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Construction of Black Creek Restoration Project flowing smoothly - Page 2

STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

Construction crews have stayed on schedule building a pump station and drain field at South Fork of Black Creek in Green Cove Springs and installing 17 miles of pipes that will siphon as much as 10 million gallons from the creek, through a 12-acre treatment cell and into Alligator Creek, which would replenish lakes Brooklyn and Geneva in Keystone Heights.

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Work on the pump station for the Black Creek Restoration Project is moving along without any major setbacks. At the current pace, water should start flowing from the South Fork of the Black Creek into lakes Brooklyn and Geneva this time next year.



Crews have installed the underground pumps and a micro tunnel near the South Fork of Little Black Creek. The pumps have arrived at the warehouse and will be delivered to the site in the next three weeks.

Work to replenish lakes Geneva, Brooklyn in Keystone Heights expected to wrap up next year

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – The throaty sound of a crane is often muffled by the constant whir of traffic 30 yards away along State Road 21. But with each burst of power and belch of diesel smoke, another 15 feet of the Black Creek Restoration Project is completed.

There haven't been any significant setbacks. Soon, the \$118 million project will be operational to send as much as 10 million gallons of excess water daily 17 miles from the South Fork of Black Creek to Alligator Creek and into lakes Brooklyn and Geneva. At the current pace, the lakes, once considered luxurious weekend playgrounds for affluent Jacksonville families, will finally lap what used to be their natural shorelines.

"I'm very pleased with the progress that they're making," said Save Our Lakes Organization President Vivian Katz-James.

"I think later this year, they'll have the filtration system. They're going to do some testing once they get all the pipes down. We're probably looking at getting the water flowing into Alligator Creek next year. If so, that would be incredible."

The restoration project seemed like a pipe dream for nearly 40 years, but it's quickly becoming a reality as crews wrap up construction of a massive pump station at Black Creek and State Road 16. Simultaneously, other workers are installing 17 miles of underground pipes along SR 16 and SR 21 to channel water to a 21-acre drain treatment filtration field northwest of Keystone Heights.

That facility will filter tannins and phosphorus from the brownish waters of Black Creek before going into Alligator Creek, which feeds into both lakes Brooklyn and Geneva.

St. Johns River Management District Executive Director Michael Register gave "an update on one of our favorite projects,

the Black Creek site," during the district's monthly meeting on Feb. 13 in Palatka. He said workers completed installing concrete collars and contractors are now backfilling the rest of the station. Also, a micro tunnel to the creek has been completed, so the next step is receiving the pumps in three weeks.

The Lake Region was founded by residents from the Northeast who wanted a vacation home that offered a mild climate, fishing, boating and swimming.

Residents around lakes Brooklyn and Geneva have fought for two generations to restore the water in the lakes, which dwindled to historic lows in the past 20 years. Once a vibrant source of water-related activities, years of below-average rainfall, a limestone base that allows water to seep into the Florida aquifer and earthen dams along Alligator Creek kept water from flowing into the lakes.

The Lake Brooklyn Association fought to have the obstructions removed from

Alligator Creek, but nearby sand mines, Camp Blanding and development had also affected the lake levels.

In 2022, SJRWMD, Save Our Lakes Organization, officials from the State, County and Keystone Heights, Clay County Utility Authority, Gainesville Regional Utilities, St. Johns Utilities and JEA all worked to complete the Black Creek Water Resource Development Project.

Three days after the announcement, crews started clearing land for the pump station and work hasn't slowed since.

Once completed, the levels at both lakes Brooklyn and Geneva are expected to rise by at least 10 feet. The pumping project will also increase water to the Upper Florida aquifer by percolating through the lake's bottom.

"Everybody is getting very helpful that the Keystone community will be able to shepherd the growth so that it still has that Florida feel," Katz-James said. "That's what I'm hoping for the future."

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Kitchen of Clay County re-opens its doors, hearts to 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 eat-

ing 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 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."



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OPINIONS & VIEWPOINTS

We're all doomed if some of the next generation is in charge

By **Don Coble**
Managing Editor

You may want to put your trays in the upright and locked position and make sure your seatbelt is tightened for this one.

The speculation is that Lia Thomas, the man who believes he's a woman and won an NCAA 500-yard freestyle championship by nearly two seconds, is engaged. Here's where it gets as confusing as



Don Coble

instructions from IKEA on how to build a dresser.

Apparently, Thomas is engaged to marry a man who also thinks he's a woman. And they plan to live as a lesbian couple.

By the way, Thomas hasn't had any surgery, so "she" swims with a bulge. Admit it, we've all wondered.

What is more alarming is Thomas' University of Pennsylvania nominated the swimmer for the NCAA Woman of the Year. That outrageous nomination was an insult to real women athletes at the school, and it came from an Ivy League school. Thank goodness the sanctioning body for college athletics looked past the obvious attempt to change the principles of biology. I've said it before, and I'll say it again: your sex isn't determined by what's

between your ears. It's determined by what's in your underwear.

This is the kind of nonsense this generation is being taught in universities. Men can be women. Women can be men. People can identify with any race, ethnicity or gender they want.

Thousands of college students believe men can get pregnant. They believe Artificial Intelligence created a false narrative of the attack on Israel. They believe it's everybody else's responsibility to pay for their college. They believe they deserve it.

According to Mike Rowe of "Dirty Jobs," college students were asked what they ranked as the most important aspect of building a career. Businesses were asked to rank their priorities. Students

SEE DOOM, 5

Recognizing the signs to prevent teen suicide

By **StatePoint Media**
For *The Oakleaf*

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.

SEE TEEN, 5

This Month in History

Five years ago, 2019

- Managing Editor at the Clay Today Eric Cravey announces his decision to step down. "Despite all of the yelling, threats and intimidation I've endured from the public in my tenure here at Clay Today, I honestly say I would not have traded any of it for a sack of gold," he said.

- Green Cove Springs was half a million dollars overbudget on the city's Public Works building, which was halfway completed. The city worked with the contractor to reduce costs by about \$276,500 by removing features from the facility such as restroom wall tiles, kitchen cabinetry, a

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@opcfla.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.

Teen

from page 4

If your child says something like “I want to die” or “I don’t care anymore,” some suggested 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 protec-

tive 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.

Doom

from page 4

said a college degree was the third most important, while businesses ranked a degree 47th.

Hard work matters.

That’s why Clay County District School’s Career and Technical Education Programs are so important. Students learn real-world skills like carpentry, HVAC, health science, auto mechanics, banking, engineering, construction and agriculture, not impulsive and misguided subjects like gender identity and

antisemitism.

Have you noticed the college students who protest usually wear a mask? They’re probably making sure mommy and daddy who pay the bills or a future employer don’t recognize them.

If this is the direction our country is going, we’re doomed.

What happened to common sense and hard work? When I worked in Daytona Beach, at least 20 “women” walked along Ridgewood Avenue (U.S. Highway

1) at 2 a.m. The police department never bothered the men dressed like women because they didn’t bother anybody. They weren’t making a statement; they were making a living.

I say that because they were what they were, and they went about their business. If they came into a convenience store or a 24-hour restaurant to use the restroom, they did it and left. Nobody cared because it wasn’t a big deal. I respected them for being brave and unapologetic – all while keeping their preferences to themselves.

No parades. No press conferences. No rallies. They got what they gave – deference.

Some in this new generation are delusional. Everything has to be in the public eye. It’s not enough to want to be different. This generation wants to get in your face to make a point. They have no platform if you take away the cameras and their ability to post cellphone videos.

From now on, I won’t pay attention to any more delusional debates. I believe people have the right to believe what they want. But I have the right to ignore them.

History

from page 4

transfer switch and generator pad.

• In a list of the top ten most dangerous intersections in Clay County, Orange Park made the list six times for intersections along Blanding Boulevard, Wells Road, Kingsley Avenue, Professional Center Drive and other roads.

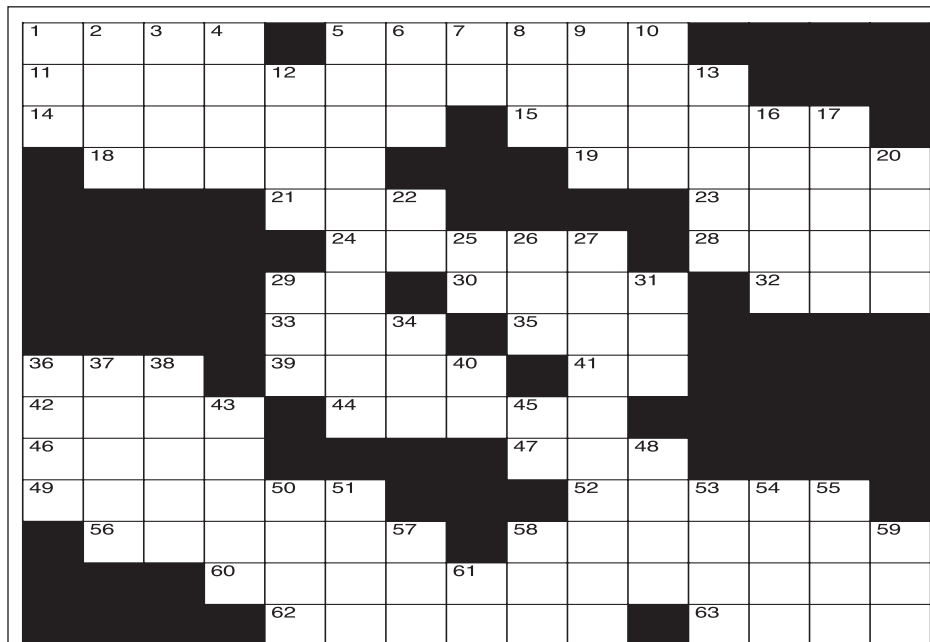
• In an effort to develop the city’s own fire and rescue service, Orange Park Town Council approved the purchase of two EMS rescue vehicles.

10 years ago, 2014

• Officers from the Clay County Sheriff’s Office, Orange Park Police Department, the state office of Parole and Probation, NCIS and the State Attorney’s held a drug sweep that resulted in 35 arrests in three days.

• For the second year, Clay County Clerk of Court Tara Green hosted a Valentine’s Day wedding ceremony at Historic Spring Park. Fourteen couples received a free wedding, music, cake, photos and flowers.

• Sue Heath retired from her job as the assistant city manager of Green Cove Springs, a job she had since 2000. Over her career, she stepped up as interim city manager several times while the manager’s post was vacant.



CLUES ACROSS

1. Constrictors
5. Abounding in rocks
11. Speed
14. German city
15. Lacking sympathy
18. Visionaries
19. Wastes away
21. One precursor to the EU
23. Nursemaid
24. Unconsciousnesses
28. Baby’s word for father
29. Equal to 64 US pints (abbr.)
30. Senses of self-importance
32. Midway between south and southwest
33. When you hope to get there
35. Electronic data processing
36. Passports and drivers licences are two
39. Fishes
41. Air Force
42. Personal computers
44. Ecological community
46. Wings
47. Halfway
49. Cool, calm and collected

CLUES DOWN

1. ___ Humbug!
2. Devices that alert pilots (abbr.)
3. Grocer
4. One point east of southeast
5. Subjects to hostility
6. Work unit
7. Atomic #56
8. British thermal unit
9. elusive Butterfly singer
10. Fastened over animal’s neck
12. Device
13. Rechargeable power source
16. Ancient sage
17. Consist of two elements
20. Iygmalion writer
22. “The Centennial State”(abbr.)
25. Of I
26. Get older
27. Brotherhoods
29. Buzzing insect
31. Sunscreen rating
34. Brew
36. Leader
37. Indigo bush
38. Burn with a hot liquid
40. Junior’s dad
43. Horse mackerels genus
45. Morning
48. Unit of linear measurement (abbr.)
50. Double curve
51. Small, twisted bunch
53. Developed
54. Mars crater
55. Humanistic discipline
57. Word element meaning ear
58. Last or greatest in an indefinitely large series
59. Wood residue
61. It cools your home



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By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

CLAY COUNTY – The biggest fear of any police officer is silence, especially following a physical confrontation with a suspect who’s considered violent.

When Clay County Sheriff’s Office and Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office deputies jumped into the murky waters of Little Black Creek on a Sunday afternoon after chasing a man suspected of an armed carjacking and home invasion, the law enforcement agencies finally wrestled control of the 19-year-old in the chest-deep creek.

One deputy didn’t immediately answer when the command tried to account for everyone. They knew he went into the water, but they didn’t see or hear from him for more than a minute after Carlos Matute was drug away in handcuffs. Just as confusion turned to fear, the deputy finally keyed his microphone and said he was wet and cold, but all right.

Not knowing is the biggest challenge of being in law enforcement.

“It’s never what you want to hear,” said Sheriff Michelle Cook.

Every day, the men and women of law enforcement face some of the worst society has to offer. The job is both rewarding and complicated. There are sights and skirmishes the public doesn’t know.

Being a cop isn’t limited to a 10-second cellphone video on the local news. It’s patience and restraint. It’s compassion and compliance. It’s a high-five from an elementary student walking home from school and a hug from someone whose problem was quickly resolved.

It’s also chasing criminals through parking lots. It’s listening to lies and fake stories. It’s the combative driver who’s had too much to drink. It’s the overwhelming sense of helplessness and urgency when a child goes missing.

“Being a cop isn’t a job,” said Orange



Clay County Sheriff’s Office deputy Ricardo Valdes leaves the Little Black Creek soaked and muddy after capturing a 19-year-old armed carjacking and armed home invasion suspect, Carlos Matute, following a several-hour manhunt along Henley Road to County Road 220 on Dec. 10 that included K-9 and helicopter support in Middleburg. Deputies wrestled with the suspect for minutes in the creek before finally subduing him.

Park Police Lt. Cody Monroe. “Being a cop is a calling.”

Statistics show that in the last 30 years, at least 40% of law enforcement officers quit in the first five years, Sheriff Michelle Cook said.

“The workforce is dwindling,” she said. “You can train somebody for what they’re going to see, smell or hear on the job. We’re like companies who have to do more with less.”

Cook said 70% of her deputies have less than five years of experience.

SEE COP, 7

Cop from page 6

Agencies rely on technology to keep pace with criminal ingenuity and fill the void. Traffic cameras and license plate readers are installed throughout the county. Green Cove Springs and Orange Park have red-light cameras. Many businesses and some residents can link their surveillance to the sheriff's office's Connect Clay County program, allowing dispatchers to get real-time information when a crime has occurred.

Two other vital tools are cellphones and doorbell cameras. Cellphones can be tracked, and home cameras often catch a suspect committing and leaving a crime.

But the most effective tool is a deputy or police officer on the beat, where they can create relationships and garner valuable intelligence. It also puts them face-to-face with bad people.

"If we're involved in a situation where we have to go hands-on with somebody to place them under arrest, emotions can seem to be high or high-strung, or a kind of no-nonsense type attitude," CCSO Sgt. Zach Cox said. "You never know what (a deputy) has dealt with in the past. Seven hours earlier, they could have been on a death scene. They could have been to a traffic fatality crash, and their range of emotions is just all over the place. Then you get the one person who has a warrant and doesn't want to put their hands behind their back, and they're amped up.

"It takes a special person, a special demeanor, to be a deputy," Cox said.

Clay Today poured through the arrest reports during a three-week timeframe, starting on Jan. 23 and ending on Feb. 13. The numbers tell just how difficult their jobs can be – five counts of attempted second-degree murder of sheriff's office deputies, 15 cases of resisting, obstructing or opposing arrest, four counts of felony fleeing with lights and sirens active, three counts of aggravated assault against law enforcement and one count of battery to a jail deputy.

Those who get past the first five years said the job is rewarding. The challenge is building experience, expanding training, learning tolerance and learning to be numb to man's indiscretions.

"There are few other professions out there that give you the opportunity to make such a difference in the world," Monroe said. "You'll never be rich. You'll not

likely be famous. But I promise you, when you prepare to leave this world and move on to the next, you'll never have to worry about whether you made a difference."

Sheriff's Office Sgt. Ed Kroh said veteran officers become immune to horrific scenes. It's why few talk about the details of their shifts. And most need an hour or two to "de-compress," another deputy said.

Kroh said he found a child who had been severely mauled by a pit bull on his first day on the job. Others have seen the results of a suicide or traffic accident.

And most, if not all, have had to use their training in a "hands-on" situation.

"I mean, you graduate the police academy with a certain demeanor," Cox said. "After the police academy, you're just excited to put on the uniform, so it takes time, years of service, to grasp a different demeanor and a way to put it into effect in

a good way."

Even when the suspect is armed and on the loose.

Matute broke into a couple's home at 3 a.m. armed with a handgun on Dec. 3. He then stole the couple's car, according to JSO, before starting an intensive search that lasted 12 hours and involved JSO, CCSO and the Florida Highway Patrol. Matute abandoned his car at a storage facility on Blanding near Henley Road before running through backyards along Henley Road for nearly two hours. He fought with deputies and K-9s before being taken into custody.

"It turned out OK," Cook said. "That's the way we want it to end. Everybody got to go home that night."

Only to get up the next morning and do it all over again.



PHOTOS SUBMITTED BY CCSO

Sgt. Zach Cox displays the wear and tear a deputy endures during the simplest of assignments. He worked the parking lot during the 2022 Clay County Agricultural Fair and wound up covered in mud after he helped people get out of the parking lot following a torrential storm.

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Vulnerable family members can be registered at Clay Watch

Sheriff's Office creating databank to help find those prone to wandering

By Don Coble

don@claytodayonline.com

FLEMING ISLAND – Imagine the rush of terror and uncertainty when a family member who has autism, dementia, Alzheimer's disease or a traumatic brain injury is suddenly missing.

The Clay County Sheriff's Office is now collecting information on vulnerable residents so that they can be found quickly and brought back home safely.

Because every minute counts.

After a year of research, planning and training, Sheriff Michelle Cook said Monday the agency now offers the Clay Watch program to build a database of information on individuals prone to wandering.

The program allows family members to voluntarily provide information about loved ones to the sheriff's office, which will help the agency send immediate alerts to deputies. The time saved by providing a photo, description, background, and tendencies can lead to a quicker response and outcome.

"I'm going to give you a specific example. We have a person in Clay County who tends to wander away, and this person likes to climb trees," Cook said. "We also have a whole lot of new deputies on the street. So, if we have this person registered in the Clay Watch database, they (dep-



STAFF PHOTO BY DON COBLE

Sheriff Michelle Cook is surrounded by her staff Monday as she explains the benefits of providing information about vulnerable family members to help the agency quickly find those who wander off.

uties) are sent to the area or the house because the person has gone missing again. They can pull up the Clay Watch registry and look at the characteristics of the person who likes to wander and see that this person likes to climb trees.

"You know, some of these folks have challenges where they're drawn to water. Or they're drawn to retention ponds. So having information ahead of time can potentially save a life."

Family members can decide how much information they want to reveal. And while the information is secured, Cook said the more her agency knows, the quicker they narrow their search.

"When we find missing people wandering the street, and they are not sure who they are or where they live, we can check the Clay Watch registry to see if we can locate them," she said. "Again, if any individual would like to register a loved one but is unsure of how to do it or would like some additional information, you are more than welcome to stop by our workstation (at the Middleburg Substation), and we will be happy to have somebody walking through the registration process."

"The program also includes how a person communicates and their aggression and anxiety triggers," said Lt. Mike Layne.

"One of the hardest things is checking somebody who cannot communicate with us," he said. "If we check in with somebody walking down the sidewalk and can't identify themselves, we wanted to be able to



To register for Clay Watch, visit claysheriff.com, where you can complete the online registration form or download and print the form for submission in person at the Middleburg Substation at 3799 Irvin Ct. For additional information about the program, contact Layne at (904) 213-6177 or visit the website for updates and resources.

search based on any of the descriptors we have, the neighborhood we were in, their physical description, what characteristics they were presenting to us.

"We have a very robust search system built into this. We can take any of that, and it will provide a list of the folks and their photographs for anybody meeting that criteria. Then, we can simply the process. It's taken a lot of work for us to get there."

To register for Clay Watch, visit claysheriff.com, where you can complete the online registration form or download and print the form for submission in person at the Middleburg Substation at 3799 Irvin Ct. For additional information about the program, contact Layne at (904) 213-6177 or visit the website for updates and resources.

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Cheers! White Claw now legal for large parties on public property

By Jack Randall
jack@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – With the Northeast Florida Scottish Highland Games & Festival and the Clay County Agricultural Fair just around the corner, the Board of County Commissioners decided to raise their glasses – figuratively.

In a 5-0 vote, the BCC officially adopted a resolution that would amend a county-wide ordinance to permit “ready-to-drink” beverages for large events on county-owned property. Previously, the ordinance only permitted beer and wine to be

sold or consumed for public or private events with 500 or more guests. While hard liquor is still prohibited, the resolution now lets Clay County festival-goers enjoy hard seltzers and other ready-to-drink alcoholic beverages. Some famous picks are White Claw, Truly, Vizzy, High Noon and Happy Dad. One infamous pick is Four Loko, which no longer contains caffeine or taurine.

Ready-to-drink beverages have equivalent or sometimes less alcohol by volume, said County Attorney Courtney Grimm during the meeting. She informed the BCC that upcoming events in the county have expressed

interest in serving them. She said these beverages would have a positive economic effect on business at the fairgrounds. Commissioner Betsy Condon found no issue with adding ready-to-drink beverages to the existing ordinance, considering the similar alcoholic content.

“I guess it’s become trendy. To my understanding, the most popular brand of this is ‘White Claw’. . . I don’t know what it is. I don’t need to know what it is, but like I said, it fits within our ordinance.”

“(At events) we get more problems with heat exhaustion than the actual alcohol,” said Vice-Chair Mike

Cella.

“(These beverages) are already sold at the counter at convenience stores. They come in cans – not that I’ve tested it – but I did look at the ingredients, and they do have a lesser percentage of alcohol than some wines, actually.”

Cella acknowledged the potential positive impact of “ready-to-drink” beverages, especially for nonprofits hosting fundraising events.

The BCC meets at 4 p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesdays of every month at the County Administration Building, 477 Houston St. in Green Cove Springs.



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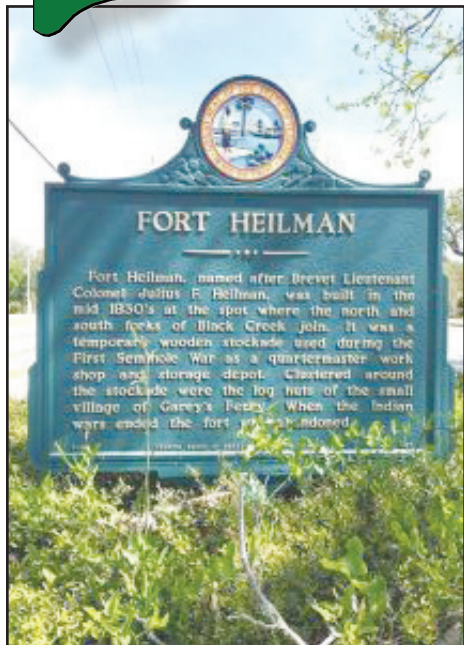
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Celebrate Clay History



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.

By Vishi Garig

*Clay County Archives Supervisor
 A Service of Tara S. Green, Clay County
 Clerk of the Circuit Court*

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



A soldier named Julius Heileman

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 graduate 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 Frederick 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.

OAKLEAF

SPORTS

Oakleaf, Keystone Heights, Ridgeview rock preseason

By Randy Lefko
randy@claytodayonline.com

OAKLEAF - The upcoming softball season looking to be another jam-packed season of state-level competition in Clay County with returners promising to make 2024 yet another strong campaign for local teams.

"We got a strong pitching staff with Charley Maddox back with a new freshman girl giving us a second arm," said Oakleaf coach Heather Han, who last year guided Oakleaf to a region playoff berth in the very tough region 1-6A lineup of notables powerhouses like Navarre, Lake Howell, Hagerty and Pace. "One of our big hitters late last year, Amya Morales, is on the mound time tonight against Baker County who should be strong again this year."

Han was directing the Oakleaf Clash of Champions preseason tournament last week with local powers from Ridgeview,

Creekside, Baldwin, Yulee, Baker County and Ponte Vedra locking horns before this week's season started up.

"The rain moved us to a double header tonight (Friday) with Toco Creek and Ponte Vedra and we are going to be tested real fast," said Ridgeview coach Angela Agurkis, who was on her former home turf as a state champion catcher for Oakleaf in her high school days. "Saige (Bialek) is stronger and has seen some great lineups and will be a powerhouse this year on the mound. We got some veterans back like Haylee McCrea and Hannah Crosby with Ky Torrence back behind second base. We lost Mary Girgis who was our fighting force last year."

Agurkis, who guided Ridgeview to a district title last year and a region final; region semi win over Clay, in her rookie season, looked like she had her team in eight-cylinder mode against Toco Creek with two quick runs off successive hits



Ridgeview pitcher Saige Bialek is returning sophomore with year of elite lineups under her belt.



Oakleaf catcher Meshayla Pettaway is gamechanging player for coach Heather Han.



Former Oakleaf High state champ catcher Angela Agurkis returns after stellar debut season as Ridgeview coach that got a region finals berth.

and crafty baserunning from McCrae and company.

Keystone Heights also played in the Oakleaf tournament and came in with a strong mound presence as well with Caitlin Frampton and Kadence Massey top returners with Ashley Nugent getting mound time in a Tuesday game against Yulee.

Keystone Heights coach Jessica Mar-

quart has a great outfield led by senior Abbie Roach, but will need to find another spark plug to replace graduate superstar Kiley Channell, now at FAU.

Keystone Heights and Oakleaf will square off on Thurs., Feb. 22 in an early season barometer gauntlet with Baker County, Ridgeview and Clay on Marquart's agenda early in the season.

Pals and Paws Dog Agility

Dogs flyin', tubin' and freezin'

By Randy Lefko
randy@claytodayonline.com

JACKSONVILLE - A massive Doberman named Spyder, a tiny Boston terrier named Frankie and even a tiny Dachshund named Kepler all showed off their best athletic talents at the Pals and Paws Dog Agility Club's weekend contest held Friday and Saturday at the Cecil Equestrian Center on Normandy Boulevard.

"We have three or four events each year and this is one of them," said Lauren Hansen, Pals and Paws Agility Club out of north Florida. "We have dogs of all sizes, shapes and abilities doing courses of 20 or so obstacles for time, points and treats at the end."

Dogs start with 100 points and end up with deductions for infractions along the way; missing an obstacle, stopping on the course, going the wrong way as well as the time element.

On one end of the Cecil Equestrian Arena, an obstacle course was set up to test dogs and trainers through tunnels, teeters, hurdles and tubes while on the opposite end, the big dogs blasted for speed, height and turning ability in the arena dirt with the likes of Dalmation high-flyer Aspen soaring above the 20-inch hurdles with Edwin Moses-like ease. "It takes a trainer and dog sometimes about 3-5 years to become synchronized," said Pals official Rita Browning, who has been in dog agility



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Agility

from page 12

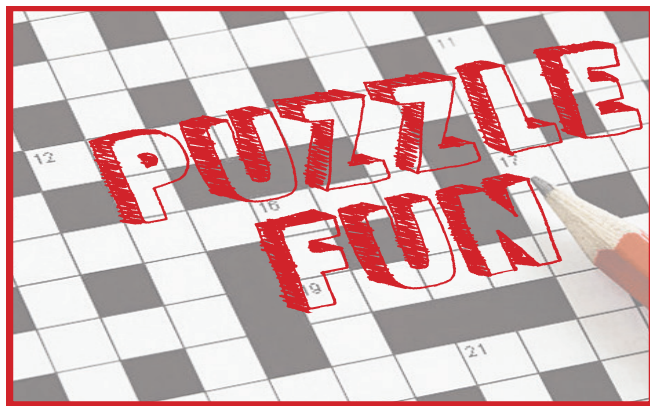
since 2008. "It's just like a coach and a runner or swimmer. You put in the time and when it clicks, it clicks."

Browning noted that, Tulsa, is the 'mecca' of dog agility where the nationals have been held with a huge national event in Tampa as well. "You will see these dogs get just as excited to get on the course as any athlete," said Browning. "You also see the dog that looks like he has no interest, but when he gets the go, he sets off like he's on fire. They just click a switch and go."

Browning coined a phrase used by dog owners, Biddable, which is the word to describe the dog that has 'the look'.

"When the trainers look at dogs and say 'he's biddable', it means he has the look," said Browning. Biddable by definition is said "to be biddable" or do the bidding of the trainer with German Shepherds the top breed with Poodles, Border Collies, Doberman Pinschers and Labrador Retrievers in the top five "biddable" breeds.

"Then, you get a Boston Terrier like we have here, that's a national champion," said Browning. "A lot depends on the trainer and owner and that relationship."



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

Level: Beginner

Ⓞ * ✎ ☺ ♪ ♫ ♬ ♧ ♨ ♩ ♪ ♫ ♬ ♧ ♨ ♩ Ⓞ * ✎ ☺ ♪ ♫ ♬ ♧ ♨ ♩ Ⓞ * ✎ ☺ ♪ ♫ ♬ ♧ ♨ ♩

CRYPTO FUN

Determine the code to reveal the answer!

Solve the code to discover words related to heart health. Each number corresponds to a letter. (Hint: 26 = E)

- A. 4 26 6 11 20**
Clue: Beats in chest
- B. 5 12 13 22 26**
Clue: Rhythm of blood flow
- C. 10 23 3 8 20 23 11**
Clue: Watch and see
- D. 10 12 22 2 13 26**
Clue: Tissues that contract

Answers: A. heart B. pulse C. monitor D. muscle

WORD SCRAMBLE

Rearrange the letters to spell something pertaining to heart health.

I N E S V

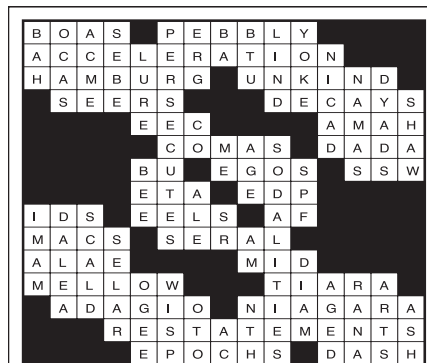
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Answer: Veins

Guess Who?

I am a singer/songwriter born in England on February 1, 1994. I rose to fame in a popular boy band, and later embarked on a successful solo career. The same year I went solo, I made my acting debut in a Christopher Nolan film.

Answer: Harry Styles



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

HEART FUNCTION WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

- AORTIC
- ARTERY
- ATRIUM
- BEAT
- BLOOD
- CARDIAC
- CHAMBERS
- COORDINATED
- HEART
- LEFT
- LUNGS
- MITRAL
- NUTRIENTS
- OXYGEN
- PATTERN
- PULMONARY
- PULSE
- RIGHT
- TISSUES
- TRICUSPID
- VALVE
- VEIN
- VENA CAVA
- VENTRICLE

OHS softball duo off to hot starts for Purdue, Maryland

By Randy Lefko
randy@claytodayonline.com
 with excerpts from *Maryland/Purdue Athletics*

OAKLEAF - Two hard-hitting, hard-running Oakleaf High softball players; Khloe Banks and Jaeda McFarland, are hammering away at college pitchers with explosive plays for their respective college teams; Purdue for Banks, Maryland for McFarland.

Banks, a sophomore for the Boilermakers, has been a major hitter in the lineup with a .875 batting average with three runs, three hits and three stolen bases in an 8-1 Purdue win over South Dakota in early February. Banks also executed a spectacular diving catch in left field to leave baserunners stranded for South Dakota.

In Purdue's season-opening weekend in February, Banks led the team in every offensive category with four stolen bases,

a .583 batting average that was seventh in the Big Ten, and six runs scored.

For McFarland, a graduate student player at Maryland, the highlight of her early season for the Terrapins was a 53rd career stolen base in an 11-4 loss to Syracuse that was McFarland's 53rd career stolen base. The steal put her fourth in Maryland history.

Against Syracuse, Maryland got a 1-0 lead with McFarland reaching on a hit by pitch, then stealing second. A single by teammate Diamond Williams scored McFarland. The steal for McFarland was her 53rd and put her fourth on Maryland career records list.

McFarland, who started all 57 games last season, finished with a perfect 100 percent field percentage. was an All-Big Ten second-team selection and on the All-Big Ten defensive team as well as the NCAA Midwest All region second team.



PHOTO COURTESY PURDUE ATHLETICS
 Former Oakleaf High powerhitter Khloe Banks is setting the Boilermakes on fire with her bat and base stealing.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARYLAND ATHLETICS
 Former Oakleaf High softball ace Jaeda McFarland is fourth on Maryland stolen bases list with 53rd swipe early in season.

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- Biometric screenings
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- Health education for women
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The new Baptist Wellness Center is adjacent to the Baptist Clay hospital at Baptist HealthPlace at Fleming Island.

For more information and to schedule an appointment, please call **904.516.1500**.

Baptist HealthPlace at Fleming Island

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Meet your
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Lisa Bradford, RN, a certified wellness coach and personal trainer, is available to help you determine your health goals and develop a personalized plan. Bradford, a Clay County native, has a passion for wellness.

"I'm here to be a supportive mentor and motivate people to make positive health choices and realize their personal wellness goals," she said.

