

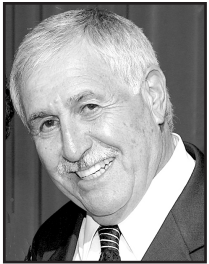
Cutler Bay

JANUARY 11 - 17, 2010

SERVING SOUTH DADE

The 'Happy' season is over, now back to the real world

BY ERNIE SOCHIN



Vice Mayor

Now that the "Happy" season is over it is time to take a look at what might lie ahead.

One thing is for sure — all those people who were camping out waiting

for stores to open pre-holiday probably spent a ton of money on gifts. The market indicators show that and everyone feels good about it. How many of those purchases were made with credit cards I wonder? Probably most. I sure hope there is money available to pay off all those debts that people have accumulated.

Lots of folks, including the TV pundits, say the economy has to turn around soon, that all this has happened before and we always bounce back. I hope they are right.

What is different now is that I don't see any major industry coming along that will employ the millions of people out of work all over the country. No giant automakers, steel mills, appliance or electronic companies... nothing.

I just saw a 60 Minutes episode dealing with a town in Iowa where the final Maytag Factory that supported the town for many years moved to Mexico. The story showed all the Newton, IA auto dealerships that were padlocked and even got down to the local Pizza parlor who had to let its five employees go and finally closed because the owner couldn't even make it working himself on 18-hour shifts.

A&P just filed for bankruptcy for cryin' out loud. I never really shopped at one but they were kind of an American institution.

I argue this point every time I hear a politician promise more jobs. I ask: Where will they come from? One recent candidate for U.S. Congress said that we still offer technical opportunities with companies like Google and Facebook. Well, Google just

laid off several hundred workers, so what does that say.

One of my favorite local restaurants, Uncle Frank's Pizza, just closed. I lost my source for the best Eggplant Parmigiana I ever tasted. Do you recognize any of the neighborhood closed businesses in the photo? Scary, huh? Do I have an answer? If I did, I would really run for president. Well on second thought maybe I do have an answer.

Watching the nighttime news, I saw riots in England, Greece and Italy — all for the same thing. Government can't afford to run the schools for free anymore and students can't afford to pay for them. I recently saw the mayor of a major city tell his teachers that they won't be getting any more raises.

Of course the usual protests took place with quotes like: "I have been a teacher for blankety blank years and this is ridiculous." The mayor's answer: "Try something else then."

Cruel but true. Maybe we have just been living too high on the hog. Maybe all these pensions that companies used to give out to entice new workers weren't really feasible. I heard a while back that General Motors largest payroll portion is going to retired people who no longer work for the company. Maybe we are all supposed to set aside some funds for our senior years and not count on an employer to guarantee it. Maybe we all don't really need a HDTV in every room and huge monthly cable TV bills to go along with them. I got by with four channels at one time and even watched test patterns if there was nothing else on.

Maybe we don't need a new car every year with a voice command GPS, 360 degree camera monitor and an auto parking sensor. Maybe we don't really need a smart phone that takes and sends movies as we



Closed businesses in the community

talk and play video games. Oh well, as my granddaughter Sienna always reminds me, "You're old, Papa." Perhaps she's right.

Jim Morin had a cute cartoon in the Herald awhile back. It showed a big fat (they are always big and fat) businessman holding a bag full of corporate profits saying to this poor unemployed guy, "We aren't hiring you unemployed because the economy is uncertain due to you unemployed not being able to find a job because we aren't hiring." Makes sense!

I almost had to retract this entire article before I submitted it. I just took my daughter out to dinner for her birthday. We went to the rather pricey Joe's Stone Crab on Miami Beach. The wait for tables was over two hours. I guess all those folks making over \$250K are spending their tax cuts early. (What was I doing there?)

Maybe the answer is as offered in my recent bid for the U.S. presidency. I promised to eliminate all taxes and provide no benefits. That way no one can complain about anything. Oh, well.