

Drug arrests made as part of multijurisdictional Operation Relentless

Page 3

WAKULLA WeatherSTEM
Weather forecast from Wakulla High School

Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Sunny Hi: 71° Lo: 52° 83% Sunrise 7:32 AM Sunset 5:46 PM	PM Rain Hi: 69° Lo: 59° 75% Sunrise 7:32 AM Sunset 5:47 PM	Thunderstorms Hi: 69° Lo: 60° 91% Sunrise 7:33 AM Sunset 5:47 PM



\$1 One Section

Locally Owned & Operated

Our 1st Year, 45th Issue
Thursday, December 29, 2022

Guilty of murder

Sentenced to life plus 45 years for the murder of Brittany Steier in July 2020

By WILLIAM SNOWDEN
Editor

Edward Harris, known by the nickname "June," was found guilty of first degree premeditated murder this week for the killing of Brittany Steier in July 2020.

Harris had two children with Steier. He shot her to death while she was picking up the children from his house – one of the children was being placed in a car seat and the other was on her hip as he began shooting her.

It took the 12-person jury less than 15 minutes to return a guilty verdict after a two-day trial.

Wakulla Circuit Judge Layne Smith, who presided over the trial, went right into sentencing – since the mandatory sentence for first degree

murder is life in prison – and sentenced Harris to an additional 45 years in prison on other charges including child neglect, felony fleeing and eluding, and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.

Harris showed no reaction when the verdict was read or when he was sentenced.

But emotions were high for family members on both sides – tears were flowing in the courtroom after the verdict as Steier's family members gave victim impact statements to Judge Smith about their loss and grief.

At the end of the proceedings, after Harris was fingerprinted by deputies and allowed to say goodbye to family members, a disturbance erupted in the courtroom as one of Harris'



Edward 'June' Harris

family members pointed a finger at another woman, later identified as Tamika Nelson, and yelled: "If it wasn't for you, Brittany would still be alive!" The two women made moves toward each other as though to fight but were quickly separated by bailiffs. A few minutes later, out in the courthouse parking lot, the women were again separated by law enforcement and told to go home.

Harris has four chil-

dren by Nelson. At the trial, evidence was presented that Harris texted her minutes before Steier arrived at his house to tell her he loved her and asking her forgiveness.

The trial was the last for Wakulla Chief Prosecutor Brian Miller, who will take over as county judge next week.

Testimony and evidence presented by the state indicated that Harris shot Steier as she put their 2-year-old son in a car seat in her van, with their 1-year-old daughter on her hip.

Steier's friend, Heather Helms, was in the passenger seat of the van – and her 9-year-old daughter was in the third row of seats. She had gone along with Steier to pick up the kids thinking it would help calm any potential trouble.

Turn to Page 3

Barbara Spears killed in traffic crash

By WILLIAM SNOWDEN
Editor

Barbara Spears, of Spring Creek, who operated Spears and Sons Seafood alongside her husband Lee Nell Spears for years, was killed in a traffic crash on Tuesday, Dec. 20. She was 87.

According to the Florida Highway Patrol, the crash occurred at the intersection of Spring Creek Highway and U.S. Highway 98 around 4 p.m. Spears, who was driving, was headed north on Spring Creek Highway and had reportedly stopped at the stop sign but apparently didn't see an oncoming vehicle and pulled into the intersection.

That vehicle, a pickup truck, driven by a 61-year-old man, was unable to stop and hit the sedan driven by Spears.

Spears suffered fatal injuries. A 79-year-old female passenger in the car sustained critical injuries, according to FHP.

The pickup truck driver and his 50-year-old passenger were reportedly uninjured.

The obituary for Spears appears on Page 3.

FHP did not release Spears' name in its accident report – under the agency's interpretation of Marsey's Law, the constitutional amendment intended to protect crime victims, FHP does not release any names of individuals involved in traffic crashes.

An historic Christmas tree

Story & Photos By
LYNDA KINSEY

The Wakulla County Property Appraiser's Office has a unique and historically decorated Christmas tree this year.

When Property Appraiser Ed Brimmer was living out of state, he and

wife Tina would buy the Wakulla County Historical Society's Christmas ornaments each year. It was a small way of staying connected to home while they were away. He has since added to the collection by purchasing any they had

missed.

The Brimmers decided to decorate the office Christmas tree so that others could enjoy them as well now that they are home.

Since 2005, the historical society offers a new ornament each

year to commemorate a historical place or building located in Wakulla each year.

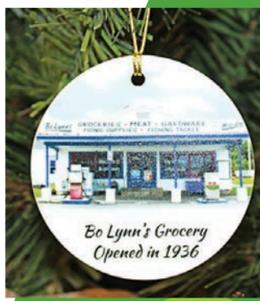
This year's ornament depicts Fort San Marcos in St. Marks, it shows the building at the confluence of the Wakulla and St. Marks rivers.



Brimmer with the office tree.



Some of the historical society's ornaments on the property appraiser's office tree: top row, Wakulla County Courthouse; middle, Sopchoppy High School, Wakulla County Jail, Willie Spears House in Spring Creek; bottom, Bo Lynn's Grocery in St. Marks, Panacea Springs Hotel, Posey's Oyster Bar, and Smith Creek School.



Mary Wallace with the winning team from Forgotten Coast Animal Hospital and Heather Rybak.

Forgotten Coast wins Gingerbread house contest

By LYNDA KINSEY
Reporter

Mary Wallace of Capital City Home Loans and Heather Rybak of Rybak Realty teamed up to reach out to area businesses to hold a holiday gingerbread house competition as a fun way to build relationships within their business community and offer a creative holiday display for all. The houses were on display at Capital City Bank in the lobby in Crawfordville along with entry forms for individuals to cast their votes on their favorite. Each were given a small kit and they could make additions, edible or not, as they choose.

The count for the winner was tallied on Monday, Dec. 19, and the winner was Forgotten Coast Animal Hospital with their gingerbread dog house.

Prizes for the winner of the contest are from local area businesses as well and Wallace said that is to encourage shopping locally. Two winners were drawn from the voters who also won baskets of goodies from area business.

Entries were from Haddock's Automotive, Forgotten Coast Animal Hospital, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, The Lodge at Wakulla Springs, Wakulla County 4-H, Shepard Springs Animal Hospital, Wakulla County Clerk of Court, Talquin Electric and TMH Walk-in Clinic and Private Practice.



Wallace with entries on display at Capital City Bank.

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RE-ADVERTISEMENT
The Wakulla County Board of County Commissioners is seeking qualified applicants for a full-time, Animal Control Officer. Starting salary is \$13-\$14 an hour, depending on experience and comes with a robust benefits package. Refer to www.mywakulla.com for additional information. Must be a resident of Wakulla County to qualify.
Veteran's preference will be given to qualified applicants. Wakulla County is an AA/EEO employer. Applications must be received on or before 5 p.m. on Wednesday, January 11, 2023.
Dec., 22, 29, Jan., 5



WAKULLA COUNTY EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY
BUILDING TECHNICIAN I

The Wakulla County Board of County Commissioners is seeking qualified applicants for the position of Building Technician I. This is a full time, benefited position, which is primarily responsible for assisting with front desk operations, including but not limited to the receiving, reviewing, and processing permit applications for the Building Department.
For more information visit www.mywakulla.com Veteran's Preference will be given to qualified applicants. Wakulla County is an AA/EEO. Starting salary is \$14.30 an hour. The application closing date for this position is Wednesday, January 11, 2023 at 5:00 p.m.
Dec., 22, 29, Jan., 5



WAKULLA COUNTY EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY
FLEET MECHANIC
ROAD AND BRIDGE DEPARTMENT

The Wakulla County Board of County Commissioners is seeking qualified applicants for a full-time benefitted position of Fleet Mechanic in the Road & Bridge Department.
Generous benefit package with starting salary of \$16.00 per hour. For additional information visit www.mywakulla.com. Drug screening is required. Veteran's preference will be given to qualified applicants. Wakulla County is an AA/EEO. Applications must be received by 5:00 p.m., Wednesday January 11, 2023.
Dec., 22, 29, Jan., 5

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FARM BUREAU INSURANCE of Wakulla County
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GENE.LAMBERT@FFBIC.COM
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CLUES ACROSS

1. Product or ___ (abbr.)
4. Zodiac sign
9. S. China seaport
14. Former OSS
15. Early English printer
16. Aphid genus
17. General's assistant (abbr.)
18. Aussies
20. Dissuades
22. Make law
23. Drench
24. Soak in a liquid
28. Male child
29. It cools your home
30. Small constellation
31. To call (archaic)
33. Explores beneath the Earth
37. Commercial
38. W. hemi-

CLUES DOWN

39. You can find it in a can
41. "Land of the free"
42. 36 inches
43. Footwear
44. Challenges
46. They hold things together
49. Of I
50. Partner to flow
51. Not connected by kinship
55. Worries
58. Garlic mayonnaise
59. A way to take by force
60. Legendary English rockers
64. Your consciousness of your own identity
65. Fencing swords
66. Silly

CLUES DOWN

67. Actor DiCaprio
68. Encircles with a belt
69. Mails a message
70. Longing
1. Horse mackerels
2. It can be viral
3. Prickly plants
4. Consciousness
5. Type of sarcoma
6. Tax collector
7. Sun up in New York
8. One who scorches
9. Influential psychotherapist
10. Situated at an apex
11. Communicative
12. Forearm nerve

CLUES DOWN

13. Former CIA
19. Folk singer DiFranco
21. Employee stock ownership plan
24. Large-scale
25. School environment
26. Remove
27. Male parents
31. Large rodent
32. Weighed down
34. Held tightly
35. ___ route: going there
36. Explains again
40. Exclamation of surprise
41. Courteously
45. Lying down
47. Judge
48. Forcefully took
52. Loosely compacted sediment
53. High mountain
54. Portable conical tents
56. Cereal grass
57. Dining utensil
59. Thoughtful
60. Helps you walk
61. Indicates near
62. Midway between northeast and east
63. Local area network

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Arrests made after Operation Relentless

Special to The Sun

On Dec. 15, detectives with the Wakulla County Sheriff's Office Criminal Investigations Division, alongside detectives of the Leon County Sheriff's Office, agents with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, members of the North Star Multijurisdictional Drug Task Force, and K9 Officers from the Florida Department of Corrections executed several arrest warrants as part of "Operation Relentless." They also executed a residential search warrant at 11 Franklin Drive in Crawfordville.

This operation was designed to target large-scale drug dealers in the Big Bend region of Florida, who supply drugs to street-level dealers in Wakulla as well as other parts of our region.

Throughout the later part of 2022, investigators with the Wakulla County Sheriff's Office Criminal Investigations Division conducted numerous drug operations including controlled buys which led to 26 arrest warrants being obtained for 22 individuals. Investigators were able to arrest nine of those individuals on Dec. 15. The enforcement actions were the result of



Travis Brewer



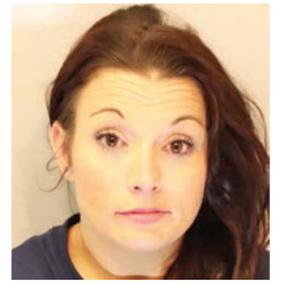
Alphonso Brooks Jr.



Kevin Gavin



Mary Grasberger



Rachel Jordan

months of covert undercover work conducted by WCSO narcotics detectives and the North Star Multijurisdictional Drug Task Force. Investigators and deputies are continuing their efforts to locate and arrest the remaining 13 wanted individuals, and updated arrest information will be released as available.

As of Dec. 21, 2022, the following persons have been arrested in Operation Relentless:

Alphonso Brooks Jr.
F.S. 893.13.1A1- Synthetic Narcotic sell (fentanyl)

F.S. 893.13.1A1 - Cocaine Sell

F.S. 893.13.1A1- Cocaine Possession

F.S. 893.13.1A1- Synthetic Narcotic Possession (fentanyl)

F.S. 901.04 Out of County Warrant (Parole violation)

William Marshall IV
F.S. 893.13.1- Methamphetamine posses-



William Marshall IV

sion
F.S. 893.13.1A2- Methamphetamine Sell

F.S. 934.215- Use of 2-way communication device to facilitate a felony

Kasi Waltermon
F.S. 893.13.1A1- Sell of Schedule 1 or 2 drugs (Two counts)

F.S. 893.13.1A1- Possession of schedule 1 or 2 drugs with the intent to sell (Two Counts)

F.S. 934.215- Use of 2-way communication device to facilitate a felony (Two Counts)

Nathan Metzler Jr.

F.S. 893.13.1A2- Marijuana sell schedule 1 (Two Counts)



Nathan Metzler

F.S. 893.13.6B- Possession over 20 grams of marijuana (Two Counts)

F.S. 934.215- Use of 2-way communication device to facilitate a felony (Two Counts)

Kevin Gavin
F.S. 893.13.1A1- Cocaine possession with intent to sell

F.S. 893.13.1A1- Cocaine sell within 1000ft of a church or place of worship

F.S. 934.215- Use of 2-way communication

device to facilitate a felony (Two Counts)

Travis Brewer
F.S. 893.1.1A2- Sell of Schedule 3 drugs
F.S. 893.13.1A2- Possession of schedule 3 drugs
F.S. 934.215 Use of 2-way communication device to facilitate a felony.



Steven Nessmith

Steven Nessmith
F.S. 893.1.1A1- Synthetic Narcotic Possession with intent to sell (fentanyl)

F.S. 893.13.1A1- Synthetic Narcotic Possession (fentanyl)

F.S. 893.13.1A1- Synthetic Narcotic Possession (fentanyl)

F.S. 934.215- Use of 2-way communication device to facilitate a felony (Two Counts)

F.S. 934.215- Use of 2-way communication device to facilitate a felony (Two Counts)

F.S. 934.215- Use of 2-way communication device to facilitate a felony (Two Counts)

F.S. 934.215- Use of 2-way communication device to facilitate a felony (Two Counts)



Kasi Waltermon

F.S. 934.215- Use of 2-way communication device to facilitate a felony.

Rachel Jordan
F.S. 893.13.1- Possession of methamphetamine

Mary Grasberger
F.S. F.S. 893.13.1- Methamphetamine possession (Two Counts)

F.S. 893.13.1A2- Methamphetamine Sell (Two Counts)

F.S. 934.215- Use of 2-way communication device to facilitate a felony (Two Counts)

F.S. 934.215- Use of 2-way communication device to facilitate a felony (Two Counts)

F.S. 934.215- Use of 2-way communication device to facilitate a felony (Two Counts)

Murder

From Front Page

Instead, Helms testified that she heard a gunshot and Steier call out, "What are you doing?"

Steier tried to get away after being shot, and Helms said she saw Harris

with a rifle.

Helms slid into the driver's seat of the still-running van and drove off, calling 911 for help, and heading to Steier's sister's house.

Deputies arrived at the scene a few minutes later and saw a green Ford Explorer trying to get by them. It was being driven

by Harris – and he subsequently led road deputies on a high speed chase through Crawfordville, reaching speeds of up to 100 mph, before he finally pulled over on Spring Creek Highway and surrendered.

Steier's body was found by the on-scene deputies as she was dying. Evi-

dence showed she was shot three times – twice in the head, including an execution-style shot in the back of her skull that didn't kill her, and a fatal shot that entered her eye.

The weapon Harris used looked like an Uzi, but was chambered for .22 Long Rifle, a very small bullet. Unspent rounds

were found around her body, apparently from the gun jamming.

Defense attorney Chuck Collins tried to create doubt in jurors' minds about issues such as who else may have been at the home. Helms testified that three men were in the yard with Harris when she and Steier arrived, but that

Harris sent them away.

The 1-year-old child was found in the house by deputies, covered in blood.

After his arrest, Harris asked for a blanket and went to sleep in the detectives annex.

Harris never spoke and showed no reaction during the trial or sentencing.

Obituaries



John D. Spears

John Dayton Spears died Saturday, Dec. 24, 2022 after an extended illness. He was at home with his wife by his side.

John was a native of Mississippi and he had lived most his entire life in the

area. He was a retired data processor working for the Leon County Board of Commissioners. John attended Timberlane Church of Christ, he loved the outdoors and taking care of his yard. When his boys were young he often would take them fishing.

Survivors include his wife of 47 years, Charlene Spears; sons, Matthew Dayton Spears and his wife Jill, Lucas John Spears and his wife Kaci; his two brothers Jerry Spears and Phillis, Danny Spears and Lana; six grandchildren, Olivia, Reece, Bowden, Bailey, Dayton and Johnny.

He was predeceased by his parents John and Geraldine Spears.

Funeral services will be Wednesday, Dec. 28, 2022 at 12 noon at Family Funeral Home in Harvey Young Chapel, The family will receive friends one hour prior to the service starting at 11 a.m. Burial will follow at the Duggar Cemetery on East Ivan Road.

Skip and Trey Young along with Paula and Kimberly are assisting the family. Family Funeral Home (850-926-5919, Familyfhc.com).



Barbara A. Spears

Barbara Addison Spears, 87, of Spring Creek, passed away very unexpectedly on Tuesday, Dec. 20, 2022.

Barbara will be remembered for her devotion to her family and friends. She was a bus driver for Wakulla County Schools for many years. She also ran her family business, Lee N. Spears and

Sons Seafood, alongside her husband and children. They provided delicious seafood to our community for decades. She and her family also operated the West Goose Creek Seineyard for a long time. She was a member of Shady Sea Baptist Church.

Barbara is survived by her children, Lee Spears, Mitch Spears and Annette Spears Clark and her husband Louis; 11 grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren.

She was predeceased by her husband, Lee Nell Spears; daughter, Debra Nell; and son, Brian. They were reunited just in time for Christmas.

The family received friends on Friday, Dec. 23, 2022 from 11 a.m. to 12 noon, prior to the funeral service at 12 noon. She was laid to rest at Debra Nell Cemetery.

Skip and Trey Young along with Kimberly and Paula are assisting the family with arrangements. Family Funeral Home (850-926-5919, Familyfhc.com).



Irene Carter Payne

Irene Carter Payne stepped into eternity Saturday afternoon, December 24, 2022, to be with her Savior, Jesus Christ and redeemed family. During her peaceful passing at home, her family was with her and witnessed the end of her journey here on this earth. As a lifelong resident of Medart, she departed this life a half of a mile from where she entered it on July 16, 1941. The fourth of five children to the late Herbert and Stella Mae Young Carter, she was devoted to Christ and her family. She loved her family sacrificially and was committed to them wholeheartedly. She was a loving wife, mother, and grandmother. She was a devoted teacher at Shadeville Elementary for over 30 years and taught 3rd, 4th and 5th grades and spent many years teaching reading. Mrs. Payne was loved by her students and all who

knew her. She exemplified the love of Christ in all she did, and she was a faithful Christian servant. One of her favorite Bible verses was Nahum 1:7 "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him."

She is survived by her husband of 62 years, William "Bill" Payne; her daughter Susan (Chuck) Turner; her oldest son, Mark (Ann); and her baby, Paul (Patrea). She is also survived by her grandchildren (listed oldest to youngest) Annabeth, Landon, Ansley, Adeline, Ayden Grace, Mary Abigail, Paul Jr., William, and Stone; her sister, Cassie (Paul) Etheridge plus many nephews and nieces. She was greatly loved by her family.

She was predeceased by her father, Herbert Carter; mother, Stella Mae Young Carter; her brothers, Kenneth and R.H.; and her sister Fay Wood.

Her visitation and service will be held in her lifelong church of Friendship Primitive Baptist Church, 165 Friendship Church Road in Crawfordville. She was raised in this church, married there, raised her children there, and her funeral services will be held there.

Visitation is Thursday, Dec. 29, 2022, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Service is Friday, Dec. 30, 2022, at 11 a.m. with internment at Friendship Memorial Garden.

Skip & Trey Young along with Paula and Kimberly are assisting the Payne family during this time. Family Funeral Home at Harvey Young Chapel (850-926-5919, Familyfhc.com).

DEATH NOTICES

• **Sheryl Grace Grimes**, 78, of St. Marks, died December 22, 2022. Family Funeral Home at Harvey Young Chapel. 850-926-5919 Familyfhc.com

• **Annie Mae Spears**, 79, of Spring Creek, died December 22, 2022. Family Funeral Home at Harvey Young Chapel. 850-926-5919 Familyfhc.com

• **Tamara Lynn Swift**, 58, of Crawfordville, died Dec. 19, 2022. Family Funeral Home at Harvey-Young Chapel 850-926-5919, www.familyfhc.com

• **Martha Jean Trawick**, 74, of Tallahassee, died Dec. 25, 2022. Family Funeral Home at Harvey Young Chapel. 850-926-5919 Familyfhc.com

Opinions

THE FIRST AMENDMENT

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

Some local feel good stories from the community:



Crum's supports young fishers

Yes, there are elves and Santa is real!

Ann Cooper has worked with Crum's Mini Mall for 40 years and she and Sam Ash, owner of Crum's, are rewarding some young fishermen from the Panacea area with gifts for Christmas for being avid fishermen and dedicated customers of the store.

The young fishermen frequent the store year round to purchase their fishing items be-

fore heading to the water to cast their lines or nets. Ann says that they are such polite kids and that the staff like seeing that these young men are spending their time and energy wisely and enjoying the great outdoors instead of other directions that many young people are going today. They hope that this reward will help to keep them in a positive direction for their futures.

Ann says she

couldn't have done it without Sam's generosity and dedication to the Panacea area.

The four local boys will receive Bait Caster Rods and Reels, a big stocking full of lures and a tackle box. They will also each receive a new bike given by an anonymous donor.

Crum's, Seatow and Gulf Specimen Marine Lab partnered to donate gifts to 14 other kids in the Panacea area as well.



4-H Craft Club gives to shelter

The 4-H Crafty Creators Club visited the animal shelter earlier in the month to donate toys and comfort items for the animals.

The club is made up of youth ages 5 to 18 who meet

monthly to sew and make craft projects. Their past projects have included gifts for the residents of Eden Springs and masks for first responders. This year they decided to make comfort items for shelter pets.

The youth collected community donations of old shirts and other recycled items and upcycled the items to make toys and other gifts for animals housed at the shelter.

On the Horizon

Calendar of upcoming events for the week of Dec. 29

Thursday, December 29

- Hatha Yoga with Zoe at 9 a.m. and Yin Yoga with Nellie at 6 p.m. at New Posh, 3709 Crawfordville Hwy. Packages available for \$12. Please RSVP email at newposh3079@gmail.com or text/call at (850) 528-5838.
- Alcoholics Anonymous meets at 6:30 p.m. at American Legion, 54 Ochlockonee St.
- The VFW Auxiliary Bingo Night will be held at 7 p.m. at 475 Arran Road in Crawfordville. There will be concessions and raffles.
- The Rotary Club of Wakulla County will have their weekly meeting at the TCC Wakulla Center at 8:30 a.m.

- Intro to Tai Chi held at the Community Center from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. All ability levels are welcome; wear comfortable clothing. Any questions can be directed to Rich or Terri Bushman at 850-228-9214.
- The Wakulla Respite Program will be available for anyone with memory impairment at no cost from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Lake Ellen Baptist Church.
- Hatha yoga with Zoe at 9 a.m. and at 6 p.m. Packages available for \$12 at New Posh, 3079 Crawfordville Hwy. Please RSVP email at newposh3079@gmail.com or text/call at (850) 528-5838.

Friday, December 30

- Alcoholics Anonymous meets at noon and 8 p.m. every Friday at the American Legion, 54 Ochlockonee St.

Saturday, December 31

- NEW YEARS EVE
- Alcoholics Anonymous meets at noon and 6:30 p.m. at the American Legion, 54 Ochlockonee St.

Sunday, January 1

- HAPPY NEW YEAR!
- Alcoholics Anonymous meets at 10 a.m. (closed meeting) and 6:30 p.m. at the American Legion, 54 Ochlockonee St.

Monday, January 2

Tuesday, January 3

- County Commission meets in the commission boardroom at 5 p.m.
- Sopchoppy Community Dinner is held every week at the Towles House at 6:30 p.m.
- Yin Yoga with Nellie at 10:30 a.m. and Flow Yoga at 6 p.m. Packages available for \$12 at New Posh on 3079 Crawfordville Hwy. Please RSVP email at newposh3079@gmail.com or text/call at (850) 528-5838.

Wednesday, January 4

- A Line Dance class will be held at 1 p.m. at the Wakulla Senior Center.
- Intro to Tai Chi held at the Community Center from 9 to 10 a.m. All ability levels are welcome; please wear comfortable clothing. For questions call Rich or Terri Bushman at 850-228-9214.

Pharmacy donates to seniors

Hiron and Purvi Patel of Crawfordville Pharmacy provided Christmas gift bags for senior citizens at the senior center. Hiron Patel is seen delivering gift bags to the center's activities director Felicia Hutchinson, whose office was reportedly packed with presents.



"It's A New Day!"

The Wakulla Sun

Editor/Publisher: William Snowden
Production Manager/IT: Eric Stanton
Circulation: Krystal Sheppard
Sales & Marketing: Lynda Kinsey
Reporter: Charity Tumbleson

editor@thewakullasun.com estanton@thewakullasun.com circulation@thewakullasun.com lkinsey@thewakullasun.com reporter@thewakullasun.com

FACEBOOK: www.facebook.com/@TheWakullaSun
TWITTER: www.twitter.com/@TheWakullaSun

DISTRIBUTOR: Jessi Smith

The Wakulla Sun is published weekly at 12 Arran Road, Crawfordville FL 32327

For advertising please call Lynda at 850-962-8019
For editorial please call William at 850-962-8024

Subscriptions to The Wakulla Sun
In County - \$35/yr. - \$20/6 mo. Out of County - \$50/yr. - \$30/6 mo.
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William Snowden
Editor & Publisher
The Wakulla Sun

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Send it to Florida Press Foundation at 336 East College Avenue, Suite 304, Tallahassee FL 32301

◀ Question of The Week ▶

– Compiled by Charity Tumbleson

Polled at the Shell gas station and at Azalea Park What are three things in your junk drawer?



CHRISTIAN DIAZ
CHEF

“A screwdriver, extra phone batteries and loose change.”



JOSH HENSON
DUCK GUIDE

“Broken phone chargers, filet knives and old phones.”



LEE MCCALLUN
SELF-EMPLOYED

“Knives, phone cords, and bullets.”



JOSEPH HILL
MINISTER

“Batteries, a magnifying glass, and candles.”



TIM POTTER
RETIRED ARMY

“Batteries, nails/screws, and tape.”

COMMUNITY NEWS

Wakulla Station News

By Verna Brock

Thank you, everyone who has expressed your condolences for the loss of my mother last week. Your kindness has been so appreciated, and deeply felt. It is a true comfort to feel your prayers and love during this time.

I hope each and every reader was able to celebrate Christmas with loved ones, traditions, and joy. Ed and I loved having children and grandkids for a big, fat Christmas-

paloosa dinner. Mostly, I was acutely aware of the abundant blessings we share.

My family is the opposite of reserved, opening gifts one at a time, taking turns, guessing what each present might be. No, we are raucous, excited, loud, and laughing like maniacs as each grandchild hands out lots of presents to everyone and the big reveal begins. I wouldn't change a thing!

Many thanks to the Wakulla County Sheriff's Department for

putting a whopping big speed detection machine in front of my house. It has been interesting to stand and clock how fast folks are going past my house. It is a 45 mph speed limit (needs to be no more than 35 mph), and almost no one is going less than 50! One dump truck had to slam on his brakes, as he was going well over 65. It's a neighborhood, people! Slow down, please.

My deepest condolences to the family of Sheryl Grimes. She has gone home to the Lord and Don. Sheryl was one of the warmest, kindest and wittiest people I have had the pleasure of knowing. I miss her, and

Don, so much.

The New Year is fast approaching, and I feel both excitement and reflection. January 1st would have been my mother's 89th birthday, so there is contemplation of all she has meant to her family. For us, New Year's was never a big deal, Alice was the big deal. But there is also the expectation of what the coming year will hold. May we all be blessed, and have the sense to know it.

The Wakulla U.M.C. will have services as usual, at 10 a.m. on New Year's day, celebrating Communion. Everyone is welcome to join us.

Library News – Dec. 29

Thursday, December 29

Entry Level Radio Technician Class 5:30pm

Friday, December 30

CLOSED

Saturday, December 31

CLOSED

Monday, January 2

No Programs Today

Tuesday, January 3

Book Bunch 10am

Wednesday, January 4

Book Babies 10am

Knitting Group 4pm

3D Printing Class Sign Up

Thursday, January 5

Sphero Chariot Challenge Sign Up

5pm

Entry Level Radio Technician Class

5:30pm

The Flowers BOD/ACC Committee 6:15pm

IT'S YOUR LIFE!

Memoir writing class coming in January!

AFTER HOURS SPEAKER SERIES

The Wakulla County Public Library is seeking speakers for a new program series. This will be an evening, adult

program. We are seeking speakers on topics such as science, nature, history, health, safety, finance, the humanities, etc. If you are interested in speaking at one of these evening programs, please fill out our interest questionnaire at <https://forms.gle/Rt4B95toyWpp5Gys8>.

UPCOMING HOLIDAY CLOSINGS

• Friday, December 30th and Saturday, December 31st for New Year's

Sheriff's Report

Sheriff's Report for Dec. 16-22.

FRIDAY, DEC. 16

• Deputy William Bennett conducted a traffic stop for faulty equipment and found the driver in possession of a small amount of marijuana. During the stop the driver was also found to have never possessed a driver's license. The driver, Anthony Sanders, was issued a notice to appear for the lack of a driver's license and a warning for the traffic infraction.

SATURDAY, DEC. 17

• Deputy Heather Will conducted a traffic stop on a vehicle in the area

of Wakulla Street and Pullback Road. Contact was made with the driver Michael Lane, who did not possess a driver's license. The tag attached to the vehicle was not assigned that particular vehicle either. During an inventory search of the vehicle, 14.7 grams of synthetic cannabinoid was located. Lane was arrested for Driving While License Suspended or Revoked (DWLSR), possession synthetic cannabinoid, possession of paraphernalia, and failure to register a vehicle.

• Deputy William Bennett responded to Koch Street in Panacea in reference to a possible theft. Tommy Sanders report-

ed the suspect borrowed a dolly to move a heavy item and never returned it. Sanders said he has made several attempts to retrieve the item with negative results. Sanders provided the name of the suspect. This case has been sent to detectives for further investigation.

SUNDAY, DEC. 18

• Deputy William Bennett responded to a location on Sopchoppy Highway in reference to a theft. Contact was made with David Taff, who advised while he was away for an extended time someone stole his boat. Taff's father knew who stole it and advised the person to bring it back.

The boat was returned prior to David's return. David stated the boat was returned but the motor attached did not belong to it. The motor on the boat came back stolen out of Dadeville, Alabama. The motor was seized as evidence. This case has been sent to detectives for further investigation.

MONDAY, DEC. 19

• John Landrum reported unknown persons entered two homes that are under construction on Winnebago Street. The suspects removed tools from one of the residences. Wakulla County CSI located evidence at both locations. Total value of the tools was approximately \$1,000. This case has been sent to de-

tectives for further investigation. Deputy Ernesto Trujillo investigated.

TUESDAY, DEC. 20

• Multiple people called and reported someone attempting to scam them out of money after receiving a call from who stated they were Capt. E. Wester with WCSO. The suspect advised victims they had a bench warrant due to missing court and that fees would need to be paid with gift cards. Please know WCSO (or any law enforcement agency) will never contact you by phone to clear up any court orders, that warrants can not be cleared up or resolved by paying a fee/fine, and court or-

der fines will not be paid via gift cards. If anyone ever feels they may be the subject of any such scam please call WCSO immediately, at 850-745-7100.

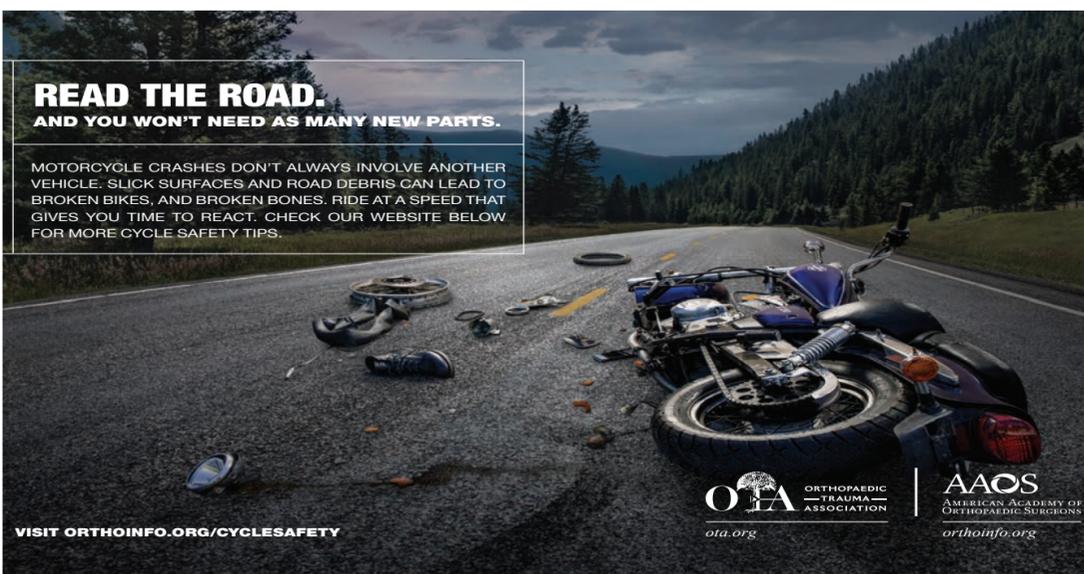
THURSDAY, DEC. 22

• James Stiles and Samuel Smith were involved in a physical altercation. Both parties were intoxicated and did not want to pursue any law enforcement action. Deputy Jake Scott investigated.

Please remember to always report suspicious or illegal activity at 850-745-7100, or call 911 for emergencies.

READ THE ROAD. AND YOU WON'T NEED AS MANY NEW PARTS.

MOTORCYCLE CRASHES DON'T ALWAYS INVOLVE ANOTHER VEHICLE. SLICK SURFACES AND ROAD DEBRIS CAN LEAD TO BROKEN BIKES, AND BROKEN BONES. RIDE AT A SPEED THAT GIVES YOU TIME TO REACT. CHECK OUR WEBSITE BELOW FOR MORE CYCLE SAFETY TIPS.



VISIT ORTHINFO.ORG/CYCLESAFETY

Kiersten Smith

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Outdoors

outdoor sports

HOME ON THE RANGE

Takes a lickin' and keeps on tickin'



By MARJ LAW

Your wife opens her big present from you at Christmas. You watch her face as she peels back the paper and finds...

A brand new handgun. What?

She didn't jump up and down and hug your neck? What is that peculiar look on her face?

Does she pause a moment and then say "thank you very much" in that polite tone of voice that says: "you shouldn't have?"

Yep. You really shouldn't have.

She's on the road a lot, or she's home a lot without you. Being a good husband, you want her to be safe. That's why you bought her this handgun.

But you shouldn't have.

Turning the question of gift-giving a gun around, would you want your wife to buy a handgun for you?

She might say: "Oh, look at this cute little gun. It fits my hand perfectly. I'm buying it for my hubby. It's so small, it will slide right into his pocket. When he's not carrying it, I can put it in my purse. And it's purple; not black like all the rest. Why not have a pretty gun?"

Yeah, I can hear you gagging right now. But just like you don't want her to purchase a handgun for you, she doesn't want you to buy a handgun for her.

You may know a lot more about guns than she. However...

I'll bet, in most cases,

your hands are not the same size. When the grip feels "right" in your hand, it may be too large for her hand (or vice-versa).

You're a good guy and you want her safe. So, you've found her a 45-caliber handgun. It has great "take-down power," and if she hits Mr. Bad with just one round, he's probably a goner.

Has she ever shot a gun before? What caliber has she shot? Has she taken a beginner class at the range, or a concealed carry class? Is she strong enough to handle this .45? Will she practice with it, or is it too uncomfortable for her to manage?

What you want her to carry, and what she is comfortable carrying, may be two very different calibers.

Does she plan to carry in her purse or on her body? Will the gun go in her pocket? Will she carry inside or outside her waistband? Have you put aside sufficient cash to find a holster that will fit the new gun?

Also, will she want different sights than the ones on the new gun? If so, does she prefer fiber optic or red dot sights? If she wants either, do you know someone who will put the sights on the gun?

If you may need accessories, like a red dot sight, does the new gun have a place to mount the sight, or can you buy a mount that will fit your gun? Is it even possible to put a red dot on your gun?

Does the new holster accommodate the sights you have put on?

Have you got another \$30 - \$40 for an UpLULA to make loading easier? Speaking of accessories, what about a laser? Does she want one to use for practice? She will also need a range bag, and ear and eye protection.

Did you find a gun that has ammunition for a reasonable price? Some am-



Which gun fits your hand and ability best?

munity is either difficult to find or very expensive.

Gosh. The price of the gun alone is hard on the wallet. Now, you might have to add the cost of new sights, a person to mount those sights, a holster, range bag, eye and ear protection, maybe a laser, and an UpLULA. What other accessories may she need? Does she want fancier grips? Are they even available for the new gun?

Does she have a strong feeling for either a hammer-fired or striker-fired gun? Do you already have a safe for when anyone comes to the house?

Another question that many people forget to ask is: is she able to field-strip/clean the gun? (And

are you able to fieldstrip that gun?) Some are pretty difficult. I find most 1911s hard to take apart to clean.

What if? What if you already bought her the gun, and it's not one she likes or can manage? This is a real problem. When hundreds of dollars are at stake, what do you do?

If your wife thinks she can learn to handle the gun with some proficiency, then someone experienced can take her to a range, explain safety rules, and teach her how to shoot. Many classes are available, too.

Since you've purchased the gun, it is now considered "used." Even if you yourself never fired it, now

it is a used gun. A used gun doesn't fetch the price of a new gun, even if you go back to the original gun store.

Is there no hope at all for the gun?

Does she absolutely not want a gun at all?

You can try to sell it yourself. Yes, you'll take a loss for this "used" gun.

You can take it back to the original store and hope they're merciful. They'll understand the situation, but remember, it's still "used."

If your wife does really want a handgun, then you can take the original one to the gun shop and they may take it back in trade for a gun she wants and likes. There's a good

chance the dealer will make a trade to suit you both.

Remember, the bottom line is that you're the good guy who loves his wife and wants her to be protected. This won't happen if the gun is forever tucked away in a safe and never used.

Find out what she does want. Bite the bullet and get her that.

Even if it's the gold necklace she's been admiring at the local jewelry store.

Marj Law is the former director of Keep Wakulla County Beautiful who has become an avid shooter in retirement.

Goliath grouper rule delayed

From FWC News

At its recent meeting, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission passed a motion to

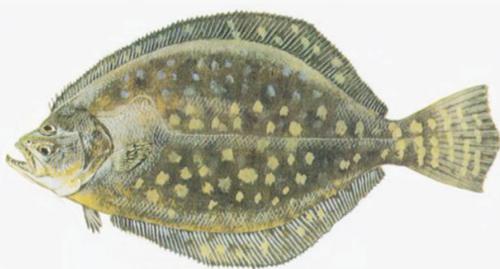
postpone decision-making on a rule to increase protections for three goliath spawning sites until the May 2023 meeting to give staff time to gather more

information and public feedback, and adjust the rule as necessary before the next spawning event.

For more information, visit MyFWC.com/

Commission and click on "Commission Meetings."

For current recreational goliath grouper regulations, visit MyFWC.com/Goliath.



SOUTHERN FLOUNDER
(*Paralichthys lethostigma*)

Flounders are a type of "flat fish". As the young larvae develop, one eye migrates across the head so both end up on the same side. They lie flat, eyes up, and can change their color to blend in. They hide from predators and ambush small fish prey with their studded teeth. They are tolerant of temperatures from 50-90F and salinities of 0-36 ppt. They weigh from 1-2 lbs and grow to 36" in their five year life span.

Eukarya, Animalia, Cordata, Actinopterygii
Pleuronectiformes, Paralichthyidae



WEEKLY WILDLIFE PHOTO



Retired Wakulla Springs State Park Ranger Bob Thompson, on his weekly wildlife survey at the park last week, snapped this photo of a black vulture swimming in the misty river. Below, a trio of turkey vultures.



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Water Ways

a peek into life on and under the water

Local writers share their experiences

Thursday 29	
Sun rise/set 7:32AM 5:45PM	Moon rise/set 12:27PM -----
Moon Illumination 44%	
Friday 30	
Sun rise/set 7:32AM 5:46PM	Moon rise/set 12:57PM 12:50AM
Moon Illumination 55%	
Saturday 31	
Sun rise/set 7:32AM 5:47PM	Moon rise/set 1:27PM 1:50AM
Moon Illumination 65%	
Sunday 1	
Sun rise/set 7:33AM 5:47PM	Moon rise/set 1:59PM 2:48AM
Moon Illumination 74%	
Monday 2	
Sun rise/set 7:33AM 5:48PM	Moon rise/set 2:33PM 3:47AM
Moon Illumination 83%	
Tuesday 3	
Sun rise/set 7:33AM 5:49PM	Moon rise/set 3:12PM 4:46AM
Moon Illumination 89%	
Wednesday 4	
Sun rise/set 7:33AM 5:49PM	Moon rise/set 3:55PM 5:44AM
Moon Illumination 95%	

Gulf Coast Weekly Almanac

Dec. 29 - Jan. 4

Tide charts by tides4fishing.com

For tides at the following points add to Dog Island Listings:

Carrabelle 28 Min.	High Tide 25 Min.
Apalachicola 1 Hr., 53 Min.	Low Tide 2 Hrs., 38 Min.
Cat Point 1 Hr., 13 Min.	2 Hrs., 31 Min.
Lower Anchorage 1 Hr., 36 Min.	2 Hrs., 3 Min.
West Pass 1 Hr., 26 Min.	2 Hrs., 39 Min.

St. Marks River Entrance

Th	12:12 am ▼ 0.9 ft	6:12 am ▲ 2.5 ft	12:44 pm ▼ 0.5 ft	7:04 pm ▲ 2.6 ft
Fr	1:37 am ▼ 0.7 ft	7:57 am ▲ 2.2 ft	1:36 pm ▼ 1.0 ft	7:53 pm ▲ 2.6 ft
Sa	3:07 am ▼ 0.4 ft	9:50 am ▲ 2.1 ft	2:36 pm ▼ 1.4 ft	8:40 pm ▲ 2.8 ft
Su	4:22 am ▼ -0.1 ft	11:15 am ▲ 2.2 ft	3:30 pm ▼ 1.6 ft	9:36 pm ▲ 2.8 ft
Mo	5:22 am ▼ -0.4 ft	12:13 pm ▲ 2.4 ft	4:32 pm ▼ 1.7 ft	10:31 pm ▲ 2.9 ft
Tu	6:12 am ▼ -0.6 ft	12:56 pm ▲ 2.5 ft	5:26 pm ▼ 1.6 ft	11:21 pm ▲ 3.0 ft
We	6:55 am ▼ -0.7 ft	1:32 pm ▲ 2.6 ft	6:13 pm ▼ 1.5 ft	

City of St. Marks

Th	1:16 am ▼ 0.8 ft	6:48 am ▲ 2.3 ft	1:48 pm ▼ 0.5 ft	7:40 pm ▲ 2.4 ft
Fr	2:41 am ▼ 0.6 ft	8:33 am ▲ 2.0 ft	2:40 pm ▼ 0.9 ft	8:29 pm ▲ 2.4 ft
Sa	4:11 am ▼ 0.3 ft	10:26 am ▲ 2.0 ft	3:40 pm ▼ 1.2 ft	9:16 pm ▲ 2.6 ft
Su	5:26 am ▼ -0.1 ft	11:51 am ▲ 2.1 ft	4:34 pm ▼ 1.5 ft	10:12 pm ▲ 2.6 ft
Mo	6:26 am ▼ -0.3 ft	12:49 pm ▲ 2.2 ft	5:36 pm ▼ 1.5 ft	11:07 pm ▲ 2.7 ft
Tu	7:16 am ▼ -0.5 ft	1:32 pm ▲ 2.2 ft	6:30 pm ▼ 1.4 ft	11:57 pm ▲ 2.8 ft
We	7:59 am ▼ -0.7 ft	2:08 pm ▲ 2.4 ft	7:17 pm ▼ 1.4 ft	

Shell Point, Spring Creek

Th	12:44 am ▼ 0.9 ft	6:31 am ▲ 2.6 ft	1:13 pm ▼ 0.2 ft	7:40 pm ▲ 2.7 ft
Fr	2:02 am ▼ 0.6 ft	8:05 am ▲ 2.2 ft	2:03 pm ▼ 0.7 ft	8:28 pm ▲ 2.8 ft
Sa	3:24 am ▼ 0.3 ft	9:50 am ▲ 2.1 ft	2:58 pm ▼ 1.1 ft	9:10 pm ▲ 2.9 ft
Su	4:35 am ▼ -0.1 ft	11:17 am ▲ 2.1 ft	3:46 pm ▼ 1.4 ft	10:01 pm ▲ 2.9 ft
Mo	5:36 am ▼ -0.4 ft	12:22 pm ▲ 2.3 ft	4:46 pm ▼ 1.6 ft	10:51 pm ▲ 2.9 ft
Tu	6:29 am ▼ -0.7 ft	1:12 pm ▲ 2.4 ft	5:41 pm ▼ 1.6 ft	11:37 pm ▲ 3.0 ft
We	7:15 am ▼ -0.8 ft	1:53 pm ▲ 2.5 ft	6:29 pm ▼ 1.6 ft	

Alligator Point, Ochlockonee Bay

Th	12:23 am ▼ 0.6 ft	6:04 am ▲ 1.9 ft	12:55 pm ▼ 0.4 ft	6:56 pm ▲ 2.0 ft
Fr	1:48 am ▼ 0.5 ft	7:49 am ▲ 1.6 ft	1:47 pm ▼ 0.7 ft	7:45 pm ▲ 2.0 ft
Sa	3:18 am ▼ 0.3 ft	9:42 am ▲ 1.6 ft	2:47 pm ▼ 1.0 ft	8:32 pm ▲ 2.1 ft
Su	4:33 am ▼ 0.0 ft	11:07 am ▲ 1.7 ft	3:41 pm ▼ 1.2 ft	9:28 pm ▲ 2.1 ft
Mo	5:33 am ▼ -0.3 ft	12:05 pm ▲ 1.8 ft	4:43 pm ▼ 1.2 ft	10:23 pm ▲ 2.2 ft
Tu	6:23 am ▼ -0.4 ft	12:48 pm ▲ 1.9 ft	5:37 pm ▼ 1.2 ft	11:13 pm ▲ 2.3 ft
We	7:06 am ▼ -0.5 ft	1:24 pm ▲ 1.9 ft	6:24 pm ▼ 1.1 ft	11:58 pm ▲ 2.3 ft

St. Teresa, Turkey Pt.

Th	12:41 am ▼ 0.8 ft	6:20 am ▲ 1.9 ft	1:02 pm ▼ 0.1 ft	7:32 pm ▲ 2.0 ft
Fr	2:10 am ▼ 0.5 ft	8:01 am ▲ 1.6 ft	1:59 pm ▼ 0.6 ft	8:13 pm ▲ 2.0 ft
Sa	3:30 am ▼ 0.1 ft	9:57 am ▲ 1.6 ft	3:04 pm ▼ 0.9 ft	8:48 pm ▲ 2.1 ft
Su	4:32 am ▼ -0.4 ft	11:38 am ▲ 1.6 ft	3:58 pm ▼ 1.2 ft	9:33 pm ▲ 2.2 ft
Mo	5:26 am ▼ -0.6 ft	12:49 pm ▲ 1.8 ft	4:58 pm ▼ 1.4 ft	10:17 pm ▲ 2.3 ft
Tu	6:12 am ▼ -0.8 ft	1:37 pm ▲ 1.8 ft	5:45 pm ▼ 1.4 ft	11:01 pm ▲ 2.3 ft
We	6:52 am ▼ -0.9 ft	2:13 pm ▲ 1.8 ft	6:22 pm ▼ 1.4 ft	11:42 pm ▲ 2.3 ft

Dog Island West End

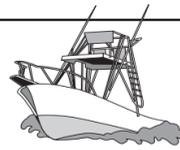
Th	1:19 am ▼ 0.8 ft	6:15 am ▲ 1.4 ft	1:01 pm ▼ 0.2 ft	7:48 pm ▲ 1.7 ft
Fr	2:47 am ▼ 0.5 ft	8:19 am ▲ 1.2 ft	1:43 pm ▼ 0.6 ft	8:25 pm ▲ 1.8 ft
Sa	3:58 am ▼ 0.1 ft	10:37 am ▲ 1.1 ft	2:35 pm ▼ 1.0 ft	8:52 pm ▲ 1.9 ft
Su	4:56 am ▼ -0.3 ft	1:09 pm ▲ 1.3 ft	3:10 pm ▼ 1.2 ft	9:28 pm ▲ 2.0 ft
Mo	5:51 am ▼ -0.5 ft	2:11 pm ▲ 1.4 ft	4:24 pm ▼ 1.4 ft	10:06 pm ▲ 2.0 ft
Tu	6:35 am ▼ -0.7 ft	2:45 pm ▲ 1.6 ft	6:02 pm ▼ 1.5 ft	10:46 pm ▲ 2.0 ft
We	7:12 am ▼ -0.8 ft	3:13 pm ▲ 1.6 ft	6:50 pm ▼ 1.4 ft	11:33 pm ▲ 2.1 ft

Best hunting and fishing based on solar times: MAJOR feeding periods are 2 hours long, centered on the solar time. MINOR feeding periods are only 1 hour long, again centered on the solar time.



Coast Guard Auxiliary Reports

By Carolyn Brown Treadon



With the New Year upon us, many boaters take to the water to enjoy festivities, which can involve shooting off fireworks.

It may seem obvious, but doing fireworks on boats is never a good idea. The Florida Times-Union reported that the Consumer Product Safety Commission stated that on average, 280 people go to the emergency room every day with fireworks-related injuries in the month around the July 4th holiday. This is an important fact to be mindful of if you are planning to shoot off any fireworks this New Year's Eve.

As discussed in an article found in The Log, boaters often look at civic fireworks festivities as an opportunity to discharge expired marine flares. And, while this may be done without any intent to commit a hoax, the firing

Boating Emergencies

Coast Guard Station

Panama City (850) 234-4228

Coast Guard Station

Yankeetown (352) 447-6900

Coast Guard Auxiliary

Apalachee Bay (Flotilla 12) (850) 942-7500
or (850) 284-1166

of a red marine flare in a non-emergency is still a false distress message — and, as such, it is a federal crime and can be treated as such.

As we head into the holiday weekend, one of the leading causes for accidents is boating while intoxicated. Remember to drink responsibly and designate a driver.

Boaters 21 years of age or older are considered to be under the influence, and may not operate a

boat or PWC, if their blood alcohol level is 0.08 or more or if drugs are detected.

Additionally, many boaters with limited or no experience on the water are out in heavier than usual traffic. When accidents do happen, the Coast Guard will often broadcast out of channel 16 a series of messages.

Thanks to Sherrie, we will always remember safe boating is no accident!

If you would like to learn more about vessel safety checks, please contact Steve Hults, Staff Officer for Vessel Examinations at steve.hults@uscgaux.net.

Please contact us for more information about our safe boating classes or learning more about getting involved in the Auxiliary, check out our website at www.uscgaux.net follow us on FaceBook @ Apalachee Bay Flotilla 12 or contact our Flotilla Commander Phil Hill at pnkhill2000@yahoo.com

The Coast Guard Auxiliary is the uniformed civilian volunteer component of the U.S. Coast Guard and supports the Coast Guard in nearly all mission areas. The Auxiliary was created by Congress in 1939. For more information, please visit www.cgaux.org.

Underwater Wakulla

By Rusty Miller

Side mount diving (continued).

We are on the third day of my side mount training at Emerald springs. This is the first time I have been to Emerald springs and I have lived in Wakulla for 16 years. I've heard about it but usually it's been pretty mucked up by rain and runoff. Since this has been a relatively dry season it is very clear. It's very deceiving when you look at it from the bank because the walls of the sink hole have black silt that makes it look like a dark hole but the water is really clear when you are in it. There is a staircase that is very long down to what is a narrow rock ledge a foot or two deep and about three feet sticking out towards the water. At the top of the stairs there is a platform and a bench that you can put on your wet suit or dry suit and harness. You walk down the first set of stairs to a small platform, then you proceed down the second set of stairs into the spring.

My instructor had already taken our tanks to the rock ledge, so all I had to do was go down the stairs, which is not an easy task when most of one of your feet is missing and you don't have a big toe on the other one. I made my way very carefully down the stairs to the bottom little platform and I sat on one of the rock ledges waiting on my instructor to tell me what to do next. We went through the checks on the tanks and regulators to make sure there were no leaks, then she said to go ahead and attach them to my harness. My surprise was, I was able to attach them with no issues the first try unlike I had at Peacock the first try. All the fumbling and trying really helped.

I inflate my harness BC and slid into the 68 degree water. We started our decent to the 40 foot mark, which is where Joerg, the other instructor, had run a circuit of line for us to practice with. I finally got my buoyancy set for the depth and then started trying to get my frog kick going correctly. I can say that I was no better than before. I would do it correctly every once in a while and then lose it.

Sensing my frustration building, we surfaced and we talked about it and all the while she was very encouraging to me. What she said our next skill was going to be really took me by surprise. She said we were going to the tree to practice my kick. When she was giving me the briefing of the area and the spring basin she had mentioned that a long time ago a big chunk of a tree trunk had fallen straight into the spring with enough force to drive it deep into the silt bed and remain vertical a few feet below the surface of the water. Cave divers use this to connect their stage bottles to before they enter the cave, so they can decompress on the way back up.

We get to the tree and we go through the fluttering of the tank valve skill. This is if you have a small leak develop and you turn off the tank and exhale then turn it on enough to inhale air, this will help conserve air while you make your way back to the surface. When I did that successfully several times, then she had me grab the trunk of the tree and lay in a horizontal face down position with my knees bent 90 degrees and practice my frog kick. So after about an hour of this I set off to try to make a complete circuit with my frog kick. I was not as successful as I had hoped but every time I messed up, I immediately went back to the tree and practiced again.

Let's just say I spent most of my time under water on the tree.

We surfaced again and she said she wanted to take me on a tour of the spring basin and just show me where the cave entrances were. Yes, you read correctly there are several caves in Emerald Springs and that's why you cannot or should not go there with just an open water certification.

When you read this article you will have been through Christmas so please have a very good new year and continue to make bubbles.

Russell Miller #59999

Updates to gopher tortoise guidelines

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission recently approved staff's recommendation to update Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines.

The goal of the update is to better protect gopher tortoises by incentivizing relocations to protected recipient sites, clearly defining roles and responsibilities in the relocation process, and clarifying other provisions in the guidelines.

Key revisions and information included in the guidelines were presented at two public webinars where FWC staff collected feedback from participants. Staff reviewed feedback and incorporated edits as necessary before bringing an updated version to the FWC Commissioners for approval.

The permitting guidelines support the Gopher Tortoise Management Plan, which was created by the FWC with the ultimate goal of restoring and maintaining secure, viable populations of gopher tortoises throughout Florida, so the species no longer warrants state listing.

The Gopher Tortoise Management Plan and associated Guidelines provide the management framework for gopher tortoise conservation in Florida. Gopher Tortoise Permitting Guidelines clarify protections, outline activities where permits are needed, provide methods and qualifications for individuals conducting gopher tortoise relocation, and outline requirements for sites that



FWC PHOTO BY CAROL LYN PARRISH

receive gopher tortoises. The initial Guidelines were approved in 2008 and several revisions over the years have allowed for continued improvement in the permitting process and in conservation for the species.

In Florida, the gopher tortoise is state-listed as Threatened. Both the tortoise and its burrow are protected under state law. Property owners must obtain permits from the FWC before land clearing or development takes place, and tortoises must be captured and relocated to FWC-authorized recipient areas.

In October, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced the decision to maintain the current federal status of the gopher tortoise and not federally list this species

in the eastern portion of its range, including in Florida. This decision was directly related to the FWC and partners' successful conservation efforts, including establishing important protections for this species and collecting valuable population and life history information.

The gopher tortoise occurs in parts of all 67 Florida counties and in neighboring states. The tortoise is known as a keystone species, and its burrows serve as important refuges for hundreds of native animals including imperiled species such as the Eastern indigo snake and the Florida burrowing owl. To learn more about gopher tortoises and the FWC's Gopher Tortoise Program, visit MyFWC.com/GopherTortoise

Make 2023 a better year



By **SHERYL H. BOLDT**

Are you glad 2022 is over? Do you cringe every time you recall the poor choices you made, even though you've genuinely repented of those choices?

In 2 Samuel 12, we read about how the prophet Nathan confronted King David about his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and how David sought and received God's forgiveness. If he hadn't accepted God's mercy, it's likely that his sinful behavior would have defined the rest of his life.

Living under the weight of his sin would have made it much more difficult for David to seek and hear God's direction during the tumultuous years that followed. Furthermore, if he made light of God's

mercy, his confidence as king of Israel would have taken a hit.

And ... we probably wouldn't know David as a man after God's heart (Acts 13:22).

Just as David did, we, too, must accept God's mercy when we repent. Years ago, I allowed my choices to define me. I wore regret like chains and feared I'd never break free, even though I repented of those choices over and over again.

Thankfully, I finally accepted God's forgiveness. In time, I saw myself differently as

a dearly loved child of God.

A woman after God's heart.

But when we live under condemnation, it not only changes the way we see ourselves, it also affects the way others see us. Rather than seeing us as beloved children of God, they perceive us as miserable, guilt-ridden souls. They might never know us as people who are joyfully (albeit imperfectly) committed to God's ways.

Imagine how it would change people's perception of us if we stopped

dwelling on our failures, sincerely repented of our sins, and prayed the words of King David after Nathan confronted him: "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise" (Psalm 51:15 ESV).

Think how it would transform our witness as Christ followers if we praised God for the extraordinary love He displayed at Calvary. As we continue to declare God's praises, our confidence in His love and faithfulness will grow. Our witness will become stronger as we no longer believe the lie that we're

not worthy of God's care and direction.

Ask yourself—which would be a more dynamic testimony in 2023? Allowing our hearts to grow weary with regret and sorrow because of our sins? Or opening our mouths, declaring God's praises, and thanking Him for His welcomed mercy?

Sheryl H. Boldt is a sales executive for Wave 94 and author of the blog, www.TodayCanBeDifferent.net. Connect with her at SherylHBoldt.Wave94@gmail.com.

No box for Jesus



By **CHERYL CRUCE**

Christmas is over, the New Year approaches, and candy hearts already line the store shelves, ready for the next holiday of love. Christmas pageants have run the breadth of Church services, each unique in its own way. The yard ornaments and brightly colored lights displaying "season's greetings" have dimmed throughout the

neighborhoods. Moms and Dads take down Christmas trees and sort through the array of vibrant paper, torn and scattered on the floor. Inadvertently, one item is always lost in the excitement of Christmas morning.

As ornaments and wintery villages are carefully wrapped and placed in the appropriate boxes, extra room is made on the closet shelf for storage. Eventually, the door will close until the next season of holiday gift-giving and love. It is a never-ending cycle of life, for in 365 days (minus a few for preparation), it all begins again.

The "begins again" has me contemplating the final box ready for

packaging.

The words "Manger scene" mark the box stirring my spirit as I sip my morning cup of coffee. Each character is carefully wrapped and ready to be packaged. Even Baby Jesus carries a healthy covering of swaddling tissue to protect Him from the cold darkness of the closet. Oh, the ponderings of my mind and the questions I ask myself.

It all comes down to this, why do we put Jesus in the box? Why do we celebrate the hope, peace, love, and joy of advent for a short season? Why do we light the Christ candle just one day of the year? The truth is, we shouldn't. "Joy to the World" and "Go Tell it on the Moun-

tain" are anthems that celebrate the intention of the Christian life. That intent is a year-round responsibility that cannot be met when we put Jesus in a box. The closer we draw to the truth of the season, the more life it breathes within us.

We do not need a store shelf to tell us when to love or when to be joyous. We only need to draw close to the source. C.S. Lewis said, "If you want to get warm, you must stand near the fire: if you want to be wet, you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, and eternal life, you must get close to, or even into, the thing that has them."

All of these elements

were brought to us through the life of Jesus. We could put Jesus in the box until the next holiday season, along with the power to overcome life's obstacles. However, that choice may cause us to lose the joy and love we have just experienced.

It is encouraging to know that Mary cradled her baby close to her heart, treasuring the words of the shepherds. We should treasure their words as well, keeping Jesus within our hearts. Christmas does not have to cease because the store shelf presumes it so. We do not have to box up baby Jesus because another day has dawned on our calendar. The message of His kingdom lives on

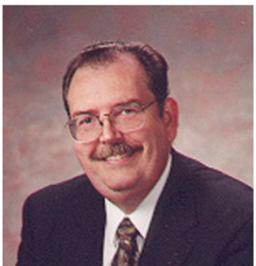
within each of us. The gift of peace and goodwill given by God is for all humanity. It cannot be packaged in a box. Isn't it time we draw near the source of the proclamation of His birth?

Luke 2:13-14,16 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

Cheryl Mixon-Cruce is Pastor of Ochlockonee Bay United Methodist Church and Sopchoppy United Methodist Church.

OUT TO PASTOR

The liar in the red suit



By **JAMES SNYDER**

Around this time of the year, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage and I revel in our family memories.

Unlike me, she has some wonderful memories because of her large family. I came from a very small family and therefore don't have that many memories let alone wonderful memories.

This reminded me of my first encounter with what my parents called Santa Claus.

Growing up, we didn't have television, and the teachers at the school I attended were mostly Mennonites. They didn't celebrate Santa Claus, and there was no mention of him in our classes. Christmas was focused on the birth of Christ.

In a small town like ours, there weren't any shopping malls, so there was no place for Santa Claus to set up his little booth and greet all the little children during the Christmas season.

Then one Christmas, Santa Claus and his entourage set up in our

downtown square. Everybody was invited to come and see Santa Claus.

I mentioned this to my father and asked him about Santa Claus.

"Well," my father said, "you go see Santa Claus, sit on his lap and tell him what you want for Christmas."

When I heard that my eyes just lit up in great delight. "You mean I can tell Santa Claus what I want for Christmas?"

With a smile on his face, my father shook his head most energetically. I believed him; after all, fathers don't lie.

All I ever wanted for Christmas when I was young was a pony. Now, with Santa Claus in town, I had the opportunity to request a pony for this Christmas. I can't tell you how excited I was.

My parents took me and my siblings downtown at the square to meet Santa Claus. I was excited, and so were my siblings. We chattered and chattered all the way the Santa's place. We told each other what we wanted Santa to bring us for Christmas.

I remember that first experience with Santa Claus. As I walked up and sat in his lap, I was a wee bit nervous. Then the thoughts dancing in my head was that this was my opportunity to get my long-awaited pony for Christmas

"Ho, ho, ho, and what would you like for Christmas this year, little fella?"

I wanted to hear that all my life. I then explained to him that all I wanted for Christmas was a pony. Any color pony would do as long as it was a pony. So I explained to him what I would do with a pony and how it would change my life and everything.

As he listened to me, he was chuckling, "Ho, ho, ho."

When I finished my request, he said, "Young man is that really what you want for Christmas? If so, you'll have to be nice and not naughty because if you're naughty, I can't do it."

With a hearty nod and a smile on my face, I promised I would never be naughty.

As I left dear old Santa's lap, all I could think of was how this little pony he would bring me on Christmas day would change my life. That's all

I could talk about on the way home that day.

I did notice that my father and mother were looking at each other but not smiling and I did not catch what was happening.

On Christmas Eve, as we got the Christmas tree all ready, I was excited, and I made a little space under the tree for the pony Santa would bring me that night.

It was hard to sleep because I was listening for the reindeer to land on the roof with my pony for Christmas. Eventually, I fell asleep and dreamed of that wonderful little pony all night.

I couldn't wait to get up that morning, and I ran into the living room where the Christmas tree was. I shouted excitedly, "Where's my pony?"

My father tried to explain that perhaps I had been on Santa's "naughty list," and he couldn't bring me that pony for Christmas this year.

I shed tears all day, and the following days were terrible.

For the next three Christmases, I did the same thing. Every Christmas, Santa promised to bring me a pony for Christmas as long as I was not naughty.

Christmas after Christmas and no pony. I tried to have my father explain to me what Santa's definition of naughty was. He tried to explain, but I couldn't understand what he was talking about at the time.

I could not believe that that wonderful person called Santa Claus could ever lie to someone like me. So what did I ever do to get on his naughty list?

I never went back to sit on Santa's lap ever again. But, later in life, I realized that the guy in the red suit was lying to me, and he wasn't really Santa Claus.

Thinking about this I remembered what the Angels told the shepherds on that glorious day. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." (Luke 2:11-12).

The real purpose of Christmas is celebrating the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ.

My life changed when I received him as my Lord and Savior. Yours can too.

Dr. James L. Snyder lives in Ocala, FL with the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. Telephone 1-352-216-3025, e-mail jamessnyder51@gmail.com, website www.jamessnyderministries.com.

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Student of the Week

Brody Johnson, 8th grader at Riversprings Middle

Principal: Josh Sandgren

Brody Johnson is an 8th grader at Riversprings Middle School. He plays basketball as well as being a 2nd Baseman for the Bear's Baseball team. Brody also plays 2nd Base with the Tallahassee Bomber. When he isn't playing baseball and basketball, he enjoys sculpting and drawing. He is a member of the National Junior Honor Society. Brody's favorite part about being at RMS is having great teachers. RMS is lucky to have Brody as a student. Go Bears!

STUDENT OF THE WEEK FEATURES A DIFFERENT SCHOOL EACH WEEK.



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5 STAR RATING

Flower of the Week at Sopchoppy Depot Park
Dahoon Holly



By LYNN ARTZ and SANDY TEDDER

Dahoon holly (Ilex cassine) is one of three native hollies at Sopchoppy Depot Park. In the fall and winter, female plants display red, berry-like fruit that appeals to birds and small mammals. This evergreen tree grows 20-30 feet tall in full sun to partial shade. Dahoon holly grows naturally in wetlands and does best in moist soils but can tolerate drier locations with watering. It is a worthy, yet underused, addition to the home landscape. Although very tolerant of pruning, little pruning is needed to shape a strong, nicely structured tree. Dahoon hollies can be found at the northeast and northwest edges of the pond at Sopchoppy Depot Park. American holly (Ilex opaca) and yaupon holly (Ilex vomitoria) are the other two native hollies found in the park.

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Lisa Craze, CFC
Wakulla County Tax Collector

ENACTED: 2006.

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