



LIFESTYLE
East Orlando has lots of work ahead to achieve ambitious recycling program

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SPORTS
Knights look toward men's basketball championship season

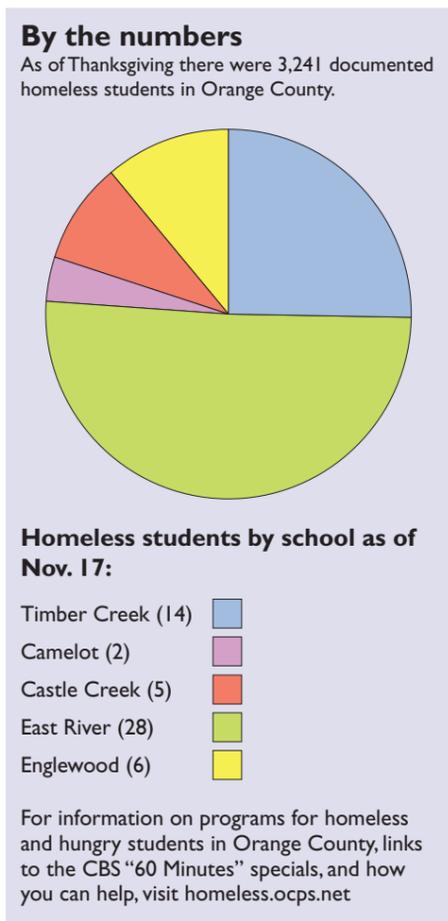
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Hungry after school

Local schools have launched a multitude of programs to help their hungry and homeless students



■ SARAH WILSON
Sun Staff

They sleep in motels, shelters and cars, and live off free school breakfasts and lunches and donated groceries. Orange County Public School officials say they've seen and heard an increasing number of stories of homelessness and hunger from students in the past five years.

As of Thanksgiving, there were 3,241-recorded homeless students in Orange County.

Homelessness and hunger are problems that go hand-in-hand as two of the biggest hurdles facing students living and learning in Orange County, said Homeless Education Liaison for OCPS, Christina Savino.

To help these kids, she said, the county, along with individual schools and partnerships with local businesses and organizations, have increased the number of services they have available to help needy students get by and succeed.

"These students often fall behind, and with education really being the focus and key of getting out of poverty and homelessness," she said, "it's important to wrap them around with as many ser-

vices as possible to keep them on track for graduation."

From corporate sponsored food pantries and emergency stashes of granola bars kept in teacher drawers, to stocks of surplus school supplies and an extra available jacket when its cold, Savino says every little thing helps.

On Friday afternoon, 26 students from Englewood Elementary School file one by one into an unassuming storage closet next to the school's auditorium.

Their names are checked off a list compiled by teachers and administrators as students listed a homeless or in great need, and they're each handed a paper or plastic bag—sometimes seemingly bigger than they are—filled with six nonperishable food items to take home to feed their family over the weekend.

"Some of these kids during the week depend on our free breakfast and lunch, but then come in again Monday after the weekend and you know they may not have eaten since," Compliance Teacher Guadalupe Armenteros said. "This way we can make sure they had food."

Friday, Jan. 27 was opening day for Englewood's LOVE Food Pantry—one of 30 to open in Orange and Seminole counties public schools since the fall, coordinated by the Christian Service Center for Central Florida—and half of its shelves are already empty.

At Timber Creek High School, economics teacher Michael Robbins and his students started their own food pantry out of a cupboard in his classroom last year, stocked with canned foods, soups, cere-

■ Please see **HOMELESS** on page 5

Chamber heads in new direction

The East Orlando Chamber is starting to heal after a lack of strong leadership

■ MEGAN STOKES
Sun Staff

Social networking, a fresh website and new partnerships are what the East Orlando Chamber of Commerce hopes will turn things around after a long absence of leadership in the organization.

The tipping point for the Chamber: the departure of executive director Kevin McFall in January after only three months on the job.

"We're working with other groups to see what kind of symbiotic relationships we can develop such as government, which we can tap to let people know about new tax incentives or local transportation issues and members like our members from Medical City," Board Chairman Brian Watson of Broad and Cassel in Orlando said. "It goes back to connectivity. It's not just about networking."

Before McFall, there was only one staff

person running the show for more than a year—planning events, building up membership and acting as the mouthpiece for the organization.

At its peak, which was during the economic boom in 2004 and 2005, the EOCC had about 800 members. Now it has a little more than 200 members. The board's vice chairperson, Carol Ann Dykes, manager of the University of Central Florida Business Incubator, attributed the decline to the recession and a lack of leadership.

"We had periods of time when we've been without core leadership, when we have not had a face in the community. We've lost memberships and not attained a lot of new members like we could have if we had that strong core leadership in place. We're looking forward to having that," she said.

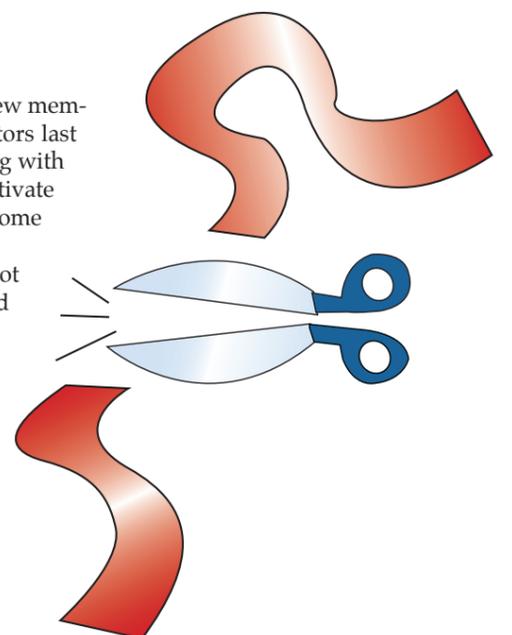
Now, not only are they looking for a new

leader, the chamber inducted nine new members to its 18-person Board of Directors last month. Dykes said new blood mixing with the old on the board should help cultivate the change the chamber needs to become stronger in the community.

"We're very excited to have a lot of new energy and fresh ideas and new perspectives. But it's also very important for any board to have those individuals who have been there for a while too for continuity and history," she said. "We are refocusing, reorganizing and we really want to re-energize this chamber."

Last year, the chamber moved from their store front in the Alafaya Village plaza along Alafaya Trail to

■ Please see **CHAMBER** on page 4





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Beat KAHLI
Owner

Coffee Hour with Beat

We should all learn from Seminole County's mistake

Politically, professionally and personally, I am conservative. I'll always prefer the practical choice over pie-in-the-sky, and facts over forecasts. In politics, I lean toward initiatives that will reduce our taxes and streamline government operations.

As a developer, I know for certain that I can build a road or school for less money than government will spend on the same product. And I've actually done it.

I admit I am not a fair comparison. I'm a business owner. I want efficiency and results. I want an end product that does what it's supposed to do sustainably. Process, to me, is secondary.

Government is not a business. Nor should it be. Government isn't just me, it's us. Good government is everyone.

For the past 20 years or so, Seminole County has attracted major employers and thousands of home owners by touting some of the state's best elementary and secondary schools.

Seminole County schools are highlighted in every Realtor's brochure. Chambers of Commerce

laud their schools the way farmers praise rich soil and ample rainfall.

But Seminole County parents are up in arms. The School Board wants to close some schools, consolidate student bodies, economize.

Unfortunately, the parents are way too late.

As Scott Maxwell pointed out in The Orlando Sentinel, Seminole voters have consistently elected local and state politicians who have promised to cut their taxes and reduce government spending to make their lives even better.

We live in a democracy. For better or worse, our government is us.

Seminole County's dilemma – it's an ugly one – ought to inspire

Government is not a business. Nor should it be. Government isn't just me, it's us. Good government is everyone.

a little soul-searching. What do we want our government to do?

Our schools are among the most important things government does, and I defy anyone to show me how the private sector can do public schools any better.

In East Orlando, we are blessed with some of the best public schools in Florida. I couldn't be more proud of Avalon Park Elementary School or Timber Creek High School, two that I know the best.

My company paid for and built Avalon Middle School. We are being reimbursed, but the decision to fund and to build the school took long and careful consideration.

I don't know everything about

public schools, but I can assure you I spent many hours thinking about them.

We need public schools because we know our community is better off if every child gets a decent education. We pay taxes to build the schools, pay the teachers, and buy the books.

We don't do this so that every kid will become a doctor. That's the job of the kid and the kid's parents.

We support public schools so that every kid can learn to read and write, understand our laws, see how our system works, and learn to earn a living. That's very selfish. I want better schools so that I can enjoy a better, safer, more orderly community.

We want our government to do most of the things it does for the same reasons.

Government isn't bad. Government is us. And good government results when we all pay attention, when we all take a hand in it.

Seminole County voters have thrown out the baby and kept the bathwater. We need to learn from their mistake.



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Testing the water

■ MEGAN STOKES
Sun Staff

Results from water quality tests of Bithlo wells should be available in mid-February, after Environmental Protection Division specialists traveled throughout the small town in December and January.

Chris and Christy White were one of the 105 homeowners in Bithlo who requested water testing during a packed public meeting held at the Bithlo Community Center in early December. There, Orange County Mayor Teresa Jacobs promised that everyone in Bithlo who is worried about their water can have it tested by the county free of charge — usually, tests cost homeowners about \$100.

The Whites said they're not afraid of the results.

"It's well water so people should know what they're getting," Chris said, adding that they have a filter on their well and use water softener. "The problem is that people move in next to these car crushing places and gas stations and it's really buyer beware."

"No one's forced to live there," Christy added. "You have choices from one end of town to the other for good prices. Lately people have the impression that people are stuck here."

EPD Environmental Specialist

Mark Kronor said he's seen mixed reviews from homeowners as he tests their wells.

"Some people are concerned and some accept that well water is bad without filtration. They are resigned to the fact that you will need some kind of water treatment, whether it be for toxins or the smell," he said.

There are close to 2,000 private water wells in the community, possibly making it the densest in private wells in the county, according to the Orange County Health Department. If left untreated, the water can be foul-smelling, rust-colored, thick in consistency and full of toxins.

"The most important thing to get across to people is that sometimes water looks fine, smells fine and it's bad for your health, while other times it looks and smells bad but it's fine to drink. Don't judge for yourself," EPD Manager Lori Cunniff said.

The reason some worry

In November, Orange County sent letters to Bithlo homeowners about water testing results, which showed that private wells in the six-block zone surrounding the old Circle K gas station, located south of East Colonial Drive in Bithlo, exceeded the maximum level for benzene — to which long-term exposure may cause cancer — iron, aluminum and manganese. A pe-

Contact EPD at 407-836-1400 or the Orange County Health Department at 407-858-1400 for questions or concerns.

troleum leak was discovered from the Circle K in 1986.

The state has designated the Circle K leak an imminent threat, meaning that if left unchecked, it poses a hazard to human health and safety or the natural environment. Orange County Health Department Director Dr. Kevin Sherin said 100 wells were sampled in this zone and about 13 or 14 wells showed contamination. Because of the state's SUPER Act, anyone within this zone qualifies for free water testing and filters.

Jocelyn and Jim Darity have never had their water tested but because of its orange-brown color, they don't drink it. They had their water tested by the county in January as well.

"We just want to see what the result is, why it's turning brown and why it leaves an orange-brown residue in the sink, tub and shower," Jocelyn said. "We have no idea what to expect. The water is so bad, it looks oily"

Since they moved into their Bithlo home in 2007, they've only drank bottled water from Publix and they take their white clothing to a coin laundry to be cleaned since they discovered that the wa-

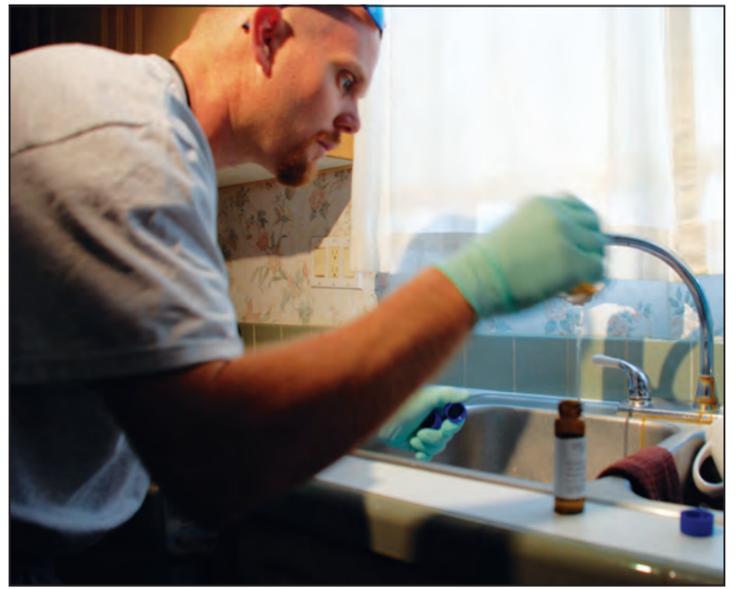


PHOTO BY MEGAN STOKES

An environmental specialist tests the water inside a Bithlo resident's home.

ter will stain their clothing. It's even turned their white dishes a faint orange.

"I wouldn't drink it," Jim said, cringing.

Residents were also concerned that if water tests conclude that they need a filter, they won't be able to afford it. If you don't qualify for a free filter, Jacobs has said that there are inexpensive filters people can buy. But the OCHD said filters for removing petroleum products, which is the issue in the Circle K zone, can cost up to \$10,000.

If contamination is found, Cunniff said DEP would need to take a confirmation sample. If it comes back positive, they'll send the homeowner vouchers for bottled

drinking water. Then, they'll supply filtration for their system.

"It's my understanding that if anything is above the primary drinking water standards that they will put them into the (DEP) program," Cunniff said.

The \$10,000 the county is spending for Bithlo testing "is worth it to them because they need to know that their water is safe," Jacobs said. "We're quite confident that we'll get good results."

To those who fear the possibility of public water, Jacobs said: "Running water lines: that is the last option. I'm a big believer that people should be able to choose how much government they want," she said.

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CHAMBER

■ CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

an older building donated to the organization on East Colonial Drive. But Dykes is excited about yet another move the chamber will make soon to the UCF Incubator in the Central Florida Research Park.

"The building is an older building. It really doesn't present the image that we would like and it kind of isolates the chamber being in that location," Dykes said.

At the incubator, the chamber will be able to interact with the nearly 50 businesses that are incubator clients, and have access to meeting facilities to host events and seminars and storage space. Being so close to the UCF campus, it will allow the chamber to more easily take on student interns.

"It was a no-brainer for me. We have a lot of opportunity to give exposure to these small businesses, in the chamber and the Incubator. There's a lot of mutual benefit," Dykes said.

Elaine Hinsdale, the EOCC's executive director from 2009 to 2010, said a strong chamber is most important during an economic slump because when a chamber is not functioning effectively, the small business community suffers, as small businesses tend to make up the majority of chamber membership.

"If you've got small businesses that are able to grow, they're going to be hiring and the local economy is going to be doing well, but if they are struggling and shutting their doors, then the opposite happens."

Help is here

One of the partnerships the chamber has created is with Oviedo/Winter Springs Regional Chamber of Commerce. President and CEO Cory Skeates said his chamber has already essentially recreated what a chamber does by getting on Facebook and Twitter, creating different avenues for their memberships to showcase their business to the community — such as an online calendar they

can post events to — and hiring a marketing person to ensure exposure to the community.

"We try to be more of a civic organization rather than just a business organization," he said.

The Oviedo/Winter Springs chamber has 475 members — 200 more than when Skeates started there five years ago. During the boom there were about 650 members, so he said they have seen a reduction but those members are now starting to come back.

Skeates is one of a three-person staff at the chamber, including a marketing and events director, whom he credits with a lot of the chamber's success.

"We put in a lot of hours, that's for sure," he said. "If you're on the outside looking in, you wouldn't know it's that few of staff. We have a lot of members who step up and help out. Being involved helps them as much as it does us."

Dykes said there's no way they could hire another staff person at this time.

"It's a matter of finances. We would love to hire another staff person but we need to build our membership first and hold more events to re-grow the chamber and rebuild its budget," Dykes said. "We've been operating in the black and that's really a testament to the board members of the past year or two. There's been good fiscal management."

Although they may not be able to follow the Oviedo/Winter Springs chamber's lead in that way, they are planning to team up with them in hopes to attract new members and retain the ones they have. For instance, they're planning a dual-chamber speed networking event, a hob nob on June 26 at the UCF Bright House Stadium, and they are partnering for the annual Ovations Awards program, which recognizes excellence in business.

"We're really trying to do what we can to make sure all of the chambers in the area are successful," Skeates said. "The worst thing for every chamber right now is to have a neighboring chamber fail because it reflects poorly on all the chambers."

During a struggling economy, oftentimes one of the first things to suffer is memberships to different organizations. Hinsdale said the only way to retain membership during this time is to provide something members need and can't get elsewhere.

"Here, with all this going on with the Alafaya Trail widening and now the East Colonial Drive widening from Dean (Road) to Bithlo, that's going to impact the business community. There's a great chamber opportunity there: provide the businesses along those corridors with news and information that they can't get in their local newspapers or anywhere else."

PHOTO BY MEGAN STOKES
Chief Judge Belvin Perry Jr. swears in the new EOCC Board of Directors.

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Correction

Ken Zook's title was incorrect in the article "Staying Healthy in East Orlando," which ran in the Jan. 6 issue of the East Orlando Sun. Zook is the general manager of the Waterford Lakes Community Association. The article also stated that the Waterford Lakes Walking Trail is open to the general public but it is only open to Waterford Lakes residents.

HOMELESS

■ CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

als and granola bars donated by the school community. Robbins says students can drop by whenever they're in need, or students will be referred to as in need by a teacher or the school's Homeless Coordinator, Jo Lynn Schall, and provided a bag of food to take

with them to their families.

"We recognized that some students at our school didn't have enough food at home and that times are tough, so we decided we wanted to provide a helping hand," Robbins said. "...Students can't learn if they don't know where their next meal will be coming from."

In addition to food, Timber Creek as well as other lo-

cal schools, like East River High School, have clothes closets available to students who might need a jacket when it's cold, or new pants or shoes if theirs get worn out. The schools also have stocks of school supplies in the office to hand out to students as needed.

"The whole idea is to keep them stable at school since their situation already is what it is at home," Yolanda Dorta, a social worker for OCPS, said.

Sponsoring change

After CBS's "60 Minutes" ran two specials on the prevalence of homelessness among students in Central Florida last year, Sarah Au, the senior specialist for Partners in Education with OCPS, said the school board has seen an outpouring of support from local businesses and organizations to try to help students in need.

"It has had such a positive impact in bringing together people who want to help and people who need help," she said. "We're trying to match up the businesses that want to help with the schools who need it."

The LOVE Food Pantry installed at Englewood Elementary is an example of one of these efforts. After viewing the specials, members of the First Baptist Church of Orlando pledged \$5 million dollars to go toward helping Central Florida's hungry and homeless students.

Partnering with OCPS and the Christian Service Center of Central Florida, they decided the



PHOTO BY SARAH WILSON

Bags of food await homeless or needy students at Englewood Elementary.

money would be best spent toward installing food pantries in schools in need, opening 13 in the fall of 2011. This spring, 17 more have opened across the county, each totally free to the schools they service and restocked weekly.

"After the first semester, the project doubled in size," Danny de Armas, senior associate pastor at First Baptist Church Orlando, said. "It was not even by us giving any more money, but by other sponsors and businesses hearing about it and wanting to fund more."

Associates at Keller Williams Realty in Waterford Lakes also saw the CBS special and have decided to dedicate their annual day of service on May 12, known as RED Day, to helping local East Orlando students in need.

Beth Hobart, a realtor with

Keller Williams, said the firm has decided to adopt three local schools - Castle Creek, Camelot and Timber Creek - and is currently working out details with the principals and faculty at the schools to assess their needs, and how Keller Williams can best help.

"When we saw the '60 Minutes' special and realized this is happening right in our own backyard, we knew we had to do something," Hobart said.

Stephanie Phillips, the homeless education coordinator at Castle Creek Elementary, said she is very excited about the partnership her school has in the works with Keller Williams and the aid it can bring to her students.

"It's such a wonderful thing," she said. "We have a lot of need in our community, but we have a lot of people wanting to help, too."

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Emergency Services 24



What's Your Emergency???

2012 has started with a bang for local Orlando based Emergency Services 24 (ES24). With expansion into South Florida and the Tampa region ES24 has been steadily assisting property owners in their time of need after suffering unexpected water damage or fire damages to their buildings.

This is the season for building fires but with the mild weather there has been a drop in house or commercial building fires. The cold weather usually creates more hazards to buildings as fireplaces, space heaters and other electric overloads create the potential for unexpected fires.

"We have been running around the clock" field supervisor Brian Honea states. The water losses to homes have been steady enough to keep all of trucks servicing properties 24/7. We can be at any property within 30 minutes in the metro area with crews to extract water, keep properties from further damage and get owners back to normal as quickly as possible.

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Food trucks in east



PHOTOS BY ISAAC BABCOCK

The Avalon Park Food Truck Bazaar was called a success by organizers, bringing in more than 2,000 customers on Jan. 29. A selection from 25 trucks ranged from Middle Eastern to pet gourmet.



Rotary Business of the Month

Embroidery Solutions

February's Rotary Business of the Month is Embroidery Solutions in East Orlando. Since opening 14 years ago, the company has been a huge supporter of East Orlando schools, especially Timber Creek and East River high schools, giving them free T-shirts and uniforms, award plaques for their banquets and buying banner advertisements at their sports fields. Embroidery Solutions gives to other schools as well and has donated merchandise to East Orlando organizations such as Eastside Cycling and the Timber Creek High School Booster Club. Embroidery Solutions is located at 6457 Hazeltine National Drive, Ste. 120, Orlando. For more information, call 407-438-8188, email info@embroiderysolutions.com or visit www.embroiderysolutions.net



From left: Embroidery Solutions Co-owner Leo Ambrose, Sales and Design Associate Jamie Cothorn, Rotary of Avalon Park's Bob Ewald and Embroidery Solutions Co-owner Andrew Nazareth

Co-sponsored by the Rotary Club of Avalon Park, the East Orlando Sun and Pinnacle Awards and Promotions, the Rotary Business of the Month recognizes East Orlando businesses and organizations that are actively involved in their communities and embody the motto of Rotary: Service above self. Winners receive a plaque, a free advertisement in the Sun and a spot in the Downtown Avalon Park Discount Card, which serves all of East Orlando. Nominate a business at www.facebook.com/avalonparkrotary

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Knights struggle in C-USA play

■ ISAAC BABCOCK
Sun Staff

The Knights had a rough week in conference play, but still have plenty of time to recover before the men's basketball championship season.

UCF fell in two straight games to Conference USA foes, after going 5-1 to start conference play. In the process the formerly high-flying Knights (16-6, 5-3) dropped from first in the conference to fourth, bypassed by Tulsa and Southern Miss, who handed them their two recent losses.

Against Tulsa Jan. 25, the Knights found themselves within a point of the lead with just more than two minutes left to play in the game, but a series of fouls, turnovers and missed shots sank the Knights, who watched the Golden

Hurricane slowly pull away in the final minute of the game to win 66-61.

There was no singular hero for the Knights on that fight on the court, spreading double-digit scores among three players. Keith Clanton again led the way with 15 points, 11 rebounds and four turnovers. Captain A.J. Rompza had an unusual night, picking up zero turnovers, steals or rebounds and only one assist, but dropping 11 points into the net. Rising backup forward Tristan Spurlock rained down 10 points while grabbing seven boards.

It was more frustration for the Knights on Jan. 28 as they watched a 12-point lead disintegrate rapidly heading into halftime, then watched as Southern Miss piled on a lead that would reach its peak

of 13 points in the final seconds of the game. The Golden Eagles would win that game 78-65, with the Knights plagued by abysmal shooting for a second straight night, hitting 40 percent of overall shots, and only 28.6 percent of three pointers.

A big rebound in shooting and defense led the Knights to a 84-69 decimation of Palm Beach Atlantic on Monday, as they shot 47.8 percent, thanks largely to newcomer Kasey Wilson, who came out of nowhere to nearly lead the team in points with 15, hitting seven of 10 shots. Marcus Jordan led the team in points with 17.

The Knights return to the court at 3 p.m. on Saturday at SMU in Dallas before flying home for a Feb. 8 showdown against Marshall. That game tips off at 7 p.m.



PHOTO BY ISAAC BABCOCK

Tristan Spurlock has emerged as a promising shooter for the Knights so far.

Third district title for TCHS soccer

■ JOHN BEDELL
Sun Staff

The Timber Creek boys soccer team had to enter the state playoffs with a sense of urgency.

"We've got to play like there is no tomorrow and in the state playoffs, there isn't," Timber Creek Coach Ibrahim Chehab said after winning a third straight district title in late January.

A goal in overtime in the first round of the state playoffs against Lake Howell ended Timber Creek's streak on Jan. 31.

The 1-1 tie at the end of regulation forced a 10-minute overtime period. Senior Chris Aguilar had scored early for the Wolves and Lake Howell had answered with a score off a corner kick late in the first half.

Six minutes into the overtime period, the Wolves' goalie Tyler Richards made a save deep in the box and a Lake Howell player collided with him. The referee ruled that the ball had broken the plane of the goal and Lake Howell had

a 2-1 overtime win to advance in the playoffs.

"It was a very controversial ending," Chehab said. "As we shook hands, the Lake Howell coach said 'I do not see how that was a goal.' He also told that to our goalie."

At first, Chehab thought the referee's whistle was due to the collision between Richard and a Lake Howell player in the box. Then he saw the referee point to the center circle and knew the game was over.

Chehab described it as a difficult game, but he also said his team had not taken advantage of some quality scoring chances.

"In soccer, sometimes that happens," he said. "You just don't hit on your chances. Both teams fought real hard."

Despite the difficult loss, the Timber Creek Wolves did earn their third consecutive district trophy on Friday, Jan. 27, with a 3-2 win over Winter Park High School.



PHOTO BY JOHN BEDELL

TCHS boys soccer coach Ibrahim Chehab, right, discusses strategy with his team before heading back out to the field.

Chehab said stability has been a key to Timber Creek's success. The players have had the same coach, the same system and the same message during the three-year run: preparation.

"Winning the district title starts on day-one of the season," Chehab said. "We have to be motivated every game. To win the top seed, every game counts."

Besides being prepared, the players have had it drilled into their heads that everyone on the team is equally important. That is not always an easy concept to teach in our world of sports celebrities.

"I am more concerned about

the guys that don't play a lot than the ones that do. They come to practice every day and they need to push every starter in practice," Chehab said.

Although everyone is valued, there are a few stand out players. Assistant Coach Clay Phillips described senior Austin Stirtz as the glue that holds the Wolves' defense together.

"He is steadfast," Phillips said. Stirtz said he enjoys the defensive side but also likes the opportunity to score.

"I think we are pretty solid on defense," Stirtz said.

Chehab puts the utmost importance on a team's defense.

In Sierra Leone, West Africa kids played soccer in fields that doubled as streets. Stones and sticks made up their goals. This is where Chehab learned how to play soccer and he earned his playing time as a defender and midfielder.

"My philosophy is that we should win most games 1-0 or 2-1," he said. "We should not score 4 and give up 3 or score 4 and give up 5."

Goalie Tyler Richards has also been a defensive stalwart for the Wolves. In each of the three district tournament games, the sophomore keeper stopped a penalty kick.

"He has been outstanding," Chehab said. "If he doesn't stop those penalty kicks, I don't know where we would be."

Although their push is over this year, Chehab will be working to keep the group motivated. He described soccer as 40 to 50 percent skill and 50 to 60 percent passion.

"Against Winter Park, we were the better team," he said. "But give them credit. They closed the gap by being more aggressive. They wanted it so much. My job is to not let our opponents beat us by having more passion."

You can count on the passion from the streets of Sierra Leone being part of the Timber Creek Wolves as long as Coach Chehab is using soccer to teach Timber Creek players life lessons.

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The Scoop

The **Avalon Middle boys and girls basketball** teams have been selected to participate in the 2012 NBA All-Star Gatorade Jam Session Invitational Basketball tournament Feb. 23-26. The tourney will bring together Central Florida's premier boys and girls middle school basketball programs.

UCF junior guard Gevenia Carter was

named the Conference USA Player of the Week and the College Sports Madness C-USA Player of the Week on Jan. 23.

UCF senior guard A.J. Rompza and junior forward Keith Clanton picked up Conference USA Men's Basketball Player of the Week awards in January. Rompza snagged the honor Jan. 9 after leading UCF to a pair of league

victories. Rompza averaged 13.5 points, 6.5 assists, 5 steals and 4 rebounds in wins over Tulane and East Carolina. Clanton picked up his award Jan. 23 after leading the team to victories over Memphis and UAB. Clanton averaged 16.5 points on 59.1 percent shooting in the wins.

Five members of the **East River boys wrestling team** took home first place titles at the

Metro Conference Championship at Cypress Creek High School Jan. 27. Micah Cross, Tanner Meadows, Corey Ray, Felix Rodriguez and Griffin Soderquist all won in their weight class. In addition, East River wrestlers Deshawn Dexter, Alex Perryman and Josh Swestyn won third place titles.



AJ Rompza

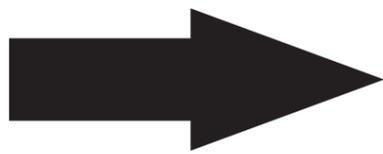


Gevenia Carter



Keith Clanton

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Beating cancer to help others

Timber Creek High School senior volunteers for the organizations he said helped save his life

■ **BRITTNI JOHNSON**
Sun Staff

Wesley Rivera was 12 when he started getting sick. He was pale, got infections, had bruises and fatigue, but the doctor his family took him to didn't recognize how serious it was. His mother had a gut feeling — something wasn't right. She took him to a new doctor who took one look at Rivera and sent him to the emergency room.

The now Timber Creek High School senior had leukemia, and he needed a bone marrow transplant to survive.

"It really was a lot to take in ... I kind of went in autopilot," Rivera, 18, said.

He spent months in the hospital, underwent chemotherapy and had a life-saving bone marrow transplant from the donation of his sister, who was a perfect match. At 12, the process was tough to comprehend, but knowing his life was at risk was something he fully understood. He knew he could die.

"I knew it was real, that the possibility was real, and I felt the pain of the leukemia," Rivera said.

But with the strength from his family, who was determined to get through this, that possibility would just never become a real-

ity. His parents, sister and brother never left his side, and he was never alone.

"There was no other alternative, there was no giving in to any doubt that I wouldn't come out of there alive and that we wouldn't be fine in the end," he said. "And knowing that really helped me get through it."

He'll be cancer-free for six years on Feb. 14, which makes him officially cured. He celebrates his "second birthday" — March 29, the day of his bone marrow transplant — each year with a family dinner. His favorite is steak or his dad's special garlic chicken, and no one misses the night. It's a treasure to celebrate simple, regular moments like a family dinner, his mom said.

"It's like a rebirth," said his mom Mrs. Rivera.

Shaped by cancer

And though he lives a busy life as a high school senior, Wing Commander in JROTC — the highest rank there is in the organization — dedicated student and first TCHS graduate to ever be accepted to Yale University, he hasn't forgotten how cancer has shaped him as a person.

"It has made me who I am today," Rivera said. "I just was

Wesley Rivera volunteers for several organizations, visit each one's website to get more information about how you can help, too. For Florida's Blood Centers visit www.floridabloodcenters.org, Kids Beating Cancer at www.kidsbeatingcancer.com and The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society at www.LLS.org

forced to grow up. A lot of kids take a lot of things for granted, waking up, having your loved ones and everything, and through this I got to realize how quickly that can be taken away from you."

His friends see that, too.

"He realizes that life is short and he appreciates things more and respects things more," said Monai Williams, a friend of 10 years.

Williams has even been inspired to become a pediatric oncologist after supporting Rivera through his fight against cancer.

Cancer changed Rivera's values and work ethic, he said. Rivera volunteers at three organizations related to cancer: Florida's Blood Centers, Kids Beating Cancer and The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. He's brought blood drives to TCHS with the help from his



PHOTO BY BRITTNI JOHNSON
Wesley Rivera is the first TCHS student to be accepted into Yale University.

JROTC cadets. His instructor, Maj. Brian Humphrey, said he's a leader people want to listen to.

"He's one of those young men that I don't know what he has in his system — that drive, that determination, that forthrightness to

want to be the best," Humphrey said.

Rivera also shares his story with anyone who will listen and inspires others to help. Michael Pratt, interim CEO for Florida's Blood Centers, said Rivera's story always gives that extra nudge when people are deciding to donate blood.

"Wesley has the ability to reach in and grab you by the heart and squeeze it," Pratt said.

Rivera serves as a compelling story of survival for families battling cancer with their children, said Margaret Guedes, CEO, president and founder of the charity Kids Beating Cancer.

"He's an amazing young man who's overcome incredible obstacles and he's done it with grace and courage," she said. "It gives the families optimism and hope."

But Rivera sees this as "self service." He'll never stop giving some of his life to the organizations he said saved his. And he'll always be reminded of that each year, for the rest of his life, when he goes to get his cancer-free check up. Those days never worry him, like you might think, they only tell him that he's healthy. They make him feel good, and he's quite matter of fact about it.

"I'm not afraid," he said.

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Waste not, win big

Central Florida has a long way to go to reach its 75 percent recycling goal, but local cities are working toward it despite tough economic odds

■ **BRITTON JOHNSON**
Sun Staff

Jim Foulks won't be friends with someone who doesn't recycle, so he just makes it happen for them.

"I call it recycling interventions," Foulks said with a grin. "I will, in a friendly way, make people feel guilty about recycling."

Say he's at a barbecue and a friend tosses their can in the trash — Foulks just takes it right out and asks where the recycling bins are. It's a simple act, but it certainly gets the point across. He's not the recycling police by any means, but for Foulks, it's important to share the idea that recycling is easy.

"We've converted a lot of people to recycling," he said.

Foulks, who lives in Avalon Park with his wife and three kids, recycles more than half of his waste through Orange County's recycling program and composting his organic trash. And for Florida's goal to reach a 75 percent recycling rate by 2020, his family is a model for many, but most Central Florida cities have a long way to go before their rates reach that level.

Oviedo's success

Orange County hadn't even reached that 30 percent goal that was made before the 75 percent mark was set, and many Orange County cities are far even from those numbers.

Winter Park, for example, recycles about 10 percent of its solid waste. But Oviedo is a bright spot

in Central Florida's recycling mission.

Oviedo residents are the best recyclers in Seminole County, said Johnny Edwards, the solid waste manager for Seminole County. They recycle about 35 percent of their waste, and 500 pounds per home, per year. Residents have access to unlimited bins for recycling at no extra charge, and can earn up to \$100 in rebates each year using Recyclebank, a program that gives discounts in exchange for points you earn recycling. The program is free for residents and included in the city's waste contract. Oviedo is the only local city that offers this.

Since implementing unlimited bins, the city has seen 150 more pounds of waste per home, per year being recycled. Oviedo Utility Manager, Josef Grusauskas, said Recyclebank has kept resident recycling momentum up.

"It's more of a reward for recycling being done, to not let it slip back," Grusauskas said.

Recycling options

There are options to encourage more recycling, and some Foulks considers great ideas for Avalon Park. As of now, Avalon Park doesn't have recycling on its main commercial streets and its businesses don't have recycling programs. Foulks' wife Linda has taken home thousands of water bottles from the local YMCA to recycle.

"It's almost embarrassing to not have the opportunity for recycling," he said.



PHOTO BY BRITTON JOHNSON

Jim Foulks, showing off his compost, said he's not a fanatic about the environment — he doesn't even own a recycling bumper sticker. Recycling is just common sense.

cling," he said.

But Avalon Park doesn't represent all of East Orlando. Karin Brantley, who is in inhouse sales and responsible for Waste Pro's commercial business, said 70 percent of their commercial clients in East Orlando do choose to have some form of recycling.

Waterford Lakes Town Center has a cardboard container for businesses and requires them to use it for their cardboard waste, or incur a fine.

Debbie Sponsler, section manager for Orange County's Utilities Solid Waste Division, said there has been progress with getting more recycling programs going in the past, but with the economy it's tough. Unlike Waterford, she said overall most businesses in the area don't want to spend the money. There's no way to require businesses to recycle because they negotiate their own waste contracts, but Sponsler said she does see encouraging them to include recycling as an important step toward the state's recycling goals.

For information about Orange County recycling, visit ocflrecycles.net. If you're an Oviedo resident, visit recyclebank.com for more information about their rewards program.

"We need to reach out more to commercial businesses," she said.

There's also the option to offer larger recycling bins for residents or a pay-as-you-go method to garbage pickup — the more trash you create, the more you pay. Edwards said that's not a system he sees coming to Central Florida anytime soon.

The struggle with apartments

There's also the lack of apartment complexes offering recycling to their residents. Most multi-family dwellings are left out of the convenient community curbside programs, and would have to purchase it through their own waste management contract, which is an added cost that most

don't choose.

"In this economy you want to cut costs and recycling costs money," Sponsler said.

Many of East Orlando's student centered apartment complexes offer recycling, such as University House, Alafaya Club and Knights Landing. But for regular citizens, the choices are slim. GrandeVillage on Avalon Park was the only apartment complex listing their recycling options. The complex, which has 487 units, offers its residents a large compactor to place their recyclables, and Waste Pro sorts the items for them.

"It's important to offer everything. People have different lifestyles ... and if they're strong with recycling we want to offer that to them," Leasing Consultant Jennifer Middleton said.

There's also a cost in educating tenants on how to use the recycling bins. One of the biggest problems in apartment complex recycling is contamination from people putting the wrong things, or even their garbage, in the wrong bins, Sponsler said.

Economic effects

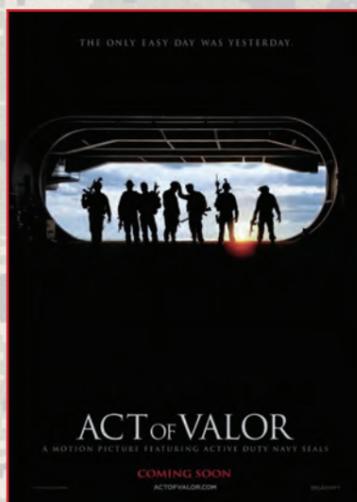
Economics play a role in recycling developments, too. The down economy has cut waste in Orange and Seminole counties by at least 20 percent from people buying less, keeping more and eating out less means, all contributing to less trash. But it also means less money to spend on recycling and the necessary facilities.

James Golden, a geologist with 30 years of experience in environment and solid waste management consulting, and the owner of HSA Golden Engineering in Orlando, said that the future will be in recycling. But he said he doesn't think Florida can reach the 75 percent recycling goal by 2020, and that even if it did on a state level, poor rural communities would never individually reach it.

"Unfortunately it takes investment," he said.

Foulks thinks it's worth the investment and time. He doesn't claim to be a super recycler, and even admits he forgets his reusable bags for grocery shopping from time to time. But the fact that he calls himself an "average Joe recycler" means, to him, that any normal family can do it, and should.

"It's just good business," he said, "it's good for the environment and it's common sense."



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Valentine's Day calendar

Yoga East Orlando will offer **Partners Yoga Classes** at 1 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 5. Partners of all levels of yoga experience can take this special

one-day, two-hour class for \$25 per individual or \$45 per couple. Register online at yogaeastorlando.com or by phone at 407-730-3257.

variety of special flavors are available by the dozen for \$18. For more information visit sweetbyholly.com.

The **UCF Jazz Chamber Groups Concert** will take place on Tuesday, Feb. 14 from 8 to 9:30 p.m. in the auditorium of the UCF Rehearsal Hall. For more information, visit music.cah.ucf.edu/events.php.

Bayridge Sushi will be offering a **Valentine's dinner** for two package that includes soup, salad, sushi, hibachi and wine. The package will cost \$89.95. For reservations and more information, call 407-282-8488 or visit brsushi.com/locations/avalon-park.

Sweet's cupcakes



Pottery Pad will be offering a pottery package for two. The package allows couples to paint any two items under \$20 for only \$25. Desserts will be served from 5 to 10 p.m. For reservations or more information call 407-674-7844 or visit potterypadorlando.com

Sweet! By Good Golly Miss Holly cupcake bakery is taking orders for its special **Valentine's Day Collection** through Tuesday, Feb. 14. A



Pottery Pad

Calendar



Faces of HIV

FEBRUARY

Orange County Animal Services offers **free dog training** classes at their office located at 2769 Conroy Road in Orlando. The classes are taught by a certified trainer from Think Alpha Dog training school. For more information or to register, call 407-254-9140 or email animalservices@ocfl.net

Free Medicare, Medicaid, Medigap/HMO counseling, prescription drug plans and long-term care insurance counseling is available by the Florida Department of Elder Affairs' **SHINE program**. The program is from 10 a.m. to noon on the third Tuesday of each month (closed July-August) at the East Orange Community Center, 12050 E. Colonial Drive, Orlando. For more information, call 407-254-9610 ext. 0. Bring a list of medications of prescription bottles, insurance card or Medicare card.

FEB. 2

Local theater company Magic Curtain Productions will be performing **"Little Orphan Annie"** Feb. 2-4 at the Timber Creek High School

Performing Arts Center. Shows start at 7 p.m. nightly with a 2 p.m. matinee on Saturday. Tickets are \$10 in advance and \$12 at the door. Kids 3 and younger are free. For more information visit mcptheater.com or call 407-282-8368.

FEB. 3

Faces of HIV, a mobile art exhibit depicting the lives of Florida residents living with HIV and AIDS will be at the University of Central Florida Student Union from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday, Feb. 3. For more information, visit wemakethechange.com/faces

FEB. 4

Country singer **Miranda Lambert** will be live in concert with special guests Chris Young and Jerrod Neimann at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 4, at the UCF Arena. For tickets or more information, visit ucfarena.com

FEB. 7

CFLSG 3, a networking event to benefit the UCF Alumni Excellence Fund, is from 5:30-11:30 p.m. Tuesday,

Feb. 7, at Terrace 390 in downtown Orlando on the first floor of the Bank of America building. Admission is \$10 in advance and \$15 at the door, which includes parking, appetizers and drink specials all night. For more information, visit cflsg3.eventbrite.com

Rock band Tool will be making a stop in Orlando as part of their Winter Tour at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 7, at the UCF Arena. Tool will be joined by special guest YOB. For more information or for tickets, visit ucfarena.com or Ticketmaster.

FEB. 9

The UCF Alumni Association will be hosting the **Canvas & Cabernet** fundraiser at 6 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 9, at the UCF Fairwinds Alumni Center on the UCF Campus. Pre-registration costs \$25 and is required. Proceeds benefit the UCF Visual Arts and Design Alumni Chapter scholarship. Visit ucfalumni.com/art

FEB. 11

There is a **Father-Daughter Dance**



Celtic Woman

event from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 11, at Avalon Park's Founder's Square. The fee is \$15 per father in advance or \$20 at the door. There will be a DJ, food and drinks. To register or for more information, visit www.christkingdom.org

The Orange County Adopt-A-Tree program will be holding an **adoption event** from 8 a.m. to noon Saturday, Feb. 11, at Ft. Christmas Historical Park, 1300 Ft. Christmas Road, Christmas. For more information call 407-254-9200 or visit orange.ifas.ufl.edu

FEB. 17

Irish folk music troupe **Celtic Woman** will perform their "Believe" Tour at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 17, at

the UCF Arena. For tickets or more information, visit ucfarena.com

FEB. 18

The **Orlando Wetlands Festival** will take place from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 18, at Fort Christmas Park, 1300 N. Fort Christmas Road, Christmas. Admission is free. Call Orlando Wetlands Park 407-568-1706 or visit cityoforlando.net/wetlands.

FEB. 26

The **UCF Art Gallery** is hosting an art show featuring almost 50 Central Florida artists through Feb. 26 in room 140 of the UCF Visual Arts building, open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Saturday. For information visit <http://gallery.cah.ucf.edu>

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UCF Art Gallery

Local Valentine's Day events abound

Feb. 4 — The musical rites of spring

Works by visionary composers will be performed by the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra when Maestro Christopher Wilkins leads the Orchestra in a Legendary Composers concert at 8 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 4, at the Bob Carr PAC in Orlando. The entire course of musical history changed when the world accepted the genius of Beethoven. His "6th Symphony (the Pastorale)" joins Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring", which changed ballet

music forever. "These works represent two opposing views of nature: one bucolic, the other utterly terrifying," says Maestro Wilkins. "Beethoven's 'Pastorale' symphony is one of the most enticing musical landscapes in history, while 'The Rite of Spring' seems more like the eruption of a volcano." Even those unfamiliar with orchestral music will recognize the works from Disney's 1940 animated film "Fantasia". Call 407-770-0071, or visit www.orlandophil.org



Josh Garrick
Culture worthy of your calendar

Orlando Ballet, will take place on Feb. 10-12 at the Bob Carr Performing Arts Center in Orlando. You can get those Valentine's Day tickets at 407-426-1739 or orlando-ballet.org

Feb. 10-12 — Ballet's 'Battle of the Sexes'

The Orlando Ballet's Artistic Director Robert Hill put Central Florida on notice in his first season when he created a series of sexy ballets for a program he called "Battle of the Sexes". Working with bodies that stretch and exercise every day as part of their 'job,' the idea was received with standing ovations with Hill proving that's how to bring sexy back — Florida style! "Battle of the Sexes III", presented by the

Feb. 12 — Valentine's Day with Andrea Bocelli

We need a word bigger than "superstar" for the Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli, who will make a very special Valentine's Day weekend appearance at the Amway Center for an evening of romance on Sunday, Feb. 12. The performance will highlight Bocelli's lushly romantic repertoire of classical arias along with

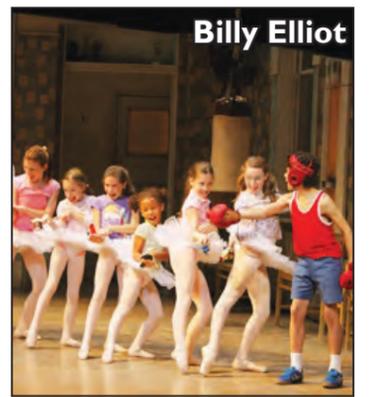
the world's most famous love songs. This is Bocelli's first-ever performance in Orlando. Bocelli ("the Voice") has sold more than 65 million albums worldwide and continually receives rave reviews throughout his sold-out U.S. tours. And a welcome 'local note' is struck by the news that 60 members of Winter Park's Bach Festival Choir will join Bocelli for his only Central Florida performance. You can buy tickets at amwaycenter.com, Amway Center box office, charge-by-phone at 800-745-3000 or at Ticketmaster.com

Feb. 15 to 26 — 'Billy Elliott'

Billy Elliot is a kid from a working-class family in England who is training to be a boxer, because his hard-drinking father wants him to be something more than an out-of-work factory bloke. But Billy discovers — and becomes obsessed with — the world of ballet. While his family attempts to come to terms with this strange (for them) career path, Billy gets a shot at a scholarship with a prestigious dance school that may be his way out of town. "Billy Elliot the Musical" opened on Broadway in 2008 with a book by Lee Hall and music by Elton John. The Musical won 10 Tony Awards — including BEST Musical. Choreographer Pete Darling is quick to say that the show is about much more than 'just' ballet. He used tap, hip-hop, jazz, acrobatics and folk dancing to tell this inspiring story. "Billy Elliot the Musical" is at the Bob Carr Performing Arts Center in Orlando from Feb. 15-26. Visit ticketmaster.com

Feb. 24 — "Sleeping Beauty"

And speaking of *ballet*, the legendary Bolshoi dancer Sergei Radchenko will bring the Moscow Festival Ballet, made up of extraordinary dancers from throughout Russia to Daytona Beach on Feb. 24. Staging new productions of timeless classics,



Billy Elliot

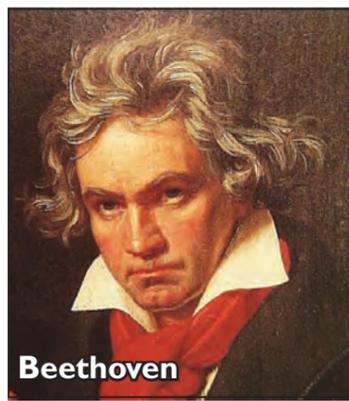
they will bring Tchaikovsky's "Sleeping Beauty" to the Peabody Auditorium as part of a coast-to-coast tour of the United States. For one evening, we are invited to an era of magnificent grace and royal beauty as the dancers blend the rich traditions and classical training of Russia's Bolshoi and Maryinsky theaters in centuries of ballet tradition. This one-night-only performance is presented by the Daytona Beach Symphony Society. Visit www.dbss.org

Feb. 28-29 — Michael Jackson

Consider a repertoire of the greatest pop music of all time — created by Michael Jackson — and then let your imagination fly as that music is used for Cirque du Soleil's newest full-length evening of performance magic. The must-see ticket of the season — "MJ - THE IMMORTAL" — will be performed in two performances only—Feb. 28-29—at the Amway Center in Orlando. This life-changing production combines Michael Jackson's music with the choreography and athleticism of Cirque du Soleil to give fans a unique view into the spirit, passion and heart of the artistic genius who forever transformed global pop culture. Written and directed by Jamie King, who has channeled Michael's love of music and dance, fairy tale and magic, and the fragile beauty of nature into a show featuring more than 60 international dancers, musicians and acrobats. Tickets are available at ticketmaster.com or 1-800-745-3000.

March 2 and 4 — A Verdi masterpiece

Commissioned to write a new opera in 1850, Giuseppe Verdi was entranced by a story by Victor Hugo. But Hugo's play depicted a king as an immoral womanizer — an idea that was not accepted in Europe at that time. So the king became a duke, and Verdi created the compelling story of "Rigoletto", the hunchback court jester and the seductive Duke of Mantua — a fascinating tale of seduction, treachery and Italian vendettas. Produced in collaboration with the new Florida Opera Theatre, this concert opera features the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra in performance March 2 at 8 p.m. and March 4 at 2 p.m. at the Bob Carr in Orlando. Call 407-770-0071 or visit orlandophil.org



Beethoven



Michael Jackson

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Josh Garrick is a writer, photographer, educator and fine art curator. He is a member of the Curatorial Council for the Museum of Florida Art. Garrick can be reached at joshgarrick9@gmail.com or 407-522-3906.

Local schools' new fundraising tool

A new online program is making school fundraising easier for educators and parents alike

■ JORDAN KEYES
Sun Staff

The days of candy bars and magazine subscriptions as school fundraiser material may soon be a thing of the past.

Thanks to the Fuel My School program, East Orlando schools have found a faster, easier way to raise support via the Internet.

Sunrise Elementary School has raised more than \$17,000 in funds and resources since starting the program in 2011. Much of that went to a technology fund, which helped put sorely needed projectors and computers into their classrooms.

"If a parent says, 'How can I help?' I send them right to Fuel My School," Sunrise Elementary Principal Shayne Grove said. "It's easy — they'll know exactly what we need and they can write it off on their taxes."

Windermere resident Lisa Hilgenfeldt founded FMS to make fundraising easier on parents and schools alike. The program gives each member school a webpage that they can use to connect directly with potential supporters and provide them with a number of ways to track and meet schools' individual needs. Each FMS page links visitors to several different options for supporting their school.

"It's a one-stop shop to go to support your school and drive funds and resources to your

For more information, visit fuelmyschool.com

school," said Lisa Hilgenfeldt, the founder of FMS.

One choice that parents and sponsors have is the "school mall." This option allows anyone to shop at various online retailers that they would already be using, such as Amazon or Best Buy, where a percentage of the proceeds will go directly to the school. The most direct support method is the school wish list, which allows administrators to post items or materials that the school needs and connect with someone who can meet that need.

"When we first started our wish list, we had cases of water on there," Grove said. "It was up there for less than a week and a mom brought two cases of water for our clinic."

Sunrise teacher Maggie Franklin uses the technology provided through FMS on a daily basis. She is able to use one of several "technology carts" that have a variety of devices used to enhance the learning process.

"The projectors help us save paper as well as give students a visual element to connect with," Franklin said.

Sunrise PTA members Jamie Korenstein and Jenny Burton have been working with the school's site for more than a year. Burton



PHOTO BY JORDAN KEYES

Kennedy, a Sunrise Elementary fourth-grader, goes through a grammar exercise using a projector that Fuel My School funds helped purchase. The school was able to use money from the new program to reach their technology fundraising goals.

prioritizes communicating with the community through email as well as through the school's FMS page.

"Just keeping it organized and updating it are key," Burton said. "You have to remind people, 'There's a new wish. Go look!'"

Though schools like Sunrise are making huge strides in fundraising through FMS, some are still figuring out how to make it work for them. Waterford Elementary principal Charles Lindlau

admits that, though he has seen some wishes granted through the program, his school hasn't had as much success as other schools in the East Orlando area. He pointed out that the school has been notifying parents through emails, phone calls and newsletters, but they will continue promoting it through other mediums.

"This Monday, we're filming a commercial starring our young students to get the word out," Lindlau said. "We want to show

just how simple it is."

Convenience has become a sort of rallying cry for those who are trying to spread the word about FMS. The concept was born out of Hilgenfeldt's frustration with the typical fundraising methods. Her son was cut from his freshman football team because the school didn't have enough helmets.

"I have four children in Orange County schools and I'm doing everything that's required to support their education," Hilgenfeldt said. "In our life, we don't have the time to do that in the traditional way."

Help during a crisis

School funds are tight. OCPS per-student spending has been consistently dropping, going from \$6,945 to \$6,667 just since last year. In the midst of this, FMS is providing a new way to meet very specific needs that schools may not have room in the budget for anymore.

"From a stapler to an outdoor water fountain to some really specialized sensory equipment, all of that is available out there," said Sara Au, head of the Orange County Public Schools' Partners in Education initiative, who has been helping OCPS partner with FMS. "But since Fuel My School gives us an online reach, it makes it that much more accessible."

Since its launch in the fall of 2010, every school in Orange County has joined the program and Lake County schools are joining rapidly. Though Hilgenfeldt said that the program will always be focused on Central Florida, schools in seven other states have started using FMS.

In total, Fuel My School has helped grant more than 300 wishes and pumped more than \$100,000 into Central Florida schools. The success of the program comes as no surprise to Grove.

"To me, it's a no-brainer," Grove said. "It's really easy and my main suggestion would be to have an outstanding parent group."

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School News



Kids Against Hunger

The **Avalon Middle School Art Club** was awarded the grand prize in their art competition for the second straight year. In addition to the grand prize, AMS students were given the Sponsor's Award for their work on a gingerbread house.

Magic Curtain Productions' **Senior Performance Troupe** had a successful first showing at the National Junior Theater Festival in Atlanta, Ga. MCP theater director Rhonda Cato was awarded the top Freddie G. award for her dedication and achievement in youth theater. MCP choreographer Victoria Kroll was also honored with the Broadway Slam Event Choreography award.

Avalon Middle School's Service Learning Clubs: Student Council, Beta Club, National Junior Honor Society and Builders Club combined their efforts to hold a food and toy

drive for local families in the community. Classes competed for who could bring in the most toys, and the winners were Ms. Lucas' sixth grade class; Ms. Garrity's class and Ms. Hilyer's class tied in the seventh grade category; and Ms. Carr's class and Ms. Morales' class tied in the eighth grade category.

Carolyn Deeb, Avalon Middle School athletic director and fitness teacher, was awarded the 2012 Sports Professional of the Year Award for the Southeast region. The award was established to honor outstanding leaders in the professional domain of sports. Coach Deeb will be honored at the Southern District convention in February.

More than 100 people helped The **Kiwanis Club of East Orange County** and Kids Against Hunger

— a national organization with a mission to reduce the number of hungry children in the world — to package more than 4,000 meals that will be delivered to food pantries throughout Orange County Public Schools on Saturday, Jan. 28.

Avalon Middle's Jay Fligor, Lourdes Miranda, Azalia Samsam and Amber Teague's artwork was chosen to be on display in the Peggy Crosby Student Gallery at the Orlando Museum of Art.

Avalon Elementary tied for seventh in Florida's recent ranking of its more than 3,000 public schools. Schools were ranked based on points earned in the state's grading system, which gives each school a letter grade. Grades for elementary and middle schools are based on student performance and improvement on the FCAT.

"KIDS' QUOTES"

We asked Camelot Elementary students about their valentine.



"Mrs. Aldridge [Principal of Camelot] because she cares for us and because she wanted to be our principal!"
— Liliana, 6



"My friend Ashley because she's my best friend."
— Alexis, 7



"My mom because she's so sweet to me. She gets food for me and takes me to theme parks."
— Kennedy, 6



"I don't know. Kennedy because he's my best friend."
— Alexander, 7



"My mom because she plays with me a lot."
— Aliyah, 6



"Hannah from my classroom because she's beautiful and nice and because she has beautiful freckles on her cheeks."
— Jayden, 7

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Commissioner's Corner

Orange County elected officials offer New Year's resolutions



Jennifer Thompson
Orange County District 4 Commissioner

My goal this year is to keep the Alafaya Trail widening on schedule, address bigger transportation concerns in our community, and to work to find a suitable location for the East Orange Homeless Drop-In Center.



Ted Edwards
Orange County District 5 Commissioner

Now that it's a new year, my staff and I have begun work on goals for a productive year ahead. Based on my first year in office, below are some of the objectives for the upcoming year:

- A main priority is to continue advocating prudent spending of taxpayer dollars and providing excellent county services consistent with available resources.

- Encouraging investment in infrastructure for improvement in access and safety on local roadways, such as relieving congestion on State Road 50 through the FDOT road widening project.

- Promoting sidewalk projects around schools to create connections with neighborhoods.

- Through serving on UCF Research Park Board of Directors, we'll work toward bringing high-tech job growth in simulation and defense industries, which will promote diverse economic development within Orange County to provide varied work and business opportunities.

- Encouraging growth that protects our environment and neighborhoods while benefiting all of our citizens, such as addressing the contaminated water issue in Bithlo resulting from leaky gas tanks.

- Integrating the environment into our decisions as we work toward creating sustainable community, particularly related to our lakes and stewardship of land by creating a Lake Pickett Advisory Board.

- Continuing to improve livability and quality of all District 5 neighborhoods by working with our county departments on completion of construction projects, like the new fire station in Christmas and splash park in Bithlo.



Daryl Flynn
Orange County School Board member

The Orange County School Board aims to be the top producer of successful students in the nation. Their goals center on an intense focus on student achievement, a high performing and dedicated team, a safe learning and work environment, efficient operations, and sustained community engagement. This year, one of the most important tasks that the board will face will be to choose a new superintendent who will support and achieve these goals. Supporting and ensuring that the designated search process includes public input and is transparent is key to selecting a superintendent. The task of selecting a new superintendent won't end the day that he or she takes over the reins of leadership on July 1. It is my goal to encourage a smooth transition period and build a strong, positive relationship with the new superintendent so that he or she is able to successfully continue the upward trend of academic achievement for all OCPS students.

Feeling comfortable during the interview

I am often asked if I will meet with someone prior to an interview to help them polish up their skills. Many people are not comfortable with the interview process and second guess themselves when it comes to answering questions.

Recently we interviewed for a position at Christian HELP and we were very fortunate to have several great candidates. The interviews all went very well and we actually had a difficult time making a choice.

When it came down to it there were a few factors that we looked at above and beyond their qualifications. One was how they fit in or complemented the people already in place, and the second was their long-term goals and how they saw themselves growing within the organization.

One of the interviewees was



Sandi Vidal
Ask Sandi

someone I was already connected with so she felt comfortable in the interview. This was great for both of us, but she said she is not always that comfortable in interviews. As I gave her advice, I let her know that she had done great in the process and should always be like that in an interview.

Practice sample interview questions with a friend or a coach prior to interviewing.

If you have no one else, use a

mirror. Listen to your answers as they come out. Answers to standard questions like "Tell me about yourself" and "What are your strengths and what are your weaknesses" should just roll off your tongue. These are asked so regularly that you should always have an answer.

After you leave an interview record your impressions. This will help you to improve. Also use that time to write a thank you note and re-capture what you want to emphasize from the interview and anything that you would like the interviewer to know.

Sandi Vidal, an Avalon Park resident, is the executive director for Christian HELP and the Central Florida Employment Council and has more than 15 years of recruiting and human resources experience. Visit www.cfec.org

Easy-to-grow Asian greens are a must

Some of the most productive plants I grow in my garden could be categorized as Asian greens. The simple abundance of harvesting the early leaf and stem portions of these vegetables provide a quick and nutritious harvest with minimal maintenance. As we grow into our lucrative spring season, take advantage of some of the easiest crops to produce on Earth.

Most Asian greens must be started from seeds instead of off-the-shelf transplants. Locating the seeds is a low hurdle to choosing many of these exotic plants. (I haven't had much luck at nursery center seed racks.) An Internet search of seed catalogs will provide numerous options. Since purchasing seeds offers an incredible economy of scale over buying transplants, don't skimp on trying a spectrum of varieties.

Starting the seeds requires a balanced mix of quality potting soil, clean containers, moisture, warmth and sunlight. Most Asian greens germinate in just a few days, so be prepared to deliver the new sprouts to full sun. Left in limited light, lanky, weak seedlings are prone to stem disease and damage. Provide fresh air and ventilation



Tom Carey
From My Garden to Yours

as a warm sunny day could lead to overheating. In three to four weeks most of these seedlings will be ready to grow in the great expanse of the garden.

Available soil fertility, moisture, pest controls, sunlight and space provided in almost any garden configuration is usually adequate. A 3-gallon landscape pot filled with well-drained potting mix supplies ample space for six transplants. A 4-foot square bed using grid pattern spacing produces dozens of heads. As the crop starts to mature, pick crowded 'thinning greens' for those gourmet baby vegetables that are so expensive in the grocery store.

Most Asian greens are in the Brassica family of plants, similar to radish or cabbage. I repeatedly plant Pac choi, a smaller variety of Bok choi.

Another favorite is Mizuna, which produces a large quantity of fine, mild-flavored green or purple fern-like foliage. For edible flowers, try Hon Tsai Tai. Tatsoi is spoon shaped, quick to mature, but has a strong mustard flavor. Other names to mess with your spell-checker are Shungiku, Bekana, Komatsuna, Vit or Michilli.

Gather individual leaves and stems or harvest the whole head by cutting at ground level. Promptly rinse to avoid wilting. I graze fresh from my garden, taste testing to compare and contrast many of these unique flavors. The vitamin, fiber and mineral components of Asian greens are easily off the charts. I'll leave it to you to research the myriad recipe and menu possibilities of one of the world's most popular crops.

Asian greens, Seeds, nursery center, seed catalog, exotic plants, crops, wilting, Brassica, Bok choi, Mizuna, Pac choi, Tatsoi, Hon Tsai Tai, Shungiku, Bekana, Komatsuna, Vit, Michilli

Tom Carey is the owner of Sundew Gardens, a you-pick gardening business near the University of Central Florida in East Orlando. Visit the Sundew Gardens Facebook page.



Here's what EOSun.com readers are writing about the Jan. 13 article "Bithlo under a microscope," which details the water quality testing by Orange County government in the small town:

"THE COUNTY SHOULD HAVE SENT THE RESIDENTS OF BITHLO AN APPLICATION FORM TO GET WATER TESTED AND USED THE LOCAL COMMUNITY CENTER AS A CENTRAL POINT TO HAVE WATER TESTED. NOT EVERYONE IN BITHLO IS AWARE OF THIS SITUATION. WHERE'S A CONTACT PHONE NUMBER AND HOW DO WE APPLY FOR WATER TEST?"

—MIKE JAZO

"NOTHING LIKE THIS COULD HAPPEN IN WINTER PARK OR HEATHROW. I STILL THINK A CLASS ACTION SUIT IS THE WAY TO GO. CALL JOHN MORGAN AND LET THAT COCKY LITTLE BASTARD WIN IT FOR YOU!"

—LISA EIKE FULFORD

Letters to the editor

Book club breeds readers

Every day, elementary school students in the U.S. spend an average of only six minutes reading a book. By comparison, these students devote four hours to watching television and seven hours on a computer, playing video games and using a cell phone or other hand-held device. These sobering statistics are manifested in the classroom by challenge areas such as low desire to read, poor comprehension, inability to analyze or apply what has been read and poor test scores. Timber Lakes Elementary School has the action plan to change this paradigm.

What have we done?

The school was selected by Scholastic International to host an exclusive Harry Potter Book Club. Out of the nationally selected schools, Timber Lakes ranks first in student participation, books read, volunteer hours procured and products donated.

Within less than five months of the start of the book club, 57 percent of book club students' minutes reading outside of school increased by 26 minutes per day. During the same five months, student enthusiasm for reading and reading-related activities increased by 90 percent.

More than one-third of all third-, fourth- and fifth-graders participate in the Harry Potter Book Club and enrollment continues to grow every day. Due to the overwhelmingly positive response to

The school was selected by Scholastic International to host an exclusive Harry Potter Book Club. Out of the nationally selected schools, Timber Lakes ranks first in student participation, books read, volunteer hours procured and products donated.

this book club, a book club featuring the Magic Tree House series targeting first- and second-grade students will launch in January 2013. This club initially targeted a 30-student enrollment; more than 80 have registered.

The Harry Potter Book Club also collaborated with a wide variety of community partners to create its own reading interactive computer game and three-dimensional castle. They also participated in a local festival and parade, performing the Hogwarts School Song for hundreds of festival attendees.

Timber Lakes also created a mentor reading program in partnership, where Timber Creek High School Beta Club members read with our most unmotivated and struggling readers to help inspire our students to love reading, comprehend what they've read and apply it in the classroom.

How did we do it?

Timber Lakes was selected to host these exclusive book clubs as the result of educational advocacy work at the local, district and state level and the positive and productive relationship developed with Scholastic International.

We've secured active participation from more than 90 percent of Timber Lakes' faculty and staff and accumulated thousands of parent volunteer hours to develop and deliver unique and innovative reading lessons tailored to our book club students.

The school raised nearly \$173,000 via in-kind donations to create our own website, computer game, graphics and video;

custom murals for the media center, science lab, cafeteria and front office to build book awareness and enthusiasm; planned visits to Universal Studios and Dinosaur World; and provided books and other purchased items to ensure book club appeal to all students.

More mentor opportunities were created through the International Academy of Design and Technology, the University of Central Florida, Kiwanis of Avalon Park and other key contributors to build one-on-one mentor relationships with our book club students.

— Jenny Wojcik, third grade teacher

File for homestead

I would like homeowners to be aware that now is the time to file for homestead exemption.

Those who bought and occupied a home prior to Jan. 1, 2012 may be eligible for a significant tax savings—an average of \$742 annually for most homeowners.

The Property Appraiser's website has a simple and quick feature that allows residents to file online, making it easy for residential property owners to file from the convenience of their home for the up to \$50,000 homestead exemption deduction. Visit www.ocpafl.org.

All new homeowners were mailed a letter four to six weeks following the recording of their deed that contained information on filing homestead exemption. Current property owners who have experienced a transfer of title, such as an addition or removal of a name on the title, name change from divorce, death of a spouse or establishing a trust, were also mailed a letter and will need to re-file for the exemption.

The letter contains an individually assigned user ID and password for safe and secure online filing. Also enclosed are instructions to file by mail if no internet access is available.

We are extremely pleased to be able to take the lead in Florida by offering this service to our customers. In these busy times, the on-line application process delivers on my promise to provide easier, quicker and friendlier service to Orange County property owners.

— Bill Donegan
Orange County Property Appraiser

Credit helps people in need

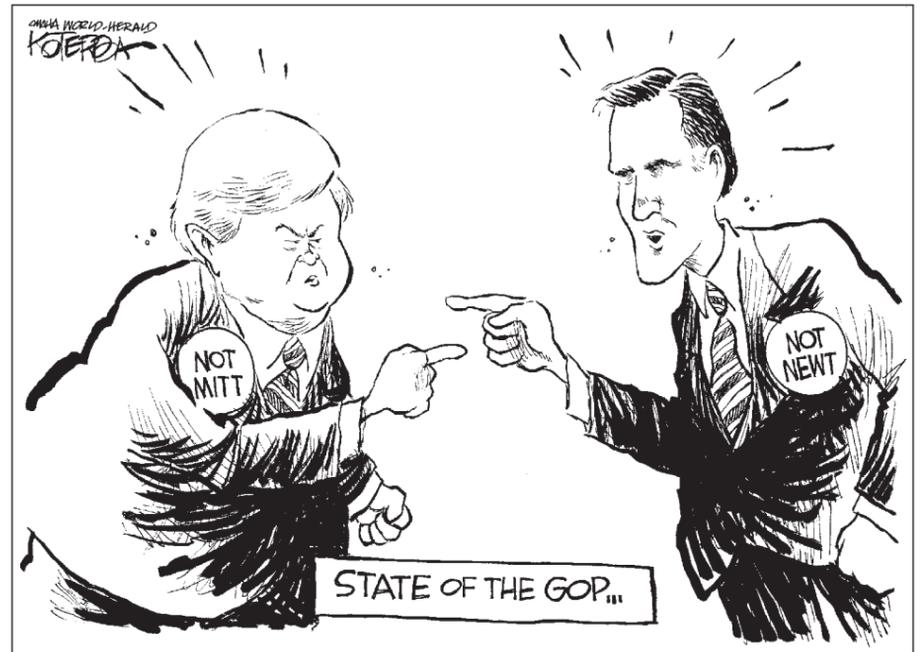
It's no secret that East Orange County, as well as all of Central Florida, is facing a heartbreaking and growing crisis of poverty and homelessness among local children and families.

Many of us have been deeply moved by televised reports on CBS "60 Minutes", CNN and other national news outlets that have highlighted families crowded into cars and sleeping in parking lots; fathers standing guard all night to protect their loved ones; and children getting washed and ready for school in public restrooms. It's a crisis that United Way and our agency partners have been witnessing, and responding to, for quite some time. It's also something we've been tracking through 2-1-1, United Way's free 24-hour information, referral and crisis helpline.

Last year alone more than 163,590 Orange, Osceola and Seminole county residents sought urgent assistance through 2-1-1 — an alarming 101-percent increase since 2007. Nearly two-thirds were first-time callers who never needed help before and more than half required assistance with utilities and housing — basic human needs.

One of the many things United Way is doing to help stem this tragic tide, is promoting awareness of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which is credited with lifting more children out of poverty than any other federal program.

By offering tax credits of up to \$5,717, EITC can make a life-changing difference for people who are struggling to pay for



rent, electricity, daycare, medical treatment or any ordinary expense. Best of all, claiming EITC is easy to do at more than 30 free local tax preparation sites, which help people receive 100 percent of their refund usually within 10 days or less.

EITC also provides a significant boost to the local economy. More than half a billion dollars in refunds were distributed in the tri-county region alone last year. With the majority of dollars spent on such things as groceries, car repairs, home improvements, medical care and other goods and services, local merchants and retailers also prosper.

Despite the many benefits, the Internal Revenue Service estimates that one in four eligible recipients fail to claim EITC, mainly due to lack of awareness. That's why United Way is calling on residents, businesses and others to help us promote it.

While EITC is not a silver bullet, it is one of the best tools our community has for helping families survive — and recover — from the ongoing economic crisis. With well paying, full-time jobs still hard to find, it's likely that even more residents will qualify for this tremendous benefit in the difficult year ahead.

So if you know someone who may qualify for EITC or needs help with any basic need, please urge them to simply dial 2-1-1. Together, by living united, we can help our neighbors and communities recover from this crisis.

— Robert H. (Bob) Brown, president/CEO
Heart of Florida United Way

Help kids with Crohn's

For the last four years, East Orlando resident Cameron Cox, 14, has been living with Crohn's disease, a chronic and often painful digestive disease.

He has always been a very healthy child. He is super active in sports, loves traveling with his family and hanging out at the beach. He would never get sick. Then one day he did.

At first the doctor told his mom that he had a stomach virus and was advised to let it run its course. Then he had blood work, and the doctor was still at a loss. Cam was then sent to see a Pediatric Gastroenterologist.

His diagnosis was a long and painful experience. Cam spent February through April of 2008 going from doctor to doctor, hospital to hospital, and having test after test. He was constantly being told, "Drink this, sit still, hold your breath, don't move!"

He had fierce stomach and intestinal pains and a lot of diarrhea and even some blood in his stool. At this point, he had lost 24 pounds from having chronic diarrhea and could hardly eat anything.

Finally he had to have two procedures: a colonoscopy and an endoscopy. He was so scared to get the I-V as well as the anesthesia. These two tests and the biopsy finally gave Cam's parents his diagnosis:

Crohn's disease.

All he wanted to do was go to school, play sports and hang out with his friends and family. Cam's life, as he knew it, had changed forever. He had lost so much of his freedom. There are days Cam just can't get out of bed because of the pain.

Cam really tries to have a good attitude toward his new daily routine. He has to take up to 16 pills a day now. He continues to have a "normal" childhood and still loves to play golf, basketball and volleyball as long as he feels up to it. He wakes up each morning and faces the day as it comes to him. There are days when Cam feels sorry for himself, and then he can hear his mom's gentle words of encouragement, "suck it up cupcake — pity party is now over, that train has left the station." She hugs him and kisses him on the head and he moves on.

Cam spent February through April of 2008 going from doctor to doctor, hospital to hospital, and having test after test.

Cam wishes he did not have Crohn's disease. He deals with it the best he can with the support of his family, friends and his wonderful doctors. He knows there are others out there far worse than him, but with your help you can help us find a cure for this awful disease.

Join Team Challenge, the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation's half marathon training program, during the summer 2012 race season for the Virginia Wine Country Half Marathon.

The Virginia Wine Country Half Marathon is the newest and fifth event in the Wine Country Half Marathon series, and the first held in the eastern U.S. Held in Loudoun County, this race course is a scenic 13.1 mile race, starting and finishing at bucolic Doukenie winery. Come visit DC's fabulous wine country while helping make a difference with the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation.

When you train with Team Challenge you will receive everything you need to cross the finish line, including training by two professional coaches, round-trip airfare to Virginia, ground transportation, race entry with race day shirt, three-night hotel stay, team challenge pre-race pasta party, and an amazing wine festival after party.

Contact Amy Stickel at astickeltemp@ccfa.org or 646-875-2079 for more information or visit www.ccteamchallenge.org

— Lindsey Gardner
Crohn's and Colitis Foundation

2012 Downtown Avalon Park *Calendar of Events*

Absolutely Avalon
Saturday, April 14th, 2012, 5-9 p.m.

July 4th
Wednesday, July 4th, 5-9 p.m.

Oktoberfest
Friday, October 12th, 2012, 6-10 p.m.
Saturday, October 13th, 2012, 6-10 p.m.

Spooktacular
Saturday, October 27th, 2012, 5-9 p.m.

Avalon Jubilee
Friday, November 16th, 2012, 3-10 p.m.
Saturday & Sunday, November 17th & 18th, 10 a.m. – 10 p.m.

Avalon Aglow & Holiday Parade
Saturday, December 1st, 2012, 3-9 p.m.

Movie Under the Stars
Check www.AvalonPark.com for Up-to-date Listings

Hosted by Avalon Park Merchant Association. For more information on this and other events visit avalonpark.com or call 407-658-6565.
Avalon Park is conveniently located in East Orlando, 5 miles south of the 408 Expressway on Alafaya Trail.



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Kids Need You! Become a Foster Parent, contact 407-739-8462!

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Family owned restaurant looking for upbeat energetic servers & grill cooks. apply at either location. 12205 Narcoossee Rd. Orlando 407-282-7737 or 3020 Lambertson Blvd. Orlando (corner of Curry Ford & Dean) 407-704-7957

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

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-Phone: 407-671-4700
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-Rabbi@geshershalom.com, www.geshershalom.com, Shalomorlando.com
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You are invited to our Purim Festival at 11 a.m. Saturday, March 10.

A time of fun for the whole family, with a "Speil" (play) costumes, face painting, games, crafts and treats! Free admission. PASSOVER SEDER Plan now to attend our 8th Annual Community Passover Seder, at 5:45 p.m. Saturday, April 7 at the Rosen Plaza Hotel, 9700 International Drive. Enjoy a traditional Seder and learn about Yeshua (Jesus) in the Passover. Music and dance specials, an Afikomen (matzah) search for the children, and Jonathan Settel in concert! \$50 for adults, \$25 for children (4-12 years of age); no charge for children under 4. Free self-parking, valet available. Seating is limited! Make your reservation now at shalomorlando.com. For more information, call 407-671-4700 or 407-782-6177.

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