

Highlands Radio Group



6/29/2020

Like the rest of the state, as testing continues for the Coronavirus here in Highlands County the numbers continue to rise. At last report, there had been 8,653 tests done locally. Of those, 8,239 have been negative with 345 positive cases.

The severity of those positive cases remains unknown. Florida Department of Health officials will reveal that 58 people have been hospitalized locally at some point in their illness. Since numbers started being kept, 11 fatalities in Highlands now have been tied to the Coronavirus.

An automobile accident north of Lake Placid reportedly has claimed a life. Witnesses say it appears a northbound car went out of control on Highway 27 near the intersection of Lake Henry Drive and flipped.

No names or other details have yet been released.

Authorities now say there was a fatality in the fire last night at Sun 'N Lakes South. Units from all over the county descended on the mobile home on Swaunee Lane. However, despite arriving within seven minutes of the initial call - they say the home was nearly a total loss.

Units from Sun 'N Lakes South, Highlands Park, Lake Placid and Placid Lakes responded to the call along with law enforcement and EMS units.

The name of the victim has not been released. The State Fire Marshal's office has been called in to determine the cause.

One person died and fifteen others were treated after a hazardous materials incident in Sebring yesterday. Not much is known about it, save to say that Sebring firefighters were called to an address on Ellenton Avenue on what was paged out as a medical call. Three children, three Sebring Police Officers and a pair of Highlands County Fire Rescue/EMS workers were among those injured. They were transported to the hospital, where they were evaluated and released.

The name of the deceased and other details have not yet been released.

Highlands County firefighters teamed up with units from the Florida Forest Service yesterday to contain a brush fire off Lone Bay Road north of Avon Park. Firefighters had to protect a pair of structures while the flames ate up about 20 acres there.

Officials described it as "inaccessible muck acreage." Despite the blistering temperatures, no injuries were reported there. Apparently, there still is smoke in the area from that blaze.

Highlands County officials remind residents that recycling resumes today. That means the green cans should only be used for recyclable goods. Currently the only items that are being accepted are steel & aluminum cans, plastic bottles & jars and clean cardboard.

Authorities say the items should be placed loose in the cart because there is NO recycling of plastic bags of any kind.

6/30/2020

In their report this morning, Florida Department of Health officials say Highlands County has registered five new positive cases of the Coronavirus and 174 negative test results. The current report shows 8,784 tests done locally. Of those, 8,425 have been negative with 350 positive cases.

They report that as a 96-percent negative testing rate.

The severity of those positive cases remains unknown. Florida Department of Health officials will reveal that 58 people have been hospitalized locally at some point in their illness. Since numbers started being kept, 11 fatalities in Highlands have been tied to the Coronavirus.

Lake Placid police say they have recorded the second traffic fatality in as many days there. A 24-year-old Lake Placid man was killed when his car was hit broadside by a tractor trailer rig. According to reports, it appears Emilio Cardenas ran the red light at the intersection of Interlake Boulevard and Highway 27 about 10:30 last night.

Yesterday morning, a Sebring woman was killed in a traffic crash. 33-year-old Opal Kendricks was northbound on Highway 27 and was ejected from her vehicle when it rolled near Lake Henry Drive.

Highlands County sheriff's officials say it may be a while before they release the name of the person found dead in a Sunday night fire at Sun 'N Lake South. Apparently making a positive identification of the remains has been difficult.

Units from all over the county descended on the mobile home on Swanunee Lane. However, despite arriving within seven minutes of the initial call - they say the home was nearly a total loss.

The State Fire Marshal's office is investigating the incident.

Another day full of fires in Highlands County yesterday. First the flames broke out in Venus - apparently sparked by a lightning strike. Authorities say there were several brush fires along the west side of Highway 27 near Herrell road. The Florida Forest Service dispatched a dozer to help corral that one.

A second blaze in the area charred about three acres.

The third fire was reportedly off State Road 621 near Able Road in Highlands Park. That one apparently was five acres in a sugar cane field. Units from Lake Placid, Sun 'N Lake South, Leisure Lakes and Lorida turned out to put that one down.

7/2/2020

Latest Numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show Highlands County has registered 15 new positive cases of the Coronavirus and 435 negative test results. The current report shows 9,520 tests done locally. Of those, 9,133 have been negative with 372 positive cases.

The severity of those positive cases remains unknown. Florida Department of Health officials will reveal that 67 people have been hospitalized locally at some point in their illness. Since numbers started being kept, 11 fatalities in Highlands have been tied to the Coronavirus.

It appears Highlands County is in line for some cash from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief & Economic Security Act. Highlands County Commissioner Don Elwell, who sat in on the CARES committee meetings, reports that Highlands County will receive about \$4.6 million. Those funds must be distributed by September 30th. Once that money is handed out, the county will be in line for another \$13.8 million to help those most affected by the pandemic.

The money is designed to assist with expenses due to the Corona virus. Those expenses include such things as assisting individuals with rent, utilities and the like. Also for for small businesses, non-profits, testing costs and to reimburse government expenses.

More details will be released as programs are firmed up.

Highlands County Sheriff's Office Special Operations Division deputies teamed up agents from the Drug Enforcement Agency, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and deputies with the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office for "Operation Dry Ice."

Together they rounded up more than 20 drug dealers from all over Highlands County. Some of those arrested could also be facing federal indictments in the future.

Independence day is coming and officials of the Avon Park Air Force Range say they will be

hosting a bit of training today. Those with their eyes to the skies may see some F-16 fighter jets and H-60s which will be working out at the bombing range there.

A Winter Haven man was killed last night in a Lake Wales auto accident. Polk County Sheriff's reports say 25-year-old Rene Perez was on Crews Road when he lost control of his car while passing another vehicle. Witnesses said the Chevy Impala spun out and slammed into a stand of trees. They say he was not buckled up.

Perez suffered severe internal injuries and was transported to Lake Wales Medical Center where he was pronounced dead on arrival.

7/3/2020

Numbers released this morning by the Florida Department of Health show Highlands County has registered 18 new positive cases of the Coronavirus and 127 negative test results. The current report shows 9,665 tests done locally - of those, 9,260 have been negative with 390 positive cases.

The severity of those positive cases remains unknown. Florida Department of Health officials will reveal only that 68 people have been hospitalized locally at some point in their illness. Since numbers started being kept, 11 fatalities in Highlands have been tied to the Coronavirus.

Fire gutted a mobile home near Sebring late last night. Units from Desoto City, West Sebring, Sun 'N Lake and Lorida responded to the Barnum Street address shortly before 11:30.

No injuries were reported in the fire - which apparently did significant damage to the structure. Preliminary findings by State Fire Marshal's investigators say they believe it was electrical in nature.

A blaze in a shed sparked an adjoining brush fire at Avon Park Lakes yesterday. Units from Highlands Lakes, West Sebring, the City of Avon Park and even the Florida Forest Service responded and were able to keep it contained mostly to the structure.

Damage to the contents was set at between \$5,000 and \$7,000. No cause for the fire has been released. There were no injuries reported.

While some communities are discussing de-funding the police, here in Highlands County, a rally in support of law enforcement has been slated for today. Those who back the blue - and the green - will gather at 5:30 this evening at the intersection of Bayview Street and Highway 27 near the Sebring Square shopping plaza to show their support for law enforcement.

The flag and sign wave is expected to run about an hour and a half.

7/6/2020

Numbers released by the Florida Department of Health this morning show Highlands County has registered 11 new positive cases of the Coronavirus and 51 negative test results. The current report shows 9,999 tests done locally - of those, 9,567 have been negative with 405 positive cases.

The severity of those positive cases remains unknown. Florida Department of Health officials will reveal only that 70 people have been hospitalized locally at some point in their illness. Since numbers started being kept, 12 fatalities in Highlands have been tied to the Coronavirus.

Highlands County commissioners will convene tomorrow at the government center for their first meeting of July. They will get an update on money headed this way from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act. Reportedly there will be two phases, the first for \$4.6 million, with a subsequent payment of as much as \$13.8 million.

The commission also is set to receive a preliminary budget report for the upcoming fiscal year. Projections are set for money lost from sales tax, gas tax and tourist taxes over the past four months due to the Coronavirus situation.

Highlands County commissioner Don Elwell will hold his 20th, and possibly final, town hall meeting tomorrow night at South Florida State College. Due to Coronavirus concerns and suggested distancing, 400 chairs have been marked off for the event in the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts.

The college also is mandating that masks be worn for anyone planning to attend the event.

Among other things, Elwell will discuss the upcoming budget, money coming from the CARES Act and other community concerns. That will be held tomorrow evening beginning at 5:15pm.

Highlands county firefighters were busy over the weekend. Units from Lorida, Desoto City and the Florida Forest Service were called out yesterday to extinguish a blaze off White Oak Road in Lorida. Officials say it apparently was started by a lightning strike. No injuries were reported and there was no structure damage.

Two vehicles were destroyed Friday when one tried to pull another out of the mud near Lake Damon in Avon Park, Heat from underneath the cars started a brush fire, which consumed both of the vehicles. No injuries were reported in that incident.

It appears the Independence Day celebrations went off in Highlands County without a hitch, Fireworks shows were put on in Avon Park, Sebring and Lake Placid. There was also a boat parade in Lake June Saturday afternoon.

Local law enforcement officials say it appears despite the cannonade of fireworks over the weekend, nobody lost any fingers or toes.

It's getting down to the last few hours, and officials of the Sebring International Raceway are calling on everybody to get their votes in. Sebring has been voted as the Number One Motorsports Event on the USA Today's 10best list. Although the leaderboard has been concealed, at last report, Sebring was in line to maintain their Number One spot.

Voters can vote once on any of their devices including desktop and laptop computers, tablets and smart phones. A link to the vote is on any of our Facebook pages.

7/7/2020

Numbers released this morning by the Florida Department of Health show Highlands County has registered 30 new positive cases of the Coronavirus and 44 negative test results. The current report shows 10,062 tests have been done locally - of those, 9,611 have been negative with 435 positive cases.

The severity of those positive cases remains unknown. Florida Department of Health officials will reveal only that 74 people have been hospitalized locally at some point in their illness. Since numbers started being kept, 12 fatalities in Highlands have been tied to the Coronavirus.

Highlands County commissioners got an update on the so-called "CARES" Act when they met this morning in regular session. The county is in line for a \$4.6 million dollar initial payment with a subsequent payment of \$13.8 million dollar influx.

Commissioners worked on ways to disburse the money to individuals and businesses and parameters for such payments. They called the exercise a "fluid situation." Apparently, they will use the same kinds of application processes that Polk County has put in place.

Highlands County commissioner Don Elwell will hold his 20th, and possibly final, town hall meeting tonight at South Florida State College. Due to Coronavirus concerns and suggested distancing, 400 chairs have been marked off for the event in the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts.

The college also is mandating that masks be worn for anyone planning to attend the event.

Among other things, Elwell will discuss the upcoming budget, money coming from the CARES Act and other community concerns. That will be held this evening beginning at 5:15pm.

Another casualty of the Coronavirus. The Vet Jam End of SummerFest has been pushed back to September. The event, featuring music, food a poker run and other entertainment was to have been held this coming weekend.

Meanwhile, The Cadillac Grand Prix of Sebring will be held next weekend with limited attendance, masks and fan distancing guidelines.

7/8/2020

Numbers released this morning by the Florida Department of Health show Highlands County has registered 22 new positive cases of the Coronavirus and 139 negative test results. The current report shows 10,224 tests have been done locally - of those, 9,750 have been negative with 457 positive cases.

The severity of those positive cases remains unknown. Florida Department of Health officials

will reveal only that 76 people have been hospitalized locally at some point in their illness. Since numbers started being kept, 12 fatalities in Highlands have been tied to the Coronavirus.

Highlands County Commissioners yesterday approved a plan to disburse money from the so called CARES Act. The initial distribution will be \$4.6 million dollars from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief & Economic Security Act.

There will be \$1500 in individual assistance to eligible residents and some two million dollars in funds for eligible businesses. Under Community Proposals, there's \$250,000 to give to non-profits that qualify. There's also \$720,000 for Coronavirus testing and distribution and \$500,000 to County government for safety improvements.

The application period for the funds has not yet been set.

It does not appear that there will be any mask mandates in the area - at least for a while. Highlands County commissioners have declined to issue a mandate that all residents be forced to wear facemasks - due to the Coronavirus. They cited discussions with Highlands County Sheriff Paul Blackman who said enforcement of such a policy would not be possible.

Polk County commissioners likewise turned down the idea of a blanket mandate which would have forced all citizens to don facemasks of some kind.

Officials from Hardee county noted they have no such mandate, saying commissioners there have not taken up the issue.

Bassmaster Magazine has declared Lake Istokpoga as one of the Best Bass Lakes of the Decades. In all, there a 100 bodies of water on the annual list. Previously, Istokpoga has been tapped as one of the best such fishing lakes in the Southeast.

Istokpoga has been the site of several large scale tournaments and even a number of television specialists. Bassmaster rankers say it is one of the lakes on their "bucket list" to fish.

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Meanwhile, The Cadillac Grand Prix of Sebring will be held next weekend with limited attendance, masks and fan distancing guidelines.

Highlands County commissioners will convene this morning at the government center for their first meeting of July. They will get an update on money headed this way from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act. Reportedly there will be two phases, the first for \$4.6 million, with a subsequent payment of a much as \$13.8 million.

The commission also is set to receive a preliminary budget report for the upcoming fiscal year. Projections are set for money lost from sales tax, gas tax and tourist taxes over the past four months due to the Coronavirus situation.

7/9/2020

Numbers released this morning by the Florida Department of Health show Highlands County has registered 16 new positive cases of the Coronavirus and 91 negative test results. The current report shows 10,331 tests have been done locally - of those, 9,841 have been negative with 473 positive cases.

The severity of those positive cases remains unknown. Florida Department of Health officials will reveal only that 81 people have been hospitalized locally at some point in their illness. Since numbers started being kept, 12 fatalities in Highlands have been tied to the Coronavirus.

If you have any business at the Highlands County Courthouse, you might want to try and get it taken care of today. Due to Court funding being cut by \$250,000.00 Court Services for Highlands will be closed each Friday beginning tomorrow.

The Board side of the Clerk's Office will remain open for such things as official records, tax deeds and marriage licenses.

Emergency cases such as domestic violence, mental health and RPO cases also will be handled. Clerk of Courts Bob Germain says the 53-percent cut also may result in some layoffs and furloughs.

As revenues plummet due to the Coronavirus, Highlands County Commissioners are seeking citizen input on how to structure their budget for the upcoming fiscal year. A community meeting is set for the commissioners chambers this evening at 6:00 to hear ideas from residents on how the spending plan is structured, where cuts should be made and where they think the county can get more money.

It's going to be a busy day of training at the Avon park Air Force Range. Officials there say they first will be entertaining F16 fighter jets and H60 helicopters.

Later on this evening there will be activity by the big AC 130s. There has been quite a bit of activity at the range over the past few weeks.

Wondering what those big black tanks are on the side of the Lake Placid Dollar General? Reportedly, they're part of the store's fire suppression system. Each of the big canisters reportedly contains 40,000 gallons of water.

Authorities say there's a pump system that restores the supplies if the water is used or evaporates out. Another such system is in place at another outlet just south of Sebring.

It does not appear that there will be any facemask mandates in the area - at least for a while. Highlands County commissioners have declined to issue a mandate that all residents be forced to wear facemasks - due to the Coronavirus. They cited discussions with Highlands County Sheriff Paul Blackman who said enforcement of such a policy would not be possible.

Polk County commissioners likewise turned down the idea of a blanket mandate which would have forced all citizens to don facemasks of some kind.

Officials from both Hardee and Okeechobee county noted they also have no such mandate, saying their commissioners there have not even addressed the issue.

7/13/2020

New Coronavirus numbers released this morning by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 25 new positive results and 151 negative tests. Of the 11,146 tests administered locally over the past four months - 10,570 have been negative with 557 positives. There have been 85 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 13 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept back in February.

Avon Park city council members will gather tonight for another virtual session. Among other things, they will get a report on money the city can expect from the so-called "CARES" Act. City Manager Mark Schrader will give a report on how much money will be coming in from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief & Economic Recovery Act and where it should go.

Councilwoman Maria Sutherland also is expected to bring up a discussion on a mandated mask order for the City of Charm. Highlands County commissioners decided against such an order after Sheriff Paul Blackman said it would be very difficult to enforce such a statute.

Highlands County Sheriff's officials are asking people to quit calling the jail to find out which five inmates there have tested positive for the Coronavirus. They note that federal HIPPA statutes prevent them from releasing any of that information.

According to reports, the inmates began to show symptoms a week ago and were immediately quarantined. The cases were confirmed Friday. Spokesmen say jail procedures have been in place since March to provide for screening, cleaning and protective measures.

It remains unclear how the virus got into the jail facility.

Highlands County school officials say there is increasing interest in classes offered by the Highlands Virtual School. They say the best way to learn about the online classes is...well.. online.

School officials say they have posted a number of informational videos about the school on their YouTube channel. They say links to those videos are easily accessible on the Highlands Virtual School's web page.

7/14/2020

New Coronavirus numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 25 new positive results and 151 negative tests. Of the 11,146 tests administered locally over the past four months - 10,570 have been negative with 557 positives. There have been 85 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 13 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept back in February.

Highlands County Commissioners will hold a budget workshop this evening. Despite taking hits in the gas, sales and tourist taxes due to the Coronavirus lockdown, it appears they will be

looking at a \$161.2 million dollar spending plan - that's up some \$6.6 million dollars from the current outlay.

There is speculation that in addition to increased property valuation this year, commissioners could raise the millage from the current 8.55 to 9.25.

Commissioners will hold their workshop this evening at 5:30 at the boardroom on Commerce Street.

Saying she personally was not in favor of such an action, Avon Park City Councilwoman Maria Sutherland last night brought up the notion of imposing a mask mandate on the City of Charm. The idea got a cool reception with City Attorney Gerald Buhr cautioning council members there currently are numerous lawsuits against cities that have enacted such ordinances.

Mayor Garrett Anderson said in his opinion, mask mandates should be left up to individual businesses and to leave mask wearing up to individuals.

No action was taken on the idea.

It looks like it's out with the old and in with the new in Avon Park. Chamber of Commerce officials there say they have pulled the plug on the annual Christmas Parade due to the coronavirus. They say they have not received any funding to stage the event and there are permits to be pulled that would have allowed it to happen.

Meanwhile, it appears the City of Charm may have inherited the annual Veterans Day Parade. Organizers there say they are unable to stage it in Sebring, due to the 12 Hours of Sebring being re-scheduled for November. City officials say they will bring the issue to the city council at their next session.

7/15/2020

New Coronavirus numbers released this morning by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 37 new positive results and 209 negative cases. Of the 11,540 tests administered locally over the past four months - 10,898 have been negative with 627 positives. There have been 93 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 13 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept back in February.

Highlands County Commissioners met last night for a 2-hour workshop on the budget for the upcoming fiscal year. The spending plan for commissioners and the county's constitutional officers is set at \$161.2 million dollars, That's a \$6.6 million dollar increase over this year's budget.

Staff told the commissioners that three of the constitutional offices budgets were up, while two were down from the current outlay.

Commissioners will set a tentative millage rate at their next regular budget session this coming

Tuesday.

It appears that former administrations in Avon Park may have been penny wise and pound foolish. Council members in the City of Charm were told at their meeting that much of the city's infrastructure - including water lines - are falling apart.

City Attorney Gerald Buhr told the board that there are programs that had been let go that needed to be re-instated. Staff reported that some water meters are not reading and some pipes are so clogged that workers could not drag a 4-inch camera through them

Mayor Garrett Anderson asked staff members to see if they could find money in the budget to hire some crews to get to work on the issue.

By the way, Highlands County Sheriff's officials say if you get a text or phone call from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation saying you can get a huge grant if you pay several thousand dollars in registration fees, that's a scam.

Their advice is - just hang up. It's like calls on your car's extended warranty and people claiming to be your computer repair person and asking to link up with your system.

7/16/2020

New Coronavirus numbers released by the Florida Department of Health this morning show that there have been 29 new positive results and 130 negative cases. Of the 11,698 tests administered locally over the past four months - 11,028 have been negative with 656 positives. There have been 98 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 13 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept back in February.

It appears the city of Avon Park has been hampered by the Coronavirus. City Manager Mark Schrader has revealed a number of employees have been sent home due to exposure. One has been out for five weeks. Schrader said first family members had it - now the employee also has tested positive.

Several others - including two firefighters are off work with Corona-like symptoms.

There have been crimes against churches around the state and the nation involving damage, graffiti and theft. Now officials from Saint Catherine's Catholic church in Sebring say somebody has taken their statue of the Virgin Mary - again.

Reportedly, this is the second statue stolen in the last month. Anyone with information is asked to call the church or local law enforcement. Church officials also are asking for prayer for the culprits.

A 46-year-old New Jersey man has been arrested after a high speed chase involving a stolen vehicle in Polk County. Benjamin Torres has been charged with Grand Theft Auto and Felony Fleeing to Elude.

Lake Wales police first attempted to stop the Ford Expedition that was reported stolen out of

Virginia. The vehicle sped away leading officers on a pursuit. Torres allegedly later ditched the car and ran. He subsequently surrendered to a K-9 officer without incident.

7/17/2020

Coronavirus numbers released by the Florida Department of Health yesterday show that there have been 31 new positive results and 114 negative cases in Highlands County.

Of the 11,844 tests administered locally over the past four months - 11,142 have been negative with 687 positives. There have been 104 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 15 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept back in February.

Highlands county officials have announced that former county commissioner Claude Howerton has passed away at his home in Lorida. He was 95.

Howerton served on the board from 1982 - 1989 representing District 2. Among other things, Howerton was instrumental in the implementation of the County's Comprehensive Land Use Management Plan and the siting of the current landfill.

His daughter Donna Howerton currently is the senior member of the Highlands County School Board, his grandson Gator Howerton serves as the Highlands County Engineer.

The Coronavirus continues to cause events to be shuffled here in Highlands County. Officials at South Florida State College say they have cancelled all of the performances at the Alan Jay Wildstein Center for the Performing Arts - at least through December.

Meanwhile, teams have started to load in for this weekend's Cadillac Grand Prix at the Sebring International Raceway. The International Motorsports Association event will be open to fans under strict guidelines. In addition to the Grand Prix sprint race, there will be two supporting races.

By the way, if you like to see your tax dollars at work, officials of the Avon Park Air Force Range say they will have f-16 fighter jets working out there until about 3:30 this afternoon.

Reportedly, nothing special is slated for this weekend.

7/20/2020

Coronavirus numbers climbed across the board over the weekend. Statistics released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 98 new positive results and 426 negative cases in Highlands County.

Of the 12,346 tests administered locally over the past four months - 11,569 have been negative with 765 positives. There have been 113 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 15 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept back

in February.

A reminder from Highlands County Supervisor of Elections Penny Ogg - today is the day that the books close for the Primary Election.

Any new voter registration or party change will have to be completed today. You can either go in to the Supervisor of Elections office, or, they can be done online at www.registertovoteFlorida.gov,

There are forms and links on the Supervisor's website at VoteHighlans.com. but the forms also are available through the tax collector, public assistances offices and libraries.

A Highlands County motorcyclist was killed over the weekend. Florida Highway Patrol reports only identify him as a 34-year-old Sebring man. Apparently the man was turning from Mike Kahn Road onto Paradise Lane, when he was struck by an oncoming sport utility vehicle.

He was knocked off his bike and into the roadway. He was pronounced dead at the scene. Troopers say he WAS wearing his helmet - but have not released the man's name.

The Mobil One 12 Hours of Sebring has retained their position as the number one motorsports event in North America. It's the second time in a row they have topped the USA Today's 10Best list.

The news comes on the heels of a very successful Cadillac Grand Prix of Sebring sprint race this past weekend, staged here by the International Motorsports Association. This year's 12-Hours, also staged by IMSA, has been pushed back to November, due to the Coronavirus.

Polk County Sheriff's officials still are looking for information surrounding a triple homicide in Frostproof.

Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd said that the men were beaten and shot late Friday night at a lake where they had planned to go catfishing.

Killed were 23-year-old Damion Tillman, 30-year-old Keven Springfield and 27-year-old Brandon Rollins.

Judd described the killing as a massacre. He would not speculate about whether the assailants knew the victims, although he also suggested it wasn't a random attack.

Highlands County Emergency Medical Services teamed up with units from Polk and Osceola counties over the weekend to affect a rescue. The incident reportedly involved a jet ski accident on the Kissimmee River north of the Avon Park Air Force Range.

Reportedly, by the time units arrived at the remote location, the victim had been brought to shore. They were transported to an area hospital where they are listed in "stable" condition.

7/21/2020

Coronavirus numbers released this morning by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 31 new positive results and 86 new negative in Highlands County.

Of the 12,626 tests administered locally over the past four months - 11,804 have been negative with 809 positives. There have been 117 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 16 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept back in February.

Highlands County commissioners voted this morning to set the tentative millage rate at 9.0 - or nine dollars for each \$1,000 of taxable valuation for homes and businesses in the county.

It is up from the current millage rate of 8.55 and the rollback rate of 8.32 - however, commissioners say they hope to reduce the rate back to the current 8.55 by the final hearings in September.

In other action, commissioners decided not to have a mask mandate in the county, but strongly urge residents to wear them.

For the first time in almost a decade, there will be no Sick Sideways team in the Mazda MX-5 Cup. Owner John Dean of Sebring has announced they are pulling out of the series for this year calling it a "financial decision."

Since joining the series in 2012, Dean has parlayed his effort into the the series' most successful team to date - breaking more records, and scoring more wins & championships than anyone in series' history

Their accomplishments include the most team wins, most driver wins, most team & driver podiums and most driver pole positions. Sick Sideways has eqarned three MX-5 Championships and has been Team of the Year three times.

Dean says he hopes to return to competition in 2021.

The Frostproof city council met last night. They voted to appoint Jon Albert as Mayor of the Friendly City with Austin Gravley to serve as Vice Mayor. Resident Tashana True was appointed to replace Martin Sullivan - he resigned from Council seat 4. She will serve the remainder of Sullivan's term.

While Polk County sheriff's detectives move to try and find out who killed three men Friday night in rural Frostproof - reward money continues to grow. Sheriff Grady Judd announced that there is as much as \$30,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the perpetrators.

Judd said his agency has recieved more than 100 tips so far to help his deputies solve the case. He said he does not believe the murders were a "random act of violence."

Last week, Highlands County Commissioners held a workshop on their budget for the upcoming fiscal year. Today, they will have a look at budgets submitted by the constitutional officers.

Under the current spending plan, commissioners have tbe budget set at \$161.2 million dollars - that's up \$6.6 million from this year's outlay. Reportedly, three of the Constitutional's budgets are up while two are down.

Commissioners say a bright spot for them is property values have gone up this year -meaning

a higher taxable value.

Commissioners are expected to set a tentative millage rate today as well.

Following pressure from a local resident, Highlands County Commissioners at their meeting today again will talk about the possibility of imposing a mask mandate for everyone in the county. Avon Park city council members dropped the idea after city attorney Gerald Burh cautioned them that a number of Florida counties and cities had incurred lawsuits after imposing such mandates.

Some counties have as much as a \$250 fine for those who refuse to don the mask in public places.

7/22/2020

Coronavirus numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show today that there have been 67 new positive results and 86 new negative in Highlands County.

Of the 12,626 tests administered locally over the past five months - 12,087 have been negative with 876 positives. There have been 119 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 16 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept back in February.

Highlands County commissioners have voted to set the tentative millage rate at 9.0 - or nine dollars for each \$1,000 of taxable valuation for homes and businesses in the county.

It is up from the current millage rate of 8.55 and the rollback rate of 8.32 - however, commissioners say they hope to reduce the rate back to the current 8.55 by the final hearings in September.

Highlands County commissioners yesterday decided not to enact a facemask mandate in the county. There are no similar mandates in Polk, Hardee, Desoto or Okechobee Counties. Although they will not force people to wear masks they strongly urge residents to wear them.

A Hardee County man was struck and killed early this morning just north of Sebring. Florida Highway Patrol officials say the victim, identified only as a 32-year-old Wauchulla man, was walking in the Northbound lane of Highway 17 near Romona Avenue when he was struck from behind by a vehicle.

Troopers have not said whether or not they have any evidence as to what kind of vehicle it was or any other information about the victim.

The County Road 17 was closed for about four hours while an investigation was conducted.

State Road 17 was closed off near Arbuckle Creek Road for a time this morning due to a fatal hit and run accident. Reportedly a vehicle hit a pedestrian in the area shortly after 2:AM.

Apparently, the motorist did not stop. Florida Highway Patrol officials have not released any

information about the pedestrian.

While some activities have been declining due to the current situation, officials of the Avon Park Air Force Range say that does not include them.

Apparently, exercises at the bombing range will continue throughout the week. Exactly what kind of aircraft and military hardware will be involved has not yet been released.

7/23/2020

The latest Coronavirus numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 36 new positive cases and 221 new negative results in Highlands County.

Of the 13,232 tests administered locally over the past five months - 12,308 have been negative with 912 positives. There have been 119 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 16 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

Better late than never. Graduation ceremonies for Highlands County Schools students will begin this evening. The ceremonies, usually held in June, were pushed back due to fears over spread of the Coronavirus.

Seniors from Sebring Senior High School will get their diplomas this evening at the Alan Jay Arena at the Highlands County Fairgrounds. Avon Park seniors will have their chance tomorrow night with Lake Placid to hold their ceremonies on Saturday evening. Students from the Highlands County Virtual School will get their certificates Saturday morning.

Although there are no government-ordered mask mandates in Highlands, Hardee, Desoto, Polk or Okechobee counties, there are some businesses which require masks for customers to enter.

In an effort to help keep local residents informed about where they will be required to do face coverings, the Greater Sebring Chamber of Commerce has started a list of businesses that require masks to enter.

Chamber officials say they will post that list on their website for customers to reference.

While some activities have been declining due to the current situation, officials of the Avon Park Air Force Range say that does not include them.

Apparently, exercises at the bombing range will continue throughout the week. Exactly what kind of aircraft and military hardware will be involved has not yet been released.

7/24/2020

The latest Coronavirus numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 56 new positive cases and 234 new negative results in Highlands County.

Of the 13,619 tests administered locally over the past five months - 12,642 have been negative

with 968 positives. There have been 120 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 22 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

Highlands County Sheriff's officials say they have filed charges of aggravated child abuse against 29-year-old Philetta Moransit in connection with the death of 5-year-old Chance Peterkin. The youngster's body was found shortly after midnight this morning in the waters of Lake Lelia.

According to accounts, Moransit and the boy had been reported missing around 6:00 last night after having not been seen since yesterday morning.

Moransit was located shortly before 8:PM. on the campus of South Florida State College, but reportedly has been uncooperative with the investigation.

Better than a thousand parents, relatives and well-wishers turned out last night at the Alan Jay Arena as the Sebring High School Class of 2020 turned from seniors into alumni. Graduation ceremonies for schools in Highlands District schools were pushed back two months due to fears created by the Coronavirus.

Nearly 500 viewers were tuned in on the internet to watch the proceedings on the district's YouTube channel

Avon Park seniors will have their graduation this evening at the fairgrounds with Lake Placid to hold their ceremonies tomorrow night. Students from the Highlands County Virtual School will get their certificates at Sebring Senior High tomorrow morning.

First came word that the 12 Hours of Sebring has retained its Number One spot as North America's best motorsports event - now Sebring has set another record.

NBC Sports has announced that last weekend's Cadillac Grand Prix of Sebring was the most-watched IMSA race with better than 350,000 viewers. It was the most since acquiring media rights to WeatherTech Championship.

Viewership was up better than 90 percent compared to the IMSA average for races on the network,

Tragic news from the Highlands County Sheriff's Office. The body of 5-year-old Chance Peterkin was located in the waters of Lake Lelia shortly after midnight.

The youngster and his mother, 29-year-old Philetta Moransit, had been reported missing around 6:00 last night after having not been seen since yesterday morning.

Moransit was located shortly before 8:PM. on the campus of South Florida State College, but reportedly has been uncooperative with the investigation.

Sheriff Paul Blackman, who had been on a boat searching for several hours, located Peterkin's body in the water shortly after midnight.

Although there are no government-ordered mask mandates in Highlands, Hardee, Desoto, Polk or Okeechobee counties, there are some businesses which require masks for customers to enter.

In an effort to help keep local residents informed about where they will be required to do face

coverings, the Greater Sebring Chamber of Commerce has started a list of businesses that require masks to enter.

Chamber officials say they will post that list on their website for customers to reference.

While some activities have been declining due to the current situation, officials of the Avon Park Air Force Range say that does not include them.

Apparently, exercises at the bombing range will continue throughout the week. Exactly what kind of aircraft and military hardware will be involved has not yet been released.

7/27/2020

The latest Coronavirus numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 29 additional positive cases and 144 new negative results in Highlands County.

Of the 14,211 tests administered locally over the past five months - 13,135 have been negative with 1,068 positives. There have been 125 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 22 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

A single vehicle accident in the south end of the county yesterday sent at least one person to the hospital. According to reports, the car went out of control on County Road 29 near West Palm Circle. The auto first rolled, then caught fire.

Authorities say bystanders were able to pull the motorist from the car and put out the fire before units arrived at the scene. Reportedly, one victim was flown out by the Aeromed Air Ambulance.

Units from the Lorida and Desoto City Volunteer Fire Departments paired up with the Florida Forest Service yesterday to contain a brush fire. That one flared up off Tawny Drive on the northeast side of Lake Istokpoga.

The flames charred about an acre of ground. There were no injuries and no structures were damaged. Cause remains under investigation.

Ben-Hill Griffin III reportedly has died. He apparently passed away at his home in Frostproof this past Saturday. Griffin was 78.

Son of citrus giant Ben-Hill Griffin jr., he served as President and Chairman of the board of Alico as well as Orange-Co Inc. Griffin also served as president of Seald Sweet and Florida Citrus Packers among other things.

No announcements have been made about his final arrangements.

Hundreds of Highlands County high school seniors became alumni over the weekend as graduation ceremonies were held in Avon Park, Lake Placid and for the Highland Virtual School. All the ceremonies came off with a hitch.

They had been pushed back two months due to the Coronavirus.

Meanwhile, Highlands County schools are preparing to open up for the 2020-2021 School

Year next month. Students will have the option of face-to-face traditional learning, remote online learning or the Highlands Virtual School.

7/28/2020

The latest Coronavirus numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 46 additional positive cases and 175 new negative results in Highlands County.

Of the 14,425 tests administered locally over the past five months - 13,310 have been negative with 1,103 positives. There have been 126 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 24 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

Many locals have been trying to find out how to get their portion of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act cash. Known as "CARES," millions of dollars have been allocated to Highlands County.

A webpage has been set up to help local individuals and businesses who need additional information. HighlandsCares.com is where people need to go to begin the application process.

Highlands County government officials say it could go live as early as tomorrow.

No more Mr. Nice Guy for the Avon Park city council. At their meeting last night council members agreed to begin cracking down on code enforcement and going after people who are behind in their utility bills.

The council had agreed not to shut off water to those who did not pay their bills due to the Coronavirus crisis. Now, they say, it's time to pay the piper.

The council also agreed they no longer will forgive code enforcement violations and will go after the amount of fines accrued. Reportedly, there's \$35,000 currently on the books.

Highlands County Sheriff's detectives are trying to unravel the circumstances surrounding the death of 5-year-old Chance Peterkin and are asking for the public's help. They are asking anybody who saw him and his mother, 29-year-old Philletta Moransit between noon and 7:30 last Thursday to step forward and share what they know.

The youngster's body was found floating in Lake Leila early Friday morning. The cause of his death has not yet been released. Moransit has been uncooperative and is being held in the Highlands County jail - reportedly on child neglect counts.

Firefighters from Leisure Lakes and Desoto City were called out yesterday to quell a house fire. The flames erupted in the home off Payne Road when it was hit by a bolt of lightning.

Quick work by responders kept the damage to one corner of the single-story dwelling. No injuries were reported in the incident. No dollar damage estimate was released.

7/28/2020

The latest Coronavirus numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 12 additional positive cases and 12 new negative results in Highlands County.

Of the 14,449 tests administered locally over the past five months - 13,322 have been negative with 1,115 positives. There have been 128 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 25 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

Highlands County Emergency Management officials are asking people to review their storm preparedness provisions as they watch a weather system currently heading for the eastern Caribbean.

The as-yet unnamed weather system is predicted to develop into a tropical storm today. forecasters are warning Puerto Rico and other islands to prepare for the possibility of dangerous heavy rains and strong winds.

Current models show it running up through the middle of the state by the weekend. However, they say it's too early to pinpoint what the system will do.

In a fifteen minute session yesterday, Highlands County commissioners accepted a termination agreement with former board attorney Joy Carmichael. The action officially ended the sometimes stormy relationship Carmichael had with the board.

As part of the pact, Carmichael will receive additional severance pay and other concessions. She, in turn gave up a public hearing on the matter and all rights to sue the board.

Highlands County Administrator Randy Vossburg told commissioners that efforts to cover her position already have been started.

It appears that teachers will be back in the classroom locally beginning next week. The School Board of Highlands County met last night and approved two revisions for the 2020-2021 school year.

Teachers will be back at the schools beginning next Wednesday, August 5th, while the first day of school for students here has been set for Monday August 17.

Officials say that the decision, based on input from the SBHC Calendar Committee and district and school administrators, will provide additional preparation time. Three options ranging from face-to-face learning to virtual school now are being offered.

7/30/2020

That tropical system in the eastern Caribbean now has a name. Tropical Storm Isaias is heading for Hispaniola carrying the threat of flooding and landslides. Highlands County Emergency Management officials continue to ask area residents to review their storm preparedness provisions.

The U.S. National Hurricane Center in Miami says the storm is following a path that could take it around or through Florida by this weekend.

In preparation for the possibility of storm activity this weekend Highlands County are providing

the public with sand bags. Those who want them will be able to get up to 10 bags per person through Saturday.

The bags will be available at the Road and Bridge office on George Blvd. south of Sebring, The Road and Bridge office on East Winthrop Street in Avon Park and the Road and Bridge office on County Road 621 in Lake Placid. Bags will be brought to your car by a county employee.

Sand for the bags is available at South George Boulevard just north of the Emergency Operations Center in Sebring, the intersection of County Road 17 East, Old Bombing Range Road and Isabelle Lake Road in Avon Park and the intersection of County Road 619, County Road 621 and Highlands Lake Drive in Lake Placid.

Highlands County soon will have a new assistant county administrator. Reportedly, Highlands County Extension Director and Citrus Agent Laurie Hurner is resigning her post to take the new position.

That action reportedly is slated to happen next week. Hurner previously worked as a field representative for Florida Citrus Mutual and has served as an agriculture instructor at what is now South Florida State College in Avon Park.

Officials at the Polk County Sheriff's Office say deputies have arrested a candidate for the Polk County Board of Commissioners there.

Martin Grenfell faces counts of false swearing with regard to voting - a third-degree felony. Grenfell reportedly had pled guilty in 2012 for felony trafficking in counterfeit labels and received three years' probation.

However - Grenfell signed a Candidate Oath, which attests that he is qualified to hold office under the Constitution and the Laws of Florida which includes the prohibition against holding an elected office by a convicted felon.

7/30/2020

The latest Coronavirus numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 31 additional positive cases and 159 new negative results in Highlands County.

Of the 14,787 tests administered locally over the past five months - 13,613 have been negative with 1,163 positives. There have been 138 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 26 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

Isaias now has become a Category One hurricane. The storm has hit the Bahamas and is heading for Florida. New tracks now show it brushing the east coast of the sunshine state. Latest reports show Isaias with winds of 80 miles per hour moving northwest at about 17.

Highlands County Emergency Management officials continue to ask area residents to review their storm preparedness provisions.

In preparation for the possibility of storm activity this weekend Highlands County is providing the public with sand bags. Those who want them will be able to get up to 10 bags per person

today and tomorrow at the Highlands County Road & Bridge locations in Avon Park, Sebring and Lake Placid.

Bags will be brought to your car by a county employee.

Officials from the Highlands County Extension office say those seeds from China have popped up locally. Officials here say they already have fielded "a couple of calls" from folks who say they have received the unsolicited packages in the mail.

Reportedly, they are labeled as "jewelry," but instead contain the seeds. Officials have not yet determined exactly what they are - but are urging citizens not to plant them. Local officials say anyone who gets them should report it to Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services at 1-888-397-1517.

More problems for Philletta Moransit. The 29-year-old mother of Chance Peterkin reportedly has been sentenced to nearly three months in jail on contempt of court charges. Moransit and her son went missing earlier this week. The youngster later was found drowned in Lake Lelia.

Moransit had been held on charges of resisting an officer and child neglect. Reportedly, she has been uncooperative in the investigation as to how the child ended up in the water.

The contempt charges reportedly came during Moransit's first appearance before Judge Anthony Rittehour.

In preparation for the possibility of storm activity this weekend Highlands County are providing the public with sand bags. Those who want them will be able to get up to 10 bags per person through Saturday.

The bags will be available at the Road and Bridge office on George Blvd. south of Sebring, The Road and Bridge office on East Winthrop Street in Avon Park and the Road and Bridge office on County Road 621 in Lake Placid. Bags will be brought to your car by a county employee.

Sand for the bags is available at South George Boulevard just north of the Emergency Operations Center in Sebring, the intersection of County Road 17 East, Old Bombing Range Road and Isabelle Lake Road in Avon Park and the intersection of County Road 619, County Road 621 and Highlands Lake Drive in Lake Placid.

8/4/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 15 additional positive tests returned and 57 new negatives conducted in Highlands County.

Of the 15,409 tests administered locally over the past five months - 14,085 tests have been negative with 1,311 positive cases recorded.

There have been 148 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 30 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

It's back to school today for hundreds of Highlands County school teachers. Things will look a bit different this year as all non-essential furniture has been moved out to make room for the so-called "social distancing" of students.

At least some students are slated to be back in the classroom next Friday. A percentage of parents have opted to use distance learning and the Highlands County Virtual Schools.

Highlands County Public Safety Director Marc Bashoor yesterday gave Highlands County Commissioners a third quarter update on the status of the Fire Rescue Division. He explained capital outlays saying that three new fire trucks are on order and hinted at the purchase of a fourth.

As fire services are consolidated into a single county department, Bashoor said he envisioned five full time stations sprinkled around the county. He told commissioners some people said they could not afford it - he asked the board to consider what they couldn't do without.

Florida Highway Patrol officials still have not identified the man killed Monday when their pickup truck hit a semi-tractor trailer rig.

Troopers describe the driver only as a 29-year-old Ormond Beach resident. Reportedly he was towing a utility trailer, and was attempting to turn onto Ben-Hill Griffin Road, when he struck the back of the semi-trailer.

The semi then overturned and caught fire. It sparked a subsequent brush fire that kept the roadway closed for more than 12 hours. Volunteer firefighters and the Florida Forest Service were called in to extinguish the blaze.

A teacher from Okeechobee County is the state's new Teacher of the Year. State officials named Krista Stanley as the 2021 Florida Department of Education Teacher of the Year.

She is a sixth grade teacher at Yearling Middle School in Okeechobee. Stanley will receive a \$20,000 check and an \$8,000 scholarship to present to a student of her choice.

Stanley was chosen from among more than 176,900 Florida public school teachers.

8/6/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 17 additional positive tests returned and 88 new negatives conducted in Highlands County.

Of the 15,514 tests administered locally over the past five months - 14,173 tests have been negative with 1,328 positive cases recorded.

There have been 153 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 34 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

Highlands County Emergency Management Manager Latosha Reiss told county commissioners, she was excited about the number of people initially filing for money from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act.

First day figures on Monday showed there were 860 applications from businesses, non-profits

and individuals. Highlands is in line for \$4.6 million dollars in the first round. They have to give all that money away by September 30th to be eligible for the second round - that'll be more than \$13 million.

Those who want to find out if they qualify can go to www.HighlandsCares.com

The election season started in earnest today as early voting got under way in Highlands County, Polling places will be open 8:30 am until 4:30 pm each day until next Saturday.

Ballots may be cast at the Kenilworth Operations Center on Kenilworth Blvd in Sebring, the Avon Park City Council Chambers at the Avon Park City Hall and at the Lake Placid Town Government Center.

There were no serious injuries when two semi-trucks collided in the south end of the county. The mishap occurred at the intersection of Highway 27 and State Road 70. No accident description has yet been released.

Yes, you may be hearing some sonic booms. Officials at the Avon Park Bombing Range say they are hosting more exercises. Aircraft will be flying from 8am until late in the evening. Officials declined to say what kinds of planes are utilizing the Air Force facility.

8/7/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 27 additional positive tests returned and 81 new negatives conducted in Highlands County.

Of the 15,623 tests administered locally over the past five months - 14,254 tests have been negative with 1,328 positive cases recorded.

There have been 153 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 34 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

Highlands County Supervisor of Elections Penny Ogg says everything went smoothly yesterday on the first day of early voting.

Ogg said nearly 12% of the voters came in to mark their ballots with 7,600 of Highlands' 63,654 voters making their marks.

Polls will be open again today from 8:30 am until 4:30 pm and then again each day until next Saturday.

Ballots may be cast at the Kenilworth Operations Center on Kenilworth Blvd in Sebring, the Avon Park City Council Chambers at the Avon Park City Hall and at the Lake Placid Town Government Center.

It's getting to be back to school time. Teachers went back to the classroom this past Monday and students will be headed back on Monday the 17th. Now, those stocking up on school supplies will get a bit of a break as the tax-free days begin today.

All taxes, including the county's extra penny and the school board's half cent, have been

suspended through Sunday on a myriad of items. Items include selected clothing and footwear, books, computers and accessories among other things.

Most merchants will have details posted for shoppers.

Florida Lottery officials say a 37-year-old Sebring woman has picked a winning scratch-off ticket worth almost a million dollars.

Lizna Chagani, nabbed the prize on the \$5,000,000 GOLD RUSH CLASSIC Scratch-Off game. She chose to receive her winnings as a one-time, lump-sum payment of \$710,000.00.

Chagani purchased her winning ticket from Sebring Food Mart on Highway 27 South in Sebring. The retailer will receive a \$2,000 bonus commission for selling the winning Scratch-Off ticket.

Yes, you may be hearing some sonic booms. Officials at the Avon Park Bombing Range say they are hosting more exercises. Aircraft will be flying from 8am until late in the evening. Officials declined to say what kinds of planes are utilizing the Air Force facility.

A Lake Wales man had been charged with Attempted 2nd Degree Murder after allegedly beating a couple people with a table leg.

The incident apparently stemmed from a disagreement between Ernesto Pagan-Rodriguez and one of his neighbors.

Polk Sheriff's officials say a verbal altercation escalated into a physical one when Pagan-Rodriguez grabbed up the table leg and started swinging. Reportedly, he stopped after the table leg broke.

One of the victims reportedly is in critical condition. Pagan-Rodriguez has been charged with attempted murder in the incident.

8/10/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 14 additional positive tests returned and 80 new negatives conducted in Highlands County.

Of the 16,091 tests administered locally over the past five months - 14,629 tests have been negative with 1,449 positive cases recorded.

There have been 160 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 40 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

Highlands County Sheriff's detectives are looking into the circumstances surrounding a shooting at Sun 'N Lakes South last night. The incident reportedly happened in an area off Concert and Fairfield streets about 7:30.

Reportedly, one person was taken to an out-of-county trauma center. No names or other details have yet been released.

Fire destroyed a double-wide mobile home last night off State Road 66. Units from Desoto City, West Sebring and Sun 'N Lake responded to the address on Maxanna Street about 11:30. There were no injuries in the incident.

Damage was set at \$80,000 to the home with another \$5,000 to an adjoining building. Authorities say the cause was electrical. It was the third fire in Highlands over the weekend.

Yesterday afternoon units from Highlands Lakes and Avon Park station 5 battled the heat and the flames. The small but difficult brush fire, harred a half acre in the old “dump” area behind the gun range off of SR-17.

The hot under-carriage of a car driving through tall grass started the blaze.

8/11/2020

Early yesterday morning units from Lake Placid, Sun n Lakes, Highlands Park and Placid Lakes responded to a Taylor Street address near Lake Placid.

Arriving units found a mobile home with fire showing from all windows. Eleven occupants including 7 children escaped.

Cause of that fire was determined to be from a candle burning and is listed as accidental. Loss there has been set at \$40,000.

It appears that Highlands County voters are mailing it in. Statistics released by the Highlands County Supervisor office show that of the 9,081 early votes cast 7,496 were mailed [in.So](#) far, only 1,561 people have come in to mark their ballots in person.

The latest figures show just over 14-percent of Highlands 63,654 voters have turned out to make their voices heard.

Polls will be open again today from 8:30 am until 4:30 pm and then again each day until this coming Saturday.

Ballots may be cast at the Kenilworth Operations Center on Kenilworth Blvd in Sebring, the Avon Park City Council Chambers at the Avon Park City Hall and at the Lake Placid Town Government Center.

8/12/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 25 additional positive tests returned and 217 new negatives conducted in Highlands County.

Of the 16,358 tests administered locally over the past five months - 14,846 tests have been negative with 1,501 positive cases recorded.

There have been 163 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 37 deaths

have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

Early voting is continuing in Highlands County with a few more walk-ins coming in to cast their ballots. Of the 10,707 votes cast so far, 2,310 ballots have been cast at one of the three early voting locations. The bulk of the ballots continue to be by mail, with some 8,383 delivered to the elections office.

Supervisor of Elections Penny Ogg said that other than an asymptomatic worker testing positive for the Coronavirus, things have been moving smoothly. That worker, who had been masked, now is in self quarantine.

Early voting goes on through Saturday in Avon Park, Sebring and Lake Placid. Primary Election Day will be this coming Tuesday.

One person was injured and the Southbound lanes of U.S. 27 were shut down for a time yesterday after a semi tractor-trailer rig collided with a pickup truck. The semi apparently T-boned the pickup at the intersection of U.S 27 and Lake Mirror Drive south of Lake Placid.

The driver of the pickup was airlifted to an area trauma center. Florida Highway Patrol officials have released no other information on the incident.

A 50-year-old Frostproof man has been sentenced to jail on drug counts. U.S. District Judge Mary S. Scriven yesterday sent Mario Alberto Rivas to 10 years in federal prison. Rivas apparently had conspired with others to possess methamphetamine with the intent to distribute.

Rivas reportedly had pleaded guilty to the charges back in February.

8/13/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 25 additional positive tests returned and 217 new negatives conducted in Highlands County.

Of the 16,358 tests administered locally over the past five months - 14,846 tests have been negative with 1,501 positive cases recorded.

There have been 163 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 37 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

The family of a Sebring man killed in a July hit-and-run accident now are offering a reward to see if they can find the truck and driver responsible. 32-year-old Kyle Harris was struck in the early morning hours of July 22nd as he walked along State Road 17.

They are looking for information on the vehicle. It is said to have higher than average mirrors and might have been a work truck. Damage would have been to the right side. Anyone with information is asked to call the Florida Highway Patrol or the Highlands County Sheriff's Office.

It appears that a Sebring landmark may be disappearing. Reportedly, preparations are underway to take down the old Nan-Cess-O-Wee hotel. As of yet, no permits for the demolition have been pulled, however, the building reportedly has been deemed uninhabitable by city officials.

A bit of living history is gone. Officials at the Sebring International Raceway have announced that Ralph Deshon has passed away.

DeShon and Frits Koster co-drove a Crosley Hot Shot to victory at Sebring in the 1st race ever held here. The 6 Hour Sam Collier Memorial was run on December 31st, 1950.

DeShon, who was a regular in the press box at Sebring for many years, was a walking encyclopedia of the early days of racing.

He was 94.

Highlands County Sheriff's officials are warning residents about yet another scam. According to reports, people receive a telephone call with an automated one-question survey.

Press 1 if they are happy with the president or 2 if they are not. No matter which one you press, you are forwarded to a person who asks for money.

Sheriff's officials say the operators aren't willing to answer any questions about who they represent. They urge folks who want to donate, to give their money directly to chosen candidates or political party.

Early voting is continuing in Highlands County with just over 17.5% of the electorate making their voices heard. A few more walk-ins coming in to cast their ballots. Of the 11,170 votes cast so far, 2,628 ballots have been cast at one of the three early voting locations. The bulk of the ballots continue to be by mail, with some 8,545 delivered to the elections office.

Supervisor of Elections Penny Ogg says things have been moving pretty smoothly.

Early voting goes on through Saturday in Avon Park, Sebring and Lake Placid. Primary Election Day will be this coming Tuesday.

8/14/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 22 additional positive tests returned and 118 new negatives conducted in Highlands County.

Of the 16,498 tests administered locally over the past five months - 14,964 tests have been negative with 1,523 positive cases recorded.

There have been 170 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 40 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

The family of a Sebring man killed in a July hit-and-run accident now are offering a reward to see if they can find the truck and driver responsible. 32-year-old Kyle Heine (Hy-nee) was struck in the early morning hours of July 22nd as he walked along State Road 17.

They are looking for information on the vehicle. It is said to have higher than average mirrors and might have been a work truck. Damage would have been to the right side. Anyone with information is asked to call the Florida Highway Patrol or the Highlands County Sheriff's Office.

It appears that a Sebring landmark may be disappearing. Reportedly, preparations are underway to take down the old Nan-Cess-O-Wee hotel on Ridgewood Drive in the downtown area.

As of yet, no permits for the demolition have been pulled, however, the building reportedly has been deemed uninhabitable by city officials.

Early voting wraps up tomorrow in Highlands County. As of this morning, just over 19% of the electorate have made their voices heard. A few more walk-ins coming in to cast their ballots. Of the 12,203 votes cast so far, 3,157 ballots have been cast at one of the three early voting locations. The bulk of the ballots continue to be by mail, with some 9,042 delivered to the elections office.

Supervisor of Elections Penny Ogg says things have been moving pretty smoothly.

Early voting goes on through tomorrow in Avon Park, Sebring and Lake Placid. Primary Election Day will be this coming Tuesday.

8/17/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there were 65 additional positive tests returned over the weekend and 405 new negatives conducted in Highlands County.

Of the 16,988 tests administered locally over the past five months - 15,369 tests have been negative with 1,608 positive cases recorded.

There have been 176 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 41 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

The Avon Park city council will meet tonight in yet another virtual session. After tough talk about not backing off on code enforcement fines - the council will be asked about three lein reductions by local property owners.

In other action, the council will consider a request for proposal for the purchase of the old Brickell Building. The structure has caused the city problems for decades. They'll also look at adopting historic building regulations and will look at setting a preliminary fire assessment for the city.

State Road 70 near County Road 721 has been closed due to a fatal car crash. Reportedly, two vehicles collided head on near the intersection of 70 and Greenbriar Lane about 8:00 this morning.

One person has died and several others were injured. The Florida Highway Patrol has released no other information on the incident.

Highlands County schools opened today. Officials say as of yet there are no first-day attendance numbers yet available. They do say it appears that classes resumed without incident - save for a few traffic jams around several schools.

They caution motorists that schools will be letting out this afternoon. Watch out for children walking or riding bicycles home from classes.

One of two men struck by lightning last week in Avon Park now has died. Reportedly, the pair were walking around Lake Olivia in Avon Park Lakes and were headed home to seek shelter when the bolt hit along Nautilus Drive.

One of the men reportedly was treated at an area hospital then released. The other was taken to a Tampa-area trauma center where he remained in critical condition - but since has expired. No names have yet been released.

Highlands County Supervisor of Elections Penny Ogg is getting ready for tomorrow's primary. Early voting had just over 21-percent of the electorate turn out and most of them were by mail.

Of the 13,381 votes cast, 9,413 came in by mail. Still, 3,972 residents came in to one of the three polling places set up in Avon Park, Sebring and Lake Placid to cast their ballots.

Election day voting for the primaries will begin tomorrow morning at 7am.

It's back to school for youngsters around Highlands County today. The question is, how many youngsters actually will show up at the classrooms. Transportation officials caution parents to have their kids at their stops early - saying the routes may go quickly if there are no students at some of the stops.

Motorists are urged to use caution this morning as children wait by the road or walk to schools. Extra patrols have been dispatched to school zones.

8/18/2020

Today is primary election day. All 25 precincts opened this morning and Supervisor of Elections Penny Ogg says things have moving along smoothly. Earlier this morning, numbers showed that some 2,405 residents had turned out to cast their ballots, with another 425 votes delivered by mail.

Early voting wrapped up Saturday with approximately 20-percent of the electorate casting their ballots either in person or by mail. The polls will be open until 7:00 tonight.

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 6 additional positive tests and 46 negatives added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 17,141 tests administered locally over the past five months - 15,491 tests have been negative with 1,639 positive cases recorded.

There have been 179 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 42 deaths

have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

An Avon Park man is dead following a confrontation with Highlands County Sheriff's deputies. According to reports, 34-year-old Keith Allen Filgar was shot and killed last night after pointing a firearm at officers.

Lawmen reportedly had chased Filgar through the Avon Park Lakes area following a domestic dispute call. Filgar allegedly had attacked his brother with a machete, but fled the scene.

The deputies have been placed on administrative leave. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement has been called in to investigate the incident.

One person was killed, two others were injured and State Road 70 was blocked for several hours following a three-vehicle accident yesterday morning. The driver of a sedan, identified only as a 39-year-old West Palm Beach man was killed when a semi-tractor trailer rig went left of center and slammed into the car.

Florida Highway Patrol officials have not released the names of the drivers or any other details. The driver of a third vehicle was seriously injured when his SUV was gathered up into the mishap.

Highlands County schools opened yesterday. Officials say as of yet there are no first-day attendance numbers available. They do say it appears that classes resumed without incident - save for a few traffic jams around several schools.

It appears there were at least a few issues - The student helpdesk experienced what was termed "a very high call volume." With operators having to get back to those who left messages.

Officials caution motorists that schools are on again today. Please slow down in school zones and watch out for children walking or riding bicycles.

Highlands County commissioners will meet this morning in regular session. Among other things, they'll look at a half-million dollar budget for the Tourist Development Commission and prepare to hire an assistant county attorney.

Commissioner also are expected to move forward with the sale of 31 surplus properties to get them back on the tax rolls. Apparently they'll be getting more than \$34,000 from the sales of that land.

Highlands County Supervisor of Elections Penny Ogg says things are ready for today's primary. Candidates are challenging for seats on Highlands County Commission in districts 2,3 and 5 as well as for the Highlands County Clerk of the Courts position.

All 25 precincts will be open for today's balloting. Early voting wrapped up Saturday. Just over 21-percent of the electorate have cast their ballots - most of them were mail.

Balloting will be held today from 7am until 7pm. The general election will be held in November.

8/19/2020

Well the primaries are over and the winners now have been declared. With all the precincts now reporting - Jerome Kasubowski picked up 46-percent of the vote to take the Highlands County Clerk of Courts seat.

In the county commission races, Kathy Rapp took District 2 with 48-percent of the vote, Scott Kirouac won the District 3 seat with 52-percent and Chris Campbell won the District 5 seat with 36-percent of the vote.

Kaylee Tuck won her District 55 Florida House Republican primary with just over 56-percent of the vote. She now advances to the November general election

About a third of registered voters cast their ballots either in person or by mail. Balloting reportedly went smoothly with no major incidents to report.

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 21 additional positive tests and 102 negatives added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 17,264 tests administered locally over the past five months - 15,593 tests have been negative with 1,660 positive cases recorded.

There have been 183 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 47 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

The Highlands County School Board will hold a special session tonight. At issue is whether or not to allow sports competition to resume in the local system. The meeting will be held at 5:30 PM in the Garland Boggus boardroom at the the district offices.

There already has been overwhelming support on social media for the activity. Some parents have asked that should the board allow games to be played between schools. band and cheerleader activities also should be resumed.

Weather is being blamed for a fire that broke out in a home near Lake Clay. Units from Lake Placid and Sun 'N Lakes South responded to the call on Citadel Street when a house there was struck by lightning.

Firefighters extinguished what was termed a small but stubborn attic fire. No injuries were reported in the incident. A dollar damage estimate was not available.

8/24/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 5 additional positive tests and 75 negatives added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 17,828 tests administered locally - 16,078 tests have been negative with 1,740 positive cases recorded.

There have been 189 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 53 deaths

have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

Avon Park city council members will gather tonight for a special session. At issue will be the draft budget for the upcoming fiscal year. Tentative millage in the City of Charm was raised from .3 mils to 3-mils. The idea was to set it high and roll it back.

However, a number of fiscal challenges have come before the council in recent weeks - including refurbishing and repair to a number of municipal buildings. This will not be a virtual session, it will be held in the Avon Park city council chambers starting at 6:PM.

The Avon Park city council continues to try and sell the Brickell Building. The downtown structure has been a thorn in the side of municipal officials for decades. Once bought by the city and targeted for low income housing - council members have put it back on the market.

They have instructed City Manager Mark Scradler to come up with a Request For Proposals on the building to get it back on the tax roles. Provisions will include a tight schedule for improvements with an eye toward a for-profit business to purchase the structure.

A homeowner shot and killed a burglary suspect who tried to break into her Auburndale home. Polk County Sheriff's investigators say, the fatal shooting took place on Ellie Road early Saturday morning.

Deputies said the homeowner shot Joshua Mathieu, 34, as he was reportedly breaking into the home, brandishing a tire iron.

Mathieu was pronounced dead at the scene, according to officials. They say he had a criminal history dating back a decade.

8/25/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 7 additional positive tests and 63 negatives added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 17,898 tests administered locally - 16,141 tests have been negative with 1,747 positive cases recorded.

There have been 189 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 57 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

Avon Park city council members worked through a budget workshop last night with a hybrid session. Some board members and staff showed up at the council chambers, with others participating in a Zoom meeting.

Early indications are that at the current .3 mil taxation rate, the city will be dipping into reserve funds to meet upcoming expenditures. The council will meet again on the 31st in a special meeting where they can take action on some of the issues.

A youngster in Avon Park Lakes took a tumble last night and it earned him a trip to the

hospital. According to reports, the 8-year-old fell approximately 10-feet from a loft during a hay moving operation at a Bowden Road address.

The boy was airlifted to a pediatric trauma unit with leg injuries.

8/26/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 9 additional positive tests and 80 negatives added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 17,987 tests administered locally - 16,221 tests have been negative with 1,756 positive cases recorded.

There have been 190 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 57 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

As Avon Park city council members struggle with their budget for the upcoming fiscal year, the care and maintenance of municipally-owned buildings has become a challenge,

The Classic Caladiums building reportedly is in need of hundreds of thousands of dollars in repairs and there also are other structures that are in line for maintenance and refurbishing. Councilwoman Maria Sutherland has asked for a list of city-owned properties to try and get a handle on looming costs for the upcoming fiscal year.

Highlands County Sheriff's officials are warning residents about more scams. At issue this time are Facebook posts offering money to the first 50 or 100 people that reply to a post.

Those posting claim they are doing something good in response to COVID. What they are really doing is scamming people out of money.

They will message those who comment and tell them that in order to get the cash, they first have to pay some money. Authorities say THAT IS 100 PERCENT ALWAYS A SCAM

Highlands County Supervisor of Elections Penny Ogg has answered a question about mail-in vs voting in person. Ogg says once a person has voted either by mail, early or Election Day, that vote is cast and any additional ballots would not be counted.

For instance - if a person sent a vote by mail ballot in and then went to a early voting or Election Day polling location they would be able to vote there IF the vote by mail had not been received, and if they vote at that location then the vote by mail would not be counted once received by the Elections Office.

She says Highlands County has electronic poll books which are constantly being updated. Citizens may track your vote by mail ballot on their website or by calling the elections office.

Better than 300 Duke Energy customers were without power this morning. The lights went out shortly before 5:00 near the Sun 'N Lake community. Company officials have not said what caused the problem.

8/27/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 25 additional positive tests and 56 negatives added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 18,066 tests administered locally - 16,275 tests have been negative with 1,781 positive cases recorded.

There have been 190 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 60 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

The Duke Energy Solar Power Plant in Lake Placid reportedly is slated to be part of a new program. Company officials have announced an 18-megawatt lithium battery will be built at the site - which came online in December of last year.

Apparently, it will be the first of it's kind for Duke - they say it will allow for greater efficiency. It is one of three such projects going in across the Sunshine State.

They say they hope to have it operational by the end of next year.

They say time flies when you're having fun. Avon Park City Manager Mark Schrader has informed city council members, he was hired six months ago. At the time, council members agreed to employ the former Highlands County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy with a proviso that they would review his performance after six months.

Schrader says, he's ready for the review and assessment. No word on when the council will formally take up the action.

It might be the biggest Christmas in Frostproof in a century, While cities and towns across Florida have announced they are pulling the plug on their annual processions Frostproof say's their Christmas parade still is on.

Moreover, Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd has agreed to be the Grand Marshal. The parade is slated for December 5th with the annual Holly Jolly Christmas Party to follow at Henderson Field.

8/28/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 25 additional positive tests and 56 negatives added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 18,066 tests administered locally - 16,275 tests have been negative with 1,781 positive cases recorded.

There have been 190 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 60 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

Officials at the Highlands County Emergency Management Division say they have established a temporary pet shelter for the 2020 hurricane season. Described as "a shelter of last resort," the facility will be only for residents of Highlands County.

Pets will be housed in a separate area from people. Pet owners would be given a schedule to attend to their animals needs. Only two humans per pet will be permitted.

All dogs and cats admitted must have been vaccinated and microchipped. Owners must bring their own food and accessories. Livestock, reptiles, birds and pocket pets will not be admitted.

Officials of the City of Sebring report nobody as of yet has pulled a demolition permit for the Nan-Cess-0-Wee Hotel downtown. New video has emerged showing the structure has suffered what has been termed "catastrophic roof damage."

Downtown neighbors maintain they have talked with developers, who have promised that they will refurbish and eventually re-open the landmark.

Avon Park city council members have started the process of instituting rules and regulations for historic structures in the City of Charm. City attorney Gerald Buhr told the council that there already are two ordinances in the books. However, they appear to be in conflict with each other.

Apparently, there needs to be a procedure in place for grants or for demolition of such structures. Avon Park currently is dealing with taking down both the Wilde Building and the old fire department location.

A man who spent the last 37 years in prison on a assault and murder charges walked out of Hardee County prison yesterday after officials discovered dramatic new evidence that proved his innocence.

Fifty-six-year-old Robert DuBoise had been serving a life sentence after being convicted in 1983 for the murder of 19-year-old Barbara Grams. Officials for the prosecutor in Tampa said during a court hearing that much of the physical evidence in the case had been destroyed.

However they were able to track down evidence at the county medical examiner's office and process that for DNA. Within a week, the evidence excluded DuBoise.

8/31/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released this mornign by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been two additional positives, and 45 negatives added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 18,493 tests administered locally - 16,660 have been negative with 1823 positive cases recorded.

There have been 196 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 67 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

Avon Park city council members will round out the month of August tonight with a special

meeting. They will hear the first reading of an ordinance, setting policies and procedures for semi-public parking lots.

The idea is to allow for outdoor dining for some of the restaurants in the city of charm to enlarge their capacity.

In other action, the council will look at regulations for dealing with leins assessed for code enforcement violation. The meeting will be both in the council chambers and as an internet session.

Highlands County Sheriff's officials are alerting residents of another scam. This one comes through the mail in the form of a letter. A group calling itself the United States Deputy Sheriff's Association apparently claims they want to provide free equipment to local law enforcement agencies.

But officials say, their chief beneficiary is themselves. They say some 95-percent of the money raised goes to "administrative costs." Doing the math - that's only five percent to other organizations.

Authorities caution, there may be better ways to donate to your local law enforcement agencies.

It appears the Humane Society of Highlands County is getting into the veterinary business. Officials of the organization say they plan to open a full-service clinic tomorrow and now are accepting appointments.

9/1/2020

Several members of the Avon Park city council had a dust-up last night over the issue of raising taxes. While councilwoman Brenda Gray wanted to hold the line on the current .3-mil level, several other council members pointed to staffing issues and looming repair bills that are going to be costing money in the City of Charm.

Formal action on the millage will come later this month. On a unanimous vote, the council approved new regulations on parking lots that could help restaurants expand their outdoor dining facilities.

Highlands County commissioners this morning turned back yet another effort to impose a mask mandate on local citizens. A number of residents have repeatedly come before the commission asking for the decree.

Commissioners also talked about the issue of trash collection and recycling. They gave County Engineer Gator Howerton direction to move forward on a plan to simplify the recycling program, starting with a single recyclable item. Company officials say they will be happy to work with the county on working out a solution.

First, the Mobil One 12 Hours of Sebring was moved back to September due to the Coronavirus. Now comes word they will be going head-to-head with another road race. The FIA

apparently has moved the date of the 8 Hours of Bahrain up a week and now matches Sebring's planned November 14th race date.

Sebring raceway officials say the change will not be a large challenge - citing the numerous travel restrictions in place worldwide. They also note not many of the drivers had been scheduled for both races.

Highlands County commissioners will be talking trash when they meet this morning in regular session. At issue will be the current recycling program and possible alternatives to it.

The county's current provider, WasteConnections, reportedly wants to be let out of their current contract, Company officials say they are losing revenue due to the collapse of the recycling market.

So commissioners will be looking at possibilities for long-term solutions and are calling for citizen input.

9/2/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show that there have been 8 additional positives, and 33 negatives added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 18,846 tests administered locally - 16,833 have been negative with 1846 positive cases recorded.

There have been 197 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 69 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

The Avon Park city council continues to work on policies and procedures for collecting property leins assessed by their code enforcement department. Council members agreed they have been too lenient in the past on forgiving such fines.

They discussed separating the violations into major and minor categories - to decide how much of the fines to try and collect. City officials say they will continue to refine the program.

Reportedly, there are millions of dollars in outstanding leins in the City of Charm.

There were no injuries, but Phase III of the Sebring Parkway was closed for a time when a large piece of machinery overturned at the north traffic circle there.

Units from the West Sebring fire department were called in to help deal with the situation, which did damage to the roadway and caused a hazardous materials spill.

The road was closed as the industrial lifter was uprighted and repairs were made. Florida Highway Patrol officials have released no names or details on what caused the machinery to tip over.

The Highlands County chapter of the FFA has been nationally ranked for the first time ever. Reportedly, they have been declared a 3-star chapter. That means the local organization has provided activities that meet National FFA Award Program pillar requirements.

They were cited in the areas of Building communities, Growing Leaders, and Strengthening Agriculture. This year only 15 chapters across the state of Florida earned a 3-star rating.

9/3/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health today show that there have been 8 additional positives, and 81 negatives added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 18,778 tests administered locally - 16,914 have been negative with 1854 positive cases recorded.

There have been 198 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 69 deaths have been tied to the corona virus since numbers started being kept.

Avon Park city council members will get together tonight. It's the second time this week they will have convened to take care of business in the City of Charm. Tonight they will be discussing municipal health insurance among other things.

Reportedly, the rising cost of coverage is colliding with the city's unusually low tax rate. In other action, the council will look at enacting rules and regulations for historic buildings in the city.

This again will be a blended session, with some members and staff in the city council chambers with others participating via a ZOOM internet session.

Ten people were injured and Highway 27 was closed for a time yesterday when two vehicles collided near Lake Placid. The accident occurred at the intersection of Aaron Drive and 27.

Reportedly, a child was flown out to an area trauma center as the result of the accident. Florida Highway Patrol officials have not released any details on the incident.

Officials at the Sebring International Raceway are releasing details about plans for this year's Mobil One 12 Hours of Sebring. The event was pushed back from March to November due to the coronavirus.

Track officials say they will have some tickets and parking passes available starting in mid-October. However, the paddock will not be open to spectators and no additional passes will be available for much of the hospitality areas.

A vendor village will be set up at the site for trackside vendors. More details on the restrictions have been posted at the track's website.

The city of Frostproof will be kicking off the Labor Day weekend tomorrow evening. To be held at Henderson Field beginning at 5pm, there will be music with bands and a live DJ.

In addition to family games and activities, organizers say there will be some buskers, including "Pyro Joe," a fire eater. A long list of food trucks and other vendors

9/4/2020

Two people were injured yesterday when a couple of vehicles collided north of Lake Placid. The mishap occurred shortly after noon at the intersection of Highway 27 and Lykes Road,

The force of the impact caused one of the cars to overturn. Officials say two patients were transported and one refused care. Florida Highway Patrol officials have released no details on the incident.

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show there have been 8 additional positives, and 81 negatives added to Highlands County's ongoing count. Of the 18,778 tests administered locally - 16,914 have been negative with 1854 positive cases recorded.

There have been 198 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 69 deaths have been tied to the corona virus here since numbers started being kept.

The Avon Park city council got good news and bad news last night. On the good side, it appears that the city will be getting a break on insurance for their employees. Staff told the council it was "a very strong renewal."

In other action, it appears they have to send a proposal to tear down the Wild Building to the city's Planning & Zoning board for a recommendation before they can raze it. Apparently, the P&Z Board will look at the issue next week.

City attorney Gerald Buhr told the council it is a procedural issue.

Former Sebring city councilman Buddy Whitlock has passed away. A Sebring native, Whitlock served two terms on the council, but might best be known as a co-founder of the Sebring Thunder car show held annually around the Circle in Sebring.

The Vet Jam end of Summer Fest is slated for tomorrow and Sunday. That event will be held at the Moose Lodge on Highway 98 South of Sebring with two days of live music, food and fun. A poker run will be held as well, The event is free and open to the public.

The city of Frostproof will be kicking off the Labor Day weekend tomorrow evening. The Frostproof Celebration will be held at Henderson Field beginning at 5pm.

In addition to bands and a live DJ, organizers say there will be family games and activities and some buskers. "Pyro Joe," a fire eater will be making an appearance. A long list of food trucks and other vendors also are slated to be there.

They say, to date, Frostproof has cancelled none of their activities - and are looking forward to a Christmas parade they are describing as huge.

9/7/2020

It appears to have been a pretty quiet Labor Day weekend so far. Law enforcement and fire/rescue officials say they have been busy - but no issues of any note.

Both the Vet Jam End of Summer Fest and the Frostproof celebration also apparently came off

without a hitch.

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health over the weekend show there have been 55 additional positives, and 317 negatives added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 19,150 tests administered locally - 17,231 have been negative with 1909 positive cases recorded.

There have been 201 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 69 deaths have been tied to the corona virus here since numbers started being kept.

Heartland Horses for the Handicapped reportedly is in line for some help. Ralph Stivala a local Boy Scout, is working on his Eagle Scout project. His plan is to build a pole barn on the property with a "SureHands Lift."

The mechanism would permit people transfer from their wheelchairs to horseback in a more safe fashion. Stivala currently is raising money for the materials to get the project underway.

9/8/2020

It appears Highlands County has a couple of significant positions to fill. Both Highlands County Business Services Director Tosha Morgan and Road & Bridge Director Kyle Green have filed their resignations.

So far, no reason for the actions has yet been released. Green most recently made an unsuccessful bid for the Highlands County Clerk of the Courts office.

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show there have been 14 additional positives, and 71 negative tests added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 19,323 tests administered locally - 17,378 have been negative with 1935 positive cases recorded.

There have been 202 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 69 deaths have been tied to the corona virus here since numbers started being kept.

The Highlands County School Board will get together this evening. They first will hold a 4:00 workshop session to deal with the so-called "Return to Athletics" plan which will allow youngsters once again to compete in sports.

At 5:00, the Board will have a special meeting and public hearing to discuss the budget for the upcoming fiscal year. The \$178 million dollar spending plan will be supported by a tax rate of more than six mils.

Both sessions will be in the Garland Boggus Boardroom.

The Highlands County Sheriff's office has issued a warning about the penalty for stealing or defacing campaign signs. They say such an action is considered criminal mischief.

The penalty for such activities could land defendants in the Highlands County jail for 60 days. The memo comes after several signs for the Re-election of President Donald Trump were defaced along Highway 27.

If you think there's a bit more air traffic in the area - you're right. Officials of the Avon Park Air Force Range say they are hosting training sessions again today.

Flights are slated to run from mid-morning until mid-afternoon. Then a second round of training in the late evening. They did not indicate what kind of aircraft would be involved in the activities.

Labor Day 2020 has come and gone with no major incidents to report. Local law enforcement agencies say they worked no shootings, stabbings, structure fires, car crashes, armed robberies or any of the like. They were busy, however, with traffic stops and other normal law enforcement duties.

About the biggest weekend incident was a water outage in the city of Frostproof - that was caused by lightning strike.

9/9/2020

Highlands County officials have released additional information about the resignations of Highlands County Business Services Director Tosha Morgan and Road & Bridge Director Kyle Green. The pair reportedly stepped down following the findings of a recent investigation.

According to a report by officials of Brown Law & Consulting, the two had been engaged in an "improper relationship," in violation of county policy.

The report indicates that the relationship may have been going on for better than a year.

Highlands County Administrator Randy Vossburg reportedly is taking actions to fill both the posts.

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show there have been 10 additional positives, and 61 negative tests added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 19,934 tests administered locally - 17,439 have been negative with 1945 positive cases recorded.

There have been 206 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 69 deaths have been tied to the corona virus here since numbers started being kept.

A head-on crash last night on Highway 27 resulted in no injuries but a trip to jail for one of the drivers. Sebring police say a Chevy pickup reportedly was northbound in the southbound lane of 27 in front of the Fairmount Cinema Square shopping center.

The Silverado collided head-on with a southbound Ford Edge. Noone was transported from the mishap. However, the driver of the pickup was charged with DUI and taken to the Highlands County Jail.

Officials of the Highlands County school system say they have enlarged the free lunch program for students. They say that changes to United States Department of Agriculture regulations now allow school districts across the nation to include virtual school students in no-cost meal service.

Students in Highlands Virtual School, as well as those enrolled in Florida Virtual School, now are eligible to be served no-cost meals.

9/10/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show there have been two additional positives, and 21 negative tests added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 19,417 tests administered locally - 17,460 have been negative with 1947 positive cases recorded.

There have been 205 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 69 deaths have been tied to the corona virus here since numbers started being kept.

It appears that scams have become so commonplace, the Highlands County Sheriff's Office has produced a brochure to help people being conned out of their hard-earned cash. Scams can come via computer, over the phone, by text message and even in the mail.

The tri-fold brochure outlines everything from coronavirus related scams to those involving relatives. It also gives the top ways to spot a scam. The brochure is available at the Sheriff's Office or on their Facebook page.

Highlands County has a clearance sale going on. They have put more than 130 lots around the county up for bid. The properties are located in Avon Park Lakes, Holiday Shores, the Country Club of Sebring, Placid Lakes and Leisure Lakes - as well as in Avon Park, Sebring, Lake Placid and Sun 'N Lake,

Those who want to make a bid better hurry - paperwork needs to be filed by 3:00 this afternoon. A complete list can be found under the Highlands County Commission's web page under Purchasing Department.

Frostproof city council members will hear a proposal for yet another special event when they meet in regular session this evening. The Chamber of Commerce there has requested the use of Henderson Field next month for a JeepToberFest.

In addition to the Jeeps, live music, food, inflatables and other entertainment is planned. The field was used last weekend for a Labor Day Celebration. Reportedly, Frostproof has cancelled none of their special events this year.

9/11/2020

As people observe 9/11 the Sounds of Freedom may be heard overhead. Officials of the Avon Park Air Force Range indicate that exercises will be going on at the Bombing Range all day today.

They did not indicate what kind of aircraft would be in the area or what other kinds of machinery might be involved in the sessions.

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show there have been two additional positive, and 21 negative tests added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 19,417 tests administered locally - 17,460 have been negative with 1947 positive cases recorded.

There have been 205 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 69 deaths have been tied to the corona virus here since numbers started being kept.

Two people were injured and State Road 66 was tied up for a time yesterday when two cars collided near the intersection of 66 and Payne Road. According to reports, a Sport Utility Vehicle ran into the back of a pickup truck,

One of the two people injured in the mishap was taken to a local hospital as a result of the accident.

According to reports, Highlands County officials are looking to hire a fire marshal. Among other things, the new fire marshal will be responsible for fire Prevention, fire safety, public education and development of fire service programs.

The action comes in the wake of the retirement of Jimmy Branca, who recently stepped down after 30 years of service.

Currently, inspectors from the State Fire Marshal's office are called in to investigate causes and other details of local fire incidents.

9/14/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show there have been 9 additional positive, and 117 negative tests added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 19,930 tests administered locally - 17,915 have been negative with 2005 positive cases recorded.

There have been 210 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 78 deaths have been tied to the corona virus here since numbers started being kept.

Avon Park city council members will get together for their first session of September tonight. They'll start with public hearings on the tentative budget and fire assessment rates for the upcoming fiscal year.

In other action, the council will discuss the pending demolition of the Wylde Building and the need for more members on the city's planning & zoning board. They also are set to determine a date for the annual tricker treat festivities.

The Frostproof city council also will be getting together. They will meet this afternoon at 3:30. The workshop will deal both with the millage and the capital improvement budget for the upcoming fiscal year in the Friendly City.

A pedestrian was struck and killed over the weekend. Florida Highway Patrol officials have not been able to identify the man. They only will say a 20-year-old man was at the wheel of a sedan when he struck the pedestrian from behind off Highlands Blvd and Parkdale Drive Saturday night.

The victim was pronounced dead at the scene. No names or other details have been released. Apparently, they still are trying to identify the victim.

A Bartow man reportedly was killed early yesterday morning in an accident in Winter Haven. According to reports, 52-year-old William Clabough was at the counter a Marathon gas station, when an out of control vehicle careened off the road crashed into the the building.

The black Kia Optima apparently jumped the concrete curb and through the parking lot, striking an unoccupied Ford Mustang before crashing into the building.

The driver of the vehicle also was taken to an area hospital. Charges in the incident are pending.

9/15/2020

Officials from the NuCor Steel manufacturing facility say they are well underway to starting operation. Reportedly, they already have hired 156 people - 63 of who live in Highlands County. They say the Rolling operations should be functional in October with the melt shop to be on line some time in November.

They say other work - such as intersection improvements are still under construction.

Highlands County commissioners are scrambling to spend \$4.6 million dollars in CARES act money by the end of the month. Apparently scrutiny of the applications for the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security act money is going slowly.

The county needs to have all that money paid out by the end of the month to be eligible for a second round of more than \$13 million dollars. Commissioners called to have additional personnel review and approve the applications from individuals, businesses and community services so that checks can be cut.

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show there have been 9 additional positive, and 117 negative tests added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 19,930 tests administered locally - 17,915 have been negative with 2005 positive cases recorded.

There have been 210 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 78 deaths have been tied to the corona virus here since numbers started being kept.

Avon Park city council last night set their rates for fire assessment, as well as a tentative budget and millage rate for the upcoming fiscal year. The fire assessment in the City of Charm will remain the same - but taxes could be going up.

By a 3-2 margin, the council moved to leave the tentative millage at 2 mills - up from .3 mills. Council members Maria Sutherland, Jim Barnard and Mayor Garrett Anderson agreed that would give them some wiggle room, to make adjustments on the budget.

A final hearing will be September 28th.

With all of the cancellations in the area, Avon Park city council members last night agreed that Tricker Treat should go on as usual. It will be held the last Saturday in October - which just happens to be the 31st.

Council members agreed that those who want to participate can, and those who do not can either not turn out or leave their porch lights off.

One person was injured this morning in an accident west of Placid Lakes. Described as a single vehicle rollover, it occurred just off State Road 70.

Florida Highway Patrol units as well as units from the Placid Lakes and Sun 'N Lake departments responded along with EMS. The roadway in the area is open.

Highlands County commissioners have a bit of work ahead of them this morning. Among other things, they will look at approving a zoning change for 11-acres of property out in Spring Lake that will allow for the construction of a hotel/motel facility there.

In other action, commissioners will be asked to wave more than \$23,000 in fees for the county's multi-use sports complex - as well as charges for traffic operations and EMS units. The idea is to clear the way for a bicycling event there.

Commissioners also are expected to sell a dozen county-owned properties and get them back on the tax rolls.

9/16/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show there have been 6 additional positive, and 29 negative tests added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 20,062 tests administered locally - 18,028 have been negative with 2024 positive cases recorded.

There have been 215 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 80 deaths

have been tied to the corona virus here since numbers started being kept.

Despite an impassioned plea from Avon Park Planning & Zoning member Jean Jordan, Avon Park city council members voted 3-2 to stand by their decision to have the Wylde Building torn down.

Consulting engineer Carl Cool described the structure as "a terrible mess," He told council that if they saved the outside of the building, a new structure built to 2020 standards would have to be built inside of it.

Council member Stanley Spurlock contended grant money could be available to fund the reconstruction. Both he and councilwoman Maria Sutherland voted against the move.

Officials from the NuCor Steel manufacturing facility say they are well underway to starting operation. Reportedly, they already have hired 156 people - 63 of who live in Highlands County. They say the Rolling Mill should be functional in October with the Melt Shop to be on line some time in November.

The water and sewer service from Avon Park reportedly already is operational. They say other work - such as intersection improvements are still under construction.

Highlands County commissioners are scrambling to spend \$4.6 million dollars in CARES act money by the end of the month. Apparently scrutiny of the applications for the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security act money is going slowly.

The county needs to have all that money paid out by the end of the month to be eligible for a second round of more than \$13 million dollars. Commissioners called to have additional personnel review and approve the applications from individuals, businesses and community services so that checks can be cut.

In a rare move, Highlands County commissioners have turned back a request by the Tourist Development Council. TDC representatives had asked the county to waive fees for use of the Highlands County Multi-Sports Complex, plus charges for sheriff's deputies and traffic operations.

The idea was to underwrite a bicycling event here in the county. Commissioner Arlene Tuck noted that the sponsoring organization "Gran Fondo New York," is a for profit company and did not want taxpayers to foot the bill. The denial came on a 3-2 margin.

Another heartland community has announced that they WILL have a Christmas parade. The Jaycees have announced that their annual holiday processional will go on as planned in Sebring December 4th.

Because of the current conditions, organizers say there will be extra education for parade goers and participants to encourage social distancing while watching or participating, masks are recommended and live streaming of the parade is under consideration.

Frostproof already has announced they will be having their Christmas parade as well.

9/18/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show there have been 13 additional positive, and 67 negative tests added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 20,142 tests administered locally - 18,095 have been negative with 2037 positive cases recorded.

There have been 215 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 81 deaths have been tied to the corona virus here since numbers started being kept.

The city of Avon Park is looking for a bit of help. First, they are looking for citizens who would like to serve on the city's planning & zoning board. They currently only have five of seven members, and some others may be looking to retire.

The only requirement is that you be a resident of the City of Charm. They also are looking for an airport greeter, to mind the fixed base operation out at the Avon Park airport. They are hoping for a retired pilot or two who would consider manning the phones and answering questions for those who land at the facility.

More information can be had by calling the Avon Park city hall.

A familiar company has a new name. Beginning today, CenturyLink will be known as Lumen Technologies. Company officials say the re-branding will mark a new focus on 4.0 technologies.

No major changes are expected to the organization itself, which will remain headquartered in Louisiana.

There were no serious injuries, but a lot of damage yesterday when a car and a pickup collided on Highway 27 south of Sebring. The incident occurred late yesterday afternoon at the intersection of Highway 27 and Lake Josephine Drive.

The force of the impact caused the truck to overturn. Reportedly it rolled several times before coming to rest on its roof. No names or other details have been released.

The area Pinehurst and Sunset drives in Sebring Shores was closed off for a time last night when Comcast van had a tree fall on it. So far, there's no indication how that accident happened.

The walls have come tumbling down in the City of Charm as the old Avon Park Fire Station has gone under the wrecking ball. The building which was damaged beyond repair by Hurricane Irma, was razed to make way for construction of a new Church Service Center facility.

Also slated to come down in Avon Park is the Wylde Building downtown. In Sebring, permits have been pulled to demolish the old Nancesowee Hotel. No dates for those demos have yet been announced.

9/21/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show there have been 41 additional positive, and 359 negative tests added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 20,542 tests administered locally - 18,454 have been negative with 2078 positive cases recorded.

There have been 221 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 81 deaths have been tied to the corona virus here since numbers started being kept.

Highlands County fire/rescue units last night pulled a motorist from a stranded car. At first, the driver thought they'd driven into a pond - what it turned out to be was a deep puddle at the intersection of Queen Avenue and Sunrise way - brought on by yesterday's torrential rains.

It was deep enough that the water was pouring into the vehicle. Workers used an EMS backboard to get the driver back to land.

They said the bands of rain brought as much as 6-inches of water to Highlands County.

One person was injured in a single vehicle rollover accident early yesterday morning. It occurred on Highway 27 at Lykes Road north of Lake Placid. Reportedly, the victim was transported to a local hospital. No indication has been given as to the extent of their injuries.

Two other vehicles were involved when they struck the debris field from the rollover. No injuries were reported there.

A motorist was flown out from an accident Saturday night at Highway 27 and Harrel Road in Venus. The roadway was closed for a time as the result of that mishap.

They may be the City of Charm - but they might not be the City of Food Trucks. At least some Avon Park city council members say they have received calls of concern about the mobile food vendors setting up shop in various areas of the city.

They say at this time, the city has no rules or regulations regarding such vehicles. Avon Park Mayor Garrett Anderson has called for a special meeting the first Monday in October to address the issue.

9/23/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show there have been 44 additional positive, and 8 negative tests added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 20,765 tests administered locally - 18,644 have been negative with 2111 positive cases recorded.

There have been 222 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 81 deaths have been tied to the corona virus here since numbers started being kept.

One person was injured yesterday when they were struck by a car west of Sebring. According

to reports, the incident occurred on Golfview Road. The pedestrian was airlifted to a local trauma center. Florida Highway Patrol officials have released no names or other details.

After months of waiting, the Highlands County Children's Advocacy Center finally will get signage naming the center in honor of former Highlands County School Superintendent Ruth Handley. Highlands County commissioners took the action to bestow the honorarium on Handley back in December.

Dedication ceremonies now have been set for October 2nd. Handley, then-Human Services Director Kevin Roberts and then-County Commissioner Doris Gentry were among a group that developed the facility to assist youngsters involved in child abuse cases.

Although travel has been down across the country due to the coronavirus, a new report shows road trips are up - at least locally. The numbers from SEO Clarity claim that long-distance road trips are up by nearly 78-percent for the Sebring/Avon Park Metro area.

The numbers show that there were some 1,946 road trips last year - but that number has jumped to 3,440 this year. There have been concerted efforts by Visit Florida and the U.S Travel Association for residents to discover all the Sunshine State has to offer.

9/24/2020

Units from Highlands Park, Lake Placid, Sun 'N Lakes South and Desoto City were called out to a housefire early this morning. According to reports, the structure on Durham Avenue reportedly was well involved in flames by the time firefighters arrived at the scene.

No injuries have been reported and the cause of the fire remains under investigation. There are reports that the house might have been vacant at the time of the blaze.

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show there have been 10 additional positive, and 51 negative tests added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 20,876 tests administered locally - 18,695 have been negative with 2121 positive cases recorded.

There have been 223 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 82 deaths have been tied to the corona virus here since numbers started being kept.

The city of Avon Park apparently still is looking for a bit of help. First, they continue to seek citizens who would like to serve on the city's planning & zoning board. They currently only have five of seven members, and some others may be looking to retire.

The only requirement is that applicants be residents of the City of Charm. They also are looking for an airport greeter, to mind the fixed base operation out at the Avon Park airport. They are hoping for a retired pilot or two who would consider manning the phones and answering questions for those who land at the facility.

More information can be had by calling the Avon Park city hall.

Acting on a tip from officials at the Walgreen's Drug Store, detectives from the Sebring Field Office of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement began an investigation that led them to a fraudulent coupon scheme.

According to reports, the criminals would produce fake paper and digital coupons that were redeemed across central and south Florida to the tune of \$30,000. The perpetrators then would purchase goods using the coupons and subsequently sell them using social media sites.

Two of the suspects were sent to the Palm Beach Detention Center, the third is being held in Texas.

The Center for Elephant Conservation in Polk County is closing. Apparently they will head for a new wildlife sanctuary in Yulee. Reportedly, a new 2,500-acre home for former circus elephants is being constructed there. The White Oak Conservation Center has announced that it's expecting to welcome 30 Asian elephants starting next year.

Most of the animals previously traveled with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus until they were retired in 2016.

The elephants will have access to nine interlinked areas that will include a variety of vegetation and habitat types, such as wetlands, meadows and woods. The center is constructing eleven waterholes and three barns equipped with veterinary equipment.

9/25/2020

A man is dead and a woman is in jail following an overnight incident in Sebring. According to reports, Highlands County Sheriff's deputies were serving a warrant on Kelly Townsend at a Markland Lane residence,

At that time, deputies saw Matthew Nocerino. Noting that he also had warrants, they ordered him to stop. He didn't and a chase ensued. According to reports, Nocerino took a shot at deputies - hitting one of them in the bulletproof vest.

Deputies returned fire - killing Nocerino. Townsend subsequently has been booked into the Highlands County jail on her warrants.

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show there have been 5 additional positive, and 97 negative tests added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 20,929 tests administered locally - 18,792 have been negative with 2127 positive cases recorded.

There have been 226 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 82 deaths have been tied to the corona virus here since numbers started being kept.

It appears the Nancesowee hotel in Sebring will be coming down sooner than later. Crews reportedly were in the place yesterday doing preliminary work in getting the place ready for

demolition.

The Nancesowee has been vacant for years. There have been several efforts to rehabilitate the building. However, none have been successful.

Recent videos have shown the building suffered what was termed "catastrophic roof collapse."

One person was injured yesterday in an accident involving an all-terrain vehicle. The mishap occurred on Sheppard Road in Venus. The rider was taken to the hospital after the vehicle overturned.

So far no names or other details in the accident have been released.

Polk County Sheriff's officials have arrested a Frostproof woman, charging she set up a fake charity, but instead, spent the money on herself.

According to reports, Amanda Lynn Brown set up a GoFundMe account, supposedly to help the families of a Frostproof triple homicide case.

There was nearly \$12,000 in the account when it was closed. However, none of the money apparently made it to the victims. Brown was charged with several counts and booked into the Polk County Jail.

9/28/2020

The latest Coronavirus test numbers released by the Florida Department of Health show there have been 4 additional positive, and 50 negative tests added to Highlands County's ongoing count.

Of the 21,268 tests administered locally - 19,098 have been negative with 2160 positive cases recorded.

There have been 231 people hospitalized at some point during their illness and 86 deaths have been tied to the corona virus here since numbers started being kept.

As Governor Ron Desantis moves to re-open the state, comes word of more local closings. Officials of the Highlands Art League have announced that they have decided not to hold the annual Fine Arts & Crafts festival in November. They say they hope to have it next year.

Meanwhile, The Humane Society of Highland County has pulled the plug on Terror Trail for this year. The scare-fest has been a major fundraiser for the group.

An Avon Park man reportedly has perished in an accident in Hendry County. According to reports from the Florida Highway Patrol, the 66-year-old driver was near the intersection of Highway 27 and County Road 720 just south of Clewiston when he lost control of his Sport Utility Vehicle.

The SUV went off the road, into a ditch and overturned. The driver was killed. FHP officials have declined to release his name.

It looks to be a big meeting for the Avon Park city council tonight as they first get together as the city's Community Redevelopment Agency then hold their final budget hearing.

Council has been eyeing the idea of increasing millage in the city from .3-tenths of a mil to as much as 2 mills to take care of some pressing financial needs in the City of Charm. They'll also go over their capital improvement plan.

At the CRA session, the council will discuss hiring a full-time employee and a part-time marketing person for the Avon Park Airport.

9/29/2020

Over the past six months or so, 89 deaths have been tied to the Coronavirus and 231 people have been hospitalized at some point here in Highlands County. There have been more than 21,000 tests administered with better than 19,000 coming back negative.

To date, there have been 2160 positive tests - however, health officials have not indicated how severe the symptoms have been, At last report, there were 62 additional negative tests and ten positives.

Governor Ron Desantis has moved the state into Phase III of recovery and lifted many restrictions on restaurants, bars and other businesses.

By a 3-2 vote, Avon Park city council members last night voted to raise the milage in the City of Charm. It will go from .3-tenths of a mil to a full mill. Or from 30-cents from each \$1,000 of valuation to a dollar for each \$1,000 of valuation.

That comes out to a 232-percent increase - which council members say will be around \$50 for the average homeowner. After a three hour session, the council hammered out just over \$18.3 million dollars in expenditures for the upcoming fiscal year.

The furor over approving loans in Highlands County for the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act money apparently has subsided. Officials from the county commission say that time provisions for approving loans have been relaxed - meaning that the county will be eligible for \$13-million more in relief aid.

To date, the county has cut nearly 500 checks to individuals for a total of almost three-quarters of a million dollars, another 230 checks have gone to to businesses for about the same amount as well as nearly \$135,000 to community service groups.

The first blush of money for Highlands was set at better than \$4-million.

A 40-year-old Avon Park man faces nearly a dozen counts after Highlands County Sheriff's deputies found him with enough Fentanyl to kill nearly 40,000 people.

Authorities say deputies pulled over a car driven by 40-year-old Ruben Ramirez Rivera for a traffic infraction. A subsequent search of the vehicle revealed the fentanyl, plus a cache of heroin, cocaine, oxycodone and Xanax.

Value of the drugs was set at \$40,000, Rameriez Rivera was charged with multiple counts and booked into the Highlands County jail.

9/30/2020

Highlands County will have a new clerk of the courts beginning tomorrow. Current Clerk Bob Germaine reportedly will retire effective at midnight tonight. Clerk-elect Jerome Kaszubowski was sworn in earlier this morning and will take over duties beginning tomorrow.

Meanwhile, Kaszubowski says repairs to the courthouse have been all but finished, and operations will resume there as of next Monday, October 5th.

Several of the clerk's operations - including some courtroom proceedings had to be moved after a water main break that flooded the building earlier this year.

The Highlands County Tourist Development Council reportedly is in line for a grant of nearly \$47,000 from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The money will be used for improvements at Lake Istokpoga Park and Windy Point Park. Officials say the work will improve facilities used by fishing tournaments in the area.

The TDC already had allocated better than \$287,000 in tourist tax money for the work - which will include boat trailer parking, the construction of a floating mooring dock and construction of pavilions among other things.

The city of Avon Park reportedly may be getting ready to get tough on code enforcement. City Attorney Gerald Buhr has given city council members suggestions on policies and procedures for collecting fines and leins enacted by the city in response to code enforcement violations.

The council reportedly will take action on what Buhr termed "A Complex Policy," at their next regular session.

This coming Monday, the council will look at regulating food trucks in the city. Buhr told the council that ability has been clipped to some degree, due to new state laws.

Over the past six months or so, 89 deaths have been tied to the Coronavirus and 231 people have been hospitalized at some point here in Highlands County. There have been more than 21,000 tests administered with better than 19,000 coming back negative.

To date, there have been 2160 positive tests - however, health officials have not indicated how severe the symptoms have been. At last report, there were 62 additional negative tests and ten positives.

Governor Ron Desantis has moved the state into Phase III of recovery and lifted many restrictions on restaurants, bars and other businesses.