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THURSDAY APRIL 24, 2025

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K9s take flight at fair

New stunt dog show raises awareness for homeless animals

By Kyla Woodard
kyla@claytodayonline.com

GREEN COVE SPRINGS — Who said dogs can't fly?

That was the million-dollar question at the April 4 showing of K9s in Flight.

The brand-new stunt show at the annual Clay County Agricultural Fair offers a look into the soaring athletic capabilities of some special canines.

With more than 20 years of professional show experience, the group is known as the country's premier high-flying dog entertainers, led by John Misita.

During the approximately 25-minute show, Misita, along with his team, practiced an abundance of Frisbee tricks. They allowed the dogs to take flight, whether to hover above the grassy ground or to dive into a water-filled pool.

A mix of energetic tunes and audience participation left the crowd entranced at the sight.

Additionally, the small arena was surrounded with "Adopt a pet, save a life" signs, bringing a sentimental aspect to the popular show.

All dogs involved are rescued and adopted by the team members from shelters around the country. The cause comes from passion displayed throughout the show.

SEE STUNT SHOW, 2

Singer places 2nd in Talent Hunt



PHOTO COURTESY OF OMEGA PSI FRATERNITY

Kaelyn Newman

Omega Psi Fraternity hosted its Annual Talent Hunt Program on April 12. Kaelyn Newman of Oakleaf High School earned 2nd-place honors for her vocal rendition of "With You" from *Ghost: The Musical* by Bruce Joel Rubin. Attendees were invited to Westside High School in Duval County to be part of the contest.

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STUNT SHOW

from page 1

even in their catchphrase “Homeless to high flying.”

One of the show’s missions is to educate the public on the growing issue of pet overpopulation.

According to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, around 3.1 million dogs enter U.S. animal shelters every year, while approximately 390,000 dogs are euthanized each year.

Misita urged the audience to consider pet adoption.

“We’re losing thousands of dogs every day because we don’t have enough homes,” Misita said.

“So, how about it? Consider adopting a pet [and] saving a life.”



Any update on the Oakleaf Plantation Library project?

Currently, there is no update from the county on the progress of the incoming Oakleaf Plantation Library.

Clay Today previously reported that at a Feb. 11 meeting, Board of County Commissioner’s approved a \$750,000 grant to start the project’s design plan.

The grant was an agreement with the State of Florida Department of State and appropriated for the State Fiscal Year 2024/2025 by the Florida Legislature.

A request for qualifications was set to be sent before the end of February.

The library will be located near Oak-

leaf Village Elementary at the end of Plantation Oaks Boulevard.

If you have a question about your community that you want answered, email kyla@claytodayonline.com.



STAFF PHOTOS BY KYLA WOODARD

One of the show’s missions is to educate the public on the growing issue of pet overpopulation.

Palatka population grows with hospitality

By **Randy Reagor**
For Clay Today

Nature, waterfront, nice downtown area — Palatka has all three.

In fact, Palatka is the center point of the Lake Butler to St. Augustine Rails-to-Trails, which I recently discovered when cycling 11 miles from downtown to the Putnam County border in Hastings.

The big difference between when I last bicycled there in 2016 is the people. Nine years ago, I saw only five people but this time I saw 25-30, and most of them cyclists.

In true Southern fashion, almost everyone greeted me. The hospitality spilled over to the drivers because several times at cross streets, even when they had the right-of-way, they waved me on.

Another great feature about the trail is that most of it is separate from the road. Other than a few blocks downtown, there are several feet of grass or concrete between you and vehicle traffic to the eastern county border, which is where I encountered the most cyclists.

About a third of this stretch is shaded and parallels power lines, which as bird watchers know often attract hawks, falcons, and other raptors. I even saw a rabbit on the trail (I spend a lot of time outdoors and hadn't seen one in years). There

are benches where you can stop and enjoy the view of creeks, woodlands and farms during your ride or walk.

Heading back into Palatka, I stopped at the top of the Memorial Bridge over the St. Johns River to get a good view of the James C. Godwin Riverfront Park. Home of the Clock Tower, it also hosts various community events and festivals throughout the year.

The park welcomes you to a walkable downtown Palatka, where you'll find numerous shops, restaurants and accommodations, several of which are right on the trail.

Whether you walk, cycle or drive, come experience the big three in Palatka/Putnam County.

When you go:

- Check out Ravines State Park, which is only 1.4 miles from downtown. Make sure you get there early; when I went last year, the parking lot was filling up. Leashed dogs are welcome there as well as on the trail. For more information, go to: Ravine Gardens State Park | Florida State Parks

- Stop by the Putnam County Chamber of Commerce/Visitors Bureau. Brenda, the receptionist, is friendly and helpful. If not for her, I would have left my helmet and phone behind on a recent visit.



COURTESY PHOTO BY RANDY REAGOR

Big sky and bicycle country, Florida style

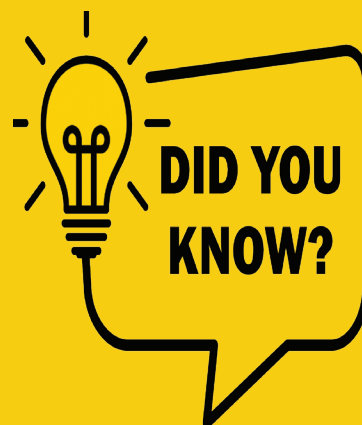


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This week, our focus is the Clay County Agriculture Fair, straight from its website: In the early 1970s, community leaders got together with Jesse Godbold, Clay County Agricultural agent, and decided the county's agricultural identity and heritage were worthy of being showcased for county residents. Among those forward thinkers who dreamed up the fair was Claude Kelly, now identified as its "father." The dream took shape in 1972, when the county purchased 28 acres of land for the Clay County Agriculture Center through a sizable donation by the Paul E. Reinhold family. In the late 1970s, a group of citizens and community leaders formed the Clay County Fair Association; they were granted a state charter in 1982. The first fair was held from March 31 to April 4, 1987.

To collect and serve: \$15K raised for Tip-A-Cop

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

ORANGE PARK — There was a considerable show of force at Texas Roadhouse from April 16-18 as deputies with the Clay County Sheriff's Office and officers with the Orange Park Police Department served water, bread, soft drinks and iced tea during the annual Tip-A-Cop fundraiser.

The three-day haul amounted to a record \$14,763.

"We were more than pleased," said Law Enforcement Torch Run Coordinator Zachary Cox. "Every year, we get more and more donations. The goal is, obviously, to beat the previous year's number. We did that, and more, with this year's Tip-A-Cop. The Clay County community and our citizens are super-generous and have a giving heart."

Law enforcement officials and Clay County Special Olympics athletes greeted guests as they entered the busy steakhouse. They solicited extra "tips" to send athletes to the Florida State Games from May 14 to 18 by helping servers with their duties. Money donated to Tip-A-Cop was separate from tips left for servers.

A year ago, they earned \$13,492 in tips.

"All of our athletes, especially the ones who were there and were helping us out, carrying bread and opening the door when they came in to check in with the hostess — that's their Super Bowl. They love it."

"All the customers at the restaurant loved interacting with them and hearing their story. It really meant a lot."

Cox said the reason for the three primary fundraising events is so the athletes "have fun."

The other events will be the Torch Run on May 2 and another Tip-A-Cop event at the Longhorn Steakhouse on Fleming Island in the fall.

The Torch Run will start from the Hibernia Publix at 9 a.m. Even so, all participants must park at the Plantation Sports Complex at 321 Old Hard Road before 8:30 a.m. to purchase a Torch Run T-shirt (cot-



STAFF PHOTO BY DON COBLE

CCSO negotiator Jonathon Parales makes his pitch to diners Brett and Linda Perry of Keystone Heights.

ton shirts are \$20; Dry-Fit shirts are \$25) and sign a participation waiver. Then, they will be shuttled to Publix for the run, including bicycles and walkers.

The route will include leaving Publix, crossing U.S. Highway 17, going north on the Black Creek bike trail and turning west on Village Square Parkway. The route will then move south on Town Center Boulevard and make a right turn on Old Hard Road before entering the Plantation Sports Complex, where supporters and a group of food vendors will greet them.

Anyone who parks at Publix won't have a ride from Plantation Sports Complex back to the grocery store after the run.



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY CCSO

The team of Clay County Special Olympics athletes, the Clay County Sheriff's Office and the Orange Park Police Department collected \$14,763 at last week's Tip-A-Cop.

First Class: Postman retires after 30 years

By Don Coble
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ORANGE PARK – Mark Miller wasn't sure what he would do after he delivered his last piece of mail on March 28, but he was confident about one thing: "Whatever I do, it will be in air conditioning."

After spending the last 30 years driving a mail truck or walking a beat around some sleepy Orange Park neighborhoods, Miller is tired of sweating. He's ready to chill – literally – and enjoy whatever's next in his life.

"I really haven't thought about what I'm

going to do," he said after shaking hands and delivering mail to Roger Macik on Grasshopper Lane in the Holly Point West neighborhood. "It gets 120 degrees in that truck in the summer, so I won't miss that. But in 30 years, I've made a lot of friends and a lot of memories. I will miss it dearly. It is bittersweet."

Residents in the neighborhood decided to send Miller into retirement with a week-long celebration. Streets, houses and mailboxes in Holly Point were decorated with banners, balloons and streamers. During his final days, Miller was given gifts, a sash and flowers.

"We wanted to do something special because he's been such a good friend to everyone," said April Pepera. "Everyone in the neighborhood knows him. We're going to miss him."

Residents gave him three cases of beer and a bottle of Scotch.

"The beer will go to good use," he said.

Miller said the volume of mail has dramatically changed since he started. The advent of emails reduced personal mail, but there are still plenty of sales flyers, magazines and cards.

"Back when I started, we got tons of mail," Miller said. "It has cut off a lot, I'd say by 50%. It's just a sign of the times, with emails and everything else, the electronic age."

Miller said he was surprised by the receptions in Holly Point East and West neighborhoods during his final week with the U.S. Postal Service.



STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

Roger Macik thanked Mark Miller for delivering his mail for the past 30 years.

"It's truly amazing. It blew me off my feet," he said. "When you've been around for 30 years, you make an impression."

Although Park Avenue (U.S. Highway 17) divides the neighborhoods, they both require Miller to use his truck to deliver mail to some mailboxes and to walk the rest of his route.

"They call it parking loops," he said. "There are two on this side (west) and two on the other. Sometimes it's nice to go out and walk. Unless it's Christmas or Valentine's Day, it's not a lot of mail, and I move pretty fast."

Miller said he likes to crossbow hunt, or he may spend time fishing. There are no immediate plans other than taking time off and resting his feet.

And enjoying air conditioning.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Mark Miller was reminded how much he was appreciated throughout the Holly Point neighborhood.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

After 30 years, Mark Miller delivered his last birthday card, sales flyer and postcard on Friday, March 28. Residents decorated their Holly Point neighborhood during Miller's final week to celebrate his friendship and dedicated service.

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FHSAA Class 3A Weightlifting

Shev' blasts bench press for weightlift gold

Oakleaf five gets fourth



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Oakleaf High's state champion brothers; Noah, up top, the 2025 154 state champion in Traditional scoring, and, bottom, big brother Noah Shevchook, a state champion in 2024 for Oakleaf, paired up as coach and athlete as Oakleaf finished fourth in Class 3A with just five weightlifters.

By Randy Lefko

randy@claytodayonline.com

LAKELAND - Oakleaf High junior Noah Shevchook had his big brother Elijah hovering over his final bench press as he finished off his trek to equal big brother with a state weightlifting title Saturday in Lakeland.

Shevchook won in the Traditional scoring of weightlifting; a combination of Clean and Jerk and Bench Press lifts while finishing third in the Olympics scoring; Olympic Snatch and Clean and Jerk.

Elijah Shevchook, a graduated state champion from last year's state meet, has been in brother Noah's corner as well as the Oakleaf High team all season and the presence of the champion made its impact Saturday.

"I think I bring a little bit of the what to expect when you get here vibe," said Elijah Shevchook. "During the season, I pushed all the lifters to focus on the very little pieces that go into a successful lift. Today was the validation of that."

For Oakleaf, Christian Rodriguez at 169 was just 15 feet away from the Shevchook battle royale and was going blow for blow with his best guys to take a third place bronze medal in Traditional also with a battle above the 300 pound mark. Rodri-

quez, injured in his lower back earlier this season, was not competing in the Olympic Snatch and did not factor in the Olympics scoring for the Knights.

Amazingly, with just five lifters taking the trip to Lakeland, coaches Lane Samples and Jerard Lanoir were able to throw enough weight around to finish fourth overall in Traditional and sixth overall in Olympics.

"We brought some firepower with us and we knew we were going to put big numbers up if we did our jobs," said Samples. "We had tremendous finishes from Ray, Lucius and Ethan (Williams, third in Olympics and Traditional at 129; Manley eighth at 199 Olympics; Simon, fourth at 238 in Olympics) with Daniel (Israel, in 129, our only non scoring lifter). That's pretty good for a small team going up against big teams like Pace, Spruce Creek and Navarre who have dominated here forever."

Pace, with two champions and 11 top 10 placers, won the Olympics team title with 30 points with Spruce Creek second at 17, Navarre third at 16, Forest Hill fourth at 14, Jupiter fifth at 12 and Oakleaf sixth at 11 in a tie with Manatee.

In Traditional, Pace, with three champions and nine top 10 finishers, won with 37 points ahead of Venice with 20 with Na-



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Oakleaf High 199 weightlifter Lucius Manley hoists away in Olympic Snatch en route to eighth place finish in Olympics scoring as Knights finished fourth in Traditional and sixth in Olympics with just five athletes at the Class 3A state weightlifting championships held Saturday in Lakeland.

varre third at 17 and Oakleaf fourth at 15. St. Cloud was fifth with nine.

Ironically, the region 1-3A finishers were the same lineup in Traditional; Pace, Spruce Creek, Navarre and Oakleaf with, in Olympics it was Pace, Spruce Creek, Navarre, Crestview and Oakleaf in fifth.

"That's a pretty tough regional lineup that we knew we were going to see again at state," said Samples. "All I can tell the guys is hit your lifts and hope they miss one of theirs."

For Noah Shevchook, the chase to the title started with his third place finish last year and ended with a Mano-a-Mano battle with a trio of astounding competitors in the 154 pound division that played above the 300 pound barrier all day.

"I knew what I could do in the bench press and that if I did my lifts, I could win the title," said Shevchook. "I wanted the Olympics title, but the other guys were a little tougher in the Clean and Jerk."

Shevchook's main nemesis was Milton High's Bryson Brown, who took the region Olympics title from Shevchook a week ago by just five pounds with Shevchook returning the favor in Traditional with Pace's Ryan Harrigill putting Bryson at third.

The third prong of the three-way challenge came from Angel Quintero of Forest

Hill High, but Quintero, who was second in the best Olympic lifter on the day and the eventual 154 Olympics champion, was not competing in the bench press session and gave Shevchook, third rated in Traditional best lifter, the driver's seat. Brown was second in Olympics.

"I was going to come down to Bryson (Brown) and me again in Traditional," said Shevchook. "He's a great Snatch and Clean and Jerk guy, but I knew what I could do in bench press."

In the Olympics Snatch, Harrigill was first to fall with misses at 205 pounds to take him out of the equation with Brown hitting his final lift at 255 and Quintero recovering from a miss at 240 to hit 240 and 255 to equal Brown. Also hovering the picture was a 240 lift from Winter Park's Nichola Deshaies. Note: Quintero weighed less than Brown in body weight which is the tie-breaking factor in weightlifting.

In Clean and Jerk, Shevchook, alarmingly, missed his opener at 290 to cause heart palpitations in the RP Funding Arena.

"It was just a glitch and the officials are very tight at state," said Shevchook. "I didn't panic and made it (290) on my second lift."

Brown and Quintero smelled blood in

SEE WEIGHTLIFT GOLD, 7

WEIGHTLIFT GOLD

from page 6

the water and put up 300 pound openers, then 310 for Brown and 315 for Quintero, but Shevchhook had one lift and hit 305 to secure third place.

In Traditional, with the Clean and Jerk scores putting Shevchhook at a disadvantage five pounds down on Brown and a tenuous 15 up on Harrigill, Shevchhook threw his trump card in with a 310 opener. Brown opened at just 255, but Harrigill was back in the mix with a 290 opener.

"It was meant to put them on their heels," said Shevchhook. "Bryson only hit a 260 at regions and I knew I was going over 300."

With Harrigill forced to chase Shevchhook, his second lift, 300 and third lift, a Hail Mary at 310, both failed with Brown good at 265, but off at 270.

Shevchhook, charged by watching the action around him and watching (or better, hearing) his teammate also getting big crowd reactions, jumped to a 320 second lift, then took a final shot at a state record 335 after securing his gold medal.

"I've done it in practice and had a 325 last week, but it wasn't needed," said Shevchhook.

Meanwhile, Rodriguez, the Traditional region champ by a body weight tiebreaker to Crestview's Eli Anglin at 595 total, Rodriguez held a five pound advantage after the clean and jerk at 290-285, then both clearing their first bench press at 305 to set up a final two lifts of intensity. The wild card guy in the 169 was Venice High's



Three amigos that battled the best of Class 3A weightlifting were, from left, Noah Shevchhook, Traditional 154 state champion; Christian Rodriguez, third in Traditional at 169, and Oakleaf assistant coach Elijah Shevchhook, a 2024 state weightlifting champion for Knights.

Ruh Tanner, also not competing in Olympic Snatch, who quietly may have taken advantage of the Rodriguez Anglin battle to sit in contention for the top prize when the dust settled.

"We tied at regions and I knew he was not going to let up," said Rodriguez. "That second lift was sloppy and then he hit his (at 315). I had to go up to beat him and missed at 315."

With Tanner hitting at 295, but missing at 300, the trio was within pounds of each other heading to the bench press.

Anglin and Rodriguez both opened good at 305, but Ranner opened at 310 to add five points to his lead on the threesome.

Tanner continued to improve with lifts of 315 and 320 to take the title with Anglin good at 315, but a miss at 325 to take the outright silver medal. Rodriguez was off on two attempts at 315.

"I'll be back," said Rodriguez. "I'm not making excuses, but I missed a month for my injury from the Snatch, but wanted to go as far as I could today with my teammates."

At the opposite end of the arena, at 119, Williams was in a weight class with a three time state champion; Michael Ziss of St. Cloud who again dominated with Williams third with a 415 total in Traditional and a 360 total in Olympics to a 430 and 435 totals for Jagari Gardner of Hagerty.

In the upper weight divisions, Oakleaf's Ethan Simons, at 238, finished with a 565 total in Olympics for his fourth behind a top score of 580 with a 705 winning in Traditional.

At 199, Lucius Manley, in Olympics, had best lifts of 230 and 265 to finish eighth.

Class 3A finishers

119: Ray Williams OHS (360 total Olympics, 415 total Traditional)

129: Daniel Israel OHS (400 total Traditional)

154: Noah Shevchhook OHS (535 total Olympics, 625 total Traditional)

169: Christian Rodriguez OHS (595 total Traditional)

199: Lucius Manley OHS (495 total Olympics)

238: Ethan Simons OHS (565 total Olympics, 610 total Traditional)



Oakleaf 119 weightlifter Ray Williams sets up to finish off 195 clean and jerk, then a 205 to finish third in both Olympics and Traditional to add key team points for Oakleaf.



Oakleaf High 154 weightlifter Noah Shevchhook lifts strong in front of Oakleaf coach Lane Samples, left, while top competitor Bryson Brown, right, watches in one of his tense battles at Class 3A championships on Saturday in Lakeland.



Oakleaf High 199 weightlifter Lucius Manley hoists away in Olympic Snatch en route to eighth place finish in Olympics scoring as Knights finished fourth in Traditional and sixth in Olympics with just five athletes at the Class 3A state weightlifting championships held Saturday in Lakeland.

FIHS, RHS, OHS, SJCDs to regions

By Randy Lefko

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FLEMING ISLAND - Fleming Island High's boys and girls tennis teams; led by sophomore Zack Wyatt and Tessa Wilson for the girls, won their district championship tournaments at Eagle Harbor Tennis Club on Wednesday to advance to their region with Ridgeview's girls and boys both finishing second to Fleming Island. Both teams advance to region play on Tues-

day, April 22; Fleming Island boys hosting Nease at Eagle Harbor, Ridgeview boys at Ponte Vedra while the Fleming Island girls host Ponte Vedra and Ridgeview's girls, led by Chloe Bois, head to Nease.

In Class 4A, Oakleaf's girls team, led by Adassah Prevost, will travel to Spruce Creek.

In Class 1A, St. Johns Country Day School's boys team will travel to P.K. Yonge.



Ridgeview High singles ace Chloe Bois rolls a forehand in singles for Panthers who were district runnerups and will head to Nease for their region opener.



Fleming Island boys tennis; from left, Kesl Cumpstone, Zach Hyatt, Max Frakt, Andrew Welsh and Aidan Whipple will host Ponte Vedra in their region opener at Eagle Harbor Tennis Complex after winning district title over Ridgeview.

STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO



Oakleaf advanced their girls team to regions to take on Spruce Creek in Class 4A. Pictured are doubles partners Julissa Rodriguez and Keila Noles.



Fleming Island's Katie Baird blasts away in singles to lead Golden Eagles to district title and region opener against Ponte Vedra on Tuesday, April 22 at Eagle Harbor Tennis Complex.

Spring Football Starting April 28



Area high school football teams will be starting the process to prepare for the upcoming 2025 fall season with a month of spring football starting on April 28. Teams will be practicing for about a month with a spring game scheduled in May.

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Could it be a hernia?

8 silent signs

Yes, women get hernias — but the signs are not always obvious. Most common is a bulge in the abdomen, but here are some other symptoms that you may be more likely to ignore:

- Pain in the pelvic area
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fever
- Constipation
- Feeling full and bloated
- Heartburn
- Weakness and muscle fatigue in the upper leg or groin
- Pain when lifting or coughing

If left untreated, your hernia could grow, get more painful, or even become dangerous at some point. And a hernia won't go away on its own. The good news is today's minimally invasive hernia treatment options, including robotic-assisted surgery, can offer you fast recovery.

**For more information
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appointment:**

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