

# THE BLOOMINGDALE GAZETTE

Volume XXXI  
Number 11

NOVEMBER 2011 • THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE BLOOMINGDALE HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATION SINCE 1980



SUSAN GREEN

Father Bill Swengros, pastor of St. Stephen Catholic Church, looks on while American flag is unfurled over the casket of 1st Lt. Ivan Lechowich during a funeral Mass.

## ...and some gave all

1st Lt. Ivan Lechowich, a Bloomingdale resident, lost his life while serving his country in Afghanistan. See page 4.

### QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Once again, we come to the Holiday Season, a deeply religious time that each of us observes, in his own way, by going to the mall of his choice."

*Dave Barry*

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# Cheddar Biscuit offers comfort chow, Southern style

BY SUSAN GREEN

Stop in at the new Cheddar Biscuit restaurant, and you might feel like you're settling down to a feast on Grandma's porch.

In fact, you can ask to sit a spell on the screened porch and dig into such Southern staples as fried chicken, pot roast or country-fried steak, all accompanied by sides and the eatery's signature cheesy biscuit.

But the woman behind the food and the ambiance is nobody's grandma.

She's Holly Franklin, 25, not long out of college classes at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, where she majored in communications. She and her fiancé, Nick Girard, 27, an Army veteran, grew up in the Brandon/Valrico ar-

ea and opened the restaurant together last month at 1020 E. Bloomingdale Ave., in the Plaza Bella retail center.

The daughter of restaurant owners Ken and Wyomme Franklin, Holly has logged some hours at her parents' place, Moe's Southwest Grill at Winthrop Village in Riverview. When it came to her dream menu, though, she decided to suit herself.

"I decided that I wanted to start my own place, and I wanted it to be food that I like," Franklin said, adding that she admires her mother's Southern style of cooking and borrowed heavily from those recipes.

Girard, also a fan of food at the Franklin homestead, was happy to go along.

"I eat over there all the time," he said.

Comfort food reigns at the Cheddar Biscuit, so much so that customers can order a traditional Thanksgiving turkey dinner any time of year "because it makes you feel good," Franklin said.

Franklin said she was working at The Green Boutique at Plaza Bella when the restaurant space became available. She and Girard decided to remodel the former steakhouse and open their business there because few eateries in the area serve Southern food.

Already the restaurant has taken on special meaning for the couple. After three years of courting and two weeks before opening the doors to the public, Girard decided to propose.

"She thought I was going to a Bucs game," he

recalled. Instead, Franklin arrived at the business under construction to find that Girard had set up a candlelit dinner for two.

"I got down on my knee and proposed to her," he said. When Franklin said yes, a cheer sounded from the kitchen, where about two dozen friends and family members were hiding.

The couple plan to live in Bloomingdale East.

The biggest thing they have in common, Franklin said, is love of family and community. Hanging on the restaurant walls as a hometown tribute are old photographs of Tampa and East Hillsborough, some dating to the late 1800s.

Plantation shutters and soft lighting complete the décor. Television pro-



SUSAN GREEN

Working at the Plaza Bella restaurant, The Cheddar Biscuit, (left to right) are Joshua Armand, Sheila Oliveras, owners Holly Franklin and Nick Girard, and Matthew Perdun.

grams aired during business hours will always be appropriate for kids, Girard promised.

"It's just a wholesome environment and good food," he said.

Because southerners

aren't always persnickety about time, Franklin decided to open the doors daily at 10:58 a.m. and close at 9:32 p.m., to give customers some leeway.

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Left, Father Bill Swengros, pastor of St. Stephen Catholic Church, looks on while American flag is unfurled over the casket of 1st. Lt. Ivan Lechowich during a funeral Mass. Pictured above, Ivan and Jen enjoy a silly moment together.

SUSAN GREEN

# Fallen Bloomingdale soldier hailed as a hero

BY SUSAN GREEN

To his loved ones, he was the family cut-up, the one who couldn't pose for a snapshot without doing something silly.

To his comrades at arms, he was a hero, someone who put the welfare of others ahead of his own and saved lives by his choices as an Army soldier.

For the Bloomingdale community, his death in Afghanistan was a painful reminder of the sacrifices made by military families and the power of conflicts across the globe to stab the hearts of people half a world away.

Last month, Bloomingdale said good-bye to Ivan Lechowich, who moved with his parents, Rick and Gina, and sister Erika to the community in 1997. The Army first lieutenant was 27 when the vehicle he was riding in hit a roadside bomb Sept. 28 in Ghazni province, Afghanistan, according to military reports. He and two others died in the blast.

About 350 people crowded into St. Stephen Catholic Church for a funeral Mass on Oct. 15, and more paid their respects by saluting the funeral cavalcade as it motored along Bell Shoals Road.

Still others waited on Providence Road to salute the fallen soldier as he was laid to rest at Serenity Meadows in Riverview.

Ivan had married his sweetheart, Jen, at St. Stephen almost a year before. A few days before his death, the couple welcomed a newborn daughter, Natalie Marie, into the world, with Ivan marveling at her beauty from nearly 8,000 miles away through the use of computer technology. He instantly anchored his Facebook wall with the baby's birthday photo.

Gina Lechowich said the family managed to con-

nect with Ivan via Skype about seven hours after Natalie's birth. It was 2 a.m. in Afghanistan.

"He was very proud," Gina recalled. "But he had a hard time because ... everyone [he worked with] was asleep. He had to wait until daylight, when he could tell everyone about her."

She remembered her son first for his sense of humor and his ability to lighten the family mood, whatever the circumstances.

But she also recalled a more serious side, including a passion for history



HERO, Page 5 Rick and Nat

PROVIDE



SUSAN GREEN

Members of the Patriot Guard prepare to join the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office in a motorcycle escort for 1st Lt. Ivan Lechowich of Bloomingdale, who was killed by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan.

## Hero

From Page 4

and a desire to learn that led him to graduate from King High School's international baccalaureate program and the University of Florida with plans to become a lawyer. Something changed his mind during law school, however, and her son decided to follow the career path of his father, a retired lieutenant colonel. Ivan enlisted in July 2009.

At the funeral, St. Stephen pastor Bill Swengros noted that Ivan set goals for his Army career and worked with determination to realize them. Undaunted by failure to pass a test to enter a prestigious engineering program, he studied and succeeded on his second try.

At the time of his death, Swengros said, Ivan was working on a team to defuse bombs, a dangerous mission that carried little recognition or glory.

"He was just born to be a peacemaker," the pastor said.

"He's the one that made the streets clean. ... He's the one that saved countless lives."

Gina Lechowich said one of her greatest comforts came from the e-mail of a soldier who was with her son the day he died. The soldier credited Ivan with saving her life.

"I got an e-mail ... that said, 'Know that he's a hero, and I'm living proof,'" Gina said. "We'll save that for the little one [Natalie]."

She said the family also is grateful for the support of the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office and the Patriot Guard, a veterans organization that provides motorcycle escorts for military funerals and wounded soldiers.

Most of all, she has been touched by the outpouring of support and sympathy from her neighbors in Bloomingdale, many of whom brought food or flowers even though they did not know the family personally.

"It's very heartwarming," she said.

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# Church tradition offers a patch of paradise

BY SUSAN GREEN

And they call it pumpkin love.

It's that moment when someone age 3 to 9 locks eyes on the perfect orb, the one that entices with flawless symmetry, ideal color or maybe an endearing lopsided look.

Cole Ladewig, 9, of Valrico showed up at the St. Andrew's United Methodist Church pumpkin patch last month to log some community service hours on behalf of Bloomingdale Cub Scout Pack 61. But the lure of the gourd distracted him from his duties.

"Mom, I want this one," he called to his mother, Lyndsey Ladewig, who also is the pack's den leader for third-graders. He clutched a round, ruddy beauty and declared that pumpkin perfection is de-

finied by shape.

For 8-year-old Connor Boone of Valrico, however, the true measure of sublimity in a squash is size.

"I picked the biggest one," he said, dragging a red wagon loaded with the monster toward the parking lot. His mother, Michelle, estimated the pumpkin weighed about 30 pounds.

Katisia Coleman, 4, of Brandon hugged her selection to her chest and marveled at its hue. The patch offered some unusual colors, from white to white with green stripes, but Katisia would have none of that.

"I like the orange ones," she said.

Jim and Brenda Paugh of Brandon live across the street from the church. Every October, the pumpkin piles beckon like the

Promised Land. The couple has been bringing their children, Mark, 6, and Rebecca, 3, to the patch for years, and last month they also brought Brenda's niece, Olivia Allegood.

"We watch it get set up every year, and they [the kids] get more and more excited," Jim Paugh said. "You can only drive past it so many times before you have to go in."

Every year, St. Andrew's orders about 3,000 pumpkins and sells out by the end of October, said church youth pastor Dan Segale.

This year, the patch took on new popularity when the church combined a Saturday opening with a family festival that included kids' attractions. Youth volunteer Josie Walker estimated that patch sales that day alone would tally

about \$1,500.

Proceeds, typically thousands of dollars, go to fund outings and mission trips for the youth program, but that's not the primary reason for doing it, Segale said.

"It's a community outreach," he said. "It's really just a chance for the community to come out and meet us. Our mission is to be part of the community, not just a church in the community."

Running a pumpkin patch is not without challenges. Squirrels love squash and find it difficult to resist the temptation of hundreds lying in an open field. Segale said in years past he tried numerous methods of shooing them away, ranging from posting a watchdog to employing commercial squirrel repellant.

Finally, he decided to share. He filled a wagon with busted pumpkins and parked it under a tree that also is a popular squirrel hangout.

"This definitely works," Segale said. "They're going to get what they want."

Whether children found their match at the patch by size, shape or shade of orange, there was no guarantee of complete compatibility.

Connor, for instance, discovered the drawbacks of falling in love with a bulbous squash that weighed half as much as he did when he tried in vain to hoist it into the family vehicle. After a few attempts in which the pumpkin refused to budge, he sighed and turned to his mother.

"I wish gravity wasn't invented."



SUSAN GREEN

Mark Paugh, 6, of Brandon finds his perfect pumpkin match at the patch run by St. Andrew United Methodist Church.



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## THE BLOOMINGDALE GAZETTE

The official publication of the BHA since 1980  
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The Gazette is published by Sunbelt Newspapers

**Publisher:**  
Denise Palmer

202 S. Parker Street,  
Tampa, FL 33606-2395  
Ph: (813) 259-7479  
Advertising: 627-4771

The Gazette is delivered free to Bloomingdale residents on the first Saturday of each month.

During the Oct. 1 weekend, two golf course homes were broken into. In both cases the perpetrator(s) smashed out the rear sliding glass doors to the master bedrooms and removed currency, coins, jewelry and more. Both homes unoccupied, and the crimes appear to be related.

Here are some points to consider regarding protecting your home

◆ Based on this information, it appears that the burglars may be using the courses and cart paths to access the back of homes. Thus, those living on a golf course may be more likely to be victimized.

◆ Those involved know that most homes with security systems do not have glass breakage sensors. Additionally, most master bedrooms do not incorporate a motion sensor. The perpetrator(s) are careful to not slide the broken door or window open, which would activate the alarm. The perpetrators enter and confine themselves to the master bedroom, never entering other rooms which are protected by motion sensors. Additionally, the perpetrators know that jewelry is typically stored in the master bedroom and can be easily concealed in pockets or a backpack.

◆ It's likely the perpetrator(s) are surveilling victim's homes, or using other methods to determine the homeowner(s) are away. When homeowners post vacation plans or other away periods on Facebook, perpetrator(s) are able to plan burglaries.

◆ Residents who utilize metal safes may want to consider bolting the safe to the concrete floor inside the home in a strategic location. Perpetrator(s) often carry the safe away if

breaking into the safe would take a great deal of time. Small safes and lock boxes are routinely carried away by criminals.

◆ If you cannot add glass breakage sensors to the master bedroom doors or windows, consider relocating expensive jewelry to a more secure area.

## Crime Report

◆ Residents are encouraged to report suspicious activity to (813) 247-8200 (non emergency line) immediately. Ideally, callers should be able to describe the subjects, what they are wearing, and what direction they were headed. When vehicles are involved, makes, models,

color of vehicle, and direction of travel are crucial. Its extremely helpful if a tag number can be identified and provided to the call taker.

These talking points are simply meant to stimulate the thought process of Bloomingdale residents who wish to protect them-

selves from costly burglaries. Remember, when protecting your home and property, the age old adage "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" truly applies.

Detective James C. Howell  
District IV - Investigations and  
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## Pinwheels for Peace



On Sept. 21, people from all over the world participated in Pinwheels for Peace to celebrate the International Day of Peace. Since 1982 this day has celebrated the wish of peace all over the planet and in 2002 the United Nations proclaimed Sept.

21st the official International Day of Peace where people from all over the world could participate in whatever way they wanted, they could gather together to sing, plant a tree, light a candle or just sit quietly.

In 2005 two art teachers from Coconut Creek, Florida started Pinwheels for Peace as a way to let their students participate. Their students wrote messages of peace on their pinwheels and planted them in honor of the day. What started with 500,000 pinwheels then grew into 3.5 million last year and this year the total will be higher!

Our Girl Scout Troop wanted to participate because we always talk about being in the Sisterhood of Girl Scouts. We are proud to call ourselves Girl Scouts, we are proud to be citizens of the world and we wanted to join with people all over the world, because what we all have in common is our wish for peace. We made hundreds of pinwheels and created a Peace Sign outside of Burns Middle School and we hope to participate again next year and every-one year!

Elizabeth Corn  
Cadette Troop 5  
Valrico, FL

## Bloomingtondale High School on Fox 13 News



KIM WALLACE

Charley Belcher interview with Head Football Coach John Booth!

BY KIM WALLACE

Bloomingtondale High School was selected for a Good Day Fox 13 News Pep Rally of the Week Live on September 23rd, 2011 with Charley Belcher! Bloomingtondale students were in a contest with Durant High School for the spot. The voting was done online by the students. Fortunately, both schools got selected but Bloomingtondale got Charley Belcher and 93.3 FLZ!

Bloomingtondale showed Great Spirit for Fox 13 and 93.3 with performances from the cheerleaders, drum line, band, tug-a-war contest and class with



Charley Belcher interviews Meleah Baker senior of Bloomingtondale Marching Band.

most spirit, which Charley Belcher picked the senior class with most spirit. Belcher also interviewed with Mark West - Principal, Jon Sever - Band director and John Booth - Head Football Coach. This was a very exciting time for Bloomingtondale, especially since football is doing well this season!

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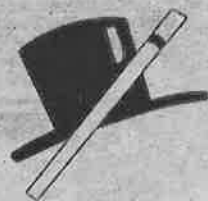




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KIM WALLACE

Second and third graders gather after completing 30 minutes of running or walking

## Hike-A-Thon fundraiser at Cimino Elementary

BY KIM WALLACE

The PTA started out this year with the hopes of one major fundraiser for their school, so they joined up with "Go Take A Hike" in Lakeland to do a Hike-A-Thon fundraiser with the students. This is Cimino's

second annual Hike-A-Thon fundraiser for the PTA. They increased their funds by 30 percent this year. Amanda Moore, fundraiser coordinator, and Principal Talley were very excited with the event's outcome. Last year, when they decided to do this type of fundraiser, they were not just thinking about the money, they also took into the consideration that this would be a great way to get the chil-

dren involved. Each student participated in the run by getting a one-time donation or donation by the number of laps they did. This is one way to also get the students to exercise and learn the importance of helping out the school. The money they raise goes to help the school with living habit, mini grants for teachers and PTA programs of all kinds. So of course they look forward to next year's event!

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## Bloomingtondale Homecoming Week

BY KIM WALLACE

Bloomingtondale High School celebrated homecoming starting Monday, Oct. 10, with students dressing up as character vs. wacky tacky. Tuesday it was western vs. tourist, Wednesday it was color blast vs. tie-dye, Thursday is was nerd vs. glam and Friday was Black Out Bulls spirit day, which led up to the pep rally and the Friday football game, a 65-15 score victory against Leto.

During halftime festivities the homecoming court was introduced, including the king and queen, Jackson Kelly and Meleah Baker. Congratulations to everyone!



KIM WALLACE

Bloomingtondale High School 2011 Homecoming Queen Meleah Baker and King Jackson Kelley

Mrs. Remmert senior class enjoyed participating in homecoming week. Left to right back: Donal Gillis, Sal Lopez-Santiago. Middle: Tyler Cates, Christian Wilkinson, Lauren Bailey, Tyler Harris, Anna Taylor, Ja'Kayla Lucas, Tori Souther, Monica Cala, Kristina Giardina. Front: Gabby Gilberto, Nneka Edney, Stephanie Saha, Bethany Wallace, Sarah Pinson and Mrs. Remert.



KIM WALLACE

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## Bloomington Buzz



SUSAN GREEN

Kristin Rence and Amanda Lund



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Sylvia Fernandez, Donna Lancaster and Debbie Weismann

BY SUSAN GREEN

With day-after-Thanksgiving sales around the corner and Christmas looming, we decided to ask customers having lunch at Panera Bread on Lithia-Pinecrest Road about their shopping plans. Here's this month's question:

### Do you plan to spend more, less, or about the same this Christmas as in the past?

#### Kristin Rence of Brandon:

"Probably about the same. I've already started [in August]. ... I do that because here are things you see and think, 'I should get that for someone,' and then you don't and you go back and it's gone."

#### Amanda Lund of Valrico:

"It depends on the job situation. I'm relocating [to New England]."

#### Donna Lancaster of Valrico:

"I'm not there yet. I'm trying to get through Veterans Day first."

#### Debbie Weismann of Valrico:

"It's too early to think about it. The things you buy too early, you almost forget you have. ... And the closer you are to Christmas, the more the sales are out there."

#### Sylvia Fernandez of Brandon:

"I probably won't spend much. My husband hasn't had a job for a year and a half, so it's kind of tight."

## Community Station Notes

### Operation Medicine Cabinet a success

To help residents properly dispose of outdated and unused medicines and drugs the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office completed another successful special Operation Medicine Cabinet. Working with Kristi Campbell from Homeinstead Senior Care, deputies collected more than 450 pounds of unused and outdated prescription medicines and drugs. That's 450 pounds of drugs that didn't get abused or end up in our water system.



MACK AUSTIN

Deputy Curtis Warren and Kristi Campbell from Homeinstead Senior Care stand ready to load the hundreds of pounds of outdated and unused medicines collected at the Sheriff's October Operation Medicine Cabinet.

The Sheriff's Office would like to thank Hawthorne Village Retirement Community for the use of their facilities during this project and also thank the many residents who took the time to bring in



Curtis Warren

their expired and unused medicines for proper disposal and destruction. Watch your local papers for information on the next Operation Medicine Cabinet projects' times and locations.

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# FAMILY FEST



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