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Thursday, January 25, 2018

Vol. 5 • No. 01



Work keeps moving along on Clay County's newest public school in a decade. Discovery Oaks Elementary will relieve overcrowding in existing Oakleaf-area schools and is set to open for the start of the 2018-19 school year.

Traffic cameras could be gone in a flash

By Alex Wilson
The Oakleaf

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The Florida Legislature may be one step closer to prohibiting red light camera programs statewide, something that could affect local revenue significantly.

The Florida House of Representatives passed House Bill 6001 on Jan. 12 with a vote of 83-18. If its companion bill passes the Florida Senate, governments with red light cameras will be prohibited from using them after 2021.

Both Green Cove Springs and Orange Park have red light cameras, with several on U.S. Highway 17 alone. Together, the two cities have averaged an annual total of \$461,956 in revenue from the traffic cameras for the past five years.

An identical bill remains to be reviewed by the senate, but the bills come at a time when a nationwide movement towards removing red light cameras is gaining momentum.

"Legislation like this comes around every year, but this year it has a little more steam than usual," said Jim Arnold, city attorney for Green Cove Springs. "Of course, if the legislature prohibits red light cameras, then we won't have them."

HB 6001 primarily repeals specific statutes related to red light cameras in the Mark Wandall Traffic Safety

SEE SCHOOL, 12

SEE CAMERA, 11

Discovery Oaks boundaries set

By Wesley LeBlanc
The Oakleaf

FLEMING ISLAND – Clay County's newest elementary school has a new set of attendance boundaries after a Jan. 4 vote from the Clay County School Board.

The board voted 5-0 to advertise a 21-day notice of the board's intent to adopt an Attendance Boundary Plan that district staff presented to the

community in a meeting in December.

This plan shapes the attendance boundaries for Discovery Oaks Elementary, which is on track to open this coming August for the 2018-19 school year. The board also accepted a plan to add sixth grade to both Plantation Oaks and Oakleaf Village Elementary schools, which currently serve Pre-K to fifth grade. Oakleaf

Junior High will also be re-aligned to offer only seventh to eighth grades, whereas, the school currently is grades sixth through eighth.

According to a presentation given at a previous meeting, the goal in the Oakleaf redistricting are to open Discovery Oaks Elementary with a sustainable student population and have no relocatable classrooms,

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Politicians walk out of King Day event

By Kile Brewer
The Oakleaf

ORANGE PARK – During the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day breakfast, Live The Dream Chief Executive Officer Michael Dobson reminded people not to get too comfortable.

Dobson was the guest speaker at the Monday morning event, solidifying a partnership with the Florida branch of One Church One Child Inc. where breakfast organizer Rev. Bill Randall sits on the board. Through the partnership, One Church One Child will receive some of the funds from the Live The Dream foundation's MLK vanity license plate sales to benefit orphaned and abandoned children throughout the state.

As Dobson took the podium he began with some comments on the license plate and why it is important for people to buy it, not only to support King's legacy, but also to help children who are in need. "The tag helps fight poverty, and to alleviate illness and disease," Dobson said, as guests finished their break-

fast and sipped coffee, the audience of politicians and officials sat in their chairs listening.

"I'm not sure why a lot of you are here today, and I often wonder, 'Are we here because we're checking off a box to say that we were here?'" he asked the crowd. "What I ask you to do, if at all possible, is to think about that legacy of King."

First, he told his story. Dobson explained that in 2002, when he first heard about the MLK license plate, he never thought it would get through the legislature, "that's just never gonna' happen," he remembered saying. Being born in the segregated South, he never thought that lawmakers in Tallahassee would allow the tag to become a reality. He was surprised though, when they were receptive and supportive, including former governor Jeb Bush, who signed the bill into law. Dobson found out that above all, the legislature supports freedom, which was King's ultimate goal: freedom for all people.

SEE KING, 10



STAFF PHOTO BY KILE BREWER

Michael Dobson, president and CEO of The Dream Foundation, speaks Monday morning during the annual MLK Breakfast held each year by St. Simon Baptist Church pastor Bill Randall as part of MLK Day-N-Clay.

Nonprofit preserves sensitive lands in Clay County

By Wesley LeBlanc
The Oakleaf

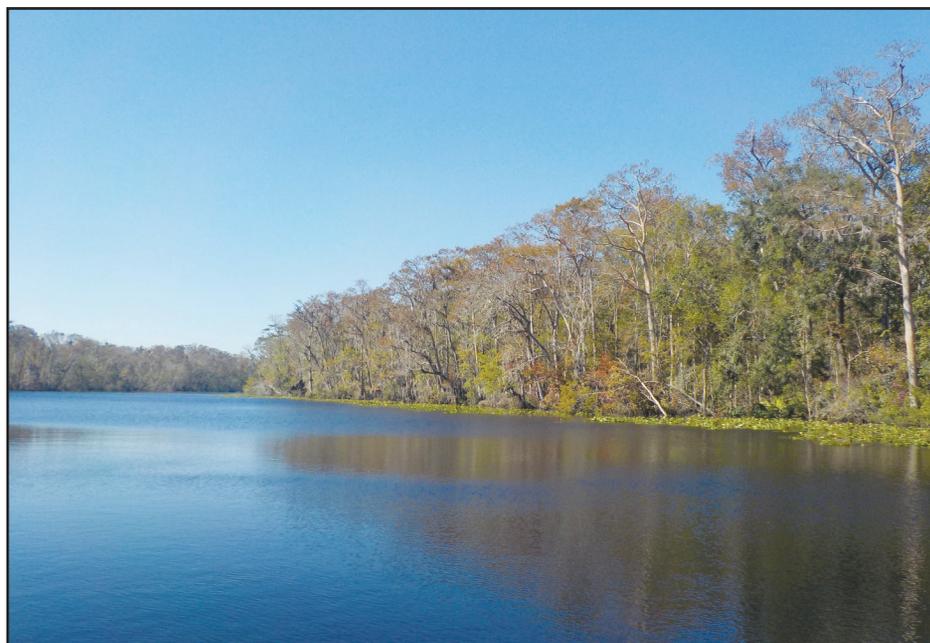
JACKSONVILLE – One of Clay County's largest development companies is helping preserve sensitive areas along Black Creek and Doctors Lake with help from a Jacksonville-based nonprofit.

South Doctors Lake Ltd., owned by James R. Menard, donated 388 acres along the two waterways in December to the North Florida Land Trust.

Land Trust President Jim McCarthy describes the donation as a huge win on various fronts.

"Preserving this land is not only good for Black Creek and Doctors Lake, but it will also have economic benefits by acting as a natural buffer against flooding," McCarthy said.

According to McCarthy, an acre of wetlands, which is how McCarthy would classify the Black Creek area,



Long a treasure of Clay County, a section of land along Black Creek will be preserved from commercial development after a donation to the North Florida Land Trust from South Doctors Lake Ltd., a private Clay County development company.

holds anywhere between 1 million and 1.5 million gallons of water. Because of this, when floodwaters make their way into the Black Creek area, the banks of the creek and surrounding land soaks up water that would otherwise flood the area.

Preserving land like this throughout North Florida has always been the goal of the North Florida Land Trust, according to North Florida Land Trust Conservation Advocate, Andrea Conover.

"When we were founded in 1999, our goal was to ensure that North Florida didn't end up like South Florida," Conover said. "And by that, I mean, our goal was to ensure important pieces of North Florida land remain protected."

Since its founding, the nonprofit

SEE LAND, 9



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Second Aldi opens in Clay

By Kile Brewer
The Oakleaf

ORANGE PARK – For many Clay County residents, quality grocery products at low prices are just around the corner after the county's second Aldi store opened its doors on Blanding Boulevard near Orange Park.

The store officially opened at 9 a.m. on Jan. 11 with about a dozen

customers waiting in line that first morning. In addition to the grand opening, Aldi stores throughout the Jacksonville area hosted a hiring event for those hoping to get in on Aldi's \$12, or more, per hour starting pay.

"Aldi takes a positive approach with workers, they always take care of their workers and staff," said Jordan Augier, a district manager in



Customers wait in line on the opening day of the new Aldi store on Blanding Boulevard near Orange Park.



STAFF PHOTOS BY KILE BREWER

Customers shop in the produce section at the new Aldi store near Orange Park. Though the store is one of the chain's smaller footprint locations, it offers a full array of food products at prices below the industry standard.

training for Aldi who started at the company less than a year ago. "Aldi is in the top 94 percent for pay, and there are always opportunities to move up and expand yourself. They look for the people who want to grow – those who don't just want to do the same thing for the rest of their lives."

Though the 19,842-square foot

store – in the Bolton Plaza – popped up in just three months, the scouting and details that went into the location took years of planning. The store is part of an expansion for the company into the Central and Northeast Florida markets. This store is the fifth to open in the Jacksonville area, with others on the way

SEE ALDI, 8

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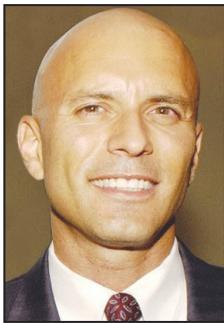
By Tim Canova
FloridaPolitics.com

Floridians have never been closer to putting an open primaries referendum on the 2018 ballot than we are today.

A proposal to amend our primary system was submitted by Commissioner Bill Schifino of the Florida Constitutional Revision Commission. Schifino's open primary proposal is now one of six being considered by the full Commission, out of more than 2,000 original proposals.

Florida needs this political reform.

In 2016, independent voters who wanted to vote in the presidential primaries were presented with two bad options: register with a political party they refused to join or stay home.



Tim Canova

The Schifino proposal will allow 3.4 million independent voters – 26 percent of all voters in Florida – to cast their ballots in either the Democratic or Republican primary elections without being forced to join a party.

All the CRC has to do is put the measure before the voters for approval. I hope they listen to the people and do just that.

I'm a passionate advocate on many policy issues, and sometimes people ask me why I devote time and energy advocating for opening our primary system. For me, being a progressive means advocating for a system that is fair to all voters, including people who disagree with me. That's the kind of leadership that is so lacking in Congress today. Closed primaries are part of a political culture that allows party insiders to thrive at the expense of the people.

In a poll co-conducted by my organization Progress for All, Florida Fair and Open Primaries and Open Primaries, 73 percent of Floridians—including majorities of Republicans and Democrats as well as independents supported putting an open primaries measure before the voters in November 2018.

Demographics in our state and in our country are changing rapidly. Independents are the fastest growing segment of voters in Florida, and some surveys suggest more than 70 percent of millennials are indepen-

SEE VOTERS, 5



Explore the stars at upcoming Starlight Night

By Thomas Webber

I will turn 50 this year. There, I said it. There's no turning back and no more denial. I am making the transition from being a vibrant, young life-of-the-party to a wise, old sage.

Naturally, there are now many who would like to seek my learned counsel. And I am glad to pontificate my views when given the chance. Like right now, for example.

Five decades. Wow. I think the one thing that stands out the most in my mind is witnessing the transition in preference from the real to the artificial.

Pixels have replaced people and places. Video games are more popular than actual play. And, to an old guy like me, the phrase "virtual reality" seems like an oxymoron.

I see folks everyday walking with their heads down, staring at a device instead of interacting with their surroundings. They have "friends" – hundreds of them – whom they have never met. A meaningful conversation is sacrificed for messaging and texting.

We are losing touch with each other.

And with nature.

This is nothing new. Urbanization has been separating us from nature for over a century: Cities go



Thomas Webber

up, the lights turn on, and the human species becomes domesticated.

One of the casualties of such progress is the splendor of a night sky.

It is an unfortunate turn of the page in the history of mankind, for humanity had a relationship with the stars for thousands of years. They were used to predict seasons, dictate the course of nations and drive science forward.

Writers, poets and dreamers would strive to properly articulate the magnificence of the heavens.

But now we live in a time where many will never stare in awe and humility at the night sky. Between light pollution and the allure of electronics, the celestial is becoming forgotten.

Let's recapture our curiosity.

On January 25, from 5:30-9 p.m., you have the opportunity to become reacquainted with our place in space. Starlight Night at Lake Asbury Junior High School is a free public event that offers telescope viewing, science demonstrations, arts and crafts for the kids and some fun guests to help guide you through heavens.

"I really believe that everyone, young and old, has an innate fascination with the universe, and this evening offers people a chance to begin such a journey of discovery," said Desiree Webber, science teacher at LAJH and organizer of the event.

"Our tagline is, 'Science, Learn-

SEE STARLIGHT, 5

Word of the week

Word of the Week is a feature that aims to help readers boost their vocabulary in a meaningful way that has practical application. Each week, our editorial staff presents a word, its definition and its use in a sentence.

Regicide: A noun meaning "the action of killing a king or a sitting monarch."

"King Charles I of England fell victim to regicide by beheading after being placed on trial for treason."

This week in History

5 years ago, 2013

A headcount of students in the Clay County School District showed 682 fewer students than projected, which put the district at risk of having a \$6.47 million budget shortfall.

The Clay Board of County Commissioners debated an ordinance governing how mobile veterinary offices would operate in Clay County.

After a three-and-a-half year wait, the Wings of Dream Museum in Keystone Heights learned it was to receive a donated World War Two-era Douglas C-47 after being selected from a pool of aviation museums around the U.S.

10 years ago, 2008

Board of County Commissioners Chairman George Bush and School Board Vice Chairman Charlie Van Zant Jr. spoke out opposing the "Save Our Homes" tax bill that was moving through the Florida Legislature. Both said the bill would take money out of local government coffers because it increased the homestead exemption.

The age-old debate about evolution led to a packed room of speakers at the Clay County School Board. After the discussion, the board passed a "watered-down" version of the state-required resolution.

A second jury found County Commissioner Christy Fitzgerald innocent of criminal charges that had been previously recommended by a 2006

SEE HISTORY, 5



Voters

from page 4

dents. We risk losing an entire generation of voters if we don't embrace them. Democrats can't win elections without independent voters. Right now we're saying to them, "You're not wanted in the primary process, but join us in the general election." We simply can't have it both ways.

I was disappointed in the recent decision of the Unity Reform Commission, a body created by the Democratic National Committee at the 2016 National Convention, to not recommend that the Democratic Party enact a 50-state open primaries rule for the 2020 presidential contest. Regardless of state election law, both political parties could, if they wanted, write rules to give every voter in every state the right to cast a ballot in the 2020 presidential primaries. It was a missed opportunity for Democrats to open our doors to independents.

Effective political change requires more than replacing individual politicians. Our political system itself is reinforcing partisanship at ever-increasing rates. If we want to transform politics, we have to elect better leaders and change how they get elected.

Which brings me back to the Constitution Revision Commission and the opportunity to now do right by the people of Florida.

The Commission held nine public hearings in early 2017, from Miami to the Florida Panhandle, to hear firsthand what issues are most important to citizens. Thousands of Floridians spoke out at the hearings, signed petitions, sent emails and made calls to CRC members to support an open primaries referendum. Inspired by this demand, Commissioner Bill Schifino introduced his proposal. Now as the Commission moves proposals forward – including a vote on the open primaries proposal – we need to make our voices heard as we did so strongly last year. The CRC will be holding a second set of public hearings starting Feb. 12. I hope everyone will join me in attending one or more of these hearings and urge the CRC to adopt Commissioner Schifino's recommendation and put an open primaries referendum on the 2018 ballot for the voters to approve. The message is simple: Let the voters decide. That's a progressive value that all Floridians can get behind.

Tim Canova is the chair of Progress for All, a grassroots political and community action group based in Hollywood, Florida that supports progressive candidates and causes. He is challenging Debbie Wasserman Schultz for the Democratic Party nomination in South Florida's 23rd Congressional District.

Student Dispatches

FLEMING ISLAND – Launching January 1, 2018, Student Dispatches will be written by students in grades three through 12 and printed with parents' permission. Each student who submits a dispatch will also submit a consent form along with their writing. Student Dispatches will also be printed in Clay Today and on our website so kids can then share their posts via social media, so their friends can see it on their device(s).

Here's what we're asking for. Students in grades 3-12 who attend public, private, charter, home or parochial school will write us and tell us what they are doing in school. Sounds simple, right? Well, it is.



It could be as simple as:

"On Monday, Oct. 23, my class took a tour of the Museum of Science and History where we got to see a presentation about the Milky Way in the museum's planetarium. If you've never been to the planetarium before, I'd recommend a visit. It's as if you're outside looking at the stars but you're learning because there is narration going on that teaches you a lesson. It also made me want to learn

more about Astronomy."

–Cindy Doe, 5th grader, Maple Street School

We're also asking students to send us a photo to go along with their piece as well. The photo could be a group photo or a photo of kids doing stuff, in the case of this example, looking through a telescope.

Parents, here's where you come in. We have developed a consent form for students under age 18 that parents must sign for the student. The form will be available for download on our website, www.claytodayonline.com.

Student Dispatches should be emailed to Managing Editor Eric Cravey at eric@opcfla.com.

History

from page 4

grand jury looking into the Sleepy Hollow illegal dumping scandal.

20 years ago, 1998

Green Cove Springs City Council held public debate on how to save the old and ailing Qui-Si-Sana hotel, one of the last hotels from the city's era as a tourist destination.

The Clay County Sheriff's Office charged 19-year-old Michael David McJunkin with murder and armed robbery in connection with the stabbing death of Shannon Carol Holzer that occurred on New Year's Eve.

British mining company Tarmac appealed a 5-1 vote of the Clay County Planning Commission to deny a rezoning request that would have allowed it to establish a sand mine in Keystone Heights. Residents

opposed the sand mine.

30 years ago, 1988

The Clay Board of County Commissioners voted to oppose a plan to set up a hazardous waste disposal facility on the east side of Camp Blanding. The BCC would write the Department of Environmental Regulation and state legislators asking to kill the project.

The Florida Department of Transportation said a proposed route for an outer beltway loop around Jacksonville would not likely run through Fleming Island and involve a new bridge across the St. Johns River to eventually connect with Interstate 95.

Clay County Sheriff Jennings Murrhee said Robert Pugh, 30, and Paula Johnson, 32, both of Gainesville, were the first grand theft arrests made in Florida for allegedly

stealing Florida Lottery tickets since the game of chance was launched statewide that month. They were booked into the Clay County Jail.

40 years ago, 1978

The Clay Board of County Commissioners unveiled plans to expand the County Health Department Building, the county courthouse and county jail in its regular meeting.

The Clay County Chamber of Commerce – having experienced membership growth from 180 to 600 – moved its headquarters from Green Cove Springs to Orange Park at 1567 Kingsley Ave., the former location of Kingsley Bank.

The Clay County Zoning Commission granted a special use permit to Clay Electric Cooperative to construct a substation on a 30-acre tract on the northwest corner of Blanding Boulevard and Branan Field Road.

Starlight

from page 4

ing, and Community,' as visitors will also get to mingle with neighbors and learn about their schools and programs," she added.

The Northeast Florida Astronomical Society – NEFAS – will provide a range of telescopes, equipment and experts to help you explore the final frontier. And the January sky has plenty to offer.

The moon will be in its first-quarter phase on the 25th, giving depth to the lunar mountains and craters. Deep sky objects, such as the Orion Nebula and the Horsehead Nebula, are also popular winter targets. Star clusters, double stars and even Uranus and Neptune will also be explored.

And as much as Floridians dislike the cold, the cooler temperature and lower humidity make this the best time of year to observe.

The science demonstrations are presented by Oakleaf High School's AP Physics classes, with inquiry questions and real-world applications. Can you safely touch 250,000 Volts? How does a bicycle stay upright? Do different observers in the universe experience the same event?

A real meteorite will also be on display that visitors will be able to hold. Star maps will be distributed with live instruction on how to use them.

Awesome!

Food will be available for a small fee, with proceeds supporting the LAJH Chapter of the Future Farmers of America.

What a great way to begin, or recapture, a lifelong love of learning. It is time to turn our heads upward again, to the splendor of a starlight night.

"We are excited to host our very first Starlight Night at Lake Asbury Junior High School," said Beck Murphy, principal. "And we are thrilled to partner with NEFAS and others to offer this great learning opportunity to our students, their families, and our community."

Indeed.

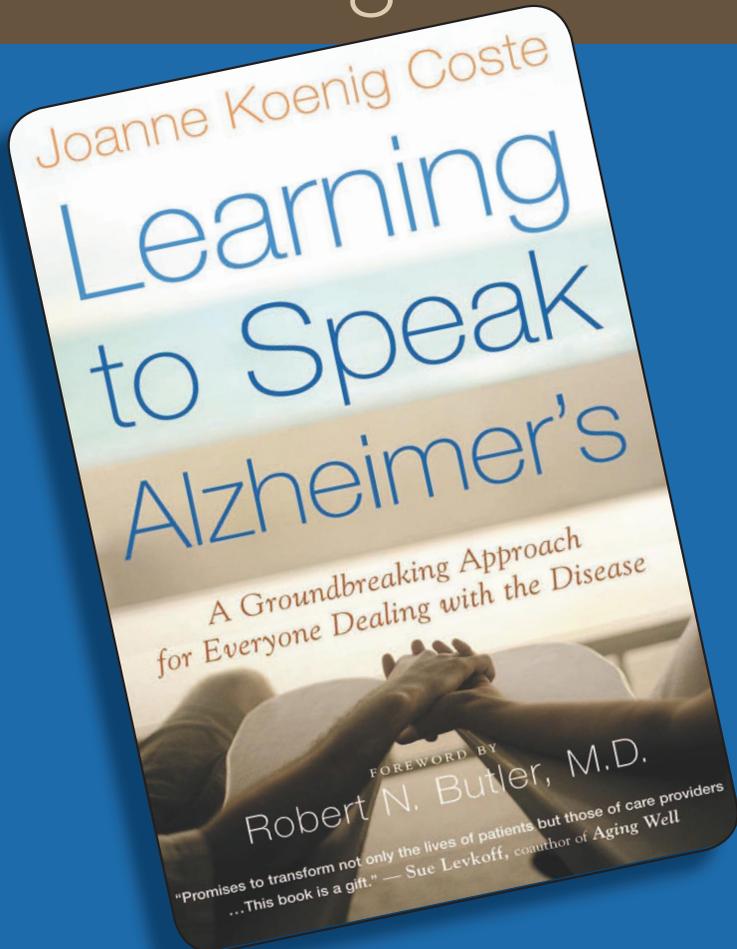
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Commissioners consider library self-checkout

By Debra W. Buehn
The Oakleaf

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – With an eye toward the future, Clay County is taking a look at technology that would allow library patrons to check in and out their own books, freeing up librarians to do work that makes better use of their skills.

Meeting in a workshop session Jan. 16 to discuss the library, the Board of County Commissioners directed staff to look further into RFID technology, which stands for Radio Frequency Identification that would allow library patrons to scan their own books for check in and check out, as well as pay their fines. It would also help with inventory, officials said. The thinking is such a system would free up those working in the libraries to work more closely with patrons on programs, books and other items that would benefit the system, its employees and its users more.



Gavin Rollins

Because they met in a workshop session, no official vote could be taken. That will be done at a regular BCC meeting, and will happen after staff brings back a more specific report on costs of an RFID program and what it is all about. The board was somewhat split in its support of the RFID idea, with Commission Chairman Gavin Rollins among those who felt it should be looked at very seriously.

“My thought is we have to do this,” Rollins said. “As the county continues to grow, we’re going to have to expand libraries and we’re going to have to have this system.”

Rollins said that not only was the system more efficient, but it was valuable because of what it did for the staff.

“We have a lot of very intelligent people working in the library system who have advanced degrees and that type of thing and their highest and best use isn’t always just scanning a book out,” he said.

Rollins emphasized he wasn’t in favor of downsizing or seeing any library worker lose their job because of the new system, but rather wanted to see their skills put to better use.

Commissioner Wayne Bolla

agreed, especially since the libraries will be expanding their hours as of Feb. 1. Library hours were cut after the economic crisis of 2008-2009 in a cost-saving effort.

“It’s part of the key to getting the hours extended without hiring a ton of people,” he said.

Cost of an RFID system was the main concern for two county commissioners – Gayward Hendry and Mike Cella – who said they had some reservations. Troy Nagle, information services director for the county and the person who presented the library report to the BCC at the workshop, said the initial cost would probably be around \$300,000.

“I’ve had to do inventories at libraries manually and that is a bear,” said Hendry. “However, I think \$300,000 at this time would be a little much for our budget.”

But Bolla said the system would save money over time.

“So we save an equivalent person at every library, practically. That’s a lot,” he said.

Commissioner Diane Hutchings agreed, and also said the money comes from different sources of funding. The RFID comes from capital improvement funds, which she said the county currently had more of, while the other expense would come from general revenue.

“We’re tight on that,” she said.

But Cella, who serves as the vice chairman of the BCC, said he still had reservations.

“I have reservations specifically because of the costs and what [Capital Improvement Plan] projects we’re either going to delay or do away with,” he said.

The system would also require a labor-intensive period at its installation as all materials would have to be outfitted with an RFID tag for check-out and check-in purposes, Nagle said. But he added that issue had already been looked at and people identified who could handle that if the system is instituted.

In the end, the staff was tasked with looking further into pricing and other matters dealing with the RFID system, as well as other options. That information will be brought back to the BCC, along with a more specific library report dealing with other issues that were discussed by commissioners and staff at the Jan. 16 workshop, at a future BCC meeting, where it can be discussed and eventually voted on.



Founder back at the helm at Quigley House

By **Kile Brewer**
The Oakleaf

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Ellen Siler has returned to Quigley House as chief executive officer, but the move is not permanent.

Siler is only stepping in as an interim chief until the board can hire a replacement for former CEO Peggy Payne, who recently resigned after six years of service.

“We’re really happy with all the things she did,” Siler said. “She was just ready to move on to a new adventure.”

Siler, who currently works for the Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence, was contacted through that organization when the CEO position became vacant and asked if she would fill in until a replacement could be found. Siler obliged and returned to the place she helped get off the ground more than 20 years ago.

Siler served as the Quigley House executive director for the organization’s first seven years, when the shelter was a donated house with 15 beds. She stayed through Quigley House’s infancy, seeing it through until it received a \$1.7 million grant to build a new shelter. She then went on to work for Hubbard House in Jacksonville as CEO for 20 years. Soon after retiring last August, she was called back into service and her current role at Quigley House.

“I was enjoying retirement, and I will enjoy it again after they find a new CEO,” Siler said. “But I spent several years of my life here, and [Quigley House] means a lot to me.”

The board has posted the job through the Florida Coalition website, whose staff will screen candidates for the minimum requirements to serve as a CEO of an organization like Quigley House.

For example, one job requirement is a Department of Children and Families requirement of at least two years’ experience working in the domestic violence field. Applications will be taken through Feb. 23, and the interview process will begin.

Siler said she will not be making any changes to the operations at Quigley House during her brief tenure here, but will instead just sort of keep things going until the new CEO is chosen and ready to step in. She said that Payne had put a solid five-year plan together before her resignation that outlined the next few years and has the organization on the right track.



STAFF PHOTO BY KILE BREWER

Ellen Siler, interim chief executive officer at Quigley House, sits in the organization’s conference room last Thursday. Siler, the former executive director at Quigley House, gladly stepped in to fill the vacant spot until the board can hire a permanent CEO.

“My main job is to make sure that the services aren’t interrupted during the transition,” Siler said. “It’s to make sure the excellent services Quigley House has provided will continue.”

In the meantime, Siler is overseeing a few things such as the installation of added security at the headquarters, including a new system for buzzing visitors through the door, which Siler said had been in the works for some time. She is also looking to put a sign at the entrance to the headquarters building. Since it is set back off U.S. Highway 17, visitors sometimes have trouble finding the building without any markers advertising the street number along the highway.

For Siler, she is happy to return to Quigley House for a few months as she continues her career in the industry. She also encourages anyone who feels threatened or has been abused to call the hotline at (904) 284-0061, or the toll-free number at 800-500-1119.

“Knowing there is someplace to go and be safe makes all the difference,” she said.

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Aldi

from page 3

including an Oakleaf store that will be Clay County's third.

"We've had overwhelming customer support [in this area]," said the region's Director of Operations Bob Schmalz. "Our stores have a fantastic reputation, and it made sense to put one in Orange Park with their population density."

The grocery retailer recently announced a \$3.4 billion capital

We've had overwhelming customer support [in this area]. Our stores have a fantastic reputation, and it made sense to put one in Orange Park with their population density."

— Bob Schmalz, Region's Director of Operations

investment to expand to 2,500 stores nationwide by the end of 2022 building on its already aggressive growth plan to spend \$1.6 billion program to remodel 1,300 stores by 2020.

In addition to providing industry-leading pay and employee benefits, the stores are also known for treating their customers well, specifically in that they guarantee the quality of their products will hold up against other brands while only charging a fraction of the cost that a customer would pay at a Publix or Winn Dixie store. Aldi even brews its own beer and bottles its own wine to keep prices down on the more expensive items.

"We have the lowest prices in the market, and the highest quality product," Schmalz said. "Our prices will get you in the door and the quality keeps you coming back."

Aldi carries all the same items that can be found at the average large supermarket, but its stores have smaller footprints and a less aisle-filled shopping experience. Aldi keeps its aisle height around eye level to make the stores feel open and comfortable, instead of walking down long aisles with floor-to-ceiling shelving. Schmalz explained that it want the stores to feel user-friendly and welcoming for customers to keep them coming back.

"It's easy to get in and easy to get out because of the smaller footprint," he said.

The store is now open on the regular Aldi schedule, opening from 9 a.m. until 9 p.m. all days except Sunday when it closes an hour early at 8 p.m.

An Aldi store is also under construction in the Oakleaf. These two new stores will join Aldi's first Clay County store in the busy Branan Field Road and Blanding Boulevard area north of Middleburg, which opened in May 2015.

Panel recommends BCC pay hike

By Debra W. Buehn
The Oakleaf

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – In an effort to correct what they see as a punishment to the wrong people, the Charter Review Commission will present the voters of Clay County with a ballot issue in November designed to bring Clay County commissioners' salaries more in line with their peers across the state.

Members of the CRC present at the commission's Jan. 4 meeting voted 9-0 unanimously to put on the November general ballot an item that would raise Clay County commissioners' salaries from their current \$37,000 a year to about \$51,580 a year. The pay hike would be done in 5 percent increments over a four-year period. Six Charter Review Commission members were absent from the meeting.

That option won out over two others that were brought before the full CRC by a subcommittee that was formed specifically to look at the issue of commissioners' salaries. One of those options would have raised commissioners' salaries to state statutes' levels of a little over \$70,000 in one fell swoop as soon as legally possible, presumably Jan. 1, 2019. The other would have raised the salaries to the state formula level, but over a period of five years. (The state formula is known as section 145.031 or "145" for short.)

The third option, which won out, was a slight modification of the second option. It stated that that the CRC would not have to put salaries at 100 percent of the state statute formula's amount, but could use any percentage of that formula it deemed proper.

The option that the CRC approved to bring before the voters of Clay County would put commissioners' salaries at 70 percent of the state formula level, instead of the 50 percent at which it now is.

"I feel like this is reasonable looking out for both the citizens and the commissioners," said Larry Kirkman, who chaired the

subcommittee.

Kirkman said he was originally going to support going to 80 percent of the state formula level, but after hearing from many people who were "in opposition to all or some increase" decided 70 percent was a good number.

The 70 percent level, if approved, would not go up over the years, but the pay level could because of a state stipulation associated with rising population levels, said CRC member Art Hooker.

Officials have repeatedly said county commissioners have not asked for the raise. It came up for discussion because it was one of the top three items members of the Charter Review Committee thought should be dealt with during the CRC's 2017-2018 session.

A Charter Review Commission is appointed every four years to review the county's charter and determine if there are items that need to be revised or amended. The 15 members of the CRC are nominated by the Board of County Commissioners.

The problem members of the CRC saw with the county commissioners' salaries is that their salaries fall near the bottom of the pay scale compared to the majority of other commissioners in the state. Because Clay County is one of 20 charter counties in the state (the other 47 counties are known as "constitutional" counties and are ruled by state statute), it is governed by what is called "home rule."

The commissioners' current salaries were set by a voter initiative passed in the 2008 general election. That initiative amended the county charter.

Most other Florida county commissioners' salaries are determined by the state's formulas. In a report recently issued through the Office of Economic and Demographic Research for 2017-2018, the amount paid to Clay County commissioners should be \$73,686, said Hooker.

That's a bump up according to figures previously supplied by county auditor Mike Price, who said

in a Nov. 8, 2017 memo in answer to CRC questions that following 145, "the salary for sitting commissioners today would be \$70,505."

In comparison, constitutional officers in the county, who are paid through the state formula, currently receive the following annual salary for what is considered full-time work: the clerk of courts, supervisor of elections, property appraiser and tax collector receive \$128,874 while the sheriff receives \$137, 837, Price said in the same memo.

The reason behind the voter initiative that lowered county commissioners' pay was a large part of the general review of the commissioners' salaries at the Jan. 4 meeting. Hooker had invited Price to attend and went over a 47-page document Price wrote titled "Internal Inquiry Final Report" and dated Nov. 17, 2005.

In the report, which is public record, Price went over what had happened that led voters to lower commissioners' pay. Price also went over the basics of the situation in a recent memo to the CRC answering its questions concerning the history of the time.

Basically, Price said during the mid-2000s, the public came to view the county government as "basically dishonest." This came on the heels of "scandals" involving county government that resulted in a Federal Bureau of Investigation and state attorney's office investigations, a grand jury being convened in 2006 and two senior management-level BCC employees being terminated. There was also the indictment and trials of an elected official and a senior manager. In addition, another scandal had occurred in 2004 that alleged an elected official had misused a county credit card.

Looking to make the county government more accountable, the 2006 Charter Review Commission came up with the idea to add two at-large members to the county commission, paying for the new members by cutting the existing members' salaries. Even though that idea was passed

SEE HIKE, 15

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Land

from page 2

has protected a total of 18,811 acres of land, with 5,720 of those acres being owned directly by the trust. Another 1,462 acres are currently under conservation easement in which a private owner owns the property but does so with restrictive developmental rights. The owner can still farm those lands and cut down trees for the use of timber and more, but they can't develop something like a subdivision or an office building on the land.

The remaining 11,629 protected acres includes land that the trust considers facilitated, or protected. Conover said protection can come in a number of ways. Sometimes it simply means temporarily holding ownership of the land and sometimes that help is funding. Other times, it's land the trust has owned but handed over to other agencies. For example, if the trust gains ownership of land near a national park, the United States National Park Service might be given ownership over the land. Regardless, Conover assures that the land is always protected.

While the trust wishes it could protect any and all land it can acquire, that isn't the case. The trust is constantly looking at potential land acquisitions and – based on a number of qualities and characteristics of that land – chooses which acquisition to move forward with next.

"We look at biodiversity and habitat, water quality preservation, water quality restoration, farm and forestlands and finally, public use and recreation," Conover said.

The 388 recently-acquired acres in Clay County came into the North Florida Land Trust's portfolio through an interesting sequence of events, said McCarthy.

"[South Doctors Lake, Ltd.'s] called us to see if we'd be interested," McCarthy said. "There isn't a huge

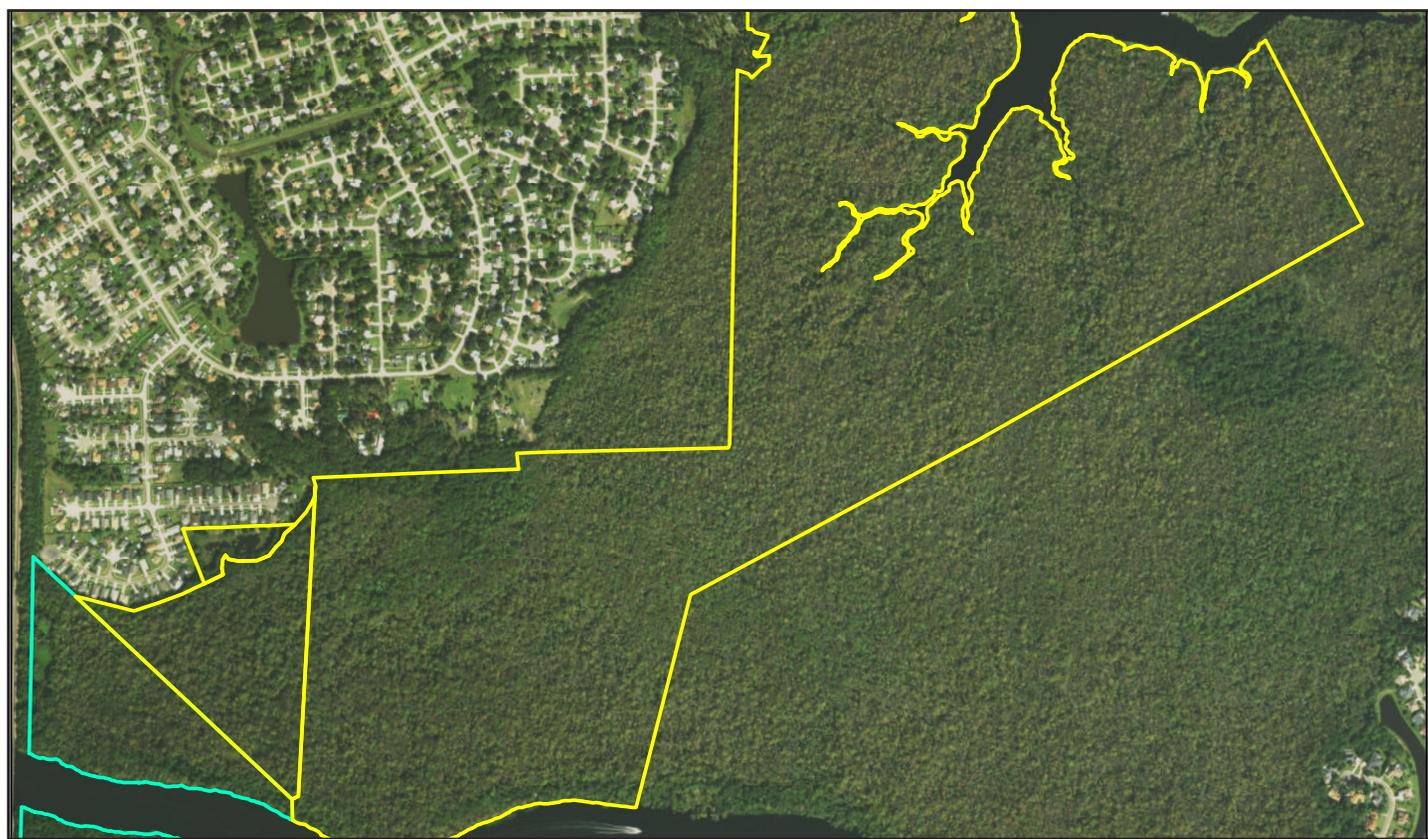


PHOTO PROVIDED BY NORTH FLORIDA LAND TRUST

The yellow line marks a section of land that will be preserved along Black Creek in Clay County. The land was recently donated to the North Florida Land Trust from South Doctors Lake Ltd., a real estate development company.

market for anyone trying to sell 388 acres of wetland and generally speaking, there isn't much to do with that land."

No stranger to owning and developing large tracts of land, South Doctors Lake Ltd. has a development portfolio that includes Heritage Farms, Peter's Creek, Oak Creek and Villages of Fireside subdivisions.

"There's a huge advantage to donating it with taxes and marketability and what not, and albeit difficult, you can build on wetlands with proper mitigation but they didn't want to see that happen," McCarthy said. "They knew they wanted to donate and when their agent reached out to us, we jumped on the opportunity."

Protection aside, McCarthy said this acquisition was important to the trust specifically because it was Black Creek acreage, which accord-

ing to McCarthy, is a beloved piece of North Florida land.

"Those of us who have been fortunate to have been born here have always loved it and those of us who

have moved here, like myself, have fallen in love with it," McCarthy said.

"We want our kids and grandkids to enjoy what we always have had the pleasure of enjoying."

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King

from page 2

Dobson said he remembered sitting at home when he was young, watching black and white television and seeing images of King speaking cut together with those of African Americans fleeing riot cops and dogs. "A lot of African Americans were afraid," he said. He remembered women talking about King and how they were worried somebody would kill him. He said that since that time, people have forgotten who they are and what they're up against.

"Over time, people have become distracted, and that distraction has made us comfortable," Dobson said. "We're comfortable where King was trying to make us uncomfortable."

He said that King wanted to remind people of who they are, but now people have become comfortable in their lives, no matter how unfortunate they may be. He said that people have become comfortable in poverty, sitting in their living room watching shows about someone else's wealth and feeling comfortable.

"I'm not sure how we can be comfortable when 70 percent of the prison population is African-American," he said.

Dobson told the crowd to fight for things that matter, remembering a time when a group fought to get a street renamed to Martin Luther King Boulevard in Tampa, but Dobson asked whether that fight helped to improve the African-American community, and if that was what King would've wanted.

Following Dobson's speech, Randall took the microphone to present the 2018 MLK Day-N-Clay scholarship, and to introduce Clay County Supervisor of Elections Chris Chamb-



STAFF PHOTO BY KILE BREWER

Those present at the MLK Day-N-Clay breakfast held hands during the closing prayer Monday as ceremonies came to an end.

less who announced the names of every African-American political candidate or elected official to ever come from Clay County.

Among those names was that of former U.S. Rep. Corrine Brown, who was sentenced to five years in prison after her recent conviction on 18 counts of fraud and tax violations. Brown is scheduled to begin her federal prison sentence on Jan. 29.

Following a group photo of all the candidates and elected officials, Brown was given the opportunity to speak to the audience though she had not been included in the scheduled programming.

During her speech, she strayed from any specific mention of her conviction, instead focusing her message on doing "the best I could," as well as a positive speech about the dash between your birth date

and death date as representing what you did in your life. However, Brown then introduced a Jacksonville attorney who spoke about her case and the potential for an appeal due to the fact that a juror was removed from her trial in federal court for expressing views provided to him by the "holy spirit," with the judge citing that as outside influence. "Dr. King would've never stood by silent," the lawyer said.

During the off-book presentation by Brown and her attorney, a handful of Clay County officials walked out, including Sheriff Darryl Daniels, who spoke to a local news crew outside and posted a video of the interview to the Clay County Sheriff Office Facebook page.

Daniels said the situation made him feel awkward to be photographed as the Sheriff of Clay County with a convicted felon.

"In this setting where we're celebrating, or speaking to the life work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.," Daniels said. "It may not have been the most appropriate setting to bring someone with some cloudiness associated with her name into that setting."

Following Brown's speech, Randall took the microphone to close out ceremonies and say that instead of five years in prison he would've sentenced her to life outside serving the people of her former area of governance through fundraising and volunteerism.

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Camera

from page 1

Program, which Florida Legislature passed in 2010. Mark Wandall, a Bradenton resident who died in a traffic accident in 2003, inspired a slew of changes to traffic laws regarding safety. Tragically, his daughter Madison was born 19 days later. Wandall's wife, Melissa, went on to establish the Mark Wandall Foundation, which offers programs to support children who've lost a parent or guardian.

Consequently, the Orange Park Police Department cited the Mark Wandell Act in 2012 as a way to increase safety in establishing its red light camera program.

However, the Wandall Traffic Safety Program also helped introduce red light cameras to Florida, something that several Florida representatives have begun to rally against.

"The failure and corruption of red light cameras has been well documented," House Speaker Richard Corcoran (R-Land O' Lakes), stated in a press release. "Having reviewed years of data with Representatives [Bryan] Avila (R-Hialeah) and [Blaise] Ingoglia (R-Spring Hill), it is clear that red light cameras are more about revenue than public safety."



Red light cameras could be history in Florida as a bill passed Jan. 12 by the Florida House of Representatives gets passed by the Florida Senate.

A variety of studies from organizations such as the National Motorists Association and the United States Public Interest Research Group have found that red light cameras lead to an increase in both citations and traffic incidents. Furthermore, several studies published in the Florida Public Health Review have found that cameras also lead to increased

injuries. These same studies have also found that red light cameras often appear to be more motivated by profit than by public safety.

"Red light cameras do not benefit the public – they only benefit local governments addicted to the revenue they generate and the companies that provide the services," stated Ingoglia, in a press release. "If red light cameras were really about public safety, local governments would not be getting rid of them once their revenues decline. It is further proof they are nothing but

taxation by citation."

If the bill succeeds, there would be no immediate change. Instead the bill would take effect in 2021, and would prohibit the implementation of new red light camera programs. Legislators predict that drivers will save \$159 million annually.

Locally, the Town of Orange Park implemented red light cameras in 2012 in the midst of a tight budget year that would force town council to dip into reserve funds to balance its budget. The town signed another new five-year contract for its cameras in the fall of 2017 with Mesa, Ariz.-based American Traffic Solutions, which is also used by Green Cove Springs.

Red Light Camera Revenue

Green Cove Springs

Year	Revenue
2012-13	\$434,889.76
2013-14	\$168,915.71
2014-15	\$190,526.57
2015-16	\$351,522.49
2016-17	\$418,287.70
Total	-1,564,142.23

Source: Green Cove Springs City Clerk

Orange Park

Year	Revenue
2012-13	\$228,417
2013-14	\$525,518
2014-15	\$439,965
2015-16	\$549,447
2016-17	\$646,698
Total	-2,390,045

Source: Town of Orange Park, Sarah Campbell Town Manager

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School

from page 1

reduce enrollment at Plantation Oaks Elementary and Oakleaf Junior and realign the grade structure.

The rezoning also aims to minimize disruption to all students and schools involved and the busing required, all while providing safe walking and biking routes to the new school which is in the Eagle Landing section of Oakleaf.

Two options were presented in the redistricting for the Oakleaf area. Option 1 sees the zoning expand westward, with option 2 expanding more south. Both options allow Discovery Oaks Elementary to relieve Plantation Oaks Elementary's enrollment, have students already qualified for busing and keep neighborhoods together. Those are the only similarities between the two options.

Option one maintains boundary proximity to schools and allows Plantation Oaks Elementary and Discovery Oaks Elementary to experience equal growth, while also allowing a reduction in transportation requirements. All of this comes at a cost of walkers and bikers having to cross at Oakleaf Plantation Parkway, which would require a traffic signal

and a crossing guard.

Option two eliminates the need for walkers and bikers to cross Oakleaf Plantation Parkway but came with a quite a few cons, according to the presentation. Option two sees the rezoning losing boundary proximity to schools, a potential overgrowth of Discovery Oaks Elementary as there will be three growing neighborhoods in this area, and no savings on transportation costs. This option also requires buses to take a left turn onto Oakleaf Plantation Parkway.



Addison Davis

As far as attendance goes, option one has Discovery Oaks Elementary with a projected 826 students and Plantation Oaks Elementary with 802. Option two puts Discovery Oaks Elementary's attendance at 805 and Plantation Oaks Elementary at 823 students.

Much discussion had been held in previous meetings, and even a community meeting held in December, according to Superintendent Addison Davis. However, the Jan. 4 meeting

saw a board in agreement, leading to virtually no discussion before the 5-0 vote.

"Option one was the option for us because it protects neighborhoods and keeps them together," Davis said. "Option two saw kids across the street from each other attending different schools."

"It just didn't make sense to us to have a school visible, within walking distance, but because of zoning, you can't go there," Davis said.

At the end of the meeting, District 3 board member, Betsy Condon, asked to revisit the school district's participation in the controversial House Bill 7069 statewide lawsuit. She wants to remove her school board district from the lawsuit at the February meeting.

HB 7069 became effective July 1 last year after being passed in the 11th hour of the Florida Legislature. It requires districts to share local property tax money with charter schools. The lawsuit challenges the bill's constitutionality.

Last September, the Clay County School Board became the 15th Florida school district to join the lawsuit following a 3-2 vote, with District 5 board member Ashley Gilhousen and Condon voting no.

Condon sees potential difficulties in securing funds for her district due to her district's involvement in the lawsuit. "I talked with Senator Rob Bradley, who is chair of appropriations, and typically, this person is able to find some money to fund



Sen. Rob Bradley

some projects in their home areas that can be supported by other legislators," Condon said. "The difficulty comes in where we are suing the legislature, so for him to be able to go to his colleagues

and say, 'I want to do this for my home county,' we are only one of 13 counties suing the state legislature."

District 2 board member Carol Studdard asked Condon if any promises were made to which Condon answered with a no.

In other business, the board passed the Controlled Open Enrollment Plan for 2018 with a 5-0 vote. This plan sets the capacity to be used by the district in determining which schools have available seats for students wishing to attend the school of their choice next school year.

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Community Briefs

Yesterdays Festival coming to Gold Head park

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – Clay County residents have a chance to “Take a Walk Back in Time” on January 27, 2018 from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. at Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park.

There will be historic demonstrations, cast iron cooking, antique cars, steam engines, antique tractors, live music, re-enactors, park tram tours, canon firing and food concessions.

The Yesterdays Festival is free with paid park admission of \$5 per vehicle, for up to eight people. The park’s address is 6239 State Rd. 21, Keystone Heights.

For more information, call (352)473-4701 or visit www.floridastateparks.org/mikeroess/.

The festival is sponsored by Friends of the Park/Gold Head Associates who use the proceeds to fund park improvements that are not fully covered by state budget allocations.

Symphony coming to Orange Park

ORANGE PARK – An ensemble of the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra will be featured in concert on Feb. 4 at 4 p.m. at Island View Baptist located 900 Park St. in Orange Park.

The performance will be centered around the theme of “Celebrating Diversity and Inclusion.”

This event will also feature a community choir composed of persons from various schools, churches and community organizations. If you are interested in singing on the community choir please call (904) 562-8409 or (904) 264-6411 and leave your information via text or voicemail, or the church secretary at Island View Baptist Church.

You may also email your information to gentlemenatheart3@gmail.com. All rehearsals will be conducted at Island View Baptist Church and



Orange Park Medical Center to make \$12 million investment in Westside Jax

ORANGE PARK – Orange Park Medical Center will build a \$12 million free-standing emergency room facility on Jacksonville’s Westside.

The hospital paid \$1.35 million for 1.96 acres of land on Jan. 11 and plans to break ground in the spring.

The 10-bed, 10,800 square foot emergency room will be built just east of the Lane Avenue and Normandy Boulevard intersection.

“We know that when people experience emergencies they’re looking for fast, high-quality and convenient care. By bringing an ER to the Normandy area we will be able to meet the communities growing need with the same high-level of care that we offer in our main emergency room,” said Steven Goodfriend, OPMC’s Emergency Services medical director.

When complete, the center will add 50 staff members to the

Orange Park Medical Center health system. The facility will be the second free-standing emergency room for Orange Park Medical Center. Park West ER on 103rd Street just east of Interstate 295 in Westside cared for more than 50,000 patients in 2017.

“Immediately after we opened our Park West ER, it was clear that we were meeting a great demand for emergency care in the West Jacksonville area. Due to continued growth, we expanded the space by 3,100 square foot and 8 patient rooms last May,” said Chad Patrick, OPMC chief executive officer.

The ER will be open 24-hours a day, offering around-the-clock radiology services and staffed by a team of board-certified emergency physicians, as well as specially trained nurses and staff, equipped to treat both adults and children.

The new emergency room located at 5573 Normandy Blvd. is expected to open in the fall of 2018.

rehearsal times will be announced on Jan. 17.

The event is free to the public but seating is limited, and is on a first come, first served basis.

Foundation to host “A Drug Free Day in Clay”

ORANGE PARK – A nonprofit foundation that educates the public about drug addiction has teamed up with City Streets to Student Athletes to present a symposium about the opioid crisis.

The Derek Hatcher Foundation will host the free event on Feb. 3 from 3:30-5 p.m. at the Thrasher-Horne Center. The event will feature real life stories, door prizes and interactive discussions about working together to keep the community safe. The foundation will also give a presentation about college scholarship opportunities for Clay County students at the event.

“As you may have heard, we are in the middle of an opiate epidemic and Clay County is not an exception. Deaths from opioids have been rising sharply for years, and drug overdoses already kill more Americans under age 50 that anything else, and it is predicted to get worse before it gets better,” states Debbie Rizer, president of the Derek Hatcher Foundation, in a press release.

Rizer is also Hatcher’s mother.

During his senior year at Ridgeview High, Derek Hatcher threw more than 2,300 yards and 18 touchdowns and, as a freshman, walked on as a punter at the University of Arkansas. He died at the age of 24 in February 2016 from a drug overdose. A video about Hatcher’s story will be shown at this event.

SEE BRIEFS, 14

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Briefs

from page 13

School needs community's help with field trip expenses

ORANGE PARK – In recognition of Black History Month Orange Park Junior High students are writing research-based essays about how the sacrifices of the Civil Rights movement have improved the quality of life for their generation.

On Feb. 3, 50 students will be selected to take a deluxe tour to Savannah, Georgia where they will be given a private Freedom Trail tour of significant sites related to African-American history. They will have lunch at Savannah State College, a first experience for most on a college campus. The school is turning to the community for help.

History teacher Cindy Cheatwood is accepting donations to help cover the expenses of the trip. The Rotary Club of Orange Park, which sponsored 13 students, was the first group to assist the students. However, 14 students still need sponsorships. For more information or to make a donation, contact Cheatwood at ckcheatwood@hotmail.com or at Orange Park Junior High at (904) 336-5975.

Clay WIC offices moving

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The Florida Department of Health in Clay County's Women Infants and Children program offices will move to 301 South West St. in Green Cove Springs on Feb. 1.

"Moving our WIC program to Green Coves Springs will help to streamline services to our clients. Our Healthy Start program and Vital Statistics offices are also at our Green Cove location making it easier for young families to access all of our services. We are planning to have a satellite office for WIC clients in Orange Park in the coming year," said Heather Huffman, Health Department administrator.

WIC is a federally-funded nutrition program for Women, Infants and Children that provides healthy foods, nutrition education and counseling, breastfeeding support, and referrals for health care and community services at no cost. Florida WIC clients use a WIC EBT card to purchase WIC-approved foods at authorized WIC grocery stores.

Recipients must have a total household income equal to or less than the amounts shown in the WIC Income Guidelines. Recipients of Medicaid, Temporary Cash Assistance

or Food Assistance are also eligible for WIC. To apply for WIC, call (904) 272-3177 and choose option 1.

Extreme athletes return to Clay County

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – Once again Ultrarunners are returning to Clay County for the 4th annual 'Run Into History' on Jan. 27.

The fourth annual Hellcat 10K, 30K and 50K races will be held on the runways and trails of the long forgotten Navy Auxiliary Air Station Jacksonville at Benjamin Lee Field, 1 Bunker Ave. in Green Cove Springs.

More than 50 Ultrarunners from seven different states and as far away as Michigan and Ohio will be participating in the 50K with an additional 200-250 runners doing the 10K and 30K races.

Because this base was the main training base for the F6F Hellcat fighter, which had over 5,000 shoot downs in WWII, runners will run in the shadows of WWII fighter pilots and heroes to include Gen. Roy Geiger, the father of Marine Corps Aviation, The Black Sheep Squadron pilots, Joe Kennedy (JFK's brother) and many more.

The race is a fundraiser for the Military Museum of North Florida. All runners and their families will have

free access to the museum. "We have the coolest finishers medal out there. It depicts the F6F Hellcat," said Chris Rodatz, race director. Needless to say, the race is named after this great carrier based fighter. For more information, go to www.hellcatrace.com or contact Rodatz at (904) 655-6511 or crodatz@bellsouth.net.

3rd Annual Private Camellia Garden Tour is coming

MELROSE – On Jan. 28, from noon to 4 p.m., guests have a chance to stroll the private gardens of 1,500 camellias hosted by top camellia prize winners in Melrose.

Acres of beautiful plants, with hundreds of varieties will be on display. Larry Rahme will be selling camellia plants including many hard-to-find varieties. There will also be demonstrations, handouts, gardening tips and silent auctions, as well as coffee and homemade cookies for sale.

Golf carts will be available for those needing assistance.

Directions:

The tour location is 202 Mason Rd. in Melrose. Travel on State Road 26 two miles east of Melrose. Turn south on Mason Road and follow the signs. Admission is \$5 per person.



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Hike from page 8

by voters and two new members elected, they never took office as a citizen's initiative group that voters supported in 2008 resulted in the two new members being cut and commissioners' salaries being lowered to \$37,000 a year, where it still remains.

For Price, the whole thing essentially resulted in punishing future commissioners for what previous commissioners had done, something he did not agree with. Price – a Certified Public Accountant – also said on Jan. 4 that he wanted to make sure people understood no county commissioner had ever complained to him about their salary or asked him to write a memo to the CRC concerning the salary history (that was written in response to a CRC question, he said).

"No member of the BCC asked me to write a memo to you guys.

No member of the Board of County Commissioners has ever discussed their pay or expressed any dissatisfaction with their pay in my presence, ever," he said.

At the end of the review, Hooker thanked Price and said he thought it was important for people to understand how things had gotten to the point they are today and "also to understand that's in the past and that does not involve these current county commissioners and if we're smart as voters, it won't involve future county commissioners."

The other CRC members present agreed with him.

"We cannot continue as a county, as a community and as human beings to make others suffer for someone else's sins," said Tamara Brandt, who added she believed the commissioners put in a tremendous amount of time – much more than a part-time job – and deserved a pay hike.

Much of the resulting discussion revolved around whether the commissioners' jobs were part time or

full time, and how to present a pay hike to the public so it would understand why it was being suggested. Among the methods discussed were meeting with civic groups or home owners associations and others to answer questions and utilizing various forms of publicity. Brandt is president of Ridgcrest Civic Association.

"I think we have to make sure that we educate the citizens and that we bring them on board to understand how important it is if we're going to get the caliber of people that we want on the commission," said Glo Smith.

As for how much time commissioners put into their job, the consensus was that the jobs are much more than part time.

"I'm guessing that it's a full-time or more than full-time job," said Paul Sarto, who took the place of David Cheers, who had to resign.

Ronald Stotler, a former county commissioner, said it's definitely not a job where you punch in from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., but rather one where a person is constantly on call. "There's no set hours," he said.

CRC Vice Chairman Charles R. "Scotty" Taylor Jr. suggested inviting current and/or former commissioners to appear to let the CRC know how they view their jobs. "I think we need to have that on record," he said.

Brandt also suggested getting calendars from the past couple of months for current commissioners to see what their schedules are like.

The CRC will meet again at 7 p.m. Jan. 29 in the county commission chambers to discuss single district representation versus at-large representation, another issue that came about from a previous citizen petition and referendum.

Community Briefs

Little joins DCSI and Idea Recruitment

FLEMING ISLAND – A Fleming Island human resources consulting and recruitment firm has a new business development manager.

Lauren Little joined IDEA Recruitment and DSSCI after serving eight years of active duty as a U.S. Marine duty, owning two Edible Arrangements franchises, and working in education, rehabilitation, not-for-profit and banking firms.



Lauren Little

Little was named the Southeast Business Magazine's "Woman of Influence" in 2016. Earlier in her career, Little received titles such as "Veteran of Influence," "Entrepreneur of the Year," "Small Business Administration Veteran Business Owner of the Year" and "Women in Business Franchisee of the Year" by various organizations. "We are so proud to have Lauren on our team. She brings an enormous amount of talent, passion and skill to our award-winning team," said Suzi Lemen, chief executive officer.

Formed in 1993, DCSI has been recognized by INC. Magazine as one of the 500 fastest growing privately held companies in the U.S.

Clay County is 'health ready'

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – The National Association of County and City Health Officials and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently recognized the Florida Department of Health in Clay County for meeting rigorous national standards of public health preparedness.

Project Public Health Ready is a collaborative initiative between the Florida Department of Health, NACCHO and the CDC that sets state and national criteria in all-hazards preparedness planning, workforce capacity development, and demonstration of readiness through exercises or real events. DOH-Clay has received PPHR recognition three times since 2006.

"The health department is prepared to respond to any public health emergency and during Hurricane Irma, we put our plans to the test. Our staff worked tirelessly to assist Clay County residents in the county's special needs shelter. We learned some lessons that we will use to continue to improve our plans, but our staff is prepared and ready," said Heather Huffman, Health Department administrator for Clay County.

PPHR recognition confirms that DOH-Clay has a thorough and coordinated emergency response plan in place and that staff have the training to protect the health of the community during an emergency.



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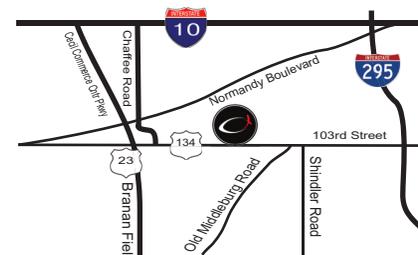
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STAFF PHOTO BY RANDY LEFKO

Oakleaf High weightlifter Lexi Perez finishes 205 pound clean and jerk that secured her district title at the district 5-2A championships held Friday at Oakleaf High School.

Perez outduels Pena for title

By Randy Lefko
The Oakleaf

OAKLEAF – Oakleaf High’s Lexi Perez knew what she needed to hold off a strong bench press from Middleburg High’s Jay Pena and delivered with a 205 pound best lift on her first try at the weight to win the 154 pound district title at the District 5-2A championship meet at Oakleaf High School on Friday.

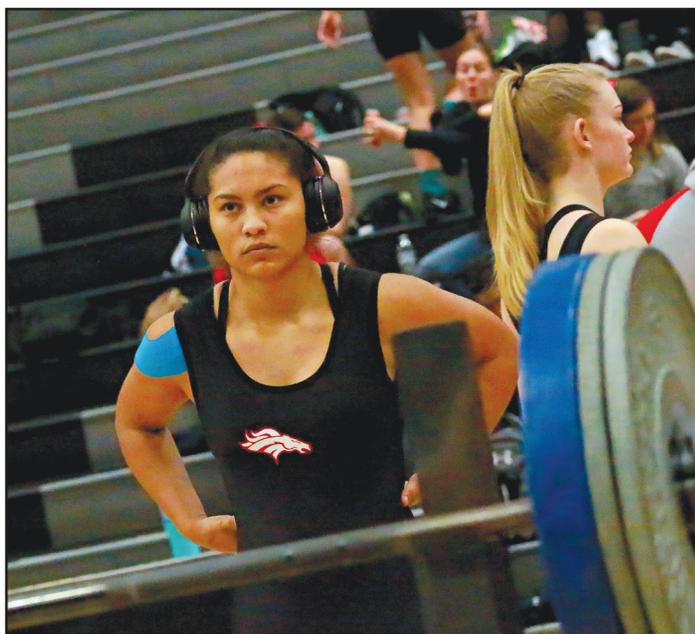
“Lexi won on her first lift (clean and jerk) at 185 then wanted to try for her best at 205,” said Oakleaf High assistant coach Dana Arthur. “She is such a competitor out there. She’s improved a ton.”

Pena, with an impressive 20 pound gap on Perez after she powered through a 175 pound bench press, clean and jerked just 155 to finish second to Perez with her 330 total off Perez’ 355 total.

At last year’s state meet, at 154, Perez finished 16th with just a 300 pound total off a 130 bench and 170 clean and jerk with Pena fifth at 325 off a 175 bench press and a 150 clean and jerk.

“There’s power in the bench press and there’s technique in the clean and jerk,” said Middleburg coach Perry

SEE LIFT, 20



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Middleburg High’s Jay Pena concentrates before her bench press at the district 5-2A championships held Fri., Jan. 11 at Oakleaf. Pena was second in the 154 pound division.

Garis named new Oakleaf football coach

By Randy Lefko
The Oakleaf

OAKLEAF—Oakleaf High School named former Orange Park, Clay and Ponte Vedra coach Frank Garis as the latest head football coach as the Knights look to upgrade from this year’s surprising 2-8 record under departed coach Steve Reynolds, who took over in 2016, went 7-3 before dropping to 2-8 in 2017.

Garis, 30, and part of Final Four runs with Clay High in 2013 and, most recently, with Ponte Vedra High School last year, plus a part of the 2005 Class 4A Nease state champ team as a player, brings a wealth of championship experience to the Knights’ program that has got only as close as a region final in 2014 under coach Derek Chipoletti, who finished 12-1 with a first-ever unbeaten 10-0 regular season record, a district title and a first-ever playoff win at Oakleaf High School. Oakleaf will be Garis’ first foray as a head coach after coaching nearly every position on a football field.

“There’s a lot of good players in this room,” said Garis. “I probably

SEE COACH, 19



Oakleaf High’s new head football coach Frank Garis was introduced Jan. 11 at the high school to his team and, here, shakes hands with a player in the Oakleaf weight training facility. Garis has had coaching stints at Nease, Orange Park, Clay and Ponte Vedra high schools.

Fleming Island hoops' girls wins Knights' district rematch

By Randy Lefko
The Oakleaf

FLEMINGISLAND—Fleming Island High must have seen the start of the Middleburg High girls basketball team that bolted to a 28-5 first quarter lead against Oakleaf High last week as the Golden Eagles copied the strategy with an 18-7 opening salvo en route to a 65-44 district 4-8A win recently at Fleming Island High School.

The win gives the Golden Eagle girls sole possession of the top spot in district 4-8A with their 17-3, 6-1 record with Oakleaf just off the pace at 14-4, 4-2. Oakleaf and Bartram Trail both are at 4-2 for district games with Creekside and Buchholz both winless in district contests. Oakleaf's two district losses have been to Fleming Island. As the season nears the finish of regular season play, Fleming Island has one district game remaining on January 16 at Creekside (6-13, 0-4). Oakleaf has a Wed., Jan. 17 game with Bartram Trail (10-7, 4-2) and a January 27 game with Buchholz (6-9, 0-5) to finish district play.

Against Oakleaf, Fleming Island opened with a flurry of steals and buckets led by Hope Rozier and Mo-

riah Martin who combined for a 7-2 lead after just two minutes with Martin floating in a three-pointer on her first shot. Martin would finish with 15 points on the night; her season best, with teammate Aubrey Burke also finishing with 15 points. Fleming Island finished with 16 steals and 15 assists on the night.

In the second period, Fleming Island slowed their pace a bit as Oakleaf responded with Mar'ria Davis and Andrea Diaz-Merced generating a five point opening with Diaz-Merced nailing a three-pointer to pull the Lady Knights to 19-12 with 6:02 to the half.

Fleming Island coach Joey Williams took a time out to rally his troops and his "chat" seemed effective as the Golden Eagles clamped down on Oakleaf's 12 points while pushing the score to 30-12 in a flash.

A blocked shot from Burke on Oakleaf center Dajah Oden revved the Fleming Island attack as guard Tia Robinson bounced downcourt for a free layup on the play. From there, Rozier and Martin again hit the points button before Oakleaf finally got back on the scoreboard with free



STAFF PHOTO BY RANDY LEFKO

Fleming Island guard Aubrey Burke looks inside for pass against Oakleaf in Eagles' 65-44 win.

throws from Sabria Littles.

The half ended at 37-15.

Oakleaf again got off the floor and put a comeback of sorts together with a quick three buckets from Oden and Littles, plus another three-pointer from Diaz-Merced as Fleming Island seemed to need another jolt of "chat" from Williams after the 18-11 run by the Knights.

After a crowd-pleasing banked three pointer from Diaz-Merced and the score creeping closer to 41-27,

Robinson took the reigns with passes to Molly Ragle and Martin pushing the Golden Eagles to 47-33 on the scoreboard just as the third quarter ended.

In the final stanza, Oakleaf went to the three point stripe with Littles and guard Chancellor Lee trying to gobble up some points quickly, but Fleming Island took advantage of the misses to grab rebounds and layups to the 60-41 final score.

Knights look to make district run

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

JACKSONVILLE—Oakleaf High School's boys basketball team waited around for an extra 30 minutes as Robert E. Lee High's bus found its way to Ribault High and their noon game in the Bernard Wilkes Christmas Classic on Jan. 2 before igniting to a fast-start 18-7 lead en route to a 56-16 win that capped a strong holiday two weeks for coach Jason Price.

"We get back into district play when we resume school after games with Clay and Orange Park (Jan. 4-5), but the second half of the season starts next week with Bartram Trail (January 11)," said Price, 6-2, with a 2-1 slate in district 4-8A trailing leader Creekside (11-2, 3-0). "Bartram Trail is the meat of the second half schedule. If we can't knock off Creekside; we have a nice rivalry, then I hope someone else can get them."

Price's lament centered around the district 4-8A championship tournament last year that Creekside knocked Oakleaf out of in the semifinal round. After exchanging regular season wins over each other, Creekside beat Oakleaf in the district semifinal then won the district title over Gainesville Buchholz then lost in the region finals against eventual 8A runnerup Tallahassee Lincoln in the state semifinal round. Buchholz lost to Robert E. Lee in the region quarterfinal.

Over the holiday, Oakleaf traveled to take on opponents far and wide and came away with wins in Georgia at the Cook County Hornet Classic over Fitzgerald (75-61) and Cook (55-21) high schools after a big 73-54 win over 7A-Lake Region at the Jenkins Arena in Lakeland and district wins over Fleming Island (51-50) and Buchholz (53-41).

Price saw senior Deonte Sher-

wood, a guard, as the focal point of the energized Knights attack.

"Against Cook, Deonte scored 33 points with Kenny Thomas adding another 20 as we are not beholden to one or two key guys for wins," said Price. "Kenny also is leading our team in assists from a wing man position. We're doing a better job of moving the ball around and getting better shots."

Against Lee, Oakleaf opened with steal to layup display that started with Sherwood pickpocketing Lee's point guard and rifling a scoring pass to Willie Edwards to open the game. From there, Thomas had a steal, Sherwood again with another assist to Edwards, center Chantz Williams with two blocked shots and Thomas with a three pointer at the first quarter buzzer and the score at 15-5.

"We planned to run five or six guys on their point guard; Jones, who is the leading area scorer with five 30-point games to this point," said Price.

Thomas would land his second three-pointer, get a steal to a Saich Williams layup before the stands got lit with a steal from Quintez Johnson that set up a savage dunk from 6'-4"

Kameron McKenzie that scored the game 25-7 with two minutes left in the half.

Oakleaf continued the onslaught for the 56-16 win.

Price has seen his up-tempo attack as fruitful and pointed to a video session for the team after the Creekside loss and before the Fleming Island win; 51-50 buzzerbeater at Fleming Island High School.

"We didn't practice between the Creekside loss and the Fleming Island game," said Price. "We watched the video of the Creekside game. It was eye opening. We saw the evidence of the two or three things we have to do. After that, they came out and did those two or three things better and we beat Fleming Island."

Price said the team took from the Creekside loss and moved forward much quicker than previous teams and also produced the current five game win streak.

"In year's past, the loss to Creekside would have taken a week to recover from," said Price. "The video showed a lot that the kids could take and refocus with."

Coach

from page 17

this room,” said Garis. “I probably coached some older brothers of you guys. I have seen what Oakleaf is in the games that I was on the opposite sideline.”

Garis, who grew up in Cleveland and attended Nease High School in Ponte Vedra, did played offensive line in front of quarterback Tim Tebow in the Nease state title run in 2005.

“I started coaching in my senior year at Nease in 2006,” said Garis, who also coached at year at Orange Park High (2007) before returning to his alma mater Nease in 2008. “That’s where the passion started.”

From 2009 through 2014, Garis followed coach Matt Toblin to Clay High where he coached also with present Blue Devil coach Joshua Hoekstra. After Toblin left Clay in 2011, Hoekstra guided Clay to the Class 5A title game in 2013. American Heritage beat Clay in that title game.

After Clay, Garis followed Toblin again to Ponte Vedra High where the Sharks earned a Class 5A title bid with a semifinal win over Clay before losing to American Heritage in the title game.

In her presentation of Garis to the Oakleaf High football boys on Friday, Oakleaf High Principal Treasure Pickett indicated that Garis’ expertise in helping teams get to the state championship game was a big selling point for his hire.



STAFF PHOTOS BY RANDY LEFKO

Former Orange Park, Clay and Ponte Vedra football coach Frank Garis meets and greets with Oakleaf High School team and administration after being selected as new head football coach at Oakleaf High School on Thurs., Jan. 11. Garis replaces Steve Reynolds who finished 2-8 in 2017.

“He has things that we want called state championships,” said Pickett to the Oakleaf team. “That’s what we want. We want that ring like our softball has.”

Garis, with his on-field experience against Oakleaf in past years, sees a return to the rugged matches of past rivalries within the county and beyond.

“There is a lot of similar kids, coaches and philosophies in Clay

County and I think the county schools here are returning to all the schools being competitive each year,” said Garis.

Garis considers Oakleaf a “gem” of football in Jacksonville area.

“They have a great feeder system with good junior high football,” said Garis. “The elementary schools are also close to the high school and the kids all have played a bunch together before they get here.”

Garis will come in teaching physical education at Oakleaf High School.



New Oakleaf High football coach Frank Garris has a handful of championship experience with a handful of state playoff games with Clay, Ponte Vedra and nease high Schools.

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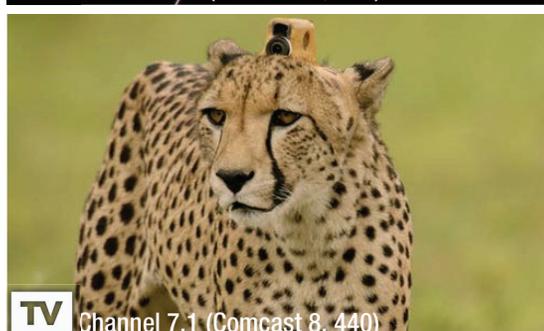


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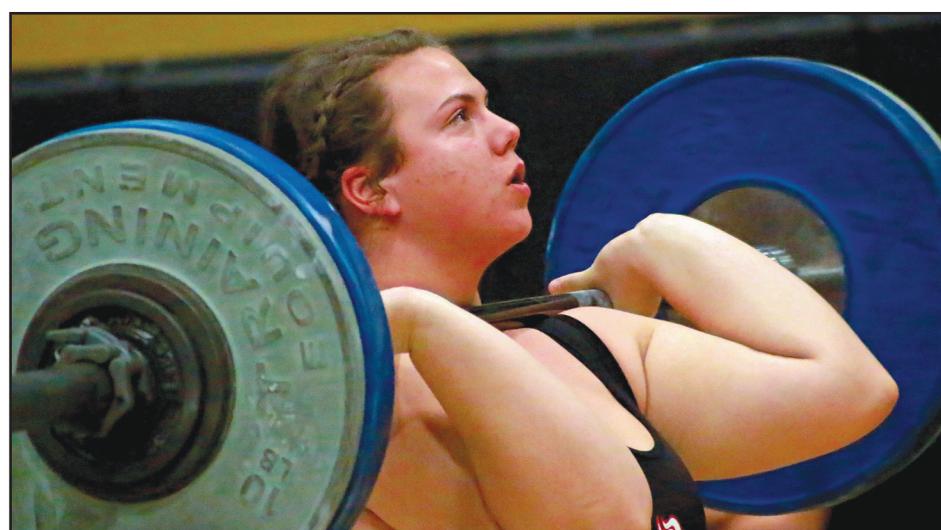
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Fleming Island High's Jaeden Fernandez powers up her clean and jerk to win district title at 169 pounds. Fernandez advances to the region championships at Spruce Creek High on January 20.



Middleburg High's Payton Mahon is all business in clean and jerk as shes lifts to a district title in the unlimited weight class to advance to the region championships at Spruce Creek on January 20.

Lift
 from page 17

Hopper. "Jay is young and learning."

At last year's region 3-2A meet, Pena finished second at 310 with Perez third at 295 in the 154 pound division.

Lifters finishing in the top six advance to the region 3-2A meet to be held at Spruce Creek High in Port Orange on January 20. Spruce Creek finished as Class 2A runnerups to Navarre High School with Bartram Trail just out of the medals in seventh place.

In the team scores, Bartram Trail

won with 45 points off three individual champions with Creekside second at 37 with just one champion. Middleburg finish third with 34 points behind a title to Payton Mahon at Unlimited but runnerups to Pena, Makita Esdale at 110 and Josie Alexander at 119. Mahon, second at last year's region meet, finished 16th at Unlimited at last year's state meet.

Oakleaf finished fourth at 32 points with Perez, Hadassah Davis at 139 and Gabby Willis at 183 winning titles. Fleming Island got one title at 169 with Jaeden Fernandez to finish fifth with 27 points.

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The Sheriff's Sale will take place Wednesday, February 14, 2018 at 11 A.M. at the Miami-Dade County Sheriff's Office, 601 NW 1 Court, 9th Floor, Miami, FL. Inspection: Tues, February 13, 2018 from 9:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. at two locations: 4 Star Island Drive and 5 Star Island Drive, Miami Beach, FL 33139.

Exceptional, one-of-a-kind luxury items representing Kramer's well-known extravagant celebrity lifestyle are available for sale including European home furnishings, artwork, exquisite home decor, sculptures, oriental rugs, mask collections, life-size collectible figures and statues, electronics,

audio/video equipment, book collections, office equipment, office furniture, patio furniture, concrete outdoor décor/statues, hand tools, power tools, restaurant equipment, fitness equipment and much more. A 2011 Toyota Tacoma truck will be sold separately. All other personal property will be sold as one lot via Sheriff's sale.

The contact person for sale inquiries is: Latasha Gethers Hines, Esq. Kozyak Tropin & Throckmorton 2525 Ponce de Leon Blvd., 9th Floor Miami, Fl 33134 Direct 305.728.2966 | email: lgh@kttlaw.com

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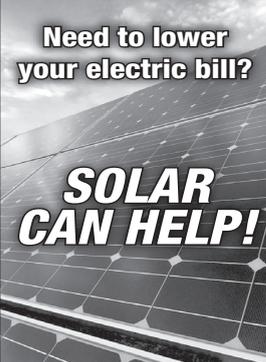
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