



# The Islander News

*The Life and Times of Key Biscayne, Florida*



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## We Are Thankful For: Frank Caplan: dedicated to improving the Key for everyone

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Take a look at local news, Village Council meetings, political campaigns, etc. in the past decade or so, and three issues stand out as recurring concerns: the fate of the old Sonesta Beach Resort site, the island's lack of a high school and a persistent shortage of playing fields.

In the past couple years, however, the tone of the news has shifted: the future of the Sonesta lot was resolved in a manner most people consider appealing if not ideal; a school for 1,100 Village students in grades 6-12 will open

at the MAST@Virginia Key campus in 2015; and a new joint-use playing field will be available for youth sports teams at the same location next spring.

According to local officials, it is no surprise those accomplishments coincide with the first two-year term of newly-reelected Mayor Frank Caplan – one of many reasons the community is thankful for the longtime volunteer who first assumed the island's highest elected office in 2010.

Village Manager John Gilbert – who worked side-by-side with Caplan on those accomplishments – remarked, “The Mayor has a passion for this community, and

an attention to detail, that are second to none. His mind is three, four, five steps ahead on any issue, and through his passion for the community, he gets attention and buy-in from others on the issues that affect Key Biscayne.”

Caplan's colleagues on the Council had similar praise.

“I’m so happy to work with him,” Council member Mayra Pena Lindsay said. “We have always had great Councils and great Mayors, but I think he is just so well-rounded in such a superlative way. He is compassionate, he is respectful, he leads with a good demeanor. He works diligently,

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Islander News photo

**Mayor Frank Caplan spoke at this year's Veterans' Day ceremony.**





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## MAYOR CAPLAN

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nimbly. He studies all the angles. And he's relentless."

It is Caplan's work ethic on behalf of the Village that comes up again and again.

While all Council members joined Pena Lindsay in noting the Village has always been blessed with top-notch Mayors, several joked they wonder how Caplan finds time in the day to sleep.

Pena Lindsay noted if the Village had to pay Caplan what he could bill in his professional life as an attorney, "We couldn't afford him." Council member Michael Davey said he's told Caplan on more than one occasion to pace himself, noting it's hard to imagine how the Mayor can balance his professional and family life with all the time he spends working on behalf of the Village: "I don't know how he does it, because he works so hard at Village stuff," Davey said. "I see him all the time, meeting with people, meeting with concerned groups. He's always involved."

Council member Robert Gusman added, "I don't know how he gets it all in. He's a hardworking, dedicated Mayor — there's no question."

At the same time, something Davey alluded to — the Mayor's willingness to hear from everyone impacted by an issue — also drew praise.

"The things I admire most are his even-keeled disposition, and his genuine interest in hearing all sides of every issue," Vice Mayor Michael Kelly remarked. "He is extremely patient, and wants to understand the problem. He is truly interested in a fair outcome that achieves the best benefit for all parties concerned."

Davey agreed, noting, "The most important part of government is trying to include everyone in the discussion, and he's done a

great job of that. He does his best to listen to both sides and to take everything into account."

Council member Enrique Garcia noted Caplan's leadership style not only earns consensus among residents, but elected officials as well: "He brings us all together," Garcia said. "He's a guy who knows how to bring the Council and the community together — he makes sure all issues go through a process so everybody understands them."

Pena Lindsay knows it comes from the heart: she said Caplan genuinely doesn't have pet issues, and therefore is able to focus on decisions that benefit everyone on the Key.

Officials add the Mayor's ability to reach out has also reaped rewards in an always-tough arena: improving communication and interaction with the City of Miami and Miami-Dade County.

Gilbert said the way Caplan carries himself — and his ability to be outcome-oriented — gets real attention with outside entities. "He is extremely respected for how he presents himself, how he presents the issues and how he presents solutions for those issues. He doesn't just bring problems to the table, he brings ideas for how to solve them," the Manager remarked.

That's a major reason for the recent positive progress on long-standing problems like the Sonesta issue and school and playing field deficiencies, Council members say.

Pena Lindsay credits Caplan with "changing the whole dynamic" on the Sonesta topic, ultimately negotiating an improved site plan with developer Consultatio Key Biscayne LLC that moved tall buildings far from adjacent single-family homes and scaled back the size of the condominium.

"He created a climate of opportunity for people to come to the table without feeling they were the enemy," she said, noting the situation evolved from highly contentious to harmonic under Caplan's guidance. "He just cleaned the slate and made things happen where there had been such a negative history and such animosity. It's priceless."

Pena Lindsay noted part of the picture is Caplan's incredible institutional knowledge of the Key, as well as his ability to negotiate "with tremendous finesse and expertise."

While Caplan's negotiations over the Sonesta property helped prevent a situation where massive, intense buildings were built close to single-family homes, Vice Mayor Kelly noted Caplan also supported a move to prevent additional density island-wide: an ordinance that prohibits Councils from approving site plans that add more residential units than currently exist on a property.

Kelly, who was the most vocal supporter of the issue, called Caplan's vote for the ordinance an example of the Mayor's decisiveness: "He has not been afraid to take a stand where needed, such as in the case of the density ordinance."

Council members note all those abilities were equally evident in the creation of the Interlocal Agreement with the Miami-Dade School District that resulted in the high school and shared-use playing field at MAST, which solve two of the island's most troubling deficiencies.

Davey said the MAST project stands out as a vital accomplishment: "You look at the issue's he's tackled, like the school — that's such a huge deal for this community."

Pena Lindsay added Caplan doggedly

pursued talks with the school district. "He got a couple of no's, and he continued going forward. He saw there were opportunities, where many people would have given up. He was absolutely dedicated to that mission and to making it happen."

While any list of the Mayor's achievements in the last two years is surely impressive and a good reason for thanks, officials say, perhaps even more telling is that Council members know full well they've been on the other side of votes from the Mayor — yet still affirm his dedication to making the Village a better place for everyone.

"We agree to disagree on certain things," Davey acknowledged. "But I respect his opinions. He's thoughtful in how he approaches things."

"He's been a phenomenal Mayor, and I'm glad he's up there."

Gusman added, "We haven't seen eye-to-eye on every issue, but there's no denying he is a hard-working, dedicated guy. He's kind, smart — the whole gamut."

With that in mind, returning Council members said they are looking forward to another two years of working with Caplan for the best of Key Biscayne.

"He brings an amazing level of experience and talent to the job," Pena Lindsay remarked. "It's his passion, what he's completely committed to. He enjoys it. You can tell he gets a kick out of it — and that makes it a wonderful experience for everyone who sees it."

Kelly added, "I can't say enough good things about Mayor Caplan. I truly admire him and think he has been a tremendous asset for the Council and our community."