

## The gas plant that wasn't

A "ghost company" planned to transport volatile fuel through Port Tampa Bay.

BY MALENA CAROLLO AND JAY CRIDLIN  
Times Staff Writers

The Tampa Port Authority's June board meeting started like always, with a prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. Then came the call for public comments.

Most port board meetings feature one or two speakers, if any. This one had nine, queued up both on Zoom and in person. All had the same concern: an April report to the U.S. Department of Energy filed by a fuel company called Strom Inc.

Seven years ago, Strom obtained a license from the federal government and has quietly pursued a plan to move a fuel called "liquified natural gas," or LNG, from a 174-acre facility in Crystal River to one of Florida's ports via truck or train. Its April report indicated that Port Tampa Bay has tentatively agreed to be its choice.

The fuel is a form of natural gas that is cooled to become a liquid. It is most often used in countries that don't have infrastructure to extract and transport the gas form of the energy source. Opponents say the fuel can be dangerous to transport, calling rail shipments "bomb trains," and should bear public discussion before a decision is reached to move it through a city. That's what prompted the cavalcade of speakers at the port.

Their questions came as a surprise to port leaders, because as one official told the speakers: Port Tampa Bay has no agreement with Strom. It is not negotiating with Strom. And it has no plans to export liquefied natural gas of any kind.

See STROM, 6A

## Charter schools survive

Hillsborough School Board reverses course, blasts state for overreach.

BY MARLENE SOKOL  
Times Staff Writer

Faced with the threat of losing nearly \$1 billion in government funding, the Hillsborough County School Board on Tuesday reversed a series of votes it took last month and allowed four charter schools to remain open without interruption.

The 6-1 vote affects more than 2,000 student at Pivot, South-

Shore, Woodmont and Kid's Community College Preparatory High charter schools. Board member Jessica Vaughn dissented because she wanted to vote on the four schools individually. She wanted the motion to include increased oversight at the four publicly funded, yet independently managed schools.

Instead, the board received assurances from school superin-

tendent Addison Davis that the stepped-up supervision will happen.

Vaughn and others took the opportunity to speak out against Florida Commissioner of Education Richard Corcoran and the State Board of Education. Corcoran has repeatedly accused them of breaking Florida law, and the State Board backed up his assertion when it met on Wednes-

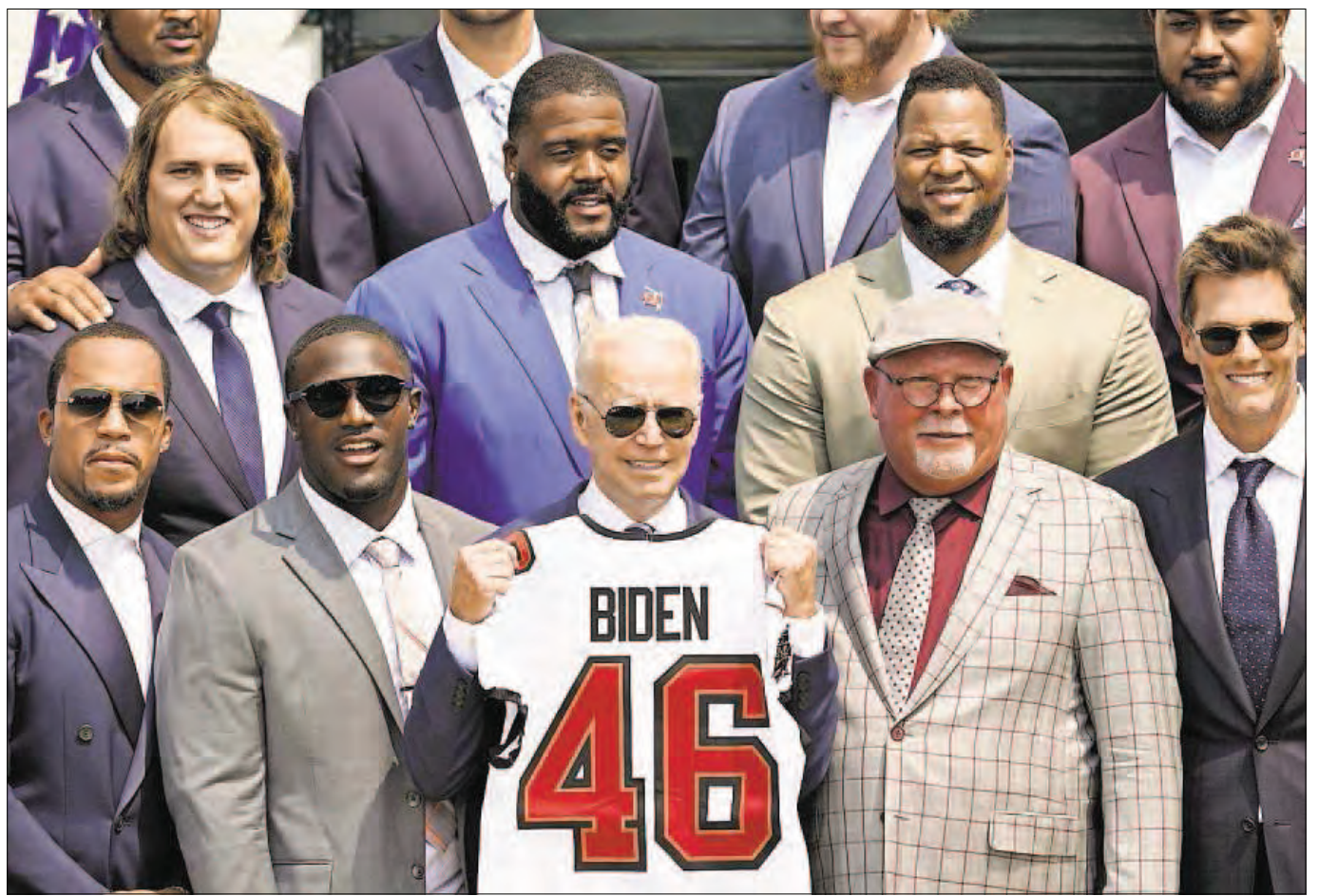
day in Seminole.

"We're not criminals," said board Chair Lynn Gray, who is asking for written affirmation to protect the board members' reputations.

Board member Nadia Combs said she was "astounded" by a lack of civility state leaders showed Hillsborough during the Seminole gathering.  
See SCHOOLS, 6A

### 2021 SUPER BOWL CHAMPIONS

## THE BUCS STOP HERE



ANDREW HARNIK | Associated Press

President Joe Biden, No. 46, welcomes the Super Bowl champion Buccaneers to the White House on Tuesday. Flanking Biden at left are Kevin Minter and Devin White; at right, head coach Bruce Arians and quarterback Tom Brady. From left in the second row are Ali Marpet, Donovan Smith and Ndamukong Suh. **Sports, 1C**

### THE NEW RECRUITS | EPILOGUE

## WHO STAYS, WHO GOES

Twenty-three cadets graduated in Class 219 of St. Petersburg College's police academy. All joined local law enforcement. Not everyone lasted.

BY LANE DEGREGORY  
Times Staff Writer

Five months after graduating from St. Petersburg College's police academy, the new cops are on the streets, patrolling and responding to calls, riding with field training officers who rate them on appearance, communication skills and decisions.

At a bus stop in downtown Clearwater, a disheveled woman is slumped on a bench between two bulging tote bags, holding a cup of coffee. Four police officers surround her.

"I paid for this. Please, no!" cries the woman. "I paid ..."

"Can you stand up for me, please?" says Hannah Anhalt, unclipping handcuffs from her belt. "We need you to stand up."

"Oh my God!" yells the woman. "Am I being arrested?"



JOHN PENDYGRAFT | Times

Hannah Anhalt, 25, now with the Clearwater Police Department, arrests a habitual shoplifter on June 22.

Anhalt doesn't answer. Isn't it obvious? She cuffs the woman, then unfolds a piece of paper. She still hasn't memorized the Miran-

da warning. "You have a right to remain silent," she reads. "You have the right to consult a lawyer." See EPILOGUE, 3A

To read the complete series, go to [tampabay.com/newrecruits](http://tampabay.com/newrecruits)

## Even on clear days, waters will rise: study

Tidal flooding will occur more often in coming decades, due to several factors.

BY ZACHARY T. SAMPSON AND KAILYN RHONE  
Times Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG — Sunny day flooding could go from an occasional nuisance to a regular problem in the city, according to a new study. It projects that St. Petersburg might see inundation at high tide more than 60 times a year in the coming decades.

Sea level rise, periodic shifts in tides and weather patterns are to blame, researchers said.

"The reason we're worrying about it now is this has been going on forever, but we never noticed it before," said University of South Florida College of Marine Science Associate Dean Gary Mitchum, one of seven authors on the study. "Now the

high tide increase every decade or two is superimposed on sea level rise, and the combination of the two is giving us vastly increased events."

The area could reach what the report deems a tipping point in 2033. In the decade before then, the researchers suggest, St. Petersburg will see high-tide flooding about 6 days a year. In the decade after, that number could reach 67 days of tidal flooding in one year.

This type of inundation is not catastrophic, like the impact of storm surge from a tropical storm or hurricane. It is a persistent nuisance that already soaks streets and bubbles through drains in some Florida cities, most notoriously Miami and in the Keys.

Residents of flood-prone coastal neighborhoods, like St. Petersburg's Shore Acres, may see several inches of water on roads, forcing them to re-route See FLOODING, 3A

### BEZOS DELIVERED SAFELY TO SPACE

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos took a 10-minute ride on his rocket company's first flight with people on board and reached an altitude of about 66 miles. **Nation, 5A**

### RESIDENTS AWAIT NEWS ON RETURN

Days after two pipe breaks forced the evacuation of a Tampa high-rise, about 500 residents still don't know when they will be allowed to move back home. **Local, 1B**

### A WELCOME MAT FOR CANADIANS

State economists hope Florida will not have to wait too long to receive a boost from international travelers as COVID-19 border restrictions ease. **Business, 5B**

### THE DISH ON 22 SOUTH FARE

We recently dined at 22 South, the new food hall in St. Petersburg's Historic Manhattan Casino. Here's the skinny on the food and what not to miss. **Taste, 1E**

### Fairly dry for now

8 a.m. Noon 4 p.m. 8 p.m.

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30% chance of rain  
More, back page of Sports

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Photobys by JOHN PENDYGRAFT | Times

Mikayla Fabricant, 23, left, quickly found out she didn't want to work in law enforcement. She quit the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office after a month.

**EPILOGUE**  
continued from 1A

A gas station clerk told police the woman stole the coffee. She had a long record of shoplifting. Anhalt eases the woman into the police car's backseat and radios for someone to pick her up.

In the past, she might have sat in jail. Now, officers can refer her to a mental health unit that the Pinellas County sheriff set up. The homeless woman will "get services, counseling," says Anhalt's supervisor. "And, hopefully, some help."

All 23 of the recent graduates from St. Petersburg College's police academy got hired by local law enforcement agencies, including the youngest recruit. He is now a Pasco County deputy.

The three cadets the *Tampa Bay Times* featured in an eight-part series are stressed but enjoying their jobs.

Anhalt, who used to investigate fraud at an insurance agency, is patrolling Clearwater. KeVonn Mabon, a former NFL player, and Brittany Moody, who has a young son, are both Pinellas County deputies.

But law enforcement wasn't for everyone. After a few weeks in the field, three members of Class 219 decided they didn't want to be cops — and quit the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office. They had to pay back the \$4,000 tuition the agency had sponsored.

At her new job, Anhalt had to do seven weeks of report writing and responding to simulated scenarios. Then she got tased. And pepper-sprayed. Again. "At least I knew what to expect," she said.

She's had to separate feuding couples, respond to a car crash, stabbing, burglary, a man strangling someone and a woman yelling at people who weren't there. "One guy had automatic weapons, a shotgun in his couch,

all kinds of ammo," she said. "He was ready for war."

The worst call was when a 50-something woman, in town for her daughter's wedding, crashed on a jet ski.

"The family came to the hospital in their bathing suits," she said. "We had to tell them she died."

She still gets nervous before every shift, overwhelmed by all the chaos, confused trying to navigate neighborhoods. "So far, I guess, I'm enjoying it," she said. "I have more good days than bad days."

She doesn't want to quit, but she told her fiancé, "I'm not sure I'm cut out for this."

They haven't set a date to get married, too busy with work.

Plus, they recently had to move. The house they were renting, she said, was in a bad neighborhood. When she started wearing her uniform every day, she saw neighbors narrowing their eyes at her. "It became uncomfortable, just coming home."

•••

Mabon framed his Tennessee Titans jersey and hung it in his new apartment. He never went to a doctor to get his back checked, but he hasn't been in pain since he fell during the sprint at the physical fitness exam.

Being a deputy is great, he said, though "it's somewhat frustrating, because you realize that there is so much stuff that you still don't know."

Overall, he said, "It's pretty fun not knowing what you're going to get into every day."

Moody has responded to calls about trespassing, burglaries, drunken driving "and more dead bodies than I can count." Most of them, she said, died of natural causes. "But you still have to inspect them, make sure there was no foul play, call the medical examiner."

Domestic violence calls are the hardest, worrying about someone firing off a weapon. But they also can be the most rewarding, when

she can refer a battered woman to somewhere safe.

She was working overnights, having her now 8-year-old son stay with his dad. But she's back on days now, so she can tuck Bryan into bed. He often asks, "Mommy, did you arrest all the bad people?"

Being a deputy is demanding, Moody said. She's "always tired, always questioning myself and everyone around me."

But, also, she said, "It's everything I thought it would be."

The job has changed her, she said. "I carry myself totally differently. And I don't really trust a lot of people."

She gets treated differently, too, depending on where she's working. In Dunedin, she said, everyone thanks her for her service. "In Lealman, it's all: F--- you! F--- the cops!"

Instead of aspiring to be on the SWAT team, work with K-9s or become a detective, like she thought she might want to do, Moody said she now wants to do community policing, youth outreach, keep kids out of jail — like the runaway she recently talked to.

"I hope some day some kid will remember me and say, 'Officer Moody really helped me out.'"

•••

Coach Joe Saponare turned 50 in March, played golf in Hawaii with three of his New Jersey friends, built a new gym at the academy, "complete with kettlebells." He's looking forward to making tougher work-outs for new recruits. And he's helping plan a simulated city, which the academy got a grant to build.

"I hope this class can help change things," he said of 219. "I hope if they see someone using an inappropriate amount of force, they'll intervene."

Coach Sap was surprised that three of his cadets had already quit — two women and a former military man. None of them had struggled during the training or

tests. The older woman, who was 33 when she signed up, surprised Coach Sap the most. "She was a badass." A colleague said she'd struggled to strike a commanding presence and was getting derided by her supervisor.

The younger woman, who's 23, said she couldn't eat, couldn't sleep, couldn't stop crying. "I dreaded getting up every day. I had a pit in my stomach all the time," she said. "I kept thinking that at the end of the day, I could get killed. Or someone else could get killed because of me."

Mikayla Fabricant wanted to be a cop to help people, to make a difference. She chose the profession when she was 18, majored in criminology at the University of Florida, signed up for the academy as soon as she graduated.

In the *Times* series, she's the female recruit who worries about pepper-spraying protesters.

"Everyone told me, 'You're so nice and sweet, it's not in your nature to be a cop,'" said Fabricant, whose classmates called her Fab. "I hated the shooting scenarios, where you have to be so aggressive. I could literally feel myself changing. I was becoming harder, desensitized, jaded."

She thought about quitting but stuck it out, because she didn't want to pay back the tuition — and her mom kept telling her things would get better. But after a month, she couldn't take it.

"I busted my ass trying to love it," she said, "but I didn't."

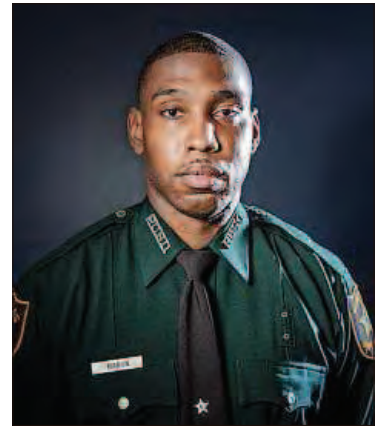
She had done a good job in the field, she said. Passed all the tests, interacted well with the public. Supervisors spent two hours trying to talk her into staying on the force. But once she'd made up her mind, and felt the relief, she couldn't look back.

"I was sacrificing my happiness for a job where everyone hates you, you work bad hours and it's always dangerous — for not that much money."

Her mom was upset she quit. Her dad and boyfriend were



Class 219 police recruit Brittany Moody, 31, joined the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office after graduation.



Class 219 police recruit KeVonn Mabon, 27, also became a Pinellas County deputy.

relieved. She spent all the salary she had saved during the academy to pay back the \$4,000.

She is now a nanny for two little girls and taking a yearlong class to become certified as a primary school teacher. "I can still help people, still make a difference," she said. "But now, I have the weekends off, I'll have summers off, for almost the same money. And I'll be getting paid to color with kids."

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**FLOODING**  
continued from 1A

drives to work, school or home — even on days when it doesn't rain. City infrastructure, like pipes and pavement, would be submerged more often in corrosive saltwater.

The dramatic rise in flooding stems in part from a roughly 18-year tidal cycle, determined by the alignment of the sun, earth and moon, Mitchum said. This predictable pattern, he said, leads to spikes and drops in the maximum height of tides. The cycle is about to see years of declining tides, which Mitchum said will offset or mask the effects of sea level rise.

In 2033, the cycle is expected to turn around. Heightened tides in conjunction with sea level rise could create a compound effect that Mitchum said will offer a glimpse of how flooding decades into the future may reshape the region because of rising seas alone.

The lead author of the study, Philip Thompson, director of the University of Hawaii's Sea Level Center, said St. Petersburg is especially affected by the tidal changes across decades because it generally has one high tide per day, compared to other regions

that experience two.

Nuisance flooding already is a worry for local planners. Pinellas County is studying the prospect of future floods in a vulnerability assessment paid for using money dispersed after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Local engineers in some cities are installing valves to stop the sea from filling stormwater systems at high tide.

"It just leads to constant environmental degradation of systems — mechanical, electrical, infrastructure," said Pinellas Sustainability and Resiliency Coordinator Hank Hodde. He recalled a meeting where he heard a resident of the Florida Keys ask local leaders to install a car wash for cleaning off vehicles exposed to saltwater flooding.

"It's going to be here all the time," Hodde said. "Like rain."

A lot of research and writing has been dedicated to understanding nuisance flooding, said Jayantha Obeysekera, director of the Sea Level Solutions Center at Florida International University. But the latest analysis offers a window into how soon it could become a bigger problem. Obeysekera was not involved in writing the paper, though he knows the authors and his work was cited in the report.



CHRIS URSO | Times (2018)

Streets puddled in corrosive saltwater pose a threat to vehicles.

The researchers used National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administrative flooding standards and tidal gauge data as their foundation for an intermediate projection for how far seas could rise.

"If it happens once a year, maybe people can live with it," Obeysekera said. But as flooding becomes more regular, he said, residents "expect the communities to come up with adaptation so they don't have to basically walk on water five, 10 times a year."

Knowing more precisely when

and where flooding will hit at high tide would allow public works departments to prepare. In the next phase of his research, Mitchum said he wants to find a way for scientists to make those nearer-term forecasts possible.

The almost 70 nuisance floods a year projected in St. Petersburg would not be spaced out evenly across months, according to the study. The flooding might instead happen in clusters, Mitchum said, with peaks depending on the season.

Eventually nearly every high tide in certain bad months could bring flooding, he said. Water levels around St. Petersburg tend to be highest when the sea is warmer in summer and early fall.

Although sunny day flooding should remain infrequent in the near term, Thompson, of the University of Hawaii, said it would be a mistake for governments to be complacent in the coming years. Building better drainage systems and modifying zoning around Tampa Bay are two ways he imagines officials could look to mitigate future damage.

King tides that cause flooding across the state should be a bellwether, he said. "Florida is already sort of the epicenter."

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