

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS HERALD

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VOL. 10 NO. 5 THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2024



STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

Keystone Heights Elementary teacher Allison Sanders uses a lot of demonstrative gestures to attract – and keep – the attention of her EBD students.

Rookie of the year

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – Allison Sanders never hesitated when asked about the significance of being selected as the Rookie Teacher of the Year during the Apple Awards presented by the Clay Education Foundation.

“My sixth graders are great,” she said. That affinity is why principal Elizabeth Turbeville nominated her.

“She has very strong relationships with students, and she has helped each of them make tremendous progress,” Turbeville said. “Her data is outstanding. She’s just an all-around amazing teacher and individual.”

She teaches math and science to students from third through sixth grade.

Sanders was honored with the Teacher and School-Related Employee of the Year during the Apple Award ceremonies on Feb. 8 at the Thrasher-Horne Center. This is the first time the foundation has offered the rookie category.

She was picked ahead of two other final-

The
Apple
Awards

PRESENTED BY THE CLAY EDUCATION
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ists before the awards.

Sanders is a self-contained teacher for students with emotional behavioral disorders. She has a demonstrative style to capture her students’ attention and keep them engaged.

SEE APPLE, 3

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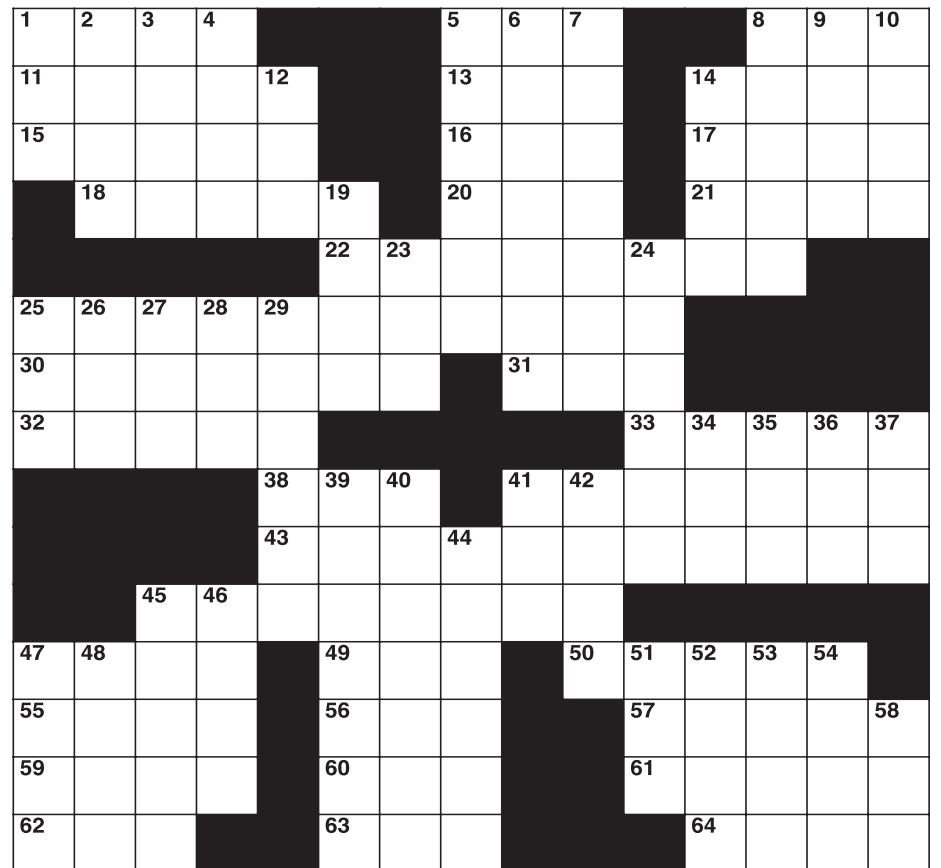


PUZZLE FUN

Get Scrambled

Unscramble the words to determine the phrase.
nelphearcu

Answer: Leprechaun



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Golf scores
- 5. Shock therapy
- 8. Ballplayer's tool
- 11. Quench one's thirst
- 13. Female relatives of American war vets (abbr.)
- 14. Every one of two or more things
- 15. Member of Muslim people
- 16. Play
- 17. Type of cheese
- 18. Type of lounge chair
- 20. ___ King Cole, musician
- 21. Fellows
- 22. North, Central and South
- 25. In an early way
- 30. Foes
- 31. Georgia rockers
- 32. Cryptocurrency
- 33. Narrow path along a slope
- 38. Disallow
- 41. Joyousness
- 43. Inaccessible
- 45. Evoke emotions
- 47. Ancient kingdom near Dead Sea
- 49. Boston Celtic punk rockers (abbr.)

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Pacific Standard Time
- 2. Protruding ridge on nematodes
- 3. Indian king
- 4. Type of milk
- 5. One who brings home the bacon
- 6. More comprehensible
- 7. Connected with sense of touch
- 8. Red mineral
- 9. Breezed through
- 10. Therefore
- 12. Supplement with difficulty
- 14. Early kingdom of Syria
- 19. Satisfy

- 23. They confuse doctors (abbr.)
- 24. Brass instrument
- 25. Domesticated animal
- 26. Ribonucleic acid
- 27. Snake-like fish
- 28. Woman (French)
- 29. Economically-minded aircraft
- 34. When you hope to get somewhere
- 35. Tease
- 36. Actress Gretchen
- 37. Midway between northeast and east
- 39. Inoffensive
- 40. Yellowish cotton cloth
- 41. Consume
- 42. Does not tell the truth
- 44. Improved something
- 45. Spiritual leader
- 46. Abba __, Israeli politician
- 47. Fix
- 48. Evergreen tree genus
- 51. Swiss river
- 52. Prejudice
- 53. Major C. European river
- 54. Long, narrow strap
- 58. Male parent

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Clay Today, 3513 U.S. Hwy 17, Fleming Island, FL U.S.P.S. (063-800) Periodical Postage Paid at Orange Park, Florida

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Apple

from page 1

“Even though the numbers (of students) are low, it takes a good bit to make them want to be there and pull something from it,” Sanders said.

“I nominated her and felt very compelled to do so,” Turbeville said. “Every principal in the district had the opportunity to nominate someone they felt strongly about a strong first- or second-year teacher. I feel like she is among the best at our school, even our veteran teachers.”

She started at Keystone Heights in 2019 as a paralegal. She then became a behavioral health assistant while earning her bachelor’s

degree. She became a teacher 14 months ago.

Turbeville said teachers in their first or second years were eligible for the award.

School and district staff approached Sanders and assistant Pam Saxon at the same time to say they were finalists. Saxon was one of five in the school-related category.

“I feel very honored and humbled that my principal chose me to nominate out of the other people at the school who would have been in that category as well,” Sanders said.

“Becoming a teacher and coming full circle has been pretty amazing. I had a lot of a lot of determination. There was definitely a lot of sticking to it, that’s for sure.”



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OPINIONS & VIEWPOINTS

Greed driven by lack of empathy for consumers

By Don Coble
Managing Editor

Last year's average inflation rate was 4.1%, which, thankfully, isn't as steep as the 8% annual inflation rate that capped off 2022 or the 4.7% rate at the end of 2021. But since then, costs have only climbed, as demonstrated by the consumer price index, a frequently cited measure of buying power.

The CPI measures the price fluctuations of consumer goods and services. According to the CPI, inflation was higher – 4.06% in 2023 and 9.59% in 2022.

Oddly enough, the CPI doesn't typically include food or



Don Coble

energy. I hate to remind the pencil pushers in Washington, D.C., but those numbers significantly impact a family's budget. That's why the only numbers that matter to me are what's on the bottom of the receipt, and that number is infuriating.

Those numbers mean prices are higher, and we have fewer dollars to spend.

I'm sick of companies taking advantage of hard-working people, especially during difficult financial times. The more the dollar shrinks, the more big business works to squeeze every dollar from a family's budget.

Just two years ago, you could get a two-liter bottle of soda at the grocery store for about \$1. Now it's nearly \$4. Nationally, the average cost for a gallon of gasoline is \$3.20. It was \$2.40 at the start of 2021 and as much as \$5.06 in 2022.

According to the House Budget Committee, mortgage interest rates have risen from 2.7% in January 2021 to the current rate of 6.4% – the most rapid rate increase since the end of the Jimmy Carter presiden-

cy and the beginning of Ronald Reagan's term in 1981.

Equally alarming, renting has become more costly than buying. According to Florida Housing Data Clearinghouse, rent increased by 45.77% in the last three years to a monthly average of \$1,591 for a two-bedroom apartment.

People are finally pushing back.

Global supermarket chain Carrefour pulled all PepsiCo products from its shelves of 9,000 stores last week in France, Spain, Italy and Belgium because of "unacceptable price increases."

That means you can't buy Pepsi, Mountain Dew, Rice-A-Roni, Lay's potato chips, 7UP, Lipton Iced Tea, Cheetos or Quaker Oats products after PepsiCo increased its prices by more than 10% in seven consecutive quarters.

Although PepsiCo reported a 14% increase in profits, it defended higher prices because cooking oil now costs more follow-

SEE GREED, 5

Recognizing the signs to prevent teen suicide

By StatePoint Media
For The Herald

Children and teens can be moody, but when signs of mental health troubles last for weeks, don't assume it's just a passing mood.

Suicide is a leading cause of death among U.S. children, teens and young adults ages 10-24, and rates have been on the rise. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that all teens be screened for suicide risk starting at age 12.

While no single cause has been identified, suicide is often preceded by depression that is undiagnosed or untreated. Most youth show some warning signs or behavior changes in advance. Families and their doctors can work together to identify if a child or teen is struggling with depression, anxiety or substance use, all of which increase the risk of suicide.

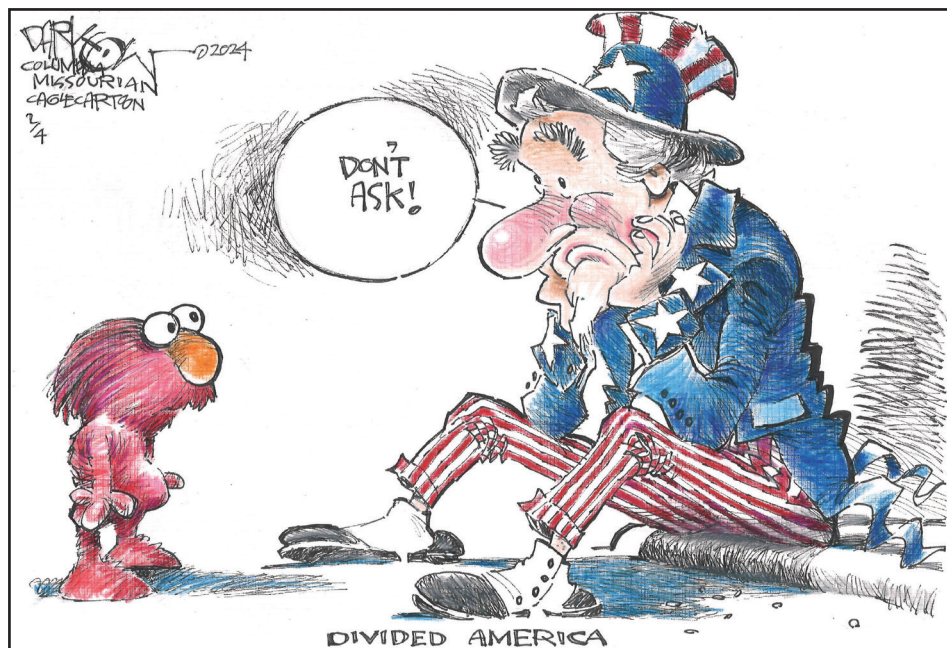
"Suicide is complex but often preventable," said Janet Lee, MD, FAAP. "When a person talks about killing themselves or feeling hopeless or trapped, it should always be taken seriously."

Don't be afraid to ask your child or teen to talk about their mental health or if they're contemplating suicide. Asking directly is the best way to know what your child is thinking. Studies show that it is safe to ask about suicide risk and that asking the question will not put the idea into their head. Note that your child may initially turn away or be silent, but actions may speak louder than words. Watch for major changes in your child's sleep patterns, appetite and social activities. Self-isolation, especially for kids who usually enjoy hanging out with friends or participating in activities, can signal serious difficulties.

"Your goal should be to create a safe space where your child can trust you to listen and express concern without judgment or blame," Dr. Lee said.

If your child says something like "I want to die" or "I don't care anymore," some sug-

SEE SIGNS, 5



Word OF THE MONTH

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.

Vivacious: (vuh-VAY-shus) an adjective meaning someone or something is happy and lively in an appealing way.

"Our vivacious host's bubbly humor and welcoming spirit quickly set everyone at ease."

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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. We look forward to hearing from you!

Opinions ...

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

Greed

from page 4

ing Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Stew Leonard's, a New Jersey, New York and Connecticut supermarket chain, said it wouldn't accept any more big company price increases because their customers were finally pushing back.

A McDonald's in Connecticut sells the Big Mac combo meal – a sandwich, fries and soft drink – for \$17.59. The location wasn't in an airport, either.

I was a customer at the same car insurance company for more than 20 years. I have a good driving record and a 12-year-old car, but I got an \$800-a-year rate increase for my loyalty. The company told me it's because the cost of repairing and replacing cars has increased, so it passed those costs to its customers. I asked why reckless drivers weren't



A McDonald's in Connecticut sells the Big Mac combo meal – a sandwich, fries and soft drink – for \$17.59. The location wasn't in an airport, either.

responsible for the extra costs. I didn't get an answer.

So, I pushed back. I changed companies. I'm contemplating doing the same with cable television.

Those of us with AT&T's U-verse or DirecTV took our local NBA and ABC broadcasts off the air for six weeks. Tenga Inc. owns channels 12 and 25 here, and according to AT&T, it dropped the stations because

Tenga wanted more money.

That meant fans with DirecTV couldn't watch the Jacksonville-Baltimore game on Sunday Night Football because it was on NBC.

Also, local subscribers of DISH Network haven't been able to watch FOX30 since November 2022 because station owner Cox Media Group wanted more money.

Tenga was originally part of Gannett Company. Tenga/Gannett has \$3 billion in revenues. AT&T acquired DirecTV in 2015, and together they have more than \$67 billion in revenues. Cox has annual revenues of \$21 billion, while DISH is worth \$3.08 billion. And customers were caught in the middle of the money grab.

More than 20 years ago, Eartha Kitt famously said, "Greed is so destructive. It destroys everything."

Things have changed since Kitt made that comment. Sadly, one thing may never change – greed.

This Month in History

Five years ago, 2019

- After the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, it was mandated across Florida that every school must have at least one officer present on campus. Clay County District Schools initiated the process of establishing its own police department, which was a move that was initially supported. However, citing poor performance and high costs, CCDS would eventually hand off its police department to the Sheriff's Office in 2023.

- Erik Williams, a sixth grader from St. Johns Country Day School, won his second

Clay County Spelling Bee title in a row after 17 rounds. His winning word was "piazza" – a public square or marketplace in a town, usually Italian.

10 years ago, 2014

- The Board of County Commissioners (BCC) supported a water project that cleaned out Alligator Creek. The ultimate goal was to raise the water levels of the lakes in the Keystone Heights area by finding the "obstructions or impediments to flow." Alligator Creek is a long, winding water source that flows through the Etonia Lake Chain,

including Lake Brooklyn and Lake Geneva.

- Barco-Newton YMCA children's sports coach Jimmy Laverne Holmes of Fleming Island pleaded guilty to federal charges of receiving child pornography over the internet.

20 years ago, 2004

- A weekend party in Middleburg that ended with a stabbing incident led to a second-degree murder charge for Joshua Ingle, who was accused of killing Steven Manninger.

- The BCC voted in favor of a burn ban in response to a dry spell that led to a rash of fires in Middleburg, McRae, Clay Hill and Keystone Heights.

30 years ago, 1994

- Clay High Principal David Owens announced his intention to change the name of the school's mascot from the "Blue Devils," which led to a groundswell of public opposition from the community.

- The BCC voiced support for Sheriff Lancaster's three-pronged plan to curb juvenile crime. Lancaster wanted to establish a juvenile boot camp, a countywide teen curfew and a pre-trial detention facility.

40 years ago, 1984

- The BCC narrowed down the list of potential candidates for county administrator to three. Ultimately, former U.S. Navy officer Larry Myers topped the list, beating out Will McDonald and Charles Rosebrough.

Signs

from page 4

gested responses should be:

- "I'm sorry you are feeling this way—can you share a bit more?"
- "It sounds like you're in tremendous pain, and you can't see a way out."
- "Maybe you're wondering how life got this complicated and difficult?"
- "Right now, you're unsure of the answers to your problems."
- "You must really, really be hurting

inside to consider ending your life."

Common causes of stress that increase the risk of suicide include major life-changing events, including the loss of a loved one to death, divorce, deployment or incarceration. Bullying, discrimination, racism and stigma surrounding mental health or suicide can also increase risks. Children who have witnessed or are suffering violence or domestic abuse, engage in self-harming behavior or experienced a suicide in their school or friend group are also at higher risk of suicide. Research has shown there are protective factors that help reduce the risk

of suicide, including ready access to health care. Maintaining close connections to family, friends, and one's community is also important.

Parents and guardians should limit access to lethal means, such as removing firearms and locking up medications or other potential poisons or weapons in the home. Half of youth suicides occur with firearms – and suicide attempts with firearms are almost always fatal. Teens and adolescents who attempt suicide with a firearm almost always use a gun found in their house, studies find.

"Suicide is often impulsive and a moment of crisis can escalate quickly," Dr. Lee said. "If your child is considering suicide, call or text 988 or chat on 988lifeline.org right away. The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress and prevention and crisis resources."

For more information, visit HealthyChildren.org. As children grow and become more independent, knowing what they are thinking and feeling can be more challenging. However, if you see signs that your child's mental health is under threat, it's important to tune in and take action.

County still leans heavily toward Republican Party

By Jack Randall
jack@claytodayonline.com

CLAY COUNTY – Florida is a closed primary state, meaning you must be registered with the corresponding political party to vote in either the Republican or Democrat primary elections on Aug. 20. You can register for the Republican or Democrat political parties with the Supervisor of Elections. Election Day, the general election open to all eligible citizens, will be held on Nov. 5.

Clay County has leaned heavily toward Republican candidates in elections stretching back since the 1960s, and it's a trend that Clay GOP intends to continue this election cycle.



Clay Dems hold meetings monthly on the fourth Monday at 6:30 p.m. For more or to join, contact claycountyp@gmail.com for information or the meeting Zoom code.



Clay GOP holds meetings on the fourth Monday of each month at the Town Hall of Orange Park at 7:30 p.m. For information or membership, call (904) 272-3400.

According to the Supervisor of Elections Office, there are 82,627 registered Republicans in the county. There are 30,746 voters with no political affiliation and 29,852 Democrats.

Clay GOP is the official branch of the Republican Party in the county. According to its website, Clay GOP believes the strength of our nation lies with the individual and that

each person's dignity, freedom, ability and responsibility must be honored. Free enterprise and encouraging individual initiative have brought this nation opportunity, economic growth and prosperity. And more.

Clay GOP holds meetings on the fourth Monday of each month at the Town Hall of Orange Park at 7:30 p.m. For information or

membership, call (904) 272-3400.

Clay Dems is the official branch of the Democrat Party in the county. According to its website, Florida Democrats believe in effective and efficient government that prioritizes quality education, healthcare for all, environmental and climate justice, an economy that works for all, immigration reform, voting rights and government accountability.

Clay Dems is gearing up for a fundraiser as they prepare to endorse candidates in the upcoming presidential, state and local elections.

They hold meetings monthly on the fourth Monday at 6:30 p.m. For more or to join, contact claycountyp@gmail.com for information or the meeting Zoom code.

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'It's for the good of the city'

Resident hopes to sell land which would improve SR 100 and 21 intersection

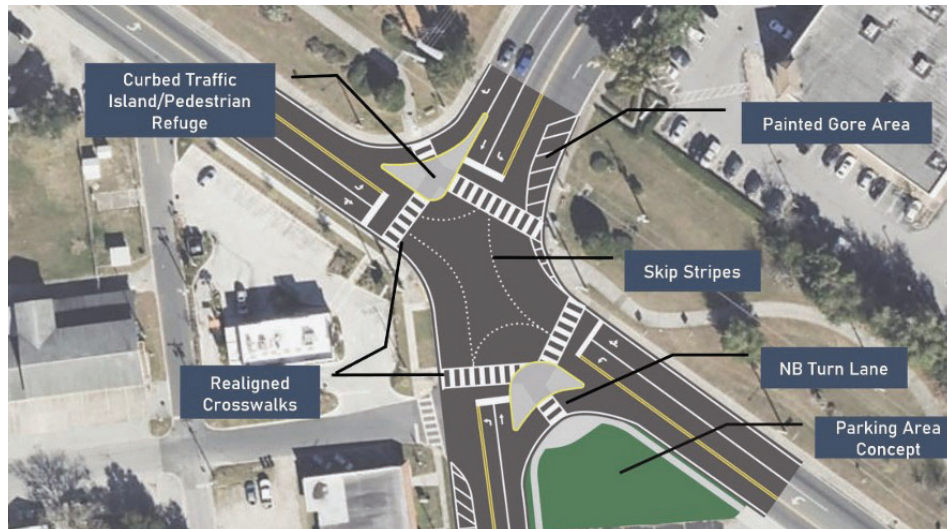
By Jack Randall
jack@claytodayonline.com

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – During the past few months, the City Council has pondered how to address the cumbersome and usually congested intersection of State Roads 100 and 21.

An analysis presented by North Florida TPO during a city council meeting in January offered some recommendations to improve traffic flow through the intersection



The plot where the vacant China Chef restaurant currently sits.



STAFF PHOTOS BY JACK RANDALL

City Manager Charlie Van Zant Jr. was sworn in with his family present. One of his first duties is to finalize the purchase and acquisition of a plot of land at the intersection of State Roads 100 21.

based on guidance from the Florida Department of Transportation.

North Florida TPO proposed a dedicated right-turn lane going northbound on SR 21, where the vacant China Chef restaurant currently sits, improving traffic flow and reducing crashes by 12%.

Currently, the right turn is at a stiff 46-de-

A proposal presented by North Florida TPO for improving the intersection once the city purchases the plot.

gree angle, which causes vehicles to slow down into the turn. The analysis said that slow turning movement leads to a higher probability of rear-end crashes. Residents agreed with that sentiment as they shared their difficult experiences behind the wheel.

The intersection was an area of particular concern for the former City Manager Lynn Rutkowski.

With City Manager Charlie Van Zant Jr.

SEE KEYSTONE, 14

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Agricola: Up-and-coming 'agi-hood' community proposed in Clay

By Jack Randall
jack@claytodayonline.com

CLAY COUNTY – The Agricola family owns 30,000 acres of timberland forests across Florida, but 3,100 acres just south of Green Cove Springs have been set aside for something special.

Christophe Agricola stood underneath a cultivated canopy, looking through rows and rows of planted pine trees, and he envisioned something more. The family sometimes sells timberland to state agencies, investors or existing developers. But not this time.

“We thought we would look into our own property, see what could happen, and (attempt) something that would be better,” Agricola said. The Agricola Property is a proposed planned community that aims to be not merely an ambitious project within county lines but a national model for what modern alternative living could look like – featuring the small-town charm and rural culture of Clay County.

According to one presentation, Agricola would be a walkable, self-contained community developed around a village center featuring mixed-use commercial/residential buildings. Pedestrian trails would integrate economic, residential and agricultural districts – forming not merely a neighborhood, but an “agri-hood.” It would have its own schools, amenities and

commercial and residential buildings.

Instead of paying typical HOA fees for lawn maintenance, residents would

financially support, participate and enjoy community agriculture.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has affected how we perceive the workforce and housing. There’s now a focus toward lifestyle and hybrid work options,” Agricola said. “People want to live in a community and be a part of it.”

The proposed community will benefit because it will be located near the developing First Coast Expressway.

Their financial assessment estimates that Agricola construction could create more than 4,000 jobs, \$7.4 million in ad valorem revenue to Clay County during development and \$236 million in ad valorem during the next 25 years.

While the economic and cultural potential is exciting, Agricola said the environment takes precedence. He says he plans to go above and beyond Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) guidelines by expanding the buffer between development and existing wetlands. FDEP recommends a 30-foot buffer. Agricola is pushing for a 100-foot buffer on average. Agricola views wetlands as a valuable natural resource, not a hindrance.

“We’ve been in Florida, and we’ve seen the growth. Much of the growth has been good for the economy and has helped our family business, too. But there’s been some bad growth as well. We are lucky to live in a state dedicated to conservation. But there is only so much that can be done at the state level,” Agricola said.

Agricola said he understands the impor-



STAFF PHOTOS BY JACK RANDALL

Christophe Agricola stands on the property that he hopes will one day be a bustling, environmentally conscious community that captures the small-town charm and rural culture of Clay County.

tance of environmental conservation. He said his father, Bill Agricola, brokered the deal between the Jennings family and the state of Florida that created Jennings State Forest. That was Agricola’s way of following in his father’s footsteps and leaving his legacy in Clay County.

“Growth is going to happen, but we want to ensure that it is for the better,” he said. “We can put an emphasis on making something that is valuable and sustainable and

respectful of nature – not just going ahead and clear-cutting wetlands and placing cookie-cutter housing on top.”

Agricola wants his community to integrate nurturing homes and natural environments. Houses are to be made affordable and with quality. He said that walkability is vital to fostering a sense of community and experiencing surrounding nature. Agricola

SEE AGRICOLA, 10



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All aboard the Impact Clay Train

Makes inaugural stop at Keystone Heights in county-wide circuit

By Jack Randall
jack@claytodayonline.com

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – The “Impact Clay Train” made its first stop at Keystone Heights Junior/Senior High last Saturday, where mobile care teams provided benefits to the community. The services convoy will stop throughout the county on the third Saturday of each month.

“The goal is to build trust and consistency among the communities we visit,” said Impact Clay CEO Connie Thomas.

Impact Clay Train is a mobile health-care caravan comprised of private, public, nonprofit and faith-based organizations dedicated to making healthcare and social services more accessible to residents who otherwise couldn’t access them. There were many “cars” on the train:

Clay Behavioral Health helped residents



STAFF PHOTOS BY JACK RANDALL

Children of all ages, including County Commissioner Mike Cella, enjoyed free train rides during Saturday’s event. A litany of services was available at the Impact Clay Train’s first stop at Keystone Heights Junior/Senior High on Saturday, including benefit sign-ups by Clay Behavioral Health Center, free haircuts, vision and medical checkups, and food and clothes pantry.



sign up for government benefits like Medicaid and SNAP. The organization was also there to triage mental health and substance abuse to offer resources for those in need.

Celebration Church, Food for Clay County and Waste Not Want Not offered bundles and bounties of food residents could take home. No one went home hungry.

The Emanuel Project was there to continue its mission of providing quality healthcare services to the underserved and vulnerable populations of Northeast Florida. The nonprofit used an RV repurposed as a mobile clinic to offer checkups, physicals and referrals for residents without health insurance or limited health coverage. Seeds of Love and Springs Church had a clothing boutique “car” that offered clothes from infant to all sizes.

Cuts of Grace and Valkyrie Salon offered free haircuts.

Showering God’s Love offered hot showers and privacy for those without access to

running water.

Mercy Support Services offered faith-based counseling and spiritual guidance.

Saved 2 Serve grilled up some sizzling, savory burgers and hotdogs.

Although Impact Clay Train is not a “train” in a literal sense, the organization was sure to offer engineers’ hats, train whistles and a train ride attraction for anyone who wanted fun. Commissioner Mike Cella had a blast riding in the caboose, even if he was a bit dizzy getting off, he said.

Impact Clay Train will be pulling up to Clay Hill Elementary in Clay Hill on Feb. 17. After that, the train will stop at Grove Park Elementary in Orange Park on March. 16. From there, the train will return to Keystone Heights again.

Thomas invited the community to come out to the stops throughout the year. The events are open to the public, and the health-

care professionals are there to answer any questions.

“Anyone who needs community – anyone who wants or needs any help is welcome to come out. We have 75 volunteers who love people and are here to serve you... Don’t hesitate to come out to our other stops, either,” said Thomas.



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Concept drawings from a proposal for the Agricola Property shared with the Board of County Commissioners.

Agricola from page 8

used the term “free range children” to describe the safety of his community – you can be comfortable that children playing outside, running along the trails or using recreational facilities will be safe.

But there’s no such thing as a foolproof plan, especially in real estate development.

“Even with best-laid plans, you never know what can happen. What we did set up apart, so we went the planned community route. We’re tied to a development agreement that we are bound to and which the county can enforce. We’re not making all these promises and then pulling a bait-and-switch. We are committed to this vision,” Agricola said.

The Agricola team first sat down with county staff three years ago. They are still rezoning their property from “agriculture”

to “planned community.” Agricola said they submitted their planned unit development (PUD) to the state and expect to receive feedback next month.

A community workshop is planned for Feb. 27 at 10 a.m. and is open to the public for feedback and suggestions. The final approval is up to the Board of County Commissioners from there.

“We try to be as transparent and open and communicative. We have an open-door policy because it benefits us. Their perspective benefits us. If they have good ideas, we want to incorporate them. We do care. These are our neighbors, and we’ve always tried to be good neighbors,” he said.

The team is eager to get the ball rolling. “It is easier to sell that vision when they can see it – and that takes time,” Agricola said, referring to commercial investors that would set up shop in the community.

“Unlike most developers, we don’t have a ticking clock hanging over our heads. It



would be great to get this as soon as possible, but it depends on the market and reaching out to interested businesses. I don’t have an answer to when we’ll get started – it’ll be

when the time is right,” he said.

“We’re timber farmers. We’ve learned to be patient.”



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Kitchen of Clay County re-opens its doors, hearts for those in need

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

ORANGE PARK – A shopping cart was parked at the back door of the Orange Park Senior Center on Saturday, carrying two opened boxes of cereal, assorted clothes, a blanket, and water bottles. It wasn't much, but for one person eating lunch provided by The Kitchen of Clay County, it was likely the meager accounting of everything he owned.

That didn't matter once he entered the dining room. There were no questions, no judgments and plenty of food from the group that has offered free meals for 15 years.

"I didn't know about this," he said while spooning hot soup with one hand and eating a sandwich with the other. "This means a lot to me."

The kitchen handed out meals in a drive-through at the First Baptist Church of Orange Park since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only was Saturday's undertaking the first at the senior center, but it was also the first time in years residents were allowed to come inside, sit down and be served their meals.

"When COVID hit, we weren't allowed to serve the seniors," said Jennifer Knight. "It's so good to have a place where people can come in and sit down to eat. There's such a need here in Clay County. Last year, we served just short of 19,000 meals between our three kitchens."

Food is also provided in a drive-through at Black Creek Methodist Church in

Middleburg and inside at Sacred Heart Mission Church Branch in Green Cove Springs. Like Orange Park, the hours are 11



Volunteer Ben Woods gave a woman a much-needed hug of encouragement and compassion after she finished her meal.



Dakhari didn't know about The Kitchen until he met a man who offered him a ride earlier on Saturday. Dakhari is grateful for the meal, especially the assortment of desserts.

a.m. to 1 p.m. every Saturday.

The food comes from Waste Not Want Not and through other volunteer drives. Organizations like St. Catherine's Catholic Church volunteer as servers each week.

One woman sat alone, slurping small bites of soup. A church member filled a bag with breakfast sandwiches and treats and left it beside her. She said it's been a while since anyone reached out to help.

"Until lately, I didn't need it," she said, "but things happen."

A series of unfortunate events forced her to live at an extended-stay hotel in another county. Not only did The Kitchen feed her, but they also gave her the attention and empathy she desperately missed.

"My apartment was condemned, and they changed the locks so I couldn't get in," she said. "All of my belongings were in there. Everything I have now is what I had in my car. I love to get out, so it's been real difficult."

Between Social Security and her pension, she only has \$300 left after paying her hotel bill at the end of the month.

"My bills are \$350," she said. "I've maxed out all of my credit cards."

Her ex-husband is helping, she said. He makes her car, insurance and cellphone payments and may try to help with her rent.

And she's grateful for what she has.

"Now that I know about this, I will be back," she said. "This makes a difference."



PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

From left, volunteers Christiane Loring, Alyssa Torres, Jenn, and Camille Knight prepared meals for anyone who needed them last Saturday at the Orange Park Senior Center. After delivering meals in a drive-through at First Baptist Church of Orange Park since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, The Kitchen of Clay County not only found a new home, but it finally could invite residents to sit down and be served.



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Mayor Nina Rodenroth led the proclamation that recognized the centennial of the Keystone Heights Woman's Club. Rodenroth is a new member.



Keystone

from page 7

sworn in, the City Council voted 4-0 to allow the new city manager to begin negotiations to purchase the plot of land where the vacant China Chef restaurant currently sits.

The plot of land is owned by Rashaun Patel, who purchased the land for \$240,000. In a gesture of goodwill, Patel offered to sell the plot of land for the original price and no interest.

"It's no problem for me to sell to the city. I want to make the offer. I don't want interest (payments) from you. It's for the good of the city. I have no problem with how you handle it," Patel said.

Council members Stephen Hart and Tony Brown discussed the offer and how to use the land best when purchased.

"(The property) will probably be best as a turn land for the highway. It's a difficult turn, as testimony from the last meeting. Especially for trucks," said Hart.

"We've kicked the can around... we as a city should jump on the opportunity," said Brown.

"You guys are trying to do good things for the city, and I'm happy to help," Patel said.

A deal will likely be ironed out during the city council workshop on Feb. 28 at 8 a.m. The workshop will also discuss the Smart City Plan, the parks plan and vandalism in city parks.

At the workshop, Mayor Nina Rodenroth plans to share statistics on how much vandalism has financially burdened the city. She hopes to discuss possibly kickstarting a community-led task force to address the issue.

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Baptist Medical Center Clay earns Primary Stroke Center designation

Bringing lifesaving stroke treatment closer to home for Clay County residents

FLEMING ISLAND - Baptist Health's newest hospital, Baptist Medical Center Clay, has earned Primary Stroke Center designation from The Joint Commission and the American Heart Association/American Stroke Association. This specialist certification signifies excellence in the care of stroke patients and demonstrates Baptist Health's commitment to provide timely access to high-quality stroke care. Every 40 seconds, someone in the U.S. has a stroke. It is the leading causes of disability in the country and the fifth leading cause of death. A stroke occurs when blood vessels carrying oxygen and nutrients to the brain become blocked or rupture. Deprived of blood and oxygen, brain cells quickly die. Early stroke detection and prompt treatment are key to saving lives and minimizing or avoiding disabilities. Improving access to high-quality stroke care To receive the certification, Baptist Clay participated in a rigorous application process that involved providing data on stroke admissions, treatment plans and patient outcomes as well as having an on-site evaluation to demonstrate an elevated level of care, including:

- An acute stroke team available 24/7
 - A neurologist accessible 24/7
 - Designated beds for stroke patients
 - The ability to provide IV medications to help reduce the stroke's impact
- "This certification underscores Baptist Health's steadfast commitment to increasing access to top-quality stroke care in Clay County," said the president of Baptist Clay, Ed Hubel, FACHE. "In 2016, Baptist Clay became the first freestanding emergency center in Florida to receive acute stroke-ready hospital certification from The Joint Commission. We are now proud to be able to offer our patients the next level of stroke care."

Acute stroke-ready hospitals provide immediate stroke care and then transfer patients to a hospital for an elevated level of care. As a Primary Stroke Center, patients can now stay at Baptist Clay. Part of a com-

prehensive stroke network This new Primary Stroke Center designation for Baptist Clay comes as Baptist Health celebrates the tenth anniversary of the opening of its state-of-the-art Stroke & Cerebrovascular Center

at Baptist Medical Center Jacksonville. The facility is a certified Comprehensive Stroke Center—a designation shared by just 4% of all hospitals in the U.S.—and a vital component of Baptist Health's renowned stroke

network. Clay County patients can receive lifesaving treatment closer to home while still benefitting from access to this comprehensive stroke network, which serves North-

SEE STROKE, 18



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By Vishi Garig
Clay County Archives Supervisor
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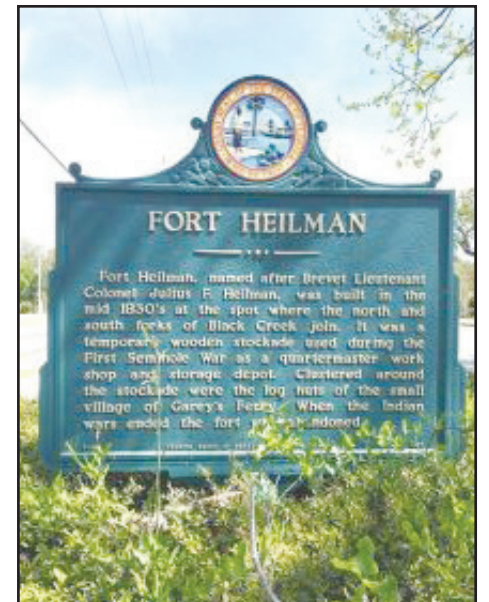
CLAY COUNTY – Brevet Lt. Col. Julius Heileman lay on his cot at Fort Drane near Micanopy. He was sweaty and feverish. The exhaustion he felt was unbearable. He lain sick like this for days, his skin yellow with jaundice and blood seeping from his nose. The camp surgeon could do little for him. The battle at Micanopy took the last of his strength. Through eyes clinched tight with delirium, we can imagine him looking back on his life.

Born in 1787 in Granville, Massachusetts, to a doctor named Johan Frederich Heileman and his wife Olive Robinson, Julius was destined to serve his country. His father was from Claustal, Rendsburg-Eckernforde, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany. His mother, Olive Robinson, was the daughter of an American reverend.

Johan Frederich Heileman came to America and served as a company surgeon in the forces of the English ally, Germany, during the American Revolution. He was a General Riedel's German Brigade member in General Burgoyne's Army. Johan was captured at the battle of Bennington, and somewhere along the way to the prison camp, he either escaped or deserted. He married Olive and had three children with her, Julius being the youngest. Johan made a good life for himself and his family in America, his adopted country.

When Julius was 16, he was accepted to West Point as a cadet. Laying on his cot, he thought about the harsh marching drills, the difficult engineering courses, and the classes on conducting warfare. He chose artillery when he graduated in 1806 as the 12th grad-

A soldier named Julius Heileman



PHOTOS BY LEGENDS OF AMERICA

A marker on State Road 21 in Middleburg stands where Fort Heileman once stood in the 1830s. Notice how the state misspelled Heileman's last name.

uate of West Point.

Commissioned a second lieutenant, he would be a soldier on the battlefield, leading men from in front, not the rear. The Army sent him first to various garrisons around the Atlantic seaboard, and he was able to serve in the War of 1812. As he lay on his thin blankets, he thought about his promotion: First Lieutenant in 1808 and then Captain in 1813. He thought about the cold weather at some of his postings guarding forts like Sacketts Harbor, New York and Ft. Niagara, New York. The cold and the snow were very different from Florida's heat, humidity, and sweltering sun. Even the enemy he was guarding against was so different. Here in Florida, his foe was a tough, unforgiving, and proud people – the Seminoles. They took no prisoners.

Julius rolled over on his side and folded his arms tightly across his chest, groaning. He looked back in pride on May 1823, when the Army recognized his ten years of faithful service and made him a Brevet Major. He was stationed at Ft. Monroe in Virginia, then onto Ft. Moultrie in Charleston – the same fort the Seminole warrior Osceola would be held prisoner and died at in 1838. He thought about how much he had loved his first wife, Henrietta Auchmutz, when he married her in 1814 and how much it hurt when she died in 1823. She had been with

him in Charleston and then gone back home to Boston. She died there of an undetermined illness.

He thought about his second wife, Ann Mason, and of the children. Ann was the daughter of George Mason. Julius thought about the old man who was so important to the young country. At Philadelphia in 1787, Mason was most outspoken at the Constitutional Convention. He exerted great influence, but during the last two weeks of the convention, he decided not to sign the constitution. Two of Mason's greatest concerns were later incorporated into the document. The Bill of Rights addressed one concern, and the 11th Amendment addressed his desire for control of the judiciary.

Who was going to take care of Ann and the children now? Julius was distraught. But, by 1835, Julius was sent to Florida. General Winfield Scott had come through the forks of Black Creek and understood its valuable strategic location. He ordered then-Maj. Heileman to proceed immediately and build a garrison there, an armory, a supply depot. Julius got to work on this huge task.

He remembered how hot it was, how black the water was, how deep and cool it was. The fort was right at Garey's Ferry, a ferry run by Samuel Garey. He remembered the snakes, the fleeting deer, the graceful water birds and the creeping alligators. He

thought about how many of his men seemed to be sick all the time with fevers, dysentery, scurvy, and the occasional drowning.

He thought about his greatest battle on the day he fought the Seminoles near Micanopy. It was June 7, 1836. He felt pride in his chest at the way he raced out front of the cannon and led his men from the front. The president promoted him for his past gallantry and meritorious service just two days before, on June 25. But alas, the sun was setting. Julius' breathing stopped, and he passed onto that great battlefield in the sky, a soldier just fading away.

Fort Heileman, Clay County's Seminole war-era fort that once stood in modern-day Middleburg, is named after its founder and defender, Brevet Lt. Col. Julius Frederich Heileman. Located at the modern-day Main Street boat ramp, the fort was the major supply depot for North Florida during the Second Seminole War. The Indian Removal Act brought on the war and was signed into law by President Andrew Jackson on May 28, 1830.

The law authorized the president to grant lands west of the Mississippi in exchange for Indian lands within existing state borders. A few tribes went peacefully, but many resisted the relocation, especially the Seminoles. The tribe, after everything was said and done, remains undefeated to this day.

Badcock Home Furniture & more posts second-highest company earnings

Second-year store one of 380 in Badcock's outlets across the Southeast

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Nestled in the seemingly quiet corner of Cove Plaza is what's quickly become a gold mine for the furniture business.

In less than two years, Badcock Home Furniture & more of Green Cove Springs has evolved into one of the company's best stores in the country by posting the second-highest sales among its 380 outlets in Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Virginia.

"This year, we hit No. 2," said manager



Emily Espinoza deserved a break after leading the Green Cove Springs Badcock Home Furniture & more to the second-highest sales among 380 other stores in 2023.

Emily Espinoza with a smile. "I am so grateful because, especially right now, it has been a rough year with the economy. But our community has helped us so much. They have been very, very welcoming."

Besides a wide selection of furniture, the Cove Plaza location also offers electronics, bedding and mattresses, appliances and lawn equipment.

This is not Badcock's first foray into Green Cove Springs. The original store closed shortly after the owner died more than a decade ago. Andy Johnston said he spent 10 years looking for the right opportunity to return to the city. He found a 19,620-square-foot retail space and opened



STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

Badcock Home Furniture & more has an expansive selection of furniture, bedding, appliances and electronics.

it on Feb. 24, 2022.

Now, it's one of the organization's flagship properties.

"We're still getting people to know that we're here and getting to know us," Espinoza said. "We've only been here for about two years, but it's been great. We try to be as good with the community as possible because I feel like family is everything. Our dealers in all of our stores are a big family. We want to make our customers feel like they are our family because, at the end of the day, my priority is to help them have their house become a home."

Espinoza said each store is required to meet quarterly projections. Her store not only met them, but they exceeded expectations.

"Yes, sales are up," she said. "We've been able to hit our numbers."

Espinoza started as a salesperson when the store opened. She said she was promoted to store manager last January.

"I have seen such a big change in the community. I mean, our community is growing so much," she said. "I love Green Cove Springs."



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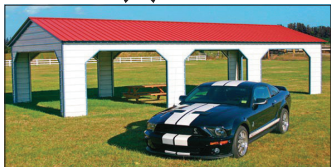


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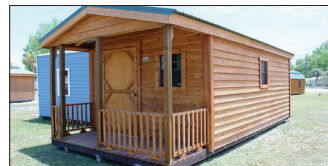
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Stroke

from page 15

east Florida and Southeast Georgia through multiple sites and specialized services. In addition to the Stroke & Cerebrovascular Center, the growing network includes:

- Two other Primary Stroke Centers at Baptist Medical Center Beaches and Baptist Medical Center South.
- Acute stroke-ready facilities at Baptist Medical Center Nassau, Baptist & Wolfson Oakleaf Emergency Room, Baptist & Wolfson Town Center Emergency Room and Baptist & Wolfson North Emergency Room.
- Access to world-class care for brain aneurysms and other cerebrovascular diseases.

• Baptist Health's Tele-Stroke Program, providing expert stroke consultation virtually to 14 health care facilities within a 160-mile radius of downtown Jacksonville. "At Baptist Health, we're passionate about elevating the standard of stroke care not only in our community but also for health systems across the country through education, research and innovation," said Ricardo Hanel, MD, PhD, neurosurgeon and co-medical director of the Stroke & Cerebrovascular Center. "As we say, 'time is brain,' and our specially trained teams are ready 24/7 so that stroke patients can receive prompt treatment for the best possible outcomes. But the first step is for patients to know the signs and symptoms of stroke and seek care in the first place!" In addition to Baptist Health's participation in stroke education initiatives at various community outreach events, information and resources on strokes can be found on our website at baptistjax.com/stroke.

Physicians providing care at Baptist Health hospitals are not employees or agents of the hospital. Dr. Hanel is employed by Lyerly Baptist, Inc.

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Keystone Heights High's girls weightlifting team employed a similar strategy as their three-time state champion boys teams by getting top five finishes by multiple lifters in each weight division to team titles in both disciplines; Olympic and Tradition, at their 6-1A district championships.

Keystone Heights win two 1A titles

By Randy Lefko
randy@claytodayonline.com

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS - Following the footsteps of their boy's weightlifting team successes, the Keystone Heights High girl's weightlifting team got handfuls of top-five finishes to finish as district champions in Olympic lifting and a share of the district title in the Traditional at the District 6-1A girls weightlifting championships held Friday at Keystone Heights High School.

Keystone Heights won just one individual title in Olympic scoring with Paige Harrington winning at 183, but edged out Baldwin and St. Johns Country Day School 57-55-29 for the team title.

In Traditional, Harrington won again with teammate Chloe still adding at title at 139 with Keystone Heights tying with Baldwin 42-42 and Union County second

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Keystone Heights wrestlers in hunt for more region spots

By Randy Lefko
randy@claytodayonline.com

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – Keystone Heights High wrestling is undergoing expansion each season with a full lineup in place this season despite its youth.

“We have a lot of seventh and eighth graders on our roster right now, but they are hungry to make the program grow more in the next couple of years,” said Keystone Heights coach Shaun Goetzman, in his second year. “The program has grown for the past six or seven years and I want to continue that.”

On Saturday, Keystone Heights traveled to Stanton Prep for the Stanton Invitational and finished seventh among 18 teams with 79 points with the winner, Toco Creek, finishing with 180 points with Vero Beach and Beachside in second and third at 177 and 170.5.

On January 6, at Riverside High’s Marine Corps Challenge, Keystone Heights finished fourth behind Vero Beach, Riverside and Beachside with a 126-point total. Vero Beach won with 287 points.

“We know we are not in the league of the teams we are going up against, but the tournaments give us, first, mat time to see what we practice for, and, second, a chance to see what upper-level techniques other wrestlers use,” said Goetzman, himself a New York state wrestler in his youth. “One thing these kids know is to not give up.”

The top wrestler for Goetzman, with a 20-4 overall record, is eighth grader Atreyu Contes who finished as 106 runner-up at Stanton with an 18-7 major decision loss to Vero Beach’s Matt Haake. Contes, who started wrestling just last year, commented that his past summer of camps and conditioning has made him better.

“I didn’t know anything when I started in seventh grade, but I went to a lot of camps and clinics over the summer and learned a lot,” said Contes, who 106 runnerup at the Marine Corps Invite at Riverside High a few weeks ago. “I have a couple of pretty good moves that I can use on the mat and I watch a lot of the other matches while I’m at a meet.”

Contes finished fifth at his district meet last year to miss the top four that advance to regions.

“If I knew then what I know now about the sport, I would have gone to regions,” said Contes. “Hopefully, my learning will get me that spot this year.”

Other top finishers at Stanton were sophomore Jared Goetzman (16-9 at 120) who battled back from a quarterfinal loss to win three matches before losing in the third-place match. Goetzman won the 120 individual title at Riverside with five wins and a finals pin.

Also in his third-place match at 132, junior Phoenix Contes (11-7) lost his quarterfinal match 8-1 to Toco Creek’s Landon Caviness, battled back with three wins; two via pin, then lost to

Caviness a second time; this time in overtime. Contes was fourth at Riverside.

Others at Stanton were seventh grader Cason Burton at 106, who won three, lost two and missed his third-place match by one match; seventh grader Mikey McCall at 113 who finished 2-2; junior Adam McGarvey at 126 who won three matches by first period pins before losing in the consolation semifinals; junior Ayden Graff at 132, who wrestled and lost by pin to Phoenix Contes



Keystone Heights’ 106 pounder Cason Burton tries to settle in for pin in Indians visit to Stanton Invitational.

in his first match; freshman Henry Carhuayo at 138 who won two and lost two and finished third at Riverside; freshman Seth Fernandez at 138, who was 0-2; freshman Arthur Durning at 144 who won two by pin and lost twice by pin and senior Marcellus Beem at 150 who won three by pin and lost

twice. Beem was fifth at Riverside.

Also at Riverside were freshman Riley McGorty at 126 who finished third with five wins one one loss; freshman Arthur Durning at 144 who finished fourth and junior Alyx Nichols at 175 who was fourth.



Keystone Heights’ eighth grader Atreyu Contes, now 20-4, battled for position in Stanton Invitational semifinal on Saturday. Contes lost in championship final. Below: Fleming Island wrestlers Jordan Mukaddam, left, and Matthew Newman battled at Flagler Palm Coast Rotary. Newman won at 113; Mukaddam lost in 120 final.

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BLUEGREEN VACATIONS DUELS: qualifying races to set the field for the Daytona 500 will be on Feb. 15 at 7 p.m. at the Daytona International Speedway, 1801 W. International Speedway Blvd. For tickets, visit daytonainternationalspeedway.com.

FREE HEALTH SERVICES: provided by Comprehensive Health Center of Orlando and Clay County Fire Rescue's Community Paramedicine Program will be on Feb. 15 from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. at the Paramedicine Office at 2110 Blanding Blvd, Suite 8, in the Grande Ole Plaza in Middleburg. Residents can get free rapid testing and treatment, free health care insurance (must meet qualifications) and giveaways.

RUMOURS ATL: will play on Feb. 16 at 7:30 p.m. at the Thrasher-Horne Center, 283 College Dr. in Orange Park. Tickets to hear the Fleetwood Mac tribute band are available at the box office or thcenter.org.

JOHN WAITE: will be at the Florida Theatre, 128 E. Forsyth St. in Jacksonville, on Feb. 16, at 8 p.m. Visit floridatheatre.com for tickets.

JACKSONVILLE ICEMEN VS. FLORIDA EVERBLADES: hockey game will be Feb. 16 at 7 p.m. at the VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena, 300 A. Philip Randolph

Blvd. in Jacksonville. Tickets are available at ticketmaster.com.

FRESH FROM FLORIDA 250 CRAFTSMAN SERIES TRUCK RACE: will be on Feb. 16 at 7:30 p.m. at the Daytona International Speedway, 1801 W. International Speedway Blvd. For tickets, visit daytonainternationalspeedway.com.

CLAY COUNTY ELEMENTARY TRACK MEET: will be on Feb. 17 from 8 a.m.-noon at Middleburg High, 3750 County Road 220.

THE KITCHEN OF CLAY COUNTY: will provide free meals on Feb. 17 at the Orange Park Senior Center, 414 Stowe St., Sacred Heart Mission Church Branch, 207 Palmetto St. in Green Cove Springs and Black Creek Methodist Church, 3925 Main St. in Middleburg (drive-through), from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. All are welcome.

THE KITCHEN OF CLAY COUNTY: will provide free meals on Feb. 17 at the Orange Park Senior Center, 414 Stowe St., Sacred Heart Mission Church Branch, 207 Palmetto St. in Green Cove Springs and Black Creek Methodist Church, 3925 Main St. in Middleburg (drive-through), from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. All are welcome.

TOOL LENDING LIBRARY: offered by

Mission of the Dirt Road will be open for free tool loans on Feb. 17 from 9 a.m.-noon at 7790 State Road 100 in Keystone Heights. For more information, call (352) 478-8050.

GREEN COVE SPRINGS MARKET IN THE PARK: will be on Feb. 17 from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. on Walnut Street. Vendors will have their handcrafted goods, clothes and snacks on sale.

BRANDT 200 ARCA MENARDS SERIES RACE: will be on Feb. 17 at 1:30 p.m. at the Daytona International Speedway, 1801 W. International Speedway Blvd. For tickets, visit daytonainternationalspeedway.com.

UNITED RENTALS 300 XFINITY SERIES RACE: will be on Feb. 17 at 5 p.m. at the Daytona International Speedway, 1801 W. International Speedway Blvd. For tickets, visit daytonainternationalspeedway.com.

ROD STEWART: will play on Feb. 17 at 8 p.m. at Daily's Place, 1 Daily's Place adjacent to EverBank Stadium in Jacksonville. Tickets are available at ticketmaster.com.

CODY JOHNSON: THE LEATHER TOUR: will be at the VyStar Veteran's Memorial Arena, 300 A. Philip Randolph Blvd., Jacksonville, on Feb. 17 at 7:30 p.m. For

tickets, visit ticketmaster.com.

DAYTONA 500: will be on Feb. 18 at 2:30 p.m. at the Daytona International Speedway, 1801 W. International Speedway Blvd. For tickets, visit daytonainternationalspeedway.com.

PENNEY FARMS CONCERT SERIES: will feature a mother/daughter harp duo playing classical and Celtic music. on Feb. 18 at 7 p.m. at Penney Memorial Church, 4465 Poling Blvd. Admission and parking are free.

JACKSONVILLE ICEMEN VS. SAVANNAH GHOST PIRATES: hockey game will be Feb. 18 at 7 p.m. at the VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena, 300 A. Philip Randolph Blvd. in Jacksonville. Tickets are available at ticketmaster.com.

ORANGE PARK TOWN COUNCIL: will meet on Feb. 20 at 7 p.m. at Town Hall Council Chambers, 2042 Park Ave.

CLAY COUNTY DISTRICT SCHOOLS NINTH-GRADE EXPO: will be on Feb. 20 from 6-7:30 p.m. at Keystone Heights High, 900 Orchid Ave.

GREEN COVE SPRINGS CITY COUNCIL: will meet on Feb. 20 at 7 p.m. inside City Hall Chambers at 321 Walnut St.

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