

**THURSDAY**

TODAY & next morning  
**HIGH 71**  
 Numerous storms; some could be strong.  
**LOW 51**  
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CITRUS COUNTY

# CHRONICLE

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**IN BRIEF**

## Special library board seeking members

The Citrus County Special Library District is seeking applications for five positions on the Special Library District Advisory Board. They are seeking qualified members for two-year terms that expire Jan. 31, 2024. Eligible applicants must be a qualified elector of Citrus County.

Applications will be accepted until April 5. To apply, visit [citrusbocc.com/boardapplication](http://citrusbocc.com/boardapplication) and submit to Denise Gallagher, Citrus County Administration, 3600 W. Sovereign Path, Suite 267, Lecanto, FL 34461. Nominations and appointments will occur at the April 26 meeting of the Special Library District Governing Board.

For more information on the Citrus County Library System, visit [citruslibraries.org](http://citruslibraries.org) or call 352-746-9077.

## Supervisor of Elections meeting public in CR

The Supervisor of Elections office invites the public to visit them from 9-11 a.m. on March 24 at the Crystal River City Hall, located at 123 N.W. U.S. 19, Crystal River.

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

## Local government holding community input event

Citrus County government has rescheduled their strategic planning community input events. Citizens are invited to attend either of the following in-person events:

Community Input Session at 1 p.m. on April 4 at Citrus Springs Community Center, 1570 W. Citrus Springs Blvd., Citrus Springs.

Community Input Session at 6 p.m. on April 4 at Lecanto Government Building, 3600 W. Sovereign Path, #166, Lecanto.

After the community input sessions have concluded, citizen input will be processed and provided to a Strategic Planning Working Group, who will meet on April 5 and 6.

Call 352-527-5484 or email [veronica@citrusbocc.com](mailto:veronica@citrusbocc.com).

## USF taps lawyer, grad as new president

TAMPA (AP) — The University of South Florida's board of trustees has elevated the school's interim president to the official position.

The trustees voted Tuesday to hire Rhea Law, a prominent Tampa attorney and USF grad, to replace Steve Currall, who resigned in July. Law had been hired to temporarily replace him. The trustees chose Law, 72, over Jeffrey Talley, a former chief of the U.S. Army Reserve who has held several academic positions.

Law's contract has yet to be negotiated, but her annual pay will be between \$760,000 to \$1.1 million.

# Nasty weather forecast for Thursday

By MICHAEL D. BATES  
 Chronicle Reporter

Citrus Countians can look forward to a nasty day weather-wise on Thursday.

The National Weather Service (NWS) is forecasting a 90 percent chance of rain and accumulations in Citrus could reach three-quarters

to 1 inch. Residents could wake up to stormy conditions.

Highs will be near 72 degrees Thursday, with rain tapering off toward evening.

Rain or shine, the ribbon-cutting of the new Withlacoochee-Dunnellon Trail Connector will take

place at 10:30 a.m. at the new trail underpass on the west side of U.S. 41 and County Road 39, said Kris Carson, spokeswoman for the Florida Department of Transportation.

The public is invited, she said.

On Wednesday, a line of strong storms made its way

east through the Panhandle and Big Bend area, causing possible flash flooding.

It's headed this way.

"The severe threat will be isolated in Central Florida as this line moves there (Wednesday) evening through Thursday," according to Bryan Williams, meteorologist with the Florida

Forest Service.

All this rain has lowered Citrus County's brush fire chances. The county placed in the low range on the Keetch-Byram Drought Index.

Michael D. Bates is a staff writer with the Citrus County Chronicle and can be reached at [mbates@chronicleonline.com](mailto:mbates@chronicleonline.com)



Friends of the Crystal River Preserve State Park members Dorsey DeMaster and Pam Shemet return to the Mullet Hole Kayak Launch Wednesday, March 23, as the launch is officially opened to the public. The launch is located off of North Sailboat Avenue in Crystal River.

Photos by Matthew Beck / Chronicle photo editor

# Park gets kayak ramp overhaul



Pam Shemet, a kayak enthusiast and member of the Friends of the Crystal River Preserve State Parks, waits for a ceremonial ribbon cutting to take place Wednesday, March 23, at the Mullet Hole Kayak Launch in Crystal River.

By FRED HIERS  
 Chronicle Reporter

The 28,000 acres of the Crystal River Preserve and Archaeological Park became this week a little more accessible.

Private donors gave more than \$5,000 to overhaul the kayak and canoe ramp at the Mullet Hole. That launch site allows boaters to enter the Mullet Hole, which feeds into Indian River Canal, and from there into Crystal River and the Gulf of Mexico.

The new launch site made of concrete, gravel and rubber matting is one of two in the vast state park. It took the place of a precarious ramp made up of gravel and a steep drop that often left many kayakers and canoers tipping into the chilly waters.

"It was extremely challenging and a poor design," said Pam Shemet, 62, of Homosassa and a member of Friends of the Crystal River State Park.

Officials of the park, volunteers, and members of environmental and kayaking groups held a ribbon-cut-

ting ceremony Wednesday at the launch site.

Shemet said she wanted the launch ramp to be easy to use, especially for beginners. That's because a bad first experience kayaking for a beginner could easily turn them off to boating.

"You want it to be a positive experience," said Dorsey DeMaster, a kayaker and president of the Florida Paddling Trails Association. "Being outside like this is healthy for one's soul," she said.

And more people ventured outside and took up outdoor activities, such as kayaking and canoeing, when the COVID-19 pandemic was at its worst.

The better ramp "is just another way to encourage people to go outside," DeMaster said.

DeMaster said if she and others want people to protect and feel a kinship with the environment then they need to get out into nature.

"You get such a sense of peace ... on the water," she said.

Barbara Roberts, the

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# Madeleine Albright, 1st female secretary of state, dies

By MATTHEW LEE  
 AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON — Madeleine Albright, a child refugee from Nazi- and then Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe who rose to become the first female secretary of state and a mentor to many current and former American statesmen and women, died Wednesday of cancer, her family said. She was 84.

A lifelong Democrat who nonetheless worked to bring Republicans into her orbit, Albright was chosen in 1996 by President Bill Clinton to be America's top diplomat, elevating her from U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, where she had been



Haraz N. Ghanbari / AP

Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright testifies on Capitol Hill in Washington, on Oct. 22, 2009 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on NATO.

only the second woman to hold that job. As secretary of state, Albright was the highest-ranking woman in the history of the U.S. government.

She was not in the line of succession to the presidency, however, because she was born in what was then Czechoslovakia. Still, she was universally admired for breaking a glass ceiling, even by her political detractors.

"We have lost a loving mother, grandmother, sister, aunt and friend," her family said in a statement.

President Joe Biden ordered flags at the White House and other federal buildings and grounds to be flown at half-staff until March 27.

Outpourings of condolences came quickly.

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# Poverty simulator brings empathy to county leaders

By BUSTER THOMPSON  
 Chronicle Reporter

My fictitious mother, Felicia Fuentes, approached the utility company's "front desk"—a folding table along the wall of a Withlacoochee Technical College conference room.

"I'm here to pay my bill," said Fuentes, a 34-year-old single mother of two played by Citrus County Commissioner Holly Davis.

"Transportation passes, please," replied the receptionist, portrayed by Albert Balk, a social studies teacher on special assignment for the Citrus County School District.

Fuentes and I, acting as Fuentes' 14-year-old daughter, Francisca, handed Balk our respective bus vouchers.

Balk then told us we owed \$295 in utilities, including a \$50 late fee.

"Is there any way we can get the late fee waived," Fuentes said before explaining how her husband recently deserted her.

"I'm very sorry to hear that," Balk said in his polite denial of her request.

Fuentes flipped through a stack of paperwork in her hands to see what cash she had. What she found didn't come close to what was due.

Unfortunately, she just had to pay \$100 to get me out of juvenile detention for bringing a weapon to school.

Balk suggested we use our EBT, or electronic benefits transfer, card, but its remaining fund balance from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, along with our cash, still wasn't enough.

"I need to get a job," Fuentes told Balk before she and I traveled to the employment office across the conference room, once again using up two valuable bus passes.

Once there, Fuentes filled out a job application, and the employer told her they might contact her to schedule an interview. Even if she was hired, Fuentes wouldn't get her first paycheck in time. She needed the money now to keep our family in its three-room apartment.

Citrus County Education Foundation (CEEFF) Board President and local Suncoast Credit Union Branch Manager David White played Franco, my character's 17-year-old

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