

Law & Order Sheriff's Office is evacuated because of suspicious package

The Jacksonville Sheriff's Office was evacuated for about an hour and a half Wednesday after a wooden box with a "suspicious note attached to it" was dropped off by a concerned resident, police said.

Employees were allowed back inside the 501 E. Bay St. headquarters after the box, held together with nails, was taken to the firing range for investigation, police said.

The box was delivered to the home of a woman identified only as a government employee by police. She brought it to the Police Memorial Building before noon, Sheriff Mike Williams said.

"There was a letter that came with it, a very cryptic letter that obviously raised their level of concern," Williams said.

Officers did a basic investigation on the package at the Sheriff's Office, then brought in the bomb squad because of "some concerns on the X-ray," the Sheriff's Office said. It was also decided to evacuate employees, who were picked up by JTA buses and moved a few blocks away for safety, Williams said.

Nothing explosive or radioactive was found in the box. But Williams said this may be part of a similar issue occurring across the country.

"People are sending packages, not necessarily to government offices, but to individuals," he said. "Some of our law enforcement partners around the country have dealt with this recently. The letters are almost exactly the same, so obviously we believe this is an internet type of thing that's going around."

Anyone who gets a package like this should not bring it to the Sheriff's Office but leave it alone and call police to "come to you," Williams said.

The Sheriff's Office said no police services city-wide were impacted by the investigation, including the 911 call center and jail. The records counter and the downtown building were closed to the public during the evacuation.

Dan Scanlan

Man, 79, dies a day after fire

A 79-year-old man badly burned Tuesday in a Westside house fire has died, authorities said Wednesday.

The victim was hospitalized with severe burns and smoke inhalation following the fire in the 2200 block of Bills Drive, according to a state Fire Marshal's Office spokesman. Firefighters were called to the home about 7:20 a.m. Tom Francis, spokesman for the Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department, said they



The wooden box that was part of the suspicious package includes the faded logo for a nickel metal company. (Jacksonville Sheriff's Office)

found the victim unconscious inside after quickly bringing the fire under control. Officials could not release his name.

Jon Moore, spokesman for the state Fire Marshal's Office, said preliminary indications are the fire began in the kitchen.

He said there was nothing at this time to suggest suspicious activity was involved, but noted the investigation is ongoing. The Red Cross is assisting three people displaced by the fire, which also killed a dog, according to the fire department.

Moore said despite the damage, it does not appear the home will be a total loss.

Garrett Pelican

CLAY 4-year-old dies after being rescued from water

A 4-year-old boy has died after he was rescued from the water Sunday in Keystone Heights, according to Times-Union news partner First Coast News. He becomes the third child drowning in four days on the First Coast.

The Clay County Sheriff's Office didn't provide a location or other details in Sunday's incident, only saying the boy died Monday.

Tuesday in Yulee, an 18-month-old boy died after crawling through a pet door and ending up in a pool while being baby-sat by a 16-year-old with four other children, Nassau County's sheriff said.

Saturday in Jacksonville, a 2-year-old boy fell into the family's pool and drowned, the Sheriff's Office there said.

Scott Butler

Renner leading pack; House speaker's race comes down to Friday vote

By Tia Mitchell
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State Rep. Paul Renner remains a front-runner heading into Friday's election to determine the next person in line to become speaker of the Florida House.

Although there are four candidates, Renner and state Rep. Jamie Grant of Tampa are believed to have the most support ahead of voting. The other hopefuls are Rep. Byron Donalds of Naples and Rep. Erin Grall of Vero Beach, who if elected would become the House's first female speaker-to-be.

The 26 representatives who comprise the House GOP freshman class will cast votes during a closed-doors meeting at an Orlando hotel. The candidates agreed to a secret ballot, and if no one receives a majority of votes then the person who received the least support will be eliminated round-by-round until a winner is selected.

That person will be in line to serve as speaker from 2022 to 2024.

If Renner is the last person standing, he will become the first speaker from Northeast Florida since John Thrasher served in the role from 1998 to 2000. Jim King served as Senate president from 2002 to 2004.

After the governor, the Legislature's two chamber leaders are considered the most powerful positions in Florida government. They determine who will chair legislative committees and get to make appointments to various governing and advisory boards. The House speaker and Senate president largely set the agenda and priorities of the annual legislative session.

Renner declined to speak on-the-record about Friday's election.



A rezoning notice is seen on County Dock Road. (Bob Self/Florida Times-Union)

City Council delays vote on Mandarin subdivision

The Times-Union

The Jacksonville City Council on Tuesday delayed voting on a plan for a new subdivision in Mandarin that has upset residents.

The subdivision, located off County Dock Road, would include 21 homes. The builder is requesting approval from the city to waive zoning rules that allow nine homes on to be built on the 9.3-acre site. Neighbors object to the plan, saying the increased

density would diminish their quality of life and increase traffic on a narrow 16-foot wide road.

Council members were set to approve a plan that would force the developer to offset environmental and traffic impacts of the development. However, they couldn't reach an agreement and decided to delay voting on the plan.

The plan will undergo more review by council committees when the body returns from its summer break in late July.



Workers plot dunes and plant sea oat seeds on the Neptune Beach and Atlantic Beach border. (Tiffanie Reynolds, Florida Times-Union)

RESTORATION

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after and be finished by mid-August.

The project started in mid-September to widen the beach berm 20 to 60 feet and raise the elevation of the beach by 3 to 5 feet.

However, the project halted when Hurricane Matthew eroded dunes and restoration work in early October.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers worked with federal and state agencies,

the city of Jacksonville and all three Duval County beach communities to move forward with a new project contract that included dune restoration.

The Duval County project was initially constructed in 1978-80. Since then, five principal renourishments occurred (1985-87, 1991, 1995, 2005, and 2011) in addition to periodic placement of sand dredged from navigation projects. Beach renourishment occurs about every five to six years to maintain beaches as part of the project.

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