Mutual pact becomes reality
By Jeff Odom
Lake/Lutz News Correspondent

Nearly four years ago, Steinbrenner seniors Chris Williams and Gerald Bautista began their high school baseball careers at Sickles. On Nov. 9 the two signed letters of intent to continue their careers at the college level.

While it may seem like just a pair of signings on a day where a slew of schools hosted such ceremonies, these Warriors’ story goes back to when they were sophomores.

“It’s a blessing, because two years ago we made a pact that we would sign with the same school or a different school on we made a pact that we would sign with the same school or a different school on the same day,” said Bautista, a third baseman who signed with the University of Florida.

Williams, a pitcher who signed with St. Leo University, says their friendship extends way back to childhood.

“Me and Gerald have been best friends probably since we were 7,” Williams said. “We just grew up together and always played hard together.”

When Bautista put on his blue-and-orange Florida cap, a large grin appeared on his face and he nodded at his father, Danny Bautista, a 15-year MLB player.

“I’m ready to go,” said an emotional Bautista. “I’m just blessed and I just thank God and my family, especially my dad. He’s been there through the good and bad situations.”

Warriors coach John Crumbley has seen the two grow since they came to the school in 2009.

“They’re both serious about the game of baseball,” Crumbley said. “They both work hard; they’re good leaders on the field and hopefully we’ll ride that to the next level this year.”

Hurricanes volleyball player Jess Johnson, between her parents, Brenda and Glenn; after she signed her letter of intent on Nov. 9 to play at Norfolk State University. (Photo by Eugenio Torrens)

John signs to Norfolk State
By Eugenio Torrens
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Jess Johnson knows exactly what she wants for graduation.

Winter clothes. A lot of winter clothes.

Johnson signed her letter of intent on Nov. 9 to play volleyball for Norfolk State University, a Division I school in Virginia. Bishop McLaughlin’s outside hitter had other colleges in mind, but her official visit in September sealed the deal.

“I just fell in love with the school completely, so I knew that that’s where I wanted to go,” said Johnson, who plans to study chemistry.

Johnson said she is excited and ready for the next chapter of her life, both on and off the court.

“I think I could really help them, and their coach seems to think that I could help them, so I’m really excited to go,” Johnson said.

Johnson was an integral part of the Hurricanes’ record-setting season, piling up 403 kills this season — an average of 5.1 per game — and putting her at more than 1,000 kills for her high school career. Bishop McLaughlin set program record 16 wins this year, capped off with the first playoff appearance.

Hurricanes coach Doug Chinchar has known Johnson since she was 9 years old, and coached her for two years at Bishop McLaughlin. He said the match between Johnson and the Spartans made sense.

“I think she’s going to be a perfect fit just because of the way their school runs,” Chinchar said. “It’s not the Ohio State where you’re going 100 billion miles an hour and they hold that scholarship over your head and say ‘Hey if you don’t do this you’re done.’

He added the signing makes Johnson the first girl to sign a Division I scholarship in Hurricanes history.

‘I hope that people in the Land O’ Lakes area notice this,’ Chinchar said. ‘They have a young lady going to college for free to play volleyball. Beautiful.’

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Why do you go to all the work and expense of putting up an elaborate display?
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How many lights? What is your theme? How many inflatables?
How many animated figures? How long does it take to set up your display? How long to take down?
When does your display go up? When do you take it down? How long have you been doing this?
Does your display get bigger every year?

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