



OKEECHOBEE NEWS

Vol. 103 No. 24

Friday, February 24, 2012

50¢ Plus tax

Chamber building may reopen ... Page 3

Okeechobee soccer program expanding ... Page 19

Code violations fined ... Page 11

Young anglers catch big bass ... Page 23



Lake Levels

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8 arrested in undercover pill operation

By Eric Kopp
Okeechobee News

A six-month, multi-agency investigation dubbed 'Operation Pill Crusher' culminated with eight arrests on numerous felony charges in both Okeechobee and Glades counties.

Detectives involved in the operation said they were focused on buying prescription medications and during the operation bought oxycodone, xanax and percocet pills. The investigators bought oxycodone pills for \$16 to \$25 each, and xanax and percocet tablets for

"These are people who actually sell to anyone who has the money to pay—including our children."

Okeechobee County Sheriff Paul May

\$5 to \$6 each.

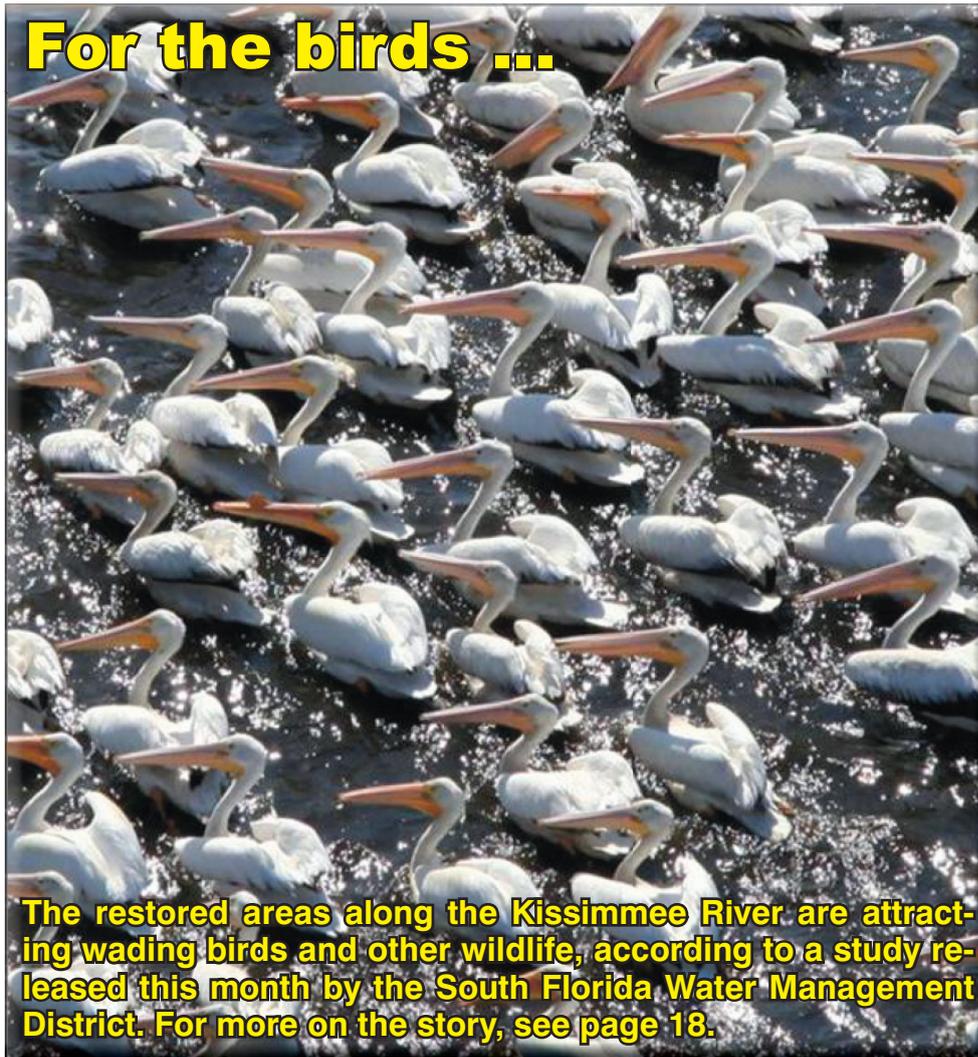
"These are the people who actually sell to anyone who has the money to pay—including our children," said Okeechobee County Sheriff Paul May.

Sheriff May went on to explain that about

six months ago he contacted Glades County Sheriff Stuart Whiddon about the pill problem and asked if his agency could help the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office (OCSO)

See **PILLS** — Page 8

For the birds ...



The restored areas along the Kissimmee River are attracting wading birds and other wildlife, according to a study released this month by the South Florida Water Management District. For more on the story, see page 18.

County hires new parks & rec director

By Pete Gawda
Okeechobee News

As the result of action taken by Okeechobee County Commissioners at their Feb. 23 meeting the county now has a new parks and recreation director.

Upon the recommendation of county administrator Robbie Chartier, the commission confirmed the appointment of Albert Scoggins as director of parks and recreation. Mr. Scoggins is a graduate of the University of Florida, holds a Certificate of Sports Management from North Carolina State University and is a Certified Park and Recreation Professional by the National Recreation and Parks Association. He has 25 years experience in parks and recreation. For 10 years he was recreation director for the City of Stuart. Mr. Scoggins also spent 13 years with the St. Lucie County Department of Leisure Services as recreation manager, recreation supervisor and manager of the Thomas J. White Stadium, spring training home of the New York Mets. Currently he is a certified fitness trainer with Results Fitness Corporation of Stuart. Mr. Scoggins was selected over 12 other

See **COUNTY** — Page 8

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Tabitha Trent/Rotary Club

Rotary student of the month

Congratulations to OHS Senior Nicole Perdomo (right) for being selected as Rotary's Student of the Month. She was introduced by Rotarian, Dawn Hoover (left). During her presentation to Rotary members Nicole spoke of her passion and sincere desire to serve others as her volunteer activities include teaching Spanish at Central Elementary, assisting with weekend campus clean-up projects at OHS, organizing Halloween carnivals, working with migrant children and serving at Martha's House. In addition to being recognized for her countless hours of community service, Nicole is very active on both an academic and athletic scale as she serves on a number of school committees and advisory councils; she is a member of the Beta Club, Drama Club, Poetry Club, Student Court, National Honor Society and the Senior Advisory Committee. Nicole's athletic ventures include being a varsity swimmer, varsity basketball player and an athlete-scholar (maintaining a 3.5 GPA or better). She shared with the club her love for theatrical life and the justice system, as such she has applied with the University of Miami where she plans to pursue a BA degree in Political Science/Pre-Law with a minor in Drama. The Rotary Club of Okeechobee meets every Tuesday at noon at the Golden Corral Restaurant; please feel free to come join us for a wonderful time of fellowship and experience "Service Above Self" in action!



Okeechobee News/Pete Gawda

Golfer of the Year

At the Tuesday, Feb. 21, meeting of the Okeechobee City Council Mayor James Kirk recognized Richard Donegan, who was accompanied by his parents, for being named High School Boys Golfer of the Year Class of 2012. Pictured, left to right, are Rick Donegan, Richard Donegan, Mayor Kirk and Nancy Donegan.

City council discusses leasing chamber building

By Pete Gawda
Okeechobee News

After being vacant for many months the city-owned chamber of commerce building could be leased by the recently formed Chamber of Commerce of Okeechobee County. At their meeting on Tuesday evening, Feb. 21 the Okeechobee City Council spent considerable time discussing a proposed lease with Terry Burroughs, vice president of the Chamber of Commerce of Okeechobee County.

The building had been seized by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for nonpayment of payroll taxes by the long inactive Okeechobee County Chamber of Commerce. The IRS held an auction of the contents of the building to satisfy the tax lien and recently released the building back to the city.

Councilman Dowling Watford said he was glad to see the issue was being cleared up. He thanked Congressman Tom Rooney for helping the city regain possession of the building from the IRS.

Since the building has been vacant and

inaccessible to the city for some time, the council was unsure as to its present condition. The council and Mr. Burroughs were in agreement that the building should be inspected before proceeding with lease negotiations. Mr. Burroughs said the utilities should be turned on in order to inspect the building and since he did not have a lease he could not turn the utilities on.

Councilman Clayton Williams suggested the chamber consider listing the city on their insurance for the building.

Tommy Hoover, an interested citizen, did not think taxpayers should be subject to paying for any repairs to the building since the chamber was getting such a good deal. The proposed lease was for \$1 a month. Mr. Hoover felt that if the chamber were not willing to pay for repairs the city might want to seek another tenant. However, deed restrictions prevent the building from being used for any purpose other than a chamber building.

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

Okeechobee Forecast

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Weather forecast for Okeechobee County from the National Weather Service

Local Forecast

Friday: Mostly sunny, with a high near 87. Calm wind becoming south southwest between 10 and 15 mph. Winds could gust as high as 25 mph.

Friday night: A 20 percent chance of showers after 1 a.m. Mostly cloudy, with a low around 65. Southwest wind around 5 mph becoming calm.

Extended Forecast

Saturday: A 20 percent chance of showers before 11 a.m. Mostly cloudy, with a high near 72. North wind between 5 and 15 mph.

Saturday night: Mostly cloudy, with a low around 56. Northeast wind around 10 mph.

Sunday: A 20 percent chance of showers. Partly sunny, with a high near 76. East wind between 5 and 15 mph, with gusts as high as 25 mph.

County Fair Association has space for exhibitors

The Okeechobee County Fair Association is now accepting applications for exhibitor space at the 2012 Okeechobee County Fair. This year they will feature a new and different look to the exhibit tent. The exhibitors will be housed in a clear span tent which allows the fair patrons full view and access to each exhibitor without the worry of walking up and down rows. If you are interested in securing exhibit space, please go to the web site at www.okeechobeeountyfair.com and download the exhibitor application. If you have further questions, please contact Jeff Jones at 863-634-2321.

Brahman Theatres III

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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!

Teachers' contract

• I would not like to be a teacher in any county as I see it is a 24-hour job, if you are a good teacher as I have seen them grading papers at ball games and meetings, while they are sitting waiting for something. They never have enough time to get all the paperwork and assignments that they have to do on school time also they have to stay late and meet with parents a lot, at the parents' convenience, not theirs. People who are not in the line of work are very quick to judge what they do not know, just as lawmakers make decisions on things that they have no clue about if you have never done the job you should not be able to make decisions about it. Sometimes money is not the answer, values and credibility are more important.

• My friend is a PE teacher at a school in town, he said that half of his evaluation this year will be determined by students' FCAT scores! He teaches how to play sports, a health unit, and how to be physically fit. Nothing about reading, or math. How is that fair? If kids do poorly on FCAT it makes him look bad?

SFWMMD leasing practices questioned

• I have lived here all my life and it's always been that way. You have money or know somebody or you don't get to play the game. Too bad it's that way but it's got worse as the years go by. And if they re-elect Obama and the people in power that are in there now get back in, it's only going to get worse. I think that if the people in the United States of America vote in 2012 the way they did in 2008, then four years from Nov. 8, 2012 there will be no USA.

• An earlier story said this lease renewal process was common practice. There are probably many others who got the same deal and didn't make the newspaper. Maybe it is just all those who already have the leases that are being renewed.

Show me the money

• I see they are building another bank in Okeechobee. I just have to wonder, how is there enough money in this little town to need so many banks. Every time I turn around they are building another bank. Apparently there are a lot of rich people here who dress and act like everyone else, drive modest cars and live in modest homes so no one knows who has the big money. Someone must have money for all those banks to decide to come here.

Lost dog

• This might be a good time to remind everyone to make sure your dog has a collar and tags. Even the most careful pet owner can have something happen that results in the dog being lost. If you have tags on the animal, there is a much greater chance that whoever finds him will be able to let you know where he is. The tags given out by the vet's office have the vet's number on them, and your dog has a license number. So they can look up the number and know whose dog it is. For a dog that travels with its owner a lot, and has an increased chance of being lost away from home, a microchip might be a good investment.

• The Okeechobee Humane Society/Pet Rescue is microchipping our shelter dogs for customers. Whenever a dog comes into our shelter, we scan them for a microchip. When we find one in a dog the excitement is high there! Sometimes the information has not been updated, and it makes it tough to return the dog to the owner.

• If your dog has a chip registered, some day it may be necessary to update the information that goes with it. My buddy was the registered owner of our dog and when he died and I brought the dog to Michigan, I called Las Vegas and let them know my new phone number. Both of our phone numbers had been closed out and I wanted to make sure the chip ID place had my cell phone number (new) on record before we started the three-day trek to his new home.

• I agree that microchips are a good idea. My escape artist is chipped, but I prefer not to keep a collar on my little dogs in fear they will get caught on something and strangle themselves. A little dog showed up at my house one time and I took it to the vet and they scanned her, found a chip and saw that she was their patient. They contacted the owners and she was reunited with her little human girl. It was so awesome.

Mudfest

• I have mixed emotions about the MudFest. On the one hand a person with a bit of land has to be rather creative these days to try to make something on it. I also HATE so-called environmentalists. It is marvelous the amount of people who actually have the money to spend to come here and get dirty yet they can't pay their mortgages. What a great capitalistic idea these landowners had! I saw some of the MudFest people in our local stores buying this and that and paying local sales taxes. That is good for our local economy. On the other hand I do not enjoy highway 70 when they are all here. My family avoids that stretch of road like the plague on those weekends.

• I live next door to it and I can tell you that Mudfest is not a good neighbor. All I hear for 72 hours are the deafening noises from the engines, music and yelling. And the front of my place is littered with ice bags, beer boxes, beer cans and bottles and other trash. I doubt that the people who profited from Mudfest will pick up the trash in front of my place. It is most definitely an extreme imposition on the neighbors. Mudfest actually costs me money and the quiet enjoyment of my home.

Gas prices

• Is Barack Obama just trying to "manage the decline" of America or is he trying to help America? He is not doing either one very well. I, for one, wasn't raised in America to DECLINE. I was taught to forge on and get it done whatever it was. I was also taught to help others. Seems like nowadays all my tax money goes to help others who sit around watching the DECLINE.

• In 2008 and the gas prices went up the libbies and commies crucified Bush, but now one of their kind is going through the same thing nary a word other than hard questions like what kind of tree do you like or did you enjoy your vacation?

Out of field teachers

• Parents, I seriously advise you to check out your child's teacher and her qualifications. People that have gone to school to be a teacher are far more qualified than someone who has not. You can't say that because they pass three tests, that makes them a teacher, only to see if they will like it--they have something to fall back on. Your child should not be a guinea pig. I think teachers are great, but I would not want someone who is not qualified to teach my child.

• Sometimes it is hard to find a person with a specific teaching degree. A person may agree to teach in that subject and take classes to fulfill the requirements within the specified period of time. So, you have a degree in underwater basketweaving, but you want to teach wood shop.

• Just because you have a degree in teaching doesn't mean you are a good teacher. Teaching is a calling, and some people are just better at it than others. I'd rather have a Literature major with a passion for reading as an English teacher than a person with a teaching degree. I've known plenty of teachers who do not have a degree in education that I would vouch for any day. And the same holds true the opposite for teachers with those fancy degrees that I would never allow my child to have as a teacher.

• Out of field can mean a lot of different things. I would sure like to be informed if my kid is being taught something like Math by a History teacher. I am less concerned if the field is right but the teacher just has to get additional certifications. It would be nice if the school would provide this information rather than the parents needing to request it. The standards and requirements are changing requiring existing teachers to continue their education and become "re"-certified. For example: just being a science teacher certified in science does not make you in-field/highly qualified to teach Biology or Chemistry even if you were in-field for prior years. Additional certifications are now required to be in-field/highly qualified for each.

• Out-of-field means that a teacher is teaching a class in which he or she does not hold certification. Out-of-field teaching is only allowed once, unless that teacher is documented as on the path to being certified in that field. It usually occurs where there is a need for that position to be filled and a teacher does have the educational/job experience to fill that void. For example, a person fluent in Spanish, but does not have the official certification for (i.e. hasn't taken the state subject area test yet) it on his/her record, or someone who normally teaches one science subject picking up another science subject, etc. Out-of-field teachers are put on record as being such and can be subject to vetting. I believe schools must also post them. I know OHS has them posted in the section for the parents weekly news (there are 4 teachers on the list) and you can check at the FLDOE website. One of the requirement for being highly qualified is to hold a Bachelor's Degree or higher in your intended field.

KEECHOBEE NEWS

To Reach Us

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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...

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- To help our community become a better place to live and work, through our dedication to conscientious journalism.
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- 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.
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- To correct our errors and to give each correction the prominence it deserves.
- To provide a right to reply to those we write about.
- To treat people with courtesy, respect and compassion.

MEMBER



City council applies for economic development grant

By Pete Gawda
Okeechobee News

Motorists travelling into the city on S.R. 70 from the east might soon have easier going thanks to action taken Tuesday evening, Feb. 21, by the Okeechobee City Council.

After hearing from the city's grant administrator, Nancy Phillips, the council voted to proceed with application for an economic development grant. The \$257,827 grant would be used for lengthening S.R. 70 westbound left turn lanes at S.E. Tenth and S.E. Thirteenth Avenues and construction of a west bound left turn lane in front of Appleby's Neighborhood Bar and Grill on S.R. 70. The cost of the 350 linear feet of road work would be broken down into \$200,994 for construction, \$31,735 for engineering and inspection, \$6,000 for surveying and geotech testing and \$19,098 for grant administration. Ms. Phillips said she would have the application completed and sent off by Friday. In connection with the grant application Ms. Phillips conducted a required fair housing workshop for elected officials and the general public.

The council also spent some time discussing recommendations made by the park committee concerning a proposed park at the intersection of S.E. Sixth Avenue and S.E. Seventh Street on Taylor Creek and looking at a conceptual drawing of the proposed park. The committee recommended bathrooms and water fountains, step terracing along the creek bank, low impact lighting, fencing, shaded benches and a sign with park rules and regulations as well as a sign recognizing in-kind contributions to the park.

City administrator Brian Whitehall said it would be a somewhat passive park with amenities significantly reduced from previous suggestions.

Councilman Mike O'Connor, who first proposed the park, said that terracing would be a nightmare for the city to maintain. He said high water would recede and leave trash on the terraces and that they would have to be cut with a weed eater rather than a mower. He favored a sloped bank. He also felt that fencing along the creek bank would take away from the beauty of the park. The councilman said that chickees, shade trees and mulch have been donated as well as the labor for putting down a mulch trail around the park.

Councilman Dowling Watford felt that fencing around the playground area would be a good idea. He, too, was against fencing the creek bank. He was uncertain about rest room facilities, fearing the cost of maintenance and possible vandalism.

Mayor James Kirk felt that a water fountain and rest rooms needed some thought.

Councilman Devin Maxwell believed some of the council's questions would be answered as costs of the proposed amenities are learned.

Mr. Whitehall suggested soliciting donations for park amenities. He said a construction flow chart with costs would be helpful.

Turning to another matter, Councilman Maxwell suggested that the city contact the Florida Department of Transportation (DOT) and ask that DOT consider city input when planning landscaping for the intersection of S.R. 70 and U.S. 441. That way existing land-

scape and the city's future landscape plans could be taken into consideration in designing landscaping for the intersection. City administrator Bryan Whitehall was asked to follow up on that suggestion.

Ron and Linda Main, of N.E. Eighth Street, addressed the council concerning the city noise ordinance. They suggested changes to the ordinance and the chief of police was asked to investigate those proposed changes.

The city might soon have a low-cost source of labor. Colonel Royce Dykes and classification supervisor Javier Jones addressed the council concerning the Okeechobee Correctional Institute Work Program. They told a little bit about the prison, said the prison wanted to become

more visible to the community and invited the councilmen to visit the facility. They said that because of an expected increase in inmate population, prison work crews would soon be available to help local governments and nonprofit organizations. They said these would be minimum security prisoners about to be released that would not require correctional officer supervision. The colonel said it is amazing how much work an inmate crew can turn out. The work crews are part of the prison's program to teach the inmates useful skills and help them to get back into the workforce.

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



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Community Events

Girl Scouts needed for parade

Calling on all adult Girl Scouts! If you were a Girl Scout as a girl or worked with Girl Scouts as an adult, we would like to have you join us in marching in the Speckled Perch Parade March 10, to celebrate our 100th anniversary! Contact Laurie Pharr for more information 863-634-0465. The Scouts would like to have at least 100 Girl Scouts and adults in the parade in honor of the 100th anniversary of Girl Scouting.

Masonic Lodge holds Sunday Breakfast

The Masonic Lodge at 107 N.W. Fifth St., will hold a breakfast on Sunday, **Feb. 26**, from 8 a.m.-11 a.m. Adults \$6 and kids 12 and under \$3. Eggs, bacon, grits, pancakes, biscuits & gravy, etc. Carry outs are available. Public is welcome. The Lodge holds this breakfast on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of the month. Proceeds go to Okeechobee Youth Programs.

Eagles North to host Bingo

Tuesday, Feb. 28, the North Eagles is holding Bingo from 1 p.m. until? Lots of Fun. 9985 U.S. 441 North, Okeechobee.

Proceeds go to the F.O.E. 4137 community benefit fund.



Special to the Okeechobee News/ Sharon Vinson

Health and Safety Expo

The Okeechobee Educational Foundation hosted a booth at the 2012 Health and Safety Expo. Rose Ferrell was the lucky winner of the prize basket full of health related items. Congratulations Ms. Ferrell!

Community Events

Church holds community gospel sing

On Friday, **Feb. 24**, a Community Gospel Sing will take place at Okeechobee Presbyterian Church at 312 N. Parrott Ave. which will start at 6:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome.

Cypress Eagles will host steak/fish dinner Feb. 24

Come join us at the Cypress Hut Eagles for Friday night steak/fish night on **Feb. 24**, from 5:30-8:30 p.m. Music by The Harpers. All proceeds will benefit the Community Fund. The public is welcome.

Moose Lodge announces weekend happenings

Lots of fun will be happening at the Moose Lodge, 159 N.W. 36th St. this weekend. Friday, Feb. 24, there will be bingo at 6:30 p.m. with bonanza start at 5 p.m. On Saturday food will be served 5:30-7:30 p.m. with Music By Lisa 7-10 p.m. Sunday's cooked to order breakfast will be 8-11 a.m. for a cost of \$5. Proceeds benefit Moose Charities.

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.

Harold 'Gator'

Havlin Selover Jr., 71

OKEECHOBEE — Harold "Gator" Havlin Selover Jr., age 71, of Okeechobee, died Tuesday, Feb. 21, 2012, in the Okeechobee Health Care Facility.

He was born April 17, 1940, in Cape May, N.J., to Harold H. and Elsie Foley Selover. He proudly served in the National Guard. He owned a Marina in Stuart for over 20 years and was a retired Boat Captain. He retired to Okeechobee in 1992 and was a member of the United Methodist Church. In addition he was an avid fisherman and hunter.

He was preceded in death by a daughter, Karen Marie Selover; and father, Harold Havlin Selover Sr.

He is survived by his wife, Carrie Lynn Selover; sons, Matthew Spencer Selover, Timothy Allen Ward, and Harold Havlin Selover III; mother, Elsie Foley; step-brother, Henry Foley; and sister Catherine.

The family will receive friends today, Feb. 24, 2012, from 2 p.m. until service time of 3 p.m., in the Buxton Funeral Home Chapel, 110 NE 5th Street, Okeechobee, Florida 34972.



Yard sale to benefit Pregnancy Center

The Pregnancy Center of Okeechobee will be have a one day yard sale on Friday, **Feb. 24**, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Come support the Pregnancy Center and find your treasures at the same time. The Center is located at 500 N.W. Sixth St., Okeechobee. The office number is 863-467-8748. If you would like to donate items for the yard sale, please bring them to the Center this week.

Eagles North to host steak night

Eagles North, 9985 U.S. 441 N., Okeechobee invites everyone to join us for steak night on Friday, **Feb. 24**, Steak Night. Starts at 5:30 p.m. until 9 p.m. Music by Steven. Come rock with him, he knows how! Proceeds go to F.O.E. 4137 community benefit fund.

Eagles North to host card bingo

Saturday, **Feb. 25**, we will have Card Bingo starting at 4 p.m. Come and play. 9985 U.S. 441 N., Okeechobee. Proceeds go to the F.O.E. community benefit fund.

Syble M. Burroughs

OKEECHOBEE — Syble M. Burroughs, daughter of Lon and Willie Crawford, born in Athens, Ga., on June 26, 1916, passed away on Feb. 21, 2012, at the Hamrick House in Okeechobee after a long battle with Alzheimer's. Syble and her family came to Okeechobee in 1956.

Syble opened her florist business, Syble's Flowers and Gifts in 1965.

Syble's passion for flower designing and her love for the community contributed to her success as a business woman in Okeechobee. She was cheerful and always had a smile for you. Syble never met a stranger and was loved by each and every person she met.

She was predeceased by her loving husband, George W. of 66 years; her parents, one sister and five brothers.

She is survived by her brother, Lon Crawford, Jr. of Athens, Ga.; her son, Terry W. (Maureen) Burroughs; her grandchildren, Kelley (Satasha) Burroughs of Jacksonville, Fla., Lana (Mortimer) Jones of Atlanta, Ga.; and five great-grandchildren.

Visitation will be Monday, Feb. 27, at 5 p.m., with the service at 6 p.m. at the Buxton Funeral Home, 110 NE 5th St, Okeechobee.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to Hospice of Okeechobee, 411 SE 4th St., Okeechobee, FL 34974. All arrangements were entrusted to the loving care of Buxton Funeral Home and Crematory. Online condolences may be made at www.buxtonfuneralhome.com.



VFW North announces plans weekend events

The North VFW, 300 N.W. 34th St. has a weekend full of fun planned. The grill will be open on Friday, 5-9 p.m. with karaoke hosted by XXL (Capt. Dennis) 7-10 p.m. Saturday, there will be burgers on the grill noon-2 p.m., Bar Bingo 1 p.m. Fish/Shrimp Dinner 5-7 p.m. with karaoke hosted by D & K Karaoke (Danny & Kathy) 7-10 p.m. On Sunday there will be a Daytona 500 party with Lori will be serving Roasted Chicken 2-4 p.m. for a donation of \$6.50 with karaoke hosted by Lisa 6-9 p.m. Proceeds go towards veterans assistance programs. Hope to see you all there.

Music audition invites solos and duos

B.R.A.T. Club is holding music auditions on Saturday, **Feb. 25**, from 3-5 p.m., at Serenity Coffee Shop. We are looking for solo or duo act to open for Contemporary Christian group SAMESTATE in concert on May 4, at the Freshman Auditorium at 7 p.m. No age limit. Auditions are open to the public. Must perform Christian songs. Auditions can be done with tracks, acoustics or Acapella. NO CHARGE! For more information please call Teresa Chandler at 863-801-4996.

OHS Band to host benefit barbecue

Okeechobee High School Band will host a barbecue chicken dinner for only \$8 per plate. You can order and pick up orders between 11 a.m.-1 p.m. on Saturday, **Feb. 25**. There will also be a yard sale held with proceed to benefit the OHS Band from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. Bring your old goodies and tables. Use the high school parking lot for just \$10. For more information, please contact Kim at 863-697-6422 (please leave a message).

Bassmaster Weekend Series Tourney set

The Bassmaster Weekend Series Tournament will be held Saturday, **Feb. 25**, in Okeechobee. Take-offs and weigh-ins are free and open to the public. Anglers will take off from C. Scott Driver Recreation Area located at 10100 W. Highway 78 at 7 a.m. Weigh-in will be held at C. Scott Driver Recreation Area beginning at 3 p.m. on Saturday. The Lake Okeechobee Bassmaster Weekend Series Tournament is being hosted by the Okeechobee County Tourist Development Council. For further information call 863-763-3959.

Candidate meet and greet planned

Come meet and greet your candidate, Sharon Wallace, for Okeechobee County Property Appraiser. Saturday, **Feb. 25**, from 4-6 p.m. at The Lodge at the Lake Restaurant. Free hor"s dourves.

West Virginia Day planned

West Virginia Day will be celebrated on **Feb. 25**, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the **First Baptist Church**, 401 S.W. Fourth St., Okeechobee. Bring a covered dish. For information call 863-467-8636 or 863-634-1427 Ray or Phyllis.

Yard sale planned to benefit CES

Central Elementary School will hold a community yard sale on Saturday, **Feb. 25** in the bus loop at the school. The sale begins at 8 a.m. until 1 p.m. Get a head start on your spring cleaning. Call to reserve your spot to sell. Rent a table for just \$10 while supplies last. Bring your own table for only \$5. Stop by and shop for great buys on clothes, household items and more. Contact Peggy Friend for more information at 863-462-5077.

Yard sale benefits church summer camp

The **First United Methodist** Youth will hold their annual yard sale to benefit summer church camp, on Saturday, **Feb. 25**, from 8 a.m. until noon. Furniture, small appliances, books, nick nacks, clothes, toys and much more will be offered for sale. Come support the scholarships that allow children to have a week at camp they would not normally be able to afford.

4-H Ethics class set for Saturday

There will be a "last chance" 4-H Ethics Certification class on Saturday, **Feb. 25**, from 1-4 p.m. at the Extension Office. You must have a current ethics number to show at the Okeechobee Youth Livestock Show or in the Okeechobee County Fair 4-H Horse Show. You do not need to pre-register for this class.

Cypress Eagles will host fried chicken night Feb. 26

Cypress Hut Eagles will host fried chicken night on Sunday, **Feb. 26**, from 1-5 p.m. Just \$6 per plate with all proceeds to benefit Community Charity Fund. The public is welcome.

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<p>2008 DODGE NITRO SXT 31K MI., BLACK PEARL #11953A ONLY \$13,950</p> 	<p>2006 CHEVY COLORADO 48K MI., BLACK #111043B ONLY \$14,950</p> 	<p>2011 FORD FIESTA SEL 13K MI., OXFORD WHT #P4186A1 ONLY \$16,950</p> 	<p>2008 MUSTANG SHELBY 35K MI., VISTA BLUE #P4248 ONLY \$26,950</p> 

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PILLS

Continued From Page 1

with the investigation.

"The cooperation between agencies was excellent," said Sheriff Whiddon. "It's an ongoing project we have in Glades and Okeechobee counties. Drugs don't stop at the county line."

Those arrested, their charges and bonds were:

- Hubert Lee Jenkins, 34, N.W. Fifth St., Okeechobee, was charged with the sale of a controlled substance - oxycodone (two counts) and possession of a controlled substance with intent to sell - oxycodone (two counts). His bond was set at \$100,000.

- Brandon Ray Harper, 21, Cypress St., Okeechobee, was charged with attempted sale of a controlled substance - oxycodone and petit theft. His bond was set at \$5,500.

- Wendy Inez Cassidy, 43, N.W. 294th St., Okeechobee, was charged with sale of a controlled substance - oxycodone, possession of a controlled substance with intent to sell - oxycodone and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon. Her bond was set at \$30,000.

- Courtney Leonard Levingston, 41, S.E. 42nd Trace, Okeechobee, was charged with trafficking a controlled substance - oxycodone. His bond was set at \$50,000.

- Helen Elizabeth Griffith, 27, S.E. 43rd St., Okeechobee, was charged with the sale of a controlled substance - oxycodone (two counts) and possession of a controlled substance with intent to sell - oxycodone (two counts). Her bond was set at \$80,000.

- Henry Homer DeBerry, Jr., 69, U.S. 441 S.E., Okeechobee, was charged with the sale of a controlled substance - oxycodone and possession of a controlled substance with intent to sell - oxycodone. His bond was set at \$30,000.

- Jeremy Lloyd Jordan, 33, S.W. Colorado Ave., Port St. Lucie, was arrested on Glades County warrants charging him with the sale of a controlled substance - oxycodone and possession of a controlled substance with intent to sell - oxycodone. His bond was set at \$50,000. He was also arrested on Okeechobee County warrants charging him with the sale of a controlled substance - oxycodone and possession of a controlled substance with intent to sell - oxycodone. His bond on

those charges was set at \$30,000.

- Cynthia Aponte, 25, S.W. Third Ave., Okeechobee, was charged with trafficking in a controlled substance - oxycodone, sale of cocaine and possession of cocaine with intent to sell. Her bond was set at \$200,000

Other than Jordan and Aponte, all of the arrests were made Wednesday, Feb. 22.

St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office records indicate that Jordan was arrested Wednesday night by the U.S. Marshal's Office. Aponte was arrested Thursday morning, Feb. 23, by detectives with the Okeechobee Narcotics Task Force.

For some of those taken into custody, being arrested on drug charges is nothing new.

It should be noted that investigators are currently holding arrest warrants on three more individuals who are either serving sentences in prison or the Okeechobee County Jail. Under the Florida public records law, the names of those individuals cannot be released until they are actually placed under arrest.

Department of Corrections (DOC) records show that Jenkins first went to prison in November of 1998 after he was found guilty of possession of cocaine. He was released from prison a year later. He returned to prison on April 25, 2001, after he was found guilty of sale of cocaine. He was released June 12, 2002. Then, on April 15, 2005, Jenkins was again sent to prison following his cocaine possession conviction. He was released Aug. 11, 2007.

On Aug. 6, 2009, Jenkins was again convicted on cocaine possession and sale of cocaine charges. Then-Circuit Court Judge Lawrence Mirman sentenced him to 16 months in the Okeechobee County Jail.

"Big Hurb has won the big vacation," said Sheriff May, adding that Jenkins will be going to prison for a long time.

In the case of someone the age of DeBerry, often times they turn to selling their personal medications just to make ends meet.

"Not according to what we saw," said a task force detective when asked if DeBerry was selling his own prescriptions.

When asked why prescription pills are being sold so cheaply in Florida, as compared to states in the North, Florida Department of Law Enforcement Special Agent Shane Pollard said it's a case of supply and demand.

"The supply just isn't there, so they can sell them at a higher rate," he said. "Because

of law enforcement activity the prices are starting to go up here."

Agent Pollard is part of a special state task force whose aim is to curtail the activity of illegal pill mills, as well as stop the street level sales of prescription meds.

According to detectives involved in these arrests, the street-level sale of drugs like cocaine are actually waning. They say that more and more of these dealers are switch-

ing to pills because they are in such high demand and they can make a higher profit.

Besides task force detectives and GCSO detectives the Okeechobee City Police Department, FDLE and the Drug Enforcement Administration were involved in the operation.

Detectives said this investigation will be continuing.

COUNTY

Continued From Page 1

applicants.

Turning to other matters, local contractor Elbert Batton told the board that licensed and insured contractors are struggling and having to compete with unlicensed contractors. "The general public is always at risk when they use unlicensed contractors," he said. Another problem he mentioned is that home additions by unlicensed contractors are not assessed for property taxes.

Ed Garcia, regional program administrator for the Department of Business and Professional Regulations also discussed the problem of unlicensed contractors and handymen working outside the scope of their license. He said the fist offense for a person representing themselves as licensed contractor was a misdemeanor and the second offense was a felony. Mr. Garcia said a licensed contractor has been trained and is required to have insurance and workers compensation. This presentation stimulated a discussion of current county regulations concerning contractors and handymen.

Commissioners spent a considerable amount of discussing pending litigation with American Well Drilling. This situation has been ongoing for about ten years and involves an injection well that American Drilling Services constructed at the sports complex. The well failed, causing the involvement of the Department of Environmental Protection and lengthy court action. The board finally voted to authorize staff to work the attorneys to resolve the pending litigation. Commissioner Joey Hoover cast the lone dissenting vote. He favored letting the issue play out in the court system.

In other action the board:

- tabled purchase of a replacement X-ray machine for the Okeechobee County Judicial Center in order to receive additional information;

- approved a proposal from AVCON, Inc.,

for professional services for the airport conceptual drainage master plan and mitigation support services in the amount of \$19,700;

- approved using the services of the architectural firm of Chastain-Skillman for the proposed Okeechobee County Property Appraiser, Tax Collector and Drivers License Building;

- authorized the county administrator to approve purchase of equipment, engineering and construction services for an energy efficiency conservation block grant (EE-CBG);

- authorized the chair or the county administrator to execute work authorizations with GLE Associates, Inc, for engineering services pertaining to the EECBG;

- appointed Tom Benbow, Mark Brandel and Jim Davis to the agri-civic center advisory committee with terms to end March 1, 2016;

- appointed John Abney, Jr. as regular member and Scott Chapman as alternate member to the construction industry licensing board with terms to end March 1, 2015;

- appointed Deborah Raulerson to the library advisory board with a term to end March 1, 2016;

- appointed John Creasman as an alternate member to the Okeechobee Utility Authority Board of Directors with a term to end March 1, 2013;

- appointed Ted Kelchner and Mike Long to the planning board/board of adjustments and appeals with terms to expire March 1, 2015;

- appointed Jim McCain to the tourist development council with a term to end July 1, 2015;

- scheduled an executive sessions concerning International Association of Fire Fighters Union negotiations;

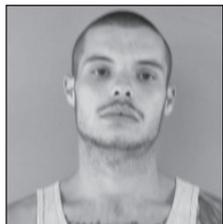
- amended the reserve policy to conform to current government regulations; and

- received a financial update through Jan. 31.

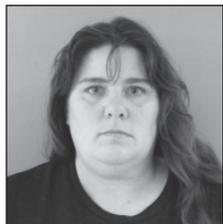
Post your opinions in the Public Issues Forum at www.newszap.com. Reporter Pete Gawda can be reached at pgawda@newszap.com.



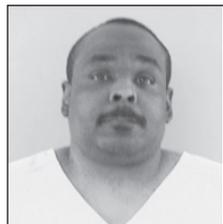
Hubert Lee Jenkins



Brandon Ray Harper



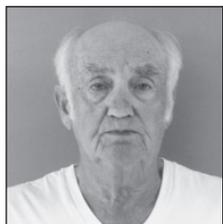
Wendy Inez Cassidy



Courtney L. Levingston



Helen Elizabeth Griffith



Henry Homer DeBerry



Jeremy Lloyd Jordan



Cynthia Aponte

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Medical Directory: <http://specialsections.newszap.com/SS/Page.aspx?&secid=59786&pagenum=1>

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School Information Guide: <http://specialsections.newszap.com/SS/Page.aspx?&secid=68371&pagenum=1>

Man accused of beating woman with screwdriver

By Eric Kopp
Okeechobee News



Jeremy Jones

A local man was arrested on felony charges after he reportedly hit his girlfriend in the head with the handle of a screwdriver and urinated on her.

Jeremy Jones, 25, N.W. 17th Ave., was arrested Tuesday, Feb. 21, on charges of aggravated assault and aggravated battery. He is being held in the Okeechobee County Jail on \$75,000 bond.

Deputy Tammy Serafini, of the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office (OCSO), stated in her arrest report that Jones and his long-time girlfriend were arguing around 1:30 a.m. in their upstairs bedroom when it turned from verbal to physical.

The deputy stated that the couple were ar-

guing because Jones thought his paramour was seeing another man, and because she "... wouldn't let him get high."

The woman reportedly told Deputy Serafini that she is afraid of Jones because he has hit her in the past and, on at least one occasion, has tried to electrocute her.

According to the deputy's report, Jones made the 23-year-old woman lay down on the floor. Then, while she was on the floor, he allegedly urinated on her.

Jones then supposedly pulled her up by her hair and started punching her in the

head. At one point, stated the report, Jones picked up a screwdriver and began hitting the woman in the head with the handle as he threatened to stab her with the tool.

The woman, added the report, told the deputy that Jones also burned her chest with a lit cigarette.

Deputy Serafini stated that the woman was able to get away from Jones when a knock on the bedroom door distracted him.

She then ran down the stairs with Jones following. Jones reportedly followed the woman into the kitchen where he chased

her around a table until her mother intervened.

Jones then left the home, and was later arrested on an outstanding warrant charging him with battery against his girlfriend, stated the deputy. County jail records indicate that his bond on the battery charge has been set at \$20,000.

The deputy went on to state that she photographed the woman's injuries and collected her soiled clothing. However, the report does not indicate if the victim received medical treatment.

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).

- James David Gruber, 21, U.S. 441 S.E., Okeechobee, was arrested Feb. 15 by Deputy Yamil Astacio on an Okeechobee County warrant charging him with violation of probation - criminal use of personal identification information (five counts) and violation of probation - grand theft. His bond was set at \$1,044.72.

- Penny Lyn Bickel, 34, S.E. 17th St., Okeechobee, was arrested Feb. 15 by Deputy Corporal Aric Majere on a DOC amended felony warrant charging her with violation of probation - petit theft. She is being held without bond.

- Nance Harmon, 50, Peach St., Okeechobee, was arrested Feb. 21 by Deputy Greg Popovich on an Okeechobee County warrant charging him with violation of probation - driving under the influence. He is being held without bond.

- Dalton Thomas, 17, S.W. Fourth St., Okeechobee, was arrested Feb. 21 by Deputy Steven McKinley on a St. Lucie County warrant charging him with violation of probation - burglary and violation of probation - illegal use of gill net. He is being held without bond.

- Barbara Ann Tyner, 58, U.S. 441 S.E., Okeechobee, was arrested Feb. 21 by Dep-

uty Tammy Serafini on Okeechobee County warrants charging her with violation of probation - driving under the influence and violation of probation - possession of cocaine. She is being held without bond.

- Shelly Goist, 40, S.E. 34th Ave., Okeechobee, was arrested Feb. 21 by Deputy Leland Schoonmaker on an Okeechobee County warrant charging her with violation of probation - grand theft and violation of probation - uttering a forged instrument. She is being held without bond.

- Bryan Leejean Walburn, 18, U.S. 441 S.E., Okeechobee, was arrested Feb. 21 by Deputy Cpl. Aric Majere on an Okeechobee County amended warrant charging him with violation of probation - driving under the influence. He is being held without bond.

- Armando Reyes-Arciniega, 25, Laurette Lane, Lake Worth, was arrested Feb. 21 by Deputy Cpl. Aric Majere on a Palm Beach County warrant charging him with trafficking in cocaine and the sale of cocaine. He is being held without bond.

- Miguel Alan Rodrigues, 26, S.E. 36th Ave., Okeechobee, was arrested Feb. 21 by Deputy Cpl. Aric Majere on amended Okeechobee County warrants charging him with violation of probation - driving under the influence and violation of probation - battery. He is being held without bond.

- Christopher Martin, 26, S.E. 33rd Terrace, Okeechobee, was arrested Feb. 22 by Deputy Patricia Massung on a St. Lucie County warrant charging him with driving under the influence. He is being held without bond.

- Lorenzo Rivera, 25, S.E. 21st Court, Okeechobee, was arrested Feb. 22 by Dep-

uty Greg Popovich on a warrant charging him with the felony of battery on a law enforcement officer and the misdemeanor of disorderly intoxication. His bond was set at \$3,000.

- Alan Case, 22, N.E. Fourth, Okeechobee, was arrested Feb. 22 by Deputy Greg Popovich on a felony charge of battery on a law enforcement officer and the misdemeanor of disorderly intoxication. His bond was set at \$3,000.

- Stanley Scott West, 52, S.R. 78, Moore Haven, was arrested Feb. 22 by Deputy Greg Popovich on an Okeechobee County warrant charging him with making a false affidavit - perjury (three counts) and fraudulent application for a driver's license (three counts). His bond was set at \$9,000.

- John Charles Morgan, 59, N.E. 96th Ave., Okeechobee, was arrested Feb. 22 by Deputy Joseph Hall on a St. Lucie County warrant charging him with exploitation of the elderly. His bond was set at \$10,000.

- Adam Brantley Osceola, 24, N.E. 10th St., Okeechobee, was arrested Feb. 22 by Deputy Joseph Hall on Okeechobee County warrants charging him with tampering with physical evidence, failure to appear - possession of oxycodone and failure to appear - possession of drug paraphernalia. 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.

Guardians for New Futures to provide free training

Guardians for New Futures (GFNF) is a 501(C)(3) that supports the Guardian ad Litem Program in the 19th Circuit. Guardians for New Future's mission is to support the Guardian ad Litem volunteers and the children involved in the dependency court system and assigned to the GAL Program.

In addition, they have expanded their mission to include bringing awareness to the community about signs of abuse and the proper way to report abuse to ensure the child's case is acted upon quickly. During the expansion of their mission program coordinators discovered that the teachers in the four county area spend the largest portion of the day with our children and many times it is the teachers, school personnel and day care providers who see and report suspected abuse.

In addition, they found through discussion with teachers and members of the community that many times reports are made and the case is not moved to immediate investigation track because "key words" are not used when speaking to the abuse hotline. For those children the abuse cycle continues. This training is completely free to all teachers, school personnel, day care providers and anyone who works with children.

3rd Annual Open House

Saturday, February 25th

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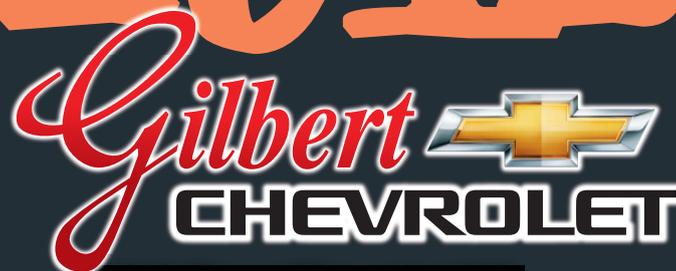
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Students of the Week

Everglades Elementary students achieving excellence in the classroom for the week of Feb. 20-24, include: kindergarten, Star Phillips, Emma Baumhardt, Blaine Boyer, Caden Hurt, Hailey Shrou, Baldemar Gaona; first grade, Joshua Boon, Anyah Johnson, Hailey Mendoza, Fred Cherenfant, Lorenzo Santiago, Kayleigh Carter, Esmeralda Campos; second grade, Adam Mowery, Leah Huntley, Amber Rodriguez, B'ellana Schlosser, Lindsey Jaimes, Jacklin Hernandez; third grade, Wyatt Blackstone, Alaina Hines, Mackenzie Crum, Jasmine Chapman, Carlos DeLaCruz; fourth grade, Cassidy Johnson, Yamilet Reyna; fifth grade, Liliana Ramirez, Nayeli Urbina, David Jennings, Christian Woolverton and Tanner Nelson. Congratulations to our many outstanding students.



Special to the Okeechobee News/CES

Spelling Bee time!

The School Spelling Bee was held at Central Elementary on Tuesday, Feb. 21. The students did a fantastic job! In first place is Alize Merchant, second place is Shelby Sumner and alternate is Xandrea Cea. Judges were from left to right Jill Rogers, Sharon Nipper, Mary Ann Dana and Pam Trent. Thank you for all your help and support.

Code magistrate imposes fine

By Pete Gawda
Okeechobee News

Of the two cases heard by Okeechobee County Code Enforcement Special Magistrate Lois Nichols on Tuesday afternoon, Feb. 21, she found one to be in noncompliance and imposed a fine in the other case.

According to code enforcement officer Rollo Ridley, John D. Holt has a lot on S.E. 60th Drive that has extreme overgrowth, an accumulation of yard trash and a derelict shed. The special magistrate found him to be in noncompliance. Often a person is given 30 days to come into compliance. Because of extenuating circumstances, Mr. Holt was given two months to come into compliance or he could face a fine of up to \$250.

In the other case, which was tabled from the January meeting, Angela Cunningham had been ordered to remove the overgrowth from her S.E. 35th Lane property. Mr. Ridley stated that the property was still not in compliance. Therefore, beginning Feb. 22

Ms. Cunningham will be fined \$30 a day for every day of noncompliance.

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

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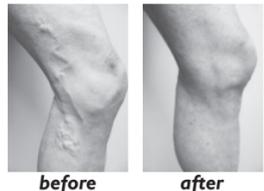
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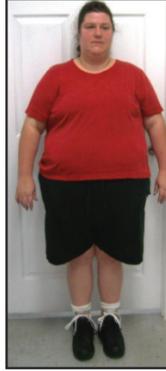
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This is a Physicians Weight Loss Centers client testimonial.

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I was 37 years old and tipping the scales at 300 pounds! My lifestyle consisted of watching TV and sleeping all the time because I was always so tired. I had already had a mild heart attack at age 26 and was now diagnosed a type 2 diabetic, requiring 100 units of insulin, twice a day, along with oral medication to try and control my diabetes. I was on blood pressure & thyroid medications. I had to wear ankle braces for support and walking even a few steps, would cause me to be short of breath and diaphoretic. I had stomach and digestion problems. One of my hardest daily tasks was bending over to tie my shoes.

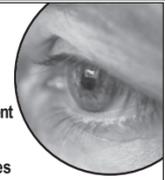


My "aha moment" came one morning after a visit with one of my doctors. I was told that if I didn't lose some weight, my days were numbered! I was taking more and more medications and with all my health issues, I didn't think gastric bypass surgery was the best choice for me. So, I got my mind set right and with support from my husband, family and my PWLC counselors, I started my weight loss program in June 2010. My PWLC counselors taught me how to eat right and that losing weight is a "lifestyle change...not just

a diet". Over the next 11 months, my weight consistently dropped and my doctor took me off more and more medications. I was now able to walk without my ankle braces! I lost 155 pounds and 142 inches in 11 1/2 months! My BMI dropped from 49.1 (morbidly obese) to a healthy 23.6. My clothing went from a size 28 to a size 10-12. Today, my lifestyle has drastically changed! You can find me mowing my grass, with a push mower, in the Florida heat! I can easily walk 3 miles through my neighborhood, without shortness of breath and I have so much energy, it's hard for me to sit still! Now, I'm the one running errands for my neighbors, who have trouble getting out! My blood sugar levels and blood pressures are normal now. I am totally off all insulin injections and almost all other medications. My doctor is absolutely thrilled with my results! I feel great and definitely have much more self-esteem! I recently traveled up North to visit my family. My oldest son, who hadn't seen me in 4 years, didn't recognize me at first. He gave me a big hug and had a tear in his eye. "Losing weight is the best thing I ever did for my health...and myself!"
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Students of the Week

Seminole Elementary would like to congratulate their Students of the Week for the week of Feb. 17 including: Jennifer Loreda, Cheyenne Tyson, Daniela Vargas, Shanice Snell, Jonathan Mederos, Miriam Hernandez, Itzel Mederos, Mitty Ross, Thomas Garcia, Joel Treadway, Jacqueline Mandujano-Pena, Gabriela Delgado, Anabella Cardoso, Emma Wilkerson, Alexis Llanas, Mason Downing, Kenyon Garner, Jessika Olivera, Hadley Hoggard, Dusty Jernigan, Colton Armstrong, Carlos Hernandez, Sergio Pena, Huillermo Diaz-Lopez, Sabin Griffis, Brandon Mitchell, Guadalupe Lara and Levi Morse.

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Special to the Okeechobee News/SES

Students of the Week

Congratulations to the Students of the Week at South Elementary for the week of Feb. 13-17. They are: Katia Ruiz, Luke Hayes, Logan Hamblen, Kailey May, Lexus Adams, Monica Hampton, Victor Navarro, Amante Hart, Madyson McGuinness, Hannah Ellsworth, Alex Willoughby, Tristan Robinson, Madison May, Jacob Aldridge, Jonas Macaldo and Seth Hendrix.

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Commissioners discuss economic development

By Pete Gawda
Okeechobee News

How do we attract new businesses to the county that would improve the quality of life? That was the main thrust of a workshop Okeechobee County Commissioners held Tuesday evening, Feb. 21, with the Business Development Board of Okeechobee County (BDB).

The BDB suggested four areas to improve the economic climate of the county: modification of impact fee policy, local contractor bid preference, requiring the use of local sub-contractors and the creation of an investment fund.

The first suggestion considered a modification of the impact fee policy that allows for payment of the impact fee at the time the certificate of occupancy is issued. The reasoning is that the impact to a business does not fully occur until the business is open. This would also lessen the initial investment.

"It could provide a competitive edge for the county," said Mr. Burroughs of the BDB. Mr. Burroughs said this was an option and not mandatory in all cases. He suggested this incentive be given to target industries.

County attorney John Cassels suggested the impact fee be paid in phases. However, he was concerned about deferring the entire fee until the certificate of occupancy is issued.

Commissioner Ray Domer suggested delaying any action until the pending impact fee study is completed. He said one of the

current problems is that the county has collected impact fees for projects for which it can't pay. He expressed concern with the county fulfilling its obligations.

Commissioner Frank Irby was in favor of phasing in impact fees.

Commissioner Joey Hoover felt some businesses might benefit by phasing in impact fees, while for others it would not work.

Businessman Mac Whorley observed that phasing in is what the county is currently doing with fire, EMS and garbage assessment. When the certificate of occupancy is issued, prorated assessments are imposed.

Turning to the second suggestion, currently a local contractor who submits a bid within 5 percent of the lowest bid is eligible to receive the contract at the price he bid, which would be up to 5 percent over the lowest bid. The BDB suggested that a local vendor who bid within five percent of the lowest bid would be given the opportunity to receive the contract by matching the lowest bid. If there were two local bidders within 5 percent of the lowest bid and the lower of the two was not interested in meeting the low bid, the second lowest local bidder would have the opportunity to meet the lowest bid.

Commissioner Domer wondered if such a policy would discourage out of town bidders. Mr. Burroughs said such a risk exists with the present policy.

Mr. Cassels said the current policy is used

"We need ideas to move forward."

Commissioner Margaret Helton

more by suppliers of products rather than construction.

Mr. Burroughs said that St. Lucie County has the policy he was proposing but he was not aware how helpful it had been.

Commissioner Hoover felt this proposed policy would be more restrictive to local contractors than the current policy.

"We need ideas to move forward," said commissioner Margaret Garrard Helton.

Bill Dover, who was helping Mr. Burroughs with the presentation, said the goals of economic development were to help existing businesses, create more and better jobs and create more investment capital.

The BDB also suggested that the county require a contractor to use a certain percentage of local sub-contractors. Exceptions would be made if the type of work required is not offered by local contractors.

Commissioner Hoover liked the idea of using local subcontractors but he didn't know how it could be enforced.

Commissioner Domer said he has seen local jobs that could have been done by local contractors. However, he conceded this proposed policy needs some work before it would benefit local businesses.

Commissioner Hoover suggested some

type of scoring system based on percentage of local purchases and the use of local labor.

Mr. Burroughs also suggested creation of an investment fund that would offer assistance to targeted industries with low-cost loans. The prospective business would have to be in a certain field, jobs created would have to pay 115 percent of the median Okeechobee wage and the company would have to create a minimum of 50 jobs.

"This is one of the tools in your tool kit that you may never use," said Mr. Dover, "but it's nice to have."

Commissioner Hoover said he would like to see specifics of how the proposed policies work in other counties.

Commissioner Bryant Culpepper suggested waiting to receive the consultant's report on impact fees before having another such workshop.

It appears the workshop was successful in stimulating the flow of ideas. At one point in the discussion Mr. Dover said, "It looks to me like we have done our job, we've started a discussion that won't stop until (county administrator) Robbie (Chartier) has some suggestions."

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

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Degree can boost lifetime earnings

By **Mickie Anderson**
University of Florida

GAINESVILLE, Fla.—A new economic study suggests that having a degree from one of Florida's 11 state universities can be a financial lifesaver—equivalent to more than \$1 million in a worker's lifetime earnings.

The State University System's Board of Governors requested the economic study to update earlier figures, said Alan Hodges, an extension scientist with the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.

The team included economists from UF and Florida State University.

"The value of a university degree is, in some cases, worth millions of dollars over a person's working lifetime," Hodges said. "And not only does it mean higher earnings, but also a greater likelihood of employment—so all of this has real meaning for the current employment crisis."

The study found that the 11 public universities had nearly a \$52 billion value-added economic impact on the state's economy during the 2009-2010 fiscal year, which ended in June 2010. That represents a little more than 7.25 percent of the state's total economic activity and includes regional multiplier effects produced by government and household spending by those who work for, attend or conduct business related to the State University System.

The economists estimated that the universities and related businesses are responsible directly and indirectly for about 771,000 jobs in the state, or 7.9 percent of the state's workforce.

The study did not include spending on college sports events, nor did it include spending by university technology "spinoff" companies.

The salary gap between college degree holders and those with high school diplomas was not unexpected, but the results

were dramatic nonetheless, Hodges said.

Using data from the state's Department of Education, the study found these average annual earnings for Florida high school and university graduates in fiscal year 2009-10 who were employed in Florida in 2010: those with high school diplomas, \$20,924; bachelor's degree, \$36,520; master's degree, \$58,698; doctorate, \$66,743, and professionals, such as physicians or attorneys, \$70,716.

Extended to 30 years and accounting for typical pay increases, the difference between those with high school diplomas and higher degrees remained vast, with bachelor's degree recipients outpacing high school graduates by more than \$550,000; master's degrees, more than \$850,000; doctorates, more than \$1.3 million and professionals, more than \$1.8 million.

And employment potential for university graduates at all levels was far higher than for those with high school diplomas, Hodges noted.

"Right now, the unemployment rate in Florida is about 10 percent," he said. "But for people with a college degree, it's about half that. And for people with only a high school degree, it's double that, close to 20 percent."

Besides UF and FSU, the state's public universities include the University of West Florida, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, University of North Florida, University of Central Florida, University of South Florida, New College of Florida, Florida Gulf Coast University, Florida Atlantic University and Florida International University.

The research team also included Thomas Stevens and Rodney Clouser, both from UF's Food and Resource Economics Department, and Julie Harrington, Martijn Niekus and Keith Baker, from FSU's Center for Economic Forecasting and Analysis.



Special to the Okeechobee News/Shared Services

Basket winner

Alicen Sheehey was the lucky winner of the gift basket provided by Family Preservation Services at the Fifth Annual Okeechobee Family Health and Safety Expo. Save the date for the 2013 Expo - Saturday, Jan. 26, 2013.



Okeechobee News/Pete Gawda

Five years' service

At the Tuesday, Feb. 21, meeting of the Okeechobee City Council, Mayor James Kirk, right, presented a Five-Year Longevity Service Award to Scott Morgan, left.

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Kissimmee River Restoration attracts wildlife

An environmental monitoring program to measure the effectiveness of the state-federal Kissimmee River Restoration Project has revealed a promising increase in wading birds and waterfowl, thriving aquatic invertebrates and improvements in water quality.

"The abundant wildlife now seen along the Kissimmee is a powerful indicator of the benefits of long-term investments in restoration," said South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Executive Director Melissa Meeker. "The District's documentation

of these improvements provides us and our restoration partners—as well as the public—with critical insights into the ecosystem's ongoing recovery."

Environmental monitoring conducted since completion of the first phase of construction in 2001 has shown improvements in aquatic life, reductions in accumulated bottom sediments, reestablishment of floodplain wetlands and an increase in waterfowl and wading birds.



Special to the Okeechobee News/SFWMD

White ibis, great egrets, snowy egrets and wood storks forage in the Phase II area.



Special to the Okeechobee News/SFWMD

Wood storks have been photographed in the Phase II river channel.

Among the observations:

- The number of wading birds observed increased by 64 percent. Three species long absent from the river are now documented regularly.

- Shorebird species commonly observed jumped from 2 to 11.

- Waterfowl sightings increased dramatically—by 29 times compared to pre-restoration sightings.

In addition, dissolved oxygen levels in the river have improved, which is critical for the long-term survival of fish and other aquatic organisms.

Wetland vegetation, which once covered only 37 percent of the Phase I restoration area prior to construction, has fully achieved the restoration target of 80 percent coverage. In addition to an increase in wading birds, shorebirds and waterfowl, the numbers of wetland-dependent marsh birds and songbirds have also increased since restoration began in 2001.

These results suggest that after construction is complete in 2014 and hydrologic conditions are fully restored in 2015, the region is on track to achieve its goal of restored ecological integrity in the Kissimmee River and its floodplain. Ecological monitoring is scheduled to continue for at least five years after project completion to guide management of the flood control system and evaluate the ultimate success of the restoration project.

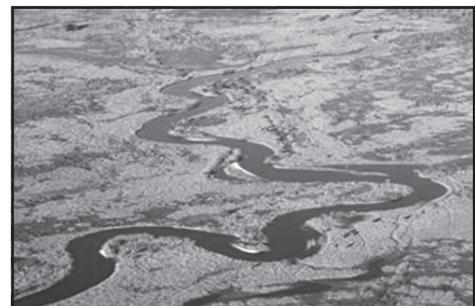
The Kissimmee Basin is the headwaters of Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. The Kissimmee River Restoration Project is a partnership between the South Florida Water Management District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that has been in place for more than 20 years. The Army Corps is responsible for construction, and the District is responsible for land acquisition and restoration evaluation monitoring. Project construction is scheduled for completion in December 2014.



Special to the Okeechobee News/SFWMD
Blue-winged teal are found in the Phase I restoration area.



Special to the Okeechobee News/SFWMD
In the photo above, Yellowlegs are found in the Phase I restoration area. In the photo below the restoration of the river forced water back into the winding oxbows, creating habitat for wildlife.



Special to the Okeechobee News/SFWMD

Birds are plentiful in the areas around the restored Kissimmee River.

OHS tennis team beats Clewiston Lady Tigers

By Charles M. Murphy
Okeechobee News

Okeechobee High School continued to roll over lesser opponents Tuesday as they shut out Clewiston 7-0 in high school tennis action in Hendry County.

For the boys, Otto Ramirez crushed Francisco Reyes in #1 singles 8-0. Brendon Jonassaint, and Colton Root also won their singles matches by shutouts. Jonassaint defeated Richard Valera 8-0 and Root defeated Jamie Laudaverde by the same score.

Cody Walker won in #2 singles in a tough match with Gibran Azan 8-5. Lucas Penido defeated Leo Garcia 8-1 in #4 singles 8-1.

In doubles the team of Jonassaint and Walker defeated Reyes and Valera 8-0 and

the team of Penido and Root defeated Azan and Garcia 8-2.

The OHS girls team also won by shutout against the Lady Tigers and had a number of very strong performances on the court.

Samantha Rivero defeated Anesse Levy 8-5 in the #1 singles match. Jenna Rath rolled past Sussy Tamez 8-1 in #2 singles and Vanessa Watt defeated Anna Jasso in #3 singles, 8-0. Dayla Ferneau, Jessica Luna and Alley Lopez won their singles matches by shutout 8-0.

Okeechobee only dropped one game in the two doubles matches.

The tennis teams traveled to Martin County on Wednesday and return home on Feb. 28 to meet Hardee High School at 4 p.m. at the Okeechobee Sports Complex.

Okeechobee Club soccer continues to expand

By Charles M. Murphy
Okeechobee News

Soccer is more and more a year-round sport in Okeechobee and the Club Soccer Program has announced a spring soccer league for boys and girls only teams for youth ages 7-16.

Signups will be held on Saturday, March 3, at 3 p.m. at the sports Complex Pavilion. For further information or questions please call Lupe Serrano at 561-719-5585.

For ages 7 and 8, 9-10 and 11-12, tryouts are scheduled for Monday and Wednesday

March 12 and 14. For older kids, ages 13-14 and ages 15-16, tryouts are scheduled for Tuesday and Thursday March 13 and 15. Tryouts for the teams will be held from 5 p.m. until 6:30 p.m. at the soccer fields across from North Elementary.

The soccer program will also host an Alumni soccer tournament on Saturday, March 24, at Brahman stadium for athletes 16 and older. The match starts at 4:30 p.m. A \$3 admission will be charged to attend. For more information call Dawn Fox at 863-697-1641 or Manuel Sanchez at 532-1145.

Big Lake Sportsman's Dinner & Expo planned for Saturday

The Big Lake Sportsman's Dinner & Expo will be held Feb. 25, at the Recreation Outreach Complex, 310 S.W. Fifth Avenue. An archery tournament will begin at 2 p.m. The wild game banquet will start at 4 p.m. There will be a fishing simulator, a hunting simulator and prize drawings. For more information call 863-763-2171.

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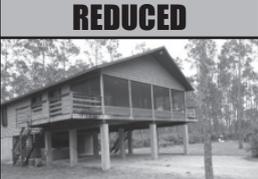


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¹ Whichever comes first. See dealer for limited warranty details. ² Monthly payment is \$16.67 for every \$1,000 financed. Example down payment: 6%. Includes bonus cash. Some customers will not qualify. Excludes leases. See dealer for details. Must take delivery by 2/29/12. ³ EPA estimated. ⁴ Always use safety belts and proper child restraints. Children are safer when properly secured in a rear seat. See the Owner's Manual for more safety information. ⁵ Requires a subscription sold separately by SiriusXM after trial period. Available only in select markets. For more information, see xmradio.com/navtraffic for customer agreement. Available only in the 48 contiguous United States and Washington, D.C. ⁶ Monthly payment is \$16.67 for every \$1,000 financed. Example down payment: 6%. Some customers will not qualify. Not available with some other offers. Excludes leases. Must show proof of current ownership of a 1999 or newer vehicle. Must trade in vehicle. See dealer for details. Must take delivery by 2/29/12. ⁷ Based on Vincentric 2011 Model Level Analysis. ©2012 General Motors.

Big O Teen anglers enjoy day of great fishing

The first Big O Teen Anglers tournament of the new year was held Jan. 28 out of Lock 7. They had 18 anglers take to the water with a 100 percent success rate. Ten of the 18 anglers had a five fish limit. 73 fish totaling 110.34 lbs were brought to the scales.

The winners in the 11-14 year old age group are:

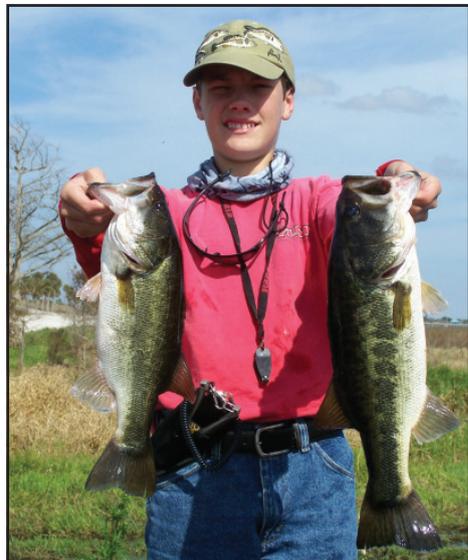
- 1st - Robby Hays 11.89 lbs
- 2nd - Luke Farmer 8.19 lbs
- 3rd - Nathan Center 7.35 lbs and big fish 4.34lbs.

The winners in the 15-18 year old age group are:

- 1st - Matthew Haff 9.77 lbs and big fish 3.51 lbs.
- 2nd - Ty Riva 9.46 lbs.
- 3rd - Kenny Brewer 7.92 lbs.

The Teen Anglers would like to welcome our new members Matthew Haff, Drew

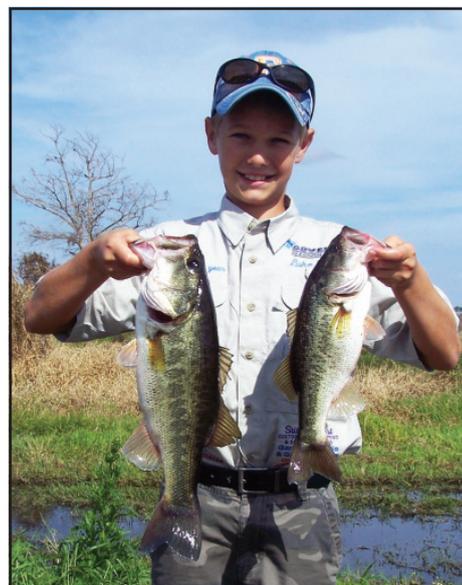
Wanczak, Trevor Teele, Kenny Whaley, Colton Revels, Nathan Center & Josh Hiler. They would also like to thank our boat captains Leroy Bauer, Ken Hall, Mike Ingrahm, Ernie Johnson, Larry Wise, Skip Jeslosky, Matt Johnson, Richard Stiglitz & Mike Zubricky. Thank you George and Madalyne DuPont for the hotdogs and sodas.



Special to the Okeechobee News/Big O Teens Matthew Haff in the 15-18 age group won first place with fish weighing 9.77 lbs. and big fish at 3.51 lbs.



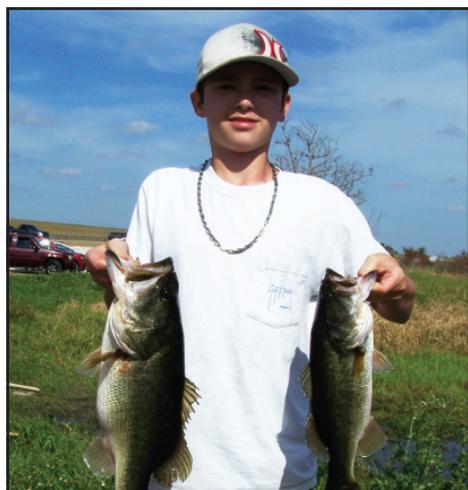
Special to the Okeechobee News/Big O Teens Robby Hays in the 11-14 age group won first place with fish weighing 11.89 lbs.



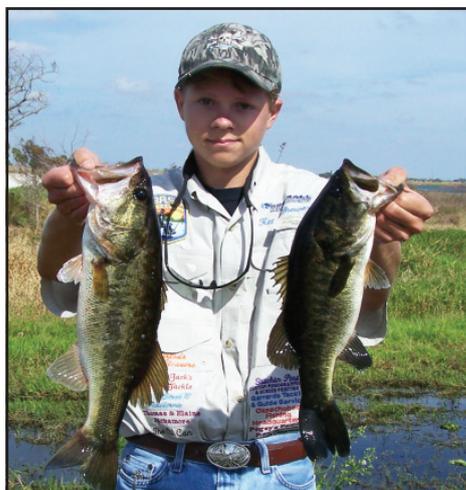
Special to the Okeechobee News/Big O Teens Luke Farmer in the 11-14 age group won second place with fish weighing 8.19 lbs.



Special to the Okeechobee News/Big O Teens Ty Riva in the 15-18 age group won second place with fish weighing 9.46 lbs.



Special to the Okeechobee News/Big O Teens Nathan Center in the 11-14 age group won third place with fish weighing 7.35 lbs. and big fish weighing 4.34 lbs.



Special to the Okeechobee News/Big O Teens Kenny Brewer in the 15-18 age group won third place with fish weighing 7.92 lbs.



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