

CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT



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Gene McAvoy, pictured with wife Donna McAvoy, was recently inducted into the National Association of County Agricultural Agents Hall of Fame. [Courtesy photo]

ROLE MODEL

McAvoy inducted into Ag Agents Hall of Fame

SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE

WEST PALM BEACH — Gene McAvoy was inducted into the National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA) Hall of Fame at the NACAA Annual Meeting and Professional Improvement Conference, held in West Palm Beach, July 17-22.

McAvoy is only one of three Florida county agents ever to receive this recognition. He said he felt exceptionally blessed to have received this award in Florida surrounded by his peers who nominated him for this honor.

McAvoy was an exemplary role model during his 25-year career with the UF IFAS Extension service beginning in 1997 when he joined the Hendry County Extension Office as the Vegetable/

Horticulture Agent providing direction and leadership to the Vegetable Horticulture Program.

In 2004, McAvoy became one of University of Florida IFAS's first Regional Specialized Extension Agents (one of two) in which role he continued to provide direction and leadership for the development, implementation and evaluation of Extension educational programs for vegetable producers in the five-county area of Southwest Florida in the following areas: crop production efficiency and sustainability, farm safety and regulatory compliance, integrated pest management, post-harvest quality and food safety, and vegetable nutrition and irrigation management as well as planning

» See McAvoy on page 20

CONSTRUCTION

LaBelle approves 3 story apartments

By C. M. Schmidlkofer
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — LaBelle officials approved in a 3-2 vote to grant a variance to Better Spaces Southeast, LLC, a Fort Myers construction firm, to allow a three-story, 45-foot-tall multi-family building in the downtown business district.

Matt Valentine, Better Spaces owner, plans to build an 18-unit multi-family building with a pool and 41-car parking area on the undeveloped parcel located north of Yeomans Ave. and west of North Lee Street, to be called Begonia Apartments. The project will have three bedroom apartments on the

ends of the buildings and two bedroom apartments in between for all stories.

Valentine told the LaBelle County Commission during its commission meeting Aug. 4 that he needed the variance in order to make a profit off the development, that his company owns outright.

Commissioners approved the variance on condition that Valentine relocate 18 existing oak trees from the proposed parking area to another area on the property.

Commissioner Bobbie Spratt put forth the motion when Commissioner Hugo Vargas' motion

» See Apartments on page 20

CALOOSAHATCHEE

LaBelle considers boat docking fees

By C. M. Schmidlkofer
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — The joy over finding a \$5 bill overlooked at the bottom of a purse might be a good way to describe the excitement the City of LaBelle BOC expressed when learning it had been sitting on a revenue stream unawares.

During its Aug. 4 commission meeting, board members were informed it was not only possible, but highly recommended, to charge overnight boaters to dock at

» See Fees on page 20



Boaters who dock at the LaBelle marina might be asked to pay a small fee. [Courtesy photo]

LABELLE NEWS
24/7

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NEW LOCATION

Jasey's Southern Spa moves to new LaBelle location

By C. M. Schmidtkofer
 CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — If it is true that every cloud has a silver lining, LaBelle resident Jasey Ward has hit the jackpot.

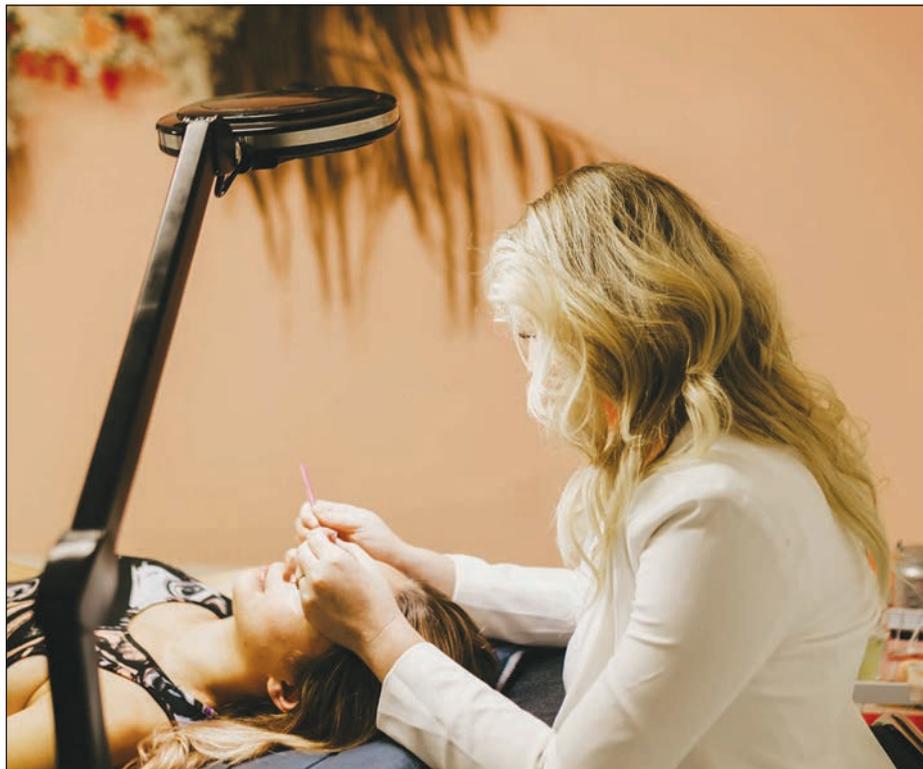
At the age of 10, Ward was involved in a car accident with her brother, Wyatt, and her stepmother. While the youngsters were spared serious injury, their parent experienced pain and difficulty walking.

"Of course, the doctors prescribed her medications," Ward said. "Fortunately, we're a holistic family, so she decided not to take medication that could be potentially addicting. Instead, I volunteered to massage her back every day after school."

Thanks to Ward's efforts, her stepmother was soon walking and feeling good again.

"This sparked my interest in the field that I am in," she said.

That spark led her on a path to study massage, which led to studies in skin



Jasey Ward gives a client a lash treatment at Jasey's Southern Spa in LaBelle. Facials, massages, microblading, threading and more are offered at the one-stop spa. [Photo by Faith Morgan]

care and microblading, prompting her to open a salon in LaBelle focusing on those skills and more.

In June, Ward, who will soon change her name to Jasey Altman this

October when she marries her fiancé, expanded her practice from Wallace Plaza to a larger facility at 1043 CR-731, Suite 103, in LaBelle.

By appointment only,

Ward, sole proprietor of Jasey's Southern Spa, along with her new manicurist Riley Cummins, sees clients at her salon, Monday through Friday

>> See Spa on page 4



Jasey Ward, owner of Jasey's Southern Spa in LaBelle, greets clients with Nail Specialist Riley Cummins. Ward moved her spa in June to 1043 CR-731, Suite 103, in LaBelle. By appointment only. [Photo by Faith Morgan]

WORKFORCE

Collaboration to remove employment barriers

By Aysegul Timur, Amir B. Ferreira Neto, Tessa LeSage, Michael Swindle and Lillie Rentz
 SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — Jobs and corresponding workforce demands are increasing dramatically in Hendry and Glades counties in anticipation of the completion of Airglades International Airport. On its own, this project is expected to add 1,400 jobs by 2024 and will attract additional opportunities for economic development.

Furthermore, the counties have grown training opportunities, including tremendous educational collaborations to expand programming and partnerships within the community. Even with these expanding community assets, we need to do more to meet employer demand for workers and change lives in our rural communities.

Creating solutions to help job seekers secure the necessary credentials and skills to be successful in Hendry's and Glades'

economies is vital to the future. That's why Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) in partnership with FutureMakers Coalition at Collaboratory will develop and implement the Southwest Florida Equitable Jobs Pipeline. The pipeline is the result of eight years of efforts laying the foundation for a game-changing workforce development investment – \$22.9 million from the U.S. Economic Development Administration's Good Jobs Challenge, part of the American Rescue Plan.

This award is among 32 recipients to be funded from 509 applicants, a historic achievement for

Southwest Florida's workforce and economy.

Developing local talent relies on three pillars: locating the regional talent, understanding the skills gap, and developing the appropriate plan to meet the needs of businesses and the workforce. To that



Aysegul Timur



Amir B. Ferreira Neto



Tessa LeSage



Michael Swindle



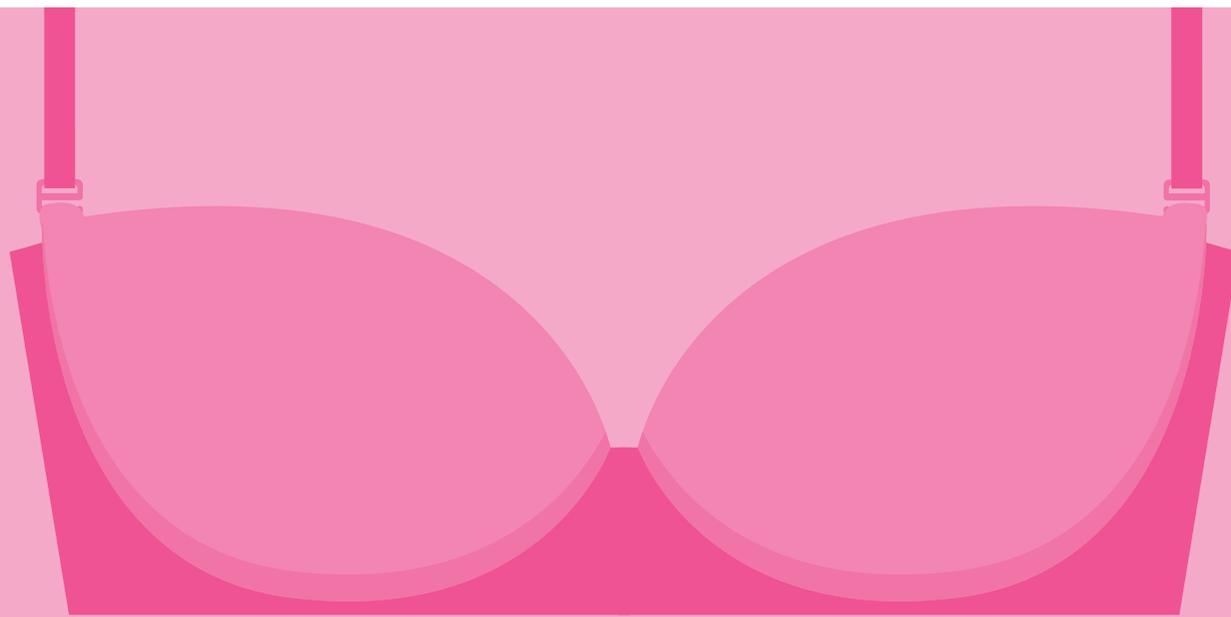
Lillie Rentz Neto

end, the Southwest Florida Equitable Jobs Pipeline will focus on four transforming industry sectors – health care, manufacturing, logistics and K-12 public education – to meet many challenges ahead.

The Southwest Florida Equitable Jobs Pipeline

targets underserved populations who face multiple barriers to education, employment and career advancement. These barriers can seem unbeatable to those facing them and, conversely, be invisible to those who

>> See Workforce on page 4



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Spa

» From page 2
from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 8 a.m. and opens the salon for nails only from 12 noon to 8 p.m. on Sundays. Appointments can be made by calling 863-532-0419.

The larger space was much needed due to the growth of her clientele and Ward is looking for another professional to rent a room in the spa – preferably a massage therapist or someone who can provide Botox injections.

Ward chose her business name due to its uniqueness. “Have you ever heard of a Southern spa? Doubtful,” she said. “What is a Southern spa? Well, I’ll tell you, it is a home away from home where you can be surrounded by sweet Southern hospitality and people who treat you like family!”

In addition to massages,

clients enjoy facials, permanent makeup, brow waxing, pedicures and manicures, microblading, henna and threading, waxing and tinting, and body sculpting with noninvasive ultrasonic high frequency waves that melt fat cells away with no downtime.

In fact, her spa is the only one in LaBelle offering all of these services in one place, she said.

And it’s not just women who come in for pampering. Ward said men enjoy facials, brow waxing and pedicures. She said those that come in regularly for facials see improvements in their skin. “Their skin has changed so much in the past year of coming, it is truly amazing to see,” she said.

A Moore Haven native, Ward said she moved to LaBelle to pursue her business dreams, but that is only the most recent stop

of her silver lining journey.

Experiencing the success of her stepmother’s health due to massage, Ward worked hard to graduate high school at age 16 to enroll in college studying business and by the age of 18 she studied massage and specialized skin care at Sunstate Academy.

“But it wasn’t enough for me,” she said. “I wanted to learn more.”

Encouraged by her grandmother to pursue microblading skills, Ward took a course at Bonita Careers, a wise choice as she says microblading is her spa’s most popular service.

Nail specialist Cummins also attended Bonita Careers becoming a medical esthetician. She sought to expand her skills and went back to school for nails.

Currently Cummins splits her work between Ward’s spa and a job at



Nail Specialist Riley Cummins offers a wide array of nail services to clients at Jasey’s Southern Spa in LaBelle. [Photo by Faith Morgan]

Bonita Careers, but she plans to move full-time to Jasey’s Southern Spa.

“She has excelled in anything she puts her mind to,” Ward said. “And boy, does she love doing nails.”

Ward said she chose

LaBelle for her business since she and her fiancé live there, playing cornhole and going hog hunting when they have time.

“It is our home,” she said. “We love the people and love to give back to them.

The smiles I see from just a simple eyebrow wax or a facial or even microblading, is what keeps me going! My clientele are all family; I’m sure each one will tell you that!”

OBITUARIES



Cecil O. Akin (Papa Cecil), 75

LABELLE — Cecil O. Akin (Papa Cecil) passed away on July 21, 2022, at this home in LaBelle. His 43-year battle with MS, and more recently heart disease, came to an end. Even though the battle was long and rough he looked forward to taking morning walks around the neighborhood. Cecil was a native of Florida and Hendry County.

He was born in Clewiston to Paul R. and Isabelle A. Mills Akin. He graduated from Clewiston High School in 1965 and Miami-Dade College in 1977 with an AS in Funeral Services. Cecil was a former Scoutmaster in Clewiston and representative of BSA Gulfstream Council, past President of Clewiston Jaycees, charter member of Kiwanis of LaBelle, member of Clewiston Lions Club, past Master of F&AM Moore Haven, LaBelle and

Clewiston and former Grandmaster of District 28 Valley of Scottish Rite, Commandery of Knights of Templar and Grand Marshall of Swamp Cabbage Festival in 1993. He also was former member and Chairman of Hendry County Board of County Commissioners, was a founding member of Independent Funeral Directors of Florida (IFDF) and served on the State Board of Funeral and Cemetery Services. He was former co-owner of Akin-Davis Funeral Homes. He was a member of First Baptist Church of LaBelle and former Deacon.

He is survived by his wife, Ann; daughter, Kimberly; son, Daniel and his wife, Nan; grandsons, Greyson and Drayton; siblings, Barbara Akin, Jerry Akin (Donna), Patty Raulerson, Jimmy Akin (Nora); and many lifelong friends and fellow Masons, nieces, nephews & cousins; and brother-in-law, Russell Kilpatrick.

Cecil was proud to serve the people of Hendry County whenever possible, loved his wife and family, and was proud to be able to see Kimberly and Daniel grow into adults and step in to run the funeral homes when he had to step down from working. He enjoyed watching Greyson and Drayton grow up and loved it when they called him Papa Cecil. He believed everyone should make each day count. The race in life is not how fast you travel on your way but how you win by savoring each day and having Faith in God and following his plan for you.

Workforce

» From page 2

have access to greater resources.

This initiative will recruit job seekers within these communities into pipelines that lead to industry-recognized credentials and a career with local employers. By strengthening our regional collaboration through this work, we expect to find long-term community solutions to address these barriers.

The Southwest Florida Equitable Jobs Pipeline relies on partnerships with employers and educational providers to close skills gaps. We also need

nonprofits to support and help develop ways to meet our workforce’s needs. We will partner with employers in each industry to lead the process of refining our understanding of needed skills with those missing in the region. Education partners will recruit job seekers to partake in new training programs tailored to industry needs and businesses that have committed to hiring trainees.

Earlier this year, FutureMakers Coalition was chosen by CivicLab as one of five rural partnerships across the U.S. to participate in a two-year initiative to improve higher education

and workforce systems in Hendry County. The goal is to advance our ability to build relationships and resources to seize opportunities and ensure our communities benefit fully from the growth ahead. It’s this kind of success we will leverage as we create the Southwest Florida Equitable Jobs Pipeline.

If you are interested in getting involved and being part of this historic initiative, please email us at info@futuremakerscoalition.com. Together we can improve our region to attract, retain and cultivate talent.

For more news, see our website!

The Caloosa Belle Independent is published monthly, with free print editions mailed to every address in the LaBelle zipcode. Want more news throughout the month? Subscribe to our website at SouthCentralFloridaLife.com. The website is updated daily with news about LaBelle and Hendry County as well as news from the nearby communities. For everything from arrest reports, to coverage of city, county and school board meetings, to information on traffic accidents, to photos from local schools, check out the wide variety of LaBelle news online at SouthCentralFloridaLife.com. The website also features state, national and world news from the Associated Press.

HEALTH

Send news and photographs to cbnews@iniusa.org

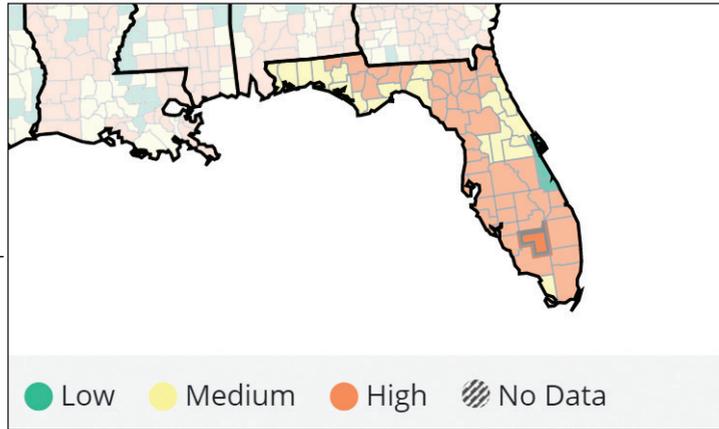
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CORONAVIRUS

Florida's covid risk remains high, per CDC

By **Katrina Elsken**
 CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT



The Centers for Disease Control map, updated Aug. 24, shows most of Florida at high risk of COVID-19. Hendry County is highlighted on the map.

Florida's COVID-19 new case positivity rate remains high, according to the Florida Department of Health (FDOH). The most recent data from FDOH indicates new case positivity in Hendry County at 16% and Glades County new case positivity at 23.7%.

Since many people now use home tests, available free by mail from the U.S. government or for purchase at many grocery and drug stores, the positivity numbers only include those tested at a health department, pharmacy, hospital or doctor's office. Home tests are not in the mandatory reporting group.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) now designate counties as high, medium or low risk of covid. While FDOH previously used the new case positivity rates to judge the risk, the CDC focuses on the number of covid-positive people who are ill enough

to require hospitalization and the number of intensive care unit beds available. They also consider the number of (reported) new cases in the county in the past seven days, divided by the population of the county.

As of Aug. 24, most of Florida was considered at high risk by the CDC. Both Hendry and Glades County were considered high risk areas by the CDC.

The most recent FDOH report shows 60% of Hendry County residents have been vaccinated against COVID-19, and 49% of Glades County residents have been vaccinated.

The CDC recommends

those in areas at high risk for covid to:

- Wear a face mask in public indoor spaces or anywhere you cannot maintain at least 6 feet of distance between yourself and others not in your household.
- Stay updated with vaccinations.
- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly.
- Consult your doctor for additional recommendations, especially if you have other health concerns.

Every home in the United States is eligible for three orders of free covid tests. Each order includes four tests. For free covid tests, go to covid.gov/tests.

OBESITY RATES

Obesity rates rising in South Central Florida

By **Katrina Elsken**
 CALOOSA BELLE

Florida's obesity rates are lower than the national average, but South Central Floridians have put on weight over the past 10 years, according to the 2022 Florida County Health Rankings.

Nationwide, 32% of adults have a body mass index (BMI) above 30 that puts them in the obesity range while 26% of Floridians are considered obese.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), BMI is a person's weight in

kilograms divided by the square of height in meters. A high BMI can indicate high body fatness.

To calculate BMI, see the Adult BMI Calculator or determine BMI by finding your height and weight in the National Institute of Health website's BMI Index Chart.

- If your BMI is less than 18.5, it falls within the underweight range.
- If your BMI is 18.5 to <25, it falls within the healthy weight range.
- If your BMI is 25.0 to <30, it falls within the

overweight range.

• If your BMI is 30.0 or higher, it falls within the obesity range.

Statewide, Florida had an adult obesity rate of 26% in 2012 and maintained that rate in 2022.

2022 Florida County Health Rankings found adult obesity levels rising in South Central Florida.

• Glades County's 2012 adult obesity level was 35%; 2022 obesity level, 37%.

• Hendry County's 2012 adult obesity level was 35%; 2022 obesity level, 42%.

EXERCISE

Become a certified Exercise Program instructor

SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

SOUTHWEST, FL — The Area Agency on Aging for Southwest Florida (AAASWFL) is seeking dedicated individuals to become certified Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program instructors and volunteers to lead workshops in their local and surrounding communities.

Certification courses

are led by the Aquatic Exercise Association (AEA) and take place online. The cost of certification is covered by AAASWFL with a volunteer commitment to lead Arthritis Foundation Exercise Program workshops on behalf of the Area Agency on Aging for SWFL. Instructors must be comfortable with leading older adults in a class setting, have the capacity

to demonstrate as well as teach low-impact exercises that are targeted for adults ages 60 and over that have been diagnosed with arthritis or chronic pain, and reside within AAASWFL's service area that includes Charlotte, Collier, Desoto, Lee, Hendry, Glades, and Sarasota counties.

For more info, visit aaaswfl.org or call (866) 413-5337.

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What is 'family' to you?

By Rev. Elizabeth Nelson
GOOD SHEPHERD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

When you hear the word "family," what comes to mind? The words "family" or "families" appear over 250 times in the Bible, and the first time it is mentioned, it refers to animals, not persons!

As Noah exits the ark after the flood, it is written, "and every animal...went out of the ark by families."

The baby Moses would have never survived, floating down the river in a basket, if an Egyptian princess had not taken him into her house and

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

raised him like her own son.

The story of Joseph and his brothers does have a happy ending, but early on was full of tragedy.

Then there is the beautiful story of Ruth, who is so devoted to her mother-in-law that she chooses to stay with her rather than move on and find a new life after the death of her husband. Blood isn't the only thing that can bind persons together as in a family.

Over and over again, scripture tells us that family can and should extend beyond bloodlines, reach into places we might not expect, and shatter borders that might shock us. As Christians, we share an unbreakable bond

that holds us together, whether we are present or absent at our Sunday worship.

As Christians, we are...at our core...connected because we hold close the same truths, the same creed, the same Father. And as far as a bloodline is concerned, we are all connected by the blood of Jesus which was shed to make us all one family in Christ.

About the author: Previously the priest at St. Francis of Assisi in Lake Placid for 21 years, Rev. Elizabeth L. Nelson is now the Priest at Good Shepherd Episcopal Church in LaBelle.

SOCIAL SECURITY MATTERS

Who should file for Social Security early?

By Russell Gloor

AMAC CERTIFIED SOCIAL SECURITY ADVISOR

Dear Rusty: My wife will be turning 62 and eligible to collect Social Security this year. We realize it will be a reduced amount. I am 52 and have been the sole income earner for most of the last 20 years. We also have an adopted son who will be turning 14 this year. We realize he will receive a dependent benefit until he turns 18 and this may make the case for filing early. I am confused about widow benefits - will my wife's early filing affect her widow's benefit amount? Signed: Confused Husband

Dear Confused Husband: When your wife claims her own SS retirement benefit (e.g., at 62) will have no effect on the benefit available to her as your widow. The only thing that would affect her survivor benefit as your widow is her age when

she claims it. Claimed before her FRA, her survivor benefit would be reduced, but claimed at or after her FRA, your wife's survivor benefit as your widow will be 100% of the amount you were receiving (or, if you are not yet collecting, the amount you were entitled to receive) at your death. Your wife would get that amount, instead of her smaller personal amount.

However, for your awareness, your wife's spousal benefit while you are both living (which she can claim when you start your own SS benefit) will be less than half of your FRA benefit amount because she claimed her own SS retirement benefit at age 62. The reason is that your wife's benefit as your spouse when you claim will consist of her own reduced SS retirement benefit, plus a spousal boost to bring her payment up to her spousal entitlement. Since her spousal boost will be added to her own reduced early benefit, her

total payment as your spouse will be less than 50% of your FRA benefit amount.

If your wife claims her own SS retirement benefit at age 62, she can also apply for your adopted minor son's benefits based on her personal lifetime work record. Although your wife's personal early benefit will be cut (by 30%) for claiming at age 62, your son's benefit as your wife's minor child will be based on your wife's full retirement age (FRA) benefit amount. Your son's benefit from your wife will be 50% of your wife's FRA amount (not her age 62 amount). As you know, your son will get that amount until he is 18 (or 19 if he is still in high school).

This article is intended for information purposes only and does not represent legal or financial guidance. To submit a question, visit our website (amacfoundation.org/programs/social-security-advisory) or email us at ssadvisor@amacfoundation.org.

RECIPE OF THE MONTH



Leftover Fried Chicken Casserole

SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

Ingredients

- 1 cup of rice (uncooked)
- 2 cups deboned fried chicken
- 2 cans cream of celery or cream of mushroom soup
- 1 can of milk
- 1 can of water
- 1 bag of frozen veggies
- 1 cup of Parmesan cheese
- 1 cup of mozzarella cheese
- ½ cup cheddar cheese
- Optional 1 cup French fried Onion for topping

Directions

- Pre-heat oven to 350
- Mix all ingredients together
- Pour into a greased 9 X 13 baking dish
- Cook at 350 for 40 minutes.

This recipe provided by Southern Heritage Real Estate.

In a hurry and don't have time to make your own fried chicken for this recipe? Grab some from your favorite grocery store!

CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

at SouthCentralFloridaLife.com

Delivering Western Hendry County's News since 1922

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We Pledge...

- To operate the newspaper as a public trust
- To help our community become a better place to live and work, through our dedication to conscientious journalism
- To provide the information citizens need to make their own intelligent decisions about public issues
- To report the news with honesty, accuracy, purposeful neutrality, fairness, objectivity, fearlessness, and compassion
- To use our opinion pages to facilitate community debate, not to dominate it with our own opinions
- To disclose our own conflicts of interest or potential conflicts to our readers
- To correct our errors and to give each correction the prominence it deserves.
- To provide a right to reply to those we write about.
- To treat people with courtesy, respect, and compassion

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ADOPT A PET

Caloosa Humane Society seeks forever homes for pets

LABELLE — The Caloosa Humane Society has lots of dogs and cats just waiting to be your new best friends. The Caloosa Humane Society, Inc. is a not-for-profit, 501 (c) (3) status organization that receives no federal, state, or local funding and relies on donations, bequests and fundraising events. The shelter, 1200 Pratt Blvd in LaBelle is open Tuesday-Saturday from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information call 863-675-0997. [Photos courtesy of Caloosa Humane Society]



Perla should be named Purrrrrria. And she loves to be held. Perla is 4-months-old.



Fizgig cannot wait to get out of this cone so she can go back to full-on playing! This cutie is 3-months-old.



Kim is cuteness overload! She is 3-months-old.



Nick is always on the move. And he loves to cuddle. Nick is 3-months-old.



Brandy will steal your heart in a minute! She is 4-months-old.



Onyx is playful and friendly. He is 3-months-old.



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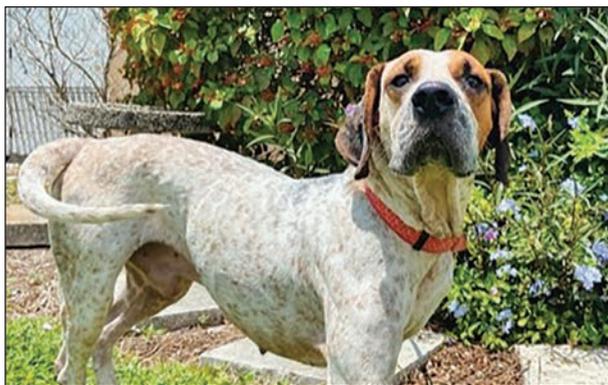


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Xander is so patient. He came to CHS with several injuries, but now he's as good as new. Xander is 2 years old.



This is Missy. She is cute and playful. Missy is 6 years old.



Jagger has very sad eyes, but is really a happy boy! He was one of the 65+ dogs rescued in Montura. Jagger is 4 years old.



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EDUCATION

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SCHOLARSHIPS



Law students receive scholarships

The Hendry-Glades Bar Association, a professional association of the attorneys practicing law in Hendry and Glades Counties, awarded scholarships on July 28, in the amount of \$1,500 each to Alton Burton and Scott Morrison. Alton is pictured on the left, he is a 2013 LaBelle High School graduate, and is entering his third year at Ave Maria School of Law in Naples. Scott, pictured on the right, is a 2015 LaBelle High School graduate, and entering his second year at Barry University School of Law in Orlando. [Courtesy photo]

HONOR GUARD



VFW supports LHS Honor Guard

LABELLE – VFW Post 10100 and Auxiliary are supporting the first Honor Guard at the LaBelle High School. They have supplied their uniforms and now doing fundraisers for them to go on a trip to Washington DC. Back row on the left is Ron Snell, teacher and instructor. Back row on the right is Bethany Mudge, canteen manager for the VFW Post. The Honor Guard will perform at all of the high school football games and various activities around the county. They will perform at the Fallen Heroes Benefit at the Veterans Park on Oct. 8.

TEACHER SHORTAGE

School district hires 10 teachers from outside the U.S.

By **C. M. Schmidtkofer**
 SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — Ten of Hendry County School District's new teachers this school year are from outside of the United States.

Due to the shortage of teachers nationwide, and particularly in Florida where there is a shortage of approximately 9,500 teachers according to the Florida Education Association, the school board Aug. 2 voted to hire outside of the country to fill teacher vacancies in its district.

Housing has been

secured for the majority of the foreign teachers in apartments in Clewiston or LaBelle, according to Roberto Sanchez, school district secondary education director.

The school district does not assist the new hires with relocation expenses, he said. That is through a partnership with TPG, a U.S. Department of State department which sponsors J-1 visas for teacher exchange visitors.

"Foreign teachers come to this country through the J-1 visa program," he said. "Which they obtain for

three years and can extend for two additional years."

The teachers are under an annual contract, just like the district's other teachers, he said.

Hiring through the International Alliance Group, the district will pay 20-25% more than what the district pays current teachers through the union negotiated salary, according to school board member Stephanie Busin.

Busin was the descending vote Aug. 2, calling the solution "an expensive response to the [current] turnover" at the district.

INCENTIVE



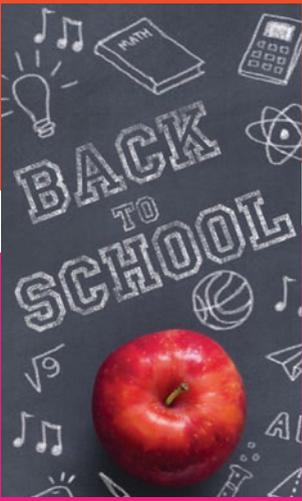
Taking one for the team

Fourth graders at Country Oaks Elementary School in LaBelle who scored a 3 or higher on their English Language Arts Florida Standards Assessments (ELA FSA) last year got to put a pie in Mrs. Kruse's face! [Photo courtesy Country Oaks Elementary]



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Country Oaks Elementary School welcomed students to the new school in August. [Photo courtesy Country Oaks Elementary School]



Fifth graders in Ms. Strickland's Class at LaBelle Elementary School have been working on a rock garden near the bus loop. [Photo courtesy LaBelle Elementary School]



LaBelle Elementary School students in Ms. Fred's class are enjoying the new school year. [Photo courtesy LaBelle Elementary School]



West Glades School welcomed students at open house on Aug. 5. [Photo courtesy West Glades School]



Country Oaks Elementary School students are excited about the new school year. [Photo courtesy Country Oaks Elementary School]



LaBelle High School seniors are ready for the new school year. [Photo courtesy LaBelle High School]



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LIBERTY VILLAGE

LaBelle greenlights Liberty Village PUD

By C. M. Schmidtkofer
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — The City of LaBelle approved moving forward with the Liberty Village Proposed Unit Development (PUD) in a 4-0 vote during its regular board meeting July 14.

Mayor Julie Wilkins was not present at the meeting. The ordinance rezones 278.13 acres south of Helms Road and 3/4 mile west of SR 29 to mixed use from agricultural.

Applicants Jack Paul Properties, Inc., located in Wauchula, and Galvano Real Estate, LLC, based in Fort Myers, plan to build 971 single-family detached dwelling units for a 55-plus community, an 18-hole golf course with clubhouse and recreational amenities, and a 60,000 square-foot area for commercial uses on the

Helms Road frontage.

City commissioners had requested some changes to the original PUD request based on input from the property's neighbors and its own concerns when it held the first reading in June. Those requests have since been incorporated into the proposed ordinance, approved with the added stipulation the entire 18-hole golf course be completed by the completion of the 400th residential build.

The single-family mobile homes are perfect for retiring senior citizens looking to move to the area, said Rich Galvano, owner of Galvano Real Estate, LLC.

With 22 million families nationwide living in mobile homes, Galvano said the properties are in great demand and theirs will meet wind and other codes set

forth by the state.

With the average \$400,000 price tag for a new single-family home in LaBelle, seniors will find an affordable option when faced with being priced out of the market, he said.

"You've got retiring people that may not have that much put away," he said. "And they can roll into a place like this and with their Social Security can live out a very nice life."

A phone call to Liberty Village requesting lot prices was not immediately returned.

The membership-only golf course and driving range will be open to the public and Liberty Village residents, something Galvano said was forefront in the planning as the partnership are committed to an open-space concept al-

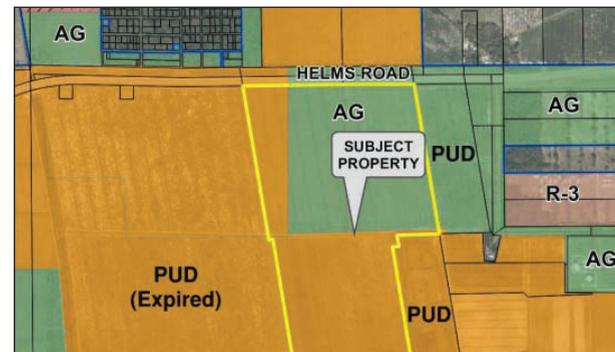
lowing public interaction.

In a surprise announcement, Galvano added the partnership would like to donate three acres to the city with the intention of building a 50-meter by 25-meter public swimming pool with up to 20 lanes and an exercise facility.

The entity would be a partnership between Galvano's company, Jack Paul Properties, LLC and the city of LaBelle.

The fact the city doesn't have money for a pool, as mentioned by Commissioner Bobbie Spratt, didn't deter the continuation of the pitch.

Galvano said these projects can usually succeed with the help of state representatives. However, since not in the ordinance, he recommended a stipulation



This map shows the proposed site for Liberty Village PUD. [Photo courtesy City of LaBelle]

that would require approval of all parties before the enterprise breaks ground.

"We'll sit down and do what you recommend," he said. "And we'll carve it out and make sure it is equitable for everyone."

Since the ordinance had its second reading during the Public Hearings component of the board meeting, a resident took

to the podium warning commissioners to ensure promises were put in writing in advance of moving forward.

"You see lots of pretty pictures, which is great, too," she said of the maps, plans and building representations. "But if those renderings are not in the ordinance ... it's not necessarily reality."

GROWTH

Impact fee study agreement in place for Hendry County

By C. M. Schmidtkofer
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

CLEWISTON — Hendry County commissioners took another step forward towards imposing impact fees on new developments in the county during its Aug. 9 meeting at the Harlem Civic Center in Clewiston.

The board voted 5-0 to pay \$149,330 to Chicago-based engineering firm Alfred Benesch & Company to conduct an impact fee study to be completed within 240 days of the signing of the agreement.

The study will evaluate how emergency medical services, transportation, libraries, law enforcement and correctional facilities will be impacted by development (and thus what

fees should be charged to developers), including a \$34,667.50 fee for educational facilities that will be paid by the Hendry County School District, bringing down the county's cost to \$114,662.50.

Benesch will provide eight presentations throughout the study, with an additional two in-person presentations in Clewiston and LaBelle, open to the public.

Commissioners were anxious to get the ball rolling on the study, some voicing regrets this hadn't been undertaken sooner.

"We should have done this two years ago," Commissioner Darrell Harris said.

Vice Chair Mitchell Willis disagreed with those that

said impact fees will slow or stop the growth in the county.

"Tell Collier and Lee counties that," he said. "... because the last time I checked they were busting at the seams."

He also disagreed with contractors who said it will raise their costs too high.

"Well, look, you've already marked your stuff up 60%," he said. "Maybe you need to work with the people that you're selling your homes to and help us make sure that my kids have a class to go to, your kids have a class to go to."

Commissioner Ramon Iglesias pointed out that contractors may pay the up-front fee, but the end user ultimately pays the bill.

CODE ENFORCEMENT

LaBelle forgives Trading Post code enforcement liens

By C. M. Schmidtkofer
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — The City of LaBelle may finally be free of the Trading Post, which has been closed for some time.

During the regular commission meeting July 14, owner Sana Abuqab requested a release of years of accumulated liens placed on the property, located at 10 E. Hickpoochee Ave., by the City of LaBelle.

During the open discussion period, commissioners learned of a proposed purchase by an unnamed buyer who plans to demolish the building and redevelop the property if the deal goes through. The contract is expected to be finalized soon, said City Attorney Derek Rooney.

A title search revealed

\$100,000 of liens against the property, with almost \$92,000 being utility liens for base service charges. Most of these liens cannot be cleared from the title without going through an extensive process, Rooney said, and would pass the cost on to other rate payers, something the city does not want to do.

The city can waive the approximately \$14,000 in recent code enforcement liens but there are other court-ordered liens with an unknown value at this time.

"My recommendation is that any lien relief on the code enforcement liens would have to be predicated on the posting of some form of surety to ensure if the closing does not occur, the city can use that surety to tear down the building,"

Rooney said.

"Quite honestly, I don't have any sympathy for him [Abuqab] because we have put up with that site for years," Commissioner Bobbie Spratt said. "We've been trying to get it cleaned up; we've been trying to contact him to clean it up. I don't want to forgive anything."

She added that the city has had to pay its employees to go out to the property and to court to enforce city codes.

After further discussion, commissioners voted 3-1 to approve forgiving the code enforcement liens along with approximately \$800 in trash removal liens provided surety is secured.

Spratt was the descending vote. Mayor Julie Wilkins was not present.



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NEW HIRES

HCSO welcomes four new employees

SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE
INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — On Monday, Aug. 1, Hendry County Sheriff Steve Whidden swore in four new employees. All four were recent graduates of the SW Florida Public Service Academy Class #165 in Ft. Myers on July 19.

Deputy Hernan Ramirez Garcia is a graduate of LaBelle High School. Hernan served four years in the United States Marine Corps. While attending the SW Florida Public Service Academy he was a member of the Color Guard. Hernan is currently assigned to the

Sheriff's Office Road Patrol unit.

Deputy Larry Rodriguez was born in Queens, New York. His family moved to Broward County when he was 6-years-old. Larry attended Clewiston High School his junior year then transferred to LaBelle High School for his senior year and graduated with honors. Larry went to three different colleges on a full baseball scholarship earning an Associate's Degree in Liberal Arts. Larry is currently assigned to the Sheriff's Office Road Patrol unit.

Deputy Dayana Calvo Driggs is originally from

Miami and moved to Clewiston in 2012. Dayana is a graduate of Clewiston High School. She attended Keiser University earning an Associate's Degree in Criminal Justice. Before coming to the HCSO she was a teen counselor for the Boys and Girls Club of America on the Brighton Seminole Indian Reservation. Dayana is currently assigned to the Sheriff's Office Road Patrol unit.

Deputy Isabel Rodriguez attended Clewiston High School and was in the Public Safety Academy for four years. She graduated with her E911



Left to right are Hendry County Sheriff's Office Deputy Hernan Ramirez Garcia, Deputy Larry Rodriguez, Deputy Dayana Calvo Driggs, Deputy Isabel Rodriguez and Sheriff Steve Whidden. [Photo courtesy Hendry County Sheriff's Office]

telecommunications certification from the program. Isabel worked in telecommunications at the

Glades County Sheriff's Office and the Clewiston Police Department before coming to the HCSO. Isabel

is currently assigned to the Sheriff's Office Road Patrol unit.

HOUSING

Hometown Heroes Housing Program helps home buyers

By **Mallarie Kennedy**
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — The last few years have tested frontline workers to the extreme. Working through a pandemic and supply shortages, all with an impending recession hanging over their heads, they have continued to serve. Now, they are finally getting the break they deserve.

On June 1, 2022, Governor Ron DeSantis announced The Hometown Heroes Housing Program

to show gratitude to those who bravely help their communities by making homeownership affordable.

"In Florida, we value the contributions of our police, firefighters, teachers, and nurses," DeSantis said when introducing the new \$100 million program.

The Florida Hometown Heroes Housing Program is coordinated by the Florida Housing and Finance Corporation and has the most inclusive eligibility out of all down payment assistance

programs in Florida.

"The Hometown Heroes program helps those who help us," local realtor Denise Walker explains. "If qualified, the program will help with the down payment and closing costs in the form of a second mortgage at zero percent interest."

If eligible, borrowers will receive lower than market interest rates, and up to 5% of their mortgage loan, up to \$25,000, for down payment and closing cost assistance. As Walker

explained, down payment assistance will be given as a 30-year deferred second mortgage.

So, who qualifies as a hometown hero? You may be surprised at how comprehensive the list is. "Day care, home health aides, dental assistants, EMTs, police, fire, phlebotomists, to name a few. If you assist the general public, chances are you qualify. Of course, we can't forget our active military and veterans," Walker continues. There are over

50 critical professions listed.

If you think you may qualify, the first place to start is with an experienced realtor like Walker. A realtor will help you through each process step, making each step as easy as possible. Denise Walker says it's as simple as making the call.

"It costs nothing to pick up the phone and call a realtor who can put you in touch with several lenders who work with this program," Walker

explains. "We can help guide potential qualifiers to many lenders that offer the Hometown Heroes program."

In addition to facilitating discussions with a lender, a skilled agent will walk you through your options, explain everything during the process, and negotiate on your behalf. "We can hold your hand through the process, with the end result being homeownership! Homeownership is the American dream come true!"

NOISE ORDINANCE

LaBelle mayor disturbed by loud noise from Civic Center

By **C. M. Schmidtkofer**
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — The LaBelle City Commission continued a second reading of a proposed noise abatement ordinance during its Aug. 4 meeting, to be revisited during its Sept. 8 regular meeting.

As written, noise levels cannot exceed 60 decibels on a neighbor's property line, meaning levels are

measured by the receiver of the sound rather than the sender.

This caused Mayor Julie Wilkins to suggest more discussion on how sound is measured, since her recent complaints to the city about loud noise coming from the Civic Center near her home, registered at exactly 60 decibels at the edge of her property line.

"So it was in compliance,"

Wilkins said. "But it was shaking my ribcage in my bedroom."

She added that her neighbors have complained to her about the noise as well but preferred not to call in a complaint.

There are sound-deafening materials in the civic center to keep noise down, but because the doors are kept open, sound escapes and can be

problematic for neighbors.

The same is true of other community centers. According to the code, noise is not supposed to leave a building. But many public facilities leave doors open during events, so the sound is not kept indoors.

Commissioner Hugo Vargas said he lived close to the civic center at one time and would only hear the noise if he left his house.

"Now you would be complaining about it," Wilkins said. "If you lived right next to it."

Wilkins asked if there was a better way to enforce the code, to change the decibel reading or if reading from the site instead of a neighbor's property would be a better option - but it is a major concern of hers.

"So, I don't know what

the compromise is on that because we want to make life easier so it can be enforced," she said. "But 60 [decibels] is apparently not low enough ... and I did talk to Captain Reed about it, and he said make sure you put that in there that it can't leave the building or edge of the property."

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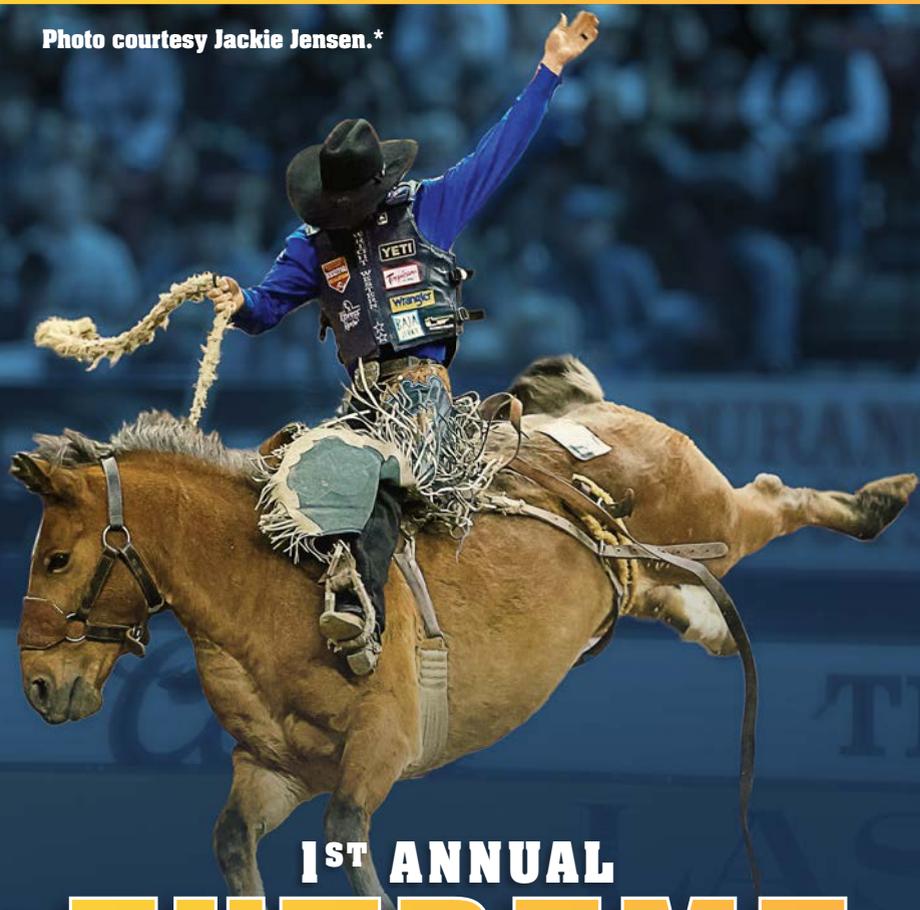
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INNOVATION

Web-based tool helps control blueberry disease

By **Brad Buck**
UF/IFAS

GAINESVILLE — Anthracnose fruit rot plagues blueberries, especially in Florida. In fact, it's among the fruit's most damaging diseases. To manage the disease, farmers normally spray the crop with fungicides, but on a calendar basis – in other words, every two or three weeks.

So, a few years ago, University of Florida scientists developed the Blueberry Advisory System, a tool to help blueberry growers fight fruit rot – through a system of alerts.

Now, researchers have proof the system works to help minimize fruit rot and improve crop yields.

When flowers and fruit

are developing, many farmers use a calendar-based method to spray their plants to protect against the rot. With the Blueberry Advisory System, they spray when the tool sends them alerts. Notifications are received via text or email.

Growers can also use the risk assessments to choose whether to use a less-expensive fungicide when they encounter moderate disease risk, or a more effective but also more expensive product during high-risk periods.

“Several Florida commercial blueberry growers have reported using the Blueberry Advisory System to help with the timing of fungicides to control anthracnose fruit rot,

either by using the web-based tool alone or in combination with farmers' own spray programs,” said Doug Phillips, UF/IFAS statewide blueberry Extension coordinator.

Clyde Fraisse, a UF/IFAS professor of agricultural and biological engineering, designed the Agroclimate system that hosts this and other disease tools. Natalia Peres, a plant pathology professor at the UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center, adapted and evaluated the disease models used in the system.

Peres outlines the success of the method in a new UF/IFAS Extension document.

“The system can be especially useful in helping newer blueberry growers identify the disease and

its dynamics,” Peres said. “It may also reduce the number of fungicide applications, especially when adopted by growers who are risk averse.”

She and her research colleagues assessed the system at nine blueberry farms spread out over Dade City (Pasco County), Fort Lonesome (Hillsborough County) and LaBelle (Hendry County).

Results were good. The system notified growers to spray fungicide when fruit rot was more likely to develop, and in most cases, they didn't need to apply the sprays as often.

Any method that helps fight disease is vital to the efforts of Florida farmers who grow blueberries.

The season (from bloom through harvest) runs



Natalia Peres, professor of plant pathology at the UF/IFAS Gulf Coast Research and Education Center. [Photo courtesy UF/IFAS Photography]

between December and May and includes about 5,500 acres, with an annual value of \$62 million.

Blueberries are most

susceptible to fruit rot in warm, wet weather, with temperatures between 59 and 81 degrees.

LAKE OKEECHOBEE

Citrus growers concerned LOSOM could threaten water supply

By **Katrina Elsen**
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

Will the operational flexibility in the Lake Okeechobee System Operating Manual (LOSOM) leave farmers without sufficient water for their crops?

At the Aug. 18 online meeting with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Kerry Kates, of the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association, spoke on behalf of citrus growers located within the Lake Okeechobee service area in portions of Glades, Hendry and Lee Counties.”

“As legally-permitted water users relying on Lake Okeechobee, our citrus growers need some certainty in this process,” Kates explained. “With this water control plan and regulation schedule, we currently do not have that. The ambiguity that is now integrated within the LOSOM schedule is detrimental to this industry, as it attempts an arduous recovery from citrus greening

disease which has unfortunately decimated groves statewide. For perspective, this year, Florida's iconic crop had the lowest box count for oranges since the 1940s. This industry is resilient and is fighting hard to build itself back and to survive. As decisions are made to replant groves, which will take years to bear fruit and provide any financial return, there are always a myriad number of inherent risks that need to be considered. Please do not make access to legally permitted water one of them.”

He said the current water control draft plan gives all power to the corps, allowing them to act unilaterally to make decisions to determine water releases from the lake.

Previous lake schedules gave the crops control when the water was high enough to cause a dam safety concern and the South Florida Water Man-

agement District control over lake releases when the lake was lower – will before the lake entered the water shortage level.

“Only when the lake stage drops and crosses a trigger line from Zone D into the water shortage management zone is deference finally afforded to the South Florida Water Management District. Clearly, this will impede the state's ability to carry out its statutory obligations regarding water allocations to legally permitted users.

“The inclusion of an intermediate area within Zone D such as the once proposed 1.5 foot zone above the water shortage management zone where the district would be the primary decision maker regarding releases should be added into the regulation schedule,” he said.

“This zone could act as a safeguard, allowing the state to take the necessary steps to mitigate the

potential of drought into the water shortage band. Deference should not be offered to the district only after that threshold has been crossed.”

Kates said the language of LOSOM is “far too ambiguous on how the corps intends to work with the district to meet the demands for water supply.”

He said notably absent from the proposed LOSOM draft is any reference to consistency with existing Florida water law.

“The model the corps selected will not restore the pre-LORS08 level for permitted water users,” said Kates.

LORS08 is the Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule, implemented in 2008, in response to concerns about the integrity of the Herbert Hoover Dike which surrounds Lake Okeechobee. Repairs to the dike are expected to be complete in October. According to USACE, LOSOM

is expected to go into effect in April 2023.

“Please do not promulgate a water control plan and regulation schedule that is incompatible with our state water law, and one which relegates the district to the role of mere bystander until we find ourselves in a water shortage crisis,” Kates added.

“Hendry County relies on Lake Okeechobee deliveries through S-77,” said Bill Baker, who represented lakeside communities on the LOSOM Project Delivery Team (PDT). S-77 is the Julian Keen Jr. Lock at Moore Haven, where Lake O water enters the Caloosahatchee River.

The LOSOM plan that was initially selected does not achieve the goal of providing a pre-LORS08 level of service, but it did include some improvement over LORS08, he explained.

That model included a conservation mode, that ensured the improvements

to water supply could be achieved.

“At the Nov. 16 PDT meeting last year, it was shown that without the conservation mode, the water supply improvements were eliminated.

“Conservation mode includes Zone D subzones and associated logic with reliable releases in each subzone, based on stage, climate and upstream conditions, with lower flows west and south as stages decline and conditions dry,” said Baker.

“There's no mention of conservation mode in the water control plan and we've been told in the last few meetings that water supply will now be a *consideration* along with other considerations used when making release decisions.”

Public comments about LOSOM may also be emailed by Monday, Sept. 12 to LakeOCComments@usace.army.mil



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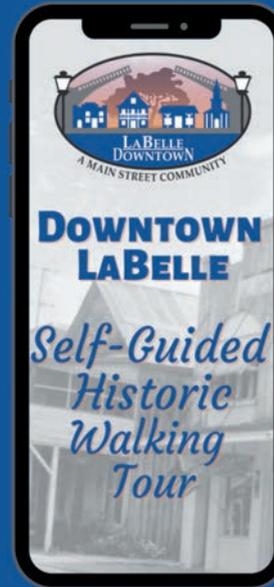
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THINGS TO DO

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to cbnews@iniusa.org

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Garden Club is back!

LaBelle Garden Club is reactivating after COVID! The meetings will be the fourth Monday of the month at 7 p.m. at the Dallas Townsend Center at 1085 Pratt Blvd - across from the Health Department. The club will meet Monday, **Sept. 26** at 7 p.m. County Extension Agent Craig Frey will be the guest speaker getting us started on planting a Florida Friendly Fall Garden. As in previous years anyone can bring any plant or garden produce to exchange or share. Bring any plants that need identifying, any questions or local features happening. The club is looking for all ages interested in flowers, growing vegetables, composting or topics to be suggested. If anyone wants to share a treat for light refreshments, it's always welcome! For more information please call or text Nikki 239-564-2005.

Come see what the front of the building is looking like thanks to Margaret England and the 4-H Club gardeners!

First responders luncheon

On Monday, **Sept. 12**, the American Legion will host a free luncheon for all first responders, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the American Legion. Wear your badge.

Dine in or take out. The meal will be served by the American Legion Auxiliary.

Kiwanis Club meets

The Kiwanis Club of LaBelle will install new 2022-2023 officers on Tuesday, **Sept. 20**, at 6 p.m. at Christ Central Church. Full dinner by Cracker Cookin' with 2+ entrees will be served. Members from the district will also be attending. Enjoy the evening and dinner for \$35 each.

Woman's Club to meet

You're Invited! The public is welcome to come to GFWC LaBelle Community Woman's Club on the second Tuesday of the month September through May. The social starts at 6 p.m. with the business meeting starting at 6:30 p.m. The GFWC is located at 382 W Hickpochee Avenue next to Ace Hardware in LaBelle.

American Legion Post #130 events

American Legion Post 130 is located at 699 S.R. 80 West, across from the Shell Station. For further information: 863-675-8300. Upcoming events include the following.

Every Thursday at "blind draw" pool tournament starts at 6:30 p.m. Entry is \$10 per person. The tournament is limited to the first 20 entrants.

Pizza and hot dogs available - all day:

- 11 a.m. till close - Sunday through Thursday;
- 11 a.m. - 1 a.m. - Friday and Saturday;
- 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. - Happy Hour - Monday - Friday.

First Friday of the month (Sept. 2) is Fish Fry from 5 - 7 p.m., followed by Karaoke in the lounge beginning at 7 p.m.

American Legion Post 130 Meetings - all members welcome:

- Sept 6 - ALR (Legion Riders) at 7p.m.
- Sept 14 - SAL at 7 p.m.
- Sept 15 - E-board meeting at 6:30, general 7 p.m.
- Sept. 15 - third Thursday - 6 p.m. - American Legion Auxiliary.
- DAV Meetings will commence in October; they usually don't have meetings June-September.

American Legion Post 130 is located at 699 SR80 West, across from the Shell Station. Call 863-675-8300 for more information.

Moose Lodge hosts events

The LaBelle Moose Lodge has Summer hours: Open Monday through Saturday 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., or later if there are customers, and CLOSED Sundays till Sept. 11.

Follow us on Facebook: Labelle Moose Lodge 2398.

Tuesdays are open pool table all day, with taco and taco salad specials!

Music at 7 p.m. on Wednesdays!

Bingo is every Thursday, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m., open to the public.

Not a member? Stop by and check us out, Guests are welcome! Located at 230 Jaycee Lions Dr. in LaBelle. 863-230-6154

VFW Post 10100 hosts events

LABELLE - The LaBelle VFW, 20 Veterans Way, plans the following events:

- Friday, Sept. 2, Meatloaf Dinner, serving will begin at 5 p.m.

- Saturday, Sept. 3, Moore 2 Music is in the House, entertainment will begin at 6 p.m.

- Saturday, Sept. 10, Wing Dinner, choice of sauce and onion rings or fries. Serving begins at 5 p.m.

- Saturday, Sept. 10, Dawn Renee' entertainment will begin at 5 p.m.

- Saturday, Sept. 17, Chicken Parm dinner, serving will begin at 5 p.m.

- Saturday, Sept. 17, Dawn Renee' is in the House for your entertainment, music will begin at 5 p.m.

- Saturday, Sept. 24, Steve White Kareoke will begin at 5 p.m.

- Every Sunday morning: Biscuits and Gravy at 9 a.m.

- Every Monday night, Left, Right, Center will begin at 5 p.m.

- Every Wednesday night, Euchre Cards at 5 p.m.

- Every Friday night there will be free jukebox from 6 to 8 p.m.

- Every Saturday, night there will be

entertainment.

This is a SMOKE FREE VFW. Smoking is permitted on the outside Patio.

The VFW is open to the public for lunch every day.

Every Monday and Thursday FREE Tia Chi Class is from 1 until 2 p.m. Friday is Red Shirt Day, all day get \$.50 off all drinks except for soda and draft.

Moon Lite Madness is Friday and Saturday from 8 to 10 p.m., \$.50 off all drink, except soda and draft.

Men's Night is every Monday night from 6 to 8 p.m.

Ladies Night is every Thursday, night from 6 to 8 p.m.

Happy Hour is Monday to Friday 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 4 to 6 p.m.

Bingo is every Sunday at 2 p.m., open to the public.

Turkey shoot is on the second and fourth Sunday of every month at 1 p.m. Open to the public.

First Thursday of every month is House Committee Meeting at 6 p.m.

First Thursday of every month is Veterans Regular monthly meeting at 7 p.m.

Second Wednesday of every month, the Auxiliary meets at 6 p.m.

Honor your Veteran on the Veterans Park Wall. Further information and applications are available at the VFW Post.

The post is located on Hwy. 29 next to the rodeo grounds. For further information call 863-675-8008.

Refuse to Sink bass tournament

The Refuse to Sink Memorial Bass Tournament will be hosted by Roland and Mary Ann Martin's Marina in Clewiston on Sept. 10. The event will include blessing of the boats, entertainment and a catfish fry from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Elks Lodge. Refuse to sink is a nonprofit organization to promote mental health education and awareness and suicide

prevention. Field is limited to 150 boats. Fishing will be from safe light to 3 p.m. Entry is \$80 per boat/team. For more information, call Carmen at 954-543-2337.

Hope Connection Senior Services

All seniors 60 and up are invited to come to Hope Connections on Cowboy Way just east of the airport for a hot free luncheon Monday through Fridays. Sign up for transportation if needed. Enjoy comradely, games, social contact, new friends and information about community and medical help. Call 863-675-1576 for more information.

Salvation Army distributes food

On Wednesdays from 9-11 a.m. (and 1-3 p.m. if food is still available) the Salvation Army gives free food to needy families. It is easy to sign-up to be eligible for once a month pickup. Anyone may make donations to the Salvation Army food pantry between 9-5 weekdays. Clubs and groups are encouraged to host food drives to help stock their food pantry. For information, call Greg at 863-517-1088.

Christ Central distributes food

Christ Central Church on East SR80 hosts a food distribution every Thursday morning. First time recipients sign up, otherwise, line up for free food.

Church offers grief support group

LABELLE — Have you experienced the loss of someone you love? Has there been a struggle to move forward since that loved one has been gone? Do you feel like no one truly understands what you are going through? Do you wonder why anger, de-

pression, loneliness, impatience, irritation and frustration seem to define your life now? Join a group of people who are on a similar journey. Find compassion, support and hope together in GriefShare. This support group meet in the Grace building of Caloosa Baptist Church, 550 W. Hickpochee Ave. in LaBelle. To register, call or text Cindy at 863-673-3855.

Chamber plans banquet

The LaBelle Chamber of Commerce will host the 2022 Business of the Year banquet on **Oct. 3**, at the LaBelle Civic Center, 481 Hickpochee Ave. Meet and greet will start at 5 p.m. Dinner will be served at 6 p.m. Rep. Lauren Melo will be the guest speaker. For tickets or more information, call 863-675-0125.

Kiwanis hosts Kids Day

Kiwanis Kids Day is scheduled for Saturday **Oct. 15**, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Barron Park. Join in the fun with games, entertainment, food, face painting, bounce houses and lots of vendors. The LaBelle High School Kiwanis Key Club and West Glades Middle School Builders Club students will be on hand to add to the excitement. Save the date - bring your friends and family. Come join in the fun, food, entertainment and many community vendors which gives everyone a chance to learn about the many services available to everyone in LaBelle. If interested in being a vendor or entertainer, please contact Nikki at 239-54-2005.

We want your news!

Have an event to add to this column? Clubs, organizations and churches are welcome to send community event items to cbnews@iniusa.org



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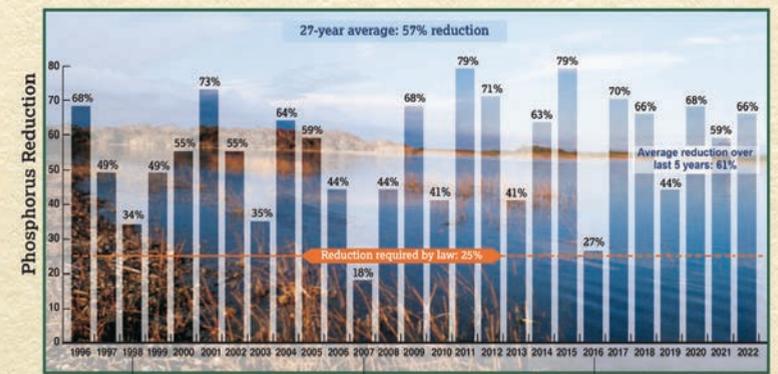
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PHOSPHORUS REDUCTION BY SUGARCANE FARMERS IN THE EVERGLADES AGRICULTURAL AREA
 (25% reduction required by 1994 Everglades Forever Act)



Data Source: South Florida Water Management District



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Apartments

» From page 1

to deny the request on grounds the height is not within the code, died for lack of a second.

“Although this goes against every grain in my body, because I really want two stories, not three,” Spratt put forth the motion with the condition of relocating the oak trees.

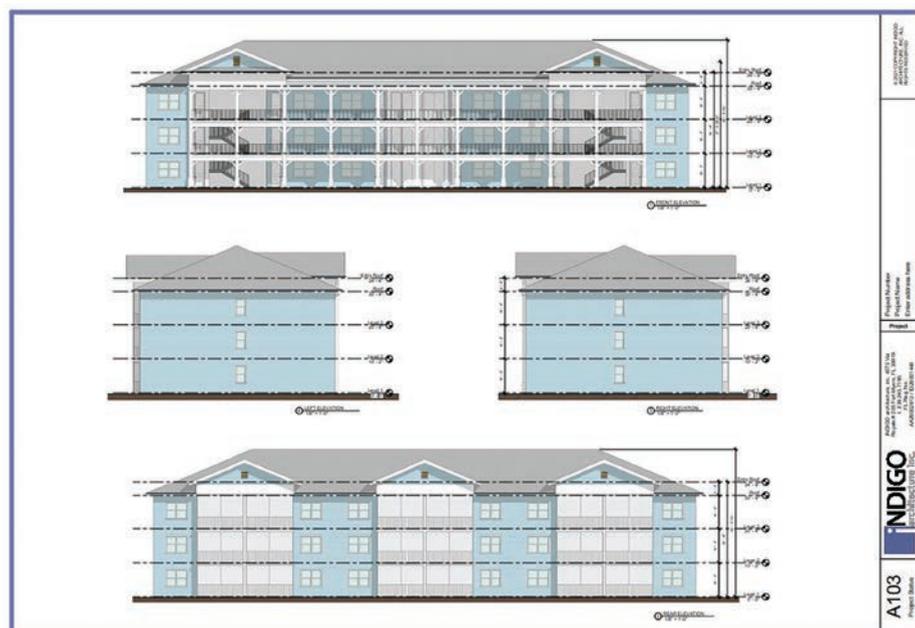
The motion was reluctantly seconded by Commissioner Daniel Akin, as he had voiced disappointment over a three-story building as well.

Vargas and Commissioner Jackie Ratica cast the descending votes.

City Fair Housing Coordinator Alexis Crespo had warned commissioners that Valentine had numerous options to build on the site, including gas stations and stores, that he could build without the variance.

“If you saw the list of things he could put on the property, you may not like it,” Crespo said.

Valentine said he wanted to enhance the downtown community with a family-friendly development and



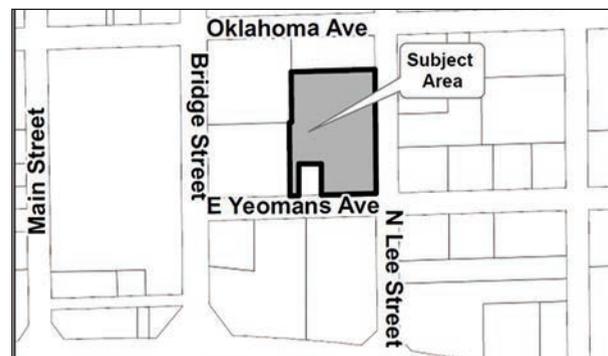
The above artist's rendition shows the proposed three story apartment complex for downtown LaBelle. [Photo courtesy Indigo Architecture, Inc.]

had agreed to exterior conditions recommended by the LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Corporation and the city's planning and utilities department.

But if push came to shove, he said he would develop within his rights.

“We will find an appropriate way to use the property one way or the other,” he said.

To ease commissioners' concerns, Mayor Julie Wilkins said plans have to be approved by



The above map shows the location for the proposed Begonia Apartments. [Photo courtesy City of LaBelle]

construction and building permits that will hold Valentine to the agreed-

upon plan. She said she trusted his promise to uphold the agreement.

Fees

» From page 1

LaBelle City Dock.

“We are one of the only docks in the country that doesn't charge” for overnight docking, City Code Enforcement Director Zane Mungillo told commissioners, adding that visitors tell him that LaBelle's dock is “one of the best kept secrets in southern Florida.”

Mungillo pointed out that 95% of the marina's overnight guests come from outside LaBelle.

Mungillo came across the opportunity unexpectedly as he was looking for ways to track boaters, which presently relies on the good faith effort of boaters who come and go into the marina. When boaters fail to sign out when they are scheduled to leave, Mungillo has to go find them, which can be a task, he said.

A simpler solution is to subscribe to a tracking system accessible by cell phones, laptops and computers through a company called Dockwa, a marina management program that streamlines operations from accounting, payments, slip inventories and more.

Mungillo said the annual cost of the platform is \$2,000, and that it requires marinas charge boaters to use the app, required also by the handful of similar apps he investigated. The upside is that the city can impose fees of their choosing to cover the cost while providing revenue for maintenance and save taxpayers money by paying for the dock's water and electricity, which users are not charged or reimbursed for.

“I think it's not a bad idea,” Commissioner Daniel Akin said. “Because it takes some of the expense off our city residents and helps

with maintenance and repairs.”

Commissioner Bobbie Spratt agreed, adding that taxpayers shouldn't be paying for utility service at the dock in the first place.

Commissioners were impressed with Mungillo's pitch for Dockwa, which would not only bring in some cash, but attract more boaters to LaBelle, translating into more shoppers in the city and more money to support its local businesses.

Dockwa promises “on average Dockwa increases a marina's net operating income by 20%.”

According to Dockwa, at least two marinas increased the number of boats by an average of 100-200% within the first year after getting the app, the main reason being that nearly 75% of boaters that have a boat between 20-60 feet already use the app when looking for a place to

stay overnight.

The app provides easy access for boaters to sign in and out of a marina, charges boaters' credit cards, processes payments, notifies marina/city officials of registrations and check-outs, allows advertising events to registered boaters and fees can be structured in a variety of ways.

Mungillo suggested the city consider a flat rate per foot while charging for electricity and water at the dock separately but left the final decision to commissioners.

“I think you're going to start seeing more boats in, even though we're charging a fee,” he said.

The commission voted 5-0 for Mungillo to return in September with suggested fees and accurate costs of water and electrical usage at the dock for further discussion.



Gene McAvoy is only one of three Florida county agents ever to receive the NACAA Hall of Fame Award. [Courtesy photo]

McAvoy

» From page 1

and implementing the Environmental Horticulture Program in Hendry County where he delivered Extension programming to area homeowners, civic groups, and 4-H youth.

McAvoy became the County Extension Director for Hendry County in 2005 and continued to serve in that role and as well as Regional Specialized Vegetable/Horticulture Extension Agent IV until he retired in 2019. On his retirement, he was granted the title Extension Agent Emeritus by the University of Florida.

McAvoy did not stay retired long and after 19 days he was invited back to join UF IFAS as the Associate Director for Stakeholder Relations at the UF IFAS Southwest Florida Research and Education Center, a position in which he continued to serve the agricultural community of Southwest Florida and beyond from 2019 - 2022.

McAvoy retired from UF IFAS again in July 2022 and is now president of Have Gun Will Travel Agricultural Consulting.

During his Extension career, McAvoy served as president of Florida Association of County Agricultural Agents and was president when Florida hosted the NACAA annual meeting in 2004. His dedication to agriculture and penchant for professionalism and service did not stop there.

He went on to become president of NACAA in 2019 and was influential in helping steer the association through the COVID-19 pandemic,

helping transition the 2020 Annual Meeting and Professional Improvement Conference to the first ever virtual AMPIC attended by over 1,400 county agents from across the country. AS NACAA President, McAvoy welcomed Guam into the association.

After his term as NACAA President, McAvoy went on to serve as the president of the Joint Council of Extension Professionals in 2021-22.

McAvoy was a late comer to Extension and in some ways an unlikely candidate to achieve all that he has during his career. Born in Orange, New Jersey, McAvoy spent his formative years in East Orange, New Jersey, just a few blocks from Newark, NJ. From his first part-time summer high school job on a farm, where he picked strawberries, peppers and tomatoes, McAvoy developed a love for his lifelong passion - agriculture.

McAvoy received his Bachelor of Science (Plant Science) and Master of Science (Horticulture) degrees from Rutgers University.

After graduating from Rutgers, McAvoy joined the Peace Corps, serving in Niger. This led to 12 years with the US Agency for International Development, working with vegetable growers in Niger, South Africa, and Jamaica before moving his family north to Florida to join UF.

McAvoy has received multiple awards during his years of service and has spent over 50 years supporting and advocating for the agriculture industry in Florida and beyond.

McAvoy and his wife Donna live on their ranch outside LaBelle.



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Should you own bonds when interest rates rise?

It's no secret that this has been a tough year for the stock market. But if you own bonds, you may also have some concerns.

What's happened is that the Federal Reserve has been raising interest rates to fight inflation. This can cause the value of your existing bonds to drop, because investors will want to buy the newly issued bonds that pay the higher rates.

Still, bonds continue to offer you some key benefits. For one thing, as long as you hold your bonds until maturity, you'll continue to receive the same interest payments. Also, bonds can help reduce the effects of market volatility on a stock-heavy portfolio.

And if you own a mix of short-, intermediate- and long-term bonds, you'll likely always have some bonds maturing. When they do, you can reinvest the proceeds into the new, higher-paying bonds.

It might not feel pleasant to see the current value of your bonds drop. But if you're not selling them before they mature, and you can take advantage of the opportunities afforded by higher interest rates, you'll find that owning bonds can still be a valuable part of your investment strategy.

Before investing in bonds, you should understand the risks involved, including credit risk and market risk. Bond investments are also subject to interest rate risk such that when interest rates rise, the prices of bonds can decrease, and the investor can lose principal value if the investment is sold prior to maturity.

This article was written by Edward Jones for use by your local Edward Jones Financial Advisor, Edward Jones, Member SIPC

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Hendry County BOCC is seeking applications for a full-time **Water Plant Operator at Port Labelle Utilities**. This is a FT position with benefits. Pay dependent upon experience. Applications must be received at the Human Resources Department, 640 South Main Street, LaBelle, FL 33935. A complete job posting and application forms are available on the Hendry County website at www.hendryfla.net.

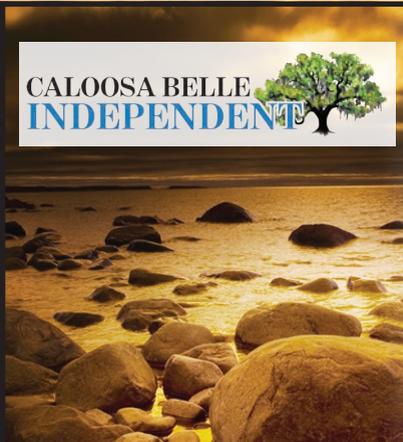
Hendry County is a VP, EEO/AA, DFWP employer and participates in E-Verify. Individuals needing assistance in the application process should contact the County Human Resources department at 863-675-5352

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Highlands Hammock State Park offers many natural wonders

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Highlands Hammock, with more rare and endemic species history are preserved. Visitors can walk the trails where the towering oaks of a magnificent hydric hammock. Deer, alligators and a variety of birds frequent the park.

With its beautiful old-growth hammock and variety of habitats and wildlife species, this is ... the Real Florida at its best.

To see these natural wonders, hike any of nine trails, including an elevated boardwalk through a cypress swamp. Make sure to travel the 3-mile bike loop, or take the tram for those who prefer to sit back and leisurely take it all in.

Highlands Hammock State Park is home to the state of Florida's Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Museum. The park is one of eight original parks built by the CCC in Florida and one of several hundred nationwide that were constructed or improved upon by the CCC.

Launched in 1933 as part of President Roosevelt's "New Deal" building programs during the Great Depression, the CCC employed hundreds of thousands of men to shape the landscape. The program provided the opportunity for work during a time when there was none. The workers built parks, planted trees, and restored forests. Museum, which was established in 1994, is housed in a building constructed by the CCC.

Museum docents conduct tours where visitors can learn about the CCC and the history of the park through interactive exhibits. Documentary films featuring the oral histories of former CCC boys may be viewed on the museum stage. Children may learn about the CCC and the Great Depression through a 'CCC History Detective' Scavenger Hunt. Museum volunteers literally bring the Great Depression and the CCC to life by connecting visitors to those 'another day, another dollar' times and showing how much the CCC has impacted the development of Florida's parks.

The museum is usually open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Hours may vary during the summer and on holidays.

The park, 5931 Hammock Road, Sebring, 33872, is open 8 a.m. until sunset, 365 days a year. Entry fee is \$6 per vehicle. For more information, call 863-386-6094.

This tourism feature was brought to you by Handy Food Stores, who encourages you to get out and explore your own backyard and all the things our region has to offer!



Highlands Hammock State Park's elevated boardwalks take visitors through a cypress swamp. [Photo courtesy Highlands Hammock State Park]



Alligators are among the wildlife often seen in the park. The park even offers alligator tours. [Photo by Dorothy Harris/Highlands Hammock State Park]



Hickory Trail is one of nine hiking trails in the park. [Photo courtesy Highlands Hammock State Park]



Highlands Hammock is rich in natural beauty. [Photo courtesy Highlands Hammock State Park]

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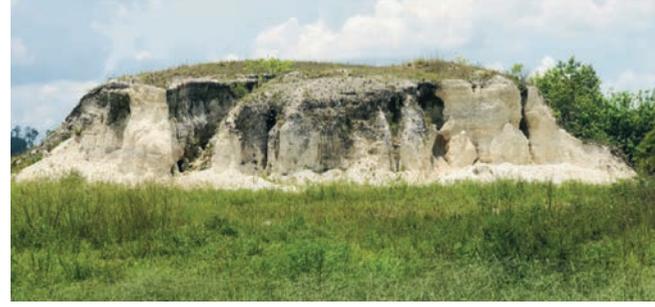


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ALVA 30 ACRES RIVER FRONT HOME.....	\$6,500,000	FORT MYERS 2.5 ACRES I-75 AT BAYSHORE RD (78).....	\$890,000
FORT MYERS 12 ACRES S-41	PENDING \$5,900,000	FORT MYERS 4+ ACRES 9481 BAYSHORE	SOLD \$890,000
PUNTA GORDA 220+ ACRES SR 31.....	PENDING \$3,500,000	ALVA 34 ACRES BEDMAN CREEK.....	SOLD \$845,000
PUNTA GORDA 30 ACRES AT I-75 & HWY 17.....	\$3,500,000	FORT MYERS 2.3 ACRES METRO PARKWAY.....	SOLD \$800,000
FORT MYERS 7.5 ACRES RV-BOAT SALES-STORAGE SITE..	\$3,200,000	FORT MYERS 2 INDUSTRIAL LOTS COTTON LN..	D.O. READY TO BUILD \$790,000
FORT MYERS 4 ACRES AT COLONIAL BLVD	SOLD \$2,900,000	FORT MYERS 1.3 ACRES CPD I-75 AT BAYSHORE RD.....	\$595,000
FORT MYERS 11 ACRES AT I-75 AT BAYSHORE RD.....	\$1,950,000	FORT MYERS 1.25 ACRES C1-A I-75 AT BAYSHORE RD.....	\$495,000
FORT LAUDERDALE 4 ACRES AT HWY 7(441)...	SOLD \$1,900,000	ALVA RIVER FRONT HOME SITE-LARGE DOCK, BOAT SLIP.....	\$489,000
FORT MYERS 2.5 ACRES AT N. 41 AT SUPER WALMART.....	\$1,750,000	ALVA RIVER FRONT HOME SITE.....	\$395,000
FORT MYERS 5 ACRES AT N. 41 BY SUPER WALMART...	\$1,750,000	PUNTA GORDA 23 ACRES 15810 HUGHS BLACK RD OFF BABCOCK RANCH RD....	SOLD \$300,000
ALVA RIVERFRONT 10 ACRES.....	\$1,700,000	ALVA 10 ACRES 20301 LANGFORD RD	SOLD \$269,000
BUCKINGHAM 40 ACRES, PEACE RD.....	PENDING \$1,200,000	ALVA LUXURY HOME SITE 18511 TELEGRAPH CREEK LANE....	SOLD \$189,000
BUCKINGHAM 47 ACRES AG-2 BUCKINGHAM RD....	SOLD \$990,000		

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