



## IN BRIEF

### Boat launch passes available now

As of Jan. 1, boat launch fees took effect at the following County-maintained boat ramps: Fort Island Gulf Beach, Fort Island Trail Park, Hernando Beach, and MacRae's. No other county boat ramps currently require launch fees. The fees collected will be used to maintain and improve Citrus County boat ramps.

Customers will have the option to pay the fees by downloading the Premium Parking app, using a QR code located at the ramps or contacting the customer service payment line at 844-236-2011. Customers can choose to pay the daily launch fee or register for the resident or non-resident annual passes directly through the Premium Parking website.

To purchase a daily or annual pass, visit the Premium Parking website at [premiumparking.com/city/citrus-county](http://premiumparking.com/city/citrus-county) or call 844-236-2011 and dial "0" to speak to a representative. For any issues acquiring a pass, contact Parks and Recreation at 352-527-7540.

### Supervisor of Elections to have outreach event

The Supervisor of Elections office invites the public to visit them from 9 to 11 a.m. March 17 at the Lecanto Government Building, 3600 W. Sovereign Path in Lecanto.

This is a convenient way to register to vote, make changes to your voter record or request a vote-by-mail ballot. Information to apply for election worker positions will also be available. To host the elections office staff at your organization or business, contact Supervisor Maureen 'Mo' Baird.

For more information, visit [votecitrus.gov](http://votecitrus.gov), email [vote@votecitrus.gov](mailto:vote@votecitrus.gov) or call 352-564-7120.

### County to close portion of West Riverwood Drive for drain replacement

Citrus County Road Maintenance will be closing a portion of West Riverwood Drive near Crystal River for a day to replace a cross drain.

West Riverwood Drive will be shut down to traffic Wednesday, March 23, from the Inglis Dam Recreation Area entrance to 1,000 feet west of West Notch Path, and is expected to reopen later in the day by close of business, according to the county.

Motorists will need to seek alternative routes during the work, and the county is planning to post signage in the area March 16 to give travelers advanced notice.

For more information, contact county road maintenance at 352-527-7610.

# Riverwalk project fully funded

## Construction will begin in 2023

By MICHAEL D. BATES  
Chronicle Reporter

The King's Bay Riverwalk project is now fully funded and construction slated to start in 2023.

Legislators earmarked \$3 million for the project in the state budget announced Monday.

Crystal River City Manager Ken Frink thanked Sen. Wilton Simpson, Rep.

Ralph Massullo and all the legislators "for investing in Crystal River and the entire Citrus County."

The additional money, he said, can be used for lighting, parking and other public improvements directly related to the Riverwalk. The entire project will cost an estimated \$8.6 million.

"We are in the final stages of permitting for the Riverwalk through the state," Frink told the Chronicle. "Once that and the federal permits are secured, we can start construction at the conclusion of the 22/23 manatee season."

Crystal River Mayor Joe Meek also thanked Simpson, Massullo, House Speaker Chris Sprowls and the entire state Legislature for all the projects receiving state dollars through

the budget. They include: ■ The King's Bay Restoration Project: \$10 million ■ The Homosassa River Restoration Project: \$10 million ■ The Academy of Environmental Sciences Septic-to-Sewer project: \$250,000 ■ The Citrus High School Canes Construction Academy: \$162,200 ■ Crystal River Airport runway extension and environmental assessment: \$7.1 million. ■ Crystal River Turkey

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Oak bypass: \$20.7 million. ■ Habitat for Humanity at Citrus Springs: \$2.5 million. ■ Fort Island Trail multi-use path: \$9.25 million.

"These projects will have a major impact on Crystal River, Citrus County, and the state of Florida," Meek said. "We have a strong partnership with the state government and are very appreciative for all their support."

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FRINK



MEEK



Matthew Beck / Chronicle photo editor

Newfound sisters Rose Brechka of Pine Ridge, left, and Pattie Cilen of The Villages visit with one another Thursday, March 10, reflecting on the discovery of the additional members of their family. The two ladies share the same father.

# Finding family

## Woman's ancestry search reveals more than she even imagined

By NANCY KENNEDY  
Chronicle Reporter

Every family has its skeletons in the closet, those things no one talks about except in whispers, if at all.

For Rose Brechka's family, it was her father, John Lester. Sometime before she was 4, her father went out for a pack of cigarettes and never returned.

John Lester was Pattie Cilen's father too, although she hadn't know anything about Rose or Rose's younger brother, Jerry.

Pattie knew about the family of four boys she sometimes visited, the boys who lived with John Lester and a woman who wasn't her mother.

The boys even came to her house for her birthday party, but Pattie didn't know that the boys were her half-brothers.

And she certainly didn't know about Rose and Jerry and their mother.

No one knew, or no one talked about, the fact that Pattie's father and the boys' father and Rose's father were all the same man, John Lester. (If that was even his real name.)

That information wouldn't be known until after 2018 — 66 years after John



Special to the Chronicle

An old photograph depicts members of the family, including the women's father.

Lester had died.

This is the story of how Rose Brechka, now 89, learned about at least some of the skeletons in her family's closet.

"I don't remember him at all," Brechka said from her home in Pine Ridge. "My mother was pregnant, and she and my father got married a month after I was born. That was a disgrace on the family back then."

"After he left, my mother never said anything, never mentioned him," she said.

When she was 6 or 7, Brechka, her mother and brother moved from Jersey City to Carteret, New Jersey, to live with her grandmother.

"It was a very small town," she said. "I was told, if anyone asked about my father I was to say he was dead. When I was 10, that's when I learned he had walked out."

Her brother, Jerry, was a troublemaker, and one day he was called into the principal's office for fighting with another boy.

When the principal told him she wanted to talk to his mother, Jerry told her that his mother was busy working.

When she said, "Then I want to see your father," Jerry replied, "You can't see him because he ran away."

"I was in the fourth grade and my brother was in second grade, and he knew about our father but I didn't," Brechka said. "I was called into the principal's office because she wanted to know the story, but I didn't know anything about it."

"So, when I went home that day I asked my grandmother, and that's when I found out he left us. It was a shock," she said.

See FAMILY, page A2

# Construction Academy set to get share of state budget

By HANNAH SACHEWICZ  
Chronicle Reporter

The Citrus Construction Academy at Citrus High School (CHS) is slated to receive \$253,200 of the \$112.1 billion budget passed by Florida lawmakers at the 2022 legislative

session.

Citrus County School District spokeswoman Lindsay Blair told the Chronicle the funds were requested to purchase new equipment to get the academy up and running at CHS.

"The first task is to find a teacher for the academy,

then the money can be used to start putting equipment in place," Blair said.

The funds will take effect July 1 and Gov. Ron DeSantis has line-item veto power. However, Citrus Construction Academy president Harold Walker said he feels confident they'll receive the

funds. "We feel our project is pretty safe."

Walker said he pitched the idea for the academy in 2016. Since then, it's come a long way, but there's work to be done.

Quoting a Chinese proverb, Walker said, "The best time to plant a tree was 20

years ago. The second best time is now."

"Today, we're going to be planting these trees," Walker said.

With classes set to start during the 2022-23 school year, the district is tasked

See ACADEMY, page A5

# COVID cases in county down

## Some fear new rise looming

By FRED HIERS  
Chronicle Reporter

Citrus County deaths and new coronavirus infections have fallen to rates not seen for months as the pandemic winds down here and throughout Florida.

The drop in cases and hospitalization was, in part, behind the Florida Department of Health's decision to roll back the public release of COVID-19 cases and deaths to once every two weeks rather than once a week.

The number of new coronavirus cases in Citrus County fell to 56 for the week ending March 10. That was a steep drop from 129 during the week ending March 3, according to COVID-19 data from the Florida Department of Health.

The number of local deaths due to the pandemic also fell to six for the week ending March 13. The week down from 11 during the week ending March 3, according to the Centers for Disease and Prevention.

That now brings the county's cumulative cases to 29,503 since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020. In Citrus County 950 people have died from the virus.

Florida is seeing a similar trend.

There were 8,835 new cases during the week ending March 13, according to the CDC. That was a 28 percent drop from the previous week. There have been nearly 5.83 million COVID-19 cases in Florida.

During the week ending March 13, Florida saw 72 deaths due to the pandemic. That puts Florida's cumulative death count at 72,039.

Just as new cases are declining, so are hospitalizations linked to the virus.

COVID-19 hospital admissions in Citrus County for the week ending March 12 fell to only five. That represented a 27 percent decline from the previous week, according to the CDC.

COVID-19 patients

See COVID, page A5