



Hendry

County News

Formerly Caloosa Belle Independent



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Annual festival brings fun weekend



LABELLE – Festival royalty enjoyed the parade on Feb. 22. See Page 2 for more photos. [Photo by Richard Marion/Hendry County News]

Special to Hendry County News

LABELLE – LaBelle’s annual Swamp Cabbage Festival brought a weekend of fun

activities Feb. 22 and 23, with a parade, car show, arts and crafts booths, food vendors, live entertainment, rodeo and fly-in. • See **Festival** on page 2

BEAUTY PAGEANT



CLEWISTON – Miss Teen Latina Briza Forteza (left) and Miss Latina Gabriela Sanchez (right). See Page 2 for the story. [Courtesy photo]



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FROM THE COVER



LABELLE — The theme of the 2025 Swamp Cabbage Festival was 'Planes, Trains and Automobiles: A travel through history.' [Photo by Richard Marion/Hendry County News]

Festival Swamp Festival Parade winners were:

- From page 1
- Best Business Entry: Extreme Temp Air Conditioning & Heating;
- Civic/Non-Profit Organization: Hendry County Workforce Development;
- Faith Based: Iglesia Christiana Restauracion;
- Good Neighbors: Bayshore Cloggers and Tempco Pest Control;
- Marching Band: LaBelle High School Marching Band;
- Youth/Family: LaBelle High School FFA;
- Best Overall: LaBelle High School Marching Band.

The festival is held each year on the last full weekend in February.



LABELLE — There was plenty to see at the Swamp Cabbage Festival Parade on Feb. 22. [Photo by Richard Marion/Hendry County News]



LABELLE — The Swamp Cabbage Festival Parade was held Feb. 22. [Photo by Richard Marion/Hendry County News]



LABELLE — Children enjoyed participating in the parade. [Photo by Richard Marion/Lake Okeechobee News]

New Miss Latina and Miss Teen Latina crowned

SPECIAL TO HENDRY COUNTY NEWS

CLEWISTON — Miss Latina & Miss Teen Latina of the Glades, a beauty pageant representing and empowering Hispanic women in

the Glades area since 2001, has crowned their new 2025 reigning queens. Gabriela Sanchez is the new Miss Latina Of The Glades 2025. Briza Forteza is the new Miss

Teen Latina of the glades 2025. The pageant was Feb. 1, held in the Clewiston High School Auditorium. Five young ladies competed in the teen category while six compet-

ed in the miss category. The ladies were judged on individual judges interview, introductions, cultural wear, evening gown, and on stage questions.



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Tigers send a wrestler to state tournament in back-to-back years

By Richard Marion
HENDRY COUNTY NEWS

CLEWISTON — For the second year in a row, the Clewiston High School Tiger varsity wrestling team is sending a wrestler to the state tournament.

William Bussott won third place in his weight class at the regional tournament, to advance to the Florida High School Athletic Association state tournament. Last year, Gumaro Martinez III earned a ticket to the state tournament after placing fourth in his weight class at regionals.

“Big congratulations to William Bussott for earning an appearance at the FHSAA Wrestling state champi-

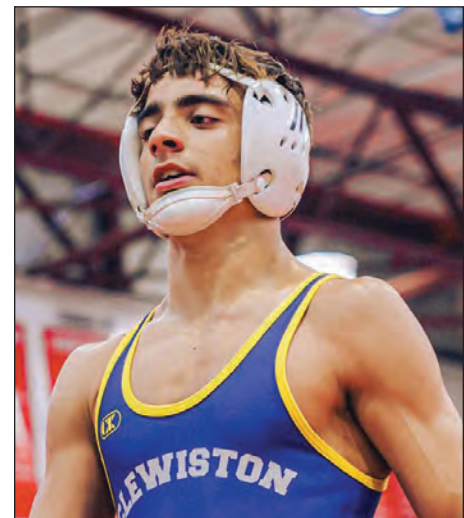
onships,” said Clewiston coach Joe Hernandez. “He understands the task at hand is not complete. We look forward to some hard practice and competing well at the Silver Spurs Arena in Kissimmee on March 6. Although William Bussott is the only state qualifier, we are very proud of the entire wrestling team for all their hard work, dedication, and placing in the top 10 in our region.”

Tiger wrestlers were at regionals thanks to a dominating performance at the district tournament on Feb. 22. Nine Tigers won medals at the tournament and the entire Tiger wrestling team advanced to the regionals.

William Bussott and Arturo Garcia

earned first place in their weight class. While Chance Harper and Thomas Rudd earned second. Rian King, Byron Taylor, Elias Garcia, and Louie Madrigal all earned a third-place medal. And Garque Allen secured a fourth-place finish.

The team has been on a hot streak in 2025. The Tigers finished second out of five teams at the Canes Duals on Jan. 18. Before that, on Jan. 3, the Tigers performed well at the Somerset Scuffle, with Elias Garcia, Thomas Rudd, and Byron Taylor taking third place in their weight class, William Bussott earning fourth place, and Rian King and Chance Harper taking fifth.



William Bussott earned a ticket to the FHSAA state tournament. [Photo courtesy of Chance Harper/Clewiston Wrestling]

Saddle up! Great Florida Cattle Drive planned in 2026

By Katrina Elsen
HENDRY COUNTY NEWS

Have you ever wanted to experience a real cattle drive? Plans are underway for the next Great Florida Cattle Drive, Jan 26-31, 2026.

The week-long event will celebrate Florida’s history as cattle country, as participants on horseback drive a herd of cattle across Florida ranchland.

The re-enactment drives began in 1995 to honor Florida’s rich ranching heritage, a reminder of times when wild cattle were collected, driven to ports and exported to Cuba.

Re-enactment drives were also held in 2006, 2016 and 2022.

The 2022 drive was originally planned for 2021 to celebrate the arrival of cattle in North America in 1521. It was postponed for a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Anyone can go, so long as you have a horse to ride or a horse- or mule- drawn wagon to ride in. Those



Participants are encouraged to dress in period attire. [Photo by Katrina Elsen/Hendry County News]

who plan to go are advised to start early on conditioning their horses and themselves for the physical demands of the trail. Cattle drives do not move quickly. For past drives, the herd covered about 10 to 12 miles a day. Riders were in the saddle for six to nine hours a day.

In 2022, about a third of the riders



About 400 riders participated in 2022 Great Florida Cattle Drive, which was held in honor of the 500th anniversary of the arrival of cattle in Florida. The drive was originally planned for 2021, but had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. [Photo by Katrina Elsen/Hendry County News]

were in the “elder” category – over 60 years of age. The oldest was 91. The youngest rider was 5 years old.

Most participants ride their own horses, but there are options to lease a

horse for the event.

For updates, follow the Great Florida Cattle Drive on Facebook or see the website at greatfloridacattle drive.com.

COMMUNITY NEWS

Arts of the Inland presents the Kaleidoscope of Art

SPECIAL TO HENDRY COUNTY NEWS

LABELLE — Arts of the Inland is proud to present its highly anticipated Art Gala, an evening dedicated to celebrating local artists and fostering community engagement through the transformative power of creativity. The gala will take place on Saturday, March 22, from 5 to 8 p.m. at the Arts of the Inland Gallery, 471 North Lee Street, LaBelle.

This exclusive event will showcase a stunning collection of artwork from talented regional artists, offering attendees the opportunity to immerse themselves in a kaleidoscope of colors, textures, and artistic expressions. Guests will enjoy live music, delightful finger foods, and a silent auction

featuring gift baskets generously donated by local businesses.

The Art Gala is a key highlight of Arts of the Inland's ongoing exhibition, Kaleidoscope, which runs from Feb. 27 through March 30, 2025. Much like a kaleidoscope's shifting patterns, this exhibition celebrates the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of the visual and performing arts, providing artists with a platform to share their work while fostering appreciation for artistic diversity within the community.

"This event is more than just an art show; it's a vibrant celebration of artistic expression and the incredible talent that flourishes in our region," said Stella Luckey, the President of Arts of the Inland, a non-profit

organization. "We invite everyone to step into the colorful world of the arts for a memorable evening filled with creativity, connection, and inspiration. Not only will you experience the visual arts of our organization, but also performances from talented local artists."

In addition to showcasing artwork, the gala will feature an awards presentation, recognizing exceptional pieces selected by renowned artists Clyde and Nikki Butcher. These celebrated judges bring their expertise and passion for the arts to the event, making this an extraordinary opportunity for participating artists. Attendees will also have the unique chance to engage with creators, learn about their artistic journeys, and even

take home a piece of the experience through the silent auction.

Event Details:

- Exhibition Dates: Feb. 27 – March 30, 2025
- Gala Reception & Awards: Saturday, March 22, from 5-8 p.m.
- Artwork Removal: Tuesday, April 1, 3-6 p.m.

Arts of the Inland is dedicated to supporting and promoting local artists, fostering a thriving cultural community, and making art accessible to all. Don't miss this dazzling evening celebrating creativity and artistic excellence!

For more information, please contact: Stella Luckey artsinland@gmail.com or visit artsinland.com.

Habitat for Humanity unveils new headquarters, five affordable housing initiatives

SPECIAL TO HENDRY COUNTY NEWS

FORT MYERS — Habitat for Humanity of Lee and Hendry Counties recently held its "Blueprints of the Future" event on Feb. 4, hosted by Clive Daniel Home in Fort Myers. The event gathered community leaders and supporters to learn about Habitat's upcoming plans and initiatives for the community.

During the event, Habitat leadership shared the organization's vision and anticipated impact for future projects, which include five affordable housing initiatives and Habitat's new "Forever Home" headquarters on Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. By expanding affordable homeownership opportunities and establishing new headquarters, the event highlighted

the crucial role of community support in turning these plans into reality.

"For decades, Habitat for Humanity has been a leader in affordable homeownership in Lee County, built on a foundation of faith, action, and generosity. We focus on creating not just houses, but opportunities for families in need," said CEO Becky Lucas of Habitat for Humanity of Lee and Hendry Counties. "With strong community support and exceptional partners, we can bring our 'Blueprints for the Future' to life to serve more low-income earning households."

Habitat is partnering with Lee County to build five affordable housing projects that are part of Community Development Block Grant

Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) initiatives, totaling 204 single-family homes to help rebuild the community after Hurricane Ian. The partial funding will assist in completing two Habitat neighborhoods currently underway, including Heritage Heights in Harlem Heights and McNeill Village in North Fort Myers, while also advancing three additional projects, Diplomat South in North Fort Myers, White Coral in Fort Myers, and scattered lots across Cape Coral.

The organization's new headquarters and Forever Home will create a once-in-a-generation opportunity for a centralized hub for both Lee and Hendry counties, following the destruction of its former headquarters due to Hurricane Ian in 2022. The

future space will enable Habitat for Humanity to expand its reach and better serve families seeking affordable homeownership.

Since 1982, Habitat has partnered with nearly 1,900 families to help them achieve their dream of affordable homeownership. Alongside volunteers, Habitat homeowners help build their own home by completing more than 300 hours of sweat equity, in addition to attending financial education classes, paying \$2,000 in closing costs and committing to pay an affordable mortgage set at no more than 30% of their monthly income.

To learn more about Habitat for Humanity of Lee and Hendry Counties or to get involved, visit Habitat4Humanity.org.

OPINION

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Do you wonder where you came from?

By Reverend Elizabeth Nelson
GOOD SHEPHERD EPISCOPAL
CHURCH

Do you ever wonder where you came from? Ancestry.com has become quite a sensation. People are finding relatives they didn't know they had while also finding ancestors that, in some cases, had made history. I once saw a television program, sponsored by the same, where new-found relatives were united, and it was so special to see these two unknowns embrace, touch-

ing a closeness they had never felt before.

It reminded me of a picture I had seen. It was called "Homecoming." It's a picture of Jesus, arms thrown around the neck of the person he was welcoming. Jesus' face is lit up with joy, a few tears in His eyes, and both are standing on a beautiful grouping of clouds with the blue sky all around them. Hence... the title of the picture... Homecoming! Jesus, this person's very first ancestor, welcoming his child home to the place that had been prepared for him since the

beginning of time.

Do you ever wonder what that day of homecoming will be like for you? It might make you think about the births, the graduations, the weddings you would miss. Instead, what about this: I plan to live my life to the fullest, enjoy the blessings God has given me, and I know that when my time on earth is done, there is a homecoming waiting for me, greater than I can possibly imagine! What could be better than Jesus' arms outstretched, poised to bring you into the kingdom. Remember: you are blessed!

PETS OF THE WEEK



CALOOSA HUMANE SOCIETY PETS SEEK FOREVER HOMES

LABELLE – The Caloosa Humane Society has a mix of adorable dogs and cats who are in need of loving families! Come find your fur baby! The Caloosa Humane Society, Inc. is a not-for-profit, 501 (c)(3) status organization that receives no federal, state, or local funding and relies on donations, bequests and fundraising events. The shelter, 1200 Pratt Blvd in LaBelle is open Tuesday-Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. For more information call 863-675-0997. [Photos courtesy of Caloosa Humane Society]



Hendry County News

at  **LakeONews.com**

Hendry County's Hometown Paper

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CHS JOURNALISM PRESENTS LIVING WAX MUSEUM

CLEWISTON — CHS Journalism presented the school's annual Living Wax Museum as one of its Black History Month festivities. CHS Journalism Teacher Jay Similien says, "Our students were excited to continue this tradition to represent and teach their classmates about African American historical figures & contributors to society. We are proud of each student with their board & presentation." [Photos courtesy CHS]



STUDENTS HAVE A BLAST AT COLOR FUN RUN

LABELLE — Upthegrove Elementary students had a fantastic time at their Color Fun Run on Feb. 21. For more photos visit facebook.com/UESEagles [Photos courtesy Upthegrove Elementary]



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WSE STUDENTS ENJOY HENDRY COUNTY FAIR

CLEWISTON — On Monday, Feb. 10, kindergarteners from Westside Elementary School had a fantastic time visiting the Hendry County Fair. From farm animals to carnival games, it was a day full of learning and laughter! For lots more photos, visit the Westside Elementary School Facebook page at Facebook.com/westsideclewiston [Photo courtesy Westside Elementary]



COE STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT GATORS

LABELLE — Country Oaks Elementary's students visited Gatorama, on Feb. 19, and had so much fun learning about the gators, their environment, and the food chain. They got to hold baby gators. For more photos visit facebook.com/countryoakscolt [Photo courtesy Country Oaks Elementary]



2ND GRADERS KEEP TRADITION

LABELLE — LaBelle Elementary 2nd-graders kept the second grade tradition by creating miniature floats and walking in the school's Swamp Cabbage parade. For more photos visit facebook.com/LaBelleElementary [Photo courtesy LaBelle Elementary School]

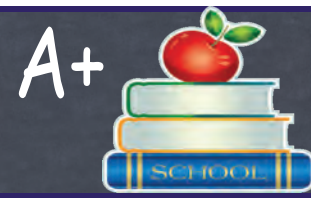


FLORIDA B. THOMAS LIBRARY & FAMILIES SUPPORT YOUNG READERS

CLEWISTON — Parent meeting in session for the Reading Rise Tutoring Program at the Florida B. Thomas Library! The Library was so excited to partner with families to support young readers on their literacy journey. The program start date was Feb. 11 and will end on May 29. A huge thank you to the amazing teachers: Denishesha Thorpe, Adrienne Samples, Chelsey Brown, and Syreeta Wheeler! Let's Rise Together! [Courtesy photo]



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Clewiston water rates to increase

By Cathy Womble

HENDRY COUNTY NEWS

CLEWISTON — The Clewiston City Commissioners discussed water rates during their Feb. 24 meeting.

City Finance Director Randy Maxson along with Erin Clease and Niah Jamison from Water Worth spoke to the commissioners about water rates in the city. He said their rates are much lower than surrounding communities charge. Jamison did most of the presentation using a slideshow the three put together. She showed them that as things are now, their revenue is not increasing, but their expenses are.

The presentation demonstrated how things would look if they

increased their rates and how they would look if they did not increase. “It’s just hard to get around the fact that something needs to happen,” said Maxson. He added that it is hard to know what they can depend on in the way of grants, and those would affect the revenue needed. He suggested possibly increasing the rates by 5%.

They also looked at a 25% increase for one or two years. When asked if he was comfortable with doing 5% for five years, Maxson said he thought that was probably what he could get away with. “I just wanted to get started on something.”

The commissioners asked why there was nothing between 5% and 25%, and the presenters were able to

immediately show a 10% increase for five years. They looked at surrounding counties, including Okeechobee, and discovered they have lower rates than all of the surrounding counties. Even if they went up 25%, they would still have lower rates than most of the surrounding communities.

Commissioner Mila Gardner said she would be more comfortable increasing by increments rather than jumping straight to 25%. All the commissioners agreed that 10% is where they want to begin. Next month, Maxson will present the commissioners with an amended resolution.

Also, during the meeting, Melissa Morley, Senior Benefits consultant from Health and Welfare of the Geh-

ring Group gave a presentation via Teams about employee benefits.

Mary Nelle Corbin Thomas was not present to receive her proclamation, but the mayor and commission members recognized her as Citizen of the Year.

The mayor read a list of members of the CRA (Community Redevelopment Agency) Advisory Board. They include Chris Musgrave Jr. Wendy Costello, Matthew Wadell, Dr. Raymond Carroll, Timothy Potts, Kiersten Maxton and Stephanie Thomas.

The commission meetings are open to the public and are held on the fourth Monday of the month at 5 p.m. The meetings can also be watched online. City of Clewiston

Program to save county money on healthcare for jail inmates

By Katrina Elsen

HENDRY COUNTY NEWS

LABELLE — At their Feb. 11 meeting, Hendry County Commissioners voted to take advantage of a program to save the county money on medical expenses at the county jail.

According to the county staff report, Hendry County Jail provides health care to the inmates. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, the cost of medical coverage was \$1,625,950. In FY2024 costs were \$1,615,745 and year-to-date, FY2025 costs for the first four months of the year are \$403,780.

HealthCred Care Insurance Services provides inmates who are

“not incarcerated” access to health insurance through the Affordable Care Act. “Not incarcerated” individuals are defined as those who are on probation, parole or house arrest, or in jail or prison pending disposition of charges.

There are 24 counties in Florida signed up with this program.

The services provided by Health-Care Cred are at no cost to the county. This will not stop the county from having to pay for inmate healthcare, but it will result in significant savings, the staff report found.

HealthCred Care will do the initial intake of the current jail population. They will also provide tablets and

train jail staff to sign new inmates up as part of the intake process. The jail averages three or four new inmates per day. The coverage starts on the first day of the month following approval of the application. State-wide studies have found 70 – 80% of county jail inmates can be covered by this program.

“If they sign someone up today, they will be eligible March 1,” said County Administrator Jennifer Davis.

“Another savings is that we won’t get a bill,” said Davis. “The bills will go directly to the Affordable Care Act, the folks that process the payments and they will pay them directly. Right now, the jail staff gets all

the bills. They have a whole staff of folks that go through, verify and then it comes to our office and our office has to go through, verify and prepare request for payment. I get involved if it is over a certain amount because we have a three-party agreement with the sheriff and the clerk, that I as the county administrator have to approve certain payments. It will greatly increase our efficiency.

“So it frees up staff so they can be utilized in other departments,” said Commissioner Ramon Iglesias.

Davis said anyone who is not a legal citizen will not qualify for the insurance.

LaBelle honors firefighters for their service

By Richard Marion

HENDRY COUNTY NEWS

LABELLE — The City of LaBelle Board of Commissioners honored members of the local fire department for their service at their Feb. 13 meeting.

Commissioners each read a plaque that honored a specific firefighter for a call they responded to last year in which they went above and beyond

and saved a life. Each firefighter was awarded a Life Saving Plaque.

Firefighters recognized at the meeting included Ronald Snell, Micheal Kemp, David White, Brent Stevens, Matthew Coker, Zane Mungillo, and Colton Bass.

Commissioners also received a presentation from Ian Womack of Fitch and Associates at their Feb. 13 meeting. Fitch and Associates per-

formed a risk assessment on LaBelle’s fire department, analyzing data from calls including location and response time.

According to data gathered by Fitch and Associates, response time to calls in LaBelle’s fire zone boundary was an average of 8 minutes and 48 seconds in 2023. A heatmap presented to the commission that illustrated where fire incidents occurred

showed that most of the calls were in the city of LaBelle.

Womack said the data showed that 98.49% of the time, the fire department had zero or only one call that it was responding to. Which means the likelihood of two or more concurrent incidents was only 1.51%.

LaBelle just recently hired their first full time firefighters back in February of 2024.

LABELLE THINGS TO DO

FCT to present 'Lone Star Spirits'

LABELLE — Firehouse Community Theatre presents *Lone Star Spirits* on Friday, **March 14**, Saturday, **March 15**, and Sunday, **March 16**. Friday and Saturday showtime is at 7 p.m. and Sunday is at 2 p.m. For information or tickets, visit firehousecommunitytheatre.com.

Shop Downtown Outdoor

LABELLE — Downtown Outdoor Saturday Market will be held on Saturday, **April 1** at 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., from Barron Library to Barron Park on DeSoto Avenue. There will be live music, food trucks and unique vendors. For information, visit downtownlabelle.com.

VFW flea market is open on Saturdays

LABELLE — The VFW flea market is open every **Saturday**, rain or shine, from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. located between Martin Luther King Boulevard and Miller Avenue, near the Shell gas station on Route 80.

Barron Library happenings

LABELLE — Barron Library, 461 N. Main St., will hold the following events in March: On **Mondays** the Spanish class will meet at 5-6:30 p.m. and the Chess Club meets at 5-6:30 p.m. On **Tuesdays** Story Time will be held at 11:30 a.m. with a special guest each week. On **Wednesdays** the Sewing Club meets at 4-6 p.m. On Thursdays the Spanish class will be held at 5-7 p.m. For info, call 863-675-0833.

Legion plans events

LABELLE — American Legion Post 130 is located at 699 W Hickpochee Ave., across from the Shell Station. For info, call 863-675-8300. Upcoming events include the follow-

ing. Pizza & hot dogs available – all day: **Sunday - Thursday** 11 a.m. till close and **Fridays and Saturday** 11 a.m. to 1 a.m. Happy Hour is held on Monday - Friday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday Fish Fry nights is held from 5-7 p.m. Karaoke begins at 7 p.m. Friday & Saturdays, Karaoke in lounge at 7 p.m.

VFW Post 10100 hosts events

LABELLE — The LaBelle VFW, 20 Veterans Way (Hwy. 29 next to rodeo grounds), plans the following events: Every **Saturday night** there will be entertainment. Every **Saturday**, best burgers in town. Serving from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Every **Wednesday**, Euchre cards at 5 p.m. First and third **Friday**, jam session begins at 6 p.m. Every **Sunday**, biscuits and gravy made by Jennifer. Serving begins at 9 a.m. Second and fourth **Friday**, free juke box from 6 to 8 p.m. For info, call 863-675-8008.

Assembly of God church services

LABELLE — LaBelle Assembly of God, 139 Fraser Ave, holds a service on **Sundays** at 9:45 am. and a worship service at 11 a.m. Bible Study is held on **Wednesdays** at 7 p.m. Community Ladies Bible Study is held on **Fridays** at noon. The church has a ramp and a wheel chair - and if you need assistance, or for info, call 863-675-0900 to leave a message.

Woman's Club to meet

You're Invited! The public is welcome to come to GFWC LaBelle Community Woman's Club, 382 W Hickpochee Ave. next to Ace Hardware on the second Tuesday of the month September through May. The social starts at 6 p.m. with the business meeting starting at 6:30 p.m.

Transportation for veterans

available

Transportation is available for to and from the Affairs Medical Center in West Palm Beach and the VA clinic in Cape Coral. Vans can only transport two at a time and they must sit in the back seats. Veterans must wear mask at all times while in the van, the service cannot transport wheelchairs. Van scheduling number 863-675-5255. Disabled American Van Transport to West Palm Beach VAMC on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, leaving at 5:30 a.m. return 11 a.m. Disabled American Van Transport to Lee County (Cape Coral Clinic) on Monday, Wednesday and Friday leaving at 5:30 a.m. return 11 a.m.

Church offers grief support group

Caloosa Baptist Church, 550 W. Hickpochee Ave. holds GriefShare support group meetings. To register, call or text Cindy at 863-673-3855.

Garden Club meets

LaBelle Garden Club meets the fourth **Monday** of the month at 7 p.m. at the Dallas Townsend Center at 1085 Pratt Blvd - across from the Health Department. Anyone can bring any plant or garden produce to exchange or share. Bring any plants that need identifying, any questions or local features happening. If anyone wants to share a treat for light refreshments, it's always welcome! For more information please call or text Nikki 239-564-2005.

Salvation Army distributes food

LABELLE — The Salvation Army gives free food to needy families on Wednesdays from 9 a.m. to noon at the United Way House, 133 N Bridge St. It is easy to sign-up to be eligible for once a month pickup. Anyone may make donations to the

Salvation Army food pantry between 9-5 weekdays. For information, call Angie or Jody at 863-674-1441.

Christ Central distributes food

LABELLE — Christ Central Church on East SR80 hosts a food distribution every Thursday morning. First time recipients sign up, otherwise, line up for free food.

BBBS seeking mentors

Big Brothers Big Sisters is seeking volunteers to ignite, inspire and empower potential in our youth. Learn how to become a mentor by visiting our website at www.bbbssun.org. No title, degree or special qualifications are needed. A little time, encouragement and a laugh or two can be just what a child needs to achieve a BIG and brighter future. For more information contact Laurie Waninger at 863-345-0107, or to sign up go to www.bbbssun.org and click on the tab Become a Big.

AA meets in LaBelle

Alcoholics Anonymous meets in LaBelle at the following locations.

- Hispanos de LaBelle, 462 E. Cowboy Way, meets on **Sundays** at 9 a.m. and **Mondays** and **Fridays** at 8 p.m. (Spanish)
- Good Shepherd Church, 1098 Collingswood Pkwy., Port LaBelle Group meets on **Sundays** at 7 p.m., hosts a discussion meeting on **Fridays** at 7 p.m, and "As Bill Sees it" on **Saturdays** at 9 a.m.

- First Christian Church, 138 Ford Ave., LaBelle Group holds "12th 12" meeting on **Tuesdays** at 7 p.m., a discussion meeting on **Thursdays** at 7 p.m., and an Early Bird meeting on **Wednesdays** at 7 a.m.

The AA 24-hour phone line is: 239-275-5111.

For info about AA meetings, go online to <https://www.aa.org/>



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Employment

Central County Water Drainage District is looking to hire a **Life Guard**. Must be CPR certified and have certification, possess a valid and clean driver's license, have high school diploma or equivalent to it, must pass a drug test and have a clean background check.

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Central County Water Drainage District,
475 S. Cabbage Palm Street, Clewiston FL
(Montura Ranch Estates) 33440.

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Commissioners approve resolution against controversial crosswalk

By Richard Marion
HENDRY COUNTY NEWS

LABELLE — LaBelle City Commissioners approved a resolution opposing the crosswalk on SR 80 east of Martin Street. The resolution calls on the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) to remove and relocate the crosswalk due to health and safety concerns.

The crosswalk issues were raised directly to FDOT back during a Sept. 20, 2024 meeting when FDOT representatives were in LaBelle for a presentation on the future of SR 80. At that meeting, commissioners decided to officially adopt a resolution asking for the crosswalk to be relocated.

The resolution states that the crosswalk has generated significant public concern due to potential health and safety risks it poses to the residents of LaBelle, as well as the disruption to traffic flow in and out of nearby businesses. The crosswalk is located next to Contreras Mexican Restaurant.

During discussion on the resolution, Mayor

Julie C. Wilkins revealed that a similar crosswalk that FDOT was planning in Clewiston is now no longer happening.

"They (FDOT) actually delayed indefinitely the installation of these in Clewiston," said Mayor Wilkins. "It was going to be done in Clewiston, but because they got so much flak from us and our citizens, they removed it. That shows that it is a problem."

Clerk-Commissioner Hugo Vargas agreed the crosswalk needed to be tweaked and relocated but argued that people that do not have vehicles still need a way to cross the road.

"I think we have residents that don't have transportation that are playing Frogger on SR80," said Commissioner Vargas. "It's a safety concern. Does it need improvement? Yes. But do they still need a safe place to cross the road? Absolutely."

The resolution ends with the City Commission urging FDOT to involve the citizens of LaBelle in the planning and approval process of future infrastructure projects to ensure that the voices of the community are heard and considered.

Visit historic St. Augustine

SPECIAL TO HENDRY COUNTY NEWS & LAKE OKEECHOBEE NEWS

ST. AUGUSTINE – Florida’s oldest city is filled with history.

St. Augustine is the oldest continuously occupied settlement of European origin in the United States.

During the Spanish Colonial Period (1586 to 1764) the town plan was designed. The narrow streets and balconied houses were introduced by settlers from Spain.

The Castillo de San Marcos fort was completed in the late 17th century, designed to protect the city from English pirates. The fort, now part of the National Park Service, is open to the public seven days a week, except Thanksgiving and Christmas Day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

A variety of museums showcase the city’s history. Tourist attractions in St. Augustine include the Pirate Museum, the Lightner Museum, Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park, Spanish Military Hospital, the Colonial Quarter Museum, the Medieval Torture Museum, the Oldest Store Museum and the Old Florida Museum.

The National Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche marks the spot of the first Catholic Mass in North America in 1565. The first Catholic parish in St. Augustine was founded in 1565, but early churches were destroyed by fires. The Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine, which has stone walls, was built in 1797.



ST. AUGUSTINE - The Oldest Wooden Schoolhouse has been preserved to reflect the homestead life of settlers and school life in the 1800s.



ST. AUGUSTINE - The Huguenot Cemetery (also known as the St. Augustine Public Burying Ground) in St. Augustine, Florida, located across from the historic City Gate was a Protestant burial ground between the years 1821 and 1884.



ST. AUGUSTINE - The National Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche marks the spot of the first Catholic Mass in North America in 1565.



ST AUGUSTINE - Park personnel and volunteers dress in period costume to fire a cannon at Castillo de San Marcos

[All photos by Katrina Elsken/Lake Okeechobee News]



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