

Otero on teaching:
Molding the minds
and future leaders
of tomorrow



Editor's note - The Sumter Sun Times is featuring first-year Sumter district teachers in a series. This week's focus is on Hector Luis Otero, Jr.

Hector Luis Otero Jr. was new to the Sumter County School District as a teacher.

Business was his passion as a child and being bilingual, he wanted to be able to share that with others. He graduated from Alexander Hamilton High School in 2003. The school is in Elmsford, N.Y. He has a master's degree.

"I have a military, business and law enforcement background. My last 20 years can be a book. However, I am always looking for new challenges."

OTERO | 2

Roundabout nearing completion

The C.R. 466 and C.R. 475 N roundabout project is entering its third and final phase of construction. Beginning the night of Monday, Feb. 9, 2026, the roundabout was set to become fully operational for drivers, enabling a continuous traffic flow and improved roadway safety.

The last phase of construction will include the installation of street lights near the roads and is expected to last approximately three to four weeks.

"This project continues to move forward."

ROUNDABOUT | 2



Chop Shop Operation



numerous golf carts and golf cart parts, in plain view, including engines and other components.

According to the SCSO, detectives obtained a search warrant for the property, which confirmed that Harrell had been altering serial numbers on golf carts, disassembling and modifying them. Detectives believe the activity had been occurring for several months and involved theft from multiple locations throughout Sumter County. Four golf carts

were recovered in various stages of modification.

They also found multiple chain saws and tools. The investigation also revealed that Harrell was not a lawful resident of the property and had been squatting at the location for an undetermined period of time.

Harrell was arrested for Operating a Chop Shop, Burglary (four counts), Grand Theft (four counts), Petit Theft (three counts), Trespassing (two counts) and Criminal Mischief, according to the SCSO.

The agency reminds the public, "If You See Something, Say Something." Criminal activity can also be reported anonymously through Crimeline.

Joshua Wayne Harrell

Brian Keith Winton

In the courtroom of Judge Mary P. Hatcher, jurors found Brian Keith Winton guilty on all counts in a child sexual battery case. Winton, 48, of Bushnell, was charged and convicted of three counts of Sexual Battery upon a child under 12 years of age and four counts of Lewd and Lascivious Molestation of a Child Victim less than 12 years of age, according to the Fifth Judicial Circuit of the Florida State Attorney's Office.

After interviews with the victims and Winton being read his Miranda rights, he reportedly admitted to sexually battering both victims, according to the press release from the state attorney's office.

The release noted that he was arrested in October of 2023, following a Sumter County Sheriff's Office investigation into possible sexual offenses involving two minor children. Both victims disclosed to authorities, during two separate interviews, that the defendant had sexually battered them on numerous occasions over a period of four years, starting when the victims were as young as 10 years old. Probable cause was established for Winton's arrest after each victim recounted specific occurrences and descriptive details to detectives.

The Honda Accord was traveling southbound on C.R. 462 while a Volvo SUV, driven by a 61-year-old Georgia man, was traveling southbound on I-75. The vehicles collided - the Volvo traveled to the outside shoulder of the interstate and the Accord came to rest in

the southbound travel lanes. The driver of the Volvo suffered minor injuries, according to FHP.

The Florida Highway Patrol does not release the identity of crash victims.

An Inverness man was killed when the car he was driving left the C.R. 462 overpass and landed on I-75 to collide with another vehicle.

The southbound travel lanes. The driver of the Volvo suffered minor injuries, according to FHP.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant State Attorney Shelby Senn, with the investigation conducted by Investigator Pam Warren of the Sumter County Sheriff's Office.

Winton was taken into custody to await his sentencing pending a presentence investigation.

Explosive Devices - The Villages

The Sumter County Sheriff's Office (SCSO) responded to Yucatan Way within The Villages, just after 11 a.m., in response to a call referencing what appeared to be explosive military items. Deputies responded and immediately began evacuating nearby residents to ensure their safety and Lake County's bomb squad, according to the SCSO.

The explosives were confirmed stolen from the military. The scene is now clear of any explosives and the case is currently under investigation by the FBI.

Inverness man killed when car leaves overpass, lands on I-75 to collide with another vehicle



The Florida Highway Patrol does not release the identity of crash victims.

Chili Cook-off, bake sale to support students for summer camp

Rock of Ages Lutheran Church will host its annual Chili Cook-off and Bake Sale from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 21 at 4957 E. C.R. 462 in Wildwood. Proceeds from the \$5 entry fee and sales of homemade baked goods will benefit Luther Springs Summer Camp scholarships.

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BULLETIN

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In & Around Tea Time

Dade Battlefield Historic Park and the Dade Battlefield Society hosted their annual Traditional Tea last week, on Saturday, Feb. 7. The event drew a crowd, with 57 people attending.

Last month, they hosted a quilt show and coming up next are a variety of experiences, from silk scarf and rock painting, to Project Wild for Kids and Dutch oven cooking on an open fire.

The tea included savory and sweet treats, as well as a variety of specialty teas. There was live music and an old-fashioned apron display, as well as a special apron poem.

Participants were able to borrow the park's vintage accessories to add to their tea-going experience.

Volunteers put in the work for the event, with sweets, music and more.

The event drew a crowd this year, with 57 people attending. The tea included savory and sweet treats, as well as a variety of specialty teas. There was live music and an old-fashioned apron display, as well as a special apron poem.

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Volunteers served up sweets and poured tea for guests to sample. The society and park host several events through the year - a little something for everyone, from crafting to nature walks and historian-led events. They host an annual battle reenactment, as well as Christmas on the Florida Frontier and a spring egg hunt.

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