

OKEECHOBEE NEWS

Vol. 100 No. 52

Friday, May 1, 2009

50¢ Plus tax

Fatal car crash
on 441 S.E. ... Page 3



OHS wrestlers honored
... Page 7

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Lake Levels

11.29 feet
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Source: South Florida Water Management District. Depth given in feet above sea level

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Budget debate brings no results

County commission takes no action on proposed employee furloughs; another meeting set for May 7

By Pete Gawda
Okeechobee News

County employees will now have to wait another week to find out if they will be facing a five day furlough.

After a lengthy discussion at their meeting on Thursday, April 30, Okeechobee County Commissioners took no action on county

administrator Lyndon Bonner's proposal that county employees be given a five day furlough as a means to help overcome the county's budget shortfall. He had proposed that on five separate dates all county employees be given the day off without pay. They would still receive health benefits, but the county would not pay retirement for that day.

The county is currently facing a budget shortfall of over \$2 million and Mr. Bonner said it was growing "by leaps and bounds." Deputy County Administrator Robbie Chartier, who is in charge of the finance department stated that all significant sources of revenue are down.

"We are not living within our current revenues now," Mrs. Chartier said. "We are using reserves."

"It is not a fix all," said Mr. Bonner. "This is a temporary fix."

He called it a tool to help balance the budget.

"Give us some more tools," asked commissioner Clif Betts. "Give us some options."

The board had already scheduled a special meeting scheduled for next Thursday to discuss land development regulations. Mr. Bonner said he would meet with the constitutional officers on Monday and then present other options to the board on Thursday.

Mr. Bonner said he had already met once with the constitutional officers -- the sheriff, the supervisor of elections, the property appraiser, the tax collector and the clerk of the courts -- about the furlough idea.

The sheriff was the only constitutional officer present when the matter was discussed and he said he did not agree with the plan.

"I don't know how you can cut deputies off the road," Sheriff Paul May said.

"This is a blueprint for failure and a recipe for disaster," he said. "If I was a crook and knew Okeechobee County would fur-

See COUNTY — Page 2

Detective seeks help in combating gangs

By Eric Kopp
Okeechobee News

Detective Sergeant Brad Stark is looking for some help.

So, he got a handful of people together Tuesday to offer suggestions and discuss ideas of how to stem the growth of gangs in Okeechobee County.

"I'm looking for volunteers to step in and start helping," the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office (OCSO) detective told the diverse group. "We have a gang problem—not just in Okeechobee County but in the state."

Sgt. Stark heads up the OCSO gang and street crimes unit and is now trying to find members of the community to not only help combat gangs locally, but to help compile a report for the state Attorney General's Office.

Sgt. Stark said Attorney General Bill McCollum established a Gang Reduction Strategy Task

Force on Nov. 14, 2008. That task force is made up of people from every county in Florida who have formed boards. Those groups and boards then meet and establish guidelines and programs in their community to reduce gang activity.

The April 28 meeting was the local group's inaugural meeting.

Each county's board consists of five categories—education, criminal justice, business relations, prevention and intervention, rehabilitation and re-entry.

"Right now, we have eight volunteers on the board and we're hoping to expand that by getting the word out," Sgt. Stark said.

The board currently consists of: chair - Sgt. Stark; education committee - Assistant Superintendent of Schools Ken Kenworthy and Mike Radebaugh, from the school district's Career Services



Okeechobee News/Eric Kopp
Detective Sergeant Brad Stark, from the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office, spoke to a group of volunteers who gathered Tuesday, April 28, to discuss ideas and strategies for dealing with local gangs and ways to curb the recruitment of youngsters into these gangs.

See GANGS — Page 2

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BUDGET

Continued From Page 1

ough deputies, I would go there at 3 a.m.”

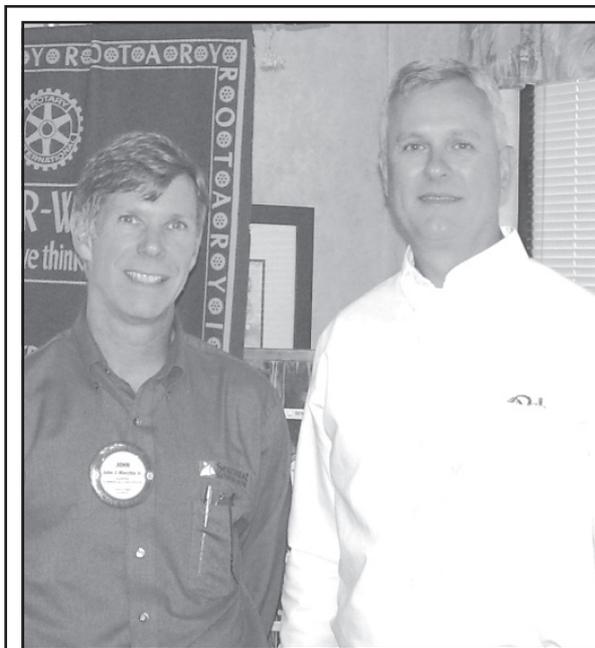
“I think a furlough is a band-aid,” was the opinion of commissioner Ray Domer. “You are going to have to reduce staff overall or you are going to have to reduce wages.”

“I would prefer a cross-the-board pay cut that starts with me,” said the sheriff, “That’s the fair way.”

Commissioner Joey Hoover suggested that different departments might have to deal with the shortfall in different ways. He suggested that some departments might want to work seven hours day or work four 10 hour days.

Commissioner Betts agreed. “It is not one size fits all,” he said.

The commission will meet at 9 a.m. Thursday, May 7 in the Health Department Auditorium.



Okeechobee News/Linda Bridges

Economic development sought

Mark Smith (right), president of Seacoast National Bank and Economic Restructuring Director for Okeechobee Main Street was the guest speaker at the April 28 meeting of the Okeechobee Rotary Club. Mr. Smith said they hope to hire a full time professional economic development director with funding from the city, county and private donations. He said it is important to attract new industry that is a good fit for the local community. At left is John Macchia.

GANGS

Continued From Page 1

department; criminal justice - Assistant State Attorney Ashley Albright and Michele Bell, from the OCSO Criminal Investigations Division - Sex Crimes Unit; business relations - Steve Geary, from Shoreline Seawall Aluminum; prevention/intervention - Cherie Surls, from the Department of Juvenile Justice; and, rehabilitation/re-entry - Sam Vuleta, from Shoreline Seawall Aluminum.

Sgt. Stark said the group will be meeting quarterly to develop different strategies.

“We’ll send a report to the attorney general who will review the information for possible funding for the community,” said Sgt. Stark. “We’ll tell them what we’re doing and what the government can do to help.”

The OCSO detective told the group that he has documented 12 criminal street gangs in Okeechobee County with over 200 members and associates. Local gang members range in age from babies to grandfathers, he said.

He went on to say most local gang members are 18 to 30 years old, but that his unit mainly targets members between the ages of 14 and 23.

“You’ve got to target them early,” he told everyone.

While a number of ideas were discussed, Sgt. Stark pointed out that sports and athletic groups are usually of little interest to gang members.

“These gang bangers are not sports oriented,” he said. “These types of kids are into car clubs. Car clubs are big right now and that’s what’s attracting them.”

The detective told the group there are currently 11 car clubs in Okeechobee County.

A big problem in the battle against gangs is money, said Sgt. Stark.

“We need money to combat gangs,” he said. “Because of budget restraints in the state, everyone is having funding problems.”

He went on to say that reports generated by the local task force will help the state Attorney General’s office develop funding for later projects.

One local project, added Sgt. Stark, is the

annual motorcycle rally and car show held in the fall. The two-day event raises awareness and money to help combat the recruiting of youngsters into gangs.

Proceeds from the event funds scholarships to graduating seniors from Okeechobee High School, helps fund the Community Gang Graffiti Eradication Program and helps fund a statewide gang-free program. A portion of the proceeds also goes to the Florida Gang Investigators Association (FGIA) to help with that group’s programs.

Lottery

The Florida Lottery: Numbers selected Wednesday in the Florida Lottery are: **Cash 3:** 1-4-2; **Play 4:** 8-4-2-2; **Fantasy 5:** 6-8-10-19-22; **Lotto:** 1-3-9-11-22-26; **Powerball:** 6-19-36-50-59 **PB13 x5.** Numbers selected Thursday are **Cash 3:** 0-6-6; **Play 4:** 0-1-4-9.

Okeechobee Forecast

Friday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 87. East southeast wind between 10 and 15 mph, with gusts as high as 20 mph.

Friday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 62. East southeast wind between 5 and 10 mph.

Extended Forecast

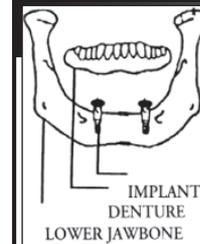
Saturday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 88. Calm wind becoming east between 5 and 10 mph.

Saturday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 62. Southeast wind between 5 and 10 mph.

Sunday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 88. Calm wind becoming southeast between 5 and 10 mph.

Sunday Night: Partly cloudy, with a low around 66. East southeast wind between 5 and 10 mph.

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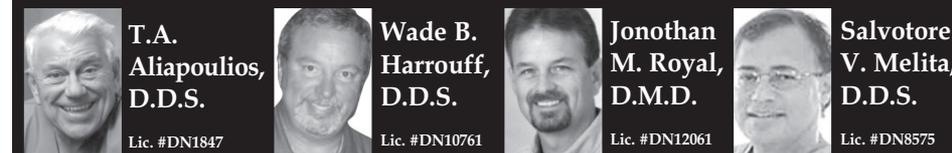
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U.S. 441 crash claims man's life

By Eric Kopp
Okeechobee News

An Okeechobee man died at a West Palm Beach hospital as a result of a two-vehicle accident on U.S. 441 S.E. Wednesday, states a Florida Highway Patrol (FHP) report.

The FHP report states that Michael George Hovell, 46, died April 29 at St. Mary's Hospital.

FHP Corporal Robert G. Leatherow stated in his report that Jose Omar Cerna, 58, Belle

Glade, was making a left turn from County Road 15-B onto U.S. 441 S.E. around 6:11 p.m. but apparently did not see Mr. Hovell.

As Mr. Cerna was turning his 1997 Mack tractor-trailer onto the two-lane highway Mr. Hovell steered to the right trying to avoid a collision, but was unable to do so. The front end of Mr. Hovell's 1997 Chevrolet van struck the trailer's left side, the trooper's report stated.

The Okeechobee man, stated Cpl. Leathe-

row, was then pinned inside his half-ton van. After he was freed from the van, he was transported to St. Mary's Hospital where he later died.

Cpl. Leatherow said Mr. Cerna was not injured.

According to the report Mr. Cerna was wearing his seat belt, but Mr. Hovell was not.

The trooper's report states the accident is still under investigation.

Argument leads to gunfire, arrest

By Eric Kopp
Okeechobee News

An argument ended with an Okeechobee man being arrested after a gun was reportedly fired.

James Mark Branham, 39, N.E. 342nd Trail, was arrested April 28 on a felony charge of aggravated assault with a firearm. His bond was set at \$2,500.

An arrest report by Deputy Michael Hazellief, from the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office (OCSO), said Branham became involved in an argument with a couple who had lived at the aforementioned address

but had moved out. The report states the couple returned to the address to get some of their property when Branham saw the couple looking through his wife's vehicle, the report continued.

The three began to argue and, according to the report, Branham repeatedly told the couple to leave but they wouldn't.

At some point Branham left the couple, went into the residence and returned with a hand-



James Mark Branham

gun, stated the deputy's report. He then allegedly fired one shot into the ground and again told the couple to leave, which they did.

Deputy Hazellief went on to state that he recovered a .22 caliber shell casing on the ground, near the back porch of the residence.

According to the arrest report, Branham gave the deputy a High Standard .22 magnum two-shot derringer.

Deputy Hazellief went on to state in his report that the couple were trespassed from the property.

Four arrested in fight at local bar

By Eric Kopp
Okeechobee News

Four men were eventually arrested following a fight at a local bar that involved security guards and police officers who were trying to quell the affray.

Arrested were: Adrian Orduna, 23, Eddie Orduna, 20, Miguel Orduna, 20, and Juan Hernandez-Garcia, 32, N.W. Sixth St., Okeechobee.

Adrian Orduna was arrested on misdemeanor charges of battery and resisting a law enforcement officer without violence. He was booked into the Okeechobee County Jail under a bond of \$1,000. Eddie Orduna was arrested on a charge of battery, and his bond was set at \$500. Miguel Orduna was charged with battery and disorderly intoxication. His bond was set at \$1,000.

Hernandez-Garcia was arrested on felony

charges of battery on a law enforcement officer and resisting a law enforcement officer with violence. His bond was set at \$5,000.

According to arrest reports from the Okeechobee City Police Department (OCPD), Officer Jack Boon was sent to the El Amigo del Todos bar, S.W. Second St., due to a fight in progress. Upon his arrival he saw security personnel trying to keep some men from re-entering the bar.

Officer Boon said Eddie Orduna and two other men were causing problems inside the bar and when the security officer, Lucas Marguez, confronted them the men pushed him into a wall and began hitting him. The other two men were later identified as Adrian Orduna and Miguel Orduna.



Eddie Orduna



Miguel Orduna

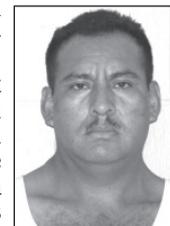
Mr. Marguez was also bitten on the left side of his face by Adrian Orduna, stated arrest reports.

Officer Boon's report states that he was forced to use his taser on Adrian Orduna, and that when he did this Hernandez-Garcia jumped on the officer's back.

OCPD Sergeant Victoria Williams stated in her report that while Officer Boon was trying to remove Hernandez-Garcia, Miguel Orduna then began to move toward Officer Boon's back. But, he was pulled away and later arrested by Sgt. Williams.

Another arrest report by Officer Ryan Holroyd states that once Officer Boon was able to get his assailant off his back the man left the scene, but was then returned by Jose Chaparro, another security guard at the bar.

None of the reports indicate if any of the officers were injured in the melee.



Juan Hernandez-Garcia

Okeechobee man gets 18-month prison term

By Eric Kopp
Okeechobee News

An Okeechobee man was sentenced to a prison term of 18 months after he was adjudicated guilty on a charge of possession of cocaine.

Circuit Court Judge Lawrence Mirman on Monday, April 13, also ordered Tomas Rivera, 38, to pay \$1,230 in court costs and fees. The judge added that Rivera's driver's

license will be suspended for two years.

Rivera, N.E. 64th Drive, was credited with having served one day in jail.

An arrest report by Sergeant Russ Cale, of the Okeechobee City Police Department (OCPD), states that Rivera was arrested Dec. 13, 2008. Sgt. Cale's report indicates that he saw a security officer at El Amigo de Todos, S.W. Second St., chase Rivera through the bar and out the front door.

Once outside the bar, Sgt. Cale said he saw Rivera throw something to the ground.

After Rivera was taken into custody, the sergeant retrieved the plastic baggie thrown down by Rivera. Inside the bag was a white powdery substance, stated the report. When field tested, the substance indicated a positive result for the presence of cocaine.

Sgt. Cale's report stated that the suspected cocaine weighed 1.95 grams.

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Public Forum/Speak Out

Speak Out has moved online, where it is quicker and easier to share your ideas and converse with others. Go to www.newszap.com, click on the community name and your local or state Public Forum. There, you can create new topics or comment on existing topics. What follows is a sampling of some of the discussions currently taking place. Thanks for participating!

Summer programs

• I see ads for the summer camps and programs in the paper. I want to warn the parents, don't put off making plans. The spaces in these camps go fast. If you delay signing up, you will wind up on the waiting list.

Skunk Ape

• I am not sure if there was a Skunk Ape around on the weekend, but there certainly was a strong odor around the road near Popash Slough. Maybe the Skunk Ape hasn't abandoned us. Keep watching when you go over that bridge on State Road 70 near 67th Drive.

Things I have learned growing up around the lake ...

• Possums sleep in the middle of the road with their feet in the air. There are 5,000 types of snakes on earth and 4,998 live in The South. There are 10,000 types of spiders. All 10,000 live in The South, plus a couple no one's seen before. If it grows, it sticks; if it crawls, it bites.. People actually grow and eat okra. Iced tea is appropriate for all meals and you start drinking it when you're two. We do like a little tea with our sugar! Backwards and forwards means 'I know everything about you.' You don't have to wear a watch because it doesn't matter what time it is. You work until you're done or it's too dark to see.

• Lately I think people don't wear a watch because everyone uses their telephone to tell time. Ask what time it is and see how many people flip their cell phone open.

County budget

• If the county needs to save money, I think they need to cut some of those big administrative salaries they pay out. We don't need so many bosses on the payroll.

Recycling

• If the county wants to help the country save money, they should make it easier to recycle. Why can't they put some recycling bins around town? The way it is now, you have to drive so far to turn in recyclables that it costs too much in gas to do it. If you can't give us curbside recycling, at least give us recycling bins at each of the shopping centers.

The 'c' word

• With the high costs of just about everything, maybe now is the time to consolidate the city and county governments into one municipal government. Do we really need both a police department and a sheriff's office? Do we really need two fire departments? Wouldn't it make more sense to consolidate these?

Boating safety

• In regard to the story about the boaters who thought they were near Taylor Creek and they found them on the rocks near Pahokee, it sounds like they really need to invest in a GPS before venturing back out on the lake. I have heard of people getting lost or confused, but that is the other side of a very big lake.

• I know the sheriff's department is low on funds, but I still think their search and rescue folks should have an airboat. The lake gets low and the boaters get stuck in areas that the rescue teams can't reach without an airboat. Maybe someone could donate one as a tax deduction. I know boaters should be more careful, but it still seems like any department that does rescues on the lake should have an airboat.

Sex offenders

• Parents of teenage boys should sit them down and explain the law to them. If they are 18 and are caught with a girl who is younger, they can wind up in jail and facing a sex offender label the rest of their lives. It's the law and some girls' parents will make sure it is enforced. Leave the 'jail bait' alone. And men age 21 and over especially need to keep away from girls who are under the age of 18 as they can wind up being labeled a sexual predator. Some girls look and act older than they are. Make sure you know exactly how old they are before asking for a date.

A filibuster proof majority

• You have to go all the way back to 1937 to find the last American President who enjoyed what was, in practice, a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate, according to Senate Associate Historian Donald Ritchie. With Arlen Specter's switch (and assuming, that Al Franken ever gets sworn in), Barack Obama has the Magic 60 Votes -- and an opportunity that his predecessors would greatly have envied.

• Sen. Specter saw the "writing on the wall," as far as his chance in the upcoming primary. And -- since he wanted to keep his "day job" -- he moved to the Democrats. My guess is he thinks that he can "walk away" with that Primary.

• Sen. Lieberman left the Democrats for the same reason Specter left the Republicans, and when Lieberman did it the conservatives could not sing his praises enough for "standing up for his principles" and rejecting the Democratic Party. In reality he was merely trying to avoid defeat in the primary because of his stand on the Iraq War.

• Sen. Lieberman did indeed "switch", but he did it after his primary AND he ran against his opponents and won in the election, voted in by his Constituents. Sen. Specter "switched" in midstream, basically thumbing his nose at the voters who voted him in as a Republican.

• Arlen Specter has always been his own man. Just one day after his switch, he voted against Obama's budget.

• I personally have no problem if a politician switches parties. My problem is with the hypocrisy of those who complain about the other side doing it. The voters elected the politician based on his platform. One's platform does not suddenly change overnight. For example, Specter will likely vote according to his moderate political philosophy just as he has always done. He was willing to vote with Democrats on the stimulus bill and on other issues. He has voted with Republicans on a variety of issues as well. You can change his label, but he's still the same.

No fireworks this year

• It's a shame that we can't afford a community fireworks show this year, but I suspect that will happen in a lot of places. We can celebrate the Fourth of July with old fashioned picnics and spending time with family. And if you really want to see fireworks, get a group together and carpool out to Brighton Reservation.

• No fireworks? What a way to celebrate this nation's independence day.

Shop at home

• I want to encourage everyone to try to shop at home and use local businesses when they can. We are seeing a lot of businesses closing. When that happens it hurts the local tax base and puts local folks out of work. You can help by showing some loyalty to your community and shopping locally when you can. We are in this together. We need to help each other.

Swine flu

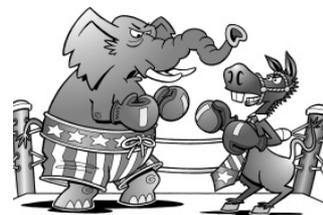
• There are a few things you can do to help prevent infection, or the spread of swine flu. Wash your hands often with soap and water. Don't touch your face -- eyes, nose, mouth, ears. Get enough sleep, eat healthy, exercise and drink plenty of fluids. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

• I saw on the news that it is being discussed whether they should close the borders and restrict travel to Mexico in order to control the spread of Swine Flu. I can understand people probably don't want to travel there right now and it is not hard to change vacation plans. But how are they going to stop the illegals sneaking over the border?

• From what I have read, the concern about the Swine Flu is that it is not just those already at high risk are in danger. With normal flu, you really only have to worry about it being serious for the elderly and the very young. But with this flu, otherwise healthy adults have died. I think we need to take the threat seriously and take every precaution we can to keep the disease from spreading.

• If you don't think flu can be fatal, look back at the history of this country. In the 1800s, thousands of people died in influenza epidemics. Flu can lead to very serious complications.

• Want to avoid the flu? Go wash your hands. Wash at least five times a day. Also, always wash before touching food.



OKEECHOBEE NEWS

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We Pledge...

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purposeful neutrality, fairness, objectivity, fearlessness and compassion.

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- To correct our errors and to give each correction the prominence it deserves.
- To provide a right to reply to those we write about.
- To treat people with courtesy, respect and compassion.

MEMBER OF:



Letters to the Editor

Softball Tournament

On April 11, the second annual Okeechobee Firefighters and Paramedics Softball Tournament was hosted at the Okeechobee Softball Fields. It was a success and we cannot thank everyone enough. We look forward to another great year in 2010 and would like to take this time to recognize the sponsors and teams that contributed in making this fundraiser a reality.

Sponsors for the tournament are as follows: Commercial Communications by

Sprint, Seacoast Bank (North Branch), Bill's Mini Mart, Maximum Tanning, Winn Dixie, Allied Welding and Maintenance, Allied Pivot Sales, Merita Bread Store, Quality Tee's, and Cupcake Cuties.

We would also like to thank the following teams: CIS-PAL, Jwayco Crew, First Bank, and Hayes Cabinets for their participation. Thank you to Photography by Bobbi and everyone who took time out of their Saturday to volunteer.

Last but not least, Jill Rogers, thank you

for all of your time and effort again this year. You have been a great help and we owe you big time. We hope everyone had a great experience and will join us again next year.

**Christopher Douglas
Firefighter-Paramedic OCFR**

Tax cap proposed

As a Florida Taxpayer, I am unhappy that the Senate is refusing to place the 1.35 percent property tax cap (SB 0738) on the Ballot in 2009. Your vote could help us to choose to cut our property taxes 20 percent and restore our Florida economy.

Please insist that Senate President Jeff Atwater move this to the senate floor for a vote this week!

**Sincerely,
Donn Wonderling
Okeechobee**

Raulerson Hospital staff appreciated

I would like to commend Raulerson Hospital for the recent stay I had this month. I have been in hospitals from the East Coast, West Coast and South. I would not go to any other hospital.

I have a medical condition which requires hospitalization. I have had this condition since 1989.

The staff at Raulerson, from the CEO to all the departments was truly concerned with me. They kept me calm, stress free and took great care of me and my medical needs.

I have heard others comment unfavorably towards Raulerson. My only comment would be, then that patients need to look closer at them. Were they being ugly, impatient or possibly they think they know more than the medical staff? (Sometimes a little knowledge is dangerous.)

The doctors and nursing staff are very knowledgeable and the patients should realize they are there to help and get you better so you can go back home where it is comfortable.

Raulerson gives each patient a handbook upon arrival. I read the entire book and this handbook covers just about anything you would want to know. I'm sure a lot of patients probably just put it in the drawer. This book is informative and Raulerson has made this for each and every person admitted.

Again, as stated, I would not go to any other hospital but, Raulerson.

**Respectfully,
Deloris Ann Bourn**

Community Calendar

FRIDAY

Tops Take off Pounds Sensibly #669 meets at 9 a.m. at the First United Methodist Church, 200 N.W. Second St. The public is invited. All persons interested in a sensible approach to losing weight and becoming part of a caring group are welcome to come and see what we are all about. For information, contact Ollie Morgret at 800-932-8677.

Highlands Social Dance Club welcomes the public to their dance every Friday, from 7 until 10 p.m. at the Sebring Lions Club on Sebring Parkway, one mile east of U.S. 27 in Sebring. Tickets are \$5 for members and \$6 for guests. For information, call 863-471-0559.

Just for Today Club of Okeechobee, 242 Hwy. 441 S.E., Okeechobee, N.A. Sickest Of The Sick - Open Discussion/Speaker at 8 p.m. The Just for Today Club of Okeechobee is not affiliated with any 12 step fellowships.

A.A. meeting from noon until 1 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church 200 N.W. Second St. This is an open meeting.

A.A. meets from 8 until 9 p.m. at the Church of Our Saviour, 200 N.W. Third St. This is an open speaker meeting.

The Highlands Social Dance Club will begin its 27th season on Sept. 7, hosting ballroom dancing every Friday at the Sebring Lions Club on Sebring Parkway, one mile east of U.S. 27. For information call 863-471-0559 or 863-385-6621.

Compulsive overeaters are invited to a week-

ly meeting. Overeaters Anonymous (OA) meets at the Okeechobee Presbyterian Church, 312 N. Parrott Avenue on Fridays, 6 until 7 p.m. (Use 4th Street entrance.) Overeaters Anonymous is not a diet club. There are no dues, fees or weigh-ins. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop eating compulsively. For more information call Loretta at 863-763-7165 or 863-697-0206.

SATURDAY

A.A. meeting from 8 until 9 p.m. at Okeechobee Presbyterian Church, 312 N. Parrott Ave. It will be a closed discussion.

Okeechobee Chapter D.A.R. meets the first Saturday of every month October-May at Oakview Baptist Church 677 S.W. 32nd Street at 10 a.m. For information call Kenna Noonan at 863-634-5669.

The Gathering Church will hold its monthly healing service on the first Saturday of every month from 10 a.m. until noon. Anyone desiring to receive personal prayer for healing is welcome to attend. The Gathering is located at 1735 S.W. 24th Ave. For information call Theresa Brown at 863-357-3318.

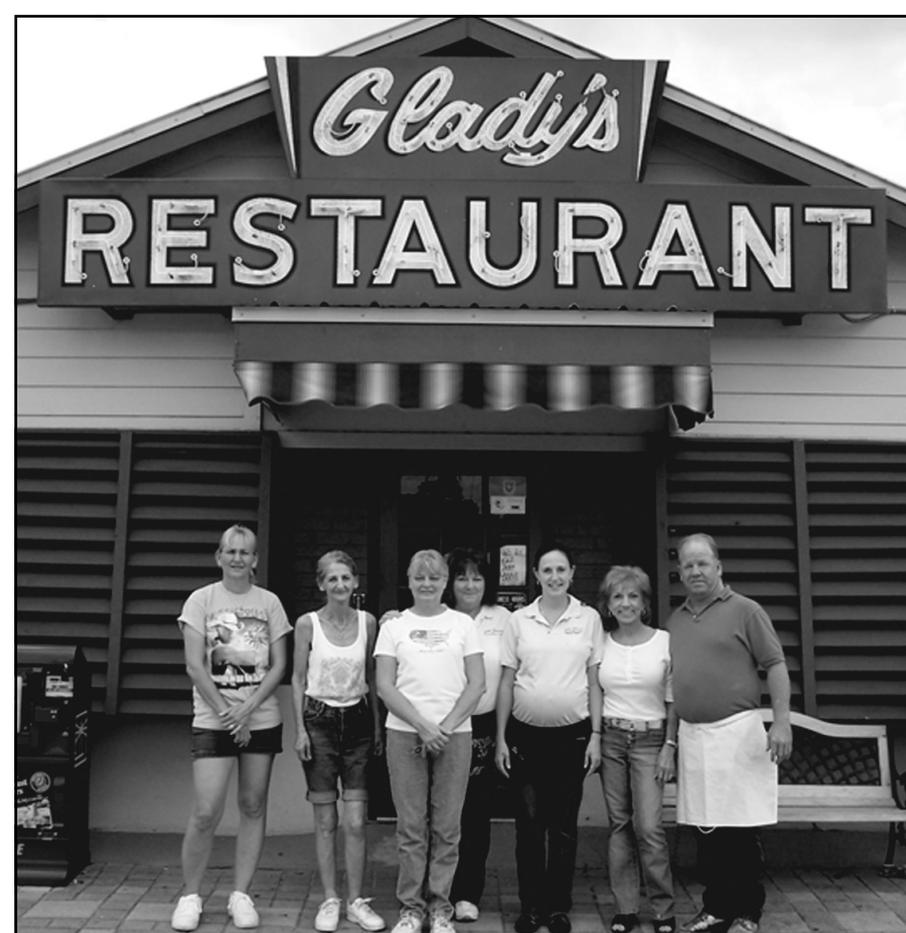
Just for Today Club of Okeechobee, 242 Hwy. 441 S.E., Okeechobee, A.A. weekend noon Open Discussion meeting; N.A. Sickest Of The Sick Group 7 p.m.; N.A. Nowhere Left To Go Group Open Discussion meeting 8 p.m. The Just for Today Club of Okeechobee is not affiliated with any 12 step fellowships.



Submitted photo

Meeting with Mike Horner

Members of the Okeechobee Junior Leaders 4-H Club recently traveled to Tallahassee, to study state government. Representative Mike Horner was very interested in discussing the issues presented to him during a meeting in his office in the capitol. As a token of their thanks, the members presented Representative Horner with a lapel pin to commemorate 100 years of Florida 4-H, "A Century of Youth Success." Pictured from left to right are: Kyle Walker, Emilie Lege, Mrs. Linda Syfrett, Representative Mike Horner, Austin Pluskot, Janna Mullis, Wesley Mims, Justin Hoover, Mrs. Diane Spann, Kelsey Burnham and Raychel Rabon.



Okeechobee News/Pete Gawda

Restaurant closed

The staff at Gladys's gathered in front of the restaurant for a picture the day before the restaurant closed. Pictured, left to right, are, Donna Hoffman, who has been a dishwasher 13 or 14 years, Joyce Clay who has been a cook for over 40 years. Barbara Tomb, who spent 19 1/2 years as assistant cook, Sherry Houlette, waitress/cashier for 22 years, Sheila Schaffer, waitress for 9 years, Bertie Griffis, who grew up in the restaurant when it was run by her mother, Gladys Clay, and her son, Jeff Griffis who has also worked all his life at the restaurant.

Community Events

National Scrapbooking Day celebration set

Saturday, **May 2**, is "National Scrapbooking Day." This celebration was started in 1994, by Creative Memories, a well-known album company. Our local scrapbook group, known as, "Croppin' Crew" will be celebrating on this day. We will meet at Treasure Island Baptist Church from 9 a.m. until 6 p.m. There will be a number of demonstrations and make-n-take projects throughout the day. One of the make-n-takes will be a gift cardholder using heat embossing. All levels of scrapbookers are invited to join us for the day. Bring a covered dish if you wish to participate in our covered dish luncheon. If you need more information you can call Joan at: 863-467-0290 or Corry at 863-467-2231.

Chaka's Stars Youth Camp registration

Are you looking for fun and excitement

to pass the hot summer days? Then Chaka's Stars Summer Youth Experience may be what you are looking for. We welcome your child to attend our third annual six week summer camp presented by Chaka's Stars Foundation. Camp will be conducted beginning on Monday, June 15 through Friday, July 24, from the hours of 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday with the exception of Friday, July 3, in observance of Independence Day. Registration for the Summer Day Camp will begin on Saturday, **May 2**, at the Douglas Brown Community Center under the pavilion from noon until 2 p.m. Registration is open to youth between the ages of 6-14, space is limited. There will be a \$25 registration fee. This fee will cover the cost of field trips and meals to be provided on field trips along with a camp t-shirt. The weekly fees will be \$10 per child. For more information, please contact Chaka Smith at 863-634-7424 or Terra Morris at 863-484-2509.

Obituaries

Thomas Edwin Walker Sr., 86

OKEECHOBEE — Thomas Edwin Walker Sr., of Okeechobee, died April 29, 2009, at his home. He was 86.

Born Jan. 24, 1923, to Hulon and Inez Walker, he was a lifetime resident of Okeechobee. He proudly served our country in the U.S. Army during World War II.

Mr. Walker was preceded in death by his brother, Enoch Walker.

He is survived by his wife of 59 years, Joann Walker; two sons, Thomas E. Walker, Jr. (Kathy) of Okeechobee and

Joel V. Walker of Ft. Myers; two daughters, Joy Walker and Lana Powell of Tampa; six grandchildren; seven great grandchildren; brother, Emory Walker (Onnie Jean); and sister, Martha Domer.

Visitation will be 4-7 p.m. today, May 1, at Bass Okeechobee Chapel. The funeral services will be 11 a.m. Saturday, May 2, at First Baptist Church of Okeechobee with Pastor Mickey Evans and Pastor Randy Huckabee officiating. Burial will follow at Evergreen Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to Hospice of Okeechobee, P.O. Box 1548, Okeechobee, FL 34973.

Friends may sign the guestbook at www.bassokeechobeefh.com.

All arrangements are entrusted to the loving care of Bass Okeechobee Funeral Home and Crematory, 205 NE 2nd ST, Okeechobee, FL 34972.

Obituaries should be submitted to the Okeechobee News by e-mailing obits@newszap.com. Customers may also request photos and links to online guest books. A link to the obituaries is available at www.newszap.com.

Lorayne 'Grammom' Kresser, 91

OKEECHOBEE — Lorayne "Grammom" Kresser, age 91, of Okeechobee died Sunday, April 26, 2009, at her residence.

Born on March 3, 1918, in Philadelphia, she was the only child of Fredrick and Helen Reiger. During her working years, she worked in statistical data and vital records for the city of Philadelphia and after moving to Florida, she

work as a waitress in Palm Beach Hotels. She has been a 19 year resident of Okeechobee and enjoyed crafts, cooking and flowers.

Preceded in death by her husband Wilmer, she is survived by her son, Fredrick Kresser, Sr.; and daughter, Lorayne Johnson, both of Okeechobee. She is also survived by three great-grandchildren. "Grammom" will be greatly missed by her family, many friends and her pets, Fluffy and KC.

Friends may call at the Buxton Funeral Home Chapel on Sunday, May 2, from noon until service time at 1 p.m.

All arrangements are under the care and direction of Buxton Funeral Home and Crematory. Guests may convey their sympathy at www.buxtonfuneralhome.com.



Free memory loss screenings

On Friday, **May 1**, from 11 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. the Alzheimer's Association will sponsor free memory loss screenings. They will be held at the Visiting Nurse Association, 208 S.E. Park St. Appointments are needed - please call Donna True at 1-800-861-7826, ext. 1. Screenings are for anyone - any age - concerned about memory loss. Screenings conducted by staff from St. Mary's Memory Disorder Center. Immediate results.

Burnin' Strings Band holds concert

The Burnin' Strings Bluegrass Band will hold a concert on **May 2**, at Buckhead Ridge Baptist Church (turn left at Sunoco station on Hwy 78 W., go one mile, church on the left), from 6 until 8 p.m. Tickets are a \$5 donation at the door. All proceeds will benefit the Baptist Children's Home in Miami. For more information call 863-357-6113.

Pearline Thomas

OKEECHOBEE — Pearline Thomas died Sunday, April 26, 2009, at Raulerson Hospital, Okeechobee.

Born Sept. 14, 1931, in Concorde, N.C., she had been a resident of Okeechobee for 25 years coming from Neptune, N.J. She was a member of the Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church and the Red Hatters.

She was preceded in death by a son, Michael Thomas.

She is survived by her sister, Ruth Givens of Okeechobee; companion of 43 years, Willie Edward Finney of Asbury Park, N.J.; daughter, Maryella Thomas of Okeechobee; sons, George Thomas, of Atlanta, Ga., Willie Thomas of Neptune, N.J., Woodie Thomas of Crawfordville, and Darrin Wilkerson of California. In addition she is survived by a host of grandchildren, great-grandchildren, aunts, uncles, cousins and friends.

A Memorial Service will be 11 a.m. Saturday, May 2, in the Mt. Olive Baptist Church of Okeechobee.

All arrangements are under the direction and care of the Buxton Funeral Home and Crematory, 110 NE 5th Street, Okeechobee.

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Okeechobee Brahman wrestlers honored at banquet

By Charles M. Murphy
Okeechobee News

It was an emotional night Monday as the Okeechobee High School Brahman wrestling program lost some very talented seniors and also learned they will lose their long time coach.

Bruce Jahner is hanging up the whistle after 15 years as Okeechobee High School wrestling coach. Graduates this year include four time district champion Donny Bush, who took home another MVP award, and Tyler Hayes, who recently signed a college wrestling scholarship.

Okeechobee went 11-6 this past year and won several individual titles.

Jahner thanked the parents for the opportunity to coach their kids over the years. He said without them, he couldn't have had the success he's had, "This is the last go. I enjoyed every minute of it. I will remember each and every one of you. It was well worth it. I love Okeechobee and I love the people. There are such wonderful people here."

Jahner will continue to teach at OHS next year.

Bush was at the top of the list of wrestlers in this area this year. He lost at the state tournament this year, but losing wasn't much of a habit for the 145 pound dynamo. He won 35 of 38 matches which included 20 pin fall victories. He intends to study to become a fireman and could join the military. Bush presented Jahner with a folder of news clippings his grandmother had taken out of various newspapers during his career.

"I'm real happy that I got a lot of wins and a lot of awards over the past few years. I thought I'd get the Brahman award tonight," he noted.

Bush retires with the most wins in high school history. He noted he made the book for Coach Jahner so they will always have those memories, "My grandmother just cut them out every time she saw something, he meant a lot to me, and me and coach have had a good run together," he said.

Hayes took home the Brahman award and will also wrestle at Newberry College in South Carolina next year. Hayes was another state qualifier this year. Tyler finished 31-4 this year.

Jahner said he will still be involved with the wrestling program. He said he hopes his assist Vidal Torres gets the opportunity to take over the program. He also praised long time friend Todd Jones for his assistance over the years.

Jahner told the returning wrestlers to continue to stay active and to keep their grades up. He said they should spend more time in the weight room and get stronger. He urged them to practice with the Big Lake Wrestling Club and to attend wrestling camps over the summer. The wrestling club can assist wrestlers in the costs of attending wrestling camps.

Jahner also spoke optimistically about the future, "We have a good group coming back and we have one of the best freshmen classes coming to school in many years. We will still be a solid team next year," he commented.

Jahner said it was an exciting time to finish up with the kids and hand out awards.

He noted the kids pick most of the award. He said his decision to leave will hit him when he gets closer to graduation. "I plan on getting married. It's kind of hard giving 100 percent to each one. If you start giving half and half, nobody wins on that. Right now I think it's a good decision for me."

Jahner said he had a long line of great wrestlers over the year. He said he prides himself on remembering all of his players. "There's been quite a few. To pick one I really can't. It was an honor and privilege to coach those kids and every kid, even if they weren't the best athlete. You can't win every match. I was pleased with every kid I had."

Wrestlers who earned letters this year include Jose Banuelos, Mitchell Dean, Donald Bryan, Craig Cleckley, Allan Garza, Chase Kaufman, Saul Garcia, Kenny Webb, Josh Gruber, Donny Bush, Tyler Hayes, Corey Krum, David Sanchez, Jose Medallin, Tony Bonnett, and Zac Griffith. Miranda Dubois, Tabitha Smith, and Ande Eddings received awards for keeping stats this year.

Garcia was also honored as a scholar athlete.

Donald Bryan took the Rookie of the Year Award. Josh Gruber won the Most Improved Wrestler Award. Tyler Hayes took home the Most Dedicated Wrestler Award.

Bush, Cleckley and Medallin also won certificates for doing well at the Treasure Lake Conference Tournament in February.

Gruber said he'll likely take over as team leader next year. He was a district champion

in his weight class. "I'm surprised I got this award, but I feel pretty good. It is sad that coach is leaving, but new opportunities are opening up, I have no doubt we'll still have a good year."



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy
Coach Todd Jones, Bruce Jahner, and Vidal Torres pose for pictures at Monday's banquet.



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy
Miranda DuBois receives a letter for being the wrestling team statistician this year from Coach Bruce Jahner.



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy
Saul Garcia was honored as a scholar athlete at Monday's banquet.



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy
Donald Bryan (left) was honored as rookie of the year in a vote of his peers. Also in photo is Coach Bruce Jahner.



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy
Josh Gruber (left) won the most improved wrestler award from Coach Bruce Jahner.



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy
Tyler Hayes (left) poses with the Brahman award with Coach Bruce Jahner.



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy
Donny Bush (left) won the most valuable wrestler award. Also in picture is Coach Bruce Jahner.

'Houdini' returned to local jail

By Eric Kopp
Okeechobee News

'Houdini' is going to find that another escape from the Okeechobee County Jail will be no easy feat.

Alajandro Perez, who bills himself as the great escape artist, was returned to the local jail Wednesday, April 29. He had been held in the Palm Beach County Jail following his arrest there on an Okeechobee County warrant charging him with escape.

"We're just going to be sure he's observed more closely than before," said Okeechobee County Jail Administrator Ronnie White.

Mr. White said additional security measures have been put in place and that anytime Perez is not in his cell he will be handcuffed and shackled. Perez is being held in segregation, meaning no one is in the cell with him.

Perez, 45, escaped from the local jail around 2:21 p.m. on Feb. 6 and was captured Tuesday, Feb. 24, by the United States Marshal's Service - Florida Regional Fugitive Task Force. He was taken into custody as he crawled out the bathroom window of a

home in rural Palm Beach County.

When arrested there, Perez was found to be in possession of 2 grams of suspected cocaine and was then charged with possession of cocaine.

Public Information Officer Eric Davis, of the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, said Thursday, April 30, that Perez had entered a plea of guilty. He was credited with the 61 days he had already served in Palm Beach County and was then returned to Okeechobee.

Perez escaped from the local jail while in a 4-foot-by-8-foot outdoors recreation pod. His orange jump suit was found on the roof of the jail, said OCSO case officer Detective Sergeant Brad Stark. When he fled the complex Perez was clad only in his boxer shorts and a T-shirt, added Sgt. Stark.

Records indicate that Perez had tried to escape the local jail on Jan. 1 by breaking out a window. However, he was unsuccessful



Alajandro Perez

and was then charged with attempted escape and criminal mischief. His bond was set at \$15,000.

Perez was arrested Dec. 16, 2008, on charges of burglary of an occupied dwelling, grand theft and possession of burglary tools. His bond on those charges was set at \$46,000.

While Perez was on the lam he missed a scheduled court date so a charge of failure to appear on the attempted escape and criminal mischief charges have been added.

Perez is now being held without bond on the failure to appear charges, as well as the newest escape charge.

After his escape investigators found a message from Perez written with a felt tip pen above his cell door. It read: "Your job is to keep me here. My job is to find a way out of here." It was signed "Houdini."

He also left them a message written vertically down the left side of the metal door frame that read: "The last laugh is the one that counts."

It's a pretty safe bet that Perez was not laughing when that iron door slammed behind him Wednesday.

State Road 70 work to begin May 6

By Pete Gawda
Okeechobee News

Beginning May 6 the goal of a four lane highway from the City of Okeechobee to the east coast will come closer to reality. However, completion of the entire stretch is still several years away. Business leaders have long said that the lack of a four lane highway is slowing the economic development of the area.

May 6 is the date that Sheltra and Son Construction, Inc. of Indiantown is scheduled to begin work four laning S.R. 70 eastward from the county line to Berman Road.

The project is part of the Florida Department of Transportation's (DOT) long range program. It was originally planned in 2005 to occur in fiscal year 08/09. The project is proceeding according to schedule with funding coming from DOT's work program allotted by the state legislature. There are no federal funds or stimulus money involved in the project which is scheduled for completion in July of 2010.

However, there will be several more years of traffic delays caused by construction before S.R. 70 is four laned all the way from Fort Pierce to Okeechobee. In Okeechobee County funds are not expected to be avail-

able for another five years for construction of the remaining section of S.R. 70 up to where the four lane currently ends east of the city.

In St. Lucie County about 10 more miles will be four laned beginning in June pending the receipt of federal economic stimulus funding. Another section is scheduled to be bid in 2014. The current section of four laning under construction in St. Lucie County is scheduled for completion in early 2010.

Post your opinions in the Public Issues Forum at www.newszap.com. Reporter Pete Gawda can be reached at pgawda@newszap.com.

Front end loader destroyed in blaze

By Charles M. Murphy
Okeechobee News

A front end loader valued at \$75,000 was a total loss Tuesday after a fire at 391 S.W. 67th Drive, Okeechobee County Fire Rescue said.

A report from Lt. Robert Banfield said firemen responded with four units and seven firemen and found the machinery 100 percent involved. They also found a pile of debris and trees near the loader completely involved.

Banfield said 30 gallons of hydraulic oil and 40 gallons of fuel in the machinery fueled the blaze. Some area trees were also burned in the fire.

Firemen arrived just before 5 p.m. and were on the scene for close to two hours. There were no structures threatened, and no injuries reported.

Banfield's report said the fire originated in the engine area. The State Fire Marshall was called in to investigate the cause of the blaze. Approximately 1,500 gallons of water was used to put out the fire. The equipment was owned by Kenneth Collins Tree Service.

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Teen charged with hitting teacher

By Eric Kopp
Okeechobee News

A student at New Endeavor High School was arrested by a School Resource Officer after he reportedly cursed and hit a teacher.

Chase Wyatt Weeks, 14, N.W. 15th St., Okeechobee, was arrested Tuesday, April 28, on a felony charge of battery on a school official. He was booked into the Okeechobee County Jail then transported to the Department of Juvenile Justice Detention Center in Fort Pierce.

School Resource Officer Deputy Dan McGee, of the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office

(OCSO), stated in an arrest report that Weeks was arrested after he hit physical education teacher Lonnie Sears. The report went on to state that Weeks cursed Coach Sears and called him some derogatory names.

Tuesday's incident apparently began when the teacher asked Weeks to leave his classroom, but the teen refused. Witness statements indicate that Weeks became hostile toward the coach and started using profanity, continued the report.



Chase Wyatt Weeks

When Coach Sears took the teen by the arm to escort him out of the classroom Weeks pushed the teacher in the chest "and started to get physical," stated the report. At this point the teacher pushed the boy away from him, but Weeks allegedly came at him again.

As the coach and another male school official took Weeks to the floor to subdue him, the teen kept trying to kick and hit the coach, the deputy stated.

The deputy's report does not indicate where the coach was struck, or if any of the three people involved were injured.

Arrest Report

The following individuals were arrested on felony or driving under the influence (DUI) charges by the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office (OCSO), the Okeechobee City Police Department (OCPD), the Florida Highway Patrol (FHP), the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) or the Department of Corrections (DOC).

- Marlon Thomas, 26, Eighth St., Buckhead Ridge, was arrested April 21 by Officer Ryan Holroyd on a felony charge of driving while license suspended - habitual offender. He was also arrested on a misdemeanor charge of obstruction. His bond was set at \$3,000.

- Ellen Hope Daoust, 40, Ketuck Church Road, Ringgold, Va., was arrested April 24 by Officer Chad Troutman on a fugitive warrant from the State of Virginia. She is being held without bond.

- Christopher T. Estremera, 35, S.E. 36th Ave., Okeechobee, was arrested April 24 by DOC's Michael White on charges of violation of probation - lewd assault victim under the age of 16 (two counts) and violation of probation - adult sex with victim 16-17 years of age. He is being held without bond.

- Moses Coley, 46, N.E. 14th Ave., Okeechobee, was arrested April 24 by Deputy Sergeant J. Royal on an Okeechobee County warrant charging him with burglary of a structure. His bond was set at \$5,000.

- Danny A. Bonilla, 29, N.W. Eighth Ave., Okeechobee, was arrested April 25 by Deputy Joseph Gracie on a charge of driving while license suspended - habitual offender. His bond was set at \$2,500.

- Michael T. Hartford, 21, U.S. 441 S.E., Okeechobee, was arrested April 27 by DOC's Michael White on a charge of violation of probation - lewd and lascivious molestation victim under 12. He is being held without bond.

- Leann Nichole Williams, 21, S.E. 26th St., Okeechobee, was arrested April 27 by Deputy Cpl. Aric Majere on an Okeechobee County warrant charging her with grand theft. Her bond was set at \$4,000.

- Christopher King, 25, S.E. Seventh St., Okeechobee, was arrested April 27 by Deputy G. Popovich on an Okeechobee County warrant charging him with amended violation of probation - driving under the influence. He is being held without bond.

- Rinella Billie, 36, N.W. 33rd Ave., Okeechobee, was arrested April 27 by Deputy Cpl. Aric Majere on an Okeechobee County warrant charging her with driving under the influence. She was released on her own recognizance.

- Monica Pickens, 31, S.E. 57th Drive, Okeechobee, was arrested April 28 by Deputy Paul Jackson on an Okaloosa County warrant charging her with violation of probation - cruelty toward a child - abuse without great harm. She is being held without bond.

- Rebecca Jean Lowery, 37, N.E. 11th Court, Okeechobee, was arrested April 28 by Deputy Howard Pickering on an Okeechobee County warrant charging her with violation of probation - possession of a controlled substance (hydrocodone). She is being held without bond.

- Kimberly Christine Peterman, 23, N.W. 12th Ave., Okeechobee, was arrested April 28 by Deputy Cpl. Aric Majere on a Department of Corrections warrant charging her with violation of probation - forgery (five counts), violation of probation - uttering a forged instrument (five counts), violation of probation - grand theft, violation of probation - possession of cocaine and violation of probation - organized fraud. She is being held without bond.

- Adam Brantley Osceola, 21, S.W. Third Ave., Okeechobee, was arrested April 29 by Deputy Dale Hardy on a Glades County warrant charging him with violation of probation - burglary of a structure, violation of probation - possession of cocaine and violation of probation - driving while license suspended. He is being held without bond.

- Marquise Ladell Daniels, 20, N.E. 18th Ave., Okeechobee, was arrested April 29 by Officer Belen Reyna on a misdemeanor charge of driving while license suspended. His bond was set at \$500. Daniels was later arrested by Deputy Cpl. Aric Majere on an Okeechobee County warrant charging him with the felonies of giving false information to a pawnbroker and grand theft. His bond on those charges was set at \$4,000.

This column lists arrests and not convictions, unless otherwise stated. Anyone listed here who is later found innocent or has had the charges against them dropped is welcome to inform this newspaper. The information will be confirmed and printed.

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Local students compete in Florida State Science Fair

Recently, 13 Okeechobee students attended the Florida State Science and Engineering Fair, which was held in Lakeland, Florida. Students from both Middle Schools and the High School competed against nearly 850 science projects from throughout the state. The following students won awards at the fair:



Submitted photo

Okeechobee County students who competed in the State Science Fair included: front row (left to right): Chris Boney, Tim Gray, Samantha Rivero, Krista Pope, Celena Letcher, and Alec Hert; back row (left to right): Dalton Hodges, Ryan Reister, Julianne Meives, Darby Jones, Trent Johnson, Joy Burnham, and Joey Barletto.

Ryan Reister (YMS) received an Honorable Mention paper weight for his research in physics, \$10 cash and a membership to the Florida Junior Academy of Sciences and a \$50 savings bond from the Hernando Region. Julianne Meives (YMS) was awarded a third place plaque for her research in physics, \$10 cash and a membership to the Florida Junior Academy of Sciences. Alec Hert (OFC) received a \$50 savings bond from the Hernando Region. Joy Burnham (OHS) received a Special Recognition ribbon for her research in Zoology. Celena Letcher (OHS) received an Honorable Mention paper weight for her research in Zoology. Tim Gray (OHS)

was awarded a fourth place plaque for his research in physics. The Science teachers in Okeechobee would like to congratulate all of the students who attended the fair.

National Day of prayer observance

By Pete Gawda
Okeechobee News

The Okeechobee Ministerial Association is sponsoring the local observance of the **National Day of Prayer**, Thursday, **May 7** on the courthouse lawn beginning at noon. Prayers will be offered for local, state and national leaders as well as law enforcement officers and fire fighters. Lunch will be provided.



Places of Worship

Oakview Baptist Church, 677 S.W. 32nd St., is hosting its 14th Annual Golf Tournament on Saturday, **May 16** at the Okeechobee Golf & Country club, The cost is \$45 which includes the green fee, cart and a barbecue lunch. You may register at the church office Monday through Thursday or on Sunday morning in the church vestibule. Proceeds aid our youth in their mission projects and mission trips. Form more information call 763-1699.

The Okeechobee News welcomes news from area churches for this column. E-mail okeenews@newszap.com or call Pete Gawda at 863 763-3134, extension 4225. The deadline to receive information is 5 p.m. the Monday before.

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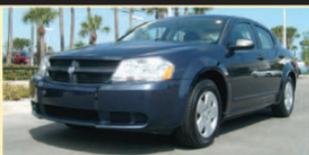
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Group promotes autism awareness

By Charles M. Murphy
Okeechobee News

Johanna Crews with the Okeechobee Autism Support Group was the featured speaker at this month's Okeechobee Community Collaborative Council meeting held Tuesday at the School Board offices.



Johanna Crews

Autism Awareness was the subject of Crews' presentation. Persons with autism can be hard to diagnose, both for experts and for parents. The person may laugh or giggle at inappropriate times, have no real fear of dangers, may prefer to be alone and may avoid eye contact. There are a number of symptoms autism patients display.

Ms. Crews told the group that her child, Casey, age four, has autism. She wanted the group to know what it was like for a parent to deal with autism. Parents can never take a day off when their child is autistic. Normal everyday things for other kids, like eating out in a restaurant or playing in a park, is a huge ordeal for parents.

Many autistic kids need constant supervision. Some are prone to yelling and screaming.

Autism is treatable. There are a number of therapies including behavior therapy, ap-

plied behavior analysis, structured teaching, speech and language therapy, social skills therapy and occupational therapy.

Ms. Crews said autism is becoming more common. Males are four times more likely to have autism than females. It is important that these children have early intervention and therapy.

Autism is the sixth most common disability in the United States. It is more common than child hood cancer.

There are 41 children in the Okeechobee school system with autism, Ms. Crews said. The numbers have increased tremendously in the past several years.

The Okeechobee Autism Support Group started after an incident she experienced at a park. An adult called her son retarded. She noted it was heart breaking. She had just moved here and was shocked by the incident. "I want to do something, and meet other parents like me. I didn't have anyone to talk to. My family and friends really can't know what I feel and what exactly I go through," she said.

Sharing the awareness one individual at a time is the motto of the group. They provide information to parents. The group is made up of volunteers, supporters, teachers and parents. They would like to recruit more teachers and volunteers.

National awareness day in February was commemorated in Okeechobee with a bowling fundraiser. They also participated in February's Speckled Perch Festival in Flagler

Park.

They group also participates in the Okeechobee Special Equestrian program. Her son goes every week for 30 minutes. It is something Casey looks forward to each week. "When we get home he seems more peaceful and calmed down."

Saturday they held the first annual Okeechobee autism walk on the Herbert Hoover Dike. There was a great turnout. It was a free event. Anyone who would like to volunteer or receive information can call 863- 863-467-0841 or browse the web page myspace.com/Okeechobeeautism.

Crews said she has enjoyed living in Okeechobee for the past year and has gotten a lot of information and support from the community, "It has given me inspiration to keep going."

Debbie Gillette will become the new Chairperson of the CCC in June. Elections for a chair elect will be held on May 26.

Kay Begin of the Okeechobee Healthy Start Coalition reported that 56 women and one dad attended a Healthy Star baby shower last Friday. 10 agencies participated while 20 businesses and individuals donated funds or services for the event.

Communities in Schools plan to hold three camps this summer. Those include a skate camp for 6-16 year olds. Sheriff Paul May will host a camp for kids, age 8-14 in June. June 1st will be the sign up day for the Communities in Schools Camps. For more information call 863-462-5863.

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Tennis teams celebrate winning seasons

By Charles M. Murphy
Okeechobee News

Corey White and Kari Berger were named most valuable players for their respective teams as the Okeechobee High School tennis teams held their annual banquets on Sunday at the Berger ranch on Berman Road.

The boy's team finished off a (12-3) season with a trip to the state regional this year. The girl's team got off to quick start and finished the season with a solid 10-5 record.

Boy's Coach Bryan Van Camp said he was very pleased with how the season went,

"It was really a great season. We had great support from the community. I think the kids really enjoyed playing this year."

Zach Fowler was named the Brahman award winner for the boys and Alisha Wilcox won the award for the girl's squad.

"It was a fun banquet with a pretty good crowd and a lot of good food. The kids played some football afterward, it was a fun day," Van Camp said.

The high school will have to look for a new girl's coach as Morgan Ungerott will not return next year.

U-12 boys win championship at Soccer Challenge

Three local boys win championship at the Pompano Beach Spring 3 v 3 Challenge tournament. On one of the sunniest days of this year the boys played four qualifying matches Saturday, before taking on the Boca Juniors in the finals. Without any extra players the boys played brilliantly. The Boca Juniors got on the board quickly by scoring three goals but Okeechobee settled in and won 10-3. Coach Paul Gibbons Regional Director of

Coerver Coaching at Treasure Coast United where the boys train, said it was an outstanding effort by all three. By winning the Championship the boys qualify for nationals at Disney's Wide World of Sports where they play against teams from across the nation in July 31-Aug 2. Congratulations, Edger Ayala, Logan Laskey, and Wilson Santos.



Submitted photo

Edger Ayala, Logan Laskey, and Wilson Santos, three U12 soccer players for Okeechobee, helped their team to a 10-3 win over Boca during 3 v 3 Championship. The boys will go onto nationals at Disney's Wide World of Sports at the end of July.

KOA Campgrounds kick off summer with free night

Several KOA campgrounds in Florida are participating in Kampgrounds of America's Sixth Annual Come Kamp & Care With Us Weekend Friday, **May 8** and Saturday, **May 9**.

The event, created in 2004 to offer campers an easy way to affordably explore KOA campgrounds in their area, and at the same time have a fun, affordable weekend to start their summer camping season.

All campers at participating campgrounds who stay as a paying guest on Friday, May 8, will receive a free night of camping on Saturday, May 9.

The event is open to the public. RVs and tents are welcome, and participating KOAs are offering free nights in their accommodations, including many KOA Camping Kabins.

The event also serves as a fundraising

event for KOA Care Camps for children with cancer. A partial list of participating KOA campgrounds in Florida include:

- Clewiston/Lake Okeechobee KOA
- Daytona/Speedway KOA
- Fort Myers/Pine Island KOA
- Kissimmee/Orlando KOA
- Okeechobee KOA
- Orlando S.E./Lake Whipoorwill KOA
- Orlando S.W./Fort Summit KOA

Campgrounds fill up fast for this popular event, so don't wait. Make your reservations today at <http://www.koa.com/>. More information on Come Kamp & Care With Us Weekend, including a complete list of participating campgrounds in Florida and North America, is also available at [KOA.com](http://www.koa.com). More information about KOA Care Camps for children with cancer is available at www.koacarecamps.com.

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Brahmans end post season drought in dramatic fashion



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy
Dustin Stokes hammers a ball through the infield during the seventh inning of Tuesday's game in Ft. Pierce.

By Charles M. Murphy

Okeechobee News

Okeechobee is headed back to the post season after the baseball team went nine innings to defeat Lincoln Park 1-0 Tuesday night in the District 14-4A semifinals.

Okeechobee (16-10), advanced to meet Fort Pierce Westwood in Thursday's final. The Panthers were a surprise upset winner of Jensen Beach, 14-0, in the other semifinal.

"I still haven't absorbed what just happened," an ecstatic Brahmans Coach Dylan Tedders said afterward, "I'm just in awe. This game was awesome."

Tedders had plenty of praise to go around. Pitcher Cameron Tewksbury pitched eight shutout innings. Shortstop Drew Selvey made several excellent defensive plays. Brice Buckner hit a double to start the winning rally in the ninth.

"It was a game of highs and lows. I'm just speechless right now. I'm about ready to cry," he added.

Tewksbury continued his dominance over the Greyhounds as he scattered four hits over eight innings before giving way to Jonathan Crawford in the ninth. He noted he



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy
Adam Tewksbury (right) takes some practice swings during Tuesday's game with Lincoln Park.

felt he had good stuff right from the opening pitch. "We're just excited. You saw the dog pile. That's all I can really say. We just had to stay in it and get that run across."

Lincoln Park didn't get more than one runner on base in any inning until the ninth inning. Crawford came on and picked off a runner on third base to end the threat. He noted he liked being on the mound with the game on the line. "It gets you pumped up," he said. "The runner was dancing around a little bit and Coach Ward said the pick-off was open. I give the credit to Cameron Tewksbury. He did all the work and I got the win."

Jordan Modine matched Tewksbury as he shut out Okeechobee for the first seven innings. Okeechobee got a scratch single from Buckner in the first, and then didn't have another hit until the seventh. There was one questionable umpires call in the second. Jonathan Crawford led off with a walk and went to second on a ground ball. The umpire ruled the second basemen tagged Crawford as he ran by. He then threw wildly to first. Instead of first and second and no one out, Okeechobee had a runner on first and one out.



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy
Coach Dylan Tedders argues a call during the second inning of Tuesday's game.

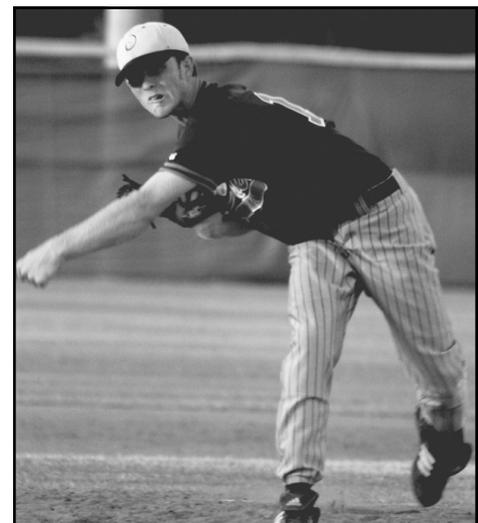
Dustin Stokes, who was injured Monday during a slide, and unable to play the field, led off the seventh with a single. Adam Tewksbury couldn't get the bunt down, and the inning ended with Stokes caught trying to steal second. Brandon Farless nearly won the game with a blooper down the left field line. Stokes ran all the way and would have scored on the play. The ball drifted into foul territory at the last minute.

Mike Minondo hit a two out single in the eighth inning, but was stranded, setting the stage for a dramatic ninth inning.

Buckner squared off against hard throwing Kyle Davis to start the ninth. He found a pitch to his liking and slammed it into the gap in right center field. Brice noted he has hit every day to get ready and knew he couldn't win the game with one swing, "I tunneled in and I was looking for a strike I could reach, I just hit it in the hole."

Buckner wasn't a player the last time Okeechobee went to the post season, but he hung around the team a lot and his father Kenry was an assistant coach when the Brahmans went to the final four. He noted that is something he'd like to repeat. "This is our run," he said. "We want to share that experience, it's a great feeling having the whole town behind you."

With Buckner on second, Corey White came on to pitch run. LPA walked Dustin Stokes, and Adam Tewksbury laid down a perfect sacrifice bunt to put runners on second and third. LPA then walked Crawford to load the bases. Mark Weir, who didn't start the



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy
Cameron Tewksbury held LPA scoreless into the ninth inning Tuesday.

game, fell behind two strikes but had confidence he could still make contact. Weir hit a triple on a two strike count on Monday night and this time knocked the ball over the pitchers head. "I didn't think the shortstop would have a play at home. When he fumbled it I knew we had it."

White raced home with the winning run and the Brahmans erupted into a wild celebration.

The championship game was played Thursday night in Fort Pierce. Okeechobee will also play in a regional playoff game next Tuesday.

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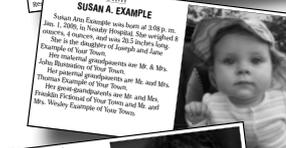
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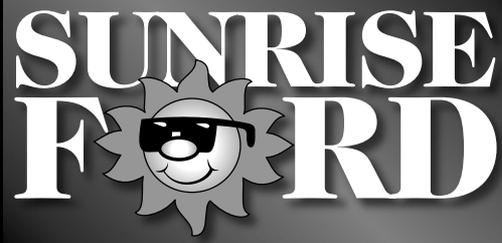
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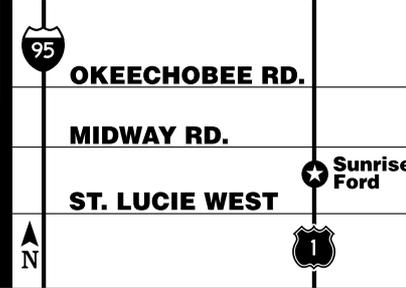
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