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Homeless center closer to reality

Hundreds of letters to commissioners put the pressure on to find drop-in site for East Orlando homeless

■ MEGAN STOKES
Sun Staff

"I know a family who lost their house and now they're living in their car. That is really sad. If we build this homeless center, maybe people won't have to live in their cars."

This excerpt from a letter by Ali, 13, of the Spirit of Joy Youth Group was one of hundreds received by Orange County commissioners, urging them to find a location for an East Orlando homeless drop-in center, which will offer an array of services to the growing homeless population in East Orlando.

An update on the drop-in center is scheduled for the Orange County Commission on March 20, where Commissioner Jennifer Thompson is optimistic that a solution to this three-year-long conundrum can be found.

She and the two other East Orange County commissioners, Ted Edwards and John Martinez,

have been eyeing the East Orange Community Center located near the intersection of Alafaya Trail and East Colonial Drive. To locate the drop-in center there, the county would have to find another location for the Orange County Head Start program, a preschool for low-income children. Thompson said the maneuver could turn out to be a win-win for everyone, since the Head Start program is space-limited.

The county received an \$800,000 grant to lease or purchase land for a drop-in center in 2009, but finding a location has proven difficult due to either the county's price limitations, opposition from neighbors and issues with the site itself.

Commissioners said they're feeling pressure from the community to get this project under way.

"We're spending so much time looking for a property and then there's the politics on top of it," Thompson said. "That money's



PHOTO BY MEGAN STOKES

Orange County commissioners are eyeing the East Orange Community Center for a homeless drop-in center. This would mean displacing the Head Start program but it could mean more space for a packed program.

sitting there; we have a true need for it and I can't figure out for the life of me that we haven't figured this out yet."

Edwards agreed. "I still find it mind boggling that in this econ-

omy, with this many distressed properties along East Colonial that a site could not be located for a good price. I think the site parameters might have been too restrictive."

But the challenge in finding a site is crystal clear to Orange County Real Estate Management Division's Gary Roberts, who's in charge of scouting these sites.

■ Please see **DROP IN** on page 4

Research Park works to rally through cuts

Area's three sectors map out plans to survive national budget cuts

■ MEGAN STOKES
Sun Staff

With historic national defense budget cuts, continued manufacturing outsourcing and an economy not yet expecting a vast recovery, 2012 will likely be a year of transition for many tenants of Central Florida's Research Park, Executive Director Joe Wallace said.

Business in Research Park, which employs about 9,500 Central Floridians, can be sectioned into three different sectors: Department of Defense, commercial businesses and incubator/start-up companies. Each, he predicts, will make different adjustments to help them thrive through uncertain economic times.

"I don't see a downslide now," Wallace said, "but I don't see an upside either until probably late 2013."

He said he predicts industry to stay constant for those involved with the

University of Central Florida's Business Incubator at Central Florida Research Park, while commercial industries may still struggle with a continued lack of consumer spending.

Carol Ann Dykes, site manager of the UCF Business Incubator, said the coming years will test how well new businesses can adapt to survive in an ever-changing market.

"By teaching these new businesses flexibility and nimbleness it makes it easier for them to adapt to the needs of the market," Dykes said.

She says the incubator plays a big role in feeding the cycle of businesses that come in and out of Research Park by fostering companies so that they can develop successfully and create more high-level jobs in Central Florida.

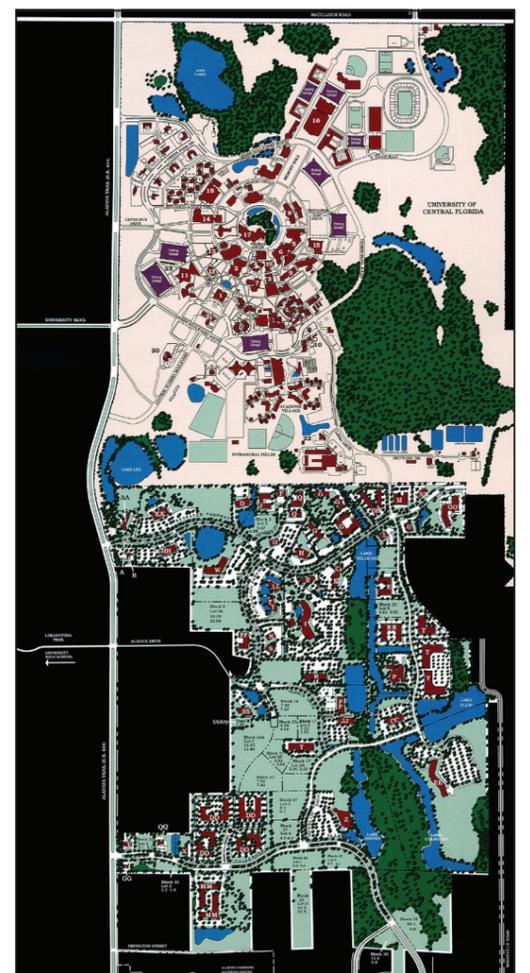
"The economy and budget cuts will surely have some impact... but I don't

think it will hinder our companies from growing to find success in diversified markets," she said.

All eyes right now are on Park's defense sector. Since the Pentagon announced in January that it plans to try to reduce Department of Defense spending by \$259 billion over the next five years, and \$487 billion in the next decade, Wallace said he's heard some raised concerns over what impact that will have on those employed in simulation and modeling programs in defense, government, academia and industry at Research Park — jointly referred to as Team Orlando.

"Right now I haven't seen any cut-backs at my level," Wallace said. "But I'm sure all of the sectors are doing everything they can to continue to thrive."

Cpt. Bill Reuter, commanding offi-



GRAPHIC COURTESY OF RESEARCH PARK
Central Florida Research Park continues to grow.

■ Please see **RESEARCH** on page 4



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Coffee with Beat

Beat Kahli



My spring forecast: Feeling good about America

It's nearly spring. Here in East Orlando, it's summer again, but through most of the world, the new year is just sprouting, which means it's time to issue our predictions for the coming seasons.

Traditionally, we'd talk of crops, livestock and babies. But here in East Orlando, we're starting new traditions all the time. So I have a few predictions to share. When winter week rolls around again, we'll tally them up to see just how right I am.

- The economy will improve this year. Even if nothing else happens in Europe, the Mideast or here in the U.S., the economy will be better. The economy has improved during election years ever since 1932. That said, fuel prices will be higher, and the oil companies will report record profits. Again!

- Your kids will be smarter. If you are blessed with children, you know they will probably do at least one thing dumb this year. Regardless, by next spring, they will be smarter than they are right now. And you'll be one year wiser.

- Your house will be worth more. Despite the dire emoluments of the most gloom-and-doom think tank wizards, the consensus among independent economists is that the U.S. housing markets downturn has run its course. The good thing about lying on the floor is that you can't fall very far. We'll never see the bubble rise like it did in 2005, and that's a good thing.

- The Christmas season will start even earlier this year. And while I groaned at the first signs of the holiday season last October, it seems like it flew by in 2011 and it was lovelier than ever.

I say we start it sometime during baseball season, like maybe August. This will upset Halloween aficionados, and no doubt we'll see at least one Zombie Santa Claus come Oct. 31.

- At least two more poohbahs in the Middle East will wake up to reality and lose their authoritarian power. It ought to be clear that democracy has just as much a place in the Middle East as in the rest of the world. The so-called Arab spring has been an inspiration,

though one fraught with tragedies and turmoil.

- At least one highly promising startup company will announce it has set up shop in East Orlando. This is a safer prediction than you realize and doesn't require a lick of insider information.

The UCF Business Incubation Program seems like it's helping a new startup launch about every three weeks on average, and some of the business ideas are nothing short of brilliant. If you ever want some good news about the Central Florida economic prospects, visit incubator.ucf.edu

- Timber Creek High School will have a winning season in more than one sport, will graduate a record number of seniors this year, and see a record number of graduates go on to college or university. Whenever I'm feeling a little blue, I drive over by the school and bask in the glow of all that youthful exuberance.

- We'll witness one major political scandal. Please refer to prediction No. 1, this is an election year. The more curmudgeonly among

us will claim this year's election is itself a scandal. They are wrong. Democracy, with all its warts and whoopsies, is a glorious exercise.

- Your family will experience at least one tragedy. I hope and pray it's a minor one, among the lines of a drowned goldfish or leaky hot water heater. And trust that it will be balanced by at least one event of great happiness for you and your family. Try and focus on the happiness, I think it's why we are here.

- We'll all wonder what all the hoo-hah was about on Dec. 12, 2012. We'll all learn that the ancient Mayan people, as inventive as they were (corn, tomatoes, the numeral zero) never envisioned a wheel, and never meant to forecast the end of civilization as we know it. We'll still be here. And we'll be waiting to see how many of my predictions are worth their salt.



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- June 30, 1961
John F. Kennedy

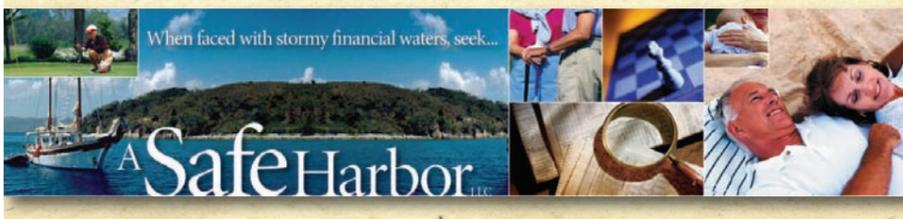
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DROP IN

■ CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

They've considered more than 60 properties surrounding the East Colonial Drive corridor from Semoran Boulevard to Alafaya Trail and none panned out so far.

"We've looked at anything and everything and everything in between," Roberts said. "It's a tough one; I feel bad for this one. It's just a tough, tough project. Everyone's sympathetic to the situation but when the rubber meets the road [no one wants it]."

Thompson has already contacted Orange County School Board Member Daryl Flynn to explore any possible partnerships with Orange County Public Schools to house the Head Start program. She received many re-

sponses from local realtors when she recently posted an inquiry on Facebook about 9,000- to 11,000 square-foot of commercial space between Dean Road and Avalon Park Boulevard.

"It looks like I have support of the Community Center from the community. I feel good that it's the right spot," she said. "Head Start is in an old facility and they need to expand, so if we can move them into a new spot we can assume they'd be for it. We really need to enhance the Head Start program on the east side."

Because of limited classroom space, all seven classrooms are at capacity, which is 20 students. Ideally, a Head Start class size is 17 students. Director of Orange County Family Services Lonnie Bell said their focus is to add more locations in East Orlando, since

the current location serves such a large area, but a chance to increase the number of classrooms surfaced "would be a plus," he said.

Currently, the waiting list for the east side Head Start is 51 kids but that fluctuates throughout the year and can get as high as 100. This is partially due to the maximum number of publically funded students.

"Right now the bulk of our sites are on the west side. We think it would be appropriate, given Orange County demographics, to increase our services on the east side," Bell said. "That's something we've been thinking about for a long time, but we have not been able to find the right space or partnership to make that happen."

Although he agrees the Com-

munity Center is a solid option, Roberts said he tries not to get fixated on one property so that he doesn't miss another potential opportunity for a site.

"Until the day I have a contract and I'm standing in front of the board with approval, I'll continue to look. I go out in that area at least once a week hoping to find a site," he said, adding that even when he and his wife are traveling through the area he drives slow, looking for any new property signs.

"We've drilled a lot of dry holes and every time we think we have something, something comes up. There's a tremendous amount of pressure."

As for the community, Anna Elias, member of Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church, who encouraged members of the congregation to

write letters to the commissioners, said they plan to attend the March meeting in full force.

She said people are so passionate about the homeless situation in East Orlando that they jumped at the chance to write their local leaders.

"Times are hard so people are seeing this more directly — homes in foreclosure, people losing their jobs," she said. "It's more palpable and direct rather than some guy walking down Colonial (Drive) pushing a cart."

"I think it's time that we move from the discussion phase to the action phase. We have to come up with some kind of safety net to help our neighbors in need. It's not us and them anymore, it's all of us."

RESEARCH

■ CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

cer of Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division and Naval Support Activity Orlando, which both operate out of Research Park, said he doesn't expect the cuts to financially impact the defense operations or workforce here in Central Florida.

"I expect our productivity to stay at worst the same," he said.

Reuter expects that eventually the cuts will actually enhance the importance of the work in simulation and modeling done at Research Park, as the military looks to invest in more efficient training technologies to cut costs in the future.

"Right now the core mission of these activities seem somewhat insular," Reuter said, "because the mission is actually something that offsets the amount of money spent on some of these programs

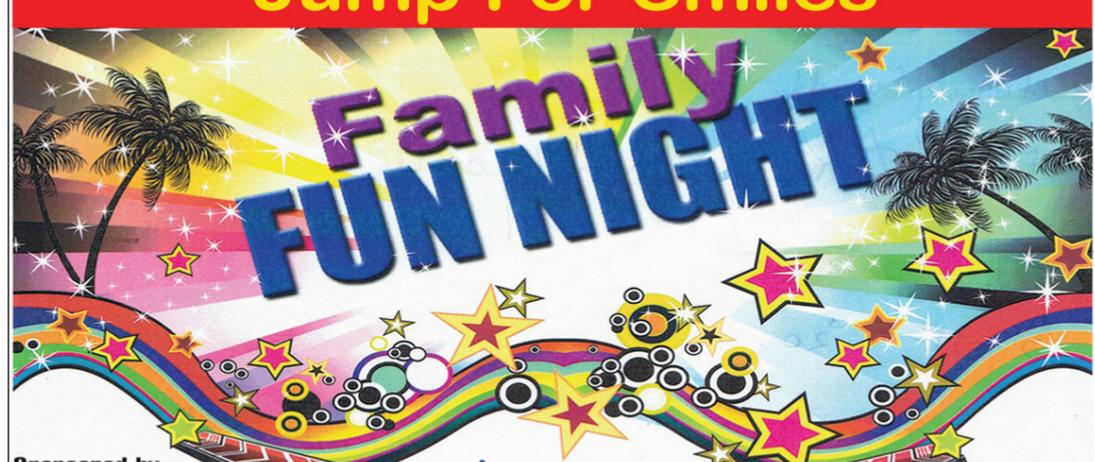
in the future."

Though the Department of Defense's employment is currently capped, he said there is potential for these programs to grow in coming years, with no workforce cuts in sight.

"The demand for our services continues to increase," he said. "As it is we'll just be having to do more work with the same amount of people."

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Rotary Business of the Month

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March's Rotary Business of the Month is Rinse Cleaners in Waterford. Owners Juan and Marianela Chirinos have been giving back to the East Orlando community since they opened their "green" dry cleaning business in 2007. Twice a year they collect school supplies for A Gift for Teaching Foundation; they urge their customers, friends and neighbors to fill shoeboxes with clothes, toys and toiletries for Operation Christmas Child each year; and every winter they collect coats, jackets and sweaters, which they donate to schools with children who cannot afford them. This year, they gave 40 outerwear pieces to Orange County Academy in Bithlo. They also have been cleaning OCA kids' uniforms twice a week for nearly a year. Rinse Cleaners is located at 448 S. Alafaya Trail, Ste. 9, in Orlando. For more information, call 407-249-3332 or visit rinsecleaners.com.

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 facebook.com/avalonparkrotary.



Rinse Cleaners Owners Juan Chirinos with Rotary of Avalon Park's Jim Foulks.

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Homeless students' stories

A day-in-the-life account of several Timber Creek High School homeless students' struggles



PHOTO BY MEGAN STOKES

Maria Shorkey, director of community relations at the Covenant House, sorts items in their clothes closet for homeless teens. Shorkey said many kids are afraid to stay there but it's really a safe place for them.

■ **SARAH WILSON**
Sun Staff

It's 4 a.m. when across town alarms sound to awake Timber Creek seniors Keyna, 17, and Natalie, 18. They sleep at each of their respective grandparents' houses, where both have found temporary homes.

At 6 a.m. when the folding doors of the Lynx buses they catch to Timber Creek High School in Avalon Park close behind them, it is more than metal that now separates them from their lives at home — it's a mental wall. Everything that faced them before those doors closed, they say, is now a world away.

Gone are the girls who live in a world of overcrowded houses, bare pantries and dwindling to non-existent bank accounts. In their place are girls who study hard, take Advanced Placement classes and lead student clubs.

"I live in two different worlds," Keyna said. "I can't let my issues at home follow me to school or I'd never pass."

They both have learned to fake it so well that though their bus routes often cross, neither girl knows the other is there, getting on the same bus, jumping the same mental threshold, to go to the same school, where they fall under the same statistic: two of Timber Creek High School's 14 registered homeless students.

To the schools' other 2,962 students, and the majority of the faculty, Keyna and Natalie are just two high-achieving students working their way through senior

year, balancing honors classes, extracurriculars and finishing college applications.

"We all just have to work with what we have... I have the same amount of work as all the other students, but I don't have the same schedule," Natalie said.

"Sometimes I get depressed with what's going on at home, but I don't want sympathy so I just don't show it," Keyna said. "Every day I just put up a front — I keep it to myself."

The only time that front comes down during the school day is when TCHS SAFE Coordinator JoLynn Schall's office door opens.

A safe place

Nearly 400 students every nine weeks, Schall estimates, pass through the door to her SAFE office. Whether they need food, clothes, help finding a place to sleep or just an ear to listen, Schall is there to provide any help she and her database of school and county resources can offer.

As the school's SAFE coordinator, which stands for Student Assistance Family Empowerment, Schall deals with not only homeless students, but those dealing with abuse, depression, anger issues and substance abuse, to name a few.

"These kids deal with a lot every day, and some have no parents to guide them on the right path... I've been able to be that support for them, that surrogate caregiver," she said.

It's a Friday morning when a tall, lanky 12th-grader walks through her door. He sits down, fiddles with his hat and stares at his shoes — a gift from Timber Creek's clothes closet. "Do you know where you're sleeping tonight?" Schall asks. The boy shakes his head no, and Schall springs into action, afraid, she admits later, he'll be on a park bench tonight if she can't find another

option.

Minutes later she's on the phone with a local shelter, the Covenant House, that offers bed, food, clothes and life services to those ages 18-21, checking his status on the 80-person long waiting list, where his name has been listed the last six days. She hands the phone to the boy, who quietly murmurs single-word answers to the person on the other end, before he hangs up.

"They have a bed for you?" Schall asks hopefully.

He nods, "But I said no."

"Why? Because you're scared?"

He nods again, burying his face in his hands before the tears brimming in his eyes can escape, as he slumps back into his chair, eyes once more on his sneakers.

It's common, Maria Shorkey, community relations director for Covenant House says, that kids are scared to seek out refuge in a shelter.

"It takes a big leap of faith for these kids to agree to stay here," she said. "They've been let down by adults over and over and over again, and it's hard for them to trust that we're really here to help them."

But Covenant House, located off of East Colonial, near Semoran Boulevard in East Orlando, which has in the past two years limited its scope to 18-21 year olds in need due to increased pressure from the economy, isn't like the shelter she says kids often picture in their heads.

The walls inside are painted a rainbow of sherbet colors. There are two classrooms with laptops for homework or GED study, a dining area, a childcare room for young mothers, a small chapel, an outdoor basketball court and 10 dorm-style bedrooms that sleep 20 to 25 youth a night.

Any youth in need can have access to the shelter's programs

and facilities for free, but only those approved off the waiting list can be guaranteed a bed. Once you're in, you can stay as long as you need, Shorkey said, but on average, stays range from 14 to 45 days, with a new bed usually opening up nightly.

"Sometimes these kids feel like they're invisible in life because no one even notices they're there," Shorkey said. "It's an uphill battle... but we want these kids to know we're here, and we want to do everything in our power we can to help them live normal, happy, healthy lives in the future."

The next step

After the boy goes back to class, Schall continues to work on finding him a bed for the night, while also filling out paperwork for Keyna and Natalie, asking for money through Orange County Public School's McKinney-Vento Program (MVP), which works to remove any and all barriers to the educational process of students experiencing homelessness, to cover the remainder of their senior year expenses.

From college application fees, to cap and gown rentals and yearbook costs, the girls have been lucky enough to have the majority of their necessary fees covered so far. Each girl has applied to multiple colleges in state and out.

Keyna has no phone or Internet access where she lives and she recently quit her afterschool sports team to apply for jobs to help her family try to afford a more permanent home. She has an interview with Duke University in North Carolina this month.

"Sometimes I just wish I was a normal kid... but it's just never going to be like that," Keyna said. "I have to realize my life is never going to be like that — normal — unless I really work for it."

Natalie hopes to major in biotechnology and one day make

enough money to own her own home.

"I'm ready to get out of here... I'm excited to move on and that's why I have to fill this stuff out," she says, waving a half-completed MVP form.

This time the forms are filled out with prom season in mind. Both girls are looking for funds to cover the cost of dresses, shoes and accessories.

Keyna has already started looking for dresses. She fell in love with one, she says, covered in silver, shiny sequins with deep purple accents. "I call it my Beyonce dress," she says with a laugh.

"But I just look at the price tag and I think of all the other things I could do with that money," she says, her laughter gone. "It's just too much."

Schall said it's her goal with the SAFE office to level the playing field for all students when they come into school. "I just want them to feel like they're the same as any other student when they're here," she said, whether that's through providing pretty prom dresses or a hot meal so they can have full stomachs to concentrate in classes.

"I try to stress to them that their education is their way out, that their situation right now isn't the way it's always going to be," she said. "There's always hope."

It's hope that Keyna and Natalie continue to hold onto through their last four months of high school before graduation in June. A hope that one day they don't have to live in a world of revolving doors, and that one day they'll have a place — other than the SAFE office — where they can really feel safe and at home.

Editor's note: The names of some students have been changed to protect their privacy.

For more information on OCPS programs for homeless students, visit homeless.ocps.net. To learn more about the SAFE program at your local schools, visit tinyurl.com/OCPS-SAFE

Florida Flight: Keep dreaming

■ MEGAN STOKES
Sun Staff

The rhythmic pounding on the pavement, the swoosh of the net and the adrenaline from a body working overtime all helped Mark King forget his troubles as a child.

He'd play basketball from the moment he got home from school until his mother forced him into the house, sometimes as late as 10 p.m. It was the perfect distraction from the electricity and water routinely being turned off in his Detroit, Mich. home, his father's constant trips to the hospital as he battled bipolar disorder and the relentless teasing from kids at school about his hand-me-down clothing. He even slept with his basketball.

"It was all I had," he said. He didn't discover the game or its healing properties until his father shocked him by asking him to play with some neighborhood kids. King and his father lost miserably, but it turned out to be one of the most life-altering events he would ever experience.

"These moments, when he was normal functioning, were very rare," he said.

Something snapped in the 9-year-old. Suddenly, nothing else in his life mattered more than playing basketball. After a lot of convincing by King, his father, unable to afford a regulation hoop, bought a metal ring and built a backboard out of wood and set it up in the backyard.

"I would forget all of the problems I had [while playing basketball]. Sometimes I would forget to eat dinner. I would lose track of everything. It was like escaping into a rocket ship and entering another world," King said.

King, 35, still has basketball on the brain as founder and presi-

dent of the Florida Flight, a minor league basketball team that started in Kissimmee in 2010, and recently moved to Avalon Park where they play on the regulation-size court at Avalon Middle School.

Billy Bass, head of the Avalon Middle Fitness Department, said the Flight has been very involved with the students and the community.

Players have visited the school's gym classes, teaching kids basketball skills and doing drills with them. Bass said the players see about 1,000 kids when they come.

"Middle school kids are like a mold, they are getting shaped right now. Any time the kids have someone who can teach them something they're good at—a role model—they'll want to be as good as them," Bass said.

Flight point guard Ernest Jones said the Kissimmee venue was great for the team, but they never had as big an impact on the community and the youth as they have here in Avalon.

"We were not able to get an outlet to the children, the community and the things we wanted to do," he said. "We're the new team in town and some people may think it's just about selling tickets, but it's about getting out in the community, playing ball in the courts in Avalon. We've had guys and kids out there playing against us, just having fun. Then the next time they remember you."

Jones said the biggest message they want to send the kids is never give up on your dreams.

"A lot of guys on the team won't make it to the NBA, but that doesn't mean it has to stop there. The NBA is there but not everyone makes it," he said.

Jones said King is the perfect example of that as he was excluded from many opportunities growing up but never lost track of his passion for the game.

"God chose a different path for him and I think he's doing more with what he has now than he ever would have if he made it to the NBA," Jones said. "He's touching more lives by telling his story, owning the team and giving other people the opportunities he



PHOTO BY MEGAN STOKES

Florida Flight Founder and President Mark King plays basketball with his 3-year-old daughter, Angelica.

didn't have."

Never give up

When he started trying out for teams in seventh grade, King stood at 4 feet, 10 inches and weighed 70 pounds. Eating potpies just about every night, or takeout from the Burger King where his mother worked, left him scrawny and malnourished, but he kept trying anyway. He went through middle and high school gripping his dream to play for the NBA tight and all the while never making a team.

"In 12th grade I had just gotten cut from the team and I remember walking home from the bus stop and I almost ran into a parked car. I went straight to the basketball hoop. I would tell everyone from 12 years old on that I would play pro and I would get laughed at. I'll be honest, it didn't make a lot of sense."

King always found a way to play the game he loved. In his senior year, he signed up for a Basketball Tech class, which was intended for the school's team to get extra practice, but it allowed him an opportunity to practice with the players every morning. Since it was his first class, he'd arrive when the building opened to get some extra hoop time.

King grew from his 5'4" stature in high school to his current 5'11" shortly after graduation, but still his basketball career never

evolved. He spent his years at Pikeville College in Kentucky, relentlessly trying to be a permanent fixture on their team. Even after that never panned out, he still refused to give up.

After marrying his college sweetheart, Florence, he worked as an Arby's manager in Kentucky. In a twist of fate, he lost that job just as minor league team the Orlando Aces started up. He got on the roster and played for them until the team folded a year later.

"I was 30 years old and I was a player, the director and the interim head coach," he said. "I learned everything I needed to know about running a minor league basketball team."

Florence said she's made a lot of sacrifices for King to move forward with his dream of playing basketball, and later to run a minor league team.

"It's his dream. We've had some tough times but you're not happy if you're not doing something you're supposed to do," she said.

Florence was a pretty competitive basketball player in high school and she also played net ball, which is like basketball, minus the backboard and the dribbling, and is very popular where she grew up in Sri Lanka. The two played a lot before the arrival of their 3-year-old daughter Angelica.

"She'd always foul me," King

said about his wife.

"Well he was just so cocky," Florence joked.

King said Angelica is three inches taller than the average child her age, which he hopes is a sign that a love of basketball might run in the family. The duo dribbles the ball together, plays keep-away and passes the ball back and fourth — she's more likely to roll the ball or even kick it to her father.

Angelica has been going to Flight games since she was a baby. Bass said the Flight makes the games fun for all kids—providing a DJ, a high-energy mascot and the players going around high-fiving the kids.

"They really try to get the kids involved. There was a good turnout last time — a lot of kids. Some kids can't go to a Magic game so they can come here and get a taste of what the NBA is like," he said.

"It's just starting off. It's the beginnings of the relationship [between Avalon and the Flight]."

Although King agrees, he said the community is already starting to embrace the team.

"I was at Wal-Mart a few weeks ago and one of the workers said, 'Hey coach'. I thought, 'OK we're here'," he said. "It was a good moment for me. I didn't feel like we were making that big of an impact yet, but apparently we are."

The first Flight game in Avalon Park is on Saturday, March 31, at Avalon Middle School, where they'll hold all of their future games. The next one is on Saturday, April 28. The Flight also offers a Not Afraid to Fly mentorship program. Visit flighthoops.com for more information and a full game schedule.

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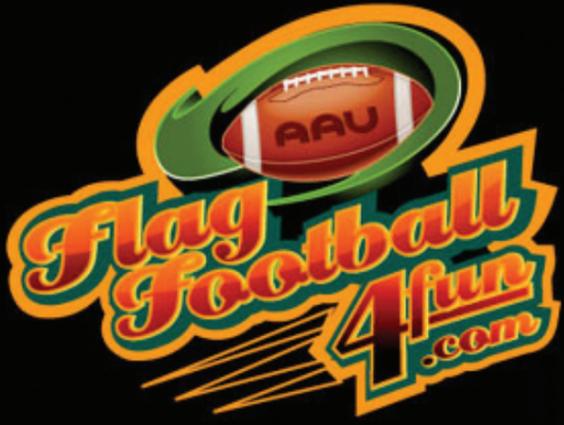
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Knights close in on the playoffs

■ ISAAC BABCOCK
Sun Staff

The UCF Knights shrugged off a loss at Rice on Feb. 22 to come back home and decimate UTEP 63-45 in front of the home crowd for the second to last time this season. But the euphoria didn't last long, as they then suffered a devastating 84-55 loss at Memphis Feb. 28. Now they're staring down the Conference USA tournament with eyes on a postseason run.

Things were looking up for UCF in C-USA play after the big win over UTEP. With little playing time from regular starters A.J. Rompza and Josh Crittle, they managed a big win. While those two key players were resting on the bench, freshman Kasey Wilson got his UCF starting debut at forward, picking up four points and four rebounds, and leading the team with three blocks. Two more freshmen, Rod Days and Wayne

Martin, each had some playing time as well, with Days picking up two points and two rebounds, and Martin snagging a turnover in only a minute on the court.

Isaiah Sykes again led the team in scoring with 23 points, collecting 11 rebounds for a double-double in the game.

He needed them all after the Knights let a lead slip and the struggling Miners tie the game at 29-even. But after early second half sluggishness they ran up a massive scoring gap to run away with the lead and the win.

That was sweet redemption after the game before that, when the Knights (20-9, 9-6) blew a 20-point lead against Rice to lose a game that would have put them in a tie for second in the conference.

But the Knights couldn't hold onto their momentum as they headed to Memphis, who the Knights had narrowly defeated

for the first time earlier this season.

Memphis' offense exploded early in the game, outscoring the Knights 33-18 heading into the half, while the Knights' shooting sputtered, with only 30 percent accuracy.

Center Josh Crittle had one of his best scoring games of the season with eight points, but the Knights' lackluster shooting continued to plague them in the second half en route to a blowout loss.

They will return home for a final regular season game against UAB (13-14, 8-6) at 7 p.m. Saturday. The only time the two teams faced each other this season the Knights won in Birmingham by a score of 48-41, one of the lowest scoring games in team history. It was also the first time the Knights had ever beaten the Blazers.

The Knights will head to the



PHOTO BY ISAAC BABCOCK

Center Josh Crittle has helped energize the Knights near the end of the season.

Conference USA tournament on March 7, part of a four-day, 11-game slugfest. The Knights will also be hoping their performance during the season is good enough

for an NCAA tournament bid. For the Knights, who have appeared in the tournament four times, a spot this year would end a drought that started after the 2005 season.

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The Scoop

Two seniors from Timber Creek have signed with Lehigh University in Pennsylvania. Lehigh's Division I athletics program picked up Leah Turner for their volleyball team and Mat Verdon for the football team.

On Feb. 1, three East River High School seniors signed to play football with three different colleges in the southeast. Adam Duckett signed with Georgia Military College, Ivan Rios signed with FAMU and Josh Farr signed with the Florida Institute of Technology.

The East River High School Girls Weightlifting team placed second in the Super Metro Conference in February. Chelsea Brooks placed first place in the 101 lb. class.

Two East River High School wrestlers competed in the 2012 FHSAA State Wrestling Championship in February at the Lakeland Center. Micah Cross placed No. 6 and Corey Ray placed No. 2 in the state. East River Falcon Wrestlers finished No. 10 in Class 3A in the state--higher than any other competing Orange County school.





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A 400-day Epoch adventure

A former UCF student completed a row across the Atlantic Ocean last month, and will continue the challenge by biking, kayaking and hiking, completing 10,000 self-powered miles

■ **BRITNI JOHNSON**
Sun Staff

A team of four rows a 29-foot-long boat. It's a speck in the Atlantic Ocean, minuscule compared to the three-story waves and 50 mph winds it battles. Saltwater smacks the team members' skin, and the only space they have for refuge from the penetrating rain, blistering sun and incredible work it takes to steer and propel their oars through the wild ocean, is a tiny cubby not large enough to sit up straight in.

It's taken 56 days, but that speck has navigated the 2,550 nautical miles — nearly 3,000 miles on land — that it takes to cross the Atlantic Ocean. Team Epoch, led and formed by Fern Park resident and University of Central Florida alumna Sonya Baumstein, set off on the Talisker Whiskey Atlantic Challenge (TWAC) on Dec. 5 in La Gomera, Spain, and arrived eighth of 17 teams on Monday, Jan. 30, in Barbados.

The TWAC was created in 1997, and since then, fewer than 200 people have crossed the Atlantic. Team Epoch is the first mixed gender team of four to complete the race, and were the only Americans to participate this year.

Baumstein joked that they were, out of 17 teams, voted least prepared. She hopes her team can inspire others to take a chance on adventure. While Baumstein had been a rower for Winter Park High School and passionate about the sport, she had no idea what she was in for at the TWAC. Long-time friend Ashley Frasier said she never expected something like this from her.

"It surprised me," Frasier said. "She had never come off to me as this hardcore, outdoor girl."

And she isn't.

"We're like an everyman if you will," Baumstein said. "We're showing everyone you don't have to have rowed the ocean before, you don't have to have climbed Mt. Everest to be an adventurer."

Two weeks after this challenge, Baumstein and her team will embark on the next three legs of what she calls the 400 Challenge. They plan to complete 10,000 self-powered miles in 400 days. Team Epoch will bike along the West Coast, kayak the Inside Passage from Alaska to Washington and then hike the Pacific Crest Trail.

Baumstein's goal with the 400 Challenge is to help promote her non-profit organization Epoch Expeditions. She'll tell her Challenge tale along the rest of her trip, educating adults and students on the environment and its wonders. This is the beginning of the organization, and when she gets back, she plans to connect people to their environment through expeditions and adventures, though less epic than her own current journey.

"I was aggravated with how impossible it seemed for somebody to get outdoors," she said.

To learn more about Epoch Expeditions and Team Epoch's 400 Challenge, visit teamepoch.org. Follow them on their website, Facebook and Twitter to see how their journey is going.

For more information about the Talisker Whiskey Atlantic Challenge, visit TaliskerWhiskeyAtlanticChallenge.com

Baumstein said she didn't like how expensive it was becoming to set out on a real adventure: the cost of taking time off work, buying equipment and traveling to an exotic location. She just wanted to offer people — particularly those older than 40, whom she said have become landlocked at home and behind desks — with an affordable way to explore the outdoors. Her expeditions will range from three days to 100 or more, with the 400 Challenge as a model for the future trips. She wants people to take these trips and turn them into a passion for conservation that lasts.

"This isn't supposed to be a one-time experience — this is supposed to be the beginning of their experience," she said.

Tougher than Everest

While she and her team have a long way to go, nothing will compare to what they endured on the Atlantic, Baumstein said. The team took shifts rowing, two hours on, two hours off. There's no breaking for a night's sleep, these three men and one woman row for a couple hours, change into dry clothes, eat some ramen noodles and sleep for a little over an hour, 24 hours a day. The pain in their arms never goes away because there is no rest.

Some days it rains for hours and it takes days to dry off. Another day, instead of rain, it's a shark as big as their boat that follows them from hours.

Many say this expedition is tougher than climbing Mt. Everest, because there's no precedent for any trip; every day is different. And the ocean has no base camps.

"Adventuring is not easy and that's why not everyone does it," Baumstein said. "It's our Everest."

But Baumstein said it's her team and her determination to finish her goal that keeps her going. She'd been working on this trip and forming Epoch Expeditions and nothing else for nine months. When she's feeling down, she gives herself the same pep talk.

"This is my baby," she said. "I'm achieving this, something that people said I couldn't do."

But her friend, Frasier, said anybody who knows Baumstein knows she would never give up.

"She's probably one of the most headstrong and motivated people you will ever meet," Frasier said. "When she came to me and told me she was doing this, I knew she could do it just because



PHOTO BY BRIAN FINKE — TALISKER WHISKEY ATLANTIC CHALLENGE

Team Epoch includes Jonathan Crane, Christopher Crane, Sonya Baumstein, a former University of Central Florida and Winter Park High School student, and Oliver Levick. The team completed 8th in the Talisker Whiskey Atlantic Challenge on Jan. 30.

... when she has her mind set on something, it will get done."

And she's got a great team backing her up. Their spirit of adventure connects them.

Michael McGovern, an Orlando resident who didn't take part in the TWAC but will join starting on the bike leg, said he's drawn to the challenge.

"The things that most people might shy away from, the challenges that are part of this 400 Challenge, are sort of the things that interest me and being able to overcome those obstacles," McGovern said. "I've always had a strong sense of adventure and I've always been driven to sort of escape, and I've never been able to really satisfy that desire."

Baumstein's own desire might not be for the wicked days on the water, but it definitely is for the beautiful ones. On some nights, she and her team could see the Milky Way and Orion's Belt because there wasn't a cloud, or light, in the sky to compete. The wind was perfect and the waves would push the boat just right.

"You could feel the boat gliding on top of them and it was just light and easy ... and that was incredible."

Epoch Expeditions, Sonya Baumstein, Team Epoch, 400 Challenge, Facebook, Talisker Whiskey Atlantic Challenge, TaliskerWhiskeyAtlanticChallenge.com, Atlantic Ocean, Winter Park High School, Fern Park, Barbados, Ashley Frasier, Mt. Everest, Michael McGovern, Orlando

Sweet treats at Waterford



PHOTOS BY MEGAN STOKES

Lake Nona's Lollcakes, top, and Sprinkles Custom Cakes showed off their sweets at the Waterford Lakes Town Center's Sweets Treats and Wine on Feb. 25.

Healthy Living

Electric cars are right at home in East Orlando

Expert: It's like the chicken and the egg, electric car chargers have to come before the cars

■ JORDAN KEYES
Sun Staff

For Frankie Rosado, the installation of three new electric car charging stations in downtown Avalon Park opens up a world of possibilities.

"I didn't know that they had those out here yet," said Rosado, who lives and works in Avalon. "But if I needed a new car, that would definitely make me consider buying electric."

Rosado is a hairstylist and musician who works in the Peter Jacobs salon in Avalon Park by day and performs at various venues in downtown Orlando by night, so rising gas prices are a major concern for him.

The stations, called ChargePoints, were installed by the Orlando Utilities Commission at no cost to the community as part of

the ChargePoint America program, which aims to expand the use of sustainable fuels.

"It's kind of like a chicken-and-egg situation," said Dave Norvell, University of Central Florida Department of Sustainability and Energy head of facilities. "Cars can't go to market until there are charging stations and the charging stations need the cars to be marketable. We've got to invest in the infrastructure to be ready for the cars that are coming."

In 2010, UCF installed solar car charging stations very similar to the stations in Avalon Park. Norvell oversees the department that is in charge of four solar-powered stations on campus. The department is even installing an additional four stations to meet the campus' needs.

OUC has already installed

several stations in downtown Orlando but the Avalon stations are the beginning of their expansion. OUC spokesman Tim Trudell says they are reaching out to as many communities as they can in their coverage area.

"This type of infrastructure doesn't just pop up overnight," he said. "We want to start getting those stations set up even though there aren't that many electric cars in the area yet."

Proponents of alternative fuels are saying that the time is right for a transition.

"We've been watching the market for a few years now," Norvell said. "This past year was the big unveiling of the electric vehicle where all major car manufacturers are producing electric vehicles."

Ignorance is the main obstacle standing in the way of a transition

to alternative fuel options, Norvell said. Many people just aren't aware of the benefits of electric cars.

"There's a great deal of misunderstanding about the cost of fuel," Norvell said. "For instance, at our current rate that we pay for electricity here, if you take the same amount of energy that it would take to match up with a gallon of gas, you would be paying about 75 cents."

Avalon Park Group marketing director Stephanie Hodson has been tasked with getting the word out about the stations. She has been using emails and the community newsletter to alert residents to the presence of the ChargePoints in Avalon and will soon be ramping up the promotion of the new fuel source through different media.

"We're doing a lot of press to

let people know that they're out here," Hodson said.

Avalon Park resident Rebekah Serra had not heard about the stations in her area, but she says she's excited that they're here.

"I recently went to St. Petersburg and saw that they had a bunch there," Serra said. "It's awesome that they're putting some in Avalon as well. I really think it's where the future is headed."

East Orlando could soon be seeing massive changes in automotive fueling and Avalon Park Group wants to make sure the community is ready.

"The best thing to know is that Avalon Park Group is always working to be cutting edge," Hodson said. "We're always looking to bring new, cutting-edge amenities and services to our community."

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PHOTO BY JORDAN KEYES

Dave Norvell, executive director of facilities for UCF's Department of Sustainability and Energy Management, oversees the operation of car charging stations. The amount of electricity that would equal the power of a gallon of gas costs 75 cents.

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Calendar



March
There will be a **food drive** March 1-31 at SOHO Office, 3564 Avalon Park, Blvd., Ste. 1, Orlando. Nonperishable food and personal hygiene items are needed. For more information, visit www.orlando1.sohoffice.com or call 407-482-0662.

March 2
The **Harlem Globetrotters** will have an exhibition at 2 p.m. Sunday, March 4 at the UCF Arena, Building 50 N. Gemini Blvd., Orlando. Tickets start at \$18. For more information, visit ucfarena.com

March 6
The **Citizenship Inspired** program is at 5 p.m. Tuesday, March 6 at the Alafaya Branch Library, 12000 E. Colonial Drive, Orlando. Citizenship Inspired is a four-week program where students will meet once each week to prepare for the U.S. Naturalization Test and Interview. For more information or to register, call 407-835-7323 or visit ocls.info/locations/alafaya

Magic Curtain Productions will be holding auditions for their production of **"Aladdin"** Tuesday, March 6 at Lifesong Church, 2800 S. Alafaya Trail, Orlando. Auditions for children ages 8-12 begin at 6 p.m. and auditions for ages 13 and older begin at 7 p.m. For more information, visit magiccurtainproductions.com/auditions

March 8
The **Orlando FIRST Robotics**

Regional Competition is from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. March 8-10 at the UCF Arena, Building 50 N. Gemini Blvd., Orlando. This event is free and open to the public. For more information, visit floridafirstregional.com

March 10
The Orange Audubon Society's **Nature Journaling workshop**, for children ages 7-12, starts at 8 a.m. Saturday, March 10 at Orlando Wetlands Park, 25155 Wheeler Road Christmas, Fla. Cost is \$10 per child for Audubon members, \$16 for non-members; parents are welcome to participate at the same rates. Pre-registering is required. For more information, contact Robert Amoruso at Wildscapeimages@att.net

Basics of Wills and Trusts is from 10-11 a.m. Saturday, March 10 at the Alafaya Branch Library, 12000 E. Colonial Drive, Orlando. Paula B. Leite and Katherine A. Martin of Englert, Leite & Martin, PL will host two complimentary seminars on the need-to-know details of wills and trusts. Admission is free. For more information, visit ocls.info/locations/alafaya

March 11
Disney's "Phineas and Ferb: The Best LIVE Tour Ever!" will be making a stop Sunday, March 11 at the UCF Arena, Building 50 N. Gemini Blvd., Orlando. Show times are 2:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. and ticket costs start at \$15. For more information, visit ucfarena.com

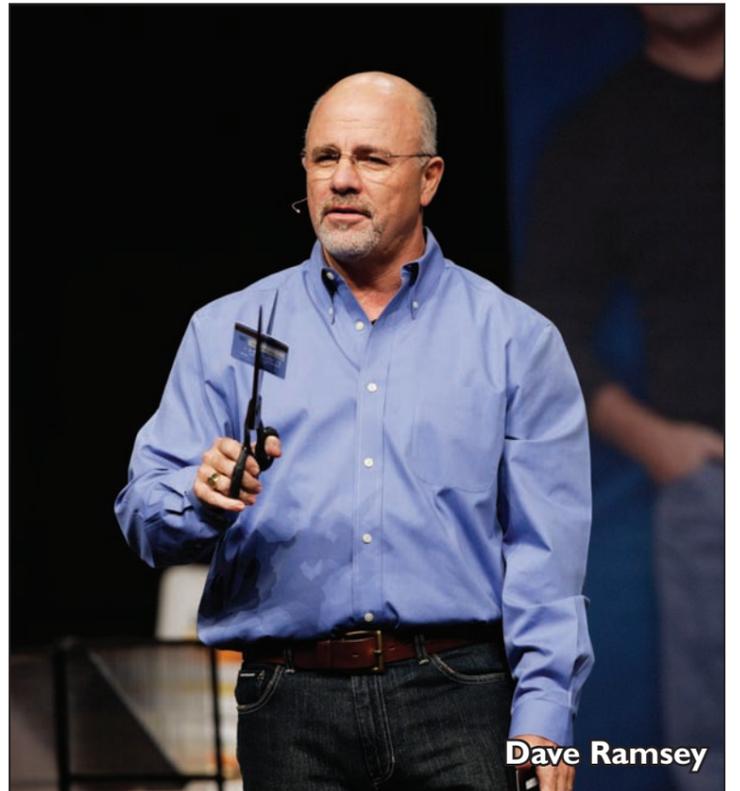
March 17
Family Focus: Create a Video Game Part I is from 12:30-3:30 p.m. Saturday, March 17 at the Alafaya Branch Library, 12000 E. Colonial Drive, Orlando. It is the first of two class sessions that will teach families how to create their own video game prototype. For more information, visit ocls.info/locations/alafaya

International financial expert **Dave Ramsey** will be presenting his Total Money Makeover Live event from 1-6 p.m. Saturday, March 17 at the UCF Arena, Building 50 N. Gemini Blvd., Orlando. Registration starts at \$35. For more information or to register, visit daveramsey.com/live

Fort Christmas Historical Park's annual **Bluegrass Festival** is from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. March 17-18 at 1300 Fort Christmas Road, Christmas. Admission is free. For more information, call 407-254-9310.

March 22
Theatre UCF will be presenting their performance of the play **"Ragtime"** March 22-25, 29-31 and April 1 in the UCF Theater, 4000 Central Florida Blvd., Orlando. Performances Thursday-Saturday begin at 8 p.m. and performances on Sunday begin at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$12 for students, \$17 for seniors and \$19 for adults. Visit theatre.ucf.edu.

March 23
The 6th Annual St. Jude's **Trike-A-Thon** is from 9:15-11 a.m. Friday, March 23 at 1411 Melanie Drive, Or-



Dave Ramsey

lando. The contributions the children collect from friends and families go to St. Jude's Hospital. For more information, visit stjude.org

Marla Stevenson from **Seminole Music Together** is teaching an interactive music class for parents and children at 12:15 p.m. Friday, March 23 at the Alafaya Branch Library, 12000 E. Colonial Drive, Orlando. Registration is required. For more information or to register, call 407-835-7323 or visit ocls.info/locations/alafaya

Valencia's **Spring Dance Concert** is at 8 p.m. March 23-24 in the Valencia East Campus Performing Arts Center, 701 N Econlockhatchee Trail, Orlando. Tickets for this show cost \$10 for general admission, \$8 for students, alumni, faculty, staff and seniors and \$6 for children 12 and under. Visit valenciacollege.edu/art-sandentertainment

March 24
Family Focus: Create a Video Game Part 2 is from 12:30-3:30 p.m. Saturday, March 24 at the Alafaya Branch Library, 12000 E. Colonial Drive, Orlando. It is the second of

two-class sessions that will teach families how to create their own video game prototype. For more information, visit ocls.info/locations/alafaya

Avalon Park's **Easter Egg Hunt** is at 9 a.m. Saturday, March 24 at Town Park, located near downtown Avalon. Special prizes and pictures with the Easter Bunny will also be available. For more information, call the Avalon Park POA at 407-249-9395 or visit avalonparkpoa.com

Get to Know: Orange County Parks is at 11 a.m. Saturday, March 24 at the Alafaya Branch Library, 12000 E. Colonial Drive, Orlando. Stop by and learn about some of Central Florida's greatest public parks from representatives of the Orange County Parks and Recreation department. Admission is free. Visit ocls.info/locations/alafaya

March 28
Preschoolers can go to the library for a jungle adventure with **Rumble in the Jungle** at 11 a.m. Wednesday, March 28 at the Alafaya Branch Library, 12000 E. Colonial Drive. Admission is free and children ages 3-5 are welcome to participate. For more information, visit ocls.info/locations/alafaya

March 31
The 3rd Annual **UCF Book Festival** is from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, March 31 at the UCF Arena, Building 50 N. Gemini Blvd., Orlando. Admission is free. For more information, visit bookfestival.ucf.edu or follow the event on Twitter @UCFBookFestival

The Orange County Master Gardeners **Plant Fair** is from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, March 31 at Orange County Extension Education Center, 6021 S. Conway Road, Orlando. The event is open to the public. Admission is free. Visit facebook.com/OCMGs

April 6
St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic Church's self-guided **Stations of the Cross for Families** will run between 3-6 p.m. Friday, April 6 at the Avalon Park Amphitheater at 3680 Avalon Park E Blvd, Orlando. For more information, call Allie at 407-929-6626.

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New 1940s musical at the Playhouse

Through March 24 – The Andrews Brothers (A New '40s Musical)

Yes, you read the title correctly. "The Andrews Brothers" is a new 1940's musical comedy running through March 24 at the always fun, always innovative, Winter Park Playhouse. "The Andrews Brothers" includes 27 Andrews Sisters songs and tells the wacky story of three brothers working for the USO in the South Pacific in 1945. When The Andrews Sisters (who are scheduled to perform) do not arrive, the brothers don wigs and khaki skirts to fill in to entertain the troops. Directed by Michael Edwards and featuring four of the finest singing actors in Florida – Kevin Kelly, Todd Mummert, Roy Alan and Sarah Michele – this promises to be another tuneful success for the Playhouse. Visit winterparkplayhouse.org or call 407-645-0145.

March 9 – Beethoven's 5th by the Minnesota Orchestra

The Minnesota Orchestra will present a performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 on Friday, March 9, thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor and the Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation. Adding

to the rapturous sound of the evening is violinist phenomenon Midori who will perform Sibelius' Concerto for Violin in D minor. Led by Music Director Osmo Vänskä, the program also features Brahms' "Variations on a Theme of Joseph Haydn". Having made her debut at age 11 – with the New York Philharmonic – Midori's 29-year performing career is seen among the greatest before the public today. The concert is set for 8 p.m. at the Bob Carr Performing Arts Centre. Call 407-770-0071 or visit OrlandoPhil.org

March 9 to May 20 – The Flower Power Concert Series

At Disney's Epcot theme park, music comes alive this spring as the Epcot International Flower & Garden Festival from March 9 to May 20. Along with Disney's dazzling gardens and character topiaries, the Festival features live music from singing stars of the '60s and '70s in the Flower Power Concert Series. A different artist is presented each weekend at the America Gardens Theatre with shows on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays at 5:15, 6:30 and 7:45 p.m. Beginning with Jose Feliciano on March 9 and featuring acts including Starship starring



Josh Garrick
Culture worthy of your calendar

Mickey Thomas, The Guess Who, Chubby Checker, Paul Revere & The Raiders, and Davy Jones, among others, the musical acts are included with theme park admission. Visit disneyworld.com

March 10 – James Bond and Austin Powers in concert!

The forces of evil better stay away from the Bob Carr PAC on Saturday, March 10, as the Orlando Philharmonic pays tribute to James Bond, Austin Powers, Inspector Clouseau and other spies and arch-villains of the cinema with "Bond and Beyond," performed at 2 and 8 p.m. The concert features music from 007 movies like "Diamonds Are Forever", "From Russia With Love" and "Goldfinger" while Tony Award-winner Debbie Gravitte provides vocals for James Bond

favorites. Michael Krajewski will conduct the concerts. Call 407-770-0071, or visit orlandophil.org

March 14 – Kathy Ireland and the Women's Leadership Council

Entrepreneur, philanthropist and super-model Kathy Ireland will headline Heart of Florida United Way's 5th Annual Women's Leadership Luncheon beginning at 11:30 a.m. on Wednesday, March 14. Co-chaired by Helen Donegan and Karen Dee, The Women's Leadership Council raises funds and support for women and children dealing with domestic violence, poverty and lack of health care. A heart-breaking 65 percent of clients served by United Way partner agencies are women. Ireland is the CEO of a \$1.9 billion design empire and has worked diligently to improve education, reduce poverty and help families. The luncheon is at the Hilton Orlando Convention Center, at 6001 Destination Parkway. Tickets may be purchased at hfuw.org or by calling 407-429-2111.

March 16 – Lord of the Dance

Sixteen years after Michael Flatley created Lord of the Dance,

it is selling out arenas as the world's highest grossing dance show. Join the 60 million people who have already seen this hit show when the tour arrives in Orlando at the Bob Carr PAC on March 16 for two performances only. Visit OrlandoBroadway.com or call 1-800-982-2787 or 407-704-6116.

March 30 – Noel Coward's Private Lives

An evening of sophisticated one-liners and witty comebacks make up Noel Coward's best play. "Private Lives" is scandalous even today, and it is also veddy British, sexy, and as sparkling as perfectly chilled champagne. "Private Lives" opens March 30 at the Mad Cow Theatre. This glamorous and tempestuous couple haven't seen each other since their divorce five years ago when they meet again by chance on a hotel balcony. Their passion reignites, but they happen to be on their respective honeymoons...with two other people! "Private Lives" will run through April 29. Mad Cow Theatre is at 105 S. Magnolia Ave. in Orlando. Call 407-297-8788 or visit madcowtheatre.com

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Daring to be a star

East Orlando resident and Sunrise Elementary student Kennedy Mason, 10, will star in the upcoming show "Lyle and the Crocodile" at the Orlando Repertory Theatre

■ **BRITTON JOHNSON**
Sun Staff

She'll happily jump rope under a bright spotlight, leap fearlessly between mattresses, or bark and pant like a dog, all on a stage and in front of a crowd of people watching her intently.

Kennedy Mason, a Sunrise Elementary fourth-grader, has been demanding the attention of an audience since she was 4 years old. She's been in commercials for Publix, Brighthouse and Busch Gardens, performed in community theater with East Orlando's Magic Curtain Productions, and most recently landed a spot on the cast of "Lyle and the Crocodile" at the Orlando Repertory Theater this month.

It all started when a pre-kindergarten teacher and theater director saw her in her school's annual Thanksgiving performance. Kennedy's gobble outshone her classmates. Her ability to forget everyone there and give it her all, as loudly and happily as she could, was a spark Rhonda Cato couldn't ignore.

"She's just fearless," said Cato, Magic Curtain Productions' artistic director.

"The rest is really history," said her mom Cari Mason, teacher at Avalon Elementary. "It just hasn't stopped since then."

Kennedy has always been a child who was never afraid of a little silliness, even with an audience.

"She's just uninhibited," her mom said. "She's not afraid to try new things, make a funny face, she's not embarrassed by anything. She goes with the flow. She's just an easy kid."

"That's something that Kennedy has, she has that ability to just be that character and not be self-conscious about what she's doing," Cato said.

Natural actress

That's a trait Cato said is invaluable in the world of acting. When Kennedy's given a character, she dives right in and there's never a moment of being awkward or unsure, Cato said.



PHOTO BY THE ORLANDO REPERTORY THEATRE
Resident Kennedy Mason played in "Annie" for Magic Curtain Productions. She's now starring in "Lyle and the Crocodile."

Kennedy said the more action the better when it comes to her acting parts. She loves that she gets to jump rope onstage in "Lyle the Crocodile," and couldn't imagine being nervous about something so easy as jumping across a few beds when she was in "Annie" for Magic Curtain Productions.

One of her favorite memories, she said, was being able to ace a dance routine for "Annie" during the song "You're Never Fully Dressed Without a Smile." The choreographers changed the dance six times, and getting the performance down perfectly was pretty tough, but she remembers finishing it - demonstrating her favorite kick line part as she tells the story - and hearing the clapping and cheering from the audience. That, she says, is what makes theater great.

"If there was no audience, there would be no show," Kennedy said.

All business

Kennedy is also great at taking direction, something a lot of children have trouble with, Cato said. She knows how to play mean and nice, and loves memorizing lines while her mom helps by playing all

the other characters. And though she's a kid at heart, when it's time to act, she's all business. She spends six days a week, basically a full-time job, rehearsing for her "Lyle" role. And despite a crowd of adults surrounding her on a commercial shoot, working sometimes 12-hour days, she never gets nervous or complains, and is always prepared, said Mark Kohl, director and cinematographer for Kohl Pictures.

"She's an adult in a kid's body," Kohl said. "As a director, she makes it really, really easy."

And Kennedy takes her maturity with her on auditions, too. If she doesn't get the part, she's always positive that something bigger and better will come along. Even when she messes up a line, she said she only thinks of the next time when she'll redeem herself by doing it right.

And that's because, Kennedy says, there's nothing else she'd rather be doing. Even when her mom offers other activities, she's matter-of-fact about just not having the time for it. This is her passion.

"There's really nothing she doesn't like about it," her mom said. "She said to me this morning, 'Mom, it just makes my heart happy, that's just where I like to be.'"

"It's like my home," Kennedy said.

"KIDS' QUOTES"

It's getting warmer. What do you like to do outside?



"Honestly, I like to play on the playground with my family and friends. I do the monkey bars and the swings. Sometimes the slide, too."

— Jessica, 7



"I like to go on the swings. That's my favorite thing to do outside."

— Paige, 6



"I like to skateboard because you can do a lot of tricks."

— Robert, 6



"I like to play 'Dragon Ball Z'. It's a TV show."

— Ian, 7

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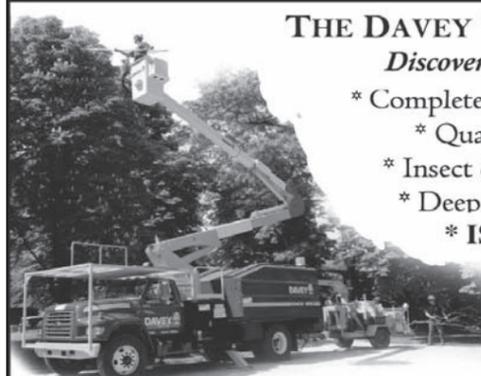
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Kennedy Mason will be performing in "Lyle the Crocodile" at the Orlando Repertory Theatre, which runs Saturdays and Sundays, Feb. 23, through March 25. You can buy tickets at www.orlandorep.com, or call 407-896-7365.

School News

Five Camelot Elementary School crossing guards were honored on Crossing Guard Appreciation Day, Feb. 3. Monserrate Francheschi, Randy Belchick, Maureen Buckley, Joyce Go and William Jackson were given a certificate of appreciation, a basket filled with freebies from Waterford businesses and cards from Camelot students.

Students from Theatre UCF received high honors at the Kennedy Center/American College Theater Region IV Festival at Daytona State College. UCF students brought home honors in Scenic Design (Benson Knight, first place), Playwriting (Bryant Hernandez, first place), Costume Design (Melissa Palomino, Meritorious Achievement), Dramaturgy (RK Barringhaus, Runner Up), and Stage Management (Jasmin Holton, Alternate).

Kavaliro collected 630 boxes of cereal, 3,387 packets of pop tarts, and 59 misc breakfast items. There are more bins being delivered on Monday.

Avalon Middle School students Bryan Paape, Ankit Vishnubhotia, Michael Hoffman, Mindy Lieu, Jared Turnago, Emad Kashif, Quinn Shepstock, Amy Pho, Zachary Mendez, Gabriel Gamet, and Sebastien Trias competed in the Central Florida Regional Math Counts on Saturday, Feb. 18. Out of 328 Central Florida Mathletes, AMS ranked in the 91st percentile and one AMS student ranked in the 98th percentile.

In February, Avalon Elementary second graders created a living wax museum. During the



Crossing Guard Day

event, each student dressed up as a historical figure of their choice and stood completely still until the time came to come to life and present their speech.

Waterford Elementary students, Kasey Adkins, Damian Truax, Lindsey Evans, and Matthew Crudo, have been selected to participate in the district's All County Choir. The All County Choir is a gather of students from multiple schools selected on the basis of good vocal quality and strong character. The students will work with clinicians to

help them grow vocally ending with a performance at 7 p.m. Tuesday, May 8 at Calvary Assembly.

Nine East River astronomy students were selected to participate in the University of Florida's STARS Program, which allows students to participate in laboratory exercises and telescope observations at UF. Of the 25 total students selected statewide, more students were selected from East River than any other school.

Camp directory

Spring break will soon be here and that means many families will have children in need of something to do. Many local businesses are offering spring break camps for any kid, whether they're artsy or athletic, East Orlando has a camp for any kid.

both their Waterford Lakes and Avalon Park locations on March 23 and March 26-30. The cost is \$35 per day, \$130 for March 26-30, or \$165 for every day of Spring Break. For more information, call 407-306-9035 or visit kidsrkidsorlando.com

Avalon Dance will host a dance camp from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. March 26-30. Campers will learn a range of styles from ballet to hip hop, and will participate in games and activities as well. The cost is \$135 for the full week, and kids ages 4 and older are welcome. For more information, call 407-380-3444 or visit avalondance.net

There will be free, daily spring break activities from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. March 26-29, and from 5 to 9 p.m. on Friday, March 30, in Avalon Park's Town Park. Activities include pool parties, a basketball tournament and a movie night at Avalon Church. For more information, call 407-249-9395, or find Friday Night Life on Facebook.

La Petite Academy Daycare is offering activities for kids March 26-30. Kids will take part in arts and crafts, games and other activities. The cost is \$125 per child. For more information, call 407-273-8522 or visit lapetite.com

Pottery Pad in Avalon Park will be hosting a camp from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. March 26-30. Children ages 5 and older will be painting pottery along with other arts and crafts. There is a \$15 deposit for a guaranteed spot, and the prices range from \$50 for each individual day to \$220 for the week. For more information call 407-674-7844 or visit potteryadorlando.com

Orlando Metro Gymnastics' Waterford location will hold their Kidz Sports Day Camp from 8:15 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. March 26-30. There will be five days of gymnastics and sports training, as well as fun activities. The program offers full-day and half-day programs. Kids have the option to attend any of the days individually at \$45 a day, or all five days for \$160. For more information, call 407-207-4110 or visit orlandometrogymnastics.com

Painted By Hue is offering pottery molding and glass fusing classes for children ages 7 and older starting at 10 a.m. on Fridays, March 23 and March 30. Each class is \$22 and there will be two classes on both days. For more information, call 407-282-5556 or visit paintedbyhue.com

Kids R Kids will take campers on a journey through time during their Camp Tremendous Time Travelers program. The activities are offered at

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Christmas, Fla., marks 175 years



Ted Edwards
Commissioner's Corner

I want to take the opportunity to feature the town of Christmas, one of the District 5 communities within east Orange County. This year, the town will celebrate 175 years—a unique bit of Florida history. Located along State Road 50, some 20 miles southeast of downtown Orlando, the town of Christmas is roughly 4.5-square-miles with a population of 2,500 residents.

The town is hard for a driver to miss, due in part to the large, decorated, lit up Christmas tree that stands beside the town sign. The town has its own post office where people from all over come each holiday season to have their Christmas cards postmarked, "Christmas, Fla."

The town has a rich tradition within Orange County in the cattle, citrus and eco-tourism industries. There are working cattle ranches, citrus groves and hundreds of acres of land under conservation. In addition, a popular tourist spot is Jungle Adventure, featuring the world's largest alligator-shaped building, measuring more than 200 feet in length. This year, the town of Christmas will also be home to a new Orange County Fire Station, scheduled to break ground in late March.

The town of Christmas is centered around and home to Ft. Christmas Park, one of the premiere parks in Orange County.

The park was established in 1930 and totals 20 acres. It is considered a "living history" site with multiple historic buildings for people to tour, along with hiking trails and community events that display old Florida pioneer life.

The park is also where Ft. Christmas is located. Soldiers fighting the second Seminole Indian War built the fort on Dec. 25, 1837; today it houses exhibits and artifacts. The Fort was built eight years before Florida became the 27th State in 1845. The fort will also celebrate its 175-year anniversary.

Some of the annual events at Ft. Christmas Park include the Bluegrass Festival held in March; Old Timers Day held the second Saturday in May; and Cracker Christmas held during the first week of December.

The Town is also home to "Orlando Wetlands Park". There is an annual Wetlands Park Festival held each year in February, which is sponsored by the city of Orlando, Orange County and the Audubon Society.

More information about Ft. Christmas Park and upcoming events can be found on Orange County's website under the Parks and Recreation Department at www.ocfl.net

The town of Christmas is a community of residents who are always welcoming to anyone who visits. I encourage all Orange County residents to visit the Ft. Christmas Park during this year's celebration.

As always, my staff and I are available to assist you should you have any questions or concerns. Feel free to contact Dana Boyte or Lynette Rummel at 407-836-7350 or email district5@ocfl.net.

Yours Truly,
Orange County Commissioner
Ted Edwards

Treat a job search like a full-time job

Sometimes I wonder if there is a magic formula to getting a job. As I work with people, both professional and entry level, I am always looking for feedback on what worked for them.

Resoundingly the answer is, finding a job is hard work! The people I have seen who are successful in landing their next job have really worked hard for it. They approached it like a sales job. They networked, asked for introductions, checked out all sources for job leads and looked at potential career changes when needed.

I tend to be very goal oriented. I set my mind to do things and then work backward to figure out what I have to do to get there. For example, when I was job searching, I made a list of companies I would like to work for and then a list of people I knew at those companies. With websites like Linked-



Sandi Vidal
Ask Sandi

In and Google, there is a wealth of information out there for you to find.

I am hearing now that the six degrees of separation has gone down to four with social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn. It is much easier now to find someone who knows someone. The key is not abusing that privilege. As you network, think about not only what is in it for you, but the others you are meeting with as well.

Use the tools that work best for you to stay organized. If you are a calendar person, keep a calendar of to-dos and people to meet with. If you are a list person keep a checklist. You can also use electronic methods or good old-fashioned paper and pen.

The key is to stay on top of your job search and also to walk away from it every once in awhile. There are many free things you can do to free up your mind, keep your confidence up and help you move forward.

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

Bad cop / Bad cop

We have five kids. Five wonderful, beautiful, perfect little snowflakes, each of whom has a unique talent for getting under our skin. We love them dearly, but that's the easy part. The hard part is parenting effectively. Being a mom or a dad probably comes pretty naturally to most people, but when it comes to making the right parenting choices, the path isn't always so clear.

Looking back at our still-unfinished parenting journey, one of the best choices we made was an agreement early on to function as a single parental unit whenever possible. Let's call it the Bad Cop/Bad Cop approach. Instead of having a good cop and a bad cop, like every episode of "Law & Order", we try to form a unified front. What happens, especially when children are as clever and devious as ours (and did I mention that we love them dearly?), is that they look for chinks in the armor, or find ways to play the parents against each other.

For example, just the other day our 8-year-old boy came into the room and asked me for permission to get on the Wii; because I was preoccupied with



Chris Carroll
Parent to Parent

something, I quickly evaluated the situation (1 kid sleeping, 2 kids playing out, 1 kid reading) and said yes. He turned and started to leave. "Hold on a second," I said. "Didn't I just hear you ask Mama the exact same thing a few minutes ago in the other room?" He smiled sheepishly and said "yes," a little too cleverly for his own good. "And what did she say?" He didn't respond, both of us knowing the answer. "Go in time out," I said, correctly predicting a tantrum. His crime wasn't asking to play the Wii, of course; his crime was trying to play us.

I could have easily said yes and over-ridden Jackie, or she could have over-ridden me, or we both could have ignored him happily playing the Wii, lost in the chaos of a large bustling

family, and the planet wouldn't have gone crashing into the sun. But he would've learned a new skill: try to play them against each other enough, and eventually you'll get what you want.

This approach is most important when it comes to discipline. When we have to make the really hard decisions (like putting the Wii in a box and packing it away), we both have to be on the same page. And there's not always time to discuss and plan ahead. Sometimes justice must be meted out on the fly, and the parent who isn't doing the meting, so to speak, has to get on board the discipline train and wipe that horrified look off his face as he realizes that he also won't be able to play the Wii if it's packed away in a box; because they're watching your reaction, looking for that weak spot, trying to find a way to change your mind.

If you're both on the same page, hopefully they'll only have their behavior to change.

Chris and Jackie Carroll co-author Parent to Parent and live in Avalon Park with their five children

Magic beans

To sell something as valuable as the family livestock for a handful of beans would put any of us in either the nuthatch or poorhouse. But our friend Jack took the risk and then climbed his magic beanstalk to the giant's realm. His adventures and rewards were worth the effort, resulting in riches and tales enduring to this day. If only our gardening adventures could be so fruitful, alas I am here to tell you they can be!

The common edible vegetable, tagged taxonomically as *Phaseolus vulgaris*, has been cultivated by us humans, *Homo sapiens*, for thousands of years in both the old and new world. Columbus found fields of beans on an early cruise to the Bahamas. The Native American method of growing beans, corn and squash as companion plants is called "Three Sisters" cropping. Vining pole beans have been a staple crop for modern Americans since



Tom Carey
From My Garden to Yours

the first pioneers settled the continent. The recent development of the bush bean has motivated modern cultivation to reach an industrial scale.

As a green snap or unripe bean, we eat the immature seed along with the tender pods. This expedited harvest provides an earlier crop than letting the bean reach the shelling or dried stage. The varieties grown for green harvest are different from many other familiar storage types, such as black, fava, garbanzo, navy or soybeans. A benefit of home gar-

dening is the multiple harvests provided as beans continue to flower and set fruit after the first crop is hand picked. Green beans also come in yellow wax and purple heirloom flavors.

The pole or vining types offer the benefit of convenient access on the trellis and produce over a longer timeframe. To grow pole beans requires the construction of a suitable trellis of about 6-foot-tall that is able to withstand the vagaries of our erratic weather, especially wind. I created trellis rings of scrap fence 3 feet in diameter that are

transportable and available for other climbing crops.

Varieties of bush beans I have successfully grown include Provider, Contender, Top Crop and Blue Lake. Bush beans planted directly to garden soil and spaced about 4 to 6 inches apart produce a first harvest in two months. Beans are leguminous, meaning they can produce their own nitrogen fertilizer in harmony with certain types of soil bacteria. Inoculating bacteria can be purchased to imbue this natural phenomenon to your gardening playbook. For a truly

productive garden, we should follow Jack's example and plant the magical fruit. (You knew that was coming!)

Livestock, beanstalk, Three Sisters, black, fava, garbanzo, navy, soybeans, Provider, Contender, Top Crop, Blue Lake, Fertilizer, Inoculating, garden

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.

Home Magnifier

Preparing to sell your home? Price it right

You've made the decision. You're Selling your home. Although you're not likely to get an hour-long special like LeBron when he decided to move, this choice is one of the most important you and your fam-

ily will make. Now, the anxiety sets in. How much can we get? What about repairs? Is anything selling in this market? There's good news for sellers in today's market. Price it right, put some marketing behind it and throw a

competent Realtor in the mix and you have a recipe for success. I outline the ingredients to a successful sale below.

Get a sellers mindset

The most important thing you can do is prepare mentally for the sale of your home. Try to take as much emotion out of the scenario as you can. Sometimes buyers begin negotiations with low offers, don't take it personally.

Sellers are cautioned to keep the home in showing condition at all times. Put away those dishes, sweep the porch in the morning and keep the dirty laundry out of view. Does your home need touch-up paint or have fraying carpet? Walk your home with your Realtor and outline potential "value vampires". In the case of luxury homes you have more invested (read: more to lose) so

it's well worth your while to spring for bigger ticket items like landscaping, new appliances and cabinetry. At the least, clean your home top to bottom and keep it that way.

Price it right the first time

This is one of the big ones. Consult with your Realtor regarding recent neighborhood sales to see what the true current market value of your home actually is. I spoke with a seller recently and she informed me that she bought the home and added \$50,000 in upgrades and to break even she would need to get at least \$150,000. Unfortunately for her, the recent neighborhood sales were between \$90,000 and \$100,000. Her story is not unique. Just be aware that retail for upgrades in your home do not translate directly into resale

dollars. An appraiser will have a value range for such upgrades. The best indication of value is the solds within the past three to six months in your direct area. If your home has unique features or is custom, these factors will definitely come into play and your Realtor will be able to show you the market trends for your area. The good news is in many markets we are seeing values stabilize and often times multiple offers on homes that are priced well and marketed properly. Also, don't price it much more than market value or it may languish on the market and deter ready, willing and able buyers. Homes typically sell here around 96 percent of their original list price so do it right the first time for success. Your first offer is often your best offer, and traditionally, sellers see lower priced offers as their homes remain on the market.

—Christina Rordam, Realtor, CSP, CNE, CDPE
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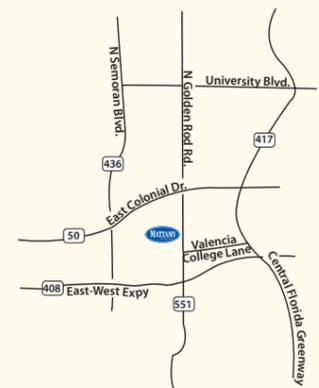
Azalea Cove promises to live up to the beauty of its name. The homes in Azalea Cove will have 3 or more bedrooms, multiple bathrooms, Double Car Garages and large kitchens for family gatherings.

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