

metro

ANGELA COREY
Former state attorney hired by incoming Clay sheriff **Story, B-2**



ABORTION LAW
ACLU of Florida challenges the 2016 restrictions **Story, B-3**

Council votes to fund events for constituents

Money can only be used for internal costs like paying police, city staffers

By Christopher Hong
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The Jacksonville City Council approved a plan that would give each council member \$3,500 a year to host community events in their district, which supporters say will help inform residents of government initiatives and bring neighborhoods together.

The council also approved spending \$415,000

to install temporary seats at EverBank Field for this month's TaxSlayer Bowl college football game and signed off on an agreement with a group of local businessmen to resurrect a long-closed restaurant that overlooks Clapboard Creek on the city's Northside.

For years, council members who wanted to host events at city parks would request access to the property as well as other city re-

sources, like staffers' time, bleachers and stages, said City Councilman Reginald Brown, who introduced the plan.

This year, the mayor's office told him that wasn't allowed, so Brown introduced legislation to create clear rules for council members to arrange events intended to benefit their district.

The events would be required to benefit a council

member's constituents and promote or inform attendees about government activities, programs or projects. They are prohibited from being political in nature.

The plan faced pushback earlier this year from council members concerned that there were no limits to what the city's money could be used for. They also raised concerns about whether donations

from private businesses or nonprofits to help pay for the events may violate the city's ethics rules that restrict council members from receiving gifts.

Since then, several major changes have been made to the plan. Now, the money can only be used to pay for internal costs of hosting events, like paying police to attend and city staffers

COUNCIL continues on B-4

Ghosts of holiday dinner reading, past and present



mark woods

There are several theatrical productions of "A Christmas Carol" this year in North Florida, from a one-man show to a one-night touring production.

But, in my unbiased opinion, I have to recommend seeing one of four performances at Douglas Anderson School of the Arts, Thursday through Sunday, tickets available at www.datheatreboosters.org.

I say this partly because I'm always blown away by the work of DA students, partly because this is my daughter's first high school show and partly because I haven't done any booster club volunteer hours.

OK, I might be a tad bit biased.

Mia has small but memorable roles. Or at least

listening to her talk about "Fan" (young Scrooge's sister), "Want" (one of the children the Ghost of Christmas Present warns Scrooge to beware of) and "Turkey Boy" (fetches the prize turkey for a joyfully repentant Scrooge) has bought back memories for me.

Not of being in the play or even watching it on TV.

Of listening to my dad read aloud after dinner.

I wasn't a young child when he did this. As the oldest of three children, I was a teenage boy who pretty much embraced the brooding stereotype, doing little more at dinner than eating, mumbling short answers and thinking about what I was going to do after dinner.

We had to ask to be excused from the table. Sometimes Dad would look at his watch and cheerfully say, "It hasn't been 30 minutes yet."

WOODS continues on B-4

Santa delights kids at FOP Christmas Party



Santa and Mrs. Claus give Taylor Coles, 3, of Westview K-8 School, her gift at the 67th annual Fraternal Order of Police Christmas Party held Tuesday at the fairgrounds. (Photos by Bruce Lipsky/Florida Times-Union)

Current and retired police officers serve at annual event

By Dan Scanlan
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With the whoop of a siren and cheers from 180 children, Santa Claus rolled into the Jacksonville Fairgrounds Tuesday atop the hood of a Jacksonville police car as one of the city's longest-running holiday gift-giving events kicked off.

When the 68th annual Fraternal Order of Police Christmas Party was over, exceptional-education students from eight Duval County public schools got a special toy from Santa with the help of dozens of police officers.

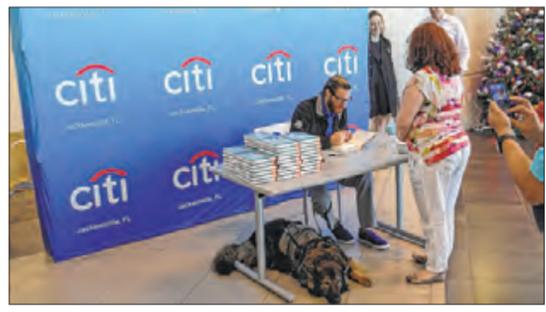
Taking a break from lunch,

XMAS continues on B-4



Children welcome Santa Claus as he arrives on the hood of a Jacksonville Sheriff's Office police cruiser for the 67th annual Fraternal Order of Police Christmas Party.

Inspiring Navy vet offers support for blind swimmer



Brad Snyder signs a copy of his book at an event at Jacksonville's Citigroup office Tuesday. (Joe Daraskevich/Florida Times-Union)

Man was injured in Afghanistan but won gold medals in Paralympics

By Joe Daraskevich
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Christmas lights and snowflakes dangled in the lobby of Jacksonville's Citigroup office Tuesday morning, but the employees in a line wrapping around the corner and into a hallway were not there to see Santa Claus.

Brad Snyder — and his guide dog Gizzy — sat at a table at the front of the line for about an hour until each person passed through. They all wanted a signed copy of the Paralympian's book after hearing his inspirational story of adversity and triumph.

His book is called "Fire in My Eyes: An American Warrior's Journey from Being Blinded on the Battlefield to Gold Medal Victory." It gives a firsthand

look into Snyder's life of consistently overcoming obstacles.

The Navy veteran was blinded Sept. 7, 2011, during his tour as an explosive ordnance officer in Afghanistan. Exactly one year later, he won a gold medal in swimming at the Paralympic Games in London. He won a total of two golds and a silver in London followed by three golds and a silver this year in Rio de Janeiro, and he hopes to be competing again four years from now in Tokyo.

"You don't have to get blown up and go through all these things to learn what I learned," Snyder told the group of employees during a question-and-answer session.

He encouraged them to look inward for inspiration to motivate themselves toward future goals.

"We can't commit to our legacy if we don't know what it is," Snyder told the

BOOK continues on B-4

Heroes save woman, but more needed

Despite her struggles, Cherilyn Brown has tried to remain cheerful

By Tiffany Salameh
University of North Florida

Three black trash bags were lined up at the door. They were full of belongings.

They were the only belongings Cherilyn Brown, 40, had left to her name earlier this year when she was forced to leave her longtime home in an assisted-living facility after the owner's death.

Brown, who is developmentally disabled and unable to speak, was the only resident from the facility who had yet to find a new home.

She had no relatives to take her in.

Her prospects looked grim.

Today, when Brown is asked to describe that moment in her life, she scribbles a single word on



Cherilyn Brown, 39, is disabled and can't communicate verbally. She uses a walker to get around, is not able to work and attends a program at the ARC of Jacksonville. (Will Dickey/The Florida Times-Union)



INSIDE
How to help: Learn how to contribute to the fund. **B-4**

— in the form of Tamba Nguaja and Aware, a Jacksonville nonprofit that works with physically and mentally disabled individuals — stepped up to save Brown.

Tamba, a staffer at Aware, previously worked with Brown over the years and even took her to church, bowling and other activities.

When he learned about Brown's condition, Nguaja sprang into action.

Nguaja said Brown had nothing.

First, Nguaja tried to find an immediate new home for Brown.

When that wasn't successful, Nguaja and his wife took Brown into their home for two weeks until,

NEW LIFE, BUT OBSTACLES REMAIN
Fortunately, two heroes

HOPE continues on B-4

XMAS

Continued from B-1

Mandarin Oaks Elementary School student Valentino Flores said he's been waiting for this party for a long time.

"I had to wait all the way until December," the 10-year-old said. "I get a present from Santa Claus!"

Love Grove Elementary School student Alan Velazquez had basic reasons for wanting to be there.

"I love Santa," the 9-year-old said. "I like to get presents."

The holiday event began in 1948 by two women detectives for a few special-education students. These days about 140 current and retired police officers serve at the holiday event for pre-kindergarten to third-grade students, helped by teachers, other volunteers and bus drivers. Students also came from Westview, Waterleaf, Sabal Palm, Biscayne, Biltmore and Central Riverside elementary schools, mingling with officers in uniform or tactical gear as others sat on police motorcycles and fired up emergency lights.

The party's chief elf is retired police officer Vic



Santa arrives on the front of a Jacksonville Sheriff's Office police cruiser at the 67th annual Fraternal Order of Police Christmas Party was held Tuesday at the fairgrounds in Jacksonville. (Photos by Bruce Lipsky/Florida Times-Union)

Groner, who began his holiday helping in 1976. Tuesday's event was his retirement as he passes the baton to Sgt. Josh Griffis and his wife, Jessica, next year.

"I woke up this morning thinking, wow, this is pretty neat to get to do this one more time," Groner said. "And as long as I can stay fairly healthy, I can still come here and help them out and watch Josh take care of things. It's in good

hands." Griffis and his wife were on hand to help and prepare for next year. He said he's really humbled Groner would trust him to run future parties for these students.

"We love kids, we love what this event stands for, we love to be able to give back to our community," the sergeant said. "It's just a truly humbling experience to see these kids light up like this."

Also helping was Gail Roberts, executive director of Duval County School's Exceptional Education and Student Services Department. "It is just such a wonderful opportunity for the community, our schools and the FOP to come together and support these students," she said. "We are so appreciative."

So was Waterleaf student Christynah Williams, digging the last ice cream from



Emelee Serrano, 5, hooks up her Princess Twilight Sparkle Friendship Train at the Fraternal Order of Police Christmas Party.

her container as she waited for Santa.

"I want Santa because I want presents," the 5-year-old said.

Excitement was Sabal Palm student Keion Wright's mood as he waited. "I get toys and I get to get on motorcycles," the 8-year-old said.

The party cost about \$10,000, all donations that paid for school bus rental, food and gifts. It's not the

only holiday party this week done by local public safety officials to help special-needs children. The Jacksonville Association of Firefighters hosts its annual Christmas party Thursday morning at its union dining hall on Stockton Street to present custom-built three-wheeled bicycles to children at Wolfson Children's Rehabilitation.

Dan Scanlan: (904) 359-4549

BOOK

Continued from B-2

crowd. He explained the importance of an anchor thought and told them he thinks of fallen soldiers for inspiration. The fact that they never got a chance to continue with their lives is enough for him to keep pushing on with his own. He knows not everyone can relate to a friend who died in combat, but he explained many people use their children or spouses as motivation.

"My goal is to become the best blind dude in the country," Snyder said, encouraging those in the crowd to create their own goals.

Snyder got the chance to sit down with — and inspire — another blind man for about 15 minutes before he addressed the group of hundreds.

Ross Minor, 18, is a local blind swimmer with a tragic story of his own.

Minor graduated from Jacksonville's Bishop Snyder High last spring as the captain of the swim team. Ten years ago he and his brother were shot in the head by their father before the man turned the gun on himself. Minor survived the shooting but lost his sight.

He's now taking college courses at Florida State College at Jacksonville, and he's excited about bonding with his first guide dog. He told Snyder he's looking for a pool to continue his swim training now that he's no longer in high school.

After hearing some of Minor's times from high school swim meets, Snyder was impressed and told him he needs to do more than just find a pool.

"Our best Paralympic athletes are yet undiscovered and Ross is probably a great example of that," Snyder said after he finished signing books. "I truly believe that Ross is at least a medalist, if not a gold medalist, come Tokyo if we can provide him the right resources."

Minor said he exchanged contact information with Snyder so the two can talk about getting involved with a Paralympic swim coach.

"I told him my times and he seemed to think I could be like him one day if I keep improving," Minor said.

Snyder said he knew he was talking to an athlete when he shook Minor's hand and felt his shoulders. The swim times just confirmed that notion.

"I may be shaking the hand of the person who will be taking my gold medal, and that's great," Snyder said.

Snyder said people don't think of strapping young men like himself or Minor when they think of blind people. He said the thought of helplessness is much more common.

That's why he wrote his book, Snyder said. He wants to break the misconceptions about people — especially veterans — with disabilities.

Joe Daraskevich: (904) 359-4308

COUNCIL

Continued from B-1

to prepare for the event. All events must clear a lengthy review process from several city departments — including the ethics department — before getting final approval from the council president.

Any donations from third-parties would be made to the city, not individual council members, to avoid ethics violations.

Councilman John Crescimbeni, who previously expressed concerns about the plan, said he was happy with the changes and voted for it.

However, a few council members said the city faces too many outstanding and expensive costly

needs and has no business paying for the events.

"We're not out of the woods yet as a city, and every dime and nickel counts," said Councilman Danny Becton. "I don't think the taxpayers would be too happy about this."

However, Councilwoman Joyce Morgan said the events are an important tool to bring neighborhoods together and inform constituents about what they're doing in City Hall.

"What better way to spend the money than on the people we serve," Morgan said.

Councilwoman Katrina Brown said she also thinks the events could help neighborhoods, especially those like the many in her district that suffer from high rates of violent crime. She also said the

plan clearly establishes a process and will ensure everyone follows the rules.

"I ain't trying to go to jail," Brown said in jest.

The council approved the plan, with a cost of \$70,000 annually, in a 17-2 vote. Becton and Councilman Al Ferraro voted no.

TAXSLAYER BOWL, PALMS FISH CAMP

The \$415,000 to pay for roughly 2,200 temporary seats for the TaxSlayer Bowl was needed to comply with the city's requirement to have a minimum number of club area seats available for the game. Roughly 3,000 seats were removed by the Jaguars' recent renovation of the stadium.

The council also approved an agreement with

several local businessmen to re-open the Palms Fish Camp, which has been shut down since 2005.

The opportunity to bring the restaurant back online arose earlier this year after the city, which owns the land, resolved a messy legal feud with the developer who planned to reopen it.

The group, which includes Donald "Marshall" Adkison, Marc Hardesty and James McKenzie, was the only one to respond to the city's request for new tenants.

The group needs to make plenty of improvements to the building before it's ready for business. If all goes to plan, they hope to open their doors by July.

Christopher Hong: (904) 359-4272

WOODS

Continued from B-1

My parents had decided that it wasn't enough for us to eat dinner together. We needed to be there for a full half hour. Several years, with Christmas approaching, it got even worse when, after we finished eating, Dad pulled out a copy of book and started reading.

"Marley was dead: to begin with ..."

I remember thinking that my friends weren't doing this. They probably already were watching TV, or if it was a weekend, getting ready to go out or, more likely, stay in. (Put it this way: When "That '70s Show" was set largely around a bunch

of friends hanging out in a Wisconsin basement, it felt like a flashback.)

And here I was, listening to my father read Dickens?

Or at least that was my initial reaction. But a funny thing happened on the way to Scrooge opening the blinds and realizing it was Christmas Day. As Dad read aloud, clearly enjoying delivering the moments of horror and humor, I inevitably enjoyed listening. I lost track of time and, before I knew it, he was closing the book. That was the end of one of the five "staves" in the novella. He'd read the next one the next night.

And by the next night, while I'd never admit it at the time, I was looking

forward to it.

This is how good Dickens was. More than a century after his death, he could get the attention of a teenager, make him shudder, make him smile, make him wary of Ignorance and Want, make him think about the value of kindness, family and fellow man.

So while I have other Christmas favorites — from "It's a Wonderful Life" to "A Christmas Story" — it's tough to top the story written in 1843 and performed every year since, in all kinds of forms and settings. Stage, film, ballet, musical, animation, dinner theater and, yes, post-dinner reading.

I've told my wife, Toni, the story of my dad's dinner readings enough that

she recently said, "Why don't you do that?"

It was a good question. And I guess my first impulse was that it's not the kind of thing we do today, that our lives are too busy, that Mia is too old for such things, that ...

I realized my dad easily could have said all the same things.

Mia isn't the quiet teenager I was. To the contrary, I am lucky to get in two words when we sit down for dinner. But we do try to sit down for dinner. And a few nights ago, after we finished eating, I found a way to get in more than two words. I started reading aloud. "Marley was dead ..."

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HOPE

Continued from B-1

eventually, Aware was able to find Brown's current residence in Orange Park.

She lives in an apartment with a roommate and receives a wide range of care, including help from Aware to carry out daily tasks and keep up with basic hygiene.

The apartment is small and is minimally furnished, at best.

For Brown, it is a welcome oasis.

"I love it here," Brown wrote.

While Brown is thrilled with her new home, she lacks basic necessities. She needs clothes, shoes and basic household items like towels and sheets.

"We did get her a few things for the apartment when she moved in," says Aware support coordinator Pete Brewer, "but we weren't able to get her everything she [needs]."

Brown has few resources to meet these needs: While she receives monthly help for her disability, most of it goes to pay rent and utilities — leaving her with about \$100 for the month.

Every weekday, Brown attends the ARC Jacksonville where she folds boxes from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

But she would also enjoy taking part in other ac-

tivities, such as movies or concerts.

Brown enjoys painting and would love to have a watercolor set she could use at home.

CHEERFUL AND HOPEFUL

Despite her struggles, Brown remains cheerful.

She uses a walker because her balance is unstable at times. Brown frequently smiles and giggles, communicating through her day with pen and paper.

While she is not always able to clearly recall some events from her past, she eagerly shares the ones she does remember.

She lost her ability to speak at age 16, due to tumors on her vocal cords that required several surgeries and left her with a T-shaped scar across her neck and collarbone.

While her mother has died and her father was never present in her life, Brown remembers that she has a younger sister, Tracee, whom she believes still lives in this area.

It is that connection to her sister — her family — that Brown longingly hopes to have again someday.

When asked to name the Christmas present she'd like to have most of all this holiday season, Brown crawled a simple answer on paper.

"Tracee," it read.

How to contribute

The Hope Fund is a joint effort of The Florida Times-Union, UNF and HandsOn Jacksonville. Money will be distributed among the participating agencies, which will purchase gifts or necessities for the families.

Send your gift to:

The Hope Fund
P.O. Box 1949
Jacksonville, Fla., 32231



The Hope Fund only accepts monetary donations. Every dollar you contribute goes directly to the people who need your help. Contributions are tax deductible.

For more information:
(904) 332-6767
8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Monday through Friday

ONLINE: www.hopefund.org

Please make your contribution payable to "The Hope Fund".

Name _____
Business _____
Address _____
Phone _____

The Times-Union will publish names and donation amounts.

Please indicate your preference below.

- Permission to publish name only.
- I wish to remain anonymous.
- I wish to donate in memory of. Please print the following:



Thanks to VyStar for making electronic donations possible.

A donation box is located in the Times-Union lobby at 1 Riverside Ave. Hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. workdays. To donate by credit card, see hopefund.org. Only monetary donations accepted for this fund.

Thank you for your support!

Death Notices

BARNETT- Vernon R. Barnett 86, of Lake Butler passed away peacefully on December 12, 2016. Arrangements by Archer Funeral Home. 386-496-2008

BRIDGERS- James Davis Bridgers Jr., 84, passed away on December 11, 2016. Arrangements by George H. Hewell and Son Funeral Home, 4747 Main Street, Jacksonville, FL 32206 (904)355-9545.

BRINSON- Joseph Hubert Brinson, 81, passed away December 11, 2016. Arrangements by Arlington Park Funeral Home and Cemetery. 904-724-6384

BRIZELE- Mr. Ronald O. Brazile passed away 12/9/16. Arrangements by Huff & Battise Funeral Home, Fernandina Beach, FL.

BUSBY- David Wayne Busby 54, of Raiford, Florida passed away on December 12, 2016. Arrangements by Archer Funeral Home. 386-496-2008

COOPER- Alice Marie Cooper, 86, passed away on December 12, 2016. Arrangements by Jacksonville Memory Gardens Funeral Home 111 Blanding Blvd, Orange Park,

CUMMINGS - Allan James Cummings, 79, of Jacksonville Beach, passed away December 11, 2016. Arrangements by Quinn-Shalz, A Family Funeral Home & Cremation Centre

DATRES - Doris Mitzi Datres, age 73, of Tallahassee, FL passed away on December 12, 2016. Arrangements by V. Todd Ferreira Funeral Services 904-259-5700.

ELMER- Theodore Allen Elmer, 68, of Jacksonville, Florida passed away December 8, 2016.

HANNA- Jean Ann Hanna, age 91, of Fernandina Beach passed away on Tuesday, December 13, 2016. Arrangements by Oxley-Heard 904-261-3644

HUNAVY - Mary Jean Hunavy, 85, of Jacksonville, passed away December 10, 2016. Arrangements by Quinn-Shalz, A Family Funeral Home & Cremation Centre

JACKSON- Barbara Dale Jackson, 75, of Lake City, passed away on December 9, 2016. Arrangements by Guerry Funeral Home, Macclenny, Florida. 904-259-2211

JANCSAR- Mary Jancsar 92, July 17, 1924 - December 12, 2016. Arrangements by Affordable Cremation Solutions 904-683-5427

JENKINS- Anthony Jenkins, 56, of Gainesville, passed away on Tuesday, December 13, 2016. Arrangements by Karl N. Flagg Serenity Memorial Chapel, Palatka.

KELLY- Mack Kelly, 90, of Putnam Hall, passed away on Tuesday, December 13, 2016. Arrangements by Karl N. Flagg Serenity Memorial Chapel, Palatka.

PATTI-James Joseph Patti, 57, of Ponte Vedra Beach, passed away December 12, 2016. Arrangements by Quinn-Shalz, A Family Funeral Home & Cremation Centre

PRICE- Natale Ellis Price, 96, passed away December 12, 2016. Arrangements by Hardage-Giddens Oaklawn Chapel 904-737-7171