



D'ANN WHITE/Photos

Saving Green Space

Joe Hickie, above, said the 10 acres of woods behind his Monte Lake Drive home was a major selling point when he bought his house in 1987. Hickie and his neighbors are attempting to preserve the wooded area through the county's Environmental Lands Acquisition and Protection Program. The woods serve as a playground for Freeway, the Hickies' dog, at right. See story, page 3.



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Residents encouraged to participate in Relay For Life

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Protecting No Man's Land

By D'ANN WHITE
Editor

For more than seven years, it's been no man's land.

The builders abandoned it; it was never deeded to the community; and the county was just waiting for someone to come forward to pay the back taxes and claim it.

But now a resident is hoping to convince the county to preserve and protect one of the last vestiges of undeveloped land in Bloomingdale East.

Last October, Monte Lake Drive resident Joe Hickle nominated the 10 wooded acres behind his home for the county's Environmental Lands Acquisition and Protection Program, which preserves and protects environmentally sensitive lands.

Hickle said it was the wood-

ed property behind the house he and his wife, Joni, purchased in 1987 that attracted him to the Stratford Trace neighborhood.

The Hickles paid a premium for their lot from the developer, Five-Star Development Corp., for the privilege of backing up to 10 acres designated to be used for parks and recreation in the site plan for Bloomingdale East.

"We were the first house in this section of Bloomingdale," recalled Hickle. "And when we bought it, we were told the property behind us was a private parks and recreation area, that it would always be a natural area. We loved that."

But, in 1997, the Hickles got a rude awakening.

A neighbor noticed someone surveying the property. When Hickle investigated, he discovered that the Miami

developer had gone bankrupt and abandoned the property. Originally, it was supposed to be deeded to the community's homeowners association. But since no mandatory homeowners association was ever formed in Stratford Trace, there was no entity to deed it to.

Hillsborough County took control of the property and was willing to sell it to anyone who would pay the back taxes.

Fortunately for the Hickles, no one bought it. After seven years, the property legally belonged to Hillsborough County. That seven-year period expired Dec. 9.

During that time, Hickle and his neighbors held their breath. With the empty property north being developed for River Crossing Estates, they feared it was only a matter of time before a developer began

investigating the 10 upland wooded acres behind Monte Lake.

In fact, there have been surveys out looking at the 10 acres several times over the years. But, according to Mike Kelly, director of the county's real estate department, any developer would face major obstacles trying to get the land rezoned for development.

Bloomingdale was one of Hillsborough County's first Developments of Regional Impact, a growth management designation for developments that have a major impact on the area that went into effect in the late 1970s.

That meant not only did the county have to approve the land uses, but the state Department of Community Affairs had to sign off on it as

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Web Site: www.BloomingdaleGazette.com
BHA meetings are at the community office on the 1st Monday of each month at 7 p.m.

President — Ted Grable
Vice President — Joe Hickle
Treasurer — Pam Liguori
Director — Tony Diolosa
Director — Steve Heckel
Director — Cheryl Kehrmeier
Director — Michele Caballer
Director — Billy Hightower
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Director — Lydia Harrod

Bloomingdale Special Taxing District

3509 Bell Shoals Rd., Valrico, FL 33594
(813) 684-6667
BSTD meetings are held at the community office on the 2nd Monday of each month at 7 p.m.

President — Thom Snelling

Vice President — Russell Jones
Treasurer — Dale Kahn
Recording Secretary — Alice Burleson
Correspondence Secretary — David West
Trustee — Myron Magedanz
Trustee — Michael Buday
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President — Bill Grace

Treasurer — Fred Englehart

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D'ANN WHITE/Photo

The county has repainted the handball courts at Bloomingdale Park East but the Bloomingdale Homeowners Association board believes many more improvements are needed at the park. Top on the list is rebuilding the restrooms, which have been locked and unused for years.

Park Improvements Good, But More Needed

By D'ANN WHITE
Editor

It's better than it was.

But the board of the Bloomingdale Homeowners Association is hoping to see more improvements at Bloomingdale Park East in the near future.

Hillsborough County is currently making improvements at the park on Natures Way as part of a pilot program to upgrade 75 community parks throughout the county.

Board member Lydia Harrod has been the liaison with the county and feels the improvements so far are good but would like to see more done and the improvements accelerated.

"Just repainting the handball courts has been a big improvement," said Harrod. "But we'd like to see more."

David Fountain of the Hillsborough County Parks, Recreation and Conservation Department said there are a number of improvements in the works including replacing the old barbecue grills, removing and replacing the existing restrooms by 2006, which have been boarded up for years, installing a new 20- by 20-foot picnic shelter and installing a 6-foot-wide side-

walk so parents with strollers and residents in wheelchairs can reach the amenities.

The county also plans to replace the fencing and benches around the tennis courts and resurface the courts, put in new basketball hoops, replace trash cans, add picnic tables, install new security lighting, install safety tile in the tot play area, and install a new tot swing and a 5- to 12-year-old play unit.

The total cost of the improvements is \$163,356.

Of special interest to the board of the Bloomingdale Homeowners Association is that the parks department tap into the Bloomingdale Special Taxing District's irrigation system, said BHA President Ted Grable. "They've all been great fixes so far but I think we'll see a big improvement once the park has irrigation," he said. "I'm all for conserving water but common areas need to have green grass."

The BHA also would like more lighting for security.

"The recurring themes for Park East are to improve the appearance, provide more shade, replace worn-out equipment and provide better lighting for night security," said Harrod.

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Calendar

Clean air seminar

Nature's Health Foods & Café Inc., 3443 Lithia-Pinecrest Road, will present a free seminar on "The Air We Breathe and the Water We Drink" Feb. 9 from 7 to 9 p.m. Refreshments will be provided by Nature's Health Foods & Café.

Call: 263-4237.

Democrats to meet

Ann DeMoss, chairwoman of the newly formed Brandon Democrat Committee, announced that the next meeting will be held at the Simply Thai restaurant in Bloomingdale Plaza Feb. 9 at

6 p.m. Students and anyone else interested in supporting the Democratic Party are welcome to attend.

The committee's mission is to register voters and assist local, state, and national Democratic candidates in the upcoming primary and general elections.

Voter registration tables are being set up in various locations around the Brandon area. Anyone who would like to register to vote or get involved in any of the committee's activities can call Ann DeMoss at 741-1678.

See CALENDAR, Page 23

Expert Evaluates Bloomingdale Common Areas

By D'ANN WHITE
Editor

It's going to take a lot of green stuff to keep Bloomingdale green.

That was the conclusion of agronomist Dan Morgan who conducted an evaluation of the community's common areas at the request of the Bloomingdale Special Taxing District.

Morgan, who does similar evaluations for Raymond James Stadium and Legends Field, has suggested a number of changes to the maintenance of the common areas including a higher concentration of fertilization in the 30 acres of St. Augustine grass, more insecticides and herbicides, removing trees along Culbreath Road, raising the

tree canopy 12 feet for 171 oak trees, raising the mower height and better maintaining the 13.4 miles of irrigation lines.

BSTD President Thom Snelling asked property manager Al Devney to see what changes can be made to the maintenance contract without adjusting the budget and then rank the needs and find out how much it would cost to implement them in next year's budget.

Among the items Devney will look into is hiring an irrigation company to maintain the community's sprinkler system. Devney currently does all the maintenance himself and can only get around to inspecting each of the 26 different systems every 90 days.

Devney noted that the district currently does not spray its bushes for disease or bug control and suggested that be added to the \$22,800 pest control contract right away. A number of bushes in the common areas are dying due to disease and insects, he said.

In other business, residents can rest assured their money is being well spent. That was the conclusion of accountants for the Bloomingdale Special Taxing District.

Michael Hayes of Ferraro, Higginbotham & Hayes presented the district's annual audit report, showing the district is in the black.

The annual budget is \$475,200 and the total fund balance was \$461,693.

Also at the meeting,

trustees debated what to do about the wooden benches throughout the community.

Trustee Dale Kahn said they're an eyesore and proposed removing them all.

"They're rotting and in horrible shape," he said.

Last year he obtained an estimate of \$1,200 to remove the benches put in eight years ago for children waiting at the bus stops. The bus stops have since been moved and are no longer located near the benches.

However, trustee David West wasn't sure they needed to be removed. "They may just need a little spit and shine," he said.

Devney will bring back estimates on removing and upgrading the benches.

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Meet Your Neighbors

Pat Boody Heads Up Friends Group

By D'ANN WHITE
Editor

The old wooden card catalogues have been replaced with computers that provide information at the touch of a mouse.

Bar code scanners now do the job of the hand stamps librarians once used to check out books.

And even the smallest of libraries can now offer patrons thousands of titles with the aid of Internet exchange services.

As a longtime librarian, Bloomingdale resident Pat Boody has watched the public library evolve into the high-tech, instant-service operation it is today.

But Boody said one thing will never change.

"People will always need books," she said. "There's nothing that compares to sitting in a big chair at night and reading a good book. I don't believe computers will ever replace books."

She's counting on the community's love of books as she heads up the South Brandon Library's new Friends of the Library organization, which had its first meeting Thursday at the Campo Family YMCA.

According to Patricia Koerber, the public information officer for the county library system, Boody is a natural to



D'ANN WHITE/Photo

Bloomingdale resident Pat Boody is heading the Friends of the Library chapter for the South Brandon Library.

head up the new group.

"I wanted to be a librarian since I was in fifth grade," said Boody, recalling many a childhood hour spent reading Happy Hollisters and Nancy Drew mysteries. "I loved reading and I loved books."

She attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she received her master's degree in library and information sciences. From there, she began working as a corporate librarian — in attor-

neys' offices, at hospitals and at government agencies, all of which required their own libraries and librarians to oversee them.

She went to the business information center at Tampa Electric for 20 years before computers made the center obsolete. But Boody was far from obsolete. She simply moved into information technology research at Tampa Electric, where she's become adept at researching and finding information online.

In her free time, she's volunteered in various capacities for the public library systems, including as a delegate to a Whitehouse conference on libraries and reviewing public library grants for the Florida Library Services Technology Act, which funds programs like "Born to Read," exposing infants to books.

"I was able to see the things rural libraries did to provide resources in their communities, and I began to realize just how powerful a library can be in a community."

But at home, when she

wants to relax, Boody said she doesn't reach for the keyboard. She reaches for a good book.

"I don't think the Internet will ever replace books," she said. "Studies have shown that when people are looking ahead at a computer screen, they're absorbing information in a different way than they are when they're looking down at a book."

And while she believes computers are a useful tool for teachers, nothing can capture a child's imagination like a good book.

"I think the most important skill a child can develop is reading," said Boody. "And libraries can make a real difference if a child is struggling with reading because they offer tutoring, summer reading programs and other programs that give children that solid foundation they need."

The most important aspect of a public library, however, is the fact that it's accessible to anyone, no matter the income, age or education.

See NEIGHBOR, Page 20

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BHA Encourages Relay For Life Participation

By D'ANN WHITE
Editor

If you've noticed an increase in the number of yard sales, bake sales and car washes in the Bloomingdale area, there's good reason.

Teams of students, church groups, neighbors and service organizations have spent the past several months raising funds for the annual American Cancer Society Relay for Life. This year the South Brandon Relay for Life will take place March 12-13 at Bloomingdale High School.

According to Bloomingdale resident Anthony Pursino, who is chairing this year's Relay for Life, the relay is more than an opportunity for the community to come together to raise funds to fight cancer.

"Nearly everyone has been affected by cancer in some way," said Pursino. "This is a way for us to honor cancer survivors and raise money that's

used locally to help them."

The relay, to be held on the Bloomingdale High School track, is 18 hours long, starting at 6 p.m. March 12 and ending at noon March 13. Teams of 10 to 15 people camp out at the high school, taking turns walking, jogging or running around the track. Each team is required to have someone on the track at all times during the event.

"It's like a big block party," said Pursino. "You have groups that set up booths and sell food or drinks to raise funds. It's a lot of fun."

This year the relay theme is "Cancer is No Laughing Matter," and teams are asked to set up campsites using TV sitcoms as themes. The Bloomingdale MOMS Club has decided on "M.A.S.H." while the Bloomingdale High School Crimson Times newspaper staff is opting for "The Beverly Hillbillies."

A particularly memorable

event at the relay, said Pursino, is the "survivor's walk," which takes place at 9 p.m. March 12. People who have survived cancer are encouraged to walk the track while friends and family of those who have lost their battle with the disease light luminaries in memory of their loved ones.

"It's a very emotional moment," said Pursino.

With Pursino's encouragement, the Bloomingdale Homeowners Association board decided to form its own team and challenged the Bloomingdale Taxing District to form one as well.

"My father died of cancer," said BHA President Ted Grable. "There are few of us who haven't been impacted by cancer in some way. This is a chance to show that Bloomingdale is a loving, caring community."

BHA Vice President Joe Hickle is heading up the BHA team, which has not yet

decided on a comedy show theme. He hopes to raise \$1,440.

"We can do this if we get 72 people, two people to walk together at, say, \$20 each for 30 minutes," he said. Anyone interested in walking with the BHA team or contributing a donation can contact Hickle at jhickle1@tampabay.rr.com.

Currently, 45 teams have signed up to participate but Pursino hopes to get double that number.

Each team participating in the relay is asked to raise at least \$100 for the event. Last year, the South Brandon Relay for Life raised more than \$97,000 and honored 98 cancer survivors.

On Feb. 9 at 7 p.m., there will be a team captains' meeting for the South Brandon Relay for Life in the Bloomingdale High School auditorium.

For more information, contact Pursino at 653-0732 or sbrandonrelay@aol.com.



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Bloomington Area Community Council Report

By MACK AUSTIN

The Bloomington Area Community Council is made up of residents from homeowners associations in the Bloomington area who work directly with Bloomington Community Resource Deputy Pete Maurer, Community Service Officer Sandy Capitano and other local government representatives to coordinate the resolution of community issues and concerns.

The BACC meets monthly (the third Thursday at 7 p.m. at the Sheriff's Community Substation on Bell Shoals Road) to discuss issues that have been brought to the attention of a council member, Maurer or Capitano. Participation by residents is encouraged.

The BACC monitored, addressed and coordinated numerous areas of special interest and concern throughout 2003. Significant progress was made in some areas. Other areas require continued work and time to resolve. These areas included:

At the January BACC meeting, Community Resource Deputy Pete Maurer began the meeting by welcoming new members that included Kevin Schmidt and Carson Green from Bloomington Cove, and Dan Prenatt and Jerry Dean from Indian Hills.

Maurer briefed members on several topics of interest and concern, including a review of the current burglary statistics for the area. He noted that several burglary



MACK AUSTIN/Photos

After combined efforts by BACC members, Deputy Pete Maurer, Hillsborough County Parks Maintenance Unit I supervisor Jeff Mauch and county traffic operations engineers, county officials have given final approval and funding for the construction of an "enhanced crosswalk" between the Bloomington Little league and the Campo Family YMCA.

cases had been solved thanks to the efforts of the HCSO burglary section and the support of concerned residents.

Maurer said residents play an important role in reducing crime in the community. Any resident noticing suspicious activities in a neighborhood should call the sheriff's dispatch at 247-8200.

Crime Stoppers is another way of assisting the Sheriff's Office. The number is (800) 873-8477. Residents' names will not be used.

Bloomington is a non-solicitation community. Residents noticing solicitors can call the sheriff's dispatch section or the Bloomington

Homeowners Association at 651-1129. Solicitation is one technique criminals use to search neighborhoods for possible targets, said Maurer.

Maurer briefed members on the Party House Ordinance and how parents are held responsible for teens having parties at their homes, especially for any drinking that takes place. This includes underage drinking and anyone driving after they have been drinking.

He also briefed the need for residents to provide help in enforcing the noise ordinance.

Members reviewed updates on several topics of concern including the proposal to amend the truck route ordinance to remove Lithia-Pinecrest Road and Bloomington Avenue from the county truck route plan. BACC member Joe Ligouri noted that the hearing on the amendments has been continued. No date has been set.

The BACC is awaiting county traffic engineer studies on putting a three-way stop at Natures Way and Culbreath

Road south of Cimino Elementary School.

BACC member Gary Johansson briefed members on the status of the development proposed for the intersection of Bloomington Avenue and John Moore Road and also noted the construction of the new development at the end of John Moore Road.

Member Terry Ward briefed members on the need to be aware of people using the Alafia River.

Final approval and funding has been made for a crosswalk on Culbreath Road between the Bloomington Little League and the Campo Family YMCA.

The sewer line project on Culbreath Road is scheduled for completion this month.

Members also noted speeding problems in several neighborhoods including Bloomington Oaks.

Contact Maurer or Community Service Officer Sandy Capitano at the Bloomington Sheriff's Substation for additional information the BACC, 635-8040.



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371519

SAY YOU SAW IT IN THE
THE BLOOMINGDALE GAZETTE

Oak Crest Residents Discuss Neighborhood Concerns

By D'ANN WHITE
Editor

Armed with issues ranging from litter to ill-kept homes, residents of Oak Crest in Bloomingdale East met with the Bloomingdale PRIDE committee last month to discuss concerns and solutions.

PRIDE is a committee of the Bloomingdale Homeowners Association attempting to improve the community through cleanups, educational programs and other community activities.

After completing three successful community cleanups last year, PRIDE coordinator Cheryl Kehrmeier said the committee now plans to focus on the concerns of individual communities.

The Oak Crest meeting was the first in a series of neighborhood meetings the committee is planning. Oak Crest, with 483 homes, represents 10 percent of Bloomingdale, noted Kehrmeier.

Top among Oak Crest residents' concerns is the deterioration of some of the homes in the community, which was developed between 1987 and 1993, as well as deed restriction violations.

Oak Crest, like many individual neighborhoods in Bloomingdale, has its own set of deed restrictions. However,

resident Wesley Bunn said there are a number of neighbors who are either unaware of the deed restrictions or have chosen to ignore them.

Among the deed restrictions being violated is one that prohibits parking on lawns, said Bunn. But he said it's a common sight throughout the neighborhood.

Bloomingdale Homeowners Association board member Steve Heckel, who is heading up a code enforcement effort for the BHA, said Oak Crest actually has one of the more comprehensive set of deed restrictions in Bloomingdale.

Not only is parking on the lawn prohibited, residents aren't supposed to park in their driveways.

"But we have to decide if parking in the driveway is something we feel we should enforce," he said.

The residents are also concerned about commercial vehicles, boats and school buses parked in the neighborhood.

Heckel said the BHA is starting a comprehensive investigation and enforcement program to make sure residents abide by the deed restrictions in their neighborhoods.

In the meantime, Kehrmeier suggested the neighbors

begin their own effort to improve Oak Crest by hosting a neighborhood cleanup this spring.

She said they might start by cleaning up and painting the homes of low-income and elderly residents who are unable to do the work themselves.

The county offers recycled paint for such efforts, she said. "And we can help you get a load of mulch for the neighbors to share."

The neighbors also discussed the possibility of giving an award for most improved home or yard to encourage residents to keep up their properties.

"It really has a domino effect," said Heckel. "We've seen that where I live on Sandy Creek Drive. Pride in the neighborhood has gone way up."

The PRIDE committee also plans to help Oak Crest residents qualify for the county's Adopt-A-Pond program to

help clean up the neighborhood ponds, which residents say are filled with litter.

The neighbors also would like to distribute copies of the Oak Crest deed restrictions to all the residents so they know exactly what is and isn't permitted.

"The only way a grassroots program will work is if the people care," said Kehrmeier.

Kehrmeier said the February and March PRIDE meeting will focus on neighborhoods in Bloomingdale West, now known as sections C, D, E, I and H, and Bloomingdale Estates.

Many of these neighborhoods have no name so the BHA will ask the residents to name their neighborhoods so decorative signs can be erected at the entrances to the neighborhoods. The BHA is hoping that naming the neighborhoods will give their residents an increased sense of ownership.

Residents Invited To Attend Neighborhood Conference

News Report

The Bloomingdale Homeowners Association is inviting residents to take part in the Hillsborough County Neighborhood Conference March 27 from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Hillsborough Community College, 4001 Tampa Bay Blvd., Dale Mabry campus.

The conference will feature workshops that will inform and educate residents of the more than 800 registered neighborhood, civic, homeowners and time watch associations throughout the county.

The goal is to educate resi-

dents on building a sense of community through improving neighborhood safety, community aesthetics, developing effective communications with neighbors, understanding the public and private resources that are available.

Anyone interested can obtain a registration form from the BHA office on Bell Shoals Road behind the Citgo service station. The BHA will pay the \$15 registration fee for any resident wishing to attend.

Registration is due by March 19.



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- Brandon 913 W. Brandon Blvd, 684-4499
- Brandon 11393 Causeway Blvd, 643-6944
- N. Brandon 1213 Kingsway Ave, 653-4535
- Lithia 16739 FishHawk Blvd, 654-7991
- Plant City 2621 Thonotosassa Rd, 752-6631
- Providence 1983 Lumsden Rd, 654-4423
- Riverview 11697 Boyette Rd, 672-1832
- Seffner 1515 N. Parson Ave., 684-5897
- Valrico 1985 E. Brandon Blvd, 654-2324
- Valrico 2511 SR 60 E, 643-4825

• Apollo Beach 220 Apollo Beach Blvd, 645-1499

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374420

Bulls Band Banks On Bids

By D'ANN WHITE
Editor

Going, going, gone to Myrtle Beach.

At least that's what members of the Bloomingdale High School Rajun' Bulls Band are hoping as they prepare for the 17th annual band boosters auction Feb. 28 at Bloomingdale High School, which raises funds so they can attend a national competition, this year in Myrtle Beach, S.C.

Professional auctioneers Rob Hennessee and John Jernigan will oversee the bidding of items ranging from theme park tickets to football items signed by Buccaneers to products donated by local businesses.

A pasta dinner will take place from 5 to 6 p.m. followed by an auction preview at 5:30 p.m. and the auction at 6.

The auction has become a tradition for the Bloomingdale Rajun' Bulls Band Boosters who use the funds to send the band members to national competition and pay for music, equipment and repairs. "It's a fun way to raise money for the band," said booster and band parent Lynne Walther. "It's been very profitable over the years."

Last year the auction raised \$10,000.

"If it weren't for this event, there are students who would not be able to make the trip to



Band members display some of the items that will be auctioned Feb. 28 during the Bloomingdale High School Rajun' Bulls Band's annual fundraiser. From left are John Baker, Chris Long, Kara Walther, Phillip Colesanti, top, Ryan Casella and Brytani Russell.

national competition," said booster parent and co-chair of the event Michelle Colesanti.

This year the band will journey to Myrtle Beach April 15-

18, where band director Ted Hope is expecting a good showing.

"We always return home with superior ratings," he said.

The auction was Hope's idea 17 years ago. He wanted to find a way to raise money that didn't involve the students selling door to door.

But the 280 band members don't get off scot-free, said Walther, this year's co-chairwoman with Colesanti. They are expected to visit area businesses and solicit donations of gift certificates and products to be auctioned.

"The students get a percentage of the proceeds of the sale of whatever items they bring in," said Walther. "There are some students

who get their entire trip paid for."

The cost to go to national competition this year is \$325.

The dinner and auction event is open to the entire community, and Walther is hoping residents will come out and support the band, whether they have children in it or not.

The boosters will sell baked good and other refreshments during the auction.

Hope said he has no doubt this year's auction will be as successful as past years. "We have great kids and great parents," he said. "We can't lose."

Anyone interested in donating an item for the auction can contact Walther at 681-8889 or Colesanti at 654-0013.

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Bloomingtondale Resident Files For House Seat

By D'ANN WHITE
Editor

Sure, she voted on Election Day and kept abreast of the issues.

But as a stay-at-home mom, Bloomingtondale resident Arlene Waldron said doing something as daring as running for political office just wasn't on her radar.

That changed five years ago when her son, Jeffrey, missed out on a Florida Bright Futures Scholarship because the state gave a different weight to advanced placement classes than the school district did.

She took her objections to her local legislators and, in the process, discovered that a petite, energized mom can carry a bit of weight of her own.

"That was definitely where it all started," said Waldron, 46, who has officially filed to run for the District 62 seat being vacated by Johnnie Byrd, R-Plant City, in the Florida House. The district includes Plant City and portions of Brandon, Seffner and Valrico, including a portion of Bloomingtondale where Waldron lives.

A second-generation Seffner native (her parents, Mary and Richard Stephens, were raised in Seffner, too), Waldron said she's never been afraid to take a risk.

"At Brandon High School, I tried out for everything — track, cheerleading, drama, you name it," she said. "I wasn't great at anything, but my parents were always my biggest fans."

She married after graduating in 1975 and settled down to raise her two sons. Once the boys were in grade school, she began working part time as a bank mortgage processor, always insisting on leaving in time to be with her sons after school.

As her sons, Jeffrey and Ronnie Messer, got older and no longer needed mom at home, Waldron parlayed her part-time work into a full-time banking position, specializing in serving small busi-

nesses. She currently is a vice president and branch market manager at BankAtlantic in Brandon.

As part of her commitment to her job, she became active in the Greater Brandon Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Seffner Area Chamber of Commerce.

She also married her husband, John, five years ago, adding three stepchildren, Johnny, Josh and Jessica, to the fold.

"But when the kids went off to college four years ago, I got empty nest syndrome," Waldron said. "I needed something to nurture so I decided to nurture my community."

She got actively involved in the Greater Brandon Area YMCA fundraisers and the Brandon Outreach Clinic, started a women's golf group called the Good Ole Girl Network that's raised more than \$40,000 for Brandon charities and, most recently, founded the Greater Brandon Community Foundation with Brandon accountant and longtime friend Anne Nymark, which will provide grant money to Brandon charities.

But Waldron said her brush with legislative reform also gave her a taste for politics. She served on the Hillsborough County Charter Review Board in 2000 and then ran for county commissioner against incumbent Ronda Storms. She lost the election by about 5,000 votes.

"But that experience didn't deter me," she said. "It only encouraged me more."

When Byrd decided to make a bid for the U.S. Senate, Waldron said she saw an opportunity to "be a real part of the decision-making process" and work on the issues she believes are important to the district, including education and issues concerning senior citizens.

"I can't remember who said this but I truly believe it," she said. "If you take care of the children and if you take care of the elderly, everything in between will take care of itself."

Between now and the pri-



Arlene Waldron

mary Aug. 31, Waldron plans to do a lot of walking, a lot of knocking on doors and a lot of introducing herself to voters, especially in Plant City where she isn't as well-known as she is in Brandon and where her two Republican opponents live.

So far, Republicans Joshua Burgin of Plant City and Plant City Commissioner Richard Glorioso have filed to run for the seat. The only Democrat running so far is Ashley Smith of Valrico.

"Since there's no incumbent, everyone's on an equal playing field," Waldron said. "And I've heard my opponents are all gentlemen so I expect it to be a good, positive campaign. I think we all want to do this for the right reasons."

She believes her advantage lies in the fact that she was born and raised in rural Seffner and now works as a banker in high-growth Brandon, giving her insight into the district's rural roots as well as its urban involvement.

"I may live in Valrico, but I'm going to work very hard to be inclusive and convince the voters throughout the district that I care about their needs and can represent them equally," she said. "I think this is where I'm supposed to be at this time in my life."

So far, Republicans Joshua Burgin of Plant City and Plant

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Construction Projects Under Way, Nearly Done

By MACK AUSTIN
Correspondent

Boyette Road widening

Many Bloomingdale residents go south on Bell Shoals Road to Boyette Road to work or for other business. So, the widening of Boyette Road is a welcome project.

But, with the widening will come the long period during which the actual construction will take place. This will mean traffic delays on Boyette Road and also increased traffic on Bell Shoals Road due to drivers from FishHawk Ranch and other areas trying to take the alternate route to miss the construction.

The first phase will include the widening of Boyette Road to six lanes from U.S. 301 to Balm-Riverview Road. This phase is scheduled to start this month and slated to be completed in early 2005.

The second phase will include the widening of Boyette Road to four lanes from Balm-Riverview to McMullen Road. Construction is scheduled to begin late this year and be completed by

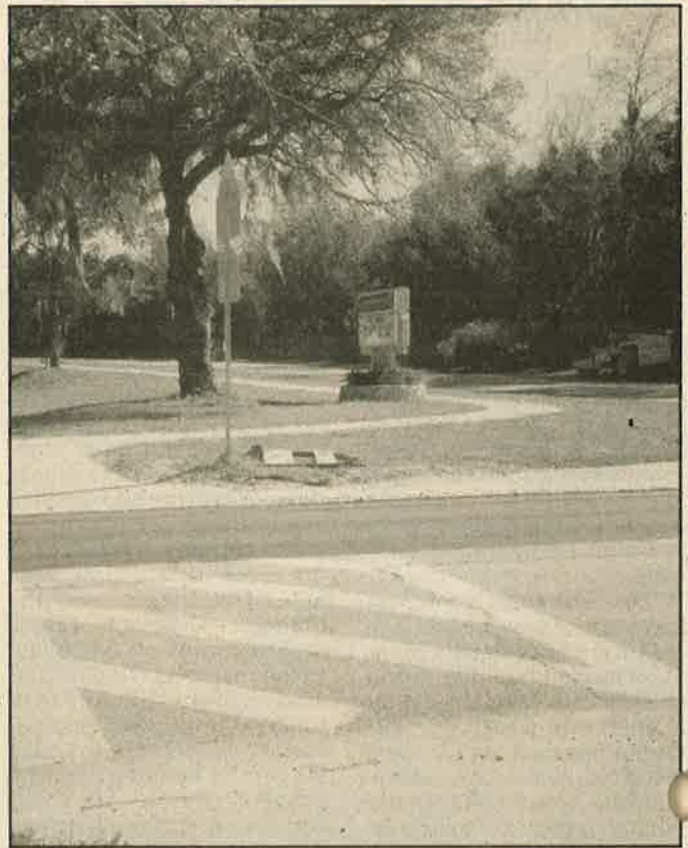
the end of 2005. There could be some delays in this phase due to land acquisitions for the required right of way.

The third phase will include the widening of Boyette Road to four lanes from McMullen Road to Bell Shoals Road. Current plans call for construction to begin in 2005 and be completed in 2007. Land acquisition is also one of the key factors determining this schedule.

Culbreath Road pipeline

The 5-mile, \$3 million project to install a 24-inch sewer line from Lithia-Pinecrest Road, down Erindale Drive and Culbreath Road and then under the Alafia River and on to FishHawk Ranch is nearing completion. Construction schedules call for completion by Feb. 15.

The last three phases include installing pipeline under Culbreath Park and restoring the park, then testing the entire pipeline for leaks and making repairs, and refilling the asphalt on Erindale Drive and Culbreath Road in preparation for paving both streets.



MACK AUSTIN/Photo

Once Culbreath Road is repaved, the county operations department plans to redo the school crossing at Cimino Elementary School.

Can I See Your Address? Hillsborough County Requires It

By STEVE HECKEL
BHA director

The numbers you display on your house are the only way that emergency personnel have of insuring that they

have responded quickly to the correct residence.

Hillsborough County Ordinance 87-06 requires all residences to have correct addresses clearly displayed on houses and/or mailboxes

(both sides).

Numbers must be large enough (at least 3 inches) to be clearly visible from the street while traveling in either direction. They should be made of durable weather-resistant materials, in a color contrasting to their background. Numbers should be kept clear of obstruction such as shrubbery. Numbers painted on the curb can be blocked by parked vehicles, obscured by standing water or dirt, wear away quickly, and are not easily seen at night or from a dis-

tance (this alone will not comply with the county's ordinance).

After appropriate notification, failure to comply will be referred to the Hillsborough County Housing and Code Enforcement Department with possible fines of up to \$50 per day or a lien against the property.

Check your home's address to insure it complies and, more importantly, to insure that emergency personnel can find you when you need them most.

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LETTERS? COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?

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Bloomingtondale West Neighborhoods Discussed At Neighborhood PRIDE Meeting This Month

By CHERYL KEHRMEYER
BHA director

The Bloomingtondale Neighborhood PRIDE Program is moving forward in the New Year with new goals, and one of them is to have residents give their neighborhoods a name.

At this meeting, we'll also listen to the needs and concerns of these residents, work with the teams to get a list of goals established and provide the resources to get things started. We invite all residents in these sections to come and help build a strong neighborhood PRIDE team for your community.

Through this Neighborhood PRIDE Program, the BHA's goal is to have volunteers in each neighborhood helping the BHA to implement the program in all of Bloomingtondale's 40 sections. We invite you to attend our monthly Neighborhood PRIDE meetings held the third Monday of each month from 7 to 8 p.m. at the BHA office on Bell Shoals Road so you can see how the BHA and you can work together to help your neighborhood.

We will provide team leaders with a PRIDE Resource Manual that includes tips and ideas on forming a neighborhood team, organizing volunteers and implementing neighborhood-based community improvement projects. Additionally, we will talk about being good neighbors, deed restrictions and county code compliance.

Volunteers are still needed. For more information on the Neighborhood PRIDE Program, including upcoming meetings and how you can help, call the BHA office at 681-2051 (or send e-mails to Bloomingtondale.Homeowners@Verizon.net Attention:

Monthly Meeting of Bloomingtondale Neighborhood PRIDE

Monday, Feb. 16

7 to 8 p.m.
Sections H1, H2, H3, H4, D (Bloomingtondale Estates)

Monday, March 15

7 to 8 p.m.
Sections C1, C2, C3, C4, E, I

PRIDE Coordinator). We look forward to hearing from you and helping you improve your neighborhood.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

If you live on these streets, come on Monday, Feb. 16:

Sections H1 and H3
Bloomingtondale Drive (401 - 423)
Cedar Grove Drive (501 - 514)
Emberwood Drive
Fallon Court
Paddlewheel Drive
Sweetleaf Drive
Van Reed Manor Drive

Sections H2 and H4
Canoga Park Drive (4107 - 4119)
Cedar Grove Drive (515 - 638)
Denage Court
Encina Drive
Ephrata Drive
Fieldstone Drive
Royan Way
Sandy Creek Drive (501 - 621)
Wynnwood Drive

Bloomingtondale Estates (Section D)
Applegate Circle
Bayfield Drive

PRIDE Good Neighbor Tip

Help control litter in your area by placing all trash in bags and inside of cans on trash collection day.

Bessemer Circle
Bloomingtondale Drive (104 - 314)
Butternut Court
Buttonwood Court
Paddlewheel Court
Rosedale Drive
Sabal Palm Court

Caliente Drive
Fortuna Drive

Section E
Bloomingtondale Drive (606 to 714)
Cloverhill Court
Oakmoss Drive
Shady Nook Drive
Sweatleaf Court
Windtree Court

If you live on these streets, come Monday, March 15:

Sections C1 and C2
Fenner Court
Herlong Court
Hollister Place
Isleton Drive
Redondo Drive
Wasco Court

Section I
Brinton Court
Canoga Park Drive (Even addresses 4102 to 4126)
Curran Court
Kerlien Place
Sandy Creek Drive (623 to 657)

Section C3 and C4

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Outside of Hillsborough Co. 800-299-2181

A Perfect Place For Puppies

By LESLIE WHITE
Correspondent

Dennis and Lisa Purnell opened Bloomingdale's Park Avenue Puppies about three weeks ago, and already they've seen many puppies welcomed into new families.

"People come in about five or six times before they actually take a puppy home," said Dennis Purnell.

"The puppies get plenty of socialization before they ever leave here."

Each puppy has about 20 to 30 minutes of playtime, and then a sign is placed on the pen encouraging customers to let the puppies nap for a while.

"Puppies are just like newborns — they're up for short periods then they need a nap," Purnell said.

With 20 years in the pet business, the Purnells have developed a trusting relationship with breeders in Texas, Oklahoma and are working to cultivate relationships with local breeders.

Dennis Purnell relies on these breeders because he admits, "We're kind of nutty about the puppies we choose. The breeders we use know this about us. We don't accept puppies we wouldn't bring home ourselves. They allow us to handpick the puppies."

It's this practice that ensures healthy puppies, because the Purnells make it their business to know the breeding and veterinary and vaccination practices of each



LESLIE WHITE/Photo

Kaitlin and Cody Purnell, the children of Dennis and Lisa Purnell, owners of Park Avenue Puppies, cradle a Chihuahua puppy inside the store's pet play area.

breeder they use.

Currently, Park Avenue is home to a chocolate lab, a boxer, a cocker spaniel, a Pekinese, a Jack Russell terrier, a Siberian husky and even a schnoodle, which is a cross between a schnauzer and a poodle.

There are several other breeds, a few of which had signs proclaiming the good news: "I'm going home!"

But before these puppies go home, the Purnells offer a training class that is included

in the price of the puppy. This helps new pet owners better understand the breed they've chosen, as well as teach the basics of potty training, grooming, nutritional needs and the prevention of destructive chewing.

The Purnells want to equip the new owners with all the information necessary to ensure that this, new pet/owner relationship is a successful one.

Purnell believes "basic training sets the tone for the

puppy later in life."

These classes last anywhere from 30 minutes to five hours, depending on how familiar the new owners are in caring for a pet.

Park Avenue Puppies is at Lithia-Pinecrest Road and Avenue, behind the Hess gas station. Store hours are Monday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 6 p.m.

For more information, call 662-2592.

The new Exit office at the Shoppes of Lithia offers more room for the growing agency's associates to work.



Photo courtesy Exit Realty Advisors

Exit Realty Opens New Office

News Report

With its trademark "Exit For Sale" signs posted in nearly every neighborhood, Exit Realty Advisors is making a big entrance into the local real estate market.

Broker/owner Jim Barron recently relocated his office to the Shoppes of Lithia at 3442 Lithia-Pinecrest Road south of Bloomingdale Avenue to

better serve Bloomingdale, FishHawk Ranch and other communities in the area.

Formerly located at 318 E. Bloomingdale Ave., the new, larger office features several conference rooms and plenty of space for the office's 30 agents.

"In the two years since Jim opened this office, it has

See EXIT, Page 22

Bloomingtondale Substation Notes

by DEPUTY PETE MAURER

Community Service Officer Sandy Capitano and I can't believe it. We checked the calendar and this month will mark our sixth anniversary working in the Bloomingtondale community.

We both want to personally thank everyone in the Bloomingtondale and surrounding area for their outstanding support and cooperation. It has truly been our pleasure to work with all of you. Along with the many other law enforcement officers that work in your community, we are very proud to serve and protect you, your families, your homes and your businesses.

We have seen great progress in these past years as we've continued to work directly with local residents, county staff and business owners in making our area safer and more secure for both homeowners and business owners.

We received outstanding support from members of your Bloomingtondale Area Community Council (BACC). Your council continues to demonstrate how active involvement by concerned residents will make a positive difference in improving the quality of life for everyone in our community. Outstanding support from the Bloomingtondale Homeowners Association (BHA) has enabled us to complete several important community projects.

During our time serving you, we've always placed special emphasis on the safety and security of your families and especially your children. We do appreciate the outstanding response you've given to all of our special projects including Suitcases for Kids, car seat safety, Cops and Computers, the Bloomingtondale High School Reading

Program (magazine donations), school safety programs and school security programs. All of these programs continue to be very successful thanks to your concern and generosity.

We would ask now that each and every one of you please continue to do your part in improving safety in our community. Traffic safety continues to be one of the most serious and dangerous areas of concern. Traffic volumes continue to increase with the continued growth. Every driver must drive responsibly. All traffic laws must be obeyed. Serious consequences occur when they are broken and innocent folks pay the price.

All of us in the sheriff's office will continue to do our part to enforce these laws.

Keeping your homes and property secure is another area where we need your continued cooperation. Every homeowner must do his or her part to make any security system work. Close your garage doors. Lock up your vehicles and homes when you leave and even when you're home.

You're inviting thieves into our neighborhoods when you don't. They know where to find the easy targets. Watch out for your neighbors. Become involved in improving the security of your neighborhoods. Call the sheriff's office dispatch at 247-8200 to report suspicious activity or CRIME STOPPERS at (800) 873-8477 to report problems.

As we look forward to another great year of working together, we give you our pledge to do our part and we ask that you do your part. We will continue to make our community a great place to live and work. It is our honor and pleasure to serve and protect.



MACK AUSTIN/Photo

The Bloomingtondale Sheriff's Substation is celebrating its sixth year in Bloomingtondale under Community Resource Deputy Pete Maurer and Community Service Officer Sandy Capitano.

Winning in life

NBC Nightly News calls **Bonnie St. John** "one of the five most inspiring women in America." Against tremendous odds, she used her imagination and determination to overcome adversity.

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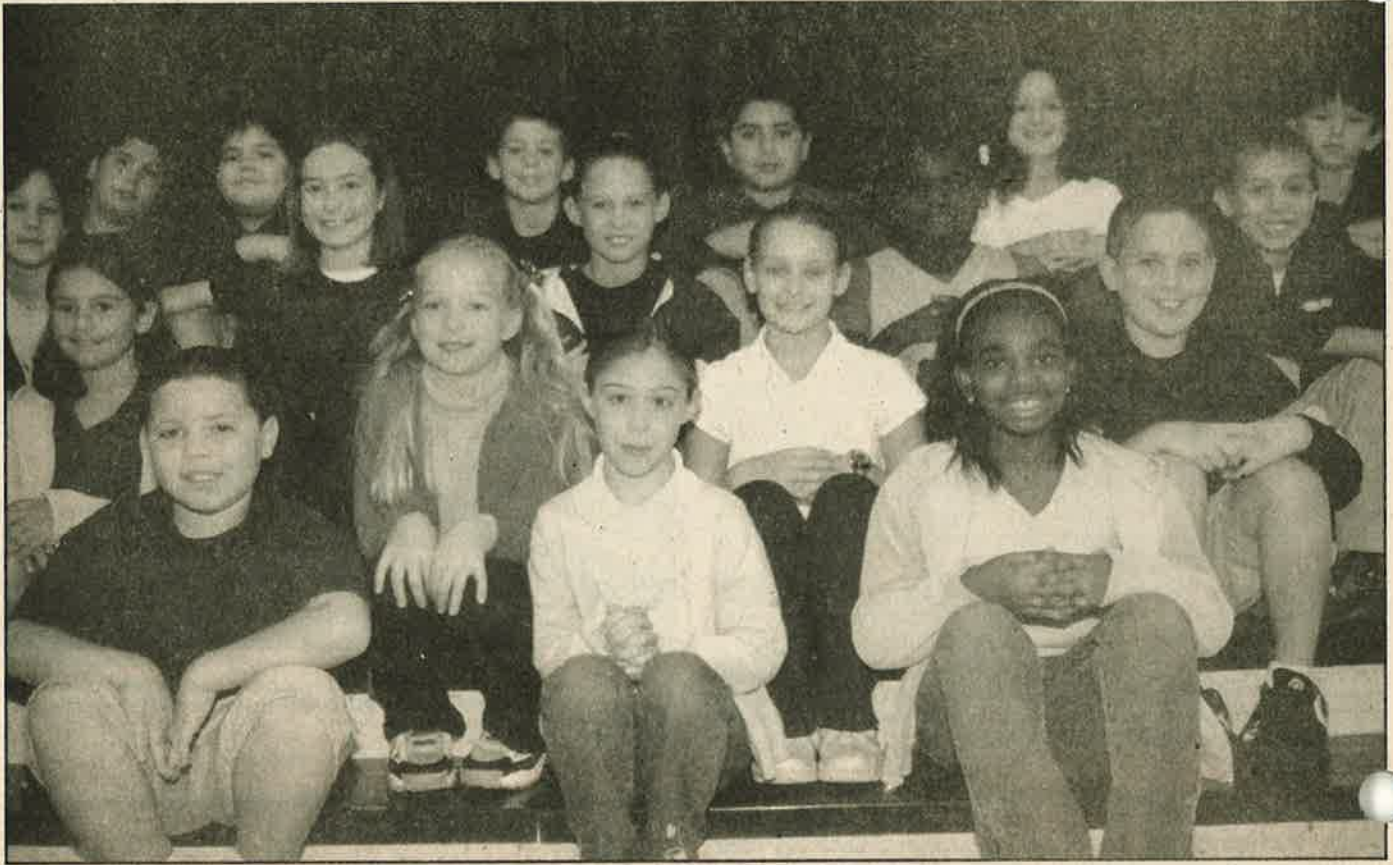


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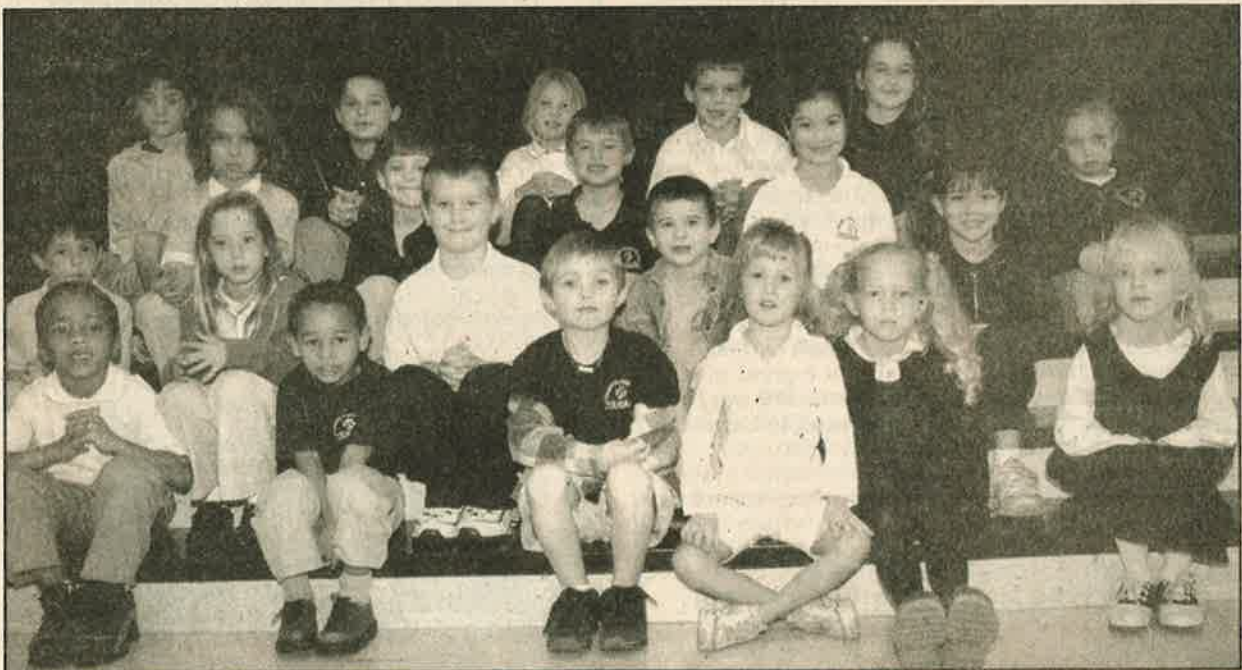
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SAY YOU SAW IT IN THE
THE BLOOMINGDALE GAZETTE

Cimino Cool Cats



Cimino Cool Cats for Character in grades three to five for November, above, were, bottom row, from left, Alex Irvin, Katelyn Smith, Amber Smith, second row, Abby Provenzano, Danielle Gross, Payton Sims, Daniel Migowski, third row, Kaitlyn Byrd, Laura Kelly, Taylor Hodges, Akira Meteye, Alan Campeau, top row, Kevin Adams, Bryce Ferreira, David Dittfield, Randall Zak, Sara Villa, Robert Rhoades, (absent) Elayna Fisher. Cimino Cool Cats for Character in grades kindergarten through two, below, for November were, bottom row, from left, Calvin Foster, Nicholas Harwood, Jared Gross, Alexis Cardoso, Tyra Raby, Aubree Cutler, second row, Levi Whidden, Madison Whidden, Samuel Gordon, Parker Reeves, Breanna Newby, third row, Allison Jordan, Benjamin Harris, Bradley Johnston, Lauren Sullivan, Madison Harrell, top row, Jessica Rogers, Carter Fleck, Hall Hoseman, Nathaniel Smitz, Allison Ferren and (absent) Brice Bequette and Ethan Bruce.



Property Manager's Report

By AL DEVNEY

Irrigation

Thunder Irrigation repaired a broken main line at the pump for the Garnet system and upgraded the irrigation at the Warm Springs and Springville entrances.

During the monthly maintenance inspection, 22 spray heads and two rotors were replaced and nine risers were repaired or adjusted.

Additionally, there were 20 light bulbs replaced.

Landscaping

Cardinal Landscaping

installed 1,500 pansies at seven locations and the landscaping at the Warm Springs and Springville entrances.

Devney Property Management Inc. put up the Christmas decorations throughout the area.

Signs by Mineo repainted the entrance signs at Springville and Warm Springs.

Lee's Lawn Service removed the old landscaping and cleaned and painted the walls at the Warm Springs and Springville entrances, trimmed some broken limbs on Culbreath Road and painted the bench on Bell Shoals Road.

Handy Hands repaired the vandalized bus stop bench on Canoga Park Drive and watered the two new live oaks on Culbreath four days a week for a month.

We had three accidents this month — a car versus a new tree on Natures Way, a car versus a tree on Springvale and a car versus a wall on Natures Way. The new tree on Natures Way lost, the tree on Springvale won and the wall on Natures Way won. All the accidents were hit and run. There was a total of 14 accidents for 2003.

ZK Construction repaired a broken column on Culbreath

Road.

There were 15 broken slats in the wooden fence on Natures Way as of the end of the month.

In the land of eat, drink and pitch out the window, there were 19 bags of litter picked up, a queen-size mattress, a traffic cone, a rearview mirror and 17 cents.

The beverages of choice were Mountain Dew for soft drinks, Natural Light for beer and Canadian Mist for distilled spirits.

Al Devney is the property manager for the Bloomingdale Special Taxing District.

Truck Route, John Moore Hearings Continued

By D'ANN WHITE
Editor

Two public hearings of special interest to Bloomingdale residents have been rescheduled.

A hearing on a proposal to eliminate Bloomingdale Avenue and Lithia-Pinecrest Road from the county's truck route plan was originally scheduled for Jan. 27 but Bill McCall, project manager for Hillsborough County's Planning and Growth Management Department, said it will be delayed to give county staff more time to look into the affects of the changes.

Assistant County Administrator Bernardo Garcia asked for the delay after being bombarded with protests from Sun City Center residents who fear it will bring more truck traffic to State Road 674.

McCall said his staff is recommending the amendments because of current weight limits of 50,000 pounds on Lithia-Pinecrest Road. Rather than eliminating only through-trucks, the weight limits are forcing delivery and construction trucks they need to be in the area onto local roads such as Miller and Val-

rico roads.

He guesses about 45 percent of the trucks using Bloomingdale and Lithia-Pinecrest are through-trucks and would, therefore, need to find an alternative truck route, such as State Road 60 or S.R. 674. He said S.R. 674 could see a 10 percent increase in truck traffic, equating to 150 to 180 additional trucks each day. State and federal highways must, by law, must permit through-truck traffic. No date has been set on a new hearing.

Also, a much-debated rezoning request for the southwest corner of John Moore Road and Bloomingdale Avenue also has been continued at the request of the developer's attorney, Vin Marchetti.

Resident Jeannette Figari, a member of the homeowners group UNDO (United Neighbors Dedicated Opposition) that has been working with the developer, said the group had no objection to the continuance until Feb. 24.

"We still have a couple of issues we're trying to work out before it goes to the zoning hearing master," she said.

The Barclay Group wants to

rezone the wooded pasture to build 32,000 square feet of commercial and office space on a 5.7-acre parcel along Bloomingdale, including a CVS Pharmacy.

As part of the same rezoning, Sunrise Homes is asking to build 49 single-family homes on the 29.57 acres abutting the Bloomingdale parcel.

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SAY YOU SAW IT IN THE
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Liquor Store Caters To Customers' Tastes

By LESLIE WHITE
Correspondent

Among the new businesses finding a home in the Shoppes at Lithia is a store called AJ's Fine Wine and Liquors.

Catering to customers is owner Ajay S. Jambhekar top priority, and it shows the minute a customer walks in the door.

Jambhekar said he is striving to create a full-service store focusing on providing exactly what his customers need or want.

Just inside the door is a rack of wine aficionado magazines to aid in proper selection, as well as a classic cocktails recipe book so that no ingredient gets left out. Jambhekar has even been known to surf the Internet to provide his customers with the means to create the concoctions they desire.

"It's a learning experience on a day-to-day basis. A customer comes in and asks me for something; I'll get it for them. We do special orders," he said.

Loyalty and longevity are traits he learned from his former job experiences.

"It took me a long time to make the career change from an accounting manager in corporate America to the major move of opening a business of my own. We get too comfortable in our careers



Ajay S. Jambhekar is the owner of AJ's Fine Wine and Liquors in the Shoppes at Lithia.

to make changes."

But after a relocation from the Northeast to Tampa, and four job changes in six years, Jambhekar was ready for change, and now shares his experiences at the Indo-U.S. Chamber of Commerce meetings in Valrico where he encourages other small business owners.

With his new business endeavor opening just two months ago, he feels he's found his niche in the Bloomingdale area. "Our customers are very happy with us."

The store is decorated in rich browns and wood trim with art dotting the walls and

helpful signs aiding the customers in making their selections. Aside from fine wines, AJ's also carries a full line of scotch, vodka and rums imported from the Caribbean, offering a variety of brands and flavors.

Jambhekar also showcases upscale cigars. Soon, he'd like to include gourmet, high-end snacks with an Indian flair. His goal is to cultivate a long-term relationship with his customers.

"I want them to say, 'This is the place I want to go.'"

Jambhekar pays special attention to his customers with the use of a special com-

puter scanning system, which keeps track of customers' tastes and purchases, enabling him to do something to show appreciation for them by rewarding their loyalty with a bottle of their favorite beverage.

"I have a good relationship with my distributors," explained Jambhekar. "It allows me to reward my customers. I think we need to get back to customer service. It should be about what they want, and what I can do for them."

Along those lines, AJ's will offer home delivery for large parties.

"It's one less thing they'll have to think about," he said.

He also is planning a grand opening celebration in February, where Jambhekar will host a wine, rum, vodka and scotch tasting, accompanied by appetizers. He'll have a raffle for a miniature travel refrigerator and two gift baskets, as well as giveaways. A date for the celebration has yet to be set, but will be advertised beforehand.

Jambhekar plans to have an in-house wine tasting every other month to allow his customers access to the various selections in his store.

AJ's Fine Wine and Liquors, at 3451 Lithia-Pinecrest Road in the Shoppes at Lithia is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Call: 654-6488.

NEIGHBOR

From page 8

"It's one of the few things in life that is truly free," she said. "And the library offers so much more than it used to — computers, videotapes, CDs, photographs. It's a community gathering place. It's a place where a child can experience his first story time or an adult can get a chance to meet his favorite author."

A Bloomingdale resident since 1982 when the area was dominated by orange groves and cow pastures, Boody said getting a library in her own backyard is a dream come true. So

when George asked her to help organize a Friends of the Library group for the new library, Boody didn't hesitate to help.

"I'd like the Friends to be there from day one," she said. "I'm hoping we can be a community sounding board and advocacy group for the library. We can bring programs such as poetry readings and author visits. And we can organize fundraisers to pay for these programs. We want to play whatever role the library the library needs us to play.

Boody has been attending

Friends of the Library meetings at the main library downtown to get a sense of the group's purpose. Koerper is also providing her with a copy of the parent organization's by-laws.

The Hillsborough County Friends of the Library is part of a national nonprofit organization that promotes and raises funds for the library.

Membership fees are \$10 for individuals and \$25 for a family.

Although the new 15,000-square-foot library on Bloomingdale Avenue east of Bloomingdale High School

won't be completed until next December, several groups have already expressed an interest in using the library, including the Brandon Genealogical Society and the Hillsborough County Literacy Council.

"All these organizations can really strengthen the library," said Boody. "I'm especially looking forward to getting high school students involved in the Friends since the library is right next door."

Boody can be contacted at pwboody@tecoenergy.com

Store Just Right For Chocoholics

By LESLIE WHITE
Correspondent

Enter Time 4 Chocolate and the sweet smell of chocolate confections greet you at the door, accompany you throughout the store, and Lourdes Balestena wouldn't have it any other way.

A former teacher who found herself laid up with a broken leg, Balestena decided to spend her time making decadent treats. They were so good, she opened a small kiosk in International Mall in Miami.

Making strawberries dipped with Belgian chocolate, Balestena knew she'd found her calling. Relocating to Valrico, she found a permanent home for her treats and opened Time 4 Chocolate in August.

"Business has been really good," Balestena confessed. "I'm here all the time."

The business sells cake and candy supplies — everything from cake pans to instruction books, and molds in every

conceivable shape and size. But Time 4 Chocolate specializes in decadent desserts like truffles, homemade fudge, cakes, chocolate-dipped nuts and candies.

Balestena has expanded her menu to include breakfast and lunch sandwiches. But one of her most favorite parts of the business is the children's parties and chocolate-making classes she offers.

"The more time you have, the more things you can create. Sometimes, during the class, I will learn something from some of the women. There are some very creative people. They keep coming back because they leave with more ideas every time they come in for a class."

Balestena offers several classes themed to upcoming holidays, which last about two hours each. There is also a Wilton cake decorating class offered. Course times and subjects vary, so call for

See STORE, Page 23



LESLEIE WHITE/Photo
Lourdes Balestena expects to be especially busy this Valentine's Day at her store, Time 4 Chocolate

Keep Those Dogs Leashed

By MICHELE CABALLER
BHA director

The west side of Bloomingdale, particularly Cedar Grove, Emberwood, Sweetleaf, Fallon and Denage, has been experiencing an increase in loose, aggressive dogs.

I'm sure they're sweet pets with their owners but are nasty when out roaming at night to the point that the sheriff's office and animal services has been called more than once. But it's hard for them to be here when the animals are actually running loose. I have noticed more and more people carrying sticks for their walks.

Residents are encouraged to call Hillsborough County Animals Services at 744-5660

when they see a pet roaming.

According to Section 10 of Hillsborough County's Animal Ordinance, excluding the public right of way or the owner's property, no dog is permitted to stray at large or go onto someone else's property without the consent of the property owner.

Any dog that is on private property without the consent of the property owner or resident may be captured and confined by Animal Services or other humane organization.

The county's leash law calls for dogs to be under the direct control of the owner or keeper at all times.

Fines for failing to obey the leash law are \$100 for a first offense and \$200 for a second offense.

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LAND

From page 3

well.

Any changes to Bloomingdale's DRI, said Kelly, would require the DRI being amended and approved by the state.

That's not the only obstacle a developer would face. When Bloomingdale was developed, builders were required to set aside a certain percentage of property for "green space" to avoid over development.

Kelly theorizes that the 10 acres behind the Hickles was designated for parks and recreation to meet the developer's obligation to set aside green space.

Nevertheless, with Bloomingdale rapidly facing build-out, Hickle and his neighbors fear an aggressive developer just may get the property rezoned.

"It's prime property," he said. "Someone with a lot of money could make a fortune off of it."

Peggy Hamric of the real estate department said Hickle's fears aren't unfounded.

She said the county can't hold the property indefinitely and, if a developer made an attempt to rezone it, the county would be hard-pressed to rebut the zoning change.

To avoid the possibility, Hickle, a member of the Bloomingdale Homeowners Association board of directors, and fellow directors have asked the county to either consider making the property part of the ELAPP program or turning the property into a passive park with trails.

"It just makes sense," said Hickle. "The county already

owns the property so all they'd have to do is transfer it to the ELAPP program. They won't have to spend a dime. At the very least, it would keep it the natural area the way it is."

Hickle noted that there is already access to the 10 acres via an undersized lot on Monte Lake Drive where the neighborhood kids play football. And the children have built a fort in the woods behind the vacant lot.

"It's already being used for recreation," said Hickle. "It's just a matter of the county making it formal."

Hickle himself often walks his dogs in the woods behind his home where they've spotted fox, raccoons, eagles, hawks, owls and other wildlife. "Virtually every wild animal you can imagine lives in that 10 acres because development has pushed them out of everywhere else," he said. "They have no where else to go."

He added that the property has another use. It contains the drainage easement for the entire neighborhood, filtering overflow from Monte Lake, a manmade lake within the subdivision. From there, the water flows into the flood plain and then the Alafia River.

Although Hickle nominated the property for ELAPP last fall, the homeowners association has yet to hear whether it's being considered.

ELAPP has used property taxes to buy 38,500 acres for \$143 million since it was approved by voters in 1987 and again in 1990. A citizens advisory committee reviews the nominations and then

makes recommendations to the county commission.

Sites eligible under ELAPP include environmentally sensitive areas, land endangered by development, archeological areas, property featuring native plants and animals or unique geological features, areas which protect water quality or quantity and acreage that could serve as a buffer or connection to existing natural areas. There are no restrictions on how large or small a piece of property has to be.

Hickle believes this property meets several of those requirements.

The county's Conservation Services Office, which oversees the ELAPP program, is now in the process of reviewing sites that were nominated last fall. There's no word on the status of the 10 acres and a parks official said it could be months before a final decision is made.

While the BHA doesn't have the resources or legal authority to own property, BHA President Ted Grable said the association is behind the effort to preserve whatever environmental property remaining in Bloomingdale that it can.

"We can't develop every inch of ground," said Grable. "We don't have enough park land as it is. There's got to be a place for the birds and bunnies."

At the same time, he said the BHA doesn't have any taxing authority and cannot afford to pay insurance and taxes on the land. Taxes on the property, now valued at about \$110,000 according to the property appraiser's office, would be \$2,605 a year.

"We've asked the county to hold the property in trust and not take any action on it until we can explore all the options," said Grable.

This isn't the first time the BHA has faced this situation. In 2000, an out-of-state land speculator purchased an 11-acre property off Murray Dale Drive in Bloomingdale East for \$2,500 in back taxes. Like the Monte Lake property, it was designated for private parks and recreation but never deeded to a homeowners association. The new owner wanted to build a single home on the property but the neighbors successfully fought the effort. The property is now for sale for \$275,000.

Kelly said the same story has been repeated throughout the county.

"Every year we end up inheriting these types of situations," he said. "It's not unique to Bloomingdale. But I commend the Bloomingdale Homeowners Association for being on the ball and making us aware of this situation."

Oftentimes, the property acquired by the county through nonpayment of back taxes is eventually declared surplus property and sold.

Kelly said that will not happen to the Monte Lake property without talking to the BHA first. "We'll also be getting together with the parks people to see if they have any interest in it."

Hickle was relieved to hear Kelly's promise.

"That gives us some comfort," he said. "But we need some closure to this story. Otherwise, pretty soon there won't be a blade of grass left in Bloomingdale."

EXIT

From page 22

grown tremendously," said sales associate Ellen Cohen. "Now we're serving all of Hillsborough County as well as Pinellas and Pasco counties."

In addition to real estate services, the office also is home to Mortgage Options of Florida.

"We want to be a one-stop service for all of the community's real estate needs," said Barron.

In the past seven years since its founding in Toronto, Canada, Exit Realty Corp. International has been attracting top real estate associates by offering residuals to

supplement their income. The associate receives a 10 percent residual every time a transaction closes. Even after an associate retires, he can still receive residuals.

"It's a very attractive incentive for real estate associates," said Cohen. "That's one of the reasons the company is grow-

ing by leaps and bounds. It's a great company to be associated with."

Since 1996, Exit has doubled its number of agents every year. It now has more than 4,000 associates and 290 franchises.

For more information, call 251-EXIT.

SAY YOU SAW IT IN THE BLOOMINGDALE GAZETTE

Births

The following Bloomingdale-area births were reported at Brandon Regional Hospital:

Dec. 16
Rhett Matthew Hayes, son of Laura and Matthew Hayes of Kristin Place

Jan. 5
Ryan Jameson Hewitt, son of Tara and James Hewitt of Siena Way

Jan. 11
Caden Jude Mayfield, son of Christina and Gregory Mayfield of Kingsford Place

STORE

From page 21

upcoming schedules.

Unique kids parties can be booked for up to 18 kids, comfortably.

Parents can choose between a candy mold party, where the kids learn how to melt chocolate and make their own lollipops or bite-size pieces, or a treats party where kids can have fun by dipping various yummys into chocolate.

Partygoers make their own bagel pizza, then learn the how to's of making their own desserts, each going home with a starter supply kit to allow them to try it at home.

With Valentine's Day just a couple of weeks away, Balestena has just the right gift for the chocolate lover,

with shaped cakes and hand-created chocolate boxes that can actually hold a gift inside.

Running short on gift ideas? Try a cookie basket or a gift basket loaded with goodies.

All this and Balestena still has time to make cakes. A design book is on hand to thumb through, with themed cakes for most every occasion. She hasn't delved into weddings yet, though many customers have asked.

For the do-it-yourselfer, cake pans are available for rent for \$5.99 on a two- to three-day rental.

Balestena said she loves what she does, and explains that she comes from a family of great cooks with Venezuelan influence.

Her brother is a chef and her parents, Antonio and Lourdes Balestena, are about to open a restaurant in Brandon. "Majestic Cafe" will open this February at the corner of Lumsden and Providence roads in Brandon Centre South. The menu will offer some of their daughter's treats and desserts, as well as salads, either pre-made or built at the salad bar, along

with gourmet sandwiches and soups.

Currently, Time 4 Chocolate, 3240 Lithia-Pinecrest Road in Royal Oaks shopping center, is offering a 75 percent discount on previous holiday supplies and treats.

Store hours are Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Saturday from 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Call: 571-7725.

CALENDAR

From page 6

Leaders luncheon

On Feb. 9 at 11:45 a.m. the American Cancer Society will host a Community Leaders Luncheon at Carrabba's Italian Grill on Providence Road. The keynote speaker will be ACS honorary chair, Sheriff Cal Henderson.

That evening at 7 p.m., there will be a team captains meeting for the South Brandon Relay for Life in the Bloomingdale High School auditorium.

Stay-at-home dads

The Tampa Area Dads At Home chapter of Stay At Home Dads will meet Feb. 25 at Panera Bread in Westfield Shoppingtown Brandon.

Tampa Area Dads At Home is a group that meets for lunch at least once a month in a local restaurant as well as for outings, playgroups and other activities.

Call: 505-9729 or visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TampaDads/>.

Valrico communities to meet

The Association of Valrico Communities will meet Feb. 26 at 7 p.m. at the Campo Family YMCA on Bloomingdale Avenue to discuss topics of interest to homeowners associations in Valrico.

Call: 684-8676.

Health fair

The Greater Brandon Chamber of Commerce will hold Health Fair 2004 "Future Trends in Health Care" March 13 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Campo Family YMCA, 3414 Culbreath Road.

The event will have free parking, free health screenings, entertainment, demonstrations and grand prize drawings.

Exhibitor space is available with booth cost for members at \$100, and \$200 for non-members. Registration forms and full payment are due by Feb. 27.

Call: Janet Noah, 689-1221.

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