



Happy Holidays

In honor of the holidays, the Highlands News-Sun office will be closed New Year's Day.

We hope your holidays are peaceful and safe.

The Highlands News-Sun office at 321 N. Ridgewood Drive in Sebring will close at 3 p.m. through Jan. 3. Happy Holidays to each and every one.



COURTESY PHOTO

Construction nearing completion at Nucor prior to the Dec. 18 startup of production.

County sees increase in COVID cases, vaccines

By KIM MOODY and ALLEN MOODY
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — Highlands County had more new cases and another death but the positivity rate dropped tremendously as shown by the Florida Department of Health COVID-19 reports on Wednesday.

The county added 55 new cases of COVID-19 infections on Wednesday. The new cases bring the total to 4,918. The cases of coronavirus break down to 4,869 residents and 49 non-residents, which is three more than Tuesday.

One more death was reported, which brings the death toll to 202 deaths attributed to the virus. One bright note on the report was the sizable decrease in the positivity rate to 9.27% from Tuesday's 54.17%. There were 550 tests processed with 499 negative results compared to Monday when only 77 tests were processed. While Wednesday's rate is much more palatable, it is still higher than the state's positivity rate. One factor in the decrease is the amount of tests processed from Tuesday.

There have been 435 hospitalizations overall. The Agency for Health Care Administration showed 52 current hospitalizations at 4:03 p.m. Wednesday. AHCA also reported the county's ICU bed census as 23 with six beds available.

The state saw an increase of 13,871 cases, which pushes the overall total to over 1.3 million with 1,306,123 cases. There have been 1,283,701 Florida residents test positive and 22,422 non-residents.

On Tuesday, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis extended his state of emergency order for COVID-19. The order, which was first issued March 9, allows DeSantis more flexibility regarding expenditures detailing with COVID-19 and allows medical professionals, social workers and counselors licensed in other states to render services in Florida, provided they are free of charge. The order also allows pharmacists to issue a 30-day emergency prescription refill of maintenance medications.

State testing picked up dramatically, as there were more than 155,000 tests given on Tuesday, which resulted in a positivity rate of 8.72% for new cases. The number of tests given broke a four-day streak of fewer than 80,000 tests given per day.

There were an additional 137 deaths reported by the state, bringing the overall total to 21,857. There have been 21,546 resident deaths and 311 non-resident deaths.

UPDATE | 8A

Nucor starts production at new steel mill

By MARC VALERO
STAFF WRITER

AVON PARK — Nucor Corporation's new rebar micro mill, just north of Avon Park, is up and running, producing steel products for the construction industry.

The mill, just north of the Highlands/Polk County line and east of U.S. 27, began operating on Dec. 12.

The Nucor Steel Florida team will ramp up production through the first quarter of 2021, according to a press release.

The mill will utilize the abundant supply of scrap metal in Florida to recycle into new steel products that will supply the region's construction market.

Nucor Steel Florida's 235 teammates will annually produce up to 350,000 tons of sustainable rebar products that will contain nearly 100% recycled content.

"We congratulate the entire Nucor Steel Florida team for their hard work during the pandemic to start up this project on schedule and for completing this project safely," the press

release stated.

Mayor Garrett Anderson said, "It has been a while in the making, but I'm thrilled to see production has begun."

"This plant will not only produce products that our community and state need, but employ generations of homegrown citizens as well. Nucor has been great to work with and hopefully will be only the first of many great companies to arrive in our area."

Councilwoman Maria Sutherland was pleased to hear the plant was now operational. She had hoped it would have started sooner, because it seemed they needed to get started sooner, but is glad it is moving along.

Initially it was announced the mill would begin production in July 2020, but production was rescheduled to start in the fourth quarter of 2020.

While Nucor refers to the mill's location as Frostproof, it is much closer to the City of Avon Park, which provided water and sewer utilities and the new electrical lines to provide the power literally run through downtown Avon Park.

In June 2018, the Central Florida Development Council touted Polk

County being picked for the mill's location.

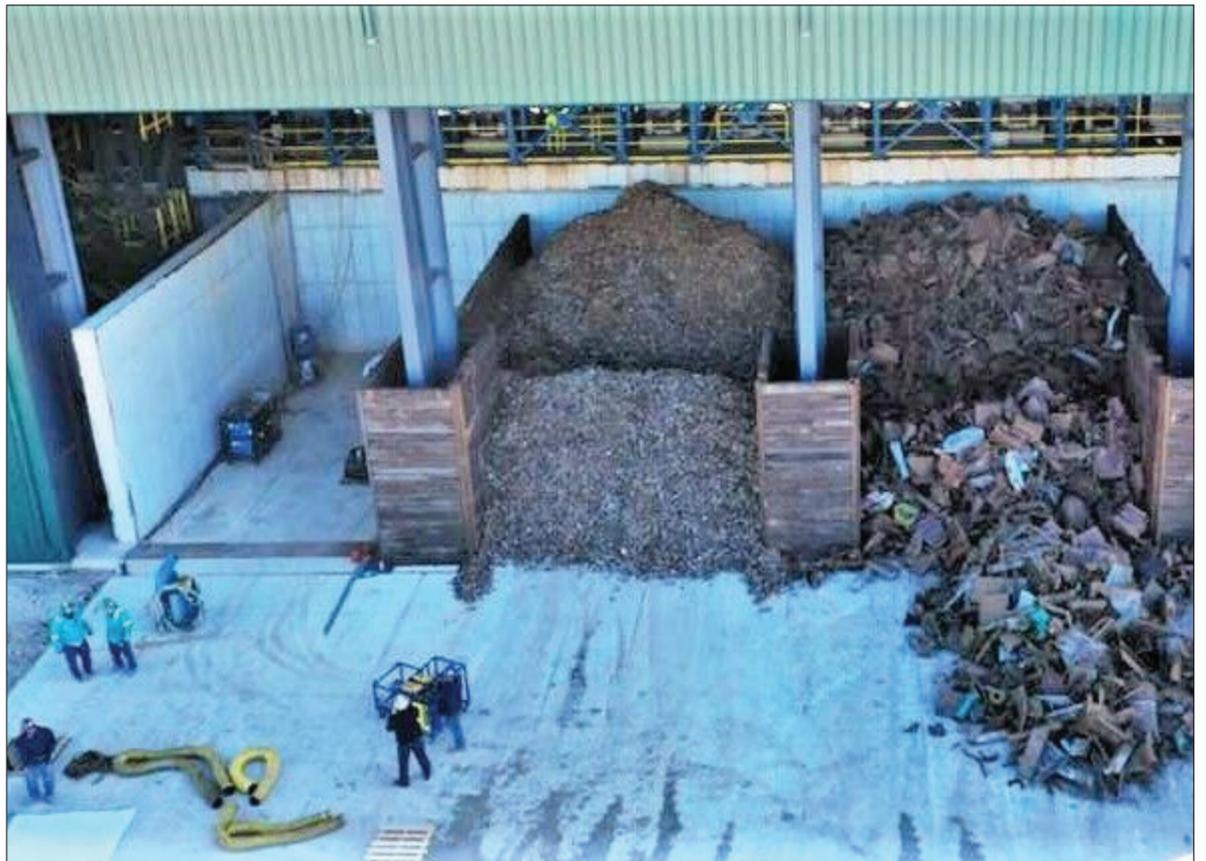
Drew Wilcox, vice president and general manager of Nucor Steel Florida, said Polk County was the company's No. 1 choice, after looking at sites from Miami to South Carolina. The reasons are tied into the three things that make this type of micro mill work:

- It has to be close to the scrap metal it buys to save on freight. With 650 Nucor-related employees already in Florida, including some in the recycling business, locating in Polk County made sense.

- The company has to have a low-cost production plan.

- It needs to be close to its consumer base, also to save money on freight. The biggest markets for rebar, which is what the micro mill will produce, are from Tampa to Orlando and south to Miami.

Wilcox also said three other factors contributed: The plant has heavy energy load and Duke Energy is nearby, the site is close to a major highway — U.S. 27 and it's also close to rail (on CSX line).



COURTESY PHOTO

The first loads of scrap metal arrived at Nucor prior to the Dec. 18 startup. Nucor Steel Florida will recycle about 350,000 tons of scrap metal per year.

A look back at those we lost in 2020

Givers, teachers, heroes and regular folks

By PHIL ATTINGER
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — As we look back on 2020, it would take all of the pages in the Highlands News-Sun to recall all the local people who left the Earth this year.

It would take even more pages than usual to honor the more than 200 residents the county lost to COVID-19, some of them notable people, remembered for making a difference in the community. Each and every person lost in 2020 has left a void.

What follows are those we remember whose lives made a tangible difference in the community.

The face and voice of Duke Energy in Florida's Heartland — **Jerry Miller** — died at age 61 on Feb. 24. For 37 years, Miller worked in the electric utility business, having started in energy conservation for Florida Power Corporation, and eventually became the company spokesperson in Central Florida. He helped customers adjust to the changes when Progress Energy was bought by Duke Energy, attended community events, served as a liaison for Progress Energy and

provided information to local newspapers and radio on power restoration after such pivotal disasters as the destructive 2004 hurricane season.

Garland Boggus, 89, of Sebring died March 20. He had more than 40 years of service with The School Board of Highlands County as purchasing agent and transportation director. The School Board's board room is named in honor of Boggus, who was born Sept. 2, 1930 in Fitzgerald, Georgia and moved to

LOST | 8A



Classifieds.....B4-6 Obituaries.....A3 Viewpoints.....A6
Comics.....B7-10 Sports.....B1 Weather.....A10
Lottery.....A2 TV Listings.....A9

Good morning To
Diedre Johnson
Thanks for reading!

