

# KEYSTONE HEIGHTS HERALD

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## Work on Black Creek Restoration Project flowing smoothly

By Don Coble  
don@claytodayonline.com

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – Vivian Katz-James said it's hard for her to control her emotions when she drives along State Road 21 between Lakes Brooklyn, Geneva, and Middleburg.

"I'm always tempted to honk my horn when I go by," she said.

As the president of the Save Our Lakes Organization, she's impressed with the progress of the Black Creek Water Restoration Project and DBE Management LLC, which was awarded \$41.3 million in September 2022 to build a 17-mile pipeline along SR 16 and 21 from Black Creek South Fork to Alligator Creek. Once as much as 10 million gallons of Black Creek reach Alligator Creek, it will be directed into Lake Brooklyn and eventually moved into Lake Geneva to replenish the Upper Florida aquifer and Lower Sante Fe basin.

SOLO spent decades working with the Clay County Board of Commissioners, St. Johns River Water Management District, Clay County Utility Authority, Gainesville



Save Our Lakes Organization is waiting for approval from the Department of Environmental Protection to remove the forest that grew in when the water left Lake Geneva. When the water returns, the forest will die and rot.

**SEE PROJECT, 9**

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# PUZZLE FUN

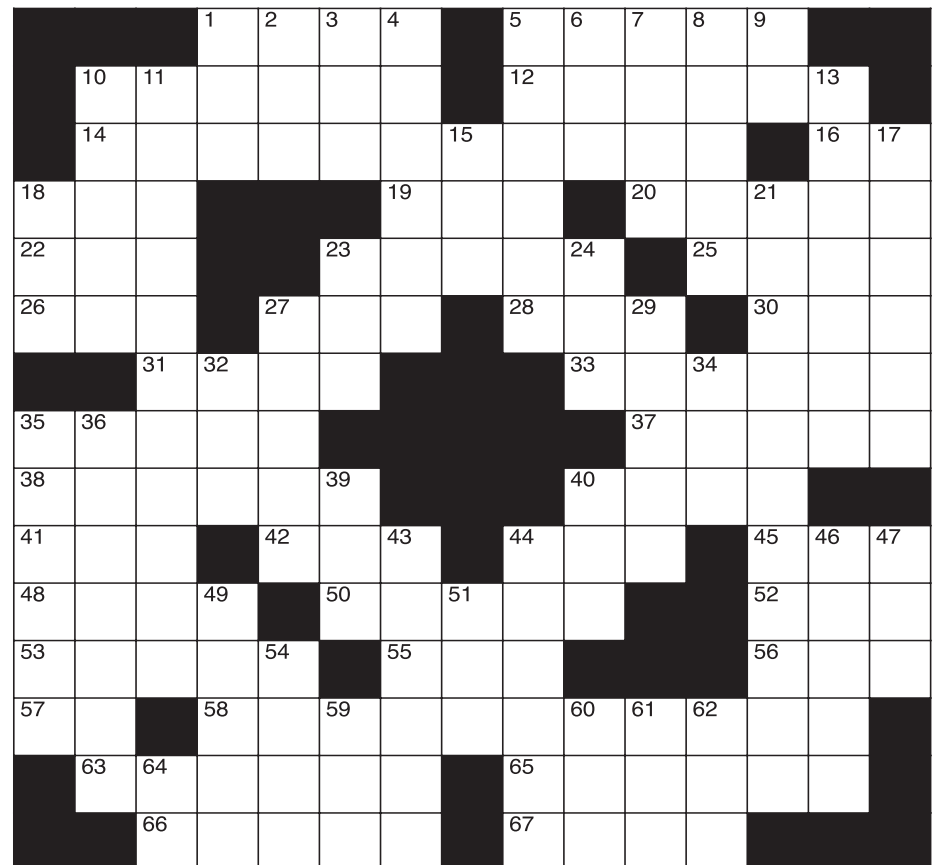
## Get Scrambled

Unscramble the words to determine the phrase.

osicppel

*Answer: Popsicle*

Puzzles sponsored by



**CLUES ACROSS**

- 1. Native American people
- 5. Very long periods of time (Brit.)
- 10. Schoolboard accessory
- 12. Rods
- 14. One who renews
- 16. Sculpted body part
- 18. Chatter incessantly
- 19. \_\_\_ King Cole, musician
- 20. Plates on a turtle's shell
- 22. University of Utah athlete
- 23. The world of the dead
- 25. Singer Redding
- 26. Former Yankee great Mattingly
- 27. Prefix indicating wrongly
- 28. Unhappy
- 30. Anger
- 31. Dark brown or black
- 33. Restaurants have a lot of them
- 35. Made a mistake
- 37. Damp
- 38. Type of gasoline
- 40. Actor LeBlanc
- 41. Perform in a play
- 42. One's mother
- 44. Prohibit
- 45. Swiss river
- 48. Part of a banana
- 50. Indian hand clash cymbals
- 52. Relative biological effectiveness

(abbr.)

- 53. Agave
- 55. Noted journalist Tarbell
- 56. Computer firm
- 57. Type of record
- 58. Bacterium that can cause infection
- 63. Sheaths enclosing the spinal cord
- 65. A narrow opening (as in a rock wall)
- 66. Pattern
- 67. Very eager to see something

**CLUES DOWN**

- 1. Witch
- 2. Utilize
- 3. Writing utensil
- 4. Places to perform
- 5. Subsides
- 6. Consume
- 7. Athleisure clothing brand
- 8. California town
- 9. Atomic #50
- 10. The Muse of lyric and love poetry
- 11. Creates anew
- 13. Humorous commentaries
- 15. Cool!
- 17. Most ignoble

18. Soggy dirt

- 21. Designed to be useful
- 23. Hebrew unit of liquid capacity
- 24. High schoolers' test
- 27. One-time internet accessory
- 29. City in India
- 32. Furniture
- 34. You have likely chatted with one
- 35. Pass or go by
- 36. Proof of purchase
- 39. A digital tape recording of sound
- 40. More (Spanish)
- 43. Disfigured
- 44. White (Spanish)
- 46. Building occupied by monks
- 47. Georgia rock band
- 49. Device that generates intense beam of light
- 51. State of agitation
- 54. Make by braiding
- 59. Local area network
- 60. Unit of work or energy
- 61. Indigenous person of Thailand
- 62. Liquefied natural gas
- 64. Distance to top



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## KEYSTONE HEIGHTS HERALD

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# BCC approves funding for school resource officers

By Kyla Woodard  
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GREEN COVE SPRINGS- The Clay County School board will move forward with their decision to reutilize the Clay County Sheriff's Office within its school system.

The Clay County Board of County Commissioners voted unanimously to implement its Interlocal Agreement with the Clay County School Board at Tuesday's meeting.

The agreement will allow for a budget of approximately \$6.8 million dollars, for the

2024 to 2025 fiscal year, to be allocated to the sheriff's office to effectively transition and carry out their jobs within the school district.

The total budget will go towards various purposes including salaries, retirement, benefits, training and education, uniforms and operating expenses.

The approval comes following last year's vote by the school board to utilize the Clay County Sheriff's Office in lieu of the Clay



STAFF PHOTOS BY KYLA WOODARD

The Clay County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to approve the funding for school resource officers.

SEE SCHOOL, 7

# chill out This Summer

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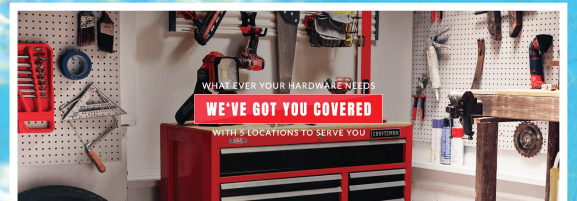
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## OPINIONS & VIEWPOINTS

# G's Slow Smoked BBQ to make grand return in GCS

'From the horse's mouth' (not keyboard warriors)

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Gary Park has neither the time nor the interest to quibble with the “keyboard warriors.” Besides, he's too busy working to rebuild G's Slow Smoked BBQ – and the futures of his former employees.



Don Coble

It's not easy taking the high road when a handful of people on social media try to tear you down, especially when done out of hate or ignorance. But he knows the facts. So do his friends and former employees. And that's good enough.

In addition to getting one restaurant ready for opening and wrapping up the



The remodeling of the Pizza Hut in Starke continues. Gary Park hopes to soon have his former employees working at a new G's Slow Smoked BBQ.

planning stages for a second store, Park has also been involved in several charitable events to raise money to help his employees who were displaced by a fire that destroyed his restaurant on Jan. 9.

Some have twisted that noble gesture into a greedy money grab, claiming Park has used the money to help finance the remodeling of a former Pizza Hut in Starke into one of his barbecue restaurants. Others said he's taking money from Clay County and moving it to Bradford.

Park simply shook his head and sighed. “I didn't ask anybody to do a fundraiser. I was very humbled and appreciative,” he said. “And the monies raised in Clay County, nothing goes over to any other county. It's all stayed in Clay County. What they don't realize is it went into a transmission. I bought (a former employee) a transmission. Another of them was going to move to North Carolina. I gave her enough to stay here until I got open again to return to work. She's one of my good workers. You know, so she's struggling. They're all struggling. None of that money went into any of the restaurants. It's for the employees. They still got bills to pay, so it's for them.”

Park said he and his investors bought

SEE BBQ, 5



## Tips to having a safe, healthy summer

By StatePoint Media  
For Clay Today

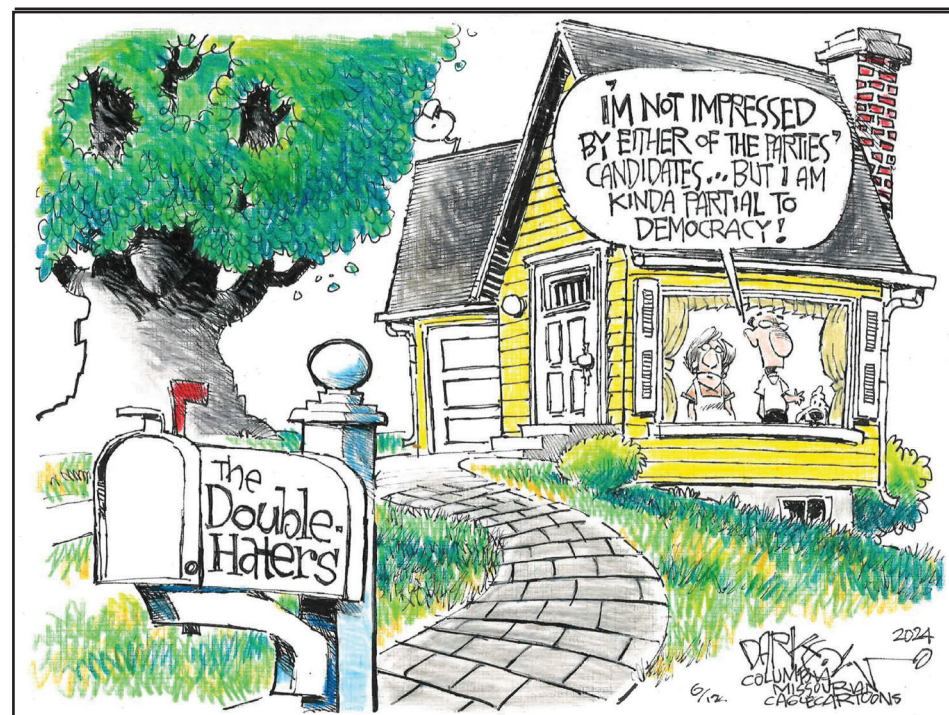
Summer is a great time to try new activities and get outdoors, but the season also brings unique risks, according to medical experts.

“Regardless of where you are in your fitness journey, the warm weather months offer opportunities to reevaluate your wellness goals for the remainder of the year. But as you and your family get active, it's important to prepare. Understanding water safety and sun safety and recognizing the signs of heat-related conditions are all critical,” said Dr. Jesse M. Ehrenfeld, president of the American Medical Association.

To help you enjoy a safe and healthy summer, the AMA offers these tips:

- Be smart about sunscreen. When shopping, look for a broad-spectrum sunscreen of at least SPF 30. Also, understand that no sunscreen is waterproof, and you'll need to reapply it every couple of hours and after exposure to water or sweat.
- Make sure your family is up-to-date on their vaccines. Before summer travel or camp season, double-check everyone's vaccine status. If you have questions, consult your physician and review trusted resources, including [getvaccineanswers.org](http://getvaccineanswers.org).
- Prioritize water safety. Ensure everyone in your family achieves water competency skills. Teach children to ask permission before going near water, have them and in-

SEE SUMMER, 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.

**Moxie:** (MAHK-see) a noun meaning courage and determination (aka nerve), energy and pep (aka verve), or know-how (as, say, reflected in one's oeuvre).

“She clearly doesn't need coffee to start her day full of moxie.”

### Send us a letter ...

We'd like to hear from you. Perhaps you are concerned about the county commission, the school board or your city council or commission, sit down and take a few moments to write us

a letter. All we ask is that you keep it civil, no name-calling and write no more than 600 words. All we ask is that you stick to local issues, be clear and make a point. We reserve the right to edit for AP Stylebook errors, grammar and spelling. In your

email, type Letter to the Editor in your subject and send it to Managing Editor Don Coble at [don@claytodayonline.com](mailto: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.

## Summer

from page 4

experienced swimmers or boaters wear U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets, and, at the beach, always swim in lifeguarded areas.

- Reduce your intake of processed foods and sugar-sweetened beverages, especially those with added sodium and sugar.

Eat less red meat and processed meats, and add more plant-based foods to your diet, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, olive oil, nuts and seeds.

Also, reduce your consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and drink more

water instead. Drinking sugary beverages, even 100% fruit juices, is associated with a higher all-cause mortality risk, according to a study published in JAMA Network Open.

- Take advantage of warmer weather and find ways to be physically active. Exercise is essential for your physical and mental health. Adults should get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity each week.

- While exercise is important, it's essential to be smart about it. If exercising outside, avoid the early afternoon (noon to 3 p.m.) when it's hottest.

Drink water before, during and after

physical activity, and wear light-colored, lightweight, moisture-wicking clothing. Look for signs of heat exhaustion, including cool, moist, pale skin, heavy sweating, headache, nausea and dizziness.

CDC's Heat Risk Dashboard informs you on how best to protect yourself when temperatures impact your health.

- If consuming alcohol, do so in moderation as defined by the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans – up to one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men, and only by adults of legal drinking age.

- Know your blood pressure numbers. Visit [ManageYourBP.org](http://ManageYourBP.org) to understand your numbers better and take the necessary steps

to control high blood pressure, also known as hypertension. Doing so will reduce your risk of heart attack or stroke.

- Check your community's outdoor air quality using the Air Quality Index. Smoke from wildfires and degraded air quality can irritate your eyes, nose, throat and lungs. Children, pregnant people and those with certain chronic conditions must be conscientious.

"If you have questions or concerns about summer-related health issues, now is a great time to talk to your physician," Dr. Ehrenfeld said.

## This Month in History

### Five years ago, 2019

- After raiding a trap house in Orange Park, sheriff deputies placed a sheet of plywood over a window broken in the raid. On the board was stenciled: "You Had Options" with a steaming cup of coffee, which has become the agency's message in its war to rid the county of illegal drugs.

- Pockets of blue-green algae, also called cyanobacteria, were spotted and tested in multiple areas of Clay County's large section of the river. The most common areas were Doctors Lake, Black Creek and under the Shands Bridge.

- A homeless man was arrested at Dental Plus on Blanding Boulevard after he climbed onto a six-foot-tall statue of Jesus and spray painted the face.

### 10 years ago, 2014

- Orange Park High turned to crowdfunding website SkoolWerx.com to help raise the \$85,000 needed to repair the Don Hall track.

- Clay County Sheriff deputies wrongly extradited a woman from Louisiana who happened to have the same name, Ashley Chiasson, as a suspect for grand theft and attempting to defraud a financial institution. Days after the confusion, the actual correct perpetrator was later arrested.

- U.S. Rep. Ted Yoho (R-3), a veterinarian, volunteered at Clay County Animal Control.

### 20 years ago, 2004

- The Green Cove Springs Police Department investigated a robbery at an Orange Avenue liquor store where the victim suffered a gunshot wound to the upper right chest and shoulder.

- Construction got underway on Seamark Ranch, a home for troubled children, just west of Penney Farms off State Road 16. The facility was built on 468 acres donated by landowners Hawley Smith and Chester Stokes

### 30 years ago, 1994

- The Clay County School Board wrestled with whether to vote outright to raise the property millage rate by a quarter mill – allowable by state law at the time – or ask the Board of County Commissioners to place the measure on that fall's ballot as a straw vote to gauge public support.

- Clay County Sheriff's Office deputies retrieved the body of John Scholtz, 17, of Johnson, Fla., from Lake Geneva following a weekend incident. Police said the teen was on medication for a seizure disorder and may have had a seizure while swimming.

- The Clay County Drug Task Force arrested 57 people during an undercover sting operation. Drugs seized in the raid ranged from marijuana to LSD. The youngest person arrested was 19, while the oldest was 63.

### 40 years ago, 1984

- Florida Agriculture Commissioner Doyle Conner visited sites in the Keystone Heights area to determine what type of disease killed hundreds of live oak trees.

- Attorney Alan Winter was sworn in as an assistant state attorney for the Fourth

Judicial Circuit in which he would serve Clay County.

- Rep. Frank Williams (D-Starke) helped secure \$175,000 in state funds that would be matched with county funds to build a new branch library to serve Middleburg.

### 50 years ago, 1974

- Appointed by Gov. Reuben Askew on May 20, 1971, to fill a seat on the Board of County Commissioners left open by the death of her husband, Otto J. Murrhee Sr., Kathleen Murrhee said she would not run for re-election.

- The Clay County Zoning Commission granted a special use zoning classification to the Clay County School Board to enable the board to construct what would become Orange Park Junior High on Gano Avenue.

- Officers from the Orange Park Police Department investigated the death of Patricia Raye Boyles, 16, whose bruised and battered body was discovered on railroad tracks near I-295 and Wells Road.

## BBQ

from page 4

Pizza Hut from the City of Starke because he wanted a quicker way to get his employees back to work. He tried to find locations along Blanding Boulevard, but none were available. He's expanding the Starke building and hopes to have it operational soon.

At the same time, he's moving forward with a second restaurant that

will transform the restaurant scene in Green Cove Springs.

"We bought the four acres next to Saloon 17," he said. "We are going to build a G's there, too."

The new restaurant on U.S. Highway 17 will be unlike any other.

"It's a big project for Clay County," he said. "It's going to be two or three stories. The bottom two stories will be the barbecue, which will be 9,000 square feet. A nice cigar

lounge will be up there if we do a third floor. We've already done the site plans. It's moving along. It's happening. We have partners, and it's a \$3-\$4 million project.

"There, you heard it from the horse's mouth." And not on Facebook.

"You know, if you just asked me, I would have told you what's going on," Park said. Before the fire, Park said he wanted to open a second restaurant in Macclenny, but his bid on a building failed. Then came the fire.

"Everything kind of happened in reverse," he said. "I wasn't planning on going to Starke. The city owned the building. We made a bid and got it. It was unexpected for me. It may not be where I want to be right now, but I needed to get my employees back to work. That was really important to me." The big project is Green Cove. There's a lot of good things happening."

No matter what the keyboard warriors write.

# Groups dedicated to breaking through the stigma, addiction of opioids

Grieving mother astonished to learn about success of Community Paramedicine programs



Ray Lewis III

Tatyana S. McCall broke her silence during the monthly Clay County SafetyNet Alliance meeting last week when experts warned of the dangers of opioid stigma. The mother of Hall of Fame linebacker Ray Lewis III originally wanted to work with other nonprofits in the county, but she suddenly felt compelled to share the story of Hall of Fame linebacker Ray Lewis and her son, who died nearly a year ago of an accidental drug overdose.



STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

The Community Paramedicine Program network includes, from left, Gabriel Gunn, Director of Community and Social Services with the Board of County Commissioners; Irene Toto, CEO of Clay Behavioral Health Center; Stephanie Geoghagan, Project Coordinator with Clay Action Coalition; Glenn East, Clay Behavioral Opioid Response Coordinator; and Lisa Rogers, Naloxone Coordinator with Community Paramedicine.



By Don Coble  
don@claytodayonline.com

MIDDLEBURG – The longer Tatyana McCall listened to the opioid addiction programs offered and successfully delivered in Clay County, the more difficult it was for her to sit quietly.

There was too much pain, too much angst pent inside a mother's soul to not say something. Her words were more profound than anything printed on a pamphlet.

"I'm taking off my chapter president, my service organization hat and putting on my

SEE NARCAN, 10

## Keystone City Council increases payroll budget by \$200,000

By Jack Randall  
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KEYSTONE HEIGHTS — The council voted 4-0 to expand its payroll budget by 17% and grant a 5% raise for public works employees at a possible new meeting location at the Historic Keystone Pavilion on June 3.

For the 2022-2023 Budget Year, the city's general fund income was \$1,023,055. With about 43% going toward expenses and 41% for payroll, the city had \$158,728 left over.

During a workshop on May 21, Mayor Nina Rodenroth expressed an interest in setting a target of a 60/40 split between payroll and expenses - 60% going to payroll and 40% going toward expenses.

The council also voted unanimously with Councilmember Dan Lewandowski absent - to increase payroll expenditures from \$423,476 to \$625,814, which increases payroll expenditures from 41% to 58% of the city's income.

The city is now projected to have \$17,783 in income left over, with the city's income

expected to increase by 6% since 2023. The increased payroll clarifies five full-time positions and one part-time position in City Hall: public works director, executive assistant/event coordinator, project manager, cemetery manager, public works employee and front desk employee.

Before the vote, Councilmember Christine Thompson amended the proposal to include a 5% raise for public works employees instead of 3%, which she said was an overdue cost-of-living adjustment.

"When was the last time (public works employees) got a cost-of-living adjustment?" Thompson said.

"My feeling is 3% isn't very much, especially since we don't know when they had the last one," she added.

With the amended proposal passing 4-0, Rodenroth met her 60/40 goal.

"The decision is a positive investment for the city and its citizens," Rodenroth said.

"We are still in good shape by increasing our staffing and will continue to have money left. Without proper staffing, the city hosts



STAFF PHOTO BY JACK RANDALL

The new location offers more space than City Hall and a sweeping, picturesque vista of Lake Geneva as a backdrop.

limited events and projects are extended indefinitely due to lack of staffing. Expanding our resources is a good decision for the community," Rodenroth said.

The council is considering to continue to meet at the pavilion since it has more room and a picturesque view of Lake Geneva as a backdrop.

# Rapid DNA machine newest weapon for Sheriff's Office

Testing station can identify and link suspects to unsolved crimes in less than 90 minutes

By Don Coble  
don@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The Clay County Sheriff's Office's newest weapon to stop crime only needs a little spit, not a gun or badge, to complete its job.

The agency's newest gadget, a RapidHIT ID System machine, will use DNA to prevent wanted criminals from being released before they can be identified by other forms of testing. Sheriff Michelle Cook said the new

machine will expedite the identification of criminals linked to unsolved crimes and dead people during an informal presentation for Florida Sen. Jennifer Bradley last Monday.

"This is so exciting. I can't wait because I know the next evolution is going to be a crime scene instant DNA," she said. "If somebody breaks into a house, there's now an ability to swab it right there. We wanted to be one of the first in the state to get this because I want that to be the next step."

Counties used to have to wait between 45 and 90 days for DNA results from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. By then, Cook said anyone wanted for another

**SEE DNA, 11**

STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE  
Clay County Sheriff's Office deputy Charles Harwood shows Sheriff Michelle Cook and Florida Sen. Jennifer Bradley how the RapidHIT ID System DNA machine works.



The agreement between the Clay County School District and the Clay County Sheriff's Office has a budget of approximately \$6.8 million for the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

## School from page 3

County District Schools Police Department. The usage of the resource officers on school campuses dates back to the passing of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act in 2018.

Following the Parkland school shooting, the act aimed to create a safer environment in Florida schools and made many safety reforms, including requiring the presence of patrol officers on school campuses.

The new agreement and budget will officially take effect on July 1 and remain effective until June 30, 2027.

According to the agreement, beginning on July 5, the school board is required to pay the county one-sixth of the agreed budget.

For every month after, a payment of one-twelfth of the budget is required.

The agreement also states that it can be renewed for additional one year terms after its three year run, unless there is a notice of non-renewal by either side.

"We are happy that the Interlocal Agreement with the Clay County School Board regarding funding for the school resource officers was approved tonight by the BoCC. Since the decision to return the SRO function was made last Fall, the Clay County Sheriff's Office and the Clay County School District have worked hand in hand to ensure a transparent and smooth transition," said Sheriff Michelle Cook. "The Clay County Sheriff's Office is committed to keeping our kids safe and that mission starts July 1. We are ready."



Scott Gerber  
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# Residents can embark on a historic adventure with History Passport

By Jack Randall  
jack@claytodayonline.com

CLAY COUNTY – The Celebrate Clay History Passport is both a game and a journey you can embark on to explore the historical sites in the county. By visiting 15 out of 25 historical sites in person, you and your friends and family can win prizes at the Clay County Archives Center.

“This is the inaugural, gamified Clay County history tour,” Kimberly Morgan, Director of Tourism, said.

Think of it like Pokemon Go but for local history.

The History Passport is free to play and an adventure in your pocket. To play, start by downloading the free Explore Clay app and clicking on the Tours sidebar option. Enable the app to access your location while in use, and be sure to create an account so that your progress will be saved.

The app will give directions to each historical marker and briefly describe the historical site. You must be within a certain radius to have your passport “stamped.” Once you’re near the historical site, click “Check-In Now” to get credit.

The app has 25 historical sites to guide you and provide background information. You’ll discover the Clark House, once part



The adventure begins by downloading the Explore Clay app, signing into your account and clicking on Tours on the sidebar. From there, pick an interesting historical site on the Celebrate Clay History Passport. Once you’re within the vicinity of the historical site, click “Check-In Now” to get credit. The app will give you directions to each historical marker and a brief description of the historical site.

of a “monkey farm.” The natural spring at Spring Park has beckoned tourists since the 1870s. The Penney Farms Museum and J. C. Penney Statue. Gold Head Branch, one of Florida’s first state parks, was developed during the New Deal in the 1930s. Branan Field and the National POW/MIA Memo-



STAFF PHOTOS BY JACK RANDALL

rial near where the original Blue Angels squadron practiced. The History Passport is a collaboration between the Clay County Tourism Department and Clay County Archives. Although passports have been created in the past, this is the first one that is interactive.

The app aligns with Clay County District School’s local history curriculum, which is studied in the last two weeks of eighth grade.

Anyone can discover historical monuments hidden in plain sight. “History” isn’t some vague, abstract concept. History is here, present, and all around the county, from Oakleaf to Keystone Heights to Orange Park and Green Cove Springs.

It’s a fun way to spend a day outdoors, entertain children this summer, and show family visitors why your hometown is so great.

“History happened here. Our goal is to share everything that happened here,” Mary Justino, the Clerk’s Office Public Information Officer, said.

“Get out of your zone. Meet your neighbors and explore areas that you wouldn’t go to otherwise,” she said.

If the program succeeds, the team plans to improve it by adding audio and video or more history stops. Think of it as beta testing a new game.

“Get ready, Clay County. There’s lots of history coming your way,” Morgan said.

The app is out now, and the History Passport is free to play. Clay County Archives are open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. for you to share your 15 completed stops, which redeems a prize.

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## Project from page 1

Regional Utilities, St. Johns Utilities and JEA to secure \$100 million to pay for the project.

Once it got going, DBE worked feverishly to stay ahead of schedule and under budget.

“There was seven miles to go at our May 14 meeting (with SJRWMD),” said SOLO member Robert Thomas. “They’re doing about 1,000 feet a day when it’s not raining. That’s taking us about three weeks into September – about Sept. 20, they should be done.”

The Black Creek project will collect excess water and move it to the Lake Region. Katz-James said there are safeguards to



make sure it doesn’t harm Black Creek. Lakes Brooklyn and Geneva are one of two primary sources to replenish the Sante Fe

basin, the primary source of water for Northeast Florida. Thomas said the Black Creek project is expected to be completed this fall.

“Fall,” Katz-Jones said, “is from September to December.”

Nonetheless, Thomas said there are plans to operationalize the pump station as soon as possible.

“This is all very tentative, but at the end of June, they expect to energize the pumps to make sure that they work,” he said. “At the end of September, the tentative plan is to actually send water down the pipeline. Then, they will take October, November, and December to do the treatment area. And tentatively, we could see water to Black Creek in December, provided rainfall allows the pumps Black Creek to be turned on.”

Katz-Jones said the testing in October and November will test the filtration system to remove the reddish-brown tannins from the Black Creek.

With water returning to the Lake Region, SOLO said they would move to another project – removing a forest that sprouted in the baron land that once was under water.

After wrangling for as many as 40 years to replenish the lakes and aquifer, SOLO now can think ahead.

“We’ve already talked with a logging company,” Katz-James said. “When the water comes back, that forest will tie. We’re waiting for approval from the DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) to get ahead of it.”

# Wellness from A to Z

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# Narcan

from page 6

mom hat," she said. "I will share stuff that impacted me relatively recently. I'm the mother of three biological sons and one adopted son, and I share these with Ray Lewis, an NFL Hall of Famer. We lost our oldest son, Ray Lewis III, god, next month will be one year. So many things you said resonated on many different levels, but one pill can kill. As a parent, not knowing that there was this, you know, that he was engaging in these recreational activities."

McCall drove from Orlando to represent the Kappa Alpha Theta sorority at the monthly Clay County SafetyNet Alliance meeting at Mercy Support Services. SafetyNet is a group of service partners among faith-based, non-profit, for-profit and local government groups to avoid duplication and create partnerships to find solutions and improve services within the county.

In May, the topic was fighting the two-front opioid battle—addiction and stigma. The meeting included representatives of Clay County Community Services Department,

## Ways to recognize an overdose:

- Pinpoint pupils
- Person starts turning purple or blue if they're white; gray or ashy if they're Black
- Slow, labored or not breathing. If they're breathing, it may be gurgly
- Person is unresponsive
- Use your knuckles and rub the sternum briskly to see if they recognize pain, or use a hard object and press against a fingernail to see if they recognize pain
- Cold or clammy skin

If any of these signs are prevalent, administer Narcan by spraying one quick burst into one nostril. If the condition doesn't change, spray another Narcan dispenser in the other nostril. If the person is not suffering an overdose, Narcan won't hurt them.

Clay County Fire Rescue Paramedicine Team, Clay Behavioral Health Center, Clay Action Coalition and Phoenix House.

McCall wanted to see how SafetyNet operated and to expand her sorority's efforts to Northeast Florida. Her visit, however, created a resounding effect on everyone – particularly her.

Her son, "Ray-Ray" was found "unresponsive" last June 15. His cause of death was list-

ed as an accidental overdose. McCall said he took an unprescribed pill laced with fentanyl.

"I did see that he had these erratic behaviors," she said. "He suffered from headaches and those sorts of things. He was a lifelong football player. He played football from 5 years old, and he played contact football until he passed away. So, in donating his brain after he passed, we learned that he had chronic traumatic encephalopathy, CTE, which we took as a degenerative brain disease, from the trauma from football impacted those things like substance misuse/substance abuse, so not knowing as a parent was very hard."

Those who deal with opioid addiction said there also are challenges with stigmas. Many feel administering Narcan during an overdose is enabling them to get high again. Some parents, spouses, and friends are embarrassed that their loved one needs help.

"Substance abuse is a disease of the brain," said Lisa Rogers, Naloxone Coordinator Community Paramedicine with Clay County Fire Rescue. "For our program, with the stigma, the most important thing we found has been education. We talked to people, and we let them know that substance use and opioid use disorders are diseases of the brain. And that people are not using it to get high. They're using it just so they're not sick anymore. And once we can educate them with statistics, data and hard evidence, we can change their minds."

Narcan is a nasal spray that helps a person breathe normally during an overdose, and it is harmless if the person is not in drug-induced distress. The paramedicine program offers free Narcan kits at all 13 fire stations, including Orange Park, and at its Paramedicine office at 2710 Blanding Blvd., Suite 8, in the Winn-Dixie shopping center on the corner of County Road 281 in Middleburg. Moreover, they offer free lessons on how to recognize an overdose, how to administer Narcan and how to deal with the stigma linked to addiction.

Officials are adjusting to the stigmas of addictions. At the 2023 Clay County Agricultural Fair, one guest emailed Fire Rescue about the Community Paramedicine Program agency offering free Narcan kits, telling people how to recognize an overdose and where to get help. The person said the program was reviving addicts so they could get high again.

They were ordered to put their Narcan kits under the counter and only give them away if someone asked for them.

Rogers and Clay Behavioral Medical Center's Glenn East said that more than 80% of those who became addicted to opioids started on pain medication following an injury.

Others stay addicted by stealing pills from family members. Rogers said anyone who has unused or outdated pills can drop them off at a fire station or a pharmacy or pick up a free drug deactivation system offered by the Community Coalition Alliance at the paramedicine office on Thursdays. You can place pills in the bag, add water and close the bag. The chemicals inside will dissolve the pills.

"The way you deal with stigma is with education," East said.

That includes educating the public you won't be criminally or civilly responsible for calling 911 or administering Narcan to someone who is overdosing.

At this year's fair, the Community Paramedicine Program had a prominent booth in front of the Exhibition Halls, and they were allowed to display literature and Narcan kits.

"And we handed out 1,545 Narcan kits," Rogers said. "We can't save them if we can't get them the help they need."

There are 164 people currently undergoing addiction treatment at Clay Behavioral, and all but one came through the paramedicine program, according to Gabrielle Gunn, Director of Community and Social Services with the Clay County Board of County Commissioners.

"I talk to people all over the state, health programs all over the state," East said. "I don't think anybody has the network we developed for our community."

For McCall, the trip to Clay County was so enlightening that it helped her gain a little more insight into her son's dark secrets.

"He passed away in the Central Florida area in Orlando, which is in a big city, you know, and the point you made, there was nothing like this there, no information accessible or visible," she said. "We were a very prominent family with access to resources and information. But as a mother of sons, I didn't have this information connected to me."

"I just want to commend each of you and your organization for what you're doing. As I sat here this morning, I was going to introduce our local chapter that we just chartered here in Clay County to the services we provide."

"I've had to fight back with Mother's Day just passing and the anniversary of his passing coming up in a couple of weeks. When this happened with my son, it was heartbreaking."

But this is commendable. So keep doing what you're doing. I hope there is a way to share the pathway you all are creating with other organizations. Other counties like Seminole County and Orange County don't have this. Other counties can learn from what you're doing here."



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# DNA

from page 7

crime would likely have bonded out. The RapidHIT DNA machine can return a result in about 85 to 90 minutes before the arrestee makes a bond appearance.

“So that allows you to have that information before they get released (on bond). I mean, that’s a big deal,” Bradley said.

“Before they’ve got a first appearance because in that 90 minutes, we’ll actually get their DNA through (National Crime Information Center), and we’ll be able to match it,” said CCSO deputy Charles Harwood.

“You could have an unsolved case, and you get a hit before they’re released, and you’re able to tie this individual to an unsolved prominent crime in another jurisdiction somewhere as opposed to having to wait 45-90 days...” Bradley said.

“And the person’s out doing it again,” Cook said.

“That’s a pretty big deal,” Bradley said.

The machine from Thermo Fisher Scientific cost about \$130,000, but it came as part of a \$250,000 grant given to the Florida Sheriff’s Association last September. Eleven mid-sized counties, including Flagler, Baker and Nassau counties in Northeast Florida, were selected to receive a portion of the \$2.75 million allotted in the current budget by the Florida Legislature and signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Bradley, along with Reps. Sam Garrison and Bobby Payne, representing all or portions of Clay County, voted in favor of the bill.

During the booking process, if the suspect meets one of the following criteria, a DNA sample is taken from five swabs of their mouth. According to Harwood, an arrestee charged with homicide, assault, battery, culpable negligence, kidnapping, custody offenses, human trafficking, false imprisonment, luring or enticing a child, weapons or firearms offenses, sexual battery, lewdness, indecent exposure, burglary and trespassing, theft, robbery and related crimes, drug abuse, prevention and control can be tested.

People tested in Clay County are more likely to be charged with violent crimes like murder, attempted murder and sex crimes, Harwood said. He expects the county to average 2.2 tests a day. Each test costs \$135.

“This is going to be for anybody that comes that’s been arrested and has no DNA profile on file at FDLE or in any county,” Harwood said. So basically, when we fingerprint them and look at their charges, we determine whether they’re eligible because several statutes are required. Right, they’re

also those that require us to take DNA. So what we do is fingerprint them. We have a scanner over there. Our live scan is our fingerprint machine, and it’s tied into rapid DNA.”

Each test kit has an RFID reader that must be scanned when opened and before it is placed inside the RapidHIT ID machine to ensure a chain of custody. The swab is then pushed into a cartridge and inserted into the machine. Less than 90 minutes later, it pro-

vides information about a match with FDLE or any other agency or no match at all.

“It helps because sometimes if they’re in here for a serious crime or they know they’re wanted, they don’t give us their real name,” Cook said.

Bradley said Cook’s insistence was a big reason Clay County was one of 11 in Florida to get the machine.

“We’ve got the technology. It’s just expensive,” she said. “The larger counties have the

ability to secure the funds to get it. But in the mid-size growing counties, you don’t want to see an uptick in some of this violent crime; we’ve got to get them the tools to get to the communities.

“This doesn’t happen without the counties advocating for it and reaching out to the state and saying, ‘Look, we need it,’ and that’s what y’all did. That’s what the sheriff did. And that makes a big difference.”



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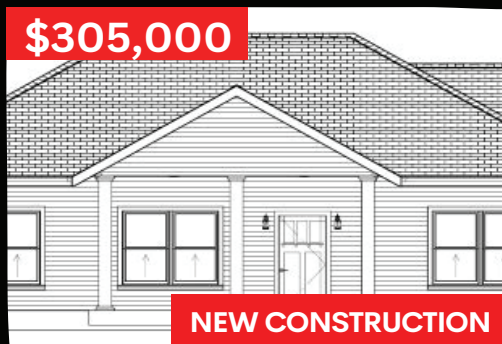
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# The Melrose Center: A mosaic of art, music, community

By Jack Randall  
jack@claytodayonline.com

MELROSE — A statue named “Aariel” spreads its arms as it stands in the sculpture garden beside a flamboyance (flock) of flamingoes. It is a welcoming monument that symbolizes the Melrose Center’s commitment to the community it cares for.

The Melrose Center – part art gallery, part restaurant cafe, part health clinic – is a nonprofit founded in 2010 by Bruce and Gwen Waite. The cafe is open five days a week from Tuesday to Saturday.

“Our model is to look and feel like a café and a restaurant. People come in to socially connect,” Bruce said. “It was in response to a need in the community. There wasn’t a place of this nature where people could come together. Over time, it’s proven to be a haven



STAFF PHOTOS BY JACK RANDALL  
“Aariel” sculpted by Kirsten Engstrom greets patrons visiting the Melrose Center.

for many people.”

“We have many groups, such as singers and dancers, who perform. It’s fun. We love them. There’s a lot to do here,” Gwen said.

The first Friday of every month is a special occasion at the center. A health checkup fair kicks off in the morning, followed by an art walk later at night.

At the health checkup fair recently, the restaurant’s dining hall welcomed patrons for free screenings for diabetes and cholesterol, plus access to a pediatrician and a general physician. The screenings were free regardless of insurance status. Bruce



STAFF PHOTOS BY JACK RANDALL  
Gwen and Bruce Waite and their daughter, Dakota, pose for a photo during the monthly Melrose Art Walk.

said more than 20 received their COVID-19 booster shots.

“We have a lot of local artists who are also very involved in the health care stuff. They donate their time,” Gwen said.

The Melrose Art Walk is a community-wide event in which other businesses and

art galleries participate. The same artists and patients from the health checkup fair can return later for a night of live music, a bite to eat, dancing beside the stage, and a stroll through the art gallery at the other building.

The Melrose Center is strategically located in the unincorporated town of Melrose, which is at the crossroads of four counties: Clay, Putnam, Bradford, and Alachua.

“And we’re right in the center of all four,” Bruce said. “We’re 200 yards from Clay, 200 from Bradford and 300 from Alachua. We serve all four counties.”

Bruce and Gwen are from Key West, bringing their motto: “one human family,” and an island-time appreciation for arts and culture.

The Waite family left Key West to pursue a contract to create the Butterfly Rainforest at the Florida Museum of Natural History in Gainesville. The contract was an interesting project that led the family to travel throughout Central and South America for “butterfly operations.”

“It was nifty to have 150,000 live butterflies flying around,” Bruce said.



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SEE MELROSE, 17

# Fire up grill for sweet, smoky smell of success

Tips for turning flame-broiled disasters into pitmaster perfection

By Don Coble  
don@claytodayonline.com

CLAY COUNTY — There's more to cooking the perfect piece of meat over an open flame than soaking it with lighter fluid, throwing a match, and watching the smoke blanket the neighborhood in a greasy fog.

Most of us would like to believe we are the King of the Cookout, the Sultan of the Smoker, and the Potentate of the Pit. However, most of us lack the skill and patience to turn a slab of raw meat into a juicy, smoke-ringed masterpiece.

"First, it's a passion," said Blues Hog BBQ championship team member Josh Skipper. "It's supposed to be simple. It takes in all the senses — the smell, the taste, the sound, the sight and the touch."

Skipper lives on Fleming Island and was part of the 2022 team that won the Whole Hog competition at Memphis in May, considered the World Championship. This year, Blues Hog finished fourth in Whole Hog and first in Seafood.

Like most grilling experts, there are differing opinions on achieving perfection. But most agree on a few basic facts: it takes patience, the proper cooking vessel and fuel, and quality meat and vegetables.

"I enjoy the atmosphere of being outside," said Middleburg's Jason Wheeler, who has a catering food truck, Wheeler's Barbecue. "Once you learn the art of true barbecue and what it takes to make really good barbecue, that's what really makes it fun because you put in the time and the effort. It's just slow smoke."

Wheeler said he prefers using pecan wood. Others like oak or hickory.



Jason Wheeler loves the time and effort it takes to make good barbecue.

According to the Grill Masters Club, oak and post oak are best for brisket, sausage, ribs, and chicken. Hickory is popular in the South and is best for pork and chicken. Maple has a sweeter undertone for bacon, ham, cheese, and vegetables, while pecan is similar to hickory and is best for pork, beef, and chicken. Alder works best with seafood, and Mesquite has a savory smoke flavor for chicken and larger cuts of pork and beef.

G's Slow Smoked BBQ owner Gary Park said one of the biggest mistakes made by

SEE GRILL, 16



STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

Todd Knowles of Premier Gas and Grills in Green Cove Springs said to use the right grill and the right fuel for each recipe.



Josh Skipper said the secret to good barbecue is using all of your senses around the grill.



Gary Park said wait until the fire is ready before adding your meat because "you want a good, clean smoke."

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## Grill

from page 15

amateur grillers is adding the meat too soon.

"You've got to wait until the charcoal burns down," he said. "When I started 20 or 30 years ago, I always ruined some hamburgers. I used charcoal, probably Kingsford or something, and lighter fluid, which is fine if you let it burn out. But I didn't let it burn out in time. I was ready to eat my hamburgers, and they smelled like lighter fluid, so they were ruined."

Todd Knowles, owner of Premier Gas and Grills in Green Cove Springs, said the type of fuel you use is critical.

"If you're serious about grilling, you should have three grills," he said. "Charcoal is for steaks and chicken. A pellet smoker is for ribs and brisket. A gas grill is for hot dogs, burgers and vegetables. Yes, I said vegetables. Grilling vegetables in a good pan with oil and seasonings is amazing."

"Each grill has a purpose. Pellet grills are great for smoking meats and are easy to use, while charcoal grills take a little more work but are always worth the wait once you take a bite. Propane can cook many things, but you must cook low and slow."

"Remember, with anything, preparation and time is what it takes to produce great-tasting food. We aren't microwaving. We're grilling."



**"If you're serious about grilling, you should have three grills. Charcoal is for steaks and chicken. A pellet smoker is for ribs and brisket. A gas grill is for hot dogs, burgers and vegetables. Yes, I said vegetables. Grilling vegetables in a good pan with oil and seasonings is amazing."**

— Todd Knowles, owner of Premier Gas and Grills in Green Cove Springs

World champions are determined by cooking whole hogs. But since most of us either can't or won't face that challenge, a brisket is considered one of the most difficult items to master, especially a whole brisket, since one end has two layers and the other is considerably thinner.

Again, the secret is low and slow.

It could take 20 hours to trim, season, inject and cook a 16-pound brisket. And during that time, you must keep an eye on the fire to maintain a 225-275-degree temperature. It's best to start new charcoal and wood outside the grill and add the embers to

the fire to avoid the bitter taste of creosotes until it burns off.

Also, it's important to cook brisket wrapped in butcher paper or foil on the grill for the final two hours and let it "rest" for another hour before you cut into it. Your patience will be rewarded.

Park, who will open two BBQ restaurants in Starke and Green Cove Springs, said if you're in a hurry, go through the drive-thru line and the local burger joint. But if you want a real reward, light the grill, pull up a lawn chair and wait.

"For me personally, when it comes to

barbecue, it's my passion," he said. "I love barbecue. It's a game of patience. You want to ensure your fire's right because you want a good, clean smoke."

When you master that, you can tackle which sauce is best. There are Texas and Kansas City sauces, Alabama white sauce, North Carolina vinegar, and Lexington sauces. Georgia has a sauce, as do South Carolina, Florida, Memphis, and St. Louis. There are even mustard sauces and dry spice rubs.

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## Community Briefs

### Gary Newman elected State Vietnam Veteran's Council President

ORLANDO – Aaron "Gary" Newman of Orange Park was elected President of the Vietnam Veterans of America Florida State Council on June 8 at the Orlando Marriott Lake Mary.

The Navy veteran has served as Florida State Council First Vice President for four years. Before that, he held the position of Second Vice President.

The Florida State Council is the second largest VVA state council, with 5,825 members and 30 chapters as of April 2024.

Newman, the founder and former president of VVA Col. William G. Byrns Chapter 1059 in Clay County, was inducted in 2018 into the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame.

He also founded Chapter 1080, the incarcerated chapter at Union Correctional Institution, and currently serves on the VVA's Veterans Incarcerated and In the Justice committee. He was recognized in 2017 by the VVA for his work with incarcerated veterans.

A recipient of the VVA's Special Achievement Award of 2022, he is the former Florida Veterans Assistance Foundation president.

He was the 2017 Florida State Council John Koprowski Member of the Year, and in 2015, he received the VVA President's Spe-



Aaron 'Gary' Newman

cial Recognition Award for a new Veterans Treatment Court in Clay County.

Newman replaces John McGinty of Chapter 1084, who held the FSC's president position for four years.

Marc Goodell, President of Thomas H. Corey Chapter 25 in West Palm Beach, was elected First Vice President, and Jerry Klein, Vice President of Thomas H. Corey Chapter 25 in West Palm Beach, was elected the Second Vice President.

David Treffinger, President of Col. William G. Byrns Chapter 1059, was elected secretary, and Stuart Berman, Secretary-Treasurer of Chapter 594 in Fort Myers, was elected treasurer.

### Community First Credit Union selects Sam Inman as CEO

JACKSONVILLE—The Board of Directors of Community First Credit Union of Florida announced D. Samuel "Sam" Inman,

SEE BRIEFS, 18





Art on display and available for purchase in the art gallery.

## Melrose

from page 14

The family fell in love with Melrose as they finished their contract. Their prior work in social services in Key West and Texas spurred an interest in the family to set up their one-stop shop. They ended up fitting right in. Melrose consists of a large population of Key West "expatriates."

Between the wellness fair and the art walk, the Melrose Center employees have

dinner together in the dining hall underneath, where the "Conch Republic Flag" of Key West is proudly displayed.

Bruce joked Melrose is the "Northern-most Point."

The restaurant's menu blends Cuban and Greek culinary traditions to reengineer popular meals to be healthier.

The walls are adorned with paintings and sketches. Crafts can be bought in the

gift shop. One craftsman assembled a guitar made of stained glass that glows with a button press. Another crafted a lamp using found materials resembling a UFO.

All the added items create a mosaic of the Melrose Center's close-knit community.

"Leave the politics outside. Enjoy the music and the food. We focus on commonalities here. The things we still agree on," Bruce said.

Catie Miller cherishes the Melrose

Center, which she calls "our clubhouse." Her partner, Kirsten Engstrom, sculpted "Ariel."

"We were what you'd call 'hippies' or 'counterculture.' We've always been community-oriented and loving. We have recreated that community feeling here," Miller said.

"Bruce and Gwen have offered a place for others to come. This is their service on this planet. They're special, special people."

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## Briefs

from page 16

MBA has been selected as its new CEO and president, assuming the position on Aug. 31 after a brief transition alongside retiring CEO John Hirabayashi.

Inman most recently served as chief financial officer and chief risk officer at Community First and has held various leadership roles since joining the organization in 1990. He started as an assistant accounting manager at the credit union and became its first internal auditor.



D. Samuel Inman

Rising through the ranks, Inman joined the senior leadership team as CFO in 1997.

Three Community First branches are in Clay County — Oakleaf, Orange Park and Fleming Island.

The Board of Directors conducted a comprehensive national search for the new CEO and president. Board Chair Malinda “Lindy” Prudencio chaired the CEO Search Committee and partnered with a national search firm to interview candidates from

credit unions nationwide, ultimately choosing Inman for the position.

“Sam was the top candidate among some of the finest credit union leaders in the country,” said Prudencio. “We believe he is the best leader to secure and expand Community First’s future.”

Inman has played an instrumental role in growing Community First’s assets from \$156 million to \$2.7 billion, with \$344 million retained earnings since joining the organization more than 34 years ago.

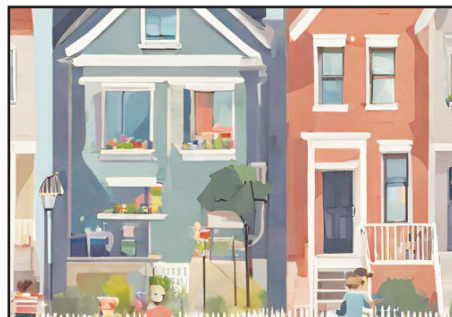
### Input needed for Community Block Grants

CLAY COUNTY—Every year, the county receives funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development through the Community Development Block Grant program.

The money spent through the CDBG program must serve one of three CDBG National Objectives: to benefit low-and moderate-income persons; to aid in the prevention or elimination of slum or blight; and to meet a community development need of urgency.

Residents are encouraged to join the discussion on how the county will address its current needs at four remaining public hearings:

- Keystone Heights Pavilion, 565 S. Lawrence Blvd., on June 17, at 6 p.m.
- Middleburg-Clay Hill Library, 2245



Aster Ave, Middleburg, on June 18, at 6 p.m.

- Orange Park Library, 2054 Plainfield Ave., on June 27 at 6 p.m.

- County Administration Building, 477 Houston St., Green Cove Springs, on July 23, at 5 p.m.

### Boys and Girls Clubs offering Free Super Camps this summer

CLAY COUNTY—The Boys and Girls Clubs of Northeast Florida are hosting free Super Camps at several schools. The camps focus on academics, STEM, Art, Sports, Music, Food, Field Trips and more.

The programs are a safe place for children to enhance their growth during the summer. Sessions are Monday through Friday, until July 19 at:

- Grove Park Elementary, 1643 Miller St., Orange Park, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. To register, visit [BGCNF.ORG](http://BGCNF.ORG).

- Montclair Elementary, 2398 Moody Ave., Orange Park, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. (bus transportation is provided.) To register, visit [BGCNF.ORG/JOIN](http://BGCNF.ORG/JOIN).

- Wilkinson Junior High, 5025 County Road 215, Middleburg, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (transportation is available.) To register, email [Charlie@BGCNF.org](mailto:Charlie@BGCNF.org).

- Green Cove Springs Junior High, 1220 Bonaventure Ave., from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. (transportation is provided.) To register, email [drut@bgcnf.org](mailto:drut@bgcnf.org).

### Orange Park Woman’s Club award eight scholarships

ORANGE PARK—Eight Clay County graduating seniors of the Class of 2024 received \$1000 scholarships from the Orange Park Woman’s Club. Certificates were presented during the senior awards programs at each student’s high school.

Recipients submitted letters of recommendation, an essay, information on community service performed, and various awards received in ninth through 12th grades. The scholarship program and other outreach efforts in education have been a

major focus of the Orange Park Woman’s Club for many years. Proceeds from the Club’s annual Rummage Sale in late July provide scholarship funding.

Scholarships were awarded to Jessica Cherry, Tyler Davies, Sunai Grant, Tyler Howell, Cheyenne Ivey, Jaden Park, Alina Stefanik and Grace Ward.

### Georgia Southern announces its honor roll lists

STATESBORO, Ga. – Several former Clay County students were recognized for academic achievement for the Spring Semester at Georgia Southern University.

Katy Callahan of Fleming Island, Kamryn Valentine and Krystyn Wright of Middleburg and Zoe Dearborn of Keystone Heights earned spots on the President’s List for achieving 4.0 grade point averaged with a minimum of 12 semester hours, while Rachel Cannady of Green Cove Springs, Shania Pinkney and Skyler Vanslyke and Oakleaf and Kendall Sage of Fleming Island all made the Dean’s List with GPAs of at least 3.5. Georgia Southern University, a public Carnegie Doctoral/R2 institution founded in 1906, offers approximately 155 different degree programs serving more than 26,100 students through 10 colleges on three campuses in Statesboro, Savannah, Hinesville and online instruction.

### Maryland Global Campus’s Dean’s List filled with Clay students

ADELPHI, Md. – More than 15,000 University of Maryland Global Campus students made the Dean’s List for the spring term. To be eligible for the honor, a student must complete at least six credits during the term, earn a grade point average of at least 3.5 term and maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.5.

The following students in the area earned the honors: Stephanie Angarita-Esquerria and Quintavius Freeman from Fleming Island, Quinton Brent, Onjel Caraballo, Dustin Clover, Capri Davis, Brittanie Henderson and Casey Lima of Middleburg, Kianna Brown and Oscar Montano of orange park, Carlos Conyers, Andrew Veldman and Benjamin Wolfe of Oakleaf, Jason Garcia, Regina McCormick and Samuel Willow of Green Cove Springs and Amber Lind of Keystone Heights. University of Maryland Global Campus was founded more than 75 years ago to serve the higher education needs of working adults and military servicemembers.

### How to report a problem with a Clay Electric outdoor light

If you are aware of an inoperative or malfunctioning outdoor light on Clay Electric Cooperative’s lines, call 1-800-224-4917 to report the problem; login to [MyClayElectric](http://MyClayElectric), click Submit an Inquiry, then Other Issues/General Inquiry, then Outdoor Light Problem; or email [contactus@clayelectric.com](mailto:contactus@clayelectric.com) to report the problem.

When reporting the problem, you will need to provide the following information so the co-op can make the appropriate repair, and contact you should there be any questions:

- (1) Specific street address where the outdoor light is located
- (2) A description of where the outdoor light is located on the property
- (3) A description of the nature of the malfunction or failure of illumination of the outdoor light
- (4) Sufficient contact information, including your name, address, telephone number, and account number (if a Clay Electric Cooperative member)



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Clay High softball player plays

# FAST & FURIOUS

## Hey Mom? Can I have a dragster?

By Randy Lefko  
Randy@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS - For Heather Highhouse, the beauty of allowing her two children; Savannah and Will, to drive down a drag strip at 100-200 miles per hour is the blackmail aspect of "So you don't want to take the garbage out?"

"It does have its advantages," said Heather Highhouse, the team mom, strategist, nutritionist and track photographer for her two very fast kids; 14-year-old Savannah, a Clay High freshman, and Will, 18, about to graduate Clay High senior. "Though I kid about that as part of them running dragsters,

I think they are both pretty good kids and understand that they have earned their ability to compete."

For Savannah Highhouse, a 14-year-old (15 in August) freshman catcher and outfield player on the Clay High softball team who is without an automobile driver's license yet, the draw to racing dragsters; which started at 10 years old, came with hanging out at the track while Dad was racing muscle cars down the track.

Heather Highhouse recalls going to the track with her dad as a childhood weekend adventure.



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Savannah Highhouse smiles amidst the checks she has won in recent drag races.

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# Fast

from page 19

"I grew up at the track with my dad who raced a 1968 GTO," said Heather Highhouse. "I grew up from six weeks old at the track. Bill and I met when he was like 20 years old when he raced with a 1980 Camaro. I married into the race scene, but we built the family first."

Where the kids got involved was when Bill got the itch to race again when Savannah was about nine years old.

"I was okay with the dragster idea," said Heather Highhouse, noting husband Bill runs and is part owner of First Coast Electric to finance the adventures. "It was a passion of the family."

For Savannah Highhouse, who had a game ball from the Blue Devils come from behind win over Ponte Vedra, the thrill of anticipating a home run is about as nerve-racking as awaiting the green light on the track for her race start.



Savannah Highhouse shows off some "bling" she has won in her recent racing. Will Highhouse, also a dragster racer, shows off his dad Billy's two champions trophies with Savannah watching.

"I had to get an NHRA (National Hot Rod Association) physical to get an NHRA license," said Savannah Highhouse. "They make sure I'm physically fit to drive the dragster. My dad came to Lake Asbury Elementary to take me and Will with him to buy a dragster. I said, 'cool!'"

With softball her main passion at the time, when she was eight, Savannah watched and fell in love with the sport.

"I was eight when we got the dragster and it took me a year to decide that I wanted to race them," said Savannah Highhouse, who raced a two-day bracket race at the Gainesville Dragway on Saturday and Sunday, May 18-19 with recent excursions to Las Vegas and Bristol, TN. "I was on a travel softball team and that took much of the weekend. I had to choose."

In her racing career thus far, recently, Savannah Highhouse has climbed to a top five rankings in the United States including a recent best appearing junior dragster award plus some winners checks.

"I got a new car in the works that is being sandblasted and built," said Savannah

# CLAY COUNTY IS FAST & FURIOUS



Other local dragster phenoms at Gainesville Dragway on Saturday were, from left, Ciara Height from Keystone Heights, Rydin Cook of Orange Park along with twin brother Zandir, Blake Jones of Orange Park and Haleigh Wright of Middleburg.

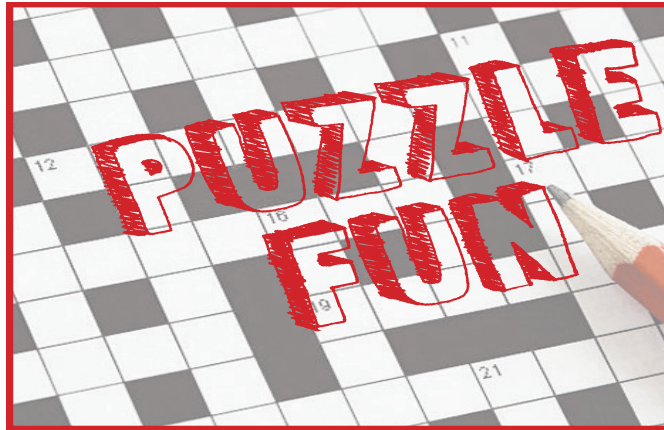
Highhouse. "I have to know a lot about the weather, the tire pressures, the chains, the clutch and the reactions. The only thing I don't do is start the engine. My dad does that outside the car."

The parallels of drag racing and softball are unique for Savannah with her first "almost" home run giving her the same adrenaline rush at home plate as waiting for the green light on the start strip.

"As soon as I get in my car, I get in my zone," said Savannah Highhouse. "Just before I'm ready to go, after prestage and my tire burnout, I sit in my car and pray a little. I get a fist pump from my brother and then I'm ready to go."

In the Ponte Vedra game where she got the game ball for her five runs batted in, Savannah Highhouse nearly got her first high school home run.

"It was just as intense when I got in the batter's box as waiting for the green light," said Savannah Highhouse, who put five runs across with two doubles and nearly hit the dinger in the 9-4 win. "Coach Lewis (Clay softball coach Matt Lewis) said he never gives game balls to hitters, but that was quite the night for me."



Advanced level crossword puzzle grid with numbers 5, 8, 4, 2, 7, 9, 8, 4, 2, 1, 7, 5, 3, 9, 6, 8, 2, 1, 2, 9, 9, 5, 3, 7, 2.

Level: Advanced

CRYPTO FUN Determine the code to reveal the answer!

Solve the code to discover words related to grilling. Each number corresponds to a letter. (Hint: 24 = O)

- A. 12 11 26 10 10 Clue: Outdoor cooking device
B. 8 11 24 8 13 2 17 Clue: Gas fuel
C. 5 23 13 11 5 24 13 10 Clue: Grill fuel option
D. 5 24 24 4 26 2 12 Clue: Preparing a meal

Answers: A. grill B. propane C. charcoal D. cooking

WORD SCRAMBLE

Rearrange the letters to spell something pertaining to grilling.

RBGRUE

Blank boxes for the word scramble answer.

Answer: Burger

Guess Who?

I am a singer/songwriter born in Alabama on June 20, 1949. I founded several R&B groups and also played tennis on scholarship. I co-wrote a song to help raise funds for famine in Africa. Today, I'm a judge on "American Idol."

Answer: Lionel Richie



Numbered grid for the Grill & BBQ Word Search puzzle.

GRILL & BBQ WORD SEARCH

Word search grid containing letters: B L P B I F I N I B T M T N D M G H, H L U R E D E T A S L F E K A R H N A V K H G D G, C E B R D A S L F E K A R H N A V K H G D G, T H P N A I E R C T E I E Y I T N H R I H B D R N N R B L E R H N M B F L F K Y C S H R C C L N O, U O R T S V G B M A R I N A D E, O P V C N P D V I H N T P A L K O, R N P I B R T F S K R R A B N Y, T R E D H E I L F I L R M N B S, E I E T E I K S I R B B, V V V C M O S M O K E S, A A A F N G E S G, L L H I T P F, Y L F F M I P G, H B D R N N R B L, E P M E T A B B N E, C I M E Y E A O R, G N A F A A I, B B V F I U N R S H B, P V F I U N R S H B, U O K E L L P T R A C I P R, L L C C R R E D G P F Y E, S N U T O A S E B D A, D T L E G V D V R V H, I L V U B D A F U S B

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## LEGALS

### LEGAL NOTICE

**Project Title:** Demolition and Site Preparation Services for Existing Building

**Introduction:** The City of Keystone Heights, located in Keystone Heights, FL is seeking proposals from qualified contractors to provide demolition and site preparation services for an existing building located at 125 E Walker Drive, Keystone Heights, FL 32656. The scope of work includes the demolition and removal of the existing abandoned building and site furnishings, disconnection of electrical and plumbing systems, debris removal, and maintenance of traffic during the demolition process.

**The prebid meeting date will be June 24, 2024 at 10:00 AM and all bids are due by July 16, 2024 at 4:00 PM.**

**Project Overview:** The project involves the complete demolition of an existing building encompassing 1,500 square feet. The building is a vacant brick restaurant. The City of Keystone Heights shall make its best efforts to maintain the site conditions existing at the time of inspection for bidding purposes. The demolition must be conducted in accordance with all relevant local, state, and federal regulations. Qualified contractors must carry Commercial General Liability Insurance of 100/300

**Scope of Work:** The scope of work for this project includes, but is not limited to:  
-Demolition and removal of the existing building, concrete/asphalt slabs, and foundations.  
-Demolition and removal of site improvements, including but not limited to foundation, parking slab, concrete sidewalk, underground structures, signs, and poles.  
-Disconnection and removal of all electrical and plumbing systems. Contractor required to call 811 for locates prior to work being commenced.  
-Proper disposal of hazardous materials, if any, in accordance with environmental regulations.  
-Removal and disposal of all debris generated during the demolition process.  
-Implementation and maintenance of traffic control measures to ensure safety during demolition activities. Conduct demolition operations to prevent injury to people and damage to adjacent facilities. Ensure safe passage of people and traffic around the demolition area.  
-Restoration of the site to a clean and level condition upon completion of dem-

olition activities.

**Quality Assurance:** Contractor shall comply with all applicable EPA, state and local notification regulations before starting demolition. Contractor shall comply with hauling and disposal regulations of authorities having jurisdiction; all other codes, standards, regulations, and workers' safety rules that are administered by federal agencies (HUD, EPA, OSHA, and DOT) or state agencies (State OSHA, DEM, DOH, etc.); and any other local regulations and standards (i.e. building codes) that may apply. The demolition contractor must secure all associated permits. By submitting a proposal, Contractor affirms they have familiarized themselves with the legal requirements (federal, state, and local laws, ordinances, rules, and regulations) and other conditions which may affect performance of this Scope of Work.

**Proposal Requirements:** Interested contractors are requested to submit proposals that include the following information:  
-Company profile, including relevant experience in demolition and site preparation projects.  
-Description of the proposed methodology and equipment to be used for demolition and debris removal.  
-Proposed timeline for completion of the project.  
-Safety plan outlining measures to ensure the safety of workers and the surrounding community during demolition activities.  
-Environmental protection plan detailing how hazardous materials will be identified, handled, and disposed of in compliance with regulations.  
-Cost proposal, including a breakdown of all expenses related to the project.

**Evaluation Criteria:** Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:  
-Experience and qualifications of the contractor.  
-Proposed methodology and equipment.  
-Compliance with safety and environmental regulations.  
-Cost-effectiveness of the proposal.  
-Proposed timeline for completion of the project.  
-Appropriate insurance coverage (\$1 Million/\$3 Million)

**Submission Instructions:** Proposals must be submitted electronically to Beau Wright at [wright@keystoneheights.us](mailto:wright@keystoneheights.us) no later than [Proposal Submission Deadline]. Late submissions will not be considered.

**Site Visit:** A mandatory pre-bid site visit will be held on [Date and Time] at 125 E Walker Drive, Keystone Heights, FL 32656. Contractors must attend the site visit to familiarize themselves with the project site and requirements. Contractor must survey the existing site to determine the scope of demolition as well as the existence of any potential hazardous materials.

**Contact Information:** For inquiries or clarifications regarding this RFP, please contact Beau Wright at [wright@keystoneheights.us](mailto:wright@keystoneheights.us) or 352-473-4807.

**Reservation of Rights:** The City of Keystone Heights reserves the right to reject any or all proposals received, to waive any irregularities or informalities in the proposals received, and to select the proposal deemed to be in the best interest of the city.

Thank you for your interest in this project. We look forward to receiving your proposal.

**Legal 11/20/2024 Published 6/13/2024 and 6/20/2024 in Clay County's Clay Today newspaper and 6/20/2024 in Clay County's Keystone Herald newspaper**

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