

**COMMUNITY:****911**

Remembrance, 6

**ADOPT A PET:****Dogs and cats**

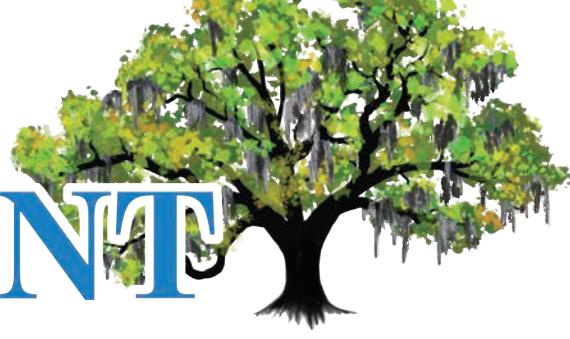
Need homes, 8 & 9

EDUCATION:**LSH to add more**

Student parking, 10

**HEALTH:**
A time like
No other 4**AGRICULTURE:**
Farmworkers
Need housing, 20**THINGS TO DO:**
October
Events planned, 14

CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

Delivering Western Hendry County's News since 1922 ◆ SouthCentralFloridaLife.com**CELEBRATION**

Howl-O-Ween and Doxie Dash return Oct. 22



By C. M. Schmidlkofe^r
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — Mark your calendars for some howling good Halloween fun Saturday, Oct. 22, the date for the Third Annual Howl-O-Ween event and Lenny's Downtown Doxie Dash in LaBelle.

The LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Corporation (LDRC) website states this fundraising event was created to bring a fun way for folks to enjoy fall festivities

with their pets. Proceeds go towards current and future projects to increase the value of the downtown district as it continues to revitalize and beautify.

Howl-O-Ween starts at 9:30 a.m. and ends at 4 p.m. at Barron Park, and the Downtown Doxie Dash race begins at 10:15 a.m., hosted by the LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Corporation (LDRC).

In addition to the Downtown Doxie Dash event,

there will be a pet costume contest, a HCSO K-9 demonstration, vendors, a wheelchair derby, food trucks, cold beer and games with music provided by DJ Drea Baron aka The Urbin Legend.

LDRC Executive Director Kelly Boone said event participation has increased since the first event in 2020, from eight racers in the Downtown Doxie Dash that year to 35 in 2021 and

» See Howl-O-Ween on Page 18

COMMUNITY THEATRE

Theatre presents 'A Murder Has Been Renounced'



The cast of "A Murder Has been Renounced," includes (front row, left to right) Michael Stanforth and Rainia Ward, (back row) Deanne Sawyer, Barbara McDowell, Aida DeVale, Conner Harper and Ashley Corbitt. [Photo courtesy Firehouse Community Theatre, Inc.]

SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

A dark and stormy night with impassable roads and impossible phones. There is thunder and lightning, gun shots and kidnapping, thievery and murder all rolled into one unbelievable

» See Theatre on Page 18

AWARD

On Wednesday, Aug. 24, Hendry County Sheriff Steve Whidden presented Corporal Veronica Lopez the Life Saving Award for Outstanding Law Enforcement Performance. See the full story on Page 18 [Photo courtesy HCSO]

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BENEFIT

Fallen Heroes Benefit planned for Oct. 8

By Cindy Pearce

LABELLE — The 14th Annual Fallen Heroes Benefit will be held on Saturday, Oct. 8, in LaBelle. This event benefits the Veterans Memorial Park at the intersection of State Road 80 and State Road 29 in the heart of LaBelle and is a valued asset to the community.

Prior to the benefit there will be a program at the Veterans Park at 9:30 a.m., with local Honor Guard and dignitaries. Then on to the LaBelle American Legion, located at 699 S.R. 80, for the benefit festivities. Dinners will be available for a donation of \$10 starting at 11 a.m. and will continue until 3 p.m. or until sold out. Meals will include a pork steak with cheesy potatoes, baked beans and a brownie. There will be music, a 50/50 drawing, cake auction, silent auctions and more throughout the event.

Each year this benefit has been a joint commun-

ty project co-sponsored by the members of the American Legion Post 130, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 10100, Disabled American Veterans Chapter 144 and many other loyal volunteers.

At this time, donations are sought to help offset the cost of the annual event. A community project such as this is a proud moment when we can give 100% of our proceeds to the benefit. If you have something you would like to donate please call the American Legion at 864-675-8300 or the LaBelle VFW at 863-675-8008. Your help will be greatly appreciated and supported by the members of these local civic groups.

Please plan on attending and helping us remember the reason the benefit was started and continues to honor all veterans.

The LaBelle Veterans Memorial Park Benefit is a non-profit 501c that gathers once a year to raise funds

to honor our hometown heroes. This is not a memorial site to remember the fallen, but a place in the center of our town to celebrate and honor the men and women living and passed, who have sacrificed and served our country.

It was originally started in honor of Marine Staff Sgt. Christopher D. Strickland and Chief Warrant Officer Robert Hammett Jr., two local men killed in action in 2008.

The committee would like to thank the many businesses and individuals who have donated their time and monies to help improve the LaBelle Veterans Memorial Park, year after year.

Also, to thank each individual for their donation. Thank you, for always remembering and honoring those who have sacrificed so much, and continued to do so for our freedom.

DECORATIONS

Scarecrows on the Wharf to feature couples

SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — The 2022 Scarecrows on the Wharf event will feature scarecrow couples.

The annual contest includes entries from families, associations, clubs, businesses, community groups, youth groups and individuals.

Event dates are Oct. 3-21. Scarecrows will be in place by dusk on Oct. 2. Scarecrows must be removed by sunset on Oct. 30.

Scarecrows on the Wharf is sponsored by



The 2021 Scarecrows on the Wharf contest featured the Sanderson Sisters from the movie "Hocus Pocus." [Courtesy photo]

MOPs of LaBelle and LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Corporation.

For more info, contact Megan Narehood at 863-843-0624 or MOPSOFLABELLE@gmail.com.

MOPs stands for Mothers of Preschoolers. The organization helps mothers of young children to foster relationships with other moms.

AWARDS



Rotary awards Four Way Test Award

LABELLE — The Rotary Club recently awarded the Four Way Test Award. Domingo Marin and Ramiro Rodriguez accepted the Four Way Test Award for three 2021-2022 recipients. Mario Acevedo, Glenn Holt and Craig Hampton were nominated by Rotarian Rock Aboujaoude for the incredible amount of cost, manpower, equipment and materials they donated to the construction of the new Hendry County Sports Complex on Forrey Drive. Their generous actions saved Hendry County hundreds of thousands of dollars! Domingo Marin was one of the foreman on-site that worked tirelessly to get this project moving forward. Rotary recognizes their Service Above Self actions as applied to the Four Way Test. Pictured from left to right are Rock Aboujaoude, Domingo Marin and Ramiro Rodriguez. [Courtesy photo]

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

Pumpkin cream cheese swirl muffins

Ingredients

Muffin:

- 1 3/4 cups all purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon pumpkin spice
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 (15 oz) can pumpkin (pure pumpkin puree)
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup packed brown sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract

Cream Cheese Swirl:

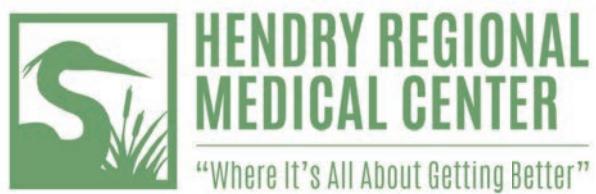
- 8 oz cream cheese
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1 large egg yolk
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Place paper baking cups into muffin pan. Set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk flour, pumpkin spice, baking soda and salt until well combined. Set aside.
3. In large bowl, whisk together pumpkin, sugar and brown sugar.
4. Beat in eggs, vegetable oil and vanilla extract. Slowly whisk in the flour mixture, until there are no lumps. Fill muffin tins 3/4 full.
5. In a medium bowl, beat cream cheese until smooth. Add in sugar, egg yolk and vanilla extract and beat until well combined.
6. Top each muffin with about 1 tablespoon of cream cheese mixture and use a toothpick to swirl it into the batter. This will not look smooth, but it will bake up much prettier.
7. Bake muffins for 18-20 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.
8. These are best at room temperature or even slightly chilled! Store in an airtight container in the fridge.



This week's recipe provided by Southern Heritage Real Estate.



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GUEST COMMENTARY

Pandemic was a time like no other

By Dakota Redd, RN
CHIEF NURSING OFFICER, HENDRY
REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

The temptation looking back on the summer of 2021 - at a time that was like no other in our hospital's history when the full force of the COVID-19 Delta variant was unleashed on our community and hospital - is to try to forget. It would be easy here to discuss all the difficulty, the fear, anger, exhaustion, and tragedy we faced. We could even debate (argue) the confusing science-but that is not the intent. No, what I would like to share about that historic and unprecedented attack on our community's health, and hospital by this virus, are the heroes, the selfless heroic moments, and the times that we as an organization met the full intent of our Mission Statement and the community rallied with full support - in our efforts.

I want to speak to the courage, of the nonclinical staff, nurses, therapist, physicians who despite fear, exhaustion, and worry, agreed that it was important to not allow these feelings to influence what they were attempting to do. To remain in the moment, to be compassionate and caring even in the face

of sorrow, tragedy and, yes, death. A true hero defined faces their fear head on but continues into the darkness regardless the outcome. Dr. Martin Luther King once said, Darkness can't be replaced by darkness, only light replaces darkness-and hate can't replace hate only love can." I witnessed many rays of light - illuminating and replacing the darkness - and several expressions of caring love!

I became aware of extraordinary commitments from staff throughout the hospital working long hours to keep our facility clean, our equipment supplied and maintained-no matter the time. I witnessed physicians who could have stayed safe at home but understood the challenge and without regard to self, status, or specialty training said, "I can help!" Surgeons and doctors of anesthesia responding to the crisis in the emergency department, which was by now full beyond capacity, and two-thirds of that capacity full of critically ill patients being sustained on breathing machines. Our inpatient unit full of levels of patient illness that required intense focused care. Our staff rose to meet that

need!

I learned of stories of staff - who despite the risk - ensured that no patient was left alone as they relinquished their fight and gave way to God; of a spouse being allowed to hold the hand of their true love as they could no longer hold onto life; of a patient who, fearing for her life infected by the virus, had been reassured, and comforted by a nurse who - unknowingly was singing an old spiritual song that the patient recognized immediately and understood to be a "sign" that God was still in control! The patient once fully recovered would later return to the hospital with a bouquet of flowers for that nurse - "her angel!"

I felt the support of leaders who led by example - not from their office or home - but here on the front lines - days, nights, and weekends supporting the efforts of the clinicians and healthcare providers trying to do battle against the virus. I sat in on the calls with local authorities, our prehospital partners, and county emergency management teams all with one common mission - beating back the surge with a common voice to protect our community!



A COVID-19 memorial statue is located outside the entrance of Hendry Regional Medical Center. [Photo courtesy Hendry Regional Medical Center]

I recall the random acts of support from our community business partners of lunches donated and offers of "how can we help, how can we express our gratitude?"

Yes, it was a "Time like no other." While difficult and tragic, it was also a time of compassion, light, and love!

All heroes, acting selflessly and heroically fulfilling the mission - our Mission!

TREATMENT

Congestive heart failure is serious

By Doctor Leland Heller,
M.D.
OKEECHOBEE FAMILY PRACTICE

Untreated, congestive heart failure has the same 5 year survival as pancreas cancer. Not good. There are two different types of heart failure. Systolic heart failure means the heart muscle is weak. Diastolic heart failure means the heart is stiff and slow to fill kind of like a stiff balloon. You can have both types.

The good news is that it's usually treatable and often reversible. In systolic heart failure, it's not the weak heart that kills you - it's the chemicals your body produces in response to the weak heart.

There are three classes of medications that have been shown to double expected life span for systolic heart failure and cut hospitalizations in half. Beta blockers such as Toprol (long acting metoprolol succinate) and carvedilol. The aldosterone inhibitor spironolactone is used as well. ACE inhibitors or ARBs are another medication that can turn around heart failure. Entresto is a new medication that takes the place of an ACE inhibitor or ARB. Some diabetic medication like Farxiga has

been shown to improved heart failure as well. Maximum doses give the maximum benefit - if tolerated.

Diastolic heart failure often responds to beta blockers. By slowing the heart rate the heart has more time to fill the stiff heart. Entresto has been shown to help with diastolic heart failure as well.

The major symptoms of heart failure are fatigue, swelling, shortness of breath, inability to lay flat, rapid heart beat or cough. Sometimes the abdomen can swell also.

Heart failure is caused by undertreated high blood pressure, viral infections, coronary artery disease, heart valve disease and sometimes genetics.

A healthy heart pumps out 55-75% of the blood with each heartbeat. Fifty percent is normal in the older population. If its 35% or lower the patient is at risk of sudden death from a rhythm disturbance. These individuals need an implantable defibrillator.

The medications require regular lab work, usually every 3 months. An echocardiogram (sound waves of the heart) is often done annually to follow the progression of the disease.

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OPINIONS

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

What a veteran with a service dog wants you to know

Thousands of Americans, especially veterans, suffer from serious conditions such as Post-Traumatic Stress and Traumatic Brain Injury. For many of these people, a trained service dog is a lifesaving means of recovery and their best hope to continue a normal life. September is National Service Dog Month, a time dedicated to raising awareness and

showing appreciation for the extraordinary work service dogs do every day for the people in their care. However, it's also an opportunity to familiarize yourself with service dog etiquette.

Unfortunately, many people don't know how to appropriately interact with service dog teams. Service dogs are not pets – they have been specially trained to perform specific tasks for people with disabilities and when they are in public, they are working. Many times, the handler's physical and emotional

safety depends on the service dog's behavior.

American Humane is committed to harnessing the healing powers of the human-animal bond to assist veterans through its Pups4Patriots™ program, and our trainers have paired dozens of veterans with lifesaving service dogs. As such, here are some service dog etiquette tips that a veteran with a service dog wants you to know:

- Talk to the handler, not the dog
- Do not ask what the service dog is for or why

they need a service dog

- Do not pet or ask to pet a service dog – s/he is working
- Do not try to distract a service dog

- Do not offer food or treats to a service dog
- Do not let your dog get close to a service dog

We hope the public will follow these tips to help ensure a safe, positive environment for all service dogs and their handlers.

Dr. Robin Ganzert
*American Humane CEO
and president*

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

You were born a chooser

By Rev. Elizabeth L. Nelson

GOOD SHEPHERD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Choices. Life is filled with them. And truth be told, being able to choose is one of God's greatest gifts to us. Choosing helps us grow; it can also lead us down the wrong path. And choices always have consequences. Even Jesus made choic-

es. I often wonder, when He was growing up...did He think about the choices He would have to make when He became an adult? Did He hope He would be able to make the right choices when the time came? Those might have been his human thoughts, but we know God doesn't make mistakes, so His choices were always correct.

The apostles chose to follow Jesus, and all but John were martyred for that

choice. So many people in Jesus' day chose to follow Jesus. Then there was the rich young man, when told that leaving his wealth behind was the choice he had to make to follow Jesus, chose to walk away. That was his choice.

Choices have consequences. But know this: We each have a small piece of God's creation where we live, work, and worship. And within that small portion of God's creation,

we have choices to make. Choose to be like Jesus in all that you do. And someday, when you stand before Jesus, he will say: "Well done! The consequence for your good works is entering the kingdom that was chosen especially for you!"

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.

REMEMBERANCE



LaBelle remembers 911

LABELLE — Hendry County Sheriff's Office Color Guard was proud and humbled to participate in the 911 Remembrance Ceremony at LaBelle's Veterans Park on Sept. 11. Also in attendance were Hendry County Sheriff's Office Explorer Post 642. [Photos courtesy HCSO]

CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

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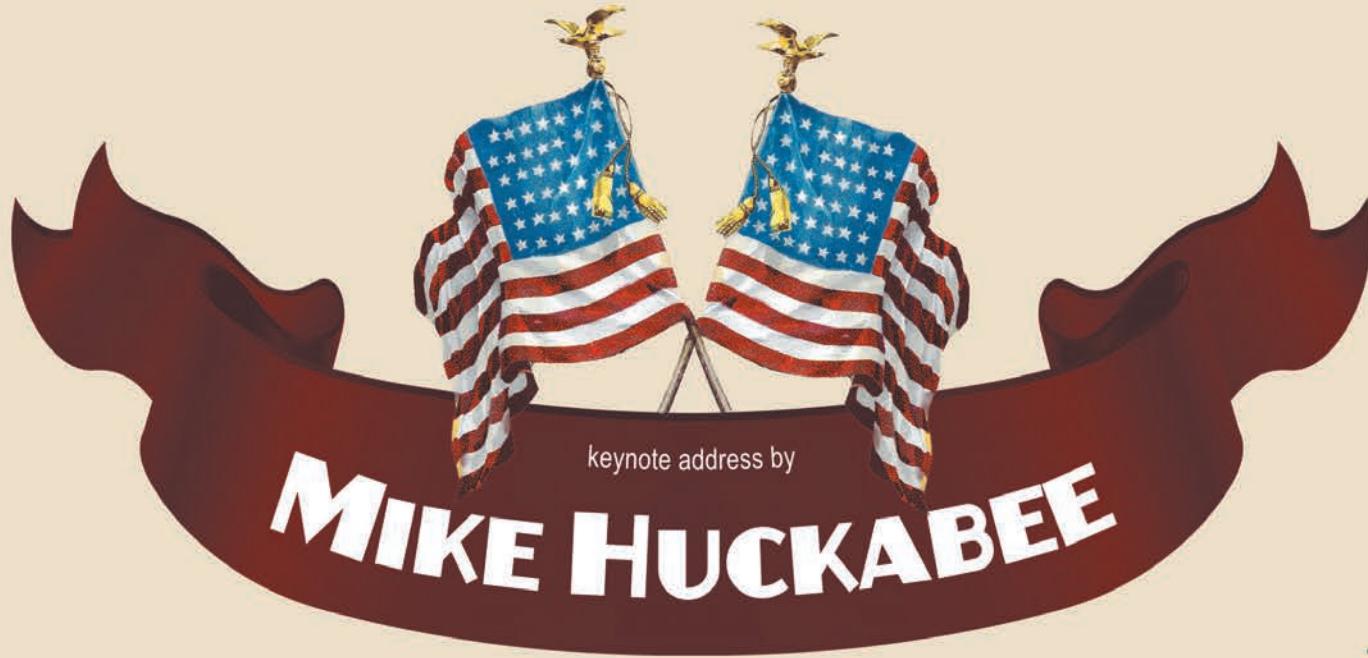
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Caloosa Humane Society seeks forever homes for pets

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]



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EDUCATION

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HCSd considers lawsuit against vape maker

By C. M. Schmidkofer
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — The Hendry County School District is considering joining 1,400 other school districts nation-wide in various class-action lawsuits against Juul Labs, Inc., maker of the popular nicotine vape pens, or e-cigarettes, that attorneys say are targeted to children.

Kirton McConkie Attorney Joel Write promised the school board it would cost the district nothing to join the other districts the Utah-based law firm is representing and that they might win a substantial cash settlement if they win in court.

Write spoke via Zoom to the school board during a brief public workshop before the regular board meeting Sept. 6, saying the school district does not even have to prove vaping is a problem to participate in the lawsuit Kirton McConkie is pursuing on be-

half of several other school districts.

"We're asking for many millions of dollars to abate the public nuisance of vaping," Write said.

For school districts to win the battle against underage vaping on school property requires money — money a potential legal settlement from Juul, its owner, Altria Group and its Phillip Morris subsidiary, he said. Write highlighted three main components of fighting underage vaping in schools: education, prevention and treatment for those who have succumbed to the practice.

He suggested in addition to typical disciplinary actions such as student suspension, student peers be on the forefront of each category, either by discouraging fellow students from starting vaping with warnings of addiction and health risks to helping them overcome the practice through peer-to-peer counseling.

"Some districts have hired kids who beat vaping to be mentors to kids who are struggling with vaping, that can be very effective too," he said. "Some kids will even do it for free or a very low cost."

Vaping protections on campus and added staff costs money and resources, he said. If the lawsuit is won, the school district forfeits 25% of the award to attorney fees and can spend the money any way they want in the fight against underage vaping use.

Write is confident his law firm will be successful in winning its lawsuit, pointing to a September 6 ruling in Connecticut for Juul Labs to pay almost \$440 million settlement to 33 states. It's one of the largest lawsuits against the e-cigarette company, which is also facing hundreds of personal suits by individuals and teens who claim they became addicted to Juul's vaping products.

LABELLE HIGH SCHOOL

LHS to add more student parking

By Katrina Elskens
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — The Hendry County School District approved an interlocal agreement to use county right-of-way on a portion of Cowboy Way for student parking at LaBelle High School during their Sept. 20 meeting.

"When you build a school for 900 students and you put 1,480 students in it, a lot of things happen," said Superintendent of Schools Michael Swindle. He said

it means there isn't enough room in the cafeteria and the gym is not large enough for the whole school to attend assemblies. It also means there is not enough room for parking for the students who want to drive.

He said everything from the chain link fence to Cowboy Lane is county property. The county will grant the school district the use of the property for student parking. The agreement includes putting in a culvert.

Board Member Paul Samerdyke said there is also a logjam of traffic at the school due to the traffic pattern used by students dropping off and picking up students as well as the school buses. He said when drivers leaving the school try to turn left, it backs up the school buses and cars behind them.

Swindle said school district staff is working on a traffic survey to alleviate this problem at several schools.

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SAFETY PATROL



LES announces Safety Patrol team

LABELLE — LaBelle Elementary School announces the fifth grade Safety Patrol for the 2022/2023 school year: Front row: Lauren Perez, Forrest Poudrier, Abdallah Lopez, Fabian Arrieta, Litzy Dominguez-Garcia, Betsy Diaz-Calderon, Marcos Esquivel, Angelie Villegas, Camila Soto, Yaritzel Piedra and Alexander Mejia-Santizo. Middle row: Raegann French, Franki Floyd, Magaby Alonso, Brittany Salas-Velasquez, Adanely Enriquez, Salvador Delgado, Zahira Herrera, Caleb Rodriguez, Bentley Moreno, Angel Rebollo, Axel Moreno and Deputy Bozzi. Back row: Benjamin Gonzalez, Lesly Villa-Hernandez, Cristalady Castro-Rodriguez, Selena Moreno, Mylie Poblan, Angel Gomez and Mr. Haskell. Not pictured: Dylan Velasquez-Garcia and Amalie Santiago. [Photo courtesy LaBelle Elementary School]

HONORS



LES recognizes August Students of the Month

LABELLE — LaBelle Elementary School congratulates their August Students of the Month. Pre-kindergarten through first grade students are: Xavier Russell, Mia Marroquin, Alexa Moreno, Mia McCormick, Daniel Alvarez, Anna Gonzalez Aparicio, Aylin Hernandez, Olvin Miguel and Aubrie Gulliford-Green. (Photo courtesy LaBelle Elementary School)



Second through fifth grade Students of the Month are: Front row: Fabian Arrieta, Janely Hernandez, Abigail Villeda, Madison Sexton, Madison Banks and Jania Guido. Back Row: Axel Moreno, Litzy Dominguez, Aliyah Gonzalez, Jennifer Hernandez, Derek Hernandez, Patrick Pierson and Evelyn Garcia. (Photo courtesy LaBelle Elementary School)

FARM BUREAU



LaBelle student wins speech contest

CLEWISTON — Addyson Shivelor, 10th grade student of LaBelle High School, competed in the Florida Farm Bureau District Speech Contest held at the old Dunwody Lodge, in Clewiston, on Aug. 27 and won first place. She competed against students from Broward and Collier Counties. She moved on to the state competition. Addyson (middle) is pictured with students she competed against. (Courtesy photo)

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100 YEARS

First Bank celebrates their centennial with Customer Appreciation Days

SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

CLEWISTON — First Bank is celebrating their 100th anniversary in business this year.

Community members are invited to Customer Appreciation Days, featuring free food and giveaways at the LaBelle branch on Oct. 19, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

On Nov. 16, the First Bank Centennial Celebration will be held at the Moore Haven Rodeo Grounds from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. The celebration will have food trucks, First Bank merchandise and special guest speaker, former Arkansas Governor, Mike Huckabee. This will be a free event open to the public.

"We are happy this year to celebrate our 100th anniversary, our centennial anniversary," First Bank President Carey Soud explained in a radio interview on Big Lake Now earlier this year.

"We are one of the oldest community banks in the State of Florida. To our knowledge there's three or four banks that have had the privilege in Florida to celebrate 100 years. We have a rich history. We started in Clewiston in 1922.

"The City of Clewiston was named after A.C. Clewes who was also a banker," he said.

"He had enough wisdom and foresight to know if you are going to start a new town, the best thing you can do is to start a bank there, to fund commerce and industry and real estate development.

"First Bank has been here since 1922, helping the local economy to grow and to thrive. Obviously, it has worked. We've both been very successful through the years," he continued.

A.C. Clewes's grandson became the chairman of Florida Banker's Association. Our current chair, Miller Couse, was chair of the Florida Banker's Association in 2008. So this small town has had two Florida bankers' association chairmen over its 100-year history.

"We've always had the idea that if you want to borrow money in Hendry County, then we want to be involved in it," he said.

"We've been involved in making people's dreams come true. Whether it's financing a car, a home or a business or an education, we want to be part of that legacy."

"It's humbling to know

the work we do today has a legacy back for 100 years," said Executive Vice President Andrew Couse. We always joke that both Hendry County and the City were formed in 1923, so we're older than the city or the county. We've been a part of everything that has happened in our communities for those 100 years.

Community banking is important. "We know the people. We know the businesses. We know the industry. A large bank outside the area doesn't necessarily understand sugar cane farming or vegetable growing, doesn't understand the machine shop that builds specialty products that service those types of industries.

"We understand them because we are part of the community. We don't just know the business. We know the people. At the end of the day, you're not just doing business with a company. There's a person. It's a business about relationships," said Couse.

"Our hearts are here," said Soud. "While we have a rich legacy of 100 years, our focus is on the next 100 years."

The bank started with a single location in Clewiston in 1922 with about \$250,000



In front of the Watanabe Hotel (left to right) are Mr. Thomas, A. C. Clewes - Founder of Clewiston, E. L. Stewart - director/cashier, J. A. Griffin, C. C. Whitaker - Early Stockholder, C. V. Parkinson - director/president, Bill Lee, John Sam Cottrell - director/vice president, E. C. Cole - Clewiston Company (owned real estate of Clewiston), Dick Griffin - Exchange Bank of Tampa, Ike Kraft - brother-in-law of A. C. Clewes, Peter O. Knight - early stockholder Chief Woodward - Tampa law enforcement officer. [Photo courtesy First Bank]

in assets. Today the bank has \$650 million in assets and seven full service branches, employing more than 100 people.

- The main bank is at 300 E. Sugarland Highway, Clewiston. The bank was originally at Watanabe Hotel. In 1928, it moved to where Brenda's Place is now located. The bank moved to the current location in 1956. The building renovated in 1976 and again in 2006.

- The 101 S. Berner Road, Clewiston, branch opened in 1996.

- The LaBelle branch,

301 State Road 80, LaBelle, opened in 1981.

- The Fort Myers branch, 11741 Palm Beach Boulevard, Suite 100, Fort Myers, opened in 2007.

- The Glades County branch, 24704 U.S. Hwy. 27, Moore Haven, opened in 2008.

- The Belle Glade branch, 325 S Main Street, Belle Glade, opened in 2016.

- The Immokalee branch, 316 N 15th St., Immokalee, opened in 2018.

Over the years, the bank has been constantly moving forward with new technology. The bank's first

ATM was installed in 1978. They added mobile banking and online banking in the late 2000s. During covid, First Bank implemented fully digital document submission and signing abilities to get loans to customers without them having to come in.

In September, First Bank added social media pages this month. Future plans call for implementing ATMs, which are like ATMs, but customers can call a teller and speak with them while using it for help or for bank transactions they need a teller to do.



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THINGS TO DO

Join the fun at a Block Party

LABELLE — Two Peas Cafe, 870 W Hickpochee Ave. #500, will host a Block Party for the third annual fundraiser for the SW. Florida Heroes Foundation, Inc. in memory of Julian Keen on Saturday, Oct.

1 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. All food served will be for a donation only. Menu includes swamp cabbage, pulled pork, Boar's Head hot dogs and "The Julian" Dill Pickle Club. Festivities includes music by Sheriff Whidden & The Posse, bounce house, Felda & LaBelle Fire Departments along with FWC and EMS, children's activities, live auctions, 50/50, and a basket will be raffled. Scholarships will be awarded at this event.

Visit the DAV Flea Market

LABELLE — Disabled American Veterans Saturday Flea Market will be held at 228 Miller Avenue on Oct. 1, 8, 15, 22 and 29 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., rain or shine. Free parking.

Chamber hosts Meet & Greet

LABELLE — The LaBelle Chamber of Commerce, 481 W. Hickpochee Ave., will celebrate their 2022 Business of the Year and honor past recipients at a Membership Banquet on Monday, Oct. 3, with a Meet & Greet from 5 to 6

p.m. Dinner will promptly begin at 6 p.m. Guest speaker will be State Representative Lauren Melo. For information and tickets, call 863-675-0125 or email lchamberofcomm@embarqmail.com.

Sewing Club meets

LABELLE — The LaBelle Sewing Club meets at the Barron Library, 461 North Main St., on Monday, Oct. 3, 17, 24 and 31 from 5 to 7 p.m.

Chess Club meets

LABELLE — The LaBelle Chess Club meets at the Barron Library, 461 North Main St., on Monday, Oct. 3, 17, 24 and 31 from 5 to 6 p.m.

Blood drive planned

The BIG RED BUS comes to the American Legion on Thursday, Oct. 13 from noon – 6 p.m. The blood mobile requires an ID. Everyone is required to bring and wear a face mask. Blood donation is considered an essential service. You are our only

source to help accident victims, cancer and surgical patients. Thank you to everyone for your donation. Drink plenty of water before donating. Each donor will receive a wellness checkup including blood pressure, temperature,

pulse, iron count and cholesterol screening!. Please make appointments - visit www.oneblood.org/donate-now, or 1-888-936-6283. Look for the Big Red Bus in front of the American Legion across from the Shell Station on West SR80.

Golf Tournament set Oct. 14

FORT MYERS — The Second Annual Clubs & Carts Golf Tournament will be held at the Veranda Golf Club, Whispering Oaks Course, 12201 River Village Way in Fort Myers, on Friday, Oct. 14. For information call 863-675-0125 or email lchamberofcomm@embarqmail.com. Register at 7:30 a.m. and shotgun start is at 8:30 a.m. Rain or shine. Lunch will be provided. There will be no refunds. Registration forms must be submitted by Oct. 7. Registration forms can be picked up at the LaBelle Chamber of Commerce. Proceeds from this event will support the LaBelle Chamber of Commerce in their efforts to provide scholarships for local students, as well as to promote and support local businesses.

Audubon offers birding trips

CLEWISTON — The Hendry Glades Audubon and SFWMD offers escorted birding trips to Stormwater Treatment Area 5

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Moose Lodge hosts events

The LaBelle Moose Lodge Open Monday through Saturday 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., or later if there are customers, and Sunday from 1 p.m. 'till 8 p.m. Follow us on Facebook: LaBelle Moose Lodge 2398

Mondays are hot dog specials.

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

Music at 7 p.m. on Wednesdays! With wing specials!

Bingo is every Thursday, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m., open to the public with burger specials all day.

Not a member? Stop by and check us out, Guests are welcome! The lodge is 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:

- The VFW will host the fifth annual Trunk or Treat on Sunday, Oct. 31 from 5 to 7 p.m. For information, call 863-675-8008.

- Friday, Oct. 7, Meatloaf Dinner; serving will begin at 5 p.m.

- Saturday, Oct. 8, Dawn Renee' is in the House for your entertainment, music will begin at 5 p.m.

- Saturday, Oct. 15, Auxiliary beef loin dinner begins at 5 p.m.

» See Things to Do on Page 16



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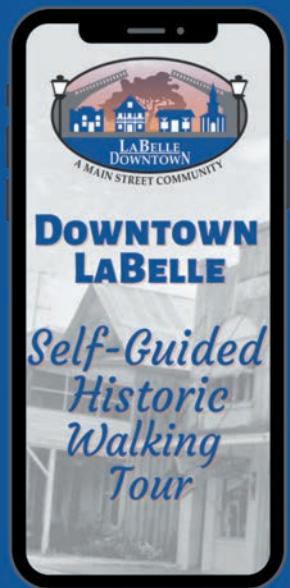


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Look closely at open enrollment choices

It will soon be open enrollment season — the time of year when you can review your employee benefits and make changes as needed. What areas should you focus on?

One to consider is health insurance. If you're still satisfied with your coverage, and it hasn't changed since last year, you may want to keep the same plan. But some employers are now offering high-deductible plans, which may give you access to health savings accounts that can offer tax benefits.

Next, look at life insurance. Is your employer's group coverage sufficient for your needs? If not, you may need to consider a private policy. And the same is true for your employer's disability insurance.

Finally, consider your 401(k) or similar retirement plan. While you can typically make changes to your plan throughout the year, why not take this opportunity to see if you need to adjust your investments? You might also consider boosting your contributions.

Try to get the most from your benefits package – it can be an important part of your overall financial strategy.

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

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- Saturday, Oct. 15, Moore 2 Music is in the House, entertainment will begin at 6 p.m.

- Saturday, Oct. 22, Dinner TBA. Serving begins at 5 p.m.

- Saturday, Oct. 27, Steve White Karaoke begins at 5 p.m.

- Saturday, Oct. 29, Dinner TBA. Serving begins 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 is Pizza Night beginning at 5 p.m. Dine-in or take-out.

- 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 drinks, 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.

Outdoor Market

LABELLE — Shop downtown Outdoor Saturday Market on Saturday, **Nov. 5**, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Shop from Barron Library to Barron Park along the City Wharf.

Night of dinner and dancing

LABELLE — The River Bend Motorcoach Resort, 5800 West State Road 80, will host Peace, Love & Paws Gala with a night of dinner, dancing and saving lives on Saturday, **Nov. 5**. Doors open at 5 p.m. Proceeds will benefit the Caloosa Humane Society.

Elvis tribute is Nov. 12

LABELLE — The nationally acclaimed tribute artist Matt Stone stars as Elvis at the Firehouse Community Theatre, 241 Bridge St., on Saturday, **Nov. 12**, at 8 p.m. For information or tickets, call 863-675-3066 or visit firehousecommunitytheatre.com.

Wharf Walk Artisan Weekend

LABELLE — Wharf Walk Artisan Weekend will be held in downtown LaBelle on Saturday, **Nov. 12** from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday, **Nov. 13** from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at DeSoto Avenue Wharf and Barron Park, 1559 De Soto Ave. For information, visit www.downtownlabelle.com/wharfwalk..

Kids Day rescheduled

Kiwanis Kids Day has been rescheduled to Jan. 21, 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. Save the date - bring your friends and family. If interested in being a vendor or entertainer, please contact Nikki at 239-54-2005.

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

Woman's Club to meet

The public is welcome to come to GFWC LaBelle Community Woman's Club, 382 W Hickpochee Ave. next to Ace Hardware 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.

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.

Grief support group meets

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, depression, 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.

Garden Club is back!

LaBelle Garden Club meets the fourth Monday of the month at 7 p.m. at the Dallas Townsend Center at 1085 Pratt Blvd - across from the Health Department. Anyone can bring any plant or garden produce to exchange or share. If anyone wants to share a treat for light refreshments, it's always welcome! For more infor-

mation please call or text Nikki 239-564-2005.

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.

AA meets in LaBelle

Alcoholics Anonymous meets in LaBelle at the following locations.

- Hispanos de LaBelle, 462 E. Cowboy Way, meets on **Sundays** at 9 a.m. and **Mondays and Fridays** at 8 p.m. (Spanish)

- Good Shepherd Church, 1098 Collingswood Pkwy., Port LaBelle Group meets on **Sundays** at 7 p.m., hosts a discussion meeting on **Fridays** at 7 p.m., and "As Bill Sees it" on **Saturdays** at 9 a.m.

- First Christian Church, 138 Ford Ave, LaBelle Group holds "12&12" meeting on **Tuesdays** at 7 p.m., a discussion meeting on **Thursdays** at 7 p.m., and an Early Bird meeting on **Wednesdays** at 7 a.m.

The AA 24-hour phone line is: 239-275-5111.

For more information about AA meetings, go online to <https://www.aa.org/>

Transportation for veterans

Transportation is available for veterans to and from the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in West Palm Beach. Van scheduling number 863-675-5255.

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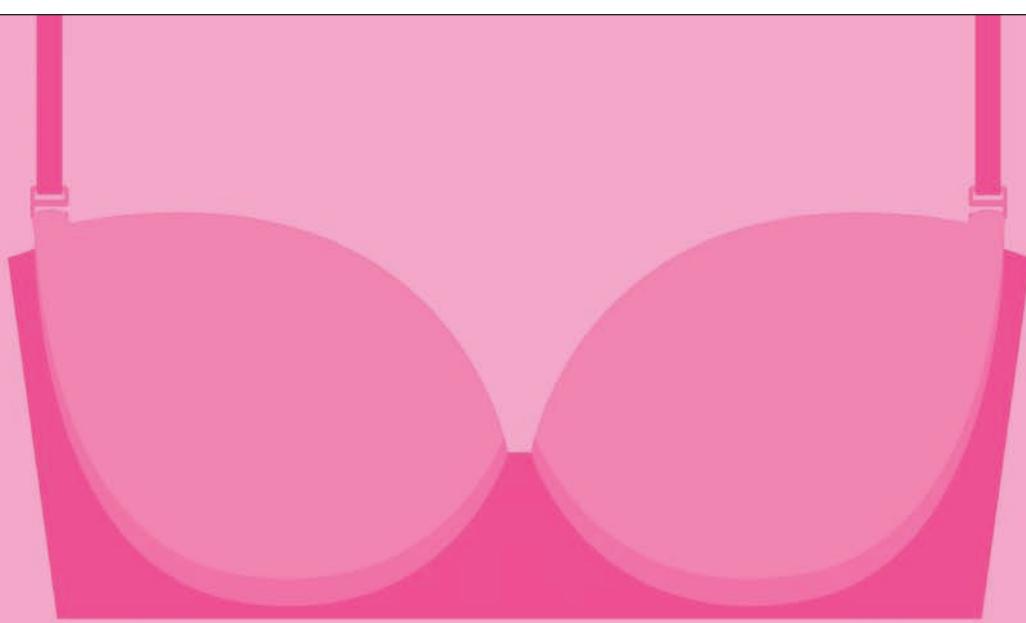
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Howl-O-Ween

» From Page 1

13 pet costume contest participants in 2020 to 27 last year.

There are also some new sponsors this year, and more of them, Boone said.

"We always have Hendry County Tourism and the City of LaBelle as supporters," she said. "This year, the new sponsors are Heartland Homes of Florida, Port LaBelle Marina, Hendry County Sheriff's Office, Southern Heritage Real Estate & Investments, Inc., The Caloosa Kitchen, R. Short Creations and Fourth Quarter Designs."

In addition to a food truck, Luna's Little Cheese Emporium will make an appearance and Suncoast Beverage will have cold adult beverages.

"The Hendry County Sheriff's Office K-9 Officers will have a great presentation," Boone said. "We will have a performance for the dog finale: Mentalism with Brendon W. We have great vendors coming!"

In memory of Lenny LaForest, who helped coordinate everything wiener-dog

involved in years past, the LDRC board elected to add his name to the Downtown Doxie Dash, now Lenny's Downtown Doxie Dash.

Boone said Lenny is greatly missed; however Doug Dailey has stepped into fill Lenny's shoes.

If you're interested in becoming a sponsor, call 863-225-2749 or visit downtownlabelle.com

If you have other ideas or how to help, contact Kelly Boone at 863-225-2749 or email kelly@downtownlabelle.com.

Boone is asking for videos from owners of past wiener dog participants to post on its website. Send those under two minutes to Boone at kelly@downtownlabelle.com or downtownlabelle@gmail.com.

Those who want to participate in either competition, secure a vendor booth or want more information should visit the LDRC website at: www.downtownlabelle.com/howloween.

The deadline to enter the Howl-O-Ween Pet Costume Contest is 11 p.m., Oct. 15. The application can be found here: www.eventeny.com/events/applications/application/?id=886. There



The Howl-O-Ween event will include a pet costume contest. [Photo courtesy LDRC]

is no charge to enter the competition.

There is a \$10 fee to enter Lenny's Downtown Doxie Dash. The deadline for entries is 5 p.m. Oct. 21. The application can be found at eventeny.com/events/applications/application/?id=887

Vendors can apply for booth space at www.downtownlabelle.com/howloween, the deadline is 11 p.m., Oct. 15. Application fees are \$10-\$60.

There is also a pet rescue group application at www.downtownlabelle.com/howloween. The deadline is 11:59 p.m. Oct. 8 with a \$10 entry fee.

Theatre

» From Page 1

evening.

Call 863-675-3066 to get tickets! Leave a message and someone will call you back!

Support actors and community theatre; please get your tickets now for this great murder mystery comedy!

The show runs Oct. 28, 29, 30 and Nov. 4, 5, 6. The Friday and Saturday

evening show starts at 7 p.m. and the Sunday show starts at 2 p.m.

The Firehouse Community Theatre Inc is located in beautiful downtown LaBelle at 241 N. Bridge Street.

AWARD

Lopez honored for saving child

SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — In the morning hours of May 1, 2022, Cpl. Veronica Lopez responded to a call of a 10-month-old child that had possibly drowned in a bathtub in a home in western Hendry County. Upon Cpl. Lopez's arrival, she was met by the mother who was holding the unresponsive child. Based on her training, Cpl. Lopez immediately began CPR on the infant.

Due to her quick action, the infant began to respond and started breathing.

Lopez's actions attributed to the saving of the infant's life. With this display of conspicuous initiative, capability and quick response, Cpl. Lopez has earned the respect and admiration for herself and the agency.

On Aug. 24 Hendry County Sheriff Steve Whidden presented Cpl. Lopez with the Life Saving Award for Outstanding

Law Enforcement Performance, in the Saving of a Human Life. Under true emergency circumstances, she acted to prevent the loss of life either by exercising appropriate first aid procedures or by direct intervention. The Life Saving Award is awarded to an employee for competent and expedient action that is directly accountable for sustaining or saving a human life.



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HOUSING

Migrant farm workers are essential in Hendry County

By C. M. Schmidkofeर
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — Tourists may think of Florida as the “Sunshine State” full of sand, surf and fun, but those who live here realize the state depends on its many thriving farms economically as much as tourism dollars.

Hendry County boasts 437 farms, according to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, out of the 47,100 in the state per Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) in 2016.

While many farms are citrus, other crops including vegetables, sugarcane, mushrooms and livestock, make up the state’s farm operations with medical marijuana enterprises gaining in popularity.

A good number of these farms employ temporary or seasonal migrant farm workers – many who are housed on farm property or off-site dwelling units – vital to the sustenance and growth of the industry in the county and in other parts of the country.

But there is increasing resistance in Hendry County to the practice as the area grows with non-agricultural businesses and a residential housing boom.

Residents of the City of Felda vehemently objected to a proposed zoning change that would permit a residential housing unit for 80 migrant workers on the David Jamerson, LLC, farm during the Hendry County

Commission meeting Aug. 23.

Commissioners sided with residents and rejected the request, despite the owner conceding to numerous conditions added to the resolution. This means that the farm may have to sell off some of its land due to a lack of workers.

Two agricultural professionals spoke in defense of the housing unit, explaining that migrant workers are a necessity in southwest Florida’s farming industry.

“Agriculture in southwest Florida is a \$1.9 billion industry,” retired Hendry County Extension Agent Gene McAvoy said. “It is the life blood of this county ... citrus and vegetable crops ... both of these take enormous amounts of labor.”

It’s not unusual for a farm like David Jamerson, LLC, or Charles Obern’s C&B Farms, Inc. to have 80 to 100 temporary workers during the harvest period, he said. As the crops are time-sensitive, migrant labor is essential to plant, care for and harvest crops in a timely fashion to keep farms in business.

Today Florida is the largest user of H2A workers in the country, he said, which includes roofing and construction migrant workers as well as for farming.

Twenty-five years ago, there were no federal or state regulations and

migrant workers were subjected to poor housing conditions.

Today with state and federal oversight, they are vetted carefully and enjoy the same benefits as a U.S. worker. Skilled workers are carefully recruited and paid above minimum wage, given free housing and transportation to and from their country of origin and to town for shopping and medical care, he said.

“No farmer, no businessperson, on the planet Earth would do that if they had any other source of labor,” McAvoy said, adding that international competition for produce has compounded the need for migrant workers.

Charles Obern of C&B Farms, Inc. described at the meeting the process for recruiting, transporting and employing migrant farm workers.

The federal government highly controls migrant workers, he said, requiring him to have each worker sign a contract and be brought to the country through a special visa program.

He recruits from rural areas in Mexico and makes sure each worker has a covid shot as required by law before they get the visa. Each goes through an interview process by the state department, where their background is checked and fingerprints taken.

“They will know if they’ve been in the United States

illegally in the past,” Obern said. “They’ll know if they have aliases. They’ll know if they’ve committed crimes in the United States. All our people have to go through the State Department to get vetted before they give you the passport.

Obern said by 2019 he had up to 14 trailer homes for migrant workers, when he spent an additional \$1 million for bunk houses to hold 96 additional workers, bringing his total capacity to 180 workers.

The Florida Department of Health inspects housing conditions monthly and when Obern puts in an H2A petition, the state sends people from Tallahassee occasionally to verify that the housing is up to par, including water testing and waste services.

His workers are assigned housekeeping duties when not on the job and firearms, drugs and alcohol are not permitted on the grounds which are under video surveillance. Obern conducts random drug screening and firearm, drug or alcohol violations may result in terminations.

Obern estimates it costs him about \$1,200 per worker for all the expenses, bringing his total annual cost to over \$200,000.

His contract allows for only five unexcused absences with three unexcused absences in a row before a worker is dismissed. Upon termination, either voluntarily or not, he

is required by law to turn them over to the Department of Labor as absconders where their name is listed on a register.

Obern said Hendry County is a farming community that has out of necessity become dependent on migrant farmworkers, who require housing.

“That’s what we do in this county,” he said. “That’s where the money comes to

fund this county. We have a decreasing amount of domestic workers. We just have less people that want to work on a farm. That’s just the way it is.”

His farm went from 400 domestic workers in the early 2000s to about 28 today.

“I have to replace workers with somebody, or I quit farming,” he said.

NEW OFFICER



K-9 Taz joins HCSO

LABELLE — Hendry County Sheriff’s Office is pleased to introduce the department’s newest member K-9, Taz, and his handler, Sgt. Lovadis Dominguez. Taz is a 2 year old Belgian Malinois and is a certified drug detection dog. Both Taz and Sgt. Dominguez have completed their training and are currently working together on the road. [Photo courtesy HCSO]

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See the stars at Kissimmee Prairie State Park

OKEECHOBEE COUNTY – If you love camping, hiking or star gazing, check out Kissimmee Prairie State Park, 33104 N.W. 192nd Ave., in northern Okeechobee County.

Kissimmee Prairie is a land dominated by the great blue sky. Part of the Everglades headwaters, the preserve protects the largest remaining tract of Florida dry prairie, an ecosystem shaped by cycles of flooding and fire.

Many rare, threatened and endangered species inhabit this place, and the wide-open landscape means that bird-watchers and photographers have ample opportunity to catch sight of a grasshopper sparrow, crested caracara or burrowing owl.

Internationally recognized for its lack of light pollution, the night sky above the prairie is inky black — campers can spot the Milky Way without using telescopes or binoculars.

In 2016, Kissimmee Prairie Preserve was recognized as Florida's first Dark Sky Park by the International Dark Sky Association.

All Florida State Parks close at sunset; however, there are offer several ways to gain after-hours access to the preserve to enjoy the dark skies.

Go online to Floridastateparks.org to reserve a campsite in either the family campground or equestrian campground.

Go online to Floridastateparks.org to reserve an astronomy pad site. There are special restrictions for the astronomy sites: After dark, all lights must be



The Florida grasshopper sparrow (*Ammmodramus savannarum floridanus*), the rarest bird in North America, is a non-migratory subspecies found only in the dry prairies of south-central Florida. [Photo courtesy Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park]



Kissimmee Prairie is a designated Dark Skies Park, a great place for stargazing. [Photo courtesy Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park]



Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park offers Guided Prairie Buggy Tours. On the buggy you will have an elevated seat on a guided tour of the largest remaining stretch of wild prairie in Florida. The buggy tour runs on Saturday and Sunday and state holidays at 9 a.m., November through March. [Photo courtesy Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park]



In 1997, the state of Florida acquired 48,000 acres to establish Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park. [Photo courtesy Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park]

red spectrum and no campfires are allowed on these sites. When an astronomy viewing pad is reserved, you must arrive at the preserve prior to sunset and make contact with the ranger on duty to receive additional pertinent information.

If you are a Florida State Parks Family Annual Pass holder interested in gaining access to the preserve after sunset, please come into the office during our regular office hours and sign up for an after-hours permit, which would grant you access to the preserve's common day use areas after hours.

Stargazers have the chance to see

stars, planets and other celestial bodies in incomprehensible numbers and unforgettable brilliance. Jupiter and Saturn are both clearly visible in the night sky. You may be able to witness the International Space Station making its orbit around Earth.

Rocket launches from the space centers on the east coast are also viewable.

Please note: The entrance is closed daily 15 minutes after sunset. Only registered campers or after-hours pass holders are allowed entry after dark.

For more information, please call 864-462-5360.

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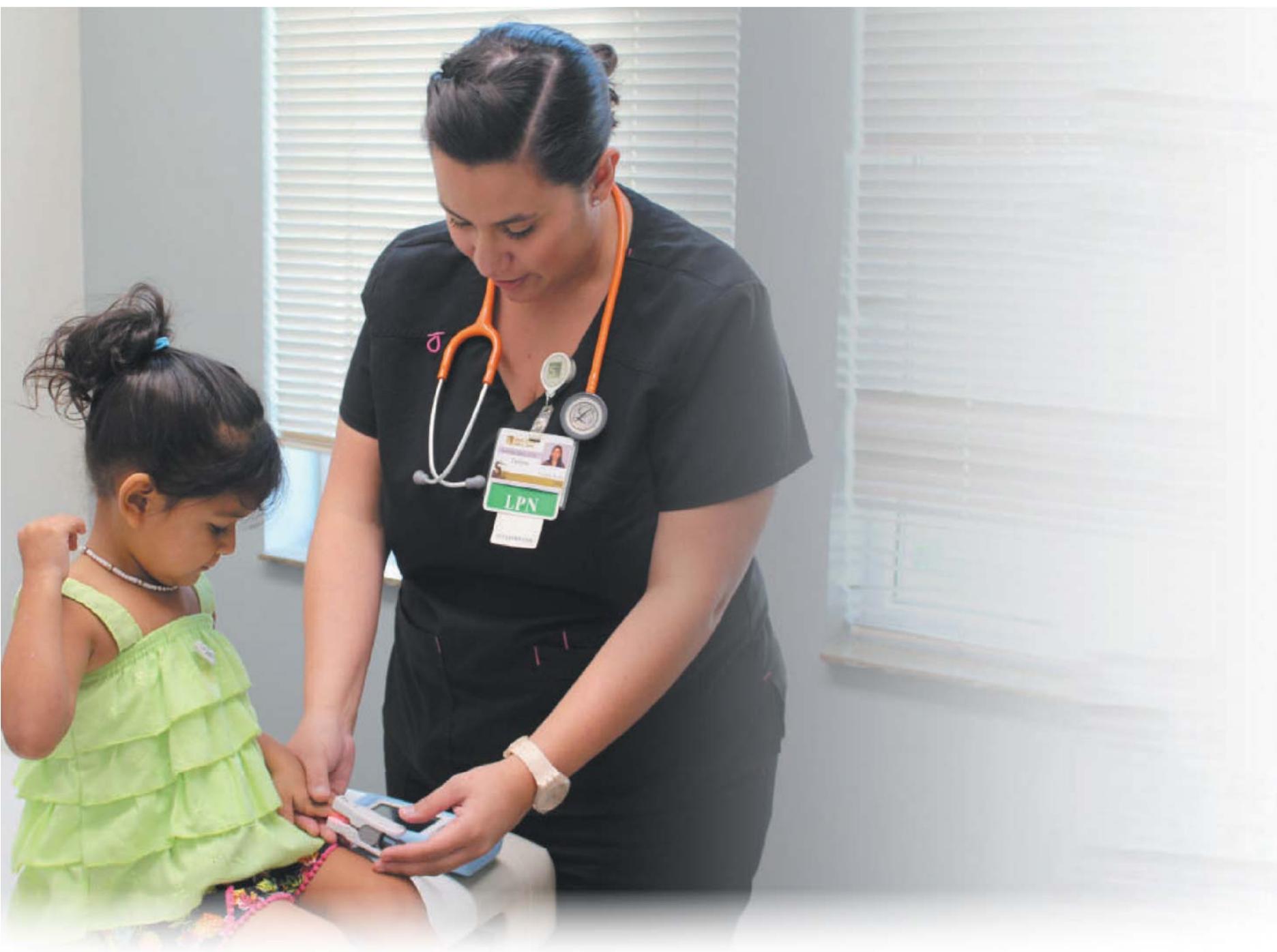
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