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The Zephyrhills News

YOUR HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER SINCE 1911

Thursday, December 30, 2021 110th Year - No. 16

thezephyrhillsnews.com 50¢

Format change

With this week's Top 10 lists, the format has changed. The TV listings, obituaries and weather will return in the Jan. 6, 2022 edition. We wish all of our valued readers and business partners a Happy New Year.

A Year In Review

Inside this 2021 issue we share the top 10 news and sports stories for the past year. On the political scene, the city was a popular destination for Governor Ron DeSantis, who visited three times. Downtown activities, many of which were cancelled or postponed the year before, returned with a Christmas parade among the highlights. Eagles Aerie 3752 had its downtown grand opening and the Crystal Bar reopened. Growth and expansion were reflected in Two Rivers community getting a green light. Road and traffic improvements were ongoing. The city also expanded its reclaimed water project.

Sports

The Zephyrhills News highlights goals and achievements of local athletes and sports teams with our top 10 sports stories for 2021. The high school football team dominated rival Pasco in the 9-Mile War and qualified to the playoffs for the seventh time in eight seasons. The girls weightlifters won a third straight district title while the boys were district runners-up in that sport. The boys track team won a district title with several runners earning medals at the state meet. Stewart Middle had another unbeaten football season. The Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics relocated to Wiregrass Ranch. Four San Antonio baseball teams made states.

Email Address

If you would like to email *The Zephyrhills News* story ideas, press releases, club news, park news, special events or letters to the editor, please send your information to our email address: thezephyrhillsnews@gmail.com.

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NO. 1

Governor inks \$101.5 billion state budget at city hall



Above: Governor Ron DeSantis speaks about the state's budget at city hall.

STEVE LEE

Ron DeSantis makes second appearance in Zephyrhills over past three months

By STEVE LEE
 News Reporter
 June 3, 2021

For the second time in three months the governor of Florida came to Zephyrhills for a significant act. On Wednesday afternoon in council chambers at city hall, Ron DeSantis signed the Florida Leads state budget he approved after this spring's legislative sessions in Tallahassee.

For the fiscal year of 2021-22 Florida's budget totals \$101.5 billion, which includes \$169 million in tax relief. The governor vetoed \$1.5 billion in spending, including \$1.35 million from federal

funds received under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.

"We're very excited to sign the budget for this year into law," DeSantis said. "There have been a lot of people over the last year, the last year and a half, that said thank God I live in Florida."

In March DeSantis made a surprise visit to Zephyrhills. His message that morning in the parking lot of the old SunTrust Building on Gall Boulevard was vowing to expand vaccine dosages to more seniors and other various groups throughout the state.

That marked the first by a Florida governor since Rick Scott came here in 2012 to tout job growth in Pasco County.

On hand Wednesday were local dignitaries, city and community leaders, and politicians representing east Pasco. Among that group were State Representative Randy Maggard, a longtime Dade City resident serving District 38; Danny Burgess, a state senator who grew up in Zephyrhills and serves District 20; Wilton Simpson,

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The Zephyrhills News top 10 news stories of 2021

By STEVE LEE
 News Reporter

With all of its new subdivisions, business developments and expansions that include popular restaurants, new Veterans Clinic and continued expansion of the Sarah Vande Berg Tennis & Wellness Center, Zephyrhills is in a growth stage like never before.

Coupled with the ever-growing Wesley Chapel area and further developments in northern Hillsborough County, it certainly was expected that eventually some of that growth would come this way. Along those lines, new and wider roads are under construction to not only alleviate traffic congestion but bring folks to Zephyrhills.

As the best local source for news and advertising in the area, *The Zephyrhills News*, founded in 1911, continues to thrive. That merits a heartfelt thanks to our readers and advertisers. So enjoy this edition of our top 10 news stories that ran in the widely read weekly newspaper throughout the year. We also run the top 10 sports stories of year in this edition.

A year after countries, states and cities dealt with partial shutdowns and cancellations due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, 2021 marked a rebounding year of sorts with the reopening or revival of business and events. Nowhere was that more apparent than Zephyrhills, which resumed numerous activities and events following a year's hiatus.

Perhaps Randy Stovall, chairman of the Zephyrhills Chamber of Commerce, summed it up best when he called local business and community leaders, along with residents, resilient for the way they came through 2020 and moved forward into 2021 as best as they could.

So without further adieu, here are the top 10 stories of 2021.

Governor Ron DeSantis came to Zephyrhills City Hall in June, marking one of his three trips to the east Pasco city during the year. The last time he joked that he had been here so often he could run for mayor, although current mayor Gene Whitfield might have something to say about that. The governor inked a \$101.5 billion state budget in council chambers during that visit.

In April, a mask ban was lifted in Pasco County. Nonetheless, despite an executive order from the county administrator's office, schools, courthouses and hospitals were given the okay to retain mask requirements. The initial mandate to wear face coverings in the county has been initiated in June 2020 in an effort to combat spreading the coronavirus. The executive order partially rescinded that mandate.

A project nearly two years in the making came to fruition in September with the downtown grand opening of Fraternal Order of Eagles Aerie 3752. The relocation from Wesley Chapel, near the New River Library to 5th Avenue in the former Wells Fargo building, was cause for celebration. Members, city officials and local business

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NO. 2



Mask ban lifted in Pasco County

Schools, courthouses and hospitals retain mask requirements despite executive order from county administrator

By STEVE LEE
 News Reporter
 April 8, 2021

A mandate to wear face coverings in Pasco County, initiated in June of 2020 as an effort to combat spreading the coronavirus, has been rescinded somewhat but not completely.

On April 5, an executive order from the Pasco County Administrator's office came down declaring masks would no longer be required. The order was due, in part, to lower COVID-19 hospitalization rates and a recent increase in vaccinations against the virus.

Among county residents 65 and older, 70 percent have been vaccinated with an additional 57 percent of 50 and older receiving at least one dose of the vaccine. Now, all state residents are eligible for vaccination shots at such places as retail pharmacies, hospitals and doctor's offices.

Nonetheless, wearing masks, maintaining social distancing and frequent hand-washing are recommended until further notice. The county also recommends wearing masks indoors.

"Increasingly, Pasco County residents are getting vaccinated and we're seeing fewer people with severe COVID-19 symptoms in area hospitals," said Dan Biles, the county's administrator. "It's the right time to relax the face covering requirement in Pasco County."

Biles noted that while the mask mandate has been lifted, certain companies or locales have the option of deciding policy at their own discretion.

"Local businesses have the authority to require customers to wear face masks," he said, adding, "The county supports the continued efforts to reduce the spread of the virus."

Not everyone, however, is on board with lifting the face covering ban. Masks remain required on public transportation, in county schools and at the main courthouses in Dade City and New Port Richey. There are other locales as well, such as hospitals and other businesses.

For now, schools at every grade level in the county still require masks to be worn on campuses and in district offices. That goes for students, staff and visitors alike.

Pasco School Superintendent Kurt Browning, who last year had his own bout with COVID-19, wasted little time in responding to the ease of restrictions by the county administrator by recording a video posted on the school board's web site.

"I cannot in good conscience abandon our health and safety protocols at this time," he said in a press release from the school board offices. "Our protocols have helped to prevent, and certainly reduce, the spread of COVID-19 among our students and staff."

The authority of Pasco Schools to require masks is dependent on whether or not Governor DeSantis' Executive Order is extended beyond the expiration date of April 26. If the Executive Order is not extended, the district will have no choice but to make masks optional.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention continues to recommend wearing of masks in schools as Florida remains under an emergency order until April 26. That order could be extended by Governor Ron DeSantis, who for the most part has supported business openings and in-school teaching during the pandemic while promoting a seniors first agenda for the vaccine rollouts.

Steve Hegarty, a school district spokesman, reported that positive cases of COVID-19 among students and staff decreased significantly since January. There was, however, an increase in March, likely related to spring break. Still, he noted the increases were below the number of positive cases reported earlier this year.

As for the AdventHealth hospitals in Zephyrhills, Dade City and Wesley Chapel, masks and social distancing will remain in affect for now.

"Wearing a mask is one of the most selfless acts you can do to protect yourself and others in public," said Robin McGuinness, senior executive officer of patient outcomes for AdventHealth's West Florida Division. "We encourage everyone to get vaccinated if they are eligible and to continue to social distance, cover their mouths and nose and sanitize hands frequently to lower the number of people contracting COVID-19."





The Zephyrhills News



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GOVERNOR: From Page 1A

president of the Florida Senate from Trilby; and county commissioner Ron Oakley from Dade City.

DeSantis noted that he came to Zephyrhills at Simpson's behest.

"The region here should feel very proud," the governor said. "We asked Senator Simpson where (the signing) would have the greatest success and he thought there would be no better place than Zephyrhills."

The state budget funds disaster preparedness, supports men and women of law enforcement and first responders, prioritizes students and teachers, and continues to protect the state's environment.

"We made a decision as other states kept locking citizens down we'd lift people up in Florida," the governor said. "We worked hard to get people back to work in our state."

DeSantis, who earlier in the day spoke at a restaurant in New Smyrna Beach, noted that the approved budget did not result in increased taxes. In fact, it came while maintaining the lowest per capita tax burden in the nation.

"When we came into this

legislative session I knew we were going to be strong," DeSantis said, noting that the state should have about \$10 billion in reserves in a state that often deals with hurricanes and natural disasters.

The governor said in April the state took in \$800 million more than some estimates, adding, "That puts us in an incredibly strong position."

Comparing New York's state budget as being twice the size of Florida's, DeSantis said, "We're very prudent in how we spend money."

On education, DeSantis noted that while during the coronavirus pandemic the teacher's union "sued us to close the schools, at the end of the day the teachers wanted to get back."

Funding various school programs and raising the minimum K-12 teacher salary to \$47,500 are among the strides the governor mentioned in education.

On the environment he said \$625 million is earmarked for Everglades restoration, beach nourishment, rising sea levels and water resources.

"That is important when you have 1,300 miles of coastline" DeSantis said.

NEWS INTRO: From Page 1A

leaders joined in the celebration.

Also in September, the green light was given to the Two Rivers project. Upon completion it is projected to be one of the county's largest developments. The master-planned 3,405-acre community, approved unanimously by the Pasco County Commission, has been 12 years in the making and will be built along State Road 56, extending from U.S. 301 to Morris Bridge Road.

Along U.S. 301, a bit of nostalgia was revived in Zephyrhills with the opening of the new Crystal Bar. The landmark watering hole, which burned down in 2019, was rebuilt on the original site. As always, it is being run by the Geddes family. Jerry's Crystal Bar & Package Store was opened in 1954.

After a year of a lot of online learning, Saint Leo welcomed a record number of students to campus at the beginning of the fall semester. The annual move-in day for incoming students attracted more than 1,100 freshmen and transfers, who settled

into residence halls on the sprawling campus bordering Lake Jovita.

The Zephyrhills Police Department let the public know about its concerted efforts to take drugs off the streets. Thanks to the exemplary work of a special unit, drug seizures within the city limits were on the rise last summer.

A mega-contractor working on the diverging diamond at State Road 54 and I-75 halted progress on that and other road projects. While those projects are not in municipal Zephyrhills they do affect east and central Pasco residents.

The city expanded its reclaimed water program, which had been around since 2003. It provided more options for residences and businesses to utilize.

On the first day back to school a mask controversy took center stage. Pasco School Superintendent Kurt Browning let people know he would abide by the governor's edict against mask mandates, but with reservations.

U.S. Postal Service introduces pen pal project



Teachers are invited to sign up for free letter-writing kit

WeAreTeachers offers daily articles, videos, and giveaways for educators.

"WeAreTeachers is so excited to work with USPS on this unique program that will share free resources with teachers and give 25,000 classrooms of students the opportunity to have a pen pal experience and build friendships and understanding across the United States," said Dana Truby, the company's editorial director.

U.S. public, charter, and private school teachers are invited to join The USPS Pen Pal Project. More information, including official rules and instructions for teachers to sign up their classes for the project, is available at www.WeAreTeachers.com.

The U.S. Postal Service generally receives no tax dollars for operating expenses and relies on the sale of postage, products and services to fund its operations.

The U.S. Postal Service is working with WeAreTeachers to introduce The USPS Pen Pal Project, a free educational program for students in Grades 3-5, this 2021-2022 school year.

The USPS Pen Pal Project will provide 25,000 classrooms across the country the opportunity to partner with matched classes to write one million letters with the goal of building friendships and understanding diverse perspectives.

Each participating classroom will receive a USPS Pen Pal Project kit with a teaching poster, cards, and envelopes. By participating in the program, students will improve their writing, communication, and collaboration skills.

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- Whole Belly Clams

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Chicken Tender Tuesday
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ALL YOU CAN EAT & ENJOY \$16.99

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Thursday, 1/6 • ALL DAY
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Mohamed Saleh, MD is a fellowship-trained neurosurgeon specializing in minimally invasive spine surgery and complex spinal reconstruction. He earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities in Genetics, Cell biology and Development with high distinction. He went on to earn his medical degree from New York Medical College with honors and is a member of the national Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Society. Dr. Saleh completed his residency and fellowship training at the University of Cincinnati under the guidance of Dr. Joseph Cheng, specializing in minimally invasive techniques, spinal deformity and complex spinal disorders.

Dr. Saleh treats patients with various neurosurgical disorders and specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of spinal disorders. He utilizes a patient-centered, comprehensive team approach including therapy, interventional pain management and minimally invasive surgery as a last resort. He enjoys educating patients on their condition, reviewing all treatment options and formulating a personalized care plan to get them back to doing the things they enjoy.

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Eagles present checks to two organizations

On Dec 4, the Officers of the Auxiliary and Aeries for the Fraternal Order of Eagles 3752 presented checks to two community resource centers. In recognition of helping the needy in the community the Eagles presented the board members and director of Meals on Wheels a donation to help with costs of the center. Eagle members were able to receive a tour of the new facility and the outstanding job they are doing feeding the community.

Lynda Vest, Charla Vande Berg and John Daff presented a donation in recognition of the



service the Healing Hearts Café has brought to the Zephyrhills community.

"Both of these community centers recognize the needs of our town, and we are honored to be a part of helping to keep their doors open."

Each center is always in need of volunteers, drivers and supplies, as the demand continues to grow.

Eagles is proud to help be part of this amazing town they call home.



Ladies of the Oriental Shrine induct new members



The Ladies of the Oriental Shrine of North America, Cairo Court 97 inducted seven new members on Dec. 15. The ceremonial was attended by the Grand High Priestess, Lady Kate Kalmbach and three of the Grand Officers, Ladies PC Mabry, Cyndi Rudd and Carol Sue Roberts, PGHP, PHP.

HAPPY NEW YEAR 2022

Since we have God's wisdom and knowledge revealed today for this "dispensation of grace," we can say: "We know the future with confidence and security. Our future is great, that is, our eternal future. This being true because we have believed God's report from the holy scriptures concerning our "blessed hope" of our salvation that we have "in Christ our Saviour."



Some of YOU who may read this aren't as confident as we are, but we hope and pray that YOU will come to know Christ personally, and that YOU will have peace with God this year and every subsequent year!

We encourage YOU to read YOUR Bible and learn about God's grace, mercy, and peace that he freely gives to ALL who will trust him. The message of God's grace for the Church where God is dispensing his grace and mercy to all nations of people is found in the writings of the apostle Paul alone. These Bible books are Romans through Philemon.

The "good news" of your salvation and the forgiveness of all our sins is found in **1 Corinthians 15:1-4**: *Moreover, brethren, I (the apostle Paul) declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; 2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. 3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:* Simply believe this report for your eternal salvation and security.

And after YOU trust this gospel for YOUR salvation and peace, God will seal YOU with his Holy Spirit of promise. **Ephesians 1:13-14**: *In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, 14 Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

Please send for free Bible information on "ETERNAL LIFE INSURANCE" and "RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE SCRIPTURES" according to 2 Tim. 2:15. Write to our P.O.Box or Email [www.Dadecityfellowship@bibletruthfortoday.com](mailto:Dadecityfellowship@bibletruthfortoday.com)

DADE CITY GRACE BIBLE CHURCH
 P.O. Box 2274, Dade City, FL 33526
 Dade City Business Center Office Plaza, Suite 403
 15000 U.S. Hwy 301 N., Dade City, FL 33523
 Look for the Water Tower / YouTube: Dade City Grace Bible Church
 Meeting Time: Sundays—10 A.M., PH: 352-567-3955

CHURCH NEWS

First Baptist Church of Zephyrhills, 38231 5th Ave., invites you to Sunday services with Pastor Rob McKinney.

The teen TRUTH ministries, is Wednesdays at 6 p.m., with youth leaders, Carla Berger and Paul Warner. Bus transportation is available.

The children ministry, TeamKid, is Wednesdays at 6 p.m. with director, Lorraine McKinney, and teachers, Carol Arnold and Sarah Lutz.

The Sunday services are: Sunday school for all ages, 9:30 a.m.; worship service, 10:45 a.m.; and evening service at 6 p.m. Wednesday mid-week service, 6 p.m. and choir practice is at 6 p.m. For more information, call the church at (813) 782-5574.

Crystal Springs Worship Center, 2155 Paul Buchman Hwy. is an Assembly of God Church. Adult Sunday school at 9:30 a.m. followed by the morning worship at 10:30 a.m.

The Ladies of Light Ministry Bible Study meets on Tuesdays 9:30 a.m. Wednesday night service starts at 6:30 p.m. For more information, call (813) 788-1612.

East Pasco Seventh-day Adventist Church, 7333 Dairy Rd. invites you to Saturday services with Lead Pastor Ray Pichette and Associate Pastor, Ricardo Barrieffe. Bible study is at 10:15 a.m. and worship services are at 9 and 11 a.m. Wednesday mid-week services are at 7 p.m.

Narcotics Anonymous is Sunday, 7 p.m., Al-Anon (Noon Solutions) is Monday, 12 p.m., Al-Anon (Serenity), Wednesday, 7 p.m., Narcotics Anonymous is Sunday, Wednesday and Thursday 7 p.m., Alcoholics Anonymous is Friday at 10 a.m. and Overeaters Anonymous is Monday, 5:30 p.m. and Friday, 11:30 a.m.

Women's Ministries Bible Study Group is Thursday, 5 p.m.

The Adventist Health Food Store is open at the church Wednesdays, 1-4 p.m.

For more information, call (813) 782-2000.

First United Methodist Church of Zephyrhills, 38635 5th Ave. and Senior Pastor Steve Ezra invites everyone to worship services every Sunday, with contemporary service at 9:30 a.m. and traditional service at 11 a.m. Coffee and fellowship in Cooper Hall behind the sanctuary, every Sunday, 9-10:45 a.m.

Adult Sunday school is 9:30 a.m. for the Crusaders and Lamplighters groups, then Truthseekers at 10:45 a.m. United Methodist Youth Group (grades 6-12th) meets every Sunday, 4-5:30p.m. in Cooper Hall, youth room with group discussion about relevant topics with fellowship, praise and worship time. All are welcome and bring a friend.

For more information, call (813) 782-5645 or visit www.fumczhills.org.

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 Morning Worship..... 10:45 a.m.
 Evening Service..... 6 p.m.
 Wednesday Service..... 6 p.m.

FIRST UNITED METHODIST
 38635 5th Ave.
 (813) 782-5645
 Senior Pastor Steve Ezra
 Sunday Services
 Contemporary..... 9:30 a.m.
 Traditional..... 11 a.m.
 Live streaming for both services at www.fumczhills.org

CRYSTAL SPRINGS WORSHIP CENTER
 2155 Paul Buchman Hwy.
 (813) 788-1612
 Pastor Linda Davis
 Sunday
 Adult Sunday School..... 9:30 a.m.
 Morning Worship..... 10:30 a.m.
 Tuesday
 Ladies Bible Study..... 9:30 a.m.
 Wednesday
 Evening Service..... 6:30 p.m.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN
 5510 19th St.
 (813) 782-7412
 Pastor Denise Lay
 Sunday
 Worship..... 10 a.m.
 Sunday School (Nursery/Grades K-12)..... 10 a.m.
 Adult Study..... 8:30 a.m.
 Coffee fellowship after worship
 Wednesday
 REFRESH Supper..... 5:30 p.m.
 REFRESH Youth Group..... 6 p.m.
 Adult Bible Study..... 6 p.m.
 Choir Practice..... 7 p.m.
 Second Saturday King's Men (in fellowship hall)..... 9 a.m.
www.firstpcz.org

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF ZEPHYRHILLS
 38231 5th Ave.
 (813) 782-5574
 Pastor Robert McKinney
 Sunday
 Sunday School..... 9:30 a.m.
 Worship..... 10:45 a.m. and 6 p.m.
 Wednesday
 Service..... 6 p.m.
 Choir Practice..... 6 p.m.
 Children's Activities..... 6 p.m.
 TRUTH teen ministries..... 6:15 p.m.

THE CHURCH AT CHANCEY ROAD
 34921 Chancey Rd.
 (813) 317-4975
 Pastor Tim Mitchell
 Sunday
 Worship..... 10:15 a.m.
 Worship, Bible Study and Communion
 Monday
 Prayer and Bible Reading..... 12 p.m.
 Overcomers Bible Study..... 6 p.m. (12 step program)
 Tuesday
 Bible Study..... 6:30 p.m.
 Wednesday
 Fellowship Dinner..... 6 p.m. followed by Bible study for all ages at 6:45 p.m.
 Thursday
 Heart Dance Ladies Group..... 10 a.m.
 Friday
 Prayer and Bible Study..... 7:45 am.
www.thechurchatchanseyroad.com

ATONEMENT LUTHERAN CHURCH
 29617 S.R. 54
 (813) 973-2211
 Pastor Scott Lindner
 Saturday
 Godly Worship Service..... 5 p.m.
 Sunday
 Worship Service with Communion..... 10 a.m.
discoveralc.com

ST. JOSEPH CATHOLIC CHURCH
 38710 5th Ave.
 (813) 782-2813
 Reverend Allan Tupa
 Saturday
 Mass..... 4 p.m. Sunday
 Mass..... 7, 9, 11 a.m.
 Weekday Masses
 Monday..... 8 a.m.
 Tuesday..... 8 a.m.
 Wednesday..... 8 a.m.
 Thursday..... 8 a.m.
 Friday..... 8 a.m.
 Saturday
 Adoration/Confessions..... 8-9 a.m.

DADE CITY GRACE BIBLE CHURCH
 Dade City Business Center
 Suite 403
 15000 U.S. Hwy. 301
 (352) 567-3955
 Pastor Willard L. Sessoms
 Fellowship..... 9:30 a.m.
 Sunday Service..... 10 a.m.
www.bibletruthfortoday.com

EAST PASCO SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH
 7333 Dairy Rd.
 (813) 782-2000
 Ray Pichette, Lead Pastor
 Ricardo Barrieffe, Associate Pastor
 Saturday
 Bible Study..... 10:15 a.m.
 Worship Service..... 9 and 11 a.m.
 Al-non
 Monday, 12 p.m. and Wednesday, 7 p.m.
 Alcohol Anonymous
 Friday, 10 a.m.
 Overeaters Anonymous
 Monday, 5:30 p.m. and Friday 11:30 a.m.
 Narcotics Anonymous
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 Worship..... 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m.
 Wednesday
 Bible Study..... 7:30 p.m.
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 (813) 783-2727
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 Coffee and Donut Fellowship..... 10:30 a.m.
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 Wednesday
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 Reverend Tod A. Shouse
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 Sunday
 Worship Service..... 10 a.m. with communion on the second and fourth Sundays. You may stream the 10 a.m. service at www.facebook.com/OurSaviorLutheranChurchOfZephyrhillsFL



NO. 3

Eagles finally get their downtown grand opening



Left: John Daff and Linda Vest were among the organization's leaders who spoke at the event.

Above: Fraternal Order of Eagles Aeries 3752 leaders and members were joined by local dignitaries and city leaders for the ribbon-cutting.

5th Avenue site has been home to the Fraternal Order of Eagles Aeries 3752 since relocation from Wesley Chapel in spring of 2020

By STEVE LEE
News Reporter
Sept. 2, 2021

The Fraternal Order of Eagles Aeries 3752 have been downtown since taking over the former Wells Fargo Bank building in the spring of 2020. After a few stops and starts, primarily due to the on-and-off again presence of the coronavirus pandemic and a recent resurgence, the non-profit charitable organization finally got its grand opening.

Last Thursday, it became official as members were joined by city leaders and local dignitaries to celebrate with a traditional ribbon-cutting as well as words of appreciation from a handful of notable speakers. They came together at the renovated 10,000-square-foot building.

"On behalf of the city we just want to say we're very happy to have you downtown," said Todd Vande Berg, the city's planner who showed up with city manager Billy Poe and city clerk Lori Hillman.

"This is everything; people helping people. I love it," said John Hierons, a trustee and past president who has been part of the local chapter for 20 years.

The local chapter, along with the accompanying Ladies

Auxiliary, has been in the east Pasco area for five decades. It incorporated in 1977.

The renovation of an abandoned downtown building was completed in three stages. The FOP Aeries 3752 had been in a building off State Road 54 and across from the New River Branch Library in Wesley Chapel, just beyond city limits. That site has since been bulldozed.

"This here is bringing us into Zephyrhills," trustee Reed Sutton said.

Eddie Shaw, a longtime member who helped pressure wash the outside area during the early stages of renovating the property, pulled up front on his 2014 Harley Davidson Softail to join in the celebration. He often parks his motorcycle out front.

Tim Hoyt, the Eagles Grand Aerie Membership Coordinator based in Ohio, came down for the ceremony and following party. He congratulated John Daff, chapter president as well as being president of the local Eagle Riders, and Linda Vest, the Ladies Auxiliary president, for their efforts in leading the local chapter.

"People helping people," is what Hoyt and the others emphasized during last week's event, which he labeled a "re-birth" for the local chapter.

Hoyt, who said, "I'm blessed to go around and help people," emphasized that 100 percent of money raised for charities actually goes to those

charities with no hidden or administrative costs. Hoyt thanked city leadership "for helping us get to this point. For believing in us and giving us the opportunity to continue donating to the Zephyrhills and Wesley Chapel communities."

"The city has been a godsend," Hierons said. "They wanted us here. We've helped them revitalize the downtown area." Another notable element favoring the local chapter is that being more a part of the city has led to more and younger people entering the building and joining.

"We get more of the younger generation here," said Sutton, comparing the downtown building to the previous location several miles to the west. "Everybody comes downtown."

"A lot of professionals are coming into the club," added Pat Hochstetler, coordinator for the auxiliary.

Daff noted how many longtime members showed up for last week's event.

"We are family in this building," he said.

The local Eagles have numerous activities on a weekly basis. Their calendar includes pool tournaments, darts, karaoke, bingo, card games and live music.

STEVE LEE

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FEEDS 6-8

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PICK 4 MEATS.
FEEDS 8-10

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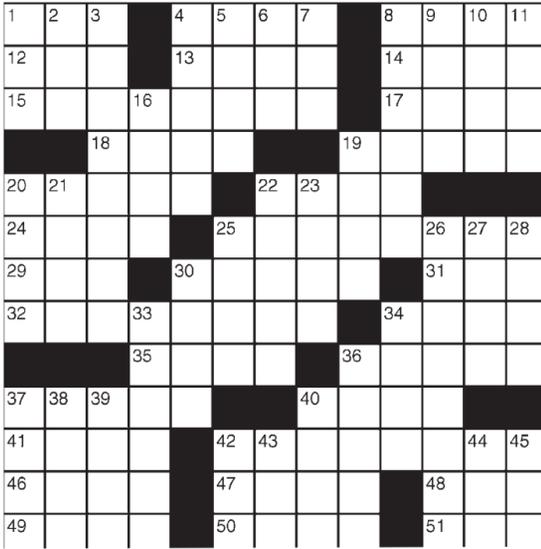
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KING CROSSWORD - DEC. 30

ACROSS

- 1 Steal from
- 4 Highlander
- 8 Streamlet
- 12 Historic period
- 13 String
- 14 Tom Joad, for one
- 15 Bridgetown's island
- 17 "It's -- real!"
- 18 Intends
- 19 Tropical fruit
- 20 Jazz genre
- 22 Piece of work
- 24 Priests' garments
- 25 "Excellent work!"
- 29 Espionage org.
- 30 Spectrum creator
- 31 Ms. Thurman
- 32 Wavering
- 34 Twain hero
- 35 Sharp tooth
- 36 Clearheaded
- 37 Cream-filled pastries
- 40 Arrive
- 41 Jai --
- 42 Chocolatey frozen treat
- 46 Give up
- 47 Carry on
- 48 Citrus drink
- 49 Crystal gazer
- 50 Eye part
- 51 U.K. fliers

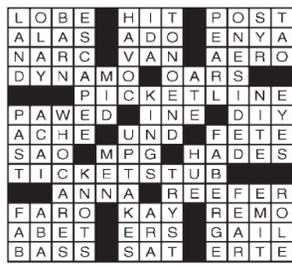


- 16 Life stories
- 19 Site of Apra Harbor
- 20 "Coffee Cantata" composer
- 21 Writer Wiesel
- 22 Rubber gasket
- 23 Nuisance
- 25 Mom's mom
- 26 Place to get a fruit smoothie
- 27 Hotel chain
- 28 Combo
- 30 School orgs.
- 33 Not as certain
- 34 Seethe
- 36 Theater boxes
- 37 Campaign-funding gps.
- 38 Fonda's beekeeper role
- 39 Lose color
- 40 406, in Roman numerals
- 42 Calendar abbr.
- 43 Eg. and Syr., once
- 44 Oklahoma city
- 45 Ump

DOWN

- 1 Civil War soldier
- 2 Man-mouse link
- 3 Whom Pilate pardoned
- 4 Rascal
- 5 Atlantic catches
- 6 Granada gold
- 7 QB stats
- 8 Hearty
- 9 Furniture brand
- 10 Actor Schreiber
- 11 Sultry Horne

ANSWERS TO KING CROSSWORDS DEC. 23



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 O M J H S F B I C A E Y W T U
 R N O R E A S T E R T P T S N
 L J H F A T E D S B S S S O Z
 X V T R S Q O H M A A K A M I
 H F D A T B Z Y T E E W E T V
 T R E Q M O N L Y U L R R S K
 E I T S A E B I H F O D B A C
 A Z X W N V D R A W T S A E F

Find the listed words in the diagram. They run in all directions forward, backward, up, down and diagonally
 Unlisted clue hint: A LEAVENING AGENT

Abreast	Eastman	Eastwood	Nor'easter
Beast	Eastmost	Feast	Oleaster
Beastie	Eastside	Least	Southeast
Breastbone	Eastward	Mid east	

HOCUS-FOCUS



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



Differences: 1. Plant is missing. 2. Screen is different. 3. Cap is reversed. 4. Bell is missing. 5. Sleeve is shorter. 6. Hamster is bigger. 7. Hamster is moved. 8. Hamster is different. 9. Screen is different. 10. Cap is reversed.



"It's the ones you were _____ it would be."

SCRAMBLERS

Unscramble the letters within each rectangle to form four ordinary words. Then rearrange the boxed letters to form the mystery word, which will complete the gag!

Later
TERAF

Fervent
RANTED

Blanket
EARLY

Temple
SHINER

TODAY'S WORD

STRANGE BUT TRUE

By Lucie Winborne

- If all the stars in the Milky Way were grains of salt, they'd fill an Olympic-size swimming pool.
- The Louvre museum in Paris was originally built as a fortress to repel Vikings.
- In 1887, a group of men added Susanna Madora Salter of Argonia, Kansas, to a mayoral ballot as a prank intended to embarrass and curtail the influence of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, of which she was an officer. Instead, she won over 60% of the vote and became America's first female mayor.
- Olympic medalist Mark Spitz was famed for his large mustache in an era when swimmers shaved their bodies to become more hydrodynamic. He once joked to the Russian team's coach that his mustache helped him swim faster by deflecting water from his mouth and making him more bullet-shaped. The following year, a mustache was sported by every member of the male Russian team.
- Despite their humps, camels have straight spines.
- The first use of the word "Superbowl," credited to a Chinese writer named Lom Ba Di, dates to the third century.
- In 2008, Chile minted 1.5 million 50-peso coins with a spelling error, only noticing a year later they'd spelled "CHIEE" instead of "CHILE."
- Honeybee venom has been found to destroy some types of cancer cells.
- There's a Google map for Mercury, Venus, Earth's moon, Mars, Pluto, three out of four of Jupiter's moons, and all but one of the round Saturnian moons.
- Juan Ponce de Leon brought cattle when he landed at Charlotte Harbor in 1521, his second trip to La Florida. When he came under attack, four of his heifers and a bull fled into the scrub, thus introducing cows to America.

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30ft Georgie Boy Class-A	2015 30ft Freelander Class-C	2018 35ft Durango Gold 5th Wheel	2021 34ft Alpha Wolf Travel Trailer
<p>Chevy V-8, AC & Heat, queen bed, sofa, dinette, runs and drives great!!!! Was \$24,995 Now \$15,723</p>	<p>27k miles, generator, sleeps-7, ducted AC & Heat/, full bath, kitchen. Clean!!!! Was \$64,995 Now \$48,543</p>	<p>3-slides, rear entertainment, L-sofa, washer & dryer hookups, hydraulic leveling. LOADED!!! Was \$59,995 Now \$45,467</p>	<p>Wide bunks, electric awning, AM/FM Bluetooth stereo, sleeps-10, queen bedroom, outside kitchen. MSRP \$56,983 Now \$38,417</p>
2021 38ft Torque Toy Hauler	2021 27ft Grey Wolf Toy Hauler	2022 45ft Vengeance Rogue 5th Wheel	2015 40ft Big 5th Wheel
<p>1-slide, 13ft cargo area, sleeps-6, 50" TV, electric awnings + jacks, king master bed, generator, LOADED!!! MSRP \$72,995 Now \$54,764</p>	<p>AC, ducted AC, 2-way refrigerator, queen bed, electric awning. NEW!!! Was \$36,995 Now \$27,823</p>	<p>3-slides, generator, rear patio, TVs, fireplace, auto leveling, 3-awnings, LOADED!!! MSRP \$119,995 Now \$79,724</p>	<p>3-slides, washer-dryer hookups, residential refrigerator, 6-point hydraulic leveling. CLEAN!!!! Was \$58,995 Now \$44,716</p>

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NO. 4

Two Rivers community gets the green light



Above: Four lanes, including two for turns, are shown along SR 56 at the Morris Bridge Road intersection. Below: A car drives through the intersection of State Road 56 and Morris Bridge Road.

STEVE LEE



Pasco County Commission unanimously approves plans for large development in east and central Pasco

By STEVE LEE
News Reporter
Sept. 30, 2021

Two Rivers, a master-planned community encompassing large areas of east and central Pasco, has been given the green light. Last week in Dade City, the Pasco County Commission unanimously approved rezoning for the extensive development, giving the go-ahead to move from proposal and comprehensive plans to the early stages of construction.

"The motion passes 5-0," said Ron Oakley, the commission's chairman.

The project, 12 years in the making, will be built along State Road 56 and extend from U.S. 301 to Morris Bridge Road, which clearly impacts Zephyrhills and the outlying areas to the south and east. Setting the stage for the development just south of the Pasco-Hillsborough line was the four-lane extension with additional turn lanes of SR 56 in 2019. Traffic signals are at Morris Bridge Road and U.S. 301.

It is earmarked for a 3,405-acre community that will include 6,400 residential units, schools (high, middle and elementary), 246 conservation acres with an extensive trail system and an 80-acre district park with spaces for multi-purpose fields, an aquatics center, playgrounds, a dog park, along with courts for tennis and basketball.

Additionally, projected are numerous parcels for retail and industrial land usage. Additional plans call for a potential library and public safety site for the Pasco Sheriff's Office and Pasco Fire Rescue.

The acreage has primarily been zoned for agriculture but that needed to change for the

developmental plans. Commissioners, following approval of county staff, giving the okay to rezone 3,405 acres is just the latest in a sequence of governmental approvals.

Clarke Hobby, an attorney who spoke on behalf of the Eisenhower Property Group and Thomas family, noted that Bob Sierra had the site under contact as far back as 2008. There have been several owners along the way.

"We believe that this project has been done the right way," he said. "One of the biggest things you have to remember about Two Rivers is that it truly is a mixed-use project. It's been set up correctly from the get-go."

Hobby added that the site could contain up to 2.6 million employment-generated usage.

"We're not short-changing it," he said. "We're going to create a log of jobs along the way in addition to making an overall great community."

Some county residents voiced their disapproval about growth and development, along with school zones and traffic. Hobby, however, informed commissioners that "we'll make sure that there's adequate east-west connections."

While the project clearly is beyond city limits, city manager Billy Poe views it as a boost to the entire area, especially Zephyrhills.

"Higher end homes are being built along that 56 corridor," he said, adding that plans call for another subdivision near State Road 56 along the east side of U.S. 301. "As that growth comes this way we're hoping it will spread."

Two Rivers, Poe said, "is not in the city limits, but it's close enough that it will support all the businesses within the city. From 56 and 301 you can be downtown within five minutes. It's not inconceivable that when (future residents of those planned homes) come out of their subdivisions they can come into town and shop."

Poe also noted that rather than drive to Wesley Chapel for goods and services, people could come to Zephyrhills for restaurants, auto shops or places like the Zephyrhills Brewery. Another attraction to get people in Two Rivers coming to Zephyrhills would be the activities at the venue near the city's airport and events such as downtown parades.

NO. 5

Crystal Bar has reopened



Above: Family members who decided on rebuilding the Crystal Bar that their late parents opened in 1954 stand in front of the back entrance. They are: (left to right) Karol Sealander, Gerri Belluso, Bob Geddes, Rene Hill and Kurt Geddes.

STEVE LEE

Landmark watering hole in Zephyrhills has been rebuilt after original site burned down in 2019

By STEVE LEE
News Reporter
April 1, 2021

At long last, the Crystal Bar has reopened. A soft opening for the landmark gathering place in Zephyrhills took place last Friday at noon. The original structure burned down in 2019 and has been replaced.

An official grand opening is not scheduled until the weekend of April 23-24. In the interim, longtime and even new customers no doubt will continue to spend time at the newly refurbished watering hole, which was rebuilt this past year.

Of course, the reopening drew plenty of family, as well as longtime customers who frequented the former bar. Among the notable family members were siblings Karol Sealander, Gerri Belluso, Rene Hill, along with brothers Bob and Kurt Geddes.

At noon on Friday, the Crystal Bar officially reopened with Bob Geddes welcoming the first wave of guests as they arrived: "We're open. C'mon in. The beer's cold."

"We're proud to be able to serve the community again," Sealander said. "It's not the same. It never really will be the same, but the name's still there. Mom and dad will be proud of us, for sure."

Making the soft opening even more special is that it came on what could've been the 92nd birthday of the family's matriarch, Jerry Geddes.

"I'm thrilled I'm here," Kurt Geddes said. "It's mom's birthday. My mother broke water with me behind the bar."

Jerry's Crystal Bar & Package Store opened

in 1954. Jerry and Bob Geddes, both of whom have passed away, relocated from Chicago to Tampa and purchased a gas station in the Hyde Park area in the early 1950s. They later sold it and built the Crystal Bar along Gall Boulevard. The location remained the same and the bar retained a full liquor license.

While masks are required to enter the building, once inside people removed them to drink and socialize with family and friends. Unlike the former building, smoking is not permitted inside, but there are designated areas outside.

"The nation's healing, so let's socialize again," Bob Geddes said, adding "It's a no-nonsense style bar."

There is a 24-foot-high ceiling in the 5,000-square-foot building, which is about 2,000-square-foot larger than the old building, and the bar extends out into one large room. At the far north end there is a spacious bandstand. Video bar games are mounted to a side wall and there are four new pool tables.

Shooting pool on one of those tables last Friday afternoon were former regulars Russ VanDam and Matthew McDonald.

"It's beautiful," said McDonald, who is retired from the U.S. Navy. "It's the atmosphere, it's smoke-free and the pool tables are awesome. They're off the charts."

Also shooting pool at another table were Mona Bartle and Mike Page. Bartle bought a beer for her late husband.

"I was waiting for this place to reopen, because I'm within walking distance," said Bartle, adding that while the Crystal was being rebuilt "I didn't go out. I sat by my pool."

Added Page, "It's cool that they brought it back. It's awesome with all this space."

Against one wall is a piece of the original bar. The family is not sure of what to do with it yet, but wanted to preserve it. Sealander, whose husband Ed's company built the new place, figures they might put a glass top on and place photos of her parents and the family underneath.

The Crystal is open seven days a week and closes at 2 a.m. It opens at 10 a.m. daily except for Sunday when the doors open at 11 a.m.

Right: Many former customers and some newcomers gathered around the bar and nearby tables.



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NO. 6

Record number of incoming students at Saint Leo's move-in day

Right: Vehicles constantly pulled up to be unloaded by students, family members and a host of volunteers from the university.



STEVE LEE

More than 1,100 freshmen and transfers settle into residence halls on the sprawling campus near Lake Jovita

By STEVE LEE
News Reporter
Sept. 2, 2021

Joining a host of volunteers and staff members to help students during Saint Leo's move-in day on Saturday were three coaches. Rick O'Dette, the baseball coach, basketball coach Lance Randall and Brad Jorgensen, the only lacrosse coach in that sport's 17-year history at the university, helped freshmen and transfer students get acclimated to the sprawling campus off Lake Jovita in Dade City.

For that coaching trio it was all about welcoming young men and women to the scenic campus in the hills of east Pasco County and making the transition as smooth as possible. Students were moved into five residence halls — Benoit, Henderson, Alumni, Roderick and Marmion & Snyder.

"You've got kids coming from all over the country," said O'Dette, who has coached baseball for five seasons at Saint Leo and noted that 15 ballplayers moved in last weekend. "We're able to make them comfortable, make their parents comfortable."

Jorgensen added that it was important to get one particular message across to the new students: "Having them understand they've got a community that's waiting and ready for them."

Jorgensen and his wife Caroline, director of the university's brand marketing and communications, know first-hand of the importance of making an incoming student feel comfortable

at a new school. They recently moved their son Thomas, a freshman, onto the St. Joseph campus in Philadelphia.

Among those volunteers helping new students move into their respective residence halls were four fraternity brothers.

"We just want to help them; make their lives easier," said senior Domenic Frederico of (SAE) Sigma Alpha Epsilon.

Fraternity brother Logan Burke, a junior, recalled being in the new students' shoes not so long ago when he moved down to Florida after graduating high school in New Jersey. He said he remembers "all the excitement of moving down to the area."

Fraternity brothers Jack Prieto and Ziyad Amro, both juniors, also helped students carry items from vehicles to their rooms.

Among the students lugging personal belongings and favorite items into their new residences on campus was Zizeir Miller, an engineer major from Jacksonville. He said he brought "a little bit of everything."

The busy day, which preceded Sunday's move-in for returning students and the first day of classes on Tuesday, proved to be a school record-setter for a third straight year. The administrative staff reported more than 1,100 new students moved in last weekend, numbers that surpass the fall registration figures for 2019 and 2020.

"For anyone in admissions, this is the best day," said Maribeth Stevens, assistant vice president of university campus and center enrollment. "It's a great day, especially because of the challenges we've had (with cancellations and postponements stemming from the coronavirus pandemic) over the past 18 months. It's really a celebration of where the students are."

Angelica Molina, a sophomore majoring in global studies, said she is looking forward to the influx of students from so many countries. "I love seeing people from everywhere," she said. "I love learning about their cultures."

NO. 7

ZPD taking drugs off the streets



Shown with Bolt the police dog is a wide array of drugs, money, weapons and paraphernalia recently confiscated during arrests and seizures by the Zephyrhills Police Department.

Drug seizures are on the rise in Zephyrhills thanks to the exemplary work of a special unit

By STEVE LEE
News Reporter
Aug. 26, 2021

While many traffic stops by the Zephyrhills Police Department often result in minimal infractions or warnings, some are anything but routine. One such stop last month yielded a substantial amount of drugs, specifically 70 grams of methamphetamine and a small amount of cocaine.

That is just one example of how the ZPD is dealing with overdoses and drugs with seizures on the rise of late within the city limits.

Those numbers have been added to the statistics for this year so far. Since January the department has collectively seized 577 articles of narcotics or paraphernalia. That includes more than 1,300 grams of methamphetamine, almost 60 grams of Fentanyl and nearly 40 grams of cocaine, as well as 1,424 pills of various kinds.

"A lot of the credit does need to go to the special response team, but it is a collaborative effort and we're focusing on getting (drugs) out of the city," said Derek Brewer, the city's police chief.

That amount of Fentanyl taken off the streets potentially could kill around 60,000 people. So far in 2021, the city is on track to exceed last year's drug overdoses by 14 percent. For his part, Brewer is issuing a call-to-action for Zephyrhills residents due to the recent spike in drug overdose related deaths.

"I'm proud of the tremendous work our

officers continue to do getting dangerous narcotics off the streets of Zephyrhills," the chief said. "However, we recognize that enforcement is not the only way to combat drug addictions. We encourage our residents to take advantage of local addiction resources."

"We are the enforcement arm and will continue to enforce the laws, while reminding our community members that there are services available for those who want help," Brewer continued. "We don't want to have to notify anyone else's next-of-kin about a fatal overdose."

Aside from the special response team the local police department always has had help from the K-9 unit, which currently consists of officer Lorenzo Limoges and his dog Bolt, along with officer Morris Sparkman and his canine partner Jax.

"They play a big role," Brewer said, acknowledging the vital contributions made by the officers and their police dogs. "I think we're making an impact."

Two local officers who no longer are part of the canine unit but had been for numerous years are Joe Rinaldo and Billy Adams.

Rinaldo, who also has been the boys and girls weightlifting coach at various times at Zephyrhills High, had Gunner and Mako. He most recently lost Mako last year. Adams worked for a long time with Jenko.

"I think we're attacking it better now than we have," Rinaldo said of pursuing drug dealers and coming through with arrests and prosecutions. "It's driving the sellers out of the city. If it wasn't for me and Billy working (with the dogs) you wouldn't have the success they have now."

"We set the bar and they raised it," he said, alluding to the current teams on the K-9 unit. "That's the way it should be."

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NO. 8

D.A.B. default affects East Pasco County but not municipal Zephyrhills



Above: Eastbound view of State Road 56 crossing over I-75.

ANDY WARRNER

The mega-contractor that was working on the diverging diamond at SR 54 and I-75 has halted progress on that and other road projects in Pasco County

By ANDY WARRENER
News Reporter
Aug. 12, 2021

No D.A.B. projects are in Zephyrhills City Limits but two projects in particular are going to affect Zephyrhills and East Pasco County residents. The two projects in question are the SR56 at I-75 Diverging Diamonds, as well as the widening of SR54 between Curley Road and Eiland Boulevard.

The first one to go was the SR56/I-75 Project or T7412. As far back as November of 2020, the FDOT issued a Notice of Intent to Default to D.A.B.. By July 1 of 2021, the FDOT declared D.A.B. in default. Diverging Diamond sounds like a great idea. It takes the left turns out of any intersection, accelerating the traffic signal changes for east-westbound and north-southbound traffic. Anyone that attempts to take on SR 56 any time near rush hour knows they are in for a stop-and-go battle. Improvements were being made. The orange barrels were up and "road closed" signs emerged but the project stalled. D.A.B.'s contention was that design errors by the FDOT impacted the project's schedule and cost.

"Despite the existence of significant errors in the project design provided by FDOT and the recommendation of an independent Disputes Review Board that upheld D.A.B.'s contentions regarding the existence of the design errors and the resulting impact to the project schedule and costs to complete, FDOT has declared D.A.B. in default," wrote Debora and William Bachschmidt, president and vice president of D.A.B. Constructors in their statement.

Regardless, the project is stalled and D.A.B. is out. What happens next is the project goes into what is called a Surety Bond, a contract between three parties - the bond holder, the contractor (DAB) and the FDOT. Performance bonds that include the three parties, are usually

a requirement to bid for a state or local contract.

"The City of Zephyrhills requires contractors to get a performance bond to bid on city projects," Zephyrhills City Manager William Poe Jr. said. "When the contractor fails to meet the performance bond, everything gets put on hold but you still have to find a company to finish the work."

That's where the SR56/I-75 Project is right now. The Surety for the project has requested bids be submitted on Aug. 12. From there, the FDOT will select the winning bid and work will resume. It's hard to put any sort of timeline together until the new contract is awarded.

"We are very happy to be able to watch this one from the sidelines," Poe said.

The other project, the widening of SR 54 between Curley and Eiland continues and faces the same challenge, that of finding a new contractor to complete the work. The latter project may affect more residents of Zephyrhills, as it is closer to city limits and there are some alternatives to crossing over I-75 at SR56, unfortunately, SR54 is one of them. Both projects, as inconvenient as they might be, are not enforcing closures. Eiland Boulevard was cut off at SR54 last week but has opened up again for access. Nevertheless, both project delays are likely to cause hassles for Zephyrhills residents.

"It's definitely affecting our residents," Zephyrhills Public Works Director Shane LeBlanc said. "I really felt sorry for the more-or-less 400 employees who got laid off. That's horrible."

D.A.B. does not and has not had any contracts with the City of Zephyrhills. LeBlanc said that they did bid on one project but that they were not the low bidder. Zephyrhills tends to go with smaller contracting companies that do most of the work themselves. This is likely to insulate city projects from major defaults like D.A.B.'s.

"This is why we have that bonding requirement, the process and protection are there for the owner if needs be," LeBlanc said. "Also, when smaller companies bid on projects, they have less overhead and perform a lot of the work themselves, instead of subcontracting it out. This helps keep down costs."

It's an uncertain time in the industry. Cost of goods are soaring and there is an intense labor shortage. It's no surprise that there are casualties. The projects will eventually pick back up again. It's just a matter of who will pick them up and when.

NO. 9

Got lawn? Reclaimed water expanding in Zephyrhills



Left: Zephyrhills City Hall utilizes reclaimed water.

STEVE LEE

It's been around since 2003 but options for residences and businesses to utilize reclaimed water are expanding

By ANDY WARRENER
News Reporter
Aug. 5, 2021

Got lawn? Don't want to pay \$2.41 per 1,000 gallons of water to keep it up? Look into bringing in reclaimed water. Reclaimed water goes for 32 cents per 1,000 gallons for properties less than one acre. That rate drops to just 18 cents per 1,000 gallons for properties larger than one acre. If you've seen the pinkish-purple signs or the same color water main pipes, there's a good chance that reclaimed water is being used in that area.

The City of Zephyrhills went online with reclaimed water in 2003, when it obtained a Southwest Florida Management District (SWFMD) grant to help the wastewater treatment facility on Alston Avenue run a reclaimed water pipeline, the pinkish-purple PVC pipe, all the way to the corner of CR 54 and Wire Road. From there, the city has continued to add sections of pipe as well as access valves along the way.

Large properties have been able to benefit from the use of reclaimed water. The Zephyrhills Municipal Golf Course has been using reclaimed water, almost since it became available and Zephyrhills Utilities Director John Bostic estimated that the facility uses about 10 million gallons per month, depending on seasonal rainfall. The proximity of the golf course and of nearby Krusen Field made both locations prime users of the reclaimed water. Zephyrhills High School, as well as Stewart Middle School use reclaimed water for their athletic fields.

Developments came in and the city added pink pipelines. The Abbott Park Development on the north side of town is even further expanding the reclaimed water network. The city is furnishing half the expense, while SWFMD is furnishing the other half to run a line where it can be accessed at the development.

"Abbott Park will be the first major development to have full reclaimed water," Bostic said.

Bringing the line that far north will also allow for access by the Scotland Yard Golf Course.

Golf courses and athletic fields have thirsty fields to water but what about the average homeowner? As it turns out, there's an avenue to bring reclaimed water to your house. A prospective resident would come to the building department and provide details about their residence. From there, the building department establishes how far the residence is away from a reclaimed line. A cost-to-connect estimate is derived and if the individual wants the reclaimed water, they can pay the cost estimate. This cost can run high, especially in light of a surge in material costs but residents can also band together to tamp down the cost. For instance, it might be cost prohibitive for one person to pay to run a line to their home. Yet, if several or even dozens of adjacent residents all want the service, it defrays the cost significantly.

"We encourage people to come together to apply," Bostic said. "We want to help people as much as possible but we also aren't going to do work that people can do for themselves."

One added benefit to using reclaimed water is that there is no sewer meterage for using it. While city residents pay for municipal water and sewer, the reclaimed water is spread on the lawn and thus does not incur sewer metering fees.

Reclaimed water usage is expanding nationwide, as well as in Zephyrhills. In 2003, when the program began, the city pumped 75,266,000 into the reclaimed system. In 2020, that number rose to 111,069,000. Most new developments are required to use reclaimed water for irrigation purposes. As the city continues to grow and as more current residences and businesses adopt it, the demand will continue to grow proportionately. Bostic says that the Alston Plant can handle it.

"(5 or 10 years in the future) I expect every drop of reclaimed water from our Wastewater Treatment Facility to be used in a beneficial manner," Bostic said. "Our current limitations are based on our customers' usage of the wastewater system. Our plant is designed to treat 3.85 million gallons per day and we currently only use about 1.8 million (less than half) of that capacity."

NO. 10

Mask controversy takes center stage on first day of school

Superintendent Kurt Browning abides by governor's edict against mask mandates with reservations

By STEVE LEE
News Reporter
Aug. 12, 2021

Governor Ron DeSantis' executive order banning mask mandates in public schools a subsequent threat of withholding state funds was the primary topic discussed in Pasco Superintendent Kurt Browning's press conference at Cypress Creek Middle on the first day of school.

"Weathering the storm," is how Browning aptly put it, noting that he anticipates coronavirus cases to increase as they have been recently. Another assessment is forthcoming from the school board within two weeks.

"I am fearful that it could cause us to close

down schools," Browning said, reminding that mask mandates were in place during the last school year.

In Pasco, safety measures center on social distancing, encouraging mask wearing and washing hands often. In neighboring Hillsborough County, however, a mask mandate was issued with an accompanying opt out option. Plus, on Tuesday, the Broward County School Board voted to keep a mask mandate in place, thereby defying the governor's order.

They're not the only ones. In Texas, school districts in Austin, Dallas and Houston defied a similar executive order by Governor Greg Abbott. And in both states, the governors are facing lawsuits from parents.

In Florida, the Center for Disease Control reported cases of Covid-19 cases exceeding 20,000 last Friday, Saturday and Sunday. That contributed to the pandemic exceeding 36 million cases nationwide with more than 620,000 deaths as of Monday.

The superintendent knows first-hand how devastating Covid-19 can be, having experienced the adverse effects of it last spring. Nonetheless, Pasco does not plan to implement a



Above: Zephyrhills High students get out of school and board busses near the main entrance.

STEVE LEE

mask mandate.

"I'm not going to go against the governor's executive order," he said. "Do I like it? No, I don't like it. I wish that he had not said that. We wouldn't be here today having this conversation if there had been a statewide mandate."

Near the end of the school day on Tuesday, school district spokesman Stephen Hegarty reported a wide range on the percentages of administrators, teachers, school personnel and students donning masks.

"We're getting different readings, ranging from 80 to 20 percent," he said late in the afternoon. "It really seems to be very different, depending on where you go."

At Stewart Middle, assistant principal Josh Borders noted that "most people on campus are wearing masks."

Borders, a Zephyrhills High graduate, also was somewhat relieved to have gotten through the first school day without any major incidents. That sentiment was shared by Matt Hayes, an assistant principal at Zephyrhills High, Wesley Chapel High principal Matt McDermott, along with numerous other educators and administrators.

"The first day is going well," Borders reported late in the school day. "It's great to see all of our students back on campus. Our goal is to get them to school safely, feed them lunch and get them home safely."

Browning noted that getting students to and from schools took a bit longer than planned on Tuesday, due, in part, to a shortage of bus drivers. He requested parents to bear with school officials as some trips took longer than they might have.

At Wesley Chapel High, McDermott, who formerly taught and served as an assistant principal at Zephyrhills High, said, "several staff and students have chosen to wear masks."

All in all, he added, "It was a great start to the year. It's great to see smiling faces."

At Zephyrhills High, where construction remains ongoing as part of a three-year, \$33 million renovation project, Hayes estimated about 30 percent of the students wore masks.

"It was a little crazy, like all first days," he said. "But the building was done (with a few projects being continued) and we're thankful for a great faculty to help along with the first day."

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