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## Accusations complicate court fight

Dueling attorney ethical complaints delay resolution in condo records lawsuit

By Ron Hurtibise  
South Florida Sun Sentinel

A years-long court fight over a condo owner's right to access her condo association's financial

records has spawned a new level of conflict — this time between attorneys in the case — that threatens to further delay resolution of the matter. Despite orders by two judges

and an arbitrator, the Boca View Condominium Association still has not given unit owner Eleanor Lepseter's personal lawyer access to the association's financial records as required by Florida law. As the association pursues an appeal and a rehearing over the rulings, attorneys involved in the cases are now targeting one

another: In February, one of Lepseter's attorneys filed a complaint to the Florida Bar against one of the association's former lawyers at the firm Becker & Poliakoff, saying he allowed the association president's brother to engage in unlicensed practice of law by authoring a proposed judge's

order last year. In March, the association's current attorney filed a motion to disqualify Lepseter's attorneys because the Bar complaint was based on an email that one of the Lepseter attorneys had flagged as privileged communication. Turn to Fight, Page 30



Former Pembroke Pines residents Juan Hernandez and his family — wife Ariel, and kids Kaleb, 9, and Elle, 3 — in front of their home in Ave Maria on Tuesday. Hernandez commutes five days a week for his law enforcement job in Broward. CARLINE JEAN/SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL

## Fleeing rising prices

South Floridians move to small town to seek affordability, safety

By Amber Bonenfant  
South Florida Sun Sentinel

Almost 90 minutes west of South Florida lies a hidden small town, Ave Maria, surrounded by

lush, sprawling greenery, quiet neighborhoods interrupted only by the sound of birds chirping and the occasional cheerful greeting of neighbors. Ave Maria has become an unexpected haven for those looking to flee the expenses of South Florida's tri-county area. The town has seen a surge over the past few years as South Florid-

ians have been arriving, lured by the promise of a quieter, laid-back lifestyle, a safe and family-friendly environment, and a chance to escape the rising affordability crisis making it difficult for families to make ends meet. "You come here, and there are these gates, and it's almost like you can hear singing," said former Miramar resident Candyce

Haynes, 35. "I was like, 'What is this Pleasantville town and how to do I get in?'" She, her husband and her son moved to Ave Maria pre-pandemic, enticed by the prospect of having a new-construction home that didn't need renovations or updates and the safety

Turn to Prices, Page 14

## Patronis targets use of ESG by BlackRock

Principles have become a target of GOP leaders across the country

By Jeffrey Schweers  
Orlando Sentinel

TALLAHASSEE — When Florida CFO Jimmy Patronis decided to drop BlackRock from managing \$2 billion in state treasury funds, he blamed company CEO Larry Fink's commitment to using climate change and other factors to decide where to invest. Yet all but one of the firms that Patronis moved the money to actually follow those same ESG principles, which take into account a company's policies on environmental, social and governance issues when weighing investment risk.

ESG has become a major target of Gov. Ron DeSantis and other GOP leaders across the country, who call it a bad policy meant to circumvent the ballot box to impose "radical leftist ideology" and "wokeism" on the public. Yet financial analysts have calculated widespread divestiture could cost taxpayers billions in fees and interest, and put the pensions of millions of government workers at risk. At the center of the effort to help Republican officials discredit and boycott ESG-committed fund managers is the State Financial

Turn to BlackRock, Page 2

## Perfect ending to a perfect season



Dave Hyde

When their perfect season was done, when their national championship was won, when they'd

set a scoring record and a winning record — when they'd not just accomplished what any team could, but done it with a defining style, Jim Crutchfield pulled the microphone toward him and even had the perfect words ready. "It's been a storybook season with a storybook ending to it," the Nova Southeastern men's basketball coach said after a 111-101 win

ONLINE The Elite 8 game between Florida Atlantic and Kansas State ended too late for this edition. For coverage, go to SunSentinel.com/Sports.

against West Liberty (WVa.) in the Division II national championship. Turn to Hyde, Page 28



Nova Southeastern's Dallas Graziani is lifted up by teammates as they celebrate their victory Saturday over West Liberty in the championship game of the NCAA Division II tournament in Evansville, Ind. MACGABE BROWN/AP

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Prices

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the community offered their family.

"I don't really miss South Florida," Haynes said. "You can go into the chaos of the city and come home and be like 'I was just visiting.' I don't hear police sirens all hours of the night."

Josias Manzanillo and his wife, Delmaris, former residents of Davie, moved to Ave Maria in 2020 after having trouble finding a home they liked for the price they wanted in South Florida.

"Ave Maria came up and we thought 'What a jewel we found.' We didn't just find a house, we found a place where we could spend time," Manzanillo said.

The decision to leave South Florida behind

Located almost 20 miles off Alligator Alley, Ave Maria is a master-planned community developed by Barron Collier Companies, in a partnership with Tom Monaghan, co-founder of Domino's Pizza. Construction started in 2005, and the first residents moved in 2007.

The whole of the community spans 22,000 acres, with 17,000 acres set aside for nature preservation, leaving about 4,000 acres for residential and commercial building. Currently, there are about 4,100 homes built, with room for there to be around 11,000 total.

With four home builders offering a slew of different products ranging from condos starting in the low \$200,000s to coach homes and sprawling single-family homes overlooking a golf course, potential residents are able to get in at various price points.

Combined with amenities such as a water park, pickleball courts and tennis courts for families, as well as a university in the middle of the town, it offers a sense of family that some say they felt was missing in South Florida.

It was with this in mind



The Sanchez family — Sienna, 12, Roman, 14, Sera, 17, Skye, 5, Stella, 8, mom Lourdes and dad Serfin — inside their home in Ave Maria on Tuesday. CARLINE JEAN/SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL

that Serf Sanchez, his wife, Lourdes, and their five children found themselves at Ave Maria.

Unhappy with what they felt was a lack of safety in Miami, and deeming family the most important thing, they toured Ave Maria after Sanchez's wife stumbled across an advertisement for the town. Four days later, they decided to buy a home there, despite already having purchased a new home in Miami, they said.

"They were able to take advantage of the market and sell their home in Miami, and wanted for a year while waiting for their home to be built."

"When we saw the prices here for the first time, there was a difference in what we had purchased in Miami," noted Sanchez. "With us making our decision, it was geared toward family, but the affordability factor helped."

Their home in Ave Maria cost them about 30% less than what they sold their house in Miami for.

According to CC Homes Senior Vice President Diana Ibarra, homes that they develop in Ave Maria are usually more affordable than the ones offered in South Florida.

For example, in their community called Kingfishers Reserve in Cooper City, a home would probably cost a buyer around \$1.2 million. The same type of home in Ave Maria may cost a buyer

about \$650,000. The average price point of their homes in Ave Maria, depending on the collection and upgrades, starts in the \$320,000s and can go up to the \$650,000s.

The Sanchez's home in Ave Maria sits at 4,100 square feet, with four bedrooms, three and half bathrooms, a patio and a three-car garage. Their overall costs have gone down as well — they're paying about half in homeowner's insurance than they were in Miami.

For them, life there has exceeded their expectations. Sanchez only has to commute to Miami about two to three times a month to oversee his real estate team there, their children have made friends and are involved in extracurricular activities.

"In Miami, there is a lot of hustle and bustle. The traffic is just so different when you're here. Life is just more laid back," Lourdes Sanchez said.

The surge of South Florida residents

CC Homes, based in Coral Gables, has been building in Ave Maria for years, attracted by the availability of land and the accessibility to Broward County.

According to Ibarra, 75% to 80% of their buyers come from the South Florida area.

Some are first-time homebuyers, others are South Floridians who can work remotely, while others have professions, such as nurses, where they only need to drive into the tri-county area three times a week.

"Right away when we got there, that was our focus and we got a lot of people to come, especially from Dade and Broward," noted Ibarra. "It's the affordability, you couldn't find a house in Broward or Dade like that."

Lennar, another builder growing near the entrance, has been hard for them to get a grasp on the trend, they did see South Florida residents making their way over during the pandemic.

And Broward County residents are packing up their lives and establishing themselves in the small town. Tucked away in the Avalon Park division of Ave Maria lies a sprawling five-bedroom, four bathroom home, with a freshly manicured lawn and flowers growing near the entrance. On a Tuesday afternoon, the neighborhood is largely peaceful, save for the shouts of schoolkids who are pedaling furiously on bikes as they race one another to be the first to make it home.

It's home to Juan and Ariel Hernandez, former residents of Pembroke Pines, who moved with their two young children to Ave Maria two years ago.

"When we started to have children, we were mindful

of the overcrowding in the Broward County area," said Ariel Hernandez. "It was so compact and didn't have that family feel anymore."

And now they feel that Ave Maria offers them what they had been missing in Broward County. Neighbors who wave and greet you when they see you, the ability to walk across your driveway to ask your neighbor for sugar for your cafe con leche and the persistent ringing of the doorbell as your son's friends ask if he can come out and play.

"It's a slower pace of life," added Hernandez. "Your neighbors bring you pie! We had carolers during the holidays. It was like, 'What? In South Florida? Have you ever heard of such a thing?'"

Like other homebuyers, Ave Maria came up in their search for a home and once they visited, they were sold. They purchased their home in 2020, and officially closed on it in 2021.

For them, they came at the right time, as they have seen equity rise in their home. After seller credits, they paid about \$605,000 for the home, and believe they could probably get around \$900,000 if they were to sell now.

The main disadvantage, however, is the commute. Juan Hernandez still makes to work, he said. Working in the Broward County Sheriff's Office as a school resource officer, he drives 80 minutes back and forth each day to make it to work.

But living in Ave Maria is still worth it, he said.

A small-town lifestyle

Life in Ave Maria doesn't seem far off from the small towns portrayed in Hallmark movies. In the late winter and spring months, a weekly trolley tour takes place of the entire town, presented by an older man named Joe, who regales groups with his fountain of knowledge and sly jokes about small-town life.

At the town's local coffee shop, The Bean, residents grab a quick breakfast or a cup of coffee, while some

residents sit on rocking chairs outside the welcome center, listening to music playing over the speakers.

"We didn't just find a home, we found a community," added Josias Manzanillo. "We do more things together now than we did before."

He and his wife, Delmaris, have carved a life out for themselves in the thriving small town. Some of that includes volunteering at the church in town, or visiting the local brewery or going to Mercato at Ave, where they host Latin nights.

The town, for the most part, has everything residents would need inside of it. There is a giant Public for groceries, a Mobile gas station, a fire station, a dialysis center, a veterinarian, a fitness center for residents and a handful of restaurants ranging from the Pub and Grill to the Oasis Kitchen Lounge.

Some of those stores are owned by former South Florida residents who have moved their businesses to Ave Maria, such as Dr. Luisa Del Toro, the local eye doctor, and Ana Garcia-Iguran, an obstetrician and gynecologist.

Mercato at Ave is a bustling marketplace owned by husband-and-wife team Jorge Arroyo and Reina Del Mar Torres, former residents of South Florida. Having lived in Broward and Miami-Dade counties, they were looking for places to open a business, according to Arroyo.

One day, on a road trip heading to the west coast they saw a billboard advertising Ave Maria. They visited, decided it was a good fit for their goals and stayed ever since. Originally, they launched their business at the Ave Maria farmer's market in 2020 but have since been able to expand.

Now Mercato at Ave is a flourishing home to about 15 small businesses selling items from ice cream to scented candles. They also own a boutique clothing store called Hoja de Mentro. "It's a growing market, and it's going to take time, but we love it here," the couple said.

HOBBY LOBBY advertisement featuring various home decor items, seasonal sales (Summer Toys 40% off, Spring Shop 40% off, Easter Party, Crafts & Decorations 40% off), and other products like wedding items, wearable art, frames, best-selling books, jewelry making, paper crafts, and furniture. Includes store hours and location information.