

metro

A VIGIL FOR JAHLEEL
Mother seeks answers in son's death **Story, B-#**



good news
cindy holifield

Views mixed on pension offer

Curry's latest offer would make costs go up in the short term for taxpayers

By Nate Monroe and David Bauerlein
The Times-Union

The financial impact of Mayor Lenny Curry's latest collective bargaining offer to the police, firefighter and general employees unions is unclear, but it appears costs would rise in the short term given the mix of more expensive pension benefits for current employees, pay raises and a generous 401(k) plan for future employees that he's put on the negotiating

table. That uncertainty has left some longtime observers of — and participants in — Jacksonville's struggles with employee retirement problems unable to fully analyze whether Curry's proposal would be a good one for taxpayers. Others, including influential civic and business groups, are still reviewing the proposal, though many such leaders have expressed confidence in the mayor. "In my opinion, this is a sig-

nificant offer and consistent with what many large employers are doing locally," said Jax Chamber President Daniel Davis. "Kudos to Mayor Curry for his bold proposal. He clearly supports our first responders and is committed to solving our city's unfunded pension liability for our citizens." But Florida TaxWatch President Dominic Calabro, whose organization sounded the alarm about Jacksonville's pension problems in 2008, said he doesn't think Curry's proposal for moving public safety workers into 401(k)-style accounts with hefty city contributions is financially sustainable. He said moving to 401(k) ac-

counts isn't a fix if the city is going to be committed to contributing to the accounts at a rate equal to 25 percent of the employee's salary. "You're substituting one poison for another poison," Calabro said. The Jax Chamber board will discuss Curry's latest offer next week. The Jacksonville Civic Council, a group of the city's top CEOs and civic leaders, is still reviewing Curry's proposal. Curry's plan would completely wipe out the reductions in pension benefits for police and firefighters that City Council approved in June

PENSION continues on B-3

Campaign aims to help service dogs

Patriot Service Dogs is a recipient of Whole Foods "Donate Your Dime" campaign. The organization is a non-profit that provides well-trained service dogs to disabled veterans and military. The campaign runs through Jan. 17 at the Whole Foods at 10601 San Jose Blvd. in Mandarin. Whole Foods will donate 10 cents per bag to customers who re-use their own shopping bags for groceries. Customers can then use the donation as a discount on their bills or donate it back to Patriot Service Dogs or the Whole Planet Foundation.

"When customers choose to reuse their bags, they are making a very positive impact for the environment," said **Karen Doyle**, Whole Foods Market's regional healthy eating and green mission specialist. "Most plastic bags end up in the landfill because they are not accepted in most residential recycling centers. Plastic bags are one of the most common items polluting our environment, eventually ending up in our waterways and oceans."

To find out more about the program, or to donate, call (904) 777-1371.

More good news:

- Employees from various 121 Financial locations collected and delivered six car loads of paper products, cleaning supplies and non-perishable food items to Gabriel House of Care recently. In addition, the volunteers provided lunch for the guests and donated \$2500 to help those who stay there.

- **Pete Johnson**, senior biologist at LG2 Environmental Solutions, has received the Bob and Carol Grimes Foundation for the Environment award. The award recognizes area individuals who take the initiative to act on behalf of wildlife and the environment. Johnson received the award for his work in supporting Crosby Sanctuary, a wildlife habitat preserve in Orange Park.

For more information on the Crosby Sanctuary, go to duvalaudubon.org or crosbysanctuary.blogspot.com.

- Volunteer Florida has provided Communities in Schools of Jacksonville with more than \$300,000 to support Duval Reads, the nonprofit's literacy program. The matching grant will fund 29 AmeriCorps members in 14 Duval County Public Schools which provide intensive one-on-one and small group reading tutoring to students reading below grade level in kindergarten through ninth grade, during the 2016-2017 school year.

"We are so grateful to have Volunteer Florida as a longstanding partner that understands the importance of literacy training for at-risk students," said **Steve Gilbert**, CEO of Communities in Schools of Jacksonville. "Reading is the foundation of education, and by giving

GOOD NEWS continues on B-5

El Faro hearings resume on Feb. 6

Final sessions first since audio, data recovered

By Sebastian Kitchen
sebastian.kitchen@jacksonville.com

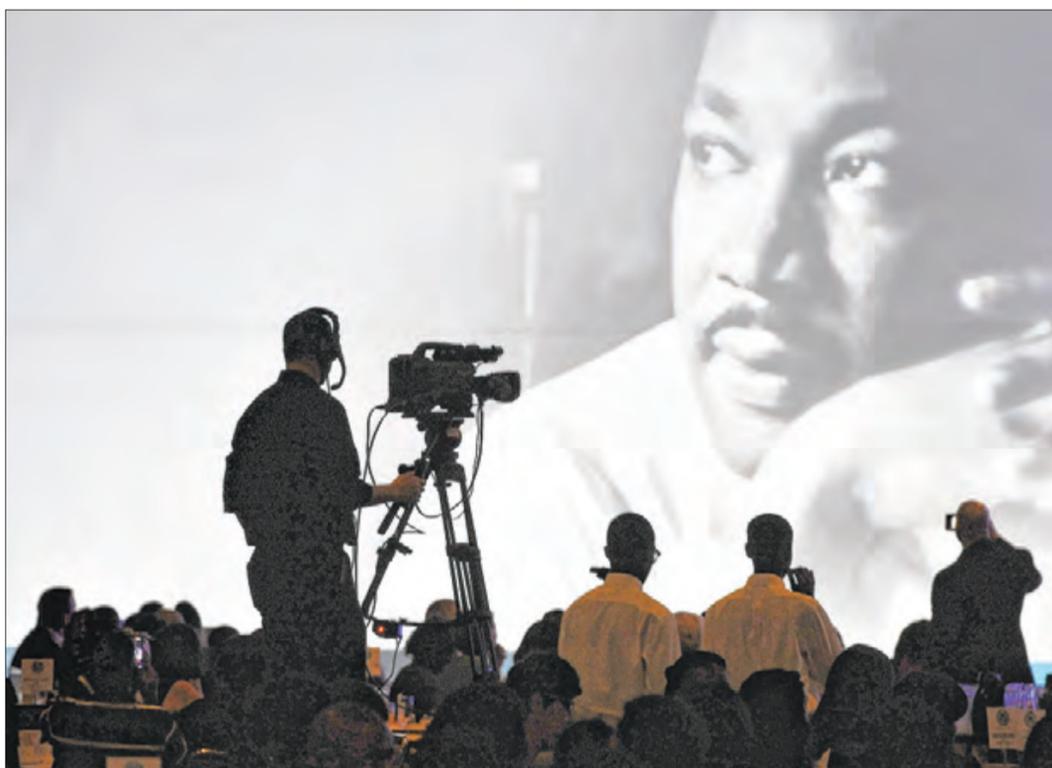
A U.S. Coast Guard investigative panel has set its third and final hearing on the El Faro cargo ship sinking that killed all 33 on board. The hearing will be the first since investigators recovered 26 hours of audio and data from the ship's data recorder found 3 miles below the surface near the ship's wreck off the coast of the Bahamas.

The Coast Guard Marine Board of Investigation will begin the hearing Feb. 6 at the Prime Osborn Convention Center, 1000 Water St.

The Coast Guard and National Transportation Safety Board, which are co-operating while conducting separate investigations into the tragedy, will "examine additional elements of the investigation including crew witnesses, (ship owner) Tote company officials, Coast Guard officials and contents of El Faro's voyage data recorder, including the transcript of bridge audio recordings which was released Dec. 13" by the NTSB.

The audio revealed the sometimes intense and heartbreaking final hours aboard the ship, as some

EL FARO continues on B-5



A video camera operator is silhouetted by a large image of Martin Luther King Jr. as historic photos of the civil rights leader were projected during Friday morning's breakfast. The 30th annual Martin Luther King Jr. Breakfast was held in the Prime Osborn Convention Center on Friday morning.

Honoring King's legacy with annual breakfast



Members of the Edward Waters College Concert Choir perform during the start of Friday morning's Martin Luther King Jr. Breakfast. The event, honoring the slain civil rights leader, featured performances by Mama Blue and the Edward Waters College Concert Choir, recognition of local youth as Tomorrow's Leaders, and keynote speaker Bertice Berry. (Photos by Bob Self/Florida Times-Union)

Beacon of pride unveiled in historic neighborhood

By Ann Friedman
ann.friedman@jacksonville.com

When Alyssa Key bought a two-story building on the corner of East First Street and North Main Street in Springfield just over a year ago, she envisioned a mural on the east wall of the more than 115-year-old structure.

"I thought it would be a nice addition to the neighborhood and allow visitors and locals to take pictures in front of it," she said.

"Welcome murals are popping up all over the country and there should be one in Springfield, too."

On Friday, Key's vision came to life as a "Welcome to Springfield" mural was unveiled at her property at 1101 N. Main St.

The mural features landmarks throughout the nearly 150-year-old community and was painted by Key's longtime friend, artist

MURAL continues on B-2



Grant Thornton's mural for his friend Alyssa Key's building was unveiled on Friday. (Bob Mack/Florida Times-Union)

Daily Editor Scott Butler · (904) 359-4566 · scott.butler@jacksonville.com

JAN 29 AT 7PM
On Sale NOW

Join our E-Club | Text the word "Shows" to 228-28

Florida Theatre Ticket Office
355.2787 | floridatheatre.com
128 Forsyth St | Downtown Jax

BOZ SCAGGS

WITH SPECIAL GUEST
THE ROBERT GRAY BAND

