



FILE PHOTO

The lighted decorations were not as showy this year as in years past. This is a picture of lighted decor from the vintage lamp post from a Christmas season past.

## Community to help decorate town next year

By KIM LEATHERMAN  
STAFF WRITER

LAKE PLACID — If you thought the Christmas decorations and lights in the Town of Lake Placid were a little on the skimpy side, you might be right. The lackluster displays were a far cry from the normal Hallmark “small town” movie set perfection that residents and visitors are accustomed to.

The lights in DeVane Park, affectionately known as the “circle,” were very late going up this year. Some decorations such as the banners/flags that normally hang on the “old fashioned” light poles were not seen and there were generally less displays.

Residents may have to rescue Christmas in Lake Placid next year, similar to them picking up and running with the Halloween event that was almost canceled this year. At least one resident has reached out to Town Administrator Phil Williams about donating items to the town’s décor. June Rosenblum has said she would like to see DeVane Park have more lights and displays. She has even volunteered to donate to the cause. Rosenblum has been shopping on the internet and has seen several

DECORATE | 5A

## Under a new roof



MARC VALERO/SEBRING

The Church Service Center is now at its new location on South Railroad Avenue, Avon Park.

## Church Service Center relocates

By MARC VALERO  
STAFF WRITER

AVON PARK — After operating from a shed since Hurricane Irma, the Church Service Center is now helping the needy from its new location — the former Jahna Concrete office.

Church Service Center Director John Jeffo said Thursday, “We are in the building, finally.”

The center was based at the Station Building on South Butler Avenue, but damage from the hurricane pushed its operations to a metal shed behind the building.

The City of Avon Park, through a lease agreement with a token payment, provided the center with the former Jahna Concrete offices at 120 S. Railroad Avenue.

About a dozen of the center’s volunteers were on hand Tuesday for a variety of tasks including moving items in from the old location.

The new location has a separate room for clothing that is provided for the needy.

Jeffo noted that the store-type clothing racks were donated to the center. A church that used to have a food bank donated wooden shelves for food storage. A moving company donated its time to move the racks and heavy items.

“Some of this stuff is too heavy. We are in our 70’s and 80’s; I am 84. I can move a couple of cans, but I can’t overdo it,” Jeffo said in jest, holding one can of food.

The center’s hours are 9 a.m. to noon Tuesday through Friday. The hours may change, Jeffo said. They used to be open until 1 p.m., but at the temporary location in the shed they didn’t have heat or air conditioning.

“We had so many fans, the guys had to wear golf shoes,” he said with a laugh.

A couple of City Council members have said the city-owned former Jahna Concrete property would be an ideal location for the city’s streets department.

Jeffo said the city asked him if they fixed the Station building, if he would move back into it. He replied “no.”

“They had two years they could have done it; why didn’t they do it then,” Jeffo said. “We spent all the money getting this ready and now they ask me if I want to move back. I don’t want to move back.”

He ordered a building to house the USDA donations that are currently being held in a church’s garage.



MARC VALERO, STAFF

Dan Chaisson places cans and boxes of non-perishable food items in bags for distribution at the Church Service Center.



MARC VALERO/STAFF

The Church Service Center’s clothing room at its new location at 120 S. Railroad Ave., Avon Park.



MARC VALERO/STAFF

The old Bank of America parking lot and drive-through teller parcel on Lakeview Drive, the City of Sebring is slated to purchase, has no asbestos materials according to a recent inspection.

## Former bank property clears inspection for city purchase

By MARC VALERO  
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — An inspection of former bank drive-through showed no signs of asbestos, clearing the way for the City of Sebring to purchase the property.

At its Dec. 17 meeting, the Sebring City Council tabled its decision on purchasing the old Bank of America parking lot and drive-through teller parcel. The purchase is to provide parking for nearby city-owned properties and for overflow parking for the downtown.

The property at 1960 Lakeview Drive, Lot 5, which is also bordered by Franklin Street, is owned by Sebring Flea Market, LLC and has an assessed and taxable value of \$179,598, according to the Highlands County Property Appraiser website.

There is a proposed contract for the city to purchase the property for \$200,000. The property was recently appraised at a value of \$202,000.

The property purchase was tabled so that an inspection could be performed to determine if the site has any asbestos.

Councilman Charles Lowrance is an owner of the property. The city continues to wait for an opinion from the office of the Florida Commission on Ethics that the sale would be in compliance with the applicable ethics laws.

Assistant City Manager Bob Hoffman said Thursday there was an asbestos study done for Lowrance some time ago (March 4, 2017) and the study was redone and certified (Dec. 27, 2019) for the city. There was no asbestos found in the building.

The city has potential layouts, with an overlay of the existing property, for angled parking and straight-in parking with both designs creating about 140 parking spaces.

## ‘Open and ongoing’

## State officials have several fires still under investigation

By PHIL ATTINGER  
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — For now, Florida State Fire Marshal officials do not have an update on this week’s truck fire at the Lake Sebring boat ramp. That matter is still under investigation by the Fire Marshal. Fortunately, there were no injuries nor loss of property, aside from the truck.

Reports that a boat was also involved in the fire early Monday morning turned out to be incorrect. A pickup truck had caught fire at the Lake Sebring boat ramp at

626 Memorial Drive, close to the fence of neighbor Peter Harrison.

He reported getting covered in ash while spraying water from his garden hose on his backyard fence and his own boat to protect both from the flames.

“I credit the police department with forcing me to safety,” he later told the Highlands News-Sun, noting that he had full gasoline cans on his boat. “I wasn’t thinking of being in so much danger.”

He also thanked West Sebring firefighters for a rapid response and “for saving my property

from certain destruction.”

There are other recent fires still under investigation by Fire Marshal agents:

- Dec. 15 shortly after 3:30 a.m. — Highlands County Fire Rescue crews answered a call for a semi-trailer engulfed in flames on County Road 721 and Wheeler Avenue in Lake Placid.

- Nov. 29 at 10 p.m. — Highlands County Fire Rescue units answered a call for a burning warehouse at 5130 US 27 North in Sebring, on the east side of the highway, just north of Tanglewood. Crews found the office area of the vacant

warehouse fully involved in fire and got it extinguished, without injuries.

- Nov. 21 at 10:30 p.m. — A 1930s-era home at 1232 Katcalani Ave. in Sebring caught fire. After Sebring fire crews put the fire out, they spent a long time looking for the sole resident in the extensive debris, which consisted of burned stacks and piles of belongings, until Sebring police found him at another location.

The home’s owner had several cases of code violations from the city of Sebring and, according to city officials at the time, police had three open

cases on the house for not keeping the house to minimum maintenance standards and having debris around it. Cases dating back to 2014 had gone into foreclosure to collect liens totaling \$405,052, according to Sebring police, and other cases have liens pending.

- Nov. 9 at 3:30 a.m. — Sebring fire crews fought a fire at Custom Prints at 1086 Lakeview Drive. The building was vacant and no one was injured. A car parked near the building was determined to be a total loss along with much of the building.



Classifieds..... B5-8 Obituaries..... A5  
Comics ..... A7-8, B9-10 Sports ..... B1  
Lottery ..... B2 TV Listings ..... A9

Viewpoints..... A6  
Weather..... A10

Good morning To  
Judith Ketner  
Thanks for reading!

