

metro

PLAN EXPANDS

Okeechobee water proposal includes other projects **Story, B-4**



French make it into a book of Georgia history

DARIEN, GA. | For those who know Buddy Sullivan, it may seem a little like cheating that he authored a 300-page book on Sapelo Island. And not just because some of the pages are filled with Ben Galland's pictures from the island.

Sullivan says he drew heavily on — among other things — 25 volumes of coastal history, and he wrote them all.

Speaking in his increasingly rare but fine southern accent, Sullivan said, "This book was a fairly easy project. I've written 25 books over the years. It didn't require much research."

He's written about the original Native American inhabitants, the Spanish missionaries, the Scottish and English colonists, Confederate and Union soldiers, and the freed slaves who took ownership of part of Sapelo after the Civil War. But ask him about the most compelling story in "Sapelo: People and Place on a Georgia Sea Island" and Sullivan searches his memory only briefly before saying it would be the story of the six Frenchmen who once owned the barrier island.

"A group of nobles fleeing the [French] Revolution in 1790 bought Sapelo," he said.

They figured to make a fortune growing cotton there, but the only thing that grew well was animosity and distrust.

"It was an undertaking that began with promise but, through mismanagement, incompatibility and increasing discord, ended in failure," Sullivan wrote of the enterprise.

The man who recruited the other investors, Francois Marie Loys Dumoussay de La Vauve, was way ahead of his time, perhaps because the used car did not yet exist. By 1794, the whole arrangement was a mess because of unpaid taxes, debt and a variety of other financial entanglements.

Dumoussay was the first to go, dying on Sept. 11, but he wasn't the last. Four days later, two other investors, a man and his nephew, had a confrontation fueled by Dumoussay's duplicity.

The account in the Georgia Gazette read thusly: "On Sapelo Island, the 15th instant, was unhappily deprived of existence by being shot, M. Hyacinthe De Chappedelaine, aged about 40 years — a gentleman who while alive was beloved by his friends, respected by his acquaintances, and esteemed as a worthy member of society by the community at large."

Not at large was his uncle — as the French say — Picot Boisfeillet, who was charged with murder.

Of the three survivors, one went back to France and was beheaded, Sullivan said.

"The other two gave up and sold the island. That's how Thomas Spalding came to Sapelo," Sullivan said.

A loyalist born on St. Simons Island, Spalding rode out the American Revolution on the St. Johns River in British Florida, but came back to Georgia and eventually acquired a lot of

DICKSON continues on B-2

House committee backs off juvenile civil citations requirements

By Tia Mitchell
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TALLAHASSEE | A committee in the House and another in the Senate took different approaches Wednesday on how to help juveniles avoid long-term consequences for minor

offenses. The Senate panel signed off on a bill requiring first-time offenders to receive civil citations or be placed in a diversion program if they commit an eligible misdemeanor. At the same time, the House committee stripped that same lan-

guage from its bill and instead focused on making it easier for juvenile offenders to have arrest records expunged.

Both votes were unanimous.

Testifying in favor of Senate Bill 196 at the Appropriations Subcommittee on Criminal and Civil Justice, Geneva Pittman spoke about her experiences as a member of one of Jacksonville's neigh-

borhood accountability boards that oversee the Teen Court program.

She told a story about a 17-year-old girl who received a civil citation for petty theft and was compelled to perform 35 hours of community service, attend counseling for her anger issues and conduct an interview with a Navy recruiter because her goal was to enlist.

"She is now today grad-

uated from high school and is successfully in the Navy," said Pittman, who is a member of ICARE. "She came back before the board to say, 'Thank you for changing my life.'"

SB 196 requires law enforcement officers to write civil citations if the juvenile is a first-time offender charged with one of 12 crimes, including

CITATIONS continues on B-2

JTA demonstrates driverless vehicles to replace Skyway



Vasilis Karavidas, a test and operation engineer for Easy Mile, talks to passengers about the features of his company's autonomous vehicle during a ride Wednesday afternoon. The Jacksonville Transportation Authority and World Class Jax worked with Easy Mile to demonstrate an example of an autonomous vehicle that took passengers around a course under the Hart Bridge approach alongside Gator Bowl Boulevard. (Photos by Bob Self/Florida Times-Union)

Board approves the development phase of new vehicles for transit

By Amanda Williamson
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Jacksonville residents and officials boarded a driverless vehicle Wednesday to experience what likely will be the future of transit here.

The rounded red-and-black vehicle navigated its way seamlessly through the parking lot across from Intuition Ale Works on East Bay Street. It slipped past a concrete pole without bumping the obstacle — and when a reporter accidentally stepped in front of the oncoming vehicle, it stopped.

All without a driver, without rails and without a guide.

Jacksonville Transportation Authority executives are turning to driverless vehicles to replace the aging and limited Skyway rail system, and worked with a vendor to offer a demonstration for those interested. The Easy Mile EZ10 allowed approximately 100 potential customers to see, touch and ride a vehicle utilizing next generation autonomous technology.

What these residents seemed to care about most, however, wasn't the new technology, but the reliability of the system. They wanted to know could it get

DRIVERLESS continues on B-2



Jacksonville Transportation Authority executives are turning to driverless vehicles to replace the aging and limited Skyway rail system. The Easy Mile EZ10 allowed approximately 100 potential customers to see, touch and ride a vehicle utilizing next generation autonomous technology.



A visitor walks past a classic Studebaker coupe and customized 1960s Chevrolet convertible at the Jacksonville Automobile and Motorcycle Museum. (Dan Scanlan/Florida Times-Union)

Car museum to shut its doors

Site will close at the end of March after a year of operation in mall

By Dan Scanlan
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A Jacksonville car museum that struggled to achieve the vision it had when it opened in early 2016 in the west end of

the 50-year-old Regency Square mall will shut down in three weeks.

Museum founders said they are blaming the condition of the roof in the former department store they occupy in the Arling-

ton mall for the closure.

An email statement from Erin Eiras, who initially funded the Jacksonville Automobile and Motorcycle Museum with her husband, said it saddens her to report the closure. But the leaks forced them to file a lien against Regency to cover funds they

MUSEUM continues on B-2

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Senate ready to shift universities to 'block' tuition

Major bill expected to pass today would leave specifics up to schools

By Lloyd Dunkelberger
News Service of Florida

TALLAHASSEE | State universities would have to move forward with "block" tuition programs by the fall of 2018 under a higher-education initiative that the Florida Senate is poised to approve today.

Block tuition is just a portion of a major bill (SB 2) that embodies Senate President Joe Negron's effort to elevate Florida's higher-education system. Other measures would expand the Bright Futures merit scholarship program, tighten graduation standards for universities and state colleges and create a program to attract top-quality professors and researchers.

The Senate took up the bill Wednesday. The block tuition proposal would require universities to switch from charging students on a credit-hour basis for each class they take to using a flat per-semester charge no matter how many classes they take.

Florida universities have had the option of developing block tuition plans for a number of years, but none have been enacted. Negron and Sen. Bill Galvano, a Bradenton Republican sponsoring the higher-education bill, have said block tuition will provide flexibility and another incentive for students to graduate on time, noting that many of the top-tier public universities in the nation use block tuition.

But the legislation will leave it up to each of the 12 state universities to develop the specifics of block tuition plans, which would have to be approved by the university system's Board of Governors before they take effect in the fall of 2018.

Some university advocates have questioned the potential financial impact of a block tuition mandate, noting that if a school charges students a flat fee that is the equivalent of 12 credit hours in a semester but the student takes 15 credit hours of classes, it will represent a revenue loss.

An analysis by Florida State University showed a potential \$40 million cost if the school charged students a 12-hour block tuition fee but students could take up to 15 hours. The cost included a \$20 million loss in tuition and fees and

another \$20 million that would be needed to hire instructors for the anticipated higher class demand.

"There are many ways this can be accomplished," Galvano said, saying universities can develop plans to lessen the financial impact.

The Senate adopted an amendment from Galvano that would require each university to approve a block tuition plan by Oct. 1 and then submit the proposal to the Board of Governors. The board would then submit a report to the Legislature by Dec. 1, including any "recommendations for improving block tuition and fee benefits for students."

As the Senate took up the bill Wednesday, other senators said they wanted the proposal to include more need-based financial aid for students from low-income families.

The major scholarship expansion in the bill is for a merit-based program, expanding the Bright Futures award for the highest-performing students, known as "academic scholars," to 100 percent of tuition and \$300 per fall and spring semesters for books. The scholarships, which now cover only about half of the tuition and fees, would also be expanded to the summer semester.

The bill would expand some need-based financial aid, including doubling the

state match for a program that supports "first generation" college students and establishing a new program to pay full tuition for students from farmworker families.

Also, Galvano and Senate Minority Leader Oscar Braynon, D-Miami Gardens, backed a successful amendment that would recognize schools that have a "significantly higher access" rate for students on need-based programs, such as Pell Grants, in the performance funding formula.

MUSEUM

Continued from B-1

spent on repairs.

"The roof leaks and mildew has gotten too bad for us to stay," the statement said. "Five days after every rain storm, we have to wait to see if any cars will get dripped on with dirty water leaking from the second floor. There have been two electrical fires due to rain soaking the electrical panels. The city was made aware of these issues in June, but they have not taken any action to stop this problem."

Mall general manager Jim Kramer said he couldn't comment on the museum's shutdown or its operators' reasons

behind it.

When it opened in early 2016, the then-anonymous collectors hoped to establish the city's first auto museum with 100 cars and motorcycles, racing simulators, a 200-seat auditorium, a slot car track, art gallery and an automotive restoration education program.

The two Northeast Florida car collectors set up a nonprofit organization and tried to get area car owners to display their rides in the museum. But only a few did, so the couple added some from their own collection.

They put on about 50 events, including a monthly hot rod cruise-in they said drew an estimated 100,000 people.

Chris Conover, Sunshine State Chevelles car club president and museum volunteer, managed the monthly cruise-in. His club also made a donation to help the museum. Conover said they saw the potential of a car museum in Jacksonville, but it never came to fruition because of multiple issues.

"You couldn't even have a vending machine inside because of the rules with the mall with food courts," Conover said. "We have had to jump a bunch of hurdles with the city, property owner and management. The pieces just didn't seem to fall into place. It boils down to the location and what we called the 'Regency Stigma' — the deterioration of that part

of town and the mall as a whole."

Museum officials said the leaking roof forced them to replace at least 100 water-damaged roof tiles since January alone, as "nasty brown water" would seep through after each storm.

That, and other costs were supposed to be credited to the museum by the mall owners, but museum officials said it was not. So they filed the lien to prevent owners from selling or renting that space until the money is repaid.

Museum officials said they are actively seeking a new location, but haven't found one yet.

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DRIVERLESS

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them from where they are, to where they want to be — and a lot of times, they said, that isn't on the current Skyway route.

"The opportunity to perhaps expand the mass transportation here in Jacksonville," Lamar Campbell said when asked what drew him to the demonstration. "The Skyway doesn't go to many places. It's very expensive to maintain, and expansion is a tremendous burden on taxpayers."

Though she's never been in an autonomous vehicle before, Jennifer Kennedy, a traffic engineer in Jacksonville, believes the smaller vehicle will allow more versatility and allow JTA to reach further into the city.

She isn't wrong.

Future plans for the Skyway will include removing the guide beam from current infrastructure and creating access points along existing routes. These points will allow the driverless vehicles to leave the elevated pathway and merge onto roadways on dedicated lanes. This way, JTA can expand into areas such as Riverside, Brooklyn and San Marco without constructing additional structures within the communities.

According to Brad Thornburn, JTA vice president of planning, development and innovation, the authority plans also to decrease wait times for customers at each stop from every six to eight minutes, to every two to three minutes. As a result, JTA will have to invest in more driverless

vehicles, but they come at a much smaller price tag than the approximately \$5 million it costs to replace an existing Skyway vehicle.

The transportation authority has not announced a time line, cost or specifics for moving forward with the expanded system. It has also not decided which vendor or automated vehicles to use, but executives believe it is well-situated to take advantage of the rapidly-developing technology.

Last month, the board approved moving into the development phase of the project, which JTA has named the Ultimate Urban Circulator.

"The [Ultimate Urban Circulator Program] will help drive economic growth through enhanced mobility, connectivity, sus-

tained economic growth and vibrancy for Jacksonville," said Nathaniel Ford Sr., CEO of JTA.

Staff writer Sebastian Kitchen contributed to this report.

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CITATIONS

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battery, possession of marijuana and resisting an officer without violence. Law enforcement groups, including the Florida Police Chiefs Association and the Florida Sheriffs Association, oppose the measure because they say it takes away their autonomy in the field.

"We do need to make sure that we continue to keep law enforcement discretion in these circumstances," said Matt Dugan, representing the sheriffs.

The bill has one more committee stop before it is eligible for a floor vote.

But a companion bill in the House now has a completely different focus after changes Wednesday.

The House Criminal Justice Committee voted to replace civil citation language in House Bill 205 with new expungement rules for juveniles who complete diversion programs after an arrest.

Groups on opposite sides of the civil citation issue all said they supported the changes to make it easier to wipe juvenile arrest records clean. But a coalition focused on reforming juvenile justice laws more broadly, which includes Jacksonville's ICARE, is still focused on helping youth offenders avoid arrest in the first place.

"We support the expunction aspect of this bill; we just wanted to clarify that this is no longer a civil citation bill," Scott McCoy of the Southern Poverty Law Center said. "... I just wanted to make clear that by supporting the expunction portion we are not saying that the SPLC is not in favor of increasing the utilization of juvenile civil citation."

HB 205 has two more committee stops. A second House bill, HB 213, still has the juvenile civil citation requirement in its language.

That bill was filed in January and has yet to be scheduled for a hearing.

Tia Mitchell: (850) 933-1321

DICKSON

Continued from B-1

land. He was a renowned planter and pioneered sea island cotton. He had a house on Sapelo and another on the mainland called Ashantilly.

The mainland house is now home to the nonprofit Ashantilly Center, and Sullivan and Galland will be there at 3 p.m. Sunday talking about the book. On March 23 at 6 p.m., Sullivan will lecture at the Coastal Georgia Historical Society's Alfred W. Jones Heritage Center on St. Simons Island. That won't be hard for Sullivan, either, since he's been giving winter history programs there for 22 years.

Sullivan's early work

didn't require much research. He was a sportswriter for the Times-Union and Savannah Morning News, and sportswriters don't often write about Abner Doubleday when covering a baseball game. In 1985, he went home to Darien as editor of the weekly Darien News and left there to manage the Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve. During those 20 years, he had among the best commutes imaginable: a ferry ride. The work, however, gave him more time to author histories.

Sullivan stresses he didn't set out to write a book on Sapelo, but an old friend talked him into it. Former Atlanta Journal-Constitution reporter Jingle Davis already had

written books for the University of Georgia Press on two subjects she knows: St. Simons Island, where she lives, and Jekyll Island, which she can see out her front door. Those two big volumes also featured Galland's photography.

"Jingle is a long time friend and newspaper colleague," Sullivan said. "She suggested it and recommended Ben."

Sullivan and Galland made a proposal to University of Georgia Press, and the book is complete and slickly done.

If you like history, the book is a good read, but it's probably a better listen if Sullivan is doing the talking.

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