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Lake City Reporter

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Meteorite hunter finds pieces in forest

UCLA researcher confirms that small black chunks are space rocks.

By **LARRY GRIFFIN**
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last month, veteran meteorite hunter Larry Atkins was only in the state by chance, visiting his father. When he heard about the meteorite, though, he

jumped at the chance to go hunting. So he gathered a group of friends and family members and went for it. After two weeks of hunting, they came back with six pieces of the meteorite uncovered from the forest

ROCK continued on 3A



LARRY GRIFFIN/Lake City Reporter

Larry Atkins is an avid meteorite hunter who says he has discovered over 100 meteorites across the United States. He is pictured here with a piece of the meteorite that landed in a forest last month north of Lake City. He and a group of friends and family members found six rocks that they believe are pieces of the meteorite.

MARCH FOR BABIES

The kickoff luncheon for the 2016 March for Babies was held Tuesday at the Holiday Inn & Suites in Lake City.

RIGHT: Decorations sit outside Tuesday's gathering. The 2016 fundraising goal is \$89,600 for the Suwannee Valley area.



Photos by SAM BURROUGHS/Lake City Reporter



Christina Patrick holds Kayleigh Patrick, the ambassador baby presented at the luncheon. Signature sponsors are PotashCorp-White Springs and the First Federal Bank of Florida.



Festive centerpieces featuring Mardi Gras colors, beads and masks adorn the tables at Tuesday's event. This year's platinum sponsors are Anderson Columbia and Publix.

Mother of victim, drunk driver share stage

CHS students get earful on consequences of DUI and power of forgiveness.

By **KAYLA LOKEINSKY**
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On Mother's Day in 2002, Renne Napier had all four of her children with her. However, one of them was in a coffin, and only there in spirit.

That was the day of her daughter Meagan's visitation. It was the day before they would bury the 20-year-old college student. The day before a mother would see her baby for the last time.

"I can't even describe to you the horrible sound that came out of my soul," Napier said.

Napier has told this story more times than she can remember, and each time it gets a little bit easier. The most recent telling of this story occurred at Columbia High School on Tuesday as she gave a presentation to juniors and seniors about the dangers of drinking and driving.

Since 2004 Napier has been traveling the state of Florida, sharing her story and hoping to prevent another student from being

NAPIER continued on 3A

FGC professors chronicle the dangers of Zika virus

First case of the illness was recorded in 1947.

By **NICK ROLLISON**
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Despite rising concern over the Zika virus, the atmosphere during a Florida Gateway College presentation was relaxed and informative.

For a little over an hour, four FGC professors from the Biological Sciences department and one professor from the Water Resources department talked to FGC students about the nature, risks and prevention of the Zika virus.

"One of the most important things in any pandemic or epidemics is prevention, and one of the most important things in

prevention is education to the community," Dr. Juan Guzman, professor of anatomy and physiology. "In addition to that, we have a lot of future nurses, physical therapists and people who are going over to different careers, and we have to educate them."

The five professors discussed such topics as the beginnings of the outbreak, dated to May 2015 in Brazil, to the use of mosquito repellent for prevention of the virus, as well as the dangers that Zika presents to pregnant women in the form of microcephaly birth defects.

According to Cheryl Boice, professor of biology and microbiology, the first case of the Zika virus was recorded back in 1947.

"So, it's been around," Boice said. "Just like I would say with West Nile, we didn't start hearing about that until 2012 when that became prevalent in our country."



NICK ROLLISON/Lake City Reporter

Florida Gateway College held a presentation for students Tuesday titled "Zika Virus: The New Aggressor." Pictured is Dr. Ali Messenger, one of the five presenters at the event. The professors detailed the origins of the virus, which was first recorded in 1947. The most recent outbreak began in Brazil in May.

WHOM TO CALL

To learn more the Zika virus and how to protect yourself and your family, visit the Florida Department of Health website at www.floridahealth.gov.

You may also call the Columbia County DOH office at 758-1068.

The clinic is located at 217 NE Franklin St.

Hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

There is no need to make an appointment.



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LOCAL
One hurt in crash on Northwest Lake Jeffery Road, 3A.

One hurt in crash on Lake Jeffery Road



Photos by LARRY GRIFFIN/Lake City Reporter

A two-vehicle crash on Northwest Lake Jeffery Road Tuesday morning blocked traffic while law enforcement officials tried to sort out what happened. At least one person was hospitalized following the crash. The FHP said the crash was under investigation and did not have further information on the accident as of press time Tuesday.

NAPIER

Continued From 1A

affected by drunk driving the way her daughter was.

"I never planned to bury one of my children," said Napier to an auditorium full of silent students. "Your parents aren't planning it either."

On May 11, 2002, Meagan and her best friend, Lisa Dixon, had their lives cut short by a drunk driver when they were on their way home from the beach. Napier's re-telling of the events before and after their deaths is chilling. The Columbia High School auditorium was silent as students viewed photos of the accident scene and watched video interviews of the victims' families.

It was obvious that Napier wasn't just up there preaching. She truly did want the students to make the right choices when it comes to their future.

"I care about you," she said. "That's why I'm here. It really is my hope and my desire that something in your heart changes today."

A small gasp echoed in the auditorium when she introduced Eric Smallridge, the man who caused the deaths of Meagan and Lisa. She welcomed him onstage, and applause erupted when they embraced each other.

Smallridge was found guilty of two counts of DUI manslaughter and sentenced to 22 years in prison — 11 years each for the deaths of Meagan and Lisa.

It was Napier, unable to find true happiness despite having her daughter's killer in jail, who went to the judge and asked that he be released after 11 years.

Since 2006, Smallridge has accompanied Napier on her presentations. In those early appearances, he wore a prison uniform and was shackled at the wrists and ankles. He showed students how serious drinking and

driving can be.

Now that he's been released from prison, he continues to travel with Napier and speak with her at events coordinated by the Meagan Napier Foundation.

The forgiveness Napier was able to find for Smallridge has allowed the two of them to make an impression on thousands of students.

"The ability to do presentations has had a profound impact on my life," Smallridge said. "It gives my life true purpose."

After the presentation, dozens of CHS students, some in tears, lined up to speak to Napier and Smallridge. Some wanted a picture or a hug. A handful shared how drunk driving had affected someone in their lives, and they were met with warm hugs and words of encouragement.

"My favorite thing is to hear the responses of students and to hear that this was a positive experience



Renne Napier speaks with students Tuesday at Columbia High School. She lost her daughter, Meagan, in an accident caused by a drunk driver.



PHOTOS COURTESY CCSO

Eric Smallridge, who was convicted of DUI manslaughter in the crash that killed Meagan Napier, speaks with an emotional student after Tuesday's presentation on drunk driving at CHS.

on their life," Smallridge said.

The students' response was exactly what Columbia County Sheriff's Deputy Jimmy Finnell was hoping for when he proposed having Napier come speak at CHS. After hearing her speak at a conference, he knew the students in his county had to experience it themselves.

"It's an organization with a message that everyone needs to hear," Finnell said.

"My son is sitting right in the front row. He's a junior here. It hits home for a lot of us."

Columbia County School District Superintendent Terry Huddleston said Napier's message was a timely one, especially with end-of-school-year activities approaching.

"You can raise your kids the best you can, but when they get to be 16, 17 or 18, they start to make choices," Huddleston said. "Peer

pressure encourages poor choices. We hope this real-life story hits them in the heart."

Napier, along with Smallridge, left students with tears in their eyes and a new perspective on their lives.

"I speak from the heart," Napier said. "The message is way more important than my emotions. I just want students to take one thing away that will save their life."

ROCK

Continued From 1A

north of town.

Larry was joined by his aunt, Laura, Mike Hankey with the American Meteor Society, and two friends, Brenden Fallon and Josh Adkins. According to Larry, Laura found one meteorite piece, he and Hankey each found two, and Fallon and Adkins were walking together when they both discovered one larger piece.

Holding out a small black piece of rock in his open palm, Larry spoke in a revelatory tone about their discovery.

"This is 4.56 billion years old," he said. "It's basically virgin material. This is like the crumbs of the origin of our solar system."

Hankey, who found the first meteorite on their first day of hunting, described meteorite hunting as a long and arduous process that occasionally yields results.

"We all went out there about two Saturdays ago," Hankey said. "I found a meteorite, and then Larry found one. We found two more that day, and I went home after that. Larry and the others stayed out there and hunted for (a) week, and found one more. Then they hunted for another week after that and found one more stone. So it was two weeks of hunting for six stones."



LARRY GRIFFIN/Lake City Reporter

This photo offers a closeup view of one of six pieces of the meteorite that crashed to Earth last month in a heavily wooded area just north of Lake City.

Hankey said he is drawn to hunting meteorites for the excitement of the unknown. He estimated that the one that crashed to Earth just north of Lake City last month was probably the size of a pickup before it broke apart. He said there are many variables, including the age of the meteorite and the type of meteorite it is.

Because black rocks aren't common in Florida, Larry said it was easier to

find the pieces of the meteorite than it would have been elsewhere. Most of Florida, he said, is sand. However, the presence of charcoal in the forest from controlled burns made up for that, making the meteorite pieces harder to see.

He showed a piece to a colleague of his, UCLA meteorite researcher Alan Rubin, who confirmed it was just what he thought.

"It's definitely a meteorite," Rubin told the Lake

City Reporter. "It was probably shocked out of the surface of its parent asteroid and suffered numerous high-energy collisions in space."

Rubin hadn't had the chance to study the meteorite as of Tuesday but said he would do so next week. By studying it, he said he will be able to tell what kind of meteorite it is and how damaged it was by falling to Earth.

For seven months of the year, Larry is out in the deserts of Arizona and Nevada hunting for meteorites. The desert is the best place to do that, he said, because of the lack of rain that would submerge the meteorites in the damp ground.

It's because of the rain and generally wetter climate in Florida, he said, that their window to find pieces of the meteorite here in January was so small.

"This thing's worst enemy is water," he said, indicating the meteorite piece he held. "These meteorites are going to be gone. Right now, the ferns are starting to pop. It's done. There will never be another one of these found from this fall."

Only one of the meteorite pieces they found was above ground. The rest, according to Larry, were close to being submerged underground, which he said was the fate that would befall any other meteorite pieces still out there.

When he isn't hunting for meteorites, Larry runs a business in Michigan eradicating poison ivy from residents' homes. He said his passion for meteorite hunting started when he was a child and interested in fossils.

"I was in the second grade," he said. "I was inter-

ested in fossils and snakes and bugs. I always wanted to be an explorer, but I felt like everything had already been discovered."

But years later, in his 30s, he read an issue of Smithsonian magazine and discovered a picture of meteorologist Robert Haag holding a meteorite piece.

"After reading that, I was a different person," Larry said. "I started hunting immediately."

That was 16 years ago, and he's been at it ever since.

The appeal in it for Larry is how rare it is for people to see a meteorite falling. In Florida, it's only happened five other times before this, he said.

"The big thing is the allure of people witnessing the fall," he said. "To see it and then literally go out and find it. It's the rarest thing ever."

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING ON A TEMPORARY USE PERMIT

FORT WHITE, FLORIDA

The Town of Fort White, Florida, Planning and Zoning Board is holding a Public Hearing to consider approval of a Temporary Use Permit for an Easter Weekend Festival located at the Johnnie B Bryant Softball Field located on Plymouth Ave, on March 26 and 27, 2016, from 10:00 am until sunset.

The Town of Fort White Planning and Zoning Board will hold a Public Hearing on the proposed Permit on MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2016, at 7:00 P.M., at the Town Hall Meeting Room, at 118 SW Wilson Springs Rd, Fort White, Florida. All interested parties are encouraged to attend and participate in the Public Hearing Process.

Copies of the Application and applicable Land Development Regulations may be obtained from the Town of Fort White Clerk's Office at Town Hall.

AGENDA

Planning & Zoning Board
Monday February 22, 2016
7:00 pm

I. Call to order

II. Approval of Minutes

III. Old Business: Public Hearing on Ordinance #185-2016

Approving Resolution and Report (RAR) Amendments for

The Town of Fort White

Comprehensive Plan/BAR — Fred Kolstein

IV. New Business: Public Hearing on a Temporary Use Permit

Johnnie B. Bryant Celebration — Easter Weekend (Ricka Fleming)

located at the Johnnie B Bryant Softball Field on Plymouth Ave,

on March 26 and 27, 2016, from 10:00 am until sunset.

V. Goal of the Order

VI. Adjourn

Please be advised that if a person decides to appeal any decision made with respect to any matter considered at this hearing, such person will need a record of these proceedings, and for this purpose such person may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

Gateway Art Gallery

New Class Offered: Color Workshop

The Gateway Art Gallery has added a special Color Workshop to the regular Schedule of classes. The class will be on February 22 and 29 from 4-6 p.m. The instructor is Mike Greidan. He graduated from Northern Illinois University with a BFA degree in Drawing and Painting. Mike was originally an oil painter but now works exclusively in watercolor and colored pencil. He is a member of the CPUSA. Mike is well known in the art world as a professional artist and teacher. He works currently with the Savannah College of Art and Design in Atlanta and Savannah.

The Color Workshop will expand the artist knowledge of color for all mediums. They will work with a limited palette: primary colors cyan, magenta, and yellow. The goal is to use the minimal colors to mix secondary, tertiary, and the complete color wheel. The goal being to make effective color statements in our paintings and drawings.

The class will be held at the Gallery located at 168 N. Marion Ave. Lake City, FL. Call (386) 752-5229. All supplies are included. The class cost is \$45 per session. The participants will receive a nice value pack valued at the cost of the class.

168 N. Marion Ave. Lake City, FL 32025
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