

Orange County is celebrating Earth Month throughout all of April. See page 5A.



Apopka swimmer places 23rd in the nation in national swimming competition. See page 1B.



The Apopka Chief



MAIN STREET DAILY NEWS

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Planning board greenlights new Golden Gem Road development

Plan underway to bring road up to city standards

By Teresa Sargeant
Reporter



Photo by Teresa Sargeant

The city is working to widen Golden Gem Road.

The Apopka Planning Commission voted unanimously this week to recommend approval for a new Golden Gem Road subdivision, following discussion about bringing the road up to city standards and how the proposed development would impact the nearby reclaimed water pond.

The April 8 public hearing for Ordinance 3102 focused on changing the zoning for Golden Gem Estates from

County A-1 (Citrus Rural) to Kelly Park Interchange — Mixed-Use (KPI-MU).

The master plan/major development plan outlines a community of 65 single-family detached units on approximately 20 acres located west

of Golden Gem Road and south of Nightshade Grove Lane and Sadler Road.

In addition, the plan proposes almost three acres of open space, including a dog

See DEVELOPMENT Page 4A

Commissioner Moore announces campaign for Apopka Mayor

County commissioner to challenge two-term incumbent Bryan Nelson

By Teresa Sargeant
Reporter



Christine Moore

Orange County District 2 Commissioner Christine Moore announced in an April 7 statement that she will run for Apopka mayor, seeking to unseat two-term incumbent Bryan Nelson.

Moore listed a five-point platform to her campaign: halt any more suburban sprawl; address reclaimed water, sewer and

ing Apopka's numerous infrastructure debacles, lack of City staffing, and insecure financial future," Moore said in her announcement. "I plan increased opportunities for citizen engagement, a revitalized downtown Apopka, and desire to restore joy and civility in the community."

Moore's announcement comes 11 months before the March 2026 city elections, which will also include races for City Council seats 1 and 2. Nelson has not yet announced whether he will seek a third term.

Moore was elected as

See CAMPAIGN Page 5A

Community pushes in new fire truck at Fire Station No. 2

Nearly \$1M truck was customized as upgrade replacing old truck

By Teresa Sargeant
Reporter



Photo by Teresa Sargeant

Community members and firefighters pose in front of Apopka Fire Station No. 2's newest truck, a Rosenbauer Commander, which firefighters had customized as an upgrade over the old truck.

City firefighters at Apopka Fire Station No. 2 welcomed their new nearly \$1 million fire truck with a push-in ceremony, where first responders and community members shoved the vehicle into the station's bay.

The push-in ceremony, which took place Tuesday, April 8, bears a lot of historical significance for those in fire service.

"The push-in ceremony, deeply rooted in the history of the fire service, is not just a tradition but a symbol of our enduring connection to the brave heritage of those

who came before us," a city of Apopka news release said. "It is a powerful reminder of a time when firefighters phys-

ically pushed their equipment into the bay, showcasing their dedication and teamwork. While we may no longer need

to move our equipment by hand, the significance of this

See FIRE TRUCK Page 8A

Apopka City Council approves \$1.3M Southwick Commons agreement



Photo by Teresa Sargeant

Southwick Commons is a multi-family development comprised of 192 units currently under construction at the southeast corner of Alabama Avenue and East Sixth Street at the Apopka City Center.

Some citizens criticize exemption for developer

By Teresa Sargeant
Reporter

The Apopka City Council unanimously approved the four-party multi-family affordable housing developer's agreement for the

school impact fee exemption for Southwick Commons, amounting to \$1,296,192.

The vote took place at the April 2 City Council meeting and puts in place an agreement between the city of Apopka, Southwick Commons LTD, Orange County and the Orange County School Board.

See AGREEMENT Page 3A

City advances Border Lake flood mitigation plans

Officials split on whether completion timeline is realistic

By Teresa Sargeant
Reporter

The Apopka City Council this week discussed the logistics of the flood mitigation solutions for the chain of lakes in the Piedmont-Wekiwa Road/S.R. 436 area, which is the recipient of two grants totaling more than \$6 million.

The short-term solution would include obtaining an emergency permit from Orange County, dredging a pond at the Wekiwa Village

subdivision to help with the upcoming pumping and restoration of original pond volume, and the city setting up sediment controls and retention ponds with geo fabric, concrete blocks and flocculation blocks.

The long-term solution would involve building a pump station that would draw excess water from Border Lake and transfer the water to a yet-to-be expanded retention pond at a wastewater treatment plant.

For the short-term solution, the city of Apopka secured approval from residents for the right of way. The city is still working on getting final approval for

both the long-term and short-term solutions from Lumen, an internet service provider that owns property next to Border Lake.

"They're receptive," Mayor Bryan Nelson said at the City Council meeting on Wednesday, April 2. "They don't see any problem. Obviously, it's a big company and so [it] never, never moves that fast. But we're hoping to get this one wrapped up very soon."

Border Lake will be pumped down about 3 feet, while Lake Jackson McDade and Piedmont lakes will be pumped down between 1 and 2.5 feet. City staff used the funding approved from the

previous council meeting for the pump rentals and fueling.

Once the permit is secured, the city could expect to start pumping within a week at a 24/7 rate. Local residents requested that the city conduct the work 24/7 in order to complete it within three weeks.

Nelson outlined the long-term solution, which included collaborating with Lumen and Utilities Inc. for a midterm solution involving a pump station on the Lumen property.

"What we'll do is end up putting a pump station on the — it would be the east most side of Border Lake, which is still the Lumen property,"

Nelson said. "We would tie it in the midterm project, would be to tie it into the Utilities incline. We've gotten also verbal approval from Utilities Inc, or whatever the new name is, to add right into their pipe. They have a 16-inch pipe that runs from there the Wekiwa area, all the way out to our Cleveland (Street wastewater) plant. So, we'd be able to take that, the water and excess water off Border, put it into that pipe, and run it all the way out to our wastewater plant there at Cleveland."

Later during discussion among the City Council and city staff, Diana Almodovar,

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This week

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Opinion

The Apopka Chief

A weekly newspaper founded in 1923

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Copy Editor Nancy Thomas	Administrative Assistant Debrah Hayden
Publication Coordinator Josué Toruño	

State grant helps city improve water quality

The city has received over \$1 million in funding to replace standard septic tanks with Distributed Wastewater Treatment Systems (DWT), which gives the homeowner 75% of the benefit of sewer for 25% of the cost.

Apopka Mayor



Bryan Nelson

This program is being funded in part by grants from the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and St. Johns Water Management District to remove nitrogen in primary focus areas near our springs.

Between the already permitted DWT systems and signed contracts, the city has over 50 contracts for DWT systems. Our goal is to replace 100 septic systems with a DWT system to help with removing nitrogen from the wastewater.

Another potential problem in effluent from below the septic tank drain field is phosphorus. Dr. Brian Lapointe, a water quality expert with Florida Atlantic University, wants to look at additional treatment options, such as polishing filters to remove phosphorus from the DWT systems.

Although phosphorus is more im-

portant to coastal communities that have salt or brackish water, removing it from fresh water is still a priority. Excess nitrogen and phosphorus can cause eutrophication and the formation of harmful algal blooms that threaten not only human life but also can also destroy fish and wildlife.

Our DWT provider, OnSyte, which has replaced or will replace 50 units in the Wekiva Glen neighborhood has had some initial success with a prototype to remove phosphorus from the effluent.

DEP has grant dollars available for new technologies that remove excess nutrients from wastewater more efficiently. The City of Apopka was awarded a \$75,000 grant under the Harmful Algal Bloom Innovative Technology Project Grant to see what Onsyte could do to remove phosphorus from the wastewater.

We are excited to partner with DEP and OnSyte to look at technologies that not only save the taxpayer money but also improve one of our most precious resources — our water.

Because he lives, all fear is gone

By Mike Gilland

Easter is around the corner, and for many of us, hearing the very term immediately brings to mind such events as egg hunts, Peeps, Reese's eggs (my favorite!), and dressing up in our Sunday best to attend a church service. Some may have attended a sunrise service or two in their lifetime.

For a Christian, while all of these wonderful traditions are both meaningful and fun, a much deeper and profound reason to appreciate this day exists. In fact, the main player in the very meaning of Easter, Jesus Christ, and His willingness to go through the process of the crucifixion is the very essence and root of our faith. Simply stated, that single act is the most important event in all of recorded history.

Now, I am aware that such a statement is saying a lot. But even though many today would not treat the event with as much importance, that doesn't change the facts.

Even more important than the cross itself is the fact that,



Photo by Pisit Heng via Unsplash

three days later, Jesus rose from the dead by the power of God. And THAT event — the resurrection of Christ — is the real story of Easter. It's too bad that the true meaning of this most amazing holiday is sometimes relegated to only bunnies and egg hunts.

More than half a century ago, Gloria and Bill Gaither

penned a song titled "Because He Lives," and that song has become a hymn. In fact, I am convinced that one day, it will be included in hymnals alongside the great hymns of the church.

Not only is the composition full of beauty from a musical standpoint, the lyrics are rich and meaningful. In a few short stanzas, we hear the whole picture of the gospel of Jesus and comprehend its deep meaning.

One of my favorite parts of this song is the chorus, which boldly states that "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow... because He lives, all fear is gone." That is a comforting reality, especially in times like these.

Whatever you are facing, whatever the news this week, there is a truth we can reach for, receive, and hang on to: He lives.

And because He lives, there is a hope, and a peace that passes understanding.

— Mike Gilland is operations manager for the Shepherd Radio, which airs locally on 1270 AM.

HB 5101 threatens OCPS funding

As I discussed last week, we are seeing several education bills moving through the legislature during this session.

One of the issues we are hearing discussed a lot around the state and country is the issue of chronic absenteeism. It has become a growing problem since the pandemic, with students missing significant days of school.

HB 1367 is working to address the issue of reporting as it requires the State Board of Education to establish a statewide attendance policy that defines types of absences and provides guidelines for reporting.

Having a standard reporting approach is the first step to recognizing where improvements need to be made. The bill was unanimously voted out of its last committee stop and will keep moving forward.

I want to mention again HB 5101 that looks to make significant changes to the add-on funding for advanced studies programs like AP, IB, AICE, dual enrollment and Career

Orange County School Board, District 7



Melissa Byrd

and Technical Education programs. The legislation wants to reduce the funding by 50%, which would result in a \$16 million loss for Orange County Public Schools next year.

After listening to the bill sponsor discuss the reasons for the cuts in the budget committee last week, I learned that the concern is that this add-on "bonus" or "incentive" money given to districts is not base student funding that should be paying for the courses. They asked why districts are using this "bonus" money to pay for the majority of the cost of these programs. Where is the base student funding going

that should be paying for these courses?

It is apparent that the bill sponsor does not know that the roughly \$8,000 per student they give districts to offer a complete education does not nearly cover the expenses districts incur delivering those required services. Therefore, districts have to use all available funding to backfill the massive budget shortfalls from the state.

The bottom line is, the consequences of this 50% reduction would result in fewer qualified teachers to teach these courses, less teacher training, increased cost to families to pay test fees and purchase supplies and, biggest of all, limited courses and program options for students.

This is certainly not how we make our Florida students more competitive nationwide and ready for college and career after high school.

If you want to reach out to your legislators, you can find your representatives at FLHouse.gov or FLSenate.gov.



About The Apopka Chief

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Letters to the editor are welcome and encouraged, but they should be signed and include a daytime telephone number, address, or email address for verification. Management reserves the right to edit letters.

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ALL ABOUT APOPKA

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City Clerk.....	407-703-1704
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Code Enforcement.....	407-703-1738
Finance Dept.....	407-703-1725
Fire (non-emerg.).....	407-703-1756
Parks and Rec. Dept.....	407-703-1741
Police Chief.....	407-703-1769
Police (non-emerg.).....	407-703-1771
Job Line.....	407-703-1743
Solid Waste Collect.....	407-703-1731
Street Maintenance.....	407-703-1731
Utility Billing.....	407-703-1727
Medical, fire emergency.....	911
The city of Apopka was chartered in 1882. It is located at 28°30 north latitude and is 150 feet above sea level. Its population is about 48,000 and its total area is more than 30 sq. mi. www.apopka.net	

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Other Area Numbers of Note

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Marco Rubio (Rep.).....	407-254-2573
U.S. Representative	
Daniel Webster (Dist. 11).....	352-241-9220
State Representatives	
Doug Bankson.....	407-476-6787
Carolina Amesty (Dist. 45).....	unknown
State Senators	
Geraldine Thompson (Dist.11).....	407-297-2045
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Christine Moore.....	407-836-7350
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City Council approves residential development for Wyld Oaks

Residents criticize city growth outpacing infrastructure

By Teresa Sargeant
Reporter



Photo by Marshall Tempest

Commissioner Nick Nesta speaks at the City Council meeting.

The Apopka City Council last week unanimously approved a major development plan (MDP) for a development of 54 single-family detached units on 9 acres in the Wyld Oaks neighborhood overlay, but residents brought up concerns surrounding the development, such as school overcrowding, traffic and infrastructure.

The major development plan proposes 4101 Golden Gem Road to go up east of Golden Gem Road and north of the Neighborhood District

Overlay of the Wyld Oaks development.

The project owner is Kelly Park VB Development. The applicant is Kimley-Horn & Associates.

The Neighborhood Overlay District allows at most 198 residential units to be built in one phase. After 4101 Golden Gem Road is built

out, 144 residential units will be left in the Wyld Oaks Neighborhood District Overlay, according to the staff report in the April 2 City Council agenda packet.

The packet also notes that the Wyld Oaks development agreement says a development is being determined based on each district over-

lay's total gross acreage.

The 4101 Golden Gem Road plan will include sidewalks along Golden Gem Road and within the development itself.

Commissioner Nick Nesta asked about any alleyways being part of the Golden Gem Road development and about the green space requirements.

City planner Jean Sanchez said a recent site plan revision will mean there will be no alleyways. As for the green space question, Sanchez said that 4101 Golden Gem Road meets the 20% open space requirement by including a 10-acre open space.

In further discussion with Sanchez, Nesta verified that each phase or overlay district in the Wyld Oaks development will tap into the 10-acre open space.

Sanchez also said that

other Wyld Oaks developments, Kelly Industrial Park and Madison Oaks, have their own amenities to meet their open space stipulations. Kelly Industrial Park already meets Wyld Oaks' 5% open space requirement, but due to the size, the city requested that the industrial park provide its own amenities.

Resident Rod Olsen recommended that the city implement a moratorium to impede or stop future developments until the city improves infrastructure for current developments.

Agreeing with Olsen, resident Sylvester Hall suggested the city focus on proper transportation and school infrastructure before approving new developments.

"Let's just be responsible," Hall said. "We can change as we go. We can im-

prove. All I'm asking you when you bring a developer in, is if the roads need to be widened, whatever it needs to be to make sure we get adequate traffic for our citizens, is that it won't be a traffic nightmare."

Wyld Oaks is a 215-acre mixed-use development currently under construction off the 429 Beltway and the West Kelly Park Road interchange in Apopka. The development will have many amenities intended to accommodate a thriving state and regional population and help alleviate the affordable housing crisis, supporters have said.

The 2024 demand for Wyld Oaks retail was estimated to be about \$1.1 billion, while supply is only \$700 million, leaving a gap of about \$400 million, according to a past Wyld Oaks press release.

Flood plans

Continued from page 1A

city civil engineer, clarified that the excess water won't be pumped directly into the Cleveland Street wastewater plant, but into an expanded retention pond that is yet to be constructed.

The city of Apopka was approved for two grants totaling more than \$6 million for the flood mitigation. The grants are to go toward constructing a permanent stormwater treatment system to cut down flooding and improve water quality for irrigation and aquifer recharge.

The first is a state grant from Apopka Wekiva Springs Region Aquifer Recharge and Flood Protection, which will provide \$2.5 million state funding with a required local match of \$2.5 million. The project this grant will fund is a joint project between Apopka, Orange County,

Seminole County, Florida Department of Transportation, and St. Johns River Management District.

The other grant is the Apopka Wekiva Springs Region Alternative Water Supply and Flood Protection, which is \$3.75 million in federal funding and requires a local match of \$2 million.

Vice Mayor Diane Velazquez asked if the city has the capacity at the wastewater plant to handle the excess water. In response, Nelson said Apopka discussed with Ocoee and Winter Garden representatives about a regional plan to help with water needs and the design phase for the Golden Gem retention pond.

Commissioner Alexander H. Smith asked about the timeline for implementing the pumps.

In response, Nelson confirmed the pumps and piping are already secured.

Commissioner Nick Nesta inquired about the cost of the pumps and monitoring, with the vendor providing both pumps and monitoring services. He also asked whether the timeline is realistic for seeing the long-term solution come to fruition.

"Not to make a pun out of this, but a lot of this seems like a pipe dream of getting it done next year," Nesta said. "I mean, there's almost no, no way that's going to happen next year."

Almodovar said it's a matter of obtaining all of the needed permits and funds in place before construction starts.

"We want to make an effort to have it done next year, definitely," she said.

Agreement

Continued from page 1A

The impact fees are for Orange County Public Schools (OCPS), not the city of Apopka.

The developer sought approval of the developer's agreement for the school impact fee exemption, according to the city staff report in the April 2 City Council agenda packet. OCPS approved the agreement on Feb. 26, according to a staff report in the April 2 City Council agenda.

The agreement is pending approval from the Orange County Board of County Commissioners, which is set to consider it on April 22.

Located at the southeast corner of Alabama Avenue and East Sixth Street, Southwick Commons is a multi-family development comprised of 192 units that was previously approved as an affordable housing development.

Housing that meets or exceeds the definition of "affordable" as defined by Florida Statutes may be subjected to an exemption of all or part of the school impact fees, per the Orange County code.

Before the City Council

voted, residents raised concerns about how the impact fee exemption would affect school funding.

Dr. Phyllis Olmstead suggested there should be a sliding scale based on income level of residents at Southwick Commons, to avoid deficits. She said the agreement may not consider various income levels within the apartment complex.

"I think that there needs to be a sliding scale that if it's 20% needy and the rest regular or high income, that it needs to be sliding scale that only 20% gets waived or 30% gets waived because we can't make a deficit of the education system," she said. "This is ridiculous to waive all the funds going for all the children."

Southwick Commons previously faced an uphill battle in getting greenlit for construction at the Apopka City Center in downtown Apopka.

In 2022, the city rejected the proposed Southwick Commons for the City Center because the development didn't meet the de-

veloper's agreement with Taurus Southern Investments, the City Center developer, and the company that sold the apartment property to Wendover Housing Partners, which builds low-income housing.

The Apopka City Center developer's agreement called for luxury dwellings to attract high-income earners who would have more disposable income for spending at the Apopka City Center.

Wendover then sued the city in late 2022 and won a judgment that said the city could not discriminate on approval of the apartment complex based on its funding source. Wendover had received more than \$40 million from various governmental entities to build the rent-controlled apartments.

Among the issues that the city had was the lack of balconies on the apartments. After discussions with Wendover, 35 of the Southwick Commons apartments will have full-sized balconies and the others will have step-out verandas.

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Orange Blossom Jazz Festival on tap this weekend

Forty-eight jazz band performances to fill two-day event

Staff Reports

The second annual Orange Blossom Jazz Festival will celebrate jazz music and jazz bands with 48 performances over the two-day event, more than double the number of performances in last year's festival.

Organized by the Apopka High School in partnership with the city of Apopka, the Orange Blossom Jazz Festival is scheduled for 9 a. m. to 7 p. m. on Friday, April 11, and 9 a. m. to the final headliner starting at 7 p. m. on Saturday, April 12, at the Apopka Amphitheater.

The Amphitheater is located at the Northwest Recreation Complex, 3710 Jason Dwellley Parkway,

Apopka.

All proceeds will go toward the scholarship fund for the Apopka High Band Summer Music Camp, which will help participating students boost their knowledge and skills as Blue Dart-er Bands performers.

The event will have headliner performances from some of the nation's top college and university jazz ensembles from as far as Tallahassee (Florida State

University) and Jacksonville (University of North Florida), to Central Florida (University of Central Florida) and as far south as Palm Beach and Broward counties.

This year the festival is also teaming up with Full Sail University, which will provide all gear and manpower to the Orange Blossom Jazz Festival by doing the videography, lights, engineering and sound.

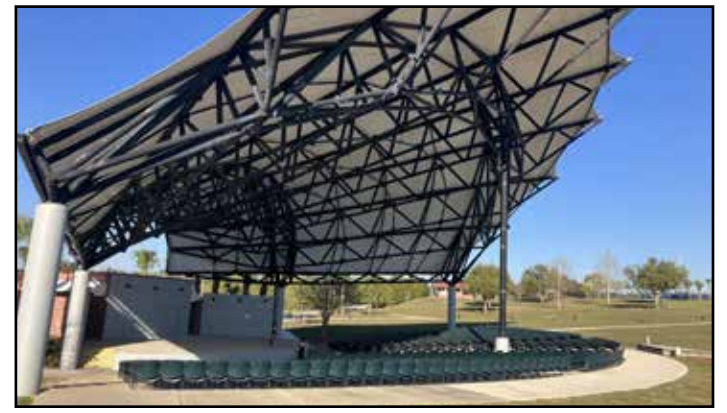


Photo by J.C. Derrick

The Apopka Amphitheater located at 3710 Jason Dwellley Pkwy.

Development

Continued from page 1A

park/walking area, a trail around the stormwater pond, and a seating and gathering space, as well as a connection to Nightshade Grove Lane and principal ingress and egress through Golden Gem Road.

The proposed design standards include a 10-foot minimum required setback for the front porch, 15 feet for the side, 20 feet for the rear, and a 1,300 square-foot minimum living area.

The project will encompass a 30% design for Golden Gem Road's northern portion.

According to Geoffrey Summitt, project applicant and founder of G.L. Summitt Engineering, the Golden Gem Estates development

is aiming for infrastructure completion by the end of this year, with sales projections uncertain.

Planning Commission member Robert Ryan asked about the timeline for bringing Golden Gem Road up to city standards. City planner Jean Sanchez replied by saying that the design for the northern portion of Golden Gem Road is underway, but the construction date hasn't been determined yet.

"We're still on the design," Sanchez said. "It's undergoing design right now, even though we haven't taken over the jurisdiction yet, so we're at 30% design. I don't have the commencement for construction of the actual road yet to bring the northern

part to city standards."

Sanchez further clarified that the design fund for Golden Gem Road comes from a pioneering agreement, but construction funding is not yet available.

Commission member Ryan also questioned the impact of Golden Gem Estates' development on the reclaimed 250-million-gallon reclaimed water pond, which the state recently cited for violations.

City engineer Vladimir Simonovski said that the Golden Gem Estates development will not impact the reclaimed water system.

"The wastewater collection will continue as planned. The water distribution will continue as planned. The re-

claimed water is still, there's a piping system that goes all the way to the north, to my knowledge, to Kelly Park Road, actually, and even further," Simonovski said. "So, even without that facility being in place right now, the reclaimed water can be distributed to the new developments."

Commission member Ryan expressed concern to Summitt about how Golden Gem Road is currently not a safe infrastructure for Golden Gem Estates development. Summitt acknowledged that in the seven years he has attended Apopka planning and city council meetings, Golden Gem Road has been brought up as an issue regarding all the projects along that

infrastructure.

Summitt said he believes the issue is getting Orange County to work with the city; the county hasn't been paying attention to Golden Gem Road because the development there lies within the city's jurisdiction.

In further discussion, Summitt said the city is earning revenue from Golden Gem Road by way of transportation impact fees for developments occurring on that road. Those impact fees go into the city's capital improvement program to fund the construction projects.

"There's the catch-22, right? The county has no interest in planning to get the road to the city, and the city's collecting the money," Sum-

mitt said. "The city wasn't able to do anything because the road control was all that was out here, and it was ambiguous, and nobody knew what was going to happen. But... now that we know that the city is going to take it, you can actually put a plan in motion to get it resolved, and that's what we're trying to do."

The City Council will hold the first reading of Ordinance No. 3102 and master plan/major development plan at its May 7 meeting, which begins at 1:30 p. m. A second reading and adoption of the ordinance will take place May 21. Both City Council meetings will take place at Apopka City Hall, 120 E. Main St., Apopka.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Nancy Pilat
1939-2025

Nancy Irene Pilat, a beloved mother, grandmother and great grandmother passed away on March 27th, 2025 at the age of 85. She was born in Orlando, FL on October 14th 1939. She was a lifelong resident of Apopka, Florida.

Nancy Graduated Apopka High school, Class of 1957. She was a member of the drum majorettes, Beta club and Annual Staff. After graduation she attended Florida Southern College for awhile. She enjoyed competitive swimming and waterskiing in her free time.

Nancy owned Hugo Pilat Florist in Apopka for many years that she took over from her parents Hugo and Aubrey Pilat. Hugo Pilat Florist was opened in 1956 as the first flower shop in Apopka, Florida. She especially loved spending time at New Smyrna Beach with family and friends. She leaves behind a legacy of love and laughter, and will be deeply missed by all who knew her.

Nancy is survived by her children Raymond Thompson Jr and Michelle Stutzman, grandchildren Matt Thompson Brittney McCord, Heather Bitter, Hannah Russamano, Jessica Cox, Rebekah Thompson and Brooke Cox; 16 great grandchildren, as well as her first cousin Danny Wallace. Nancy I Pilat was laid to rest with her parents in Edgewood cemetery in Apopka on April 2, 2025. She will forever be in our hearts.



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Orange County to celebrate Earth all month long

Earth Month 2025 is packed with celebrations, classes

By Teresa Sargeant
Reporter

Orange County will celebrate Earth Month throughout April to honor the planet, including several activities planned for Apopka.

Earth Month 2025 events and activities allow people opportunities to learn more about and adopt more eco-friendly habits as well as emphasize the countywide conservation and environmental efforts.

Scheduled activities include Earth Day celebrations, eco-tours and Adopt-A-Tree. University of Florida Orange County Extension Office (UF/IFAS) is offering various classes and workshops where attendees can learn various skills such as vegetable gardening, how to grow oyster mushrooms and farming backyard chickens.

In Apopka, two Earth Month events will take place,

both at Magnolia Park. Alligator Arts and Crafts 11 a.m. – 3 p.m. from April 20 to 26. Then there will be an Earth Day celebration 11–11:45 a.m. on April 22. On the earth day celebration, attendees will take a walking tour around Lake Apopka and learn about the natural habitat that surrounds the lake.

“This April, we’re not just celebrating Earth Day,” Orange County Mayor Jerry L. Demings said in a video on the Orange County Earth Month web page. “We’re dedicating the entire month to educating our community about the vital work Orange County is doing to preserve and conserve our natural resources. By working together, we can ensure Orange County continues to be a vibrant, healthy and thriving place for all residents to live, work and visit.”

For Earth Month, Demings recommended that people find new means of transportation with the county’s various initiatives, such as the Accelerated Transporta-



Photo by Teresa Sargeant

Orange County is celebrating Earth Month during of April with classes and events, including two scheduled in Apopka’s Magnolia Park: Alligator Arts and Crafts from April 20 to 26, then an Earth Day celebration on April 22.

tion Safety Program, Vision Zero, micro mobility and more.

“These options take cars off of our roads while making our communities safer

and more sustainable,” Demings said.

Go to ocfl.net/Earth-Month for more information and a complete schedule of events.



Photo by Teresa Sargeant

Magnolia Park borders Lake Apopka (pictured).



Photo by Teresa Sargeant

One amenity at Magnolia Park in Apopka is the Eco Education Center, where visitors can learn about the local wildlife and Lake Apopka’s history.

Campaign

Continued from page 1A

District 2 commissioner in 2018 after serving from 2009 to 2018 on the Orange County School Board. She has served as vice-chair of the Orange County Board of County Commissioners, Orange County School Board, and will become chair of MetroPlan Orlando.

In her announcement, Moore touted her work on a \$125 million septic-to-sew-

er program for 2,000 homes to improve water quality and preserve Wekiwa Springs. Since then, 500 homes have switched to sewer in this initiative.

Moore also cited her work for a short-term solution for the Border Lake flooding in the Piedmont-Wekiwa Road/S.R. 436 area, and a push for improvements in downtown Apop-

ka that brought about way-finding signage, the Apopka skate park and pump track, and Downtown Area Trail.

Moore voted to fund the Accelerated Transportation Safety Program, an Orange County initiative focused on improving pedestrian safety by kicking off safety, sidewalk, lighting, and transit projects. The program resulted in the construction of

new sidewalks in older unincorporated Apopka neighborhoods, Apopka streets getting lighting, and the installation of four-way stops at intersections.

She has also helped start a neighborhood leader program, bringing together independent groups to clean up corridors, mount family events and curate community murals, according to her

announcement.

As Orange County School Board member for District 7, which encompasses Apopka, Moore said she oversaw the construction of 18 new schools in one decade. They include Apopka, Clay Springs, Dream Lake, Lovell, Phillis Wheatley, Rock Springs and Zellwood elementary schools; and Apopka Memorial Mid-

dle School.

A 35-year resident of Apopka, Moore has been a professional musician, music instructor and real estate investor. She is the mother of two adult children and grandmother of four.

Moore also helped Joe Kilsheimer mount a successful campaign to defeat long-time Apopka Mayor John Land in 2014.



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Tick season shifts into full gear — are you ready?



DEAR PAW'S CORNER: My dog "Happy" and I went hiking this weekend, and when we got back to the car, I did the usual check for bugs and burrs on his long coat. I was shocked to find 12 tiny ticks clinging to his fur. I brushed them off and found five more scurrying around my boot laces. These are baby ticks, right? Should I be worried about tick bites for both of us? — Karl M., Roanoke, Virginia

DEAR KARL: You should continue to be vigilant over the next few days, but don't worry too much — un-

less Happy shows signs of illness. Doing a "tick check" after each trip outdoors is important, and you did exactly what you needed to do.

Over the next few days, brush through Happy's coat frequently to dislodge any additional ticks. Newly hatched ticks are indeed tiny and hard to see. Run your hand through Happy's coat so that you can check his skin for visible bites or lodged ticks. If you notice a bull's-eye rash around an area, contact the veterinarian.

If you haven't treated your hiking boots or clothing with permethrin yet, now is the time

to do so. Spray the treatment outside, away from Happy or any other animal, and do not let Happy near those clothes until they have dried completely. The permethrin will stay effective through a few washes.

To keep ticks out of the house, follow similar procedures to flea prevention. Give Happy a regular flea and tick preventative, vacuum and mop the house regularly, and terminate any ticks you find.

Send your tips, comments or questions to ask@pawscorner.com.

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Annual Race Exhibition set for Saturday

Free event to feature car show, activities
Staff Reports



Courtesy of Classic Mazda

Classic Mazda will showcase two four-rotor Mazda prototypes from the company's Heritage Collection at the 17th Annual Race Exhibition on Saturday.

The 767B and RX-792P will be among the vehicles on display at the annual event, which will run 5-8 p. m. at 1983 N. Semoran Blvd. in Orlando.

The Race Exhibi-

An MX-5 Cup racecar on display at the 2024 Race Exhibition at Classic Mazda.

tion will also feature a car show, an MX-5 Cup car signing, Hot Wheels racing and a meet-and-greet with the BSI Racing team, plus a racing simulator, photo booth and food trucks. The event is free.

Foliage Sertoma Club announces Service to Mankind honorees

Local selection will be considered for national honor

Staff Reports

The Foliage Sertoma Club of Apopka has announced the honorees the club is recognizing for their dedication to community service in the Apopka area.

Honorees will be recognized at the annual Service to Mankind Dinner, set for 5:30-7:30 p. m. on April 29 at the Fran Carlton Center, 11 N. Forest Ave., Apopka.

"Our Service To Mankind dinner is truly a community affair," Wes Dumey, Foliage Sertoma president, said in a statement. "In addition to honoring great people doing wonderful volunteerism, Wekiva High School Culinary class creates the delicious meal and the Apopka High School Beta Club serves the guests. Our club members present the stories about each special nominee and the mayor and I announce our annual winner. We hope a lot of folks will come join us."

Following the footsteps of the



Francina Boykin (second from right) is the recipient of the Foliage Sertoma Club of Apopka's Service to Mankind Award in April 2024. With her are (l to r) Pat McGuffin (chairman of the board), Foliage Sertoma Club President Lorena Potter, and member, Mayor Bryan Nelson.

national Sertoma, Inc., each year for five years, the Foliage Sertoma Club of Apopka has asked the public to nominate fellow citizens who have served selflessly with little recognition.

"Although each nominee is worthy in their own way for impacting our Apopka community, the national award is based on specific

guidelines which include considerations about their service for the past year," a Foliage Sertoma Club press release stated. "Additionally, the number impacted and the tenure that they have served."

The club's Service to Mankind Committee evaluates the nominations and chooses one to submit on behalf of Apopka to the national

Sertoma organization.

In addition to the April 29 dinner, the honoree will ride in the annual Christmas parade and is given \$250 for donating to the cause of choice at a Saturday Sounds concert this May.

Dinner tickets are \$25 each and are available on the donate link at foliagesertoma.org. The club recommends website visitors leaving a name and number of guests in the comments.

The 51-year-old Foliage Sertoma Club organizes the annual Apopka Christmas Parade, scheduled this year for Dec. 13, and supports community programs with sponsorships and volunteer work.

The 2025 Sertoma Service to Mankind Honorees

Janice Dafeldecker — Clay Springs Elementary School crossing guard and Good News Club Youth Program

David Durre — Sheeler Oaks homeowners association leadership and community cleanup projects

Linda Lee — Farmworker who conducts ongoing pesticide safety education

Mike MacWithey — Apopka Youth high school sports for 40 years and Robotics sponsor who has impacted generations of local families

Emmanuel Sosa — Apopka police officer who established a registry of local special needs individuals

Othelius Swift — New Hope Missionary Baptist Church food and clothing pantry volunteer and PTA programs for Phillis Wheatley Elementary School

Pam Welker — An Orange County corridor chief volunteer for the Sheeler area who created the youth community garden and built benches for parks

Linus Adah Wodi, MD — AdventHealth Apopka cardiovascular disease physician who was instrumental in supporting educational programs and inclusive community care for heart disease prevention

Bishop Johnnie Wright — Apopka's First John Holiness Church pastor who is also the caretaker and restorer of the Historical Memorial Garden Cemetery on South Marvin Zanders Avenue in Apopka

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A MINECRAFT MOVIE (PG) 11:00; 12:30*; 1:30; 4:00; 7:00; 7:30; 10:20; 10:50	A WORKING MAN (R) 12:20; 3:40; 6:40; 9:40	NOTE Single Asterisk * Fri & Sun Only Double Asterisks ** Sat Only
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DISNEY'S SNOW WHITE (PG) 11:10**; 11:20	THE KING OF KINGS (PG) 1:10; 4:10; 7:10; 10:10	

King Crossword Answers

B	L	A	H		P	E	W		A	Q	U	A	
B	O	R	A		A	T	E		F	U	R	S	
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The Crossword Puzzle is found on page 4B

SUDOKU PUZZLE

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

SUDOKU ANSWERS: PAGE 4B

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦ Moderate ♦♦ Challenging ♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

			6			3	7	2
		2				1	8	6
		6			8			
9			1	7			3	5
	8				5			9
		1	9		6	2		7
	2			1		7		
6	5	3	8		7		2	1
	1			6	4	9	5	

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Nonprofit to show how it rehabs birds of prey

Program is on April 17 at Harry P. Leu Gardens

Staff reports

Avian Reconditioning Center (ARC) representatives will demonstrate in a program how the Apopka nonprofit rehabilitates sick and injured birds of prey and introduce four less common raptors.

Hosted by the Orange Audubon Society, the program will take place at 7 p. m. on April 17 at Harry P. Leu Gardens, 1920 North Forest Ave., Orlando, in the Camellia Room. The event is free, and no reservations required. The program is suitable for children and all ages.

Situated on 10 acres of land on West Lester Road in Apopka, the ARC is a rehabilitation site for injured or sick birds of prey, also known as raptors, as well as an educational facility for visitors. Using falconry techniques, staff and volunteers assess a raptor's odds of wildlife survival post-recovery and to train young birds to hunt.

Human and natural risks such as encounters with electric lines and poisoning endanger raptors, according to a press release.

Call 407-637-2525 for more information.

Fire truck

Continued from page 1A



Photo by Teresa Sargeant

Apopka Fire Chief Wil Rivera-Sanchez addresses the crowd at the push-in ceremony.

tradition remains strong in our commitment to service.”

The cost for the Fire Station No. 2's new Rosenbauer Commander covers both the truck itself and the equipment stocking it. The new vehicle's upgraded capabilities include pumping up to 2,000 gallons of water per minute, compared to its older counterpart's 1,500 gallons. The new truck also has 1,000-gallon water reserve compared to the previous one's 750 gallons.

The new truck features advanced safety technologies, such as a double particulate filter to reduce carcinogenic contaminants in the cab.

The truck has one driver, a lieutenant and two firefighters, totaling four people.

The old truck, a 13-year-old Rosenbauer Commander, will be used as a reserve apparatus, serving as a backup when the new truck

needs servicing, according to Apopka Fire Chief Wil Rivera-Sanchez.

The Commander is a customizable chassis model offered by Rosenbauer, a manufacturer of fire safety equipment with 14 locations. A group of Apopka firefighters conceived the design based on what the fire station needed for their new apparatus, then traveled to a Rosenbauer site in South Dakota to ensure that everything was customized to the city of Apopka's needs.

The community is excited about the new truck, and the push-in ceremony is a symbol of their support, Rivera-Sanchez said.

“This is awesome,” he said. “This is obviously the community spirit. They are fully behind the fire department. We're fully behind our community and unifying both and sharing this mo-



Photo by Teresa Sargeant

Firefighters and community members push Apopka Fire Station No. 2's new fire truck into the station's bay at the April 8 push-in ceremony.

ment is very special to us.”

Marco Dominguez, an Apopka resident, said he attended the push-in ceremony to support the firefighters. He didn't push the fire truck, but his nephew Aaron Brisson did.

Dominguez highlighted the importance of community unity and mutual support for first responders. He brings the firefighters food and participates in activities they host. His son, Caleb Dominguez, is an honorary Apopka firefighter.

“We're a community as a whole, and I think when we have first responders in the community that work together, well, in a lot of areas, we won't fall down,” Marco Dominguez said. “We talk about working together and not falling down and encourage each other. They do so much for us, yes, so we also pray for them. We try to do



Photo by Teresa Sargeant

Participants finish the push-in.

whatever we could do in that capacity.”

Dominguez said he has never attended a fire truck push-in ceremony before, which he learned about online.

“This is actually the first one in Apopka,” he said. “I know other places, they've had them, but this was the first one. That's why it was important also to come support it.”

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Join Lake Apopka Natural Gas District in Celebrating National Safe Digging Month

April is National Safe Digging Month, a nationwide initiative dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of safe digging that can prevent unnecessary damage to underground utility lines. At Lake Apopka Natural Gas District (LANGD), safety is at the heart of everything we do, and we are proud to keep our communities safe and informed by spreading awareness of the importance of practicing safe digging.



Contacting Sunshine 811 is free and legally required before starting any digging project in Florida. For more information, please contact Lake Apopka Natural Gas District main office at (407) 656-2734.

Spring is here and for many it's the perfect time of year for home improvement projects. Whether you're landscaping, installing a new fence, or breaking ground on a larger project, one crucial step should never be overlooked: calling 811 before you dig.

Why Call 811? In the United States, an underground utility line is damaged, on average, every six minutes. Striking a buried gas, water, or electrical line can cause service disruptions, costly repairs, or even serious injury. Fortunately, a simple call to 811

or an online request at Sunshine811.com can help prevent these concerns. The process is easy, free, and required by law in Florida.

Safe Digging Tips
To ensure your next project is both safe and efficient, keep these key tips in mind:

1. Plan Your Project: Before contacting Sunshine 811, gather specific information about your digging project, such as your address, type of project, timeline and more.

2. Contact Sunshine 811: Once you have all project information ready, contact Sunshine 811 online at Sunshine811.com or by phone at 811.

3. Wait the Required Time: After you submit a ticket, member utility operators have two full business days to mark the location of

underground facilities on your property.

4. Confirm Utility Responses: Follow the progress of each member utility by viewing the positive response codes they use to explain your dig site.

5. Confirm the Marks: Once the two full business days have passed, confirm that all member utility companies have responded to your ticket.

6. Dig with Care: Now that the buried facilities on your property have been marked or cleared, it's time to start digging!

For additional information, visit Sunshine811.com/6-steps-to-safe-digging.

A Commitment to Safety and Community

Beyond Safe Digging Month, LANGD is committed to protecting our

customers, contractors, and community members year-round. As a trusted energy provider for over 65 years, we continue to promote safety best practices while delivering safe, affordable, and reliable natural gas to homes and businesses in Apopka, Clermont, Winter Garden, and surrounding areas.

This National Safe Digging Month and beyond, join LANGD and Sunshine 811 in making safety a priority. For more information about natural gas services, safety tips, and how LANGD can support your energy needs, visit www.langd.org or contact our team at (407) 656-2734 or EnergyChoice@langd.org.

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Apopka swimmer takes 23rd in national competition

Keira Druck swam 5 kilometers in open water in just over an hour

By Marshall Tempest
Reporter

Keira Druck had never swum an open water race before, but that didn't stop her from diving in with some of the nation's best at a recent

competition. After more than an hour in the water at Nathan Benderson Park in Sarasota, she looked at her time and couldn't believe what she had done.

"Finishing 23rd in the nation and fifth in the state was shocking," Druck said. "The fact that I did so well and placed so high is honestly crazy to me."

Last month, Druck, a 13-year-old Wolf Lake Middle School eighth grader,

qualified for the Open Water Junior National Championship because of her 17:29:47 one-mile swim at the Florida Age Group Championships on March 6 in Ocala. She said that when she first found out she qualified for the open water championship, she was excited but nervous because of her lack of experience in open water.

"My immediate reaction after I saw my time was just happy because I knew

I dropped time but had no idea I had achieved so much with my new time."

Druck's nervousness was also fueled by the distance. Going into the Florida Age Group Championships, she had only swum a 1,650-yard race once before. She smashed her previous personal best by 45 seconds.

"I knew I was going to do well no matter what time I got," she said. "I had never expected to have that good of

a time."

Druck is a member of the Patriot Aquatics swim team and would look at the record board every day, wondering if she would ever make it up there. With a time of 17:29:47 in the one-mile swim at the Florida Age Group Championships, Druck broke a team record that had stood for more than a decade.

"Breaking a record that

See **DRUCK** Page 2B



Courtesy of Kristin Herman-Druck
Keira Druck is a 13-year-old Wolf Lake Middle eighth grader.

Apopka softball starts winning streak after falling to Horizon

Mia Aeschilman tosses shutout in return from injury

By Marshall Tempest
Reporter

The Blue Darter softball team bounced back after losing to No. 34 Horizon last week, posting wins over Olympia, Evans and Cornerstone Charter Academy this week. The team went 3-1 in the Metro Conference Tournament and carries a three-game winning streak into the home stretch of its regular season schedule.

Apopka vs. Olympia (20-0)

The result of this game was a forgone conclusion after the Blue Darters opened with a nine-run first inning. The Blue Darters tamed Olympia Titans at the plate, giving up just two hits and tossing a shutout.

Apopka scored nine runs in the first inning, two in the second, three in the fourth and six in the fifth.

The nine runs in the first inning came on a two-run home run from Taylor Smith, an RBI single from Alicia Lopez, a two-run Olympia fielding error, a dropped third strike, a Hagan Mcgatlin RBI groundout, another Olympia

fielding error, and finally, a double by Sydney Bartkin to cap off the big rally.

The two runs in the second came from a fielding error by Olympia to send in the first run, followed by a bases-loaded walk. The runs in the fourth inning started with a double by Shylah Pino that sent in two runs. Smith followed up with a sacrifice fly that sent in a third run to put Apopka up 14-0.

In the fifth inning, Apopka closed out the game with six more runs. The Titan's fielding continued falling apart as two more errors allowed three runs to score. Braylyn Pirillo smacked a line drive double to center field to send in two more runs and then advanced to third before finding herself at home plate on a wild pitch to bring in the 20th run of the game.

Pirillo, Smith and Lopez stood out at the plate in the overwhelming victory. Pirillo went 2-for-2 with two runs, five RBIs and two doubles. Smith went 1-for-3 at the plate, collecting two runs, three RBIs, one home run and one stolen base. Lopez went 1-for-1 with two runs, one RBI and three stolen bases.

The Apopka bullpen pitched another shutout in

See **SOFTBALL** Page 3B



Photo by Marshall Tempest

Mia Aeschilman made her first appearance on the mound this season in Apopka's 16-0 win over Evans and tossed a two-hit shutout.

Apopka baseball pushes to finish regular season strong

7A District 4

Tournament starts next week

By Marshall Tempest
Reporter

The Apopka baseball team split their first two games this week against University High School and Horizon, following a big loss to No. 10-ranked Winter Park. This week after beating University and falling to Horizon, Apopka played their final regular-season game against St. Cloud after press time.

Apopka vs. Winter Park

The Blue Darters were run-ruled for the first time this season last week when they fell 10-0 in five innings to the Winter Park Wildcats, who are ranked 10th in the state. The loss snapped Apopka's four-game winning streak coming out of spring break.

Head coach Bobby Brewer said the Blue Darters are a better team than they showed.

"The score was not any indication of what kind of ball club we are," he said. "We just didn't play well. It was the worst game we have played all year long. I don't know what was wrong with



Photo by Marshall Tempest

Apopka's Jez Hamrick is batting .292 this season and has collected 14 hits, 11 runs, 14 RBIs and one double in 48 at-bats.

us, but, you know, we were just out of sync, and everything just wasn't working for us."

The Wildcats scored two runs in the first inning, two in the third inning and six in the fourth inning to break open the game. The Blue Darters couldn't bring in any runs but tallied five hits in the game, leaving six runners on base. Four Apopka players collected hits in this game: Nico Posluszny, Collin VanFleet, Ty Livingston and Aiden Rieli.

Apopka made three errors on defense, but the team's bigger problem was pitching. Wyatt Jagers

See **BASEBALL** Page 3B

Emotional victory brings Wekiva 2025 Tidal Wave Cup

Boys defeat Bishop Moore in first round of district tournament

By Marshall Tempest
Reporter

The Wekiva boys and girls water polo teams defeated the Apopka boys and girls water polo teams to take home the Tidal Wave Cup for the 2025 season. The Tidal Wave Cup also served as a night of memory for the late coach Markeith Williams, who started the Tidal Wave Cup and died Tuesday, March 29, after a 15-month battle following a stroke.

"This win means everything," girls head coach Caitlyn Bennet said after the win. "This is a huge encouragement for all of us, our players, and their families. It's something we've wanted for a long time, and now we finally get to bring that trophy back home."

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Photo by Marshall Tempest

Both the Wekiva water polo teams brought home the 2025 Tidal Wave Cup when they defeated Apopka in their final regular season game on Thursday, April 3.

Apopka girls and boys water polo fall in Tidal Wave Cup battle

The Blue Darters prepare for the district tournament

By Marshall Tempest
Reporter

In their annual Tidal Wave Cup, the Apopka boys and girls water polo teams suffered tough losses against cross-town rivals the Wekiva Mustangs last week.

Girls

The girls water polo team was on a good run coming into the Tidal Wave Cup, sitting at 8-11 and ranked 36th in Florida. They were 5-1 in their last six games, falling 11-1 to No. 15 Olympia and beating Colonial 13-6, No. 39 Lyman 6-4, No. 30 Gainesville 4-3, No. 38 Wekiva 9-8 OT and No. 41 Venice 13-9.

The game started rough for Apopka, as Wekiva quick-



Photo by Marshall Tempest

An Apopka water polo player rises out of the water trying to disrupt a shot from a Wekiva shooter on Thursday, April 3.

ly got out in front 3-1 only halfway through the first period. The Blue Darters did well to keep to their game plan of ball movement and spreading

out wide to create gaps in the Wekiva defense, which led to them to tying the game up at

See **AHS** Page 4B

Watch out for Gators while you're flyin' over the the water



GOIN' FISHIN'

Jim Keck
Correspondent

Hello Folks,
We finally got some rain but we still need a lot more. We've had some hot days lately, and I'm glad we've got some cooler weather on the way. The fishin' has been doin' pretty good in most of our lakes here of late.
We have a full moon

this weekend, and if you want to catch some panfish, this would be the weekend to go get a cooler full.

Lake Kissimmee has been on fire, and some folks are gettin' their limit of bluegills and shellcrackers. Most of those fish are bein' caught on red worms. You can catch 'em on crickets and grass-shrimp, too. Your limit of bluegill, shellcrackers, warmouth, and redbreast is 50 per day.

You can only have two days of these panfish in your possession. There is no size limit on panfish, but a good size panfish is bigger than

the palm of your hand.

I reported last week that some anglers are gettin' their limit of panfish in Lake Kissimmee by 9:30 or 10:00 a. m. Most of the panfish are bein' caught in the lily pads in Lake Kissimmee.

If you go panfishin' over the weekend, make sure you take along a cooler with lots of ice to keep the bluegills cool. You also want to take a towel along to hold those slimy fish while you get the hook out of their mouth. You see, when bluegills spawn they give off an oil, and they can be very hard to hold onto just gettin' the hook out of

their mouth. I've seen this happen on other lakes in our area. Some bluegills spawn just off-shore in about 3 to 5 feet of water, and you can find 'em by lookin' for a slick spot on top of the water. You can also smell 'em when you really get on 'em.

They are catchin' limits of bluegills and shellcrackers in Lake Okeechobee, too. I would say just generally speakin', now would be a good time to catch some panfish, and I'm sure that in other lakes in our area, folks have been producin' their limits of bluegills, as well.

The bass fishin' has

been good in most of the lakes around the area. The Harris Chain has been hot for catchin' bass. There was a tournament over the weekend, sponsored by Holiday Marine. It's called "King of the Swamp" or "King of The Harris Chain." Congrats to Kennie Steverson and Rick Miller on their win. They brought five bass to the scales that weighed in at 24.40 pounds. Good goin', you guys, on your win. This was the second annual "King of the Harris Chain Bass Tournament."

Our friend Bobby Bakewell caught over 20

pounds of bass, but he had to release 'em because he couldn't make it back to the weigh-in. Bobby sheared the prop on his boat because he thinks he probably hit a gator. The good news is that Bobby and his partner weren't hurt in the encounter.

Well, that's it for this week. It's gonna be a good weekend to go fishin'. Get the family in the boat or fish from the bank, and... let's go fishin'!

Tip of the week: Bluegills spawnin'!

SAVE A FEW AND GOOD LUCK!

WHS

Continued from page 1B



Photo by Marshall Tempest

A Wekiva player drives toward the Apopka goal for a one-one opportunity with Apopka's goalie Travis Novak.



Photo by Marshall Tempest

Wekiva's Ali Thomas scores a goal on Apopka's goalie Katherine Berens during the 2025 Tidal Wave Cup.

Girls

Bennet said the win was the first time Wekiva had beaten Apopka since she took over the program after Williams' accident.

"We really wanted to win for Markeith," Bennet said. "His family was here today, so it means everything to us. A lot of my girls are seniors, and they've played better than I've ever seen today."

The Mustangs took home the win in spectacular fashion, scoring a Hail Mary goal in the final two seconds of the game. The game was back-and-forth throughout, with Apopka and Wekiva taking turns outscoring each other.

"I mean, my heart rate is always up at games, but playing against Apopka and being tied like that, I was just hoping that we could go into overtime," Bennet said. "We

had our main scorer, Ali Thomas, take up a different position in the back, and she scored a fantastic goal. So — I guess it worked."

Apopka and Wekiva both scored three goals apiece in the first period. Wekiva outscored Apopka 3-1 in the second period, leading 6-4 heading into the third. The Blue Darters bounced back in the third, outscoring the Mustangs 4-2, tying the game up at 8-8 going into the final period. The Mustangs outscored Apopka 3-2 in the fourth period to win 11-10.

Leading the Mustangs in the win was Ali Thomas and Della Lucas. Thomas scored five of the team's 11 goals with a 35.7 shooting percentage. Lucas scored four of the team's goals with a 66.7 shooting percentage while collecting one steal.

Wekiva's goalkeeper, Ema Thomas, had a fantastic night in the cage. Ema collected 11 saves and allowed 10 goals on 21 shots on goal for a 52.3 save percentage.

After winning the 2025 Tidal Wave Cup, the girls prepared for the district tournament. There are just three schools in Wekiva's district: Winter Park, Bishop Moore and Wekiva. Wekiva is entering the tournament with a 9-12 record while being ranked 35th in the state and 77th in the nation. Winter Park is 19-3 and ranked third in the state and third nationally heading into the district tournament. Bishop Moore is 11-3, ranked 19th in the state and 37th in the nation.

Winter Park is the first seed and faced off against Edgewater in the first round defeating them 18-2. Bishop Moore and

Wekiva faced off in the first round of the tournament. In Wekiva's matchup with Bishop Moore earlier this season, the Mustangs fell 18-10.

The winner of Wekiva and Bishop Moore will face Winter Park in the district championship. The district champion will secure an automatic bid into the state championship tournament.

The district tournament started Tuesday, April 8, at Bishop Moore, which defeated Wekiva to end the Mustangs' season.

Boys

The boys started way behind in their game against the Blue Darters, getting outscored 4-1 in the first period. Luckily, they bounced back efficiently, outscoring Apopka 5-4 in the second period. After that, Wekiva didn't let

off the gas, outscoring Apopka 5-3 in the third and 3-2 in the fourth to take home the win 14-13. It was a huge comeback win for the Mustangs.

Holden Pedrick and Cameron Parry led the Mustangs to the win. Pedrick scored seven of the team's 14 goals with a 46.7 shooting percentage while collecting an assist and three steals. Parry scored five goals with a 71.4 shooting percentage and collected an assist.

Stalls and ball security were the driving factors in Wekiva's win. The team collected 17 steals while only giving away six turnovers to Apopka.

Wekiva's goalkeeper, Hayden Scalise, did well in the goal, allowing 13 goals and saving eight of 21 shots on goal. Scalise had a

38.0 save percentage.

After winning the Tidal Wave Cup, the boys turn their attention to the district tournament. Like the girls, the boys only have three schools in their district: Winter Park, Bishop Moore and Wekiva. Winter Park leads the district, followed by Bishop Moore, then Wekiva at third.

Wekiva is heading into the tournament with an 11-9 record, ranking 32nd in the state and 69th in the nation. Winter Park is coming into the tournament with a 14-9 record, ranking 13th in the state and 27th in the nation. Bishop Moore is coming into the tournament with a 9-4 record, ranking 30th in the state and 63rd in the nation.

Wekiva will face Bishop Moore in the first round while Winter Park enjoys a bye. Earlier this year, the boys faced Bishop Moore and lost 19-14. If the boys defeat Bishop Moore, they will face Winter Park in the district championship for a chance at a state championship tournament bid.

The district tournament started Tuesday, April 8, at Bishop Moore. The Mustangs defeated Bishop Moore in a nail biting 19-18 victory. The boys were then set to face off against the No. 13 ranked Winter Park Wildcats on Wednesday in the district championship for a chance at an automatic bid into the state tournament.

Druck

Continued from page 1B

has been held for 12 years just felt unreal cause I had been waiting my whole life to break a record," Druck said.

After that, Druck joined 47 other 15-and-under swimmers from across the United States at the Open Water Junior National Championship in Sarasota, where she competed with 45 other swimmers in the junior women's 5K. Druck landed right in the middle of the pack, finishing 23rd with a time of 1:09:33.

The winning time was 1:05:29, meaning Druck was just over four minutes off the top spot — a solid showing,

especially considering this was her first time racing in open water. She held her own against some of the most experienced young swimmers in the country.

Druck told me that knowing she was racing against the best swimmers from around the country was exciting but nerve-racking. She had never met any of the swimmers she was competing against, but she said they were "all so nice and extremely talented."

"If there's one thing I learned from the race, it's that even though something might seem scary, you should

always be willing to try new things," Druck said.

Druck qualified to join the Zones Championship to represent the Southwest Region with her finish at the open water championships. The Zones Championship is a high-level regional meet where top swimmers from several nearby states compete. It's one of the last significant steps before national-level competitions.

Even though Druck qualified for the Zones Championship with her impressive and record-breaking finish, she has opted not to compete. Druck's

mother, Kristin S. Herman-Druck, told me that Druck and her family had made the decision because Druck is focused on the state championships coming up soon.

"Keira was very excited to qualify for Zones and represent the southwest region," Herman-Druck said in an interview this week. "Over the past few days, the tough decision was made."

Druck said the other swim meet to which she is entirely committed is one of three that lead to the state championships in July. Herman-Druck said her daughter has high ex-

pectations for herself for the state championship, so she determined that skipping the Zones was necessary for her long-term goals to come to fruition.

Druck said that her parents, her sister, her coach, and her friends at the pool motivate her to push herself in the pool every day.

"But the main thing that motivates me is knowing that I have something special and knowing that if I keep working hard, I could be like the people I've been dreaming of almost my whole life," Druck said.



Courtesy of Kristin Herman-Druck
Keira Druck



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SE HABLA ESPAÑOL

Apopka to face Ocoee to open district tournament

Blue Darters look to avenge last year's loss in district championship

By Marshall Tempest
Reporter

The Apopka baseball team will begin its quest for a district crown against the Ocoee Knights next week in the Class 7A District 4 Tour-

namant at Lake Brantley. West Orange — which sits atop the district standings — Lake Brantley, Lake Mary and Seminole will also vie for the district title and a bid in the state playoffs.

As of Wednesday, April 9, West Orange boasts a sparkling 18-5 record and is ranked 43rd in the state. Lake Brantley follows with a 14-8-1 record and is ranked 60th in the state. Apopka comes in with a 13-7 record,

followed by Ocoee (11-11), Lake Mary (11-12) and Seminole (4-19).

In the quarterfinal round, four-seed Lake Mary will host five-seed Seminole, while three-seed Apopka will host six-seed Ocoee. The winner of the Apopka and Ocoee game will face Lake Brantley in the semifinal round of the district championship. The winner of the Lake Mary and Seminole game will face West

Orange in the semifinals.

Apopka faced Ocoee once this season, back in February, and dominated the Knights 10-2. If Apopka can show their growth since the beginning of the season, they should be able to have a similar performance against Ocoee in the first round.

The Blue Darters had a very similar journey to the district championship last year, when they were also the third seed facing the

sixth seed in the opening round. They trounced Evans, 16-0, to advance to the semifinals.

In the semifinal round, Apopka faced second-seeded West Orange, which the Blue Darters defeated 5-3 to earn a chance to be the district champions.

But Apopka fell to the Lake Brantley Patriots, 7-4, in the district title game.

Even if Apopka were to experience the same fate

this year, head coach Bob Brewer thinks there's a good chance his team could still sneak into the state playoffs — if they take care of business at the end of the regular season.

"We need to win all three games this week to keep our rankings where we need to be," Brewer said. "So, we get in (the state tournament) even if we don't win the district championship."

Softball

Continued from page 1B

this victory, with Ava Millspaugh and Bartkin giving up just two hits in their time on the mound. Millspaugh started and earned the win with 3 and 2/3 innings of shutout ball. She struck out two and gave up two hits while throwing 37 pitches, 26 for strikes.

Bartkin came in to relieve and finished the game, giving up no hits or runs. In one inning of work, Bartkin collected two strikeouts and threw 19 pitches, nine of which were strikes.

Apopka vs. Evans (16-0)

Like the win over Olympia, this game was decided in the first inning. Apopka scored seven runs in the first inning and never looked back. They dominated the Evans Trojans, forcing the run rule in just three innings.

The Blue Darters scored seven runs in the first inning, three in the second and six in the third to end the game. The seven-run first inning started, once again, with a home run from Smith that sent in the first two runs. Then, a double by Lopez sent in the third run followed by a single by Ava Gonzalez that sent in the fourth. Three



Photo by Marshall Tempest

Callie Sowers sends the ball down the right field line for a base hit on Monday, April 7.

singles by Skyla Durand, Reese Kernz and Pino sent in the next three runs, upping the score to 7-0.

The runs in the second came from a double by Bartkin that sent in one, a single by Riley Ford that sent in another, and another single from Gonzalez put Apopka on top 10-0.

Apopka's six-run third inning started with a single from Callie Sowers that sent in the 11th run. Hazel Bowman reached base due to a Trojans' fielding error and sent in the 12th run. Mcgat-

lin followed up with a double to center field to send in run 13. The 14th run was sent in on a wild pitch from Evans. The last two runs of the game came on a hard grounder from Durand that was a fielder's choice that sent in one run and a single from Pirillo to send in the game's final run. Apopka was up 16-0 going into the bottom of the third and quickly finished the game.

The Blue Darters had eight players with a perfect batting average in this game: Smith, Gonzalez, Ford, Mc-



Photo by Marshall Tempest

Riley Ford went 1-for-1 at the plate and collected two runs and an RBI in Apopka's win over Evans.

gatlin, Pirillo, Pino, Kernz and Sowers. Leading the Blue Darters at the plate were Durand, Smith and Ford. Durand went 1-for-2, collecting two runs and two RBIs. Smith went 1-for-1, collecting one run, two RBIs and a home run. Ford went 1-for-1 while scoring two runs and grabbing one RBI.

Apopka's Mia Aeschilman made her first appearance on the mound this season in the win over Evans after injuries have sidelined her until now. Throwing a shutout in her first appear-

ance this season, Aeschilman collected two strikeouts and only gave up two hits while throwing 36 pitches, 28 of which were strikes.

After the game, head coach Mike MacWithey told me he was very happy with Aeschilman's time on the mound. He told me that, with her just returning from injury, he had her mostly throwing fastballs.

"We didn't call a lot of movement pitches; she was just throwing fastballs and change-ups," MacWithey said. "That's the reason

why they got a couple of hits on us as well. They never would've gotten a hit if she was throwing screwballs, drop balls and rise balls, but that's ok. It's still a shutout for her."

MacWithey also said the game made his team grateful for their renovated softball complex.

"I take away from the game how blessed we are," MacWithey said. "One of my players mentioned it as well. You know, the girl looked at this field and went, 'Wow, it doesn't quite compare to ours.' And she looked me in the face and said, 'Thank you for all you do.' It makes you feel good that they (the team) recognize that your facility is important, your field is important — you know if you look good, you feel good, you play good."

On Wednesday, Apopka continued its dominant run, defeating No. 44 Cornerstone Charter Academy (CCA), 13-1, on the road. CCA dropped to 15-5 and saw its 11-game winning streak come to an abrupt end. Taylor Smith, Ava Gonzalez, Skyla Durand and Shylah Pino each delivered multi-hit games in the big win.

Baseball

Continued from page 1B

started on the mound and took the loss. He gave up two hits, two runs (one earned), one walk and hit one batter while striking out one.

Connor McAfee came in to relieve Jagers in the third and lasted one and 2/3 innings. He allowed one hit and issued four walks, leading to six runs (four earned). He also struck out five batters while throwing 60 pitches.

Logan Page came on in relief to close out the fourth inning and gave up two earned runs on two hits while recording one out.



Photo by Marshall Tempest

Camron Pennock has a 1.00 ERA this season in six appearances on the mound for the Blue Darters.

ed to the kids, and the boys understood, and we let them talk it out a little bit," Brewer said. "Everybody said that for whatever reason, they just weren't focused (against Winter Park). And so, they committed themselves to these

next three games, going into districts, they said they would win all three games. We told ourselves that we'll refocus and get back on track — and that's what you saw tonight."

The Blue Darters were dominant in this matchup

from the start, scoring seven runs in the bottom of the first inning. The offense was relentless, piling on another in the second, three in the third and one in the fourth.

Jez Hamrick started the seven-run first inning with an RBI single to left field. Tyler Spaid upped the score to 3-0 with a sacrifice fly that sent in two more runs. Immediately after, VanFleet secured an RBI triple to push Apopka ahead 4-0. A single by Posluszny and doubles from Reef VanKuren and Rieli scored the final three runs.

Posluszny sent in a run on a fielder's choice in the second inning, stretching the Blue Darter lead to 8-0. In the third inning, Saunders laced a double to send in the ninth run of the game. A Jagers sacrifice fly and another RBI single from Hamrick pushed across two more runs in the third. The game's final run was scored on a Cougar field-

ing error in the fourth inning.

Apopka dominated every phase of the game, with great at-bats, pitching and defense.

It was a true hitting parade for the Blue Darters as they collected nine hits in 20 at-bats. Hamrick led the way going 2-for-3 at the plate, driving in two runs and scoring twice. Posluszny went 1-for-3, collecting one run and two RBIs. Saunders went 1-for-2 with a double, an RBI and two runs scored.

Apopka used four of its arms on the mound and came close to a combined no-hitter. McAfee started and gave up just one walk while striking out five across two shutout innings. Camron Pennock came in to relieve McAfee and struck out two in one perfect inning. Page followed with his own perfect inning, striking out one.

Maddox Stinson ended the game on the mound for Apopka and gave up the only

hit in his two innings of work. Stinson struck out two and walked none.

Apopka vs. Horizon

Apopka traveled to Horizon Wednesday night and fell 8-5 in a heartbreaking loss. The Blue Darters fought to the end and almost made a comeback in a game where their fielding was uncharacteristically error prone.

Jagers was the difference maker in the attempted comeback, delivering clutch at-bats that spurred rallies. He went 3-for-3 at the plate collecting one run and two RBIs.

Jagers pitched the first three innings and took the loss, allowing three runs (two earned) on seven hits and a walk. Pennock came on in relief and pitched two innings, giving up five runs, only one of which was earned, on five hits and three walks. The Apopka defense made six errors in the loss.

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AHS

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3-3 near the end of the first period.

Going into the second period, the Darters and the Mustangs were tied 3-3. This was when the Mustangs pulled away from the Blue Darters. Apopka scored one goal to Wekiva's three in the second period, giving the Mustangs the lead 6-4 at halftime.

The Blue Darters bounced back in the third period, outscoring the Mustangs 4-2, tying the game back up at 8-8. For this matchup, it came down to the final period, as it has all year.

Apopka was ahead 10-9 with just three minutes left on the clock in the fourth period as they focused on possession, defense, and smart shots. The Blue Darters couldn't get anything past the Mustangs' stalwart defense.

The Mustangs were able to tie up the game at 10-10 with just 1:05 left in the fourth period. It was back and forth as each team battled for possession and a good shot. It came down to the last shot for the Mustangs on a Hail Mary shot. With just two seconds left, Wekiva scored the game-winning goal to take home the Tidal Wave Cup.

Apopka's Alex McReynolds, Brooke Bemiss and Lily Whitworth led the team in the loss. McReynolds scored four of the team's 10 goals with a 66.7 shot percentage while also collecting two assists and three steals. Bemiss scored three goals and had a 33.0 shot percentage. Whitworth scored on goal with a perfect shooting percentage and collected two assists.

Apopka's goalie, Katherine Berens, had a great night in the cage with six saves and 11 goals allowed. The Wekiva players took 30 shots, with 17 being on target. Of



Photo by Marshall Tempest

Harry Pennell leads the Blue Darters in goals scored this year with 84. Pennell is ranked 16th in the nation in goals scored this season.

those 17 on-target shots, Berens only allowed 11 for a 35.29 save percentage.

After the Tidal Wave Cup, Apopka prepares for the District 1 Tournament. With just three schools in District 1 (Apopka, Gainesville, and Lake Minneola), the tournament will have no more than two rounds. Gainesville leads the district and will have a first-round bye. Apopka is seed two and will face Lake Minneola in the first round.

If Apopka defeats Lake Minneola, they will face Gainesville in the championship round of the district tournament. But when the Blue Darters faced Lake Minneola earlier this season, they fell 11-8, so Apopka will need to change its game plan this time around.

The Blue Darters have already faced No. 28 Gainesville twice this season and have split the matchups. They lost in their first meeting 8-4 but then defeated them 4-3 in

their next matchup. If Apopka defeats Gainesville, they will get an automatic bid into the state championship tournament. If they do not win, it will come down to MaxPreps power rankings and records to determine who will fill out the other spot in the state championship tournament.

The district tournament started on Tuesday, April 8, with Apopka hosting Lake Minneola. The girls defeated the Lake Minneola Hawks 11-7 outscoring the Hawks in every period except the fourth. McReynolds led the team in the win collecting one goal and four of the team's 10 assists. Apopka's Berens had another fantastic night in the cage making 16 saves on 23 shots on goal for a 69.5 save percentage.

With the win the girls advanced to the championship round of the district tournament where they faced Gainesville on Thursday after press time.

Boys

The boys' water polo team was on a bad run coming into this game, sitting at 8-12 and ranked 41st in the state. They were 2-4 in their last six games, defeating Colonial 19-5 and Olympia 21-20 while falling to Lyman 17-9, Gainesville 12-9, Wekiva 14-9 and Venice 11-10.

Apopka jumped out ahead in the first period, outscoring Wekiva 4-1. But in the second period, the game turned into the shootout we knew it would be. The Mustangs outscored the Blue Darters 5-4, trailing 8-6 at halftime.

In the second half, the Mustangs showed up, outscoring Apopka 5-3 in the third period to tie the game at 11-11. Apopka opened up the fourth period with a goal to take the lead back 12-11. Wekiva answered shortly after with a goal of their own to tie the game back up at

12-12 with 6:30 left. Apopka immediately responded with another goal and took the lead 13-12 with 6:20 left in the game.

Wekiva tied the game with 4:10 left and scored the winning goal with 2:33 left. The Mustangs were up 14-13, but Apopka had a chance to tie it back up. The Blue Darters were unable to make it happen, and they fell to the Mustangs in the Tidal Wave Cup.

Apopka's Steven Novak, Harry Pennell and Andrew Kurz led the team in the loss. Novak scored three goals with a 33.3 shooting percentage while bringing in four assists. Pennell scored seven of the team's 13 goals with a 77.8 shooting percentage. Kurz scored one goal with a 33.3 shooting percentage while also bringing in three assists and one steal.

Apopka's goalkeeper, Travis Novak, had a fantastic night in the cage. Travis

saved 14 shots and allowed 19 for a 42.4 save percentage for shots on goal.

After losing to the Mustangs in their final regular-season game, the team prepares for the district tournament. Like the girls, the boys' water polo team has only three schools in its district: Lake Minneola, Gainesville, and Apopka. Gainesville leads the district, so they will have a first-round bye, while Apopka will face off against Lake Minneola.

The Blue Darters faced Lake Minneola earlier in the season, dominating them in a 19-9 win. Suppose Apopka defeats Lake Minneola in the first round. In that case, they will face No. 25 ranked Gainesville in the district championship for a chance at a state championship tournament bid. Apopka has faced Gainesville twice this season and has fallen both times (15-9 and 12-9).

The district tournament started on Tuesday, April 8, with Apopka hosting Lake Minneola. The boys like the girls, defeated the Hawks in the first round. The Blue Darters dominated in a 22-15 victory. The boys also outscored the Hawks in every period except the fourth.

Pennell was a sniper in the pool leading the team to the win with 10 of the team's 22 goals finishing with a 90.9 shooting percentage. Travis Novak did well in the cage making ten saves on 25 shots on goal for a 40.0 save percentage.

Like the girls with the win over Lake Minneola the boys moved on to the championship round of the district tournament where they faced Gainesville on Thursday after press time.

SUDOKU ANSWERS

8	9	5	6	4	1	3	7	2
3	4	2	7	5	9	1	8	6
1	7	6	3	2	8	5	9	4
9	6	4	1	7	2	8	3	5
2	8	7	4	3	5	6	1	9
5	3	1	9	8	6	2	4	7
4	2	9	5	1	3	7	6	8
6	5	3	8	9	7	4	2	1
7	1	8	2	6	4	9	5	3

PUZZLE CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 6A

STOP

AI THEFT

Stealing is un-American. Tell Washington to make Big Tech pay for the content it takes.

#SupportResponsibleAI

VERSE OF THE WEEK

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Proverbs 16:18

Visit us online for all the Apopka area church listings

King Crossword

ACROSS

1 Mediocre
5 Church seat
8 Greenish blue
12 Tora —, Afghanistan
13 Noshed
14 PETA concerns
15 Slight criticisms
17 Pear-shaped fruits
18 Step
19 Hot dish holder
21 Oodles
24 Log chopper
25 Mandatory coll. courses
28 Calendar entry (Abbr.)
30 Zodiac animal
33 Chit
34 Concepts
35 Swelled head
36 Singer
37 Proscribes

DOWN

1 Cookouts, briefly
2 LummoX
3 Met solo
4 Customs
5 Bud
6 Bordeaux summer
7 Left on a map
8 Tack on

9 Trembled
10 Desire
11 Celeb's aide
16 Buddy
20 "Phooey!"
22 Zilch
23 Shell out
25 Estuary
26 A gazillion years
27 Groups of five
29 El —, Texas
31 Turkish title
32 Oft-tattooed word
34 "A likely story!"
38 "Queen of Soul" Franklin
40 Skating figure
42 Scrap
43 Italian cheese, for short
44 Sci-fi race
45 Iso-
47 Boxer Spinks
48 Press
49 Recipe amts.
52 Web address
53 Squid squirt

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
12				13			14				
15				16			17				
18						19	20				
			21		22	23		24			
25	26	27			28		29		30	31	32
33				34					35		
36				37				38			
			39	40			41		42		
43	44				45		46		47	48	49
50					51	52	53				
54									56		
57					58				59		

