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The Zephyrhills News

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Thursday, December 31, 2020 109th 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. 7, 2021 edition. We wish all of our valued readers and business partners a Happy New Year.

A Year In Review

Inside this 2020 issue we share the top 10 news and sports stories for the past year. The local news scene, clearly affected by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, was highlighted by several political changes, a merger of the city and county fire departments, construction for housing developments, businesses and roadway projects. Plus, Winters Mobile Home Park, a Zephyrhills landmark, was sold. Another city landmark, the Crystal Bar which burned down in 2019, is being rebuilt and nearly ready for a grand opening. Lastly, the city council set the millage rate at 6.35.

Sports

The Zephyrhills News highlights goals and achievements of local athletes and sports teams with our top 10 sports stories for 2020. The Sarah Vande Berg Tennis Center, honoring the late local standout, opened. Sweetwater/Settler's Rest wins Horseshoe title. The football team advanced to the playoffs for the sixth time in seven seasons. The school's weight room was named for longtime athletic director/coach Bruce Cimorelli. The girls weightlifters won a second straight region title. The boys basketball made a sixth consecutive postseason appearance. Stewart Middle went unbeaten in girls basketball for the first time in school history.

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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Zephyrhills News



NO. 1

City Council declares state of emergency



The Zephyrhills Special City Council Meeting was nearly empty with chairs set apart at a safe social distance. **ANDY WARRENER**

As schools and businesses shutter in an attempt to contain the virus, the city follows suit

By **ANDY WARRENER**
News Reporter
March 19, 2020

At a special city council meeting on Monday, the three council members present, voted unanimously to declare a state of emergency in the City of Zephyrhills. The Resolution No. 769-20, follows on the heels of a March 1 executive order by the governor's office directing the Department of Health to issue a Public Health Emergency. On March 9, a new executive order declared

a state-wide state of emergency. On March 12, the Pasco County Board of County Commissioners declared a local state of emergency. Resolution No. 769-20 states: "WHEREAS, the City of Zephyrhills is threatened by the COVID-19 because of the apparent ability of the virus to spread rapidly among humans through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes."

It is within Florida statutes that a municipal corporation like the City of Zephyrhills can declare a state of local emergency for up to seven days and can be extended as necessary in seven-day increments.

What does this mean for city government? It means that it waives the procedures and formalities otherwise required of a municipal corporation by law pertaining to:

- Performance of public work and taking whatever prudent action is necessary to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the community.

➤ **STATE OF EMERGENCY:** See Page 2A

The Zephyrhills News top 10 news stories of 2020

By **ANDY WARRENER**
News Reporter

The year 2020 will forever be burned in the national psyche as the "COVID year." Outbreaks, lockdowns, runs on toilet paper with a mixture of caution and hysteria dominated headlines. It was difficult to even compose a news story after March that didn't contain the words, "COVID-19" or "coronavirus." Those words have become part of predictive texting on our cell phones.

When movie writers compose time period specific scripts that take place in 2020, you can bet that most of the characters will have masks on. Yet, while the global pandemic and still not quite completed presidential election have spread like a pall over the year, there were some stories that shone through the darkness. Let's take a look at the top 10.

It's hard to even remember the pre-COVID part of 2020. Our top 10 stories of the year start off with a Zephyrhills City Council meeting declaring a state of emergency on March 19. Resolution No. 769-20 came just after an executive order by the Governor's office on March 9 and a Pasco County directive on March 12, both declaring a state of emergency.

In the city, the executive orders were renewed every seven days and allowed for a few executive powers given to Zephyrhills City Manager William Poe Jr. Those powers included making purchases for the city, entering into contracts and performing public work. Little would we know that these seven-day renewals would extend into the fall and winter.

The city held municipal elections in April. Voting was going to be an interesting prospect on the heels of the state of emergency and ensuing lockdown. It never came down to it as councilman Alan Knight did not draw an opponent for his run at reelection, nor did incumbent Gene Whitfield for mayor. Other municipalities, Dade City and San Antonio postponed their elections, originally slated for April 14, to the party preference primaries in August.

In one of the few bright spots on the news docket in 2020, was the groundbreaking of the newly-rebuilt Crystal Bar in Zephyrhills, the one that burned down in 2019. The iconic Crystal Bar originally opened in 1954 under the name Jerry's Crystal Bar & Package Store on Gall Boulevard. While the new structure couldn't have the nostalgia of the original, it was well-designed and even larger, boasting 2,000 more square feet of space, bumping up the capacity to 150 people. Community members were drawn to the groundbreaking and shared their stories about the place.

In July, the city budget was beginning to take shape. A number of workshops preceded the FY20-21 budget presentation to city council. Other city business was conducted at the meeting, local ordinances and permitting

➤ **NEWS INTRO:** See Page 2A

NO. 2

A nation waits while East Pasco County decides

With the presidential election coming down to the wire, local and state elections are called

By **ANDY WARRENER**
News Reporter
Nov. 5, 2020

Come on, Pennsylvania. An eager nation awaits the results in what is shaping up to be one of the closest presidential elections in the history of the country. As of Wednesday morning, Fox News has the race 238-213 Biden. NBC has the race 224-213 Biden and Yahoo had the race at 238-213 Biden. A quartet of swing states leaning toward Trump could tilt the election toward the incumbent. Michigan, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Georgia are the final battlegrounds that will decide the 2020 election. All four currently have small leads in Trump's favor.

If Trump claims all four, that should decide the election. If one or two of them break toward Biden, Biden could be the next president. Pennsylvania, holding 20 Electoral Votes, is both the biggest prize and the furthest behind in vote counting. As of Wednesday morning, Trump holds a bit more than a 500,000-vote lead in the state where just 74 percent of



Newly-elected state rep Randy Maggard (second from left) waves signs with his team. **ANDY WARRENER**

➤ **ELECTION:** See Page 4A





The Zephyrhills News

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► **STATE OF EMERGENCY:** From Page 1A

- Entering into contracts.
- Incurring obligations.
- Employment of permanent and temporary workers.
- Utilization of volunteer workers.
- Rental of equipment.
- Acquisition and distribution, with or without compensation, of supplies, materials and facilities.
- Appropriation and expenditure of public funds.

The resolution went into effect at 12:01 a.m. March 18, 2020 and can either be rescinded or renewed after seven days. What does this mean for the city? Any employees traveling out of the country or on a cruise must self-isolate for 14 days before returning to work, whether or not they show symptoms.

The Zephyrhills Public Library is closed until further notice. Library staff is working on a plan to create a drive-through to allow citizens to place a hold on a book or checkout a book.

Council chambers will be utilized only for essential business activities and residents are encouraged to pay their utility bills online.

Fire Rescue has purchased gloves for all departments and gloves and masks for fire and police departments. ZPD Chief Derek Brewer was present at the Monday meeting discussing the resolution with council members. Brewer and his 34 officers now face some new challenges in keeping the peace in Zephyrhills but the emergency declaration gives Brewer and the department a few more options to manage the situation.

"We're always looking at staffing," Brewer said. "The resolution gives us some flexibility if we need to have officers work more overtime, as well as other resources not normally available. For instance, we're buying masks and even eyewear. We're trying to put together a strategy to limit interaction but police work is still police work."

Brewer did state that currently no ZPD officers have tested positive for COVID-19.

"Our officers are implementing good hygiene practices," Brewer said. "We had to change the way we've done

business for years."

Both city council and ZPD will continue to monitor the situation.

"You never know how the situation is going to evolve," Brewer said. "You never know what you might need in addition to what we have here (in the resolution)."

As of Tuesday, Governor Ron DeSantis has cancelled all public school classes until April 14. All bars and nightclubs as of 5 p.m. Tuesday are to be closed for the next 30 days.

All Tampa Bay YMCA locations, including the Zephyrhills location will be closed until March 29.

All AdventHealth Zephyrhills and Dade City educational programs are cancelled through April.

State parks have cancelled all group activities and are not honoring any additional camping reservations. Public buildings in state parks are closed while parks remain open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Pasco County parks are closing all recreation complex buildings and community center buildings until March 29. County park events are postponed for two weeks. Currently County parks and beaches remain open to the public. Find out more about Pasco County closures at bit.ly/PascoClosings.

Learn more by following the President's Coronavirus Guidelines for America, as well as the latest information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Florida Department of Health but here are some tips:

Avoid social gatherings in groups of more than 10 people, including restaurant and bar settings.

Practice social distancing, avoiding prolonged contact within six feet.

Make use of available online options including shopping, and takeout or drive-thru dining.

If you feel sick, stay home. Do not go to work. Contact your medical provider.

Practice good hygiene – hand washing and frequent disinfecting are your best defense

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis' office has activated an emergency bridge loan program, as well as an online business assessment survey to assess the impact of COVID-19 on local business operations and the economy, so actions to implement appropriate relief programs can begin. You can take the survey here: <https://floridadisaster.biz>.

► **NEWS INTRO:** From Page 1A

but the headliner was the announcement that the millage rate for the city would remain steady at 6.35 mills. Even with the rate remaining fixed, city officials still expected a bump in revenues due to new acquisitions into the city boundaries.

Even in light of lockdowns and businesses struggling, the city forged ahead with building projects through the Summer and Fall. An August check in with Poe revealed a number of building projects going full-steam ahead. The Bristol Meadows project, just outside city boundaries, road work on U.S. Highway 301 south of the Zephyrhills Correctional Institute, continuing work on the airport runway extension, subdivisions The Oaks of Pasco and Calusa Springs all continued work throughout the pandemic. Continuing work on the new Sarah Vande Berg Tennis & Wellness Center was unabated during this time as well.

One of the larger municipal projects in the city began work in 2020. In August, *The Zephyrhills News* ran a story detailing the Pretty Pond/301 project. The intersection is a busy thoroughfare and the impact of construction is going to be significant. The story laid out the three major intersections and the signalling and lane improvements that are to be made at each one. In a nutshell, one traffic light will be taken out, while two will be added north and south of the removed signal. Other improvements to turn lanes on perpendicular roads will help alleviate existing traffic and also service nearby commercial and residential developments, slated for late 2020 and 2021.

In September, Zephyrhills made the difficult decision to merge fire rescue with Pasco County. A plan in the works for some time, the inevitable outcome finally unfolded on Sept. 27. Transfers of equipment and stations began right away and all of the city firefighters that did not take retirement were brought on as Pasco firefighters. Details regarding accrued sick time and leave were worked out as well as qualifications for rank and most officials dubbed it a smooth transition. It gives Pasco Fire Rescue an even greater chunk of the county to service. Only New Port Richey and Port Richey on the west side still retain their municipal fire departments.

Later in September, city council approved a renovation design for the Jeffries Carriage House. Built in 1910 at the same time as the residential home, the carriage house remained boarded up, even as the main house underwent renovation. At the Sept. 10 council meeting, Kerns Family Construction was awarded the contract to renovate the Carriage House. The cost estimate ranged between about \$150,000 and \$180,000 and Kerns Family Construction was at work just days after the contract was awarded. The city hopes to be able to rent out the structure as a live-work environment. Much of the original style and structure is intended to be preserved on the project. The two-story building was originally used to house and conduct repairs on horse-drawn carriages, before automobiles hit the city streets.

Still in September, the sale of the Winters Mobile Home Park marked the end of nearly 70 years of family ownership. The 200-space park was sold to Keystone Winters LLC of Odessa for \$7.5 million. With owner Bob Winters in his 70's, he and the family felt it was time to move on. The community was known for putting on events and even credited with reviving the Celtic Festival in Zephyr Park. The new owners appear to want to keep the park just as it has been.

Easily the biggest story of 2020 was the November elections. While the close presidential race could not even be called for days after Election Day, former vice president Joe Biden attained a significant popular vote margin, as well as an Electoral College lead. President Trump and his legal team would ask for a number of recounts in swing states and while certain states like Pennsylvania and Georgia have now certified their results, the Electoral College still has not made their results official.

Locally, it was big news as well. Former Zephyrhills mayor Danny Burgess is headed to the Florida State Senate as the newly-elected representative for Senate District 20, last won by Tom Lee. State Representative Randy Maggard, who won a special election for House District 38 after Burgess left the post to pursue a position as executive director of the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, in 2018, was reelected to the post this November.

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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.

Our Savior Lutheran Church, 5626 20th St., invites you to Saturday worship service at 5:30 p.m. and Sunday worship service at 10 a.m. You can also watch live on Sunday at 10 a.m. at <https://www.facebook.com/OurSaviorLutheranChurchOfZephyrhillsFl>.

iorLutheranChurchOfZephyrhillsFl. For more information, call (813) 782-1369.

Dade City Grace Bible Church, 15000 U.S. Hwy. 301, Dade City Business Center, Suite 403, will meet 9:30 a.m. for fellowship. The Song and Devotional Bible Thought for the Week begins at 10 a.m. along with Pastor Willard L. Sessoms preaching the morning Grace Bible Study message. Youth Bible study lesson, for ages 6-10 years old, is during the morning Message Hour.

The church provides a Tract and Literature Ministry at the Webster Flea Market on Mondays during the season. For more information, visit www.BibleTruthForToday.com or call (352) 567-3955.

The Church at Chancey Road, 34921 Chancey Rd., and Pastor Tim Mitchell would like to invite you to Sundays at 10:15 a.m. and Wednesdays at 6:45 p.m. for worship, Bible study and communion. Nursery and kids programs are available at all services.

The Abundant Blessings Food Pantry is open, Monday-Thursday, 10 a.m. For those in attendance at either the Sunday 10:15 a.m. or Wednesday 6:45 p.m. services the Food Pantry will be open after each service.

For more information on the ministries of the church visit: www.thechurchatchanceyroad.com

com and you can also watch live on Facebook at www.facebook.com/tim.mitchell every Sunday and Wednesday.

Zephyrhills Church of Christ, 5444 4th St. welcomes you to visit with them for Sunday Bible study, 9:30 a.m. followed by Sunday worship at 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. There is a midweek Bible study on Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m.

If you have any questions you can contact Preacher Kevin Heaton, at (205) 405-7700 or heatonkevin@yahoo.com. You may also reach one of the members: Joe Bates (813) 846-9441 or Wayne Frye (352) 424-0144. Visit zephyrhillschurch.com or the blog page at acordofblue.wordpress.com.

Victory Baptist Church, 6950 Forbes Rd., invites you to join them for their services on Sunday at 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. Sunday school is at 10

a.m. There is a mid-week service on Wednesday, 7 p.m. Nursery and children's programs are available. For more information, visit www.vbc-zhills.com or call (813) 783-8300.

First United Methodist Church of Zephyrhills, 38635 5th Ave. has Sunday services. A contemporary, 9 a.m. and the traditional at 11 a.m. All attending must wear a mask and follow all social distancing guidelines.

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



FROM THE MANGER TO THE CROSS

Where our Saviour 'suffered, bled and died.'
Let us never forget, it was for us,
That our Lord was crucified.

He came unto his own, and his own received him not,
Even while suffering in anguish, upon that cruel cross,
The soldiers laughed and jeered him,
For his robe they cast their lots.

As believers we think of our blessed Saviour,
Upon that cruel cross,
To those who chose not to believe,
One can only imagine how great will be their loss.

From the manger to the cross,
To that tomb so bleak and so cold,
He has risen and lives for us,
THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD. AMEN!

Remember, God loves You, Christ died for You, was buried for You,
and He arose from the dead for You (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)!

WHY NOT BELIEVE GOD'S WORD in the BIBLE,
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- YouTube link is: Dade City Grace Bible Church
- Email us at: Dadecityfellowship@bibletruthfortoday.com
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- www.BibleTruthForToday.com

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Wednesday
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(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

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38231 5th Ave.
(813) 782-5574
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Sunday
Sunday School.....9:30 a.m.
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Fellowship.....9:30 a.m.
Sunday Service.....10 a.m.
www.bibletruthfortoday.com

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6950 Forbes Rd.
(813) 783-8300
Pastor David Toulson
Sunday School.....10 a.m.
Morning Worship.....11 a.m.
Evening Worship.....6 p.m.
Wednesday
Bible Study/Prayer.....7 p.m.
Kids Club.....7 p.m.

OUR SAVIOR LUTHERAN CHURCH

5626 20th St.
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Sunday
Worship Service.....10 a.m. stream at www.oursaviorlutheranzephyrhills.org

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

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Ray Pichette, Lead Pastor
Ricardo Barriffe, Associate Pastor
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Worship Service.....10:45 a.m.
Thursday
ALNON.....7 p.m.
Ladies Bible Study.....7 p.m.
Friday
Alcoholics Anonymous.....10 a.m.
Overeaters Anonymous
Monday, 5:30 p.m. and Friday 11:30 a.m.
Narcotics Anonymous
Sunday, Wednesday and Thursday, 6:30 p.m.
www.eastpascoadventist.com

ATONEMENT LUTHERAN CHURCH

29617 S.R. 54
(813) 973-2211
Pastor Scott Lindner
Saturday
Godify Worship Service.....5 p.m.
Sunday
Worship Service with Communion.....10 a.m.
discoveralac.com

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 a.m.
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ELECTION:
From Page 1A

the votes have been counted. More than 1,700,000 votes remain to be tabulated.

While the nation waits in suspense over the presidential election, state and local offices and amendments have results. Starting out at the national level, US Rep Gus Bilirakis from House District 12 was re-elected on Tuesday. Bilirakis defeated Democrat Kimberly Walker 284,680 to 167,989 (62.89 percent to 37.11 percent). In state elections, former Zephyrhills mayor and former House District 38 state representative Danny Burgess won his bid for State Senate District 20, the seat vacated by Tom Lee. Burgess defeated Democrat Kathy Lewis 141,348 to 116,389 (54.84 percent to 46.16 percent).

"I want to take this moment to thank you on behalf of myself and my family for your prayers and outpouring of love and support over these past few months. It has been an honor to stand before this community and offer up my candidacy for the State Senate and I couldn't have been able to do it without your help - so thank you." Burgess said in a public statement.

In State House, Republican Randy Maggard followed up his win in the 2018 special election with a 57,746 to 40,613 (58.71 percent to 41.29 percent) win over Democrat Brian Staver. Maggard was excited to have another chance to get to work in Tallahassee on Tuesday night.

"Having that first year of experience is going to help with this next session," Maggard said. "I had some success getting appropriations and some bills signed but now I'm further along the learning curve and will hit the ground running. I look forward to the session and I'm glad people chose me for it."

Maggard ran in an election plagued by COVID-19 restrictions, making it one of the more unique processes.

"This election was totally different than the last one," Maggard said. "This one was a lot more calls, a lot more virtual meetings. Even when we were able to walk and visit homes while keeping social distance, it was strange but we actually got a lot more people to engage. In the special election, people would take the brochure and move on. This one, people wanted to have more conversations."

In Pasco County elections, both Republican county commissioners won re-elections bids. Kathryn Starkey defended her seat from



Newly-elected state senator Danny Burgess and his wife Courtney toast a win for the former mayor of Zephyrhills. **ANDY WARRENER**

Democratic challenger Jessica Stempien 178,501 to 112,243. Jack Mariano held off Democrat Brandi Geodt 170,683 to 99,549. NPA candidate Victor Rodriguez tallied 19,317. All judges Carlos Muniz, Drew Atkinson, Morris Silberman, Daniel Sleet and Teves Smith were retained. Randy Evans and Gary Joiner won seats as mosquito control commissioners.

The state amendments on the ballot took interesting turns. Amendment 1, which would add exclusive language to the state constitution stipulating that, "only" citizens could vote in Florida elections, passed overwhelmingly - 79.3 percent to 20.7 percent. State amendments require a 60 percent threshold. Amendment 2, which would raise Florida's minimum wage to \$10/hour by September 2021 and to \$15/hour by 2026, passed narrowly - 60.8 percent to 39.2 percent. Amendment 3, which would have opened up state party preference primaries to voters of any party designation, did not pass, failing with 57.01 percent support. Amendment 4, which would have required Citizen Initiated Constitutional Amendments to complete the process twice, failed with just 47.53 percent support. Amendment 5, which increases the portability period for homestead exemptions passed comfortably with 74.49 percent support. Amendment 6, which grants a tax exemption to spouses of deceased or disabled veterans passed with an overwhelming majority of 89.73 percent.

NO. 3

Municipal elections postponed until at least June



Mayor Gene Whitfield presents retiring city manager Steve Spina with a plaque and proclamation denoting his 30 years of service to the city. **STEVE LEE**

Mayor Gene Whitfield and councilman Alan Knight were unopposed and retain their Zephyrhills seats

By **STEVE LEE**
News Reporter
April 23, 2020

For the mayor of Zephyrhills and one of five councilmen from this east Pasco city, it did not matter much that some elections slated for April 14 will not take place until June or even later due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Incumbents Gene Whitfield, the city's mayor, retained his seat when challenger John Docherty did not qualify for the election and councilman Alan Knight kept his status due to the lack of any challengers.

"It turns out that the mayor is unopposed," said Brian Corley, Pasco County's elections supervisor.

City manager Billy Poe explained that Docherty was disqualified due to not meeting a financial obligation, specifically some unpaid fees that were among the requirements for the contested mayoral seat.

For his part, Poe, who relishes the good-willed nature and professionalism of the council, has worked with Whitfield and Knight for quite some time. He approved of that pair continuing their work in the city's council chambers as well as their numerous contributions to Zephyrhills and its residents.

"Both the mayor and Alan are pretty level-headed," said Poe, who last year switched from being the city manager in Dade City to taking on that role in the city he grew up in. "They have the city's best interests at heart when they're making decisions. Keeping the same board we have at this time is beneficial."

Municipal elections in three cities — Zephyrhills, Dade City and San Antonio — were postponed like many scheduled activities of late due to the coronavirus pandemic. Governor Ron DeSantis declared state shutdowns earlier this month and that included issuing an executive order to cancel any political voting in April. Voting could take place in June or on Aug. 18, the state's primary election date.

"We had three elections rescheduled because of the virus," Corley said. "We're concerned about the safety of the citizens and we're working with the secretary of state on a revised date."

Corley noted that city leaders from those three municipalities were in mutual agreement that delaying the elections

► **MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS:** See Page 6A

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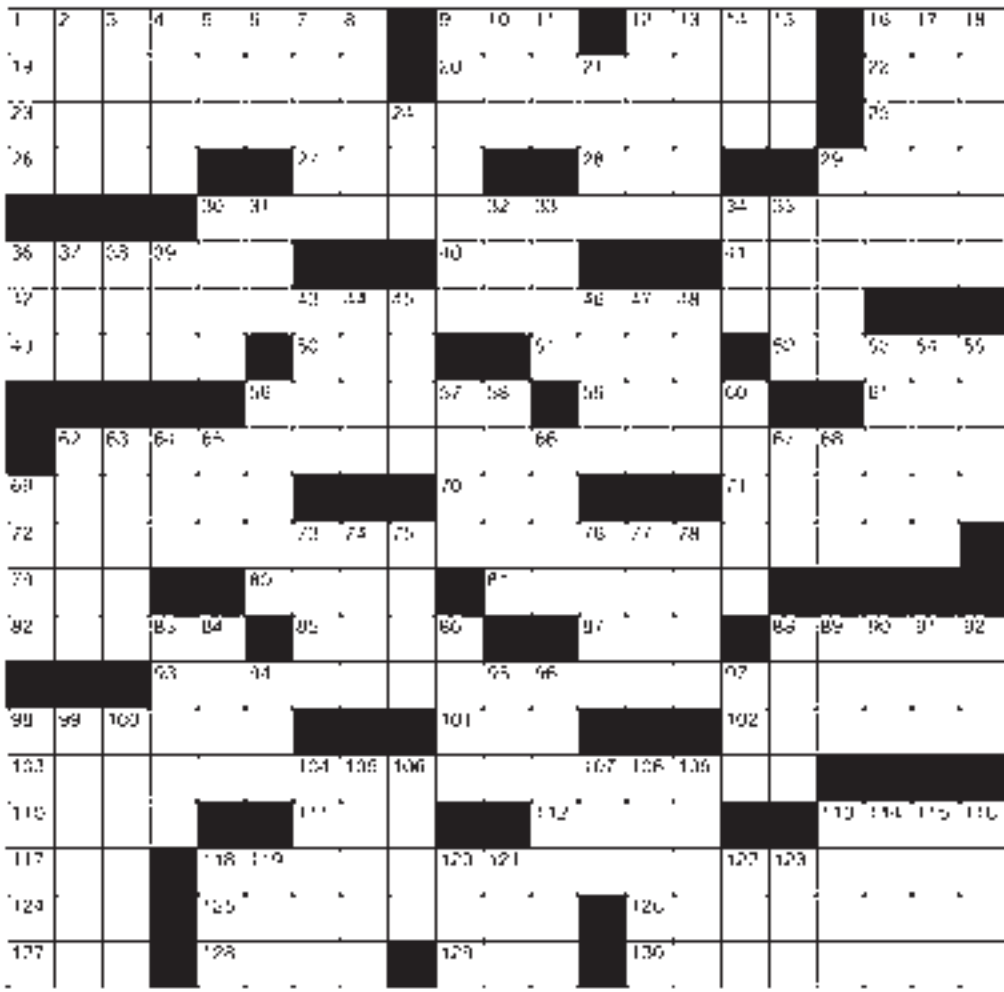
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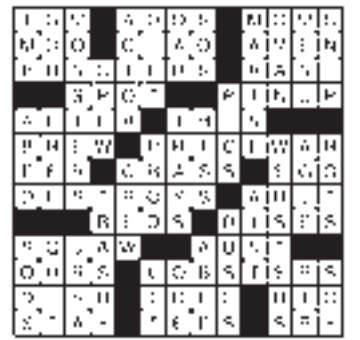
SUPER CROSSWORD - DEC. 31



- | | | | | | |
|-----|---|----|-------------------------------|-----|---------------------------|
| 62 | Effortless progress with zero snags? [2017, 1999, 1980] | 9 | Gobbles up | 84 | "-- Little Tenderness" |
| 69 | Certain scroll key on PC -- Dhabi (emirate) | 10 | In-favor vote | 86 | Lightest coin |
| 70 | Mr. -- ("Fantasy Island" host) | 11 | JFK, e.g. | 88 | Actor Griffith |
| 71 | Kings and queens hold agave liquor dear? [2013, 1966, 1958] | 12 | High-strung | 89 | Dol. parts |
| 72 | High peak | 13 | Vine-covered | 90 | Farming tool |
| 79 | Revered sort | 14 | Grassy area | 91 | Barn percher |
| 80 | Revered sort | 15 | Mom's skill, in brief | 92 | Slip- -- (mules, e.g.) |
| 81 | Directs | 16 | Fright-filled | 94 | D.C.'s land |
| 82 | Cantata kin | 17 | Wellspring | 95 | Silent "OK" |
| 85 | Dirt clump | 18 | Epithet for Tarzan | 96 | Santo -- |
| 87 | Ph.D. or MBA | 21 | Most recent | 97 | Diminutive |
| 88 | Allergic reaction? | 24 | Before | 98 | Audiophile's storage item |
| 93 | City's main business section during a tornado? [1982, 1967, 1965] | 29 | Sorbet alternative, for short | 99 | Danny of "Ruby" |
| 98 | The Everly Brothers' -- "Clown" | 30 | Shine up | 100 | Wrap, as a weak wrist |
| 101 | Bovine cry | 31 | Broody rock genre | 104 | Papas' partners |
| 102 | Old Fords | 32 | Japanese dance-drama | 105 | Activist Hoffman |
| 103 | Rigg made Rooney go "Wow!?" [1957, 2000, 1982] | 33 | Concerning | 106 | Final letters |
| 110 | Many a seized car | 34 | "So cute!" | 107 | Chemical suffix |
| 111 | Honest prez | 35 | Beer bubbles | 108 | "Over There" composer |
| 112 | Revered sort | 36 | "-- ching!" | 109 | Kevin of "Silverado" |
| 113 | Messy stack | 37 | Slim fish | 113 | Pitcher -- Wilhelm |
| 117 | Bitter brew | 38 | -- Blo fuse | 114 | Central Sicilian city |
| 118 | This puzzle's long answers each consist of three of these | 39 | NYSE debut | 115 | Golden -- (senior) |
| 124 | Actor Gulager | 43 | Of ears | 116 | "Hey ... over this way!" |
| 125 | Extolling | 44 | Jaunty tune | 118 | "Car Talk" network |
| 126 | Analgesics | 45 | Frosts | 119 | "Mystifier" Geller |
| 127 | "Keystone" lawman | 46 | Modular part | 120 | Chest bone |
| 128 | Move upward | 47 | Ark-itect? | 121 | Artist Yoko |
| 129 | Heckling cry | 48 | Charity | 122 | Job for AAA |
| 130 | Fresh beginning | 53 | Katy Perry's "I Kissed --" | 123 | 1960s univ. radicals |

- ACROSS**
- | | | | | | |
|----|---|----|--|----|---|
| 1 | Dreamworld | 25 | Regret a lot | 41 | Inflexible |
| 9 | Pa | 26 | Mythical ship | 42 | Assist an unwise fugitive? [1965, 2002, 1961] |
| 12 | Incline | 27 | Plane-related | 49 | Like cold fish |
| 16 | Big -- whale | 28 | Compass dir. | 50 | Muscular jerk |
| 19 | Person copying another | 29 | Growing field | 51 | Organic compound |
| 20 | Straight-ahead view | 30 | Franklin brought a certain continent's nations back together? [1972, 1979, 1983] | 52 | Castle encirclers |
| 22 | Dandy sort | 36 | Very reactive element | 56 | Join others in the attack |
| 23 | "That raving guy is lying!?" [1958, 1999, 1983] | 40 | Actor Ely | 59 | Poetic foot |
| | | | | 61 | -- long way |

ANSWERS TO KING CROSSWORDS DEC. 24



STRANGE BUT TRUE *By Lucie Winborne*

- Doc Martens come in all different colors and sizes now, but the first pair was created using old tires.
- There actually aren't "57 varieties" of Heinz ketchup, and never were. Company founder H.J. Heinz thought his product should have a number, and he just happened to like 57.
- March 3 is known as "What if Cats and Dogs Had Opposable Thumbs Day."
- The number of permutations within a deck of cards is mind-bogglingly large: an 8 with 67 zeroes after it. That means there are more card combinations than stars in the Milky Way, which amount to as many as 400 billion!
- Cataract surgery was possible as early as the 6th century B.C.
- Barbie's physical appearance was inspired by a German doll named Bild Lilli, created in 1952 and based on a high-end call girl named Lilli who was featured in the comic strip "Bild-Zeitung."
- She was sold as an adult novelty in bars and tobacco shops -- definitely not as a children's toy. Barbie inventor Ruth Handler saw the doll while vacationing in Europe and brought it home.
- Sunsets on Mars are blue.
- The Gate Tower Building in Osaka, Japan, has a highway that passes through the building, between the fifth and seventh floors.
- A Paris morgue needed help identifying bodies in the 1860s, so decided to open its doors to the public. They probably underestimated people's morbid curiosity, though, as soon 40,000 people a day were coming to look at corpses.
- Mob boss Vincent Gigante would wander around New York in his bathrobe to convince the police he was insane, and thus avoid capture.

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Councilman Alan Knight (right) and Mayor Gene Whitfield (left) examine documents during the Mayor's Caucus.

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS: From Page 4A

was in the best possible interest of the general public. He also expressed concerns about the health of poll workers and his staff. More than 200 poll worker positions were filled during last month's presidential preference primary, but many did not show up in early April amid concerns about catching the coronavirus.

Corley is not yet ready to pinpoint a specific upcoming date for local voting. He did, however, express a strong belief that the rescheduled voting day could be sometime in June.

In the meantime, the county's elections office is strongly promoting voting by mail. Corley indicated that is something that has increased in recent weeks.

"We're definitely seeing an uptick," he said. "Voters who already voted by mail do not

need to vote again. They did their civic duty. You only get to vote one time."

Voters who have not done so may request a vote-by-mail ballot online at PascoVotes.gov or by calling (800) 851-8754.

The races for the Dade City Commission are: Group 3, two-term incumbent Jim Shive is being challenged by Matthew Shane Wilson; Group 4, Ann Cosentino and Knute J. Nathe; and Group 5, Normita Woodard and Christopher King, who are running for the seat being vacated by Eunice Penix, who did not seek reelection after nearly 27 years in office.

In San Antonio, a crowded field is seeking three commission seats. That list includes incumbents Elayne Bassinger and Sarah Schrader, along with Joseph Corture, John Vogel II and Dacia Wadsworth Mitchell.

NO. 5

Family sells Winters Mobile Home Park



A sign welcomes residents and visitors alike to the park that has been in Zephyrhills along State Road 54 since 1952.

STEVE LEE

55-and-over community had been in the Winters' family for five generations

By STEVE LEE
News Reporter

Sept. 17, 2020

For some members of the Winters family, now every time they drive past Winters Mobile Home Park it might be bittersweet and a bit melancholic. Five generations and nearly 70 years of family ownership will do that.

The park, which started as a tourist spot for travel trailers and now has about 200 lots on nearly 30 acres, sold in August for \$7.5 million. According to the Pasco County Property Appraiser's Office it was sold to Keystone Winters LLC in Odessa.

"It hasn't really sunk in yet," said Helen Winters, the matriarch of the family. "I'm very happy. This probably should've been done before."

Perhaps, but for Bob Winters, the timing was right.

"There were a lot of factors — age, the coronavirus situation, it's a brave new world," he said. "It was one of those necessary evils. I'm in my 70s, but I still like to work and do stuff."

"It was a sweet and sour meatball," said Dade City attorney Charlie Waller, who assisted Helen and the family with the sale to the new owners.

Winters Mobile Home Park, family-owned and operated for decades, lies adjacent to Zephyr Park and is just one of 102 mobile home parks in Zephyrhills. The 50-and-over adult community features a clubhouse, shuffleboard courts and a library, along with activities like bingo, dances and coffee hours.

City manager Billy Poe acknowledged the sale and is hopeful that Winters sticks around.

"We heard rumors, but I don't know the details of it," Poe said of the sale. "Bob Winters has been involved with the community for decades. Hopefully, his plans don't include leaving Zephyrhills and he stays around. He's been

a big part of the community."

Winters, who has spent time on the city's police and fire departments, reassured Poe and others in the community that he and other family members are not going anywhere.

"None of us are leaving town," he said. "We're all staying right now."

Community activism has been as much a part of Winters' life as managing the park since he was a student council president at Zephyrhills High in 1965. Like many people in the community, Cliff McDuffie, the city's former mayor, spoke highly of Winters and his involvement on the local scene.

"He's a very, very community-minded individual and he always wants to get involved," said McDuffie, who recalled Winters being part of a group of local people that used to meet for morning coffee at the old Neukom's Drug Store downtown and later at Barb's Restaurant. "He was very helpful in getting things done to benefit the city."

McDuffie recalled how Winters played an instrumental role in organizing an air show that formerly took place at Skydive City and helping to get a Celtic Festival in Zephyr Park off the ground. That latter event was relocated to Pioneer Florida Museum in Dade City, but did not last at that location either.

McDuffie said there has been some discussion about bringing back the Celtic Festival, noting that Winters "is one of the guys that wants to get it going again."

Bob Hartwig, the retired fire chief of Zephyrhills, spoke fondly of the family and their community involvement.

"I think it's a landmark in the city," he said of the park, adding, "I only hope the new owners can be as community-oriented like Bob and Gordon (Bob's late father) were."

Waller noted that the new owners "plan to keep it just like it is. This is not the only park they own, so they know what it's like."

That makes Melonie Monson, executive director of the Zephyrhills Chamber of Commerce, happy.

"We love it when we have our family-owned business that we know, but it's okay for families to move on," she said. "We look forward to building a new partnership with the new owners."

NO. 4

Merger of fire departments is under way

A view from the municipal building's parking lot reveals the city's downtown fire station that is being transferred to Pasco County Fire and Rescue. The official crossover is slated for Sept. 27.



Zephyrhills Fire Department and Pasco County Fire and Rescue combining efforts for area residents

By STEVE LEE
News Reporter

Sept. 10, 2020

Many questions were raised when there was talk initially then subsequent plans to merge the Zephyrhills Fire Department and Pasco County Fire and Rescue. The answer to all queries is that they're making it work.

The joint effort, which will officially be implemented on Sept. 27, is designed to leave city and county residents with ample fire service and emergency coverage. The measure was approved by the City of Zephyrhills and Pasco County Commission in the spring, following a year of negotiations.

"County crews have been coming out here," city manager Billy Poe said. "They're slowly transitioning things to their system so eventually they can flip the switch and it's county. City guys have been going to the county (stations) to train."

"We're excited to welcome them all aboard," said Corey Dierdorff, the county's fire rescue spokesman.

Zephyrhills' two stations, located at 6th Avenue and Dean Dairy Road and to be renamed stations 25 and 29, along with 24 staff members and some apparatus, will soon be part of Pasco County Fire Rescue. Since the city did not have ambulances, the county plan calls for them to be at each station.

Additionally, the Zephyrhills Fire Cadet and Volunteer programs are being merged, allowing those citizens to be involved with Pasco County Fire Rescue.

"You hate to lose the fire department of Zephyrhills, because it was part of the community," said Bob Winters, president of Zephyrhills Volunteer Fire Rescue. "It's going to lose that hometown feel, but it should provide good service."

While Pasco County Commissioner Ron

Oakley labeled the merger as "a win-win" for the city and county, Scott Cassin assured commissioners and residents that there will be improvements such as better response times, better coordination in emergency dispatch and greater access to high-rise fire responses.

While the transition is scheduled for Sept. 27, the next morning, which is a Monday, will begin with a meet-and-greet at both Zephyrhills stations. In attendance will be fire and rescue personnel, along with some city and county leaders.

"In my opinion, it's been a pretty smooth transition to this point," said Poe, who lauded city and county personnel for working together and does not envision any problems with services for residents. "That was the goal, to limit the disruptions as much as possible."

The county now services nearly all of Pasco. Only New Port Richey and Port Richey — both cities are located along the U.S. 19 corridor on the west side of the county — remain as municipal fire departments.

Funding the local fire department has been a hotly debated topic this past year with city officials working on assessment strategies. In the summer of 2019, city council gave the go-ahead to pursue the county option and got approval from the city's firefighters' union.

Zephyrhills has more than 15,000 residents with the population expected to increase substantially as several new subdivisions are being built and others expanded. As part of their annual property tax bills, city residents will be assessed the 1.8036 mills that county residents pay. That comes out to \$180.36 for a \$100,000 home.

City residents did not have a separate tax for the fire department. Poe explained that coverage was included in the 6.35 overall millage rate.

If any of the 24 city fire staff lacks state paramedic certification have four years to do so. Selected emergency vehicles and other city equipment will also become county property.

Three battalion chiefs will not be making the transition. Poe said Chuck Blankenbeckley and Mickey Gibbs are retiring, while Michael Richards is pursuing a vacancy as the city's fire inspector.

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NO. 6

Groundbreaking for the new Crystal Bar



Family members with gold-plated shovels prepare to dig up some dirt where the Crystal Bar will be rebuilt.

STEVE LEE

By STEVE LEE
News Reporter
May 7, 2020

Family behind bar and package store that burned to the ground plans to rebuild a 65-year-old city landmark

One of the most famous gathering places in Zephyrhills burned to the ground in 2019. Now, family members of the parents who opened that 65-year-old city landmark plan to rebuild.

A groundbreaking for the new Crystal Bar, which originally opened as Jerry's Crystal Bar & Package Store at 5707 Gall Blvd. in 1954, took place Saturday at the same location. Ironically, it was a year to the date of the old place burning down.

Children of the original owners — Karol Sealander, Genni Belluso, Rene Hill, Kurt Geddes and Bob Geddes, along with Kandy Halls (who resides in Arizona) — are behind the project. They, along with a few other family members, grabbed gold shovels in front of four mounds of dirt for a symbolic photo of Saturday's event.

"We want to do this for our generation," Sealander said. "It's something that's in our blood."

"We just couldn't let it go," added Bob Geddes, who worked in construction for nearly two decades and helped build various Publix's throughout the southeastern United States. "People always wanted to know, are you going to rebuild? It was a right of passage."

As for the one-year anniversary, she added, "We just got lucky. That just worked out great." Jerry and Bob Geddes, both of whom have passed away, moved from Chicago to Tampa and purchased a gas station in the Hyde Park area of Tampa in the 1950s. They later sold it so a church could use the property for parking and built the Crystal Bar.

"I'm glad they did it, because we all grew up in Zephyrhills," Bob Geddes said. "There's nothing wrong with Zephyrhills."

The replacement surely will not be the same as the old building. It will appear as a

two-story structure but will have high ceilings and be only one-story with pool tables and a stage as well as the bar. According to Ed Sealander, who heads the construction project, the 5,000-square-foot structure will be built on five city lots off Gall Boulevard.

With about 2,000 more feet than the old building, occupancy will increase by 20 people to 150.

"It's going to be different," Karol Sealander said. "It's not going to look like the Crystal."

When it comes to a family-owned business and a fun, friendly atmosphere, however, it surely will be like the Crystal of days gone by. For the adult children, it will feel like coming back home in a way.

"We all grew up right here. We lived on the site," Bob Geddes said.

Added his daughter Elizabeth Geddes, a 2000 Zephyrhills High graduate, "I just always liked knowing where my family was."

Although social distancing is being practiced throughout the city, state and world for that matter, that did not stop dozens of friends and former regulars from turning out for Saturday's event.

"I wouldn't mind if everybody would keep their distance," Bob Geddes said, amazed at the number of people who showed up in support. "It's nice to see everybody come out."

Added Sealander, "We miss out socializing."

So too do many of the folks who showed up on Saturday, including former musician and music organizer Bruce Edwards: "It's just a great vibe and a nice intimate space. People came here because they loved the music."

"It's the brotherhood; the family," said Rich Perrez, a regular describing the attraction to the Crystal.

Bruce Bigelow, another longtime patron, could relate, saying, "It's actually like a second home." Former patron Sharon Smith showed just how much the place meant to her. She brought the ashes of her late husband Davey, who passed away last November: "I had to bring him here."

The completion date is targeted for November, but Hill was already thinking ahead when she said to the crowd, "You've all got to make reservations for New Year's Eve."

NO. 7



Zephyrhills City Council is back in chamber and practicing social distancing.

STEVE LEE

City council sets millage rate at 6.35

A brief city council meeting was preceded by a budget workshop and followed by a CRA meeting

By ANDY WARRENER
News Reporter
July 30, 2020

Business was short and sweet at Monday's Zephyrhills City Council meeting. The heavy lifting was done earlier during a budget meeting where city staff prepared the FY 20-21 budget. City staff will present the budget to council by Aug. 7 as they await some final revenue from the state.

Three Consent Agenda Items were on the list. Item 1.1 just approved the July 13 minutes.

Item 1.2 approved an interlocal agreement (ILA) with Pasco County for Disaster Response and Recovery related services. The purpose is to streamline the reimbursement process from FEMA. An ILA was recommended by city staff because FEMA reimbursement funds are distributed first to the county and then the county reimburses the city in its jurisdiction. It assures faster reimbursement and 100 percent of the eligible rate.

Item 1.3 approved a Leon Wilson's agreement to connect his property located along 8th Avenue to city water and/or sewer. Wilson, the property owner, is responsible for all costs as-

sociated with the installation of services along with appropriate impact fees. The property owner also agrees to annex their property into city boundaries once the property becomes contiguous with city boundaries. City staff recommended approval. All three items were bundled and approved unanimously, 4-0 with councilman Alan Knight absent from the dais.

Two Business Items got their second readings on Monday. Ordinance No. 1402-20 repealed Ordinance No. 1379-19 of the City's Land Development Code (LDC) with regard to public rights-of-way and wireless infrastructure.

Item 2.2 was the second reading of Ordinance No. 1403-20. This modified setback requirements for Light Industrial (LI) zoning, allowing front setbacks to be reduced to 20 feet and side and rear setback to 10 feet. It was approved 4-0.

In the Finance Director's Report, the news that the city would keep its millage rate fixed at 6.35 mills for the next fiscal year broke. Keeping the rate the same is aimed at keeping costs low for residents. City staff and council members anticipate higher revenue still, with new acquisitions into the city boundaries. It passed 4-0.

In the comments section, councilman Lance Smith introduced Nick Walton, executive director of the Sarah Vande Berg Tennis Foundation. Walton spoke briefly about cultivating grants for the foundation that he hopes to utilize in order to create free programs at the tennis center for children.

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NO. 8

Carriage House revamp already underway



Kerns Family Construction is already on the job, just weeks after the proposal was approved by the Zephyrhills City Council. **ANDY WARRENER**

The historic building behind the Jeffries House will get a major renovation and it's already in-progress

By **ANDY WARRENER**
News Reporter
Sept. 10, 2020

Captain Howard B. Jeffries served the Union Army during the American Civil War as part of Company E, 21st Pennsylvania Cavalry. He moved to the Zephyrhills area in 1909. Back then the town was called Abbott Station or just "Abbott."

The historic house on Main Street, was built in 1910 and the two-story carriage house just behind, was built that same year. The roughly 400-square-foot out building would have been used to store the family carriage and associated tack. It's use as a carriage house could not have gone on for too long as Henry Ford's Model A was first produced in 1903 and the Model T was coming off production lines as early as 1908. In May of 1927, Ford watch the 15,000,000th Model T roll off the assembly line.

"It (Carriage House) had been boarded up and at one point had a second-story deck but it was falling into a state of disrepair," Zephyrhills Public Works Director Shane LeBlanc said. "We took the deck down, boarded it up and were waiting for a plan to revitalize it."

The wait ended on Aug. 24 of this year when Business Item 3.1 was passed 4-1 by the Zephyrhills City Council, and greenlit the renovation project undertaken by Kerns Family Construction.

Kerns Family Construction was the only entity that responded to a bid distribution through BidNet Direct. Their proposal, which has a grand total of \$185,853.96 has a contingency amount includes \$30,975.59. The project cost could be as low as \$154,877.96. Kerns submitting the only bid and their experience working on other historic buildings within the CRA District, were factors in awarding the contract.

"This project is right up their alley," LeBlanc said. "Plus the CRA has a positive reputation of what can be done with redeveloping historic buildings."

Attracting a live-work tenant or some kind of commercial venture would be welcomed. The building is getting a significant renovation.

"The bottom floor will be an open concept, while the second floor will be for an apartment," CRA Director Gail Hamilton said. "Once it's done, we will do an RFP (request for proposal) for both the Jeffries House and the Carriage House. We think some type of business might be interested in the property."

The timeline is moving, too. Hamilton said on Sept. 8 that she expects the project to be completed within the next 60 to 90 days.

The city acquired both the Jeffries House and Carriage House from CenterState Bank in 2014. The city paid roughly \$111,000 for the lot that contained both buildings.

"I remember Danny (Burgess) was a driving force on council to take ownership of the Jeffries House," LeBlanc said. "He did not want to see it go to a private owner or fall into disrepair."

Since then, the Jeffries House has been restored and is currently in use by the CRA. It remains available for public or private rental.

By Friday, Sept. 4, Kerns construction crews were already on the scene, removing old boards and preparing the site.

"The idea is to make it into a live-work rental type of space with the top floor the living quarters," Tim Walsh of Kerns Family Construction said. "We're saving as much of the original wood for future projects and we're going to use the original windows and flooring to keep as much of the original structure as possible."

Kerns even has plans on doing workshops on how to restore old windows.

"It's going to be pretty cool when it's all done," Walsh said.

The city had another restoration success story in 2015 when they renovated a World War II military barracks near the Zephyrhills Airport. That building would become today's Zephyrhills Military Museum. The \$92,000 project was taken on by Ryman Construction and included replacing a lot of old and termite-damaged wood and replacing all the doors and windows, among other things.

"That was another project that could have gone either way," LeBlanc said.

NO. 9



Renovations are under way at the New River Branch Library, which also served as a voting place during the recent elections. **STEVE LEE**

No slowdown in sight for local projects

Building and road projects continue to lead the way for the expansion of Zephyrhills and outlying areas

By **STEVE LEE**
News Reporter
Aug. 20, 2020

Despite various slowdowns and shutdowns stemming from the continuing coronavirus pandemic, it seems to be full steam ahead for several notable construction and road projects in and around the city. Especially in residential developments, noted city councilman Lance Smith and city planner Todd Vande Berg.

"The residential end hasn't let up any and the interest rates are historically low right now, so people are still buying," said Smith, who owns Lance Smith Realty that primarily serves Zephyrhills, Dade City and Wesley Chapel.

Vande Berg is well aware of the ongoing construction and renovations being made throughout the area and, like his counterpart on the city council, does not envision any setbacks or slowdowns in the near future.

"There's no stopping," he said. "All the residential projects are booming with no slowdown in sight."

While some residential projects are just getting under way, a few others are nearing completion. On Chancey Boulevard, just outside of city limits and in east Pasco, is Bristol Meadows. That housing development lies in between U.S. 301 and Chancey Road. Just to the south along U.S. 301 and near the Zephyrhills Correctional Institute land has been cleared for another large subdivision and further up the road off Chancey, the Zephyrhills Municipal Airport is working extensively on a runway expansion.

Along Simons Road are two new single-family home subdivisions under construction. The Oaks of Pasco and Calusa Springs border

the Silverado Golf & Country Club.

Aside from various residential developments springing up, one of the more visible signs of progress is the rebuilding of The Crystal Bar, a Zephyrhills landmark since 1954 before it burned down in May of 2019. The new building, which has a concrete structure up along Gall Boulevard and should once again be a popular family-owned tavern, is tentatively set to open sometime after the New Year.

"We're probably going to open in January," said Bob Geddes, project manager for Sealander Contractors. "A lot of people are seeing it's going up and that's great."

Added his sister Carol Sealander, a local realtor, "Things are moving along smoothly and our family is eager to see it open again."

Another major project sure to draw plenty of people is the Sarah Vande Berg Tennis and Wellness Center being built off Simons Road. The \$5 million facility, that will offer numerous academic and athletic programs including the United Global Academy, had been targeted to open in August. The opening date now is more likely to be sometime in mid-September.

"It's getting close," said Vande Berg, whose daughter was a Zephyrhills High tennis standout and perished in a 2014 automobile crash. "Every time I go out there you see more and more work done. The project is amazing."

Meanwhile, road work continues along the State Road 54 west bypass extension into Zephyrhills. The project's aim is to relieve traffic congestion along the east-west corridor between Zephyrhills and Wesley Chapel.

The road-widening project, which began in 2017, extends along that thoroughfare from County Road 577 (Curly Road) to County Road 54 (Eiland Boulevard). Formerly a two-lane road it is being extended to four with additional turn lanes. Along that stretch is the Avalon Park West subdivision.

Also in that area, a new three-level storage business is nearing completion while across SR 54 a renovation to the New River Branch Library continues. At Summertree Plaza, which is at the corner of SR 54 and Eiland Boulevard, a new O'Reilly's Auto Parts store is being built.

NO. 10

The 4-1-1 on the Pretty Pond/301 Traffic Signal Project



Panoramic photo of the current intersection between Merchants Square and the Townview Shopping Plaza. **ANDY WARRENER**

The joint project between local and state governments will alter the stretch of U.S. Highway 301 between Medical Arts Court and Pretty Pond Road

By **ANDY WARRENER**
News Reporter
Aug. 27, 2020

We hear these projects being discussed at city council meetings. Oftentimes it feels like drinking from a fire hydrant. This story is an attempt to break the project down into its genesis and its details and in easily palatable chunks.

Number one. The need. Currently, there is a through light, a traffic signal that allows for traffic to travel across US Highway 301 from

Merchants Square to the Townview Shopping Center. Traffic can also turn either right or left out of that signaled intersection. That's going to change. Merchants Square is the shopping center with Rural King, Panera and Ross. Townview has Hobby Lobby and Popeyes. That traffic signal is going away. Why?

"The existing signal (between the two shopping centers) was installed in the early 90s," Zephyrhills Planning Director Todd Vande Berg said. "At that time, there was no development north of Pretty Pond."

The developers of the aforementioned shopping plazas wanted a connecting light, even though the Department of Transportation (DOT) wanted a signal at Pretty Pond and 301. Now, almost 30 years later, the area north of Pretty Pond is booming. Shopping plazas with Publix, Lowes, Walmart and Microtel came online. Chik-Fil-A has made it clear that they will not come into the northeast corner of Pretty Pond and 301 until a traffic signal is installed. Vande Berg also noted that there was interest by users for the northwest corner of Pretty Pond and 301 if a signal were to be installed.

East of 301 and north of Pretty Pond is a large slated development in what used to be Zephyr Lakes but is now dubbed the Abbott Park Project, a 550-unit, single-family development that will need a better developed road and a signal allowing left turns south on 301. Part of the Metro project for the development entails a developer-funded extension of Kossik Road from 301 to Wire Road. Vande Berg also noted it being easier for police and fire vehicles to enter 301 from a traffic signal at Pretty Pond as opposed to from the vast parking lots in the shopping centers. There are also tentative plans to connect Dairy Road from Pretty Pond to Kossik.

The area has changed. Where in years past, the retail centers more or less stopped at the opposing shopping plazas, now the area has become a, "major retail node" and warrants accommodation. That together with the large residential development have increased the traffic needs at and north of Pretty Pond. That's not to mention the renewed ease with which motorists will be able to ingress and egress from the Medical Arts Court that contains a number of outpatient medical offices.

Number two. The details. Let's start south to north, at the intersection of 301 and Medical Arts Court. Medical Arts Court currently terminates at 301. When the project is complete, there will be full access through the intersection with a left turn lane on each side of 301. Travelling

east-west across 301, there will be a shared lane for crossing 301 and for turning north or south on 301, depending on the approach. On 301 approaching the intersection, the northbound 301 lanes will have a designated left turn only lane as well as an extended right turn only lane. The southbound 301 lanes at the intersection will mirror the northbound except there will be no changes to the length of the right turn only lane.

Further north, at the intersection where the current traffic signal exists, between the two plazas - the signal will be removed. It will then allow for just a right turn in and right turn out of the respective plazas. A channelized median will prohibit vehicles crossing all the way from one plaza to the other. The southbound lanes on 301 will have a left turn only lane (onto Medical Arts Court) that extends all the way to the current intersection. Medians inside the plazas will occupy the current left turn lanes egressing from Merchants Square and Townview.

A long left turn only lane will be added to the northbound side of 301 that will allow a left turn west onto Pretty Pond. At the Pretty Pond/301 intersection, the eastbound lanes will have a designated left turn only lane (north on 301) as well as an adjacent straight or right turn lane. The westbound Pretty Pond lanes will have a left turn only (south on 301), a straight through lane and a right turn only lane.

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