

KHJH's Reddish 'eradicates' competition at Spelling Bee

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By Don Coble don@Claytodayonline.com

LAKE ASBURY – The word eradicate means to destroy. For Keystone Heights Junior High's Rena Reddish, it's a word that clinched Tuesday night's Clay County District School's Annual Spelling Bee at Lake Asbury Junior High.

SEE BEE, 6

From left, Third place St. Johns Country Day SchoolMax Rivera, second place Orange Park Junior High Andreas Alvarez and winner Keystone Heights Junior High Rena Reddish finished in top three at Clay Spelling Bee.



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Fleming Island High AICE students hoist Brady White after he became the county's first to win U.S. Senate Youth program award.

Brady White honored in surprise ceremony at Fleming Island High

Senior first from Clay County to be selected for U.S. Senate Youth Program

By Don Coble don@claytodayonline.com

FLEMING ISLAND – Brady White only expected a one-on-one interview with Clay Today when he was called to the office on Friday, Jan. 27.

He didn't know he was walking into what proved to be one of the best-kept secrets on the Fleming Island High campus.

As he entered the Hall of Champions lobby, he saw Florida Rep. Sam Garrison.

And his parents. Then Florida Sen. Jennifer Bradley. He also noticed his parents, who were supposed to be out of town.

His shock turned into excitement when he saw his classmates in his AICE class. That's when he knew something big was about to happen.

White learned on Jan. 10 he was selected to receive the rare U.S. Senate Youth Program scholarship. What surprised him was how everyone else reacted to the accomplishment.

Federal, state, county and school officials planned to commemorate White's accomplishment for two weeks. The difficult part was keeping it a secret.



"When it actually happened, I was like, wow, because I'm very involved politically," the senior said. "I've never seen that many of the officials in one place at one time. It just meant the world to me."

Garrison and Bradley were joined by Superintendent David Broskie, members of the school board, county commission, Fleming Island High administration and a representative from U.S. Rep. Alan Bean's office.

"I cannot believe, honestly, that that happened," White said. "I was told it was just going to be a one-on-one interview."

The Senate Youth Program will allow White to join 103 other high school juniors and seniors for a weeklong, behind the scene, look at how Congress works. White and another student from Miami will represent Florida, and they will shadow Senators Marco Rubio and Rick Scott. White is the only student from Clay County to win the

"I entered this world, I have always been told politics is so dysfunctional," White said. "I found the best people in politics really want to be better for the community."

White had to write an essay, provide details of his community service, and show recommendations from school, civic and elected officials.

White is the Chairman of the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council and the only student with the Clay Education Foundation.

Fleming Island Principal Thomas Pittman told Broskie White's work with the Student Advisory Council has helped bridge the gap between educators and students.

"This is a group of students that give

a voice for the district's leadership to hear what students are thinking, what issues are important to students," Pittman said. "He's advocated on your behalf. And has done an admirable job of leading a very diverse group. I would say some are strong-willed people. There's no doubt Brady has the drive to be successful in life and is a real example."

Pittman also suggested White's political ambition may go all the way to the White House.

"Someday he might be in charge of all of us," he said.

White will attend the University of Florida next year and study Political Science with hopes of someday being a Judge Advocate General lawyer in the U.S. Navy. A portion of his college expenses will be offset by a \$10,000 scholarship that came with the Senate Youth Program selection.

"I worked for Senator Rubio on his campaign, so that's kind of like why I'm so excited because I'll be able to see him now in his official capacity rather than just his campaign capacity," White said. "That'll be very interesting.

"I've never met Rick Scott, so that'll be cool as well. I should have met the President (Joe Biden) actually in July because I was one of the two to represent the state at Voice Nation. We were supposed to meet the President, but that was the week he had COVID, so he had to quarantine. We couldn't meet him, but we got to meet his dog."

This time, White will join Rubio and Scott at a reception for all Senate Youth Program winners. That gathering usually attracts as many as 80 from the House of Representatives.



Clay County School News is published monthly by Clay Today. 3513 U.S. Highway 17, Fleming Island, Florida 32003 For advertising information: 904-264-3200



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Oakleaf graduate completes U.S. Navy Ceremonial Guard training

By Rick Burke

Navy Office of Community Outreach

MILLINGTON, Tenn. Seaman Damarious Flowers recently completed an intensive 10-week training program to become a member of the elite U.S. Navy Ceremonial Guard.

The Oakleaf High and Liberty University graduate joined the Navy six months ago. Today, Flowers serves as a U.S. Navy Ceremonial Guardsman.

"I joined the Navy to follow in my father's footsteps and to build a better future for me and my family," said Flowers.

Established in 1931, the Ceremonial Guard is the official honor guard of the U.S. Navy and is based at Naval District Washington Anacostia Annex in Washington, D.C.

According to Navy officials, the U.S. Navy Ceremonial Guard's primary mission is to represent the service in the Presidential,



Seaman Damarious Flowers

Joint Armed Forces, Navy, and public ceremonies in and around the nation's capital. Members of the Navy Ceremonial Guard participate in some of our nation's most prestigious ceremonies, including Presidential inaugurations and arrival ceremonies for foreign officials.

"The biggest thing I've learned since being at the guard is how important attention to detail is for a military man," said Flowers.

Sailors of the Ceremonial Guard are hand selected while attending boot camp at Recruit Training Command in Great Lakes, Illinois. Strict military order and discipline, combined with teamwork, allow the Ceremonial Guard to fulfill their responsibilities with pride and determination. They are experts in close-order drill, coordination and timing.

The Ceremonial Guard is comprised of the drill team, color guard, casket bearers and firing party. "I enjoy the comradery between the platoons, as everyone holds each other to higher standards," said Flowers. "I also like the opportunity we have to honor our fallen shipmates."

"Making it out of training is the biggest thing I felt that I've accomplished since making it out of boot camp," he said.

As a member of the U.S. Navy, Flowers, as well as other sailors, know they are part of a service tradition providing unforgettable experiences through leadership development, world affairs and humanitarian assistance."I believe serving in the Navy means to continue my family's military legacy, by following in my father's footsteps and giving back to my country," added Flowers. "I'm also picking up where my fallen shipmates left off."



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DAYTONA BEACH – Most race fans visited the Daytona International Speedway on Friday, Feb. 17, to watch the Craftsman Truck Series opener. But a large contingent went to the World Center of Racing to hear the Keystone Heights High chorus sing during pre-race ceremonies, followed by the band playing the Star Spangled Banner – all while the school's JROTC presented colors. The JROTC returned the next day to present colors ahead of the Xfinity Series race. The school has been invited back to NASCAR's most prominent racing weekend for several years.







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Navy SEAL Virtual Reality Experience makes stop at Oakleaf High School

By Don Coble don@claytodayonline.com

OAKLEAF – Alliyah Turner leaned as if she was riding in a boat, speeding along a waterway and carving a path through a series of turns. She turned the steering wheel and maneuvered the throttle to avoid running ashore in a simulated U.S. Navy SEAL virtual experience presentation. The Oakleaf High junior was invited to the Virtual Reality Experience in the school's parking lot last Tuesday. She was one of nearly 600 students who talked to recruiters, virtually piloted a high-speed boat and watched displays for STEM-related careers.

"Mainly, it's JROTC and Aerospace students, but students from Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes were invited," said Aerospace Team instructor Ellis Bowler.

The Navy Outreach and Diverstiy program makes selected stops at high schools. The team at Oakleaf was at Palm Coast High last week, and their stop was Phoenix this week.

According to the Navy, the program identifies high-ability students who excel in high-demand Navy STEM fields, such as nuclear engineering, cryptology, IT and health care. The Navy also shared information about its \$180,000 ROTC Scholarship Program, which pays full college tuition for students with exceptional academic and leadership credentials.

The main attraction will be the Nimitz, a mobile, state-of-the-art virtual reality experience that simulates an actual highspeed Navy SEAL mission.

"We (were) extremely excited to spend time at Oakleaf High School, meeting with the exceptional students and faculty, and discussing the great opportunities available in today's Navy," says LCDR Claudia Alday, with Navy Diversity and Outreach. "It is important for today's high school students to understand that a Navy STEM career offers an exceptional future."

Participants go through a video briefing before strapping on an Oculus Rift



Nearly 600 students, most from Oakleaf High's Aerospace and JROTC programs, were treated to a day of virtual and physical challenges during a Virtual Reality Experience program and recruitment.

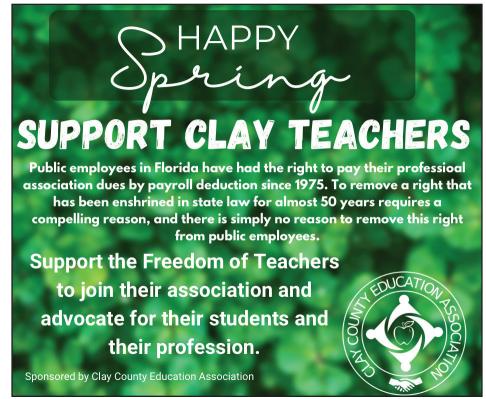


headset and a piece of wearable technology called a SubPac (traditionally used by Club DJs) that percusses in real time to the sounds of the mission. Students then navigate the mission using a cutting-edge steering wheel and throttle system replicating the actual sensation of piloting a high-speed SWCC boat. Once finished, participants move to the debriefing station, where they receive feedback and a performance grade.



STAFF PHOTOS BY DON COBLE

Aaliyah Turner, a junior, virtually operated the controls of a boat as part of a program that will offer a \$180,000 Reserve Officer Training Corps scholarship for students seeking a STEM career.



Bee from page 1

The eighth grader survived 12 rounds of words and 35 other competitors to advance to the Northeast Florida Regional Spelling Bee with a chance to move to the Scripps National Spelling Bee on May 28 in Maryland.

"I guess I've always been a good speller," Reddish said. "The only word I was worried about was the one in the secondto-last round."

But she still spelled "reverberate" without any problem.

After Reddish correctly spelled "succumb" in the 11th round, Orange Park Junior High's Andreas Alvarez missed "follicle." Reddish easily spelled "eradicate" to earn the applause of Superintendent David Broskie, school board members Mary Bolla and Beth Clark, school district teachers and families.

Seven spellers were eliminated in the first round, and the field whittled to 18 after 11 missed words in the second round.

The field narrowed to eight for Round 7 and six misspelled their words to leave



Rena Reddish an eighth grader from Keystone Heights Junior High and Orange Park Jnuior High's Andreas Alvarez wait for their turn.

Reddish and Alvarez. They correctly spelled their words for three rounds before Alvarez's miss in Round 11. News of Reddish's accomplishment got back to Keystone Heights before she did. The City Council honored their speller at Monday night's monthly meeting.



With the word eradicate Rena Reddish takes the win to become the Clay County District School's Spelling bee champion.



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Topping out Reystone

Superintendent David Broskie, school board members, community members, and Keystone Heights Elementary School teachers and staff enjoyed a topping out and beam signing ceremony to celebrate the school's news cafetorium.



Judges impressed at Clay Rotary Science and Engineering Fair

County's top 109 students bring ingenious projects to fairgrounds

By Don Coble

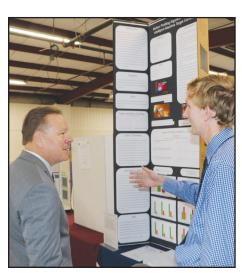
don@claytodayonline.com GREEN COVE SPRINGS – When Aaliyah (Devin) Callahan enrolled at Clay High after being home-schooled for three years, she was terrified by what she saw. The restrooms were filled with vape smoke and there were several mentions of drug use.

"It hit me like a truck," she said. "I was surprised seeing it in high school."

That gave Callahan an idea for this year's Clay Rotary Science and Engineering Fair. She posted a questionnaire on social media and placed QR codes on the walls at the school to solicit information about the connection between anxiety and drug use.

The message was: "Are you diagnosed with anxiety? Do you partake in drug use? (EX. weed, nicotine, alcohol, methamphetamines, ect.?)

"The school let me put up the QR codes and everything was anonymous," Callahan said. "I also put a Google Form on social media and kept it up for two weeks and four days. I cut it off at 150 people."



Callahan broke down her results to include boys, girls and others. Her results were telling: Anxiety does increase the chance of drug use.

Judges liked her method, experiment, hypothesis and conclusion enough to give her the second-place award Tuesday in the Combined Behavioral, Social, Biomedical and Health Science category.

This year's science fair attracted 109 entries at the Clay County Fairgrounds. Winners were announced Wednesday



Judge Tori Granese and Keystone Heights Elementary sudent Carter Andrews discuss his Science Fair project Tuesday. See list of winners pages 8-9

night at Orange Park High.

"These projects are so impressive," said Superintendent David Broskie. "It's amazing how they come up with these ideas. We certainly have a lot of talented students in this county."



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2023 CLAY ROTARY SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING FAIR WINNERS

Combined Animal Sciences

1st Place: NataLee LuPau 2nd Place: Tyler Brock

Combined Behavioral, Social, Biomedical & Health Sciences

1st Place: Merrick Rapoza 2nd Place: Aaliyah (Devin) Callahan 3rd Place: Layla Glover

> Combined Cellular/ Molecular Biology, Biochemistry, & Microbiology

1st: Phoenix Ricketts **2nd:** Ameerah Mata

Junior Chemistry A

1st: Emily Stoehr **2nd:** Hartley Georges

Junior Chemistry B

1st: Gracie Foster **2nd:** Caitlyn Garrett

Senior Chemistry

1st: Emma Duong2nd: Dylan Barclay3rd: Haron Brown, Justice Deazle, Niurka Ortiz Burgos

Junior Earth & Environmental Sciences A

1st: Lyla Goddard **2nd:** Cadence Bandor

> Junior Earth & Environmental Sciences B

1st: Chandani Armogan **2nd:** Garrett McClain

> Senior Earth & Environmental Sciences A

1st: Sophia Versage **2nd:** Kayleigh Fonseca

Senior Earth & Environmental Sciences B

1st: Prisha Dabhi, Autumn Dib, Ylliria Hernandez **2nd:** Shayla Brown, Wain Sulph, Brenda Torres

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Junior Engineering

1st: Brody Toves2nd: Sebastian Jennings3rd: Aurora Norman, Aubrey Schultz

Senior Engineering

1st: Ethan Robinson

1st: William Davis

Combined Environmental Engineering

Combined Mathematics, Robotics, Intelligent Machines, & Systems Software

1st: Alexander Gordon

Junior Physics & Astronomy

1st: William Rogers2nd: Joshua Mason3rd: William McGready

Senior Physics & Astronomy

1st: Aliyah Davis 2nd: Austin Hallett

Junior Plant Sciences A

1st: Dylan Baker **2nd:** Avah Strickland

Junior Plant Sciences B

1st: Logan Hauselman, Nathan McDuffie **2nd:** Ravin Bastin

Senior Plant Sciences

1st: Taylor Dean 2nd: Danielle Fleurant, Valerie Santini-Ayala, Angel Zheng

SPECIAL AWARDS

American Psychological Association: Laura Herndon

Association for Women Geoscientists: Kayleigh Fonseca

Lemelson Early Inventor Prize: Joshua Chun, Antonio Estrada

NASA Earth System Science Award: Haley Sutherland

2023 CLAY ROTARY SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING FAIR WINNERS

National Geographic Award: Maeve Byrnes, Saumara Robinson

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: Sanaa Lee

Naval Science Awards: Junior Level - William Rogers, Lyla Goddard; Senior Level - Haley Sutherland, Dylan Barclay

Office of Naval Research - U.S. Navy/ U.S. Marine Corps: Regeneron Biomedical Science Award: Danielle Fleurant, Valerie Santini-Ayala, Angel Zheng Ricoh USA, Inc.: Sanaa Lee

Sherman O'Brien Excellence in Physics Award: Junior Level - Brody Toves; Senior Level - Ethan Robinson

Society for In Vitro Biology: Phoenix Ricketts

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID): Aliyah Davis

U.S. Metric Association: Aliyah Davis

U.S. Stockholm Junior Water Prize: Aliyah Davis, Ravien Johnson, and Isabella Amador & Riley Chapman

United States Air Force Yale Science and Engineering Association: Haley Sutherland

Robot Wheels' Effect

and Accur

Agility



Ridgeview's Sanaa Lee and Judge Richard Segall talk about her project "Water Filtration Utlizing Nitrate-Selective Resin and Passive Currents Generated by Hurricane Forces."

THERMO FISHER JUNIOR INNOVATORS CHALLENGE

Chandani Armogan Dylan Baker Gracie Foster Lyla Goddard William Rogers Emily Stoehr

STATE FAIR NOMINEES

Joshua Antonio Dylan Barclay Joshua Chun & Antonio Estrada Aliyah Davis Angelo De La Rosa Emma Duong Michael Gilkey Alexander Gordon Austin Hallett Merrick Rapoza Phoenix Ricketts

INTERNATIONAL FAIR NOMINEES

Emma Duong Alexander Gordon



STAFF PHOTO BY DON COBLE Science Fair judge Richard Segall listens to Orange Park Junior High's Joshua Chun as he explaines how the wheels effect the agility and accuracy of a robotic machine.



Ridgeview's NJROTC Cadet Pass in Review attracts dignitaries

ORANGE PARK – Retired Rear Adm. Daniel Fillion joined Superintendent David Broskie, school board members Beth Clark and Ashley Gilhousen and U.S. Navy Cmdr. Jon Moore at the Ridgeview High Navy JROTC Cadet Pass in Review Ceremony on Friday, Feb. 10. Moore is the commander of the P-8 Poseidon Fleet Introduction Team from NAS JAX. Cadets participate in community service projects, civic programs, and educational field trips throughout the year.







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Fleming Island's Janae Jordan wins Patti Grace Smith Fellowship grant

Jordan was one of a handful of students in the country to earn grant

By Don Coble don@claytodatonline.com

Janae Jordan's career path has been like a ride on a spaceship – meteoric with a seemingly-scripted course.

As a child, she loved building Ikea furniture and playing with LEGOs, which led her to take engineering classes at Lakeside Junior High. That led to studying robotics and a seventh-grade trip to the Duke Talent Identification Program. The only courses available at Duke were aerospace engineering, so her future continued to be narrowly refined.

Now a freshman at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach,

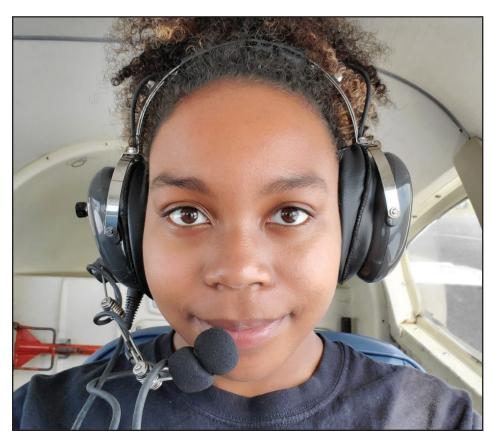
Jordan was one of a handful of students in the country to earn the Patti Grace Smith Fellowship.

The honor comes with paid internships at industry-leading firms, professional mentoring and grants of as much as \$2,000. For the third consecutive year, Embry-Riddle had the most students selected for this award of any university in the country.

"When I was at Duke TIP, I took the (aerospace engineering) class and it was fun," the Fleming Island High graduate said. "It wasn't as hard as I thought it would be. That's when I thought maybe this is what I want to do with my career. That's how it all happened."

The fellowship is offered to Black students as a "commitment to help African-Americans around the world to get their foot in the door," Jordan said. It recognizes students based on excellence in academics, creativity, ingenuity and serving others to help promote diversity in the aerospace sector, including in engineering, science, policy and more.

"We are delighted to continue to find excited, driven and talented students that want to bring Black excellence into aerospace," said Tiffany Russell Lockett, cofounder of the Patti Grace Smith Fellowship. "Our goal is always to bring the best students forward for our host companies to consider, and this is the



Janae Jordan

most competitive class to date. With the highest number of applicants ever, we are excited to see where this class goes and how we will continue to make an impact in the future."

The annual fellowship is given to 31 students a year.

For Jordan, it was another step in a complicated life. Her mother died of a brain tumor when she was 11. Her academic records were lost when her school closed, which forced her to retake all of her placement exams. Suddenly she was a year behind her classmates.

"However, this gave me the motiva-



tion to catch up in any way possible," she said.

To catch up, Jordan took dual classes that got her back on track with the rest of her class and helped her earn college credits. Her success in those courses led to scholarships and, eventually, to acceptance into Embry-Riddle.

After graduation, Jordan hopes to work in the design and manufacturing of rockets or planes.

Now majoring in Aerospace Engineering, Jordan will do her internship at BryceTech in Alexandria, Virginia.

"We couldn't be prouder of our students chosen for this prestigious award," said Russell Griffin, Embry-Riddle's chief diversity and inclusion officer. "These Patti Grace Smith Fellowship winners exemplify how Embry-Riddle's deep focus on readiness for aerospace engagement extends to all our students, making them standouts to and for the industry."



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