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JANUARY 8, 2026

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TRIPLE TREAT WIN BRINGS TROPHY TO ARCADIA



DESOTO COUNTY

GAME OF THE WEEK

Sponsored by:



STEVE KNAPP

Sports Writer
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The DeSoto Bulldogs show their trophy as the 2025 champions of the Chick-fil-A Classic tournament.

The battling Bulldogs overcame adversity to complete their two year mission and reach their goal at the Chick-fil-A Classic basketball tournament. It has been over a year since the girls basketball team had

claimed their tournament championship at Babcock Ranch. This tournament meant more with more at stake and a chance for respect, revenge and team growth through adversity. They accomplished everything in their 60-56 championship win over the undefeated IMG Blue team.

Their mission started at the Chick-fil-A Classic

SEE CHAMPS PAGE 8 >>



DESOTO COUNTY SPORTS

PAGE 4

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GOVERNMENT MEETING SCHEDULE

CITY OF ARCADIA

CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS OCCUR THE 1ST AND 3RD TUESDAY OF THE MONTH UNLESS OTHERWISE SPECIFIED

Margaret Way Building
23 N. Polk Ave., Arcadia, FL 34266

JAN 13	DESOTO COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS MEETING
TUES 9A	Administration Building 201 E. Oak Street, Suite 103 Arcadia, FL 34266
JAN 27	DESOTO COUNTY SPECIAL MASTER HEARING
TUES 11A	Administration Building 201 E. Oak Street, Suite 103 Arcadia, FL 34266
JAN 27	DESOTO COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS MEETING
TUES 3P	Administration Building 201 E. Oak Street, Suite 103 Arcadia, FL 34266

Active dates and times are subject to change.
County: <http://desotobocc.com/calendar>
City: <https://arcadia-fl.gov/events/>

Realtor Showcase

See page 13

DESOTO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE **ARREST REPORT**
See page 15

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YOU'RE INVITED! DESOTO COUNTY AHEAD: COMMUNITY UPDATE DINNER & RESOURCE FAIR



CAROL MAHLER

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Photos provided

At 4:00 p.m., on Tues., Jan. 13, you are invited to a free community update dinner and resource fair at the Turner Agri-Civic Center, 2250 NE Roan St., for DeSoto County Ahead, our local "Aspirations to Actions," an initiative of The Patterson Foundation (TPF). You'll have a chance to "earn" a \$25.00 gift card, plus your name will be entered into a drawing for a \$1,000.00 pay-it-forward award for the non-profit organization of your choice.

This community update and resource fair is the third one held since DeSoto County Ahead began. TPF Consultant Cheri Coryea recalled that about 50 community organizations participated in the first event in 2023. "It was a really great opportunity to meet the community and collectively learn about your resources that were available," she said. The second time, in 2025, the event "expanded slightly" with 64 organizations participating.

This year, the resource fair will showcase more than 90 organizations located or serving in our community. "This is an opportunity to increase our knowledge of the resources available in DeSoto County," Coryea said. "We're very excited about that."

TPF values the time that people will spend at the event, so participants will receive "passport" cards. If they meet 35 or more of the community organizations during the resource fair, they will receive \$25.00 gift cards, and their names will be entered into a drawing for a pay-it-forward award. The person whose name is drawn will choose the non-profit organization to receive \$1,000.00.

For the first time, the resource fair will also include "the job board" coordinated by TPF Digital Navigator Joanny Hanson. She has been monitoring job openings and will have links to the position postings, according to Coryea. "She will also advise how to apply for different jobs and exactly whom to contact."

In addition, before the resource fair opens to the public, representatives of the organizations will have a special hour to meet and talk with each other. This opportunity was suggested by some who participated in last year's resource fair.

At 5:00 p.m., dinner will be served thanks to the generosity of The Patterson Foundation. "We work with local vendors to provide food," Coryea said. "That's the main reason for registration, so we can plan ahead."

Starting at 7:00 p.m., the update will feature meaningful presentations by various community change makers. Since 2024, those who participated in



Cheri Coryea, a consultant with The Patterson Foundation, was one of the presenters at the 2025 DeSoto County Ahead Community Update Dinner and Resource Fair.

Set up as exhibitors during the 2025 DeSoto County Ahead Community Update Dinner and Resource Fair in the Turner Agri-Civic Center, local organizations offered information and give-aways to those attending the event.



Everyone listened to the 2025 DeSoto County Ahead Community Update presentations from representatives of The Patterson Foundation as well as "community change makers."

During the 2025 DeSoto County Ahead Community Update Dinner and Resource Fair, some participants started to eat dinner while other continued to talk with Resource Fair Exhibitors.

the public innovators labs have formed eight teams working on four themes: faith, health, housing, and youth. "Through conversations with different segments of the community, they are working . . . to address people's concerns and aspirations," Coryea said. She said that people may sign up to help or join the action teams.

She also invited everyone attending to bring a piece of technology that they no longer need or are using for the Sarasota Technology Users Group's "Device Drive." The group repairs or refurbishes the devices and gives them away to those who reach out for assistance in a four-county area—

especially DeSoto County.

"More than 1,000 devices have been donated since October," Coryea said. "We would love to have as many more as we can. The need is heavy in DeSoto County." If people are unable to bring their devices to the event, they may drop them off at the DeSoto County Library, 125 N. Hillsborough Ave., until Jan. 31.

Since registration began, 15 community residents have volunteered to work during the event as well as 12 students from either the DeSoto High School JROTC or Links-2-Success. "Not only does it help us," Coryea said, "but it's also helpful for people to see people whom they recognize."

She also praised and thanked Tourist Development Director Sondra Guffey and Turner Center Director Eric Hamilton. "They are so accommodating," Coryea said. "We're using every inch of the Turner Center for this event, and we are thankful for how generous they are with working for us."

There is no cost to attend this event, and more than 400 people have registered. "Register now," Coryea said. "Bring your kids. Don't miss it."

Register online at qrs.ly/ffgvjx0 For more information, call Coryea at 941-713-3899 or online at CCoryea@thepattersonfoundation.org.

From left, Alicia Exantus and Lyndsey Smith, consultants with The Patterson Foundation, show off the 2025 DeSoto County Ahead Passports. If participants met 35 of the 60 Resource Fair Exhibitors, they received a \$25.00 gift card, and their names were entered into a drawing to award \$1,000.00 to a non-profit of their choice.

FDOT HOLDS CORRIDOR ALTERNATIVES PUBLIC MEETINGS

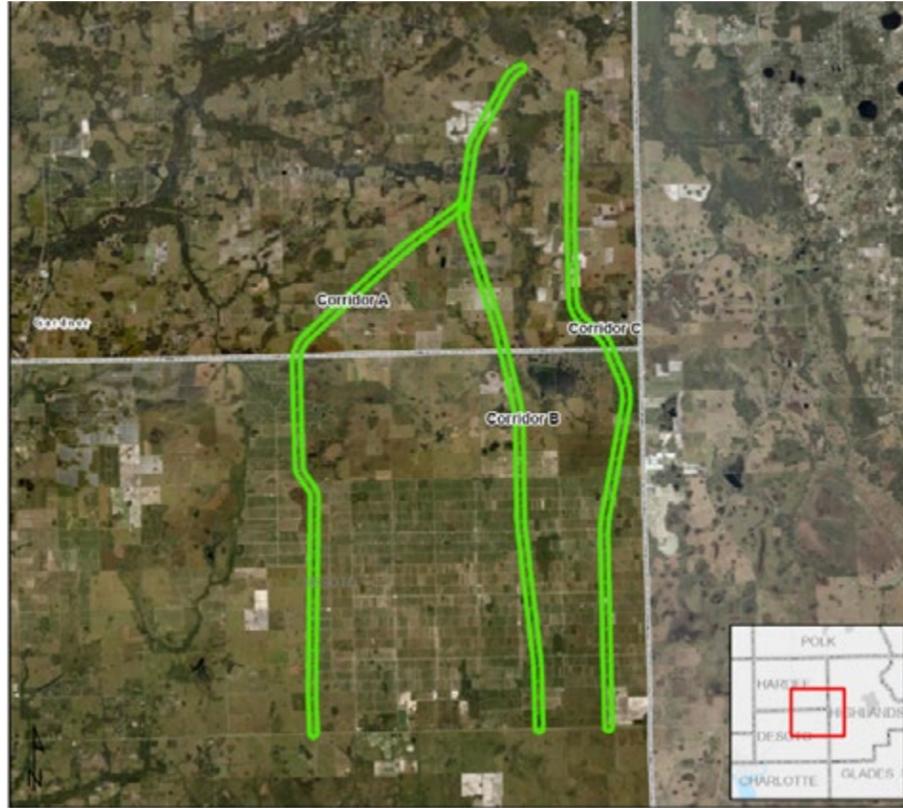


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Photos provided

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), District 1, will hold three “Corridor Alternatives” public meetings from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.: Jan. 15, at the Turner Agri-Civic Center Exhibit Hall, 2250 NE Roan St., Arcadia; Jan. 22, at the Hardee County Agri-Civic Center, 515 Civic Center Dr., Wauchula; and Jan. 29 at the Town of Lake Placid Government Center, 1069 U.S. Highway 27 N., Lake Placid. In addition, a Self-Guided Virtual Meeting Room will be available on the Project Website from Jan. 15 to Feb. 12, 2026: www.swflroads.com/project/455782-1.

The meetings offer the public a chance to review the alternatives, ask questions, and offer opinions about the conceptual design and proposed transportation improvements west of U.S. Highway (U.S.) 27 and east of U.S. 17 between State Road (S.R.) 70 and S.R. 66 in DeSoto, Hardee, and Highlands counties as part of the Project Development and Environment (PD&E) study. One of the alternatives is a toll road, and another is not building.

The corridor alternatives are located in northeast DeSoto County where Jules Freeman (1914-2013) and his brother Jack Freeman (1919-2019) developed “Joshua Groves” in 1968. In 1953, the brothers had established San Carlos Park, and according to the Website for San Carlos Park Homes (sancarlosparkhomes.com/san-carlos-park): “Larger than the City



The Corridor Alternatives are located in northeastern DeSoto County for transportation improvements east of U.S. Highway (U.S.) 17 and west of U.S. 27 between State Road (S.R.) 70 and S.R. 66 as portrayed on this aerial map provided by FDOT.

of Manhattan, the groves were once recognized by National Geographic Magazine as the world’s largest.”

The property was acquired by American Agronomics Corp. (AAC) that included a citrus grove management operation that sold property, planted in Valencia oranges, ranging from 2.5 acres to 30 or more acres, to investors. In the 1980s, Golden Grove Management, an AAC subsidiary, cared for the properties, including cultivation, harvesting, and fruit sales.

AAC merged with Orange-co of Florida, Inc., and in 2014, they sold to Alico, Inc., as the public company was named in 1974. In 1898, it had been founded as the Atlantic Land Improvement Company, a subsidiary of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad, and in 1960 became the Alico Land

Development Co..

The PD&E Project exhibits will be on display during the informal, open-house format of the in-person meetings, and the same materials will be provided at each meeting. Study-team members will not make any formal presentations but will be available to answer questions and record comments.

The public may also submit comments through the project website <https://www.swflroads.com/project/455782-1> or email FDOT Project Representative David Long at David.Long@dot.state.fl.us or mail them to 801 N. Broadway Ave., MS 1-41, Bartow, FL 33830. Comments may be submitted at any time, but to be included in the meeting record, they must be submitted by Feb. 12, 2026.

On Nov. 19, 2024, FDOT had “hosted a public visioning workshop to engage

the community and gather input on their vision for SR 70 to SR 66,” and people participated in-person at the Turner Center or online. In addition, a “virtual, self-guided interactive meeting room was available from November 20 to December 4, 2024.”

Following “the procedures outlined in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, along with federal and state laws and regulations,” the PD&E is a process that assesses the economic, natural, physical environment, and social impacts of a possible transportation improvement. Based on the results of the Highlands County Feasibility Study, this PD&E study is considering “a potential new alignment to better accommodate the evolving nature of U.S. 27 and address key needs such as network resilience, freight movement, and safe mobility.”

For questions, please contact FDOT Project Representative David Long at: 813-334-7056 or David.Long@dot.state.fl.us.

KINGS HIGHWAY (COUNTY ROAD 769) FROM CHARLOTTE COUNTY LINE TO SW GLENADINE AVENUE ROADWAY PROJECT

PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 8 AND THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2026



ARCADIA, Fla. – The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), in coordination with Desoto County, is hosting a public information meeting for the Kings Highway from Charlotte County Line to SW Glenadine Avenue Roadway Design Project. The proposed improvements include widening the roadway, median access modifications, and drainage improvements.

The public information meeting is being held to present information about the proposed improvements and provide the public with an opportunity to offer feedback on the project. You

can participate in the public information meeting in-person or live online. The same materials will be displayed at both the in-person and online events and will also be posted on the project website.

IN-PERSON OPTION: The in-person public information meeting will be held on Thursday, January 8, 2026, at the Grace Presbyterian Church, 10548 Kings Highway, Arcadia, Florida 34269. The public information meeting begins at 5:30 p.m. with an open-house format and a looping video.

LIVE ONLINE OPTION: Attend virtually on Thursday, January 15, 2026 starting at 5:30 p.m. This event will include a video presentation and a live question-and-answer component with the project team. Register in advance by visiting <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/8157516911744717149> or

on the project website. Once registered, attendees will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting online.

For more information on the upcoming public information meeting, visit the project website <https://www.swflroads.com/project/440342-2> or contact the project manager.

FDOT is sending notices to property owners, business owners, interested persons and organizations within 300 feet of the project to provide the opportunity to give comments to FDOT regarding this project. If you have any questions about the project, please contact FDOT Project Manager, Doug Burkhardt, P.E., by phone at (813) 727-9151, or by email at doug.burkhardt@dot.state.fl.us.

FDOT solicits public participation

without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability, or family status. People who require special accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act or who require translation services (free of charge) should contact Cynthia Sykes, District One Title VI Coordinator, at (863) 519-2287, or email at Cynthia.Sykes@dot.state.fl.us at least seven days prior to the public workshop.

The environmental review, consultation, and other actions required by applicable Federal environmental laws for this project are being, or have been, carried out by FDOT pursuant to 23 U.S.C. §327 and a Memorandum of Understanding dated May 26, 2022 and executed by FHWA and FDOT.



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SENIOR NIGHT FOR LADY LIFTERS



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The Bulldogs hosted Lake Placid for their senior night meet. DeSoto seniors included Charlotte Howard, Celina Martinez and Noelia Amesquita. Freshman Ambrey Hicks set a new personal record in the bench with a total of 65 pounds. Junior River Rhodes participated in three events and set a new personal record (PR) in both the bench with a 100 pound lift and clean and jerk with 95 pounds.

Coaches Yasmeen Martinez and Rayna Henry flank seniors Charlotte Howard, Celina Martinez and Noelia Amesquita on senior night.



Charlotte Howard totaled 215 pounds with this 110 pound clean and jerk.



River Rhodes set two new personal records with a 95 pound clean and jerk and 100 pound bench press. The junior also did a 65 pound lift in the snatch competition.



Celina Martinez concentrates before making her 75 pound lift in the clean and jerk.



DeSoto weightlifting coach Rayna Henry judges a lift in the meet against Lake Placid.

Coaches Martinez and Henry received a personalized water bottle on senior night.



Senior Noelia Amesquita gets ready for her clean and jerk lift on senior night.

DESOTO COUNTY

ATHLETE OF THE WEEK



JANERIS BING



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Janeris Bing showed last week in the Chick-fil-A Classic tournament that you don't have to be the biggest player on the court, you don't have to be the best player on the court or lead the team in scoring to make a huge contribution to her team.

Bing led the Bulldogs in scoring for the first two games and even had a double double in their second game. An ankle injury followed by a wrist injury took her out of the championship game for nearly half of the contest. She scored just 2 points. She finished with 37 points behind Cherish

Wiggins and Yahri Tyler who had 47 each and Rihanna Downing who had 38 for the three games.

I saw her fall and then hobble to the bench as she walked gingerly on a badly injured ankle. With Bing and Tyler out of the game, the Bulldogs fell behind by 12 points to the undefeated IMG Blue team. It was even worse when Bing's ankle was taped up at halftime making her unable to run or even walk normally.

That's when Bing told coach Primus to "take off the tape. I'm going to give it all I have for my team." She played the second half matched up with the Ascenders number one offensive player and shut her down. "She's a fighter and I love her," said Primus.

Bing was surprised to hear her name called out as the tournament MVP. "When my name was called for MVP, I was honestly surprised and very grateful especially since my last game was not my best offensively. It meant a lot to be recognized for my defense because I always try to impact the game in different ways," said Bing.

Bing's drive, grit, athleticism and desire to give everything she had for her team makes her worthy of the title of DESOTO COUNTY ATHLETE OF THE WEEK.



Janeris Bing holds her MVP trophy for the Chick-fil-A Classic tournament.



Janeris Bing is all smiles after receiving her MVP trophy.

Janeris Bing is deadly from three point range as she knocked down 20 points in the game against Bradenton Christian in the Chick-fil-A Classic.



Tournament MVP Janeris Bing gets in the paint for this shot. She had a double double against Bayshore.



Janeris Bing puts up a shot against IMG Blue in the championship game.

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TOMMIE HENRY

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE BLUE



STEVE KNAPP

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Tommie Henry thought he had a plan for the rest of his teaching career. He wanted to be an assistant principal once the new school is finished and complete his career in administration. When he first came back to DeSoto I asked him if he wanted to coach again. He said, "Coaching is in my DNA but at this time I don't want to coach, I want to be the best Dean that I can be."

Now Coach Henry is the new head football coach at DeSoto County High School. I asked him what changed in the past five years to want to get back into coaching and he said "I prayed over it for a long time and I believe it is a God thing. This is what He wants me to do." So after a lot of years playing the game and working at different levels and organizations as an assistant coach at various positions, Henry decided to take his first head coaching job.

If you know Tommie Henry you know he doesn't back down from a challenge. He was told that he could never play D1 football, or turn pro or become a teacher because "Kids from little towns like Arcadia don't do that."

Henry is a Florida State graduate, had an 11 year career in pro football, then became a teacher, then Dean of students and is now ready for the biggest challenge of his career. He plans to rebuild the DeSoto County football program. The once mighty Bulldog program has fallen on hard times this decade and over the past 3 seasons won just 2 games while losing 28.

Henry said, "It's all about the blue. We need to get this program back on its feet and that includes everybody. Players, parents, coaches, fans everybody has got to believe it is "all about the blue. I want to build a relationship with everybody, from the coaches in the youth league and their players to the middle school and high school, get everyone wanting to be a part of the blue."

It is his hope to get players who want to stay here and become the ones who turns the program around. He doesn't like to see kids transfer out of the district and hopes that now they will stay and maybe some will come back and be a part of the rebuilding.

Henry has been busy talking with many potential coaches over the past three weeks.

"First and foremost I want to build a stable staff that knows we are here for the long haul so we can grow together. I need to get the right strength coach to come in and work with our team. We've got to start at the bottom and start to rebuild this program. Picking a staff is so important to me. I need guys who



Tommie Henry waves to the crowd when his jersey was retired. Now he is at the helm of the Bulldogs as their new head football coach.

know they are here for the long haul, committed, able to build the kids up and of course have football knowledge. I want younger coaches who are hungry and older coaches with wisdom. Language is going to be an issue. We won't curse at the kids or bring them down on what they didn't do, we will build them up." said Henry.

Henry has been in pads from age 8

until 33 and knows what a good locker room looks like, what commitment looks like and he believes he can bring back the pride of being a Bulldog. "I've been around many great coaches and have learned a little about the game from all of them and now I am ready to take what I have learned and get this program back where it needs to be. It's not an instant gratification thing, it is going to

take time and commitment from a lot of people," said Henry.

Henry said he has had an overwhelming, positive response from friends and the community since being named head coach. That's what it is going to take to get the program turned around, a commitment from everybody.

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE BLUE!

SENIORS ESCAPE WITH EXCITING DOUBLE OVERTIME WIN OVER JUNIORS



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The class of 2026 tied a record set by a few other classes as they won their annual powder puff game against the Junior class. Coupled with a win over the class of 2025 last season, it gives the seniors bragging rights that can't be challenged.

The seniors struck twice early in the game. First with a touchdown pass from co-captain Jo Duke to co-captain Lilly Fullerton. Izzy Gonzalez (she will play a big role later) intercepted a pass in the junior's red zone to set up a touchdown run by Nariah Wiley. It looked like the class of 2026 was ready to rout the junior class and make a quick game with no doubt as to who the superior team was.

But wait! The seniors offense got shut down due to the juniors' strong defense led by Ariel Johnson and others. The juniors chipped away at the lead with Johnson scoring on a long touchdown run. Down 14-7 midway into the second half, Brighten Long picked off a Duke pass and returned it 10 yards to the end zone to tie the game at 14.

Both teams threatened late in the game but couldn't score forcing an overtime period. Neither team was able to score in their first possession as both classes put up a strong defense. In the second overtime period, Duke found Gonzalez in traffic in the end zone with a small window and managed to get it to her for the 21-14 win in what many called the most exciting powder puff game in memory.



With confetti falling, Lilly Fullerton spikes the ball after a touchdown catch that put the seniors ahead 7-0.



Ariel Johnson turns the corner and outruns the seniors to score the first touchdown for the juniors.



Izzy Gonzalez, Jo Duke, Lilly Fullerton and Nariah Wiley hold the powder puff championship trophy. They combined for all three touchdowns in the 21-14 overtime win over the Juniors.

Between plays, Ariel Johnson and Brighten Long pose for a photo who scored both touchdowns for the junior class.

Izzy Gonzalez hauls in the game winning touchdown pass for a double overtime 21-14 win over the junior class.



The Junior and Senior classes pray before the start of their powder puff game.

CHAMPS

FROM PAGE 1 >>

basketball tournament in 2023. They were beaten up pretty badly losing all three games and being outscored 143-99. In 2024 they outscored their opponents 168-159 as they improved their record to 2-1 with their only loss coming in the finals to Booker. In the final three days of 2025 the Bulldogs absolutely destroyed their opponents in their first two games outscoring them 131-21.

That set up a rematch with mighty IMG Blue. IMG had beaten DeSoto two weeks earlier at the "Battle at the Cove" in Port Charlotte by 8 points after the Bulldogs led by 12 at the half. They were the final hurdle that stood in the way of completing their mission that started two years ago.

The rematch was a complete reversal from their earlier meeting. In that game, DeSoto took a 12 point lead into halftime but couldn't do anything in the second half as Yahri Tyler and Janeris Bing both fouled out. To not complete a game and not show the other team just how good you really are leaves a haunting memory that doesn't go away until you meet again.

Now the Bulldogs had the chance for what coach Ardine Primus called "a triple treat". With a chance to get respect from the Ascenders, win the championship and battle back from adversity would provide a "delicious triple treat."

After DeSoto took a 6-5 lead, adversity struck. The next 6 possessions for the Bulldogs came up with no points and they never even got off a shot as turnovers put them in a 13-6 hole after an 8-0 IMG run.

Tyler stopped the run with a free throw. After another bucket from the Ascenders boosted the lead to 8 at 15-7, Cherish Wiggins added three points with an "and one" which was followed up by Rihanna Downing's goal to cut the lead to 15-12. An opportunity to score again at the buzzer was missed because of unawareness of the clock when the rebound was kicked out rather than put back up with a second left in the quarter.

Hard times hit DeSoto even harder in the second quarter. Bing, who won the most valuable player in the tournament trophy, sprained her right ankle and hobbled around as long as she could



The DeSoto team cheers as they are announced as the champions of the tournament.

Rihanna Downing does a lot of work in traffic as she gathers in another rebound. It was Downing's game winning bucket with 1:34 left in the game that gave DeSoto a 58-56 lead. Downing also had another double in the championship game with 13 points.



Yahri Tyler and Cherish Wiggins both were named to the all tournament team. They each scored 47 points in the three games.



The champions also picked up some individual awards as coach Ardine Primus and Ladeja Dennis stand next to Yahri Tyler and Cherish Wiggins who were named to the all tournament team. Janeris Bing, in the middle, was the most valuable player in the tournament.

before leaving the game. She also sprained her wrist on defense in the second quarter. Bing had led the team in scoring in the first two games with 35 and it appeared as if she may be out for the rest of the game. Tyler also grabbed for her chest and left the game due to an apparent injury.

With DeSoto's top scorer and rebounder out of the game, there was another flurry of turnovers as the Ascenders pulled ahead by as much as 12 points. A Wiggins three pointer cut the lead to 9 at the half 36-27. With Tyler and Bing on the bench, the game had to slow down on both ends of the court especially in transitions as the subs weren't able to keep up the high

speed fast pace.

At halftime Primus reminded the girls of their mission. "Championship teams don't become champions without going through a struggle. The girls came together at halftime and jelled. They were committed to coming out in the second half and really giving it all they had. We left it all on the court. I've got a resilient group. I love them to death and they are going to give me all they have and I will give them all I have too," said Primus.

With a renewed passion and energy the Bulldogs came out strong in the second half. Tyler was back in the game and Bing (read about her in the Athlete of the Week story) was patched up and

guttled out a second half comeback.

DeSoto outscored the Ascenders 19-5 in the third quarter to take a 46-41 lead going into the final 8 minutes of play. It was a long 8 minutes as the two teams battled, trading leads, and gaining momentum only to see the other team fight back.

Primus must have walked a mile in the fourth quarter as she anxiously paced in front of her bench like an expectant father in the waiting room. With 2 seconds left and the Bulldogs up by 4 points with the ball, she walked in my direction and gave me a high five.

GAME OVER, MISSION ACCOMPLISHED.

WANT TO IMPROVE ARCADIA? AND SHOP LOCAL? DOWNTOWN IS YOUR DESTINATION



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Photos provided

If you've ever thought about how downtown could be better, now is your chance to say so! From 9:00 a.m. to noon, Jan. 10, you're invited to participate in an American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) Walk Audit, "a fun, hands-on, community walk that gives residents a voice in improving safety, accessibility, and walkability in downtown Arcadia."

In addition, enjoy the Downtown Vintage Market from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Jan. 10, in the Tree of Knowledge Park and the Truist Bank parking lot, plus downtown gift and specialty boutiques; antique, book, music, and thrift stores; coffee, ice cream, and smoothie shops; and cafes, diners, and restaurants.

Walk-audit participants will be asked to observe lighting, sidewalks, street crossings, traffic flow, and "overall pedestrian comfort," and their responses will help identify ways to make downtown "safer and more enjoyable for people of all ages and abilities."

The Walk Audit is part of a \$25,000.00 AARP Community Challenge grant that Arcadia Main Street received to produce and install "way-finding" signs downtown. AMS Director Pam Ames said, "This has been a learning experience for me. I never knew all the ins and outs of way-finding signage."

Most people use way-finding signs, but they don't know what they are. For instance, the AMS office, 17 N. Polk Ave., is located about a block from the U.S. Post Office, yet many passers-by stop in to ask Ames, "Where is the post office?" Signs that direct people to the post office or to a public parking lot are great examples of way-finding signs. They also point out "key destinations, historical sites, and cultural landmarks."

The term "way-finding" was first used by Architect Kevin Lynch in his book "The Image of the City," published in 1960, to identify how people determine their location and destination and form a plan of how to travel from one place to another. Ames said, "My goal is that when the construction of State Road 70 is completed, we need to be tourist ready and welcoming to residents as well. We need good roads, good signage, and—of course—we already have a good downtown."

Thanks to Pastor Nathan Headrick, a group from the Church of God Arcadia, 1423 NE Oak St., will participate, and Ames has invited other churches as well. AMS Volunteers Jim Covey and Lisa Covey have encouraged residents from area mobile home parks



Cheri Quakenbush and Aaron Quakenbush, residents of Arcadia Village Mobile Home Park, assessed N. Monroe Ave. near old City Hall during the Sept. 13, 2025, community walk. They learned about the AARP Community Challenge grant on Facebook.



Many people shopped local during the Dec. 13 Downtown Vintage Merry Market in the Tree of Knowledge Park and the Truist Bank Parking lot. This month's event will be 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Jan. 10.



During the community walk on Sept. 13, 2025, Van Fussell, Blaine Wallace, and Gina Fussell stopped for a moment near the W. Oak St. and Polk Ave. intersection. "We come downtown all the time," Gina Fussell said. "We love downtown."

Food trucks and vendors of all kinds participated in the Downtown Vintage Merry Market on Dec. 13, 2025. The Downtown Vintage Market will be set up from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Jan. 10, in the Tree of Knowledge Park and the Truist Bank Parking lot.



to take the walk audit. "We love those volunteers," Ames said, "and we hope to get more."

AMS has held community walks on Sept. 13, 2025, and Oct. 11, 2025, that resulted in 50 completed surveys.

Ames is hoping that this Sat.'s event garners that many again or more. She is hoping especially for participants who are 50 years or older, but everyone is welcome! Pick up your audit forms at the AMS office, 17 N. Polk Ave.,

and take a walk downtown, and while you're there, shop local. Register for the walk at arcadiamainstreet.com/aarp-community-challenge or for more information, call 863-494-2020.

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

MOSES: RESCUE WITH RISK • HEBREWS 11:24-29 NLT

PASTOR ABDIEL FUENTES

First Christian Church
DeSoto County Ministerial Association

Let's turn our attention to Moses, whose life embodies the kind of faith that refuses to retreat in the face of danger. Drawing from Hebrews 11:24-29, we see that Moses' journey is not merely a tale of ancient heroism. It's a living testimony to the power and necessity of faith that risks everything for God's purposes.

Moses' story unfolds against the backdrop of generational suffering and hope. Into this context of suffering and silence, Moses was born—a child marked for death by Pharaoh's decree (Ex 1:22), yet rescued by the risky steps of faith of his parents (Ex 2:1-3; Heb 11:23). Their decision to hide Moses and place him in a basket on the Nile was an act of defiance and trust, risking

everything. Divine intervention lifted Moses from the river into Pharaoh's palace (Ex 2:5-10), but the actual test of faith came when Moses, grown, refused the privileges of royalty. Hebrews 11:24-26 tells us that Moses chose to be mistreated with God's people rather than enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin, considering "the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt" (Heb 11:24-26).

This choice was not merely personal; it was political and prophetic. Moses' faith led him to reject privilege, embrace suffering, and trust God's word even when obedience seemed irrational (Ex 3:10-12; Ex 4:10-13). He risked his life to confront Pharaoh (Ex 5:1), endured ridicule to obey God's commands (Ex 7:1-6), and led Israel through the plagues (Ex 7-12), the Passover (Ex 12:1-28; Heb 11:28), and across the Red Sea (Ex 14:21-31; Heb 11:29). Each

step was fraught with danger, yet Moses did not flinch.

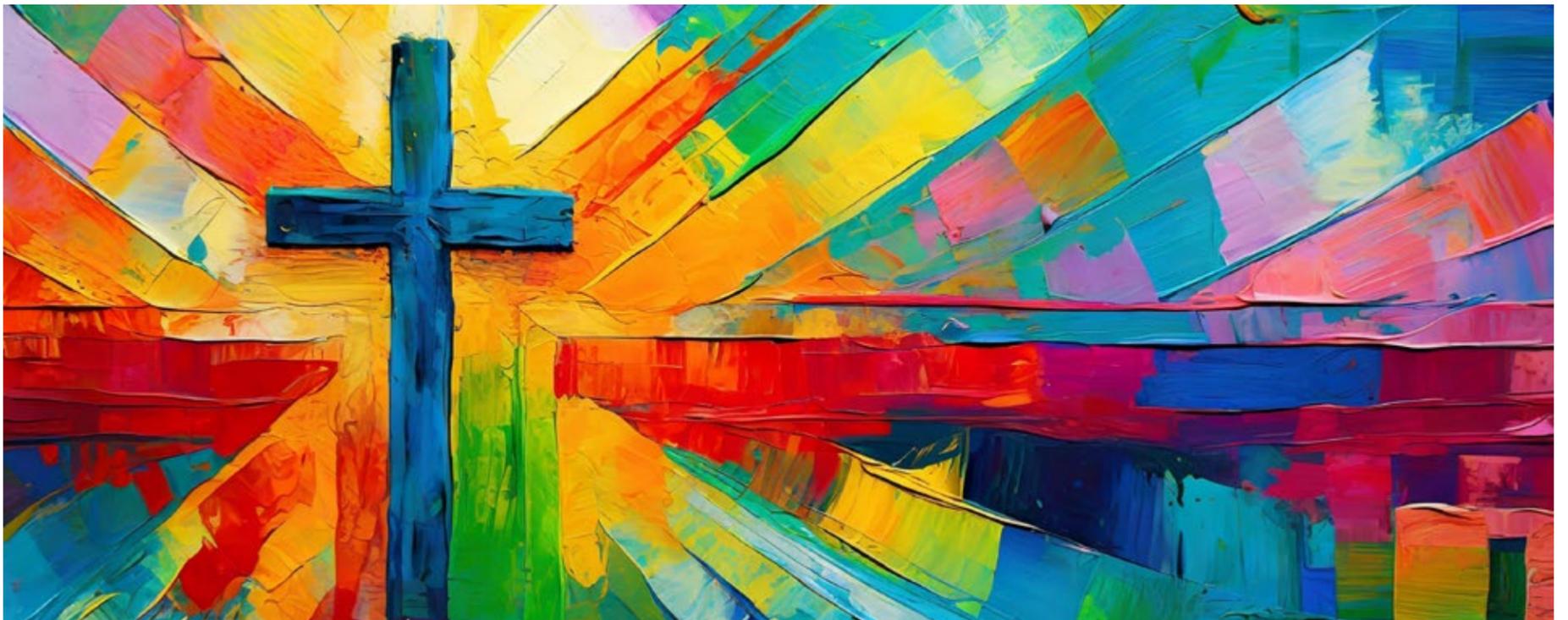
Redemption, as the Exodus reveals, is never safe—it is costly and demands risk. From trembling families painting blood on their doorposts (Ex 12:7, 13, 22-23) to the terror of walking between massive walls of water (Ex 14:21-22), deliverance was found not in comfort, but in the courageous steps of obedience.

But here is the thing you need to take from Moses' story: Faith still requires risk for redemption, even today. Comfort and complacency are the enemies of obedience (Mt 16:24-25). In relationships, faith demands forgiveness when bitterness feels safer (Eph 4:32; Mt 18:21-22). In finances, it calls for generosity when saving feels prudent (2 Cor 9:6-8; Prov 11:24-25). In ministry and witness, faith asks us to risk rejection for the sake of truth (Mt 5:10-

12; Acts 4:19-20). Moses could have clung to comfort, but he chose to suffer for the sake of redemption. Likewise, Christ surrendered his life for our salvation—that we could be redeemed (Phil 2:5-8; Rom 5:8). And we're called to risk for the sake of others (Gal 6:2).

The challenge for us is to examine where comfort is keeping you from obedience. It's a call to take one risk this week for someone else's freedom—whether in serving (Mk 10:45), standing for truth (Eph 6:13-14), or supporting God's mission (Mt 28:19-20). Faith is not about personal safety; it is about deliverance for God's people (Ps 34:17-19). Redemption is always worth the risk because the reward is true freedom and a legacy of hope (Jn 8:36; Rom 15:13).

Real, genuine faith is not safe—it is risky. But in that risk, we find the deliverance and freedom God has promised (Josh 1:9; Ps 27:1).



THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF THE BURN BAN



DeSoto County, Fla. (December 30, 2025) – A Burn Ban is in effect for DeSoto County, FL, which prohibits open burning unless authorized by the Florida Forest Service. The DeSoto

County "Emergency Drought Conditions Fire Hazard" Ordinance No. 2017-07 is implemented with the intent to limit fire hazards in the county during periods and conditions of extreme drought. This Ordinance shall be implemented by a Resolution of the Board of County Commissioners. On November 18, 2025, Resolution No. 2025-104 passed, implementing the Ordinance.

The purpose of the Burn Ban is to prioritize life and property within the

DeSoto County community.

The countywide, mandatory Burn Ban prohibits all outdoor burning that has not been permitted by the Florida Forest Service. Bonfires, fireworks, sparklers, trick noisemakers and novelties, flares, campfires, and the burning of vegetative (yard) debris is not allowed at this time.

Above-ground charcoal, gas, and electric grills, however, are permitted for use. DeSoto County urges everyone to ensure charcoals are extinguished upon

completion of cooking when using grills. Barrel-type barbecue smokers are also allowed, as this is not considered "open burning." If you are using methods of cooking, avoid using outdoor cooking methods if in close proximity to heavily wooded areas.

For additional information, call DeSoto County at 863-993-4800. To report a violation of the Burn Ban, contact the DeSoto County Sheriff's Office at 863-993-4700.

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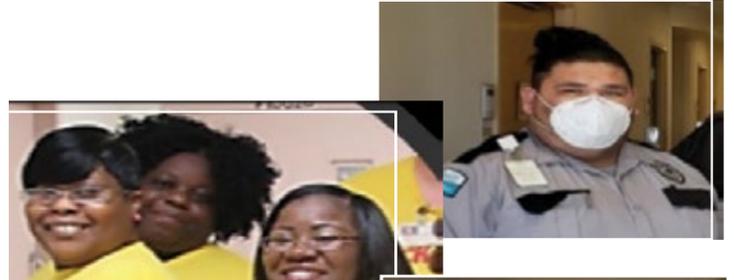


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This December, let's celebrate what truly matters—supporting one another and powering the connections that make our communities shine!





OBITUARIES

SARAH KATHERYN "KAY" GEORGE

Born on January 26, 1943 in Bonifay, Florida, Sarah Katheryn "Kay" George, 82 passed away peacefully in her sleep on December 9, 2025. She loved being the daughter of the late Halley B. Lewis and Cola Hardee Lewis. She was the proud sister of her surviving siblings Halley B. Lewis Jr. (wife Mary Gene), Sam H. Lewis (wife Jan), Cola "Pat" Provau (husband Mike), and John W. Lewis (late wife Bonnie). She was preceded in death in 1991 by her husband and love of her life Harry Wallace "Wally" George who she wed in 1967. She was the loving mother to Amy George and her husband George William Talbot Jr. of Austin, Texas and sales executive Stephanie George Ragans and her husband Coach William Cecil Ragans Jr. of Tallahassee, Florida. She was the adoring grandmother to her grandchildren William "Tripp" Cecil Ragans III, Bailey Kay Ragans, Rowan Talbot, and Wyatt Talbot.

Kay was a 1961 graduate of DeSoto High School where she was crowned Homecoming Queen, "Wittiest of her Class" and "Best

Dressed". She graduated from Florida State University (FSU) where she earned a Bachelor's in Elementary Education in 1965. She was a spirited FSU cheerleader; her daughter Stephanie and granddaughter Bailey Kay followed in her legacy at FSU. She was also a trapeze artist in the FSU Circus and a member of Zeta Tau Alpha sorority. A life long learner, she earned a Masters in Administrative Supervision in 1990 from Nova University. As a world history teacher, she inspired thousands of mostly middle school children for 42 years. In 2003 she received "Outstanding Teacher Performance Recognition" from the State of Florida and was nominated as a Lee County "Golden Apple Teacher" finalist 11 times retiring from Cypress Lake middle School in 2007. In retirement, she cruised the world with her sister Pat, visiting over 28 countries from France to Russia. She was a super athlete; water skied, snow skied, biked, golfed. She loved the beach, watching football, watching her granddaughter cheer, shopping deals, going to shows in Vegas with

her girls, playing bridge with friends, laughing at AI baby memes with Wyatt, and sitting around and telling stories with family and friends.

In her 1993 holiday letter she ends, "I have been blessed in so many ways. Somehow, among all of things for which I am thankful, my family and my friends stand out far above the rest. Without these gifts, we would not be who we are and who we will be. Merry Christmas and

Happy New Year!"

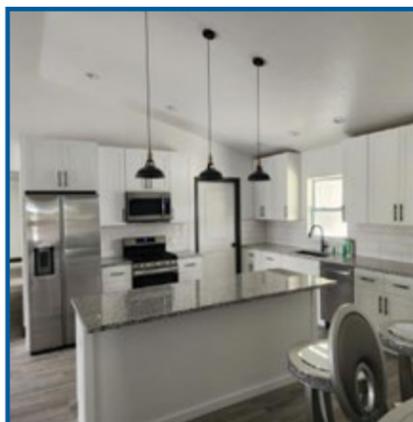
To know Kay was to love her. Family and friends will be invited to a Celebration of Life in early 2026. For an invitation, email amygeorgetexas@gmail.com. In lieu of flowers, consider supporting her favorite brother-in-law Mike Provau's lifework caring for his community through DeSoto Cares Homeless Services.



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DESOTO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE



ARREST REPORT | 12/26/25 - 1/1/26

Agustin Magana, Pedro:
Fraud-Imperson - False Id Given To Leo

Alix, Matheus:
Larc - Other Theft

Avila-Avila, Bryan:
Moving Traffic Viol - Operate Motor Vehicle W/O Valid Lic 1St Conv

Barrueta Caballero, Oralia:
Battery - Touch Or Strike

Bernadac-Galarza, Yesenia:
Moving Traffic Viol - Operate Motor Vehicle W/O Valid Lic 1St Conv

Callahan, Shane:
Robbery - By Sudden Snatching Wo Firearm Or Weapon, Battery - Commit Domestic Battery By Strangulation, Damage Prop-Crim Misch - Over 200 Dols Under 1000 Dols

Caraballo-Ruiz, Miguel:
Battery - On Person 65 Years Of Age Or Older

Daniels, Ra' Neisha Shatterika:
Disorderly Conduct - Brawling Fighting Corrupt Public Moral Decency, Aggrav Asslt - Weapon - W Deadly Weapon Without Intent To Kill

Domingo-Cabrera, Jorge Alfredo:
Moving Traffic Viol - Operate Motor Vehicle W/O Valid Lic 1St Conv

Fraser, William Michael:
Drugs-Possess - Possess Controlled Substance W/O Prescription, Drug Equip-Possess - Drug Equip-Possess: And Or Use

Fuller, Erick Allen:
Battery - Touch Or Strike

Jimenez-Perez, Gregorio:
Moving Traffic Viol - Operate Motor Vehicle W/O Valid Lic 1St Conv

Lauriano-Guzman, Valentin:
Moving Traffic Viol - Operate Motor Vehicle W/O Valid Lic 1St Conv, Out-Of-County Warrant - Out-Of-County Warrant

Lopez-Vicente, Cristian Emanuel:
Moving Traffic Viol - Operate Motor Vehicle W/O Valid Lic 1St Conv

Martinez Barragan, Pablo:
Failure To Appear - Written Promise To Appear

Mejia Lopez, Samuel:
Moving Traffic Viol - Operate Motor Vehicle W/O Valid Lic 1St Conv

Miranda, Vanessa Leigh:
Firing Weapon - In Public Or On Residential Property

Mullen, Michaela:
Nonmoving Traffic Viol - Fail To Register Motor Veh, Flee/Elude Police - Flee Elude Leo With Lights Siren Active, Resist Officer - Obstruct Wo Violence, Drugs-Possess - Possess Controlled Substance W/O Prescription, Veh Theft - Grand Theft Of Motor Vehicle

Murciano, Roberto:
Moving Traffic Viol - Driv While Lic Suspend Revocation Equiv Status

Nelson, Kolleen Rae:
Moving Traffic Viol - Dwlsr Or Revocation Equiv Status, Drugs-Possess - Possess Controlled Substance W/O Prescription, Drug Equip-Possess - Drug Equip-Possess: And Or Use

Polk, Akenaton RaeVonte:
Moving Traffic Viol - Driv While Lic Suspend Revocation Equiv Status

Rachel, Caleb:
Flee/Elude Police - Flee Elude Leo With Lights Siren Active, Veh Theft - Grand Theft Of Motor Vehicle

Reyes, Rigoberto:
Nonmoving Traffic Viol - Fail To Register Motor Veh

Rodriguez-Hererra, Lorena:
Battery - Touch Or Strike

Ryan, Michael James:
Resist Officer - Obstruct Wo Violence

Santana, Reinaldo:
Out-Of-County Warrant

Shine, Braylon Octavius Rashad:
Disorderly Conduct - Brawling Fighting Corrupt Public Moral Decency

Washington, Ariana Jashae:
Dui-Unlaw Bld Alch - 0.15 Or Higher Or W Person Under 18 In Vehicle, Moving Traffic Viol - Driv While Lic Suspend Revocation Equiv Status

Westberry, Skylynn Amanda:
Out-Of-County Warrant

Wilson, Kenzaria:
Disorderly Conduct - Brawling Fighting Corrupt Public Moral Decency

Wright, Howard Anthony:
Failure To Appear - Written Promise To Appear

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- Widow's / Widower's Exemption
- Disability Exemption
- Exemption for Blind Persons
- Veteran's Combat-Related Percentage Discount (age 65 or older)
- Deployed Military Exemption
- Exemptions for Surviving Spouse of Veteran or First Responder

If you have questions concerning the qualifications for these exemptions, please contact our office:

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REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

- Social Security Number
- Florida Driver's License or ID Card (with current address)
- Florida Vehicle Tag Number
- Voter Registration (if applicable)
- Immigration Information (Residency, Passport, etc.)
- School Information where dependent children are registered
- Checking/Savings Account Statement (leave in envelope)
- Paid Utility Bill (with Service Address)
- Death Certificate for Spouse (when applying for widow/widower's exemption)
- Copy of Trust (for properties titled to Trusts)
- For disability exemptions, contact the office for the documentation required (includes service-connected)



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