

Detroit school officials visit to check out Vitti

By Denise Smith Amos
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Three members of Detroit's School Board visited five Jacksonville schools Wednesday morning and the met with school leaders and community members — as well as Superintendent Nikolai Vitti — in the afternoon.

The trip is the latest



Vitti

interviewed Duval Superintendent Nikolai Vitti in Detroit last week and River Rouge Superintendent Derrick Coleman on Monday.

stage in Detroit's ongoing superintendent search. Detroit Board members

A third finalist withdrew from consideration.

The board now is visiting the finalists' districts.

Vitti took the group to Ribault High, the Bridge to Success, a program for over-age students at West Jacksonville; the single-gender Young Mens and Women's Leadership Academies at Butler, Andrew Robinson Elementary, and

then newly minted R.L. Brown Gifted and Talented Center.

Before touring Andrew Robinson, Vitti said he selected the schools for the tour so that the board members could see a cross section of traditional schools and schools with new programs. He declined to answer more questions and said the board members

have asked not to be interviewed or photographed.

The day's plans also included interviews with Duval School Board Chairwoman Paula Wright and Board members Warren Jones and Cheryl Grymes. Also on the list are Pastor John Guns, of St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, and Darnell Smith, chairman of the Jacksonville

Chamber of Commerce.

Detroit has a seven-member board. The three visiting Duval are vice president Angeliqu Peterson-Mayberry, and members Deborah Hunter-Harville and LaMar Lemmons.

The board plans to visit the River Rouge district, which is near Detroit, next week, a district spokeswoman said.

N.C. man arrested in toddler's death

2-year-old's death is the 11th such case in the county

By Dan Scanlan
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A 36-year-old North Carolina man who was staying at a Jacksonville hotel has been charged with murder in his girlfriend's 2-year-old daughter's beating death, according to the sheriff's office.

The girl's death is among a growing number of cases in Jacksonville this year after children, some as young as a month old, died from injuries ranging from an accidental shooting to physical trauma, according to police and the Florida Department of Children and Families.

Brandon Michael Smith of Willow Spring was located March 28 in Fayetteville, N.C., by U.S. deputy marshals after the sheriff's office issued a warrant for his arrest, police said. He was brought back to Jacksonville Tuesday, then officially charged in Alayna Elizabeth Williamson's death. The 2-year-old and her 21-year-old mother are from Seagrove, N.C.

The child's funeral was

March 31 in Seagrove. Her family called her "Lay-Lay" or "Layna" and her smile "could brighten any heart," according to her obituary.

Police said officers were dispatched to Memorial Hospital about 9 a.m. March 22 on a report of a child who had been brought in with serious injuries. The child had been at InTown Suites at 3162 S. St. Johns Bluff Road, then was brought to the hospital. Due to the seriousness of her injuries, Alayna was airlifted to UF Health Jacksonville, but later died from what investigators said was multiple blunt force trauma to her head.

In another case last month in Jacksonville, 23-year-old Vung Deih Nuam was arrested March 26 on a charge of child neglect after her 1-month-old child died days after being hospitalized with severe bruising, according to her arrest report. The child's name was not provided by the Sheriff's Office, but WJXT TV-4 reported it as Hannah Htoo. The family lived in the Stonemont Village Apartments in the

Spring Park area.

The infant was pronounced dead March 29, according to the Department of Children and Families. Hospital staff said she had bruises, bleeding in the brain and numerous bone fractures in different stages of healing that could not have been caused by a single event, according to Nuam's arrest report.

Police interviewed Nuam at the sheriff's office and she could not explain how the child received the injuries, the report said. But she said "nobody ever held her child without her watching."

Nuam is already on probation from a prior child neglect case in Lake City, stemming from injuries discovered when a 2-year-old boy was taken to Lake City Medical Center on June 29, 2014, according to that police report.

The child had dark bruises on his face, chest, head and neck when he was brought in, with both eyes swollen, one totally shut, according to the Lake City report. Nuam told police her son was



Nuam



Smith

"an active child" and that he had fallen, the report said. But after further investigation by the hospital and Children and Families staff, the investigating officer said the injuries were "intentional from repeated strikes."

Nuam told investigators the boy was with her at all times and denied hitting him, the report said. She was charged with child cruelty and child neglect.

The Department of Children and Families lists the deaths of 11 children reported as of March 31 this year in Duval County, nine under investigation. A Feb. 4 death of a 5-year-old child was listed as accidental after her 8-year-old brother shot her, according to department records.

The state recorded 35 total child deaths in 2016 locally, 12 of them as of early April. Ten of those were determined to be sleep-related or Sudden Infant Death.

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First Coast Happenings

THURSDAY

Book Sale, 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Thursday-Friday; Bag Day, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday; Ponte Vedra Beach branch library, 101 Library Blvd., Ponte Vedra Beach. (904) 827-6950 or sjcpls.org.

"The Ugly Duckling," 10:30 a.m. Thursday and April 19, Alhambra Theatre & Dining, 12000 Beach Blvd. \$12 a person. Reservations, (904) 641-1212 or alhambrajax.com.

Charter Week 2017, through Saturday, Jacksonville University, 2800 University Blvd. N. Includes a campus-wide food drive all week. Registration, ju.edu/charterday/costs-registration.php.

■ **Thursday** — Blood drive, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Student Alumni Association & Dolphin Productions: "Meet Me at the Rat," 7 to 9 p.m., River House.

■ **Friday** — Day of Service, 8:30 to 11:30 a.m.; Food distribution to the needy in the community through the Feeding Northeast Florida Mobile Food Pantry, 9 to 11:30 a.m., JU's Parking Lot A, in front of the Gooding Building; Day of Service celebratory luncheon, noon to 1 p.m., Nelm's Science Green; Porter Music and Art Festival, 5:15 to 10:15 p.m., Dolphin Green.

■ **Saturday** — Men's Soccer Alumni Game, 10 a.m., Southern Oak Stadium; Men's Soccer FootGolf Tournament, noon, at Blue Cypress Golf Course; Football Spring Game, 1 p.m., D.B. Milne Field; River House Rendezvous, 2-5 p.m., River House.

Clay County Agricultural Fair, through Saturday, 2497 Florida 16 W., Green Cove Springs. Includes arts and crafts, livestock, Disc-connected K9s World Famous Frisbee Dog, live entertainment, \$10 adults, \$7 seniors 65 and older and children 6-12; armbands, \$15; VIP Hospitality Tent, \$35, includes catered food. claycountyfair.org.

■ **Thursday** — noon to 11 p.m.; Senior Day, seniors get in free noon to 6 p.m.; Main Street Parade, 4 p.m.; Atlantic City Boys, 7 p.m.; Wynonna & The Big Noise, 8 p.m., reserved seating.

■ **Friday** — 10 a.m. to 11 p.m.; Talent Show winners, 7 p.m.; Granger Smith with Earl Dubbles Jr., 8 p.m., reserved seating.

■ **Saturday** — 10 a.m. to 11 p.m.; Jordan and the Posey Pickers, 7 p.m.; Steven Curtis Chapman, 8

p.m., reserved seating.

Victims of Crime Observance, through Saturday, various venues. (904) 630-2489 (630-CITY) or coj.net.

■ **Thursday** — Awards Recognition Luncheon, noon, Main Library, 303 N. Laura St. Program will honor crime victims and their families. \$30. Reservations, (904) 630-7103.

■ **Saturday** — Unity in the Community, noon, Families of Slain Children, 3108 N. Myrtle Ave. Features a day of celebration for victims and their families. Includes refreshments.

Jax Poetry Fest, in a celebration of National Poetry Month, through Friday, various venues. Includes free poetry lessons, spoken word, interactive poetry, and poetry performances. facebook.com/JaxPoetryFest.

■ **Thursday** — Workshops, 1 to 7:30 p.m., Hope at Hand, 3886 Atlantic Blvd.

■ **Friday** — Performance by poet Dominique Christina, of Denver, CO., 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Karpeles Manuscript Museum Library, 101 W. First St.

Alhambra After Dark, meal 5:50 to 7:20 p.m., show 7:50 p.m. Thursday-Friday; meal 11 a.m. and 5:50 p.m., show 1:15 and 7:50 p.m. Saturday; meal 11:50 a.m., show 1:50 p.m. Sunday; Alhambra Theatre & Dining, 12000 Beach Blvd. \$64, includes dinner and a show. Reservations, (904) 641-1212 or alhambrajax.com.

Forum on Government and Public Policy, 7 p.m., Flagler College's Lewis Auditorium, 14 Granada St. Speaker is John A. Farrell on "Why Nixon? Why Nixon Now? A Study of a Controversial President in a Time of Presidential Controversy." (904) 826-8572 or flagler.edu.

"The Dining Room," 7:30 p.m.

Thursday-Friday, 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Douglas Anderson School of the Arts, 2445 San Diego Road. \$20 adults, \$10 students. (904) 346-5620, ext. 122, or datheatreboosters.org.

"Stalking Ottis Toole: A Southern Gothic," as part of dramaWorks, 7:30 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, 2 p.m. Sunday, Florida State College at Jacksonville's South Campus, 11901 Beach Blvd. \$10 adults, \$5 FSCJ faculty, staff and students with ID, in advance; \$10 at the door. Reservations, (904) 646-2222.

St. Johns commissioners OK sports complex

By Jake Martin
St. Augustine Record

St. Johns County commissioners have approved a rezoning request and Comprehensive Plan amendment to allow for Project Family, a massive indoor sports facility with additional commercial components, just south of the Duval County line.

St. Johns Development Partners LLC asked the county to rezone the property, about 42.3 acres south of Race Track Road between Interstate 95 and St. Johns Parkway, from Open Rural to Planned Unit Development to make way for 175,000 square feet of indoor commercial recreation and 125,000 square feet of other commercial space. Surrounding lands to the east, south and west make up the designated Urban Service Area for Durbin Park.

Lisa Davis, CEO of St. Johns Development Partners, touted the potential for the recreational facility to attract regional and state tournaments as well as other sporting



St. Johns County commissioners approved an indoor sports complex south of Race Track Road.

events, especially considering hotels planned for construction nearby that could accommodate out-of-town competitors and families. She estimated Project Family could bring as much as \$9 million into the county over a 3-year period just from tournaments and other weekend events.

Wil Smith, director of Parks and Recreation, said the county's facilities in the northern end of the county are strained due to high participation rates in clubs and programs and a lack of field space. He said the project would help offset the demand for what's already there while

providing something new altogether.

The recreational facility will likely include indoor fields, courts and turf areas for a variety of sports, as well as training/workout space. It is also planned to include a multi-purpose conference room and snack bar. The indoor recreational component would come within the first 10-year phase with other commercial space to come within a second 10-year phase. Davis said she was hoping to break ground on the project by late summer or early fall and open by August 2018, although she said the facility would more likely open

in early 2019.

According to backup documents, it's anticipated the proposed uses, in combination, would not generate more than 700 afternoon/evening peak hour trips. Widening of segments of Race Track Road as well as construction of additional roads in the area are already on the table or in the works. Once completed, West Peyton Parkway and State Road 9B will be located to the west of the property.

Plans had indicated just 117 paved parking spaces with an unimproved grassy area to the south for overflow parking.

Commission Chair Jimmy Johns questioned whether staff could require additional parking later on, to which staff said they can take a look at how the facility is actually being used within 18 months after it opens and make adjustments, pending a study, from there.

The Planning and Zoning Agency unanimously recommended approval of the project at its Nov. 17 meeting.

TRIAL

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Toward the end of his testimony — 5½ hours from the moment he first stepped into the witness stand (there were some breaks) — his arms and legs were shaking.

He spoke of the gratitude he felt for Adkins who was allowing him to have sex with his girlfriend at a young age and without getting into trouble. He spoke of wanting to give him something in return, so he offered Adkins his

girlfriend when they were 15 and Adkins 50. He spoke of them having oral sex with each other when he had already passed Georgia's age of consent, which is 16. He spoke of Adkins never forcing himself on him.

"I never felt forced," the young man said.

"Why did you do it then?" asked Assistant District Attorney Katie Gropper.

"I don't know why I did it. It just happened," the young man said.

"How do you feel?" Gropper asked.

"I respected him, like my dad. At that point I'd do anything to keep him around so he wouldn't leave me," he said.

He went on to talk about asking Adkins to send him a photograph of his penis when he was stationed in Germany, a year after he left Brunswick.

He spoke of his struggles, his guilt, his problems at times not remembering dates and certain events.

Kevin Gough, Adkins' defense attorney, honed in on that.

Gough has stressed the

young man changed the timeframe of when sexual events occurred so that Adkins could be charged with molesting minors, both the young man and his girlfriend at the time. If both were 16, Adkins could not be charged under Georgia law because that is the age of consent.

"What is your motive?" asked Gough.

"Peace of mind for one," the young man said. "It would be nice to go back to a time when I didn't think about it."

Eileen Kelley: 904-329-4104

EXEMPTION

Continued from B-1

positional (SJR 1774), filed by Sen. Tom Lee, R-Thonotosassa, has won support from one committee.

The state Revenue Estimating Conference projected that, if approved by voters, local governments collectively would see non-school property-tax revenue drop by \$752.7 million annually starting in the

2019-2020 fiscal year.

Committee Chairman Jim Boyd, R-Bradenton, estimated the change would save property owners an average of about \$170 a year.

Voting against the proposal, Rep. Don Hahnfeldt, R-The Villages, asked if it was unreasonable to force local governments to "sharpen their pencils" to enact further budget cuts that will be felt most by those who need local ser-

vices.

"This is an idea that is great in intention, but is at best a feel-good for legislators and it's going to be devastating for our communities," Hahnfeldt said.

Meanwhile, Rep. Al Jacquet, D-Lantana, voted for the measure after briefly proposing an amendment that would have boosted the exemption to cover up to \$150,000 of a property's assessed value.

"Let's put our people

first," Jacquet said. "I did not hear from one taxpayer in my district who said this is a bad idea."

Holland, who said he isn't weighing in for or against the proposed exemption, said he provided the financial analysis so policy-makers would have information about the impact.

The exemption would apply to non-school taxes. In the city of Jacksonville, that would be for the tax

bill from the city, the St. Johns River Water Management District and the Florida Inland Navigation District.

Holland said based on current tax rates for those three entities, a homeowner who gets the full benefit of an additional \$25,000 homestead exemption would save \$294.

State law now provides a homestead exemption of up to \$50,000 for non-school taxes. For school taxes, the

homestead exemption is \$25,000.

Local officials from across the state told lawmakers the proposed constitutional amendment would put more of the tax burden on fewer people, and force county and municipal governments to decide if they would cut services or increase taxes.

The News Service of Florida contributed to this report
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