

The Chattahoochee News-Herald

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Chattahoochee police report multiple drug arrests in September

Erin Hill
Gadsden County News Service

Chattahoochee police reported four arrests stemming from three September traffic stops that resulted in drug-related charges. The incidents occurred Sept. 5, Sept. 23 and Sept. 26. The first occurred shortly after midnight Sept. 5, when Chattahoochee Police Lt. Seth Alday reported seeing a white 2006 Nissan pickup traveling south on South Main Street at an estimated 55 mph in a 30 mph zone. Alday's radar registered the vehicle traveling 57 mph, according to the arrest report. Alday stopped the truck after it turned onto Angle Street and then Drury Lane. The driver was

identified as Christopher Jermaine Dudley, whom Alday said he recognized from previous interactions. According to the report, Dudley told Alday his driver's license was suspended. A records check showed the license had been suspended since July 2025 and that Dudley had a previous guilty adjudication for driving with a suspended license. Officer Rafferty arrived and deployed K-9 Dutch for a free-air sniff around the vehicle. Police said the dog alerted to the odor of illegal narcotics. Alday reported seeing a glass smoking device partially exposed from a brown paper bag in Dudley's hand. The officer said the device contained a

white residue he believed to be methamphetamine residue. During a search following Dudley's arrest, police reported finding a small bag containing approximately 0.5 grams of a crystalline substance in his right watch pocket. The substance field-tested positive for methamphetamine, according to the arrest report. Police said the glass smoking device also field-tested positive for methamphetamine. Dudley was arrested on charges of possession of methamphetamine, possession of drug paraphernalia and knowingly driving with a suspended license. At his first appearance, bond was set at \$1,000 on the methamphetamine

charge and \$500 each on the drug paraphernalia and suspended-license charges. A second incident occurred Sept. 23 when Alday reported seeing a black Chevrolet Impala and recognizing passenger Tahnea Jean Matula as someone he believed had an active arrest warrant. A law enforcement database check confirmed Matula had a failure-to-appear warrant out of Gadsden County, according to the arrest report. Alday stopped the vehicle near West River Road and Harrison Street at approximately 9:25 p.m. After Matula was detained and the warrant was confirmed, Rafferty deployed K-9 Dutch. Police said the dog gave a

positive alert for the odor of narcotics. Alday reported finding a multicolored bag in the passenger seat that Matula said belonged to her. Inside, police reported finding two empty plastic bags and a small plastic bag containing a crystalline substance that field-tested positive for methamphetamine. Matula was arrested on the outstanding warrant and a felony charge of possession of methamphetamine and transported to the Gadsden County Jail. At her first appearance Sept. 24, bond on the methamphetamine charge was set at \$2,500. The failure-to-appear case was listed as no bond. Chattahoochee police reported two additional

arrests following a Sept. 26 traffic stop. According to information released by Chattahoochee Police Chief Michael Miller, Nathan Watson was accused of possessing a felony quantity of a controlled substance and drug paraphernalia. Passenger James Peterson was accused of possessing crack cocaine and drug paraphernalia. Both men were arrested and taken to the Gadsden County Jail. Arrest affidavits providing additional details about the Sept. 26 incident were not available as of press time. The charges are accusations, and the defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty in court.

Former Florida State Hospital employee accused of sexual misconduct with patient

Erin Hill
Gadsden County News Service

A former Florida State Hospital employee is facing a felony sexual offense following allegations that he engaged in sexual misconduct with a patient at the Chattahoochee facility. Justin Hall was arrested after a patient accused him of exposing himself and making unwanted sexual advances during encounters in his office,

according to arrest documents. The patient told investigators that during one encounter she was in Hall's office waiting for a telephone call when Hall allegedly placed his hand on her knee and kissed her. According to the arrest documents, the patient said Hall told her not to tell anyone. She told investigators she attempted to take a highlighter and pen from the office as evidence

that she had been there because the office did not have cameras. Hall allegedly demanded the items back before exposing himself to the patient. The patient told investigators Hall grabbed her head in an attempt to have her perform a sex act, but she refused. The patient also described another encounter in which Hall allegedly asked her to lift her bra and touched her. During that

encounter, Hall allegedly gave her a note that said, "I love you." Investigators interviewed Hall, who had worked at Florida State Hospital for 23 years. Hall told investigators that meetings with patients were documented and conducted in groups rather than one-on-one, according to the arrest documents. Hall initially denied meeting individually with the patient and denied the

sexual misconduct allegations. Investigators later confronted Hall with surveillance footage that they said showed Hall and the patient entering his office. Hall then said he had forgotten about those instances, according to the arrest documents. During a search of Hall's office, investigators reported finding a crumpled note consistent with the note the patient had described.

The Florida Department of Children and Families, which operates Florida State Hospital, said it acted immediately upon learning of the allegations. The department confirmed Hall is no longer employed there and said it continues to cooperate with law enforcement. Court records show Hall was released on a \$5,000 bond. The allegations against Hall have not been proven in court.

Ransomware attack at Gadsden County Sheriff's Office delayed county audit

Erin Hill
Gadsden County News Service

A ransomware attack that locked the Gadsden County Sheriff's Office out of its computer systems for more than a month contributed to delays in the county's annual financial audit and other required financial reporting, according to records and information presented to county commissioners.

The attack affected the Sheriff's Office accounting system and initially left the agency able to use only one computer, according to emails from Ryan Tucker, a partner with Purvis Gray, the accounting firm conducting Gadsden County's audit for the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30, 2025. The emails, sent to county officials over several months, document how problems at the Sheriff's Office affected the progress of the countywide audit. In a Jan. 30 email, Tucker wrote that the Sheriff's Office finance officer had informed auditors that the agency had been the victim of a ransomware attack and that all of its information technology systems had been locked for more than a month, including its accounting system.

At the time, the accounting system had not been restored, Tucker wrote. The Sheriff's Office was working with information technology specialists from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement but could not provide auditors with a definitive timeline for when its systems would be restored or when its financial records would be ready for audit. While auditors had already made substantial progress reviewing other county offices, Tucker reported that none of the Sheriff's Office audit had been completed as of Jan. 30. The delay also affected another state reporting requirement. Tucker wrote that the county's Statement of County Funded Court-Related Functions was due to the state Jan. 31 but could not be completed because it required salary information from the Sheriff's Office. By March 31, audi-

tors reported that work involving the Board of County Commissioners, clerk of court, tax collector, property appraiser and supervisor of elections was approximately 85% to 90% complete. The Sheriff's Office, however, still could not provide a definitive date for when its books would be ready for audit. The March update also confirmed that the county's Statement of County Funded Court-Related Functions had eventually been submitted to the state, but after the Jan. 31 statutory deadline. The delay continued into May. In a May 13 email, Tucker said auditors had given the Sheriff's Office a May 11 deadline to provide requested information if the county was going to meet its June 30 audit reporting deadline. "As of today, we have not received any of the requested information," Tucker wrote. Auditors said at the time they were unsure when the Sheriff's Of-

fice books would be closed and ready for review. Tucker also advised county officials that it typically takes several months for the Florida Auditor General's Office to compile its list of governments with late audit submissions and recommended the county respond promptly to any correspondence concerning the missed deadline. Progress was reported by July. In a July 1 email, Tucker said the Sheriff's Office had begun providing requested documents and that audit fieldwork was scheduled to begin July 14. Auditors hoped to complete the Sheriff's Office portion of the audit by the end of July or early August and issue the countywide reports by the end of August. The audit was ultimately completed after the state's June 30 deadline. During a September presentation to county commissioners, Tucker discussed the delay and

the problems associated with the incident. Auditors recommended changes intended to reduce the risk of a similar disruption affecting the Sheriff's Office financial records in the future, including moving accounting systems to a cloud-based environment. The audit also addressed staffing and financial closing procedures at the Sheriff's Office, including recommendations to evaluate accounting staffing needs and establish procedures for completing year-end financial work and maintaining access to records. Col. Bobby Collins of the Gadsden County Sheriff's Office said the agency could not comment on the ransomware attack because it remains under active investigation. The Sheriff's Office has not publicly disclosed additional details about the attack, including who was responsible or whether a ransom was demanded or paid.



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SHOP LOCAL

Gadsden County adopts \$71.1 million budget after debate over employee cuts

Erin Hill
Gadsden County News Service

Gadsden County commissioners adopted a \$71.1 million budget for the 2026-27 fiscal year following a lengthy discussion over spending reductions and the termination of 13 full-time and four part-time employees.

The Board of County Commissioners approved the \$71,139,378 budget Sept. 22 on a 3-2 vote, with Commissioners Rontorious Green and Brenda Holt opposed.

Commissioners also unanimously approved a final property tax rate of 8.8 mills. The rate is 2.89% above the rolled-back rate of 8.553 mills.

The final budget is about \$1.05 million, or 1.49%, higher than the previous year's \$70.09 million budget.

The personnel reductions came as the county worked to make approximately \$1.6 million in cuts. Commissioners had directed the administrator to make budget cuts, but, according to Holt, the board did not direct the administrator to terminate employees.

During the budget discussion, Raynak said the positions recommended for elimination were selected to have the least impact on the county's ability to provide services.

Raynak said salary adjustments resulting from a study conducted by

the county's Human Resources department had driven salary expenses from just under \$10 million to about \$12 million in the 2025-26 fiscal year. With the reductions, Raynak said salary expenses would fall to just under \$11 million.

"We're trying to contain the rapid escalation of the expenses versus the revenue not keeping up with it," Raynak said.

Interim County Administrator Reginald James said personnel accounts for approximately 65% of county expenses. He said 13 full-time and four part-time employees were terminated.

Holt argued that commissioners should have looked further at discre-

tionary spending before employees lost their jobs.

"I'm looking at why do we even have summer youth when we have people that got laid off that have bills and responsibilities and the children are only going to get \$700 or \$800 during the summer, and these people lost their jobs," Holt said.

The Summer Youth Program was among the areas discussed for reductions. Holt also said the county could hold off on Parks and Recreation spending for a year and recommended cutting back on commissioner expenses.

"It just doesn't make any sense to me," Holt said.

Holt also raised concerns about cuts to the Apalachee Regional Planning Council. She said the council had done much of the groundwork involving Gretna and development in the county and provides planning and research assistance in an area stretching from Apalachicola to Gretna.

"What we need to do is back up from the recreational part because people are upset about their taxes but we're not showing any real cuts on the intangible things," Holt said. "If we were going to cut anything anywhere it should be in the job market so we can encourage businesses to come in."

Holt reiterated that commissioners had in-

structed the administrator to make cuts but had not instructed him to terminate employees.

James said the 13 full-time terminations were legally carried out.

Commissioners initially considered a motion on the budget that failed on a 2-3 vote.

Commissioner Shawn Wood later made a motion to adopt the 2026-27 budget. That motion passed 3-2, with Green and Holt opposed.

Wood then made a motion for commissioners to review the budget line by line within 30 days and make amendments. That motion passed unanimously.

The county's 2026-27 fiscal year begins Oct. 1.

Community Calendar

October

Monday, Oct. 5

- Fidget Fun**

Children can make their own custom fidget toys from 5 to 6 p.m. at the William A. "Bill" McGill Public Library, 732 S. Pat Thomas Parkway, Quincy. Advance registration is required by calling 850-627-7106.

Tuesday, Oct. 6

- Fidget Fun**

Children can make their own custom fidget toys from 5 to 6 p.m. at the William A. "Bill" McGill Public Library, 732 S. Pat Thomas Parkway, Quincy. Advance registration is required by calling 850-627-7106.

Monday, Oct. 12

- Fidget Fun**

Children can make their own custom fidget toys from 5 to 6 p.m. at the William A. "Bill" McGill Public Library, 732 S. Pat Thomas Parkway, Quincy. Advance registration is required by calling 850-627-7106.

Tuesday, Oct. 13

- Mod Podge Craft**

The Gadsden County Public Library System will host a free Mod Podge decoupage craft program at 6 p.m. at the William A. "Bill" McGill Public Library, 732 S. Pat Thomas Parkway, Quincy. The program is for ages 7 and older. Advance reservations are required.

Saturday, Oct. 17

- Gadsden Health Expo**

FSU Health will host the Gadsden Health Expo from 9 a.m. to noon at the Gadsden County Courthouse, 10 E. Jefferson St., Quincy. The event will offer health and community resources, giveaways and information for individuals and families.

Monday, Oct. 19

- Plush Pumpkins**

The Gadsden County Public Library System will host Plush Pumpkins from 5 to 6:30 p.m. at the William A. "Bill" McGill Public Library, 732 S. Pat Thomas Parkway, Quincy. Participants will celebrate fall by making pumpkins from recycled fabric. Advance registration is required by calling 850-627-7106.

Tuesday, Oct. 20

- Fall Canvas Painting**

Children ages 5 and older can create a fall-themed canvas painting at 6 p.m. at the William A. "Bill" McGill Public Library, 732 S. Pat Thomas Parkway, Quincy. The free program includes all supplies, and a parent or guardian must be present.

Monday, Oct. 26

- Plush Pumpkins**

The Gadsden County Public Library System will host

another Plush Pumpkins session from 5 to 6:30 p.m. at the William A. "Bill" McGill Public Library, 732 S. Pat Thomas Parkway, Quincy. Participants will make pumpkins from recycled fabric. Advance registration is required by calling 850-627-7106.

Tuesday, Oct. 27

- Family Night: Spookley the Square Pumpkin**

The Gadsden County Public Library System will host a free family night featuring "Spookley the Square Pumpkin" at 6 p.m. at the William A. "Bill" McGill Public Library, 732 S. Pat Thomas Parkway, Quincy. The program includes story time followed by a fall craft and is intended for children ages 4 and older. Parents or guardians must be present.

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Puzzles on page 5.

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RACK 3 = 57

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RACK 4 = 10

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Clyde Butcher exhibition brings Everglades to Gadsden Arts



Gator Hook #1, 2009, silver gelatin print AP 1/3, 64 x 40 inches. On loan from Window of the Eye, Inc.

Ruby Williams
Gadsden County News Service

We invite you to experience “America’s Everglades: Through the Lens of Clyde Butcher,” on view at the Gadsden Arts Center & Museum through Dec. 12. This major exhibition, on loan from Window of the Eye Inc., brings together Butcher’s monumental photography to explore Florida’s precious ecosystems and invite reflection on the beauty and vulnerability of the Florida Everglades.

While Butcher has photographed natural land-

scapes across the country, he is best known for his black-and-white images of Florida. Through his photography, Butcher encourages viewers to immerse themselves in nature’s powerful beauty and consider the importance of Florida’s natural environment.

Butcher’s work combining art and conservation, along with his mastery of the medium and his efforts to push the boundaries of what is possible with large-format film photography, have brought the artist statewide and national recognition. His honors include induction into the Florida Artists Hall of Fame in 1998 and the National Medal of Arts in 2022, the highest honor given to artists by the U.S. government.

“America’s Everglades” celebrates art, environmental history and human history in Florida. It tells the story of President Harry S. Truman, who dedicated Everglades National Park in 1947. The exhibition also includes artifacts on loan from the Museum of Florida History, offering additional insight into how Native peoples have shaped the history of the Everglades and helped preserve it in

more recent years.

On Thursday, Oct. 22, from noon to 1:30 p.m., Gadsden Arts will host Rebecca Henson, founder of the Springsong Museum in Silver Spring, Maryland, for a Dine & Discover luncheon titled “Rachel Carson: Mother of the Environmental Movement.” In connection with “America’s Everglades: Through the Lens of Clyde Butcher,” Henson will discuss the legacy of Rachel Carson and her work as a biologist, author and conservationist. Reservations are required and available through Gadsden Arts.

On Saturday, Oct. 24, Willow the barred owl

See Exhibition
on page 6



Tamiami Trail #1, 1986, silver gelatin print 2/25, 64 x 40 inches. On loan from Window of the Eye, Inc.

Laura Demakowski McAlpin, LFD

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PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

THE GADSDEN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ARE CONSIDERING PROPOSED CHANGES TO ITS BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026.

THE CHANGES WILL BE DISCUSSED AT THE BOARD'S NEXT REGULAR SCHEDULED MEETING TO BE HELD OCTOBER 6, 2026, AT 6:00 P.M. IN THE GADSDEN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSION CHAMBERS, 9 EAST JEFFERSON STREET, QUINCY, FLORIDA.

Public comment for the meeting should be submitted via email to citizenstobeheard@gadsdencountyfl.gov until 10:00am on Tuesday, October 6, 2026 in order to allow sufficient time for provision to the Gadsden county commission prior to the meeting. Any comment submitted after this time will be accepted and included as part of the official record of the meeting.

The Purpose of the Public Hearing will be to amend the following budgets:

	GENERAL FUND	SPECIAL REVENUE FUND	CAPITAL PROJECTS
REVENUE	+ (-)	+ (-)	+ (-)
Fund Balance			
Charges For Services		194,332.00	
Intergovernmental Revenue			
Transfers In			
Miscellaneous Revenue			
Net Change	-	194,332.00	-
EXPENSE			
General Government			
Public Safety		194,332.00	
Economic Environment			
Human Services			
Transportation			
Culture/Recreation			
Net Change	-	194,332.00	-

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MEETING NOTICE

The next regular meeting of the Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners will be on Tuesday, October 6, 2026, starting at 6:00 p.m. The following items have been agendaed: **Awards, Presentations, and Appearances:** Proclamation for Archie Mae Carter **Consent:** Ratification Memo, September 14, 2026, Regular BOCC Meeting, September 22, 2026, Budget Public Hearing, Approval of the Judiciary Inquiry System (JIS) Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, (DHSMV)- Access Certification Statement, Approval of DEWBERRY ENGINEERS, INC. PROVIDE DESIGN SERVICES FOR CR 65 ATTAPULGUS HWY FROM PORTER MITCHELL RD TO GEORGIA STATE LINE (Small County Road Assistance Program (SCRAP) **Items Pulled for Discussion. Citizens Requesting to be Heard on Non-Agenda Items (3-minute limit):** The Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners welcomes and encourages public participation at all Board meetings. Citizens can speak for up to three (3) minutes on non-agenda items. Public comments and participation are also encouraged for items on the agenda. Additionally, if you are unable to attend a meeting in person, comments from the Public can also be submitted via email to CitizensToBeHeard@gadsdencountyfl.gov by noon on the meeting date. Comments submitted after the deadline but prior to the meeting will be added to the official record, but the County cannot guarantee that Commissioners and staff will have adequate time to review them prior to the meeting. Citizens are further encouraged to participate on the County’s website at www.gadsdencountyfl.gov. **Public Hearings. General Business:** Approval of 2027 Small County Consolidated Waste Grant Application with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. (DEP), Approval for Chairman to Review and Sign Required Compliance Documents from Northwest Florida Health Network, Approval of the Subject: Disaster Housing Preservation Grant (\$50,000.00), Approval of the Gadsden County Housing Preservation Grant (\$5,676.00, Request Board Approval to accept the State-Funded Agreement between Gadsden County and Department of Management Services to continue GIS Maintenance to County PSAP through DataMark, Core Services for County PSAP through Indigital, and to continue 911 Recorder Maintenance through Interaction Insight Corporation, Approval of the Subject: Disaster Housing Preservation Grant (\$50,000.00), Approval of the Gadsden County Housing Preservation Grant (\$300,000.00), Approval of purchase of 22 desktop PCs from CDW, Approval of Local Agency (LAP) Time Extension for 436992-1 - CR 268 ADAMS ST FROM CR 274 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR BLVD TO CLARK ST, Approval of Local Agency (LAP) Time Extension for 436992-1 - CR 268 ADAMS ST FROM CR 274 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR BLVD TO CLARK ST, Approval of Local Agency (LAP) Time Extension for 436992-1 - CR 268 ADAMS ST FROM CR 274 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR BLVD TO CLARK ST, Approval of Local Agency (LAP) Expiration of Agreement/Time Extension for 453007-2-CANE CREEK ROAD OVER CANE CREEK BRIDGE NO. 504020 REPAIR, Approval of Local Agency Time Extension for Charles Brown Road Over Mill Dam Creek Bridge No. 504024-BSCOP Repair, Approval of SFY 2026—2027 Public Emergency Medical Transportation (PEMT) Letter of Agreement with the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration, Approval of Contract Extension with AECOM, Inc., Approval of Resolution 2026-043 which rescinds Resolution 2022-032 and terminates the prospective discretionary commitment to provide \$275,000 annually for the remaining portion of the ten-year funding period., Approval of Motorola Project Maintenance Contract Renewal, Approval to accept the 2026- 2027 State Emergency Management Preparedness and Assistance Agreement #A0678, Requesting Board approval to accept proposed funding agreement #F0192 from the Florida Division of Emergency Management for final stage of construction of the Emergency Operations Center and Public Safety Complex **Interim County Attorney:** Updates; **Interim County Administrator:** Updates; **Discussion Items by Commissioners:** Updates. (This agenda and a listing of the Receipt/File items may be viewed in electronic format on the County’s website at www.gadsdencountyfl.gov.)

If a person decides to appeal any decision by the Board of County Commissioners with respect to any matter considered at such public meeting, he/she will need a record of the proceedings and for such purpose, he/she may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes testimony and evidence to which the appeal is to be heard.

In accordance with Section 286.26, Florida Statutes, persons needing special accommodation to participate in this meeting should contact the Facilities Management Office, 9-B East Jefferson Street, Quincy, FL 32351, by written request at least 48 hours prior to the meeting. Telephone: (850) 875-8665 or 850-363-1360.



Hey, I was there to help, right? Right there in the kitchenette loaned us by the Roosevelt Hotel in Anchorage. My wife, Pam, ran the headquarters for the Iditarod Dogsled Race, and it was the second year of the race, 1974, and there I sat, a genuine Alaskan long-distance dog musher who had participated in the first race the year before.

So when a nicely dressed elderly gentleman with a thick Boston accent stopped by for coffee and questions about the race . . . hey, I'm there for you.

He said his name was Norman Vaughan and he had some questions, and we talked for more than an hour. Oh, I explained to this obvious city guy all about how the dogs were hooked up, and how far we could go each day, depending on weather. He was a good student, too. When he rose to go, he said, "Slim, I think we'll be seeing a lot of each other and become good friends."

Okay . . .

I'd never thought of dog mushing as something an elderly gentleman in a suit and tie from Boston would be interested in, but I've been fooled before. As a newspaperman, I've interviewed all kinds of fascinating folks over the years.

But there was something about Norman that I genuinely admired, even if I couldn't have said exactly what it was.

Pam and I discussed how this race had captured the attention of the world after just its inaugural run. For the record, it has begun (for 50 years now) on the first Saturday in March in Anchorage, then crosses Alaska to end up on Front Street in Nome in front of the Board of Trade Saloon, where Wyatt Earp was once the bartender, back when Nome was a boom town. This gives a guy a long, cold camping trip before he gets to Front Street. Many aren't able to complete the race for various reasons, and I was one of those. Four days in, I crushed an ankle. I crawled in the sled and the team took me 20 miles to the next checkpoint, where I was ignominiously airlifted to a hospital in Anchorage by Army helicopter.

So I guess it's only natural that a Boston gentleman would be interested in seeing how something like this could happen. And that's what Pam and I were discussing for the next half hour after Norman left.

Pam mentioned how nice it was of me to fill our visitor in on the wonderful world of dog driving. Hey, our cabin was 12 miles from the nearest road, and we had to drive the dogs to get to the car, right? Experienced dog mushers, both of us.

So about a half hour after Norman left, we were discussing him and sipping coffee when the news guy on the radio said, "The special guest at the musher's banquet tonight will be Colonel Norman Vaughan, who drove a dog team to the South Pole in support of the Byrd Expedition in 1930."

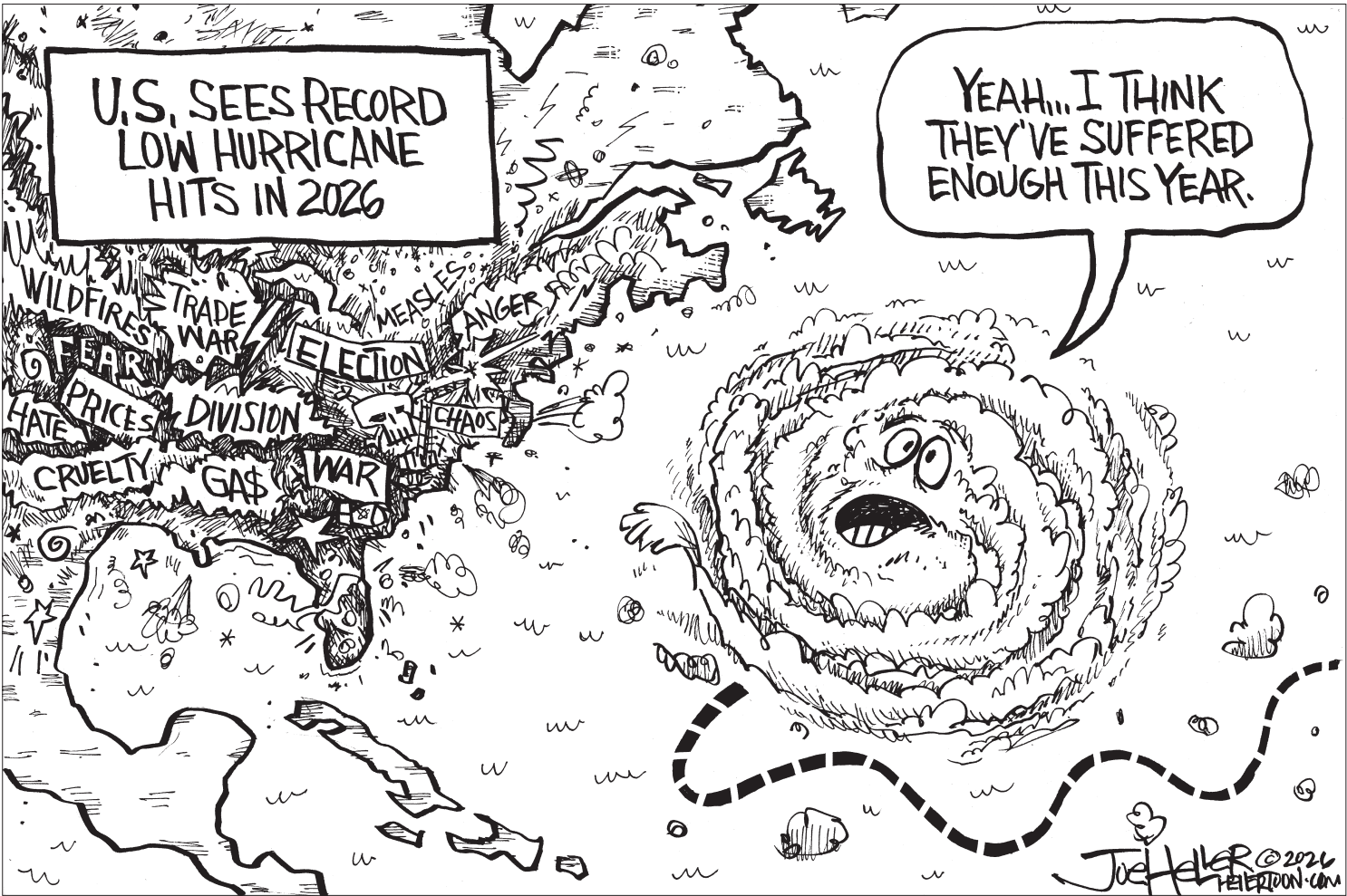
I didn't have to say anything because Pam was laughing so hard she couldn't have heard me anyway. Much to my regret, the floor in the Roosevelt Hotel didn't open up and swallow embarrassed dog mushers. I've had to live with the memory all this time.

Norman Vaughan drove his dog team to the South Pole as a possible rescuer in case Richard Byrd's plane was forced down. During World War II, Norman was in charge of dog team rescue in Greenland, where they could rescue any air crews forced down on the ice cap. More than 100 fliers were rescued by his dog teams.

Byrd named a peak in Antarctica after Norman and Norman went down there and climbed it with some friends just before his 89th birthday. He and I were friends for the rest of his life, and when Norman Vaughan finally was able to finish the Iditarod Race in Nome, one of my dogs was his leader.

But after giving this polar explorer the benefit of my vast experience in that hotel room for more than an hour, about all I could do is grin and shrug and say, "Well, at least now he knows how to do it the right way."

Brought to you by "Strange Tales of Alaska" now available online.



Nurse Judy's Nook

Friends

Judy Conlin

Life is full of heartaches. You may lose almost your entire family. You may lose most of your longtime friends. You may lose beloved pets. As one ages, there are more losses. This is the normal way life goes, although in my particular case, there may have been more losses than usual and some of them way earlier than usual. Sometimes I think about all this, and I start feeling sorry for myself.

It took an incident last week to show me how really blessed I am. Let me explain. We were on the stage at the theater getting ready to start blocking our scenes for our next show, which will be Oct. 23-25 at 2 p.m. at Tallahassee Theatre. I showed a message on my phone to one of the other actors just as we were about to begin. Quickly, I dropped the phone to the floor or into my purse. I never left the stage again except to go to my car.

I had to pick up a pair of glasses, and before I went into the store, I noticed that my phone was not in its designated spot. I immediately guessed I'd left it on the stage. I picked up my glasses and went right back to the studio. It was not on that stage.

I knew where most of the cast was eating lunch. I couldn't call them — no phone — so I drove there. I told my sad story and asked my friend who I showed my phone to if she had accidentally picked it up and put it in her bag. She immediately left the restaurant and went to search for it in her bag but came back with a negative response.

That wasn't the end of the matter. The whole group sprang into action. They were going to find that phone. First, they called our director to see if she had found it. She hadn't, but she referred us to the lady who was manning the box office to check and call us back.

In the meantime, they asked if I had gone through my bags and my car. I said I had but was going to check again. The only guy in the group there insisted he was going to go with me. He is a perfect Southern gentleman and helped me by opening doors, traversing curbs, etc. We searched through all my things again. He found a pair of shears that I had been hunting for, but we found no phone.

The lady from the theater called back. The phone was not there. She had checked the stage, the restroom and the dressing room, and the phone was not there.

They had all been dialing my phone, but it always went to voice-mail. I remembered I had turned the volume way down during church and Bible study and had not turned it back up. We were never going to hear it ringing.

Now they all decided that I must return to the theater with one of them and search again. The melee was on. Each argued why they should be the one to go back with me. Ann, the actress next oldest to me, was done eating and said she was going there now to search and would wait for whoever went with me to come.

The most adamant voice, Holly's, won out, declaring I was riding with her and she would then bring me back to get my car. They all reiterated how it might be easier for them to go, but they all offered something, one even taking the guy home as he was previously riding home with my new chauffeur. I was completely baffled as to why I needed to be driven, as I had made it there on my own, but was swept along by this new group effort.

On arrival, Ann had scoured the theater, the porch, the steps and the parking lot and discovered nothing. Undeterred, we three lifted carpet edges and shined flashlights down crevices, but all to no avail. They then called one of our members who had

not gone to lunch. She suggested calling Verizon to see if they could trace the phone. No luck there, but they did say I had some insurance to help buy a new phone.

I kept apologizing for ruining their day, but they said they had had a grand time chatting and bonding all afternoon. I said it was time to give up and go home, as the day was over. My driver was willing to leave, but she was not giving up.

"We will go back and check your car one more time," she declared.

Back we went. While she was parking her car, I began dumping everything out once again. This time, a shiny corner of something peeked out between a stapled and clipped script. It was my phone. I can't imagine how it could have fallen into such a tight hiding place, but there it was.

I tell all this to my cynical alter ego, Nurse Judy.

"Shame on you," she says. "You felt sorry for yourself when people did all this for such a pathetic, pitiful, frumpy old woman."

I hate to say it, but she is right. Old friends may be gold, but new friends can be more precious than gold. Thank you all.

**More later,
Grateful Judy
www.nursejudynfo.com**

Grace Notes

hope. mercy.

Nancy Kennedy

When I think about getting a tattoo, which I will never, ever do, I've always wanted it to say, "hope."

Lowercase letters with a period.

Lately, I've been thinking about getting a second tattoo, which I will never, ever do. This one I want to say, "mercy."

Also lowercase letters with a period.

Why a period? I don't know. But there has to be one.

hope.

I think about mercy a lot. I'm fascinated by merciful people. The ones who embrace people in ways I don't think I would.

Years ago, I read about Irish Catholic novice priests who failed to become ordained or who were dismissed for moral indiscretions. They were called "spoiled priests."

They were cast out, but instead of being outcasts, they were the ones people would go to when they

messed up their lives.

Instead of seeking help from the "official" Catholic priests, they sought the ones who also knew what it meant to be damaged goods.

They were "spoiled," but not unusable.

They still had faith. They still knew forgiveness and grace.

No judgment. Just mercy.

It's as if their falling and failing somehow made them more approachable, more attractive.

I'll never forget a story I wrote for the newspaper about a woman named Crysinda, the pastor of a tiny Pentecostal church.

She grew up watching evangelists on television and felt called to be a traveling evangelist herself. At one time she preached three services a day, seven days a week.

She wanted to change the world for Jesus.

After a while, she became discouraged and disillusioned by the things she saw — corruption and abuse of power by other ministers.

"One in particular would tell poor people that unless they gave God their food stamps and jewelry, they couldn't receive a blessing," she said.

Fed up, she walked away from anything having to do with God or the ministry and jumped headfirst into using and dealing drugs.

And yet, something way, way deep within her wouldn't — couldn't — stop believing, she said.

"I know it wasn't what God wanted for my life, but the whole time I was getting high, I was still preaching the Word," she said. "People would come to me with their spiritual questions and I'd open the Bible and we'd pray together."

That's my favorite part of her story. hope. mercy.

When I think of spoiled priests and failed evangelists, I think about my own life.

I've done things I'm not proud of. I have memories that make me cringe, others that bring shame.

I've felt like damaged goods.

Probably we all have at some time in our lives.

At times I've wondered if mercy ever runs out. As if God would ever say, "Sorry. You've reached your limit."

This morning at church the pastor read, "His mercy is over all that He has made." (Psalm 145:9)

Then he said, "This is the word of God."

I had one of those "Whoa" moments and imagined a canopy of mercy, a shelter over all He has made.

It covered everything.

Truly, our hope is that we are never beyond mercy's borders. Because of mercy, we're still usable.

Still valuable.

Worthy.

That's not a wish, but a fact.

It's not a dream, but a statement.

hope. mercy. Period.

Contact Nancy Kennedy at 352-564-2927 (leave a message) or email at nkennedy@chronicleonline.com.

At The Pump

Local, State, and National

National Average:

\$4.48 per gallon

Florida Average:

\$4.37 per gallon

Gadsden County Average:

\$4.21 per gallon

Jackson County Average:

\$4.10 per gallon

Leon County Average

\$4.21 per gallon

Numbers based on AAA Gas Prices report, as of Sept. 28, 2026.

Perfectly Pumpkin

(Culinary.net)
Fill your house with the aroma of fall with warm slices of this Pumpkin Loaf dolloped with butter.

Find more seasonal dessert recipes at Culinary.net.

Pumpkin Loaf

- Nonstick cooking spray
- 4 eggs
- 3 1/2 cups flour
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 sticks butter

- 2 cups sugar
- 1 can (15 ounces) pumpkin puree
- 1 cup chocolate chips
- 1 cup walnuts, chopped

Heat oven to 350 F. Prepare loaf and muffin pans with nonstick cooking spray. In bowl, whisk eggs. Set aside. In separate bowl, sift flour, baking soda, cinnamon, nutmeg and salt together. Set aside. In another bowl, cream

butter and sugar. Add whisked eggs and mix until blended. Alternately add flour mixture and pumpkin puree to egg mixture, beating until blended. Fold in chocolate chips and walnuts. Pour batter into loaf and muffin pans. Bake 40-45 minutes, or until toothpick inserted into center comes out clean. Cool 10 minutes before removing from pans.



Bo celebrates five years at Elephant Refuge North America



Erin Hill
Gadsden County News Service

Bo, a 12,000-pound Asian elephant who spent more than three decades in captivity before retiring to Elephant Refuge North America, marked five years at the South Georgia refuge Sept. 23. Bo arrived at the Attapulgus refuge Sept. 23, 2021, becoming its first resident. The refuge is operated by Elephant Aid International and encompasses 850 acres of rolling hills, pastures and forests. According to Elephant Aid International, Bo spent the first 34 years of his life living according to human schedules and performing in a circus environment. His arrival at the refuge required him to adjust to having considerably more freedom over where he went and how he spent his time.

Caregivers initially walked alongside Bo and guided him into the shade when he became overheated, according to the organization. Over time, he began navigating the property and making those choices independently. “Watching Bo discover his own agency over the last five years has been incredibly moving,” said Carol Buckley, founder and CEO of Elephant Aid International. “He has learned to embrace his freedom completely, choosing his own paths, forming bonds with two adoring herd mates, Tarra and Mundi, and teaching us what true resilience looks like.” Bo now shares the refuge with Tarra and Mundi and spends much of his time roaming the property. His routines also include interacting with caregiv-

ers. According to Elephant Aid International, Bo frequently makes a chirping sound when caregivers arrive with his daily supplements. If a meal is late, he may bellow from the pasture, alerting caregivers to his location. Bo also has access to a heated barn but sometimes chooses to sleep outdoors in the refuge habitat. Elephant Aid International said Bo’s five years at the refuge demonstrate how his behavior has changed as he has adjusted to an environment that allows him greater freedom to choose where he goes, when he eats and how he spends his time. The organization provides lifetime care for elephants at the refuge and works to improve conditions for elephants living in captivity.



Join Us for Great
**Food & Drink Specials
Nightly!**
Live Music
Lauren Grace
Friday, Oct 2nd
6:30pm - 9:30pm



- 🔥 Tasty Bar Bites
- 🔥 Full Dinner Menu
- 🔥 Classic Cocktails
- 🔥 Specialty Martinis
- 🔥 Beer and Wine

Check out our store and unique merchandise!

Happy Hour 4 – 7pm Daily

Karaoke
Hosted by
Local Musician
Steven Ritter
**Tuesday
Starting
at 6:30pm**

Bar Bingo
Wednesdays
**Fun and Prizes
starting at 6:30**

Prime Rib
**Thursday
5pm**



306 1st Street Downtown Historic Havana
850-397-1518
facebook.com/OffTheRailsIrishPub

FSU Health to host Gadsden Health Expo in Quincy

Erin Hill
Gadsden County News Service

Gadsden County residents will have an opportunity to receive health screenings and connect with health care providers and community organizations during the Gadsden Health Expo next month. FSU Health will host the event Saturday, Oct. 17, from 9 a.m. to noon at the Gadsden County Courthouse, 10 E. Jefferson St. in Quincy. The expo’s theme is

“Taking Charge: Your Health and Wellness Matters.” According to information from Florida State University, the event will feature health screenings, educational resources, family-friendly activities, giveaways and opportunities for residents to learn about health-related research. Attendees will also have opportunities to interact with health care providers, wellness experts and community organizations

and learn about programs and services available to individuals and families. The Gadsden Health Expo is being held in connection with Florida State University’s 2026 Discovery Days, a series of events highlighting research and related activities at the university. FSU Health, Discovery Days and Gadsden County are participating in the event. Advance registration is available for those planning to attend.

Exhibition from page 3

will join Free Family Saturday, presented by St. Francis Wildlife Association. Willow represents one of the many species that thrive in Florida’s Everglades, and children will have an opportunity to meet her and create art inspired by her. Walk-in visits are welcome Tuesdays through Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Guided tours and field trips are available for groups by calling 850-627-5024 or visiting the Gadsden Arts website. For families with children, every Saturday is a Free Family Day at Gadsden Arts, with art-making activities and exploration

for children and their favorite adults. “America’s Everglades” is presented by Tallahassee State College and Black Fig. Support for the program is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, celebrating NEA America250: Arts Projects Honoring the National Garden of American Heroes. Funding for the program was provided through a grant from Florida Humanities with funds from The Mosaic Company. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this program do not necessarily represent those of Florida Humanities or The Mosaic Company. Major exhibitions are

made possible by the Impact Fund and Watson Arts Fund. Gadsden Arts is sponsored in part by a grant from the Community Foundation of North Florida and a grant from the State of Florida, Division of Arts and Culture, with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts. The Gadsden Arts Center & Museum is located at 13 N. Madison St. in Quincy and is open to the public Tuesdays through Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free for members and children 17 and younger, \$5 for adults and \$3 for students. For more information about visiting and events, visit the Gadsden Arts website.