

Weightlifting: County teams competed in GC8 meet / B1

THURSDAY
TODAY & next morning
HIGH **77**
LOW **64**
Cloudy, storms likely. Some could be heavy.
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CITRUS COUNTY CHRONICLE



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IN BRIEF

Attend the Chronicle's home, outdoor show

Attend the Citrus County Chronicle's Spring Home and Outdoor Show from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. March 12 at the Florida National Guard Armory, 8551 W. Venable St. in Crystal River.

Meet helpful and knowledgeable home improvement vendors including remodeling, decorating, kitchen and baths, flooring, windows, solar, landscaping, roofing, heating and air conditioning and much more.

For more information, visit chronicleonline.com/events/homeshow.

MOAA to sponsor talk by commissioner

The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) Citrus County Chapter welcomes veterans and the public to attend a MOAA-sponsored speaker presentation by Citrus County Commissioner Holly L. Davis.

The event takes place starting at 10 a.m. Thursday, March 10, at the American Legion Post 155, 6585 W. Gulf-to-Lake Highway, Crystal River.

Davis will speak on county issues and solutions, especially those affecting veterans in Citrus County.

For more information and registration, go to the MOAA Citrus County Chapter website upcoming events calendar at: <https://moaaf.org/Chapters/CitrusCounty>.

Supervisor of Elections to be at library

The Supervisor of Elections office invites the public to visit them at the Citrus Springs Library from 10 a.m. to noon on March 10 at the Citrus Springs Library, 1826 W. Country Club Drive, Citrus Springs.

This is a convenient way to register to vote, make changes to voter records, or request a vote-by-mail ballot. Information to apply for election worker positions will also be available.

To learn more, visit votecitrus.gov, email vote@votecitrus.gov or call 352-564-7120.

State budget votes expected Monday

Senate President Wilton Simpson said negotiations on the state budget could be completed Thursday, setting up final votes on the package Monday.

Legislative leaders acknowledged Tuesday night the need to extend the 60-day session beyond the scheduled completion on Friday, as work continued on the spending plan. Simpson, R-Trilby, announced at the start of a Senate floor session on Wednesday the work is expected to be completed Thursday.

"We may or may not be here Friday, but we will certainly come back Monday, I believe, to vote on the budget," Simpson said. "We will debate it. We will have everything ready to go and probably come about noon Monday to vote on the budget, and that would be the final act of business."

Substitute teacher pay will increase

School board talks growth in Citrus County

By HANNAH SACHEWICZ
Chronicle Reporter

It's official – substitute teacher pay has increased effective March 9.

The pay raise came to fruition at Tuesday evening's Citrus County School Board meeting, following a discussion between district officials and board members at February's workshop.

The conversation was originally sparked due to a shortage in substitute teachers, which Superintendent Sandra "Sam" Himmel told the board was not specific to Citrus County.

Due to the shortage, and subsequent underutilization of the substitute budget for the current school year, school board member Thomas Kennedy suggested the pay be increased as soon as possible.

Two weeks later, it was. Instructional substitutes are now being paid between \$15 and \$25 more per day, depending on degree level and certification.

Board members also talked growth in Citrus County, as district planning director Chuck Dixon updated them on upcoming residential projects that may impact school capacity in the future.

According to Dixon, projects include:

- Wyld Palms: 230 units off Turner Camp Road in Inverness;
- Eisenhower Develop-

ment Group project: 830 units on Citrus Springs Boulevard;

■ Crystal Ridge: 957 units bordering Crystal Oaks and Cinnamon Ridge in Lecanto;

■ Lecanto Preserve: 608 units at the intersection of County Road 491 and State Road 44 in Lecanto;

■ Tuscan Ranch: 7,000

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Matthew Beck / Chronicle photo editor

Mary Kay Pavilionis, left, and Gail Roughgarden, both volunteers with the Friends of the Citrus County Library, pore through in this 2020 photograph.

Nonprofit Spotlight: Friends of the Citrus County Library System

By HANNAH SACHEWICZ
Chronicle Reporter

Editor's note: Every community depends on the resources and support that nonprofit agencies provide people, whether physical, material or emotional.

The Chronicle's ongoing series, Nonprofit Spotlight, profiles the nonprofit agencies in Citrus County that exist to help make life better for us all.

To have your nonprofit organization considered for a spotlight, here's the link to an online form you can fill out: chronicle.com/site/forms/nonprofit_spotlight.

Friends, not foes

The Friends of the Citrus County Library System (FOCCLS) are just that – friends.

FOCCLS was established in 2001 when three Friends of the Library groups – Central Ridge, Coastal Region and Lakes Region – joined together as a nonprofit. Later, in 2018, the Floral City Friends of the Library joined.

"Our day-to-day work focuses on raising funds for the Citrus County Library System (CCLS) through our book sales," FOCCLS president Sandy Price said.

They also work to stimulate greater interest in local libraries, promote knowledge of functions, services, resources and needs of the library and encourage gifts, endowments and bequests to the library system.

"We want to help our library system provide the finest level of service to the people of Citrus County," Price said.

Friends' fan favorite: The Mega Sale

This weekend, FOCCLS volunteers will be booked and busy.

Every year, FOCCLS hosts two Mega Sales, offering a wide variety of gently used books and puzzles. COVID-19 canceled Mega Sales in the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021, but the sale made its grand return in October 2021. This weekend, the sale is back again at the Citrus County Auditorium, 3610 S. Florida Ave. in Inverness.

During the four-day sale, shoppers can expect the following:

- Opening day: 3 to 7 p.m. March 11 with a \$5 entry donation at the door
- Sale continues: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. March 12
- Half-priced day: 9 a.m.

to 3 p.m. March 13
■ Clearance bag day: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

"Our customers at the sales are thrilled to have access to such a wide assortment of books," Price said. "The library system is thrilled to receive our checks to support their book acquisition needs."

While browsing at your local branch of the CCLS, look for the blue dots on the spines of library books. Those books were purchased by funds raised from FOCCLS book sales.

Volunteers are vital

As a 100 percent volunteer-run organization, Price said FOCCLS' love of books and libraries keeps them motivated. On a regular basis, 15 volunteers

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Crystal Ridge housing proposal passes hurdle

By MICHAEL D. BATES
Chronicle Reporter

The 957-home Crystal Ridge development passed another hurdle Tuesday when county commissioners voted unanimously to send the project to the state for review.

The development will border Crystal Oaks and Cinnamon Ridge in Lecanto. The county's Planning and Development Commission (PDC) in January also voted unanimously to approve the application – with amended conditions – and found it consistent with the county's comprehensive plan and land development codes.

Civil Engineer Chuck Pigeon, with Pigeon-Ardurra in Ocala, told commissioners the development would be built in four phases. He also outlined the use of "green" open spaces, which will comprise 70 of the 354 acres.

That pleased Commissioner Holly Davis, who liked the energy-saving features of the project.

"It looks wonderful," she said. "That's the way of the future."

Some of the amenities

See **HOUSING**, page A2

55 tons of lettuce fed to Florida's starving manatees

By CURT ANDERSON
Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG — More than 55 tons of lettuce have been fed to starving Florida manatees as part of an experimental program to help the slow-moving marine mammals since their natural food is being destroyed by water pollution, wildlife officials said Wednesday.

The lettuce, funded by more than 1,000 individual donations, is offered to manatees that gather in the warm water discharge near a power plant on Florida's east coast as they typically do during cold months.

Officials from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Rebecca Blackwell / AP

An adult and young manatee swim together in a canal Feb. 16 in Coral Gables. The experimental program to feed Florida manatees starving because water pollution is destroying their natural food has topped 55 tons of lettuce, wildlife officials said Wednesday.

said in a conference call that the feeding program has made a difference.

"That's a substantial amount," said Ron Mezich,

feeding program coordinator for the Florida wildlife commission. "We're not done yet."

The unprecedented feed-

ing response came after a record 1,100 manatees died last year, largely because of starvation. The problem requires a long-term solution because pollution from agriculture, septic tanks, urban runoff and other sources is killing the seagrass on which the marine mammals rely.

Through Feb. 25 this year, about 375 confirmed manatee deaths have been recorded. That compares to 389 during the same period last year; both are far above the 136 deaths reported in 2020 during the first two months.

More than 80 rescued manatees are currently being cared for at facilities in Florida, Texas, Puerto Rico and Ohio, according to Terri Calleson of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Some

of those are abandoned calves that typically take longer to recover.

Florida legislators last year provided \$8 million for several seagrass restoration projects that will get off the ground this year, officials said. But it won't be an immediate solution.

"We're not solving the seagrass issue in a year," said Tom Reinert of the Florida wildlife commission.

There are currently about 7,500 manatees, also known as sea cows, living in Florida waters. They are listed federally as a threatened species, although there are efforts to give them the heightened endangered designation.

The approach of warmer

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