

CLAY TODAY

A CHRISTMAS STORY
Fun & Free
'A Christmas Story' will be shown during Christmas in the Courtyard Saturday from 7-9 p.m. at the Historic Triangle Courtyard at 915 Walnut St. in Green Cove Springs.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2022

WWW.CLAYTODAYONLINE.COM

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Brian Cree has been the owner of Cree's Trees in Middleburg since relocating from Ocean City, Maryland in 2013. Cree has been a connoisseur of the industry for 40 years since his childhood, learning a passion for Christmas tree farming from his late father.

Christmas tree business still growing in Clay

By Lee Wardlaw
lee@claytodayonline.com

CLAY COUNTY – When the calendar turns from November to December each year in Clay County, Florida, that means trading focus from Thanksgiving turkey to Christmas trees.

That oftentimes means purchasing a live tree for the entire household to enjoy.

SEE TREES, 13



RideOut's Rosie steals the spotlight from Dolly Parton during 'The Kelly Clarkson Show'

Story told of blind first-grader getting Braille books from Imagination Library

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

MIDDLEBURG – Rosie giggled every time one of her classmates said hello as she stood in front of RideOut Elementary after school last Friday. The outpouring of affection and attention has become part of her daily routine. Her gregarious attitude and infectious smile

SEE ROSIE, 17



Renegades on the run

STAFF PHOTO BY RANDY LEFKO

Oakleaf Renegades football coach Carlos Lowe address his 10-Under football team at halftime, up 13-0 against Lower Perks of Pennsylvania, in the Pop Warner Division two national tournament semifinal on Tuesday at Orlando's Camping World Stadium. The Renegades won 27-0 and will play Friday in the Pop Warner national championship game at 8:30 a.m. See more coverage in Clay Today sports pages.

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Letters for Santa allows children to enjoy magic of Christmas

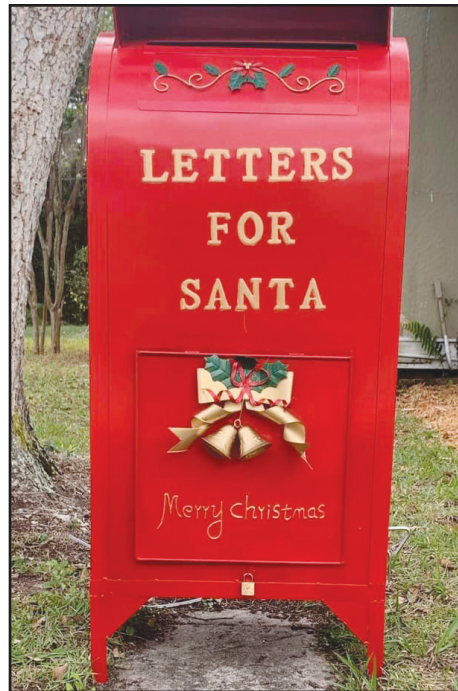
By **Kylie Cordell**
For *Clay Today*

CLAY COUNTY – A personalized letter from Santa Claus may be a child's most cherished gift. For generations, letters have been addressed to the North Pole from all over the globe. And each year, those letters are dropped off in mailboxes, where they are sent to the fabled North Pole. The tradition continues in Green Cove Springs, Melrose and Keystone Heights.

Until Dec. 20, families can place their letters in Santa's mailbox by the Spring Park Pool Pavilion or mail them directly to City Hall at City of Green Cove Springs Santa's Elf 321 Walnut St. Green Cove Springs, 32043. Children also can leave letters to Santa at special mailboxes at Gator Bait Sports Bar and Grill in Melrose and Center Cross Ministries at 350 S. Lawrence Blvd. and Johnny's Bar-B-Q and Catering at 7411 State Road 21, both in Keystone Heights. In Green Cove Springs, Letters to Santa was started by the city council to encourage children to write a letter and receive a handwritten response from the jolly man himself.

"The program started in 2020 at the start of the pandemic," said Executive Asst. Kimberly Thomas. "It was such a huge hit and sought after as the season came back around, we just decided to keep it."

If you place a letter in Santa's Mailbox,



you won't need to include a postage stamp. However, you must include a name and a return address if you wish to receive a letter from Santa.

"It's checked every morning by Santa's elf. We've gotten letters from all over Florida," said Thomas. "I've even got one from California. It's a pretty big program. We usually receive around 400 letters written to Santa each year, and we're well on our way this year.

"We currently only have one elf helping Santa. It's sometimes an all-day event, but it's a lot of fun, and he thoroughly enjoys reading all the letters."

If you place a letter in Santa's Mailbox, you won't need to include a postage stamp. However, you must include a name and a return address if you wish to receive a letter from Santa.

Santa has also received many original artworks, poems and coloring pages.

"We received several this week that was just full of glitter. You could tell the children spent a long time working on them. But, of course, Mrs. Claus was concerned about how long it would take to get Santa to get all that glitter off his clothes and his desk and everything else," Thomas said. "Sometimes you just have to work around the glitter."

Most children, of course, send a Christmas wishlist.

"Christmas is all about toys when you're a kid. It still is," Thomas said. "We get a lot of electronic and video games, Barbie dolls, Hot Wheels, LEGO kits."

Through the program, children also get the opportunity to ask Santa questions. So what seems to be the main concern for local children this Christmas?

"We get questions like, 'Are Santa

Claus' pajamas red? Does Mrs. Claus snore? Do you really like chocolate chip cookies more than oatmeal cookies? Can you convince mom to help me get a pet snake?" said Thomas. "We also get, 'We lost grandma this year,' and 'Will Santa come to visit me if I have two houses? I live with mommy and live with daddy,' or 'my daddy is in jail.

Can you make sure he has a happy Christmas?"

Letters to Santa is not only about desires and wants. It can be a time to reflect on the year, give thanks, and acknowledge the people who have made a difference in your life. "That," Thomas said, "is the true spirit of Christmas."

Letters to Santa offers a window into the mind of a child and a lens through which to understand their dreams, aspirations, and their worries. Although he does not parent any children in his letters, Santa is here to support their needs and wishes, regardless if they are on the naughty or nice list.

"We've been able to restore a lot of faith in Santa with a lot of the letters. We want them to believe in Christmas magic for as long as they can. That's what makes Christmas magical," Thomas said. "That's what makes it fun."

Curbside recycling resumes throughout Clay County

By **Don Coble**
don@claytodayonline.com

CLAY COUNTY – There was an extra rumble of garage trucks this week in Clay County, as Waste Management resumed curbside recycling pickups in the unincorporated areas of the county and Keystone Heights.

Sidelined for nearly 16 months by the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of workers, the company returned on Monday, Dec. 5, to keep paper, cardboard, glass, cans and plastic items out of landfills.

Recycling pickup dates will be the same day when yard waste is collected.

Since COVID-19, Waste Management has struggled with staffing shortages for more than a year. To offset the lack of licensed drivers with CDL licenses, the company offered better salaries, benefits and sign-on bonuses. While residents were able to take recyclables to any one of the county's five permanent drop-off sites. To offset the overwhelming demand – and to keep recyclable materials from ending up in trash heaps – the county also created seven



temporary sites. Those temporary sites will be removed Dec. 19.

Residents are reminded to separate paper products from glass, cans and plastic items. Bins can be requested online through the Clay Connected service request platform, which is located on the county's website homepage, <https://www.claycountygov.com/>, and on the Garbage and Recycling webpage at www.claycountygov.com/community/garbage-and-recycling.

Bins also can be requested by calling Environmental Services at (904) 284-6374. Residents in the City of Keystone Heights should call Waste Management at (904)

695-0500 to request bins. Although residents paid for recycling services through their property taxes, the Board of County Commission voted to provide rebates during the disruption. According to the county, paper products are generally limited to clean, dry paper products such as newspapers, books, junk mail, shredded paper and flattened corrugated cardboard cut into 2-foot-by-3-foot pieces. The other container bin should be for rinsed containers including plastic and glass bottles and jars, aluminum and steel cans, and cartons and juice boxes.

Recycling bins curbside by 6 a.m. on your collection day. Use the "Collection Day

Lookup" to find your recycling collection pick-up dates here: <https://www.claycountygov.com/community/garbage-and-recycling/residential-curbside-services-recycling>, or select "Curbside Collection" from the Environmental Services home page at "Garbage and Recycling" under the "Community tab."

Certain items should not be placed in recycling bins because they are considered hazardous or can damage sorting equipment. Prohibited items include medical sharps, plastic grocery bags, Styrofoam, chemical containers, broken glass, window glass, mirrors, aluminum foil and clothes hangers.

**Permanent sites will remain open
Thursday through Saturday from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at:**

- **Clay Hill Environmental Convenience Center, 5869 County Road 218, Middleburg.**
- **Doctor's Inlet Environmental Convenience Center, 288 Sleepy Hollow Road, Middleburg.**
- **Keystone Heights Environmental Convenience Center, 5505 County Road 214, Keystone Heights.**
- **Long Bay Environmental Convenience Center, 1589 Long Bay Road, Middleburg.**
- **Rosemary Hill Solid Waste Management Facility, 3545 Rosemary Hill Road, Green Cove Springs.**

**CLAY
TODAY**

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Final grades are coming out for kids throughout Clay County. So, in all fairness, we thought we should share ours as well. For more information or to find a doctor, please call 844.70.NURSE.

Learn more at HCAFloridaHealthcare.com



Garrison, Payne selected to serve on House Appropriations Committee

By Renzo Downey
For FloridaPolitics

Florida House Speaker Paul Renner has released committee assignments for the 2023 Regular Session, including the selection of Sam Garrison (R-Fleming Island) and Bobby Payne (R-Palatka) to the Appropriations Committee.

The announcement, released Tuesday evening, comes the week before lawmakers return to Tallahassee to begin a Special Session on property insurance and interim meetings ahead of Session.

Renner, a Palm Coast Republican, will preside over House Republicans' first supermajority since the 2014-16 term.

"To the greatest extent possible, committee preferences were accommodated," Renner said in a memo to members.

The list includes assignments for nine main committees, 23 subcommittees, five joint committees and the Select Committee on Hurricane Resiliency and Recovery.

Renner is now waiting on Democratic Leader Fentrice Driskell to name Ranking Members for each committee.

Senate President Kathleen Passidomo, a Naples Republican, released Senate committee assignments on Monday.

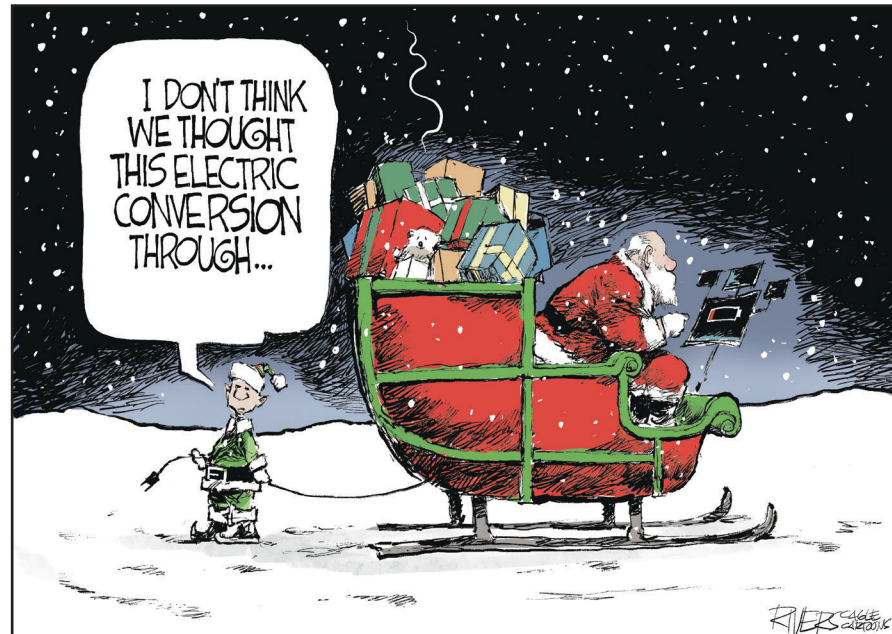
Lawmakers will converge on the capital city Monday for previously scheduled meetings and the Special Session, which includes property insurance, hurricane relief and a toll credit program. However, the bulk of the work will focus on property insurance.

Perhaps the most important committee in the House process is the Appropriations Committee, led by Chair and Ormond Beach Republican Rep. Tom Leek. Dover Republican Rep. Lawrence McClure will be Vice Chair and Islamorada Republican Rep. Jim Mooney will be Whip. The following lawmakers are also members: Republicans Garrison, Driskell, Thad Altman, Alex Andrade, Melony Bell, Chuck Brannan, Jason Shoaf, Demi Busatta Cabrera, Linda Chaney, Randy Fine, Majority Leader Michael Grant, Tommy Gregory, Joe Harding, Fred Hawkins, Ralph Massullo, Bobby Payne, Speaker-designate Daniel Perez, Bob Rommel, Michelle Salzman, Cyndi Stevenson and Josie Tomkow and Democrats Christine Hunschofsky, Christopher Benjamin, Dotie Joseph, David Silvers, Kelly, Patricia Williams and Mike Gottlieb.

Insurance legislation will likely head through the Commerce Committee, which is led by Rommel, of Naples. He will be joined by Vice Chair and Shalimar Republican Rep. Patt Maney and Whip and Sweetwater Republican Rep. David Borrero, plus

SEE COMMITTEE, 5

OPINION



Everyone will be unfairly impacted if new fees aren't passed

By Don Coble
Managing Editor

LAKE ASBURY – Coppergate Elementary is located on Henley Road, about 150 yards from County Road 220. A block past CR 220 on Henley is RideOut Elementary. And around the corner from the end of Henley is Shadowlawn Elementary.

Those three elementary schools are separated by just 6.7 miles.

Land has been cleared midway on Henley for a new housing development. And at the end of Henley, several thousand homes are planned along County Road 218 near Shadowlawn.

In that same stretch, there's only one junior high, and the two closest high schools are Middleburg and Clay.

When those houses are completed, we're going to need more elementary schools. And as those children get older, the demands will be shifted to needing more junior and senior highs.

How are we going to pay for all of that growth? Impact fees.

The idea of tacking a fee onto the price of new construction has been used by hundreds of municipalities. If we need new schools, roads, jails, parks, libraries, more law enforcement and firefighters and infrastructure, the people creating the additional demand should absorb a big part of the cost.

The Board of County Commissioners



Don Coble

will vote on an impact fee at its Dec. 13 meeting as part of its long-range Comprehensive Plan through 2045. During a recent workshop, the developers said their math came up with fees that were less than what was suggested by Willdan Financial Services.

In all fairness, once a county is developed, the builders move onto new territories, make their money without a lot of headwinds and then get out. Whether you've just moved here from another state or you've been here your entire life, we're all stuck with the final bill.

That's why the impact fee must be approved.

Willdan's study compared the growth and the impact it leaves on a community with other counties. It came up with a simple plan that each new house 1,500 square feet and smaller would be assessed a one-time fee of \$3,666. Houses between 1,501-2,499 square feet will pay \$4,877 and a single-family home larger than 2,500 square feet will be assessed \$6,103.

Fees range from \$367 for a new office to \$6,103.

Make no mistake: we need development. We need new commerce. But it must be done responsibly. Growth is a good thing. Out-of-control growth is not. It's bad enough our children may soon be crammed into elementary schools because we couldn't match the fervor to live here, but it's worse if they have to spend the rest of their lives paying for our neglect.

According to Willdan, the development impact fee schedule "summarizes

SEE GROWTH, 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.

Anneal: (uh-NEEL) a verb that means to heat and allow to cool slowly to make it easier to work with.

"The silversmith taught students how to anneal the silver to make it less brittle."

This Week in History

Five years ago, 2017

- Karen Lake is appointed Keystone Heights Mayor by the other members of the city council.
- The Board of County Commissioners consider amending its ordinances to allow for exotic animals to be housed at rescue facilities.
- Residents are assured by the Florida Department of Transportation that a \$13.7 million plan to improve the traffic flow at Wells Road and Park Avenue are on target.

10 years ago, 2012

- Middleburg's Alexis Toto is flown to New York by Dreams Come True to see a Jets game and meet quarterback Tim Tebow.
- Anthony Michael Margadonna pleaded guilty to killing 13-year-old Brien Andrew Alvezios in a traffic accident.
- Adrian Andrews is sworn to serve on the Penney Farms Town Council.

20 years ago, 2002

- Arkansas-based Tyson Foods announces it will close its hatchery on Fleming Island in the next couple of months.
- Orange Park High hosts the JROTC Winter Field Meet.
- St. Johns Country Day School volleyball coach Traci Livingston finishes third in the Class A Coach of the Year balloting by the Florida Dairy Farmers.

30 years ago, 1992

- A historical marker is dedicated near Spring Park to chronicle the development and growth of Green Cove Springs.
- The BCC votes to acquire the Kingsley Service Company for \$22.2 million.
- The first-degree murder trial for An-

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.

Growth

from page 4

the maximum justified development impact fee schedule that would meet the county's identified needs and does not unfairly overburden new development."

The addition of the First Coast Expressway will only exasperate the need for additional services.

As many as 20,000 new homes and apartments are expected to be built between Governors Park and the Sandridge Road area.

Willdan told the BCC the county will need an additional \$227.1 million to fund necessary projects in the future. The greatest need is \$62.2 million for new fire and rescue facilities.

According to Fire Rescue Chief Loren Mock, the number of calls has risen by 40% from 2015 to 2022. The county has 12 current stations and an agreement with Orange Park which increases coverage to 13 stations.

Of the county's 12 stations, nine were originally built as volunteer stations with two bays and none can be expanded.

"I can't have the new homes go in and not have the services for it," Mock said "I don't know how to protect it. We're going to exceed the capability without major changes."

The same goes for police, water, sewage, roads, parks and, especially, our children's schools.



Penney Farms Retirement Center donates to Hurricane Nicole relief
MIDDLEBURG – Bill Mial (r) of the Penney Farms Retirement Center hands a check for \$18,750 that was collected during Sunday services to Salvation Army Cmdrs. Julie and Mike Chamberlain as part of that organization's relief for victims of Hurricane Nicole in Southwest Florida.



Committee

from page 4

the following members: Republicans Joseph, Leek, Webster Barnaby, Wyman Duggan, Mike Giallombardo, Chip LaMarca, Lauren Melo, Toby Overdorf, Joel Rudman, Tyler Sirois, Kevin Steele, Chase Tramont and Brad Yeager and Democrats Bruce Antone, Kristen Arrington, Christopher Benjamin, Kim Daniels and Allison Tant.

The Insurance and Banking Subcommittee of the Commerce Committee will be chaired by Duggan, with Miami Lakes Republican Rep. Tom Fabricio acting as

Vice Chair. The panel also includes the following members: Republicans Benjamin, Borrero, Rudman, Hunschoksky, Steele, Stevenson, Tramont, Adam Anderson, Griff Griffiths, Rachel Plakon and John Paul Temple and Democrats Gallop Franklin and Marie Woodson.

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.

History

from page 4

drew Clemmons starts. He was accused of killing Orange Park Winn-Dixie assistant store manager Kevin Baker.

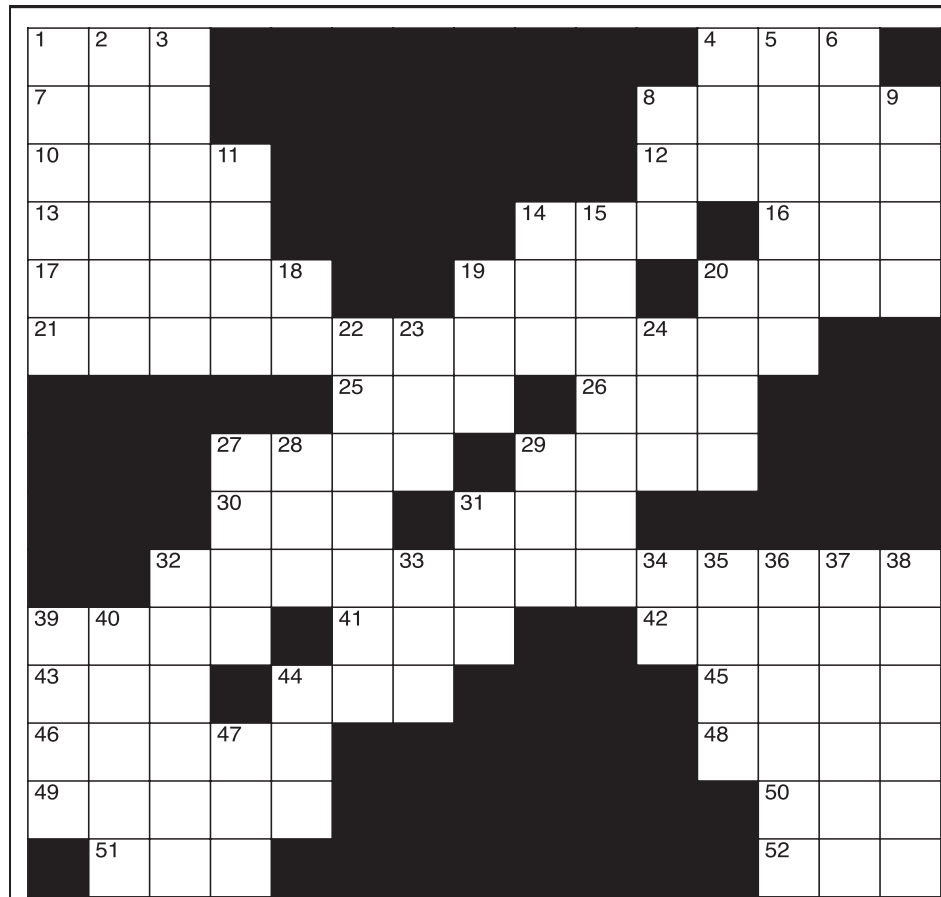
40 years ago, 1982

- Hickory Grove Baptist Church offers

a free Christmas Day dinner to residents near the Green Cove Springs area.

- The county agrees to provide Basic Life Support equipment to Keystone Heights.

- State Sen. Joe Carlucci was the guest speaker at the Green Cove Springs Business Council.



CLUES ACROSS

- Basics
- Swiss river
- Constrictor snake
- Building occupied by monks
- Discount
- Deal a blow to
- Relating to the ear
- Thyrotropin
- Loud, unpleasant noise
- Large intestines
- Move with a curving trajectory
- Witnesses
- You need both to live
- Dash
- Network
- Dig
- C. European river
- Supplement with difficulty
- Corporate executive
- Carroll O'Connor's onscreen wife
- No variation
- Airborne (abbr.)

CLUES DOWN

- Engulf
- Waterside hotel
- Printed cotton fabric
- Defensive nuclear weapon
- One who follows the rules
- Lace up once more
- Fire byproduct
- Hankering
- Outer
- One-time aerospace firm
- Seafood

- Commercial
- Epoxy hardener (abbr.)
- Samoan monetary unit
- Type of gland
- Arrest
- Check
- Past participle of be
- Alias
- A major division of geological time
- Kids programming channel (abbr.)
- Joked
- Helps little firms
- Roman numeral 50
- Impressive in size or scope
- Domineering leader
- A person who delivers a speech
- One after 89
- Young hawk
- The scene of any event or action
- A team's best pitcher
- Integrated data processing



The Cost of Christmas

When your Kringle is short on jingle

By Kylie Cordell
For Clay Today

CLAY COUNTY – Every child dreams of waking up to a roomful of Christmas presents. If you are a parent, you know the joy of seeing their little faces light up when Santa Claus visits.

Parents want Christmas to make their children happy regardless of their financial situation. This usually involves the hottest toys: a \$250 Barbie Dream House, a \$150 electric train set and a \$50 science kit. Unfortunately, the gift of Christmas can come with a burdensome price tag.

Nearly 217 million Americans (84%) plan to buy gifts for friends and loved ones this holiday season. On average, shoppers spend \$800, contributing to more than \$178 billion in gift spending.

Toys at the retail price can cost many parents more than a week's pay. Some have to make the impossible choices between buying their child a Christmas present or paying rent. For families, the cost of Christmas presents can make the holidays financially stressful.

But it doesn't have to be.



Here are free or low-cost gift ideas for the child in your life:

- **Buy secondhand.** Buying secondhand is a smart option for families on a budget. For families with young children, places like Moonbabies Children's Resale on 1805 E West Pkwy, Fleming Island, also caters to low-cost children's clothes and toys. For older children, Gone Broke Gaming on 686 Kingsley Ave in Orange Park and Games Galore on 66 Blanding Blvd buy and sell used video games, electronics and



consoles.

- **Shop for deals where Amazon returns are sold.** Every Thursday, The Value Bins Store at 1433 S. Orange Ave. in the Cove Plaza in Green Cove Springs stocks its 63 tables with items returned from Amazon to be sold for \$7 a pound on Friday. The price decreases daily until what's left is sold for \$1 a pound on Tuesdays.

- **Experience-based presents.** Explore what's to offer in your hometown. Many Christmas presents end up on a shelf collecting dust, so make your gift memorable by doing something fun as a family. The wonder of shared experiences can make magic that can last a lifetime. They never need new batteries, go out of style, get left out in the rain or become obsolete in a few months.

Go on a hike at Camp Chowenaw and explore the history of the Girl Scouts. Rent bikes along the Black Creek Trail. Go geocaching at St. Mary's Shoals in nearby Baker County.

Suppose your child is interested in military history. In that case, you can explore the Camp Blanding Museum or the Military Museum of North Florida in Green Cove Springs, which are homes to a colorful collection of US and foreign weapons, photo exhibits, and mannequins. The exhibits tell the story of Camp Blanding, the units that trained there, and the surrounding areas during WW2. The Military Museum at Reynolds Industrial Park explores the military history of Clay County.

Hit Clay County's many art studios, such as the Jason Wright Studios and Augusta Savage Arts and Community Center at 1107 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. in Green Cove Springs, or watch a show at the Thrasher-Horne Center on the St. Johns River State College campus at 283 College Dr. in Orange Park.

The Clay County Storywalk is another fun, family-friendly outdoor activity that

combines exercise and a love of reading. Families can enjoy Spring Park's beautiful river view while reading the pages of a children's book posted along the walking path. It's a fun activity that builds early literacy skills.

The Orange Park Mall Play Area and Bungee jump is another fun – and free – activity for children. Children can jump high in the air, and parents can take a break from shopping and relax while getting a bite to eat in the Food Court.

Non-Profit Organizations: Many local organizations and charities help distribute toys to needy families. J.P. Hall Children's Charities will be celebrating its 41st annual Christmas Party for the underprivileged children of Clay County on Dec. 17. The foundation has donated more than 30,000 toys to children in Clay County. At the party, children 14 and younger will receive at least three new toys. In addition to the festive Christmas bag, they can select a used bicycle.

Another great organization is Marine Corps' Toys for Tots. One of the best features of Toys for Tots is that it's really very easy to receive a toy from them if you qualify. All a family has to do is select the Request a Toy link on their site, fill out the toy request form, and the charity will send a toy if the family qualifies. In addition, the charity also has a lot of holiday-themed events that are designed to help out families that are struggling during the holiday season.

The Salvation Army also provides a variety of services to those in need. Among them is the Rescue Christmas program. Donations help provide shelter, food assistance and other services to those struggling to meet their financial needs. Whatever your financial situation is this Christmas, you can make the Holiday special for the loved ones in your life, because it's not about what or how much you give but the love with which you give.

I want you to have a day you'll never forget.

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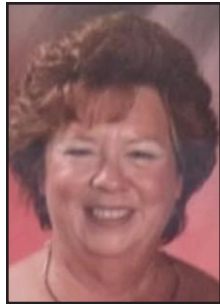
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Obituaries

Janis Kay Stuckey

Janis Kay Stuckey, 74, of Orange Park, went home to be with the Lord on Sunday, November 27, 2022 following a battle with cancer.

She enjoyed fishing, sewing, and spending time with her grand and great-grandchildren. She retired as a lieutenant from the Clay County Fire and Rescue after 19 years of service where she was known by many as "Mom."



Janis Kay Stuckey

She is survived by her fiancée, Michael Sible, her daughter, Kim East (Glenn), her sister, Debbie Corson, her grandkids, Matthew East, Justin East (Katherine) and Dylan East and her great-grandchildren, Mason and Emilynn. Her mother Jennie and father Albert were waiting for her at the gates of heaven.

Services will be on Saturday, December 10, 2022 at 10:00 a.m. at Russell Baptist Church. A graveside service will follow immediately at Russell Haven of Rest Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks for donations in Janis's memory to either Haven Hospice or to the Donna Deegan Foundation.

Memories and condolences may be expressed to the family at Janis's Book of Memories page at www.johnsonoverturffunerals.com.

Ricky Evans

Ricky Evans age 64 of Bomont, WVA, went to his heavenly home on November 24th in Middleburg, FL.

Ricky was a hard worker, a mentor to many in the field of concrete construction, and a provider for his family with a love for camping, motorcycles, mechanic work, and classic cars.



Ricky Evans

Mr. Evans was a devoted husband, father, and grandfather. He is survived by his wife of 43 years, Patricia Evans. Sons, Michael DeMoss, Bruce Evans, and Ricky Evans (wife, Crystal). Daughters, Shannon Evans and Tiffany Higginbotham (husband, Bryan). Grandchildren, Jasman, Victoria, Ricky Jr., Kaylie, Lilly, and soon to be Great Grandfather. Also, preceded by his mother and father, Lulia & Bruce Evans, brother, James Evans and sister, Lora Phillips.

A Celebration of Life service will be held 11:00 AM on Friday, December 16, 2022 at Russell Haven of Rest Funeral Home 2335 Sandridge Rd. Green Cove Spring, FL 32043.



A.J. Brake

A.J. Brake, 75, of Green Cove Springs, FL, passed away November 30, 2022

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



Grants available for small organizations in NE Florida

For Clay Today

CLAY COUNTY – Applications for 2023 Competitive Small Organization Grants are now available! The deadline to apply is Feb. 1 at 5 p.m. ET.

These grants are open to nonprofit organizations in Clay, Duval, St. Johns, Nassau, Putnam and Baker counties with annual operating budgets of \$200,000 or



Baptist Health opens Wound Care and Hyperbaric Medicine Center

FLEMING ISLAND – As part of an ongoing commitment to providing top-quality patient care, Baptist Clay has opened a Wound Care and Hyperbaric Medicine Center where healing is possible for even the most complex wounds.

The Wound Care and Hyperbaric Medicine Center at Baptist Clay provide comprehensive care to patients with chronic or acute wounds, foot ulcers, venous insufficiency, diabetic ulcers, wounds caused by radiation, trauma and more.

"It's our goal to provide the community with all of the medical care they need in one place," said Darin Roark, Baptist Clay hospital president. "Now, people with complicated wounds can get the care they need right here on our Fleming Island campus, so they can get back to doing the things they love."

A team of professionals that includes hyperbaric and wound care specialists, podiatrists (foot care specialists), vascular and general surgeons, plastic re-

constructive surgeons, and orthopedic surgeons work with patients to develop a personalized wound care program to restore them to optimum health as quickly as possible. The team has advanced training in wound care, including medications, dressings and state-of-the-art technologies such as hyperbaric oxygen therapy.

Hyperbaric medicine works by delivering high levels of oxygen to the patient's bloodstream in a pressurized environment. This increases the supply of oxygen delivered to the wounded tissue, stimulating new growth in blood vessels. Hyperbaric oxygen therapy has been shown to enhance the healing process.

The Wound Care and Hyperbaric Medicine Center at Baptist Clay offer patients hope and healing through unparalleled education, treatment and follow-up care. Call (904) 202-4325 to schedule a consultation. The center is located at Baptist Clay, 1747 Baptist Clay Dr., on Fleming Island.

less. Grant requests up to \$2,500 will be considered for funding.

As in the past, we will have a particular – but not exclusive – focus on community projects and to help organizations become stronger. Priority will be given to projects that:

- Build community (neighborhood improvement projects, community engagement to preserve neighborhood identity)
- Provide support for unmet basic needs (hunger, clothing, and other basic items)

- Strengthen your nonprofit (training, planning, coaching)
- Support under-resourced children/youth (mentoring, enrichment activities, after-school programs)
- Support diversity, equity and inclusion

For more information and to apply, go to: <https://www.jaxcf.org/receive/small-organization>.

For questions, please contact Reagan Bass, Program Associate, rbass@jaxcf.org.

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FUNERAL HOME**

Clay Connect app provides quicker responses, information to residents

By Lee Wardlaw
lee@claytodayonline.com

CLAY COUNTY – Clay Connect, a free, new mobile application and online service request platform where residents can request services and access information from a desktop or mobile device.

The free app and service request platform is now available for both Android and Apple users, and it can be accessed on the app store for users of both brands of cellular and tablet devices. The platform is also available via the county government's online home at ClayCounty.gov.

By using the new service, users can report a problem, request services and get more information on a myriad of county services, departments and opportunities from either their desktop, tablet or mobile

device.

County Communications Director Laura Christmas said, "Our goal behind this is to give our residents one more way to report issues and get information. We're proud to launch this app so they can do it right at their fingertips."

Clay County residents can now report several items of concern to the county government through the application.

This can range far and wide, whether that be a newly-discovered pothole, spotted stray animal, missed curbside collection, or other reported problem or requested service.

With the establishment of the new, user-friendly, high-tech service, locals can now get the answers to their burning questions with either the simple click of a but-



ton or with the strike of a few letters on the keypad.

The goal of the platform is to raise the bar for customer service in Clay County while giving residents an avenue to stay connected to their local government from their fingertips.

"You always hear see something, say something," Christmas said. "This app gives our residents an easy way to do that if they encounter an issue in one of our parks, on our roads, or anything else we

can help fix. All they have to do is take a quick photo, start a new request on the app, upload it, and we'll take it from there.:

Requests are monitored during regular business hours. The county said if a resident is undergoing or seeking to address an emergency, they could call 911.

Regardless, Clay County encourages residents to utilize the useful and streamlined service powered by GoGov, a software solutions company connecting citizens and governments.

Grant dollars available from the Women's Giving Alliance

For Clay Today

CLAY COUNTY – Women's Giving Alliance, an initiative of The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida, is offering significant grant money for nonprofits in our area that provide services to women and girls.

The grant process has begun for 2023 funding from the Women's Giving Alliance, a dynamic group of diverse women who pool their philanthropic giving to make a lasting impact on the lives of women and girls in Northeast Florida – Clay, Duval, Nassau, St. Johns, Putnam and Baker counties.

WGA recognizes that non-profit agencies and their clients in Northeast Florida continue to be disproportionately nega-

tively impacted by recent and persistent economic conditions. In response, WGA is offering one-time grants for agency workforce support or for client basic needs support. Learn more at jaxcf.formstack.com/forms/wga_2023clientbasicneeds.

Organizations may apply for only one of the two opportunities available: a one-year grant with an amount of as much as 50,000. Grant size cannot be more than 20% of the organization's overall budget.

To apply online, click on jaxcf.formstack.com/forms/wga_2023workforcesupport for the agency workforce support grant application.

For more information, contact Nikki Sabol, WGA Director, at nsabol@jaxcf.org or (904) 356-4483.

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From parades to parties to festive lights, there will be enough holiday cheer to put a smile on the grumpiest of all scrooges. If your organization has a function planned for Christmas, feel free to forward the information to don@claytodayonline.com.

• The annual **Parade of Trees and Santa's Mailbox** will be at Spring Park in Green Cove Springs. The mailbox will be available until Dec. 20, or children may send their letters to Santa's Elf, at 321 Walnut St., while 160 trees decorated by families, organizations and local businesses will be on display until 10 p.m. nightly until Dec. 31.

• **Letters to Santa** can be left at the mailbox at Keystone Heights City Hall at 555 S. Lawrence Blvd. or at Johnny's Bar-B-Q and Catering at 7411 State Road 21 in Keystone Heights.

• **Green Cove Springs Police Department** will be collecting new toys and candy for its Annual Toy and Candy Drive until Dec. 15. Items may be dropped off at the police department at 1001 Idlewild Ave. and at City Hall at 321 Walnut St.

• **Santa at the Silos** will be from 5-8 p.m. on Dec. 9 at 2221 County Road 220 in Middleburg. The event, which is presented by True Life Church, offers free photos with Santa Claus and the Grinch, carolers, hot cocoa, face painting, children's Christmas crafts and cookies.

• The free movie, **"A Christmas Story"** will be shown during Christmas in the Court-

HOLIDAY HAPPENINGS

yard will be on Dec. 10 from 7-9 p.m. at the Historic Triangle Courtyard at 915 Walnut St. in Green Cove Springs.

• **Santa's Workshop** will be on Dec. 10 from 10 a.m.-noon at the Lake Asbury Learning Center at 2781 Henley Road in Green Cove Springs. Children will be treated to a morning of arts, crafts and a visit from Santa Claus.

• **Village Oaks** will host the second annual Country Christmas from Dec. 9-11 from 5-9 p.m. at 5960 Sweet Moody Road in Green Cove Springs. Entry fees are \$5, while children 3 and younger are free. The event will feature local vendors, country cooking and drinks.

• **Sniktaw Farms' Christmas Light Spectacular** will be from Dec. 9-11 from 6-9 p.m. at 2579 Russell Road in Green Cove Springs. Costs are \$7 for adults, \$5 for children and children 3 and younger are free. The program includes bright lights, music, Christmas Village and letters to Santa.

• **Orange Park Hometown Holiday** will be celebrated on Dec. 9 and 10 from 5-9 p.m. at the Clarke House, 1039 Kingsley Ave. Clarke House Park will be bursting with holiday cheer, with tours of the decorated house,

classic holiday movies on the outdoor big screen, live music, shopping in the Christmas village, food vendors, a lighted trail ride and the opportunity to purchase a photo with Santa.

• **Pet Photos with Santa Paws** will be on Dec. 10 from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. at Pet Supermarket, 835 Blanding Blvd., in Orange Park. There also will be a Christmas basket raffle.

• The **Keystone Heights Holiday Extravaganza** will be on Dec. 10 from 10 a.m.-9 p.m. downtown at the Theme Park and Keystone Beach. Vendors and food trucks will open at 10 a.m., followed by live music from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. The Kiwanis Christmas Parade will start at 6 p.m. along Lawrence Boulevard, while Christmas cartoons and "Arthur Christmas" will be at Keystone Beach, starting at 7:30 p.m.

• **Pentatonix: A Christmas Special** will be at the VyStar Memorial Arena, on Dec. 14 at 7 p.m. For tickets, visit ticketmaster.com.

• Orange Park will host its **Firetruck Parade** with Santa on Dec. 16 from 6:30-8:30 p.m.

• **Concert on the Green's Cocoa and**

Carols will be on Dec. 16 from 5-8 p.m. at River Road and Kingsley Avenue. More than a dozen Clay County schools are scheduled to perform the sounds of the season. You can watch the Firetruck Parade from the event, and free gift wrapping will be available, along with additional entertainment and holiday vendors.

• **Trans-Siberian Orchestra will bring their "The Ghosts of Christmas Eve"** show to the VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena on Dec. 16 at 7:30 p.m. For tickets, visit ticketmaster.com.

• **Cirque Música: Holiday Wonderland** will be performed on Dec. 16 at the Florida Theater in Jacksonville, 128 Forsyth St. For tickets, visit www.CirqueMusica.com.

• The **American Legion Post 250 Children's Christmas Party** will be on Dec. 17 from 1-4 p.m. at 2608 Black Creek Dr. in Middleburg. Photos with Santa will be available, as well as gifts, pizza and drinks.

• The **Apopka Drive Night of Lights** will be on Dec. 17 at 5 p.m. The street is located off Farm Way behind the Silos Shoppes of Middleburg.

• The 40th annual **J.P. Hall Children's Charities Party** will be on Dec. 18 from 9 a.m.-noon at the Clay County Fairgrounds, Children 14 and younger will receive a bag of toys in the drive-thru event at the Cattleman's Arena. Children must be in the car to receive toys. There is no registration or sign-up for the event.



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Keystone Heights' first Shop Small was a big hit

By **Natalie Gilstrap**
For Clay Today

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – The City of Keystone Heights recently held its first Shop Small event. The nationwide observed event was founded in 2010 with the goal of encouraging people to holiday shop at small local businesses.

"It was a good turnout for the first one," said Jennifer Ford, Keystone Heights Champion for Shop Small.

Visitors were able to visit the local small businesses in the area such as the Rustic Gypsy, Urban Finds, Guns and Gifts and Santa Fe Electronics. In addition, the event had Santa Claus and Buddy the Elf for the children to meet.

"Buddy the Elf was a huge hit," Ford said. "We loved having Buddy. That was super cute."

Visitors also enjoyed a free pancake breakfast and had the opportunity to meet Sheriff Michelle Cook. The city also held its first Festival of Trees at the city's Natural Park in which individuals could rent a tree and decorate it. Also, residents were able

to participate in the lighting of a 21-foot Christmas tree.

The Festival of Trees proved to be popular, prompting the city plans to have more trees for next year.

Despite the gloomy weather, residents all were in a merry mood.

"Everybody was smiling and joyful. They had a great time. I feel like Shop Small kicked off the holiday season," Ford said. "It put a lot of smiles on a lot of faces and everybody was in good spirits."

The city is planning to host Shop Small next year and include its annual Holiday Extravaganza. In doing so, they hope to see an increase in vendors and visitors thus bringing an increase in foot traffic for the smaller businesses.

PHOTOS BY NATALIE GILSTRAP

The first Shop Small event in Keystone Heights was well-received as hundreds shopped for deals at local shops. Children also got their pictures taken with Santa Claus. Organizers said they plan to expand the program next year.



Clay Fair's Tasha Hyder graduates from IAFE Institute of Fair Management

For Clay Today

INDIANAPOLIS – Clay County Agriculture Fair Executive Director Tasha Hyder was recognized at the International Association of Fairs and Expositions annual convention as a graduate of the Institute of Fair Management.

Launched in 2007, the Institute consists of a series of courses covering the areas of core competency necessary for today's industry professional and volunteers involved in the production of their agricultural fair. Courses include management, risk management, marketing, programming, operations and year-round

facility usage.

Hyder enrolled in the program in 2020 and was one of 21 graduates honored at the IAFE Convention. Currently, there are more than 221 people enrolled in the Institute of Fair Management from across the U.S., Canada and Australia.

Hyder has been the Executive Director of the Clay County Fair since 2016 and has received numerous industry awards throughout her tenure. She serves on several committees for IAFE and Florida Associations. The Clay County Agricultural Fair also brought home 16 awards from their Marketing, Sponsorship, Agriculture,

Ag-Education, Early Florida Village and Creative Arts areas.

The International Association of Fairs and Expositions, based in Springfield, Missouri, is a voluntary, nonprofit corporation, serving state, provincial, regional, and county agricultural fairs, shows, exhibitions and expositions. Its associate members include state and provincial associations of fairs, non-agricultural expositions and festivals, associations, corporations and individuals engaged in providing products and services to its members, all of whom are interested in the improvement of fairs, shows, expositions and allied fields.



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Trees

from page 1

For residents, there are plenty of locations available to purchase your next tree, whether that be a local dealer like Songer's Christmas Trees, Cree's Tree's, or Severts Tree Farm, or large national retailers such as Ace Hardware, Lowe's or Home Depot.

With Christmas Day being right around the corner, Clay Today has taken a closer look into the ever-important holiday season industry in the county this year, delving into issues such as tree prices after supply chain costs and gasoline prices, availability and whether demand for the national holiday home staple has risen.

Brian Cree, owner of Cree's Trees behind the Marathon Gas Station at 3138 County Road 220 in Middleburg, has been in the Christmas tree farming industry for over 40 years.

As a boy, his father would give Brian and his brother 30-40 trees to sell from their front yard in New York, with Santa's favorite shrubs being freshly grown at his now-late old man's operation in New Hampshire, a 300-acre, 10,000-15,000 tree operation.

Cree has been selling trees in the county for nine years.

With trees for customers on the east coast typically being shipped in from North Carolina and other far-reaching northern states like New York, New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine, Cree said that the economic recession and rising fuel costs have resulted in increased supply chain costs to ship the trees, resulting in a 10% increase for the price to purchase a small tree (4-8 feet) and 20-30% for a large tree (9-13 feet) compared to last year.

"Everything has gone up with inflation.



The farming is getting more expensive, labor is becoming more expensive and harder to find, and then there's fuel," he said.

One major factor for the increasing rate of farming: is short-term farms clear-cutting trees measuring between 5-8 feet, selling those to dealers and never looking back.

"A few years ago, there was a big rush with the box stores buying out everything. They started clear-cutting those farms and they went out of business after that," Cree said. Cree said that clear-cutting took place in all major Christmas tree farming areas in the United States.

"(Buyers) would purchase those trees for one price, and then, those farms never replenished," he said.

Availability of Christmas trees has been continually dwindling across the market, according to Cree.

"(Availability) has become less and less. Three years ago, my farm wasn't able to get anything taller than eight feet," he said.

Thus, Cree pivoted, switching from one farm to another in Western North Carolina.

Nevertheless, sales have remained steady.

"Sales have been about where they've been in the past. I have my regular customers that come in every year that are going to put up a real tree," Cree said.

One reason for this could be the affordable rates offered at Cree's Trees, which range between \$50-200 for all sizes.

In light of rising costs, the small business owner will do whatever it takes to keep costs affordable for his loyal, local customers.

"I try to absorb some of the costs by hauling the trees myself and also working the lot solo for most of the season. This helps me keep my prices reasonable," he said.

Cree doesn't know where the industry could be heading, and he doesn't often speak with competing tree lot owners.

Despite all of the issues, Cree expects a similar return on his investment this holiday season. "(The supply chain and economy issues) haven't really affected me much this year, but I've only been open for a week. I'm not going to know until the end, but it's on track for where I usually finish," he said.

There are a few differences between private lots and large retailers and that starts with the prices, according to Brian Rau, merchandising manager at Lowe's Home Improvement's Orange Park location at 2285 Kingsley Ave.

"Our's range from the mid-\$50s for smaller trees to the \$120 range for a 9-10-foot tree. I heard that some private lots were charging \$200 for the same size. That's what I'm hearing from customers, at least," he said.

On the other hand, their availability of trees saw some earlier interruptions due to supply chain issues, but that's not the case anymore, according to Rau.

"I had a half-full tree tent, and now, I'm bursting at the seams. I don't have a single corral in my tree tent that's not bursting with trees at the seams. At this point, I'm ready for anybody to come down here," Rau said.

However, that didn't come without earlier struggles.

"I know they had to figure out the logistics for a lot of that. I think a lot of (the issues) were due to a COVID lag with trucking and the availability of drivers to get the trees down here. That has been a challenge, but we've rebounded off of that," he said.

"I didn't have (as many trees) as I probably would have had around November 17th or 18th as I did last year or the year prior. We did get the full shipment of trees, but it just took a little bit longer. They were pulling some of our shipments that we were supposed to get, but we moved all of those forward and were able to figure out how to get the trucks here," Rau said.

The vast majority of their trees are shipped in from Canada, Rau said.

Rau received his last shipment of trees on Nov. 25, and now, with a fully-stocked supply, business is back to usual for Lowe's.

Songer's Tree Farm, located at 5255 Carter Spencer Rd. in Middleburg, is not dealing with supply chain issues, as all trees are grown onsite. Prices range from \$31.95-\$111.95 from under 5 feet to a maximum of 12 feet, with each additional half foot costing customers an additional \$7.

Due to a limited crop in 2022, Songer's already has ended this year's sale. He said there's no guarantee that the farm will return to business during next year's holiday season.

Community Briefs

Thrasher-Horne: Memorabilia, gift certificates a perfect gift

ORANGE PARK –Signed posters, flyers and banners from recent acts at the Thrasher-Horne Center are on sale at the center's box office at 483 College Dr. in Orange Park. The money will go to the Thrasher-Horne Center Annual Fund to provide financial assistance for future programs. Included in the items are items from Craig Morgan, comedian Bill Engvall, Diamond Rio, Electric Light Orchestra Experience, LeAnn Rimes, Michael W. Smith, Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Pete the Cat, Ricky Nelson Remembered, The Marshall Tucker Band, The

Young Irelanders and Beautiful: The Carole King Musical.

Items range from \$5 to \$50, and they can only be picked up at the center.

For more information, call (904) 276-6815 or visit thcenter.org.

Clay Electric to reduce December power bills

CLAY COUNTY – Clay Electric members will be billed less for power in December thanks to a reduction in the Power Cost Adjustment on bills. Members using the industry household average of 1,000 kWh of power will now pay \$149.90. The previous

cost was \$159.50. The cooperative can lower the cost of power due to a slight decrease in the price of natural gas, which Seminole Electric Cooperative (Clay's wholesale power provider) uses to generate a sizable portion of the wholesale electricity it provides. The PCA is a separate line item on each Clay Electric statement, which reflects the increases/decreases in the co-op's cost of power. The cost of wholesale power is more than 70 percent of Clay's total expenses. When the cost of power is greater than the amount included in the base rate, the PCA is a charge. When the cost is less, it's a credit. As a not-for-profit cooperative, Clay Electric members receive power at cost.

Garden Club offers Scholarship

FLEMING ISLAND – The Garden Club of Fleming Island wishes to assist a graduating student of Fleming Island High who plans on pursuing a career in environmental studies, forestry, horticulture, agriculture, marine sciences or a related field a \$500 scholarship.

The graduating student must have at least a 3.0 GPA and have chosen a college to attend. Interested students should contact their guidance counselor for the application form. The deadline is April 15.

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Keystone Heights Airport celebrates 80 years while looking to bright future

By **Natalie Gilstrap**
For Clay Today

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – Keystone Heights Airport recently held its 80th anniversary with a day-long celebration.

Eighty years and to think at one point nobody wanted this airport. They couldn't give it away and the city stepped in and said 'Well, we'll take it even though it isn't in the city limits. We'll take it. We love it.' And so it's been in our care since then," Keystone Heights Mayor Karen Lake said.

The event started with the U.S. flag arriving with a skydiver from SkyDive Palatka. The Keystone Heights JROTC then presented the flag and Steven Quinn sang the National Anthem.

Maria Searcy, the Airport Manager, thanked everyone who contributed to the event's success. Afterward, visitors and families toured the airport enjoying the many attractions, such as a vintage car show, helicopters and vintage military aircraft. Visitors also were allowed to tour a P-3 airplanes, learn more about aviation



PHOTOS BY NATALIE GILSTRAP

Residents lined up to take a tour inside a P-3C airplanes used by Rockland to train foreign military pilots at the Keystone Heights' 80th anniversary celebration.



A member of SkyDive Palatka delivered the U.S. Flag to kick off opening ceremonies on Saturday, Dec. 3. More than 3,000 attended the day-long party that included Touch a Truck, vintage airplanes and free airplane rides for children.

through the information booths and look at historic military weaponry provided by the Camp Blanding Museum. Santa Claus made an appearance and children were offered free plane rides. Lastly, vendors, food trucks, and music were at the airport.

Overall the celebration was a success as more than 3,000 people attended.

"I think it's wonderful. It's great to recognize the veterans and carry on what they did, flying the planes, and keeping them restored. It's just great. I love it," visitor Wanda said.

Community leaders were delighted.

"It is a great turnout," said County Commissioner Betsy Condon. "Everybody

is so excited to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Keystone Heights Airport. It is vital to our community and has been for eighty years."

Officials with the airport thanked the volunteers and visitors.

"The event could not have been possible if it were not for all our sponsors, hard-working volunteers and employees," Searcy said.

The World War II airfield was built in 1942 as a support field for Camp Blanding, and it was home to the AAFSAT Strategic Reconnaissance School. It was an active airfield until 1945, and in 1947 it was deeded over to the city.

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Thibert trades snow, danger of tree-cutting for myriad of jobs

By Lee Wardlaw
lee@claytodayonline.com

FLEMING ISLAND – Clay County, meet Matthew C. Thibert, a local entrepreneur with quite a fascinating backstory.

Thibert, who formerly lived in Michigan and Texas, finally settled on Fleming Island eight months ago.

Just five months after making the over 1,000-mile leap, Thibert made a major realization that he desperately wanted to leave his former industry: tree cutting.

Thus, the young entrepreneur elected to shift to the small business model about 20 weeks after relocating to the state.

During his time as a tree-cutter, Thibert learned life high above the ground can be highly dangerous at times.

"The first year that I started, more tree workers died than marines serving in the military. You just have to make sure that you're not in the way," he said, recalling the not only gruesome but also shocking statistical figure. Thibert certainly wants to save his neck, but he's got more than just himself on the line. Matthew has a family to feed, but for the hardworking man, it's about more than just the money. It's about his safety. That's because he has five children and a wife that he would prefer to return home to after he's finished with his 9-5 duties. The businessman desired to stay safe during the process of earning a paycheck, but during the process of creating a business, Thibert launched a unique service combining his wide array of skills that also has a memorable brand: The Helpful Jack, LLC.

Thibert launched his business just four months ago in August. A one-man wrecking crew, Thibert currently works alone. That may change, but one thing is clear: in the meantime, nothing will deter him from his goal. Cleaning services offered include commercial, construction, residential, deep, light, carpet, gutter, move-out cleaning, along with window washing and janitorial services.

Meanwhile, his Rolodex of handyman help includes door handle and lock replacement, door replacement, drywall repair, grout removal and replacement, interior caulking, landscaping, light electrical and plumbing and painting.

With a successful business model, a large family and plenty of fun activities available in his new North Florida home, Matthew doesn't plan on leaving the

county anytime soon.

He enjoys going on walks, bike rides and "wetting the line."

Not only that, but Thibert and his family have also transitioned smoothly into their new community, with him and his six counterparts surviving (and thriving) in their new Floridian neighborhood.

"It has been great. My neighbors have been very friendly," Thibert said.

While he's a Clay County resident, make no mistake: Duval also holds a special place in his heart. That's not because he enjoys recreating at Jacksonville Beach with his family, but also because that's where The Helpful Jack, LLC originally took off before Thibert fully established his name in rural Clay and Jacksonville.

There are several municipalities within county borders, but Thibert said that his current customer base resides on Fleming Island, Orange Park, Green Cove Springs and portions of Middleburg.

But that's not all, as Matthew is hoping customers will answer his call to action as the Christmas holiday rapidly approaches.

In the spirit of the season, Thibert is seeking to tack on a 21st item to his already fast-growing list of services: hanging Christmas lights. "I'm hoping to hang some Christmas lights for people. That's what I've been advertising. So if anyone needs that, get a hold of me," he said.

Business is business, but both Clay County and the surrounding area have made a lasting impact on Thibert and his family, so Matthew doesn't plan on leaving anytime soon.

"The sun beats the snow any day," he said. You can call or text Matthew at (810) 423-1373, or you can visit you can email him at thehelpfuljack@gmail.com or direct message him on Facebook at www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100083111569805.



Matthew Thibert



Students had the opportunity to meet with 20 community providers for the first time since 2020.

Student Health Expo returns with stop at Keystone Heights

By Natalie Gilstrap
For Clay Today

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – Keystone Heights Junior/Senior High will be allowed to attend its first Student Health Expo since the COVID-19 pandemic on Dec. 16.

"It is an event where we are having community providers come and talk about topics that will affect the student's health," said Director of Community Partnership Schools Tina Baker.

HCA Florida Orange Park Hospital, in partnership with Clay County District

Schools will organize the event to bring awareness of a healthy lifestyle to the students. Its overall focus is to encourage students to make safe and healthy decisions while bringing awareness to the local resources available.

The Student Health Expo was originally started in 2013 by the Florida Department of Health Clay County School Health to bring health awareness and injury prevention to teens. The event was first held at Keystone Heights Junior/Senior High and has been rotated annually between high schools in Clay County until COVID put the program on pause.

"We were scheduled to have it in 2020, but Covid spread and put a hold on it," Sarah Miller, Injury Prevention Coordinator at HCA Orange Park Hospital, said. "We are excited to make a full comeback to all the schools in Clay County."

The expo will be held at the high school's gym for seventh through 12th graders.

The goal is to bring health awareness to the students and reduce risky behavior before it happens. The interactive event will have tables with around 20 community providers available for students to learn about health and injury prevention. Aza Health, Clay Action Coalition, Emmanuel Project of North East Florida, HCA Orange Park Hospital and the Florida Department of Health are some of the exhibitors that will be present to educate students on topics like safe driving, first aid, nutrition and healthy relationships.

"It's bringing it into like a clearing house," Baker said. "A one-stop location where they will get exposed to information and resources that will help them make good decisions regarding their health."

Students will be able to participate in a raffle drawing after completing a questionnaire scavenger hunt.

"It's really a great opportunity," Miller said. "If anybody has questions or would like to participate, please reach out."

To learn more email about the Student Health Expo email Sarah Miller at sarah.miller6@hcahealthcare.com.

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Students learn about financial literacy at second Reality Check program

By Natalie Gilstrap
For Clay Today

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – Keystone Heights High and Capital City Bank partnered to bring the second Reality Check to the school.

The goal of the event was to teach students about financial literacy and provide them with a better understanding of the cost of living.

“It kind of shows us what to expect when we get older,” student Chloe said.

The event was held in the school’s gym and it attracted 55 volunteers. At the start of each period, students were given a package that stated their job, marital status, family and income before being directed to the bank table. Then they were directed to the housing table and then to the utility table before being allowed to visit the other booths like transportation, grocery, clothing and insurance.

This year’s event attracted more students who wanted to manage their expenses and checkbooks.

“I think the kids are coming to the realization that they are applying the skills,” said Tina Baker, director of Community Partner Schools. “It’s an application. They see the connection and that’s the big piece

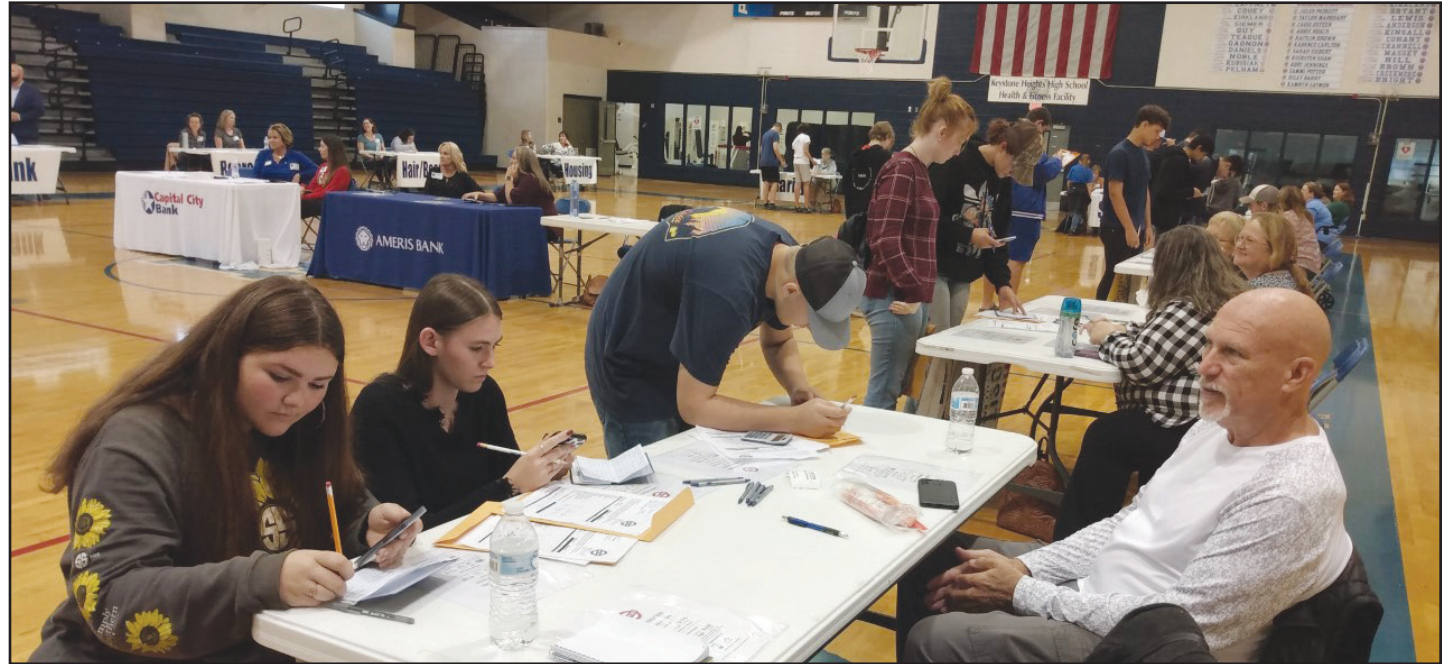


PHOTO BY NATALIE GILSTRAP

Student met with 55 volunteers at Keystone Heights High gymnasium to learn important information about managing finances during the second Reality Check program.

of it.”

Volunteers were served lunch provided by Clyde’s Cozy Kitchen Café.

Teachers said the event was a useful tool for the students.

“I think it’s great if the kids actually get into it,” said math teacher Leah Pruitt. “My

kids that are into it are really enjoying it.”

She said it’s important and recommends that students should participate. Not only did the teachers support the event, but students also said it was engaging and beneficial.

“It’s really fun. It’s a whole learning ex-

perience,” student Keila said.

Volunteers viewed Reality Check as an important tool and would recommend others to volunteer.

“It’s a great experience. We’ve recommended it to everybody that’s asked,” said volunteers Debbie and Todd Bealls.

Heritage Commission provides 40 wreaths to Keystone businesses

By Natalie Gilstrap
For Clay Today

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – The Keystone Heights Heritage Commission recently

made 40 vintage Christmas wreaths for the downtown businesses door.

The wreaths were one of the committee’s many projects planned to unite the community. The simple, yet elegant design was inspired by an image Nina Rodenroth, Chair of the Keystone Heights Heritage Commission found.

“We had to come up with a design that I thought fit what our mission is with the organization and something that fits also with the city and the décor they were going to put out,” she said.

The goal of the project was to present a sense of cohesiveness and connectivity within the community. In addition, the committee wanted to show their support to the city and have a presence within the community.

“I pitch these ideas, but I never know how well they are going to go. But stepping back and seeing a pile of them all lined up, done, ready to go in a box, the girls working feverishly to get them all done, Christmas music playing, a lot of laughing, cutting up and all that, it just really brought it to me a full circle that this was a really positive event,” Rodenroth said.

After the wreaths were completed, the committee delivered them to the business owners the Wednesday before Thanksgiving.

The overall outcome of the project was a success as business owners and the Keystone Heights City Council members were pleased with the wreaths. Due to the success of the wreaths, the heritage commit-

tee is considering expanding the experience to the community next year.

It may consider increasing the number of wreaths to include businesses within the city limits and not just the downtown area.

“I’m really proud of what we did,”

Rodenroth said.

Once the season is over, the Keystone Heights Heritage Commission will collect the wreaths and store them for next year.

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PHOTO BY NATALIE GILSTRAP

The Heritage Club created and distributed 40 holiday wreaths to local businesses for the holidays. The group hopes to hand out more wreaths next year.



Liz Williams, left, talks with her daughter Rosie, Dolly Parton and show host Kelly Clarkson during the first-grader's appearance to highlight the success of Parton's Imagination Library.

Rosie from page 1

the first-grader one of the most popular students at the school months ago. And if any students didn't know her, that all changed on Dec. 1 when she appeared with County legend Dolly Parton on "The Kelly Clarkson Show."

The show unexpectedly reached out to Rosie's family and asked to do a video interview. After the show recognized her expressive outlook, they invited her and her mother, Liz Williams, to Universal Studio, California to share their story about receiving Braille books as part of Parton's Imagination Library.

Parton's initiative to provide books has been so widespread, one in 10 children now receives a book from her program. Rosie, who suffered from septo-optic dysplasia that left her blind shortly after birth, is one of the children.

Since 1995, more than 200 million free books have been delivered to children every month.

"We began receiving Braille books from the Imagination Library. So our daughter was exposed to pre-Braille and Braille and that is so important. I don't know if you're aware of it, but only about 10% of blind children have the opportunity to be Braille literate. She's in the first grade at RideOut Elementary School in Clay County, Florida. She was reading braille and writing Braille before most children are reading or writing in print."

As Clarkson wiped away tears, Parton

appeared to be overcome by the moment. "It makes it all worthwhile to hear those stories to think that a little child, the Imagination Library, we have to have that on the radio, you just do not know," I do not know, but thank God for that child and for you (Liz) for you coming here today to share that result. That makes me feel great and I know my Dad would be proud."

Then Clarkson surprised Parton when Rosie walked onto the stage. From there, she stole the show.

Rosie got hugs from Clarkson and Parton and she quickly asked them to "sing me a song." They picked "Amazing Grace."

While they sang, Rose clutched Parton's thumb. She responded by pulling Rosie's hand to her cheek.

"I liked singing the most," Rosie said. "I liked it. It felt good to sing."

Then Rosie asked if she could sing a song, and she picked "The Lion Sleeps Tonight."

Rosie got a book a month from the program. Her favorite is "Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come."

Parton's Imagination Library has been made available by the Clay Education Foundation in two zip codes – 32043 (Green Cove Springs) and 32073 (Orange Park, Bellair, Meadowbrook Terrace and Lakeside).

Parton's charity recently got a \$5,310 donation from the Orange Park Women's Club.

Parents can sign up a child for free at ow.ly/yCTN30scAVj.

Toys for Tots looking to provide gifts to more than 5,000 children

Clay Today staff

CLAY COUNTY – The collection boxes are everywhere, the need is widespread. That's why the Clay County Marine Corps League No. 1047 General Roy S. Geiger Detachment has been collecting toys as part of its annual Toys for Tots program.

A year ago, 15,792 toys were distributed to 5,240 children. As long as there is a need, the Marines will be committed to answering every request.

There are two dropoff boxes in Keystone Heights; 33 on Fleming Island; 53 in Orange Park; 10 in Green Cove



Springs; 16 in Middleburg; and, six in Oakleaf.

For the nearest dropoff location, visit // clay-county-fl.toysfortots.org/local-coordinator-sites/lco-sites/donate-toys.aspx.

Streets of Keystone Heights, Orange Park to be filled with holiday cheer

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

CLAY COUNTY – If the Dec. 3 Christmas festival and parade in Green Cove Springs is any indication, Keystone Heights and Orange Park will celebrate the holidays with record crowds for their parades.

Keystone Heights will ring in the Christmas season with its Holiday Extravaganza on Saturday, Dec. 10, while Orange Park's Firetruck Parade with Santa, Hometown Holiday and Cocoa and Carols will fill the streets with cheer on Friday, Dec. 16.

The festivities start at 10 a.m. and it will include three primary locations: Keystone Beach, City Hall, Theme Park and the downtown area. All are located on Lawrence Boulevard, just south of State Road 100. Vendors will be allowed to set up from 8-10 a.m. at the Theme Park, and they will be open from 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

Live music starts at 1 p.m. with Quintessential Sax performing on the Rotary Circle, but the highlight of the day – the Kiwanis Christmas Parade will begin at 6 p.m.

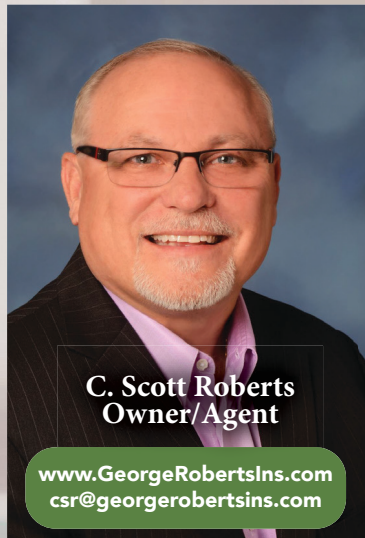
The parade route starts at Keystone Heights Elementary at Pecan Street and Orchid Avenue. It will move north along

Lawrence Boulevard until it turns left on Flamingo Street just short of SR 100.

Following the parade, the feature film "Arthur Christmas" will be shown for free at Keystone Beach. Hot cocoa, sugar cookies and popcorn will be served.

Six nights later on Friday, Dec. 16, Orange Park will host its annual Firetruck Parade with Santa. The truck will drive around neighborhood streets to make sure everyone in town has a chance to see St. Nick. Also, the Orange Park Hometown Holiday will be celebrated on Dec. 9 and 10 from 5-9 p.m. at the Clarke House. There will be tours of the decorated house, classic holiday movies on the outdoor big screen, live music, shopping in the Christmas village, food vendors, a lighted trail ride and the opportunity to purchase a photo with Santa.

And Concert on the Green's Cocoa and Carols will be on Dec. 16 from 5-8 p.m. at River Road and Kingsley Avenue. More than a dozen Clay County schools are scheduled to perform the sounds of the season, and residents can watch the Firetruck Parade from the event, and free gift wrapping will be available, along with additional entertainment and holiday vendors.




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Christmas time brings about fond memories and warm feelings for many of us. Time with loved ones, Christmas lights, beautifully decorated trees, and holiday music fills our minds. Our family especially love giving gifts, things chosen for friends and loved ones that we know will warm their hearts and express our love and care for them.

Thinking back on your Christmas memories, what is the most special gift you've ever received or given? This Christmas when we give our gifts, remember the greatest gift of all. Romans 5:8 says, "But God clearly shows and proves His own love for us, by the fact that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Amplified) There is no greater gift we have ever received in life or will ever receive in the future than the gift of salvation through Jesus!

Billy Graham once said, "The very purpose of Christ's coming into the world is that He might offer up His life as a sacrifice for the sins of men. He came to die. This is the heart of Christmas."

Declare your thanks for His gift! It is beautiful, precious, and irreplaceable. Through it, you have eternal salvation! 2 Corinthians 9:15 says, "Now thanks be to God for His indescribable gift [which is precious beyond words]!" (Amplified) That is gift above all gifts! Hallelujah! There are no words to describe the importance and impact of this gift. It should serve as our focal point not only during the Christmas season but throughout our entire lives.

The greatest gift we can give is sharing the love of Jesus with everyone. Remember those less fortunate. Do something kind for them. This is how Jesus lived His life. Model that behavior and let it shape this Christmas season. Then, carry it throughout the rest of the year with you!

Serve others and offer acts of kindness to those in need. Make that a Christmas tradition. In doing so, you will be living out the true spirit of Christmas and continuing Christ's redemptive work in this world. Don't forget the greatest gift and commit yourself to sharing that gift with others! Merry Christmas!

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



STAFF PHOTOS BY LEE WARDLAW

The recommended menu item at Palermo's Puerto Rican Kitchen is the Chef's Choice Mediterranean Fish Filet of the Day, which consists of a lightly breaded and grilled fish topped with lemon butter sauce, sun-dried tomatoes, cappers, basil, and shrimp.



Adult beverage options are aplenty for diners looking to enjoy a glass of wine or beer after a long day of work.

Taste of Clay

Palermo's Puerto Rican Kitchen brings Caribbean to Kingsley

By Lee Wardlaw

lee@claytodayonline.com

ORANGE PARK – Palermo's Puerto Rican Kitchen is a family-owned "mom and pop" restaurant serving melt-in-your-mouth Latino cuisine featuring several fresh-to-order native Puerto Rican recipes in a soothing environment that provides a great experience for any get-together, whether that be date night, a girls' or boys' night out, or family gathering.

The menu is full of several dishes, appetizers and specialty sides native to the Caribbean island.

Under the front of the menu, Clay County residents will find a section titled "Palermo's Puerto Rican Classics." Here, you will find several classic items that consist of the island's staple table fare.

Fried breaded chicken chunks, slow-roasted pork, pork or chicken cubes (sautéed in onions), skillet chicken breast or fried pork chops all provide a sensation to the taste buds, but if you're looking to mix it up, try the creole vegetables. The hearty, healthy dish is pan-seared and cooked with Palermo's homemade creole sauce.

When it comes to 'classic' Puerto Rican dishes, though, one of the most popular options is the Puerto Rican Bistec (steak). The item features thinly-sliced sirloin steak cooked in onions. The combination of hotly-cooked ingredients provides for the ultimate flavor bomb from a staple menu item.

Prices for this section of menu items depend on which item customers choose from the following two options: rice and beans or mofongo, a dish made with fried green plantains mashed with chicharrones (crispy pork skin) and garlic.

For local foodies that like to get creative when ordering at a local establishment, you'll be at home at Palermo's, as the "classics" are just the beginning of a long list of available order options.

Of seven items on the starter menu,

highlights include two options of empanadas and a traditional Puerto Rican blood sausage dish.

Try either the Chef's Choice seafood empanada (which is only available in an order of one, depending on availability) or the Abue's Empanada Trio (with choice options that are limited to chicken or beef.)

For those who like spicy food, morcilla, a blood sausage stuffed with rice and seasonal herbs (with a spicy kick), is another great appetizer that is worth a try.

Alcapurria, a fritter made of green bananas and yautia stuffed with meat, along with several other options, are found on the starter menu.

But even then, you're just getting started. Once you turn to the back page of the one-page, double-sided menu, you will be greeted with plenty of other savory surprises.

You'll be treated to plenty of hearty, warming Puerto Rican favorites. The only downside is not being able to try them all in one sitting.

"El Bohio," Palermo's Christmas dish

of slow-roasted pork served along with pigeon pea rice and Abue's homemade paste, is one of three options located under the "Specialty Rices" section of the menu.

Then, 'Palermo's Italian Fusion,' features several pasta dishes from the European nation known for its fabulous cuisine. Last (but certainly not least, though) is 'Seafood,' with this menu section putting forth the top item of all gourmet options at Palermo's: the Chef's Choice Mediterranean Fish Filet of the Day.

Above all, I recommend trying this dish, which consists of a lightly breaded and grilled fish topped with lemon butter sauce, sun-dried tomatoes, cappers, basil and shrimp.

The fish is cooked to a lightly fried, crispy perfection on the outside, coupled with a white, tasty interior that Clay County residents should love.

The fish sits on a tasty underlayer of sauce, and there's plenty of butter to dip it in, which is provided in a small cup. Then,

SEE PALERMO, 21



A glance inside of the dining area at Palermo's Puerto Rican Kitchen, located at 556 Kingsley Ave. in Orange Park.

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Clay County Farm Bureau offering scholarships

CLAY COUNTY – The County Farm Bureau announced it is accepting applications for our 2023 Scholarship Program.

Clay County Farm Bureau awards scholarships to graduating seniors and current college students whose parents, or grand-

parents are members of Clay County Farm Bureau. This scholarship program is very competitive and first preference will be given to applicants who will be pursuing a career in the field of agriculture.

We would also like to invite students to apply for the Katy Hendry Memorial Scholarship. This scholarship honors a beloved former agriculture teacher and FFA advisor

of Clay County. This special scholarship will be awarded to deserving recipients who plan to study to become an agriculture teacher.

Applications may be obtained from your high school guidance counselor, any FFA Adviser, from the Clay County Farm Bureau

Facebook page or at the bureau at 2000 Henley Road in Middleburg.

Completed applications must be received by the Clay County Farm Bureau office no later than Feb. 15. For additional information, contact Terri Davis at (904) 282-0644.

Palermo

from page 20

a smorgasbord of toppings provides for an even-further increased aurora of flavor, with the shrimp, which might taste better than the fish itself, being the star of the show.

I chose a side of fried, sweet plantains, with the crunchy, golden goodness resembling the shape of a cookie providing the perfect “island twist” to combine with the fish.

When devouring your favorite item alongside family and friends (alongside a mouthwatering list of sides that includes tostones, fried yucca, Arroz con gandules rice and more, make sure to wash it down with your favorite beverage while enjoying the outstanding atmosphere.


Red and white wine is available for \$7 a glass and \$24 for a bottle, and if you want to step your experience up a notch with a glass of red or white house sangria, the cost will be \$8. The restaurant also offers a large selection of foreign and domestic beers.

All-white painting is cut with black trim around doors, windows, and paintings adorned on the wall, which is with small flowers in vases on each table, which is furtherly enriched with poinsettias lining the center of the establishment, the Christmas plant placed below free-spirited paintings depicting life in Puerto Rico.

Couple that with soft, Puerto Rican soul music and Christmas tunes, and a gourmet meal from any budget coupled with an adult beverage should provide the same effect as lifting a large weight off the shoulders after a long day in the office or field for county residents.

Palermo's offers a fine dining experience, but don't feel the pressure of making reservations or wearing fine clothing to the establishment if you prefer to walk up service or casual dress.

You can find Palermo's Puerto Rican Kitchen at 556 Kingsley Ave. or you can visit by visiting palermopuertoricankitchen.com/, Facebook at elpalmerorestaurant or by calling (904) 269-6935.





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Office of the Clay County Property Appraiser Tracy Scott Drake, CFA, CAE, ASA, RES, AAS

2023 TAX YEAR

PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION APPLICATION SCHEDULE

Florida law provides for a number of ad valorem property tax exemptions, classifications and assessment reductions. Property owners must qualify as of **January 1, 2023** and file a 2023 tax year application by the statutory deadline, **Wednesday, March 1, 2023**. For more information, contact the Property Appraiser's Office at (904) 269-6305 or visit www.ccpao.com. Applications may be filed at the following locations:

<p>Main Office: Green Cove Springs Clay County Administration Building, 2nd Floor 477 Houston Street</p>	<p>Monday - Friday 8:00 AM - 4:30 PM Year-Round</p>
<p>Satellite Office: Orange Park Park Central Plaza (inside the Clay County Tax Collector's Office) 1518 Park Avenue</p>	<p>Mon. Tues. Thurs. Fri. 8 AM - 5 PM Wed. 9 AM - 5 PM Year-Round</p>
<p>Temporary Satellite Location: Keystone Heights Keystone Village Square (inside the Clay County Tax Collector's Office) 7380 State Road 100, Suite 10 (located by Hitchcock's)</p>	<p>8:00 AM - 4:30 PM (closed 12 PM - 1 PM)</p> <p>Tuesdays: December 6, 13, 20, 27 January 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 February 7</p>
<p>Every Tuesday from December 6 - February 7 The first Tuesday of the month from March 2023 - November 2023 (If the first Tuesday is a holiday, we will be available the following Tuesday)</p>	<p>1st Tuesday of the Month: March 7, April 4, May 2, June 6, July 11 (2nd Tuesday), Aug 1, Sept 5, Oct 3, Nov 7</p>

Police Briefs



Drug Raid Adams

CCSO SWAT, Narcotics Unit seize drugs, firearms during raid

ORANGE PARK – The Clay County Sheriff's Office's SWAT team and Narcotics Unit recovered a trove of illegal drugs while executing a search warrant on Dec. 1.

Jason William Adams, 45, was charged with possessing cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine and eight different types of illegal pills – morphine, clonazepam, diazepam, amphetamine, hydrocodone, oxycodone, valium and alprazolam – when they raided his home on Washington Avenue at 4 a.m.

Deputies also found two 12-gauge shotguns and a 20-gauge shotgun, which led to charges of possessing firearms by a convicted felon.

Adams also was charged with tampering with evidence by removing the power source to the safe where the drugs were found.

According to the arrest report, Adams was a four-time convicted felon.



Jason Adams

Orange Park man sentenced to six years for child pornography

JACKSONVILLE – U.S. District Judge Brian J. Davis sentenced Charles LeLande Boston, 32, of Orange Park to six years in federal prison for receiving child sex abuse images. Boston was also ordered to serve a five-year term of supervised release and register as a sex offender. In addition, Boston was ordered to pay \$23,000 in restitution to the victims of his offense. He was arrested on Aug. 12, 2021, and ordered detained pending the outcome of this case. He pleaded guilty on July 28, 2022.

According to court documents, the Clay County Sheriff's Office conducted an online investigation on a file-sharing network for files containing materials depicting the sexual abuse of children. In January, March, and April 2021, a CCSO detective connected with a computer that had files depicting the sexual abuse of children available for sharing over the internet. Homeland Security Investigations and CCSO later executed a search warrant at the residence connected to that computer and Boston was determined to be the owner of the computer. An examination of Boston's computer revealed a folder of downloaded files from the internet containing approximately 80 files depicting the sexual abuse of children.

"Sexual predators who victimize children have no place in our society or in our communities," said Homeland Security Investigations Jacksonville Assistant Special Agent in Charge K. Jim Phillips. "Thanks to our outstanding partnership with the Clay County Sheriff's Office, we were able to stop another pedophile from targeting our children."

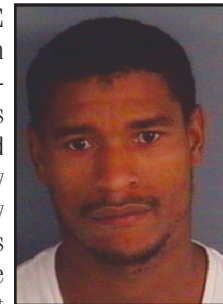
This case was investigated by the Clay County Sheriff's Office and Homeland Security Investigations. It was prosecuted by Asst. U.S. Attorney Ashley Washington.

It is another case brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse. Led by the United States Attorneys' Offices and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state, and local resources to locate, apprehend, and prosecute individuals who sexually exploit children, and to identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.justice.gov/psc.

Man accused of violating probation after killing brother

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – A man who was on probation for shooting his brother was returned to the Clay County Jail for repeatedly violating the terms of his release, the Florida Department of Corrections said.

Bernard Everette Reese Jr., 29, of Orange Park, was arrested on Nov. 29 after his probation office said he failed to report for a monthly checkup in 2019 and for not getting permission from his probation officer to move. He also was accused of using "intoxicants, drugs or other dangerous



Bernard Reese

substances."

Reese was convicted of buying a gun from somebody on the street, then accidentally shooting his brother to death in the back while they examined the gun. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison, followed by five years of probation for manslaughter and possession of a concealed firearm by a delinquent juvenile.

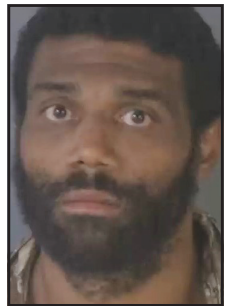
Reese's next court appearance is scheduled for Dec. 29. Until then, he will remain in jail without bond.

Man caught with illegal drugs while sleeping in stolen car

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – A deputy who responded to a disturbance wound up discovering a man with methamphetamine and pills sleeping in a car reported stolen, according to the Clay County Sheriff's Office.

Cameron Lee Yarbrough, 32, of Keystone Heights, was charged on Dec. 4 with grand theft auto, possession of meth, marijuana, buprenorphine and drug paraphernalia after Yarbrough was arrested for the stolen car. During an inventory search, deputies found the drugs inside the center console and floorboard.

Yarbrough's bond was set at \$80,013.



Cameron Yarbrough

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, Dec. 6

Joshua E. McKean, 28, Middleburg, DWLSR
Joshua A. Bogdan, 25, Fleming Island, possession-marijuana
Kenyan D.M. Butler, 26, Orange Park, possession-drug paraphernalia, resist/obstruct/oppose law enforcement
Charles E. Geddis, 72, Orange Park., aggravated assault with deadly weapon
Noah J. Davis, 40, Keystone Heights, possession-ammo/firearm by convicted felon
William K. Hambrick, 49, Green Cove Springs, FTA-DWLSR
Shanea L. Kemp, 30, Fleming Island, grand theft

D'Marcus K. Allen, 22, Green Cove Springs, VOP-carrying concealed unlicensed firearm, VOP-firing firearm from vehicle

Mario A. Thomas, 27, Green Cove Springs, FTA-DWLSR
Lauren M. Dowling, 35, Green Cove Springs, FTA-petit theft
James R. Kratzer, 40, Middleburg, domestic battery
Nathan D. Pritchard, 34, Middleburg, non-support
Robert S. Coffin, 57, Orange Park, two counts FTA-DWLSR, resisting law enforcement, battery on law enforcement/firefighter, EMT, possession-drug paraphernalia, DUI, deprive law enforcement of means of protection/communication, attempting to flee/elude with lights/siren active, DWLSR

Monday, Dec. 5

Geneva Wilson, 77, Orange Park, grand theft
Anna M. Gibson, 23, Middleburg, domestic battery

Leonardo A. Martinez, 53, Orange Park, grand theft

Walter G. Trancynger, 36, Middleburg, FTA-failure to register vehicle
William B. McNeese, 43, Fleming Island, FTA-DWLSR
Billy J. Rooksberry, 29, Middleburg, possession-methamphetamine
Christopher E. O'Neal, 27, Maxville, aggravated battery on pregnant woman
Eric P. Sluss, 18, Orange Park, battery on law enforcement/firefighter/EMT, resisting law enforcement with violence

Sunday, Dec. 4

Brittany K. White, 42, Fleming Island, shoplifting
Richard J.P. Richmond, 19, Orange Park, shoplifting
Elijah T. Neese, 24, Green Cove Springs, DUI
Hunter R. Davis, 23, Middleburg, deadly threat of serious harm to law enforcement, misuse of 911 system
Cameron L. Yarbrough, 32, Keystone Heights, grand theft auto, possession-mar-

ijuana, possession-buprenorphine naloxe, possession-drug paraphernalia

Jazmin E. Marmol, 31, Orange Park, domestic battery
Clarissa M. Johnson, 26, Middleburg, child neglect, possession-marijuana, possession-fentanyl, possession-drug paraphernalia

Saturday, Dec. 3

Billy J. Delk, 34, Middleburg, shoplifting
Edna M. Alvarez, 40, Middleburg, shoplifting
Heaven L. Akins, 18, Orange Park, burglary, possession-drug paraphernalia, trafficking-fentanyl, possession-controlled substance, possession-burglary tools
Michelle Remogat, 37, Orange Park, criminal mischief, trespassing
Francis A. Pena, 38, Orange Park, DUI
Toi K. Wilson, 36, Orange Park, domestic battery
Chad E. Green, 23, Middleburg, domestic battery

Property rezoned on Kingsley may lead to additional shopping opportunities

By Lee Wardlaw
lee@claytodayonline.com

ORANGE PARK – The Town Council agreed after a second reading to rezone the office building at 1279 Kingsley Ave. from Commercial Professional Office to Commercial Neighborhood which will allow the property to be used for convenient shopping.

“I’ve done some research on this property, and as far as parking spaces, it qualifies. The water, sewer, everything qualifies. My concern was maybe the sewer lines weren’t large enough or the water lines weren’t large enough. There’s plenty of room for capability there. I asked about a traffic study for this, it is not required,” said Mayor Randy Anderson in a sequence preceded by neither public comment nor debate from the council.

All five council members seem to favor a final approval, but they need to see site plans and get more information before the project can move forward.

“After all of the research I’ve done, this property qualifies for rezoning,” Anderson said. A representative from the property corporation was asked to speak by Councilwoman Susana Thompson.

“My plan is to keep the same neighborhood, small-town feel, and of course, the existing office space will continue.” The businessman would also like to add a small coffee shop, bakery, and restaurant. “I definitely wanted to make that a good gathering place for the community.”

In other business, the Town Council amended its 2023-2024 fiscal budget and approved the second reading of an ordinance that will modify cemetery rules and regulations.

Council members also heard a plan to change the town’s purchasing policy.

Town Manager Sarah Campbell said the reason for the changes was to provide more consistency across all departments.

“The purchasing policy itself only reflected authority for the council, the manager, and the department heads. It never actually gave them policy authority to make purchases, and we realized that it was somewhat inconsistent,” she said.

“What we’re recommending is to make it consistently \$1,000 level for those administrative employees. Again, it’s three employees, one in each of those departments, that would now have policy approval to make purchases up to the \$1,000 level.”

Previously, the Police Department had an authority level of zero, while Economic and Community Development had \$1,000, while Public Works had the same level as the Director (\$7,000).

“I expect we’ll get an audit comment this year, because we have administrative people making purchases that technically weren’t authorized by the policy, and this codifies it and puts the policy into writing and sets it at a level that the department heads are comfortable with for their administrative support staff,” Campbell concluded.

The council also heard the first reading of an ordinance amending of the Land Development Regulations to Require Notice for Design Review Board Applications and the First Reading of an Ordinance Amending Article II of the Land Development Review Regulations Regarding Household Pets. A second consent item allows for household pets to include hens and it raises



During the first portion of the meeting, Fred Jones, Director of the Planning and Design Collaborative from the Haskell Company, gave a spirited presentation on the Town of Orange Park Complete Streets Policy and Resolution.

es the number of full-grown pets allowed to reside within a dwelling from four to five.

That motion passed, 5-0.

In other news, spirited productive discussions involved residents about speed limits in residential districts, mixed-use comprehensive plans, town manager evaluation, River Road cleanup and the town

election date.

Tuesday’s meeting was the Town Council’s one and only December gathering due to the onset of the Christmas holiday and other religious and ethnic holidays that will be celebrated later this month.

The Town’s next meeting will be Tues, Jan 10.

Arrests

from page 22

Friday, Dec. 2

Camron J. Dove, 21, Orange Park, resist/obstruct/oppose law enforcement

Vincent M. Myers, 40, Orange Park, vandalism, resist/obstruct/oppose law enforcement

Jailen S. Bass, 23, Orange Park, shoplifting, resist/obstruct/oppose law enforcement, resisting arrest while trying to recover property

Todd H. Lumetta, 55, Orange Park, failure to report location

Terrence E. Green, 48, Green Cove Springs, two counts FTA-larceny

Joshua K. Hartwell, 35, Green Cove Springs, FTA

Isial W. Tolbert, 44, Orange Park, possession-drug paraphernalia

Nathaniel R. Henderson, 25, Green Cove Springs, FTA-DWSLR

Loran M. Wilson, 37, Green Cove Springs, possession-controlled substance, possession-drug paraphernalia

Thursday, Dec. 1

Alenandro Moreno, 44, Orange Park, possession-marijuana, trespassing

Charles M. McClaskey, 34, Middleburg, shoplifting

Torrey L. Turner, 34, Orange Park, shoplifting

Patrick W. Middleton, 36, Fleming Island, shoplifting

Richard D. Cooks, 36, Green Cove Springs, FTA-driving without valid license

Tera R. Horst, 32, Green Cove Springs, insurance fraud

Slone T. Reece, 26, Orange Park, VOP-community control

Henry L. Roberson, 47, Green Cove Springs, FTA

Amanda L. Gibson, 41, Middleburg, battery

Jason W. Adams, 45, Orange Park, possession-methamphetamine, possession-marijuana, possession-cocaine, nine counts possession-controlled substance, three counts possession-firearm by convicted felon, tampering with evidence

Brian F. Shearin, 35, Fleming Island, DUI

Wednesday, Nov. 30

Cal J. Mainor, 32, Orange Park, possession-controlled substance

Addison T. Noll, 20, Orange Park, criminal mischief

Reggie L. Glover, 35, Keystone Heights, domestic battery

Marquise R. Williams, 28, Green Cove Springs, violation of pretrial release conditions for protection against domestic violence

Lori L. Maddox, 44, Green Cove Springs, possession-fentanyl, possession-drug paraphernalia

Samantha R. Proffitt, 32, Middleburg, possession-fentanyl

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Christmas on Walnut

Record crowd pack Green Cove Springs for Christmas celebration

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Last Saturday started with thousands of residents flooding Walnut Street and Spring Park for the city's annual Christmas on Walnut program, and they were joined by more residents later that night for the Christmas Parade along Orange Avenue. The event, which included the Parade of Trees in the park, created a huge traffic jam, but few were complaining. Organizers said there was a record turnout for the day-long event. Parade judges selected a float from Inline Lawn and Fence with its first-place award.





Homes for the holidays: Finding homes for long-term shelter dogs

Animal Services partners with Petfinder for Find Your Max social media campaign

For Clay Today

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Clay County Animal Services is teaming up with Dr. Seuss Enterprises and the Petfinder Foundation to help long-term shelter dogs in Clay County find their forever homes this Christmas. In celebration of the 65th anniversary of How the Grinch Stole Christmas, Clay County is joining the launch of the December #FindYourMax social media campaign to help some special dogs find homes and loving families.

While K-9 companion Max was forced to do the Grinch's bidding, he knew all along that Christmas is a joyous time to share with family and friends. And finding a family of their own is exactly what all shelter dogs want. Clay County Animal Services will be highlighting some long-time shelter dogs that have had a hard time finding their forever home this December on Facebook and Instagram with the hashtag #FindYourMax. Through this national media outreach effort, we hope that the hearts of dog lovers will grow three sizes this year, and Grinches in search of their own Max will give these loving pups their very own families this Christmas. If you want to provide a loving home for one of these dogs, just search #FindYourMax on Facebook and Instagram. Loving dogs available for adoption will also be featured on Dr. Seuss Enterprises and Petfinder's Facebook and Instagram pages.

Search #FindYourMax on Facebook and Instagram today and bring home your very own "Max" this Christmas.

These loving pups and many more are



Gus

available for adoption at Clay County Animal Services, located at 3984 State Road 16 West in Green Cove Springs. The shelter is open Tuesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Visit claycountygov.com and select Animal Services under the Community Tab to view all adoptable animals at the shelter or call (904) 529-4107 for more information on adoptions.



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Vintage Market Days

Thousands find treasured gifts at Vintage Market Days

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Many shoppers brought wagons and small carts to carry away unique gifts during last weekend's Vintage Market Days at the Clay County Fairgrounds. The three-day event opened on Friday and attracted about 2,000 visitors who were looking for rare treasures like homemade crafts, antiques, soaps, jewelry, clothes, yard signs and candied apples.



TODAY'S Sports

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Golden Eagles soccer remains undefeated

By Ray Dimonda
Correspondent

FLEMING ISLAND - As Fleming Island prepared to take on the perennial powerhouse Fletcher Senators in the first division matchup of the 2022-23 season, pregame; Golden Eagles Head Soccer Coach Michael Green said "Our defense is looking better than the last few years. We are getting things sorted out with Cade Dailey as our Sweeper, doing a good job getting things sorted out, commanding marks, and getting everyone situated. Because- it is a different game playing a stopper sweeper."

Green had no idea how prophetic his statement would turn out to be as the Golden Eagles held the Senators to a single shot on goal off of a direct kick defended perfectly, and racked up six unanswered goals before the half on their way to an 8-0 mercy rule which ended the game with 27 minutes remaining on the clock.

"This was a different Fletcher team than we are used to," said Green, referring to Fletcher's rebuild and lack of depth on the bench with only three subs available. "Our kids showed up, never quit, and kept the intensity up. It was an- everybody gets in- kind of game. Ultimately, I'm very happy with

SEE SOCCER, 32



CORRESPONDENT PHOTO BY RAY DIMONDA
Fleming Island roared to an 8-0 mercy rule win over Fletcher with attacks on goal like this with Taylor Suarez in the box.

Carroll's 'chase' to the top; a season of beauty

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

MIDDLEBURG - Middleburg High senior golfer Chase Carroll's first name has been his story for the past four years as he has "chased" the elusive golf state title trophy that big brother Cody Carroll won in 2016.

Carroll, with four state tournament bids in his high school career; one more than Cody, got just about as close a final round of championship golf as a golfer could expect before a five foot putt spun around the hole off a dramatic fifth hole overtime.

"I respect the competition when it comes to winning and losing and that one was so intense," said Carroll. "My brother always said just to play my game and trust the process."

For his dramatic and exciting senior season and his equally dramatic second place finish in the Class 2A championship



Middleburg High golfer Chase Carroll's dramatic five overtime finish for a silver medal at the Class 2A golf championships earned him the Clay Today Fall Sports Top Performance award for 2022.

tournament, Carroll is named the Clay Today Fall Sports Performance of 2022.

Carroll chased the state tournament with equally tough district and region

places, but his final nine holes at the state tournament were what we write about with two eagles and five birdies erasing an eight stroke deficit to create the tie at 18 and the overtime theater. Carroll's first nine of the second round offered no preview of his nine hole finish with two double bogies and one bogie pushing him further to the rears of the leaders.

The top five Clay Today Fall sports performances of 2022 starts with an athlete that does not say much, but more that speaks with her prowess as Fleming Island junior freestyle sprinter Maryn McDade answered the bell of being a repeat champion with one of the fastest times in the country for the 50 freestyle. McDade was being chased (no pun intended) all season by Ponte Vedra High standout Penelope Zarczynski, just a sophomore, as the duo battled throughout the post season with McDade fending off her top challenger three times to dispell the myth of it's tough beating an opponent three times. McDade's 23.07 winning time is ranked 21st in the United States according to USASwimming.org's list.

SEE SUPER 6, 31

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Spartans celebrate first wrestling win

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

ORANGE PARK - St. Johns Country Day School offered up its first FHSAA girls weightlifting team last year and came home with a gold medal on their first visit to the state championships.

This year, the Spartans opened their gym to another new sport, wrestling, and, if history is a barometer, the four wins by four pins by 113-pound eighth grader Matthew Braddock at the Optimist Invitational on Saturday at Sandalwood High School could mean yet another first time gold medalist is on the way.

"He's a hammer out there and a very tough kid," said North Florida Wrestling Academy head wrestling coach P.J. Cobbert, who has nurtured Braddock for the past four years at his stronghold club in Fleming Island. "We are letting him compete locally in the Jacksonville area to get mat time, then we'll see him in high school."

Whether Cobbert gets Braddock at Fleming Island High, where Cobbert has many of his NFWA students compete at a strong level in Class 2A after a string of top five finishes in Class 3A.

"It's all up to him," said Cobbert. "He has been wrestling all over the country already and when his freshman year comes up, his family will make that decision. We are just giving him a spot to train and wrestling against top high school kids in our room."

At Sandalwood, Braddock pounded his 113-pound weight class with pins of 41, 46, 42 and 72 seconds to take the top of the podium.

We shall see...

In other matches across north Florida as area teams got their first looks at jerseys from other schools, Sandalwood won their own meet with a 162.5 to 160.0 score over Baker County with Keystone Heights finishing 13th and St. Johns 16th with just



Above: Clay High's Aubrianna Apple scorched her first match at the Lady Clash of Titans with hopes of a return state meet. Below: Fleming Island took a trip to Georgia state champion Camden County for a first-look against top tier competition.



Braddock's points as a solo grappler.

Keystone Heights, looking to keep improving from their first teams from two years ago, got a silver medal from Joshua Dowling at 285, who lost by pin to Englewood's champion Keith Forbes; and two third place finishes, one from Steven Raab at 285, who lost his second match to Forbes, then won four straight to finish third with a 6-2 win over Menendez's Colby



Two young grapplers in the North Florida Wrestling Academy training facility in Green Cove Springs; left, Bryce Fiore, 11, and Matthew Braddock, an eighth grader at St. Johns Country Day School, have added some young muscle to the already strong NFWA roster. Braddock is a first-ever wrestler for St. Johns and won his first invitational with four straight pins in the Optimist Invitational at Sandalwood High School.

Leth.

At 138, Luke Graves finished third with a bye win, but had four pins to a third period loss by pin in his second match to get bronze.

Keystone Heights fielded 13 wrestlers.

At University High in Port Orange at the Varsity Clash of the Titans, Middleburg competed to a seventh place finish with the likes of Orlando powers Winter Springs, Freedom, Deland and Hagerty with Merritt Island, Satellite and Winter Springs taking the 1-2-3 spots; 146.0-141.5-137.0. Middleburg earned 112.0 points led by a handful of second place finishes from Tucker Cody at 220, Aiden Thornton at 160, Logan Moore at 145 and Dylan Johns at 126.

At 195, Porter Loveland finished fourth after a tough 4-2 loss to Hagerty's Hunter Tate.

At the Bobcat Round Robin Invitational at Gainesville Buchholz on Saturday, Clay and Oakleaf put up their troops with new Oakleaf coach Mark DeToro teaming with Rory Roderick at his side as Clay had their dynamic duo of Jim Reape and Hunter Hill in opposite corners.

For Clay, 106 Jacob Bucci finished 5-0 with three pins and two tech falls; 17-2, 17-0, for a first place finish with a pin over Oakleaf's Connor Barnes for the title.

At 182, Dominic Martin went 5-0 with

four first period pins to the final and a 71 second finale. Martin's fastest pin of the day was just 37 seconds.

at 220, Kedric Wilboun pinned to his final as well with a 40 and 52 second slap-down before beating Clay teammate Jadon Bell 9-1 in the championship match.

Bell's only loss to Wilboun.

Clay also scored at 113; fifth to Juan Carlos

Garcia; at 120, second to Drew Holmquist; at 126, fifth the Brady Glaven; at 132, fourth to Zack Deaton; at 145, second to Landen Solomon; at 145, seventh to Drew Loveland; at 152, 10th to Tison Rivers, and eighths to Hunter Roden, Tayshawn Tate and Lukas Graham at 170, 182 and 220.

Brody Lyda took third at 195 with four pins and a first pin slap to Union County's Danny Thornton. Will Kelly was third at 285 after a tough 5-1 loss Timber Creek's Peter Nesheiwat in his first match.

For Oakleaf, got six weight division runnerups led by Connor Barnes at 106 (lost to Clay's Jacob Bucci by pin), Sebastian Bonachea at 126 (lost 3-2 to Buchholz Jediah Brown), Roman Polinsky at 160 (lost 15-0 to Timber Creek Micah Wittenberg), Bryant Taylor at 182 (Lost to Clay Dominic Martin), Isaiah Shevchook at 195

SEE WRESTLING, 34

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Lester's 44 points ignites Raiders

SJCDS Scott approaches 2,000 career points

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

ORANGE PARK - With an astounding 18 shots made off 24 shots taken, Orange Park High junior guard Eris Lester stamped out a 44 point game performance in a 64-59 win over previously unbeaten (now 5-1, 10th ranked in Class 3A) Providence on Tues., Nov. 29 as the Lady Raider schedule entered its gauntlet phase.

With the win, and a followup 51-46 win over Raines High on Tues., Dec. 2, Orange Park seemed on a roll until a Saturday night clash with Ocoee High (4-2, 7A region semifinalist 2022) that ended with the Knights winning a 48-45 thriller. Ocoee had on its schedule such powerhouses as 7A-Timber Creek (region final loser to Oakleaf in 2021), 7A-Mandarin (17-4 last year, beat by Oakleaf district final, Spruce Creek region quarter) and Winter Park (4-1, 21-6 last year, 7A region semis).

With her 44 pointer, Lester has upped her points average to an area leading 28.3 points per game with games of 23, 27, 19 and 44 thus far.

Where the Lady Raiders are vulnerable is that second shooter which is a 7.3 points per game from junior Autumn Nesmith.

Factor that into an upcoming clash at Oakleaf (7-1) on Thurs., Dec. 8 after a Tues., Dec. 6 home match against Bishop Kenny (6-1).

Bishop Kenny (7-1) has already resoundingly beat Ridgeview, 53-28, and prides its defense with four games under 20 opponents points, while Oakleaf's lone loss was an early season 68-57 to Valor Christian of Georgia in the Inside Exposure tournament at Bolles on November 21.



Oakleaf has scored near an average of 70 points per game with a balanced, high octane attack from the senior trio of Kaylah Turner (20.4 pts per game), Fantasia James (14.1 ppg) and Kamiya Jones ((9.9 ppg). Add sophomore Trista Brown advancing skill set as a fourth prototype of Coach Fred Cole's fast-paced attack with a 10.1 points per game and opponents will be facing a four pronged offensive juggernaut keyed off a steal to layup ratio of almost 10 steals per game; Turner with five per game.

Turner is the driving force with James the acrobat while Jones is the ice-in-the-veins three pointer.

Should Orange Park survive Bishop Kenny, Oakleaf will be formidable and a must-see game for area hoops fans.

Ridgeview (5-1) plays a grind game with the Blocton sisters; Nia and Nacoya, being bouncers in the paint and senior shooter Paetyn Miller on the edge with the



Left: Middleburg High is leaning on guard Brandi Mann to direct the Lady Broncos scoring while; right, Ridgeview is getting three point production from sophomore Emma Rayes.

Panthers staying above 50 points per game and opponents under 30-ish.

Against Bishop Kenny, Nia Blocton was held scoreless with just four shots with Kenny's 6'-1" paint presense, Clare Coyle, dominating the glass to a 34-11 halftime lead with just two Panther points in the first quarter.

Ridgeview's scoring has come from 10 points per games from three players; Miller, Nia Blocton and sophomore guard Emma Rayes who shares 10 threes with Millers' team leading 11 for the Panther outside shooting.

Ridgeview has not been flashy, but instead are grinders that wear opponents down.

Fleming Island has opened with three

of four wins for new coach Michael Hayward with a lone loss to Episcopal, but the Golden Eagles meat of the schedule comes in January with Oakleaf, Orange Park hosting the Golden Eagles.

London Jenkins is still the hot hand for Hayward with a 21.0 points per game. Jenkins will need help in the shooting with Victoria Nobles at just 11 and no other player above 10 points per game.

St.Johns Country Day School (2-3) got 39 points from guard Taliah Scott in 67-50 win over Munroe on Saturday after three losses by the Lady Spartans. Scott is close to 2,000 career points as St. Johns visits Terry Parker on Mon., Dec. 5. with a tough

SEE RAIDERS, 33



Left: In boys action, Oakleaf is flying high with Dallas Skinner in the paint to a showdown with Orange Park with the return from injury of guard Thomas Faucett, No. 3, and the baseline power of forward Achieve Triggs.

Oakleaf Renegades head to Pop Warner championship with 27-0 win

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

ORLANDO - Fueled by four touchdowns via long distance from running back Calvin Ferguson, the Oakleaf Sports Associations Renegades 10-under Pop Warner football team won a decisive 27-0 win over the Lower Perks Longhorns of Pennsylvania Tuesday morning at Camping World Stadium in Orlando.

“We were going to go with tough, inside running until they started to fill the box and then we were going to either bounce outside or throw the ball,” said Renegades coach Carlos Lowe. “Calvin got free for a few big ones and we had some other big plays taken back with penalty flags.”

Oakleaf, now undefeated in 11 games, earned the national semifinal with a first 27-0 win on Friday over North Carolina’s NRWF Bulldogs.

On Tuesday, Ferguson scampered twice for runs of 60 yards for scores; one with 19 seconds left in the first quarter, the second one a first touch as the second half started, that put the Longhorns on their heels very quickly.

Ferguson also caught two touchdown passes; one in the second quarter for a 60 yard scoring play, from quarterback Elijah Baker that scored off throw and catches of 15 yards over the middle that Ferguson hit the jets to finish off two plays of 65 and 45 yards for scores.



Oakleaf Renegades celebrate being in the Pop Warner National Championship game on Fri., Dec. 9 in Orlando’s Camping World Stadium.



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Oakleaf Renegade running back Calvin Ferguson had four touchdowns; two by ground, two via air, to fuel Renegades 27-0 Pop Warner National Semifinal win in Orlando.

In the second half, with Oakleaf up 13-0 and looking to batter the interior of the Longhorns, in at 11-1, it was fullback Malachi Taylor who did the most damage with consecutive bashes up the middle before fleet tailback Keonte Ayers ripped a 50 yard scoring run that would have been the dagger in the Longhorns heart, but a flag put the Renegades back near midfield.

On defense, cornerback Jordan Smith thwarted the Longhorns lone offensive threat with a spectacular interception near

the Renegades 20 yard late in the fourth quarter. Linebacker Elijah Goldwire, defensive tackle Stephen Lewis, Jr., and ends Jeremiah Santiago-Epps and Erik Aguilar dominated the defensive front for Oakleaf.


Lewis picked up a first snap fumble by the Longhorns on the games first offensive play. Oakleaf will advance to a Friday championship game in the Pop Warner Division 2 10-Under class against Illinois-based Addison Cowboys, who won games of 28-0 and 30-13 to advance.




Oakleaf Renegades quarterback Elijah Baker sets up for next play.



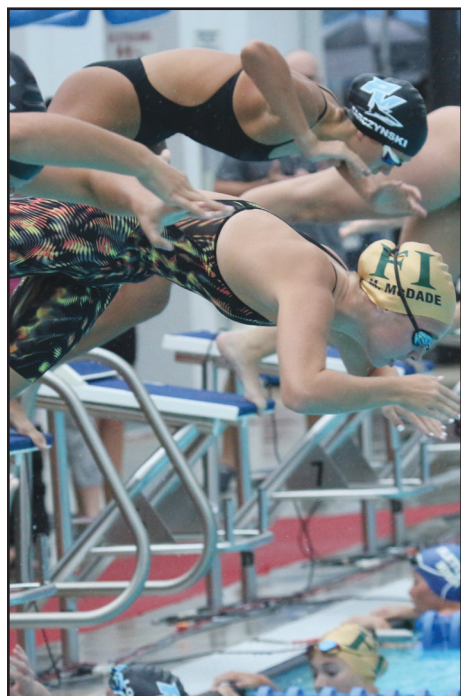
Fullback Malachi Taylor bludgeoned the middle of the lines to open up the Lower Perks defense to jaunts from tailback Calvin Ferguson.



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Maryn McDade

Super 6 from page 1

McDade holds her edge

At regions, it was McDade 23.82 to Zarczynski's 23.89.

At districts, it was McDade 23.54 to Zarczynski's 24.42 with both knowing the times would get faster in the upcoming weekends with McDade holding her edge.

For her perseverance and intensity in the face of imminent danger, McDade is the Clay Today first choice for Fall Sports performance of 2022.

1

Maryn McDade



T.J. Lane

Newcomer steps in and keeps Broncos on path

Number two on the Clay Today Fall Sports Performances of 2022 goes to a quiet guy ironically wearing number five; Middleburg High running back T.J. Lane.

Lane, a newcomer to the Middleburg football system under second year coach Ryan Wolfe, had the initial paradox of being the number two guy carrying the ball with expected top ball carrier Michael Mitchell the guy getting the headlines for his spectacular previous year.

Mitchell, who had an offer and commit to Pac 12 powerhouse NCAA 7th-ranked University of Utah (just beat 8th-ranked University of Southern California 47-24 for conference title), had some obstacles during his senior season that propelled Lane into a front-run role for Wolfe.

Lane not only stepped in and kept the Broncos on their titillating path to a playoff berth, but Lane became the workhorse of the year for Clay County football athletes with astounding games of 226 yards and two scores versus then unbeaten Bishop Kenny (8-3, 2M region playoffs) in game two, with playoff powers Bradford (12-2, 2S Final Four) and Ponte Vedra smacking the Broncos offense around before Lane revved up to a string of plus-100 yard efforts that truly embraced the "next man up" phrase.

With a near 10 yards per carry finish for his next seven games, including a final 200 yard effort in playoff loss to Escambia, Lane epitomized what a running back can do for an offense.

Lane's resume read 180, 132, then 239 vs. Clay, 182 vs. Columbia (9-4, 3S Final Four), 351 (yes 351) vs. Orange Park, 321 (yes, 321) vs. Fernandina Beach and his final 200 effort against Escambia (8-4, 3S region final loss vs. Columbia).



Graham Myers

Myers shows all his cards early in season

Number three goes to Fleming Island junior cross country ace Graham Myers, who not only showed all of his cards early in the season with a string of fast times starting in early September, but kept ticking down his clock with great efforts

2

T.J. Lane

against season great runners in his post season. Myers, who got to chase (again with that word) one of the best ever last year with St. Johns Country Day School state champion Matthew Stratton his front running teammate, but then assumed the lead role very quickly and authoritatively as a Fleming Island High School runner. Authoritatively, to the tune of a third place finish in Tallahassee. Just to add luster to the third place finish, Patrick Koon of Leon, the 3A two time champion, ripped a new state championship record of 14:56.70 for the win with Myers third behind Joshua Ruiz of 3A team champions Belen Jesuit 15:37.30 to 15:42.10. Ruiz was second to Koon in 2021 in nearly the same time, 15:37.40, with Myers making an astounding jump from his 2021 11th place finish in 16:38.00. That's a minute faster in 2022 on the same course against the two fastest guys in Class 3A. Pretty stellar.

Number four goes to another cross country runner with Oakleaf High senior



Sierra Barrera

Barrera's dedication caps off a great senior season

Sierra Barrera blasting her best races at the right time with the lone battler of the back-to-back state champions of Class 4A, Gainesville Buchholz, presumably very happy that Barrera will be in college next year.

Barrera, an outstanding 800 and 1600 finisher on the track in the previous spring, took the entire summer on a solo mission to better her strength over the three miles of cross country and exacting the results of her dedication with a crushing string of finishes to cap her senior season.

Barrera, who unleashed her fearless

3

Graham Myers

finishing kick in three races to end her high school days with a flurry, had to compete among the state's best obvious with Buchholz in both her district and region races, became the thorn of the Bobcats with a third place finish at districts upsetting a 1-2-3 finish for Buchholz, a fifth place finish at regions with just one Buchholz runner in front of her by just .2 seconds and a final blast to the Bobcats with her eighth place finish dispatching the entire Buchholz team with a split time of 19:09.90 on the very hilly Tallahassee course.

At regions, Barrera scorched her fastest time, an 18:48.9, to send the message on the Bobcat home course.

For the efforts of these six outstanding athletes, the Clay Today sports staffs offers a resounding thank you for letting us be a part of it and an encouraging message for fruitful next years in college and as high school seniors.

Rahn unloads a barrage of kill shots for Panthers

The final of the top five goes to Middleburg High middle hitter Connor Rahn who unloaded a barrage of kill shots on the Ridgeview High front defense; noted for their blocking prowess behind Haley Robinson.

In the district championship game, after both teams seemingly cruised through the season with THE game on the backburner until a critical single day that saw Ridgeview beat Bishop Kenny and Middleburg beat Bartram Trail, both in five games.

From that doubleheader, Rahn was tasked to be the critical mass for departing head coach Carrie Prewitt and the slender junior delivered with an astounding 28 kills in the Broncos 3-1 championship win. Ironically, and sometimes in sports, the defining moment sometimes overshadows the upcoming efforts, Middleburg lost in the region opener and Ridgeview wound up in the region final with a possible region final rematch between the two teams never happening.

5

Connor Rahn



Connor Rahn

4

Sierra Barrera



Clay High remains undefeated

Clay High girls soccer stayed undefeated (5-0) behind the 20 goals of Kirra Dodson, left, and far right, as well as stellar defensive from Kaygen Williamson, center.

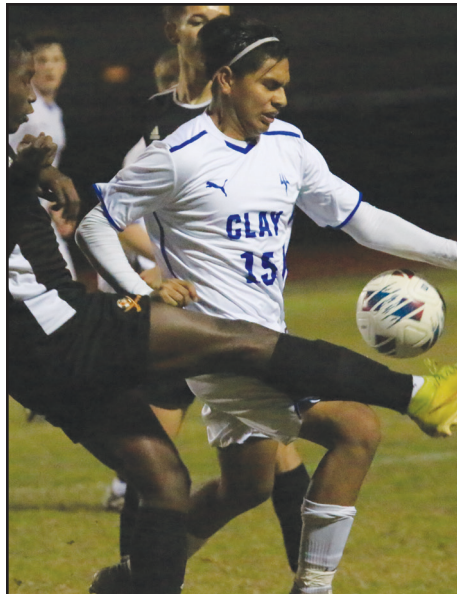
Soccer
from page 27

the result.”

After four minutes of feeling one another out, Fleming Island organized the first attack at midfield when a streaking Taylor Suarez had a long pass dropped in and he took control, heading straight for the net and eyed his shot. Suarez launched a cannon to the keeper’s right and put the first of his three points on the board at 35:50 in the first half. Suarez would rack up a hat trick all in the first half of play.

After Suarez’ ice breaker, William Kennedy followed only :25 seconds later as he had a breakaway and found himself all alone with the keeper.

Kennedy handled the ball and drew the Keeper out, then just used a gentle tap to roll the ball right by the Keeper’s right side, 2-0 with 35:25 still to play in the first half. About three minutes later, Nathan Ernst noticed the Keeper coming out way too soon to defend. Once he had the ball just



Clay High’s boys soccer got tough midfield defense from Jackson Paulen, left, after a quick first half goal from Kiende May-Parker to defeat Orange Park 2-0 and improve to 2-2-1.

inside the mid-field line, from outside the box, he launched a high shot that sailed right over the keeper’s head and hands to put the score at 3-0. Arthur Zanoelo fol-



lowed at 12:41 to bring the score to 4-0.

“The best part of our goal scoring is we have a number of games where it is three and four different players scoring,” said

Green. The first half scoring was closed out with another pair of goals from Suarez, one at 12:41, and his hat trick goal at 10:06.

The second half lasted all of 13:00 as Mathew Male said enough with the others on the team having all the fun and took matters into his own hands. At 32:29, Fleming Island had a direct kick and set up a crossing maneuver.

William Kennedy made the initial charge at the ball and jumped as Male drew back and fired a boomer that beat the Senator’s Keeper to get ahead 7-0. Male closed the game down at 27:00 as the Golden Eagles had a melee in front of the Fletcher goal, controlled the ball and beat the Senator’s keeper one last time for the 8-0 final.

“Our defense was so intense that Fletcher never had a chance to organize,” said Green. “Defense wins. That is the focus of this season, team defense. That means everyone back, everyone is communicating, and everyone gets a mark. No one is playing zone. We have a little speed and we’re a little bigger this year than we used to be, so I am hoping to make a run at it.”



CORRESPONDENT PHOTOS BY RAY DIMONDA

Left: Fleming Island High boys soccer coach Mike Green, third from left, has a fast and furious team on the field for the Golden Eagles, now 5-0-1, while forward Mathew Male is fearless striker up front with just-miss header in goal box of Fletcher High in 8-0 win.



Ellis to Mercer College

Clay High softball pitcher Gabbi Ellis, here with teammates and coaches at a signing ceremony at Clay High softball facility. Ellis will next play for Mercer College in Georgia after outstanding Final Four finish in Class 4A last year.

Raiders

from page 29

San Jose Prep (4-2) team and Episcopal (3-3) on a two game road trip.

Keystone Heights High coach Jessica Sykes-Carter has what she thinks is her most athletic team finishing off a 57-13 and 44-30 weekend double to be at 5-2 with losses to St. Augustine and Ridgeview.

Multiple sport athlete Kiley Channell is top scorer at 14.7 points per game from the outside with senior center Dezaray Bright strong inside at 12.1 points. Channell has 16 of the teams 24 three pointers with junior Yasmin Bryant landing seven.

Clay High first year coach Doug Deters is slowly finding his way around the high school girls game after a good run as boys coach at Green Cove Springs Junior High, but an injury to guard Teaghan Moses slowed the process. Deters is crafty though and will get good mileage from his team, now 2-3.

Middleburg, with coach Lindsay Burghart and assistant Max Grandstaff holding solid defensive tactics adding ex-Burg super scorer Hannah Roney to the bench to coach after superb career stops in two college, may have found a way to put



Keystone Heights point guard Kiley Channell is driving force in Lady Indians early push to winning record, 6-2, with a 14.8 points per game average and a team-leading 18 three pointers.

points on the board.

If Roney can coach up some shooters, watch out. Middleburg, 2-5, may become a sleeper team after the Christmas break.



Oakleaf High sophomore guard Trista Brown has emerged as the fourth prong of the Lady Knights wicked fast attack as Lady Knights return to prominence with six straight wins since an early season loss.



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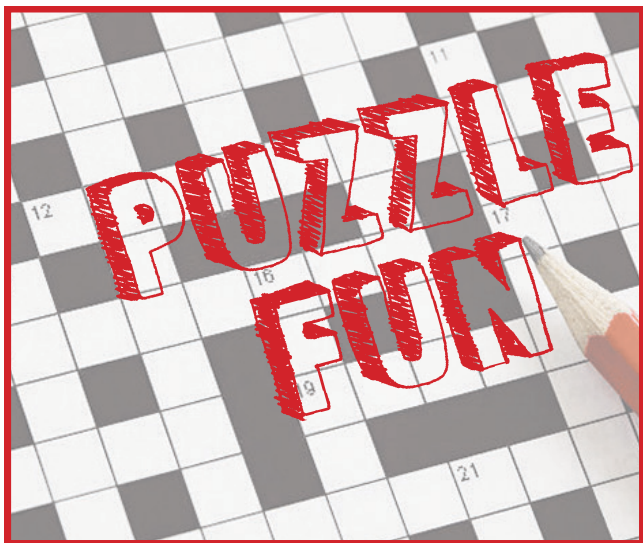


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Level: Advanced



Oakleaf High's Isaiah Shevchook bears hugs opponent at Bobcat Round Robin wrestling invitation. Shevchook finished second in weight class.

Wrestling

from page 28

(lost by pin at 2:52 to Buchholz Kason Nichols) and Tony Gray at 285, lost by pin to Timber Creek Peter Nesheiwat).

And, also at University High, on Friday, the Lady Clash of the Titans featured Matanzas again taking the top spot with Middleburg third, Oakleaf fifth and Clay 18th in the all-female wrestle-fest.

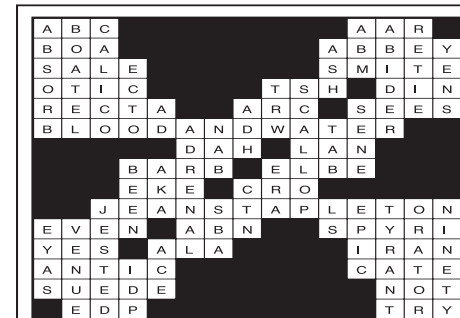
Clay's lone wrestler was state returner Aubrianna Apple who crushed her 135 weight class with five pins in the first period; two at 54 seconds.

Middleburg fielder five wrestlers led by gold medalists Gracie Bradshaw who got two quick pins and a 13-6 win for the 100 pound title and Cheyenne Cruce at 190 who pinned Oakleaf's Jazmine Moore in a tough three period battle. Cruce got the final with three pins under 39 seconds.

Skyla Fisher at 105 finished second with a loss to South Dade's Rebekka Kinkade with Memphis Moses at 110 losing in her weight class final to Matanzas' Mariah Mills via pin.

Sarah Walsh, finishing at 4-2 at 125, placed fourth after losing to Tiana Fries of Matanzas, winning four via pin, then losing by pin to Fries for fourth place.

For Oakleaf, with three top three finishers and two gold medalists; Kailani Barrientos at 125 and Kayla Harrison at 170, the start of the season saw the Lady Knights field four wrestlers. Jazmine Moore at 190 lost in her final to Cheyenne Cruce of Middleburg by third period pin and Sofia Shirley-Montijo at 155 beat Lake Wales' Jordyn Alson by pin for third place.



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

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Determine the code to reveal the answer!

Solve the code to discover words related to reading books. Each number corresponds to a letter. (Hint: 3 = S)

A. 2 6 9 17 8 19 20

Clue: Division in a book

B. 3 12 15 10 17 3 14 3

Clue: Summary

C. 8 6 19 16 19

Clue: Topic or subject

D. 3 19 8 8 14 15 11

Clue: Location

Answers: A. chapter B. synopsis C. theme D. setting

WORD SCRAMBLE

Rearrange the letters to spell something pertaining to books.

V C R S O E

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Answer: Covers

Guess Who?

I am an actress born in California on December 8, 1964. I was once employed as an NFL cheerleader for the San Francisco 49ers. I've played both a reporter seeking out a superhero and a meddling, upper crust housewife on two popular TV shows.

Answer: Teri Hatcher

GOOD BOOK WORD SEARCH

M G O X U P O M I M A G E R Y Y S N N P
 E Y N D G R A M N O I T C I F N O N H H
 M Y Y E D E N C U T A N A L O G Y O H A
 C I H G A L G U O H D L X L N F N M B O
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WORDS

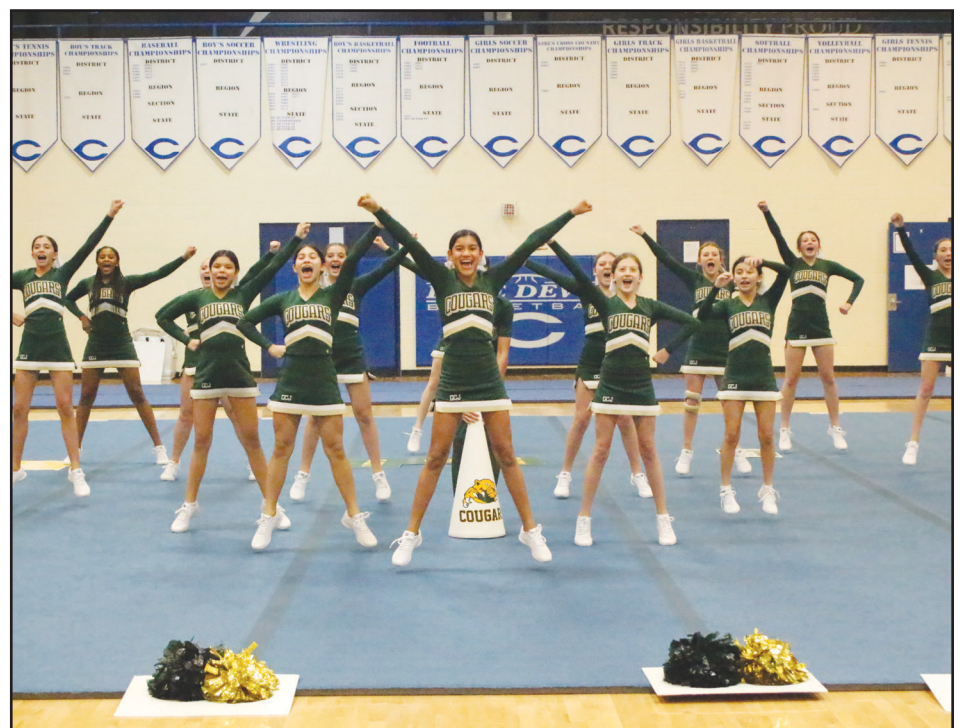
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- AFFIXES
- ALLITERATION
- ANALOGY
- ANTONYM
- AUTHOR
- BIOGRAPHY
- BOOKMARK
- CHARACTER
- COLLECTION
- COMPREHENSION
- CONCEPTS
- HOBBY
- ILLUSTRATOR
- IMAGERY
- LIBRARY
- LITERARY
- NONFICTION
- PARAGRAPH
- PHONICS
- READER
- RELAXATION
- SENTENCES

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



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

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