

CLAY TODAY

This Week ...

Chen headed to MIT – PAGE 7
 Top franchise goes to the dogs – PAGE 16
 Korn Ferry qualifier – SPORTS
 Clay Entertainment Guide – INSERT



THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 2020

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Half-cent sales tax to help with repairs, building new schools

Voters will decide fate of school tax

By Wesley LeBlanc
 wesley@opcfla.com

CLAY COUNTY – Voters will decide whether it wants a half-cent sales tax increase to pay for school maintenance and other projects after the school board approved the adding it to the November ballot.

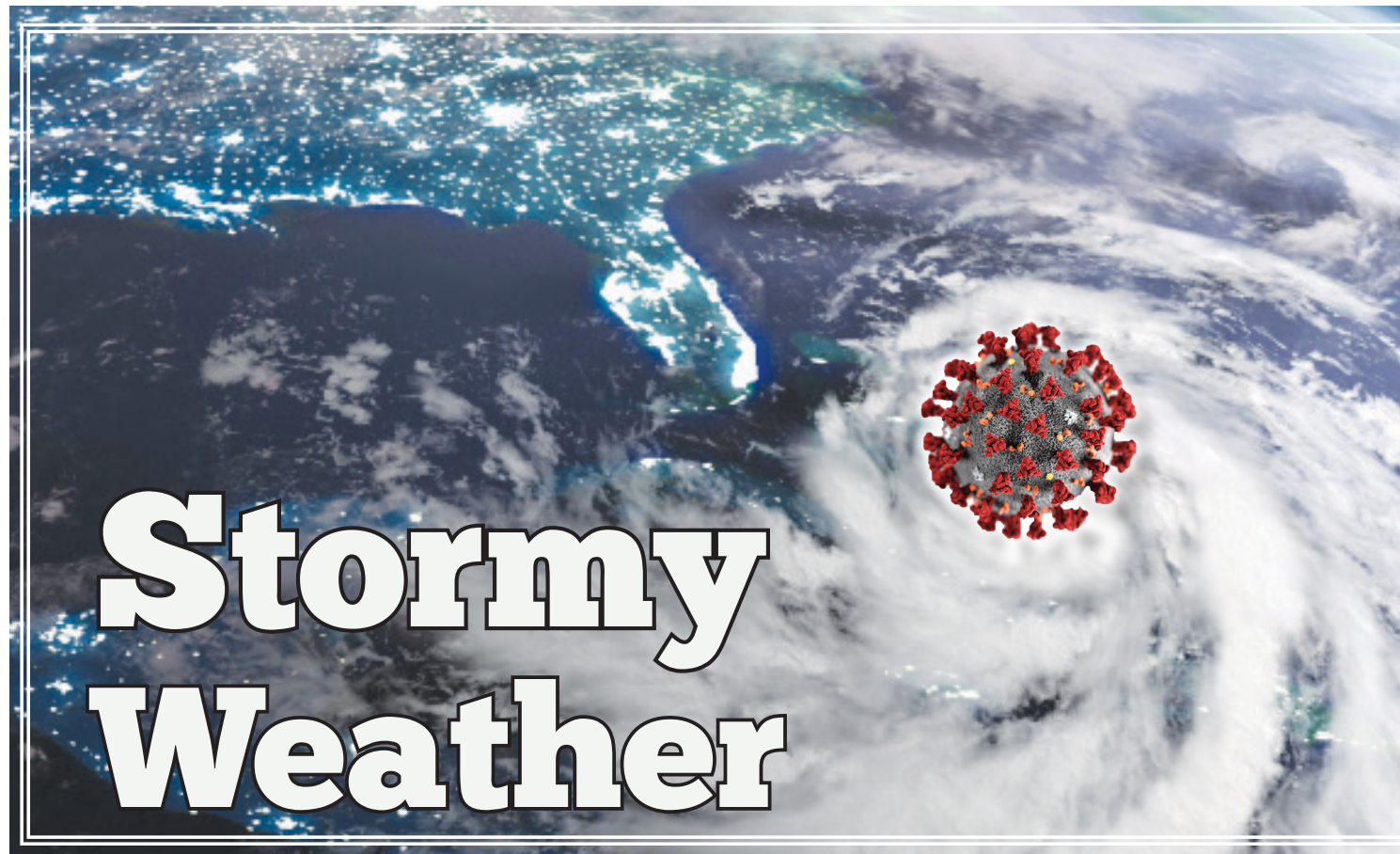
The Board of County Commissioners then agreed 5-0

Tuesday to put it on the ballot.

The vote wasn't unanimous with Janice Kerekes voting against it. She disagreed with the stipulation that charter schools must be included in the resolution. She said because their original resolution didn't include charter schools and it was passed before the law required charter schools must be included, the board's resolution should be grandfathered in.

"I just want to disagree with this whole Kerekes said at the June 4 meeting. "I really feel that our resolution should have been grandfathered in. It was written under existing language that, at the time, we took action as a board, sent to county commissioners, they took action as

SEE BALLOT, 12



Stormy Weather

COVID-19 pandemic adds to angst, preparation for hurricane season

By Bruce Hope
 bruce@opcfla.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The year 2020 has been marked globally by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has shattered normality all over the world.

Now that hurricane season is here, the angst of severe weather is only compounded by the impacts of the pandemic. Luckily, John Ward, Director of Emergency Management for the county, and those with whom he works have not forgotten about the annual threat caused by the confluence of weather and location.

Storm, continued on page 14

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INDEX

Opinion | 4-5
 Obituaries | 8

Crime | 22-23
 Sports | 25-33

Classifieds & Legals | 34-29



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Mastandrea backs up threat with lawsuit for libel, slander

Resident being sued for saying Councilman was 'on the take' during Orange Park Plaza debate

By Wesley LeBlanc
wesley@opcfla.com

ORANGE PARK – Town Council member Roland Mastandrea filed a libel and slander lawsuit against a town resident who questioned the councilman's professional behavior and economic leadership during the debate over the proposed Orange Park Plaza project.

Mastandrea sent letters to a handful of Orange Park residents saying he would sue them unless public apologies he believed were due were made.

Some of the residents who received the letters posted them in the public Orange Park Hub Facebook group. They reveal Mastandrea's request to receive publicly posted apologies within 10 days of receiving the letter.

He said in the letters the offenses made by those that received the letters were

statements of falsity.

"It is understood that you have made statement of falsity as relates to Mr. Mastandrea's professional behavior and economic relationship to the Orange Park Plaza development," the letter from Krumbein Law, PLLC, of Jacksonville reads. "Mr. Mastandrea will forego litigation if you will retract your statements by way of a public apology. That apology must be in writing and is to be posted over social media whereby any statements that were made attacking the character, professionalism, and allegations of corruption including self-dealing or use of public office [motivation] for private gain must be addressed affirmatively."

Mastandrea filed suit against at least one resident on May 28. Clay County court records indicate three open cases under Mastandrea's name, all dealing with libel and slander, but each case has the same case number and the same defendant. Mastandrea is suing the defendant for libel and slander.

The official complaint says that the

defendant made "false statements about Plaintiff [Mastandrea] that were published to third parties" and that these statements were made with "the purpose of diminishing Plaintiff's reputation in his immediate community." The complaint states that the defendant made these statements with "reckless disregard for their veracity as well as with actual malice."

"On or about March 19, 2020, [defendant], while near the entrance way at Town Hall in Orange Park, Florida published to several individuals' defamatory statements about Plaintiff," the complaint reads. "[Defendant's] statements were made with knowledge or with reckless disregard as to their falsity. [Defendant's] statements were made for the purpose of diminishing Plaintiff's reputation in the immediate community."

The complaint goes on to say that the defendant said Mastandrea was "on the take" with respect to the application for the rezoning of the Orange Park Plaza project set to be constructed by Provision Impact Ventures.

It also states that the defendant said Mastandrea is working for Provision Impact Ventures.


Mastandrea "experienced actual damages" as a result of the statements made by the defendant, according to the complaint.

Mastandrea's suit is seeking damages exceeding \$30,000, court records show, and he has requested a jury trial. A summons was issued to the defendant that states the defendant has 20 days to respond. Other court documents indicate a request for a video deposition as well as a set of interrogatory questions to be answered by the defendant within 45 days.


As of Wednesday morning, the defendant has not responded, at least through court documentation, and there are no official court events beyond the documentation.

Mastandrea is being represented by Jacksonville-based attorney Jack Krumbein.


Don Lester will preside over the case.



19TH AMENDMENT CELEBRATION



100 YEARS



Women's Rights Gains Momentum

Suffragettes protesting outside the White House. Digital image. NPS.gov. August 6, 2019. <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/womenshistory/women-s-access-to-the-vote.htm>

In 1918, with WWI raging, President Woodrow Wilson officially endorsed the 19th Amendment. Wilson addressed the Senate, asking:

"We have made partners of the women in this war. Shall we admit them only to a partnership of suffering and sacrifice and toil and not to a partnership of privilege, and right?"

Despite his impassioned plea, the amendment failed by two votes. In February 1919, it again goes before Senate, and falls short by one vote. Finally, on June 4, 1919 it passes in both the House and Senate. Now it's sent to the states to ratify.



Chance Irvine

"Being a woman did play a part in my election. I was the first to run for that seat and many women, from both parties, were happy to have a woman represent them."




Barbara Kirkman

"Male or female, everyone has to follow the same Florida Election laws. However, when first elected, I was the only female Clay County Constitutional Officer. Though, the path was paved for me by earlier elected women."



Karen Lake

"Being a woman helps. I believe it opens more doors to people who would love to have access to a Mayor. I find other women are thrilled there's a woman in a leadership role."

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Rotary Club of Orange Park, OPMC deliver 700 pounds of food to pantry

For Clay Today

ORANGE PARK – The Rotary Club of Orange Park with its mission to provide service to others, delivered more than 700 pounds of food to the Food Pantry or Green Cove Springs.

In partnership with Orange Park Medical Center, the drive-through food drive collected food donations from Rotary Club members, Orange Park Medical employees, St Johns Country Day School Interact Club and from the community over the past several weeks, culminating with a drop off food drive on June 6 at the hospital.

With the current pandemic, the food pantries' annual postal food drive – which is their biggest source of food supply for the year, has been cancelled.

To help increase the food pantries' supplies during this time of high need, the Ro-

tary Club of Orange Park partnered with Orange Park Medical Center for a community food drive.

"The global effort against COVID-19 depends on actions taken in every country. As people of action, this is our time to connect with each other to offer immediate help to people in need," said Mark Daniel Maloney, Rotary International president.

Rotary Club of Orange Park was established in Sept 19, 1969. The club's biggest annual fundraiser – Gourmet Night – has been temporarily postponed but will resume planning based on current state and/or local stay-at-home or closure orders which are subject to change. For more information about the organization and their upcoming projects and events, please contact Gi Teevan at gi@theeventsprodigi.com or by calling (904) 322-0058.

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Gov. DeSantis dismisses 'very partisan' Senators' complaints about Florida unemployment system

By A.G. Gancarski
For FloridaPolitics

Gov. Ron DeSantis was unflappable when asked his thoughts on two U.S. Senators looking into Florida's "uniquely poor" unemployment insurance system.

The Republican Governor, responding to a Tampa Bay Times story denoting claims of the unemployment system's "abject inability" from Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and Sen. Ron Wyden, essentially dismissed the inquiry as partisan.

"Florida's performance has proved uniquely poor in its abject inability to assist millions of Florida residents who have applied for and continue to await unemployment benefits," they wrote U.S. Labor Department Inspector General Scott Dahl.

"Are they U.S. Senators from Florida," DeSantis asked rhetorically, laughing, knowing that Senators Marco Rubio and Rick Scott would be unlikely to make such a play.

"I've never heard of partisan politics in Washington D.C. before," the Governor quipped. "Oh my goodness, can you imagine that?"

"Look," DeSantis added, "these guys are very partisan. That's all they're doing."

Schumer and Wyden sent a letter requesting an investigation into the federal agency's oversight of Florida's problems in carrying out expanded unemployment benefits under a federal-stimulus law known as the CARES Act.

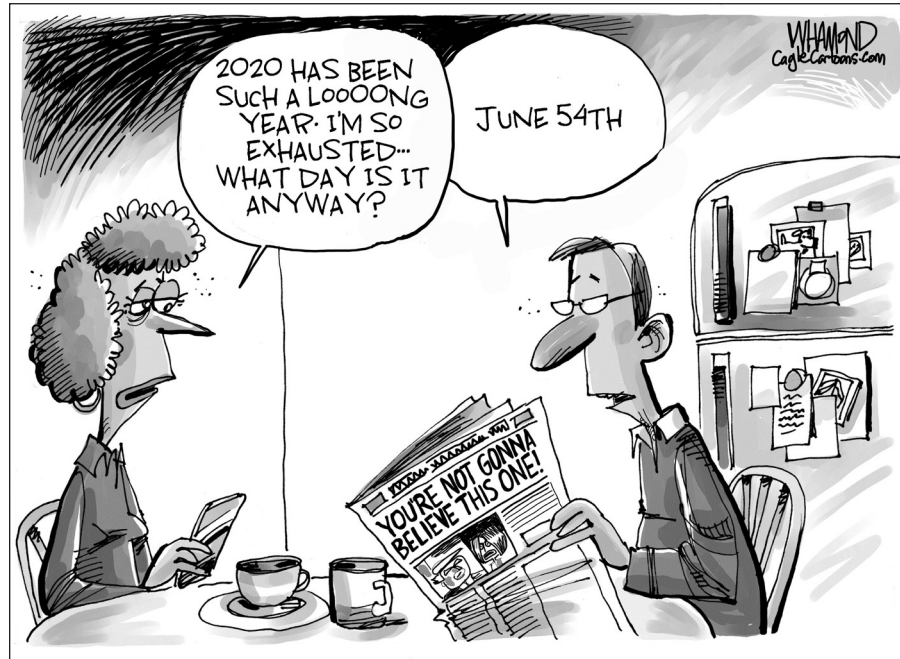
In the letter, Schumer and Wyden wrote that in addition to "repeated crashes and glitches" experienced by Floridians seeking jobless benefits, "inaction from both current and past gubernatorial administrations in Florida left (the state Department of Economic Opportunity) completely unprepared to respond to record increases in unemployment claims caused by a pandemic."

"Florida Governor Ron DeSantis recently stated that the program was 'designed with all these different things, basically to fail' and acknowledged that more changes are needed," Schumer and Wyden wrote. "Drastic improvements are needed, and it is unclear what steps are being taken immediately to mitigate the possibility of future failures in FLDEO's (the Department of Economic Opportunity's) unemployment processing system."

As of Sunday, the department reported receiving about 2.35 million claims since March 15, with nearly 1.35 million "eligible" claims processed. About 1.25 million people had been paid state and/or federal

SEE DESANTIS, 5

OPINIONS



Our children deserve a 'yes' vote on proposed half-cent sales tax for schools

By Don Coble
Managing Editor

CLAY COUNTY – Voters now will decide whether they should invest in our county schools with a half-cent sales tax.

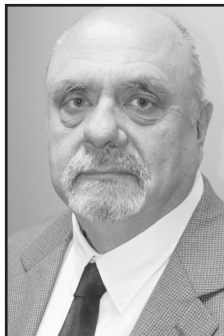
Our children are depending on us to do the right thing by voting yes.

Schools need more than \$300 million to make repairs and upgrades. The district, one of the fast-growing in the state, also needs at least \$300 million to build seven proposed schools in the future.

Michael Kemp was the Assistant Superintendent of Operations when the sales tax proposal was created. It was his job to keep the air conditioners working, the ceilings from caving in and the bathrooms from flooding. He was passionate about making repairs to the school's crumbling infrastructure.

"We have the same challenges all other districts face," he said. "Old, worn out facilities in need of renovation and no funding. We have limited funding, and the funding we have is for restricted purposes and we can only use it for X. There's an old saying: authority without capacity is futility. We have to have the capacity to be able to execute this mission and solve some of these problems."

"There's never going to be a right time for this [sales tax], and that's why



Don Coble



The school district needs money to make repairs to classrooms and other school areas like this.

probably why it's not ever discussed. That doesn't mean this challenge doesn't remain."

Kemp went to the Hillsborough County Public Schools when former superintendent Addison Davis was selected to run the country's eighth-largest school district last April.

While Kemp may be gone, his concerns – and more importantly, the problems – remain.

A half-cent tax would solve those problems. That's just one penny for every \$2 spent at the cash register. Ensuring a better future for our next generation for less than a penny is an easy fix.

While both agreed schools are in desperate need of help, the Clay County School

SEE SCHOOLS, 13

Word OF THE WEEK

Word of the Week is a feature that aims to help readers boost their vocabulary in a meaningful way that has practical application. Each week, our editorial staff presents a word, its definition and its use in a sentence.

Stiction: (*STIK-shun*) a noun that means the force required for one object to push another object.

"The tighter the bolt, the more stiction can affect torque readings."

This week in history

Five years ago, 2015

- Five people are killed in a head-on collision on State Road 21 near Camp Blanding. Two children survived the crash because they were in their safety seats.
- Orange Park's Eddie Childs is selected as Florida's top hunter safety instructor by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.
- Lt. Col. James Huggins takes command of Camp Blanding's 3-348th Regiment. Battalion.

10 years ago, 2010

- Beyond Just Dance Studio opens in Orange Park and offers Zumba lessons.
- Walter Roundtree becomes the third member of the Charter Review Commission to resign in the past six months. Roundtree cited health reasons for his departure.
- The Clay County Agriculture Fair announced its "green" initiative collected 6,900 of recyclable items during the fair in March.

20 years ago, 2000

- The Board of County Commissioners approved an emergency resolution to allow HSS Systems to apply for a state grant to build an office on Wells Road.
- The Green Cove Springs City Council appoints a committee to explore new uses for the Qui Si Sana Hotel.
- The Keystone Heights Ladies Golf Association make security blankets children as part of their commitment to community service.

30 years ago, 1990

- The county commission votes to install barriers along Lake Brooklyn to keep 4x4s from riding along the shoreline.
- The Clay County Historical Society of-

SEE HISTORY, 14

Send us a letter ...

We'd like to hear from you. Perhaps you are concerned about the county commission, the school board or your city council or commission, sit down and take a few moments to write us a letter. All we ask is that you keep it civil, no name-calling

and write no more than 600 words. All we ask is that you stick to local issues, be clear and make a point. We reserve the right to edit for AP Stylebook errors, grammar and spelling. In your email, type Letter to the Editor in your subject and send it to Managing Editor Don Coble at don@opcfla.com. We look forward to hearing from you!

Opinions ...

The views and opinions expressed on this page are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Clay Today.

Letters to the Editor

Orange Park Medical Center nurses have earned our gratitude

Editor:

There is no time more appropriate than now to salute Orange Park Medical Center's professional, compassionate, and resilient nurses. Our nursing team is excellent at using their clinical expertise--while keeping the patient at the center of all they do.

As we have faced challenging times reshaped by COVID-19, our nurses have adapted to a new reality, new protocols and recommendations, and evolving best practices without losing their passion for the important work of nursing. Last month, we celebrated National Nurses Week to honor their dedication and commitment. The compassionate care our nurses have showcased over the past three months is why we celebrate our nurses every year during this national day of recognition.

We recently celebrated the discharge of one of our first COVID-19 patients, Fernando Vizcarrando, after his 55-day stay battling COVID-19. Fernando, was a pilot, navy veteran, husband and father to three young boys. You can imagine his fear when he woke up in a hospital bed, isolated and unsure of this new world we're living in.

In addition to being expert clinical caregivers, our team became the Fernando's "instant family", playing tic-tac-toe through his ICU room window, facilitating FaceTime visits with his family and celebrating every milestone of his recovery by lining the hallway to cheer him on when he



Kathy Hester

graduated from the ICU and again to rehab. From the moment Fernando entered our ER, to the time he spent in our rehabilitation center, through to the moment he was able to walk out our doors to hold his children for the first time in eight weeks, our colleagues treated him like family. They lifted him up when he needed it most.

This is but one instance of the selflessness I witness daily at Orange Park Medical Center. I want to assure the community that, as part of HCA Healthcare, our nurses are supported in countless ways to provide the safest care always, but especially during this period. As part of this robust 186-hospital system, we learn from our fellow facilities about evidence-based best practices for treating COVID-19 patients that always reflect the Centers for Disease Control's guidelines.

Our top priority is keeping our community safe, which is why you will also see universal masking in place, greeters checking for COVID-19 symptoms and temperatures at our limited open entrances, social distancing throughout our facility and increased disinfecting in high touch areas.

After over two decades as a nurse, I remain moved that we have provided such extraordinary care for our community and each other through such an unknown time. I extend my gratitude to them, and to our community for continuing to entrust us with your care. We will get through this, together.

Kathy Hester
Chief Nursing Officer
Orange Park Medical Center

If you haven't thought it, you might want to start

Editor:

While school was in session, almost every day I drove by one of the (Clay County School Board) brand new cruisers parked on the side walk doing its important job of flashing the blue lights because school is getting out. I haven't figured out why this must happen because the road is already equipped with flashing lights alerting you of what is happening.

I wonder what the price tag is on a new police cruiser? Better yet, I wonder what a fleet of cruisers would cost? Wow, as long as we're talking about police cruisers, what about the maintenance and insurance costs? They would probably try to get away with saying they are under [warranty]. Hey, the CCSB bought a new car for each new resource officer AND lets them drive it to and from home. Since it is a county owned vehicle, who is really paying the fuel bill and wear and tear?

K-CHING, K-CHING!!!!!!

Since we bought all these new vehicles, I am sure that spending more money to occupy them was in the plan. If have a new department, you have to have administrative staff as well as a new police hierarchy.

A new department needs equipment and office space for the admin staff.

K-CHING-K-CHING!!!!

Did anyone stop to think about what happened to the school resource officers that get a job on the private police force. Pretty sure that the CCSO had to absorb them and since there is probably no exchange of money any longer between the school board and sheriff's office the odds are pretty good that tax payers will have to absorb this cost also.

K-CHING, K-CHING!!!!

I don't even want to know what the salaries and benefits are costing us for the new private police force.

I don't believe that full time resource officers are needed at the elementary level either. I think the CCSB played on everyone's fears for their children to get something where they could say, "look what I did", as they take the next political step. I pulled down the Department of Homeland Security database on school shootings and looked at the data for elementary schools.

Desantis

from page 4

benefits, while another 476,700 had been ruled ineligible for assistance.

The Governor also couldn't give a definite timeframe as to the resolution of the state Inspector General investigation.

"It's going to take time," DeSantis said, describing the "procurement process" for the state's CONNECT website. "This took place over a number of years."

The Governor added that the state has paid more than \$4.6 billion in unemployment claims.

"We've really been able to pick this thing off the mat," DeSantis added, vowing that "we're going to do more."

DeSantis, speaking to reporters in Tallahassee last month, said he authorized Inspector General Melinda Miguel to com-

mence an investigation into the CONNECT site, implemented during the Scott administration.

The Governor said getting answers about the site's myriad failures was "very important for people."

"A lot of money went into this site," and "people want an accounting," DeSantis said.

DeSantis has described the website variously as "designed to fail" and a "jaglopy in the Daytona 500," descriptions that failed to mollify many of those waiting to get their payouts.

A.G. Gancarski has been a working journalist for more than two decades. Gancarski has been a correspondent for FloridaPolitics.com since 2014. In 2018, he was a finalist for an Association of Alternative Newsweeklies "best political column." He can be reached at a.g.gancarski@gmail.com.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
13					14				15			
16				17					18			
19				20				21				
			22				23			24		
25	26	27		28			29			30		
31			32		33		34				35	
36				37		38			39		40	
	41				42			43		44		
		45					46		47		48	
49	50		51			52			53			
54		55				56				57	58	59
60					61				62			
63					64				65			
66					67				68			

CLUES ACROSS

- American composer
- Very fast aircraft
- Workplaces
- A mount on a surface
- Small freshwater fish
- Double-reed instrument
- Canadian flyers
- Famed astronomer
- Smooth, shiny fabric
- Profited
- Conspiracy
- Infections
- Chum
- Secondary school (abbr.)
- Resistance unit
- Sound unit
- Ancient city of Egypt
- Crease
- Polished
- For goodness' sake!
- College basketball tournament
- Scorches
- Describe precisely
- Thick piece of something
- Frocks
- Indicates near
- Senior enlisted US Army member
- A note added to a letter
- A nose or snout
- Clumsy
- Satisfied to the fullest
- Display of strong feeling
- Popular awards show
- Cuisine style
- Expresses pleasure
- Monetary unit of the Maldives
- Utah city
- Fight
- Messenger ribonucleic acid
- Body part
- Suspiciously reluctant
- Frying necessity
- Former CIA
- The leader
- Produces
- London soccer club
- Closes
- Region in the western Pacific Ocean
- Not present
- Small drink of whiskey
- Begat
- Helps little firms
- Pointed end of a pen
- Fencing swords
- Inches per minute (abbr.)
- Hymn
- Philippine island
- Flemish names of Ypres
- A way to inform
- Small lake
- Linear unit
- Central Japanese city
- Partially burn
- Sports award
- Part of your foot
- Atomic #21

CLUES DOWN

- Fruit of the service tree
- At some prior time
- Mongolian city ___ Bator
- Strongboxes
- Russian river
- Gurus
- Horse mackerel
- Pearl Jam's debut album
- Confines
- First month of Jewish ecclesiastical year
- Famed Idaho politician
- Prevents from seeing
- Indicate time
- Male parents
- Tab on a key ring
- The Great Dog constellation: ___ Major

Cub Scouts graduate, despite COVID-19 restrictions

By Bruce Hope
bruce@opcfla.com

FLEMING ISLAND – The Scout Oath pledges that a scout will do their best, and for Clay County Cub Scouts, they did just that this past spring, despite the COVID-19 pandemic doing its worst to disrupt every aspect of life.

The Cub Scouts, ranging in grade groups from kindergarten to fifth, continued despite the circumstances and held their yearly graduation celebration and award ceremony Saturday at Grace Anglican Church. Multiple young scouts, both boys and girls, moved onto their next grade levels and received awards.

“We go camping a lot,” said Lucas Springborn, a 10-year-old fourth-grader at Patterson Elementary. “We go fishing and other stuff,” Springborn says he loves to go camping, and that he has learned some interesting skills, such as whittling and knot-tying. He plans to go on to become a member of the Boy Scouts and eventually attain the rank of Eagle Scout.

The graduation and end-of-the-year celebration is usually a much more boisterous event, complete with a huge water balloon fight and other events, however, social distancing measures replaced with the safety of all in mind toned down the



STAFF PHOTO BY BRUCE HOPE

Cub Scouts practiced social distancing while celebrating their graduations last week. Most of the boys and girls plan to advance to the Boy Scouts level.

festivities at this iteration.

“We are having a drive-in pack graduation, which is basically an end-of-the-year celebration of all of the advancements and achievements that the kids have done throughout the year COVID-19 style,” said Josh Mintz, Black Creek District Executive for the Boy Scouts of America. “Trying to make a party that usually has everybody getting together doing water balloon fights, dinner, and everything like that, trying to find a new to do that in our new world.”

The Scouts sat in their parked vehicles until their level was called. Then they lined up next to the stage, all the while maintaining a safe social distance until their individual name was called. Once called, they walked across the stage, received their gift bag and whatever award they may have earned, and posed for pictures before the next Scout was called.

In true 2020 COVID-19 fashion, the Cubmaster, who was called away to work, made his presence felt by appearing on a

large monitor on the stage via Zoom.

“Usually, during the summer, they have a lot of pack activities, so we are still trying to plan out what those are going to be,” said Mintz. “Scouting is year-round. I know they’re planning on different activities and things like that depending on what they’re allowed to do at that time.”

For now, though, COVID-19 or not, the Scouts are driving on, are being celebrated for their accomplishments.

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Chen now headed to MIT after leaving environmental legacy throughout Clay

By Wesley LeBlanc
wesley@opclfa.com

ORANGE PARK – Recent Ridgeview High graduate Michael Chen will soon be attending the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and his recent Earth Day Scholarship will help pay for the costs.

Chen has been active in Clay County environmental advocacy for years and his actions were noticed by the National Society of High School Scholars after he applied for the scholarship. Earth Day Scholarship winners are, according to the NSHSS, students that are passionate about the environment and have helped to either raise awareness or actively protect the earth through projects or activities in their school or community. Chen has done both.

“I think that you’re really able to inspire people in a multitude of ways and that’s what this has all been about,” Chen said. “If you can convince someone to go out in nature and experience its beauty, you can convince them to preserve it.”

Chen has been trying to do that since his sophomore year, although his environmental activism stretches to even earlier than that. About halfway through his sophomore year, Chen and two of his friends, Alaa Osman and Madison Yonash, started the Earth Club at Ridgeview. Chen and this club have organized more than 20 clean-ups throughout Clay County and Jacksonville, it’s worked with the St. Johns River-Keepers, the Green Girls and the Audubon Society, which is the organization that helped the Earth Club adopt a nature preserve now known as the Crosby Sanctuary.

The Earth Club has collected invasive species around Ridgeview, installed recycling bins, installed a refillable water bottle fountain at the school and purchased and installed motion-activated cameras for the Crosby Sanctuary. The club has been to Tallahassee twice to speak with legislators about Clay County environmental hurdles like algae bloom in the St. Johns River, too.

“When we initially started the club, our teacher [Donna Foley], said it had been tried multiple times in the past without success, so it was disheartening,” Chen said. “She said people tried it and that students just weren’t interested. So, when we started the Earth Club, we knew we had to find some way to make it interesting.”

Chen said the club’s lifespan, completed projects and members indicate success to him. The secret was finding a way to make it fun and interesting in a way that inspired not just one grade of students, but all grades of students, Chen said. The club today consists of students from all grade levels at Ridgeview and will continue to work after Chen and his friends toward the next step in their lives.



Michael Chen

For Chen, that will be MIT.

Chen will pursue a degree in electrical engineering and computer science with a potential minor in political science. He plans to merge his passion for the environment with engineering.

“There’s one guy from Florida at MIT that I’ve met and he started an environmental action group so I’ll probably join that,” Chen said. “They use engineering to help out the environment. For example, they work with a lot of mining companies to improve the process and make it more environmentally sound.”

Chen said there’s also an advocacy side to environmental groups at MIT that march in the name of finding solutions to climate change. While his work in Clay County is soon coming to a close, there’s still one major project of Chen’s yet to come to life.

“We were planning this Earth Day event where we’d go to Ridgeview Elementary and set up cool booths and have a parade throughout the entire school day,” Chen said. “Everything was going to be environmental-themed and it would be fun and educational at the same time.”

Chen said sculptures made of recycled water bottles would have been there as would other fair-like staples like face painting. The club made all of these plans but soon realized they needed more funding. Chen and the club sold food from his parents’ restaurant in Green Cove Springs’ Spring Park during the annual CalaVida festival to raise money. They raised about \$1,000 and spent some of that on a refillable water bottle fountain the school needed.

Needing more money, Chen looked into grants. It was in this search that he

SEE CHEN, 10

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Obituaries

William "Bill" Matthew Garrett, Jr.

William "Bill" Matthew Garrett, Jr., 96, after an extended illness left this world for his heavenly home on Saturday, May 30, 2020 in Orange Park, Florida.

William was born in Port Arthur, Texas on April 16, 1924 and was the son of William Matthew Garrett Sr. and Winnie Gottsleben Garrett.

Having received notice that he was being drafted, immediately following his high school graduation in 1943, Bill joined the Army Air Corp. After his basic training he was sent to England where he joined the 8th Air Force (448 Bomb Group) as a waist gunner on a B24 airplane. While flying missions over Central Europe and dropping supplies to US paratroopers, his planes were shot down twice during the Battle of the Bulge.

He was wounded in action over Germany on March 24, 1945 which required hospitalization to recover. Bill was discharged on December 6, 1945 and was awarded the Purple Heart.

Bill returned to Texas and graduated from The University of Texas in Austin. He was hired by General Electric where he performed heat pump tests on air conditioners in Kansas.

In 1957 he accepted a position with Jacksonville Paper Company. In the mid-60's he began working for JEA and continued working for them until his retirement in 1993.

Through the years, Bill was actively involved with German American Club (Ortega River Club), the Jacksonville Wood Workers Club, the Selective Service Board, and a volunteer at Orange Park Medical Center. He was formerly a member of the Lakeshore Presbyterian Church and after his second marriage he joined the Orange Park United Methodist Church where he became a very active member.

Bill is predeceased by his parents, his wife, Joyce, who was the mother of his two children, and his sister Winifred.

Bill is survived by his wife of almost 40 years, Nancy Hurner Garrett, his sister Ann Nelson (Houston, Texas) and his two children Matthew (Pam) Garrett and Kathleen Garrett Johnson. He is also sur-



William "Bill" Matthew Garrett Jr.

vived by his stepchildren, Carlyle (Gayle) Martin, Pamela Martin (Michael) Roberts, Kathleen Martin Rich, Zachary (Colleen) Martin, his twelve grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Bill is also survived by a large loving stepfamily. Bill was fondly known as "Honey"; a nickname given to him by his grandchildren.

Dr. Charles Lever will officiate at a private family interment at Greenlawn Cemetery. Due to the COVID-19 virus a memorial service will be held at a later date. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to The James Boys Ministry in care of Orange Park United Methodist Church, 2105 Park Ave, Suite 19, Orange Park, Florida 32073.

Beatrice Leona Fletcher

Beatrice Leona Fletcher, 83, of Green Cove Springs earned her wings on June 5, 2020. She went to her beloved Robert L Fletcher who has waited in heaven since Jan 30, 2012.

What a wonderful reunion as she embraced Avis and John Ridley who brought her into this world in Lewiston, Maine on March 27, 1937. There will be no more tears for those who went on before her. Roger Prout (son) Jeffery Fluck (son-in-law) and two precious babies Austin Estep (grandson) and Leilani Lang (granddaughter). Embrace Kat for us mother.

You will live in the hearts of the many you leave behind. Linda and Gerald McDaniel, Tobbie Fluck, Margery and Danny Glisson and Robert and Monica Fletcher, 12 grandchildren, 34 great grandchildren and 2 great great grands. We will forever think of you every time we curl up to read a book, witness the first breath of your grand babies, walk our daughter down the aisle, go on vacation, listen to Johnny Cash or realize the last piece of this 1000 piece puzzle has been carried off by the kids.

You have taught us to pray, love and fight for what's right. Your time here is done. Until we meet again RAWR! The family will receive friends to celebrate the life of Gangsta Granny, Ms. Bea, Queen Bea,



Beatrice Leona Fletcher

Bumble Bea from 5pm to 7pm on Friday, June 12, 2020 in the Broadus-Raines Chapel.

Please sign the family's online guestbook at www.broadusraines.com.

Arrangements are under the care of Broadus-Raines Funeral Home, 501 Spring St., Green Cove Springs, FL 32043. (904) 284-4000



Lawrence Gillespie Hills

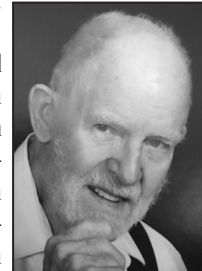
Lawrence Gillespie Hills, 89, of Penney Retirement Community died Wednesday, June 3rd, 2020. He was born at home to the late Frank George and Ethel Gertrude Hills, July 14th, 1930, near South Haven MI.

Larry graduated from Bangor High School and received a BA in Agricultural Economics and an MA in agriculture and teaching from Michigan State University.

He married Laura Jean Porter in August 1952, and they lived together in Lacota, MI until Larry was drafted into the US Army for 2 years. He farmed in Michigan for 11 years before serving as an agricultural missionary, in both Zambia and Congo, for the United Methodist Church.

He retired in 1999 and relocated to Penney Retirement Community in Penney Farms, FL. While in Africa, Larry saw a need for mobility for the disabled. He had a vision to improve their lives by developing a Personal Energy Transportation device (PET) and oversaw the manufacturing, assembly, and distribution of over 11665 PET units from Penney Retirement Community, and over 80,000 units at 23 sites in the US, and 2 overseas sites in Zambia and Sierra Leone.

Larry was an active member of Penney Memorial Church, and the Penney Farms Dialogue class, where he participated in



Lawrence Gillespie Hills

discussions for opening hearts on difficult ethical questions, faith, and science. He was beloved by many around the world. He lived a life of service, dedicated to racial equality, peace, and hands-on support to those in need. Larry loved birding, gardening, writing, and reading.

Larry was preceded in death by daughter, April Sukup and son, David.

Larry is survived by his wife, Laura, and four children: Holly McSpadden, Sharon Hills-Bonczyk, Nanda Hills, and Cheryl Clancy. He is also is survived by nine grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, the family is requesting that donations be made out to MW-PET Project, PO Box 919, Penney Farms, FL 32079

His Life and Legacy will be missed.

Please sign the family's online guestbook at www.broadusraines.com.

Arrangements are under the care of Broadus-Raines Funeral Home, 501 Spring St., Green Cove Springs, FL 32043. (904) 284-4000



Larry Walter Tode

Larry Walter Tode, 66, of Green Cove Springs, FL, passed away June 5, 2020

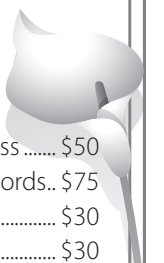
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 Ryan Chamberlin (Rep)
 Todd Chase (Rep)
 Adam Christensen (Dem)
 Philip Dodds (Dem)
 Bill Engelbrecht (Rep)
 Joe Dallas Millado (Rep)
 Gavin Rollins (Rep)
 Judson Sapp (Rep)
 Edgardo Silva (Write-In)
 James St. George (Rep)
 David Theus (Rep)
 Amy Pope Wells (Rep)
 Tom Wells (Dem)

Florida Senate, 5th District

Jennifer Bradley (Rep)
 Melina Rayna Svanhild Farley-Barrate (Dem)
 Matthew McCary (Lib)

Florida Representative, 18th District

Sam Garrison (Rep)
 Kenneth Willey (Lib)
 Leroy Edwards (Dem)

Florida Representative, 19th District

Bobby Payne (Rep, incumbent)
 Jaiden Hamilton (Dem)

State Attorney, Fourth Judicial Circuit

Melissa Nelson (Rep, incumbent)

Public Defender, Fourth Judicial Circuit

Charlie Cofer (Rep, incumbent)

Supreme Court Justice

Carlos G. Muniz (No party)

District Court of Appeal

Joseph Lewis Jr. (No party)
 Scott Makar (No party)
 Rachel Nordby (No party)
 Tim Osterhaus (No party)
 Clay Roberts (No party)
 Adam S. Tanenbaum (No party)

Clay County Circuit Judge

James J. Daniel (No party, incumbent)
 Lester B. Bass (No party, incumbent)
 Michael Kalil (No party)
 Lance M. Day (No party, incumbent)
 Adrian G. Soud (No party, incumbent)
 David M. Gooding (No party, incumbent)
 Meredith Charbula (No party, incumbent)
 Tatiana R. Salvador (No party, incumbent)
 Mike Sharrit (No party, incumbent)
 Virginia Norton (No party, incumbent)
 Waddell A. Wallace (No party, incumbent)

Clay County Clerk of the Court

Tara Green (Rep, incumbent)

Clay County Sheriff

Ben Carroll (Rep)
 Michelle Cook (Rep)
 Darryl Daniels (Rep, incumbent)
 Harold Rutledge (Rep)
 Mike Taylor (Rep)
 Catherine D. Webb (Rep)

Clay County Property Appraiser

Tracy Scott Drake (Rep)

Clay County Tax Collector

Diane Hutchings (Rep)
 Ronnie Robinson (Rep)

Clay County Superintendent of Schools

Charlie Van Zant (Rep)
 David Broskie (Rep, incumbent)
 Ann Wiggins (Rep)

Clay County Supervisor of Elections

Chris Chambless (Rep, incumbent)

Clay County Commissioner, District 1

Mike Cella (Rep, incumbent)

Clay County Commissioner, District 3

Connie Thomas (Rep)
 James B. Renninger (Rep)
 Randy Knepper (Rep)

Clay County Commissioner, District 4

Betsy Sistrunk Condon (Rep)
 Belinda Johnson (Rep)

Clay County Commissioner, District 5

Leslie Dougher (Rep)
 Kristen Burke (Rep)

Clay County School Board, District 2

Carol Studdard (No party, incumbent)
 Beth Clark (No party)
 Aaron Knowles (No party)

Clay County School Board, District 4

Mary Bolla (No party, incumbent)
 Rodney Herring (No party)

Clay Soil and Water Conservation, District 2

Richard Russell (No party)

Clay Soil and Water Conservation, District 4

Wesley Taylor (No party)

The Crossings at Fleming Island CDD, Seat 1

Michael Bruno (No party)

The Crossings at Fleming Island, CDD, Seat 2

David Herold (No party)
 Eric Heinton (No party)

The Crossings at Fleming Island CDD, Seat 5

Robbin Rush (No party)

Double Branch CDD, Seat 5

Charles Horton (No party)

Fleming Island Plantation CDD, Seat 3

John Douglas McHone (No party)

Fleming Island Plantation CDD, Seat 4

Rick Nelson (No party)

Lake Asbury MSBD, Seat 1

Mark McMillan (No party)

Lake Asbury MSBD, Seat 6

Janet Wantage (No party)

Lake Asbury MSBD, Seat 7

Michael Bueme (No party)

Lake Asbury MSBD, Seat 8

Debra Charlene Barrett (No party)

Lake Asbury MSBD, Seat 9

Melody Pickens (No party)

Magnolia West CDD, Seat 4

Douglas Kuhrt (No party)

Magnolia West CDD, Seat 5

Cynthia Riegler (No party)

Middle Village DCC, Seat 2

Michael Steiner (No party)

Ridgewood Trails CDD, Seat 1

Martin Genska (No party)

Rolling Hills CDD, Seat 1

Helana Joanne Cormier (No party)
 Jeffrey Havener Jr. (No party)
 John Miller (No party)

Rolling Hills CDD, Seat 3

Frank Mattera (No party)

South Village CDD, Seat 2

Chris Payton (No party, incumbent)

Pine Ridge Plantation CDD, Seat 2

Jeff Arp (No party)

Pine Ridge Plantation CDD, Seat 5

Nelson Nazario (No party)



Clay County Sheriff's Office awarded \$625,000 by U.S. Attorney's Office

Money will be used to hire five new deputies

TAMPA – U.S. Attorney Maria Chapa Lopez today announced \$20,875,000 in grant funding through the Department's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services COPS Hiring Program. These funds have been awarded to 14 law enforcement agencies throughout the Middle District of Florida and will allow for the hiring of 167 additional full-time law enforcement officers.

The Clay County Sheriff's Office was awarded \$625,000 to hire five new officers.

"Community policing is an effective tool in reducing crime in our neighborhoods, building relationships of mutual trust and accountability, and implementing successful prevention and intervention strategies," said U.S. Attorney Maria Chapa Lopez. "We are eager to continue working with our partner agencies, our community, and our citizens in this collective problem-solving strategy to improve public safety."

The COPS Hiring Program is a competitive award program intended to reduce crime and advance public safety through community policing by providing direct funding for the hiring of career law enforcement officers. In addition to providing financial support for hiring, CHP provides funding to state, local, and tribal law enforcement to enhance local community policing strategies and tactics. In a changing economic climate, CHP funding helps law enforcement agencies maintain sufficient sworn personnel levels to promote safe communities. Funding through this pro-

gram had been on hold since the spring of 2018 due to a nationwide injunction that was lifted earlier this year.

The Attorney General previously announced funding awards to 596 law enforcement agencies across the nation, which allows those agencies to hire 2,732 additional full-time law enforcement professionals. The awards are inclusive of the \$51 million announced in May as part of Operation Relentless Pursuit.

"The Department of Justice is committed to providing the police chiefs and sheriffs of our great nation with needed resources, tools, and support. The funding announced today will bolster their ranks and contribute to expanding community policing efforts nationwide," said Attorney General William P. Barr. "A law enforcement agency's most valuable assets are the men and women who put their lives on the line every day in the name of protecting and serving their communities."

CHP applicants were required to identify a specific crime and disorder problem focus area and explain how the funding will be used to implement community policing approaches to that problem focus area. 43 percent of the awards announced today will focus on violent crime, while the remainder of the awards will focus on a variety of issues including school-based policing to fund school resource officer positions, building trust and respect, and opioid education, prevention, and intervention. The COPS Office received nearly 1,100 applications requesting more than 4,000 law enforcement positions.

Orange Park Women's Club holding sale on June 24

ORANGE PARK – With Phase II in place around Florida, the Orange Park Women's Club will have a yard sale at its club at 130 Kingsley Ave.

The sale is June 24 from 8-11 a.m. If it's raining, the sale will be moved inside to the Charlotte Weaver Hall.

The sale will feature new children's dresses and shorts; facemasks,

Treasures and gently used woman's clothes.


Since there remains a threat of COVID-19, the women's club asks its customers to wear facemasks.

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SJR State student spotlight: Christy Cole

Preparing today for tomorrow's opportunities

By Penny Powell
SJR State

ORANGE PARK – Christy Cole isn't wasting any time training for a career in health care.

The Clay High graduate spent her senior year dually enrolled in the Emergency Medical Technician program at St. Johns River State College.

Believing that EMT training would be an insightful and useful experience, Christy took the leap. "My teacher at Clay High inspired me more than anyone to go

through with this program and continue my education; she is my biggest supporter and inspiration," Christy said.

According to Christy, the EMT training is preparing her mind to think as a health care worker and is encouraging critical thinking. "This program is so much fun, though it is a lot of hard work and dedication," she said. "Hands-on training gives you a good perspective on what the field will be like. Whether you want to be an EMT or not, it gives you experience and a foot in the door for so many opportunities."

"I am a busy person and have never liked change very much," Christy continued, "But this program took me completely out of my comfort zone, in a good way," adding that she feels blessed to be in the program - challenges and all.

SJR State EMT instructor Lisa Mancino said, "Christy is a joy to have in the classroom.

As a dual-enrollment student, I can only imagine the struggles of finishing out my senior year of high school on top of taking a full-time college program.

Christy is always smiling, willing to lend a hand to others who may be struggling and challenging herself consistently. Her determination, strong work ethic and willingness to go outside her comfort zone will serve her well in this career."

The EMT program prepares students for employment at the basic pre-hospital EMT level to treat patients with various medical and trauma conditions. The program prepares students for certification as EMTs in accordance with Chapter 64J of the Florida Administrative Code. Christy anticipates completing the program this summer.

The Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) certification is next on Christy's list. She ultimately sees herself specializing in gynecology in the future.



Christy Cole

Chen from page 7

stumbled upon the Earth Day Scholarship that is now helping pave the way for him at MIT. That doesn't mean the Earth Club's celebration isn't happening though.

"Unfortunately, because of the coronavirus, we weren't able to carry out our plans," Chen said. "We have, though, already picked out and decided who will lead the Earth Club next year and we're already talking about how to continue the plans and make the celebration happen next year."

That's what the Earth Club and Chen's

passion for the environment is all about, he said.

"The environment is something that should be argued over or debated about at all," Chen said. "No matter what you're doing, if you help the environment, you're helping the world and that's what we need to remember. There's a responsibility for our generation because our generation will feel the effects of things people are doing right now.

"It's important to inspire our generation to be invested and care about it. We'll be the ones to have the opportunity to make a lasting impact."

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BCC approves creation of Sandridge Community Development District

Board also puts school's half-cent sales tax on general election ballot

By Wesley LeBlanc
wesley@opcfla.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The Board of County Commissioners approved the creation of a Sandridge Community Development District at its Tuesday meeting with a 5-0 vote.

This district will be similar to developments like the Fleming Island Plantation. The CDD was pitched by Lauren Gentry of Hopping Green & Sams on behalf of the Wood Development Company of Jacksonville. It will manage the nearly 300-acre district.



Laura Gentry

"Establishing the CDD today would provide a governing and financing body [to the specified area] that would serve the body of land this is proposed to be over," Gentry said. "It does not override approvals otherwise left to the county."

The proposed district covers 290.5

acres near the 2429 Sandridge Road area and the proposed district is anticipated to provide public infrastructure like roadway improvements, stormwater improvements, utilities and more, according to Gentry. She said the CDD would also cover recreational amenities like parks and associated landscaping.

The main advantage of a CDD in this case is to provide governance and special financing to this area as it has access to "tax exempt public bond markets" which gives it greater flexibility and allows the CDD to pay back bonds through a levy of special assessments through the tax roll, Gentry said. This makes the CDD a "great financial vehicle" over a more traditional government body, she said.

The CDD is still a government body in the state of Florida and it's subject to sunshine laws and all actions must be taken publicly. Public records will be publicly accessible, an annual audit is required and a website that details everything must be created.

"It will be very transparent and accountable," Gentry said.

The CDD will be controlled by developers with property in the area at first, but Gentry said that once the district has 250 registered voters living within it, the CDD will turn over to residential control.

Proposed Sandridge CDD

Location:

- Approx. 290.50 acres
- 2429 Sandridge Road Green Cove Springs, Florida 32043
- Eastern Clay County
- Bounded by Sandridge Road to the north, Feed Mill Road to the West, and jurisdictional wetlands to the east and south



Hopping Green & Sams
Planners and Consultants

Gentry told the BCC a CDD will benefit the county since improvements will be paid by residents living within the district.

"The county benefits...include...assurance that there is a stable financing source with no financial burden on those outside the CDD," Gentry said. "It increases the tax base for [Clay County]...and provides a more stable maintenance entity to ensure functionality of the project long after the original developer is gone. It ensures that growth pays for itself."

Gentry said CDD debt is not disclosed

in county financial statements and that the county will retain all zoning and permitting authority in the area, with no administrative cost to the county government. The BCC voted unanimously to approve the creation of this CDD following Gentry's presentation.

In other business, the BCC approved the school board's half-cent sales tax resolution which means the resolution will appear on the general election ballot in November.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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County Tourist Development Council offers marketing grant applications

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The Clay County Tourist Development Council announced the opening of the 2020-21 Event Marketing Grant Application period.

The Event Marketing Grants are available for non-profit organizations planning to host events in Clay County between Oct. 1 and Sept. 30, 2021. The reimbursable grants can only be used for marketing outside of Clay County to encourage day and overnight visitors to come to our area. Applications will be accepted until July 15.

During the 2019-20 fiscal year, Event Marketing Grants ranging from \$2,000 to \$45,000 were awarded to more than 20 Clay County non-profit organizations. Visi-

tors coming to Clay County usually spend money at local restaurants, hotels and attractions, purchase items at local retailers and buy fuel. The purchases help support local businesses and the sales and fuel taxes paid are then invested into infrastructure and public safety improvements, which benefits Clay County residents long after the visitors return home.

Tourist Development Council Chairman and Commissioner Mike Cella said, "Events are a major asset to our community's quality of life and the TDC aims to help event planners get the funding they need to market their events to visitors." Cella added, "We know events may look differ-

ent in the future, which is why the County is working diligently to provide the event planners with the most updated information on industry standards and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention CDC Guidelines for Events to ensure the safety of event staff and attendees.

This year the annual TDC Event Marketing Grant Workshop was made available online due to the COVID-19 crisis. The TDC Event Marketing Grant Workshop for fiscal year 2020-21 can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BuOUjv4xRIA&feature=youtu.be>. To review the new fiscal year 2020-21 TDC Event Marketing Grant Guidelines, visit

<https://www.claycountygov.com/home/showdocument?id=6836>. To submit your application, visit <https://www.claycountygov.com/departments/tourism/tourist-development-council/event-marketing-grant/event-marketing-grant-20-21>. If applicants would like copies of the presentation, examples of application materials, reimbursement best practices or would like to schedule a meeting about applying for a grant, please email Katherine Savage at Katherine.savage@claycountygov.com. The TDC is here to assist event planners in any way possible to help them host successful events in Clay County as soon as it is safe to do so again.

Ballot

from page 1

School board attorney Bruce Bickner said the grandfather argument fails because the new law is ambiguous in regards to what resolutions are included. The law changed the proceedings of the half-cent sales tax that has been in discussion for over a year.

The history of the school board's half-cent sales tax is quite extensive. It was a hot topic of discussion last year when the school board tried to push the resolution onto a special election ballot, only for it to

be denied by the Board of County Commissioners. The two bodies went to court over that decision and the school board lost. The board then made adjustments to the resolution at the BCC's guidance.

This included pushing the resolution to a general election ballot in November. The resolution was approved by the school board and then the BCC following those changes. State law then changed the way a half-cent sales tax like this one worked and made it so that any school-related sales tax on a ballot after July 1 must include stipulations that direct proportionate funds to

charter schools as well as public schools.

"I understand [Kerekes'] feelings about it but it applies to all elections that occur after July 1, 2020," Bickner said. "I don't see a way that we're grandfathered in with a resolution we passed in October. The election will occur after July 2020 and I think that's the end of that story."

Because this stipulation was not in the original resolution passed last October by the school board, the board had to make amendments to the resolution to include the district's charter schools. Those amendments were made and that's what the board approved with a 4-1 vote. It's now up to voters.

The money is needed to make more

than \$300 million in repairs to existing buildings, as well as another \$300 million to pay for new schools.

In other business, superintendent David Broskie said the longer the district waits to hold its graduation for seniors, the better the chances of the graduation feeling normal.

"We're going to have to adhere to whatever guidelines are present," Broskie said. "I've seen a variety of plans out there. The longer we wait, the better our chances of having what people really want to happen. I know people are anxious to know more but...right now...it's hard to say what it will look like."



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Florida
HEALTH



PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

Praying for peace, unborn children

ORANGE PARK – A group of residents, including Father Bill Jordan of Prince of Peace Charismatic Episcopal Church and Dr. Kathi Aultman, gathered at Jeanne Pellegrino's Studio of Fine Arts last week to pray for peace and unborn children. Pellegrino also put her newest works, *The Mother and Child*, *Mission of Hope*, on display.



Orange Park hosting July 4th vehicle parade



SAT. JULY 4TH AT 9:00AM

REGISTER ONLINE BY JUNE 28
\$20 PER VEHICLE ★ MOTORIZED VEHICLES ONLY
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ORANGE PARK – The Town of Orange Park is hosting a 4th of July Vehicle Parade, beginning at 9 a.m.

The town is inviting residents and visitors sit along the route as it celebrates Independence Day social-distance style.

Residents and businesses are encouraged to decorate their yards and porches with patriotic spirit. Town residents may

pick up complimentary mini flags to wave as the parade goes by from Town Hall beginning June 16th .

The parade will leave from bestbet and travel south on River Road turning onto Kingsley Avenue. The parade will cross U.S. Highway 17 and continue west, turning right on to Plainfield Avenue. Vehicles will disband at the intersection of Plainfield Avenue and Wells

Road.

Vehicle registration is now open. Each entry is \$20 and \$10 for town businesses and residents. One vehicle is permitted for each registration. We are limited to 100 vehicles total. This is a vehicle-only parade.

In an effort to reduce the potential spread of COVID-19, nothing can be thrown or otherwise distributed from parade vehicles. This includes, but is not limited to, candy, beads, pamphlets, flyers, flags, etc.

Visit www.TownOfOrangePark.com/4th-Of-July-Parade to register a vehicle.

Feel free to submit your Calendar items

As businesses and groups get back to work, take a moment to send us a note about your group meetings. Let us know if you're meeting in person or virtually so we can resume our Calendar section to keep everyone informed.

Send your announcements to don@opcfla.com.



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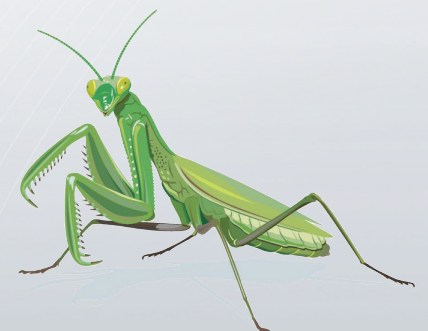


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STAFF FILE PHOTO

Call center workers field calls Friday afternoon as Hurricane Irma continued to move toward Florida. The purpose of the call center is to answer any question the public may have, as well as providing general shelter information to anyone in need of evacuation.

Storm

from page 1

Ward discussed how the county is preparing to deal with hurricane season in the wake of very different circumstances than ever before.

“Obviously we would get an opportunity to get out, do a lot of speeches, a lot of public outreaches and a lot of gathering, to educate people and hand preparedness information out,” said Ward. “Obviously that wasn’t able to happen because we were in the midst of responding to COVID and we didn’t want to bring large groups together like that. I think the education and outreach of hurricane season were impacted because we usually do that in April and May.”

The county has been pushing residents to prepare an evacuation plan now to avoid the possibility of needing to go into a shelter.

The most significant change, according to Ward, is the operational guidelines of dealing with storm shelters if necessary. With social distancing still an essential precaution to prevent a flareup of the COVID-19 virus, even more space than usual will be needed. Under typical circumstances, the area allotted in a shelter is 20 square feet a person. Special medical needs personnel are allocated 60 square feet. Under social distancing guidelines, 100 square feet is given for each evacuee

person with special medical needs personnel receiving 160 square feet. This means that more shelters will be needed if a storm approaches.

Not only are the physical locations of more shelters a need, but the budget to run them must also be considered. At an operating budget of approximately \$10,000 a day, the number of shelters must be found and planned for.

Clay County residents have not explicitly been seeking guidance regarding hurricane season, according to Ward.

“I’ve been in Jacksonville for 25 years; I’m retired military,” said Navy veteran Stanley McCoy. “I’m aware of it [hurricane season] every year, and I prepare myself. I prepare myself in a lot of different ways. I make sure I have flashlights, candles, batteries, water, and sandbags. I really try to prepare myself every year. These are natural disasters, right? I understand this COVID virus is very dangerous, but still, we have out natural disasters in Florida, so, therefore, you can’t not pay attention to that, too, so I try to prepare for everything.”

“I have a lot of people in my family in the medical field,” said a Home Depot shopper who preferred to remain unidentified. “So while we are already preparing for COVID, we have to make sure we are in hurricane mode, so stay prepared throughout the year. We live in Florida; it’s not just hurricanes. We try to stay on top of stuff.”

Schools

from page 4

Board and Board of County Commissioners spent nearly a year battling in commission chambers and in the courtroom on how to let residents make the final decision.

The school board wanted it included on a special ballot, but the county commission wanted it on the general election ballot. The fight between both elected bodies was both contentious and public.

The commission said voter turnout during a general election has been as high as 87%, but it’s generally about 26% during off-year and special elections.

A judge agreed with the county commission.

The school board voted 4-1 last week to formally ask the BCC to allow voters to make the final decision in November. The commission agreed Tuesday afternoon and supported it with a 5-0 vote.

Now that it’s on the ballot, it’s up to us. The school board believes it will be able to collect about \$600 million during the next 30 years to renovate existing schools and build new ones. As new developments come to Clay County – the BCC approved the creation of the Sandridge Community

Development District Tuesday for a 290.5-acre project in Green Cove Springs – it will be imperative we keep pace.

A half-cent tax is a small investment that will create a windfall for our children’s future.

The election for school superintendent also will be on the ballot. There are three candidates – incumbent David Broskie and former superintendents Charlie Van Zant and Ann Wiggins.

It will be important to separate fact from fiction ahead of the election. Some residents have expressed concern over the money already spent to create a school district police department. That’s a debate worth having, but it has nothing to do with the superintendent’s job.

The school police department is a function of the school board, not the superintendent. The superintendent essentially is charged with implementing and enforcing the policies of the school board.

So that shouldn’t be part of the decision-making process for the proposed sales tax. Neither have anything to do with the other.

There’s only one issue to consider: do we want to fix our old schools and build new ones, or do we let our children down?

It’s up to us to decide.

Letter

from page 5

I filtered out a lot of data and kept any data where a resource officer could have made a difference. Please keep in mind that politicians excel at manipulating data and can take data and make it look like the end of the world or an annoyance depending on the desired reaction. In the end, the result does not justify the cost of private police force answering only to the school

board.

To summarize my fears. Politicians get what they want by fear mongering. Once they get that initial funding they dive in and get so deep that it becomes cost prohibitive to change direction. This little escape cost Clay County residents about and 18% increase in their land taxes and never forget, politicians always come back for more money.....always.....

Rex Wilde
Fleming Island

History

from page 4

fers a cemetery tour inside Camp Blanding.

- The Department of Environmental Regulation is called to investigate a reported fish kill from North Fork to Black Creek.

40 years ago, 1980

- The Green Cove Springs City Council

decides to end its financial problems by selling all but 50 acres of the Rosemary Hill Landfill.

- Clay County Crescent editor Elaine Williamson after staff reporter Ann Williamson receive a second-place award in the Freedom of Information category of the Better Newspaper contest.

- Three county commissioners offer to buy 333 acres of land on Rosemary Hill Road to build the landfill.

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TRY IT AGAIN ...

Green Cove Springs accepting reservations for park pavilions

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – City of Green Cove Springs accepts new applications for park facility reservations.

This is the first time that new reservations are accepted since the City closed reservations on March 23.

As per Florida Governor Ron DeSantis’ Phase 2 Reopening guidelines, reservations will only be accepted for groups of 50 people and less. Park pavilions are still available on a first come, first serve basis. However, reservations at any pavilion will take precedence.

For any questions please contact Executive Assistant Kimberly Thomas at (904) 297-7054 or kthomas@greencovesprings.com

Woof Gang Bakery rated one of franchise's top dogs

By Wesley LeBlanc
wesley@opcfla.com

FLEMING ISLAND – Clay County's one and only Woof Gang Bakery is one of the company's most successful franchises.

The Woof Gang Bakery at 1960 East-West Parkway on Fleming Island was recently named one of the most successful franchises for its sales in 2019. The store also joined the "Millionaire Club" in doing so, meaning the store made \$1 million or more in gross sales last year.

The success of the company shows as it recently expanded its storefront to more than double its size.

"Mary and Pete [Hardin] have built a strong local presence to engage with their neighbors and customers," Woof Gang Bakery corporate office representative Cara Allen said. "To better serve the needs of the Clay County community, they have modified operations by implementing curbside service for retail and grooming, and have

introduced free, same-day home delivery in Fleming Island."

Mary Hardin said it meant a lot to be named one of the most successful Woof Gang Bakery franchises in the nationwide company. It's an indication to her that her hard work, passion and risks have paid off and her dreams have become a reality. Hardin opened the store in 2016 after growing tired of her 9-to-5 banking job.

She told her husband one day that she was ready for something new, something more dog-friendly. After looking around at her options, she decided on Woof Gang Bakery.

That was in September of 2016 and right off the bat, the store was a success.

"Clay County is a dog county and that really shows," Hardin said.

It was important to Hardin the store be an extension of Hardin, who owns five dogs, and her passion for dogs. That's why dogs are allowed in the store, to preview the toys and treats their dog mom and



STAFF PHOTOS BY BRUCE HOPE

Business has been so brisk at Woof Gang Bakery, the store doubled its space in January. The store on Fleming Island offers grooming, toys and homemade treats.

dads might be buying them. It's also why famed store boss, Kona the Shih Tzu, walks around the store to greet pet owners and pets alike.

Kona smells them first, then sits and gives them that "please pet me" look before the shopping can happen. Some dogs enter the store for a trip to Woof Gang's grooming department, others to pick out some fresh-baked treats from the store's new bakery. The grooming department was expanded when the new bakery was installed.

Hardin said the business next door closed in December. In January, Woof Gang had taken over the space. After a few months of work, it became an official part of the store making more room for showers and grooming stations, a new kitchen for fresh-baked treats and additional space to sell items like toys, leashes and dog treats.

The original store was about 1,200 square feet and now the newly-expanded grooming department itself is 1,200 square feet. Hardin said it's the customers of Woof Gang and the people of Clay County that have allowed her business to be successful enough to not only still be around but

expand into a larger space. While she's excited to relax some now that the newly-opened space has been integrated into the store, her next goals include opening another Woof Gang store somewhere else in Clay County.

"There's a real passion for dogs here in Clay County," Hardin said. "We want to bring what we offer to other parts of the county and maybe even beyond."



The owners of Woof Gang Bakery plan to open a second store in Clay County soon. Their first store on Fleming Island was recognized by the parent company as one of the top-sellers.



Emma Whitener

Orange Park High Grad & AA recipient from St. Johns this year

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Herron Real Estate linking homebuyers to American Dream

By Bruce Hope
Bruce@opcfla.com

ORANGE PARK – Residents looking to buy homes in Clay County will now have another resource to aid them in their process. David Herron and his wife Christine have opened Herron Real Estate to help prospective homebuyers in the search for their piece of the American dream.

The Herrons have been in real estate for about six years, working for another brokerage before opening their own company.

They are both listed as rising stars in the industry for the region and are among the top producers.

"After six years of working for another broker, we pretty much said we wanted to give it a shot and try our own thing," said David Herron. "That's when we decided to open our own brokerage. We were real excited to go back there [Clay County]."

The Herron's wanted to create an old-school feel in the real estate office where agents can come and hang out.

They have table tennis, arcade basketball, and a ball pit for children. They also have a large recreation area to create a family feeling.

In an effort to bring in quality agents, the Herrons offer an incentive that few brokerages can match. For every transaction completed, the agent keeps all but \$500, which they give to the Herrons as a transaction fee.

As such, the agent keeps the lion's share of the commission earned on the sale.

"We are really trying to attract a lot of talent by doing that, and also grow really quick," said Herron.

At a recent grand opening celebration, the company had several distinguished guests from the county, including former Orange Park Mayor Connie Thomas and newly-appointed Mayor Alan Watt, among others.

The company has about 15 agents currently under its banner.

They opened about two weeks before the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, during that time, they were busier than they have ever been, according to David's wife and partner Christine. T

hey found other ways to carry on business, doing things such as virtual house tours and, of course, practicing as much social distancing as possible. Many of the homes that they showed during the pandemic are in the closing stages now.

Before getting into real estate, Herron was in medical management. He gets a great thrill from real estate that wasn't there in his previous occupation.

"I love putting deals together. I love working with people," he said. "When you buy a home, that's for most families the most exciting time of their life. You know, Christmases, kids walking, you name it. It's an awesome feeling. The people are so excited that you're helping them. We are always thinking outside the box. Every time we meet with the customer, we try to figure out what's best for this customer."



Herron Real Estate has 15 agents who are dedicated in connecting homebuyers to their new home. The office at Orange Park has ball pit, arcade basketball and table tennis for children while their parents concentrate on finding the perfect home.

All-news/talk format coming to WJCT 89.9 FM on July 13

For Clay Today

JACKSONVILLE – WJCT Public Media is planning to convert 89.9 FM to an all-news/talk format, and the station will be identified as WJCT News 89.9 effective July 13.

The conversion will expand WJCT's local journalism with additional midday newscasts of local reporting by the organization's news team and thirteen new national programs will be added to the weekly schedule. The Jacksonville area in Northeast Florida is growing, requiring a healthy range of news sources to inform critical decisions about our shared future.

Public radio news audiences have also grown substantially over the last decade, reflecting a growing appreciation for the local/national mix of news and conversation that has been presented by WJCT-FM

as its primary format for more than fifteen years. WJCT's local news audience has grown, as its journalism has become increasingly available in the places and formats audiences now look for news: on air, streaming live or on demand across mobile devices and online.

WJCT also recently launched the Jacksonville Music Experience (JME), which includes 24/7 HD stations and streams offering classical music (Classical 24), a hand-crafted selection of music from the 60s, 70s, and 80s (Anthology), and WJCT's popular program, Electro Lounge, is now a dedicated station devoted to chill out, downtempo, nu jazz, and reggae (Electro Lounge Radio).

To view the new weekly programming schedule, visit <https://wjct.org/radio-preview/>.





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Educators get new roles in Clay County School District for next year

Superintendent Broskie makes 15 changes at administrative levels

For Clay Today

CLAY COUNTY – Superintendent David Broskie announced several administrative promotions within Clay County District Schools for the 2020-2021 school year. The school board approved the recommendations after each candidate completed comprehensive interviews last month.

“I continue to be amazed by the talent and leadership within our district and beyond. These administrators have proven track records of student success and growth as well as the willingness to take on new challenges. I look forward to the bright future ahead for Clay County District Schools with these leaders at the helm,” Broskie said.

The administrators are:

District Leaders:

Treasure Pickett - Director of K-12 Academic Support Services

A 2019 Clay County Principal of the Year, Treasure Pickett earned her bachelor's degree from Northeast Louisiana University, Master of Education from University of South Carolina, and Ed Leadership certification from the University of North Florida. A Clay County educator for 25 years, Pickett started her Florida teaching career at Clay High School before transitioning into administration in 2003 as an Assistant Principal of Orange Park High. In 2006, she became the Vice Principal of Middleburg High before returning to Orange Park High in 2008 as principal and leading the Raiders to an “A” rating for the first time in school history.



Treasure Pickett

Laura Fogarty - Director of Climate and Culture

Laura Fogarty is a distinguished educator with 27 years of experience serving the students and families of Clay County. She graduated from Florida State University with a Bachelor's degree in elementary education and earned her Master's degree in educational leadership at the University of North Florida. Fogarty taught at Clay Hill Elementary and Lake Asbury Elementary. She has been awarded teacher of the year three times and won the WJXT Master Teacher award. At each of these schools, her leadership skills



Laura Fogarty

stood out as she served as the school improvement chairman for both.

Jim Fossa - Supervisor of Operations, School Safety and Security

Fossa is a graduate of Salem State University and Jacksonville University's Middle Grades Math curriculum, Second Career as a Teacher program. He is a 15-year educator and three sport coach serving both Clay County and The Bolles School. Currently, Fossa is the District's Planner and Intergovernmental affairs coordinator. In that role he serves on Clay County's Planning Commission and Development Review Committee. He is a retired Navy Captain. His last duty station was US Forces Iraq, Baghdad, and second Middle East Deployment.



Jim Fossa

John Sgromolo - Coordinator of District Athletics and Development

Sgromolo is a product of the Clay County School System (Paterson Elementary, Green Cove Springs Junior High, Clay High). Following a four-year playing career at Flagler College, Sgromolo was drafted by the Los Angeles Dodgers in the 2012 MLB Draft. After his professional baseball career, he taught one year at Clay High before joining the team at Ridgeview High in 2014. In his six years at Ridgeview High School, Sgromolo was a finalist for Teacher of the Year and has led Ridgeview High to back to back FHSAA Fred E. Rozelle Sportsmanship Awards. He was also most recently a finalist for the National Athletic Director of the Year from Varsity Brands.



John Sgromolo

School-Based Leaders:

Carolyn Hayward - Principal of Wilkinson Elementary

Carolyn Hayward is a dynamic instructional leader who started teaching in Clay County at Bannerman Learning Center, first as an EBD/SC teacher, then as a Behavior Site Coach and team leader. During her 18 years at Bannerman Learning Center, she served as the ESE representative during district discipline hearings, pioneered the Community



Carolyn Hayward

Based Vocational Education program, and developed the structured behavioral support program known as the Success System. Additionally, she was voted Teacher of the Year by her colleagues. She earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Special Education from the University of South Florida and a Master of Education Degree in Educational Leadership from the University of North Florida.

Amy Vann - Principal of Thunderbolt Elementary

Amy Vann has served Clay County District Schools for the past 16 years. Prior to joining Clay County District Schools, she served as a teacher in the Duval County School District for four years. Vann has proudly served the school communities of W.E. Cherry Elementary, Paterson Elementary, and Plantation Oaks Elementary as an Assistant Principal. Prior to becoming an Assistant Principal, she taught 5th and 6th-grade and also worked as a reading coach. Vann earned her Bachelor's in Education at the University of North Florida and a Master's in Educational Leadership from Grand Canyon University.



Amy Vann

Melissa Wright - Principal of Grove Park Elementary

Melissa Wright is Clay County School District's 2019 Assistant Principal of the Year. She earned her bachelor's degree from Bethune-Cookman University in Elementary Education, her master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction from Walden University and her Educational Leadership Certification from University of North Florida. Wright began her educational career in the Putnam County School District in 1999 as a third-grade teacher. She joined the Clay County School District in 2001, as a fourth-grade teacher at Thunderbolt Elementary. She spent 11 years teaching and leading within the district as a fourth and fifth grade teacher at Argyle Elementary and Oakleaf Elementary.



Melissa Wright

Wilnitra Dixon - Principal of Oakleaf Village Elementary

Wilnitra Dixon is a Florida native who moved to Clay County in 2003 to serve as an educator for Clay County District Schools. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Social Science from Florida State University and a Master's in Educational Leadership from the University of North Florida. Dixon

has a passion for establishing positive learning environments that challenge students while encouraging and supporting teachers through continuous professional development to enhance quality instruction. Dixon has served as a teacher at Green Cove Springs Junior High and Thunderbolt Elementary. While at Thunderbolt Elementary, she was nominated as the 2013 Teacher of the Year.



Wilnitra Dixon

Melissa Metz - Principal of Coppergate School of the Arts

Melissa Metz has a Bachelor of Arts in Special Education and a Master of Education in Educational Leadership. Metz has 16 years of educational experience working in a variety of capacities in Duval County Public Schools. She was a classroom teacher for seven years at the elementary and high school levels. From there, she was a reading coach at the elementary and middle school levels before becoming a district literacy specialist. Administratively, Metz has six years of experience; three of which have been as an elementary school principal. In 2019, she moved Chimney Lakes Elementary (Title I) from a B to an A, making CLE a Florida School of Excellence.



Melissa Metz

Sarah Brennan - Principal of Tynes Elementary

Sarah Brennan is a veteran educator with 26 years of experience spanning kindergarten through post-secondary instruction. After graduating from Dartmouth College with a Bachelor of Arts in history, she returned to her hometown of Baltimore to teach in a Title 1 middle school while she pursued her Masters in Special Education. Since relocating to Clay County in 2006, Brennan worked in the classroom as a member of the inaugural faculty of Oakleaf K-8 and as an ESE inclusion teacher at Thunderbolt Elementary. In 2014, Brennan moved into the district's Human Resources department as a SPRINT teacher specialist.



Sarah Brennan

Educators

from page 18

Matthew Boyack - Principal of Oakleaf High

Matthew Boyack is a dedicated instructional leader who has served Clay County in various roles for the past 13 years. Boyack began his teaching career at Orange Park High School where he was a stand-out Social Studies teacher and coach. At Orange Park High School, he was a fervent advocate for teachers through his work as Clay County Education Association Board chairman and school-site representative. In 2015, he was honored by Clay County Schools as their "Teacher of the Year" and he went on to win the Mary J. Brogan award for "Excellence in Teaching" at the state teacher of the year awards ceremony.



Matthew Boyack

Martin Aftuck - Principal of Middleburg High

Martin Aftuck is a veteran 18-year Clay County educator. He has served as a gifted social studies teacher and coach at Lakeside Junior High, an AP US History teacher and Athletic Director at Orange Park High, and as an assistant principal at Bannerman Learning Center and Oakleaf High. Along the way, Aftuck developed a lifelong love for literacy and a passion for assisting at-risk students with access to academic interventions and social emotional learning. Following his appointment as principal at Bannerman, he proceeded to improve the climate and culture of Clay County's alternative school by working alongside teachers and staff to facilitate an environment that incentivized positive behavior and high expectations for all learners.



Martin Aftuck

Mark McKinney - Principal of Bannerman Learning Center

Mark McKinney has been an educator in Clay County for the past 25 years. He began his tenure in Clay County at Bannerman Learning Center, teaching Adaptive PE in the EBD program. He then transitioned to Clay High School where he taught Algebra I and Algebra II for 16 years. During this time, he was selected as a Spotlight Teacher of the Year, Teacher of the Year semifinalist, and



Mark McKinney

was very active with student engagement, coaching football and softball, and sponsoring many classes. McKinney has spent the last eight years as vice principal at Ridgeview High, working with teachers to build strong instructional practices and increase student graduation rates.

Laurie Burke - Principal of Keystone Heights Jr/Sr High

Laurie Burke is an alumnus of Keystone Heights Elementary and Keystone Heights Jr/Sr High, K-12. As a student-athlete, she took first place at state in the 110yd hurdles, 100-meter hurdles, the long jump, and went to the Final Four with her team in basketball. She continued her basketball career at Valdosta State University where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Health and Physical Education. She also earned her Master's Degree at the University of North Florida in Educational Leadership. Burke has served the Clay County School District for 25 years at all levels, K-12.



Laurie Burke

Amanda Stilianou - Principal of Clay Virtual Academy

Amanda Stilianou is a proud graduate of the Clay County School District where she currently has 15-years in educational experience. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Biology and received her Master's degree in Educational Leadership from the American College of Education. As a classroom teacher she taught a wide range of subjects to include Biology, Anatomy, AP Chemistry, Algebra 2 and Math for College Readiness. She has been an Assistant Principal at Oakleaf High for five years, where she has helped lead the school to an "A" grade, an increase in their graduation rate, and in expanding the digital learning throughout the school.



Amanda Stilianou

Wingate retiring after 38 years of service to Clay County schools

By Bruce Hope
bruce@opcfla.com

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – The Clay County School District is losing one of its best.

On July 31, the 38-year veteran of education with the district, Mike Wingate, is retiring. The native of Keystone Heights has spent his entire adult life educating the youth of Clay County in some form or another.

After graduating Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Wingate returned home to Keystone Heights, where he immediately became a teacher at Keystone Heights Junior/Senior high.

"I was a teacher there for 17 years; teacher and coach," Wingate said. "[I] taught social studies pretty much most of the years and coached basketball and softball primarily."

One of the exciting things about returning to his old school was that there were still teachers there who had been there when he was a student, and even after he became the principal.

Wingate loved his job and was approached about going into administration in his 15th year. He returned to school, this time at the University of North Florida, and earned his Master's Degree in Education Leadership. He was then hired at Keystone Heights as an assistant principal.

After about a year and a half in that position, he assumed the role of principal when his predecessor retired.

"I was principal about two and half years at Keystone," he said.

His journey in Clay County continued when he became the principal of Orange Park High, where he remained for about the next six years.

Next, he assumed the role of Director of Academic Services at the county level, which he has retained until now.

"I had a great time when I was in school," he said. "Like anyone else, I had some influential teachers and coaches. It



Mike Wingate, left, is congratulated by Superintendent David Broskie for 38 years of service with Clay County Schools.

just kind of was a natural fit. I wanted to teach and coach."

Wingate never had an interest in teaching at the collegiate level.

"I just loved the high school environment," said Wingate. "Clay County is a great county. No matter what school you're at, it was a great environment."

Wingate is proud of many things over his long tenure with the school district. He routinely lauds the people of Clay County.

"They've just been awesome to me," he said.

One of the things he is most proud of is the work that was done at Orange Park. During his time, the overall school grade was raised, and he was able to build a culture for the school. At the administrator level, Wingate missed the time he was able to actually spend time with students as he did as a teacher and a principal.

So what will he do for the rest of his life?

"Everybody says they'd like to take time off and travel," he said. "but I'm going to find another job. I'm only 60, so I've gotta do something else for a couple years. What that will be, I don't know, but I'm excited about anything that comes my way."

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Katie

Katie is an amazingly loving dog. She is in a foster home and has adjusted to the "home life" quite well. She is housebroken and very loyal, not to mention adorable. She hasn't quite figured out the pool yet, and was shocked to see her reflection in the water. She was fostered for the storm, but the family loved her so much, that they wanted her to be adopted out of their home. Her foster family takes her on trips and she loves the RV! She is best in a single dog home for now. If you come to meet Katie, you will be hooked!

Safe Animal Shelter | 2913 County Road 220 Middleburg | 904-276-7233
Wednesday-Sunday 12pm-5pm | www.safeanimalshelter.com

Cuban treefrogs creating damage to local ecosystems

By **Wayne Hobbs**

Environmental Horticulture Agent, Clay County

CLAY COUNTY – If you live anywhere in Florida, you probably hear frogs at night. The chorus can be deafening following a rain and most of these amphibians do an excellent job of helping keep insect populations down and are also a food source for many predators. However, did you know a really common invader may be lurking in their midst and even eating our native frogs?

A growing threat

First making the jump from Cuba to the Florida Keys as stowaways on shipping crates back in the 1920s, the Cuban Treefrog (*Osteopilus septentrionalis*) has made a march northward in our state. They are now as far north as South Carolina and as far west as Texas. In Clay County, you can often see this invasive pest hanging around outdoor lights at night, looking for an easy meal.

When you first see them, nothing seems out of place as they look like many other tree frogs but they could cause some real damage to our native ecosystems. As this pest has spread, they feed upon other tree frogs, lizards, and small snakes; lowering



their populations. They also eat many insects, taking food away from other creatures and even their tadpoles can outcompete other species.

Identifying the problem

The Cuban Treefrog is very easy to identify from other native treefrogs due to its size, its eyes, and its toe pads. While other treefrogs in Florida max out at around 2½ inches, the Cuban can grow up to 5 inches

in length. If it's over 2½ inches, it's a Cuban treefrog.

Their eyes are also larger than other species, giving them a "bug-eyed" appearance and they have larger toe pads as well. Overall, they are can be a green or brown color with a warty appearance on their back.

If you need help identifying the Cuban Treefrog, contact your local UF/IFAS Ex-

tension Office with some images or check out our fact sheet at <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/uw259>.

What to do

Since this introduced, invasive pest can cause so much damage it is best to attempt to control them the best we can. The good news is that many of our native predators such as snakes, owls, crows, and wading birds have been observed eating them.

If you find a Cuban Treefrog, the recommendation is to humanely euthanize it if possible. However, do not handle with bare hands as they can excrete an irritating chemical from their skin. The most humane way to eradicate one of the frogs is to place it in a sealed plastic bag in your freezer. This will slowly chill the frog until it goes into a hibernation state and after around a day, the deceased specimen can be disposed of.

We do understand that this process may not be palatable to everyone but our intervention can hopefully lessen populations of this pest, helping our native frogs compete. If you have any questions about invasive species or anything related to gardening, contact us at IF-SVC-Clay-MG@ufl.edu or (904) 284-6355.

St. Johns Water Management District: Prepare ahead of hurricane season

CLAY COUNTY – With the start of hurricane season just days away, the St. Johns River Water Management District's website provides easy access to valuable data and information to assist the public and local governments before, during and after severe storm events.

"The early development of Tropical Storm Arthur recently is a good reminder that now is the time to prepare for hurricane season," said St. Johns River Water Management District Executive Director Dr. Ann Shortelle. "By being proactive ahead of a storm, homeowners can help protect themselves and their property from flooding effects that are typically the biggest problem associated with hurricanes in Florida."

While hurricane season officially began

last Monday, water is a year-round focus for the district.

Its Emergency Operations Center team works daily to ensure the agency is ready for hurricane season and other emergencies, protecting the district's facilities and lands and assisting local governments, state and regional leaders with data, technical and emergency support.

The district's web pages (www.sjrwmd.com/storm/) include links to flood statements and warnings, river stage and flooding data, and local government emergency contacts.

Links to the National Weather Service, Florida Division of Emergency Management and the U.S. Geological Survey's interactive map of current conditions in the state are also available via the website

at www.sjrwmd.com/data/.

District permitting staff also play an important part in flood protection all year through their work to ensure storm water is managed on developed sites and that new drainage ditches or significant changes to existing ditches are coordinated regionally. The district and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection issue permits to install stormwater systems, which typically then become the legal responsibility of a homeowners' association or property management company.

Property owners have a vital role in preparing for hurricane season, which officially runs through Nov. 30. You can protect yourself and your property by:

- Keeping debris out of storm drains and ditches;

- Reporting clogged ditches and culverts to local governments;
- Retrofitting buildings to make them watertight;
- Cleaning out gutters and extending downspouts at least four feet from structures;
- Determining who has responsibility for stormwater pond maintenance in your neighborhood – it may be the homeowners' association;
- Obtaining flood insurance through the National Flood Insurance Program.

For general water level information and rainfall data, bookmark the district's hydrologic data webpage. To know who to call when impacted by a storm, visit www.sjrwmd.com/localgovernments/flooding/#state-national.

Office Closing

John B. McCabe, DMD Dentist will be retiring and closing the office at 407 Walnut Street in Green Cove Springs, Florida as of June 30, 2020

Patients can request their records by calling our office at 904-284-0773 or by email at gcsdmd@gmail.com

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SJRWMD Blue School Grant Program accepting applications

County teachers may apply for grants to teach about Florida water resources

For Clay Today

CLAY COUNTY – Now entering the fifth year of its Blue School Grant Program, the St. Johns River Water Management District anticipates offering as much as \$20,000 in grants for education projects that enrich student knowledge of Florida's water resources through hands-on learning. The application period runs June 1 through Sept. 4, giving teachers all summer to prepare their project proposals for the 2020–2021 grants.

An informational webinar on the grant application process will be held June 2 from 10–10:30 a.m. Register for the webinar at www.sjrwmd.com/education/blue-school.

“Even with distance learning and virtual classrooms in the mix, Blue School Grants are a great way for the district to partner with local schools on their science, technology, engineering and math [STEM] programs,” said St. Johns River Water Management District Executive Director Dr. Ann Shortelle. “We have funded 47 water resource education projects in the last four funding cycles, and I’m looking forward to another round of inspiring and imaginative project ideas.”

Through the district’s Blue School Grant Program, up to \$2,000 a school may be awarded to middle and high school teachers to enhance student knowledge of Florida’s water resources. Public and charter school teachers within the district’s boundaries are eligible to apply.

Grants may be awarded in three areas:

freshwater resources field study, water conserving landscape projects, or water conservation community/school awareness campaigns.

Due to COVID-19, there is flexibility, with appropriate communication with the district, about changes in needs due to uncertain nature of school formats for the 2020–2021 school year.

Examples of previous successful grant applications include:

- Service-learning projects where middle and high school students partnered to study water quality
- Creation of native landscape garden with educational signage
- Water quality comparison of storm-water ponds on campus
- Conversion of traditional irrigation to micro-irrigation in school landscape
- Water conservation awareness posters and video
- Teachers receiving grants will be notified on Oct. 1.



Information about criteria and deadlines and the online application can be found at www.sjrwmd.com/education/blue-school or contact Dr. Jennifer Mitchell at

jmitchell@sjrwmd.com or (904) 730-6283.

Learn more about district professionals in STEM visit <https://www.sjrwmd.com/education/stem/staff/>.

Tips for small farmers now that hurricane season is here

By Cassidy Dossin

Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent I
UF/IFAS Extension Clay County

CLAY COUNTY – The 2020 hurricane season has arrived and brings with it more uncertainty for farmers amidst COVID-19 struggles. Hurricanes have been known to wreak havoc on Florida agriculture; Hurricane Michael tore through the Florida Panhandle just two years ago in 2018, landing a \$1.3 billion hit on the state’s forestry industry, as well as harsh blows to the cotton, cattle, and peanut industries according to the Florida Department of

Agriculture and Consumer Services. Hurricane Irma was just a year earlier and caused lingering damage to the state’s crucial citrus industry for several years after making landfall. As a new disaster season takes off in an already burdensome year for farmers, here are some thoughts to keep in mind as you make a plan to protect your farm and prevent larger losses.

Hurricane Michael, although not the first storm to devastate Florida farmers, was an awful reminder of how destructive Florida weather can be. Small and large

farms alike suffered tremendous losses and felt as though they were starting over in the aftermath of the hurricane. Forced and torn from their original crops, many farmers turned to alternative agricultural industries to quickly get back in the game and protect themselves from future devastation. Alternative industries, like hops and industrial hemp, are considered more resilient to racing winds and rain, as well as other extremes like drought and heat.

SEE TIPS, 24



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Police Briefs

Man caught hiding in palmetto bushes after brief car chase

FLEMING ISLAND – A man was caught hiding in palmetto bushes on the East-West Parkway after running from Clay County Sheriff's Office deputies, after they were alerted he was driving a stolen car.

Roy Henry Forster III, of Fleming Island, was charged with grand theft auto, possession of marijuana, resisting arrest, attempting to flee and elude the police who were using their sirens and flashing lights and driving with a suspended license on June 5.

Deputies were tipped by a traffic camera that Forster's car or license tag was reported stolen while he was near U.S. Highway 17 and Wells Road. They followed him to County Road 220 to the IHOP where they approached his car. He refused to roll down his windows and eventually sped away on U.S. 17. He then turned onto Thunderbolt Park, which is a dead end, and attempted to escape by running into a thicket. After another brief struggle, he was taken into custody.

The car was reported stolen a day earlier.

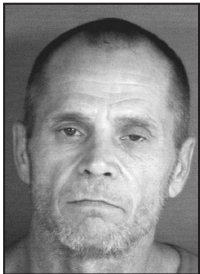


Roy Forster

Man caught with drugs after hiding behind umbrella in mother's garage

FLEMING ISLAND – Deputies found a man who was pulling a stolen trailer hiding in a garage behind an umbrella on June 4 and found cocaine, methamphetamine and heroin.

James David Pearson, 48, of Jacksonville, was also was charged with driving with a suspended license and burglary.



James Pearson

According to the Clay County Sheriff's Office, an off-duty deputy with the Baker County Sheriff's Office was driving on U.S. Highway 17 when Pearson nearly drove him off the road with his truck and trailer. The Baker deputy met with a Clay County deputy and searched the area where the truck was found parked. Pearson was found hiding in his mother's garage.

Deputy revives woman, arrests her for drug possession

ORANGE PARK – A woman found passed out in a car in the parking lot of a shopping center on Wells Road was later arrested for possession of methamphetamine, heroin, amphetamines, drug paraphernalia.

Shera Jean Gore, 42, of Fleming Island was taken to jail, but not before a Clay County Sheriff's Office deputy performed

a sternum rub to help her gain consciousness.

Woman charged with DUI after driving wrong way in Oakleaf

OAKLEAF – A woman driving in the wrong travel lanes along Plantation Oaks and Oakleaf Village boulevards was arrested and charged with DUI, but not before kicking a Clay County Sheriff's Office deputy after she refused to submit to field sobriety test.

Charmaine Eliither Gumbodete, 37, of Orange Park, also was charged on June 7 with battery on a police officer and resisting arrest.

According to CCSO, a deputy noticed Gumbodete making a wide turn from Oakleaf Plantation Parkway to Plantation Oaks Boulevard. When he followed her, she swerved several times and drifted into oncoming lanes.

She was pulled over after she drove into the wrong lane of Oakleaf Village Parkway. After she refused to do a field sobriety test, she had to be restrained by two deputies after she resisted being handcuffed. During the scuffle, the deputy was kicked in his inner thigh three times.

Once at the Clay County Jail, Gumbodete refused to take a blood alcohol test, too.

Man becomes belligerent after walking away from crashing into fence

MIDDLEBURG – A Middleburg drunken man was caught walking away from an accident on Rosemary Street on June 6.

Joseph Allen Moore II, 27, was charged with DUI with property damage, driving with a suspended license and leaving the scene of an accident with property damage.



Joseph Moore

A caller described Moore after he backed his car into a fence.

Moore, who deputies said went into several profane tirades, refused to submit to a blood alcohol test at the Clay County Jail.

Homeless man walking in traffic charged with soliciting for donations

ORANGE PARK – A homeless man was arrested June 8 for obstructing traffic on Blanding Boulevard while asking drivers from money.

Howard Williams, 66, of Jacksonville, was charged with obstruction of public streets. According to the Clay County Sheriff's Office, Williams walked between cars at Blanding and Wells Road with a sign that read: "Help a Vet."

CCSO: Bears seen along Raggedy Point Road on Fleming Island

FLEMING ISLAND – The Clay County Sheriff's Office issued a warning to residents on Raggedy Point Road of increased bear activity.

The agency said there have been sev-

eral reports of bears in the 4300 block.

CCSO issued the following warning on its social media pages:

"Please secure your trash cans and anything that may attract a bear to your location. #FWC has been notified and will be responding to assist. Please do not approach or attempt to feed the bear."



Humane Society's mobile veterinary unit recovered, but damaged

ORANGE PARK – The mobile veterinary clinic that was stolen May 31 was recovered by the Clay County Sheriff's Office, but it was returned with heavy damage.

"Fortunately, our mobile unit was recovered, but not without some fairly significant damage," said Clay Humane Executive Director Linda Welzant. "We are hopeful that it can be repaired in a timely manner so that we may continue to meet the demands of our busy veterinary clinic. The loss of this unit, on the heels of the COVID crisis and in the midst of hurricane season, could prove to be a substantial setback."

Cameras recorded the robbery and helped provide detectives with leads.

The unit, which was purchased last year, largely, with contributions from the community, was redesigned as a full-function mobile triage and treatment center. It was intended to fulfill Clay Humane's long time goal of having an additional resource to face the growing need for affordable veterinary care and to serve as an emergency response unit in times of disaster or emergency.

The Humane Society vowed to press on despite the setback.

"We are, however, committed to being available for our clients and the animals in need in our community regardless of the challenges we must endure," Welzant said.

Arrests & Bookings

(Name, age, location of arrest, charges). Key: FTA-Failure to Appear; DWLSR-Driving Without a License-Suspended or Revoked; DUI-Driving Under the Influence; VOP-Violation of Probation; BAL-blood alcohol level. There are no assumptions or representations about guilt or innocence. Anyone arrested or booked is presumed innocent.

Tuesday, June 9

John D. Parker, 31, Keystone Heights, possession/use-drug paraphernalia

Joseph W. Schweitzer, 37, Orange Park, retail petit theft

Damien A. Stitt, 22, Middleburg, burglary

Colson J.R. Burdell, 26, Middleburg, petit theft \$300-\$4,999, using anti-shop-

lifting device

Tesya P. Griffis, 22, Green Cove Springs, courtesy hold

Ashley D. Cremeans, 31, Middleburg, two counts FTA

Monday, June 8

Jeffrey Baron, 51, Fleming Island, possession-methamphetamine, possession-marijuana, possession/use-drug paraphernalia

David E. Wright, 39, Middleburg, DUI

Deann M. Huff, 36, Fleming Island, DUI, refusal to submit to BAL

Michael W. Schriver, 19, Middleburg, domestic battery

Arrests

from page 22

Amanda C. Hutchinson, 23, Green Cove Springs, FTA-DWLSR

Crystal G. Henderson, 38, Green Cove Springs, VOP-possession-controlled substance

Teresa L. Rigby, 32, Green Cove Springs, VOP-community control

Timothy L. Brown, 23, Orange Park, trespassing

Damien A. Stitt, 23, Middleburg, burglary

Brandi B. Perkins, 35, Green Cove Springs, grand theft \$300-\$4,999

Joshua T.H. Gasca, 33, Green Cove Springs, burglary, grand theft auto

John J. Exline, 42, Green Cove Springs, VOP-drug offender

Scott D. Dodd, 35, Middleburg, burglary

Howard Williams, 60, Orange Park, obstruction of public streets

Andrew J. Smith, 47, Orange Park, FTA

Allyssa C. James, 23, Middleburg, DUI

Sunday, June 7

Victoria G. Greenway, 22, Green Cove Springs, possession-marijuana, possession/use-drug paraphernalia

Joseph A. Moore, 27, Middleburg, DUI with property damage, DWLSR, leaving the scene of an accident with property damage

Dalton O. Price, 25, Fleming Island, DUI

Dillan J. Millard, 20, Orange Park, simple domestic battery

Robert W. Dean, 24, Fleming Island,

DUI

Luis E. Hernandez, 61, Orange Park, DUI with property damage, leaving scene of accident involving property damage

Charmaine E. Gumbodete, 37, Oakleaf, battery on police officer, DUI, resist/obstruct/oppose police

Saturday, June 6

David Sanderford, 43, Middleburg, DUI

Jason R. Bruce, 40, Middleburg, DUI

Jesus Marcos Gonzalez, 59, Orange Park, trespassing

Mason W. Settles, 22, Orange Park, battery on police officer/firefighter/EMT, domestic battery, resist/obstruct/oppose police

Friday, June 5

Anthony W. Davis, 29, Middleburg, trespassing

James D. Pearson, 48, Fleming Island, burglary, two counts possession-controlled substance, possession-cocaine, DWLSR

Jhamar T.E. Pryor, 22, Orange Park, burglary

Antonio J. Casanova, 29, Orange Park, soliciting donations

Dominick T. Coddling, 19, Orange Park, possession-marijuana, possession/use-drug paraphernalia

Trinity E. Hudson, 20, Orange Park, possession-marijuana, possession/use-drug paraphernalia

Joshua T.H. Gasca, 33, Orange Park, DWLSR

Kenneth R. Welch, 27, Fleming Island, burglary

David Sanderford, 43, Middleburg, DUI

Roy H. Forster, 30, Fleming Island, grand theft auto, possession-marijuana, resist/obstruct/oppose police, attempting to flee/elude police with siren/lights active, DWLSR

David L. Midyette, 52, Orange Park, DUI

Matthew C. Browder, 28, Fleming Island, vandalism

Roger L. Fierst, 66, Orange Park, domestic battery

Thursday, June 4

Teresa L. Rigby, 32, Middleburg, trespassing, simple battery

James D. Welles, 26, Orange Park, VOP-possession-controlled substance

Jady S. Dow, 29, Orange Park, petit theft

Mark S. Faulkner, 31, Green Cove Springs, FTA-smuggle contraband into jail

Alexander A. Lance, 41, Middleburg, possession-controlled substance, possession/use-drug paraphernalia, DWLSR

Jesse G.J. Carter, 25, Middleburg, possession/use-drug paraphernalia, DWLSR

Robert E. Hulse, 54, Middleburg, grand theft auto, DWLSR, operating motorcycle without license

Jeremy L. Ellington, 38, Orange Park, possession-marijuana, driving without valid license

Katrina R. Connors, 24, Green Cove Springs, VOP-community control

Joseph A. Bowen, 51, domestic battery, child abuse

Ricardo A. DaSilva, 43, Orange Park, possession-controlled substance, DWLSR

Wednesday, June 3

Carla G. Zabala, 19, Orange Park, possession-cocaine, possession/use-drug paraphernalia

Jack T. Manucy, 26, Middleburg, DUI, DWLSR

Terrence L. Iverson, 62, Orange Park, out of county warrant

Dustin Sparkman, 37, Orange Park, grand theft auto

Maria S. Duitsman, 46, Orange Park, DWLSR

Leslie P. Triche, 60, Orange Park, VOP-attempted sexual battery of a child 12 or younger

Christine R. Fagan, 43, Green Cove Springs, FTA-DWLSR

Erica J. Broaden, 32, Orange Park, criminal mischief

Austin Z. Smartt, 22, Green Cove Springs, out of county warrant

Shera J. Gore, 42, Orange Park, possession-methamphetamine, possession-heroin, possession-controlled substance, possession/use-drug paraphernalia

Cameron A. Engels, 28, Orange Park, sexual battery of victim younger than 18 without physical force violence

John A. Baer, 60, Middleburg, VOP-community control

Lori D. Harris, 45, Orange Park, retail petit theft

Maurice Tilley, 36, Orange Park, non-support

Antwuan L. Roberts, 32, Middleburg, trespassing

Craig L. Clunk, 45, FTA

Late-May showers push rain totals to above-average levels

For Clay Today

CLAY COUNTY – After a slow start, Florida's rainy season kicked off in mid-to late-May, which rounded out the month with above-average rainfall. A full report outlining hydrological conditions was presented at the district's June Governing Board online teleconference.

Highlights included:

Rainfall

- May rainfall averaged 3.46 inches districtwide, which is nearly a half-inch above the long-term average for the month.

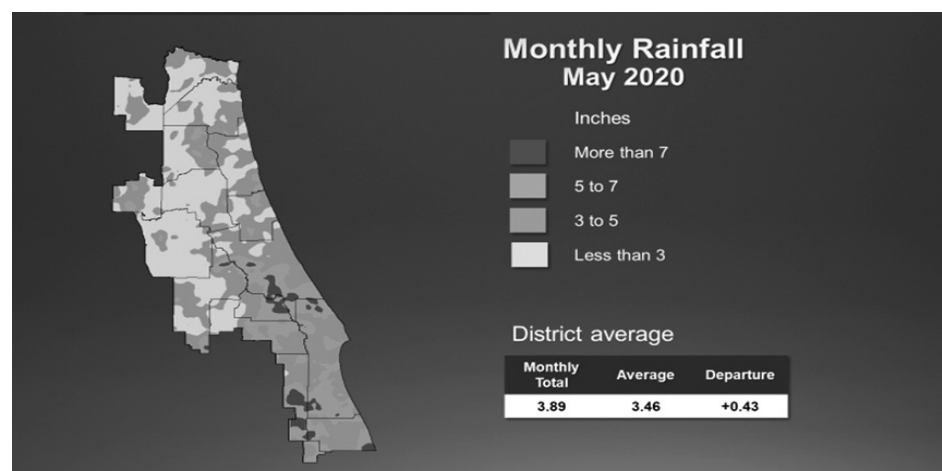
- The district's western and northern counties received below-average rainfall while central and southern counties received well-above average rainfall.

- Putnam, Baker and Marion counties received less than 3 inches of rain.

- Osceola, Indian River and Brevard received five or more inches of rain.

- Districtwide, the cumulative rainfall total over the last 12 months is 47.8 inches, which is 3.3 inches below the long-term average.

- Counties with the greatest rainfall deficit through May were Putnam, Flagler and St. Johns counties, which have a 12-month rainfall deficit of more than 10



inches.

May rainfall helped lift Volusia, Brevard and Seminole counties above the long-term average rainfall.

Groundwater

- Upper Floridan aquifer conditions (groundwater levels) at the end of May were mostly in the normal range throughout most of the district, other than areas of low and very low conditions in the coastal and central portions of the district.

- Groundwater levels are at the 39th percentile districtwide, which means that since 1980, about 61% of the time aquifer

levels have been higher than they are now.

- Dry conditions earlier in the month resulted in greater irrigation demands, and water levels in many monitoring wells decreased by 10 percent compared to the end of April. The downward trend is expected to reverse with the rainy conditions occurring in early June.

- The district's summertime water conservation message reminds water users to

- • • "Watch the Weather. Wait to Water."

Surface water flows

- Surface water flow conditions in the St. Johns River's headwaters rose to the average range for this time of year.

- Flow conditions in central Florida were in the average range, with the DeLand station reporting 799 mgd on June 1 and 3.4 billion gallons per day (bgd) at the Satsuma station.

- Flow in the headwaters at the Melbourne station was 64 mgd.

- Flow in the Ocklawaha River remained in the low range at 401 mgd.

Spring flows

- The mean monthly flow at Silver Springs decreased to 611 cubic feet per second (cfs) or 395 mgd, in May.

- Flow in Volusia Blue Spring decreased during May, with a monthly mean of 141 cfs, a decrease of 10 cfs from the April report.

- Flows at Rock Springs and Wekiwa Springs decreased very slightly, with mean monthly flows of 56 cfs and 63 cfs, respectively.

To learn more about rainfall totals and other hydrologic data collected, visit sjr-wmd.com.

Visit the district's Water Less campaign webpage at WaterLessFlorida.com and follow the district on social media to learn ways to conserve water outdoors. #WaterLessFlorida #waterconservation #sjr-wmd.

Doctors Lake Phosphorus Removal Pilot Project now online

Project will reduce phosphorus levels by 90% to prevent algae blooms

For Clay Today

FLEMING ISLAND – A full-scale demonstration project of the St. Johns River Water Management District to remove phosphorus from treated wastewater is now working to reduce the overabundance of nutrients that cause algal blooms in Doctors Lake.

After breaking ground in September 2019, the Doctors Lake Phosphorus Removal Pilot Project officially started June 5, removing dissolved phosphorus from treated wastewater from the Clay County Utility Authority's Fleming Island Regional Wastewater Plant before it is reused for irrigation in the Doctors Lake watershed. The project will reduce the phosphorous concentration by 90% and will assist in furthering water quality improvements in Doctors Lake and the Lower St. Johns River Basin.

"Forward-thinking projects to reduce the overabundance of nutrients in Doctors Lake by reducing phosphorous in the watershed will play an important role in reducing the intensity and frequency of algal blooms," said St. Johns River Water Management District Executive Director Dr. Ann Shortelle. "We thank Gov. [Ron] DeSantis and our legislative delegation for their leadership and commitment to projects and funding to benefit the St. Johns River. We are excited to work again with CCUA and appreciate their continued willingness to partner on beneficial projects for the community."

The one-year pilot project is funded through a 2018 \$1.5 million legislative appropriation, spearheaded by Sen. Rob Bradley and Rep. Travis Cummings.

"I want to thank Dr. Shortelle, the Board of the St. Johns River Water Management District and Governor DeSantis for their commitment to this project," said Sen. Bradley, of Fleming Island. "This project is critical to ending the dangerous toxic algae blooms we have seen in recent years



A system of tubing at the Doctors Lake Phosphorus Removal Pilot Project is operational and working to reduce the levels of dissolved phosphorus by 90% to help lessen the threat of algae blooms in the inlet.

in Doctors Lake. Rep. Cummings and I are pleased that the project moved forward quickly and are very proud to have been able to direct state resources to the community we love."

"Since Sen. Bradley and I first secured the funding for this project in 2018 to combat harmful algal blooms in Doctors Lake, we have been eager to see how this new technology will improve the health of the lake," said Cummings, also of Fleming Island. "I hope this partnership and dedicated commitment to improve water quality will continue, and our community will see real benefits from these efforts."

"We look forward to seeing the results

of this project over time," said CCUA Executive Director Jeremy Johnston. "If successful, scaling and adapting this type of system may help reduce nutrients in many areas of the state. We greatly appreciate the partnership with SJRWMD to test new technologies in working toward sustaining our natural resources for future generations."

The district has conducted water quality sampling on Doctors Lake since 1984. For 32 of the last 36 years, Doctors Lake has experienced repeated algal blooms. Because excessive nutrients help fuel algal blooms, the district uses water quality monitoring and science to focus its work on

reducing nutrient sources before they can enter waterbodies.

In 2019, the district contracted with the Sustainable Water Investment Group to apply its state-of-the-art technology to the project site, where treated effluent is pumped and distributed over a vegetated filtration bed that uses engineered media to remove phosphorus. This media binds with phosphorus, removing it from the water. The phosphorus remains bound to the engineered media, so no byproduct is produced. The treated water from this innovative project is returned to the effluent stream and, ultimately, Doctors Lake and the lower St. Johns River watershed.

Tips from page 21

Diversifying an agricultural operation has the capability to protect farmers in the case where one crop is severely impacted from a disaster.

Besides finding other crops and products to diversify your farm, all farmers should have a disaster plan for the standard operating procedures leading up to

and during a hurricane, including how to maintain the facility without critical services. Now is the time to test emergency backup systems and acquire extra fuel supplies. Stock up on other non-perishable emergency supplies and put together a disaster kit. Update employee contact information and go over protocols in different types of emergencies. Identify evacuation routes and meeting places for you and your loved ones. Other precautions include checking on your farm's insurance

coverage. Take new photos of the facility, machinery, and inventory for up-to-date records. Make sure you revisit and update the emergency plan for your farm as we begin the 2020 hurricane season.

Farmers face the risk of extremes that threaten their livelihood time and time again. By taking steps toward prevention and preparedness for their businesses, they can lessen the blow of disasters and have the ability to make a stronger and more effective comeback.

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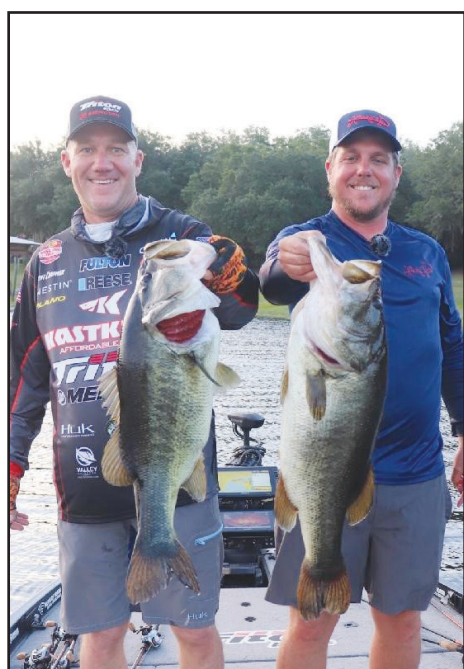
JOES AND PROS FISHING Waters goes 'Mano-a-Mano' with a world BASS champion

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS - Keystone Heights' realtor Branden Waters got a phone call last week that a pretty good fisherman was going to be nearby and asked if he would be interested in a day or two on the water with the celebrity.

"Brent Chapman, a professional bass tournament fisherman out of Kansas, used to have this show called Joes and Pro where he goes to a local fishing hole and challenges the local fishing guy," said Waters, 31. "The deal was that he had another guy that he challenged, but that didn't work

SEE FISH, 28



Former World BASS champion Brent Chapman, left, and Keystone Heights angler Branden Waters got some time on local waters for a segment of Joes and Pros fishing.



STAFF PHOTO BY RANDY LEFKO

Area golfers; from left, Andrew Lonsdale, Tommy Murray, Charles Raulerson, Cody Carroll and Chase Carroll were among the throngs of golfers descending on Eagle Harbor Golf Club on Monday and Fleming Island Golf Club on Tuesday through Thursday, with hopes of landing a coveted PGA TOUR ticket.

GOLF BUZZING IN COUNTY

Golfers chasing PGA ticket

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

FLEMING ISLAND - With the weekend providing a drenching of rain, golf enthusiasts can only hope the weather will dry up for the week as a flurry of golf action in Clay County and north Florida will highlight a schedule of qualifying rounds of play at both Eagle Harbor Golf Club and Fleming Island Golf Club.

"The next two weeks, there are a host of tournaments designed to kick start the PGA TOUR season after the pandemic shutdown," said Charles Raulerson, golf pro at Fleming Island Golf Club. "Golfers will be here for up to three weeks with opportunities to get a qualifying score to play in

Raulerson, a pro golfer for 17 years who retired in 2004, understands the

rigors of golfers looking to get on to the PGA Tour. Raulerson was on the Nike Tour 1995-98, the PGA TOUR 1999-2001 and has been at Fleming Island Golf Club the past seven years as a teaching pro.

"The next two weeks is kind of a jump start to the restart of the PGA TOUR," said Raulerson. "The Korn Ferry Tour, which is the way to the PGA Tour, has two events in June in north Florida."

With the PGA, more the coronavirus pandemic, taking away north Florida's biggest golf showcase, THE PLAYERS at Sawgrass, in March, golfers from around the world will once again descend on north Florida with hopes of nailing a coveted PGA invite.

"The Korn Ferry Tour is the No. 2 tour on the PGA TOUR," said Raulerson. "The

SEE GOLF, 31

2019-2020 TOP 5 PLAYS

1 Jeremiah 'The Bus' Jackson, blocked PAT/QB Sack

In the third quarter in a tense game against Class 6A power Lake Minneola, Fleming Island, starting at their own 35, was again on the march and leading 21-14 when a pass attempt to Broden Domenico was robbed by a Hawk safety who jumped the route and ran the ball back to the Golden Eagle 14. Several runs later, the Hawks punched it in, but had the point after attempt blocked by tackle Jeremiah Jackson, keeping Fleming Island in the lead 21-20.

On the counter, the Hawks were awakened to Jeremiah "The Bus" Jackson who broke through the line. "The Bus" cashed in with a three yard sack, immediately followed up with a sack by Zack Little, forcing the Hawks to punt.

Fleming Island eventually won 31-28

SEE TOP 5, 30



CORRESPONDENT PHOTO BY RAY DIMONDA

Fleming Island High defensive lineman Jeremian Jackson's block of a point after attempt was critical stop in Golden Eagles preserving an unbeaten regular season in 2019.

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Middleburg scholarships



Kayla Konnick with Florida State College at Jax. To run track. FSCJ added cross country in 2017-2018. Fourth in the Florida College System Activities Association Athletics cross country championship.



Felicity Muncy with South Georgia State College to play Softball. 63-29 won lost record last two years. 361 wins for head coach Jeff Savage



Tripp Rawlins with Edward Waters College NAIA to play Baseball. The Tigers, 27-35 last year, play in the Gulf Coast Athletic Conference.



Kayleigh Smith with Webber International (NAIA) to play Volleyball.



Camron Faucett with Fayetteville Tech Community College (NC) to play Baseball.



Jarod Hutchingson with Edward Waters College to play Baseball.



Edgard Enriquez with Pasco-Hernando State College to play Basketball. The PHSC men's basketball program was started by Bobby Bowman in 1991, who led the basketball program for 20 years. Coach Bowman ended his career with 334 career wins and was inducted into the FCSAA Hall of Fame in 2009.



Jordan Robinson with Ridgewater College (Minnesota) to play Basketball. Ridgewater, in the Minnesota College Athletic Conference, finished 16-10 last year and lost in the NJCAA North District semifinals to nationally-ranked Central Lakes College.

Orange Park scholarships



Trevor Todd with Webber International University (NAIA) to play Football. Webber was 3-6 last year.



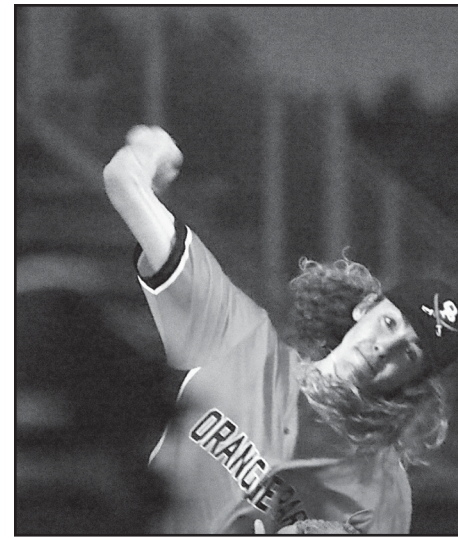
Joe Justino with University of West Florida to play Football. West Florida defeated defending NCAA Division II Valdosta in the playoffs last year before winning the national title.



Laron Bryant with Kentucky Christian University (NAIA) to play Football. Kentucky Christian finished 3-8 last year.



Steven Henrikson with SEA Atlanta Juco to play Football. Henrikson will play in the Southeast Athletic Conference



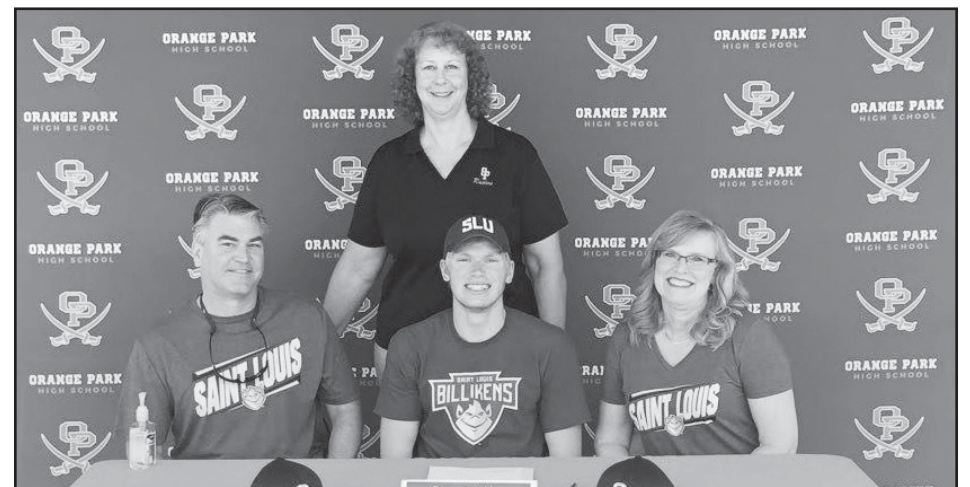
Stussy Riegel, baseball, Ed Waters



Nayeli Williams, Basketball, Thomasville University (NAIA), 4-18 last year.



Bryson Wyche Ed Waters Baseball



Danny Hinkle, St. Louis University swimming, NCAA Div. I, St. Louis finished seventh in the Atlantic 10 Conference Swimming and Diving Championships.



Kendy Charles, Football, Liberty University, NCAA Div. I

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ATHLETES OF THE WEEK



Trevor Todd
MHS, Football

Trevor Todd, an outstanding wide receiver for the Middleburg High School football team, signed a scholarship letter to attend Webber International University in Babson Park, FL. Webber is an NAIA program that finished 3-6 last year.



Shaniece Steer
RHS, Volleyball

Shaniece Steer, a power hitter for the four-time district champion Ridgeview High volleyball team, signed a letter of intent to continue her volleyball playing at Columbia International University in Columbia, SC. CIU is an NAIA program that finished last year with a 20-21 won lost record.

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Fish
 from page 25

out and his media guy is a friend of mine. He called and asked if I would be interest. Yeah, sure.”

First, some perspective. “It may not have been quite like throwing passes with a Tom Brady, but it would be close,” said Waters.

Chapman is only the 2012 Bassmasters Elite Series Angler of the Year, a Top 30 B.A.S.S. money winner with earnings near \$2.1 million with four wins and 40 top 10 finishes.

“Yeah, he’s a pretty good fisherman,” said Waters. “I figured I would at least be able to learn something from him for the two days we would be fishing.”

Waters noted that Chapman was in Hawthorne and getting ready for a major tournament in Kissimmee when the invite came about. The Major League tour is scheduled for Kissimmee with the 2020 Toyota Heavy Hitters presented by Venmo tournament set for June 7-12. Chapman, 47, from Lake Quivira, KS, is currently second in the 2020 Bass Pro Tour standings with 209 points just behind leader Ott DeFoe’s 227.

“He is part of the Major League Fishing pro tour and they were next up in Kissimmee,” said Waters. “He wanted to see what summertime fishing in Florida was all about.”

Waters considered his invite as purely random. “I’m definitely not the Keystone Heights fishing guru as there are bunch of older guys around here that can fish crazy good,” said Waters. “I just got the lucky phone call.”

The Pros and Joes fishing challenge is pretty simple, said Waters.

“I get first cast and we just fish and



Brent Chapman was the 2012 B.A.S.S. Angler of the Year and a \$2 million career purse winner before inviting Keystone Heights angler Branden Waters to fish with him on some area lakes in north Florida. Chapman was in Florida preparing to compete in a Major League Fishing pro tour event in Kissimmee.

whoever has biggest fish, most fish is the challenge,” said Waters. “I was excited, but knew he was going to show me some tricks.”

Waters, who has vast tournament experience on his own, carried his six fishing rods, a box of tackle and some crossed fingers as he met Chapman and his tournament fishing boat. “The thing about his fishing and my fishing is called presentation,” said Waters. “I know the bodies of water around here, but technique is what makes the pro fisherman so good. They know how to work their presentation; how the bait hits the water so the fish thinks it’s worth getting.”

On the day, Waters took Chapman to Sampson lake in Starke and anticipated the competition until Chapman socked a bass within the first five minutes.

“Within 10 minutes, he catches a five pounder,” said Waters, noting Chapman cast out with a Whopper Popper lure; one that skips that water and makes noise. “I’m thinking it’s going to be a long day for me.”

With the wind kicking up, Waters pulled the home court advantage card and took Chapman to an “undisclosed” spot that he knew to be chock full of big fish.

“I can’t say where, but I know it’s full of fish,” said Waters. “If I disclosed it, people would come from all over to fish there. A 14-pounder was caught there not long ago.”

On the “undisclosed” lake, Waters, who had not caught a fish yet and watched Chapman bag a four pounder again with 10 minutes, responded not with a Whopper Popper, but with a different lure.

“The second one he caught with a Top Water Walking Bait lure,” said Waters, explaining the Top Water Talking Bait Lure walks along the water back and forth and looks like a dying fish. “I had to get a fish to not be too embarrassed.”

Waters finally got on the scoreboard with a couple of 10-inch fish, but then...

“We’re still talking and catching small fish, when I suggested a Florida move,” said Waters. “He’s from Kansas and I suggested we go ‘flip the grass’, fish near the edge of the water with a worm or something into the grassy part of the water.”

The move bagged Waters a hard pull on his line with him thinking the lure got caught up on something in the grass, but not a fish. “I set the hook and I know the fish in this lake,” said Waters. “I suggested to Brett to get the net, but his normal tournament rules they can’t use a net, they have to grab the fish with their hands; called hand-landing.”

After the battle to the boat, Chapman reached in the water and yanked up the much-bigger prize.

“He hand lands it saying ‘that’s a giant,’” said Waters. “He said that’s the deal and we kept fishing for another three hours with very little action. I’m about wore out and ready to go, not used to a 10-hour day like him.”

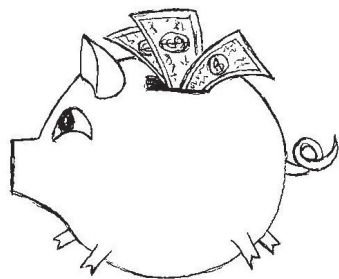
Waters moved to another part of the lake and utilized his special Hollow-bodied Frog lure.

“I was walking it in after he had just caught a 12-incher before a fish just smoked my Frog,” said Waters. “The fish tried to annihilate the frog. I said, ‘That’s another big fish.’”

Waters pulled “I figured that’s a good day,” said Waters. “Brent was a bit baffled by my swing in luck, but I just got lucky.”

Waters said the filming of his adventure will be broadcast in a few weeks.

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Orange Park built it; hoopsters loving it

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

ORANGE PARK - Orange Park High boys basketball coach Derek Kurnitsky beams when he speaks of the latest addition to enhancing his district title aspirations in the future.

"This is a powerful piece of the town that only makes what goes on in the Raider Dome even more exciting," said Kurnitsky as he watched a collection of Who's Who in basketball in Orange Park history get after a pickup game on the newest addition to the Orange Park Athletic Association sports facilities off Gano Blvd. "I hope this is becomes a destination basketball spot for north Florida and beyond."

The basketball court, layed out over a previously-existing tennis court at the OPAA fields, came from money from the town of Orange Park, according to Orange Park Town Manager Sarah Campbell.

"It's been up for about two weeks, though without basketball stripes painted on yet and the kids love it," said Campbell. "We had a neighborhood gentleman come to a budget meeting a few weeks ago and he told us how Grove Park Elementary School was the haven for Orange Park

area athletes to go to play ball all day, every day. When they fenced in the campus at Grove Park, he said a lot of the athletes lost access."

That gentleman, Edward Keyes, a standout athlete at Orange Park High and then a member of the first state title for Bolles under coach Corky Rogers, who played at Georgia Tech and eventually the University of Central Florida, with several of his relatives; mainly Keyes' brother Adrian White, a University of Florida standout with playing time with the New York Giants, Green Bay Packers and New England Patriots; nephew Edward "Dez" White, also a Bolles title winner, who played for the Chicago Bears; Lamont Floyd, an Alabama scholarship football player and even the ever-smiling Gonzalo "Pookie" Floyd, who was a Jacksonville Jaguar signee in the very early years of the NFL franchise, started the push to make the OPAA grounds that haven for neighborhood athletic activity. Keyes, an all star defensive back then wide receiver, suffered a career ending injury while in college.

"I grew up in Orange Park right across the railroad tracks and the families there had unreal athletic talent that grew from



Grove Park Elementary School basketball ace Darion Barnes goes up strong against defense of Edward Keyes in rain-dripped contest at OPAA's newest basketball court.



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Orange Park High football standout Edward Keyes, now 47, and Orange Park Town Manager Sarah Campbell were the Brain trust on a new basketball court at the Orange Park Athletic Association fields. Grove Park Elementary Schooler Darion Barnes and Orange Park High football standout Edward Keyes shared some hoop time on the newest basketball court in Clay County.



that Grove Park area," said Keyes, now 47, now an Information Tech professional for the Department of Justice after working for the PGA (Professional Golf Association). "You could go out there to Grove Park any time of the day and see bunches of kids doing everything; kickball, football, baseball, anything, even just running races. I was part of that last generation that had that access before the school got fenced in. The very athletic families of that area got choked off when the fields were gone."

Campbell got the wheels turning with some input from retired Public Works director Chuck Pavlos who suggested that the three tennis courts at the OPAA fields could become that spot.

"He told me that the three tennis courts are there and that he hardly sees all three in play at once," said Campbell. "It already had the court material and the fencing, the city council agreed and we bought the goals and materials to get it going. The lack of stripes has not stopped the kids from playing on it."

OPAA vice president John Shipley, who had been busy doing some groundskeeping around the court on the OPAA football and baseball fields, recalled his stopping with his mower to watch some of the action.

"It was like watching a college basketball game out there, the talent was so good and the enthusiasm so high," said Shipley, also a former Orange Park High football standout. "What a great idea and the kids are bringing their A-game."

Campbell noted a \$40,000 set aside from general funds to get the goals purchased and constructed.

"We had planned something like this from our October 1 meeting, but Mr. Keyes' input really got the ball rolling," said Campbell. "The Coronavirus pandemic slowed down some progress with the concrete guys and some staff actually put the goals together; a team effort."

For Keyes, the history of Orange Park athletics hopefully can return to former years of success for the Raiders' program as well as all the athletes in Clay County.

"Me and Pookie Floyd have been talking about a bigger project with an exercise trail, bringing the old pool back that is now the OPAA football building and even some miniature golf and putting greens," said Keyes. "I ride by that new basketball court and it is like a faucet that got clogged, but is now wide open. People are so excited about it and hope it brings more development to the area."

Top 5

from page 25

on a gamewinning field goal by Garret Godfrey. Both teams eventually made it to the region playoffs; Lake Minneola losing in the region 1-6A finals and Fleming Island losing in the region 1-7A semifinals.

2 LeClair, two-point conversion

BALDWIN - Middleburg High football has had its bright moments, but also some disastrous moments, and, head coach Karl Smeltzer put it all in perspective at the



Middleburg High offensive lineman Cole LeClair is usually the one clearing the way for scores, but, against Baldwin, the mammoth-sized LeClair popped over for a key two-pointer.

halftime with the Broncos down 24-3 to 3A-playoff bound Baldwin High School in their Thursday night matchup.

In a game that started to look like a play-off team blowing out a distracted two-win team looking to just end the season and get ready for basketball or soccer, seniors Cole LeClair and Joe Justino took the reigns of putting a stamp on their senior season finale to lead the Broncos to a dramatic 32-31 win. LeClair with key defensive stops and Justino, with two dramatic offensive series that saw him follow LeClair on six consecutive carries on one drive and three on the game-winner, pushed the Broncos to their 32-31 upset.

"I know how good these guys play and how hard we want to win every game," said LeClair, a massive defensive and offensive lineman for Smeltzer. "This team is my family, these guys are my home. We were telling each other we were not going to lose." LeClair even added a third quarter Larry Czonka-like two point conversion to the mix.

"We had worked on giving him the ball in practice because he is such a great kid," said a chuckling Frank Hall, the Broncos defensive coach. "He will do whatever it takes on both sides of the ball for this team."

3 Glen Miller TD catch

GAINESVILLE - A highlight reel game by senior wide receiver and safety Glenn



In the first and only win for the Panthers under first year coach Matt Knauss, it was a superb behind-the-helmet touchdown catch

Miller pushed the Ridgeview High Panther football team to their first win under new coach Matt Knauss in a 14-12 district 5-5A thriller against Gainesville Eastside High on a Thursday Homecoming night at Citizen's Field.

"This was a good district win and will give us confidence to finish strong," said Miller, who, with 5:36 left in the third period and the score locked at 7-6 for Ridgeview, latched on to a backside post pattern pass in the back of the end zone with the ball pinned to the back of his helmet with one hand. "We saw the safety carrying with our motion and we knew we could hit the backside pass. Max (quarterback Max Monroe) threw a great pass."

4 Kade Sanders, two fumbles caused on bone-jarring tackles

Keystone Heights got a key playoff-point 28-20 win over Crescent to stay at

5-0 for the season.

With 3:42 on the clock, Indians up 28-20, a Ty Friedlin punt put Crescent City at midfield for a final showdown for the game with Sanders delivering a second on the night bone-jarring tackle on a pass play downfield that Michael Kirtley would recover the loose ball.

Keystone Heights would stall and give Crescent City one more shot, but Jarrett Hughes would strip a Crescent City wide out of his final catch to end the game.



Keystone Heights High all purpose player Kade Sanders, No. 33, snuffs out a key fumble in Indians' win over Crescent City that kept Indians on path to region playoff berth.

The hit was the second fumble-causing hit by Sanders; the first creating a first quarter touchdown for the Indians by Dalton Hollingsworth.

SEE TOP 5, 33

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Golf

from page 25

erson. "The Korn Ferry Tour replaces the Web.com Tour, the previous qualifying route to the PGA."

For Fleming Island Golf Club, the Unbridled Tour, which is the underling of the Korn Ferry Tour, took take place this week from Tuesday through Thursday.

"There is only one way to the PGA TOUR and that's the Korn Ferry Tour," said Raulerson. "The Unbridled Tour follows the Korn Ferry because it has a handful of qualifying slots that players can play in the Korn Ferry at upcoming events. The whole goal is to get to the PGA."

Raulerson noted that golfers previously had the Web.com and Nike tours to get their shot into the PGA.

"Back when I played the Web.com and Nike Tours, you could go to both," said Raulerson.

Eagle Harbor Golf Club and also Palencia Golf Club in St. Augustine hosted qualifying tournaments for the Korn Ferry Challenge that starts Thursday at the Valley Course at TPC Sawgrass. The top four golfers at both sites earned a spot in the 156-man field that includes 17 former winners from the PGA TOUR.

Ryan McCormick (8-under) led all players at Eagle Harbor, while Matt Nagy, Martin Piller and Jonathan Hodge (7-under) all advanced in a Tuesday morning playoff.

Raulerson's Unbridled Tour tournament at Fleming Island will take the bulk of the up to 156 players that did not get a qualifying finish at the Eagle Harbor or Palencia to give them a second chance to get another shot at a Korn Ferry Tour opportunity.

"We are expecting 132-156 players here at Fleming Island Golf Club; two rounds, 36 holes and make a cut and those who make the cut will play on the final day, Thursday," said Raulerson. "First prize is about \$20,000 and downward."

The Korn Ferry Event gives out \$108,000 to the winner. Eagle Harbor and Palencia are just qualifiers and will have no prize money.

The Korn Ferry Tour will remain in Northeast Florida for one additional week



Fleming Island High golf grad Joshua Lee finished with a 73 at Eagle Harbor in the Korn Ferry Qualifier on Monday and will be playing Tues.-Thurs. at the Unbridled Tour event at Fleming Island Golf Course.

with an event the following week at the World Golf Village's King & Bear in St. Augustine.

"It's two mega-events in the Jacksonville area to kick off the PGA season," said Raulerson. "It just happens that the Unbridled Tour offers an additional opportunity to move on after all that. Two Mondays in a row, golfers can qualify."

Raulerson's Unbridled Tour, sponsored by By Your Side Senior Care, is a second chance for golfers to get to the second Korn Ferry event at the World Golf Village.

"At Eagle Harbor and Palencia, there will be 150 or so golfers looking to get 8-12 spots to move up," said Raulerson. "The selected players at those two sites get to play at the Korn Ferry event at TPC the following week. That event at TPC is the first PGA event since the PGA restarted after the pandemic shutdown."

Raulerson noted that former Middleburg High state champion Cody Carroll, now at University of North Florida, is scheduled to compete with Tommy Murray, 32, a Fleming Island Golf Club player, getting a sponsor invite.

"Tommy Murray is a very accomplished golfer out of this area and this club," said Raulerson. "Also competing will be Andrew Lonsdale, a good young player out of Fleming Island High School. Cody shot a 68 today and is playing strong."



One familiar face on the Eagle Harbor Korn Ferry Qualifier was former Jacksonville Jaguar kicker Josh Scobee, here dropping on hole nine after his second shot made the water hazard.

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Blue Devil football connects to Dallas Cowboy Stadium

By **Randy Lefko**
Sports Editor

Three major players in the Clay High historic state championship playoff run of 2013 connected with some quick decision-making to be part of a top-drawer football camp in historic AT&T Stadium, home of the National Football League Dallas Cowboys.

Tom George, an offensive coach for the Clay High football team who was part of that high-flying offense led by speedster quarterback Wes Weeks that finished at 11-5 with a Class 5A championship loss to American Heritage, directs Camp Impact in the historic stadium and has on his roster two players from the Blue Devil 2013 team; Jeremy Peters and Sean Grayer, both recent college graduates.

George, who followed his two sons; Nick, center, and Brandon, quarterback, both who played at University of Central Oklahoma, put some quick thinking to work to piece together an opportunity to host his June 26-28 Camp Impact in the historic stadium.

"I had done a YouTube motivational video on the advice of some friends and things rolled from there," said George, who coached an Oklahoma football high school to a state title while developing his football academy. "I've humbly had the ability to get young men to respond to me and maybe my military background is part of that that gives me the will to develop men outside of just football. The video put me in a room with the Dallas Cowboys who invited me to speak, then to host my camp in their stadium."

George's camp will involve a roster of coaches, athletes and advisor that come from various backgrounds and levels of football experience. George's various camps ranged from a 18 athletes in a beat-up soccer field in Oklahom, a 6A high school and last year, we were at Oklahoma Baptist University, a large, NCAA Div. II college. Now, we are in Cowboy Stadium."

Peters and Grayer, will join George in Dallas with two prongs of motivation; give young athletes some experience-earned advice on making football's next levels; high school to college, college to the NFL, and also to, according to George, to put athletes in front of NFL-level executives and coaches for a conversation that may spur interest for a possible summer camp invite.

For George, son Nick, who graduated UCO, has had recent interest from Canada with the Calgary Stampeders offering a try-out. Brandon, with three more years of eligibility due to injury, is slated as a starter at OCU with probable graduate school eligibility. Brandon George played quarterback at Green Cove Springs Junior High and traveled to Oklahoma with his dad with Nick also part of the Clay 2013 team as center.

Both Peters and Grayer have been grinding in the post-college race to snag an NFL camp invite with both getting interest.

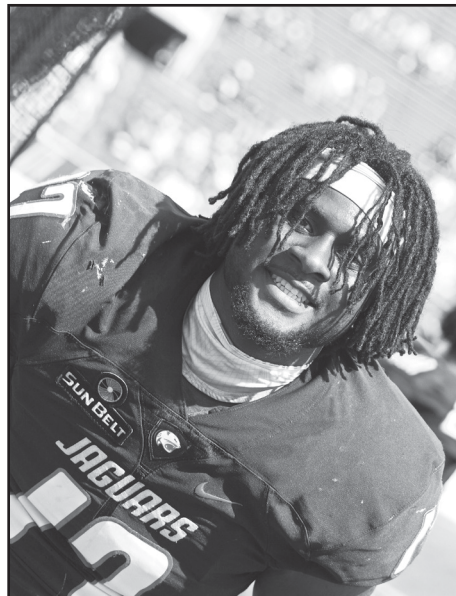
Peters, a defensive secondary athlete who finished a strong career for Liberty University in 2018 where he was a captain and was instrumental in a 2017 Liberty



Former Clay High School football coach Tom George will bring his motivation and football skill coaching to the home of the Dallas Cowboys in a July football camp.



Two former Clay High football standouts; above Jeremy Peters, who was a standout at Liberty University, and Sean Grayer, a defensive stalwart for University of South Alabama, will be part of Tom George's football camp to be held at Dallas Cowboys' stadium in July.



upset of Baylor University. In that Baylor upset, Peters led Liberty's defense with six tackles. "Coach George has been with me since my high school days and has advised me throughout," said Peters, 23, and a 5'-10", 195 lbs athlete with 61 tackles in his final season.

"Coach George had a camp in Oklahoma City last year that I was part of. We try to give high school kids some college experience and what to expect along the way."

Peters NFL experience included workouts at Liberty on his Pro Day with some phone calls afterward showing interest.

"The university sets up the Pro Day for their seasons and I was getting some feedback from the Los Angeles Chargers, but that didn't go as plan," said Peters, who ran a 4.49 second 40 yard dash. "I did a tryout for the Canadian League with Winnipeg after the Chargers."

Peters recently signed with an agent to move along his prospects.

"I'm going up to Nashville to workout on camera with the agent," said Peters, who also works as a delivery trainer for Amazon in Atlanta. "That's a way agents can network out to their people."

Liberty entered the FBS (Florida Bowl Series) in 2018 and finished with a 6-6 record including a Cure Bowl win over Georgia Southern University.

Grayer, a pass rushing defensive end with the ability to stand up and enter defensive coverage, finished up also in 2018 at the University of South Alabama after three solid years of big-time play for the Jaguars. Grayer

"Last year, I had my Pro Day at South Alabama with workouts for the Green Bay Packers, the Minnesota Vikings and the Los Angeles Rams," said Grayer, 23, at 6'-2", 230 lbs., who finished 2018 with 28 tackles, five tackles for losses and two sacks. "They were working me out as a linebacker; like a Sam Linebacker where I can cover and possibly get down in three point stance, stunt and rush the pass. I kind of did a little of both at South Alabama."

Grayer, with a 4.8 second 40 yard dash on his resume, has some college professional ball in his list as well.

"The NFL guys like my style and skill set, but my film at linebacker was limited from South Alabama," said Grayer. "The NFL is a tough business. I had a contract for a South Dakota Arena Football team, but I moved to Atlanta to pursue some business. I'm still looking to get into the NFL. That's the dream."

Scheduled for June 26-28 in Dallas, Camp Impact is designed to bring prospects, coaches and mentors to one spot.

"I call my guys mentors, not counselors," said George. "I bring in a lot of college guys like Jeremy and Sean and get them in front of NFL coaches and agents and maybe there is a longshot, but it can build a relationship for them while giving some mentorship to a younger athlete."

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