

# Bradford Cowboys complain about stadium rental fees

BY MARK J. CRAWFORD  
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A youth sports group is experiencing was shocked when its new season began, and it was told there would now be a fee to hit the field.

Rodney Mosley, emphasizing the Bradford Cowboys Athletic Association has been active around 50 years, hasn't been charged for using facilities at Bradford High School in that time. He said when the plans were being made to update the football field, the former school district administration told them the community would not be charged for using it.

That has changed, placing the organization in a difficulty situation.

"I'm here tonight because the

fees that we're being charged to use the field is basically going to put the organization out of business," he told the school board Sept. 9. As a nonprofit group, they rely on fees, donations and sponsorships to survive. The true cost, including uniforms and equipment, is around \$25,000 to \$30,000, he said. They've been raising around half of that amount and are just trying to keep the organization afloat.

Now, a one-time field rental, including the cost of security and custodial services, will be \$1,000. Mosley said they have always paid for security and custodial services, but again repeated the cost of renting the field would put them out of business.

"The organization is celebrating 50 years of being in the community, being a service to

the community kids throughout the last 50 years," he said, noting the Cowboys feed many football players into the high school's athletic program.

"I feel, and I know a lot of other people feel, this organization is a cornerstone in this community," Mosley said.

"I have been volunteering for 14 years," said Brandy Addison on behalf of the Cowboys. "It's very hard in this community for us to even get money and funds for these kids to participate. Most of us on the board are actually taking money out of our pocket to even make this organization work for our community, for the youth in our community. So, I just want to say that I feel like this is the fees are outrageous."

She said the school board should consider how much the

volunteers are doing to keep kids out of trouble.

Willie Brown, one of the organization's founders, said the youth have been playing on the field without a fee for 49 years. This year they found out they were being moved to the practice field. Now kids are wondering why they can't play at the stadium.

"That's why we're here tonight, trying to get some consideration. And like I said, these fees for us to play is ridiculous. You know, we can't afford it," he said.

The school board revised the facility usage fees in May. They start at \$100 for a classroom or \$200 for a cafeteria but jump to \$700 or \$800 for use of the new facilities at Bradford Elementary School. The high school auditorium and football

field start at \$500 but increase if the sound system is needed. The football field plus press box and lights is \$800. Security adds \$35 an hour, and custodial is \$100-plus, depending on weekend or holiday hours.

Superintendent Will Hartley suggested the board needs to further workshop the fees in the future, stating the use of new facilities should command a greater price.

Hartley said the district is in a phase of improvements — a new football field and a new school. It is working on a new high school, which will have a new gym.

The Cowboys continue to play for free on the practice field after paying a \$500 deposit charged to everyone, which is refundable if there is no damage. But damage is something the district has had

to deal with, he said, including a burn in the field and broken backs on the reserved seating.

Hartley said there have also been physical altercations resulting calls to law enforcement to assist onsite security.

When facilities are damaged, the renter must pay, but the superintendent said it is district employees that must make the repairs.

Hartley said in the future they can discuss lower fees for older facilities while sticking by the discussion in May that everyone needs to pay, especially considering increasing demand.

"The more and more people that come, everyone can't come for free," he said.

## Save Our Lakes discusses tree removal, water project, fishing pier

BY JENN SAMSEL  
Special to the Monitor

If you grew up in Keystone Heights in the 1950s, 60s, or 70s, you would remember how high Lake Geneva was. It was Boater Central, and people from all over would flock to Keystone Heights.

Today, Lake Geneva looks entirely different. Little Lake Geneva is separated from Lake Geneva, the boat ramp is inaccessible, and Nelson's Point has become a nature park, but soon, Lake Geneva will look like it once did: one giant lake.

At the Save Our Lakes meeting at the First Baptist Church on Tuesday, Sept. 10, Vivian Katz-James, the group's president, gave an update on the Geneva Project. The endeavor focuses on removing trees in the lakebed.

hazardous problems for boaters and kayakers.

Katz-James said, "Myself, along with County Commissioner Betsy Condon, met with Senator Jennifer Bradley, Representative Bobby Payne, the director of the Water Management District, and the assistant director, who was in contact with (the Florida Department of Environmental Protection) to obtain the permit needed and have the state approve the tree removal process," she said, "There is progress being made."

The state is responsible for the trees. Save Our Lakes is looking to have about 30 acres of trees removed from Lake Geneva, which would include Little Lake Geneva on S.R. 100, across from the B.P. Station and County Road 214, Nelson's Point, and another section of Lake Geneva.

Katz-James said, "The Water Management District is very optimistic that we might have something back from F.D.E.P. in a couple of weeks."

Scott Slater, a Save Our Lakes board member, said that

once approved by the state environmental agency, his group would contract with Heritage Timber. This company harvests biomass and, in return, sells it to Gainesville Regional Utilities.

G.R.U. owns and operates the 102.5-megawatt Deerhaven Renewable Generating Station biomass facility.

It's important to note that the tree removal process will be conducted with the utmost care for the environment. The project team will ensure that the natural habitat is preserved and that removing trees does not disrupt the local ecosystem. The project could take up to two weeks to be completed.

While the city and the county are in the process of working with DEP, it's important to note that the public can only remove trees on their properties if they have received a permit from the county or city.

Some residents have mixed reactions to the Geneva Project. They worry about the cost, the environmental effects, and losing their privacy.

Katz-James went on to say, "Before anything gets done, the community will have an opportunity to hear more about the tree removal process."

She added that she is working on having DEP and Fish and Wildlife officials at the November or January Save Our Lakes meetings to speak with the community.

Lake Geneva has always been a public lake for boaters, but over the decades, the lake receded. Mother nature took charge, growing trees and enclosing boaters' access. Once the trees are cleared, the lake will again be open to the public.

### Black Creek project 70% complete

The Black Creek Pipeline project is making significant strides. By January 2025, water should start flowing into Lake Brooklyn.

Katz-James said, "The Black Creek intake pump station is 98% complete, and the pipeline is 90% complete, with only about

another two miles to go. The treatment plant is 45% complete, and despite some delays in materials, the first flows into Lake Brooklyn is expected in January. Overall, the project is 70% complete, and we're ahead of schedule."

Lake Brooklyn's water level is 110.9 ft, and Lake Geneva's is 94.3 feet. The increase in water levels is not from the pipeline; it is primarily due to all the significant rainfall in Florida in the past month or so. Hurricane Debbie was a large contributor to the rise in water levels, and it's important to note that this is a temporary situation and not a result of the pipeline project.

fishing pier and will be working on obtaining additional funding over the next few months," he said.

Slater also mentioned that the new pier will be A.D.A. compliant and have sitting areas, providing a more enjoyable and accessible fishing experience for the community.

"To give you an idea, this is a 150-foot fixed dock and 40-foot gangway," he said. "The city has given us our blessing to proceed, and so the next stage is to draft a final design that now goes to F.D.E.P., which has to sign off on that permit."

The project is expected to start in 2025.

Save Our Lakes will host a Black Creek Water Resource Development Project celebration at Camp Immokalee on October 25 from 3 to 7 p.m. There will be food, music, fun, and more. Lake Region Kiwanis will cook the food.

### Trees in lakebed of Geneva

Florida has been experiencing an active rainy season. As the water continues to rise, the trees in Lake Geneva will fall, causing

## Union keeps millage at state maximum

BY TRACY LEE TATE  
Special to the Times

The Union County Board of Commissioners met in a public hearing before their regular September meeting to set the ad valorem millage rate for the county for the 2024-25 fiscal year.

There were no public comments concerning the millage rate. The board voted 4-0, with Commissioner Jimmy Tallman absent due to illness, to pass a resolution setting the county millage rate at 10 mills. The rolled-back rate for the year was 9.5475, would have been. The state maximum for county millage is 10 mills.

The board went on to discuss the final budget proposed for the year, which had been compiled

by Union County Clerk of Court and Comptroller Kellie Hendricks Rhoades and her staff.

Rhoades commented on two amendments to the budget document related to the disbursement and receipt of grant funds related to three road construction projects under the FDOT SCRAP grant program totaling \$10,777,839.

The three projects are NW 89th Ave, CR-18 and a project working on 92nd, 146th and 152nd Avenues. The second amendment removed the design funds from the budget as they have already been paid in the current fiscal year, with a total of \$624,517.

In the main budget document revenues and expenses are itemized by source (for revenues) and funds to be paid out (expenses). The General Fund is the mainstay of the budget for county operations and services, while individual departments, such as the road department and the offices of the constitutional officers are handled separately

with their own revenues and expenses (and often with transfers in from the general fund to cover expenditures).

For the coming fiscal year, the county expects a total of \$12,044,827 to flow into the general fund. This money comes from a number of sources, including ad valorem (property) and other taxes, such as infrastructure/discretionary surtaxes and the communications services taxes. There is income from fees charged for licenses and permits, charges for services, fines and forfeitures and miscellaneous revenues.

Also included in general fund revenue are transfers into the fund from other county programs and departments, like the SHIP program and the building department, as well as interest payments, officers budget excess and rents and royalties.

Using all these varied sources of revenue, the general fund pays for the business of running the county government. These

budgeted departments and services include legislative expenses (the operation of the board of commissions), finance and administration, comprehensive planning, governmental services, the dispatch call center (911), and public safety. Also included are welfare and human services, court administration and maintenance of the courthouse facilities.

Funds are transferred from the general fund to other funds. These include the county road department, EMS, Solid Waste, the Extension Service, Parks and Recreation, cemetery maintenance, E-911, animal control, the volunteer fire department, and emergency management. These transfers total \$2,173,673.

Grant and appropriation monies coming into the county coffers must be accounted for separately in the budget. These

revenues and expenditures include the appropriation for the new Providence Fire Station (\$793,975), Florida Recreation Develop Program (FRDP) grants (\$190,000), the Brownfields Grant (\$309,048), the Public Safety Complex appropriation (\$8,940,352), the Agricultural Education Complex Phase III Grant (\$485,794), the Courthouse Security Grant (\$319,054), the Courthouse Restoration Grant (\$374,996) and the Fire-Rescue Station appropriation (\$2,250,000). All these grants and appropriations to be put to use in the coming year total \$13,399,844.

Budgets for other departments include: the E911 Fund (\$591,304), Emergency Management (\$394,144), Emergency Medical Services (\$2,233,647), the Volunteer Fire Department (\$162,510), the Local Library (\$209,306, most of which is supplied by

the recently re-approved ½ mill ad valorem tax), Library State (\$121,093, fund from the state to support the library), Solid Waste (\$1,361,687), Animal Control (\$95,441), Mosquito Control (\$137,481), the Road Department (\$10,354,243), the Building Department (\$179,678), the Extension Office (\$165,390), Parks and Recreation (\$113,801), Cemetery Maintenance (\$104,658), Local Housing Assistance (SHIP) (\$958,791), funds assigned for jail construction (\$237,491), County Law Enforcement (\$39,000), State Law Enforcement (\$1,568,751) and the Sheriff's Surcharge (\$32,085).

It takes a great deal of money to run a county, even one as small as Union. The grand total for the 2024-25 fiscal year, including grants, ad valorem taxes, state funds and internally generated revenue? \$37,165,476.

## CRUNCH

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### Families may have to pay

The superintendent added that as positions become vacant throughout the year, he will think twice before filling them with new employees. He also said that students' families or community groups may have to start sharing the financial burden for costs the district now fully pays, like transportation to athletic events or extracurricular activities.

"We have assumed costs that generally, in most other places, those costs are borne by students, their teams, organizations," he said. "Just to give you an example: whenever a student goes on a competition trip, we always pay for that. We pay for the transportation, and that is a huge blessing. Most other places don't do that."

The superintendent added that now, the district pays for event



**Finance Director Renae Prevatt blamed the potential budget crisis on teacher salaries that have risen faster than state appropriations to school districts.**

ticket takers, allowing teams to pocket all gate and concessions revenues. He said that in the future, schools' athletic departments may have to share in that cost.

Ripplinger acknowledged that district officials would likely face a backlash if it asked parents

to share in costs previously borne solely by the school system.

"I understand if we begin to go down that road," he told board members, "even if not that they pay their fair share, but we begin to say we need you to shoulder a little bit of this burden, that is not going to be a well-received message, but we may get to the point where something like that may have to happen."

### Food distribution at True Vine

A communitywide food distribution hosted by Farm Share and True Vine Ministry will take place Tuesday, Sept. 24, at 10 a.m. at True Vine Outreach Ministry in Starke.

Food boxes often include fresh produce, deli and bakery items, dairy and some meats. Inventory is subject to change based on availability. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

BUDGET SUMMARY			
City of Hampton Fiscal Year 2024–2025			
*THE PROPOSED OPERATING BUDGET EXPENDITURES OF THE CITY OF HAMPTON ARE 15% MORE THAN LAST YEARS TOTAL OPERATING EXPENDITURES.			
	GENERAL FUND	WATER FUND	TOTAL
CASH RESERVE CARRY FORWARD	\$ 535,740.00	\$ 73,200.00	\$ 608,940.00
<b>ESTIMATED REVENUES</b>			
TAXES MILLAGE RATE AD VALOREM @ 2.00 (Per \$1000)	\$ 25,508.45		\$ 25,508.45
CHARGES FOR SERVICES		\$ 120,000.00	\$ 120,000.00
GRANTS	\$ 100,250.00	\$ 1,386,598.75	\$ 1,486,848.75
INTERGOVERNMENTAL	\$ 210,372.00		\$ 210,372.00
LICENSES & FEES	\$ 25,020.00		\$ 25,020.00
FINES & FORFEITURES	\$ 900.00		\$ 900.00
MISCELLANEOUS INCOME	\$ 5,328.00	\$ 408.00	\$ 5,736.00
TOTAL ESTIMATED REVENUES	\$ 367,378.45	\$ 1,507,006.75	\$ 1,874,385.20
TOTAL ESTIMATED REVENUES AND RESERVES	\$ 903,118.45	\$ 1,580,206.75	\$ 2,483,325.20
<b>ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES</b>			
GENERAL GOVERNMENT	\$ 149,730.00	\$ 72,744.00	\$ 222,474.00
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	\$ 126,669.00	\$ 67,200.00	\$ 193,869.00
TRANSPORTATION	\$ 63,084.00		\$ 63,084.00
CULTURE AND RECREATION	\$ 7,800.00		\$ 7,800.00
GRANTS	\$ 100,250.00	\$ 1,386,598.75	\$ 1,486,848.75
TOTAL ESTIMATED EXPENDITURES	\$ 447,533.00	\$ 1,526,542.75	\$ 1,974,075.75
CONTINGENCY RESERVES	\$ 455,585.45	\$ 53,664.00	\$ 509,249.45
TOTAL EXPENDITURES AND RESERVES	\$ 903,118.45	\$ 1,580,206.75	\$ 2,483,325.20
THE TENTATIVE ADOPTED/ AND/OR FINAL BUDGET ARE AT THE TAXING AUTHORITY AS A PUBLIC RECORD.			