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# Lake City Reporter

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U.S. 90 WIDENING PROJECT

## 4 lanes, few solutions



Photos by KAYLA LOKEINSKY/Lake City Reporter

The construction project on U.S. 90 West included the building of a solid median that runs from Southwest Sweetbreeze Drive to Brown Road. According to local merchants, the median has hurt their business. People traveling east toward Interstate 75 and Lake City cannot make a left turn to reach businesses on the westbound side, and people traveling west toward Live Oak can't make a left turn to reach businesses on the eastbound side.

**Local merchants: The absence of left-turn lanes is hurting business.**

By **KAYLA LOKEINSKY**  
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Business owners on U.S. 90 West have complained for years that ongoing construction has hindered commerce and kept customers out of their stores.

Now, other store owners are saying the damage will be permanent because of a concrete median that has cut them off from commuters and customers.

The Florida Department

**U.S. 90** continued on 3A



Southwest Georgia Oil Co., owner of the S&S food store at U.S. 90 and Turner Road, says a new median has negatively affected business at the convenience store.

## Lifeguard wants rival EMS firm disqualified

Company files petition with county in addition to lawsuit in circuit court.

By **CARL MCKINNEY**  
 cmckinney@lakecityreporter.com

Lifeguard Ambulance Service is taking another shot at securing an Emergency Medical Services contract with the county.

The company filed a petition with the county last week, asking for Jacksonville-based Century Ambulance, the top choice, to be disqualified.

Lifeguard's formal protest maintains the county doesn't have the authority to begin negotiations with Century because of an ongoing lawsuit it mounted against the county.

**EMS** continued on 3A

## Sale prices for homes are still on the rise

Local Realtors: Total dollar volume has also increased.

By **SAM BURROUGHS**  
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The Columbia County real estate market continues to improve.

The June 2015 Monthly Market Detail, distributed by the Florida Realtors, showed that despite total closed sales decreasing from 54 to 52, median and average sale prices have both increased.

"The big picture is the total dollar volume is up [11.7 percent] and the median sale price and average sale price [are] up," said Dan Gherna, executive vice president of the Lake City Board of Realtors.

**HOMES** continued on 3A

## Obama promotes Clinton while Kaine mocks Trump

President, VP nominee join Democrat chorus vouching for former first lady.

By **JULIE PACE**  
 and **CATHERINE LUCEY**  
 Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Their political fates now entwined, President Barack Obama is imploring voters to elect Hillary Clinton to the White House, joining a chorus of Democrats vouching Wednesday night for her readiness to be commander-in-chief at time of volatility around the world.

"Even in the middle of crisis, she listens to people and keeps her cool and treats everybody with respect," Obama said in excerpts released ahead of his remarks at the Democratic convention. "And no matter how daunting the odds, no matter how much people try to knock her down, she never, ever quits."

Clinton's running mate, Virginia Sen. Tim Kaine, introduced himself to the nation as



Obama



Kaine

a formidable foil to Republican nominee Donald Trump.

"Donald Trump has a passion," he said. "It's himself."

"Believe me!" he exclaimed over and over, imitating Trump's tone as he ridiculed a list of the Republican's promises.

**DNC** continued on 3A

## Cocaine found on two JetBlue planes



COURTESY

Two stashes of cocaine were found in the last week, one on July 20 and another on July 24. Both were found in the same compartments on JetBlue planes at Lake City Gateway Airport. In total, law enforcement confiscated 3 kilograms of the drug. "If not for the excellent working relationship we have with our local businesses, these drugs would have reached their intended destination," said Columbia County Sheriff Mark Hunter.



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**SCHOOLS**  
 Niblack's summer enrichment program wraps up today, 3A.



## HOMES

Continued From 1A

Total dollar volume increased from \$7.1 million in June 2015 to \$7.9 million in June 2016 while the median sale price increased from \$107,500 to \$140,000 and the average sale price increased from \$131,012 to \$151,970, according to the market detail.

Another highlight of the market detail is seeing the median percent of original list price increase, according to Gherna.

The median percent of original list price received

indicates how big of a percent of the price that sellers ask for that they actually receive. Columbia County's has increased from 90.9 percent in June 2015 to 95 percent for June 2016.

"We haven't seen that in a long time. You put your house on the market for \$300,000 and it sells for 95 percent of that price. What we were seeing for a long time was ... people were getting 75 to 80 percent of their original asking price," Gherna said.

Supply of inventory has also decreased from 365 in June 2015 to 318. Gherna explains that this is a good

indication that houses continue to sell.

"I think [this year] is much better than 2015," Gherna said. "Every year it seems to get a little bit better."

Other positive indicators are a decrease in the median time to contract, which went from 115 days to 82 days; and the median time to sale, which decreased from 156 days to 125 days.

The former is a measure of the median number of days between the listing date and the contract date for closed sales during the month, and the latter is the

number of days between the listing date and closing date for all sales during the month.

In addition, there were only seven distressed properties, including foreclosed homes, and no short sales were made.

"We are cycling through the foreclosed inventory ... and we are going back to a traditional market," Gherna said.

For Gherna, that is remarkable.

"I think it's been a really good month. I think it's going to stay about where it is right now for the time being," he said.

## Register to vote by Monday

From staff reports

Residents who would like to cast ballots in the Aug. 30 election have until Monday to register to vote or change their party affiliation.

Residents may also change their name or address.

For more information, call the Columbia County elections office at 758-1026.

The office is located at 971 W. Duval St., Suite 102, in Lake City.

Hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

## EMS

Continued From 1A

"We feel comfortable that our argument is factual and objective," said Lifeguard President Brett Jovanovich.

A county EMS committee recommended Century earlier this month, the second time it came in first place.

The first ranking committee chose Century in February, which the county voted to start negotiations with in May. Lifeguard, the runner-up and current EMS provider, protested that decision as well.

On a recommendation from County Attorney Joel Foreman, the county opted to start the bidding process over in June.

The new process didn't address its criticisms of the original, Lifeguard stated, many of which were repeated in the new petition: "It reshuffles points awarded for subjective criteria in favor of

Century's bid."

The lawsuit which prompted the do-over alleged Century was unfairly allowed to modify its bid after it had already been submitted.

According to an email exchange between County Purchasing Director Ray Hill and Century CEO John Glover, Century did not originally include a proposed pricing structure for its ambulance service. That information was later added.

The petition argues the county runs the risk of awarding the contract to Century in August, only to have a circuit court award it to Lifeguard in September.

Foreman declined comment.

Hill wrote a response to the petition, but the Lake City Reporter was unable to acquire a copy before press time. The response is awaiting approval from the county's outside legal counsel, Tallahassee-based law firm Nabors, Giblin & Nickerson.

## Summer enrichment program at Niblack



SAM BURROUGHS/Lake City Reporter

Thayla Mullins, a student in Niblack Elementary School's summer enrichment program for students, shows off her finished coordinate drawing on Wednesday. Students have spent most of the summer working on educational areas. The program wraps up today. Students will be celebrating with water slides, food, a movie and free play time.

## DNC

Continued From 1A

For Democrats, the night was steeped in symbolism, the passing of the baton from a barrier-breaking president to a candidate trying to make history herself.

Obama's robust support for Clinton, his political foe-turned-friend, is also driven by deep concern that Republican Donald Trump might win in November and unravel the president's eight years in office.

Trump fueled more controversy Wednesday when he encouraged Russia to meddle in the presidential campaign. On the heels of

reports that Russia may have hacked Democratic Party emails, Trump said, "Russia, if you're listening," it would be desirable to see Moscow find and publish the thousands of emails Clinton says she deleted during her years as secretary of state.

Wednesday night's Democratic lineup was aimed at emphasizing Clinton's own national security credentials. It was a significant shift in tone after two nights spent reintroducing Clinton to voters as a champion for children and families.

The convention's third night was also a time for Democrats to celebrate Obama's two terms in office. Vice President Joe Biden,

who decided against running for president this year after the death of his son, called it a "bittersweet moment."

Biden, of Scranton, Pennsylvania, Biden appealed directly to the working-class white voters who have been drawn to Trump's populism, warning them against falling for false promises and exploitation of Americans' anxieties.

Kaine also picked up the traditional attacking role of the presidential ticket's No. 2. With folksy charm, he tore into Trump, mocking his pledges to build a wall along the Mexican border, asking why he has not released his tax returns and slamming his business record, includ-

ing the now-defunct Trump University.

Liberals, particularly those who supported Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, have grumbled about Kaine being on the ticket, particularly because of his support for "fast track" approval of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact.

In a move aimed at broadening Clinton's appeal, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg — an independent who considered launching a third party bid for president — endorsed the Democratic nominee. A billionaire businessman himself, Bloomberg slammed Trump, saying: "The richest thing about Donald Trump is his hypocrisy."

## U.S. 90

Continued From 1A

of Transportation's widening project on U.S. 90 has been underway for more than three years. Part of that project included construction of medians along the stretch of road between Lake City Avenue and Brown Road.

One median runs from Southwest Sweetbreeze Drive to Brown Road without any cutouts, blocking direct access to businesses along that stretch.

There are also problems with the construction of the median on Turner Road.

"A convenience store should be convenient, and this is just not convenient," said Aaron Goodman, chief operating officer of Southwest Georgia Oil Co., which owns the S&S food store chain.

In addition to the median making it difficult for customers to enter the S&S store on the corner of U.S. 90 and Turner Road, another median recently constructed on Turner Road prevents departing S&S customers from turning left to get back onto U.S. 90.

Customers trying to leave the S&S must turn right onto the Turner Road, then take an immediate left and make a U-turn to get access to U.S. 90. If the traffic is backed up to where the median opens up, customers must drive down Turner Road until they can find an opening to turn back the other way.

According to Goodman, business at the S&S location has gone down 35 to 40 percent since the medians have been put in.

"It really has hurt that store," Goodman said. "It's tough when you're trying to get in and out of there."

People traveling east on U.S. 90 toward Interstate 75 cannot make a left turn to reach businesses on the westbound side of the road, and those traveling west on U.S. 90 toward Live Oak cannot make a left turn to reach businesses on the eastbound side.

In order to reach the Dollar General and Giebeig Family Medicine, located on U.S. 90 between Southwest Pinemount Road and Brown Road, eastbound drivers must make a U-turn at Southwest Sweetbreeze Drive. Customers leaving the

store who need to travel east must drive west to the Brown Road intersection and make a U-turn.

When Dr. Peter Giebeig bought the property to open his office in 2004, he says he already knew there would not be a cutout in the proposed median to reach his business, which was the only one there at the time. However, when the Dollar General was built in 2008, the traffic in that area increased significantly.

"We knew we weren't getting a cut in the median, and that was fine because we were the only business over here," Giebeig said. "Dollar General changed that."

According to Giebeig, when he mentioned this issue to the FDOT, they "refused to reconsider" the plans for the median.

"I do not think there's any chance they're going to fix it," Giebeig said. "It's a done deal."

Employees at the Dollar General at 5087 W. U.S. 90, were not permitted to speak to the press on the matter, but business has reportedly been hampered seriously at that location.

Another business affected

by the median's lack of cutouts is TSC Tractor Supply, located just west of

Brown Road. According to assistant store manager Mike Rich, the new median in front of the store has "absolutely been an issue."

"We've had customers complain about it," Rich said. "Just getting it opened would be good."

According to FDOT District 2 Public Information Director Tracy Hisler-Pace, the median is placed where it is for safety and is designed to cut down on traffic accidents. Hisler-Pace explained that the lack of cutouts in the median is based on a need to limit U-turns.

"By having it in one place, it cuts down on accidents," Hisler-Pace said. "The bottom line is it's all about safety."

Hisler-Pace says the median will remain without changes.

"Drivers need to be patient and take those few extra seconds or minutes to get where they're going."

According to FDOT public information officer Troy Roberts, the construction project is scheduled to be completed in about a month.

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