

Taking Police Advisory Panel Action

On June 6, 2009, a handcuffed Juan Gomez-Perez fell out of a police car and landed on his head while the officer who arrested him watched. The unfolding of this tragedy has created an unprecedented opportunity for Sarasota.

Surveys reveal that there is a racial divide in how minorities and whites perceive the police. My own research shows that 71 percent of African Americans believe that police bias is a "big reason" why black men are disproportionately incarcerated, in comparison to 37 percent of whites—a gap of 34 percentage points. This racial divide has profound consequences. First, it undermines the ability of minority communities to collaboratively work with the police to reduce crime. Second, the research shows that minorities are more likely to engage in crime when they perceive racial-ethnic discrimination. In short, a non-trusting adversarial relationship between minorities and the police increases crime.

Sarasota is now standing at the crossroads. It has the opportunity to redefine its relationship with its minority communities. This redefinition is crucial to Sarasota achieving its number one priority, that is, the economic development of Newtown. No wise businessperson will invest in a community that is perceived to be

GUEST COLUMN BY DR. JAMES UNNEVER
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communities uniformly revealed their heartfelt desire to have the police embrace their community and to empower them to take ownership of the crime that occurs in their neighborhoods. They want change and they want it now.

Second, it requires the police and the City to recognize that what they have been doing is not working. Put more simply, the police cannot arrest their way out of this problem. Therefore, the police must create new programs that alleviate perceptions of racial bias and that break down the barriers of mistrust. This means

a high-crime area. How can Sarasota reduce the level of crime in its minority communities? The solution requires far-sighted fundamental changes.

First, it requires that Sarasota openly acknowledge that there is a rift between it and its minority communities. During the Police Advisory Panel hearings, residents from these

communities uniformly revealed their heartfelt desire to have the police embrace their community and to empower them to take ownership of the crime that occurs in their neighborhoods. They want change and they want it now.

Fortunately, the Police Advisory Panel has produced a report that, if comprehensively embraced, should begin the process of making all of Sarasota's citizens equally believe they are why it is a destination city.—Compiled by S. Walch

THE SRQ JOURNAL

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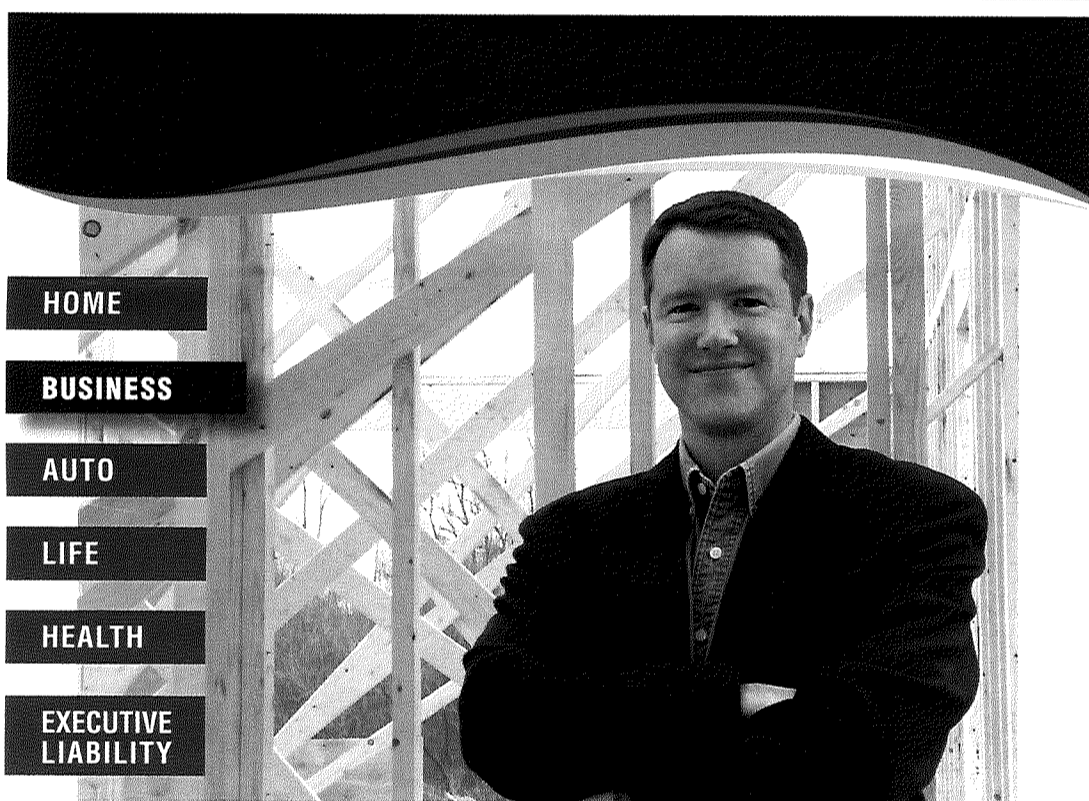
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JOEL FREEDMAN



Position: Freedman Consulting and Development President.

Education: Master's degree in Urban and Regional Planning from Texas A and M University; Bachelor's degree in Natural Resource Management from Utah State University.

Hometown: Sarasota. **Prior Business Experience:** After school, Freedman worked as a planner for the City of St. Petersburg. Freedman opened his own consulting practice in Florida in 1983. He also worked for a period at local engineering firm Bishop and Associates, but after that company was sold he started his own practice again and has run his own business since.

Community Involvement: Freedman serves on the Tampa Bay Area Regional Transportation Authority Citizen Advisory Committee. He has been heavily active in the Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce, serving as chairman from 1996 to 1998. He is also a past president of the Sarasota Ballet and served as chairman for the State Correctional Privatization Commission from 1995 until 2002.

Business Lesson Learned This Year: "Stay positive and continue to add value to everything that you do. A good example is probably being part of the redevelopment team for the Longboat Key Club and Resort, where we basically came up with a redevelopment of that project to help support our community and continue to make it a world-class resort like it has been for many years."

Why We're Watching Him: For more than a decade, Freedman has played a major role in charting the future of development in Sarasota. Right now, he is involved in high-profile developments like Pineapple Square in Sarasota and in long-range efforts like the TBARTA public transit discussions. **The Opportunity for Sarasota-Manatee:** "Probably because Sarasota was never over-developed like many communities in the state of Florida, we have the opportunity to redevelop and capitalize on our environment and the tourist amenities that we have, and I am hopeful we can encourage new businesses to expand or relocate."

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