

METRO

Manufacturers fear higher rates from a JEA sale

By David Bauerlein
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The First Coast Manufacturers Association is raising concerns that selling JEA could result in job-killing increases in electric rates.

In a letter sent Thursday to Mayor Lenny Curry and City

Council, the manufacturing association's president, Lake Ray, said he has "heard from many members who have expressed concerns about the potential sale of JEA."

The letter does not take a position for or against selling JEA. Ray's letter says the discussions among city leaders should reach

out to hear from manufacturers because the cost of producing goods in Jacksonville is directly tied to electric rates.

"Any rate hike as a result of the sale of JEA could cost businesses hundreds of thousands of dollars," Ray wrote. "Increased power costs could prevent growth opportunities

in the manufacturing industry and result in the elimination of jobs or pressure emerging small businesses."

Curry is continuing to meet with "stakeholders across the city" to discuss the future of JEA,

See SALE, A2



INSIDE | B3

EFFORT STARTS

To thank teachers who impacted lives

Hopefuls vie to sing national anthem for Jumbo Shrimp



Renie Lyniuk leads her daughter Lindsey Lyniuk off the field after Lindsey's performance of the national anthem Thursday at the Baseball Grounds of Jacksonville. Lindsey, who is blind, sang "America the Beautiful" with Alicia Keys before the Super Bowl in Jacksonville in 2005. [BOB SELF/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION]

By Matt Soergel
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"The Star-Spangled Banner" has been the bane of many a singer, and there's usually an element of anticipated disaster looming as listeners wait for the toughest parts. Sure, the singer may get past "the rockets' red glare," but can they traverse the even more challenging "land of the

free?" Maybe. Maybe not.

It takes guts to tackle it, alone, in front of strangers.

Yet on a balmy, breezy Thursday afternoon at the Baseball Grounds of Jacksonville, singer after singer stepped up confidently to a mic behind home plate and offered their version of the national anthem.

Some renditions were big and bold, and some were more

tender. Some had a bit of vocal improvisation (though nothing remotely like Fergie's recent rendition) and some were traditional, right down the middle of the plate.

A hundred people were booked to show up, auditioning for the chance to sing the anthem before one of 69 of the Jacksonville Jumbo

See ANTHEM, B3



Jarvis Weeks, a chef at St. Vincent's Medical Center, belts out the national anthem Thursday during a break from his job before quickly leaving to return to work. [BOB SELF/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION]



Jack Briggs came to the Baseball Grounds of Jacksonville to audition with decades of professional singing experience behind him. He spent 20 years in the U.S. Army Field Band and Soldiers' Chorus in Washington, D.C., and sang the national anthem for pro sports teams in the D.C. area as well. [BOB SELF/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION]



Wearing his work vest, Scott Hammer sings the national anthem during auditions Thursday for the upcoming Jumbo Shrimp season. [BOB SELF/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION]



Protesters swarm Howard Schneider's car on April 29, 2015, as he drove off from his now former office on University Boulevard. [DAN SCANLAN/FLORIDA TIMES-UNION]

Charges dropped against controversial Jacksonville dentist

By Dan Scanlan
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It was an angry scene that lasted for weeks in the spring of 2015 along an uphill stretch of University Boulevard. Parents protested how a Jacksonville dentist had abused their children in his office nearby.



Schneider

Howard Schneider had pulled more teeth than necessary, they said, and injured and threatened their children during treatment.

Schneider soon closed his office at 1871 University Blvd. S., the sign-waving and an online petition against him sucking his business dry. Then came lawsuits and the elderly dentist's Nov. 16, 2015 arrest on 11 counts of felony Medicaid fraud and one of scheme to defraud, a potential of up to 19 years in prison if convicted, prosecutors said.

A year ago he was judged mentally incompetent to go to trial. This week the 81-year-old former dentist had all fraud charges dropped "based on his deteriorating mental condition," according to the State Attorney's Office.

"If the defendant unexpectedly regains competency, the state can reinstate the charges," the filing states.

On the "Parents against dentist Howard Schneider" Facebook page, Temperance Austin wrote that dropping the charges is "very wrong," considering how children like hers were mistreated and are "still terrified to go to the dentist." Kellie Mayes wrote that she "broke down in tears" when she heard, wondering how it could be done knowing "how many innocent children" were harmed.

But Susan Leitzen, part of that Facebook protest page group, said no one there was shocked.

"I knew he was going to get off," Leitzen said. "He and his wife had a plan if they were ever in trouble. So I wasn't shocked. Disappointed, but not shocked."

Attorney John Phillips, whose civil cases filed on behalf of 131 child patients have been resolved pending final court approval for some, wonders whether Schneider was ever fit to practice.

"The issue is this, he was

found to have some level of dementia," Phillips said. "Based on some of the things he was doing and his need to repeatedly strap these children down while he worked, he probably had this a long time while he worked on children. So he couldn't stand trial, but he could work on children? That's not right, and unjust."

By the end of April 2015, 34,000 supporters had signed a change.org petition demanding the American and Florida dental associations and state revoke his license. That's when protesters spent weeks carrying signs and complaining about what the dentist had done to their children.

At the time, Brandi Motley's said her then-6 year old daughter had gone there to have a tooth pulled. Three hours later, a visit to the emergency room revealed her daughter had a fractured nose, a black eye and seven teeth gone.

"He said, 'We stepped out of the room to get something, came back and she was face-first on the floor,' " Motley said back in 2015.

Schneider voluntarily relinquished his license in May 2015 to the Florida Board of Dentistry. On Nov. 16 he was arrested on the 12-count criminal charges, and his Riverside Avenue home was foreclosed on that December. The State Attorney's Office investigation into the charges revealed Schneider had "no justification" for procedures he did, and staff refused to answer parent questions about many of them.

The criminal fraud case came to a standstill in 2016 when Schneider was deemed incompetent for trial after medical evaluation indicated he might have dementia, the State Attorney's Office said. This week's filing on the dropped charges indicates that decision was based on the finding that Schneider's competency "had little likelihood of being restored."

Phillips criticizes prosecutors for their handling of the case, saying the real heroes were the parents who "shut him down" before a child was more seriously injured or worse.

The State Attorney's Office stated it will notify Schneider's victims of the dropped charges in writing.

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ONLINE SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH COVERAGE

The Duval County School Board held the first of four meetings Thursday night to give the public to voice its opinions about the attributes and qualifications desired in a new Duval school superintendent. The meeting, which began at 6 p.m., did not end in time to meet news deadlines. For information about the meeting, look for the story online at jacksonville.com or read it in Saturday's Florida Times-Union newspaper.



INSIDE | B8

TO ARM OR NOT?

Issue of giving Teachers guns Prompts rifts, Bickering

THIS WEEKEND

FRIDAY-SATURDAY
• **Keep your eyes peeled. "The Illusionists":** brings five magicians together and gives them a chance to work their magic in a show that was described as a high-tech extravaganza when it opened on Broadway a few years ago. This touring production is scheduled

for three performances at the Times-Union Center for Performing Arts: 8 p.m. Friday, and 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday. It's part of the FSCJ Artist Series, and tickets are from \$38.50 to \$84.50. For more info, go to fscjartistsseries.org.

FRIDAY-SUNDAY

• **It's the 50th anniversary of the Home+Patio Show:** that's occupying the Prime Osborn Convention Center all weekend. It promises innovative products, home and design experts, workshops, cooking stages and more — along with

See WEEKEND, B3

Police arrest 3 Lake Shore Middle School students in guard's assault

By Denise Smith Amos
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Three Lake Shore Middle School students were arrested and face possible charges for assaulting a school security guard as he tried to break up a fight Tuesday morning.

District documents indicate that the female students, ages 12 or 13, hit or kicked security guard Jimmy Hundley during a fight between two boys.

According to the arrest reports and a statement written by School Resource Officer Mary-Alice Nouse,

two coaches radioed that a fight started on the school's basketball courts about 11:30 a.m.

Nouse said she pushed through a large circle of students to get at the two fighting boys and Hundley came in behind her, also telling students to move out of the way. Nouse said as she grabbed one boy, the other began running through the crowd and she saw a female student charging Hundley.

"I heard a lot of commotion behind me and looked back and observed Security Hundley and [the student] on the ground," Nouse

wrote. According to Hundley, the student and another girl both tried to charge him but he grabbed them. The other girl, whom he didn't know, got away and he and the first girl fell onto the ground.

One coach told police he saw two girls repeatedly punch Hundley in his face and the other coach agreed, saying he saw a third girl punch Hundley on the ground.

Those three girls were arrested on possible charges of battery on an elected school employee, which for an adult is a felony. The

girls' mothers, contacted by phone, said they don't know if their daughters will end up with those charges, because their juvenile court dates are coming up next week and in each case this would be their first offense.

All three mothers said their daughters denied hitting or kicking Hundley. Two of the girls said they were trying to break up the fight.

Two girls said they saw the third girl hit Hundley.

All three girls' mothers said that until now, the girls had not been in legal trouble or serious trouble at school.

The Times-Union generally does not identify minors who have not been charged with an adult crime.

One parent said she believes someone videotaped the fight, but police reports say the fight was not videotaped.

Nouse described the chaotic scene.

"Students began to push and shove me as I continued to hold onto the student," Nouse wrote, saying she called for more officers. "I was unable to identify any of the students as I was being attacked and was trying to remove myself

and the male student from the confrontation."

She said as students were kicking and hitting Hundley on the ground, he grabbed her waist and she helped him stand.

The school's principal declined to comment, in keeping with district rules allowing only spokespeople to comment. Interim Superintendent Patricia Willis said Thursday morning she was not ready to comment.

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LAW & ORDER

2 children get into closed pool at apartments, 1 drowns

The Times-Union

A 5-year-old boy is dead and another child hospitalized following a Thursday afternoon drowning at The Preserve at St. Nicholas apartment complex in the 3900 block of Atlantic Boulevard, according to the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office.

Police and firefighters were called to the complex pool about 4:30 p.m. after maintenance workers tried to help the children, Sgt. Mark Musser said.

The 5-year-old was found unresponsive at poolside and was declared at dead at the hospital. The second child is being treated at Wolfson Children's Hospital and is expected to survive, Musser said.

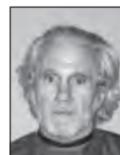
"The pool itself in fact has not been open to the apartment complex residence for several months as far as I know," Musser said. "It is gated and locked. We have been trying to determine exactly how the children made entrance into the pool area."

A resident heard noises from the closed pool and screamed for help. Apartment maintenance workers had to jump the fence, then perform CPR on the 5-year-old, Musser said.

Dan Scanlan



Morgan Byrnes



Shawn Byrnes



Campbell



Sirmons



Vega

Threats to 'shoot up' schools lead to arrest

A 21-year-old former Ribault High School student was arrested Wednesday after Facebook messages threatened to "shoot up" Lee and Raines high schools and then many more in Duval County, according to the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office.

Jamare Terrell Campbell of Cleveland Road was charged with two counts each of making a false report of planting a bomb and written threats to do bodily harm. He remains behind bars on no bail, according to jail records.

The first threat surfaced about 10 a.m. Feb. 18 after Raines High School's vice principal was sent a copy of a threatening text message a parent had received, claiming someone on Facebook was going to "shoot everybody at Raines tomorrow - watch," the arrest report said. Officers spoke to the parent and were there when a second Facebook message was sent saying someone would be shot at Raines.

School staff were alerted and Raines was put on Code Red alert, but nothing occurred.

Then on Feb. 20 a Lee High School student reported someone had sent her a message on Facebook saying he was on his way there to shoot someone in a classroom, then go to Raines to "shoot that hoe skool up" before threatening 10 other middle and high schools.

As investigators were talking with the Lee student, the man called her on the Facebook voice app, the arrest report said. The caller agreed to speak with detectives, then meet them. He didn't show up, but detectives tracked Facebook videos to Campbell, who then met with them Wednesday and was arrested.

Dan Scanlan

Student arrested after gun found in EWC dorm

A 20-year-old Edward Waters College student was arrested Wednesday night after an assault rifle

was found in his Tiger Landing dormitory room by school staff, according to the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office.

Quantez Sirmons, who lives on Mackinaw Street when not in the Ella Street dormitory, was charged with possession of a firearm on school property then released on bail the next night, according to jail records.

EWC spokeswoman Talia Ashley said the college has a zero-tolerance policy for weapons on campus.

"Our job is to protect the safety of our students, faculty, staff and administration," she said. "... The student has been suspended from college indefinitely and the crime is under investigation by JSO."

School officials alerted police that they had seized the Ruger AR-556 rifle from the dorm, saying Sirmons gave them permission to

enter the room, according to his arrest report. Police then searched the room after securing the assault rifle, which was loaded with one round, finding more ammunition and a spare ammunition clip.

Sirmons has no prior Jacksonville arrest record, according to jail records.

Dan Scanlan

FLAGLER COUNTY Palm Coast raids net drugs, guns

The discovery of multiple guns, drugs and \$54,655 in cash followed raids at two homes and the arrests of three Palm Coast men on weapon and drug possession charges, according to the Flagler County Sheriff's Office.

Shawn Timothy Byrnes, 63, was arrested Feb. 1 on charges of possession of marijuana, hashish and drug paraphernalia, and bailed out the same day, according to jail records. Morgan Michael Byrnes, 27, was arrested the same day on charges of possession of firearms,

possession of hashish and marijuana, and possession of drug paraphernalia, and also was released on bail. Felix Vega was arrested Thursday on charges of possession of controlled substances and drug paraphernalia and remains behind bars on \$5,500 bail, jail records show.

The first two men were arrested after a special investigations unit executed a search warrant at a home on Fariston Lane in Palm Coast following tips to Crime Stoppers of Northeast Florida about suspicious activity there, the Sheriff's Office said. Seven rifles and five handguns were seized with a half pound of cannabis and \$8,433 in cash.

The raid led to information about a third person involved in what the Sheriff's Office called a marijuana distribution ring. A second search warrant executed Thursday at a home on Pine Grove Drive in Palm Coast uncovered about 5 pounds of marijuana, hashish oil and \$46,222, the Sheriff's Office said. Vega was arrested at the scene.

SALE

Continued from B1

spokeswoman Tia Ford said.

She said Curry will respond to the association's letter "and appreciates working with them on issues important to the success of local manufacturers."

A consultant hired by JEA issued a report on Feb. 14 that says that if JEA were sold, the Florida Public Service Commission would take over regulating rates.

The consultant's report says based on the utility's financial outlook and Public Service Commission regulations, it does not appear a private owner of JEA would have any opportunities to seek a rate increase for five to 10 years.

"In fact, it is possible that electric rates could be lower after a sale of the system," says the report by Public Financial Management.

The report does not quantify the rates, however, and says it would take an in-depth analysis to compare future rates under private ownership compared to JEA remaining publicly owned.

A special City Council committee formed to examine the potential sale of JEA will be examining the impact on ratepayers as part of a wide-ranging analysis.

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