



# TEAM BRIEF

Italy Anyone?



MVPs



New Federal COBRA Subsidy



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**AUGUST 2009**



County Administrator **Pat Bean**

## From The County Administrator

The budget process is always complicated enough with all the players involved, but the revenue issues during this year's process have made it a very difficult one. Usually by this time, the Board of County Commissioners has completed their budget workshops and has set the trim millage for the next budget year. In other words, normally the budget process is over by now except for the two public hearing required to be held in September.

But that is not the case this year. We still have a ways to go with three budget workshops added in August and then the two public hearings September 8 and 17.

On July 31, the Board of County Commissioners set the trim millage rate, which establishes the ceiling for the final millage rate for FY 2010. Once again, for the 17<sup>th</sup> straight year, the rate includes a slight reduction for all taxpayers. Commissioners were very sensitive to all the ramifications of the current economic decline on all citizens of our county and continued their commitment to a very modest reduction.

On another positive note, the Board was advised at that meeting of approximately \$19 million of one-time money that may be available to revisit some of the reductions that have been identified in earlier budget discussions. This is potentially good news because we may be able to rescind some RIF notices and continue some services into FY 2010 that have been identified for reduction or deletion. However, you must remember that as one-time money, and there are restraints on how we can use those dollars. We will keep you advised as this issue further develops.

There are a growing number of flagged items identified at each budget workshop that will all have to be reconsidered once the Board has completed the reviews of each department's budget and the agencies we fund, such as EPC and the Planning Commission. Our directors are working diligently with staff to put the final touches on the reports that will help guide the Board on these decisions. In addition, we continue to search for cost-savings and efficiencies. The more efficiencies we can identify, the more services and jobs we can continue into FY 2010.

As I indicated above, due to the magnitude of the issues being debated during this budget process, the Board has added

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three more budget workshops prior to the final public hearings. Two workshops have already occurred (August 6 and 13), and the last one will be held August 20 at 1:30 p.m. here at County Center. No public comment is taken during these workshops, it is just a time for the Commission to discuss and debate department budgets.

But believe me, the public has shared their views. With the new Web page focused on our budget process our residents have commented by email and phone message. To date we have received more than 125 phone messages and 1,300 email comments. And this on top of our last public hearing at All People's Life Center, where more than 750 residents showed up and more than 200 signed up to speak.

Thank you for all of your support during these very difficult times. The efficiencies you have identified and the suggestions you have made have left their mark on our budget decisions. I also continue to be so proud of the work you do everyday to make Hillsborough County a great place to live, work and play.



# New Federal COBRA Subsidy to Partially Offset Costs of Health Care Premiums for Unemployed Workers

On Feb. 17, 2009, the President signed into law the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009* (ARRA 2009), which included new and temporary COBRA regulations that provide a 65 percent subsidy for COBRA continuation premiums for up to nine months for workers who have been involuntarily terminated, and for their families. The subsidy applies to group health, dental and vision plans. An employee must be enrolled in the plan(s) at the date of termination to be eligible to receive the subsidy.



Employees who were involuntarily terminated during the period of September 1, 2008 – December 31, 2009, and who elect COBRA **may** be eligible for the subsidy. If the individual is eligible for group health coverage elsewhere (for example, a spouse's plan or a new employer's plan) or Medicare, he or she is not eligible for the subsidy. The reduced premium may end earlier than the nine months if the individual becomes eligible for group health coverage, as described above, or if the individual reaches the end of his or her maximum COBRA coverage period.

The term "involuntary termination" is specifically defined by IRS regulations and does not cover employees terminated for gross misconduct. To find out if you would be considered eligible for this subsidy, please contact the Benefits Unit in the Human Resources Department.

Prepared by the County Attorney's Office

## **Friendly Reminder! Criminal Justice Department Has Moved to:**

10119 Windhorst Road, Tampa, FL 33619

Phone: 813-276-2548

Fax: 813-276-2630



# Hillsborough County Homeless Early Childhood Initiative Brings 200 Children Out of Homelessness



## Recognized As Top National Human Services Program

Identifying a homeless adult and providing them the social services they need to become self sufficient—such as food, shelter or health care—helps one person.

However, identifying a homeless child also identifies siblings and parents who are likely homeless too.

That's the objective of the Homeless Early Childhood Initiative, recipient of the [2009 NACO](#) (National Association of County Officers) [Achievement Award – Best in Category](#), the most coveted recognition among more than 500 entries related to human services programs from throughout the country.

“This program ensures that homeless families with preschool-aged kids have the necessary tools and support they need to become independent, self-sufficient members of our community,” said Hillsborough County Commissioner Mark Sharpe, who sits on the Hillsborough County Children’s Board. “This initiative is an opportunity to proactively provide homeless children and their families with social services, instead of waiting for homeless families to seek help for themselves.”

In its first year in 2008, the program served 129 families involving 217 children. These children bypassed the Head Start waiting list and received immediate placement in the program. Families immediately received intensive social services.

Head Start provides children ages 6 weeks – 4 years with early childhood development and

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## Ashwinnie Gosai – A Program Success Story

After loss of employment, the death of her mother, and a tumultuous break up with the father of her children in 2007, Ashwinnie Gosai and her four children, ages 3 – 11, were left with little financial stability and family support.

In 2008, they became homeless.

Gosai, 39, said she went to many shelters, but not all could take in her and her children. Some only accepted males, while others didn't accept children (or at least not so many children).

They lived with a friend where they slept on the cold tile floor.

They moved on to an abandoned trailer infested with rats.

All the while Gosai was working for \$7 an hour. But with no child support, it wasn't enough for an apartment for her and her children. Even if she had a home, she couldn't get power turned on until she reconciled her \$500 debt in electric bills.

And, she kept her homelessness a secret, fearing her children would be removed from her care.

"I didn't want anyone to know because I was afraid of losing my kids," she said. "I was praying for a miracle."

Gosai and her children qualified for the Homeless Early Childhood Initiative. Her younger children were placed in Head Start and Gosai received assistance for a rental deposit, food stamps and assistance for her electric bills. She even received job placement at a child care facility close to her home where she requires little transportation.

Gosai now lives in a two-bedroom apartment in a safe northeast Tampa neighborhood, receives child support for three of her four children and her oldest receives assistance for his special needs.

"I just want to be stable and make a home for my kids," Gosai said.

education; medical, dental and mental health; nutrition; and family support. Furthermore, identifying homeless children ages 3 – 4 and placing them in a quality pre-school program, such as Head Start, is an essential component for their long-term educational success. Intensive social services included a coordinated effort of 100 programs provided by various agencies and nonprofit organizations, such as Hillsborough County Children's Services, Hillsborough County Health & Social Services, Hillsborough County School District, Metropolitan Ministries and more. These services included transportation, such as gas and bus vouchers; health care; emergency and permanent housing; job training/educational assistance and job placement; and more.

All agencies involved developed a uniformed database system to quickly track the progress of participating families.

The yearly cost of this initiative was an estimated \$979,000. However, since most programs and services were existing, only \$364,000 of additional funding was required, which was provided by the Children's Board.



## MVPs

### County Senior Zones Wins Best Practices Award

Hillsborough County's Public Works Department – Traffic Division brought home the Southern Gerontological Society's (SGS) *Best Practices Award* at the organization's annual meeting this year in St. Petersburg. This is one of five awards presented annually by SGS.

The president of SGS, Dr. Ed Rosenburg (pictured on the left), presented the award to Hillsborough County for creating, designing and implementing the Senior Zone Program to help manage traffic conditions at approved senior facilities in our community. Buzz Barbour, Public Works, accepted the award. **Congratulations!**



### Sunshine Line Wins State Award



Florida's Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged in Tallahassee selected Hillsborough County's Sunshine Line as the recipient of the *2009 Dispatch Operations of the Year Award*.

As a result of last year's budget reduction actions, Sunshine Line reorganized by combining several duties and positions in the dispatch and scheduling areas. The reorganization reduced no-shows, increased efficiency, improved routing and customer service, and decreased overtime. This award acknowledges the improvements that have occurred by these actions. **Congratulations!**

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## Award Recognized Countdown Signals at Crosswalks

Mike McCarthy, Division Director of Public Works – Traffic Services, and his staff were recently recognized with a prestigious *Award of Distinction* by the Prudential-Davis Productivity Awards Program for their efforts to increase safety at pedestrian crossings by undertaking the installation of countdown signals. This awards program is sponsored by Florida TaxWatch, the Florida Council of 100 and the State of Florida. **Congratulations!**





## Attention All Interested European Travelers!



On one of her many visits to Europe, Jerry Noland (left) and one of her travelers enjoy the beautiful city of Venice, Italy, and take a picture from the famous Rialto Bridge.

Have you always dreamed of taking a trip to Europe? Have you fantasized about Rome, Venice and Florence? All the great Renaissance art of DaVinci, Michelangelo, the Sistine Chapel, St. Peter's, the David?

Have you always thought how neat it would be to glide through the mysterious waterways of Venice in a gondola? Or visit the beautiful monastery of St. Francis of Assisi? Well, the time has finally arrived!

Jerry Noland, Senior Administrative Aide to Commissioner Kevin Beckner, is a long-time traveler throughout Europe and has planned a trip to Italy in March 2010. If you are interested in learning all the details about such a trip, plan to attend an information session:

**Brown Bag Information Luncheon  
Friday, September 4, Noon  
County Center, Conference Room 26A**

Bring your lunch and all your questions, and Jerry will be happy to fill you in on all the exciting details.

If you are unable to attend but are interested in learning about the trip, email her at: [jernol@yahoo.com](mailto:jernol@yahoo.com) , and she will get back to you with answers.

Jerry has traveled with her college students, friends and other interested travelers for more than 20 years. She brings her experience, expertise, and knowledge as a seasoned overseas traveler....SEE YOU THERE!!



# High Fives

**Several Health & Social Services – Sunshine Line employees** received kudos:

**Valorie Hatfield-Larocca:** “I call Sunshine Line to order a bus pass for my son Leslie Young and Valorie has waited on me several times. She is patient and always takes the time to help me. She knows and does her job very well. If there is something she doesn’t know she will find out and get back with me. Kudos to Valorie because she is a very nice and pleasant person.” -- Denise Sloan

**Chris Mazzeo :** “Chris is patient, professional and kind. He is a very good driver and he knows how to treat the elderly and I really appreciate his kindness.” -- Terezimha Graeme

**Quanda West & Valorie Hatfield-Larocca:** “Valorie and Quanda are always very helpful and nice. I am disabled and I know I can always count on them to make sure I get my transportation to my medical appointments. They both go out of their way to help me. I really appreciate the good customer service provided by Sunshine Line.” -- Martha Spadoni

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**Fire Rescue Station 12** received a thumbs up from Terry Ringley of Public Works: “Fire Rescue Station 12 in the Gibsonton area responded to an emergency at 217 Myakki Drive at about 3:30 p.m. as my mother was having an allergic reaction to her diabetic medicine. When they arrived, my mother’s sugar was at 48, way below normal, and her heart rate was off at approximately 183/54. If it wasn’t for the response by the knowledgeable Fire Rescue staff, my mother would have left us not knowing how much could have been done for her. Fire Rescue staff stayed with her since she didn’t want to go to the hospital. When I arrived shortly thereafter, they told me her heart rate was a concern to them. In addition, they were making her a sandwich in an effort to get her sugar back at the level she needed. I have a great deal of respect for the staff that responded to this incident, and thumbs up to all of the professionals of Fire Rescue. My mom had an aorta valve malfunction and will need heart surgery. She is 76 years young and still in the hospital doing fine.”

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**Several Planning & Growth Management employees** received kudos:

**John Austin, Tom Hiznay & Dennis Kline:** “Recently, my wife and I decided to invest our money into land. This seemed like a simple concept and shouldn’t be a problem. However, due to our own efforts of exercising the due diligence clause of our contract, we were able to uncover many areas of concern. Our situation was simply going to get worse unless we sought out the right people to answer our questions and alleviate our fears. Your staff located at Planning & Growth Management – Permitting were extremely professional, knowledgeable and supportive. John Austin, Tom Hiznay and Dennis Kline were the ones who spent the most time with me. Very often we don’t give staff credit for what they do and how they serve the citizens of Hillsborough County. It is because of these gentlemen that we are able to invest our life savings with comfort and reassurance.” -- John Scott

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**Edith Wimbush (Building Services Division):** “All of my experience with Edith has been over the phone, but it’s been positive and brings a smile to my face. She goes the extra mile. Pulling permits in 21 states has given me broad perspectives on people in licensing offices and Edith Wimbush is most remarkable. One example that shines through is Paul Corbitt, our qualifier who died after a brief fight with cancer. We decided to take the test and become licensed. When we had a job in Hillsborough County, our local license was still under Paul. But Edith went to great lengths to help us switch over and in a timely fashion. She was professional, but caring. She guided us and informed us of all the necessary steps. She even followed up!” -- Karen Oliver of Atlanta’s Reliable Roofing

**Peter Aluotto & Wayne Francis:** “After our project was cleared for submittal to the building department through site planning, I was more than satisfied with their review process. Some issues arose because of the FEMA Flood Zone but I was notified promptly and these matters were resolved. I personally spoke to several representatives there who helped me resolve the issues. In particular, Wayne Francis took personal responsibility to see that this matter was handled promptly and professionally. I understand the review process, the details and time frames involved, and feel that this review was done as expeditiously as possible. I wish to thank you and Wayne Francis for your personal attention to this matter, and again apologize for any undue pressure from outside sources.” -- David Simmons of Damian Enterprises

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**Janet Walters, Stephanie Stonebridge, Jimi King, Jennifer Hausblitzel & Susan Walters, Library Services,** received a positive note from the Gutmann family: “As a parent of two young kids and a patron of the Austin Davis Library, I just want to express my gratitude. The staff has been amazing, especially Janet Walters, Stephanie Stonebridge, Jimi King, Jennifer Hausblitzel and Susan Walters have been AWESOME (as my kids say). They have always been courteous and professional, willing to help and responsive to our every need in the library. Overall, they have been excellent. Please commend them on their excellent work and dedication.”

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**Animal Services** received acknowledgement from pet owner Anneliese Meier: “My dog Baxter got out from a friend’s yard in South Tampa during the late afternoon. I was out of town at the time, and my friend was taking care of my dog. Needless to say, my friend panicked and began looking for the dog. Someone told her to call Animal Services. She did and got some wonderful person on the phone named John. He had someone from dispatch call her around 8 p.m. and he went over on the phone all the dogs they picked up that Tuesday. Baxter is a mixed breed and a rescue. It turns out Baxter was found wandering and the people who found him had called the number on his tag (my home phone number, not my cell phone number). They also went by my house (my address is also on the tag) and realized no one was there. Anyhow, those folks have been thanked, but I want to bring to your attention the great lengths your staff went to for my dog ... OK ... my big baby! I pay my taxes and I get my dog tags every year. This just shows that Hillsborough County may be a big place,

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but we are still a community and your staff realizes that many residents are responsible pet owners. Please thank your staff and if you ever need me to speak about animal control and the need to spay and get your animals tagged, I am willing to do so.”

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**James Sudberry, Consumer Protection**, received accolades up from Tetyana and Vyacheslav Petrovska: “We are writing this letter to express our deepest gratitude for your effective help in the resolution of our case against Mattress Firm. Your highly professional work has helped us exercise our consumer rights, and may be, prevent the recurrence of the similar cases with other buyers in the future. We wish all those on your team success and financial well being during this difficult time.”

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**Upper Tampa Bay Park staff** received recognition from John DeWolfe of the State of Florida Division of Forestry: “I just want to say how much we appreciate the help and hospitality we have received from your folks at Upper Tampa Bay Park. From helping coordinate retirement get-togethers to facilitating wildfire and prescribed fire training courses, Skip and his crew (Joe, Brian, Ethan, Glenn and Alan) have always gone above and beyond. We have had a very busy training schedule over the past year and it would have been much more difficult to pull off without the help of the great crew at Upper Tampa Bay Park.”

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**Tanci Mishler, Library Services**, received praise from Ilana and Titus Rhodes: “Words cannot express how much we love you. The heart that you pour into our kids is amazing. May God bless you a hundred-fold for what you are doing in this community. We will miss you!”

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**David McGriff, Code Enforcement**, received a thumbs up from resident John Fischer: “I’d like to thank you for the service that you rendered recently. I had complained of an overgrown area on a property adjacent to mine. I found you courteous, efficient and thorough. I realize that while the action to remove the hazard was not instantaneous, you did not let it slip through your fingers. Without any prompting from me, you followed up with the property owner after a brief period of no activity. You notified me of your follow up and I was pleased to see that action was taken a short time later. Your professionalism and your ability to get action quickly exceeded my expectations. Not only did I consider the over area an eyesore, I deemed it a place that could harbor vermin and posed a fire hazard. It was a pleasure to have such courteous and efficient help from county employees.”

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**Eric Olsen, Consumer Protection**, received a positive note from Mary Gawne of the Washington Refrigeration Company, Inc. in Maryland: “I just received funds owed to me from a Tampa vendor since September 2008 because of the efforts of Eric Olsen of your office. His dedication to my case and his professionalism were impressive and I could not be more pleased with the outcome. Thanks very much.”



# Take Advantage of the Workforce Readiness Training

## For Those Facing Layoffs



### Remaining Workforce Readiness Training

sessions are:

**August 28**

**September 4**

**September 10**

Many of us will wake up on October 1, and our worlds that we know will be very different. Not much about it will be normal at all. We were RIF-ed, laid off, let go – no matter how you say it, our jobs have ended. But it doesn't have to be the end of the world.

If you're facing this situation as I am, be sure to take advantage of the Workforce Readiness Training program the County is offering employees affected by the layoffs. The program is a joint effort of Hillsborough Community College's Training Center, the Tampa Bay Workforce Alliance and our own Human Resources Department.

The day-long session is for those of us who are now finding ourselves competing in today's job market – something many of us have not faced in many years. I can speak from personal experience that the sessions are worth the time. They are more than just a way to help us make that transition.

The sessions walk you through networking, the ins and outs of finding a job, resume writing and interviewing essentials. You learn about new opportunities; you learn to identify talents and skills you possess that might not have occurred to you otherwise; you realize you have the chance to embrace something new and different at this point in your life; your self-worth climbs on the meter scale.

One of the most important things that you walk away with is this – you've suffered a major loss, you've lost your job. You learn that it's perfectly normal to go through a grieving process of several stages including anger and depression. But you also learn on this day, that there's an ending to the grief, and then a new beginning. And there is some comfort in knowing that you're in a room full of people about to face that same new beginning.

By Carol Michel



TeamBrief is a monthly online newsletter by the Communications Department for Hillsborough County employees.

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**E-mail** stories ideas and good news [here](#)



Hillsborough  
County

Board of County Commissioners

The mission of Hillsborough County government is to provide effective quality service at a reasonable cost with courtesy, integrity, and accountability in a manner that protects and enhances the quality of life of our diverse population.