

CLAY TODAY



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'Operation Lightshine' leads to 10 arrests for child sexual exploitation

Sweep part of Intercept Task Force of Northeast Florida unit

By Don Coble
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GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Five men left their homes in Jacksonville in August, believing they were meeting a child for sex.

Instead, law enforcement agencies were waiting.

"Operation Lightshine," a four-day undercover operation, was created on Aug. 2 to "identify and apprehend individuals using the internet to sexually exploit children, the sheriff's office said.



Bryan Martinez



Detavious McDuffie



Eric Torres Jimenez



Luke Parrish



Marc Jubin



Reginald Jefferson



Scott Smith

The operation led to 10 arrests, including two men from Georgia and one from California. All used apps to message victims they believed to be 13 or 14.

"During 'Operation Lightshine,' investigators and agents went undercover as children online to uncover and capture

individuals involved in child sexual exploitation," Cook said. "During the operation, they successfully identified several suspects engaged in these activities. Once the operation concluded, investigators needed to gather more evidence, some which required search warrants, to ensure that

these suspects could be prosecuted and held accountable. This complex process involved a thorough investigation and collaboration between law enforcement agencies at the local and federal levels across the country. As a result of these efforts, 10

SEE STING, 2

Oakleaf, Orange Park march to Golden Eagle Classic wins

Schools win their state regional classes

STAFF PHOTO BY DON COBLE

FLEMING ISLAND – Orange Park High's marching band seemed to rise from the dead to win Class 3A with a haunting performance called "Immortalis." In contrast, Oakleaf won Class 5A and the overall title with a total score of 82.15 for music, general effort and visual. The Golden Regiment also won the percussion, color guard and drum major category with 90.5 points.

For more, see the story on Page 21.



BCC approves process to eliminate postal confusion

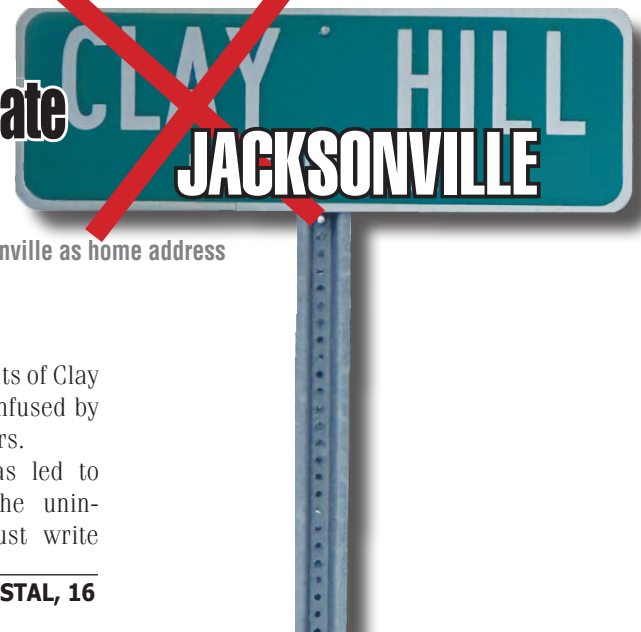
Some Clay Hill residents use Jacksonville as home address

By Lee Wardlaw
lee@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Residents of Clay Hill have been frustrated and confused by the U.S. Post Office for many years.

A seemingly slight detail has led to significant inconvenience for the unincorporated community, who must write

SEE POSTAL, 16



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Sting

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minors were arrested.”

Those arrested in the sting were:

- Marc Conner Jubin, 27, of Jacksonville, with soliciting a child for unlawful sexual conduct using computer services or devices, unlawful use of a two-way communications device and traveling to meet a minor to commit an unlawful sex act.
- Detavious Denard McDuffie, 26, of Rhine, Georgia, with soliciting a child for unlawful sexual conduct using computer services or devices, unlawful use of a two-way communications device and traveling to meet a minor to commit an unlawful sex act.
- Scott Christopher Smith, 39, of Jacksonville, with soliciting a child for unlawful sexual conduct using computer services or devices, unlawful use of a two-way communications device and traveling to meet a minor to commit an unlawful sex act.
- Eric Jayson Jiminez, 38, of Jacksonville, with soliciting a child for unlawful sexual conduct using computer services or devices, unlawful use of a two-way communications device and traveling to meet a minor to commit an unlawful sex act.
- Luke Joshua Parrish, 30, of Jacksonville, with soliciting a child for unlawful sexual conduct using computer services or devices, soliciting a child for unlawful sexual conduct using computer services

or devices through a parent, custodian, or legal guardian, unlawful use of a two-way communications device and traveling to meet a minor to commit an unlawful sex act. According to the arrest report, Parrish agreed to meet with a girl who said she was 14, and he texted the “mother” of a 13-year-old who was being sold for sex.

- Bryan Brandon Martinez, 19, of Crescent City, with soliciting a child for unlawful sexual conduct using computer services or devices, unlawful use of a two-way communications device and traveling to meet a minor to commit an unlawful sex act.
- Shawn Lei Burge, 49, of Tallahassee, with online enticement of a minor to engage in sexual activity and the distribution of child pornography.
- Reginald Renaldo Jefferson, 29, of Jacksonville, with soliciting a child for unlawful sexual conduct using computer services or devices, unlawful use of a two-way communications device, traveling to meet a minor to commit an unlawful sex act and attempting to flee and elude police.
- Jason Charles Nicholas, 53, of Ramona, California, with distribution of child sexual abuse materials over the internet.
- Jose Luis Gonzalez Jr., 33, of Gainesville, Georgia, with five counts of distribution of child sexual abuse materials over the internet.

The collaborative effort involved various agencies, including the Clay County Sheriff’s Office, Homeland Security Investigations, Jacksonville Sheriff’s Of-



Clay County Sheriff Michelle Cook identified 10 men accused of soliciting children for sexual exploitation over the internet during a joint press conference Wednesday. Cook said her agency would work with the Intercept Task Force of Northeast Florida to relentlessly find and prosecute the most vulnerable members of society – children.

ice, States Attorneys’ Office, 4th Judicial Circuit, Federal Bureau of Investigations, Naval Criminal Investigative Service, St. Johns County Sheriff’s Office, Orange Park Police Department and the U.S. Attorney’s

Office. CCGSO joined forces with seven other law enforcement agencies eight months ago to combat human trafficking and child exploitation. They joined with Operation Lightshine to create the largest task force to fight child exploitation in the country.

Operation Lightshine is a group organized in 2021 by former U.S. Marine Matt Murphy, whose sister was murdered by a man who sold women and drugs. Former Florida Gators quarterback Tim Tebow joined Murphy’s group, and they merged their fights last March with the Intercept Task Force of Northeast Florida.

“The Intercept Task Force and Operation Lightshine participated in this operation and played a pivotal role,” Cook said.

The fact that the task force could net 10 suspects in four days was “alarming, sad and scary,” Cook said. She also said the sweep proves internet chatter involving minors is prevalent.

“I want to emphasize that my top priority are safeguarding our children from harm and holding perpetrators accountable for their actions,” Cook said. “It is critical for parents and guardians to monitor their children’s online activities. Have conversations with them about any suspicious behavior or encounters they may have online, and report any incidents to authorities.

“Let’s work together as a community to create a safer online environment for our children. Every single day, we’re working to get online predators off the street.”

GCS supports Florida City Government Week, Breast Cancer Awareness Month

By Jack Randall
jack@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The City Council proclaimed the week ending on Oct. 22 to be “Florida City Government Week,” intended to recognize all who work in local government and encourage community involvement.

“The city government is the closest to its citizens. It serves its citizens and is administered by its citizens. All citizens can shape and influence their government,” said Mayor Connie Butler.

Four fifth-grade students from Charles E. Bennett Elementary were recognized for the “If I was Mayor for a Day” essay contest to celebrate Florida City Government Week.

Ibbie Gamboa, Jordan Hill, Nathan Kelley and Jubilee Walker were awarded cer-

tificates and had the opportunity to meet the mayor.

Next, the City Council proclaimed “Breast Cancer Awareness Month” in October to raise awareness of the most diagnosed cancer worldwide.

“We estimate 297,790 new female invasive breast cancer cases will be diagnosed in 2023. We estimate 2,800 cases of male breast cancer will be diagnosed in 2023,” Butler said.

Furthermore, Butler said Friday was proclaimed as “Mammography Day” to raise awareness of the most effective early breast cancer detection before symptoms can be seen or felt.

Butler shook the hand of a breast cancer survivor in the crowd and commended her strength.

“Florida Breast Early Detection program (from the Florida Department of



STAFF PHOTO BY JACK RANDALL

Four Charles E. Bennett Elementary students were given certificates after submitting outstanding “If I Was Mayor for a Day” essays.

Health) can be a life-saving resource for low or no-income individuals,” said Butler.

The Florida Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program covers the costs of a mammogram and clinical breast and

pelvic exams for women 50 through 64 without health insurance and not covered by Medicaid or Medicare.

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Standing for enlightenment ideals at epicenter of book banning

By Evan Collins
For Clay Today

My hometown of Clay County was recently revealed to be the most rampant book-banning county in the state of Florida, racking up 177 removals and 489 objections last school year.

Soon after the Florida Department of Education published a 16-page list of banned books last month, I was disheartened to find the literary graveyard of lost opportunities for the students in my county.

Twentieth-century masterpieces like “Beloved” and “The Bluest Eye” by Toni Morrison, “Flower for Algernon” by Daniel Keyes and “The Handmaid’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood, erased from shelves. More recent culturally transformative novels like “Looking for Alaska” by John Green, “The Kite Runner” by Khaled Hosseini and “The Nightingale” by Kristin Hannah, gone. And, as I expected, books addressing race and coming-of-age sexuality, like “Americanah” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and “Will Grayson, Will Grayson” by John Green and David Levithan, also found themselves in the censorship crosshairs. I concede that some of the 177 banned books do appear to have sexual content that raises legitimate concerns about their age-appropriateness; however, the vast majority do not, and this highlights the greater trend towards anti-intellectualism masquerading as anti-pornography.

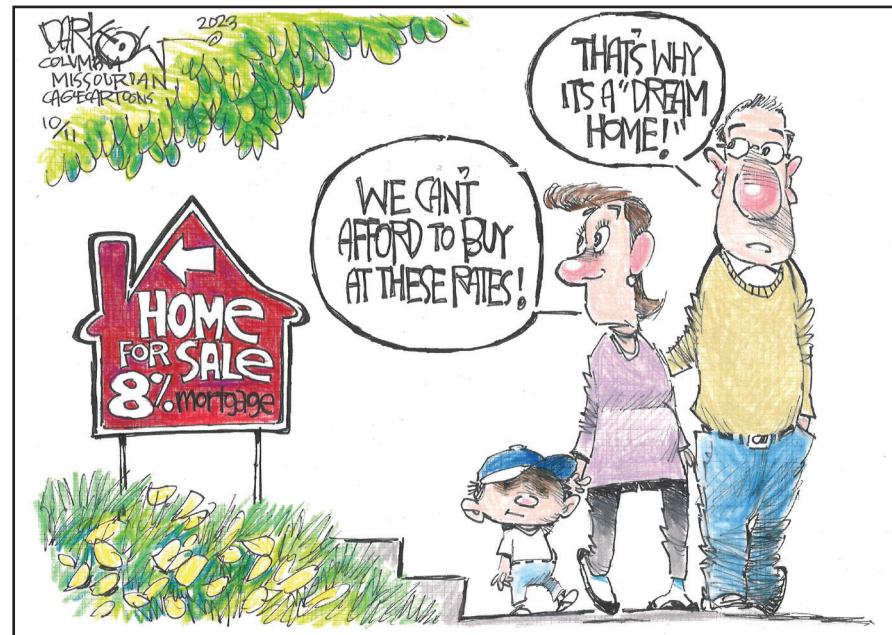
The sweeping bans come as a result of Florida House Bill 1557 (commonly referred to as the “Don’t Say Gay” law) and Florida House Bill 1467, which enables residents to lodge challenges to books in school libraries. In my county, according to Clay County District Schools spokesperson Terri Dennis, “approximately 94% of all texts that have been challenged in the district have been from one individual.”

This resident, Bruce Friedman, is a New York City transplant who has never been a student at any Clay County school. Friedman has clogged the system with 400+ objections, of which the county school board approved 177 removals. The net result is one individual subjecting more than 30,000 students to a purge of any material that diverges from his puritanical vision for our schools.

Having lived in this epicenter of book banning for my entire life until graduating from high school in 2018, I can hard-

SEE BOOKS, 5

OPINIONS



Walk and Roll to Work Day

By Jack Randall
jack@claytodayonline.com

I drove to work one day last week. I drove to get lunch, to let my two dogs out and then I drove back. I drove to my brother’s school to give him a ride home. Then I drove back to work. I drove – bumper to bumper – to the grocery store. And then I drove home.

One of my favorite movie quotes is when Ryan Gosling in “Drive” (2011), with a concise, cutthroat delivery, declares, “I drive.”

I find it so relatable.

Americans spend an average of 18 days in their car annually, and it certainly feels like it. While sitting at a red light on my commute, I thought back to the Walk and Roll to School Day at Oakleaf Village Elementary on Oct. 4. It was an exciting big-ticket event where high school cheerleaders and football players laid out the red carpet to celebrate elementary students making the healthy commitment to walk or ride their bike to school. It was a celebration that aimed to foster healthy habits in our youth. My only concern is, how long should we have that expectation?

My reasoning is, when Gov. Ron DeSantis or President Joe Biden decreed Oct. 4 to be National Walk and Roll to Work Day, did you participate? A better question is, could you like the hundreds at Oakleaf Village Elementary?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau,



Jack Randall

less than 1% of county residents walk to work, and I am not one of them. As much as I love competing in the 15k Gate River Run, I would be hard-pressed to do that distance, wearing a button-down and loafers while clutching my laptop.

More than half of workers from Clay County commute to another county. This is the highest rate of any county in Florida. As a result, our county suffers from a typical commute lasting 33 minutes on average.

Cars have been seen historically as a symbol of freedom. Today, individual car ownership is realistically an obligation. Less than 1% of county residents utilize public transportation. Less than 10% of county residents carpool. Many jobs only accept applicants who have reliable transportation.

Walk and Roll Day works for Oakleaf Village Elementary because 95% of its student body lives within walking distance. This is not the case for businesses firmly placed in commercial zoning.

Clay County is a beautiful place to call home. I am proud to. I am certain many others feel the same way. But wide swaths of developing suburbia – adhering to building out as opposed to building up – are pushing residents farther and farther away from work, school, church and any kind of life outside the four walls of their own home. Years ago, I was an undergraduate student at the University of Florida. The city of Gainesville benefits from the commercial gravitation the university exudes alongside nearby downtown. Parking spots can be rare, but students can walk freely downtown or to class. During my first two years, I didn’t take a car. I didn’t need one. In a sense, that was freedom.

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.

Harridan: (HAIR-eh-den) a noun that means a strict, bossy, or belligerent old woman.

“The old harridan who nannied for the family sent the children to bed early without supper.”

This Week in History

Five years ago, 2018

- As the Council on Aging of Clay County searched for ways to reduce financial losses, the board announced the firing of Executor Director Al Rizer.
- Mayor Karen Lake hosted the inaugural Town Hall meeting in Keystone Heights.
- Clay County Animal Services decided to stop taking in stray or abandoned cats after several cats tested positive for a “highly contagious” feline virus.

10 years ago, 2013

- A five-day sting investigation resulted in the arrests of 17 men for sex-related charges in Green Cove Springs.
- Acclaimed children’s writer Sharon M. Draper, author of award-winning “Double Dutch” and “Copper Sun,” spoke at Fleming Island High and hosted a book signing.
- Following Town Manager Cindy Hall’s retirement, former Town Manager John Bowles was named interim manager in a 4-1 decision.

20 years ago, 2003

- Fleming Island developer Ronnie Leinwohl cleared a 22-acre site along Pine Avenue on the island to begin construction of a 22-home subdivision. But first, he had a moving company transport a 240-ton brick home away from the site.
- After 13 years at the helm of the Clay County Health Department, Nick Chapman announced his retirement.
- Clay County Sheriff Scott Lancaster announced that the county jail had received accreditation from the Florida Corrections Accreditation Commission after

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.

Books

from page 4

ly profess to be surprised by this recent trend. This is a place where conservative orthodoxy has often overshadowed education. The public high school I attended was chronicled in national media in "The New York Times" as "the front line as faith and science clash" and more recently in "Vice" as the case example of "How a book gets banned in America."

Growing up in Clay County, I turned to literature as a source of solace and escape. Books offered me a glimpse into the broader world, tethering me to a greater understanding of humanity. By some miracle, my persistent journey of reading carried me to study at Yale and now MIT. However, many books that defined my journey are now banished for future students, a somber testament to the intellectual regression that suffocates my beloved hometown today.

As Clay County and the rest of the state of Florida grapple with notoriety for sweeping bans on books, I find myself torn between sorrow and indignation. The attempt to censor ideas is an affront to the very essence of education. It is not merely about the removal of titles from a shelf; it is an assault on enlightenment ideals and a curtailment of the intellectual horizons of future generations. The disgrace is amplified by its autocracy, with a single Clay County resident launching a one-man vendetta against intellectual freedom resulting in the erasure of hundreds of important books; a self-appointed referee of human knowledge incessantly blowing the whistle on any ideas he does not like.

The banning of books is but one facet of a larger phenomenon, a pervasive movement of anti-intellectualism and anti-enlightenment that threatens to engulf us. For example, two months ago the Florida Department of Education temporarily banned AP Psychology classes due to their

Growing up in Clay, I turned to literature as a source of solace and escape. Books offered me a glimpse into the broader world, tethering me to a greater understanding of humanity.

decades-old content on sexual development; the department eventually reversed the decision after immense pushback.

In an era when echo chambers and ideological divides are growing ever wider, we cannot afford to further erode the foundations of critical thinking and open discourse. We must remember that our strength as a society lies in our ability to engage with diverse perspectives and to challenge our own preconceptions.

As a bioengineer working to develop cures for complex diseases, I have come to appreciate the importance of considering all angles, arguments and criticisms in tackling hard problems. Science thrives on the unrelenting study of a diversity of informed perspectives. The removal of books in Clay County is precisely antithetical to this effort and actively worsens the educational experience for its students. Moreover, it further pushes the most persecuted in society deeper into the shadows. Censorship is turning our school libraries into labyrinths, where the only way out is to develop critical thinking skills that transcend their narrow corridors.

Clay County, though currently mired in controversy, possesses the potential to rewrite its narrative. It can choose to prioritize the education and enlightenment of its students, equipping them with the tools necessary to engage thoughtfully with the world. The path forward is not one of erasure but of enrichment, where intellectual diversity is embraced, open dialogue is cherished and the love of learning is nurtured.

History

from page 4

being scrutinized on 263 different recognized standards and practices.

30 years ago, 1993

- The Green Cove Springs City Council approved a first draft of a new ordinance aimed at curbing public drinking. The ordinance would make it easier for law enforcement to make arrests for open containers of alcoholic beverages.

- Clay Co. Sheriff Scott Lancaster said murder charges would be filed against Hombre Lewis of Jacksonville for the alleged killing of Deborah C. Hulsberg, 37 after her decomposed body was found in a wooded area in Lake Asbury.

- The Florida Department of Labor and Employment Security reported Clay County's unemployment rate to be 5.4 percent, or 59th in Florida.

40 years ago, 1983

- Green Cove Springs City Manager Bill Vermilling resigned to accept the city manager position in Cocoa, FL, which would allow him to return to the area where he grew up.

- Teacher members of the Clay County Education Association voted to accept the 1983-1984 teacher contract, which provided a 5.5 percent pay hike that was based on a recommendation from then-Governor Bob Graham.

50 years ago, 1973

- The Orange Park Town Council debated taking the lead on establishing a regional water and sewer system that would serve the town and the unincorporated areas adjacent to the town limits.

- A Clay County Grand Jury recommended the establishment of a County Planning Board to "assure maximum coordination and cooperation between municipalities and county government."



Pace Center for Girls gets \$1,000 from Gordon Chevrolet

PHOTO PROVIDED BY GORDON CHEVROLET

ORANGE PARK – Nathan Potratz, General Manager of Gordon Chevrolet, presented Pace Center for Girls Executive Director Genelle Thomas with a \$1,000 donation that will go to the organization dedicated to changing the lives of girls through the development of critical life, health and mental health and academic skills. Pace has a successful and proven program model that has changed the life trajectory of more than 40,000 girls and is recognized as one of the nation's leading advocates for girls.

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CLUES ACROSS

- 1. A device to disengage without a key
- 5. Subdivision
- 8. Network of nerves
- 12. Lounge chair
- 14. Ocean
- 15. C. European river
- 16. Bowl-shaped cavity
- 18. ___ Caesar, comedian
- 19. Lyric poems
- 20. Tia's sister
- 21. A way to develop
- 22. Cows collectively
- 23. Areas close by
- 26. Slightly disreputable
- 30. Made a mistake
- 31. One who cites
- 32. Food stall: ___ pai dong
- 33. Narrow valley between hills
- 34. Members of people living mainly in the Congo
- 39. More (Spanish)
- 42. Classroom implements
- 44. Cognizant of
- 46. One who tells on others
- 47. Free from slavery

CLUES DOWN

- 1. A dissenting clique
- 2. Japanese city
- 3. Spiritual leader
- 4. Second letter of Greek alphabet
- 5. Musical term
- 6. Ruled over
- 7. Fortified wine
- 8. First year player
- 9. Moved in a circular way
- 10. Adolescents
- 11. Scottish or Irish Gaelic language

- 13. Someone who serves in the armed forces
- 17. Bring up
- 24. Factual written account (abbr.)
- 25. Having three sides
- 26. Annoy
- 27. Hustle
- 28. American WW2 leader
- 29. Stale atmosphere
- 35. US Treasury
- 36. Sound unit
- 37. They ___
- 38. Soviet Socialist Republic
- 40. Places to play video games
- 41. Medical event
- 42. When you hope to arrive
- 43. Fixed prices
- 44. Popular Boston song
- 45. Valley in Indiana and Illinois
- 47. Omit when speaking
- 48. German explorer of the Congo Basin
- 49. Stick around
- 52. From a distance
- 53. Heroic tale
- 54. Amounts of time
- 55. Eat

Habitat for Humanity working on 182nd, 183rd homes in Clay County

By Jack Randall
jack@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Habitat for Humanity hosted its eighth annual Leaders Build on Thursday, Oct. 5, where more than 60 dutiful volunteers worked to raise the now 182nd and 183rd houses attributed to the nonprofit.

Buzzing saws, pounding hammers and a Bluetooth speaker tied to overhead plywood created the clamor that could be

heard down Belle Avenue. The construction site was loud, busy and inspiring.

“They come today to have fun!” said Executive Director Carolyn Edwards.

The volunteers worked with vigor in hot, humid conditions. One volunteer was Orange Park Police Chief Gary Goble, who manned the saw. The endeavor marks the second week of an estimated 12-week-long project to build safe, clean homes for two families.



STAFF PHOTOS BY JACK RANDALL

Volunteers cut and plaster vinyl panels to line the perimeter of two new houses being built in Green Cove Springs.



“For most families, their house is the largest and most important asset,” said Edwards.

Homeownership is important for more than just financial reasons.

“Families living in homes benefit from improved health, stability and grades from school,” she said.

Many Habitat for Humanity homes beneficiaries come from unhealthy and insecure living conditions, Edwards said. A “roof over the head” imparts psychological as much as physical shelter that grants families the foundation to pursue education, employment and official citizenship.

Habitat hires professionals to lay the foundation, wiring and plumbing. But without volunteers to cut and plaster vinyl panels along the side, to install the windows or frame the front door – the 183 donated homes never would have been built.

If you have an interest in giving back to the community and learning practical hardware skills in a safe, cooperative environment, learn more at clayhabitat.org.

“Volunteers are the drive of the organization,” said Edwards. “Without volunteers, without the community, we are nothing.”



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Obituaries claytodayonline.com

George W. Penney, Jr.

George W. Penney, Jr. died peacefully at the age of 95 at his home in Fleming Island, FL on October 5, 2023.



He was born in Boston, MA on December 31, 1927 to George and Elsie (Hiscock) Penney.

He graduated from Everett High School, served in the US Army, and got his BS in mechanical engineering from Tufts.

He worked for many years as a senior engineer at W.R. Grace until his retirement. He was married to Jeanne (Bardi) Penney for 25 years and had 2 children, Jamie and David.



George W. Penney, Jr.

He is survived by his loving companion of 25 years,

Betty Smith of Fleming Island, his daughter, Jamie Penney of North Reading MA, his daughter-in-law, Celeste (Plante) Penney and his grandson, David Penney Jr. of Tewksbury MA, and his godchildren William (Skip) Perry and Jeanine Perry. He was his preceded in death by his parents, his sister Mildred (Penney) Ilsley, his brother John Penney, his son, David Penney Sr, and his son-in-law, Kimo Lindon.

He was a born engineer and he spent many years building houses for Habitat for Humanity. Because he couldn't get enough of that, he was constantly involved in various home construction projects on his own homes, and those of his kids. He was a lifetime member of the Elks and was very

proud that his son David followed in his footsteps. He loved to travel and he and Betty had many adventures all over the world. He enjoyed playing cards with his buddies on Cape Cod and in Florida.

A memorial service will be held in the Broadus-Raines Chapel at 10:00 am on Saturday, October 28, 2023, with Chaplain Brent Beaird officiating. A graveside service will be held at Jacksonville National Cemetery at 11:00 am on Monday, October 30, 2023, with Dr. Tim McDaniel officiating.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Wounded Warrior Project www.woundedwarriorproject.com

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



Sylvia Yvonne McGee

Sylvia Yvonne McGee, 79 of Green Cove Springs, FL passed away Monday, October 9, 2023. Sylvia was born in Patuxent River, Maryland to parents Malcolm and Ethel Louise Stallard. She moved with her family to many different cities and states with the Navy. In 1977 the family moved to North Florida, where she remained. Sylvia was a substitute teacher for many years, she loved working with children. She also enjoyed sewing, knitting and used to enjoy making clothes for her kids and family. She had several animals that she adored, including her Chihuahuas and kittens. Sylvia

loved her family and she loved the Lord!

Sylvia was preceded in death by her parents Malcolm and Ethel Louise Stallard; Her first husband, Edward H. Varnadoe Jr.; and her second husband, Richard McGee.

She is survived by her son, Stephen Varnadoe; daughter, Lorraine Varnadoe, brother, Wayne Lance Stallard; grandchildren, Tess, John Mercer, Sean Mercer and Katie Varnadoe; great grandchildren, MyKenzie, Brantlee and Emalea.

Arrangements are under the care of Russell Haven of Rest Cemetery, Funeral Home and Cremation Center, 2335 Sandridge Road, Green Cove Springs, FL 32043. Family and friends may share their condolences at: www.RHRFH.com 904-284-7720



Jimmy Carl Barker

Jimmy Carl Barker, Sr., age 79, passed away peacefully on October 11, 2023, in Orange Park FL. He was born August 7, 1944, in Sanderson, FL and resided on Fleming Island for the last 43 years.

He is survived by his wife of 57 years, Norma Haynes Barker, his daughter Kimberly Diane Barker, and his son Jimmy Carl (Chip) Barker Jr. He is also survived



Sylvia Yvonne McGee



Jimmy Carl Barker

by one grandson, David Neal Dansie (Ashlee) and 3 great grandchildren: Liam, Garrison, and Harlee Dansie.

Preceding him in death include his sister Donna Barker Haxter, his brother-in-law Douglas Haxter, and his parents Roxie Louise Mann Barker and Carl James Barker.

Immediately after graduation from Fernandina Beach High School, he served in the United States Army and was stationed in various U.S. cities as well as Stuttgart, Germany. He retired from CSX in 2004 after 39 years of service where he worked in the operating and real estate departments. He was also the owner/broker of Fleming Island Realty. He was a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Fleming Island Ward, where he served in many leadership positions.

Funeral services will be held Friday, October 20th at 11:30 a.m. in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints chapel located at 780 Water Oak Lane, Fleming Island, FL. Prior to the service the family will receive visitors from 10:30-11:30. Interment will be at Manntown Cemetery in Glen St. Mary, FL.

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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bestbet's Shelton appointed to Citizens Property Insurance Corporation Board of Governors

For CLay Today

ORANGE PARK – Gov. Ron DeSantis announced the appointment of Jamie Shelton and Carlos Beruff to the Citizens Property Insurance Corporation Board of Governors on Tuesday.

Shelton is the President of bestbet Holdings, Inc. Active in his community, he is the former Chair and a current member of the Jacksonville University Board of Trustees, a board member of the Jacksonville Cham-

ber of Commerce, and the finance Chair and board member of the Jacksonville Civic Council. Shelton earned his bachelor's degree in accounting from Lipscomb University and his master's degree in business administration from the University of Memphis.



Jamie Shelton

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Historic Green Cove house still standing

Friends of the Rivers House fight to preserve history

By Jack Randall
jack@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Just across the street from Spring Park sits a house included in the 1991 National Register of Historic Places for Green Cove Springs. The house dates back to 1887, and it's where Judge Thomas Judson Rivers called

home. Rivers was a city lawyer, judge and a prominent figure in early Green Cove Springs. He passed away in 1992 and is buried with his wife in Hickory Cemetery. His descendant, Thomas Rivers II, sold the house to the city in 2020.

Located at 219 Spring St., the house is a snapshot of the classical Victorian architecture style that defined early life in the



PHOTO BY LESLEY DAVIDSON

The Judge Thomas Judson Rivers house will be remodeled and preserved after the City of Green Cove Springs accepted a proposal from Lesley Davidson to volunteer her expertise as a structural engineer and real estate that will save the home that's listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



PHOTO BY ROBERT LEWIS

Members of Friends of the Rivers House pose for quick photo after landscaping.

city. The sprawling front porch is characteristic of southern homes built in a time period before air conditioning. For a building 135 years old, the house is in remarkable condition. The structure has survived

hurricanes and floods – but its closest call came from City Council last July.

The council was concerned with the financial costs needed to preserve and

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Keystone Elementary celebrates completion of new cafetorium

New building features media center, classrooms, expanded cafeteria, auditorium

By Natalie Gilstrap
For Clay Today

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – The long-awaited and highly anticipated cafetorium at Keystone Heights Elementary is completed.

“We’re are so excited,” the school’s Principal, Beth Turbeville. “The people of the Keystone community have been anticipating this for many years.”

The Clay County District Schools hired Paul Stresing to design the new building to incorporate the school’s master plan.

“The vision was that it would fit when we add the new cafeteria,” said Mike Kemp, the Director of Facilities and Planning for the district. “Make it look like it was not an add-on, and I think the architect nailed it.”

This \$22 million project started last August and consisted of three phases: a new cafeteria, a media center, and six additional classrooms. The new cafeteria is 29,400 square feet, consisting of a new music and art room, a state-of-the-art kitchen, and an outdoor seating area. In addition, the school will be able to host performances through the cafeteria’s stage and dressing rooms. The school’s former cafeteria was renovated into a new media center that has a teacher conference center and a TV production lab. The construction team also renovated the former media center into six new classrooms that will be used for sixth



PHOTOS BY NATALIE GILSTRAP

After years of requests, planning and construction, the new \$22 million cafetorium will be the site of a ribbon cutting on Dec. 5.

grade, STEM classroom and computer and technology. Other new features include a new playground and a new covered amphitheater. The project consisted of correcting the stormwater and flooding issues, upgrading the electrical and enforcing better security cameras. Also, a new Gary Cooper Memorial is being constructed at the corner of Peach and Highland streets.

“We feel very blessed to have the facilities that we have and so grateful to Mr. (David) Broskie and our school board for allowing us to have these facilities, and our

Keystone Community is grateful as well,” Turbeville said.

Keystone Heights Elementary is excited to have the new cafeteria and other facilities.

“This Project is a perfect example of project sources coming together in the right way to help a community,” Kemp said.

The construction team is wrapping up the media center and making final touches before completion.

The school plans to host a ribbon-cutting event on Dec. 5 as a celebration.

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Local racer finishes 12th at American E-Kart Championship

Alese Piety, the only woman at finals



By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

Alese Piety's racing career shifted into a higher gear at the American E-Kart Championship last weekend at Mokena, Illinois.

The racer from Green Cove Springs learned consistency is more important to maintain momentum than mashing the gas pedal.

"I learned so much," she said after finishing 12th. "It was a good trip. I want to get my racing license. My goal is to be in a Porsche. I'm really into IMSA. I always go to Daytona (for the Rolex 24 Hours of Daytona). I think I'm going to be a good fit for that."

Piety was one of 19 regional winners at the national championship. She quali-



ified at the Autobahn Indoor Speedway in Jacksonville and was the only woman at the finals.

The National Championship was a four-day event on two indoor circuits. Racers were provided electric-powered karts from the World Karting Association (WKA), and the organizers switched karts after each round, similar to the old International Race of Champions Series. That way, if one kart was faster than the others, each racer had the benefit of driving it. Last weekend's championship was the only event for elec-

tric-powered karts approved by the WKA. The tracks – Monaco and Le Mans – were slick and twisting, Piety said. It took less than 21 seconds to complete a lap. The difference between Monaco's fastest qualifier and Piety was just 0.34 seconds – less time than a sneeze.

"I moved up some positions, and I had some really good times (on Day 3)," Piety said. "We had 16 heat races and the finals. I realize you have to be consistent to keep your momentum. I want to keep racing."

SUBMITTED PHOTOS



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Fall Festivals

HALLOWEEN HAPPENINGS



The temperatures are finally dropping, the air is crisper and the smell of pumpkin spice is everywhere. That means fall festivals and Halloween parties will fill the calendar.

Another major event that usually sells out and attracts thousands is the Amazing Grace Fall Festival at 4251 State Road 21, just south of State Road 16.

The family-oriented festival includes pumpkins, a five-acre crop maze, duck races, a playground, farm animals, corn hole, corn cribs, jump pads, photo opportunities, treats and attractions.

The times are Fridays from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. The venue also will be open on Monday, Oct. 16, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The farm is owned and operated by Justin and Kelly Mosley. They are known for carving a special message in their maze. The maze honored former Clay High swimmer Caeleb Dressel two years ago, who won seven Olympic gold medals.

This year, the Mosleys honored the memory of Levi Shepherd, a boy with special needs who died last year following a lengthy illness. A portion of the fall farm proceeds will be donated to the "Dreams Come True" organization.

Since most sessions are sold out, guests should purchase tickets in advance at agcrop-maze.com/events.

The county's biggest, oldest and most esteemed festival will get the season underway. The 42nd annual Orange Park Fall Festival will return Saturday and Sunday to Town Hall Park at 2042 Park Ave.

The two-day event will run both days between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m., including one of the largest arts, crafts, entertainment, children's activities and food celebrations in Northeast Florida.

The first festival was in 1982, and it attracted 12 vendors and two guitar players. This year's event already has more than 200, including 25 food trucks and a farmer's market, eight activities for children and representation by 29 nonprofit groups and 15 businesses.

With crowds expecting to approach 10,000, organizers are urging patrons to park at Moosheaven. Parking and a shuttle ride to the park are free. Attendees are also warned not to park at Winn-Dixie and CVS across the street, and the city will have a limited number of handicapped spots at the police station adjacent to the park.

Admission to the event is also free. There will be music and dance acts, including LeeAnn Purvis, who recorded the song "Cover Girl" in Green Cove Springs. The song tells the gripping story of a woman who hides her domestic battery wounds with makeup and denial by blowing his cover. Purvis will be on the Main Stage for the opening ceremonies with Mayor Randy Anderson and the Ridgeview High Navy JROTC team at 10 a.m. on Saturday, then for her show two hours later.

Counting the Community Stage, there are

36 acts booked.

With thousands expected, the Town asks visitors to leave their dogs at home.

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Since most sessions are sold out, guests should purchase tickets in advance at agcrop-maze.com/events.

Other festivals and Halloween-theme events include:

Friday, Oct. 20

- The Spooky Nature Trail at Camp Chowenwaw will be open through Oct. 31 at 1517 Ball Road in Green Cove Springs from 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Visitors can venture into a spooky nature trail to encounter live animals in their mysterious habitats. Bug spray, closed-toed shoes and water are recommended. The event is free.

Saturday

- The Orange Park Mall's Kidz Club will be from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. The event celebrates fall and pumpkins. The first 50 children can paint real pumpkins donated by Conners A-Maizeing Acres.

- The Rotary Club of Northeast Florida will host its Outdoor Adventure Vendor Show from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. at the Clay County Shrine Club, 2471 Russell Road in Green Cove Springs. Call Sandra at (904) 923-9884 or Susan at (904) 631-2156 to reserve a vendor space.

- A Holiday Craft Fair will be hosted from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. at St. Peter's Lutheran Church, 21 from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. at 1614 Blanding Blvd. in Middleburg. Proceeds will benefit a seminary student. For more information, call (904) 282-8876.

- The Saint Luke Catholic Church's Fall Festival will run for three days, starting on Oct. 20. The 1606 Blanding Blvd. in Middleburg event will include rides, food, raffles, auction, fireworks and live music. Hours will be from 4-10 p.m. on Oct. 20, 2-10 p.m. on Oct. 21 and noon-5 p.m. on Oct. 22. To purchase ride wristbands, visit stlukesparish.org.

Saturday, Oct. 21

- Just Smash That Rage Rooms will open its doors for the Let's Have a Smashing Trunk or Treat from 6 p.m.-8 p.m. at 1101 Blanding Blvd. in Orange Park. Mini games, bounce house, food, prizes and raffle will be offered, as well as vehicles with Halloween decorations.

- Crotoberfest will be from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. at The Senior Center at 604 Walnut St. in Green Cove Springs. Fee is \$45 with the exclusive kit and \$35 without kit. Fees include lunch, prizes and space to crop.

- Advent Lutheran Church's Trick or Treat: program will be on Oct. 21 from 3-5:30 p.m. at 2156 Loch Rane Blvd. in Orange Park. Families are invited to wear a costume for trick-or-treating and festive activities. The event is free.

Thursday, Oct. 26

- The Clay County Sheriff's Office's Trunk or Treat will be at the Walmart, 1580 Branan Field Road in Middleburg, at 5 p.m. The free event for the entire family includes first responders and their vehicles and plenty of candy.

- Fleming Island High's Trunk or Treat will be from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at 2233 Village Square Pkwy. There will be spooky trunk decorations, fun costumes and plenty of candy.

- Middleburg High will host its Trunk or Treat will be at 3750 County Road 220 from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. Wear your scaries costume and enjoy candy, photo opportunities, music and games.

- Allegro's Trunk or Treat will be from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at 3651 U.S. Highway 17 on Fleming Island.

Friday, Oct. 27

- The City of Green Cove Springs and its police department will host Trunk or Treat at the Chief Derek S. Asdot Memorial Building police headquarters at 1001 Idlewild Ave. from 6-9 p.m. There will be carnival rides, trunk or treating, a dunk tank, contests, face-painting, music and food trucks. The department is accepting candy donations at the police department, Green Cove Springs City Hall, VyStar Credit Union, the Elk's Club and Ace Hagan Hardware. Make a canned food donation for the Food Pantry of Green Cove Springs to be entered to win a gift basket. For more information, contact youngm@gcpspd.com or call (904) 297-7322.

- College Drive Fall Extravaganza will be at the Asbury United Methodist Church of Orange Park, 16 College Dr., from 6-8 p.m. The event includes trunk and treat, a pumpkin patch and a family-friendly costume competition – all in conjunction with the monthly Food Truck Friday. For vendor information, contact CDIFoodTruckNight@gmail.com.

- Dress up your furry friend for the Howl-O-ween Costume Contest at Woof Gang Bakery and Grooming, 1960 East West Pkwy. on Fleming Island. The event starts at 9 a.m. Costumed pets will be photographed and entered in a raffle for free treats for a year.

- Code Ninjas will celebrate Halloween in Minecraft – Parents Night Out from 6 p.m.-9 p.m. at 1811 Golden Eagle Way on Fleming Island. Families can work on a spooky maze game in Minecraft with a scary movie in the background. There will be a costume contest with the ninjas.

- The American Legion Post 250 Halloween Party will run from 7 p.m. to midnight at 2608 Black Creek Dr. in Middleburg. Party includes

SEE FESTIVALS, 13

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Festivals

from page 12

food, drinks and a costume party. Southbound 41 will perform.

- Seagrass Village's Trunk or Treat will be at 5 p.m. at 1949 East West Pkwy. on Fleming Island.

Saturday, Oct. 28

- Boo on the Boulevard in Keystone Heights from 5-9 p.m. The event includes trick-or-treating along Lawrence Boulevard, food trucks, face painting, games and the movie Disney/Pixar's "Monsters, Inc." at Keystone Beach at 7:30 p.m.

- Visitors are invited to dress up for the Boo at the Roo, Hoggy Walloween Event on Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. at the Rooterville Animal Sanctuary, 1209 County Road 315 in Melrose. The cost is \$15 a person or \$45 for a family. The event allows families to interact with more than 100 animals. The 20-acre farm will have Halloween decorations. The goal of the event is to promote an anti-bullying campaign. For tickets, visit rooterville.org.

- Haunted at the Hilltop Wine Social will be at The Hilltop Restaurant from 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m. at 2030 Wells Road in Orange Park. Even cost \$25 in advance and \$30 at the door. it includes sips, snacks and the scariest prize for the most creative costume.

- Reparation Earth will present its Aqtoberfest at 11 a.m. at 5968 County Road 209 South in Green Cove Springs. The event includes music, farm tours at noon and 2 p.m. and lunch. For reservations or questions, call (904) 755-1606.

- Ripple Effect Martial Arts will host a Trunk and Treat from 5 p.m.-6:30 p.m. at 1851 Golden Eagle Way on Fleming Island. The event includes candy and a costume party.

- A Halloween Doubles Tournament and Costume Contest will start at 6 p.m. at Park Avenue Billiards at 714 Park Ave. in Orange Park. For registration, visit parkavenuebilliards.com. Contestants must be members of the First Coast American Poolplayers Association.

- Star Seed Holistic Spa invites everyone to a morning of Halloween Painting and Mini Facial from 9 a.m.-noon at 767 Blanding Blvd. in Orange Park. Tickets cost \$50, including an 11-by-14-inch blacklight painting, a 15-minute facial, mimosas and appetizers. To register, visit eventbrite.com/e/treat-yourself-to-a-morning-of-halloween-painting-and-a-mini-facial-tickets.

- Scooters Coffee's Spooktacular Trunk or Treat will be from 3 p.m.-6 p.m. at 151 Park Ave. in Orange Park. Guests can decorate their vehicles, participate in a raffle and support a fundraiser.

- Trunk or Treat will be celebrated from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. at Keystone United Methodist Church, 4004 State Road 21.

- The Fall Festival Trunk or Treat will be at Lake Hill Baptist Church, 5165 County Road 214 in Keystone Heights, at 5:30 p.m.



Sunday, Oct. 29

- Fleming Island United Methodist Church will host a Halloween Mystery Dinner from 6 p.m.-8 p.m. at 7170 U.S. Highway 17. Wear your costume and enjoy a frightful dinner.

- Candy-palooza will start at 9:30 a.m. at Fleming Island United Methodist Church, 7170 U.S. Highway 17 on Fleming Island. The event combines church, costumes and candy.

- A Trunk or Treat Extravaganza will be hosted by Burn Boot Camp at 406 Old Hard Road on Fleming Island at 4 p.m.

Monday, Oct. 30

- Trunk or Treat at Oakleaf High will be from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. at 4035 Plantation Oaks Blvd. Presented by the National Honor Society, the even is for children 12 and younger.

Tuesday, Oct. 31

- Trick or Treat and Haunted Maze at Moosehaven will be from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. The event at 1701 Park Ave. in Orange Park will include food trucks, a happy haunted trail and trick or treats. Admission is free. Volunteers and donations are needed since last year's spooktacular attracted nearly 4,000. To help, contact Susan Luke at sluke@moosehaven.org.

- The Candy Crawl will be at the Orange Park Mall at 5 p.m. Families can dress up and collect treats as they explore the mall.

- The First Baptist Church of Middleburg will host two Fall Festivals – one with trunk or treat, bounce houses and food trucks at the church at 2645 Blanding Blvd. and one with trunk or treat and food trucks at the Fox Meadows Subdivision, 1521 Lake Foxmeadow Road in Middleburg.

- First Baptist Church of Middleburg's Fall Festival will be on Oct. 31 from 6-8 p.m. at 2645 Blanding Blvd. A Trunk or Treat, bounce house and food trucks will be available and at the Fox Meadows Subdivision, off Old Jennings Road, 3.2 miles west of Blanding Boulevard.

- Trunk or Treat will be offered at Elevate Life Church, 1845 Town Center Blvd. on Fleming Island. From 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Saturday, Nov. 4

- The Middleburg Historic Fall Festival will be at Middleburg Civic Association, 2102 Palmetto St., from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. Celebrate the history, culture and family fun with a classic car show, live music, food vendors, handcrafted goods, unique gifts and family entertainment.

OP Town Council works to improve Bradley Park

Tables plans for adaptive kayak launch

By Lee Wardlaw
lee@claytodayonline.com

ORANGE PARK – The Town Council unanimously voted to table the \$53,000 purchase of an “adaptive kayak launch” for Rob Bradley Conservation Park at Nelson Point from the company BoardSafe Docks on Tuesday.

BoardSafe, which has several kayak launches in Jacksonville, was vetted by Public Works Director Kyle Croce. He said that Orange Park has communicated with BoardSafe for about three months, including visiting Duval County to discuss the product.

Councilwoman Winette Sandlin said she had spoken with Croce and Town Manager Sarah Campbell about BoardSafe to gather details regarding the product's reliability, citing information on warranties and the vendor's reputation.

As the details of the deal continue to remain unresolved, it's possible the cost of the project could increase since the bid is valid for only 30 days.

“We're taking a chance on extending

the price if we do (this),” said Mayor Randy Anderson.

However, council members didn't proceed with the motion, raising concern about making a vote before bringing it to the Culture and Recreation Committee for further discussion.

The Council said they would like the matter brought before the resident-operated board before making a decision.

“I'd like to see this go through the Culture and Recreation Department. I know it's a single item, but I'd still like their input and (then) bring it back to Council for final approval,” Anderson said before the vote.

Vice Mayor Susana Thompson and Councilman Daniel Cobreiro agreed with Anderson.


The Town Council is utilizing the Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program, which provides financial assistance to local governments to develop land for public outdoor recreation.

The FRDAP grant will match funds up to \$25,000, which will help fund the development of the multiuse shoreline in Bradley Park the Council envisioned. The proposed adaptive kayak launch was fundamental to the overall concept plan.



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BCC starts process for new Oakleaf Community Center, Library

By Lee Wardlaw
lee@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The long-awaited process to build a library and community center in Oakleaf Plantation began with a unanimous decision from the Board of County Commissioners (BCC). The decision approved a formal request to the Double Branch Community Development District (CDD) which would transfer land from CDD to BCC.

The land is located on a small empty at the end of Plantation Oaks Boulevard, near Oakleaf Village Elementary. The lot is split nearly in half; BCC owns a 0.47-acre parcel and CDD owns a 0.568-acre parcel. Once BCC acquires the whole lot, it will have sufficient area to pursue construction.

Once County Attorney Courtney Grimm signs the letter, the county's request will go to the CDD Board. "What I anticipate is that in response to (the) letter, they will come back with certain stipulations," she said.

Grimm believes the intended use of the parcel, among other details such as parking for the facility, will need to be hammered out during those discussions.

Alexandra Compere, who represents Oakleaf constituents on the commission, said the BCC has long discussed the library and community center.

"Over the last several months, we've been working to meet the needs of the Oakleaf community. There have been many conversations about how to best move forward with this," she said.

Compere said the BCC is also planning a Government Center, a topic she has discussed with Supervisor of Elections Chris Chambliss on multiple occasions. "This is multifaceted, and we're moving in a direction to meet the need in (several) different ways," she said.

Compere is excited about the future of her district.

"I believe that this is a great idea. I appreciate the efforts that staff are making to move us in the (right) direction," she said.

Compere also said the Oakleaf community had come a long way to reach this point. Like Clay Hill, which is facing a mailing address issue and seeking to secure a specific designation on the U.S. Board of Geographic Names, the library has been at the top of many residents' minds.

The plan started in the early 2000s, but factors such as the 2007-2008 financial crisis and lack of dedicated funding have deterred the project in the past, she said.

This time, residents have reasons to be hopeful. Signs are pointing toward the CDD ready and willing to work with the county to get the job done, Compere said.

"(I believe) the CDD is wanting to move



forward with this. It seems like (talks) are very open and engaging," she said.

Until details are ironed out between the BCC and the CDD, the county doesn't want residents "hanging in the balance." Compere said a mobile library is the best course of action to address the community's immediate concerns.

"That will provide access to library services, so there's not a complete void while we're in the process of building the community library," she said.




A new government facility will also help create a fourth voting precinct in the county's northern areas.

"What I've come to notice during the past few years is that the lines are terribly long at our (voting locations), (especially) before or after work. Sometimes, those lines can be a deterrent, but we want to make that process easier for people so they can get out to the polls. It all boils down to growth," Compere said.

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North Florida Land Trust presents final conservation report

By Lee Wardlaw
lee@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – On Oct. 10, the North Florida Land Trust presented its final report on the Conservation Program, first introduced to officials and the community last fall.

Throughout the process, Land Trust worked closely with the Board of County Commissioners and the public, gauging collective interest as to whether they would support a referendum granting the county authority to manage land that is environmentally significant.

Ramesh Buch, North Florida Land Trust Director of Conservation, was confident that the Conservation Program had earned its spot on the ballot for a referendum vote, which will take place in November.

Buch displayed a sample of how the referendum would appear on the ballot. To be implemented, the venture would be funded by ad valorem taxes and – of course – earn majority approval from residents. Buch noted the program's top priorities: protecting drinking water sources, protecting wildlife habitats, providing access to passive recreation, and conserving agriculturally important lands.

Allison Defer, North Florida Land Trust President and CEO, emphasized the nonprofit's deep-rooted commitment to the county.

"We are not a bunch of tree-hugging hippies who want to come into the county and tell you how to run it. That's not where our values are. We have protected over 30,000 acres, nearly half of that in Clay. We are committed to the core of our existence, and we believe that it is 'now or never' in terms of preservation," he said.

Buch pointed out that the initiative is part of the Osceola to Ocala Wildlife Corridor, a 1.6-million-acre landscape of public and private lands that connected the Osceola and Ocala National Forests. Its goal is to preserve water quality, conserve five watersheds and protect outdoor recreation and green space, among other initiatives.



Ramesh Buch

Community News claytodayonline.com

Reinhold Foundation accepting applications for nonprofit leadership training programs

FLEMING ISLAND – The Paul E. and Klare N. Reinhold Foundation, Inc. is accepting applications for its 2024 Nonprofit Leadership Development and Capacity Building Training Programs. Through this initiative, the Foundation focuses on strengthening the nonprofit sector by strengthening the leadership of nonprofit organizations that serve Clay County. Any 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that provides services to county residents is eligible to apply.

Applications for the 2024 programs include workshops on nonprofit management, fundraising fundamentals, marketing and communications, volunteer leadership, strategic planning, and best practices

for nonprofit boards. Rollins College Edyth Bush Institute for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership teaches the programs. All classes are held in Clay County and are scheduled for January through March. There is no cost for those organizations selected to attend. The Reinhold Foundation underwrites all costs. In addition, the Foundation will provide cash graduation awards to eligible organizations completing training programs.

Since 2006, the Reinhold Foundation has provided free leadership training programs to board members, staff and volunteers of nonprofit groups that provide services to Clay County residents. Individuals from more than 100 nonprofit organizations that work to improve the quality of life for Clay County residents have participated in the leadership initiative.

All 501(c)(3) nonprofit groups provid-

ing services to Clay County residents are eligible to apply. Details and applications are available now at reinhold.net. The application deadline is Friday, Nov. 17.

For more information, contact Amy Parker, Executive Director, at (904) 269-5857, ext. 404 or at aparker@reinhold.net.

Pianist Dinnerstein to perform with Jacksonville Orchestra

JACKSONVILLE – The Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra, led by Music Director Courtney Lewis, will take the stage Friday, Oct. 20. and Saturday, Oct. 21, at 7:30 p.m. at Jacoby Symphony Hall. Grammy-nominated Simone Dinnerstein, who is celebrated for her finesse in performance, will bring her refined artistry to Johannes Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major. The concert program will also include performances of Beethoven's Symphony No. 4 and Lumina by Nina Shekhar.

SEE BRIEFS, 17

House

from page 9

restore the building properly. The council had leaned the other direction, opting instead to demolish the house and pave a parking lot over where it once stood.

In response, Lesley Davidson, who contributed to the 2021 Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) decision that recommended preserving the structure, took to the podium at a City Hall meeting.

"On Aug. 1, I stood before council with my five-part proposal to spearhead the restoration of the house," she said. "If we continue to knock down historic buildings and erase our past, Green Cove Springs will lose its charm and become just a passthrough on the way from (Interstate) 295 to the new First Coast Outer Beltway. This is why I am championing the restoration and protection of the Rivers house."

Davidson also offered to purchase the

house from the city.

The next day, Mayor Connie Butler called Davidson to accept the proposal to volunteer her time to preserve the historic site without Davidson having to buy it.

"(Davidson) brought a lot of passion and experience. She was a spark of inspiration," said Mayor Connie Butler. "I wanted to call her and personally congratulate her for coming forward. (The council) wants to be supportive in any way it can."

On Oct. 6 and 9, Friends of the River House, the organization dedicated to preserving the building, held a landscaping clean-up day.

"The city public works department has also stripped the deck railing, shutters, fascia boards, trim and areas of siding from the building, and stripped paint. I understand that this was done to possibly paint the structure, but they did not repair or protect the structure. The Friends of the Rivers House are interested in cleaning up

and decorating the house for the holidays while renovation bids are being sought," she said.

The CAC offered ideas for uses for the property once renovated: a museum, vendor-leased park café, city office, leasable venue space, and more, among others. "The potential is limitless," Davidson said.

She took inspiration from "The Magnificent Seven," the forerunners of the preservationist movement in historic Savannah, Georgia.

"Anna Colquitt Hunter gathered six of her friends to stop the demolition of historic houses, most notably the Davenport House, and created the Historic Savannah Foundation, which saved the city. The Magnificent Seven started a movement. And I, and friends of the Rivers House, want to start a movement too," Davidson said.

"I want to save the Gustafson House next. Now that the council supports us, we are very hopeful!"

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Postal

from page 1

“Jacksonville” when sending and receiving postal correspondence.

Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) Betsy Condon shared her constituents’ concerns at the last BCC meeting.

“I have residents who go vote in Clay County that have voted in every election during the past (several) years, and when (they go to polling locations), our election workers will say, ‘your driver’s license (reads) Jacksonville, Florida. You can’t vote here.’ That’s why they’re asking for (a specific designation on the U.S. Board of Geographic Names),” she said.

Condon represents residents in Clay Hill. She called for action, saying no legislation is scheduled even with U.S. Rep. Aaron Bean’s current leadership.

“We are on the fourth Congressman in Clay Hill that they have been asking for this,” she said. Condon also said the ZIP

Code 32234 serves other municipalities, such as Baldwin, Maxville and Jacksonville.

A motion was unanimously approved to set a two-step process for Clay Hill.

First, securing a specific designation for Clay Hill on the U.S. Board of Geographic Names will be required. That lengthy process for the county will entail detailed descriptions of Clay Hill, such as its current usage, latitude and longitude, and also the unincorporated community’s proposed name, Clay Hill.

The second step will create an “alternate preferred last line,” which is utilized in some areas of the United States where a single ZIP Code is used for delivery in multiple cities or municipalities. This designation will finally enable residents, some of whom waited for the change, to choose “Clay Hill” as part of their mailing address once the process with the Postal Service is completed. Clay Hill isn’t the only community in the county that has faced issues of this kind. The second step of Clay Hill’s process was also given to another community in the county that has a claim for its own identity: Oakleaf Plantation, which is registered on the U.S. Board of Geographic Names but still required to use Orange Park.

Like Clay Hill, Oakleaf Plantation will



have to clear hurdles to obtain an alternate preferred last line.

“There is a large part of my community that identifies with Orange Park, and they have very specific needs, and then, there is the Northwest part of the county (Oakleaf Plantation) that has a completely different set of needs. They wanted the delineation, and I have no issue with them (requesting the alternate preferred last line). It’s a pretty simple ask,” Commissioner Alexandra Compere said.

Bryan Campbell, the District 4 Director for Bean, updated the council on recent progress and provided insight into the process.

He said his office was approached at the beginning of the year in hopes of resolving the matter, reiterating the simple yet tedious process of completing the two-step change. After Clay Hill secures specific designation from the U.S. Board of Geographic Names, residents will be free to include their home as part of their mailing addresses, providing much-needed clarity.

Compere reiterated her support for Oakleaf Plantation in their fight to create an alternate preferred last line, which was often referred to by officials as an “alias” during the meeting. “I (believe) it makes perfect sense to afford them the alias. Oakleaf Plantation is a very specific part of the county, and if they want the designation, (the county) should work with the federal delegation to make it happen. I’m happy to do that,” she said.

Campbell also said Fleming Island is technically part of Orange Park, with residents having the option to write Fleming Isle, Fleming Island or Orange Park on their mail. “This is really exciting. The county has a little work to do to define the outline for Clay Hill and get it on the United States Board of Geographic Names. There’s a step one and a step two, but we will petition it to the Postal Service and get it done,” Campbell said.



Betsy Condon



PHOTOS BY NATALIE GILSTRAP

The expansion project at Keystone Heights Elementary prompted officials to move the Gary Ray Cooper Memorial to Peach and Highland streets. Cooper was a Keystone Heights High graduate who was killed in Vietnam.

Gary Cooper marker being relocated in Keystone Heights

By Natalie Gilstrap
For Clay Today

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – Construction for the new Gary Cooper Memorial is underway at the corner of Peach and Highland streets.

The new and enhanced memorial will honor the memory and sacrifice of Gary Ray Cooper, a Keystone Heights High who was killed during the Vietnam War. The reconstruction committee for the memorial has been working

closely with the architect Paul Stresing, the construction team at Scorpio and the school board to relocate a new memorial after the original was removed for the new Keystone Heights Elementary cafeteria construction.

“It’s near and dear to my heart to be involved in putting it back more enhanced than what it was,” Jeff Miller, Chairman of the reconstruction committee, said.

Once completed, the new memorial will be a four-foot tall, three-foot wide and six-inch keystone shape granite stone with a ceramic picture of Cooper’s football picture, a service picture and a proclamation from the city stating his achievements.

The stone will also have the original monument’s plaque, a Bronze Star, three Purple Hearts and a poem. Its base will have the Scripture John 15:13 on it and will stand on a grey granite hexagon tile 22 feet across. The new memorial will also have the bricks from the original monument turn into a platform with a bronze statue placed on top.

The committee plans to have floodlights, a flag and benches. A Wall of Faces leaflet will be attached next to the monument to provide information about Cooper.

“A tremendous amount of thought



Gary Ray Cooper

went into this. This didn’t just happen. This is months and months of planning,” Miller said.

The committee plans to complete the monument by Veteran’s Day on Nov. 11.

The committee will host a rededication ceremony on the Friday after Thanksgiving to celebrate the newly completed memorial. Alumni from Keystone Heights High, friends and Cooper’s family will be attending. The event will include a Color Guard ceremony and Taps. In addition, the committee is also planning to have AmVets, American Legions, county commissioners, school board members and the Scorpio construction team attend the event.

On Nov. 8, Keystone Heights Elementary principal Beth Turbeville will host a celebration in the school’s gym for the students to learn about Cooper and his sacrifice. Cooper was born on July 23, 1947, and is remembered as a town icon, coach and a youth mentor.

He made all-area and all-conference teams in basketball and was all-conference in football twice. He was also the class president, K-Club president and on the student council. He was voted Best Personality and Class Superlative. He graduated from high school in 1967.

“He was like a protector, and he’d step in if you needed something. He was there,” said Cooper’s niece, Roni Cooper.

During his time in the U.S. Army, Cooper was known to be a brave soldier. He earned the Bronze Star for Bravery in Combat, Combat Infantry Badge, Expert Marksman and the Vietnam Service Medal.

He died on Nov. 8, 1968, in Vietnam. “He was just a fella who gave 110% while he was here, and he gave the ultimate sacrifice when he went to Vietnam,” Miller said.



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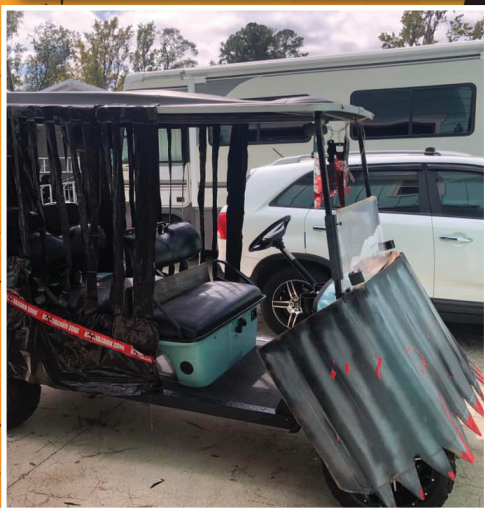




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HALLOWEEN HAUNTS ON THE HIGHWAY



PHOTOS BY RAECHEL MURPHY
LAKE ASBURY – Golf cart parades are common near Henley Road, including a Halloween parade last Saturday. Hundreds of participants and residents watched 52 golf carts with spooky decorations ride along side streets and the sidewalk. The organization plans a children-friendly Christmas parade on Dec. 2 and another Christmas parade – one of the year's largest of the year – on Dec. 16.

Briefs

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Outdoor Adventure Vendor Show coming on Oct. 21

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The Rotary Club of Northeast Florida will offer its Outdoor Adventure Vendor Show on Oct. 21 from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. at the Clay County Shrine Club, 2471 Russell Road.

The event will include more than 50 indoor and outdoor vendors and the Shrine Club will be selling food.

There will be fun for all ages as the Adventure Show will have outdoor games for kids and adults, plus Marineland of Florida will have an exciting display sure to delight all visitors.

Florida Forum Speaker Series to welcome Mike Krzyzewski

JACKSONVILLE – The Florida Forum Speaker Series, presented by The Women's Board of Wolfson Children's Hospital, will welcome Duke University's "Coach K" – Mike Krzyzewski – on Wednesday, Nov. 8. The program begins at 7 p.m. at the Center for the Performing Arts in Jacksonville.

The passionate, dynamic and inspiring coach of Duke's men's basketball team, Krzyzewski is the NCAA Division 1 men's all-time leader for wins with 1,200 games in the W column. Coach K's success includes 35 NCAA tournament appearances, 13 Final Fours and five National Championships over 46 seasons as a head coach. He also coached the U.S. men's national basketball team from 2005 to 2016, leading Team USA to three Olympic gold medals in 2008, 2012 and 2016.

Coach Krzyzewski is the first of three

events offered by the Florida Forum Speaker Series. Future programs include entrepreneur Steve Wozniak on Jan. 17, and retired U.S. Navy Adm. James Stavridis on Feb. 26.

Funds raised by the Florida Forum support the Women's Board of Wolfson Children's Hospital's commitment to raise \$1.5 million for two new Kids Kare Mobile Intensive Care Units, part of Wolfson Children's Hospital's Neonatal and Pediatric Critical Care Transport fleet, including necessary life-support equipment for the transportation of critically ill and injured infants and children.

Orange Park Chorale to perform 'Meditations of the Heart'

ORANGE PARK – The Orange Park Chorale will perform its upcoming concert series "Meditations of the Heart" in two free concerts:

- Nov. 4, at 4 p.m. at the Penney Memorial Church, 4465 Poling Blvd., Penney Farms.
- Nov. 5 at 4 p.m. at the Orange Park Presbyterian Church, 1905 Park Ave., Orange Park.

County needs suggestions on its Gateway to Clay project

CLAY COUNTY – Residents living on or near Wells Road are encouraged to complete a survey to share ideas for the Gateway to Clay initiative.

The project is a partnership between public safety, government and businesses to improve Wells Road.

The survey is available at claycounty.gov/community/gateway-to-clay.

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Extra! Extra! Standing ovation for The Island Theater's 'Newsies' production

By Jack Randall
jack@claytodayonline.com

FLEMING ISLAND – The Island Theater performed Disney's "Newsies" in several sold-out shows this past month. Performers tap-danced, sang and spered on stage in an engaging and energetic rendition demonstrating how anyone can start news-worthy movements.

"Newsies" dramatizes the historical Newsboys' Strike of 1899, the youth-led labor movement in New York City that effectively stopped the circulation of printed newspapers, most notably a publication belonging to Joseph Pulitzer.

While Pulitzer's name is synonymous with excellence in journalism today, he was known during his time as a founder of "yellow journalism." His decision to cut costs, which led to the strike, was made to offset a decrease in newspaper sales following the end of the sensationalized Spanish-American War.

"Casting for 'Newsies' was held last May, and rehearsals continued throughout summer," said Theater President Tricia Williams.

"It's been a dream role for years," said both Fleming Island High students Nick Williams and Sydney Fontenot.

Williams and Greg Schuknecht from Bartram Trail High were cast as the lead actors to play Jack Kelly. Williams possessed a commanding, charismatic stage presence. "Opening night was the scariest thing in the world," said Williams. "To practice, I drilled myself with hours of tongue twisters in a New York accent," he said.



STAFF PHOTOS BY JACK RANDALL
Sydney Fontenot (center) as Katherine Plummer with the newsies ensemble.

The very first scene, "Santa Fe" (Prologue) was Williams' favorite to perform. "It was the perfect 'I Want' song. It really set the stage and the themes that the audience can expect," he said.

Fontenot and Ridgeview's Jillian McKinney played Katherine Plummer. Fon-

tenot's performance was compelling and witty – hilariously mimicking Jack Kelly's accent for a job or two.

Her solo in "Watch What Happens" was one of many highlights from the production. She pointed to her experience in choir as her musical foundation.



A vigorous supporting cast helped capture the hustle and bustle of New York's Gilded Age, the play's setting. The dynamic stage had as much energy downstage as it did upstage. The choreography was nearly seamless in many sections.



Nick Williams (left) as Jack Kelly and Leland Locke (right) as Crutchie performing "Santa Fe" (Prologue), Williams' favorite performance in the play.

Andrew Wulbern's interpretation of Race Higgins brought swagger exhibited from every long draw of the prop cigar. Leland Locke took special consideration in portraying the disabled Crutchie, especially during skirmishing segments. During one dance routine, Ansley Engle as Specs had an unbelievable toe touch right up to the edge of the stage.

Also making an appearance were several previous "Clay Today" issues used as props – incredibly when they were ripped up and thrown into the crowd!

"Newsies" captures the nation's ambivalent relationships with journalism and labor movements. The political sentiments are as relevant now as the musical's Broadway premiere in 2012, the film premiere in 1992, or the subject matter itself in 1899.

The widely covered Writers Guild of America strike ended in a ratified contract on Oct. 9. The United Auto Workers strike, attended by both President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump, is ongoing.

"The play is still politically relevant because people who should have a say typically don't have one," said Williams.

"Everyone wants to be acknowledged. Everyone should have a voice," said Fontenot.

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Inspire awarded \$18,000 for national dance competition

Group tells tourism council it has three dates set for Thrasher-Horne Center

By Lee Wardlaw
lee@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The Tourist Development Council (TDC) unanimously approved a grant of \$18,000 for the Inspire National Dance Competition to host its annual competition on April 12-14 at the Thrasher-Horne Center. The grant will pay Inspire's full requested amount.

The organization, which also hosted an event at the venue earlier this year, sought financial assistance to offset venue rental costs, which totaled approximately \$64,000.

The aim of the sports event grant is to encourage tourism to Clay County. Inspire's application was based on metrics such as the ability to expand tourism, feasibility and quality of the proposed event.

Before the full amount was awarded, Caroline Everill, Tourism Program Manager, suggested that the Inspire National



Dance Competition receive 85% of the requested funds, totaling \$15,300. Board member Kimberly Morgan dissented, praising the substantial economic impact that would be generated.

"This is a big deal. They bring room nights, and the mothers spend a significant amount (of money) while they're here. It's a legitimate boon for the local economy," she said.

Inspire's Event Coordinator, Emma-Leigh Skinner said dancers travel from as far as Georgia and South Carolina to participate in the Orange Park event, which is

one of 31 hosted by the organization each year. "We bring visitors from all over the place. Our dancers attend with their parents, grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. Everyone wants to come see their kiddos dance," she said.

Inspire's latest competition incurred \$64,000 in venue rental costs. Contestants and their families often travel across state lines and usually spend the whole weekend. "They stay Thursday night, Friday night, Saturday night, and even Sunday night, depending on how far they have to drive," Skinner said.

Inspire already plans to return to Thrasher-Horne Center in 2025 and 2026. Many other dancing organizations are doing the same. "Thrasher-Horne has become a (premier destination) for dance competitions. So, March, April and into the summer, all of these dance groups are coming to (the Thrasher-Horne Center) and booking with us. Dance is the new thing," she said.

While one TDC board member raised concerns about attracting a local audi-

ence, TDC Chairman Mike Cella embraced Inspire's status as a national brand. "This group brings their own audience," he said. Skinner said that the group has two studios in Orange Park, which would account for visitors within the county.

With a large stage, ample seating and plenty of dressing space in the adjacent Convention Center, Skinner said the location provides an ideally better space to host the Inspire National Dance Competition than the Prime F. Osborne III Convention Center in Jacksonville or any other location in Duval County. She said the venue was more recognizable among their dance studios traveling from out of state.

After the generous grant approval from the TDC, the Inspire National Dance Competition is poised to continue its tradition, bringing dance enthusiasts to the county from near and far, being a dazzling spectacle and an economic boon for the county once again.

The TDC also awarded grants to American Cornhole League (\$7,500), Cattle at the Cove (\$5,000) and MotoSurf (\$30,000).

Couple restore, move 1899 cabin to Keystone Heights

By Natalie Gilstrap
For Clay Today

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – Kevin and Robin Bannon recently completed restoring an 1899 log cabin they discovered during their drive through Carraway Florahome in Putnam County.

"We found it in the woods," Kevin said. "So, we left a note in the mailbox that we found."

After several weeks passed, the owner Ronald Cumbus, called about the cabin.

"He told us that his grandfather built it. His father grew up in it, and then he and his two sisters grew up in it," Bannon said.

The Bannons were told they could keep the cabin if they could remove it from Cum-



PHOTOS BY NATALIE GILSTRAP

Robin and Kevin Bannon were driving through Putnam County and stumbled on a log cabin built in 1899. They offered to buy it, but the owner told them they could have it if they'd remove it from his property. They took it to Keystone Heights and refurbished it into a spectacular home.

bus's property and restore it.

With a new project ahead of them, the Bannons started the demolition process. "My wife and I started demoing it inside. We got everything out inside and then started taking the logs down."

Once the original logs were moved to their property, they got the necessary permits and started rebuilding. Laying the cabin's foundation, chinking the walls, and adding a loft were some of the many tasks the couple completed. The majority of the original cabin's wood was incorporated into the structure and interior of the rebuilt cabin.

"Anything that we took out that we could save, I tried to put back in here," he said.

The project took six years to complete. The Bannons hosted an open house to showcase their work.

"It's my mom's 90th birthday. So we figured we'd have an open house and birthday celebration because everybody I work with has been hearing about this for six years and wants to see it," Bannon said.

The event went great as family and friends visited to see the restored cabin, celebrate, and enjoy a variety of appetizers. In addition, Cumbus's siblings attended the open house and praised the restored cabin.

"He did an amazing job," Mitchell Cumbus said. As of now, the Bannons are pleased with the outcome and plan to use the cabin as a family room for the holidays.

"It's an awesome feeling," Kevin said. "I've spent a lot of hours in here. But now that I'm sitting in here, this is a dream come true. I couldn't have done it without the help of my wife Robin and my friend Chipper."

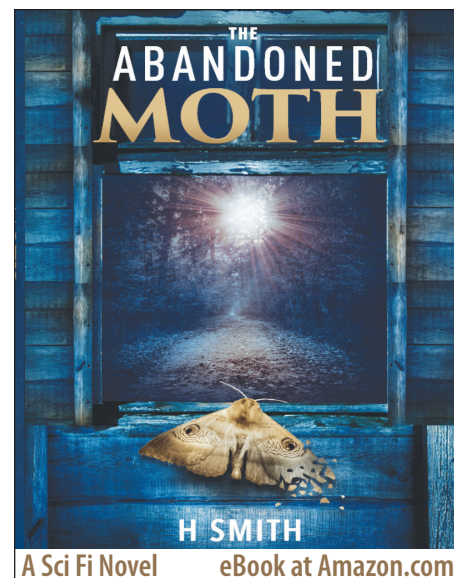
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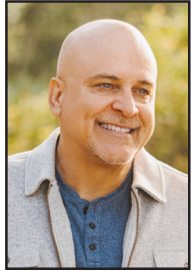
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Faith Walk

by Pastor Billy Register
True Life Church
Clay County

What Will Heaven be Like?

Science fiction writer H.G. Wells said, "The doctrine of the Kingdom of Heaven, which was the main teaching of Jesus, is certainly one of the most revolutionary doctrines that ever stirred and changed human thought."

Heaven is a topic that everyone thinks about and many talk about. Have you ever wondered what heaven will be like? We've seen so many interpretations over the years that our minds can be filled with all kinds of images such as clouds, halos and the like. Here is what the scripture says heaven will truly be like.

Revelation chapter 21 gives us great insight to Heaven. Verse 1 says "the sea was no more". In the Old Testament, the sea was often seen as a symbol of disorder and chaos. A world with no sea signifies a place of permanence and stability. In heaven, there won't be any uncertainty or chaos, just as God's promises are unwavering.

Verse 1 also speaks of "a new heaven and a new earth." This means everything will be renewed, restored to its original, perfect state. Think of a world untouched by decay, where suffering doesn't exist, and everything is as God originally intended.

The most beautiful promise is in verse 3: "God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." Heaven is where God and His people come together in perfect harmony. It's not a distant place; God's presence is intimate and shared.

In verse 4 we see, "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." This is the heart of heaven's promise – no more sadness, suffering, or death. It's a place where scars are healed, tears turn to joy, and pain is replaced with peace.

So, what will heaven be like? It's a place of incredible beauty, free from suffering, and where God is always present. It's a world made new, and Revelation 21:1-5 gives us a simple but wonderful glimpse into this heavenly reality. In the midst of life's challenges, heaven shines as our ultimate hope and destination, reminding us of the incredible promise awaiting those who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Better Business Bureau Please support legitimate charities following Gaza attack

For Clay Today

On Oct. 7, Hamas terrorists from Gaza launched a surprise attack against towns in southern Israel, including a music festival. Media reported there were more than 1,200 killed, including 25 from the United States, nearly 3,000 injured and more than 100 hostages being taken.

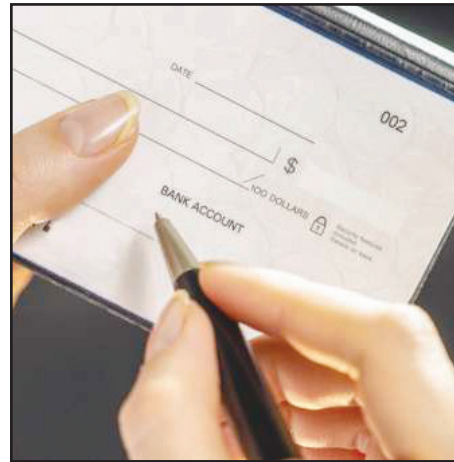
In response, Israel declared war on Hamas and sent airstrikes into Gaza on Sunday, which resulted in more than 1,100 Palestinians being killed.

For those seeking to help victims and families impacted by this crisis, the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance offers the following giving tips and a list of BBB Accredited Charities soliciting for relief efforts.

- Can the charity get to the impacted area? Not all relief organizations will be positioned to provide relief quickly. See if the charity already has a presence in Israel or Gaza.

- Are you alert to possible social media scams? Scammers recognize the emotional motivation to help in response to emergencies. Be wary of responding to appeals without taking the opportunity to verify the trustworthiness of the social media source or the specified charity.

- Should you send clothing and food? Local drives to collect clothing and food to send overseas may not be practical as the logistics and timing to deliver and



disperse such items will be challenging. Relief organizations are better equipped to obtain what is needed, distribute it effectively and avoid duplication of effort.

- Is the charity experienced in providing emergency relief? Experienced disaster relief charities are the best bet to help deliver aid immediately. New entrants may have difficulty following through even if they have the best intentions.

- Are you considering crowdfunding appeals? If engaging in crowdfunding, it is safest to give to someone you know and trust, keeping in mind that some crowdfunding sites take measures to vet posts others don't. If the poster claims they will forward funds to a specified charity, consider visiting the charity's website and giving to them directly after checking them out.

- Are you cautious about "100%" claims in appeals? Charities have fundraising and administrative expenses. If a charity promotion claims that all funds collected will be used for relief, see if there is an explanation about how they can do this. Even a credit card donation will have a processing fee. The following is a list of BBB Accredited Charities: (Please note that some of these charities are focused on relief efforts in Israel, Gaza or both areas).

- American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
- Anera
- Helping Hand for Relief and Development
- International Rescue Committee
- Islamic Relief USA
- Jewish National Fund
- Mennonite Central Committee
- Oxfam America
- Penny Appeal USA
- Project HOPE
- Save the Children

BBB is an unbiased non-profit organization that sets and upholds high standards for fair and honest business behavior. Businesses that earn BBB accreditation contractually agree and adhere to the organization's high standards of ethical business behavior. BBB provides objective advice, free BBB Business Profiles, BBB Wise Giving Reports, and educational information on topics affecting marketplace trust.

More than 500 support CHS's Caring Chef fundraiser



PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY CHS

JACKSONVILLE – The 39th annual Caring Chefs event not only served the favorite samplings and cocktails from 23 local restaurants and bars, but it also attracted 500 to the Glass Factory to raise money for The Children's Home Society of Florida's programs for early childhood services, community partnership schools, teen parenting programs, counseling and mental health services in Clay and surrounding counties in Northeast Florida.

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TRY IT AGAIN ...



Oakleaf, Orange Park bands continue march toward state championships

Golden Regiment, Raiders post class wins at Golden Eagle Classic

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

FLEMING ISLAND – Oakleaf and Orange Park High Schools have traditionally proven to be two of the best marching bands in Northeast Florida because they don't just put on halftime shows. They exhibit productions that take nearly a year to create.

Both bands excelled at the Golden Eagle Classic last Saturday with entertaining and intellectually challenging performances.

Oakleaf's Class 5A and overall championship-winning performance was called "Alchemy: Devine Chemistry." Orange Park's "Immortalis" was a playfully dark yet enticing effort that included coffins and bandmembers rising from their lying positions that helped them clinch the top Class 3A honor and second in the overall voting.

"There's a lot of bands that will go out there and they'll play 'Earth, Wind and Fire' and call it a day, or their show was basically 'these are three songs that we like,' and there's nothing wrong with that," said Oakleaf Band Director Chad Robbins.

"But for our program, we're very competitive, and it's become a mixture of music, theater, dance. All of these elements for the high-level programs are trying to push the envelope, so it's an intellectual production. And it can be overwhelming for people stepping into that field for the first time and wanting to go to that level.

"There's nothing wrong with going out, performing something for the football crowd that they enjoy, and then stepping off the field. But our students luckily buy into this and enjoy it. They thrive on it. They look forward to what our next production is going to be."

Oakleaf's show was 10 months in the making. Robbins heard a song called "Lux Aurumque" by Eric Whitacre about alchemy – transforming base metals into gold.

"I really liked the concept of gold, and



at first, I thought about maybe a show that was called "Tarnished" and what we could do visually and musically with that where we have that kind of light and dark play on gold," Robbins said. "Then all of a sudden in my research of gold, I found the word alchemy, which I knew nothing about at the time. Then I started to watch videos and read and do a lot of research and it became this really deep, super in-depth concept or idea that I knew a show could be built around it."

Oddly enough, the Golden Eagles didn't use "Lux Aurumque" in their production. Instead, they played songs Chris Cresswell, Jacob Collier and Coldplay, Fall Out Boy and Ennio Morricone.

"It was kind of the overarching theme and concept, so it took several months of planning, designing and editing and finding the right music for that," Robbins said. "That it took several months to kind of get all those things in place."

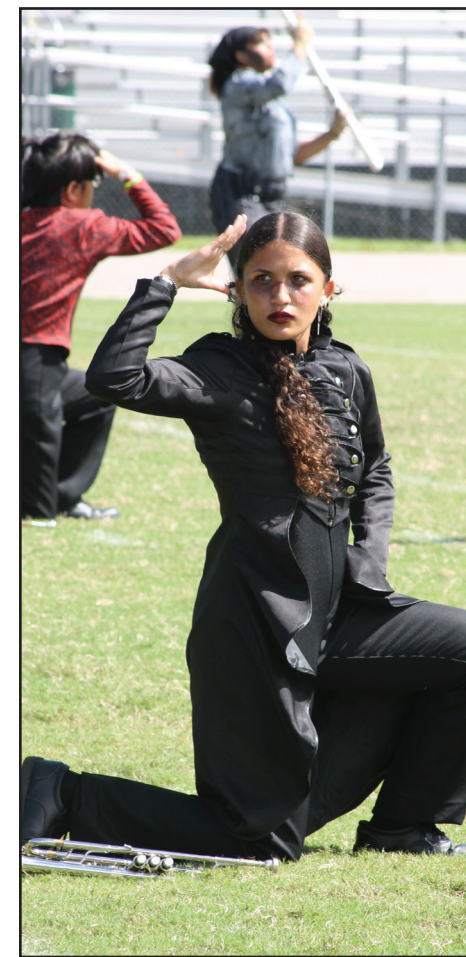
And it's a production that's constantly being tweaked. Robbins said Oakleaf will make a few minor changes to the show

SEE BAND, 24



STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

Orange Park High's "Immortalis" show was conceived last spring and perfected during five months of practice. The spooky performance started with the band lying on the football field at Fleming Island High, and they slowly rose while the color guard emerged from coffins. The show included songs like Bram Stoker's "Dracula" and "Paint It, Black" by the Rolling Stones. Orange Park finished first in Class 3A and second overall. All seven Clay County high schools participated, while host Fleming Island performed an exhibition. Ridgeview did a pirate-themed set to finish third among Class 2A schools. The competition sets up the state championship on Nov. 11 in St. Petersburg.



Police Briefs claytodayonline.com

Orange Park man arrested following fatal shooting at apartment complex

ORANGE PARK – One man was arrested on Nov. 25 after the Clay County Sheriff's Office said he fired a shot through a screen door that struck and killed a man at the Reserve Apartment Complex on Crossing Boulevard.

Ashton Scott Huffman, 33, of Orange Park, was charged with second-degree murder, firing a gun into a dwelling and aggravated assault with a deadly weapon after



Ashton Scott Huffman

firing at a man whom Huffman targeted CCSO. According to the arrest report, Huffman was outside the victim's back porch before he entered the porch and shot at the victim through the screen while he was sitting at his computer desk.

The victim managed to call 911 after Huffman pressed the gun into the center of his chest and found for control of the gun. CCSO found the victim outside his apartment with several gunshot wounds.

"This incident is believed to be a deliberate, targeted attack and not a random act," CCSO said in a release.

Huffman is being held at the Clay County Jail with an \$800,009 bond.

The sheriff's office said anyone with information should call (904) 264-6512 or leave an anonymous tip on the SaferWatch App.

Melrose couple charged with taking lumber from construction site

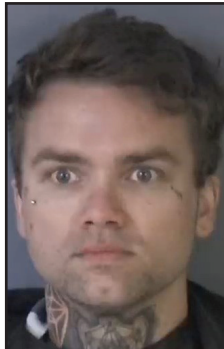
KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – A couple from Melrose were arrested after lumber was reported missing from a construction site on Oct. 14.

Paul Michael Falana, 29, and Kacy Lee Thompson, 38, were charged with grand theft and trespassing on a construction site after Clay County Sheriff's Office deputies were called after building materials were taken from a site on Bitterroot Street.

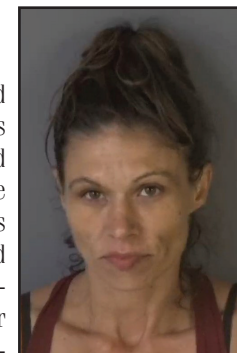
CCSO identified possible suspects and found Falana and Thompson at a house on Silver Sands Circle. They found Falana and Thompson and saw lumber stacked in the homeowner's backyard.

Deputies matched the skew numbers from the missing wood and the boards found in the house's backyard.

Thompson's bond was set at \$17,505, while Falana's was set at \$16,505.



Paul Michael Falana



Kacy Lee Thompson

Three from Clay part of 20 arrested statewide in Medicaid fraud

CLAY COUNTY – The officials recently arrested 20 people, including three from Clay County, in a fraudulent transportation scheme that caused more than \$5 million in losses to the Florida Medicaid program.

An investigation uncovered the defendants operated a nonemergency medical transportation service that billed Medicaid for thousands of trips never provided. The Clay County Sheriff's Office arrested three of the defendants who reside in Clay County: Martha Gloria Guevara Paz, 68; Yilber Ricardo Martinez Quintero, 39; and Astrid Viviana Lineros Orjuela, 34.

The case will be prosecuted by Attorney General Moody's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit through an agreement with Melissa Nelson, State Attorney for the Fourth Judicial Circuit.

Starke couple sentenced to prison for stealing mail in Keystone Heights

JACKSONVILLE – U.S. District Judge Maria M. Howard has sentenced Connor Lee Austin, 31, to 18 months in federal prison for theft of mail. His term of imprisonment will run consecutive to his current sentence of 36 months in Florida State Prison. Austin's co-defendant, Maranda Ann Stewart, 26, also from Starke, was sentenced to six months in federal prison for theft of mail. The court ordered the pair to pay restitution to the victims in the case.

Stewart had pleaded guilty on June 27, and Austin had pleaded guilty on July 12.

According to court documents and public records, in late April 2022, the Clay County Sheriff's Office received multiple reports of mail being stolen from mail-

boxes in the Keystone Heights area. Surveillance footage from homes in that area captured a truck containing two individuals driving down roads and stealing mail from mailboxes.

Law enforcement subsequently identified the driver as Stewart and Austin as the passenger. On May 6, 2022, the Baker County Sheriff's Office arrested Austin and Stewart for their involvement with a fraudulent check. During the arrest, the BCSO conducted an inventory search of the truck used by Stewart and Austin and located more than 100 pieces of mail that had been stolen from various addresses in Clay County.

Follow up investigation by the CCSO and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service – Jacksonville Office determined that after stealing mail, Austin and Stewart used Austin's phone in an effort to deposit stolen checks into their bank accounts through mobile deposit.

They also obtained funds by forging signatures on checks stolen from the mail and subsequently cashing the fraudulent checks. Law enforcement recovered mail stolen by Austin and Stewart from Baker, Bradford, Clay, Duval and Putnam Counties. Austin appeared in federal court on April 19, pursuant to a writ bringing him to Jacksonville from Florida State Prison where he is serving a prison sentence of 36 months for grand theft, grand theft from a dwelling, and burglary. The Court ordered Austin detained.

After initially releasing Stewart, the court ordered her detained on Aug. 15.

This case was investigated by CCSO and the U.S. States Postal Inspection Service – Jacksonville Office with valuable assistance from the Baker County Sheriff's Office. It was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Kevin C. Frein.

Arrests & Bookings claytodayonline.com

(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, Oct. 17

Timothy L. Brown, 42, Orange Park, trespassing
David R. Demay, 64, Middleburg, DUI
Marcellas T.W. Farrell, 33, Orange Park, trespassing
Keijarah K.L. Nelson, 21, Green Cove Springs, FTA-DWLSR
Edward L. Smith, 63, Green Cove Springs, four counts burglary, grand theft, four counts petit theft
Ashley N. Lewandowski, 34, Middleburg, possession-methamphetamine, possession-THC/Vape, violation of concealed weapon (brass knuckles), possession-drug paraphernalia

Justin L. Griffin, 36, Middleburg, possession-methamphetamine, possession-drug paraphernalia
Kari S. Pittman, 48, Green Cove Springs, writ of bodily attachment
Antwan L. Smiley, 32, Green Cove Springs, DWLSR
Tyler R. Womble, 30, Middleburg, disorderly intoxication

Monday, Oct. 16

Virgil A. Peppers, 52, Orange Park, felony battery by strangulation, battery, possession-cocaine, trespassing
Juan C.A. Jimenez, 21, Orange Park, driving without valid license
Errol R. Williams, 36, Orange Park, disorderly intoxication, resist/obstruct/oppose law enforcement
Lorraine C. Williams, 29, Keystone Heights, domestic battery
Andre K. Artis, 19, Orange Park, attempt to defraud financial institution, obtaining property

Sunday, Oct. 15

Kaleb J. Strength, 24, Middleburg, domestic battery
Kemberly Van Griffin, 65, Green Cove Springs, FTA-petit theft
Princess S.N. El Osiris, 55, Green Cove Springs, FTA-DWLSR
Maria E.A. Chaves, 29, Green Cove Springs, shoplifting
John K. Taylor, 58, Green Cove Springs, FTA-DWLSR, two counts FTA-failure to register vehicle
Ashton S. Huffman, 33, Orange Park, second-degree murder, aggravated assault with deadly weapon, shooting into dwelling
Malik J. Rutledge, 27, Orange Park, trespassing, resisting arrest
Geena D. Brackins, 30, Fleming Island, DUI
Trenton K. Nicola, 26, Green Cove Springs, aggravated assault with deadly weapon

Saturday, Oct. 14

Sean K. Sullivan, 31, Keystone Heights, possession-marijuana, possession-drug paraphernalia, DUI with passenger 18 or younger in vehicle
Jacob O. Asomani, 18, Orange Park, shoplifting

Dennis A. Wilson, 35, Middleburg, DWLSR
Samuel A. McDade, 31, Fleming Island, DWLSR, no vehicle registration
Paul M. Falana, 29, Keystone Heights, grand theft from construction site, trespassing on construction site
Kacy L. Thompson, 38, Keystone Heights, grand theft from construction site, trespassing on construction site
Jasmine M. Gullett, 31, Orange Park, three counts violation of injunction of communicating with victim of cyberstalking/stalking
Phillip E. Webber, 50, Keystone Heights, domestic battery

Friday, Oct. 13

Corey M. McAninch, 34, Fleming Island, shoplifting
Toni R. Jackson, 36 Orange Park, shoplifting
Connee J. Todd, 51, Green Cove Springs, FTA-DWLSR
Michael J. Litgen, 42, claiming false ownership of pawned items, dealing in stolen property
Daniel R. Lyons, 48, Green Cove Springs, battery in jail

Waste Not Want Not gets surprise \$100,000 donation from Chick-fil-A

Money will support nonprofit's mission to feed the hungry

By Lee Wardlaw
lee@claytodayonline.com

ORANGE PARK – It started out as just another Friday morning at the Waste Not Want Not headquarters in Orange Park.

Dedicated volunteers were packing up 5,000 to 7,000 pounds of food from restaurants, farms, grocery stores and anywhere else that produces surplus food. The donated surpluses were about to be redistributed to other nonprofits in 14 counties across the state, matching the specific nutritional needs of each supplier.

Then, representatives from the Orange Park Chick-fil-A on 1925 Wells Road arrived with breakfast for the hardworking volunteers on shift. The Wells Road Chick-fil-A, along with other area franchises, is in its seven-year partnership with the county-based nonprofit through the restaurant's Shared Table program to help feed the hungry.

But after Volunteer Director Linda McKenzie finished her tour guiding Craig Phillips, Owner and Operator of the Wells Road Chick-fil-A, she walked out to the parking lot and knew something was up. She could tell that something very special was about to happen. Employees were holding balloons, and a Chick-fil-A cow mascot rushed her with a massive check in hand.

McKenzie saw the check reading \$1,000 initially. Then, she realized that she imagined the two trailing decimal points.

The check read \$100,000.

McKenzie, Executive Director Sandra Staudt-Killea and the many volunteers realized they had hit the nonprofit lottery. Waste Not Want Not was selected as one of seven nonprofits among 1,200 across the United States and Canada that rescue surplus foods from the national chain restaurant. It was part of Chick-fil-A's \$1 million philanthropic effort to address food insecurity. Feeding America and Second Rescue in Canada also received a generation donation. When asked about the significance of the donation, Staudt-Killea couldn't help but gush about the surprising, heartfelt nature of the gift.

"This is just a true, from-the-heart gift. It's different than receiving a grant, which you have to complete paperwork and apply for," she said.

But how the nonprofit will dedicate the donation will be a discussion for another



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Clay County's Waste Not Want Not was surprised by an unexpected \$100,000 gift from Chick-fil-A as part of the company's Shared Table program. Wells Road Chick-fil-A owner Craig Phillips gave the nonprofit a check following a tour of their facility.

day.

"We're going to have to sit down with the board and dream big with this. We really have to think about how to best use this gift to honor both their mission and ours," Staudt-Killea said.

She delved deeper into what the donation means to the nonprofit, which, founded in 1990, has a longstanding, reputable, 33-year tenure in the county. Between Chick-fil-A and Waste Not Want Not, the organizations have provided over 46,000 meals to the community.

"We haven't even really allowed ourselves to envision how many people we could feed yet because never in our wildest dreams would we have expected that (the \$100,000 donation) would fall into our laps," she said.

The impact of the donation transcends monetary value. It will reinvigorate the nonprofit's mission in the county and state.

"This is a shot in the arm. This is great because our volunteers work so hard. We're the reliable picker-upper and helping Chick-fil-A accomplish their goals as well," Staudt-Killea said.

Volunteers work 363 days a year. Their only off days are Thanksgiving and Christmas. The committed individuals drive to the Orange Park Chick-fil-A and other franchises in the Jacksonville area to pick up excess food.

Their partnership with Chick-fil-A involves rescuing various items, including salads, wraps, biscuits and bounties of



chicken. Then, those items are distributed with thoughtfulness in mind. Salads and wraps are sent to after-school programs, and chicken biscuits, nuggets and breasts are delivered to the homeless.

The food makes its way to a soup kitchen in Putnam County, among several other locations, where frequently, it is creatively crafted into a new recipe. Biscuits become delicious breakfast casseroles, and nuggets are reimagined into savory teriyaki stir-fries.

"The support we get from Chick-fil-A aligns with our mission. Their Shared Table program helps prevent waste, protect the environment, and, most importantly, feed hungry people. Those three principles align (so much) with what we do, and that's

why it's a great partnership."

The seven-year alliance between Chick-fil-A and the county nonprofit is one of hope, built through sacrifice to the community through partnership, embodying charity and goodwill.

"Our Chick-fil-A restaurant strives to be a beacon of light in the Orange Park community, and the Chick-fil-A Shared Table Program gives us a great opportunity to do that. Food insecurity is a critical issue for so many of our neighbors, and it's a privilege to donate our surplus food to Waste Not Want Not so we can feed those in need in our community. We look forward to seeing how this \$100,000 donation will help them have an even greater impact," Phillips said.

Arrests

from page 22

Kenneth H. Morrison, 39, Green Cove Springs, battery in jail

Zachary P. Johnson, 32, Fleming Island, DUI with BAL .15 or higher, attempting to flee/elude law enforcement at high speed

Josue A. Rivera, 30, Middleburg, battery

Thursday, Oct. 12

Stephon D. Edwards, 33, Oakleaf,

DWLSR

Riley C. Guthrie, 30, Fleming Island, criminal mischief, resist/obstruct/oppose law enforcement, violation of injunction for protection against domestic violence

Lauren E. Smith, 30, Orange Park, shoplifting, giving false name/ID

Jennifer L. Graham, 43, Green Cove Springs, FTA-DWLSR

Daniel Williams, 34, Middleburg, failure to report change of address

Rahmaan K.T. Muhammad, 22, Green Cove Springs, violation of jail rules

Wednesday, Oct. 11

Ashlee L. Shelton, 33, Middleburg, domestic battery

India M. Johns, 25, Keystone Heights, domestic battery

Joseph P. Kane, 41, Middleburg, shoplifting

Wayne H. Gray, 33, Middleburg, aggravated assault with deadly weapon

Jeffrey E. Sigmon, 57, Green Cove Springs, FTA-leaving scene of accident

Latrell M. Austin, 39, Orange Park, leav-

ing scene of accident

Matthew C. Teuton, 39, Green Cove Springs, non-support

William R. Parker, 28, felony domestic battery by strangulation

Benjamin R. Walters, 37, Middleburg, criminal mischief

Ashely Pagan, 33, Orange Park, possession-marijuana, resist/obstruct/oppose law enforcement

Band

from page 21

before it performs at the Band of America competition this Saturday in Orlando. That competition attracts many of the premier bands in the eastern United States.

At Fleming Island, the Golden Regiment finished first in music, visual, general effect and color guard. They also were second in percussion.

Orange Park was third overall in music and percussion, second in general effect, color guard, visual and first in drum major.

Unlike sports, classifications for bands are set by the number of musicians, not the student population.

Like Oakleaf, the Raiders' production started with a basic idea more than eight months ago. Band Director Brett Pikuritz said the modern approach is to design a theme and then find music that fits.

"You have to consider all the things that would make a really engaging, artistic show," he said. "Then you have your music written, so all this is happening over the summer. And then you have your drill written – the drill is what you see as far as the formations on the field where the student performers are standing."

Hundreds of hours are spent working and perfecting the concept before the first note is played. The routine then hits the field during a summer band camp.

"You start getting the kids together over the summer and doing summer rehearsals," Pikuritz said. "We start in June and do a new member camp where we welcome the new members in and train them how to march, hold their instrument, and play their instrument at a solid fundamental level. And then we give them off a little bit of time over the summer, and we come back together at the end of July."

"There's usually a pretty intensive two-week camp, known affectionately as band camp. It's like 12-, 13-, 14-hour days. It's a lot like our two-a-days for football."

"Nobody notices how much has happened before the first day of school."

"Mortalis" is Latin for immortal, and it includes vampire lore. Orange Park's show included Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor, Bram Stoker's "Dracula," "Dido and Aeneas" by Henry Purcell and The Rolling Stones' "Paint It Black."

"I like to put some older classical music along with some newer contemporary music," Pikuritz said. "I think it creates a good balance for the performers and for the audience."

The Raiders will host its first band competition on Saturday. They expect as many as 16 bands.

All bands will be at Bartram Trail High in St. Johns County for the state assessment competition on Oct. 28. The state championship is Nov. 11 in St. Petersburg. Orange Park finished second to Hialeah-Miami Lakes last year. While many band directors are trying to finish the year on a good note, some are already working on next year's competition.

"It just depends on what kind of product you're putting together," Robbins said. "It takes a lot, for sure."



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GAME OF THE WEEK

Orange Park vs. Ponte Vedra

Keystone @ Taylor-Pierson

Oakleaf @ Madison County

Orange Park vs. Ponte Vedra

Clay @ Mataanzas

Middleburg BYE

Fleming @ Creekside

Broncos lose mud-match on Mars

Playoffs still in the picture

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

MIDDLEBURG - With a football field that looked more like the planet Mars than a grassy field to play a possible district championship game, Middleburg High put up its best psyche with two near-miss interceptions, two fumbles and a lone scoring bomb, but Columbia High eventually survived the mudfest to a 17-6 district

3-3S championship on Friday.

"You think about where the program has come from where it was three years ago to where we are now and I'm not happy with the loss, but happy about where the program is," said Middleburg coach Ryan Wolfe. "I've been on teams that had the tradition of winning and sometimes I have to step back and say wow this is year three and we just shook Columbia, shook Hawthorne, shook Bradford. Columbia just beat Bolles last week."

With neither team able to create any kind of ground game with the ankle-deep muck throughout the field, it was the passing game on both sides that made an impact; Columbia with a handful of acrobatic catches from wide receiver Camdon Frier (Florida State commit), and Middleburg with a long scoring bomb to Jarren Rozier for the Broncos lone touchdown.

"They just set up jump balls with their receivers," said Wolfe. "We talked about

SEE BRONCOS, 30



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Middleburg High linebacker Austin Cruce contemplates the result of his Broncos' 17-6 district loss to Columbia on a wet, mucky field.

Keester, Myers put Eagles sixth in state-fest

Knotts in championship form

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

JACKSONVILLE - Against a lineup of state champion teams at the New World Fall Classic cross country invitational at Cecil Field's New World Golf facility, the duo of John Keester IV and Graham Myers again battled to top finishes to put the Fleming Island High boys cross country team in the conversation about potential state medalists in a few weeks. Fleming Island's boys team finished third in Class 3A last year behind state powers Belen Jesuit and Fort Myers.

"We don't have our number three guy here today, so we are counting on some of



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Fleming Island senior cross country runner Allie Knotts heads toward finish line of New World Fall Classic in Jacksonville with big brother Luke Knott pointing the way.

the other guys to step up," said Fleming Island coach Dave Allen. "We have a strong six and that's what gets us in the top 10 in the team scores."

In the boys elite race, featuring Patrick Koon of Leon, the two-time defending 3A

champion with Fleming Island also in 3A, Myers took the early initiative with Koon blasting from the start and breaking from the starting pack quickly with Nease senior Matt Ryan, the Class 4A state champion.

SEE WORLD, 32



Lakeside dominates Junior High volleyball

STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Lakeside Junior High's girls seventh grade volleyball team celebrated a conference championship over Baker County on Thursday with teammates Charlotte Viviers, No. 17, and Katelynn Laezza giving it yell.

See more pics, page 31.

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Athlete Of The Week



Orange Park sophomore tailback **Dylon Ruiz** ran for 225 yards and one score in 19 carries in a key district win for the Raiders over Ridgeview.



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WEEK 8

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

ORANGE PARK - Orange Park High football coach Marcus Wimberly has been stoic in his focus on maybe, just maybe, getting the Raiders into the playoffs and the last three games of a season that has been topsy-turvy at best can be a marker for a team that straps up their jock straps and completes Job One.

"We talked today (Monday) about that it simply is a matter of taking care of business these next three games and maybe getting lucky with someone else helping us," said Wimberly, noting Middleburg is one of the three upcoming games. "This team has been very resilient with our inconsistencies and I think they have been improving enough each of the last couple of games that I feel like we have as good a chance as anyone else in our position."

After Friday's 36-12 district 3-3S win over Ridgeview, with defensive back Tim Barfield snagging two interceptions to lead the Raider defense, Wimberly will next face a rejuvenated Ponte Vedra team (4S), then Middleburg (3-3S) and, finally, Fleming Island.

With the Raiders swiftly moving to a 22-6 first-half lead, as has been most of their earlier regular season

Raiders lone home slot; playoffs, maybe?

games; led Clay lost 42-41; led Nease lost 27-14, Wimberly has had to bridge the inconsistency gap of his team which has had a strong run game (Joshua Johnson, 377 Yds, 10 pass catches, 7TDs), pretty good passing (Gabe Taylor, 1101 Yds, 10TDs, but 9INTs) and a late pass catching surge from Quinton Moore (9

"Gabe, remember just a sophomore, has improved his reads each week and is learning from his past mistakes," said Wimberly. "He has guys around him that can make plays and he is making good decisions."

Ponte Vedra comes in hot at 6-1 (6th in 4S) with the loss a season opener against Bartram Trail (5th in 4S) and wins over Middleburg (35-0), Bishop Kenny (55-20 and, on Friday, Toco Creek (38-6) with quarterback Benjamin Burk racking up three games with three or more TD passes (hint to Barfield) and four receivers with double-digit catches. Think they like to pass?

"I think our defense is at playoff level," said Wimberly. "Our offense has its lulls in the red zone and we have to connect there."

A solid game here, maybe an upset of magnitude, then Middleburg next in a district clash with identical records; 3-4, 1-1 in the district, making a final stab for the eighth seed in the region.

Middleburg, on the other hand, had one of its toughest grind games Friday with their 17-6 loss to Columbia, the district champion at this point, thus leaving just seven slots to contend for a region spot.



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Orange Park head football coach Marcus Wimberly and assistant coach Coby "Big Block" Hayslett, who came to Florida from Tennessee with Wimberly, have methodically put the Raiders in position for a possible region playoff slot.

"Just like last year, we beat Bishop Kenny, we beat Orange Park and Fernandina Beach and we should be the seven or eight seed," said Middleburg coach Ryan Wolfe after his 17-6 loss to district champion Columbia.

Who would of thought the Middleburg vs. Orange Park game would have playoff ramifications, but it's possible?

Middleburg's defense, playing with enough go-get, had two near-miss interceptions; two fumbles and stopped a rugged Columbia run game with a 225-pound running back that only got some traction in the fourth quarter.

The problem was offense, except for a superb catch and run for a score of about

SEE RAIDERS, 33

Raiders stay alive in slim playoff scenario

By Lee Wardlaw
Staff Writer

ORANGE PARK- In a big battle under the Friday Night Lights between Blanding Blvd. rivals, Orange Park (3-4) came away with a 36-12 victory over Ridgeview (1-5) behind a two-interception night from senior secondary specialist Timothy Barfield.

"Our defense has improved steadily all season and this was a good solid night of four-quarter football," said Orange Park coach Marcus Wimberly, stung recently by second-half collapses with sizeable leads at the break. "One thing about this team different from last year is our resilience. Last year, if we got behind, there was a lot of giving up. These guys are staying focused and have kept us alive in the playoff hunt."

The game featured big moments for both teams, but the outcome was decided early in the second quarter.

The Raiders will meet their match when tough Ponte Vedra (6-1) comes to town tomorrow night, but they had no problem with the Panthers on Homecoming. Orange Park led 15-0 by the end of the first quarter.

However, it was a game-defining drive that was capped off with a party in the end zone with just under eight minutes remaining in the second quarter that put the game away for Orange Park, the sequence giving the Raiders control early in the game. Quarterback Gabe Taylor commanded the drive from behind center and even punched in for a score from the one-yard line via a designed quarterback draw. The Raider firepower came from sophomore tailback Dylon Ruiz who zipped around for consecutive runs of 45 and 53 yards with the 53 ending in the end zone. Senior wide receiver Jaden Paulk snagged a pass on a perfectly executed mid-range drag pattern from Taylor to move the ball to the 38-yard line with 9:11 remaining up a pivotal third and three which would set the tone for the remainder of the night.

It allowed Taylor to put the nail in the coffin on the next play.

"I just feel like we executed. Whatever (head coach Marcus Wimberly) called, we ran the play, and we ran it well," said Taylor.

Raider wide receiver Quinton Moore, another weapon for Taylor, also made a substantial impact for Orange Park, the

persistent junior coming in clutch during the Raiders' following touchdown sequence after a series of penalties kept the chains going backward before Moore popped off a 26 yard gain to erase the penalty yards.

Moore hauled in a 17-yard touchdown reception with 11:54 remaining in the period to extend the Raiders' lead to 28-6.

"It's just about staying focused mentally, just not getting out of my element and continuing to do what I do," said Moore. "It's an 'on to the next play,' mindset. We're out here to have fun tonight."

Ridgeview's highlights included a fumble recovery from senior defensive tackle Braylon Hawkins in the second quarter, setting up a scoring opportunity. Ridgeview's biggest score was an 80-yard pick-six interception by defensive end Gain Huey to cut the Raiders' lead to 22-6 in the second quarter.

If that wasn't enough, tight end Jarius Moore recorded a highlight-reel-worthy 19-yard reception with just two seconds remaining in the game, putting Ridgeview in the end zone one last time right before the buzzer-beater, allowing the Panthers to cut into their rival's lead just before time expired.

Eagles wings clipped in second lopsided loss

By Ray Dimonda
Correspondent

MANDARIN - The Fleming Island Golden Eagle defense had no answers tonight as the team needs to find a way to stop a five-game losing streak. With the second 50-plus point game given up by Fleming Island in as many weeks, tonight the Mandarin Mustangs racked up 379 total yards.

On offense, Golden Eagle quarterback Cibastian Broughton could never step up and set to pass, scrambling around as he looked downfield only to find his receivers covered like a blanket. Broughton would account for a majority of Fleming Island 230 offensive rushing yards including a 72-yard touchdown run which would still not be nearly enough as the Mustangs put a 58-19 beatdown on the Golden Eagles.

"If you watch Fleming Island football this year, that's been our Achilles Heel," said Fleming Island Head Coach Chad Parker. "We're pretty good against the pass. Stopping the run has been a problem. The teams we struggle with; Bartram, Titusville, once the running backs get going, Oakleaf 260 yards rushing against us, we have to figure out a way of stopping the run."

On offense, it wasn't that Fleming Island could not get anything done. The team amassed 309 total yards. The team only



had 79 passing yards with Broughton's best target tonight being wide receiver Trace Burney. Burney had notable yards with his best a 23-yard shot to help the Golden Eagles move the ball. The Fleming Island offense would suffer two turnovers on the evening, both getting returned for touchdowns, one a 70-yard run back.

For the Mustangs, running back Tiant Wyche would have a highlight game against the Golden Eagles starting with a 41-yard rushing touchdown on the opening drive. Wyche would rack up several big runs including two 49-yard touchdown runs, a 50-yard run, an average 20.6 yards per carry, and 185 total yards. Quarterback Tramell



CORRESPONDENT PHOTO BY RAY DIMONDA

Fleming Island quarterback Cibastian Broughton seems bottled up in this situation but the junior speedster broke for a 72-yard touchdown run in loss to Mandarin.

Jones had 10 completions on 20 attempts for 171 yards.

The Golden Eagle running backs could never find a gap in the front offensive line to break the big plays, being held to two or three yards a carry. "Their linebackers were really good," said Fleming Island running back Tyler Beverly. "They filled the holes and were right there. They executed very well and that's all I can say."

Friday night, Fleming Island faces off in a district game against the Creekside Knights. The Knights, third place in class 4S district 3 behind Gainesville Bucholz and Bartram Trail, are coming off a loss to the Bartram Trail Bears 31-19. The Knights know beating Fleming Island can have post-season implications.

Asked if the team looks to next season now or try to be the spoiler with a win over the Knights, Parker said "We're always looking to play spoiler. We never cash it in. We're young anyways. We're not starting many seniors. We are starting true freshmen, sophomores, and juniors starting most places, maybe five seniors out of our 22 starters. We are really, really young."

Being a senior and one of the leaders on the team, Beverly was asked about what he does this week to lead his teammates into the district matchup. "Getting them hyped up, getting them ready to go, getting them focused on football. At the end of the day, that's what we're not doing. But we're going to get back on Monday and we'll be back to winning, it's as simple as that."

Furman sacks Samford; FHS Jeremiah Jackson gets QB sack

Courtesy Furman Athletics

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. -- Furman's defense racked up nine sacks, including one from Fleming Island High defensive tackle Jeremiah Jackson, and limited Samford to just 46 rushing yards as the FCS fourth-ranked Paladins topped the Bulldogs, 27-21, in Southern Conference action on Saturday afternoon at Pete Hanna Stadium in Birmingham, Ala.

The win marks the 10th straight league triumph for Furman (5-1, 3-0 SoCon) — its longest conference streak since reeling off a school record 13 consecutive victories throughout the 1988, '89, and '90 seasons. The Paladins' nine sacks tied for the second most in program history, first registered against Lehigh in a 2001 FCS playoff win.

The Paladins, led by Ridgeview High quarterback Tyler Huff, a second-year graduate student player, outscored Samford (3-4, 2-3 SoCon) 17-0 in the second quarter to take a 17-7 lead into halftime following a leaping one-handed, 1-yard touchdown grab by wide receiver Ben Ferguson with three seconds left of the first half clock.



Former Fleming Island High defensive tackle Jeremiah Jackson is a strong inside presence for Paladins; now 5-1. Former Ridgeview High quarterback Tyler Huff is answering the call for a second straight season as the leader of the high-octane Furman offense.

Huff threw for 205 yards and two touchdowns while rushing for 79 yards on 17 carries. Dominic Roberto rushed for a season-high 128 yards and a score on 18

carries as the Paladins' offense outgained Samford 416-337.

Also on the Paladin's defense, Fleming Island High linebacker Alex Maier had four



tackles. Furman travels to Cullowhee, N.C., next Saturday, October 21, to face Western Carolina at E.J. Whitmire Stadium. Kickoff is slated for 2:30 p.m. on ESPN+.

Knights out big-played by top-ranked Buchholz

By Mike Zima
Correspondent

OAKLEAF - A first-quarter field goal by Oakleaf High football kicker Andrew McDavid was all Oakleaf could muster as the Knights fell to top-ranked Buchholz 38-3 in a District 3-4S matchup on October 13.

"You can't start slow," said Oakleaf head coach Christopher Foy, Jr. "My concern is how we respond. We let them impose their will on us early, and we did not respond tonight."

For the second week in a row, Oakleaf (2-4 overall, 1-2 in District 3-4S) came out flat against a highly ranked opponent. Bradford ranked third in Class 2S, scored its only two touchdowns of the game on their first two possessions in the Tornadoes' 12-0 victory over the Knights on October 6. Buchholz (7-0, 2-0) also hit paydirt on its first two drives, shooting out to a 14-0 lead less than halfway through the first quarter on two scoring passes from Trace Johnson to Justin Williams. Johnson and Williams, both sophomores, hooked up for all three touchdowns scored by the Buchholz offense.

Johnson is the son of Buchholz alum and former Florida Gator quarterback Doug Johnson, and he directs the Bobcats aerial attack with surgical precision. The 6'1", 179-pounder completed 14 passes in the first half for 167 yards. The Bobcats hardly bothered with their running game, calling only three running plays while throwing the ball 22 times in the first half. The Knights simply could not cover Williams, who led all receivers with six catches for 96 yards.

Once the Bobcats seized their two-touchdown lead, the outcome was never really in doubt. Oakleaf did have a few chances to get back in it but were thwarted each time. Safety James Kitchen pro-



Oakleaf High defensive back Michael Connor makes touchdown saving tackle against Buchholz.

vided a spark when he recovered a fumble caused when Knights defensive tackles Justin Marsh-Mensie and Amare Thomas sandwiched Buchholz running back Quinton Cutler at the Bobcats 46-yard line. Two plays later, Oakleaf quarterback Brandon Wallace found split-end Bryson Keitt up the right sideline for 30 yards. The drive bogged down from there, but McDavid was true on a 37-yard field goal attempt that cut the Knights' deficit to 14-3.

It appeared that Oakleaf forced a second consecutive stop when Bobcats kicker Jay Giunta was wide left on a 47-yard field goal attempt on the ensuing possession. But the Knights were called for a running into the kicker penalty. Giunta, who kicked three field goals on the night, took advantage of the additional five yards, nailing a 42-yarder to restore a two-touchdown



CORRESPONDENT PHOTOS BY DON LONG

Oakleaf High running back Chris Foy II breaks for 40 40-yard scamper that got to the end zone but returned to the field for a penalty flag.

advantage. Oakleaf was on the verge of having its Homecoming crowd back in the game in the second quarter when running back Christopher Foy, II, the head coach's son, broke through a hole in the middle and split the safeties on his way to an apparent touchdown run from 40 yards out that would have drawn the hosts within one score.

But the play was nullified by a penalty for a chop block, and the Knights elected to punt from the Buchholz 42-yard line two plays later with 1:20 remaining until half-time. Johnson directed a two-minute drill that ended with a 38-yard field goal by Giunta as the first-half clock expired, giving Buchholz a 20-3 lead.

Any hope of a second-half comeback was dashed in the first 12 seconds of the third quarter. That is how long it took Buchholz up back R.J. Livingston to cover 80 yards, taking the second-half kickoff and jutting straight upfield, evading a tackler and outrunning McDavid to the sideline for a momentum-seizing score that, after Giunta's PAT, gave the visitors a 27-3 lead.

Johnson and Williams finished off the scoring with a 34-yard bomb with 3:37 remaining in the third quarter. Williams ran a go route and was able to haul in a perfect rainbow from Johnson despite tight coverage by Oakleaf's Michael Conner, III. Cutler ran up the middle for a two-point conversion to provide the final margin.

The Knights could not cover Johnson, who scored from 27 yards out on a skinny post and from 28 yards out on another fly pattern in the first quarter. The Bobcats milked the clock in the second half, throwing only three passes and running the ball nine times.

Oakleaf's game plan was to run the ball with Foye, II and with Jordin Price, who frequently lines up at wide receiver. Neither had any success, with Price netting only eight yards on nine carries and Foy gaining only seven yards on his first seven attempts. On four of their five first-half possessions, the Knights ran two running plays for minimal yardage and then threw on third down.

"We outnumbered them in the box," explained the elder Foy. "With them having just five in the box, we have five linemen,

a quarterback and a running back who can block if the quarterback runs the ball, so those numbers are in your favor to run the ball."

With senior linebacker and Florida commit Myles Graham leading the charge along with 6'3" defensive tackles Nick Clayton and Elijah Daniels, who each had two tackles for loss, the Buchholz five defied the numbers. Aside from a 50-yard burst from Foy late in the fourth quarter, Oakleaf ran for only 35 yards on 27 rushes. Graham, a four-star recruit, is the son of former Florida Gator and Tampa Bay Buccaneer running back Ernest Graham.

Foy's scamper gave Oakleaf a first and goal to go from the 10-yard line, but the Knights Da'Jon Brown was stopped for no gain from the two with 1:36 remaining.

Foy was somber after the loss.

"It's very disappointing," he said. "We had a good week of practice, and the coaches had an excellent game plan. But hey, you got to do it."

A season that started with such promise now teeters on disappointment. After staking a claim to being Clay County's best team with season-opening victories over Orange Park and Fleming Island, four straight losses may have damaged the Knights' psyche, particularly on offense. Oakleaf, which averaged 28.5 points per game through their first four games, has not scored a touchdown since September 29.

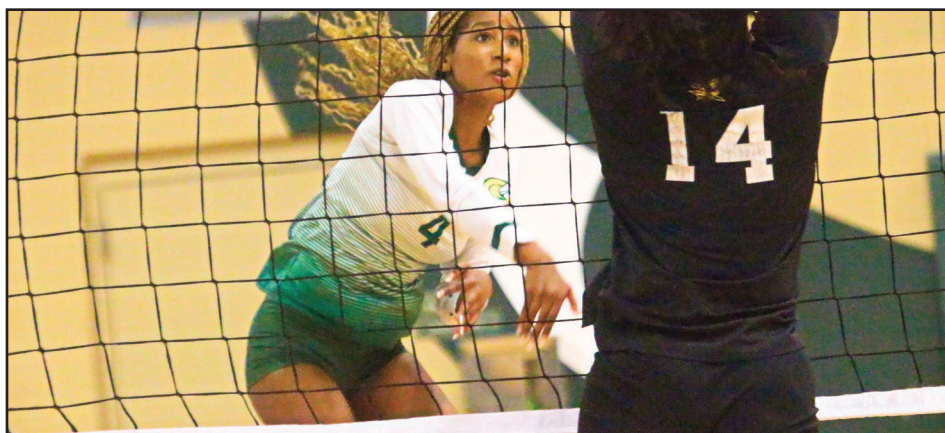
The schedule does not get much easier. Oakleaf's final three games of the regular season are on the road, beginning with a trip to Madison County on October 20. The Cowboys brandish a record of 4-1 and are ranked third in Class 1R. On October 27, the Knights play at Bartram Trail, which is ranked fifth in Class 4S and, like Buchholz, is 2-0 in District 3-4S.

"This type of schedule tests your fortitude," said Foy. "Somewhere in this journey, we have got to step up and stand up to it and find a way to get a victory."

Buchholz, now 7-0, hosts Bartram Trail on Thursday, October 19, in a game that will likely decide the winner of District 3-4S. The Bobcats will return to Clay County on October 27 for their final district game against Fleming Island.



Oakleaf High linebackers Neal Whyte, left, and Dajun Brown corral Buchholz ball carrier.



Battle of the fours

Left: Fleming Islands number for Savannah Jackson is high flying hitter as Golden Eagles win first playoff game for first-year Coach Amy Schermerhorn with 3-0 win over Oakleaf. Right: Ridgeview High server Payton Cannon gets ball in play under the eyes of the Panther in Panthers 3-0 win over Daytona Beach Mainland in region quarterfinals.



Volleyball District Tournament Results

Mon., Oct. 16
District 4-5A

- 1. Middleburg BYE2. Ridgeview over 7. Daytona Beach Mainland 25-4, 25-8, 25-12
- 3. Menendez over 6. Clay 25-19, 22-25, 25-22, 25-21
- 4. Seabreeze over 5. St. Augustine 25-20, 25-7, 25-20

Semifinals at Menendez Tues., Oct. 17: (Middleburg vs. Seabreeze) (Ridgeview vs. Menendez)
Final: Thurs., Oct. 19 at Menendez 7 p.m.

District 3-6A

- 1. Ponte Vedra BYE
- 2. Fletcher over 7. First Coast 25-9, 25-9, 25-9
- 3. Fleming Island over 6. Oakleaf

Semifinals at Ponte Vedra HS, Tues., Oct. 17: (Ponte Vedra vs. Nease), (Fletcher vs. Fleming Island)

Final: Thurs., Oct. 19 at 7 p.m. at Ponte Vedra

District 2-2A

- 1. Christ's Church Academy BYE, 2. St. Johns Country Day School BYE, 3. University Christian BYE

- 4. Eagle's View over 5. First Coast Christian 25-11, 27-29, 26-24, 26-24

Semifinals: Tues., Oct. 17 at Christ's Church (Christ's Church vs. 4. Eagle's View) (St. Johns Country Day School vs. University Christian)

Final: Thurs., Oct. 19, 6 p.m.

District 4-4A

- 1. Bishop Kenny BYE, 4. Keystone Heights BYE, 2. Bolles BYE, 3. Wolfson BYE

Semifinals: Tues., Oct. 17 at higher seed (Keystone Heights at Bishop Kenny), (Wolfson at Bolles)

Final: Thurs., Oct. 19, 7 p.m. at higher seed



Fleming Island blocker Ava Zayakoski stretches to deter kill shot from Oakleaf's DeMyah Jackson in Golden Eagles 3-0 win in district 3 - 6A quarterfinal. To former Fleming Island coaching alums; head coach Jamie Reed, left, and her assistant coach Sara Dandridge now man the bench at Oakleaf High School.



RHS Rodriguez, MHS McWatters leading FSCJ Cross Country

From FSCJ coach Joseph Hales

JACKSONVILLE - As usual Clay County Athletes are an integral part of the FSCJ XC programs.

Freshmen athletes Julio Rodriguez (Ridgeview High) and Logan Moore (Middleburg High) have taken turns leading the team by being the top runner each week of the season.

Rodriguez finished in first place at the Whistling



Kayleigh McWatters

Death 5k in 17:29 with teammates Christian Mayfield (OPHS) second in 17:32 and Logan Moore (MHS) in third at 17:35. Moore was the team's top runner at the Embry Riddle Cross Country Classic with a 30:25.46 split for the 8K (4.97 miles) course and the University of Florida Run Club XC Invitational. Former Orange Park High's Christian Mayfield has seen steady improve-



Logan Moore



Florida State College of Jacksonville cross country runners Lynn Winkler, left, and Julio Rodriguez show off trophies the first place at the Whistling Death 5K in Green Cove Springs. Right: Three Clay County cross country alums, from left, Logan Moore, of Middleburg, Christian Mayfield from Orange Park and Julio Rodriguez from Ridgeview High take command of lead at Whistling Death 5K in Green Cove Springs. Rodriguez won the event.



ment with a PR (personal record) at every meet this year and is a solid bet to make the final eight athletes that will represent the college at the NJCAA Region 8 Cross Country Championships later this month at Apalachee Regional Park in Tallahassee.

Kayleigh McWatters (Middleburg High),

with a 22:43 split at the Embry Riddle Cross Country Classic on September 16, is having another successful year as the team's number two runner and last week moved to 9th place on the FSCJ Top 10 All-Time list with her PR performance at the UF Run Club Invitational.



Middleburg defensive end Luke Wheeler smotheres Columbia quarterback Xavier Collins after sack in fourth quarter.

STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Broncos

from page 25

making them turn the ball over a bunch for us to win. We had our chances.”

Middleburg nearly pulled off the upset with the help of stingy defense in the secondary despite the air assault of Columbia quarterback Xavier Collins, just a freshman, but not afraid to challenge the Bronco deep defense despite being chased throughout the contest by Bronco defensive linemen Tucker Cody, B.J. Carter and Luke Wheeler.

“We know our defense is very good and they showed out,” said Wolfe. “Last year, we had an elite running back (Stater T.J. Lane, now at University of West Florida) and I think that has been the difference this year in our offense.”

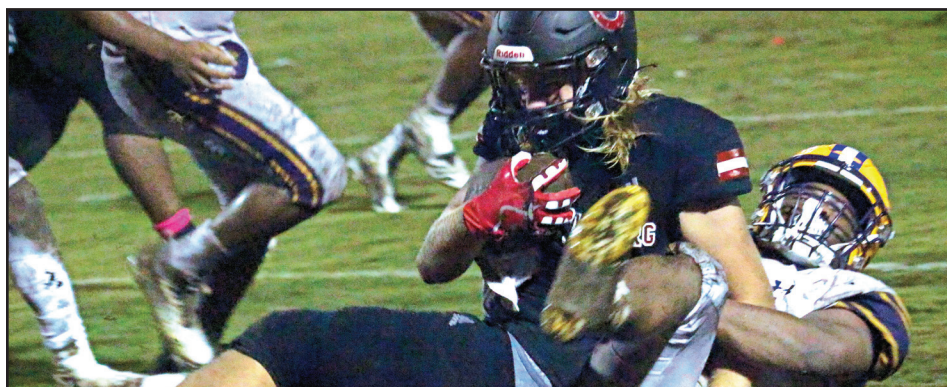
In two exchanges, Middleburg’s secondary; Wain Sulph, Landon Nalepa and Trenton Robinson, without the aid of senior Errick Fryer, who was in street clothes after a one-game suspension on a controversial



Bronco wide receiver Jarren Rozier snagged a 60 yard touchdown pass and run play for the lone score in 17-7 district loss to Columbia.

hit last week against Clay, nearly changed the game with what would have been possible pick-six interceptions both in Columbia’s side of the field.

“We get those two; one goes to the house, and the game is completely different,” said Wolfe. “We picked up two fumbles (Cody and linebacker Austin Cruce), but could not convert. In games like this, two or three turnovers are usually the difference.”



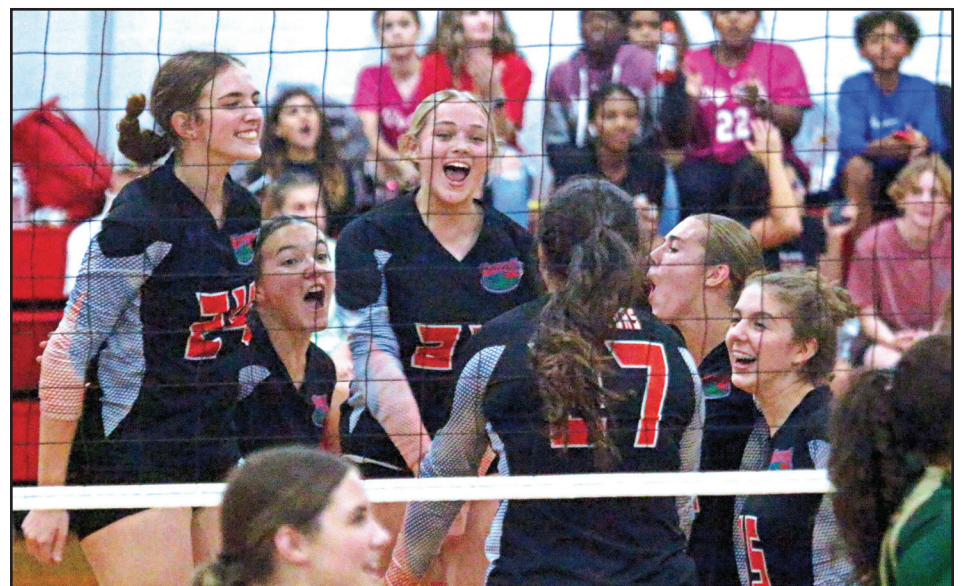
Middleburg High School inductee four new graduates into the Middleburg High School Hall of Fame; from left, Thomas Hatcher, 2002, now a NASCAR pit crew technician; Tara Green, 1987, now the Clay County Clerk of Court; civil rights activist Maude Burroughs Jackson, an honorary alumnus, and, Richard Owens, 1999, an NFL veteran and now a college coach.



Middleburg High coaches; Alan Burnsed, Benjamin Traywick and head coach Ryan Wolfe throw a bevy of hand signals to the Bronco defense.



Above left: Bronco running back Mason Zwilling powers through tackle of Columbia defender. Bottom left; Bronco defenders Hasani Scott and Trenton Robinson dislodge pass attempt to Columbia wide receiver. Above: One of bravest athletes on the field was Middleburg High wrestler Memphis Moses who ventured on to the mucky turf in bright pink pants and finished the game with not a spot of mud on her.



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World

from page 25

With Keester a step behind Myers and staying within reach of the top contenders, Koon eventually won with a 14 minute, 46 second state title level finish. It was Buchholz senior Riley Smith who caught up with the pair and finished second to Koon in 15:10 with Ryan third seven seconds later.

"I tried to stay close to the front guys, but had some troubles about midway," said Myers, a top five prospect in Class 3A after last year's third place finish to Koon and Belen Jesuit's Joshua Ruiz who was not at the New World race. "John has been running great and went by me near the two mile mark. He had a great race."

In the final surge, Keester blasted through to the finish for a 15:45 finish in ninth place with Myers falling to 16th in 15:53.

"Just next man up," said Keester. "We still keep our points with me coming in just ahead of Graham so him having a bad race doesn't hurt us. His bad day is still pretty good."

Without their third man, 800 meter specialist Roman Mollicone, Allen was relegating to seeing who would take over the third finisher spot.

With the top 25, then top 30 individuals in, Allen got a 39th place finish from sophomore Andrew Boyer, also a track standout, who clocked in at 16:28 and junior Cole Atzert in at 71st in 16:53. Senior Joshua White was 80th as fifth finisher in 16:57 as the Golden Eagles got five runners under the critical 17 minute mark.

Allen has had former Fleming Island High boys cross country coach Jason Poole at this side with football taking last year's coach Chris Otero.

Poole was able to get Fleming Island's first state teams during his earlier tenure and knows the ropes.

In the final team scores, Nease was winner with 75 points followed by Buchholz (121) and Ponte Vedra (166) with Fleming Island sixth at 187 in the tight scoring in the top 10.

Last year, Nease was 4A champion, Buchholz was seventh in 4A, Ponte Vedra was 10th in 3A with Chiles (11th in 4A) and Creekside, 4A state champions, finishing in the top five ahead of Fleming Island.

In the girls elite race at the New World Fall Classic, Fleming Island senior Allie Knotts has returned to her championship form of two years ago when her fifth place team finish at regions was instrumental in a state bid for the Golden Eagles.

With that, Knotts battled the state's best to a 17th place finish in a fast 19:22 split with sophomore teammate Brooke Reynolds just nine seconds behind in 20th as the two team leaders put the girls team in the top 10.

"My season is going well and I want to finish with a strong senior season," said Knotts, who was third finisher in 56th in 20:14.80 behind senior Katelyn Thompson and junior Reece Scott in 48th in last year's 3A race. "Brooke (65th in 3A last year as freshman in 20:21) and I run together

District lineups

Class 4A, Region 1, District 1

Oakleaf; also Buchholz (Girls 4A champs 2022, Boys 7th), Creekside (Boys 4A champs 2022, Girls 4th in 4A), Chiles (Boys 11th 4A 2022), Nease (Boys 9th 4A, Girls 18th 4A 2022)

Districts Sat., Nov. 4 at Santa Fe College, hosted by Buchholz (9 a.m. girls start, boys 9:30 a.m.)

Class 3A, Region 1, District 2

Fleming Island (Boys 3rd in 3A 2022, Girls 8th), Clay, Orange Park, Ridgeview, Middleburg; also Ponte Vedra (Boys 10th in 3A, Girls 3rd 2022), Matanzas (Boys 31st), St. Augustine (Girls 6th in 3A)

Districts Sat., Nov. 4 at Ponte Vedra High School (8:30 a.m. girls start, boys 9 a.m.)

Class 2A, Region 1, District 2

Keystone Heights; also Episcopal (Boys 24th 2022, Girls 2nd), Bishop Kenny (Boys 3rd 2022, Girls 4th), Bolles (Boys 1A champs, Girls 1A champs 2022), Fernandina Beach (Girls 27th)

Districts

Class 1A, Region 1, District 2

St. Johns Country Day School (Girls 27th 2022); also Bishop Snyder, Maclay (Girls 4th 2022, Boys 16th), Providence (Girls 8th 2022, Boys 7th), St. Joseph Academy

a lot in races and it's a good start for the team points." Up front, the battled between sophomore sensations Alyson Johnson of Creekside; 6th in 4A last year in 19:00) and Caroline Couch of Maclay (19th in 1A last year) was evident right from the start with both blitzing the field to break fast and hard with the pair shoulder to shoulder at the halfway point.

In the second half of the race, Johnson pulled away for a 17:57 win with Couch second at 18:09. Mackenzie Roy of Spruce Creek was third in 18:22 in the gapped field.

Also in the elite girls race, individual performances came from Oakleaf junior Morgan Wade with another strong finish in at 54th in 20:21 with Keystone Heights freshman finished in 87th in 21:03 just ahead of Fleming Island's Reece Scott. As a freshman, Griffin, just 70th in her region 2-2A race last year in 22:52.90, has improved immensely as her season has progressed.

Also at the New World Fall Classic event, in the Open boys and girls race, area runner with standout performances included Oakleaf sophomore Grant Keppel in fifth at 17:22 with freshman teammate Jack Strombeck 11th in 17:32. With those two top performances, Oakleaf won the boys team title with 119 points over Matanzas at 162. Keystone Heights was eighth with St. Johns Country Day School ninth.

For Keystone Heights, freshman James Thomas was 14th in 17:50 just ahead of Clay's Noah Looney in 16th at 17:56 and St. Johns Country Day School's Richard Nichols in 17th at 18:00.

For the girls Open race, St. Johns junior Rebecca Stratton, with big brother state champion Matthew Stratton, now XC at University of Florida, cheering her on the course, had top area finish in fifth at 21:34. St. Johns also got a strong finish from senior Sarah Robinson with a 30th place finish in 22:55 to secure third team spot for the Lady Spartans behind New Smyrna Beach and Stanton Prep.

CLAY COUNTY LEGAL NOTICES

NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR TAX DEED

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN: MICHAEL K MAYO, ALPHA REAL ESTATE INVESTORS LLC, the holder of the following certificate has filed said certificate for a tax deed to be issued thereon. The certificate number and year of issuance, the description of the property, and the names in which it was assessed are as follows: Certificate No.: 772/2016 Legal Description: LOT 11 BLK 62 HIGHRIDGE ESTATE AS REC O R 3155 PG 856 Parcel ID No.: 210823-003502-000-00 Opening Bid Amount: \$1,768.96 Physical Address: 7244 FURMAN ST, KEYSTONE HEIGHTS Classification: VACANT RESIDENTIAL Name in which assessed: DENTON II LLC Said property being in the County of Clay, State of Florida. Unless said certificate shall be redeemed according to law, the property described in such certificate shall be sold to the highest bidder online on the 29th day of November, 2023 at 9:30 A.M. at www.clay.realtaxdeed.com. Dated this 25th day of September, 2023 TARA S. GREEN Clay County Clerk & Comptroller Clay County, Florida By: Christina Spadea Deputy Clerk Legal 86311 Published 9/28/2023, 10/5/2023, 10/12/2023 and 10/19/2023 in Clay County's Clay Today newspaper

NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR TAX DEED

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN: LORI DENES, LD 401 K PLAN & TRUST, the holder of the following certificate has filed said certificate for a tax deed to be issued thereon. The certificate number and year of issuance, the description of the property, and the names in which it was assessed are as follows: Certificate No.: 2238/2016 Legal Description: LOTS 3-5 & PT NE 1/4 HALL LAKE U 1 O R 2983 PG 767 Parcel ID No.: 180824-007237-000-00 Opening Bid Amount: \$6,006.95 Physical Address: HALL LAKE, KEYSTONE HEIGHTS Classification: VACANT RESIDENTIAL W/SPECIAL FEATURES OR YARD ITEM Name in which assessed: MIKKI ASHLEY & SCOTT ENGEL Said property being in the County of Clay, State of Florida.

Unless said certificate shall be redeemed according to law, the property described in such certificate shall be sold to the highest bidder online on the 15th day of November, 2023 at 9:30 A.M. at www.clay.realtaxdeed.com. Dated this 25th day of September, 2023 TARA S. GREEN Clay County Clerk & Comptroller Clay County, Florida By: Christina Spadea Deputy Clerk Legal 86311 Published 9/28/2023, 10/5/2023, 10/12/2023 and 10/19/2023 in Clay County's Clay Today newspaper

SUMMONS AND NOTICE OF ACTION BY PUBLICATION

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE FOURTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, IN AND FOR CLAY COUNTY FLORIDA CASE NUMBER: 10-2023-DP-46 DIVISION: E IN THE INTEREST OF: M.M. M.M. M.M. MINOR CHILDREN THE STATE OF FLORIDA TO: Dyani Blunt, MOTHER YOU ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED that a Petition has been filed in the above-styled Court by the FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES for termination of parental rights and permanent commitment for subsequent adoption of the above-named children, M.M. who was born on August 25, 2010, M.M. who was born on August 25, 2010, and M.M. who was born on January 24, 2012. You are hereby commanded to appear before the Honorable Angela M. Cox, at the Clay County Courthouse, Juvenile Dependency Courtroom, 825 North Orange Avenue, Green Cove Springs, Florida at the hour of 2:00 p.m. o'clock on October 31, 2023, A.D. You must appear at the hearing on the date and time specified. FAILURE TO PERSONALLY APPEAR AT THIS ADVISORY HEARING CONSTITUTES CONSENT TO THE TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS TO THESE CHILDREN. IF YOU FAIL TO APPEAR ON THE DATE AND TIME SPECIFIED YOU MAY LOSE ALL LEGAL RIGHTS TO THE CHILDREN NAMED IN THE PETITION. 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 Court ADA Coordinator at (904) 255-1695 or crtintrp@coj.

net at least 7 days before your scheduled court appearance, or immediately upon receiving this notification if the time before the scheduled court appearance is less than 7 days; if you are hearing or voice impaired, call 711. WITNESS my hand as clerk of said Court and the Seal thereof, this 19th day of September, 2023. Tara S. Green as Clerk of Said Court By: Denise Haselwood As Deputy Clerk Legal 85789 Published 9/28/2023, 10/5/2023, 10/12/2023 and 10/19/2023 in Clay County's Clay Today newspaper

NOTICE OF ACTION FOR TERMINATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS AND RELATIVE ADOPTION

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE 4TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, IN AND FOR CLAY COUNTY, FLORIDA CASE# 2023 DR 1275 Division F IN RE: THE ADOPTION OF: Bennett TO: Leanne D. Barrett Quality Inn Hotel, 2006 Colby Taylor Dr. Richmond, KY 40475 YOU ARE NOTIFIED that a joint Petition for Adoption by Stepparent has been filed against you and that you are required to serve a copy of your written defenses, if any, to it on Mary Bennett whose address is 5823 Hillridge Rd, Keystone Heights, FL 32656, on or before October 30, 2023, and file the original with the clerk of this Court at 825 North Orange Ave, Green Cove Springs, FL 32043, before service on Petitioner or immediately thereafter. If you fail to do so, a default may be entered against you for the relief demanded in the petition. The minor child(ren) are identified as follows: Date of Birth Place of Birth 9/10/2011 Fayette County, KY 5/1/2018 Harlan County, KY Physical Description of Respondent: Age: 36 Race: W Hair Color: Sandy Eye Color: Blue Approximate Height: 5' 4" Approximate Weight: 135 Copies of all court documents in this case, including orders, are available at the Clerk of the Circuit Court's office. You may review these documents upon request. You must keep the Clerk of the Circuit Court's office notified of your current address. (You may file Designation of

Current mailing and E-Mail Address, Florida Supreme Court Approved Family Law Form 12.915.) Future papers in this lawsuit will be mailed or e-mailed to the addresses on record at the clerk's office. Dated: September 18, 2023 CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT By: Rebecca Crews Deputy Clerk Legal 85456 Published 9/28/2023, 10/5/2023, 10/12/2023 and 10/19/2023 in Clay County's Clay Today newspaper

AMENDED NOTICE OF SALE

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE 4TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, IN AND FOR CLAY COUNTY, FLORIDA CASE NO.: 2022-CA-908 DIVISION JACK JUSTINO a/k/a JOSEPH JACKSON JUSTINO and WANDA JUSTINO Plaintiffs, vs.: DEANN TURNER, PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ESTATE OF SHARRON L. MOORE, DECEASED, UNKNOWN HEIRS, DEVISEES, GRANTEES, ASSIGNEES, CREDITORS, TRUSTEES OR OTHER CLAIMANTS CLAIMING BY AND THROUGH SHARRON L. MOORE, DEANN TURNER, DALE L. TOWNS, CRYSTAL JOHNS, and SARA JOHNS Defendants. NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that pursuant to a Final Judgment in Foreclosure entered on September 28, 2023, and entered in Case No. 2022-CA-908 in the Circuit Court of the 4th Judicial Circuit in and for Clay County, Florida, wherein DEANN TURNER, PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE ESTATE OF SHARRON L. MOORE, DECEASED, UNKNOWN HEIRS, DEVISEES, GRANTEES, ASSIGNEES, CREDITORS, TRUSTEES OR OTHER CLAIMANTS CLAIMING BY AND THROUGH SHARRON L. MOORE, DEANN TURNER, DALE L. TOWNS, CRYSTAL JOHNS, and SARA JOHNS are the Defendants. The Clerk of the Court, Tara S. Green, will sell to the highest bidder for case at www.clay.realestate.com on November 1, 2023, at 10:00 AM, following described real property as set forth in said Final Judgment, to wit: A PORTION OF GOVERNMENT LOT 2 SECTION 12, TOWNSHIP 5 SOUTH, RANGE 24 EAST, CLAY COUNTY, FLORIDA, BEING MORE PARTICULAR-

LY DESCRIBED AS FOLLOWS: COMMENCE AT THE SOUTHWEST CORNER OF SAID SECTION 12; THENCE RUN NORTH 00 DEGREES 23 MINUTES 00 SECONDS WEST, 40.0 FEET; THENCE NORTH 89 DEGREES 48 MINUTES 00 SECONDS EAST, 618.3 FEET; THENCE NORTH 57 DEGREES 29 MINUTES 52 SECONDS EAST, 10138 FEET TO THE NORTHWEST-ERLY LINE OF SECTION STREET; THENCE ON LAST SAID LINE RUN NORTH 61 DEGREES 46 MINUTES 07 SECONDS EAST, 224.41 FEET TO THE POINT OF BEGINNING; THENCE NORTH 28 DEGREES 31 MINUTES 53 SECONDS WEST, 150.0 FEET; THENCE NORTH 61 DEGREES 46 MINUTES 07 SECONDS EAST, 112.98 FEET TO THE SOUTHWESTERLY LINE OF HARVARD STREET; THENCE ON LAST SAID LINE RUN SOUTH 27 DEGREES 55 MINUTES 53 SECONDS EAST, 150 FEET TO THE SAID LINE RUN SOUTH 61 DEGREES 46 MINUTES 07 SECONDS WEST 111.41 FEET TO THE POINT OF BEGINNING TOGETHER WITH THAT CERTAIN DOUBLE WIDE MOBILE HOME, MORE PARTICULARLY DESCRIBED AS, MAKE PEAC, IDENTIFICATION NUMBER(S) 4260A AND 7260B, TITLE NUMBER(S) 11071049 AND 11071048, PERMANENTLY AFFIXED THEREON. LESS AND EXCEPT ANY PORTION LYING IN THE BOUNDS OF SECTION STREET. TOGETHER WITH THAT CERTAIN 1974 PEAC DOUBLE WIDE MOBILE HOME #7260A AND #7260B. and commonly known as 3890 SECTION STREET, MIDDLEBURG, CLAY COUNTY, FL 32068 ANY PERSON CLAIMING AN INTEREST IN THE SURPLUS FROM THE SALE, IF ANY, OTHER THAN THE PROPERTY OWNER AS OF THE DATE OF THIS LIS PENDENS MUST FILE A CLAIM WITHIN 60 DAYS AFTER THE SALE. PUBLISHING: Clay Today WITNESS my hand and the seal of the court on October 16, 2023. TARA S. GREEN As Clerk of the Circuit Court Clay County, Florida Chelsey Mason DEPUTY CLERK IMPORTANT "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 (904) 255-1695 OR CRTINTRP@COJ.NET AT LEAST 7 DAYS BEFORE YOUR SCHEDULED COURT APPEARANCE, OR IMMEDI-

ATELY 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." Legal 88823 Published 10/19/2023 and 10/26/2023 in Clay County's Clay Today newspaper.

PUBLIC AUCTION

Extra Space Storage will hold a public auction to sell personal property described below belonging to those individuals listed below at the location indicated: 600 Blanding Blvd. Orange Park FL, 32073 October 31st, 2023 at 10:00 am Sonja Chapman Household goods Ethan Monsees Household goods Steve Self Household goods Andra Jones Household goods Christopher Wright Household goods Sara Francois Household goods Ulysses Tobler Jr Household goods Michelle Shipman Clothing Whitney Yeager Household goods Mary Lawson Household goods Roy Stevens Household goods Stephanie Byrer Household goods Gina Caramadre Household goods Wade Francis Household goods Devonta Hall Household goods Jaleesa Lasco Household goods James O'Neil Household goods Jeremiah Browder Office Furniture Herbert Mullaly Household goods Michella Seda Household goods Linie Sainilien Household goods Heather Ahmed Household goods Nina Primaldi Household goods Meggan Lee Household goods Samantha Polk Household goods Cortina Herbert-Nelson Household goods Mitzi Perry Household goods The auction will be listed and advertised on www.storagetreasures.com Purchases must be made with cash only and paid at the above referenced facility in order to complete the transaction. Extra Space Storage may refuse any bid and may rescind any purchase up until the winning bidder take possession of the personal property. Legal 86773 Published 10/12/2023 and 10/19/2023 in Clay County's Clay Today newspaper

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moeckerauctions.com/2023/10/10/colorful-products-corporation-de-inc/ (No onsite attendance) AB-1098 AU-3219, Eric Rubin

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