

The Stuart News

SCRIPPS TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS

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An education in all things Martin County

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire," said the poet William Butler Yeats. I couldn't agree more. The blaze that can be kindled through education can destroy lifelong biases, replacing them with the spark of new ideas.



Ranieri

It is a challenge, though, to find sources of information that are neutral and credible, as residents seek to better understand the community in which they live. Especially for those folks who have recently joined us in this paradise called Martin County, it is easy to fall prey to sound bites in the media or cleverly crafted words generated by special interests as they put forth their agendas.

In a community that has an abundance of groups and individuals with no shortage of strong opinions on many a topic, there is an educational program that provides a breath of fresh air for residents who are seeking authentic, factual information about Martin County's past and present and the way our community has grown and changed.

It's fittingly called "Martin County 101: It's Different Here." Created by the non-profit organization Sustainable Martin Alliance, this unique,

STACY RANIERI
GUEST COLUMNIST

MARTIN COUNTY 101: NEXT SESSION:

When: Jan. 25, 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Where: Wolf High Technology Center, IRCC's Chastain Campus, Salerno Road in Stuart

Registration: \$40 per person or \$70 per couple (includes breakfast, lunch, presentations, notebook of useful information)

Reservation: Required

To register: Call (772) 287-5272

one-day educational program explores the connections between our natural and man-made environments, social issues, our local economy and history.

From biodiversity to biotech, waterways to wages, experts present the information in a neutral, unbiased way so participants can form their own opinions about Martin County's sustainability.

Through participant surveys, Sustainable Martin Alliance knows that the program is valued by the community, and has received stellar feedback from the almost 1,000 residents that have taken the class since its inception.

My favorite comment from an at-

tendee, Noel Trachtenberg of Jensen Beach, tells it best: "The sharp edges of my personal bias were softened by becoming more educated about other perspectives."

Many residents aren't natives of Martin County or even Florida, and they often lack a "sense of place" and an understanding of the roots of our community. When residents learn about past decisions that have created current situations, they become a more informed citizenry and will be better prepared in helping to plan Martin County's future.

To my knowledge, there is no other program that gives such a balanced overview of the many parts of Martin County, showing the linkages between our natural and built environments, our economy and social systems and how they affect the way we are changing and growing in Martin County.

Whether you just arrived in our little piece of paradise or your family has been here for generations, I encourage everyone who is interested in educating themselves about Martin County to take the time to attend.

Ranieri, a Palm City resident, is president of The Firefly Group, and a founder of the Sustainable Martin Alliance. She lives in Palm City.