



EDUCATION:
Students help
With clean up, 10



ADOPT A PET:
Dogs and cats
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Clean water, 16

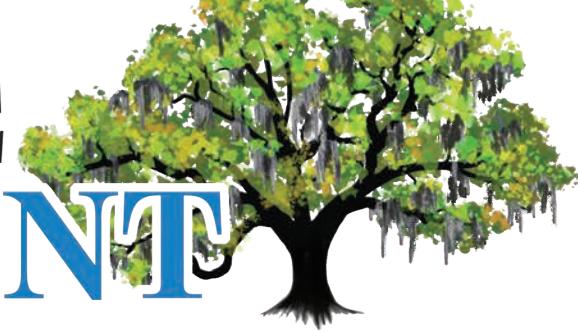


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Local veteran
In contest 20

THINGS TO DO:
Holiday events
Planned, 18

HEALTH:
Breast cancer
Awareness, 4

CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT



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CELEBRATION

LaBelle Christmas Boat Parade planned for Dec. 21

SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — East Coast Marine will host the third annual LaBelle Christmas Boat Parade, in memory of Alexandra Matos, on Wednesday, Dec. 21 at 7 p.m.

The Hendry County Sheriff's Department boat will lead the parade, starting near Barron Park and traveling up the river to Caloosa Estates.

All interested boaters and skippers, contact East Coast Marine at 721 N. Bridge Street in LaBelle. For information, call George or Nellie at 863-674-1680 or cell 239-994-0978, or email: nellie4898@gmail.com.

Deadline to register is 5 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 20.

There will be first, second and third place winners for prizes. The first place winner prize value will be up to \$100.

Prize winner sponsors are: East Coast Marine, Mike Eaton, Knotz RC, Legacy Custom Painting and Firehouse Community Theatre.



An entry from a previous year of the LaBelle Christmas Boat Parade featured Santa and his reindeer. [Courtesy photo]

RECOGNITION

LDRC honored by Florida Main Street

SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

TALLAHASSEE — Secretary of State Cord Byrd announced that LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Corporation has been designated the Florida Main Street Program of the Month on Oct. 21.

"I am pleased to designate LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Corporation as the Florida Main Street Program of the Month," said Secretary Byrd. "Their entrepreneurial spirit is evident in how they have

» See LDRC on Page 2



Among the recent improvements to Barron Park are these statues of children reading. [Photo courtesy of LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Corporation.]

FINAL HARVEST

Local citrus growers face devastating losses after Ian

By C. M. Schmidkofler
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — South Florida citrus growers were hit with a triple whammy after Hurricane Ian paid a visit Sept. 28.

Ian created wind and water damage to citrus crops already struggling with citrus greening — a deadly infection affecting all types of citrus that presently has no remedy — and the impacts of inflation that has raised costs from labor to fertilizers to pesticides and more.

In addition, citrus was still somewhat recovering from Hurricane Irma in 2017.

According to Dr. Mongi Zekri, UF/IFAS Extension in Hendry

County, Irma caused flooding in the area that impacted citrus growers.

Now, after Ian, combined with all the other factors, he said some Florida citrus growers are giving up.

"It was very devastating," he said. "Many trees were uprooted, and fruit lost and there was flooding damage. It is bad for every sector. Many need help from the federal government."

He anticipates citrus prices will increase, jobs will be lost — fruit pickers and other grove workers among them. Packing houses and trucking services will be impacted. Fertilizers and pesticides will

» See CITRUS on Page 2

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LDRC

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consistently leveraged grant funds into projects that showcase the historic downtown and benefit the entire community."

Canopied with oak trees, you can find your way back to old Florida in the City of LaBelle. Through several collaborative projects, LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Corporation (LDRC) and the City of LaBelle have breathed new life into downtown, the heart of their community. These include a complete street-scape project featuring the installation of lighting, benches, and murals, allowing LaBelle's downtown district to become a walkable space for residents and visitors.

With funding from a Small Matching Grant from the Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, LDRC designed a self-guided walking tour of downtown focusing on the time between the 1880s and 1930s. The tour also features bronze statues of children at play, which line the shaded streets. LDRC also obtained a Community Challenge Grant from AARP to install pavilions and seating in the City's treasured Barron Park along the Caloosahatchee



Benches have been added overlooking the river as part of recent improvements to Barron Park. [Photo courtesy LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Corporation.]

River. The transformation happening around Downtown LaBelle shows the promise of growth while retaining small town charm.

LDRC is the driving force behind several annual events that foster a sense of place and entrepreneurship. Howl-O-Ween, Shop Downtown Outdoor Saturday Markets, Wharf Walk Artisan Weekend, and the infamous Smoke Under the Oaks Rib Fest occur during fall months and provide entertainment and fun for the whole family.

"Transplanting here from Ohio, I raised my daughters in LaBelle. Bringing up children in a small town is a priceless experience," said Kelly Boone, Executive Di-

rector of LDRC. "My goal has always been to create a space that youth can enjoy and want to stay in to watch their families grow. I feel that the volunteers that give their time to LDRC and the community have been instrumental in developing a vibrant downtown. Sitting under our oak trees makes one feel rooted and at home, no matter where you are from."

For more information on the LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Corporation, visit DowntownLaBelle.com.

To learn more about the Florida Main Street program, visit FloridaMainStreet.com or [Facebook.com/FloridaMainStreet](https://www.facebook.com/FloridaMainStreet).

CITRUS

» From Page 1

cost more. Those costs will be passed on to the consumer.

Fruit and juice imported from overseas will increase, he said, but will cost more.

Gene McAvoy, former Hendry County Extension director, said some citrus fared better than others, but that may not change the outcome of the situation.

Now president of Have Gun Will Travel Agricultural Consulting in LaBelle and holder of numerous titles and expertise in the agricultural field, McAvoy focused on two popular orange varieties to drive home the significance of Ian's visitation and the financial and horticultural challenges facing the

industry.

Valencia oranges survived Ian's nearly 100 mph wind gusts better than the larger Hamlin variety, he said, which experienced a 60% to 70% premature fruit drop, making them unsalvageable.

But the smaller Valencia oranges were able to hold onto the trees in greater numbers than the Hamlin but will ripen earlier than usual due to broken vascular connections from twisting for hours in the winds, he said.

He expects the 20% to 30% drop off loss during the storm could increase an additional 30% on top of that due to the premature ripening.

"We're seeing that already," he said.

McAvoy said he had not heard of flooding in Hendry County from Ian, but growers did experience broken

and uprooted trees, less than what he is seeing in Charlotte and Lee counties.

Even before Ian, McAvoy said citrus growers were starting to sell off their land, leaving the business in large part due to the citrus greening and inflation.

He said Southern Garden Citrus is scaling back, the Didier family has gotten out of the business and Duda is phasing out citrus by selling the majority of their property to Florida Power and Light over the next seven years.

When agricultural properties go up for sale, developers typically snap them up, something he said is heading towards Hendry County.

"It's happening," he said. "That land at Dudas, that's almost 20,000 acres and goes into a solar farm. That's not going to come back."

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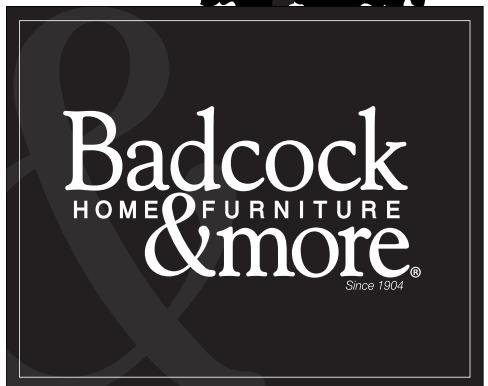
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HEALTH

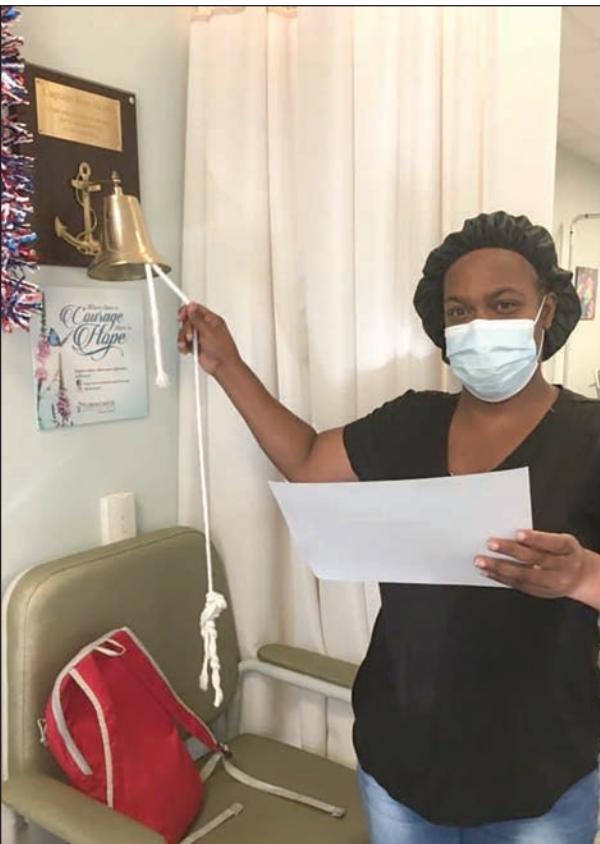
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AWARENESS

HRMC joins the fight against breast cancer



Aroma Bradshaw rings the bell after completing her radiation and chemotherapy treatment for stage 2 breast cancer. [Photo courtesy HRMC]

SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

CLEWISTON — During Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Hendry Regional Medical Center (HRMC) joined in the fight against breast cancer by offering free breast health related imaging and procedures to local women who are

uninsured or under-insured. This assistance was offered through the HRMC Pink Warriors Fund.

Breast cancer represents 30% (or 1 in 3) of all new female cancers each year and is the second leading cause of cancer death in women. Overall, the



Aroma Bradshaw (third from right in pink) stands at the starting line of the Pink Warriors Walk along with other breast cancer survivors. [Photo courtesy HRMC]

average risk of a woman developing breast cancer sometime in her life is a 1 in 8 chance.

HRMC created the Pink Warriors Fund in 2017 to raise awareness of breast cancer as well as raise funds dedicated for local women needing breast cancer related services. Each year during the month of October Hendry Regional fundraised through multiple events. The Pink Warriors Walk on Oct. 22 was attended by over 250 participants.

"We had a tremendous response and outpouring from the community in support of our events, and we were able to raise

critical dollars to help local women in their fight against breast cancer," stated Electa Waddell, marketing/foundation director. Efforts this year raised \$45,000 for the Pink Warriors Fund bringing the total since its inception to over \$163,000.

The Pink Warriors Fund has provided over 400 local women access to breast related healthcare that they may otherwise have not had. One such recipient of the fund is Aroma Bradshaw of LaBelle, a mother of three young children.

In July 2020 Bradshaw came in for an annual checkup during which

her healthcare provider ordered a mammogram through the Pink Warriors Fund. That month, at the age of 42, she was diagnosed with stage 2 breast cancer.

The Pink Warriors Fund covered the cost for her mammogram, lumpectomy and subsequent breast related health needs provided at HRMC. After a long battle that included radiation and chemotherapy, she is on her way to remission! "Hendry Regional Medical Center and the Pink Warriors Fund saved my life," stated Bradshaw.

"Early detection saves

lives. Our goal with the fund is to remove the burden of access to healthcare for breast related screenings for women in our local community," stated Waddell.

The Pink Warriors Fund can be used by any local woman in need of a breast related screening or diagnostic imaging service provided by HRMC that is not covered by insurance. To utilize the fund the healthcare provider should write "Pink Warrior Fund" on the prescription/order and the patient may make an appointment at an HRMC location in Clewiston or LaBelle.

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For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulders.

And His name will be called

Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

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SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Let's share the Joy of the Lord

By Rev. Elizabeth L. Nelson
GOOD SHEPHERD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

What brings you joy? That was the question I heard on my Christian radio station: What brings you joy? There were lots of fun answers. One gentleman said he finds great joy in watching Veggie Tales with his kids, observing their reactions to each program. A woman shared

that she takes great joy in looking at where she is in life and knowing that, at one time, she could have gone in a different direction. There was even an older guy who said he has an electric skateboard that brought him great joy!

The apostle Paul said many times that even though he was imprisoned, he had joy. Sounds strange unless you think about what joy really is. While the computer thesaurus gives twenty-two synonyms

for joy, not one of them is anything like what Paul was talking about. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, and real joy has little to do with a feeling and everything to do with a relationship with God. Given that, of course, Paul would have joy in whatever compromising situation he was in; he was doing the Lord's work! Doing God's work always brings joy!

What a wonderful God we have! He loves us so much to bring us joy no

matter the circumstances. It makes me want to tell everyone I see that a life without God isn't life at all, and that to experience all the joy that could be ours, we need God's presence in our lives. Let's spread it around!

*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.*

RECIPE OF THE MONTH

Blackberry Wine Cake

Ingredients

For the Cake
1 white cake mix
3.5 oz. blackberry jello
3 large eggs
½ cup oil
¾ cup blackberry wine
For the Syrup
1 ½ cup powdered sugar
½ cup blackberry

Instructions

For the Cake

1. Preheat the oven to 350. Prepare the bundt pan with butter and flour and/or bakers secret spray. Coat very well and set aside.

2. In a medium sized bowl, mix together the white cake mix, blackberry jello, 3 eggs, oil and 3/4 cup blackberry wine. Use a spatula to start mixing and when generally mixed, begin to whisk to remove most of the lumps.

3. Pour into the prepared bundt pan and place into the warmed oven on the center rack in the middle of the oven. Bake for 40-55 minutes until cake tester



comes out clean.
4. Remove from the oven and allow to cool until you can touch the sides of the bundt pan with your bare hands comfortably.
5. Use a butter knife and run down the ridges on the bundt pan to loosen the cake. Gently turn the pan over and give the bottom a firm but gentle tap with the heel of your hand. This should allow the cake to remove from the pan easily. Place onto a rimmed cake plate.
6. Use the handle of a

wooden spoon and gently poke holes in the cake. Proceed to the instructions for applying the syrup.

For the Syrup

1. While the cake is baking, in a medium sauce pan on the stove top over medium heat, add ½ cup wine and 1 ½ cups powdered sugar and begin stirring. Continue stirring constantly until the wine mixture becomes translucent and thickened.

2. Allow the syrup to cool while the cake finishes baking.

This recipe provided by Southern Heritage Real Estate.

SCAM WARNING

HCSO warns of door-to-door scams

SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

Hendry County Sheriff's Office has received reports from both Port LaBelle Utilities and the City of LaBelle that individuals are approaching homes knocking on doors and

identifying themselves as employees with the state, city of LaBelle and/or Port LaBelle Utilities.

They tell the homeowner the purpose of their visit is to test their water quality asking to come into their home to do so.

These individuals DO NOT represent the City of LaBelle nor do they represent the Port LaBelle Utilities System.

Neither the Port LaBelle Utilities nor the City of LaBelle will ask to come into your home.

Should you have any questions or any concerns you may contact Port LaBelle Utilities System at 863-675-5376 or the City of LaBelle, at 675-2872 and ask for either Gary Hull or their utility department.

CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

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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, visit <https://www.aa.org/>

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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]



Lucky would be happy hiding amongst Christmas boxes and wrapping paper.



Ruthie wouldn't mind playing with some Christmas ribbon.



Sherbert would like nothing more than finding his "Fur Ever Home" for Christmas.



Sam would fit in your Christmas stocking.



Flower would like nothing more than to be on your lap on Christmas morning.



Brandy would like nothing more than to wake up under your tree on Christmas morning.



Robbie would like nothing more than to climb your Christmas tree.



Little Bit would like nothing more than to snuggle with you on Christmas morning.

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EXCELLENCE

LHS band getting bigger and better

By Katrina Elsken
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LaBelle High School (LHS) band students were recognized at the Nov. 16 meeting of the Hendry County School Board.

"Our marching band has grown substantially under the direction of our wonderful director Alexander Burden," said LHS Principal Tammy Bass.

Last year the band had 44 students. This year it has 144 students participating. The marching band has also grown. Last year the marching band had 37 members; this year it has 66 members.

The LHS Cowboy Band made a clean sweep at the Heartland Marching Band Festival on Nov. 12, taking home all five trophies: Best Winds, Best Auxiliary, Best Percussion, Spirit Award and Leadership Award.

Band students have earned



The LaBelle Cowboys Marching Band made a clean sweep at the Heartland Marching Band Festival on Nov. 12, taking home all five trophies: Best Winds, Best Auxiliary, Best Percussion, Spirit Award and Leadership Award. [Photo courtesy LHS]

a number of honors. Michael Stuhlman was selected for All-State on saxophone in 2022 and 2023. Ten LHS students were selected for the 2022 Heartland Honor Band. Eight LHS students were selected for 2022 UCF Knights Rising. Eight LHS students were selected for 2022

USF Festival of Winds.

As community service, the band raised \$2,700 in October to benefit the music programs in Lee and Charlotte counties that experienced losses due to Hurricane Ian.

In other business at the meeting, Amanda Nelson was elected

as chairman of the Hendry County School Board and Dwayne Brown elected vice chairman.

Hendry County School Board members who won the 2022 elections -- Amanda Nelson, Stephanie Busin and Jon Basquin -- were sworn in at the start meeting.

HIGH SCHOOL



LHS students and staff beautify campus

LABELLE - On Friday, Nov. 4, some of the LaBelle High School students and staff participated in a campus beautification project. Students helped pick up trash, spread mulch, prime and paint, and they even had some special help with the pressure washer from their superintendent, Mr. Swindle. [Photos courtesy LaBelle High School]

STUDENTS OF THE MONTH

Upthegrove Elementary recognizes Citizens of the Month

LABELLE - Upthegrove Elementary honors Citizens of the Month for the month of September. [Photos courtesy Upthegrove Elementary School]



Pre-K: Lilliana Cintron, Joseph Miller, Bronc Crum, Cameron Miller and Aly Veliz. Not pictured: Lincoln Pequeno, Dylan Cervantes.



First and second Grades: Neily Rodriguez, Delrick Thompson, Alexander Garcia, Aria Gallegos, Sophia Perez, Tanay Patel, Oscar Funes Villeda, Anastasia Monsalve, Tod Smith, Not pictured: Daniel Cardenas and Zayden Lopez.



Third, fourth and fifth grades: Tahj Humphrey, Maryann Guerrero, Brian Trejo, Bubba Burdick, Yanet López-Pelham, Adabel Lopez, Alexander Molina, Andrea Gaytán-Guillén, Miranda Evers and Christian Sanchez, Not pictured: Alexandra Browning and Sirriah Alderman.

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STUDENTS OF THE MONTH**LES presents Students of the Month**

LABELLE – LaBelle Elementary School would like to congratulate its Students of the Month for the month of October.



Pictured in the front row are Mario Piedra, Ashlee Jimenez-Fernandez, Lizabeth Hernandez, and Diana Carreon. Pictured in the middle row are Stefani Guardado, Ila Russell, Alexia Rodriguez, and Daniela Perez. Pictured in the back row are Dylan Velasquez-Garcia, Angel Rebollo, Liyana Rolle, and Adanely Enriquez.



Pictured in the front row are Sarina Cruz, Junior Hernandez-Zuniga, Nadia Garcia-Guerra, and Lionel Delgado. Pictured in the back row are Yovana Garcia, Wesson Vasquez, Amaya Delgado, Melanie Rodriguez, Riley Munoz, Adrian Guzman-Hernandez, and Osiel Espinosa. [Photos courtesy LES]

ANNUAL HONORS**LES Teacher and Employee of the Year**

LABELLE – LaBelle Elementary School is proud to announce their Teacher of the Year, Jennifer Kingman. Her students were excited to congratulate her. Pictured at the right is Yaneth Jimnez, who has been chosen Employee of the Year. Congratulations!

STUDENTS OF THE MONTH**Upthegrove Elementary recognizes October Citizens of the Month**

LABELLE – Congratulations to the October Citizens of the Month for Upthegrove Elementary School.



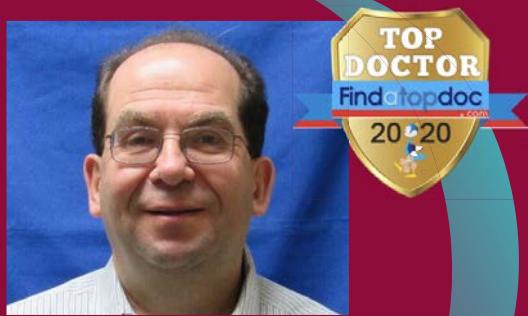
Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten: Kamila Morales, Kaydence Kaune, Leslie Carranza, Felipe Ramirez, Brylan Graham and Dayani Hernandez-Becerril.



First and second grades: Jaxson Deleon, Giselle Perez, Briana Cortez, Sofia Guzman, Emilio Mora-Ramirez, Jesus Covarrubias, Bentley Perez, Christian Gaytan-Guillen, Thiago Santiago Dominguez and Madison McDade.



Third through fifth grades: Damian Cervantes, Jose Gomez, Kaylen Mendoza, Yakelin Vasquez, Aubrey Howard, Estela Velasquez-Villanueva, Ariely Reyes, Mason Flournah, Giselle Cruz, Aldoleao Salguero, Emmanuel Lucas-Garcia, Amy Lopez and Kelvin Paez.



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OBITUARIES



Roger Dean Denning, 78

Roger Dean Denning passed away on November 8th, 2022 at the age of 78 in LaBelle, Florida, where he resided since 1975. He was born on November 13th, 1943 in Jonesville, Michigan to the late Barbara Jean Pierce Denning and Robert LaDoyt Denning, who were both longtime residents of Jonesville, Michigan and LaBelle, Florida.

Roger was born and raised in Jonesville, Michigan, where he graduated from Jonesville High School in the class of 1961. It was during this time that he would begin dating a certain high school sweetheart, who would go on to be his wife of 59 years, Sherri G. Crapo Denning. After high school, Roger attended Michigan State University, where he received a Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice. With his degree, he was able to join the United States Navy in 1966, which was a long-time dream of his. Roger served for 9 years, during which he was a flight instructor during the Vietnam War; teaching formation flying in A-3s, A-4s, and A-7s; as well as performing carrier landings.

After leaving the Navy to remain close to his young family, Roger continued to pursue his passion for aviation. He ferried aircrafts across the globe, including his favorite location of Australia, and flew corporate flights for Barry Manilow, Skyline Aviation, LaBelle Plant World, and a number of other corporations. He was a longtime Learjet pilot for Jet South Air Ambulance out of Fort Myers, Florida, and Springfield, Illinois. After retiring from aviation, he became the proprietor of LaBelle Lumber & Cabinet for several years. He also owned and operated the LaBelle Trading Post and the LaBelle Frame Shop. Following these business ventures, Roger became the controller of Southern Land Real Estate in 2005, which would go on to merge into what is now known as Southern Heritage Real Estate & Investments. He performed duties there, running the business alongside his wife, until his passing.

Roger was the jack of all trades, and truly a master of most. He built the home that his children grew up in on the Caloosahatchee River himself. He repaired and refinished countless an-

tiques, both for personal use and for selling at the LaBelle Trading Post. This knack for restoration would take root in him being an avid collector. This passion first found a home in boats, with his prized possession being a 25' Cape Dory sailboat. Later, he'd take to motorcycles. His collection, most of which being vintage frames he fully restored, would grow to over 25 bikes, primarily made up of Ducatis and BMWs.

A man of few words with strong, old-fashioned convictions, Roger was a staunch supporter of his family. He was preceded in death by his sister, Pamela J. Denning; his father, Robert L. Denning; and his mother, Barbara J. Pierce Denning. Roger is survived by his wife, Sherri G. Crapo Denning of LaBelle, FL; his son, Douglas R. Denning of LaBelle, FL; his daughter, Bonnie M. (Derik) Denning Royal of Alva, FL; his sister, Linda (Sam) Denning Kay of LaBelle, FL; his brother, John (Mabel) Denning of Deming, NM; his grandchildren: Justine L. Decker of Ashville, NC, Jordan L. Decker of Tampa, FL, and Douglas M. Denning of LaBelle, FL; his nephews: John Denning II of Deming, NM and Rob (Deborah) Kay of St. Petersburg, FL; and his niece, Kristy (Greer) Kay Pressly of Palm Beach, FL.

A celebration of life took place at Bullpit Ministries, where Roger was a loyal worshipper, on what would have been his 79th birthday. His ashes will be put to rest in his hometown of Jonesville, Michigan. In lieu of flowers, the family requests memorial donations be made to the Caloosa Humane Society of LaBelle, Florida. God bless.

Ronald E. Groves, 77

LABELLE, FL — Ronald E. Groves passed away on Sunday, October 30, 2022, at his home.

Ronald was a 1963 Graduate of Lancaster High School, Lancaster, Ohio. He was a veteran of the United States Air Force who served during the Vietnam War. He graduated from Ohio University in 1984 and began his teaching career in Hendry County Florida the same year. He taught for 15 years starting at Clewiston Intermediate School, LaBelle Intermediate School, Country Oaks Elementary School, and then retiring from LaBelle Elementary School. He had a love of vintage cars, listening to Rock-n-Roll, and spending time with family. He was very proud of being a long-time member of Mensa.

He is survived by his wife of 56 years, Janice Gorby Groves, LaBelle, Florida; daughter, Jennifer (Isaac) Randolph, LaBelle, Florida; grandson, Asher Randolph, LaBelle.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Clarence and Marie Groves of Lancaster, Ohio.

In lieu of flowers, please consider making a donation to Hope Hospice Fort Myers, Florida.



Joan Marie (Steele) Miller

Joan Marie (Steele) Miller was born in Ellisburg, New York on July 20, 1935 and passed away at her cottage in High Springs, Florida on November 8, 2022 at 87 years young surrounded by her family.

She began her story in upstate New York as the 3rd daughter of Ward and Thelma Steele. In 1956- she moved to south Florida with her husband, Ted Miller, and three small children settling in Hialeah, adding another child to the family before moving slightly north to Hollywood, Florida where they had two more children. In addition to being a wife and mother, Joan worked part time as a school bus driver, an Avon saleswoman, and even a Tupperware lady. She was an active member of and Sunday school teacher at Miami Garden's Baptist Church. In 1978, Joan and Ted moved to the west coast of Florida, to Ortona and then on to LaBelle, with their two youngest children. She continued working there as a school bus driver, a mail carrier, and as a teacher's aid and secretary at LaBelle Elementary School where she eventually retired from. She was an active member of the First Christian Church of LaBelle and was also named ABWA's Woman of the Year in the early 1990's. She was an asset to the Kiwanis organization, serving as secretary, treasurer, and president for the LaBelle Club, as Lt Governor for Division 19, and a very successful manager of the club's non-profit thrift store in LaBelle. She retired again and moved to Mountain View, Arkansas in 2003 where she and Ted continued to live an active and blessed life. She was a member of Mountain View's First Baptist Church and volunteered at the Senior Center. She and Ted filled their days and nights with music, singing, playing, and dancing along side many good friends they made at the American Legion, the Pickin' Park, the Folk Center, and many other local venues.

Joan was blessed with a talent for music; playing - keyboard, organ, and even learning the Dobro later in life and singing - solos, duos, choirs, with Christmas and Easter Cantatas being her favorite. After her husband's passing in 2016, she returned to Florida to be closer to her ever growing blessings of grands and greats - a true legacy she leaves behind - she unintentionally started the "D" tradition and it has

been carried on by her children and grandchildren. Joan completed her life story in High Springs, Florida as a member of the First Baptist Church, never passing by an opportunity to be helpful to others, kind to everyone, and a friend to so many. Her faith in God was instilled at a young age and she was a faithful servant of God throughout her life.

She was preceded in death by her husband of 64 1/2 years, Ted Miller; her parents; two sisters, Elaine Babitt and Phylis Parker; and brother, Dale Steele. She is survived by her six children: Debra (Larry) Woodford of LaBelle, Florida, Diane and husband Charles McNeal of Hollywood, Florida, Dennis Miller of Alachua, Florida, David and wife Lisa Miller of High Springs, Florida, Dawn and spouse Lauren Miller of Spring Hill, Florida, and Dale and wife Tammie Miller of Ft. Myers, Florida. Joan is also survived by 18 grandchildren, 27 great grandchildren, and one great-great grandson.

A memorial service to celebrate her life was planned for November 20th, 2022 at 2pm at the First Christian Church of LaBelle, Florida.



Amy Kathryn Harrell, 52

Amy Kathryn Harrell passed away at her home October 28, 2022.

Amy was born on June 10, 1970 in Mother, California to the late Duncan Walter and Karla Jean Reynerson Fields, Jr. Amy worked as a nurse in the medical field for many years. Amy married Kevin Harrell; he survives. Amy was preceded in death by her father and mother, Duncan and Kay Fields; father and mother-in-law, Ralph and Bettie Harrell.

Amy is survived by her husband of 33 years, Kevin Harrell; her children, Kari & J; and grandson, Joseph; along with many extended family members and friends.

Celebration of Amy's life was held on Saturday, November 12, 2022 at Christ Central Church located at 813 East Hickpochee Avenue, LaBelle, Florida, burial was in Fort Denaud Cemetery. Visitation was from 6-8 p.m. on Friday, November 11, 2022 at Akin-Davis Funeral Home located at 560 East Hickpochee Avenue, LaBelle, Florida.

Celebration arrangements are being handled by Akin-Davis Funeral Home - LaBelle.

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AT THE LIBRARY



Barron Library hosts holiday program

LABELLE — On Oct. 11, Barron Library had a bone-chilling good time while Mrs. Ellen and Puzzle read us "The Bones of Fred McFee" by Eve Bunting and "Dem Bones" by Bob Barner. The kids then made their own skeletons out of Q-Tips! [Photos courtesy Barron Library]

CONTESTANT

Man travels from LaBelle to win Key West beard contest

By Katrina Elskens
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

KEY WEST — A man whose live-aboard boat was docked in LaBelle in October and November won the Best in Show prize at the Fantasy Fest Beard contest in Key West.

Captain Ron Wolek held the second official Fantasy Fest Beard contest at the General Horseplay saloon, 423 Caroline Street in Key West, Florida on Oct. 24. The contest is unique, because it is one of the only beard contests open to all

genders to take part and build their own beards out of creative and strange materials. Both men and women compete in the Fantasy Beard categories; and all you need to do is show up with hair on your face regardless of your sex or gender to qualify to enter.

After he learned of the contest, Steven Trypuc drove more than 5 hours from LaBelle to the General Horseplay and measured in with a over 12 inch long white Santa Claus beard to win the largest prize, Best

in Show, and was crowned the 2022 Fantasy Fest Champion.

"We have big plans for next year," said Ron Wolek, the contest organizer, "like including more interactive online features. The contest is to inspire all genders to embrace something that men only could do; wear hair on their face, and grow an event where all genders can enter for fun and creativity."

Gary Ek, host of Key West's Barefoot Radio 104.9

» See BEARD on Page 15

CONCERT



Kramers in concert

LABELLE — Caloosa Baptist Church, 550 W. Hickpochee Ave. (SR 80), invites you to join them Sunday, Dec. 4, at 6 p.m. for a concert with The Kramers. This family group brings a variety of musical styles, beautiful harmonies, skilled instrumentation and a sweet gospel message in every song. There is no charge but a love offering will be taken in support of their ministry. [Courtesy photo]



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BEARD

» From Page 14

remarked on his Saturday evening show: "There is a saying coined in Key West: If you spend more time caring for your beard than your liver, then you are on the right island."

The championship was held adhering to National Beard and Mustache Association's strict standards for competitions, certifying all recipients with trophies as recognized title holders amongst world wide beard competitors.

Fantasy Fest is an annual creative costume festival that began in 1979 and has grown to a yearly event that attracts over 70,000 revelers to the island city of Key West, growing to becoming the second largest mardi gras style festival in the country. Wolek's Famous Beard Championship is an officially sanctioned Fantasy Fest event for two



KEY WEST – Steven Trypuc (left) won the Best in Show prize at the Fantasy Fest Beard contest on Oct. 24. [Photo courtesy FantasyFest.com and Nick Doll Photography]

years running as a Life of the Party Sponsor.

Wolek's Famous Beard Championship will hold the third official festival sanctioned event; the Fantasy Fest Beard Contest on Oct. 23, 2023 during Fantasy Fest 2023, which has been dubbed the year of "Uniforms & Unicorns."

Trypec lives aboard his 34-foot Gemini Catamaran and enjoys spending time in LaBelle.

He said he has been growing his beard for 6.5 years. "I had a shorter beard before," he explained. "I gave up trimming it six and a half years ago."

He said growing an award-winning beard requires patience. "Sometimes you just have to be lucky with the way it grows in," he added.

He keeps his beard clean and oils it frequently.

VOLUNTEERS

Salvation Army volunteers: The army behind the army

SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

More than two million people of all ages volunteered in 2021 to support The Salvation Army in the USA despite the lingering pandemic. The Salvation Army is looking for volunteers like YOU to raise much-needed funds and support the community's most vulnerable.

The Salvation Army relies heavily on volunteers to fulfill its mission and accomplish all its tasks, especially during the holiday season. Do not miss the chance to volunteer with The Salvation Army. "Be part of something special by helping make a difference in so many lives this holiday season," General Secretary Major Bobby Jackson said. "We have two types of volunteer opportunities just for you, whether you can give an hour, a morning or an entire day."

1. Volunteer as a Bell Ringer – You can raise

enough money to feed thirteen people for every hour of volunteer bell ringing. Salvation Army volunteers need to be available from Nov. 1 to Dec. 24, Monday through Saturday. The red kettles collect dollars to support the wide range of services and programs offered during the year. They provide food, shelter, emergency financial assistance, youth programs, and disaster relief.

During the holiday season, The Salvation Army's red kettles have been a symbol of goodwill for over 125 years. Simply select a location, date, and time on www.RegisterToRing.com. Ring with friends, bring your family, or split your shift with co-workers or your church group! All are welcome.

2. Be An Angel Tree Volunteer - Holiday shoppers can adopt a child or senior through the Angel Tree Program, making Christmas dreams a reality.

Volunteers are needed to manage Angel Tree adoption locations, sort gifts, and assist with gift distribution.

Another way to help is to host an Angel Tree in your church or place of business where employees, visitors and customers can participate by adopting one or more Angels.

"The Salvation Army is so thankful for its dedicated volunteers", said Major Jackson. He added, "It is our hope that everyone will consider volunteering with the Salvation Army this season because we cannot do it without you. Our volunteers are the army behind the Army."

Visit www.RegisterToRing.com to sign up as a volunteer bell ringer. Go to SalvationArmyFlorida.org or call 727-766-1557 for more information about the Angel Tree, to donate, or learn more about how you can support The Salvation Army this Christmas.

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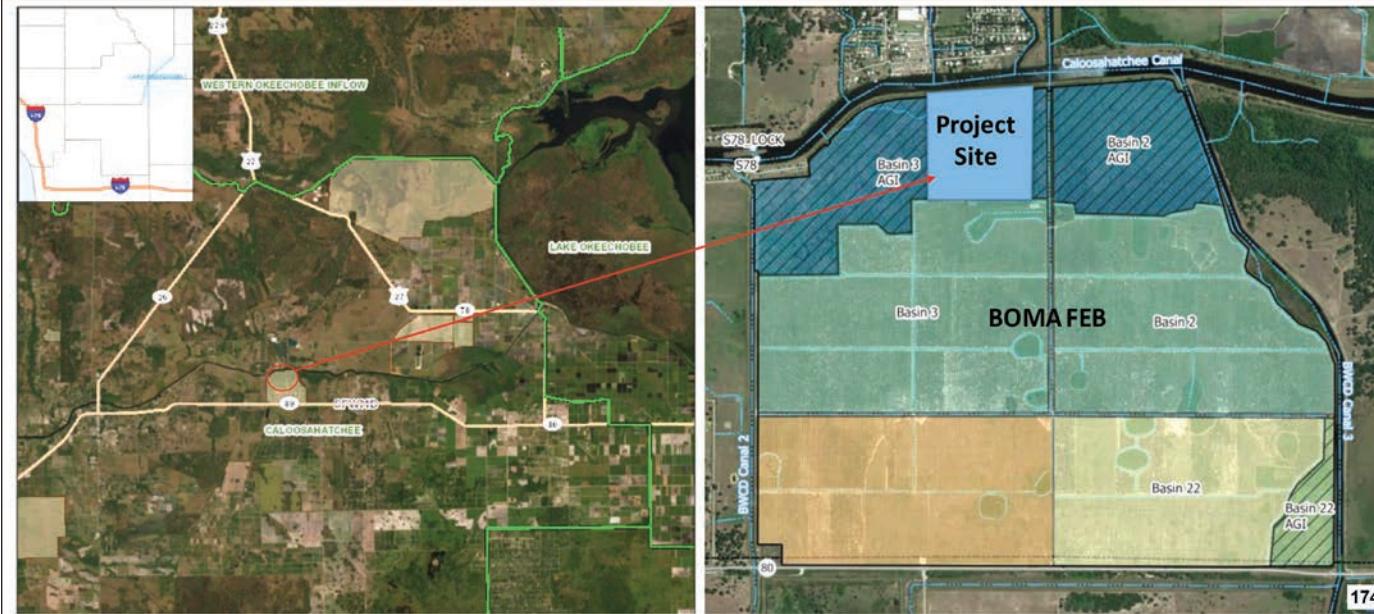
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CLEAN WATER

SFWMD approves project to clean Caloosahatchee



GLADES COUNTY – A \$24.6 million water quality treatment and testing project was approved at the Nov. 18 meeting of the South Florida Water Management District Governing Board. [Courtesy SFWMD]

By Katrina Elskens

CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

WEST PALM BEACH – The South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) is moving forward with a project to help clean water in the Caloosahatchee River.

At their Nov. 18 meeting, the SFWMD Governing Board accepted the low bid of \$26.4 million from Phillips & Jordan for the project.

"I think it is a well-de-

signed project," said SFWMD Governing Board member Ben Butler."

The staff report explains that "as part of the Northern Everglades Estuary Protection Program (NEEPP), the C-43 Canal Water Quality Treatment and Testing Project (C-43 Canal WQTTP) has an overarching objective to demonstrate and implement cost-effective, wetland-based

strategies for reducing nutrient discharges, particularly nitrogen, to the C-43 Canal, the Caloosahatchee River, and the estuary."

The planned project site for the facility, currently known as the BOMA Site, is situated South of the Caloosahatchee River, North of State Road 80, just upstream (East) of the S-78 Spillway and Lock

Structure.

The C-43 canal conceptional plan, completed in 2012, recommended a phased, multi-scale wetland demonstration testing facility to help better understand the nitrogen cycle and study the key factors associated with nitrogen reduction in treatment wetlands.

CALOOSAHATCHEE RIVER

Lake water provides beneficial flow to Caloosahatchee

By Katrina Elskens

CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

People on Florida's east coast often ask, why is more water released from Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee River than to the St. Lucie River.

The simple answer is the Caloosahatchee River needs freshwater flow from the lake in order to keep the estuary in a healthy salinity range. The St. Lucie River does not need freshwater flow from the lake.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Jacksonville District will resume releases from Lake Okeechobee to the Caloosahatchee Estuary from this week.

Julian Keen Jr. Lock and Dam (S-79) at a 14 average pulse release of 1,200 cubic feet per second (cfs) beginning Saturday, Nov. 19. No lake releases are planned for the St. Lucie Estuary.

The 1,200 cfs target is right in the middle of the REstoration COordination & VERification (RECOVER) optimal flow envelope for the Caloosahatchee. Water from the lake will only be released in amounts needed to supplement local basin runoff to meet the target of 1,200 cfs, and the target is consistent with the recommendation from the South Florida Water Management District for this week.

The releases are measured at the Franklin Lock which is more than 40 miles from the Julian Keen Jr. Lock, where lake water enters the Caloosahatchee River. If there is sufficient local basin runoff to meet the target flow, no lake water will be released.

"Lake Okeechobee has risen 3 feet in the past seven weeks due to Hurricane Ian and Nicole," said Col. James Booth, Jacksonville District commander on Nov. 18. "We had paused our releases for Hurricane Nicole and have not made releases since the storm. Based on conditions in the lake, we must begin releases to help manage

lake levels. We have worked together with our partners and stakeholders to understand how lake releases could affect conditions in the Caloosahatchee River Estuary at this time. We are making our decision looking ahead toward next wet season and are developing a seasonal strategy where we aim to manage lake levels by making beneficial releases to the extent possible. To curtail the high-volume releases that our plan calls for right now, we are going to utilize our make-up release tool which allows us to make releases at lower levels and bank the volume not released."

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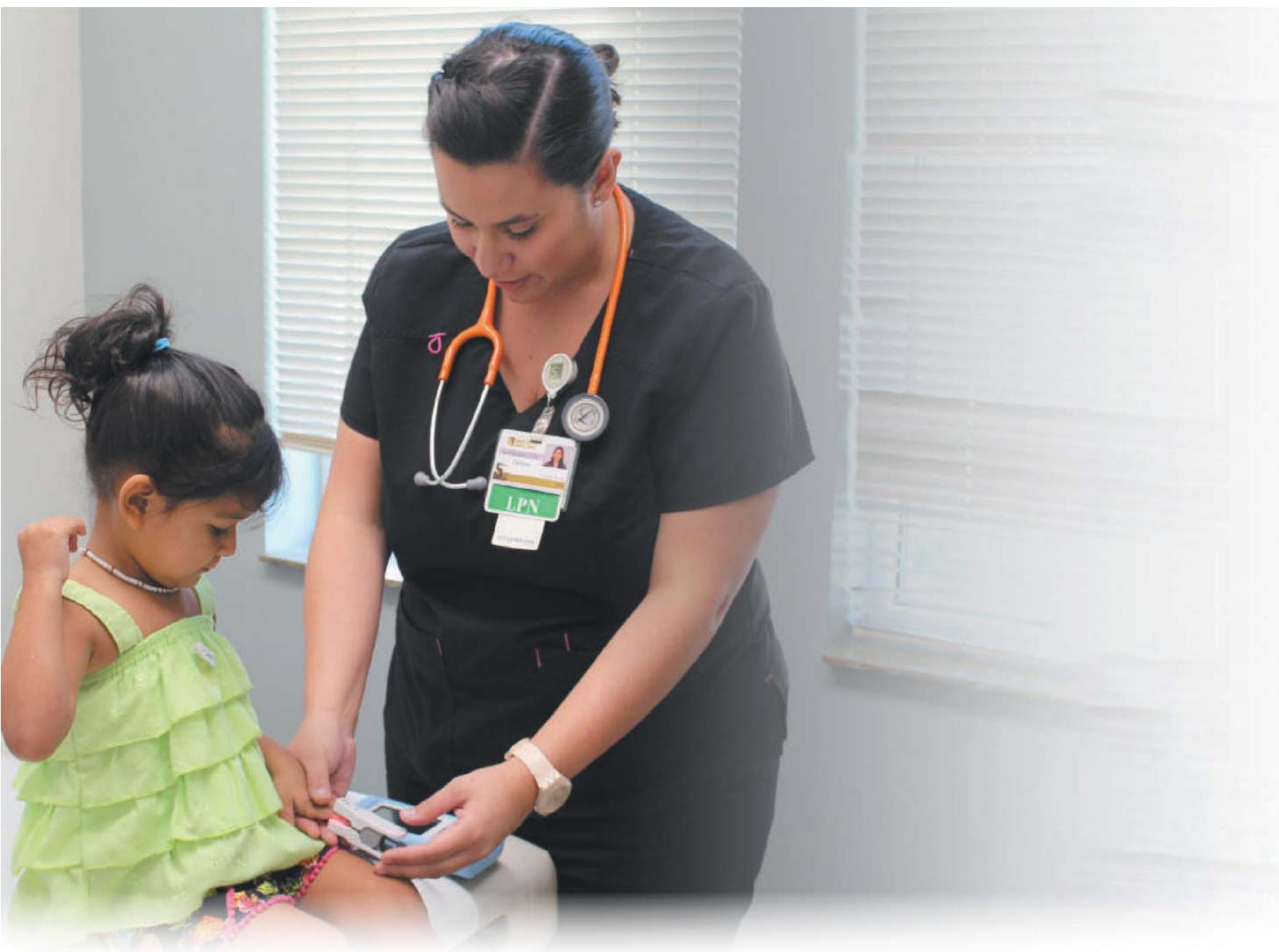
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THINGS TO DO

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:

- Pizza & Hot Dogs available: 11 a.m. till close, Sunday thru Thursday; 11 a.m. -1 a.m. Friday and Saturday; 11 a.m. -1 p.m. - Happy Hour, Monday - Friday.

- **Dec. 2, 9, 16, 23, 30** - Friday FISH FRY - 5-7 p.m. \$14; Assorted fish (baked or fried), crabcakes, chicken & chicken nuggets, baked potato or french fries, cole slaw, roll; Auxiliary serving an assortment of desserts for \$1. Public welcome! Dine In or take out. Karaoke begins at 7 p.m.

- **Dec. 2, 3; 9, 10; 16, 17; 23, 24; 30, 31** - Friday & Saturdays - Karaoke begins at 7 p.m.

- **Dec. 14** - Wednesday - Auxiliary lasagna dinner with tossed salad, garlic bread and dessert from 5-7 p.m. for \$8.00. Public welcome.

- **Dec. 14** - Wednesday - Christmas Cookie Sale from 5-7 p.m. - One dozen cookies in Christmas tin for \$6. Select your favorite cookies

- **Dec. 25** - Sunday - Christmas dinners - The LaBelle American Legion will be taking the names of veterans, disabled, seniors, shut-ins, or needy families unable to have a Christmas dinner. Someone must be home to receive the dinners between 10:30 a.m. - 1 p.m. on Christmas Day. The Legion needs name, address, phone number and number of meals to be delivered. Please call the American Legion between Thursday, Dec. 15 and Wednesday, Dec. 21 at 863-675-8300.

American Legion Post 130 Meetings: All members welcome.

- **Dec. 1** - first Thursday - 7 p.m. - DAV - Disabled American Veterans -

meeting at Christ Central Church on East S.R. 80.

- **Dec. 7** - first Wednesday - 7 p.m. - American Legion Riders meeting.
- **Dec. 8** - second Thursday - 6:30 p.m. - The American Legion
- **Dec. 14** - second Wednesday - 6 p.m. - SAL - Sons of the American Legion

- **Dec. 15** - third Thursday - 6 p.m. - American Legion Auxiliary meeting

VFW Post 10100 hosts events

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

- Friday, **Dec. 2**, Meatloaf dinner served at 5 p.m.
- Saturday, **Dec. 3**, Randy White Karaoke begins at 5 p.m.
- Saturday, **Dec. 10**, Grilled chicken quarter dinner served at 5 p.m. Music by Dawn Renee Entertainment begins at 5 p.m.

- Friday, **Dec. 16**, Chinese Gift Exchange Party at 5 p.m.
- Saturday, **Dec. 17**, Ugly Sweater Party begins at 6 p.m.
- Saturday, **Dec. 17**, Grilled pork dinner served at 5 p.m. Music by Moore 2 Music begins at 5 p.m.

- Saturday, **Dec. 24**, Spaghetti and meatball dinner served at 5 p.m. Music by Steve White Karaoke begins at 5 p.m.
- Saturday, **Dec. 31**, New Year's Eve Bash begins at 5 p.m., bring finger foods to share. Music by Richard Smith Entertainment.

- 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 first, third and fourth Wednesday night Richard Smith Entertainment is in the house at 5 p.m.
- Friday, **Dec. 16**, is live

- Every Friday night a jam session will begin at 6 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.

For further information call 863-675-8008.

Moose Lodge hosts events

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

- Friday, **Dec. 16**, is live

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pel message in every song. There is no charge but a love offering will be taken in support of their ministry.

Medicare Open Enrollment

Medicare Open Enrollment continues on Tuesdays and Thursdays through Dec. 7. SHINE is offering Medicare counseling events by phone. To schedule an appointment, call the Elder Helpline at 866-413-5337.

Shine counselors provide free, personalized, unbiased and confidential plan comparisons during the Open Enrollment periods, helping Medicare beneficiaries make an informed health insurance decision for the upcoming year.

Visit www.aaaswfl.org or www.floridashine.org for opportunities to learn more about Medicare.

entertainment from 7 to 10 p.m.

- Saturday, **Dec. 31** is the New Year's Party from 8:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m.

Tuesdays are open pool table all day and tournaments at 6 p.m. With taco and taco salad specials from 6 to 9 p.m.!

Karaoke at 7 p.m. on Wednesdays! With wing special \$.75 each! Kitchen open from 6 to 9 p.m.

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

Saturdays has special dinners from 5 to 7 p.m. Entertainment from 7 to 10 p.m.

Sundays is brunch from noon to 3 p.m.

Not a member? Stop by and check us out, Guests are welcome! The lodge is located at 230 Jaycee Lions Drive in LaBelle. For information, call 863-230-6154.

Audubon offers birding trips

CLEWISTON — The Hendry Glades Audubon and SFWMD offers escorted birding trips to Stormwater Treatment Area 5/6 on **Dec. 3** and **Dec. 17**, a.m. For information email Margaret England at hgaudubon@gmail.com or leave a message at 863-517-0202.

Shop at the Outdoor Market

LABELLE — The Outdoor Saturday Market will be held on Saturday, **Dec. 3** and **Jan. 7** from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Shop from Barron Library, 461 N. Main St. to Barron Park along the City Wharf.

Concert at Caloosa Baptist

LABELLE — Caloosa Baptist Church, 550 W. Hickpochee Ave. (SR 80), invites you to join them Sunday, **Dec. 4**, at 6 p.m. for a concert with The Kramers. This family group brings a variety of musical styles, beautiful harmonies, skilled instrumentation and a sweet gos-

pel message in every song. There is no charge but a love offering will be taken in support of their ministry.

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. The LaBelle High School Kiwanis Key Club and West Glades Middle School Builders Club students will be on hand to add to the excitement. 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 239-564-2005.

Visit the DAV Flea Market

LABELLE — LaBelle Disabled American Flea Market is held on **Saturdays**, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., at 228 Miller Avenue.

Sewing Club meets on Mondays

LABELLE — The First Bank, 301 W. Hickpochee, rescheduled their Customer Appreciation Day to Thursday, **Dec. 8** from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Join them for food, a raffle, and First Bank merchandise.

Living Healthy Workshop scheduled

LABELLE — Join the Area Agency on Aging for SWFL for a FREE Living Healthy Workshop designed to help: manage chronic health conditions; deal with pain, stress, fatigue; support healthy nutrition; and find connection. The workshop will take place at Hope Connections, 475 E. Cowboy Way in the Dining Hall on Tuesdays through **Dec. 19** from 1 to 3:30 p.m. To register, call 239-652-6914.

Kiwanis hosts Kids Day

Kiwanis Kids Day has been rescheduled to **Jan.**

Do you have, or do you know someone who has, a child in the Military? We would love to keep you company along the often challenging, but always rewarding journey of being a Military Mom! Blue Star Mothers of America is a national, non-profit 501(c)3 service organization which serves our troops, and our military families through programs, activities, and service projects. We are mothers, stepmothers,

» See THINGS TO DO on Page 19

grandmothers, foster mothers, and female legal guardians in Lee, Collier and Hendry counties who have children serving in the military, guard or reserves. Our mission is to support our military, military families, and each other, while promoting patriotism. For information, email: President. FL12@BlueStarMothers.us or visit our website: GCFBSM. weebly.com.

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 Angie or Jody at 863-674-1441.

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.

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 infor-

mation about community and medical help. Call 863-675-1576 for more information.

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 information, please call or text Nikki 239-564-2005.

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, 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 meets in the Grace building of Caloosa Baptist Church, 550 W. Hickpochee Ave. in LaBelle.

To register, call or text Cindy at 863-673-3855.

Transportation for veterans available

Transportation is available for to and from the Affairs Medical

Center in West Palm Beach and the VA clinic in Cape Coral. Vans can only transport two at a time and they must sit in the back seats.

Veterans must wear mask at all times while in the van, the service cannot transport wheelchairs. Van scheduling number 863-675-5255. Disabled American Van Transport to West Palm Beach VAMC on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, leaving at 5:30 a.m. return 11 a.m. Disabled American Van Transport to Lee County (Cape Coral Clinic) on Monday, Wednesday and Friday leaving at 5:30 a.m. return 11 a.m.

Woman's Club to meet

You're Invited! 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.

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@inusa.org. Deadline for the January edition of the Caloosa Belle Independent is Dec. 16. You can also post news items on our website calendar at southcentralfloridalife.com at no charge.

Christmas Happenings

Christmas Parade is Dec. 2

LABELLE — The Light Up LaBelle Christmas Parade will be held on Friday, Dec. 2, at 6 p.m.. The parade begins at Dollar General at N. Main St. and S.R. 80 and proceeds north on Main St. to conclude at Barron Park. Festivities in Barron Park will include pictures with Santa, movies in the park and much more. For parade registration, call Julia at 239-284-6182.

Woman's Club plans Trees of Joy

The GFFWC LaBelle Community Woman's Club will host Trees of Joy on Dec. 2 and 3. The club invites the public to view the trees while sipping hot cocoa, visiting with Santa and getting in the holiday spirit. The 863 Alliance will be there collecting toys for the Annual Christmas Outreach for underprivileged children in Hendry and Glades counties. To register or for information, email treesofjoy-labelle@gmail.com.

Light Up Your Business

LABELLE — City of LaBelle businesses can join the Light Up Your Business contest. Judging will be Saturday, Dec. 10 and the winner will be announced Wednesday, Dec. 14.

Join a Christmas Sing-A-Long

LABELLE — Firehouse Community will hold their eighth annual Christmas Sing-A-Long to benefit Toys for Tots on Sunday, Dec. 11 at 7 p.m. Admission is \$10 or an unwrapped new toy worth at least \$10.

LaBelle Christmas Boat Parade is Dec. 21

LABELLE — The LaBelle Christmas Boat Parade, hosted by East Coast Marine, will be held on Wednesday, Dec. 21. Departure time is 7 p.m. and begins at Barron Park, 1559 De Soto Ave. The parade will be lead by the Hendry County Sheriff's Department. All interested boaters/skippers contact the East Coast Marine at 721 N. Bridge St., by phone at 863-674-1680, or by email at nellie4898@gmail.com. There will be first, second and third place prizes for decorated boats.

WISHING YOU A

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!



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MS. VETERAN

LaBelle veteran places in top 10 of Ms. Veteran America®

By Carel Schmidkrofer

CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE – Elmira Johnson, a LaBelle Navy veteran focused on helping other veterans in Hendry County, rated in the top 10 of the 2022 Ms. Veteran America® competition held in Orlando on Oct. 30.

Johnson was one of 25 finalists in the event ranging in ages from 19 to 70-years-old, including retired, active duty, reservists and veterans who are judged on military

history – specifically women's military history – physical endurance, enlisted women with families, community service and a resilience award for overcoming personal tragedy along with an evening wear competition.

The proceeds of the competition funds housing for women veterans and their children through Final Salute, Inc., a Virginia-based nonprofit dedicated to their plight with help finding them housing when most temporary facilities

won't accept children. Since 2020, Final Salute, Inc. has provided over 17,000 temporary housing options and raised over \$3 million to support more than 8,000 women veterans and their children in over 30 states and territories helping the estimated 55,000 homeless women veterans across the country – with more than half being single mothers.

"They didn't give specifics [about] placement (in the competition)," Johnson said. "But I was in the top 10 when they went

to the top three."

Johnson said participating was a fun and humbling experience, where she enjoyed being surrounded by empowering women "all strong – strong and beautiful," she said.

She said she believes in the reason behind the competition, which brings awareness to the growing number of homeless women veterans.

"The only way we can eradicate this is to bring awareness to be able to provide assistance," she said. "I plan

on staying involved in the competition in one capacity or another."

Johnson has worked with the Hendry County Commission for the past 17 years, the last year specifically in the county's Veteran Services program, which focuses on helping local veterans get their Veterans Administration benefits be it disability or death and compensation, that sometimes veterans themselves don't know they are entitled to.



Elmira Johnson, a LaBelle Navy veteran, has placed in the top 10 of the 2022 Ms. Veteran America® competition [Courtesy photo]

CONTROVERSY

Tire recycling facility proposed in LaBelle

By Katrina Elskens

CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE – A tire recycling business is proposed on a 16-acre property south of E. Lincoln Avenue, approximately 800 feet east of South Bridge Street. The business would be limited to indoor recycling of tires.

At the Nov. 16 meeting of the LaBelle City Commission, commission members expressed concern there would be an unsightly pile of tires outside the business.

The applicant said all the materials would be inside the building. He said there would be no burning and no odor created. The recycling machines shred the tires which are then used in road construction, for speed bumps and for other items.

Commissioners also expressed concerns about

semis coming in and out. There are two proposed means of ingress and egress to the site. Primary access will be provided from E. Lincoln Avenue. A second point of ingress and egress is proposed to the south on Grand Avenue.

The applicant has proposed that the industrial buildings be setback a minimum of 250' from the front property line along E. Lincoln Avenue, which is adjacent to residential development. The building proposed in the northern portion of the site.

During public comments, several people who own property in the neighborhood voiced objections to siting a recycling business within the city. City officials noted the property is already zoned as industrial.

Concerns included the

safety issues regarding the heavy trucks coming and going from the site, noise and pollution. They also complained some property owners in the area were not notified of the meeting.

"I don't want to move out of LaBelle, but I would have to move," said one property owner. "I couldn't afford another house here."

The property is currently zoned Industrial.

Junior Sanchez said it would be positive for LaBelle because they would pick up tires that are illegally dumped. "I've been planning this for 20 years," he said. "It will bring a lot of taxes, a lot of workers."

He said the building will be 400 feet in length and 185 feet in width. The business will employ about 15 people.

"We're going to be one of the largest on the west

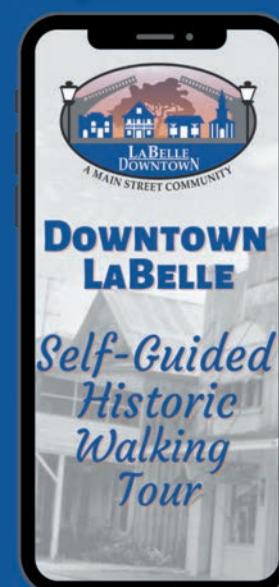
coast of Florida," he said.

"Something like this should not be in any city limits," said one property

owner. He suggested the city require an 8-foot high concrete block fence around the facility.

The commission tabled the matter until the Feb. 9 meeting.

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Caloosa Belle Independent now offers a user-friendly obituaries platform

A new feature has launched on SouthCentralFloridaLife.com to help readers who have lost a loved one by hosting an easier way to submit an obituary from the comfort of their homes.

Caloosa Belle Independent showcases a user-friendly platform at <https://www.southcentralfloridalife.com/obituaries/>. This platform features paid obituaries as well as memorials to celebrate your loved one's precious life.

Once posted, the obituary goes live on the site of your choosing, and our obituaries are picked up by Google alerts.

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DONATION

First Bank donates \$100,000 to Hurricane Ian Relief

SPECIAL TO CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

CLEWISTON — First Bank has pledged to donate \$100,000 to six organizations that are helping with the Hurricane Ian relief project. The six nonprofits are as follows:

1. Collaboratory/Unit-ed Way,

2. Samaritan's Purse,
3. Harry Chapin Food Bank,
4. Rotary District 6960,
5. Florida Gulf Coast University, and
6. Florida SouthWestern State College.

First Bank selected these six organizations because they are making boots-on-the-ground efforts to help those in Southwest Florida impacted by Hurricane Ian.

First Bank is also setting aside \$25,000 of this donation to match any employee contributions and hours volunteered to help in the restoration cause during this time of great need.

BARRON PARK LaBelle approves food trucks

By C. M. Schmidlkofer
CALOOSA BELLE INDEPENDENT

LABELLE — A vote approving a special exception resolution for food trucks at Barron Park squeaked by during the Oct. 13 LaBelle BOC meeting, with Mayor Julie Wilkins casting the dissenting vote.

The board was down one member and the measure passed 3-1 to allow food trucks at the park for a one-year trial period for months October through May. And although organizer Kelly Boone, LaBelle Downtown Revitalization Corporation, wanted to allow the trucks to remain open until 8 p.m., the board voted to limit food service until 7:30 p.m. and trucks to be out of the park by 8 p.m.

Food trucks will be scheduled at the park Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays starting at 11 a.m. and at the same hours one Sunday a month, which will be scheduled around any community events on a month-to-month basis.

Boone said an interested party in LaBelle has inquired about the program, something that Commissioner Bonnie Spratt asked about at last month's board meeting when Boone presented the proposal.

Commissioners and the mayor continued with concerns over how a food truck would impact brick

and mortar restaurants in town during those discussions, and Wilkins still had concerns during the October meeting.

Wilkins worried how local restaurants would be impacted, saying at least one owner approached her about losing business to food trucks that don't pay taxes or otherwise contribute to the community as brick-and-mortar eateries do.

"You don't know the food trucks that are coming aren't going to be contributing to the community," Boone said, adding that at this time no one knows how the food truck effort will play out.

Wilkins agreed but said historically the brick-and-mortar restaurants make more money than a food truck and hire more employees.

"And because it's a restaurant, they are contributing to the community in that way as well," she said.

Wilkins also pushed for a reduction in evening hours of operation, preferring the trucks to be in the park for lunch time crowds rather than evening diners.

Boone said she would consider limiting evening hours on Sundays to 6 p.m., but otherwise defended her later weekday hours citing difficulties diners have

finding an eatery that's open after a long day at work, and that a food truck is a convenient option for them and especially if they have children, where one can order food quickly and easily on the go.

Commissioner Bonnie Spratt preferred keeping the food trucks open later on Sundays as most restaurants are closed on Sundays. The later hours would provide better service for residents, although she'd like to see them close at 7 p.m. rather than 8 p.m.

Boone reminded the commission of the benefits to LaBelle the food trucks would bring including the daily rental of \$20 that would go into the park's improvement efforts and the opportunity for those driving through the city to stop and explore LaBelle after dining at a food truck.

She added the project would indicate the potential for a future waterfront restaurant there depending on the response from the community and visitors.

Boone said vendors will be able to apply for rentals on a schedule she will provide on the LDRC website.

"If we get a lot of interest, we might do it on a week-to-week basis and maybe do a lottery for the one Sunday a month," she said.

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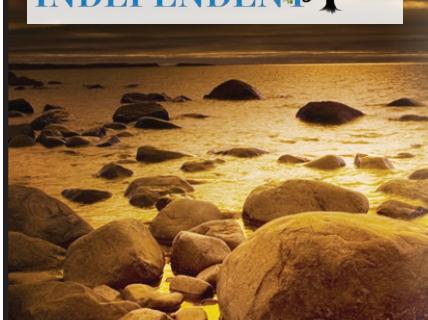
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A new feature has launched on SouthCentralFloridaLife.com to help readers who have lost a loved one by hosting an easier way to submit an obituary from the comfort of their homes.

Caloosa Belle Independent showcases a user-friendly platform at <https://www.southcentralfloridalife.com/obituaries/>. This platform features paid obituaries as well as memorials to celebrate your loved one's precious life.

Once posted, the obituary goes live on the site of your choosing, and our obituaries are picked up by Google alerts.

Central County Water Drainage District is looking to hire a **Heavy Equipment Operator**. Duties include, Operating a variety of construction and maintenance equipment such as bulldozers, graders, rollers, tractor mounted augers, trenchers, front end loaders, excavators, dump trucks • Moves and loads supplies and materials; • Typical duties include grading levees, grading roads, clearing trees, clearing fence lines, hauling materials, excavations and back filling, etc., as well as operating tractors and mowers mowing geographic area of responsibility. Performs operator maintenance on equipment operated including cleaning, oiling, lubricating, making minor adjustments. Must have a high school diploma or GED, also must possess valid and clean CDL driver's license. We are a drug free work place and will be subject to drug screening and background check.

Applications may be picked up at Central County Water Drainage District, 475 S. Cabbage Palm Street, Clewiston FL (Montura Ranch Estates) 33440.



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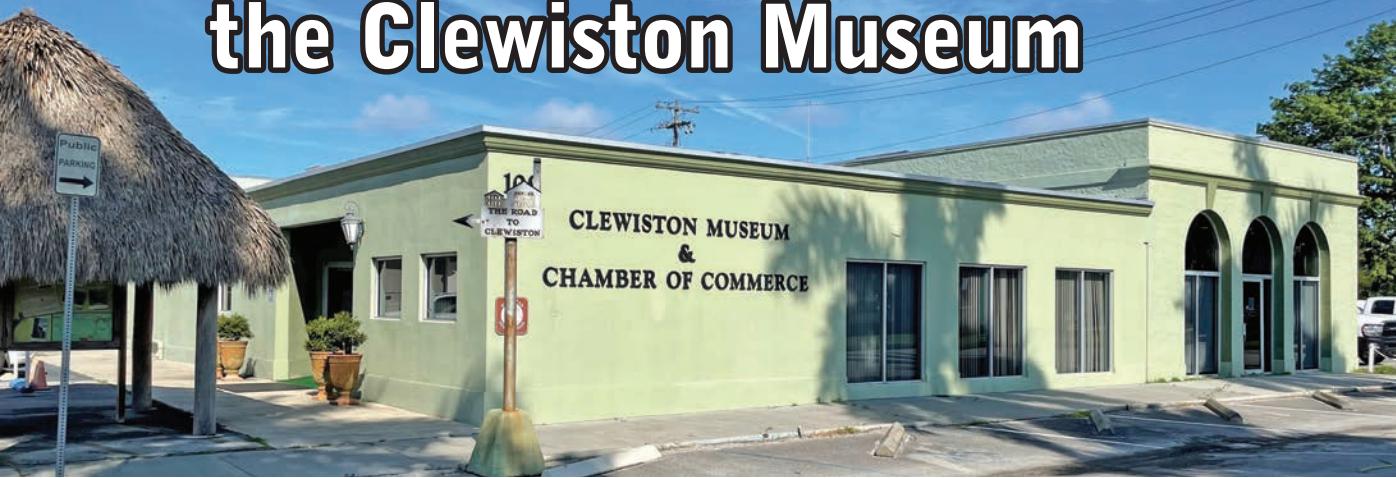
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Check out local history at the Clewiston Museum



CLEWISTON - If you are interested in South Florida history, check out the Clewiston Museum.

The museum has an impressive collection of fossils and historical artifacts, including a dugong that dates back 10 million years, mammoth and mastodon fossils, and an exhibit about prehistoric Native American culture.

Other exhibits chronicle the history of fishing on Lake Okeechobee, the construction of the Herbert Hoover Dike, the Royal Air Force flight training school at Riddle Field that was here during WWII, the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation, the cattle and sugar industries and more.

Take time to relax in the museum's theater and view films on the history of Clewiston and how sugar is made. A virtual reality exhibit will take you on a tractor through a sugar cane field and then into the sugar mill.

The museum helps those who are doing research or looking for historical photos or information. A wonderful archive of photos from the area dates back to the 1910s. The museum also houses the archives of the weekly editions of the Clewiston News from 1928 – 2009.

In the museum's theater, you'll find the Sue Corbin and Louise Sullivan Glades Art Gallery, which is specific to Glades area artists and showcases their talent.

When you visit the museum, be sure to check out the Picker's Corner as you come through the door to check out the interesting vintage items and antiques. You'll also want to visit the Museum Gift Shop, which is stocked full of local goodies and historical books.

To learn more, visit the website at www.theclewistonmuseum.org. The Clewiston Museum is located at 109 Central Avenue in Clewiston. The hours of operation of Monday-Friday from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. and on Saturday by appointment. Admission is \$10 for adults, \$8 for seniors and \$5 for students and children. For more information, call 863-983-2870 or via email at clewistonmuseum@embarqmail.com.

The Clewiston Museum is a private not-for-profit organization.



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FORT MYERS	11 ACRES AT I-75 AT BAYSHORE RD		\$1,950,000
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