

# The Lake Worth Tribune

Domine, ut videam

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2015

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## Coming Up

Friday, Feb. 20

**Taste of Lake Worth**  
6-9 p.m.  
on Lake and Lucerne  
avenues  
featuring Lake Worth  
restaurants and live music  
Tickets \$25  
Check-in at Lucerne and J  
Street near the Post Office

Saturday and Sunday,  
Feb. 21 and 22

**Street Painting Festival**  
Downtown Lake Worth  
10 a.m.-7 p.m.

Monday, Feb. 23

**Bryant Park  
Neighborhood Association  
City Commission  
Candidates Forum**  
at 7 p.m.  
at The Beach Club  
at the Lake Worth  
Golf Course  
One 7th Avenue North  
All are invited to attend.



Is that a lifeguard or a ski instructor? Taylor Johnson, age 27, was wearing heavy sweat pants and a hoodie at the Lake Worth Beach on Thursday morning, Feb. 19, and was keeping her head covered with a knit cap. When she got to work that morning at the beach it was just 48 degrees. (photo by Margaret Menge)

## City Secretly Investigates Lake Worth Church

Code Compliance Officer Snoops on Worship Service; Secretly Videotapes, Notes 'People holding what appear to be Bibles'

By Margaret Menge

Is the City of Lake Worth cracking down on Christianity?

Pastor Mike Olive of Common Ground Church says a code compliance officer came into Common Grounds Coffee Bar on 12 J Street on a Sunday morning two weeks ago when the church, which has its offices next door, was having a worship service there. The city employee, he says, came into the coffee shop wearing a hoodie and secretly videotaped the service.

The code officer came back last Sunday, handed a business card to the associate pastor out on the sidewalk in front of the coffee shop and said: "This Sunday is your last Sunday."

Pastor Mike said he's gotten no notice of any violation of any local law – no letter from the city, nothing.

But one of his employees went online on the city's web site and found that an inspection had been performed and



Pastor Mike Olive, founder of Common Ground Church, says he's going to fight the city for the right to hold worship services on Sunday mornings at a neighboring business he owns, Common Grounds (with an 's') Coffee Bar, located at 12 South J Street.

a non-compliance affidavit issued.

"No one has seen it," said Olive. "They have not communicated to me about anything."

"I inspected the property and found the following violations: Business rental property found without a current City of Lake Worth business license, specifically to operate as a church, or a house of worship" writes the code compliance officer, Gerald Coscia, in his case narrative, found on the city's web site. The inspection date listed is Feb. 9.

Mike Olive says Common Grounds Coffee Bar does have a business license, and insists that it's not a church: It's a coffee shop that leases space to a church every Sunday morning, just as restaurants on Lake Avenue rent their back rooms to neighborhood associations and other groups on a regular basis.

The only difference? On Sunday mornings at Common Grounds Coffee Bar, they're praying.

Olive, who grew up in Palm Beach County, came

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## A License to Pray?

By Margaret Menge

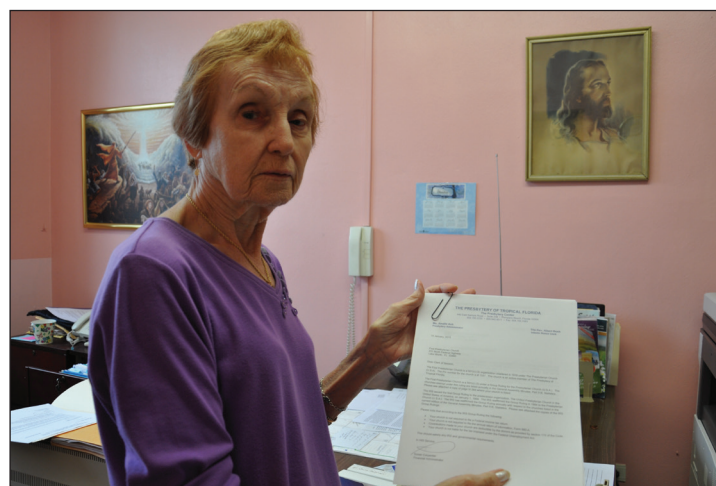
Do you need a license to pray in the City of Lake Worth? It would seem so.

A number of churches recently got letters from the city telling them that it is "unlawful" for them to be operating without a license, and that the city does not have a license on file for them.

The city's manager of code compliance, Mark Woods, says it's nothing new, and that churches have always needed to have a license.

"It's brand new," Pastor Joan Abell of the First Presbyterian Church told the Tribune this week. "We've been there 99 years and we've never had to have a license."

The church's administrative assistant, Barbara Stanton, says she called the city and spoke with a woman who said there would be no fee for a business license if the church produced paperwork showing that it was approved as a tax-exempt organization by the IRS. Stanton says she called the Presbytery and asked for this. When they'd located it, and sent to it Lake Worth, she had a church



Barbara Stanton, the administrative assistant at the First Presbyterian Church, holding three letters she received in December – one for the church, one for the school, and one for the chapel. The church hasn't had a school in decades. The chapel and the church are the same entity. (photo by Margaret Menge)

member take it down to the city offices at Second Avenue North, where they issue business licenses.

"She wouldn't even accept it," says Stanton. "She said no."

She said the church member, John Powell, went to Commissioner Andy Amorosio to ask him about the license. "He said, 'Oh, it's for your own good,'" said Stanton.

"I'd like to know what the bottom line of this is, and why," said Pastor Joan Abell.

Abell is the interim part-time pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, located at 231 North Federal Hwy. She was brought in to help the church get back on its feet after a steep decline in membership. The church only has 17 members left and most of them are elderly.

"Where do you all of a sudden say the church has to have a license to gather and pray?" asked Abell. "The session is not very pleased about

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## Street Closings for 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Street Painting Festival

Parking will be prohibited on the following streets from 6 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 20, to 10 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 22 for the annual Street Painting Festival.

- Lake Avenue from South Dixie Hwy. to South Federal Hwy.
- Lucerne Avenue from South Dixie Hwy. to North Federal Hwy.
- J, K, L, M streets from 2nd Avenue North to 1st Avenue South

The Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office may tow vehicles left parked on these streets in violation of this temporary order. The Lake Worth Bridge will remain open during the festival. There will be detour signs in place to direct vehicle traffic to access Lake Worth Bridge. Anyone wanting access to the bridge from the south end will be detoured at 2nd Ave South then east bound to the bridge. Anyone wanting access to the bridge from the north end will be detoured to 2nd Ave North then eastbound to the bridge.

## City's Murder Rate Dropped in 2014

By Margaret Menge

The trend line is good(!) says Capt. Rolando Silva, commander of the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office for District 14 – Lake Worth. Fewer people are being murdered in Lake Worth. Just three last year and four the year before, compared to 11 in 2007 and 2008, the year the city gave up local control over its police department and signed a contract with the sheriff's office.

The number of murders, according to the Uniform Crime Report, dropped to three in 2010, went up to four in 2011, and then eight in 2012, but has now dropped again with four murders in 2013 and three last year.

"The city seems to be in a safer position," Capt. Silva told the Tribune this month, while cautioning that police can't take full credit for reductions in homicide rates,

and saying homicide rates aren't the only measure of a good law enforcement agency.

"Of course, we have an influence," he said. "I think there's a deterrence value, without a doubt."

One of the first homicides in Palm Beach County this year happened in Lake Worth, however, when a 27-year-old man named Woodley Erilas was found dead in the street on Jan. 9

in front of his residence at 922 North H Street. He died of a gunshot wound. Police say they have very little information about what may have happened to Erilas and the case is still being investigated.

Of the three murders in the city in 2014, two have been cleared, and one remains unsolved:

**CLEARED:** Cuban Woman Killed Her Husband; Told Her Daughter She Was



Tired of Working for Him

On Sunday, March 16, 2014, police were called to a home at 407 North E

Street. When they arrived, they found Cuban immi-

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