

PALM BEACH GARDENS & JUPITER
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WEEK OF NOVEMBER 25-DECEMBER 1, 2010

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COURTESY PHOTO
 Above, Peter Dobens, project Public Information Officer.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

BY TIM NORRIS
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Uh-oh, here they come, just ahead, on the left and right. Orange diamonds, black letters, WORK ZONE, ROAD NARROWS, LANE ENDS, MERGE RIGHT-LEFT. Howling and buffeting by, from I-95 across the intersection with Military Trail and PGA Boulevard, on a stretch studded with warning signs, people in their motor

SEE I95, A8 ▶

Big Heart Brigade on way to feeding 80,000

FLORIDA WEEKLY STAFF

It's a miracle that happens every year. More than 1,000 volunteers began cooking turkeys and the trimmings in Palm Beach Gardens on Nov. 20, preparing meals for 80,000 needy people across Palm Beach County. They cook nonstop for six days, with an organized precision that would match any military operation, says local businessman Tom DeRita, who founded the Big Heart Brigade 18 years ago. It started when Mr. DeRita's teenage son David asked his dad to help him cook Thanksgiving meals for some homeless veterans. The nonprofit Brigade has since grown

each year. This year, requests for more than 92,000 meals were submitted. The week before the holiday the group still needed \$25,000. The goal was reduced to 80,000. Last year, the Brigade delivered meals to more than 67,000 people. "It's amazing what can happen when good people decide they can accomplish something," says Mr. DeRita. "Just a meal, a Thanksgiving meal, can put a smile on people's faces like you wouldn't believe." It costs the Heart Brigade \$1.35 to provide one meal. More than 60 businesses and agencies help support the effort, in addition to the 5,000 total volunteers who help cook and deliver. The city of Palm Beach Gardens,

especially the fire department, plays a big role. Scores of firefighters go through certification to cook, which takes place at Fire Station No. 3 on Northlake Boulevard. Chief Pete Bergel calls the cooking and the delivery of the dinners, "Indescribable. There's really no way to believe that you can accomplish all of that in a week, but we do," the chief says. The Brigade supports other charitable causes throughout the year, but the Thanksgiving dinner is its biggest effort. Donations can be made at bigheartbrigade.com or by calling 502-8194 or 719-2877. ■

■ SEE PHOTOS ON A12 ▶

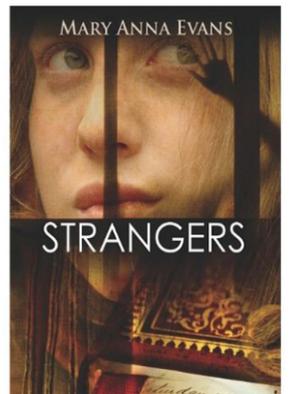
INSIDE



Warm tradition
 Florida Classical Ballet performs "The Nutcracker." B1 ▶



Gardens Society
 See who's out and about in Palm Beach County. B12-14 ▶



Book review
 "Strangers" serves a generous feast of history and mystery. A7 ▶



The Mashup
 Go ahead, throw that turkey. B8 ▶

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I-95

From page 1

machines barely and rarely turn a watchful eye to the unfolding drama.

Gliding off into the city, though, they get a better, and sometimes sweatier and fret-ier, look. Still, the detail of the enterprise is often lost in bypassing blur or bluster.

The \$87.5 million I-95 HOV Expansion Project and its two stages in Palm Beach County, a 4.3-mile, \$44 million stretch from just short of PGA Boulevard to close to Donald Ross Road in Palm Beach Gardens on the south continuing into a 4.5-mile, \$43.5 million span from Donald Ross to just shy of Indiantown Road in Jupiter on the north, is not slouching toward its scheduled end, in spring 2012. In fact, crews for contractors Community Asphalt Corp. (working on the south part) and Posen Construction (working on the north) have pushed ahead of schedule.

They are transforming three lanes in each direction to five — one lane in each direction will be a High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane.

Stalled in traffic on a feeder street, slowed by a lane-pinch, rebuffed by a barricade, motorists may look up rather than sideways, imploring relief, but delays could give them time to home in on a legion of workers, bent at labor with sledge hammers and pneumatic drills, tight-roping along wood forms for pouring concrete piers and abutments, strapped into scrapers and dozers and cranes and tractors.

Motorists could look closer, but, mostly, they don't.

Overlooked on the overpass, unappreciated on the under-shunt, the people who build and restore and expand these roadways, even wearing bright orange and yellow vests, might as well go jump in the tar bucket.

How about the crew, there, lifting and drilling and bolting galvanized steel guard rails into place? How about this guy, here, in the Panama hat and orange vest, sucking exhaust through a hot afternoon as he waves traffic off the interstate and onto a stretch of PGA Boulevard narrowed by plastic barrels? How about any of the 80 to 100 workers on a given day, the contractors and sub-contractors, or the legions supporting and directing them, from offices and in a fleet of vehicles?

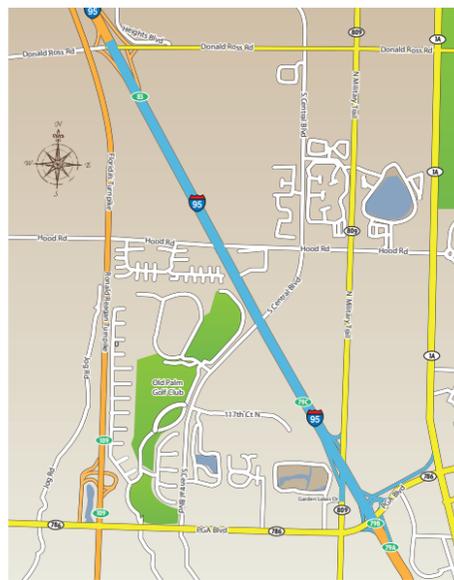
How about getting outta the way?

This culture's in a hurry. Exactly where it's hurrying to might be an open question, but hardly anyone questions the how.

At the Military Trail overpass on I-95 in Palm Beach Gardens, being shored and widened by a swarm of workers, Peter Dobens might wish he could collar passing motorists and narrate the scene. Most recent counts show nearly 100,000 vehicles gunning through that intersection every day, way beyond Dobens' collar-grabbing capacity.

He knows, all too well, that the public, drivers and passengers and homeowners and renters, get peevis and rankled about delays and noise. He knows, because a lot of the calls come to him, as the project's Public Information Officer.

There's plenty to discuss. Dan Barbato of Target Engineering, administrator of the north project for Cardno/TBE Group, says, "There's a whole lot going on. We're talking about a process, building a road. But the specifications, the plans, the standard index, the design manuals, thousands of volumes of manuals and booklets that tell us what to do, and we have to take the materials and test them, and all the



"Most people think, 'How hard can it be?' They have no idea how hard it can be."

— Dan Barbato, Target Engineering

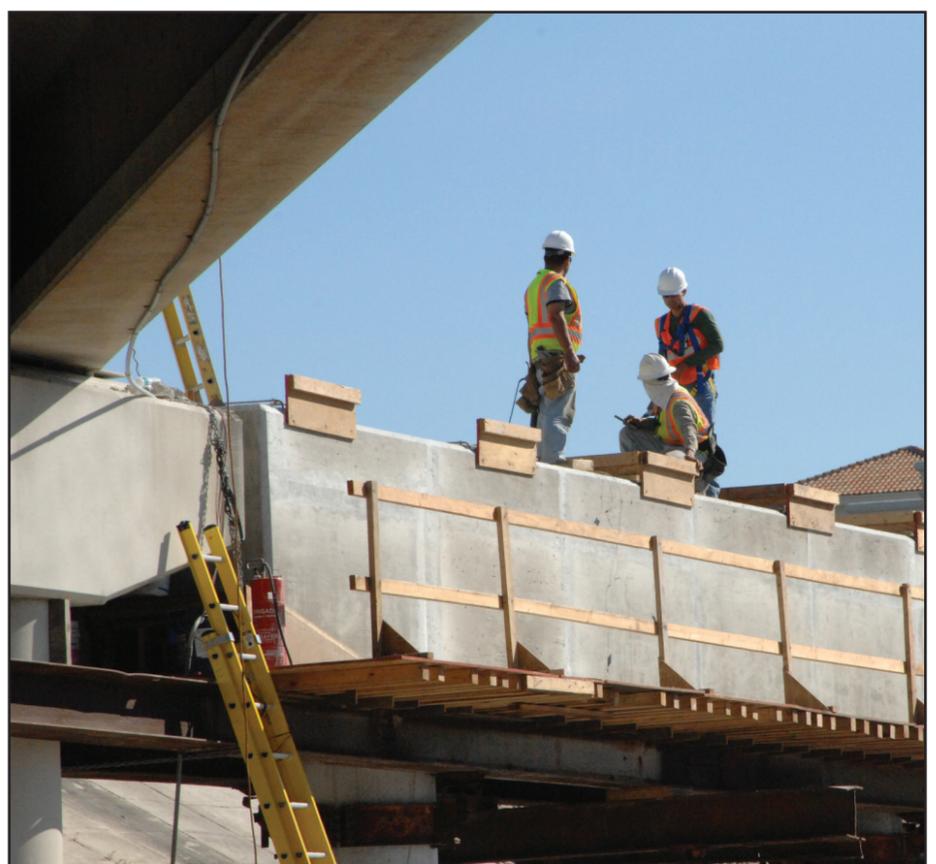
material specifications, the workmanship, the survey, the unknowns that you encounter during construction, all of those factor in.

"Most people think, 'How hard can it be?' They have no idea how hard it can be."

Mr. Dobens does. He may finger-dance on the Internet, may jawbone by phone, but he is also a foot soldier, something he has in common with the workers on or above the ground.

Like Mr. Barbato's counterpart on the south project, Pat Kennedy, and like the whole project's overall boss, senior project engineer Mike Irwin, Mr. Dobens does far more than ride a desk. He was out earlier this month, on foot, knocking on doors in the Egret Landing and Heights of Jupiter subdivisions, delivering notices headlined I-95 NIGHT REPAVING AND RESTRIPIPING TO BEGIN SUNDAY, NOV. 14, and then explaining the work, answering questions, fielding any flak.

"It's ensuring that these people have somebody to go to if they have a problem," he says. "This way they can put a face with my voice and feel they can give me a call. They may not always hear what they want, but at least they know that their issue is being addressed."



FLORIDA DOT PHOTOS

As many as 100 workers a day might be at the construction site at I-95 and PGA Boulevard.

The construction workers, of course, are front-and-center (and left and right), too, soldiers of feet and also of arms and backs and helmeted heads. "In summer, and in the afternoon heat now, where you get even more heat radiating up from the asphalt, they're just out there sweating," Mr. Dobens says. In heavy boots and long sleeves and gloves and reflective vests, nearly all of them pack a water bottle. Those driving by in cooled air and casual wear aren't likely to notice.

As they roll along, merrily or usually otherwise, travelers don't stop to think: every inch of this highway, this road, has been built. Designed, engineered, argued and modified through layers of approval and permission. Then laid down, lime rock substrate first, then two inches of asphalt on the first lift, two more inches on the second lift, and three-quarters inch of friction course on the top.

The layers are laid down, pressed and rolled, then ornamented with guard rails and support and sound walls and drainage ditches and overpasses and directional paint by hand — on a throttle, or shovel, or drill or sprayer. And that doesn't begin to pull

in the exhaustive planning, the design and redesign, the budgeting and political interplay, impact on environment and neighborhoods, public meetings and neighborhood canvassing, or all the detailed fuss and chazerai around the roadway itself, railings, sound and barrier walls, drainage, lighting, painting, landscaping.

What passers-by are left to see, just now, is a whiz-by patchwork glimpse of daily progress on discreet sites and stages. Those frustrated by a blocked-off ramp or a sudden slow down are even less likely to appreciate either the big picture or the very small one.

By contract and state rule, crews can close lanes only at night, with few exceptions. Heaviest work is often done in the glare of roadside lights, and out of the glare of public notice. When they do need to step into the traffic flow, contractors get creative, and the result is often dramatic.

One night earlier this month, just south of Indiantown Road, crews had to plant a new overhead truss for directional signs that would straddle all five northbound lanes, without closing the road and shunting traffic onto detours.

They came up with "traffic pacing,"

closing entrance ramps, slowing all comers to 20 mph behind a cordon of Florida Highway Patrol vehicles to create a gap of 20 minutes, enough time to bring up cranes, swing around and lower the overhead structure and bolt it into place.

"In many ways it's a ballet they perform out there, to get this done in that amount of time," Mr. Dobens says.

Not long ago the Florida Department of Transportation commissioned a study on how to better serve and placate the public, and one of their conclusions was ramped-up PR. Residents and not just readers and viewers, the study suggested, needed to be informed, consulted and heard.

That thinking, and an influx of state and federal money, led project leaders to hire Quest Corporation of America, led by Sharlene Lairsey, as a state-certified DBE (Disadvantaged Business Enterprise), a minority-owned (woman-owned) business specializing in communications, community involvement, compliance and creative services.

QCA sent Mr. Dobens, a veteran of newspapers (including the Manchester Union-Leader in New Hampshire) and television (including Channel 25 in Palm Beach County and Channel 10 in St. Petersburg), to handle public and media concerns on I-95 HOV.

Handling neglect of the human effort involved might be a lost cause, but he's happy to try.

As he drives the project's two stretches, now, he offers a wider view. "It took until 1987 for the last stretch of I-95 in Florida, the 'missing link' (from Palm Beach Gardens to Fort Pierce), to be completed," he says. "A big side-effect has been all the development around it." People, he says, need to get to-and-from. I-95 is the lifeline.



MAUREEN DZIKOWSKI/FLORIDA WEEKLY

Work on expanding I-95 through Palm Beach Gardens is expected to be completed next year.

Repaving and restriping of the stretch from Indiantown Road down to Donald Ross is under way, expected to extend, with a five-day break for Thanksgiving, into mid-December. Girders on the Military Trail overpass will be placed within the next two weeks, six for the new southbound lanes of I-95 and six for the north. More asphalt courses and milling and repaving the shoulders will follow.

The contract deadline for the north project is "winter 2010," the state says, and for the south project it is "summer 2012."

The contractors have an incentive to finish earlier, since they collect bonuses based on that, and they've had

relatively few rain days. If they're late, they pay. The north part of the project is ahead by about two months, the south part is ahead but they're not sure how far as each segment of the project has its own deadlines.

Not everyone welcomes sound walls or even muted traffic noise along their back yards, Mr. Dobens knows, much less lane closures and access. But they are steam-rolled by the greater good, or goods. We need our stuff. We need our high-speed access. We expect it. We demand it!

Work crews aren't waiting for their close-up, or their thank-you's. Contractors aren't waiting for their atta-boys. Local police and Florida Highway Patrol, and the state D.O.T. and its

M.O.T. (Maintenance of Traffic) people, aren't lined up for handshakes. They're all being paid, right? Peter Dobens, who learned how to negotiate and keep his cool growing up among six children, is waiting for, and ready for, questions and doubts and recrimination.

For now, he turns a close eye to the crews, mostly anonymous, their comforts the lunch box and porta-john, badgered by weather, buffeted by the slipstreams of 18-wheelers barreling by. He wonders what might have happened to their public profile if the builders of pyramids or Great Wall or the Appian Way had signed their work — not with orange warnings or green overheads, but with their names. ■



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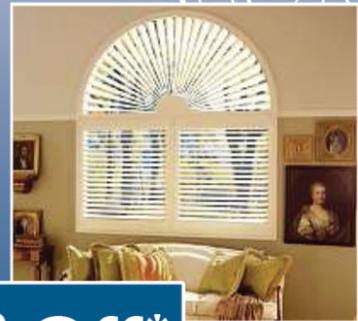

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