

Bradford County Telegraph

USPS 062-700 — Starke, Florida

Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024

146th year, 21st Issue — \$1

Used handgun and rifle in Melrose shooting

BY DAN HILDEBRAN
dan@bctelegraph.com

Bradford deputies said a Speedville man fired two weapons at a neighbor, striking the man in the lower body and sending him to a Gainesville hospital with non-life-threatening injuries.

Deputies arrested Michael Robinson, 60, on November 30 for attempted second-degree murder.

According to a sheriff's office social media post, the victim visited Robinson's residence, and an altercation broke out.

"During the scuffle, Robinson disengaged and retrieved a handgun," the office reported, "which he proceeded to fire at the victim,



Robinson

emptying the partially loaded magazine."

Deputies said Robinson then retrieved a long gun and fired more rounds at the victim, striking him in the lower body.

Looking for Christmas ornaments, gets into shootout

BY DAN HILDEBRAN
dan@bctelegraph.com

A 54-year-old Starke man who told deputies he was looking for Christmas ornaments was arrested for aggravated assault with a deadly weapon after witnesses said he started a gunfight in Starke's Reno neighborhood.

Derek Dean was also arrested for discharging a firearm from a vehicle.

According to an arrest report, the victim told deputies that Dean used to live next door to the victim's residence and drove up to the victim's house, accusing the East Reba Street inhabitant of "stealing stuff from the property."

According to the victim, Dean pulled a black pistol out of a holster and fired several rounds at his former



Dean

neighbor. The victim then returned fire with a 410 single-shot bolt action shotgun.

Dean then drove away, getting off additional shots as he retreated.

See SHOOTOUT, page 2



WORTH NOTING

Toy drive for Christmas party

Concerned Citizens of Bradford County is requesting donations of new, unwrapped toys for ages 6 months to 14 years old. These will be given to children in need during the organization's annual Christmas party on Dec. 21, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the RJE Complex on Pine Street in Starke.

Drop-off location for donations include Starke City Hall, Bradford County Sheriff's Office, the Downtown Grill and Danielle's Car Salon on Brownlee Street.

Church of God food distribution

Starke Church of God by Faith and Farm Share plan a food distribution on Thursday, Dec. 5, from 10-11:30 a.m. This is a drive-thru distribution. The church is located at 730 Old Lawtey Road in Starke. This distribution may begin early depending on the arrival of the food truck.

Food distribution at RJE

A communitywide food distribution hosted by Feeding Northeast Florida and True Vine Ministry will take place Wednesday, Dec. 11, at 8:30 a.m. at the RJE Complex on Pine Street in Starke.

Food boxes often include fresh produce, deli and bakery items, dairy and some meats. Inventory is subject to availability. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Multifamily yard sale

There will be a Community Yard Sale on Saturday, Dec. 7, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at 15043 U.S. Hwy 301 South (the former Jay's Mini Mart) sponsored by the We Care Democrats. If you would like to set up your own table that day, call 904-612-3942 to reserve your space.



Santa Claus talks to children during the Keystone Heights Parade of Trees.

Keystone debuts Parade of Trees

BY DAN HILDEBRAN
dan@bctelegraph.com

Keystone Heights Mayor Nina Rodenroth said over 25 Lake Region businesses and organizations sponsored and decorated a Christmas tree in the city's Natural Park for the municipality's first annual Parade of Trees.

The city served cocoa and apple cider, and Santa Claus talked to children who came to the event.

Participants filled out ballots to vote for their favorite entries. The city's Drew Bell said voting will continue at city hall throughout the month, with the winner announced at the end of December.

Manager answers questions about those 'lead' letters

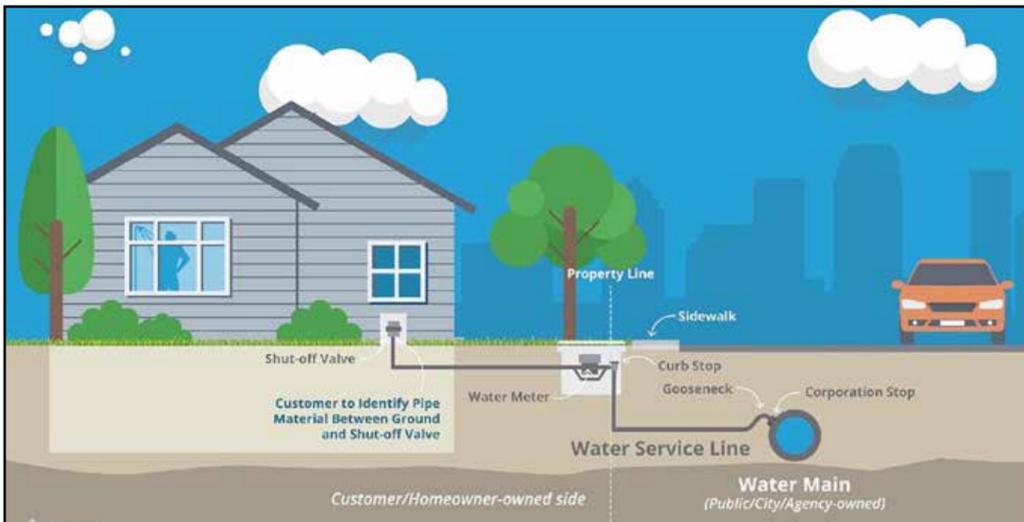
BY MARK J. CRAWFORD
mark@bctelegraph.com

Recently, some Starke water customers received letters from the city stating that their service lines are or may have been connected to pipes made of lead, thereby increasing their risk of exposure to lead in their drinking water.

Drew Mullins, Starke's general manager for utilities, said lead service lines were historically installed by water utilities across the country, and there is now a nationwide effort to replace lead with safer material.

The letters were sent in response to an Environmental Protection Agency requirement to notify customers if their service line contains lead; a galvanized metal that may have absorbed lead from a connected line; or is made of an unknown material. The letters are intended to inform customers of the health risks of lead exposure and provide steps to reduce exposure.

See LEAD, page 3



Letters mailed to water customers contained the illustration explaining where responsibility for the lines is divided.

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Lawtey discusses possible Middleburg Park improvements

BY DAN HILDEBRAN
Dan@BcTelegraph.com

Lawtey City Council members discussed several ways to improve the municipality's Middleburg Park during the council's December 2 meeting.

Council member Debra Jordan Norman reported to her colleagues that the city's recreation board held a town hall meeting at the park, inviting citizens to suggest upgrades. She added that two recreation board members showed up for the workshop in addition to a member of the public.

Suggestions for improvements included a walking track around the perimeter of the parcel, upgrading the tennis courts and adding lines to make the surface playable for pickleball in addition to tennis, and renovating

the park's building for arts and crafts, watching movies, and other purposes.

Council Member Emily Hoffman reminded her colleagues that County Commissioner Carolyn Spooner said grants were available to improve the park. She asked what the status of the grants was.

Citizen John Mercier responded that according to property appraiser records, there is no building on the site, even though a structure is on the parcel. He added that the lack of building records could hurt the city's chances of obtaining a grant for park improvements.

Lawtey Police Department Maj. Nathan Blom added that a county architect and engineer visited the park, and the architect estimated that improving the site would cost

\$1 million. The architect also said the facility's parking lot was below street grade, making the area susceptible to flooding and adding to the rehabilitation cost. The police officer added that bringing the park up to Americans with Disabilities Act standards and installing heating and air conditioning could drive the cost above \$2 million.

Norman told the council that representatives of a Bradford County youth football league had asked if the league could use the park for practices and games.

The council member added that the league was looking at increased rental fees from the school district for using the high school football field and was looking for more economical alternatives.

Norman said that one obstacle to the arrangement might be the league's need for lighting, which Middleburg Park lacks.



Elena Smith (left) and August Lefevers of Students Working Against Tobacco spoke to the council about prohibiting smoking in parks.

"Every person in Bradford County should be free to enjoy the great outdoors without exposure to toxic smoke vapor," said Smith. "Smoking is already prohibited in state parks, and now, thanks to new legislation, counties and municipalities can prohibit smoking and vaping in their local parks."

The student added that 55.9% of youth in Bradford County report being exposed to second-hand smoke.

Lefevers said Bradford County and the City of Starke are now banning smoking in their parks. She added that signs are not enough to discourage smoking in the recreational areas frequented by children and families.

She added that 30.5% of Bradford County youth say they have tried cigarettes, vaping products, smokeless cigars, or methamphetamine.

"Sixteen-point four percent reported that they're currently using one of these products, she added. "Both are above the state average."

Students lobby for smoke-free parks

Elena Smith and August

Lefevers of Students Working Against Tobacco spoke to the council about prohibiting smoking in parks.

SHOOTOUT

Continued from page 1

When interviewed about the incident, Dean told deputies

he was in the area looking for Christmas ornaments, and after he and his former neighbor began to argue, it was the alleged victim who fired the first shots.

A witness who saw the

encounter from her yard told officers she heard yelling, saw Dean return to his SUV, and heard a gunshot.

"I looked up and seen the guy in the gray SUV shoot 2-3

more times," said the witness, according to the arrest report. "I seen the guy that lives in the house run from the yard and shoot 2 shots while the guy in the silver truck was pulling off."

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UNION COUNTY TIMES

Thank you for THE MEMORIES

Homeless to be booted from parks and other public spaces

BY MARK J. CRAWFORD
mark@bctelegraph.com

Individuals without housing who may have found accommodations on public property are now prohibited from sleeping there by state law.

The law leaves it up to cities and counties to decide whether to designate a public space where the homeless can go, providing a list of requirements are met.

Capt. Kevin Mueller of the Bradford County Sheriff's Office broached the discussion while updating the city commission about traffic enforcement on downtown streets, including the frequency of large delivery trucks making deliveries to local businesses.

Mueller said the sheriff's office

met with city officials about using cameras to help law enforcement monitor what is happening in city parks. In addition to driving and parking signage, he said the city parks need signs displaying when the parks are closed so the sheriff's office can enforce those hours, lock up the bathrooms and prevent vandalism.

The signage would forbid trespassing in the parks and the city pavilion past dusk or a specific hour, he said, including any unsheltered person using public property to sleep.

"I think we're being pretty successful at getting homeless people from underneath the roadways (overpass) and at the pavilion, but eventually we're going to need some teeth," Mueller said.

Attorney Danielle Adams said Mueller made a salient point, mentioning state legislation that as of Oct. 1 made it illegal to sleep in such public locations, whether in a tent, temporary structure or the open air. As of Jan. 1, cities and counties could be subject to a civil lawsuit from a resident or business owner for failing to prevent it.

Adams said their office would be bringing an ordinance to the commission with options for implementing the requirements of the state law. She said some cities like have decided to simply tell people to move on. Others are addressing it through code enforcement, issuing citations and fining individuals for violating the law.

Adams said it's hard to know

how everything will play out with this new legislation. She predicted litigation.

"It was a big change in the legislation and the case law history. Up until then, it was considered cruel and unusual punishment to punish homelessness, and so the Supreme Court saying this year, 'No, it's not,' was news," she said.

The legislation does not allow counties or cities to permit general camping or sleeping on public property, including in public buildings, on their premises or on public rights of way. They may designate a specific public property for this purpose with the concurrence of the Department of Children and Families only if there are insufficient beds in

shelters to house the homeless, the area designated does not abut a residential area, and the location does not "materially affect" residential or commercial property values.

Fiscally constrained counties like Bradford are spared additional requirements that could prove costly, including providing security, maintaining sanitation and coordinating behavioral health services such as substance abuse and mental health treatment.

They would have to prohibit use of alcohol or drugs at any such site.

Such a site cannot be designated for more than a year without a review by DCF, and the agency may inspect the properties at any time and order

the closure of any site that does not meet statutory requirements.

If a resident or business owner prevails in a civil action against the city or county for failing to prevent camping or sleeping on public property, the court may award reasonable expenses incurred in bringing the civil action. A complainant must first provide written notice to the city or county regarding the violation.

The provisions of the law do not apply during a state of emergency declared by the governor or the county. Likewise, the law does not apply to staying overnight in a vehicle that is registered, insured and located in a place where it may lawfully be. Nor does it apply to camping for recreational purposes on property designated for such purposes.

Union special assessments explained

BY TRACY LEE TATE
Special to the Times

At its regular November meeting, the Union County Board of County Commissioners reviewed a report prepared by Union County Property Appraiser Bruce Dukes, detailing the funds collected by the county from the special assessments for rescue and garbage services that all property owners pay with their ad valorem taxes.

All property owners are assessed the same fee for rescue services, \$70 each. Residential classes include single-family, mobile homes and multi-family

residences (i.e., apartments, duplexes, etc.). The total of these is \$308,700, all of which is used to fund rescue services. Residential property owners also pay the same amount for garbage services, for the same total of \$308,700. The total special assessments paid by residential property owners is \$617,400.

Rates for commercial garbage services are a little different as businesses are charged by classes. Commercial garbage class one included the smallest business that do not have a great deal of waste, such as business offices. The businesses pay \$65 each

(there are 24 such businesses in Union County). Commercial garbage class two businesses produce a little more garbage than those in class one and pay a little more as well, \$85. Class three businesses are businesses such as restaurants, which produce other wastes as well as paper products. They are charged \$110. Class four businesses are most often very large and/or are involved in manufacturing. Class four businesses pay \$130. These funds pay towards the operation of the county solid waste department and all of the collection sites.

Both services paid for by the assessments also receive funding from the county to operated, although both solid waste and rescue both derive income from other sources as well — solid waste from recycling and dumpster rentals and rescue from insurance payments for transport, as well as transports paid for by Lake Butler Hospital and the prisons. Both departments are working towards becoming self-sufficient, supporting themselves through the assessments and the income they take in, eventually greatly reducing the funds currently taken from the county.

LEAD

Continued from page 1

The following statement was included in the letters:

Exposure to lead in drinking water can cause serious health effects in all age groups. Infants and children can have decreases in IQ and attention span. Lead exposure can lead to new learning and behavior problems or worsen existing learning and behavior problems. The children of women who are exposed to lead before or during pregnancy can have increased risk of these negative health effects. Adults can have increased risks of heart disease, high blood pressure, and kidney, or nervous system problems.

Not surprisingly, the letters resulted in a few phone calls to city hall. Mullins compiled some of the common questions and provided some answers.

Q: "What does this mean?"

A: The EPA and DEP has required all cities and towns to check residential lines for possible galvanized lines. This study was done over the summer. Galvanized lines were installed decades ago as the primary service lines to homes. Under the EPA rule, they state because of the use of galvanized metal pipes, there may be an increased chance of lead from your pipes. Newer construction, beginning

in the 1980s, used PVC and poly materials for water lines.

Q: "Who determined that?"

A: Over the summer, the required study was conducted by physically going to residential homes to check the service line.

Q: "Is the city going to replace my metal line?"

A: At present, we cannot. However, we will continue to inquire about funding opportunities for assistance to homeowners.

Q: "Do I have to replace it?"

A: While the EPA and DEP recommend homeowners replace their service lines, it is up to the individual homeowners whether they replace their line.

Q: "What is the city doing about this overall?"

A: We are continually seeking and obtaining grants and loans to replace, rehabilitate and extend all infrastructure throughout the city.

Q: "Is the city water safe to drink?"

A: Yes. We follow DEP's regulations on treatment of water. We also conduct the required field testing of the water.

Q: "What is galvanized pipe?"

A: It is a specific type of metal that was primarily used in the 20th century for water lines. The life span is between 40-50 years.

Q: "I have a letter that said my lines were of unknown material. What does that mean?"

A: It means that the pipe could be cast iron, PVC, PEX (plastic).

Q: "Will you test my water?"

A: Yes. You may call 904-964-5027 and we will take samples. Alternatively, you may contact a certified laboratory to have your water tested for lead. A list of certified laboratories is available at <https://floridadep.gov/dear/florida-dep-laboratory/content/nelap-certified-laboratory-search>.

The letter also includes steps to reduce lead in drinking water, including:

- use a filter.
- clean the aerators (screens) in your faucets where lead and other particles can collect.
- use cold water to drink, cook and prepare baby formula. Lead dissolves more easily in hot water, and boiling water does not remove it.
- run your water to flush your pipes. Water standing in pipes has more time to absorb lead. Flushing can include showering, doing laundry or washing dishes.

The city can test your water for lead (904-964-5027). A physician or the health department (904-964-7732) can provide information about blood tests for lead exposure.

The city owns the water mains and the service lines that connect to water meters. It can provide information about efforts to replace older infrastructure.

Property owners are responsible for lines connecting water meters to their homes or offices. The city can provide

information about how to identify the material making up those lines as well as financing solutions for replacing those lines if needed.

For more information on reducing lead exposure, visit EPA's website at <http://www.epa.gov/lead>.

Lawtey Christmas Program Dec. 15

The public is invited to this year's Lawtey Community Christmas Program, which is scheduled for Sunday, Dec. 15, at 4 p.m. at Lawtey's Grace Methodist Church.

Lawtey Christmas Parade

Lawtey's Christmas Parade will take place Saturday, Dec. 21, beginning at 10 a.m. Come enjoy the lineup of classic cars, church and community floats, horses, Santa and more. The parade travels from Lawtey Elementary School, east down Lake Street (C.R. 225) and turns around at Walk by Faith Ministries.

There will be a gathering at the home of Ben and Emma Strong with free food and drinks while they last. For more information, contact Ben Strong at 904-782-3130 or Cynthia Ross at 904-782-3107.

Bethlehem Walk

Walk through Bethlehem and witness a live nativity at

Morning-Star Baptist Church on County Road 18 in Worthington Springs. This biblical account of the Christmas story will feature live characters and animals, including camels. Come join the Jewish pilgrims on their way to Bethlehem, visiting several market shops and ending at the nativity.

The walk will take place from 6 to 8 p.m. Friday through Sunday, Dec. 13-15. Please contact Robert Worrell for more information at 352-339-4291 or 352-496-2390.

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Union celebrates Farm City

BY TRACY LEE TATE
Special to the Times

On Nov. 20, 2024, the annual Union County Farm City events were held at the Union County Agricultural Education Center.

The day began early with about 190 3rd graders (10 third-grade classes) from Lake Butler Elementary School who participated in a series of learning stations about agricultural topics.

Three University of Florida graduate students brought instruments and supplies to cover topics in engineering, aquatic engineering, and invasive plants, including a screen viewed with virtual reality goggles.

Also on hand were stations staffed by members of the Union County Beekeepers Club and Six Petal Flower Company.

Lunch grown on Union County farm

Soon, it was time for lunch, prepared by Michael Dukes, consisting of smoked chicken, cornbread, corn on the cob and mustard greens. Dessert was strawberry shortcake. All of the produce was grown on the Dukes Family Farm and Six Petal Flower Company.

The CARES (County Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship) recognition of Bielling Family was awarded to them last March by the commissioner of agriculture, but the farm was recognized at the event as well, with Cathy Bielling representing the farm as a CARES Farmer.

After everyone had their plates and a little time to eat the program was opened by UF IFAS Extension Agent Jim DeValerio, who welcomed everyone to the event. The Pledge of Allegiance and the 4-H pledge were led by Emily Parrish and Cadence Duniven, members of the Union County 4-H Bunny Buddies Club. The Invocation was given by Raylan Dyal, member of the Union County 4-H Homeschool Club, then Latoya Hampton, member of the Pig Tails and Pony Tails



Melissa Dukes McNeal, was the guest speaker for the 2024 Farm City program, talking about being part of a multigenerational farm family.



John Hall, founder of Promised Land Family Ministries, announced that the Dukes Family Farm had been selected the winner of the contest.



About 65 people attended the Farm City Luncheon and program.

4-H Club, gave a short talk about "What is 4-H?"

Bailey Varnes, Lake Butler Senior FFA, then gave a presentation titled "Women in Agriculture," followed by the recognition of the Community Partners at Farm Bureau (who sponsored the event along with the Dukes Family Farm and Six Petal Flower Company).

The CARES (County Alliance for Responsible Environmental Stewardship) recognition of Bielling Family was awarded to them last March by the commissioner of agriculture, but the farm was recognized at the event as well, with Cathy Bielling representing the farm as a CARES Farmer.

Dukes awarded Farm Family bronze plaque

Next, it was time for the Keynote Speaker, Melissa Dukes



Bailey Varnes, a member of Lake Butler Senior FFA, gave a talk about Women in Agriculture as part of the Farm City program.



The presenter and the winners of the Union County Family Farm of the Year award. Pictured are: (back row) presenter John Hall, Michael Dukes, Robin Dukes, Melissa Dukes McNeal and Union County Extension Agent Jim DeValerio; (front) Glover O'Neal.

McNeal. She talked about the history of the Dukes Family Farm, which has been in Union County since the 1860's. She is a fifth-generation member of the farm family. She also spoke about growing up and working on a multi-generational farm and what like lessons it has taught her to pass on to the next generation.

DeValerio then took the podium to announce the

presentation of the Union County Farm Family Award. The award was presented Dukes Family Farm by Promised Land Family Ministries Director John Hall, who had nominated the family but did not know the winner until just before he spoke.

He wasn't the only one who was kept in the dark about the winner. Although they brought

most of the food, prepared it, helped sponsor the event and provided the Keynote Speaker, none of the members of the Dukes family knew they were to receive the award – except for Robin Dukes, who was sworn to secrecy but tasked with getting as many members of the family as possible to attend the event. The family received a bronze

plaque and were both pleased and surprised.

The event ended on this happy note, and attendees stayed and talked for a while before returning home or to work to complete their day. All seemed to have enjoyed the food and the program, especially the newest best-kept-secret in Union County.

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Union County conservation easement protects upper New River corridor

A 200-acre family property in Union County near Raiford was recently protected by a conservation easement purchased by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and facilitated by Alachua Conservation Trust.

The two organizations worked together to assist the Diercks family to sell a conservation easement. The conservation easement was acquired through Florida Forever, the state's premier land acquisition program.

The property lies just west of the upper New River, an important tributary of the Santa Fe River, and is adjacent to existing Raiford Wildlife Management Area conservation

lands. Protection of this property expands existing conservation lands around Raiford and contributes to protection of the Ocala to Osceola (O2O) Corridor, a critical linkage of the larger Florida Wildlife Corridor — a network of over 18 million acres designated as high conservation priority by the Florida legislature.

The Diercks family land is part of the 69,000-acre Raiford to Osceola Greenway Florida Forever project area, which is designed to provide habitat connection between existing conservation areas.

The Diercks family currently owns and manages their property for timber, recreation and wildlife habitat, and are members of the North Florida Prescribed Burn Association. The property contains pine plantations,



forested wetlands and floodplains and provides habitat for a number of wildlife species, including

the federally at-risk Suwannee alligator snapping turtle, Florida black bear, southern fox squirrel, bobwhite quail, sandhill crane and swallow-tailed kite.

"The protection of the Diercks family property through this conservation easement will not only safeguard vital wildlife habitat, but also strengthen the ecological ties between existing conservation lands," explained ACT Executive Director Tom Kay. "By protecting this land, the Suwannee alligator snapping turtle and Florida black bear have a chance to thrive, while also honoring the family's legacy of land stewardship."

The Diercks Family shared, "It is gratifying to see our family's land protected through this conservation easement. It has been our goal to preserve this area for future generations. This partnership is a step towards protecting its natural beauty and wildlife, and we hope it inspires others to take action in protecting Florida's precious landscapes. We could not have gotten this conservation easement done without the assistance of ACT. ACT staff were instrumental in keeping everyone on track and moving forward. Their experience and knowledge of the process was invaluable to us."

For additional information about this project or about Alachua Conservation Trust, please contact ACT at info@AlachuaConservationTrust.org.

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City leaders have been discussing the building for two years, with many calling the site an eyesore.

Bids approved for China Chef demo

BY DAN HILDEBRAN
dan@bctelegraph.com

Keystone Heights City Council members approved two bids to tear down the abandoned China Chef Restaurant at the city's main intersection during a November 25 Community Redevelopment Agency meeting.

Council members voted to buy the 0.165-acre parcel at 125 East Walker Drive in March for \$240,000.

A consultant commissioned by the North Florida Transportation Planning Council recommended that the triangular parcel be converted into parking and open space.

Phil Shad, with the engineering firm AtkinsRealis, also suggested the city use the open space as a marquee gateway to downtown, with a sign and other assets giving visitors a positive first impression of the city.

In subsequent meetings, council members indicated they intended to implement the consultant's recommendations.

Bids for demolishing the structure and leaving the parcel with level ground ranged from \$17,750 from East Coast Site and Utilities to \$126,184 from Plus Point Construction.

The council awarded the bid to the second lowest bidder, Assist 2 Build, with a bid of \$18,450.

City Executive Assistant Beau Wright, who manages the project, recommended Assist 2 Build because the East Coast bid did not include seeding the cleared site with grass.

Wright explained that East Coast did not attend an optional pre-bid meeting, during which he told the other contractors that he wanted the seeding included in the bids.

In a separate bid process,

council members awarded an \$11,800 asbestos removal contract to ELS Abatement and Construction to remove asbestos from the roof of the building. Three other contractors submitted bids for the work, the highest of which came in at \$19,800.

City leaders have been discussing the building for two years, with many calling the site an eyesore.

During a 2023 city council meeting, Council Member Tony Brown said, "I want people to see another picture of our progress downtown...Get rid of what's right there and make it look good when people come into town."

After the two votes on November 25, Council Member Elston "Speedy" Kussler added an exclamation point to the proceedings by stating, "Tear it down."

Brown tries to stop golf course talk

BY DAN HILDEBRAN
dan@bctelegraph.com

The Keystone Heights City Council turned away an attempt by council member Tony Brown to stop discussions about the city purchasing the Keystone Heights Golf and Country Club in Bradford County.

Golf course co-owner Brad Harvey said in June that the property is for sale, and because the nine-hole layout is currently zoned for single-family housing, the land may be more valuable as homesites rather than its current use.

He added that he was trying to convince city leaders to purchase the course to preserve its original use and historic value. The layout was designed by legendary course architect Donald Ross.

During the November 25 city council meeting, Brown said he had always opposed the idea and complained that he had

kept reading on social media that the city was purchasing the approximately 46-acre tract. The council member added that many city residents oppose the proposal, which has an asking price of \$1 million.

"I guess I'm an old fuddy-duddy when it comes to this stuff," Brown told his colleagues, "but I personally think that this council tonight needs to make a decision whether we are going to do it and go forth and let the manager do his thing in the way of looking at it. I just know that I've had several citizens tell me we were crazy if we go and spend that kind of money in another county."

However, Mayor Nina Rodenroth pushed for continued discussions about the possible buy. She said she foresaw a town hall meeting on the topic and possibly a referendum to approve the purchase.

City Manager Charlie Van

Zant said he had researched a potential purchase and asked Crystal Lake resident Keith Cumbus to address the council on his work on the project.

Cumbus said he had consulted with golf course designer Bobby Weed to analyze the course's income potential. He and Weed estimated that, with improvements, the course's current 7,000 annual rounds of golf could be increased to 20,000.

"We're in a bit of a golf desert here in North Central Florida as compared to so many other places within the state," he said.

Brown and council member Dan Lewandowski said the course's location in Bradford County is a sticking point. Lewandowski added that if Bradford County officials are unwilling to participate in a possible deal, he sees no future for it.

Clay commissioners among lowest paid

BY DAN HILDEBRAN
dan@bctelegraph.com

With an annual salary of \$37,000, Clay County Commissioners are among the lowest paid in the state, ranking them 56 out of 67 counties, even though Clay County's population is in Florida's top half.

The reason is that Clay is one of Florida's 20 charter counties with salaries of commissioners set by the charter instead of the state.

Each year, the Florida Legislature's Office of Economic and Demographic Research recalculates the salaries of most county and state officials based mainly on population. The 2024 report, issued last month, prescribed salaries for Bradford commissioners at \$40,183 and Union commissioners at \$35,540.

The new computations give Union commissioners a monthly paycheck of only \$163 less than

those in Clay, even though Clay's population is more than 14 times that of its western neighbor.

If Clay were not a charter county and the state-regulated the board's pay, each commissioner would earn \$93,334 instead of \$37,000.

The legislative office also

gave Bradford and Union commissioners salary increases of around three-and-a-half percent beginning on October 1.

However, Clay commissioners do not get cost-of-living

See PAID, page 6

Christmas Gala in Melrose

Join Faith Presbyterian for the 9th annual Christmas Gala on Sunday, Dec. 8. Listen to

the sounds of Christmas with the Quintessential Sax from Keystone Heights starting at 2 p.m. The cantata "Appalachian Winter" by Joseph M. Martin will begin at 3 p.m. with the combined

choirs from Faith Presbyterian and First Presbyterian of Starke. There will be a beautiful display of nativities from around the world. A reception will follow. The church is located at 2738 S.R. 21 in Melrose (Midway).

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Crime

Recent arrests in Bradford, Union and Clay

The following individuals were arrested recently by local law enforcement officers in Bradford, Union or Clay (Keystone Heights-area) counties. All defendants are considered innocent until convicted in a court or until pleading guilty or no contest. Information in this report is from law enforcement agencies and court documents, which are public records.

Bradford

James Carney, 33, of Gainesville, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 23 for possession of drug equipment and driving with a suspended or revoked license.

Bobby Copeland, 33, of Jacksonville, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 26 for trafficking in drugs, possession of drugs, and smuggling contraband into a prison.

Cordell Cray, 38, of Starke, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 24 for battery and contempt of court.

Gretchin Crews, 49, of Hampton, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 28 for a probation violation.

Tyler Dyal, 32, of Hilliard, was

arrested by Bradford deputies on November 27 for failure to appear.

Isaac Fowler, 21, of Lawtey, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 23 for fraud and an out-of-county warrant.

Christopher Fuller, 33, of Starke, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 25 for a probation violation.

Melissa Harris, 49, of MacClenny, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 27 for an out-of-county warrant.

Irma Kight, 70, of Starke, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 28 for battery and aggravated assault.

Timothy Lewis, 37, of San Mateo, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 27 for out-of-county warrants.

Glenn Mergyari, 35, of Starke, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 27 for driving with a suspended or revoked license.

Joseph Mitchell, 56, of Starke, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 23 for withholding support.

Nicholas Orosco, 42, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 29 for failure to appear.

Keith Pryer, 55, of Wesley Chapel, was arrested by FHP

troopers on November 26 for fraud-impersonation, driving with a suspended or revoked license, an out-of-county warrant, and attaching a tag not assigned.

Jacob Reed, 35, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 24 for DUI.

Dallas Robinson, 22, of Starke, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 25 for an out-of-county warrant.

Najeeb Smith, 34, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 27 for an out-of-county warrant.

Lester Walker, 50, was arrested by Bradford deputies on November 28 for trespassing, resisting an officer, possession of a weapon by a convicted felon, and destroying evidence.

Union

Cody Andrews, 32, of High Springs, was arrested by Union deputies on November 27 for a probation violation.

Anthony Hendrieth, 30, of Lake Butler, was arrested by Union deputies on November 28 for a probation violation.

Clay

Christopher Gordon, 31, of Keystone Heights, was arrested by Clay deputies on November 29 for domestic battery.

Starke Santa Breakfast

Santa returns to Starke Elementary School for the annual Santa Breakfast on Saturday, Dec. 7. Breakfast will be served from 8 to 10 a.m. for \$4 per child and \$6 per adult. Pictures with

Santa will be \$4 and delivered digitally to you.

Gifts and goodies will be on sale in the Santa Store. Student-made Christmas ornaments will also be on display. Stay to play bingo from 10 to 11 a.m. for \$2 to \$5 per game. Cash only, smaller bills below \$20 preferred.

Enter Starke Christmas Parade

Secure your place in the Starke Christmas Parade by contacting the North Florida Regional Chamber of Commerce for an entry form at 904-964-5278 or pam@northfloridachamber.com. The application deadline is Tuesday, Dec. 10 at noon. The parade will take place Saturday, Dec. 14 at 6 p.m.

Skipper elected Clay school board chair

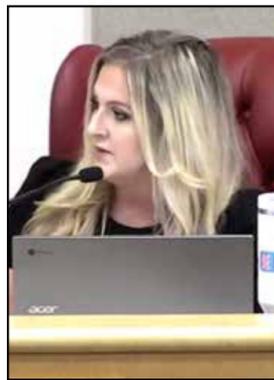
BY DAN HILDEBRAN
dan@bctelegraph.com

Clay County School Board members elected Erin Skipper as their new chair during a November 19 reorganizational meeting in Fleming Island.

Outgoing chair Ashley Gillhousen and Beth Clark were also nominated to lead the board from December 2024 through November 2025. Later in the meeting, Gillhousen was elected vice chair.

Skipper was first elected to the board in 2022, unseating 12-year incumbent Janice Kerekes after securing the endorsement of Governor Ron DeSantis. The Middleburg High School graduate and emergency department nurse was also endorsed by high-profile Clay County Republicans like former County Commissioners Gayward Hendry and Mike Cella and Republican Executive Committeeman Scotty Taylor.

In 2023, Skipper led the



School board member Erin Skipper

school board in abolishing its own police department and transferring school security back to the Clay County Sheriff's Office. She also successfully advocated for requiring students to use bathrooms and locker rooms according to their birth

sex. Earlier this year, Skipper was elected state committeewoman for the Clay County Republican executive committee.

Along with Taylor, the Fleming Island resident will represent Clay Republicans in the Florida GOP committee.

School board members also approved their meeting calendar for the upcoming 12 months, voting to meet on the first Thursday of each month at Fleming Island High School's teacher service center. However, meetings in December 2024, January 2025, and July 2025 were scheduled for different dates because of conflicting events and holidays.

During the reorganizational meeting, board members also welcomed their newest colleague, Robert Alvero. The Cuban-born firefighter and Florida State Guard lieutenant won a November 5 runoff with 54% of the vote against James Hughes.

PAID Continued from page 5

increases.

In 2022, Clay County voters were asked to approve cost-of-living adjustments to county commissioners' pay. The charter amendment garnered only 38% of the vote, failing by nearly 35,000 votes.

The legislative office dictates the pay of Clay County's remaining officers. However, the county's constitutional officers, like the sheriff and tax collector, are term-limited by the charter, and an attempt to remove those term limits failed in 2022 by a margin of 79% to 21%.

Other county salaries

Other 2024-2025 county salaries mandated by the Office of Economic and Demographic Research are:

Clerk of Circuit Court, Property Appraiser, and Supervisor of Elections Clay: \$168,693, Bradford: \$128,770, Union: \$123,895;

Tax Collector, Clay: \$196,200, Bradford: \$156,277, Union: \$151,402;

Sheriff, Clay: \$235,260, Bradford: \$195,336, Union: \$190,462;

Schools Superintendent, Clay: \$196,200, Bradford: \$156,277, Union: \$151,402;

School Board, Clay: \$46,554, Bradford: \$34,082, Union: \$32,793.

One county office not dictated by population is the county

judge, meaning that the county judges in Clay, Bradford, and Union earn the same \$186,034 a year as their counterparts in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties. All circuit judges earn \$196,898, judges on district courts of appeal earn \$218,939, and Supreme Court Justices earn \$258,957.

Population

A significant component of salary determinations in the legislative office's report is based on county populations.

According to estimates by the University of Florida's Bureau of Economic and Business Research, six counties have populations greater than one million: Broward, Duval, Hillsborough, Miami-Dade, Orange, and Palm Beach. Six more have populations of 500,000 to one million: Brevard, Lee, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, and Volusia. Nineteen counties, including Clay and Alachua, have 200,000 to 500,000 residents. Seven have populations between 100,000 and 200,000, and 12, including Putnam, Columbia, and Suwannee, have 30,000 to 100,000 residents. That leaves 17 counties with under 30,000 people, including Union, Bradford, and Baker. Union County, the state's least populated county for decades, now outpaces Liberty, Lafayette, Jefferson, Hamilton, Glades, Franklin, and Calhoun in number of residents.

Charter counties

Twenty Florida counties, in

which more than 75% of the state's population resides, are charter counties. Those include Alachua, Clay, Columbia, and Duval. Wakulla is the only charter county in the state with a population under 50,000.

Charters act like a federal or state constitution, serving as a governing document for a jurisdiction.

Most county charters dictate the terms of county commissioners' service, including their terms of office, whether officials are term-limited, their compensation, whether they can be recalled, and whether they are elected at-large or in single-member districts.

Clay is the only charter county in which commissioners' pay may only be changed by charter.

Charters also outline the selection and roles of county executives. The county executives in Duval, Miami-Dade, and Orange are elected, and the rest are appointed.

Charters may also govern the role of other county officers like the sheriff and school board members.

Duval's charter dictates that school board members are limited to two terms and that the city council sets their salaries.

Leon and Lee made the supervisor of elections office a non-partisan post.

In 1964, Miami-Dade's charter eliminated the sheriff and made the county mayor the county's chief law enforcement officer. However, after a lawsuit by the Florida Sheriff's Association, which claimed that the move violated the state's constitution, Miami-Dade voters elected their first sheriff in 60 years this year.

Letters

Remember his legacy

Dear Editor:
Bradford and Clay Counties recently lost one of their finest, Jason Wyatt Bennett, a man who, even at a young age, touched the

lives of so many with his kindness, his dedication, and his unwavering commitment to service. I had the privilege of knowing Jason's mother and father, Betty Jo and David Bennett, during my time as Bradford County's Civil Defense Director (1964). I remember her bringing Jason and John to the office, and even then, a spark of something

special was evident in young Jason.

Little did I know, when I decided to run for the Florida House of Representatives (1972), that 5-year-old Jason would play such an unexpectedly significant role in my campaign. The image of him confidently and politely handing out campaign cards, asking people to vote for me, remains vividly in my memory. It wasn't just the help, it was the poise, the maturity — qualities beyond his years that were truly remarkable. He possessed a natural ability to connect with people, to inspire trust and goodwill. That wasn't a one-off event; it was indicative of the man he would become.

Jason's commitment to helping others wasn't a fleeting childhood phase; it was the bedrock of his character. He continued throughout his life to dedicate himself to service. This dedication to his community, to his family, and to those around him is a testament to the kind of person he was. His legacy is one of generosity, compassion, and unwavering dedication.

While we mourn his passing, let us also celebrate the life he lived, a life full of purpose and meaning. His memory will live on in the hearts of all who knew him, a reminder of the power of kindness, the importance of service, and the enduring impact a single life can have. We extend our deepest condolences to his family and friends, and may the memories of Jason Wyatt Bennett bring comfort and peace during this difficult time.

Respectfully,
Frank Williams
Former Member
Florida House of Representatives
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Still addresses Starke's 'environmental nightmare'

BY MARK J. CRAWFORD
mark@bctelegraph.com

Paul Still called a wetlands mitigation project "an environmental nightmare" during his presentation to Starke city commissioners last month.

Still, a board member for the Bradford Soil and Water Conservation District, was allowed to present their concerns after warning that Starke would face the cost of cleaning and maintaining the site and could be liable for any upstream flooding resulting from the project.

The Edwards Bottomlands Project involves the restoration of wetlands areas along Alligator Creek west of U.S. 301. It was proposed and developed by the Suwannee River Water Management District as a solution for the city's unpermitted excavation of the creek, which resulted in erosion and the buildup of sediment in Lake Rowell. Florida Department of Transportation was brought in as a funding entity because it needed to mitigate the wetlands areas destroyed during construction of the Starke bypass.

Still's presentation documented a few problems, according to him. One was the potential long-term cost of cleanup and maintenance of the Starke-owned site, which he showed in aerial photos from 2017 and 2024.

"You can see how heavily wooded this area was. It was actually a beautiful piece of property with large trees, and they eventually essentially destroyed it in the process, in my opinion, created a very serious environmental problem and a potentially costly problem for the city of Starke," Still said.

Pursuant to the environmental resource permit issued by the water management district for this property, the district will be held harmless from any liability from the construction, operation or maintenance of the project. Any maintenance of the project, including the routine removal of sediment and debris, will be Starke's responsibility once postconstruction monitoring is complete.

"One real question that I think we need to be concerned about is, 'Is the city of Starke responsible for potential upstream flooding damages, if in fact the water management district is relieved of all of its liability?'" he asked.

Still also had aerial photos of sediment along the channel, as well as bank erosion, channel blockages and accumulated trash, including tires, furniture and a large, motorized children's vehicle, which he said made its way to the Edwards Bottomlands from the Laura Street Bridge.

"That just shows you how anything can move down



Paul Still's aerial depiction of the Edwards Bottomlands are before and after construction of the project. Photos courtesy of Bradford Soil and Water Conservation District.

Alligator Creek during the high flows. And so, you have this tremendous amount of stuff coming down," he said. The photo of the motorized car was taken in April. Since then, it has been covered by even more trash and debris, he said.

"The sand, in some cases, that's been deposited is 18 inches to two feet deep," he said.

If this sediment and other blockages are not removed, Still said they could potentially cause flooding upstream, with the permit making the city of Starke liable for damages. He said the Edwards Bottomlands Project may already be restricting flow of water in the creek. Nine of the 10 historic Alligator Creek crests have taken place since the project was completed, he said.

"This really should be telling us that the project must have had some impact on the flow of water down Alligator Creek to cause this sort of distortion in the history of what's going on in Alligator Creek. The only peak that was higher was (Hurricane Irma) in 2017 and Irma was a major deal," he said.

Further, while the water management district is using contractors to monitor the site during a five-year period to determine whether the wetlands mitigation was successful, they do not appear to be performing the required maintenance, according to Still. He noted that wetland plant species and trees planted have not survived or are not growing as normal, meanwhile invasive plant species have taken root with the potential to spread further downstream. Both conditions are contrary to standards set by the permit.

Still said the monitoring reports don't appear to reflect the conditions of the site. Bradford Soil and Water Conservation District's attempt to obtain the most recent documents from

the current year were met with a \$100 request from the water management district. The city needs the reports if it does not already have them, he said.

A separate permit from the Army Corps of Engineers requires a five-year monitoring period. If performance standards have not been met for wetlands mitigation at the end of that period, the permittee must begin a remediation program. The project was divided into three phases, and the monitoring period for the first phase ended last month. Again, Still said the soil and water board doesn't know the status because it could not obtain the 2024 monitoring reports.

Remediation, including removal of invasive species, sediment and trash, as well as replanting of wetlands species, would come at a big cost, according to Still.

Still also raised another specter. He said a draft permit application from Chemours has requested to move 3 million gallons of water per day from the Trail Ridge South Mine up to a treatment system.

"The problem with that process that we see is this water has been demonstrated to be high in radium, and if you move that high radium up here, then it potentially is going to end up in Alligator Creek," Still said. "They can treat the radium. They can do what's called a barium precipitation, but then that is taking it out of the water, but it's put it in the solids. And so, when you have a rain event that has serious flows across this system, it theoretically can pick it up and move it on down. And if we have a flood situation, then it can get in people's houses and so forth. So, we were concerned about this."

Bradford Soil and Water Conservation District has asked



Sediment deposited in the Edwards Bottomlands from upstream must be removed.



Trash and debris included a motorized children's vehicle, which Still said made its way west of U.S. 301 from Laura Street.



A channel blockage with fallen trees, branches and a wooden pallet.

that this provision be removed from the permit, he said.

City commissioners were grateful for the presentation and concerned by what they heard. General Manager Drew Mullins said the information had been communicated to the water management district, which has forwarded it to its consultants. Attorney Danielle Adams said

their office would be happy to take the lead and work with city staff to determine how they can help.

"In my opinion, we don't need to be in the conservation business as a town," Mayor Andy Redding said, noting that one section of the creek flows through Starke. "Obviously, we need to manage what we can

manage, but I do not like that this was put in our laps. And it seems to me, and my understanding is, the water management district basically prescribed the plan, somewhat administered it, and then everything else, at the end of the day, they say, 'It's your baby.'"

Late audit still looks good for Bradford County

BY MARK J. CRAWFORD
mark@bctelegraph.com

Accounting issues in the sheriff's office resulted in a late audit for Bradford County.

Brendan McKittrick of James Moore and Company delivered the results of that Fiscal Year 2023 audit to county commissioners last week, highlighting growth in funds, but some timeliness issues that need to be addressed in Sheriff Gordon Smith's finance office.

"I did want to thank the commission again for the opportunity to perform the audit this year. And I also wanted to address that we are late with the audit this year. We did have some challenges, specifically in the sheriff's office, with getting that audit completed," he said.

Staffing changes as well as the move to a new accounting software system were credited for the difficulty. While the sheriff's office did engage a third-party CPA to come in and work on the books, they weren't brought in for the audit until August.

"We've had conversations with their office, really talking about how we can improve this next year," he said.

The deadline for the

completion of the audit is the end of June. McKittrick noted audits for the commission and other constitutional officers were completed in April or May.

The audit contains two significant issues and two recommendations for the sheriff's office. Auditors noted the sheriff's offices historic reliance on external auditors to prepare financial statements and make yearend adjustments, resulting in delayed reporting and potential inaccuracies. Ultimately, a third-party CPA was brought in to prepare financial records for auditors, including reconciling bank activity to the general ledger. External auditors should not be engaged in the audited organization's internal controls, so they recommended the sheriff's office continue to engage outside accounting assistance for guidance and reviews throughout the year.

The other finding involved multiple account balances requiring adjustment — including capital outlay expenditures, fixed asset balances, depreciation expense balances and grant revenue — to accurately present the financial statements. Auditors recommended reconciling significant transactions throughout the year and at year's end for accuracy and completeness.

Additional recommendations for financial management included actively monitoring budget-to-actual spending

comparisons to avoid overspending and making budget amendments throughout the year as necessary.

Finally, the sheriff's office did not complete an annual report to the Florida Chief Financial Officer, which could result in a loss of protection from the state on public depositor funds. This needs to be submitted annually by Nov. 30.

In the sheriff's response, Smith said they will continue to engage outside assistance for periodic reviews and audit preparation. Quarterly budget reviews will be scheduled. The office also has a financial administrator on staff now with more than 25 years of government accounting experience.

Revenue was received in excess of what was budgeted, according to the sheriff, leading to the over expenditures. Budget amendments should have been completed and will be in the future. Failure to submit the financial report to the CFO was declared a clerical oversight that has already been rectified.

Last year, the sheriff's office received similar comments about the need for outside accounting services and budget amendments.

The county received an unmodified opinion from auditors on its major funds, meaning its financial statements fairly present the county's financial position. It received a qualified opinion on governmental activities, meaning the financial

statements also fairly present the position of those activities, but the county has not implemented standards that measure the postemployment health benefits liabilities.

The county's expenditure of federal funds more than \$750,000 was also audited with no findings, nor were there material weaknesses, issues of noncompliance or modifications necessary in other sections of the audit.

McKittrick showed that the county's general fund balance has increased from \$5.7 to \$18.2 million since the end of Fiscal Year 2021. Of that amount, nearly \$15.4 million of that funding is assigned compared to \$183,491 at the end of 2021. Meanwhile, the unassigned fund balance has dropped from \$5.3 million to \$2.75 million. The county had less unassigned

money in the general fund going into the current fiscal year.

McKittrick next compared the combined assigned and unassigned fund balance to the spending and transfers out of the general fund, which for the current year tops \$35 million. Comparing that with the total \$18.2 million general fund balance shows that at 51.5%, the fund balance is well above the minimum 16.7% recommended by the Government Finance Officers Association. That was up from 47.8% last year.

As for the other departmental funds, McKittrick showed the nearly \$12.5 million total was down almost \$4.4 million from the prior year. There were no deficits in individual funds, however. The library ended 2023 with \$467,625. Transportation Trust had more than \$2.8 million remaining. Fines and Forfeitures

had \$2.1 million. The other nonmajor governmental funds totaled \$2.1 million.

The county also has nearly \$5 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding remaining, although it has been assigned to capital projects.

A decrease in capital outlay spending and a tax increase caused revenue to exceed expenditures by \$1.7 million in 2023, according to management's analysis. The county's net position was \$51 million (total assets and deferred outflows minus total liabilities and deferred inflows). Of that amount, \$6.6 million was unrestricted for governmental activities, \$3.2 million was restricted and the remaining \$41.1 million represents investment in capital assets.



Russ WADE

Attorney at Law

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Tigers' season ends with 34-8 state-semifinal loss to Madison County

BY CECE THOMAS

Special to the Telegraph-Times-Monitor

In recent years, it seems like the Union County and Madison County high school football teams fight each other for the right to play on in the postseason.

Only one can come out on top.

This year, it was the host Cowboys, who defeated the Tigers 34-8 in a Rural Class state semifinal game on Nov. 29.

Second seed Madison, which will now play top seed Hawthorne for the state championship on Friday, Dec. 6, has now won seven of eight playoff matchups against the Tigers.

"They were a really good football team and just better than us tonight," Union Head Coach Andrew Thomas said. "They jumped on us early, and we didn't tackle well in the first half. There were some missed opportunities for us. They had a good defense."

In the first half, the Cowboys (9-3) had 301 yards rushing and 329 total yards in building a 34-8 lead. A scoreless second half saw them gain just 82 yards.

It was the second time in three years that the third seed Tigers (10-2) played a state-semifinal game and the sixth straight year they advanced to at least the region-final round.

"Our boys played their heart out the second half," Thomas said. "We had a really good season and made it to the Final Four. I am really proud of them."

The Cowboys received a short kick from Gavin Jenkins to start the game, with a fair catch giving them the ball at their own 36. A running back was met in the backfield and dropped for a loss on first down, while quarterback L.J. Crumity kept the ball on second down, picking up a few yards to bring up third-and-10. An incomplete pass then had Madison lining up to punt, but a fake turned into a 64-yard touchdown run with 10:34 to go in the first quarter. The extra point was good for a 7-0 Madison lead.

Alec McClellon returned the following kickoff to the Union 34-yard line. Two runs by Drew Simmons brought up third-and-9. Ibn Williams made a beautiful catch on the third-down play, but he was ruled out of bounds, resulting in a punt on fourth down.

Madison, starting a drive at its own 21, had a huge pass play that took the Cowboys down to the Union 27. It was third-and-5 after two run plays when Crumity kept the ball and picked up enough yardage for a first down. A flag for holding backed the Cowboys up.

It looked as if the Tigers had made a stop on the next play, but the running back emerged from the pile and scored a touchdown with 1:29 left in the first quarter. The Cowboys' two-point conversion was no good, which put the score at 13-0.

A pass from Trenton Klein to Bryan Tyson and a quarterback

keeper by Klein brought up third-and-1 for the Tigers heading into the second quarter. A carry by C.J. Ivey picked up enough yardage for a first down at the Union 36. A pass to Gavin Jenkins was good for a touchdown with 11:09 to go in the second quarter. Klein kept the ball on the two-point conversion and made it into the end zone, making the score 13-8.

A great kick by Jenkins, with the Madison returner stumbling, set the Cowboys up at their own 21. A first-down handoff picked up about 5 yards. A handoff on the next play saw the back taking it all the way for a touchdown with 10:32 left in the second quarter. An offside penalty on Union on the extra-point attempt was declined, but the Tigers were penalized for being offside again. Madison accepted the second penalty and successfully went for two, making the score 21-8.

The Tigers began their next series at their own 20. A keeper by Klein picked up a few yards before a fumble occurred. Madison recovered at the 25-yard line.

A run around left end by the Cowboys was good for a first down at the 12-yard line. Three more run attempts left Madison facing a fourth down. Another run was good for a touchdown and a 27-8 Cowboys lead with 9:05 left in the second quarter. The extra point was no good.

Madison was penalized on the kickoff and had to re-kick. Ivey

received the low kick, which put the Union offense at its own 40-yard line. Simmons carried the ball and picked up enough for a first down at the Madison 47. Klein threw two incomplete passes before completing one to Tyson for another first down at the 28-yard line.

After a false-start penalty, Klein picked up a couple of yards on a keeper. A double-pass play on third down resulted in an incompleteness on Tyson to Jenkins in the end zone. Klein's pass on fourth down was incomplete, which had Madison taking over at its own 31-yard line.

Madison picked up a whole lot of yards on a run play to the Union 32. After a run for 4 yards, another run saw the back break about three tackles on the way to another touchdown with 4:03 to go in the half. The extra point was good, making the score 34-8.

The second half began with Simmons returning Madison's kickoff to the Union 37. A Klein pass to Tyson picked up 5 yards. After Simmons was held to a 1-yard gain, a third-down pass went over Jenkins' head. Klein completed a pass to Simmons on fourth down, but it left the Tigers short of a first down.

Madison took over at the Union 44 and was penalized twice, with the result being the Cowboys had a first-and-25 at

See UCHS, page 14



Ar'Nayshia Griffin (second from left) drives to the basket in the Tornadoes' 53-45 win over Columbia.

BHS girls are 2-2 after win over Columbia

BY CLIFF SMELLEY
cliff@bctelegraph.com

Cherish Bing and Ar'Nayshia Griffin scored every point during an 11-0 fourth-quarter run as the Bradford High School girls basketball team defeated visiting Columbia 53-45 on Dec. 3.

The Class 3A Tornadoes (2-2) were coming off a 56-20 loss to Rural Class Williston on Nov. 30 and got off to a rough start against Class 5A Columbia. Bradford committed eight turnovers in the

first quarter and trailed 9-4 at one point.

Bradford eventually tied it up at the free-throw line, making 5 of 6 attempts. Two foul shots by Griffin to start the second quarter made the score 9-9.

A Griffin defensive rebound led to a transition basket by Nichelle Brown, while a drive by Griffin resulted in another score, putting the Tornadoes up 13-9.

See BHS, page 13

Legal Notices

Legals for the week of Dec. 5, 2024

BRADFORD

NOTICE OF INTENT TO USE UNIFORM METHOD OF COLLECTING NON-AD VALOREM SPECIAL ASSESSMENTS AND NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

The Board of County Commissioners (the "Board") of Bradford County, Florida (the "County") hereby provides notice, pursuant to Section 197.3632(3)(a), Florida Statutes, of its intent to use the uniform method of collecting non-ad valorem assessments for more than one year to fund annual costs incurred by the County in providing fire protection and emergency medical services. The uniform method allows for the collection of non-ad valorem assessments, sometimes referred to as special assessments, on the annual property tax bill mailed each November by the county tax collector. The Board will consider the adoption of a resolution electing to use the uniform collection method, commencing in November 2025, at a public hearing to be held at 6:30 p.m. on December 19, 2024, at the County Commission Chambers located at 945 North Temple Avenue, Starke, Florida 32091.

Such resolution will state the need for the levy and will contain a legal description of the boundaries of the real property subject to the levy. The non-ad valorem assessments may be levied within the entire County; provided, however, that the imposition and collection of non-ad valorem assessments from any incorporated area of the County shall be subject to the consent by ordinance of the governing body of the affected municipality as required by section 125.01(1)(g), Florida Statutes. The resolution does not impose any assessments, it only preserves the County's ability to collect assessments on the annual property tax bill beginning in November 2025, if the Board takes additional steps before then to impose fire protection assessments. Such additional steps include public hearing and mailed notice at least twenty (20) days before the public hearing to all owners of real property subject to the assessments. Copies of the proposed form of resolution are on file at the office of the County Manager, 945 North Temple Avenue, Starke, Florida 32091. All interested persons are invited to attend the public hearing. In the event any person decides to appeal any decision by the Board with respect to any matter relating to the consideration of the resolution at the referenced public hearing, a record of the proceeding may be needed and in such an event, such person may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the public hearing is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence on which the appeal is

to be based. In accordance with the American with Disabilities Act, persons needing a special accommodation of an interpreter to participate in these proceedings should contact the County Manager at (904) 966-6327, at least 48 hours prior to the time of the hearing.

Board of County Commissioners of Bradford County, Florida
Publish on the following dates:
November 21, 2024, November 28, 2024, December 5, 2024, December 12, 2024

11/21 4tchg 12/12-BCT

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING CONCERNING A VARIANCE AS PROVIDED FOR IN THE BRADFORD COUNTY LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

BY THE BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT OF BRADFORD COUNTY, FLORIDA, NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that, pursuant to the Bradford County Land Development Regulations, as amended, hereinafter referred to as the Land Development Regulations, objections, recommendations and comments concerning a variance, as described below, will be heard by the Board of Adjustment of Bradford County, Florida, at a public hearing on December 19th, 2024 at 6:00 p.m. or as soon thereafter as the matter can be heard, in the County Commission Meeting Room, North Wing, County Courthouse located at 945 N. Temple Avenue in Starke, Florida. V 24-09 an application by Dan Brejcha to request a Variance be granted as provided for in Section 4.7 "RE", 4.7.7 Minimum Yard setbacks from a required 10' to a requested 5' along the exterior lot lines of the property being described as follows: Lots 1 and 2, Block 3, Santa Fe Shores, according to plat thereof recorded in Plat Book 2, Page 74, of the public records of Bradford County, Fla. and being Bradford County Parcel Number 06219-C-00100. The public hearing may be continued to one or more future dates. Any interested party shall be advised that the date, time and place of any continuation of the public hearing shall be announced during the public hearing and that no further notice concerning the matter will be published, unless said continuation exceeds six calendar weeks from the date of the above referenced public hearing. Aforementioned public hearing, all interested parties may appear to be heard with respect to the appeal. Copies of the material are available for public inspection at the Office of the Director of Zoning, Planning, and Building, County Courthouse located at 945 North Temple Avenue, North Wing, Starke, Florida, during regular business hours. All persons are advised that if they decide to appeal any decision made at the above referenced public hearing, they will need a record of the proceedings, and that, for

such purpose, they may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. 12/5 1tchg-BCT

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BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF BRADFORD COUNTY, FLORIDA

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the Board of County Commissioners of Bradford County, Florida shall hold a public hearing on Thursday December 19th, 2024 at 6:30 P.M., or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard, in the Board of County Commissioners Chambers at the Bradford County Courthouse, located at 945 N. Temple Avenue in Starke, Florida, to consider the exercise of its authority pursuant to Chapter 177.101(3), Florida Statutes, to vacate Lots 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28 of C.J. Weeks Sub-Division of the Town of Hampton, in the SW1/4 of the SE1/4 of Section 19, Township 7 South, Range 22 East, Bradford County, Florida as it pertains to the following Bradford County Parcel Number;

04929-0-02300

Copies of materials related to this public hearing may be obtained by any member of the public at the Office of the Zoning Department, located at 945 North Temple Avenue, Starke, Florida, during regular business hours (Monday through Friday, exclusive of holidays, from 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M.). On the date, time and place first above mentioned, all interested persons may appear and be heard with respect to this matter. The public hearing may be continued to one or more future dates. Any interested party shall be advised that the date, time and place of any continuation of the public hearing shall be announced during the public hearing and that no further notice concerning the matter will be published.

All persons are advised that, if they decide to appeal any decision made at the public hearing, they will need a record of the proceedings and, for such purpose, they may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. Persons with disabilities who require assistance to participate in the meeting are requested to notify the Clerk of the Court, Bradford County Courthouse, Starke, Florida, 904-966-6280 at least two business days in advance; if you are hearing or voice impaired call 1-800-955-8771. 12/5 1tchg-BCT

DEFENDANTS, AMENDED CLERK'S NOTICE OF SALE UNDER F.S. CHAPTER 45 NOTICE IS GIVEN that, in accordance with the Summary Final Judgment of Foreclosure dated October 28, 2024, and Amended Final Judgment of Foreclosure dated October 31, 2024, in the above styled cause, I will sell to the highest and best bidder for cash on the Courthouse steps, Union County Courthouse, 55 West Main Street, Lake Butler, Union County, Florida, at 11:00 A.M. on January 23, 2025, the following described property: Lot 4, PALMETTO COMMONS, a subdivision according to the plat thereof as recorded in Plat Book 3, Page 4, on file in the office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court in and for Union County, Florida. Tax Parcel Identification Number: 01-05-18-1L-000-040-0 ANY PERSON CLAIMING AN INTEREST IN THE SURPLUS FROM THE SALE, IF ANY, OTHER THAN THE PROPERTY OWNER AS OF THE DATE OF THE LIS PENDENS FILED HEREIN MUST FILE A CLAIM WITH THIS COURT WITHIN SIXTY (60) DAYS AFTER THE DATE OF THE SALE. Dated this 20th day of November, 2024.

KELLIE HENDRICKS RHOADES, Clerk of Courts
BY: Crystal Hollingsworth Deputy Clerk
CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE I CERTIFY that a true and correct copy of the foregoing has been furnished by United States Mail, or electronic mail on this 20th of November, 2024, to the following: LUBOV BOGOPOLSKAYA 1317 EDGEWATER DR STE 1917 ORLANDO, FL 32804 THE COMMONS LANDOWNERS' ASSOCIATION, INC., 1826 SW SR 47 LAKE CITY, FL 32025 Bonnie S. Green, Esquire, attorney for Plaintiff, @ bonniengreen@darbypeele.com and deloresbrannen@darbypeele.com. BY: C. Hollingsworth, Deputy Clerk 11/28 2tchg 12/5-UCT

The Union County Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS) Planning Committee is to meet on Thursday, December 17, 2024, at 10a (EST) via Teams. The County encourages any interested citizens and business owners to attend and provide input. The Committee guides the preparation of the Union County LMS, which serves as a plan to reduce the community's long-term risk for protecting people and property from the effects of natural disasters and to build a safer and stronger community. Please contact Tim Allen at allentc@unionsheriff.us for a Teams invite if interested. 12/5 2tchg 12/12-UCT

UNION

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT, EIGHTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, IN AND FOR UNION COUNTY, FLORIDA CASE NUMBER: 63-2024-CA-0015 BULLARD-DENUNE INVESTMENT CO., a Florida corporation, Plaintiff, vs. LUBOV BOGOPOLSKAYA, and THE COMMONS LANDOWNERS' ASSOCIATION, INC., a Florida non-profit corporation,

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Dec. 10 last day to donate to Holidays with Heroes with Heroes

Donations are being accepted until 5 p.m. on Dec. 10 for the upcoming Holidays with Heroes event, which continues the tradition of Starke Shop with a Cop.

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Bradford Sheriff Charitable Foundation is a registered 501(c)(3) entity.

KHHS is in top 10 in 2 sports with release of state's 2024 fall academic teams

BY CLIFF SMELLEY
cliff@bctelegraph.com

Keystone Heights High School had five athletic teams included with the release of the Florida High School Athletic Association Fall Academic Champions, with

the Indians having two teams earn top-10 honors with their cumulative grade-point average.

Academic Champions are named for each sport in each classification. A team with a cumulative GPA of at least 3.0 on an unweighted scale of 4.0 can be nominated by its athletic director.

Keystone had the seventh highest GPA of 3.173 in Class 2A football and was the third highest public-school team. Clearwater Calvary Christian had the highest GPA of 3.553.

Also finishing ahead of Keystone were Tampa Berkeley Prep, Pinecrest Gulliver Prep, West Palm Beach Kings Academy, Coconut Creek North Broward Prep and Santa Rosa Beach South Walton.

The Indians had the ninth highest GPA of 3.822 in Class 2A girls cross country and had

the third highest GPA for a public school. Fort Lauderdale NSU University had the highest GPA of 3.94.

Other teams ahead of Keystone were Merritt Island Edgewood, Winter Park Trinity Prep, Cape Coral Oasis, Montverde Academy, Orlando Lake Highland Prep, Jacksonville Episcopal and Gainesville Eastside.

Keystone finished just outside of the top 10 in Class 3A volleyball, with a GPA of 3.496. That was good for 13th and third highest among public schools.

Berkeley Prep had the highest GPA of 3.885.

The Indians were 30th in Class 1A boys golf with a GPA of 3.335 and 31st in Class 2A boys cross country with a GPA of 3.362.

Fort Lauderdale Pine Crest topped the 1A boys golf teams with a GPA of 3.909, while

Berkeley Prep's GPA of 3.967 was highest in 2A boys cross country.

KHHS soccer teams return to action, with the girls defeating Crescent 5-1

BY CLIFF SMELLEY
cliff@bctelegraph.com

The Keystone Heights High School soccer teams played their first matches after the Thanksgiving break, with the girls team defeating host Crescent City 5-1 win on Dec. 2.

It was the third straight win for the Indians (6-2-1).

Halea Lam scored two goals, while Tayler Buchanan, Parker Collins and Kayden Huntley each scored one.

Park led the team in assists with two. Buchanan and Huntley had one each.

Goalie Aspen Krohn made six saves.

It wasn't as good of a result for the boys team, which traveled to Alachua and lost 8-0 to District 4-3A opponent Santa Fe on Dec. 2.

The loss snapped a four-match winning streak for the Indians (5-2-1).

Keystone's teams will travel to Fernandina Beach on Friday, Dec. 6, with the girls playing at 5:30 p.m. and the boys playing at 7:20 p.m.

On Tuesday, Dec. 10, the girls team travels to play Middleburg at 7:20 p.m.

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Live, silent auctions raise \$8K for Bradford County 4-H

BY CLIFF SMELLEY
cliff@bctelegraph.com

A postponement didn't seem to affect the attendance at the Bradford County 4-H auction, with the assembled crowd inside Starke's Gov. Charley E. Johns Conference Center combining to raise a little more than \$8,000 in support of 4-H youth.

The event, which was held Nov. 7, didn't take place on its original date of Oct. 10 due to Hurricane Milton.

"I'm really excited to see such a great turnout here tonight, especially considering this event got pushed back a whole month," "We are very grateful for you all who showed up tonight. Thank you for that."

Guests, who enjoyed a meal provided by Hill's BBQ and Catering, were able to take part in both silent and live auctions. The silent auction raised \$2,084, while the live auction resulted in a total sale of \$6,110.

Hunter Williams served as auctioneer, doing his best to get the most amount of money he could out of 28 items in the live auction. He also generated laughter with some of his comments on items.

A Skull Mounts by Zack voucher, which was good for one alligator, bear, deer or hog skull mount, prompted Williams to say, "It is pretty self-explanatory, but you do have to provide the animal. It will not be provided for you."

When he felt the item wasn't generating enough bids, Williams said, "You all must not be real good shots. You don't have very much confidence in yourself."

When it came time to bid on a Death-by-Chocolate cake made by Pam Whitehead, Williams said, "It looks like diabetes in a bowl, but you don't have to worry about it until tomorrow. You've got to eat it first."

One item was a quilt made by Virginia Crews that featured the image of a tractor. When the 4-H members who were displaying the item for bidders unfolded it,



Avery Crawford (left), a 4-H member, wheeled out this Traeger grill for display at auctioneer Hunter Williams recognizes bids.



Klayton Knipp (left) and Avery Crawford exhibit the auction's first item — a wooden, toy barn with horses, made by the Horsin' Around 4-H club.

the tractor was pointing upward.

"The tractor's going uphill," said Williams, who later added, "That's a fancy tractor there. It goes straight up. I haven't ever seen another one like it in all my

life."

The quilt, which sold for \$240, was one of 15 items that sold for \$200 or more. A TriStar Viper G2 20-gauge youth-model shotgun donated by Bradford Gun sold

for \$600, while two items sold for at least \$400: a strawberry cake made by Virginia Autry sold for \$420, while a Traeger Pro 22 pellet grill donated by Hamilton Farms sold for \$400.

Some other items that generated the most money included:

—Blackstone 28-inch two-burner griddle donated by Hamilton Custom Services, \$360.

—Stihl FS 91 R weed trimmer donated by Ag-Pro, \$320.

—Carrot cake made by Barry Whitehead, \$300.

—Pecan cheesecake made by Lori Caren, \$300.

—Hummingbird cake made by Crystal Elixson, \$280.

—Certificate for cattle fitting and clipping donated by Clay Whitehead, \$270.

—Gift-card basket donated by Green Acres 4-H Club, \$260.

—Certificate for four round bales of hay donated by Terry Whitehead, \$260.

—Wooden American flag made by Brown Acres Woodworks club, \$240.

—Certificate for 20 square bales of hay donated by Joe Hendricks, \$210.

—DeWalt drill set, crescent-wrench set and LED work light donated by Jackson Building Supply, \$200.

The cake made by Lori Caren was the night's last item, so Williams did his best to encourage the bidders to go all out, saying the cake was "the most popular thing" in the auction.

"I bet that's what you came here for," Williams said, adding, "It's a pecan cheesecake that is known in all parts of India, Afghanistan and the other half of the world. If you haven't ever had it, it's worth it. It's worth the money. I don't care what it brings — \$2,000 — it's worth it."

Barry Whitehead donated five items to the auction, including four Boston butts he would smoke and have ready for pick up the day before Thanksgiving.



Sterling Westbrook (right), agricultural program assistant, hands a cake to Kameron Dyal, who was one of the 4-H youth who exhibited items during the auction.

The butts collectively sold for \$480.

As an event that benefitted the 4-H program, it, of course, featured the help of several 4-H youth. Lane Hartley and Saylor Rhoden led the crowd in the pledge of allegiance and the 4-H pledge, while Dylan Brown provided the blessing for the meal. Youth also displayed the auction items, walking them around the room so bidders could get a better look.

During a break in the live auction, 4-H member Shayna Durrance presented a speech that earned her third place at the state level and qualified her for nationals (see related story).

Scarborough made a few brief remarks about 4-H, though she assumed many people there knew all about the organization.

"I'm assuming most of you in this room know what 4-H is if you're here supporting it. Right? It is an awesome, youth-development organization," Scarborough said. "You probably think of 4-H and think agriculture, but we do a lot of things beyond agriculture as well."

Scarborough said the Bradford program currently consists of nine community clubs, one after-



Zion Tyson is ready to show off one of seven cakes that were auctioned off. The cakes collectively brought in a total of \$1,570. Cakes made by Virginia Autry and Barry Whitehead sold for \$420 and \$300, respectively.

school club and one livestock-judging team.

"We are doing well in all areas and working on expanding our reach throughout the county and

See AUCTION, page 12

Durrance finds her passion and confidence in livestock judging

BY CLIFF SMELLEY
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A roomful of people provided good practice for Bradford County 4-H member Shayna Durrance, who'll be competing at the national level in public speaking in Denver in January.

Durrance had the chance to speak at the Bradford 4-H auction, which was held Nov. 7 at Starke's Gov. Charley E. Johns Conference Center.

"I thought it would be a good idea to let Miss Shayna showcase her public speech about her journey of livestock judging," Bradford 4-H Youth Development Agent Bailea Scarborough said, noting that it would be the largest crowd Durrance had spoken in front of.

The speech earned Durrance first place at the district level and third place at the state level.

"We're very proud of her and proud to send her to nationals and help support her," Scarborough said.

Durrance began by telling the crowd she is 16 and president of her 4-H club, Green Acres. She



Shayna Durrance presented her speech which earned her first place in public speaking at the district level and third place at the state level, which qualified her for nationals.

has shown rabbits since she was 4 and has exhibited breeding and market cattle for eight years.

"Throughout the years, I've had many successes and accomplishments — too many to mention in a speech," Durrance

said. "However, I am going to be talking about the one that's taught me the most life skills in the past three years. That is being on the state-champion livestock-judging team from Bradford 4-H."

"In 2019, I competed in my first livestock-judging contest. For those who don't know, livestock judging is where you judge a class of four animals to determine how well of a breeding animal they'll be in the future or how well of a market animal they'll be at slaughter and eventually on your plate.

"I agreed to try judging even though I knew nothing about it."

The result was a second-place finish for her and her team in the Junior division.

"This sparked my love and interest for judging," Durrance said. "I participated in my first judging camp in the summer of 2019 in Union County. On our mock-contest day, I placed a class of market hogs, breeding does and breeding ewes correctly.

"My love and interest grew even more."

Durrance said she waited approximately three years for an opportunity to be part of a judging team. That occurred in October 2021 when Bradford Extension Livestock and Natural Resources Agent Lizzie Whitehead decided to start a Bradford team.

"I started going to practices weekly and learning more of the basics," Durrance said. "When it came time to learn how to write and say reasons, which is an explanation of why you placed the class the way you did, I was beyond nervous. Public speaking in a room with someone I didn't know was one of my worst fears."

"I just kept going to practice and giving 110 percent to be the best for the team."

The first year saw the team compete in a few contests and do "exceptionally well," Durrance said. She then attended the University of Florida judging camp in the summer of 2022.

"I was placed in the advanced

See SPEECH, page 11

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SPEECH

Continued from page 10

group, which helps more with reasons than it does with placing classes," Durrance said. "This camp helped get me more comfortable in the reasons room and improved my reasons sets tremendously."

Durrance said when practices for her Bradford 4-H team resumed, the team not only had Whitehead as coach, but also Kyle Dyksterhouse and Carson Williams as assistant coaches. Dyksterhouse competed collegiately out west, while Willison was on a successful high-school team.

"These two worked with us one-on-one in the reasons room and with sorting through classes," Durrance said. "Over time, they wanted my reasons

sets to be longer, which requires a lot of memorization skills. With their help of finding a new way to set up my reasons, not only did my sets get longer, but my memorization skills improved drastically.

"We continued to practice and go to contests to get ready for the state contest in April. Little did we know, the four-man team from Bradford County would be named the 2023 Florida 4-H State-Champion Livestock-Judging Team."

Durrance and her team would compete at the national level in Louisville, Kentucky, which had them fundraising and practicing over the summer. Durrance's summer also consisted of attending several judging camps, including one at the University of Tennessee.

"This one stood out to me the most, though," she said of the Tennessee camp. "We got

to work one-on-one with the college's team in the reasons room. They gave me many tips and tricks for nationals.

"Staying at this camp and at hotels for other contests taught me how important it is to always be responsible for yourself and punctual.

"At the camp, we got to stay in a dorm room with one roommate. It gave you the feeling of being on your own and being an adult, and you had to be on time for the camp.

"That's not the only thing I took home from this camp. On the back of our camp T-shirts, there's a quote that I not only use in livestock judging, but in every competitive event that I compete in. It's a quote by (legendary UT Women's Basketball Coach) Pat Summitt, and it says, 'Here's how I'm going to beat you. I'm going to outwork you. That's it. That's all there is to it.'"

Still, Durrance admitted she was nervous about competing at nationals.

"My number-one fear was I was going to bomb all of my classes and all of my reasons sets," she said. "There was one thing that gave me hope. In the wise words of Mr. Clay Whitehead with the UF Animal Sciences department, 'It's your opinion. If you want to be wrong, then be wrong.' He said this during a restaurant debate while we were in Louisville.

"We placed 20th out of 30 teams and all (team members) had some personal highs. The personal high I'm the most proud of is talking to 48 out of 50 on a set of market-hog reasons."

Durrance, after presenting her reasons as she did at nationals, said, "Although I cannot compete at the state contest again, I can still compete at county fairs and other smaller contests.

"In the past three years, I have competed in a total of 27 contests. Only six of those I came home empty handed — one of them being nationals. At the end of the day, the ribbons and banners you get are just something to say, 'I did good on this one day.' What really matters is what you learn and hold onto for the future.

"Livestock judging has taught me how important it is to always be responsible for yourself and to be punctual. It has helped me improve my memory skills drastically, which not only helps in the reasons room, but on other teams I compete on as well.

"Livestock judging has taught me how to work professionally with people who make it difficult, how to receive constructive criticism and use it to better myself. Livestock judging has taught me how to be respectful and mature, even when it's hard.

"Most importantly, livestock

judging has helped me with my public speaking. Without it, I wouldn't be up here speaking in front of you today."

Durrance said her future plans include competing on a junior-college team out west and then transferring to the University of Tennessee to compete.

Livestock judging became a passion and has had a tremendous impact on Durrance.

"In the words of Dr. Harlan Ritchie with the University of Michigan at the Animal Sciences department, 'Judging brings out the confidence in those who may be timid and humbles those who tend to be conceited.' I couldn't agree more.

"Livestock judging has done so much for me and has taught me so much. I will always cherish it and never take it for granted.

"This has been my journey of judging. Thank you."



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the Bradford County Road Department, 812 B North Grand St. in Starke or from the County's website at www.bradfordcounty-fl.gov The deadline for accepting applications is December 19, 2024, before the close business. Bradford County is an Equal Opportunity Employer. For questions, please call. (904) 966-6243.

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Obituaries

Ruth Browning

Ruth Browning, 83, of Starke, died Tuesday, Nov. 26, 2024. She was preceded in death by her parents; and her husband, Irvin Browning.

Survivors are three children, Gary Browning, Kenneth Browning and Debra McKeown; three sisters; and extended family members

Visitation will be from 12 p.m. until 1 p.m. at the DeWitt C. Jones Chapel on Thursday, Dec. 5. Funeral services will start at 1 p.m. Interment will follow at Sapp Cemetery.

Arrangements are by Jones-Gallagher Funeral Home of Starke 904-964-6200 www.jonesgallagherfh.com.

Doris Coburn

Doris C. "Chris" Coburn, 89, of Gainesville died Monday, Nov. 18, 2024, after an extended illness. In addition to her parents; she was preceded in death by her husband, Henry E. Coburn; and three sisters.

She is survived by her son, Doug (Margie) Coburn; stepson, Kyle (Mary) Coburn; sister, Audrey Rundle; and extended family members.

A graveside service was held Saturday, Nov. 23. Interment was at Forest Meadows Cemetery.

Arrangements are under the care of Milam Funeral Home, 311 S. Main St., Gainesville, 32601. 352-376-5361. www.milamfh.com

Faith Dearing

Faith "Candy" Evangeline Dearing, 84, of Starke died Wednesday, Nov. 27, 2024, at her residence. She was born in Binghamton, New York on May 1, 1940, to the late Clarence Earl McDonald and Gertha "Peggy" Amy White McDonald. She was preceded in death by her parents; seven brothers; and five sisters.

Survivors are five children, all of Florida; many grandchildren, and extended family and friends.

A private Celebration of Life will be held at her residence.

Arrangements are under the care and direction of V. Todd Ferreira Funeral Services, Starke. 904-964-5757.



Amos Desue

Amos Desue, 93, passed away Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2024. He was a lifelong resident of Starke and attended the local schools of Bradford County. He served in the Marine Corps and received an honorable discharge.

Survivors are four sons, Glenn Desue, Nicholas Lamoree, Amos Lamoree, and Joseph Lamoree; two daughters, Carol Jones and Sandra Tyson; and a host of grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nieces, nephews, cousins and many friends.

A private memorial service will be scheduled at a later date.

Arrangements by Haile Funeral Home Inc., 802 Oak St., Starke.

PAID OBITUARY

Peter Henry

Peter "Pete" Charles Henry, 64, of Brooker went to his heavenly home on Monday, Nov. 25, 2024, at UF Health Shands Hospital in Gainesville. He was born in Portsmouth, Virginia on April 12, 1960, to the late Isaac Thurston Henry and Grace Kathryn Bessent Henry. He was raised in Portsmouth, Virginia until moving to Brooker in 1967. He graduated from Bradford High School in 1978 and began his journey at Trinity Bible College in Dunedin. He met the love of his life and forever companion, Valerie Marie Griner, through his church, and they were happily married on June 7, 1980. As newlyweds they resided in Safety Harbor for a few years and came back to Brooker until he started his career in the military. In October of 1984, he proudly joined the United States Army, where he served for 15 years. He and his family traveled the world; first being stationed in Fort Louis, Washington, then Baumholder, Germany, Idar Ober Stein Rheinland Pfalz, Germany, Ft. Stewart, Georgia, back to Baumholder, Germany, and finally Fort Campbell, Kentucky. In 1999, he retired from the military as a Staff Sergeant, and they returned home to Brooker. He had great knowledge in carpentry and built leadership skills while in the military. Both qualities were very valuable in his career transition to roadway contracting. He began his career at CDM Contracting in Lake Butler and was currently serving as their vice president. Pete was an amazing man, with great knowledge; but his faith in his Lord and Savior was key to his success. He led a life of service; to God, to his country, and to his family. He was hard-working, never had idle hands, used his gifts to bless others and had the heart of a servant. He started serving in the ministry as a deacon in 1987 at Trinity Baptist Church and in 2002 at Northside Baptist Church. He was devoted to furthering God's Kingdom, spreading the gospel and leading the lost to the Lord. He was a family man who cherished every moment with his beloved wife, children, and grandchildren. He found great joy in spending time with his family, friends, and church family. He was a true treasure, was deeply loved and will be forever missed. His legacy of love, hard-work ethic, leadership, and devotion to the Lord will continue to impact generations to come. He was preceded in death by his parents; and brothers, Wayne Henry and Larry Henry.

Pete is survived by his loving wife of 44 years, Valerie Henry of Brooker; children, Theresa (Rodney) Frazier of Brooker, Christine Henry of Cleveland, Ohio, Joshua (Jessica) Henry of Danville, Indiana, and Ashley (Thomas) Alvarez of Brooker; sisters, April (A.J.) Sontag of Cincinnati, Ohio and Vicky (Tommy) Carter of Wausau; grandchildren, Tavian Frazier, Emma Frazier, Kylie Rae Henry, Kamryn Henry, Liam Alvarez, Lincoln Alvarez, and Juliet Alvarez; along with several extended family members and friends.

A memorial Celebration of Life was held on Tuesday, Dec. 3, at Northside Baptist Church with Pastor Chris Davis officiating. The family received friends an hour prior to the service at the church.

Arrangements were under the care and direction of V. Todd Ferreira Funeral Services and Archie Tanner Memorial Chapel, Starke. 904-964-5757. Visit www.ferreifuneralservices.com to sign the family's guest book.

PAID OBITUARY



Logan Hunter

Logan Harrison Hunter, 20, of Starke, died Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2024, at UF Health Shands Hospital in Gainesville.

Survivors are his parents, Sherry (Dalton Russell) Hunter, and Benjamin Lee Hunter; brothers, Coleby Lee (Stormy) Hunter and Briar Lane Hunter; sister, Layla Kristine Bradley; and extended family members and friends.

A graveside celebration of life was held Sunday, Dec. 1, 2024, at Santa Fe Cemetery.

Arrangements were under the care and direction of V. Todd Ferreira Funeral Services, Starke. 904-964-5757.



Ollie Powell

Ollie Wayne Powell, 81, of Melrose, died at his home on Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2024.

Survivors are his wife, Karen Johnson Powell; daughters, Elaine (Terry) Meyer, Cynthia (Sean) Gall and Jennifer Powell; two brothers; and numerous extended family members and friends.

A Celebration of Life was held Tuesday, Nov. 26, at Community Church of Keystone Heights. Interment followed at Forest Meadows Memorial Park East in Gainesville.

Arrangements were under the care of Milam Funeral Home, Inc., 311 S. Main St., Gainesville, 32601. 352-376-5361. www.milamfh.com

Ruby Tennant

Ruby Jeanette Underhill Tennant, 85, of Starke, passed away peacefully on Friday, Nov. 29, 2024, at Cedar Hill Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in Jacksonville.

She was born in Wilson, North Carolina on June 15, 1939, to the late Richard Reddin Page and Mary Magdonline Hawley Page. She was raised in North Carolina and graduated from Lee Woodard High School in 1957. Shortly after graduating, she started her first job at Kings Department Store. In 1960, she married Grover Linwood Underhill. She was a devoted wife and treasured being a mother. After Grover and Ruby were married, she stayed home to take care of her family. Later in life, she resided in Norfolk, Virginia for a season and finally made Bradford County her home in 1999, where she met her second husband, Ed Tennant. More than anything, she loved her family, enjoyed spending precious time with them and cherished making memories.

She was preceded in death by her parents; spouses, Grover Linwood Underhill and Ed Tennant; her son, Linwood Wayne Underhill; brothers, James Page and Raymond Page; and sisters, Shirley Page Goodwin, Mary Page Matson, and Loretta Page Denardo.

She is survived by her son, Phillip Underhill; stepchildren, Ed Tennant, Chad Tennant, Dwayne Tennant, and Ramona Petry; sister, Judy Page Burnette of Richmond, North Carolina; many grandchildren; and several extended family members and friends.

Her family will celebrate her life privately.

Arrangements are under the care and direction of V. Todd Ferreira Funeral Services and Archie Tanner Memorial Chapel, Starke. 904-964-5757.

PAID OBITUARY



John W. Hersey

John Wayne Hersey, 78, of Theresa passed away Monday, Nov. 25, 2024, in Palatka, following an extended illness. He was born Jan. 16, 1946, in Starke to Clyde and Geneva (Alford) Hersey. He graduated with the Class of 1964 from Bradford High School, where he was elected Senior Class President and Starke Chapter FFA President. He then attended Orlando Barber College and worked in Deland and Palatka after passing the State Boards Exam. In 1965, he enlisted in the Florida Army National Guard and began working full time with them in December 1968. In 2005, he retired after a total of 39 years, nine months, and one day of dedicated service. Following his retirement from the National Guard, he decided to run for Bradford County Commissioner and was elected for two terms, November 2002 to November 2010. Now that he was "fully" retired, he said he could do whatever he wanted, (within reason). He was a longtime and dedicated member of Hope Baptist Church, where he served as church clerk and on the Board of Trustees for 46 years. He was also past president of the Civitan Club of Starke, past secretary of Starke Rotary Club, and past president and co-founder of Theresa Volunteer Fire Department (which was very near and dear to his heart). He was an avid Florida Gator and Green Bay Packers fan, he enjoyed being outdoors gardening and, especially, hunting, but most of all, he loved spending time with his family and friends. He was known for ALWAYS giving a helping hand to anyone in need (and sometimes not in need) and was known for his witty and great sense of humor. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his siblings, Raymond Hersey, Elbert Hersey, Dwight Hersey, Denise Hersey Norman, Becky Newham Reddish and William Newham.

Left behind to cherish his memory is his much devoted and defiantly loving wife of 58 wonderful years, Peggy (Crenshaw) Hersey; their children, Jason (Dawn) Hersey, Holly Hersey (Benji) Bass, and Heather Hersey (Shane) Bass; siblings, Margaret (Hersey) Brannen, Donald Hersey, DeWitt Hersey, Doley Hersey, Lancin Hersey, and David Newham. He was lovingly called "Papa" by Ethan Bass, Ansley Bass, Colten (Cherith) Bass, Jake Bass, Jackson Hersey, Kimber Hersey, and Gabriel Richie.

Services were held Wednesday, Nov. 27, at Sampson City Church of God with Mr. Johnny Frampton officiating. Interment followed at Hope Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations can be made to Samaritan's Purse.

Arrangements were under the care of Milam Funeral Home, Inc., 311 S. Main St., Gainesville, 32601. 352-376-5361. www.milamfh.com

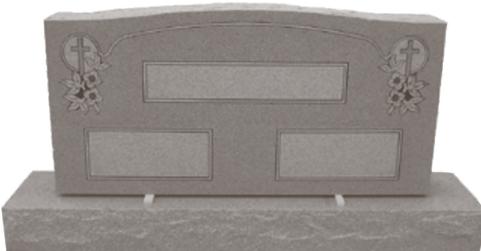
PAID OBITUARY



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Jennifer T. Arrubla, Esq

Cleaners), with DLPbank's name being drawn.

Besides DLPbank, table sponsors were AAA Hay and Trucking, Belle Oaks Barn, Bradford County Farm Bureau, Bradford County Sheriff's Office, Broome and Durrance families, C&S Site Prep and Thompson's Garage, Bradford County Commissioner Diane Andrews, Crews family, Darling Ingredients Inc., Focused Vision Education Consultants, LLC, Hamilton Farms, Pipeline Contractors Inc., Rockin' N Farms (Ray and Nancy Norman), Suburban Carpet Cleaners, Whitehead Family Cattle and the Wilson family.

Follow what's happening with Bradford 4-H on Facebook (UF IFAS Extension Bradford County 4-H). You may also call 904-966-6224 for more information.

AUCTION

Continued from page 10

providing more opportunities for youth here." Scarborough said.

Scarborough thanked those who donated items for both auctions as well as those who were table sponsors. The table sponsors were entered into a drawing for an Igloo cooler (donated by Suburban Carpet



BHS
Continued from page 8

The Tornadoes scored 11 of the final 17 points of the half. Griffin sank a three-pointer off a Brown assist. Brown later knocked down back-to-back three-pointers off Griffin assists. Griffin later added a two-point bucket to help Bradford take a 26-22 lead into halftime.

Griffin, who finished with 24 points, scored all but four of her team's 12 third-quarter points.

It was a 28-28 game when Griffin sank two free throws after getting fouled on a drive to the basket. An offensive rebound and putback by Griffin put Bradford up 32-29. She later grabbed a defensive rebound and dribbled the length of the court for another score, making it 34-29.

Griffin would add one more basket that was part of a 10-2 run to close out the quarter. Kailyn



Cherish Bing (second from right) puts up a shot in the lane in the fourth quarter against Columbia.

Teal had a rebound putback in the final seconds that sent the Tornadoes into the fourth quarter leading 38-30.

Bradford's 11-0 fourth-quarter run began with Bing scoring on a drive to the basket. Griffin sank a trey on a Brown assist and later scored under the basket, drawing a foul and making the ensuing free throw. Brown then assisted on another three-pointer — this time by Bing. The run put the Tornadoes up 52-35.

Brown and Bing finished with 10 and seven points, respectively.

Wynter Barrington added four points, while Teal, Kahmyra Hankerson, Ky'lee Johnson and Nyasia Lopey each had two.

The Tornadoes travel to play P.K. Yonge on Friday, Dec. 6, at 7 p.m. Bradford then hosts Episcopal on Tuesday, Dec. 10, at 7 p.m.

Prior to Dec. 3, P.K. Yonge was 0-4, while Episcopal was 2-2.

HCA boys win 2nd straight

Aiden Wilson prepares to put up a shot in Hope Christian Academy's 50-42 win over Westwood on Dec. 2. The Lions have won two in a row and are now 2-2. They travel to Ocala to play First Assembly on Monday, Dec. 9, and then to Jasper to play Corinth. Both games tip off at 6 p.m. Photo by Chris Amis.

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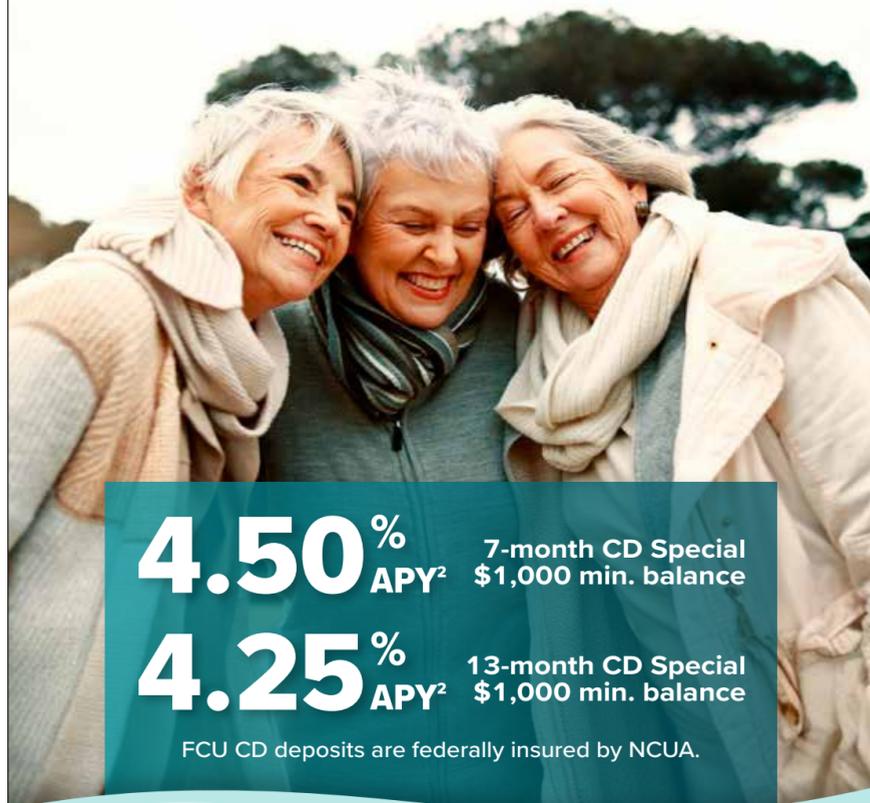
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UCHS

Continued from page 8

their own 41. They got 8 of those yards back on a run play, but a running back was stopped at the line of scrimmage on second down. Another handoff resulted in the back being dropped for a loss. Madison punted, with Simmons making a fair catch at his own 25-yard line.

Tyson caught a pass, but was tackled as soon as he caught it, bringing up second-and-7. After Klein was met at the line of scrimmage on a keeper, he completed a pass on third down to Tyson, who picked up more than enough for a first down at the 46. Three straight incompletions brought up fourth-and-10. The Cowboys intercepted a fourth-down pass attempt, which set their offense up at midfield.

The Cowboys were penalized on the first play following the turnover and backed up 5 yards. Three run plays brought up fourth-and-3. Madison received another 5-yard penalty and

punted. The ball rolled to a stop at the Union 16.

Simmons had a carry for 4 yards on first down, while Klein's pass to Jenkins on second down was batted away by Madison. Another incompletion on third down forced the Tigers to punt.

Madison again began a drive with a penalty, with the false-start call making it first-and-15. Crumity then kept the ball, but was stopped immediately by Jaden McCray. The Tigers' Williams intercepted a pass on second down, but it was ruled he was out of bounds, bringing up a third-down play for the Cowboys. An incomplete pass brought up fourth down and a punt. Union took over at its own 41-yard line.

Simmons picked up about 3 yards on a run. Ivey then got the carry and was met at the line of scrimmage. Klein completed a pass to Ashton Newsom, which brought up fourth-and-4 as the third quarter ended. The Tigers picked up the first down on a Newsom catch. Newsom then caught another pass for a first

down at the Madison 23. A pass into the end zone for Tyson was intercepted.

The Cowboys had a run of 4 yards before a Crumity carry picked up enough for a first down. Madison picked up another two first downs on runs, moving across midfield to the Union 45. Another handoff resulted in an 8-yard gain, but a flag for holding had the Cowboys facing first-and-18. Madison kept the ball on the ground for three more plays, but couldn't pick up enough for a first down. The Cowboys punted, with Simmons making a fair catch at his own 20-yard line.

Simmons then got the carry on first down, taking the ball out to the 36 for a first down. McClellon caught a pass past midfield for a first down at the Madison 49. McClellon caught another pass, but was met immediately by the Madison defense. Simmons picked up a couple of yards on a carry, bringing up third-and-6. A pass intended for Williams was intercepted at the 11-yard line.



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