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THE KEYS

Schools seek full-time nurses

BY LISA FUSS

PLANTATION KEY — Keys educators are sending a coconut telegraph to Tallahassee next week, but their message to state legislators won't read like a favorite Jimmy Buffet lyric.

The Monroe County School Board says it's "going out" without full-time nurses in each of its 12 schools and will mail Florida's 160 representatives and senators decorative coconuts with that slogan to help get the point across.

The absence of full-time nurses in Keys schools is just one of the issues on tap before the county school board, which meets today at Plantation Key School in Tavernier. Local education officials also will decide today whether public school students should return to school a week earlier than usual this summer.

Under a proposed school calendar, students at Monroe's 12 elementary, middle and high schools would return for fall classes Aug. 11, a week ahead of the usual schedule. The change would be in effect only this summer's vacation by a week, with classes ending this year June 8.

Keys schools would close for business a week early next year, on May 31.

VACATION CONFLICT

Educators contend the concept would benefit students by allowing more time for winter test preparation.

KEYS CALENDAR

TODAY

- Registration for adult classes at Coral Shores High School, through Thursday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the main office. Fees vary. Find out more at registration. Classes begin Monday.

WEDNESDAY

- Key Largo Hammocks Botanical State Park free lecture series, Leubers, 7:30 to 8:30 p.m., John Pinnerkamp Coral Reef State Park Visitors Center. Call 305-651-1202.
- Habitat for Humanity of Key West and the Lower Florida Keys board meeting, 7 p.m., Holiday Inn Beachside, Key West. Call 305-672-4456.
- Monroe County Humanities Coalition annual meeting, 10 a.m., Rural Health Network, 1622 Spalding Ct., Unit 4, Key West. Call 305-293-7970. Public is welcome.

THURSDAY

- Funding meeting for children and adults for Marathon state park, 6 p.m., Marathon Library, Counsellman Jim Johnson will attend.
- Big Five Key Botanical Society meeting, 7:30 p.m., Lord of the Sea Lutheran Church, Key Deer Boulevard. Mary Miller discusses books. For details, call Herb's Conch Gardens, 305-879-3964.

FRIDAY

- Marathon Garden Club meeting, 10:30 a.m. Speaker is Jim Duquesnel. Call 305-745-0971.

SAUNDAY

- Significant Volunteer Fire Department open house, noon to 3 p.m.

MONDAY

- Pony Club Travel Club meeting, 6 p.m., Robin Harri Cafe, mile marker 66.2. Make reservations by Friday. Call 305-671-9808. Membership required.
- Catholic Education Alternative for the Key West community, 7 p.m., Mary Immaculate Star of the Sea auditorium.

JAN. 24

- Key Largo Hammocks Botanical State Park free lecture series, Coasting Avocados in the Keys, 7:30 to 8:30 p.m., John Pinnerkamp Coral Reef State Park Visitors Center. Call 305-651-1202.

JAN. 25

- Federal Aviation Administration free safety seminar, 7 p.m., Florida Keys Marathon Airport terminal, Call Barbara at 305-209-6060.
- Florida Keys Discovery slide lecture, The History of Key West and the Florida Keys, 7:30 p.m., Key West Library auditorium.

JAN. 26

- Marathon Business and Professional Women's Club's seventh annual five-limber run/walk on old Seves Mile Bridge. Entrance fee is \$15 before Monday, \$20 after. Call 305-745-0547.

JAN. 31

- Key Largo Hammocks Botanical State Park free lecture series, Astronomy, 7:30 to 8:30 p.m., John Pinnerkamp Coral Reef State Park Visitors Center. Call 305-651-1202.

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MESSAGE TO TALLHASSEE: The Monroe County School Board says it's "going out" without full-time school nurses in each of its 12 schools.

but many parents and teachers oppose an early start because it would conflict with traditional vacation schedules. Although the board has considered starting the school year early for years, today is the first time 10-13 members will vote on the issue.

While educators must weigh the pros and cons of the proposed school calendar, they are deciding about the school nurse situation in the Keys.

"I wouldn't say our standards are in jeopardy, but they would certainly be better served with nurses in every school," said Monroe County School Board Chairwoman Anne Kelly Cahoon, who wants state legislators to find a dedicated funding source such as the Tobacco Settlement Trust Fund to support full-time nurses in every public school.

CHILDREN'S NEEDS

"There are so many medically fragile kids in schools right now, kids who take medicine, kids who get injured if

medical personnel is there to analyze the situation, nurses can get them back into the classroom that much faster."

Only two of Monroe's 12 schools — Singarful Elementary/Middle School and Key Largo School — have full-time nurses because of grant money. The others have either part-time nurses or visiting nurses from the county health department, says Monroe County School Board Vice Chairwoman Debra Walker, who helped orchestrate the coconut campaign.

FUNDING DILEMMA

The school district could hire full-time nurses for all county schools, but only if it takes money out of classrooms, Walker says. With limited education dollars already committed to funding teaching and learning priorities, most school boards, including Monroe's, cannot afford to fund a school-nurse program.

Abside from the health ramifications of schools without full-time nurses, Walker contends administrators and teachers are being taken away from their regular duties to care for sick and injured students. Walker estimates the county spends approximately \$100,000 in staff time each year on student medical care.

Although the painted coconuts won't evoke policy change overnight, local educators expect them to turn heads at the state Capitol. Walker said the coconuts are due to arrive on legislators' desks Jan. 24, which marks National School Nurse Day.



WANTED: Police released two photos of suspect Larry Leatherwood.

Slaying suspect eludes manhunt

Fugitive believed to be still in Florida

BY LISA FUSS

MARATHON — The Monroe County Sheriff's Office is asking for the public's help in locating a Marathon man wanted for allegedly slaying a man to death as he left a fast-food restaurant party last year.

Larry Leatherwood, 35, has been on the run since witnesses said they first saw him in a handbag Oct. 15 at Mark's Evans, a former cook at Pook's Bay-side restaurant in Marathon.

Evans, 54, was shot three times, twice in the body and once in the head, police said, and died before paramedics and police arrived at the scene on Sombroff Road.

Leatherwood and Evans reportedly had a dispute earlier that evening over Evans' wife, who was separated from her husband but had dated Leatherwood.

Mark Evans was shot three times, twice in the body and once in the head, and died before paramedics and police arrived.

Witnesses told detectives that Leatherwood was harassing Evans at the party and returned to the gathering with a gun after being asked to leave.

Police believe Leatherwood, a plumber, has left the Keys but is still hiding out in Florida, perhaps with the assistance of friends and relatives, said Det. James Norman, who is handling the case for the Sheriff's Office.

Although investigators have received numerous tips about Leatherwood's whereabouts, all have proven unavailing.

"We just haven't gotten where we want to be with this case," said Norman, who has joined forces with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. "We know Leatherwood has said he wouldn't be taken alive, so we know he's talking to people out there. We're hoping one of them will come forward with information."

Leatherwood, who has a lengthy criminal record for violent crimes involving drugs and guns, is considered armed and dangerous.

Police say Leatherwood is six feet four, 200 pounds, and has been known to go by the names Larry and Johnnie L. Evans.

Anyone who knows Leatherwood's whereabouts is asked to contact the Sheriff's Office at 305-209-2400 or the Florida Department of Law Enforcement at 305-202-0208.

Callers who wish to remain anonymous should contact Crime Stoppers of the Florida Keys.

If the tip leads to an arrest, the caller will be eligible for a reward of up to \$2,000.

The Crime Stoppers hotline number is 1-800-366-7176.

GONE FISHING



Sugarloaf Middle School students Casey Cardinal, right, Gavin Doll and Andy Stockard fish off the Nile Channel Bridge using Sunnstrand and Ramrod keys. They were out on Monday for the March Luther King Jr. holiday.

BY LISA FUSS

ISLAMORADA — A Hollywood teenager was critically injured Monday after the personal watercraft he was aboard collided with another one in Whale Channel Harbor.

The 16-year-old boy, whose name was not released Monday pending notification of family, suffered a broken hip and leg along with several lacerations and internal injuries in the collision. He was taken to Mortner Hospital and later airlifted to Miami Children's Hospital.

The teen is listed in critical but stable condition and may need surgery, hospital spokeswoman Cynthia Gatterer said.

According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the teenager rented a personal watercraft, probably a Jet Ski or a WaveRunner, from WaterSport Corporation at Whale Harbor and struck another rented personal watercraft being operated by friend Michael Kruger, 25, also of Hollywood.

Witnesses say Kruger was heading north in Whale Harbor Channel when he made a slow turn to his left, crossing in front of the personal watercraft operated by the 16-year-old. Kruger's vessel was struck broadside by the boy's.

Kruger sustained minor injuries and did not require hospitalization, according to law enforcement officials. A passenger aboard the injured teenager's vessel was not injured.

Charges are pending in the accident.

Marine officials cited WaterSport Corporation for renting the personal watercraft to the two victims without the required proof of boater education. Florida law requires that anyone born after Sept. 30, 1983, successfully complete an approved boater education course prior to operating a vessel with more than 10 horsepower.

The law also requires that people born after that date have in their possession during the operation of the vessel a card proving their successful completion of the course and a picture ID.

Hollywood teenager is injured in personal watercraft collision

The 16-year-old boy suffered a broken hip and jaw along with several lacerations and internal injuries.

EDITOR: JAY DUCASSI