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VOLUME 3, ISSUE 23 YOUR INDEPENDENT LOCAL COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER FRIDAY, JUNE 8, 2018

All Aboard Florida given time to sell bonds for second phase



PHOTO: GORDON RADFORD

BY BETH WALTON | Staff Writer

All Aboard Florida got another break from an indulgent federal government last week when the U.S. Department of Transportation granted the company more time to issue \$1.15 billion of Private Activity Bonds to finance the second phase of its high-speed passenger rail service.

"This propels our project as we extend Brightline to Orlando, developing a transportation network that will benefit the entire state," said Brightline President Patrick Goddard.

The tax-exempt bonds were allocated in December and set to expire May 31. So far, investors

CONTINUED ON PAGE A4

GHO sale brings infusion of cash, new opportunities

BY RAY McNULTY | Staff Writer

GHO Homes President Bill Handler wants everyone to know that he has sold only a controlling share of his company to Texas-based Green Brick Partners.

He hasn't sold his soul. GHO Homes is still his brand, backed by his reputation, and he says he will continue to run the business with the same standards and management team that made

the company the nation's fastest-growing mid-size homebuilder in 2017.

"It's still a local operation, and that's exactly what both of us wanted," Handler said. "Green Brick is a publicly traded company, but they wanted a local partner – someone who knew the market and the people, someone with a strong brand, a track record of success and a reputation for honesty."

"We didn't have to do this deal, but it was the perfect opportunity," he added. "With Green Brick's strong financial resources, combined with GHO's deep connections in this market, we've become a bigger player when it comes to buying and developing land."

CONTINUED ON PAGE A10

'TANKS' FOR SHOWING UP! AQUARIUM RECRUITS VOLUNTEERS AT OPEN HOUSE

BY DEBBIE CARSON | Staff Writer
debbie@stlucievoice.com

Volunteers with a few hours on their hands and an interest in all things aquatic are encouraged to consider lending their time and skills to the St. Lucie County Aquarium, home to the Smithsonian Marine Ecosystems Exhibit.

To that end, staff left the doors open to the aquarium after hours, welcoming more than two dozen prospective volunteers during the first-in-anyone's-memory volunteer open house.

Visitors mingled with volunteers, interns and staff while learning about the different positions



Harriett Scott talks with Smithsonian volunteer Diane Barbret at the Open House.

PHOTO: MITCH KLOORFAIN

available and the need for their help. "It's right up my alley," said Port St. Lucie resident Lenora Willis. Being retired from the Army, making the drive to the aquarium doesn't pose a challenge; she's

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SLING OF BEAUTY

Hiram Garland, representing John Carroll High School, hurls his signature sidearm pitch for the North team during the annual Mike Picano Treasure Coast All-Star Game at First Data Field. The South team won the contest, started last Thursday but concluded Sunday due to rain storms, by a 16-5 score.

PHOTO: MITCH KLOORFAIN

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**House of the Week:
 Stunning upgrades in
 Townpark. Page A17**



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7 more Habitat homes planned in PSL

BY DEBBIE CARSON | Staff Writer
debbie@stlucievoice.com

In the next couple of months, Habitat for Humanity will start building a dream home for Army National Guardsman Chris Blackmon and his family. It's a labor of love the agency plans to complete in a mere seven days.

"They were a good fit," Melissa Winstead, Habitat's development director, said of the Blackmons.

"That's really exciting," she said of finishing construction of a home in a matter of a week. Of course, whether they meet their self-imposed deadline depends largely on the weather and receiving all the necessary permits and inspections.

To that end, the City of Port St. Lucie has stepped up its partnership with Habitat. City Manager Russ Blackburn has directed his staff to expedite the project while ensuring all is done safely and properly.

The City Council last week approved assigning seven city-owned residential lots to Habitat for home construction following a selection process.

"We would like to thank the City of Port St. Lucie and the council for this endorsement and support of affordable home ownership in Port St. Lucie," Habitat's Executive Director Bob Calhoun told

the council at the time of the unanimous vote. "This will go a long way to increasing that supply of affordable and permanent housing for our citizens. So, thank you."

All seven lots once held condemned homes that – in most cases – have been demolished. They are all located in the 34952 and 34953 ZIP code areas.

Habitat is working with the Treasure Coast Builders Association to build the home for the Blackmon family, which includes veteran Blackmon, his wife, Latasha, and three children ranging in age from 9 to infant.

Port St. Lucie's requirements for affordable housing construction are a little higher than those Habitat typically builds to, but Winstead is confident the agency can meet the requirements with minimal problems.

"It's not going to be difficult to achieve," she said, explaining that one modification will be installing a two-car garage instead of Habitat's typical one-car garage.

While Habitat for Humanity continues to search for volunteers to help with the build – not just for the Blackmon home – the group is also seeking financial donations, materials including landscaping and shower enclosures, and corporate partners.

More than two dozen such companies have already pledged their support for the Blackmon project, according to Winstead.

The challenge has also been posed to the Port St. Lucie City Council.

"Whatever you can do, we appreciate," Treasure Coast Builders Association Executive Director Maddie Williams told the council last week, adding that they need not be skilled builders. Instead, they could help paint or even serve lunch to the volunteers.

Winstead said there is a large need for affordable housing in Port St. Lucie. The typical rent for a 2-bed 2-bath home runs over \$1,000. A 3-bedroom, 2-bath Habitat home, however, carries a 15- or 20-year mortgage of about \$750.

"Habitat makes such a huge difference," she said, explaining that 46 percent of the residents are financially insecure. By providing a lower-cost housing solution, Habitat homeowners have more money left at the end of the month they can either save or use to offset other expenses.

Leveraging community support and sweat equity from the homeowners, Habitat can build a new home that appraises between \$140,000 and \$150,000, Winstead said.



As for the Blackmon home, Habitat expects to start building sometime in August. The remaining six homes will be completed as resources become available. Per the agreement with the city, Habitat has two years to build those six houses.

WHERE THE HABITAT HOMES WILL BE:

- 502 NW Sherbrook Ave.
- 141 NE Surfside Ave.
- 696 SW Heather St.
- 601 SW Seagull Terrace
- 1568 SE Faculty Court
- 1573 SE Faculty Court
- 470 SW Asbury Lane.

Anyone who wants to donate or volunteer or otherwise partner with Habitat for Humanity is encouraged to contact Melissa Winstead by calling 772-464-1117, ext. 103, or visit www.StLucieHabitat.org.

Those interested in being considered for a Habitat home are also encouraged to visit Habitat's web site for more information. ■

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Celebrating a graduation 'Club'!

Rebecca Jacques, left, Boys & Girls Clubs of St. Lucie County's Youth of the Year, receives a ceremonial pin from Executive Director Will Armstead as all of the clubs' graduates are celebrated last Wednesday at Keiser University in St. Lucie West. ■

Services District's board green-lights Utility Drive office plan

BY PATRICK McCALLISTER | Correspondent

The St. Lucie West Services District's Board of Supervisors gave the nod to reviving a plan to build a permanent, 7,000-square-foot office at 450 SW Utility Drive.

"The consensus among them is to move on with Plan A," Dennis Pickle, the district's manager and utilities director, said.

The board had its regular monthly business meeting on Tuesday.

The board revisited a \$1.2 million plan to construct a new office. The board voted last year to build the permanent office and budgeted the money for it. The district has used a modular office for about a decade.

"We're 90 percent finished with the plans already," Pickle said before the monthly business meeting.

The board put the building plans on a shelf as it eyed the possibility of purchasing

the St. Lucie Trail Golf Club's 22,000-square-foot clubhouse for a customer-service and meeting office.

CGI St. Lucie recently purchased the golf club. It offered the district an opportunity to purchase the clubhouse and about five acres. The district offered CGI \$1.1 million. However, CGI got another offer on the clubhouse, which it decided to pursue.

About 75 attended a special district board meeting in March to discuss the then-proposed purchase of the clubhouse. Many expressed concerns the district office being at the golf club would greatly increase heavy-vehicle traffic at Country Club Estates. Pickle said that wouldn't have been the case — the district was going to continue using the Utility Drive location for work vehicles.

However, that meeting revealed that

there was a widespread community wish for the district to have a large enough meeting room to accommodate homeowner association meetings. Pickle said as the district moves forward with planning the permanent office, it will add about 50 percent more capacity.

"I think we'll move it from 65 to 100 (seats)," he said.

The district is still negotiating with CGI to purchase some land at St. Lucie Trails to build a stormwater management area that would help reduce flooding at The Enclave at St. Lucie West and Lake Forest at St. Lucie West. Additionally, Lake Forest Pointe and Country Club Estates would benefit from the proposed additional stormwater storage. The biggest benefit would be to Cashmere Boulevard between Heatherwood and St. Lucie West boulevards. ■

BRIGHTLINE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

have not rushed to buy the bonds. The seven-month extension through the end of the year was granted on the condition that the company continue to seek alternative financing.

The rail company's access to Private Activity Bonds, which are subsidized by the government and offer tax-exempt interest rates to investors, remains a source of contention as counties along the Treasure Coast fight to keep Brightline trains from traveling through their communities.

The train, which travels at speeds up to 110 miles per hour, launched a West Palm Beach to Fort Lauderdale line in January and extended service to Miami last month.

The final stretch of the proposed Miami to Orlando service, which will travel through Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River and Brevard counties without making a stop, is still at least two years away, Brightline officials have said.

The project is set to run 30 high-speed trains through the Treasure Coast daily and will require millions of dollars in safety upgrades. Indian River County joined Martin County and advocacy group Citizens Against Rail Expansion in Florida filing a



PHOTO: GORDON RADFORD

lawsuit in February in attempt to prevent the train's planned expansion along the Treasure Coast.

The complaint, filed in the U.S. District Court of the District of Columbia, names the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Federal Railroad Administration as defendants.

It alleges the DOT ignored safety, maritime and environmental problems and improperly subsidized the Brightline trains with tax exempt bonds, while violating the National Environmental Policy Act. ■

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WWW.STLUCIEVOICE.COM
NEWS & VIEWS

Associate Publisher

Steven E. Erlanger, 772.370.7983
steve@stlucievoice.com

Community Editor

Paul Keaney, 617.593.6320
paul@stlucievoice.com

Community Reporter

Debbie Carson, 772.584.9083
debbie@stlucievoice.com

Chief Photographer

Mitch Kloorfain, 772.260.5612
mitch@stlucievoice.com

Advertising Consultant

Jeffrey A. Mayer, 772.370.6179
jeff@stlucievoice.com

Graphic Designer

Eric Macon, eric@stlucievoice.com

Columnists: Shelley Koppel



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VERO BEACH 32963 MEDIA LLC

President and Publisher

Milton R. Benjamin, 772.559.4187
milt@stlucievoice.com

Creative Director

Dan Alexander, 772.539.2700
dan@stlucievoice.com

Corporate Editor

Steven M. Thomas, 772.453.1196
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Another cancer scare proves there are limits to my courage

I was down a quart of courage. I usually write something for breast cancer awareness month.

As a survivor, I am dedicated to reminding women to take care of themselves. It has been almost two decades since my cancer, and while I see my oncologist regularly, I hadn't felt really threatened for a while.

In April, I had my routine-but-never-really routine visit.

The doctor felt the breast where I'd had the cancer and didn't like what he found. I told him I was due for a mammogram in June. He said, "Let's get it sooner."

All of a sudden, the carefully constructed wall of not worrying all the time fell apart.

"Why do I need it sooner?" I asked.

"You're going away and I want to make sure we get everything in before you go (to France)," he replied.

Now I was seeing dots before my eyes.

"Everything what?" I asked. "I'm not leaving until September."

"In case you need a biopsy," he replied.

I've seen this movie. The last time I saw it, it ended very badly. I didn't like it the first time. Why would I want to see it again?

We scheduled the mammogram for six days later and I went home.

When I dealt with breast cancer, I was very brave in the face of multiple unforeseen complications. I wanted to keep my husband calm and when people asked me why I didn't just blow, I said that if I did, I'd never come back from it. Crying? It leaves you with a headache, red nose and cancer. It doesn't make it go away.

I told myself that if it happened that I had cancer, I would cope with it again. There are differences, though. I'm almost 20 years older and my husband, who was my rock, is gone. I am taking care of my 92-year-old mother, and what will happen to her?

Finally, there was the scariest question of all. I flunked chemo the first time and the breast has already had radiation. How would they treat me? Plan A was not an option. What was Plan B?

In the ensuing week, I tried not to worry. I told friends, but didn't dwell on it. I was, as always, the brave little soldier.

The day of the mammogram, I took myself over to the facility, where a technician with the tact and compassion of Nurse Ratched made an already stressful situation even more so. Everything, apparently, was my fault, from the fact that she had picked up some other patient's papers to zinc oxide (don't ask).

She was having a bad day. I knew something about that.

After two rounds of pictures (that pesky zinc oxide), she finally told me that the radiologist said there was no sign of cancer. I got out of here as fast I could get dressed and got out. I came home and was happy. Then came the next day and I fell apart.

Everyone, including me, was thrilled that I did not have cancer, but no one, including me, knew how frightened I had been or how much I was seeing the past.

Someone told me that cancer begins as the elephant in the room that you keep bumping into, and eventually it

recedes into an end table. My end table had ballooned into an entire living room suite. For three days, I couldn't stop crying. I even called my (male) editor because I figured he needed me and wouldn't fire me if I ranted. He finally got off the phone, later telling me he'd been driving in New Jersey (while visiting his mother there) and talking while driving. I asked him why he didn't stop me.

"You were on a roll," he said.

Anyway, I finally concluded that I was down a quart of courage, that sometimes you expect more from yourself than is realistic.

Being brave all the time is hard work. Sometimes you need to replenish. Several days of crying helped get rid of some of the emotions pushing against me.

I am very glad it turned out this way. I hope I don't have to go through it again, but if I do, I hope I'll be a little kinder to myself, a little more forgiving of having perfectly normal human emotions.

Like everyone else, I'm a work in progress. Sometimes there's more progress than others. ■



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Bill Hoffman, Smithsonian Marine Ecosystems Exhibit Manager, explains the parts of the exhibit a visitor doesn't normally get to see during a tour of the Fort Pierce facility last Thursday. PHOTO: MITCH KLOORFAYN

AQUARIUM VOLUNTEERS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

used to the travel, she said. Willis came into the aquarium for the first time Thursday evening and took in the different exhibits.

"We should learn something every day," Willis said. She hopes to help the aquarium by going on field outings to collect specimens from the Indian River Lagoon as well as taking photographs.

Both are among the aquarium's needs.

Marie Petrelis, a Tradition resident, also made the open house her first visit to the aquarium. She said the visit was dual-purpose – not only to see the exhibits, but also to learn how she can help. "For me, it's administration," Petrelis said, explaining that she'd rather work behind the scenes in the office and support various projects.

"It boggles my mind," she said after touring the aquarium. Most surprising, she said, was all the little details that must be attended to and how all the tanks are kept natural.

Other volunteers are needed to help prepare food and handle feedings at the aquarium. "You would be the magic hand," exhibit manager Bill Hoffman told the gathered volunteer hopefuls.

While taking the tour, they saw a hand drop into the tanks unloading a container of "sea monkeys" and other food for the various fish.

Hoffman said many of the volunteers use that time to talk to the fish – but it's far

more important to listen than to talk. Feeding time is a critical time to take stock of the creatures' appetite and overall well-being.

"I'm really happy with the number of people" who attended, said volunteer coordinator Jasmine Fox, adding that more people came out than there are open volunteer spots.

The aquarium runs on a limited staff and between 15 and 30 active volunteers. The staff size is enough to take care of the creatures who call the aquarium home – but volunteers help stretch resources and allow the staff to take on new projects and endeavors.

"Volunteers are so passionate," Fox said. She noted that they often provide different perspectives and input. "We rely on them a lot." Not every volunteer post requires speaking to groups or even individuals. So even those who are more fish-friendly than they are people-friendly can help out.

Coral gardening is one such task that can be done after hours and at one's own schedule. Feeding the fish, on the other hand, must be done to the aquarium's schedule – but it, too, doesn't require speaking to the general public.

"If you have an interest, you can be plugged into the system," Fox said.

To see all the volunteer opportunities available and to apply online, visit the aquarium's website – <https://s.si.edu/1j7hRS7> – or contact Jasmine Fox by either calling her at 772-465-3271 or emailing foxj2@si.edu. ■



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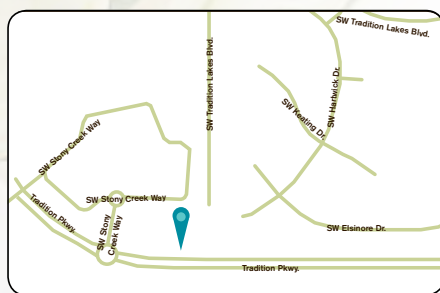


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ARREST AFTER SWAT CALL

BY DEBBIE CARSON | Staff Writer
debbie@stlucievoice.com

A woman was able to flee from a violent altercation with her boyfriend and call for help from a gas station, Port St. Lucie police said, which ultimately led to SWAT responding to the couple's home and the shutdown of several streets in the area of SW Trenton Lane.

The incident occurred Friday, June 1, around 3 a.m., during which police say Christopher Donald Simicsak, 36, struck his 25-year-old girlfriend with his hand and the butt of a firearm.

The woman told police that they had been together three years and had only recently moved to Port St. Lucie.

During the altercation, Simicsak threatened to shoot the woman, according to police. He also started to destroy the inside of the home, tearing down blinds, breaking the glass slider door, and ripping screens from the porch – as photos taken from the scene show.



SIMICSAK

While Simicsak destroyed the house, the woman was able to make her escape and fled to a nearby gas station to call for help.

Officers arrived at the gas station and were able to determine a crime had been committed and then went to the house, located in the 2100 block of SW Trenton Lane. When they couldn't make contact with Simicsak, authorities called for the Crisis Negotiation Team and the SWAT Team due to the presence of firearms.

SWAT deployed a remote-controlled robot inside the home to observe what was happening, Master Sgt. Frank Sabol told **St. Lucie Voice**.

Simicsak eventually surrendered and was arrested. He faces multiple charges including aggravated assault with a firearm – domestic violence, aggravated battery – domestic violence, tampering with a victim, and violation of probation. He was taken to the county jail. ■

Cops: Man killed sister's dog, hid in attic

What led a 22-year-old Port St. Lucie man to kill his sister's dog with a pair of scissors remains unclear while police continue their investigation.

What is known is that Don Ulwazi Spencer, 22, of the 5300 block of NW Aloha St., in the Torino community, was arrested in late May on an animal cruelty charge after he told officers that he had stabbed his sister's dog to death with scissors.

Spencer had been found hiding in the house's attic when police arrived following a request for a welfare check. A family member had requested the welfare check, Master Sgt. Frank Sabol told **St. Lucie Voice**. He did not identify who the family member was.

Not immediately finding Spencer, police noticed blood on the garage floor

and damage to the garage ceiling. Police entered the attic and discovered Spencer, who was hiding under a box, authorities said.



SPENCER

Spencer told officers what he had done and they found the dead dog in a black plastic bag in a garbage can, according to police. He also told them he also had planned on burning down the house – his sister's house.

Investigators located several "incendiary looking" devices in a bedroom, which prompted calls for service to St. Lucie Fire and to the bomb squad. The agencies successfully retrieved and removed the devices.

Sabol said the agency suspects the devices would have been able to cause significant fire damage to the house. ■

– DEBBIE CARSON

67-year-old nabbed on kid-porn charges

A tip led investigators to the door of a 67-year-old man believed to have possessed and transmitted child pornography in Port St. Lucie.

Authorities arrested Stephen M. Henderson, who faces 36 counts on two charges – possession of child pornography and electronic transmission of the same.

He is being held at the jail in lieu of \$135,000 bail.

The investigation began in January after a tip came in from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children Cy-

ber Tipline to the South Florida Internet Crimes Against Children, where Port St. Lucie police detectives are assigned.

Detectives discovered an IP address tied to Henderson that was used to upload and send child porn, according to the Port St. Lucie Police Department.

In late May, they secured and executed a search warrant on Henderson's home in the 600 block of SE Harborview Drive, netting evidence to support the charges, police said. No further information was provided. ■

– DEBBIE CARSON



HENDERSON

IN LOVING MEMORY

JANE F. HISSEM, 93

Port St. Lucie

Jane Francis Hissem, 93, of Port St. Lucie passed away on Monday, May 28 at Hay-Madeira Hospice House in Stuart. She is formerly of North Chicago, Ill.

Jane was raised as a Catholic and was a member of Holy Family Church in North Chicago before moving to Port St. Lucie.

She worked as a telephone operator, floral designer and seamstress, as well as becoming a supervisor in the medical industry before retiring. She was an active member of the American Legion Ladies Auxiliary and PTA, and devoted countless hours to the community.

She and her late husband enjoyed traveling the United States before settling in Port St. Lucie. She was a member of the First Congregational Church in Port St. Lucie, which she considered her second family. She was known for making lap blankets and pillows for her family and is believed to have completed over 500 in total. Her last big project she completed before her passing was presenting 60 blankets and pillows this past Memorial Day to the American Legion for area Vets.

Survivors include her daughter, Barbara (Alan) Becker of Ingleside, Ill; three grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren; her

two dear friends in Port St. Lucie, Cathy Schultze and Lou Kiesling; her daughter-in-law, Robbyn Flint of Port St. Lucie; and son-in-law, Rod Badger of Edmonds, Wash.; and numerous nieces and nephews.

MARY J. WRIGHT, 72

Port St. Lucie

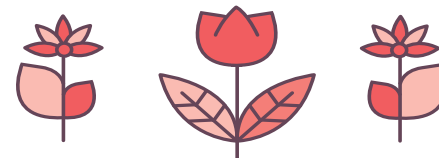
Mary J. Wright, 72, of Port St. Lucie went home to the Lord on May 27. Mary was born in Manchester, Jamaica. She immigrated to the Bronx, New York, in 1970, where she remained until relocating to Port St. Lucie 10 years ago.

Prior to her retirement, Mary worked as a nurse. She was a Deaconess at the Seventh Day Adventist Church on Tulip Boulevard in Port St. Lucie.

She was gifted at crocheting, lovingly crafting blankets for her family.

Mary is survived by her children, Alma Wright, Ian Wright, Douglas (Suni) Simpson and Sean (Kathryn) Wright; 11 grandchildren; three great-grandchildren; siblings, Garnett, Veron, Christine and Karen Wright; and many more relatives and friends.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Septimus and Veta Wright; and her brother, Emmanuel Wright.



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GHO SALE
 CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

"We're now well-positioned to continue our growth, and we have the capital we'll need to pursue future opportunities."

Green Brick recently purchased all of GHO's assets and acquired 80 percent of Handler's company through an investment in a newly formed entity, GRBK GHO Homes LLC. Handler owns 20 percent of the new company and retained his title as president. He said decisions regarding GHO's projects here will continue to be made locally.

Asked if it was difficult to part with the controlling share of the company his father, Dan, founded in 1983 – and the business he ran for the past 18 years – Handler said sentiment wasn't a factor.

"When you have bank loans, you're not in total control, anyway," Handler said. "The people I'm working with at Green Brick are awesome. We have the same vision, the same values."

"If there are problems, we solve them together," he added. "If there are opportunities, we'll chase them together."

The deal with Green Brick marks the second time in 12 years that Handler has sold his company.

In a perfectly timed move, he sold GHO to national builder Woodside Homes in 2006, just before the housing market collapsed across the country. By 2008, an overextended Woodside was bankrupt, and in 2010, Han-

dlar bought his company and its assets back for a fraction of the 2006 sale price.

As the country recovered from the Great Recession and the housing market rebounded, Handler nurtured GHO's resurgence, which saw the company's home sales soar from 26 in 2012 to more than 240 in 2017, when revenues grew to more than \$85 million.

"The market here is healthy," said Handler, whose company is currently selling homes in 16 subdivisions, 15 of which are in Indian River County, where GHO is now preparing to start another new, 71-home community, called Arabella Reserve, at the intersection of 49th Street and 58th Avenue.

Operating from a position of strength, Handler began to explore a possible partnership that would strengthen GHO's financial position with an infusion of capital for future projects.

He sought the assistance of Michael P. Kahn & Associates, a nationally known financial advisory firm that specializes in housing industry mergers and acquisitions, and a meeting with Green Brick was arranged.

Green Brick, which began as a biofuel company that operated ethanol production facilities in the Midwest, moved into real estate and home building in 2014.

Over the past four years, Green Brick has grown into a multi-regional home builder with a strong presence in the high-growth Dallas and Atlanta markets, where it owns or controls more than 6,000 home sites. The company also has a minority share in Chal-

lenger Homes in Colorado Springs.

The acquisition of GHO added another 900 lots to Green Brick's portfolio.

According to Green Brick's website: "The company is engaged in all aspects of the home-building process, including land acquisition and development, entitlements, design, construction, marketing and sales for its residential neighborhoods and master-planned communities."

The GHO deal is Green Brick's first real-estate venture in Florida.

In 2017, Builder Magazine included GHO on its list of the nation's "Top 200 Builders" and named the company the "fastest growing builder" among those ranked No. 101 to 200 in homes sold.

GHO earned similar recognition in 2014.

"You're always looking at what's next," Handler said. "Then you've got to be able to compete – to be able to fund the deals that make sense – but deals are getting more expensive. "This partnership allows us to continue to be competitive."

Handler said his focus remains on Indian River County, though the additional capital will allow him to expand south into St. Lucie County, where GHO is already active in the Meadowood golf community in Fort Pierce.

As for the possibility that selling controlling interest in GHO to Green Brick was a sign that he's ready to get out of the home-building business, Handler said, "No, sir. We're busy. Sales are up. The market is strong."

"Besides," he added, "this is what I do." ■



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LIBRARY'S 'SENSESATIONAL STORY TIME' TAILORED TO KIDS WITH SENSORY ISSUES

BY PATRICK McCALLISTER | Correspondent

Children love stories. But some need them told a little softer.

Lisa Lima, children's program specialist at the Paula A. Lewis Branch Library, has created the SenseSational Story Time for them.

"It's a sensory-sensitivity story time," she said.

People with autism and some other conditions often have accompanying sensory processing disorders. For example, most folks hardly notice a clock ticking. To someone with sensory processing disorders that affects his or her hearing, the clock can sound many times louder than it does to others and be maddening. Because of this, people, especially children, with sensory disorders can have difficult times understanding stories and instructions. "We're limiting it to 10 children," Lima said. "We're setting up a room that will be appropriate for them."

The SenseSational Story Time – unlike most library programs – isn't open to participants just showing up. Lima said children with sensory issues are unique. Each has their own needs and preferences.

"(Parents) need to call me, or come talk to me personally at the library," Lima said.

Lima said she'll learn about all the participating children's needs and preferences. "I really want to know their names, so when they come in I can greet them," she said.

Lima has a background working with children with autism and other qualifying conditions for Exceptional Education and Student Services programs.

"I've worked with ESE children, pre-school, for five years," she said.

That was children in the state's pre-kindergarten program. From that training, Lima knows that children with conditions

that have accompanying sensory processing problems need more of a few things than others, and less of others. Lima said the SenseSational Story Time will be done in a room with softer lighting and fewer ambient sounds than usual.

Maureen Gallagher, branch supervisor, said the SenseSational Story Time will tap into some best practices among educators for working with the children with special needs. Each session will have two stories with a theme. "Everything will be a repetition of that theme," Gallagher said. "We learned everything needs to be regimented and scheduled."

The regimented scheduling is because children with autism and other conditions often become anxious an unable to learn if events seem unpredictable to them.

The prevalence of autism spectrum disorder is a matter of much debate. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's oft-cited figure is about 1 in 68 children have the condition. Others put the figure much higher. Some organizations point to the National Center for Health Statistics' National Health Survey to say it appears government data shows occurrences to be closer to 1 in 45 children. Because autism spectrum disorder is diagnosed based on behavioral evidence, and its causes are mysterious, its prevalence is likely to remain a matter of debate.

SenseSational Story Time is on Tuesdays from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. for the summer. Attendees must be registered and have accompanying parents or guardians. Siblings are welcomed to attend. To register, call Lima at 772-871-5484.

The Lewis Branch Library is at 2950 SW Rosser Blvd., Port St. Lucie. Information about all its programs is at www.stlucieco.gov. ■



PHOTO: MITCH KLOORFAIN

'CANE-DO ATTITUDE AT THE EXPO

Jill Roberts and Diana Gonzalez chat with new Port St. Lucie resident Dorene Harrison at the WQCS radio booth Saturday at the Hurricane Expo at the Port St. Lucie Civic Center. Harrison is no stranger to hurricanes, having moved here from Miami. ■

IRSC presents 100-plus high school diplomas

More than 100 Indian River State College High School and GED Preparation graduates participated in the Adult Secondary Education Graduation Ceremony on May 24 in the McAlpin Fine Arts Center at the IRSC Main Campus in Fort Pierce.

Commencement speaker Dr. Alfred Williams, Associate Professor and Department Chair of Fire Science, addressed the graduates with inspirational remarks about their educational journey and career paths. Many of these graduates will continue their education in one of IRSC's certificate or degree programs. Dr. Kelly Amatucci, Assistant Dean of the School of Education, explains, "Students enrolled in IRSC Adult Education program shave the opportunity to simultaneously be-



Joseph White congratulates his grandmother, Barbara Gaal, after the IRSC Adult Education Graduation Ceremony. Both received high school diplomas.

gin their career while completing their high school credential. Ongoing support is provided through mentoring and career inventories. Financial support is also available for students in need who would like to register for college courses."

Students in the IRSC High School program earn high school credits in traditional and online courses, while students in the GED Preparation program progress at their own pace to

review high school subjects prior to taking the GED exam. The IRSC High School and GED Preparation programs award thousands of dollars per year in scholarships through the IRSC Foundation Inc., and this year, 33 students received scholarships totaling \$35,000. ■

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‘Well-done’ food may be recipe for higher blood pressure

BY MARIA CANFIELD | Correspondent

Now there is another thing to worry about, apparently.

While almost everyone knows that what we eat can affect our risk of high blood pressure, a new study out of Harvard suggests that how “cooked through” our food is may also influence the risk.

The researchers analyzed the data of over 100,000 men and women who took part in one of three studies that collected information on how much meat and fish participants consumed each month, how these foods were cooked, and their levels of “doneness.”

At the beginning of their study participation, none of the men or women had high blood pressure. At the end of the follow-up period, which averaged 12 to 16 years, more than a third had developed the condition.

The research team, led by Gang Liu, Ph.D., of the Department of Nutrition at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in Boston, found that participants who ate grilled, broiled or roasted beef, chicken or fish at least 15 times each month were 17 percent more likely to develop high blood pressure than those who ate these foods fewer than four times per month.



Samantha Lynch. PHOTO: DENISE RITCHE

But the real news out of the study is this: Among participants who reported preferring their meat, poultry and fish well-done, the risk of high blood pressure

was increased by an additional 15 percent, compared with those who preferred those foods prepared less well-done. This finding was not affected by the type – or

how much – food the participants consumed, only how well-done it was.

Samantha Lynch, MS, RDN, LDN, a registered dietitian and nutritionist with a private Treasure Coast practice, is familiar with the study. She says “it’s important to know the ‘smoke points’ of the oils we cook with. The smoke point is the cooking temperature at which a fat or oil begins to break down and degrade. When we eat food cooked past the smoke point, harmful compounds begin to circulate in our bodies, leading to inflammation and oxidative stress, which reduces the ability of the body to detoxify.”

High blood pressure (hypertension) occurs when the force of blood that pushes against the wall of the arteries becomes too high. In 2017, the American Heart Association and the American College of Cardiology revised the definition of high blood pressure from 140/90 or higher to 130/80 or higher. “Normal” blood pressure is 120/80; a top (systolic) number between 121 and 129 is now considered “elevated.” The new guidelines eliminate the category of “prehypertension.”

Under the new definition, it’s estimated that almost half of adults in the United States have high blood pressure, with the associated increased risk of stroke, heart

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attack and heart disease. Lynch says “under these new guidelines, the prevalence of high blood pressure is expected to triple among men under age 45, and double among women under age 45.”

The link between hypertension and the “doneness” of food may have to do with something called heterocyclic aromatic amines (HAAs), potentially harmful compounds produced when meats, poultry, and fish are cooked at high temperatures. Harvard’s Liu says HAAs and other chemicals produced by high-temperature cooking may lead to oxidative stress, inflammation and insulin resistance, which can raise the risk of high blood pressure.

Lynch says “it’s important to know the smoke points of the oils we cook with. The smoke point is the cooking temperature at which a fat or oil begins to break down and degrade. When we eat food cooked past the smoke point, harmful compounds begin to circulate in our bodies, leading to inflammation and oxidative stress, which reduces the ability of the body to detoxify.”

An oil has reached its smoke point after it starts to smoke and burn when heated. The estimated smoke point of common cooking oils can vary greatly depending on the quality of the oil, but Lynch shared the following guidelines:

- Butter: 350°F
- Extra-virgin olive oil: 325°F
- Sesame oil: 350°F

- Coconut oil: 350°F
- Grapeseed oil: 420°F
- Ghee: 485°F
- Avocado oil: 520°F

A caveat: “It is important to note this study identifies a trend, not a cause and effect,” says Lynch. “I would like to see a study which has controls for variables such as the person’s weight, their fruit and vegetable intake, and overall health.”

While the research team acknowledges their study cannot prove cause and effect, Liu says “our findings suggest that it may help reduce the risk of high blood pressure if you don’t eat these foods cooked well-done and avoid the use of open-flame and/or high-temperature cooking methods, including grilling/barbecuing and broiling.”

Lynch offers this additional advice: “Use unrefined, cold-pressed and/or unfiltered cooking oils, as they are the least processed and have the best nutrient profile. Opt for the lowest heat application possible when cooking to minimize the ingestion of harmful compounds. Olive oil is fine for lower-heat cooking and finishing, but with polyunsaturated fats such as nut and seed oils (like flaxseed oil), it’s best to avoid heating at all; save these for dressings.”

Samantha Lynch’s office is located at 4445 Hwy A1A, Suite 239, in Vero Beach. She can also be reached via her website: www.samanthalynchnutrition.com. ■

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Medical supply company's PSL expansion equals healthy jobs infusion

ABC Home Medical Supply opened its corporate headquarters in Port St. Lucie just 18 months ago, creating 89 new jobs in St. Lucie County. Last week Mike O'Connor, the company's president and CEO, announced an expansion that will employ up to 200 at their Prima Vista Boulevard location within the next 18 months.

"For us, Florida has an excellent medical supply employee base, including in and around St. Lucie County. We have also really appreciated the willingness of the EDC (Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County) to work with us," said O'Connor. "This area is a good place for customer care talent."

Prior to opening their Port St. Lucie offices in January 2017, ABC Home Medical Supply had a small office in Stuart for four years. The company merged with ABC Medical Experea in mid-2016 and looked at locations in California, Pennsylvania and Florida for their headquarters. Keith Jones, ABC's president and CEO at that time, said no other community they considered offered the type of support or opportunity that they found in St. Lucie County.

The company currently employs 91 people in Florida; 89 of these employees work out of their Prima Vista offices in Port St. Lucie. The expansion plan calls for doubling the local workforce and investing in



Debbie Hawley, Kathryn Hensley, Crystal Stiles, E. Wayne Gent, Peter Tesch, Anthony Bonna, Aliesha Seitz, Mike O'Connor.

an additional 7,500 square feet of office space in the building they lease now.

"You can't find a more exciting success story than ABC Home Medical," said Pete Tesch, EDC president. "In their first 18 months in Port St. Lucie, they grew to 89 employees and now they are getting ready to more than double that number."

ABC Medical's plans include growing their profession as well as their business. The company will be launching an internship program with St. Lucie Public Schools. High school students working toward earn-

ing their Certified Medical Administrative Assisting (CMAA) Certificate will have the opportunity to do clinical internships at ABC Home Medical.

"We will be partnering with ABC Home Medical Supply so that our students can observe all the components of their CMAA training in a real-world setting," said Aliesha Seitz, director of the district's Career and Technical Education Program. Seitz said the district will be offering transportation and that the students would be able to do their internship hours during class time. ABC

management will also work with in the students in the classroom.

The agreement with ABC is just one component of St. Lucie Public Schools' efforts to focus on health care and science professions. In the 2019-2020 school year, the district will be transitioning Westwood High School into a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, math) academy, focusing on medicine, coding and robotics, according to Kerry Padrick, chief communications officer.

"We are working to nurture and grow students who have the ability to move into a directed mission, streamlining their pathway into local college programs or directly into the workforce," said Padrick. "Career-focused mentoring, internships, and high-tech programs like augmented reality applications are all part of our program."

The EDC is a private, not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting economic vitality in St. Lucie County through the attraction, retention and expansion of businesses in the community. The EDC works in partnership with local governments and the private sector to advance its goals of creating more and better-paying jobs for residents, broadening the tax base and improving St. Lucie County's economic quality of life. Contact the EDC at 772.336.6250 or <http://www.youredc.com>. ■

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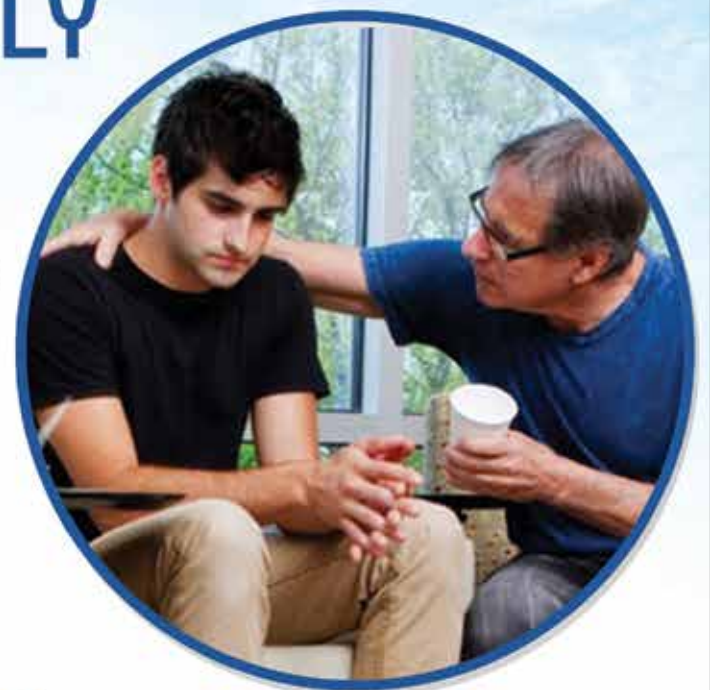


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