

10 people to watch in 2008

By the Times staff
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They include a Hall of Fame former Buccaneer, a thirty-something financial playmaker and a septuagenarian attorney. Some are well-known politicians and entrepreneurs; others behind-the-scenes players.

They include key planners behind some of the biggest projects planned in the region: a multibillion-dollar nuclear power plant, a new stadium for the Tampa Bay Rays and a fast-expanding Seminole Hard Rock casino. And what they do next promises to impact such hot-button issues as homeowners insurance, health care, and how safely the government invests our money amid a subprime mortgage meltdown.

Together, they make up 10 people to keep an eye on in the new year:

Lee Roy Selmon, 53, co-founder, Lee Roy Selmon's restaurant chain

Why we're watching: Concepts cut loose by OSI Restaurant Partners usually exit the back door and head straight for the morgue:

Think Paul Lee's Chinese Kitchen, or Zazarac, the Tampa company's short-lived Cajun test. So when an investment group led by OSI director and former Tampa Bay Buccaneer Lee Roy Selmon took his six-store, self-named chain solo in October, it broke new ground. Selmon and president Peter Barli aren't just pursuing a more aggressive growth plan for the upscale-Southern-food concept than OSI did (the pair hopes to have 30 locations open by 2012). They're challenging OSI orthodoxy, which said that Selmon's probably would never be more than a local play. OSI may still be proved right. But by retaining a 20 percent stake in the enterprise, the company is wisely hedging its bets. *Scott Barancik, Times staff writer*

Danny Wool, 44, Veropedia founder, and Terry Foote, 41, Veropedia investor

Why we're watching: If Jimmy Wales is the public face of the Wikipedia Show, then Danny Wool and Terry Foote are two of his former stagehands. They were with Wikipedia -- Wool as the grants coordinator, Foote as a volunteer -- before it became a household phrase, when it was operating from a tiny office suite in downtown St. Petersburg. Now, Wales is packing up Wikipedia for Silicon Valley, and Wool and Foote, who are staying behind, hope to emulate his rise to tech stardom with a similar Web site, Veropedia. Veropedia, they say, is like Wikipedia, except reliable. Volunteers lift articles from Wikipedia, edit them for accuracy and grammar, then add them to the Veropedia Web site, which -- unlike Wikipedia -- can't be changed by the average Joe. They insist they're not competing with Wikipedia. Good thing: Wikipedia has 9-million entries and 75,000 contributors; Veropedia has fewer than 5,000 entries, and 140 volunteers. Wool and Foote are aiming Veropedia at teachers and students who, apparently, don't want to trek to the library. Wool resigned from the Wikimedia Foundation, the nonprofit that runs Wikipedia, in March because he disagreed with some directors about how they were running the organization. He launched Veropedia in April. Veropedia "is really running on a shoestring," said Wool, who hopes to fund it with advertising but is currently running it with personal savings and loans from friends. *Christina Rexrode, Times staff writer*

Dexter Douglass, 78, prominent Democrat and Tallahassee lawyer, former Gov. Lawton Chiles' general counsel when the state sued the tobacco industry in 1997 and walked away with \$11.3-billion.

Why we're watching: He's the heaviest hitter among the three trial lawyers

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