



2006 All-America City Award Application

Community Information

Community name and state:

Sarasota County, Florida

Your community is applying as a:

Neighborhood Town City County Region

If applying as a region, name participating communities:

If applying as a neighborhood, name city:

Has your community applied before? Yes No If Yes, which years: 2004, 2005

Has your community been a Finalist before? Yes No If Yes, which years: 2005

Has your community been an All-America City before? Yes No If Yes, which years: _____

Contact Information

All-America City Award co-contacts (primary contact persons available throughout entire competition and for follow-up):

Name: Jim Ley Gary Norris, Ph.D.

Title: County Administrator Superintendent of Schools

Organization: Sarasota County Government Sarasota County School Board

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List the 3 individuals who most actively participated in filling out this All-America City Award application (add additional lines if needed):
(Provide name and title; organization; phone; e-mail address)

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Tamara Schells, Senior Planner, Sarasota County, 941-861-5152, tschells@scgov.net

The community applying will receive one complimentary membership (or a membership renewal if an AAC application was submitted last year) to the National Civic League for one year. To whom should this membership be directed?

Name David Mills, Chairman
Sarasota County Board of Commissioners
Address 1660 Ringling Boulevard, Second Floor
City, State, Zip Code Sarasota, FL 34236
Phone Number 941-861-5000 Fax 941-861-5987
Email dmills@scgov.net

If we are designated an All-America City, we agree to follow NCL's rules (available on the Web site) regarding use of the All-America City Award logo, a registered trademark of the National Civic League.

Signature:  Date: March 16, 2006

Name: James L. Ley Title: County Administrator

Signature:  Date: March 16, 2006

Name: Gary Norris, Ph.D. Title: Superintendent of Schools

Community Statistics

Note: Use the most up-to-date statistics possible for your neighborhood, town, city, county, or region (source suggestions: U.S. Census Bureau, State Department of Economic Security, State Department of Finance, Department of Public Health, and local school statistics)

POPULATION (in year 2000 or most recent): 367,867

Source/Date: Florida Population Studies 2005 County Estimates, Bureau of Economic and Business Research

POPULATION PERCENTAGE CHANGE 1990-2000 (indicate + or -): + 17.3 %

Source/Date: US Census, 1990 and 2000

RACIAL/ETHNIC POPULATION BREAKDOWN (percentage):

| | |
|--|---------------|
| White alone | <u>91.9</u> % |
| Hispanic or Latino (of any race) | <u>6.0</u> % |
| Black or African American alone | <u>4.2</u> % |
| Asian alone | <u>1.0</u> % |
| American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) alone | <u>0.3</u> % |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (NHOP) alone | <u>0</u> % |
| Some other race alone | <u>2.1</u> % |
| Two or more races | <u>0.5</u> % |

Source/Date: County Population 2004 Estimates, US Census Bureau

MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME: \$ 50,128

Source/Date: American Community Survey Profile 2003, Sarasota-Bradenton MSA, US Census

PERCENTAGE OF FAMILIES BELOW POVERTY LEVEL: 5.9 %

Source/Date: American Community Survey Profile 2003, Sarasota-Bradenton MSA, US Census

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: 3.2 %

Source/Date: Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation, Local Area Unemployment Statistics Program, 2005 County Annual Averages

POPULATION BREAKDOWN BY AGE GROUP (percentages, if available):

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------------|
| 19 years old and under | <u>19</u> % |
| 20-24 | <u>4</u> % |
| 25-44 | <u>21</u> % |
| 45-64 | <u>27</u> % |
| 65 and over | <u>29</u> % |

Source/Date: American Community Survey Profile 2003, Sarasota-Bradenton MSA, US Census

PERCENTAGE OF HOME OWNERSHIP: 79.1 %

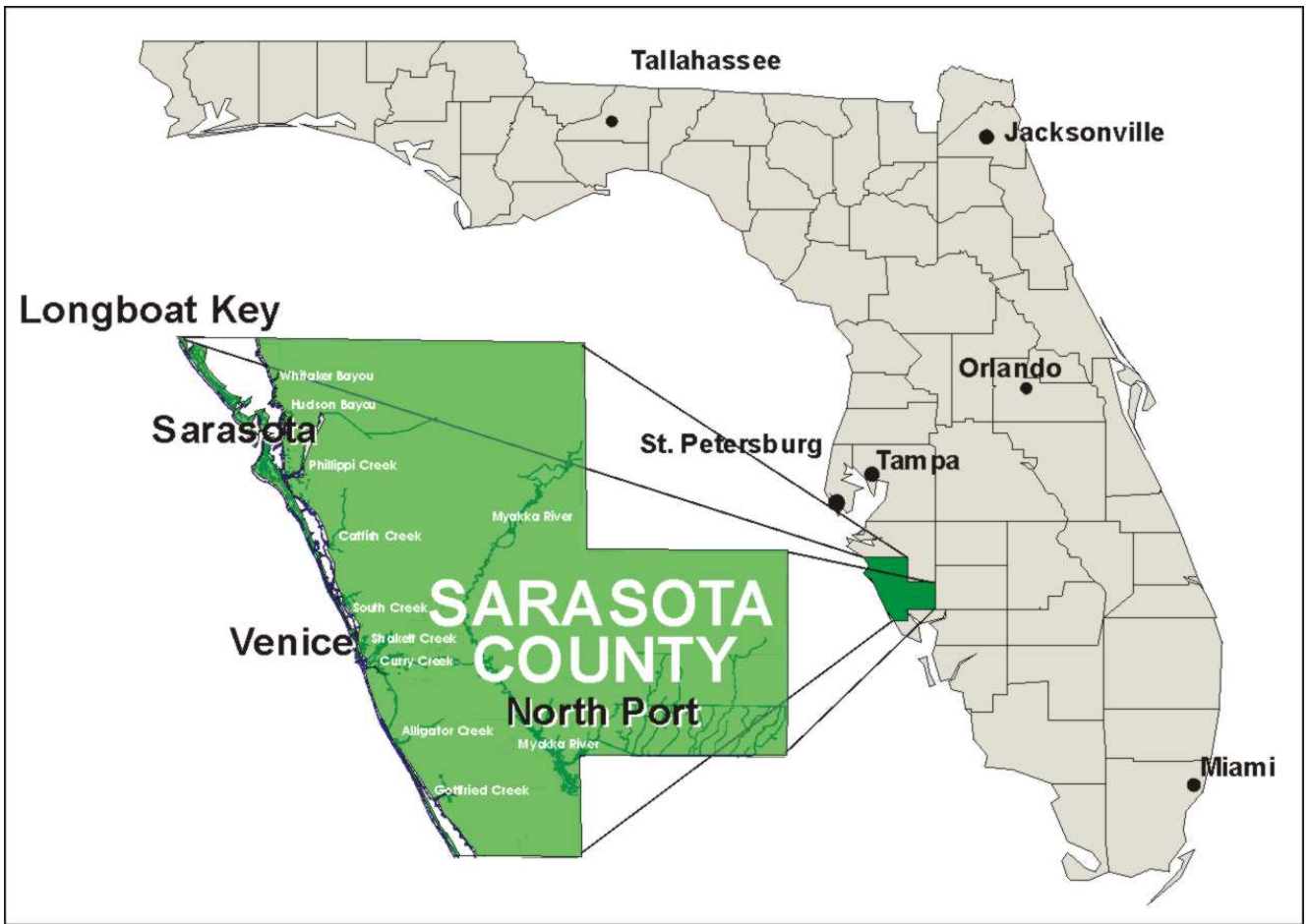
Source/Date: American Community Survey Profile 2003, Sarasota-Bradenton MSA, US Census

WORKFORCE DISTRIBUTION -- Name the three largest employment sectors in your community and provide the percentage of total employed in each:

| | |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Education, Health and Social | <u>17</u> % |
| Retail Trade | <u>13</u> % |
| Arts, Entertainment, Recreation | <u>12</u> % |

Source/Date: American Community Survey Profile 2003, Sarasota-Bradenton MSA, US Census

★★ Please attach a state map with your community clearly marked (attach as a separate sheet).



Part I

Civic Infrastructure

Describe your community. Using the four major sections of the National Civic League's *The Civic Index, Second Edition* (see www.ncl.org for more information), examine your community's civic infrastructure and civic capacity and describe how your community *lives* each of the answers to each of the following questions. Please include real examples of how your community has demonstrated its strengths and faced its challenges. The roman numerals correspond to parts of *The Civic Index, Second Edition*. Also see the application instructions for this section.

Add lines as needed for your responses

I. What is our community vision for its future? (300 word maximum)

In recent years, large numbers of Sarasota citizens actively participated in our long term plan, known as Sarasota 2050. Two principle goals arose from our conversations about the future: enhance livability, and preserve resources. These themes intertwine in our day-to-day perceptions of a sustainable future, and support our vision for tomorrow. We are keenly focused on protecting and enhancing the intricate balance between our environment, economy, and society.

Between May and August 2005, community members gathered in conversation to re-affirm our understandings of a preferred future. Three hundred residents engaged in "Community Conversations", a structured process that sought to identify two things: "*What we value?*" and "*The legacy we want to leave for future generations.*" Together, citizens and local officials explored ways to nurture a community that can build on the best of what we have, encourage what we value, and create a future that reflects what we hold dear.

Some of the *key values* identified in the community conversations include:

- Environment
- Good Schools
- Arts and Culture
- Engaged citizens
- Affordable Housing

Some of the *key legacies* identified in the community discussions include:

- Environment
- Good Schools
- Arts and culture
- Access to healthcare
- Cultural diversity

These *shared values* and our collective concept of *key legacies*, are intertwined in our vision of Sarasota's future. Our environmental ethic is evident. Citizens identified 'good schools' in our key values and key legacies. Engaged citizens with access to healthcare, are a part of how we see the future. These values and legacies form the foundation of our AAC application.

II. How are we fulfilling the new roles for community governance?

II. (a). What is the extent and nature of community member participation in community improvement efforts? (300 word maximum)

Sarasota County citizens participate, and raise their voices and hands make our community a better place. Sarasota citizens are engaged. Sarasota citizens address critical needs, raise money for charity, tax themselves to support education and the environment, and take personal responsibility for the community of today and tomorrow.

Our civic indicators show that:

- 80% of voting age population is registered to vote (71% US average)
- 65% of voting age population voted in 2004 election (59% US average)
- 40% of adults volunteer

Sarasota County Openly Plans for Excellence (SCOPE) totaled the following volunteer participation:

| COMMUNITY ISSUES | NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS | TOTAL VOLUNTEER HOURS OF SERVICE |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Race and Cultural Relations | 200 | 1,140 |
| Redevelopment and Infill | 80 | 2,118 |
| Aging | 405 | 2,240 |
| School Dropouts | 100 | 3,355 |
| Affordable Housing | 80 | 4,020 |

Approximately 20-25 community health leaders are actively guiding the Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP). CHIP's recent results include:

- Seven new clinics
- Programs to combat obesity and diabetes
- Increase uninsured access to healthcare
- 114 community meetings with over 2,280 attendees

Since 2003, over 100 projects in 94 neighborhoods submitted and received matching grants for neighborhood improvements. Examples include:

- Beautification and park enhancements
- Safety and traffic improvements
- Improved pathways and lighting

The Sarasota County 2005 Opinion Survey stated:

- 78% of the respondents stated that they share a sense of local community pride
- 54% said they actively participate in the community
- 69% ***believe they are responsible*** to create a sense of community

From October 2004 to September 2005, 9,782 volunteers logged 168,500 hours providing support with local government. The Friends of the Library led this list with over 116,000 hours.

II. (b). What role does government play in community-wide decision-making and how do they contribute to improving the community? (300 word maximum)

Local government is a *convener and facilitator* of community discussions, and coordinator of funding for action.

Sarasota County Government increases community dialogue and understanding of a range of issues by:

- Establishing a “*Civility Code*” that models expected public discourse
- Framing the complexity of issues for forming policy
- Supporting and protecting “places” for community meetings
- Providing senior staff increased expertise as facilitators and conveners
- Maintaining an active citizens training program in the Citizens Academy
- Actively supporting community-based organizations, non-profits and grants-in-aid programs

Local government:

- Convened tipping point community conversations about affordable housing—resulting in the creation of a community land trust.
- Has committed approximately \$20 million in startup funds for affordable housing.
- Interprets land use decisions as balancing the values of sustainability: the needs of environment, places for people, and prosperity
- Supports self sufficiency in neighborhoods by funding \$603,000 *in matching grants* since 2003
- Actively supports the community’s environmental ethic by preserving resources and living and building “green”

Local government leads by example, and has:

- Established a holistic approach to watershed management, conservation and protection
- Calculated the community's ecological footprint
- Established a solid waste management program that reduces waste and increases recycling
- Instituted best management practices for vegetative and insect nuisances
- Created the first green code language in the nation that advocates environmentally preferred procurement
- Incorporated Green building principles and design and construction (2 Leed Certified Buildings)
- Committed to energy management and conservation (including hosting the first school fuel cell in the U.S.)

Our health department is jointly run by a state and county partnership, the only one in the state. Our County Board and School Board share Information Technology leadership, which integrates community strategy and helps focus and align technology resources, thereby creating greater value for citizens.

II. (c). What role does the non-profit sector play in community-wide decision making and how do they contribute to improving the community? (300 word maximum)

The non-profit sector is a key partner in stimulating community conversation and gatherings. Our non-profits actively guide, support, and fund community programs supporting our vision.

As a result of 2004s four hurricane events, *the non-profit agencies*:

- Recognized the need to coordinate various agency efforts during emergency conditions
- Now run the shelters, help write the policies, and train and plan emergency response with government as a partner
- Have a task force comprised of the Red Cross, Salvation Army, schools, hospitals and churches to ensure smooth evacuations from the threat of hurricane

Non-profits are often the “front door” for persons to volunteer. Sarasota has the following levels of volunteers:

- The friendship Volunteer Center estimates 5,600 volunteers annually contribute to 499 non-profit organizations, and over 2,000 students
- Mote Marine, a non-profit dedicated to excellence in marine science, has 1,400 volunteers per year – equivalent to 95 full-time employees
- Habitat for Humanity builds 23 houses per year and recently committed to a \$1.3 million project.

Three of our major foundations work closely with the schools to change the way teacher development and student learning occurs. The non-profits jointly funded five-years of training improvements for teacher development.

Sarasota County’s community foundations provide millions of dollars of community support each year. Local non-profit contributions in 2005 were:

- \$1,222,456 -- Selby Foundation
- \$6,207,950 -- Gulf Coast Community Foundation
- \$6,812,279 -- Sarasota Memorial Healthcare Foundation
- \$5,300,000 -- Community Foundation of Sarasota County

Sarasota County Government’s grants-in-aid contribute another \$9 million to local non-profits for human services, the arts, and community building.

We all recognize that we can each do a little something to improve our homes and neighborhoods.

II. (d). What role does business play in community-wide decision-making and how do they contribute to improving the community? (300 word maximum)

Sarasota County is a vibrant, inclusive community with a regional perspective that encourages business to thrive and prosper. Business contributes to the community and the community supports business.

Our business community has a goal of economic sustainability. It recognizes that the economic sustainability requires that Sarasota County attracts and retains a wide range of ages, nationalities and

lifestyles. This diversity promotes a multifaceted economy that attracts national and international visitors, residents and businesses. The “cluster” work groups focus on issues that affect the overall business climate of Sarasota County and the surrounding regions. Issues identified by the groups include: affordable housing and livable wages; regulatory issues, community education and public relations; regional perspective on development; and the availability of capital.

Business leaders actively participate in community issues, as evidenced by their school auditing expertise and community leadership with Citizens for Better Schools. Businesses are a strong voice in community-wide education discussions and proactively support funding for educational needs.

Our business community:

- Funds foundations and non-profits
- Serve as directors on non-profit boards and County Commission Advisory Councils
- Is leading the way for community understanding of “cluster theory” and economic development
- Participates with government and non-profits in developing solutions for affordable housing, including the development and support of the Community Housing Trust
- Participates in the design and construction of community infrastructure, often sharing best practices to reduce total community cost

Sarasota County has grown most of its key businesses, both large and small. A quality business environment brings attention to Sarasota and supports a prosperous community. In 2005, Sarasota-Bradenton-Venice MSA ranked No. 4 on *American Business Journal*’s list of the “Hottest Major Metro Areas for Jobs.”

III. How do we work together as a community?

III. (a). How does our community recognize and celebrate its diversity? (300 word maximum)

SCOPE has led 35 community meetings on the subject of racial diversity. The conversations at these meetings are shifting the dialogue about race to conversations about: more effective communication; the intersection of race and economics; and exploring new entrepreneurial/economic efforts.

Paralleling these community meetings, SCOPE is convening small groups to learn effective communication techniques to improve race relations. Under development is sponsorship of a social justice film festival that would use film as a tool for community change.

Our 2050 Plan supports *New Urbanism* principles and land use strategies, respecting the need and value of diversity.

We recognize and celebrate diversity with:

- SCOPE’s ongoing effort to build racial inclusion and social connectedness
- Our 2050 Plan — a plan for change in our built environment to a multi-use, mixed-income walkable community
- Business clusters centered on economic diversification

- SCOPE’s stories project — an effort to celebrate diverse cultural stories and perspectives within the community
 - Sarasota’s History Video Archived project, which has videotaped the story of community leaders and made them available in our libraries
 - Our *Music in the Park* programs celebrate a diversity of cultural sound with hundreds attending each week.
 - The County Fair has strong 4-H participation, a recognition of our agricultural and rural heritage
 - Summer beach runs bring young and old together to exercise along on the coastline
 - Reading festivals are a celebration of arts and culture
 - The Shark Tooth Festival celebrates our unique natural history
 - Art in Public places brings us together
 - Our recognition of historical and natural resources, from buildings to middens
-

III. (b). How does our community work with neighboring communities to address shared challenges? Is there a shared regional vision? (300 word maximum)

Community does not stop at arbitrary geo-political boundaries. Neighborhoods do not begin and end at the city line. People create regional vision and their perspective is not limited by mapped boundaries, but by their personal life patterns. What follows is a list of our regional challenges and the broad actions being taken to align resources and address problems.

Within the region we share numerous challenges and are taking the noted actions:

- Sustainable water supply
 - Sarasota participates in regional water supply systems from Manatee County and the Peace River Water Authority
 - We participate in Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council
 - Sensitivity to environmental risk is prevalent
- Threat of hurricane and wildfire natural disaster
 - The Suncoast Technology Alliance coordinates regional disaster recovery capability
 - Staff from adjacent governments immediately deployed to neighboring Charlotte County following the 2004 hurricane
 - A multi-county fire and emergency response network is in-place
- Demographics of aging
 - Concerns for care, cost and independence
 - Local communities are building self-sustaining systems independent of political boundary lines
- Economies that may be too dependent on tourism and retirement industries
 - Sarasota participates in the Tampa Bay Partnership for Regional Development
 - The Suncoast Workforce Development Board examines regional workforce requirements
- A spreading gap between the “haves” and “have nots”, driven primarily by high net worth retirees and lower earned wage income because of the high percentage of service work

- Manatee Community College with Manatee and Sarasota campuses
 - University of South Florida with Tampa and Sarasota campuses
 - A housing market that is unaffordable to many
 - Preliminary discussions are seeing affordable housing as a matter of regional concern
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IV. How does our community strengthen its ability to solve problems? (300 word maximum)

When we rush to solve today's problems, tomorrow often ends up like yesterday.

Instead of focusing on what problems we can solve, Sarasota County is considering a "possibilities" approach to assessing our community. Major institutions in Sarasota County like the county government, school system, and visionary non-profit groups, work from a *focus on possibilities* instead of problems and problem solving.

When the Economic Development Corporation began, we thought that Sarasota County's *problem* was we did not have enough large employers so the group tried to find ways to lure big companies to Sarasota County. A study revealed that our "originals," small businesses that started and thrive here, were the driving force behind 80% of our economic growth, we knew the solution would not come from outside. This realization led us to focus on current successes and the possibilities of improving it for the future. We created innovation clusters to foster and improve what we have allowing for greater entrepreneurship.

Our demographics provide another example: 29% of our population is over 65, while the US averages 12%. Before, we would consider the many problems associated with aging and plan responses to those problems.

- We would look at how to build nursing homes – and not socially connected communities that care for their neighbors.
- We would fret about illness – and not consider how wellness can extend a senior's independence.
- We would focus on mental problems – and not notice that this generation is one of this country's best-educated generations.

Today, we find ways to solve problems, but only after first looking at our strengths and successes. As the understanding of possibilities grow as well as the ownership and determination to solve our problems together, Sarasota grows as a community. We seek innovative ideas and make them work for Sarasota County.

Part II: Community Background and Community Challenge Section

Add lines as needed for your responses

1 (A). Community Background: Set the background for your community. Tell its story. Summarize your community’s history, successes and struggles. Describe how your community got to where it is today and your community’s current state of affairs. (700 word maximum):

Sarasota’s history, as a village, a town, a city, a county and a community, reveals a spirit accountable and responsible to values beyond individual interests. The pioneers of the nineteenth century pooled their talents to establish settlements in Florida’s frontier. Beginning in 1842, settlers pooled talents and resources so that the settlement along Sarasota Bay endured and flourished.

The bounty of land, water and air nourished residents of Southwest Florida 10,000 years ago. Pioneers came for health, adventure and to start life anew. Promoters called it “paradise,” and for 150 years since its founding, people have chosen to settle here. When the pressure of rapid growth in recent decades seemed to threaten the quality of this place, community groups such as Save Our Bays formed to raise public awareness of the need to re-think the future of the environment while enjoying it in the present.

Well known to naturalists, seasonal visitors and vacationers, Sarasota’s pristine beauty has attracted visitors for more than a hundred years. The protection of nature is a legacy we received from our fathers and will leave for our children.

In the small communities of the early 20th Century, individuals and families came together to create some of the institutions and amenities they wanted for their new home. They established public work days to beautify and improve the town. Sidewalks were built and street trees planted. A bay front park was first cleared and planted as a waterfront park in 1912 when Sarasota’s men turned out to work while the women provided supervision, moral support and refreshment. By working together Sarasotans “barn-raised” parks, sidewalks, and other civic improvements.

Our *sense of place* is strongly embedded within the foundations of our history, diverse and eclectic to many, but strongly connected by the social fabric of community.

Sarasota’s ethic supports education and the arts. The community has supported education issues from its beginnings:

- The first school began in a family’s corn crib
- Men in the early “Sara Sota” community converted an abandoned fishing shack into a classroom in 1878 after the mothers of the community convinced a resident to help teach their children
- Sarasotans pulled together in 1902 to establish a town and to build roads and schools
- In 1919, a local vote made school attendance mandatory for all children between the ages of seven and sixteen
- Woman’s Clubs in Sarasota, Venice-Nokomis and Englewood began the first libraries in the county
- The Sarasota Woman’s Club provided a public health nurse for the rural one-room schools

- Out of the Sarasota Woman’s Club came the community group that built Sarasota’s first municipal hospital

During the early 1900’s, Sarasota attracted wealthy and devoted patrons of the arts. These new residents and visitors, long accustomed to high quality in the fine arts, brought their love of culture to Sarasota. Sarasota County’s performing arts hall – the Van Wezel – was designed by William Wesley Peters, a chief architect in the Taliesin studio founded by Frank Lloyd Wright.

A powerful social ethic that respects the value of our arts and architectural heritage evolved from the influences of John and Mable Ringling’s art collection (now the Ringling Museum) and the Sarasota School of Architecture (1941-1966). Sarasota School architects blurred the boundaries between interior and exterior space, further underscoring the community’s strong bond with the natural environment. Innovative young architects used Sarasota County’s tropical landscape to apply their ideas about blurring the line in a home’s relationship with the outdoors. They sought to make the modernist architectural style appropriate for the Florida environment. Thus, our county is home to prized buildings of the 20th century’s modernist movement.

Our history highlights the guiding ethics of our community:

- A committed and enduring respect and love for the natural environment
- A collective recognition that Sarasotans build and revere community
- A recognition and passion for education, art and architecture

1 (B). Community Celebration: Why should your community be selected as an All-America City? Describe what makes your community a great place to live, work, and play. (300 word maximum)

Sarasota County works together to solve problems. We have our community challenges, but we look at them honestly with an eye to possibilities. Some of our great assets include:

- A beautiful natural environment
- An A+ public school system, actively supported by community
- Stimulating performing arts
- Low unemployment
- A diversifying economy
- A range of cultural activities
- Museums, galleries and architectural history
- Film festivals
- Soap box derby races on Main Street
- 1,000 holes of golf
- Great boating and fishing
- Fine beaches

But we believe we have something more, something that a small handful of communities welcome and embrace. We are building a sustainable community, holding this principle as a key value that influences all that we do. Our community values make Sarasota County Florida a truly great place to live and work: concern is not only about here and now, but about future generations. In a rapidly changing world, where values are challenged and often compromised, Sarasota strives to steadfastly maintain its environmental ethic, grow our social fabric, maintain a sense of place, and act in a

sustainable manner. Supporting and building community in a sustainable fashion requires balancing three key and often conflicting elements of community building and their respective interests:

- The social
- The economic
- The natural

Our community grows and thrives by our values. These values may be unwritten, unspoken, and abstract, but they exist quietly in the fabric of our daily lives, our daily decisions. Our community aspires to a better future. Our values include respect for the environment, support for education, and recognition of diversity. We know today's behaviors and judgments provide tomorrow's foundation and sustenance.

1 (C). Community Challenges: Based upon your community's current status, describe your community's two most pressing challenges.

Challenge #1: *(200 words maximum)*

Great habitats have succumbed to man's creation of place—oftentimes a sprawling, unsustainable, clear-cut place. In the sustainability balancing act, our natural environment actively supports the drivers of tourism and construction. From our beaches to our pine flatwoods, people come to visit and often decide to stay in Sarasota because of the state of our natural environment. With an expanding population, our community is constantly balancing property rights and environmental assets and economic development, and there is frequently no clear and immediate answer. We run a risk of irreversible impact to our natural world. Facing an uncertain future, positive community focus is needed.

The environment needs to be better understood and protected at the local level. Finding the right equilibrium between today's needs and tomorrow's legacy is challenging. It is important to understand the steps we each can take to protect and enhance the little environmental world that surrounds us. Too often, environmental damage is unknowingly caused by seemingly innocent actions. A challenge is to expand understanding of *how we live with the natural environment* (our shoe size and its ecological footprint so to speak), and understand our individual and collective responsibilities to protect and enhance the natural world.

Challenge #2: *(200 words maximum)*

We believe the age demographics of Sarasota today, are the age demographics of the United States tomorrow. We have relative to the United States average, a disproportionate percentage of citizens over the age of 65. We are already facing complex demographic issues associated with an aging population.

Today, *nearly 30% of Sarasota's population is over the age of 65. The national average is 12%.* We are face-to-face with some of the complexities of aging: challenges of income; social security; Medicare; Medicaid; and prescription costs. On top of these challenges, we can all expect to live

longer. How will we care for our citizens, our parents, our older neighbors? Do we expect government to singularly solve these problems?

In Sarasota, we believe that neighbors look out for neighbors and friends care for friends. This is abundantly true when we examine aging in our society. Our senior population is a wonderful asset, full of wisdom, volunteerism, and positive vision. Unfortunately for many, aging brings moments of confusion, limited mobility, and changes in the pattern and style of our social interaction. As we build community, we must recognize that our society is aging, and systems of community support are required.

Part III: Community-Driven Projects

Add lines as needed for your responses

Part II requires descriptions of three collaborative community projects that have significantly affected the community. The first two projects should be drawn directly from the two community challenges stated above.

The third project should be reflective of what your community is doing for children and youth.

PROJECT ONE (Challenge #1)

1. Project summary, name and give a brief description. (150 word maximum)

Neighborhood Environmental Stewardship Team (NEST) is a volunteer organization partnering with Sarasota County to increase awareness of the importance of native habitats and watersheds in our community. It encourages people to interact with nature through fun and hands-on activities. The NEST idea germinated during the development of the Lemon Bay Ecosystem Restoration Project in 2001 as an opportunity for residents (neighbors, civic groups, student organizations) to actively work with land managers and restoration ecologists in restoring the native habitats of the preserve. During this initial project, citizens from the surrounding neighborhoods participated in water quality monitoring, fish sampling, a frog listening network, trash and invasive plant removal, native plantings and a Scrub-jay watch program.

NEST's primary purpose is to provide constructive and meaningful activities for people to improve the environmental quality of their watershed and neighborhoods, while expanding the knowledge base and advocacy for watershed improvements.

2. Describe the relationship between this project and your first challenge, the project's history, and how it is being sustained? (300 word maximum)

Red Bug Slough is a 70 acre urban forest preserve consisting of unique upland and wetland habitats with oak hammocks, pine flatwoods, open bodies of water and marshes. This urban forest provides habitat for a biodiversity of wildlife and is designated a wildlife viewing hotspot by both the Sarasota Audubon and Butterfly Club chapters. To understand Red Bug Slough Preserve, many aspects must be taken into consideration such as, removal of exotic vegetation, hydrological restoration, prescribed burning, and the protection of historical resources. A major component of this site was the establishment of public access for its use by the residents of Sarasota County. The security issues at the Red Bug Slough Preserve presented a major challenge. The Preserve's history as an uncontrolled urban area and the limited county staff resources available to restrict unlawful activities at the site made community involvement necessary. To this end, the Red Bug Slough Preserve Neighborhood Watch Group was formed in 2002 with area residents to partner with the county and the land manager to address security issues. In conjunction with the concern for the public access issue at the Red Bug Slough Preserve, an environmental education program was initiated in 2004 with the Environmental Science Academy of Booker High School to partner with the county and the land manager to address public education and access issues. These partnerships with the community provide long-term security

for the site and also promote the use of the site for recreation and educational activities by the general public, ecology groups and school groups.

3. Describe the partnerships and collaborations involved in the creation, development, and implementation of this project. (300 word maximum)

This NEST project is an example of what can be achieved when the community, school groups and government entities work together to accomplish a common goal. As a result of this synergy the Red Bug Slough Preserve Neighborhood Watch Group was formed with the cooperation of the Neighborhood Watch Program of the Sheriff's Office of Sarasota County. The members assist the land manager to recruit residents around the Preserve in an attempt to involve the entire community. The members represent residents of single homes, condominiums and apartments in the community.

The Environmental Education Program of the Red Bug Slough Preserve received funding from the Learn and Serve program of Southwest Florida Water Management District's (SWFWMD) Legacy program. This funding allowed fieldtrips of students and teachers from Booker High School to participate in onsite projects that were mentored by the Sarasota Butterfly Club and the Florida Department of Forestry.

The Red Bug Slough Preserve Neighborhood Watch Group has also successfully implemented the Neighborhood Watch model on the much larger scale for the community surrounding the Preserve (i.e., equivalent to about 6 regular size Neighborhood Watch Groups). It holds regularly scheduled meetings where security issues are discussed with the area patrol officers and land manager. These meetings also serve the important role of keeping residents updated about land management plans and activities.

As the NEST program has expanded into other neighborhoods within the County we have also developed additional partnerships with homeowners associations, civic groups, school groups and environmental groups such as the Sarasota Bay and Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Programs, Science and Environmental Council of Sarasota County, Mote Marine Laboratory, Sarasota Conservation Foundation and The Florida House.

4. Describe the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of this project in the last 3 years and explain how this project has been a success. (300 word maximum)

The strength and commitment of NEST's community involvement was highlighted when the Red Bug Slough Neighborhood Watch Group was instrumental in the reporting and apprehension by the authorities of an individual who was illegally dumping sewage waste at the site. According to police records and the community, reported criminal activities on the Preserve have dropped dramatically.

Also, the Environmental Education Program of the Red Bug Slough Preserve has successfully assisted the land manager in providing public access. For example, students completed a butterfly garden and signage at the entrance to the Preserve that was the focus point for a very successful grand opening event. The hiking trails were greatly improved for public usage by the clearing projects completed by the students. The field studies initiated in various habitats of the Preserve have contributed to the documentation and reporting of the impacts of land management activities.

These projects demonstrate an important start to promoting community ownership, expanded understanding, and pride of this Preserve. These residents and students now understand better that their "backyard" includes public spaces such as the Preserve. These programs reach a multi-generational audience that contribute to the goals of NEST and the ESLPP programs to promote a continuing sense of place and balance for present and future residents of Sarasota County. It also demonstrates to the public that individual participation is a very worthwhile and meaningful endeavor by providing learning and service to their community.

The success of Red Bug Slough has been carried over and expanded into numerous other NEST projects throughout the County. These other projects mirror the successes of Red Bug Slough by providing environmental education and motivating the community to start projects that enhance the environment around them. Remember, "Knowledge is Power", but it is only powerful if put into action.

Name the primary contact for the project. Provide name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. (This person may be contacted to verify information.)

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PROJECT TWO (Challenge #2)

1. Project summary, name and give a brief description. (150 word maximum)

A Special Time and *Comfort Connection* are non-profit, non-denominational, weekly, adult day respite programs. These two programs provide meals and structured activities to adults needing 24 hour care. A professional RN directs and is on-staff to meet the medical needs of the attendees. Trained volunteers give one-on-one attention to the attendees. As a social model program, we provide music, games, crafts, exercise and friendship to reduce isolation and increase self-esteem. The participants call it the "party" because they get to socialize and interact with people outside their home.

A Special Time provides caregivers quality time for their needs, without hurting their budget. We also offer them support, resources, and referrals to deal with care giving stress. If the person could not afford the \$25.00 price, then it is waived or reduced. The daily average for a nursing home in Florida is \$165 per day and growing.

2. Describe the relationship between this project and your second challenge, the project's history, and how it is being sustained? (300 word maximum)

Sarasota County is a youthful community when measured by attitude and lifestyle. According to the American Community Survey Profile 2003, 29% of Sarasota's population is over 65 and

approximately 45% of all households include someone over age 65. Sarasota is ahead of the demographic shift as the “baby boomer” population ages.

Englewood surveyed their community and found a need for caregiver respite; six churches established Comfort Connection with the help of Carol Lucas. In August 2004, CHIP surveyed North Port and found 12% had families that needed nursing or home care, but couldn’t afford it, leaving a spouse or child to care for the family member.

Joan Fischer developed A Special Time, in response to two friends’ care giving dilemmas. A church planning committee member mentioned ‘Comfort Connection’ in neighboring Englewood. Joan Fischer met with Carol Lucas, the director, and a rapport/mentoring relationship developed. The program filled the mission/vision of the host church. Ideas, forms, funding and supply sources were shared. As needed, phone calls and visits continue.

Joan’s enthusiasm and her pastor’s support allowed A Special Time to begin. The pastor at Living Waters Lutheran Church donated the site. Four area churches provided volunteers and a volunteer coordinator. An advisory board was established. A highly qualified registered nurse directs the program. In addition to donations, a needs list was developed, program guidelines, and outcome measurements were established. A Special Time opened in November 2004 with a grant from the Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice.

After the start-up grant, reasonable fees and private donations sustain the programs. The low cost of A Special Time is made possible by the donation of space, utilities, and insurance of one of the churches, occasional food donations, and the use of trained volunteers. Newspaper articles and word of mouth recruits new participants.

CHIP and SCOPE address healthy communities and aging in Sarasota.

3. Describe the partnerships and collaborations involved in the creation, development, and implementation of this project. (300 word maximum)

A group of citizens in Englewood invited six churches to found Comfort Connection. They then partnered with Joan Fischer teaching her their model of care giving respite. The transfer of ideas to create new sites for care giving and the multiple churches, volunteers, and non-profits involved makes this unique program.

The Lutheran pastor and Joan Fischer visited five area churches. Each pastor expressed a need for the service and agreed to a partnership offering a new, non-denominational program in the North Port area. These churches are:

- North Port Community United Church of Christ
- Living Waters Lutheran Church
- St. Nathaniel’s Episcopal Church
- St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church
- Trinity United Methodist Church

Gulf Coast Community Foundation provided a grant to begin A Special Time. Other individuals have provided donations up to \$1000. Five local churches collaborated to provide the space and volunteers. They also provide occasional lunches. A brochure was designed and printed by a local

printer. Our library, the Chamber of Commerce and Social Services in North Port agreed to display the brochures. The Chamber also listed us in the Senior Citizens Guide and we were invited to exhibit at the community health fair. The local newspapers published several articles and we were invited to attend government meetings and workshops. Our program was a missing component in a continuum of respite services for the elderly in Sarasota South County. It serves two purposes: first, to enhance the quality of life for the participant; and second, to give the caregivers much needed respite. We have found that it also has a positive effect on the relationship between the participant and caregiver.

A Special Time also participates in the broader community health discussions through CHIP. Their experience and contacts help build community understandings and expand partnerships.

4. Describe the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of this project in the last 3 years and explain how this project has been a success. (300 word maximum)

A Special Time has been operating for fifteen months. Eighteen seniors were screened, fifteen attended with eight of those remaining in the program. Those no longer attending have gone into nursing facilities, moved out of the area or died. We average six participants each week and provide quality respite at a reasonable cost - \$25.00 per session which includes all supplies, food and staffing.

We have forty five volunteers providing a total of 3080 hours of service since its inception. Due to increasing community visibility the number of calls and inquiries has risen.

Comfort Connection provides services for 12 adults. They have six churches participating in the care and give 5 hours of care each week.

Our mission is to enhance and improve the quality of life for the elderly, disabled and early stage Alzheimer participants and their caregivers. The emotional and physical relief felt by the caregivers has been expressed to us repeatedly. They also report fewer challenging behaviors at home, participate more, and are more interested in their surroundings and activities. The participants often refer to A Special Time as “the party”. We did not have the program one week and the next week “John” came in and let the Director know he was not happy that we didn’t have “the party”. The Director’s approach is a key component to the success of the program. Caregivers are reluctant to give over the care of their loved ones so they need to feel confident they’re doing the “right thing”. Our Director instantly instills confidence as it is clear that she is genuinely a caring person and conducts herself with the utmost professionalism. It is this approach that has given our program a positive reputation in our community.

Name the primary contact for the project. Provide name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. (This person may be contacted to verify information.)

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PROJECT THREE

As a commitment to America's Promise, the National Civic League has issued the Youth Initiative Challenge. We ask that at least one project from each All-America City applicant document ways in which the lives of children and youth have been tangibly improved.

1. Project summary, name and give a brief description. (150 word maximum)

Home Computers for Sarasota County Students evolved from the passion and personal commitment of Ron Zimmerman, a teacher in the Sarasota County Public School system. A network of volunteers refurbishes and upgrades donated, salvaged, and auction bought computers. The reconditioned computers are distributed to Sarasota County students and their families. Each computer features Open Office productivity software, an encyclopedia, and a typing program which teaches keyboarding skills plus age appropriate programs to improve mathematical or language arts skills. Computers are ready to surf the Internet. Training is usually given when the computers are picked-up from a child's school or when the machine is brought to the student's home.

Teachers and staff in ten schools identify students who might benefit from a home computer. The students and families use them to word process, improve keyboarding skills, use educational CDs, and do internet research. Students can also practice the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test (FCAT).

2. Describe the relationship between this project and the challenge it is addressing, the project's history, and how it is being sustained? (300 word maximum)

Students who don't have home access to technology lack an essential tool in our information rich society. A home computer is a vital educational tool which enables students to turn-in typed reports, do independent research, and communicate their efforts clearly. Students whose households lack a computer are at a severe disadvantage. Although only 8% of all Sarasota families live below the poverty line, the percentage of students living below the poverty line has increased to 14%.

Thirty percent of Sarasota students do not have access to a computer at home—these are often the families living in poverty. Ron Zimmerman knew from personal experience and research that students without computers fall behind their peers. About eight years ago, Ron began an effort to ensure equity in local education. The first year, some donated old computers were refurbished and given to 40 students at Bay Haven Elementary School with a \$500 grant. Through the years additional grants have been obtained to provide computers to hundreds of Sarasota students. Riverview High School, Teen Pregnancy Program, Phoenix Academy, and several elementary schools all distribute computers. In 2005 through 2006, thanks to \$43,000 in grants from the Education Foundation of Sarasota, more than 500 students have received refurbished computers as Phase II.

Besides distributing computers through the Sarasota County School District, the program has worked with various contacts in Newtown to deliver computers to students in an area where 80% of the students are on free or reduced lunches. Computers have been distributed through after-school programs, summer daycare facilities, and the Newtown Boys Club.

Expanded partnerships, volunteers, space, and grants are anticipated so every school might soon distribute computers to students and their families to help them across the "Digital Divide."

3. Describe the partnerships and collaborations involved in the creation, development, and implementation of this project. (300 word maximum)

Home Computers for Sarasota County Students has grown because of numerous individual, business, educational, and government partnerships.

During the program's initial years, Mr. Zimmerman did most of the work himself with a small \$500 grant from the Education Foundation of Sarasota County Inc. The first year, old computers were refurbished, software installed, and 40 students received computers. Two years ago computer engineer Andrew Kiss became partners with Zimmerman. Mr. Kiss's volunteers work thousands of hours. He is a committed parent of a fifth grader who believes computers should be in every home.

As the program expanded to 10 Sarasota County Schools, more Sarasota County School District employees have donated their time. Teachers identify families needing a computer, contact families, deliver to students, arrange and participate in our numerous computer distribution nights. This is an extra public service many teachers and administrators are providing to Sarasota County Students.

Businesses such as Sun Hydraulics, Willis A Smith Construction, U-Store It, and Weber Manufacturing have given free services and facilities so the program may evolve and serve more students. Numerous businesses have also donated computer equipment. On-going partnerships have been established with P.B.O.A., the Williams Law Firm, and Coldwell Banker, which continually provide large quantities of hardware.

Sarasota County Schools and Sarasota County are technology partners. Outdated school or office computers are often great home computers. This technology partnership includes supplying computer hardware to Home Computers for Sarasota County Students. The school district and County are exploring ways to make internet access affordable for these students.

Future plans include the utilization of additional volunteers and student help from elementary, secondary, and local colleges in the refurbishing of computers. This program exemplifies an ongoing effort to increase student achievement and create a technology node in Sarasota County.

4. Describe the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of this project in the last 3 years and explain how this project has been a success. (300 word maximum)

“In my career, I have never seen such excitement for learning as I did when I saw three boys from the same family a few days after Mr. Zimmerman delivered their computer. They literally jumped up and down as they relayed stories about various accomplishments on the computer. As the boys talked, their mother looked on with such contentment. I saw a tear in her eye as she explained that she had used the computer earlier that afternoon to work on her resume to apply for a higher paying job.”
—School Social Worker

This program has many success stories!

Teachers notice that the computer is promoting student achievement. Assignments are computer assisted. Previously handwritten work is now typed, spell checked, and grammar is improved. Significant amounts of time beyond classroom are spent interacting with educational CD programs like

Reader Rabbit and Math Blaster. Learning at home must be fun and the computer is certainly a tool that engages students' interest, so the child spends hours learning basic skills.

This year, the program entered phase II which is expanding the reaches of the program. For the 2005-2006 school year Home Computers for Sarasota County Students is on track to deliver 350-400 computers. Only 60 and 80 machines were distributed in 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 school years.

Success is not measured in the number of computers donated, but in the students and how their lives have been impacted. Having access to a home computer has allowed some teenage mothers to continue their schoolwork at home rather than dropping out of school. The reasons for student achievement gaps vary, but Home Computers for Sarasota County Students is meeting one need in Sarasota County, one student at a time.

Name the primary contact for the project. Provide name & title, organization, address, telephone, and e-mail address. (*This person may be contacted to verify information.*)

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End of Application

See www.ncl.org/aac/ or the application instructions for detailed application instructions and sample applications from previous All-America City Winners.



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