

O Observer EAST COUNTY



SPECIAL: HEALTH MATTERS

In this issue
Running unites senior couple.



INSIDE HOLIDAY HOOPLA!

See inside for our guide to the holidays. 3

IN FOCUS: SCOTTISH SOIREE

MacAllisters hosts annual festival. PAGES 16-17



You. Your neighbors. Your neighborhood.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2010

SHORT STACK

KUDOS, QUOTABLES AND COMMUNITY



+ Nolan students march in Myakka

Students in Nolan Middle School's FFA chapter took their organization to the streets for the Myakka City Holiday Parade Dec. 5.

The chapter's theme was "Past, Present and Future: FFAers Wishing you a Very Merry Christmas."

Nolan students also helped with the a blood drive after the parade.



+ Ranch hosts Cornaro tribute

The Sarasota Sister Cities Association and The Ausonian Society celebrated a 500-year anniversary tribute to Caterina Cornaro, The Lady of Asolo, with a gala Nov. 17 at Lakewood Ranch Golf and Country Club.

Chairs included **Alessandra DeStefanis**, SSCA city director for Treviso, Italy, and **Dr. Joseph Polizzi**, president of The Ausonian Society.

tragedy

ODA remembers former student Taylor Emmons

The former pitcher, a 2009 graduate, was killed in an accident Sunday in Coral Gables.

By Pam Eubanks and Jen Blanco

LAKEWOOD RANCH —The Out-of-Door Academy community is mourning the loss of one of their own.

ODA graduate and former baseball star Taylor Emmons, 19, died shortly after 1 a.m., Dec. 5, in Coral Gables, where he was at-

tending college at the University of Miami. Emmons was struck by an SUV.

"It's tough," said ODA alumni Tony Gurry, who co-captained the Thunder baseball team with Emmons in 2009. "Yeah, it's tough. He was well respected by everyone. Everyone loved him. He was definitely a great team-

mate and friend. I don't understand why it had to be him."

A Coral Gables Police Department report states a silver Toyota 4Runner was traveling southbound on San Amaro Drive when it collided with Emmons, a pedestrian. The driver, who was later identified as Mary Suzanne Jean, 39, of Miami, stopped, attempted some sort of first aid and called authorities, said Kelly Denham,

SEE EMMONS / PAGE 4



File photo
Taylor Emmons played golf and baseball at ODA.

back to the future



Pam Eubanks
Carolyn Sutherland, Peggy Christ and Bill Halstead, members of the Old Braden River Historical Society, are thrilled with the new facility and its opening.

Jiggs Landing now open

Manatee County will celebrate the renovated Jiggs Landing with a ribbon-cutting ceremony Dec. 11.

By Pam Eubanks | News Editor

MANATEE COUNTY — A piece of the past now is heading into the future.

After a year of renovations, the historic Jiggs Landing fish camp property opens to the public with a special presentation and ribbon-cutting ceremony at 9:30 a.m., Dec. 11. The celebration, which will feature historical photo displays, riverfront nature tours, an open house, raffles and refresh-

ments, will run until 1 p.m.

"We've undertaken this project because of the public desire to write a new chapter of history for Jiggs," said Charlie Hunsicker, director of Manatee County's Natural Resources Department. "The renovation and improvements were done to allow the passion of Agnes and Jiggs Metcalf's original vision to evolve and be passed to a new generation of outdoor enthusi-

SEE JIGGS / PAGE 2

INFORMATION

JIGGS LANDING GRAND OPENING

WHEN: 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., Dec. 11

WHERE: Jiggs Landing, 6106 63rd St. E., Bradenton

DETAILS: Ceremony starts at 9:30 a.m. with the ribbon cutting following at 10 a.m. Other festivities include tours, historical photo displays and more.

INFO: 748-4501, Ext. 4602

WATERWORKS

Heritage Harbour CDD OKs contracts

American Ecosystems will be responsible for lake/pond maintenance, while Eco Consultants will maintain wetlands.

By Pam Eubanks | News Editor

HERITAGE HARBOUR — The Heritage Harbour South Community Development District officially will assume responsibility for lake and wetland maintenance within the district starting Jan. 1.

The board of supervisors on Dec. 2 approved contractors for both projects, which were previously handled by the Heritage Harbour Master Association.

Supervisors approved a contract for lake/pond aquatic maintenance with American Ecosystems for a total cost of \$32,176. The bid came in at \$24,164 less than the next lowest bid. A separate \$61,535 contract for wetland maintenance with Eco Consultants also was approved. That bid came in at \$44,119 less than the next lowest bidder.

Matt Morris, principal for Morris-Riley Development Management, the firm hired by the

SEE CDD / PAGE 4

INDEX

Business Directory.....	28
Classifieds.....	28
Cops Corner.....	8
Crossword.....	27
Neighborhood.....	10
Real Estate.....	21
Sports.....	22

Vol. 11, No. 49

Two sections

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The Observer EAST COUNTY

"If we are to build a better world, we must remember that the guiding principle is this — a policy of freedom for the individual is the only truly progressive policy."
Friedrich Hayek
"Road to Serfdom," 1944

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SPOTLIGHT

Willis Elementary student stars in Players production

Stevie Lee Romero, 10, takes the lead role in his Manatee Players debut.

By Michael Eng | Executive Editor

LAKEWOOD RANCH — From the day he was born, 10-year-old Stevie Lee Romero has been full of surprises.

The fourth-grader in Keli Georgas' class at Willis Elementary made his world debut in dramatic fashion on Aug. 21, 2000. At just 28 weeks and weighing 2 pounds, 11 ounces, Stevie Lee's hand stretched only from mother Belinda's thumbail to her thumb joint.

But the preemie proved to be a fighter, and just five weeks after his birth, he was able to come home to be with his family in the Country Club of Lakewood Ranch.

"There were no complications," Belinda says. "He just decided it was time."

Ten years later, Stevie Lee again decided he was ready for another debut — this time on stage at the Manatee Players Riverfront Theatre. In his first foray into community theater, Stevie Lee landed the lead role in the Players' production of "Oliver!" The play opened last week and continues through Dec. 31.

"I was surprised," Stevie Lee says of opening night. "Every-



Denny Miller

Stevie Lee Romero dazzled audiences during the opening week of 'Oliver!'

thing turned out really good. ... And I didn't forget any lines.

"It's really fun," he says of acting. "You get to be a billion different people. Oliver is an orphan in England."

Although this is his first performance with the Players, Stevie Lee's acting résumé stretches back further. He cut his acting teeth last year as a part of Wil-

lis' third-grade play and spent last summer with Lakewood Ranch High drama department chair Roxane Caravan as part of the Acting Up! camp. There, he performed "High School Musical 2" and met one of his role models, Lakewood graduate Dane LaFemina.

LaFemina introduced Stevie Lee to his vocal coach, Alan Coe, and also encouraged him to audition for "Oliver!"

Stevie Lee spent time perfecting his audition piece — "Little People" from "Les Misérables." But on the morning of the audition Oct. 2, doubts began to creep into his mind.

"He came to me and said, 'Mom, will you be disappointed if I don't want to go?'" Belinda remembers. "I got him undressed and back into normal clothes and told him we'd just go to his brother's (Ryan's) game instead."

"If we were going to do this, I wanted it to be because he wanted to," she says.

Eventually, Stevie Lee decided to head to the theater. Despite it being his first audition, he says he wasn't nervous.

"I was getting over the flu and a sinus infection, so I was just

EMMONS / FROM PAGE 1

public information officer for the Coral Gables Police Department. Emmons suffered critical injuries and was transported to Doctor's Hospital, where he died.

Denham said the accident is under investigation, and a toxicology test is being conducted as part of the investigation. Results could take up to 150 days to come back. No official incident report had been made public as of press time Tuesday.

"We're still very early in the investigation," Denham said, noting the police department was following up every potential lead and rumor.

Back home in the East County, friends and family are reeling from the loss.

"Taylor was an amazing human being," said longtime friend Nathan Feldhacker, who also played golf with Emmons at ODA. "He could make anyone laugh at anytime. He was the most fun-loving, welcoming, just incredible person I ever had the honor to know."

Emmons, who was study-

"Taylor was an amazing human being. ... He was the most fun-loving, welcoming, just incredible person I ever had the honor to know."
— Nathan Feldhacker

ing entrepreneurship and was a member of the Sigma Chi fraternity at Miami, was a star athlete at ODA. Along with Gurry, he helped lead the Thunder baseball team to the second game of the Class 1A-Region 3 championship series his senior year. That season, the team set 14 school records, posted the most wins in a single season, won the team's first district title and advanced to the regional finals for the first time.

"When we were playing baseball, he was always trying to make it fun — when it was time to have fun," said Sean Fleeman, who was a year younger than Emmons. "But when it was time to be serious, he was the first one to tell you. He was the leader."

"He was guiding everyone," he said. "He was one of the most friendly guys. Everyone at our school knew and loved him."

There was no way to not like him."

Gurry agreed, adding his friend's sense of humor was one of his most beloved qualities.

"He just simply made everyone's day more enjoyable with his positive attitude, ability to make everyone laugh, and love and consideration for others," he said. "He could also hit a baseball farther than I have ever seen. It was a great privilege having such an inspiring and loving friend in my life who will never be replaced or forgotten by any of us. Mr. and Mrs. Emmons, Sam, and Mike you're in all of our thoughts and prayers."

Baseball Coach Mike Verrill said he would always remember Emmons for his "unbelievable smile and good humor."

"He could light up a room or an entire ball field with that cocky

Oliver!

WHEN: 7:30 p.m., Tuesdays through Thursdays; 8 p.m., Fridays and Saturdays; 2 p.m., Sundays, through Dec. 31
WHERE: Manatee Players Riverfront Theatre, 102 12th St. W.
TICKETS: \$25 for adults; \$11 for students
INFO: 748-5874 or www.manateeplayers.com

trying to get the mucous out," he says with a smile.

Although Stevie Lee says he would have been happy with a peripheral role, directors saw a star in him and cast him as the lead. And so far, audiences seem to agree: Stevie's opening performance received rave reviews from critics. His infectious charisma, kindhearted nature and yes, those squeezable cheeks, make him a perfect Oliver.

And if you ask Stevie Lee, he'll add one more attribute.

"Spunk," he says with a grin. "I'm spunky like Oliver!"

Stevie Lee cites several actors, including Jackie Gleason, Will Ferrell, Kevin James and Eddie Murphy, among his favorites and says he would like to try a comedic role in the future.

However, Stevie Lee says his career aspirations fall more in line with his father, Dr. Steve Romero, a veterinarian.

"I want to be an anesthesiologist," he says proudly.
Contact Michael Eng at meng@yourobserver.com.

smile of his," he said. "Taylor as an individual was just simply a great young man who always helped others, was a leader and an inspiration to other students. He had tremendous school spirit and would be the guy to cheer the other teams on at ODA. His enthusiasm was infectious as well as relentless. He is what anyone would want in a son, teammate and friend."

Verrill said baseball team members are supporting each other as best they can and plan to honor Emmons' memory in some way through the team and the school.

"It is, of course, a very sad day for all of us," he said. "I will always remember Taylor and give him a place in my heart. He is one of those really great kids that I suppose I got too close to because the pain of his passing is just unbearable to me. I and the team will greatly miss him, but never forget him."

Grief counselors were on campus at ODA on Monday. Funeral services had not yet been arranged by press time Tuesday.

Contact Pam Eubanks at peubanks@yourobserver.com.

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CDD / FROM PAGE 1

CDD to oversee the projects, confirmed he had checked with references for both companies and was confident they would do a good job.

"Eco Consultants did a lot of the initial permitting on the (Heritage Harbour) project," Morris said. "They are familiar (with it). American Ecosystems has other CDD clients in the area."

Although bids awarded seemed low compared to counter offers, Morris said numbers were comparable to those paid to contractors hired by the Heritage Harbour Master Association

for similar services. In total, costs for both wetland and lake maintenance came in at about \$2,300 less than the budgeted amount.

The Master HOA will continue maintaining two lakes within the district, and Morris said he was working with the HOA to see if they will use the same contractor as the CDD for those bodies of water. Aquaterra owns and maintains three lakes, as well.

After approving the contracts, Supervisor Joseph Jaudon suggested the board direct the Heritage Harbour Master Association about its expectations for the maintenance of the lakes and wetlands that remain under as-

sociation care but belong to the district. He also suggested getting periodic condition reports about those bodies of water.

"We cannot expect another will manage our properties if we don't give them guidelines," said Jaudon, who has experience in property management and real estate. "It's just a good idea, I think, if a property owner sets out his expectations. You wouldn't give over your home to a real estate company downtown without (knowing what's going on at the property). It's just good business sense."

Morris said the new contractors should begin work the first

IN OTHER BUSINESS:

CDD District Manager Jim Ward said he expects to have an agreement with Aquaterra, a Heritage Harbour's developer-controlled irrigation utility company, to present to the board at its January meeting.

week of January. Both companies will be tasked with an initial cleanup of lakes and wetland areas and then weekly site visits and ongoing maintenance.

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