Finding Alternatives to Build
A Better Panama City Beach … for ALL!

By

Jim Barr, Candidate for City Council of PCB

Introduction:

Many believe Panama City Beach is “broken” due to the incidences during Spring Break 2015. As an eternal optimist, while I certainly believe our reputation as a city has been severely tarnished, this does not mean we can’t have a new vision and move towards a better tomorrow.

The vast majority of the residents of Panama City Beach believe “enough is enough” and we want our beach back! Is it worth:

- Having to suffer the deaths of young people from alcohol poisoning?
- Needing to remember and honor, more than a decade later, the death of one of our own police officers—Kevin Kight—who was murdered during Spring Break?
- Enduring stabbings, shootings, rapes, unwanted pregnancies (and perhaps the resulting abortions)?
- Prohibiting a gateway into drug addiction, felonies, prison terms, and DUI manslaughter cases?

Let’s work – together – to find alternatives! Within these pages, I will provide the background, supporting evidence and facts, not to mention a suggested course of action and possible solutions.

My position is: We need to bring back civility to Panama City Beach and the surrounding community. In addition, with my plan, we should be able to realize a net financial gain that should exceed the amount that has been realized by the college-level Spring Break. The only thing that will be “lost” will be on the sale of alcohol, but that should be viewed as a small sacrifice to pay when we calculate the number of lives that have been adversely affected by the use of alcohol, as outlined in the bullet points above.

Background:

There was a time when Panama City Beach was in the spotlight for being the “Best Spring Break—Panama City Beach” (“number one in the country”).

However, since that time, the light has dimmed and even college publications are “calling it as they see it” rating Panama City Beach as the “trashiest Spring Break in the nation”.

“In all our years of partying and raging, never in our life have we seen the amount of ruckus PCB brought in one weekend.

---

1 Southern Living magazine. Article by Steve Millburg on Dr. Stephen P. Leatherman, “Calling Dr. Beach”, June 1995 issue, Page 43.
“Keep in mind that only a small amount of the Spring Breakers is actually college students; a lot of the people you’ll see turning up are visitors or locals, which of course just adds to the trashiness. For extra bonus points that don’t count for anything (except against your driving record) make sure to rent a scooter from one of the numerous rental locations in the city. It’s easily one of the most dangerous things you’ll ever do in your life, especially after hours of sweaty day-drinking.” 2

These comments are from a publication produced by the students themselves, so shouldn’t we listen to the obvious voices?

Guns, violent crime, obscene actions, as well as public drunkenness and nudity, not to mention rapes and unrestrained public urination, simply will not be tolerated. So, where do we go from here?

**Supporting Evidence:**

“In total, the agencies confiscated 93 guns in the six weeks encompassing the college holiday and made 507 drug arrests, according to the agencies’ statistics. Last year, those numbers were significantly less, with 38 guns being taken off the streets and only 201 people arrested on drug charges.

“From March 1 through April 12, PCBPD responded to 13,301 calls for service. Those numbers increased from the 11,632 calls for service police worked last year. BCSO saw a similar trend, according to their figures. Officers responded to 6,138 calls for service while the previous year was 4,110.

“PCBPD arrests increased from 1,219 last year to 1,332 for the current year’s Spring Break six-week period. BCSO arrests saw a vastly more significant increase, leaping from 324 last year to 1,091 this year.

“In total, officers arrested 2,423 people in just a few weeks in Panama City Beach this year.”

It is not unusual to find Panama City Beach listed as one of the “most dangerous cities in the state.”

Unfortunately, the damage doesn’t stop there. What about the toll Spring Break takes on First Responders?

“The night I went out with the Bay County Sheriff’s Officers, it was pure chaos. The pure insanity that I saw happening on the beach on my ride along could definitely be characterized as a war zone. There were two shootings and one stabbing that night, and none of them were related to each other. While we were responding to a shooting at the Holiday Inn, a gentleman walked out with a stab wound and was almost run down by our responding vehicles. After exiting the vehicle and observing the chaos, I realized that this was a combined, continuous

2 COED® Online review of “Trashiest Spring Break destinations in the U.S.”
effort from Fire Fighters, Sheriff’s Deputies, Panama City Beach Police Officers, and even Florida Highway Patrolmen. And this rodeo had no signs of ending anytime soon. … From a scientific perspective, Spring Break elevates cortisol levels (and keeps them elevated) for too long. Something needs to be done. Spring Break definitely has a monetary cost, but the hidden health costs to our First Responders are simply put, not right.”

**Looking at Both Sides of the Issue:**

It is understood that tourism is the very lifeblood of our community.

And, most everyone agrees with Maj. Tommy Ford who was quoted as saying “It has become something bigger and uglier than the Spring Break of old,” Ford said to *The News Herald.* “What once was a week for college students to decompress gave way to the many that followed the party. A criminal element was also attracted, and we began to experience an increase in violence and lawlessness that shocked the conscience of our community.”

Spring Break *is* important to our local economy, but it *must* be managed! The TDC has reported that businesses earn more revenue during June and July than during the month of March, which is when the majority of Spring Break partying occurs.

**PRO:**

As outlined on their Facebook page, *Citizens United for Panama City Beach* is “a concerned group of businesses, hoteliers, restaurants, clubs, their staff and supporters united in the protection of our residents, our workforce, and our beaches.”

- They want to work to recommend ordinance changes that build upon 17 new ordinances. (Note: Some of these ordinances are working their way through the system at this time.)
- They say they will continue to support Sheriff McKeithen’s five-step plan incorporating the limitation of the ban of alcohol behind “hot zones” instead of all 27 miles of beach.
- They want to collaborate with the TDC, Beach Government, and Chambers of Commerce on the content of advertising messages for a cleaner Spring Break image with a primary focus on family-friendly fun and our beautiful, clean beaches.
- They aim to work to create a transition time of lowering our expectation on Spring Break while pursuing business, from a different market, such as conventions, corporate meetings, and sporting events.
- They have said that, during Spring Break, all club and bar owners will agree and adhere to a requirement of providing a ration of security staff and law enforcement based on occupancy during recommended “Hot Spot” times and zones with direct lines of communication with law enforcement. (Club and bar owners are also working on some adjustments to their business practices.)
- They plan to create an overall emphasis of keeping one’s own property under control and keeping an uninvited element out at the property owner’s expense, not the County’s.

---

4 Online report “The Hidden Effects of Spring Break on Our First Responders” by Ed Naggiar, retired Navy SEAL Officer with a PhD in Industrial Organizational Psychology and lead resilience trainer for Bay County First Responders, specifically the Bay County Sheriff’s Office (BCSO).
5 Facebook.com/citizensunitedpcb
And, they have expressed concerns about business that may be forced to close.

CON:

Even though a few businesses may experience financial losses, they will only need to experience temporary pain for future gain. I also believe successful businesses will be smart enough to adapt into whatever climate they are placed.

- Even though some disagree, both Daytona Beach and Fort Lauderdale were able to replace the Spring Break crowd with family, groups, international and convention business. (*My plans will be outlined later in this paper.*) However, some maintain it may be harder for Bay County to rebound.
- Spring Break was so horrible; it generated national publicity which could hurt property values and tourism in the non-Spring Break months. (In summer 2015, our numbers rebounded, but what will happen within the shoulder months? That is yet to be seen.)
- Our neighborhoods should not be overrun by the undesirables that steal and keep locals from getting the rest they deserve.
- Every property should have a Zero Tolerance Policy, which has not been done.
- Littering and property damage exceeded our City’s capabilities.
- Scooter businesses were also part of the problem, but that issue is also being addressed.

CONCLUSION:

Our community has pulled together to recover following hurricanes, and I’m confident we can improve our tourism numbers following this tsunami of bad publicity. I totally agree with our City Manager, Mario Gisbert, when he was interviewed by The News Herald – “Whenever there is change, there are growing pains,” he said. “Everybody has to do their part to fill in the little gaps. It’s all about marketing.”

Working in tandem with the Tourist Development Council (TDC), I will help to develop their 12-month strategy and strengthen our brand as a great destination.

When I’m elected to the city Council, I will work to bring civility back to Panama City Beach and our extraordinary community. In addition, I will devote my total efforts, full time, to make my purposed aspirations a reality. I will not be a part-time Council member.

I promise to:

- Initiate a plan that will bring 200,000 high school and church related students to Panama City Beach (PCB) during the months of March and April. (This alternative plan will provide a net financial gain for PCB that will exceed the amount that has been realized by the most recent college-level Spring Break. (Note: The only loss will be on the sale of alcohol, but that will be a small sacrifice to pay as mentioned in comments above.) High school groups will not only spend more money on food, but the cost for law enforcement and property damage will be greatly reduced.
- With the assistance of Rotary Clubs and churches locally and across the county, I will work with a team to promote and organize high school and church groups to come to
PCB during the months of March and April. Television networks will be solicited to promote this alternative plan for Spring Break.

- With my considerable expertise in organizing educational opportunities at Gulf Coast State College and in Tennessee, we will give high school and church related students another tangible reason, and purpose, for coming. Students will be able to attend seminars for four (4) days that will focus on life skills and character development concentrating on the Six Pillars of Character: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Caring, Fairness, and Citizenship, which will give them a competitive advantage when entering college. Special emphasis will be placed on the student’s duty to God, themselves, their family, their community, and country. These students will have living changing events while they are here enjoying wholesome activities on our beautiful beaches.

- Other plans will concentrate on luring high school baseball teams to PCB during the months of March, April, and May. (Facilities are currently in the planning stages for such activities.)

- During the month of May, major corporations will be recruited to hold their annual meetings, retreats, or trade shows on PCB. (Such relationships could also spill over into our other shoulder seasons.)

- Groups, like Campus Crusades, will be lobbied for their business, and area churches are already active in this hosting and business-mentoring process. Also, during the month of May, efforts will be made to make Panama City Beach the Story Telling Capital of the South.

Such wholesome activities will attract a higher caliber student than what we are currently hosting. High school groups would be required to provide one (1) chaperone for every ten (10) students. In addition, I envision many parents would want to accompany their child to such a wholesome destination, and as result of this wholesome experience, they will want to return with their family. Their favorable experiences would hopefully result in real estate sales.

For more information on my concepts, and to provide your valuable feedback about my background and credentials, please go to: www.VoteJimBarr.com. You can get to know me and my experience by clicking on the “Meet Jim” tab.

YES, … we DO want our beach back! To help accomplish these tangible, and beneficial, goals –

And “Close the Door to the Past”

*Just say “NO” to College Spring Break!*

*Say “YES” to:*

*Profitable Alternatives*

*High School, Church Related & Family Retreats:*

*Character Education & Wholesome Fun*

*Elect*

*JIM BARR, City Council, Ward 1*

*For a Better Panama City Beach*