

Wrestling: County grapplers compete at state meet / B1

FRIDAY
 TODAY & next morning
HIGH 84
LOW 54 Mostly sunny and warm.
PAGE A4

CITRUS COUNTY CHRONICLE



www.chronicleonline.com

MARCH 4, 2022

Florida's Best Community

Newspaper Serving Florida's Best Community

\$1

VOL. 128 ISSUE 63

FROM THE CAPITAL

Smoking restrictions get green light

A measure that would let local governments restrict smoking at beaches and parks is headed to Gov. Ron DeSantis.

The Senate on Wednesday voted 30-7 to approve the proposal (HB 105), which would apply to beaches and parks owned by municipalities and counties.



GRUTERS

The local governments, however, could not prevent "the smoking of unfiltered cigars." Senate sponsor Joe Gruters, R-Sarasota, said the intention of the bill was to get rid of cigarette butts that don't quickly biodegrade.

"If you live near a beach, the number one picked-up item consistently on an annual basis over and over again, are cigarette butts," Gruters said. "What happens all the time is this second-hand smoke, to me it is disgusting. But what's even more disgusting is when you reach into the sand and pick up one of those butts. And those filters that are in the cigarettes are what ends up in the water, destroying the environment."

The House approved the measure in a 105-10 vote on Feb. 24. The proposal would build on a 2002 constitutional amendment that prohibited smoking in restaurants and at other indoor workplaces. The Senate had earlier sought to provide exemptions for cigars that do not contain filters or plastic tips and pipe tobacco.

House unanimously passes tax package

With unanimous support, the Florida House on Wednesday passed what



SPROWLS

Speaker Chris Sprowls, R-Palm Harbor, called the "coolest tax package" he's seen produced by the House. The wide-ranging package (HB 7071) is topped by four proposed sales-tax "holidays." The House wants to offer a 14-day tax holiday in late July and early August on back-to-school items such as clothes, school supplies and personal computers; a 14-day holiday in late May and early June to prepare for hurricane season; a seven-day holiday around Independence Day to encourage people to be more active; and a seven-day holiday around Labor Day on tools and other work equipment.

Additional sales-tax breaks would be offered on baby clothes; diapers; children's books; Energy Star refrigerators, washers, dryers and water heaters; impact-resistant windows, doors and garage doors; new mobile homes and admissions to Formula One Grand Prix races. Among other things, the package includes a proposal to provide tax relief to property owners affected by a sudden and unforeseen collapse of a residential building.

MPO endorses parkway extension

Adds amendment to its long-range plan

By **MICHAEL D. BATES**
 Chronicle Reporter

Transportation officials Thursday took a big step to formally ensure the Suncoast Parkway gets extended from State Road 44 to U.S. 19.

Construction starts next year on extending the parkway 3 miles from S.R. 44

to County Road 486, about 1,500 feet east of the Pine Ridge entrance. That is a certainty.

But on Thursday, the Hernando/Citrus Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) voted 8-0 on an amendment to the 2045 long-range transportation plan that includes the extension of the parkway from County Road 486 to County Road 495 and from County Road 495 to U.S. 19 north of Crystal River.

That was a big deal said MPO member and County Commissioner Jeff Kinnard. And it was no wonder when it came time to vote on that amendment, he enthusiastically told his fellow board members, "I will gladly make the motion to approve." Once it makes the long-



KINNARD



SCHLABACH

range plan, "it's there to stay," Kinnard said.

County Commissioner and MPO member Ruthie Schlabach said after the meeting she wanted to make that motion but Kinnard beat her to it.

"It's definitely good news for Citrus County and Crystal River," Schlabach said.

Crystal River officials have repeatedly said they want the parkway route to end north of the city so as not to add congestion to their downtown area.

The long-range plan is a federally mandated document updated every five years, and outlines the vision for transportation in Citrus County for the next 25 years. It looks at the projected outline of pedestrian,

See **MPO**, page A7



Displaced people queue Thursday, March 3, to get on a train to Poland, inside Lviv railway station, in Lviv, western Ukraine.

Bernat Armanque / AP



Special to the Chronicle

On Feb. 17, Jeff Patton married Olena Skrynchenko in Ukraine. One week later, they were fleeing for their lives.

Couple caught in war zone after marriage

Crystal River man weds minister bride in Ukraine

By **NANCY KENNEDY**
 Chronicle Reporter

Crystal River resident Jeff Patton, a widower since 2014, had waited eight years to meet the right woman.

Halfway around the world in Ukraine, Olena Skrynchenko had been waiting 22 years to meet the right man.

Both of them ordained ministers, knew when they met online that God had brought them together.

So, on Feb. 9, Patton arrived in Kyiv, and on Feb. 17 the couple were married.

One week later, they, along with Olena's severely disabled 27-year-

old son, were fleeing for their lives, heading to Poland.

"We left Kyiv and drove west along the northern border of Belarus, which is where the Russian army made its first breach into Ukraine," Patton said by phone from Warsaw, Poland, Wednesday. "At one point, the army was advancing across the road where we were at, behind us. And if we would've had to stop for anything, we would probably not be giving interviews."

Patton added that they hadn't experienced any fear, although they had been concerned and cautious.

"We knew God had interrupted our original plans and that we were where we needed to be, going in the direction we needed to go," he said.

See **COUPLE**, page A8

SOS pantry continues to feed people

Group needs more volunteers

By **NANCY KENNEDY**
 Chronicle Reporter

On any given Thursday, an average of 150 cars go through the well-oiled machine that's the SOS Food Pantry food distribution in Hernando.

Well before dawn, cars start lining up in the parking lot of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church at 439 E. Norvell Bryant Highway where SOS has its own shed and walk-in cooler to store food for their weekly food giveaway to hungry people.

In the past year they've replaced their shed that had fallen apart, repaired the compressor in the freezer



Nancy Kennedy / Chronicle Reporter

Rose and Brian Dew volunteer with SOS Food Pantry on Thursdays at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Hernando. The Dews also have a ministry that feeds homeless and hungry people at Hernando Lake every Saturday afternoon at 2 p.m. SOS Food Pantry donates food to the Dews to distribute to the people they are in contact with.

after it went out and lost their big walk-in refrigerator after it was struck by lightning.

See **PANTRY**, page A8

Around-the-clock alligator hunting supported

By **JIM TURNER**
 The News Service of Florida

TALLAHASSEE — Wildlife officials agreed Wednesday to around-the-clock hours for alligator hunting but expressed some concerns about a new part of the hunting arsenal.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission on Wednesday directed staff members to set up rule changes that will ensure more daylight hours for alligator hunting in most parts of the state. The commission also supported allowing pre-charged pneumatic airbows with tethered lines as part of the equipment that alligator hunters can use.

But commissioners, meeting at the Tampa Convention Center, directed staff to look into modifying the allowed strength of airbows. That came after Robb Upthegrove, a Plant City resident from an alligator hunting family, expressed concerns about allowing just any hunter to use an airbow, which he said could be as strong as a "rifle."

"It's a great tool," said Upthegrove. "But if it's not used right, it could cause issues in the future."

Commissioner Steven Hudson agreed.

"The intent is similar to the harpoon where it just

See **HUNTING**, page A7

INDEX
 Classifieds C6

Comics C5
 Crossword C11

Editorial A12
 Entertainment A4

Horoscope C5
 Lottery Numbers B3

Movies C5
 Obituaries A8

TV Listings C4
 Weather A4

