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City Has Big Plans For 2018

New Businesses, Code Enforcement, Roads On The Agenda

by Keri McAlpine

While 2017 was a busy year that brought in many changes for the City of Zephyrhills, 2018 is looking to continue in the same manner.

City Manager Steve Spina has a long list of goals and projects planned for the city, many continuing on the success and plans from last year.

"We're going to be pretty busy. I think it's going to be a good year – a big push," Spina said.

At the top of his list is finishing the new city hall building, which Spina said is currently ahead of schedule and expected to meet its September completion date. Last week he said workers were installing steel beams to start constructing the second floor.

"Right now they're on schedule and everything's going great," Spina said. When asked about the city's current temporary office locations, he said operations are running smoothly, however everyone will be happy to hold

City • Continued on Page 3A

Ryman Comes Through, Again

Local Family Wins Roofing Contest

by Keri McAlpine



Tammy Ryman hugs and congratulates Danny Huffman on Dec. 23 after the Huffman family was surprised as the winners of the eighth annual Ryman Roofing Holiday Re-Roof Contest.

Photo Provided

After being nominated three years in a row, a Zephyrhills family was the lucky winner of Ryman Roofing's eighth annual "Holiday Re-Roof" contest.

Zephyrhills locals Danny and Danielle Huffman were surprised on Dec. 23 that they won the prize, an up to \$10,000 expense.

Danny works in the medical field and is a military veteran, having been deployed multiple times in the last several years, in the worst of the worst scenarios. He became a registered nurse a couple of years ago and currently works at Florida Hospital Zephyrhills.

Danielle works at Lee Reed Insurance, and helped pay the bills by working two jobs while Danny was in school for his nursing degree. They have a son, Logan, and in the past few years took on the responsibility of Danielle's sister when she

Ryman • Continued on Page 7A

Four Want Compton's Seat

Former Councilwoman Aims To Serve Again

by Dave Walters

The race for Zephyrhills City Council Seat 3 keeps growing. As of the Jan. 1, four candidates are vying for the soon-to-be-vacated seat currently held by Kent Compton.

After more than a decade in office, Compton has opted not to run for re-election opening the door for several candidates including one former council member, Jodi Wilkeson, and political newcomers Devin Alexander, Anna Bailey and Cory Sommers.

Wilkeson opted to run for the seat after Compton informed her he wasn't going to seek re-election and would support her in her bid to return to City Council.

"He called me to announce that he wasn't running and asked me to run and he would support me," said Wilkeson, who held Seat 2 for six years before being rejected by voters in 2014, in favor of Alan Knight. "I've wanted to get back on council. There are so many more good things I can do."

Seat • Continued on Page 3A



Devin Alexander



Anna Bailey



Cory Sommers



Jodi Wilkeson

Depot Museum To Reopen Next Month

Remodeling Will Increase Building's Usefulness

Story and photo by Joe Potter



Parks Supervisor James Lyon, Community Redevelopment Area Director Gail Hamilton, Mayor Gene Whitfield, Building Official Bill Burgess, Code Enforcement Officer Joel Bacon, and parks employees Jeff Bruss and Rusty Guynn took a break Thursday while working at the historic Depot Museum on South Avenue.

City employees are busily remodeling the historic Depot Museum on South Avenue and the facility will reopen in February, City Manager Steve Spina said.

The building has been closed for a few weeks for two reasons.

Some of the displays inside need to be reviewed and a decision needs to be made on how to best utilize the building and its contents, Spina said.

"Currently, city staff is repairing walls, painting and otherwise touching up the depot," Spina said in a press release.

Hobbyists who volunteer with the model railroad equipment are working

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Zephyrhills Arrests

Officer Sees Through The Old Switcheroo

Areli Deul Reno, 25, of 39067 Heritage Circle, was arrested by Zephyrhills police on Dec. 17 and charged with knowingly driving while license suspended or revoked, resisting/obstruction without violence and violation of probation. Police stopped Reno for allegedly disregarding a traffic control device at Fifth Avenue and Seventh Street. Reno allegedly switched seats with a passenger as an officer was approaching the vehicle. The passenger was the registered owner of the vehicle. Reno spontaneously said he was sorry for switching seats. Police learned Reno's driver's license had two active suspensions for failure to pay court obligations and that he was also on felony probation until May 19, 2019, for carrying a concealed firearm.



Jail where he was being held after being arrested on another charge. He advised post Miranda that he grabbed the victim by her wrist because he thought the victim was going to hurt him.

Patrick Steven Quinn, 29, of 6140 Ninth St., was arrested by Zephyrhills police on Dec. 14 and charged with knowingly providing false identification to law enforcement and driving while license suspended or revoked. Quinn was reportedly involved in a traffic crash at Geiger Road and Gall Boulevard on Dec. 10. He allegedly told police at that time that his name was Fate Quinn and he was born on Jan. 30, 1991. This information could not be verified by checking records. He was cited for not having the ability to provide his identity. Through investigative techniques, police were able to determine Quinn's actual identity. Quinn's license was suspended as of Nov. 28 for failure to pay traffic fines. Police also learned Quinn was wanted on warrants charging him with two counts of failure to appear.



They both later responded to the police station and Brown made a written statement admitting to stealing the item from Lowe's. Brown reportedly has three prior convictions for theft of goods out of Louisiana.

Robin M. Griffith, 42, of Webster, was arrested by Zephyrhills police on Dec. 14 and charged with grand theft retail. Police responded to Rural King, 7422 Gall Blvd., regarding a theft complaint. Griffith allegedly concealed nine items valued at \$318.85 in her purse and left the store without paying for them. She was detained by store employees until police arrived. Post Miranda, Griffith said she was unemployed and just wanted to get Christmas presents for her two adult children. Police learned Griffith had three prior convictions for retail theft.



Paul Joseph Martinez, 47, of 35122 Cheshire St., Dade City, was arrested by Zephyrhills police on Dec. 19 and charged with habitual traffic offender – driving while license suspended or revoked and violation of probation. Police stopped Martinez for driving a vehicle without a tag attached. He spontaneously said his driver's license was suspended. A records check disclosed Martinez's license had been suspended multiple times and that he was placed on probation on Sept. 4.



Loralie Janene Gallagher, 41, of Tampa, was arrested by Zephyrhills police on Dec. 11 and charged with driving under the influence – no injury or death and driving while license suspended or revoked. Police were dispatched to 7-Eleven, 7600 Gall Blvd., where they stopped a vehicle leaving the area that matched the description of the one a caller provided. Gallagher was allegedly not operating the vehicle in a safe manner and its license plate expired on Dec. 6. Gallagher's actions of having a slow reaction to police's attempts to stop her and her fidgeting after police made contact with her were consistent with a person under the influence of narcotics and she performed poorly on field sobriety tests. Also, police learned Gallagher's license was revoked on Dec. 4, 2008.



Kevin Spencer Callahan, also known as **Kevin Sellars Burton**, 21, of 38027 Meyer Ave., was arrested by Zephyrhills police on Dec. 7 and charged with trespass after warning. Police responded to Walmart, 7631 Gall Blvd., regarding an unwanted guest. Callahan was previously trespassed from the business in 2013. He was released on his own recognizance.

Alisha Annlavada White, 36, of 8716 Hamster Drive, was arrested by Zephyrhills police on Dec. 3 and charged with tag not assigned. Police stopped a vehicle White was driving because one of its taillights were not operating properly. White spontaneously said the tag attached was assigned to another vehicle. This was verified through a records check and White was released on her own recognizance.

Daniel Ruben Galindo, 42, of 5850 10th St., was arrested by Zephyrhills police on Dec. 18 and charged with domestic battery. Galindo allegedly forcibly removed his girlfriend of three months from a residence by grabbing her arms and dragging her outside. The victim also said Galindo pushed her face into the ground.



Andrew Laif Hatcher, 38, of 5506 21st St., was arrested by Zephyrhills police on Dec. 17 and charged with domestic battery. Hatcher's girlfriend reportedly began to scream at him when she saw him in the carport with another woman. The victim reportedly told Hatcher he needed to leave and to take the other woman with him. Hatcher then allegedly violently grabbed the victim by her wrist and pushed her backwards, causing her to drop her cell phone, which shattered on the ground. One of the victim's roommates corroborated her account of what transpired. There were no visible marks on the victim's wrists. Hatcher was interviewed at the Pasco County



Angela Angelle Brown, 26, of Lumberton, was arrested by Zephyrhills police on Dec. 4 and charged with retail theft second degree – third or subsequent offense. She allegedly went into Lowe's, 7921 Gall Blvd., and took possession of one item valued at \$129, and proceeded past all points of purchase without paying for the item. She allegedly dropped the bag that was used to conceal the item and fled when Lowe's loss prevention personnel approached her. She left the scene in a vehicle registered to her boyfriend.



Robert Joseph Lilley, 31, of Land O' Lakes, was arrested by Zephyrhills police on Dec. 18 and charged with petit theft from merchant – third subsequent offense. Police responded to Walmart, 7631 Gall Blvd., regarding a shoplifting complaint. Lilley allegedly removed three Bluetooth speakers, valued at \$267.34, from their packaging, and hid them in his pants. He then left the store without paying for them. A fourth item, a knife, was also recovered. Police learned Lilley had two prior convictions for theft. Post Miranda, Lilley reportedly admitted to taking the speakers. He said he has a drug addiction problem and funds his drug purchases through stealing items.

Robert Lloyd Brinkley, 25, of 4241 Skydive Lane, was arrested by Zephyrhills police on Dec. 10 and charged with possession of less than 20 grams of marijuana and possession of paraphernalia. Police stopped him because of an inoperable headlight on a vehicle he was driving. A strong odor of burnt marijuana could reportedly be detected emitting from the vehicle. A search resulted in the discovery of 4.3 grams of a substance positively identified as marijuana along with a water pipe. Brinkley was also arrested on a Hillsborough County warrant charging him with possession of less than 20 grams of marijuana.



The information provided in the Zephyrhills Police report is taken from public record. All parties are considered innocent until proven guilty.

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Zephyrhills Pair Charged In Rash Of Burglaries

Staff Report

Pasco Sheriff's deputies have arrested two men and charged them with multiple felonies in connection with a string of burglaries that occurred in the Zephyrhills area during the Christmas holidays.

Kevin Michael Mellerke, 19, of 38424 Second Ave., and Dalton James Burkett, also 19, of 37521 Marcliff Terrace, allegedly burglarized vehicles during



Mellerke



Burkett

the late hours of Christmas Eve and on Christmas night.

Mellerke was being held without bond for allegedly violating probation on prior convictions for burglary and grand theft.

Mellerke's bond was set at \$157,000 and Burkett's bond was set at \$67,000 for the offenses for which they were arrested on Dec. 26.

Money, personal items, firearms, ammunition, and other items were reportedly taken from several victims.

Mellerke and Dalton were

apprehended through the efforts of the District 2 Strategic Targeted Area Response (STAR) team with assistance from the public, the Department of Corrections (Probation) and the Zephyrhills Police Department.

The team was also able to recover several guns, ammo, narcotics, drug paraphernalia and stolen property items.

Further investigation may lead to additional charges and suspects as well, the sheriff's office said.

City • Continued from Page 1A

council and other meetings in a larger space.

This past year was a great one for downtown as a handful of new businesses popped up including restaurants and specialty shops. Spina said he wants to continue that growth downtown and in the CRA district, hoping to bring some new business to the north side of Fifth Avenue.

"That's been very positive so we just want to keep that momentum going," Spina said.

Next on Spina's list is code enforcement, a big issue the city has been trying to devote time to, he said. A task force has been assembled with members from the police, public works, planning, building and code enforcement and CRA departments. The mayor has also been involved in making code enforcement more effective. The goal of the enforcement team is to bring a positive image to Zephyrhills and ensure safety

regulations, he said. Neighborhood cleanups have also been a positive change for code enforcement and the city plans to continue hosting them throughout 2018.



Steve Spina

New businesses expected to come to town this year include Wawa, Culvers and Starbucks, a personal favorite of Spina's, he said. Plans for the intersection of U.S. 301 and Pretty Pond Road will hopefully be finalized this year, which will in turn possibly bring about an Aldi grocery and a Chick-fil-A.

Out by the airport, proposals will be expected this year for the aero center hangar to bring about new tenants. The utilities department will be working on adding a sewer line to the area north of the airport for a new industrial area.

Spina said the city might go back to "planning some of the enclaves that are in the city and maybe doing some annexations." He said they are "not trying to go crazy" but might be looking at dividing the city into quadrants or quarters.

Other goals for 2018 include updating the city's comprehensive plan, looking into medical marijuana and zoning, working on the new tennis center and other recreation projects, and "hopefully" paving Simons Road.

As far as other road projects, Spina said the city will be focusing on the current State Road 56 extension and possibly extending it when it hits U.S. 301 to connect U.S. 301 with Chancey Road.

"We're trying to not take too much on our plate, but it does sound pretty ambitious. I'm tired already," Spina chuckled.

Seat • Continued from Page 1A

Wilkeson, who is soon to be ending her run as president of the Zephyrhills Daybreak Rotary Club, said she is prepared to once again contribute as a city leader.

"People still come up to me in the store and consider me their representative," Wilkeson said. "I miss representing the people. This city has a tremendous staff and together we can do more great things in Zephyrhills."

She will be facing off against Alexander, Bailey and Sommers, who also have filed paperwork with the Pasco County Supervisor of Elections Office to run for the vacated seat.

Alexander, a 24-year-old Zephyrhills native, feels its time the baton be passed to a younger generation to represent the city.

"I always saw Zephyrhills as Florida's best kept secret," Alexander said. "I know we didn't get here by ourselves. The history of our city shows great leadership. Many have made the city what it is today. It's time for the baton to be handed down. I am grateful for those folks who came before me."

"I've talked to so many folks and they are ready for a change. It's time to see new ideals and fresh perspectives."

Alexander will be running on a platform that focuses on fiscal responsibility, economic development, public safety and improving communication between

city government and the residents of Zephyrhills.

Bailey, who grew up in Zephyrhills since the age of three, owns and operates Creative Souls Café and Outside the Box on Fifth Avenue.

"I want to make a difference," said Bailey. "I want to make a change and bring new life to our town."

She plans to focus on fairness when it comes to code enforcement and ordinance compliance. She also plans to address the need for things for children to do in Zephyrhills.

"I want to make sure children have a place to go," Bailey said. "It has been an issue since I was a kid. There should be a place that is community-oriented to develop life skills that they don't learn in school. It needs to be addressed. We need to get them skills to start their life with instead of them getting into drugs or other bad things."

Bailey also plans to address the Zephyrhills homeless population a priority as well as improving the city's communication with its residents.

Sommers, a 28-year-old learning design coach with the Pasco County School District, has lived in Zephyrhills for the past 21 years and wants to use his skills to make improvements in city government.

As a former government teacher at Pasco Middle School, Sommers is truly

passionate about government and the city.

"I love Zephyrhills," Sommers said. "I love raising my family here. I would like to use my skills to improve communications between city hall and the citizens. Information is not reaching the citizens in a timely manner. I want to make the communication better with

the citizens and get them involved in the decision-making.

"I was raised here and I want to make this a better place. I want to keep it a family friendly place to attract more families to the city."

The four will square off in the April 10 election where a candidate with the most votes wins the seat.

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East Pasco Events

Jan. 4 – Lions Club Sight Program – The Zephyrhills Lions Club, located at 5827 Dean Dairy Road, will be accepting applications for its Sight Program from 9-11:30 a.m. Applicants must bring required documents, which can be found on www.e-clubhouse.org/sites/zephyrhills. The program is open to all Pasco County residents in need of basic eye care. Contact the clubhouse at (813) 788-1441 for information.

Jan. 6 – Community Yard Sale – Ramblewood Community, 3853 Gall Blvd., is hosting a community wide yard sale from 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Call (813) 469-9684 for information.

Jan. 8 – Soup and Pie Dinner – The Ladies of Cairo Court #97 Ladies Oriental Shrine are hosting a soup and pie dinner from 3:30-6:30 p.m. at the Masonic Hall, 5950 12th St. Proceeds benefit the Shriner's Hospital for Children in Tampa.

Jan. 9 – Lose the Jiggle Safely and Naturally – Start the New Year by giving yourself a healthy, happy body. This free class will discuss healthy eating and natural essential oils for healthy weight management. Held from 3-4:30 p.m. at Living Food Bakery & Cafe, 38201 10th Ave. Enter to win a free gift. Call Marti at (813) 399-4467 or Deanna at (813) 479-7724 for information.

Jan. 10 – Bingo Brings in New Year – Usher in 2018 from 2-3 p.m. at Florida Hospital Zephyrhills, 7050 Gall Blvd. in the Creation Café. Call (877) 534-3108 for information and required registration. Enjoy assorted puddings with whipped topping, play Bingo for prizes and hear a presentation by Nurse Lisha McDonough.

Jan. 10 – Stretch and Relax – Relaxing stretching session for for beginners. Held from 3:30-4:30 p.m. at the Creation Health Wellness Center, 38233 Daughtery Road. Call (813) 779-6476 for information.

Jan. 12 – Ireland's Piano Man – Entertainment at the Gem Estates clubhouse will begin at 7 p.m. and will feature Cahal Dunne, a composer, pianist, comedian and story teller. Music ranging from Irish to Broadway to country will be performed. Tickets are \$10. Call Lee at (813) 780-1012 or Tes at (517) 914-4718 for information and tickets.

Jan. 13 – Rummage and Bake Sale – Ramblewood Community, 3853 Gall Blvd., is hosting a community rummage and bake sale from 8 a.m.-2 p.m. Call (813) 469-9684 for information.

Jan. 13 – Begonias – Learn about the various types of begonias including how to plant, propagate and care for them at this free UF/IFAS Pasco Extension seminar. Registration required at Eventbrite. Held from 10-11 a.m. at the Zephyrhills Library, 5347 Eighth St.

Jan. 13 – Raising Cane – Stop by the Pioneer Florida Museum, 15602 Pioneer Museum Road, for a sweet and spicy event from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Admission is \$5 per person. Children 5 and under are free. Locals are invited to compete in a people's choice chili cook off. Also featured will be a pancake breakfast, syrup tasting, iron skillet tossing and more. Visit pioneerfloridamuseum.org for information and a complete list of scheduled events.

For more events visit www.pasconewspubs.com

Pasco Cold Weather Shelters

As extremely cold air continues to move through the area, Pasco County is opening Cold Weather Shelters through Saturday for anyone needing a warm place to spend the night.

Local locations in east Pasco include:
 • Restored Hope, Dade City – call (352) 437-4815 before 6 p.m. daily - limited service.
 • Samaritan Project of Zephyrhills –

call (813) 810-8670 before 9 p.m. daily - limited service; no pets.

Temperatures are expected to fall into the low 30s and upper 20s through Saturday night. These low temperatures and wind chills are dangerous to anyone who will be outside for long periods of time. Children, the elderly and pets are especially vulnerable to the cold and extra care should be taken to protect them.



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 11:15 a.m. Live Entertainment – The Crackerbilly's, The Sara Rose Band and The Hired Gun Band
 The Barking Dogs will perform throughout the day near the sugar mill
 12:30 p.m. Southern Syrup-Makers Association Annual meeting will be held in the Mabel Jordan Barn. Public welcome.
 4:30 p.m. Chili Awards Presentation

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Commentary



First Things First

Greg First

Manatees Know Where To Go

Many of the winter residents are back and there is not a day that goes by where someone is not talking about the weather back home. Even the manatees get smart this time of year and head south. For many of us who live here year round it feels like it is getting really cold when the temperature starts to head below 70 degrees. The manatees got it right. Seventy-two degrees is just about perfect.

It's not hard to spot some of the winter residents. Some have on shorts with flip-flops or sandals and white socks almost up to their knees, which is probably a fashion trend in certain parts of the country. Everyone wants to blend in and not be taken as an out-of-towner. I do the same thing when I am in Jamaica. I don't want the locals to know I am not one of them. They might not say it but I am pretty sure they know. Maybe it's my accent.

The winter season is here and it is starting to get pretty crowded. I can still make a left turn on busy U.S. 301 so I know everyone is not back yet. As a flurry of new developments are approved for parts of this area it is going to keep getting more difficult

to navigate some of these major two-lane roads. I remember when U.S. 19 in western Pasco County was two lanes. Then they went to four lanes and now six lanes in many places. I also remember when Morris Bridge Road didn't have very much traffic. You could always make a fast trip to Tampa by taking that route. Now this two-lane road is like a parking lot during busy hours. The traffic just can't seem to get moving. I have heard since I was a kid that plans were in the works to four-lane U.S. 301. They have done enough surveys over the years to pay for the project. The last time I checked with the Department of Transportation money was still not available to make this happen. I hope I see it in my lifetime and I'm not getting any younger.

I just read snow is possible west of Zephyrhills and Dade City in January. I have seen snowflakes (I am not talking about the political ones) here a couple of times. The whole area comes to a screeching stop when this happens. When I was in elementary school the whole class got to go outside with magnifying glasses and see how these mysterious white crystals looked up close. It was pretty awesome. I can't say I ever had to shovel it but understand it can be quite a project.

For the most part whatever kind of weather we get it is no doubt better than many other parts of the country and Canada. We are never going to top some of the stories we have been told, such as surviving a winter with temperatures at 50 degrees below zero.

Here's to each and every one of you and I hope 2018 is the best year yet. Just remember to bundle up and be grateful there aren't icicles dangling off your nose.

Letter To The Editor...

To The Editor,

On Dec. 20, 2017 the Zephyrhills Police Department hosted their annual "Christmas In Blue" event which provided local youth with Christmas gifts.

Our local newspaper [the *Zephyrhills Free Press*] covered the event and took a photograph where one of our officers displaying a hand gesture that was interpreted by some as alt-right.

We have done an internal review of the incident and do not believe it was intended to be offensive or derogatory in nature. The officer was playing a game called the "circle game," which was made famous in the 1980s.

While we view it as unprofessional

to play a game in uniform, it was not intended to be alt-right, political, racist or an otherwise offensive hand gesture.

It is unfortunate that this has overshadowed our annual "Christmas In Blue" celebration where the Zephyrhills Police Department and community partners gave away 30 bicycles and fed at least 75 people. We have been in contact with civic organizations that have supported our conclusion.

The anti-defamation league has provided the following link www.adl.org/.../no-the-ok-gesture-is-not-a-hate-symbol.

Chief Derek Brewer
 Zephyrhills Police Department

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Merged Relay In Wesley Chapel

Cancer Awareness Event Will Be Seven Hours

Story and photo by Keri McAlpine

After announcing the merger of three area Relay for Life events, a decision has been made on where to hold the newly named Relay for Life of East Pasco.

The new event, which has combined the Dade City/San Antonio, Wesley Chapel/Wiregrass, and Zephyrhills events, will be held at Cypress Creek Middle High School in Wesley Chapel.

The American Cancer Society hosted a meet and greet on Nov. 1 in Dade City to discuss the strategy. Since then, the event leadership team of about 20 people has formed, according to ACS Community Development Manager Bonnie Gibson.

The “core four” of the team are all from Wesley Chapel. Paul Bartrell will serve as event chair, Kandis Alfonso as experience lead, Miranda Oller as co-lead, and the fund the cure lead was filled by Sherell Hill.

For the remaining leadership members, six more are from Wesley Chapel, five from Zephyrhills and four from Dade City.

Gibson said the entire committee voted on the new location for the Relay,

not just the core four.

The decision to host it in Wesley Chapel was made partly because the new school, which opened this fall, offered it as a venue for the event. The school’s principal has also reportedly held Relays at her former schools, Gibson said. She added it was the best location geographically to encompass all three areas and outlying communities.

“We’re able to really include the surrounding communities and have it be a family, community day or evening event,” Gibson said. “It’s a positive energy, definitely, around [the decision] and everybody’s just really excited to get down in the trenches of planning the event.”

The high school is about 14 miles from Zephyrhills and Dade City at 8701 Old Pasco Road, and 10 miles north of central Wesley Chapel.

In its original state, Relays were held for 24 hours to accompany the idea that “Cancer doesn’t sleep.” The merged Relay is scheduled for May 12 from 3 to 10 p.m.

The Zephyrhills and Dade City relays have slowly moved from their 24-hour time slots to smaller increments.



Local students led the survivors in their first lap around the Fifth Avenue track during last year’s Zephyrhills Relay for Life.

Gibson said many factors went into deciding the duration of the Relay, but that ultimately the American Cancer Society now encourages organizers to “Relay your way” and do what fits best with the community.

“We try to be sensitive to the needs of the community and work closely with the volunteers to determine what will truly be the best fit ... the 24 hours isn’t always a great fit,” said ACS Communications Director Jennifer Howe.

Gibson said she wouldn’t be surprised either way if next year’s event returned

to a longer schedule, or if it stayed at seven hours.

“By shortening our event we really strengthen it being a community awareness event,” she said.

Next for the new leadership team is the kickoff event, which will be held Jan. 16 at 6:30 p.m., inside the Holiday Inn Express in Wesley Chapel.

The event is “basically a big party” where the community is invited to learn about all of this and more concerning the new Relay. Attendees will also be able to learn about forming and registering teams, and fundraising opportunities.

Depot • Continued from Page 1A

with the city to move their setups out of the freight room on the south side of the building.

That room can then be used as open space to hold city and club meetings and other events when the Depot Museum reopens. It may also be rented for weddings or parties.

“We have received a lot of calls about using the depot as a rental space and its current set up inhibited that type of public access,” Spina wrote.

All railroad and train memorabilia, including the train setup, will be housed in the center room, which previously

served as the depot station office.

Historic displays will be housed in the two waiting rooms on the north end of the building. The Zephyrhills Historical Association has already removed several historic displays and placed them into storage.

“Some paintings and maps are currently displayed in the in the city hall annex and at the Jeffries House,” Spina said “Some of the artwork is planned for display in the new city hall as well.

“We are not keeping news articles, many of which are yellowed and torn, and will rely on the recently

microfiche files of the *Zephyrhills News* that the city paid about \$10,000 to copy and save. These are available for review and copying at the city library.

“Other items are in storage, including glass display cases, file cabinets and furniture,” Spina said.

City leaders will meet with the ZHA in January to discuss the possibility of association members serving as volunteer docents at the Jeffries House and also at the Depot Museum when it reopens.

This would be a way for the Depot Museum to be open more hours per week, Spina said.

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Senators Demand Answers From FDA

Raids Rankle Owner Of Six Canadian MedStores

by Joe Potter

Three United States senators have all demanded answers from Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Scott Gottlieb following an October raid by FDA agents on six Canadian MedStores in the Tampa bay area.

U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis, R-FL 12th, has “already reached out to the FDA,” Summer Robertson, a spokeswoman for Bilirakis, said Tuesday. However he has yet to hear back from the agency regarding his November request.

It was not known at press time what specific actions Bilirakis has taken regarding the matter.

Bill Hepscher owns the stores in Zephyrhills, Lakeland, Largo, Tarpon Springs, Tampa and Altamonte Spring where the simultaneous raids occurred

Oct. 26. The stores help people who want to order legitimate medications from international pharmacies.

Hepscher contacted Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., and Bilirakis following the raids.

Nelson told Gottlieb in his letter that the FDA’s recent actions “raise serious questions about whether the agency has changed its policy regarding the enforcement of prescription drugs being imported into the country for personal use.”

He urged Gottlieb to act promptly regarding his request for information. “We must work together to ensure that Americans can access their medications,” Nelson wrote.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, and Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., demanded in their letter that Gottlieb tell them by Jan. 5 if the FDA has changed its policy regarding the personal importation of safe prescription drugs from Canada.

That policy is outlined in the FDA’s 2016 Regulatory Procedures Manual.

Grassley and Klobuchar also said they

want to know what the FDA’s current policy is on drug importation and if there are currently any barriers to the certification of importation of prescription drugs from Canada.

Their areas of interest involve the restrictions on manufacture and importation of drugs no longer made or available in the U.S.

Hepscher said he personally met with Bilirakis and his chief of staff, Liz Hittos.

Hepscher previously told the *Zephyrhills Free Press* he believes the FDA’s policy has changed.

“This is a complete switch in policy from what the FDA has allowed for the past 15 years that we have been in business,” Hepscher said in November. He opened the local Canadian MedStore in 2002.

“We have hung our shingle out for the past 15 years (in Zephyrhills) and have been doing the same thing every week. We haven’t been hiding anything,” he said.

“The FDA has had a longstanding policy that individuals could order up to a 90-

day supply of legitimate medications from international pharmacies,” Hepscher said in a November interview.

The FDA does not comment on ongoing investigations, press officer Lyndsay Meyer said in an email.

The quest to get more affordable medications for many Americans captured the attention of Grassley and U.S. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., nearly a year ago.

They wrote a letter to Tom Price, who was then Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in an effort to get that agency to act on the importation of prescription drugs from Canada as a solution to the rapidly rising costs in the U.S.

Price resigned in September because of his use of private airplanes for travel before taking any action on the senators’ request.

Eric Hargan, who was appointed acting HHS secretary following Price’s resignation, also has not taken any action on the senators’ request.

December Student Citizens Of The Month



Greater Zephyrhills Chamber of Commerce Student Citizens for December 2017 stand with Chamber representatives at the Student Citizen of the Month ceremony held Dec. 20 at the Church at Chancey Road. From left, front row, are Ryan Simpson, Academy of Spectrum Diversity; Abigail Ray, West Zephyrhills Elementary School; Kylie Strickland, Chester W. Taylor Elementary School; Madelyn Holbrook, Woodland Elementary School; Leslie Owotoki, Heritage Academy; and Darla Cant, Hope Ranch Learning Academy. Shown from left in the back row are Chamber Executive Director Melonie Monson; Chase Booker, Zephyrhills High School; Steve Spina, Zephyrhills City Manager; Aaliyah Pacheco, Stewart Middle School; and Chamber Ambassador Chairperson Katy Boyd. Steven Trevino, The Broach School, was not present for the ceremony. Photo Provided

Spotlight On Talent Welcomes 35th Year

Calling all future stars – this is the area’s version of “America’s Got Talent.” Do you dream of performing onstage, or have plans to earn a performing arts college scholarship? Prepare first in a local competition, Spotlight on Talent, that gives performers up through grade 12 opportunities for audition and performance experience, prizes and trophies.

Heritage Arts Center Association is working on plans for its 35th talent contest. The dates have been set several weeks earlier than in the past. Applications and information are available at heritagearts.org; and information is distributed to each school music teacher in central and east Pasco County, as well as dance, vocal and instrumental studios, and at the Chambers of Commerce.

The regional competition gives over \$4,000 in cash prizes and trophies to winners in several age categories. Part of the excitement is that HACA also awards a \$1,000 scholarship to a Pasco County resident graduating senior. The scholarship winner will be announced at the end of the final show.

The last few years have been record-breaking for Spotlight on Talent. Several hundred students participate each year, with judges evaluating more than 100 different acts. The final competitions will be on March 10, at the theater at Wesley Chapel High School. Act I at 12 p.m. will be younger finalists and Act II at 7 p.m. will be older competitors. Tickets for adults will be \$12 or both shows for \$20. For students through high school the fee is \$6, both shows for \$10 (under 5 is free).

Tryouts will be held on Feb. 10. Participants are judged on talent, stage presence and appropriate appearance. The deadline for applications is Jan. 25.

Vocalists, dancers, instrumental musicians, piano players, baton twirlers, bands, gymnasts and other entertainment are welcome to participate. There are several age categories for solos and one or more group categories. A student may enter as a solo and with a group.

If you are interested in becoming a sponsor, email Barbara Friedman at spotlight@heritagearts.org or call (352) 567-1720 for information.



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County Closes Senior Center

The Zephyrhills Senior Center on 16th Street permanently closed on Sunday with a new site “expected to be announced in the coming weeks”.

Pasco County Senior Services said seniors who would normally dine at St. Elizabeth’s Episcopal Church at 5855 16th St. in Zephyrhills should visit the Dade

City location.

Registered diners are welcome to eat at the Dade City Senior Center, 13853 15th St., until a new site for the senior center is determined. This week’s press release said the Pasco County Senior Services Division “extends its apologies for any inconvenience this closure may cause.”

Ryman • Continued from Page 1A



Danny, Danielle and Landon Huffman, outside of their Zephyrhills home which will soon receive a brand new roof.

was a minor.

Becky and Joe Rinaldo nominated the family in the Ryman Roofing contest.

“The Huffmans are greatly deserving of this holiday blessing. They both are always so willing to bless others with their time, talents and love,” Becky said in her entry this year. “They are constantly giving of themselves, and it would be great to see them get this huge blessing to show that their love and efforts they give to others do not go unnoticed.”

Danielle said she remembered Becky talking to her about entering the family in the contest three years ago, but had no idea she was still entering them every year.

“We’re extremely grateful and blessed and we can’t thank Ryman Roofing enough for doing this every year,” Danielle said.

She added what a help this prize will be, as their roof is in much need of replacement.

Ryman Roofing began the holiday contest eight years ago with a simple concept in mind.

“We wanted to give back to the communities that had supported us for over 35 years. Without them, we would not



Danielle Huffman said she was shocked upon learning she and her family will be receiving a new roof, free of charge.

have been able to sustain our business,” Kevin Ryman told the *Zephyrhills Free Press* on a previous occasion.

That idea turned into a 100 percent free roof being awarded to one family each year.

Contestants were asked to submit a brief story describing why they – or the person they entered on behalf of – was deserving and in need of a new roof. The only conditions were that the home be residential, occupied by the entrant, in good standing with the mortgage company, and under 2,500 square feet.

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Cookies, Cocoa And Compassion

Event Supports Awareness Of Domestic Violence

Story and photos by **Emily Kochanski**

The holidays are a time for reaching out and helping those who are in need of it most. Keeping with the Christmas spirit, Sunrise of Pasco County partnered with the Imagine Center in San Antonio to host an extra special community event – Cookies and Cocoa with Santa.

The five-hour December event on Pennsylvania Avenue featured a number of seasonal activities suitable for both children and adults. For a mere \$10 (\$5 if families



A buffet of tasty treats was dished out by members of the Dough-Mestic Confections Café.



Local businesses donated gift baskets, seasonal snacks, and other items to the silent auction.

registered in advance), kids could get their pictures taken with Santa Claus, decorate and then devour gingerbread cookies, paint rocks with members from the East Pasco Rocks group, or take a tour of the Pasco fire station. Parents could treat themselves to tasty offerings from the Dough-Mestic Confections Café, browse the Christmas marketplace, or participate in a silent auction.

This was the first major event for members of Imagine Solutions, a bookkeeping business that is partnered with Imagine Center. Miranda Faulkner-Smith, chief executive officer for Imagine Solutions, hosted the event along with her mother Julie Faulkner, who works for AmeriStrength, and sister Nikki Armas, an employee at Digital Lightbridge.

The event held personal significance for the trio. “Our family has been touched by domestic violence,” Faulkner said. “We have become close with [Sunrise of Pasco County] to understand the programs they offer, the assistance they give, and the real hope that they bring to these women and children to help them escape.”

Numerous items for the auction, marketplace, and activities were provided by several local organizations, including LuLaRoe, Doterra, San Antonio Lumber, Snap-On Tools, Spivey Karate, and others. The total amount was not yet known at press time, but all the proceeds went to the women and children at Sunrise of Pasco County in



Michael’s arts and crafts store donated a number of gingerbread cookies for children to decorate.



Children and parents were invited to pose for pictures with the whole Claus family.

need of a holiday cheer. The women of Imagine Solutions are hoping this event, and ones in the future, will help unite the community as a whole.

“We were hoping to bring more people to San Antonio and to bring awareness to domestic violence,” Faulkner said.

Imagine Solutions is looking forward to partnering with Sunrise again in the near future. The Imagine Center is also available to host other fundraising or personal events. For more information about Imagine Solutions or to rent the Center, contact Miranda Faulkner-Smith at MFaulkner@HelpMeImagine.com.



Children could paint some holiday themed rocks with a little help from members of the East Pasco Rocks group.



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