

# TALLAHASSEE REPORTS

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TallahasseeReports.com

## The Reports

**Tallahassee Mayor Dailey** responded to Commissioner Matlow's latest attack on City Manager Reese Goad and another city employee. **P1**

**The Leon County School Board** voted 4-1 on May 26 to place a proposed one-mill property tax increase on the November ballot. **P1**

**The Tallahassee City Commission** voted at their May 13th meeting to launch a nationwide search for the next city manager. **P5**

**Facing persistent teacher shortages** in several subject areas, Leon County Schools is considering a partnership that would recruit international educators. **P4**

**A school safety company** says Leon County's Godby High School is the first in the country to install an AI system to instantly detect a gun on campus. **P5**

**The latest jobs report** shows the Leon County April unemployment rate is 4.8%. The March unemployment rate was revised to 4.7%. **P7**

**TSC and Sterling Flight Training** have partnered to launch a new Professional Aeronautics Certification (PAC) program. **P5**

## City Receives "Forever Chemicals" Update

By Steve Stewart

City of Tallahassee officials told city commissioners this month that testing related to PFAS contamination in the Woodville area indicates the city's Southeast Farm spray field is not a significant source of groundwater contamination identified in central Woodville.

The update, presented during the May 13 City Commission meeting, outlined the city's ongoing monitoring and testing efforts related to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, commonly known as PFAS. The chemicals, often referred to as "forever

CITY, Page 5

## Matlow's Attack on Reese Goad's "Family" Backfires

*Mayor Dailey accuses Matlow of "bullying tactics"*

By Steve Stewart

What Jeremy Matlow thought was another social media driven political attack on Tallahassee City Manager Reese Goad – this time involving Goad's family – backfired when Matlow was informed he had his facts wrong.

However, the damage was done, as his false claims wrongly implicated a city employee, with Matlow accusing him of public corruption.

Matlow sought to take advantage of a recently revealed federal government audit of a grant program awarded to the city. In the process Matlow accused City Manager Reese Goad and his "brother-in-law" of "public corruption." Matlow wrote on a



Commissioner Matlow falsely accused City Manager Reese Goad, city employee of nepotism.

social media post, "Nepotism between Reese Goad as City

Manager and Adam Jacobs, Budget Director for the COT housing

department underscores the poor judgement of Reese Goad again. The

city manager and his brother-in-law have cost the city another politi-

MATLOW, Page 4

## Peter Schweizer Endorses Luke Murphy in Florida's 2nd Congressional District Race

By Steve Stewart

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Peter Schweizer, the bestselling author and government accountability watchdog known for his hard-hitting investigations into political corruption, has officially endorsed Tallahassee resident and Iraq war veteran Luke Murphy in the Republican primary race for Florida's 2nd Congressional District.

Schweizer, president of the Government Accountability Institute and author of New York Times bestselling books including *The Invisible Coup*, *Blood Money* and *Clinton Cash*, announced his support for Murphy on social media the Tuesday after Memorial Day.

"I normally spend my time exposing the things that are wrong with our politicians, and rarely publicly support ones I think will do the job well," Schweizer

wrote in a post on his personal Facebook and Twitter pages. "But Luke Murphy's story of service and sacrifice is so compelling, and his desire to continue to fight for his country, along with his combinations of smarts and strength have caused me to make an exception. I proudly endorse Luke's run for Congress, and encourage all of you to do the same."

Murphy, who faces a crowded primary field including Florida GOP chairman Evan Power, Nick Lewis, Keith Gross, Austin Rogers, Audie Rowell and Jim Norton, welcomed the endorsement as a significant boost to his campaign's credibility on government accountability issues.

"Peter Schweizer has spent decades exposing the corrupt dealings that too many politicians on both sides of the aisle would rather keep hidden," Murphy



said. "His endorsement means the world to me and to the voters of the 2nd District who are hungry for real representation, not business as usual."

Florida's 2nd Congressional District, which covers the Panhandle and Big Bend region including Tallahassee, is considered a safe seat for Republicans, and has been held by Neal Dunn since 2017. Murphy's campaign has centered on defending the constitutional rights of all Americans, supporting term limits to bring accountability back to Washington,

MURPHY, Page 6

## School Board Supports \$24M Property Tax Initiative, 4-1

By Steve Stewart

The Leon County School Board voted 4-1 on May 26 to place a proposed one-mill property tax increase on the November ballot, a move expected to generate approximately \$24 million annually for Leon County Schools as district leaders grapple with mounting financial pressures and declining student enrollment.

School board member Laurie Cox voted no.

Board members said the referendum is needed to provide additional flexibility in the district's budget, particularly as rising operational costs and state funding challenges strain finances. District officials have pointed to increasing health insurance costs, restricted funding streams, and the impact of school choice programs as contributing factors behind the budget difficulties. Earlier this year, the district cut nearly \$7 million from its budget while also pursuing renewal of a separate half-cent sales tax.

The measure, which now advances to the Leon County Commission for ballot placement approval, would increase property taxes for four years beginning in 2027 if approved by voters.

The proposal has drawn criticism from residents and community observers who argue the district has not adequately addressed long-term financial management

PROPERTY TAX, Page 5

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## INSIDE



Leon County HS Alum Lee Poppell Advances to U.S. Open Final Qualifier. P9

## Community News

# Capital City Bank Expands Tallahassee Presence with Business Banker Willie Correa

By Staff

Capital City Bank recently announced the addition of Willie Correa as a business banker stating the hire is “strengthening its commitment to serving business owners across Leon County and the greater Tallahassee region.”

Correa has more than 20 years of Tallahassee-based experience in commercial lending, business banking and relationship management.

“Business owners in the Tallahassee region need a banking partner who understands the local market and delivers

responsive, practical financial solutions,” said Don May, regional market executive for North Florida and South Georgia. “Willie’s extensive experience in commercial banking, combined with his strong community ties and relationship-focused approach, enhances our ability to serve clients and support continued growth across the region.”

The press release noted that “Correa is a relationship-driven business banker and commercial lender who helps businesses grow through personalized banking strategies, commercial lending support and business development op-

portunities. Fluent in Spanish, he works closely with clients seeking lenders for business loans as well as those looking to establish a business bank account and build long-term financial relationships.”

Prior to joining Capital City Bank, Correa spent more than 20 years in the banking and financial services industry, holding roles of increasing responsibility in commercial lending, business banking and relationship management. His experience includes structuring lending solutions, managing deposit relationships and supporting ongoing credit needs, including renewals and

portfolio growth. Throughout his career, he has contributed to the development of business banking teams and helped drive initiatives focused on expanding commercial client relationships and service offerings.

An active member of the Tallahassee community, Correa has served as president of Capital Action and Catholic Charities. He has also coached youth baseball in Tallahassee for more than 20 years. His long-standing community involvement reflects his commitment to building strong relationships and supporting local businesses.



Correa is based at the Capital City Bank Bradfordville Road Office at 6691 Thomasville Road. More information is available at [bankers.ccbg.com/fl/tallahassee/willie-correa.html](http://bankers.ccbg.com/fl/tallahassee/willie-correa.html).

# Florida A&M University Announces Dr. Robert Nobles II as SVP for Health Science Enterprise

By Alonda Thomas  
FAMUNews

Florida A&M University (FAMU) recently announced the appointment of alumnus Robert E. Nobles, II, DrPH, MPH, as the new Senior Vice President for Health Sciences Enterprise and Research Innovation. He will report to Executive Vice President for Health Sciences Enterprise and Research Innovation Donald Palm, III, Ph.D.

“I am both deeply honored and genuinely excited to extend a warm welcome to Dr. Robert E. Nobles II as our new Senior Vice President for Health Science Enterprise and Research Innovation at Florida A&M University,” said Palm. “He joins us as a nationally respected research leader with an exceptional record in driving significant research growth, building world-class infrastructure,

and nurturing a culture of excellence. His impressive background will be invaluable as we accelerate our pursuit of R1 distinction.”

Nobles will spearhead FAMU’s strategy to become a Carnegie R1 classified institution, which is the designation for research universities with the highest level of research activity, doctoral programs, and scholarly publications. He is especially skilled at mobilizing institutions to reach ambitious goals, while maximizing exceptional talent and collaborations to strengthen and architect new and existing programs and opportunities.

“I’m excited to be called back to the Hill as we begin this transformation process of becoming a Carnegie Classified R1 institution, with the highest level of research activity, doctoral programs, and scholarly publications,”

said Nobles. “Following the visionary leadership of President Marva Johnson and Executive VP Dr. Donald Palm, and partnering closely with the exceptionally talented Provost, Dr. Allyson Watson, FAMU will be a destination for future scholars ready to make a positive impact on the world around them.”

Most recently, Nobles served as the vice president for Research Administration at Emory University where he oversaw a \$1.1B research enterprise supported by more than 500 professionals. To accomplish more than 50% growth in less than 5 years, he leveraged partnerships across the university and provided strategic and operational direction for all major research administrative functions—from compliance and grant management to technology transfer. He is also the deputy director for the

SECURE Center, which is a \$50M NSF funded national research security initiative. Previously, Nobles held research leadership roles at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Texas A&M, University of Texas Health Science Center – Houston, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Nobles currently serves on the executive committee of the Federal Demonstration Partnership. He is the chair of the finance and audit committee for the Oak Ridge Associated Universities Board of Directors, and he serves on the Advisory Council of Public Responsibility in Medicine & Research.

Nobles received his Bachelor of Science in molecular biology and a Master of Public Health in epidemiology from Florida A&M University. He obtained his Doctor of Public Health in health policy &



management, health economics, and epidemiology from the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston.

“Throughout his career, Dr. Nobles has played a pivotal role in leading and scaling billion-dollar research enterprises while championing innovation, ensuring compliance, and promoting faculty success. We look forward to working together to boldly enhance our status as a premier institution of innovation, discovery, and impact,” said Palm.

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## Community News

### Florida's Young Civic Leaders to Compete in 2026 National Civics Bee® State Finals in Tallahassee

By FSU News

Florida State University's Institute for Governance and Civics (IGC) will host the 2026 Florida Statewide Finals of the National Civics Bee® at 4 p.m. Tuesday, June 30, at the Augustus B. Turnbull III Florida State Conference Center. The event will bring together middle school students from across Florida who advanced through regional competitions to compete in a live, quiz-style civics championship.

Presented in partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation and chambers of commerce across Florida, with Kinder Morgan serving as the presenting sponsor, the nonpartisan competition encourages students in grades 6-8 to deepen their understanding of

American government, civic responsibility and community engagement.

The Florida winner will earn a trip to Washington, D.C., to compete in the National Civics Bee® championship this fall, where students will compete for national honors and a first-place 529 education award of \$100,000.

This year's statewide finals will feature an interactive audience experience, remarks on the importance of civic education, and a distinguished lineup of event leaders and judges.

The emcee is Mark Harrison, the 2026 Florida Teacher of the Year and economics and government teacher at Union County High School / Lake Butler

The Keynote Speaker is Ryan Owens, Director of the IGC, who will talk on the

vital role of civic education in shaping future leaders.

The judges include: Allen Fore, VP for Public Affairs at Kinder Morgan, Inc., The Honorable Nina Ashenafi-Richardson, Leon County Judge, 2nd Judicial Court, Barney Bishop, President & CEO of Barney Bishop Consulting, LLC, Sherry Lawrance, Deerlake Middle School Civics Teacher and FSU Alumna, and DeVoe Moore, Entrepreneur.

"The National Civics Bee gives students a meaningful opportunity to strengthen their understanding of government, think clearly about their communities and see themselves as active participants in civic life," said Ryan Owens, director of the IGC. "We're proud to welcome these outstanding students to Tallahassee and celebrate the



curiosity, leadership and civic responsibility they represent."

The event is free and open to the public, and community members are invited to attend as spectators, participate in the live audience experience and cheer on students as they demonstrate their knowledge of civics and their commitment to public life.

The statewide finals reflect the IGC's broader mission to strengthen civic knowledge

and prepare the next generation of engaged citizens and responsible leaders. At a time when civic understanding matters as much as ever, the National Civics Bee® offers students a meaningful opportunity to learn, lead and contribute to their communities.

For more information about the Florida Statewide Civics Bee, visit [igc.fsu.edu](http://igc.fsu.edu).

### TSC Expands Bachelor's Offerings with Two Business-Focused Degrees

By TSC News

Tallahassee State College is expanding its bachelor's degree offerings with the launch of two new Bachelor of Applied Science (B.A.S.) programs designed to meet growing workforce needs in the Tallahassee region and across Florida.

Beginning this fall, students will be able to pursue a Bachelor of Applied Science in Auditing and Compliance Management or a Bachelor of Applied Science in Management Analytics, two programs developed in response to increasing employer demand for professionals with expertise in compliance,

risk management, business analytics, and strategic decision-making. Applications are now being accepted for both programs.

The Bachelor of Applied Science in Auditing and Compliance Management prepares students for careers in auditing, regulatory compliance, and risk management, with a strong focus on the needs of government and public-sector organizations in Florida's capital city. Students will develop skills in auditing practices, internal controls, fraud examination, governmental accounting, and risk management while preparing for careers that support accountability, transparency, and regulatory oversight across public and

private sectors.

The Bachelor of Applied Science in Management Analytics prepares students to help organizations make smarter, data-driven decisions through business analytics, strategic analysis, and operational improvement. The program equips students with skills in data analysis, visualization, business processes, and strategic management, preparing graduates for careers across industries, including government, healthcare, finance, and technology, where analytical and decision-making skills are increasingly in demand.

"As industries become more data-driven and compliance-focused, the

need for highly skilled professionals continues to grow," said Dr. Calandra Stringer, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. "Organizations today need professionals who can interpret complex information, identify risks, improve processes, and help leaders make informed decisions. These programs were designed with those workforce realities in mind."

The new bachelor's programs continue TSC's commitment to expanding accessible, workforce-focused educational opportunities that align with regional and statewide economic needs.

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## Local News

# LCS to Consider International Teachers Amid Shortages, Financial Challenges

By Steve Stewart

Facing persistent teacher shortages in several subject areas, the Leon County Schools is considering a partnership that would recruit international educators to work in local classrooms through a cultural exchange program.

District officials recently reviewed a proposal from TPG Cultural Exchange, a U.S. Department of State-designated J-1 visa sponsor that places certified international teachers in K-12 schools across the country. According to the company's presentation to the district, TPG has more than 15 years of experience

and reports a 93% year-over-year teacher retention rate in partner districts.

Publicly identified countries connected to TPG teachers include India, Jamaica, Philippines, Ghana, Uganda, Spain, and France.

The initiative is aimed at helping the district fill hard-to-staff positions, including exceptional student education, STEM fields, English language learning, and elementary education. TPG states that participating teachers must hold the equivalent of a U.S. bachelor's degree in education, have at least two years of teaching experience, demonstrate English fluency,

and obtain Florida certification before entering classrooms.

Under the proposed arrangement, Leon County Schools would interview and select candidates while TPG would manage visa sponsorship, relocation assistance, compliance requirements, and ongoing support services. The company says the J-1 visas are initially valid for three years and may be extended to five years with federal approval.

District leaders indicated the recruitment effort would not replace local hiring initiatives, but instead supplement ongoing efforts to address staffing shortages that have



affected schools nationwide. Supporters say international teachers can provide students with broader cultural perspectives and global learning opportunities in addition to filling vacancies.

TPG's materials highlighted partnerships with school districts in Florida and other states, including Duval County Public Schools and Polk County Public Schools.

# Matlow's Attack on Reese Goad's "Family" Backfires

MATLOW, From Front Page

cal, financial, and reputational black eye... This is a dark moment for our city."

Matlow continued, "Both Mr. Goad and his brother-in-law have let down our city government."

The attack backfired when it was revealed that Matlow's claims were false. The Budget Director for the city referenced in Matlow's post is not related to City Manager Goad.

Matlow used the false narrative to make dramatic claims, writing, "the embarrassment of public corruption amid allegations and findings by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development against the City of Tallahassee is the very last straw we can take."

The audit initiated by the federal government has not been completed and no find-

ings have been released.

Matlow offered an apology for his mistake at the end of Wednesday's city commission meeting but was criticized by Mayor Dailey for not understanding the impact of his irresponsible actions on an innocent city employee.

### Mayor Dailey Responds

Mayor Dailey responded to Matlow's false accusations in a four-minute speech at the end of the meeting. Dailey's comments were direct and highly critical of Commissioner Matlow's media post that Dailey characterized as a failed "political target hit" on the City Manager.

Dailey asserted that Matlow had wrongly accused a career service employee, Adam Jacobs, of "collusion of a felony"

on his official website and social media after confusing the employee with someone else due to a similar name.

Dailey described Matlow's actions as "disgusting" and "unbelievable," noting that while the City Manager is accustomed to political criticism, Matlow had extended his attacks to a subordinate professional.

Dailey emphasized that the accusation—which involved a felony that could carry serious prison time—was entirely frivolous and untrue. He highlighted that the targeted employee, Adam Jacobs, is a respected "urban farmer" and professional who has faced personal harassment and family distress as a result of the post.

The Mayor used the incident to challenge the narrative

surrounding the commission's 3-2 split, arguing that the toxic work environment at City Hall is being fueled by Commissioner Matlow's "bullying tactics" rather than the majority. Dailey claimed these tactics are directed "from the manager's office down" and reached a breaking point with the public targeting of a non-elected employee.

Dailey expressed grave concerns regarding the city's liability, stating that Matlow had potentially exposed himself and the city to one of the "greatest liable [libel] lawsuits" in its history. He formally called upon the Inspector General to investigate potential policy violations regarding how the commission treats career service employees, violations of the "non-interference clause" and the overall creation

of a hostile or toxic workplace.

The Mayor concluded by stating that a casual verbal apology at the end of a meeting was "unacceptable". He demanded that Commissioner Matlow provide a full, formal apology at the next city commission meeting, which must be issued publicly, in writing, and on social media to address the damage done to Jacobs' reputation.

Dailey ended the meeting by personally apologizing to Jacobs on behalf of the city, assuring the employee of his full support before abruptly adjourning.

Matlow left the city hall chambers while Dailey was responding to Matlow's attack on Goad.



# Leon County Gets Update on Video Surveillance Technology

## Leon County Schools Operates Over 3,000 Cameras

By Steve Stewart

The Leon County Commission recently received a detailed status report outlining how local governments and law enforcement agencies are using video surveillance technology across the community, including the growing role of artificial intelligence and privately owned security cameras in criminal investigations.

The commission voted 6 - 0 with Commissioner Welch out of Chambers, to direct the County Attorney to bring back an agenda item which analyzes the Board's legal purview and oversight options regarding the use of video cameras in public spaces to protect privacy rights and limit the collection of data by third parties.

The May 12 agenda item, requested by commissioners last month, examined the use of public-space cameras by Leon County Sheriff's Office, the City of Tallahassee, Leon County Schools and the Capital Region Real Time Crime Center.

County staff reported Leon County currently operates approximately 400 closed-circuit cameras at county buildings and parks to support public safety and protect public property. The county budgets about \$50,000 annually for camera hardware, maintenance, software and licensing. Officials said the county does not use facial recognition or other artificial intelligence technologies with its existing surveillance systems.

However, the report notes artificial intelligence is becoming more common in traffic enforcement and law enforcement technology. Leon County recently authorized school-zone speed cameras in unincorporated areas and is seeking a vendor to install and operate the automated systems. Officials said AI-assisted speed detection and license plate readers are considered industry standards for accuracy.

The report also detailed the extensive camera networks operated by other agencies. The City of Tallahassee manages approximately 245 traffic cameras through its Regional Traffic Management Center, while Tallahassee Police utilize body cam-



eras, license plate readers, infrared cameras and drones. TPD's camera operations cost roughly \$850,000 annually.

Leon County Schools operates more than 3,000 cameras districtwide, including surveillance cameras on campuses and stop-arm cameras mounted on school buses. The district also uses artificial intelligence software designed to detect visible firearms and alert law enforcement within seconds.

Meanwhile, the Sheriff's Office reported spending about \$114,000 annually on video camera systems and related services. LCSO uses AI-supported facial recognition and license plate reader technology tied into the Capital Region Real Time Crime Center, which was established in 2022 through a partnership involving local governments, Florida State University and state law enforcement agencies.

A major focus of the report was Connect Tallahassee, a voluntary program launched in March that allows residents and businesses to share security camera footage with law enforcement. Officials said the system currently includes 172 registered cameras and 215 integrated cameras connected to the crime center.

County officials said the initiative supports the board's strategic effort to combat graffiti and roadside littering. Through the county's "Love Leon County... don't trash it" campaign, officials are encouraging residents to report vandalism and littering incidents while also promoting participation in Connect Tallahassee to expand investigative resources available to law enforcement.

# Amid Enrollment Declines, LCS Considers Student Recruitment Company

By Steve Stewart

Facing declining enrollment and increased competition from charter, private and home-school options, the Leon County School Board is considering hiring student recruitment firm Caissa K12 to help bring students back to the district's public schools. During the Leon County Schools agenda review meeting on Monday, May 11th, officials received information about Caissa K12.

According to materials presented to board members, the Tennessee-based company specializes in student recruitment, retention and chronic absenteeism campaigns for public school districts across the country. Caissa says it currently works with more than 100 districts in over two dozen states and uses political-style campaign strategies to identify and recruit students.

The proposal comes as Leon County Schools faces financial pressure linked to declining enrollment. Public school districts receive state funding based largely on student attendance, meaning each student who leaves for a charter school, private school, home-schooling or another district reduces district revenue. Community discussions in Tallahassee have increasingly focused on enrollment losses and potential budget cuts or school consolidations.

The company's materials describe a "performance-based" model in which districts pay only for students who successfully enroll and attend school. Caissa says it tracks students individually to verify results and uses outreach tactics including canvassing, direct mail, phone calls, digital advertising, community events and grassroots organizing.

Caissa officials argue public

school districts now operate in a competitive environment and must actively market their programs to families. The company says its campaigns are designed to improve enrollment trends, increase state funding tied to student counts and strengthen public awareness of district offerings.

One of the biggest questions surrounding Caissa's proposal is the company's fee structure. While Leon County Schools has not publicly released a proposed payment amount, contracts in other districts provide insight into the company's pricing model.

In Orange County Public Schools, district officials approved a contract paying Caissa \$935 for every student successfully recruited or recovered who remained enrolled for at least 30 instructional days. District officials there said the company helped re-enroll 1,932 students during the first year of the agreement, generating approximately \$1.8 million in payments to Caissa. However, Orange County officials argued each returning student also generated nearly \$8,950 in state funding, leaving the district with a net financial gain.

A similar contract approved this year by Hartford Public Schools also pays Caissa \$935 per recruited student, with the agreement capped at \$500,000.

Caissa describes its services as "performance-based," meaning districts pay only for verified enrollment results rather than traditional advertising fees. The company's campaigns include direct mail, phone calls, digital advertising, canvassing, community events and grassroots outreach.

Leon County Schools officials have not yet announced whether the board will move forward with a contract.

## Local News

## City Begins National Search for New City Manager

By Steve Stewart

The Tallahassee City Commission voted at the May 13th meeting to launch a nationwide search for the next city manager following the announced retirement of longtime City Manager Reese Goad.

Goad notified commissioners of his intent to retire effective Sept. 30, 2026, or when a successor is hired. Goad has worked for the City of Tallahassee for 26

years, including serving as deputy city manager before being appointed interim city manager on Nov. 8, 2017. He was formally appointed city manager in September 2018 and has led the city for nearly nine years.

The city manager is one of four appointed officials established by the city charter and serves as the administrative head of city government. The position oversees daily operations, public safety services, utilities, budgeting, personnel

decisions and implementation of commission policies.

Under Goad's leadership, the city has managed a fiscal year 2026 operating and capital budget of approximately \$1.2 billion and assets totaling nearly \$6 billion, including pension funds. The city manager also supervises roughly 2,923 employees and oversees six municipal utilities, the region's largest law enforcement agency, Tallahassee Fire Department operations, more than 100 city parks and

the Tallahassee International Airport.

To guide the transition, city staff reviewed proposals from two executive recruitment firms already under contract with the city — Ad-Vance and S. Renée Narloch & Associates. Staff recommended hiring S. Renée Narloch & Associates based on experience, qualifications and cost.

The proposed recruitment process is expected to take about 16 weeks and cost approximately \$30,000, includ-

ing advertising, candidate screening, background checks and finalist interviews. The search will include national advertising through professional organizations and direct outreach to experienced public sector administrators.

Following the recruitment process, finalists will participate in public interviews with the City Commission before a final selection is made.

## City Receives "Forever Chemicals" Update

CITY, From Front Page

chemicals," are widely used in consumer and industrial products and have become a growing environmental and public health concern nationwide.

The update comes after local scientists requested a study on the city of Tallahassee's Southeast Farm water treatment spray field on Tram Road as a potential source of contamination found in a number of private wells throughout the Woodville area.

According to the report, the city has conducted ex-

tensive sampling of drinking water, wastewater influent, treated effluent sprayed at the Southeast Farm, biosolids, groundwater wells, and industrial users connected to the wastewater system.

Testing results showed PFAS levels in treated wastewater sprayed at the Southeast Farm measured 2.2 parts per trillion for PFOA and 2.3 parts per trillion for PFOS. Those levels are below the federal drinking water standard of 4 parts per trillion established for both compounds.

City officials said groundwater monitoring data also supports the conclusion that the Southeast Farm is not the primary source of elevated PFAS levels discovered in central Woodville. The report noted that the groundwater contamination area identified by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection is approximately 2.74 miles from the spray field.

The update stated that most private well samples collected by the Florida Department of Health in Woodville were below the

new federal drinking water standard. As of March 25, 2026, 85 of 112 private well samples tested below 4 parts per trillion. One well on Oak Ridge Road East measured 76 parts per trillion for PFOS, above the state's provisional groundwater cleanup target level of 70 parts per trillion.

City officials said additional sources are likely contributing to PFAS contamination entering the wastewater system. Sampling identified elevated PFAS levels associated with landfill leachate, laundry operations and car

washes.

The city emphasized that Tallahassee's public drinking water continues to meet all regulatory standards and said officials have been proactive in testing for PFAS prior to regulatory mandates.

The report also noted that PFAS regulations continue to evolve at both the federal and state levels. City officials said Tallahassee will continue monitoring drinking water and wastewater systems while working with state agencies on the broader Woodville investigation.

## School Board Supports \$24M Property Tax Initiative, 4-1

PROPERTY TAX, From Front Page

issues before seeking additional taxpayer funding. Critics have highlighted that student enrollment in Leon County has declined for at least five consecutive years, while the district has continued adding administrative positions.

Questions about administrative growth have become a focal point in the debate. Critics contend the district has failed to explain why more administrative staff are needed despite serving fewer students. Others have called for an independent review of the district budget before voters are asked to approve higher property taxes.

Supporters of the referendum argue the additional funding is necessary to maintain employee pay, school safety initiatives, and educational services amid continued financial uncertainty.

After the vote, board members and Superintendent Hanna pledged to address the administrative staffing issue.

## TSC, Sterling Flight Launch "Zero to Hero" Pilot Training Program

Tallahassee State College (TSC) and Sterling Flight Training have partnered to launch a new Professional Aeronautics Certification (PAC) program, creating an accelerated pathway for students pursuing careers as professional pilots.

The innovative program was developed in response to the nationwide pilot shortage and is designed to help students move from zero flight experience to commercial pilot readiness in as little as 12 to 16 months.

The PAC program combines comprehensive ground school instruction with hands-on flight training, preparing students for FAA pilot certifications and entry into the aviation workforce. Through a cohort-based model, students progress together through training in a focused, collaborative learning environment while gaining the knowledge, flight hours, and practical experience needed to pursue careers in aviation.

Students will split their training between classroom instruction at TSC and flight instruction at Sterling Flight Training, located

at the Bobby Bowden Tallahassee International Airport. The program includes classroom learning, simulator training, one-on-one flight instruction, and aircraft-based flight time, allowing students to earn 250 to 300 flight hours.

Unlike many traditional collegiate aviation programs, the PAC program is intentionally non-degree, focusing directly on the FAA certifications required for employment as a professional pilot.

"Professional pilots get paid for their FAA licenses, not their degrees, so we chose to cut out the aviation-related degree that many other colleges offer and that their graduates rarely monetize," said Dr. Chris Johnson, program architect and former professor at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University.

The program is designed to make aviation careers more accessible to a broad range of students, including traditional college students, career changers, and Veterans seeking a streamlined pathway into the aviation industry.

"Aviation is one of the fastest-growing workforce sectors in the

country, and this partnership allows TSC to respond quickly to industry demand while creating life-changing career opportunities for our students," said Shelly Bell, Vice President for Workforce Development at Tallahassee State College. "The PAC program provides an accelerated, affordable pathway into high-paying aviation careers right here in our region."

The Professional Aeronautics Certification program is scheduled to launch in Fall 2026. Space is limited, and prospective students are encouraged to apply early. For more information about the Professional Aeronautics Certification program or to apply online, visit Sterling-Flight.com.

There will be a free, community event to celebrate the program's launch on Wednesday, May 20, at Sterling Flight School. The event will have aircraft displays, program information sessions, networking with aviation professionals, a raffle for a free discovery flight, and pizza.

## Local News Briefs

## Godby High School Pilots Gun Detection System

A large school safety company says Leon County's Godby High School is the first in the country to install an AI based system to instantly detect and report a gun on campus. Zero Eyes School Safety President Chris Heilig says the technology uses the school's existing network of cameras. These pass the suspected gun image to a human-staffed response center. Personnel there make the final determination about the legitimacy of the threat. If confirmed, they then sound the alarm to the designated responders.

"So the camera feed at the school detects the gun with our software, we receive an image with a bounding box around that weapon, and then we communicate to the school district, 911, law enforcement to say, 'There's a weapon on campus.'" The entire process, says Heilig, is very close to instantaneous.

"Within 3 to 5 seconds, if it's a dispatched weapon on campus, it's go time and we're all working to head that off at the pass."

The same Zero Eyes technology, said a company spokesman, was used to alert police in early May to the presence of a gun in a parking garage at Florida State University. The school brought it online after last year's fatal on-campus shooting.

## Leon County to Hold Workshop on COCA Future

During the May 12 Leon County Commission meeting, approximately 50 speakers addressed an item that recommended an alternative administrative structure for Leon County's Cultural Grant Programs, currently administered by the Council on Culture & Arts (COCA), under a one-year agreement that ends September 30, 2026.

Staff recommends bringing the cultural grant program and cultural tourism marketing in-house through the County's Division of Tourism. Doing so would restore County custody of cultural grant funding, align the program with the oversight that governs the County's other TDT grants and integrate cultural tourism marketing into the County's destination marketing operations. The re-

structure would also produce approximately \$213,000 in annual operating cost savings and establish standardized outcome reporting for cultural grant investments.

After a lengthy discussion, Commissioner Cummings made a motion to bring back this issue during the Budget Workshop on June 16, 2026. The motion passed 5 – 1 with Vice Chairman O'Keefe in opposition and Commissioner Welch out of Chambers.

## Historical Harms Issue Headed Back to Charter Review Committee

At its April 14, 2026 meeting, the Leon County Commission requested a framework to address historic harmful public policy decisions that could be provided to the Citizen Charter Review Committee for further consideration as a charter amendment based on geographic areas rather than race, gender, ethnicity, or any other protected class; consistent with state and federal laws; and does not jeopardize state and federal funding.

At the May 12 meeting, staff provided context by demonstrating the County's

comprehensive and ongoing efforts to address the needs in geographic areas through investment and engagement in underserved areas and vulnerable populations that align with best practices; are consistent with state and federal laws; and do not jeopardize state and federal funding awarded to the County.

After discussion, Commissioner Maddox made a motion to direct the Citizen Charter Review Committee to consider a proposed charter amendment addressing historic harmful public policy decisions based on geographical areas in the community rather than race, gender, ethnicity, or any other protected class; compliant with state and federal laws; and does not jeopardize state and federal funding.

The motion passed 4 – 2 with Commissioner Cummings and Chairman Caban in opposition and Commissioner Welch out of Chambers.

## TPD to Hold Annual Law Enforcement Memorial During Historic Bicentennial Year

On Thursday, May 28, at 9 a.m., the Tallahassee Police Department (TPD) honored

fallen law enforcement heroes during its annual Law Enforcement Memorial Ceremony in front of TPD Headquarters on Seventh Avenue.

The solemn ceremony recognized the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving and protecting their communities. As TPD commemorates its bicentennial year in 2026, the memorial also served as a reminder of the generations of officers who have dedicated their lives to safeguarding Tallahassee over the past 200 years.

"This ceremony is an opportunity to pause and remember the sacrifice and service of those who gave everything in the line of duty," said Chief Lawrence Revell. "As we reflect on TPD's bicentennial year, we also honor the legacy of the men and women whose commitment to this profession helped shape our department and community."

During the ceremony, TPD's Honor Guard lowered the flags to half-staff in remembrance of the fallen.

## State News

# Lawmakers Complete Budget Deals

By Gray Rohrer  
The News Service of Florida

House and Senate leaders reached a final deal on the state budget late Sunday night, the last step in an extended process that required a special session to complete for the second year in a row.

The spending plan for the fiscal year that starts July 1 will be nearly \$115 billion, less than the Senate's preferred budget but not the \$113.6 billion plan preferred by the House.

House Speaker Daniel Perez, R-Miami, had insisted on larger cuts to the existing budget, fearing projected deficits in future years if spending wasn't curtailed. The chambers couldn't reach an agreement during the regular session that ended March 13.

Legislators plan to approve the budget Friday and send it to Gov. Ron DeSantis.

Here's a look at some of the agreements reached Sunday:

### EDUCATION

After clashing during the regular session over the state voucher program, the chambers agreed to keep the \$4.5 billion for scholarships for homeschool and private school tuition inside the main funding formula for K-12 public schools.

An audit showing mismanagement of the program in November spurred the Senate to push for changes to ensure scholarship funds are being paid correctly, but the House wouldn't go along.

The chambers also approved a provision to prevent deep cuts to school districts, which are seeing declining enrollment. Two counties, Union and Glades, saw their school districts put on emergency administration after enrollment declines jeopardized their solvency, and lawmakers moved to prevent the same from happening in other counties.

A measure setting aside \$7 million for capital improvements at private schools in "financially disadvantaged" areas was amended to require the funds to be spent in rural counties with less than 10,000 people, with the funds disbursed by Dec. 1.

Lawmakers will also allow Florida State University to use existing funds to pay for the acquisition of Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare. FSU agreed to buy the hospital from the City of Tallahassee earlier this year, paying \$3.6 million per year for 30 years, and investing \$1.7 billion in the same period.

There's also a deal in place to transfer control of the University of South Florida's Manatee-Sarasota campus to New College of Florida, which the House wanted but the Senate resisted until late in budget negotiations.

### HEALTH CARE

In the health care portion of the budget, one point of contention was the Cancer Innovation Fund championed by First Lady Casey DeSantis. The Senate preferred \$30 million while the House didn't want to fund the program that seeks to boost cancer research, but the chambers settled on

\$20 million on Sunday evening.

Lawmakers provided emergency funding during the regular session to the AIDS Drug Assistance Program, which faced cuts by the Department of Health amid a shortfall of federal funding. That funding only lasts until June 30, the end of the fiscal year. Now, the program that helps HIV patients get needed prescriptions will receive \$75 million, as top budget negotiators acknowledged the cuts earlier this year pushed people in the program to get private coverage to get their medications.

A \$50 million fund that was part of a 2024 law championed by Sen. Kathleen Passidomo, who was Senate President at the time, was eliminated in the last round of budget talks. The Health Innovation Council, though, still has funds from the current year to help bring new medical technologies to hospitals.

The House wanted \$250,000 to study the effects of leaving the federal health care exchange, where residents can shop for Affordable Care Act plans, but the Senate didn't agree to it.

### ENVIRONMENT

When the Legislature ended the regular session without a budget in place, DeSantis threatened to veto the spending plan if it didn't include enough funding for Everglades restoration projects.

The final budget deal has \$514 million for such projects, which McClure and Hooper said should satisfy DeSantis. But they said his veto threat wasn't on their mind during negotia-

tions.

"\$514 million is well above the statutory minimum and it is a lot of money and should continue the (Everglades restoration) efforts," House budget chief Rep. Lawrence McClure, R-Dover, said.

The chambers also agreed to \$425 million for the Rural and Family Lands program, which pays for easements on agricultural land to prevent development on farmland.

### OTHER ISSUES

As part of the budget deal, the state will also provide \$4.5 million in grants to county supervisors of elections to pay for software or hardware to conduct post-election audits.

And there will be \$4 million for the families of the Groveland Four — Ernest Thomas, Charles Greenlee, Samuel Shepherd and Walter Irvin — African-American men falsely accused of raping a white woman in Lake County in 1949. They were pardoned in 2019 and exonerated in 2021. The Senate had the measure in its initial budget but the House resisted the provision until the last week of budget talks.

One issue where the chambers couldn't reach an agreement was on security funding. The Senate wanted to pay for a security detail for DeSantis and his family for one year after he leaves office on Jan. 5, but the House wouldn't go along. Also, the Senate didn't agree to the House push to provide security to the nominees for governor of each major party after the Aug. 18 primary election.

## DOJ Charges Ex-Cuban Leader Raúl Castro With Murder, Conspiracy to Kill For 1996 Shoot-Down

By Liv Caputo  
The Florida Phoenix

The Trump administration has charged former Cuban president Raúl Castro with murder and conspiracy to kill for his alleged role in the 1996 shoot-down of two civilian rescue flights.

The Department of Justice announced the development Wednesday at Miami's Freedom Tower — the long-standing beacon for Cuban exiles.

A warrant for the 94-year-old's arrest has already been issued, officials said. Five others have also been charged.

"For the first time in nearly 70 years, senior leadership of the Cuban regime has been charged in this country — in the United States of America — for acts of violence resulting in the deaths of American citizens," said acting U.S. Attorney General Todd Blanche, revealing the indictment on Cuban

Independence Day.

"Today's indictment, while it does not bring back the murdered victims, it makes a statement," he continued. "The United States government has not forgotten these innocent men who were shot out of the sky."

While the indictment wasn't unsealed until Wednesday, a Miami grand jury returned the charges against Fidel Castro's younger brother on April 23, Blanche said. These include murder, conspiracy to kill U.S. nationals, and destruction of aircraft.

Five airmen with alleged involvement in the shootdown were charged with conspiracy to kill U.S. nationals.

The move marks a turning point in President Trump's mounting pressure on the economically crippled island. It's his most aggressive maneuver yet, following stark warnings that Cuba would be "next" after Venezuelan dictator Nicolas Maduro's capture, clandestine Cuban-related meetings

involving Secretary of State Marco Rubio and CIA Director John Ratcliffe, and reports that Cuba has amassed more than 300 military drones.

It remains unclear how the Trump administration plans to force Castro to stand trial. Blanche told reporters that he expects Castro to "show up here," but they could also get him "another way."

"This isn't a show indictment," he said. "We indict men outside of this country all the time."

### Brothers to the Rescue

The charges come two months after Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier announced a state-level criminal investigation into Castro, one of the last leaders of the 1959 Cuban revolution, the Phoenix has reported. Uthmeier joined U.S. Sen. Ashley Moody and a host of federal officials in Miami on Wednesday.

"There can be no future for a free

Cuba as long as the Castros and their criminal gang of thugs remain in power," Uthmeier declared.

The case centers on the Brothers to the Rescue flights by a 1990s Miami group that regularly scoured international waters for Cuban refugees.

But in 1996, two of their twin-engine Cessnas were shot out of the sky by Cuban MiGs, killing three Americans and one U.S. permanent resident.

Two Cuban spies who had infiltrated the nonprofit provided flight details to the Cuban government, resulting in the attack, according to CBS News. Although a U.S. federal court indicted a Cuban general and two fighter pilots for the crimes in 2003, charges were never brought against the Castros. Fidel Castro died in 2016.

South Florida lawmakers — representing the largest Cuban diaspora in the nation — have demanded a probe into Castro for decades.

## Florida Sees Drop in First Quarter Tourism

By Jim Turner,  
The News Service of Florida

Florida attracted slightly fewer tourists in the first quarter than during the same period last year, data from the state's tourism marketing agency released Tuesday show Visit Florida reported an estimated 39.89 million people journeyed to the state between January 1 and March 31, down 1 percent from the first quarter of 2025.

Florida's figures remain bolstered by people traveling from other states, which accounted for 36.54 million, or nearly 92 percent, of the visitors in the first quarter. The quarterly total is 1.2 percent fewer than in the first quarter of 2025 and the lowest for the quarter since 2022 when 36.39 million people traveled to Florida as the nation was

still emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before the quarterly numbers were released, Visit Florida President and CEO Bryan Griffin told members of the public-private agency's executive committee they have seen an increase in people driving to Florida, with some flying to airports outside the state and then motoring south.

"We need to let those numbers settle before we know for sure," Griffin said in a conference call last Wednesday.

There were 2.29 million overseas travelers to Florida in the first quarter of this year, up 8.5 percent from the same period of 2025, and 1.05 million Canadians, 12.1 percent fewer than last year.

The Canadian figures would have been more pronounced without

changes to the 2025 figures.

Included with the first quarter report, Visit Florida revised the overall count for 2025 from 143.29 million to 143.33 million.

Among the changes was an increase in Canadian travelers from 2.9 million to 3.17 million for the year and 1.06 million to 1.2 million for the first quarter of 2025.

"The revised data reflects delayed final reporting from kiosk issues at Ontario ports resulting in an undercount of U.S. visits in quarterly travel surveys," a release from Visit Florida stated. "The updated analysis also more accurately captures evolving Canadian travel patterns, including travelers driving into the United States before flying onward to Florida."

The overseas count is the most

ever for the quarter, topping the 2.28 million in 2019, the year before the pandemic.

Griffin called the overseas figures "phenomenal, with travel from the United Kingdom up 17.2 percent from the first quarter of 2025 and from Ireland by 14.5 percent in the same time.

"We continue to lean in and encourage and invite people from overseas, and to develop the way that we do business there and the marketing efforts that we have there," Griffin said. "And we've got some great things planned for the year ahead."

Brazil has surpassed the United Kingdom in the past two years as the top source of overseas travelers. In 2025, Brazil accounted for 10.5 percent of overseas travelers. The United Kingdom was at 9.7 percent last year.

## Peter Schweizer Endorses Luke Murphy in Florida's 2nd Congressional District Race

MURPHY, From Front Page

and standing up for the veterans who sacrificed to protect our nation. Murphy describes his beliefs as "a commonsense, America First approach that delivers real results for first responders, veterans, farmers, and hardworking middle-class

families."

Schweizer's endorsement adds national conservative credibility to Murphy's bid and is expected to help with fundraising ahead of the August 18th primary.

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Business News

# Leon County Job Growth Stagnate in April

The latest jobs report shows the Leon County April unemployment rate was 4.8%. The March unemployment rate was 4.7%. The increase was due to the lack of job growth coupled with a modest increase in the workforce.

Job growth was essentially flat in April when compared to March, as the number of unemployed increased from 7,790 to 8,095 in April.

There were 158,830 people working in Leon County in April compared to March's revised employment number of 158,733. The size of the workforce in April was 166,925 up from the

166,523 reported in March.

### Year Over Year Comparisons

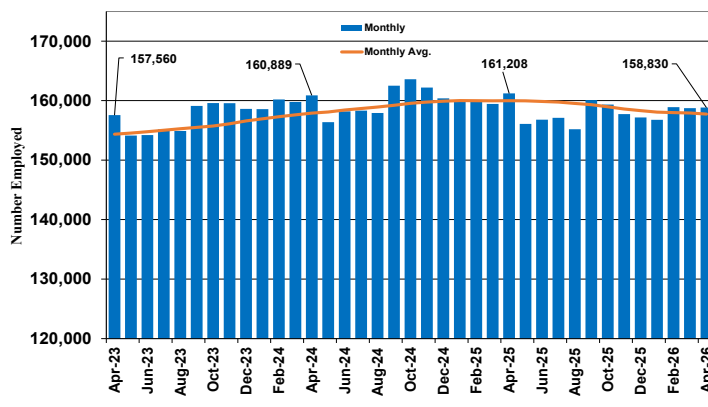
The Leon County Jobs Report, provided below, shows the number of people working in April 2026 was 2,378 less than in April 2025. The April labor force – those looking for jobs – came in at 166,925 which was 154 more than reported one year ago.

The April unemployment rate of 4.8% is up from the 3.3% reported one year ago. At the state level, the April unemployment rate of 4.6% (not seasonally adjusted) was up from the 3.4% reported one year ago.

The chart below shows the monthly level of jobs in Leon County over the last 37 months with a 12-month average trend line. The highlighted numbers relate to employment levels for the month of April

Leon County Monthly Employment

Data: 2023-2026, Source: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity



back to 2023.

Leon County Jobs Report				
	Apr-24	Apr-25	Apr-26	Chg 25/26
Jobs Added	1,108	1,763	97	
Tot. Employed	160,889	161,208	158,830	-2,378
Tot. Labor Force	165,766	166,771	166,925	154
Unemploy. Rate (%)	2.9	3.3	4.8	1.5

Source: Florida Department of Econ. Opportunity

# Residential Building Permits Continue to Rebound in April

According to filings with Leon County and the City of Tallahassee, the number of single-family residential construction permits was up 27.3% in April 2026 when compared to April 2025.

There were 70 permits issued in April 2026, compared to 55 permits issued one year ago. There were 58 permits issued last month, March 2026.

The 3-Mnth Avg. data (Feb. – Apr.), which smooths out the month-to-month volatility, shows a

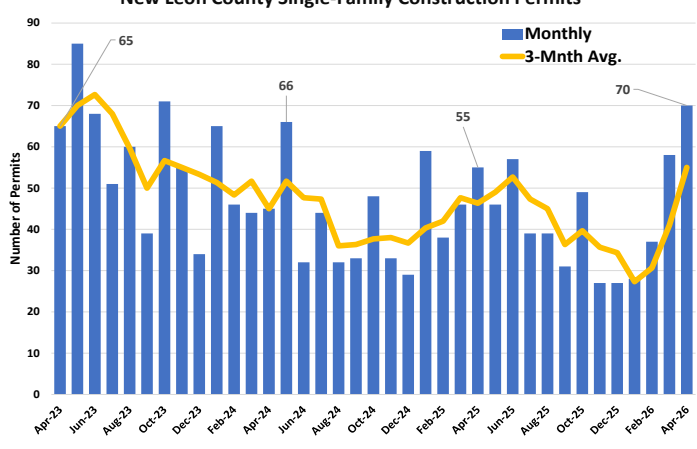
18.8% increase in the number of permits issued over the same 3-month period one year ago.

The 3-Mnth Avg. data show a 0.8% increase in monthly average permit value during this period. The 3-month average permit values increased from \$12.1 million in April 2025 to \$12.2 million in April 2026.

The chart below shows the number of permits issued each month for the last 37-month period. A 3-month average line is also included. The highlighted numbers relate to permits issued in the month of April back to 2023.

The chart shows that the 3-month average declining trend that began in June 2025 has been reversed. The year-to-date (YTD) numbers through April show 2026 permits (193) is

New Leon County Single-Family Construction Permits




just behind the number of permits issued during the start of 2025 (198).

New SFR Permit Report				
	Apr-25	Apr-26	Chg	%Chg
Permits	55	70	15	27.3%
Value (millions)	\$ 13.5	\$ 12.6	\$ (0.9)	-6.7%
3-Mnth Avg.	46.3	55.0	8.7	18.8%
Value (millions)	\$ 12.1	\$ 12.2	\$ 0.1	0.8%

Source: Leon County, Office of Econ. Vitality

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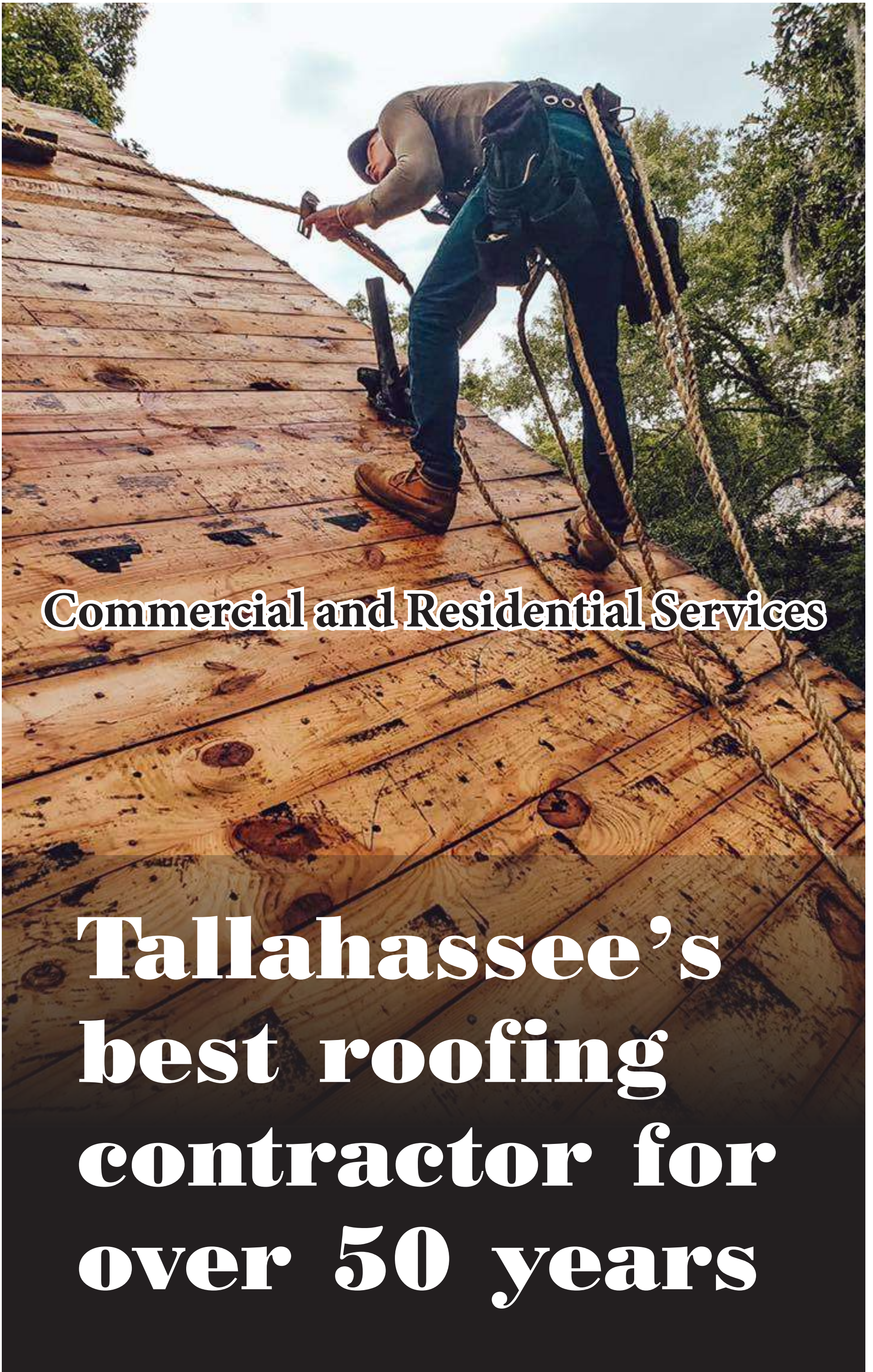
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## Local Sports

### Multiple Leon County Athletes Compete in Boys Weightlifting State Tournament

By Robert Stewart

Starting on May 6th, the FHSAA Boys Weightlifting State Championship took place at the RP Funding Center in Lakeland, FL. Four Leon County schools were represented in two different classifications with Florida High and Maclay having athletes compete in the 1A class and Lincoln and Godby having athletes compete in the 2A class.

In high school weightlifting, the Traditional and Olympic categories use different lifts to determine an athlete's total score. Traditional weightlifting combines the bench press and squat, focusing more on overall strength and powerlifting-style movements. Olympic weightlifting combines the snatch and clean and jerk, which emphasize explosive power, speed, technique, and full-body coordination. Athletes can compete in one or both categories during meets and championships.

#### Class 1A

Florida High and Maclay athletes delivered multiple podium finishes at the FHSAA 1A Boys State Weightlifting Championships, highlighted by a pair of runner-up performances from Florida High's Jason Harville and strong Olympic showings from both Tallahassee programs.

Florida High placed seventh overall in the Traditional competition with nine points and fifth overall in the Olympic standings with 12 points. The Seminoles were led by Harville in the 219-pound class, where he earned second place in both disciplines. Harville totaled 635 pounds in the Traditional competition and followed with a 545-pound total in Olympic lifting to secure another state runner-up finish.

Jason Aliche also produced a standout performance for Florida High in the 238-pound class, finishing third in both categories. Aliche recorded a 635-pound total in Traditional lifting before adding a 540-pound Olympic total for another pair of podium finishes.

In the Unlimited class, Micah Deem added points for the Seminoles with a fourth-place finish in Olympic lifting after totaling 510 pounds. Luis Rodriguez competed in the 119-pound division and placed 10th in Traditional with a 305-pound total, while Antonio Dickey Jr. finished 11th in the Olympic standings of the 154-pound class with a 385-pound total.

Maclay also saw success at the state meet, led by Justin Murphy's podium finish in the Olympic competition. Competing in the 183-pound class, Murphy placed

third with a total of 480 pounds after also finishing eighth in Traditional lifting with a 530-pound total.

Andrew Guyer added a ninth-place Olympic finish in the 169-pound division with a 420-pound total, while Nic Streety placed 12th in the 199-pound Olympic field after totaling 430 pounds. Abram Wildrick rounded out Maclay's state qualifiers with an eighth-place finish in the Unlimited Olympic division, recording a total of 480 pounds.

#### Class 2A

Lincoln and Godby represented Tallahassee at the FHSAA 2A Boys State Weightlifting Championships, with Lincoln earning a top-five finish in the 169-pound class.

Lincoln tied for 25th overall in the traditional standings with three points, led by Javon Johnson's fourth-place finish in the 169-pound division after totaling 590 pounds. Kaylen Rogers also competed for the Trojans in the 183-pound class, placing 11th with a total of 565 pounds. Both Lincoln lifters competed exclusively in the Traditional category.

Godby's Tre Stenson competed in the unlimited class and finished ninth in the Traditional competition with a total of 625 pounds.

### Leon County Alum Lee Poppell Advances to U.S. Open Final Qualifier

By Robert Stewart

After developing into one of the top young golfers in the Big Bend area at Lincoln High School and Maclay School, Lee Poppell has continued that success at Troy University. The rising senior recently took another major step in his career after shooting a 4-under 68 to tie for second place at a local qualifier for the U.S. Open Golf Championship at The Plantation at Ponte Vedra. Poppell recorded six birdies during the round, including four on the back nine after making the turn at even par, earning a spot in the final qualifying round for one of golf's most prestigious tournaments.

The performance continued a strong junior season for Poppell at Troy, where he posted a 72.06 stroke average and a 0.25 score versus par. He led the Trojans with 15 under-par rounds in 32 total rounds and finished inside the top 25 in eight of 11 events, including a tie for 18th at the Sun Belt Championship entering U.S. Open qualifying.

Before his collegiate success, Poppell built an impressive high school and junior golf résumé in Tallahassee. He finished second at the 2022 Florida Junior Tour Championship and tied for 34th at the 2022 Florida Amateur Championship while competing against many of the state's top amateur golfers. He also captured the 2022 Big Bend Championship in dominant fashion, firing a 7-under 65 to win by six strokes in one of the premier tournaments in the Florida Panhandle. Later that spring, he shot a 2-under 70 to win a district championship title. Poppell also earned multiple victories on the Southeast Junior Golf Tour in 2021, winning events at Wynlakes and Sea Palms while adding a fourth-place finish at the Ben An Junior Championship.

### Leon Alum Jayvin Strouble Wins Conference Title at 2026 ASUN Track & Field Championships

By Robert Stewart

The 2026 ASUN Outdoor Track & Field Championships took place May 14th - May 16th with nine teams competing including UNF, Austin Peay, Bellarmine, Central Arkansas, ECU, Jacksonville, Lipscomb, Queens and West Georgia. Leon High alumnus Jayvin Strouble competed in the high jump for University of North Florida, ultimately setting a personal record and claiming a conference title while helping the Ospreys finish second overall as a team.

Strouble contributed 10 points for UNF as he set a PR of 2.09m (6 10¼") in the high jump as a freshman during his first conference champion-

ship appearance. The Ospreys men's track and field team fell short of first place with 164 points behind Central Arkansas who placed first as a team with 229 points.

During his freshman outdoor season at the University of North Florida, Strouble continued to compete against strong collegiate competition in the high jump. Strouble placed 11th at the UCF Knights Invite after clearing 1.96 meters before earning a fourth-place finish at the Dick Roberts Seminole Invitational with a mark of 1.95 meters. He later matched his season-best clearance of 1.96 meters to place 16th at the Georgia Tech Invitational and finished 10th at the East Coast Relays with a jump of 1.93 meters.

During his senior season with Leon

in 2025, Jayvin Strouble established himself as one of the top high school high jumpers in the state. Strouble dominated the postseason, winning both the FHSAA 3A District 2 and Region 1 championships with matching jumps of 1.97 meters to qualify for the state finals. He also won seven outdoor meets overall, including the Tommy Taylor Invitational with a season-best clearance of 2.05 meters. Strouble added victories at the FSU Relays and the Chiles Capital City Track & Field Classic with jumps of 2.03 and 1.97 meters, respectively. At the FHSAA 3A State Finals, Strouble placed fifth with a mark of 1.92 meters before going on to finish ninth nationally at New Balance Nationals Outdoor and third at the AAU National



Club Championship after clearing 2 meters.

See previous high school coverage of Jayvin Strouble here: Leon County Track & Field State Championship Results and Top Leon County Performances in Boys Track and Field




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## Local Sports

# Rickards' Crumitie and Belcher Win Multiple Track and Field State Titles

By Robert Stewart

Starting on May 6th and finishing on May 9th, multiple Leon County schools competed in the different classifications of the FHSAA Track and Field State meet held at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville, FL. Eighteen Leon County athletes placed top three in their event with multiple athletes bringing home state titles.

### Class 3A

The Rickards track and field team had two standout performances from Davion Crumitie on the boys side and Journee Belcher on the girls side. Crumitie won two individual state titles placing first in the 100-meter dash with a time

of 10.3 and placing first in the 200-meter dash with a time of 20.79. Crumitie also took home gold in the 4x100 Meter relay alongside teammates Aaron Johnson Jr., Christian Randolph and Demari Bouie with a total time of 40.96. On the girls side, Belcher came back to Tallahassee with three state titles and a third-place finish. Belcher placed first in the 200-meter dash with a time of 23.60, placed first in the 400-meter dash with a time of 53.19, placed first in the high jump with a height of 1.72m and placed third in the 100-meter dash with a time of 11.70. Rickards' Sacori Gardner also competed in the 100-meter dash placing second with a time of 11.64.

Chiles had three athletes

place in the top three in their respective event including Allison Davenport, who was the only Chiles athlete to bring home a state title placing first in the girls pole vault with a height of 3.6m. Chiles' Lelia Jones also competed in the girls pole vault placing third with a height of 3.45m. On the boys side, Joshua Hicks placed second in the 3200 meter run representing the Timberwolves with a time of 8:56.84.

Lincoln had three athletes with notable performances including Kennedy Scott who won a state title placing first in the girls discus with a throw of 47.14m. Lincolns Anthony Vail placed second in the 110 meter hurdles with a time of 13.88 while also placing third in the 400 meter hurdles with a time

of 53.77. Matthew Hauser represented the Trojans in the 3200 meter run placing third with a time of 9:17.64.

### Class 2A

Florida High's Micah Deem brought a state title back to Tallahassee as he placed first in the boys shot put with a throw of 16.59m. Deem was the only Seminole to place in the top 3 in their respective event.

### Class 1A

Maclay had two athletes bring home medals during the state meet with Priscilla Izuegbu placing third in the



girls high jump with a height of 1.62m, and Regan Pickles placing third in the girls pole vault with a height of 3.15m.

# Lincoln Baseball Brings Home a State Title

By Robert Stewart

On May 20th, the Lincoln Trojans won the FHSAA 5A state championship with a gritty 5-4 victory over the Winter Springs Bears at Hammond Stadium located in Fort Meyers, FL.

Lincoln battled through pressure from the Bears throughout the night, using timely hitting and key pitching performances to finish the season on top. The Trojans scored five runs on five hits while drawing five walks to help manufacture offense in the championship matchup.

Senior Cody Garber led Lincoln offensively, finishing 2-for-3 with an RBI and a run scored. Sophomore Luke Thomas added a hit and drove in two runs, while junior Carson Koch recorded an RBI hit and scored once. Freshman Robert Quinn also contributed an RBI for the Trojans. Junior Jayson Parker reached base three times on walks and scored a run, helping Lincoln keep offensive pressure on Winter Springs.

On the mound, sophomore Jacob Rabion earned the win

after pitching four innings in relief, allowing four runs on six hits. Junior Chase Fuller delivered a strong outing in relief, striking out one and allowing just one hit in 1.2 scoreless innings, while junior Zachary Burch added 1.1 scoreless innings to help close out the championship victory.

Lincoln's defense also came through in crucial moments despite a pair of errors, with freshman Robert Quinn recording eight putouts and Tyson Bailey adding six defensive outs. Bailey also stole a base for the Trojans.

The championship victory capped off a memorable postseason run for Lincoln, as the Trojans finished the year with a state title and cemented themselves among the top baseball programs in the state.

### Semifinals

On May 18th, the Lincoln Trojans baseball defeated Mater Academy Charter Lions baseball 7-4 in the Class 5A state semifinals at Hammond Stadium in Fort Myers, using a late offensive surge to secure the victory.

Lincoln came out aggressive

early, scoring in the first inning to take an immediate lead before adding two more runs in the third inning to go up 3-0. The Trojans consistently pressured the defense throughout the game with aggressive base running, patience at the plate and timely situational hitting.

After Mater Academy Charter tied the game in the fourth inning, Lincoln regrouped and delivered its biggest moment of the night in the sixth inning. The Trojans exploded for four runs in the frame, taking advantage of defensive mistakes while delivering key hits that shifted the momentum permanently in their favor.

Jayson Parker led Lincoln offensively with one of his best performances of the postseason, finishing 2-for-3 with two runs scored and two RBIs. Parker consistently delivered in key moments and helped spark the Trojans' offense during the decisive innings.

Cody Garber also made a major impact for Lincoln, recording a hit and driving in two runs. Garber added pressure on the bases as well



with two stolen bases. Carson Koch contributed an RBI, while Chase Fuller crossed the plate twice and reached base multiple times. Bennett Malone added a hit and drew two walks to help keep innings alive for the Trojans.

Lincoln's offense managed six hits overall but found ways to manufacture runs throughout the game. The Trojans also drew five walks and stole four bases, creating scoring opportunities even when hits were limited.

On the mound, Lincoln received strong outings from several pitchers. Senior Ethan LaFuria turned in four solid innings, allowing just one hit and no earned runs while striking out five batters. LaFuria kept the Trojans steady

through the middle innings and limited hard contact throughout his appearance.

Sophomore Jacob Rabion earned the win in relief after pitching the final 2.2 innings. Rabion allowed just one run while striking out two batters to help close out the game. Chase Fuller also made a brief appearance in relief during the contest.

Defensively, Lincoln battled through several miscues but continued to respond in key situations. Despite committing five errors, the Trojans were able to limit damage and come up with important outs late in the game.

The victory marked another memorable postseason performance for Lincoln.



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