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STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

Residents like Keith Madsen (below) were relieved - and weary -- about the resumption of curbside recycling pickups.

Curbside recycling pickup to resume in December

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

DOCTORS INLET – Keith Madsen was happy, yet skeptical when he read the notice taped to the side of the collection bin at the Doctor's Inlet Environmental Convenience Center that said curbside pickups would resume on Dec. 5 in the unincorporated areas of Clay County and Keystone Heights.

"I'm just surprised how long it took to get it back," he said as he dumped a bin of bottles and cans into the oversized dumpsters. "We've had to do a lot of stuff on our own, but it would be worse if we didn't do it."

The county was forced to halt curbside pickup more than two years ago during the COVID-19 pandemic. Waste Management, which has the contract to

pick up trash for the county, struggled to find as many as 10 drivers since, forcing conscientious residents to bag up their bottles, cans, plastic, boxes and paper and drive them to any of the five permanent dropoff sites or one of the seven temporary sites.

"Some people don't think it's worth it," Madsen said. "I'll be glad when they start picking it up, but I'll believe it when I see it."

Madsen said he drives from Orange Park to the Doctors Inlet transfer station about once a week.

County commissioners approved rebates from property taxes during the suspension of service.

Residents should start to request bins now, the county said. To get a recycling bin, residents should visit the county's website homepage, www.claycounty-



www.claycountygov.com/, and on the Garbage and Recycling webpage here: www.claycountygov.com/community/garbage-and-recycling.

Residents can also request a bin on the free Clay Connected app, which is available for Android and Apple devices in the app store or by calling Environmental Services at (904) 284-6374. Residents in the City of Keystone Heights should call Waste Management at (904) 695-0500 to

SEE CURBSIDE, 9

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Clay pickleball duo qualify for Florida State Senior Games

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

OAKLEAF – When Eric Stokes and Ben Amponin left for a pickleball tournament at Ormond Beach last week, they decided the drive was too long to come home without a victory.

As winners of the Ormond Beach Senior Games, they face an even longer drive to Zephyrhills for the state championship on Dec. 10-11.

Pickleball has become one of the most-popular sports for seniors, Amponin said. In fact, many of the senior athletes at the state games will be playing a sport that combines tennis and ping pong.

“We moved on, we’re going to we’re able to play in the Florida Senior Games, the state competition next month Zephyrhills,” Amponin said. “So far, 972 athletes have registered, so the majority of athletes are playing pickleball – more than basketball, more than golf, more than volleyball or track and field. Pickleball is definitely growing in popularity.”

Amponin lives in Oakleaf; Stokes lives on Fleming Island. They practice at Eagle

Landing on Fleming Island.

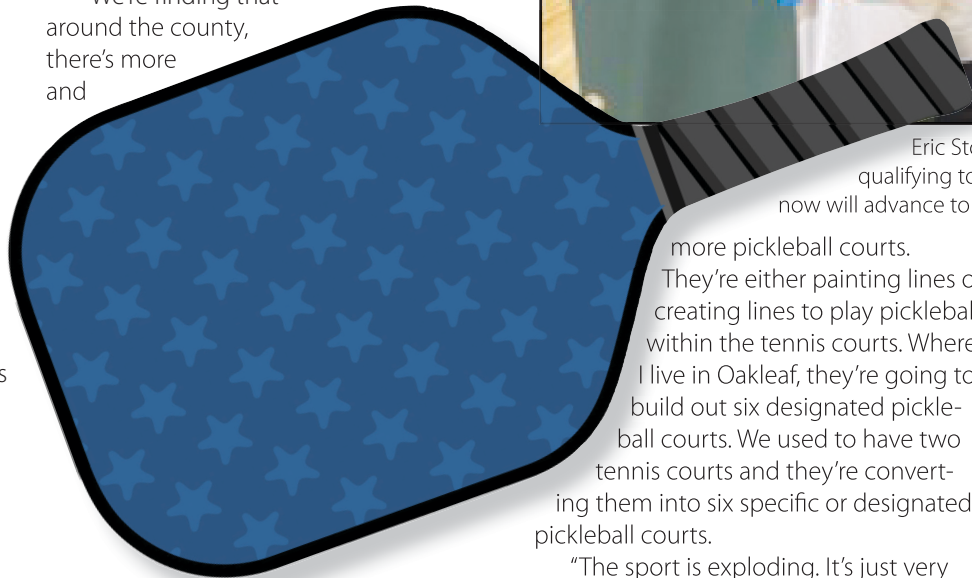
County and city officials have been busy building new pickleball courts or converting tennis courts to keep up with the demand. Amponin said the reason is simple: it’s easy to play, especially for seniors.

“Tennis courts are being used less around the county,” he said.

“We’re finding that around the county, there’s more and



Eric Stokes (l) and Ben Amponin won the pickleball qualifying tournament at Ormond Beach. The Clay County duo now will advance to the Florida State Senior Games in December.



more pickleball courts. They’re either painting lines or creating lines to play pickleball within the tennis courts. Where I live in Oakleaf, they’re going to build out six designated pickleball courts. We used to have two tennis courts and they’re converting them into six specific or designated pickleball courts.

“The sport is exploding. It’s just very

popular. It’s easy to learn. It’s simple. It’s a simple game. It just takes a little time to develop the skills.”

Another regional tournament was played in Jacksonville and those games attracted 50-and-older players from Georgia, Gainesville and Eustis.

“We were determined to not come empty,” Amponin said of the Ormond Beach Games. “We accomplished that. Now we’re setting our sites on Zephyrhills.”

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OPINIONS & VIEWPOINTS

Now back to regularly scheduled programming – and reality

By **Don Coble**
Managing Editor

Just when I thought it was safe to turn the television on again, there was Donald Trump, front and center on Tuesday, telling us we need to make America great again by electing him president.

That probably means Joe Biden will run again.

We just can't catch a break from this constant, predictable and divisive political rhetoric. It's two years from the next election and it's already started. And in the process, the country continues to become more divided than ever. Let the insults begin.

That's why I'm stepping away from the national news cycle. If it's not an episode of "Yellowstone," "Stranger Things," "Glitch," "Ted Lasso" or reruns of old sitcoms like "Monk," "Psych," "Two and a Half Men" or



Don Coble

How have I gone this long and not been amazed by the beauty of Spring Park? How did I allow myself to become so mesmerized by the political banter that I didn't notice I had a bottle of salad dressing from Food Lion? I believe the grocery store chain left Florida in 2012.

"Mom," the television will stay off.

Without the noise, I suddenly realized my utility shed needs to be rearranged. I moved into my new house on Valentine's Day, and I just found about 10 boxes I've been ignoring that need to be emptied.

And why is the inside of my car so dirty? Bigger yet, why haven't I noticed it during the past year?

How have I gone this long and not been amazed by the beauty of Spring Park? How did I allow myself to become so mesmerized by the political banter that I didn't notice I had a bottle of salad dressing from Food Lion? I believe the grocery store chain left Florida in 2012.

Like too many other people, I allowed myself to become punch-drunk by watching election stories during the past year. One network promises a red wave.

Another predicts the opposite. Meanwhile, I still had boxes that needed to be unpacked. And a car that needs to be cleaned. And a shed that's cluttered.

I have a golf bag sitting in the corner of my office and it occurred to me that I haven't hit a golf ball in 20 months. I used to play three times a week. How did I become so distracted?

I am choosing to be in control of my own thoughts. That means looking for flights to Albuquerque, New Mexico, to see my grandson. That means exploring the trails and caverns at Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park. That means getting back on the golf course again. Just wondering, but do golf balls go stale?

Maybe I will read a book. Maybe not.

It's hard to believe it's been more than 20 years since I've gone fishing. We're in one of the fishing capitals of the world and I elected to spend more time watching 24-hour cable news than wetting a line. I wish somebody would have put some stinkbait under my nose a year ago to bring me back to my senses.

I want to get back to debating who has the best college football team, not

SEE REALITY, 5

Local insurance expert: Expect changes in Social Security, Medicare in 2023

By **Bill Green**
Green Insurance Agency

ORANGE PARK – Bill Green advises Medicare beneficiaries that two historic announcements for next year with Social Security and Medicare include an expected Social Security increase of approximately 8.7%, the largest increase in the program's history. Also, the Medicare Part B premium and Part B deductible will cost less with coverage for physician services, outpatient hospital services, durable medical equipment and other medical and health services not covered by Part A.

According to Green, president and owner of Green Insurance Agency in Orange Park, the standard Part B premium in 2023 will reflect a decreased

amount of \$164.50 from this year's cost of \$170.10. The annual deductible for Part B will be \$226, a decrease of \$7 from \$233.

"In 2022 we saw a huge increase in the Part B premium due to the estimation of the cost of a new Alzheimer's medication called aducanumab with the brand name of Aduhelm," Green said. "The cost and usage were still unknown going into 2022, so to get ahead and create extra reserves for the Medicare trust fund, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services increased the premiums significantly.

"However due to a lower cost and usage than anticipated, the premium reduction is an attempt from CMS to pass some of the reserves back to people with Medicare Part B coverage."

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The Medicare annual enrollment period for 2023 is underway and will end on Dec. 7.

"This is the time when people eligible for Medicare can compare the upcoming 2023 coverage between original Medicare, Medicare Advantage, and Part D prescription drug plans," Green said. "Medicare health and drug plan costs and coverages can change each year, so people with Medicare should look at the



Bill Green

SEE CHANGES, 5

This Month in History

Five years ago, 2017

- "Recovering Clay" is created to raise money for victims in the wake of Hurricane Irma.

- Brig. Gen. Paul Chauncey III of the Florida National Guard tells an audience at Camp Blanding he hopes "peace breaks out soon" in the Middle East during the post's Veterans Day ceremony.

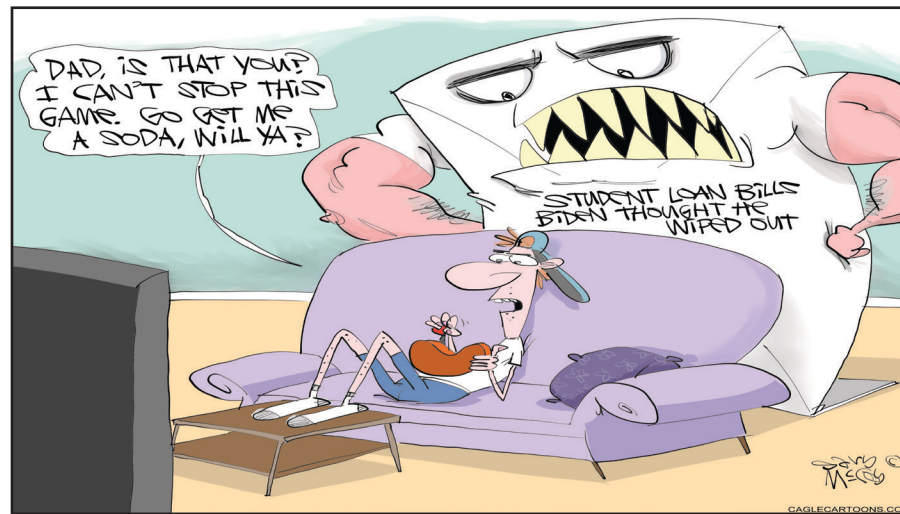
- Florida Sen. Rob Bradley (R-Fleming Island) was selected to be the Senate Budget Chief.

10 years ago, 2012

- John Buskager is charged with felony murder by the Orange Park Police after Andrew Stickman is found strangled in the Roadway Inn on Park Avenue.

- Orange Park Town Council passes an agreement with the nonprofit Orange Park Patrons to manage and maintain the Orange Park State Park off Gano Avenue.

- The Clay County Development Authority pad \$450,000 for a 30-year license to build a \$21 million baseball and soccer



complex from Big League Dreams.

20 years ago, 2002

- Chris Chase, 12, who had been missing for a day off Old Jennings Road, is hiding in a culvert near Long Bay Road.

- The Green Cove Springs City Council gets a preview of what to expect when the new city hall is completed.

- Alice Grisham, a teacher for gifted students at Wilkinson Elementary, came to school in a Colonial Period dress during a class on the American Revolution.

30 years ago, 1992

- Amanda Nicole Arnold, 1, of Middleburg wins the Little Miss Florida pageant.

- Orange Park celebrates the grand re-opening of the newly expanded public library.

- Judge William Wilkes denies Jacksonville-based Valuing Our Children And Laws organization's request a Middleburg mother, Crystal Gail Jones be sterilized after one of her children drowned in Black Creek and a second child nearly drowned in a pond.

Send us a letter ...

We'd like to hear from you. Perhaps you are concerned about the county commission, the school board or your city council or commission, sit down and take a few moments to write us a letter. All we ask is that you keep it civil, no name-calling and write no more than 600 words. All we ask is that you stick

to local issues, be clear and make a point. We reserve the right to edit for AP Stylebook errors, grammar and spelling. In your email, type Letter to the Editor in your subject and send it to Managing Editor Don Coble at don@opcfla.com. We look forward to hearing from you!

Opinions ...

The views and opinions expressed on this page are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Clay Today.



Smoldering fire leaves portions of Clay County under cloud of smoke

Piles of tree debris, underground mulch could take months to burn out

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

MIDDLEBURG – Jeff Reedy was forced to spend \$2,000 last week for an air purification unit for his house on Power Line Road. He has to put his dog in the car and drive nearly two miles to walk his dog because the smoke is so thick along Thunder Road – and around much of Clay County – it has become something that challenges his health and patience.

The fire at the property owned by Peggy Geer started on Friday, Nov. 4. It has been burning since. And it probably won't start spewing embers, ash and smoke for months.

"I bought 13 acres beside this facility and built my forever home," Reedy said. "I've been in that home since April, and now I'm dealing with this."

The fire is burning below ground level, much like a swampy peat or bog fire. Even with 2½ inches of rain from Tropical Storm

Nicole, the smoke still bellows from the large stacks of tree debris.

The tree service was approved by the Department of Environmental Protection to operate an incinerator. However, Clay County Fire Rescue Chief Lorin Mock told the Clay Board of County Commissioners, the amount of material on the property poses a real threat to the area that will take time to burn out.

"The amount of organic material, both the timbers and the reduced material which the permitting apparently allowed to build up, has created a fairly deep-seated fire in the area that is impossible to control," he said. "It's similar to a peat bog when it begins to burn. So while we don't have any immediate hope for controlling it, it would be my goal that over time with continual rainfall and reduction of the fire it will begin to reduce the amount of smoke and ash. But I've got to tell you, it's

SEE FIRE, 9

Reality

from page 4

the economy. The answer is, of course, UCF.

I want to talk about the storylines from "Yellowstone," not social media Tweets. Is Beth really that mean? Who will Rip take to the Train Station next? How the heck did Carter get so tall in one year?

I don't want to see "Let's Go Brandon"

or "Democracy Matters" bumper stickers again.

One national outlet's slogan is, "We report, you decide." I decide to turn the channel. I decide to be in charge of my thoughts, opinions and priorities. If I'm going to let my emotions get the best of me, it will be when UCF loses or when I get to McDonald's too late for the breakfast menu. So if you'll excuse me, my shed isn't going to organize itself.

Changes

from page 4

coverage options annually to decide on the options that fit their health needs."

Additionally, while Part A covers a portion of hospital costs for beneficiaries, the deductible for 2023 is increasing from \$1,556 to \$1,600, a small \$44 increase. Green said the second part of Part A is a stay in a Skilled Nursing Facility following a hospital stay. Medicare covers at no cost for the first 20 days in a SNF. That is a slight increase from \$194.50 to \$200 a day after day 20.

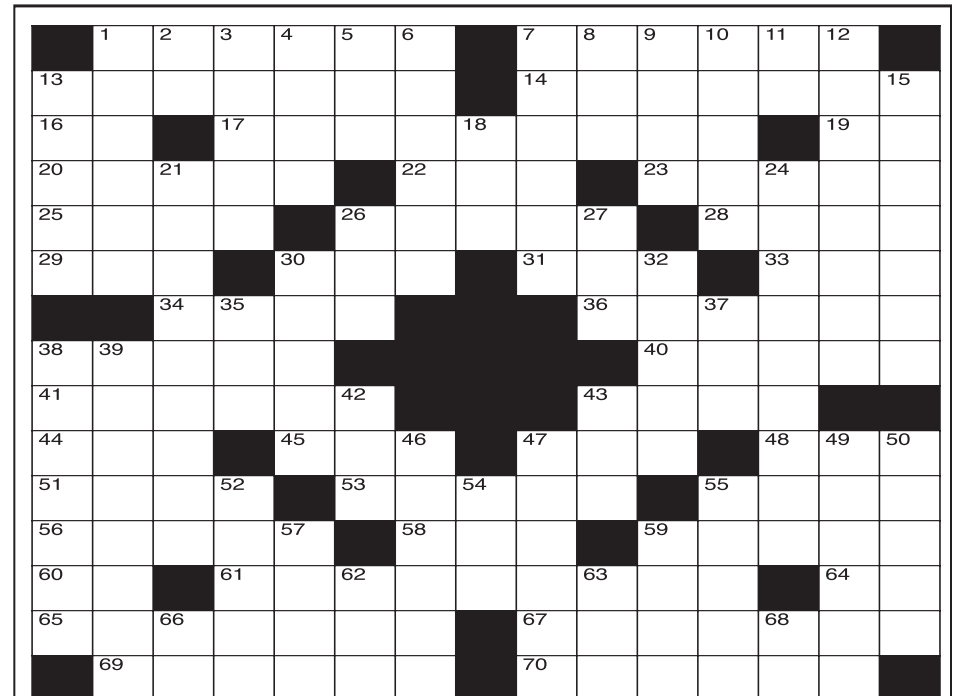
"Part A is no cost for the majority of Medicare beneficiaries, however, if they or their spouse do not have at least 40 quarters of work credits then you have to pay for Part A. That cost is based on the number of quarters you have reported," said Green. "For those with at least 30 quarters, the premium to buy Part A is \$278, a \$4 increase from 2022. Those with

less than 30 quarters pay the full premium of \$506, an increase of \$7."

Green offers more information about Medicare in his recently published book that helps baby boomers and seniors navigate the complex insurance process with advice and tips for better decision-making. "Medicare Breakdown, The Alphabet Soup of Medicare," is offered for free to those interested in learning more at medicarealphabetsoup.com. Green and his team have helped thousands of people in the Medicare and insurance coverage industry.

Green attends numerous conferences and seminars in the Medicare and insurance field each year. Green is a member of the National Association of Health Underwriters, Jacksonville Association of Health Underwriters, Baker County Chamber of Commerce and the Clay Chamber.

For more information, call (904) 717-1176 or email bill@greeninsagency.com. Visit the website at <https://greeninsagency.com>.

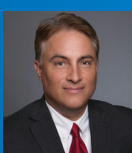


CLUES ACROSS

1. India's 'City of Lakes'
7. Large marine mammals
13. Used to carry belongings when traveling
14. Rechristens
16. Equally
17. Heavy plant-eating mammals
19. Millihenry
20. Japanese immigrant to N. America
22. Deep, red-brown sea bream
23. Norse gods
25. Peppermint and pekoe are two
26. Auguste __, founder of positivism
28. Self-immolation by fire ritual
29. High-resolution microscope (abbr.)
30. Wide metal vessel used in cooking
31. V-shaped open trough
33. People of southern Benin
34. People of southern Ghana
36. It's a significant creed
38. Period between eclipses
40. Furies
41. Emerged
43. Philippine Island
44. Where wrestlers battle
45. Unhappy
47. Central European river
48. Language

CLUES DOWN

51. Semitransparent gemstone
53. Forming in a bottom layer
55. Distinct region
56. Broad blades
58. Leavened bread
59. Influential cosmetics exec
60. Exclamation of surprise
61. Era free of war
64. One who helps professors
65. Idealistic
67. Ornamental plants
69. Grouped
70. Kids love this street
18. An unskilled actor who overacts
21. One who volunteers to help
24. Precaution
26. Beverage holder
27. Very long period of time
30. Bullfighting maneuvers
32. More critical
35. Sends packing in a boxing match
37. Taxi
38. Decorative Russian tea urn
39. North American Great Plains natives
42. Seize
43. A passage with access only at one end
46. Cut a rug
47. Devil rays
49. Bubble up
50. Veranda
52. Outcast
54. Car mechanics group
55. Realm
57. A place to get off your feet
59. Popular music awards show
62. Consumed
63. A way to make cooler
66. Thus
68. Indicates it's been registered



Chris Guzewich Agency Manager

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Farm Bureau receives highest statewide recognition

For The Oakleaf

MIDDLEBURG – The Clay County Farm Bureau has earned a coveted award for its achievements in the past year. The local organization received the Apex Award at the 2022 Florida Farm Bureau Annual Meeting.

The Apex Award is bestowed on a county Farm Bureau that exhibits the highest level of innovation, program effectiveness, involvement of volunteers, and goal achievements in each of the six-member group sizes across the state.

Farm Bureau members support families producing food and fiber in their communities. Agriculture and related enterprises in Clay County provide an economic impact of \$931 each year that supports 19,295 jobs. Clay County Farm Bureau works hard to keep those jobs and dollars in our county.

Our members are also positive contributors to our community. They serve as volunteers in various civic and charitable projects, including the Clay County Fair, Cattlemen's Corporation, U/F IFAS Extension programs such as 4-H and in-school programs like the Future Farmers of

America.

Gayward Hendry, Clay County Farm Bureau President, said members have worked together to earn this award, devoting time and dedication toward achieving common goals.

"Our volunteers are the heart of our organization and it makes me proud to be a part of an organization that works to better the lives of those living in our community," he said.

Farm Bureau members will join their fellow volunteers across the state to lead various activities and programs in the next year. The organization announced its Ag Literacy Reading program will soon start registration. Teachers across the county can sign up to receive a free copy of this year's Ag Literacy book and Farm Bureau volunteers will be in the schools reading to students.

Plans are beginning for the 2023 Ag Venture Field Trips at the Clay County Fair, and the bureau expects to see more than 900 students participate in this educational experience.

For more information about the Clay County Farm Bureau and how to become involved, contact the local office at (904)



From left, Annie Wallau-UF/IFAS Clay County Extension Director, Eugene Hickey-Board Member, Clay County Farm Bureau President Gayward Hendry-President and Clay County Farm Bureau Field Representative for District 3 Greg Harden all shared in Clay County Farm Bureau's Apex Award.

282-0644. The Clay County Farm Bureau is affiliated with the Florida Farm Bureau Federation. Information about the state

organization is available at www.florida-farmbureau.org.

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Irene Toto



Dr. Kenneth A Scheppkie

Clay embarks on program that treats CORE issues of opioid addiction

By Don Coble
don@claytodayonline.com

MIDDLEBURG – After a successful two-year test run in Palm Beach County, Florida’s Coordinated Opioid Recovery program (CORE) will soon expand to seven other counties in the next two months, including Clay County.

State and local officials in the fight against opioid addiction, including Florida Surgeon General Dr. Joseph Ladapo, Asst. Secretary for Substance Abuse and Mental Health for the Florid Department of Children and Families Erica Floyd Thomas, program architect and Deputy Secretary for Health Dr. Kenneth A. Scheppke joined officials with the Clay County Health Department, Fire Rescue and Clay Behavior Tuesday to announce the revolutionary program that’s designed to offer resources to break the vicious cycle of addiction.

“We’re here for a terrible reason in terms of the opioid crisis and all the harm that it has inflicted on Floridians and also around the country,” Ladapo said. “But we’re also here for a really hopeful reason because we’ve come with a part of the solution.”

CORE is a comprehensive approach

that expands overdose responses and treats the primary and secondary impacts of substance abuse disorder.

Floridians battling with addiction can utilize CORE to receive medically assisted treatment that is specialized to sustain a clean pathway to success. CORE will be expanded in two phases. Phase one counties include Clay, Brevard, Duval, Escambia, Gulf, Manatee, Marion, Pasco, and Volusia counties.

Typically, when somebody overdoses, they’re taken to the nearest hospital and released once they are out of danger. Once CORE is operational, an overdose patient will be treated by EMTs and emergency response technicians who have training in substance abuse. They then will be transported to a medical facility that’s also equipped to deal with addictions, similar to someone who is taken to a trauma center.

Treatment will include a sustainable clinical pathway to sobriety, including a transfer to a multi-specialty medical group to start medication-assisted treatment.

“Addiction is heartbreaking for all involved, and we ultimately want to help people address the stress traumas that led them to addiction,” Lapapo said when

To seek help, either as an addict or a family member of an addict, or to get more information on community paramedicine, call (904) 284-7703.

the program was unveiled in August. “One day the standard of care will address the trauma and the stress, but until then we have the evidence-based practices that exist in place.

This program is an applied, intensive application to managing addiction through powerful, effective practice that connects people to what they need to get out of the horrific cycle of addiction.”

The county already has a community paramedicine program that focuses on providing treatment and Narcan kits. To better focus on drug-related emergencies, Clay County Fire Rescue recently opened a community paramedicine office at the Grande Olde Plaza in Middleburg.

“It’s important for us not to underestimate what it means to offer someone a helping hand,” Floyd said. “And that’s our ultimate goal because department we’re able to do that.

The CORE network maximizes those moments of impact by comprehensively connecting the pieces. In addition to hospital services, outpatient treatment, medication-assisted treatment and peer support services.

“We want to make sure that we’re meeting people at the right place, at the right time, in the right moment that we’re able to support them. We know that

substance use disorder is not acute or episodic. It’s a lifelong journey of recovery, and we want to be here on that journey of recovery.”

CCFR Battalion Chief Glenn East, who runs the community paramedicine program, said 24 people have remained sober for at least six months after participating in the county’s program. He also said nearly 200 have been – or still are participating – in the program.

One of the 24, Tammy Bugely, told her gripping story of living as a heroin and fentanyl addict for 20 years. She said she struggled to remain sober for the past 16 months.

“In May, almost two years ago, I overdosed,” she said. “My daughter and my mom found me in the bathroom, blue and almost dead.”

Another facet of the program is stabilizing other challenges facing addicts, like medical and mental health conditions, dental care and social services that can help with career training, housing or food insecurity.

“We can cure a lot of problems in our society,” Scheppke said.

To seek help, either as an addict or a family member of an addict, or to get more information on community paramedicine, call (904) 284-7703.

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STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – Anyone owning a car wash within 25 miles of the Keystone Airport probably had a very busy weekend after the three-day Krawlin’ for the Fallen event. Mud-boggers and trail riders found themselves – and their vehicles – caked with mud – all while bringing awareness to Off-Road United’s program expected to earn \$100,000 to support Gold Star families. “Our goal is to bring the survivors out to bridge the gap between law enforcement and the community,” said Krawlin’ founder Christine Johnson. This weekend’s event, considered one of the largest off-road festivals in Florida, attracted 150 survivors of fallen or injured first responders. There were more than 2,000 visitors to the airport, it also attracted more than 800 Jeeps and 70 vendors. Next year’s Krawlin’ for the Fallen is scheduled for Nov. 10-12, Johnson said.



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Fire from page 5

pretty bad.”

DEP grandfathered the permit for the incinerator after getting approval from the county’s planning and zoning department. The property also complies with the Lake Asbury Master Plan, Mock said.

That’s not a lot of help to Reedy. “Friday night (Nov 4), property owners were watering their homes down,” he said. “The flames were over the top of the trees. It looked like it was raining ash. The neighbors have been told there is nothing that can be done to put it out.

“The property owners of the homes surrounding it are dealing with an abundant amount of stress and trauma from this situation. The smell of the smoke is in their homes; the ash is all over their porches, decks, homes, cars, etc. The cars have to be washed daily just so we can see to drive.

The stress of possibly losing everything they have worked for being lost is indescribable. I have videos of red showers raining down on my property. The ash content is so bad, I can’t breathe.”

Fire and Rescue and the U.S. Forest Service worked together for a week to control the flames. It now appears the fire will have to extinguish itself. The suspected embers from the incinerator probably ignited the fire. Mock said his agency had been called several times to the property



to put out other blazes.

Depending on the wind, the smell of smoke has been detected as far away as Clay Hill, Orange Park, Middleburg and Fleming Island.

What concerns Mock and Reedy is the winds have primarily been from the east, which pushes the smoke westerly. If the wind changes, Mock said it could ignite other 40-foot-tall piles of trees on fire.

“It sounds like we have a real mess,” said Wayne Bolla during his final meeting as the BCC Chairman.

Councilman Mike Cella said county attorney Courtney K. Grimm to explore the possibility of holding the EPA responsible.

“The quality of air there is horrible,” Reedy said. “What I’m asking for is help. Help these guys (Fire Rescue). We have to go outside of Clay County and get help because they’re telling me two to three months for this fire. It’s not acceptable. This can’t happen again.”

Curbside from page 1

request bins. Waste Management already is delivering recycling bins.

The paper products bin is for clean, dry paper products such as newspapers, books, junk mail, shredded paper, and flattened corrugated cardboard cut into 2-foot by three-foot pieces.

The containers bin is for rinsed containers including plastic and glass bottles and jars, aluminum and steel cans, and cartons and juice boxes.

Please place only accepted recyclable items in the bins and keep containers and paper products separate.

Residents can expect their curbside recycling to be picked up on the same day their yard trash is picked up.

Place recycling bins curbside by 6 a.m. on your collection day. Use the “Collection Day Lookup” to find your recycling collection pick-up dates here: www.claycountygov.com/community/garbage-and-recycling/residential-curbside-services-recycling, or select “Curbside Collection” from the Environmental Services home page at “Garbage and Recycling” under the “Community tab.”

Waste Management will continue to service the seven temporary recycling drop-off sites through Dec. 18.

Temporary drop-off locations:

- Fleming Island Library, 1895 Town Center Blvd., Fleming Island, open sunrise to sunset
- Oakleaf Community Park, 3979 Plantation Oaks Blvd, Orange Park, open sunrise to sunset
- Ronnie Van Zant Park, 2760 Sandridge Road, Green Cove Springs, open sunrise to

sunset

- Sunrise Park, 7933 Sunrise Blvd, Keystone Heights, open sunrise to sunset
 - Walter Odum Park, 450 Parkwood Dr., Orange Park, open sunrise to sunset
 - Former Kingsley Lake Volunteer Fire Station, 6343 Seminole St., open sunrise to sunset
 - Omega Park, 4317 County Road 218, Middleburg, open sunrise to sunset
- Residents can continue to bring recycling to the permanent drop-off sites.
- Permanent drop-off sites:
- Clay Hill Environmental Convenience Center, 5869 CR 218, Middleburg, open Thursday through Saturday, 7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.
 - Doctor’s Inlet Environmental Convenience Center, 288 Sleepy Hollow Rd, Middleburg, open Thursday through Saturday, 7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.
 - Keystone Heights Environmental Convenience Center, 5505 CR 214, Keystone Heights, open Thursday through Saturday 7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.
 - Long Bay Environmental Convenience Center, 1589 Long Bay Road, Middleburg, open Thursday through Saturday, 7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.
 - Rosemary Hill Solid Waste Management Facility, 3545 Rosemary Hill Road, Green Cove Springs, open Monday through Saturday, 7:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

Certain items should not be placed in recycling bins because they are considered hazardous or can damage sorting equipment, like medical sharps, plastic bags, Styrofoam, chemical containers, broken glass, window glass or mirrors, aluminum foil and clothes hangers.

There will be no collection on the following holidays: New Year’s Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Single-family homes now for sale at Double Branch in Oakleaf

For The Oakleaf

OAKLEAF – PulteGroup, one of the nation’s leading home builders, announces sales are underway at Double Branch. Located in Double Branch is a new construction community offering single-family homes from the \$300,000s.

“After hosting a successful VIP sales event, we are pleased to officially open at Double Branch,” said Tony Nason, Division President of PulteGroup’s Northeast Florida Division. “Many of today’s buyers are looking for homes in locations that are near outdoor recreation areas and also offer the conveniences of highways and shopping. Our newest single-family home community in Clay County is ideal for families of all ages with its innovative single-family homes built with the homeowner in mind.”

Double Branch offers 50-foot and 60-foot homesites and 11 consumer-inspired, single-family home designs, ranging in size from 1,590 square feet to more than 4,000 square feet. Pulte’s wide range of home plans includes three to seven bedrooms with thoughtfully designed spaces, sophisticated upgrades and spacious modern living. Model homes will open in early 2023. Double Branch has no CDD fees and low HOA dues. The community includes a Fiber Network that provides



fast, reliable, multi-user internet needed in homes today and in the future.

Double Branch residents enjoy a variety of amenities including community parks, a children’s playground, a dog park, nature trails and more. The community is a short drive from state parks and recreational areas.

Double Branch is zoned for excellent schools in the Clay County Public School District that are less than five miles away. The community is less than one mile from the First Coast Expressway and near shopping and retail centers.

Double Branch is located at 3495 Kindewood Dr. For more information, call (904) 604-7656 or visit www.pulte.com/jacksonville.



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O.P. Women's Club raise \$5,310 for Dolly Parton Imagination Library

By **Kylie Cordell**
For *Clay Today*

ORANGE PARK – The Orange Park Woman's Club presented a check for \$5,310 to Delta Kappa Gamma teachers' sorority to help fund the Dolly Parton Imagination Library project in Clay County.

Parton's project provides free books to children from birth to 5 years old. Registration is free of cost and can be done at the hospital when a child is born or online at Imaginationlibrary.com.

"You can fill in your information and then it will then tell you that it is available in your area and point you in the direction of online registration," said Communications Liason for the club, Sandy Keller.

The program is already available in Green Cove Springs and has just become available in the 32073 zip code, which includes Orange Park, Lakeside and Argyle Forest. Spreading a love of education and literacy has been one of many key aspects of the Orange Park Women's Club, a volunteer, non-profit organization and a member of the General Federation of Women's Clubs.

"The women's club was responsible for starting the library services in the community," Keller said. "So the library is a very old part of the mission of the women's club. That's why this project is so important. It's really been a lifelong, organizational journey for supporting education and libraries."

Gale Miller, the Education and Libraries Community Service Program Chairman, agreed.

"Originally, in Orange Park, we helped to establish the library system here, so it really is a legacy that we're carrying out." Having founded more than 474 public libraries and 4,655 traveling libraries in the 1930s, The American Library Association credited GFWC with establishing 75% of America's public libraries. In the 21st century, libraries continue to be an important part of our communities, as demonstrated

by a 2013 survey in which 90% of Americans, ages 16 and older, said the closing of their local public library would have an impact on their community. Literacy is also a catalyst for participating in social, cultural, political and economic activities, and for learning throughout life.

"Kids being exposed to books is so key to education. It predicts how they are going to do in school, and if they perform well in school, it opens doors to be successful in life," Miller said.

According to First Reader Statistics, the greatest amount of brain growth occurs between birth and 5. By the age of 2, children who read regularly display greater language comprehension, larger vocabularies and higher cognitive skills than their peers.

"So I personally feel that it is a great program, and I think it helps our community, and our schools, and hopefully, it will help produce people in the workforce and in society who are contributors," Miller said.

"We want to instill a love of reading in young children," Keller said.

Not only will the program give children a head start on expanding their vocabulary and building independence and self-confidence, but having access to books early in life helps children learn to make sense of the world around them, build social-emotional skills and of course, imagination.

"Each county can partner with the Dolly Parton Imagination library by signing up and guaranteeing a certain amount of money to help fund the shipping cost for those books to that specific area," Keller said.

"But the real goal is to see this across the county," Miller said.

Green Cove Springs was the first to be selected for the program because the organization felt it had the most need for literacy among young children.

"But we are wanting to support Orange Park as well, so we did a fundraiser



to help bring those books to Orange Park," Keller said.

To support the efforts of students, teachers and parents, community organizations raised funds for shipping costs of \$25 a year, for each child at the Orange Park Women's Club's annual Rummage Sale.

"Throughout the year people call us to donate to the annual sale. Over \$5,000 were raised, We also received donations outside of the rummage sale," Keller said.

If you would like to support the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, contact the Orange Park Women's Club. The Committee meets on the first Thursday of each month at 130 Kingsley Ave. Women seeking an opportunity to make a difference and give back to the community are invited to visit orangeparkwomensclub.com for more information. Donations to the Dolly Parton Imagination Library can also be made to Clay Education Foundation.

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SPORTS

FHSAA Swim and Dive Championships



Fleming Island sophomore diver Ava Brinkman soars above the FHSAA scoreboard en route to Class 3A title.

Brinkman, McDade bring home gold

OHS: Loving in two events

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

STUART - Fleming Island High bagged two gold medals at the FHSAA state swimming and diving Class 3A championship meet Friday in Stuart with junior freestyler Maryn McDade successfully defending her 50 free state title and sophomore diver Ava Brinkman overcoming a horrific diving accident to return to the top tier of her sport.

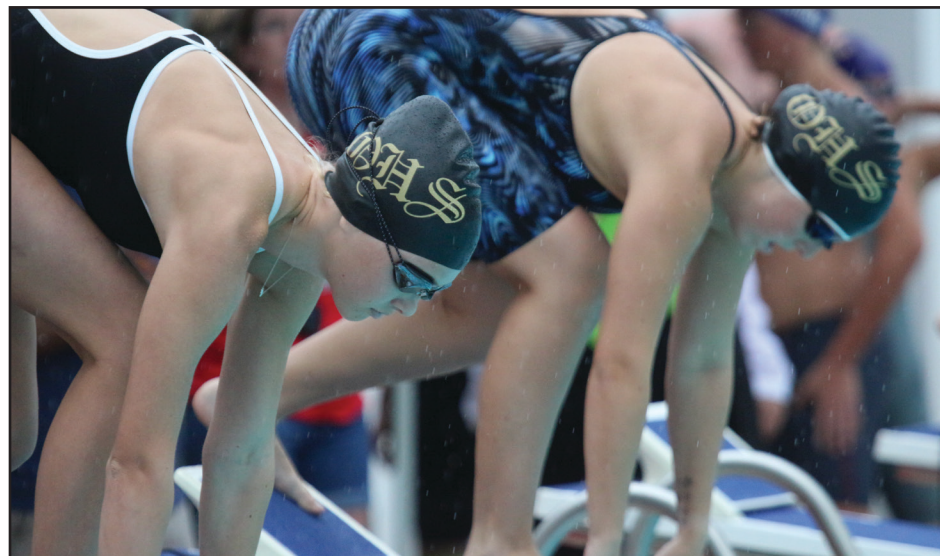
Brinkman, who as a freshman registered one of the top scores statewide in

her district championships last year, had a diving accident in the week prior to regions that ended her spectacular climb as one of the top upcoming divers in Florida.

"It was definitely a surreal experience especially with everything that I went through with the accident," said Brinkman, who scored 448.85 points for the gold with runnerup Hadley Futch of Winter Springs keeping chase with a 441.80. "I think it was incredible to see how I grew up within myself and made my way back to win the state championship."

For Andrea Brinkman, Ava's mom, the anxiety of watching the year of recovery, the return to national level competition and the training to return to the state high school diving ranks was

SEE GOLD, XX



Oakleaf High swimmers key for start of race in action this season. Knights got a handful of swimmers to state with Peyton Loving competing in two events.



Oakleaf High linebacker Shaquille Quarterman, who was part of undefeated playoff season for Knights football, accepts jersey in frame from Athletic Director Marcus Miller, left, and Principal Matthew Boyack in jersey retirement ceremony.

Knights end season with win

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

OAKLEAF - Oakleaf High football coach Marcus Miller, thrust into the position by the unexpected departure of Frank Garis over the summer, finished up his interim campaign with a five win, five loss season that teetered through most of the season at breakneck speed.

Miller started the season with a 45-8 win over Orange Park that showed off the Knights ability to score behind quarterback Drew Ammons, wide receiver Taylor Bradshaw and running back Devin Outlaw.

An excruciating 25-20 loss to Baker County, now in the region playoffs round two, Miller saw a vulnerability with inopportune penalties that boded some adjustment.

From there, the Knights responded with two wins; a 35-14 over Hollist Christian, a small startup school program, and a thrilling, quick-hitting district blasting of Fleming Island, 26-20 (Ammon 240 Yds passing, 2TDs, 70 Yard scoring bomb to Carlos Witherup), that seemed to propel the Knights into the playoff conversation.

From there, Miller saw some of his best football played and some of his less than best football as the Knights battled back-to-back-to-back playoff bound teams; Chiles, Creekside and Buchholz down to the wire in all three, but ultimately, all three ending in tragic final minute losses; 27-23, 49-48 and 45-31. Creekside and Buchholz are still playing



Oakleaf running back Devin Outlaw finds room in Knights' win over Madison County.

in the Class 4S playoffs with wins in the quarterfinals. Against Chiles, Bradshaw had career night with 10 catches, 206 yards and two scores; Ammon passed for 403 yards but Oakleaf, with a thrilling second half comeback failed on a late fourth quarter fourth down situation at the Chiles goal line.

A strong, but outmanned Madison County team brought back-to-back Class 1A state titles to Oakleaf, but the Knights took care of business, 27-21,

SEE FOOTBALL, 13



Oakleaf Renegades quarterback Elijah Baker gets center snap from teammate Andric Rashert in Pop Warner second round playoff win, 12-0, against Augusta United of Georgia. Renegades advance to round three and shot at Pop Warner National Tournament on Saturday at Oceanway Park in Jacksonville.



Oakleaf Renegade linebacker Jaquavion Valentine wraps up Augusta United quarterback for sack.



Renegades coach Carlos Lowe addresses team during timeout. Below: Renegades defensive front had goal line stand late in game.



Three Pointer

Oakleaf High guard Kamiya Jones lets fly with her patented corner three pointer in preseason clash with Creekside.

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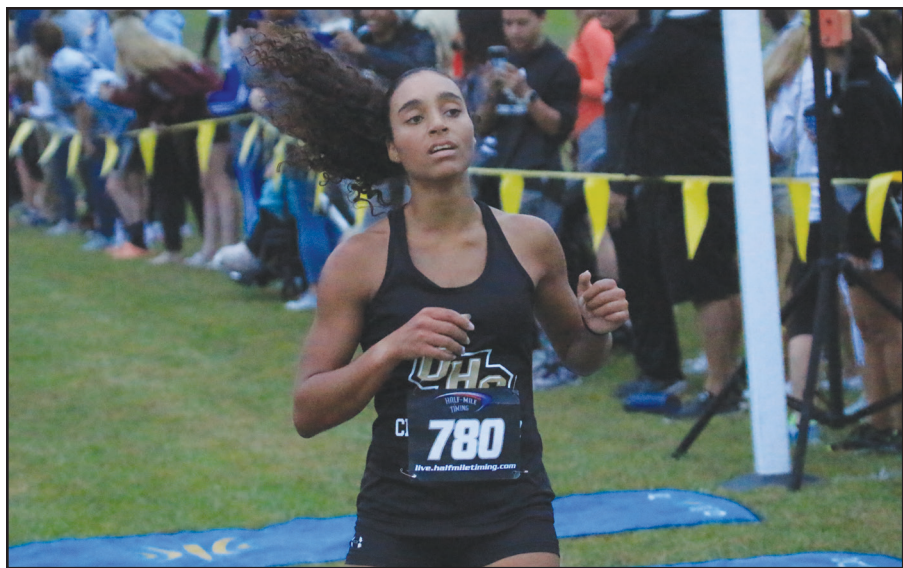
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Oakleaf High senior Sierra Barrera capped strong season with eighth place finish in Class 4A.

Barrera eighth at state XC

By Randy Lefko
Sports Editor

TALLAHASSEE - Fleming Island High junior Graham Myers was slowly approaching a possible triple play of cross country with his recent district and region titles, but his journey for the third prong; the Class 3A title, fell short only because the defending Class 3A champion decided to set a new state course record on the same day.

"He (Patrick Koon, Leon, defending state champion) went out really fast on the first mile, like 4:38, and me and another guy were chasing at 4:46," said Myers. "My dad had suggested going out at 4:50 and having some energy at the end which may have worked. I pleased I had some gas at the end to chase down Ruiz (Joshua Ruiz of Belen Jesuit, runnerup for eventual team champions) just not enough real estate."

Myers, third in an outstanding 15 minute, 42.10 second effort, watched from the lead chase pack as defending champion Patrick Koon, of Leon, pulled away decisively at the second mile to garner his second straight title in 14:56.70. Koon's run was the fastest time ever posted on the Apalachee Regional Park tough, hill course.

As the runners passed mile one on the course, Koon was closer to both Ruiz and Myers in a 4:38 opener with his chasers at 4:46, but Koon blasted the second mile extend away from the field smoothly with a 9:30 two mile split with Ruiz and Myers 14 seconds off the pace.

"He just took off at the top of the hill," said Myers. "This is his home course and he has probably run that hill a hundred times. It was decisive."

In second place, Belen Jesuit, a 10-time state title team, had junior Joshua Ruiz able to hold off Myers' surges in the final mile to take the runnerup at 15:37.30 to hold off a big move by Myers. Belen Jesuit eventual finished with four top 10 finishers to win the state

title again with Fort Myers; led by fourth placer Joseph Koraya in 15:47.20 behind Myers.

All three frontrunners broke early from the main pack of chase runners to stage their own mano-a-mano battle for the title.

From there, teams battled after withstanding the furious front pace and settled in to get runners in at 21st (John Keester IV in 16:32.60), 36th (Danny Sakowski in 17:00.91) and 39th (Jacob Campbell in 17:02.90) to secure the third place team finish. Fleming Island had slight edges in their 2-3-4-5 finishers just ahead of Leon's quartet in.

"We were missing our good freshman Andrew Boyer to a flu and, I think, if he had a 17 minute finish, we catch Fort Myers for second place," said Myers.

Belen Jesuit scored at 34 points with Fort Myers at 125 and Fleming Island at 144. Leon was fourth at 168 with the rest of the field over 200 points.

Ridgeview High senior Julio Rodriguez finished 106th in 17:55.80.

In the girls Class 4A race, Oakleaf High senior Sierra Barrera finished eighth with a 19:09.90 effort after back-to-back finishes under 19 minutes at her district and region races. Barrera faced off as a chaser of a front running pace group that included eventual winner Emma O'Day of Boca Raton who won in 18:23.90 on the tough, hilly course. Just five runners in the girls race finished under 19 minutes.

In the team scoring, defending 4A champion Buchholz repeated as champions with Barrera finishing ahead of all of the Buchholz runners after finishing among the Bobcats top three runners at district and regions.

Just one local runner, Creekside freshman Alyson Johnson finished ahead of Barrera with her sixth place finish with Buchholz' first runner in at 11th.

Behind Buchholz were Braddock High, Niceville and Creekside.

Football

from page 11

before readying for a clash with look time rival Bartram Trail in a pivotal district game that was last chance to sneak into region playoffs.

Bartram Trail, to meet Buchholz in the region 1-4S semifinals, took care of business with a 55-20 rout that ended the Knights' playoff hopes.

Oakleaf ended their season with a strong 49-14 win over Clay High.

Ammon finished the season with 1680 yards passing, 18 touchdowns and just eight interceptions, plus 365 yards rushing with three scores.

Bradshaw finished with 42 catches for 684 yards with eight touchdowns, plus two interceptions on defense. Witherup had 24 catches with four touchdowns.

Outlaw finished with 964 yards rushing with 13 touchdowns and five 100-plus yard games.

On defense, sophomore secondary ace Drake Stubbs was the enforcer for the Knights with 78 stops; three for losses and two interceptions. Bryson Keitt also had two picks for the Knights defense. Sophomore DaJon Brown led the Knights with 79 tackles and 12 tackles for losses plus four sacks. Defensive tackle Prince Savea was strong middle man for Oakleaf with 58 tackles and six sacks.

Gold

from page 11

somewhat relieved by daughter Ava's precision through the three rounds of state meet competition.

"I guess the year past really fast, from the hospital to not going to state to working hard to return and then, all of sudden, we are at state," said Andrea Brinkman. "It all hit me when she did the last dive and I knew there were three other girls that could have caught her but I knew they were not able to score enough with their dives to catch her. I knew she had won."

Ava Brinkman was unaware of her position on the leaderboard until the very end when mom Andrea motioned to look at the scoreboard behind her.

"Throughout all of my competitions, I hardly ever look at the scoreboard except to see my scores," said Ava Brinkman, who was also district and region champion. "After my last dive, I looked to see who was in position to possibly catch me."

Brinkman's clutch dive that separated her from her two chasers; Hutch and St. Thomas Aquinas' Kaitlyn Raby (third at 438.60) was her final dive.

"I felt like they were both ahead of me before that last dive and I scored an 8 and an 8.5 on my back one and a half half," said Brinkman. "When I hit that one, I felt good that they were not going to catch me."

McDade, who quietly last year blitzed the pool to her first state title in her specialty; the 50 freestyle, warded off all challengers; mainly a pesky duo from Ponte Vedra High School, to complete the mission a second time only this time with a bit more tension involved.

In her prelims, McDade had to fend off Ponte Vedra sophomore sensation Penelope Zarczynski, a district and region rival in the prior

two weeks. McDade smoothly ripped her fastest 50 of the season with a 23.39 with Zarczynski just off at 23.42 and Seminole's Mahya Golubovic third at 23.47 in one of the tightest races up to that point.

In the final, the 1-2-3 stayed the same with McDade hitting the turbo to knock her time down to 23.07 to win with Zarczynski runnerup at 223.36 and Golubovic third at 23.49 as the trio delivered one of the highest races in recent history.

Zarczynski turned the tables on McDade in the 100 free with a gold with McDade fourth. McDade was tied for second last year in the 100 free.

In other races, Fleming Island junior Dylan Ducut finished 16th in the Boys 50 free in 22.33. Ducut was disqualified in the 100 butterfly as well.

In the 500 free, Fleming Island freshman Elizabeth Loehr finished 18th with a 5:18.34 effort. The winner's time was 4:59.30. McDade teamed with Kelsey Bright, Katelyn Moore and Rielly Hurley in the 200 free relay that finished 16th and the 400 free relay that finished 13th.

In the 100 backstroke, Fleming Island's David Goodwin finished 16th in 56.73 with the winner at 48.47.

Fleming Island finished 13th in women's team scores with Ponte Vedra winning the top spot.

For the boys, Nease won the state title with Fleming Island at 43rd.

Orange Park's Sebastian Lopez finished 12th in the 100 free with a 48.46. The winner was at 45.17.

Lopez also finished 22nd in the 100 breaststroke.

Lopez later teamed with Gavin Dobson, Aston Danninger and Kaden Danninger to get 11th in the 200 free relay in 1:31.33. The winner was 1:25.72.

For Oakleaf, sophomore Peyton Loving finished 12th in the 100 breast stroke at 1:08.98 with a prelim split of 1:07.77. The winner was at 1:01.94.

Loving also finished 19th in the 50 free at 25.25. Loving teamed with Olivia Votava, Delicia Coleman and Jazzmine Moore to get 14th in the 200 medley relay and 13th in the 200 free relay.

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- Separate care station so the baby can room in with mom
- Resort-style decor
- Large spa-like bathrooms
- Recliner/gliders and sleeper sofas
- Plenty of storage room for mom and family
- Large windows for natural light
- Mini-fridges in each suite
- 55" flat-screen TVs



A sneak peek at our large and comfy L&D suites.

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For more information about Baptist Clay, visit baptistjax.com/clay

To find an OB who will deliver at Baptist Clay, call **202.4HER**.



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