

metro

NUTRITION WASTELAND Conference addresses city's 'food deserts'

Story, B-3



mark woods

Witch hunts are hard, but I found one

I went on a witch hunt the other day. It took a while, but I eventually found a witch named Stephanie on the Southside.

Let me backtrack. When I came to work Monday morning, going on a witch hunt seemed like the thing to do. I mean, all weekend I kept turning on the TV and opening the paper and seeing politicians saying the media, the FBI and others were engaged in witch hunts.

That's what former Congresswoman Corrine Brown has been saying ever since the Times-Union first reported that tens of thousands of dollars, donated to a sham charity, ended up in her personal bank account. She said she didn't do anything wrong.

"It's a witch hunt, and I'm the witch they're trying to get," she said.

She continued to repeat this after her conviction in federal court on 18 counts of financial crimes, telling WJXT TV-4, "I still feel like it was a witch hunt. ... I stand by that."

She's hardly the only politician talking about witch hunts. President Trump has tweeted several times that he's the subject of one. And not just any witch hunt, of course. The biggest witch hunt ever, one that has prompted him to rip U.S. intelligence agencies and ask, "Are we living in Nazi Germany?"

Just last week, after the appointment of former FBI director Bob Mueller as a special counsel, the president tweeted: "This is the single greatest witch hunt of a politician in American history."

So with all of this in mind, I decided to go on a witch hunt — to see if I could find a witch right here in North Florida.

I started where pretty much every hunt these days begins: Google.

I searched for "witches" and "Jacksonville" and quickly found some "Witches Meet-ups" (including a few listed in the Times-Union calendar). Alas, it didn't look like any were coming up soon.

I found the website for the Jacksonville Pagan Pride Alliance. It said that the 17th annual Jacksonville Pagan Pride Day will be held in September with the goal of "accurate education of Paganism, building community, aiding charity and supporting activism of Paganism."

I sent an email to the local coordinator, explaining my witch hunt and asking if she could help me out. I got an automated email saying she was on vacation.

I found a reference to International Pagan Coming Out Day. It was May 2. So I missed that.

I wasn't doing very well at this witch hunt stuff.

I considered contacting state Rep. Kimberly Daniels. The Jacksonville minister and author of "Demon Dictionary" sure seems to know where to find witches. Namely everywhere. You may recall that she has said you shouldn't let your kids eat Halloween candy, because witches have cursed most of it.

(When I first heard this, I resisted the temptation to tell my daughter this and suggest that witches put the worst curses on Snickers bars, which is why I really should find a way to "dispose" of all of those cursed candy bars.)

I eventually found "the Fey Witch," located on Southside Boulevard.

"Closed today," Google said.

I called the number listed and sent a message

WOODS continues on B-2

Barbecue sauce plant to be auctioned

Louisiana bank wins default judgment against business co-owned by Councilwoman Brown

By David Bauerlein
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The Commonwealth Avenue building for the Jerome Brown BBQ Sauce Plant will go on the auction block next month after a Louisiana bank won a default judgment against the business co-owned by City Councilwoman Katrina Brown.

Cowwealth, which is owned by Brown and her mother, JoAnn Brown, bought the 34,000-square-

foot building to mass-manufacture sauce in a venture that got a \$2.65 million loan through the U.S. Small Business Administration plus \$590,000 from the city's Northwest Jacksonville Economic Development Trust Fund.

Despite the mix of private and taxpayer investment, the business struggled, repeatedly missed loan repayments, and failed to create any of the 56 jobs required by the city's contract with

Cowwealth.

The city and BizCapital Bidco I LLC, which provided the bank loan, each filed lawsuits in February against Cowwealth.

BizCapital won a final judgment of foreclosure Monday. Based on that judgment, the Duval County Clerk's office scheduled an auction for June 29.

It's unlikely the city will get any financial benefit from the auction of the property because Biz Capital has first priority on the



The city of Jacksonville provided \$590,000 to help a barbecue sauce maker purchase and renovate a Commonwealth Avenue building. (Florida Times-Union/Will Dickey)

Commonwealth Avenue property.

The Duval County Property Appraiser lists the building and land at 5368

Commonwealth Ave. at a market value of about \$1 million.

PLANT continues on B-2



Mime Johnnie Lewis Miller, aka "Uncle Louie," adjusts his tie as he readies himself for another day's work on an almost deserted Bourbon Street in New Orleans on Ash Wednesday in 2006. Miller, now 60, is in a New Orleans jail on an out-of-state warrant accusing him of murder and attempted armed robbery of a Jacksonville grocery store owner in 1974. (Bob Self/Florida Times-Union)

Nabbing 'Uncle Louie'

Fingerprints lead to New Orleans performer's arrest in 43-year-old Jacksonville murder case

By Ramon Antonio Vargas & John Simerman
The New Orleans Advocate



Farah

Fingerprints found on a box of cake mix and a can of frosting prompted police to arrest well-known French Quarter human statue "Uncle Louie" last week in the fatal shooting of a Jacksonville grocer 43 years ago, according to authorities.

The 60-year-old street performer, whose name is Johnnie Lewis Miller, remains in a New Orleans jail nearly a week after police picked him up on an out-of-state warrant accusing him of murder and attempted armed robbery in the May 22, 1974, shooting of 34-year-old Freddie Farah at his Jacksonville gro-

cery store. Authorities in Jacksonville have still not publicly acknowledged the arrest of Miller, who is facing an extradition hearing tentatively set for next month in Orleans Parish Criminal District Court.

But an account from the New Orleans Police Department explains how authorities in two states teamed up to arrest Miller, whose Uncle Sam-like costume has long been a fixture in the French Quarter.

According to the account, Jacksonville cold-case investigators late last year decided to revisit Farah's case, which had

never resulted in any arrests or even the identification of a suspect.

It appeared the most useful evidence investigators had recovered was so-called latent fingerprints left on a box of cake mix and a can of frosting the killer had placed near the cash register of Farah's store, according to the account.

As it had done before, the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office ran that evidence through a fingerprint database. This time, they got a hit: The database indicated that prints lifted from the can and box belonged to Miller, the police account said.

Investigators also recovered a partial palm print from a soft

drink can left on Farah's store's counter. But Miller did not have palm prints on file with any local, state or national agency, the police account said.

Jacksonville investigators later asked New Orleans detective Ryan Aucoin for help in obtaining permission to get complete finger and palm prints for Miller, who previously lived in Jacksonville but has been a highly visible presence in the French Quarter for more than two decades.

On May 16, New Orleans police jailed Miller on a warrant signed by a Jacksonville judge, and he is being held without bail.

Miller's arrest sent shock waves through the French Quarter, where countless tourists have posed for pictures with him while he was frozen midstep and pretending to walk a miniature stuffed dog dubbed

LOUIE continues on B-2

Brosche elected City Council president in tight race

She broke tradition by challenging council VP Crescimbeni for position

By Christopher Hong
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Anna Lopez Brosche will be next year's president of the Jacksonville City Council after winning a tight — and at times heated — race on Tuesday against John Crescimbeni.

Brosche's challenge of Crescimbeni, the council's vice president, broke the

council's long-standing tradition to select the vice president as president. She won in an 11 to 8 vote.

"It's an honor and a privilege to lead and to serve you all, which I do not take lightly," Brosche said after the vote.

The president is the second most powerful elected official in City Hall behind the mayor. The position



Brosche



Crescimbeni

holds a number of procedural powers that can greatly influence the passage of laws and decisions about how the city spends money. One of the most significant will be choosing the make-up of standing committees, which review legislation and create

the city's budget.

Brosche, a Republican, is the first of the 11 new members elected in 2015 to lead the council, as well as the first Asian-American to hold the position. She's a certified public accountant who ran on a socially moderate — she voted for the city's historic gay rights bill earlier this year — and fiscally conservative platform.

Her victory was bolstered by bipartisan support, which included four African-American Demo-

crats who voted as a bloc to help strengthen their ability to solve long-standing issues in their neighborhoods.

"Jacksonville has almost one million residents and a diverse population. Councilwoman Brosche embodies all that is right with Jacksonville," said Councilman Garrett Dennis, a member of that voting bloc.

Brosche's challenge of the vice president isn't un-

BROSCHÉ continues on B-2

City Council OKs DOJ discrimination lawsuit

Settlement will cost Jacksonville nearly \$2 million in penalties, fees

By Christopher Hong
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The city resolved Tuesday a federal discrimination complaint stemming from its 2014 decision to stop a local nonprofit from building an apartment complex in Springfield for people with disabilities.

The City Council approved a settlement to a lawsuit the city faces from the nonprofit, Ability Housing, as well as the Justice Department and a statewide disability advocacy group.

The settlement will cost the city nearly \$2 million in penalties, legal fees and a grant that would pay for a supportive housing facility for people with disabilities. It also changes the city's zoning laws, including a special overlay for historic Springfield that was used to block Ability Housing's project.

The council took months to approve the settlement as it sorted out concerns expressed by several council members — as well as an influential

lobbyist hired by Springfield businessman Jack Meeks, who spearheaded the opposition campaign against the project and the settlement.

Those critics said the new zoning laws were vaguely defined and could open the door for intrusive housing facilities to move into neighborhoods without any input from residents.

In response, the council tweaked the new zoning rules. That includes requiring the city to notify neighbors if they are considering changes to a residence that aren't allowed under zoning laws in order to accommodate residents with disabilities.

Ability Housing and the Justice Department agreed to those changes.

The controversy surrounding the apartments dates back to 2013, when Ability Housing announced its plans to convert an existing 12-unit complex on Cottage Avenue into a housing facility for homeless residents, many expected to be vet-



An apartment complex in the Springfield neighborhood of Jacksonville was once considered an Ability Housing project. Neighborhood objections stopped the project from moving forward. (Bob Mack/Florida Times-Union)

erans with mental illnesses and drug addictions.

The city blocked the group's plan. Its reasoning: The project was a "cut above" normal housing because it would provide supportive services to residents, which isn't allowed under the special zoning rules for Springfield.

Those prohibitions on certain housing facilities

will be removed under the settlement.

In response to the city's decision, Ability Housing sued the city at the end of 2014 for housing discrimination. The Justice Department began investigating shortly after and joined the lawsuit at the end of last year.

Shannon Nazworth, executive director for Ability

Housing, said she was glad the city finally resolved the issue.

"We're just very grateful, after three years, that it's come to the right outcome," she said. "We're very happy for the city, and we're looking forward to moving forward and creating more housing for people who need it."

WOODS

Continued from B-1

on Facebook. While I was out of the office, I missed a call back from the Fey Witch. So now I was playing phone tag with a witch.

We eventually did connect. Stephanie McGrath is a 50-year-old grandmother. She has dark hair, but no pointy hat or cackle; just an endearing laugh as she played along with my hunt, telling me a bit about herself.

She has a degree with dual concentrations in U.S. and European history, and a minor in fine arts. She grew up in California and lived in Ohio before moving to North Florida to help take care of her father as he battles cancer.

"I'm fairly active in the community," she said. "But I'm what is considered to be a solitary witch."

She said she's been a practicing psychic for more than 30 years. The "fey" part comes from Celtic traditions she has studied. She uses tarot cards, does readings, blesses homes, rids negative energies and passes along messages from beyond.

Even though she's based on the Southside, she says the internet allows her to have clients all over the world, from all walks of life, from a professor at an Oregon university to single mothers in Ohio trailer parks.

"A witch today is a person who has taken control of powers that are all around us, but a lot of times people tend to dismiss," she said, describing a mix of positive thought, prayer, physics and psychology. "It's not what you see on TV. I wish it was. That would be so much fun."

I eventually heard back from some other organizations. I told them my witch hunt already was a success. I had found a witch on the Southside. But I'd keep them in mind for future witch hunts.

I mean, I resisted the temptation to ask the Fey Witch if she could see into the future and answer important questions such as: Will the Jaguars finally have a winning record this season? Will I be riding a new paddleboard this summer? And, of course, what will become of what some politicians describe as "witch hunts"?

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Police: After converting to Islam, man kills roommates

Former neo-Nazi killed allegedly them to bring attention to anti-Muslim sentiment

Amy B. Wang
The Washington Post

A former neo-Nazi who converted to Islam is accused of killing his two roommates because they "disrespected" his new faith, police said.

Last Friday evening, police arrested 18-year-old Devon Arthurs after he briefly held three people at gunpoint at a smoke shop in Tampa, then surrendered to officers.

That incident, it turned out, was only the tip of the iceberg.

During the arrest, Arthurs mentioned to police that people in an apartment across the street were "definitely dead," according to Tampa Police Department records.

When officers entered that apartment, in a manicured upscale complex

in north Tampa, they found the bodies of two of Arthurs's roommates, 22-year-old Jeremy Himmelman and 18-year-old Andrew Oneschuk. Both men had gunshot wounds to the upper body and head and were dead, records stated.

Outside the apartment, a fourth roommate, 21-year-old Brandon Russell, was "crying and was visibly upset," police said.

"He doesn't know what's going on and just found (the two dead roommates) like you guys did," Arthurs told police.

What followed was a chilling confession in which Arthurs described in detail how and why he had killed two of his roommates earlier, police said. According to records, Arthurs told officers that "all of them had been friends

with a common neo-Nazi belief" until Arthurs converted to Islam.

Since then, Arthurs stated, he has become angered by the world's anti-Muslim sentiment and had wanted to bring attention to his cause. Arthurs also stated that, before the murder, he had been privy to neo-Nazi internet chat sites threatening to kill people, and he had developed a thinking that he should take some of the neo-Nazis with him.

Arthurs had displayed some of his ideology when he walked into the Green Planet Smoke Shop about 5:30 p.m. Friday — presumably after killing his roommates — and produced a gun, ordering a customer and employee to "get the [expletive] on the ground," according to police.

After a second customer walked into the store, Arthurs told all three hostages that he had already killed someone and was "upset due to America bombing

his Muslim countries," a police report stated.

When Tampa police officers arrived about five minutes later, Arthurs surrendered after a brief standoff and was placed under arrest. According to police, he exclaimed "Allah Mohammed!" as he was being walked to a patrol car, and told officers: "I had to do it. This wouldn't have had to happen if your country didn't bomb my country."

County arrest records indicate Arthurs was born in Florida.

In a search of the apartment Arthurs shared with his three roommates, officers discovered bomb-making equipment in the garage, including fuses and a cooler containing a "white cake-like substance" that bomb squad technicians recognized as the explosive HMTD (hexamethylene triperoxide diamine), according to a criminal complaint filed

by the FBI in U.S. District Court.

Inside a bedroom belonging to Russell, the roommate who had been crying when police arrived, officers found firearms, ammunition and "Nazi/white supremacist propaganda," including a framed picture of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh on the dresser. McVeigh was sentenced to death for the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, which killed 168 and was the deadliest terrorist attack on American soil before Sept. 11, 2001.

Russell told investigators that he had made the HMTD and was the owner of the fuses found in the garage. He explained that he formerly belonged to an engineering club at the University of South Florida and had used the HMTD to "boost homemade rockets and send balloons into the atmosphere for testing," according to the complaint.

BROSCHÉ

Continued from B-1

precedented. In fact, Crescimbeni lost his bid for council president in 1998 in the same manner.

Still, it drew criticism from a few colleagues. The most pointed came from Councilman Bill Gulliford, who said Brosche's move could poison working relationships between council members and that he'd refuse to serve on any committees next year if Brosche won.

Brosche and Crescim-

beni sat next to each other during the vote. They shook hands after the results were announced, although Brosche didn't mention Crescimbeni in her victory speech.

She said the omission wasn't intended as a slight and that she doesn't think any hard feelings will spill into the next year.

"This has been an interesting and long 85 days, and I'm really excited to put it behind us but also move forward," Brosche said.

Crescimbeni's loss marks the end of a roll-

ercoaster campaign for council president, the only key leadership position he hasn't held in his 17 years on the council.

Crescimbeni faced stiff competition from Councilman Doyle Carter in last year's election for vice president. He won in dramatic fashion after Councilman Reginald Gaffney flipped on his pledge to support Carter and handed Crescimbeni the deciding vote.

Typically, the vice presidency race decides who will serve as president the following year. How-

ever, rumors that Brosche would challenge him proved to be true in February when she announced her candidacy.

Crescimbeni quickly earned the support from five council members, although Brosche eventually closed the gap. Coming into Tuesday's vote, she had nine pledges of support, just one short needed to win.

In the vice presidency race, Councilman Aaron Bowman beat Scott Wilson. Bowman, a Republican elected in 2015, is the senior vice president

of business development with JAXUSA and former commander of Mayport Naval Station.

HOW THEY VOTED

Brosche: Al Ferraro, Aaron Bowman, Matt Schellenberg, Reginald Gaffney, Katrina Brown, Garrett Dennis, Reginald Brown, Danny Becton, Doyle Carter, Anna Lopez Brosche, Sam Newby

Crescimbeni: Joyce Morgan, Scott Wilson, Lori Boyer, Bill Gulliford, Jim Love, John Crescimbeni, Tommy Hazouri, Greg Anderson

LOUIE

Continued from B-1

Little Willie.

By Monday afternoon, more than a dozen people had donated about \$1,300 to an online fund for Miller's legal representation. People identifying themselves as friends of Miller flocked to social media and said they hoped — for his sake — that a mistake had been made.

Alex Osborn, a fellow street performer who admires Miller as an artist and considers him a friend, said Monday, "If it is true, then I hope for justice, as far down the road as it is.

"If it is true, then I hope for justice, as far down the road as it is. But the natural reaction is if your friend is accused of something horrible, of course you don't want it to be true."

Alex Osborn
street performer and friend of Johnie Lewis Miller

But the natural reaction is if your friend is accused of something horrible, of course you don't want it to be true."

Farah's relatives have declined to comment on Miller's capture. One of his children said they have been asked to wait until the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office announces the arrest before speaking out on

the case.

However, an organization in Jacksonville that last month used its website to call attention to Farah's killing lauded authorities' work.

"For 43 years, the Farah family has been denied justice," Project: Cold Case said in a statement to The Florida Times-Union. "Thanks to the Jackson-

ville Sheriff's Office and its cold-case detectives, that is no longer the situation."

Documents preceding Miller's arrest also provide details of events surrounding Farah's slaying.

After being told at gunpoint that his store was being held up, Farah tried to swat the weapon out of his attacker's grip as he moved away, the documents said. Farah died from a gunshot wound to the head and the killer immediately fled, police said, citing an eyewitness.

Farah's survivors included his wife, three daughters and a son. The children were all young at the time.

PLANT

Continued from B-1

BizCapital's lawsuit says Cowealth owes \$2.76 million to the bank for an unpaid loan amount, plus interest, late fees and attorney fees.

The city of Jacksonville sued Cowealth to recover a \$210,549 grant the city provided from the Northwest Jacksonville Economic Development Trust Fund for

the barbecue sauce manufacturing venture. The breach of contract lawsuit contends Cowealth failed to create any of the 56 jobs it was supposed to bring online in return for the city's support.

The city's lawsuit is still pending. In addition to the grant, the city provided a \$380,000 loan to Cowealth for the barbecue plant.

Biz Capital's lawsuit originally named JoAnn Brown and her husband Jerome,

who is the namesake for the barbecue sauce, in the list of defendants.

JoAnn and Jerome Brown filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy last week, which put a stay on the bank's lawsuit against them.

Biz Capital then dropped the JoAnn and Jerome Brown from the lawsuit, allowing the case to proceed against the other defendants for the foreclosure judgment.

JoAnn Brown could not

be reached Tuesday for comment. Katrina Brown is not named individually as a defendant.

Federal authorities also opened an investigation of the plant. The U.S. Small Business Administration's Office of Inspector General joined the FBI and the IRS in a raid last December of the building. Federal authorities have not announced any results of that investigation.

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