

# OKEECHOBEE NEWS

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Friday, August 21, 2009

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**Great 'gator egg hatch ...**  
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## County considers cutting salaries

**By Pete Gawda**  
 Okeechobee News

County employees could be facing a salary cut. County employees spent Wednesday and Thursday afternoons struggling to balance the budget. The good news is that bids for the EOC appear to be about \$1 million less than budgeted and taxpayers may not see an increase in property taxes. According to figures released on Wednesday by county administrator Lyndon Bonner, only two of the constitutional officers, the

clerk of the court and the supervisor of elections have cut their budgets the amount requested by the commissioners. The sheriff's requested cut was \$703,840. However, barring any hurricanes, the sheriff predicted he would be able to return to the commissioners \$600,000 in unused funds from this year's budget. That cut the sheriff's requested deduction to \$103,840. However, on Thursday the sheriff agreed to make that additional cut. He warned commissioners that if there were a major hurricane, he would have to come back to them to ask for more money.

The budget is now short about \$140,000, a shortfall attributed to the remaining constitutional officers who have not cut their budgets as much as the apportionment called for. Commissioner Clif Betts said he felt the constitutional officers have done all they can do. At one point Thursday afternoon Commissioner Joey Hoover appeared to be irritated with Mr. Bonner. "Don't just give me information," Commissioner Hoover said. "I want a solution. Give me a recommendation. Come out with a

specific course and defend it." "We laid off people, we reduced services," Mr. Bonner replied. "I can respond to any level of service you want to provide." Mr. Bonner mentioned salary options because it is an ongoing cost and would provide the most relief at the moment. The proposed budget is based on a millage rate of 7.6905. One mill equals one dollar in taxes for every \$1,000 of assessed value. That rate would bring in \$536,307 over the current tax revenues. However,

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## Professional soccer player volunteers to help Okeechobee

**By Charles M. Murphy**  
 Okeechobee News

Ken Davy has done about everything in the sport of soccer. He's played high school ball and college ball, played for his country, and even for cash. Now Davy lives in Okeechobee and is teaching Okeechobee kids how to play the game properly as he coaches one of Okeechobee club soccer teams. "Okeechobee has a lot of players with soccer in their blood. They have the raw potential. My job is to develop that potential. Right now I'm impressed with the way the kids have improved and listened to me," he said. "They are doing the basic things they didn't do a year or two ago." Davy came to Okeechobee to take a job at the former Eckerd

School for Boys. He ran into the High School Coach Lonnie Sears, gave him his credentials, and was invited to help with the high school team. He's come a long way from his days in Kingston, Jamaica. He played at Excelsior High School and won the high school championship of Jamaica in 1973. His two brothers, Richard and Michael, also won championships in soccer. They went to Howard University and both played on the colleges 1974 National Championship Team. It wasn't surprising that Howard coaches would also be interested in Ken. They offered him a college scholarship and he was an All American at Howard for four straight years. He won the

See Soccer — Page 2



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy  
**Ken Davy shows off his soccer skills at a recent practice.**

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# County

Continued From Page 1

Commissioner Hoover proposed giving taxpayer a break. He suggested a lower millage rate which would bring in the same amount of tax revenue as the current budget. As a means of making up the \$536,208 difference he proposed a 2 percent cut in employees'

pay. Each 1 percent cut in employees pay across the board would save \$208,000. He suggested the remaining shortfall be made up by additional cost cutting measures.

"This is based on projections," warned Commissioner Ray Domer of the proposed budget, "There is no cushion in case projected numbers are off. Last year you spent more money than you took in. You are right back where you were last year with less money."

# Soccer

Continued From Page 1

Most Valuable defensive player award in the Senior Bowl all star game.

Davy also played for the Jamaican national teams. He spent two years on the under 19 team, and played briefly for the National team in 1975.

After college Davy turned professional and played in the North American Soccer League for four years with the Washington Diplomats. He also played in the indoor soccer league for the Philadelphia Fever. In 1984, the NASL folded, and Davy moved to Miami where he began a teaching career.

One of his fondest memories of profes-

sional ball was a match with the New York Cosmos and the legendary, Pele. "He was still very tricky and magical, but he had lost a lot of his speed. I tackled him during the match and he said something under his breath in Portuguese. I said to him, whatever you say man, same to you."

After the match Davy is convinced Pele was about to hand him his #10 jersey as the two men walked toward each other on the field. However, another teammate of Davy's suddenly snatched the jersey away and ran into the locker room.

"I think he wanted to give it to me, that #10 jersey was very sought after," he said.

Davy realized soon after his playing career that he had a gift with his ability to coach. He coached a team of five and six year olds to an undefeated 12-0 season. He said he real-

"We may not be able to do the things we currently do," warned Mr. Bonner.

Since these were workshops, no formal action could be taken.

Commissioners will meet again Tuesday, Aug. 25 at 1 p.m. to continue budget discussion.

**Post your opinions in the Public Issues Forum at [www.newszap.com](http://www.newszap.com). Reporter Pete Gawda can be reached at [pgawda@newszap.com](mailto:pgawda@newszap.com).**

ized then that he had a future in coaching.

"I can coach better than I can play, and I was really an excellent soccer player," he noted.

He went on to coach at a couple of middle schools in South Florida and at Eli High School before he moved to Okeechobee.

Now he tries to help Okeechobee soccer players. "They've never seen this kind of coaching. We have preached team work. I give most of the praise to Lonnie Sears. He is really an excellent coach."

He also praised former Brahman girl's coach Brian King for his work with local kids.

Davy's two daughters, Jihan, 19, and Danae, 23, also share his love for soccer.

"Soccer is my life. The kids here are improving but they are not where we want them to be. We are getting there slowly and surely," he added.

Davy said he'd like to see more parents get involved with club soccer and help build a solid program in Okeechobee.

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# Raulerson Ambassadors club invites volunteers

Raulerson Hospital is inviting Okeechobee residents to join the Raulerson Hospital Ambassadors club. Raulerson Hospital is your community hospital and we welcome individual volunteers who would like to participate in regularly scheduled meeting where your unbiased feedback will help us provide excellent patient care during your stay or a loved one's stay. We

are looking for dedicated individuals, who have either been a patient or a visitor at Raulerson Hospital. If you would like to participate in this progressive community program, please contact Marnie Lauter at 863-824-2702 or by e-mailing Marnie Lauter at: ([marnie.lauter@hcahealthcare.com](mailto:marnie.lauter@hcahealthcare.com)) for more information.

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# Traffic infraction leads to felony arrest

By Eric Kopp  
Okeechobee News

When Steven Shane Britnell was stopped for allegedly running a stop sign, little did he know that he would go to jail and be held there on \$75,000 bond.

Britnell, 37, N.W. 27th St., Okeechobee, was arrested Monday, Aug. 17, by a detective with the Okeechobee Narcotics Task Force for having all the chemicals he needed to make methamphetamine. He was officially arrested on felony charges of unlawful possession of listed chemicals and delivery of drug par-



Steven Shane Britnell

aphernalia, and a misdemeanor charge of driving while license suspended with knowledge. He was booked into the Okeechobee County Jail under a bond of \$75,500.

"He was in possession of everything he needed to produce meth," explained Detective Ted Van Deman, of the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office (OCSO), of the felony charge.

Around 9:33 p.m. Monday the task force detective stopped Britnell for reportedly running a stop sign at the intersection of S.W. 24th Ave. and S.W. 16th St. At this time, wrote the detective in his arrest report, it was learned that Britnell's driver's license had been suspended.

Britnell was placed under arrest and the 1996 black Pontiac automobile he was driving was towed to the impound area at the

sheriff's office.

The detective's arrest report states that while a mandatory inventory of the vehicle was being done, three packages containing nasal decongestant pills were found. Also found in the car was a plastic pill crusher, two packages of lithium batteries, camp fuel, drain cleaner, rubber tubing, a small pipe cutter and a bag of fertilizer. These are all items used to make methamphetamine, stated the detective.

An 18-year-old man and a 17-year-old juvenile were with Britnell at the time of his arrest. However, they were not arrested and were released to their parents.

The detective's report goes on to state that Britnell was issued a traffic citation for failure to stop at the stop sign.

## Report: Man caught in teen's bedroom

By Eric Kopp  
Okeechobee News

An Okeechobee man was arrested after he was reportedly caught in the bedroom of a 14-year-old girl.

Jeantavious A. Saintelus, 18, N.E. 13th Ave., was arrested Tuesday, Aug. 18, on a felony charge of lewd and lascivious molestation. He was also arrested on a misdemeanor charge of contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

Saintelus was booked



Jeantavious A. Saintelus

into the Okeechobee County Jail under a bond of \$12,500.

An arrest report by Deputy Jonathan Hazy, of the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office (OCSO), states that Saintelus was caught in the girl's bedroom by her mother. The victim's mother reportedly told the deputy that she had told the man to stay away from her daughter.

According to the report, the teen and Saintelus had been seeing each other for about a year.



Surveillance Photo

If you recognize this man and have any information on his whereabouts or who he is. Please call Detective Steve Worley at the Highlands County Sheriff's Office at 863-402-7250 or call Heartland Crime Stoppers at 1-800-226-TIPS.

## HCSO seeks help in locating fraud suspect

The Highlands County Sheriff's Office is requesting assistance from the public in identifying a credit card fraud suspect. In the early morning hours of July 28, a Hispanic male wearing a light blue/gray short sleeve shirt with black horizontal stripes and plaid long shorts entered the Circle K at U.S. 27 and U.S. 98. The suspect, who has a noticeable scar on his right forearm, was driving a red sleeper cab semi truck with an enclosed trailer attached. The suspect purchased over \$500 worth of diesel fuel for the semi using a stolen credit card.

Anyone with information regarding this suspect is urged to call Detective Steve Worley at the Highlands County Sheriff's Office at 863-402-7250. Callers may also provide information through Heartland Crime Stoppers at 1-800-226-TIPS. Callers to Heartland Crime Stoppers may remain anonymous and may be eligible for a cash reward.

## Man jailed on molestation charges

By Eric Kopp  
Okeechobee News

An Okeechobee man has been arrested and charged with molesting three young girls, and is being held without bond in the Okeechobee County Jail.

Esdras Gomez, 32, N.W. 38th Terrace, was arrested Tuesday, Aug. 18, and charged with two counts of capital sexual battery, one count of sexual battery-victim 12-16 years of age and one count of lewd and lascivious molestation-victim under 12.

His bond on the lewd and lascivious charge has been set at \$100,000. Gomez is being held without bond on the remaining three charges.

An arrest report by Detective Rosemary Farless, of the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office (OCSO), indicates that in some instances the alleged molestations have been going on for up to nine years and started when one of the purported victims was around 6 years of age.



Esdras Gomez

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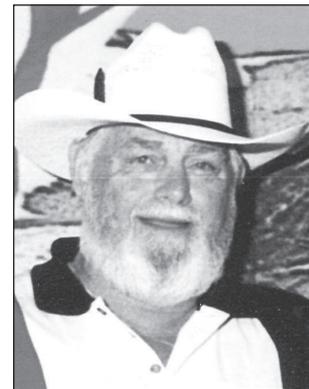
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### County employees

• Okeechobee county employees -- are they randomly drug tested? If not, they definitely need to be.

### Memory card lost

\* I went to CVS and printed out some pictures but I forgot to take my memory card out of the slot. I guess the next person that came along, thought "wow, I've got a memory card." But I'd like it back. That's exactly what it was, a "memory" card -- pictures that I can never capture again, like the birth of my first baby and first steps of him doing things. If you read this and have a heart, please return to CVS or Okeechobee News.

### Electric

• I was just wondering has anybody else's electric bill become unbelievably high like mine has? Is it because of all of the foreclosures going on that you have to jack up the prices to cover the extra revenue that is missing due to foreclosure? Is it because the foreclosures, so you have to charge the people who are actually paying on their homes extra? I think it is wrong. There are a lot of poor people out there who cannot afford these light bills. I don't think it's right that we be taken advantage of, because of a loss of revenue from other people.

• I don't know why these light bills have skyrocketed like they have, but it is outrageous. My bill used to only be around \$80+ a month and just in the past three months has jumped to \$200+ a month. A friend of mine, her light bill used to run around \$200+ and now this month jumped to over \$400. What's going on here people? I've lived in almost my entire life and in my current home for 15+ years of my life and my power bill has never been this high before. The power companies are going to drive people out of house and home. Something has to give.

• I would like to know why these light bills have gotten so high. Did someone decide to finally stop raising gas prices and decide to raise power bills instead? I mean what, did they think to themselves "hmm, they take a strike on buying gas and so we lower the prices, because it hurts the gas market? But they can't take a strike on paying electric, because you can't live in your house without it?" So they just decided to mess everyone up and raise a bill that pretty much HAS to be paid. Since power isn't really something you can just not pay, because then it's an arm and a leg to get it turned back on. What is the deal people? I mean in a recession, don't you think you would try to lower prices? I mean isn't it better to have 100 people paying \$100 a month instead of 50 people paying \$175 a month?

### FDA

• This is about the FDA, the Federal Drug Administration. You see them advertising these medicines on television for you to get from your doctor. Then it lists death as one of the side effects. I don't call that a side effect, I call that a permanent effect. They want to sell you something that may cause you to die. That's very intelligent. Somebody needs to get control and put a stop to this craziness. Because if you get that one side effect listed, you're not going to come back from it.



### Obama

• President Obama needs to stay at the White House. Every time he goes on his little trips, it costs at least a half million dollars to go there and back. So you figure each time he takes a trip, he wastes a half million dollars, that our tax payers pay for. He wants us to get out of this recession, but every time he takes a trip it costs over a half million dollars so if he takes four or five trips that's 2-3 million dollars. But he don't care as long as he ain't sharing his money. He wants to share the wealth. Maybe he should pay for it himself every time he flies, help save the taxpayers some money.

### Health care

• I saw on MSNBC where they were on there talking about the healthcare plan. They've got protestors on there that are like 5-year-old kids. They've got no attention plan, nor do they know what they are talking about. I may be an idiot, but I'm entitled to my opinion. If they want to stand up there with Obama, that's one thing, but don't stand up there and tell me I'm an idiot. No, I don't like this plan. What happened to this country's Freedom of Choice?

### Singing group

• New Testament Baptist Church had a guest singing group during their Sunday morning worship service this past Sunday. I just want to say that the group truly touched my heart. The last song that they did was a tribute to all of the veterans that were present in the service. And while I'm not a veteran, I have several family members and friends whom are currently fighting or have fought for our freedom which we hold so dear. And it just really reminded me, that just because it isn't a specific day on the calendar such as Veterans Day or Memorial Day, we should thank our veterans everyday for there service to this country. And God Bless the group that did the song, you were a true blessing.

### Curfew

• I read in the Okeechobee News that some residents plan to ask the county commissioners to establish a curfew for those under the age of 18, due to the growing problem with gangs and gang violence in Okeechobee County. Other counties in Florida have established curfews that seem to make sense. There are common-sense exceptions written into the law for teens who are out with a parent or guardian; those who are outdoors on their family's property or on other private property with permission of the owner, those who are going to and from work; those who are going home from a school function, etc. I think it might be a good idea because it gives the police another tool to use to curb the gang activities.

• The majority of the residents of Okeechobee City/County will probably have no conflict with a curfew. Fines paid by those who violate the curfew could generate much needed revenue.

• As a time frame I would suggest a curfew of 11 p.m. on week nights and midnight on weekends.

• 11 p.m. on weekdays and midnight on weekends sounds reasonable. Many teens already have earlier curfews set by their parents. According to the Clewiston News, Clewiston has a curfew that prohibits minors from being out between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m. on weeknights and from being out between 12:01 a.m. and 6 a.m. on weekends. First violation results in a written warning; subsequent violations result in a \$50 fine (to be paid by the parents). Minors not complying will be taken into custody and parents will be required to pick them up. If the parents aren't located within two hours, officers may take steps under the child abuse statute, or transport them to their residences. Exceptions to the hours of the curfew are made for special circumstances, including being accompanied by the parents; emergencies; returning from a school-sponsored function, etc.

• This idea -- this whole idea, in short -- is bunk, rubbish and a fistful of assumptions. I say no.

### Deaths

• All this time they've been going on about Michael Jackson and Elvis Presley, always talking about how great they are, they are two people who died of drug overdose. And yet you're still making money off of them. Well there are a lot of people out there that die from drug overdose every day and they don't carry on about them. They are lucky if they even get one little byline in the paper for their death. But they get all of this hoopla over them because they had fame and fortune. I don't care what they had, they were junkies and died of drug overdose. That's your problem, you don't have to keep bringing it up to the crowd, four and five months after it happened.

### Disability

• I am veteran and am qualified to be disabled, and the government tells me I have enough to get disability, but yet, they won't give me a disability check. But yet, if you are 300 lbs. and are fat and out of shape, they will give you a disability check. I want to know what is up with that. I really am disabled. They have just had too many cheeseburgers and got fat.

# OKEECHOBEE NEWS

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**Publisher:** Tom Byrd

## Our Purpose...

The Okeechobee News is published by Independent Newspapers of Florida. Independent is owned by a unique trust that enables this newspaper to pursue a mission of journalistic service to the citizens of the community. Since no dividends are paid, the company is able to thrive on profit margins below industry standards. All after-tax surpluses are reinvested in Independent's mission of journalistic service, commitment to the ideals of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and support of the community's deliberation of public issues.

## We Pledge...

- To operate this newspaper as a public trust
- To help our community become a better place to live and work, through our dedication to conscientious journalism.
- To provide the information citizens need to make their own intelligent decisions about public issues.

- To report the news with honesty, accuracy, purposeful neutrality, fairness, objectivity, fearlessness and compassion.
- To use our opinion pages to facilitate community debate, not to dominate it with our own opinions.
- To disclose our own conflicts of interest or potential conflicts to our readers.
- 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.

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## Letters to the Editor

### Remember the Lost Boys

Carson Williams ... Devon Venables ... Joshua "2" Creasman. Former Okeechobee High School football coach Chris Branham called these three boys "The Lost Boys of Okeechobee" because, like the Lost Boys from the story Peter Pan, they never grew up.

We, the parents of the Lost Boys of Okeechobee would like to thank our wonderful community for the generosity and outpouring of support in our time of need.

However, this is not a letter of thanks. More importantly, we want to send a message to the youth of Okeechobee.

On August 1, 2009, our community lost three outstanding young men. They were taken away by a tragic and unfortunate accident. Could it have been prevented, maybe, but that is not for us to say. We can only pray that this tragedy will serve as a wakeup call to the future leaders of our community. Okeechobee cannot afford to continue to ignore the fact that many of our young people have died in recent tragic automobile accidents. While we know that the sudden departure of these three young men will not be taken lightly, the youth of this community must take away from this tragedy the realization that one of them could be pictured in their casket.

Even though we as parents taught our children to live smart and safe, we know that making the right decision is not always easy. The young people must utilize the skills their parents have passed on to them when making day-to-day decisions and recognize that any choice made can be a life-altering effect for them, their family and friends.

Carson, Devon and Joshua will be missed tremendously by all of their friends. The anguish that we, their families, are experiencing defies words. We want this tragedy to be remembered by each and every young person in our community. If you are in a situation that a choice made could jeopardize your own well-being, think of our Lost Boys. Maybe you will make the right choice and you will be safe.

We want to leave you with the following: The Author Jack Lemmon said "Death ends a life, not a relationship." It is hoped that the relationships built by these three young men will continue with life. Life is built on love and wisdom. Love for God and Family and the wisdom to make the right choices in the many ways that you live life.

**Peter, Dinae and Hailey Venables  
John Creasman  
David and Pam Williams  
Cody and Channing Williams**



**Devon Venables**



**Joshua "2" Creasman**



**Carson Williams**



Special to the Okeechobee News

**The families of Okeechobee's "Lost Boys" hope this photo will remind young people to carefully think about their actions.**

### Emergency Management Operations

I'd like to respond to comments in the letter to the editor submitted by Mr. Murphy, specifically those regarding Emergency Management and the proposed Emergency Operation Center.

I have been a volunteer for the past 10 years at the EOC. I have participated in all activations, drills and exercises. I also had many misconceptions of what our Emergency Management actually does. There is so much more involved, it is hard to simplify it, but here is my attempt.

To start, it is an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and all four phases of emergency management must be conducted in a defensible, accessible workspace. From Mitigation and Preparedness to the more familiar Response and Recovery phases. Here's where the Emergency Support Function staff, known as ESFs, come in.

There are 17 ESFs in Okeechobee's EOC, including Transportation, Law Enforcement, Animal Concerns, Planning, Mass Care, Search and Rescue, plus Volunteers and Donations to name a few. There are staff for the incident also. The Incident Command System, known as ICS, has eight main positions. ICS is part of the National Incident Management System and participation is required for counties to receive federal funds.

These positions include the Incident Commander, Safety Officer, Public Information Officer plus Operations, Planning, Logistics and Finance Section Chiefs, who have Unit Leaders under them. Unit Leaders report on facilities, resources, aviation, ground support, documentation, compensation and claims, to name a few. This means at times there are up to 40 people working out of the EOC.

This doesn't include the Policy and Guidance Group that are our elected City and County officials and other appropriate personnel that advise on legal or financial concerns. That is a lot of people in the EOC. You also have media and private citizens that come to the EOC for answers. Now, try fitting all those people into our EOC for a conference call from the state! I don't know if Mr. Murphy has ever been inside the EOC. For longtime residents, it is the former emergency room at the original hospital and it is not very big, nor is it going to withstand a major hurricane. The attached State Attorney's office didn't survive 2004.

To try to simplify Emergency Management to three meetings in 30 years just shows how widespread ignorance can get and is a disservice to those that have worked many hours over many years to help our community in times of disaster.

Disasters aren't limited to hurricanes. EOCs have been activated for every reason imaginable, such as flooding, tornadoes, fires, sinkholes, pandemics, terroristic threats, hazardous material spills, mass migrations and evacuations, even massive rodent infestations! Remember those mosquitoes from TS Fay? There are also drills and exercises required by the state, ongoing training, public education and preparedness. Public events, such as parades and large funerals are also handled through the EOC. Emergency Management is available 365 days a year, 24 hours a day.

Our former Director of Emergency Management, Gene O'Neill worked very hard for the proposed EOC for several years. The Federal Grant, that we are in danger of losing even with the extensions, will provide 1.5 million for construction costs. This requires the building to include a rating of 185 mph, seven days of self-sufficiency on fuel, water and sewer at a raised elevation above the 100 year flood plain. It must also be used for Emergency Management purposes for a minimum of 15 years. It may have been Gene's dream, but after visiting most EOCs in Florida and realizing how small and understaffed we are, I hope our current administration can make his dream come true.

Gene was very involved in the hiring process of our current director, Michael Faulkner, who has obtained an EMPA grant that offsets his salary costs to the county.

Most aren't aware that Okeechobee County Emergency Management's staff consists of one director and one administrative assistant, which is why there is a very real need for trained volunteers.

Mr. Faulkner, offers training of many of the positions listed above for anyone interested in volunteering and learning what Emergency Management actually does. Call 863-763-3212 for more information. I know he will address any concerns or questions regarding the need for the proposed EOC much better than I can. I hope this helps clear up some misconceptions regarding emergency management and the EOC. I appreciate the opportunity to provide my personal opinion on this matter.

Sincerely,  
**Lynn Hooks**

## 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. For information, contact Ollie Morgret at 800-932-8677.

**A.A. meeting** from noon until 1 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, 200 N.W. Second St. It's an open meeting.

**A.A. meeting** from 8 until 9 p.m. at the Church of Our Saviour, 200 N.W. Third St. It will be an open speaker meeting.

**Business Women's Referral Networking Luncheon** will be held on the third Friday of every month at the Brahma Bull Restaurant, 2405 U.S. 441 S.E., beginning at 11:30 a.m. for networking and then lunch. Networking opportunities available for women in business and is open to the public. No membership is required. For information, contact Robin Delgado at 800-299-8878; or, by e-mail at info@flainjurylawyer.com.

Compulsive overeaters are invited to a weekly 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. 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

Ballroom dancing in Okeechobee

A group class in ballroom dancing is being offered in Okeechobee at Church of Our Saviour Parish Hall, 200 N.W. Third Street on Saturday afternoons at 4 p.m. The cost for the hour lesson is \$10. Private instructions are also available. Come and enjoy the fun with or without a partner. For more information call 772-794-9040.

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

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## Community Events

### Gang-free rally is Saturday

The third annual Gang Free Okeechobee Motorcycle Rally will be held Saturday, **Aug. 22**, beginning with a poker run. The poker run will end at noon at VFW Post #10539, 33912 U.S. 441 S.E., where there will be food, prize giveaways, auctions, vendors, karaoke and more. The festivities at the Post are open to the public and there will be no admission charge. All of the money raised by the one-day event will be used to sponsor scholarships for local graduating seniors. The first motorcycle will leave out of Luncker's Sports Grill, 4825 U.S. 441 S., at 10 a.m. For information contact either Detective Sergeant Brad Stark or Michele Bell at the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office, 863-763-3117.

### Horse farm to host back to school event

Wagon Wheel Horse Farm in Okeechobee is hosting a back to school event on **Aug. 22**, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Several members of the medical and optical fields that are providers of care will have a booth at the event. A limited number of backpacks and supplies will be given away. Pony rides and lunch. Call 863-634-6397 or 863-467-1670 for more directions and more information.

### First Indian Baptist Church celebrates Golden Anniversary

The First Indian Baptist Church of Brighton will celebrate 50 years of serving Jesus Christ with a "Homecoming Event." Please come and bring your family and friends to an exciting reunion with old memories, Creek songs, Bluegrass music, delicious food and great fellowship on Sunday, **Aug. 23**, at 10:45 a.m. at 20060 Reservation Road, (Hwy. 721 S.) A celebration dinner will follow. For more information about the event, please contact Pastor Wonder Johns at 863-634-1639, 863-763-5730, or the church phone at 863-357-0013.

### Faith Alive

Faith Alive Fellowship, 3075 SW 3rd Terrace, will hold a revival with special guest speaker "Evangelist Gil Howard-Browne" from Times of Refreshing Ministries in Tampa, **Aug. 23-25**, Sunday, Aug. 23 at 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Monday and Tuesday at 7 p.m. If life has you drained, or you're going through tough times, that has led to discouragement, loss of vision and purpose. Join us, where you will be blessed, encouraged, inspired, refreshed and restored. The dates are Monday and Tuesday evening at 7:00 pm. For more information please call Mary Sue at 763-0577

### Buckhead VFW to host dinner sale

Buckhead Ridge VFW Post 9528, 29012 East Hwy. 78, Okeechobee, will host a Cornish hen dinner with all the trimmings including one whole hen with pecan and mushroom stuffing, wild rice and peas and ice cream for desert. The dinner will be held on Sunday, **Aug. 23**, and donations for the dinner are \$8. Serving will start at 12:30 p.m. and end serving at 2:30 p.m. Entertainment will be music with door prizes for "Jail and Bail" by Men's Auxiliary all afternoon. A cake walk will be held by Ladies Auxiliary at 1:30 p.m. and a Chinese Auction will be held by our AMVETS at 2:30 p.m. A 50/50 drawing will be held for a basket of cheer. Come out and join the midsummer fun. For information on ordering, please call 863-467-2882.

### Monthly Book Club meeting set

The Friends of the Okeechobee Library Book Club will meet on Thursday, **Aug. 27**, at 6 p.m. at the library. The book for discussion is *The Disappointment Artist*, Essays by Jonathan Lethem. The meeting is open to the public. For more information call Jan Fehrman at 863-357-9980.

### Okeechobee Forecast

**Today:** Partly cloudy with a high near 92 and a 50 percent chance of scattered showers and thunderstorms after noon. Heat index values will be as high as 99 with calm winds becoming east northeast around 5 mph.

**Tonight:** Partly cloudy with a slight chance of isolated showers and thunderstorms before 10 p.m. The low will be around 73 with winds from the east around 5 mph becoming calm.

### Extended Forecast

**Saturday:** Partly cloudy with a high near 92 and a 50 percent chance of scattered showers and thunderstorms after 11 a.m. Winds will be calm becoming west around 5 mph.

**Saturday night:** Partly cloudy with a low around 73 and a 20 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms before midnight. Winds will be from the south southwest around 5 mph.

### Lotteries

**Florida Lottery** — Here are the numbers selected Wednesday in the Florida Lottery: **Cash 3:** 5-9-3; **Play 4:** 8-8-7-7; **Fantasy 5:** 10-19-26-28-35; **Mega Money:** 3-18-28-32 MB 8; **Florida Lotto:** 14-16-17-19-43-45; **Powerball:** 14-24-31-43-51 PB27 x5. Numbers drawn Thursday, **Cash 3:** 0-9-8; **Play 4:** 4-6-9-1.

### Coffee Klatch set for Aug. 27

The next Coffee Klatch will be held on Thursday, **Aug. 27**, 8 a.m. at American Red Cross, 323 North Parrott Ave., Okeechobee. Please come and join us for this morning social. Our morning social gives each member an opportunity to become better acquainted with other members in the business community. The Okeechobee Area Chamber of Commerce invites anyone interested in becoming a new member of the chamber to come and visit and enjoy a great morning social experience. We hope to see you there.

### Golf team to hold fund raiser

The Okeechobee boys and girls golf teams will hold a fundraiser golf tournament on Saturday, **Aug. 29**, at the Okeechobee Golf and Country Club. The registration fee is \$200 for teams of four. Hole sponsorships cost \$100. There will be prizes, and lunch provided. For more information call Mark Ward at 863-634-1722.

### Event to benefit Pet Rescue

Fraternal Order of Eagles Aerie #4509, 4701 S.E. 441, will host a special event to benefit the Humane Society/Pet Rescue on Saturday, **Aug. 29**, starting at 1 p.m. There will be live music, food, an auction and drawings. Donations for the auction—NO CLOTHING PLEASE—may be dropped off at 4701 S.E. 441. For information, call 863-467-1154.

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## Obituaries

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### Pearlie Alderman, 97

OKEECHOBEE — Pearlie Alderman, 97, of Okeechobee, died Wednesday, Aug. 12, 2009, at Hospice House of Okeechobee.

She was born Sept. 4, 1911, in Quitman, Ga. She has been a longtime resident of Okeechobee coming from Georgia. She was employed as a Custodian with the United States Postal Service.

She was preceded in death by her father, Oliver Jones and mother, Eva D. Matthews.

Survivors include her sons, Robert Alderman of Pahokee, Clyde Alderman of Riviera Beach, Fred Alderman of Orlando, and Ronald Alderman of Okeechobee; daughters, Eva Henderson of Okeechobee, and Barbara Alderman of Orlando; sisters, Elvina Jones of Sebring, and Eva Owens of Baltimore, Md.; 28 grandchildren and a host of great-grandchildren.

Visitation will be 1 p.m. until time of service, Saturday, Aug. 22. A celebration of life will begin at 2 p.m. at First Missionary Baptist Church of Deans Court, Okeechobee. Burial will follow at Evergreen Cemetery, Okeechobee.

Arrangements are under the direction of Stone Brothers Funeral Home, Fort Pierce, FL. Please sign the guest book at [www.stonebrothersfuneralhome.com](http://www.stonebrothersfuneralhome.com)



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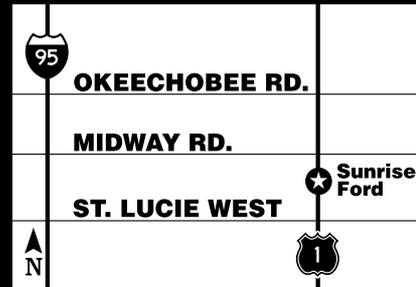
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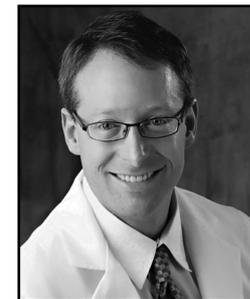
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# Special athletes compete in district bowling

LAKE PLACID—Special athletes from Highlands, Hardee and Okeechobee counties merged together at Royal Palms Bowling Center on Aug. 15, to compete.

Although Special STARS sets up the district wide bowling for all three counties to compete against each other for medals, some athletes choose to get along and play on the same teams. For example, two Hardee County men jumped aboard a team of three Highlands County athletes to make a team to compete in district. There were two other five-person teams in the competition—one from Okeechobee and one made up of all Highlands County athletes.

Okeechobee's team walked away with the gold medals in the team event scoring a total of 1,221 with five people bowling two games. The Hardee/Highlands team took second place with a total of 1,005 while the all-Highlands team got the bronze medal scoring 798.

The winning Okeechobee team had Joseph Berry, Joe Borg, Dana Collins, Nathan Purdue and Tom Gorney on it. Members of the Hardee/Highlands team were Lewis Simpson and Bruce Brummett, both of Hardee County, and Larry Rivers, Greg Robinson and Stephanie Travi, all of Highlands. The Highlands team consisted of Alan Kufnowski, Gerald Bass, Eva Monk, John Smith and Jeannene Eby.

The total medal standings was Highlands winning the most with 14 gold, 16 silver and 10 bronze. Okeechobee was second with eight gold, four silver and six bronze. Hardee took home two silver medals. Ribbons were presented to fourth place winners.

Highlands County athlete Danny Bass joined efforts with Dustin Carey, of Okeechobee, to compete in doubles in assisted ramp bowling. They took home the gold medal as they competed against Jimmy Phipps and Jim Kentfield, both of Highlands, who got silver.

In other doubles competition, Sharon Carpenter and Rodney Walker, of Highlands, took the gold medal. Betty Burnett and Nancy Cassels, of Highlands, teamed up to take the silver while Rhonda Crews and Lucy Wendt, of Okeechobee, took the bronze. In a different division of doubles, Joe Singha and Samantha Martin, of Highlands, won gold, while Okeechobee bowl-

ers Roger Smith and Jodi Mains took silver and Steve Kotch and Jackie Wentworth took bronze.

Sara Canali and Patty Wilfong, of Highlands, teamed up in doubles to do unassisted ramp bowling and won the gold medal against Tony Bock and Herb Adkins, also of Highlands, who won second.

In singles those from Highlands who won gold were Donna Addison, Travis Moss, Lorraine Steeves, Kenny Stoll, Emily Lavelly, Amelia Titus, Perry Bright and Mike Babich. Silver medalists from Highlands were Kelly Gilmore, Patrick Patterson, Emily Harrison, Bobby Talley, Cody Crouse, Helena Spies and Bobby Byrd. Bronze medalists were Linda Decker, Mac

Smith, Frances Goff, Maria Rivera and Kenny Roberts.

Okeechobee's gold medalists in singles were Bill Bailey and Kay Palmer. The silver medalists were John Patrick and Gay Palmer. Bronze medalists were David Westgate and Leonard Bain.



Submitted photos Members of the Okeechobee Special STARS bowling team (from left) Nathan Purdue, Joe Borg, Dana Collins, Tom Gorney and Joseph Berry, celebrate as their names are called to win the gold medal in bowling.



Submitted photos Leonard Bain, a Special STARS athlete from Okeechobee, screams with excitement as his name is called to receive a bronze medal in bowling on Aug. 15, at Royal Palms Bowling Center in Lake Placid.



Submitted photos These are all the bowlers from Okeechobee County who competed in Special STARS Bowling District competition on Aug. 15, at Royal Palms Bowling Center in Lake Placid. They competed against Highlands and Hardee counties.



Submitted photos Special STARS athlete Kay Palmer, of Okeechobee, pushes her bowling ball down the ramp during district competition on Aug. 15, in Lake Placid.

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# Gatorama invites visitors for 'Great gator egg hatch'

PALMDALE—Do your children think education is boring? "It definitely does not have to be," say Allen and Patty Register, owners of Gatorama. It is the time of year that chirping, grunting and snapping baby alligators emerge from their shells to meet the world. Gatorama is marking this occasion by hosting an "Alligator Hatching Festival" Aug. 22 through Sept. 1, at their animal park at 6180 U.S. Highway 27, Palmdale.

"This is a great opportunity for parents to teach their children about one of nature's fascinating life cycles," said Allen Register. "For the next two weeks we will welcome over two thousand alligators into the world

at Gatorama. Guests will actually be able to see these little baby alligators wiggle out of the eggs."

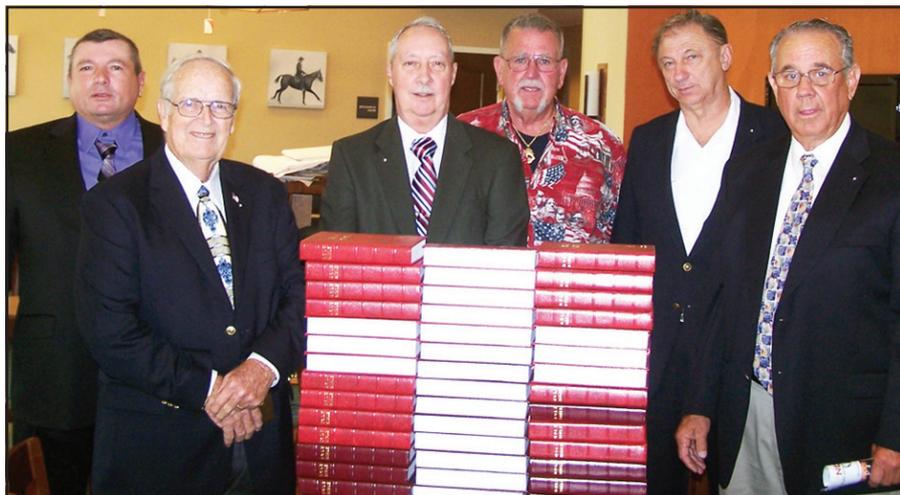
Visitors to Gatorama will also be able to learn about the history of the American alligator and how the populations have been protected through one of the most truly successful, sustainable-use management programs ever implemented. American alligators have been off the endangered species list since 1987 and populations are still growing. Alligator farming is an important part of the program.

For more information and directions, call 863-675-0623 or visit [www.Gatorama.com](http://www.Gatorama.com).



Submitted photo/Gatorama

This little hatchling breaks into the world chirping, grunting and snapping to greet visitors to Gatorama.



Okeechobee News/Pete Gawda

## Spreading the Good News

On Friday morning, Aug. 14 the Gideons presented Bibles to the new Hampton Inn on East Park Street. The Gideons are an organization of business and professional people who belong to various evangelical denominations and who promote the Gospel by distributing Bibles to hotels, motels, doctors' offices, schools and to military people. The presentation included prayer and an explanation of the purpose of the Gideons. Bob Keebler used one of the new Bibles to read Matthew 11:28 where Jesus said: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Clayton Williams told the staff of the Hampton Inn that while the staff was offering physical rest, the Gideons were offering spiritual rest. "We hope they enjoy both," he added. The Gideons then presented pocket-sized New Testaments to the staff of the hotel. Taking part in the presentation were, left to right Del Suggs, Jim Love, Richard Ray, Mike McClanahan, Bob Keebler and Clayton Williams. The hotel will open for business on Sept. 3.



Okeechobee News/Katrina Elsken

## Pet of the Week

Pongo is a Chihuahua and is about 2 years young. He is very gentle and has lots of energy. He is up to date on all of his vaccines and is neutered. If you are interested in adopting Pongo, please contact Human Society Pet Rescue Florida, at 863 357-1104. To see more available animals go to [PETFINDER.COM](http://PETFINDER.COM). Homes are also needed to "foster" animals who are waiting for a permanent adoptive home.

## News in Brief

### Raulerson Ambassadors Club invites volunteers

Raulerson Hospital is inviting Okeechobee residents to join the Raulerson Hospital Ambassadors club. Raulerson Hospital is your community hospital and we welcome individual volunteers who would like to participate in regularly scheduled meeting where your unbiased feedback will help us provide excellent patient care during your stay or a loved one's stay. We are looking for dedicated individuals, who have either been a patient or a visitor at Raulerson Hospital. If you would like to participate in this progressive community program, please contact Marnie Lauter at 863-824-2702 or by e-mailing Marnie Lauter at: ([marnie.lauter@hca-healthcare.com](mailto:marnie.lauter@hca-healthcare.com)) for more information.

### Share your story

Has your life, or that of a loved one, been saved through blood transfusion? Share your story and help encourage blood donations. Call Raye at 863-610-2176.

### Big Brothers, Big Sisters to support reading mentor program

Big Brothers Big Sisters, along with Americorp volunteers, will serve all five Okeechobee elementary schools for the 2009-2010 school year! The program provides reading mentors to referred children in grades K-3. BBBS is hosting a Clay Shoot at Quail Creek Plantation on Saturday, Oct. 24. I hope you can support this program and the children in Okeechobee by sponsoring, donating a drawing item or shooting at this event. Contact Sharon Vinson at Shared Services at 863-462-5000 ext 257 for more information.

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# OKEECHOBEE NEWS

# City taxes could go down 22 percent

By Pete Gawda  
Okeechobee News

In these dismal economic times, there is a ray of sunshine for City of Okeechobee taxpayers. Because of declining property values and no increase in the millage rate, some city residents could see their city taxes go down 22 percent according to Mayor Jim Kirk.

In connection with their regular meeting on Tuesday evening, Aug. 18, the Okeechobee City Council held a workshop to discuss the budget for fiscal year 2009/10.

The proposed \$5,278,639 budget for the coming fiscal year is \$163,715 less than the current budget. Revenues are projected to be \$477,095 less than the current budget.

"We have beat this thing like a dead horse for the past several months," City Administrator Brian Whitehall said of staff and department heads efforts on the budget.

"We thought last year was bad. This year is considerably worse," he added.

It was noted that all sources of taxes are down for the city.

Revenues have come down, down, down," stated the mayor.

However, staff and department heads were very frugal in preparing the proposed budget. All city departments have been pursuing a rigorous cost reduction plan. The city council cut their operating budget 30 percent from the current budget. Other departments noted savings in operating costs ranging from 5 to 18 percent.

The mayor commended budget planners on their efforts.

"It would have been real easy to say, "I can't cut anymore," he said.

The proposed budget contains a 1.5 percent step increase in salary for employees.

"I think giving the step is generous," was the opinion of Councilman Dowling Watford.

"I've always liked to give raises," said the mayor. "This time I can't do it in good conscience. We're in a crisis."

Councilman Lowery Markham stated that in the past the council had always given employees what they could.

Since they could not give raises, it was the consensus of the council to follow Council Mike O'Connor's suggestion to give city employees a holiday for their birthdays. In addition, staff was directed to look at the cost of giving employees up to four additional days off. These days would be taken one a time, once a quarter. They would be taken either on a Friday or a Monday to give the employee a long weekend.

The proposed budget could have been balanced with a millage rate of 7.3121. One mil equals one dollar in taxes for every \$1,000 of assessed value. However, the city council decided to keep the current millage rate of 6.7432. The funds brought in by that millage rate are calculated to be \$159,450 less than the amount required to balance the budget. That difference will be made up from reserves.

It must be noted that this is a proposed budget and the above figures are subject to change before adoption of the final budget.

Turning to other matters the council set a solid waste collection rate of \$216.48 per customer. In a related matter, the council adopted an amendment to the franchise agree-

ment with Waste Management. The amendment renewed the franchise agreement until Sept. 30, 2014 and provides for renewal for five consecutive years. It modified the wording of the original franchise agreement and provided for recycling. It also set a cap of 7.5 percent per year on rate increases and established rates for commercial dumpsters.

Councilman Clayton Williams cast the lone dissenting vote against the Waste Management agreement. He was opposed to the 7.5 percent annual cap on rate increases. Councilman Williams had offered an amendment to set the cap at 3 percent. However, his amendment failed by a vote of 4 to 1.

The council also held the first reading and set Sept. 1 as final public hearing for a proposed ordinance to close a portion of SW 15th Street.

In other action, the council:

- appointed Billy Douglas and Glenn Hodges to the fire pension board;
- re-appointed Gary Ritter to the fire pension board; and
- appointed Judy Douglas and Bill Ledford as regular members of the code enforcement board and Allison Murphy as an alternate member of that board.

Post your opinions in the Public Issues Forum at [www.newszap.com](http://www.newszap.com). Reporter Pete Gawda can be reached at [pgawda@newszap.com](mailto:pgawda@newszap.com).

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## Shared Services to sponsor first 'Tween Summit'

The Shared Services Network, funders of the Community Collaborative Council, is pleased to present the very first "Tween Summit." This summit is for children 10-12 years old with his/her parents; at IRSC in Okeechobee on Friday, Aug. 21, from 6-8 p.m. The summit is free, and will offer a free backpack with school supplies to

the first 100 children with a parent present, and 100 bags of supplies to the second 100 attendees with a parent present. There will also be free pizza, soda and cookies prior to the guest speakers. Linking parents and children together through communication is the theme.

## Save \$\$\$\$ on Your DMV Transactions

A message from your Tax Collector:

The Florida Legislature has increased motor vehicle and vessel fees effective September 1, 2009. If your birth month is prior to December 1, 2009, you can avoid these higher fees by renewing vehicle and/or vessel registrations before September 1. Also, by choosing the optional 2-year renewal, you will lock in the lower fees for two years. If your birth month is September, the renewal notice mailed to you could reflect the higher fees. If you plan to mail your renewal prior to September 1, call our office at 863-763-3421 to obtain the correct amount. Internet renewals or in-person renewals at the Tax Collector's office will be at the current rate until September 1. To view the new fee schedule go to [www.okeechobeeountytaxcollector.com](http://www.okeechobeeountytaxcollector.com) and click the blue link under the Fee Increase article.

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# Jury finds man guilty of battery

By Eric Kopp  
Okeechobee News

An Okeechobee man was sentenced Wednesday, Aug. 19, to a term of eight months in the Okeechobee County Jail after being found guilty of misdemeanor battery. Reginald Massey, 25, was arrested Sept. 7, 2008, on a felony charge of aggravated

battery. However, a six-member jury of his peers found him guilty of misdemeanor battery—a lesser-included crime.

Massey was arrested by Deputy Justin Akins, of the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office (OCSO), and accused of hitting the victim in the face with a semi-automatic handgun. An arrest report by Deputy Akins indicated that the victim, Marlon Scott, was

struck as he was getting out of a truck that was driven by Felton Johnson.

Assistant State Attorney Stephanie Tew indicated that the jury apparently felt it was a mutual fight and chose to convict Massey on the misdemeanor charge.

Massey was represented by Roger Azcona of the Public Defender's Office.

# County reports fewer traffic crashes

By Charles M. Murphy  
Okeechobee News

The number of fatalities, alcohol related crashes, and motor vehicle crashes on Okeechobee roads were down by over five percent in 2008 according to the latest report from the Florida Department of Highway and Motor Vehicles.

Okeechobee saw a 5-percent decrease in crashes, a 7.4 percent decrease in fatalities, and a 6-percent decrease in alcohol related crashes last year, according to the state.

There were 398 crashes in Okeechobee, which was a low rate for a Florida county

our size between 35,000 and 100,000 population.

There were 55 alcohol related crashes, nine fatalities, and six alcohol related fatalities on Okeechobee roads last year.

There were 14 fatalities and six alcohol related fatalities in Okeechobee during 2007.

The report said there were 34 crashes that involved alcohol and injuries, 23 accidents with injuries that involved motorcycles, one bicycle fatality, and one pedestrian fatality reported in 2008. There were 55 crashes involving commercial vehicles with two fatalities.

Okeechobee City had 115 total crashes. Of those, 9.6 percent were alcohol related, the report said.

Glades County also saw a decline in the number of crashes, 128. They had 19 alcohol related crashes, 13 fatalities, and six alcohol related fatalities. The number of fatal accidents were up sharply as only three people lost their lives in Glades County in 2007.

Glades County had 14 accidents that involved injury and alcohol, and three crashes where pedestrians were injured. While there was a reduction in commercial vehicle crashes, nine of them resulted in fatalities last year.

Moore Haven City reported 27 crashes. Nineteen percent of those crashes were alcohol related.

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# Florida Highway Patrol to conduct driver's license check

The Florida Highway Patrol, will be conducting a driver's license checkpoint on Friday, Aug. 21, from 8 until 10 a.m., at the location of State Road 700 (aka Parrott Avenue or U.S. 441) and 18th Street in Okeechobee County.

Recognizing the danger presented to the public by defective vehicle equipment, troopers will concentrate their efforts on ve-

hicles being operated with defects such as bad brakes, worn tires and defective lighting equipment. In addition, attention will be directed to driver's license violations.

Law enforcement has found these checkpoints to be an effective means of enforcing the equipment and drivers license laws of Florida while ensuring the protection of all motorists.

# Local pet rescue needs your help

The Humane Society Pet Rescue of Okeechobee needs help to keep the shelter a great place for adoptable pets to stay. Many of our "shelter helpers" will be going back to school and we need help in keeping kennels

a clean place for dogs, cats, puppies and kittens. We are also in need of donations to help with food, vet and other operating expenses. Anyone interested in helping is asked to contact Belinda at the shelter at 863-357-1104.

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# Okeechobee high school golf teams have high hopes

By Charles M. Murphy  
Okeechobee News

Interest in golf is running rampant at Okeechobee High School.

An astounding number of 20 boys and 13 girls showed up for tryouts this week.

The boy's team is expected to be very competitive again. They were district runners up and a regional qualifier last year. They did lose Corey White, but have gained teenage golf prodigy Kodi Stephen.

Also on the team are Michael Watson, a second team all conference performer last year, and Richard Donegan, who shot the low score of the year for the team 34, and was an honorable mention selection to the Treasure Lake Conference All star squad.

Boys Coach Mark Ward said a lot of his players are now committed full time to the game of golf and have developed their skills immensely in the past year.

"We have 20 boys and 15 girls coming out here in this heat, walking around with a bag of clubs on their arm. That says a lot about their dedication to the sport," he noted.

Ward also gets help from assistant Coach Bubba Mullins, and girls coach Lonnie Sears. He also praised the Okeechobee Golf and Country Club for donating the use of their

course to the high school team. He also personally thanked Jim Waldau and Terry Lanman for their support of the program. He also praised the Okeechobee Booster Club for their financial assistance.

Other members of the boy's team include Jimmy Hadden, who has undergone two shoulder surgeries in the past 24 months, and Tim Gray, a starter on last year's squad.

Tyler Platt, and Tony Devoss are also expected to be huge contributors this year.

"Gray plays a lot and takes a big rip at the ball, but he's consistent. Tyler is a competitor, who works hard at his game, and Devoss has the skills and the composure to be very good," Ward noted.

Ward said Donegan has tons of potential to be great at both golf and baseball. "He'll have a decision to make on what sport he will focus on someday," Ward added.

Stephen strikes the ball as well as any player on the team. He has been competing in tournaments across the state for several years. "He's right there with the best we have," Ward said.

Other contributors include Danny Busbin, and Tyler Finney.

Ward said other golfers could step up in the next two weeks and also make the squad.

The girl's team has a lot of new faces, but return several players.

"They have a little bit of experience so that should help them. They are excited

and willing to learn," Ward added.

Key players include Sarah Payne, Chyenne Prescott and Emily Raulerson.



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy

Jimmy Hadden is coming back from two shoulder surgeries to be a key member of the golf team.



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy

Tim Gray is expected to have another strong season for Okeechobee golf.

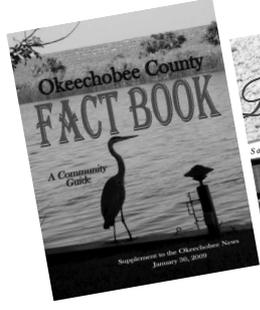


Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy

Tony Devoss eyes a putt during a golf practice Wednesday.

Kodi Stephen launches his drive off the 9th tee during practice Wednesday. Richard Donegan tees off during golf practice Wednesday. Tyler Platt lines up a shot during golf practice Wednesday.

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# Crawford follows in footsteps

By Charles M. Murphy  
Okeechobee News

The Florida Gators came-a-calling and Jonathan Crawford didn't take long to decide he wanted to play baseball in Gainesville.

Crawford verbally committed to the Gators late last week and will officially sign on Nov. 11.

"I've never been a Gator fan at all. They put a good offer on the table for me. It was the best offer so I just took it," he said.

Crawford still has options as he admits his ultimate goal is to play professional baseball.

He said he was very impressed with the way the Gators handled the situation.

"Playing pro ball has been my dream ever since I started playing baseball. I plan on playing pro ball," he stated.

Crawford's uncle David was drafted by the Philadelphia Phillies organization. His father Neal also played ball in Okeechobee. His cousin Matt was a prolific homerun hitter for Okeechobee, who went on to play at South Florida Community College.

Crawford said his family just is committed to playing baseball, "They just enjoy it and know a lot. They love the sport."

Brahman Coach Dylan Tedders has had three players sign Division I scholarships. Blake Marsocci and Robbie Elsemiller played at Stetson University. He noted he's not surprised that a top team plucked Crawford early.

"They (Florida) knew the more people that saw him play that would mean a greater chance that someone else would come along. They didn't want to lose him," Tedders said.

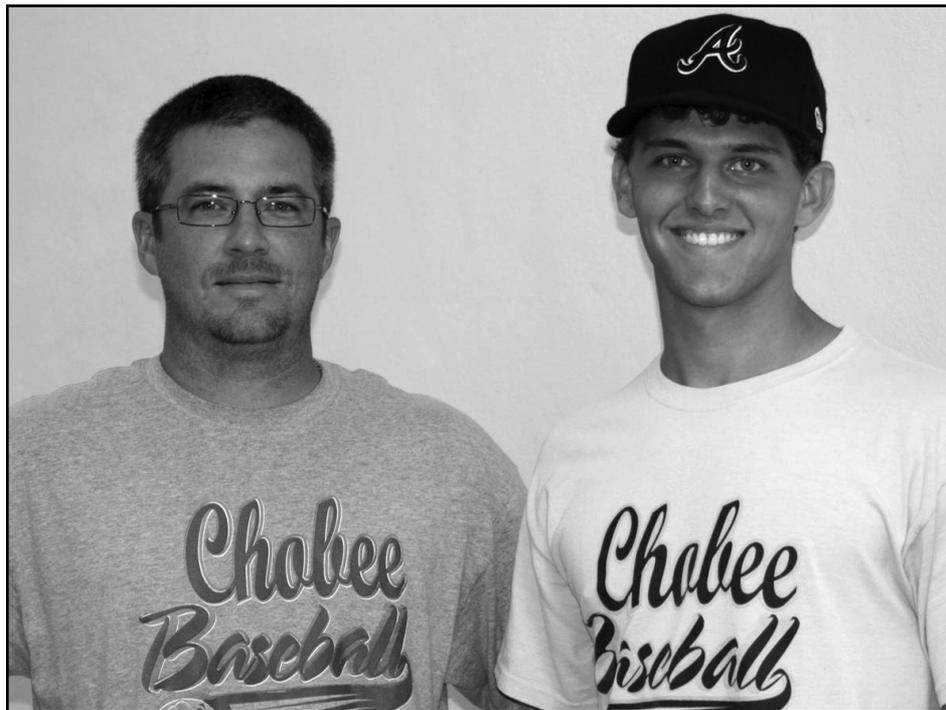
Crawford attended a baseball player showcase in Lakeland run by Sunshine Athletic Incorporated in early August. He threw a bullpen and impressed a number of college scouts and coaches.

Tedders said the scouts liked his talent, his size, and his potential, "He's a great kid. He's always smiling about something. He works hard. He had a rough sophomore year, but he was mentally focused to keep working and not give up. Natural talent plus the desire to work hard mean good things will happen."

Crawford won three games at last year's District tournament to lead Okeechobee to a playoff berth. He has 10 career wins and over 150 strikeouts. He has averaged over a strikeout per inning. He explained that he has worked out a lot this off season, and also played American Legion ball to improve his skills. He said the decision about college will take a lot of the pressure off his shoulders for his senior year.

"The Gator Coach liked my pitching a lot. He liked my hitting. He said I have a good chance to be a two way player. Now I can cruise through the high school season with no pressure and just play for fun."

Tedders said he expects a lot of pro scouts at Brahman games this year. He also stated a community celebration is planned to honor Crawford on Nov. 11, when he signs his college scholarship.



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy  
(l-r) Brahman Coach Dylan Tedders and Brahman hurler Jonathan Crawford.

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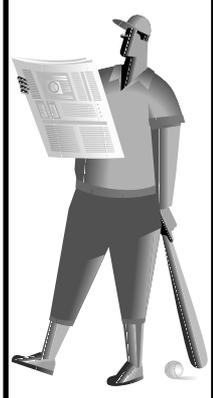
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