

BUSINESS PLUS

FLORIDA BUSINESS BRIEFS

CRUISE LINES
RCL WANTS BIGGER PORTS IN ASIA

Royal Caribbean Cruises (RCL) urged Asian countries Friday to improve their port facilities to accommodate larger ships as the company expands its operations in the region to gain new customers.

"It is really important for hubs in Asia to commence infrastructure improvement," said Adam Goldstein, president of the Miami-based line, which announced the opening of its Asian headquarters in Singapore.

INSURANCE
VIATICAL TOLD TO STOP BUSINESS IN FLORIDA

A Minnesota viatical-settlement company was ordered Friday to cease doing business in Florida.

Florida Insurance Commissioner Kevin McCarty issued a cease-and-desist order to Great West Growth of Minneapolis after finding the company has conducted business in the state without a license as required by law.

Viatical-settlement providers buy the life-insurance policies of the sick for a discount and then resell the interests to investors.

FINANCE
RAYMOND JAMES SHARES SURGE 7.4%

Shares of Raymond James Financial (RJP) posted their biggest gain in five years after Wachovia analyst Douglas Sipkin raised his recommendation, citing improved earnings prospects, amid takeover speculation.

Shares of Raymond James, the second-largest publicly traded regional brokerage firm by market value, climbed \$2.33, or 7.4 percent, to \$33.84 in New York Stock Exchange composite trading.

SECURITIES
NASD PANEL AWARDS \$1-YEAR-OLD \$850,000

Jordan Weirnerman, an 81-year-old Aventura retiree, on Friday was awarded \$850,000 by a National Association of Securities Dealers arbitration panel.

Morgan Stanley and broker Kyle Ross were found negligent in selling Weirnerman proprietary growth investments when they knew Weirnerman wanted income investments.

The award included \$250,000 in punitive damages. Weirnerman was represented by Jeffrey Erez and Jeffrey Sonn of Sonn & Erez in Fort Lauderdale.

ARRESTS
SPOUSES ACCUSED OF MEDICAID FRAUD

Fernando and Ileana Fonts, a South Florida husband-and-wife team that owns Free Line Medical Equipment, were arrested Friday morning and charged with falsely billing Medicaid more than \$1 million, the Florida Attorney General's office announced.

Authorities allege the Fonts delivered faulty equipment or never delivered the equipment but billed Medicaid for functional equipment ostensibly delivered to Medicaid recipients for about 20 months. The Fonts are charged with one count each of grand theft and organized scheme to defraud, both first-degree felonies.

POMPAÑO BEACH

Investors buy into glass

An investor group led by developer Ed Easton bought a Canadian maker of aluminum windows and curtain walls that has an assembly facility in Pompano Beach.

BY MARTHA BRANNIGAN
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Miami developer Ed Easton is making a big move into the curtain-wall business, which provides the dazzling glass exteriors for high-rise towers.

Red Holdings, a new Pompano Beach-based investment firm led by Easton, bought Macyro Group of Quebec, Canada for \$19 million. Macyro, whose shares traded on the Toronto Stock Exchange, has two units:

Gamma Industries, which makes and installs aluminum windows and doors for high rises, and GammaUSA, which has a Pompano Beach assembly plant that employs 126.

Easton said the window venture is "totally separate" from Easton Group, which develops and owns commercial real estate and works on projects such as a 220,000-square-foot condo warehouse at International Corporate Park in the Doral area.

Easton said the curtain-wall industry "has a solid future and the acquisition price was around book value. I'm also doing it because of my partner's experience. You've got to have a lot of experience to hang windows at 55 stories."

His partner is Elliot Kracko, a 35-year veteran of the curtain-wall industry whose work includes outfitting the AOL Time Warner building in New York.



EASTON

Gov. Jeb Bush; Kathleen Shanahan, formerly Bush's chief of staff; and several of Kracko's associates.

Red Holdings is focusing on building its market share in Florida, Canada and New York.

Easton said demand for curtain walls and windows is strong despite the softening of the residential condo market in Miami. "In Dade County, that party's over. But New York City and Los Angeles are booming in that regard," he said. "Elliot and his team have booked over \$30 million in business in the past 30 days and we had a backlog of \$60 million. So business is good."

Other investors include Colleen Castille, secretary of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection under Gov. Jeb Bush; Kathleen Shanahan, formerly Bush's chief of staff; and several of Kracko's associates.

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COURTS

Mai-Kai caught off guard by suit

*MAI-KAI, FROM 1C

for 50 years. The restaurant, at 3599 N. Federal Hwy., resembles an elaborate tiki bar and seats 716.

The loan is significantly less than the \$5 million assessed value of the restaurant's real estate. And Levy said the Mai-Kai is "doing fine." Asked if it's profitable, he answered, "Why not?"

Still, the Mai-Kai occasionally has been hit through the years with state warrants and federal liens for not paying its taxes on time. It has always paid the amounts after the public notices, including \$255,000 (which includes interest and penalties) in May to resolve two tax warrants.

Levy declined to explain why the Mai-Kai has sometimes waited until after the notices are filed to pay its taxes, saying it was "personal."

According to documents filed with the lawsuit against Mai-Kai Inc., Ronald H. Barnhart loaned Mai-Kai \$200,000 at 9 percent interest in 2001. The

The loan in dispute is significantly less than the \$5 million assessed value of the restaurant's real estate.

loan was payable in 2004.

Barnhart, a Honeywell vice president who lived in Herndon, Va., died in Fort Lauderdale less than three months after making the loan. The note later passed to a trust that he had set up. His son, Ronald Douglas Barnhart of Norfolk, Va., is the trustee. He sued Mai-Kai seeking repayment.

Cary A. Lubetsky, a Miami lawyer representing Barnhart, said he had no information on how the loan came about or why it hasn't been repaid.

Lubetsky said Barnhart simply wants to be paid. "I'm sure my client does not want to own the Mai-Kai," Lubetsky added.

One twist to the dispute: The mortgage note was never recorded with the Broward County Records Division, though it's not clear why. A year after the loan was made, records show the Mai-Kai obtained a \$750,000 first-mortgage loan and a \$250,000 second-mortgage loan from American National Bank. A third note for \$60,000 was added in 2003. The loans are due in 2017.

BROADCASTING

Delivering news in Spanish

*EQUITY, FROM 1C



DANNY JOHNSTON/AP

work Univision. Now Equity also owns Univision affiliates in Arkansas, Florida — Fort Myers and Jacksonville — Michigan, Oklahoma, Texas and Utah that receive nightly newscasts from Little Rock.

Equity has traded publicly since May, after Coconut Palm Acquisition — led by South Florida entrepreneur Richard Rochon — bought it and took on Equity's name. Regulatory filings show the firm posted a quarterly operating loss of \$12.4 million on March 31, which it blamed on the expense of buying and building stations. Quarterly revenue of \$6.77 million was off from \$7.3 million last year.

"What we saw in Equity was a distribution system that has been built but not exploited in terms of content," Rochon said. "They had a good distribution system, but content needed to be supplied."

Standing in its small studio in Little Rock, executive producer Juan Carlos Gomez acknowledged the news program's limits. The program relies on a few full-time photographers and reporters in each market, not the local bullpen typical of established English-language newscasts.

Four producers put the show together with one in-studio cameraman and four people huddled in a small control room.

HISPANIC ISSUES

While unable to match the staff, Gomez said reporters instead focus on issues that affect Hispanics — the immigration debate, for example. Police and crime stories, known in Spanish as sucesos, also get their play — but only when a victim or a robber is Hispanic, he said.

The staff also looks for

STUDIO: In an Arkansas studio of Equity Media Holdings, weather anchor Lizette Alvarez works for a Spanish-speaking newscast that will air in Fort Myers.

chances to tell Hispanics where they can find information in Spanish for community events like health fairs.

The Spanish-speaking staff fills in on-air roles at times, like Gomez anchoring the shows' sports segment. However, in the control room, the four staffers running the filming acknowledged they didn't speak Spanish.

"I'm picking up a little bit," said Philip Tripp, who cued video for a segment after an over-the-shoulder graphic displayed a misspelled word.

Fess and Gomez praised the news operation as providing a Hispanic perspective needed in news. The Detroit affiliate received a local Emmy nomination this year for a segment on gangs.

The stations could tap into a huge — and rapidly growing — market. Estimates from Nielsen Media Research show 11.6 million Hispanic households in the

United States with telecasting business now of localism — which we know works and sells and pays and serves the community and everything else — and making as much profit as possible for the ownership," said Woolfel.

LACK OF PROGRAMS

As that market has grown, however, local Spanish-language newscasts haven't followed outside of historically Hispanic communities. Teleundo, the NBC Universal-owned Spanish language network, replaced local newscasts last year with three regional programs covering Arizona, Texas and the West Coast as part of a cost-cutting move.

The need to collapse operations comes as stations deal with "economies of scale," said Stacey Woolfel, an associate professor of journalism at University of Missouri-Columbia and a Radio-Television News Directors Association board member.

"It reflects that struggle

that we have in the broadcasting business now of localism — which we know works and sells and pays and serves the community and everything else — and making as much profit as possible for the ownership," said Woolfel.

"The revenue is not there as it is in English, so I'm sure the company is trying to cover its cities and at the same time, break even, make a profit or at least minimize the loss as they get these things going."

Equity repeats its afternoon newscast in the evening, but discussions continue about offering a nightly show as well. By the end of the year, it wants to launch local newscasts from Little Rock for stations in Kansas City, Kan., Minneapolis, Nashville and Waco, Texas, and add more local reporters.

"I think we've just blown away expectations with what we've been able to do," Fess said.

FAST FOOD

Burger King to eliminate trans fats

*BURGER KING, FROM 1C

was taking too long to shift to healthier oils. The Washington-based Center for Science in the Public Interest sued Burger King in May, saying the company was moving too slowly and had failed to set a definite timetable for removal of trans fats.

In response, Burger King

said in May it expected to begin the national rollout of its new zero trans-fat oil by the end of this year.

McDonald's said earlier this year it had selected a new trans-fat-free oil. Wendy's started using cooking oil with zero grams of trans fat in August 2006.

Starbucks announced in May it will cut artificial trans

fats out of food and drinks in its stores in the continental United States, Alaska and Canada by the end of the year.

Burger King is owned by Burger King Holdings Inc. and operates more than 11,200 restaurants worldwide. About 90 percent of its restaurants are owned and operated by franchisees.

ECONOMY

Jobless rate remains steady at 4.5 percent

*ECONOMY, FROM 1C

month ago.

Workers saw modest wage gains in June. Average hourly earnings rose to \$17.38, a 0.3 percent increase from May.

Over the past 12 months, wages grew by 3.9 percent. Of the 132,000 total jobs added in June, 40,000 came from the government

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