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NASSAU COUNTY

County awarded \$6.26M grant

Funds support road to job creation hub near U.S. 301, I-10

BY NICK BLANK
News-Leader

Speaking in Yulee on Thursday morning, Gov. Ron DeSantis awarded the county \$6.25 million

to fund a road for a new job creation hub near U.S. 301 and I-10.

The U.S. 301 and I-10 interchange runs along U.S. 90 south of Bryceville in West Nassau County. County officials said the

future project could accommodate 6.3 million square feet of commercial or industrial space.

"The new site will be an ideal hub for businesses across multiple sectors, including manufactur-

ing, transportation and logistics, and is expected to create 1,250 jobs at the Nassau County site," DeSantis said to applause.

Joined by Commerce Secretary Alex Kelly, DeSantis said investment in rural areas can go further. *DESANTIS continued on 2A*



NICK BLANK/NEWS-LEADER

Gov. Ron DeSantis speaks Thursday in Yulee.

FERNANDINA BEACH

Recall moves forward

Supervisor of Elections given petition to recall Poynter, Minshew

BY NICK BLANK
News-Leader

A pair of recall petitions for two Fernandina Beach city commissioners who voted for paid parking downtown have acquired a suitable number of signatures and have been delivered to Nassau County election officials.

According to state statutes, 10% of registered voters in the city need to sign the petition. At Tuesday night's city commission meeting, Recall FB 2026 Chair Pat Gass said 1,465 petitions were signed in favor of recalling Commissioner Genece Minshew and 1,458 petitions were signed in favor of recalling Commissioner Tim Poynter, approximately 320 more signatures petitions for both than the group needed.

RECALL continued on 7A

ALDI postpones store opening

BY ASHLEY CHANDLER
News-Leader

ALDI confirmed it is postponing the opening of its store on Amelia Island.

The company previously announced that the store at 947 Amelia Plaza would open Thursday. Due to a shift in "construction timing," the location may not open this month.

"While construction timing has shifted our original grand opening plans slightly, we remain on track to open our new Fernandina Beach store in the next few months," said Matt Thon, Regional Vice President, on Wednesday. "We appreciate the excitement and

ALDI continued on 7A

BREAKING BARRIERS



PHOTOS BY ASHLEY CHANDLER/NEWS-LEADER

Christine Roldan and Hero the French bulldog sit alongside their ribbons from the Westminster Dog Show.

Nassau teen titles at Westminster

Roldan is first person of color to win a junior title at the dog show

BY MARISA DEMAR
News-Leader

Christine Roldan, an 18 year old from Callahan took third place in the 150th Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show as a junior handler.

When Roldan, along with her French bulldog Hero took the floor of Madison Square Garden in New York City in February, the intense lights and cameras made for a nerve-racking show.

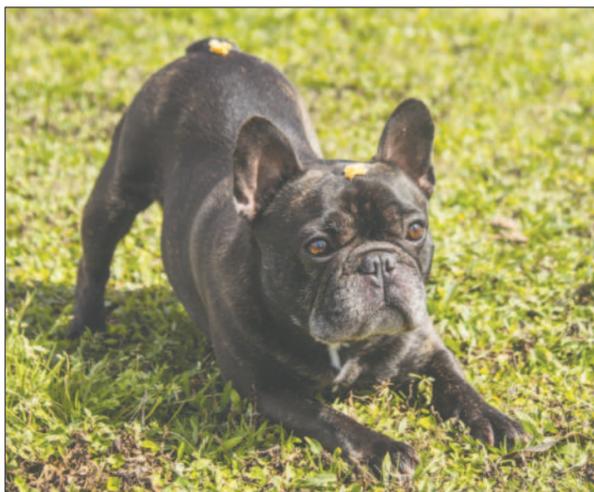
"So many famous people have been there and getting to

Westminster is the biggest thing you can accomplish with being in dog shows so to be able to be on that carpet and be there with so many other talented kids I was super nervous but so happy to be there with my best friend," Roldan said.

Hero, the seven-year-old French bulldog, remained calm and collected.

"He is a pro, he's very professional at the shows and he is just ready to go even if I am a little nervous," she said.

DOG continued on 8A



Hero the French bulldog shows off one of many of the tricks that he knows in February outside of his home in Callahan.

NASSAU COUNTY

County Attorney weighs legislative impact

BY AMY MULLIGAN
News-Leader

More than 1,900 bills have been introduced during the 2026 Legislative Session.

"There are some very fast-

moving amendments going on in the legislature right now," Nassau County Attorney Denise May said.

May briefed county officials on what key ones her team is tracking during the Nassau County Board of County Commissioners Winter

Strategic Planning Session last week.

May pointed to the top 10 that could have the most impact on Nassau County:

Property Tax Reform (HB 203): Proposes a homestead

property exemption from all ad valorem taxes except school levies, with a prohibition on reducing funding for first responders starting in FY 2027-2028.

This could significantly impact *BILLS continued on 7A*

LOOKING BACK 50 YEARS

Save Our Open Space was formed to help preserve natural land on Amelia Island and expand Egan's Creek Greenway.

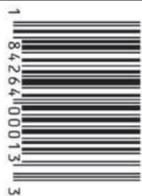
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HIGH SCHOOL TENNIS

Pirates eye districts after mid-season wins over Hornets, Crusaders

BY ASHLEY CHANDLER
News-Leader

Yulee and Fernandina Beach high schools faced off in boys and girls tennis this week for the second time this season.

The Pirates brought the same high level of play to Yulee on Tuesday that they have had all season. Both boys and girls squads won all their matches against the Hornets to take two 7-0 team wins back to Fernandina, just in time for a rematch against Bishop Kenny.

Both squads prevailed in the rematch, avenging losses to Bishop Kenny from last week. Pirates girls tennis coach Susie DeMille said last week it was tie-breaker after tie-breaker for the both the boys and girls in the first matchup on Feb. 24.

The boys beat the Crusaders 5-2 Wednesday and the girls won 4-3.

"The Bishop Kenny match was an especially great win," said Carrie Vitori, head

boys coach.

Fernandina Beach's tennis teams have been fairly successful all season long. The boys are 6-2, ranked first in their district. Their only two team losses were at the hands of Bishop Kenny and Bolles, both out of Jacksonville. The young girls squad sits at 4-3, losing also to the two Jacksonville teams as well as West Nassau on Feb. 26, 4-3.

DeMille said the season has been "fantastic." To promote team unity, DeMille said her and Vitori, treat the two teams as one big team and co-coach together.

"When we started our season we told them, we make decisions together. Our lineups are together, and we coach them together," DeMille said. "It creates symmetry for both the boys and the girls, too, because otherwise, they separate themselves."

"I really love our team this year, the camaraderie they've

TENNIS Continued on 2B



ASHLEY CHANDLER/NEWS-LEADER

Jacob Kovalcik and Nate Cole, No. 1 and 2 tennis players at Fernandina Beach High School. Prepare for a match Tuesday at Yulee High School.

FERNANDINA BEACH



NICK BLANK/NEWS-LEADER

A crowd gathers outside City Hall Tuesday evening.

City closer to potential Ybor Alvarez solution

BY NICK BLANK
News-Leader

Fernandina Beach commissioners directed staff at a crowded workshop Tuesday night to research a proposal that would keep youth soccer on Amelia Island, though questions about the price tag lingered.

Ybor Alvarez Soccer Complex, located at 3243 Bailey Road, is of significant interest for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for a hangar project.

Fernandina Beach Municipal Airport owns the land, so the city would have to purchase the property to keep the current sports complex. Nassau County has agreed to grant the city \$1.7 million toward keeping the fields or building new complexes.

Vice Mayor Darron Ayscue recommended switching the location of the proposed hangar site to the other side of the property, essentially over the softball fields. He acknowledged someone wasn't going to win and said softball could be accommodated at other city fields.

In soccer parlance, he compared the city's situation to being in the 88th minute and down by three goals.

"I understand that somewhere we are going to lose something when these hangars come in," Ayscue said. "If we flipped it, we left the soccer fields where they are at Ybor Alvarez, along with the parking and



ASHLEY CHANDLER/NEWS-LEADER

Soccer goals Wednesday at the Ybor Alvarez Soccer Complex, located at 3243 Bailey Road.

everything else, we don't have to construct soccer fields at that point. We'll essentially have Amelia Island Soccer, their home, permanently, if we can get the FAA to agree to allow us to give up those fields and then come out to the runway. It's going to be a little bit challenging, but everything is challenging."

Commissioners directed Airport Contractor Nathan Coyle to develop a conceptual site plan for the new plan and for city staff to complete a cost analysis of Ayscue's proposal, extending to a general obligation bond idea suggested by Commissioner

Joyce Tuten.

City staff presented with four options: a new complex off-island constructed within 12-18 months, constructing fields near Simmons Road in a heavily forested and wetland-impacted area, building on the Fernandina Beach Golf Course or building on airport land requiring land acquisition costs. City staff did not recommend the Simmons Road or golf course options.

Coyle said there's been a long history of looking at options for YASC

COMPLEX Continued on 2B

Wildlight's Run Wild Raises \$20,000 for local YMCA

For the News-Leader

Energy and community spirit were on full display Saturday, February 28, as more than 1,200 runners hit the trails for the fourth annual Run Wild 10K, 5K and Fun Run in Wildlight. The event raised \$20,000 for the YMCA at Wildlight, with proceeds supporting the YMCA's financial assistance program, which provides after-school care and summer enrichment opportunities for local children and families.

Participants of all ages took to Wildlight's scenic trails and neighborhood streets, enjoying a race designed for competitive runners, casual joggers and families alike. The post-race celebration featured a Kids' Zone, local favorites such as Chubby Burrito, Kona Ice, Papa Churros and Family Grounds Coffee Truck, and refreshments from SJ Brewing. Entertainment included The Honey Badgers at the finish line, with Paul Ivey and Mike



At left, The overall 5K winners of the Run Wild event in Wildlight. Right, the 10K winners.



PHOTOS BY KIM KELLY PHOTOGRAPHY

McDaniel performing along the course.

"The incredible turnout for Run Wild reflects what makes this community so special," said

Brean Thompson, Wildlight's marketing manager. "Not only does this event celebrate health and connection, but it also allows us to give back in a meaningful

way. We're proud to support the YMCA's mission and the vital programs they provide for local families."

Now in its fourth year, Run

Wild continues to grow as one of Nassau County's signature spring events, blending fitness, family-friendly activities and meaningful community impact.