



SCHOOL NEWS



HAPPENINGS FROM OUR CLAY COUNTY SCHOOLS

NOVEMBER 2022

OPHS marches to regional band competition title

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

FLEMING ISLAND – The idea for Orange Park High's competition-winning marching band performance was born in a coffee shop.

In between sips, the school's band directors bounced ideas for this year's show.

"We just threw around things until something sounded cool," director Brett Pikuritz said. "And then we said 'OK, what kind of music could you see for this?' It's kind of weird how it happens and it really comes from nothing. And then you just hear something and you're like, 'oh, that sounds great.' And then you start organically kind of piecing it together. And then I start contributing pieces of music that I think fit into that theme.

"We were throwing around like, you know, 'Enter Sandman.' Somebody said words, and somebody said, tubular or something. And so, we were coming up with these kinds of thematic and then eventually we got to 'OK hey, we like the words idea how can we deal with that?'"

The idea of words led to the notion of speaking volumes, which led them to think about the founding fathers. They also realized books speak volumes."

Words Speak Volumes was created.

Months later – and countless hours of practice later – Orange Park turned the coffee shop idea into a performance that clinched the Class 2A Florida Marching Band Competition Regional competition Saturday at Fleming Island High.

Twenty-one high school bands com-

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19 Clay schools to benefit from \$200 million in School Recognition Awards

By **Renzo Downey**
For Florida Politics

Gov. Ron DeSantis is awarding \$200 million in School Recognition Awards to 1,400 public schools for their performance during the 2021-22 school year.

Eligible schools received a school grade of "A" or improved one letter grade from the prior year. Schools can use the funds for nonrecurring faculty and staff bonuses, nonrecurring expenditures on educational equipment and materials, or temporary personnel to assist in maintaining or improving student performance. In Clay County, 18 schools achieved "A" grades, while Montclair Elementary improved by one grade level.

"We trust the schools will make the good decisions, but it's really important that when you have the success that that is recognized, and that's what these awards are doing," DeSan-

tis told reporters Monday.

The School Recognition Program became a political battleground during the 2022 Legislative Session when lawmakers attempted to limit the awards to schools in the 55 school districts that did not impose mask mandates that violated state policy. That was the compromise to the "Putting Parents First Adjustment" plan first promoted by Brevard County Republican Rep. Randy Fine, but DeSantis overrode the proposal, stating his desire to hold district administrators accountable, not schools.

"As Governor, I direct the Department of Education to implement the Florida School Recognition Program consistent with the reading of the language, which is to reward eligible schools for their achievements, as districts' actions have no bearing on a school's eligibility," DeSantis wrote in a letter to Education Commissioner Manny Díaz.

DeSantis presented the awards at Toledo

Making The Grade

Orange Park Elementary
W.E. Cherry Elementary
Doctors Inlet Elementary
Middleburg Elementary
Lakeside Junior High
Lakeside Elementary
Ridgeview Elementary
Lake Asbury Elementary
Robert M. Patterson Elementary
Tynes Elementary
Fleming Island Elementary
Thunderbolt Elementary
Rideout Elementary
Fleming Island High
Swimming Pen Elementary
Oakleaf Village Elementary
Discovery Oaks Elementary
Plantation Oaks Elementary
St. Johns Classical Academy

Improved by one grade: Montclair Elementary.

Blade Elementary School in North Port, located in Sarasota County. The announcement comes less than three weeks after Hurricane Ian struck Southwest Florida. Most schools have restarted classes, while the remainder is set to return this week.

"This award was earned by schools like Toledo Blade Elementary before Ian hit, of course. But now that you're dealing with what we're dealing with, this may come in handy to help assist in some of those areas as well," DeSantis said. In Collier County, 38 schools received \$5 million; in Lee County, 27 schools received \$3.6 million; in Sarasota County, 24 schools received \$3.8 million; in Charlotte County, six schools received \$600,000; and one school, Bowling Green Elementary, received \$54,000 in Hardee County. Díaz praised the Governor for what he said was an understanding of the importance of teachers, and he highlighted recent pay raises and bonuses for teachers DeSantis has

helped usher in.

"His investment, his leadership and investing over \$2 billion the last three years directly to teachers is a sign of that and understanding how important (it is) to have our schools open, our kids learning and trying to get back to normalcy," Díaz said. The Governor, who is up for re-election in just over three weeks, teased upcoming proposals for teacher support, workforce education and early literacy.

"We have more initiatives that I would have announced by now if it weren't for this doggone hurricane putting everything off the calendar, but stay tuned," he said.

Renzo Downey covers state government for Florida Politics. After graduating from Northwestern University in 2019, Renzo began his reporting career in the Lone Star State, covering state government for the Austin American-Statesman. Shoot Renzo an email at renzo@floridapolitics.com and follow him on Twitter @RenzoDowney.

**CLAY
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‘The Backyard’ opens at OPHS for student, community programs

ORANGE PARK – Orange Park High, a Community Partnership School, celebrated the grand opening of “The Backyard,” a newly-renovated space for student and community programs hosted by the Community Partnership School. The redesigned space will serve as the center for college and career readiness workshops, school supply giveaways, monthly food distributions and more.

Core partners and community leaders participated in the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Funding and in-kind donations for the renovation were provided by generous community friends including CBV Cares, Rotary Club of Orange Park Sunrise and private giving by individual donors.

Orange Park partners, families and the local community are invited to attend.

Lauren Pfanenstiel, Director of the Community Partnership School at Sabal Palm Elementary, Superintendent David Broskie, Orange Park High Principal Ivan Gunder and Jon Cantrell, President of Clay Chamber were honored guests.

With the help of core partners, local businesses and faith-based partners, Orange Park High is addressing key barriers to learning – empowering students to reach for success inside the classroom and beyond.

The Community Partnership Schools



model at Orange Park High is a long-term commitment among Children’s Home Society of Florida, Clay County District Schools, HCA Florida Orange Park Hospital, Palms Medical Center and St. Johns River State College, bringing together high-quality academics, health care, counseling, mentoring and more — right on-site at the school where students and families are comfortable.

First implemented in Florida in 2010, the Community Partnership Schools model has proven to improve outcomes for children and families.

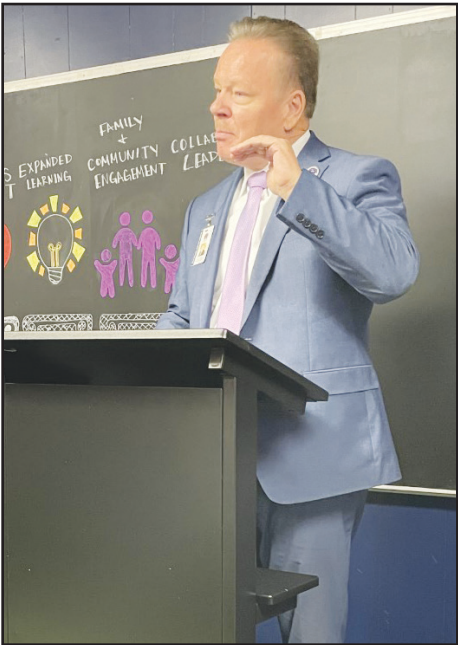
Specific successes include reduced disciplinary actions, improved attendance, greater parental involvement and, at high schools, increased graduation rates.

The newly renovated space will expand the Community Partnership Schools model at Orange Park High, allowing more children and families to realize their full

potential.

Orange Park High focuses on the immediate and long-term needs and goals of Orange Park High students, their families and the local community. Led by a partnership among Children’s Home Society of Florida, Clay County District Schools, HCA Florida Orange Park Hospital,

Palms Medical Center and St. Johns River State College, Orange Park High School, A Community Partnership School integrates health and wellness programs, positive social activities, and leadership opportunities into the education and lives of students and families, empowering them to pursue success.



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SJR State College student spotlight

Meet Aaron Thurman

ORANGE PARK – After serving 20 years in the U.S. Navy, Aaron Thurmond, 61, was ready to take his LPN to the next level. He enrolled in the LPN Bridge to ASN program at St. Johns River State College and turned his nursing certificate into an associate in science degree (RN). The motivation behind continuing his education was to learn more, do more (for the patients) and earn more.

What was your career before you attended the nursing program?

Thurman: “I spent 20 years in the United States Navy as a hospital corpsman. I enjoyed taking care of the sailors and their dependents. I’ve always had that ‘wanting to help others’ attitude as long as I can remember. When my recruiter told me I could work in the hospital if I enlisted in the Navy, I did not hesitate to sign up for military service.

“After retiring from the Navy, I was an LPN with Mayo Clinic, but then transferred to an assisted living facility to better manage my ASN classes with my work schedule.”

What inspired you to advance your nursing career?

Thurman: “RNs have a more expanded range of practice than the LPNs. RNs can administer medications and perform diagnostic tests. RNs can also specialize in certain areas of the nursing field and command higher wages.”

Why did you select SJR State for your training?

Thurman: “I heard positive reviews from coworkers who graduated from the SJR State nursing program, and it’s conveniently close to my home.”



What did you enjoy most about your time at SJR State?

Thurman: “The help of the staff and the camaraderie of my classmates. My classmates looked up to me because of my age and experience in the medical field. The staff was very helpful - always cheering me on.”

What is the biggest thing you have learned about yourself as a student?

Thurman: “No matter how difficult some of the topics were, I was able to push myself, even when I wanted to give up.”

What was your biggest challenge during the program?

Thurman: “Trying to study and work full time.”

What are your plans after you graduate?

Thurman: “Return to Mayo Clinic and work in dialysis, internal medicine or at the VA clinic.”

What is your advice to others who may be considering enrolling in the program?

Thurman: “Make sure you are willing to give 100% and you have the backing of your family.”



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Clay High Homecoming parade



STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

Clay students, graduates celebrate Homecoming

GREEN COVE SPRINGS - The streets around the Historical Triangle were filled with revelry on Friday, Oct. 14 for the Clay High Homecoming Parade. Students decorated floats and former Blue Devil and Clay County Sheriff Michelle Cook (above) served as the Grand Marshal. While there was plenty of celebration before the football game, there wasn't much afterwards when Clay lost to Menendez, 22-18.

Band
from page 1

peted, while host Fleming Island and the University of Jacksonville bands played exhibition sets.

Winners from the four classes qualified to advance to the state championships in Broward County in late November.

Orange Park swept first-place scores in ensemble music, performance, general music and effect, ensemble and individual performances, percussion, color guard and drum major.

"It was a great accomplishment for Orange Park," Pikuritz said.

Trinity Christian clinched the Class 1A regional title, while Ponte Vedra won Class 3A and Orlando University won Class 4A.

Locally, Middleburg finished second in Class 1A, while Keystone Heights was seventh; Ridgeview was third and Clay was sixth in Class 2A and Oakleaf was runner-up in Class 4A.

Pikuritz said the Raiders band spent between 15 and 30 extra hours of preparation outside of school commitments. Most of the practice came with the bands working in smaller groups.

"Percussion has a class third period every day," Pikuritz said. "Any wind instrumentalists that you saw like a trumpet, flute, clarinet, they have fifth-period class every day. And color guard, they actually meet as a seventh-period class every single day.

"And then also, there's evening rehearsals and afternoon sectionals they put in. We actually do those on Tuesday, Thursday nights, where everybody comes together and combines their effort in order to put together what you see is the finished product."



FLEMING ISLAND - The Orange Park High band turned its 'Words Speak Volumes' show into a district championship. Senior Viktorya Bradford gave the Raiders an outstanding color guard performance, while bands from Clay, Ridgeview, Middleburg, Keystone Heights and Oakleaf also participated.

STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

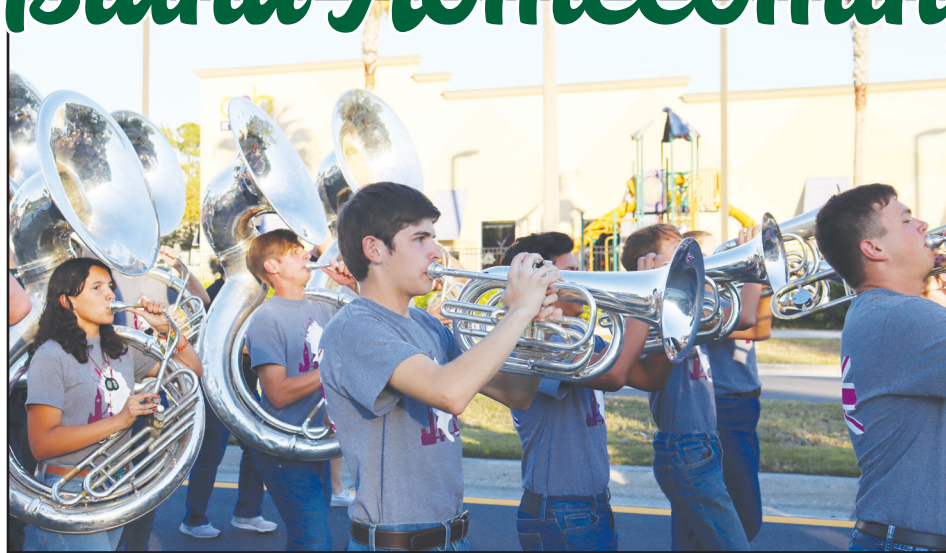


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PHOTOS BY JOHNS WILLIAMS, FIHS STUDENT



School Happenings

Shadowlawn to open time capsule Nov. 2

Shadowlawn Elementary School will host a "Time Capsule Opening Event" on Wednesday, November 2, 2022 at 4 p.m. to celebrate 14 years of Falcon pride. Special guests will include Superintendent David Broskie and the first Shadowlawn Elementary School principal, Mr. Dale Eichhorn.



CVA principal Stilianou receives 2022 Trendsetter Award

Congratulations to Clay Virtual Academy's principal, Amanda Stilianou, on receiving the 2022 Trendsetter Award, Best Practices (Administrator), from Blended and Online Learning Discovery of Florida (FI-BOLD)! This award recognizes the accomplishments of one virtual school administrator in the state.



Amanda Stilianou



Marsh receives mini-grant for Clay County Education Foundation

Congratulations to one of our amazing teachers, Sharon Marsh. She received a mini-grant from the Clay County Education Foundation.



Stop Bullying Campaign Contest

Attention 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students: the Len Mattiace Foundation Stop the Bullying Campaign Contest ends on Tuesday, November 8th. Two students will win \$1,000! For more information on the contest rules and submission of student projects, <https://www.lenmattiace.com/clay-stop-the-bullying-campaign>

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KidX CLUB



(Back row, from left) Teen Court Coordinator Stacey Smith, Tripp Stewart, Phoenix Cumpstone, Gracen Osborne, Analise Stuart, Sofia Croft, Nicholas Santana, Judge Whittington, Tyler Mess, Dalton Reichenbach, C.J. Anderson, Ella Rose Gibson, Sarah Jensen, Dylan Southwick, Zoe Anderson, Head Coach Kendra New, Esq. and Coach Theresa Sanders, and (front row, from left) Bradley Wells, Moriah Fleming, Haley Bolam, Victoria Beharry, Zion Bowen, Emma Pennington, Aniuta Kremsaliuk, Grace Owens, Coach Audrea Stewart and (kneeling) Coach Nichole Delaware finished first among 15 teams at the State Teen Court Mock Trial Competition.

Clay County Teen Mock Trial team wins state competition

For Clay Today

CLAY COUNTY – Clay County Teen Court, a branch of the Clay County Clerk of Court and Comptroller’s Office, sent two teams to this year’s recent statewide mock trial competition held at Florida State University in Tallahassee.

Team A won the state competition, placing first out of 15 teams

Additionally, students were awarded the Tallahassee Spirit Award, which means they were the group selected by event competitors as having the highest level of professionalism and integrity. Numerous team members won individual Best Attorney and Best Witness awards, with one attorney even earning a perfect score. Clay County Teen Court brought home five individual awards.

This year’s involvement of Clay County Judge Steven B. Whittington may have been one key to the teams’ success. The judge presided over some of the teenagers’ preparation for the competition, including a practice “scrimmage” where his real-world advice and guidance were appreciated, the team said.



Clerk Tara S. Green and Teen Court Manager Michelle Taylor provided the following recognition and thanks, especially to Teen Court Supervisor and Mock Trial Team Coach Stacey Smith and to Mock Trial Team Head Coach, Kendra New, Esq.

Additional assistance was provided by community members Debbie Mueller and Audrea Stewart and from attorneys Geraldine Hartin, Seth Studer, Shelby Serig, Jim Thies, Nichole Delaware and Theresa Sanders. Plus, Jamie Cona and Angela Sheppard, members of the State Attorney’s Office, assisted.

For additional information about Teen Court programs in Clay County, please visit the Teen Court section of the Clay County Clerk’s website, clayclerk.com. With this recent victory, the Clay County Teen Court program now has three state competition mock trials in the last four years.

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SCAN ME

Roderick Kearney gets All America honors

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

ORANGE PARK - Orange Park High senior offensive tackle Roderick Kearney joined former Oakleaf High linebacker Shaquille Quarterman, now an NFL player for the Jacksonville Jaguars, and Fleming Island High's Ian Silberman, an offensive tackle at the University of Florida and Boston College and an NFL veteran, now an offensive line coach at Fleming Island High School, as the latest recipient of the Under Armour All America jersey and a spot for the annual All American all star game in January.

The Under Armour All American selection team is the nation's top 100 recruits according to major recruiting sources. The list of Under Armour selection players that have made National Football League rosters includes Julio Jones, A.J. Green, Jameis Winston, Leonard Fournette and Jadeveon Clowney all still playing in the NFL.

Roderick Kearney's football journey started at Orange Park Junior High and has stayed the course with a select bunch of Wildcat teammates that have been at his side as an Orange Park High Raider football star and, at last week's Under Armour All America selection jersey ceremony held at Orange Park High, Kearney acknowledge his guys by his side.

"It's special to share this with my guys," said Kearney, an offensive tackle for the Raiders football team under coach Marcus Wimberly. "We've been playing together and getting better together for a long time. Family is important."

One of Kearney's guys, senior running back JoJo Restall, said his four-plus years of following Kearney downfield has shown



Orange Park senior offensive tackle Roderick Kearney shows off his Under Armour All American jersey and shares some of the spotlight with his Raider teammates in ceremony Wednesday afternoon.

him the destructive force of his big guy up front.

"It's so cool to run behind him," said Restall. "I've had a lot of long runs from behind him. We talk all the time in the huddle when we think a play can go the distance."

Wimberly, who took over the Raider football program this year and got to see just a year of Kearney, noted that Kearney's All American selection is not entirely about knocking people around on a football field.

"The qualities of leadership and work ethic and a thirst to learn are all the qualities of an All American selection," said



STAFF PHOTO BY RANDY LEFKO

Wimberly. "Whenever we run power, he just dominates the guy in front of him and he's pretty simple about it. I don't think there was guy that Roderick could not dominate."

Wimberly did note that Kearney has been inquiring about running the ball into the end zone in a game.

"Every big guy wants to do that," said Wimberly.

As for Kearney in college, Wimberly cited Kearney's football IQ as a key ingredient plus the normal transition to strength and power.

"He has seen what the weight room has done for him at this level," said Wimberly. "At the next level, it will be a little

more intense and he's smart enough to respond positively to it. He's a great learner."

Kearney did note that one player, Westside High's Jordan Hall, was one player that he had to bring his A-game to the field.

"Nobody really gave me fits, but 'Big Baby', Jordan Hall, a 6'-5" 300 pound defensive lineman for Westside High School was a tough guy against me," said Kearney. "He has some offers from big schools so maybe I'll see him again."

According to 247 Sports.com, a national recruiting website, Hall has had offers from Alabama, Ohio State, Florida, Florida State and Georgia. Kearney has verbally committed to Florida State University.



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Lakeside Elementary celebrated Red Ribbon Week with a crazy hat day on Wednesday, Oct. 26.

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