

# Tethering dogs, burning trash discussed at meeting

BY DAN HILDEBRAN  
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The Clay County Sheriff's Office and the Clay Chamber's Lake Region Prosperity Partners held a joint meeting on Jan. 23 at Keystone Heights's First Baptist Church. Detective Gary

Winterstein and other deputies who investigate animal abuse and environmental violations were the spotlight speakers.

Also attending were County Commissioner Betsy Condon and the county's Animal Services Director Ernest Hagan.

Winterstein said the most

common animal abuse cases stem from underfeeding and tethering.

In 2022, Clay County Commissioners passed an ordinance to protect animals from abuse. Part of the new law restricted tethering or leashing dogs to a stationary object.

Tethering is prohibited for dogs under a year old and for pregnant or unhealthy canines. In addition, dogs cannot be tethered within five feet of a property line, must have access to food and water, and must be visible to the owner at all times while tethered. When discussing the sheriff's

office environmental crimes investigations, the officers talked about restrictions on outdoor burning in the Keystone Heights area.

They said no outdoor fires are allowed within the City of Keystone Heights. Burning outside the city limits in Clay

County is restricted to yard waste only. Residents may not burn garbage, particularly cardboard or plastic, because those materials contain potentially harmful chemicals that could be released when burned.

## Clay Sheriff's Office meets with High Ridge residents about crime prevention

BY JENN SAMSEL  
Special to the Monitor

On Jan. 28, the Clay County Sheriff's Office hosted a crime prevention class at the Mission of the Dirt Road.

Sgt. Diana Coxen from the Office of Community Affairs began the presentation by stating that her agency considers Clay County one of the safest in the state.

The sergeant then explained to attendees the difference between property crimes, violent crimes, and fraud.

"Scams are the largest growing crime that you'll see in the United States and the world actually," she said, "but in Clay County itself, fraud has up ticked because it's so easy to commit fraud these days, and with social media and all the electronics and technology, frauds have become rampant."

Community Affairs Deputy Dimitri Santiago gave the crowd tips for safeguarding their property.

- Stay Aware of Your Surroundings. Monitor your neighbors and the neighborhood and report any suspicious activity.

- Secure Your Home: Always keep your garage door closed, and do not leave doors or windows unlocked. Use curtains to prevent outsiders from looking in.

- Avoid Hiding Keys Outside: Do not use mats, flowerpots, or fake rocks to hide your house key, as these are easily discovered.

- Install Security Systems: Consider placing an alarm system in your home and vehicle.

- Use Cameras and Signage: Install security cameras and display signs, such as "Beware of Dog" or "This property is protected by [Security System]."

- Maintain Your Yard: Keep your yard tidy and trim hedges low. As law enforcement has noted, high hedges can create ambush points.

- Utilize Defensive Plants: Consider planting thorny or prickly plants near windows for



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"High Ridge has come a long way towards improving its community."- Community Affairs Deputy Din=mitri Santiago

Set timers throughout your home to turn on lights, TVs, etc., giving the impression that someone is home.

- Parking Precautions: If you don't have a vehicle, ask a neighbor to park theirs at your property to create the appearance

of occupancy.

- Keep Your Vehicle Secure: Always lock your car and avoid leaving valuables or keys inside, especially weapons. Do not make your vehicle an easy target for theft or break-ins.

"If you plan on leaving on vacation," Santiago advised, "notify the Sheriff's Department to add you to the step-up program. A step-up is when deputies visit your house every shift to check your property. If your house is on a step-up date, it's mandatory that day."

The deputy also offered advice to break-in victims.

"If you return home and find that your house has been burglarized," he added, "don't go in. Don't go back out, don't touch anything, and call the sheriff's office immediately."

The officers also informed residents of a new trend involving SunPass-related emails and text messages. They said it's important to avoid opening these communications, as scammers are skilled at stealing your

identity. Remember, SunPass will not send you a text message.

If you are a victim of fraud or spam, here are some tips to follow: • File a police report.

- Contact the credit bureaus: Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion. Place a fraud alert on your credit report.

- Report the incident to the Federal Trade Commission.

- Block scammers on your phone.

- Do not open emails from unknown senders.

Deputy Santiago concluded by saying, "Regardless of who they are, everyone's afforded safety. If you're displaced and have important property, find a secure place to keep it."

Some residents of High Ridge expressed concerns to the Sheriff's Department on multiple topics.

The Sheriff's Department reassured everyone at the meeting about these concerns.

"High Ridge has come a long way towards improving its community," Santiago said.

## Opioid settlement funds Naloxone, fall prevention, chronic disease treatment

BY DAN HILDEBRAN  
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The Bradford County Fire Rescue lieutenant leading the county's community paramedicine effort gave the Keystone Heights Rotary Club an overview of the program on Jan. 29.

Lt. David Weeks leads the team, and University of Florida interns Elijah Hendley and Casandra Ramirez joined the program as support specialists two weeks ago.

Fire Chief Ben Carter told the civic group that the county's paramedicine program has been running for about one year, is funded through opioid settlement money, and does not cost local taxpayers.

Carter added that he had asked the board of county commissioners for two years to ensure the program had a significant impact.

"If it's not a staple in our community within those first two years," he told the Rotarians, "then let's do away with the program."

The chief added that, in his view, Weeks accomplished that mission in only eight months.

### Frequent flyers

"It really has turned into something more than anything we thought it could be," Carter said. "The goal of it originally was for opioid abatement, and so our repeat offenders, drug users, and things of that nature are who we targeted originally."

Carter said one goal of the



(L-R) Bradford County Community Paramedicine Team Leader Lt. David Weeks, Fire Rescue Chief Ben Carter, and County Manager Scott Kornegay.

program is to shift heavy users of the county's emergency medical services and local hospital emergency departments to more appropriate and effective care. He called those individuals frequent flyers.

"Some of our frequent flyers were using the emergency departments as their primary care, and it was crowding up the emergency departments," he said.

"I'll give you an example," he told the Rotarians. "We had one patient we transported 52 times last year. That's once a

week. And so, we essentially just spent a lot of resources taking care of that one patient. I don't have the numbers in front of me, but I think it was something around in the neighborhood of \$150,000 that was just on that one patient, essentially between the transports and whatnot."

Carter claimed that through the paramedicine program, that patient no longer requires frequent trips to the emergency department.

"We've not transported that patient in quite some time due to the efforts of Lt. Weeks," he said.

### Whatever it takes

Weeks told the group that of the 148 calls for service his program has responded to, 43 resulted from referrals from fire rescue crews. He added that his program had distributed 220 boxes of Naloxone, the nasal spray that rapidly reverses opioid overdoses.

"Whenever they complete a patient report," Weeks said of ambulance crew members, "they have the ability to flag that patient for further follow-up with us. Maybe they've identified that (the patient) needs help with transportation, they have a substance abuse problem, they may have trouble with their insurance, anything like that."

Weeks said the first step is a face-to-face meeting with the patient, whether at home, the hospital, or anywhere else.

"We'll meet 'em on the side of the road," he said. "Whatever it takes. We always try to go to that patient. And from there, once we've identified their initial needs, we'll start to work with that patient. We'll start referring them to any organizations that could help them, whether it's utility assistance, like I said, transportation needs, things like

that."

### Four areas of focus

Weeks said his program focuses on four areas: substance abuse, fall prevention, chronic disease, and accessibility.

The substance abuse segment features the opioid abatement measures of free naloxone kits, naloxone cabinets, and public education.

Weeks added that his program had distributed 220 boxes of Naloxone, the nasal spray that rapidly reverses opioid overdoses and is also known under the

brand name Narcan.

Weeks said that in addition to distributing Naloxone, he has established a partnership with Meridian Healthcare to help in the substance abuse focus of the program.

The lieutenant added that his team will start teaching fall prevention courses at the county's senior center soon.

"Fall prevention is another one of the projects that the two interns are going to start working on," he said, adding that the pair will become certified through the

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