

THE BLOOMINGDALE GAZETTE

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PARENT PAPARAZZI

Proud parents armed with cameras and camcorders gather for a pre-prom photo op in Bloomingdale last week.

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IS THIS TREE SAFE?

Treating hazardous trees is a complicated but important job.

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PROJECT CURE



D'ANN WHITE/Photo

Some of the members of the Project Cure Hot Pink Flamingos chili cook-off team, from left, Lisa Huetteman, Kristina Glenn, Diane Rush, Karin Graziano and Mary Owens, accept the award for raising the most money during the event from Tampa Tribune columnist Steve Otto.

Hot Pink Flamingos Rock Chili Contest, Plan Natures Way Walk

By D'ANN WHITE

One Saturday in April, hell apparently froze over.

It didn't make the national news. There wasn't an NBC Special Report or an 84-point headline on the front page of the Tribune.

But I knew it must have happened

because my friend Rita showed up at 6 a.m. to walk around Natures Way with us as part of our training for the second annual 60-mile Project Cure walk in October. And Rita has told me repeatedly and firmly that she'd only get up that early on a weekend morning to walk with us when hell froze over.

So I could only conclude that Satan and his minions were scrambling for mittens, parkas and ski caps. Either that or Rita, like the rest of us, has simply had enough of that feeling of helplessness that comes over you when you

See CURE, Page 18



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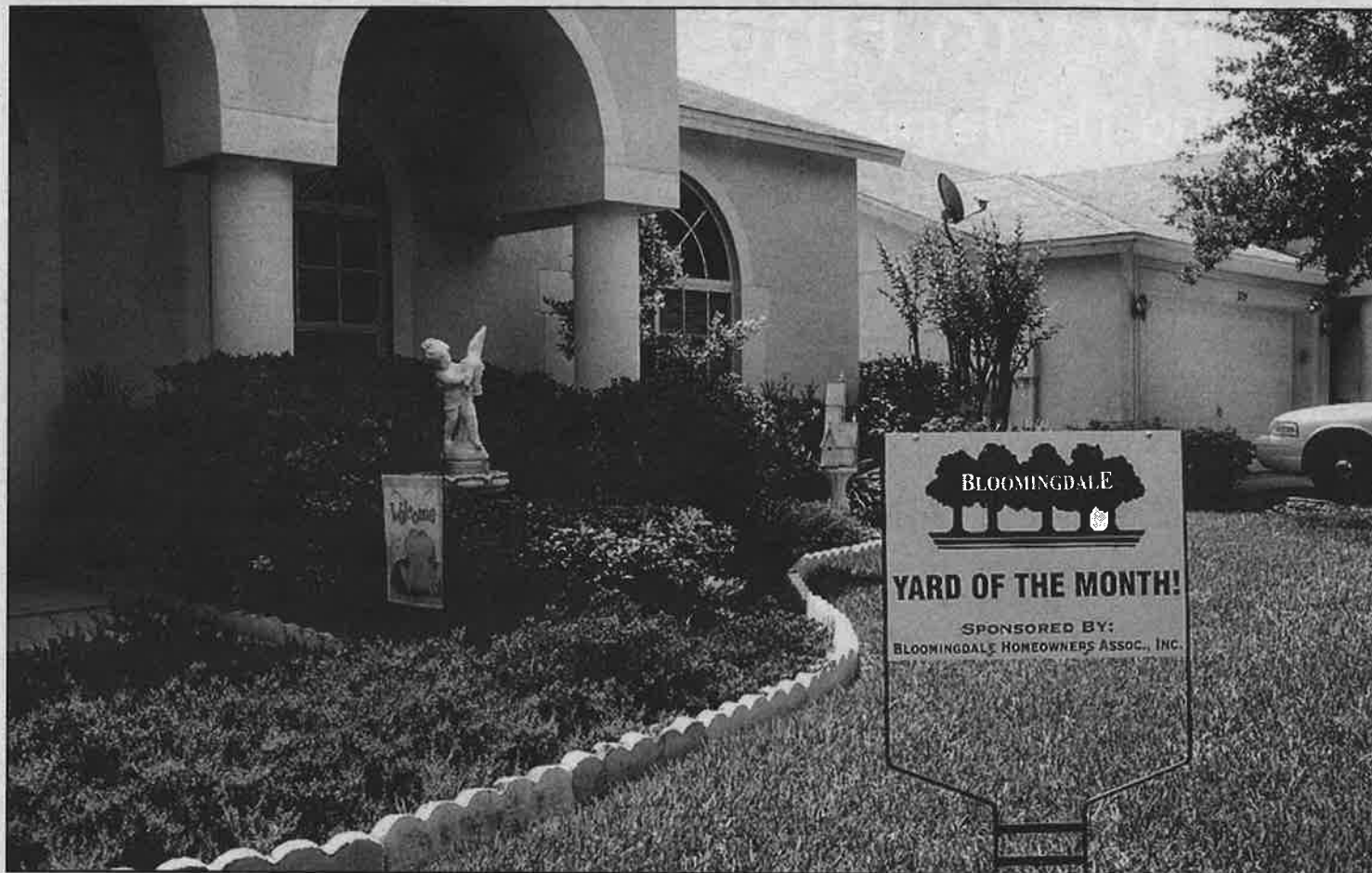
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LAURA FRAZIER/Photo

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Al Higginbotham

Commissioner's Corner

By AL HIGGINBOTHAM
Hillsborough County
Commission, District IV

Well, it didn't rain much since I last wrote to you. The National Weather Service reports just two to three 3 inches throughout the Tampa Bay area in the last 30 days. So much for April showers!

It is a different system of showers however that has kept me too busy to plant a vegetable garden like I always have. There are numerous issues before your county commission of which you need to be aware, and I'm happy

to provide to you a "forecast" on these issues. My hope and goal is that April's showers will bring May's flowers in the form of good government working for the people.

My forecast for the budget process: partly cloudy, but clearing.

Your county budget is done every two years and amounts to nearly \$4 billion. Those dollars provide services like Fire Rescue, Sheriff's patrols, and money for building libraries, roads, and

other infrastructure.

The budget process is under particular scrutiny this year as we work with the state Legislature to lower your property taxes. While Hillsborough County has been lowering millage rates on which your taxes are based for years, this represents a great time to tighten government's belt and reduce any duplicative or unnecessary spending. At the same time, if the cuts are too severe, important county services could suffer.

My staff and I are working to

make sure that the next biennial budget truly reflects the priorities of our community and does so in a way that is responsible and conservative and provides the same outstanding level of service you've come to expect. There are plenty of opportunities for public input at public hearings this summer, and I'll make sure you are aware of those dates and times.

When it comes to evaluating the Comprehensive Plan, the forecast shows an area of high

See CORNER, Page 19

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Hillsborough Codes, Neighborhood Deed Restrictions Set Standards

By LAURA FRAZIER
lfrazier@mediageneral.com

Hillsborough County's Minimum Housing Code was established to ensure that residents have safe and healthy places to live. County Code Enforcement officers inspect housing units to ensure they meet minimum standards such as structurally sound buildings and roofs, fences in good repair and swimming pools that are properly maintained and screened or fenced to prevent access to small children.

Code Enforcement also handles complaints concerning nuisance conditions such as inoperable vehicles, rat infestation, trash on lots, and high weeds and grass on vacant lots.

The codes apply to all homes in Hillsborough County.

The code enforcement process begins when the county receives a complaint about a potential violation. Complaints can be submitted anonymously online or by phone.

According to Code Enforcement Supervisor, Bill Langford, initial inspections are performed within three working days after the complaint is received. If violations are confirmed, a case file is opened and the property owner is given a reasonable period of time -- depending on the nature of the

violation and other factors -- in which to correct the problem.

Once a case file is opened, any county resident can call Code Enforcement to inquire about the status of the case.

According to the county's Web site, if compliance cannot be achieved through normal channels, the case is sent to a hearing before the Hillsborough County Code Enforcement Board.

If the board determines that a violation does exist on the property, a compliance order is issued. If the homeowner then fails to meet the compliance deadline, a fine will be assessed for each day the property remains in violation.

The final steps in the process, at a progression determined by the enforcement board, include assessment of a lien against all properties owned by the individual and continued assessment of the daily fine. If a fee continues to accumulate for more than 90 days, the case is referred to the County Attorney's office, where the option to foreclose on the property is considered.

In deed restricted communities such as Bloomingdale, it is important to note that many neighborhood sections are subject to deed restrictions that go above and beyond

Some Examples Of County Code Violations

Hillsborough County Codes standards apply to all homes in the county. Please note: deed restrictions in many sections of Bloomingdale are even more stringent than county code requirements.

VEHICLES

Vehicles must be operational (able to move under own its own power) and intact; No more than two unregistered, untagged, or expired tag vehicles are allowed; Commercial vehicles over one ton may not be parked overnight in residential areas; Boats or RV's over 20 feet may be parked in rear or side yards but must be kept five feet from the property line; Boats or RV's cannot be parked on the right-of-way (grassy area between the sidewalk and the road).

See CODE, Page 17

See ENFORCE, Page 16

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Is This Tree Safe?

By ROB NORTHROP

Trees around our homes provide cooling shade in the summer that reduces energy use and costs. For many of the folks I talk to each month, the simple pleasure of watching birds and squirrels nesting, feeding and playing on the limbs makes their trees an essential part of their home.

However, trees can be dangerous. Limbs fall and can do damage to homes and property, and in the worse case cause injury to people. All too often we

are unaware of the risks associated with declining and defective trees. Recognizing hazardous trees and taking corrective action can protect property and prevent injury.

Evaluating and treating hazardous trees is complicated and often requires specific knowledge and expertise. When in doubt seek help, through the University of Florida Extension Service, local Division of Forestry office, or a qualified professional arborist or forester.

It is the owner's responsibility

to ensure the safety of his/her trees on his/her property, as well as the limbs reaching over into another's property. An annual review of your trees, using the following check list, can help alert you to the potential for a problem.

- Are there large dead branches in the tree?
- Are there detached branches hanging in the tree?
- Does the tree have cavities or rotten wood along the trunk or in the major branches?
- Are mushrooms present at the base of the tree?
- Are there cracks or splits in the trunk or where branches are attached?
- Have any branches fallen from the tree?
- Have adjacent trees fallen over or died?
- Has the trunk developed a strong lean?
- Do many of the major branches arise from one point on the trunk?
- Have the roots been broken off, injured or damaged by lowering the soil level, installing pavement, repairing sidewalks or digging trenches?
- Has the site recently been

changed by construction, raising soil level or installing lawns?

- Have the leaves prematurely developed an unusual color or size?
- Have tree in adjacent wooded areas been removed?
- Has the tree been topped or otherwise heavily pruned?

Corrective action begins with annual inspections of large trees near valuable property or in areas frequently used by family, friends or neighbors. If a tree has been deemed a hazard, it has been identified as having one or more of the defects from the inspection checklist, and has a poten-

See TREE, Page 17

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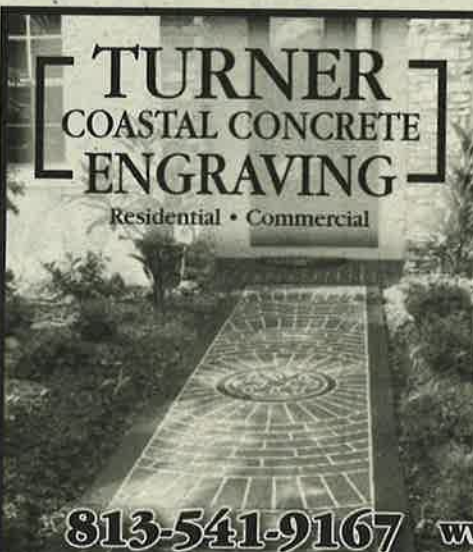
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WEEKEND DATEBOOK: MAY 5

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Blood drive

The Brandon Fresh Market and the Florida Blood Services will host a blood drive May 5 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Winthrop Town Centre on Bloomingdale Avenue and Providence Road.

All donors will receive a T-shirt, a wellness checkup including a cholesterol screening and a coupon for an area theme park.

Information: 748-0441 or www.brandonfreshmarket.com.

Music Idol contest

Music Showcase, 402 Oakfield Drive, will host a Music

Idol-style competition May 5 at 10 a.m. Three age groups will be judged: 5 to 12; 13 to 18; and 18 and older. Participants will be judged on song choice, performance and stage presence.

Call: 685-5998, or visit Music Showcase Monday through Saturday.

Dapper Doggie, 881 E. Bloomingdale Avenue, will hold a free informational program to address pet health and nutrition and the growing pet food recall list. Jim Balsimo with Natura Pet Foods will answer questions and discuss nutrition and how to read and decipher food labels. Special discounts and free samples will be available.

Call: 662-0560.

Fashion Show Benefits YMCA Girls' Program

A Gazette Report

The ninth annual YMCA Wild and Classy Fashion Show will take place May 5 from noon to 3 p.m. at the Palmetto Club at FishHawk Ranch to benefit the YMCA's Y Girls Rule program, which helps girls age 12 to 17 who are in the foster care system build self-esteem and develop life skills.

The ladies-only event will feature women business leaders from the greater Brandon community modeling fashions from Tamela's Boutique, Talbots, JCPenney, Trendy Teens, Red's Sporting Goods and Catherines.

BankAtlantic is the title sponsor and The Tampa Tribune/Brandon News is the media sponsor. Other sponsors are All American Title, Brandon Mitsubishi/Brandon Hyundai, Choice Realty, Magruder Agency Inc., Ameri Funds, Mercantile Bank, Professional Accounting, Brandon Buick and the Tara Hewitt, Waldron and Midyette families. Divine Designs Salon & Spa will style the models' hair.

Tickets are \$50 and can be purchased online at www.tampaymca.org/fashionshow or by calling the Brandon Family YMCA at 685-5402.

Web Site Monitors Proposed Widening Of Lithia-Pinecrest Road

A Gazette Report

The Hillsborough County Public Works Department has established a Web site for the planning, development and engineering study taking place in anticipation of widening Lithia-Pinecrest Road to four lanes.

According to project manager Scott Passmore, the county will put study information and documents on the Web site as the study pro-

gresses for the public to comment on.

"It is vital that we receive public input early and often regarding the study so that all points of view can be incorporated and analyzed," Passmore said.

The Web site is www.lpcstudy.com.

Recent information posted includes the PowerPoint presentation from the public kick-off meeting in January and an interactive public comment form.

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Kids Think Outside The Box

By LAURA FRAZIER

lfrazier@mediageneral.com

Just after 1:00 a.m. on a recent Saturday morning, in a parking lot off State Road 60 in Brandon, 9-year-old Zachary Bonner bedded down for the night in a flimsy cardboard box.

Local outreach groups estimate 2,000 homeless people currently live in the greater Brandon area. Zach Bonner is not one of them.

The boy has a bedroom of his own and a healthy family life at home in the upscale subdivision of Lithia Ridge in Valrico. He's not worried about finding food or shelter for himself on a daily basis. What does concern him is the nationwide epidemic of homeless children living on the streets, and he intends to do something about it. The young community activist has rallied dozens of individuals and businesses to join his mission to reach out to street kids.

A third grade student who studies online with Florida Virtual Academy, Zach organized

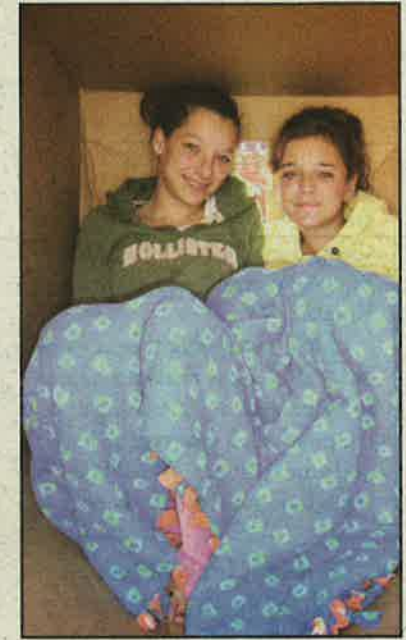


Zach Bonner of Valrico curls up to sleep in the parking lot of Best Buy, outside the cardboard box he sheltered in overnight on April 20. The 9 year old boy organized "Project 24 Hours" to bring attention to the plight of homeless street kids. Above right, Melissa Yates and Carina Vallefuoco, seventh grade students from Martinez Middle School in Lutz, said they had fun camping out overnight but looked forward to going home to clean up.

"Project 24 Hours" to bring attention to the plight of minors without a bed to sleep in or a guardian to turn to. About 40 kids, many students from New-

some and Bloomingdale high schools, joined Zach April 20 to sleep in boxes in the parking lot of Best Buy on Grand Regency Boulevard.

"I wanted to bring awareness to the 1.6 million homeless street kids, and also to get kids that normally wouldn't volunteer to help around their community,"



LAURA FRAZIER/Photo

he said. Zach's goal hit home with Nathan Constable, a senior at Newsome High School.

"To be perfectly honest, I came out here because I needed community service hours (to meet high school graduation requirements)," Constable said.

"But I really liked helping out with this, trying to meet their (homeless kids') needs. I am definitely going to start volunteering more."

The group gathered at Best Buy at 2 p.m. Friday afternoon. They painted discarded appliance boxes the store provided, watched a documentary about street kids and entertained themselves with simple games. They snacked on donated food that Zach and his 17 year old brother, Matt, collected prior to the event.

Not long after midnight, the campers retreated to their boxes, in a roped-off corner of the lot. Zach's mother, Laurie Bonner, helped organize and supervise the event. She said the kids rustled around in their boxes until finally settling down "somewhat" around 2 a.m.

The group was up with the



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Pre-Prom Parent Paparazzi



LAURA FRAZIER/Photos

The parental mosh pit buzzed with excited shutter bugs, but Norka Lopez, pictured, opted for a quiet spot far removed from the frenzy to shoot some video of her son, Rolando Lopez.

By LAURA FRAZIER
lfrazier@mediageneral.com

Proof that graduation season is upon us, photos of expertly coiffed and elegantly outfitted teenagers poised poolside are popping up as E-mail attachments and My Space posts everywhere. But what's the view like from the other side of the lens?

Last Saturday night, a few hours before Bloomingdale Senior High School's April 28 prom, dozens of grads and their dates gathered in Bloomingdale Village for a four-years-running annual photo shoot. The tight-knit group of teens commenced together through Alafia Elementary and Burns Middle School.

About 50 parents and family members armed with digital cameras, camcorders and camera phones turned out for the pre-prom photo op, staged at Dan Mier's picturesque lakeside home on the ninth hole of Bloomingdale Golfers Club.

In the parent paparazzi pit, the



photographers jostled for the perfect angle.

"You're stepping on her dress!"

"Move in a little closer."

"Pull your pants up!"

"When are the limos getting here?"

And, most frequently overheard, "They're graduating. Can you believe it?"

Mier lamented the fact that 2007 may be the last year he hosts the prom

night pre-party.

"This group of friends went through school with my fiancée's son, T.J. Hamilton. T.J. and the last of the group are all graduating this year, so I think this might be the last one."

The camera crew will convene at least once more, when the students graduate May 23 at the University of South Florida Sun Dome.

"We'll all be there," Mier said.



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Registration For Free Voluntary Pre-K Under Way

A Gazette Report

The Agency for Workforce Innovation, the lead state agency for workforce and early learning services in the State of Florida, announced this week registration for the summer session of Voluntary Pre-kindergarten, known as VPK, is under way.

Now in its second year, VPK program enrollment is up 20.5 percent today compared to the same time last year.

According to the agency, the VPK program gives children a head start in school by helping them develop the skills to become good readers and successful students. Children who enter kindergarten able to recognize shapes and colors, clearly express their thoughts and ideas, and identify letters from the alphabet are at a greater advantage.

The VPK program aims to give children a strong learning foundation by teaching the

fundamentals of letter sounds, numbers, shapes and colors. They also learn important social and emotional skills, becoming familiar with the structure of school and a classroom, and the importance of teachers as figures of authority, all intended to make the transition to kindergarten easier.

The summer session is open to all 4-year-olds who have not previously participated in the program. Summer VPK consists of 300 hours of instructional time, including mealtime, but not including nap/rest time. For more information call the VPK Hotline at (850) 921-3180 or visit www.vpkflorida.org.

The Office of Early Learning, a division within the Agency For Workforce Innovation, provides oversight of Florida's school readiness programs and is the lead entity for implementing the state's Voluntary Pre-kindergarten program.



LAURA FRAZIER/Photo

Dennis Lee, lead singer of The Dennis Lee Show band, serenades Briana Riner, blind since birth, with her favorite song, "Pretty Woman," at the Willis Peters Exceptional Center prom April 28.

An Exceptional Evening

By LAURA FRAZIER

lfrazier@mediageneral.com

Just seven students will graduate this year from Willis Peters Exceptional Center secondary school, but more than 100 students and family members attended the center's prom last weekend. The annual dance was held April 28 at Brandon Elks Lodge 2383 on Centennial

Lodge Drive.

Willis Peters, on Nelson Avenue in Dover, is one of 17 exceptional student centers throughout Hillsborough County. The centers, run by the Hillsborough County School District, serve trainable students with moderate to severely disabling mental, physical or emotional handicaps.

See DANCE, Page 16

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PROPERTY MANAGER'S REPORT

Bloomington's property manager, Al Devney of DPMI Property Management, Inc., serves as a project coordinator for maintenance and improvement projects approved by the Bloomington Special Taxing District board of trustees. He also provides regular inspections of Bloomington's common areas, entryways and irrigation systems. To report a community maintenance need, call Devney at (813) 684-6667 or E-mail bloomington.district@verizon.net.

Projects and Activities

- In March, Cardinal landscaping trimmed the crepe myrtle trees and creeping fig as required by their contract. Starting in April, they switched to a once-a-week mowing schedule.
- J.A. Weaver Tree Co. raised the canopy to 13 and a half feet on 154 trees along Natures Way, from Culbreath to Moondale.
- Witt Fence Co. repaired a vandalized fence on Erindale Drive.
- Russell Electric repaired, on two separate occasions, vandalized lights, fixtures and sensors at the Holleman Drive entrance.
- Planscape Inc. replaced two destroyed Jatropa trees on Culbreath by the iron bench.
- The construction of a

turning lane on Bell Shoals Road at Garnet Drive resulted in the removal of one full and one partial irrigation zone. Thunder Irrigation and Planscape are working on a proposal to replace the irrigation.

- Brandon Sign was awarded the contract to replace an entrance sign at Culbreath Cove.
- Planscape Inc. took soil samples along Natures Way and Greenhollow to determine the soil composition. The results will aid the district in plant selection and fertilization.
- Signs by Mineo replaced two signs stolen from the directory at Culbreath and Erindale.
- An American flag at the Greenhollow entrance was replaced due to wear and tear.
- In the land of eat, drink and pitch out the window, 22 bags of trash and 30 snipe signs were removed, along with part of the front end of a car, a chain saw chain, a tail light lens, a blue towel, one pair of socks and twenty-three cents.
- A total of 74 lights, 7 lamp receptacles and two light sensors replaced. Lamp receptacles, light sensors and 62 lights were vandalized. The beverages of choice were Diet Coke with Lime for soft drinks, Budweiser for beer and Kahlua Mudslide for distilled spirits.

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LAURA FRAZIER/Photo

Students from Bloomingdale and New-some high schools assemble care packages containing food and personal care items for homeless kids. Stand Up For Kids will deliver backpacks filled with the supplies to street kids in the Tampa Bay area. At right, Desiree McGowan and Valerie Smiler, Bloomingdale High seniors, and Nathan Constable, a senior at Newsome High, stretch and chat after waking up early Saturday morning.



BOX

Continued From Page 10

sun Saturday, eager to fill 200 backpacks with food and personal care items for homeless kids. The provisions were purchased with monetary and in-kind donations made by businesses and individuals to the Little Red Wagon Foundation, a charity clearinghouse Zach established in 2005, at the age of 7.

The backpacks will be delivered to local homeless kids by one of Zach's foundation partners, Stand Up For Kids. The nonprofit group assists at-risk youth in 60 cities throughout the United States and Mexico. Like Zach, they're committed

to the rescue of homeless street kids.

Editor's Note: Log on to www.bloomingdalegazette.com to read more about Project 24 Hours and Zachary Bonner, a 2006 recipient of President George W. Bush's National Points of Light award, given to citizens who make significant efforts to help people in their community. Zach is also currently one of three national finalists in Build-A-Bear Workshop's annual Huggable Heroes award, given to kids so committed to volunteering and giving back that they are sure to change the world.

THE BLOOMINGDALE GAZETTE

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Taxing District Oversees Maintenance, Improvements

By DAVID STECK

My name is David Steck, one of six trustees elected to sit on the board of the Bloomingdale Special Taxing District, known as the BSTD.

The BSTD exists to maintain Bloomingdale's common areas, such as mowing right-of-ways, applying pest & fertilization agents and performing general landscaping, as well as preserving its assets like irrigation systems, entryway signs and lighting systems, to name a few. The BSTD is the largest of 127 taxing districts in Hillsborough County.

I ran for this unpaid elected position in 2005 in an effort to do my part to affect the community in a positive manner, specifically to help maintain its solid fiscal position, to better Bloomingdale's long-term ability to compete with newer communities in our area and lastly, to improve its overall "curb appeal" (by limiting trash, litter, general debris and the aging effect).

Regarding the first point, our annual budget is nearing \$640,000, half of which goes to mow and edge the common areas, maintain our bounty of entryway landscaping and to apply pesticides & fertilizer. These measures are all needed to properly care for our six square miles of real property, 16 linear miles of concrete wall, 14 miles of irrigation piping and 23 water wells, just for starters.

The taxing district board prides itself on our sound fiscal budgeting approach and our ability to hire the dozens of contractors it takes to run the property from year to year. However, input from you is still paramount.

The second point speaks to my desire to better position Bloomingdale to compete long term with surrounding communities with regard to improving overall property values (it's a foregone conclusion that the



David Steck

quality of our local schools has the most profound impact on property values). Without a fiscally sound operating budget in the taxing district -- and the appropriate Trustees to manage it -- and without a neat, clean and ascetically pleasing community in which to live, our property values will erode.

My third point is perhaps the most salient: curb appeal. Some areas of Bloomingdale are more than 20 years old, so we need to take every reasonable measure to help offset the effects of aging. Clearly our community possesses too much litter, trash and general debris, whether it is cigarette butts along our roadways, overgrown foliage or the unsightly and potentially dangerous "snipe" signs that offenders litter our community with.

Research points to the fact that these illegal roadside snipe signs irritate and frustrate residents more than they generate new business, so the point of offenders sticking them in the ground is confusing at best, and a potential liability for them in the worst case.

The trustees, along with our property manager, Al Devney, make every effort to get this debris picked up and to coordinate with the appropriate Hillsborough County departments to assist, like Roads & Streets and Code Enforcement.

I am also working regularly with local businesses all around

See IMPROVE, Page 17

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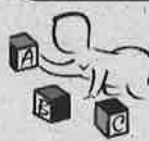
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LAURA FRAZIER/Photo

Willis Peters administrator, Peggy Ferro, helps graduate Amy Doyen with her corsage while her father, Steven Doyen, looks on. Amy is severely mentally handicapped and unable to speak.

DANCE

Continued From Page 12

School administrator Peggy Ferro said Willis Peters serves about 130 students ranging in age from 3 to 22 years old.

"We have students who are handicapped mentally, physically and visually, and some have multiple handicaps," Ferro said.

The administrator welcomed students and family members to the prom Saturday night.

Graduate Amy Doyen, who is severely mentally handicapped and unable to speak, was escorted to the dance by her father, Steven Doyen.

"She picked out her own dress," Doyen said.

Doyen fumbled with his 21-year-old daughter's corsage a bit until Ferro stepped in to help pin the

flower to Amy's red sequined gown.

But just moments later, white petals and baby's breath sprigs lie on the floor at Amy's feet. She had plucked the corsage apart while her father's attention was averted.

Doyen reacted with a smile and a soft sigh, a testament to the patience demanded of parents of severely disabled children.

"Her mother is going to wonder why she's not wearing this," he said, stooping to pick up the discarded bloom.

Elks Lodge members Sharon and Duane Petry understand the challenges faced by the families of exceptional needs children.

The Petrys' grown son, Duane, Jr., served punch at the party. The 44-year-old man, permanently

See DANCE, Page 19

ENFORCE

Continued From Page 6

county code requirements.

For example, county codes set forth limits on the length and height of boats that can be parked in residential driveways. But some deed restrictions prohibit homeowners from parking any kind of boat outside their garage or fenced-in back yard.

Likewise, the county requires all sheds to be situated at least three feet from the property line. However, in some sections of Bloomingdale, sheds must be set back from the property line as much as 15 feet. In most areas, sheds must not be visible from the front or side yard. And in some sections, deed restrictions entirely prohibit sheds.

In sections of the community with mandatory homeowners associations — such as Fox Run, The Links, Cambridge Cove and Bloomingdale Cove — deed restrictions are enforced by the individual association. However, most of the 40 sections in Bloomingdale East and West do not have mandatory associations. In those cases, the Bloomingdale Homeowners Association assists homeowners who wish to pursue deed restriction enforcement. The BHA, run by volunteers who live in the community, offers voluntary membership to all Bloomingdale residents, regardless of the section in

which they live.

Residents who suspect a home in their neighborhood may be in violation of county codes can get more information or submit an anonymous complaint to County Code Enforcement online at www.hillsboroughcounty.org/hcce or by phone, (813) 641-6946.

Those who suspect a home may be in violation of neighborhood deed restrictions can submit an anonymous complaint to the Bloomingdale Homeowners Association Inc. online at www.bloomingtongazette.com/complaintform. Residents can also bring their concerns before the BHA Board of Directors at its monthly open meetings, held the first Monday each month at 7 p.m. at the Bloomingdale Community Office, 3509 Bell Shoals Road.

Most deed restriction documents are available to download on the BHA Web site. Copies are also available at the community office, open Monday — Thursday from 7 a.m. to noon, or phone (813) 681-2051. For more information, please E-mail info@bloomingtongazette.com or call the community office.

IMPROVE

Continued From Page 15

us by getting to know their management staffs and encouraging them to "do the right thing" by better maintaining the exterior of their property. One example is that we recently worked with the management of Sweetbay Supermarkets to clean up the vacant parcel of land along Bell Shoals Rd. adjacent to the store.

The area looks much better after having been mowed and trimmed. Such proactive steps have a positive impact on their business and their income statements, and such improvements clearly have a long-term positive impact on Bloomingdale.

TREE

Continued From Page 7

tial target. There are three options for corrective action: move the target, prune the tree, or remove the tree.

Moving the target, where this is practical, is often the easiest and most economical approach to hazard potential. Removing swings and moving picnic tables or vehicles out of the reach of the hazardous tree solves the problem with little effort or expense.

A hazardous condition may result from defective branches and/or poor branch attachment to the trunk. In this case, proper pruning can often correct the problem. Pruning should be considered when a branch is dead; a large branch is cracked or decayed; a large branch is weakly attached to a limb or the trunk (attached at a sharp angle appearing as a V rather than U connection; a broken branch is lodged in the tree's crown.

I have lived in the Augusta Village section of Bloomingdale East for the past five years with my wife Nancy, who is an outstanding mother of three and a dedicated third grade teacher at our A+ rated Cimino Elementary School. My three young sons all work diligently in their academic careers, as well as competing in soccer, chess, Tae Kwon Do, electronic gadgetry and just plain old recreating.

I encourage any resident in Bloomingdale to contact me anytime at dsteck@tampabay.rr.com, (813) 781-8884 or at the Bloomingdale Community Office, (813) 684-6667. Our office manager, Derry Wilson, will be happy to take a message for me. Please also feel free to attend any of our monthly meetings, held at the community office on the second Monday of each month at 7 pm. Your input is welcome, and I look forward to talking with you.

Carefully consider alternatives of completely removing the tree. The effects of the removal can be dramatic, leading to changes in home temperature, the appearance of your property, and reduction of the overall value of your property.

Tree removal should be considered the final option. Removing trees is dangerous even when trees are solid and healthy. Damaged, rotting and otherwise unhealthy trees pose special hazards to tree fellers. Removal of hazardous trees should be left to professionals.

Rob Northrop is a Forestry Extension Agent with the Hillsborough County/University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service. Contact him at Northrop@ifas.ufl.edu or (813) 744-5519.

CODE

Continued From Page 6

SHEDS

Sheds must be at least three feet from the property line.

GARAGE SALES

Garage sales are limited to one every six months, for no more than three days in duration.

SWIMMING POOLS

Pools must be screened or fenced to prevent access by small children, and must be properly maintained, sanitary and mosquito free.

FENCES

Fences must be maintained, sound and sturdy.

STORAGE PODS

The use of temporary storage pods is limited to seven days, no more than six times per year.

NUISANCE CONDITIONS

Weeds, grass, or underbrush shall not exceed 18 inches. Junk, trash and debris -- abandoned motor vehicles, furniture, appliances, rotten lumber, paper, trash, etc. -- are all considered nuisance conditions and are not permitted; Dead or dying trees which may present a hazard are not permitted.

STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS

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CURE

Continued From Page 1

watch friend after friend bravely but futilely battle breast cancer.

It was after attending the funerals of three friends that a group of women from St. Stephen Catholic Church came up with Project Cure last year. We wanted to make a real difference, so we joined forces with the Tampa Bay Lightning Foundation to raise funds for the Don and Erika Wallace Breast Cancer Foundation at the Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute. We talked to foundation representatives and researchers, and we learned that Moffitt is conducting groundbreaking research into breast cancer right here in our back yard.

Over several months, we raised awareness about breast cancer and the need for self-exams and annual mammograms (I know two women who got their first mammograms this year). We brought people together that might not otherwise have connected for this common cause. And, most importantly, we collected \$26,500 for the foundation. The Lightning Foundation then matched those funds.

I'm not an early riser myself, but, recalling the suffering of my friends as they fought breast cancer, I found myself automatically setting my alarm for 5 a.m., donning my walking shoes in a semi-dream state and joining my fellow walkers brandishing flashlights on Natures Way in Bloomingdale East.

Despite training throughout the summer, I was still unprepared for the actual three-day walk. By the second day, my heels were a mass of blisters.

Kevin Nance, a registered nurse and the husband of my friend, Cheryl Nance, who died of breast cancer the previous January, first pleaded with me to quit walking. Then he threatened to sit on me and hide my tennis shoes.

But I figured if I could get used to getting up at 5 a.m. on Saturday and Sunday, I could get used to the discomfort of a few blisters.

When he realized I was determined to finish the walk, Kevin begrudgingly bandaged my feet the best he could, dosed me with pain reliever and reluctantly sent me on my way. I still cringe when I watch the videotape showing me hobbling along.

No, I'll put up with early wakeup calls, blisters and even humiliation for a cause I believe in. I think everyone who knows me will agree I met the humiliation requirement during the annual St. Stephen Spring Jubilee April 14.

This year a portion of the proceeds from the jubilee's annual chili cook-off went to Project Cure. The women of St. Stephen had two teams registered but had more volunteers than we needed so cook-off organizer John Pignataro of the Krewe of Alafia Norsemen suggested we form a third team. It was just two days before the cook-off and, in what can only be described as a moment of temporary insanity, I volunteered to head the new team.

Afterward, I was talking to my sister in St. Louis who said, "What were you thinking? You don't even cook!"

True. That's why I recruited my husband, who

does cook, by reminding him that I spent 22 hours in labor bearing his child.

Keeping that in mind, he dutifully arrived at the chili cook-off that morning where he chopped and mixed and spiced. He added all the secret ingredients and put the chili on a low simmer. Before he went on his merry way, he reminded me that all I had to do was stir it and make sure it doesn't get too hot and scorch the bottom of the pot.

Simple enough. Except I got distracted taking photos and chatting with Tampa Tribune columnist Steve Otto, who was one of the judges. Before I knew it, someone asked, "What's that smell? Is something burning?"

By and by, the judges went off to a secret place so they could taste the contestants' chili without being disturbed or bribed or otherwise influenced, so I only heard what transpired secondhand. But I figure it's pretty accurate since I heard it from my priest, Father Mike Juran, also one of the chili judges, and priests have to tell the truth.

He said there was one entry the "seasoned" chili judges said was so horrible they spit it out. He didn't dare try it. Apparently, it even smelled bad. The judges gave it last place.

"That was mine!" I said enthusiastically, because at least it was memorable. I'd gotten 11th place out of 11 entries. Then I had a horrible thought.

"No one threw up, did they?"

I asked if he'd give me absolution if I stole a copy of the winning chili recipe to use for next year's chili cook-off. Father Mike just shook his head and said it wouldn't do me any good.

"You'd just burn it again," he said. For once, I couldn't argue with a priest.

I'm not sure exactly how far I'm willing to go for Project Cure. But every time I watch my son's classmates at St. Stephen Catholic School, Joshua Bryant and Olivia Nance, mark another milestone in their lives without their mothers, my determination is renewed.

I guess I'm willing to do just about anything.

Maybe you feel the same way.

This year we're reaching out to the entire community, inviting all the churches, community groups, civic organizations, businesses and neighborhoods to join Project Cure and the Tampa Bay Lightning Foundation for the 60-mile walk around Natures Way Oct. 19-21. We're hoping to double the amount raised last year.

For starters, you can set your alarm clock to 5 a.m. and meet us at Bloomingdale Park East Saturday and Sunday morning to begin training. Or you can form your own team and start training at your preferred location and time.

Hey, if Rita and I can do it .

D'Ann White is a Bloomingdale resident and editor of The Brandon News. To find out how to get involved in Project Cure, contact her at dwhite@mediageneral.com.

www.bloomingdalegazette.com

DANCE

Continued From Page 16

brain-damaged during a difficult birth, lives in a converted apartment at his parents' home in Brandon.

"The hardest thing for these parents is accepting the fact that even when you tell your child something 12 times over, they look at you like you never said it," Sharon Petry said.

Duane joins his parents in Elks activities, but is most content channel surfing at home. It's not the life the couple envisioned when they married 45 years ago, but it's a good one.

Petry clapped when she spotted her son dancing at his post behind the punch table.

She shouted over the live band, "Look at him. We love him, and he's happy. Oh, Duane's got it made!"

Dennis Lee, lead singer of The Dennis Lee Show band, emceed the event. For the past 22 years, Lee and his band have performed for free at the school's prom.

As students arrived, the charismatic performer was quick to greet them.

Briana Kimer, led to the dance floor by family members, was eager to meet Lee.

The teenager, blind since birth, wore a pink satin dress spritzed with cotton-candy scented perfume. She reached out for Lee, searching his face with her hands.

"It's scratchy, isn't it?" Lee said.

When Briana told the singer it was her 16th birthday, he turned up his microphone to address the crowd.

"Excuse me everyone, attention! I just met Briana here, and guess what? Today is her sweet 16 birthday!"

Lee danced with Briana as he crooned her favorite song: Pretty Woman.

Teacher Amy Peters stood beside the stage, soaking in the sight of the children and their families laughing and dancing.

"This is such a big night for our students," Peters said.

"They start talking about it at the beginning of the school year. They want to know, 'when is the prom?'"

The theme of the dance, selected by students, was "A Night To Remember."

Brandon Elks Lodge lounge manager, Don Morris, said the lodge has

provided food, refreshments and volunteers for the prom for many years. His wife, Leslie Morris, administrator of Simmons Exceptional Student Center in Plant City, is a former Willis Peters administrator. Several years ago, when the school needed a new place to hold its dance, the Elks Lodge offered the use of its facilities for free.

Students graduating from Hillsborough's exceptional centers must meet state mandated requirements for students with disabilities and individual benchmarks set forth by their teachers and parents, Ferro said. Graduates earn a special diploma from the school district by taking a variety of courses that cover basic academics, communication skills, career preparation, social living skills and more.

The Willis Peters Exceptional Center Class of 2007 graduates are Jakey Binnion, Gustavo Alvarado, Richard Woods, Nicole Becker, Ricardo Beverly, Bruce Whittaker and Jason Devine. The graduation ceremony will take place May 16 at 1 p.m. at Dover Elementary School, 3035 Nelson Avenue.

Information: 757-9462

CORNER

Continued From Page 5

pressure moving in.

The Comprehensive Plan governs land use on every parcel in the county and looks out 20 years. The board is in the process of evaluating our comprehensive plan and making tough decisions.

As our county has grown in population, the signs of development are present both in the exciting growth of our economy and the frustrating hum of sitting in traffic. Among other things, the comprehensive plan is designed to provide a mix of retail, office, and residential uses to limit the number of trips people make in their cars. It also connects the construction of infrastructure with new development.

There are many competing interests in this issue - like protecting the rural lifestyle of some areas while maintaining the suburban feel of our more developed communities. I am working to untangle each issue presented and know that working together, we will find solutions to these pressing problems.

If you have questions or comments about these issues and the other issues important to you, your family, and your livelihood, please contact me or my staff at (813) 272 - 5740. I look forward to hearing from you soon because working together we will make a difference.

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