

OKEECHOBEE NEWS

Vol. 100 No. 155

Sunday, December 27, 2009

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Jingles, the dog, celebrates new home ... Page 8

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High school graduation rates improve

By Charles M. Murphy
 Okeechobee News

Okeechobee continued to show improvements on their graduation and drop out rates according to an annual report released by the Florida Department of Education.

Director of K-12 accountability and assessment Sharon Suits said Okeechobee seems to get better and better each year as more stu-

dents earn diplomas.

"We are very pleased with our progress," Mrs. Suits said. "We see more graduates each year. We look to make further improvements this year."

There are three different formulas being used to determine graduation and drop out rates. Florida has its own calculation. The National Governors Association has a second classification and the Fed-

eral government has a third calculation known as the no child left behind program.

Okeechobee had a 69.3 percent graduation rate under the Florida standards, 64.4 percent under the NGA, and a 66.2 percent rate under the no child left behind standards in 2008-2009.

Since 2004, under the NGA formula, Okeechobee's graduation rate has risen from 58.5 percent

to 64.4 percent. The NGA counts all standard diplomas, and special diplomas for ESE students. It does not count GED diplomas.

Since 2004 under the no child left behind calculation Okeechobee's graduation rate has increased from 58 percent to 66.2 percent. This calculation only measures students who earn

See SCHOOL— Page 12

Okeechobee County ranch goes 'green'

By Charles M. Murphy
 Okeechobee News

Last week's rain made a lot of Okeechobee pastures greener than before. One local ranch has gone green in more ways than one.

The Southern Accent Farm, owned for nearly a decade by Allen Smith, recently installed a commercial solar array on the roof of their equipment shed and uses solar energy to power the commercial operations on their ranch off US 441 north.

"All of us need to look at something to offset what we buy. We definitely need to go green. It's very cost effective, do your homework. It's a good thing."

The 16 kilowatt system powers the shop, the equipment barn, the cow pens and the horse barn at the ranch. Smith worked in the nuclear industry and states he knows how much energy it takes to operate business today. "We need to look at the future because every dollar counts in the farming industry right now."

Mr. Smith said everyone needs to be doing something to help the environment. "Foreign oil is killing us; we have so much debt to

other countries."

Mr. Smith also recycles almost everything that comes onto the ranch. He said he is not an advocate of feeding large landfills.

His is the first commercial operation in Glades Electric's territory to go solar power. There are seven residences that are powered by solar power in their territory, officials said.

Mr. Smith moved here from Manatee County. He said he hasn't regretted the move for one instant and is thrilled to be a part of Okeechobee, "It's the best place in the world for us to move. It's great. We love it here."

The system cost about \$110,000. Complete Electric of Sebastian installed the system over the summer. Already Mr. Smith has saved about 5,000 kilowatts of power since he installed the system. The annual savings is about \$4,000.

The solar panels were installed on the roof of his equipment barn. The company added steel braces and reinforcement to handle the extra load.

Federal grant and state rebates helped Mr. Smith pay for the new

See GREEN — Page 12



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy
Allen Smith poses with his Brangus Bull, Cade, a very friendly bull at his Okeechobee ranch.



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Okeechobee Clerks of court budgets now online

By Eric Kopp
Okeechobee News

Following the state trend of keeping governmental business open and transparent, Florida clerks of court have posted their budgets on line for all to see.

The Clerks in the Sunshine web site can be found at www.myfloridaclerks.com.

"I think it's great. We all want to have a transparent government," said Sharon Robertson, the Okeechobee County clerk of courts.

The web sites provides the public with information about where their court fees go and how their tax dollars are being used at both the local and state levels.

"While our budgets have always been public record, posting them all in one loca-

tion will make it easier for citizens to view how we are spending public dollars to achieve our constitutional mission -- protecting public records and auditing local government to ensure Florida's tax dollars are spent according to the law," said Jim Fuller, Duval County clerk of court and president of the Florida Association of Court Clerks and Comptrollers.

"This will let everybody know that we don't have a pot of gold," said Ms. Robertson. "We're running a tight ship."

Before long, the public will have access to the budgets and more for each governmental department in Okeechobee County.

County administrator Lyndon Bonner said the county "will be rolling out a whole new web site." He said he hopes to have the new site available to the public by the March

2010 meeting of the Okeechobee County Board of County Commissioners.

"We're shooting for March 15," he said. "But it's going to be a few weeks before it's ready to be tested." The clerk of the circuit court was established by the Constitution of

1838 and is the public trustee for the county. The clerk provides the checks and balances in county government by acting in their capacity as clerk to the board, clerk to the court, keeper of the public record, comptroller and internal auditor of county funds.

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).

- Joseph Colton Herbst III, 25, N.W. 90th Court, Okeechobee, was arrested Dec. 22 by Deputy Raul Marrero on an Okeechobee County warrant charging him with violation of probation - dealing in stolen property. He is being held without bond.

- Ryan Christopher Bass, 28, Pine Drive, Pom-

pano Beach, was arrested Dec. 22 by Deputy Corporal Aric Majere on a Department of Corrections amended warrant charging him with violation of probation - giving false information to a pawn broker - less than \$300. He is being held without bond.

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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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!

Abuse

• In the case of the 12-year-old who is accused of abusing other boys, I am glad that the newspaper kept all identifying information out of the paper so that no one knows who the victims are. I know since this is a felony you could have printed the name and address of the boy, but I suspect that would make it too easy for people to guess who the victims are. With so many kids out of school for the flu last week and all of them out on holiday break this week, there is no way anyone can identify the parties involved. It is important for parents to know it happened, so they can talk to their own children, and I hope all of those involved get the help they need to get past this.

• In most cases, sexual abusers were abused themselves. They need to get help for the victims; find out if there were any more victims and get them help; and find out if the 12-year-old was abused and if so by whom, and if that person had other victims. A victim who does not get help can turn into an abuser and the cycle goes on. It is horrible that this was done to children.

Elephants

• Is there any word on if the elephant preserve will ever open? I recall reading about it quite a while ago, that they were building an elephant preserve just past the Okeechobee County line. I think it would be great to have elephants in the area. Maybe they could put one in the parade, but I don't know if they could get anyone to volunteer to be the pooper scooper behind that parade entry.



Drainage

• The county planners need to start driving around the community after a heavy rain. There is water backing up all over the place because people have done things to interfere with the drainage. For example, a guy who is tired of his backyard being soggy puts in a bunch of fill dirt and backs the water up on the neighbors. That is against the law and the county should do something to restore the flow. Another guy wants a new driveway and puts in a culvert, but to save money puts in a small one and it cannot handle the flow of water and it backs up and floods the road. That is also illegal. But until the county starts cracking down on these things, nothing will improve. Also, people need to understand that the county ditches are there to drain the roads, period. The ditches along the sides of a road are not to drain your property. Water that falls on your property is expected to stay on your property and ideally you should leave enough grass area that the water can soak in and recharge the aquifer.

Holiday hours

• In response to the employee who complained because a local store is open on Christmas Eve and the employees have to stay after it closes to clean and restock, I have a solution for that. If people would quit shopping on Christmas Eve, the stores would close. The same goes for Sundays. If people did not shop on Sunday, the stores would close and everyone could have a day off with their families. It amazes me how many so-called Christians shop on Sunday, even though this means they are forcing other people to work on the Lord's Day. If you think it is against the Bible to work on a Sunday, then you should not shop on a Sunday because this forces other people to work on that day. If no one shopped on Sunday, the stores would close that day. Merchants would not keep a store open with no customers.

• The guy who complained about having to work on Christmas Eve should consider himself lucky. Think about the cops, firefighters, health care professionals and others who have to work on Christmas Day. There are many jobs that have to be staffed seven days a week in order for society to function. Be happy that at least the store is closed on Christmas Day and you get to spend that day with your family because some people are not so lucky.

Letters to the editor

Nursing home care questioned

On behalf of the more than 400 volunteer long-term care ombudsmen statewide who advocate for improved quality of life and care for residents, I am writing to share a concern about a growing trend in Florida's nursing homes, the improper transfer and discharge of nursing home residents. Proper resident transfer and discharge processes are crucial to protecting the safety and ensuring the wellbeing of elders who live in nursing homes.

When a nursing home initiates the transfer or discharge of a resident who has lived there at least 30 days, facility staff must provide the resident with a written 30-day notice of the transfer or discharge, unless certain conditions exist.

Under state and federal law, a resident may only be discharged for one of six specified reasons, including if he or she falls behind in payment, if he or she is endangering him/herself or others or if the facility is unable provide adequate care for the resident's needs. Both endangerment and a facility's inability to care for the resident must be documented in the resident's medical record. This documentation for discharge may only be completed by the facility's medical director or the resident's physician. If this authorization occurs, the resident and her legal representative must then be given proper notice of the facility's intent to discharge the resident.

If the resident falls behind on his or her payments, the nursing home has the duty to assist the resident in enrolling in the appropriate Medicaid or Medicare Programs to cover the costs. If a resident is still behind

in payment after the assistance is provided, then the facility may discharge the individual with a written 30-day notice.

A copy of all discharge notices must be sent to the local long-term care ombudsman office. This notice gives ombudsmen the opportunity to review cases and facilitate any communication necessary between a resident and the facility, ensuring each resident receives the treatment and respect they deserve and that his or her right to challenge an improper transfer or discharge is protected.

Residents should never be threatened with a transfer or discharge by any staff member. Any such threats are a violation of federal and state law and should be reported to the ombudsman and/or to the Agency for Health Care Administration.

All residents have the right to file a request for a fair hearing to appeal a discharge. If a resident has reason to believe he or she has grounds for such an appeal, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program encourages these individuals to file a request for hearing within the first 10 days of receiving the notice. Acting within the initial 10 day window allows a resident to remain in the current facility until the hearing is concluded. An ombudsman volunteer can assist in the hearing process as well as represent residents at the hearing. If you or a loved one has concerns about a transfer or discharge notice, or any other issues concerning a long-term care facility resident, call us toll-free at 1-888-831-0404 or visit us online at: <http://ombudsman.myflorida.com>.

In service,
Brian Lee
State Ombudsman
lee@elderaffairs.org

Community Calendar

Sunday

A.A. meeting from 7:30 until 8:30 p.m. at the Church of Our Saviour, 200 N.W. Third St. It will be an open step meeting.

A.A. open 12 step meeting from 7:30 until 8:30 p.m. at the Church of Our Savior, 200 N.W. Third St.

A.A. meeting will be held from noon to 1 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, 200 N.W. Second St. This will be an open meeting.

Monday

A.A. Grapevine open meetings at 6:30 p.m. at Okeechobee Presbyterian Church, 312 N. Parrot Ave.

A.A. meeting from noon to 1 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church, 200 N.W. Second St. This will be an open meeting.

Tuesday

Al-Ateen and Alanon meeting at the Church of Our Saviour, 200 N.W. Third St., at 8 p.m.

OKEECHOBEE NEWS

To Reach Us

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To Submit News

The Okeechobee News welcomes submissions from its readers. Opinions, calendar items, stories ideas and photographs are welcome. Call (863) 763-3134 to reach our newsroom. Items may be mailed, faxed or e-mailed.

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Call 800-282-8586 to report a missed newspaper or poor delivery.

Additional copies of the newspaper are available for 50 cents Wednesday and Friday and 75 cents for Sunday at the office. Home delivery subscriptions are available at \$18.00 for three months.

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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.

MEMBER

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Reflections from the Pulpit

By Rev. Dr. Paul E. Jackson, Sr.
International Prayer Warriors for Christ

Where do I begin, or where do I end? Here it is Sunday, Dec. 27, 2009 and we have just four more days and this year will come to an end. I know that a lot of people had a bad year, but I also know that God will never give anyone more than they can handle. I do hope your Christmas was a good one, and I hope that you will take the time to really thank the Lord for all that he has done for you over the years. As I stated above, there are just four days left in this year, meaning 2009 will be history and 2010 should begin. While I still have the chance, I want to write something, not about just someone or something, but something about each of you reading this, and I do hope that you will enjoy every word.

I want to take the time for all of you to think about something that is so great about each of you, that is that, in your own way you are unique! You see, to me each one of you has your own special way that can't be matched or compared to anyone else. I want you to think about what a remarkable and miraculous thing it is to be you. Of all the people who have come and gone on this earth, since the beginning of time, not one of them has been like you. No one who has ever lived or will ever live will ever have your combination of abilities, talents, opportunities, acquaintances, burdens, friends or sorrows, for believe me when I say, it will never happen.

No one's fingerprints are like yours, and no one has the same combination of jokes and also expressions that you have. The few people who laugh at all the same things you do don't smile the way you do. No one prays about exactly the same things you do. No one is loved by the same combination of people that love you, no one before, and no one to come, for you are absolutely unique. Enjoy that uniqueness. You do not have to pretend in order to seem more like someone else, for you weren't meant to be like someone else. You don't have to lie to conceal the parts of you that are not like what you see in anyone else. Just try to understand that you were meant to be different.

Nowhere ever in all of history will the same things be going on in anyone's mind, soul and spirit as are going on in yours right now as you read this. If you did not exist, there would be a hole in creation, a gap in history, something missing from the plan for humankind. I want you to really treasure your uniqueness, for it is a gift given to you. No one can reach out to others in the same way that you can and no one can comfort with your kind of comfort. There is no one who can be cheerful and lighthearted and joyous in your way. No one else can bring the whole unique impact of you to another human being.

Share your uniqueness. Let it be free to flow out among your family, friends and people you meet in the rush and clutter of living wherever you are. That gift of yours was given to enjoy and share. Everyone is

given a gift or talent from God, but it is up to each person to find what it is. When you do, you will know and you will be inspired just knowing it. God made each of us different in His own way and not one person is alike and never will be. You may have a lot in common with me or others, but no one will ever be you.

There are many people in this world that are not saved, some have still never heard of God, and some that don't believe in such a being as God. To those that are still not saved, it's our responsibility as Christians to try to help them get saved. It's our responsibility to be sure and spread the Word of God throughout this world, and for those that are atheist, it is still our responsibility as Christians to try and help them see where there is a Heaven and a Hell, and then it's up to them to choose which one, if either, to believe in.

I want to take this time that I have, and when I says that I have, no one but God knows how much anyone's time is, for only He holds the clock of life and death. For the last three years the Okeechobee News has given me a chance each month to write an article titled "Reflections from the Pulpit" and I am proud to do that. What I hate so bad is that the Ten Commandments are no longer on the courthouse wall, there are no Bibles anymore in any of the courthouses, and there are no prayers given in any of the public schools. But on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday, the Okeechobee News is published and you will see that God is still a big

part in that and you can believe me or not, but in my heart, I even feel that God reads the Okeechobee News.

Also try starting 2010 by doing something very important. Quit complaining so much about what isn't in the paper and be proud of what is in the paper, for there is no one that works for that paper that doesn't believe in God. Also, try to quit complaining about what the county commissioners don't do and be proud they open each meeting with a prayer. Quit complaining about what the city council doesn't do, and know they also open each meeting with a prayer. I would say that of every organization in this town that all, including sheriff, police and fire department, will open every meeting with a prayer! For this is God's town.

H1N1 shots available

The Okeechobee County Health Department will conduct H1N1 flu immunization clinics at the health department, 1728 NW 9th Ave. Appointments can be made by calling 863-462-5819.

The vaccine is available to anyone over 6 months of age. Vaccination is voluntary and there is no charge. Consent forms and vaccine information statements can be found at www.okeechobeeec.com.

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WEDDING & BIRTH ILLUSTRATION
Joseph Wayne Example and Jane Ann Example were married on Jan. 1, 2009, in Local Church. The bride, Jane, was the daughter of George and Jane Example of Your Town. The groom is the son of Sam Example and Jane Example of Your Town. The bride is a graduate of Central High School. She is currently a student at Florida State University. She is currently a student at Florida State University. She is currently a student at Florida State University.

BIRTH
Susan A. Example was born at 1:30 p. m. on Dec. 27, 2009, in Newborn Hospital. She weighed 7 pounds, 10 ounces, and was 20.5 inches long. She is the daughter of George and Jane Example of Your Town. Her maternal grandparents are Mr. & Mrs. John Example of Your Town. Her paternal grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Example of Your Town. Her great-grandparents are Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Example of Your Town and Mr. and Mrs. Wesley Example of Your Town.

ANNIVERSARY
Joseph W. Example and Jane A. Example celebrated their 10th wedding anniversary with family and friends on October 18, 2009. The celebration was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Example of Your Town. The bride is a graduate of Central High School. She is currently a student at Florida State University. She is currently a student at Florida State University. She is currently a student at Florida State University.

WEDDING ILLUSTRATION
Joseph W. Example and Jane A. Example were married on Jan. 1, 2009, in Local Church. The bride, Jane, was the daughter of George and Jane Example of Your Town. The groom is the son of Sam Example and Jane Example of Your Town. The bride is a graduate of Central High School. She is currently a student at Florida State University. She is currently a student at Florida State University. She is currently a student at Florida State University.

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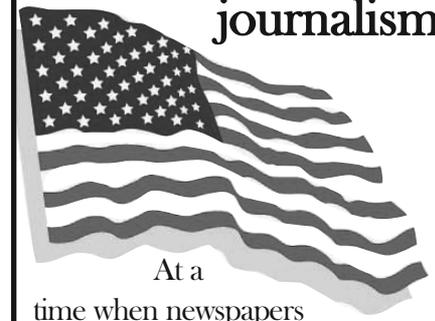
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Community Events

Masonic Lodge holds breakfast

The Masonic Lodge, 107 NW 5th St., will hold a breakfast on Sunday, **Dec. 27**, from 8-11 a.m., with eggs, bacon, sausage, grits, pancakes, biscuits/gravy, juice and coffee. The public is welcome. For information call, Hugh Alger, 863-467-1491.

Register for IRSC online

Indian River State College students can use the convenience of the web to register and pay for their classes for the Spring Semester while the College is closed for Winter Break. Classes for the Spring Semester start Jan. 6. The last day to pay for classes and avoid a late fee is Jan. 4. For more information about IRSC and to register and pay for classes, visit www.irsc.edu.

Obituaries

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.

Vivian Viola Benson, 74

OKEECHOBEE — Vivian Viola Benson, age 74, of Okeechobee, died Tuesday, Dec. 22, 2009, at her residence.

Born Dec. 3, 1935, in West Palm Beach, she had been a resident of Okeechobee since 2004 and loved the outdoors.

She was preceded in death by her sisters, Florence and Ardella.

She is survived by her husband, Charles of Okeechobee; sons, Joseph August Benson of Okeechobee, Buck Lawrence Benson of Lake Worth, Douglas Milton Benson of West Palm; granddaughters, Katie Jo Benson of Lake Worth, Nicole Benson of West Virginia; grandsons, Todd Benson and Daniel Benson both of West Palm. In addition she is survived by several brothers and sisters.

There will be no public visitation or services.

All arrangements are under the direction and care of the Buxton Funeral Home and Crematory, 110 NE 5th Street, Okeechobee, Fl. On line condolences may be made at www.buxtonfuneralhome.com.

Benefit for Lisa Burkhardt

Lisa Burkhardt is battling cancer for the second time. She is a breast cancer survivor who is now battling brain and lung cancer. A benefit for her will be held at the VFW Post 10539, 3912 Highway 441 S.E., on **Jan. 10**, starting at 1 p.m. There will be food, music, raffles and more. For information, call 863-697-2930.

OCRA to hold registration

OCRA will hold registration for T-ball, baseball and softball at the sports complex each Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. beginning **Jan. 9** through Jan. 30. Fees for the spring season will be \$75 for baseball and softball and \$60 for T-ball. All youth ages 5-14 are encouraged to play! For questions, please call 863-634-1437.

William S. Riordan, Sr., 87

OKEECHOBEE — William S. Riordan, Sr., age 87, of Okeechobee, died Wednesday, December 23, 2009 at his residence.

Born Au. 30, 1922, in Medford, Mass., he had been a resident since 1983. He proudly served in the U.S. Army during World War II and was a member of the Peace Lutheran Church, member of a Barber Shop Quartet and Just 4 Kicks. He sang for charitable events all over Okeechobee and was an avid car enthusiast. He loved to travel and yard sale.

He is survived by his wife, Virginia of Okeechobee; son, Steve Riordan (Marilyn) of Okeechobee; daughters, Linda Brooks (Tom) of Rogersville, Tenn., Lori Pack (Jerry) of Okeechobee, Debbie Montgomery (Danny) of Coconut Creek, Mary Burris (Troy) of Okeechobee; and brother, Albert Riordan of Weymouth, Massachusetts. In addition he is survived by eight grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.

The family will receive friends on Wednesday, December 30, from 12:30 p.m. until service time of 2:30 p.m. in the Buxton Funeral Home Chapel with Pastor John C. Hirst of the Peace Lutheran Church officiating. Interment will take place at a later date in Palm Beach Memorial Park.

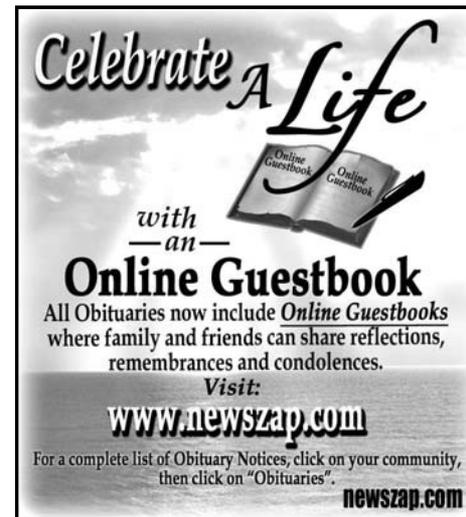
All arrangements are under the direction and care of the Buxton Funeral Home and Crematory, 110 Ne 5th Street, Okeechobee, Fl 34972. On-line condolences may be made at www.buxtonfuneralhome.com.



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Pine Creek Sporting Club celebrates new lodge

Local children benefit from holiday 'gift drive'

On Saturday, Dec. 19, Pine Creek Sporting Club, a new members-only ranch community located in Okeechobee, hosted a holiday shoot and feast to collect gifts for the children of My Aunt's House, an Okeechobee-based nonprofit organization that provides clothing, shoes, back-to-school supplies and Santa gifts to low income families, and celebrate the grand opening of the Clubhouse Lodge, a 7,000 square foot luxury hunting lodge.

The event was a great success with more than 250 people in attendance, including founding member and former #1 NFL draft pick, Tucker Frederickson, and Okeechobee County Commissioner Margaret Helton. Attendees participated in a number of events ranging from sporting clays to ornament making. More than 100 gifts were collected

for the children of My Aunt's House, and Santa Clause was also on the property with his team of live reindeer.

"We are thrilled by the success of this event," said general manager Jeff Budz. "More than 100 gifts were collected for our community's neediest families and fun was had by all."

Many youth attended the event and enjoyed archery, fishing, horseback riding, and trap shooting. Bluegrass band Highway 441 entertained the guests during the BBQ feast.

For more information on Pine Creek Sporting Club, visit www.pine-creeksporting-club.com.



Special to the Okeechobee News Pine Creek Sporting Club hosted a holiday shoot and feast on Dec. 19.

Special to the Okeechobee News Children who attended Pine Creek Sporting Club's holiday event enjoyed outdoor activities, including archery. At top, gifts were collected for My Aunt's House.



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Injured and abandoned dog has Merry Christmas

By Pete Gawda
Okeechobee News

A badly injured Okeechobee dog is on the road to recovery thanks to an animal lover.

A dog in horrible shape with serious facial injuries who appeared to have mange was found a few weeks ago at the intersection of U.S. 441 and S.R. 70 and brought to Okeechobee County Animal Control.

The staff did not have the facilities for proper treatment and were about to euthanize the dog. That is where Robin Hansen of Saint Bernard Rescue in West Palm Beach came into the picture. She had been called to animal control to take charge of a Saint Bernard that had been picked up. On her way to the Saint Bernard's kennel she passed the injured dog's kennel. He was cute, but a mess, he was skin and bones, covered in mange and very sad. On the way out she passed his kennel again. The way he was looking at her, she could not resist.

She decided to take the dog, who appeared to be a Catahoula mix, as a Christmas project and named him "Jingles." Jingles could not open his mouth. He could only open his teeth enough to stick out his tongue. She said his mouth looked like a "mail slot." The only way he could eat was by smashing his food with his face and licking up the crumbs.

"It was heartbreaking to watch," she said. "I started to cry."

The good news was that Jingles had the

noncontagious type mange, easily treated. However, the vet who examined Jingles had never seen a jaw injury like that before. Sedation and x-ray revealed that Jingles had received a blow, perhaps a kick, several months earlier that broke his jaw. The jaw healed wrong and the jaw bone was absorbed into the skull. The vet had to cut away a quarter of Jingle's jaw. The surgery was successful and now Jingles can eat, bark, and pant like any other dog.

Without proper treatment, Ms. Hansen said that Jingles would have died because his jaw would continue to tighten up.

Jingles is recovering nicely, he has been neutered, and he is putting on weight. He has been adopted by one of the nurses at the animal hospital Ms. Hansen manages. Jingles will be in his new home once his stitches are removed.

However, that is not the end of the story. Ms. Hansen, who deals with animal control organizations all over the state, said the people at Okeechobee have always been kind, friendly and easy to deal with. She said they have always been helpful even though they are not very well funded. She said other animal control organizations have a lot more to work with. She decided to start taking up a collection to buy a microscope for animal control so they can properly diagnose mange. She said a medical supply house has agreed to furnish one at cost. She also discovered that animal control does not have a washing machine. She is trying to se-

cure one for the facility. Anyone wishing to donate can contact Ms. Hansen at 561-689-1911 or 954-439-4970 or animal control at 863-357-3225.

St. Bernard Rescue is a 501 3 (c) non profit organization.

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



Special to the Okeechobee News
Jingles, a Catahoula mix, is on the road to recovery after being brought in to Okeechobee County Animal Control with mange and a serious facial injury.



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New online Sports Network features Okeechobee teams

The Okeechobee News invites you to check out the innovative new Okeechobee Sports Network on the internet at <http://fl.newszap.com/OkeechobeeSportsNetwork>.

Youth, adult recreation leagues, and school sports teams now have an exciting online sports page and resource they can call their own. This free site is a partnership between the Okeechobee News and Community Sports Desk, a national sports software company.

Team representatives can post their schedules, game stories, statistics, standings and photos on dedicated web pages on the site.

This is an invaluable and professional tool the community now has to positively highlight local sports.

There is absolutely no charge for teams and leagues to participate in Okeechobee Sports Network.

The site will be supported by sponsored web advertising featuring an innovative revenue sharing model, with 20 percent of web advertising sales on the site going back to the participating teams and leagues.

Local businesses interested in finding out how to become a sponsor can contact their lo-

cal Okeechobee News advertising representative or call Judy Kasten at 863-763-3134 or by email at jkasten@strato.net.

Interested teams and leagues can contact Renee Hawley by e-mail at rhawley@communitysportsdesk.com, to participate and find out how your team can win a free pizza party!

Okeechobee Sports Network will also be giving away a \$25 gift certificate from the Ultimate Gamer for the best local sports photo posted on the site by Jan. 31.

Call Renee toll free at 888-853-7904 for a demonstration or to get started right away.



Special to the Okeechobee News

Co-Ed Champs

CIS-PAL went undefeated this season at 8-0, claiming the title for two consecutive seasons. The team includes: Jill Rogers, Bryan Stokes, Bobbie Jo Jenkins, Jeneane and Ricky Rhuda, Rebecca Gainer, Amanda Bluett, John Kemp, Cecil Bays, Eddie Green, Mitchell Comfort, Phillip White, Kim McMahon, Janet Estremera, Juan Suarez, Brandon Gabbard, Randall Harden, and Brett Barcia. Congratulations team!

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County unemployment levels rise in November

By Charles M. Murphy

Okeechobee News

Unemployment levels went up in both Okeechobee and Glades County in November.

Only seven counties in Florida had higher unemployment rates than Okeechobee according to the monthly report from the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation, Labor Market Statistics Center.

The report said 2,478 Okeechobee residents received unemployment benefits in November, a rate of 13.5 percent. That compared to 2,424 who received benefits in October, a rate of 13 percent.

In November, 2008, 1,799 residents received unemployment benefits in Okeechobee, a jobless rate of 9.9 percent.

Glades County had 485 residents receive unemployment benefits in November, a rate of 9.8 percent. That compared to 461 who

received unemployment checks in October, a rate of 9.3 percent. One year ago the jobless rate was 6.8 percent in Glades County. Only 17 Florida counties had lower jobless rates than Glades County last month.

The jobless rate in Florida was 11.5 percent in November, up from 11.3 percent in October. Around the area, Highlands County had 11.7 percent unemployment; Hendry County, 14.9 percent, Palm Beach County had 11.7 percent; Martin County, 12.4 percent; St. Lucie County, 14.7 percent; and Osceola County had 13.3 percent. Hendry County had the highest jobless rate in the state. Liberty County had the lowest rate, 6.1 percent.



Special to the Okeechobee News

What Christmas means ...

On Tuesday, Dec. 15, Everglades students put on a Christmas show titled "What Christmas means to me." Families were entertained as singers and dancers performed and narrators read from student writings.



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SCHOOL

Continued From Page 1

standard diplomas within four years of entering high school. After this year, the no child left behind standard will be the only graduation rate recognized. There will be no GED exit options for students.

Since 2004 under the Florida standards Okeechobee's graduation rate has increased from 62.5 percent to 69.3 percent. This standard includes all standard diplomas, early exit GED diplomas and special diplomas for ESE students. This standard will be discontinued after this year.

Suits said due to the new legislation, she expects more Okeechobee kids to drop out of school because if they get behind in their studies, they won't have the GED exit option.

The kids can return after six months and

earn a GED but they will not count toward the districts graduation rate, she added.

"We are very pleased to see our drop out rates going down. We impress upon the students through our school system the importance of getting a high school diploma. They realize they need a diploma to get a good job," she said.

Suits said teachers often emphasize to kids the relevance of the courses they are teaching to everyday life. She said students see how these courses and their information are used in the outside world.

Suits said an improvement in reading proficiency is also helping the graduation and drop out rates, "If you can't read a text book or the notes or understand the vocabulary being used in that class you aren't going to be successful. Our reading improvements are really monumental."

Since 2004, the drop out rate has gone down from 7.2 percent to 3.9 percent. The drop out rate went down 1.3 percent from

2007-2008 to 2008-2009.

"The drop out rate is the only statistic we want to see go down and still be happy about it," Suits said.

Suits said due to societal changes, it is more and more important to earn a high school diploma now. She said the GED exit option has been an important tool to keep some kids in school. She said she worries more students could drop out if they get off to a bad start in high school. Between 10 and 14 students take advantage of the GED option each year.

The drop out rate for white students was 3.4 percent last year. The drop out rate for blacks was 3.4 percent and the drop out rate for Hispanics was 4.4 percent.

The graduation rate for white students was 69.3 percent, 59.4 percent for black students, and 56.1 percent for Hispanic students, the state reported.

GREEN

Continued From Page 1

system. He said it cost about \$14,000. The grant program is called the 160 Treasure Grant. For more information interested persons can contact Whitney Rauh at Complete Solar Inc at 772-388-0533.

Mr. Smith said he has gotten numerous phone calls about the system. He added that several people came by and talked about it.

Many of the visitors are fellow members of the agriculture industry. "Complete electric did a super job installing the system. It's real neat. You can't even see it, you don't even know its here unless I tell you. We try to take care of the land, the wildlife, our animals, everything here."

The ranch also won the Florida Farm Bureau's Care award last year for its environmentally friendly practices.



Allen Smith (left) talks with Mike Macleary of Complete Electric about his new solar power system.

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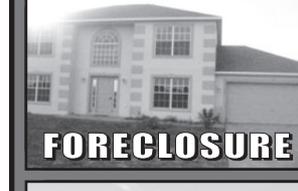
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5003-H: Conners Gables Two Story 3 2/2 home, Dining room, Family room off the Kitchen area, screened porch, 2 Car Garage. \$128,700 MLS #203530



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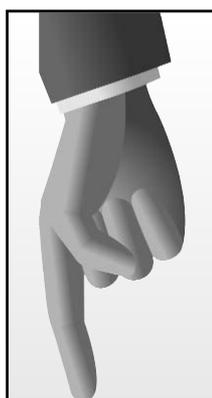
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The classified ads

Boys soccer team defends Christmas tournament title

By Charles M. Murphy
Okeechobee News

Okeechobee High School Boys Soccer Team won their seventh match in a row and won their second consecutive Brahman Christmas tournament title with a 2-0 victory over Port St. Lucie on Tuesday night.

Eddie Guerrero scored two goals and the team played sound, aggressive defense, as they limited Port St. Lucie to only three shots on goal.

Coach Lonnie Sears called it the best match his team has played this year.

"We put it together, offensively and defensively. Our midfielders Erick Garcia, Hunter Pritchard and Eddie Guerrero controlled the game. Defensively and offensively it looked good, we did a good job," the coach said.

Okeechobee (8-4) also got assists from Erick Garcia and Oscar Garcia. Goal tender Serafin Espinoza made three saves in the Brahman net. Bruce Pierre had eight saves for Port St. Lucie (5-6-2).

Sears said the jaguars are a really good team. He said there is something to be said for our defense that limits them to only three shots.

"They're playing top notch teams and are very aggressive. They play top quality teams. They're a good team, we played a good match."

Okeechobee had other chances to score but couldn't put a lot of shots on net. Several times, Adrian Leon, Hunter Pritchard and others had headers near the Jaguar net but were off target.

Guerrero scored 18 minutes into the match, and added the insurance goal with 29 minutes remaining in the match.

Sears said his team will practice over the break just to keep things rolling in a positive direction. He said he wished the second half of the season started right now, "We're defi-

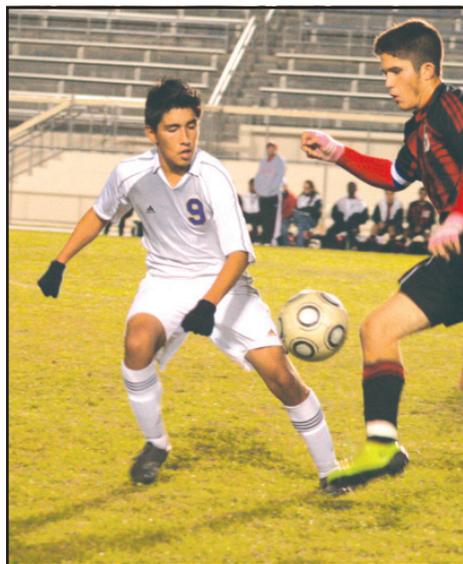
nately looking forward to it. We won't relax too much and will practice over the break to keep it going."

Guerrero said his game is rounding into form. He said the entire team played well Tuesday.

"We just played awesome," he said. "I scored one of the best goals of my high school career in the tournament."

Guerrero was knocked down a few times by rough play near the end, but never changed his tactics or the expression on his face. "They had to make their move. They picked up the intensity. I fall, I get back up. This is my senior year, I'm giving everything I have every second."

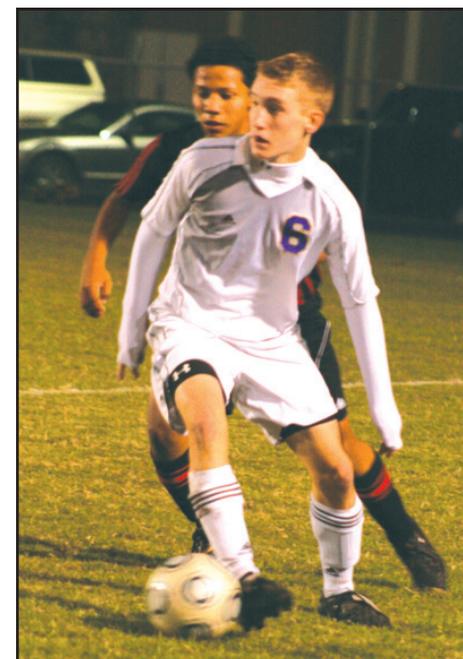
Suncoast won the third place game 6-0 over John Carroll.



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy
Midfielder Erick Garcia, #9, helped control the game.



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy
Eddie Guerrero scored two goals in the OHS Brahman's Tuesday win over Port St. Lucie.



Okeechobee News/Charles Murphy
Midfielder Hunter Pritchard, #6, did a good job in the OHS win Tuesday.

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Jonathan Sanders, M.D., J.D.

Suarez helps Southern Indiana team finish 6th in the nation

By Charles M. Murphy
Okeechobee News

Bryan Suarez continues to improve as a runner and as a result so does his college team.

The Southern Indiana Eagles finished sixth in the nation at the Division II cross country championships this year. The college hosted the event and had their third best finish ever and their best finish since 1983.

Suarez said it felt good to be a part of the success this year.

"I'm getting better," he said. "There are good runners on the team and that helps me a lot. They are educated, smart runners, and I learn from them."

Suarez had a storied career in Okeechobee and finished third in the state in Class 3A during his senior year. He is now a sophomore and is studying accounting. He said cross country and running continues to be a major part of his life.

"I'm working on running all the time and developing. I'm trying to adjust to see where I need to go. It takes a lot more time these days. I pay attention to a lot of the little things, drills, exercises, even diet."

Suarez said college has been an awesome experience but he always enjoys going home and seeing his family and friends.

"It is nice to see people and get that support again. It's good to know what I'm work-

ing for," he added.

Suarez might switch his major to business administration soon. He said he would like to be an Athletic Director when he graduates from college.

He noted he always still has a dream to one day run in the summer Olympic Games.

Suarez competed in some prestigious races in Kentucky, Missouri and Indiana this year. He finished in 32nd place at the Stegemoller Classic 6 K, 28th at the USI Pre-National Invitational, 20th at the GLVC MIAA Challenge, and 17th at the GLVC Championships.

Suarez said he also is very pleased that the Okeechobee cross country team has continued the success he started in 2006.

"I'm very proud of them. They have done really well. They are keeping it up and I'm proud of them," he said.



Bryan Suarez

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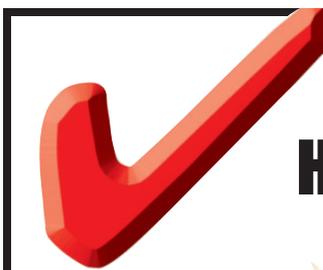
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