

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS HERALD

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The Black Creek Restoration Project spigot is finally on



Filtration field near Alligator Creek and Lake Brooklyn

**Project took decades,
\$100 million to gain traction
in Keystone Heights**

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – The pipes are in the ground – all 17 mileof them.. The pump

station at Black Creek’s South Prong and the delivery station adjacent to Lake Brooklyn are complete.

The pipes are filled with water from the Black Creek, and testing has started in the first cell for the Black Creek Water Restoration Project.

The quest to replenish the water in Lakes Brooklyn and Geneva started in the 1980s. Mismanagement and abuse, particularly

Project Overview

- 10mdg Intake Pump Station at South Fork Black Creek and SR 16 near Penney Farms
- 17 mile 30 inch Transmission Main
- Regional Aquifer Recharge
- Estimated Total Project Cost \$119 M



by regional power companies, depleted the water from two lakes, making the tiny city a paradise for the East Coast elites.

Driven by the Save Our Lakes Organization and supported by former Florida Sen. Rob Bradley, Florida Reps. Travis Cummings and Bobby Payne, former St. Johns River Water Management District Chairman Douglas Burnett, former Keystone Heights City Manager Scott Kornegay and SOLO, the

project went from a pipe dream in 2017 to approval in 2022 to completion.

State, Keystone Height officials, Clay County Board of Commissioners, St. Johns River Water Management District, SOLO and four local utility companies – Clay County Utility Authority, Gainesville Regional Utilities, St. Johns Utilities and JEA all chipped in to cover the \$119 million price

SEE CREEK, 11

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PUZZLE FUN

WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?

There are four differences between Picture A and Picture B.





Answers:
1. Missing barrette in hair 2. Red paint on paper 3. Extra strawberries on dress 4. Doll on shelf

GUESS WHO?

I am an actor born in Florida on March 13, 1950. I helped found the St. Nicholas Theater Company. I've appeared in many movies that showcase my versatility. I was nominated for an Academy Award for my work in a dark comedy about a Minnesota city.

Answer: *William H. Macy*

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CLUES ACROSS

1. “Loser” rocker
5. Partner to relaxation
9. Mixing
11. Winged nut
13. Expression of blame
15. Vast ocean
16. Comedienne Gasteyer
17. Multiply
19. Meat from a pig (French)
21. Related
22. Rocker Stewart
23. Surprise completely
25. Loon
26. Canister
27. Large, deep-bodied fish
29. Takes forcefully
31. Oil cartel
33. Palmer and Hepburn are two
34. More than one
36. Places down purposefully
38. Pitching statistic
39. Type of sword
41. Witnesses
43. Body part
44. Mixes slowly

CLUES DOWN

1. __ Aires, city
2. Coarse grass
3. Type of gene
4. Door handle
5. Competition
6. Muslim ruler title
7. Hunting expeditions
8. Large mollusk
9. Bind securely
10. Former U.S. presidential candidate
11. 2-point plays in football
12. Breezed through
14. Type setting
15. Felt for
18. Codified rules

CLUES ACROSS

20. Small dome
24. Chevrotain
26. Male reproductive gland
28. Controversial beliefs
30. Z Z Z
32. One who confines another
34. Bishop
35. Garlands
37. Bird that flies by the coast
38. Optical device
40. Greek goddess of discord
42. Some are “Rolling”
43. Formerly (archaic)
45. Thrust a knife into
47. German river
49. Atomic #26
50. Make a grotesque face
51. Primordial matter of the universe
55. Chinese philosophical principle





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OPINIONS & VIEWPOINTS

We have to pay more now because we didn't pay then

By Don Coble
Managing Editor

I had my annual physical last week, and my doctor told me it's good I've lost a significant amount of weight in the previous year because the rest of my numbers were outstanding.

My cholesterol and blood pressure figures were significantly low. And despite my best efforts, my liver and kidneys were in greatshape.

Although I'm 67, he said I was healthier than most of his patients and could probably work until I'm 90.

It's good because I love the newspaper business - and need the money.

My mortgage company told me that because of the economy, I didn't have enough money in my escrow account for 2025. When I went to the bank to pay the difference, there was a line of customers to pay for their escrow



Don Coble

shortages. When I left the parking lot and turned on County Road 220, I was realized we're all going to have to dig deep into our bank accounts here in Clay County for the next few years.

We need new schools, roads and a first responder safety complex. These are facts, and we've put it off for too long. Granted, we've gone through an economic crisis and a pandemic. But the longer we wait, the more it will cost us, or our children, in the future.

This week, Boston-based Freehold Capital Management bought 2,445 acres for \$70.02 million between County Road 315 and Magnolia West with plans to build a community called "Agrihood" with as many as 4,489 homes. That means the Clay County District Schools will need to make high school "RRR" known as Saratoga Springs High for 2,500 students with an opening target date of 2030, "AA" known as Governors Park Elementary for Kindergarten through eighth grade for 1,275 students with an opening target of 2031 and "C" known as Saratoga Springs Elementary for 862 students with an opening target date of 2032.

Clay County's population has grown

by 18.4% in the last 10 years, but its investment in itself hasn't been able to keep pace. Others have quickly realized what we knew all along - Clay is a great place to be. The problem was we weren't prepared to welcome them. And if you need a reminder, look at our roads.

The county deserves credit for its Bonded Transportation Program. According to its website, it has designated seven large road projects to increase public safety, improve traffic flow, and reduce congestion. Of course, accomplishing this will involve a year-long traffic nightmare, especially along County Road 220 in Middleburg.

That's the price of foreseeing growth early - and absorbing growing pains.

Work between Knight Boxx Road and a block west of Henley Road will take more than a year to widen the roadway from two lanes to four. The work also includes improvements at Henley Road and C.R. 220 intersection, and it will involve one-lane shutdowns on C.R. 220 and complete shutdowns at the bridge over Little Black Creek.

Other projects include improvements to Sandridge Road and the new thoroughfare called Cathedral Oak Parkway (Agrihood).

SEE MORE, 5

No child should be priced out of playing sports

By Hanna Skandera
President and CEO Daniels Fund

Participating in youth sports has long been a cornerstone of the American experience - or at least it used to be. Fewer American children are playing sports, and shifting trends are leaving countless children on the sidelines.

It is important to reverse this trend. Youth sports are not just games; they are a critical component of childhood development. Simply put, the well-being of our nation hinges, in part, on our investments in youth sports today.

The cost of participating in sports has become increasingly prohibitive. The rise of digital entertainment has captivated children's attention, drawing them away from physical activities. These declining participation rates threaten young Americans' mental and physical health. Exercise can help reduce the increasing anxiety and depression in children.

Youth sports are becoming steadily more privatized: Today, "pay-to-play" youth sports are a \$30-to-\$40 billion dollar industry. American families spend an average of almost \$900 annually a child to participate in organized sports.

The growing socio-economic gap in sports participation is glaring. Today, while more than two in three children from wealthier families play sports, only about one in three from the poorest families get the same opportunity.

Sports teach teamwork, discipline, perseverance, and resilience - traits that are essential both on and off the field. For many



Hanna Skandera

SEE SPORTS, 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 applications.

Ultraneous: (el-TROH-nee-es) an adjective that means spontaneous.

"Every person in the store stopped and motioned as if they were playing drums when the famous drum beat in Phil Collins' "In the Air Tonight" was played over the store's intercom.

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

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Letter to the Editor in your subject and send it to Managing Editor Don Coble at don@claytodayonline.com. We look forward to hearing from you!

Opinions ...

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

More

from page 4

The program emphasizes improving traffic flow, increasing public safety, increasing travel lanes, and adding drainage features, including sidewalks and bicycle lanes.

The project is estimated to cost \$179 million and is funded through bonds and other revenue streams.

Another big ticket includes a much-needed safety complex.

Sheriff Michelle Cook has pleaded with the Clay County Commission and with the delegates who represent Clay County at the Florida Legislature on the need to replace the dilapidated Clay County Jail and Sheriff’s with a Safety Complex and would put all the agency’s departments, as well as the coun-

ty’s 911 system, Fleet Maintenance and Fire Rescue on the same property. To do that, the county would need to invest in 50-to-60 acres. The current jail was built in 1972, and it is outdated. Inmates must sleep on mattresses on the floor and in the hallways. On nights when there is no more room, CCSO must pay neighboring counties to house overflow inmates.

Another problem is the sheriff’s office has outgrown its current location.

“The fact that we have people and stuff in 30 different buildings throughout the county and our buildings are old is why we have to do something,” Cook said. “They’re inefficient. The buildings are falling apart. That is not a smart way to do business. So, we must develop a comprehensive, long-term solution to this plan.”

With so much of the county having been

The current jail was built in 1972, and it is outdated. Inmates must sleep on mattresses on the floor and in the hallways. On nights when there is no more room, CCSO must pay neighboring counties to house overflow inmates.

developed, the only areas with 50-to-60 plots of land remaining would be around or south of Green Cove Springs. The sheriff’s office currently has a large plot of land for a shooting range off County Road 215. When asked if that would be a perfect place for a safety complex, Cook said it wouldn’t have sufficient utilities for another 10 years.

“We don’t have 10 years,” she said.

“We have people and stuff in 30 different buildings throughout the county, and our buildings are old,” she said. “They’re ineffi-

cient. “Our buildings are falling apart. It is not a smart way to do business. We must come up with a comprehensive, long-term solution to this plan. It’s not working.”

But it’s going to cost money. There’s no escaping that. We must pay for the welcome center for the people coming with the long-term hopes that we will realize the benefits of their property and that sales taxes will make our lives better down the road.

But my doctor says I should be around long enough to enjoy it.

This Month in History

Five years ago, 2020

- Lake Asbury Junior High’s Taylor Thigpen earns the NASA Earth System Science Project Award and finishes second in the Earth and Environmental Sciences Group B at the 2020 Clay Rotary Science and Engineering Fair.
- The Green Cove Springs City Council votes to charge a \$125 stormwater fee for each single-family home.
- Friends of Augusta Savage opens a clothes closet at Charles E. Bennett Elementary in Green Cove Springs.

10 years ago, 2015

- The Orange Park Town Council denies councilwoman Phyliss Vancas’ \$500 request for a trip to Washington, D.C., to lobby for funds.
- Amanda Mane Moon, 25, was arrested and charged with embezzling \$40,18 from the Board of County Commissioners while she served as the interim coordinator for the State Housing Initiative Partnership.
- The Board of County Commissioners reversed course and voted 4-1 against spending \$10 million in unused bond money on a mega-sports complex.

20 years ago, 2005

- Clay County Fire Rescue workers showed local students how to flow water in the event of a house fire during the annual career shadowing program.
- The Clay County Sheriff’s Office arrested a Vero Beach man for impersonating a law enforcement officer. Scott E. Davis was charged with pulling a man over on State Road 16 near Camp Blanding while driving a vehicle equipped with replica police lights and wearing police gear.

30 years ago, 1995

- The Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office arrested three men – Joseph M. Harding and Phillip A. Swain of Jacksonville and Samuel

L. Walker of Orange Park – for the murder of Michael Renardo Clements of Orange Park. The three were accused of killing Clements and dumping his body on Kilcullen Lane in Jacksonville.

- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced it would test milk produced by Green Cove Springs-based Gustafson’s Farm for allegations of dioxin contamination.

40 years ago, 1985

- The Green Cove Springs City Council appointed residents to a new Code Enforcement Board to seek and cite residents and businesses to break specific city codes.
- The BCC passed an ordinance prohibiting adults from hosting house parties where alcohol or drugs would be served to minors.

Sports

from page 4

children from challenging family situations, sports offer a sense of belonging and purpose and put them on the path to a more stable future.

Engagement in sports activities has been associated with improved academic performance, enhanced self-esteem, and an increased probability of college enrollment. Studies indicate that 66% of students who achieve all A’s participate in organized sports, compared to 24% of students with mostly D’s and F’s.

Children who play sports have higher lifetime earnings. They have vastly lower

Children who play sports have higher lifetime earnings. They have vastly lower rates of depression, obesity, and other serious health conditions. The benefits are so stark that Americans would be a collective \$57 billion richer each year, thanks to reduced healthcare spending and increased productivity.

rates of depression, obesity, and other serious health conditions. The benefits are so stark that Americans would be a collective \$57 billion richer each year, thanks to reduced healthcare spending and increased productivity, if the youth sports participation rate increased by just about 10 percentage points, according to one recent study.

Investing in youth sports is a matter of public health – and national pride. The athletes who will represent us in the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and the 2034 Salt Lake City Olympics are today’s young hopefuls in

recreational leagues and school teams.

Without a robust pipeline of young talent, not only will our health suffer – but our ability to compete at the highest levels will be compromised.

Non-profit organizations have a unique opportunity to cultivate that pipeline. My organization, the Daniels Fund, recently teamed up with the Aspen Institute to launch the first Colorado Youth Sports Giving Day. With over \$3.7 million raised through overwhelming support from philanthropists and community members, this

campaign demonstrates the deep belief in the importance of making sports accessible to all children.

As a society, we’ll need to make big investments to ensure that every child has a chance to experience the benefits of sports. By doing so, we will build a healthier, more resilient generation of Americans.

Hanna Skandera is president and CEO of the Daniels Fund (danielsfund.org) and is a former track and field athlete and coach. This piece originally ran in Salon.

GCS Junior High hosts formal naturalization ceremony

Fifty individuals take Oath of Allegiance to become U.S. citizens

By Kyla Woodard
kyla@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS - Becoming an American citizen is not easy.

But the smiles and cheers of 50 individuals as they took the Oath of Allegiance last Friday proved that the journey is worth it.

In collaboration with the United States District Court Judges, Middle District of Florida, Jacksonville Division and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Green Cove Springs Junior High School hosted a naturalization ceremony to welcome the new citizens warmly.

The ceremony aimed to give Civics students a hands-on learning experience, immersing them in the process. The cafeteria was transformed into a courtroom, where family members watched on, and students became participants and spectators of the momentous occasion.



Civics students were able to witness the naturalization process firsthand, but also be a participant.



STAFF PHOTOS BY KYLA WOODARD

Fifty candidates took the Oath of Allegiance to become American citizens on Thursday. The ceremony was held at Green Cove Springs Junior High.

Each student escorted a candidate to their seat, presenting their name and where they were from.

The participants were between 20 and 70 years old. They originated from 29 countries: Albania, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Bahamas, Belarus, Bermuda, Canada, Brazil, Burma, Cuba, China, Colombia, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, India, Portugal, Philippines, Russia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, Vietnam and Venezuela.

Seventh-grade Civics Teacher Michael Taft has been helping put the event together for three years and said that citizenship is the first benchmark taught in the class. Students also need to be immersed in the last step of the process.

"That's an awesome thing for these kids to witness," Taft said. "We hear about naturalization and the struggles people have gone through to become a citizen of this country.

But, for the people here today to witness fifty people, they have accomplished that major hurdle and have become a citizen of the country, so I think it's a wonderful thing."

For Chief District Judge Marcia Morales Howard, who presided over the ceremony, it's always essential to bring these types of ceremonies out of the courtroom and into the lives of the community.

"It's the greatest reminder of how lucky we are to be American citizens," Howard said. "When you hear how hard these people work to become our fellow citizens, when you see the looks of pride, hope, and joy just explode across their faces when they're declared new citizens, it's an incredibly uplifting event."

Taft said he hopes the event eventually spreads to other junior highs in the county, ensuring all students can witness what it means to become an American citizen.



The candidates ranged from 20 to 70 years old and originated from 29 countries, including Albania, Bangladesh, Bolivia and Ethiopia.

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Courthouse unveils renovated vault honoring late department manager

By Kyla Woodard
kyla@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS - Staff at the Clay County Clerk of Court and Comptroller's Office gathered last Thursday to dedicate a newly refurbished vault to a cherished team member.

Renamed the Jewel Baskin Vault, the space honors the memory of the recording department manager who passed away sud-

denly last year while on a church mission trip in Africa. Baskin had served the courthouse for 38 years before her passing. Her colleagues said Baskin talked about renovating the room frequently, and they're proud to have made her vision a reality. The Recording Department vault is where the county's most important records and historical displays are stored, among other resources. But, with the vault not in the best state, Baskin wanted a change. She



Baskin's family and coworkers were there to view the refurbished space.



STAFF PHOTOS BY KYLA WOODARD

The vault was dedicated to Recording Department Manager Jewel Baskin, who passed away last year while on a mission trip in Africa.



The space also has a wall dedicated to Clay County historical archives.



The space features freshly painted walls, up-cycled display cabinets and cleaned furniture.

wanted something for the community to be proud of. So, the renovation project officially began three months ago. Baskin even spearheaded it by reorganizing what the office said was about 50 years' worth of documents, files and maps stored inside. Thanks to a team of employees and vendors, her work was finished, and her ideas were brought to life. Fresh paint fills the walls, up-cycled display cabinets with compiled history line the room and cleaned furniture awaits use.

"This is a brand new space where our employees and the public get to enjoy," said Clerk Tara Green. "And that's why this makes it super special that we've done this in honor of Jewel." Members of Baskin's family were also invited to the unveiling and teared up at the site, thanking the office for honoring her legacy in such a way. The office invited the family and public to enjoy the space anytime they would like and said they knew she was smiling down with pride.

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Class of 2024

Bartram Trail Eagles honored at recognition dinner

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

FLEMING ISLAND – Guest speaker Robert Frederick Schlegal Jr., a retired U.S. Army Colonel, told Eagle Scouts who were awaiting to receive their accolades for achieving the highest rank of the organization about the history of the Eagles and his struggle to earn his final merit badge to achieve the rank.

The 43rd Annual Bartram Trail District

Recognition Dinner on Saturday, Feb. 1, extended a tradition that started with 10 Eagles in the Class of 1982. The Class of 2024 honored 38 Eagles.

Schlegal told the newest class the first Eagle was Arthur Eldred in 1912. The Board of Review consisted of the National Commissioner, the National President, and other luminaries of the Boy Scouts of America, which had been formed two years earlier.

More than 2.5 million people have

SEE EAGLES, 10



Eagle Scout Evan Davies stands at attention as BSA Bartram Trail District Commissioner Jon Jaeger slides the woggle up his neckerchief during last Saturday's ceremony as Bartram Trail District Director Jennifer Jeannotte watches.

STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

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Eagles

from page 9

earned the rank of Eagle, according to Boy Scouts of America.

“I have been blessed to wear at least three different kinds of Eagle packages during my lifetime,” he said. “I was pleased to see that in scouting year 2020, the first class of female Eagle Scouts, numbering nearly 2000, received the Eagle Scout rank as I just celebrated my 80th birthday. I had been fortunate to see many changes in the scouting program.”

Schlegal said despite living on Long Island, New York, he couldn’t swim, and a swimming merit badge was required to become an Eagle.

“I had a big problem for somebody who lived right next to the mighty Hudson River: I could not swim,” he said. “When I was 2 or 3 years old, my uncle and sister pushed me back and forth on a lake on an inner tube in several feet of water, and somehow the inner tube and I turned over. It was a terrifying experience because it took them probably only a few seconds to get me up and above the water; it seemed like forever to this child. I’m sure that traumatized me and gave me a terrible fear of putting my head underwater.”

To earn his swimming merit badge, Schlegal had to jump into deep water, swim 25 yards from shore and swim safely back to shore.

An Eagle Scout named Fred McCaffrey



Flanked on the left by Boy Scouts of America North Florida Council CEO Kelvin G. Williams and Keynote Speaker Ret. U.S. Army Col. Robert Frederick Schlegal Jr. was the Bartram Trail Boy Scout Eagle Class of 2024.

took Schlegal “under his wings” and helped him conquer his fear of water and taught him to swim. Schlegal became an Eagle in 1960.

Today’s Eagles must earn at least 41 merit badges, demonstrate leadership within their troop, pass an Eagle Scout Board of Review and complete a significant community project.

The ceremony for Bartram Trail, which encompasses scouts from Clay, Putnam

and Bradford counties, was at Sullivan Hall on the Sacred Heart Catholic Church campus. While some scouts couldn’t make the ceremony, most recognized awards and certificates of appreciation from civic and governmental groups like Clay Superintendent David Broskie, School Board Member Michele Hanson and Clay County Sheriff’s Office Assistant Chief of Patrol Chad Ricks for their accomplishments.

Each was adorned with light blue Eagle



The guest speaker was Ret. U.S. Army Col. Robert Frederick Schlegal, who told the Class of 2024 he became an Eagle in 1960.

neckerchiefs by Bartram Trail District Director Jennifer Jeannotte and District Commissioner Jon Jaeger. North Florida Council CEO Kelvin Williams also met Scouts.

TYLER LEW MCMILLEN

October 22, 2024

Tyler began his scouting adventure when he joined Cub Pack 146 in 2012 and earned his Bobcat, Tiger, Wolf, Bear, and Webelos Ranks, and the Arrow of Light Award. He crossed over to Troop 187 in January 2017 and earned his First Class Rank in April 2018. Tyler has served his Troop as Scribe, Quartermaster, Assistant Patrol Leader, Patrol Leader, Assistant Senior Patrol Leader,



Tyler McMillen

and Order of the Arrow Representative.

Tyler is a Brotherhood member of the Order of the Arrow and has earned 32 Merit Badges. He has attended summer camp at Camps Shands and Daniel Boone.

For his Eagle Project, Tyler installed American Flag drop off locations for the American Veterans Post.

Tyler is a graduate of Keystone Heights High School where he was a member of the National Honor Society, the Math Honor Society, and the Band. He also works at Winn-Dixie and belongs to a Sea Scout Ship. Tyler’s post-graduation plans include attending Santa Fe College for two years to earn an associate’s degree and then transfer to the University of Florida to complete his degree for Computer Science and become a member of their marching band. Tyler’s career

goal is to become a Computer Programmer or possibly stepping into a management position with Winn-Dixie. He plans to remain active in Scouting, especially through Sea Scouts.

LAYKEN ALYSSA KEDGLEY

August 27, 2024

Layken began her scouting adventure when she joined Troop 9187 in November 2019 and earned her First Class Rank in February 2022. Layken has served her Troop as Troop Guide, Patrol Leader, Assistant Senior Patrol Leader, and Senior Patrol Leader.

Layken is an Ordeal member of the Order of the Arrow and has earned 26 Merit Badges. She has attended summer camp at Camp Shands.

For her Eagle Project, Layken refur-

bished and made improvements to a garden at Faith Presbyterian Church in Keystone Heights.

Layken is a graduate of Keystone Heights High School where she was the President of the Drama Club and a member of the Senior Girls Club. Layken’s post-graduation plans include attending Santa Fe College to pursue an associate’s degree. She then plans to enlist in the U.S. Coast Guard and pursue a career as a Marine Biologist.



Layken Kedgley

Creek

from page 1

tag.

Now it's time to turn the spigot on.

"They've already got water in the pipes for pressure testing," said Vivian Katz-James. "They're bringing the water into the holding tank. They're testing the first cell. There are six cells, so the first cell has all the filtration materials. They will test it to make sure the water is up to standard. They're going to allow a month or two for that. If everything works out, they'll start releasing water into Alligator Creek (and into Lake Brooklyn) a month from now). Then, they'll move to the next cell, and so on We're so excited."

Katz-James said the BCWRP was built to alternate between two three-cell systems. Each cell can pump 12.5 million gallons of



water from Black Creek to Alligator Creek and into Lake Brooklyn. From there, the water would eventually overflow into Lake Geneva.

"You know, I've been holding my breath all the way," she said. "I've turned blue sever-

al times, but I think it's good to go. Now we're working on getting the Geneva Restoration Project underway."

Lake Geneva's water levels have been low for the past 50 years, and trees and vegetation now cover the lake beds. SOLO has

worked with homeowners, Clay County, and Keystone Heights officials to get the forest and vegetation removed before Black Creek restores the water.

Katz-James said SOLO, Clay and Bradford counties, Keystone Heights, St. Johns River Water Management District and homeowners are working to get a permit to cut down the trees and vegetation to restore the environment to pre-1970s conditions.

"There are issues like access," she said. "There are some big trees in some areas."

It's been five decades, but SOLO now has a voice that's been heard.

"Pretty much everybody's working together right now to save our lakes," Katz-James said. "We have support for the Geneva Restoration Project. When that's done, it will be an exclamation point for everyone who's had to see these lakes lose water for the last 40 or 50 years."

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Clay Water and Soil appoints Rachel Fox as Board Chair



For The Herald

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The Clay Soil and Water Conservation and District reorganized its board during a special meeting last Monday following the resignation of Harrison “Ted” Clark on Jan. 24.

The board voted unanimously to appoint Rachel Fox of District 2 as the new board chair, Duane Combass of District 4 as the vice chair and secretary and Wes Taylor of District 5 as the treasurer.

STAFF PHOTO BY DON COBLE

Rachel Fox when she was sworn into her position on the Clay Soil and Water Conservation District Board last month by Judge Ray Forbess.

The District has an opening to fill Clark’s District 1 seat, and Fox said a resident from that district expressed an interest in filling the role during Monday’s meeting.

The next meeting at the Clay County Extension Office adjacent to the fairgrounds on State Road 16 will be on Feb. 14 at 8:30 a.m.

Clark resigned after he was arrested on Jan. 19 by the Nassau County Sheriff’s Office in a sex sting after the agency accused him of soliciting what he believed was a 14-year-old boy for sex through a cellphone app called “Sniffles.”

Ground broken for Saratoga Springs

For Clay Today
GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Freehold Communities joined community leaders and local builders in a groundbreaking ceremony Thursday, Jan. 20, for its visionary 2,240-acre Saratoga Springs “agrihood.”

The master-planned residential community will be between Magnolia West and County Road 315, blending modern living with agricultural sustainability.

Saratoga Springs will bring a new meaning to “agrihood” living. Anchored by multiple working farms throughout the masterplan, the community will feature five thoughtfully designed neighborhoods, miles of interconnected walking trails, parks, and expansive amenities to foster engagement, wellness and connection.

Freehold submitted plans to purchase the Reinhold Corporation’s land and build as many as 4,489 new homes at Saratoga Springs in 2006. The school board included the construction of three new schools by 2032 years ago in its 10-year master plan.

“Saratoga Springs will emerge in a market ranked among the fastest growing in the region,” said Freehold Capital Management Executive Vice President Andrew Smith. “We are excited to enhance this opportunity by building a community that engages directly with nature. The amenities and sense of togetherness of Saratoga Springs are what today’s homebuyers actively seek. This approach underscores our commitment to



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FREEHOLD COMMUNITIES

Members of Freehold Communities, Clay County Commissioner Kristen Burke, builders and architects and Reinhold Corporation participated in the groundbreaking ceremony.

creating desirable, innovative places that respond to the evolving needs of families and individuals in North Florida.”

Lennar and Ryan Homes will serve as builder partners in the first phases of the community. New home construction is tentatively set to begin in early 2026.

“This is a once-in-a-lifetime piece of land,

and we will work closely with our builder partners to ensure we maximize our place in one of the most promising submarkets in Florida,” Smith said.

Saratoga Springs will produce various fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers to be shared among residents.

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College Briefs

Amber Jeffries finishes master's studies

OXFORD, Ohio – Having applied the tools of science, education and conservation to become leaders in conversation communities, graduate students in the Global Field Program (GFP) and the Advanced Inquiry Program (AIP) from Miami University's Project Dragonfly finished their master's studies.

Amber Jeffries of Orange Park, Florida, concluded her master's course of study with a Master of Arts in Biology from Miami University through Project Dragonfly.

Since joining the Advanced Inquiry Program master's in 2022, Jeffries has traveled to Costa Rica and taken courses on the web from Miami while also conducting projects that have made a difference in Clay County.

Throughout her time in the AIP, Jeffries developed a Master Plan – a kind of personal mission statement for what she wanted to accomplish in the program. In many of the master's courses, Jeffries designed projects that supported this plan, which culminated in a final portfolio, "Connecting the Community Through Conservation Education," presented in a Capstone course.

Jeffries works as an education specialist at Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens.

Deshawn Jackson graduates from Furman University

GREENVILLE, S.C. – Furman University announced that 24 students received bachelor's degrees in December, including Jeremiah Deshawn Jackson of Fleming Island, who graduated cum laude with a Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences.

Jackson's parents/guardians are Marvin Jackson and Latanya Jackson.

Students receiving degrees in December 2024 have the option to participate in the May 2025 Commencement Ceremony.

Marquette University selects Archer to its Dean's List

MILWAUKEE, Wis. – Helene Archer of Green Cove Springs was selected to the Dean's List for the fall semester at Marquette University. She is pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Biological Sciences.

To make the Dean's List, students must have earned at least 12 credits for the semester and have no disqualifying grades. The GPA threshold varies by college. For the College of Education and the Klingler College of Arts and Sciences, undergraduate students must have at least a 3.7 GPA.

Green Cove Springs' Hall on Samford's Dean's List

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. – Kinley Hall, an Early Childhood/Elementary/Special Edu-

cation major from Green Cove Springs, was selected to Samford University's Dean's List for Fall semester.

To qualify for the dean's list, a student must earn a minimum 3.5 grade point average out of a possible 4.0 while attempting at least 12 credit hours of coursework. The Dean's List is the highest academic recognition given by the school at the end of each semester.

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The Evolution of Black Sacred Music

Friends of Augusta Savage host melodic event highlighting journey of Black culture

By Kyla Woodard
kyla@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS - In honor of Black History Month, the Friends of Augusta Savage sang with hearts full of pride at their musical program last Saturday.
Held at Mt. Zion AME Church, the Evolution of Black Sacred Music event aimed to



The Mt. Pleasant Missionary Baptist Church Women in White mirrored the performance style of the Clara Ward Singers, who dominated the African American gospel scene during the 1940's and 1950's.



The choir sang staple African American gospel songs such as 'Wade in the Water', 'Steal Away' and 'Precious Lord Take My Hand'.

tell the story of African American survival and prosperity during harsh times in U.S. history — solely through song.
Featuring a collection of gospel songs journeying through slavery to post emancipation, each sang by the choir told the story of important turning points in Black American history — along with soulful narrating

from Rev. Rose Wilson.
From the fields of the south and the coded messages written in song for the Underground Railroad, to the preservation of Negro Spirituals and freedom anthems during the Civil Rights Movement, the program was full of remembrance.
The program also included emphasis on



Rev. Rose Wilson was the program narrator.

African American trailblazers such as Dr. Thomas Dorsey, Mahalia Jackson, the Fisk Jubilee Singers, the Clara Ward Singers and even MC Hammer — with his introduction of the Christian rap genre.

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College

from page 15

Paetyn Miller on Lawrence Tech's Dean's List

SOUTHFIELD, Mich. – Lawrence Technological University has announced Paetyn Miller of Middleburg earned a spot on the Dean's List of top scholars for the Fall semester. Miller is majoring in Media Communication.

President's, Dean's Lists posted at Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. – A total of 14,631 students enrolled during Fall Semester at The University of Alabama earned spots on the President's and Dean's lists were named to the dean's list with an academic record of 3.5 (or above) or the president's list with an academic record of 4.0 (all A's).

Local students included Lilly Hudson of Fleming Island, Eris Lester and Akilah Prier of Oakleaf of Jacksonville (32244) were selected to the Dean's List.

The University of Alabama, part of The University of Alabama System, is the state's flagship university. UA shapes a better world through its teaching, research and service. With a global reputation for excellence, UA provides an inclusive, forward-thinking environment and nearly 200 degree programs on a beautiful, student-centered campus.

Halley Heyer makes Chancellor's Lis at Ole Miss

UNIVERSITY, Miss. – Halley Heyer, of Fleming Island, made the University of Mississippi's Honor Roll lists.

Heyer, in the Accountancy program, was on the Chancellor's Honor Roll, which is reserved for students who earn a semester GPA of 3.75-4.00.

To be eligible for honor roll designation, a student must have completed at least 12 graded hours for the semester and may not be on academic probation during the semester.

Meanwhile, Orange Park's Isabella Boyd and Fleming Island's Abigail Glavin qualified for the Dean's List with a minimum GPA of 3.50.

Sessions makes Furman University's Dean's List

GREENVILLE, S.C. – Gabrielle Sessions of Fleming Island earned a place on Furman

University's Dean's List for the fall semester. Furman's dean's list is composed of full-time undergraduate students who earn a grade point average of 3.4 or higher on a four-point system. Sessions' parents and/or guardians are William Sessions and Natalie Sessions.

Furman is a private, undergraduate liberal arts and sciences university of 2,500 students in Greenville, South Carolina.

17 from Clay on Maryland Global Campus' Honor Roll

ADELPHI, Md. – More than 16,000 University of Maryland Global Campus students were on the Dean's List for the fall 2024 term, including 17 from Clay County. To be eligible for the honor, a student must complete at least six credits during the term, earned a grade point average of at least 3.5 for the term, and maintained a cumulative GPA of 3.5.

The following local students were named to the Dean's List:

Desiree Acuna of Green Cove Springs, Quinton Brent, Onjel Caraballo, Dustin Clover, Robert Hankins, Casey Lima and Mark McMichael, Irma Sanchez, Nicholas Hager, Randy Nunez and Alexis Vinson Knott of Orange Park, Robin Miller of Fleming Island and Charmayne Glasman, Aeddon Schultz, Joshua Stieff, Joseph Whipp and Benjamin Wolfe of Oakleaf.



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'Why did we wait so long?'

Local bakeries react to FDA ban on Red Dye No. 3

Color additive used for popular foods, confections linked to cancer

By Kyla Woodard

kyla@claytodayonline.com

CLAY COUNTY - Following a long battle for most food and health connoisseurs, on Wednesday, Jan. 15, marked a new step forward in the world of healthy living.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced it would ban the use of FD&C Red No. 3 in food and ingested drugs.

The synthetic color additive, used to give products a bright, cherry red appeal—think a slice of red velvet cake or the maraschino cherry in your cocktail—was found to be linked to cancer.

The dye is most commonly found in popular confections and products, like cookies, frostings, cakes and candies. But, it could appear in some medicines, including acetaminophen.

With the recent decision, these products could begin to look a little different in the near future. And food businesses are weighing in. For local bakers, food coloring is a key part of their craft. And many are saying the ban of this particular ingredient is a long time coming.

"I think it's definitely a step in the right direction, but I think we definitely have more work to do," said Melissa Jonyka, owner of Hyssop and Honey Sourdough Bakery in Middleburg.

Gail Whitehead, owner of Grandma Gail's Dough House in Green Cove Springs, has been following the potential ban since raising her children in the 1980s, when studies first linked the dye to thyroid cancer found in lab rats. The dye was eventually banned from cosmetics in 1990, but remained legal in food products.



Red Dye No. 3 is a color additive used in popular foods and confections, such as red velvet cake. The FDA recently banned the dye due to its link to cancer.

certain color. Especially probably at Christmas time," Rowan said. "And it's going to make it harder to accomplish that. Or, are they going to want to pay the price it's going to take to create that color?"

Jonyka said she thinks the ban will definitely hurt the food industry as a whole.

"I think it will definitely hurt the big food industry, just because they only care about the bottom line," Jonyka said. "But, I do hope this pushes them to make changes in other ways too, like cutting out other dyes like red 40, yellow 5, blue dyes and all of that stuff."

Making the product taste good is one thing, but co-owner of Rummies and Yummies Bakery and Coffee shop in Orange Park, Amy Hales said giving customers the 'look' that they desire is something that she and other bakers pride themselves in.

"If you want to give people a red velvet cake and it doesn't look red, people tend to not buy it," Hales said.

She said it's important to make food the right way.

"It's going to be just making sure that, again, validating any kind of coloring that I have, does not have any of the proposed banned ones or anything else that may be deemed harmful," Hales said.

Dawson said even with less artificial food colorings on the shelves, getting the look that your customers want is still possible.

Since opening Bless Your Heart Bakery in Middleburg five years ago, Dawson said she's way ahead of the curve, already using natural dyes as an alternative.

"I have several customers who already order dye free stuff from me. So, I do know what brands work," she said.

According to Instructables, some ways to achieve a natural red color is by using concentrated beet juice, berries or rhubarb.

Dawson said brands like TruColor and Supernatural Kitchen are perfect for this.

U.S. manufacturers will need to reformulate food and drug products containing the dye by 2027 and 2028, respectively.

Until then, the bakers noted how it's important to pay attention to the labels of the products you buy.

"I just hope somehow, someday, as a society we just become better educated on what we're putting in our bodies, what we're putting in our own kid's bodies," Jonyka said.

"Why did we wait so long?," Whitehead said. "I mean, it clearly has been a problem for a very long time."

Jonyka said it's saddening to see the effect that artificial preservatives as a whole have had on society. According to Tilley Distribution, artificial flavorings and dyes are more cost effective and able to meet demand, in turn, making the products cheaper options for consumers.

"It really affects lower income families and especially children," she said. "And, I think that's the worst part. It's just almost predatory."

According to the National Library of Medicine, artificial food colorings are also linked to attention-deficit and hyperactivity in children.

Because of this, baker Gabrielle Dawson said she eliminated it from her children's diet around five years ago.

Although they said the ban is a big win for the food industry, concerns still linger about the greater effect it could have on business. And with Valentine's Day around the corner, the color will be in high demand.

Life's a Batch owner Holly Rowan said she has mixed feelings. She said on one hand, she agrees with the ban. However, she feels that the more expensive alternatives could bring a big financial change for her customers.

"There's going to be a lot of people that don't care, they're going to want their cake a



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Watson wins Teacher, Massey wins School-Related Employee of the Year

Sierra Hardin recognized as Rookie Teacher of the Year

By Kyla Woodard
kyla@claytodayonline.com

ORANGE PARK - The county recognized a new teacher and school-related employee of the year at last Thursday's coveted Apple Awards.

Orange Park Elementary Sixth Grade Science Teacher Amanda Watson took home the title of Teacher of the Year and the keys to a brand-new 2025 Buick Envista presented by Garber Automall. The 2024-2025 School-Related Employee of the Year went to Lake Asbury Junior High Principal's Secretary Misty Massey.

Additionally, Bannerman Learning Center's Sierra Hardin won Rookie Teacher of the Year, while RideOut Elementary P.E. Teacher Todd Cambron was presented with

the Carol Vallencourt Award.

The winners were joined by more than 80 other county teachers and staff nominated, each having time to shine during the procession. Held at the Thrasher-Horne Center, the audience was filled with loud cheers and support from fellow teachers, family members and students.

The Clay Education Foundation hosted the event. It featured special appearances and work by Fleming Island High Eagle Band One, Middleburg High Horticulture Classes Bloomin' Broncos and culinary students from the CCDS Career and Technical Education program.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ONE CLAY

Lake Asbury Junior High Principal's Secretary Misty Massey (left) won School-Related Employee of the Year, while Orange Park Elementary teacher Amanda Watson (right) won Teacher of the Year.





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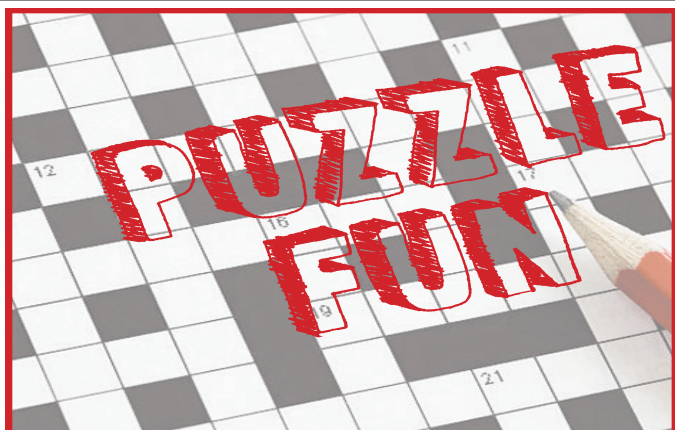
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Answers: A. heart B. cardiovascular C. pressure D. vesse

A. 15 6 5 11 10

Clue: Pumps in chest

B. 13 5 11 14 3 4 23 5 12 13 20 1 5 11

Clue: Having to do with the heart

C. 2 11 6 12 12 20 11 6

Clue: Force of blood moving through body

D. 23 6 12 12 6 1

Clue: Vein or artery

WORD SCRAMBLE

Rearrange the letters to spell something pertaining to heart health.

AQPEUL

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ARTSWERK: Plaque

GUESS WHO?

I am a singer born in Canada on February 16, 1990. I began to gain a following after anonymously uploading my songs to YouTube. I went on to release a mixtape, which was met with acclaim. I have since won multiple Grammy awards.

Answer: The weekend

HEART HEALTH

WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

AORTIC
BLOOD PRESSURE
CARDIAC
CARDIOLOGIST
CHOLESTEROL
CORONARY
ELECTROCARDIOGRAM
FAILURE
HEART
MITRAL
PACEMAKER
PRESSURE
PULMONIC
PULSE
STRESS
STROKE
SYSTOLIC
TACHYCARDIA
THROMBOSIS
TRIGLYCERIDES
VALVES
VENTRICLE

	B	E	C	K				R	E	S	T	
F	U	S	I	N	G			S	A	M	A	R
R	E	P	R	O	O	F		P	A	C	I	F
A	N	A		P	R	O	L	I	F	E	R	A
P	O	R	C		E	N	A	T	E		R	O
	S	T	U	N		T	W	I	T		T	I
		O	P	A	H			S	E	I	Z	E
			O	P	E	C		D	E	E	S	
		P	L	U	R	A	L		S	E	T	S
	E	R	A		E	P	E	E		S	E	E
E	Y	E			S	T	I	R	S		S	A
R	E	L	I	G	I	O	S	I	T	Y		B
S	C	A	R	I	E	R		S	A	L	T	I
T	U	T	O	R	S				B	E	A	R
	P	E	N	N						M	O	D

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

Classifieds

for Clay County

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904-579-2154
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Fleming Island, FL 32003

MESSAGE TO ADVERTISERS

All ads are non-refundable. Please check your ad copy the first week of publication. We will only apply credit for the first run and credits are subject to approval of the publisher. If ad is canceled prior to the first insertion cancellation must be made by classified deadline of Monday by noon. Ads must comply with Federal, State a

local laws. We are not responsible for ad content. Ads are subject to approval by the publisher.

DEADLINE MONDAY NOON

LINER ADS

All line ads are 4 lines, 20-25 characters per line. Additional lines may be purchased. All rates are NET.

PRIVATE PARTY COMMERCIAL

1 week \$14.50	1 week \$23
2 week \$24	2 week \$40
3 week \$32	3 week \$56
4 week \$40	4 week \$72

EMPLOYMENT SPOTLIGHT

Ads are \$27 per column inch with a minimum of 2"

ESTATE & GARAGE SALES

\$21

BUSINESS & SERVICE DIRECTORY

1.5" x 2" \$80 for 4 weeks
1.5" x 3" \$160 for 4 weeks

Cost includes online at: **claytodayonline.com**

Sod Cutter for Rent

Sod Cutter for Rent, \$100.00 per day.7 days a week.Please call 904-868-7602

Dog Found

Black and Brown Hound Dog found at the McDonald's in Starke. Has a chip, but not updated. Possibly from the Orange Park area. He is chunky and neutered. Please call 904-263-7009

We buy Guitars

We Buy Vintage Guitars! Looking for 1920-1980 Gibson, Martin, Fender, Gretsch, Epiphone, Guild, Mosrite, Rickenbacker, Prairie State, D'Angelico, Stromberg. And Gibson Mandolins / Banjos. These brands only! Call for a quote: 1-866-307-5421

Cash paid for watches

CASH PAID FOR HIGH-END MEN'S SPORT WATCHES. Rolex, Breitling, Omega, Patek Philippe, Heuer, Daytona, GMT, Submariner and Speedmaster. These brands only! Call for a quote: 1-888-280-1115

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DREN. FAST FREE PICKUP. 24 hour response. Running or not. Maximum Tax Deduction and No Emission Test Required! Call 24/7: 888-815-4341

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Call today and receive a

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PLUS \$1600 OFF

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1-855-417-1306

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