

# Lake City Reporter

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**SUNDAY EDITION**



**Schools hit money issues 1C**

**PLUS**

**Odd timing at the state attorney's office,**

**Opinion, 4A**

**TIGERS BEAT RIVAL**



**SEE SPORTS, 1B**



**A sight to see**

Four friends in the local wedding industry take girls trip to Iceland and discover beauty.

**1D**

## Former mentor's spirit stays with group of local cowgirls

By **KAYLA LOKEINSKY**  
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About this time last year, Alyce Vaughn was helping coordinate a routine for the Crossfire Cowgirls

rodeo drill team with her mother, Lynne Crawford. She suggested the team do the drill to "Fight Song," an anthem for those battling cancer, and the perfect choice for their routine set to honor those

who have suffered from the disease.

A former drill team member herself, Vaughn served as a mentor

**MENTOR** continued on 3A



Former rodeo drill team members Hannah Cox (from left), Alyce Vaughn, Bethany Cox and Jordan Spires. Vaughn died from complications due to diabetes at age 25. She was one of the original Columbia Cowgirls, now known as the Crossfire Cowgirls, and later served as a mentor and coach.

FILE

### RED FOR REMEMBRANCE



COURTESY

On Friday, faculty and students at Fort White High School wore red to honor teacher Amanda Humphries, who died of a brain aneurysm last week. Red was Mrs. Humphries' favorite color. A school official said the display was meant to honor her legacy at the school.

## Dogs have their day in Downtown Lake City

By **TAYLOR GAINES**  
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When Brenda Gray passed out in her backyard, Doodle was there to save her.

"He jumped on me and started barking so loud that the neighbors came," she said. "If he hadn't, I would have been dead."

Gray has a cardiac condition that can lead to an irregular heartbeat after standing for too long. She said Doodle, her dachshund service dog, rescued her twice from dire situations by getting help.

Years later, after an accident that blew out a disc in Doodle's back, she takes care of him in return. He can only walk on his front legs and often uses a dog wheelchair to get around.

Still, Gray said, they take care of each other. "He means everything," she said. "[The bond we have] is closer than any human."

Gray was one of hundreds of dog owners who attended the WoofStock Festival at the



TAYLOR GAINES/Lake City Reporter

Dachshund Mary Francis licks the face of her owner, Judy Delbene, during the Smooching Pooches competition at the WoofStock Festival at the Darby Pavilion on Saturday.

**DOGS** continued on 5A

## Blood alcohol level for mayor was .22

Nearly 3 times the legal limit; hearing set for March 23

By **CARL MCKINNEY**  
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Lake City Mayor Stephen Witt's blood alcohol level was .220 when his SUV ended up four-feet-deep in Lake DeSoto in January, nearly three times the legal limit of .08, according to a report from the Florida Highway Patrol.



Witt

The report was withheld from the Lake City Reporter until Friday, and did not appear in a previous story detailing a DUI charge filed against Witt, 64.

**MAYOR** continued on 3A

## Date is set for Decker reprimand

The News Service of Florida

Suspended Third Circuit Judge Andrew Decker III will receive a public reprimand May 2 from the Florida Supreme Court because of wrongdoing before he was elected to the bench in 2012.

The Supreme Court ruled last week that Decker should be suspended for six months and receive a reprimand. The

**DECKER** continued on 5A



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**TODAY'S WEATHER**

**68 50**  
Rain likely, 2A



Opinion ..... 4A  
Calendar ..... 6A  
Puzzles ..... 2-3B  
Business ..... 1C  
Advice & Comics ..... 3D



**SCHOOLS**  
Elementary school students showcase STEM skills at countywide event, 7A.



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# Pro rodeo rides into town this weekend

By KAYLA LOKEINSKY  
klokeinsky@lakecityreporter.com

It's time to saddle up for this year's Florida Gateway Pro Rodeo, which is packed with some of the best-known acts in the business.

Watch a cowboy ride a bucking bronco, tackle a steer or ride a bull. See cowgirls guide their horses around the arena, making sharp turns and thundering through the dirt. Witness one of the most exciting rodeo specialty acts in the world. Do all this and more right here in Lake City.

The 23rd Annual Florida Gateway Pro Rodeo will take place Friday to Sunday at the Columbia County Fairgrounds Rodeo Arena.

According to Columbia County Resources President Mike Nelson, the rodeo is an event that is highly anticipated by locals and visitors.

"Everybody looks forward to it," Nelson said. "They're always ready to come out and see it."

Perhaps the highlight of this year's rodeo is the return of John Payne, better known as the "One Arm Bandit." The 15-time PRCA Specialty Act of the Year will be bringing his thrilling, dangerous act to Lake City, complete with stunts that will make you hold your breath in anticipation.

Payne, who is on rotation with the Florida Gateway Pro Rodeo, comes to perform his act about every three years.

"It's a little bit wild," Payne said. "There's a lot of danger in the show. It's not something grandma would want to do."

Last year, an estimated 6,000-8,000 people attended the rodeo, but with Payne making an appearance, that number is expected to rise.

"It probably will go up a little bit



Robert Lee Dewey, of Blanchard, Oklahoma, attempts to hang on to a bull during a past Florida Gateway Pro Rodeo.

more," Nelson said. "With John Payne coming in that makes a big difference."

Also performing at this year's Florida Gateway Pro Rodeo is Brian Potter, a rodeo clown with several different personas, including "Motocross Mike" and "Redneck Fireworks."

Rodeo action will be centered around seven high-octane events: bareback riding, saddle bronc, barrel racing, calf roping, steer wrestling, bull riding and team roping.

On Friday, the gates open at 6 p.m. and the event begins at 7:30

p.m. In addition to rodeo events, Friday's show will also feature the crowning of the Florida Gateway Pro Rodeo Queens during intermission.

Saturday night will serve as the Tough Enough to Wear Pink Fundraiser for breast cancer awareness. Gates open from at 4 p.m. for the Rodeo Kids Zone, free for all children with paid admission, and at 6 p.m. for the main show, which starts at 7:30 p.m.

Also on Saturday night, the Crossfire Cowgirls Rodeo Drill Team will perform a special routine, choreographed to the song

"Fight Song," to honor people who are suffering from or who have suffered from various diseases, including diabetes, cancer and Alzheimer's.

"They always do an excellent job," Nelson said. "It makes the chills go down your body."

On Sunday, the gates will open at noon and the show starts at 2 p.m. Sunday will include a salute to the armed forces, and veterans will get in free with proof of a valid ID.

The Crossfire Cowgirls will perform their military tribute during Sunday's show.

Admission for the Florida Gateway Pro Rodeo is \$10 in advance. Tickets are on sale at Russell's Western Wear, S&S Food Stores, the Columbia County Fairgrounds Office and the Fort White Farm and Feed Store. Tickets at the gate are \$14 for adults. For children ages 6-12, the tickets are \$5 and children under 5 years old will be admitted free.

For more information about the Florida Gateway Pro Rodeo, call the Columbia County Fairgrounds at 752-8822 or visit [www.columbiacountyfair.org](http://www.columbiacountyfair.org).

## MENTOR

Continued From 1A

for young group of cowgirls, and helped them create what has become one of their most memorable routines.

At this year's Florida Gateway Pro Rodeo, the Crossfire Cowgirls will once again do their "Fight Song" routine, but this time to honor the memory of Vaughn, who passed away on July 5, 2016 at age 25.

As they honor one of their own, the Crossfire Cowgirls know that Vaughn's spirit will be with them as they thunder through the arena.

"To be able to do this for her, to bring her back into the arena, I feel like she's been out of it for a while," Crawford said. "I just feel like I can bring her back in the arena one more time and let her ride with them."

"She never left the arena," added Kiaya Roberts, a member of the Crossfire Cowgirls and Vaughn's 15-year-old niece.

Vaughn, who lived her entire life in Columbia County, died suddenly last summer after a battle with diabetes.

"It came on so fast," Crawford said. "Nobody even knew she was sick.

"Her friends and all were very much shocked, as were our families," she added. "We had no idea we were fixing to lose her."

Less than a week before she went into the hospital, Vaughn stayed with the Crossfire Cowgirls at a horse camp. They spent the night in Crawford's barn bunkhouse, laughing, dancing and setting off fireworks.

"They stayed up and did goofy stuff all night long," Crawford said.

The girls now have that memory and countless others to hold on to. For them, their tribute performance during Saturday night's rodeo will allow them to bring her to the arena with them again.

"It's a blessing, really," 12-year-old Crossfire Cowgirls team member Lily Lee said. "Every time I do the drill I get chill bumps and I can hear her voice in my head telling us what to do and making us laugh."

"She's always right there with us," 14-year-old Crossfire Cowgirl Kylee Brown added.

Roberts, Lee and Brown were Vaughn's "pick of the litter" according to Crawford. She helped do their makeup before last year's rodeo queen competition, she gave them point-

ers while they practiced drills and she gave them all nicknames. They can still feel her presence every time they ride.

"The baseball drill was her favorite drill, and when I practice it I always think of the instructions that she gave me," Roberts said. "Don't turn too tight, make sure you stay out of your horse's mouth. Just different instructions that didn't mean much then but mean so much now."

Vaughn was one of the original members of the drill team, formerly known as the Columbia Cowgirls. She was on the inaugural team in 2005 and remained on it for about six years. After that, she served as a mentor and coach. Crawford, who has coached the team since its first year, says she still carries Vaughn with her every day.

"I know she is with them when they ride," Crawford said. "I can hear her and see her, making those faces or fussing at them, in her way, not my way, and just being the kind of person that she was. I can so much see it out there."

During Saturday night's performance at the Florida Gateway Pro Rodeo, the Crossfire Cowgirls will perform their tribute to Vaughn. They performed

the routine last year, carrying black flags with pick ribbons that Vaughn bought online, in honor of breast cancer awareness. This year, the Crossfire Cowgirls will be honoring people who have battled all types of diseases, including cancer, Alzheimer's and diabetes, among others.

They have also incorporated more fireworks into their routine this year, including some that will shoot up to 250 feet into the air. The girls' talent and precision combined with the fireworks and the passion with which they will

perform the drill as they dedicate it to Vaughn will make for a show-stopping performance.

"They do this drill and it is absolutely hair-raising," Crawford said. "It is unreal. The speed they do it in is kind of scary for me sometimes. But then I cannot stand still when I'm watching them do this drill. My feet don't stand still, my hands don't stand still."

The Crossfire Cowgirls will perform another show at Sunday's rodeo in honor of veterans. The drill, which was also performed at last year's rodeo, will show-

case the cowgirls carrying the American flag as well as flags representing the branches of the United States military.

As a team, the girls show a lot of heart and care for each other, the community and veterans, which is a big reason they do the tribute. The passion and heart they put into their performances is just one of the many things that Vaughn passed on to them.

"She had a big heart and these girls, they got that from her," Crawford said. "I know they did, because they all have such big hearts."

## MAYOR

Continued From 1A

According to the Florida Highway Patrol, Witt started the engine of his 2011 GMC Terrain around midnight on Jan. 27 and put it in gear before exiting the vehicle.

The SUV, which was parked at the Elks Lodge on 259 NE Hernando Ave., traveled south/southeast over a curb and down into the embankment of the lake, according to reports.

Witt sustained minor injuries and was taken to Lake City Medical Center.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement tested a blood sample from the hospital.

Witt has a court appearance scheduled for 8:30 a.m. March 23.

The accident caused \$2,000 in property damage, not including Witt's vehicle, according to FHP.

The mayor also received a citation for careless driving, court records show.

Otis James  
Bradley Sr.  
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