

Bradford County Telegraph

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146th year, 4th Issue — \$1

Vehicle submerged during storm

BY DAN HILDEBRAN
dan@bctelegraph.com

One person was taken to a hospital after a driver steered a vehicle into a ditch between a Dollar General parking lot and State Road 21 between Keystone Heights and Melrose.

Bradford County Fire Chief Ben Carter said that when one of his engines arrived at the Winn-Dixie at the corner of State Road 21 and Southeast 31st Street, a few bystanders were already in the water with the vehicle, trying to remove someone from the silver SUV.

“One of our members who was on the special operations team entered the water and was able to swim the patient back to shore,” Carter said.

The fire chief called the bystanders heroes, adding that they called the Monday, August 5, early afternoon crash into 9-1-1 and then took action to save the driver.

“They were able to break the window and get the person partially removed from the vehicle,” Carter said, “and then our person, who’s on

the special operations team, was able to jump in and help get him the rest of the way out and swim to shore.”

Carter added that a Clay County special operations unit performed a sonar scan of the ditch between the parking lot and the road to verify that no other patients were in the water.

The fire chief declined to identify the driver’s gender or condition. However, one person on scene said the patient was not breathing when removed from the SUV.

Hurricane Debby blows down road debris

Carter also could not say whether the incident was related to Hurricane Debby, which was passing through the area at the time of the incident.

He said that visibility was degraded when he arrived at the Midway Winn-Dixie and Dollar General after the crash.



(Left) A Clay County Fire Rescue Special Operations Team performs a sonar scan of a ditch while (right) a Florida Highway Patrol trooper uses a winch on a patrol cruiser to pull an SUV out of the water.

“It was pretty tough to see where the parking lot ended, and the retention pond started even when I pulled up on the scene,” he said.

He also said the traffic crash was the most serious incident within the county as the storm passed to the west.

“A lot of trees down, wires down,” he said of calls to which his agency responded. “We’ve done quite a significant amount of tree removal in partnership with the public works department. “It’s been a team effort for sure.”

Family in Providence survives tornado scare

BY DAN HILDEBRAN
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A family in Western Union County had a close call with a small tornado as Hurricane Debby closed in on Florida’s Big Bend.

Zayden Pressley, an eighth grader at First Christian Academy in High Springs, said he was at first confused by the alert he received on his cell phone.

“It says tornado. It doesn’t say hurricane,” Zayden recalled telling his parents about the alert he received around 7:45 p.m. Sunday. Two minutes later, Zayden’s parents, Darryl and Layne, received similar alerts on their phones.

Layne said that after the second warning, she wanted to check on her parents, who were temporarily staying in a camper in the backyard, but it was too late.

“All of the sudden, the wind picked up, and things started flying around outside and we just kind of looked at each other,” remembered Layne.

In a panic, Zayden and Layne darted under a staircase while Darryl ran for a bathroom.

While in their respective safe



Providence residents Darryl, Zayden, and Layne Pressley suffered minor property damage after a small tornado struck their property.

places, the family of three heard debris striking the house and the freight-train sound they had heard tornado victims describe.

Five to ten seconds later, it was over.

When the family ventured outside, they discovered that Layne’s parents were fine and had not realized what

had happened.

A tree in the front yard was blown over, crushing the swing that previously hung from it.

The attached garage suffered roof damage, a solar panel was missing, and a privacy fence was blown away, revealing a neighbor’s overturned pontoon boat and camper. The

Pressley’s aluminum shed in the backyard temporarily went missing but was discovered later about a block away.

The family found a two-by-four that the wind had driven into a bonus room in the garage.

The Pressleys said they feel fortunate to have escaped with only minor property damage.

They credit the alerts they received on their cell phones for warning them of the danger.

Darryl said the family had also received a cell phone alert around 15 minutes before the twister struck, so the three had gotten a trio of alerts within 15 minutes of the incident.

Zayden said he had gotten a little weary of the warnings.

“A lot of times they always say stuff’s going to happen, but then it never really does, Zayden said, “so I was just like, oh, it’s probably overreacting, and it’s just a small little—what we normally would get.”

The eighth grader said that he briefly thought about ignoring the alert.

He added that he will never do that again.



The family discovered a two-by-four that the wind had driven into a bonus room in the garage.



A privacy fence was blown away, revealing a neighbor’s overturned pontoon boat (right) and camper (left).



A tree in the front yard was blown over, crushing the swing that previously hung from it.

Commission votes: No fire assessment this year

BY MARK J. CRAWFORD
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A resolution setting the amount of a special fire assessment fee was defeated Aug. 6 by a split vote, 4-1.

The issue is not dead, but most commissioners sided with vocal members of the public requesting more time to ask questions and share information.

Support remains among most commissioners to consider a fire assessment in the future, and an ordinance approved at their prior meeting in July leaves the process for doing so in place.

In the meantime, there was discussion among the dissenting

commissioners of workshops with the public to better explain what was being proposed and to answer questions. Commissioner Diane Andrews described these workshops as collaborative discussions with the public in which everyone is looking at the same information.

Resolution dead for now

This initial resolution would have done a lot of things except finalize collection of the fire assessment on annual property tax bills. That would have taken place after a final public hearing in September.

Based on the initial resolution, however, each residential dwelling unit would have been charged \$167 a year. This includes residential dwellings on agricultural land, although other agricultural properties are exempt by state law. Mobile home parks pay per rentable lot.

Nonresidential prosperities, including businesses, would have been charged 11 cents per square foot. This includes RV parks where each rentable space represents 500 square feet per state law. Vacant parcels would have each been charged \$46.50 per year.

These amounts represent 50% of what the commission could have

charged based on the methodology the consultant used to break down the cost of providing fire rescue services within Bradford County. These amounts would have raised 50% of the of the fire department’s budget, or nearly \$1.68 million, minus the exemptions.

The resolution included exemptions for faith-based and other nonprofits, government properties (not including properties leased for private use), institutional properties, disabled veterans and low-income households living at or below the federal poverty level.

See FEE, page 7

Bradford schools hold open houses

Lawtey Elementary School’s Open House is Thursday, Aug. 8, from 4 to 5:30 p.m. Meet teachers and drop off school supplies. Snowie Gator will be selling snow cones, and t-shirts will be on sale for \$12.

Bradford Elementary School’s Open House is Thursday, Aug. 8, from 4 to 6 p.m. Come meet the teachers and purchase dinner or a snack from Limp Brizkit or Trippie Hippie.

Starke Elementary School’s Open House is Thursday, Aug. 8, from 4 to 5:30 p.m. Meet teachers and enjoy something from Kona Ice and Big T’s BBQ.

Bradford Middle School’s Open House will be Friday, Aug. 9, from 5:30 to 7 p.m. beginning in the gymnasium. Schedules will be available through Focus. Vendors will have food for sale.

Bradford High School’s Open House is Thursday, Aug. 8, from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Schedules will be available through Focus. Tornado gear and parking passes will be available to purchase. Trippie Hippie will be selling food.

Early voting

Early voting in Bradford County, early voting for the primary will be available through Aug. 18, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. If you’re going to take advantage of early voting, you will go to the commission meeting room in the north wing of the Bradford County Courthouse.

To vote by mail, request a ballot by calling the elections office at 904-966-6266 or visiting the website at www.votebradfordfl.gov. The deadline to request a ballot by mail for the primary is Aug. 8. In Union County, early voting takes place in the Supervisor of Elections Office at 175 W. Main St. in Lake Butler. The dates are Aug. 10-17 from 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday through Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

In Keystone Heights, early voting takes place at city hall from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. beginning Thursday, Aug. 8, and runs through Aug. 17.

Food distribution at True Vine

A communitywide food distribution hosted by Farm Share and True Vine Ministry will take place Tuesday, Aug. 13 and 27, at 10 a.m. at True Vine Outreach Ministry 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.



With a proven record as our Clerk, Kellie has the education and credentials to excel in her duties, and the experience to continue to serve Union County with **accountability** and **transparency**.

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- ★ Protected taxpayer dollars by refusing payment for improper expenditures.
- ★ Digitized all marriage licenses since Union County's creation in 1921, allowing online access to important genealogical research.



Paid for by Kellie Hendricks Rhoades, Republican for Clerk of Court

EXPERIENCE & QUALIFICATIONS

Licensed CPA since 2008
Certified Court Clerk & Comptroller by the Florida Supreme Court since 2014
Served as District Director and currently serves on multiple committees for Florida Court Clerks & Comptrollers Association
Bachelor's Degree in Accounting from the University of Florida
Master of Accountancy Degree from the University of North Florida

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Kellie's track record is one of grit and determination. The Clerk serves as checks and balances that protect your tax dollars. Kellie swore an oath to hold people in positions of power accountable, which is why for more than a decade, she has ensured that everyone in our county government follows policies and procedures established to guard against waste, fraud and abuse. As an 8th generation Union County resident who believes in true governmental transparency, she puts her fellow Union County citizens first and will stay the course when the job is hard.

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Visit us on-line at www.FloridaTwinTheatre.com

Church of God food distribution

Starke Church of God by Faith is distributing food on Thursday, Aug. 15, from 10 to 11:30 a.m. at the church, 730 Old Lawtey Road in Starke. This is a drive-thru giveaway.

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Paid for by Tracey Kendrick, Republican, for Superintendent of Bradford County Schools.

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Bradford County watching water levels following TS Debby

BY MARK J. CRAWFORD
mark@bctelegraph.com

Shortly following Hurricane Debby's arrival on the coast of Florida's Big Bend near Steinhatchee on Aug. 2, it was downgraded to a tropical storm that passed north of Bradford County but brought the usual mixture of high winds and heavy rainfall that toppled trees and power lines, flooded streets and ditches, and closed business and government offices.

Emergency personnel were prepared for the worst, reportedly working 12, 16 or more hours a day responding where needed to block roads and clear debris.

Emergency Management Director Brad Witt said emergency operations always gets a lot of attention for these responses, but he said if you see a firefighter or a deputy, a medic or someone who works in communications, public works or utilities, you should thank them.

"They were the ones out there yesterday in the rain. I saw they were soaking wet. Many of them didn't eat till late. They didn't go home till late. Everything we do in the EOC means nothing without their efforts," he said, also thanking the county's leadership, including the commission, county manager and department directors. "We have a lot of leadership who gets involved in making those decisions and helping guide this ship."

Meetings began when they learned the storm system was moving toward Florida. Witt said one of the first moves was to get the gates open at Three Pipes to prepare for the inflow of additional water to Sampson Lake. Even though the rain the county was receiving did not allow the lake level to drop, he believes opening the gates did keep the lake from rising even more that it did because of the storm.

"The lake's holding ok right now. It's getting ready to enter minor flood stage at this point, but we've had no reports of any impacts from that. We'll continue to monitor that," he said. The "event" is not over as run off and additional rain enter the system.

"The storm has moved into Georgia, but we'll continue to



Bradford County Fire Chief Ben Carter said virtually all of the storm recovery calls were for downed trees or power lines. This tree snapped on Starke's Pratt Street, across the street from the Bradford County Library.



A photo shared by Chief Feltner shows him and Sgt. Jordan blocking roads at the corner of Grove and Adams Streets in Lawtey.

keep our EOC staff monitoring this event until we know that that threat has subsided."

Rain gauges monitored through the storm indicated 5.5 to 7 inches of rain. It was a lot of rain in a short amount of time inundating ditches and causing minor flooding on roads, he said.

Self-serve sandbags were still available at four of the county's solid waste collection centers: Lawtey, Brooker, Old Lawtey Road and C.R. 229.

Southwest County Road 237 west of Brooker and Southwest 101st Avenue from S.R. 100 back

to Southwest 163rd were the only two remaining roads closed as of Tuesday. Public works will repair unimproved roads as the water subsides, Witt said.

He also reported that all but 4% of Clay Electric customers and 9% of Florida Power and Light customers remained without power as of Tuesday morning.

"Again, I want to thank all of our teams that are involved in this," Witt said. "The sheriff's office and fire rescue established rescue task forces in case we had any water rescues. Thankfully, that was not needed yesterday.



Sheriff's deputies warned U.S. 301 southbound motorists of street flooding near Starke's Chevrolet dealership.

Both agencies also went up to additional staffing. Public works had roadway closure teams and debris teams put together to get out there to close down any roadways and go get any obstructions out of the road. We kept in close contact with our utilities partners who worked diligently through the storm and kept us updated on those outages."

Public Works Director Jason Dodds also had a list of thank-yous that included citizens who went out of their way to help their neighbors and community.

"I can tell you that yesterday, when we had trees down all over the county, there was multiple residents with tractors calling, saying, 'Don't come out here. We've got this tree. We'll clear this one. Y'all go to the next one.' And that's how great this county is," he said.

Lawtey Police Chief Jerry Feltner did report online that water was entering some homes on flooded roads.

"Due to the massive amount of rainfall, if you do not live in the city of Lawtey on the streets of Adams, Grove, Olive, Jackson, SE 1st, Paul Lane and the Lawtey Apartment Complex, please avoid these areas. When you drive down these streets you are pushing water into the houses of these individuals. Please be respectful and find different routes. All roads are under water and will be that way for some time," he wrote.

Starke Operations Director Jimmy Crosby said a number

of large oak trees fell in the city where rain had already drenched the ground prior to the arrival of Debby's winds. One nearly fell on him as he was taking footage of a flooded manhole.

City Manager Drew Mullins, said despite the large amount of rain, Starke didn't experience a large amount of flooding. He attributed that to ongoing efforts to clear ditches of debris, increase depth and clear culverts.

"While we saw significant improvement from previous years, we still have a long way to

go," he said.

"I cannot express my appreciation enough to the city staff on the fantastic job they did yesterday. The electric line crew, public works, fire department and others all worked together to clear roads from fallen trees/limbs, restore power and clear ditches," he said. "By owning our own electric distribution system, investment in staff, and increased tree trimming, city customers saw their power restored, on average, in less than an hour.

Debby brings rain and wind to Union County

BY TRACY LEE TATE
Special to the Times

Hurricane Debby made landfall Monday morning Aug. 4 on the west coast of Florida near the panhandle as a Category 1 hurricane. Most Union County residents had to deal mainly with some wind and a whole lot of water.

Debby spawned several tornados in central and north central Florida. One twister developed near Waldo on Sunday, Aug. 5, 2024, and traveled to Brooker, then on to Worthington Springs and Providence. Two homes were damaged, but there were no injuries. Observers noted that the storm spent most of its travels without actually touching the ground.

According to Union County Emergency Management, as of 7:45 p.m., the county received 10+ inches of rain partially because the storm stalled earlier in its trip. Winds at Lake Butler were continuous Monday, between 30-40 mph and gusts up to 45 mph. Maximum rain amounts and wind gusts were most likely higher in the western part of the county.

Trees in the roads were reported down and in the road on SR-100E, SR-100W, and SR-121. The most notable occurrence of water flowing over the road occurred at the intersection of SW 163rd Lane and SW 72nd Trail and in other locations. Water flowing across roads continued for a couple of days as the water found a place

to run off.

By mid-morning Monday, Clay Electric still at work trying to restore power to 54% of its customers in the county.

Union County District Schools were closed, as were the county offices and Lake Butler City Hall. Some local businesses were open as usual on Monday morning, but

some chose to open later in the day than usual or not at all. T

The big worry now is flooding. As of press time, the Santa Fe River at Worthington Springs was projected to crest above major flood stage on or about August 8 at 12 p.m. at a depth of 66.5 feet. Emergency management advises residents with homes along the

river to have an evacuation plan should water encroach on their homes. Flooding is expected to affect farmland and some homes south of west CR-18 and other areas to the south.

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<p>Clay Electric Cooperative, Inc. Competitive Rates, non-profit, right here in your community</p> <p>A True Energy Cooperative</p> <p>Keystone District Office 352-473-4917 • clayelectric.com</p>	<p>After Church on Sunday Come to Powell's Dairy Freeze</p> <p>"Home of the Foot Long Steak" Stop by for Ice Cream on Wednesday Night! US 301 NORTH • STARKE, FL</p>	<p>Come Worship with us STARKE SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH Church • Saturday 11:00 a.m. School • Saturday 10:00 a.m. 1649 W. Madison St • Starke, FL</p>
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Brunch encourages women, recognizes leaders

On July 20, Starke came together for an empowering event known as Beauty, Brains & Brunch. This gathering aimed to uplift and connect women from various backgrounds, fostering an atmosphere filled with love, warmth and unity.

The event featured keynote speakers Kandice Stover and Ashley Cochran, whose

stories and insights sparked meaningful conversations, providing valuable guidance on both personal and professional growth. The words of Stover and Cochran resonated deeply, encouraging women to pursue their goals with renewed vigor and confidence.

A highlight of the day was the recognition of two exceptional women who have made significant contributions to the community. Glenda Faye Johnson Ruise was honored as the Most Inspirational Mentor for her pivotal role in the life of Elijah Cohen, guiding and supporting him since his ninth-grade year.

Additionally, Janice Mortimer received the MVP Award for her unwavering dedication and encouragement, solidifying her status as the community's biggest supporter.

The intimate setting of the event allowed for genuine connections to form. The palpable energy in the room was a testament to the open dialogue, exchange of ideas, and lasting relationships that were fostered throughout the day.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with many attendees expressing their appreciation for the opportunity to be part of such an empowering event.

Beauty, Brains & Brunch is an invitation-only luncheon series dedicated to cultivating relationships that inspire and empower women. The organizers express their immense gratitude for the support and participation of all who attended, looking forward to continuing this tradition of empowerment and connection in the years to come.



Glenda Ruise receives a hug from Elijah Cohen.

LEFT: Janice Morimer and Elijah Cohen.

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<p>Sporting Chance 218 N Temple Ave, Starke, FL 32091 (904) 964-7434</p> <p>“The owner sat down with me and helped me find a logo for my husband’s company and then designed the shirt with logo and name. She also took time to explain the different shirt and ordering options. I also got a deal on the Gator items at 70% off.”</p>	<p>Big Teal Cleaning 12696 US HWY 301 South Starke, FL 32091 (904) 903-6746</p> <p>“Overall great experience & service!! Cleaned my Semi & trailer with care which I usually don’t receive from other companies.”</p>	<p>C & S Site Prep 22787 NW 34th Ave, Lawtey, FL 32058 (352) 235-1210</p> <p>Land Clearing, Driveway, Culverts, Excavation, Ponds, House Pads, Drainage, Grading, Erosion Control, Dirt, Lime Rock, Asphalt, Sand, Crushed Concrete, 57 Stone</p>
<p>Ford’s Land Clearing Inc. (352) 260-2387 Servicing Starke, Keystone, and surrounding areas!</p> <p>“We used Ford’s Land Clearing to clear our new home site and to install our culvert. They cleared it timely and as requested. Their communication was on point, always answered the phone and kept us aware of schedule delays, etc. We highly recommend Ford’s Land Clearing!”</p>	<p>Phillip McDonald Plumbing 740 S Orange St, Starke, FL 32091 (904) 964-3737</p> <p>“This is the only plumbing company we will use moving forward. We purchased a home last year and it’s had many plumbing and septic issues. The staff is really nice, responsive and quick with repairs. I know we can count on them anytime something goes wrong with the plumbing and septic system in our home. I highly recommend using them for any plumbing needs you may have. Definitely 5 star service!”</p>	<p>Turners Automotive & Transmission 135 Commercial Cir, Keystone Heights, FL 32656 (352) 473-3404</p> <p>“This shop is excellent I would highly recommend them. I had a key but the door wouldn’t open. The lock mechanism wasn’t working. They were closing up shop on a Friday night and didn’t charge me anything. They were amazing.”</p>
<p>Teal Tile Carpet One 131 N Cherry St, Starke, FL 32091 (904) 964-7423</p> <p>“High quality in every way!!!! Product was great. Workmanship was great. Pleasant staff. Just a pleasure to work with. Highly recommend!”</p>	<p>Bradford County Eye Center 292 Lafayette St, Starke, FL 32091 (904) 964-8076</p> <p>“The entire staff from making my appointment, to the receptionist upon arrival, the lady that did my pre screening (forgot her name) made me feel so at ease, and Dr. Jen, so wonderful at explaining and very thorough. Rachel was so helpful and thoughtful to help me finding the perfect pair of glasses. What an awesome group of people! Keep doing what you do! Thank you!”</p>	<p>Victory Way Church of God 205 SW Magnolia Ave, Keystone Heights, FL 32656 (941) 718-7006</p> <p>SUNDAY SCHOOL: 9:45 AM SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP: 10:30 AM CHILDREN’S CHURCH DURING MORNING WORSHIP SUNDAY NIGHT: 6:00 PM THURSDAY NIGHT: 7:30 PM</p>
<p>Hearing Aids Today 450 S Lawrence Blvd, Keystone Heights, FL 32656 (352) 877-4471</p> <p>“It is obvious that the team at Hearing Aids Today is compassionate and dedicated to insure that your hearing health is well cared for.”</p>	<p>Dr. Nancy Short, Chiropractor SE 28th St, Melrose, FL 32666 (904) 778-6859</p> <p>“Dr Short has been the most caring Doctor I have ever had. She listens to you and gives great advice. She has always been very helpful and fixes my issues. I’ve had Chiropractic care for the last 40 years and she is the best.”</p>	<p>Durrance Pump 864 N Temple Ave STE C, Starke, FL 32091 (904) 964-7061</p> <p>“They did a great job at a fair price. They did exactly what was needed for the job and inspected the other equipment to make sure it was good. They are super busy and everyone recommends them for their good service.”</p>
<p>Jackson Building Supply Inc. 937 S Walnut St, Starke, FL 32091 (904) 964-6078</p> <p>“My hubby and I love this place. We’re out at Kingsley lake and the big box stores on Blanding seem a million miles away. JBS is much quicker and a much safer drive. It’s well worth it and the inventory is extensive. We’re fans”</p>	<p>The Chiropractic & Injury Clinic of Starke 601 E Call St, Starke, FL 32091 (904) 964-8018</p> <p>“Dr. Lowry and the staff here a superb team. They are kind, professional and their experience showed with each visit. The therapy and adjustments were beneficial right from the start. I highly recommend their services.”</p>	<p>Bradford County Sheriffs Office 945-B N Temple Ave, Starke, FL 32091 (904) 966-6161</p> <p>“Officer Adam helped me with my flat tire. I was kinda awestruck. I’ve never had a police officer do something like that for me. I moved to this county from Jacksonville 5 months ago, and I’m really impressed! Officer Adam thank you!”</p>
<p>Keystone Plumbing Inc. 2473 State Rte 100, Starke, FL 32091 (352) 792-4426</p> <p>“Great local business! Fast and fair. Not many left like this jewel. I will always call and recommend them for all your plumbing needs. Very courteous and fast. Dealing local with a place like this is a refreshing and comforting feeling. Thank you guys!!</p>	<p>Bradford County Public Library 456 W Pratt St, Starke, FL 32091 (904) 368-3911</p> <p>“I love the staff here. They are always kind & helpful to me & my 3 girls. We go in to just grab a few books & stay an hour just to chat with everyone & check out all the upcoming events they offer.”</p>	<p>Robert’s Insurance 986 N Temple Ave, Starke, FL 32091 (904) 452-7784</p> <p>“Always a great place to visit and get help, thanks!”</p>

Lake Region

UNION COUNTY

Clay County sets initial millage rate

BY DAN HILDEBRAN
dan@bctelegraph.com

Clay County Commissioners unanimously set an initial millage rate of 8.601 during their July 23 meeting. Under Florida law, the five-member panel may lower the rate easily but cannot increase it without sending out new truth-in-millage notices.

In addition, not all county taxpayers will pay the same rate.

Clay County millage is divided into several taxing units, with a base rate of 5.5471 mills.

Residents living in unincorporated areas will pay an additional millage of 0.1477.

There is a law enforcement taxing unit millage of 2.4014. Orange Park and Green Cove Springs residents are exempt from that millage because those cities have their own police departments.

In addition, there is a fire control taxing unit of 0.5048, of which Orange Park residents are exempt because the town has its own fire department.

There are two special district taxing units, one for Lake Asbury, for which the rate is zero, and one for Challenger Center, which runs along the First Coast Expressway and has a 3.00 mil rate.

Principal outlines educational challenges

BY DAN HILDEBRAN
dan@bctelegraph.com

The principal of Keystone Heights Junior-Senior High School spoke during the Wednesday, July 24, meeting of the Keystone Heights Rotary Club.

Laurie Burke explained to the club the challenges facing today's educators and her plans for the upcoming year.

The school's athletic director and Rotary Club member Chuck Dickinson, who invited his boss to speak at the civic club, told the group that Burke is a 1991 Keystone Heights High School graduate and a five-time state champion in track and field. Her father, David Owens, was principal at Keystone High when she attended. Owens later served as Clay County superintendent of schools.

"I am, of course, an alumnus also," Dickinson told the group. "But to have a principal that actually has graduated from Keystone Heights, I think that's a big deal."

The athletic director added that because of her background, Burke appreciates the value of athletics and how high school academics and sports complement one another.

Thanks for community support

Burke, who is beginning her fifth year leading the Orchid Avenue campus, thanked the Rotary Club for funding new equipment in the school's home-side concession stand at the football stadium. She added that the upgrades came after the school district replaced the campus's track.

The principal said the district is now replacing the concession stand on the visitor's side of the stadium, which the band booster club uses for fundraising.

Burke reminded the club that the new track and concession stand are funded by a half-penny sales tax Clay County voters approved in 2020 to improve school infrastructure.

She thanked Rotary Club members for their support, adding that because of the Lake Region's distance from the population centers of Clay County, her school does not have to compete for community support like schools in north and central Clay County.

"We have our own community here," she said, "and that is special in its own way because I've worked up there at Fleming Island High School and Clay High School, and it's a little bit of a battle to get that support (from community groups) because they are giving to three, four, five different schools."

Challenge accepted

Burke told the group that teachers return to campus on August 5, and students arrive on August 13.

The principal said this year's school theme is "Challenge Accepted."

"We are looking at the challenges and barriers we faced in the previous years, and we are accepting those and conquering them," she said of the theme.

Burke also highlighted a new student orientation called "Indian Welcome."

"It's mainly for the incoming seventh graders," she said. "It's scary; it's extra scary at Keystone because you are coming into a high school, and you're only in seventh grade."

Burke said the orientation is student-led, with undergraduate leaders calling incoming seventh graders and attempting to

connect with them.

"So, they have that personal phone call from a student before they even show up that morning," she explained, "and they'll get to see their class schedule, and they'll get to walk around; they'll get to learn a lot about the school on that day."

Burke said the orientation not only educates incoming seventh graders but also attempts to help them establish relationships with veteran Indians.

"They go through this whole training, and it's like a big church camp where they hype up the students coming in," she explained. "Everybody has a friend and a connection because they are very intentional about how they lead."

Teachers and coaches needed

Burke said one of the challenges facing school administrators now is a lack of applicants for instructional jobs.

"I wouldn't say there's a shortage, there's not enough people," she said of the labor market. "When I'm interviewing somebody, and they're fresh out of college, that was common when I was looking for a job 30 years ago... You don't find that very often (now). I get pretty excited when I have a young person to even interview."

The principal added that finding social studies teachers is easier than filling slots in math and science departments.

Student no-shows

Burke said the other major challenge facing schools today is student attendance.

"The culture today is to not be in attendance in school," Burke said. "We've got other important things to do, or school's too hard, so I don't want to have to show up. And then it's hard as a parent to be that parent of tough love and make your kids do the things they don't want to do because we know that's important for their future."

The principal said she and her faculty created incentives last year to boost attendance and plan to expand them this year.

"The state is supposedly putting back in some supports of the truancy court that they took away several years ago," Burke added. "We've yet to see that."

Burke said some parents declare their students home-schooled, relieving the child from going to a campus.

"Just to share with you why that's a problem," she explained. "When you go to homeschool, the parent can literally print out a diploma or print out grades or print out credits and say: My child has graduated."

She added that many colleges and potential employers may

not accept the homemade documentation.

"The other problem with homeschool," Burke continued, "is when a student goes to homeschool and then they come back because it wasn't working, they're behind significantly, and we have to try to catch them up, and sometimes we don't have enough time before the state gives them the four years to graduate to catch them up."

Burke said she relied on community support to help fund attendance incentives, including a periodic pancake breakfast for students.

"The kids really enjoyed the pancake breakfasts," Burke told the Rotarians. "When we thought about kind of going away from that because we were thinking that it had gotten kind of old to the students, we couldn't do it because, for the kids that do get the pancake breakfast, it's a big deal to them."

Burke said that even before the pandemic when she was working at Fleming Island High School, she saw parents taking students out of classes for extended Christmas breaks, vacations, and other activities rather than coordinating family trips with the school schedule.

"They just didn't think being in the classroom was important," she said of parents.

We can't give up

Burke said that when her father, David Owens, was the principal at Keystone High, he fought different battles than the ones she now faces. She added, however, that the challenges her father took on 35 years ago were no less significant than the ones she faces now.

"This is just the nature of the times, and we'll figure them out," she said of the problems in today's classrooms, "and then there will be a new battle, and we will figure that one out. That's what we do."

The principal said she and her faculty and staff are committed to preparing Lake Region students for their futures. But she added that they need help from the community.

"It's important to have foundational people like we have in our community to stick with it, and to stick with students and to stick with families and to stick with our community," she implored. "We can't give up because it's hard. The students need us. They don't know it, but they need us. And if we're not doing it, there's nobody coming in behind us. We have to build that community foundation through our schools. That's what we do in life as adults. You become the responsible one for helping young people take your place."



Keystone Heights Junior-Senior High School Athletic Director Churck Dickinson, Principal Laurie Burke and Rotary Club President Todd Beals.

Library referendum on ballot

BY TRACY LEE TATE
Special to the Times

The Union County Public Library first opened its doors on March 1, 1990, after a referendum was passed for the ½ millage ad valorem tax for the library's local funding.

In order to continue funding through the ad valorem taxation, voters must approve the library referendum every two years.

Additional funding is received each year from the State Aid to Libraries grant. The library's funding helps with the daily operation of the library, including staffing, materials, programming, technology needs, utilities and more.

Without the local funding that comes from the ad valorem tax, the Union County Public Library

would not qualify for the state funds.

The library has grown significantly in its 34 years of operation. Over 40,000 items are housed in the library, including books, newspapers, books on CD, DVD's, Wonderbooks and more. Additionally, library patrons have free access to several online databases and e-books via the library's website, www.UnionCountyPublicLibrary.org. The Library offers computers for public access, as well as free wireless access for its customers.

The public library's youth services department continues to grow with each passing year, offering weekly preschool Storytime and bi-weekly after-school programs. The library also provides an outlet for teens with craft and activity events and

hosts a club for local high school students—the Junior Friends of the Library. This group not only plans many fun activities but also participates in volunteer projects for the library.

The library building grew significantly in size when a new facility was built in Lake Butler in 2009. The new library was funded through a State Construction Grant, the sale of the old library, individual donors, years of fundraising efforts, and additional support from the Union County Board of Commissioners. The referendum that will be on the ballot on Aug. 20, 2024, is not an increase in taxes but simply a continuation of funding for the Union County Public Library and the community it serves.

Methodist women award scholarships

At the annual Summer Salad Luncheon for the Starke Methodist Women, \$500 scholarships were awarded to Chauncey Patterson and Maddie Miller Thompson.

Chauncey Patterson is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Trent Patterson. He completed his high school program at the same time he completed his academic program at Santa Fe College. He is now planning on attending the University of Florida and majoring in computer sciences with an emphasis on artificial intelligence.

Maddie Thompson is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Kevin Miller and the wife of Wyatt Thompson. She received her BA degree in psychology from Florida State University. Maddie is now enrolled in an accelerated graduate nursing program through the University of Florida and Shands Hospital in Jacksonville. She had the



The Starke Methodist Women awarded \$500 scholarships to Chauncey Patterson and Maddie Miller Thompson.

opportunity to work as a case manager with the Department of Health for AIDS patients and has indicated that she would possibly like to continue working in the infectious disease field in the

future. The Starke Methodist Women are extremely proud of these two young people as they continue their educational journey.

The Matthews Museum (Bradford County Museum) Needs Volunteers!

- * Show visitors around the museum.
- * Share interesting facts about Bradford County.
- * All of this in a climate controlled location.
- * Students can earn Community Service Points.

To find out more

Contact: Chuck Kramer
(904) 964-5001 or (904) 364-6977



UNION COUNTY



The Pink Ladies have a special place within the sheriff's department. They volunteer to serve and are often the first face seen by visitors. Gertrude Griffis was recently standing post. Griffis said they offer toys and comfort to children who are having to wait during difficult circumstances.



Newly sworn in Auxiliary Officers: (front row) Charlotte Williams (First VP); (back) Loretta Edwards (2nd VP), Linda Johns (President), Virginia Linzy (Recording Secretary), Gertrude Griffis (Correspondence Secretary), and Linda Hildebran (Treasurer).



Shelby Burkhalter was the Auxiliary's Scholarship recipient two years in a row. Burkhalter thanked the organization for helping her achieve her dream of becoming an RN.

Pink Ladies banquet spotlights achievements, encourages new volunteers

BY MELISSA PYLE

Special to the Telegraph

Imagine being in a crisis situation, being afraid, and confused. This can happen to adults, even young children in our community who are thrust into a set of circumstances they did not create and find themselves at the Bradford County Sheriff's Office.

Now imagine, in that same moment, being greeted by a motherly, often grandmotherly face. Fears are subdued, toys are given, kind words exchanged. This is just one of the wonderful services celebrated at the Bradford County Auxiliary, also

known as the "Pink Ladies," annual banquet on July 9 at the Women's Club of Starke.

Sheriff Gordon Smith explained their contributions to the community well in his opening comments at this year's banquet when he said, "They are like a motherly figure to us ... provide a friendly presence. The Pink Ladies help reduce the anxiety and stress associated with a visit to the sheriff's office, not only for victims but also their families."

Another service the organization provides, but is mostly unknown, is wellness checks. These checks are a free service to anyone who would like to sign

themselves or a loved one up for daily calls. If a person does not answer the daily call, a deputy is sent to check on the resident. This service has saved the lives of people who otherwise would have gone for days without help after a fall or injury. Residents are encouraged to sign up by calling the sheriff's office.

The auxiliary also offers an endowment scholarship with Santa Fe College and the banquet was an opportunity to recognize this year's recipient, Shelby Burkhalter. Burkhalter was also last year's recipient and is in the process of completing her nursing degree by December. Burkhalter

thanked the group for providing this scholarship and said, "I wouldn't be able to do any of it without the financial support of the scholarship." Burkhalter said it is helping her move towards her future goal of becoming a flight nurse.

The annual banquet provides a time to recognize the hours of service each member has contributed, the fundraising efforts, and donations made to local fire, rescue, and law enforcement agencies. The combined hours of volunteer service was said to be over 3,400 hours. The annual fair fundraiser raised \$6,800. President Linda Johns thanked all the

volunteers who helped prepare the food at this year's fair fundraiser, many of whom were local officials and law enforcement officers.

Johns explained that funds raised helped to purchase life saving devices such as jump kits and tourniquets. The most recent donation will be first aid kits to the Lawley Police Department for all their road vehicles.

The banquet concluded with the officers for 2024 being sworn in by Sheriff Smith, promising to uphold and honor the Pink Ladies Auxiliary Code. The positions were named as follows: President Linda Johns, First Vice

President Charlotte Williams, Second Vice President Loretta Edwards, Recording Secretary Virginia Lindsey, Correspondence Secretary Gertrude Griffis, and Treasurer Linda Hildebran.

Johns encouraged attendees to spread the word about the program and especially its need for new volunteers. The volunteers are a vital part of the Bradford community. Anyone interested in volunteering for any amount of time can contact the sheriff's office to fill out an application form or call Johns directly at 904-263-0399.



Paid for by Ryan J. Perez, Republican for Clerk of Courts

EARLY VOTING 8/10-8/17 ELECTION DAY 8/20

Union County Friends,

My name is Ryan Perez. I am a republican candidate for Union County Clerk of Courts.

With an inside look at the current state of our local government, the budget process, and its needs - I am eager to apply my skills and training to benefit our community in this office. The success of every office hinges on strong leadership that supports its team, enabling them to excel in their dedication and skills. My formal education in Public Relations, ongoing Leadership Studies at the University of Florida, and Governmental Leadership Training with the Florida Association of Counties position me well to lead a team of professionals in efficiently conducting the business of our community with success and heart. My experience managing large groups, teams, and separate budgets for over 100 annual large-scale events at the University of Florida uniquely qualifies me to be the people-centered leader our county needs right now.

I have had the opportunity of visiting just over 800 homes in our great county while on the campaign trail. I have had many great conversations and so wish I had the time and resources to visit with all of you. I would like to take this opportunity to share a few pieces of information as well as some insight from my heart as you and your families decide who is the best candidate to support. I ask that you be prayerful and ask for God's guidance on who would best represent the county in this position moving forward.

For starters, I am dissatisfied with the state of our local government. Over the past few years, personal conflict between the County Clerk and County Coordinator has derailed the effectiveness and efficiency of county business and resources. I believe that if residents aren't paying attention to what's been happening in local government, they should be.

During this unfortunate time in our county's history, statutory obligations of the office of the Clerk have been neglected due to overfixation and distraction of this personal conflict. To name a couple in recent months alone:

- 1) A large responsibility of the Clerk is producing, maintaining, and distributing the official minutes of Board and committee meetings in a timely manner to be approved at each board meeting. Official board minutes from the Clerk's office have been late for several years. **During the past few months of the campaign, there have been 24 sets of late minutes pushed through to the board for approval, with some dating back as far as five years ago (2019). The public deserves more efficiency in public access to information so that you can keep up with what is happening in your local government. I want to help with that.**
- 2) Another responsibility of the Clerk is to invest excess funds of the county. This is a responsibility that has not been acted upon by the Clerk until it was brought up by a commissioner in recent months. It is on record in public meetings that **the county has lost around \$50,000-\$75,000 by the Clerk not investing \$1,000,000 or more in excess funds this year.**

Throughout my term as Union County County Commissioner for District 1, I served the public with honesty, integrity, and a level head. Amidst great chaos, I chaired some of the most contentious public meetings in our county's history. Throughout it all, I chaired effectively, maintaining meeting decorum, and facing conflict head-on with respect and clarity. Many members of the public have credited me with being a voice of reason in tumultuous times. The ongoing conflicts between the County Clerk and County Coordinator escalated into a destructive cycle that negatively impacted our county. Despite my countless attempts to foster reconciliation between the two, tensions continued to rise. It is frustrating to say that it took me 1,095 days in office - mediating, chairing contentious meetings, fielding angry calls - and even a threat on my own daughter's life to get my "wake-up call". It took me being at rock bottom on day 1,095 to realize that change could not happen unless the players did. I had finally had enough - my family had enough - and I believe many of you in the community have had enough. It was time for me to back up and refocus all of my efforts in pursuit of where I could be most useful for our community. And that's in the Clerk's office.

A culture of "whose side are you on?" has taken over our local government. I assure you - I am on neither side. I am on the county's side! Shortcomings in performance are continually justified by blaming the other party. Internal communication and simple problem solving that could be resolved by simple telephone calls or conversations do not exist. It has become customary to place blame and argument over communication and resolution. When we allow personal disdain to enter dynamics that should be upheld by rules and structure - an environment of mutual respect and reverence cannot exist. If we continue to lose sight of that, experience and skill are worthless when given way to personal agendas. Experience is gifted to those given the opportunity. Everyone starts as a novice - experience is teachable. An unteachable skill, however, is a spirit of unity and the dedication to fulfilling it. My vision for Union County is unity - not division. It's time to reunite, re-engage, and work together for our constituency. May we continue to seek God's will in all elections.

I leave you with the answers to some FAQs from the campaign trail:

- 1) **What is your vision for the Clerk's office?**
 - I will **restore communication and collaboration** between all offices in our local government. I believe we can **uphold policies, checks and balances, and legislation** while maintaining a cooperative and professional working relationship with all parties involved, fostering a teamwork mentality.
 - I will be **YOUR** Clerk. I will be **open and accessible to you and your family** when you come into the Clerk's Office.
 - I will bring the Clerk's office into the new age, **integrating the latest software** and technologies to streamline processes and foster efficiency.
- 2) **What are the duties of the Clerk? Are they all financial?**
 - In comparison, **financial matters are a small part of the Clerk's responsibilities.** On a much larger scale, the duties include a wide range of **record-keeping and information management** for the judicial system (court) and local government. The duties of the Clerk are largely clerical and ministerial. Above all -- **being a strong, present leader** who supports their staff is at the heart of any office's success.
 - **We are blessed to have several experienced staff members in the Clerk's office.** If elected, **I look forward to working with them** in support of their current efforts and supplementing any needs they may require.
- 3) **Do you have to be a CPA to be the Clerk of Courts?**
 - No. **Most** Clerks in the state (over 90%) are **NOT CPAs.**
 - **The Clerk does not have decision-making authority** in the creation of the county budget. That power is reserved for the Board of Commissioners. The budgetary responsibilities of the Clerk are rooted in ensuring **the Board's** approved policies and budget are followed and in accordance with state and federal laws.
 - There is already a Finance Manager position on the Clerk's staff to carry out financial accounting and reporting services. **No new positions would need to be added in my administration.**

I caution you all to not be confused by intimidation or fear tactics. I do not entertain hate speech or negativity from those who only seek to tarnish my reputation with fabrications. I am always available for a visit or phone call from those with legitimate questions seeking clarity. For more information and documentation on some of the above statements, please scan this QR code to visit my campaign Facebook page or look up "Ryan Perez for Union County Clerk of Courts" on Facebook.

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."

-Ryan J. Perez
352-275-3804



Thomas Lashley, new principal of Brooker Community School, speaks at Belle Oaks Barn.

Brooker Community School welcomes new principal

BY CAROL MOSLEY
Special to the Telegraph

Brooker Community School is preparing for the new school year with lots of changes in the works, including the addition of sixth grade.

The charter school also hopes to add voluntary prekindergarten.

Enrollment is twice that of last year with about 80 students expected this year thanks to recruitment efforts. As a public charter school, students from any area are eligible.

The biggest change was saying goodbye to outgoing principal Felicia Moss and welcoming incoming principal Thomas Lashley.

Charter School Board Chair Suzanne McRee sent an email notice to staff that Moss decided not to renew her contract. She thanked Moss, "the Founding principal of our beloved Brooker Community School." She went on to say that Moss "had the challenge of building the train as we go along and has been able to set up systems that will carry us forward into the coming years."

Lashley is excited to fill the spot as the new principal. He grew up in Live Oak, went to college in Georgia and got his doctorate degree in Educational leadership and policy from

Florida State University, with a research focus in early literacy practices.

Lashley has been an educator and administrator at all levels, including college. He owned a tutoring company at one time. He played sports in his early years and has been a varsity level football, baseball and softball coach. Lashley is even a published author of two suspense novels.

Lashley was given a meet and greet welcome at Belle Oaks Barn in Brooker. He was accompanied by his wife, Laura, and other family members. The Lashleys have six grown children.

Returning teachers and staff, as well as the board members and community volunteers joined in the event. Lashley said it is the community support for the school that drew him to apply for the open position. He's never seen a community so determined to have a local school and so engaged in its operations.

New to the board is former student and frequent volunteer, John Eagle. He hopes to share his talents in the field of photo and video production as an opportunity for the students.

Registration is open and the first day of school is Aug. 12.



Andy Johnson displays his new lieutenant's badge after being promoted to the rank and assigned as the office's new jail inspector. Also pictured are (l-r) Criminal Special Operations Division Commander Captain Josh Luke, Chief of Operations Major George L. Konkel Jr., Sheriff Gordon Smith, Johnson and Corrections Bureau Chief Major Dawn McKinley.

Sheriff fills jail inspector post

BY DAN HILDEBRAN
dan@bctelegram.com

Bradford County Sheriff Gordon Smith has created an inspector's post for the office's jail division and filled the slot with a new lieutenant with 13 years of experience in the Department of Corrections and service in three local sheriff's offices.

The new jail inspector, Lt. Andy Johnson, was born in Miami and moved to Clay County after Hurricane Andrew hit South Florida in 1992. He graduated from Clay County public schools.

Undersheriff Col. Brad Smith said Sheriff Gordon Smith had been thinking about creating the new position for a while. The inspector's primary role would be to investigate crimes

occurring at the jail.

"Like the escape we recently had," Smith said. "They would lead on that investigation."

Smith added that the inspector will investigate contraband infractions at the lockup, as well as investigating inmate deaths.

The sheriff's colonel said that following two recent jail incidents, the discovery of drugs inside the facility and the escape, Johnson was the lead investigator and that the head of the office's corrections bureau was impressed with this work.

"Major (Dawn) McKinley commented during those investigations that Andy was a terrific investigator, but at the same time, he had a professional background in the Department of Corrections. He was a captain and worked with a drug detection dog inside for many years. He

has insights into corrections that most law enforcement investigators don't."

Smith said Johnson will report to McKinley. The colonel added that he anticipates Johnson will be assigned to inspect other county jails in the state for compliance with the Florida Model Jail Standards, which will give the inspector more exposure to corrections' best practices and how things could go wrong.

"It's an in-house State accreditation, basically," Smith said. "So, our plan is already in place. Training is offered periodically throughout the year. I think we've got him in a class coming up in September to start the training to become a state-certified jail inspector for accreditation-type inspections of other jails."

FEE

Continued from page 1

Veterans who already qualified for a property tax exemption would have automatically qualified for the fire assessment exemption. Poverty exemptions would have been provided to qualified applicants whose properties would be removed from the assessment roll. (Refunds would have been facilitated for those who applied after certification of the assessment roll.)

Starke property owners were also exempt, not from any action by the county commission, but by inaction of the city commission, which never formally considered participation.

This shifted more of the cost burden to residential property owners in other municipalities and unincorporated Bradford County. Residential property owners would have paid nearly 74% of the amount raised for fire rescue services based on the demand from those properties, i.e., calls for service. Nonresidential properties would have paid close to 16%, with the remainder coming from vacant property owners (nonagricultural).

Letters to all affected property owners would have been mailed by Aug. 15 informing them of a public hearing and vote on the final resolution as a special meeting on Sept. 5.

Defeat of the resolution means that mailout and meeting will not take place.

Discussion and decision

There were public comments at the top of the meeting from citizens Carol Mosley and Paul Still asking the commission to slow down and raising questions about what property owners are being asked to pay for.

"Here we are making major decisions affecting the public's finances without having full information and without the time for such due diligence. Having some public workshops on the matter could have allowed for more information to be discussed and made any conclusion more palatable," Mosley said.

In addition to questions about

the cost of sending trucks to fight fires, she had a problem with charging the same fee to each residence, which she said benefits owners with the most expensive properties.

Still said the commission wasn't ready to approve the resolution because it was missing information. He suggested the commission hire another consultant to provide additional options for imposing a fire assessment. He also said the board should stop "rubber stamping" the fire rescue budget and make cuts that could reduce taxes.

Commissioner Andrews said she had met with staff including County Manager Scott Kornegay and Fire Rescue Chief Ben Carter about costs but found some avenues for cost cutting like modifying work schedules were blocked by the current union contract, which is not up for renewal until 2026. But a lot of work was accomplished on determining the amount of the assessment fee for each category as well as including exemptions for those with limited incomes.

Andrews said, however, she has never suggested budget cuts or station closures that would reduce the level of service.

"I have always recognized the amazing lifesaving job that they do, and nothing has changed," she said, recognizing the recent retention pond rescue.

But she said until there has been some economic improvement, she couldn't support asking citizens to pay an additional form of taxation.

"We have paid for our fire services out of the general fund for many years, and until we implement another method, we will continue to pay for the services as we have in the past," Andrews said.

Commissioner Chris Dougherty agreed people are struggling with a higher cost of living, and he acknowledged people have a lot of questions despite the many public discussions.

"I still think that there's some time to put those questions together so that we can make sure that what we're doing is right for the folks in Bradford County to provide that service that we have been providing, again, paying that out of our general fund," he said.

Dougherty confirmed with the board's attorney that the ordinance previously approved would still allow the commission to take up the issue of a special assessment at another time. Attorney Rob Bradley compared the ordinance to a tool in the county's toolbox that could be used next year or beyond. There was some question of whether the county would incur additional consultant costs to keep the figures in the assessment study current.

"I acknowledge that we need some form of assessment to maintain our department," Commission Chairwoman Carolyn Spooner said. "It was the amount of that and when that should commence. In my opinion, at this time, it was early to do that. And the rate which was recommended in that resolution was not, in my opinion, a viable amount to ask our residents to provide."

Spooner said the recommended tax rate remains at 10 mills for next year, and to add anything to that was asking too much.

"I concur that we need an assessment, but we don't have to do that right now," she said. "The (ordinance) that we passed previously, would allow us to continue the dialogue."

Commissioner Danny Riddick was the only commissioner to vote in favor of the resolution. He said he didn't understand why they had the manager bring Stantac back for the assessment study last November if they didn't intend to move forward this year. After paying at least \$60,000 for the study, the commission remains where it was last year, he said. It was the same in 2019 when the commission got to this point and didn't approve the assessment.

Riddick said they could put off the decision for another year, but at that time the commission will find itself in the same position.

"Sooner or later, you have to pull the trigger and say, 'We need money for fire and rescue.' I mean, it's the Board of County Commissioners (job) to provide adequate fire protection. That's our job," he said.

The perception of how much protection is "adequate" depends on your need at the time, Riddick said.

"I guarantee that man, or whoever it was, that was upside

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

Keleb Evan-Franklin Anderson, 20, of Starke, was arrested by Bradford deputies on July 30 for resisting an officer.

Amy Pearl Ball, 53, of Hilliard, was arrested by Bradford deputies on August 2 for a probation violation.

Jailen Stephan Bass, 24, was arrested by Bradford deputies on July 31 for vehicle theft and resisting an officer.

Tyciala Kinnie Brown, 33, of Gainesville, was arrested by Bradford deputies on July 29 for failure to appear.

Athena Danielle Carter, 35, of Sanderson, was arrested by Bradford deputies on July 30 for an out-of-county warrant.

Charles Christopher Chamberlain, 51, of Starke, was arrested by Bradford deputies on August 1 for an out-of-county warrant.

Jessica Michelle Faulkner, 32, of Starke, was arrested by Bradford deputies on July 31 for possession of drugs and possession of marijuana.

Ashley Noel Forbes, 39, of Lake Butler, was arrested by Bradford deputies on July 30 for possession of drugs and possession of drug equipment.

Cindy Marie Kinder, 23, of Hampton, was arrested by Bradford deputies on July 28 for battery.

Kent Thomas Knox, 56, of Keystone Heights, was arrested by Bradford deputies on August 2 for battery and obstructing Justice.

Candace Nicole Mach, 35, of Lake City, was arrested by Bradford deputies on August 1 for battery.

Adam S. McCaulley, 20, of Starke, was arrested by Bradford deputies on July 30 for resisting an officer and possession of drug equipment.

down in that vehicle in that retention pond was sure hoping that fire station would be a lot closer to get to him quicker," he said.

"What I'm saying is we've gone through all this, all this money, all this expense, all this headache, and then to walk out of here today and don't pass nothing. Don't put nothing in place. I mean, at least put something in place to get the ball rolling forward and to move on," he said.

Riddick said, like Andrews, he has had the same cost cutting conversations with staff, but even if the fire department budget was cut in half, there would still be no funding for it.

Travis Miller, 44, of Starke, was arrested by Bradford deputies on August 2 for a probation violation.

Angela Elizabeth Smith, 39, of Starke, was arrested by Bradford deputies on July 30 for possession of drug equipment, distributing obscene material, and possession of drugs.

James Allen Williams, 58, of Starke, was arrested by Bradford deputies on July 30 for public order crimes, possession of marijuana, and possession of drug equipment.

James Allen Williams Jr., 32, of Starke, was arrested by Bradford deputies on July 30 for possession of obscene material, possession of drugs, and possession of drug equipment.

Union

Darryel Dakotah Cassels, 35, of Lake Butler, was arrested by Union deputies on July 29 for possession of drug equipment, possession of drugs, and driving with a suspended or revoked license.

Frances Ruthann Chandler, 38, of Lake Butler, was arrested by Union deputies on August 2 for failure to appear.

Jessie Lee Dover, 29, of Lake Butler, was arrested by Union deputies on July 30 for petit theft.

Christopher Calvin Hendrix, 39, of Lake Butler, was arrested by Union deputies on August 1 for failure to appear.

Jenny K. Hernandez, 33, of Lake Butler, was arrested by Union deputies on August 4 for disorderly intoxication.

Carlos Mendez, 25, of Lake Butler, was arrested by Union deputies on August 1 for felony burglary.

Katherine Elizabeth Nolan, 37, of Lake Butler, was arrested by Union deputies on August 1 for driving with a suspended or revoked license-habitual offender.

Clay

Kyle Matthew Gibbs, 27, of Keystone Heights, was arrested by Clay deputies on July 31 for arson and vandalism.

Robert Gerard Rascicot, 60, of Keystone Heights, was arrested by Clay deputies on August 1 for battery.

Brandy Michelle Rowland, 40, of Keystone Heights, was arrested by Clay deputies on July 29 for trespassing.

Shane William Straight, 18, of Keystone Heights, was arrested by Clay deputies on July 28 for failure to stop after a crash involving an injury.

Michael Raymond Williams, 36, of Keystone Heights, was arrested by Clay deputies on July 28 for assault and battery during a burglary, domestic battery, and resisting an officer without violence.

Former city worker arrested for bribery

BY DAN HILDEBRAN
dan@bctelegram.com

A former employee for the City of Lake Butler was arrested on July 23 after the Department of Corrections accused him of taking bribes to supply inmates with tobacco.

Corey Joseph Sweat, 25, of Starke, was arrested by Union deputies for smuggling contraband into a prison and bribery.

According to an FDC inspector general's probable cause affidavit, the defendant was assigned to supervise a work crew for the city and, during that time, provided inmates with tobacco in exchange for cash delivered through a smartphone app.

The affidavit said a family member of one inmate tipped off inspectors.

The report outlined four cash payments from the family members or acquaintances of four different inmates to Sweat totaling \$160.

Investigators also interviewed several inmates who told them the cash payments were for cigarettes.

Lake Butler City Manager Kimberly Hayes said that Sweat was no longer employed with the municipality when she began working for the city in January 2024.

In a separate case, Natavis D. Baynard, 42, of Quitman, Georgia, was arrested by Union deputies on July 23 for bribery of a public servant, smuggling contraband into a prison, and use of a two-way communications device to facilitate a felony.

According to court papers, Baynard, a former RMC inmate, acted as a go-between for a former correctional officer and several other inmates. The former correctional officer allegedly provided cigarettes to the inmates.

of the information between commissioners, professionals and the public. She also hoped that postelection, the country will enter a healing stage and there will be economic recovery to help take the pressure off people.

She said the public knows the county needs funding, but they need to be involved working with the commission on something they can agree with and afford.

Riddick moved to approve the resolution, and Dougherty seconded the motion for additional brief discussion. In the end, Riddick was the only vote in favor of the resolution.

Spooner said they do have an ordinance in place now to implement a fire assessment, but the time to do so has not been agreed upon. The amount remains in question, too.

Dougherty was fine with recovering 50% of the fire budget with a \$167 fire assessment. He said with increases in property values, the commission might be able to pass an assessment and lower taxes at the same time next year.

Spooner and Andrews have suggested starting even lower than 50% budget recovery with an assessment around \$80 or \$90 per dwelling unit.

Andrews shared her vision of open discussions

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State runner-up BHS readying for 2024



Dontae Balfour (right) is pictured in Charlotte's 33-26 overtime win over Tulsa last season. Balfour, a 2021 Bradford High School graduate, ended the game with an interception. Photo provided courtesy of Charlotte Athletics.

Balfour named to Jim Thorpe Preseason List

BY CLIFF SMELLEY
cliff@bctelegraph.com

University of North Carolina at Charlotte football player Dontae Balfour, a 2021 Bradford High School graduate, has been named to the Paycom Jim Thorpe Award Preseason Watch List.

The list, released July 31 by the Oklahoma Sports Hall of Fame and the Jim Thorpe Association, consists of 42 defensive backs who were selected because of past performance and preseason All-America honors.

Additional players may be added to the list as the season progresses.

Balfour enters his junior year at Charlotte as a preseason All-American Athletic Conference selection by Athlon Sports and Phil Steele.

The former Tornado spent two years at North Carolina — redshirting his first year — before transferring to Charlotte. He started all 11 games for the

49'ers last season, finishing fourth on the team in tackles with 54. He had five games in which he recorded at least six tackles, with a season-high nine in a 44-38 overtime loss to Memphis.

Balfour tied a program record for pass breakups in a game with four against Memphis. He finished the season with 11 pass breakups, tying a program record and leaving him six shy of the school career record.

One week prior to the Memphis loss, the 6-2, 185-pound defensive back had an interception in overtime to give the 49ers a 33-26 overtime win over Tulsa. Charlotte scored the go-ahead touchdown on three plays in the first overtime period. The first two plays of Tulsa's overtime series were incompletions, with Balfour breaking up the pass on the second-down play. Balfour then

See THORPE, page 10

BY CLIFF SMELLEY
cliff@bctelegraph.com

Seven seniors from Bradford High School's 2023 football team are now with college programs. Five of those were starters on a defensive unit that allowed 90 points in 50 games. Also gone are the quarterback who led the team in passing and rushing, the starting running back and the leading wide receiver.

Yet there's a mindset around the program that the Tornadoes, who were the Class 2S state runner-up, will be just fine when the 2024 season kicks off.

"The expectation is to win," Head Coach Jamie Rodgers said. "The expectation is to come up here and do things at a high level. We come out here and work the same as we did two years ago. We come out here and work the same as we did last year. These guys should expect if we do those things, we should win."

Rodgers said the best programs have a system in which most of your starters — year in and year out — are juniors and seniors.

That's what he's got at BHS. That's why he doesn't expect a drop off, despite the graduation of key players.

"These (younger) guys practiced with (the older guys) last year," Rodgers said. "They saw what it took and got a lot of reps at practice. We were fortunate to be up in a lot of games the last couple of years to where those guys got a bunch of reps."

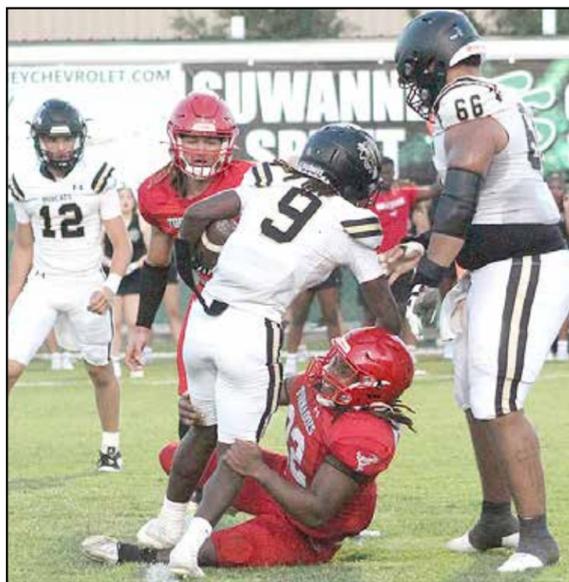
Bradford proved itself to be one of the best programs in the state the last couple of years, losing just three games total in 2022 and 2023 and finishing as the Class 2S state runner-up in 2023.

The Tornadoes have returning starters at various positions, but Rodgers said if he had to single out positions of strength, one would be an offensive line that returns such players as seniors Cayden Carter and Jacob Ferguson and juniors Ridge Bradley and Kyren Green. Last year, the unit helped the Tornadoes rush for 3,084 yards for an average of 206 yards per

2024 BHS Varsity Football Schedule

Aug. 16	Columbia (KC)	7 p.m.
Aug. 23	at Baker County	7 p.m.
Aug. 30	Dunnellon	7:30 p.m.
Sept. 6	South Sumter	7:30 p.m.
Sept. 13	Mandarin	7 p.m.
Sept. 27	Keystone* (HC)	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 4	Palatka*	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 11	at Newberry*	7:30 p.m.
Oct. 18	at Leon	7 p.m.
Oct. 25	at Santa Fe*	7:30 p.m.
Nov. 1	at NFEI	7 p.m.

* District game
KC Preseason Kickoff Classic
HC Homecoming



Brian Clifflin (second from right) prepares to bring Buchholz's Daionte Hicks down for a loss in a May 16 spring jamboree. Clifflin is a returner who'll contribute at linebacker and running back.

game.

"Their growth from week one to the playoffs at the end of the year was the biggest growth I've ever seen in a unit in my 20 years of coaching," Rodgers said. "It was their grit, their toughness and the way they wanted to finish plays. First downs weren't good enough. It was about trying to score."

Rodgers described the linemen as a close group, which is the goal.

"They hang out together, they eat together, they walk around school together — when you've got that, you've got a chance to be really good," Rodgers said. "That's a really good unit right now."

The coach said with their experience, the linemen should be "blowing up holes" this season. Who they'll be blowing up holes for is a number of backs who could all contribute — a situation different from last year, when senior Willie Pollard was counted on as the main back until he suffered an injury.

"We knew last year coming in it was going to be Willie," Rodgers said. "Willie was going to get the majority of the carries."

"This year, I see battles every

day in practice."

Battling it out in practice are players such as Gino Addison (junior), Iyen Addison (sophomore), Jy'Quez Cason (junior), Brian Clifflin (senior) and Brandon Williams (senior). Clifflin was the Tornadoes' third-leading rusher last year with 440 yards and four touchdowns on 74 carries.

Gino Addison and Iyen Addison transferred to Clay High School, but have returned to Bradford. Iyen Addison was the Blue Devils' leading rusher last year with 669 yards and seven touchdowns on 101 carries. Gino Addison was Clay's third-leading rusher with 471 yards and a team-high eight touchdowns on 70 carries.

"If we give those guys a good crease," Rodgers said of all of his running backs, "it's going to be fun to watch."

Quarterback Dae'Jon Shanks graduated, but in steps a player with some experience in senior Zack Paulk, a transfer from Columbia. He played in only four games last year because of an injury, but went 55 of 108 for 761 yards and seven touchdowns.

See BHS, page 12

PUBLIC NOTICE FROM THE SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS BRADFORD COUNTY, FLORIDA OFFICIAL SAMPLE BALLOT FOR AUGUST 20, 2024 CLOSED PRIMARY ELECTION

The PRIMARY ELECTION on August 20th 2024 is a Closed Primary Election

Polls will be open from 7am to 7pm on Election Day.

PLEASE BE SURE YOUR RESIDENCE ADDRESS IS UP TO DATE TO SAVE YOU TIME ON ELECTION DAY! CONTACT YOUR ELECTIONS OFFICE IF YOU NEED TO UPDATE YOUR ADDRESS

For additional information, contact our office at (904) 966-6266 or check our website at www.votebradfordfl.gov



Vote Early! Early Voting runs from Aug 5 - 18 at the Bradford County Courthouse. 9am to 6pm, daily

Official Primary Election Sample Ballot / Boleta Oficial de Muestra Elecciones Primarias August 20, 2024 / 20 de Agosto de 2024 Republican Party / Partido Republicano Bradford County, Florida / Condado de Bradford, Florida

Instructions: To vote completely fill in the oval next to your choice. Use black or blue ballpoint pen. If you make a mistake, don't hesitate to ask for a new ballot. If you erase or make other marks, your vote may not count. Instrucciones: Para votar, llene completamente el óvalo al lado de su preferencia. Use bolígrafo negro o azul. Si usted hace un error, no dude en pedir una nueva boleta. Si borra o hace otras marcas, su voto no se puede contar.

<p>United States Senator Senador de los Estados Unidos (Vote for One) (Vote por Uno)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> John S. Columbus REP</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Keith Gross REP</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Rick Scott REP</p>	<p>County Commissioner - District 5 Junta de Comisionados del Condado - Distrito 5 Contienda Primaria Universal (Vote for One) (Vote por Uno) Precincts 5, 9 & 13 only. Precintos 5, 9 & 13 solamente</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Diane Andrews REP</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Brian Outlaw REP</p>
<p>Representative in Congress Distrito 3 Representante en el Congreso Distrito 3 (Vote for One) (Vote por Uno)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Kat Cammack REP</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Alec Stevens REP</p>	<p>School Board Member- District 4 Miembro De La Junta Escolar- Distrito 4 (Vote for One) (Vote por Uno) Precincts 10, 11 & 12 only. Precintos 10, 11 & 12 solamente</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Dana Reddish Bell</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Mitchell Gunter</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Candace Cragg Osteen</p>
<p>Superintendent of Schools Superintendente de escuelas (Vote for One) (Vote por Uno)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Will Hartley REP</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Tracey Kendrick REP</p>	

Official Primary Election Sample Ballot / Boleta Oficial de Muestra Elecciones Primarias August 20, 2024 / 20 de Agosto de 2024 Democratic Party / Partido Democrático Bradford County, Florida / Condado de Bradford, Florida

United States Senator
Senador de los Estados Unidos
(Vote for One) (Vote por Uno)

Stanley Campbell DEM

Rod Joseph DEM

Debbie Mucarsel-Powell DEM

Brian Rush DEM

County Commissioner - District 5
Junta de Comisionados del Condado - Distrito 5
Contienda Primaria Universal
(Vote for One) (Vote por Uno)
Precincts 5, 9 & 13 only.
Precintos 5, 9 & 13 solamente

Diane Andrews REP

Brian Outlaw REP

School Board Member- District 4
Miembro De La Junta Escolar- Distrito 4
(Vote for One) (Vote por Uno)
Precincts 10, 11 & 12 only.
Precintos 10, 11 & 12 solamente

Dana Reddish Bell

Mitchell Gunter

Candace Cragg Osteen

Official Primary Election Sample Ballot / Boleta Oficial de Muestra Elecciones Primarias August 20, 2024 / 20 de Agosto de 2024 Nonpartisan / Sin Partido Bradford County, Florida / Condado de Bradford, Florida

County Commissioner - District 5
Junta de Comisionados del Condado - Distrito 5
Contienda Primaria Universal
(Vote for One) (Vote por Uno)
Precincts 5, 9 & 13 only.
Precintos 5, 9 & 13 solamente

Diane Andrews REP

Brian Outlaw REP

School Board Member- District 4
Miembro De La Junta Escolar- Distrito 4
(Vote for One) (Vote por Uno)
Precincts 10, 11 & 12 only.
Precintos 10, 11 & 12 solamente

Dana Reddish Bell

Mitchell Gunter

Candace Cragg Osteen

Bradford County, Florida
Precincts & Polling Locations
Revised January 2024

<p>Precinct 1 Lawley Community Center 22598 Park St Lawley, FL 32058</p>	<p>Precinct 8 Starke Golf & Country Club 15501 NE 14th Ave Starke, FL 32091</p>
<p>Precinct 2 Lawley Community Center 22598 Park St Lawley, FL 32058</p>	<p>Precinct 9 Sampson City Church of God 8252 SW County Road 225 Starke, FL 32091</p>
<p>Precinct 3 Heilbronn Springs Baptist Church 21354 NW SR 16 Starke, FL 32091</p>	<p>Precinct 10 Theresa Community Center 1748 SE 81st Ave Starke, FL 32091</p>
<p>Precinct 4 Church of God by Faith 730 Old Lawley Rd Starke, FL 32091</p>	<p>Precinct 11 Hampton City Hall 5784 Navarre Ave Hampton, FL 32044</p>
<p>Precinct 5 Bayless Highway Baptist Church 11798 NW CR 225 Starke, FL 32091</p>	<p>Precinct 12 Keystone United Methodist Multi-Ministry Bldg 4004 SR 21 South Keystone Heights, FL 32656</p>
<p>Precinct 6 Bradford County Senior Center 1805 N Temple Ave Starke, FL 32091</p>	<p>Precinct 13 Brooker City Hall/Community Center 17435 Tetstone Ave Brooker, FL 32622</p>
<p>Precinct 7 Madison Street Baptist Church 900 W Madison St Starke, FL 32091</p>	

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Due to redistricting, your precinct and polling location may have changed. Visit our website www.votebradfordfl.gov to see your new precinct and location.

¡NUEVOS LUGARES DE VOTACIÓN!
Debido a la redistribución de distritos, es posible que su distrito electoral y su lugar de votación hayan cambiado. Visite nuestro sitio web www.votebradfordfl.gov para ver su nuevo distrito electoral y ubicación.

McRae teacher now Starke Elementary AP

BY CLIFF SMELLEY
cliff@bctelegraph.com

The right position. That's what Michelle Ware was waiting for. She had earned her master's degree in Educational Leadership from the University of North Florida in 2022, but wasn't looking to leave her job as a teacher for the first opportunity that came along. "I love the classroom," Ware said. "I was like, 'I'll just wait until I get the right position.' I was not eager to jump from the classroom to (assistant principal). I was like, 'When the timing's right, it'll happen.'" With God's guidance, Ware realized the timing was right — and the position was right — to make that jump, accepting the job as assistant principal at Starke Elementary School.

"I prayed a lot about this position when it did become available," said Ware, who taught at Keystone Heights' McRae Elementary the last seven years. "I fully feel that this was the right time. I really feel that what I have learned in the classroom in 21 years I can now use to help other teachers cultivate and learn."

Ware, who lives in Hampton, is now one of two new leaders at Starke Elementary, joining Principal Laurén Morgan, who was assistant principal at Southside/Bradford Elementary School the past three years.

"I feel like it's going to be awesome," Ware said. "It's kind of like we're starting something new, but it's not a bad new. We're really cultivating and pushing

things in the right direction. Not that they hadn't been doing great, but we really want to help the students and the teachers and the community really reach their best selves.

"I'm excited to be a part of that, to watch it unfold. (The school was) one point away from a B this year. I'm really excited to see how we're going to grow next year."

Ware said she grew up wanting to be a teacher. She acted as if she was one when playing with siblings and cousins, all of whom were younger than her.

"I always played school," Ware said. "I was always corralling them into doing whatever I wanted them to do."

Ware also credited her fourth-grade teacher for inspiring her to want to be a teacher. The teacher gave Ware extra worksheets that she could use when playing make-believe as a teacher and let Ware put stickers on the papers she was grading.

"She just really took me in and made me feel extra special," Ware said, adding, "I can't even remember one thing she taught me that year, to be honest. It was the connection that I felt."

Ware earned her bachelor's degree at the University of Florida and began her teaching career in Alachua County, which she described as a "full-circle moment." She went to school in Alachua and received a full-ride college scholarship from the Education Foundation of Alachua County, which she earned by remaining an A-B student and meeting other criteria (such as



Michelle Ware, who spent the last seven years as a teacher at Keystone's McRae Elementary, is the new assistant principal at Starke Elementary.



George and Dot Green (center) pose with the inaugural recipients of George W. Green Sr. Family Minority Scholarships: Malcolm Sercy (far left) and Trestin Durant (far right).

Durant and Sercy are 1st recipients of George Green Sr. Minority Scholarships

Two recent graduates of Union County high school have received scholarships that will help them to achieve their educational goals and professional development.

Trestin Durant and Malcolm Sercy are the first-ever recipients of the George W. Green Sr. Family Minority Scholarships, which are awarded on the basis of academic achievement and recommendations of UCHS teachers and staff.

Durant, the son of Eric and Celena Durant, is a music composer and alumnus of the UCHS band. He will be attending Jacksonville University, from which he received a four-year academic scholarship, to attain a

bachelor's degree in Music.

Sercy, the son of Jean Sercy and Patricia Waldron, earned a top-five score on the American Government/Civics end-of-course exam and will attend Santa Fe College to earn an associate's degree. He then plans to transfer to the University of Florida and work toward a bachelor's degree in Education.

George Wayne Green Sr, the president of the minority scholarship program, has been helping kids in Union County since 2014 and hopes to help more kids (and their parents) in the future cover their educational costs. Green believes in the importance of higher education for minority students in Union.

avoiding troubles with drugs and law enforcement) since she was an eighth-grader.

"It was really great to then give back to Alachua County and become an educator for their community," she said.

It was also neat for Ware to begin her career as a fourth-grade teacher, reminding her of the fourth-grade teacher who meant so much to her as a student.

"It was just awesome," Ware said. "It was like a Disney movie."

Ware taught multiple grades from fourth to eighth. She spent 14 years in Alachua County before her career took her to Clay County and McRae Elementary.

It was almost like following

in the footsteps of Morgan, Ware said. Morgan, who graduated from UF the year before Ware did, taught at McRae. Then, when Morgan was at Melrose Elementary School, Ware used to see her during the summers, hanging out at the beach with her fellow teachers who were friends of Morgan's.

"I actually knew her through other people," Ware said. "It's kind of neat how our lives have just kind of circled each other this whole time. We weren't like best friends or even friends, really. We were acquaintances."

Those acquaintances are now working side by side at Starke

See WARE, page 13

Brugh moves from BMS to become Bradford Elementary AP

BY CLIFF SMELLEY
cliff@bctelegraph.com

Karen Brugh may be starting a new job for the second straight year, but with it comes familiarity.

Brugh, who began her career as an administrator as the assistant principal at Bradford Middle School last year, is now serving in that same role at Bradford Elementary School.

"It is (a new start)," Brugh said, "but it's almost like coming back to my roots."

Those roots she referred to were first established at the elementary level, which is where her teaching career began.

Also, her career in the Bradford County School District began at Southside Elementary School, which has since undergone a name change and a location change as the new Bradford Elementary on 144th Street.

The new school, of course, is quite different from the old Southside Elementary she taught at. It also provides Brugh with a bigger campus than the one she was used to at BMS.

"I remember my first week here (at Bradford Elementary). I think I may have gotten lost a time or two," Brugh said, adding, "I'm definitely getting my steps in over here."

Brugh said BMS made great gains last year in improving its state grade from a D to a C and is excited to see how the school continues to progress under its new administrative team of Principal Crystal Williams and Assistant Principal Rob Charles. She'll miss out on being personally involved in any future gains at BMS, but she's now at a school that has made incredible improvement the last couple of years, improving from a D to a C and then to a B this past year.

"Watching Bradford Elementary last year, even in my middle school capacity, it was encouraging to see their dedication to one mind and one goal in getting to where they wanted to be," Brugh said, adding, "I am super excited to carry on the foundation that has been laid here."

Bradford Elementary was not far from being an A school, so obviously the goal is to keep working and improving.

"We've got to get back in the car and start driving again," Brugh said.

It's a big car. It would be obvious to think of the front and passenger seats occupied by Brugh and Principal Cassie Melvin, but they're just two of many who factor into the school's success.

"It's not a one-person job," Brugh said. "It's everyone working together to get where we need to go."

A love of learning

Brugh figured out that where



Karen Brugh is the new assistant principal at Bradford Elementary School after serving one year in that same role at Bradford Middle School.

she needed to go was into education. It seemed a natural career choice for someone who loved learning growing up. She credited the "wonderful" teachers she had for fostering that love.

It was while she was a student at Clay High School that Brugh definitively decided to go into education. Though she described herself as a "homebody," she traveled quite a distance to go to college. She attended Tennessee Temple University in Chattanooga.

She returned home to Clay County after earning her degree and began teaching at the elementary school she attended as a student. In fact, she was able to work with the teacher who taught her in first grade.

"It was an awesome experience going back to my elementary school," Brugh said. "I actually taught third grade in the very same classroom that I was in in third grade."

Brugh and her family, which consists of husband, Larry, and children Jonathan (2022 Bradford High School graduate), Jacob (2023 BHS graduate), Jeffrey (BHS junior) and Katherine (BHS freshman), moved to Bradford County. She continued to teach in Clay County for a couple of years before joining the Bradford School District.

As you might expect from someone who has a love for learning, Brugh wasn't content

how Hawkins sometimes would go along with something she wanted to do, even if he wasn't too sure about it himself.

"I think sometimes he might have looked at me like, 'We're doing what?' But he went along with my shenanigans," Brugh said. "Anything that was for the kids or to build morale among the staff or to make connections with the community. I was appreciative of that."

Brugh said Hawkins was

always approachable, which made an impression on her as a first-year administrator.

"I knew I could always go to him if I didn't understand something or I needed to question something," she said. "He was always open to anything I needed to ask. Even if it was something I didn't necessarily agree with or understand, he was very open to me coming to him."

That's how Brugh wants to be for teachers at Bradford

Elementary.

"I tell them that my door is always open," she said. "They can come in and kick, scream, yell, talk, pray — whatever they need to do. I've said to them, 'Then I'll dust you off and send you back out.'"

Brugh said she can still relate to what teachers are going through, having been out of the

See BRUGH, page 13

The project described was supported by Funding Opportunity Number 84VCA2030-03-02 from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. The contents provided are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of HHS or any of its agencies.

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Beals outlines goals as new Keystone Rotary Club president

BY DAN HILDEBRAN
Dan@BcTelegraph.com

Todd Beals, the new president of the Keystone Heights Rotary Club, said he wants to increase membership by 10 people in 2024-25 and focus the group's fundraising efforts on one major event.

Beals spent three years in the 1980s working on Lockheed P-3 Orions at Naval Air Station Jacksonville before landing a job at Learjet in Wichita, Kansas.

While in Jacksonville, he met his wife, Debbie, and the pair spent 18 years in the Midwest before returning to the Lake Region to care for Debbie's father.

While working in the Sunflower State for Learjet, Beals also launched his real estate career, which he said attracted him because he's a people person

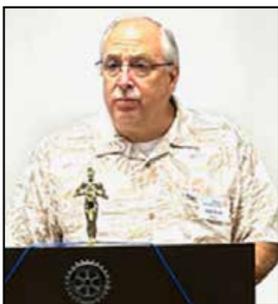
and doesn't like to be chained to a desk all day.

Todd and Debbie are partners in Team Beals- Lake Area Realtors and are affiliated with Florida Homes Realty and Mortgage.

He said that despite the headwinds of stubborn interest rates and election-year uncertainties, people continue to move to the Sunshine State and the Lake Region.

He also said Keystone Heights continues to attract new businesses and investors.

Soon after moving to the Lake Region, the couple decided to get involved with the community, joining Lake Region Kiwanis. Debbie is also a member of the Friends of Keystone Heights, Fla., organizing the city's centennial celebration. She also serves on Clay County's Tourist



Todd Beals is the new president of the Keystone Heights Rotary Club.

Development Council. Debbie and Todd support the Keystone Heights High School Resource Center, Holiday Helpers, Save Our Lakes, and Sheriff Michelle Cook's community outreach meetings: Sheriff's Net. Todd

recently took over leadership of the Keystone Heights Business Association.

Todd said being involved in so many groups can be exhausting but, at the same time, rewarding.

Beals said his interest in community service started as a vehicle to network and find new relationships with other businesspeople in the Lake Region. However, he quickly discovered the fulfillment and rewards of helping others in need, and he added that others have followed that path.

"I think when they start out, they think, this is going to help me network with other businesses," he said. "And then once you get drawn in and you're doing things for the community, some of these habits change, and you actually enjoy doing the community stuff, and it ends up

not being all about networking with the other businesses."

Beals said his first priority for the Rotary Club is increasing membership, adding that the first obstacle in growing the club is a lack of awareness of opportunities in community service.

He said many community groups are still recovering from COVID, which lured people away from face-to-face contact and made them comfortable communicating remotely.

"I think it's too bad because I think personal touch and communication has a lot to do with leadership," he said. "As people start getting back out and having those meaningful relationships again, I'm hoping things will start to pick up and get better for community groups."

He said that many people

want to be involved in their communities but are unaware of the opportunities to serve.

"For instance, you had the Kiwanis Parade, and everybody thought the city did it," he said. "And that's an event that Kiwanis has had for a long time."

His other priority is to develop a signature fundraising event for the club that will provide funds for community projects.

He said that his idea for one big project rather than a series of smaller fundraisers came after meeting with other incoming Rotary presidents.

The new Rotary leader added that the amount of money other clubs were raising with major events was a revelation.

Beals said that it may take him two years to see the fruition of his vision, but he is willing to wait.

THORPE Continued from page 8

made an interception on third

down to end the game.

Balfour, who finished last season as a third-team All-AAC selection, had a notable performance in a 22-7 loss to Florida. He recorded eight

tackles, with his six solo stops leading both teams.

Charlotte, which went 3-9 last year, opens this season with a home game against James

Madison on Saturday, Aug. 31.

Balfour will make a return to Florida when the 49ers play Florida Atlantic on Saturday, Nov. 23.

The 49ers schedule includes two teams that have former Bradford Tornadoes: East Carolina on Oct. 5 and Memphis on Oct. 26. Defensive lineman

Torin Brazell plays for East Carolina, while defensive back/receiver Chail Cummings plays for Memphis. Both players are 2024 BHS graduates.

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Obituaries

Charles Barrett

Charles U. Barrett, 62, died Monday, July 29, 2024, in Maryland. He was a graduate of the University of Florida.

Survivors are his wife, Teresa Barrett, sons, Weston A. Barrett, Chandler A. Barrett, and Treyford A. Barrett; and a sister, Stephanie Barrett.

The viewing and funeral service will be Saturday, Aug. 10, at Peetsville Cemetery, Lawtey, beginning at 2 p.m.

Services are entrusted to Haile Funeral Home, Inc., 802 N. Oak St., Starke. 904-964-7905

Jurutha Desue

Ms. Jurutha Kelly Desue, 91, passed away Friday, Aug. 2, 2024 at her residence. She attended the local schools of Bradford County, including R.J.E., and was a homemaker. She was a life-long member of Pleasant Grove Community Church in Starke.

Survivors are her children, a son, Glen "Beaver" Desue; daughters, Vivian Carroll Jones and Sandra Tyson; a brother, Roosevelt Kelly; eight grandchildren; and nine great-grandchildren.

The viewing will be Friday, Aug. 9, from 10 a.m. until 12 p.m. at Pleasant Grove Community Church, Starke. The cortege will form on Friday, Aug. 9, at 12:45 p.m. at the home of Ms. Jurutha Desue. The funeral service will begin at 1 p.m. on Friday, Aug. 9, at Pleasant Grove Community Church, officiated by Pastor Carl Tyson. Interment will follow at Bob Love Cemetery.

Services are entrusted to Haile Funeral Home, Inc., 802 N. Oak St., Starke. 904-964-7905

PAID OBITUARY

Alice Z. Diggs-Hamilton

A Centenarian

Mother Alice Zinner Diggs Hamilton, 103, of Lawtey, wife of the late Deacon Howard Arthur Hamilton Sr. and daughter of the late Stephen and Daisy Strong-Diggs, peacefully surrendered to the Will of God on Wednesday, July 31, 2024, at her home surrounded by her family. She was a long-time member of Saint Johns Missionary Baptist Church, where she served as a Church Mother.

Endearing memories will linger in the hearts of her sons, Jessie Hamilton, Irie Hamilton, Arthur Hamilton, Charles Hamilton and Edward Hamilton, (Howard Hamilton Jr. and David Hamilton preceded her in death); daughters, Dorothy Maddox, Minnie Williams, Daisy Reeves and Zinner Strong, (Margaret Byron preceded her in death); 47 grandchildren; 55 great-grandchildren; 27 great-great-grandchildren; four great-great-great-grandchildren; and a host of in-laws, nieces, nephews, cousins and friends.

The Homegoing Celebration will be at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Aug. 10, 2024, at True Vine Outreach Ministry, Starke. Elder Ross Chandler is Pastor, with her grandson, Elder Edward L. Hamilton Sr., Associate Pastor, delivering the eulogy. Mother Hamilton will be viewed at Saint Johns Missionary Baptist Church, Lawtey on Friday, Aug. 9, from 5:30 p.m. until 7:30 p.m. and at True Vine Outreach Ministry on Saturday, Aug. 10, 2024, beginning 30 minutes prior to the service and with the professional. The procession will form at Mother Hamilton's residence, 20836 NE 17th Ave., Lawtey, at 10:15 a.m. The burial will follow at Peetsville Memorial Cemetery.

Arrangements are entrusted to Duncan Brothers Funeral Home, 428 N.W. Eighth St., Gainesville.

PAID OBITUARY

Evelyn McCulley

Evelyn Sue McCulley peacefully left this world on Sunday, June 9, 2024, among family who loved her. She was born Oct. 1, 1939, in New Madrid, Missouri. She was the oldest child and the only daughter of James Earl and Mildred Irene (Skaggs) Allen. The family moved to Florida in the early 1950s and settled in Minneola. She married into a large, loving family in Lawtey and had many relatives by marriage in Bradford County. She loved traveling, fishing, crafting, reading, and spending time with her family. She was known for her sarcastic wit and imaginative view of life. Her free spirit will be missed by all. She was preceded in death by her parents; brother, Robert "Bob" Earl; and grandson, Jacob Livingston.

She leaves behind two brothers, Michael and He Who Will Not Be Named; along with five children, James Livingston, Tasha (Joe) Spradley, Camilla (John) Evans, William "Will" Cruce, and Darrell (Allie) Cruce. She also leaves behind a multitude of grandchildren; great-grandchildren; and a great-great-grandchild.

The family will hold a Celebration of Life in a place she held dear to her heart, Horseshoe Beach, in late September. All of her family, whether related by blood or love, are invited to attend.

PAID OBITUARY

Lorene Nunery

Lorene D. Nunery, 96, of Palm Coast died Thursday, July 11, 2024, at her home. She was born April 3, 1928, in Starke to the late Carl and Mae (Dyal) McKinney. She was preceded in death by her children, Michael Nunery, Donna Nunery; and one grandson.

She is survived by children, Victoria Nunery Voges, Charles (Rebecca) Nunery, Lori Leone (David) Piper; nine grandchildren; 10 great-grandchildren; and numerous extended family members.

Funeral services were held at DeWitt C. Jones Chapel on Monday, Aug. 5. Interment followed at Brown Cemetery.

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

Raymond Robinson

Raymond Mark Robinson, 64, of Melrose died Wednesday, July 24, 2024, at UF Health/Shands Hospital in Gainesville. He was born Sept. 20, 1959, in Jacksonville and was a longtime area resident. He was of the Christian faith. He was preceded in death by his mother, June (Larsy) Robinson.

He is survived by his son, Joshua Mark Robinson; father, Raymond Eugene Robinson; brother, Paul Robinson; and his companion, Janice Kalogiros.

No services will be held at this time.

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

BHS

Continued from page 8

In the spring jamboree, Paulk, who's more of a dropback passer compared to the overall athlete that Shanks was, completed 13 of 22 passes for 164 yards.

"He's got unbelievable arm strength," Rodgers said. "He's a 4.0 student. He's going to be able to survey the field and get the ball to where it needs to be. He's not going to throw it into trouble very often."

Rodgers said you can look at Paulk and be unable to tell if he just threw a 50-yard touchdown pass or got picked off in the red zone.

"His demeanor — it doesn't change," Rodgers said. "I like that in a quarterback. You've got to be able to move forward and erase the bad stuff fast. If something is really good, you've got to be able to forget it, too, and go and make another big play."

Senior Jeremiah McKenzie will also see action at quarterback. He started most of 2022 at the position, though was mainly a linebacker last season. Still, he was fourth on the team in rushing last year with 332 yards and six

touchdowns. He also completed 6 of 9 passes for 68 yards and two touchdowns last year.

Rodgers said with Paulk on the team, McKenzie can focus on his strength as a runner when he enters the game at quarterback.

"Now, we've got the ability to package his stuff to what highlights (his abilities)," Rodgers said. "We don't have to make him try to throw deep balls. We don't have to try to make him read defenses and throw it into places."

Players such as Cason, Williams, Jordan Cason (sophomore), Marlin Haywood (junior) and Mikey Oliver (senior) look to share the load in filling the shoes of graduate Chail Cummings, the team's leading receiver last season. Cummings had 846 receiving yards, while the rest of the team combined for 569.

"A lot of times last year, it was throw it up, and hopefully Chail's down there," Rodgers said. "That was some of our pass game. We don't want it to be that way. We want to spread it around."

Though the offense has been pretty good the last two years, averaging 29 points per game in 2022 and 31 per game in 2023, it has been overshadowed by a defensive unit that allowed 169 points and recorded 15 shutouts in those two seasons combined.

The defensive line loses sacks leader Torin Brazell, who combined with fellow graduated lineman Jordan Daniels to record 136 tackles last season, but, like the offensive line, Rodgers considers the unit a strength for the Tornados. One of the returning starters is Duke Lewis, who was the third leading tackler with 104 and second in sacks with 12. Lewis played as a senior last season, but was granted an extra year of eligibility by the Florida High School Athletic Association following an appeal. Lewis missed a lot of his sophomore year due to injuries sustained in a traffic crash.

"His grades suffered during those six months," Rodgers said, "but last year, he was A-B honor roll for the full year. His parents wanted to appeal to the FHSAA, to see if they could get that year that he lost back."

"We're very fortunate to have him (this season)."

Rodgers said Lewis has an "unbelievable motor" and has gained 15-20 pounds of muscle.

Barry Warren Jr.

Mr. Barry "Bubba" Keith Warren Jr. 34, of Starke was the beloved son of father, Barry Keith Warren Sr., and mother, Tammy (Gilbert) Kenneth, and Danielle Warren "Mama." He was born Feb. 7, 1990, and passed away Tuesday, July 27, 2024. He was a strong-willed, fearless individual. He lived each moment as his heart desired. He loved spending time with loved ones, country music, and hanging out. He had the voice of an angel and a heart of gold. He loved passionately and cared attentively. His big, strong hugs could remind you just how much he loved you. To some he had a rough exterior, but he was a teddy bear through and through. He was preceded in death by his paternal grandfather, Jackson Warren; and two maternal grandfathers, Kenneth (Tammy) Padgett and Louis (Danielle) Stolfo.

He is survived by his parents; children, Kayden, Kallie, Mason, and Derek; siblings, Kenny Warren, Trevor Gilliam, and Sarah (Jeremy) Mosley; grandparents, Betty Warren, Kay Padgett, and Jane Stolfo; fiancé, Brittany; and many extended family members.

In lieu of a service, the family will be holding a private celebration of life.

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



PAID OBITUARY



BHS

Continued from page 8

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"We're very fortunate to have him (this season)."

Rodgers said Lewis has an "unbelievable motor" and has gained 15-20 pounds of muscle.



Gino Addison (far right), following blocker Cayden Carter (far left), carries the ball against Suwannee in the May 16 spring jamboree. Addison is back home in Bradford after playing for Clay, while Carter is part of an experienced offensive line Head Coach Jamie Rodgers expects to be "blowing up holes."

"The sky's the limit for him," said Rodgers, adding that Lewis has received two Division-I college offers since being granted an extra year.

Opponents had a hard time dealing with Lewis on one end of the line and Brazell on the other. Rodgers said this year, a player like Jamarion Foye (junior) could step in and fill in for the graduated Brazell.

"He's going to step up and do a good job," Rodgers said.

The line returns Trente-Jenkins, who was seventh in tackles last season as a junior with 64. Jenkins was listed at 6-0, 290, last season, but Rodgers said he's dropped 15-20 pounds this year.

"He moves like a bigger skill guy now," Rodgers said, adding that Jenkins can now line up at end some along with playing inside. He'll also see some action on offense at fullback.

"He's just going to move so much faster," Rodgers said.

The linebacking corps loses Chason Clark and Devon McBride, who were the team's top two in tackles with 134 and 118, respectively. However, starter McKenzie returns for his senior season after finishing fourth on the team in tackles last year with 101.

Rodgers said McKenzie is a leader by example as well as "a really good football player" who could play multiple positions in college on either side of the ball.

"That's rare to have a guy built like him — with that much

muscle — and who can do the things that he does," Rodgers said of McKenzie, who's listed at 6-2, 195.

Senior Reese Wainwright saw action last year when he'd go in to give Clark. Now, he'll be the player an underclassman will spell at times.

"Reese Wainwright is going to play a bunch of snaps for us at linebacker this year," Rodgers said.

Lewis can also move from the line to play linebacker, Rodgers said, adding that players such as Cliffin and Gino Addison will be contributors as well.

Rodgers described Cliffin as a "special leader" on the field and in the weight room. The coach mentioned how Cliffin, as someone who weighs 195 pounds, squatted 650 pounds recently.

"If everybody would work in the weight room like Brian Cliffin, we'd be unstoppable," Rodgers said.

The secondary loses players such as Cummings, Damarion Hankerson and Malakai Murphy, who, like Cummings, is now a collegiate student-athlete. The unit does return experience with Oliver and Williams, while players such as Jordan Cason, Jy'Quez Cason and senior Tyler Berry will also be counted on.

"When you lose Chail and Malakai Murphy and those kinds of guys who were back there, it's going to take a little while," Rodgers said. "It'll take some reps."

Rodgers said he's talked to other schools' coaches, who've said that because of the players BHS graduated, the defense can't be as good as it has been the past two years.

"I make sure I relay that to the guys," Rodgers said. "They're chomping at the bit. They're ready to go."

Rodgers has been ready to go, too.

"The older you get in this business, January through June is kind of boring," the coach said. "You need a break, but in February, you're ready to go again."

"We've been in the weight room for months. Now, it's time to get back on the field and go."

Bradford hosts a preseason kickoff classic against Columbia on Friday, Aug. 16, at 7 p.m. The Tornados then begin the season in earnest with a road game against Baker County on Friday, Aug. 23, at 7 p.m.

The Tornados' first home game that counts is against Dunnellon on Friday, Aug. 30, at 7:30 p.m.

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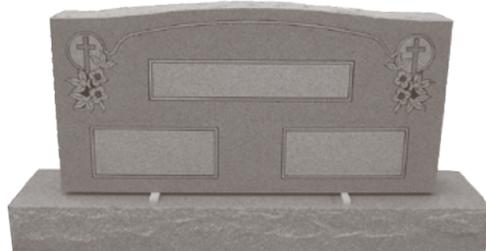
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WARE

Continued from page 9

Elementary.
 “I’m just so happy and blessed to be a part of what she’s doing here and to work alongside her,” Ware said.
 Ware said she began working toward a move in administration when she took advantage of a cohort program at UNF, which she began in 2020. The situation was similar to the one that led her to accept the job at Starke Elementary.
 “It, again, was God knocking on my heart, saying, ‘This is what I want you to do.’ I kept seeing the fliers (about the cohort program), or somebody would put something in my mailbox, or I would get an email,” Ware said. “I was like, ‘OK, God. I hear you.’”
 As she prepares to enter her first year as an administrator, Ware said one of her goals is for Starke Elementary to rise to an A school in the state’s rankings. She said she and Morgan both know what it takes to get there. Ware saw significant improvements take place at McRae, while Morgan witnessed the same at

Southside/Bradford.
 Ware said it takes a lot of work to improve in the state’s grade rankings. It also takes everyone working together as a team — a team that now has two new leaders.
 “Change is hard for everybody,” Ware said. “I just hope (Starke Elementary staff) can learn to trust us and be as excited as we are to be here and to work together to show the community and our students and our parents and Bradford County what we can do in our classrooms.”
 Improving a school’s performance, of course, involves focusing on the rigors of the work being done in the classrooms, but the focus can’t prevent students from also having enjoyable moments.
 “You want to make sure you’re balancing the fun with the academics,” Ware said.
 When she’s not on a school campus, Ware enjoys spending time with her children, Silver, 10, and Madison, 11, and her fiancé, Joshua Davis. They enjoy fishing and being at the beach.
 Ware also spends a good amount of time at ballparks as her son is an “avid baseball player.”

She also enjoys being a part of her church, Orange Heights Baptist.
 “If I’m not at the ballpark, I’m at the beach or church, usually,” Ware said.
 Though there has been flurries of activity at Starke Elementary, making new hires and prepping for the school year, Ware admitted it’s quiet and doesn’t seem like she’s at a school. Therefore, she’s eagerly awaiting the return of teachers and students.
 “I’m really excited just to get to meet everybody and the kids and get those first-day hugs and high-fives,” Ware said.
 She’ll enter the year with more duties than she’s had in the past as a classroom teacher, but she’s sure to keep relying on the advice she once received from a teacher, who was referencing a Jimmy Buffett song: “Breathe In, Breathe Out, Move On.”
 “Don’t get all worked up over stuff,” Ware said. “You can handle only one thing at a time.”
 It’ll also help that she’ll be breathing in, breathing out and moving on at the school God wanted her to be at.
 “God just kept knocking on my heart about coming over to Bradford,” Ware said, adding, “It was just meant to be.”

BRUGH

Continued from page 9

classroom for only one year. Through that knowledge, she’ll support teachers any way she can.
 “I’ll do everything I can to break down any walls that I can for them or offer any support for them that they might need in their classrooms,” Brugh said.
 Brugh said that she wants teachers to be honest with her. So far, they’ve proven to be just that in response to surveys Brugh sent out shortly after being named Bradford Elementary’s assistant principal. She asked teachers what they expected out of her as assistant principal.
 “They were very honest in their answers,” Brugh said, adding, “I appreciate that they were. I welcome that always —

for everyone to be honest.”
The year ahead

Anticipation.
 If there’s a word to describe what Brugh is feeling right now as teachers have been trickling in and out, preparing for the start of school, that is it.
 “Watching them come in and getting their classrooms set up is exciting because the new year is about to begin,” Brugh said.
 She looks forward to working alongside Melvin, whom she describes as a “phenomenal leader” who’s able to pass her passion for the school doing well to others at the school and in the community.
 Brugh witnessed the start of the school’s improvement when she began her Bradford teaching career at Southside Elementary. She said Melvin and former

Assistant Principal Laurén Morgan (who’s now the principal at Starke Elementary) were determined to cause a culture shift at the school.
 “They did whatever it took to get there,” Brugh said of ascending in the state’s school-grade system. “Now, the staff and the students have tasted and seen that they can get there. I think once you have tasted something and seen that you can do it, it gives you that much more confidence that you can go farther.”
 And the school does still have farther to go.
 “If we hit that A, I may just do a flip,” Brugh said. “We are certainly going for it. We know what is working and what we need to do to continue the drive. With a few tweaks here and there, I think we’ll get there.”

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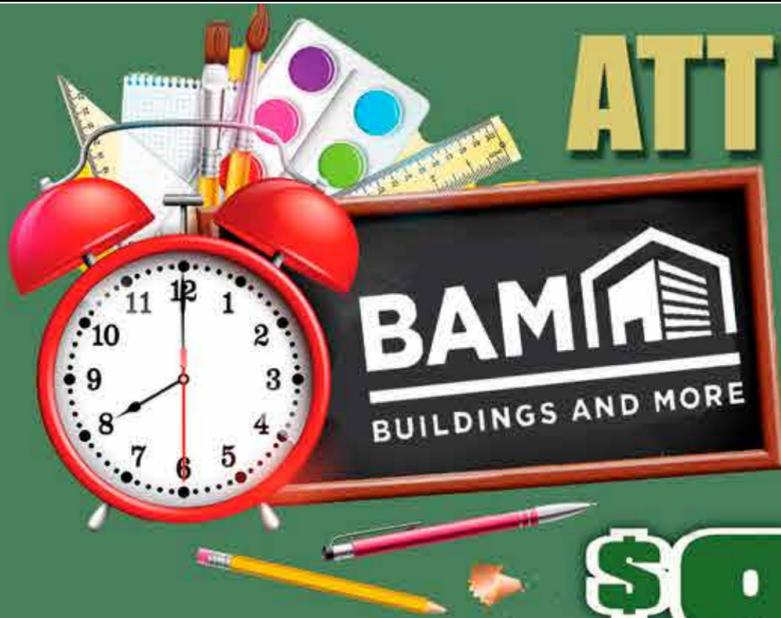
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Thank you!

To all the attendees, community organizations, and local businesses who helped make the 2024 Summer Library Programs amazing, THANK YOU for being an integral part of our success story. We look forward to seeing you next year!

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