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News Digest

Fort Myers man has eye on captain taken by pirates

Mark Alexander, right, a Fort Myers resident, attended the Massachusetts Maritime Academy, with Capt. Richard Phillips, who is being held by Somali pirates off the coast of Africa. **NATION, A4**



Veterans lead Masters; Tiger, Phil paired today

Kenny Perry and Angel Cabrera, at 11-under, lead after three rounds of the Masters. Phil Mickelson and Tiger Woods, seven strokes back, will play together today. **SPORTS, C1**

Condos linger in limbo

Banks let foreclosures slide, put communities at risk, HOAs say

BY DICK HOGAN
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Some lenders in Lee County are deciding to not enforce mortgage foreclosures they've filed — leaving the properties in a limbo that homeowners associations say could destroy some communities.

A banking industry official said the lenders may sometimes simply be carrying out the orders of investors who actually own the mortgages, but others blame the banks for a trend that could cost neighbors and taxpayers dearly.

The problem is most acute in those condominiums already on the ropes since numerous owners have stopped paying their association dues because falling prices have left their units worth less than their mortgages. The same is true for some neighborhoods with homeowners associations.

That creates a downward spiral that's hard to escape from, said Bill Davis, secretary of the condominium board at the 112-unit Renaissance on the Winkler Avenue extension in Fort Myers.

The problem, he said, is the property is left effectively with nobody in control of it. The borrower still owns the property but can't sell it because it's worth less than the mortgage.

Meanwhile, the bank doesn't have control because it's still not the owner and the condo board can't file its own foreclosure to get back maintenance fees because the lender's mortgage has priority.

"There's no incentive for the condo association or homeowners association to prosecute its foreclosure when the lender is also prosecuting its foreclosure," said attorney Kevin Miller of the law firm Becker & Pollakoff, a law firm that represents

See FORECLOSURES A3

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Database: Search foreclosures in SW Fla.

Piracy strikes home for local man

BY DAVE BREITENSTEIN
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A Fort Myers man is watching closely the plight of an American ship captain held hostage by pirates off the coast of Africa.

Mark Alexander, 50, graduated from Massachusetts Maritime Academy in 1980, a year after Capt. Richard Phillips completed the program. As Phillips is in a stalemate with Somali pirates, Alexander is watching the event unfold on television, seeing the rigorous training they both learned 30 years ago coming into play.

"Mass Maritime is a place that teaches you how to survive," Alexander said Saturday. "It is a

very macho academy.

"All graduates are self-proclaimed half-nuts. That's why ship owners love us."



ALEXANDER
Trained with
kidnapped
captain

Alexander recalls Phillips being athletic and extremely talented, serving as ship captain during their summer jaunts on the sea. Upon graduation, Alexander worked as a ship engineer for Exxon, but gave up the trade after growing tired of long stretches on the ocean. He now works as a senior investment advisor for Sperry Van Ness.

Phillips never tired, though, and was at the helm of the U.S.-flagged Maersk Alabama as it traveled toward the Kenyan port of Mombasa to deliver food aid for residents of Somalia, Rwanda and Uganda.

The U.S. Navy now has ships in the region, but Phillips isn't in safe hands just yet.

"He's got four guys with AK-47s keeping an eye on him in that little boat," Alexander said.

The attempted capture of the Alabama is just another in a string of Somali pirate incidents, but this one is different.

"It's been a big problem for a long time, but this time, they picked on an American ship," he said.