School News

HAPPENINGS FROM OUR CLAY COUNTY SCHOOLS

JANUARY 2018 Vol. 6 — Issue 5

Indian Battalion on track for being the 'tip of the spear'

By Lt. Col. (Retired) Richard Hall

KEYSTONE HEIGHTS – It's been a busy school year for the Keystone Heights High School Army JROTC program.

The Indian Battalion Raiders Team has been diligently practicing strenuous events since September 2017 and their dedication paid off at the Regional Raiders Challenge Meet held in Lake Butler on Nov. 4. The team placed first in the Mixed Team competition and qualified them for state competition. The Raiders placed first in two of the five events – the 5K Team Run and the Tire Flip while placing high enough in the Cross-Country Rescue (Litter Carry), the Obstacle Course and the One-Rope Bridge to win the overall mixed competition.

Collectively, these five events encompass about five miles and test physical fitness, strength, agility and endurance. The Raiders typically practice three times a week and run approximately 10 miles a week in addition to practicing flipping tires which weigh several hundred pounds.

This form of strength training builds entire body strength as well as confidence. Several cadets who started the year straining to help lift a tire in a group of five can now flip the tire by themselves. The Regional Champion Raider team is organized and directed by the Cadet Battalion Executive Officer, Cadet Major Riley Tiller, is in his fourth year of the program.

"The opportunities JROTC allows those who take it are truly unique. I've been able to test myself and find new thresholds physically and mentally with the Raider Team and Academic Team. I like to think I've inspired the same change in others," Tiller said.

Recent KHHS Cadet activities include the entire Corps of Cadets attending CPR and First Aid training conducted as a community service by Hallway Training Solutions in August and September 2017. Each cadet completing the training achieved Heart saver First Aid CPR AED certification through the American Heart Association.

Cadets took a field trip to Camp Blanding Joint Training Center in October 2017 where they were greeted by The Adjutant General of Florida and then received a briefing by the aviation crew of a Florida National Guard UH60 Blackhawk helicopter.

The Indian Battalion also participated in a Leadership Reaction Course while at Camp Blanding to practice leadership, problem-solving, and teamwork skills. The

SEE JROTC, 10

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STAFF PHOTO BY KILE BREWER

Orange Park Elementary Media Specialist MaryPat Callihan organizes students from OPE Sunday morning at Oakleaf High School before leaving for the Jacksonville Jaguars game.

Reading Challenge kids treated to Jaguars game

By Kile Brewer
School News

OAKLEAF – The morning of Dec. 3, MaryPat Callihan stood in a parking lot filled with about 800 students from Clay County schools.

Callihan, the Orange Park Elementary School Media Specialist, was in charge of getting every one of those children on a bus and to the Jacksonville Jaguars game as part of the team's Honor Rows program, the second year Honor Rows has given tickets for Callihan's month-long reading challenge. "Last year we got 500 tickets," Callihan said. "They were impressed with our program and this year they gave us 1,600."

Callihan said when the program began eight years ago at her school, they received donated four-ticket packages that would go out to a couple of kids from each school who just went to the game with their families.

Last year she got involved with Honor Rows for the first time and realized that

SEE JAGUARS, 3

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Jaguars

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this is the route that her reading program should follow to allow the most kids the chance to see the game – the more tickets that are available, the more students see that they have a good chance at going to the game if they participate in the reading challenge.

The tickets were awarded to 1,600 children who participated in the reading program, and the more books they read, the more chances they had at being selected as one of the ticket winners. The chosen participants, all from grades 3-6, were split into two loading zones Sunday – one at Fleming Island High School and the one at Oakleaf High where Callihan was working.

After loading the busses and heading to the game, the students sat in the Honor Rows seats where they were shown on the live CBS broadcast during the game. Lunch was provided through the program, in addition to a T-shirt and other merchandise. Even the bus drivers got jerseys to wear for the day and lunch at the stadium, which Callihan noted as being extra special for the drivers, who have to give up their entire Sunday to make the trip to EverBank Field and back.

STAFF PHOTO BY KILE BREWER

Student winners from the annual reading challenge gather at Oakleaf High School Dec. 3 before heading to the Jacksonville Jaguars game as part of the Honor Rows program.

The reading program lasts 30 days and requires students to read books, fill out a questionnaire and submit a slip into a bucket at their school showing that they had finished a book and entered for a chance to win. The reader who tallied up the most books, and the reader who read the most total words were automatic winners, which helped fuel competition and kept the kids interested in striving not only to read books, but to read more than their classmates across the county.

"Not only do they have to read, but they have to show they are understanding the books, and that they are on their reading level," Callihan said. "The children develop strategies to finish the most books and some only read big books to try and get the most words."

The program has been massively successful, with kids at almost every Clay County school reading more than a million words, and some totaling 60-80 books over the course of the 30-day competition. This competitive atmosphere provides students with a platform that encourages them to succeed and achieve goal through incentivizes, such as the Jaguars game. "I think for some of them, they don't believe that they have the ability to do what they can do," Callihan said. "It's so good to see them coming in [the library] every day, read a book, take a test and by the end of the reading challenge they've read over 30 books."

Grammy winner mentors Clay band students

By Kile Brewer
School News

OAKLEAF – It's not every day that students get to learn from someone who has earned one of the top honors in their field, but that's what happened Monday at Oakleaf Junior High.

Jacksonville native and two-time Grammy award winning jazz drummer Ulysses Owens Jr. held a clinic for the Oakleaf Junior High School Jazz Band. While he performed for the students, he also gave them a few pointers to help prepare for upcoming competitions and performances.

"Things like this are incredibly important to me. Jacksonville is still in a place where there's not a lot of professional talent here. Those of us who are connected, and living our dreams need to stay connected here." said Owens, who founded Don't Miss a Beat, an organization that helps youth stay in school through focusing on music and other arts.

School Band Director Michael Summers often brings in clinicians to work with the students to give them new insight into how they can improve. Summers was introduced to Owens through his brother-in-law, Ben Norman, who met Owens at an all-district band event while in their teens.

Over the years, both men kept in touch, even as Owens moved to New York City to attend the Juilliard School and began travelling the world in jazz ensembles. Norman asked Owens to stop by Oakleaf and offer some expertise.

Owens, who was described by The New York Times as an artist "who takes a back seat to no one," spent a small portion of his time wowing students with his drumming prowess. However, he spent the majority of the class working on a few small things that could improve the sound and feeling of the three pieces of music the band performed.

"In jazz, there's a lot of stuff that's on the paper, and a whole lot of stuff that's not on the paper," Owens said. "I'd like to

STAFF PHOTO BY KILE BREWER

Professional jazz drummer Ulysses Owens Jr. helps Oakleaf Junior High School jazz band drummer Nathan Summers with a new technique Monday during a one-day clinic with the school's jazz band.

Ulysses Owens Jr. directs the Oakleaf Junior High School Jazz Band Dec. 11 during a clinic held with the band in preparation for upcoming performances and competitions.

STAFF PHOTOS BY KILE BREWER

Two-time Grammy Award winning jazz drummer Ulysses Owens Jr. performed a drum solo at the end of a clinic held with the Oakleaf Junior High School Jazz Band at the school Dec. 11.

hear a lot more joy in the music."

These may sound like abstracted suggestions – they really are. That is the nature of jazz. The band can play the music note for note perfect, but Owens, through his extensive training and natural gift, took them a step further, where musical precision blends with feeling and becomes something more cohesive and complete.

First off, Owens moved the rhythm section – piano, bass and drums – closer to the band. Though Owens may seem biased, he explained that the rhythm section, especially the drummer, leads the band. The director, he said, is only there to give the drummer what he needs to lead the band through the music.

> **"I've been using a drum set since fourth grade. [Owens] showed me a new rhythm that I couldn't play before. Now that I've tried it, it seems much easier."**
>
> **– Nathan Summers**

The band's drummer, Nathan Summers – the school band director's son – was all ears. The eighth grader has his sights set high in the music world. The younger Summers, a two-time all-state band member, hopes to follow in Owens' footsteps to attend Douglas Anderson School of the Arts in Jacksonville, and pursue a career in music. In November, Summers was selected again to take part in the 2017-18 All-State Middle School Band in Tampa.

"I've been using a drum set since fourth grade," Nathan said. "[Owens] showed me a new rhythm that I couldn't play before. Now that I've tried it, it seems much easier."

Summers' father thinks that several of the band students at Oakleaf Junior could have music in their futures as long as they stick with it and continue to receive help from professionals like Owens.

"He's probably the best, or at least one of the best, drummers to come out of the state of Florida," Michael Summers said. "I want to emphasize that this can be a career for these kids. We have a lot of talented kids that one day could be up there with people like him."

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Youth Challenge Academy graduates new class

By Wesley LeBlanc
School News

ORANGE PARK – Twenty-two weeks ago, Tiffany Colón had no intentions of graduating from high school.

Rather than paying attention to what the teacher was saying, Colón was using class time to sleep. Rather than asking a question about something she didn't understand, she would just give up, as in her mind, it wasn't worth it. She had no appreciation for how hard her teachers worked to keep her engaged, and more importantly, keep her in school, she said.

Because her father's habit of working late, Colón often found herself playing parent for her siblings at home in Clay County. This further detracted Colón's mind from school and instead of doing her homework, she was taking care of her brothers and sisters. No matter how hard her father or her teachers pushed her, Colón could not bring herself to care about school.

Colón was given one last option by her father five and half months ago. That option was the Florida Youth ChalleNGe Academy at Camp Blanding.

In 1991, the Joint Armed Service Committee directed the National Guard to develop a plan to provide education and self-discipline to youth using methods found commonly used in core military training. Two years later, this plan came into fruition and was officially named the ChalleNGe Program. (The NG is capitalized as a reminder of National Guard). Now, more than 20 years later, this program has had 121,000 students graduate across the nation, with the majority of these graduates receiving a high school diploma or GED.

Colón's morning routine drastically changed when she entered the Florida Youth ChalleNGe Academy. Instead of sleeping past the hours that high school starts, Colón was required to wake up at 4 a.m.

"It was really tough at first," Colón said. "I was determined, though."

Two weeks into the program, the academy members were given more time to sleep, having to wake up later in the morning at 5 a.m. instead.

Throughout the program, Colón found herself not only enduring physical trials such as obstacle courses and wall climbing, but also physical fitness regimens similar to those a private might endure in boot camp. Most surprising to Colón, though, was her ability to continue her education through the academy's school credit recovery program.

"They taught us discipline, patience, appreciation, punctuality – if you were five minutes early, you were five minutes late," Colón said, laughing. "All of these values we learned helped me finish my education.

"Now, I'm going to graduate with my class," continued Colón, who graduated from the program Dec. 12 in a ceremony

SEE YOUTH, 7

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Youth

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at the Thrasher Horne Center. "Before this, that never seemed possible."

More than 1,000 guests and friends and families attended the ceremony and were all thrilled to see their cadet graduate from the academy.

After montages of academy videos played, ranging from their take on Stephen King's It to "Camp Van Karaoke," the orchestra pit, previously unseen, began rising from below. With it, nearly 20 academy cadets, stood still as statues. After a shout, not unlike what you might hear in the military, the cadets who have now risen to the seating level began a march. A perfectly-timed cadence between the stomps of the cadets and the shouts of the cadet leading them brought the audience to shouts and cheers.

Shortly after, each platoon of cadets made their way forward in a similar fashion, each sporting their own take on a catchy marching shout. Once seated, the many members of the military present in the audience were introduced. This included the members seated on stage, who each gave a small speech to the audience and cadets. It wasn't until Brig. Gen. Trey Chauncey took the mic that the shouts, hoots and hollers reappeared.

"It is not because you always exceeded but rather, because those around you helping you, you learned how to not be afraid to fail," said Chauncey, whose remarks were greeted with shouts of agreement.

"You learned to pick yourself up and do it again," Chauncey said. Again, the cadets shouted.

"And again," continued Chauncey. Once more, the cadets shouted.

"And if you failed again, you weren't afraid to pick yourself up and do it again," finished Chauncey. This time, he was met with a crescendo of shouts from every cadet in front of him.

As the ceremony proceeded, awards were given, including checks ranging from $100 to $300 for doing the most volunteer work, for having the best marks and more. Scholarships reaching $4000 were given to the cadets that proved they deserved it, and promised to use it moving forward in their college education, a path they might have otherwise never considered. Every cadet, all 158 of them, including Cadet Tiffany Colón, left this ceremony with a high school diploma signed and handed to them by the Clay County School Superintendent Addison Davis.

STAFF PHOTO BY WELSEY LEBLANC

Cadets from the Florida Youth Challenge Academy demonstrate some of the drills to parents and guests at the Dec. 12 graduation ceremony at the Thrasher Horne Center.

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Robotics competition teaches life skills

By Kile Brewer
School News

ORANGE PARK – While the kids may disagree, most adults at the FIRST LEGO League robotics competition would tell you that it's not all about the robots.

While the kids are preparing their projects and completing the research portion of their year's work, the adult sponsors and parents notice that the kids are doing more than playing with LEGOs and learning about science, technology, engineering and math.

"Some of the kids that never fit in anywhere now fit in somewhere," said Leslee Bryan, Clay County District Schools Robotics coordinator. "They learn how to work as a team. They have a home here."

Throughout the process of building and programming their robots, as well as the more intensive and time-consuming research portion of the project, students learn how to identify their individual

STAFF PHOTO BY KILE BREWER

Paterson Elementary School robotics students compete in a qualifying tournament Dec. 13 at the Thrasher Horne Center. The tournament is one of three that was held at the center.

Students from the Thunderbolt Elementary robotics team prepare for head-to-head competition Dec. 13 during the Robo Thrasher One qualifying event that determines which teams will move on to the regional level of competition.

STAFF PHOTOS BY KILE BREWER

Gold-painted plungers were given as trophies to teams winning the top spots overall, as well as some prizes for individual aspects of the team's performance at the end of the Robo Thrasher One qualifying competition at the Thrasher Horne Center Dec. 13.

strengths. The 10-person teams can then use that to assign certain parts of the project to specific team members. They also learn how to work together as a group to overcome challenges and differences of opinion and ultimately get their project done in a way that fulfills the goals of every team member.

"Everybody has to work together," said Paterson Elementary School student James Hanson, 9, who participated in FLL for the first time this year. "I'm gonna do it again. It was kind of fun and kind of challenging at the same time. Sometimes we fight and argue, but we always have to work together to [meet] our goal."

Paterson was one of three Clay County schools, and one of 14 schools that competed Dec. 13 at Robo Thrasher One, the first of three qualifying tournaments for the Northeast Region of FLL to be held at the Thrasher Horne Center. Three teams from each competition will advance, along with teams from other qualifying events throughout the NE Region. Robo Thrasher Two and Three will be held at THC on January 4 and 5 next year.

During the event, teams present their research project to a panel of judges. The project centers around the theme of the year, with this year's theme being water use and conservation.

"It's very real-world," Bryan said. "Teams research a problem, identify what is the problem and what is a solution to that problem. If there is a solution, they will identify whether or not that solution can be implemented in the real world."

Paterson took home the top prize in the research portion of the competition, but didn't quite make the cut to move on to the regional level of competition. However, through their research comparing commercial car washes to car wash fundraisers, they found that car washes actually waste very little water, especially when compared to garden hose types of car wash events. The team will be featured in a national magazine, Carwash Magazine, where the team's coach Jen Seco spoke about their findings throughout their months of research.

"The best part is that they're building public speaking and leadership skills," Seco said. "[FLL] really makes them think critically about 'Where is the problem, and how can I solve it?'"

In addition to their presentation, each team will also compete on the FLL robotics board to round out the competition. The board stays the same year to year, but the goals placed around the tabletop change. Designed to look like a map and built over the top of a grid, the board features 10 tasks all centered around the current year's theme. Teams program robots to either use optical sensors and follow the "roads" on the board, or use math to calculate the distance robots need to travel in various directions to move through each of the tasks.

"The board was more challenging this year," said Kathryn McNeill, 10, also of Paterson. "The missions are further apart. It makes it more fun."

JROTC

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cadets were visited by a representative from the Florida National Guard Public Affairs Office a week before the field trip and shown an award-winning PBS documentary on Camp Blanding's history. The producer of the film discussed the making of the documentary along with the historical significance of Camp Blanding during World War II.

Cadets strive to be scholarly as well as athletic. The Academics Team is practicing using the JROTC provided website. Leadership and academic tests are used to enhance reading comprehension of the cadets. The Drill Team will start after the holidays and provide opportunity for enhancing attention to detail, following directions, and confidence. The KHHS JROTC program is in synch with the School District of Clay County's goal of collaborative learning. The cadets conduct much of their own instruction, provide mentoring to junior cadets, conduct inspections, and function as a military organization with their own chain of command and military staff.

Examples of cadet initiatives include inventorying and issuing uniforms, conducting awards boards, and conducting small group meetings to facilitate collaborative learning. Staff meetings ran by the cadet chain of command are conducted weekly. Special events are planned and supervised by cadets with the instructors in an advisory and support role. The instructor's main purpose is to serve as mentors and role models for the cadets. A large percentage of the upper-class cadets have completed or are pursuing their dual enrollment Associate degrees. As one example, Cadet Lieutenant Colonel Taylor Butler, current cadet battalion commander, is on track to receive an associate's degree prior to high school graduation. She is also enlisted in the U.S. Army under the Delayed Entry Program and will attend Medical Specialist and Airborne training to become a paratrooper next year after high school graduation.

Cadet Lt. Col. Butler, cadet battalion commander, said she is proud of her JROTC experience. "Throughout my four years in the JROTC program, I have seen tremendous growth in all areas. Each year we have labored tirelessly to become more successful and organized, and we are finally beginning to see all of it come together. We are now an accredited program with successful teams heading to state competitions, we volunteer regularly with organizations in our surrounding area, we work alongside surrounding JROTC programs, and we have established good communal relationships. "Most of all, our unit has exemplified teamwork and comradery, uniting us to achieve all we set out to do and anything beyond that. While our work is far from done, I am confident each year we will only find more to refine and even more things to participate in. I am proud to be leading such motivated and hard-working cadets."

School Briefs

Apply for 2018 DAR scholarship

ORANGE PARK – Students who will be graduating in the spring of 2018 are encouraged to apply for a $1,000 Sophia Fleming Scholarship, sponsored by Sophia Fleming Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the America Revolution.

Applicants must be graduating from either the Clay County Public School System, St. Johns Country Day School, or are home schooled. Students are eligible if they are going to attend any post-secondary program of study, including colleges, universities, or Vocational or technical schools. No GPA information is required.

Applicants are requested to write an essay, provide a list of their awards and recognitions and two letters of recommendation. Scholarship applications are due on or before February 23, 2018.

The scholarship documents will be provided to each public high school guidance office in Clay County and St. Johns Country Day School as of January 4, 2018. The instruction sheet and application form provide all of the information a student needs to apply. Forms are also available by clicking on Sophia Fleming Scholarship at http://www.sophiaflemingchapter.org/

The winner will be notified the week of March 27, 2018. Please do not mail applications via certified or registered mail. Each applicant will be notified once his or her application has been received.

Mail the application documents to: Lynda Lewis, Chairman, Sophia Fleming Scholarship Committee, Sophia Fleming Chapter, NSDAR, 316 Scenic Point Lane, Fleming Island, FL 32003.

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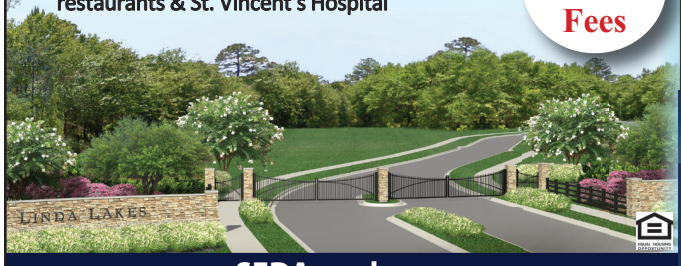
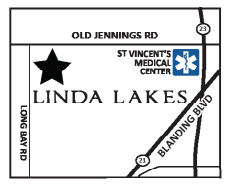


From the upper $200's

(904) 573-6026



Directions: South on Blanding Blvd, west on Old Jennings Rd., 3.5 miles on the left

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www.SEDAnewhomes.com

SEDA Construction Company-CGC020880 *See agent for details-$17,000 special offer applies to Linda Lakes only. *SEDA pays up to $7,000 toward total Closing Costs with SEDA approved lender. $10,000 must be used toward free options and can not be taken off of the sales price. Applies to full priced contracts only written between 1/1/18-1/31/18. This offer is for a limited time only & cannot be combined with any other specials. Price & availability subject to change without notice.

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