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# The Palm Beach Post

Saturday, May 30, 2009

The Home Page of Paradise

First edition | 75 cents

'You have to be careful you don't get caught on the softball field by some guy with a bat.'



ALFREDO ESTEPA, doing time for drugs



## Convicts solving conflicts



Staff photos by RICHARD GRAULICH

Mediation instructor John Cohen works with prisoners in the South Bay Correctional Peer Education Mediation Program this month.

*Inmates learn how to mediate flare-ups, with the goal of helping others.*



An inmate takes notes during a mediation class. Showdowns over real or perceived slights happen all the time in prison, inmates say.

**> PRACTICING PEACE IN PRISON**  
 Can convicts learn how to think before acting out?  
**PalmBeachPost.com/yourpost**

By JOHN LANTIGUA  
*Palm Beach Post Staff Writer*  
 SOUTH BAY — Juan Cervante sums up every convict's nightmare. "You come in here sentenced to a year, you get into it with some guy, and the next thing you know that year turns into a life sentence," he says. In other words, an argument with another inmate, in the hot-house confines of prison, turns violent. You hurt him or kill him — maybe even in self-defense — and corrections officials throw away the key. Inmates know such calamities

happen and that is one reason why, on a recent day at South Bay Correctional Facility, 20 of 1,863 residents sat in class listening carefully to former British magistrate John Cohen. Cohen, who moved to Palm Beach County in 2005 after working as a judge in Britain for 12 years, is a professional mediator. He sports jacket and tie and speaks with a British accent. His students wear prison uniforms and a museum's worth of tattoos. "I'm training this group to mediate conflicts between other inmates in this prison before those

See MEDIATION, 8A ▶

## Prelude to panic: Tax rolls plummet

*With countywide values lower than feared, scrambling officials ponder tax hikes, layoffs and sharp cuts.*

By JENNIFER SORENTRUE  
*Palm Beach Post Staff Writer*

WEST PALM BEACH — The financial forecast for Palm Beach County and its municipalities was already bleak. On Friday it became dire. Many local cities learned that their tax base has plummeted even faster than Property Appraiser Gary Nikolits had projected last month, when he was expecting the quickest free fall since the Great Depression. Now people may have to search even further back for comparisons, Nikolits said Friday. "I can't imagine anything has been this widespread," he said. "There was a bust way back in the 1800s." In late April, Nikolits' office estimated that the total value of taxable properties countywide had fallen nearly 12 percent since 2008. But a new estimate released Friday puts the drop at 13.5 percent, leaving many local governments with a larger-than-expected hole in their finances. It's too soon to say how all the cities will react, but the major options include tax hikes, layoffs and sharp cuts in services. On Thursday, county administrators proposed a 13.5 percent tax-rate increase and layoffs of 175 workers. In Lake Worth, managers had been bracing for a 15 percent drop in the tax base. But Nikolits' new estimate puts the decrease at 24.3 percent.

See VALUES, 4A ▶

### The biggest losers

Largest estimated declines in property tax bases among Palm Beach County municipalities:

- Loxahatchee Groves:** 26.3 percent
- Lake Worth:** 24.3 percent
- Greenacres:** 23.8 percent
- Palm Springs:** 23.6 percent
- Hypoluxo:** 20.9 percent

## Snitching on McCarty lops 2 years off Newell's prison term

*'The greater good is served,' a federal judge says.*

By GEORGE BENNETT and SUSAN SPENCER-WENDEL  
*Palm Beach Post Staff Writers*  
 WEST PALM BEACH — Disgraced former Palm Beach County Commissioner Warren Newell's willingness to

sing from behind bars might not have gone over well with his fellow federal inmates in Pensacola, but on Friday it earned him a hefty reduction in his five-year sentence for corruption.

U.S. District Judge Kenneth Marra slashed two years from Newell's sentence after prosecutors said his cooperation helped them nail former Commissioner Mary McCarty on corruption charges. She faces as much as five years in prison at her sentencing next week. "But for Mr. Newell's cooperation, Mary McCarty would

still be on the county commission," Marra said during a brief hearing at the federal courthouse on Clematis Street. "The greater good is served." Prosecutors said Newell also is helping them with other criminal investigations, which they did not discuss publicly. Newell's testimony was

See NEWELL, 4A ▶



**Newell sings:**  
 The former county official's testimony provided authorities with 'critical' information, an assistant U.S. attorney says.  
 RICHARD GRAULICH  
 2007 staff file photo

**Judge to Cuba: Pay up**  
 In Miami, he awards man \$1 billion over father's 1959 suicide. **Story, 2A**

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FORECAST ON BACK PAGE OF SPORTS



## State universities to raise tuition 15 percent; largest hike in 17 years

By KIMBERLY MILLER  
*Palm Beach Post Staff Writer*  
 All of Florida's public universities plan to increase tuition 15 percent in the fall, the maximum allowed under a new state law and the biggest rate hike students have seen in 17 years. "It's awful, there are no jobs but tuition is going up," said Stuart resident Andy Werner, whose daughter attends the University of Central Florida. Werner said both he and his wife lost their jobs this year. "The costs go up, and you're thinking, 'Where is the money going to come from?'" Werner said. For most students, the tuition increases mean they will pay between \$370 and \$400 more for a full 30-credit year. The hikes are particularly biting be-

**FAU increase**  
 '08-'09 per credit: \$82.03\*  
 '09-'10 per credit: \$94.33\*  
 '09-'10 full year: \$2,830\*  
 \*Does not include fees.  
 ■ See all state school increases, 5A  
 ■ FAU to lay off 30 workers. **Local, 1B**

cause Bright Futures Scholarships will not pay for the extra tuition. Schools were required to give the Board of Governors their 2009-10 tuition proposals by Friday. For the first time, all 11 universities have the power to raise tuition above what lawmakers set to 15. See TUITION, 5A ▶

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