

ARCADIA



BROUGHT TO YOU BY PEACE RIVER SHOPPER NEWS & MORE

FEBRUARY 12, 2026

THE COMMUNITY

Local

BACK TO BACK DISTRICT CHAMPIONS

BULLDOGS CRUSH OPPONENTS WITH BLOWOUT WINS



DESOTO COUNTY

GAME OF THE WEEK

Sponsored by:



The DeSoto Bulldogs rolled over the Lemon Bay Mantas 67-28 to win their back to back district championship.



STEVE KNAPP

Sports Writer
sports@peacerivershopper.com

The DeSoto Bulldogs were "ON ALL NIGHT LIKE THE FRONT PORCH LIGHT" as they easily walked through the 4A district 12 competition to gain their first back to back championship in 35 years. Some of the player's parents were still in high school when the Bulldogs last successfully defended their crown. With a strong team returning next season, a "three-peat" is very much a possibility.

Their 67-28 demolition of Lemon Bay in the finals came on the heels of a 59-11 thrashing of Cypress Lakes

in the semifinal game. Both district games saw a running clock for the entire second half which is something the Bulldogs have seen a lot of this season. For 13 of the team's 20 wins, they have had the running clock showing total domination over their opponents.

Against the Mantas the Bulldogs came out slowly missing their first 7 shots (many of them were put backs that didn't fall). They got it going with a 4-0 lead only to

SEE CHAMPS PAGE 8 >

HELP SUPPORT ARCADIA'S NEWEST PUBLICATION!

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US IN MAKING OUR COMMUNITY BETTER, TOGETHER!

For advertising, contact Angie Duckett: sales@peacerivershopper.com or call 863-990-9813

To participate as a Community Contributor, email: editorial@peacerivershopper.com



DESOTO COUNTY SPORTS

PAGE 4

STEVE KNAPP

sports@peacerivershopper.com

Publix

GET YOUR PUBlix
WEEKLY ADS INSIDE!

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

FEB 16	DESOTO COUNTY COUNTY OFFICES CLOSED
	In observance of President's Day

FEB 24	DESOTO COUNTY SPECIAL MASTER HEARING
TUES 11A	Administration Building 201 E. Oak Street, Suite 103 Arcadia, FL 34266
FEB 24	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://desotobccc.com/calendar>
City: <https://arcadia-fl.gov/events/>

Realtor Showcase See page 13

DESOTO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE  ARREST REPORT

..... See page 15

SALES INQUIRIES:
SALES@PEACERIVERSHOPPER.COM
863.990.9813

223 E. OAK ST. STE. 1
ARCADIA, FL 34266

SALES / OFFICE MANAGER
[Angie Duckett](mailto:Angie.Duckett@peacerivershopper.com)

CREATIVE DIR / AD DESIGN
[Jackie Bierman](mailto:Jackie.Bierman@peacerivershopper.com)

OPS / PRODUCT DESIGN
[Jonathan Bruch](mailto:Jonathan.Bruch@peacerivershopper.com)

COUNCIL AWARDS BID FOR SPEER CENTER RESTORATION FOR YMCA



CAROL MAHLER

Independent Contractor
carolmahler22acl@gmail.com
Photos provided

At the Feb. 3 meeting, the Council awarded Invitation For Bid (IFB) 2025-05 Arcadia Speer Center Repair, Restoration and Renovations, issued on Oct. 24, 2025, to Close Construction Services, LLC, of Okeechobee, the only bid received.

"This project is a public-private partnership between the City of Arcadia and the YMCA of Southwest Florida" with a cost of more than \$2 million. The City will use the \$450,000.00 State Division of Historical Resources (DHR) grant and \$389,377.60 from the City's Fund 107. The YMCA of Southwest Florida "has secured grants from the Florida Department of Education and other donated and grant funds for the total of \$1,834,864.04."

In his comments, City Attorney T.J. Wohl said, "I'm looking forward to working on the YMCA contract. This is an exciting project."

In addition, the Council approved the agreement with Andrew Sitework, LLC, for IFB 2025-04 City of Arcadia Constructed Wetlands, awarded on Jan. 20, for more than \$6.2 million, funded by a Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection (FDEP) grant.

Also, Jacobs Engineering Group, Inc., was approved for Construction Engineering Inspection (CEI) Services for \$345,304.00 for the Arcadia Constructed Wetland Project, financed through the FDEP grant with an additional \$76,334.00 from the City's Water/Sewer Fund. With funding provided by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Community Assistance and the City's Water/Sewer Fund, Jacobs Engineering had previously completed the design for the Arcadia Constructed Wetland Project, and that design is the sole-source justification for Jacobs.

Moreover, the Council ratified Change Order #2 for \$487,461.76 within the FDEP State Revolving Fund (SRF) Grant Loan Agreement to Andrew Sitework, LLC, for additional upgrades associated with the Water Distribution System Improvements, Phase 1B, in particular replacement of the water services for the City's mobile home park as well as additional water main diversions (because of unknown sewer and stormwater mains), connections of the new water mains, and an insertion valve and tap on Baldwin to existing mains that were discovered in construction.

IN OTHER BUSINESS

The Council proclaimed Feb. as Black History Month and urged "all residents, businesses, government agencies and service groups to join in celebrating Black History Month and give support to the activities surrounding it." After



YMCA of Southwest Florida's Chief Finance Officer (CFO) John Campbell told the Council that he is looking forward to beginning the repair, restoration, and renovations of The Speer Center as the new home of the YMCA in Arcadia.



The Council proclaimed Feb. as Black History Month, and Mayor Judy Wertz-Strickland presented the proclamation to Building A Village Vice-president Darien Bailey.



Speaking on behalf of the Change Order #2 for the Water Distribution System Improvements, Phase 1B project, Engineer Julie Karleskint of Hazen and Sawyer demonstrated the diameter open in a 12" water main that was recently replaced.



After Code Enforcement Officer Naomi Lantz presented the request for 34 W. Oak St. to block two parking spaces as they work on the exterior, Building Owner Ashton Hoehe asked the Council for assistance in meeting the requirements of the State Fire Code.



DeSoto County Historical Society President Adrian Cline requested that the Council to waive the Certificate of Appropriateness application fee (\$65.00) to reroof the John Morgan Ingraham House Museum.



Arcadia Main Street Director Pam Ames asked for permission for two murals: one funded by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) grant and the other by the America 250 Initiative. City Attorney T. J. Wohl said that such items should be on an agenda, so the Council will hold a one-item meeting to vote on the matter at 5:00 p.m. on Feb. 10.

accepting the proclamation, Building A Village (BAV) Vice-president Darien Bailey thanked the Council for acknowledging Black History Month; however, he noted that Black History is American History and important 365 days of the year.

The Council approved the contract with Ecolite Holdings, LLC, doing business as (dba) EcoSport, LLC, to upgrade the LED Sport Lighting at six City-owned park ballfields, using the The Interlocal Purchasing System (TIPS) contract (Request For Proposals) RFP-24120301. Funded by the \$300,000.00 the City received from insurance from Hurricane Ian damage to the lights, EcoSport will repair/replace the lighting for North Arcadia Complex Fields 3 and 4 for \$261,774.00 plus the Smith-Brown Recreation Complex (SBRC) basketball courts and pavilion for approximately \$25,000.00.

Although BAV would like to have lighting for the SBRC ballfields, Bailey

said that BAV was established "for the kids," so he agreed with the Council's decision to fund lighting for the North Arcadia Complex fields first as they already have leagues in place that are using the fields. He said, "This decision is in the best interest of the kids of the City." He was also grateful for the funding to repair/replace the lighting for the SBRC basketball court and pavilion.

The Council approved the blocking of two parking spaces (and the sidewalk) first on W. Oak St. and then on N. Polk Ave. in front of 34 W. Oak St., so that the Kingston Group may remove the exterior cedar shakes. The work will be done from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Mon. through Fri., from Feb. 16 through Mar. 13, 2026, and the dumpster/dump trailer will removed during weekend special events.

City Administrator Beth Carsten brought forth two proposals concerning the Arcadia Historic District: one was to finish the re-survey that Arcadia Main

Street started with their DHR grant, and the other was a professional "desk-top review" of the data from the 1984 survey and the 2025 update augmented by some "drive-by" overviews. The Council agreed to the latter, so Carsten will solicit bids for the work and bring the project back to Council.

The Council declared five office chairs as surplus and then approved the proposed disposal: donation to charity.

COMMENTS FROM DEPTS.

Marshal Quinn Jones distributed the Arcadia Police Dept. Council Report for Jan. 2026: nine felony, six misdemeanor, 11 traffic, and three warrant arrests; 25 traffic accident reports; 116 traffic and 149 warning citations; one open and three closed criminal investigations; and responses to 596 complaints. He also reminded everyone to keep their vehicles locked because of some recent burglaries.

STUDENTS OF THE MONTH

The DeSoto County Chamber of Commerce's Early Bird was held Thursday, February 5, 2026 and was hosted by the Arcadia Rodeo Association at the Mosaic Arena. The following students were recognized as Students of the Month for January and February (not all are pictured).



JANUARY DHS

LESLY DELACRUZ
9TH GRADE

HIFIEICE STEWARD
10TH GRADE

JOAN PENATE-YECTLI
11TH GRADE

NAYELI LOPEZ-APARICIO
12TH GRADE

FEBRUARY DHS

TOLERANCE TILMAN
9TH GRADE

SIBBIE JACOBSON
10TH GRADE

RIVER RHODES
11TH GRADE

ZULEMA BARRAGAN
12TH GRADE



JANUARY DMS

EMILY PEREZ
6TH GRADE

RUTH SEBASTIAN
7TH GRADE

EMMA LEE BURRIS
8TH GRADE

FEBRUARY DMS

VALERIA REGINA CONTRERAS
6TH GRADE

ISAAC DAVID ESPINOZA
7TH GRADE

SOFIA SANDATE-ALBARRAN
8TH GRADE

GO BULLDOGS



NOTICE OF INTENT TO USE UNIFORM METHOD OF COLLECTING NON-AD VALOREM ASSESSMENTS

DeSoto County, Florida (the "County") hereby provides notice, pursuant to section 197.3632, Florida Statutes, of its intent to use the uniform method of collecting non-ad valorem assessments throughout the unincorporated area of the County and the incorporated area of the City of Arcadia to fund the cost of providing fire protection services, facilities, and programs and emergency medical services, facilities, and programs, commencing with the Fiscal Year beginning on October 1, 2026 and continuing until discontinued by the County. The County will consider the adoption of a resolution electing to use the uniform method of collecting such assessments authorized by section 197.3632, Florida Statutes, at a public hearing to be held at 3:00 p.m. on February 24, 2026, in the DeSoto County Administration Building, 201 East Oak Street, Suite 103, Arcadia, Florida 34266. Such resolution will state the need for the levy and will contain a legal description of the boundaries of the real property subject to the levy. Copies of the proposed form of resolution, which contains the legal description of the real property subject to the levy, are on file at the Office of the County Administrator in the DeSoto County Administration Building located at 201 East Oak Street, Suite 201, Arcadia, Florida 34266 between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday

In the event any person decides to appeal any decision by the County with respect to any matter relating to the consideration of the resolution at the above-referenced public hearing, a record of the proceeding may be needed and in such an event, such person may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the public hearing is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence on which the appeal is to be based. In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, persons needing a special accommodation or an interpreter to participate in this proceeding should contact the County at (863) 993-4800 at least two (2) business days before the hearing. Hearing impaired persons can access the foregoing telephone number by contacting the Florida Relay Service at 1-800-955-8770 (Voice) or 1-800-955-8771 (TDD).

THANK YOU TO OUR BULLDOG YOUTH SPONSOR!

- DESOTO COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD (PRS)
- MOSAIC • FPL • JEWEL CONTRACTING



PEACE RIVER SPORTS

BASKETBALL SEASON ENDS IN 71-40 LOSS



STEVE KNAPP

Sports Writer
sports@peacerivershopper.com

The Desoto boys basketball season came to an early end in the district tournament at Lemon Bay with a 71-40 loss. The day before the game coach Darrel Nicklow said he had a good game plan drawn up and truly thought the Bulldogs would win. He said "it all depends on who shows up".

Apparently nobody showed up as the team never got started and fell behind early and never got back into it. The Mantas Luke Brown pumped in 10 of the team's first 12 points to get off to a quick 12-2 lead on their way to a 26-11 lead at the end of one. The Bulldogs seemed to lack energy in the slow start. For the first 2 minutes of the second quarter, the Bulldogs had a spark and played well scoring the first 5 points in the quarter to give them life and give them a shot at getting back into the game.

Unfortunately that couple of minutes was all they had left in the tank as they went the next 6 minutes scoring on one free throw from Kasson Johnson and trailed 38-17 at the half. The Bulldogs were a victim of a too fast pace of play and were plagued by way too many turnovers, mostly on bad passes. The second half saw the Mantas lead grow as they flirted with the running clock. The Bulldogs scored just enough to continue the game without the running clock.

Julian Quezada hit double figures scoring in each quarter for a total of 12 points to lead the Bulldogs.

It was a lackluster end to a season of highs and lows and a tough way for the seniors to finish their high school career. They ended their season with a 9-16 record which is a one game improvement over last season's 8-17 mark. It could have been more.

The JV team had another impressive season with a 14-6 record which hopefully transfers to next year's varsity season. Laurance Sipe led the JV team and the entire basketball program with 209 points so along with other JV members and returning varsity players,



The Desoto starting lineup waits for their introduction at Lemon Bay.



Phillip Mcburney hauls in a rebound in the 71-40 loss at Lemon Bay.



Enrique Castro puts up a shot and will be one of the key returning players next season.



Te'Coy Campbell gets fouled on his way to the basket. He led the team in scoring this season but was held to no field goals and just 2 points on a 2-6 effort from the free throw line.



Laurance Sipe gets surrounded by Mantas after hauling in a rebound. He was called up to the varsity after leading the JV team with 209 points this season.



The team gathers on the bench for a timeout as coach Nicklow draws up a play.



Phillip Mcburney goes to the hoop in the district tournament loss at Lemon Bay.

there is a very good chance for the team to reach the .500 record.

Sophomore Te'Coy Campbell will be one of the returning players next season. He was in the top three of nearly every team category, including rebounds, steals, blocks and field goal percentage. Campbell led the team in scoring edging Azir Blanding by 7

points. He also led the team in free throw percentage and scoring average with 9.5 points a game. He was tied for first in assists so he will be one of the valuable returning players.

DESOTO COUNTY

ATHLETES OF THE WEEK

Sponsored by:
Mosaic**GIRLS VARSITY BASKETBALL**

STEVE KNAPP

Sports Writer
sports@peacerivershopper.com

It was pretty easy to decide on an athlete of the week for today's paper. I came to the season's first practice and dubbed the season "A SPECIAL SEASON". The team has made it a special season with more to come. Lets take a look at some of the photos from their back to back district championship win.



With every generation,

we get better at protecting our environment.

Reclamation ecologists like Ashlee work to return mined lands to productive use as wildlife habitats, public parks and more—so future generations can enjoy these lands for years to come.

**Mosaic**

LADY BULLDOGS CRUISE TO ANOTHER BLOWOUT WIN 59-11



STEVE KNAPP

Sports Writer
sports@peacerivershopper.com

The girls basketball team played a nearly perfect half against the Cypress Lakes Panthers with a 47-7 lead at the break that eventually led to their 59-11 win. A running clock for the entire second half kept the Bulldogs from reaching the century mark.

DeSoto jumped out to an 18-0 lead before the Panthers got their first point. They missed both free throw shots but a lane violation by the Bulldogs gave them another shot which was successful. They got their only field goal of the quarter on a last second buzzer beater "Hail Mary" that dusted the net with 0.4 seconds on the clock. They easily could have been held scoreless in the opening 8 minutes.

On the Bulldog side of the court, everything went right. They led 27-3 at the end of the first quarter. Considering they missed 3 put backs and a layup, they could have led 35-0 at the end of the quarter.

Coach Primus was under the weather and watched the game from an easy chair behind the bench. JV coach Ladeja Dennis took the reigns with assistance from boys coach Darrel Nicklow. Dennis is now 4-0 filling in at the varsity level. Primus said their game plan was that they were going to throw a full court press on the Panthers and feed Cherish Wiggins. Both worked to perfection.

Wiggins needed 53 points to reach the coveted 1000 point mark. With Yahri Tyler hitting the mark earlier this season at Hardee, it would make a very rare occurrence to have a pair of 1000 point players on the same team. (It could happen next season as Janeris Bing is within range to make it)

Wiggins totaled 23 points with 19



Rihanna Downing and Janeris Bing apply pressure on the Panther player as the strong DeSoto defense held them to just 3 points in the first quarter.



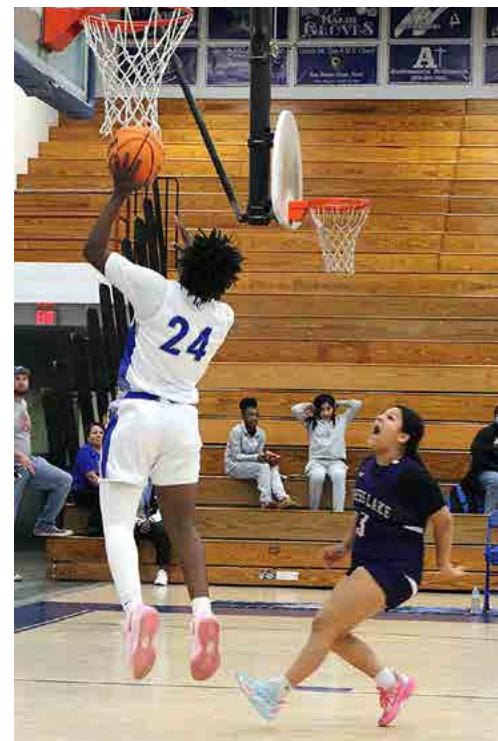
Janeris Bing reaches for a Panther pass in the 59-11 win.



Cherish Wiggins successfully launches a long three point shot at the end of the first half. Wiggins had 19 points in the first half as the Bulldogs led 47-7.



Janeris Bing is all smiles as she congratulates Cherish Wiggins on her shot to end the first half. Both juniors could reach 1000 career points as teammates next season.



Cherish Wiggins goes to the hoop for 2 of her team high 23 points in the 59-11 beat down of Cypress Lakes.

of them coming in the first half. With a running clock and reserves on the court, her production was curtailed in the second half. That has happened many times this season as the Bulldogs

have won 12 games by at least 33 points which has limited her playing time.

Bing had a big game also with 13 points of which 10 came in the first quarter. She shot 67% from the

three point line which was the same percentage as the team had from the free throw line.

BULLDOGS FALL TO TARPONS IN LOW SCORING CONTEST



STEVE KNAPP

Sports Writer
sports@peacerivershopper.com

The DeSoto JV girls basketball team traveled to Charlotte for a rematch against the Tarpons. With a late start it was decided to have a running clock which cut down on the score. Charlotte scored six times in the first quarter while the Bulldogs were held scoreless.

The second quarter was when the tables turned as the Tarpons failed to add anything while the Bulldogs picked up 5 to make it a 6-5 score at halftime. Brighten Long broke the ice for DeSoto with a shot from up close and Zari Anderson bounced a shot off the glass from 3 point land to account for DeSoto's 5 points.

Junior Zari Anderson drives to the hoop for 2 of her team high 6 points.

The Tarpons pulled away scoring 21 to the Bulldogs' 6 points to make the final score 27-11. Anderson led Desoto with 6 points with Zaniyah King getting 3 along with Long's 2 for the Bulldog points.

SEE JV BBALL PAGE 9 >



DESO TO SPORTS

ROUND-UP
THE WEEK IN REVIEW

STEVE KNAPP

Sports Writer
sports@peacerivershopper.com

The girls varsity basketball team was the big news last week. For detailed information concerning those games read the stories in this issue.

The varsity boys basketball season ended last week with a loss at Lemon Bay. That game is also in the sports section.

The middle school volleyball team is off to a great start at 5-0 under first year coach Taylor Shaver. The JV team suffered their first loss last week and are now 4-1 for the season. Both teams will be home tonight to face Hardee and again next Thursday to face Avon Park.

The boys and girls tennis teams had three matches last week but I haven't gotten results on those matches. They are at Avon Park today with the girls at Ft. Meade next Tuesday.

Both teams will host Booker a week from today at 4pm.

The track team will get their first experience of the new season at Dunbar this Saturday.

The boys weightlifting team will be



home next Tuesday at 4 pm against Avon Park.

The softball team begins play a week from today at Booker and home on Friday against Hardee at 7:30.

The baseball team has their home opener tonight against Imagine high school then back to back games next Tuesday and Thursday with Babcock Ranch providing the competition both days.

The JV baseball team starts their season on the road with three games at Frostproof, Imagine and Avon Park.

Little league and Miss Desoto coaches send your team's results to me at sbigdaddyknapp@aol.com if you want your scores printed in this column.

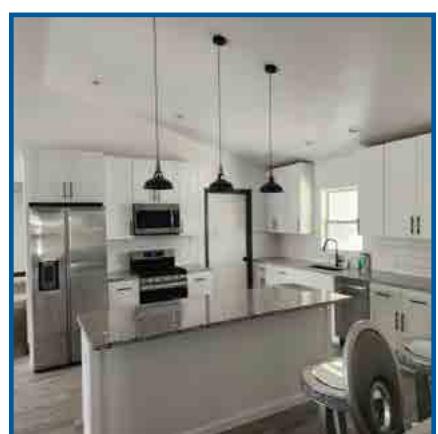


JEWEL
CONTRACTING INC.

CUSTOM HOMES
STARTING AT \$269,000!

**BUILDING HOMES IN
DESO TO COUNTY SINCE 2005**

IF YOU HAVE THE LAND OR ARE THINKING OF PURCHASING LAND...
LET US HELP YOU GET YOUR DREAM HOME BUILT!



CALL ROGER AT: 863-990-5921
OR AJ AT: 863-633-8345

JEWELCONTRACTINGINC.COM

CHAMPS

FROM PAGE 1 >>

see the Mantas tie it up at 4. That must have sparked a fire for the Bulldogs as they scored the next 14 points to finish the quarter with an 18-4 lead.

After the Mantas scored the first point in the second quarter to end the Bulldogs' run, DeSoto went on another run 11-0. That combined 25-1 run pretty much ended the game right there with a 29-5 lead. DeSoto led 41-14 at the break and increased it to 57-22 going into the final 8 minutes.

Cherish Wiggins led the Bulldogs with 18 points. She had 14 in the first half and spent the second half dishing out a team high 7 assists along with another team high 4 steals. Janeris Bing had 16 points with 12 of them coming from downtown. Bing had 7 boards to lead the team. Yahri Tyler scored all 14 of her points in the first half and pretty much rested a nagging minor injury in the second half. She still ended up with 6 rebounds along with Wiggins and Rihanna Downing. Whitley Barron came off the bench and hit 3 triples in the fourth quarter for her 9 points.

Wiggins put a scare into the Bulldog fans when she collided with Kylie Jones from Lemon Bay. They both went down and after a few tense minutes, Wiggins limped off the court. Wiggins, who is tougher than a \$2 steak, returned to the game later and played without any problem. She sent a message Saturday saying, "I'm doing just fine and will be back by Friday".

Wiggins needs just 9 points to reach 400 for the season and a total of 12 to reach 1000 for her career. Because it is a regional tournament game, the team and fans will not be able to celebrate her milestone until after the game.

With a win tomorrow night against Robinson in the regional quarterfinal, the Bulldogs will move on to the semifinals to be held at home next Friday night.



Yahri Tyler drives the baseline for two of her 14 points in the win over Lemon Bay.



Whitley Barron nailing a trey in the 67-22 win. Barron hit three big bombs in the fourth quarter for her 9 points.



Darrel Nicklow helps Cherish Wiggins off the court after she was injured in a collision with Kylie Jones in the 67-22 win. Wiggins led the Bulldogs with 18 points.



Rihanna Downing hauls down one of her 6 rebounds in the district championship win over Lemon Bay.

Janeris Bing scores the final bucket with over 2 minutes left in the game for the Bulldogs giving them their 67th point which drew a cheer from her teammates. It's that 6-7 thing!



CONGRATULATIONS BULLDOGS!

BUY OR RENT **SHIPPING CONTAINERS**
EXPAND YOUR STORAGE OPTIONS

CALL FOR PRICES!

(863) 303-4439

• SHED MOVING & ANCHORING • RV MOVING & ANCHORING •
• CONTAINER MOVING & ANCHORING •




ShedPro
MOVING & ANCHORING
SHEDPRO.PRO
SHEDPROLLC@GMAIL.COM



For All Your Water Needs


Ray NEWBERRY
WELL DRILLING

Water Treatment Sales & Service
• Pumps • Tanks • Aerators • Salt Delivery
863-494-6548

Newberry A Trusted Name in the Water Industry for Over 50 Years.
Owned & Operated by a SWFWMD. Licensed Water Well Contractor. License #2881

JV BBALL

FROM PAGE 6 »



Lucinda Felix gets the ball to midcourt in the loss at Charlotte.



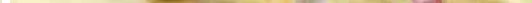
Iris Rios drives towards the basket for Desoto in the 27-11 loss to Charlotte.



Volleyball star Brighten Long is also on the court for the Bulldogs basketball team and launches a three point shot in the 42-17 loss against North Port.



Kamyrea Brown drives to the basket against North Port.



Brighten Long scores on this shot for the first points of the game for Desoto in the loss at Charlotte.



Sa'niyah White battles for position under the net in the 42-17 loss at North Port.



charlotte advanced
ORTHODONTICS

"On that final day of treatment when a patient looks in the mirror and sees his or her perfect smile, it has all been worth it"

Dr. Christina Pepper



**BRACES &
INVISALIGN®
FOR ALL AGES**

Hablamos español
Arcadia location at 930 E Gibson St, Arcadia
941.629.2221

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES

PASTOR DAVID STEWART

Grace Presbyterian Church of Lake Suzy
DeSoto County Ministerial Association

"One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple." (Psalm 27:4)

Well, it is another Thursday. Sometimes these days are wondrous and filled with joy. Other times they are

darksome and weary, and joy seems ever elusive. And yet, as the day comes, one thing remains. The Lord is the sovereign ruler over every moment in time, and He is no less active in our lives.

I found myself singing a few songs last night as I went to bed. Most nights I'm asleep about the time my head hits the pillow. Other times it is a process that involves singing. The thought that triggered this was this: I desperately want to bask in the bright sunshine of

God's face. It is the hope and promise of the benediction we heard yesterday. "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace" (Numb. 6:24-26).

Oh, to gaze upon the glorious face of our dear Savior. And yet, "now we see in a mirror dimly." The glass is cloudy and worn. Sometimes the Holy Spirit allows a clean patch so that we can get a clearer view of our dear Savior, but

these are rare. But even as I gaze now in that mirror, I am reminded of how Paul completes that thought. "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face." (1 Cor. 13:12) So, I must continue to gaze, longing for that day when the image in me will be fully restored, that I may see him as he is.

That song was the hymn

"The Sands of Time Are Sinking," by Anne Cousin. This has whispers from Isaiah 25, which Paul quotes in 1 Corinthians 15, as well as Revelation 22.

The sands of time are sinking, The dawn of heaven breaks; the summer morn I've sighed for, The fair sweet morn awakes; dark, dark hath been the midnight, but dayspring is at hand, And glory, glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land.

O Christ, he is the fountain, the deep sweet well of love!

The streams on earth I've tasted more deep I'll drink above: there to an ocean fulness his mercy doth expand, and glory, glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land.

The bride eyes not her garment, but her dear bridegroom's face; I will not gaze at glory, but on my King of grace; not at the crown he gifteth, but on his pierced hand: the Lamb is all the glory of Emmanuel's land.

As we press on through another week, let us bask in the bright sunshine of our dear Savior's face, knowing that he is always with us, even when there are stormy gales or choppy seas.



2026 DESOTO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT TO SHOWCASE 'CHANGE THAT COUNTS'

Open summit will focus on future development in DeSoto, downtown rejuvenation, entrepreneurship, AI and healthcare.



DeSoto County, Fla.—DeSoto County will bring community leaders, business owners, and residents together this spring to explore practical ideas shaping the county's future at the 2nd Annual DeSoto Economic Development Summit.

Held Thursday, March 26, from 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., the summit will focus on this year's theme, "Change that Counts," highlighting downtown revitalization, entrepreneurship, artificial intelligence in health care, and opportunities for sustainable growth in DeSoto County.

The summit includes local and

national speakers and panels, networking opportunities and hands-on interaction. Find out about the DeSoto County planning and development process, the state of our utilities system, new businesses on the horizon, and the historic rural renaissance.

Keynote speaker, Shellie Phelps of Biggest Fish Consulting, is sponsored by Florida Power & Light, who recognizes the power of community innovation. Phelps is a force in the realm of neighborhood revitalization and economic development. She has taken her success in revitalizing Wetumpka, Alabama, to the rural communities of Florida.

Phelps has become a recognized authority on fostering creative community growth through collaboration. Her presentations inspire and empower

audiences with insights into the transformative power of partnership, the role of the arts, and authentic branding in revitalizing small towns and creating stronger, more vibrant communities.

Because artificial intelligence (AI) is a primary factor in business, the economy, education and healthcare, the County reached out to Peter Justen, founder & CEO of AmeriTrust Solutions, to present at the event. AmeriTrust provides technology that modernizes benefit programs for state and federal governments, helping agencies reduce costs, accelerate approvals. The company is particularly focused on rural healthcare provider.

Justen, a "serial entrepreneur," recently received the Health innovation Leadership Award at the 15th Annual World Leaders Summit.

The summit, held at the Turner Agri-Civic Center, 2250 N.E. Roan Street, in Arcadia, includes breakfast and lunch. The charge for attendees is \$10 at the door. Exhibitor cost is \$50 and includes a display table and two tickets. Attendees and exhibitors can register at tinyurl.com/Desotosummit2026.

The DeSoto Economic Development Summit is open to residents, business owners, entrepreneurs, educators, and community leaders who want to be part of shaping the county's future. Registration for attendees, exhibitors, and sponsors is now open at www.GoDeSotoFL.com. Those interested in participating are encouraged to register early and join the conversation about the changes that will help DeSoto County grow and thrive.

HELP SUPPORT THE ARCADIA COMMUNITY LOCAL!

For advertising, contact Angie Duckett: sales@peacerivershopper.com or call 863-990-9813
To participate as a Community Contributor, email: editorial@peacerivershopper.com



There's never been a better time to quit with Group Quit.

*Tobacco Free Florida's Group Quit Sessions (in-person or virtual) now offer participants \$25 - \$125 in gift cards for their attendance.**



GROUP QUIT

Free, expert-led in-person or virtual sessions for all Florida residents, regardless of insurance status. Upon class completion, participants are eligible to receive free nicotine replacement therapy such as patches, gum, or lozenges.**

Pre-registration required

Call Gulfcoast South AHEC today at:

866-534-7909

*while supplies last

**if medically appropriate for those 18 years of age or older

Learn more about all of Tobacco Free Florida's tools and services at TobaccoFreeFlorida.com/QuitYourWay.



GULFCOAST SOUTH
AREA HEALTH
EDUCATION CENTER

Florida
HEALTH



ARCADIA HOUSING AUTHORITY HOSTS COMMUNITY DAY



CAROL MAHLER

Independent Contractor
carolmahler22acl@gmail.com
Photos provided

On Feb. 6, under sunny skies and despite the icy wind, the Arcadia Housing Authority held its annual Community Day to welcome residents, families, and local partners for some noon-time hours of celebration, connection, and engagement.

Community partners and local organizations that provide valuable resources set up informational booths to share health guidance, educational materials, and supporting services details. The event featured music by DJ Dan Watkins of Mile High Entertainment and food prepared and served by Jimmey Shelton in his Traveling Kitchen food truck.

"Our Community Day is about bringing people together and strengthening the bonds within our neighborhoods," said Becky-Sue Mercer, Executive Director of the Arcadia Housing Authority. "We are proud to serve our residents and grateful to the community partners who help make events like this possible."

The Arcadia Housing Authority extends its sincere appreciation to community organizations whose support made the event a success: Advance America, All Faiths Food Bank, Area Agency on Aging, Big Brothers Big Sisters Suncoast, Boys and Girls Club of Sarasota and DeSoto Counties, Catholic Charities, Coker Landscape, DeSoto Cares, DeSoto County Historical Society, DeSoto County Library, DeSoto County Sheriff Office, DeSoto County Social Services, First 1,000 Days, Florida Non-Profit Housing, Florida Rural Legal Services, Healthy Start, Heartland Homeless Coalition, Patterson Foundation, Pregnancy Solutions, Salvation Army Senior Friendship Center, Step Up Suncoast, Suncoast Campaign For Grade Level Reading, and Tidewell Hospice/Empath.

For more information about the Arcadia Housing Authority and upcoming events, please contact Mercer at 863-494-4343 or online at Director@housingarcadia.com



At left, Ama Burns of the DeSoto County Library, encouraged everyone at the Arcadia Housing Authority's Community Day to play a game to win a prize or a book.



Office Manager Juanita Lewis-Ross and Arcadia Housing Authority Executive Director stood for a moment at the DeSoto County Historical Society's booth at the Community Day on Feb. 6.



Kay Reshard talked with Chelsea Palmer and Clara Alvarez about the Suncoast Campaign for Grade Level Reading, one of the organizations that participated in Community Day.



Property Clerks Haven Fogarty and Jaylin Castillo waited to greet those attending the Arcadia Housing Authority's Community Day on Feb. 6.



Members of the Arcadia Housing Authority Commission, Rusty Cox and Mel Jackson enjoyed talking with residents and those representing organizations during Community Day.



With tables for eating lunch set up in the middle of the parking lot at the Arcadia Housing Authority office, 7 Booker T. Washington Ave., organizations arranged their informational booths around the edges.

Our Father,
who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth,
As it is in heaven.
Give us this day,
our daily bread.
And forgive us

our trespasses,
As we forgive them that
trespass against us.
And lead us not
into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen.



While I Breathe I Hope

Realtor Showcase



United Country Real Estate | **GULFLAND REAL ESTATE**

Mac Martin, ALC, GRI, BA
BROKER/OWNER

863.494.2100
landpanther@gmail.com
2019 Florida Land Realtor

National Marketing, Local Expertise®
FOR YOUR Lifestyle Property

www.gulflandrealestate.com

Your Hometown Realtor



Jean Vitali

Contact this agent:
 ☎ 863.990.5106
 📩 jean1711@gmail.com
 🌐 www.jeanvitali.com

ONE CALL DOES IT ALL!

COLLINS MANAGEMENT & REALTY

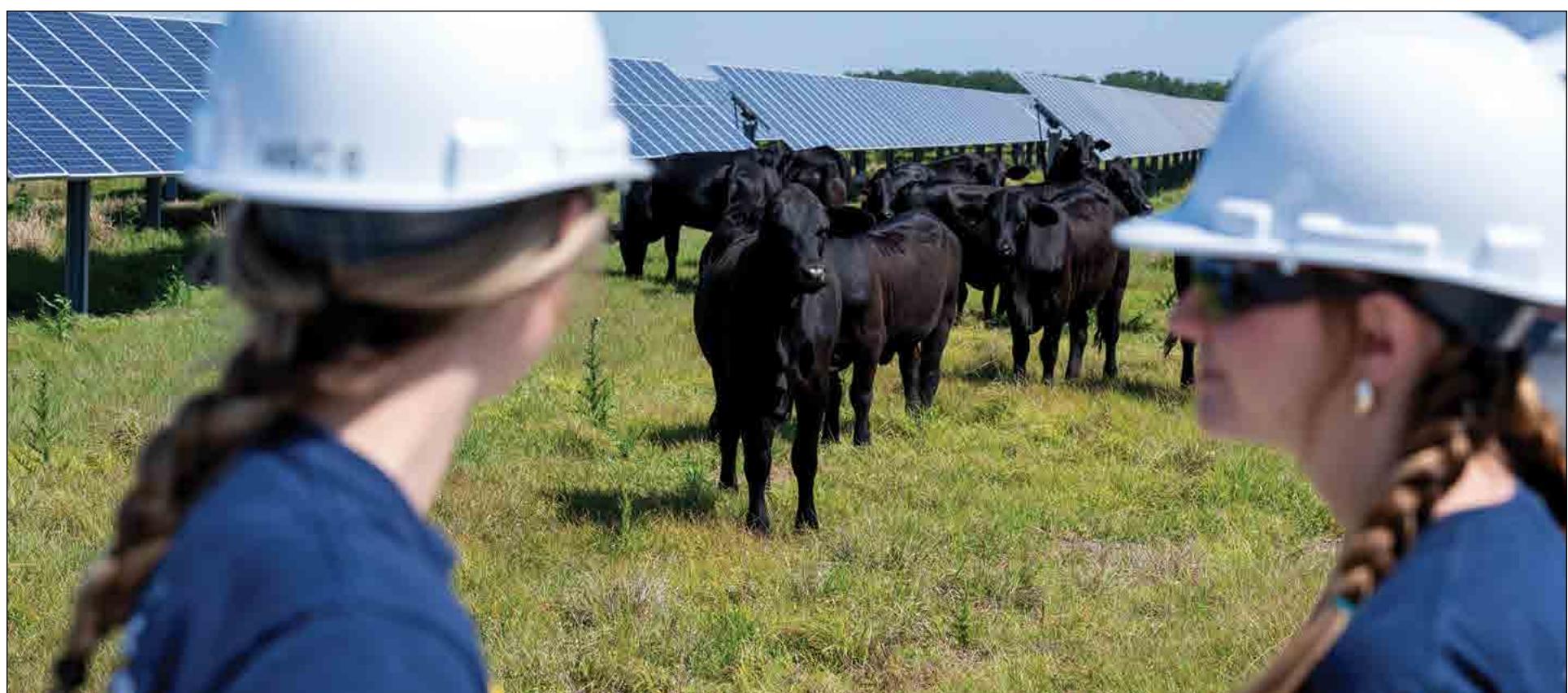
Dan Collins, Broker
 ☎ 863.494.6181
 223 E. Oak Street
 Arcadia, FL 34266

Make Your Appointment Today!



RMZ Realty Inc
Oralia Ramirez, BROKER
863.494.2702
 oraliaramirez@gmail.com

www.rmzhomez.com



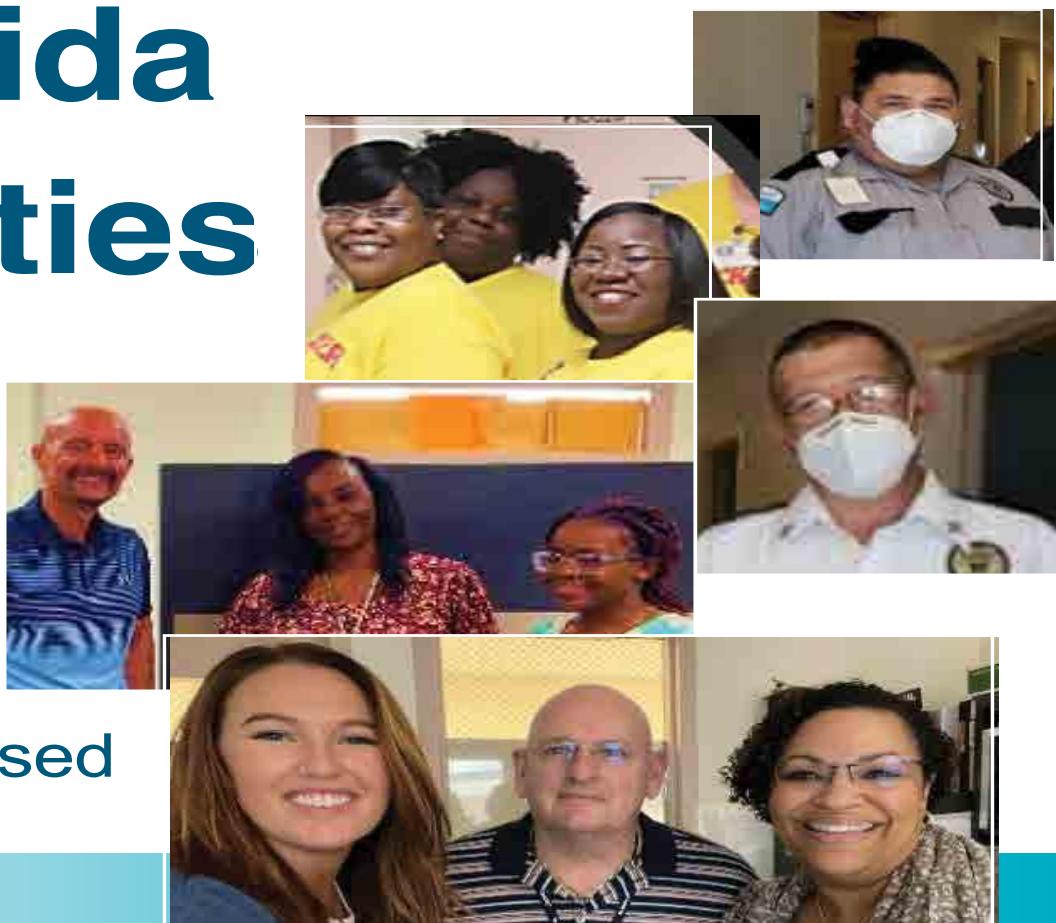
Florida Power and Light Company is proud to support the 98th Annual Arcadia All-Florida Championship Rodeo, a long-standing tradition in DeSoto County.

As part of our commitment to solar stewardship, FPL is exploring agrivoltaics – the co-use of land for solar energy production and agriculture – through projects such as our cattle grazing pilot at FPL Cattle Ranch Solar Energy Center.

We are excited to introduce the next generation to innovative solutions while celebrating the community's rich history.



Join the Mission to Keep Florida Communities Safe



We provide evidence based
Forensic Treatment.

**Walk-in interviews
every Wednesday 9am-noon**

Recovery Solutions/Florida Civil Commitment Center

13619 Hwy 70 Arcadia, Florida 34266 (10.5 miles east of Walmart)

(863) 491-4800. To apply please visit RecoverySolutions.us/careers/

We have jobs and careers in security (\$21), nursing (\$23-38), direct care (\$15-16), mental health therapist, maintenance, food service and more...

We find the best fit for applicants based on their work history, attitude, education and interests. New employees receive intensive training and OTJ support.

YOU have choices! We offer Daily Pay, regular paychecks, various health care plans (health, dental, vision), 401K, sponsorship for the Correctional Academy, full time and PRN, some sign bonuses are up to \$2000, air conditioned work environment, tuition reimbursement and more...



Florida Civil Commitment Center
13619 SE Hwy 70, Arcadia FL 34266 (863)491-4800

DESOTO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE



ARREST REPORT |

1/30/26 - 2/5/26

Angeles-Ascencio, Bartolome:

Larc - Other Theft, Fraud-Imperson - False Id Given To Leo

Burnsed, Michael Lee:

Trespassing - Trespass Occupied Structure Or Conveyance

Castillo, Ricardo:

Contempt Of Court - Viol Injunction Protection Domestic Violence

Collins, Audrey Samone:

Possess Counterfeited - License Plates Etc, Nonmoving Traffic Viol - Fail To Register Motor Veh

Degoede, Jessica Elizabeth:

Veh Theft - Grand Theft Of Motor Vehicle, Flee/Elude Police - Flee Elude Leo With Lights Siren Active, Resist Officer - Obstruct Wo Violence, Burgl - Burglary Unoccupied Conveyance Unarmed

Favors Jr., Albert:

House For Other Agency

Garcia, Andres Ordóñez:

Disorderly Conduct - Affray, Drug Equip-Possess - Drug Equip-Possess: And Or Use

Garrett, Richard Lee:

Dui-Unlaw Bld Alch - Dui Influence Of Alcohol Or Drugs, Dui-Unlaw Bld Alch - Refusal Submit Dui Testing

Gordon, Elizabeth C:

Failure To Appear - Written Promise To Appear, Battery - Touch Or Strike

Hernandez Jr., Pedro:

Moving Traffic Viol - Operate Motor Vehicle W/O Valid Lic 1St Conv, Drugs-Possess - Possess Controlled Substance W/O Prescription (X2), Drug Equip-Possess - Drug Equip-Possess: And Or Use, Writ Of Bodily Attachment - Non Criminal Arrest

Hodges, Mathew Lee:

Larc - Grand Theft 750 Less Than 5K Dols, Burgl - Burglary Of Occupied Dwelling Unarmed, Fraud - False Owner Info Pawn Items Less Than 300 Dols

Jones, Wilfred Jermine:

Prob Violation - Prob Violation (X2)

Manganelli IV, Alfonso:

Drug Equip-Possess - Drug Equip-Possess: And Or Use

Martinez-Vasquez, Cesar Honey:

Moving Traffic Viol - Operate Motor Vehicle W/O Valid Lic 1St Conv

Martinez, Tammie Renee:

Aggrav Battery - Aggrav Battery Cause Bodily Harm Or Disability

McDuffy, Tatiana Leesheike:

Nonmoving Traffic Viol - Fail To Register Motor Veh

Morazan, Yeison:

Disorderly Conduct - Affray

Morazes, Beau William:

Resist Officer - Obstruct Wo Violence, Possess Forged - Possess 10+ Forged Bank Bill/Check/Draft/Note, Larc - Grand Theft Of Firearm, Possession Of Weapon - Or Ammo By Convicted Fla Felon

Peoples, Timothy Alan:

Resist Officer - Obstruct Wo Violence, Possess Forged - Possess 10+ Forged Bank Bill/Check/Draft/Note, Larc - Grand Theft Of Firearm, Possession Of Weapon - Or Ammo By Convicted Fla Felon

Watson, Ronald Edwin:

House For Other Agency

Wells, Stephen James:

Burgl - Burglary Of Occupied Dwelling Unarmed, Damage Prop-Crim Misch - Over 200 Dols Under 1000 Dols

Willis, Myles Jakob Robin:

Drug Equip-Possess - Drug Equip-Possess: And Or Use (X2), Possession Of Weapon - Or Ammo By Convicted Fla Felon

INFORMATION ON THIS REPORT IS PROVIDED FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY FROM THE PUBLIC INMATE RECORDS OF THE DESOTO COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE. WHILE EVERY EFFORT IS MADE TO ENSURE THAT THE POSTED INFORMATION IS ACCURATE, IT MAY CONTAIN FACTUAL OR OTHER ERRORS. ARREST INFORMATION MAY NOT REFLECT THE CURRENT INFORMATION. AN ARREST DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE INDIVIDUAL HAS BEEN CONVICTED OF A CRIME. THE INFORMATION ON THIS REPORT SHOULD NOT BE RELIED UPON FOR ANY TYPE OF LEGAL ACTION. UNAUTHORIZED OR ILLEGAL USE OF THE INFORMATION IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED.

NEWS FROM THE DESK OF SHERIFF POTTER

FURTHER PROMOTING SAFE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA USE



SHERIFF POTTER
DeSoto County Sheriff

Dear DeSoto County,

I feel a sense of duty to protect and serve our community in all aspects of life, including through preventing crime in the digital realm. In this rapidly evolving digital age, the internet and social media have become integral parts of our daily lives, connecting us with loved ones, providing information and fostering close relationships bringing communities together. However, as much as these technological advancements have enhanced our lives, they also bring certain risks.

In recent years, we have observed an alarming rise in cybercrimes, online scams and instances of cyberbullying, targeting

unsuspecting individuals, especially our youth. As your Sheriff, I believe it is our law enforcement agency's responsibility to raise awareness and provide guidance on how to use the internet and social media safely to protect yourself and others.

We urge parents and guardians in our community to engage in open and honest conversations with their children about internet safety. It is crucial to educate our youth about the potential risks that can be associated with sharing personal information online, interacting with strangers and engaging with phishing scams. By promoting a dynamic of trust and open communication, we can empower our youth to make responsible decisions.

It is not only children at risk. Adults in our community must remain vigilant against cyber threats. It is important to always be cautious when sharing personal information or financial details

online, especially through websites that may be unfamiliar. I advise you to regularly update passwords and ensure they are strong and unique, to best prevent unauthorized access to online accounts. Reporting any suspicious activity promptly can help our law enforcement deputies safeguard the community online.

We understand that social media platforms have become a means of communication for many individuals, and we encourage responsible usage. While these platforms allow us to connect with friends, family, and colleagues, it is essential to exercise discretion and think before posting. Keep in mind, once something is posted online, it could remain there indefinitely, potentially impacting your personal and/or professional life.

As part of our commitment to fostering digital safety, the DeSoto County Sheriff's Office prides itself on organizing educational

and community outreach programs focused on internet safety. We aim to equip members within our community with the knowledge and tools necessary to protect themselves and their families while navigating online.

I encourage you to help our agency promote a safe and secure digital environment for everyone. By staying informed and implementing responsible internet and social media practices, we can mitigate risks and protect ourselves and our loved ones from potential harm.

Thank you for your continued support in our mission to uphold safety and security in every aspect of our community's lives.

**Be Kind, Be Safe, God Bless,
Sheriff James F. Potter**

YMCA

FROM PAGE 2 »

Airport Director Shelley Peacock reported a total of 4,783 operations in Jan., averaging about 154 per day. The Taxiway Alpha and the Jet A fuel designs are almost complete, and the projects are funded 90% by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), 5% by the Florida Dept. of Transportation (FDOT), and 5% by the City. The Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) Chap. 1226's pancake breakfast is Feb. 7 and the Young Eagles Program is Feb. 14. The ribbon-cutting for the ramp expansion will be at 10:30 a.m. on Feb. 17, on the same day as Taco Tues..

Golf Course Director Jeff Gibson noted, "Golf is a weather-dependent sport," but the new golf simulator will always be available. He had to delay opening the course last week because of frost, and the course is very busy with leagues playing and some upcoming tournaments.

Carsten asked Public Works Director Steve Underwood to give an update on the Gibson St. project, and he reported that fences were removed and replaced



School District Community Outreach Coordinator Ashley Brown announced Feb. as Black History Month, Career and Technical Education Month, and the week as School Counselor Week.

for the street widening, the southside curb is poured, and completion may be around April. He felt that Thomas Marine Construction was doing excellent work.

Carsten reported good training in Tallahassee and Orlando plus a committee meeting with FDEP and Rep. Vanessa Oliver. She invited Council members to the Historic Preservation Commission Training Workshop from 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. on Feb 10 in the Council Chambers, and she reminded



Representing Arcadia Pride, Jade Hill recounted the event held last year: a BBQ in DeSoto Memorial Veterans Park for families with children—all locals and Christians—sharing a message that "it is okay to be different" and a goal of "celebrating diversity in the community."

everyone of the Ridge League dinner meeting on Feb. 12 in Lake Wales.

CONSENT AGENDA

The Council approved the following special event permits for Arcadia Main Street under the Consent Agenda: amended the one for the Discover Arcadia 2nd Sat. Vintage Marketplace to include an art show, Oak St. closure, and duration from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.; and the ones for AMS's Hearts

and Harmony Music and Wine Walk, from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on Feb. 14 downtown with an Oak St. closure, and Arcadia Bike Fest from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., on Apr. 4 and Nov. 7, downtown with Oak St. closed from DeSoto to Orange Ave., and between Oak St. and Hickory St. or Magnolia St., DeSoto, Polk, and Monroe avenues will be closed.

HELP SUPPORT THE ARCADIA COMMUNITY LOCAL!

For advertising, contact Angie Duckett:
sales@peacerivershopper.com or call 863-990-9813

To participate as a Community Contributor, email:
editorial@peacerivershopper.com



DeSoto County High School's 19th Annual PROJECT GRADUATION

Benefit Dinner & Silent Auction

Sponsored by:

Mosaic **drugFREE**
DESOTO COALITION

MARCH 7TH

DESOTO MIDDLE SCHOOL CAFETERIA
Doors open at 5:00 pm

For tickets or more info, contact Leslie Bickett at:
(863) 990-5601 or **lesliejo46@yahoo.com**

CATERER: SLIM'S BBQ

Make Checks Payable to: **DFDC - Project Graduation**, PO Box 2537, Arcadia, FL 34265

Proceeds help raise money to fund the annual graduation party.

EARLY FOG STALLS AIRPORT'S PANCAKE BREAKFAST



CAROL MAHLER

Independent Contractor
carolmahler22acl@gmail.com
Photos provided

On Feb. 7, early ground fog kept most pilots away from the monthly pancake breakfast sponsored by Experimental Aircraft Association's (EAA) Chap. 1126 at the Municipal Airport, 2269 A. C. Polk, Jr. Dr., and as it cleared, attendance increased.

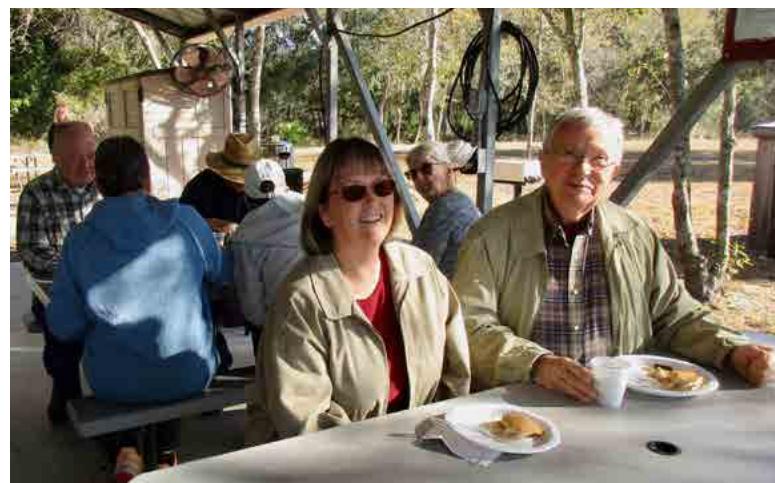
On the first Sat. of the month from Oct. through Apr., pilots and their guests fly—and local residents drive-in for the monthly Pancake Breakfast. Pancakes, eggs, sausage, biscuits and gravy, and more are served up freshly made, all you care to eat, for \$8.00 a person.

The donations support the Young Eagles Program that gives eight- to 17-year-old youngsters "their first free ride in an airplane. It's the only program of its kind, with the sole mission to introduce and inspire kids in the world of aviation" (eaa.org/eaa/youth/free-ye-flights).

City Council Member Keith Keene and Cindy Keene, his wife, enjoyed breakfast. "They're doing a great job," he said. "It supports a wonderful program for the kids."

Volunteers included Airport Director Shelley Peacock and her assistant Veera Fitzpatrick, plus Jim Brewer, Geri Draper, Jack Scott, and Lynna Welker. Temperatures were brisk enough that a fire was burning in the fire pit just outside the pilot's shelter.

Welker accepted donations for the breakfast at the new registration counter that was built out of wood pallets for the first-time "Christmas In The City" event in downtown Arcadia in 2025.



From left, Cindy Keene, and her husband, City Council Member Keith Keene joined the diners at the pancake breakfast prepared and served by members of the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) Chap. 1126 at the Arcadia Airport.



At right, Eric Grenier flew Russ Morris in his RV-12 to the pancake breakfast. They are regular attendees of the Taco Tuesday event, but this was the first breakfast they had attended this season.



Driving in from Fort Ogden, from left, Joy Reardon holding Stetson Reardon, Jason Reardon, Conner Reardon, and Macy Reardon appreciated the pancake breakfast. "The food is good," Macy said. "The sausage gravy is the best," Jason said.

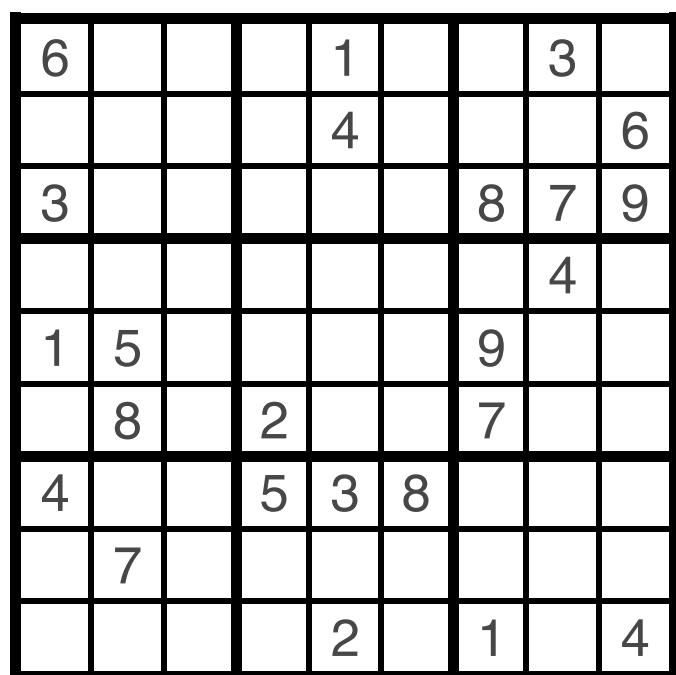


From left, Cayden Peacock, Brandon Jordan, and Peyton Peacock drove to the pancake breakfast from Winter Haven. She said, "I'm a big fan of the pancakes and the sausages."

James Bedell, the Airport's maintenance man, added a shelf to make it a more functional addition for the pancake breakfasts.

Mark your calendar for 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. on March 7 and April 4 for the last two pancake breakfasts of the season. EAA Chap. 1126 will offer Young Eagles flights on Feb. 14, and parents may register their children at EAAChapters.org. For more information, call 863-494-7844 or check online at arcadia-municipal-airport-x06.

In the Aviation City pilot campground shelter, Lynna Welker, EAA Chap. 1126 member, accepted donations for the pancake breakfast at the new registration counter repurposed from the "Christmas In The City" event.

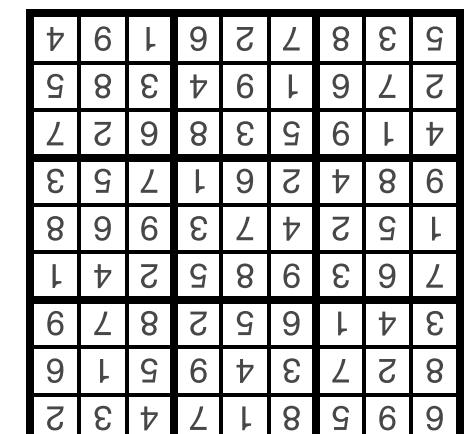


Level: Intermediate

SUDOKU

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!



ANSWERS:

HELP SUPPORT THE ARCADIA COMMUNITY LOCAL!

For advertising, contact Angie Duckett:
sales@peacerivershopper.com or call 863-990-9813

To participate as a Community Contributor, email:
editorial@peacerivershopper.com

WHAT'S POSSIBLE THROUGH SOUTH FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE



As conversations about economic growth, workforce readiness, and community well-being continue, South Florida State College (SFSC) is consistently tied to organizations and corporations throughout the region.

According to a recent economic impact study examining fiscal year 2023–24, SFSC contributed \$210.3 million in added income to the regional economy, which is equal to 4% of the area's total gross regional product. To put that into perspective, one out of every 24 jobs in the region is supported by the activities of SFSC, its students, or its alumni.

This impact is not just anecdotal, it is evident in paychecks, positions, and career pathways across the region.

THE POWER OF ALUMNI

The greatest economic contribution of SFSC comes from its alumni. Former students employed in the region generated \$169.9 million in added income in a single year, supporting 2,216 jobs. SFSC's alumni are nurses, technicians, first responders, educators, and skilled professionals, who residents interact with every day and whose education translates directly into production benefits and higher earnings for local industries.

Beyond alumni impact, SFSC's day-to-day operations play a significant role in sustaining the local economy. The College employs 513 faculty and staff, with 82% living within the service area, ensuring that salaries are reinvested locally, supporting local businesses and community initiatives. The combined payroll and operational spending added \$35.2 million to the regional economy.

Current students also contribute in a



SFSC President, Fred Hawkins

meaningful and valuable way with 14% of SFSC students relocating to the area to attend the College, bringing new dollars into local communities through housing, food, transportation, and everyday expenses. Student spending added \$5.2 million to the regional economy and supported 84 additional jobs.

LUCRATIVE FUTURES

For students, the value proposition of SFSC is clear and measurable. Graduates who earned an associate degree in fiscal year 2023–24 will earn \$6,200 more per year on average than peers with only a high school diploma. Over a working lifetime, that difference amounts to \$260,400 in additional earnings per graduate.

When viewed as an investment, the return is staggering. For every \$1 students invest in tuition, books, and income students temporarily set aside while investing in their education, they receive \$7.50 in higher future earnings. The average annual rate of return for students is 22.9%, which is more than double the average for traditional long-term investment benchmarks. Students who invest in themselves strengthen not only their own futures, but the future of the communities they call home.



SFSC Welcome Center, Avon Park Campus

BENEFITS TO THE TAXPAYERS

The benefits of SFSC extend well beyond individual students. From a taxpayer perspective, the College generates more value than it costs. Over the working lives of its students, SFSC produces \$42 million in combined tax revenue and public-sector savings, exceeding the \$38.2 million in state funding it received.

At the societal level, the return is even more pronounced. The study estimates \$607.6 million in total social benefits statewide, driven by higher lifetime earnings, increased business output, and reduced public costs related to healthcare, the criminal justice system, and income assistance. For every \$1 spent by the College and its students, society gains \$9.40 in benefits. In addition, when the public invests \$1 in the College, they receive \$1.10 back, so SFSC generates more value than it consumes.

MORE THAN A COLLEGE

These statistics tell an impressive story, but they only begin to explain SFSC's role within the Heartland of Florida. The College is not simply an educational institution; it is an economic

stabilizer, a talent pipeline, and a force multiplier for community prosperity. The strength of SFSC is currently felt by the 2,927 jobs across the region that are supported by the College.

At a time when Florida, like much of the nation, faces workforce shortages, demographic shifts, and economic uncertainty, South Florida State College stands as an inspiring solution. The region suffers from low attainment rates, with Highlands County ranked at 38 of the 67 counties, Hardee at 64, and DeSoto at 65, so the work continues. SFSC's impact is measurable, its return on investment is undeniable, and its influence reaches far beyond the classroom.

SFSC's mission is to develop human potential and create brighter futures, but its true impact cannot be confined to a single student or a single campus. The College is strengthening the region, and revealing that education works best when it connects people, ideas, and opportunity. Within DeSoto, Hardee, and Highlands counties, the data reveals the influence of education on the economy and the potential exists to further improve the imprint the College has on Florida's Heartland.

SFSC ATHLETICS BENEFITS FROM MILLION DOLLAR HOLE-IN-ONE GOLF SHOOTOUT



AVON PARK, Fla. – Jan. 22, 2026

– The South Florida State College (SFSC) Foundation hosted its ninth annual Million Dollar Hole-in-One Golf Shootout sponsored by Bill Jarrett Ford on Saturday, Jan. 17. This year, the event raised over \$15,000 in support of SFSC Athletics.

Golfers participated in the three-day Golf Shootout and new Putt Challenge, which began on Thursday, Jan. 15 at Sun 'N Lake Golf Club in Sebring. Throughout the qualifying rounds, 90 golfers swung for the \$1 million prize, and 45 golfers tried to putt their way to \$10,000.

The group of top 12 shootout

qualifiers were: Kyle Braxton, Trent Adrian, Mike Nelson, Brooke Sortore, Ty Van Bulck, Todd Smith, Steve Sortore, Michael Thayer, Greg Lundgren, Michael Kelly, Jeff Taylor, and Paul Sippl. The Putt Challenge finalist was Jeff Taylor.

“What a fabulous turnout! We are so grateful to our community for showing up and supporting our student-athletes,” said Emily Dabolt, executive director of the SFSC Foundation. “This event wouldn't be possible without the dedication of our sponsors, volunteers, and golfers, who believe in investing in our students' futures.”

Proceeds from the golf shootout benefit SFSC Panther Athletics in women's volleyball, women's cross country, men's baseball, and women's softball. SFSC's student-athletes assisted throughout the Golf Shootout.



PORT CHARLOTTE GUN SHOW

CENTENNIAL PARK REC CENTER

1120 CENTENNIAL BLVD • PORT CHARLOTTE, FL

FEBRUARY 14TH & 15TH

SATURDAY 9AM-5PM & SUNDAY 9AM-3PM

UPCOMING

PORT CHARLOTTE

MARCH 14TH & 15TH

CENTENNIAL PARK REC CENTER

1120 CENTENNIAL BLVD

SAT 9AM-5PM & SUN 9AM-3PM

TENTATIVE

**WE ARE THE BEST COMBINATION OF FFL
DEALERS AND PRIVATE COLLECTORS AROUND!**

All Federal, State, and local laws must be obeyed.

Guns, knives, accessories, ammo, parts, and so much more. Come ready to buy, sell, or trade. We have new, used, and antique items.

And as always, FREE PARKING!

CHILDREN (16 and Under)
2-Day Admission

Free

ACTIVE Military or LEO
2-Day Admission

Free

Veteran OR Retired LEO
2-Day Admission

\$1⁰⁰ off

ADULT (17 and Over)
2-Day Admission

\$10⁰⁰

WE HAVE TONS OF GUNS AND AMMO AVAILABLE!

Tickets sold at the door, Cash or Check Only, limit 1 discount per person

Saturday AND Sunday

Come and go as you please on both days!



**2 GUYS
GUN SHOW**



727-776-3442 • 2GuysShows.com

Did you purchase or construct a new home last year?



DEADLINE to file your application for Homestead Exemption is MARCH 1ST

To qualify for homestead exemptions, you **MUST** own and occupy your home as your primary residence and be a Florida resident as of **JANUARY 1ST**

FILE ONLINE

OR

FILE IN PERSON

Online Exemptions Applications are provided as a courtesy.

IMPORTANT

Please do **NOT** use the Online Exemption Application on **PUBLIC** computers, such as those at the public library or coffee shop. You will be required to provide **PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL** information, such as Social Security Number and Driver's License.

TO FILE ONLINE, VISIT:
desotopa.com/online_exemptions/

The application process can be overwhelming, due to the nature of the form supplied by the Florida Department of Revenue and the number of documents required to be provided.

**CALL TO SCHEDULE
IN-PERSON APPOINTMENT:
863-993-4866**

Each individual applying should bring **ALL** of the required documents listed below.

ADDITIONAL EXEMPTIONS

- Senior's Exemptions (age 65 or older, limited income)
- Disabled Veteran's Exemption
- 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:

**863.993.4866 • 815 N. Mills Ave., Suite 101, Arcadia
Office Hours: Monday - Friday 8:30 am - 5:00 pm**

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)



DESOTO COUNTY PROPERTY APPRAISER

David A. Williams, CFA, CCF

www.desotopa.com