

CLAY TODAY



— INSERT

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Oakleaf Renegades tailback Calvin Ferguson stole the show once again after a four touchdown performance at the Pop Warner National Tournament on Friday, Dec. 9, with three 50-plus yard scores in the Pop Warner 10-Under National Championship game with the Renegades winning, 34-19, at Orlando's Camping World Stadium. The Renegades, coached by Carlos Lowe, finished the season unbeaten and won the championship after back-to-back 27-0 quarterfinal and semifinal wins. *See story on page 32*



Baptist Medical Center Clay finally gets to finish line

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

FLEMING ISLAND — Moments after the ribbon at the front doors of Baptist Medical Center Clay was cut and dignitaries had completed their Chamber of Commerce group photos, Darin Roark took a step away from the entrance and

SEE BAPTIST, 7



COLD CASE FILES

Unsolved ... but not forgotten

Periodically, Clay Today will highlight an unsolved case from the Clay County Sheriff's Office, Green Cove Springs and Orange Park police departments or the Florida Highway Patrol. While the cases are considered cold, law enforcement hopes refreshing information may lead to a tip that solves the crime.

'It's right there'

Orange Park still searching for clue that will solve Jillian Berrios cold case

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

ORANGE PARK — There are days when Lt. Cody Monroe's attention wanes and his memory focuses on the tiniest of details the morning Jillian Berrios was murdered.

He's poured through every detail, big and small. He's chased hundreds of leads, watched hours of video and considered every possibility.

"This one haunts me," Monroe said. "It's frustrating. It's scary. It's right there."

Monroe had just been promoted to the

SEE CASE, 11



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Clay legislative delegation to hear community concerns

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

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Florida Rep. Sam Garrison (R-Fleming Island), chairman of the Clay County legislative delegation, will be holding a meeting to hear public testimony on state issues and the consideration of local bills.

The delegations include chambers of commerce, local elected officials, employers, and other community leaders and representatives.

“It’s an annual event. It is put on by the Clay County Legislation Delegation with Rep. (Bobby) Payne and Sen. (Jennifer) Bradley, and we do it every year to provide an opportunity for the people of Clay County to let us know what’s on their minds and what they care about,” Garrison said.

The organizational meeting will be held Monday, Dec. 19, from 3-6 p.m. The public hearing will take place on the fourth floor at the Clay County Administration Building, 477 Houston St.

“Traditionally, we encourage our local governments to be there to let us know what they are dealing with on a local level; however, it is open for anyone to attend,” Garrison said.

“Many community organizations come to share their mission. Sometimes people

make requests for state funding. Often-times, there are just a few folks from the community who just want three minutes to say their peace. We certainly welcome them.”

Garrison said the value in holding delegation meetings because it allows voters to present needs and share concerns within their community.

“Our meetings in Tallahassee tend to be on the Macro scale, issues of state-wide concern. We’re here to address those issues and be a voice for our local communities,” he said.

“Sometimes people will have legislative issues that matter to them, and this is an opportunity to speak to us directly. It’s an opportunity for us to listen. Everyone gets the same amount of time. We just want to allow everyone to be heard.”

For the most part, community delegations seek appropriations and policy changes weighing in on federal rules and regulations. Many address budget funding.

“The county has issues that are important to them that involve the state. If it’s important to the county, then it’s certainly important to us,” Garrison said.

The delegation meetings have also helped determine which projects are most important to the community.



“Last year, we received funding of \$1 million to help restore the Clay County Jail. That came from discussions with the local people,” Garrison said. “Another example would be the one million and a half dollars we received to expand the Clay County trail system near Jennings State Forest and that part of the county that’s been underserved for a long time. That didn’t come from the government, that came from the community.”

Garrison encourages anyone who wants to speak to come in person; however, the meeting will also have a live stream. Inter-

ested citizens wishing to be placed on the agenda for the meeting are asked to contact Garrison’s office by email at Courtney.Hoard@myfloridahouse.gov.

The deadline to get on the agenda is Friday. Materials and handouts necessary for the hearing must also be turned in by Friday.

“We request that people who want to speak put in a request, and we can put them on the agenda, but that’s not a requirement,” Garrison said. “Anyone who wants to speak will have the opportunity to. We are here to listen.”

BCC approves impact fee; delays start for six months

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

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The Board of County Commission finally voted Tuesday night to implement an impact fee on new development, but decided to push the start date back to June.

Commissioner Kristen Burke seemed to reluctantly entered a motion to demand the collection of \$121 million during the next 22 years from new construction, then she amended her motion to include a six-month delay.

That motion passed, 5-0.

The approval came after developers and builders told commissioners the new fee would cripple growth. By delaying the start, the BCC appeared to find common ground.

With the vote, Clay County became the 44th of 67 counties in Florida to charge extra fees on new development to offset the costs of building new schools, roads, infrastructure, parks, law enforcement,

constitutional facilities and fire and rescue to accommodate growth.

“If there’s another way to raise the money, bring it to us,” commissioner Mike Cella said.

According to the Clay County Development Impact Fee Study and the long-range Comprehensive Plan, the county is expected to have a \$400 million shortfall of funds through 2045, and consultants with Willdan Financial Services said the county will be able to collect an additional \$280 million through existing taxes. As the population grows, Willdan said, the county will get more revenue from property, ad valorem, sales and gas taxes. That means the county would be short \$121 million to pay for essentials.

Developers and construction companies said the current economic conditions and rising interest rates have led to a reduction of building permits. A \$6,103 impact fee on a new house larger than 2,500-square-feet, would cripple the coun-

ty’s growth – and lead to the collection of fewer tax dollars.

Assistant County Manager Troy Nagle worked with developers and Willdan to rework some of the collection fees – and redefine some of the long-term needs.

“I think the study is definitely an improvement. It’s getting better,” said Daniel Vallencourt, whose family owns Vallencourt Construction Company. “It still just needs a lot of work. There’s a very high possibility that when we start spending this impacted money, we have to fund it with other money. So we’re going to have to have it somehow we don’t have it now.”

Nagle reiterated the county will fund the difference by collecting more taxes as the population grows.

“If we stay on our current pace, our staff believes the ad valorem will support it,” Nagle said.

Commissioner Jim Renninger said once the First Coast Expressway is completed, Clay County should experience a boon in

new businesses and residential communities.

“The First Coast Expressway will be a huge game changer as far as sales tax,” he said. Commissioners were reminded the county’s sheriff’s office and fire rescue already is operating without enough personnel and resources. And as the county’s population increases, the deficits will become direr.

“We handle about 250,000 calls for service a year,” Sheriff Michelle Cook said. “And as Chief (Loren Mock of Fire Rescue) also mentioned, we start getting more than one priority call going on in the county at a time we’re already strapped for people to respond. And as people continue to move, as more traffic comes in, as more people drive through the county, our call volume is just going to increase.”

The board meets at 4 p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesday of every month. Due to the holidays, the BCC’s next meeting will be on Jan. 10.

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Toll reduction fast-tracked through Florida Senate

Smaller fees include First Coast Expressway

By Christine Jordan Sexton
For FloridaPolitics

Some drivers could see a 50% credit on tolls in the 2023 calendar year – funded by Florida’s budget surplus – under a priority proposal of Gov. Ron DeSantis that is on a fast highway to the finish line during this week’s Special Session.

The Senate Fiscal Policy Committee on Monday voted unanimously to approve SB 6A, which authorizes the Florida Turnpike Enterprise to establish a toll relief program for drivers that notch 35 transactions a month on their SunPass transponders.

The plan includes the First Coast Expressway in Clay County.

The bill cleared through the committee, while the House Appropriations Committee will consider its version of the proposal bill in committee on Tuesday.

Senate Fiscal Policy Committee member Sen. Lori Berman voted for the bill but asked Sen. Nick DiCeglie why the state wasn’t lowering the tolls for everyone given the \$500 million general revenue investment needed to make it a reality.

“Thirty-five transactions a month, those are typical folks who drive five or six times a week. Those are typically our hardworking Floridians,” he said, explaining the policy.

Berman said she had “concerns” that the policy picked “winners and losers.” Someone who required dialysis three times a month, she said, wouldn’t qualify for the benefit even though they are using the same roads.

Berman said the proposal should “benefit a broader class.”

The proposal authorizes the Florida Turnpike Enterprise to establish the program effective from Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, 2023, for all Florida toll facilities that use a Florida-issued transponder or are interoperable with the Florida Department of Transportation’s SunPass system.

The discounts are for transponders that rack up 35 or more transactions per calendar month. The discounts are equal to 50% of the amount paid for the qualifying transactions.

A “qualifying transaction” is a paid transponder-based toll transaction incurred by a two-axle vehicle for travel on a Florida toll facility using a Florida issued transponder linked to a qualifying account. The account credit must be posted to the qualifying account the month after the

SEE TOLLS, 5

OPINIONS



The gift of conversation makes a perfect holiday present

By Irene Toto
CEO Clay Behavioral Health Center

CLAY COUNTY – It’s no secret that the holiday season can be stressful, exhausting and even depressing. For many people, the dissonance between Hallmark Channel expectations and personal reality is crushing – and several years of a pandemic, accompanied by an opioid epidemic plus economic and political upheaval, has only made things worse.



Irene Toto

Fortunately, there is a silver lining to the holiday cloud. Whether you are feeling the strain yourself or reaching out to help friends and neighbors weather the holiday blues, you will probably interact with more folks than usual over the next few weeks, and those encounters can be the greatest gift of the holidays.

Social interaction has enormous benefits for both our state of mind and our physical health. Study after study shows that the strongest predictors of quality of life, mental acuity and longevity revolve around other human beings.

Exercise and “clean eating” are much lower on the scale than relationships – and close ties are important, but so are more casual connections such as greeting your mail carrier or chatting with the barista at your favorite coffee shop.

Just as importantly, increased social activity at this time of year gives us more opportunities to converse with friends, neighbors and family members. Whether it’s dinnertime dialogue, preparing holiday treats, or visiting at the annual company party, the season gives us chances to not only catch up but to also gauge how people are really feeling.

Being together gives us a chance to ask “How are you doing?” with genuine curiosity – and then follow up if a friend, family member – even a stranger – doesn’t seem to be doing well. Sometimes, people will be surprisingly candid about their state of mind. Other times, the conversation is a little less direct. In either case, gatherings provide opportunities to talk. And talking can be the first step in connecting folks with mental health care that can make a world of difference.

If you feel uncomfortable having those talks or encounter someone in dire need of help – such as a person contemplating suicide – those conversations can feel difficult, if not impossible.

Fortunately, there are proven techniques that promote constructive results, and a local initiative called Talkable Communities provides free mental health training to help.

TC is a collaboration among five behavioral health providers in six North Florida counties.

Based on the idea that it takes a village to promote mental and emotional well-being, they offer three courses. Two of them specifically address how to aid young people at risk for mental ill-

SEE CONVERSATION, 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.

Stemwinder: (STEM-WIYN-der) a noun that means an interesting or rousing speech.

“The candidate for the city council delivered a stemwinder so powerful, it instantly raised its poll numbers.”

This Week in History

Five years ago, 2017

- County commissioners may get an 89% pay increase to help push their salaries to the same levels as other counties.
- Ground is broken for St. Johns Classical Academy on Fleming Island.
- Two-time Grammy award winning jazz drummer Ulysses Owens Jr. holds a clinic at Oakleaf Junior High.

10 years ago, 2012

- Tow truck driver Napoleon Ballard of Keystone Heights is killed when he became trapped under the front tire of a pickup truck he was towing.
- Despite a rejection from the planning commission, the BCC moved forward to allow digital billboards.
- Mary Ann McCall of Fleming Island is charged with taking at least \$50,000 from victims after she told them she needed help paying her bills because she was dying of cancer.

20 years ago, 2002

- The Board of County Commissioners and the School Board work to create a draft of an ordinance to levy school impact fees to keep pace with growth.
- Kellie Jo Kilberg is hired to run the Clay County Economic Development Council and Clay County Development Authority.
- Students at Doctors Inlet Elementary present a multi-cultural program called “Christmas on Candy Cane Lane.”

30 years ago, 1992

- The first-degree murder trial for Andrew Clemons ends in a hung jury. Clemons was accused of killing Orange Park Winn-Dixie assistant manager Kevin Baker during a robbery.

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.

Letter to the editor

Band parent applauds Clay Today's coverage of high school bands

Editor:

Thank you for your wonderful coverage of the state band competition and the awesome performance of our local high school bands.

Each week when I see several pages covering high school sports, I wonder why the accomplishments of our young musicians are not given more acknowledgment. Our young athletes certainly deserve recognition, but so do our young musicians. They put in just as many hours learning their skills, perhaps more. They all practice at home to learn their individual instruments. Then they practice marching during the summer months as noted in your article.

And after marching season is over, they dive into concert season.

Band is year-round. These students learn a skill, but they also learn teamwork

and sportsmanship, just as the athletes do. Having been to many band competitions over the years, I have noted that these kids for the most part are incredibly well-mannered and well-behaved. I have many times heard kids from one band complementing the performance of another band.

There is competition, but there is also a shared love of music and the ability to appreciate the abilities of the competitors. I would challenge you to go to one or more of their Christmas or spring concerts and cover that in an article. It may not be as showy as a performance on a football field, but it takes every bit as much work, skill and dedication.

We have a fantastic music program in the Clay County schools, at the elementary, junior high, and senior high levels. They deserve to be seen.

Carol Norman

Conversation

from page 4

ness, substance use and suicide. The third – “Question. Persuade. Refer.”—teaches participants how to recognize the warning signs of a suicide crisis at any age, and then help that person get appropriate help.

You can find more information about the TC partners and course offerings online at TalkableCommunities.org

With rates of depression and anxiety rising throughout our region, and suicide

becoming a leading cause of death in our nation, we all need to step up and help connect our neighbors, co-workers and loved ones with the resources they need to be safe and feel better. If the holiday season makes that easier, it will truly be a gift for all concerned.

With more than 30 years of experience in the mental health field, Irene M. Toto, LMHC, is CEO of Clay Behavioral Health Center, a partner in the Talkable Communities Initiative.

History

from page 4

- The Orange Park High football team loses to Manatee, 37-17, in the Class 5A semifinals.

- Bikers participate in a Harley Christmas to collect toys during its Toy Fun Run project.

40 years ago, 1982

- Talmadge Stuckey reluctantly is approved for a 52-unit apartment complex in Green Cove Springs.

- County Property Appraiser Mickey Murray said the county will lose about \$400,000 after the state's Supreme Court strikes down the five-year requirement to qualify for \$25,000 homestead exemption.

- The school board decides to call elementary school “C” Ridgeview Elementary.

Florida's Morrisroe's work to be featured at SJRSC's Palatka campus

PALATKA – University of Florida Professor in the School of Art and Art History Julia Morrisroe's current project, “Good Life,” will be on display at St. Johns River State College's Florida School of the Arts Main Gallery on the St. Johns River State College campus in Palatka.

Julia Morrisroe's current project was developed from an examination into the question of how the “Good Life” is enshrined in public art and commemorative monuments. The question framed a course Morrisroe was teaching that delved into the fraught history regarding confederate

monuments, which was brought to national attention by the white nationalist's attack in Charlottesville, the visit of Richard Spencer to the University of Florida and the removal of a confederate monument from a local county courthouse.

“This research resonates with my long interest in medieval religious iconography and how images are used to embed meaning in culture,” Morrisroe said. “With over 700 monuments still standing in public spaces, I consider how monuments can become vehicles for transformation rather than agents of oppression and tyranny.”

Tolls

from page 4

credit is earned.

There are no residency requirements for SunPass, which means that the discounts will also apply to snowbirds so long as they meet the minimum number of trips.

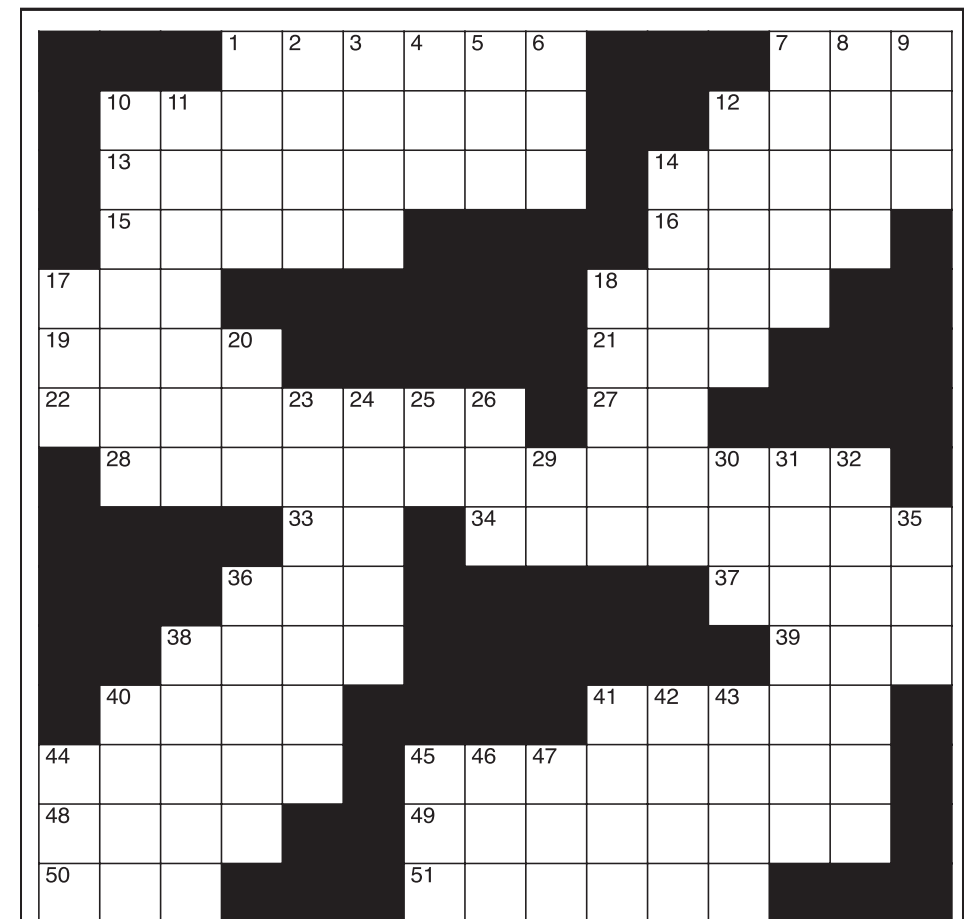
In moving the bill during the Special Session on property insurance, the Legislature has agreed to fast-track a proposal that DeSantis initially said would be a priority for the 2023 Regular Session.

It also builds off a proposal DeSantis announced last August called “SunPass Savings.” Under the plan, customers with two-axle vehicles receive a 20% credit to their SunPass account if they incurred at least 40 paid toll transactions in a month, or a 25% credit to their SunPass account if they incur at least 80 paid toll transactions.

Florida toll facilities included in the

SunPass Savings program, according to a staff analysis of SB 6A, include the Turnpike Mainline (SR 91/SR 821), Sawgrass Expressway (SR 869), Alligator Alley, Polk Parkway (SR 570), Sunshine Skyway Bridge, Interstate 4 connector, Veterans Expressway (SR 589), Suncoast Parkway (SR 589), Beachline East (SR 528) MP 0-8, Beachline West (SR 528) MP 31-46, Western Beltway (SR 429) MP 0-11, Southern Connector Extension (SR 417) MP 0-3, Seminole Expressway (SR 417) MP 38-55 A/B, Wekiva Parkway (SR 429) Mount Plymouth Rd to SR 46, First Coast Expressway (SR 23), Garcon Point Bridge, Pinellas Bayway and express lanes.

Christine Jordan Sexton is a Tallahassee-based health care reporter who focuses on health care policy and the politics behind it. Medicaid, health insurance, workers' compensation, and business and professional regulation are just a few of the things that keep me busy.



CLUES ACROSS

1. Respiratory disorder
7. Bulgarian mountain peak
10. Group of important people
12. South American nation
13. Amazes
14. ___-Castell, makers of pens
15. Perlman and Seehorn are two
16. Early medieval alphabet
17. Legislator (slang)
18. Tasty crustacean
19. Course of action
21. Airborne (abbr.)
22. Permanent church appointment
27. Larry and Curly's pal
28. Famed American journalist
33. 12th letter of Greek alphabet
34. In a way, vanished
36. Afflict in mind or body
37. Egyptian Sun god
38. Source of the Blue Nile
39. Egyptian unit of weight
40. Be the source of pain

CLUES DOWN

1. Wager
2. Classical portico
3. As a result
4. Bird
5. A type of OSquad
6. Autonomic nervous system
7. Dish with food on a stick
8. City northwest of Provo
9. C. European river
10. One out of jail
11. Henry Clay estate
12. Heathen
14. Refrained
17. Parts per billion (abbr.)

18. ÒThe StrangerÓ author
20. Not old
23. Periods of starvation
24. Language of tribe in India
25. Savings account
26. Pitching stat
29. Megabyte
30. Ribonucleic acid
31. A place to put your feet
32. The fun part of a week
35. We all have our own
36. Partner to ÓoohedÓ
38. African nation
40. Breezed through
41. Sets out
42. Other
43. Not fattening
44. ÓMuch ___ about nothingÓ
45. Central Time
46. Former EU monetary unit
47. Charles S. Dutton sitcom

J.P. Hall Christmas Party to bring holiday cheer to local children

**Event starts at 9 a.m.
Saturday at Clay County
Fairgrounds**

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The hard work is done. Now comes the fun part.

Volunteers with J.P. Hall Children's Charities will host their 41st Christmas Party Saturday morning at the Clay County Fairgrounds with hopes of answering the dreams and needs of more than 1,000 children.

After gathering up toys and donations for months, the nonprofit happily will give it all away so children will wake up with toys under the Christmas tree.

While the first bag of toys will be distributed at 9, cars will get in line hours in advance to be the first to drive thru the Cattleman's Arena. Every Clay County child 14 and younger will get a bag of three new toys and the opportunity to pick out a bicycle and one used toy.

The struggling economy and higher prices have put a squeeze on holiday budgets, said charities CEO Virginia Hall.

"People who are struggling with the current economics of our country," she said.

Each bag of toys costs about \$35, so



residents can make donations at jphall-charities.com. "When someone donates \$35 for one bag of toys, that's wonderful," Hall recently said.

To make it happen, the charity that's committed year-round to improving the lives of underprivileged children of Clay

County relies on donations. Hall, the charity's CEO, said the need for services during the holidays has never been greater.

Last year, more than 1,100 children received toys. That number is expected to increase on Saturday, Hall said.

HCA Florida Orange Park Hospital and Clay Chamber recently hosted its annual Christmas Luncheon at the Hilltop Restaurant in Orange Park to collect toys and money for the Children's Charities Christmas Party. The event was sold out and hundreds of toys were added to the thousands that were already collected or purchased.

Toys will be divided into age-appropriate categories for boys and girls. The event is open to Clay County children and the child must be in the car. The gates to the fairgrounds will close promptly at noon, Hall said, but every child already in line will get toys.

Entertainers perform Christmas carols for the enjoyment of both the volunteers and the participants.

The charity is committed year-round to improving the lives of underprivileged children of Clay County. Hall said the need for services during the holidays has never been greater.

In partnership with the Clothes Closet in Orange Park, families also can get free clothing.

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Florida Supervisor of Elections offering scholarship money

For Clay Today

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The Florida Supervisors of Elections Association will offer four \$1,200 scholarships in 2023 to college students majoring in Political Science, Public or Business Administration or Journalism/Mass Communications. Clay County Supervisor of Elections, Chris H Chambless, encourages all eligible students to apply.

This scholarship is open to Clay County registered voters who have been enrolled or accepted in a Florida college or university as a full-time student and who is at least a junior. To be eligible, the student

must maintain a "C" average or better and have been a resident of Florida for the previous two years.

The deadline to apply for a scholarship is March 10. Applications are available online at ClayElections.gov or may be picked up from the Clay County Supervisor of Elections office, 500 N. Orange Ave.

Applications must be submitted to the elections office of the county in which the applicant is registered to vote. Each county will select one finalist to send to the FSE Scholarship Committee for consideration.

If you have questions or need more information, please call (904) 269-6350 or visit ClayElections.gov your source for verified election information.

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Baptist New 102-bed hospital will provide contemporary care in Clay County

from page 1



Crews started the project more than two years ago.

Baptist Medical Center Clay: From conception to completion

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

FLEMING ISLAND – Two years ago, Baptist Medical Center Clay existed only on blueprints and imaginations.

Now it's just a handful of days away from serving the medical needs of the community.

Baptist announced its plan to build a 300,000-square-foot, full-service hospital on Jan. 22, 2020.



Two years ago, Baptist Medical Center Clay President Darin Roark pointed where the new hospital would be built.

During the announcement, Baptist Clay President Darin Roark said, "Clay County residents tell us they need more hospital-based health care services close to where they live and work. Having a full-service hospital nearby will eliminate the need for travel while providing the medical expertise that Baptist Health is known for."

Days later, Roark stood in the parking lot of the Emergency Center and visualized where and what the hospital would be.

The first bulldozer belched black smoke and started clearing the lot

SEE CLAY, 20



The final beam was put in place on Sept. 31, 2021. Fourteen months later, the hospital is ready to accept patients.

took a much-needed deep breath.

His dream of building an intricate, yet contemporary, the medical facility was, at long last, at the finish line. Except for buffing out a few scuff marks, laying sod and fluffing pillows, the work is done. And that means Roark could finally slow down.

His mind has been filled with ideas, plans and challenges since hospital and county officials broke ground on the \$235 million project that also included transforming the old VyStar building west of the hospital into a health center.

"I usually get about two hours of sleep," Roark said while walking through the hospital two days before the ribbon cutting. "I get up and go running for about an hour and then I'm here. I've been running on adrenaline. This project is personal."

Roark is the hospital president. He's walked through the site since the first scoop of dirt was moved and the first nail was driven. He's been down every hallway and checked behind every door since construction workers started framing the 102 patient rooms. The plans are committed to memory so all work stayed on target.

During his daily tours, he tries to thank every worker and employee for their hard work. The praise generally is followed by a handshake. Portions of the Baptist Clay are already operational. The laboratory has been open for more than a week. The pharmacy is ready to go. Nurses and technicians have spent the last few weeks in training, often sharing the same hallways with men in yellow vests and hard hats who were making sure every wall was straight and sound. Except for rooms in maternity and neonatal intensive care units for twins, every room at Baptist Clay is private. Roark and unit nurses said both units for newborns will allow babies to get the most contemporary care available. "It is amazing in every way," said Sarah Surrency. "We can't wait to have our first delivery here. We are eager to (hopefully) get started on the 20th, and we've got



STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

Baptist Neonatal Intensive Care Unit Nursing Supervisor Letitia Croce has worked in NICA for 15 years, but she is amazed by the technology and care at the new hospital.

great staff, and great experience – all the things we're going to have an amazing story to tell here about the display."

Surrency said unless there are complications, the baby and mother aren't separated until they are discharged. Each room has a fold-out bed, a full bathroom, a safe, a refrigerator for the family, a refrigerator for baby milk and a large-screen television.

"That's what's beautiful about it. We want the bonding to take part from the minute that baby comes out of the womb," she said. "We are going to have skin-to-skin care bonding. The entire stay, there is no moving and shuffling of departments when that baby's delivered. Mama and baby stay together and they stay in the same room."

If there are complications, NCIU is next door. "We're just so blessed with this technology," supervisor Letitia Croce. "This is brand new. To me, and I've been in NICU for almost 15 years, this is the best of the best. We have so much of the newest that I'm a

little speechless. I'm super excited to be a part of it."

The health place next door also has several available services. Just last week, the 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.

Eventually, health place will be home to Baptist doctors, as well as meeting rooms for classes, healthy living programs and other medical services. The new hospital cost \$175 million, Roark said, and with the conversion of health place, "We're all in at \$235 million."

There currently are 585 employees and Roark said that soon will grow to 600. And with it comes a shift in challenges from building a hospital to running one.

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Veterans to be honored throughout Clay during Wreaths Across America

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

CLAY COUNTY – Last year's Wreaths Across America was especially stressful for Tina Bullock, she felt the pressure of taking over for Joan Jones, the wreaths scheduled for Keystone Heights Cemetary didn't arrive until the morning of the event.

What kept Bullock grounded, though, was the purpose of the day – to remember our fallen U.S. veterans, to honor those who served and to teach children the value of freedom.

"What I realize now is how did (Jones) get all of this done? She certainly was dedicated and what she accomplished is amazing," Bullock said.

Although Bullock ran last year's ceremony, Jones still had a seat on the main stage. Jones, who brought Wreaths Across America to Keystone Heights in 2011, died on Oct. 26. She was 95.

One of the 500 wreaths at the cemetery will be placed in her honor.

Ceremonies also are scheduled for Magnolia Cemetery in Orange Park, Jacksonville Memory Gardens in Orange Park and Hardage-Giddens Holly Hill Memorial Park in Middleburg. Wreaths also will be placed with veterans' gravemarkers at Middleburg Methodist Church on Sunday.

Saturday's programs will start at noon.

At Magnolia Cemetery, Mayor Randy Anderson will lead the town's observance at the Veteran's Memorial Wall.

Guests are asked to bring a lawn chair as seating will be limited. Parking will be at the First Baptist Church at 1140 Kingsley Avenue.

Wreaths Across America was first inspired when 12-year-old Morrill Worcester won a trip to the nation's capital. He later recognized his success as a businessman was, in large part, due to the values of this nation and the veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.



Worcester had a surplus of wreaths in 1992 and he placed them on graves at Arlington Cemetery. Thirty years later, millions of wreaths have been distributed.

Bullock ordered 609 wreaths this year, and they arrived on Monday. Of those, 73 were given to Middleburg Methodist Church and others were made available for Amvets Post 86 in Keystone Heights.

Bullock said nearly 8,000 wreaths have been dedicated to Keystone Heights in the last 12 years. She said her most-pressing cost is new wire stands. The Lake Region Kiwanis gave her a mini-grant to buy new stands this year, and they were placed on the graves days in advance.

"(Former Clay County Commissioner and Ret. U.S. Marine) Gayward Hendry will be our guest speaker," Bullock said. "We really want to child children involved so Keystone Heights Elementary will sing; Keystone Heights High JROTC and the American Heritage girls will be there, too.

"We want to make sure our young people are aware of the service of our veterans."

Bullock said there will be extra wreaths in case they missed a veteran.

"I always worry we're going to miss somebody," she said.

At least she has plenty of wreaths if she needs them. And they got there on time.



Obituaries

Shawn Ray Taylor

Shawn Ray Taylor, 48, of Bryceville, FL, passed away December 6, 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



Bonnie Jean Landry

Bonnie Jean Landry, 91, of Orange Park, FL, passed away December 9, 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

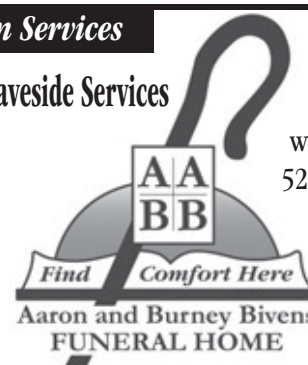


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PHOTOS COURTESY OF GREEN COVE SPRINGS POLICE DEPARTMENT



Shop with a Cop

Green Cove Spring Police Department take 12 children on a shopping spree at Walmart

FLEMING ISLAND – Twelve children not only got the thrill of arriving at the Walmart Supercenter on Fleming Island with a police escort, the left with a lot of the wish list filled. The Green Cove Springs Police Department invited 12 children to cookies and hot chocolate to their headquarters, and from there they road a bus provided by Springs Church with police cruisers using the red and blue flashing lights. Each child was given \$140 to spend, and each had an officer escorting them through the store, police chief John Guzman said.

Community Briefs

Green Cove Animal Hospital collecting items for Food Pantry of Green Cove Springs

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The Green Cove Springs Animal Hospital will be collecting nonperishable food to help feed the community, and it is offering discounts for every item donated.

The hospital at 3363 U.S. Highway 17 will accept items like canned fruits and vegetables, soups, meats and peanut butter. For each item, the hospital will apply a \$1 credit toward future invoices at the hospital.

At the end of the drive, the food will be delivered to the Food Pantry of Green Cove Springs.

Thrasher-Horne: Show memorabilia, gift certificates a perfect Christmas 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. The center also is selling tickets and gift certificates to upcoming shows. For more information, call (904) 276-6815 or visit thcenter.org.

After-school programs underway at Augusta Savage Museum and Mentoring Center

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Although classes already have started, officials at the Augusta Savage Museum and Mentoring Center are still accepting students for its after-school programs.

Classes include Art Workshop with Barbara Cornett on Thursdays (through Dec. 15), Introduction in Dance by Leslee Bryan on Tuesdays (through May 25), Dress for Success by Felecia Hampshire on Thursdays (through Nov. 10), Reading Tutoring by Cynthia Reese on Wednesdays (through November), Math Tutoring by Lucy Conrad on Tuesdays or Thursdays (through May), Counselor Tammy Rowson on Tuesdays, Dance by La'Farrah Davis on Mondays (through May 25).

More classes may be added to accommodate enrollment.



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2608 Black Creek Dr., Middleburg, FL

Chili cookoff between first responders, veterans brings heat to Shane's fight against leukemia

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

FLEMING ISLAND – If there's one thing first responders and veterans know, it's how to make chili. But who makes the best? Cops? Firefighters? EMTs? Emergency Management? Former soldiers?

What makes a good chili? Should it be spicy? What about beans? Are there secret ingredients – folks in Cincinnati add chocolate – that make a difference?

Sunday's chili cookoff at Whitey's Fish Camp will help provide some answers – all while helping a local boy, Shane, who is battling leukemia.

The Clay County Sheriff's Office, Fire Rescue, Emergency Management, Schools District and the Schools District, Green Cove Springs and Orange Park police departments to join with Waymaker GIs and Operation Barnabas to support the fundraiser.

The first bowl will be filled at 2 p.m. and the taste fest won't end until 4 p.m., and it costs \$10 to be one of the lucky tasters.

The agencies involved, however, lit a fire in the competition long before the first burner was turned on.

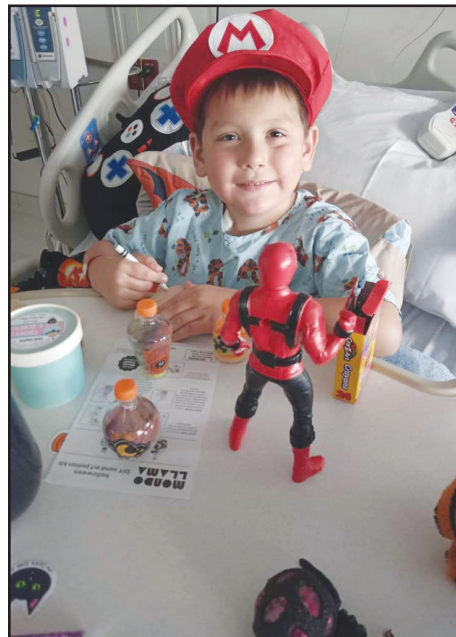
"Firefighters know food and we definitely know a thing or two about heat!," said acting Fire/Rescue Chief David E. Motes. "Clay County Department of Public Safety looks forward to squaring off against the competition and especially so with our Law Enforcement brothers and sisters."

Green Cove will send three different entries, according to chief John Guzman.

"I won't have one," he said. "Nobody would want to eat my chili."

Raylan Heck is the lead officer for Operation Barnabas. That group is dedicated to providing homeless veterans and their families with housing and food, while helping to prevent suicide and providing spiritual encouragement.

"Operation Barnabas is a Charity that helps veterans," Heck said. "The root word



County first responders and veterans have rallied around Nathan and his fight against leukemia.

for Charity is Love. We are gonna win the Chili Cookoff because we are gonna make our chili with Love. Plus the Secret is it's my Grandmothers recipe, so there is that."

Clay County District School Police aren't backing down, either.

"We are going to win because we have a team member bringing his Buffalo, New York, recipe that is out of this world," Chief Kenneth Wagner said. "The secret, it's made with grit and love for our Clay County Students.

"(Our) team, 'Not So Silent Night Chili Cooking Team' is putting our best to the test."

The Division of Emergency Management is used to responding to disasters, so there are times when a good bowl of chili becomes their lifeblood.

"Emergency Managers are tasked daily with pulling calm out of crisis – making order out of chaos – but as (philosopher Friedrich) Nietzsche was credited to have said, 'Gazing into the eyes of the beast, one



From left, Kenneth Wagner, Raylan Heck, David Motes, Michelle Cook, John Guzman, Nathan's friend Alyssa Pfeifer and Whitey's bar manager Jerry Byrd will compete in a chili cookoff Sunday at Whitey's to raise money for Nathan's fight against leukemia. The cost is \$10 a taster.

Reasons Why The Emergency Management Chili Will Be The BEST Chili

By Mike Ladd

Emergency Managers (EM) are tasked daily with pulling calm out of crisis – making order out of chaos – but as Nietzsche was credited to have said, "gazing into the eyes of the beast, one should be careful not to become the beast." Who better than EM to release the "beast" in the spirit of our White Chicken Chili?

Additionally, our world-famous (okay, pretty famous in our house) chili will be prepared and served by Team America EM – an all-star team that has a childhood cancer survivor (3 years post-treatment) on board that truly understands how important this event is.



While winning is probably a given based on the incredibly tasty and high quality of our chili – being part of this incredible Community effort to help Shane and his family in this fight is clearly job number one!

should be careful not to become the beast.' Who better than EM to release the 'beast' in the spirit of our White Chicken Chili?" said deputy director Mike Ladd.

"Additionally, our world-famous (OK, pretty famous in our house) chili will be prepared and served by Team America EM – an all-star team that has a childhood cancer survivor (three years post-treatment) on board that truly understands how important this event is. While winning is probably a given based on the incredibly tasty and high quality of our chili, being

part of this incredible Community effort to help Shane and his family in this fight is clearly job number one!"

Despite being the smallest law enforcement agency in the county, the Orange Park Police Department is happy to stand toe-to-toe when any agency when it comes to chili.

"OPPD's Nicest whip up the Meanest chili," said Lt. Cody Monroe. "The 'OPPD' proprietary blend chili is sure to be having judges asking for more and may just raise the most money for Shane!"

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Case

from page 1

homicide department at the Orange Park Police Department a few weeks before officers were called to the 500 block of Loring Avenue after somebody reported hearing gunshots.

When they arrived, they found Nissan Maxima crashed into a tree at the intersection of Loring and Plainfield Avenue. The driver, 27-year-old Jillian Marie Berrios was slumped behind the wheel. She died after being taken to Orange Park Medical Center. The passenger was injured by flying glass.



Jillian Berrios

There are aspects of the shooting that are certain. Two unknown Black men approached the car from behind shortly after 5:30 a.m. and one of them fired five times into the car.

The man walked back to what investigators believe was a red Chevrolet Aveo and drive away with another Black man.

They know the women were celebrating a friend's birthday by spending the night dancing. Their last stop was at the Taboo Bar and Grill on Atlantic Boulevard in Jacksonville. When they left the parking lot, the red Aveo also pulled away and followed them back to Orange Park. Sunrise was still two hours away on Oct. 19, 2013, when Berrios took her final breath – but before trying to stave off the inevitable.

"When the suspect vehicle pulled up behind her, the person exited the vehicle from behind her and approached the passenger side of the car," Monroe said. "And then five rounds went through the window of the passenger side, missing the passenger but striking the driver.

"She was able to put it in gear, but the problem was she was at the end of the parking lot. So she had to do like a 2.3-point turn to get turned around to come back out, but she started losing consciousness and then drove off and crashed across the street on Loring Avenue. That's where we found her."

Monroe is one of several detectives who've worked the case. Each hoped to find something that went unnoticed. Nothing was too insignificant or small.

Their investigation led them to believe Berrios wasn't involved in drug or gang activities, but she often hung out with those who were in it.

"Despite all the interviews and all the background checks that we did on her, the



The Orange Park Police Department put a significant focus on locating the Chevrolet Aveo the two suspects drove. Detectives checked with rental car companies and other police departments from several states during the investigation.



people she associated with she tended to hang out with a crew," Monroe said. "I truly think she was, you know, a great human being by all accounts and all her friends and family. You know, tell her how you know how good of a person she was.

"Everyone we spoke with during the investigation told us Jillian, or Jilly Beans is what they called her, was super loving and big-hearted type person who would give you the shirt off her back if anybody needed help."

So why was she killed? Why did two men follow the women for 23 miles, approach the car, shoot five times and drive away?

"There were all different kinds of rumors swirling around the investigation," Monroe said. "Some of the people that were involved in the investigation were related to the Latin King Gang, Bloods Gang. There was narcotics activity that was kind of uncovered during our investigation, so there were a lot of different directions this case took us. But at the end of the day, there was just not the physical evidence at

the time to key us in on a specific suspect." Monroe said some of the witnesses seemed to be trolling for information during interviews.

"There were times where when they would have someone come in and talk to the police, and it felt like they were interrogating us to see what we knew sometimes," Monroe said.

Although Berrios was murdered nine years ago, a lot of the details are still fresh in Monroe's mind. And he promised not to stop looking for the people responsible for the crime.

"The case has been left active since its beginning. Police department detectives have not stopped investigating this case," he said. "Again, like I mentioned earlier, a detective remains assigned to this homicide and is still working on new leads and new technology that may assist in solving

this case. There's always new things that come out new information, a new technology that we can explore to use."

Monroe hopes the community has the same determination to find justice for the mother of two.

"We plead to the public that there's anything they can do to help us in this case, any bit of information. I think it's important to contact us because we absolutely want to bring her killer to justice. This one truly comes down to somebody calling us and saying hey, 'We have this information we think it might help you.' Even if it's the most unsuspecting piece of information, even if it's the littlest piece of information that might be something we didn't hear or didn't get back then that could make the difference in these cases."

To report information about the Jillian Berrios case, call the Orange Park Police Department at or the Florida Department of Law Enforcement at (850) 410-7000.

Hospice volunteers provide soothing comfort, friendship for terminally ill

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

ORANGE PARK – Lives can be uplifted by volunteers at Haven-Custead Hospice Care Center for the terminally ill, but it can be an emotionally stressful job.

What compels someone to volunteer to visit hospice patients? After all, it takes a particular type of person to open up to such an experience. Getting close to someone who is dying may seem like a hopeless relationship, but these relationships do matter.

Patients in hospice are faced with the hardest part of dying – how they lived, or perhaps, how they haven't. At the end of life, many begin to ask questions like, "Was it worth it? Did I matter? Did I have a purpose? Did I make a difference? Did I live for myself or others? Did I live courageously?"

Others are forced to reconcile with regrets they carried in life, which can weigh tremendously on a person. Thankfully, they don't have to carry them alone.



Haven Hospice recently acknowledged local former volunteer Bettye Zowarka by creating an award in her honor.

"A lot of times volunteers get to hear those stories, and they find out there are some unresolved issues," said Sandra

Francis, Haven Hospice volunteer and training coordinator at Haven locations in Orange Park and Jacksonville. "We had a

patient who lived on her own. She had terminal cancer. Well, the volunteer came in almost every week and they became pretty good friends."

After staying for several weeks, the volunteer asked why she had no other visitors.

"The woman told her that she had a daughter who had not spoken to her in 30 years. So we were able to locate the daughter and she came down to be with her mother in her final moments. That patient died in her daughter's arms," Francis said.

Volunteers can impact someone's life, no matter how brief. As a hospice volunteer, you not only bear witness to the last days, sometimes the final hours, of a person's life and their stories.

It gives patients meaning, comfort and the courage to move on.

"Many of the volunteers are searching for purpose, as well," said Francis. "To

SEE VOLUNTEER, 13

'Angel Dog' Wyatt provides joy to hospice patients, families

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

ORANGE PARK – Sometimes solace come in the form of a 40-pound Goldendoodle.

When Wyatt lies flat on the floor, his great wooly head between two enormous paws, you could almost mistake him for a white shag carpet, his fur so thick it nearly covers his eyes.

Besides the occasional head tousels and sleepy upward gaze at his beloved owner, Wyatt is perfectly still, like a sleeping giant.

"Wyatt will lay down in front of one person, and they will ask me, 'How did he know? Can Wyatt pick out people who need him the most?'" said Wyatt owner Leland Taylor. "Dogs have a sense and pick on stuff like that."

Wyatt, who's known as the Angel Dog, was certified as a Florida Therapy last year, Taylor said.

Wyatt and Taylor have volunteered nearly 500 hours at Haven-Custead Hospice Care Center in Orange Park since February. They visit the center every afternoon. The sight of Wyatt and the touch of his long shaggy white hair often bring

peace and joy to patients. He often visits in the silver angel wings.

"The dog has been amazing. Lots of times patients are hanging on to something. We're not sure why or what's holding them back, so the dog will put his paws on the patient's bed and nuzzle their hand, giving them enough confidence to leave. It's happened many times," said the volunteer and training coordinator Sandra Francis. "They call him the Angel Dog."

"Wyatt has been instrumental in helping some patients who were slow to transition, and this one particular patient, their best friend who had been at his bedside, told the family that the patient loved dogs," said Hospice Nurse Noni Harris. "Well, Wyatt came into the room this particular day. Her eyes opened just enough to see his paws on the bed. She had the biggest smile on her face, and then she died during his visit at her bedside. She passed away with Wyatt right there."

Of course, saying goodbye is never easy, but it's easier knowing they passed with a smile and love in their hearts.

"The family rejoiced. They were all so grateful, and they came to my desk afterward and said it was Wyatt that guided her

to Heaven," Harris said. "And there have been other patients that Leoland and Wyatt have also helped. Wyatt is just so angelic and gives such beauty in his sweet temperament; everyone loves to see him."

For centuries, Dogs have provided comfort for the aggrieved. Many claim dogs can sense when death is near through body language cues, smells only they can detect, or in other ways not yet known.

"We all have a belief in something. I don't think you could do this job without it," Harris said.

Taylor, however, isn't convinced his dog has supernatural abilities.

"They were so thankful," he said. "It could be coincidental, but the family fully believed that the dog pushed their family member over to the next stage. Maybe they're just looking for something to help them let go – I don't know. If it is coincidental, that's fine; as long as it helps the family members. That's why Wyatt and I are here."

Dogs have been used to provide comfort not just in death but also in other difficult times.

"It's not just about his visiting with the patients and their families," Harris said. "He also helps the staff. It's a tough job. You have to deal with many heavy, difficult



'Angel Dog' Wyatt

times for patients, which can weigh on us emotionally, too."

People are accepted into a hospice program if they are terminally ill and have less than six months to live. They are often

SEE ANGEL DOG, 13

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Volunteer

from page 12

give back and be a part of their community. When I talk to volunteers, I always ask them what brought them to us, and generally speaking, they've had a family member in hospice, or they just feel God's calling to do this."

Being there, talking, listening, holding someone's hand, making phone calls to family members and running errands, these simple acts of kindness can make a whole world of difference in the last moments of someone's life.

"In the volunteering training, we go through all the aspects of hospice, not the clinical side of things, but emotional and spiritual support," Francis said. "As far as volunteers go, we have about 35 at Orange Park. Some of them do administrative work. We have other volunteers that help in our resale store, Haven Attic. As far as patients are concerned, our volunteers are there purely for companionship. They can go to their homes or here in the care center.

For a complete list of volunteer opportunities, go to beyourhaven.org.

"We also have a program called 'No One Dies Alone,'" Francis said.

NODA volunteers comfort patients in care centers, facilities, and homes during their last hours of life. "We have several

volunteers from that particular program who sit at the bedside around the clock for the last couple of days of the patient's life."

Volunteers can also create a legacy for patients by engaging in activities including taking hand photography, recording oral histories and sewing memory quilts.

"This program is called Haven Legacy," she said. "For example, we have a volunteer who photographs patients' hands with their families."

Hands, Francis said, tell us the life that a person has led – their talents, skills, how they made their living and how they expressed their love for others.

"The face doesn't always look great at the end of life, but hands have a story," she said.

Haven Legacy provides other complimentary services to families in hospice care, including life review videos, slide shows of memorable family photos, memory bears, and written narratives of the loved one's life story, many of them led by volunteer programs.

The program supports families with meaningful mementos of the life of their loved ones, free of charge. If you want to volunteer, go to The Haven website, beyourhaven.org, to fill out an application or speak with a volunteer coordinator about those opportunities.

Be a story keeper, a confider, a companion. It is never too late to give back.

just tremendous."

In addition to making home visits to patients, the delightful dog attends multidisciplinary team meetings held at healthcare agencies all around Clay County.

"He goes to the hospital. He goes to the school of the Deaf and Blind," Taylor said. "We go to the Alzheimer's Center and Special Needs Schools. We even volunteer at the airport to help people calm down and relax during stressful connecting flights. Dogs really can do amazing things."

If you and your pet want to get involved, go to the Haven website, beyourhaven.org, to fill out an application or speak with the volunteer coordinator about other volunteer opportunities.

Holiday Happenings

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.

• 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.

• **Sweets with Santa** will be served on Dec. 17 from 6-7:30 p.m. at the Women's Club of Keystone Heights, 6747 Woman's Club Dr. Everyone is invited and children will be able to share sweets with Santa and make crafts. There is no charge, but donations are appreciated.

• 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. 17 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.

Angel Dog

from page 12

placed in a hospital or nursing home, but some live at home. Hospice work provides a wonderful opportunity to share time with individuals in their final stages of life.

It's by no means an easy job, Harris said.

"It's challenging, both physically and emotionally," she said. "You have to be able to support the patient and their families emotionally and help prepare them for their next step. It's not an easy one for anyone.

"When we have an outlet like Wyatt, it's

just tremendous."

In addition to making home visits to patients, the delightful dog attends multidisciplinary team meetings held at healthcare agencies all around Clay County.

"He goes to the hospital. He goes to the school of the Deaf and Blind," Taylor said. "We go to the Alzheimer's Center and Special Needs Schools. We even volunteer at the airport to help people calm down and relax during stressful connecting flights. Dogs really can do amazing things."

If you and your pet want to get involved, go to the Haven website, beyourhaven.org, to fill out an application or speak with the volunteer coordinator about other volunteer opportunities.

JAA opens military lounge at JAX Airport for holiday travel

JACKSONVILLE – The Jacksonville Aviation Authority has opened a new military lounge for active-duty service men and women at Jacksonville International Airport prior to the start of popular travel holidays such as Christmas and New Year's.

The Jacksonville International Airport Military Lounge is located on the baggage claim level at the site of the former USO. The Authority refurbished and updated the space while the North Jacksonville Rotary Club, United Way of Northeast Florida's Mission United and the Veterans Council of Duval County helped to coordinate volun-

teers to staff the lounge.

"With Northeast Florida's deep ties to the military community, having a designated lounge area for service men and women was incredibly important to us," JAA CEO Mark VanLoh said. "So many service members travel through our airport. We wanted them to have a space in our terminal where they could feel at home."

Anyone interested in volunteering at the JAX Airport Military lounge can apply at www.volgistics.com/appform/1353073576



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Wild Things Exotic Animals: Christmas gifts that slither, hiss, croak and grunt

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

MIDDLEBURG – So, your child wants a pet for Christmas.

Most children ask for puppies and kittens. The average child will beg their parents for a pet at least 1,584 times before the age of 18. Almost every parent has heard, “But you won’t have to do anything!”

But what about your not-so-average child? What do you do when Timmy wants a ball python for Christmas? Or a leopard gecko? Even an alligator? Wild Things Exotic Animals at 2500 Blanding Blvd, has got your little one with the weird wish list covered this Christmas.

A family-owned business, Wild Things prides itself on its boas, pythons, monitors, geckos, amphibians, crocodilian, ferrets, hedgehogs, chinchillas, skinny pigs, sugar gliders and and more

“Ninety-nine percent all the animals in the store are bred in-house by us,” owner Matt Crews said. “By breeding the animals ourselves, we have better control over the health and quality of the animals we offer. It’s almost like creating a living artwork.”

In addition to the pet store, Crews also has three 23-foot buildings where he breeds ball pythons, boas and crocodiles, so another 800 or more animals at their private facilities.

“It’s a tremendous amount of work but an experience that’s unmatched. Because we breed most of them in-house, I see the whole life cycle. It’s just amazing,” he said.

Ball pythons are the most popular animal that he breeds and sells.

“They only get to about four feet, they’re very docile and come in every pattern and color you can imagine, but we breed everything from the leopard geckos, king snakes and corn snakes,” Crews said. “We also specialize in silver geckos, one of three bloodlines in the county. We also do a lot of tarantulas and scorpions.” There are animals he doesn’t personally breed.

“They are all captive bred. Breeding tarantulas is extremely laborious, so we buy them when they are very, very little and raise them for about a year until they are ready to be sold,” Crews said. “Tarantula owners have come from all over the south to see his eight-legged stock. We also sell rhino iguanas.”

Crews said that while not exactly a lap dog, the Rhino Iguana’s pudgy, scaly body is perfect for cuddling up on the couch and binge-watching your favorite holiday movie.

“They are particularly known for being affectionate and pet-like,” he said. “They run over to you. They want to be held and cuddled. They like certain people. They really pay attention to human behaviors and emotions.”

You may be looking for something a little smaller. Why not get a morning gecko?

“The staff is well educated and tells the customers the good and bad up front. We prefer not to sell to anyone who won’t be able to take care of it. Each animal has a range of needs; temperature that the animal can thrive at is very important, different spectrums of lighting for the reptiles, humidity, space, all those things have to come into play when buying exotic animals. The environment itself is something that you have to think about.”

– Matt Crews

“Morning geckos are pretty fascinating creatures. They are all female,” Crews said. “They reproduce by cloning themselves. I started with just two, and now we have three full colonies of hundreds of geckos.”

Or, for your little gamer, a lovable, round Pac-Man frog? They come in various colors and are one of the easiest to maintain of all frogs. Plus, they eat everything that fits in their mouth, hence pack man frog. What child wouldn’t be entertained by that?

Or you may be looking for something a bit furrier.

“We have short-tailed possums for Brazil, baby hedgehogs that we breed in-house, guinea pigs, rabbits, sugar gliders, chinchillas, skinny pigs ferrets,” Crews said.

Admittedly, he doesn’t know as much about mammals.

“We also take in any exotic animal that needs a home that we have the licensing, housing and ability to take in,” he said. “We take them in and try to find them a new home.”

Although Wild Things has a licensed amnesty location by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Crews prefers his pets to have a forever home.

“The staff is well educated and tells the customers the good and bad up front. We prefer not to sell to anyone who won’t be able to take care of it,” he said. “Each animal has a range of needs; temperature that the animal can thrive at is very important, different spectrums of lighting for the reptiles, humidity, space, all those things have to come into play when buying exotic animals. The environment itself is something that you have to think about.”

While you may be scrambling to find the perfect present for your little one, remember that Christmas is only one day a year. Reptiles pose an average of a 10-15-year commitment. During that time, they will need food, health care, a clean environment, and larger habitats as they grow – and that’s putting it mildly, Crews said.

While lizards and snakes make excellent pets, ensure your child is willing to put in the effort to take care of their cold-blooded new friend properly.



PHOTOS BY KYLIE CORDELL

Wild Things Exotic Animals has unique selection, including a crested gecko (top) and turtles and alligators.



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Firetruck Parade with Santa to weave around Orange Park

Clay County Staff

ORANGE PARK – If you live in Orange Park, you won't have to go far to watch the Firetruck Parade. In fact, you probably only need to walk out your front door.

Friday's parade will start at 6:30 p.m. at the fire station at Town Hall. From there, it will weave around the town streets, including Doctors Lake Drive, Kingsley Avenue, Gano Street, River Road, Wells Road, Holly Point Road, Plainfield Avenue, Grove Park Drive, Astor Street and Milwaukee Avenue.

Another prime location to watch the

festivities will be at River Road and Kingsley Avenue where Concert on the Green will have performances from 16 Clay County schools. The Cocoa and Carols will start at 5 p.m. and end once the parade passes.

Free gift wrapping will be offered, along with additional entertainment and holiday vendors.

Cocoa and Carols is sponsored by Concert on the Green, the City of Orange Park and Moosehaven.



2022 Firetruck Parade Route

There have been a few changes to the route this year. Please remember that mistakes are sometimes made while driving this route. They are not intentional. We would love to come down every street, however that is not possible. We cannot make special requests to change the route. We cannot give a specific time to when we will be in any certain area.

You will hear us coming ... we promise

Parade begins at 6:30 pm Fire Station

Construction on pace for new track at Keystone Heights High

By Natalie Gilstrap
For Clay Today

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – Keystone Heights High is eagerly awaiting the completion of its new track field.

"It's exciting. It needed to be done. It's going to be a nice addition to our stadium," said athletics director Charles Dickinson.

The school's original track field was built in the late 1970s and had succumbed to age and Florida's harsh summers.

Before construction started, the track had loose asphalt with clumps of grass growing in the gaps and faded lanes which made it unacceptable for competition.



Unlike the original track which was just asphalt, the new track has a rubber surface. Construction for the new track consisted of removing the old track and applying a special type of asphalt which is compatible with the rubber surface. Af-

terward, the rubber surface and seal were applied to the asphalt as a top layer. In addition, a new fence and sidewalk were built to help protect the field.

The school is waiting for the final phase of construction which involves the lanes being painted.

"It should be done by January," said principal Laurie Burke.

The new track is expected to bring benefits such as school pride. In addition, the school will be able to host track meets which haven't been possible since 1998.

Once the track is complete, the school plans to buy new equipment like carts,

hurdles and starting blocks to host future track meets.

"Our goal, not for this track season but hopefully the following track season, is to be able to do something in regards to hosting a track meet," Dickinson said.

The new track will bring the community closer and provide more activities for families to enjoy.

"You know in a small town like Keystone, it's a big deal to go to one of these events during the week," Burke said. "I mean it's kind of the thing to do here in Keystone and you feel a sense of pride for your whole community."

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF MATTHEW MITCHELL

Several residents on Apopka Street are getting in on the fun by voluntarily hanging nearly 70,000 lights outside of their homes. Event founder, Matthew Mitchell, said thousands have passed by his house during the event.

Drive-by lighting: Apopka Drive rejoicing holiday season

By Lee Wardlaw
lee@claytodayonline.com

MIDDLEBURG – On a big weekend leading up to Christmas, the Orange Park South neighborhood will celebrate its first big holiday event: The Apopka Drive Night of Lights.

The block-party-style Christmas event will take place on Saturday, Dec. 17, from 5-8 p.m. on Apopka Drive behind the Silos Shopping Center.

The family-friendly and fun affair will be chock-full of activities and events that children will enjoy, especially since Santa and Mrs. will be in attendance, along with other characters for a good Christmas story, including the Grinch and Buddy the Elf.

The Clauses will pose at a driveway. The North Pole's favorite couple will be taking requests for photograph opportunities, along with, of course, hearing Christmas wish lists from both the naughty and nice children of Clay County who, along with their older peers, go on to make the community a special place.

But that's not all. The event will include

food trucks, a petting zoo and favorite Christmas-time drinks and snacks available for purchase such as hot chocolate, cotton candy and popcorn

Food trucks will operate from 5-8 p.m. and Mr. and Mrs. Claus will be onsite from 6-8 p.m.

Along with hearing wish lists and taking the time for photo opportunities that should make for a great vintage shot years down the road for families watching their young children that grow up. The Clauses also will be reading and reviewing handwritten letters from children.

Just like a scene out of the North Pole, a mailbox will be placed in the yard, with children being asked to write letters. And for photo opportunities, event organizers have even erected a giant sleigh for children and families to hop aboard, a testament further expressing the aurora of a snowy village filled with toy-making elves.

"We have a mailbox put up in the yard, where kids can put the letters that they write. You'll get a letter back from Santa, guaranteed," said event founder Matthew Mitchell.

If that's not enough fun for the children, then throw in a few local pet goats for a meet-and-greet at the petting zoo, with children and parents can feed the goats with protein-filled peanuts and rub the animals' heads with a loving and affectionate hand of warmth.

"We've got a bunch of things lined up for all ages. We're going to make sure that everyone has a good time. It's going to be a small-town energy where kids and families can come together, forget about their worries, and celebrate the Christmas season," he said.

The event didn't come without plenty of preparation and planning. Mitchell and other organizers have been busy since August, which included a tedious and community-dedicated process of getting neighbors' support and setting up thousands of lights.

Several neighbors also will get in on the

seasonal fun by hanging lights of their own. Numbers are picking up, but as it goes with all new neighborhood holiday traditions, it might take a little bit of extra effort to get every house on the street involved.

"I have hung about 65,000-70,000 lights on my house alone, and that doesn't include the others. You know, (people) are knocking on my door, wanting to get involved and help, so the energy is starting to pick up. And next year, we'll hopefully start growing the number of houses that want to get involved," Mitchell said.

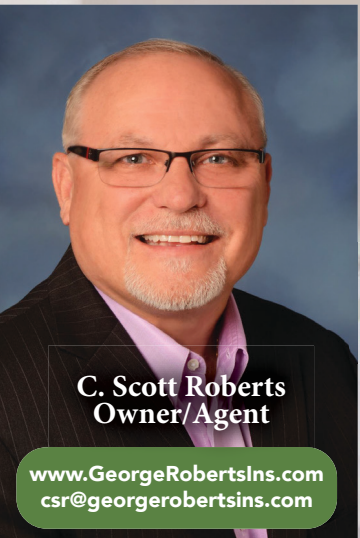
"We're excited that we can bless a couple of families in need with the money we collect. Our main goal is to make some families in the community happy through the Christmas holiday."

In the meantime, residents are encouraged to see the lights that are already up.

To learn more about the event, visit www.facebook.com/LightsonApopka/.




Houses such as this are decked out with lights in anticipation of the event.




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PHOTOS BY NATALIE GILSTRAP

Hundreds attended the Christmas party, parade and movie at Keystone Heights last Saturday night, including former school board member Tina Bullock and Mayor Karen Lake (above, right).

Keystone rings in Christmas with day-long Holiday Extravaganza

By Natalie Gilstrap
For Clay Today

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – The City of Keystone Heights kicks off the holiday season with its Holiday Extravaganza on Saturday, Dec. 10.

The all-day event had 35 vendors with their booths set up at City Hall. Residents were able to buy unique products like Christmas ornaments, crafts, home-cooked foods and T-shirts. Visitors also had the opportunity to adopt a pet through Clay County Animal Services, enjoy food trucks and watch the Quintessential Sax play live music on the Rotary Circle.

The highlight of the event was the Kiwanis Christmas Parade where families sat along Lawrence Boulevard and enjoyed seeing an array of floats. The parade's theme was "Christmas in the '70s," and the floats were judged in six categories: Judges' Choice, Most Original, Closest the Theme, Best Youth, Best Marching, and Best Business.

This year's winner for Judges' Choice was Keystone Heights AmVets Post 86, while Lake Region Kiwanis Keystone Heights – Melrose finished second.



The Starling Family won first place and Reality CWL Training was second for Most Original, while Closest in Theme went to

Keystone Heights Jr. Woman's Club, while Lake Hill Baptist Church was second.

Keystone Heights High won several

awards. The girls' basketball won first place in Best Youth and the girls' weightlifting was second. The high school's marching band came in first for Best Marching, while the JROTC was second.

First place for Best Business was Keystone Heights Animal Hospital, while KC Automotive finished second.

The event concluded with the movie, "Arthur Christmas," at Keystone Beach where families had hot cocoa, sugar cookies and popcorn.

"I thought it was charming," said resident Kim. "I was impressed by how many people in our community choose to participate. They did a beautiful job."

The Holiday Extravaganza was a success as hundreds of people came to enjoy the festivities. Smiles and laughter could be heard throughout the event as kids played on the playground and families walked around enjoying their time.

The vendors also enjoyed a great turnout and Clay County Animal Services had two dogs adopted.

"I think for the second year, the event grew exponentially," said Mayor Karen Lake.

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF APRIL MECHELLE

Despite construction, Middleburg celebrates Christmas in record fashion

MIDDLEBURG – Parade organizer Dale Carter hopes the construction along Blanding Boulevard will be completed by this time next year so he can move the Middleburg Christmas Parade from County Road 218 to better accommodate the record number of participants and crowd. Last Saturday's event attracted 90 participants. The crowd stood three- and four-deep in some portions of the route. "Everybody's talking good about it," Carter said. "We had a lot of schools there, too – the JROTCs from Middleburg and Ridgeview. Of course, we had Wilkinson. The parade was organized by the Clay County Business Association. "To be honest with you, I don't know how many people there were, but there was a lot. I think it's safe to say it was a record turnout." If the work on Blanding Boulevard is finally completed, Carter believes those numbers will grow again next year.



A CHRISTMAS STORY



Residents weren't double-dog-dared at Christmas on the Courtyard

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Residents sat bundled under blankets in folding chairs Friday night to watch “A Christmas Story” at the Historic Triangle. The free showing also allowed the Clay County Clerk of County Court and Comptroller’s Office to show off its festive holiday lights around the courtyard, while revelers ate free popcorn and watched Ralphie get his Red Ryder BB gun and younger brother Randy snort mashed potatoes.

STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE





From start to finish, Baptist Medical Center Clay consumed hospital president Darin Roark's attention and enthusiasm. He takes a daily tour of the 300,000-square-foot facility where he always stops to talk with workers and employees. Counting the remodeling project next door at health place, Baptist invested \$235 million to meet the needs of a growing county.



Clay from page 7

between the emergency center and the old VyStar building – which has been transformed into Baptist's health place to complete the Baptist Campus. Two weeks later, construction crews started marking off the area while truckloads of raw steel were delivered to an adjoining lot.

Baptist avoided many of the delays that hampered other construction projects because it bought most of its construction materials in advance. While others were dealing with COVID-19 and the collapse of the supply chain, Baptist had most of its materials in a warehouse.

"COVID certainly delayed us, but it didn't stop us. Residents are going to see a lot of changes here in the next two years. We want them to know we're still open for business. But it's an exciting time," Roark said two years ago. "I envision the finished hospital every day. I can't wait to see what it's going to look like when it's done."

The final beam was signed by construction workers, employees and community leaders on Sept. 31, 2021, during a private ceremony. After that, much of the work shifted to covering the skeleton of metal beams with walls, floors and ceilings.

"Today is a celebration. We've reached the top," said Baptist Health Board Chairman Richard Sisisky at the reception. "The sixth floor is framed out. You will continue to see, and no doubt hear, a lot of the construction as we move forward to finish with our construction in the fall of 2022."

A ribbon-cutting ceremony on Saturday, Dec. 10, put the final bow on the project. All that's left is sprucing up the parking lot and making final adjustments.



Faith Walk

by Pastor Billy Register
True Life Church
Clay County

Don't forget ... Jesus was Born!

A child was born 2000 years ago. Children are born every day, but this child was different. Many, many people had been eagerly anticipating this child's arrival. The Scriptures had foretold this birth, the arrival of a Savior who would illuminate the darkness of the world and bring salvation to God's people.

God sent Jesus because of His love for us. It was God's eternal plan being brought to fruition. Remember the why! John 3:16-17 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

Ever since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, the world, and everyone in it, was tainted by sin. Because God is a just, holy, and perfect God, humanity was separated from Him due to their sinful nature. But God was not willing to let things continue to play out this way. He loves us far too much to let us be lost to Him for all eternity. He created us for a far greater purpose than that!

So, what did He do? He sent Jesus Christ. Jesus' death on the cross would create a bridge over the gulf that had formed between humanity and God. Jesus took on the fullness of humanity's sins, past, present, and future, and took them to the cross. There, He defeated death and evil, freeing us from the clutches of sin if we follow Him.

Theologian and award-winning author Frederick Buechner said, "The birth of Jesus made possible not just a new way of understanding life but a new way of living it."

Don't forget, Jesus was born! His birth instilled hope in the world and continues to do so until this day. Just as the people eagerly awaited His arrival 2000 years ago, we should eagerly await His presence in our lives each and every day. He is our Messiah, our Savior, and He has come to show us God's love.

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Motorcycle cops gang up to enforce traffic laws, public safety

Submitted by the
Clay County Sheriff's Office
For Clay Today

CLAY COUNTY – Long before Officers Baker and Poncherello raced around southern California on the hit TV show of the 70s, motorcycle cops were the subject of comic strips, jokes, and blockbuster movies. When you think of motorcycles officers (or motors as they are often called), you may picture a deputy hiding in the woods, waiting for an unaware motorist to come racing by in hopes of ruining the driver's day and issuing a ticket for an obscene amount of money. However, the Clay County deputies who are riding these motorcycles for traffic control are anything but the typical comedy punch line.

On this day, we spent time with Deputies Nathaniel Baumgartner and Joshua Borchardt as they met in the Middleburg substation before hitting the road. Fresh off a successful round at the Space Coast Police Motorcycle Skills Event where six Clay County Sheriff's Office deputies competed against nearly 70 other officers from across the country, Baumgartner and Borchardt talked about some of the benefits and challenges of being a motorcycle cop. Certainly, these types of competitions rank at the top of one of the highlights of being a motorcycle deputy. What a civilian might perceive to be dozens of randomly laid out cones is an intricate course meant to challenge the experience and skills of even the most qualified rider.

Although the course layout is posted 30 days in advance of an event, these deputies are training continually to sharpen their skills and improve their ability to navigate even the most treacherous situation. Typically, CCSO motor deputies train one day each month and complete a full recertification every six months. Their training includes bike management skills and addressing unexpected events, including how to right a fallen 1,000-pound bike without assistance. Because of the intensity of the competition courses, these events also count towards training hours.

Beyond conducting regular traffic control, motors are often used for funeral escorts, dignitary escorts and special event protection. Because of their versatility, these powerful vehicles can even navigate through sandy and wooded paths that would be unreachable by standard law enforcement vehicles. The unique opportunities presented to this elite group of riders cer-



Deputy Joshua Borchardt



Deputy Nathaniel Baumgartner

'... Look, we know that patience is sometimes thin out there,' Everyone has somewhere to be, and everyone gets frustrated at times. We always try to use a traffic stop as a teaching moment, and we try to give some leeway when we can, but...'

—Deputy Nathaniel Baumgartner

tainly keep things interesting and enjoyable for the deputies.

Baumgartner smiled when he said. "(It's) what I love to do; I actually get paid for." Borchardt agreed as he spoke of the freedom of riding with the wind in his face. When pressed about the challenges of being on the motors, both deputies agreed that the heat of summer can make the job a little difficult.

"It can be tough to cool off with all of the gear that we are wearing, but we work through it," Baumgartner said. More concerning than the heat, though, is the constant threat of traffic congestion and distracted drivers. "We have to constantly be watching for those who may not be watching for us," the deputies said.

The conversation turned briefly to the tragic accident in 2018 that resulted in the death of motorcycle Deputy Ben Zirbel – a heartbreaking event that is always in the thoughts of those who ride.

When not running radar from a stationary position, the CCSO motors are watching for infractions, assisting drivers, working school zone, and addressing complaints of excessive speed within the numerous neighborhoods of Clay County. Because the motors don't operate within specific zones, they are free to roam throughout the entire county and can respond quickly when needed. They are also tasked to address tips

from the SaferWatch App that more Clay County residents are utilizing. The deputies revealed some of the violations they look for.

"Seatbelt infractions," Borchardt said, "definitely seatbelts. "Also when a child is not properly belted within the vehicle," Baumgartner said.

We followed the deputies to a commercial driveway just off of a busy section of Blanding Boulevard where the motors staged while conducting speed detection with their portable laser devices. Most of the time, deputies don't hide in a tree line hoping to surprise drivers. They usually are sitting off the right-of-way of a major artery through the county. Not only were the deputies completely visible, but they were positioned close enough to the road that drivers should be paying attention to them – just as a driver should be paying attention if a child were this close to the road.

Instead, we watched as some drivers chose to race by, seemingly unaware of the presence of law enforcement. Borchardt and Baumgartner raced from their parking spot as they each chased down the speeding drivers. Upon their return, we spoke about the ultimate goals and mindset behind these traffic stops.

"Look, we know that patience is sometimes thin out there," Baumgartner said. "Everyone has somewhere to be, and everyone gets frustrated at times. We always try to use a traffic stop as a teaching moment, and we try to give some leeway when we can, but..." Baumgartner's voice trails off as a vehicle races by well above the posted speed limit.

He activated his lights and siren as he pulled onto the roadway to pursue the driver.

Another vehicle, with a driver seemingly oblivious to the well-lit motor, nearly clipped the deputy as he accelerated. In that one moment, the training, skills and experience came into full view as he navigated the dangerous moment, and pulled the speeding driver over. More importantly, he lived to ride another day.

As our time with the deputies came to an end, the words of Borchardt were ever present: "We just want people to make it safely to where they are going, and we want to make it safely home at the end of the day."

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 pro-

vides.

"We're pleased to be able to lower the PCA in time for the holidays," said General Manager/CEO Ricky Davis.

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.

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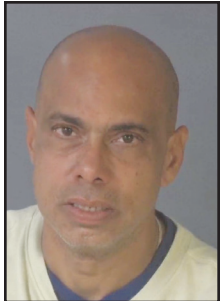
Police Briefs

Man in hot water after being caught with stolen tub

ORANGE PARK – A 53-year-old man was arrested on Dec. 5, less than two weeks after the Clay County Sheriff's Office said security surveillance showed him and a younger male take a hot tub from Spas Ect. On Nov. 24.

Leonardo Antonio Martinez, of Orange Park, was charged with grand theft after detectives linked the store's video with traffic light surveillance footage from the Florida Department of Transportation that showed the truck driving to his home with the tub in the bed.

Deputies returned on Dec. 2 and from a neighbor's yard, they noticed a large object under a tarp in Martinez's backyard. They returned on Dec. 5 and arrested Martinez and recovered the stolen tub. Owners of Spas Ect. said the tub recovered in the backyard had the same serial number as the tub taken from a trailer behind the business.



Leonardo Martinez

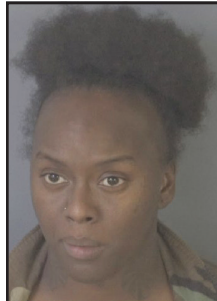
Martinez's bond was set at \$25,003.

Loss prevention officer stays busy at JC Penney

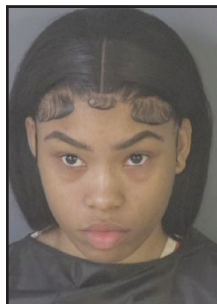
ORANGE PARK – One loss prevention officer at JC Penney in the Orange Park Mall helped send several out-of-towners to jail for shoplifting.

It started when Geneva Wilson, 77, of Jacksonville, was charged with grand theft on Dec. 5 after store security saw her stuffing \$1,189 of jewelry into her bra. According to the arrest report, Wilson first said she took the jewelry to give to her daughter and granddaughter, but she later admitted she took them because she didn't get any help from a store associate.

Then on Dec. 9, an officer told CCSO he saw Tarda-



Tardazia Seay



Jaida Batts

zia Shantrell Seay, 21, and Jaida Patricia Batts, 21, both of Fort Myers, leave the store with unpaid items.

According to the arrest report, deputies stopped the women in the mall parking lot. Seay, who was accused of taking "pink clothing item," attempted to run away, but she was caught near the Books-A-Million store entrance.

Surveillance video also showed Mast taking earrings. The total value of the items taken was \$254.98.

Seay's bond was set at \$12,504, while Batts' bond was set at \$5,004.

An hour later, the same store security officer called deputies after he saw two men walk out with unpaid items.

Mateo Amari Hardison, 18, and Jaida P. Batts, 20, both of Jacksonville, were charged with shoplifting and resisting arrest while in the commission of recovering property. CCSO had to make a traffic stop to capture both.

Bond was set at \$5,004 for both.

Woman behind county's worst case of animal cruelty gets probation

ORANGE PARK – The woman behind one of the worst cases of animal cruelty

pled guilty to five counts of aggravated animal cruelty in exchange for being placed on probation for five years and agreeing not to own any animals or being involved in animal breeding.



Jennifer Wilkie

According to documents filed at the Clay County Courthouse, Jennifer Michelle Wilkie, was originally charged with 42 other counts of animal cruelty after the Clay County Sheriff's Office, Fire Rescue and Emergency Management responded to 246 Old Jennings Road where they found 257 animals living in deplorable conditions.

Most were crammed in small cages, many covered in their own feces and suffering from skin infections. Investigators also found several skeletons and animal carcuses on the 1.3 acre lot.

Dogs, pigs, chickens, goats, pigeons and rabbits were recovered, and all were sent to a triage that was set up at the Clay County Fairgrounds. Eventually, all of the animals were adopted.

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. 13

Andrew L. Quinn, 30, Middleburg, possession-methamphetamine
Ronald P. Haase, 56, Middleburg, possession-fentanyl, possession-drug paraphernalia
Terrance T. Packer, 28, Green Cove Springs, VOP-carjacking with deadly weapon
Jessica A. Curtis, 20, Keystone Heights, domestic battery
M. Lee D. Brinson, 34, Green Cove Springs, VOP-child cruelty
Vanessa B. Martinez, 37, Green Cove Springs, FTA-DWLSR
Luis Ortiz, 58, Green Cove Springs, VOP-DUI
Debra S. Maylon, 58, Orange Park, trespassing
Adonica S. Kelley, 47, Orange Park, possession-cocaine, possession-crack cocaine, possession-drug paraphernalia
Denessa R. Kelley, 20, Orange Park, possession-cocaine

Monday, Dec. 12

Kimberly A. Morgan, 55, Green Cove Springs, DWLSR
Kristine N. Madej, 31, Green Cove Springs, court order transfer

Sunday, Dec. 11

Tabius M. Booker, 39, Green Cove Springs, two counts FTA
Liahdan D. Etienne, 22, Fleming Island, shoplifting
Micheal D. Swarney, 32, Fleming Island, domestic battery
Vanessa A. Kampffer, 23, Middleburg, domestic battery
John W. Dowden, 54, Middleburg, trespassing
Cael M. Fletcher, 18, Maxville, domestic battery
Joseph S. Barnes, 29, Orange Park, DUI

Saturday, Dec. 10

Christopher M. Warner, 19, Green Cove Springs, possession-cocaine
Timothy T. Perry, 42, Orange Park, possession-controlled substance, resist/obstruct/oppose law enforcement
Takercia M. Houston, 30, Orange Park, domestic battery
Anthony D. Williams, 25, Orange Park, trespassing
Teresa L. Rigby, 35, Orange Park, possession-drug paraphernalia, DWLSR, possession-controlled substance

Friday, Dec. 9

Samuel C. Gaskill, 29, Fleming Island, DUI with property damage/injury
Shawn P. Riley, 55, Orange Park, aggravated assault with deadly weapon
Joshua D. Stanley, 26, Fleming Island, two counts uttering worthless check
Raka S. Raychaudhuri, 55, Fleming Island, battery of person 65 or older, resist/obstruct/oppose law enforcement
Christen J. Conino, 37, Middleburg, shoplifting
Jaida P. Batts, 20, Orange Park, shoplifting, resisting arrest during recovery of property
Mateo A. Mardison, 18, Orange Park, shoplifting, resisting arrest during recovery of property
Alexis M. Mast, 21, Orange Park, shoplifting
Tardazia S. Seay, 26, Orange Park, shoplifting, resist/obstruct/oppose law enforcement
D'Marcus K. Allen, 22, Green Cove Springs, VOP-community control
Tony J. Williams, 52, Middleburg, FTA-DWLSR
Randall R. Smith, 33, Orange Park, grand theft
Dustin P. Johnson, 37, Orange Park, possession-fentanyl
Bridget M. Bronson, 36, Orange Park, possession-fentanyl
Timoth A. Taylor, 39, Middleburg, non-support

Thursday, Dec. 8

John O. Doster, 34, Middleburg, two counts sale/delivery-fentanyl
Lauren N. Bowman, 36, Orange Park, two counts VOP-community control
Matthew E. Wilkerson, 30, Green Cove Springs, FTA-battery
Tyler N. Turner, 33, Green Cove Springs, domestic battery, child abuse, tampering in proceeding
Jared L. Canon, 31, Green Cove Springs, possession-marijuana
D'Vaughn K. St. John, 22, Oakleaf, felony domestic battery by strangulation, battery, resist/obstruct/oppose law enforcement
Skyler K. Knight, 24, Middleburg, possession-fentanyl, possession-methamphetamine, possession-marijuana, possession-drug paraphernalia
Wednesday, Dec. 7
Michael L. Spencer, 64, Middleburg, two counts domestic battery
Kamryn C. King, 21, Middleburg, possession-marijuana
Scott E. Bowen, 55, Keystone Heights, battery on law enforcement/firefighter, EMT, vandalism
Shannon M. Nelson, 45, Green Cove Springs, shoplifting
Marco A. Parra, 26, Keystone Heights, driving without valid license
Joshua M. Buzzo, 32, Green Cove Springs, FTA

What's happening in Tallahassee

Monthly Legislative update by Florida Rep. Sam Garrison

For Clay Today

TALLAHASSEE – Last month, Americans in all 50 states participated in our mid-term elections. While nationwide results were mixed, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis won re-election by a historic margin and was granted a second term by the voters of our state. Along with that, the voters delivered Republican supermajorities in both the Florida House (85 of 120 seats) and Florida Senate (28 of 40 seats), providing a clear and unmistakable mandate to Keep Florida Free.

On Nov. 22, the Legislature held its Organization Session in Tallahassee as required by our state constitution. New members were sworn into their positions and the House Speaker and Senate President were formally elected, with each leader setting forth their vision for the coming term. With a historic number of GOP representatives, the Florida Legislature will continue to build on the policies that have made our state the envy of the nation: a strong economy, a commitment to public safety, and quality schools, to preserve our freedoms and strengthen families.

Most of the Legislature's work will take place during the regular 60-day legislative session beginning March 7. However, Hurricanes Ian and Nicole have put real strains on Florida's property insurance market and require immediate legislative action. DeSantis has called for a Special Session on Monday, Dec. 12 through Friday, Dec. 16 to address these issues.

During the December special session, the Legislature will look for immediate and long-term solutions to stabilize the property insurance market, lower prices for consumers and provide economic relief to people whose homes and businesses were lost. This year's hurricane season brought incredible devastation, and insured losses from Hurricane Ian alone have surpassed \$10.2 billion, according to the Florida Office of Insurance Regulation. Florida's property insurance market is struggling, and we will aim to establish desperately needed reforms that will benefit Florida ratepayers in the short term and for years to come. Lastly, I want to say thank you to everyone who decided to run for office this year. Standing for election is hard on candidates, their families, friends and co-workers. Every campaign is a team effort, win or lose, and our democratic republic is stronger for its efforts. It has been an honor serving in the Florida House for the past two years, and I want to thank the voters of Clay County for entrusting me to be your voice for another term. I wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and a happy new year full of joy and peace.



STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

Parade of trees

Hundreds of residents and visitors ascend to Spring Park in Green Cove Springs every night to see 160 trees decorated for the holidays. The display will be available until 10 p.m. through Dec. 31.

Community Redevelopment Agency created for Green Cove Springs

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The plan to redevelop the downtown area took a big step forward Tuesday night when the county and the Green Cove Springs City Council agreed to create a Community Redevelopment Agency.

The second reading of the ordinance passed, 5-0, which will create a five-member board to establish a redevelopment plan for the downtown area. The ordinance was delayed for more than 10 years because it also needed the approval of the Board of County Commissioners.

Roy M. Timberlake, Van Royal, Kristen Burke, Heather Boucher and Andrea Vall-

lencourt have been selected as prospective candidates for the CRA board.

The city council now can establish a trust fund to handle future tax revenues for the plan. During the next 30 years, Green Cove Springs will get 95% of an increased ad valorem tax from the city and county to pay for the project.

The city wants to spruce up the downtown area by widening sidewalks to accommodate outdoor dining, enhancing the medians along Orange Avenue, creating more attractive storefronts and establishing more parking.

According to one of the resolutions, the

redevelopment will be applied to areas considered "blighted."

In other business, the council unanimously approved the hiring of Purvis Gray as city auditor and it approved hiring Gannett Fleming to conduct a transportation mobility study to define the need for additional transportation investment.

The study will examine how the city will handle the growing traffic created by the rapid growth of residential communities and commerce outside the city limits.

The city council meets at 7 p.m. at City Hall on the first and third Tuesday of each month.



Happy retirement

Clay County Board of Commission Chairwoman Betsy Condon gave a special recognition to Brenda Sullivan during Tuesday night's BCC meeting. Sullivan will retire from the engineering department on Dec. 31 after serving the county for 35 years.

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Santa Claus of Keystone Heights

A pastor's journey to spread Christmas joy

By **Kylie Cordell**
For Clay Today

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – What makes a Santa Claus? Is it the red and white suit, the rosy cheeks or the jolly laugh that makes the most skeptical smile? Is it the long white beard and bushy eyebrows, the large belly like a bowl full of jelly, the playful wink as if to say, “your secret’s safe with me,” or is it the kindness in which he gives and gives unconditionally?

The legend of Santa Claus can be traced back hundreds of years to a monk named St. Nicholas. Known for his kindness, righteousness and secret gift-giving, St. Nicholas gave rise to the traditional image of Santa Claus. Some described him as a tall, jubilant man with a long white beard, the emblem of good cheer and faithfulness.

Pastor Keith Hatch of Center Cross Ministries is committed to carrying on the tradition.

“I have always loved Christmas, everything about Christmas. As a Pastor, yes, but I love the joy and socialization of the season when you get out and talk to folks, old friends, new friends,” Hatch said.

For the pastor, Christmas is a time of charity, spreading joy and spending time with family and friends. It’s a time to reflect on our values and relationship with family, community and, most importantly, with the son of God, Jesus Christ.

“That is the true meaning of Christmas,” he asked. “It is the greatest gift that anyone can receive.”

So how did a pastor become Santa Claus?

“Santa Claus is more than just a big man in a red suit on the back of a sleigh,” he said. “I realized I had the chance to do a lot of good in this city.”

Hatch’s first memory of Santa Claus was watching his father dress up on Christmas Eve.

“He would call little children he knew and tell them that Santa Claus was just about to lift off in his sleigh,” he said. “So this is something I have always wanted to do, and when you pull together the element of serving others and Christmas, that’s what it’s all about. And that’s what Center Cross Ministry is about as well.”

In 2019, Pastor Keith became the beloved “official” Santa Claus of Keystone Heights. He has visited several schools and daycares in the area. After visiting two other schools, he went to Keystone Elementary where one of the last children opened his eyes to the real impact he could have on the community.

“I had heard of all the Christmas

“We want to ensure that every child feels special during Christmas. We want to see smiles on their faces and laughter in their voices. This is what it’s all about.”

– Keith Hatch

dreams and wishes, from the latest X-box, PlayStation, newest tennis shoe, doll baby and smartphone, when this young child no older than 8 sat on my knee and shared his Christmas dream,” Hatch said. “When I asked him, ‘What would he like for Christmas?’ he said, ‘Could you bring some food for the table.’ I was slightly thrown off my sleigh by that response. After gathering my emotion, I asked, ‘Well, if I could bring you food for the table, what could I bring you?’ He said in the same humble voice, ‘Could you bring jobs for mom and dad?’”

Christmas can be a burdensome time for families. The cost of Christmas becomes even more acute for low-income households, many struggling to cover normal household bills. Some have to make the impossible choices between buying their child a Christmas present or paying rent.

“Economically, a lot of folks are struggling to buy groceries to put food on the table. People are being laid off from (their) jobs. That’s just where we are,” Hatch said. “One thing led to the other. We started putting up mailboxes when COVID hit because we couldn’t get into the schools. As we were reading these letters, we stated identified needs within the community, and I said we have to find a way to address these issues, so we started working with Mission on the Dirt Road and the Lake Area Ministries.”

That’s how the Claus Ministry was born. Pastor Hatch felt God lead him to develop a mission and ministry in Keystone Heights and the surrounding area. That mission is to identify children and families who need assistance and to provide them with the Joy of Christmas.

“We began reaching out to parents,” Hatch said. “We usually have return addresses on the letter, so we reach out and find the parents and ask if there is any way we can assist them; with food, clothes, or



PHOTOS BY KYLIE CORDELL

Keith Hatch, also known as Keystone Heights’ Santa Claus, said his role allows him to “do a lot of good in this city.” Hatch not only was on center stage during the Keystone Heights Christmas Extravaganza, but his Claus Ministries routinely makes stops of local schools, retirement homes and daycare centers to serve the emotional, financial and spiritual needs of the community.



anything like that.” Since then, the Claus Ministry has assisted 10 families and approximately 45-50 children and family members. This effort was accomplished with the help of the Community Church of Keystone Heights, local area businesses, Lake Region Kiwanis and many other people. Claus Ministry has provided food, clothes, toys for the children and a Bible to each family.

“We want to ensure that every child feels special during Christmas. We want to see smiles on their faces and laughter in their voices. This is what it’s all about,” Hatch said.

Santa Claus is often described as a Miracle Worker. Not only does the Santa of Keystone Heights bring joy to children, but he also gives them hope.

“A mother called me last night. Her child had a severe operation and she wanted him to meet Santa Claus without all the other children, so I called her, and her son had time with Santa Claus,” he said. “In the end, I knelt to pray for him, his recovery, his comfort and his family. I asked his mother if I could pray for her child, and

after she said yes. I turned to the child and asked if I could pray for him. I’ve prayed for him. I’ve prayed for many of the children and their parents.

“That’s an opportunity to share God’s love not only in a gift but in letting them know there is more support than what is right here on earth.”

If you would like to support Claus Ministry, you can write checks directly to the ministry or donate on Venmo, which can be found on Claus Ministry on their Facebook page.

“We’re hoping that these funds go past Christmas into the year. Every donation goes towards the children and their families,” Hatch said. “Any unused funds will be donated to local area resources that assist children in need throughout the year or as long as the funds last.”

The goal is to keep the spirit of giving last beyond December and throughout the year.

“Keep the true joy and peace of Christmas at the center of everything, and not just Christmas day, but every day of the year,” Hatch said.



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Heck dominates; Gunn battles Stevens

By **Randy Lefko**
Sports Editor

OAKLEAF - In what Oakleaf High girls weightlifting coach Benjamin White called "a battle against the best", White's Oakleaf High girls weightlifting team turned a simple dual meet between his Lady Knights and the Lady Blue Devils of Clay High, the defending champions in Tradition and Olympic Snatch, into a no-holds barred, standing room only lift-fest at Oakleaf High School.

"They were fired up for sure," said White. "Anytime you bring in the caliber of a program like Clay into your weightroom is going to bring extra energy."

White manipulated his lifters mentally to just stay within their boundaries and get clean lifts in each weight division.

"We stressed the importance of getting that first lift in in all three disciplines," said White. "Clay is built for big meets because they have super strong girls in multiple classes. Our depth and consistency was going to be the measure of their overwhelming power."

Note: Different than last year's format, the three disciplines of competitive weightlifting; Clean and Jerk, Bench Press and Olympic Snatch with the Olympic Snatch scored by itself. In 2022, the Olympic Snatch total is now added to both the clean and jerk and bench press to determine totals.

White's premonition proved prophetic, but his strategy did have its monumental moments as in the crushing totals offered by Clay state champion Emma Heck, a sophomore, who crushed her weight class by nearly 100 pounds in all three disciplines.

"Coach White has done a great job with his program at Oakleaf," said Clay coach Rodney Keller. "It is good for us to get out of our comfort zone and compete against



Oakleaf's Ivy Gunn, right, and Clay's Janiyah Stevens, left, battled mano-a-mano in Oakleaf win over Clay.

one of the best programs in our area."

In the Unlimited division, Clay had state champion Kyleigh LaFary and teammate Kenya Tinajero also winning by near 100 pounds with both swiftly lifting away from Oakleaf's challenges.

"The quality of the programs right here in Clay County is incredible," said Clay coach Rodney Keller. "All of our local meets have been really tight."

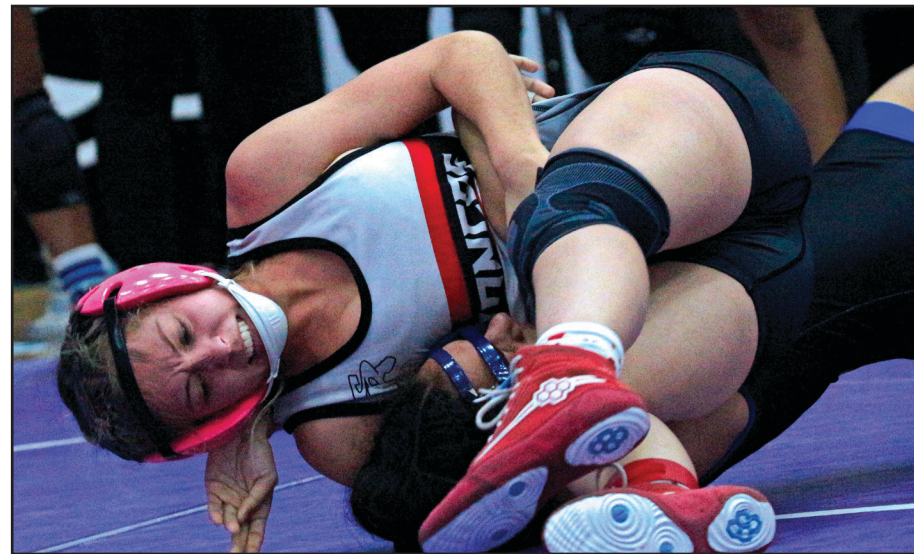
Another welcomed stronghold for Clay was AnnaLee Harbison, who was destined last year to provide big numbers for Clay coach Rodney Keller, but then suffered a knee injury that halted her season.

Harbison, also a top flag football athlete for Clay, recovered, rehabbed and returned to lifting action with a fervor with wins in the 183 weight division to bolster the Blue Devil challenge.

"For us, it's depth," said White. "We are built for duals and tri meets simply because we have two or three above

SEE LIFT, 27

Area wrestlers flexing muscles statewide



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Middleburg High 100 pound wrestler Gracie Bradshaw cranks down on headlock in prelim win at Ponte Vedra High Invitational held Saturday. Ironically, Bradshaw finished third in high-powered meet with win over freshman sister Lily Bradshaw

Ponte Vedra, Osceola, Fern Beach

By **Randy Lefko**
Sports Editor

FERNANDINA BEACH - Clay High got a team title, Fleming Island punched in with a bucketload of first place finishes and Clay powerhouse Aubrianna Apple continued her dominance as area wrestlers put up top performances statewide in week two of the 2022 wrestling season.

At the Dual in the Dunes in Fernandina Beach, Clay dominated their pool play with three wins; 1A-Union County, 3A-Lake Mary and Charlton County, GA to equal pool 3-0 marks from 3A-Bartram Trail and 1A-Episopal to set off the championship rounds with a fervor.

In the final tally, Clay took care of business with a 48-28 win over Bartram Trail and a 46-30 win over Episopal to take the team title. Bartram Trail defeated Episopal 42-36 for the runner-up spot.

In pool play, Clay beat Union County 58-22, Lake Maryu 48-27 and Charlton County 72-12.

Clay vs. Bartram Trail

- 106: Landon Willard pin
- 113: Jacob Bucci FFT Win
- 120: Holmquist FFT win
- 126: Braden Glavin pin
- 132: BT Ethan Vugman win by pin Zach Deaton
- 138: Drew Loveland pin
- 145: Landon Solomon pin
- 152: Weitz loss by pin
- 160: Grady Hutchinson (FB) FFT
- 170: Tayshaun Tate loss by Major Decision 16-4
- 182: Dom Martin pin
- 195: Brody Lyda pin
- 220: Kedtric Wilbourn pin
- 285: Jaden Bell loss by pin

Middleburg, Oakleaf crack top five at Ponte Vedra

PONTE VEDRA - In Ponte Vedra, at the Ponte Vedra Invitational which featured the likes of South Dade (5th in state), Lake Mary, Osceola and Freedom (state champion) plus Ponte Vedra (state runnerup) as well as Middleburg, Oakleaf, Orange Park, Ridgeview and Clay (13th in state),

SEE WRESTLING, 28

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NEW ARRIVALS

BENNINGTON

Lady Blue Devils remain undefeated

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

GREEN COVE SPRINGS - Clay High girls soccer opened with a first minute goal from Kate Wilkinson then added two blasts from lead scorer Kirra Dodson and a rebound punch from Faith Espino to build a 4-0 halftime lead en route to a 5-3 win over St. Augustine that kept the Lady Blue Devils' unbeaten season in tact with seven wins to open the season.

"It's a completely different year from last year," said Clay coach Stephanie Waugh, who finished at 2-10 in regular season play last year. "I lost the first three teams last year."

With sophomore Kirra Dodson ap-



Oakleaf defense Catherin Brusatto has Knights at 3-2-2 with strong 1-1 tie with Fleming Island.

proaching a Clay record setting season scoring mark with her 25 goals at present, Waugh has produced a fast-flick passing attack that keeps the ball moving from foot to foot on her front three before Dodson puts the hammer down.

Up front, Espino is the controlling force with junior Erika Martinez able to deftly move in and out of traffic to find Dodson's foot.

On the sideline, freshman Natalie Versage powers her way to the corners to set up crosses into the opposing goal box areas.

On defense, cross country ace Kaygen Williamson is a tireless, sideline-to-sideline cover man with Naima Henry on her flank.

Against St. Augustine, Dodson blasted a penalty kick to goal after being harshly tripped on her forward attack. Espino alertly planted the rebound in for a 4-0 Clay lead that held.



Clay forward Kirra Dodson's 25 goals is fueling unbeaten Blue Devil start.

Clay faces off this week with games against Oakleaf, Orange Park and Ridgeview to test their mettle. Orange Park was undefeated, now 6-1, until a 1-0 loss to Ridgeview (2-3-2) on December 8. The Raiders are led by top scorer RYANNE ROBINSON, also a volleyball standout.

Clay beat Ridgeview 6-0 earlier in season. Ridgeview tied Oakleaf 1-1 in the season opener.



Unbeaten Fleming Island (4-0-2) will need to withstand strong second half from unbeaten Bartram Trail (7-0-2) in Thursday clash at Bartram Trail.

Undefeated powers; FIHS at Bartram Trail (Thurs., Dec. 16)

Both are undefeated, 4-0-2 for Fleming Island; 7-0-2 for Bartram Trail and the Thursday, Dec. 15 smash will feature a fast scoring first half attack by Fleming Island versus a strong second half scoring team from the Lady Bears.

In just one small statistic on the MAX-PREPs stats page, Fleming Island is averaging 2.3 goals per first half while Bartram Trail is at 1.9.

Score fast and hold defense seems to be a plan for Fleming Island coach Joy Rosano.

Fleming Island, region finals loss to eventual champion Fletcher last year, has just two games with more than two goals; an 8-0 whip of Santa Fe and a 3-1 win over New Smyrna Beach on December 6.

Fleming Island's most recent game was a 2-0 win over Buchholz in Gainesville.

Rosano gets goals from senior Gianna Gardner and junior Taylor Tamares, both with five goals apiece with senior Kathryn Tamares adding three.

Bartram Trail, 7A region semifinals loss to 7A champion Creekside last year, still has Gatorade player of year Grace Ivey, now a senior, in the middle with six goals, but the Lady Bears have 10 goals from senior Olivia Bori and four more players with four and five goals on the attack.

Bartram Trail recently tied Montverde 1-1 and beat Lakeland Christian 1-0.

Spartans hosting back-to-back state champ clashes

In Montverde, St. Johns Country Day School rebounded solidly after their lone loss, a 1-0 home loss to Montverde in November, with a string of wins against 6A-Chiles (5-1), Ponte Vedra (2-0), Viera (4-1)



St. Johns coach Mike Pickett (8-1-1) is relying on super young players to keep momentum of state titles going.



and 7A-Venice (5-0) to pushed their season record to 8-1-1. The Spartans tied Bartram Trail 1-1 in November.

In that list of names are Viera (6A Final Four, lost to state champion 6A Fletcher in state semi), Ponte Vedra (6A region semi loss to Fleming Island) and Venice lost in 7A regions. Fletcher will be at St. Johns on Tues., Dec. 13 for regular season clash of state champions. Unbeaten 4A champion Bishop Moore, 8-0-3, visits Fri., Dec. 16.

Freshman Sydney Schmidt has led the Spartans attack with 10 goals leading a trio of wingmen in Sophia Pontiere (4 Goals), Lauren Mateo (7 goals) and Alexandria Fletcher (3 goals) that keep the Spartan attack balanced across the field.

Lady Indians holding at three wins

Keystone Heights High girls soccer has gotten their scoring game up to par with consecutive high-scoring games to lead into a Monday road trip to face Columbia High (4-2). After a suffocating 8-0 loss to Gainesville on December 2, coach Roger Laurent tweaked his offense a bit and came up with a 7-0, 8-0, 8-1 string of wins to put some numbers on the board and put Keystone Heights at 8-3-0 overall.

Against Trenton, Kierstyn Shaw pounded in five goals with Ella Hutchins adding two. Against Fort White, Hutchins got five goals with Kendall Gagnon adding two with Shaw with three assists. Against Newberry, Shaw was hot with six goals with Hutchins and Elizabeth Waughon adding one a piece.

For the season, Shaw has 32 goals with Hutchins at 15 and Gagnon at four. Waughon has three scores.



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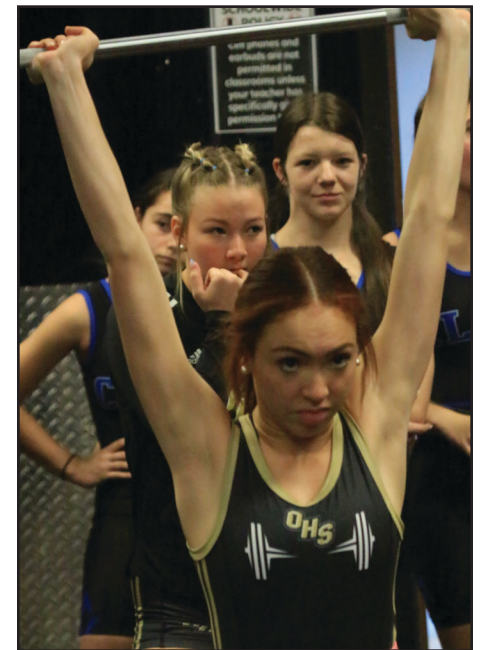
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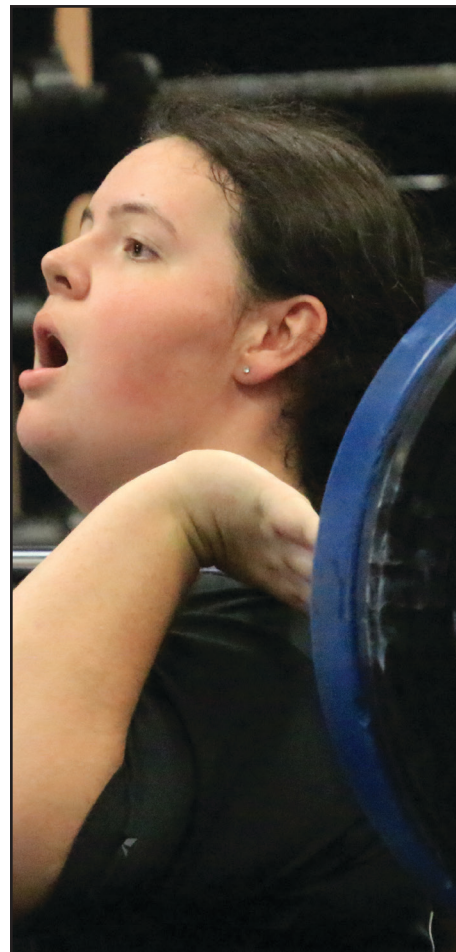


STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Left: Clay High's state champion nucleus has fueled the Lady Blue Devils with readiness to defend title, led by, center, sophomore state champion Emma Heck. Right: Oakleaf mighty mite Lola Nanan is one of many Knights lifters capable of top 10 team points for coach Ben White.



Left: Oakleaf weightlifter Emily Trimble has the eyes of her teammates plus Clay girls in clean and jerk. Right: Clay stalwarts Kyleigh LaFaye and Anna Lee Harbison bring big points in their classes.



Lift

from page 25

average lifters in each class and that gives us points. A few girls; Ivy Gunn, Caylin Völpe, Lily Auble, Amari Grant and Naya Russell go big and win their classes and all of a sudden, we are close."

As White nervously tabulated on his handheld laptop while Clay coach Keller was crunching numbers in his head, the meet's finale was orchestrated by two of both teams key veterans in the 154 pound division; Ivy Gunn, third at state 3A last year at 169, and Janiyah Stevens, state 2A champion at 154.

In the end, Gunn took the weight class in both disciplines with a personal best Clean and Jerk the difference; 350-335 in the Olympic class and 385-380 in the Regular class as Oakleaf won both ends of

the meet; 49-44 and 48-42.

"We may start having all meets in the gym," said White. "The place is packed every meet. We said all week, "to be the best you gotta beat the best" and we pulled it out. A major step for the program."

For Keller, the outcome may be a positive outcome for his defense of titles later in the season.

"For us, it's about getting back in the room and keep our heads down in preparation for the big meet at Suwannee and our big picture goals in January and beyond."

Next up is the annual Suwannee Christmas Invitational in Live Oak, a top tier event, Olympic Snatch team title won by Clay last year (third in tradition, Oakleaf seventh, Middleburg 10th), featuring numerous state-ranked lifters from around Florida.

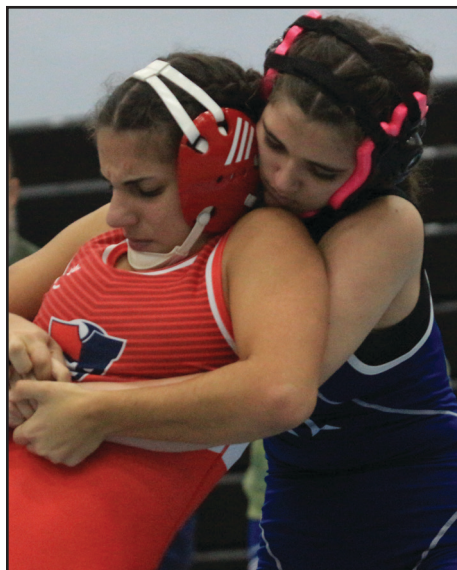
PET ADOPTION

♥ STAFF PICK OF THE WEEK ♥

A forever home for Lily

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STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

A strong collection of action from Ponte Veda Invitational; top left to right, Middleburg sisters Gracie and Lily Bradshaw, Ridgeview's Grace Searcy, Oakleaf's Adrianna Barrientos and Middleburg's Lily Bradshaw. Bottom row; Orange Park's Jasmine Hecht, Middleburg's Sara Walsh, and family fun with Barrientos trio.

Wrestling

from page 25

the wrestling was fast and furious as local girl wrestlers got a quick shot of state-wide power early in the season. The lone missing state powerhouse was third placer Matanzas.

"Talk about a collection of powerhouses," said Oakleaf coach Mark DeToro. "The teams that are here are the best in Florida with teams traveling from South Dade at the south end of the state to Milton way west in the Panhandle. This is tough meet for this early in season but a good test of readiness."

DeToro, new to Oakleaf High School this, but a veteran of sorts with Fleming Island High boys wrestling and Clay High wrestling as a state placer himself at Clay High, had just four wrestlers on his roster; Audrianna Barrientos, Kailani Barrientos, Jayla Harrison and Sofia Shirley-Montijo, but got good mileage from his quartet with junior Adrianna Barrientos, a state qualifier at 105 last year, taking top honors at 105, with the rest of the crew runnerups in their weight classes; 170 for Harrison, 120 for Kailani Barrientos and 155 for Shirley-Montijo.

"We are slowly building interest for the team, but it's tough when we have such great sports at Oakleaf; weightlifting, basketball, soccer," said DeToro. "These girls

are setting mark now and we'll build day by day."

Freedom High won the tournament with a 213 total against runnerup Osceola's 108 holding off Ponte Veda's 101 for the top three.

Middleburg grabbed fourth at 94 with Oakleaf fifth at 84. Orange Park got 22nd behind Jasmine Hecht at 150 while Clay took 14th behind Aubrianna Apple first place. Natali Tyre, sister to state champion Garrett Tyre competed at 170.

Apple, in her fast and furious style, dispensed of her first two opponent with lightning fast pins then went 7-0 and a 2:23 pin to win. Apple, eighth at state last year, looks to better her numbers this year.

"Last year was a tough year," said Apple, who was wing man to graduated state champion Madisyn Blackburn, now at Brewton Parker College. "I've worked on technique and control this year."

Middleburg fared well with numbers; seven athletes, with 190 Cheyenne Cruce, fourth at 190 last year, winning decisively in her weight class with two pins after a bye; 18 seconds and a tough 3:34 match with Mia Johnson of Fort Pierce Central.

The Broncos got team points with a handful of thirds behind Gracie Bradshaw, Memphis Moses and Skyla Fisher. Gracie Bradshaw, a senior state qualifier, had the intriguing win with a major decision 15-6 win over freshman sister Lily Bradshaw for third place.

Fisher lost her second bout to Freedom High's Matio Coutinho via pin, then stormed to two wins by pin for her third.

Moses lost her first match to Ponte Veda's Sophia Mallon, then battled back with three pins to defeat Mallon in her third place match by pin.

For Orange Park, Hecht, a state qualifier last year, lost to Oakleaf's Shirley-Montijo in her third match to finish 3-1. Hecht got a 10 second pin in her second match against Lake Mary's Arianne Augustave.

For Ridgeview, with two wrestlers, Zoey Fowler, at 130, took fourth. Graclynn Searcy finished 1-2 at 125.

Paridon, Robinson lead Fleming Island at 3A-Powerfest

KISSIMMEE - In Osceola's always rugged Danny Bryon Invitational featuring the state's best plus Georgia's best, Fleming Island got a handful of titles from their state-strong squad led by defending state runnerups Jayce Paridon (113) and Jhoel Robinson (182). Fleming Island finished third in Class 2A, in their first year in 2A, behind Jesuit and Lake Gibson.

Paridon, at 126, smoked through his weight class with four pins and a 7-0 win over Class 1A champion Jensen Beach's Ryan Mooney, third in 1A last year.

Robinson, at 220, got to his finals match with two pins and two decisions before getting an injury default win over Osceola's



Fleming Island state runnerup Jayce Paridon is top choice to return to final and reverse the outcome.

Jomar Sanchez. Sanchez was third in 3A at 220 last year.

Two of Fleming Island coach P.J. Cobbert's "Young Pups" from last year, Matthew Newman at 106, and Laird Duhaylungsod at 120, got gold and silver with tough wins over South Dade and Camden County athletes in their final matches.

Newman roared through his lineup with five pins; fastest at :25, with this toughest match, ironically, against Fleming Island teammate Jordan Mukaddam with a 3:14 fall after a 3-2 score between the two.

SEE WRESTLING, 29

Wrestling

from page 28

Newman dominated his final two matches; Jensen Beach and South Dade, with pins.

Duhaylungsod opened with South Dade's Luis Acevedo, fourth in 3A 120 last year, and lost a tough 5-2 match before re-grouping with four wins to take second with an 8-0 win over Camden County's Brandon Higgins. Duhaylungsod had a rough roster of opponents from Deland, Southwest Miami and Osceola; all 3A powerhouses) to fend off for his silver medal. One of Cobbert's lone senior returners; Ronan Bozeman at 170, finished his second place run with a 6-4 win over South Dade's Lawrence Rosario. At 160, Chris Chop finished fifth; Walter Poe, at 195, finished fourth and, at 285, Ethan Hoffstetter was fifth.



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Top, from left, Middleburg's Wyatt LeDuc was gold medalist in Tallahassee, Ridgeview's Kaiden Tibbetts fueled top finish for Ridgeview at Friday Knights Lights at Oakleaf; Clay senior Dominic Martin got win and team title at Duals in the Dunes at Fernandina Beach.



Middleburg's Tucker Cody won gold at Capital City Classic with Jhoel Robinson, Fleming Island, going big at Danny Bryon slugfest in Osceola.



Broncos: Three gold a Captial City

TALLAHASSEE - Middleburg High took the long ride to Tallahassee to face off against some Class 2A powers and came home with three first place wrestlers, two seconds and a third place finish. Sixteen teams competed. Led by Grady Woodard at 120, Wyatt Leduc at 132 and Tucker Cody at 220, all three with tough one or two point finals wins, the Broncos stayed within an half nelson with thier 238 team points behind team champion Lincoln at 289 and Wakulla at 260. Chiles was a distant 160 in fourth place.

The Broncos got team points from top five finishers from a handful of wrestlers including silver medals to freshman Bryan Davis, Jr., at 113, and senior Logan Moore

at 145.

Freshman Porter Loveland was third at 195 with a tech fall, 20-3, over Lincoln's Jordan Baker.

Ridgeview third at Friday Knights

OAKLEAF - At Oakleaf, Ridgeview High may have surprised host Oakleaf with a second place finish at the Oakleaf High hosted Friday Knight Lights afternoon wrestling invitational held last week.

With Glynn Academy of Georgia dominating with five team wins overall, Ridgeview and Oakleaf built up to 3-2 won loss records along with Westside.

In the final tally after round robin wrestling, Ridgeview fought to a 45-36 win over Oakleaf for the runnerup spot. Oakleaf would get third after Westside forfeited out

of the final match.

On the first round, Westside defeated Ridgeview 42-36 behind two late pins at 182 and 195 with Ridgeview's Rayhn Hutchinson pinning to keep the score tied, but Westside's Terrance Goodman pinning Ridgeview's Garrett Davis for the win.

Ridgeview kept moving forward with wins of 56-24 over Ponte Vedra, 72-12 over Mainland before the championship bracket had Glynn Academy wipe out Westside 75-6 for the title.

Glynn Academy beat Ridgeview 68-10 for the title with Kaiden Tibbetts getting a major decision and Raymond GoFort pinning for the Panthers' points.

Oakleaf, under new coach Mark DeTo-

ro, opened with a strong 70-9 win over Orange Park with pins throughout and wins for Orange Park from Trevion Sermons and Elijah Campbell.

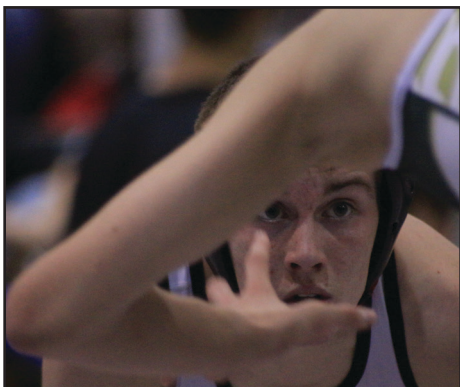
Orange Park has a little bit of a tussle from a game Keystone Heights team that finished winless in five matches with the Raiders prevailing 48-30.

For the Indians, Phoenix Contes, Luke Graves, Canyon Hayes, Steve Raab all had pins. Keystone Heights lost just 42-24 to Mainland High of Daytona Beach.

Orange Park got a win against Ponte Vedra 45-30 with pins from Eliag Grant, Jonathan Garland, Dyland Owenby, Gray, Trevion Sermons, Brody Klingler and Butler.



Orange Park's Trevion Sermons was dominant against team champion Glynn County, GA in Oakleaf's Friday Knight Lights invitational.



Middleburg's Grady Woodard won title in Tallahassee among 32 teams. Right: Oakleaf has new coach Mark DeToro, a Clay High state medalist in his day, with Rory Roderick, an Oakleaf state placer in his day. Middleburg's Grady Woodard won title in Tallahassee among 32 teams. Right: Oakleaf has new coach Mark DeToro, a Clay High state medalist in his day, with Rory Roderick, an Oakleaf state placer in his day.



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**Spotlight
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Blackburn: 10-0 in first college dual

Courtesy of BPCAthletics.com

GAFFNEY, S.C. – No. 13-ranked Brewton-Parker women's wrestling traveled to Gaffney, South Carolina to compete in the first dual of the season against NCAA DII opponent Limestone (S.C.) on Tuesday night.

On the Brewton roster is Clay High School state champion Madisyn Blackburn, wrestling at 130 pounds.

The Lady Barons (1-0) secured their first win of the season in a 31-13 defeat over the Saints (1-1)

Brewton-Parker opened the dual with three forfeits in the 101, 109, and 116 bouts. Elora Waterman, Gabriela Galvez, and Jamesa Robinson were credited with the forfeit wins to give BPC a 15-0 lead to start the dual.

At 123, Alesandra Burgos took down Caroline Schmitt in a 10-0 tech fall (1:27) to give the Lady Barons four additional points. Madisyn Blackburn followed with a 10-0 tech fall of her own (0:00) against Alyssa Garza in the 130-lb bout. Brewton-Parker Women's Wrestling appears in the latest (Dec.8) NAI A Women's Wrestling Coaches' Top-20 Poll, the national office announced.

The Lady Barons moved to 17th in the poll with seven individuals ranked.

On December 10, Brewton-Parker Women's Wrestling hosted a dual tournament on Saturday in Gillis Gymnasium in Mount Vernon. The Lady Barons (11-4) finished with a 4-1 record on the day.

Brewton-Parker put together two teams for the tournament BPC Blue (first team) and BPC Red (second team). The Lady Barons' first team gathered wins over NCAA DII opponents Lincoln Memo-



rial (Tenn.) and Limestone (S.C.) while also downing the No. 12-ranked team in the NAIA in Missouri Baptist and (RV) Montreat (N.C.).

BPC's first team notched 11 pins on the day and produced six tech falls while the second team gathered four pins. Unfortunately, the second team finished the day 0-4.

In the third dual of the day, BPC defeated Mid-South opponent, Montreat 43-4.

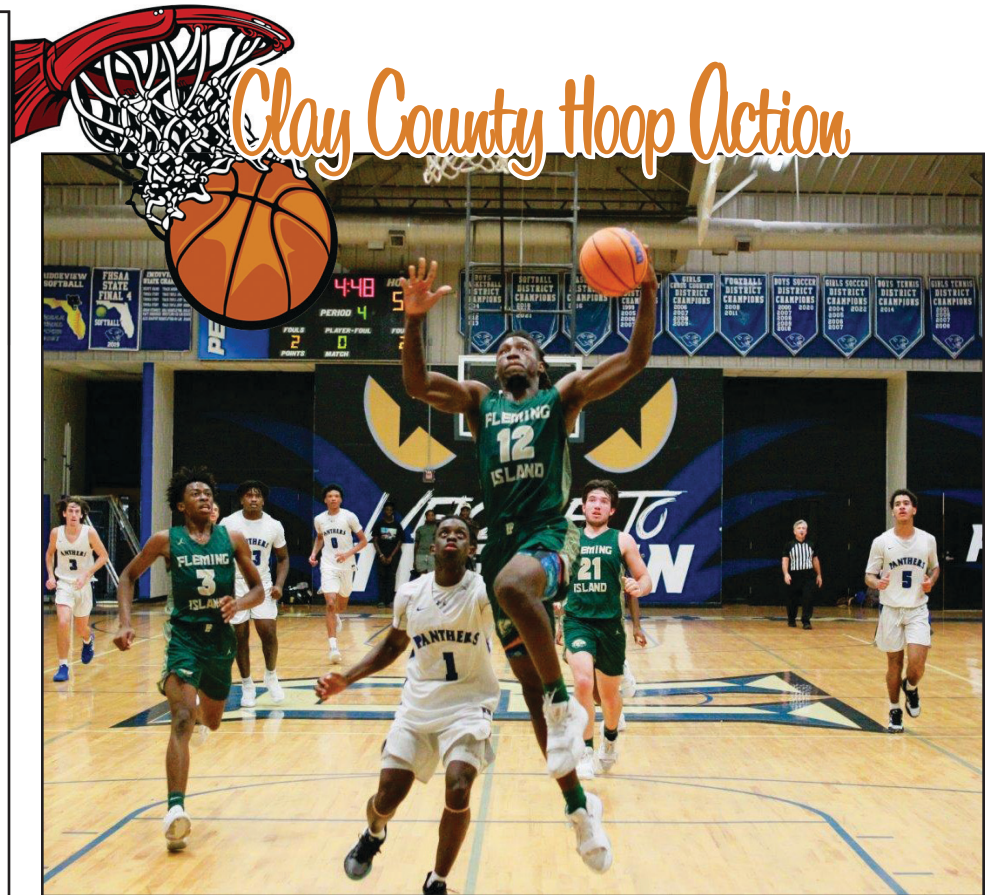
At 130, Madisyn Blackburn produced a fall (4:36) over Isabella Hoffman.

Against Limestone, the Lady Barons put together a 36-10 performance that saw three-straight forfeit wins to open the dual. Burgos (123) recorded a 2-0 decision over Caroline Schmitt followed by Blackburn's (130) pin on Alyssa Garza.

In the final dual of the day, BPC knocked off No. 12-ranked Missouri Baptist in a 35-11 win.

Blackburn won with a pin (5:33) over Taryn Johnson at 130.

Brewton-Parker returns to action on Dec. 30 at the Midlands Championships.



CORRESPONDENT PHOTOS BY RAY DIMONDA

Fleming Island forward Darion Domenick flies to hoop against Ridgeview.

Contenders look to destroy Eagles' winning streak

RIDGEVIEW- The Friday night hoops action picked up a notch as everyone in the county wants to be the first to knock down the unbeaten Fleming Island Golden Eagles.

In intra-county play, the Ridgeview Panthers wanted their shot in the Panther Den and started out looking like tonight could be the magic night as the Panthers opened up a six point lead, flying around the court, putting the Golden Eagles in a daze.

By the second quarter, the lead began to shrink as Fleming Island repositioned a few players to slow the Panther attack. The Panther's began throwing it up without draining. Fleming Island went all out on defense and began racking up the steals, driving, and hitting to get ahead 35-32 at the half.

Out of the locker room, Fleming Island charged the batteries and pounded away at the Panthers, holding the home team to four points in the fourth quarter. The onslaught continued until the final buzzer sounded on a 26 point victory over the Panthers, 78-52.

"We told them they just have to raise the energy level during the halftime, they have to get after it," said Fleming Island Head Coach Traavis Chandler. "I was proud of these guys coming out with that third quarter energy. We are down two of our top players tonight, one with an injury and the other on an official college visit. The two of them would bring 30 points. I was really proud of the other players stepping up. The Panthers really came out to play tonight, it's Friday night and we're in the Panther's Den. These guys played real hard."

After the all-out assault by the Panthers in the first quarter, they never let up. It was Fleming Island who decided it was time to step up and go all out. By 4:52



Ridgeview guard Jarren Rosier goes past Fleming Island guard Isaiah Robinson in front of Ridgeview coach Jerome Clyburn who had upset of unbeaten Golden Eagles in mind until Fleming Island surged in second half.

in the second, Fleming Island finally took control and led the game, 27-26. The Panthers used an aggressive defense and kept everything close, knowing a few points here and there could make the difference. As the teams took to the locker rooms at the half, the Golden Eagle three point lead didn't look so intimidating, giving the Panthers motivation for the second half.

But out of the locker room, the Golden Eagles looked like they found something to charge them up to full capacity.

On the other end of the court, the Panthers seemed like they never rested, or maybe rested too much. The drive just wasn't there.

"We came out, and it was just our energy was low," said Panther's Head Coach Jerome Clyburn. "Sometimes I think, well that's our Achilles Heel, the third quarter. I wish somehow we could just not have a halftime. In the beginning, the main thing was the energy kept us right in the game. In the end, we got a little tired and ran out of gas. We have to do a little more condi-



CHS Ethan Larson at Brewton Parker Wrestling

Clay High graduate Ethan Larson, now a freshman wrestler at Brewton Parker College in Georgia, is a 197 pound grappler for the Barons with recent wins in a tri-meet with Coker College and St. Andrews on December 10. Against Coker, Larson won an 11-4 match to give Brewton's its 18th point in a 27-17 loss with a team point taken from Brewton Parker. Larson got a pin against St. Andrews in the Barons' 33-15 win. Brewton Parker has a Wed., Dec. 14 match at Truett McConnell University in Georgia. Clay High state champion Garrett Tyre is a 285 pound freshman wrestler at Coker College.



Oakleaf High is employing strong halfcourt defense; here with Machi Martin picking pocket against Raines, in Knights third place finish at Fortegra Invitational.

tioning after practice.”

Fleming Island felt this and pounced all over the Panthers as Ridgeview was trying to get back into the game. At 3:17 of the third, Ridgeview was under the net and put the ball up five times without it ever going in. Coming down with the rebound, Fleming Island drove the court and drained it for another two. The highlight of the night was with a steal, Fleming Island had the ball with :02 seconds on the clock. They worked the ball over to George Hamm who ended the night as the team high scorer with 20 points. From mid-court Hamm tossed a buzzer beater, throwing up a shot that dropped with nothing but net for a 3-pointer ending the third quarter, 63-48.

The final stanza was all Golden Eagles. Even after they cleared the bench with subs, the lead just kept growing as Ridgeview couldn't catch a break on the ball dropping and Fleming Island was relentless on rebounds and driving. There was little slowed, settled play. Just hustle up and down the court and tons of layups until they amassed the 26 point gap in the last minute and held it there to head back to the Island still unblemished 6-0 with the huge 78-52 victory.

“Losing 10 seniors last year, no one thought we would be where we are at right now,” said Chandler. “I just tell the guys, one game at a time. Just believe in the culture, championship culture, championship togetherness and just getting it done. I tell them just think like we are 0-0.”

Following Hamm's 20 points, Fleming Island high scorers included Darien Domineck with 16, and Joey Chenette with 12. As a team, Fleming Island hit six 3-point shots. For the Panthers, Kole Whitaker had 17, followed by Chris Baptiste with 9. The Panthers hit seven 3-pointers.

Knights third at Fortagra

With a stifling defense in their Fortegra 9:12 tournament opener, the Oakleaf High Knights boys basketball team ran roughshod over Raines High School, but top-ranked Providence had just enough firepower to offset the Knights overwhelming attack with an overtime win. Oakleaf (6-1)



Clay High big man Cameron Jones-Dixon bodies up on drive from Munroe High guard in Blue Devils Saturday loss. Right: St. Johns Country Day School top shooter Camden Cooper, a seventh grader, has been 21 points per game for Spartan attack.

finished third with a final game; a win over Sandalwood.

“You missed a classic,” said Price, after his Episcopal game in the semifinals. “Up 58-53, we lost in overtime and had a shot at the end to win it. A great performance that came up a little short.”

Against Raines, Oakleaf won 58-12 to challenge the Providence unbeaten record; now 7-0, with a handful of steals and blocked shots; two steals from Aaron Rivers, two from Sean Jones, four blocks Coachman. Oakleaf opened up fast with a 15-9 first quarter, then closed fast with a 15-7 fourth quarter to tie the game. Providence went 10-5 in the overtime for the win.

Devin Kersh was selected among three Providence players to the Fortegra All Tournament team.

Against Providence, Kersh and Travis Knox both topped scoring with 12 points.



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Orange Park getting strong play from Kevin Monterola underneath, here is battle against Sandalwood.



adding 18 against Camden County.

In regular season play before the Fortegra Tournament, Orange Park beat Flagler Palm Coast 68-34 with Adams at 21 points.

Orange Park has a home game against Bishop Kenny (4-1) on Tues., Dec. 13.

Orange Park will play in the Battle on the Island at Fleming Island High over the Christmas break.

On Sat., Dec. 10, Clay (1-4) lost a 64-48 match to unbeaten 2A-Munroe (3-0) out of Tallahassee.

Middleburg (2-4) is riding a three game losing streak with losses to St. Johns Country Day School, Frederica Academy (GA) and Keystone Heights.

St. Johns Country Day School, led by seventh grader Camden Cooper's hot scoring (21.6 points per game), is 5-2 with three wins stopped by a loss to Toco Creek on Fri., Dec. 9. The Spartans won three over Stanton, First Coast Christian and Beaches Chapel prior to Toco Creek.

Cooper and senior center Andrew Hightower are top scorers with Hightower adding 18.9 points per game. Cooper has games of 24, 34, 32 with three games at 17 and one for 10 to lead the Spartans.

Against Stanton, with 34 points, Cooper hit five three pointers. A 32 point effort against First Coast Christian came with four threes.

Hightowers best game was an 18 point night in a win over Middleburg.

St. Johns heads to the Classic Basketball Tournament in the Gaylord Palms Resort in Orlando with a first game scheduled against Sunbright High (1-5) of Tennessee.

The Spartans bracket features teams from Tuscaloosa, AL; McGuffey High (PA), Montclair Kimberly Academy (NJ), Tiverton High (RI) and Uniontown Area (PA).

Keystone Heights boys basketball (4-2) has three straight wins since a Middleburg win on December 6 (65-52) with wins over Crescent City (63-49) and Baldwin (56-53) to start 2022.

Against Sandalwood, Kersh had 11 points, five rebounds with Knox finishing with 10.

Oakleaf five straight wins to open the season is a school record.

Oakleaf is at Clay on Tues., Dec. 13 with First Coast hosting the Knights on Friday.

Oakleaf will play in the Jarvis Williams Christmas Tournament at Palatka High School.

Also at Fortegra, Orange Park (5-2) opened with a 42-36 loss to Sandalwood before beating Camden County (83-58) and Mandarin (72-40) to finish fifth.

Against Sandalwood, Orange Park took a 21-20 lead into the third quarter and held to 26-25 into the fourth but could not break away.

Raider guard Thomas Faucett had 20 points against Mandarin with Avorie Grayson grabbing 11 rebounds.

Sherrard Adams had 20 with Faucett

Renegades holds off late charge for national title

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

ORLANDO - Following an epic 17 weeks of dominating football the Oakleaf Renegades 10-Under Pop Warner team, led by prolific tailback Calvin Ferguson's three scores, held off a second half surge by the Addison Cowboys of Illinois to win a 34-19 national championship title in just their third year of existence.

"This is the first time in about 25 years that a team from the First Coast Conference in the northeast Jacksonville area, has been to the championship game," said First Coast Conference President Dean Prince. "The last team that got close was a team from Ponte Vedra that lost a thriller in the national semifinal game."

For Carlos Lowe, in his third year at the helm of the Renegades who only started playing in the newly-constructed Oakleaf Youth Sports, the Renegades have blistered their way through a season that started August 1.

"I was in Pensacola in Perdido Bay



Buccaneers a few years ago and we made it all the way to the semifinals," said Lowe, a U.S. Marine. "This was my second time around. We told the kids last week that this whole week was either going to be a fun one and we started partying after our

semifinal win."

With the game seemingly in hand behind tailback Calvin Ferguson three 50-plus yard scoring runs and a dash from Kente Ayers, the Renegades bolted to a 27-0 lead on the Addison team to go into the half

with the same point total as their two previous wins; 27-0 in both the quarterfinals and in Tuesday's semifinal win over Lower Perks of Pennsylvania.

Prince, involved in Pop Warner and youth sports for nearly 30 years in the Jacksonville area, appreciated the efforts of Renegades coach Carlos Lowe and the Oakleaf area community, said he went into the tunnel of the Camping World Stadium to get the championship trophy at one point in the second half and returned the to field with the game a lot closer.

"Addison started to come back on the Oakleaf team, but a strip tackle and fumble recovery by the Renegades on a Cowboy breakaway seemed to turn the game around," said Prince. "That Addison team was starting to make their move."

The fumble; tackle by Ferguson on a breakaway run by Addison, fumble pick up by Antonio Hamilton, led to a final touchdown by Ferguson to move the score from 27-19 to 34-19.

"Calvin Ferguson did an amazing run af-





ter that fumble to set the game,” said Chris Kennedy, in his first year as director of the Oakleaf Youth Sports Association. “Our staff is full of plenty of military guys that understand discipline and focus to task. We have quality coaches that teach the kids good football and good sportsmanship and they just settled in and maintained the course.”

Kennedy said the team plans a Saturday banquet on Saturday to honor the team and then a Wed., Dec. 21 date with the Jacksonville Iceman hockey team.

“The kids are excited to be on the field; the big field was a special excitement,” said Prince. “The Florida Citrus Association has been a big part of giving the kids a quality experience with all the amenities in the Orlando area. The Oakleaf community



should be commended for their fundraising and support of the kids to make all this happen.”

65th Annual Pop Warner National Championships

10-Unders, Division 2

Oakleaf Renegades vs. Addison Cowboys (IL)

1st Quarter

Oakleaf: Calvin Ferguson. From Addison 39 yard line, stiff arm on left side sweep at 7:39.

43 Yard run 6-0, QB Elijah Baker PAT run 7-0

2nd Quarter

7:30 - After turnover on downs by Addison on Oakleaf 35, Calvin Ferguson jet sweep around right end, big block from wide receiver Tristan Tobler, 63 Yards TD.

13-0
PAT Keonte Ayers Run

14-0
:58 - Keonte Ayers on jet sweep right to left, 33 yards TD.

20-0

Miss PAT pass to Elijah Goldwire

Third Quarter

9:08 - Third and 10 at Oakleaf 34, Ferguson sweep left, outran Addison defense, 66 yard TD

26-0

Conversion PAT pass to Ferguson

27-0

2:37 - Addison scores, running back Jason Felhammer 12 Yd. TD

27-6

Pass to Ethan Christerna PAT

27-7

Fourth Quarter

8:07 - Oakleaf fumbles away at Addison 15, recovered by Addison Giovanni Alvarez.

7:49 - Addison scores on 65 yard pass on short slant to Ethan Christerna, outrunning Oakleaf defense to end zone.

27-13

PAT kick missed

5:27 - Oakleaf misses fourth down pass. Addison takes over one downs at Oakleaf 31

3:57 - Addison at Oakleaf 2, Oakleaf defense; Jeremiah Santiago-Epps and Jaquavion Valentine with two stops, Addison scores on fourth and one.

27-19

PAT kick no good.

1:47 - Calvin Ferguson bounces right off tackle goes 46 yards for touchdown.

33-19

PAT pass to Elijah Goldwire

34-19

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SCAN TO DONATE



Oakleaf High broke a 0-0 halftime tie with previously unbeaten Clay High with a 2-1 win Tuesday night at Clay High School. Scoring for Oakleaf were Chloe Hammer and Taylor James. Clay was without lead scorer Kirra Dodson and her 26 goals thus far in the season. Pictured are (1) Oakleaf forward Jocelyn Hill getting covered by Clay defender Kaygen Williamson, (2) Oakleaf forward Natalie Landry fires off a shot on goal, and (3) Clay freshman forward Kate Wilkening breaks for goal.



St. Johns Country Day School won a 4=0 game over Fletcher in a battle of defending state champions with the Lady Spartans champs of Class 2A and Fletcher champions of Class 6A. St. Johns will host Bishop Moore, the Class 4A champions, on Friday at 5:30 p.m. Pictured are (1), Alixandria Fletcher battling with Fletcher defender Stella Peterson, (2) St. Johns forward Sophia Pontieri just before scoring first goal of night near the 21 minute mark of the first half, and (3) senior Lauren Mateo with a hair-flying head ball. Mateo recently committed to play at Embry Riddle University. Note: St. Johns coach Mike Pickett was named the USA top girls high school soccer coach recently by MaxPreps who listed their top 100 coaches in America. The Spartans are currently ranked No. 2 in America.



Clay High hosted Oakleaf in their gym in basketball, but the Knights were on fire with a 72-52 win on Tuesday. Pictured, Oakleaf guard Aaron Rivers clamps tight defense on Clay guard Zach Bybee.

CLAY COUNTY LEGAL NOTICES

NOTICE OF FORECLOSURE SALE

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FOURTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT IN AND FOR CLAY COUNTY, FLORIDA Case No. 2021CA000815

JPMorgan Chase Bank, National Association, Plaintiff,

vs. Leonard A. Grindstaff, et al., Defendants.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that pursuant to the Final Judgment of Foreclosure dated December 12, 2022 and entered in Case No. 2021CA000815 of the Circuit Court of the Fourth Judicial Circuit in and for Clay County, Florida wherein JPMorgan Chase Bank, National Association, is the Plaintiff and Leonard A. Grindstaff; Debra H. Grindstaff; Sweetbriar Homeowners' Association, Inc.; Longshore Lake Foundation 1, LLC as successor trustee for Clay County Land Trust #04-04-25-007866-007-08; Terra Mar Property Management, LLC as Trustee of 3789 Blackthorn Court Land Trust; Unknown Tenant #1 n/k/a Kerlaunda Foster; Unknown Tenant #2 n/k/a Mr. Foster are Defendants, I, Tara S. Green, will sell to the highest and best bidder for cash at www.clay.realforeclose.com at 10:00 a.m. at January 13, 2023 on the following described property set forth in said Final Judgment, to wit:

LOT 166 OF SWEETBRIAR UNIT 4, ACCORDING TO THE PLAT THEREOF AS RECORDED IN PLAT BOOK 31, PAGE(S) 18-21, OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS OF CLAY COUNTY, FLORIDA.

Property Address: 3789 BLACKTHORN CT., ORANGE PARK, FL 32073 Any person claiming an interest in the surplus from the sale, if any, other than the property owner as of the date of the lis pendens must file a claim before the clerk reports the surplus as unclaimed.

DATED in Clay, Florida this, 13th day of December, 2022

As Clerk of Circuit Court
CLAY COUNTY, Florida
Leigh Lucroy
Deputy Clerk

Legal 47371 Published 12/15/2022 and 12/22/2022 in Clay County's Clay Today newspaper

PUBLIC AUCTION

The following vehicles will be sold at public auction for towing and storage costs at Horton's Towing, 2645 Hwy 17, Bldg. 2, Fleming Island, FL 32003 Horton's Towing reserves the right to accept or reject any and/or all bids.

Auction Date December 29, 2022, 9:00 AM

2008 Ford Vin # 1ZVHT82H385106157
2007 Chevy Vin # 1GNFK13057J372788

Legal 47370 Published 12/15/2022 in Clay County's Clay Today newspaper

NOTICE OF FORECLOSURE SALE

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FOURTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT IN AND FOR CLAY COUNTY, FLORIDA

CASE NO.: 2022CA000814
U.S. BANK TRUST NATIONAL ASSOCIATION, NOT IN ITS INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY BUT SOLELY AS OWNER TRUSTEE FOR RCF 2 ACQUISITION TRUST, Plaintiff,

vs. MARY ANN ARAUJO A/K/A MARY A. ARAUJO; JOSE ARAUJO A/K/A JOSE S. ARAUJO; DOCTORS INLET RESERVE HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION, INC.; THE INDEPENDENT SAVINGS PLAN COMPANY; UNKNOWN TENANT(S) IN POSSESSION #1 and #2, and ALL OTHER UNKNOWN PARTIES, et al., Defendants.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN pursuant to a Final Summary Judgment of Foreclosure (In Rem) dated December 7, 2022, entered in Civil Case No.: 2022CA000814 of the Circuit Court of the Fourth Judicial Circuit in and for Clay County, Florida,

wherein U.S. BANK TRUST NATIONAL ASSOCIATION, NOT IN ITS INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY BUT SOLELY AS OWNER TRUSTEE FOR RCF 2 ACQUISITION TRUST, Plaintiff, and MARY ANN ARAUJO A/K/A MARY A. ARAUJO; JOSE ARAUJO A/K/A JOSE S. ARAUJO; DOCTORS INLET RESERVE HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION, INC.; THE INDEPENDENT SAVINGS PLAN COMPANY; are Defendants.

I will sell to the highest bidder for cash, at www.clay.realforeclose.com., at 10:00 AM,

on the 25th day of January, 2023, the following described real property as set forth in said Final Summary Judgment, to wit: **LOT 66, OF BARRINGTON ESTATES UNIT FOUR, ACCORDING TO THE PLAT THEREOF AS RECORDED IN MAP BOOK 43, PAGE 43 THROUGH 48, OF THE PUBLIC OF CLAY COUNTY, FLORIDA.**

If you are a person claiming a right to funds remaining after the sale, you must file a claim with the clerk before the clerk reports the surplus as unclaimed. If you fail to file a timely claim you will not be entitled to any remaining funds. After the funds are reported as unclaimed, only the owner of record as of the date of the Lis Pendens may claim the surplus.

IF YOU ARE A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY WHO NEEDS ANY ACCOMMODATION IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROCEEDING, YOU ARE ENTITLED AT NO COST TO YOU, TO THE PROVISION OF CERTAIN ASSISTANCE. PLEASE CONTACT THE ADA

COORDINATOR AT CRTINTRP@COJ.NET OR (904) 255-1695 AT LEAST 7 DAYS BEFORE YOUR SCHEDULED COURT APPEARANCE, OR IMMEDIATELY UPON RECEIVING THIS NOTIFICATION IF THE TIME BEFORE THE SCHEDULED APPEARANCE IS LESS THAN 7 DAYS; IF YOU ARE HEARING OR VOICE IMPAIRED, CALL 711. WITNESS my hand and the seal of the court on 12/13/2022 .
TARA S. GREEN
CLERK OF THE COURT
By: Leigh Lucroy
Deputy Clerk

Legal 47368 Published 12/15/2022 and 12/22/2022 in Clay County's Clay Today newspaper

NOTICE OF PUBLIC SALE

ELITE TOWING gives notice that on 01/18/2023 at 09:00 AM the following vehicle(s) may be sold by public sale at 2865 SUITE C BLANDING BLVD to satisfy the lien for the amount owed on each vehicle for any recovery, towing, or storage services charges and administrative fees allowed pursuant to Florida statute 713.78.
3FA6P0HDXR108124 2017 FORD
JKAEKXK18ND4H5743 2022 KAWK

Legal 47269 Published 12/15/2022 in Clay County's Clay Today newspaper

SHADOWLAWN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

COUNTY ROAD 218 EXTENSION PROJECT
Clay County, Florida
Notice is hereby given that the Shadowlawn Community Development District ("District") will receive proposals for the following District project:
COUNTY ROAD 218 EXTENSION PROJECT

The Project Manual consisting of the proposal package, contract, proposal form, plans and other materials will be available beginning Thursday, December 15, 2022 at 8:00 A.M. by accessing the FTP page at the England-Thims & Miller, Inc. website <https://files.etminc.com/folders/o2xrp11>

The Project Manual will include, but not be limited to, the Request for Proposals,

proposal and contract documents, and construction plans and specifications. The Project Manual will not be available for pickup at the offices of England-Thims & Miller, Inc.

There will be a mandatory pre-proposal conference held at the offices of England, Thims & Miller, Inc. at 3:00 PM EST on December 22, 2022. Failure to attend will not preclude the District's consideration of a proposal submitted by a non-attending proposer. The pre-proposal conference may include, but not limited to, a discussion of contract requirements, inspections, evaluations, and submittal requirements.

The District reserves the right to reject any and all proposals, make modifications to the work, award the contract in whole or in part with or without cause, provide for the delivery of the project in phases, and waive minor or technical irregularities, if it determines in its discretion that it is in the District's best interests to do so. The successful proposer will be required to execute a contract with the District and file the requisite Performance and Payment Bonds and insurance within ten (10) calendar days after execution of the Construction Contract.

Any person who wishes to protest the Project Manual, or any component thereof, shall file with the District a written notice of protest within seventy-two (72) hours after the Project Manual is made available, together with a protest bond in a form acceptable to the District and in the amount of \$10,000, and shall file a formal written protest with the District within seven (7) calendar days after the date of timely filing the initial notice of protest. Filing will be perfected and deemed to have occurred upon receipt by the District Manager. Failure to timely file a notice of protest or failure to timely file a formal written protest shall constitute a waiver of any right to object to or protest the contents of the District's Project Manual. The formal written protest shall state with particularity the facts and law upon which the protest is based.

Ranking of proposals will be made on the basis of qualifications according to the evaluation criteria contained within the Project Manual; however, please note that proposals received from firms failing to meet the following minimum qualifications/ requirements will not be considered or evaluated: (1) Proposer shall be required to provide evidence of \$10,000,000 minimum bonding capacity from a Surety Company acceptable to the District; (2) Proposer shall provide proof of insurance including: General Liability Insurance capacity in an amount equal to or exceeding \$3,000,000, Automobile Liability Insurance capacity in an amount equal or exceeding \$2,000,000, General Aggregate Insurance capacity in an amount equal or exceeding \$3,000,000. (3) Proposer will have constructed three (3) projects similar in quality and scope of a minimum of \$5,000,000 each in completed construction over the last ten

(10) years; (4) Proposer is a licensed underground utility contractor in the State of Florida for a minimum of ten (10) years. Any and all questions relative to this project shall be directed in email only to Brian Landweer, P.E. at LandweerB@etminc.com no later than 3:00 PM EST on January 24, 2023.

Firms desiring to provide services for this project must submit one (1) original and four (4) copies of the required proposal no later than 3:00 PM EST on February 1, 2023 at the office of England, Thims & Miller, Inc., with an electronic copy in PDF included with the submittal package on a USB drive. Proposals shall be submitted in a sealed opaque package, shall bear the name of the proposer on the outside of the package and shall identify the name of the project. Proposals will be opened at the time and date stipulated above; those received after the time and date stipulated above will be returned unopened to the proposer. Any proposal not completed as specified or missing the required proposal documents as provided in the Project Manual may be disqualified. Shadowlawn Community Development District
District Manager

Legal 47258 Published 12/15/2022 in Clay County's Clay Today newspaper

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS NOTICE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that sealed proposals will be received until 4:00 P.M., Thursday January 12, 2023 for the following:
RFQ NO. 22/23-13, TOURISM ADVERTISING AGENCY

Proposals will be opened at 9:00 A.M., or as soon thereafter, on Friday, January 13, 2022 in the Clay County Administration Building, Conference Room "B", Fourth Floor, 477 Houston St. Green Cove Springs, Florida and through the County's electronic bidding system as well. Bids will not be valid unless received by the bid deadline.

The solicitation package is available at: [HTTPS://PROCUREMENT.OPENGOV.COM/PORTAL/CLAYCOUNTY?STATUS=ALL](https://procurement.opengov.com/portal/claycounty?status=all)

In order to submit a response to this solicitation the respondent must be registered on Clay County's Public Portal.

For information concerning procedures for responding to this Proposal, contact Jessica Loos in the Purchasing Department at (904) 284-6388 or by email: purchasing@claycountygov.com. Bidders are prohibited from contacting, by any means, whether orally, telephonically, electronically or in writing, any member of the Board, any County employee, including the County Manager, the County Attorney or the Commission Auditor, any member of the designated Evaluation

Committee or any agent of the County regarding the Request for bids in any respect during the Request for Proposal Period. The Request for Proposal Period during which no contact may occur commences from the date of publication of the notice of a Request for Proposals and ends upon a Bid Decision becoming final, i.e. after the notice of bid protest period of 72 hours has expired. However, in the event of a notice of protest, the no contact rule continues in place during the Protest Period and does not end until a resolution of the protest has occurred and become final. The following exceptions exist to the no-contact rule:

- a. Inquiries may be submitted to the Purchasing Department if specifically provided in the Request for Proposals;
- b. Pre-bid conferences provided for in the Request for Proposals; and
- c. Formal presentations by Bidders to the designated Evaluation Committee or to the Board or any committee thereof specifically contemplated in the Request for Proposals.

The Board reserves the right and power to reject any and all Proposals without cause and to waive technical and non-technical or non-material defects in the Request for Proposals or submittal of any Proposal, and in its discretion to re-advertise the Request for Proposals. The Board reserves the right to award Bids, quotes, or Proposals which would be in the Best Interest of the County. Interested vendors are advised that the Clay County Board of County Commissioners has a local preference policy and Buy American policy. The complete policy for both can be viewed at: <https://www.claycountygov.com/government/purchasing/vendor-information>.

A PERSON OR AFFILIATE WHO HAS BEEN PLACED ON THE CONVICTED VENDOR LIST FOLLOWING A CONVICTION FOR A PUBLIC ENTITY CRIME MAY NOT SUBMIT A BID ON A CONTRACT TO PROVIDE ANY GOODS OR SERVICES TO A PUBLIC ENTITY. MAY NOT SUBMIT A BID ON A CONTRACT WITH A PUBLIC ENTITY FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OR REPAIR OF A PUBLIC BUILDING OR PUBLIC WORK. MAY NOT SUBMIT BIDS ON LEASES OF REAL PROPERTY TO A PUBLIC ENTITY. MAY NOT BE AWARDED OR PERFORM WORK AS A CONTRACTOR, SUPPLIER, SUBCONTRACTOR, OR CONSULTANT UNDER A CONTRACT WITH ANY PUBLIC ENTITY, AND MAY NOT TRANSACT BUSINESS WITH ANY PUBLIC ENTITY IN EXCESS OF THE THRESHOLD AMOUNT PROVIDED IN SECTION 287.017, FLORIDA STATUTES, FOR CATEGORY TWO FOR A PERIOD OF 36 MONTHS FROM THE DATE OF BEING PLACED ON THE CONVICTED VENDOR LIST.

Legal 47257 Published 12/15/2022 in Clay County's Clay Today newspaper

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