

GOP comes home to Crist

Since leaving the Republican Party in 2010, his success as a candidate has been mixed.

BY MICHAEL VAN SICKLER
Times Political Editor

As one of Florida’s most prominent Democrats, Charlie Crist has raised an unprecedented amount of cash in his bid to become St. Petersburg’s next mayor.

Much of that money has come from an unexpected source: the political party he left 16 years ago.

Republicans and the companies and political committees they control have spent more than half a million dollars on Crist’s mayoral campaign through mid-July, campaign finance records show.

Donors include two past chairper-

sons of the Pinellas GOP, former state legislators, political committees that regularly finance Republican candidates and powerful lobbyists who have advised and contributed to the campaigns of Gov. Ron DeSantis and President Donald Trump.

The GOP’s imprint on Crist’s campaign rivals what members of his own Democratic Party are contributing, no small feat in a city where Democrats have an edge over Republicans in registered voters of 42% to 27%.

With a haul of \$1.8 million in contributions, Crist has broken the record for a St. Petersburg mayor’s race. He’s dwarfed the amounts raised by his

five opponents, including the incumbent, Democrat Ken Welch.

Officially, St. Pete’s mayor’s race is nonpartisan. Unofficially, it’s anything but. The last two elections for mayor, in 2017 and 2021, pitted Democrats against Republicans. Democrats won both times in bruising red vs. blue contests.

In interviews, some Democrats said they worry that Republicans are laying siege by using Crist as a Trojan horse. They said Republicans are staking a claim on a politician whose political identity is — once again — up for grabs.

See CRIST, 5A



Charlie Crist on the steps of St. Petersburg City Hall in April announcing he had filed the paperwork to run for St. Petersburg Mayor. His campaign has gotten a boost from Republicans. (DIRK SHADD | Times)



Crowbar owner Tom DeGeorge gives his final salute and thank you to the hundreds who attended the final live show at his independent venue on Friday night in Ybor City. (Photos by LUIS SANTANA | Times)



Talib Kweli drew hip-hop fans as well as a bigger crowd who wanted to send off the club with a sold-out show.

BY GABRIELLE CALISE AND LUIS SANTANA
Times Staff Writers

After uncountable hours of interviews, trips criss-crossing the country to champion independent music venues, a seemingly endless list of concerts hosted and local bands mentored and fans welcomed in, Crowbar owner Tom DeGeorge had one final mission Friday night.

DeGeorge stood at the edge of the stage, pressing his palms together like a punk rock monk, nodding to the beats that DJ Sandman fired off from behind a wall of laptops. Then he stepped forward and took the mic.

“Twenty years in the making is now,” DeGeorge told the room, sticky with the heat of bodies packed into every spare inch of space. “At this point, it’s not about the past. It’s not about the future. It’s about the now. And we built this together — every person here.”

After two decades in Ybor City, the time had come for Crowbar — the last full-time, independent music venue in the neighborhood — to host its final concert.

See CROWBAR, 2A

Goodbye, Crowbar

After two decades, the beloved Tampa music venue closed for good on Friday. But Tom DeGeorge isn’t done.



Music fans dance and cheer to a hip-hop set during Crowbar’s final show.

Teachers get together to ask: How can we better teach boys?

The symposium is part of an initiative by the district and the Pinellas Education Foundation.

BY HENRY FERNANDEZ
Times Staff Writer

Charles Raby sees a lot of himself in the boys he teaches.

A man with a towering frame and gentle smile, Raby is a fifth-grade teacher and football coach who moonlights as security for the Tampa Bay Rays.

Growing up, Raby said, he was

kicked out of middle school for fighting. He had to attend an alternative learning center for a few months before being reinstated at his original school.

It wasn’t until his football coaches started pushing him to work harder in the classroom that he was able to behave and push forward academically.

“Those coaches keeping on me for my grades ... they really helped me,” Raby said.

See TEACHERS, 5A



A Pinellas County educator listens to a lecture at the Boys Study Summer Symposium, an event put on by the district and Pinellas Education Foundation to close gender gaps in education. (HENRY FERNANDEZ | Times)

Correction

A story that ran in Saturday’s Times misidentified one of the organizations that submitted grant proposals to the Hope Florida Foundation and donated money to the Keep Florida Clean political committee. It was Secure Florida’s Future.