

QUARTERLY ISSUES REPORT

WGFL-TV

Date: April 10, 2016

Submitted To: WGFL Public File

Re: WGFL-TV Quarterly Issues Report
Covering the period of January 1, 2016
through March 31, 2016

WGFL QUARTERLY ISSUES

FIRST QUARTER 2016

Through informal ascertainment by written and oral communication with community members, it was determined that among the concerns of the Gainesville community at-large were the following issues:

Consumer Information

Healthcare and Medical News

Education

Crime

Government

Environment

Lifestyle

Community Safety

Weather

Research

WGFL-TV QUARTERLY ISSUES

ISSUE: Consumer Information

Program: Alachua County Talks

Type of Program: Public Affairs half-hour weekly

Airdate: Fridays and Sundays, First Quarter 2016
January 1, 2016 through March 31, 2016

Airtime: Fridays, 4:30am and Sundays 1:30am plus various
other available times throughout the quarter

DurationL: 30 Minutes

Description: This weekly program is a locally produced discussion program concerning various issues in the community and county. It features people from our community who are involved in bettering our lives and those who live here.

WGFL-TV QUARTERLY ISSUES

ISSUE: Local Crime

Program: Police on Duty

Type of Program: Locally produced half hour with Police Department

Airdate: Fridays, First Quarter 2016
January 1, 2016 through March 31, 2016

Airtime: Fridays, 4am and various other times available
throughout the quarter.

Duration: 30 Minutes

Description: In cooperation with the Gainesville Police
Department, we air this locally-produced show featuring
current day-to-day problems that face this local law
enforcement agency.

WGFL-TV QUARTERLY ISSUES

ISSUE: Community Public Affairs

Program: Ilene Silverman Show

Type of Program: Public Affairs

Airdate: Tuesdays 6am, Saturdays 6:30am

Duration: 30 Minutes

Description: Ilene Silverman is a locally produced public affairs program which covers a wide array of community issues, including health, community events and community programs benefitting our citizens.

WGFL-TV QUARTERLY ISSUES

ISSUE: Crime/Healthcare/Consumer Information/
Education/Government/Environment/Research

Program: GTN News on CBS4

Type of Program: Daily Half Hour News Program

Airdate: Monday-Friday, First Quarter 2016
January 1, 2016 through March 31, 2016

Airtime: 6pm and 11pm

Duration: 30 Minutes

Description: See attached for details on specific issues covered
throughout the quarter.

ISSUE: CRIME

Jan 4 With the New Year comes new laws going into effect in Florida. One new law is aimed at curbing human trafficking in around the state by placing signs in places considered hubs for trafficking

"This is the first time we've seen the signs and I was wondering what it was, what it was that you all were doing here and it's a subject that I think should really be addressed - and I think the signs need to be a little bit more noticeable."

The signs are being produced by the Florida Department of Transportation in English and Spanish -- a public awareness campaign that as of January 1st is now required by law.

"So one of the things that the new signs that FDOT have been mandated to create for this bill is its going to raise awareness on all forms of human trafficking occurring in Florida."

"Signs like these are being placed outside train stations, massage parlors and rest areas like this one outside Payne's Prairie for places that are popular for human trafficking."

Some travelers passing through were pleased to see the signs at the rest stop today.

"There's a lot more human trafficking than you believe and this is really a good idea and I hope it goes nationwide."

Others don't think these signs will help cut down on human trafficking in the state.

"one, people are going to ignore the sign, like I'm ignoring the snake sign over there and two people don't want to get involved - it's a sad thing, but even if they I think they see it, they're too afraid to get involved, call the number because they think it's going to come back at them."

If you do suspect human trafficking happening in your area you can report it to your local law enforcement or call the national human trafficking toll free number at 888-373-7888.

Jan 8 Stan Jonas an Army veteran living at the Archer Woods Apartments has never seen anything like this before.

"there were police cars and vans and set ups cleaning this stuff up, guys in masks."

It all began yesterday morning after a routine traffic stop.

A K-9 officer noticed a strong odor coming from a vehicle with a cracked windshield.

"And the dog alerted to the present of narcotics within the vehicle - the driver was detained and we found a one point nine grams of methamphetamine as well as a lot of narcotics paraphernalia located inside the vehicle."

Detectives arrested 37-year-old Louis Hendrix and found an active meth lab at

Hendrix's house on NE Waldo road along with children in his home.

"three young children at the waldo road residence, a 2-year-old, a 4-year-old and a toddler as well as a 15-year old that was in the house."

The Gainesville Alachua County Drug Task Force also uncovered another active meth lab at the archer woods apartment complex.

"Now only one of the apartment buildings had to be evacuated last night as a safety precaution and a resident who lives just a few feet away from that building says he knows how dangerous a meth lab can be and he's just thankful nobody was hurt."

"It's gonna blow, it's going to go straight out, you don't know how big it really is but I know they were up all night up until 2 o'clock cleaning this stuff up.

And the sheriff's office says they've been seeing a growing number of meth labs in the area.

"it's cheap to manufacture, the recipe or the directions to manufacture methamphetamine are readily available online and the high that people get from it is described to be very intense as apposed to other street drugs like marijuana sort of speak."

Hendrix has been arrested on charges of manufacturing meth, child endangerment and trafficking. Authorities say additional charges are pending.

He currently remains in the Alachua County Jail on more than \$700,000 bond.

Jan. 13 A candidate running for Gainesville Mayor was arrested on felony charges today.

Donald Shepherd is one of three candidates for the position, but the only one facing felony charges. Back in August, Christina Avalos Arteaga reported her ford F150 stolen.

An arrest report from GPD says the vehicle originally belonged to Arteaga's grandmother, but was being given to Arteaga following her grandmother's death that month. The report also states that Shepherd knew the Arteaga family. After the grandmother's death, he allegedly asked to have the vehicle- twice. Both times the answer was no.

A few days later, Arteaga noticed her truck missing and contacted GPD. As for evidence, the police department has photos of the missing truck in Shepherd's driveway. He is now facing one count of grand theft auto, a felony charge.

According to the Supervisor of Elections Pam Carpenter, charges like this will not affect Shepherd's ability to run for office. "Well currently Mr. Shepard has met all of the criteria to have his name placed on the ballot for the upcoming city of Gainesville elections. And currently there is no change to his status."

The law states that those accused are innocent until proven guilty. Carpenter says she does not know what this could do to his chances in the election.

"I really am not going to speculate on what could happen, we just have to wait and see."

As of now, Shepherd's name is still on the ballot. The victim could not be reached for comment at this time.

Jan 21 A trio of traveling car burglars busted by Gainesville Police after trying to break into several cars Monday morning. It began when police received reports of a car burglary at a park on SW Archer Road.

"Investigator Kathy Posey heard the alert and you know recognized quickly that the pattern and set herself up covertly at the planet fitness on north west 13th street."

"And police say it was right here in this Planet Fitness parking lot where the suspects were looking for any unlocked vehicles and valuable items like purses or wallets that they could steal."

"They attempted to break into a few vehicles into planet fitness, but thankfully everyone had everything locked up and had all their belongings which is great."

Police say they had their patrol vehicles follow the suspects and conduct a traffic stop.

24-year-old Keith Williams, 29-year-old John Honore and 24-year-old Mercedes Little were all arrested.

When police interviewed the suspects, they all admitted they were from Plantation, Florida and had traveled to Gainesville just to steal from vehicles.

Still others walking to their cars were shocked to learn what happened.

"I leave my belongings in my vehicle cause I'm going to work out so i wouldn't think, i mean i thought i could lock them up in my car cause you know it seemed like nothing like that is going around here."

Now Willie Hill says next time he'll rethink where he leaves his valuables.

"Maybe I won't bring a wallet, leave it home or take inside with me and you know have it on me while i work out but you know it's - i just have to be more careful that i know what's going on."

Little was released yesterday but will be making a court appearance for attempted burglary.

William and Honore still remain at the Alachua County jail on multiple charges of burglary, forging credit cards and drug possession.

Jan 25 Human remains discovered over the weekend in a wooded area in Alachua County. The bones were discovered last night and now authorities are working to identify them. He's lived here near San Felasco Park for about 17 years.

And today it came as quite a shock when Robert Malinowski saw a forensics truck drive through his quiet neighborhood.

"I'm still surprised that they even found skeletons in this area."

Now he along with other neighbors are wondering just how those bones got there.

"You know it could be a hunting accident, it could be who knows."

"Deputies say a nearby resident was walking through these woods when he spotted skeletal remains and alerted authorities"

"Immediately called us, the first deputies on scene determined and identified that it was human skeletal remains."

Now the sheriff's office is working with the medical examiner's office and the University of Florida pound lab.

"Trying to piece together exactly what happened, recover as much evidence as we can and determine an identity of this person."

Detectives at the sheriff's office are currently checking all their missing persons reports.

"not only from this area but from all around the state national databases and we will look at those, if there's clothing, identifiable jewelry that will assist us, we'll look at that type of stuff, also dental records, x-rays, different types of medical records, DNA."

The gender of the remains and how long they've been in the woods still remain a mystery for now.

At this time the Alachua County Sheriff's Office says it's too early to tell how this person died but they will continue to update the community as more information becomes available.

Jan 29 A manager of a popular BBQ restaurant is behind bars tonight accused of embezzling money. Gainesville Police say that manager stole thousands of dollars...and some of it caught on tape.

"It's sad that people are dishonest and distrustful these days and that you never really know when someone is trustworthy especially someone whose running a business."

Customers like crystal billings were shocked to learn that a manager at the 4 rivers smokehouse was caught embezzling over 40-thousand dollars.

"finding that out, it's kind of sad and I wonder if it will make people not want to go there."

24-year old Jacob George was arrested for making over 350 fraudulent cash returns over the past five months.

"And according to detectives, surveillance video not yet released to the public shows the manager pocketing some of the cash."

"He would look around to make sure no one was in the area to make sure no one was looking and he would do the refund and he would stop and look around and maybe do another refund but it was almost overly cautious that he was being."

George had been with 4 rivers for a year and a half, but on January 16th George made a refund for a whopping eight-hundred ninety-two dollars.

"I think that even without those amounts with them doing the audit, they would have found it but again he got confident, he got a little greedy, he got a little foolish and he ended up taking a lot of money."

Bobby Harrell and his wife Cynthia were just finishing their lunch at 4 rivers when they heard the news.

"I hope it doesn't hurt their business any because it was a good restaurant for our first visit there."

George was interviewed by police last Friday and requested a lawyer.

He is currently being held at the Alachua County jail on a 30,000 bond.

Feb. 12 Twenty-seven years ago, University of Florida student Tiffany Sessions went for a walk and then disappeared without a trace, but if you walk through the doors of the Alachua county Sheriff's Office you will see that she has not been forgotten.

It was every parents worst nightmare. On the night of February 9, 1989, Tiffany Sessions went for a walk and didn't come home. With all of her belongings left behind, her parents launched a massive search including private investigators and volunteers plastering the area with photos of Tiffany.

Over two decades later, the sheriff's office announced that Paul Rowles, a known serial killer who died in prison, was likely responsible.

Rowles was released from prison after just 13 years after murdering his neighbor in the 1970s. He was thrown back in jail for kidnap and rape in 1994. But, it was a journal that he used behind bars, that connected him to Tiffany Sessions.

"He put in an address book the date of Tiffany's disappearance and the number two, chronologically Tiffany would have been Paul Rowles second victim," said Det. Allen.

Once detectives made the connection, a team dug through the dumpsite where Rowles' third victim, Beth Foster's body was found. They found nothing.

With no remains and no DNA evidence, Allen says the Sessions case is not closed, but is no longer active.

"The parents now have semi closure, they haven't found the remains yet, but they're also comfortable that Paul Rowles was the murderer of their daughter," said Allen.

Last year, investigators were searching for Rowles' truck, so they could tie DNA evidence to Tiffany, but recently discovered it had been destroyed.

Mar 8 Around 2 am Sunday night, GPD responded to a call about shots fired outside Gainesville nightclubs. A witness identified Godbolt as the shooter. Officers were able to stop Godbolt's car- and arrest him.

GPD's Ben Tobias says, "It is illegal to carry that firearm inside of the bars and nightclubs. And just common sense will tell you that having a gun around a bar and nightly is a pretty bad idea."

One man was hit by one of the bullets in the hand. He was transported to UF Health Shands with a non-life threatening gunshot wound. GPD says at this point, they're unsure whether or not the gunshot wound victim was the shooter's intended target.

UF student Sam Armstrong says the incident seems isolated, and won't affect his decision to keep going out. "There's enough people in this city that you're going to have some crime from time to time. Unless I saw statistics otherwise I wouldn't really make a big fuss about it."

But Gainesville resident Joseph Graden says there have always been issues about nightlife violence in Gainesville. "It definitely is a huge factor in why I don't attend any of the major nightclubs around here, it's a problem for me."

GPD is trying to determine if there is a connection to the shooter and the victim.

Mar 11 People are preparing to file their taxes, but what they aren't always prepared for is tax fraud. Local CPA Jay Hutto says, "There are fraudulent returns being filed for folks. What happens is the taxpayer goes to file the return, but they find out that the return has already filed with their name and social security number already used."

It forces the taxpayer to prove their identity, and it could cause long term damage. Unfortunately, it's not the only way criminals can steal your information.

Hutto says, "People are getting phone calls to their home and they're very threatening calls. They represent the IRS and they give a badge number an IRS number, and they say that you have to give us 500 dollars of prepaid debit cards."

Local law enforcement agencies say there isn't much they can do to help after this type of crime has been committed. "So your first actual move is not to contact local law enforcement, it is to contact identitytheft.gov," says GPD.

For those getting ready to submit their tax returns, CPA's say they need to be mindful of Emancipation Day, which lands on Tax Day. This year individuals have to file their form 1040 by April 18th. Typically it's due on April 15th, but this year because of the holiday, the deadline is extended. Tax return forms can be found on the IRS.gov website

Mar 22 On Saturday night, Mario Brinson and Christopher Roy got into a deadly fight.

Officer Mike Lee of Lake City PD says, "According to the witnesses, Mr. Brinson and Mr. Roy were in a verbal altercation. And at some point during their argument. Mr. Brinson decided to punch Mr. Roy in his face. Mr. Roy fell to the ground face first, and immediately lost consciousness."

Officers say Brinson jumped on top of him and continued to strike Roy when he was already unconscious on the ground. Lake City Police says three officers performed CPR on the victim. They continued for 36 minutes, until he was able to be transported to a medical center.

Two female witnesses told police they couldn't call 911 for about 10 minutes because Brinson threatened them. One neighbor said he didn't hear anything when the fight broke out in one of the apartments. "I was sleeping and I just heard all the ambulance and the police department came by, and that was about it."

Roy was flown to a Gainesville hospital and put on life support. Brinson was arrested and charged with aggravated battery. Roy was taken off life support yesterday and died, and Brinson is now facing manslaughter charges.

Mar 21 A 16-year-old boy, who appeared to be armed with a semi-automatic rifle, was shot and killed following a standoff with law enforcement on Sunday night. It happened outside of the Majestic Oaks Apartment Complex in Gainesville.

Nine law enforcement officers, including five Alachua County Sheriff's Deputies and four Gainesville Police Officers were involved in the fatal shooting.

Officials say 16-year-old Robert Dentmond, who attended Gainesville High School, was killed. Police say Dentmond called 911 late Sunday night and stated he had an M-16 rifle and wanted to harm himself. When law enforcement arrived, they found him with what appeared to be an assault rifle. Officials tried numerous times to get Dentmond to put down the gun.

"Deputies pleaded with him to again drop the weapon, but the individual continued to back up, and he was in close proximity to other occupied apartment buildings at that time," said Lt. Brandon Kutner with the Alachua County Sheriff's Office.

Both ACSO and the Gainesville Police Department say they had to use lethal force to protect nearby residents.

"Anytime a law enforcement officer is forced to make the decision to use deadly force, it is not an easy decision by any means, it is not something that we view as routine, and it's something that we view as a last possible resort," said GPD Officer Ben Tobias.

Officials on scene tended to Dentmond's wounds, but he was later pronounced dead at the hospital.

The investigation has been turned over to FDLE.

Mar 23 The shooting happened two weeks ago. And now the Putnam County Sheriff's Office has recommended the mother of a 4-year-old boy face criminal charges.

Earlier today the Putnam County Sheriff's Office hosted a special press conference to go over those charges.

Detectives say they had to wait until after Jamie Gilt, the 31-year-old mother that was shot was well enough to be interviewed before they were able to finish the investigation.

About two weeks ago Gilt was driving with her 4-year-old son on Rowland Avenue and State Road 20 in Putnam County.

she stopped to make a u-turn when she felt a sharp pain in her back.

"Seconds later Jamie began to bleed from her chest, realizing she had been shot, she called her cousin who was nearby at the same time Jamie saw a patrol car approaching her, Jamie flashed her lights and attempted to wave the deputy down," says Captain Gator Deloach with the Putnam County Sheriff's Office.

She told the deputy that her son had accidentally shot her.

And relatives tell deputies that the child had just learned to unbuckle his seat belt when he saw the gun on the floor and thought it was a toy.

Lashanna Keeon, a resident in Putnam County says this story is one of the reasons why she won't have guns around her kids.

"I think that she should get charged with something because I have a 6-year-old that likes to play with guns too and if I did have them, a gun, a real one, I wouldn't have it around him because he would play with it," says Keeon.

Today the Putnam County Sheriff's Office turned this case over to the state attorney's office.

"The Putnam County Sheriff's Office supports the right for citizens to own and possess firearms, we do want to remind everyone that in the presence of a child, gun owners bear the additional responsibility of insuring children do not gain unattended access to a firearm," says Captain Deloach.

Deputies say that gun was not placed in any type of holster and the safety was not on.

Right now Gilt faces a second degree misdemeanor by allowing a minor access to a firearm and she could be facing additional charges

Mar 23 It was standing room only as hundreds packed into the Power House Family Worship Center in Southwest Gainesville on Tuesday night.

The meeting, that was scheduled by the Alachua County Sheriff's Office, comes less than two days after 16-year-old Robert Dentmond was shot following a standoff with law enforcement. According to officials, Dentmond was holding a replica gun and refused to put it down. In all, nine officers and deputies were involved.

"Obviously its precipitated by what occurred in Majestic Oaks on Sunday night, but this is an opportunity for people to come, speak with law enforcement, and have their questions answered," said Lt. Brandon Kutner.

What started as a peaceful meeting, with speakers commenting on mental health awareness and unity, quickly became riddled with outbursts.

After the victim's mother spoke to the audience, some residents got up to leave. The meeting was dismissed nearly a half hour before the scheduled time was up.

ISSUE: EDUCATION

Jan 12 A local mother has taken up a fight against the Alachua County school Board after she says her daughter's civil rights were violated in school.

Dhyana Odriscoll's 12-year-old daughter was caught sending e-mails in class to some of her classmates at Fort Clark Middle School last month.

"They took her phone, they made her enter her passcode, they took her in and out of a detention room and questioned her several times, to me it sounds almost like a police interrogation, it was really extreme.

According to Odriscoll, the e-mails contained a link to a news story regarding sensitive information about one of the teachers working at the school.

And instead of giving the student a warning they suspended her.

"I had gone and I looked at her code of conduct book and it does say that initially a verbal warning will be given and then a referral and then if the behavior continues then a suspension and so the fact that they jumped right to a suspension was upsetting for me."

Even though Odriscoll's daughter was using the school's computer her lawyer Lawrence Marrafino says the administrators had no right to force the young student to unlock her phone.

"They're asking to see her cellphone when there was no evidence that she was using her cell phone in class, the teacher wasn't complaining about that and they had probable cause which this the magic words here to violate her civil rights because the constitution - because the constitutional rights don't end at the school house door."

"Now at this point ODriscoll and her lawyer say if they don't hear anything soon from the school they may be required to take legal action against the Alachua County Public School Board."

"A lawsuit is a significant undertaking, not something to be taken lightly by either side, but something further will be done if they do not do what we think is the reasonable thing, there are other methods other things that we can do short of filing a lawsuit before that occurs.

When we reached out to school board members they said the case is considered a school disciplinary case and they could not comment to the media due to student confidentiality laws as part of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

JAN 15 Thousands of educators and concerned parents flooded the state capitol on Thursday, to voice their concerns over standardized testing and the state's accountability system.

Dozens of Alachua County residents were right in the center of the action.

"We've reached a point where it appears as though testing is more important than teaching is, and as a parent of three young children that concerns me a lot," said parent Harvey Ward.

Three of the county's five school board members joined the group of residents and boarded the bus to Tallahassee.

"Our teachers cannot teach under the system that has been imposed by this legislature," said Eileen Roy.

"I really feel like we're over testing, we have the wrong emphasis for children, and also, we have monies that are diverted - taxpayer money - precious taxpayer money that are being diverted to other things than public schools," Robert Hyatt added.

Protesters rallied against the state's high-stakes testing and the systems that evaluate teachers and decide school grades. Policies, they say are both hurting students and classroom teachers.

"Instead of my little ones learning to blow bubbles they're actually filling them in, and having to learn to do that, and it's very sad," said teacher Toni Johnson.

State lawmakers did not speak at the rally, but a few were in attendance.

Jan 20 With increasing negative stereotypes of Muslims in the media, the city of Gainesville is trying to create a more welcoming community.

The University of Florida along with leaders and members of the community held a discussion about Islamophobia and co-existing peacefully.

"People being shot at, Mosque being vandalized, people being attacked, people threatening to kill Muslim children and blow up Muslim houses of worship."

Those are just some of the hate crimes reported by the Council on American-Islamic Relations and it's negative attention against Muslims that had the Thomas center packed tonight as local leaders and community members came out to discuss Islamophobia.

"Islamophobia is the tool that is used to divide our country, to turn Americans against each other and to undermine the principals or liberty and justice that make America so great, so when we challenge Islamophobia we actually make America better for all people."

One the special guest even traveled from UC Berkeley.

"If Islamophobia is about ignorance, countering Islamophobia is rooted in education and knowledge and in creating a common framework for communities to respond and i think this is what this event is about."

Guest and UF faculty even lead discussions on combating Islamophobia, the Syrian refugee crisis, and Islam in the media.

"And one UF student tells us that with all the negative stereotypes against Muslims after the San Bernardino shooting and Paris attacks, it's important to have a discussion like this in Gainesville."

"Gainesville is in my eyes a prime spot for creating a truly welcoming community."

Paula Roetscher is the organizer behind this event and part of a non-profit called Welcoming Gainesville.

And she's trying to make Gainesville the first official city in Florida to welcome all types of diversity.

"We have so many international students, we have a lot of immigrants and most importantly we have people here who are not just newcomers to this community but they contribute, you know they work as doctors, as lawyers, as professors."

Next month the city commission will vote on whether or not to make Gainesville a more welcoming city.

Feb 3 Shortly after the local teacher's union voiced their concerns about being overwhelmed and overworked during a meeting on Tuesday night, the Alachua County School Board voted to approve a charter school that will be the first of its kind in the county.

Resilience Charter School will serve both middle and high schoolers. While there are two charter schools that are open to middle schoolers, neither teach both middle and high school students.

With plans to open in August for the 2016-2017 school year, Resilience Charter School will take over the former site of Hoggetowne Middle School, which shut its doors in 2014. It's next door to Howard Bishop Middle School on NE 9th Street.

"The fact that this was previously a school means it was designed to fit our needs, which is really awesome, and it was renovated between four and five years ago," said Instructional Director Leah Fox.

The majority of funding is coming from the state, but the [school launched a crowdfunding campaign to supplement.](#)

"We could always use extra funding, whatever we get will go right towards the students. Buying library books, making sure we have laptops for everybody," said Office Manager Elizabeth Labbe.

Some parents tell GTN News that they are intrigued by the school's project-based approach that focuses on both social and emotional learning.

"I'm quite happy with our elementary school right now, but I feel with middle and high school its incredibly important because that's really when you're figuring out who you are," said parent Whitney Mutch.

Resilience Charter School is hosting an open house at Cone Park Library on February 20 at 2 p.m. A second open house is scheduled for the same time on February 21 at library headquarters.

They are also accepting [applications for students online.](#)

Feb 24 As severe weather made its way through Alachua County on Wednesday morning, the University of Florida was recognized by the National Weather Service as a StormReady University.

"It's somewhat similar to an accreditation in that we've said we're gonna hold these standards, our standards on emergency planning have been reviewed, and they meet the criteria for this accolade, and we're excited about having that," said Chief Linda Stump-Kurnick.

UF was named as StormReady for helping students receive weather warnings, as well as promoting severe weather awareness.

"We just encourage everyone at the University of Florida to just kind of be weather-aware... to understand the hazards we face, make sure they have a good way to receive warnings, and understand what to do when one is issued," said Emergency Management Director Kenneth Allen.

Dozens of students, like Albany Dale, stopped by a booth set up outside of the Reitz Union late Wednesday morning, to learn what to do if a severe storm were to hit Gainesville.

"I saw the police officers out here and the fire rescue, because those are the people who really protect us so I was like... I really wanna know what they have to say if they're here for us," she said.

The National Weather Service has also trained building coordinators in weather spotting.

For more information on the recognition, [visit the National Weather Service's website.](#)

ISSUE: CONSUMER INTEREST

Jan 13 The Melrose Fire Department has had a contract working with Alachua County responding to 911 calls for years.

That contract between the Melrose Fire Department and Alachua County expired on January first, as neither side could come to an agreement on how much Melrose should be paid for their services.

Tuesday night, many locals gathered for the meeting between the Alachua County Board of Commissioners and the Melrose FD. After a few hours of discussion, Alachua County agreed to pay Melrose almost \$135,000, the exact figure from 2015. Melrose

accepted the deal, even though Melrose firefighter Bobby Brown says it was about \$9,000 less than they were hoping for.

The Melrose Fire Department will now continue automatically responding to calls in the Alachua County area of Melrose.

Jan 18 To celebrate what he did for the community and how he stopped racism and..across the country."

Monday commemorates the 30th anniversary in remembering the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and what he stood for.

"Gainesville, Alachua county is one of those communities that has been celebrating doctor king since 1984. we started as a national holiday in 1986 thirty years later, we're still here celebrating."

In honor of the national holiday Nadia Thomas a senior at Gainesville High School received this year's annual Edna M. Hart Keeper of the Dream Scholarship Award on the steps of city hall.

Thomas says Martin Luther King Jr. will always be someone she looks up to.

"Principals of non-violence and how he demonstrated love instead of hate."

"And despite the cold, hundreds came out to march in downtown Gainesville in order to remember doctor Martin Luther King Jr's sacrifice and to honor his legacy.

"I'm going to march because I want to support Martin Luther King."

"I've always made this march for the last probably ten years and I hadn't missed one, me and my wife and my grand kids now and I just love being here."

And Chief Tony Jones with the Ginesville Police Department says he hopes today will have a bigger impact on the younger generation.

"That they have an understanding as to what the man stand for and my other biggest hope is that there's community service to commemorate what doctor king did throughout his legacy and the civil rights movement

Jan 29 A generous donation will help kick-start a different type of program for at-risk students in Gainesville.

State-of-the-art editing equipment, video cameras, and a high-tech soundboard are ready to go at the Reichert House Youth Academy in Gainesville.

"As long as our young men are contributing to society in a positive manner, after high school, that's what we want," said Executive Director John Alexander.

A \$10,000 donation helped fund a new curriculum for audio and video production at the Reichert House.

"AT&T heard about the Reichert House's after school program and heard about this new, innovative class for video and audio production, so we wanted to contribute and really make a difference here for the youth in Gainesville," said AT&T spokesperson Karen Mcallister.

The new program will introduce some of the academy's 133 students to the career of audio and video production, and allow students to create PSA's for the community.

Alexander says the Reichert House's day-to-day schedule is intense, but much needed to set these young men up for success.

"I know that if some of the young men were participating in the Reichert House back when I was an adolescent, they wouldn't have gone to prison because this is truly a safe place, and more importantly it provides wrap around services," he said.

While the new audio and video curriculum is privately paid for by the community, funding for the Reicher House is provided by the city, GPD, and donations.

Feb 2 There's a special program helping to bring cops and the community closer together.

"I actually learned from them, I learned why I wanted to be a police officer when I started 15 years ago."

That's sergeant Gilbert Sanchez with the Hawthorne Police Department in California.

And he's sharing his story in front of our local area law enforcement on how one program changed his life.

"Coffee with a cop serves to remove the barriers between police and the community we sit down in a neutral causal setting and basically talk about the police or the citizens want."

"And programs like coffee with a cop help bring law enforcement and the community members they serve together so that they can discuss important issues and learn more about each other."

And now that program that started in Hawthorne California is coming to Gainesville.

"We got involved in this because there's a true need for community engagement, we see what's going on around the world with the communities general trust in law enforcement and it's the worst its ever been in many many years."

And Sergeant Robbie Williams with the Hawthorne Police Department says coffee with a cop is aimed at changing that.

"as we're sitting here drinking coffee, that relationship began to bud and they started talking about problems and I was able to give them resources to fixing that problem in the community."

If you want to--come out and talk with your local law enforcement over a cup of Joe, you can join them tomorrow morning from 8:00-10:30am at Chick-fil-A on Southwest Archer Road.

Feb 3 It's a new program the sheriff's office is trying out to get law enforcement and the community together.

Residents like Prinnie Mikel say Coffee with a Cop helped her relate better to the Alachua County Sheriff deputies.

"They have lives, they have wives, they have jobs, they have jobs after jobs, they do things, they're real people too and they have feelings and most of them are just big gentle being like my new friend here."

It's a program designed to help get rid of some of the negative stereotypes about law enforcement.

It gives us a chance to realize that this stigmatism, this public opinion right now is a real thing that we have to deal with and that we have to try to break down and overcome."

"And one family tells us they didn't even know this event was going on, but they learned a lot about the deputy they met today."

"Well we learned he has a couple of kids, learned that he's a sergeant and a couple of officers that we actually know personally actually report to him and some of the resource officers from Kanapaha and some other schools so it was good that there was that connection there and he was really easy to talk to."

And Sgt. Joshua Crews says he feels like he made new friends.

"I found out that one of them really likes baseball, the other ones into football and it was a cool experience just to get to know each other a little bit and share ideas."

Those who came out to sip coffee with a deputy say they'll be back.

"It's a great experience because I see so many faces and to put a name with a face or to just say thank you and to have good coffee that was a bonus."

And with over 40 community members coming out to have coffee with a deputy, the sheriff's office says they're planning on doing two more coffee with a cop events later this month.

Feb 4 Two new ambulances have been added to Alachua County Fire Rescue's new fleet.

The first of its kind in the county, each ambulance has a hydraulic mac lift, and stretchers that can hold patients weighing up to 1,600 pounds.

"For us, having a truck like this with the capabilities that this truck has with the ramp on it and the bariatric stretcher, it makes things a lot easier for us with the limited two-person crew that we have for moving some of our larger bariatric patients," said paramedic David Torsell.

Assistant Chief Jeff Taylor says while the obesity rate in Alachua County is under the state average, they also help patients from surrounding counties.

"Where we are seeing this need is that we have several counties attached to ours, and five of those seven counties are actually way above the state average for obese adults," Taylor said.

The bariatric ambulances cost about \$5,000 more than a standard ambulance.

"We certainly saw a need, and for a relatively low cost we're able to provide this service here within the county, which is going to provide a safer, quicker, and more efficient service to those in need," he said.

One of the ambulances is stationed in the southeast side of Gainesville, while the other is on the northwest side.

Feb 12 12 Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, for the past forty-seven years, the phone has been ringing behind the doors of the Alachua County Crisis Center.

Ashley Flattery and Jerry Macdaid are just two of the faces in the sea of nearly 120 volunteers.

"I've always had a value about giving back, and this is something that I can do that makes a difference," said Macdaid. "I was here working through some of the hurricanes that came through town, I was here for the student murders and that was a big community changing event."

They're just some of the volunteers who listen, and open their hearts.

"You have the privilege of sitting there with them and just being in that moment and letting them know that you're not alone," Flattery said.

She calls it a privilege to be able to sit with people in their time of need.

"It takes so much vulnerability and so much bravery for our callers to put themselves out there to complete strangers. We're not somebody's best friend that they're going to, someone's family members, we're not even somebody that's being paid to go see. We're just someone there to listen and to have a unique unbiased view to be there and support them," Flattery explained.

As new volunteers are added to the team, they go through an intensive 60-hour training. GTN News was given a rare chance to sit in on a closed-door session, where volunteers learn how to handle each and every scenario.

"We do get calls from people who are suicidal, we get calls from people who are in crisis, we also get calls from people who are lonely, who find themselves in life alone.. just very alone and its 2 in the morning," said Training Coordinator Jan Greene.

These volunteers don't have to have a background in psychology, or even a college degree.

"If they can make it through training, and show us that they can get the skills, they have the attitude, and they can receive the knowledge that we have to impart, then they can go on the phones," said Greene.

The Alachua County Crisis Center is located on SE 24th street in Gainesville, inside of the county health department building.

Mar 2 Local fire stations could be in danger of closing. Some say they really lack funding- and they're turning to Alachua County. Fire Chiefs from Micanopy- Newberry- High Springs- Cross Creek- Melrose- LaCrosse- and Windsor are asking for help.

Chief Paul McDavid of LaCrosse says, "I think it's the first time in the three years I've been around, we've seen every fire chief from every station at one time."

For years- each station has been contracted through alachua county to provide fire services. Chief Northcutt says, "They haven't received increases in their contract agreements in 5 or 6 years. The board was wanting to know what some of that impact might be."

Northcutt says one option the board is considering is becoming a county wide system. This would be different from the contracts Alachua County currently holds with each of the smaller stations. County wide would mean Alachua County would be build their own stations in the more rural areas- and the current smaller stations could be shut down. Another option would be to discuss new terms and funding on the contracts- and revise them.

Commissioner Hutchinson says the cities will make the decision of whether or not they want to continue a contract with Alachua County. "They will probably put "here's our number right here." That will then be factored in to the county's budget negotiations. And that's where we decided how we're going to pay for it, or if we're going to pay for it."

The contracts are automatically renewed every year with each station. If a station chooses not to continue service with Alachua County- they can cancel the contract before May 31st of this year. Chief Northcutt says changing from the current contracts to a county wide system could even affect the decision that was worked out with the Melrose Fire Department in January

Mar 7 Dozens of residents took part in a 4.2 mile walk last this afternoon, as part of the Lauren's Kids seventh annual Walk in My Shoes campaign.

The walk honored the 42 million survivors of child sexual abuse, who are living across the United States. Lauren's Kids is dedicated to preventing abuse and helping those survivors heal. This year, the campaign that has many stops in the state, is spending nearly a week in Gainesville.

Late this morning, Founder and CEO Lauren Book spoke to an attentive room of students at Newberry Elementary School. One year ago, a 9-year-old girl went to police about her experience with abuse, after hearing from Lauren last year at the Boys & Girls Club.

"Were really focused here on education and some of the situations that happened last year when we were at an event and read Lauren's Kingdom, and a little girl was able to share the things that had happened to her and get help," said Book.

Kingdom is a personal story of finding your voice. That story, Ofc. Erika Benson said, gave the young girl confidence to tell police Lauren's what had happened to her.

"She was so intelligent and so confident in what she was saying and she was ready to be heard and have her story stop there, and Lauren's book just gave her the power to tell us about it," said Ofc. Benston.

Book will be speaking to nearly a dozen schools this week across Alachua County. To get involved head to the Child Advocacy Center in Gainesville at 4 p.m. on March 8-10.

According to Lauren's Walk, 95% of child sexual abuse is preventable through education and awareness.

Mar 9 It was a full house tonight at the Alachua County Commission meeting as residents came out to push for a new living wage ordinance.

"To earn a living wage has many many positive benefits to both the individual and the community, it allows the person to feel like they're living a more dignified existence and they're not struggling month to month as much as they would in a sub living range," said Alachua County resident Mark Venzke.

That was the general consensus during the meeting as over 70 people voiced their opinions in passing a vote for a living wage ordinance and by the end of the night the commissioners unanimously voted in favor of a living wage ordinance for county workers.

The lowest paid county workers makes about \$12 an hour and the Alachua County Labor Coalition pointed out studies showing how expensive it is to live in Alachua county.

"MIT did a study and they said to live in Alachua County you need to be making \$14.56 an hour, somewhere around there and this is because its how much it cost to have a family, to afford for housing in Alachua county, healthcare in Alachua county, food in Alachua county," said Alachua Co. Labor Coalition organizer Jeremiah Tattersall.

One of the concerns some of the commissioners had was exemptions and whether or not to include temporary workers, but some residents say it shouldn't matter.

"if your an intern or a temp, your time is valuable," said Alachua County resident Trisha Ingle.

Two votes are needed to pass the living wage ordinance so the county will meet once again on April 12th to go over the details of the ordinance and cast a second vote.

Mar 10 The Humane Society of the United States drove into Gainesville on Thursday afternoon with its rescue rig. On board, were 120 dogs and puppies who just made an over 1,000 mile journey.

These puppies were recovered from a puppy mill in Arkansas last week.

"They were found to be in deplorable conditions, many had serious or life threatening injuries and many were found deceased on the property," said Margot Wilder, Director of Development for the Alachua County Humane Society.

Volunteers from across the state came together at the Alachua County Humane Society, to take some of the dogs back to their local groups. Nearly a dozen rescue organizations were present.

"The drive is nothing compared to the satisfaction of getting these animals cleaned up and put into good homes, that's the importance," said volunteer Tery Elzey of Naples.

Of the 120 rescues that arrived in Gainesville on Thursday, about 15 will be staying in Alachua County. They'll be available for adoption in just a couple of weeks.

3/10 Bo Diddley plaza is back open and the Union Street farmers market is busier than ever. It's also helping some lower income families eat healthier.

"Its really awesome to see people shopping you know with their kids and you know have the kids be like interested in what's going and saying I want this or I want that," says Jasmine Angelini-Knoll, assistant farm manager for Frog Song Organics.

Frog Song Organics sells local fresh produce in the farmers market in downtown Gainesville and it's also one of the many vendors who accept SNAP cards or EBT.

A lot of Farmers Markets are helping lower income families eat healthier by providing fresh fruits and vegetables.

"it means a lot to people to come and be able to select some fresh things and have it be covered under that program," says Angelini-Knoll.

At the Florida Organic Growers booth, customers can get their SNAP cards swiped and they'll get to use those cards at the numerous vendors that accept EBT.

"They get tokens, so they're colorful plastic tokens that they don't have to use that day, there's not an expiration and so they can use them there at that market or other markets that also accept EBT," says Star Tarrant, the education coordinator and office manager for Florida Organic Growers.

Florida Organic Growers receives funding from Alachua County for the EBT program, allowing those enrolled to buy food at farmers markets.

Mar 15 Earlier today, local officers played local kids in a basketball tournament, and it's all thanks to GPD's Basketball Cop Bobby White. "It's making a lot of people happy, and people want to see more of it. Since I started receiving funds through my foundation, I'm able to fund things like this."

It all started from White's basketball playing dashcam video in January. His coworker, Officer Ernell Cook says, "Basketball Cop is viral right now. Everybody knows who he is, so pretty much everywhere we go, it's Basketball Cop it's Basketball Cop. So it definitely helps with any first interaction with anybody wherever we go."

Although the kids' All Star team beat the cops' team tonight, it wasn't the win they seemed too concerned with. Eastside High student Joseph Mccray says, "It's good to see everyone smiling and having fun and sharing the ball." Gainesville High student Kaijon Scott says, "It's an awesome experience cause like we look at them to be heroes and stuff, and now they're on the court with us. And we're doing what we love to do, and we didn't know that they loved to play this game with us, so it's kind of amazing."

All of the money raised from ticket sales will be going to the Basketball Cop Foundation. The more the community gets involved in Officer White's projects, the more local kids he is able to help. To find out about other projects Officer White is working on, visit the Basketball Cop Facebook page.

Mar 18 The scene before you is just a drill, but it's one that Gainesville Fire Rescue and GPD say could save many lives.

"We're preparing for that San Bernardino or that Paris or you know heaven forbid one of those huge mass casualty type incidents where both agencies are going to be rolling in every asset that we got, so we're simulating a mass casualty incident and how law enforcement is going to respond," says Lt. Dan Stout with the Gainesville Police Department.

In this mock training exercise members of the Gainesville Police Department go inside the building looking for an active shooter, while members of Gainesville Fire Rescue standby to treat any potential victims.

Gainesville Fire Rescue has a rescue task force that allows us to be able to go in to the warm zone once it's been initially cleared by law enforcement and actually start extracting the patients out, this helps us to be able to get to the patients within five minutes instead of waiting for the lengthy time for them to be able to clear," says Operations Chief Michael Cowart with Gainesville Fire Rescue.

The training is important for both agencies because they've noticed a trend in the number of active shooting cases reported.

"This is a growing and expanding threat and we have to continue, if we just stayed static and where we were on this day and we don't advance, we're not going to be prepared for what's coming so we're trying to get out in front of that," says Lt. Stout.

And if anyone is ever put in an active shooter situation, there are a number of things Gainesville Fire says they can do to help protect yourself.

"Try to get out of the building as quickly as you can, don't worry about catching your belongings or anything else like that but grabbing co-workers as you go, if someone doesn't want to go and they freeze up, leave them there, tell them to find shelter, but get out," says Chief Cowart.

ISSUE: COMMUNITY SAFETY

Jan 15 From the work place to college campus.

The Santa Fe Police Department is working to make sure you know how to be prepared.

"There's always something you can do, whether that means, run, hide, or fight."

That's the message from lieutenant Ryan Woods with the Santa Fe Police Department. He says if you ever are faced with an active shooter, you don't have to be defenseless.

"Stapler, pens, you know any of those things, a fire extinguisher is a great weapon to defend yourself if you need to get to that point because -- if you get to the point where you cannot run, cannot hide, the only thing left to do is fight for your very existence."

" And Santa Fe police department says nearly 75 people came out to attend the training today on how to keep their community safe and what to do in case there is an active threat."

"a lot of times people get paralyzed with fear - if you train, then you don't have that so if something happens you can act upon it or you already talked about it, you have that inset that look I talked, I remember going to that presentation and it was said help something happen, I have these three options I can do."

And before a shooting happens --experts at Santa Fe say they are ways to solve a problem before things get out of hand."

"Showing respect, talking to them, they're going to realize that and that's going to calm them down and de-escalate that other party."

Those that came out for the training say the information they received was very helpful

"I'm going to put it into place, I'm going to be prepared more than anything and also to share this information with other employees and some students that we have working in our department

Santa Fe College has been doing this front line training program for two years now as part of their Safe Santa Fe initiatives.

: WEATHER ISSUE

Jan 19 The cold weather has alerted local shelters to open their cold night shelter programs to the homeless. The cold night shelter program is helping homeless families and individuals find relief from the cold.

One of the cold night shelter programs is offered at grace market place.

"They'll accept pretty much anybody especially, anybody over the age of 18 they'll accept."

"And on days like this where it's below 45 degrees places like Saint Francis House are offering services to homeless people to help them seek shelter out of the cold."

"We open up our main room and our dining room and put out cots or mattresses and people come in and sleep, they get a hot snack in the evening and then they get to eat breakfast in the morning before they go, but they need to leave first thing in the morning, they don't become residents."

Some of those people taking a break from the cold are granny. She suffers from health issues.

"I have half a stomach from cancer and I'm not allowed to and I'm now allowed to have certain things."

She cant always eat the food St. Francis House is serving.

"So Ms. Sherry when she works, she fixes me special foods."

granny says she's thankful for staff members like ms. Sherry when she comes to the shelter.

"She is more than sweet honey, she is very real inside."

St. Francis house is always looking for volunteers and donations.

"T-shirts, just real basic things and that stuff doesn't even have to be new, towels and linens don't have to be new as long as they're still serviceable and they're clean, we're happy to get them."

And if you are seeking trying to get out of the cold and you need help.

"don't wait until eight or nine o'clock that night, you know start paying attention as best you can and if you can get to one of those two places, they'll take you or they'll find a place for you."

The cold night shelter program is offered from November through the end of March.

ISSUE: ENVIRONMENT

Jan 19 A retired park ranger is raising concerns that the state is looking to change the way the Ichetucknee Springs State Park is operating.

Ron Preston says he comes to the springs almost every day and is concerned over what could happen if the state allows one vendor to operate all of the concessions, rentals, and shuttles.

"We're just afraid that the real flavor, that old Florida flavor, of this park in Fort White is going to change drastically," he said.

Another fear is that if a large corporation comes in to run all of the amenities, the money generated from the Ichetucknee Springs will not be staying in Fort White, but instead go to a supervisor.

"I feel, and the local people feel, like there should have been a public forum where they told us what is going to happen, what the cost will be, and then at least we would have time to talk with our representatives and then we as the public could talk about these issues and voice our concerns," said Preston.

GTN News reached out to the state park, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, but have not received comment.

ISSUE: HEALTH

Jan 5 It's a love story that's still going strong and now it's even stronger.

A husband and wife return to Gainesville almost a year after he donates a kidney to save her life. About five years ago Linda Katherine Segars got her husband Roy a gift he'll never forget... ballroom dancing.

"And at the time I have to tell you I thought it was just a silly gift, I mean I had never danced in my life and I thought what a waste of money but since she gave it to me as a gift I went and took the three lessons fell in love with it."

But last year his wife's health took a turn for the worse.

"In fact the doctors had told me at one point they didn't think she would survive."

Twenty years ago Kathy underwent a kidney transplant, but now she was going through kidney failure again.

And this time Roy stepped up giving her the gift of life.

"And he said, I think I need to get on the list so I'm going to try as hard as I can to qualify."

He put his name on the kidney donor list, and u-f health called the couple back saying Roy was the perfect match.

Roy and Kathy drove down from Georgia last April for a successful kidney transplant surgery.

"To now see her not just fighting to survive but living and thriving, I mean it is just a wonderful feeling for me."

"The Segars have been married for nearly 48-years and now they say after going through this experience their bond has never been closer."

"There are times when I look at him and it's like being in love with a whole new person, I feel like overwhelmed with inexpressible gratitude."

Even doctors at u-f health say they'll very pleased with how well Kathy has recovered after the procedure.

"This is a great example of people that we transplant and we transform not only their health and their numbers, you know their lab numbers but also their quality of life and their future outlook on life as well too."

Even Roy had a pretty short recovery time before he was back on his feet doing what

he loves most.

"It took about four months before I was able to get back and do a little dancing and about six or seven months and I was back doing essentially everything I've been doing before."

This April Roy will be competing in Dancing with the Athens Stars to help victims of domestic violence.

To donate to his team --- Team 5 you can visit our [Facebook page](#)

Jan 10 From battling burning buildings to knocking down fires...firefighters put their lives at risk every day.

But there's also another threat - cancer. The silent killer that has firefighters in a heated battle over Florida legislation.

Lt. Willie Saulsberry received the shock of his life three years ago when he found out he had prostate cancer.

He was left with only one thing on his mind.

"Surviving, when I say survival, it was survival because of my children, I don't want them to grow up without their dad, it wasn't so much of me in fear of my own life it was the fear of them growing up without me."

Saulsberry says no one in his family has a history of cancer so he wondered how it could happen to him.

"My lifestyle, It's pretty healthy, I'm not a risk taker and everything like that

Then he looked at his job.

At the time he was diagnosed he had already been a firefighter for over twenty years.

"That's where we kind of had the decision of where the possibility came from."

And that's when Saulsberry took action.

"I looked at my highest survival chances and that was actually having the prostate removed so I didn't want to come back later on and find out that the chemo or radiation didn't work and the cancer progressed from where it previously was."

It's stories like his that have firefighters pushing for presumptive cancer laws.

"What the cancer presumption laws do is it that it basically allows the firefighter to assume that the cancer was caused on the job and it gives them the benefit of workers compensation should it be proved to be caused by fire fighting."

Over 30 states have firefighter cancer presumption laws, but Florida isn't one of them.... Instead the sunshine state only covers presumptive laws for heart and lung disease.

Some fire stations say having cancer laws in place will cost the tax payers too much money and other stations simply say they don't have a cancer problem.

But Gainesville Fire Rescue says that's just not true.

"The reason why they're saying that there's no issue with them is because they haven't done enough research what we are, Gainesville is very progressive, we go and we look and we research.

And experts from the University of Florida say research and studies have shown links between firefighting and an increased risk for cancer.

"There was an analysis of all the published studies so far, a meta-analysis that was published a few years back that was specifically talking about the cancer that seems to show increased risk in fire fighters, for example multiple melanoma, Hodgkin's lymphoma, there were some concerns about testicular cancer and maybe also prostate and brain cancers."

Cancers that maybe caused by chemicals or carcinogens that are absorbed in the body.

"Its a mixture of different dangerous compounds and it keeps staying on their skin - not all of them take showers right away, they are tired, they are sweating so it's opening up pores and it's

getting into the blood much easier."

That's why firefighters like lieutenant Saulsberry are hoping that Florida legislators pass the presumption law this year.

"we're doing everything possible not to obtain these cancers but you still need people to do what we do, we're firefighters, we're part of EMS and we're exposed to these things."

Because firefighters are not only fighting fires every day... They're battling cancer "If you see a fire truck going by, with three fire fighters on there, one of them probably is either going to have cancer or will be dealing with cancer shortly."

Mar 3 A new full-service emergency room is coming to West Gainesville.

While some residents say it's great for patients west of the interstate, others are upset that a 24-hour operation will disrupt their peaceful neighborhood.

Jose Moreno says it all started about three years ago when the corner lot next door, where a boarded home now sits, went up for sale.

"It concerns me, I'm all for growth and I think that's wonderful but we have plenty of commercial zoning areas within a half mile of this area that are strictly commercial, but this is all residential," he said.

The lot at the intersection of Newberry Road and Parker Road was approved for commercial use late last month, and North Florida Regional Medical Center confirmed they will be opening a 24-7 full-service emergency room at the site. "There are three of us back here that 24-7, around the clock, are going to be hit with this noise and lights on forever," said neighbor Linda Stanton.

The \$10.5 million emergency department will be just over 11,000 square feet, and serve more than 12,000 patients a year. It's expected to have 10 emergency rooms and 35 staff members.

"I hope we don't get urban sprawl like in Northern Virginia areas but I love Alachua County, and this is happening whether we like it or not, so we may as well embrace it," said resident Heather Damron.

North Florida Regional says they chose the spot, because it will allow patients from counties west of the current hospital to get help quickly, without having to battle high-traffic areas.

Construction will begin this summer, and the new ER is expected to open in about a year.

Mar 4 Every two seconds- someone in the country needs a blood donation, according to the Red Cross. Life South here in Gainesville says UF students make up a large

portion of those who donate in our community. When they're on spring break, the need is critical.

Car accidents, cancer and sickle cell disease are just a few of the reasons people need blood donations. According to Life South, some people with cancer need blood every single day while going through chemotherapy. Now more than ever, they're asking for your help. Tatyana Terry of LifeSouth says, "This is the emptiest our shelves have ever been. Normally, they're pretty full."

Life South needs 1,000 donors every week to satisfy all of the blood needed in our area, and they say only about four percent of people donate regularly. Gary Kirkland of LifeSouth says, "you don't want to have somebody come into an emergency room and you say sorry we don't have blood."

Donating whole blood only takes about an hour- and doesn't cost the donor anything. When you donate one pint of whole blood, it gets divided up into plasma, platelets, and red blood cells. Those end up saving the lives of three people.

Plasma can last up to a year and can be frozen. Red blood cells last 42 days and can be refrigerated. However, platelets only last 5 days, which is why the demand for these is even greater. James Wands has been donating platelets for 14 years. "There was a sign saying help this little girl because she had hemophilia. It helps them and it helps me."

Kirkland says, "It's the blood donor who donates today that saves somebody tomorrow." LifeSouth wants at least five days of blood in reserve. This makes sure they could resupply local hospitals if a major emergency ever happened. They have donation locations in Chiefland, Alachua, and two in Gainesville. The mobile donation buses are always traveling- and people can donate there at any time.

Mar 16 Boxes of medical supplies made their way onto selves at what will soon be a new health clinic in East Gainesville.

The clinic, located at the Fernside Family Services Center, is set to open on March 31.

"This was a dream the superintendent had ever since he came here, he's been passionate about providing services, especially in low-income families, that will ultimately help children do better in school," said Jackie Johnson, spokesperson for Alachua County Public Schools.

The clinic will be run by the county health department, and offer preventative care, school physicals, and immunizations.

"This summer we'll be opening a WIC clinic one day per week, so we're hoping the community will embrace this clinic and utilize it very well," said Paul Myers from the Florida Department of Health.

The location was used about ten years ago for a similar clinic, so with some touch ups, it will be ready to go in just over two weeks. The space includes three exam rooms, four offices, and a waiting area.

Initially, the clinic will only be open on Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., but additional days may soon be added.

ISSUE: RESEARCH

Feb 11 Early this morning during a special press conference in Washington D.C., scientists announced that after decades of research they finally were able to discover gravitational waves.

And as GTN News reports, University of Florida scientists played a major role in that discovery.

"About a hundred years ago, Albert Einstein made a prediction and it looks like he was right as scientist right here at the University of Florida discuss the discovery of gravitational waves."

For the first time ever scientist can detect gravitational waves. Waves that experts say were detected from two merging black holes.

"It wasn't what we expected, we expected to see two neutrons, lighter objects and two black holes with this mass, there were hints of it but no proof of it and there was certainly no evidence at all by any other method that the two of them would be in orbits around each other circulating and eventually colliding."

And the University of Florida was one of the first to make the discovery

"The detection was made by a program called coherent wave burst, fully developed here at the University of Florida."

"UF was involved primarily with optics controls as well as data analysis and so both of those independently contributed to preparation for this discovery

Kendall Achley, a graduate student at UF says she's been apart of this research since she was a freshman.

"It's very exciting actually this has been a long time coming so to be apart of this day is amazing."

"And experts say this discovery opens up new doors for researching the Universe.

ISSUE: GOVERNMENT

Mar 5 Early polls are now open for the Presidential Preference Primary, Mayoral Election, and City Commission race in Alachua County. The Elections office says the turnout for this first day is higher than many primary elections in the past. Pam Carpenter, the Supervisor of Elections in Alachua County says, "we had 1,150 people come out and and cast their ballots today alone. And we're really pleased with that for a first day turnout."

Voters say they want to get their voice heard- and now is a good time to do so. Irma and Chester Williams say, "Beating the crowd I guess. It's so much easier, there's not a lot of crowds. And we can go in, vote, and come back out. And we can go on our way."

Early voter Robert Ostrow says, "It's spring break in Gainesville this week, so it's easier to get around town. I think there's going to be a lot of people coming out on the 15th, so I want to make sure I get here. And I want to make sure my vote counts." Early voter Dave Miller says, "My precinct is way up on Williston Rd. I live in Porter's community so coming here is a lot easier. I don't have to worry about crowds, and there's no pollsters."

Early voters have a choice of 3 polling locations. Right here at the Supervisor of Elections office. The Millhopper Branch Library, and the Tower Road Branch Library. They are open from 9-5 until Saturday, March 12th. The only exception is on Thursday, March 10th, when the polls will be open from 10-6. For any more information on early voting in Alachua County visit votealachua.com.

Mar 11 Candidates have been campaigning in Florida to prepare for the Presidential Preference Primary next Tuesday. Bernie Sanders stopped by The University of Florida today. About 4,000 people showed up at UF this morning to show their support for Sanders. The Vermont senator focused on issues that appeal to students. "We should do our best to emulate other countries who provide free tuition at public colleges and universities. I want to see that happen."

When asked about the gridlock within Congress, Sanders says he has worked with the republicans on issues in the past, but he says it may not be the situation if he takes office. "First thing if I get elected I think there will not be a Republican US senate. If I get elected, there will be a large voter turnout in the election, and I think that turnout will result in republicans losing control in the senate, and I expect losing a lot of votes in the house."

Even with Sanders being the oldest candidate running across party lines, his following is coming from young people. Many who say they went out early to cast their vote for the democratic contender. "He doesn't lie, he's never been dishonest, like I said consistent. He knows, because he's been there. He's been in our shoes, he understands the issues." "He's relatable. He talks about things that are important to me, he's sincere, he's genuine, and I believe what he says."

Molly Vise is a UF student who's part of the Progressive Gators club. She says getting the Vermont senator to campus has been a goal since May. "I saw that online that there was a Senator for free education and I was hooked immediately. When I saw that the same Senator was running for President, we immediately organized everything grassroots, and we have been going on ever since then."

With a recent upset victory in Michigan, Sanders now claims 9 states. The campaign is hoping the quick stop in Gainesville will push that number up to 10 in the Florida primary

next Tuesday. The presidential hopeful will continue on the trail, with the next stop being Tampa.

Mar 16 The race for the Gainesville City Commission District 4 seat was not a close one. Adrian Hayes-Santos won the election with 81% of the vote, while Jim Konish brought in just 18%.

"I feel great, I'm excited! We ran a very positive campaign and really focused on the issues, and that really resonated with the District 4 voters," said Hayes-Santos.

When Hayes-Santos gets sworn in this May, he says he will work to protect Gainesville's unique neighborhoods as well as promote a vibrant downtown.

"One of the focuses is that we have an amazing unique city, we're very different from the rest of Florida and we want to make sure we keep that amazing uniqueness as we grow as a city," he said.

Last week, Konish filed a complaint against Hayes-Santos questioning his residency in District 4.

"It was a last-minute political shenanigan by my opponent and I'm glad it didn't work out," said Hayes-Santos.

He ran for a Gainesville City Commission At-Large seat last year, but didn't come out on top. His mom Alycin says he came back strong.

"I was so impressed with Adrian when he actually didn't win, he took it in such a positive way, and he's a very positive person and he's run a very positive campaign and I'm just incredibly impressed with him as a person." she said.

Mar 13 This Tuesday is Florida Primary day and it's also the city of Gainesville mayoral and city commissioner elections.

And if one thing's clear, it's that there's a lot of excitement and energy when it comes to the 2016 election year.

"Early on last week we surpassed the number of early votes that we had in 2012, so this is definitely record breaking as far as early voting is concerned," says Alachua County Supervisor of Elections Pam Carpenter.

It's too late register to vote for tomorrow's election and early voting has closed, but starting tomorrow morning you can come out to your local precinct and cast your ballot.

For those who live in Alachua County and have registered as either Democrat or republican, you'll get to vote in the presidential primary.

But independent voters who didn't register with a political party before February 16th, unfortunately can't vote in tomorrow's presidential primary.

Those who live in the city of Gainesville will get to vote for the mayoral election and the presidential primary.

And if you live in city of Gainesville's district 4, you can vote for the next district 4 commissioner, mayoral election, plus the presidential primary.

But just remember before you head out to the polls, there are a few items you'll need to bring.

"You're coming to the polling place to vote, remember Florida law requires that you bring a picture and signature ID with you, a lot of people bring their drivers license and use that, it needs to be current and valid," says Carpenter.

So far over 12,000 absentee ballots have been county and over 13,000 voted early.

For those who haven't voted polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday.

Tune in to GTN News tomorrow night and we'll bring you the very latest on our local city elections and the presidential primary.

ISSUE: LIFESTYLES

A Gainesville couple is downsizing their living space as part of a popular documentary style T.V. show that's filming right here in town.

Lonie Carpenter and Danny McKibbin used to live in a giant home in Micanopy.

"It was like four stories tall, 3,000 square feet, we had an outside deck, I mean we had to pressure the deck every two weeks because of the trees that hang over, the gorgeous trees, but it was just so much," says Carpenter

They own five businesses around town and because they're always busy they decided to downsize and join the tiny house movement.

"As business owners it's going to free up our time to donate time we want to spend working towards our business, you don't really want to be at home working you know you want to be at home enjoying our house and having less house will probably be more enjoyable," says McKibbin.

Now they both are about to be featured in Tiny House Nation, a hit show on the FYI Network.

"The tiny house is nothing new, it's just the mentality its just the mentality that actually living in a smaller space will actually benefit our lives," says Tiny House Nation co-host Zack Giffin.

And Carpenter and McKibbin tell us they hope this new home will help revitalize the South East area of Gainesville.

"We really kind of beautified this small house and so we want to kind of transform this area and bring in what's happening downtown," says Carpenter.

And the co-hosts of Tiny House Nation say there's even a lot of benefits to choosing to downsize your home.

"At the crux of it when you go tiny, you're getting more time and more money and if you had more time and more money, what would you do? That's the question that people that go tiny get to answer," says Tiny House Nation co-host John Weisbarth.

And the excited Gainesville couple will be featured on an episode of Tiny House Nation this summer.

