

Fansler answers for posts



COURTESY PHOTO/FACEBOOK

Intended to call out Facebook for censorship, this post had people attacking each other in the comments, and Lake Placid Police Chief James Fansler took it down soon after posting it. He said does not condone vigilantism of any kind.

Concerns raised over tone, message

By PHIL ATTINGER
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — Lake Placid Police Chief James Fansler, whose sense of humor might offend some on social media, has done that.

He said it's unfortunate people may think that, but added the Lake Placid community knows he will defend each and every member "at the cost of my own life," regardless of color, sexual orientation, political affiliation or any other reason.

"I have never posted or said anything to intentionally offend anyone. I have spent more time trying to close the divide in our community," Fansler said in an email to the Highlands News-Sun. "From time to time my humor has offended and a few posts may have stirred a few people up and they come down immediately."

Still, the Rev. George Miller of the Emmanuel United Church of Christ has complained about some of Fansler's posts and comments.

"These public posts are worrisome, giving the impression that it may not be safe for certain individuals to travel through Lake Placid," Miller wrote to the Highlands News-Sun (see letter on A6 of today's edition). He suggested the Town of Lake Placid might want to evaluate the matter before an incident occurs involving injury or worse to a local resident or a visitor.

Miller cited a Facebook live video, dated June 1, 2020,

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JERRY MEISENHEIMER/CORRESPONDENT

Pastor Vincent Clemente presented Miriam Sondoval-Ramirez with the Rose Achievement Award at Mass on Sunday.

Sondoval-Ramirez honored at St. James

By JERRY MEISENHEIMER
CORRESPONDENT

LAKE PLACID — Sunday was a special day for Miriam Sondoval-Ramirez and members of St. James Catholic Church, in Lake Placid. Sondoval-Ramirez, 16, was honored with the Rose Achievement Award for her participation in church and community service projects.

While parishioners and family practiced social distancing, Pastor Vincent Clemente presented the teenager with her award at the 10 a.m. Mass. Afterward, a beautifully decorated social hall was the scene of an elaborate brunch, again taking precautions for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sondoval-Ramirez gained recognition for her devotion to faith and family, her leadership qualities, and her willingness to serve church and community. Debbie Anderson, spokesperson for the St. James Council of Catholic Women, explained that the Diocese of Venice asked each parish to choose a girl who is worthy of this honor.

Anderson said the criteria was to single out a teen who attends Mass regularly and is involved in church functions. Sondoval-Ramirez is not only a reader during Mass, but also an altar server. Plus, even though she has already received the Sacrament of Confirmation, she continues to attend instructional classes to learn even more about her faith.

Most of the time Sondoval-Ramirez attends the Spanish-speaking parish, Mision Catolica Santiago Apostol, in Lake Placid, which is administered through St. James Parish. She also helps pass out food to the Hispanic community.

In addition to her dedication to her church, Sondoval-Ramirez volunteers for school and community events. She is a sophomore at Lake Placid High School. Her goal is to graduate with honors and someday become an OB-GYN doctor. She says she has lived in Lake Placid her whole



JERRY MEISENHEIMER/CORRESPONDENT

Miriam Sondoval-Ramirez, 16, was recognized for her devotion to church and community at St. James Catholic Church.

life. Her parents are Juan and Sandra Sondoval-Ramirez.

Carol Smart, president of the Council of Catholic Women in Lake Placid, prepared the wording for the award and signed it. On April 10, 2021, Bishop Frank Dewayne will again honor Sondoval-Ramirez with the Golden-Rose Award in Venice, Fla.

Bad review

Post to TDC decrying racism disappeared

By PHIL ATTINGER
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — Nobody wants a negative review, but one posted to VisitSebring's social media page, because of racially-charged posts by a county official, apparently disappeared.

However, both the man who posted it and officials with the Tourist Development Council (TDC) don't know how it came to be deleted. Neither of them did it, they say.

"I did not remove the post. I would not have posted it if I did not believe in what I wrote," said Guy S. Johnson, the man who wrote on the VisitSebring site that he would not spend money here now thanks to the county commissioner's post.

When asked about it, Casey Wohl Hartt, lead marketer for the TDC, branded as "VisitSebring," expressed similar dismay. "We did not delete the comment," Hartt said.

Hartt said she and Chantel Brutus, TDC administrative assistant, looked immediately that day, even putting the posts in chronological order to find Johnson's post and make a reply.

"I looked for it and then Chantal looked for it," Hartt said. "We couldn't even find it to reply to it."

She said any reply would have been similar to the one made later that morning by the Board of County Commission.

The offending post, found the night of Sept. 23 on the social media page of Commissioner Arlene Tuck, said, "If Blacks now have their own National Anthem then they need their own welfare system paid for by Rich Black Athletes."

Tuck has said she did not know who put the post on her page, but took it down the next morning and posted a message saying she had been hacked.

Several members of the community flooded that post with screenshots of other posts, apparently from Tuck's page over the course of several months, making similar racial-charged statements.

Soon afterwards, the county's social media had a statement signed by County Commission Chair Ron Handley, expressing regret at the post on Tuck's page and general assurance that the county overall does not hold such views.

"Highlands County remains dedicated to unifying our community and breaking the barriers that divide us so that we, as a community, can move forward in unity," Handley's statement read.

Johnson told the Highlands

POST | 8A

County sees 9 new cases of COVID-19

Staff Report

Highlands County had an increase of nine new cases of coronavirus with the release of Monday's numbers by the Florida Department of Health. The cases came from 83 processed tests, the lowest number of tests in the past two weeks.

Still, the positivity rate for new cases of 9.78% was nearly double the 5% we would like to see, but was partially offset by a median age for new cases of 69,

which is 22 years more than the overall county median age of 47.

Highlands County's death rate rose from 91 to 92, but the county's death percentage of 4% is roughly double the state percentage of 2%

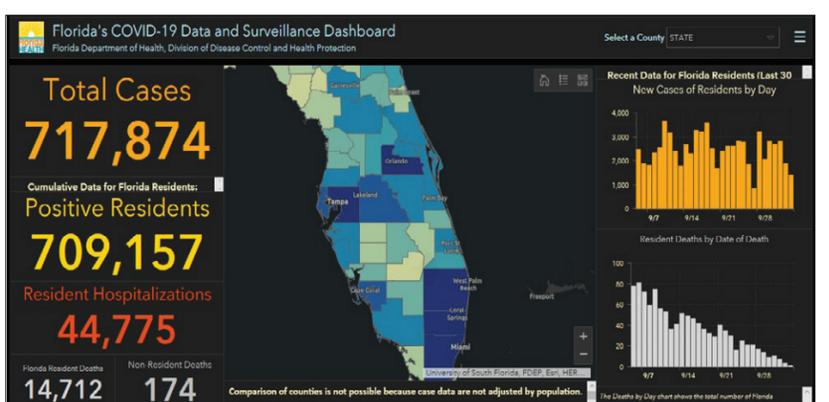
Highlands County had 24 hospitalized, according to the Agency for Health Care Administration.

A high number of the Highlands County cases have been related to long-term care facilities.

There have been 372 cases attributed to long-term care facilities, which is 17%, and more than double the state average of 7% of cases. The 3% of cases being related to a correctional facility is the same as the state average.

On the state level, there were 1,403 new cases and 57 deaths. Florida has now seen 717,874 cases between residents and non-residents and there

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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH



Classifieds.....B4-7 Sports B1 Viewpoints..... A6
Comics B7-10 TV Listings A9 Weather.....A10
Lottery A2

Good morning To
Harold Wakefield
Thanks for reading!

