

CLAY TODAY



THURSDAY, MARCH 10, 2022

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VOLUME 60, NO. 10 75¢

'It's almost genocide to me'

Local pastor reflects on Ukrainian Invasion

By Nick Blank
nick@claytodayonline.com

ORANGE PARK – Russia's invasion of Ukraine has drawn condemnation around the world, but millions of Ukrainians living abroad now watch as the attacks continue into the third week of fighting.



Paul Muzichuk

Paul Muzichuk, the Counseling Pastor at Springs Church, grew up in Ukraine before emigrating to the U.S. at a young age. He still has several connections to the country. Muzichuk originally intended to host an event, Prayer in the Square, to raise awareness of the opioid crisis. The same weekend, Russia attacked Ukraine and the event had to pivot.

"Obviously, we incorporated the Slavic churches and had prayer for both," he said. "We had a really great turnout."

The invasion coming in the social media era means every event is widely shared and discussed. Muzichuk watched over social media as his hometown of Lutsk was bombed.

"That was something you never thought you would hear, see or read in the news," he

SEE UKRAINE, 11



Colorful countdown to the Fair

The Clay County Agricultural Fair is less than three weeks away, but the fairgrounds already is alive with color after 16 local artists painted picnic tables that will be auctioned to benefit local charities. For more, see page 17.

School district asks judge to throw out complaint

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

Lawyers representing the Clay County Schools District responded to a complaint filed by a law firm focused on anti-LGBTQ litigation on behalf of parents of a R.M. Paterson Elementary student, stating "many of the plaintiffs' claims are disputed, refuted by evidence or are demonstrably untrue."

The school district hasn't disputed whether the child twice attempted suicide on the Fleming Island campus. It does, however, dispute the parents' claim the girl was approached by a school counselor who questioned her gender identity without notifying the parents. The complaint said the girl tried

SEE SCHOOL, 18



School District attorneys disputed most of the facts in a complaint filed by an anti-LGBTQ organization.

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School district highlights trip to Tallahassee, developing plans

By Nick Blank
nick@claytodayonline.com

FLEMING ISLAND— The Clay County School District focused on future challenges and looked forward to spring break in a quick board meeting last week.

Superintendent David Broskie spoke of the district's presence at Clay Day where students, administrators and the Fleming Island High band went to Tallahassee to present and learn.



David Broskie

"I always leave there feeling so good about Clay County and all the county has to offer families," he said.

Broskie relayed the results from a survey given to students, where more than 61% answered. For kindergarten-through-sixth grade students, the key topics were

school connectedness, orderliness and safety. For students seventh through 12th grade, peer and adult relations, teaching and learning and safety were areas the responses asked to be addressed.

Broskie said the district is reviewing its code of conduct, developing a teacher recruiting plan and working to continue supporting teachers.

"I always felt like we are one unit, one team to support our employees," Broskie said.

One of the district's recent challenges has been finding bus drivers. He said finding bus drivers is a hot topic everywhere. He said there were about 1,800 bus-related job openings in the state and the district wasn't in as bad of shape as nearby counties.

"Really the only solution to this is to have more people be bus drivers," Broskie said. "That's really the key to it."

Clay County Education Association President Victoria Kidwell joked about educators having an eye on spring break and a

planning day the following Monday, March 14-21, and it only being a few months until summer. Kidwell said everyone in the district has the same goal of getting their students to the highest level.

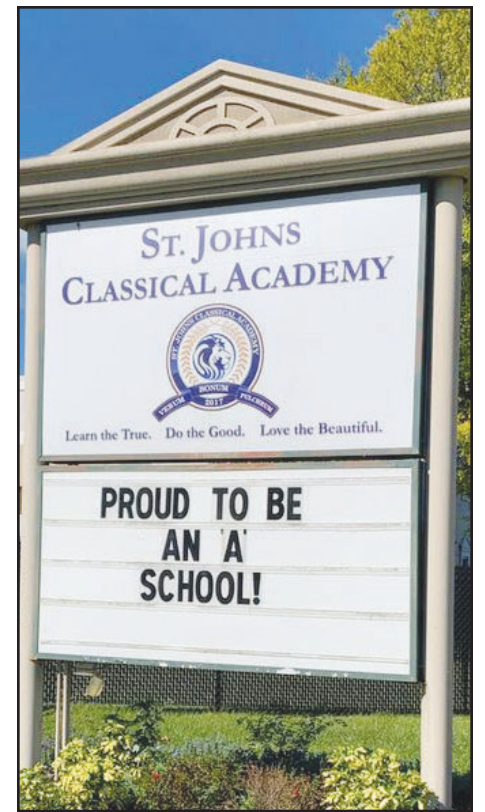
"We all want our students to thrive," Kidwell said. "We want to strengthen our public schools and it takes all of us working together."

In other business, charter school St. Johns Classical Academy received a new 15-year contract from the district with unanimous board member approval. The school is in the last year of its current charter and is able to ask for 15 years since it is designated as a high-performing charter school.

The school also requested an increase to the ceiling of its enrollment, which is now a maximum of 1,000 students.

The school's founder and president of the board Diane Hutchings thanked the school board and staff for the new contract.

"I really appreciate the opportunity you've given us," she said.



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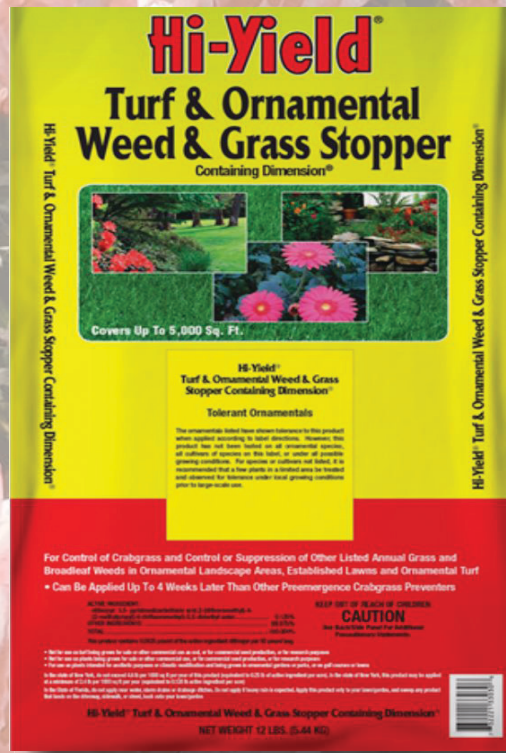
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Powerlifting America secures a home in Clay County

By William Davis
Steel Mill Fleming Island

FLEMING ISLAND – Powerlifting America recently held its first Florida meet on Fleming Island at the Steel Mill Fleming Island gym. More than 20 lifters competed in this event. Powerlifting has become a staple of Northeast Florida in the past few years. Groups like USAPL, USPA, World Powerlifting Congress, and Powerlifting America have held events here as Northeast Florida is becoming a hotbed for strength sports.

This first meet comes on the heels of the biggest news story in recent American powerlifting history. Powerlifting America as of the beginning of the year is now the official American arm of the IPF (International Powerlifting Federation). Previously USAPL (USA Powerlifting) was the IPF representative for over 40 years. The issue involves drug testing, which itself is a hot topic in sports, especially with gender issues at the forefront.



William Davis

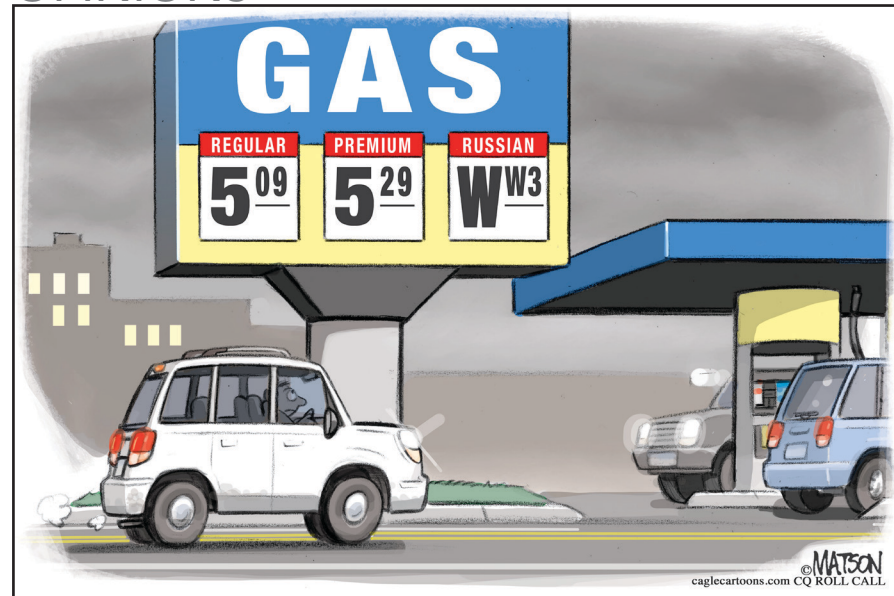
The IPF was demanding that USAPL conform to the WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency) protocol, which would be administered by USADA (United States Anti-Doping Agency). To be clear the USAPL drug tests their athletes, in fact way more than the standard WADA country. The issue it seems is pertains to WHO is doing the testing. USAPL has always done their own testing whereas the IPF wanted them to use USADA instead.

There are different talking points about this including the cost of testing. The hard part for this comes when you look at the people associated with the sport. From meet directors to judges to athletes, everyone has had to choose where to lift and who to work for. Robert Keller who was the Florida head of USAPL is now the US head for Powerlifting America. Many of the judges for USAPL were “IPF International judges,” which means nothing since the IPF removed USA Powerlifting after a 2/3 vote in Norway in November, 2021.

New IPF rules also state that any lifter, coach, or judge who takes part in ANY non-Powerlifting America meet will have a 12-month suspension from the national competition. This has caused a split and some decisions on all parties. It is a story

SEE LIFT, 5

OPINIONS



Florida House ready to crack down on illegal immigration

By Renzo Downey
For FloridaPolitics.com

The House is primed to pass legislation to further crack down on illegal immigration, a priority for Gov. Ron DeSantis. However, critics say the bill is a political move that would harm the wrong immigrants.

After the Senate approved the bill (SB 1808) along party lines late Thursday, the House considered the bill Tuesday evening with plans to vote on it Wednesday. With the bill's anticipated passage, lawmakers will hand the Republican Governor another major win from his 2022 Session agenda.

The measure, carried by Fernandina Beach Republican Sen. Aaron Bean, would prevent transportation companies from doing business with Florida if the companies participate in programs transporting to the state people who are in the country illegally.

DeSantis announced the proposal in December after criticizing President Joe Biden's immigration policies, including bringing flights to Jacksonville to relocate people he claims were in the country illegally. DeSantis and Bean, whose district includes part of Duval County, have said Florida is aware of 78 early morning flights organized by the federal government carrying immigrants to Jacksonville.

Rep. John Snyder, the Stuart Republican shepherding the bill through the House, told members the bill addresses how immigration law is supposed to work.

“What we're calling out is the abhorrent behavior of the federal government that is chartering flights in the dark of night to bring unauthorized aliens into

“What we're calling out is the abhorrent behavior of the federal government that is chartering flights in the dark of night to bring unauthorized aliens into the state of Florida.”

– John Snyder (Rep)

the state of Florida,” Snyder said.

Orlando Democratic Rep. Carlos Guillermo Smith called references to “midnight flights” by DeSantis and others “xenophobic rhetoric.” Fellow Orlando Democratic Rep. Anna V. Eskamani told members the bill is grounded in fear.

“This notion of people being smuggled into the state is not accurate, especially since these have been routine flights happening under multiple administrations, President (Donald) Trump included. The entire premise is false,” she said.

With changes made last month, Republicans argue the bill would not impact transportation companies' ability to move unaccompanied minors, people protected under Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or those with Temporary Protected Status. The bill labels immigrants not accepted as part of the Immigration and Nationality Act as “unauthorized aliens.”

“It is a complex, maze-like decision matrix,” Snyder said. “I wish that there was a black and white answer that we could clearly point to, but again, I believe this speaks to why this conversation is so important, why we need to continue to elevate that and put the pressure on the federal government to

SEE IMMIGRATION, 5

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.

Fossorial: (fah-SOR-ee-uhl) an adjective that means burrowing animals.

“The fossorial legs of a mole make them excellent at digging burrows where they live.”

This Week in History

Five years ago, 2017

- The Clay County School Board announces it will save \$1.5 million a year by eliminating three practical nurse, five technology and at least seven media specialists positions.
- Gov. Rick Scott makes a stop at Orange Park's Link Staffing to join the business rally to save jobs and promote local tourism.
- The Green Cove Springs City Council votes to support a program where local artists can apply for a permit to paint large murals around town.

10 years ago, 2012

- County Clerk James Jett, who was running for the U.S. House of Representatives, turned over a secret audio recording where he was offered cash to pull out of the race against incumbent Cliff Stearns and challenger Ted Yoho.
- Clay County Fire Rescue battled a 200-acre fire in Keystone Heights that destroyed a home in the 7500 block of Fremont Ave.
- Orange Park officials expect an 11% turnout for the March 13 election between Scott Land and Jeffrey Winter for the Town Council.

20 years ago, 2002

- Orange Park's Sgt. Bradley Crose was one of several soldiers killed in a firefight when al-Qaeda forces shot down two Army MH-47 Chinooks helicopters.
- Forty-four of the original 46 workers return to work at Iluka Resources following a three-year strike.

SEE HISTORY, 5

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@claytodayonline.com

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.

Immigration

from page 4

make this more readable.”

However, Democrats and immigration activists say Bean and Snyder referenced the entire immigration code, which they call vague. Additionally, by tying the definition to unauthorized aliens, other immigrants who are unlawfully present would be targeted by Florida’s law.

Immigration lawyers with the Florida Immigrant Coalition say the bill would impact children, DACA and TPS recipients, and refugees from Afghanistan, Haiti, Venezuela and even Ukraine. The problem lies in the federal immigration code, which distinguishes between “inadmissible” and “unauthorized” immigrants. Immigrants can be unauthorized but considered admissible.

“All in all, my quarrel is that the drafting of the bill reflects a poor understanding of immigration which causes broad, harmful consequences, and possibly even achieves results not intended by the drafters,” said Mark Prada, an immigration lawyer and executive in the American Immigration Lawyers Association.

In September, a federal judge struck down part of the 2019 sanctuary cities law, but Republicans hope the new bill will be another shot at the measure as the ruling goes to an appeal.

The new legislation would take effect immediately with DeSantis’ signature.

The bill also would require that counties strike agreements with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to participate in a program for local law enforcement

officers to help with immigration enforcement. Many counties have already reached such agreements.

DeSantis’ proposed budget included \$8 million to transport undocumented immigrants out-of-state. The proposal appeared in neither chamber’s budgets until Sunday, when the Senate included \$12 million in its proposal for that purpose. The House agreed to that spending Tuesday morning.

While the Legislature is pushing forward with the provision, the bill doesn’t consider two of DeSantis’ major five proposals to address the “Biden border crisis.”

The bill doesn’t contemplate strengthening E-Verify enforcement or requiring private entities that bring immigrants to Florida illegally to compensate the state for “the harmful costs that fall on the public.”

DeSantis also asked for jails and courts to collect the immigration status of individuals at the time of their arrest and conviction, but the bill doesn’t go that far with its immigration status reporting provisions.

DeSantis faces re-election in November and is an early front-runner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, a possibility the Governor has brushed off. Democrats in the House and the Senate have repeatedly alluded

“Maybe you don’t recognize that you’re being used as a pawn,” Tampa Democratic Rep. Dotie Joseph said to Snyder.

In a letter to lawmakers and DeSantis on Wednesday, leaders from Florida’s Venezuelan and American Business Immigration Coalition Action called the bill a direct attack on the Venezuelan community. They feared many immigrants with Temporary

Protected Status could fall into the bill if their work permits are delayed due to backlogs at federal immigration offices.

The bill was done for political reasons, the groups continued.

“All these people want — our family, our neighbors — is to be able to work to provide for their families,” they wrote. “It is an outrage that this bill risks jeopardizing their ability to do so, injects instabil-

ity and uncertainty into their long-term plans.”

Renzo Downey covers state government for Florida Politics. After graduating from Northwestern University in 2019, Renzo began his reporting career in the Lone Star State, covering state government for the Austin American-Statesman. Shoot Renzo an email at renzo@floridapolitics.com and follow him on Twitter @RenzoDowney.

Lift

from page 4

that continues to unfold as the weeks and months go by. The sport of Powerlifting has been trying to become an Olympic Sport and this may be one step closer.

One thing is for sure: powerlifting is

here to stay in Clay County. This is great for those of any age who want to compete and especially great for our youth lifters who now have off-season competitions to test their strength in. This also allows for a national stage to be seen. While we wait to see how the powerlifting soap opera in America pans out, we in Clay County get to keep on lifting.

History

from page 4

• The Home Depot celebrated its grand opening on County Road 220 on Fleming Island.

30 years ago, 1992

• With 71.1%, Clay County voters overwhelming decide the job of Superintendent should be determined in an election, not an appointment by the school board.

• Louise Mandrell headlines a list of performers who are scheduled to appear at the Clay County Fair.

• The Clay County Commission votes not to reimburse a lobbyist for a \$4,300 lobster social for state officials that wound

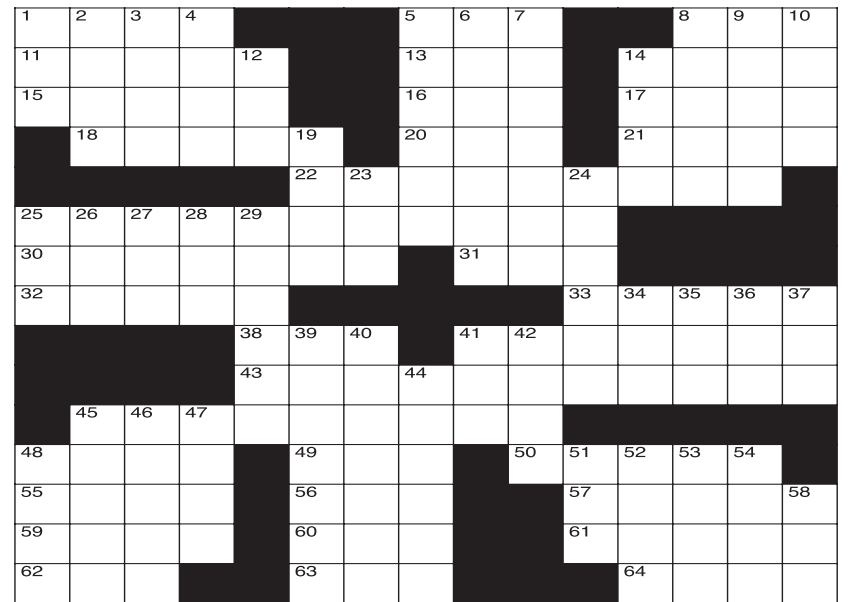
up landing the Branan Field-Chaffee Road project.

40 years ago, 1982

• Although a woman died in the fire, Steve Johnson rescues a man from a burning house on Washington Lane in Green Cove Springs.

• Green Cove Springs residents will be the first in the county to use new computerized voting machines during the April 6 city election.

• A special workshop is planned by county commissioners to explore the creation of a county administrator.



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. One who regrets
- 5. Time zone
- 8. Subway dweller
- 11. Bend in a river
- 13. Alias
- 14. Isodor __, American Nobel physicist
- 15. Very (music)
- 16. Zero
- 17. Phil __, former CIA
- 18. Competitions
- 20. Unwell
- 21. Puts in place
- 22. Gets rid of
- 25. Allows light to pass through
- 30. Climbed quickly
- 31. We all have it
- 32. There’s a North & South
- 33. Emaciation
- 38. Supervises flying
- 41. Very dark colors
- 43. Unwanted
- 45. Grants
- 48. Three visited Jesus
- 49. Wife of Amun
- 50. Broadway actress Daisy
- 55. A Spanish river
- 56. I (German)
- 57. French opera composer
- 59. Six (Spanish)
- 60. Last letter
- 61. Spiritual leader of a Jewish congregation
- 62. Noah had one
- 63. Make a mistake
- 64. Tall plant

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Computer memory
- 2. “Et __”: “And wife” (Latin)
- 3. Ancient Syrian city
- 4. College army
- 5. Cassava
- 6. Talented
- 7. Capital of Estonia
- 8. Finger millet
- 9. In a way, assists
- 10. Men’s fashion accessories
- 12. Misery
- 14. Skin disorder
- 19. Selling at specially reduced prices
- 23. Good friend
- 24. Stationary portion of a \generator
- 25. Expression of disappointment
- 26. The 17th letter of the Greek alphabet
- 27. Where birds fly
- 28. Midway between north and northeast
- 29. Chaotic states
- 34. Comedic actress Gasteyer
- 35. Kids’ dining accessory
- 36. Snakelike fish
- 37. Midway between south and southeast
- 39. Assign lifelike qualities to
- 40. One who cites
- 41. Midway between east and southeast
- 42. North wind
- 44. One or the other
- 45. Cavalry sword
- 46. Of the Hungarian language
- 47. Life stories
- 48. Flat tableland with steep edges
- 51. Swiss river
- 52. Plant that makes gum
- 53. French cleric
- 54. One point east of northeast
- 58. Free from

Pawpaw Nature Center opens at Camp Chowenwaw

Commissioners to celebrate grand opening on March 17

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Clay County Commissioners will celebrate the grand opening of the new Pawpaw Nature Center at Camp Chowenwaw County Park in Green Cove Springs on Thursday, March 17, at 2 p.m., with interactive family activities beginning at noon.

Families are invited to join the pond study program or plant their native plant seed in a take-home pot from noon-2 p.m., then stay for the grand opening ceremony.

The Pawpaw Nature Center is a new full-time facility open to visitors and school groups at Camp Chowenwaw. The center is open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily for park visitors to enjoy at their leisure, and school groups can schedule environmental education field trips throughout the year.

Formerly a scout bunkhouse built by the Meniak Club of Jacksonville in 1986, renovations to the facility have been underway for more than a year and include new windows, heating and air, floors, exhibit cases, lighting, decking, and fresh, colorful paint.

The nature center houses interactive, educational exhibits and children's activities that focus on animals and habitats found here in Clay County, such as gopher tortoise, wild turkey, brown water snake,

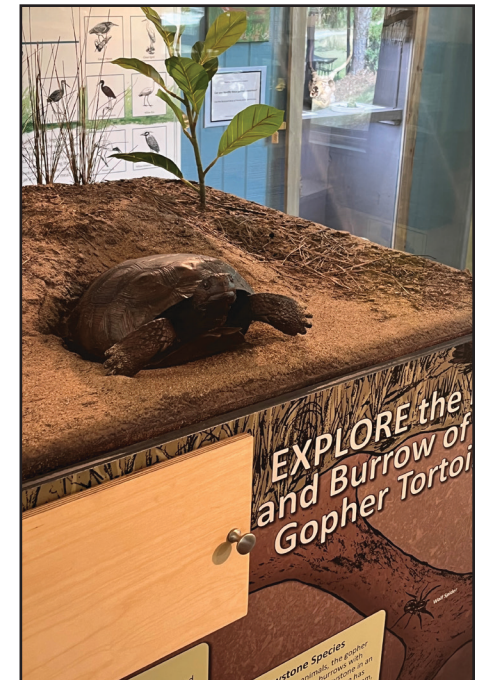


The Pawpaw Nature Center is open near the pool at Camp Chowenwaw and it offers a glimpse into the area's wildlife. County officials will celebrate the grand opening on March 17 at 2 p.m.

beaver, alligator, manatee, and black bear. Exhibits include a swamp paludarium, blackwater aquarium, gopher tortoise burrow, insect dioramas, bird viewing area, animal skulls, and a hanging river grass meadow, among others.

Chairman of the Clay County Board of County Commissioners Wayne Bolla said,

"Camp Chowenwaw County Park was purchased from the Girl Scouts of Gateway Council in 2006 through the Florida Communities Trust, Florida Forever Program. We are grateful for the partnership with Florida Communities Trust and are pleased to be able to preserve the history and pristine natural beauty of the park, and to offer



STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

this outstanding new educational facility to our community."

The staff at Camp Chowenwaw previously conducted more than 20 education programs annually at the park and now anticipate being able to increase that number to more than 100 with this new dedicated

SEE PAW, 18



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Orange Park, Middleburg highs participate at inaugural ACE Mentor Program

Students introduced to construction trades with hands-on projects

For Clay Today

JACKSONVILLE – ACE Mentor Program of Northeast Florida recently held its inaugural Trades Day to introduce high school students to a variety of construction trades through demonstrations and hands-on activities with local firms.

The event, held at American Electrical Contracting, was designed to educate students about the immediate trade job opportunities within the industry in Northeast Florida. Although contractors are increasingly busy and are eager to hire more workers, low rate of unemployment and record job openings in construction show how difficult it is bringing enough workers on board.

Founded in 2007, the ACE Mentor Program of Northeast Florida is an after-school program for high school students interested in exploring careers in architecture, construction and engineering. The

program currently serves more than 200 students from Clay, Duval and St. Johns counties, including Orange Park and Middleburg highs. Through office tours, college visits, hands-on activities and site visits, the program introduces students to the industry's various disciplines. Under the mentorship of more than 80 local industry professionals, students work in teams on projects that simulate real-life situations. ACE Mentor Program of Northeast Florida also provides scholarships to participating students to continue their education within the industry.

The event included demonstrations from 20 construction organizations that support ACE Mentor Program of Northeast Florida including carpentry contractor B3

SEE MENTOR, 18

Students from Orange Park and Middleburg highs got hands-on experience during Trades Day offered by the ACE Mentor Program. The program highlights the need for technical experience in the future.






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Obituaries

Ernest Morris May, Jr.

Ernest Morris May, Jr., 76, of Green Cove Springs, FL passed away March 1, 2022.

Broadus-Raines Funeral Home, 501 Spring St., Green Cove Springs, FL (904) 284-4000 www.broadusraines.com



Jackson M. Ely

Jackson M. Ely, 86, of Orange Park, FL passed away March 2, 2022.

Broadus-Raines Funeral Home, 501 Spring St., Green Cove Springs, FL (904) 284-4000 www.broadusraines.com



Juanita F. Henry

Juanita F. Henry, 93, of Green Cove Springs, FL passed away March 3, 2022.

Broadus-Raines Funeral Home, 501 Spring St., Green Cove Springs, FL (904) 284-4000 www.broadusraines.com



Jerry Nettuno

Jerry Nettuno, 81, of Green Cove Springs, FL, passed away March 5, 2022.

Broadus-Raines Funeral Home, 501 Spring St., Green Cove Springs, FL 32043 (904) 284-4000 www.broadusraines.com



Kenneth Cover Koutz

Kenneth Cover Koutz passed away peacefully in Orange Park FL, in the early afternoon hours of Tuesday March 1st 2022. In the presence of family and friends, he completed his life's journey



and stepped into the welcoming embrace of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Preceded in death by his father Herman, mother Madge, and sister Joan Carpenter, Ken is survived by his bride of 50 years, Arlene San Nicolas Koutz; his children—David Koutz, Vanessa Isenberg, and Kevin Koutz; his sister Lu-ellen and her husband Bill; and numerous loving family members across the United States. Ken was born in Maryland in 1947 and joined the US Navy in 1967, serving his country in the Vietnam conflict. Ken and Arlene married in San Diego in 1971, eventually raising their family in Florida—including eight grandchildren, one great grandchild, and countless friends and loved ones. Ken was an avid reader, a lifelong sports fan, and retired electronics engineer with the Lockheed Martin Corporation. Ken's family held a celebration of his life and God's abundant blessings at 11a.m. on Saturday March 5th 2022 at Calvary Chapel Orange Park, 1595 Baxley Road, Middleburg FL 32068 with Pastor Chris Fredrich officiating.

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

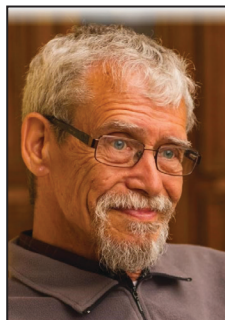


Donald Edward 'Mike' Laflamme



Donald Edward "Mike" Laflamme, 80 (Middleburg, Florida) passed away February 27, 2022. Born to Leo and Florence (Colby) Laflamme on October 18, 1941 in Woonsocket, Rhode Island. Mike attended most of his high school years at Mount Saint Charles Academy in Woonsocket,

and stepped into the welcoming embrace of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Preceded in death by his father Herman, mother Madge, and sister Joan Carpenter, Ken is survived by his bride of 50 years, Arlene San Nicolas Koutz; his children—David Koutz, Vanessa Isenberg, and Kevin Koutz; his sister Lu-ellen and her husband Bill; and numerous loving family members across the United States. Ken was born in Maryland in 1947 and joined the US Navy in 1967, serving his country in the Vietnam conflict. Ken and Arlene married in San Diego in 1971, eventually raising their family in Florida—including eight grandchildren, one great grandchild, and countless friends and loved ones. Ken was an avid reader, a lifelong sports fan, and retired electronics engineer with the Lockheed Martin Corporation. Ken's family held a celebration of his life and God's abundant blessings at 11a.m. on Saturday March 5th 2022 at Calvary Chapel Orange Park, 1595 Baxley Road, Middleburg FL 32068 with Pastor Chris Fredrich officiating.



Kenneth Cover Koutz

Rhode Island until he transferred to Palm Beach High School in West Palm Beach, Florida for his Senior year. After graduation he went into the Military and chose the Navy Branch and served on the USS Roosevelt stationed in Mayport. After serving in the Navy, he returned to Woonsocket, Rhode Island and married his sweetheart Linda (Solina) Laflamme. After they were married, they moved to Florida to live and start their family. Mike was involved with the North Palm Beach/Palm Beach Garden Jaycee for many years, for some of those years he was even the president of the Jaycees. Mike was an active member of the Loyal Order of the Moose of Palm Beach Gardens. Mike was an avid church going and he was a member of the Nativity Lutheran Church in Palm Beach Gardens, then Faith Lutheran in North Palm Beach, and when Mike and his wife moved to Clay County they became members of Advent Lutheran in Orange Park, Florida. He loved taking pictures of his family doing their activities, sporting events and family gatherings. Mike will be remembered for his great smile, warm hugs, bragging about his family and grandkids. He will also be remembered for blowing his red horn at his grandson's baseball games, attending Special Olympic events and cheering on all the athletes, especially his favorite athlete, his granddaughter.

Mike was preceded in death by his father, Leo Laflamme; mother, Florence (Colby) Laflamme; brother, Leo Laflamme; sister, Dorothy (Laflamme) Whitcher; brother, Norman Laflamme; sister, Bertha (Laflamme) McCormick; brother, John Laflamme; and sister, Shirley (Laflamme) Rainville.

He was survived by his wife, Linda (Solina) Laflamme of Middleburg, Florida; his brother, Ron Laflamme of Marietta, Georgia; his son, Dean Laflamme (Carol Fox) of Tampa, Florida; his daughter, Hally Adams (Danny Adams) of Green Cove Springs, Florida; and grandchildren, Sydney and Bryce Adams of Green Cove Springs, Flori-



Donald Edward Laflamme

da. Funeral services will be held on Friday, March 25th at the Jacksonville National Cemetery at 1:30 those wishing to attend please arrive 15 to 20 minutes before the service time and please go to Lane Three to attend the service.

After the service there will be a Celebration of Life for Mike at Eagle Landing Club Room at 3973 Eagle Landing Parkway, Orange Park, Florida.

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



Thomas Edward Means

Thomas Edward Means, age 55, of Callahan, Florida suddenly passed away on February 28, 2022. He was born on May 7, 1966, to Charles Edward Means and Marciel Hulst Rogers in St. Louis, Missouri. Thomas later moved to Orange Park, Florida where he grew up. He graduated from Orange Park High School in 1984, then went on to obtaining a Bachelor of Science degree and Business degree from the University of Florida. Thomas enjoyed coaching soccer and had done so for over 10 years.

He coached both of his sons at the Callahan Soccer Club. Thomas was an avid Florida Gators and Jacksonville Jaguar fan. To say he was a generous man would be an understatement. Thomas was loving, had the biggest heart anyone has even known. He was the epitome of the perfect husband, father, son, and friend. Thomas never went a day without telling those around him that he loved them. He supported his wife and family with whatever they wanted to do. Thomas was a proud and prideful father to

SEE OBITUARIES, 9



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Obituaries

from page 8

his beautiful daughter and two handsome sons. He opened his heart and home to many bonus children and loved them all as if they were his own. Thomas was a man who never raised his voice. He was fond of telling his sons about his childhood days where he grew up on Robinette Drive in Orange Park. He found himself mesmerized every time he heard his daughter sing. Thomas was a man who would help anyone at any time without question. He is preceded in death by his parents.

Thomas is survived by his loving wife of 22 years, Amyjo Means, daughter, Kelsey Means; sons, TJ (Kayla) Walker, Brendan Means; bonus children, Amanda (Stephan), Bobby (Haleigh), Terrell (Theresa), Daniel (Kristen), Will, Cody, Wyatt, Josh x2, Kerry; sisters, Cyndie, Mary, Tina, Anne; mother-in-law, Pamela (Michael) Tipping; sisters-in-law, Julie (Jerome) Wooten, Rose (Jim) Hammons, Kristina (Steve) Bond; brothers-in-law, Charlie (Jessica) Adams, James (Desiree) Kerun; bonus sisters, Scarlett, Nancy, Tracey (Bobby); granddaughter; due this month, Kynley Ann; bonus grandchildren; Leland, Brantley, Roslyn, Trey, William, Kamaya and Kayden; several nephews, nephews; countless number of friends.

A Celebration of Thomas's life was held on Monday, March 7, 2022, at 6:00 p.m. at Nassau Funeral Home with Gaynelle James officiating.

Family recieved friends one hour prior to the service at the funeral home.

In lieu of flowers, the family would like donations made to the Tom Means Memorial Fund that's being established to fund scholarships for the West Nassau High School boys' soccer team.

The arrangements are under the care and direction of Nassau Funeral Home, 541720 US-1, Callahan, Florida, 32011, 904-879-1770. Visit www.nassaufh.com to sign the family's guest book.

Margriet Annie Verspuij Luke

Margriet Annie Verspuij Luke departed from her earthly home on March 5, 2022. She was born on December 17, 1944 in Haarlem, The Netherlands to Willem and Maarja Verspuij. Preceded in death by her parents and six siblings, Margriet is survived by her husband Glenn Luke, sons Rogef Jan and wife Barbara, Hans Timothy and wife Leona, Wilhelm Anthony and wife Sheena and daughter Natasja Michele. Additionally, Margriet is survived by six grandchildren and many nieces and nephews who loved her. Margriet was a devoted member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and served others selflessly during her 77 years. The family will receive friends from 10:00 am to 11:00am on Friday, March 11, 2022 at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 4346 Co RD 218, Middleburg, FL. Funeral services will follow at 11:00am with Bishop Mikel Gonzalez officiating. A private burial service will take place at a later date for family members. We houden allemaal van je, Moeder!



Margriet Annie Verspuij Luke

Please sign the family's online guest-book 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.



John William Moheng, Jr.,

John William Moheng, Jr., passed from this earth on February 23, 2022, after being hospitalized with complications from the Covid-19 virus.

John was born on February 1, 1957

in Chicago, IL, was a life-long resident of Florida and of Middleburg for the last 37 years.

Affectionately known to his friends as "Craneman", John was a hardworking and dedicated family man. John loved his job operating cranes, loved horses and would rather go fishing than eat. He was also a lover of nature, plants, flowers and trees.

He is survived by his wife of 41 years, Gloria (Davis) Moheng, three children, John William Moheng, III, Michael Paul Moheng (Candice), Ripley Seamus Moheng, 7 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren. John was also survived by his mother, Juanita Snyder, a sister, Debbie Atkinson, and numerous extended family and friends in Florida and Missouri.

He was predeceased by his father, John William Moheng, Sr., his brothers David Moheng and Scott Moheng, and a son who died at birth.

John left us too soon, but we are comforted to know that he has "gone fishing" with our Lord and Savior.

A memorial service was held 11:00 am, Saturday, March 12, 2022 in the Broadus-Raines Chapel with Pastor Ken Webb officiating.

Please sign the family's online guest-book 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



John William Moheng, Jr.

Clyde Ronald Bragg

Clyde Ronald Bragg passed away unexpectedly at home, March 5, 2022. He was the second child born to Clyde H. Bragg and Della "Dolores" Stack on December 2, 1950. He leaves behind his wife, Deborah (Krizan)Bragg, four children: Shanna Blackley (Stewart), Fridae Weldon (Dave), Katie Terry (Danae), and Jacob Bragg, and one daughter by choice: Charlene Opweb (JP), 5 grandchildren: Connor, Schylar, Miranda, Addison, and Rylan, two sisters: Vickie Bauder and Sherry Hatanpa, two brothers: Terry Bragg and Michael Flowers, as well as a multitude of nieces and nephews, and great-nieces and nephews.

Clyde was an uncomplicated man with a strong work ethic, who built a career in carpentry; his perfectionism and skill led him to be the superintendent and foreman over many, many jobs, including a stint in Saudi Arabia.

Clyde strongly loved his country, supported our military and police force, and was unapologetically Conservative. His strong political opinions often got him thrown in Facebook "jail", though he must have liked it, as he spent more time in it, than he did out of it. So in keeping with the spirit of Clyde's passionate political views, we end this tribute to him with one final thought, "Let's Go Brandon!"



Obituaries

Send obituary submissions for publication in the Clay Today to obits@claytodayonline.com. Obituaries will be placed on our website claytodayonline.com and in the Clay Today newspaper.

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Baptist Medical Center Clay selects new board members

Seven board members will provide strategic guidance for soon-to-be-completed hospital

For Clay Today

FLEMING ISLAND – Baptist Clay is pleased to welcome seven board members to its new hospital on Fleming Island, scheduled to open in the fall of this year. The diverse board members will direct Baptist Clay’s strategic plans and goals to meet the health care needs of the Clay County community.

The 300,000 square-foot full-service hospital on the existing Baptist Clay Medical Campus will open with 100 beds, including maternity services, enhanced cardiology, and cancer care from Baptist MD Anderson.

Once completed in the fall, the \$235-million hospital was designed with patient-friendly features, large, private patient rooms and onsite amenities for the community. In addition, the hospital will bring 400 new jobs to Clay County.

The board members include:

Deborah Pass Durham is founder and principal at Potentiae, a company that advises growing businesses. Pass Durham helps organizations grow and evolve to achieve their goals. She has been widely recognized for her business and civic activities. Prior to founding Potentiae, she was president of ATS Services, a national employment services company, for more than 15 years. Her community involvement includes past chairman of The Jacksonville Aviation Authority, and she currently serves on the boards of Baptist Health and The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida.

“Having grown up in Clay County and to have had the privilege of serving on the Baptist Health and Wolfson Children’s Hospital boards, I am thrilled to return to

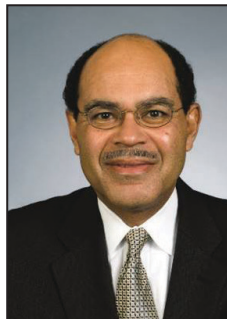
Clay and be part of bringing a new Baptist Health hospital to Fleming Island,” Pass Durham said. “We’ve assembled a great group of community leaders to help guide our path to meet the health needs of a community where people live, work and play.”

Joe Louis Barrow, Jr. is the retired chief executive officer of The First Tee, a positive youth development organization that introduces the game of golf and its values to young people. Since its inception in 1997, The First Tee has impacted more than 9 million young people in 50 states and four international locations. Barrow has been a member of the Baptist Health System board since 2009 serving in various leadership roles including chairman of the finance committee.

Mary Wood Bridgman is a retired lawyer and corporate executive who currently serves as vice chair of the Clay County Planning Commission. A native Flo-



Deborah Pass Durham



Joe Louis Barrow, Jr.



Mary Wood Bridgman



Matt Carlton

ridian, she grew up in Alachua County, earned her undergraduate and law degrees at the University of Florida, and retired following a 28-year career in Jacksonville. She has volunteered in a variety of settings and received a gubernatorial appointment to the Florida Board of Clinical Social Work, Marriage and Family Therapy and Mental Health Counseling, serving for 10 years.

Matt Carlton is a graduate of the University of Florida’s M.E. Rinker School of Construction Management and lives in Green Cove Springs. He founded Carlton Construction, a design-build and construction management firm, in 2004, and currently serves as its president. Carlton was the chair of Baptist South’s Development Council for three years and remains a council member. He also served on the board of the Clay County Development Authority from 2014 – 2018.

Wendell Chindra is president of the Clay County Chamber of Commerce. He is a native of Princes Town on the small island nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

Chindra studied geology at Lehman College, later completing a degree in social science with a minor in political science at



Wendell Chindra



R. Patrick Hayle



Keith L. Stein

Jacksonville University. He has a graduate degree in public policy.

In 2018, he was named director of operations for the Clay Chamber of Commerce and became president in 2019. Chindra is currently working on his doctorate in ministry from the Pentecostal Theological Seminary in Cleveland, Tennessee.

R. Patrick Hayle joined the City Rescue Mission in 1997, where he served in various capacities, eventually assuming the role of executive director and CEO in 2003. He left in 2010 and enjoyed a brief semi-retirement while doing consulting work with his wife.

Having been a Clay County resident for 25 years and knowing the need for improvement in homeless conditions here, Hayle now serves as executive director and CEO at Mercy Support Services. His experience and leadership in the community have produced growth and a vision for Mercy that has had a major impact in Clay County.

Keith L. Stein, MD, retired from Baptist Health in 2020 as chief medical officer and senior vice president of Medical Affairs and Clinical Effectiveness. He recently rejoined Baptist Health as the physician advisor to the CEO. Before his corporate career, Dr. Stein was a cardiac anesthesiologist and intensive care physician and is double-board certified by the American Board of Anesthesiology as an anesthesiologist and intensivist.

He has held clinical roles including chief of critical care at Mayo Clinic Jacksonville, director of the intensive care units at St. Luke’s Hospital (Jacksonville), associate chief of the division of critical care, director of biomedical informatics, director of the anesthesiology/critical care medicine training program, and director of the cardiothoracic surgical ICU at University of Pittsburgh Medical Center/Presbyterian University Hospital.

“Having grown up in Clay County and to have had the privilege of serving on the Baptist Health and Wolfson Children’s Hospital boards, I am thrilled to return to Clay and be part of bringing a new Baptist Health hospital to Fleming Island. We’ve assembled a great group of community leaders to help guide our path to meet the health needs of a community where people live, work and play.”

– Deborah Pass Durham

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Clay teen given second chance with revolutionary surgery

For Clay Today

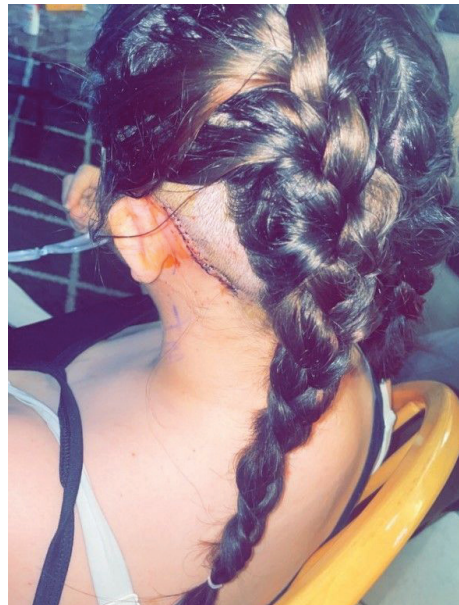
ORANGE PARK – Samantha Green has lived with Trigeminal Neuralgia since a young age. The chronic condition is a cranial nerve disorder that affects the trigeminal nerve, which is responsible for carrying sensation from your face to the brain.

The condition produces sudden, severe, shock-like feelings of pain in the face. At the age of 4, Samantha, now 16, was finally able to verbalize her pain. The simple act of the wind blowing on her face caused debilitating pain.

She spent years visiting ENTs, Dentists, and Neurologists but was left without answers until late last year when she was finally diagnosed with Trigeminal Neuralgia and began medication.

“We had to homeschool her. She missed her whole high school experience,” said Samantha’s Mother Kelly Anderson. “And the thought of COVID over the past two years has terrified me. Wearing a mask causes her extreme pain.”

Kelly lost hope that her daughter would ever have the ability to work or go to college. But in January, she saw a Facebook post about someone with Trigeminal Neuralgia who underwent surgery for the condition at HCA Florida Orange Park Hospital with Neurosurgeon Dr. Michael Horowitz.



Samantha Green shows the scar immediately following the revolutionary surgery at Orange Park Hospital, but that scar healed and allowed her to live a happy, pain-free life.

She called right away and was shocked that the very doctor that could cure her daughter was only 3 miles away. The surgery, microvascular decompression, is only available at a handful of hospitals in the United States.

“When we found Dr. Horowitz it was the miracle we had been praying for, for years.



Even after her diagnosis last year, no one ever offered surgery,” said Kelly. “The surgery promptly took away all of her pain. We went from a future of fear and panic to looking forward to the future. We’re forever grateful for this man and his staff.”

The mother and daughter are now going on college visits and Samantha has a job

she loves.

“Samantha’s story is especially rewarding,” said Dr. Michael Horowitz, Neurosurgeon at Orange Park Hospital. “It’s not often that you see someone so young with a cranial nerve disorder. It’s most common in people over the age of 50. Having the chance to give their family answers and help her get a second chance in life is why I do what I do.”

“She will live a normal life now.”

Other cranial nerve disorders include Genuiculate Neuralgia, Glossopharyngeal Neuralgia, Hemifacial Spasm, Occipital Neuralgia, and the most common Genuiculate Neuralgia. Symptoms from the disorders vary from excruciating facial pain on one side of the face, deep ear or throat pain, dizziness, hearing loss, weakness, paralysis and facial twitches.

Treatment for cranial nerve disorders varies from medication to surgical procedures such as microvascular decompression, a minimally invasive surgery that relieves the abnormal compression of the cranial nerve.

To learn more about cranial nerve disorders treatment options available at Orange Park Hospital visit <https://OrangeParkPhysicians.com/service/cranial-nerve-disorders>.

Ukraine

from page 1

said. “That was devastating.”

Muzichuk said he has compassion for the millions fleeing the country, the millions stranded there and the Russian citizens who didn’t have a say in the attacks.

He pointed to recent reports that the fleeing Ukrainians are the largest displacement of people since World War II.

“It’s an unprovoked war,” Muzichuk added. “That part is really hard, there was nothing done to provoke the war. It could have been so avoidable.”

The first couple of nights of attacks

brings on constant anguish. A friend of Muzichuk who was getting groceries for a 12-member family died in the shelling.

“It was just in cold blood,” Muzichuk said.

He said there are several Slavic churches in the Northeast Florida area, and estimated tens of thousands of Ukrainians live in the area.

For Muzichuk, whose family left Ukraine when the Soviet Union was still in place, the reason was religious persecution. He said Ukraine’s capital, Kiev, is considered a spiritual place and the war is a spiritual war.

“This is what being American is about, religious freedom and the right to worship. The Ukrainian people are peaceful, hardworking and don’t really complain much. It’s kind of their nature,” Muzichuk said. “It’s just really hard to observe what’s happening. It’s almost genocide to me, the slaughter of human kind.”

A fundraiser for Ukrainians was set up at tscjax.com.



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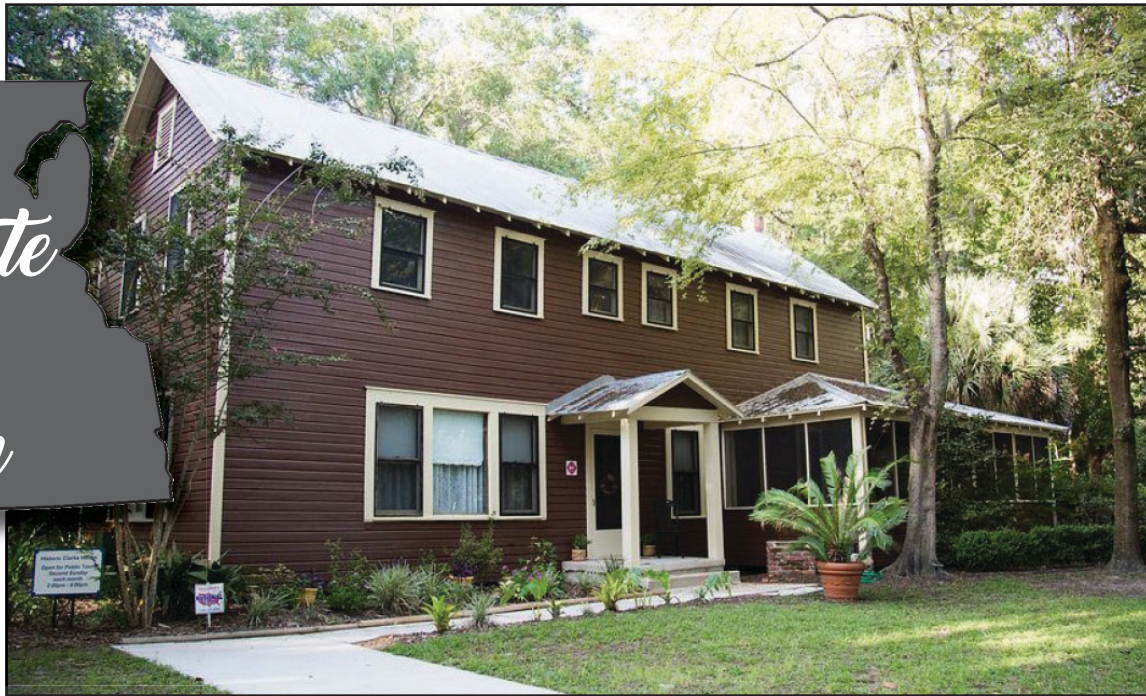
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Celebrate Clay History



Carrie and William Clark

What's in a name? Carrie Clarke Park

By Vishi Garig, archives specialist
A Service of Clerk of Court and
Comptroller Tara S. Green

ORANGE PARK – The sounds of children's laughter waifs through the air. Warm sunshine touches their faces as they ride the swings and slides at Carrie Clarke House Park. Parents sit in the shade watching over their children. Located on Kingsley Avenue, the recently renovated park gleams with new equipment. Understandably, few people stop to ask "Who is Carrie Clarke and why did they name a park after her?" Read further and you'll find out why she served as a role model for many, both then and now.

One thing that is not new at this beloved park is Carrie Clarke's house. Built in 1912 and on the National Register of Historic Places, Carrie and William Clarke lived in the house until they died in 1943 and 1979. The home is your basic wooden farmhouse because the park was once a working farm. Carrie and William grew pecans and were quite successful at it. William was a plumber and pipefitter by trade but wanted to supplement their income with proceeds from pecan farming.

Carrie was from Chicago, born in 1885. Toward the end of the American Civil War, William immigrated to America from England. He moved to Jacksonville and established a plumbing and mechanical business. The couple met, fell in love and married in 1904. The couple soon moved to Orange Park where they bought several acres of land off Kingsley Avenue, built the main farmhouse and other outlying buildings including housing for farmworkers. Later, that housing would be home to Viki the Chimp and her handlers from the Monkey Farm (Yerkes Laboratories of Primate Biology) which was just down the street. Viki was known to play in the pecan trees, swinging from limb to limb. The nuts must have been a favorite treat.

The Clarkes had one son named William Edward Clarke. Born in 1908, he eventu-

ally inherited the farm. Billy, as he was called, grew up on the farm and worked in his father's plumbing business, too. William Sr. became very involved in local politics. From positions as the Orange Park Treasurer (1924), Tax Collector, Town Clerk, Town Councilman to, eventually, Orange Park Town Mayor. He served again as the Town Treasurer (1937) until he died in 1943.

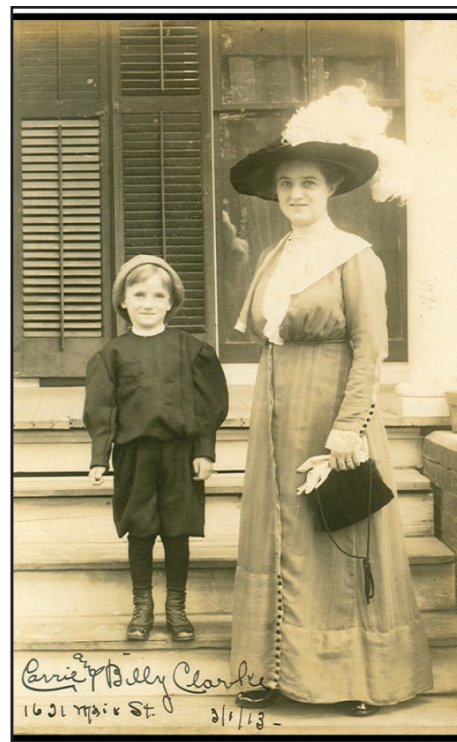
It was Carrie who had a heart of gold and she showed her love for the community by obtaining the original land for the First Baptist Church of Orange Park for \$1. Eventually, the church moved to a location across the street from Carrie's house. She sponsored missionaries around the world and helped with the church's Chil-

dren's Home. The Orange Park Woman's Club was likely Carrie's greatest love; she helped incorporate it and served as club president. Their helpful activities are well documented in the club's historic records, including their support of Orange Park Elementary School, a pet project of the club.

The impact of the Great Depression did not miss Orange Park. The hungry came to Carrie Clarke's door for plates of food and found both a meal and also kindness there. The sounds of the Wedding March song played on the piano in the Clarke's living room as the result of Carrie lending her home out often to young brides who couldn't afford a traditional wedding venue.

The town purchased the remaining 15 acres in 1991. The pecan trees are long gone and attempts to grow new ones have mainly failed, as visitors to the park are sometimes rough on the saplings. But visitors, nonetheless, are encouraged to step back in time to enjoy the park's modern facilities which now include a large new playground, sand volleyball court, nature trails, gardens, lake, pavilions, grills, restrooms, and numerous beautiful oak trees. Like Mrs. Carrie Clarke, the park named in her honor welcomes you with open arms.

According to the 1925 United States agricultural census for Florida, there were, at the end of 1924, 232,986 pecan trees of bearing age, and 436,811 trees not of bearing age in the state. To these figures should be added the number of pecan trees that have been set during the planting seasons of 1924-25 and 1925-26, which will amount to about 50,000. These trees represent a total acreage of 42,340 acres to pecans. Compare these figures with those for 1920 when there were 113,547 bearing and 208,613 young trees. It will be seen that the pecan industry is rapidly developing into one of considerable magnitude and is destined to play a very important part in the horticulture of North and West Florida.



Sunrise Dental expands 'Smiles for Miles 904'

By Nick Blank
nick@claytodayonline.com

ORANGE PARK – A local dentist office offering free care this weekend is hoping to see about 100 people at “Smiles For Miles 904.”

Dr. Michael Thomasino’s practice on Wells Road, Sunrise Dental, also hosted free treatments last year. He added that the event will have more dental professionals this year and quicker wait times at registration.

“We want to go bigger and better,” Thomasino said. “We started about three weeks before the last dental day and it was pulled off. There’s much more time to prepare this time.”

Thomasino sees the event as community service. He said he’s done charitable work overseas, but there’s always work to be done at home.

The event gives the practice a chance to educate, treat and socialize with patients. Thomasino said the event gets patients out of pain and on with life by offering exams, X-rays, extractions and other emergency dental treatments.

“With the current economy, everything is more expensive,” he said. “We know there’s plenty of people without dental insurance or a dentist in the area.”



Thomasino said he was pleased with having seven dentists, three hygienists, 10 dental assistants, 10 support staff and multiple students work the event this year, providing about \$60,000 in care and more than 200 hours combined. He said the event is also a great teamwork exercise since it brings over staff from Sunrise’s



Dr. Michael Thomasino’s Sunrise Dental will offer free care to as many as 100 patients on Saturday at his office on Wells Road. The care is estimated to save about \$60,000 to local residents.

two Jacksonville-affiliated offices.

“I think it’s streamlined pretty well, even though last year was pretty fast. The gratitude is just awesome, the camaraderie and the bonds,” Thomasino added. “It’s a chance for all three offices’ staff to work together at the same time.”

The event is also sponsored by the Florida Baptist Convention, which will provide a dental van. Florida Baptist Convention Community Ministries’ Marc Johnston said the organization was happy with the partnership and assisting the community.

“Florida Baptist Convention and dentists from across Florida have been part-

nering since 1973 to provide dental care for the underserved community,” Johnston said. “We are excited to have the opportunity to partner again with Sunrise Emergency & Family Dental Care to provide services to those in need in Orange Park and Jacksonville.”

At Sunrise’s 1700 Wells Road office (suite 19), patients must attend a dental screening on March 10 between 7 a.m.-1 p.m. to secure an appointment time on March 12, which are from 8 a.m.-1 p.m. The first 100 patients will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis.




Badcock opens new store at Cove Plaza

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – W.S. Badcock Corporation’s newest Badcock Home Furniture & more location in Green Cove Springs recently celebrated its grand during a ribbon-cutting event. The new store that features 19,620 square feet of retail space carries Badcock’s complete line of furniture, appliances, bedding, electronics, home office furnishings and accessories. The location was opened by local dealer, Andy Johnston. Andy currently owns a Badcock store in Jacksonville West, making Green Cove Springs his third store in the Jacksonville area.



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County officials review options to end recycling suspension

By Nick Blank
nick@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The Board of County Commissioners had a lengthy discussion impacting the resumption of recycling pickup at Tuesday night's board meeting.

Waste Management Public Sector Services Director Greg Huntington cited a lack of drivers as the primary issue since last spring and said the company offered \$10,000 signing bonuses and higher wages in early 2021. However, the county curbside recycling was suspended in



Jim Renninger

July. He said Waste Management has used third party contractors for yard debris.

"Yard debris was a thing that really suffered," he said.

Huntington added that Waste Management increased wages 15.5% last month. Last August, he said WM had 30 of the 40 drivers it needed for full service. The need has increased to 42 drivers due to two new garbage routes, but now the company has 27 drivers. "We actually fell back three from the 30 we had," Huntington said.

He proposed a few models where the county could pivot to a citizen recycling drop-off, moving to every other week recycling and yard debris, or different methods using an automated side load trucks to serve about 70% of customers every other week with several conditions.

"(It is) much more efficient than using

rear loaders," Huntington said of the automated side load system. "You can actually cover more ground with an ASL, so thus the amount of routes you need decreases."

Commissioner Jim Renninger said it was clear ASL is the way of the future. The switch could provide more drivers the county can't have in the present. Commissioner Mike Cella said the lack of drivers impacted each option. Cella wondered about the cost of switching to ASL trucks.

"Is it realistic that we're going to move forward with one of these (options) that soon, when you're still having those hurdles in terms of hiring?" Cella asked.

The ASL trucks require a decreased physical demand of the job, which could attract more female drivers, Commissioner Kristen Burke said. Huntington said women are underrepresented as drivers.

"Driving the ASL truck and staying in a cab and operating a joystick is much easier than driving a rear load truck ...," Huntington said.

Burke added that a major issue in recruiting drivers is a lack of affordable housing.

"People can't live here because there isn't a place to live," she said.

Interim Environmental Services Manager Milton Towns said county staff were waiting on a solid waste management plan to be finished by consultants and it may affect purchasing trash carts or the automated collection. He expected the plan back in April and commissioners asked to review the matter by no later than June 30.

"We want to know what that says before we take a step of \$3 million (for carts)," he said.

Elementary students invited to participate in Florida Space Art Contest

TALLAHASSEE – Florida Lt. Gov. Jeanette Nuñez announced the launch of the 2022 Florida Space Art Contest.

With March being Youth Art Month, students are encouraged to create an art piece inspired by the theme "Florida is the Place for Space: Celebrating Florida's Contributions to Space Travel and Exploration." Students in grades K-5 are invited to participate in the art contest. Student contest rules and guidelines can be found online at www.FloridaSpaceArt.com.

"As Chair of Space Florida's Board of Directors, I am proud to launch Florida's Space Art competition for K-5 students," said Lieutenant Governor Jeanette Nuñez.



Jeanette Nunez

"This is an exciting opportunity for students to showcase their creativity and artistic talent while highlighting Florida's iconic space coast, space travel, and exploration. I look forward to seeing all the submissions that, no doubt, will be out of this world." Space Florida, as a key sponsor of the Lieutenant Governor's Space Art Contest, believes supporting STEAM education initiatives is an integral part of its mission. "Space has long inspired the human imagination and we are excited to support the next generation of Florida artists develop their talents as they experience space as no others have before them," said Space Florida CEO Frank DiBello. "We are excited to support the Lieutenant Governor through this art contest."

Nuñez's Space Art Contest is open to all K-5 grade students in Florida. Each student will submit original, two-dimensional artwork based on this year's theme. Submissions will be broken down into two categories: K-2 and 3-5. Five original art pieces will be selected from each category, with a grand prize winner selected from each group.

Clay Soil and Water Conservation District unveils speech, poster contest

For Clay Today

CLAY COUNTY – The deadline to compete in the Clay Soil and Water Conservation District's Speech and Poster contests is April 14. Sponsored by the UF/IFAS Extension Center, the contests are open to Clay County public, private and home-schooled students between grades 6-12.

This year's theme is "Healthy Soil, Healthy Life." A written copy of the speech must be submitted by email to claysweidaide@gmail.com or in person at the extension office at 2463 State Road 16 W. in Green Cove Springs. Speeches are to be presented in double-spaced, 8.5-by-11-inch white paper with one-inch margins. Use a standard font with no greater than 12-point type. Speeches also should include a cover page with the contestant's name, speech title, parent or guardian's name, grade level and school name, along with a signed release found at <https://district.afcd.us/claysoilandwater>.

district.afcd.us/claysoilandwater.

All speeches must be original and must be at least five minutes long, but no greater than seven minutes.

The competition will be divided into two grade groups – sixth-through-eight grades and ninth-through-12th grades. Each group winner will receive \$200.

The poster competition will be divided into five groups – kindergarten-through-first grade; second and third grade; fourth-through-sixth grade; seventh-through-ninth grade; and, 10th-through-12th grade. Winners from the two youngest groups will earn \$75 each, while the three winners from the older grade groups will get \$150 each.

Entries are to be two-dimensional and be delivered flat. Each poster is to be completed by a single student, not a team.

Each entry should have an entry form attached to the back. The form can be found at <https://district.afcd.us/claysoilandwater>.



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'New name, same family'

ORANGE PARK – HCA Florida Orange Park Hospital, formerly Orange Park Medical Center, took a few moments last week to celebrate its name change with confetti and brief comments before staff and doctors returned to their duties. The name change, according to CEO Lisa Valentine, won't mean the hospital will change the way it provides care. "Certainly, we are Orange Park Hospital, but we're the same family providing the same care." Dr. Deevide Miller, a member of the Board of Trustees, said, "New name, same family. Farewell Orange Park Medical Center and welcome to HCA Florida Orange Park Hospital." HCA is the largest hospital organization in Florida.



Keystone Heights City Manager to reconsider resignation

Majority of council wants Rutkowski to stay following contemptuous February meeting

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – City manager Lynn Rutkowski told the city council she will wait until next month's meeting to announce whether she will resign in wake of an ongoing dispute with Mayor Karen Lake.

Rutkowski said Lake often sends text messages hours after the city offices are closed, and some many appeared to be demeaning and abusive. Lake wanted Rutkowski's resignation after she learned the city manager didn't graduate from high school or complete a certification. At least three of five council members, however, said they believe her decade-long experience was more important than a diploma.

Rutkowski verbally tendered her resignation three times in disgust, but the majority of the council refused to accept it.

Last Monday's meeting was much

more subdued. Lake still pushed for Rutkowski to be removed from office, but councilmen Stephen Hart and Tony Brown and councilwoman Marion Kelly rallied around Rutkowski. Councilman Bobby Brown sided with Lake. The Mayor apologized for the rancor at the February meeting.

"I'd like to tell our residents how sorry I am that I allowed last month's meeting to evolve into personal issues and drama. As your elected representatives, we all come to the table to make our city a better place. I wish as Mayor



Karen Lake



Lynn Rutkowski



Tony Brown

that I kept us better focused on issues that really matter to the citizens. Regardless of our disagreements, the policy differences, we all love the city of Keystone and want to do everything we can to keep it a great place to live."

Hart and Tony Brown asked Rutkowski to wait until the April monthly meeting to

decide whether she will stay on the job.

"Last month was terrible," Tony Brown said. "The problem that I have, and a lot of people have is the texting. As a councilman, I would like to see her not leave us."

Rutkowski accepted the offer to reconsider.

"I'll take my 30 days to reconsider," Rutkowski said. "That's all I have to say."

In other business, the council voted 4-1 to allow alcohol consumption at the Keystone Beach Pavilion.

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New owners shucking their own niche at Ronnie's Wings



New Ronnie's Wings, Oysters and More owner Mallorie Dippy said she wants to return the lost art of serving to the iconic Green Cove Springs eatery,

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – There are very few moments when Mallorie Dippy can take a break. There are orders to be delivered to tables; drinks to be poured; schedules to be made; critical business decisions to be made.

There is no time for fatigue, nor is there a time to be distracted.

"I feel plenty energized all the time," she said. "This is always what I wanted to do, so I've got lots of life to give to it."

Mallorie and her husband, Nathan, bought the iconic Ronnie's Wings, Oysters and More adjacent to Spring Park two months ago. The previous owner, Ronnie Munsey, opened the doors at 232 Walnut St. 33 years ago.

Former bartender-turned-owner, Mallorie has embraced some of the restaurant's cozy charm, the couple wasted little time in making it their own place.

"I worked for Ronnie for eight months, give or take, before I bought it," Mallorie said. "I was sharing my dream. There was no sticker shock when I bought it. I may have done things quicker than anticipated by everyone, but I definitely let it be known I was going to put my touch on it. Just updating it. Upgrades and little facelift to the building."

Like many in the restaurant business, Mallorie said her greatest challenge is adding depth to her staff. She said she's surrounded by good servers, but she needs more. And while she's concerned about the quantity of help, she's not willing to build

a staff that doesn't meet her demand for quality.

"I want to bring back the lost art of serving," she said.

While some now believe success in the restaurant business to be fleeting, Mallorie was convinced her dedication and attention to detail would give her more than a fighting chance.

One of the noticeable changes will be the days the restaurant is opened. Until she gets the help she needs to give everyone much-needed time off, the doors will be closed on Mondays starting on March 21.

"There definitely are different challenges than what I expected," she said. "I did a lot of research, Restaurants for Dummies book about running a restaurant. Thankfully, I have a lot of experience, not necessarily in managing, but just how restaurants are run. I paid a lot of atten-

tion to management styles in the industry. I was a bartender. Obviously, this is a lot more magnanimous because it's your sole responsibility.

"Management just wasn't my gig. The money wasn't there. I was working 9 to 5 as a bartender and it was awesome. This is what I wanted to do all along."

The Dippys approached the Green Cove Springs City Council at its last meeting to ask for clarification on city ordinances that could allow them to open service to their parking lot during pleasant days and special events in the park.

"Definitely want to bring it out safely and accommodatingly as much as possible," she said. "We just want to have a good time and give people a safe place to do that and enjoy the beautiful weather we have and the gorgeous scenery we have around us."

Property appraiser: Residents can still file late property tax exemption requests

CLAY COUNTY – Clay County Property Appraiser, Tracy S. Drake, informed county residents the statutory deadline to timely apply for property tax exemptions for the 2022 tax year was March 1.

However, qualified applicants who failed to apply timely may still file an application with the Property Appraiser on or before the 25th day following the mailing of the Notice of Proposed Property Taxes, which typically occurs in mid-August.

However, applicants must demonstrate extenuating circumstances as to why the application was not filed in a timely manner, pursuant to s. 196.011, Florida Statutes. Applications, a Late-Filed Explanation form, and filing instructions are available at www.ccpao.com. Homestead exemption applicants must have legal or equitable title to the property as of Jan. 1.

Applicants must also provide at least two documents to establish proof of permanent residency (i.e., updated driver's license or identification card, voter registration card, vehicle registration, utility

bill, etc.); and the social security number of all applicants (including spouses) is required. Applicants who are not U.S. citizens must provide a copy of their permanent resident (green) card. Applicants without permanent residence status should contact our office for eligibility details. Mobile homeowners should also bring the title(s) or registration(s) to the mobile home. Applications may be filed at the main office in Green Cove Springs (located on the second floor of the Administration Building), at the branch office in Orange Park (located inside the Tax Collector's Office at 1518 Park Ave. or by email to exemptiononline@ccpao.com. Once the initial application has been filed, granted exemptions will display on the office's website and the Notice of Proposed Property Tax forms.

Timely filed applications will be processed by July 1. Florida law provides for a number of ad valorem property tax exemptions, classifications and assessment reductions that will reduce the taxable value of a property. The property owner must qualify as of Jan. 1 of the current assessment year.

For more information, visit www.ccpao.com, or contact our office at (904) 269-6305, ext. 1.

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If you make handmade items and are interested, please contact **Darlene** at dcsquared3@gmail.com.

We hear from other crafters, this show is one of the best and will be held on **October 1, 2022 at 11270 San Jose Blvd., Jacksonville, Fl. 32223.**





Picnic Project provides comfort, color and compassion

Artists brought a lot of color and imagination to the Clay County Fairgrounds ahead of this year's Agricultural Fair to paint 16 picnic tables that will be used during the fair. Picnic Project not only will put the skills of local artists on display but each will be sold during an auction to benefit 16 local charities. The first-year project was sponsored by Toccoi Engineering and Stay Suites Orange Park. The charities that will benefit from the project are: Clay Education Foundation; AMIkids Clay; All Creations Intertribal Native American Community; SAFE Animal Shelter; PAL; Quit Tobacco; BASCA; Helping Hounds Project; CJ Acres Farm; Operation Barnabas; Rita Championships; Mercy Support Services; Special Olympics of Florida; Hope Therapy; Project Chance; and, TSI Cares Foundation.

Community Briefs

Annual Carrie Clarke Day returns on March 13

ORANGE PARK – The Historical Society of Orange Park's annual Carrie Clarke Day event will be held on Sunday, March 13, from 1-5 p.m. at the Clarke House Park. This year's celebration will be the first in three years following lockdown challenges that came with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The historic Clarke House will be open for tours for the full four hours. The Clarke family were early residents of Orange Park and made significant contributions to community life. Mrs. Clarke, along with her husband, William, contributed to the social, political and business life of the community. Their contributions will be shared with all who visit.

The book, Images of America: Orange Park, will be on sale, along with Clarke House and Veterans Memorial ornaments.

We will also have a gardening activity for the younger set. The Art Guild of Orange Park will help children decorate small flowerpots into which they will plant flowers provided by the Hummingbird Circle of the Garden Club of Orange Park, something that surely would have made Mrs. Clarke's heart sing.

The Clarke Park playground will be open and a good time can be had by all. Volunteers are needed to host the house tours and make visitors feel welcome. Please contact info@ophistory.org for more information or to sign up to assist.

Garden Club of Orange Park offers horticulture program

ORANGE PARK – The Garden Club of Orange Park is holding its annual educational horticulture program on Friday, March 18 from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at Advent Luther-

an Church, 2156 Loch Rane Blvd.

The program, entitled "Color Your Landscape," will feature four guest speakers sharing their knowledge about Turfgrass, Coleus Breeding, Bromeliads and Sustainable Roses. In addition to the informational speakers, plants, gardening items, crafts and baked goods will be available for sale. Opportunity drawings and door prizes are also offered.

Pre-registration is required by March 14 with a check mailed to Myra Evans, 302 Wesley Road, Green Cove Springs, 32043.

'Capturing the Moment' fine art show at Thrasher-Horne

ORANGE PARK – The Thrasher-Horne

Center currently is hosting "Capturing the Moment," a Juried Fine Art Exhibition featuring the Art Guild of Orange Park.

This 75-piece exhibit will include the announcement of first-, second- and third-place winners, along with five honorable mentions. Winners will have the opportunity to speak about their artwork. Event includes a cash bar.

All gallery artwork is for sale and available to purchase through Thrasher-Horne Center ticket office unless marked otherwise. "Capturing the Moment" is currently open for viewing at Thrasher-Horne Center Art Gallery, Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. until April 3. The event is free to the public.

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Clay County receives Florida Animal Control Association award

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Clay County Animal Services, Fire Rescue, Emergency Management, Environmental Services, Clay Humane and the Clay County Sheriff's Office received the Outstanding Cooperative Team Achievement Award from the Florida Animal Control Association for the Old Jennings Animal Acquisition Incident.

The award is given annually to a FACA member organization that demonstrates the success of a team effort to accomplish a goal.

On Oct. 11, 2021, the Clay County Sheriff's Office and Clay County Animal Services executed a search warrant at a property located on Old Jennings Road. The search warrant resulted in the removal, impounding and subsequent rehoming of 266 animals including domesticated dogs and various breeds of livestock and fowl found living in deplorable conditions. The complicated process involved long-term coordination and planning between several Clay County agencies and organizations including Clay County Animal Services, sheriff's office, environmental services, emergency management, fire rescue, public works, Clay Humane and 127 volunteers. The dedicated professionals safely executed the search warrant, seized, and transported the animals, and conducted intake and assessment operations, all during the



from left, Clay County Sheriff's Office Det. William Martinez, county volunteer coordinator Morgan Grove; Clay County Fire Rescue Battalion Chief Charles LeRoy, community and social services manager Victoria Hapner; CCSO Undersheriff Ron Lendvay; CCSO Det. Gary Winterstein; County Manager Howard Wanamaker; Clay County Animal Services Field Operations Bite Coordinator Ernest Hagen; Assistant County Manager Troy Nagle; CCSO Dep. Jeff Deese; and Emergency Management Director John Ward accepted the statewide award following the massive animal rescue last October in Orange Park.

first 15-hour operational period.

In Clay County, the Board of County Commissioners, Department of Public Safety, including Fire Rescue and Emergency Management, Clay County Sheriff's Office, Clay County Animal Services, and Clay Humane have a strong working relationship. That established relationship and the understanding and use of the Incident Command System by the agencies involved are the reasons why this large-scale, county-operated animal seizure incident was so successful and

transitioned smoothly from the sheriff's office's lead, to the Division of Emergency Management and Clay County Animal Services.

"The animal seizure incident involved a tremendous amount of planning and coordination between agencies, which led to the safe and successful execution of all operational objectives. The award and recognition for the outstanding cooperative effort is truly deserved by everyone involved," county commission chairman Wayne Bolla said.



Paw

from page 6

facility.

"We have greatly expanded our ability to provide quality environmental education programs to the community and will be able to introduce unique, local environmental topics to visiting youth and small groups year-round," said Liza McGain, Camp Chowenwaw's Volunteer and Education Coordinator.

Groups can schedule environmental education classes for topics such as animal adaptations, macro-invertebrates, fungi introduction, insects, and wetland wonders. All programs are free.

To schedule or for a complete list of programs, email Camp.Chowenwaw@ClayCountyGov.com or call (904) 529-8058.

Mentor

from page 7

Millwork, electrical contractor American Electrical, plumbing and mechanical contractors Campbell Plumbing & Mechanical, MetroPower Plumbing and W.W. Gay, sprinkler contracting firm Cox Fire Protection, design-build contractor Haskell, general contractor Auld and White, framing and drywall firm JE Abercombie, and roofing firm Reliant Roofing. Apprenticeship programs represented included: Electrical Training Alliance, Northeast Florida Builders Association (NEFBA), First Coast Technical College, Tulsa Welding School, American Electrical Academy, and Plumbing, Pipefitters and HVAC Association UA Local 234. Other organizations and supporters included masonry organizations Florida Concrete Products Association, Florida Masonry Apprenticeship Education Foundation and Masonry Association of Florida, workforce development nonprofit iBuild, National Black Women in Construction (NABWIC), and FastSigns.

"Skilled tradespeople are the backbone of the construction industry, and many of our students simply aren't aware of the vast job opportunities, which pay well and offer long-term career growth," said Nicole Eubanks, Affiliate Director of ACE Mentor Program of Northeast Florida. "With rising construction activity in Florida and tight labor market conditions, it's vital that we take additional steps to recruit and train tomorrow's workers."

To learn more about joining ACE Mentoring Program of Northeast Florida, please visit www.acementor.org/northeast-fl.

Lawsuit

from page 1

because she knew her parents' Christian beliefs conflicted with her apparent confusion over gender identification.

The parents said the school failed to tell them of their daughter's issues, and they said the school counselor may have contributed to the confusion by also calling her boy names.

The district contends the parents' claims were improper and duplicative. It also asserted the parents didn't prove there were any violations of parental liberty interests and "we are venturing into the murky area of unenumerated constitutional rights."

The district also said there is no protected constitutional right for it to notify the parents when a child has a discussion with a counselor – a discussion instigated

by the student, not the counselor.

School officials said since they had after-the-fact knowledge of the suicide attempts, it did approach any level of potential culpability.

The original 54-page document filed on behalf of the parents was delivered to the District on Feb. 4.

Lawyers representing the girl's parents said their rights were violated because the school didn't alert them of their daughter's apparent mental issues. According to the suit, the girl said she went to the counselor because she felt she was being bullied.

When the suit was filed at the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida in Jacksonville, the district issued the following statement:

"Clay County District Schools has performed a thorough and complete investigation into this matter as it was presented to us and has determined that

the allegations made by this out-of-state organization are completely false, fabricated, and appear to be intended solely for the purpose of inciting the public.

"The beginning of litigation, in general, is based on one side of a story and not based on all of the facts, as we have not reached that point in the process. Furthermore, there is a lot of information that we cannot publicly disclose due to the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act and therefore, the full story is not portrayed in the media. All employees of the district consistently work to ensure that the best interests of all students are served."

The district said in its response it didn't infringe on the parents' ability to hold or express their beliefs regarding gender identity and/or act pursuant to those beliefs.

Clay Today withheld the names of the parents to protect the student's identity.

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Area leaders discuss challenges of dealing with opioid epidemic

By Nick Blank
nick@claytodayonline.com

ORANGE PARK – Community organizers put the fullcourt press on combating the opioid epidemic Tuesday night during the Overdose Awareness Seminar at Springs Church.

Things started with an expo showcasing the work of community organizations, treatment centers and emergency services.

The audience heard from four panelists: Lakeview Health Chief Medical Officer Lantie Jorandby, Clay County Fire Rescue Battalion Chief and Community Paramedicine Coordinator Glenn East, Clay County Superintendent David Broskie and Clay County Sheriff's Office Director of Investigations and Special Operations Wayne McKinney.

Jorandby set the scene of how the epidemic began. She said in late-1990s and mid-2000s, doctors were swayed by pharmaceutical companies to prescribe highly-addictive pain medications, which they did at high volumes. Millions were prescribed opiates and became addicted. The state and federal governments later saw the devastating effects and cracked down on the medications, pushing the "first wave" of opiate users to heroin.

"All of the sudden, all of the people who were addicted could no longer get their prescriptions. The states were tracking who was getting these medicines," Jorandby said. "A cheaper alternative that was easier to get was heroin."

In 2016 and 2017, synthetic drugs like the potent and deadly fentanyl became more accessible. Jorandby said fentanyl is easy to make and 50 times more powerful than heroin and 80-to-100 times more powerful than morphine.

"It's much more potent than anything we've seen in the last 20 years or so," she added.

East outlined the problem in Clay County. Citing CDC statistics, he said fatal overdoses increased by 42% in a year-long period from April 2020 to April 2021. He said the county ranked 22nd out of the state's 67 counties for overdoses of all



types and in 2021 Fire Rescue responded to 529 opioid-related overdoses.

He said 72% of overdoses occurred in a residential setting.

"Not out in the street, not out in parking lots," he said.

He shared an example of a personal experience of the epidemic and said a family member was addicted to heroin. Other than just overdoses, East told the audience to look out for withdrawal symptoms such as muscle aches, anxiety, inability to sleep or nausea.

"Looking back, there were signs we weren't aware of," East said.

Broskie said few students were impacted by physical addiction, but the epidemic has torn families apart. He said a close family member was affected by addiction.

"The impact on families is tremendous," Broskie said. "I deal with the families all of the time."

The Clay County School District has 40,000 students and 4,900 employees in a county of 220,000 people, meaning almost everyone knows someone who is a student or district employee, he said. With the scale of the problem, the district has traditional drug prevention programs as well as counselors, social workers, and it contracts some services to local organizations.

"Children shouldn't be impacted that way when they come to school, and as superintendent, I think it's our mission to

care about kids," Broskie said. "The impact on the school system is heavy when you look at the amount of resources that are spent on this issue."

From a law enforcement standpoint, McKinney said 2015 and 2016 were high points of opiate addiction and high levels of abuse. Laws in 2018 tightly curbed the flow of prescription drugs, he said, but the problem was far from over.

"What didn't get fixed was the demand. Based on the laws of supply and demand ... some entrepreneur will find a way to make the supply readily available and that's what we saw," McKinney said.

McKinney said drugs are coming over the borders and the mail, and fentanyl is easy to ship. On the street, fentanyl takes several forms, he said, and a trend has emerged where drug dealers will give opioid emergency medicine Narcan to customers.

He said law enforcement must partner with community organizations to counter the demand and law enforcement agencies know they cannot arrest the problem away.

"Like any disease, the quicker we can get help and treatment to these people that are suffering from an addiction, the easier it makes it for us to attack the traffickers," McKinney said.

A list of county resources related to opioid addiction is available at claycountygov.com/community/public-safety/services/od2a.



Faith Walk

by Pastor Billy Register
True Life Church
Clay County

Regrets from your Past?

No one is perfect. The only perfect human life ever lived was done so by Jesus Himself. We all have done things we weren't proud of; we all have regrets in some form or another, we all have sinned. In our fallen world, this is just part of the human condition. That's precisely why we need a Savior found in Jesus.

The Apostle Paul, not a stranger to bad behavior in his past, said this in a letter he wrote to the church in Philippi.

Philippians 3:12-13: "I don't mean to say that I have already achieved things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead" (NLT).

Paul was determined to look forward and forget the past. But how do we deal with the regrets from our past? It can be extremely challenging to shake them off and embrace the clean slate we've been given.

There are a couple of things that we must do. First, if the thing we have come to regret has hurt another person and we have not made amends, we must do so. In Matthew 5:23-24, Jesus speaks on the importance of this:

"So, if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God" (NLT).

Taking this step of obedience and making amends as Jesus teaches, will bring healing to both of your hearts, and liberate you of any regret you face as you confront it and let it go. Next, it's all about a change in perspective. Ask God to help you to put your trust completely in Him and His promise of eternal life through Jesus. You have true, complete, and total freedom in Him. Embrace that freedom and walk forward boldly in it. Use it to make your impact on those around you and God's everlasting Kingdom!

You can write the Pastor at pastorbilly@findtruelife.com.

Heritage Singers' concert results in donation to Kids First, Clay Behavioral

MIDDLEBURG – Charlie Eddins, left, from the Heritage Singers presents a donation check to Clay Behavioral Director Irene Toto, Kevin Davidson and Tina Swathwood after the group performed a benefit concert at the First Presbyterian Church in Green Cove Springs. The concert was generously sponsored by Sue Myers and Phyllis Vancas, and was presented in memory of Ernie Cohen. All proceeds from the Holiday Feast, Songs that Feed the Soul concert will benefit Clay County children, adults and families served by Kids First and Clay Behavioral.



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Police Briefs

Armed man arrested in jail parking lot while attempting 'citizen's arrest' of Sheriff Cook

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Two Clay County Sheriff's Office deputies wrestled an armed man to the ground in the parking lot of the county jail after he demanded to meet with Sheriff Michelle Cook on March 6. According to two arrest reports, Robert Thomas Abel, 55, of Green Cove Springs, was charged with corruption by threatening a public servant, carrying an illegal firearm and resisting arrest after deputies noticed he had a .40-caliber handgun holstered to his shoulder. He called the agency on March 4 and demanded to see Cook by 9 a.m. two days later or "there would be hell to pay."

Abel told deputies he worked for the President of the United States. He also demanded Cook to resign for "abandoning her post." Abel was wearing a green polo shirt, camouflage pants and tactical boots. Abel wasn't able to produce any law enforcement credentials and when deputies noticed the gun, they attempted to disarm him, according to CCSO. Abel said he was at the jail to make a citizen's arrest because he wanted to confront the sheriff about previous burglaries at his house.

Once Abel was detained, deputies found a ballistic plate carrier, loose .40-caliber ammunition, several military ready-to-eat kits, coffee and snacks.

Abel's bond was set at \$75,003.

Homeowner uses gun to detain burglar until sheriff deputies arrive

MIDDLEBURG – A homeowner held a burglary suspect at gunpoint until Clay County Sheriff's Office deputies could arrive after he caught the man taking things from his master bedroom.

Kenneth George Oliver, 28, was charged with grand theft, burglary and possessing a firearm by a convicted felon after deputies said he entered a home on Alligator Boulevard on March 1. He originally took a bottle of beer and drank it on the back porch before re-entering the house to rummage through the bedroom. He had taken loose change, jewelry, cigarettes, two cellphones, two knives and a handgun before the homeowner returned to the house and caught him. The homeowner had his own handgun and he held it on Oliver until deputies arrived.



Kenneth Oliver

Oliver's bond was set at \$150,009.

Orange Park man guilty of possessing more than 200 photos of child sex

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – A Clay County jury found an Orange Park man guilty on 20 counts of child pornography and one count of transmitting child pornography with an electronic device.

Rodney Thomas Ternovsky, 44, will be sentenced on April 6 after the jury determined Ternovsky controlled 20 thumb drives or discs, each with at least 10 obscene materials depicting a child sexual act. They also convicted him of sharing child porn online.

Ternovsky took the stand for 70 minutes in his own defense. The jury clearly wasn't swayed because it took it only 57 minutes to reach its verdict.

Each count is punishable up to five years in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

Orange Park man indicted for point laser at Coast Guard helicopter

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – U.S. Attorney Roger B. Handberg announced the return of an indictment charging Justin Marland Fisher, 41, of Orange Park, with knowingly aiming a laser at an aircraft. If convicted, Fisher faces a maximum penalty of five years in federal prison.

According to the indictment, on Sept. 1, 2021, Fisher knowingly aimed the beam of a laser pointer at a U.S. Coast Guard helicopter while it was conducting a training mission in Green Cove Springs.

An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed one or more violations of federal criminal law, and every defendant is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty.

According to the Federal Aviation Administration, dangerous laser strikes topped all previous records in 2021. The FAA received 9,723 reports from pilots last year, a 41% increase over 2020. Laser strikes on aircraft remain a serious threat to aviation safety. Intentionally aiming lasers at aircraft poses a safety threat to pilots and violates federal law. Many high-powered lasers can incapacitate pilots flying aircraft that may be carrying hundreds of passengers. Please visit <https://www.faa.gov/about/initiatives/lasers/laws> for additional information.

This case was investigated by the Coast Guard Investigative Service. It will be prosecuted by Asst. U.S. Attorney John Cannizzaro.

Woman charged with making 17 false 911 calls to county

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – A 29-year-old woman was arrested for calling the county's 911 system 17 times in less than four months claiming her family had been

harmed or killed.

Kady Leigh Freeman, of Keystone Heights, was arrested and charged with making false 911 calls after deputies were called to a store on Lawrence Boulevard after Freeman called 911 and told dispatchers her family had been killed by a man named "Shorty." She said she believed they were harmed because they didn't answer her phone calls, according to the Clay County Sheriff's Office.



Kady Freeman

CCSO: Grocery employee caught making fake transactions

MIDDLEBURG – A cashier at Winn-Dixie was arrested on March 1 after store security surveillance showed her making fraudulent overrides and refunds, as well as issuing discounts for fake coupons since Nov. 30, 2021.

Emily Brooke Gursky, 18, of Middleburg, was charged with 11 counts of fraud after the store provided transactions and video showing her making refunds or activating gift cards totaling \$293.33.



Emily Gursky



Man arrested for setting neighbor's home on fire

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – A man was arrested on March 4 after Clay County Sheriff's Office deputies and the State Fire Marshall's Office said he broke into a neighbor's home and set it on fire.

Charles Gene Waxler Jr., of Green Cove Springs, was charged with ar-



Charles Waxler

son and burglary after deputies said he admitted to entering a mobile home on Russell Road and lighting newspapers in a plastic bucket.

According to the arrest report, Waxler said the reason he started the fire was that he was upset.

Waxler also was arrested in 2019 for making a bomb threat against the Orange Park Mall.

Waxler's bond was set at \$300,009.

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, March 8

Jessica N. Gingras, 36, Middleburg, possession-marijuana, two counts possession-controlled substance, possession-methamphetamine, possession-drug paraphernalia
Tracy D. Viddler, 46, Keystone Heights, simple battery
Michelle F. Dunston, 39, Middleburg, eight counts shoplifting
Patrick L. Evans, 53, Green Cove Springs, VOP-battery
Keith M. Smith, 30, Green Cove Springs, two counts tampering with electronic monitoring device,
Ronald E. Poynor, 39, Green Cove Springs, VOP-contempt of court for violating injunction for protection against domestic violence
David K.S. Martinez, 32, Orange Park, dealing in stolen property, VOP-interference with custody of minor child/incompetent person, VOP-providing false information to law enforcement concerning missing person, VOP-lewd/lascivious behavior, aggravated assault on law enforcement, possession-crack cocaine, resisting arrest, DWLSR, attempting to flee/elude law enforcement, reckless driving
Syrian B. Cofield, 22, Fleming Island, FTA-possession-firearm/ammunition by delinquent adult, FTA-possession-marijuana, FTA-possession-drug paraphernalia, FTA-failure to register vehicle
Carmel Linto, 32, Orange Park, interference of custody of child/incompetent person, use of two-way communication device to facilitate felony
Joseph L. Champion, 40, Orange Park,

trespassing
Trayvon M. Brion, 27, Orange Park, simple battery
Daniel R. Bakaley, 31, Middleburg, battery of person 65 or older
Brookelyn A. Evans, 32, Green Cove Springs, out of state fugitive warrant
Christopher J. Joplin, 33, Middleburg, DUI

Monday, March 7

Mark S. Thompson, 48, Fleming Island, possession-crack cocaine, possession-drug paraphernalia
Joshua H. Hartley, 25, Orange Park, disorderly intoxication
Ora O. Moodie, 34, Orange Park, possession-fentanyl, possession-methamphetamine, possession-drug paraphernalia
Freddie C. Blount, 32, Green Cove Springs, simple domestic battery
Aaron S. Morris, 31, Orange Park, simple battery, criminal mischief
Kimberly F. Osborne, 47, Keystone Heights, possession-fentanyl, possession-fentanyl, possession-drug paraphernalia
Pamela L. Easter, 21, Keystone Heights, simple domestic battery
Arlene N. Smith, 23, Green Cove Springs, FTA-failure to register car
Melissa D. Hill, 49, Green Cove Springs, FTA-DWLSR
Christopher S. Horne, 29, Green Cove Springs, VOP-DUI
Eric L. Ford, 36, Orange Park, possession-marijuana, trespassing
Thomas B. Tyson, 48, Orange Park, delivering methamphetamine, delivering/selling-fentanyl, use of two-way communication device to facilitate felony
Kia S. Land, 30, Green Cove Springs, forgery, uttering forged instrument

Sunday, March 6

Christian M. Johnson, 31, Orange Park, robbery
Cayla D. Johnson, 22, Orange Park, robbery, aggravated assault with deadly

weapon, vandalism
Thomas A. Smith, 54, Orange Park, shoplifting
Joseph C. Sweet, 37, Middleburg, possession-drug paraphernalia
Robert T. Abel, 55, carrying illegal firearm/electronic device, corruption by threat of a public servant/family member, resist/obstruct/oppose law enforcement, resisting arrest
Holly S. Harrell, 50, Orange Park, DUI

Saturday, March 5

Eric J. Ramirez, 35, Fleming Island, shoplifting
Keith A. Padgett, 49, Middleburg, Possession-fentanyl, FTA-DWLSR
Abby D. Lamot, 23, Middleburg, DUI with BAL .15 or higher

Friday, March 4

Marissa S. Kirkland, 24, Middleburg, shoplifting
Charles G. Waxler, 27, Green Cove Springs, two counts arson, burglary
Charles Snyder, 60, Green Cove Springs, FTA-license tag not assigned to car, FTA-failure to register vehicle, FTA-driving without a valid license
Joshua N. Rees, 33, Middleburg, FTA
James P. Johnson, 24, Middleburg, DUI, refusal to submit to BAL test

Thursday, March 3

Anthony R. Madron, 36, Keystone Heights, FTA
Edgar E. Sammons, 28, Orange Park, FTA
Cade G. Zingarelli, 23, Middleburg, simple domestic battery, adult false imprisonment
Christopher T. Modlin, 56, 56, Green Cove Springs, possession-methamphetamine
Preston S. Pocock, 56, Middleburg, resist/obstruct/oppose law enforcement, DUI with property damage/personal injury, leaving scene of accident with property

damage, DWLSR
Larry T. Burke, 22, Orange Park, FTA-criminal mischief
Blake D. Allen, 19, Orange Park, simple domestic battery
Carolyn C. Kiser, 44, Green Cove Springs, introduction of contraband into county jail
David S. Jimenez, 53, Orange Park, dealing in stolen property, grand theft, criminal mischief
Jakira A. Lewis, 23, Green Cove Springs, FTA-DWLSR
Isail W. Tolbert, 44, Middleburg, possession-methamphetamine, possession-drug paraphernalia
Brandy M. Victor, 39, Orange Park, DUI
David D. Phillips, 44, Green Cove Springs, possession-methamphetamine, possession-drug paraphernalia
Christopher R. Coyle, 56, Fleming Island, FTA
Denise L. Schultz, 29, Orange Park, DWLSR

Wednesday, March 2

Carolyn C. Kiser, 44, Green Cove Springs, introduction of contraband into county jail
David S. Jimenez, 53, Orange Park, dealing in stolen property, grand theft, criminal mischief
Jakira A. Lewis, 23, Green Cove Springs, FTA-DWLSR
Isail W. Tolbert, 44, Middleburg, possession-methamphetamine, possession-drug paraphernalia, possession-marijuana
Brandy M. Victor, 39, Orange Park, DUI
David D. Phillips, 44, Green Cove Springs, possession-methamphetamine, possession-drug paraphernalia
Christopher R. Coyle, 56, Fleming Island, FTA
Denise L. Schultz, 29, Orange Park, DWLSR

County pauses voter registration until precinct lines are drawn



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However, your Voter Information Card is on hold until Redistricting is completed, which is anticipated by June 1, 2022. Once completed, your new Voter Information Card will be on its way!




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ClayElections.gov
Your source for verified election information.

For Clay Today

CLAY COUNTY – Clay County Elections Office is currently in the process of drawing new precinct lines due to legislative reapportionment, which occurs after each U.S. Census. Lawmakers are still finalizing the district boundaries from which Florida voters elect their representation.

Because of this your precinct or representation may change. The Elections Office has decided to pause Voter Information Cards that are sent to each voter whenever they register to vote or update their voter information. You will be registered, but you will not receive a Voter Information Card until Redistricting is completed. In its place, the Elections Office will be sending

a postcard with this information and a QR code that links to our website.

Supervisor of Elections, Chris H. Chambless, reminds residents that a Voter Information Card is informational only and not needed to vote. Once Redistricting is completed, anticipated by June 1, 2022, new Voter Information Cards will be mailed out.

If you don't receive a postcard, you may check your status online at ClayElections.gov under the "My Registration Status" icon. All voters are encouraged to regularly review their information for accuracy.

If you have questions, or need more information, visit ClayElections.gov or call the office at (904) 269-6350.

Answers annual banquet confirms the need, passion for crisis pregnancy resources

By Natalie Gilstrap
For Clay Today

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – Answers is an organization was founded by JoAnna Weldon, who noticed there was a need for crisis pregnancy resources in Keystone Heights.

“When you grow up in a small community, you realize that there are not a lot of those resources,” JoAnna said. “Initially, I started Answers to help women in an unplanned pregnancy situation.”

To celebrate and raise money and awareness for the group, Answers held its 12th Annual Banquet at the cafeteria at Camp Keystone on Feb. 24.

Clinical pregnancy testing and limited ultrasounds are just some of the no cost services Answers provides for the community. They also provide no cost prenatal vitamins, connections to other resources, and life skills in basic housekeeping and dealing with conflicts. In addition, they provide hope and advocacy to those who need it.

As Answers continued to help expected mothers, they realized a second office was needed to address the needs in other areas.

“We realized that the needs in Keystone Heights were very different than the needs

“When you grow up in a small community, you realize that there are not a lot of those resources. Initially, I started Answers to help women in an unplanned pregnancy situation.”

– JoAnna Weldon

in Starke,” she said.

They opened their second office in Starke, which is operated by the same staff.

When COVID-19 struck in 2020, Answers expanded their mission to helping everyone and not just women. They helped families and individuals who were struggling to get food, jobs, and other resources. In addition, JoAnna said that the Keystone Word of Mouth has really helped grow their clientele. Before COVID, Answers had 30 to 40 clients a month and now they have more than 200.

However, with the increase of clientele, Answers is currently understaffed and struggling to meet the needs of their cli-



Answers staff members, from left, Shannon Southam, Jenn Wright, Tori Durrance, JoAnna Weldon, Tiffiny Sanders and Hillary Loper split their time between offices in Keystone Heights and Starke.



A cake auction was held to raise money which will help pay the bills for both offices. In addition, it will provide the resources needed to help those in difficult situations.

entele. JoAnna said that the donations and support the community provides is vital to Answers because it keeps their organization going. She says that they will continue to flourish in the future.

“I could even see us increasing even more as we see more people move into this area,” she said.

In order to show their support, approximately 400 people attended the Answers’ banquet. There was a cake auction

to raise money which will help pay the bills for both offices. In addition, it will provide the resources needed to help those in difficult situations. JoAnna also shared with the audience her personal thoughts from her journal. She opened her world to the audience and shared how God has walked her through this journey. Afterwards the banquet ended with a time of worship.

If you would like to learn more or to donate, go to findanswersnow.org.

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Three champions

Three Clay County wrestlers came home with gold medals after this weekend's state championships; from left, Clay 220 Garrett Tyre in Class 1A, Clay 130 Madisyn Blackburn in Class 1A and Orange Park 235 Andrea Smith in Class 1A. Blackburn and Smith earned first-ever FHSAA gold in first year of girls wrestling in Florida.

Tyre, Blackburn, Smith win wrestle titles

FIHS, RHS blanked in 2A finals

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

KISSIMMEE - Clay High senior 220 pound wrestler Garrett Tyre kind of knew his best match at the Class 1A championships in Kissimmee might be a familiar face and the premonition proved correct with Tyre linking up with Raines High's Jamari Watson for a third battle of the titans that ended in just-as-thrilling a finish as previous battles with Tyre punching out a last-second scoring opportunity to win the Class 1A title.

"It has always been a learning experience to wrestle him (Watson) because he's such a great athlete," said Tyre, after pinning Watson with just three seconds left in the third period for the region 1-1A title a week ago. "This will be the state title match in a week."

In the girls state championships, a first-time event for the FHSAA, Clay High's Madisyn Blackburn and Orange Park

High's Andrea Smith both repeated as state champions with both winning non-sanctioned state titles last year. Smith remained unbeaten through her season while defeated previously unbeaten ..Blackburn had to respond to a surprising region finish with a stomach ailment to refocus her overwhelming attack to get her gold medal.

In Class 2A, with Fleming Island dominating their region 1-2A meet and Ridgeview, Middleburg and Orange Park advancing a handful of wrestlers, the medal county was high for the quartet despite no gold medals.

"Think of this, 11 guys to state, 10 medals and they all come back," said Fleming Island coach P.J. Cobbert. "We wrestled like we always do; no flinching, no show-boating, just hard and tough. Our guys had some close matches with guys who were four, five time state meet guys. I'm proud of them."

SEE WRESTLE, 31

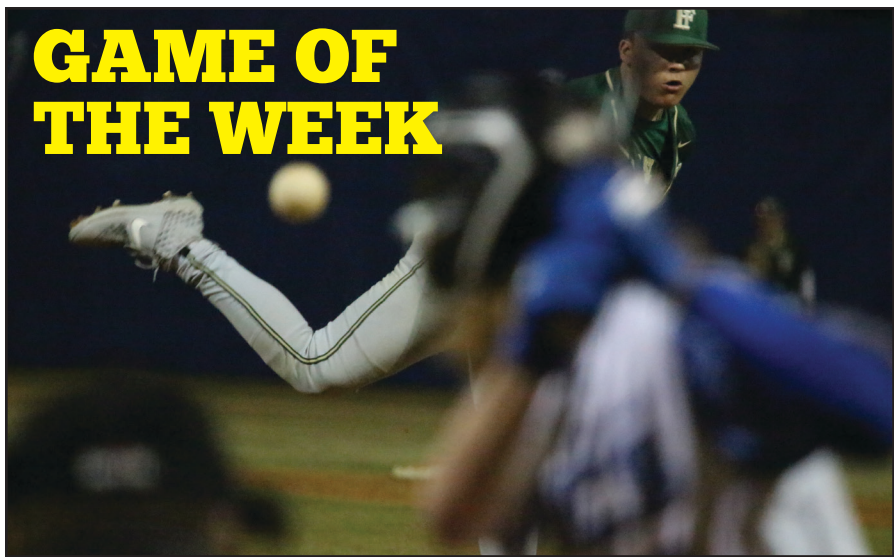
GATE RIVER RUN
USA 15K CHAMPIONSHIP
JACKSONVILLE • FLORIDA
2022

Gate River Run 15K-ers

Runners, top left, Holly Kaplan Sanford, Chiqui Deleon Hartman and Cinzia Rothrock of Fleming Island plus, right, Middleburg High girls soccer coach Kenneth Yancey are all smiles trekking the Hart Bridge in the final miles of the Gate River Run 15K on Saturday. See more, page 29.

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NEW ARRIVALS
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GAME OF THE WEEK

STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Fleming Island will look to Divine Valle on the mound with Isaac Williams as the duo looks to slow down the big bats of St. Johns Country Day School on Wednesday.

Spartans take on Golden Eagles

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

FLEMING ISLAND - Last year, the big baseball game between St. Johns Country Day School and Fleming Island high schools looked to be a pitchers' battle with 11 strikeouts in the first two innings between Brad Hodges for the Spartans and Cody Garwile for the Golden Eagles.

Now, with Carwile powering his way on the mound at Georgia Tech University (4Ks in 17-7 win over Presbyterian), Hodges is back to exact a bit of revenge from the 5-3 loss as the Spartans have sprinted to a one loss (5-1) record out of the gates with a close 8-7 loss to Georgia's top-ranked 8A team, Buford, last week. Buford featured the Gatorade Georgia Baseball Player of the Year 2021 on the mound.

Hodges has been on fire on the mound and at bat while the Golden Eagles have use their two Jacksonville University commits; Isaac Williams and Divine Valle, to answer for a severe loss on the mound off last year's 6A runner-up squad.

St. Johns, the 2A runnerup, returns the bulk of their finals team with the talents of Hodges, Finn Howell, Jor-



St. Johns Country Day School's Brad Hodges has been the big play guy for Spartans.

dan Taylor still bouncing in the dugout for coach Tom Lucas. Lucas has upped the ante schedule wise for his Spartans with a ton of high-caliber teams on the docket, including a recent road trip to Georgia.

Fleming Island, with coach Grant Bigilin kind of juggling his lineup to find the sweet spot, has senior Abram Summers as his go-to guy in the infield and in the batters box with Anders Chadwell stepping in with key hits for the Golden Eagles 2-3 record.

Doubleheader at the 'Burg

Baseball pounds Palatka; softball loses thriller

By Ray DiMonda
Correspondent

MIDDLEBURG - The Middleburg High and baseball softball teams both hosted the Palatka Panthers for side-by side double header action Thursday evening and fans were treated to exciting play on both fields.

Both teams lit up the scoreboard with rallies to get out ahead of the Panthers with each having a different outcome. The Lady Broncos bucked hard early and threw the Panthers for a good while. But the Lady Panthers regrouped on the Lady Broncos and countered with a five run rally of their own to pull ahead 5-4. The Lady Broncos came right back a day later with a 7-5 win over perennial powerhouse Baker County to push to a 4-1 overall record with wins over Trinity Christian, Leon and Providence. Note: Lady Broncos beat Gainesville 2-1 on Monday.

"I thought we started out really strong," said Lady Bronco Head Coach Ashley Houston. "Then I think we got into coast mode early and unfortunately that was a mental mistake on our side and we have to learn to finish better."

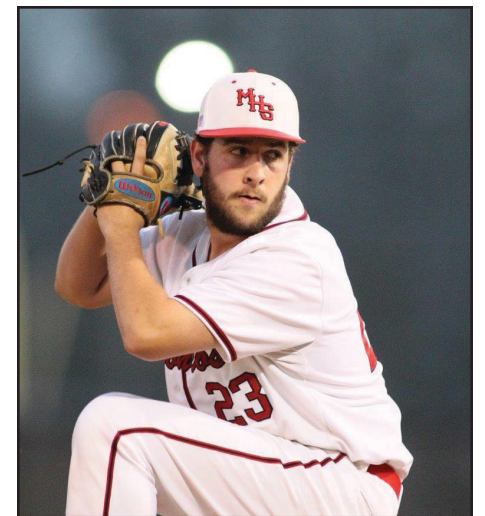
The Lady Broncos came back the next inning to tie 5-5, only to have the Panthers add another run in the fifth and sixth inning to finish out the Lady Broncos 7-5.

Next door on the baseball diamond, the boys team waited until the third inning to go on a Bronco Stampede, rolling out six runs to stun the Panthers and hold them scoreless through five innings when Palatka added a single run.

"That inning, that was huge," said Bronco Head Coach Daniel Pearce. "They really responded. I told them let's get eight runs, they gave me six."

Not holding back, the Broncos went on another rally for three more in the sixth inning to pile on nine runs as the Panthers mounted a desperate attempt to come back on the top of the seventh. The Panther's day would end after three runs would be all they could muster before having their hopes dashed to finish 9-4.

The Lady Broncos wasted no time as they had the bats awake early. In their first at-bat, Kaelyn Hagan singled with a line drive to center field, and then scored on a Maisey Campbell RBI single to notch the first score for the Broncos. Belle Mincey earned her base the hard way after getting hit by a pitch. Paige Amato singled and had a courtesy runner, Carly Johnson take the ride for her. Campbell was thrown out at third. Kerra Clarida singled on a center field worm burner RBI single, scoring Mincey and pushing Johnson to third, 2-0. On the play at home, Clarida made her way to second. After a Pitcher change, on the second pitch, Johnson took advantage of a passed ball to score, 3-0. Madison Wesley belted a grounder to center for another RBI as Clarida crossed to plate to put her team



CORRESPONDENT PHOTOS BY RAY DIMONDA

Bronco pitcher Cody Waters is part of 4-1 season .



Middleburg High pitcher Morgan Beckham teams with Mallory Forrester for dynamic pitching duo for Lady Broncos.

out front 4-0.


After a Panther five run rally in the third inning to go up 5-4, the home crowd was right back into the game as Kaelyn Hagan took advantage of an error to get onboard with an RBI single to score Alyssa Prather to even it back up, 5-5.

"We have to do better throughout the game, making adjustments," said Houston. "They bought in a second pitcher who threw a heck of a game and I never did make the adjustments and she threw us off balance."

The Lady Panthers would add one run in both the fifth and sixth innings as the Lady Broncos could only get a single runner onboard in the last three innings as the Lady Panthers closed the night 7-5.

The baseball boys needed a few innings to get the feel for the Panther's hauler before they went on a huge run started when William Edgington dropped one into right field for a double and was relived from running by Caleb Freytag.

Skylar Gray walked to put two on with one out. On the first pitch to Luke Padgett, Freytag steals to get onto third base. Padgett followed up with a single over second base that scored Freytag, and pushed Gray to third, 1-0. Padgett was advanced to second base on a defensive indifference



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Stratton, Oakleaf explode in early track action

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

JACKSONVILLE - St. Johns Country Day School senior cross country ace Matthew Stratton showed off a bit of track season readiness with two outstanding distance races while the Oakleaf High girls track team rocked Ponte Vedra with speed, endurance and high-flying talent.

Stratton, the Class 1A cross country champion last fall headed to the University of Florida next fall, opened up his season with a winning record-setting four minute 22.27 second 1600 meter run at the Bolles Bulldog Classic on Friday then followed up with an equally impressive 9:13.73 3200 meter race that featured a winning 9:03.94 split from Viera High senior Michael Toppi.

"I knew it would be a very competitive race with the people that were on the start line and I was hoping for a sub-4:20 time," said Stratton, who took a bit of time off after his cross country season to nurse a minor achilles ache. "I think the time off did some good, but now I'm ready to start focusing on shorter speed workouts."

The front end of the distance races at the Bolles meet featured a Who's Who of state ranked athletes with Creekside's Jesse Benavides in second in the mile and Fleming Island's Alex Bendig a quick 4:29.67 for fifth place.

In 2021, the Class 1A mile was won in 4:21.54 by Oak Hall's Austin Montini, the twice cross country state champion now at Yale University.

In the 3200, Toppi; second in Class 4A; Leon's Patrick Koon, Class 3A champion, and Bolles' Aidan Ryan, second in Class 2A, hammered away with Stratton in tow to four of the fastest times in the state in the very early stages of the 2022 season.

One of Stratton's top area competitors is Montini's brother Caden.

"He just ran a 4:16 and that will make the districts and regions interesting," said Stratton. Also in the 3200 field, St. Johns Country Day School sophomore Graham Myers finished eighth in 9:29.99 with Fleming Island sophomore John Keester IV 12th in 9:31.47. Montini also won the Class 1A 3200 in 9:39.11 with Stratton third in 9:42.56. On Saturday, at Ponte Vedra High's Craig Speziale Invitational, it was all Oakleaf High's girls team that showed depth and balance in whipsawing a team title against host Ponte Vedra, 134-125, with familiar faces returning to track prowess and a new face that could very well be the future of sprinting in Florida.

In the sprints, Oakleaf grabbed wins in the 200 from freshman Kaymin Sales with a dominating 25.92 over runnerup Kennedy DeVoux of Paxon's 26.74.

Sales, who has run under the King's Track Club directed by Oakleaf Junior High track guru Merlin Smith, ran 25.50 last week at the Danny Brown Invite at Bishop Snyder for third against that stellar field.

In her eighth grade season, Sales was



Oakleaf High's Sierra Barrera teamed up with track teammates Kaymin Sales, top right, and Taylor Silkert, bottom right, as Lady Knights track blasted the Craig Speziale Invite on Saturday.



Two track specialists have emerged with big results in the early part of the 2022 season with St. Johns Country Day School distance ace Matthew Stratton, left, running state-meet ready 1600 and 3200 at Bolles with Middleburg thrower Wyatt Underwood dominating shot put and discus.



the FLYRA Middle School State champion with a 25.81 personal record while finished eighth in the 400 at 59.27.

"She's the real deal," said Smith, who was ushering his newest Oakleaf Junior High squad at a tri-meet with Orange Park Junior and Lakeside Junior high schools at Ridgeview. "She'll get faster times when she has the senior girls on her shoulders. She's a great competitor."

During cross country season two seasons ago, the Oakleaf High cross country team featured the shadow duo of Taylor Silkert and Sierra Barrera as consistent top finishers. Barrera, though, ran her junior season solo with Silkert concentrating on her track aspirations, but proved formidable with a 20:18.7 region 1-4A 17th place finish in a region that featured the top teams at the Class 4A championships a week later. At Ponte Vedra, Silkert and Barrera showed off that they may be back in tandem as a solid point-getting combo for the Lady Knights with Silkert fourth in the 400 at 1:02.81 and Barrera winning the 800 at 2:25.27 against a field with seven runners under 2:30.

Barrera returned to take third in the 1600 in 5:27.70 again in a field of state-

ranked cross country finishers from November including a 1-2 finish from Lindy White and Ellie Moritz of Ponte Vedra's Class 3A champion cross country team, and a fourth place finish from Laci Watford of University Christian; ninth in Class 1A.

With Sales out of the 100 at Ponte Vedra, Clay High's Fiona Whitfield took third ahead of two Orange Park sprinters; hoops star Eris Lester, fourth and Falisha Celines in sixth with cross country runner Gabriella Barrios taking the win in the 3200.

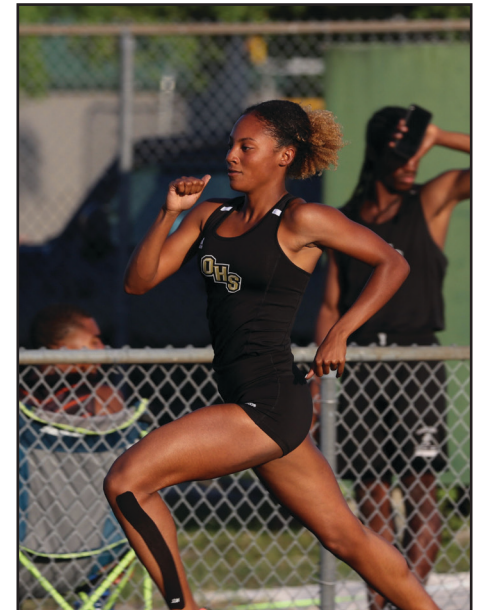
In the jumps, Oakleaf returned with Arianna Eason showing her early readiness with wins in the long jump (17'-5") and triple jump (39'-1") with freshman teammate Madison Linscomb; both Oakleaf High weightlifting teammates, second in both jumps.

The Lady Blue Devils did not keep pace with the 1-2 finish of Oakleaf and Ponte Vedra, but finished third team with 57 points just ahead of Paxon's 55.

Clay's prowess came from thrower Annalee Harbison who won the shot put (36'-3") and discus (122'-5") with teammate Ashanti Jones winning the javelin for key team points. Harbison is a member of the Clay girls weightlifting state championship



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO



team with teammate Kenya Tinajero getting fifth in the shot and third in the discus.

Fleming Island High's girls 4 x 800 returned to veterans to the track with Lauren Schaudel and Mei Chiang back on the track with Katie Thompson and Rees Scott getting second to West Port in the event by just .11 seconds; 10:13.34-10:13.55.

At Bolles, Middleburg High weight-thrasher Wyatt Underwood continued his dominance with a win in the discus (150'-11") and a sixth in the shotput (45'-1.75").

Middleburg also got a fifth place in pole vault (10'10") from Chris Gray.

Ridgeview High sophomore high jumper T'Vario Willis won in 6'-2.75" while Fleming Island sophomore Gabrielle Flores won the girls high jump at 5'-1".

In the boys races at Ponte Vedra, Orange Park's speed proved lethal with Nolan Chambers winning the 100 and Lawrence Thomas winning the 200 in a battle with Oakleaf's Amarrion Grant, 22.45-22.98. Thomas was fourth in the 100.

Orange Park won the 4 x 100 just .70 seconds ahead of Fleming Island with Fleming Island winning the 4 x 800 for the boys.

Next up is the Creekside High Invitational on Fri., March 11.

Lady Broncos hit the beach

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

JACKSONVILLE - Sun, sand and volleyball; what is the hard part of which sport to photograph on an 85 degree day in Florida?

Simple.

Drive to Bishop Kenny High School to watch Middleburg High's beach volleyball team take on Bishop Kenny and Creekside in the first official week of district matchups for the latest new sport in the FHSAA.

"It's an FHSAA sanctioned sport now after being at club level last year," said Middleburg High coach Carrie Prewitt. "We did okay last year against teams that had their own beach volleyball facility. We drive to Camp Blanding to practice now."

In the district lineup for the area; district 5-1A in region 2, Middleburg is linked up against Creekside, Oakleaf and Ponte Vedra.

"This is great for the fall volleyball conditioning and training," said Prewitt, who has a beach volleyball court at her home in Middleburg courtesy of her experience with TV's Extreme Makeover show that rebuilt Prewitt's house in 2016. "We use that court in the summer for training."

Thus far, the Lady Broncos have wins over Bishop Snyder (5-0) and Creekside (5-0) with a Wednesday match against Ponte Vedra and a Mon., March 8 match at Oakleaf where athletic director Marcus Miller has already built a beach volleyball facility.

"We had a lot of interest in the sport and I wanted to set up the team with a top-rate court and volleyball area," said Miller, who was at the Lady Knights matchup with Bishop Snyder. "We have some athletes from other sports competing including Tamira Briley, the two time state weightlifting champ."

In other districts; in district 3-1A, are Bishop Kenny, Bishop Snyder and Episcopal; in district 4-1A are Fletcher and Mandarin, and in district 6-1A are Matanzas, Atlantic High, New Smyrna Beach, Daytona Beach Seabreeze and Spruce Creek.

"We play a best two of three games to 21 points with breaks and court switches at each seven points break for the sun position," said Prewitt. "Out there today are Connor Rahn, Brooke Forkum and Taylor Mills from our fall team today with Allie Cox, Becca Staefe and Tamin Trott also on the team."

Prewitt noted that coaches are not allowed to coach during the match, but only at game breaks.



Middleburg High center hitter Conner Rahn continues her power hitting up top for Lady Broncos beach volleyball team.



From left, Rylee Custer dives for ball in action at Bishop Kenny; center, Breanna Crickmore gets bump against Creekside, and, right, Bronco coach Carrie Prewitt gives some advise in break at Bishop Kenny tri-meet with Creekside.

"We can talk at breaks, but we can't coach during competition," said Prewitt. "Keeps it quiet during the matches, I guess. This is a good sport to get the girls out of the gym and learning how to play on the sand which is tough on the endurance."

Oakleaf High two time weightlifting state champion Tamira Briley is lending her power to the Lady Knights beach volleyball team with this strong bump.




Above: Bronco defender Summer Repogle goes face down into sand but misses contact, while, below, Brooke Forkum, a leading hitter for fall volleyball squad, returns shot over the net in match against Bishop Kenny.



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO



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The Players Championship golf back in full flight

Thursday/Friday Tee Times

By PGA Tour

PONTE VEDRA BEACH - American golfer Justin Thomas found the right time for a near-perfect performance to put a rough start to the year behind him, rallying from three shots behind with bold play to close with a 4-under 68 and win THE PLAYERS Championship last year. Thomas returns for this week's edition of the annual golf festival amidst a bevy of past champions and a slew of the top ranked players worldwide.

In 2021, Thomas shot a 14-under for the tournament to narrowly hold off Lee Westwood (13-under), Brian Harman (12-under), Bryson DeChambeau (12-under) and Talor Gooch (11-under).

Thomas, 28, and a University of Alabama golf alum, opened with his first two rounds at 71 (1-under) before blistering a pair of 64 scores and a final 68, with an Eagle (2-under par) on the 11th hole, for the championship.

Thomas had a double bogie (2-over par) in each of his first two rounds to fall behind



on the leaderboard, but birdied five of his first nine in round three with an Eagle on 16.

The Players Championship holds a \$20 million purse with Thomas pocketing \$2.7 million for his win last year.

THE PLAYERS Championship announced today the field for the 2022 event, which returns to TPC Sawgrass the week of March 8-13.

The 144-player field features representation from 25 countries. Other notes on the field include: The top 30 players in the FedExCup standings First event of the 2021-22 season with the top 30 in the field

48 of the top 50 players in the Official World Golf Ranking

109 PGA TOUR winners combining for 423 TOUR titles

123 of the 125 players who qualified for the previous season's FedExCup Playoffs, the most of any tournament in the FedExCup era 8 PLAYERS Champions and 8 FedExCup Champions

The last man in the field is Taylor Moore (No. 64 in the FedExCup standings through The Honda Classic) and the first alternate is Patrick Rodgers (No. 66).

Harris English, Phil Mickelson, Steve Stricker, and Tiger Woods are the only qualified players to not commit to the championship.

Among the notable returners are Winner of Masters Tournament (five-year exemption)

Sergio Garcia (7:29 Thurs.Tee10/12:34 Fri.Tee1 with Adam Scott, Louis Oosthuizen)

Dustin Johnson (12:34 TH Tee 1/7:29 FR Tee 10 with Jordan Spieth, Daniel Berger)

Patrick Reed (7:18 TH Tee 10/12:23 FR Tee 1 with Tony Finau, Webb Simpson)

Winner of THE PLAYERS Championship (five-year exemption)

Si Woo Kim (1:29 Thur Tee 1/8:24 Fri Tee 10 with Matt Kuchar, Henrik Stenson)

Webb Simpson (7:18 TH Tee 10/12:23 FR Tee 1 with Tony Finau, Patrick Reed)

Justin Thomas (12:56 TH Tee 1/7:51 FI Tee 10 with Rory Mclroy, Collin Morikawa)

Winner of U.S. Open Championship (five-year exemption)

Bryson DeChambeau Brooks Koepka (12:56 TH Tee 1/7:51 FI Tee 10 with Scottie Scheffler, Xander Schauffele)

Gary Woodland Winner - PGA Championship (five-year exemption)

Jimmy Walker (8:02 TH Tee1/FR 1:07 Tee 10 with Sebastian Munoz, Dylan Frittelli)

Winner - The Open Championship (five-year exemption)

Shane Lowry (8:24 TH Tee 10/1:29 FR Tee 1 with Lucas Glover, Matthew Wolff)

Francesco Molinari (7:29 TH Tee 1/12:34 FR Tee 10 with Cameron Champ, Matt Jones)

Henrik Stenson (1:29 Thur Tee 1/8:24 Fri Tee 10 with Matt Kuchar, Si Woo Kim)

Lady Knights unload bats at Clay Blue Devils

By Ray DiMonda
Correspondent

GREEN COVE SPRINGS - In a battle of historic rivals in Clay County, Oakleaf High's newest addition of softball, led by new coach Heather Han plus a homer and base-clearing triple from senior Khloe Banks, introduced itself to the area via an 18-3 bombshelling of Clay High School at Clay High School.

"I consider that a good team win with two girls playing off the bench and Charlie Maddox, a freshman pitcher, throwing a ton of strikes," said Han, now 2-1. "We push to score run with our speed and force the other team to make mistakes."

The unfortunate recipient of the Oakleaf batting prowess, Clay pitcher Gabbi Ellis, saw what could be the reminiscence of Oakleaf High softball days of a power batting lineup.

"Those three in our lineup; Meshayla Pettaway, Khloe Banks and Ciara Gibson can hit and are fast around the bases," said Han. "That makes the defense move just a little bit faster than they might want to."

The followup to the front trio; junior Mariyah Sanchez, added five runs batted in with four hits; one a triple, on six trips to home plate. Banks finished with five runs batted in also as Oakleaf totaled 16 runs



Oakleaf High freshman pitcher Charlie Maddox controlled the mound with just four strikeouts with the Lady Knights defense, led by third baseman Jaidyn Collins who had two diving stabs of line drives and shortstop Mariyah Sanchez who executed a solo double play with a snag of a ground ball, step on second and rip to first to squelch a Clay batting opportunity.

batted in on the night.

"We come in with the mindset of attack the other team," said Han.



CORRESPONDENT PHOTOS BY RAY DIMONDA

Oakleaf High senior Khloe Banks gets high five from coach Heather Han after smacking right field homer in Knights 18-3 win over Clay High on Tuesday.



Oakleaf baserunner Mariyah Sanchez induced an errant catcher throw to third base for her speed on base that allowed Sanchez to score.

Oakleaf opened with a 4-1 loss to unbeaten 3A-Baldwin before beating University Christian 5-1 on March 3 with the Clay (4-3 now) win putting Oakleaf at 2-1.

"We host our own Tournament of Champions next week then go to Monteverde, then we go to the Kissimmee Klassic," said Han.



Jaguars host Flag Football Preseason Festival

Clay County was well represented At Friday's Jacksonville Jaguars Preseason Flag Football Jamboree at TIAA Bank Field with Orange Park, Middleburg, Clay, Keystone Heights, Oakleaf, Fleming Island and Ridgeview all sending teams to compete on the TIAA Bank field and also in the Daily's Place indoor facility. Area teams opened their season on Tues, March 8.



Friday, March 18, 2022
Eagle Landing Golf Club
Tee-off at 1pm

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PLATINUM SPONSOR	\$1,000	A promotional banner with your company name and logo significantly displayed. Company listed in all promotional materials and announcements. Featured in golf program and on Lions Facebook site. Four golfers passes included. Sponsor table and hole sign.
GOLD SPONSOR	\$500	A promotional banner with your company name and logo significantly displayed, listing in promotional materials, highlighted in program and on our Facebookpage. Two golfers passes and hole sign.
SILVER SPONSOR	\$250	Company name will be on a hole sign and the signs posted at the golf course. Company name in the program given to each golfer. Silver Sponsors also receive 1 golfer pass. Additionally the individual / company will be recognized in our sponsorship area of our home page.
HOLE SPONSOR	\$100	Company name will be on a hole sign posted on the golf course on the day of the tournament and in the program given to each participant.

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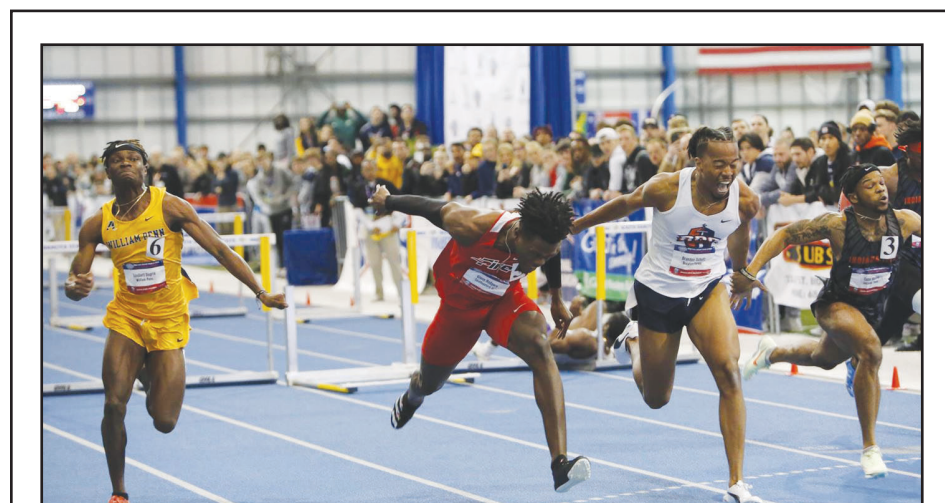


PHOTO COURTESY OF SEUATHLETICS

Southeastern University junior Glenn Rodgers, a Fleming Island High School state champion on hurdler, was the 2022 NAIA Indoor track runner-up in the championship men's 60-meter hurdles, shattering the school record for the second time in as many days at 7.81 seconds, which also tied the current national record that was broken by Brewton-Parker's Brandon Schultz, who set a new national mark by a hundredths of a second ahead of Rodgers.



Defending champion repeats 'Equalizer'

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

JACKSONVILLE - Gate River Run 15K defending champion Emily Sisson returned to Jacksonville from Arizona and dealt with the somewhat humid morning of the Gate River Run 15K American championship road race with one thing in mind.

"Coming from Arizona, where the heat is dry was a bit different today, but I kept thinking the other runners are in the same boat," said Sisson, 30. "I just went out hard and held on. The bridge was slightly

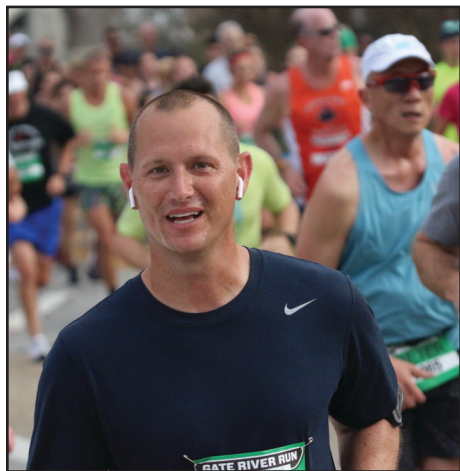


STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Gate River Run 15K womens champion Emily Sisson, No. 1, leads pack of runners through first mile on Main Street Bridge. Sisson was first across finish line to win "Equalizer" \$5,000 bonus.



Gate River Run 15K mens elite runners are a big bunch over first mile on the Main Street Bridge with California's Nico Montanez, third from left, emerging as eventual winner with three top runners all running under 4:20 for final mile.



Former Clay High football coach Joshua Hoekstra, now at Bolles, finished his 17 Gate River Run 15K run.



Fleming Island dad Dan Adams, left, escorts daughter Grace Adams and Fleming Island track teammate Marlea Feld up Hart Bridge. Adams and Feld finished second and third in 14-19 age group.



Former Fleming Island High soccer ace Janese Quick with dad Tim were together until Hart Bridge where Janese took family honors.



different than last year and that was a bit stressful at the end."

With the elite women turned loose six minutes in front of the elite men, "The Equalizer," Sisson had to race up front in order to claim an additional \$5,000 in prize money on top of the first place female prize of \$10,000.

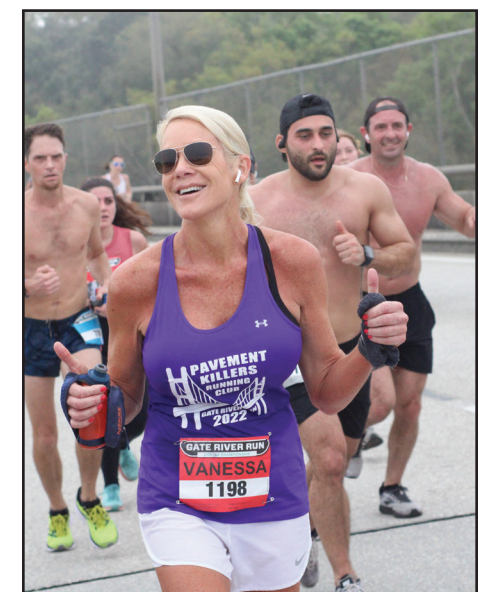
Behind her, two top male runners; Nico Montanez, of California, and Leonard Korir, of Colorado, were given chase up until Montanez turned on the gas to attack the Hart Bridge the final two miles of the race.

Sisson, winning with a 47:28 final clocking, had built up a 45 second lead on to the Hart Bridge and held on to win the Equalizer by just four seconds with Korir and Bor closing fast with sub-4:20 final miles; 4:14 for Korir, off the Hart Bridge. Sisson finished with a 4:52 last mile. Montanez won the mens title with a 43:09 split with Korir at 45:13 and Bor at 43:14.

With nearly 11,000 runners in total, top area finishers included Fleming Island High runners Grace Adams and Marlea Feld finishing with dad Dan Adams in 1:08:50 and 1:08:51 for second and third in the 14-19 age group. Orange Park's Rebecca Stratton, a St Johns Country Day School cross country runner, was 10th with another Fleming Island High athlete, Anna Rafalski, 12th.



April Martin, left, and Kristin Williams get photo-bombed on Hart Bridge.



Two of the infamous Pavement Killers running group out of Fleming Island; Jacqueline Kroggel, left (find her) and Vanessa St. Clair Lane made the finish line at the Gate River Run 15K.

PUZZLE FUN

	9	8	3	2				
						9		
	3	7						2
						5		
	4	3		6		2		9
7			1		8		4	3
4				1			3	
	6			4	5			1
			6					

Level: Intermediate

Ball

from page 24

into right field that scored Gray and got Padgett to third, 2-0. Next up was Clayton Hendry with an RBI single to left field to score Padgett, 3-0. Now with two outs, Logan Padgett singles to right field moving Hendry to third. Padgett steals second, and on the play to steal, Hendry scores, 4-0.

On the next pitch, Donovan Wimberly went yard to deep center field for a two run homer to get the Broncos out front 6-0. In the bottom of the sixth, Joseph Gallagher scored on a wild pitch, Skylar Gray scored on an RBI single by Jacob Baxley, and Luke Padgett closed out the scoring on an RBI single by Clayton Hendry, 9-1.

“Right now we just have to stay focused on one game at a time,” said Pearce. “We have to make sure we come out with the energy and focus. We didn’t come out with the focus today, but then they found it as they continued throughout the game. They continued to build that throughout the game. It’s a testament to them; never giving up, never quitting.”

The Panthers scored three in the last inning closing the gap but nowhere near what they needed as the game finished 9-4.

For the girls, leading the batting is Alyssa Prather with a batting average seven hits on 15 at bats and six runs batted in with one homer. Kerra Clarida, a freshman, has two homers with a .375 batting average. Belle Mincey has three doubles.

Pitching for Houston are senior Mallory Forrester with an astounding .28 earned runs against average with 59 strikeouts in 24 innings with sophomore Morgan Beckham adding 15 more strikeouts in eight innings.

For baseball, now 3-1, senior Clayton Hendry holds the hot bat with a .643BA with nine hits in 14 at bats with eight runs batted in and two dingers. The Broncos have big bat stats with Luke Padgett at .600BA, Zack Goodwin and Julian Martinez at .500BA with the Broncos losing a 3-1 opener to Nease before rampaging to wins of 16-4 over Orange Park, 4-0 over Keystone Heights and 9-4 over Palatka.

On the mound, Hendry has 24 strikeouts in 13 innings with Cody Waters tossing for 11Ks.

6	9	8	3	2	4	7	1	5
2	1	4	7	5	6	3	9	8
5	3	7	9	8	1	4	6	2
9	8	6	4	3	2	1	5	7
1	4	3	5	6	7	2	8	9
7	2	5	1	9	8	6	4	3
4	7	2	8	1	9	5	3	6
3	6	9	2	4	5	8	7	1
8	5	1	6	7	3	9	2	4

R	U	E	R		M	S	T		R	A	T			
O	X	B	O	W		A	K	A		R	A	B	I	
M	O	L	T	O		N	I	L		A	G	E	E	
	R	A	C	E	S	I	L	L		S	E	T	S	
					A	B	O	L	I	S	H	E	S	
T	R	A	N	S	L	U	C	E	N	T				
S	H	I	N	E	D		D	N	A					
K	O	R	E	A					T	A	B	E	S	
			F	A	A		E	B	O	N	I	E	S	
			U	N	D	E	S	I	R	A	B	L	E	
S	S	U	B	S	I	D	I	E	S					
M	A	G	I		M	U	T		E	A	G	A	N	
E	B	R	O		I	C	H			A	U	B	E	R
S	E	I	S		Z	E	E			R	A	B	B	I
A	R	C			E	R	R			R	E	E	D	

WORD SCRAMBLE

Rearrange the letters to spell something pertaining to spring.

W F S L R O E

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Answers: Flowers

Guess Who?

I am a comedienne born in New York on March 21, 1962. In high school, I was homecoming and prom queen. I had a successful comedy career before becoming a film actress and television talk show host.

Answer: Rosie O'Donnell

☉* ☿ ♋ ♌ ♍ ♎ ♏ ♐ ♑ ♒ ♓ ♔ ♕ ♖ ♗ ♘ ♙ ♚ ♛ ♜ ♝ ♞ ♟ ♠ ♡ ♢ ♣ ♤ ♥ ♦ ♧ ♨ ♩ ♪ ♫ ♬ ♭ ♭♭ ♮ ♯ ♺ ♻ ♼ ♽

CRYPTO FUN

Determine the code to reveal the answer!

Solve the code to discover words related to spring.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 26 = L)

A. 12 11 16 5 24 22

Clue: One of the seasons

B. 25 5 26 2

Clue: Not severe

C. 10 26 18 1 14 16

Clue: Part of a plant

D. 21 26 18 18 25 5 24 22

Clue: State of flowering

Answers: A. spring B. mild C. flower D. blooming

SPRING SEASON WORD SEARCH

L M A H B L I D O F F A D S F K I K K H
S S B T Z P O S K E I Y R K C K B B Y
S E T R R W B M I I T W S U H D D I L G
E A M I S E L D D U P K P N S A C S H D
M S P B Y M D F B K N W O H B Y G Y E C
Y O T E L O O L K L R R A U U G T U F Y
H N N N S O P O O N H T L U E P T U N C
G R M A A L O W T L C B S F S F I N D D
B R I K Y B B E R H S P E D C E U Y T N
R R O E A K S R Z D R T Y N Z B H A B A
T K K W E H Y S Y I U U T H H B A U E S
M G G Y O D K C N E C T T D A G T R G D
K I B W Z M R G H H Z H B Y R T T S E N
N S E H R I D T Z H B E F E E M P P R K
F R K O T C N G E Y T G E R S O A K H D
S N B B Y I W C Z D R N F R A U W R U O
F I P L C U N L Y A U L N N B G C F C H
N T O A A E K K I U Y U W O H W H O U H
G T Y M I M U N P A U C R A P B N C R C
K H W S D I B C P S C U F N Z G G W Z C

WORDS

- BIRTH
- BLOOM
- BREEZE
- BULBS
- BUNNY
- BUTTERFLY
- CHICK
- CROCUS
- DAFFODIL
- EGGS
- FLOWERS
- GREEN
- GROW
- HATCH
- HYACINTH
- LAMB
- MARCH
- NEST
- PUDDLES
- RAIN
- ROBIN
- SEASON
- SHOWERS
- SPRING

Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

Wrestle

from page 23

Fleming Island had two silver medalists; 113's Jayce Paridon, who finished at 58-1, and 182's Jhoel Robinson, 51-4, while Ridgeview's 220 Derrick Mosley, 42-4, lost in his 220 final to his region final foe. Orange Park has one wrestler, Trevion Sermons at 160, who finished 0-2, lost his first match 15-0 to eventual champion Brendon Abdon of Lake Gibson (53-2). Middleburg had four wrestlers; Jackson Hornback, Grady Woodard, Wyatt Leduc and Riley Girgis with Hornback and Girgis winning one match each. Clay wound up eighth in Class 1A with Jensen Beach top team at 178.0; Clay 77, with Fleming Island fourth in 2A behind Tampa Jesuit's 189.0 team points; Fleming Island at 113.0 behind Charlotte and Lake Gibson, both past 2A state champions. Ridgeview was 23rd with Mosley the only wrestler with Middleburg 55th and Orange Park 70th. In Class 3A, Oakleaf finished 24th behind South Dade winning yet another title with 171.5 points over rival Southwest Miami at 158.0.

"I chatted a couple of times with South Dade coach (Victor Balmededa) and I think he missed our rivalry being here," said Cobbert. "We are going to train some over the summer with the South Dade boys because they are the best; the gold standard, with 20 state titles."

For Tyre, 49-2 for the season, who missed his state meet ticket last year due to an unsportsmanlike ding at the Fleming Island vs. Clay dual match that brought a suspension that included the district tournament, he has kept focus on his goal at hand throughout the season to avoid the same fate.

"I learned from that experience that wrestling hard and little things that happen are not personal and I had to think of the bigger picture to avoid that this season," said Tyre. "The focus has been to wrestle hard and compete and not let things that happen get the better of me. My coaches have been super helpful in keeping my head on right this year and it paid off."

One key moment of the season, at the riveting region championship match, was an errant out of bounds throw that put Watson and Tyre on the floor off the mat and on top of the mat boundaries.

"He was shaken up and I was scared that I might get stuck with a penalty, but I think the officials saw that it was just tough wrestling," said Tyre. "Jamari came back on the mat and we wrestled hard to the finish and both looking forward to the state meet. I was more worried that they were going to call one of us for a concussion and that would have ended the match."

In Kissimmee, Tyre advanced with pins of 1:36 and 3:33 with a 9-1 major decision in his semifinal to get to the final while Watson, 18-3, pinned all the way to the final; :28, 2:16 and 1:18.

"I watched his first match (an 18 second pin) and was not expecting him to beat him so fast," said Tyre. "From there, I knew we were going to be in the final."

In the championship match, Tyre scored



Fleming Island 113 Jayce Paridon carried a 58-0 record into the finals before losing an 8-1 decision to earn a silver medal.

first, but both wrestlers were hit with one-point stall penalties before Watson got a two point takedown. Tyre responded with an escape to end the second period tied at 2-2.

"He was coming hard and I was stressing a bit," said Tyre. "I just kept thinking I worked too hard to not win this."

In the third, Watson struck first with a one point escape with Tyre getting a takedown in the final seconds for the win.

"I shot in on him at about 21 seconds, grabbed an ankle then we bounced around until about three seconds to go before I got the points," said Tyre. "It was amazing. He texted me later about it. He's a classy guy."

Fleming Island opened the championships with all but two of their 11 qualifiers winning to advance.

Round two, the quarterfinals, took its toll on the Golden Eagles hopes as just Paridon, Chris Chop and Robinson made the semifinals with Chop losing to Matanzas Tyler Mills a second time in two weeks to fall back into consolations. Chop would finish fifth; Mills wound up state runnerup.

"Chris being only a sophomore, I think, had a great tournament against a lot of tough people," said Cobbert. "He stayed focused on the medal after he got beat and proved he belonged there."

In the other consolations, 170 Joshua Sandoval took the most demanding route; three wins in four matches, to finish fourth. Sandoval lost his quarterfinal by pin to eventual champion Cory Cannan of Barrion Collier (59-1).

Freshmen twins Shane and Laird Du-haylungsod both medaled in their first state meet with Shane eighth at 106 and Laird sixth at 120. Kaden Schaefer finished seventh at 138, Matthew Kotler finished sixth at 145, Ronan Bozeman, who lost his opener then won three matches, finished sixth at 160, and Ethan Hoffstetter finished seventh at 285. Hoffstetter lost a 3-2 decision in quarterfinals to eventual champion Jeremiah Jackson of Kathleen (44-1).

"A bunch of freshman with state medals; a guy (Bozeman) who has wrestled for just two years and gets a state medal," said Cobbert. "I think we just have to add a little more to our arsenal and come back with more options to win. These guys we wrestled were top skilled guys who were experienced enough to adjust on the fly. That's our next phase. Maybe we learned a few solid moves, then rely a little too much. Wrestling at the top levels means taking some risks on the big moves. That's where we are going."

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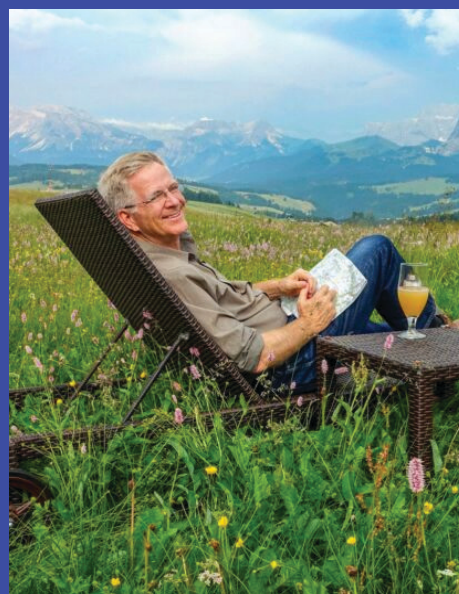
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