

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



Hector Luis Otero, Jr.

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."

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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 ROUNDABOUT | 2

Chop Shop Operation

On Wednesday, Feb. 4, 2026, the Sumter County Sheriff's Office uncovered an illegal golf cart "chop shop" while responding to an unrelated call at 916 West Clarke Street in Wildwood, according to the Sumter County Sheriff's Office (SCSO).

During the response, deputies made contact with Joshua Wayne Harrell, who was a person of interest in an ongoing investigation involving stolen golf cart equipment. Deputies observed



Joshua Wayne Harrell

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 thefts 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

Guilty verdict for man in child sexual battery case



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 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.

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. 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. 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.



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



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Bushnell QUILTERS DISPLAY THEIR TALENT AT DADE PARK

The annual Dade Quilt Show was held on Saturday, Jan. 24. The event provided an opportunity for some top quilters to show off their talents, with a variety of quilts on display in the park lodge.

There were craft and quilt demonstrators on hand, as well as vendors in pavilions and on the grounds adjacent to the lodge.

Royal resident Beverly Steele, who is also the founder of Young Performing Artists, Inc. and an avid supporter of promoting Royal history, served as guest speaker for the day. She

shared information on a quilt that belonged to her grandmother and is believed to be an Underground Railroad quilt - a historic quilt believed to have shared guidance and instructions for those seeking freedom.

People's Choice quilters received special recognition. In first place was Farmhouse Cross by Barbara Obey. Second Place went to Barbara Drayson for her Scrapaholic Blotto and third to Debra Talbott for her Autumn Squirrel.



1st Place: Farmhouse Cross by Barbara Obey

2nd Place: Scrapaholic Blotto by Barbara Drayson

3rd Place: Autumn Squirrel by Debra Talbott

People's Choice quilters received special recognition. In first place was Farmhouse Cross by Barbara Obey.

Second Place in the park quilt contest went to Barbara Drayson for her Scrapaholic Blotto.

Third place in the quilt competition went to Debra Talbott for Autumn Squirrel.



Royal resident Beverly Steele, who is also the founder of Young Performing Artists, Inc. and an avid supporter of promoting Royal history, served as guest speaker for the day. She shared information on a quilt that belonged to her grandmother and is believed to be an Underground Railroad quilt - a historic quilt believed to have shared guidance and instructions for those seeking freedom.

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BULLETIN
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.

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.