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THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 26, 2024

Vol .14 • No. 7







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His life speaks Yolanda Osborne-Kohn reflects on the loss, and legacy of her son, Drew Kohn

kyla@claytodayonline.com

OAKLEAF - There is no linear path to grieving a loss.

For a loss as significant as Yolanda Osborne-Kohn's, she is learning how to day by day.

On some days, Osborne-Kohn said she still finds herself cooking extra food for her son. Or, venturing into his room in the middle of the night hoping to find him. To hear his voice. To hear his infectious laugh.

Until it strikes her that he's not

"How do you process not seeing the physical person," Osborne-Kohn said. "Like, I'm aware that he's not here. So, that's when the tears

Following a hit-and-run incident on July 26, Morgan-Drew Kohn's life was tragically cut short seven days before his 30th birthday. In the early morning hours, while walking eastbound on Collins Road, Drew was struck by a pickup truck. He died at the scene.

Yolanda Osborne-Kohn reflects on the life,

Osborne-Kohn said she accepted it was his time to go. In the years he had been on Earth, she said he had done everything he wanted to do-live his life to the fullest and inspire others.

She remembers her son as a fighter. In 2017, just seven years before his untimely death, Drew fought tooth and nail to come back from a motorcycle accident that almost took his life. A traumatic brain injury, an impaled lung and a severed quad. When doctors said he would never be the same, Osborne-Kohn said she knew

SEE DREW, 6









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BCC holds first public hearing for tentative millage rate

Bv Kvla Woodard kyla@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS - The Board of County Commissioners held its first public hearing of an adopted budget and millage rate at Tuesday afternoon's meeting.

For the fiscal year 2024 to 2025, the tentative millage rate is set for 8.3766. This is more than the current rolled-back rate of 7.8790 mills by 6.32%.

The Board members reassured the public that this mileage rate has no increase in ad valorem taxes.

This fiscal year's tentative adopted budget was also set at \$819,013,037.

In other business

In other business, Clay County Parks and Recreation presented a study on

the progress of the future Veterans Park. Currently on phase one of the project, a feasibility study and site evaluation were conducted.

With 641 acres of land, the new park will be maintained as a public park for recreational purposes.

Of the many key findings, a significant one determined that there will need to be improvements to Spencer Grade Road for public vehicle access.

Currently the park allows for hike-in/ ride-in only. The county is continuing coordination with Jennings State Forest to determine a potential timeframe and funding for this project. Parks and Recreation will report back to the board with more information regarding the park at a later date.



STAFF PHOTO BY KYLA WOODARD

At Tuesday's meeting, the BCC held its first public hearing for a tentative budget and millage rate for fiscal year 2024 to 2025.

School district approves new direct messaging Apptegy app

By Don Coble don@claytodayonline.com

FLEMING ISLAND – The Clay County School Board approved a new app that will foster communication throughout the district at its Sept 5 meeting.

Apptegy, a media platform designed for school districts, would facilitate monitored direct messaging between teachers, coaches, parents and students. Previously, the school district used emails sent through Synergy.

Apptegy has the added benefit of sending district-wide messages to all schools and families, such as if the school was canceled

'This has been months in the making and is a collaborative effort between our Community Relations and ITS departments. I am the lead for Goal 3 of our strategic plan, which focuses on Family and Community Engagement," Communications Director Terri Dennis said.

The school districts in Putnam and Sarasota counties currently use Apptegy.

The district currently spends \$153,750.80 on district-wide communications. Apptegy aims to integrate various communication tools, such as ClassDojo and GroupMe, onto one platform.

In other business

In other business, the school board proclaimed September as Attendance Awareness Month. Posters have been placed in schools, and special perks are offered to students who don't miss classes or aren't late.



The school board recognized the National Speech and Debate team from Keystone Junior/ High following their appearance at the National Tournament. From left, Keystone Height Principal Laurie Burke joined Olivia McCoy, Mikayla Turner, Seth Preseau, Benjamin Mann and sponsor Shannon Southam after the four students received their awards at the Sept. 5



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Young Oakleaf chef second-guesses his second-place finish

Landon Brown excels in statewide Florida Future Chef championship

By Don Coble

don@claytodayonline.com

OAKLEAF – Although he's just 10 and in fifth grade, Landon Brown couldn't help but wonder if he should have been a little bolder with his spices in the Florida Future Chef championship finals.

A second-place finish in the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and Division of Food, Nutrition and Wellness competition still earned him a \$3,000 Florida Prepaid 529 Savings Plan scholarship, a premier cutting board and a chef's hat

So young to be such a perfectionist, he can't help but think an extra pinch here, a little splash there or an extra piece of basil may have made a difference.

Cooking is all Landon wants to do. He was a top-five finalist on Gordon Ramsay's "MasterChef Junior: Home for the Holidays" a year ago. He's used to working under pressure and appeasing the taste buds of picky judges. He enjoys the challenge of making rare meals well done.

"I just really like cooking. It's always been pretty comfortable for me," he said. "I just have fun. I just like to cook. Maybe

SUBMITTED PHOTO

SEE CHEF, 5

A fifth-grader at Oakleaf Village Elementary, Landon Brown worked his homemade pasta through the stand mixer.





Community Briefs

County accepting Grant Home Rehab applications

CLAY COUNTY – The county's Community Development Block Grant Home Rehabilitation application window is now open through Oct. 31.

The program is intended to assist low- to moderate-income individuals with necessary home repairs. Please apply if you own your home, qualify as low- to moderate-income, and need home repairs like roof repair/replacement, ADA accom-

modations, HVAC repair/replacement, or electric or plumbing work.

You also have the opportunity to go to one of the meetings for assistance, or you can schedule an appointment for application assistance with our Housing Program Manager or a Case Specialist by calling (904) 529-4256.

County officials will be at the Orange Park Library on Sept. 19 from 5-7:30 p.m., Middleburg/Clay Hill Library on Sept. 26 from 5-7:30 p.m., Fleming Island Library on Oct. 3 from 5-7:30 p.m., Keystone Heights Library on Oct. 17 from 5-7:30 p.m. and the Green Cove Springs Library on Oct. 24 from 5-7:30 p.m.

Homeowners can also fill out an application by visiting portal.neighborlysoftware.com/claycountyfl/participant

Detour ordered for Moody Avenue at Dye Clay YMCA

COLLEGE PARK - The bridge on Moody Avenue between Connie Circle and Meadow Drive has been deemed unsafe, prompting a 1.6-mile detour. Excessive rainfall damaged a box culvert at the Dye Clay YMCA, making the road unsafe.

Northbound traffic will begin at Connie

Circle and make a right turn on Dennis Drive, a left turn onto Moody, a right turn onto Londonderry Drive, a right turn onto Blanding Boulevard, a right turn onto Meadow and a left turn onto Moody.

Southbound traffic will begin at Meadow. Drivers will turn right onto Blanding, then right onto Meadow, then left onto Moody.

Southbound traffic will begin at Meadow. Drivers will turn right onto Meadow, a left turn onto Blanding, then left onto Londonderry and then right onto Moody.

The county is investigating the cause of the damage and will update the community as soon as possible.





Chef from page 3

I would probably change some of my seasonings, maybe be bolder, take a little more risk."

Landon goes to Oakleaf Village Elementary. He was one of 191 students statewide who entered the Florida Future Chef Champion competition to create a unique school dish that will be standardized by FDACS and shared with schools across Florida for other students to enjoy.

Landon was interviewed over Zoom and was one of three finalists selected to compete for four days in Tampa.

Sprouts Healthy Communities Foundation sponsored the event. Part of the competition involved shopping for ingredients at a local Sprouts store. All three students then had to create dishes focusing on Florida Fresh ingredients. Landon's first dish was blackened salmon with a cantaloupe

and arugula salad, mango, tomatoes and a homemade vinaigrette.

His championship round dish was called "Camo's Paradise Pasta." It included handmade pasta and shrimp. Camo is always by his side. It is an iguana from the 1997 Beanie Baby line and serves as his "sous chef."

Landon's long-range goals include starting with a food truck, becoming a world-class chef and opening Michelin-rated restaurants.

The competition also included a pizza party, a tour of Bern's Steakhouse and hands-on cooking opportunities with local chefs

The finals were in the lobby of the Epicurean Hotel. A theater was erected to seat more than 50 people to watch the finals.

Sophia Balmaseda of Conchita Espinosa Academy of Miami-Dade County finished first, while Michael Fanning of Manatee Bay Elementary was third.

"We love watching kids pursue their



Landon's finished product - his Camo's Paradise Pasta

culinary passions, especially when that aligns with nutritious school meals," said Jeremy Eason, Outreach Director for the Division of Nutrition, Education and Outreach. "Combining their love for cooking with nutrition education and eating a balanced meal is a huge win in our book."





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RESERVE A TABLE



Drew from page 1

differently.

Drew survived. And the last seven years of his life proved that.

Although it wasn't easy to let him go, Osborne-Kohn said she finds solace in the fact that she can share his powerful story with others — the life he never thought he'd have to live but the one he made the best of.

Drew always dared to pursue the impossible. A star athlete, a musician, a family man and an aspiring

minister, Osborne-Kohn said her son always knew what he wanted in life.

She recalls that in just the third grade, her son declared that he wanted 10 to 11 children

"Really, I would say, faith, food, football and family, that really encompassed him pretty much," Osborne-Kohn said. "And he didn't have any fear of trying anything new."

Born and raised in Jacksonville, Osborne-Kohn and her family eventually moved to Oakleaf. Attending Oakleaf High, Drew was a standout football star, leading the team to state-wide notoriety and winning many accolades.

But Osborne-Kohn said that he never let that change him. He never cared for the spotlight; he just cared about who he was impacting.

Current Fleming Island interim head football coach Derek Chipoletti was his coach at the time. He said Drew brought so much light to the team

"Drew had ... an infectious smile, an infectious attitude," Chipoletti said. "He was a leader."

During his senior year, however, Drew tore his rotator cuff. Osborne-Kohn said her son was devastated

"I just remember he was down," she said.

But, it didn't stop him.

Drew recovered and graduated in 2013, becoming a walk-on at Bethune-Cookman University. He subsequently attended Abilene Christian University and Edward Waters University, receiving an Associate's Degree.

Drew's life was just getting started until





PHOTO COURTESY OF YOLANDA OSBORNE-KOHN

gofundme

To donate for funeral and medical expenses, visit gofundme and enter Drew Kohn.



To provide information on Drew's hit-and-run, call the Clay County Sheriff's Office's non-emergency number (904) 264-6512 or post information at SaferWatch.

one day, it changed forever.

Osborne-Kohn said the accident happened out of the blue. Drew had just gone out to play basketball with some of his friends

Riding his motorcycle, he was struck by a vehicle, doing three to four flips before landing in a puddle of his own blood.

There were bikers nearby who ran towards the accident, thinking it was one of their own.

Osborne-Kohn said there was a husband and wife who said that, with all the debris, the accident resembled a bomb.

The 911 calls had presumed him dead on the scene, but when the wife began talking to Drew in his ear, his shallow breaths could still be heard.

By the time Osborne-Kohn and her family made it to the hospital, they were telling them that Drew wasn't viable.

"[They were] trying to get us to sign a DNR," Osborne-Kohn said. "And wanting to harvest his organs. And I told them you're not getting a toenail or an eyelash."

From there, she said it was an uphill battle. Since insurance didn't view him as viable to live either, everything was "not medically necessary."

Osborne-Kohn said she remembers sitting by Drew's bedside and asking him to give her a sign. If he were ready to go, she wouldn't make him stay. But he had to let her know if he wanted to stay.

Although Drew was still unresponsive, Osborne-Kohn said she felt something.

"In my spirit, I heard him say, 'It was real soft. I want to fight.' It was just a whisper,"

she said

At that moment, she knew she would do everything in her power to help him do that.

For 244 days, Drew remained in a coma. And Osborne-Kohn said eventually, the hospital decided to send him home.

With Drew lying in his bedroom every day on a loop, Osborne-Kohn said they would play strings of mostly worship songs and the Psalms.

"What we started noticing was we were getting more eye flutters," she said. "We'd get all excited."

The day Drew woke up, Osborne-Kohn said she was right by his side. She got the chance to catch it all on video.

Using all his energy to open his eyes to even just a tiny slit, she said that when Drew came to, the first thing he muttered was, "I'm OK. I love you."

With all the strength it took him to wake up, Osborne-Kohn said shortly after, he was out for another two weeks. But, it brought hope to his family that he was genuinely OK.

Drew was paralyzed from the neck down and had to learn how to do everything again essentially. Osborne-Kohn said that with an average Glasgow Coma Scale of the brain being 15, Drew was only a 3 when he woke up.

Drew picked up the pieces and learned how to talk again, walk again and feed himself.

Osborne-Kohn said she and her son kept active by learning how to safely reincorporate his favorite activities, such as surfing, fishing and kayaking, back into his life. She said they would even cycle 18 to 20 miles twice a week.

She said Drew's recovery was not easy but nothing short of a miracle. She is proud that Drew never gave up.

"We all have something, but we shouldn't quit," Osborne-Kohn said. "And, Drew's real-life testimony was he didn't. Even though he was trapped in a body that didn't work the way he would've liked."

Jodi Morgan is a speech/language pathologist and aphasia center manager with Brook's Rehabilitation Center. She also witnessed Drew's recovery up close and personal.

Drew suffered from aphasia, which is a language disorder caused by a brain injury. It affects reading, writing, talking and the understanding of language.

At the time, he was talking using a communication board, but Morgan said that when she first met him, she could see just how much of a light he was.

"He was just absolutely incredible and funny and kind, and he was super smart," Morgan said.

Since Morgan was also a clinical assistant professor at Jacksonville University. Osborn-Kohn and Drew began sharing his story with her graduate students and members at the aphasia center, hoping to inspire others. Morgan said everyone was in awe of him.

"I had a member here at the aphasia center who was very depressed and just super sad with life. And just nothing really inspired this person," Morgan said. "And we had tried all sorts of things with him, and





after Drew spoke, I could tell something had shifted in him."

Osborne-Kohn said that Drew was about 93% recovered by the time the truck hit him. He had begun walking on his own, learned to drive a car, voted in his first election since the accident and was just about to venture into living alone.

Osborne-Kohn said it's still hard to believe he's gone, given how close he was to his family.

"This is a bit of a shock for my family," Osborne-Kohn said. "Because Drew wasn't born disabled, he wasn't born handicapped, he didn't have any challenges like that. So, it's hard for them to get past. He scraped himself and clawed back from the motorcycle accident, [and] then now he's not here."

In the wake of his death, the family does have a GoFundMe fundraiser in order to help with funeral expenses and medical expenses during the last seven years.

Osborne-Kohn said the family wants justice for what happened.

With such a sudden loss, Osborne-Kohn said she and her family are continuing to find their way.

Drew was always a light in their lives and in the community. With Drew's bright spirit still ever present, Osborne-Kohn said it continues to guide her on the not-so-straight and narrow path of her grieving. But she feels at peace.

"I have moments where I miss him, but it's almost like I feel selfish about that," she said. "Because he was built for the season that he was here. And his time's up."

NEFAR:

Housing market showing signs of gaining traction in Clay County

CLAY COUNTY – As fall approaches, it's becoming more apparent that it's becoming more of a buyer's market. The Northeast Florida Association of REALTORS (NEFAR) Market Statistics report for August shows the housing market is becoming more affordable and stable.

"During the culmination of the summer months, we continue to see an equilibrium forming in our Northeast Florida marketplace, typically considered to be about four to six months' supply of inventory," said 2024 NEFAR President Rory Dubin.

More than Northeast Florida's six-county region, the median sales price for single-family homes dropped 3.7% to \$383,990 while the Home Affordability Index rose 6.2% to register at 69.

Month to month, closed sales in the six-county region dropped 8.0% to 1,777. Pending sales plummeted 30.6% to 1,295, while new listings decreased 6.5% to 3,097.

In Clay County, the August 2024 median price of single-family homes fell

3.3% to \$355,000. The median number of days on the market climbed 50% to 54. Month-to-month, closed sales decreased 14.9% to 228, pending sales plummeted 31.9% to 169, and new listings declined 10.5% to 450.

Active inventory for the county rose to 1,179 homes, a 7.0% increase from June 2024 and showed a 5.2-month supply. The Home Affordability Index rose 7.1% to 75.

"Although closed and pending sales have decreased and inventory has increased, with the Fed predicted to enact several smaller rate cuts in their next several meetings, the trickle effect on mortgage rates should encourage buyers (and sellers) to be more active in the market," he said.

Buyers should be happy to see an active inventory of single-family homes in the region rose 4.0% to 7,713, an increase compared to last month and an 84.3% increase over September 2023. August's median for days on the market shot up 30.8% to 51 days.



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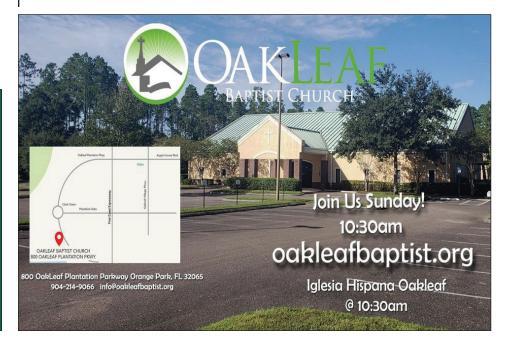
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SPORT SHORTS with Randy

By Randy Lefko randy@claytodayonline.com

Strombeck "swiftly" rising in XC ranks

OAKLEAF - Oakleaf High sophomore cross country runner Jack Strombeck gave up swimming as a fall sport to concentrate his summer on prepping for the fall cross country season much to the delight of cross country coaches Sherronda Harris and Shay Mensie.

"When he told us that, we smiled," said Harris, after Strombeck won the varsit title at the Clay County Invitational two weeks ago. "He was swimming on the summer swim team here, but told us he was going to concentrate on his summer running to get to the regions and maybe state this year. He was a little disappointed that he missed regions going to state last year."

Strombeck has led a strong contingent of his teammate harriers to solid team scores with freshman Luke Janke and junior Grant Kessel not far off the top 20 finishing paces.

Knights halted by Hawthorne

For the football team, an unbeaten start, 3-0 with wins over Fleming Island, Riverside and Orange Park, got halted by two time state champion Hawthorne on the heels of a Hail Mary pass with just two seconds on the clock on Friday, September 13.

Oakleaf had highlight touchdowns from Malaci Warten; a 72 yard scamper, and Micheal Connor III; a 95 yard kickoff return for a score, to keep close to the Rural state



Oakleaf High's Jack Strombeck, in black, has positioned himself as top contender for upcoming districts and regions with strong finishes under 17 minutes in last three races.

champions, but a hold flag on a two point conversion on a successful plunge from running back Chris Foy II that would have scored the game 22-21, turned to a Andrew McDaid PAT kick and a 21-21 tie with less than two minutes on the clock.

From there, Hawthorne opportunistically got a 50 yard kickoff return coupled with a late hit flag to set up a fourth down Hail Mary pass by a freshman quarterback to a 6'-3" wide receiver to end the game. Oakleaf will travel to Bolles on Friday, September 21.

Reed celebrates 617th career assist

In volleyball, coach Jamie Reed has methodically put her girls squad into a spot as a wild card team that could cause a little upset or two come district tournament time. Reed got a five game loss to Final Four finisher Trinity Christian just a week ago, then a solid tournament weekend at the JJVA River City Classic with a showdown with Class 5A champion Middleburg on the hook on Thursday, September 19.

Reed recently celebrated a 600-plus assists career from junior setter Jiyanna Rivers in a game with Tocoi Creek.











600-plus assists

Oakleaf High setter Jiyanna Rivera, center, gets a banner after her 617th career assist for the Lady Knights volleyball team in a game against Tocoi Creek on Tuesday. With Rivera are head coach Jamie Reed and assistant coach Jenea Riddick.



CORRESPONDENT PHOTO BY DON LONG

Oakleaf High kick returner Michael Connor III sprints away from Hawthorne tacklers en route to 95 yard touchdown run in Knights' 27-21 loss on Friday.

Wood, Loving strong contenders for state

On the swim team, Brylee Wood has

been a mainstay with wins all season with Peyton Loving a strong candidate to repeat her trip to state.





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