

THE BLOOMINGDALE GAZETTE

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Number 1

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Strength in numbers

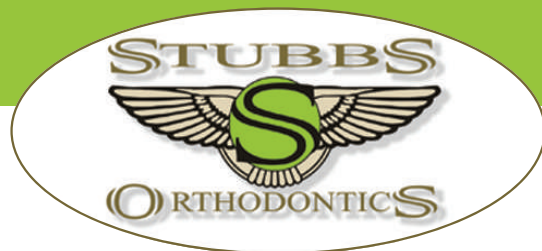
Members of Bloomingdale's Mu Alpha Theta demonstrate the right formula. See story, page 4.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep moving."

Albert Einstein

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Bloomingdale children treated to a special holiday visit



SUZANNE JONES

Kevin Williams prepares to share his wish list with Santa and Mrs. Claus. Kevin has been visiting Santa in Bloomingdale for the last 10 years (his whole life).

By SUZANNE JONES

Santa and Mrs. Claus visited Bloomingdale residents on Saturday, Dec. 1 at the Bloomingdale Special Taxing District (BSTD) office off Bell Shoals Rd. Approximately 70 children showed up to sit on Santa's lap during the three-hour visit. Elves were on hand to keep the event organized; snacks and crafts kept waiting children occupied, and each child left with a candy cane treat and a small toy. Bloomingdale Homeowners Association sponsored the event making it free for Bloomingdale families who were asked only to bring a canned food donation. All foods collected were later donated to ECHO.

Bloomingdale children asked Santa for a variety of special gifts this Christmas, but some were content simply with the experience of visiting the North Pole couple. The Martin



The Martin brothers show off some of the treats given to them during their visit with Santa.

family brought four children to see Santa and Mrs. Claus. "I asked Santa for a PS3," said one of the Martin boys. "I like the candy cane and beach ball," ex-

claimed his brother. Martin family adults thought it was a great experience for their kids, "We really appreciated that food collection was part of the event."

Yard of the Month



BY KIM MILLER



The Yard of the Month had a holiday theme this year, as the day-and-night photos of Randy and Mandy Ruscin's home, 4011 Shadowhill Drive, in Valrico, show.

The Bloomingdale Gazette's yard of the moth contest is sponsored by Ace Hardware of Bloomingdale. Send your nominations to inbloomingdalenews@gmail.com or call (813) 681-2051. Winners, such as the Ruscins, receive a \$25 gift card redeemable at Ace Hardware of Bloomingdale.



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Mu Alpha Theta demonstrates the right formula

By SUZANNE JONES

Bloomingtondale's Mu Alpha Theta team brought home several trophies from the Dec. 4 Hillsborough County Mathematics Bowl at USF. Mu Alpha Theta is the National High School and Two-Year College Mathematics Honor Society with more than 93,000 student members nationally. Every Hillsborough County Public school was represented at the Dec. 4 event, with most schools sending at least one full team of 16 students. The BSHS team placed fourth overall, bringing home trophies in Geometry, Algebra 2, Pre-Calculus and Calculus.

Bloomingtondale's Mu Alpha Theta chapter consists of 128 members and is sponsored by mathematics teachers Kimberly Masson, Susan Flaws, Susie Jennings and Susan Daily. Masson, who has served as club sponsor since 1996, describes the most rewarding part of her role as, "working with students who are enthusiastic about Mathematics and seeing them succeed in competitions."

Students compete as both individuals and in teams. Individual trophies



PROVIDED

Mu Alpha Theta shows off Math Bowl trophies at USF. Pictured, first row (left to right): Koustav Dutta, Brendan Chen, Travis Brimmer, Rachel Devillier, Ashley Halstead, Katie McLean, Ashley Ericson. In the second row are Joe Gallagher, Chris West, Tanner Chastain, Jared Horner, Tristan Phillips, Matthew Yeatts, Kyle McKishnie, Sam Braverman, Ian Ludden

are based solely on individual scores; team scoring is the sum of the four individual scores plus the score in the team round. On average students dedicate one hour per week after

school preparing for competition. The experience of competition day is well worth the time commitment according to junior Ashley Erikson. "Competing is a lot of fun," she said. "You get

to hang out all day with people who enjoy math as much as we do."

Mu Alpha Theta's next competition will be held in the spring again at USF. The date has not yet been announced.

Results

Geometry - Team: 2nd;
Individual: Tristan Phillips - 5th and Travis Brimmer - 7th
Pre-Calculus -Team: 4th,
Individual: Chris West - 7th, Ashley Erikson - 10th,
Koustav Dutta - 11th
Algebra 2 - Individual: Joe Gallagher - 12th
Calculus - Individual: Ian Ludden - 6th

Service Organizations

MacDill Family Resource Center, 710 Oakfield Drive, Suite 153, Brandon, offers services to members of the military and their families, including legal assistance, fax/Internet access, tax preparation and filing, free computer classes and more. Call (813) 655-9281.

Brandon Newcomers Club: The Brandon Newcomers Club meets at 9:30 a.m. the third Wednesday monthly September through May at Brandon Community Center, 502 E. Sadie St. The nonprofit social service organization aims to help people adjust to their new home and community and make new friends. The club also contributes annually to charity through fundraisers. Call (813) 643-3281.

Elks Dinners: Elks Lodge 2383, 800 Centennial Lodge Drive, Brandon. The lodge hosts dinners open to the public at 6:30 p.m. Wednesdays and breakfasts from 8 to 11 a.m.

the second and fourth Sundays. Call (813) 685-6469.

Connecting Businessmen to Christ meets at 7:30 a.m. Wednesdays at Village Inn Restaurant, 1995 Lumsden Road, Brandon. Call (813) 299-9219 or (813) 240-4511.

BBC Brandon Business Club meets at noon Wednesdays at Top's China Buffet, 1528 W. Brandon Blvd. to share information and leads with local businesses. Call (813) 654-3100.

Masons: Brandon Masonic Lodge 114, 203 N. Moon Ave. Degree Night is 7:30 p.m. the first and third Thursdays. Business meetings are 7:30 p.m. the second and fourth Thursdays monthly, preceded by family dinners at 6:30. Call (813) 689-4221.

Kiwanis: The Greater Brandon Kiwanis Club meets from 7:45 to 9 a.m. Thursdays at Ben's Family Restaurant, 704 E. Brandon Blvd., Brandon. Call (813) 685-7411 or go to www.brandonkiwanis.org.

Lions Club: The Brandon Lions Club meets at 6:30 p.m. the first and third Thursdays for a social, followed by a dinner meeting at 7 p.m. at Limona Improvement Association, 610 Limona Road, Brandon. Call (813) 651-1010.

Greater Seffner Area Chamber of Commerce has its membership luncheons at noon the second Thursday monthly at First Baptist Church of Mango, 11619 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. Call (813) 506-3914 for information.

Shrine Club: The Brandon Shrine Club, 125 Skywood Drive, Valrico. The club meets the last Monday monthly, beginning with fellowship hour at 6 p.m. and followed by dinner. Call (813) 681-6933 or (813) 654-1612.

Beta Omega master: The Beta Omega Master Chapter of Beta Sigma Phi is a social/service organization. Chapters in the region include Riverview and Brandon. Chapter

Bloomington students walk for education

By SUZANNE JONES

\$5000.

BSHS finished first at the Hillsborough Education Foundation's Take Stock in Children's Strides for Education Tampa Bay 5K Scholarship Walk held on Dec. 8 at the Tampa Bay Times Forum. Take Stock in Children provides "scholarships, mentors and hope" for students throughout Florida. The Hillsborough Education Foundation organized the Tampa Bay walk to benefit students in Hillsborough County. Bloomingdale High registered 276 students for its team and earned the title of Top Online Team by generating over \$10,000 in online donations, far surpassing their fundraising target of

"We had 11 days to organize a team for this walk. At the outset I would have been happy if we raised \$2500," commented BSHS walk organizer Leena Hasbini.

On the day of the event Bloomingdale registered 70 student walkers who also performed a flash mob dance to Psy's "Gangnam Style."

"Kicking off the event with a flash mob was a really fun thing for our team to do together," said BSHS sophomore Cassie Newman. Newman helped organize and lead the flash mob. "The other walkers seemed to enjoy it and it seemed to energize everyone."

Bloomingdale students



PROVIDED

Bloomingdale High School students demonstrate team spirit and school pride at the Take Stock in Children's Strides for Education Tampa Bay 5K Scholarship Walk.

earned 20 community service hours for participation by attending the three team meetings and helping assemble goodie bags in advance of the walk.

"The students' participation in this event makes me truly proud to be a

Bull," commented Ms. Hasbini.

Two Bloomingdale students ranked the highest of the walk's Top Online Participants. Senior Vincent Roth raised \$2600 and won an iPad, the Foundation's top individual par-

ticipation incentive. Kiera Tocci finished second by raising \$2020 in donations. The team's efforts banked an automatic \$7500 in BSHS scholarship funds through bonus awards of \$5000 for top fundraising team and \$2500 for regis-

tering over 250 walkers. With additional participation-based funds allocated to Bloomingdale by the Foundation, BSHS anticipates awarding over 15 individual \$1000 scholarships to this year's graduating seniors.

Thank you Brandon

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Suburban robot cowhands

By SUZANNE JONES

When does a robot need training? When it gets rusty! The robotics club is new at Bloomingdale this year, but these students are anything but rusty. On Dec. 8 the Mechanical Bulls, as the club is known, competed in just their second Ring It Up tournament. Ring It Up is the 2012-2013 FIRST Tech Challenge (FTC) game played by robots that are constructed using a combination of motors, controllers, wireless communications, metal gears, and sensors, including infrared tracking (IR) and magnet seeking. The object of the game is to score more points than an opponent by placing weighted plastic rings onto pegs of a rack placed in the center of the field of play.

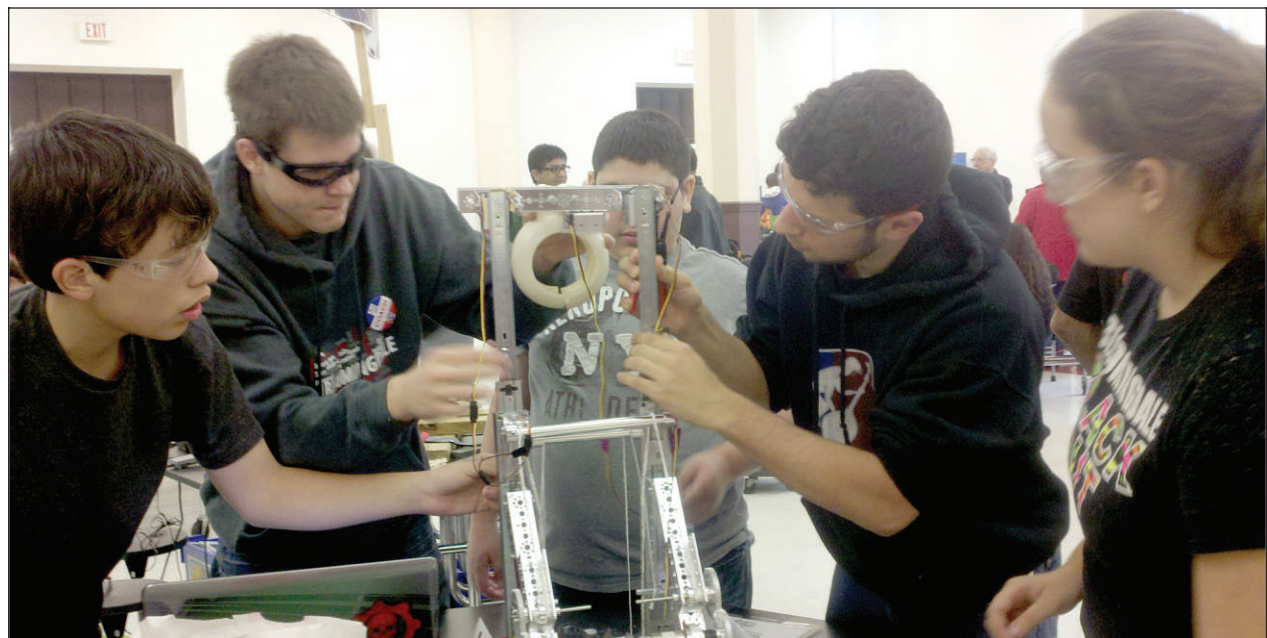
While the Mechanical Bulls placed 12th out of 14

entries in this most recent Hillsborough County league tournament, club sponsor Sarah Branam couldn't be more proud.

"We have some stiff competition in our league," she said. "We are a new club competing against the likes of Middleton High School, which specializes in engineering and has three teams competing this year. Last year one of their teams won the Robotics World Championship."

Like all BSHS clubs, robotics is allowed one fundraiser, so start-up costs have also been an issue this first year out. Despite the challenges, Branam says, "the students stay so positive. Their strength is working collaboratively."

This year's Mechanical Bulls team is comprised of nine students re-



BLOOMINGDALE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Mechanical Bulls prep robot for tournament competition at Nov. 17 league meet at Hillsborough Senior High. Pictured Left to Right: Eli Santos, Tyler Neidhardt, Rene Hernandez, Anthony Owhadi and Amanda Hymer. Not pictured: Brendan Chen, Olivia Fletcher, Josh Johnson and Andrew Bloodworth.

presenting all four grade levels. The team spends eight hours per week on average preparing for competition. Why?

"I am having fun, and participating in the club helps prepare me for college," offers Amanda Hymer.

Hymer plans to pursue mechanical engineering in college and as a career.

"What we learn in robotics, like programming and engineering, can be used in jobs when we graduate," echoes teammate, Andrew Bloodworth.

The Mechanical Bulls are looking ahead to the next league tournament on Jan. 19 in Winter Haven, and then it is on to League Championships. FTC games change annually, so while the club cannot prepare specially for next year's

game, the group will evaluate this season's experience and set expectations for the future. Congratulations to the robotics club on their first year up and running and to Sarah Branam who is also the 2012 Mathematics Teacher of the Year.

BSHS students recognized for academic excellence

By KIM MILLER

A record number of Bloomingdale juniors and seniors – 418 – were recognized for their efforts in the classroom during a Nov. 29 academic breakfast. These students received academic letters because they earned a weighted GPA of 3.5 or higher in the previous year and exemplify the high standards and traditions of Bloomingdale Senior High School.

Principal Mark West

lauded the students and challenged them to use their intelligence and the knowledge gained at BSHS as they move forward to post-secondary endeavors. Four special awards were given out to seniors during the breakfast. Five students were recognized as National Merit Commended Students: Allison Lehr, Daniel Monaghan, Vincent Roth, Amelia Tam and Matthew Yeatts. Alyssa Best was recognized as a National Achievement Outstanding Participant. National Achievement Semi-Finalists included Christian Allen and Ashley Montgomery. BSHS has three students as National Merit Semi-Finalists: Travis Bird, Ian Ludden and James Rentz.



KIM MILLER

BSHS junior and senior academic stars are treated to bagels, juice and a well-deserved break from their second period classes. Pictured on left: Dylan Sepessey, Robbie Bullara, Travis Bird, Arianna Fraley, Chris Bosek and Ryan Wicks. Pictured on right: Michael Alejandro, Michael Ramoska, Julie Roggeman, Tori Roccaforte, Sean McKenna and Zack Carter.

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KIM MILLER

Bloomingtondale Senior James Wiehle (top) vs. a wrestler from Alonzo wrestler at Dec. 12 meet.

Wrestling: the unsung heroes of Bloomingtondale

By KIM MILLER

The Bloomingtondale High boys wrestling team may be considered unsung heroes at BSHS, but this doesn't throw them. To the contrary, the team's 2012-2013 call to action is "No Excuses!"

Under the direction of first year head coach Jim Jones, the Bulls are 14-3 as of Dec. 12. Coach Jones is leveraging the three distinct wrestling styles that he and his two assistant coaches, Greg White and Darin Synhorse, bring to the mat. His team learn from their diverse experiences and the wrestlers personalize the approaches. So far, the formula is working.

Coach Jones' would love to see the community and the students get excited about wrestling.

"I have a great group of kids, and exceptional as-

sistant coaches," said Coach Jones. "We all work really hard, and with each match I see improvement in all the kids. The parent support has been phenomenal."

The lone senior on the team, James Wiehle, has been wrestling at BSHS since his freshman year. As a junior he made it to the state meet, but didn't perform to his expectations. This year he is confident of making a better impression. Wiehle explained that the new coaching staff is tough, and the twice daily practices (one before school and one after) are intense, much harder than previous years.

"It takes a lot of commitment and discipline every day," said Wiehle. He also appreciates exposure to three styles of wrestling. "They have helped me broaden my moves so I'm not so predictable."

By SHAPHALI JAIN

A teacher is so much more than someone who imparts education; he or she can be an inspiration, a mentor, a friend, a well wisher, a positive role model and a counselor all rolled into one. There is always one teacher that stands out, one that we remember years later because of the way our lives were touched by him or her. Teachers of the Year are selected by the other educators with whom they work in their respective schools.

These teachers take their jobs seriously. They are passionate and dedicated individuals who strive to touch the lives of our children in numerous ways. Congratulations to the following teachers who were appointed 2013 Teacher of the Year in our neighborhood schools: Kathy Mulvihill (Alafia Elementary), Elizabeth Sanchez (Cimino Elementary), Michael Williams (Burns Middle), Anthony Pendino (Bloomingtondale High).

Editor's note: This is part one of a two-part story. Ms. Mulvihill and Ms. Sanchez are featured in this issue. Bloomingtondale High School's Mr. Pendino and Mr. Williams, Burns Middle School Teacher of the Year, will be highlighted in the February 2013 issue of the Gazette.

Kathy Mulvihill Alafia Elementary

Kathy Mulvihill has been with Alafia Elementary since its opening 25 years ago. She says she was completely taken by surprise when an entourage of people appeared in her classroom with flowers and announced that she

had been selected Teacher of the Year. "I never dreamed of it and am very humbled by it all," Mulvihill said.

Two of Kathy Mulvihill's grandparents were educators. She remembers that they were teachers during the Great Depression when only one teacher in the family got paid. Her grandfather was paid his salary but her grandmother was not paid a penny. Despite this, Mul-

hill's grandmother continued to teach knowing that the children in her school depended on her.

"My grandmother was a wonderful role model and a great storyteller," she said of one of her greatest inspirations. "The more I thought about what she had done in her life, the more I wanted to do the same." Mulvihill attended Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, the same university from which her grandmother graduated.

In 1999, Kathy lost her husband. During that hard time the one thing she says that she looked forward to was walking into the classroom and looking at the faces of the children.

"All my problems went away at that time," she reflected. "They need you to be sharp and ready to go and that's how I had to be. Those children gave me more than I gave to them that year."

In addition to Teacher of the Year, Ms. Mulvihill won the Ida S. Baker award, which is given to an educator who goes above and beyond to meet diverse needs of the student

population.

Elizabeth Sanchez Cimino Elementary

"Cimino Elementary is staffed by some of the finest and most dedicated teachers in Hillsborough County, so naturally I feel very much honored to have been chosen to represent our school as Teacher of the Year," said Elizabeth Sanchez.

She graduated from Florida State University and has been teaching in Hillsborough County for 14 years. During her tenure, Sanchez has taught elementary grades first through fifth as an exceptional student education (ESE) teacher and as a regular education teacher. She also held the position of ESE Specialist at Cimino Elementary, but the classroom has always been where her heart is.

"I appreciate the challenge of working with in-

termediate students to prepare them for future educational experiences and to grow in responsibility," she said of her current role as a fifth grade teacher. "It also helps that the older students can understand my amazing sense of humor!"

Sanchez says that the key to teaching is making the classroom a place where students can find joy while learning.

"I am passionate about writing and encourage my students as well as my peers to embrace writing in their daily lives," she said.

Since being named Teacher of the Year, Sanchez says she has been asked to reflect on her choices and beliefs as an educator.

"Instead of viewing these requests as a taxing responsibility, I have found it to be refreshing," she said. "Through this process I have reconnected with myself and the reasons why I have chosen to work with children. I feel blessed to have had this opportunity."



Kathy
Mulvihill



Elizabeth
Sanchez

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Jan. 23 Newsome High school
Jan. 25-26 Wharton High School/County Tournament
Feb. 1-2 TBD/District Tournament
Feb. 8-9 Osceola High School/Regional Tournament
Feb. 15-16 Lakeland Civic Center/State Tournament

It is time for basketball at Bloomingdale

By KIM MILLER

Second year girls basketball head coach Joel Bower could not be happier with his team's start this season. At the end of November the girls' team was 4-0, a huge improvement over his first year, when the team had a total of three wins all season. He credits the team's success so far to hard work during the off season, playing in a summer league and attending camp. With only one senior and the core of the team being sophomores, coach Bower feels his team is right where they should be and are building and improving in the right direction.

"Our real test will be when district play begins," he admitted. "We play in a really tough district, but if the girls continue working hard and have the will to win, we may do fairly well."

Senior, Kreshara Miller says she loves the competition and aggressive play in basketball. She likes the feeling of being stronger and confident while playing. The team's sophomore talent was evident with their 62-57 defeat of arch rival Brandon Nov. 28. Sophomores Jaqueline Mayo and Serena Grant contributed 14 points each to push the Bulls past the Eagles.

The BSHS boys basket-

ball will have a fight for second in their district, according to head coach Joe Willis. Teams in the Bulls' district are evenly matched with the exception of Wharton High School, this season's favorite. Nonetheless, Coach Willis feels his team will do well.

"We make mistakes, but we take those mistakes, learn from and build on them," explained Willis.

During the preseason, Willis tried many combinations of players toward the goal of putting the best Bulls combinations on the court each game. He will use those bench players who are able to acclimate and contribute. Junior Grant Townsend has been playing basketball since the 7th grade and remarked that he likes the intensity and excitement of the game, and how the

Bulls boys

Jan. 8 @ Newsome* 8 p.m.
Jan. 9 Spoto @ BSHS 8 p.m.
Jan. 11 Wharton @ BSHS* 8 p.m.
Jan. 18 @ Durant* 8 p.m.
Jan. 19 vs Ridgewood (Ulrich Family Classic) @ 4:30 p.m. at Wiregrass Ranch High School
Jan. 22 @ Plant* 7 p.m.
Jan. 23 Middleton @ BSHS 8 p.m.
Jan. 25 @ Tampa Bay Tech 8 p.m.
Jan. 28 @ Plant City 7 p.m.
Feb. 1 East Bay @ BSHS 7 p.m.
Feb. 4-9 District Tournament @ BSHS TBD
* denotes district games

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KIM MILLER

Kreshara Miller(12) and Nuri Troy(10) fighting for position to receive an in bounds pass from Regan Lee (10)

crowd responds to the action on the court. Townsend enjoys that fans are so close that their responses to plays and the cheering positively affect the Bulls game play.

Coach Willis urges BSHS basketball alumni to get involved with the team. For more information he can be contacted at joseph.willis@sdhc.k12.fl.us. Fans can cheer on the Bulls at one of the upcoming games.

Bulls girls

Jan. 8 @ Newsome* 6:30 p.m.
Jan. 9 Spoto @ BSHS 6:30 p.m.
Jan. 11 Wharton @ BSHS* 6:30 p.m.
Jan. 18 @ Durant* 6:30 p.m.



KIM MILLER

Jose Cruz(11), George Brammeier(11), Todd Kaiser(10) going for the rebound

Financial Wellness: 10 things to do in 2013

By MADEE PRETHER

Use credit, not debit

Protect yourself from identity theft by primarily using credit cards. While both debit and credit cards are subject to identity theft, the credit card holder's liability is limited to \$50 for any fraudulent use. A debit card holder's liability is limited to \$50 only if he or she notifies the financial institution within two business days after the learning of the loss or theft. After that time the debit card holder's responsibility increases and is potentially unlimited.

Be smart with your credit card

Keep the number of credit cards you possess to a minimum to avoid building up debt, creating a higher risk, and hurting your credit score. Pay your bills on time to avoid late fees.

Create an emergency fund

Take left over money from each month and set it aside as an emergency fund. This can be used for natural disasters, burglaries, or medical procedures. Keep it somewhere safe, like a bank account or a safety deposit box.

Save for the future

Assuming approximately 50 percent of a person's income is spent on necessary costs such as food and mortgage, the other half should go into a retirement fund, savings account, or investments.

Pay off loans early

Spend your golden years enjoying life, not paying off your mortgage. Use money left over at the end of the month to pay off part of your car loan or mortgage. Once those payments are out of the way, you will have more money to spend on kids, grandkids or yourself.

Just spend less

Spend less now so that you will have more to spend in the future. Be careful with your money, live within your means, and use common sense.

Live within your means

It is recommended that no more than 50 or 60 percent of a person's monthly income be spent on basic costs such as food, mortgage, car and other essentials. If you are spending more than that, cut back.

Budget

To live within your means, start by developing a budget. A budget is simply a way of assessing and limiting how much you spend and what you spend it on; it does not need to be a strict spending plan. Simply put, a budget helps you know at the end of the month where money went.

Spend smart

Keep from making purchases you will regret by following these tips. It is tempting to buy something because it is on sale, but only purchase a sale item if it is needed. If you find yourself trying to rationalize a purchase, it is probably something unnecessary. Pursue alternative brands rather than buying only those which are familiar. Only purchase items you can afford.

Diversify

To diversify means to invest in many different places to minimize risk. If your stocks crash, you still have your savings account. If the bank closes, you still have your mutual fund. Remember that low-risk investments, such as certificates of deposit and money market accounts, have a low return, while high-risk investments, namely stocks, have a high return. Diversify by choosing investments with varying degrees of risk to maximize your return and minimize your risk.

Identity theft can happen right here in Bloomingtondale

Sandy Capitano

HCSO Community Services Officer

You've heard about identity theft on television and read about it in magazines or newspapers. But believe me it is very real. We have had an increase in reported cases of identity theft from residents in the Bloomingtondale area.

Oftentimes identity theft begins with a lost or stolen wallet. If this happens to you, take the following actions:

1. Contact card issuers and report your credit and identification cards as lost or stolen. To prepare for such a loss, take a few minutes now and make a photocopy (front and back) of each identification card and credit card in your wallet. These account numbers and the phone numbers to call will come in handy when reporting your loss.

2. If your wallet has identification in it, immediately report the loss or theft to law enforcement. Timing is critical. The sheriff's office will take a report for lost property such as a driver's license, a Social Security card, passport, military ID or a Medicare card. Once there is proof of a theft or use of the items, the crime becomes identity theft.

3. Consider requesting an initial 90-day fraud alert with one of the three credit reporting companies: Equifax (1-800-525-6285), Experian (1-888-397-3742), and Trans

Union (1-800-680-7289). An alert, which is free of charge, helps thwart any attempts to use your information to open fraudulent accounts.

Personal information may also be stolen from your mail or trash can; by devices used to "skim" debit card numbers; by hacking into electronic employment or medical files; and through email or text "phishing," which asks for your personal information under the guise of a legitimate business.

Here are seven simple fraud prevention measures that you can take immediately to protect one of your most valuable possessions, your credit.

- Monitor and review your credit report to ensure accuracy of your credit information. You may request a free credit report from each of the three credit reporting companies every 12 months through www.annualcreditreport.com.

- Never carry your Social Security card. Keep the card in a secure place at home.

- Never give out personal information unless you initiate the call or you know the caller. This goes for requests that come via the computer. Never open up an unknown email.

- Password protect all accounts, avoiding simple passwords. If you have been a victim of an internet scam or have received an e-mail that you believe was an attempted scam, file a complaint with the Internet Crime Complaint Center at www.IC3.gov.

- Mail outgoing items at the post office, not in your residential mailbox. Remove mail from your mailbox promptly. When ordering new checks, ask if you can pick them up at your local branch instead of having the checks delivered.

- Pay close attention to billing cycles. A missing statement could be the first clue to an identity theft issue.

- If you are the victim of identity theft, report the incident to the Federal Trade Commission via phone at 1-877-IDTHEFT or online at www.ftc.gov.



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Open your mouth and say ahhh

By KIM MILLER
RN, BSN

Strep throat – the painful diagnosis is topped only by its anxiety inducing informer, the giant swab. Strep throat is a highly contagious bacterial infection especially prevalent during the months of November through March. Patients usually complain of a sore, scratchy throat with difficulty swallowing food,

and sometimes even liquids. Most sore throats are caused by viruses and clear up on their own, but a small portion are caused by the Streptococcus bacteria; hence the name “strep throat.”

In addition to throat pain and difficulty swallowing, strep throat manifests itself with several symptoms including red or swollen tonsils, tiny red spots at the back of your mouth,

swollen and tender neck glands, fever and headache, rash, stomach ache and vomiting.

Diagnosis and treatment of strep throat is straightforward. Although it is possible to have several of the above symptoms and not have strep throat, a throat swab is the best way to diagnose the infection. After confirming that the infection is strep, an appropriate antibiotic will be prescribed for

you. Along with medicinal treatment, be sure to get plenty of fluids, rest, eat soft foods, gargle with warm salt water, and change your toothbrush 24 hours after starting the antibiotic to decrease reinfection.

Prevention is easy: wash hands often, and try to keep them out of your mouth; cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing; and, do not share eating utensils or drinking glasses.

What's crunchy, salty and chocolaty all over?



KIM MILLER

Some people love the sweet and salty combination of chocolate covered snack foods.

Chocolate dipped pretzels and candy coated nuts move over.

Maria Vasquez, winner of December's Everything Dipped in Chocolate contest, indulged her family with a cutting edge snack – chocolate dipped Doritos! Congratulations Maria. The Bloomingdale Homeowners Association hopes you enjoy your prize, a box of Belgium chocolates and a package of peppermint bark.

Prize winning snack, chocolate dipped Doritos.

SERVICE

From Page 4

meetings are 7:30 p.m. the first and third Tuesdays. Meetings rotate and are in members' homes. Service projects include A Kids Place, and Life Care of Brandon. Call (813) 672-4301.

The Greater Palm River Community Civic Association meets at 6:30 p.m. the third Tuesday monthly in the Fellowship Hall of First Baptist Church of Palm

River, 5415 Palm River Road, Tampa. Call (813) 626-5066.

Riverview Chamber of Commerce offers membership luncheons at 11:30 a.m. the fourth Tuesday monthly at Riverview Civic Center, 11020 Park Drive. Call (813) 234-5944.

Eagles Activities: The Eagles Lodge, 1810 Front St., Valrico. Meetings are at 8 p.m. the first and third Tuesdays. The Auxiliary meets at 8 p.m. the first and third Thursday. Breakfast is served from 8:30 to

11 a.m. the first, third and fifth Sundays. Wednesday is spaghetti night from 4:30 to 7 p.m. Call (813) 685-4173.

Beta Chi chapter: The Beta Chi chapter of Epsilon Sigma Alpha, a leadership and service organization, is seeking women who have a desire to help those in need. The chapter meets the second Tuesday monthly. Meetings rotate and take place in members' homes. Call (813) 654-6968 or (813) 657-4603.

Rotary Clubs: The Rotary Club of Tampa East meets at 12:15 p.m. Wednesdays at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Sabal Park, 10221 Princess Palm Ave., Tampa. Lunch is served. Call (813) 654-3100. The Brandon '86 Rotary meets for breakfast at 7 a.m. Fridays at The Bridges, 11202 Dewhurst Drive, Riverview. Call (863) 559-4635. The Rotary Club of Bloomingdale/FishHawk meets at noon Mondays at Fireside Grill in FishHawk Park Square, 16132

Churchview Drive, Lithia. Call (813) 643-7025. The Brandon Rotary Club meets at noon Tuesdays at Center Place Fine Arts & Civic Association, 619 Vonderburg Drive, Brandon. Call (813) 685-4343.

Toastmasters: Brandon Toastmasters meet at 6:30 p.m. at Providence West Community Center, 5417 Providence Road, Riverview. Call (813) 495-9061. Toastmasters International meets at 6:30 p.m. the first and third Tuesdays in room 7, upstairs at St. Ste-

phen Catholic Church, 5049 Bell Shoals Road, Valrico. For information, email tcummings2@tampabay.rr.com or cwood@ststephencatholic.org or call (813) 625-2444. The Valrico Toastmasters meet at 7 p.m. the second and fourth Tuesdays at Campo Family YMCA, 3414 Culbreath Road, Valrico. Call (813) 504-4535.

Send club news to, Kathy Vance, email kvance@tampatrib.com or fax to (813) 259-7676.

Bloomingdale Buzz

What is your New Year's resolution?

By DEE PRETHER

Charles Lamb proclaimed, “New Year's Day is every man's birthday.” T.S. Eliot mused, “For last year's words belong to last year's language. And next year's words await another voice.” This month we asked Bloomingdale community residents to reflect on the upcoming year and share their New Year's resolutions.

Eric Cannon decided on a personal trainer. Rather than procrastinating, he got a jump on the New Year and started training in early December. “I'm already feeling changes and heading in the right direction after 20 years.”

Carla W. responded, “I haven't thought that far ahead.”

“We can't have the same craziness we had this year, so we are going to do something different,” declared Max Prether.

Miranda Sullivan's goal is to keep applying for scholarships, get ready to graduate and prepare for college. Going into 2013 Miranda describes herself as a “combination of scared and excited.”

Peter Jensen's goal is to “incorporate more professional music” into his life for 2013 as he pursues his goal of high school graduation and college admission.

Vicki Stamper says that her number one goal for 2013 is fitness. “I want to find an exercise routine that will fit into my daily routine.” She is not a fan of diets because she knows that she will give in to her love of chocolate. Vicki's second goal is to “lighten her load” of stuff in her house and get better organized.

A Bloomingdale East resident is ready to move on after 20 years. He said, “My goal is to finalize my divorce and have an epic 2013.”

Burns Middle School Resource Officer, Deputy Bradley replied, “Get back with me.”

Help us help the community in the New Year

Happy New Year from your community sheriff's office. As with any new year, we hope for joyous moments, and we prepare for challenges that may await us as individuals, the community and at all levels of government. The Sheriff's Office will continue to make significant progress in providing Bloomingdale and the surrounding areas of Hillsborough County with a safer and more secure place to live, work, run your business and raise a family. The safety and security of the residents, their homes and businesses in our community and the county our reason for being here.

Get involved

Homeowners' associations, please ensure your representation on the Bloomingdale Area Community Council (BACC), which helps residents stay informed on important issues affecting our communities. The BACC meets the



Curtis Warren

third Thursday of each month at the Bloomingdale Community Station on Erindale Drive. We are also working to increase the number of residents serving on the sheriff's "Volunteer Citizens Patrol Program." Residents interested in helping make Bloomingdale a safer and more secure community may contact the Sheriff's Community Outreach Division at (813) 247-0944 for information on this program.

Focus on safe driving

Community law enforcement officers have noticed a significant number of accidents involving teen drivers. Families, please work hard to stop teens from suffering life changing accidents, which often are due to talking and texting while driving and are compounded by poor seat belt habits. Safe

driving practiced by all drivers in the community helps improve traffic flow and lessens congestion. By slowing down and obeying traffic laws prevents accidents that tie up traffic, and may cause deaths or serious injuries. We challenge each of you to make it your personal resolution in 2013 to slow down, drive safer and obey all of the traffic laws.

Secure your property

Open garage doors and unlocked vehicles are two common security oversights that continue to contribute to crime in our community. To help fight crime, it is simple – just lock up your homes and your vehicles. Take personal responsibility for your property, your home and your vehicles. No one will miss them more than you. Also, be a good neighbor and watch out for your neighbors. Don't make it easy for the bad guys.

Many of you may be thinking, "We hear these same safety and security steps over and over every year." That's true – we hope the reminders will spur residents to action. The simple fact is safety reminders don't work until you take action and do them!

Special thanks

Major changes are taking place within the Hillsborough County Fire Department that will directly affect the volunteers at the Bloomingdale Volunteer Fire Department Station. Full-time firefighters will be taking over the station. Our thanks go out to the many volunteer firefighters and their families who have faithfully served and protected us over these past many years. Their dedication to duty and personal sacrifices saved lives and property. We wish all of them the very best in their next endeavors.

HAVE A GREAT 2013!

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree, How Lovely Were Thy Branches

It's an annual holiday ritual – how to dispose of a once-live Christmas tree. Hillsborough County offers these options:

♦ Curbside Pickup

Curbside pickup of live Christmas trees is available to County solid waste customers by following these steps:

Remove all decorations, lights and tinsel

Cut the tree into sections no larger than 4 feet long and 6 inches in diameter

Place curbside on your next yard waste collection day

♦ Yard Waste Processing Facilities

Hillsborough County solid waste customers can skip the post-holiday blues of seeing their once-live Christmas tree sitting by the curb – and spare the hassle and work of cutting the trees into smaller pieces for pickup - by taking trees directly to a Yard Waste Processing Facility.

The sites are open Monday through Saturday (with the exception of holidays, such as Christmas Day and New Year's Day) from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

- Falkenburg Road/Resource Recovery Facility: 350 Falkenburg Road, Brandon. Phone: (813) 744-5599

- South County: 13001 U.S. Highway 41, Gibsonton. Phone: (813) 671-7611

- Northwest: 8001 W. Linebaugh Ave., Tampa. Phone: (813) 264-3816

Customers should bring their current tax bill and proper identification to access the Yard Waste Processing Facilities, and be able to unload the trees themselves. Customers should also remove all decorations, lights and tinsel. Artificial trees are not

accepted at the yard waste sites.

Non-County residential solid waste customers can dispose of yard waste by paying a tonnage fee.

For more information about Hillsborough County solid waste collection and disposal services, visit www.hillsboroughcounty.org/solidwaste, or call (813) 272-5680.

♦ Mulch

Another idea is to chop or grind live Christmas trees and use as mulch around trees, shrubs and flower beds.

For more information regarding recycling live Christmas trees, contact:

Lynn Barber, Florida-Friendly Landscaping Agent, Hillsborough County and UF-IFAS Extension, barberL@hillsborough-county.org, (813) 744-5519 ext. 54105.

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Local Elks lodge hosts free throw contest

By DENNIS OBSBORN

The Elks Hoop Shoot Free Throw Program is a national event that encourages competition, connecting and success. Brandon area elementary and middle schools held preliminary hoop shoot (free throw) contests at their school sites. The winners from each school then participated in the Brandon Elks Lodge's local contest, which was held on Saturday, Nov. 10, 2012 at the First Baptist Church of Brandon's MAC (Ministries and Activities Center). The Nov. 10 winners go on to compete in the district competition on Saturday, Jan. 5, 2013 in Sebring Florida. District winners will compete at the state level on Jan. 19, 2013 in Umatilla, Florida. If successful at the state level, students move on to the national level in April 2013. Nationally approximately 2.5 million students participated in the 2012 event. These children worked hard and hopefully will go on to do well at the next level.



PROVIDED

Nine Brandon-area winners of the local Elks Hoop Shoot Free Throw Program will compete at the district contest Sat., Jan. 5, in Sebring. Four of the winners, those from the 8/9-year-old division, are Keyara Bromley, left, Caitlyn Hayden, Breyanna Wright and Caleb Hott



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