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Mrs. World spreading her word

By Eugenio Torrens
etorrens@cnewspubs.com

April Lufriu pulls up to her office slowly. As the tires of her dark SUV crackle over the gravel, she peers out through the windshield and smiles — her pearly white smile a stark contrast to her dark brown hair and black sunglasses.

Lufriu steps out of her car and holds her smile as she walks inside to her desk at Lufriu Marble Inc., the company she and her husband, George, started in 1995.

She is dressed in jeans, a gray sweatshirt and white sneakers and works in a fluorescent-lit room.

Say hello to the newest Mrs. World.

Lufriu, 42, didn't always aspire to this.

"If I had to throw on high heels, I'd kind of just cringe," she said with a laugh. "I'd just rather be a simple overall mom, housewife."

She started doing pageants at 19 as a way to bring out her personality, primarily through public speaking and interviews.

"The hardest question is: Tell me about yourself," said the Lutz mother of three — a 12-year-old son, Brandon, an 8-year-old daughter, Savannah, and a 26-year-old stepson, Chad.

She estimated she has been in a total of

See WORLD, page 13

April Lufriu stood in disbelief, hung her head and thanked God when she heard her name called as the winner of the 2011 Mrs. World contest. (Photo courtesy of April Lufriu)

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Gaither High student April Dean hugs her mother, Amy, after the former completed the 200-meter dash at the Special Olympics on Feb. 17. (Photo by Kyle LoJacono)

Big winners at Special Olympics

By Kyle LoJacono
klojacono@cnewspubs.com

Gaither High hosted the Special Olympics games for Hillsborough County's northern schools on Feb. 17, bringing out hundreds of athletes ready to show what they can do.

The event is known as Stampede Day, which had 20 schools participating this year. Events included the tennis and softball throws, races and the shot put to name a few.

One of the athletes competing for the first time at Gaither was Steinbrenner student Rebecca Plumb, who did the 100- and 200-meter dashes.

"We practiced a lot," said Plumb, pointing to herself and

See OLYMPICS, page 13

Freedom High gets new principal

School's former leader takes on district role

By B.C. Manion
bcmanion@cnewspubs.com

There's a new leader at the helm of Freedom High, filling a vacancy created by the promotion of the school's former principal.

David Sheppard was appointed principal of Freedom High effective Feb. 20.

Sheppard said he has aspired to become a principal for the past five or six years and is pleased to have the opportunity to assume the leadership post.

That said, he also knows that high school principals today face daunting challenges. The biggest one, he said, is to engage a wide variety of students in a manner that makes all of them want to come to school.

Freedom has more than 2,000 students, drawing from a range of economic backgrounds. The school, at 17140 Commerce Park Blvd. in Tampa, draws from Lutz and New Tampa, as well as the University Community area and areas to the south.

Some students are dedicated and have a plan for their education, including which colleges they would like to attend, Sheppard said. Others are less motivated, the principal said.

The key is to have adults with the skills and personalities to engage students and to give them a desire to come to school, Sheppard said.

The new principal said his first order of business will be to listen and observe.

"I have a lot to learn about those important people who are already here," Sheppard said. "That will take a little bit of time," Sheppard said.

The educational leader, who lives in Lutz, is the former assistant principal for curriculum at Wharton High. He joined Hillsborough County's public school district in 1992, as a teacher at Leto High. Sheppard then transferred to Wharton in 1999, continuing as a teacher until 2004, when he was promoted to assistant principal for student affairs. He served as assistant principal for curriculum at Wharton beginning in 2006.

He filled a vacancy created by the promotion of Chris Farkas, who will become area leadership director. In that role, Farkas will be working with principals at a number of schools in the district's Area VII.

Farkas began his district career in 1999 as an alternative education/dropout prevention teacher. He came to Freedom as principal in 2006, moving from an assistant principal spot at Tampa Technical High.

David Sheppard

Chris Farkas

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Motorcycle certification fun, educational for trainees

By John Morton
Laker/Lutz News Correspondent

For nearly two decades, Stacy Hosman refused to get on the back of a motorcycle. Once she relented, it took her only two months to decide it was time to move up to the driver's seat.

"When my kids were little, I didn't want to get on the back of my husband Jeff's motorcycle," Hosman, of Dade City, said. "I told him I would do it when my daughter turned 18.

"Once I did it, I realized I didn't belong on the back of a bike. I wanted to do my own thing. I own horses on 20 acres in Dade City. I equate it to this: 'Who would want to be on the back of a horse?'"

Hosman was one of a handful of motorcycle trainees going through riding drills on a recent Sunday at Wharton High School's parking lot. The program, which has been required since July 0 2008 as part of motorcyclist certification, consists of 15 hours – five in the classroom and 10 on the pavement. The program is sponsored by Florida's Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

Hosman is impressed with what she's learned.

"There is a big learning curve with this," she said. "I can't believe all that goes into it."

Louie Kyler, the supervisor on hand Sunday, receives plenty of positive feedback from students like Hosman who take his course.

"Just a couple of month ago, a guy who had just completed the training came up to me and told me the class saved his life – that something had taken place on the road and what he learned had prepared him for it," the 30-year veteran instructor said. "Hearing heartwarming stories like that makes this job worthwhile. The statistics show that the number of motorcycle fatalities in the state has decreased since the program's inception, and that's really all that counts."

Motorcycle trainee Stacy Hosman gets feedback from an instructor during riding drills at Wharton High School in New Tampa.

There are thousands of riders, however, who have not benefited from any training. Many got their licenses long before the requirement was set in place.

"We estimate that 25 to 30 percent of the riders out there have no training," Kyler said. "You hope they'll see value in taking the course, even if they don't have to. You talk to a biker of 30 years about a basic training course, and they look at you like you're nuts. But I'll be darned that whenever we get one, they'll tell us couple of hours in, 'Wow, I didn't know that,' after we point something out. It never fails."

Meanwhile, Hosman's interest in learning to ride is indicative of an ongoing trend of more female riders showing up for classes.

The pack of riders takes a break.

"In the early '80s, when I started doing this, you'd see maybe two throughout a day of four classes – about two for every 50," Kyler said. "Today, it's at least two for every class of 12. Women don't want to be on the back of bikes anymore."

Hosman can attest to that. Despite having complete trust in her husband's driving, she got antsy fast and even felt out of place.

"I was amazed how comfy I felt, but I still must admit I found myself doing some backseat driving," she said. "I would lean forward and ask, 'So, do you see that?' And he'd say, 'Yes,' but if I didn't ask I wouldn't know. It just doesn't feel right, not being in control."

Furthermore, Hosman finds both a social and relationship benefit to her decision to get behind the handlebars.

"I was losing my husband on a lot of weekends because of his motorcycle trips, and now that my kids are grown I don't want that to continue," she said. "He even got into horses for me, but now it's time for me to get involved in what he likes."

So, once this course ends, is a motorcycle of her own a no-brainer for Hosman?

"Oh, absolutely," she said. "Sooner than later."

Interested in participating in the state's Rider Training Program? Go to www.flhsmv.gov.

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President & Publisher
Diane Kortus
dkortus@cnewspubs.com

EDITORIAL
CINDY SPENCE, Editor
cspence@cnewspubs.com

B.C. MANION, Community Editor
bcmanion@cnewspubs.com

KYLE LOJACONO, Sports Editor
klojacono@cnewspubs.com

EUGENIO TORRENS, Staff Writer
etorrens@cnewspubs.com

DESIGN
MATTHEW MISTRETTA, Art Director

STEFANIE BURLINGAME, Graphic Designer

ADVERTISING
TERRI WILLIAMSON, twilliamson@cnewspubs.com
Major Accounts - Lutz, Wesley Chapel
Builders & Developers - Land O' Lakes, West Pasco

STEPHANIE STEPHENSON, sstephenson@cnewspubs.com
Zephyrhills

CASSIE ROBERTS, croberts@cnewspubs.com

ACCOUNTING MANAGER
MARY EBERHARD, meberhard@cnewspubs.com

CUSTOMER SERVICE/ CLASSIFIEDS
CAROLYN BENNETT, cbennett@cnewspubs.com
GENA CROWDER, gcrowder@cnewspubs.com

ADMINISTRATIVE
KATHY WELTON / STEVE MISTRETTA

LOCATION
3632 Land O' Lakes Blvd. Suite 102 / Land O' Lakes, FL 34639

MAIL
P.O. Box 479 / Lutz, FL 33548

PHONE/FAX
ph: 813.909.2800 / fax: 813.909.2802

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Wells Fargo will open branch by year-end

Walmart and Auto Zone will build next door

By B.C. Manion
bcmanion@cnewspubs.com

Wells Fargo plans to open a 5,000-square-foot branch on SR 54, south of Bruce B. Downs Boulevard by the fourth quarter of this year.

The branch will be built using green energy standards, including ATMs that accept stacks of cash or checks without envelopes or deposit slips, according to Christina Smotryski, vice president and corporate communications manager for the bank's Florida region.

The branch will have an open layout, five drive-through lanes and an online banking station, she said.

The branch will be built on one of four outparcels at a site that Pasco County has approved for a 196.150-square-foot Walmart Supercenter and 21,372-square-foot garden center.

It is unclear when Walmart plans to proceed with construction, said Dawn Sutton, a planner for Pasco County. Walmart officials did not respond to several requests for information by The Laker.

An access road to the site will be constructed off Wiregrass Ranch Boulevard, which is a new north-south road that ultimately will run from SR 56 to SR 54.

"Walmart is required to construct a portion of Wiregrass Ranch Boulevard," Sutton said.

A typical Walmart Supercenter has about 300 employees, according to Walmart's website.

AutoZone also has submitted a site plan to the county for one of the other outparcels, but company officials from AutoZone could not be reached for comment.

WESTBAY TO OPEN MODEL

Homes by WestBay plans to open a model home this month in LakeShore Ranch, a 519-acre master-planned community off US 41. The nine executive designs in the gated community will have base prices ranging from $279,990 to $349,990. Homes by WestBay was founded by Roger Gatewood and Willy Nunn, who have built thousands of homes in the Tampa Bay area during the past three decades. For more information, visit www.westbaytampa.com.

WORKSHOP FOR ENTREPRENEURS

Aspiring entrepreneurs can learn the fundamentals of starting a business at a Friday, Feb. 24 workshop by the Pasco Economic Development Council. Carol Hendrix of the University of South Florida's Small Business Development Center will lead the session from 8:30-10 a.m. at the council's office at 16506 Pointe Village Drive Suite 101 in Lutz.

It will cover startup assistance and business plans. There is a $5 charge for a light breakfast. Reservations can be made at www.pascoedc.com/events or by calling (888) 60-PASCO.

Helping hands

Pasco-Hernando Community College nursing students helped Medical Center of Trinity move recently. Pictured left to right are Adam Olson, Tammy Babinski, Brendan Gillespie, Ashley Monsegue, Sara Widbom, Christina Grooms, Steven Teichgraeber, Sherry Johnson, Scheniqueka Williams, Melanie Smith, Jeannine Folden, Franciann Lewandowski, Melanie Banet, Christine Kelly, John Kearns, Meagan Mumich, Samuel McIntyre, Jessica Saunier, Janel Gleason, and Karen Varner. Six instructors and 83 student helped with the move from the former Community Hospital to the new, 236-bed facility at 9330 SR 54 in Trinity. For more information on Medical Center of Trinity, visit www.MedicalCenterTrinity.com or call (727) 834-4000. (Photo courtesy of PHCC)

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Working together for
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Who's who
Meet
Dr. Sullivan

Originally born in Jamaica, Brent Sullivan MD, moved to New Jersey to further his education at New Jersey's University of Medicine and Dentistry, while also achieving his doctorate in medicine and completing his residency.

Dr. Sullivan has been a part of Florida Medical Clinic's staff for 10 years. Some of his special interests include sexual dysfunction, robotic surgery, prostate cancer, vasectomy, and kidney stones.

He played soccer in college and coached local soccer teams. He still enjoys painting watercolors and sketching for recreation. His other hobbies include running, cycling, playing golf, and art appreciation. Dr. Sullivan takes about three weeks out of every year to travel.

Did You Know...

About 1 man in 6 will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during his lifetime.

Prostate cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in American men, behind only lung cancer.

About 1 man in 36 will die of prostate cancer.

The Prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test is how prostate cancer is screened-prostate biopsy diagnoses.

Early prostate cancer usually causes no symptoms and is most often found by diagnostic tests.

Some advanced prostate cancers can slow or weaken your urinary stream or make you need to urinate more often.

If the prostate cancer is advanced, you might develop blood in your urine (hematuria) or trouble getting an erection (impotence).

Age is the strongest risk factor for prostate cancer.

Prostate cancer is very rare before the age of 40, but the chance of having prostate cancer rises rapidly after age 50.

Almost 2 out of 3 prostate cancers are found in men over the age of 65.

Race and ethnicity play a major factor in diagnosing prostate cancer.

Several types of cells are found in the prostate, but almost all of prostate cancers develop from the gland cells.

Some prostate cancers can grow and spread quickly, but most of them grow slowly.

2012…or Stone Age?

By: Erica Collura

Although millions of years apart, there is one small thing the Stone Age and 2012 have in common, stones. Not the stones that are used to build houses, or the stones used to build sidewalks, but the stones the human body creates.

Even though kidney stones are very uncomfortable, the stones can be very treatable. With new technologies and appropriate training, Dr. Yockey is able to guide his patients to an easy recovery.

According to Dr. Yockey, most kidney stone cases occur in men. Dr. Yockey diagnoses a patient with Nephrolithiasis, or kidney stones, by referring patients to Florida Medical Clinic's radiology department to get a cat scan, which is a diagnostic test. "Cat scans will almost always detect kidney stones," said Dr. Yockey. "There is only one type of kidney stone it does not detect, and that particular stone is extremely rare."

There are about five different known types of kidney stones. "Once the kidney stone is passed, it gets sent to a geology lab to be analyzed," he said.

Fortunately, Dr. Yockey can choose from many different options to attack the stones. "In some cases, we can give the patients a prescription to ease the pain, while encouraging patients to drink plenty of water, so the stone can just pass on it's own without surgery."

"In more severe cases that involve surgery, I could use a method called extracorporeal shock wave lithotripsy." Dr. Yockey said. "This uses sound waves to fragment the stone, so it can be passed."

"In other cases, we can use laser technology to act like a jackhammer to the stone. Depending on the type, size and location of the stone, it will determine which surgical method to use."

Dr. Yockey describes today's technology innovative because thirty years ago doctors would have to make a large incision in a patient's abdomen, then remove and filet the kidney to remove the stones. "In most of those cases, patients would end up losing their kidneys."

"As far as preventatives go, I recommend a heart healthy diet, and a consumption of less than two grams of sodium a day." Dr. Yockey said. "I also recommend people to stay well hydrated as dehydration is the number one cause of kidney stones."

Who's who
Meet
Dr. Yockey

Born and raised in Moore, Oklahoma, Mark Yockey MD, attended the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine. He completed his residency in August, and he has practiced with Florida Medical Clinic for about six months.

His new and fresh knowledge of Urology brings a sophisticated dynamic to the Urology department at Florida Medical Clinic. His special interests include general urology, kidney stone disease, robotic surgery and urologic cancer.

Dr. Yockey became intrigued with Urology after gaining knowledge about all the new technology. During his residency, he was able to get immense amounts of hands-on experience with new technology.

When he is not spending quality time with his children, he enjoys doing anything outdoors such as hunting, fishing and golfing.

Dr. Sullivan and Dr. Yockey are located at:
14547 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33613 • 813.979.7733
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Traveling entertainer a staple in Zephyrhills

By Eugenio Torrens
etorrens@cnewspubs.com

Even in a secluded corner of the Chowder House Restaurant in Zephyrhills, Steve Jeffris is still noticeable.

He orders decaf coffee and water and the usual at this establishment — fish and chips. In the nearly two hours Jeffris is at the restaurant, he says hello to at least six people, including a table of three women — who say they "thoroughly enjoyed" his show — a waitress and one of the owners.

He stops to chat with anyone who wants to talk.

Jeffris, 53, is a self-proclaimed entertainer who has been playing the "snowbird circuit," for about 10-15 years. He doesn't limit his shows to Zephyrhills though. He plays all around the country in county and town fairs. His next show, however, is just around the corner in New Port Richey on Wednesday, Feb. 29, where he will perform for General Electric retirees.

"This is what I do for a living," he said.

But Rainbow Village in Zephyrhills is his home away from home — which is Indianapolis — during the winter season and has been for four years.

"I don't have any worries at Rainbow," Jeffris said.

Jeffris may own a unit at Rainbow Village, but he can call all of Zephyrhills his home. With his professional attire, sand-blonde beard and hair, Jeffris is pretty recognizable around town.

"I chase the snowbird circuit," Jeffris said.

He got this way because of two things: his personality and his ability.

Jeffris received his first guitar for Christmas when he was 13. By his junior year in high school, he had formed a band — Steve Jeffris and The Country Entertainers — and recorded his first album. By the time he was out of high school, there was another album and another band — The Circle City Express.

"You go through a lot of band names through the years, like you're changing socks or undershorts," Jeffris said.

He also spun records out of high school at his local radio station and that helped him memorize song lyrics, song titles, album artwork and album titles effortlessly.

Already immersed in music, Jeffris spent a lot of his early career in Nashville.

"I guess you might say trying to make it," Jeffris said. "You chase that and then it seems as you mature and you get a little bit older you realize that maybe you're chasing the wrong thing.

"It probably was better that I didn't go the Nashville route," he added. That doesn't mean Nashville didn't almost hook him.

In the late 80s, he got a call from an agency in Nashville about the possibility of getting a five-piece band together to open for a budding country star.

Steve Jeffris has been playing music for more than 35 years. Despite his Midwest music roots and professional connection to Nashville — a city steeped in music history — Jeffris loves his gig as a traveling entertainer chasing the "snowbird circuit" in Pasco County and Central Florida. (Photo courtesy of Steve Jeffris)

Jeffris decided against it, preferring the life he had established to the rigors of a superstar's touring life.

"I almost did, and I decided not to because I was already making a good living as a musician and entertainer," he said. "I was traveling some, but I had control over it and I didn't want to give that up.

"Turns out that that up-and-coming star was Garth Brooks," Jeffris said with a chuckle. "I really feel I made the right move," he continued. "I've had a ball in the last 35 years."

In 1990, Jeffris left the security of his job as a steel pipe and tubing distributor to pursue a career as a fulltime entertainer.

Armed with his guitar and a personality driven to feed off entertaining the crowd, Jeffris has compiled 11 CDs.

But it's the live shows that really get Jeffris excited and fresh after 35 years of performing.

"The audience always revives you," Jeffris said. "My therapy is get me on the phone and find me a show — give me an hour on stage and I'm well again."

In his live shows, he sings and accompanies himself on guitar with no tracks or canned music. The only piece of machinery up on stage is a drum machine to fill out the sound.

Jeffris believes the authenticity and directness of his show are reflected in his popularity.

He does it the "old-fashioned way." He books himself and manages all the administrative work that comes with his profession.

He plays an estimated more than 400 shows per year. His shows are generally either two hours with an intermission or a straight-through one-hour show.

"They like to see people do it," Jeffris said. In fact, part of Jeffris' act is trying to make people in the community and audience the star.

As part of his show at Rainbow Village, he always gets the manager of the park a special something. And when he can help it, that something involves bringing the community together.

There was the time he brought in the Zephyrhills High marching band to his show. One time, he stopped mid-show to place an order for a pie for his manager and a second later, a Sonic waitress rolled up on skates with the pie in hand.

He is constantly trying to top himself when it comes to surprising his manager. He is just as determined to improve his show in general.

Despite three-plus decades of playing, Jeffris is constantly tweaking his routine and says he'll play as long as he doesn't sound or look bad to the audience. As if preplanning for possible denial, he even made a pact with his wife, Sharon, that she would tell him when it was time to end his career.

"I'm not satisfied with my show yet," he said. He might be the only one in Zephyrhills.

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Discover the grandeur of a fantastically rich culture, that of classical China, brought to life through brilliantly choreographed dance and mesmerizing, all-original orchestral compositions. Magnificently costumed dancers—the world's elite—move in poetic arrangements that evoke pastoral beauty, imperial drama, and the glory of an ancient civilization. This season, discover what art was meant to be. Discover Shen Yun.

"I just feel blessed having been exposed to this level, this caliber of performance. It was a complete edifying experience of the human spirit. I come away with feeling like a better human being for having experienced this magnificent event."

— Omega Medina, *former senior manager of classical music for the Grammy Awards*

What Does "Shen Yun" Mean?

CHINESE IS AN IMMENSELY rich language. Many characters contain deep inner meanings and nuances that are difficult to translate into English, such as those in our very name: Shen Yun.

The character Shen (神) is a general term for "divine" or "divine being." Chinese cosmology, in fact, is replete with hundreds of deities, Buddhas, and Taoist immortals who play different roles and color the canon of Chinese history with thousands of rich stories.

This feeling of the divine plays into the second character of our name: Yun (韻). Its meaning is far greater than what literal translation can capture. "Yun" refers to the overall manner of a dancer, a dancer's style, and the meaning behind his or her movements.

So, when we put "Shen" and "Yun" together: it's about the grace, compassion, and sublime beauty of heavenly realms that are shown through the subtlest expressions and gestures of our dancers. That is the essence of the name "Shen Yun."

"Demonstrating the highest realm in arts. Shen Yun inspires the performing arts circle."
— *Chi Cao,* *principal dancer of Birmingham Royal Ballet*

"Shen Yun is absolutely No. 1, the top one in the world, absolutely the best..."
— *Ken Wells,* *legendary principal dancer of the English National Ballet*

"Absolutely beautiful... so inspiring... I may have found some new ideas for the next Avatar movie."
— *Robert Stromberg,* *Academy Award-winning production designer for Avatar*

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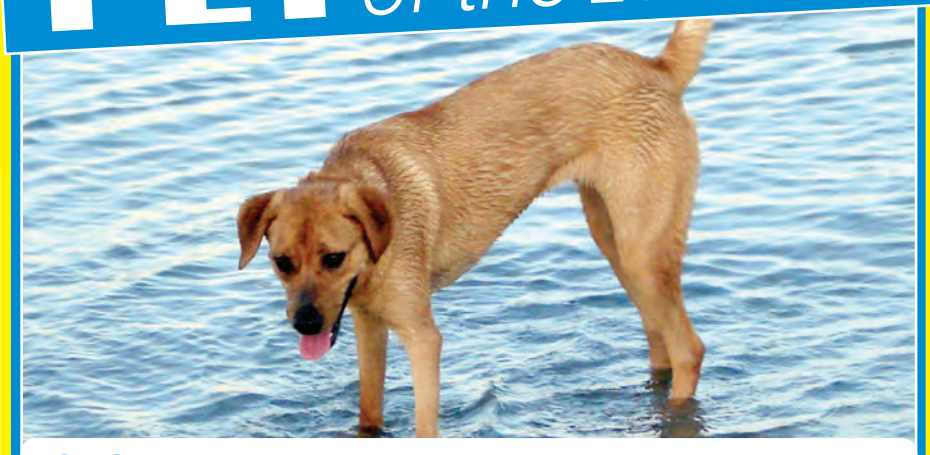
PET of the WEEK



Kira is a therapy dog

Kira is a 3-year-old mixed breed dog adopted from the Humane Society of Tampa Bay, and she is a registered therapy dog with Therapy Dogs Inc. and Tranquil Pawz Therapy Dogs. Kira serves as a reading dog at the Land O' Lakes library, while promoting the work of therapy dogs and the benefits of adopting pets from shelters. She is sweet and loving, and is loved by her family, including human, canine, and feline members of the Rodriguez family of Land O' Lakes.

Send us a pictur e and information on your favorite pet!
Write a story about why your pet is special along with a photo and mail to:
Pet of the Week, c/o The Laker, P.O. Box 479, Lutz, FL 33548
Email to kwelton@cnewspubs.com, ATTN: Pet of the Week

PLEASE NOTE: OWNERS NAME AND CITY OF RESIDENCE MUST BE INCLUDED FOR YOUR PET TO BE CONSIDERED FOR PUBLICATION.

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67 - 88 lbs	$70	45 - 66 lbs	$70
89 - 132 lbs	$85	67 - 88 lbs	$90
		89 - 132 lbs	$105

VACCINE CLINICS: Monday-Friday 1 - 2 pm

Walk-Ins Welcome. Subject to $3 medical, infectious & records fee.
(Includes exam & economy vaccines. Consult is add'l $30 on request.)

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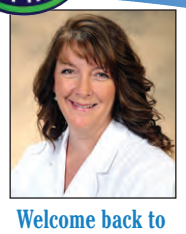

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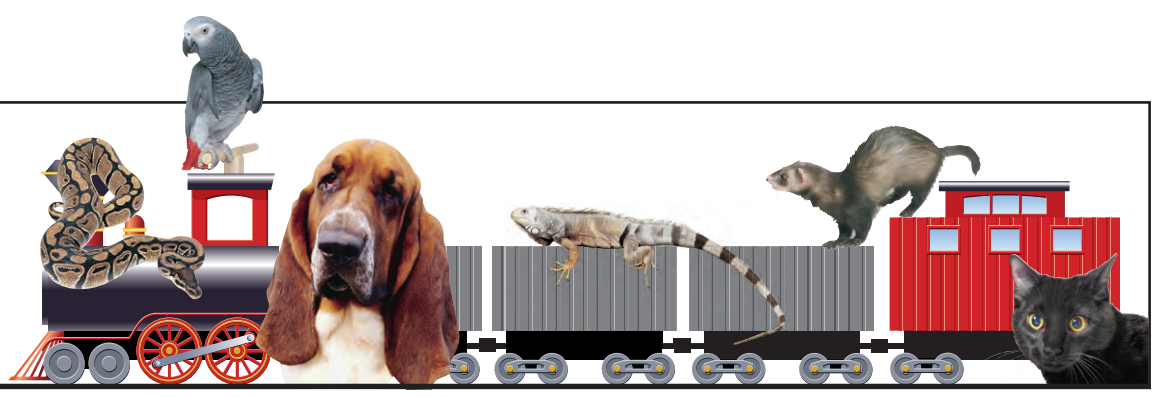

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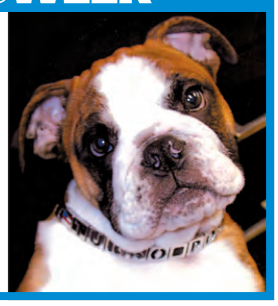

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What's Happening

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OFF TO THE RACES

The third annual Little Everglades International Combined Driving Event will be Feb. 23-26 at Little Everglades Ranch in Dade City.Top drivers and horses will be competing in selection trials for the 2012 World Championships. Singles, pairs and 4-in-hand classes will compete. On Saturday, Feb. 25, spectators can enjoy Jack Russell terrier races, classic cars, a children's area, Uncle Mike's Hugging Farm, food and beverage vendors and a silent auction. Admission is $10 per day with children 12 and under admitted free. For more information call (352) 521-3661 or email info@LittleEvergladesSteeplechase.org.

FUN AT THE FAIR

The 65th annual Pasco County Fair runs through Sunday, Feb. 26 at the fairgrounds, 36722 SR 52. Fair hours are from 3-11 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. On Friday, the fair is open from 3 p.m.-midnight; 10 a.m.-midnight on Saturday; and noon-7 p.m. on Sunday. Parking is free.Tickets are $8 for adults and $5 for children 6-12.Younger children are free. For a list of events or more information, visit www.pascocountyfair.com or call (352) 567-6678.

OPEN HOUSE

Bishop McLaughlin Catholic High School is having an open house for sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 23 at the school, 13651 Hays Road, Spring Hill. Presentations and student-led tours will be held throughout the evening. Information will be available on transportation and scholarship opportunities. For more information, visit www.bmchs.com

SYNAGOGUE HOSTS CONCER T

Shoresh David Messianic Synagogue will host Paul Wilbur in concert Friday, Feb. 24 at 7 p.m. at the synagogue, 33425 SR 54, Wesley Chapel. For more information call (813) 760-3269 or visit www.shoreshdavid.org.

COURAGEOUS

Grace Community Church will host a free showing of "Courageous" at Wesley Chapel District Park, 7727 Boyette Road, on Friday, Feb. 24 at 7 p.m. Participants are encouraged to bring chairs, blankets and snacks.The inspirational police drama shows everyday heroes who long to be the kinds of dads that make an impact on their children. For more information, call Pastor Jeff Olsen at (813) 994-9363 or visit www.ExploreGrace.com.

CHILDREN'S DA Y

Tampa Tamil Association will hold its fifth annual Children's Day competitions on Saturday, Feb. 25 and Saturday, March 3. The first event features chess, a spelling bee, geography bee and musical instruments at the Hindu Temple of Florida auditorium, 5509 Lynn Road.The second event features vocal classical/cinematic music, a quiz, coloring and drawing, fancy dress and story-writing competitions at Benito Middle School, 10101 Cross Creek Blvd., Tampa. Register at http://tamausa.dyndns.org/ChildrensDayRegn.aspx. For information, call Mahalakshmi Ramesh at (813) 994-3707, Sheila Narayanan at (813) 961-6120.

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

LORDS AND LADIES

The 34th Annual Bay Area Renaissance Festival is ready to take visitors on a journey back in time. More than 100 merchants add to the atmosphere of this charming 16th century village featuring endless entertainment, shopping, fun and food fit for a king.The theme this weekend, Feb. 25-26, is Wonders of the World, featuring a barbecue competition, a world market, belly dance competition, and free wine tastings.The festival is in town through April 1 with gates open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at MOSI. Adult tickets are $18.95, tickets for children 5-12 are $10.95, and senior tickets are $14.95. Parking is free and discount tickets are available at participating Walgreens, Circle K stores, and online at www.BayAreaRenaissanceFest.com.

AARP MEETS

The Land O'Lakes chapter of the AARP will meet Friday, Feb. 24 at 10:30 a.m. at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, 20735 Leonard Road. Featured entertainers are the Friendship Singers, directed by Delores Gast.Audience participation is encouraged in many numbers. Attendance is open to all AARP members or prospective members.This meeting is free; annual dues are $10 per person. Coffee and cake will be served and contributions are welcome. For more information, call George E. Cooper, (813) 996-6100.

MEN'S MINISTR Y

Sonrise Worship Center will hold a free car wash and cookout Saturday, Feb. 25 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.Any donations will benefit "The Rock" men's ministry.The center is at 18319 US 41 in Lutz. For more information call (813) 928-9539.

STORYTELLING

Learn the art of storytelling and why the preservation of its practice in health and wellness, community building, and education is important. From ancient times, storytelling has been the basis of all communication. Join the fun: share stories, and help build the community, Saturday, Feb. 25 at 11 a.m. at the Austin Davis Public Library, 17808 Wayne Road in Odessa.The program is free. For more information, call (813) 273-3652 or visit www.hcplc.org.

HEALING MUSIC

The Land O' Lakes Sunrays Relay for Life team is hosting a Concert for a Cure on Saturday, Feb. 25, at the Land O' Lakes Community Center, 5401 Land O' Lakes Blvd.The event will feature a play area with a bounce house for children. For more information, call (813) 746-9329.

ELLA TRIBUTE

Sonny and Perley present "Ella Unplugged," a tribute to Ella Fitzgerald, Sunday, Feb. 26 at 3 p.m. at the Jimmie B. Keel Regional Library, 2902 W. Bearss Ave.The well-known jazz duo of Sonny Daye and Perley Rousseau wrap up Black History Month with a celebration in song honoring Ella Fitzgerald.The program is free. For more information, call (813) 273-3652 or visit www.hcplc.org/"www.hcplc.org.

WEDDINGS AND SUCH

If you need professional help with a special event, check out the 2012 Events Extravaganza Expo Sunday, Feb. 26 from noon-4 p.m. at the Pebble Creek Golf Club. For free admission, register in advance on Facebook on All Brides 2 Be, LLC and Formalwear or Events 2 Perfection or by calling Carmen at (813) 838.5422.Admission is $5 at the door.The event will present ideas for weddings, vow renewal ceremonies, quinces or sweet sixteen parties, galas, bar/bat mitzvahs, themed parties, corporate events, graduations, proms, recitals or reunions.The Pebble Creek Golf Club is at 10550 Regents Park Drive.

BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND

Christian comedian Gordon Douglas will offer a night of good, clean fun when he headlines the "Leap for Life Benefit Gala" to benefit LifeChoices Women's Care in Lutz, a nonprofit pregnancy resource clinic.The event is Wednesday, Feb. 29 at 7 p.m. at Bethany Center, 18150 Bethany Center Drive, Lutz. Cost is $50 per person, which includes dinner.

BROMELIAD BONANZA

The Founders Garden Club and the Day Z Flower Club of San Antonio will have a joint meeting Thursday, March 1 at 9 a.m. at the home of Bonnie Hill of San Antonio. Dave Johnston, former president of the Bromeliads Society and owner of Bromeliads Galore, will be the speaker. Johnston has four greenhouses and 26 years of experience growing bromeliads. He will bring some of is 1,500 varieties to sell. For information, call Donna Swart, (352) 588-3631.A field trip is planned for the April meeting.

INSTEAD OF PURIM BASKETS

The Tampa Ameet Chapter in partnership with the Young Israel Chabad is sponsoring a Purim project to donate food directly to those in need, instead of making Purim baskets.There are three levels of giving, but any donations and volunteers are welcome. For more information or to volunteer, call Meral at (813) 412-7032 or Chana at (813) 375-9799.The deadline is Thursday, March 1.

DOGS JUST WANT TO HAVE FUN

Bark-fest 2012 is coming to the Land O' Lakes Recreation Complex Saturday, March 3, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Bark-fest is a day of fun for dogs, with vendors, giveaways, demonstrations, obedience advice, games and more.You can bring your dog or adopt one.The event, 3032 Collier Parkway, is free but pet supply donations will be accepted. For more information call (813) 929-1220.

MARS IN MARCH

March finds Mars at its closest to Earth, and the sun will fully illuminate the red planet's surface. Join skywatchers at the Museum of Science and Industry Saturday, March 3 from 7-10 p.m. to observe the most studied planet in our solar system.A NASA scientist will explain how NASA plans to send people to Mars and build colonies.Visit MOSI's planetarium for an interactive show about the night sky and end the evening with a view of Mars through telescopes on top of the IMAX Dome Theatre.The program fee is $20.

BOOMER BASKETBALL

The Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department is looking for adults 50 or older to compete in a 5-on-5 full court basketball league.The league will play at All Peoples Life Center, 6105 E. Sligh Ave. in Tampa. Registration is March 6 10 a.m. to noon, and the games will be Tuesdays, March through May, from 10 a.m. to noon.The $10 fee includes trophies for the winning team. For more information, call (813) 744-5871.

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EXECUTIVE HOME LOT on the corner of Big Moss Lake Road and Graham Lane just $42,000 for .58 of an acre that was purchased for $80,000 in 2007! Hurry and call Faith Garcia 813-503-6610 because this one is a steal!

2/2/2 IN THE GROVES boasts a library, fitness center, craft room, pool and Jacuzzi, lighted tennis courts, and of course 18-hole golf course $128,500. Call Carol Winship 813-469-1554

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BIG LAKE THOMAS 4 acres lake front, dock, power pole, well. Possible multiple home sites with 6 ft black chain link fence. Own your own heavily wooded/secluded estate. Call Cody 813-909-0712

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Troop 323 Supports Scouting for Food

Boy Scouts from Troop 323 in Land O' Lakes participated in the Boy Scouts of America's annual national "Scouting for Food" event Feb. 11 and 12. They collected food donations outside Publix on the corner of SR 56 and Bruce B. Downs Blvd. as well as at Winn Dixie on SR 54 and Collier Parkway. A total of 3,538 pounds of food was collected and donated to the Suncoast Harvest Food Bank in Pasco County. The group received $480 in cash donations, which the couponing moms of the troop turned into $1,500 worth of food donations. Scouts pictured are bottom row, left to right Alex Houtz, Griffen Gray, Spencer Sass, Kenny Linderbeck, Broc Fischer; second row, Eric Houtz, Keith Linderbeck, Harrison Fine, Spencer Weirich, Jimmy Brucker; and third row, Casey Weirich, Ray Binney Casey Zurawski; and top, scoutmaster Kay Linderbeck. Also participating were Aidan Jamai, Christian Benson, Dalton Gilliland, Matthew Fisher, Max Gebhart, Peter Marshall, and Steven Snell. (Photo courtesy of Laura Binney)

Free tax help is around the corner

Laker/Lutz News Staff Report

An army of volunteers turned out last tax season to prepare more than 1,000 tax returns in the Zephyrhills and Dade City area.

They are back to help again.

The AARP Tax-Aide Volunteers will prepare tax returns for free for filing with the Internal Revenue Service. All Tax-Aide volunteers are trained and certified by the IRS, and the service is open to taxpayers of any age of low to moderate income.

Returns are submitted electronically and refunds are available in approximately 10 days. Taxpayers do not have to be AARP members to participate.

The service is available now through April 14 on the following days and locations:

--Mondays: Assembly of God Church, Zephyrhills

--Tuesdays: First Baptist Church, Dade City

--Thursdays: Assembly of God Church, Zephyrhills

--Satur days: St. Rita Catholic Church, Dade City

To make an appointment call the United Way of Pasco County at (727) 845-4357.

For appointments, bring social security cards for all taxpayers and dependents, photo IDs, all tax papers, information on home energy improvements and last year's return. Walk-ins are accepted after taxpayers with appointments have been accommodated.

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Photo by Catherine French

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Photo by Lisa McCoy

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WORLD, from page 1

10 pageants. She was a dental hygienist before she and George started their marble company.

When the business started, she didn't know how to read a ruler. Now she helps her husband run the place, from taking measurements to doing templates.

Lufriu's work schedule has been a bit more demanding ever since she's donned her newest crown.

"It's a big team effort," she said, noting how her husband and parents help bear the load. "If I had to do it alone, there's no way."

So how exactly did a working mom who did pageants in her teenage years land back on the path toward tiaras?

Two words: Retinitis pigmentosa (RP).

RP is one name for a group of inherited vision disorders that causes progressive degeneration of the retina, the light sensitive membrane that coats the inside of the eyes. The majority of RP cases gradually erode peripheral vision to the point of loss and in some forms of RP, central vision may also be affected. Originally, Lufriu became invested in the cause when her sister was diagnosed with RP in 2007. It was in 2010 that Lufriu received more life-altering news: Lufriu and her son, Brandon, and daughter, Savannah, all suffered from the affliction to varying degrees.

"I felt like I was back at square one. I would be driving and crying," she said, questioning why this was happening to her and her family.

Rather than stand back and wait for RP to take its toll on the affected members of the Lufriu family, she returned to the pageant circuit. This time, it wasn't about self-discovery or personal growth, there was a bigger motivating factor.

"That's my ultimate goal, is to make (RP) a household name and in my lifetime to find a cure or something to halt the condition for my kids," Lufriu said. "That's the purpose why I was put on this Earth, and I found that out at the age of 40."

Her Hollywood-esque story caught the attention of pageant judges.

Lufriu remembers the time a judge told her he had written down "winner" during a competition after hearing Lufriu's mission.

"When you're speaking with someone, and you have a message that really strikes someone like 'Oh wow,' I tell you, you're going to stand out bigger than a Raquel Welch," Lufriu said.

"I think if I didn't have a story behind me, I don't think I would have walked away with Mrs. America nor Mrs. World."

David Marmel, cofounder with his wife, Elaine, and CEO of the Mrs. America and Mrs. World contests, was just as taken with Lufriu's background.

"I mean c'mon, take a look at who this woman is and her family structure and what she does professionally and personally and philanthropically.

"She's juggling home, family, career simultaneously and in a magnificent way. On top of that, she's carrying a burden that is indescribable — indefinable rather — to describe," Marmel added. "My God, I don't think I'm articulate enough to define this amazing woman."

When her name was called, she stood — suspended in disbelief — and hung her head and thanked God.

"It really hits you when you wake up the next morning," Lufriu said. "I think I woke up at like five in the morning and go 'Wow.' That's all I could say, was wow."

Soon she was saying "RP."

With the Mrs. World crown bestowed on her, Lufriu sought to use her increased visibility to raise RP awareness.

"People can really relate to April because she is so personally close to the mission of the Foundation Fighting Blindness and retinal diseases," said Allie Gebhardt, senior manager of media relations for the Foundation Fighting Blindness. "People can not only relate to her, but really look to her as an example of having a positive attitude about it and make the best of a situation through raising awareness and putting the focus on research and the future."

But the business-savvy Mrs. World is the first to point out awareness doesn't pay the bills.

"I need the funds in order to make this happen," she said. "I can speak and bring awareness as much as I can, but if I don't get the contributions from the public, what am I doing?"

For more information, or to donate to the Foundation Fighting Blindness, visit www.fightblindness.org.

Mrs. World stands with her family as they celebrate her achievement. Lufriu was chosen among 58 women. (Photo courtesy of April Lufriu)

Steinbrenner High student Erin Visoky prepares to launch a tennis ball during the Special Olympics games at Gaither High.

Wharton High senior Alex Lange does the shot put at Stampede Day at Gaither High on Feb. 17.

Buchanan Middle student Daren Deramus heads toward the finish line during the 25-meter wheelchair race.

OLYMPICS, from page 1

Steinbrenner teacher and Special Olympics volunteer Floyd Graham. She then added, "I can go fast and do my hardest. That's the best part."

Warriors teammate Erin Visoky did the tennis-ball throw and 25-meter run.

"I love everything here," Visoky said. "I love the tennis-ball throw, the runs, hanging out with my friends and seeing all the fans in the stands."

Visoky has competed at the event for the last four years going back to when she attended Gaither. She enjoyed the opportunity to get back to her first high school.

"That's great because I get to come back and see all my old friends and teachers," Visoky said.

Alex Lange was representing Wharton High at the event, competing in the shot put.

"I've done (Stampede Day) four times and I really look forward to supporting my friends from my school," Lange said. He then added, "I've only done the shot put one time before, and it's actually really easy to learn. You have to put a lot of effort into it though."

Two of the volunteers at the games were Gaither seniors Kayla and Katie Zambito.

The twin sisters have helped at the games the last four years. The Zambitos are co-president of the Cowboys' Best Buddies club, which pairs special education students with volunteers. Kayla's buddies with Luisa Valdez and Katie is paired with Rachel Guevarez.

"I really like being able to help them do a race if they want or support them in whatever they want to do," Kayla said. She then added, "We both started volunteering with a special needs program that does baseball for kids. Then we started volunteering with Best Buddies and volunteering at Special Olympics."

Katie added, "Being out here and seeing them run and jump and just have fun is really rewarding. It's awesome to see big smiles on all of their faces."

Hillsborough athletes next compete in the area games at the University of South Florida on March 10 for all spring events.

From left are Special Olympics buddies Luisa Valdes, Kayla Zambito, Rachel Guevarez and Katie Zambito during Stampede Day. (Photos by Kyle LoJacono)

Land O' Lakes ruled guilty of recruiting violations

By Kyle LoJacono
klojacono@cnewspubs.com

Land O' Lakes High has been found guilty of six violations by the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA) involving two students who are siblings.

The Gators must forfeit 44 athletic contests, including 23 football games, 16 junior varsity volleyball matches and five boys weightlifting meets. The school was fined $3,200 and the entire athletic department is on probation until June 1, 2013.

The FHSAA's report states a "concerned parent" told Land O' Lakes about the potential violations on Feb. 3. The school conducted an internal investigation and the two students withdrew from Land O' Lakes on Feb. 6.

Corey Sobers, FHSAA spokesman, said the final ruling was given to the school on Feb. 13. Land O' Lakes can appeal.

The FHSAA report states the family was "assisted by a coach and a football booster parent, who helped them to obtain and submit a false address to allow the students to attend Land O' Lakes High School, though they actually lived outside the district." The same address was used in August 2012 when the younger sibling enrolled at Land O' Lakes as a freshman.

Sobers said the football coach was Matt Kitchie, who was hired in 2009 but was relieved of his duties following an unrelated off-the-field incident at the end of the 2010 season.

Portions of Land O' Lakes' self-report released by the FHSAA state Kitchie knew one of the students' parents because they both coached together at a college in Kentucky. The parent told Kitchie the player wasn't happy at his school in Hillsborough County.

Former Gators quarterback Ryan Bird is at the center of six recruiting violations at Land O' Lakes High.

Former Land O' Lakes football coach Matt Kitchie was found to have been part of the illegal recruitment of Ryan Bird, who has since withdrawn from the school. (File photos)

"(Kitchie) talked about how to orchestrate the documents needed that would allow (name redacted) to enroll at LOLHS," the self-report states. … "Upon further review by the school, we determined that the address being used was at a local business, owned by football booster-parents."

The self-report states the booster, who was not identified, was "hesitant" to go along with the plan "but complied because he did not want to fall out of favor with his son's coach."

Kitchie, now the coach at Leto, denies any involvement.

"I had nothing to do with this," Kitchie said. "It's completely false."

Summer Romagnoli, spokeswoman for the Pasco School District, said no other Land O' Lakes faculty was part of the investigation.

The booster involved is banned from any contact with Gators athletics.

The Laker/Lutz News has learned the football player in question is quarterback Ryan Bird. The senior transferred from Hillsborough High for his junior year.

Ryan, who was an International Baccalaureate student at both schools, started two games as a junior and 10 contests, including the kickoff classic, in 2011.

FHSAA bylaws state a team must forfeit any contest in which an ineligible player was on the active roster even if they did not play. Ryan was on the Gators' roster for all 23 games, including two kickoff classics, the last two years and was a part of five Land O' Lakes' boys weightlifting meets last season.

The Gators went 9-2 in 2010, reaching the playoffs for the 14th straight season. Sobers said the program must vacate that postseason appearance, ending the streak at 13. Land O' Lakes finished 7-3 in 2011 without making regionals.

Ryan has one sibling, a younger sister named Madison.

Steve Bird, Ryan and Madison's father, is an assistant football coach at the University of South Florida. He coached at Eastern Kentucky University from 2005-06, the same time Kitchie was a graduate assistant at the college.

Steve Bird did not return multiple phone and email requests for comment on this story.

Land O' Lakes could have been fined $2,500 for each of the 32 contests that either of the ineligible students played in for a total of $80,000. Sobers said the amount was lessened because the school self-reported the violations.

Sobers said the Gators are eligible for the postseason in other sports this year, but another violation by any Land O' Lakes athletic program during the probation could result in playoff bans.

The FHSAA report states the school is "making changes to the enrollment requirements." It also states Land O' Lakes principal Ric Mellin "accepted full responsibility for the administration of these sports."

An inferno of no-nonsense

By Eugenio Torrens
etorrens@cnewspubs.com

Harold Givens wasn't happy and he decided to do something about it.

His daughter, Jade, was playing AAU basketball in 2003 when Givens decided there was room for improvement.

"We figured we could do it better, we could do it more effectively," Givens said. "So we started Tampa Bay Inferno."

And with that spark, Givens and his no-nonsense basketball regime began.

Givens called AAU pressure packed, noting how kids aren't there to solely have fun. They're there to learn and win in the process.

"If you don't measure up, you don't play. If you don't compete and win a spot, you don't receive a spot," Givens said.

Givens has applied his philosophy to his recreational league as well, the Junior Magic, which practices in sync with the Inferno.

"We serve a clientele that's being underserved, and that's for people that want the truth and want their kids to be taught," Givens said.

Currently, Inferno includes seven girls teams ranging from sixth-grade to high school players. The AAU season goes from late February to October — including roughly 15 tournaments and traveling within Florida, to Georgia, all the way to Virginia.

Givens' success didn't come without trials and tribulations. He said people originally took his kindness for weakness, including sticking their hands into the organization's pocket.

"I learned on the fly how to run a business," Givens said. "I watch where the money goes. I watch my people, I watch the parents. If we have to dismiss a parent and a kid, we have no problems."

Coach Harold Givens works with Morgan Sieper, 9, during a recent practice for the Inferno's joint program, the Junior Magic league. The Magic is the Inferno's recreational league. (Photos by Glenn Gefers of photosby3g.com)

Givens also has shied away from dealing with parents and politics. He has no qualms cleaning house.

"They want things their way and they don't want to follow the rules as far as Tampa Bay Inferno," Givens said. "That's really not accepted here. … We're going to do this thing right."

Part of the reason Givens strives for a nonpolitically charged environment is because his organization serves kids from different backgrounds. Kids come from Wesley Chapel, Lutz, Land O' Lakes and from as far away as Zephyrhills and Polk County.

Harold Givens started Tampa Bay Inferno after he wasn't happy the way his daughter's basketball skills were being tested in another AAU league.

One thing that translates, no matter where kids come from, is Givens' yelling.

"You have two types of kids: kids that can deal with aggressiveness and some kids that can't," Givens said.

While Givens has tried to temper his attitude, there's a lot of yelling. He wants kids to have fun and achieve, so long as they don't mind a bit of screaming along the way.

Anika Moffitt, 12, is in her first year with the Inferno and said she has no problems with Givens' techniques.

"Anybody can go out there and tell themselves to quit, but you have to have a strong mind to tell yourself to keep going," Moffitt said. "He'll even walk over to the door and tell you to leave."

Givens added, "It's not for the faint of heart. That's why I love this country so much — this country has choices. You can choose to keep your kids here or you choose not to. It doesn't bother me."

And Givens' at-times abrasive attitude has attracted kids more than it has scared them off.

"You gotta let Coach (Givens) coach," said Carol Brower, whose daughter, Stephanie, is in her third year with the Inferno. "If he's gonna yell at your kid to get your kid motivated, that's what you gotta let him do."

Brower said she noticed immediate improvement in her daughter's game and Stephanie wouldn't play anywhere else.

Anne Dykeman said Givens' intimidating and gruff exterior isn't the whole story.

"He might tell you what you're doing wrong, but he builds you back up," Dykeman said.

Some of Givens' colleagues don't agree with his coaching mentality, but none can argue with the results. The Inferno's sixth-grade team was the Youth Basketball of America national runner-up in addition to the AAU state champions.

"I want to be a national powerhouse," Givens said. "The ultimate goal, we may not reach it, is for everyone of our kids to get to college. Every single one. I want them all to obtain college scholarships."

For more information on the Inferno, call Givens at (813) 997-9933 or email TBInferno@hotmail.com.

CHECK THIS OUT

St. Petersburg stops the Bulls

The Wiregrass Ranch boys basketball team fell 77-50 at St. Petersburg in the Class 7A regional quarterfinals on Feb. 16.

The Bulls (17-11) were seeking consecutive regionals semifinals appearances after losing seven seniors, including four starters from a year ago, but were unable to hang with St. Petersburg's offense.

For more boys basketball playoff coverage, see page 16.

Gators just short of program history

By Kyle LoJacono
klojacono@cnewspubs.com

Land O' Lakes coach Mark Pearson, center, consoles seniors Andy Garcia, seated left, and Nicholas Kempton after losing the state finals. (Photos by Glenn Gefers of www.photosby3g.com)

Gators senior Nathan Dalton, right, fights for position with Patriots defender Martin Lasprilla.

The Land O' Lakes boys soccer team's first trip to the state finals since 1999 didn't have the storybook ending its players wanted.

The Gators (23-4-2) lost in the Class 3A championship 3-1 to Plantation American Heritage at the University of South Florida on Feb. 18, forcing them to wait another year for the program's first state title.

Land O' Lakes had momentum entering halftime with the score 1-1, but a pair of quick strikes by the Patriots (26-0-3) out of the locker room sealed the win. American Heritage scored 39 seconds into the second half and found the back of the net in the 46th minute.

"We came out a little flat coming out of halftime," said 15-year Gators coach Mark Pearson. "They made some good combination plays in the middle of the field and unfortunately we didn't defend very well, and not just individually but as a unit."

Land O' Lakes had its share of opportunities in the second half, including five free kicks inside or near the 18-yard box and a cross from Nathan Dalton headed just wide left by Sean Young.

"We threw as much as we could going forward, and were able to hold them to three and not give anything else up in the counterattack," Pearson said. "We just didn't finish our opportunities. … What we did do well their goalkeeper covered up well."

The Gators' goal came in the 10th minute less than 2 minutes after American Heritage opened up the scoring. Land O' Lakes' Josh Davis sent a long cross from right to left, which Miguel Laliberte sent back toward the middle for Adam Weinstock to head home.

The Gators were unable to find the back of the net again despite outshooting the Patriots 20-10.

"It hasn't really sunk in yet that we made it all the way here and lost," said Dalton, a senior midfielder/forward. "A lot of the kids were just lying on the ground, but we just told everybody to keep their heads up because we made it this far."

Land O' Lakes' finals run comes after losing 10 seniors from a year ago. The current Gators were unable to win the program's eighth straight district championship, but claimed their first regional title since 2000.

"It's been a great season for us," Pearson said. He then added, "We'll have a good group coming back. We're going to miss the guys who are leaving."

Land O' Lakes loses another 10 seniors this year.

"Most of the seniors here have been around for four years, and they've done a tremendous job for us," Pearson said. "They've represented the program well, and not just on the field but in the classroom too. We have a lot of AP and IB kids that really put themselves through academically a lot of rigor. They're great young men."

Among the graduating are the Gators' top-five points recorders: Dalton, Davis, Laliberte, Andy Garcia and Jake Frahm.

"I can't even explain in words how bad this hurts," said Frahm, a midfielder. "Senior year, all you want to do is hold that ring up and have everyone be jealous looking at you. … We haven't been past the quarterfinals of regionals since our freshman year when we won there. We wanted to build off each other and we did that this year. We played with each other getting to this game. I think we fell apart a little in this game, but we still played with heart; still gave it our all and came up short."

Frahm said the team's heart is what he will always remember about this year's team.

"That first game against Berkley (Prep) we lost 4-1, and that was the start of our season," Frahm said. "We had to start building off each other and came close as a family at school and also on the pitch. That heart brought us together to this game."

Dalton added, "We never gave up. Even in the last couple seconds when there was 30 seconds left everyone was still trying."

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Academy claims first regional title

By Kyle LoJacono
klojacono@cnewspubs.com

Wildcats senior point guard Samantha Fernandez posted 15 points, 14 steals, 11 assists and 10 rebounds against Foundation Academy.

Academy at the Lakes coach Karim Nohra talks with his team during a break against Foundation Academy. (Photos by Glenn Gefers of www.photosby3g.com)

Academy at the Lakes girls basketball coach Karim Nohra started coaching before any of his players were born.

The 20-year veteran has won more than 400 games and his teams have won nine district championships, but his Wildcats (23-5) helped him do something completely new on Feb. 18.

The academy defeated Winter Garden Foundation Academy (9-12) 64-28 in the Class 2A regional finals, sending Nohra and the Wildcats to their first final four.

"This feels much better than the journeys I've had before," Nohra said. "I'd rather do this than what I did the past eight times I've been here at this position. … It feels pretty darn good to go dancing."

During his last 10 years coaching Nohra has guided teams to nine regional finals, including the last four straight starting at Wesley Chapel High from 2008-10 and the last two seasons at the academy.

Junior forward Andrea Mauger has been coached by Nohra the last three years and was happy to give him the special gift.

"It's amazing because he's done so much to make me a better player, so to be able to give him something back feels great," said Mauger, who had 13 points. "My dream came true; the team's dream came true."

The regional championship is also the school's first in any sport.

"I don't even know what to say," said senior guard Amelia Oliver. "I'm just so excited. I'm glad to be playing with this team."

The Wildcats had an off shooting night, going 4-30 from 3-point land. They led 19-16 after the first quarter, but their defense began to suffocate Foundation after that. The academy allowed only 12 points in the final 24 minutes and six after halftime.

Senior point guard Samantha Fernandez's quickness led the Wildcats' press defense, producing 14 steals while adding 10 rebounds.

"I expected to come out and jump on them quick," Fernandez said. "That was our intention, and we did a great job of that. All of us played well defensively."

Fernandez also racked up 15 points and 11 assists — a quadruple double.

"Her performance is what we needed out of her tonight," Mauger said. "She's fast and quick. When she plays smart she's unstoppable."

Oliver had a team-high 22 points despite fighting the flu. The Wildcats also got 14 points, 11 rebounds and six steals from Vanessa Vincent. Alexis Holler posted six steals and four rebounds.

The academy blew past its regional semifinals contest on Feb. 14 at Avon Park Walker Memorial (20-1), winning 85-37.

Mauger had a game-high 27 points. Oliver added 20 points, while Fernandez and Vincent added 14 and 12, respectively.

The Wildcats play Tallahassee Florida A&M in the state semifinals on Tuesday, Feb. 21 at 2:30 p.m. at The Lakeland Center, 701 West Lime St. in Lakeland. A victory sends them to the championship game on Feb. 22 at 2:30 p.m. against the winner of the other semis between Boca Raton Grandview Prep and Hollywood Christian. Parking is $7, while admission is $10.

Academy's season of firsts

By Kyle LoJacono
klojacono@cnewspubs.com

The Academy at the Lakes boys basketball team continued sailing into uncharted waters with a 49-48 victory at Lake Wales Vanguard on Feb. 16 in the Class 2A regional quarterfinals.

The win is the Wildcats' first in the playoffs, just one of a line of new things done by the program this year.

The trip to the postseason is also a program first as is finishing a season above .500.

"This whole year has been so great," said junior guard/forward Igwe, a Freedom High transfer. "I love it here."

The academy (15-8) had an interesting fight getting to Vanguard (16-3). Their pregame meal was delayed and then they got lost on the way to the game.

"We had to change into our gear in the bus," Igwe said. "A couple of the guys fell asleep, so we had to wake them up, and they were all confused. We got there like 15 minutes before the game. … We weren't into the game like we should have been until the half."

The academy went 3-17 shooting in the first quarter but trailed only 22-20 entering halftime.

Much of the poor shooting was thanks to Vanguard's 6-foot-7 center Jean Remy Esor.

Wildcats sophomore center Evan Gordy has faced players as tall as 6-foot-10, so he has experience looking for ways to break down such giants.

"I realized he wasn't as fast reacting back to the ball," Gordy said. "He'd shift to one side and I'd stay on the other to cut to the basket. Then I tried to use my strength to box him out to get put backs. I also saw he would jump on pump fakes because he'd always go for the block."

The game stayed close to the end and included a last-second shot. Vanguard stole the ball with about 3 seconds remaining and got up a floater that hit the backboard and fell harmlessly to the ground.

"It was one of the games that was really intense back-and-forth," Gordy said. "Both teams played with a lot of energy. They had a few good players who made big shots and we had to answer. … We stayed strong and kept pushing in their court."

Igwe led the Wildcats with 16 points while kicking in two blocks. Gordy added 10 points and five rebounds.

The academy hosts Winter Haven All Saints' Academy on Tuesday, Feb. 21 at 7 p.m.

Academy at the Lakes shooting guard/forward Abaz Igwe scored a team-high 16 points in his squad's 49-48 playoff win on Feb. 16. (File photo)

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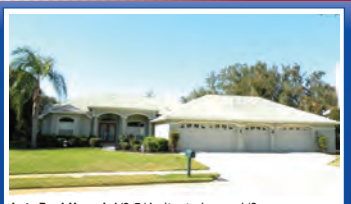
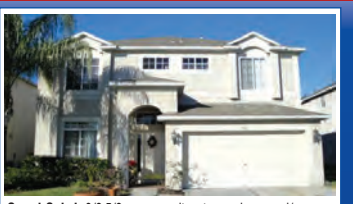


Lutz Pool Home! 4/2.5/4 situated on a 1/2 acre conservation lot. Large open living room w wood floors & triple sliders looking out to screened lanai w heated pool. Desirable Willow Bend Community with No CDD's & Low HOA! **$299.9k**. (way)

Wilderness Lakes! 5/3/3 w upgrades galore! Large balcony off 2nd story. Media room w surround sound. Enjoy the pool & heated spa in the two story screened lanai! Community features Lodge, fitness, playground, watersports & much more! **$319.9k.** (wil)

Lakefront Lutz Home! 4/2.5/2 w split bedroom plan. Master bath features garden tub. Fully enclosed & air conditioned Florida room w great lake views. Home is located on a quiet fishing lake that is over 14 acres. Property is fenced. **$285k.** (lut)

Valencia Gardens! 3/2/2 mint condition home. Open kitchen w lots of cabinet space & breakfast bar. Split bedroom plan. Lovely 13x13 Florida room. Ceramic tile & wood floors throughout. Gated community close to County Rec. Center, parks, & library. **$149.9k.** (bil)



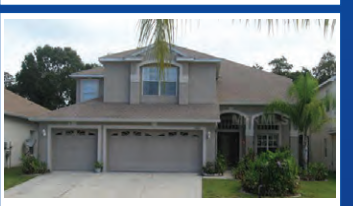
Grand Oaks! 3/2.5/2 +newer salt water pool on pond/conservation lot. Formal living/dining room, family room & large upstairs bonus room. Kitchen has oak cabinets w upgraded appliances. Tile floors downstairs. Cost saving natural gas & reclaimed water for irrigation. **$189.9k.** (ged)

The Groves! 3/2/2 villa on conservation lot. Open great room floor plan w 18" diagonal tile, recessed lighting & crown molding. Large lanai w ceramic tile & fountain. Gated active adult community featuring golf course, clubhouse, pool, & restaurant. **$129k.** (cle)

Waterfront home! 3/2/2 on canal w private dock. Interior features include new paint, all new doors & windows throughout plus lots of closet space. Large screened lanai to entertain poolside. Detached 24x40 garage w/ extra room for workshop. Over 1/2 acre lot. **$165.9k.** (tur)

Thousand Oaks! 3/2.5 new construction townhome. Includes granite countertops & stainless appliances. Maintenance free living! Located in the Trinity area close to shopping, restaurants & desirable schools. Ask about closing cost assistance. **$127,990.** (tru)

Lake Cooper! Custom 4/2.5/2 +pool +workshop located on a 80 acre ski lake in a small, upscale gated community. Private boardwalk & dock. Upgraded kitchen & bathrooms, newer barrel tile roof, brick paver lanai w wet bar. Workshop has electric & phone. Must see! **$473.9k** (ple)



Plantation Palms! 5/3/3 Pool home in gated golf community. Screened lanai to enjoy pool and view of conservation. Many upgrades including wood floors, ceramic tile and corian counter tops. Short sale with bank approved price. Great Value! **$237,300.** (mor)

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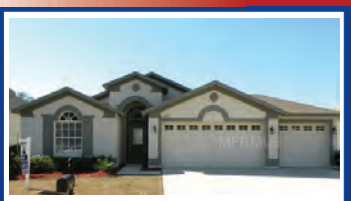
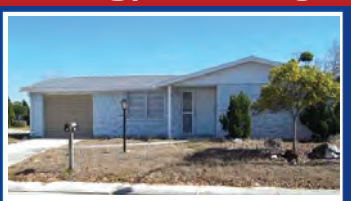


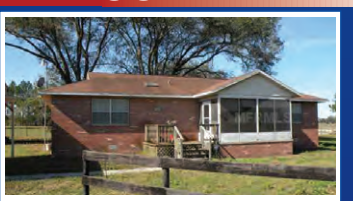
Zephyrhills! 4/2/3 w spacious open great room floor plan. Gourmet kitchen features custom 42" cabinets & new stainless appliances. Split bedroom plan. Large master bath w garden tub. Covered lanai to sit & enjoy view of the pond. Low HOA. **$159k.** (pin)



Port Richey! 2/2/1 Recently updated home! Features new kitchen cabinets & counter tops & beautiful laminate flooring throughout. Large screened lanai. Irrigation system. Great location close to Gulfview Mall, movies, restaurants & beaches. **$63.5k.** (coc)

Dade City! 3/2/2 with great curb appeal. Hardwood floors throughout. Open split floor plan. Spacious eat-in kitchen & formal dining room. Cozy living room w wood burning fireplace. Screened lanai w pool. Backs up to conservation. Fenced yard w treehouse! **$119.9k.** (wil)

San Antonio! 3/2/2 just a short walk from Community Clubhouse! Bright open family room with wall to wall sliders. Large screened lanai w ceramic tile. Gated community features golf course, pool, fitness center, & tennis courts. No CDD. **$119.9k.** (col)



Dade City! Charming 2/2 home with a 2 car carport on over 5 acres! Included on the property is a 3/1 guest house, work shop & hay barn. Mature trees and wooded views surrounding property. Bring your horses, Rv, or boat. No HOA or CDD. **$125k.** (chr)

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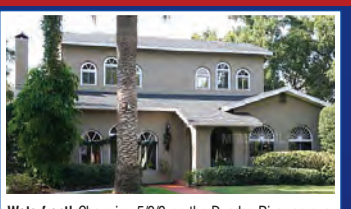
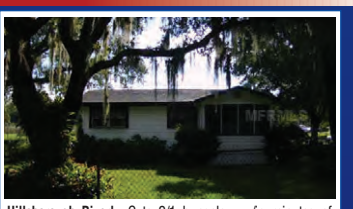
Grant Park! Cute 2/1 Block home w in walking distance to neighborhood park. Garage has been converted for extra storage space. Fully fenced yard. Easy access to downtown Tampa, shopping and restaurants. Priced to sell. Move in ready condition. **$29,999.** (54th)

Avila Dream Home! Well appointed 4/3.5/2 pool home on Avila Golf Course boasting incredible views of the 18th & 10th holes. Over 3700 sf., completely updated & features a Chef's dream kitchen, luxurious master suite as well as rich details & exquisite touches throughout. **$679k.** (gui)

On Conservation! 3/2/2 situated on quiet cul de sac surrounded by mature trees. Completely remodeled to include new cabinets, granite countertops, stainless appliances, ceramic tile, laminate floors, carpet & paint inside and out. Great location with no CDD fees. **$145k.** (bec)



Waterfront! Charming 5/3/2 on the Dundee River on over 1/2 acre. 1920s property featuring formal dining room & formal living room w fireplace. Large Sunroom with French doors. Back patio overlooks pool, impressive back yard & river. **$999k.** (dun)



Hillsborough River! Cute 2/1 bungalow w/in minutes of Busch Gardens & Community park. Fenced yard is ideal for pets. Nestled under towering oaks, this home is situated directly on the river. With a little TLC, this can be a great investment or rental property. No HOA. **$47,990.** (ren)

RENTALS

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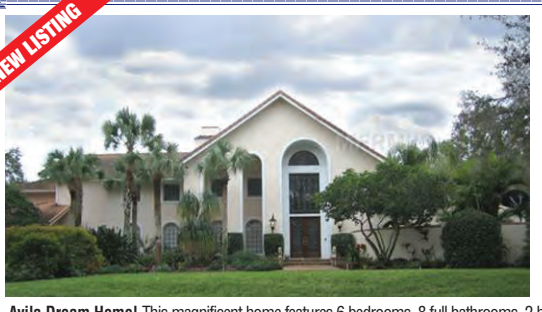
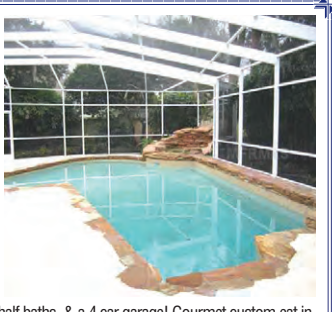
$1850/mo.	3/2.5/2	two story pool home in Grand Oaks.	Lisa Henderson 817-9834
$1400/mo.	4/2.5/2	in Oak Grove w covered lanai & pond view.	Pam Leece 235-5255
$1050/mo.	2/2.5	townhome in Meadow Pointe gated community.	Ramy Nassief 900-9009
$2395/mo.	5/3/3	in Wilderness Lakes w pool & pond view!	Laura Bloomer 541-9234
$1495/mo.	3/2/2	in New Port Richey on large fenced corner lot.	Bernadette 841-0307
$1100/mo.	3/2/2	in Zephyrhills on over an acre of fenced yard!	Patti Webster 310-0215
$1295/mo.	3/2/2	Lutz home w pool, covered lanai & fenced yard.	Josh Smith 699-0588
$1025/mo.	3/2/2	on over an acre. Fenced yard w storage shed.	Kim Joseph 352-835-1008
$900/mo.	2/1	with screened lanai & fenced yard. Convenient Tampa location.	Kim Zepp 928-3046





Avila Dream Home! This magnificent home features 6 bedrooms, 8 full bathrooms, 2 half baths, & a 4 car garage! Gourmet custom eat in kitchen w granite counter tops, island, 42 inch cabinets & stainless steel appliances. Billiard room features wet bar & built in liquor cabinetry. Media room w custom built in storage & tiered seating. Spacious master suite w sitting area & 2 walk in closets. In-law suite w kitchen, living & dining room. Lush green landscaping & courtyards surround the swimming pool w spa & waterfall **$2,099,990**. (vil)

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Softball game that unites

Sunlake senior Meghan Durbin pitches during the Pink Out game this year.

Sunlake High hosted its second annual Pink Out softball game on Feb. 14 against district rival Land O' Lakes to raise awareness for all forms of cancer. The event was started last year by seniors Courtney and Meghan Durbin, whose mother, Kay, is a cancer survivor. The Seahawks (5-1) bested the Gators (0-2) 15-5.

Seahawks senior outfielder Courtney Durbin takes a swing against Land O' Lakes in the annual Pink Out game. (Photos by Glenn Gefers of www.photosby3g.com)

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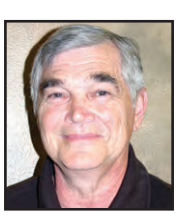

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February 16-29, 2012

Sunlake's record signing day

By Kyle LoJacono
klojacono@cnewspubs.com

The Sunlake football team had a record-setting day on Feb. 15.

That's when the fifth-year program had four players sign to play in college, a record for a single Seahawks football recruiting class.

Nick Morrison will play linebacker at Morehead State University, a Division I program in Kentucky. Cornerback/running back Rashaud Daniels, fullback/defensive end Jerome Samuels and quarterback Jacob Jackson will attend Central Methodist University, an NAIA school in Missouri.

"They've been a huge part of building the program," said Sunlake football coach Bill Browning. "They've persevered and all their hard work paid off. They're great leaders for their new programs and great role models."

Morrison was the team's leading tackler each of the last three years, posting 366 career tackles and nine fumble recoveries. He did that despite playing most of his junior year with a torn ACL in his right knee.

"I'm blessed to keep playing," Morrison said. "I had the knee injury, and to be able to keep playing after that is exciting."

The other three said getting to play together at Central Methodist, which went 5-5 last year, was a reason why they became Eagles.

"Now we can bring a little bit of Sunlake to our new school," Samuels said.

Daniels added, "I wanted Jerome to come there too because he's like a brother of mine. Then getting to play with Jacob again makes it even better."

Jackson, who transferred from Gulf as a junior, graduated last year. He originally signed with the College of DuPage but wound up going to Bluefield College. He will use his remaining three years of eligibility at Central Methodist.

Jackson threw for 1,258 yards and 18 touchdowns in 2010 while adding 1,058 rushing yards and 12 more scores.

Jackson said he was "relieved" when Sunlake made the postseason for the first time in 2011 even though he wasn't with the program.

"I called coach Browning right away when they beat Land O' Lakes for the first time and then when they made the playoffs," Jackson said.

Samuels and Daniels have attended the central Pasco County school since their freshman year, a season when the Seahawks went 1-9. Sunlake went 10-2 this season, including making its first postseason.

"This has been a great process here because now I'm going to a school that hasn't gotten to its top yet," Daniels said. "I have the chance to go there and help them get to their top."

Samuels had a team-high 536 rushing yards last year on 93 carries while adding 39 tackles and five sacks. He will likely play running back in college.

Daniels led the team in minutes played the last three years, posting 35 touchdowns, scoring nine two-point conversions and picking off seven passes during his career. He'll start out at cornerback at Central Methodist.

"I'm ready to go out there to Missouri now," Daniels said. "As a Florida boy I'm going in there with some swag and try to get a starting position."

From left are Jacob Jackson, Rashaud Daniels, Jerome Samuels and Nick Morrison during their signing on Feb. 15 as Sunlake football coach Bill Browning, back left, and the players' families look on. (Photo by Kyle LoJacono)

CHECK THIS OUT

Youth basketball tryouts March 3

The Land O' Lakes Youth Basketball Association will have tryouts for its boys competitive travel team on Saturday, March 3 at the Land O' Lakes High gym. Tryouts for players in sixth grade or younger is from 9:30 a.m.-12 p.m. For those in ninth grade and younger it is from 12-2:30 p.m. For players in 11th grade and younger it is from 2:30-5 p.m. For more information, call coach Steve Thomopalos at (813) 833-7465.

—Sports Editor Kyle LoJacono can be reached at (813) 909-2800 or klojacono@cnewspubs.com.

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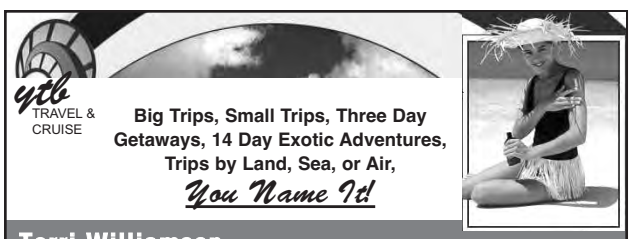

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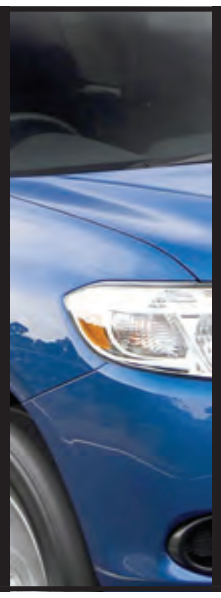

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