

opinion

Mark Nusbaum, President
Frank M. Denton, Editor
Michael P. Clark,
Editorial Page Editor

Editorial board: Those at left, Bobby
Martin, editorial writers Roger Brown and
Paula Horvath. A new group of citizen
members will join in January

A VERSE FOR TODAY

But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.
2 Thessalonians 3:13

Let's capitalize on our city's rising rep

According to the popular tourist website TripAdvisor, Jacksonville is among the top 10 "destinations on the rise" for travelers.

That's fantastic news.

But how do we fully seize the opportunity presented by our "hot city" status?

How do we ensure that Jacksonville becomes an elite tourist city that people feel compelled to visit not only once, but again and again?

It's a goal we're one step closer to reaching now that City Council has approved an intriguing plan, largely crafted by Council President Lori Boyer, that will add more focus and coherence to the city's efforts to promote and market tourism.

As Boyer says, there have always been plenty of reasons for people to visit Jacksonville and lots of things for them to do while they're here.

It's just that we haven't always had a truly coordinated plan that effectively tells folks why they should come and what they can do.

"We've been setting our sights too low for what Jacksonville can be as a tourism destination," Boyer told the Times-Union.

Her plan is a good start toward raising our sights, upping our game and maximizing our growing and much deserved status as a great place to be.

The typical difficulty with Jacksonville involves its size. It is both a county and a city, so comparisons are difficult.

And as a county, Jacksonville includes huge swaths of natural parkland that do not usually show up in the iconic images of the city that focus on downtown.

The same goes for the county's numerous waterways, not simply the majestic St. Johns River but the beaches, the Intracoastal Waterway and numerous tributaries.

WIDE RANGING PLAN

Each year, the city devotes about \$6.5 million of the hotel taxes it takes in to promoting Jacksonville as a tourist destination.

Over time, however, that effort appeared to take a scattershot approach where lots of dollars were pushed toward bringing in this weekend conference or that short-term event — but not as many bucks toward building a creative blueprint designed to promote Jacksonville over the long haul.

That will dramatically change under Boyer's wide-ranging plan.

Some of its elements include:

- Creating accessible visitors centers that will direct tourists to the places they want to go in Jacksonville — and, equally important, guide them to other sites that they might enjoy but simply didn't know about.

- Directing the city's Tourism Development Council to spend \$2 million toward promoting Jacksonville in other cities.

- Requiring the tourism council to spend another \$2 million promoting our city as a convention or meeting destination. It is a worthwhile strategy that will hopefully draw more national gatherings to the massive Prime Osborn Convention Center, which now has a reputation as an under-utilized venue that only attracts local trade shows.

- Developing other proactive approaches to boosting the city's promotional outreach, from setting aside \$500,000 to improve or acquire existing facilities to providing \$800,000 in grants to support special events.

In short, Boyer's plan provides a thoughtful and tactical blueprint that isn't designed to merely put Jacksonville on the national map as a first-tier tourist destination, but to keep it there.

City Council deserves credit for embracing that vision and approving the plan.

Those of us in Jacksonville already know this is a vibrant, energetic city with plenty to do and even more to enjoy.

And that's obviously becoming clear to people who live outside Jacksonville — and are flocking to our town in ever-increasing numbers.

Our city is becoming a hot commodity as a tourist spot. It's time to strike while the iron is equally hot.



Round Marsh in the Timucuan Preserve is a beautiful site within our city limits — and also a hotbed for historic and archaeological study. This is a magnificent part of Jacksonville that the rest of the country often does not see. (Will Dickey/Florida Times-Union)

OUR CITY: A RISING DESTINATION

Recently, the popular travel website TripAdvisor ranked Jacksonville on its top 10 list of tourist "destinations on the rise."

Here is how TripAdvisor ranked the top 10:

1. Kihei, Hawaii.
2. Park City, Utah.
3. Portland, Maine.
4. Louisville, Ky.
5. Colorado Springs, Colo.
6. Houston, Texas.
7. Tucson, Ariz.
8. Pigeon Forge, Tenn.
9. Columbus, Ohio.
10. Jacksonville.

Source: TripAdvisor.

401(k) vs Social Security

Mayor's plan is bad deal for workers

Recently, The Florida Times-Union's editorial board asked this question: "Would you accept a 401(k) match of 10 percent or more in return for not having Social Security?"

The board's response was that "most of us would jump at the chance."

Not so fast.

As an expert in employee benefits for 25-plus years, I know that jumping at that chance would be a very poor decision.

Although trading your Social Security benefits for an employer pension with a guaranteed payment can be good (think railroad pensions), trading your Social Security benefits for a 401(k) is absolutely not comparable — even with a 10 percent match!

Here's just one example of two very different programs:

Say you're a married 30-year-old Jacksonville firefighter with a couple of kids, and you die serving your community. Sadly, your 401(k) will not be enough to take care of your family because you simply have not contributed long enough for the 401(k) to be your family's nest egg.

Your loved ones will be lucky to make it one year on your 401(k) savings and only if you have diligently deducted enough from your take home pay to get the match.

In contrast, your Social Security would kick in and actually cover your family. That's because it's insurance.

See that deduction on your paystub labeled OASDI? That stands for Old Age, Survivor and Disability Insurance. That benefit goes to your widowed spouse and kids under 18.

A 401(k) is nothing like that.

Not even close.

And we are talking about risking the welfare of our youngest first responders' families, the people who risk their lives for our safety every day.

So, no I wouldn't jump at the chance for that benefit, and neither should our city employees.

Shame on Mayor Lenny Curry and this newspaper for suggesting that this 401(k) is even remotely comparable to Social Security or a pension plan.

Carolyn McGovern, Jacksonville

Another view: Mike Luckovich Creators Syndicate



Letters from Readers

JEFF FISHER VS. GUS BRADLEY

EMPLOYMENT QUESTION

So the Los Angeles Rams let Jeff Fisher go after four years as head coach. His record was 31-45-1.

Meanwhile, Jaguars head coach Gus Bradley has a dismal 14-47 record.

Could someone tell me what is in the Kool-Aid that Shad Khan is drinking? And why hasn't he fired Bradley yet?
Holly Lowe, Callahan

HART RAMP

BIGGER PRIORITIES

So Mayor Lenny Curry wants to tear down the Hart ramp at a cost of \$50 million dollars.

Is it unsafe? No.
Is it structurally deficient? No.
Is it functionally obsolete? No.

Has it been a long festering problem that Jacksonville residents have been complaining about for years? No.

Has anyone even previously suggested that the Hart ramp needed to be torn down before Curry disclosed his idea for the first time on Nov. 3? No.

Was it even an issue that Curry raised during his 2015 campaign for mayor? No.

In fact, Curry's plan to tear down the Hart ramp is a solution to a nonexistent problem.

Meanwhile, the needs of other parts of the city — like the Northside, which has a large African-American community — are being ignored by Curry as he supports every idea in the world that will help Shad Khan, the billionaire owner of the Jacksonville Jaguars.

Khan wanted an amphitheater. Curry gave it to him.
Khan wants Metropolitan Park. Curry wants to give it to him.

Now it appears that Khan wants the Hart ramp removed.

Curry wants to do that, too.

Simply put, Jacksonville has bigger problems that Curry should be addressing rather than trying to tear down a ramp

that no one has suggested needed to be torn down before the mayor announced his unnecessary plan to do so.

Terry Bork, Jacksonville

OUR NATIONAL UNION

GREAT BUT IMPERFECT

We recently had an election in which the people spoke very loudly.

And we got a new president. The government didn't speak.

The special interests didn't speak. The rich and powerful didn't speak. The people spoke.

We are the only nation in the world where the citizens reign supreme.

Is it a perfect country?

No.

We are made up of imperfect people.

We are, however, made up of people who for the most part care about making this a better country.

And that gives us the power to change and improve this country.

Thank God we live in such a country.

Charles Bickerstaff, Orange Park

JAGUARS

UNFAIR SCHEDULE

I understand and accept that the Jacksonville Jaguars will play a home game in London each year.

However, I feel the Jaguars need to address the potential unfairness of scheduling these London games so early in the season each year.

If the NFL insists on scheduling the London game anywhere from week three to week five each year, the Jaguars should insist their bye week be deferred.

Having a bye week so early each year is unfair.

The bye week should be on an equal rotation basis with all teams. It is bad enough that the Jaguars must have an away game or a bye every year on the weekend of the Florida-Georgia game.

It also appears that the Jaguars will infrequently have a last game home game

because of the TaxSlayer Bowl.

Football isn't like baseball, basketball or hockey where you have a long schedule where you can adjust the schedule more easily from year to year.

The Jaguars should insist on scheduling fairness from the NFL.

Charles Lechner, Jacksonville

ELECTORAL COLLEGE

USE IT IN FLORIDA

I must admit that I am warming up to this idea of an Electoral College.

Now when we elect our next governor here in Florida, I think the candidate that gets the second-most votes show win.

That would be keeping with the trend of our presidential elections.

Michael Cross, St. Augustine

MAINSTREAM MEDIA

AT FAULT FOR FAKE NEWS

During a pre-Christmas weekend of hustle and bustle, I was assaulted on radio and TV with a barrage of warnings about the new popular "beware of fake news" theme.

A talk show had just finished playing an excerpt from an interview of Reince Priebus, the outgoing Republican Party chairman, by Chuck Todd of NBC.

Todd implied over and over that the Russians had "hacked" both Republicans and Democrats in the recent election. And over and over, Priebus explained that Republicans had never found any such evidence.

An FBI investigation had flatly declared that the RNC had never been hacked. Period! But Todd appeared unsatisfied.

The program was then interrupted for an hourly news report that featured a newscaster who noted that "there was not much evidence that the RNC was hacked."

"Not much" implies "some."

Yes. No. Some.

Which was the fake news?

Tom Phillips, St. Augustine

LETTER POLICY

Letters of about 200 words are preferred. Letters are edited for space, clarity and newspaper style. All letters should include a name, address, occupation and telephone number. Only the name, city and occupation (when relevant) are published. Letters with a clear, concise message have the best chance of being published.

Email is preferred:

letters@jacksonville.com

Mail: Letters From Readers

The Florida Times-Union

P.O. Box 1949

Jacksonville, FL 32231

Web: jacksonville.com/opinion