Drug rehab plan draws opposition

Owners propose to put 4-6 detox beds in The Heritage Assisted Living Center

By Pete Gawda
Okeechobee News

A proposal to turn part of an assisted living center into a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center does not sit well with some Okeechobee residents. They came out to the Tuesday, Aug. 21, Okeechobee City Council meeting to voice their opposition.

The council was asked to approve an ordinance changing the zoning of The Heritage Assisted Living Center at 608 N.E. Second Ave. from Commercial Professional Office (CPO) to Light Commercial (CLT). Currently the property is zoned CPO with a special exception for an assisted living center.

At their July 19 meeting the City of Okeechobee Board of Adjustments and Appeals voted 4 to 3 to recommend that the city council approve the zoning change. By that same 4 to 3 margin the planning board approved a special exception allowing for a group home that would provide for an alcohol and/or drug rehabilitation center and an assisted living center within a CLT zoning district.

“I don’t understand how you can mesh these two together ... Let’s not put it (drug rehab) in the same building as 80 or 90 year old women.”

— Jim Vensel

Are you prepared for a tropical storm?

By Katrina Elsken
Okeechobee News

As Tropical Storm Isaac approaches Florida, area residents are hoping for the best and preparing for the worst.

Mitch Smeykal, director of Okeechobee Emergency Management, advises county residents to make the normal storm preparations. "They need to be working on their plans, and make sure they have their supplies on hand," he advised. "If you have a generator, take it out today and make sure it runs. Don’t wait until Sunday to check it."

“We don’t really know what the storm is going to do,” he said. “We don’t want to close schools or open shelters if we don’t have to.

School board to maintain 5% fund balance

Aug. 28 meeting to discuss synthetic drugs, computer use

By Charles M. Murphy
Okeechobee News

A new policy to ensure a 5 percent fund balance for Okeechobee County Schools earned unanimous approval at the monthly meeting of the School Board on Tuesday night.

The new policy states the budget should be

James Jasper retired from the transportation department this month. He had worked for the school system since 1994. He was honored by Transportation Director Louise Piper and Superintendent of Schools Ken Kenworthy.
Deputies comb pastures for missing man

By Eric Kopp
Okeechobee News

Law enforcement personnel from three different sheriff’s offices spent their day Thursday combing acres of pasture land in search of an 85-year-old Sarasota man who had gone missing from that city.

According to a Silver Alert notice from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Newton H. Whidden was last seen in the area of 4800 10th St. in Sarasota. He has been missing since Monday, Aug. 20.

Mr. Whidden’s 2000 white Dodge Caravan was found Wednesday, Aug. 22, around 3 p.m. on N.E. 128th Avenue in Okeechobee County. The vehicle appeared to be stuck in a small ditch.

Newton H. Whidden

It’s not known if he is on foot, if someone has given him a ride or if his car was stolen then abandoned in Okeechobee County.

The FDLE alert describes Mr. Whidden as a white male standing 5 feet 9-inches in height and weighing 175 pounds. He has gray hair, hazel eyes and is thought to be wearing a plaid long-sleeved shirt and tan slacks.

A Sarasota Herald Tribune newspaper story stated that Mr. Whidden has dementia and was thought to be traveling to a cemetery near Horse Creek in DeSoto County. The story said his cell phone was found in the Siesta Key Pharmacy in Sarasota.

Thursday, deputies and detectives from the Sarasota County Sheriff’s Office (SCSO), Okeechobee County Sheriff’s Office (OCSO) and the St. Lucie County Sheriff’s Office (SLCSO) spent their day combing vast acres of pasture land in the northeastern portion of Okeechobee County.

Some of the deputies were searching on horseback, others searched from the air in the SLCSO’s helicopter but the majority of the deputies and detectives were searching on foot.

It’s unknown why he is in Okeechobee County or if he has friends or family here.

Continued From Page 1

While zoning changes are the responsibility of the city council, as city planner Bill Din, manager AMSA Holding LLC, one of the owners of the facility, proposed to use 4 to 6 special exceptions under CLT zoning. If the special exception is contingent upon the rent owner’s intentions are good, but when property changes ownership, the special use will cease and it will no longer be in the public interest.”

The next speaker was Karnyne Brass, one of the owners of the assisted living facility, said that the reaction to his proposal “borders on hysteria.” The doctor said he employed several people at the SLCSO’s helicopter but the majority of the deputies and detectives were searching on foot.

The mayor concluded the matter by saying, “We will move on and this will come up at the next meeting.”

Councilman Devin Maxwell cast the lone dissenting vote. In a statement after the meeting Mr. Maxwell said, “I voted against the zoning change because the proposed use was based on a special exception that could potentially include a number of other types of group homes that wouldn’t be compatible with the area. I believe the current owner’s intentions are good, but when property changes ownership, the special exception continue and can lend to unintended uses later. I also felt that combining the new use with an existing assisted living facility in one two-story building was not in the public interest.”

Continued From Page 1

We probably won’t make that decision until after the calls from the Florida Office of Emergency Management and the National Weather Service on Friday.

“It keeps tracking further west and looks like it might be more of a west coast event,” he said. “But all it takes is a 15-degree turn to the east and it’s right on top of us.”

Okeechobee County School officials will make a decision regarding possible school closures Friday or Saturday.

Superintendent of Schools Ken Kenworthy said if the decision is not made before the end of the school day on Friday, students will be sent home with letters that explain the situation. If they decide to close school, parents will be notified through the automated phone message system. The information will also be distributed through the local media so parents should pay attention to school closing notifications on local television and radio broadcasts and the Okeechobee News page on Facebook.

The decision of whether or not to close school will depend on projected wind speeds, Mr. Kenworthy explained. “If the wind speed is over 35 mph for a sustained gust more than one minute, we have to cancel school because it is not safe to have school buses on the road.”

Emergency shelters will be opened if needed, but not all shelters may open at the same time. Check the okeechobeeecomm website or listen to local radio and television updates for news of shelter openings.

With the exception of the medical needs shelter, no one is assigned to a particular shelter. Those who require the medical needs shelter are asked to register in advance with the Okeechobee County Health Department, 1728 N.W. Ninth Avenue. The health department’s main phone number is 863-462-5819.

During an emergency, information will be broadcast on local radio and television stations. The radio stations are WOKC-FM 100.9, WOKC-AM 1570, and WWFR-FM 91.7 in Okeechobee. The television stations are Channels 5 and 25 from West Palm Beach, and the local cable station. For storm updates online go to okeechobeeecomm.com, floridadiaster.com or the Okeechobee News page on Facebook. You can also follow Okeechobee Emergency Management on twitter and see updates on their Facebook page.
Okeechobee City Council plans to lower budget

By Pete Gawda
Okeechobee News

Some taxpayers in the City of Okeechobee could see a reduction in their taxes. It was the consensus of the Okeechobee City Council at a lengthy budget workshop held Tuesday evening, Aug. 21, to keep the current millage rate of 7.7432. Since property values have been decreasing, this means some tax payers could pay less this year than last year.

One mil equal one dollar for every one thousand dollars of assessed value. The total proposed budget is $6.6 million which is a 3.9 percent decrease from the current budget.

The downward trend in property values in the city is continuing. Property values in the city have gone down 5.6 percent since last year. From fiscal year 2008 to fiscal year 2013 property values in the city have dropped over 30 percent.

Because of the drop in property values the total funds brought into the city by the proposed millage rate will result in an approximate $560,000 deficit in the general fund. Reserve funds will be used to make up that deficit. However, finance director India Riedle expects the city will not have to use the entire amount of reserves that is budgeted. At the same time some property owners will see a reduction in their taxes due to the decrease in property values.

The proposed budget contains no pay increase for full-time city employees other than the step increases already in the pay system.

While general fund expenditures in the proposed budget are up 3.7 percent from the current budget, they are down 2.6 percent from fiscal year 2008.

Significant increases include a 7.5 percent increase in insurance costs, $10,000 for website design, $6,000 for animal control services, $5,000 for election costs, a full year of operation and maintenance of the new radio system, replacement doors and framing at the fire department at a cost of $3,000 and certification and education costs of $1,700. New in the proposed budget is a step increase plan for part time employees which adds $9,800 to the budget. Fuel costs for the coming year are budgeted at $4.25 a gallon.

Shared Services will get $8,950 as opposed to $8,000 in the current budget if the new budget is approved as proposed. The request for funds from the Economic Development Board was decreased from the current budget’s $20,000 to $10,000. The city council decided to delete $500 that had been earmarked for fireworks.

Since this was a workshop, no official action could be taken. The city council will hold two public hearings in September before adoption of the budget.

City gives natural gas distribution system go ahead

By Pete Gawda
Okeechobee News

Residents of Okeechobee will soon have access to a new source of energy - natural gas.

By a vote of 3 to 2 the Okeechobee City Council at their Tuesday, Aug. 21, meeting approved a non-exclusive franchise with Florida Public Utilities Company to use city rights-of-way for a distribution system to provide natural gas to commercial and residential customers.

Natural gas for the distribution network will come from a connection with the Florida Gas Transmission pipeline on U.S. 441 at Cemetery Road. The company plans to serve large commercial users first such as feed mills, asphalt plants and restaurants. Residential service should be available by the end of next year. Unlike states further north, there is not much demand in Florida for natural gas for residential heating. Instead natural gas is used in residences for appliances such as clothes dryers, hot water heaters and stoves.

Councilmen Dowling Watford and Mike O’Connor voted against the franchise. During questioning by Mr. Watford, Barry Kennedy, operations director for Florida Public Utilities, said he could not answer certain questions because of confidentiality laws. When contacted after the meeting, Mr. Watford said that while he thought a natural gas distribution system would be a wonderful asset to the city he added, “It bothers me if there are questions you can’t answer. There may be something they don’t want you to know.”

Turning to other action, the council:
• awarded a contract to Nancy Phillips and Associates for grant administration services in connection with the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Economic Development Program;
• awarded a contract to Culpepper & Terpening, Inc. for engineering services in connection with the CDBG Economic Development Program;
• awarded a $27,245 contract to Bowline Construction for the Curtis rehabilitation project as part of the CDBG Economic Development Program;
• awarded a $29,955 contract to American Construction for the Leon rehabilitation project as part of the CDBG Economic Development Program;
• awarded an $18,180 contract James Swart for the Roberts rehabilitation project as part of the CDBG Economic Development Program;
• approved the purchase of a John Deere backhoe less a trade of an older machine for a total net cost of $80,137.

OCEA to hold general membership meeting

By Candy Walker, OCEA President

The Okeechobee County Education Association (OCEA) will have its first general membership meeting of the 2012-2013 school year on Thursday, Aug. 30, at 4:30 p.m. in the cafeteria of Central Elementary School, 510 S.W. 5th Ave.

All employees of the instructional and classified bargaining unit are encouraged to attend. Potential members may join at the meeting, if they desire. Attendees will be briefed on the status of the Aug. 29 Classified and Instructional negotiation session, which includes the latest information on the Teacher Evaluation System, and items that are being negotiated for the classified contract. Now that the VAM scores are in from the state, OCEA and the district need to make more changes to the 2011-12 Teacher Evaluation System as well as changes to the 2011-12 system.

Teachers from the 2011-12 school year still do not have their final evaluation. Teachers will find out how to proceed if their final 2011-12 Evaluation score is not what they expected to receive.

Door prizes and refreshments will be served.

An update will also be given on the OCEA “Meet and Greet” that will take place at Lunkers on Sept. 7, from 4-6 p.m. Any employee may attend that function, WITH a member.

Now is the time to be informed of the mandates the state has put on your chosen profession. Contact OCEA at 863-467-1564 for more information and plan on attending on Aug. 30. Your job may depend on it!

Chamber announces September investor luncheon

On Sept. 4, the September Chamber luncheon will be held at the IRSC Williamson Center at 11:30 a.m. This event is being sponsored entirely by the Atlantic Wealth Management Group at UBS Financial Services Inc., which is made up of Greg Thorsersen, J.D., Mixon, Steve Karr, and Sean Daley. Since the luncheon is being sponsored entirely by the Atlantic Wealth Management Group at UBS Financial Services Inc. the luncheon is free to our members. However, a RSVP will be necessary.

Our guest speaker is Mr. Kevin P. Molesky. Mr. Molesky is a Senior Regional Marketing Director at Putnam Retail Management in the broker/Dealer Division. He has been working in the investment industry since 1995 and will discuss the economic/tax climate as it relates to the upcoming elections.

Please RSVP via the Chamber website by selecting the date of the event (September 4, 2012) on the Chamber event calendar. Then click on the register on-line tab to register for the luncheon.
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!

**Polls**

- I am fed up with the polls and hearing the poll numbers. The TV people can make those numbers say anything they want to. Those numbers don’t mean a thing in real life. If someone gives me a poll to answer, I am going to make up the craziest answers I can think of. They will just spin it whichever way they want it to turn out anyway. Don’t believe the polls.

**Get it from the source**

- I am sick and tired of the Democrats telling me what the Republicans are going to do and the Republicans telling me what the Democrats are going to do. And none of it is true, according to the fact-checkers. I want my information from the source. If I want to know what the Republicans are going to do, I want to hear it from the Republicans. I want to hear what the Democrats are going to do from the Democrats. Quilt telling such outrageous lies about each other and just spin it whichever way they want it to turn out anyway. Don’t believe the polls.

**Nothing to do?**

- I hear a lot about how there’s nothing to do in Okeechobee. For those who complain, you missed out on a great opportunity to have a lot of fun and do something. The Parks and Recreation hosted Summer Camp where people can post their upcoming events and I wish people would take the time to post their events.

**Drive with care**

- Today I saw a car just speed right by a stopped school bus. If a school bus stops in front of you, the law says you have to stop!

**In the news**

- What is wrong with this country? On the news I saw several minutes devoted to the fact that Prince Harry was photographed nude in a Las Vegas hotel room, yet there was nothing about the American service-men killed in Afghanistan. Every time a celebrity gets engaged or has a baby, it’s all over the news. But our young men dying in wars overseas doesn’t even make the news.

**Letters to the editor**

**YOUNIFIED Fundraiser**

On Saturday, Aug. 4, the community of Okeechobee came together at the Okeechobee Golf and Country Club to support a great cause at the YOUNIFIED fundraiser golf tournament. Men, women and youth united together to enjoy fun, fellowship, food and prizes!

YOUNIFIED is comprised of community members uniting together to challenge teens in Okeechobee County with God’s Truth about drugs, alcohol, bullying, depression, peer pressure, and abstinence. YOUNIFIED seeks to unveil God’s presence and reveal His perfect plan in the heart of every youth. YOUNIFIED is calling upon the homes, churches, businesses, and individuals to unite under the common banner of Jesus Christ and see the Father’s Kingdom advanced in our community.

On the weekend of Jan. 11-12, YOUNIFIED will be sponsoring a large scale youth rally at Osceola Middle School for our hometown. Nationally noted author and speaker, Mark Cahill will be present to teach and challenge our youth, as well as many other local speakers. There will be live music with bands “SameState” and “The MC’s,” food, fun, door prizes (ipods, iPads, phones, etc.) and more! For more information about YOUNIFIED or sponsored events, please Bobby Steiert at 863-634-6523.

The YOUNIFIED committee members wish to sincerely thank the following churches, businesses, organizations and individuals for their support:


Thank you again,
Darlene Mayer

**Dearest Okeechobee,**

We, Myke & I, moved here 11 years ago on a whim and have never regretted the decision. We have enjoyed everything there is about Okeechobee. I got the opportunity to sing and entertain at most of the business’ and homes throughout Okeechobee and Buckhead Ridge. We have met the most amazing amount of really good people and now, are a wonderful part of our lives. We are also proud that we have participated in many fund raisers and never expected anything in return. Just being a part of our great community was more than enough, but I recently became ill and haven’t been able to work. Again, this great community, stepped up to help. Just saying “Thank you” seems so minute, but I am trying to find the words to express my esteemed gratitude.

We would like to thank VFW North, VFW South, VFW BHR, Good Spirits Lounge, Moose BHR, Moose North, WOKC Radio, Okeechobee News, KOA Kampground, Cowboy’s, Bee O’Brady’s, “The Hand List”, Friends, Neighbors and my Beloved Myke Hoyt. Special thanks to our great Friends, Dennis (XXL Karaoke) & Joyce Pruitt for organizing the event! We hope to know soon about my surgery and hope to be back doing what I do best, Sing and Show Off. Again, Thank you “My Home Town” for all your love and support.

Sincerely,
Sandoone
EMS rates decrease, garbage pickup rates increase

By Pete Gawda
Okeechobee News

During a busy morning’s meeting on Thursday, Aug. 23, Okeechobee County commissioners set assessment rates. They also handled a variety of other items including settling past due Medicaid bills with the state and considering allowing the consumption of alcohol at C. Scott Driver Park.

Commissioners finalized assessment rates for fire, EMS and solid waste collection. The proposed EMS rate is a 10 percent decrease overall from the current year’s assessment, with a 10 percent increase as was incorrectly reported earlier. Solid waste collection rates were increased by $24.50 to $217.52 for the coming year. The fire assessment rates remain the same.

Commissioners approved an amendment to the county’s comprehensive plan to establish the Amistad Rural Activity Center. This rural activity center includes about 680 acres on the east side of S.E. 128th Avenue, north of Quail Woods and Bridlewood subdivisions and south of E. Center Street. The density of that area is now changed from one residential unit per five acres to one unit per acre and the amendment calls for up to 15 acres of commercial development.

Planning official Bill Royce said there was originally some concern about the impact of Amistad on schools. However, he said that build out would not occur right away so there would be time to work out the impact on the schools. The amendment had already been approved by the appropriate state agencies.

Commissioners discussed the fate of the Advanced Stone Technology building in the county industrial park. As a result of recent litigation the county now has possession of the 19,438 square foot building valued at $200,499. Kathy Scott, the airport and industrial park director, gave a report on the condition of the building including photographs. The building has a damaged end wall column, three damaged header channels and trim at the base of the end wall. This work is covered by $1,000 deductible insurance. While the contractor is working on the facility commissioners also authorized repairs to the rake trim and curb trim in the amount of $3,984.

John Romano of New Horizons of the Treasure Coast presented the annual report for his organization. He said that for the first time there is a full-time staff member serving Okeechobee and that 1,036 Okeechobee clients were served in the past year.

The commission authorized repairs to the Okeechobee County Agri-Civic Center when they approved a proposal to remove and replace ten damaged wall panels, a damaged end wall column, three damaged header channels and trim at the base of the end wall. This work is covered by $1,000 deductible insurance. While the contractor is working on the facility commissioners also authorized repairs to the rake trim and curb trim in the amount of $3,984.

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The commission authorized staff to negotiate with the engineering firm of Steven Cooper, P.E. and Associates for consulting services on the Okeechobee Trailhead Lock 7 project.

It may soon be possible for events taking place at C. Scott Driver Park to serve alcoholic beverages—at a cost. Parks and recreation director Albee Scoggins suggested a change in policy. He recommended that alcohol consumption be allowed provided the user carries sufficient liability insurance. He also recommended increasing the fee for the outside pavilion from $50 to $150 as well as increasing the fee for the inside pavilion from $400 to $600. The security deposit would also be increased. Mr. Scoggins said that events that served alcohol would tend to be larger events that would impact the facilities more thus justifying the increased rates. Staff was directed to develop a proposed policy on alcohol consumption at C. Scott Driver Park for commission consideration.

The battle with the state over payment of past due Medicaid bills is now over. Commissioners authorized payment of $292,726.68 to the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration. This settled the past due amount in full. Now the state will not be withholding revenue sharing funds for Medicaid payments. The original amount the state claimed the county owed was much larger than that. However, that amount was reduced considerably after discussions with state officials. County administrator Robbie Chartier said that if any additional credits are discovered they will be applied to future bills. She said that there is still pending litigation questioning if the statute of limitations applies to Medicaid bills. The result of that action could possibly result in credits to future bills.

The board also received a financial update through July 31.

Post your opinions in the Public Issues Forum at www.newszap.com. Reporter Pete Gawda can be reached at pgawda@newszap.com.
Eagles North announces special weekend events

Eagles North will have Friday Steak Night on Aug. 24 beginning at 5:30 p.m. Music will be by Michael. On Saturday Night, Aug. 25 it’s the Big Corn Hole Tournament. Sign up is at 10 a.m. The action starts at noon.

Eagles host corn hole tournament

Come to Eagles North, 9985 U.S. 441 N., on Saturday, Aug. 25, for a corn hole tournament. Sign up early! There will be a payout on first and second place. For more information, call 863-763-2552. Cost is $10 per player, $20 per team. All proceeds go to the F.O.E. 4137 community benefit fund. The Aerie will also offer hamburgers, hot dogs and side dishes.

Golf benefit planned for Dennis Rutherford

A benefit is planned for local resident, Dennis Rutherford. Dennis sustained a very serious injury to his arm which required special surgery. Medical and rehabilitative bills are mounting and there is no insurance coverage. Please come out to Okeechobee Golf and Country Club and join us in a Saturday, Aug. 25, golf tournament to help offset some of the expenses. Sign up is at 7:30 a.m. and tee time is at 8 a.m. Fees are only $240 a team and includes lunch. There will be a 50/50 drawing and heated chair massage will be available with a donation. For more information, please call Kay at 863-634-8822 or David at 863-634-0751.

Martha’s House to host fundraiser

A pancake breakfast will be held to benefit Martha’s House on Sunday, Aug. 26, from 7-11 a.m. at the Frosty Mug, 6315 U.S. 441 S.E. The club will donate all food and supplies and 100 percent of the proceeds will benefit Martha’s House. The breakfast is only $5 and includes pancakes, homemade biscuits and sausage gravy, coffee and orange juice. Donations will also be accepted. For more information, please call 863-467-8232.

FFA Alumni to meet

The Okeechobee FFA Alumni will be having their first meeting of the new year on Aug. 27, at 7 p.m. at the Extension Office. Anyone interested in joining is welcome to attend. For more information please call 863-467-8696.

CCC meeting planned

The next meeting of the Community Collaborative Council, a part of the Shared Services Network of Okeechobee, will be Tuesday, Aug. 28, at 10 a.m. in the board room of the school board office.

Eagles to host bingo

Eagles North, 9985 U.S. 441 N., will have bingo on Tuesday, Aug. 28, at 1 p.m.; and Wednesday, Aug 29, bingo at 4:30 p.m. Proceeds go to the F.O.E. 4137 community benefit fund.

Church to host kids Bible Night

Join the fun at AWANA Bible Club at First Baptist Church of Okeechobee, Wednesday nights 6-8 p.m. through the school year. Clubs for 3 year olds through 12th grade. First night of Club/Registration will be Aug. 29, from 6-8 p.m. For details or questions, please call the church office at 863-763-2171.

County Fair Board to meet

The Okeechobee Fair Board of directors will meet Aug. 30, at 5:30 p.m. at the Chamber of Commerce.

Healthy Start annual meeting slated

The Okeechobee Healthy Start Coalition will have their annual meeting on Friday, Aug. 31, from 2-4 p.m. at First Baptist Church Fellowship Hall. This meeting is open to the public. The Okeechobee Healthy Start Coalition is part of a statewide network of coalitions responsible for planning and implementing services to pregnant women and children under 3 years of age. The Coalition is made up of citizens interested in promoting healthy families and babies in Okeechobee. For more information about the Coalition, please contact Kay Begin, executive director, at 863-462-5877.

OKMS taking applications for Labor Day event vendors

Okeechobee Main Street is proud to announce the 2012 All-American Labor Day Celebration scheduled for Sept. 1, 2 and 3, in the Flagler Parks! Come spend some time with friends, enjoy the “tastes” of the festival and various specialty items for sale. While in town, visit our local shops and see what they now have to offer! OKMS is now taking applications for vendors and non-profits interested in setting up a booth. If you are interested, please contact Cindy Birdashaw at 863-357-6246 or visit our website at: www.okeechobemainstreet.com.

First Baptist Church to host flag football

Boys and girls, k-12 come sign up for First and Goal Flag Football. Registration is just $35 with sign up deadline on Sept. 8. Games will be held from Sept. 22-Nov. 17. Games are sponsored by First Baptist Church, 401 SW Fourth Street, Recreation Outreach Center, 310 S.W. Fifth Ave., in Okeechobee. For more information, please call 863-467-7625.

Tobacco Free Partnership to hold September meeting

The Tobacco-Free Partnership of Okeechobee will meet Sept. 5, at noon. Lunch will be provided, please RSVP by calling 863-447-9140. The meeting will be held in the Thompson Hall, next to the Pentecostals of Okeechobee Church, 405 S.W. 10th Ave. The mission of the Tobacco-Free Partnership Okeechobee is to mobilize community partners to establish long-lasting system and policy changes that promote tobacco-free social norms in order to prevent usage of tobacco products by youth/young adults, encourage and support tobacco cessation, eliminate health hazards of secondhand smoke and decrease the number of deaths due to tobacco products.

Freedom Outreach fishing tournament

The Freedom Outreach fishing championship will be held on Sunday, Sept. 9. The entry fee is $120. You must fish at least four tournaments to be in the championship event! All tournaments will be held at Oke-Tantie Marina Boat Ramp from safe light until 2 p.m. Food and drinks free at weigh in. Please call 561-719-5989 or 863-634-8127 to register or with questions.

Residents urged to have Coffee with a Commissioner

Coffee with the Commissioner will be hosted by Commissioner Margaret Garrard on Tuesday, Sept. 11, from 10 a.m. – noon, and will be held in Commissioner Helton’s office, room 261, in the Okeechobee County Courthouse, 304 N.W. Second St. Citizens wishing to participate are encouraged to call 863-763-6441 to schedule an appointment.

Children Services Council plans public budget meeting

The Children’s Services Council of Okeechobee will have their First Public Budget Hearing for the year 2012-13 on Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2012, at 5:01 p.m., in room 303 at the Okeechobee County School Board office, 700 S.W. Second Ave.

Patriot’s Day planned

Ladies Auxiliary to VFW Post 4423 will be sponsoring a Patriot’s Day Ceremony to honor our First Responders. It will be in Veterans Park at 6 p.m. on Sept. 11. There will be guest speakers, honored guests and special guests. These men and women put their lives on the line for us every day so please give one hour of your time to honor them. Contact the Dannye Strickland at 863-763-0589 for any questions.

• Fun day’ to help injured teen

MOORE HAVEN — In July, Glades County teenager Kaleb “Fred” Langdale was swimming in the Caloosahatchee River when he was attacked by an alligator. He managed to get away but lost part of his arm in the fight. A benefit fun day fundraiser is set to help the Langdale family with medical expenses. The event is set for Oct. 6, at the Chalo-Nita Grounds in Moore Haven and will include lots of fun activities including a rib cook-off, cornhole tournament, pie eating contest, live silent auction with hunting and fishing trips. There will be something for everyone with live bands, water slides, bounce house, face painting, buggy rides, cake walks and a dunk tank to test your aim. Entertainment will include the music of Chris MacArthur. The Gator Boys alligator show will be noon and the Gator Boys will also participate in a “meet and greet.” A web site at www.go-fundme.com has been set up for donations. The goal is to raise $100,000. A link to the site and other news about Fred Langdale can be found on the Glades County Democrat page on facebook.com.

Putt for a Cure event planned

The Relay for Life Honey Do’er’s Team and Dream Team will host a best ball golf tournament on Oct. 6, at the Okeechobee Golf & Country Club. All proceeds benefit the American Cancer Society. Fee for four person team is $200, hole sponsorships are $100. There will be a 50/50 drawing and raffle tickets. For information about participants, sponsorship or donation of a raffle item call Lawrence Fipps 863-801-0901 or Missy Fipps at 863-634-8674.
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Members of the community pray on the first day of the school year for the students, faculty, board and staff of our schools as a reminder that all are invited to the September Tuesday night Prayer Walks sponsored by the Okeechobee Ministerial Association beginning Tuesday, Sept. 4, at 6 p.m. Each week’s location school will be submitted to the Okeechobee News the week prior to the walk. Please consider joining together for our schools.

Special recognition

Tammy Clifford, of The Frosty Mug, accepts a “Top Shelf Supporter” award for financial and material support of Martha’s House. Thanks to all the members of the Frosty Mug Club who help keep Martha’s House open for victims of domestic violence. The Frosty Mug, 6315 U.S. 441 S.E., will have a Martha’s House benefit breakfast 7 - 11 a.m. Sunday, Aug 26., for $5. Presenting Ms. Clifford with a plaque is Martha’s House executive director Jonathan Bean.

Critical need for O Negative blood

Florida Blood Centers are in Critical Need of O Negative Blood Type. Wal-Mart in Okeechobee will hold a blood drive on Saturday, **Aug. 25**, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Give blood to save lives. Because donated blood is processed into components to give patients only the part of the blood they need, one unit of blood may help save up to three lives. All donors will receive a camo tee shirt, a movie ticket, and a Pueblo Viejo food coupon. Photo ID required.

OKMS needs Labor Day Festival vendors

Okeechobee Main Street is proud to announce the 2012 All-American Labor Day Celebration scheduled for Sept. 1, 2 and 3, in the Flagler Parks! Come spend some time with friends, enjoy the “tastes” of the festival and various specialty items for sale. While in town, visit our local shops and see what they now have to offer! OKMS is now taking applications for vendors and non-profits interested in setting up a booth. If you are interested, please contact Cindy Birdashaw at 863-357-6246 or visit our website at: www.okeechobeemainstreet.com.

Free line dancing

Everyone 60 years of age and over is invited to free line dance classes every Monday from noon until 1 p.m.
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**JESSICA LOST 53 POUNDS WITH PWLC!**

By Jessica

Testimonial

Summer was fast approaching and so was a size 15. I live in sunny South Florida where shorts and tank tops are most women’s daily attire. I couldn’t bear the thought of another summer in jeans. I walked into Physicians Weight Loss Centers and headed to the exam and consultation room with the diet counselor. In less than five minutes, I was convinced that this was the lifestyle change I needed. I didn’t need another diet, I needed to change the way I ate forever. I have been on other diets, but this was different. The program was straightforward and easy to stick to. Seventeen weeks after my initial visit to PWLC, I walked out 53 pounds lighter and 57 inches smaller.

I went from a size 12/14 to a 2/4, from 165 pounds to 112 pounds. Through PWLC I learned to eat to live, not live to eat. I wake up every morning thinking of my next adventure, not my next meal.

It’s now summer and my daily attire consists of shorts and a tank top just what I always wanted! When people ask me about my weight loss, I tell them I went to Physicians Weight Loss Centers and it changed my life.

They didn’t provide me with a 16 week diet. They gave me the tools to change the way I eat forever.

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**Submit Photo/Physicians Weight Loss Centers**

Jessica, before and after
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### Special Sections

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By Eric Kopp
Okeechobee News

An Okeechobee man arrested for violation of probation was sentenced to seven years in prison after pleading guilty to felony charges of possession of cocaine and three felony counts of possession of cocaine with intent to sell.

Anthony Giovanni Hernandez, 20, was initially arrested in May of 2011 and was charged with burglary of a structure, grand theft and criminal mischief after he broke into the Church of the Nazarene. He took $4,500 worth of sound and video equipment from the church but left everything sitting outside the church, stated an arrest report.

Circuit Judge Robert Belanger on Monday, Aug. 20, sentenced Hernandez to 10 months on each count with the sentences to run concurrently. Hernandez also will receive credit for the 141 days he has already served in jail.

Hernandez was not initially linked to the church break-in, but his later arrest on a misdemeanor retail theft charge led Detective Ted Van Deman, of the Okeechobee County Sheriff’s Office (OCSO), directly to him.

As the detective was working the crime scene a church worker pointed out to him that whoever broke into the church also rifled through an office storage area and some empty envelopes. OCSO Detective Mark Shireman was then called in and was able to lift two fingerprints from one of those envelopes.

One of the prints belonged to a parishioner, while the other was unknown.

On June 4, 2010, OCSO Crime Scene Technician and fingerprint expert Jackie Moore entered that unknown print into the OCSO fingerprint identification system. However, she was unable to find a match.

Then, on May 1, 2011, Hernandez was arrested for shoplifting. He was subsequently booked into the county jail where he was fingerprinted then released on bond.

Twelve days later Mrs. Moore entered the booking prints of recent arrests into the OCSO print system and she got a hit. That hit indicated the print taken from the offering envelope at the church belonged to Hernandez.

Representing Hernandez at his hearing Monday was local defense attorney Glenn J. Sneider. Assistant State Attorney Jeff Davis prosecuted the case.

Hernandez told the judge, adding that Bradley has nine prior felony arrests.

A check of Department of Corrections (DOC) records shows that Bradley spent seven months in prison after being convicted in 2000 on a charge of sale of cocaine. He entered prison Nov. 1, 2000, and was released June 9, 2001.

“This has got to be your last stop in the criminal justice system,” Judge Belanger told Bradley. “When you go out with a prior felony record and commit a felony it’s not a mistake. Don’t put yourself in this situation again—it’s just not worth it.”

Bradley was also ordered to pay court costs and fees associated with his case.

Bradley will be back in front of Judge Belanger sometime in the future due to his March 19, 2012, arrest by the Okeechobee Narcotics Task Force during an undercover drug operation dubbed Operation Crackdown.

As a result of that operation, Bradley is charged with three felony counts of sale of cocaine and three felony counts of possession of cocaine with intent to sell. He was also arrested on a misdemeanor charge of possession of marijuana under 20 grams.

Bradley was one of 13 people arrested in that operation.

Okeechobee 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).

- Glen Edward Sobieci, 41, S.E. 25th St., Okeechobee, was arrested Aug. 21 by Officer Chad Troutman on a felony charge of robbery and a misdemeanor charge of criminal mischief. His bond was set at $10,500.
- Michael Vasquez, 34, N.W. Third St., Okeechobee, was arrested Aug. 21 by Officer Chad Troutman on a felony charge of robbery. His bond was set at $10,000.
- Michelle Ann Smith, 44, N.W. Ninth Ave., Okeechobee, was arrested Aug. 21 by Officer Chad Troutman on a felony charge of robbery. Her bond was set at $10,000.

He told the judge, adding that Bradley has nine prior felony arrests.
The board also approved a new strategic plan for 2012-2013 with the core values of growth.

Each member shall receive at a minimum an annual evaluation. The evaluation of instructional personnel and school administrators shall include indicators of student learning growth.

The goals include a 2 percent increase in both enrollment and the scores of students in honors, dual enrollment and advanced placement courses. Another goal is to have the schools meet or exceed the state average on assessment tests. The district also will strive to have 2 percent improvements in third grade promotion rates, higher standards in writing, reading, math and science, and a 2 percent increase in graduation rates.

Graduation rate fell from 71.7 percent in 2009-2010 to 69.9 percent in 2010-2011.

Another goal is a 2 percent reduction in dropout rates which stood at 5.3 percent for 2010-2011. That was an increase from 4.6 percent in 2009-2010. The promotion rate increased from 95.2 percent in 2010-2011 to 97.1 percent in 2011-2012. Other goals are fewer students in out-of-school suspension, fewer discipline referrals at school and on school buses, and more students enrolling in career education and designated college ready.

The board also approved the hire of Dana Bouilly as Food Service Quality Assurance Manager at large.

A town hall meeting is planned in the OHS lecture hall on Tuesday, Aug. 28, at 7 p.m. to discuss the dangers of synthetic drugs and safe computer usage at home.

Superintendent Ken Kenworthy said the first week of school has gone smoothly. Student numbers are down 327 from last year. Central Elementary was down 91 students and Seminole by 67 students in the first few days of school. High school enrollment exceeded estimates. After 10 days, the district will count students and decide if any teacher positions need to be addressed.

“We know more students will show up and we’re not going to panic,” he added.

ACT scores improved in English, reading, science and math at the high school. The district remains shy of the state average but still their improvement rate was higher than the state. The staff at OHS was praised for their hard work.

“Their primary focus on upper-level classes challenges students and kudos to them,” Mr. Kenworthy added.

Principal Toni Wiersma said student enrollment in dual enrollment courses has doubled this year.

Elise Close of Yearling Middle School, an ESE Paraprofessional, was honored upon her retirement after 32 years of service in the school system.

James Jasper, a bus driver for Okeechobee Schools since 2004, was honored upon his retirement from the system.

OHS senior Sarah Davis was recognized as a 2012 Sunshine State Scholar and for athletic exploits for the OHS softball team. Miss Davis was named the District 12-7A Player of the Year and the All Academic Player. She was unable to attend the meeting.

In other actions the board set an executive session meeting to discuss union negotiations for Monday, Aug. 27, at 5 p.m.
You can find the classifieds section of the Okeechobee News online at FLORIDA.NEWSZAP.COM. The classifieds cover a wide range of topics including jobs, rental properties, sales, and services. The section also includes announcements, services, employment opportunities, and announcements for various events.

For example, the classifieds include listings for employment opportunities such as PT DRIVER, Full-time Administrative Assistant, and Full-time for busy office working with offliner population. There are also listings for rental properties like Apartments and Townhouses, as well as announcements for garage sales and classifieds. The classifieds also include notices for various services such as Golf Cart Battery Repair and ProMobile Bicycle Sales & Repair.

Additionally, the classifieds section includes listings for pets and pet supplies, such as Wanted - 2 pups - 1 mini Schnauzer & 1 Yorkie, and WANTED - Oil Paintings. H. Newton, A. Hair, R.A. McClen- don, G. Buckner, 1715 Fleet Treasure Coins. You can also find listings for cars and other items, such as Cash for Cars & Trucks - I will buy your car or truck, and Cars for sale.

The classifieds section is a valuable resource for finding local services, products, and employment opportunities. It is a great place to look for when you need to sell or buy items, find a job, or rent a property.

For more listings, go to www.newszap.com. You can also find the classifieds section on the Okeechobee News website at OKEECHOBEE NEWS. For more information, call 863-610-0861. The classifieds section is updated regularly, so be sure to check back often.
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IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE NINETEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT IN AND FOR OKEECHOBEE COUNTY, FLORIDA

STATE OF FLORIDA

CASE NO.: 2012CA000258

A COLORADO LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, acting through the United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Florida Field Office, Okeechobee, Florida, 34974, 863-242-2700, hereinafter referred to as "PMHI".

JOHN SCARGULIS, CARLOS LUNA, JR., whose last known address is 3212 Block Ave., Okeechobee, 34974.

NOTICE TO FORECLOSURE MORTGAGE

Public Notice

Re: Adoption of Kaylie Lavina Windsor, a minor No. 63-11-1317 in the Orphan's Court Division of The Court of Common Pleas of Washington County, Pennsylvania.

To: Seth Howard, Putative Father of Kaylie Lavina Windsor, who was born July 2, 2012, in Clearfield County, Pennsylvania. A Petition has been filed asking the Court to put an end to all rights you have to the child, Kaylie Lavina Windsor. Those hearings will be held in Orphans Court Division, Courtroom B, County Courthouse, 1 South Main Street, Washington, Pennsylvania 15301 on Tuesday, September 4, 2012, at 10:00 a.m. You are warned that even if you fail, or your attorney, fail to appear at the hearing will go on without you and your rights to the child may be ended by the Court without your being present. You have the right to be represented at the hearing by a lawyer. You should take this paper to your lawyer at once. If you do not have a lawyer or cannot afford a lawyer go to telephone the office set forth below to find out where you can get legal help. If you cannot afford to hire a lawyer, please advise the office of that when you telephone or visit.

NEWSPAPER

August 24, 2012

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE NINETEENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT IN AND FOR OKEECHOBEE COUNTY, FLORIDA

CASE NO.: 2012CA000258

GARY DAVENPORT, JANE DAVENPORT A/K/A ELIZABETH DAVENPORT, AND ELIZABETH LAWRENCE, Plaintiffs,

THE UNIDENTIFIED HEIRS, DEVISEES, ASSIGNS, LIENHOLDERS, CREDI-

TORS, TRUSTEES, AND ALL OTHER PARTIES CLAIMING AN INTEREST

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MORTGAGE, hereinafter referred to as "PMHI", being in default, has been sued for a violation of your written defenses within 30 days after the first publication, if it is an advertisement; or, if it is mailed, the 90th day after the mailing of the notice, if you are a person with a disability who needs special accommodations or assistance to participate in a court proceeding or to access a court facility, you are encouraged to contact: Clerk of the Circuit Court, 250 NW 19th Avenue, Port Saint Lucie, FL 34986; 772-871-5800; TTY 711; www.psflucourts.org; for information you may request in writing to the Clerk of the Circuit Court, 250 NW 19th Avenue, Port Saint Lucie, FL 34986, 772-871-5800; or in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 per-
Winds down power poles

By Pete Gawda
Okeechobee News

The Okeechobee County Sheriff’s Office and Okeechobee County Fire/Rescue responded to a report of power poles down on U.S. 441 in the vicinity of Okeechobee Youth Development Center, 7200 U.S. 441 N., around 4:45 p.m. Tuesday afternoon, Aug. 21. Upon arrival they found five power poles down. Florida Power and Light (FPL) was contacted.

A spokesperson for the National Weather Service Office in Melbourne said that there were no reported tornadoes in the area but there were some heavy thunderstorms. The damage was likely caused by straight line winds in connection with the storms.

A spokesperson for Okeechobee Youth Development Center said there was a lot of debris and a power outage but no damage was reported.

Bill Orlove, spokesperson for FPL, said his company received the report of a power outage at 4:36 p.m. He said that 1,493 customers were without power. Power was completely restored by 8:35 p.m. Mr. Orlove confirmed that 5 poles were down and one was damaged. He said the damaged pole was replaced on Wednesday, Aug. 22.

Sports News in Brief

Firestix softball tryouts rescheduled

Try-out dates for the Okeechobee Firestix softball program have been rescheduled to Aug. 29 and 30 from 6-8 p.m. at the Okeechobee High School softball field. The softball program is a travel-based league and involves several age groups.

Youth soccer sign-ups open through Aug. 31

Sign-ups for the Youth Soccer League will be through Aug. 31, for youth ages 5-14. Registration is $35 per child and is conducted at the Parks & Recreation Department, in the Sports Complex, Monday-Friday between 8:30-5 p.m. A birth certificate is required at registration. The age determination date is Dec. 31, 2012. League play will begin Saturday, Sept. 29, and end before Christmas. For more information, call 863-763-6950.

Soccer coaches & sponsors are needed for youth league

The Okeechobee Parks & Recreation Department is seeking coaches, sponsors and officials for the Youth Soccer League beginning play in September. Sign-ups for youth ages 5-14 are under way. Anyone interested in getting involved with the program is asked to call the office at 863-763-6950.

Annual Boots and Pearls Gala planned to benefit Hospice

The Seventh Annual Boots and Pearls Gala will be held on Oct. 12, beginning at 6 p.m. at the Okeechobee KOA. The following are the various sponsorship opportunities and how to order tickets.

Please join the party for fun, fellowship, good food and dancing to the music of “Chris Macarthur and the Florida Cracker Boys.”

This is the main fundraising event of the year for Hospice of Okeechobee and there are many ways for you to participate in this evening of fun.

- Trail Boss - $3,000 includes two tables for eight, two bottles of wine on each table, valet parking and the front cover of the program.
- Table Sponsor - $1,000 includes one table for eight and recognition in the program.
- Single Ticket - $50 - Purchase at El’s Western Wear or by calling the Hospice Office at 863-467-2201. There will be a silent auction for pieces of art work by a local artist.

A silent auction will feature an array of items donated by local businesses and individuals.
OHS alum Donny Bush moves up in MMA career

By Charles M. Murphy
Okeechobee News

Okeechobee High School record-setting wrestler Donny Bush has continued to strive for excellence as an adult as he’s become quite adept at the growing sport of mixed-martial arts and has hopes of becoming a professional fighter.

He will be a part of a huge fight card, Rise of the Warrior VIII on Sept. 8, at the Havert L. Penn Center on Virginia Avenue in Fort Pierce and hopes to have an Okeechobee rooting section.

Bush has fought for the past seven months and has won four of five fights. He has traveled to Fort Lauderdale, Immokalee, Fort Myers and Fort Pierce to compete. He also trained at the facility.

He normally works out four to five times a day, six days a week, under the guidance of former MMA fighter Din Thomas. He normally works out four to five times at the facility.

Bush has fought for the past seven months and has won four of five fights. He has traveled to Fort Lauderdale, Immokalee, Fort Myers and Fort Pierce to compete. He also trains weekly at the Treasure Coast Mall in Jensen Beach at American Top Teams under the guidance of former MMA fighter Din Thomas. He normally works out four to five times at the facility.

Bush has worked to improve his skills which include wrestling, kicks, strikes and submission holds. He said it is great to work with a pro fighter.

“I like the sport a lot. It’s a passion. I’d rather be fighting in a cage legally than out of the street,” he added. Donny fights at 155 pounds.

“Donny fights at 155 pounds. He trains this hard in high school because he is in the best shape of his life.

“I’m older now and I see the results of work outs and conditioning drills. I try to explain that to the younger kids now,” he added.

Bush also volunteers his time to help coach the Okeechobee wrestling team. While at OHS Bush won four district titles, advanced to state four times, and won two regional championships. He also holds the record for most wrestling wins during a four-year career. He said he hopes to become a coach.

He thanked his grandmother Shirley Murphy, his dad Scott Bush and longtime friend Emerson Billie for all of their help through the years.

Okeechobee News