

## TROOP DEPLOYMENT

MORE U.S. TROOPS DEPLOY OVERSEAS IN WAKE OF UKRAINE INVASION

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LATE WINTER STORM BRINGS SNOW TO U.S. SOUTH, NORTHEAST

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## FDOT: Citrus leads in traffic fatalities

Florida in line to get \$1 billion grant to reduce crashes and fatalities

By MICHAEL D. BATES  
Chronicle Reporter

Citrus County has the dubious distinction of having the most traffic fatalities among 15 coun-

ties with similar populations in Florida.

The data comes from a Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) study ranking serious injuries and deaths on local and state roads from 2017-2020. Citrus, in fact, ranks in the top 20 percent in all nine categories in the report.

County Commissioner Jeff Kinnard called the data concerning.



KINNARD

Kinnard sits on the Hernando-Citrus Metropolitan Planning Or-

ganization (MPO) board, where the report was unveiled at the March 3 meeting by FDOT's District Seven Safety Administrator Peter Hsu.

Hsu acknowledged Citrus County's ratio of fatalities to other counties is high but, when asked why, he told the board he just presents the numbers and doesn't have the answers.

But he did say Florida is in line to receive \$1 billion from a federal grant to advance FDOT's "vision zero" plans to reduce crashes and fatalities, especially for cyclists and pedestrians.

"What they're trying to do with their grant money is get the law enforcement agencies for those

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## Apopka Marine of Inverness celebrates 50 years

By MICHAEL D. BATES  
Chronicle Reporter

Joe Bega remembers when Apopka Marine opened there was only one flasher light in downtown Inverness.

Fifty years later, there are plenty more lights and a plethora of stores, restaurants and businesses. But through those five decades, Bega's Apopka Marine still stands. And, a testament to the business' entrenched reputation in the county, it continues to grow.

"We've grown with the town and the county and kept right up," said owner Bega.

Customers come from all over the state to Apopka Marine, he said.

The longtime businessman told the Chronicle there is only one secret to his longevity: quality customer service.

"Once they come in here the first time, that's it," he said.

"They're hooked."

The 50th anniversary celebration goes on all year long.

The story of Apopka Marine started in 1972 when George Derewenko, father of Bega's wife Linda (who sits on the Inverness City Council) opened

the business on U.S. 41 South. Joe Bega worked for his father-in-law and in 1982, bought the business from him.

Bega moved to the current, 10-acre location at 3260 State Road 44 about 17 years ago.

"Our business really took off when we moved in there," he said.

Bega said he's kept up with industry trends and is proud to be involved in two programs that help retain good employees and better serve customers.

For the past two years, the business has participated in the Yamaha Marine Apprentice Program, which allows dealerships to pair their experienced marine technicians with an apprentice. This program helps ensure there will be a larger pool of technicians going forward.

Apopka Marine also achieved the coveted Master Technician Program certification, allowing his staff to remain highly skilled. Many customers come there for that reason, he said.

"There are only a handful of (such dealers) in the state," he said.

Bega has been involved for years with the annual Big Bass Classic, one of the largest bass tournaments in the state. Amateur and professional anglers from far and wide vie for cash prizes by hooking the biggest bass in Lake Henderson. The eighth annual event is March 19.

"That's something that (Inverness City Manager) Eric Williams and I started from scratch," Bega said.

Williams said the Begas' imprint on the city and county is evident all the time.

"When you go out on a boat on our local waterways, it's hard to never not see a boat

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Matthew Beck / Chronicle photo editor

Apopka Marine in Inverness has been in business for 50 years. Joe Bega, the owner for most of that time, took over the operation from his father-in-law who founded the business in 1972.

## Bass tournament coming to Inverness on March 19

By FRED HIERS  
Chronicle Reporter

Inverness is casting a wider net this year in hopes of attracting more people to the annual Big Bass Classic.

The city is expanding the popular fishing event to lure people who might not typically attend the high-stakes tournament. To try and do that, the city is hosting barbecue vendors and bluegrass bands to add to the fishing tournament.

The event has always been a draw for the city, Inverness Parks and Recreation Director Woody Worley told the Chronicle.

The hope now is to attract people who might enjoy the hourly bass weigh-ins at Liberty Park but want more if they were to stay in the depot district and downtown.

To hook city visitors and get them to stay for the day, Worley said the city decided to add food and bluegrass music.

"It just made sense," Worley said of the barbecue and choice of music.

The Saturday, March 19, event will begin at 7 a.m. and last un-

"We want to be a family-friendly event. We want you and your family out here and there's something for everybody to do."

WOODY WORLEY  
Inverness Parks and Recreation Director



WORLEY

til 3:30 p.m. There will be a \$1,000 cash prize each hour for the heaviest bass, beginning at 9 a.m.

There will also be a \$1,000 prize for the biggest bass of the day, biggest bag of the day and Lady Angler Biggest Bag.

Fishing participants can register online at Invernessbigbassclassic.com or by calling 800-595-4849. Registration is \$85. In 2021, the event attracted 200 fishermen. Worley thinks that number will be exceeded.

The event is now marketed as Inverness' Big Bass Bluegrass & BBQ.

"We want to be a family-friendly event," Worley said. "We want you and your family out here and there's something for everybody to do."

The event will be held at Liberty Park this year.

"It will give more of an open

look and we can incorporate a lot of different attractions," Worley said.

The park is near the city's open air pavilion, the park's open field and three sets of restrooms, he said.

For the event, the farmers and craft market will be open 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., as well as the park's playground.

Worley said he hopes the event will make a big splash.

"There you have the best of all worlds," Worley said. "We don't want an event only one family member wants to go to."

Downtown businesses also say expanding events to attract more people will benefit the downtown and generate more revenue and taxes.

"For us, as a business, the more people you draw to downtown the better," said Eric Lesage, owner of Nine State, a

### Inverness' Big Bass Bluegrass & BBQ

Sign up: Register online at Invernessbigbassclassic.com or by calling 800-595-4849. Registration is \$85.

When: The event begins at 7 a.m. Saturday, March 19.

Where: Liberty Park.

Free for all: Farmers and craft market will be open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

brewery on Tompkins Street.

He also likes the city's move to try and get downtown businesses more involved in planning and funding downtown events.

"I think we could, but the more we (businesses) do the more the expense," he said, adding there's a fine line.

He also supports the city's new entertainment district in which patrons can buy beer or wine from one establishment and carry it to another. The entertainment district is initiated during special events such as the Big Bass tournament and most recently the St. Patrick's Day parade.

## Marchman Act a tool in the battle against substance abuse and addiction

By NANCY KENNEDY  
Chronicle Reporter

When law enforcement responds to a 911 call for a possible overdose, one of the tools used to help a person with a substance addiction is also one of the most misunderstood: the Marchman Act.

Similar to the Baker Act,

which deals with mental health crises, the Marchman Act is used for involuntary assessment and treatment of someone who is impaired by drugs or alcohol and appears to be a danger to themselves or others.

According to information from the Citrus County Sheriff's Office, between Jan. 1, and March 7 of this year, law enforcement ini-



MONTGOMERY

tiated 75 Marchman Acts on individuals. "Where the Marchman Act comes into place with opioids is when there's an overdose," said Sgt. Rachel Montgomery, behavioral health sergeant for the Cit-

rus County Sheriff's Office. "Usually we're responding to a call that comes out as a 'cardiac arrest.' If Narcan is provided or if we or medical staff do a sternum rub to revive them to bring them back, we'll do a Marchman Act on them."

The Marchman Act allows law enforcement on the scene to have the person involuntarily taken to an

emergency room, which is the first step.

As Montgomery explained, when Narcan/naloxone is given, the overdose reversal effect generally lasts only 60 to 90 minutes. After that, there's a danger of re-overdosing.

"With Narcan, they have to go to the ER," she said.

While the person is still at the emergency room,

ER staff calls LifeStream to start the next step in the process, which is transporting the person to the access center in Beverly Hills for initial intake before they're transported to LifeStream's crisis stabilization unit in Leesburg.

Also, law enforcement calls a certified peer support

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