

Tennis: Lecanto girls lock down GC8 title / B1



THURSDAY
 TODAY & next morning
 HIGH **82**
 LOW **51**
 Showers and storms. Windy and cooler.
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CITRUS COUNTY CHRONICLE

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Florida's Best Community

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IN BRIEF

Chronicle seeks photos of graduating home-schooled seniors

The Chronicle wants to include graduating home-schooled seniors from Citrus County in the upcoming graduation tab for 2022. Also welcome are graduating seniors from out-of-county schools who reside in Citrus County.

Please email an attachment of the graduates' photo and his/her name to cconnolly@chronicleonline.com or mail the name and a photo to the Chronicle at 1624 N. Meadowcrest Blvd., Crystal River, FL 34429 no later than Thursday, April 14. Information and photos can also be dropped off at the front desk or in the front entrance mail slot at the Meadowcrest office in Crystal River.

Supervisor of Elections holding outreach event

To help citizens prepare for the upcoming Primary Election on August 23, the Supervisor of Elections office will be holding an outreach event at the Homosassa Post Office on April 14 from 9-11 a.m.

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.

Anyone interested in having the elections office staff at an organization or business, contact Supervisor Maureen 'Mo' Baird.

The Homosassa Post Office is located at 4610 S. Suncoast Blvd., Homosassa. To learn more, visit votecitrus.gov, email vote@votecitrus.gov, or call 352-564-7120.

Hernando Citrus MPO to meet in April

The Hernando/Citrus Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) will hold a public meeting at 1:30 p.m. on April 7 at the Brooksville City Hall, Council Chambers, 201 Howell Ave., Brooksville.

Items scheduled on the agenda include, but are not limited to:

- Hernando County Transportation Disadvantaged Local Coordinating Board Appointments
- Update from March 3 MPO Meeting
- FY 2021-2022 Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Amendment including Funding Agreement Amendment
- FY 2022-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Amendment
- FY 2023-2024 UPWP Draft
- Request to Extend Funding Grant Contract (5305)-G1W20
- Appointment to TBARTA Citizen Advisory Committee
- MPO Letter of Support - County Line Road
- Discussion - List of Priority Projects
- Addition of an MPO Financial Operation Assistant

Approximately one week prior to the meeting the meeting agenda may be viewed online at hernandocounty.us/hernandocitrusmpo.

The public is encouraged to attend. Any questions, contact Bob Esposito at 352-754-4082, ext. 28010, or email mpo@hernandocounty.us.

FDOT eyes U.S. 19 project completion

By MICHAEL D. BATES
 Chronicle Reporter

With all the hoopla surrounding the recent opening of the Suncoast Parkway and the controversial battle over a potential route for the Florida Turnpike extension, one major road project that's been going on for years has been out of the news: the widening of U.S. 19 through Homosassa and Crystal River.

The Chronicle asked the Florida Department of

Transportation (FDOT) for an update and here's the latest:

Homosassa

Work on widening a 2.1-mile stretch from West Green Acres Street to South Jump Court in Homosassa began in November 2016 and experienced numerous work stoppages over the years. It came to a complete halt in July 2021 when the original project contractor (D.A.B. Constructors) filed for bankruptcy.

Palm Harbor-based Nelson Construction picked up the contract and resumed work Jan. 3, 2022. The projected completion date is late 2022.

A "significant portion" of the stormwater drainage system still needs work, FDOT spokesman John McShaffrey said. Several locations along U.S. 19 require asphalt pavement milling and repaving to correct deficiencies.

See U.S. 19, page A2



Matthew Beck / Chronicle photo editor

Motorists travel north on U.S. 19 in Homosassa Tuesday morning, April 5, as work on a road-widening project continues on the busy highway.

Bikes in Bloom

Ozello residents celebrate spring with community spirit

By NANCY KENNEDY
 Chronicle Reporter

From pigs and pinwheels, an inflatable Snoopy with an Easter basket, flamingoes, fishing nets, corks and shells and blue crabs, even a scene from the Wizard of Oz, the community of Ozello is celebrating spring with "Bikes in Bloom."

During April, residents are displaying their decorated bicycles throughout the community for no other reason except to bring a smile to people's faces.

"During COVID, everything was shut down, and people kept to themselves or developed little groups," said Cecelia Treat. "So, we wanted to do something to bring us back together as a community again."

Longtime Ozello resident, Beverly Devillez, said she was part of Heritage Village on Citrus Avenue in Crystal River at one time and recalled the past Bikes in Bloom events in the downtown area.

"I think God put this on my heart to do here," Devillez said. "So, I posted the idea on Facebook and challenged everyone to decorate a bike."

One woman constructed



Chronicle photos

Ozello residents, Beverly Devillez, left, and Cecelia Treat, stand near one of the many bicycles that are decorated throughout Ozello, a coastal community in western Citrus County. The Ozello Bikes in Bloom idea is the brainchild of Devillez who says her hope is that the idea will become an annual, springtime activity in the month of April.

The only "rule" was to include flowers. Other than that, people could do anything they wanted.

"I never expected such a huge response," she said. "We have more than 51 bikes so far, and there's only about 400 people who live here, and many of those are weekenders."

Devillez said those who didn't have a bike used other things to decorate such as wagons or jumbo plastic toys.

a bicycle out of foam pool "noodles."

"They really added their personality," Devillez said. "If you knew the people and saw their bikes, you could recognize their personality. The woman who did the 'Wizard of Oz' bike, she always wears high heels, and if you notice, the shoes the witch is wearing are heels."

"This really has brought the community together,"

See BIKES, page A2



Seashells and wine bottle corks add detail to this design in Ozello.

Withlacoochee River advocates brainstorm restoration plan

By BUSTER THOMPSON
 Chronicle Reporter

A "war room" of advocates for the Withlacoochee River assembled to start strategizing how to save their portion of the local waterway from further harm.

Roughly two dozen people - from river residents and experts, to government and water-restoration representatives - met the evening of Tuesday, April 5, at the Yankeetown-Inglis Woman's Club.

They answered the rally call from Withlacoochee Aquatic Restoration Inc. (WAR) to brainstorm a game plan to rehabilitate the river.

"There are a lot of very bright people here," WAR president Dan Hilliard told attendees. "You do have muscle, you do have a brain, you do have ideas, and we're here to work on that; we want feedback, we want ideas."

Since it was founded in 1984 under the original title of Withlacoochee Area Residents, WAR and its members have fought for the river's health, especial-



Matthew Beck / Chronicle Photo Editor

The Withlacoochee River flows from the Green Swamp northwest into the Gulf of Mexico near Yankeetown and Inglis, pictured above.

ly its most downstream section in between Citrus and Levy counties - the Lower Withlacoochee River.

In 2012, WAR and its donors paid for an extensive study on the Lower Withlacoochee, which stretches from Lake Rousseau to the river's mouth with the Gulf of Mexico near Yankeetown.

Studies also spanned into Lake Rousseau and as far upriver as the Withlacoochee River's junction with the Rainbow River near Dunnellon.

Findings published in

July 2021 by Wetland Solutions Inc. showed there were "a variety of hydrological, physical, chemical, biological and structural impairments" to the water system because of around 120 years of human nature.

As a result, invasive vegetation has flourished while native fisheries and other river habitats have either suffered or died off.

This report and its conclusions confirmed what those who use the Lower Withlacoochee or live alongside it

See RIVER, page A5

Library director: No Pride Month display this June

Library board draws unprecedented number of applicants

By MICHAEL D. BATES
 Chronicle Reporter

Library Services Director Eric Head said he has no plans to put up an LGBTQ Pride Month display this June.

He said that gives staff time to work up a comprehensive library policy going forward and allows for a cooling off period while emotions are running hot in the community.

Head told the Chronicle Editorial Board Wednesday he doesn't want to add more fuel to an already incendiary issue. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) month occurs nationwide in June.

Last year, two local libraries had displays designed to educate people and bring awareness to the month.

Those displays prompted a firestorm of controversy from people who believed the library was using taxpayer dollars to promote an inappropriate sexual lifestyle and was indoctrinating children.

Leading the charge is John Labriola of Inverness, who has lobbied against using taxpayer dollars to promote what he calls a sexualized political agenda being promoted at taxpayers' expense.

Head has said repeatedly the public library doesn't promote anything. The display, as with all displays, is only meant to be informative, he said.

As of Wednesday, Head has received an unprecedented 45 applicants to the five open positions on the nine-member advisory board. Typically, he said he's lucky to get two or three. Head said he's fairly

See LIBRARY, page A5

