

THE BLOOMINGDALE GAZETTE

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SUSAN GREEN

7-year-old Zachary Harper, 5, of Bloomingdale reads as Cherokee and his handler, Brenda Saling, listen during a session of Tail Waggin' Tutors, a literacy-building program at Bloomingdale Regional Library.

Dog eared books

Bloomingdale Library program has kids line up, taking turns reading to patient pooches. See story, page 4.

INSIDE

Golf Spring Classic to benefit library attack survivor

Four years after a vicious attack, a young woman's ongoing rehabilitation continues to cost more than Medicaid provides. See story, page 3.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"From your parents you learn love and laughter and how to put one foot before the other. But when books are opened you discover that you have wings."

Helen Hayes

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monster

BHA's golf fundraiser to benefit library attack survivor

By SUSAN GREEN

a lot of life in her."

Her story is well-known. Almost four years ago, a young woman ready to launch into life on her own stopped at the Bloomingdale Regional Public Library book drop and nearly lost out on life altogether at the hands of a brutal attacker.

Raped, beaten and left for dead, the East Bay High School senior, poised to go to the University of Florida with a full academic scholarship, was left with brain damage that had medical professionals doubting her survival.

"At first, she wasn't going to make it through the night," said the young woman's older sister, Anna.

"Then it was: 'She's going to be a vegetable the rest of her life.' But she is extremely alert. ... She's very responsive. She's got

Now 22, the young woman's ongoing recovery is remarkable. She can sit up for several minutes and stand with someone to help her keep her balance. Her sister said she is trying to speak and form words. She smiles to respond to people. And though still dependent on a feeding tube for medication and sustenance, the young woman has begun to swallow again. Her family hopes to wean her from the tube in a year or so.

Medicaid pays for doctor and home health care visits, but provides only \$1,500 a year for therapy. That pays for about one week, Anna said.

"The No. 1 need right now is therapy," she said. Her sister receives on-going therapy from local providers, and the family currently is looking at the possibility of putting the in-

jured sister in an intensive brain rehabilitation program that is not covered by Medicaid.

Meanwhile, the Bloomingdale Homeowners Association decided to organize a Spring Classic Golf Tournament at the Bloomingdale Golfer's Club to showcase the community's popular course and benefit a worthy cause at the same time, said association board member Jane Lee.

Proceeds from the April 14 event will go to help the library victim on her road to recovery.

"As for a beneficiary, we couldn't think of anyone better," Lee said. "This young lady went through a horrific ordeal that will continue to affect the rest of her life. Who better or more deserving?"

Anna said the family is attending a fundraiser in

Tampa earlier in the day but hopes to bring her sister to the tournament to meet participants. She said the family is grateful for the outpouring of community support over the years.

In addition to helping her sister walk and talk again, medical treatments not covered by Medicaid could help improve her vision, Anna said. Though technically her sister is blind, she sees light and shadow well enough to fool strangers.

"She tracks so well, she seems to look right at you," Anna said.

The tournament will have a shotgun start at 1 p.m. and can accept a maximum of 144 players. Registration will start at noon. People can sign up as foursomes or singly, with singles being organized into foursomes on

the day of the tournament, Lee said. The deadline to sign up for the tournament is April 7.

Dress code for players is collared shirts, soft spike shoes and, please, no denims or cut-offs.

The cost of \$80 per person or \$300 for a foursome includes dinner at the golf club's Legends Grill and the chance to participate in additional contests and drawings. The association also is seeking sponsorships.

Donations are tax-deductible. Checks can be mailed to Bloomingdale Homeowners Association, P.O. Box 7221, Brandon, FL 33508.

For information, call Heather at (813) 340-6457, email Hgolf75@yahoo.com; or Lee at (813) 477-7120 or email in-bloomingdalenews@tam-pabay.rr.com.

Are you the next BHA Scholarship winner?

April 1 is the deadline for the Bloomingdale Homeowners Association to receive your completed scholarship application. In May, the winner will be invited to attend the Bloomingdale Homeowners Association Board meeting and his/her name will be announced and the award will be presented.

The Bloomingdale Homeowner's Association looks forward to helping another Bloomingdale student start their college future by awarding them this year's scholarship. Will it be you?



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Meetings: first Tuesday in January, March, May, September and November at 6 p.m.

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Kids tell tails at new library literacy program

By SUSAN GREEN

A friendly face goes a long way when someone is learning to read — especially if that face has big brown eyes nestled in fur above a lolling tongue.

Three dogs and their volunteer handlers from Therapy Dogs International proved that last month at Bloomingdale Regional Public Library, when about 20 kids lined up to take turns reading to patient pooches during the library's "Tail Waggin' Tutors" program.

Kimberly Eversole, a children's services librarian at the branch, said the library invited the group as a way to pump enthusiasm into learning new reading skills, which can be a struggle for some youngsters. If the children are motivated to read, she explained, they are more likely to press on when they hit a challenging word or sentence.

"It's really fluency," Eversole said. "Sometimes adults can be very judgmental when helping children to read, but the dogs are patient listeners. So they [children] feel really uninhibited when reading to dogs."

Toddlers, preschoolers and older children took turns petting and snuggling up to dogs while they read or flipped through pages of books they brought from home or picked out from a selection available at the library. Most chose books with a canine theme.

Emily Harper, 8, of Bloomingdale read a book titled "Labradors" to a 5-year-old labradoodle called Sam. She said afterward that she picked the book "because I like these dogs," and because she prefers nonfiction books. The book offered facts about the Labrador retriever breed.

Her brother, Zachary, 5, brought a fiction book about a dog that gets mad because no one has time for him at Christmas.

"At the end, he eats the Christmas cookies," Zachary said. He read the book to Cherokee, a 7-year-old golden retriever handled by Brenda Saling, who operates a dog obedience school in Brandon.

Jeanne Harper, the children's mother, said her son and daughter were excited to join the library program because the family does not have a dog at home.

"They love dogs," she said.



SUSAN GREEN

A dachshund named Chester, held by handler Art Finch of Brandon, listens as Patti LetoBarone of Seffner and her daughters, Elle, 3, and Isabella LetoBarone, 4, right, read a book called "Carl at the Dog Show" during the Tail Waggin' Tutors program.

"Our time doesn't permit us to have a dog."

Saling said all of the volunteers and dogs receive training and certification through Therapy Dogs International. Often, the dogs in the program spend time comforting people in hospitals, nursing homes or rehabilitation facilities.

The dogs chosen for the library program had to be especially mel-

low, as most are not accustomed to sitting for long periods listening to someone read, Saling said.

"Of course, they love the attention and the petting," she said.

Eversole said she anticipates the program will be repeated. For information about library programs, visit www.hcplc.org or call (813) 273-3652. For information about Therapy Dogs International, visit www.tdi-dog.org.



Cathy Mithaug of Brandon, left, listens with her Labradoodle, Sam, as Emily Harper of Bloomingdale reads a book during the Tail Waggin' Tutors program at Bloomingdale Regional Library.



Zachary Harper, 5, of Bloomingdale reads as Cherokee and his handler, Brenda Saling, listen during a session of Tail Waggin' Tutors, a literacy-building program at Bloomingdale Regional Library.

Homegrown artist turns author with children's novel

By SUSAN GREEN

Kat Heckenbach grew up in Riverview knowing she wanted to draw, maybe even pursue a career in art. But painting pictures with words? Not so much.

"I'm not one of those authors that always knew they wanted to be a writer," Heckenbach, who now lives in Valrico, told a group of listeners last month at the Bloomingdale Regional Public Library.

"I had always been an avid reader. ... But I thought, 'I'm not creative with words. I'm an artist. I draw. I do crafty things, not words.'"

Now, with the recent publication of her first novel, "Finding Angel," Heckenbach finds herself creating a fantasy world for young people using both her illustrative and linguistic talents. Her artwork is on the cover, her words inside.

"I took this really circuitous route," Heckenbach said. "I ended up being an artist and being a writer."

She went on to tell how she took art classes at East Bay High School and Hillsborough Community College, studied education at the University of Tampa and ended up with a degree in science. After marriage and motherhood, she tried her hand at tutoring while homeschooling her two children, now ages 9 and 12.

The fantasy worlds she loved reading about as a child lingered in her mind, however, and one day she imagined a story about a 13-year-old girl with a magical talent who was mysteriously whisked away to the other side of the globe at a young age. A boy in the story sets out to find her. Heckenbach started writing.

About four years later, after some missteps, rewrites and rides on the

learning curve, she became a published author and illustrator. In addition to the book, she has published short stories in anthologies, including "Chicken Soup for the Soul: Just for Preteens."

Her novel, "Finding Angel," was produced by a New Zealand publisher, Splashdown Books. Heckenbach said the story is aimed at middle-grade readers, generally age 12 and older.

"But I've had older teens and adults who read it and liked it," the author said.

She recommended that others interested in writing for publication join a writers' group and recruit "critique buddies," people who will read drafts and offer feedback.

Heckenbach noted that self-publishing and e-books are changing the way writers get their work out to the public. She said word-of-mouth recommendations from friends



SUSAN GREEN

Valrico author and artist Kat Heckenbach, whose novel "Finding Angel" was published in September, displayed some of her work last month during a presentation at Bloomingdale Regional Public Library.

and acquaintances remain one of a writer's strongest marketing tools.

"Tell people that you know, 'I love this book,'"

she said. Her next novel, a sequel to the first, is expected out in July.

"Finding Angel" is available on Amazon.com for

about \$14 for paperback, \$7 for Kindle. Visit www.katheckenbach.com or www.findingangel.com for more information.



Valrico author and artist Kat Heckenbach displayed copies of her children's novel, "Finding Angel," last month during a presentation at Bloomingdale Regional Public Library.

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New nursery can help spring planting ideas take root

By **SUSAN GREEN**

With Old Man Winter taking a nap most of this season, the blooming azaleas might not be the only ones suffering from early spring fever.

Bloomingtondale residents feeling the urge to add color to their yards should just give in to it, even though it may seem early on the calendar, said landscaper and horticulturist Rolando Malavé. The unseasonably warm weather makes this a good time to start planting.

"Now's the time," said Malavé, who opened Kiwi Exotic Plants last month at 3623 Lithia-Pinecrest Road.

His business offers many of the standby landscaping plants, including azaleas, roses, hibiscus and bougainvillea. However, Kiwi Exotics specializes in unusual bushes and blossoms for people who want something different

in their outdoor design.

Take the sculptured look of a bright green *duranta erecta* tree, trained to grow in a spiral shape.

"I love the light green color. It kind of pops," Malavé said. "A lot of people like to put this in front of their foyer or door. It makes a statement."

Malavé also recommends the low-maintenance *schefflera arboricola trinette*, an accent plant that looks good at the base of a tree or to set off other greenery.

"I like to put them in front of some evergreens," he said.

Azaleas are a standby for spring, and Malavé has them in dwarf and semi-dwarf sizes.

"We've got several different varieties," he said, noting that one of his favorites is a semi-dwarf version called the variegated dogwood that will reach a height of 15 to 18 inches. It sells for \$6.99 in a 3-gallon

pot. The blossoms sport a rosy hue threaded by an ivory color.

"It's something different you don't see that often," Malavé said. "They're really showy, so it's nice to put them out front."

The retailer also has a selection of Hawaiian ti plants and several varieties of palm trees. Malavé said he gets most of his plants from nurseries in Plant City, Lakeland and Ruskin, but many of the exotic plants originated in South America.

Malavé studied horticulture at Hillsborough Community College and the University of South Florida and worked in his family's Seffner-based landscaping business for about 15 years before opening Kiwi Exotics. He said he is happy to advise homeowners on plant needs and help them find something they like that will fit in a particular spot.

The key things to re-



SUSAN GREEN

Eye-popping *duranta erecta* trees (foreground), trained to grow in a spiral shape, are among the unusual landscape enhancements offered by Kiwi Exotic Plants on Lithia-Pinecrest Road.

member when planting are maintenance, drainage, watering and location, Malavé said.

Many of the plants at Kiwi Exotics require little maintenance. Some remained outdoors during a recent cold snap and weathered the temperatures just fine, Malavé said. Though most require full sun, there are attractive varieties that can tolerate shade.

For information, call (813) 661-7379.



The variegated dogwood azalea, a semi-dwarf variety available at Kiwi Exotic Plants, is among the more unusual plants homeowners might choose to add pizzazz to their yards.



The multicolored variegated tibouchina is an eye-catching plant available for sale at Kiwi Exotic Plants on Lithia-Pinecrest Road.



Rolando Malavé, owner of Kiwi Exotic Plants, demonstrates the height differences of dwarf and semi-dwarf azalea varieties that may affect where homeowners should plant them.

Need College Money?

Parents/Students, do you need help with college funds? How does a scholarship sound? If so, continue reading.

Established in 2006, the BHA scholarship is awarded annually to one high school senior living in Bloomingdale.

Beginning in February, the Scholarship Guidelines and Application Form and are available on the community website by going to: www.BloomingdaleGazette.com. Look for the button that reads, "Bloomingdale Community Scholarship Application" in upper left part of page. From there, just print out the documents and get to work!

The deadline for the Bloomingdale Homeowners Association to receive the completed application is April 1 so make sure you don't let that date get past you! In May, the winner will be invited to attend the Bloomingdale Homeowners Association Board meeting and his/her name will be announced and award given.

The Bloomingdale Homeowner's Association looks forward to helping another Bloomingdale student start their college future by awarding them this year's scholarship. We hope it's you!

'Glee' comes to the temple

Congregation Beth Shalom of Brandon, 706 Bryan Road, is proud to present a new Purim Spiel (a spoof or play), "A Very Glee Megillah," at 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 7.

This year we are happy to incorporate the popular TV show, "Glee," as our inspiration. The Glee char-

acters fit very well into the Purim storyline, as those familiar with the show will agree.

Starring Lauren Wiseman, Jamie Karr, Jeff Shaw, Jeff Newman, Suzanne Jones, and with special guest appearance by Barbara Streisand as well as many more. Director

Joel Edelson is proud and excited about the talented temple members participating this year.

"We have some favorite actors from past performances along with some new faces this year," said Joel, "Along with some great choreography as

well, designed and taught by Elizabeth Edelson."

It is toe tappin', non-stop fun for the whole family! Come dressed as your favorite Purim (or Glee) character. The fun commences at 7 p.m. with a short service, followed by the play.

Spring Break Theater Camp available

Beginning March 12 through March 16, The Florida Academy of the Performing Arts is putting on a Spring Break Theater Camp at Music Showcase located on Oakfield Drive in Brandon, Florida.

Students will learn acting techniques, singing, costumes, set design and choreography to musical numbers. The students will present a show on Friday, March 16, at the end of the camp.

The theatre camp is suitable for children ages 6-11. Students can participate for a half day (9 a.m.-noon) or full day (9 a.m.-4 p.m.). Registration and sign-up at faopa.org or by calling (813) 490-ARTS (2787).

Marching band auction March 24

The Bloomingdale Rajun Bull Marching Band auction will be Saturday, March 24. The preview will begin at 2 p.m. with the auction commencing at 3 p.m. This auction is a can't miss occasion. There will be a professional auctioneer on-site to auction off hundreds of items. In previous years, items that have been sold range from gift baskets to sports memorabilia to hotel stays. Proceeds from this auction support the students of the Bloomingdale High School Marching Band. Thank you for your support.

For information, contact: Marcy Ringdahl at (813) 744.8190 or marcy.ringdahl@sdhc.k12.fl.us.



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Bloomington Buzz

By SUSAN GREEN

Interviews for this month's Buzz were conducted at the Walgreens store at Bloomington Avenue and Bell Shoals Road. Animal lovers waiting in line for veterinary services through the mobile unit Pet Caravan were asked the following question:

WHAT PET DO YOU HAVE WITH YOU, AND WHAT MAKES THAT ANIMAL SPECIAL?



Karen Alvarez of Valrico, with Dulcea, 5 months old:

"She's an English bulldog. She's spoiled rotten. We have four dogs, and she's the baby. ... She snores. Out of the four, when they're sleeping, you can always tell which one is her.

"She loves lizards. She gets on her stomach and crouches on all fours and stalks them."



Julianna Mangum, 10, of Lithia, with Maya, 5 years old with Julianna's brothers Diego, 8, left; and Joaquim, 4

"She's a Chihuahua-corgi. She's very, very, very nice. ... She always makes me happy when I'm sad. She gives me kisses and she cuddles with me."



Phyllis Miller of Lithia, with Libby, a maltipoo:

"She has just brought so much joy to our lives. We rescued her three years ago from (the county animal shelter on) Falkenburg. She loves us. We're so important to her and she to us."

Healthy Habits

DIABETES SELF-MANAGEMENT: The Hillsborough County Health Department offers Manage Your Diabetes, a free self-management education program open to adults with diagnosed diabetes. Classes take place at: Bruton Memorial Library, 302 W. McLendon St., Plant City, 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. Friday; Ruskin Branch Library, 26 Dickman Drive S.E., 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. Tuesdays until March 6; at Sun City Center, 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. Wednesdays until March 7. Call (813) 307-8071, ext. 7107.

MINORITY BLOOD DRIVE: Remington College-Tampa Campus will hold a blood drive 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., and 4:30 to 8 p.m., March 13. The campus also holds a platelet drive that day from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. The campus is at 6302 E. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Tampa.

Call (800) 448-6405.

FREE TESTING FOR MEN: Moffitt Cancer Center partners with a variety of health organizations to offer free testing to medically underserved and uninsured men in the Tampa Bay area, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. March 17. It includes free checkup, health education workshops, fitness demonstrations and exhibitors of community support services. Admission and parking are free. Call (888) 663-3488.

WALK TO DEFEAT ALS: The ALS Association's signature event to raise money to combat Lou Gehrig's Disease is at 11 a.m. March 17 at the University of South Florida, 4202 E. Fowler Ave., Tampa. Wheelchair-bound patients along with their families and friends will make the 2-mile trek. Call (888) 257-1717.

SURVIVOR CELEBRATION

2012: Cancer survivors are invited along with family members and friends from 2 to 4 p.m. March 31 for an event designed to recognize survivors and their physicians. Event is at the Medical Arts Building at St. Joseph's Hospital, 3001 W. Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd., Tampa. There will be music, games, raffle prizes, refreshments and family activities. Call (813) 443-3078.

FREE CHAIR YOGA: Chair yoga classes will be offered 10:30 a.m. Saturdays in the clubhouse at The Bridges Retirement Community, 11350 Bloomington Ave., Riverview. Call (813) 413-8900.

ROAD TO RECOVERY: Volunteer drivers are needed. Many cancer patients need chemotherapy or radiation treatment and cannot drive. The American Cancer Society provides free

transportation for these appointments. Call (800) 227-2345.

FITNESS CLASSES: Bootcamp style classes for all fitness levels, at 6 p.m. Wednesdays and 8:30 a.m. Saturdays at Fitness Fun Studio, 3402 S. Dale Mabry Highway, Tampa. First class free; subsequent classes are \$5. Call (813) 839-5564.

PROJECT QUIT: Moffitt Cancer Center is recruiting smokers for a quit-smoking study funded by the National Cancer Institute. Project Quit will compare smoking-cessation booklets to determine how well they help people quit smoking and then stay tobacco-free. Call (877) 954-2548.

RESEARCH VOLUNTEERS: The USF School of Aging Studies is recruiting volunteers for its brain research efforts. For information about participating, call (813) 974-6703 or visit

www.agingstudies.cbcs.usf.edu.

MALL WALKING: Free mall walking takes place at 8:30 a.m. daily at Westfield Brandon, Brandon. Call (813) 684-3316.

MASTER SWIMMERS: Tampa Bay Aquatics Masters has openings for fitness and competitive swimmers and triathletes. The group swims at a complex near downtown Tampa. For information, visit www.tampaswim.com or e-mail arnp1961@aol.com.

SPECIALIZED HEARING DEVICES: The Deaf and Hearing Connection for Tampa Bay offers free specialized telephones and ring-signaling devices to Florida residents. Equipment is available by appointment. Call (727) 399-9983, (813) 952-6625 or Florida Telecommunications Relay at 1-800-222-3448 (voice) or 1-888-447-5620 (TTY), or visit www.ftri.org.

Bloomingtondale High's Tyler Harris signs baseball scholarship

By KIM WALLACE

On Wednesday, Jan. 18, Bloomingtondale Senior High School student Tyler Harris signed a baseball scholarship with Concordia University. Tyler started playing baseball when he was 5 years old in South Bend, Ind. He moved to Valrico during sixth-grade and played at Bloomingtondale Little League before moving on to both his high school team and a traveling team. Tyler has played for two years on the junior varsity team before moving on to the varsity team at Bloomingtondale. Tyler has also been involved with a traveling team, "Team Extreme," out of Tampa for the past two years.

Tyler was joined by his parents, Jim and Jolie Harris, sister Olivia, grandparents Ron and Becky

Leichtman and a special surprise visit from his Aunt Lori Levy of New York, as he signed with Concordia University. His brother, Garrick Dikos is currently studying at Indiana State and wished he could have been there. Tyler's parents commented that they are really proud of their son. "He is always practicing at the batting cage," his mother commented.

Tyler said that if it had not been for his coaches and parents, he would not be where he is today and he appreciates all that they have taught him. Bloomingtondale Coach Wilken stated that when he met Tyler in 2002 he noticed that Tyler was dedicated both on the field and off, always giving 100 percent. Coach Wilken is excited to see him move on and knows he will do well with baseball.



Coaches Jim Masson, and Head Coach Kris Wilken and Tyler Harris

KIM WALLACE

Tyler is excited and looks forward to playing ball with Concordia University in Seward, Neb., this fall.

Bloomingtondale High accident illustrates need for parking lot safety

By SUSAN GREEN

Hillsborough County school district officials say "lesson learned" after a Bloomingtondale High School freshman suffered leg burns last month when he was trapped under a Jeep on its way out of the school parking lot at dismissal time.

District spokesman Steve Hegarty said the Feb. 7 incident occurred as a result of a student "horsing around" near a line of cars inching out of the parking area toward Bloomingtondale Avenue. He

said no changes are planned to the way students and faculty are dismissed as a result.

"It was a weird thing," Hegarty said. "I think it was clearly a case of horsing around. ... I think any lessons to be learned have been learned."

A 14-year-old boy somehow got under a Jeep driven by a 16-year-old student who did not see the freshman, Hegarty said. The boy's leg became pinned between the vehicle's muffler and underbody, and could have been

badly injured if a teacher in the car behind the Jeep had not seen what was happening and alerted the driver to remain still, Hegarty said.

Emergency services workers and sheriff's deputies responded to the scene, and the boy had to be extricated and taken to Tampa General Hospital for treatment. Hegarty said the student suffered no broken bones but had burns from being wedged against the muffler.

He said no disciplinary action is planned.

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Before you begin what should be the fun process of buying a home, consider a couple finer points to help save you money, both upfront and down the road. One issue relates to your credit score and its impact on your financing, and the other relates to the condition of your home and the cost of repairs.

First, know your credit score in advance of house hunting, and take steps to improve it if it's less than good. During your loan application is not the time to find any surprises.

Correct any errors on your credit report, pay down some revolving debt, and don't make any other major purchases — like a car — until your loan paperwork is complete and you've closed on your home. This is important because borrowers with lower scores pay higher fees and interest rates, which can total tens of thousands of dollars over the life of the loan.

Once you're in the position of having made an offer to purchase, do not skimp on inspections. No matter how strapped for cash you think you are, the cost of the inspections is a drop in the bucket compared to what unexpected plumbing, electrical and structural repairs will cost you in the future. Your agent will go over a list of available inspections and suggest the most appropriate ones for your property.

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County Commissioner Higginbotham Proclaims Strawberry Festival Days

Hillsborough County Commissioner Al Higginbotham, District 4, and the Board of County Commissioners welcomed Florida Strawberry Festival representatives to the County Center for the sixth consecutive year to proclaim March 1 through 11 as Florida Strawberry Festival Days during their regular board meeting Feb. 22.

Accepting the proclamation were Strawberry Festival General Manager Paul Davis and President Ron Gainey. Also in attendance were Hillsborough County Farm Bureau Executive Director Judi Whitson, Florida Strawberry Growers Association Director Ted Campbell, Strawberry Queen Chelsea Bowden, First Maid Calli Jo Parker and court members Olivia Higgins, Erica Kelley and Chelsea Talavera.

This year's presentation had a unique twist, as royalty history was made in the selection of the 2012 Strawberry Queen. Chelsea Bowden, current Strawberry Queen, is the granddaughter of two former Strawberry Queens, Barbara Alley Bowden and Ruby Jean Barker Redman. Commissioner Higginbotham asked grandmothers Bowden and Redman to attend the presentation.

"It is a great day when I get to welcome a bit of my hometown into downtown Tampa. The Strawberry Festival and the agriculture industry have a positive impact on the economy of Hillsborough County. I'm proud of Plant City and the international fame of the Florida Strawberry Festival," said Commissioner Al Higginbotham. He encouraged all residents to visit the festival,



Back row: Bud Bowden, Olivia Higgins, Commissioner Al Higginbotham, Strawberry Queen Chelsea Bowden, court member Chelsea Talavera, Hillman Bowden, court member Erica Kelley, former Strawberry Queen Barbara Alley Bowden. Front row: Pam Bowden, First Maid Calli Jo Parker, former Strawberry Queen Ruby Jean Barker Redman

preserve its rich heritage, and celebrate the strawberry harvest.

The Florida Strawberry Festival has been an ongoing tradition since 1930. Today, the festival continues to draw major recording artists and a paid attendance of more than 500,000 people. For the third consecutive year, the annual event has been named a Blue Ribbon Fair

by the Florida Federation of Fairs and recognized by the Southeast Tourism Society as a Top 20 event in the Southeast.

Hillsborough County's Agriculture Industry Development Program estimates the strawberry acreage is the highest sales crop at \$366,046,522, representing 44.9 percent of the County's total agricultural sales. Hillsborough

County produces 90 percent of the strawberries grown in Florida, and nearly 11 percent of the strawberries grown in the nation.

Hillsborough County Chairman Al Higginbotham represents District 4, which encompasses Plant City and its surrounding areas. He was elected in 2006 to the County Commission.

Second women's seder upcoming

What a wonderful time the women and children had at the first Women's Seder held at Congregation Beth Shalom. The Seder was led by Rabbi Torop. The special Haggadahs written for women's seders were unique. We read the prayers, sang the songs, honored the famous Jewish women, and most importantly, had a fantastic time.

On Sunday, April 1, at 1 p.m., the women of CBS will sponsor its second annual Women's Seder at the temple, open to all women of CBS. Each family will be



PROVIDED

Jill Oppolo, her two daughters, and Lauren Shaw at the Women's Seder

asked to bring one dairy luncheon food item to share.

There is a charge of \$10 per CBS family, \$15 for non-member families, to

attend. If you have a Haggadah from last year, please bring it. For those who do have one, there will be a \$15 charge for the Haggadahs for members

of CBS (\$20 for nonmembers). Children of the attendees can share the Haggadahs.

Call (813) 681-6547 for information.

Business to help Scouts earn badges

The Florida Academy of Performing Arts is launching a new program to help The Boy Scouts of America earn badges involving music and theater.

Activities may include making puppets, listening to different types of music and learning music terminology.

The first two-hour workshop will be held in March at The Music Showcase, 402 Oakfield Drive. Either visit fao-pa.org or musicshowcaseonline.com, or call (813) 685-5998.

Community Station Notes

Stolen items recovered – are they yours?

At the February monthly meeting of the Bloomingdale Area Community Council (BACC), Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office Det. James Howell, District IV Latent Investigations section, briefed members with an update of earlier area vehicle burglaries.

Howell noted that two young men were arrested south of the golf course located near Crooked Stick Drive off Natures Way. These two burglars used a system known as "car hopping" – going through area neighborhoods and pulling door handles until one opens. This allowed the burglars to check 30 to 50 vehicles in a very short time. Once inside a car, they took anything of value including cash, electronics, digital cameras, iPods, MP3 players, expensive sunglasses, laptops, weapons and more. These two burglars were arrested when deputies responded to suspicious activity in the area. Numerous items were recovered.

HCSO detectives and deputies are in the process of trying to locate owners so they can return items properly identified.

Following is a list of the types of items recovered:

1. Several wrist watches and a pocket watch.
2. A backpack.
3. Matched set of portable DVD players.
4. Electronics accessories (cables, chargers).
5. Cellphones.
6. Children's electronic games.
7. Several GPS units.
8. Several iPods.
9. Flashlights.

Any Bloomingdale area resident who had these types of items stolen from their vehicles during the December 2011 time



Curtis Warren

frame are encouraged to call the Sheriff's Bloomingdale Community Station on Erindale Drive at (813) 635-8040. They should be prepared to give detailed descriptions of the items stolen and also later provide proof of ownership once coordination is completed to recover the items. And, if possible, talk to your friends and neighbors who may have had items stolen during this time period.

HOME BURGLARIES

Det. Howell also briefed BACC members on several home burglaries in the Bloomingdale West in the middle of the day, when most are not at home. The common technique used to gain entry was to break a window or glass patio door in the area of the master bedroom – areas that usually do not have broken glass sensors. Once in the home, the burglars remove cash, jewelry and anything else of value and rarely go into other areas that may have motion sensors.

However, an elderly resident in Bloomingdale West recently had people force their way into their home once they opened the door. Please, do not open your doors to strangers.

Howell noted that the most recent burglary trend in Bloomingdale East is to steal bikes while garage doors are open. To prevent this type of burglary, simply close your garage doors when away from home or your garage for any length of time.

Also, Det. Howell noted

that there have been several packages stolen from the front porches of area homes. Thieves have been following UPS trucks and then stealing the packages after UPS drops them off. To prevent this, track your packages and either make special arrangements with UPS to only have the package left when someone signs for it or make arrangements with a neighbor.

RESIDENTS MUST TAKE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

"The only way to help those of us in the Sheriff's Office reduce the number of burglaries in our area is for all residents to do their part in preventing crimes by taking personal responsibility for properly securing their homes, vehicles and personal property," Det. Howell said at the meeting. "This starts with locking up your homes and vehicles, taking valuable items out of your cars and closing your garage doors. Otherwise, you're just inviting a crime to take place. It only takes these few seconds for a crime to take place!"

REMEMBER:

If you notice any suspicious activity or a crime being committed, get all the information you can – descriptions of individuals, descriptions of vehicles and license numbers – and immediately call the Sheriff's Dispatch at (813) 247-8200. Time is critical.

AllSaints
CARPET STEAM CLEANING
3 ROOMS \$65
813-986-1266
1 & Get Hallway cleaned FREE. Additional rooms \$20 ea.

Two great sales

Starting in March (for a limited time), Back By Demand Thrift Store, Consignment, Boutique and Snack Shoppe is offering two great sales.

On the first Saturday of every month from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., come in and enjoy 50 percent off the entire stock of already low-priced clothes (excluding accessories and wedding gowns). You will find great brands such as Aeropos-

tale, Hollister, American Eagle, Lands End, Loft, Ann Taylor and more. Selections for men, women and children ranging from tees, shirts, blouses, formal wear, dresses, pants, shorts and designer jeans.

Also starting in the month of March (for a limited time), the last Saturday of every month from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., come and dig in. Fill a plastic grocery bag of select clothing for

only \$1 (plastic bags provided). Select clothing for men, women and children ranging from tees, shirts, blouses, skirts, pants, shorts, jeans and more.

Please come join us for a fun and exciting day full of shopping. We are located at the Bloomingdale Plaza, (next to Winn Dixie), 173 East Bloomingdale Ave. For information call (813) 438-8910.

Have your say - attend a BHA meeting

Friendly reminder: The Bloomingdale Homeowners Association Board of Directors would like to remind our residents that public meetings are held during the months of January, March, May, September and November. The meetings take place on the first Tuesday of the month at 6 p.m. at the Bloomingdale Park West Community Center.

Regular committee meetings will be held as needed to keep community events running on schedule. If you

would like to join a committee or have an idea for a new event, please contact us by calling the below number.

The BHA Board invites and encourages all Bloomingdale residents to attend public meetings in order to stay informed on area news and events.

If you have any questions, news to report, or simply need information, please contact us by calling (813) 681-2051 or by emailing us at inbloomingdalenews@tampabay.rr.com.

9th Annual Community Roundtable Golf Tournament

Beef 'O' Brady's on Bell Shools Road, Valrico is teaming up with the 9th Annual Community Roundtable B. Lee Elam Best Ball Scramble Golf Tournament. The tournament will be held on Saturday March 31 at Buckhorn

Springs Golf and Country Club. Beef 'O' Brady's will sponsor a putting contest with a 32-inch HDTV as the prize. The tournament will be filled with contests and prizes you won't want to miss. So come out and

support a good cause and enjoy a day of golfing! For information, contact The Community Roundtable at (813) 661-4305; email: Roundtable2008@aol.com; website: TheCommunityRoundtable.org

SEE MORE AT BLOOMINGDALEGAZETTE.COM

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BLOOMINGDALE HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION

Spring Classic Golf TOURNAMENT

Raffles for Prizes

April 14, 2012

1:00 P.M. Shotgun Start

Registration is between 12:00pm and 12:30pm

\$80.00 Per Person

\$300.00 for Foursome

Various Sponsorships Available
Collared shirts only, no demin or cutoffs, soft spikes only

For information please call:

Heather Michael @ 813-340-6547

Email address is: hgolf75@yahoo.com

Mail checks to:

Bloomington Homeowners Association

PO Box 7221

Brandon, Florida 33508

Bloomington Golfers Club

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50/50 Raffle

Longest Drive

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