

## Avon Park to add streetlight for soutside park safety

By **MARC VALERO**  
STAFF WRITER

AVON PARK — A southside area where there have been a number of shootings and murders will be getting additional lighting in an effort to deter criminal activity.

At Monday's City Council meeting, Carolina Avenue Church of Christ Pastor Herbert Sykes requested more lighting in the area of Alina McWhite Park.

"Since I have been here, for the past 15 years, we have encountered seven shootings in that area where the city has a park/playground area," he said. "Four of those resulted in deaths and one resulted in a young child and an adult being shot in the park."



**ANDERSON**

Just about three weeks ago, a young man was killed on the grounds behind the church and last year a young man was shot by the front door of the church and then he crossed the road and passed away, he said.

The church is at the southwest corner of the intersection of Fred Conner Street and Carolina Avenue.

The Highlands County Sheriff's Office had a surveillance tower there, which drove the criminal elements into darker areas, Sykes said.

He asked the City Council if there is a way to increase the lighting on Fred Conner Street so people

wouldn't come in and use the darkness to do "whatever" they do in that area.

"We have a lot of kids that use the park. It is a wonderful area, but when you get that criminal element encroaching there it makes it where no one can enjoy it," Sykes said.

Mayor Garrett Anderson asked Sykes if he believed more lighting was needed in the park or more toward the street and if streetlights would be appropriate?

Sykes replied there needs to be more lighting toward the street with the help of streetlights.

City Manager Mark Schrader said the crime did not happen on city property, however he received a call

**LIGHT | 8A**

## Town ready to play pickleball funding with county

By **JOHN GUERRA**  
STAFF WRITER

LAKE PLACID — A new complex of eight, lighted pickleball courts in Lake June Park will cost about \$432,939.

That's what the town will tell the Highlands County Recreation and Parks Advisory Committee today. The committee helps fund recreation projects in the county's municipalities through a cost-sharing model. Under the town's proposal, Lake Placid would pay \$77,929, or 18%, toward the cost, while the county would kick in the lion's share of \$355,010.

That's what the county does. Construction itself is expected to cost \$382,939; of that, the actual base, asphalt, and acrylic court surface and fencing, comes to \$243,824. Project management, \$23,000; permitting and inspection fees, \$2,000; and contingency fees, \$25,000 — make up the rest of the \$432,939.

The town will use four local contracting companies in the project, Town Administrator Phil Williams said.

Lidy Sports: \$243,824  
Excavation Point: \$42,615  
Central Contracting: \$96,500  
Polston Engineering: \$25,000

Some 160 people signed the town's online petition that asked local residents to weigh on their desire for pickleball courts. The courts will be used by adults and retirees, the town's proposal states.

"The project will provide exercise for an age bracket of the population that has comparatively negligible recreational activities in South Highlands County," the proposal states.

The town also announced its abandonment of the Lake June Phase II improvements that included new retention ponds, more parking for boats and trailers and other amenities in the park. The county had agreed to reimburse the town \$140,801.44 for those improvements, but the town now wants to use county money for pickleball courts.

"The council decided to abandon the project in favor of joining the rising tide of the sport of pickleball," Williams wrote in the RPAC proposal. "Accordingly, this application requests that the 2021 Interlocal Agreement be retracted in favor of a new Interlocal Agreement to construct eight Pickleball Courts at the Lake June Park area."

## Take Stock in Children mentor, scholar bond through a common interest

Special to the Highlands News-Sun

AVON PARK — Estrellita DeJesus-Martinez walked into the conference room at the South Florida State College (SFSC) Hardee Campus in Bowling Green recently and got the surprise of her life. Her Take Stock in Children mentor, Sandie Perreault, welcomed her with open arms and guided her into the room. On the table was a sewing machine, fabric, and a variety of sewing accessories.

DeJesus-Martinez is a junior at Hardee High School in Wauchula and met Perreault for the first time in spring 2022 through the Take Stock in Children program.

Take Stock in Children is an academically focused mentoring program that guides at-risk students toward successful completion of high school and enrollment in college. It is a statewide program that provides students with a mentor and a two-year state college tuition scholarship. The Take Stock staff also help the student obtain financial assistance for housing, transportation, and other expenses. In return, the student signs a contract to earn at least a grade of C in every class, graduate from high school with good attendance records, maintain good behavior in school, and stay crime and drug free. The SFSC Foundation serves as the lead agency for Take Stock in its service area of Highlands, DeSoto, and Hardee counties.

Take Stock mentors meet with their assigned students for approximately 30 minutes each week during the school year, offering encouragement and advice. They become a friend and a role model, help build a child's foundation of basic values, assist a student in setting goals and attaining them, guide a child toward an education and a productive life, and give a child hope for the future. A Take Stock mentor will receive training and resources to support their student's academic success.

When Perreault began to mentor DeJesus-Martinez, she had difficulty pronouncing her name. Because Estrellita is Spanish for "little star," DeJesus-Martinez suggested Perreault call her "Star."

During the early days of mentoring, Perreault looked for ways to connect with the young woman and



COURTESY/SFSC

From left: Sandie Perreault and Estrellita "Star" DeJesus-Martinez present the nine-square project.



COURTESY/SFSC

From left: Sandie Perreault and Estrellita "Star" DeJesus-Martinez with new sewing equipment.

**STOCK | 8A**

## War in Ukraine at 1 year: Pain, resilience in global economy



ACHMAD IBRAHIM/AP PHOTO

A worker serves customers at a food stall in Bekasi, on the outskirts of Jakarta, Indonesia, Thursday, Feb 2, 2023. Nearly a year after Russia invaded Ukraine, punishingly high food prices are inflicting particular hardship on the world's poor. In Jakarta, vendors know they can't pass along surging food prices to their already struggling customers.

By **PAUL WISEMAN** and **DAVID MCHUGH**  
AP BUSINESS WRITERS

An Egyptian widow is struggling to afford meat and eggs for her five children. An exasperated German laundry owner watches as his energy bill jumps fivefold. Nigerian bakeries have shut their doors, unable to afford the exorbitant price of flour.

One year after Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, and caused widespread suffering, the global economy is still enduring the consequences — crunched supplies of

grain, fertilizer and energy along with more inflation and economic uncertainty in a world that was already contending with too much of both.

As dismal as the war's impact has been, there's one consolation: It could have been worse. Companies and countries in the developed world have proved surprisingly resilient, so far avoiding the worst-case scenario of painful recession.

But in emerging economies, the pain has been more intense.

In Egypt, where nearly a third of the population

lives in poverty, Halima Rabie has struggled for years to feed her five school-age children. Now, the 47-year-old widow has cut back on even the most basic groceries as prices keep rising.

"It's become unbearable," Rabie said, heading to her job as a cleaner at a state-run hospital in Cairo's twin city of Giza. "Meat and eggs have become a luxury."

In the United States and other wealthy countries, a painful surge in consumer prices, fueled in part by the war's effect on oil prices, has steadily eased.

It's buoyed hopes that U.S. Federal Reserve inflation fighters will relent on interest rate increases that have threatened to tip the world's biggest economy into recession and sent other currencies tumbling against the dollar.

China also dropped draconian zero-COVID lockdowns late last year that hobbled growth in the second-largest economy.

Some good fortune has helped, too: A warmer-than-usual winter has helped lower natural gas prices and limit the

**WAR | 8A**



Classifieds..... **B4-6**  
Comics ..... **B7-10**

Lottery ..... **A2**  
Sports ..... **B1**

Viewpoints..... **A6**  
Weather..... **A8**

Good morning To  
Andrew Raspa  
Thanks for reading!

