

LOCAL

Violent crimes fall in WPB, others rise

There are fewer homicides, figures show, but car thefts and forcible-sex incidents increase

By Tony Doris
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

WEST PALM BEACH — The number of violent crimes is trending downward in West Palm Beach but police caution that low manpower and a rise in other categories of crime continue to challenge the department.

Year-to-date figures from 2018 to 2020 show homicides through July dropped to eight this year, from 20 in 2018. Deputy Police Chief Richard

Morris said that while the department is encouraged, it recognizes that it only takes one incident to alter that trend significantly.

He acknowledged frustration that car thefts, domestic sex crimes and some categories of larceny are rising.

Reports of “forcible sex” had dropped from 44 in 2018 to 35 the following year. But this year, they’re up to 46 incidents.

Sgt. Lori Colombino, of the city’s Special Victims Unit, attributed the increase to officers and victim advocates succeeding in building trust in encouraging victims to report sex crimes, she said.

“We monitor sexual crimes

closely and conduct outreach regularly to ensure victims, especially children, report these crimes,” she said.

Virtually none of the sex crimes this year are random street rapes, she said. They’re almost entirely domestic crimes in which victims knew their assailants, a trend exacerbated by people spending more time at home because of the pandemic, she said.

The Jan. 1 through July 30 numbers, from the department’s Strategic Intelligence Center, show auto burglaries with the biggest jump, from 701 last year to 786 this year.

Police made auto burglary



West Palm Beach police block streets at Rosemary Square after an unconfirmed report of an armed person last August. [GREG LOVETT/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

See CRIMES, B6



Mast Vessio

Rep. Mast facing rival to his right

Hobe Sound Fauci skeptic takes on incumbent Palm City congressman in primary

By Joshua Solomon
Treasure Coast Newspapers

Incumbent U.S. Rep. Brian Mast faces a Republican challenger in the primary for District 18 who is running to the right of him.

Nick Vessio pitches himself as a constitutional conservative with a career background in law enforcement in New York City. The Hobe Sound Republican says he wants to defend the Second Amendment at all costs, ensure only legal United States citizens can work jobs here and to be stronger on water-quality issues while still working with U.S. Sugar.

Mast, of Palm City, has made his name locally as a Republican who will fight for clean water, is willing to go toe-to-toe with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and is unwilling to be influenced by U.S. Sugar. He has

See RIVAL, B2

Creative space



Artist Anthony Burks in his Zero Empty Spaces art studio Thursday at Legacy Place in Palm Beach Gardens. Zero Empty Spaces is an entity that creates affordable artist studios in vacant spaces around the country. [ALLEN EYESTONE/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

Firm turns vacant PBG center into artist studios

By Jodie Wagner
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

PALM BEACH GARDENS — Affordable studio space is a rarity for South Florida artists, but a Fort Lauderdale-based company has made it easier to set up shop.

Zero Empty Spaces, a year-old vacancy management company co-founded by longtime arts advocates Evan Snow and Andrew Martineau, creates affordable artist studios in vacant spaces around the country.

Its most recent — and

See SPACE, B3



Paintings from Anthony Burks’ “Rooted Ground” series sit in the artist’s Zero Empty Spaces art studio at Legacy Place. [ALLEN EYESTONE/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]



Musgrave Pacenti



Ramadan Christie

Post wins big in FSNE contest

Three reporters capture Gold Medal for Epstein investigation; nine other awards include a first place for editorial page chief

Palm Beach Post staff reports

The Palm Beach Post won nine awards and the prestigious Gold Medal honor Thursday in the annual Florida Society of News Editors competition.

Reporters Jane Musgrave, John Pacenti and Lulu Ramadan won the Gold Medal and first place in investigative reporting for “Epstein Case: The First Failure,” which exposed how local prosecutors in 2006 botched the initial investigation into millionaire sex predator Jeffrey Epstein.

The story detailed how prosecutors downplayed the testimony of several girls who said they were sexually molested at Epstein’s Palm Beach home, resulting in charges so weak that the Palm Beach police chief sought federal intervention.

“This prequel to the Epstein case is a relentless deep dive into how this case was mishandled at a local level before it got to more publicized wrongdoing,” the judges wrote. “The relentless pursuit of this story is what we journalists must always do.”

Nick Moschella, executive editor of The Post, called the story an example of “powerful and important journalism” on behalf of the victims.

“Tragically, these victims continue to suffer in an ongoing struggle for justice

See CONTEST, B2

Worst sheriff in Florida? Competition is fierce



Frank Cerabino



Woods



Judd



Scott



Daniels

It’s not easy being known as Florida’s worst sheriff. We have a deep bench.

This week, with the COVID-19 pandemic causing new highs in Florida deaths, Marion County Sheriff Billy Woods made his move by forbidding his deputies from wearing masks while on duty or on special details, with a few exceptions. He also banned mask wearing by members of the public while they visited his department offices.

“We can debate and argue all day why and why not,” the sheriff told The Ocala Star-Banner. “The fact is, the amount of professionals that give the reason why we should, I can find the exact same amount of professionals that say why we shouldn’t.”

OK, so Woods is a stone-cold ignoramus who is a danger to the community he’s supposed to protect.

And yet, arguably, he still might not be the worst sheriff in Florida.

After all, you have to consider Clay County Sheriff Darryl Daniels, who was arrested Thursday by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement on multiple felony charges.

Florida sheriffs who themselves get arrested earn bonus points in this competition.

The charges stem from Daniels’ move last year to wrongfully arrest his long-time mistress after she broke off their six-year affair. She had worked for Daniels at

his previous job as a Duval County corrections officer.

But wait, there’s more. Using his position to file a false stalking charge against his old girlfriend might not even be the worst thing he has done in law enforcement.

Recently, Daniels, while wearing a giant cowboy hat with his green uniform, made a Facebook video warning Black Lives Matter protesters to stay away from Clay County.

Daniels, who is Black, said that if any protesters organized there and threatened to destroy any property, he would deputize every legal gun owner in Clay County to handle them.

See CERABINO, B3

COMMUNITY

Delray commissioners to triple salaries

Panel acknowledges timing is awkward, but compensation lags neighboring cities significantly

By Mike Diamond
Special to The Post

DELRAY BEACH — City commissioners are expected to nearly triple their salaries Tuesday while acknowledging it is the wrong time to do it.

Annual salaries for the four commissioners would increase from \$9,000 a year to \$24,000 a year and from \$12,000 to \$30,000 for the mayor. The city charter prevents the increases from taking effect until after the

election in March 2021.

Commissioners voted 4-1 for the salary increase this week but will need to approve it again following a public hearing Tuesday.

A survey shows that the annual salaries paid in nearby Boynton Beach and Boca Raton to elected officials are significantly higher than those currently in Delray Beach. They are \$20,000 and \$24,000 for commissioners and the mayor, respectively, in Boynton Beach and \$28,000 for council members and \$38,000 for the mayor in Boca Raton.

“The optics are never good when you are giving yourself a raise,” Commissioner Shirley Johnson said. “We have been



Petrolia

Tuesday and a regular meeting that began at 4 p.m. later that day that did not end until nearly 9 p.m.

Mayor Shelly Petrolia noted that if the salaries are not increased now, salary increases, under the city charter, could not be considered again until six months after the March 2021 election. That is because voters soundly rejected a referendum this year that would have allowed commissioners to

working non-stop since 10 a.m.”

She was referring to a workshop meeting in the morning

immediately raise their salaries after an election instead of waiting the six months.

At that same budget meeting this week, the commission balked at using nearly \$9 million in surplus revenue to hold down the tax rate. Instead, it instructed staff to find more cuts to lower the use of surplus funds to balance the budget. Petrolia and the four Delray Beach commissioners agreed that the optics of a salary increase for them does not look good at a time when staff was instructed to make significant budget cuts that might result in layoffs.

Commissioner Adam Frankel, who voted yes, said he wants “to think about it” and might change his mind

when the issue is considered again Tuesday. Frankel agreed with his colleagues that they are “woefully underpaid.”

“We are in a no-win situation,” Frankel said.

Commissioner Ryan Boylston said the increase is warranted but he said he cannot support the move. He explained “the triple trifecta” of a recession, a budget shortfall and a pandemic are enough to force him to vote no. Frankel said commissioners put so many hours in on city business that current salaries are not enough to compensate them.

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SPACE

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largest — studio space opened last month at the Legacy Place lifestyle center in Palm Beach Gardens.

The 6,502-square-foot space, located between Venetian Nail Spa and Sal’s Italian Ristorante, had been vacant for almost two years after its previous tenant, Woodhouse Day Spa, closed in October 2018.

Fourteen local artists are renting space at the location, which is open daily for tours and art purchases.

“Zero Empty Spaces is a win-win for our center, the artists and the community,” said Tricia Schmidt, senior property manager for Legacy Place.

Zero Empty Spaces works with city commissioners, Community Redevelopment Agencies and property owners to identify vacant properties that are open to being activated. Once a lease with a property owner is secured, artists have the opportunity to sublease studio space for a little as \$2 per square foot. Zero Empty Spaces covers

utilities.

Space is rented on a month-to-month basis, with studio sizes ranging from 100 square feet to 3,000 square feet. Studio space is accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The idea behind Zero Empty Spaces is to expand the appreciation of all genres of art and help create a thriving cultural community in the cities surrounding each location, Martineau said.

The Palm Beach Gardens location is one of eight throughout South Florida, with others in Boca Raton, Hollywood, Oakland Park, Fort Lauderdale Beach and Pompano Beach.

Additional locations are planned for Sunrise, Miami Beach and Orlando, Martineau said, and the company also has been negotiating with property owners and management companies in Illinois, North Carolina, New York and elsewhere around the country and in Canada.

“The goal of our program is to make this opportunity available to artists of any level, whether they’re emerging, established or anywhere in-between,” Snow said. “The fact that it is affordable



Evan Snow, left, and Andrew Martineau co-founded Zero Empty Spaces, which creates affordable artist studios in vacant spaces around the country. The 6,502-square-foot space at Legacy Place is the largest location in South Florida. [ALLEN EYESTONE/PALMBEACHPOST.COM]

and accessible, and an artist that is just beginning can get a space for just \$200 a month, doesn’t exist anywhere.”

Anthony Burks jumped at the opportunity to set up a working studio at Zero Empty Spaces at Legacy Place.

The West Palm Beach artist and founder of the local nonprofit No More Starving Artists Foundation has tried — and failed — for years to find affordable studio space in Palm Beach County.

His new 140-square-foot

space at Zero Empty Spaces gives him the opportunity to create and showcase his artwork in addition to mentoring emerging artists who have reserved studio space nearby.

“I’ve been trying to get studio space for years,” he said. “This is how I make my living. The rents around here are high. I wouldn’t last a month. As soon as Zero Empty Spaces announced the space, I was in. Everything here has been created in my house. I have a home studio, and I

needed to get out of my home and create more.”

Burks is among a handful of established artists at Zero Empty Spaces, but there are others, such as Jupiter resident Ashley Capps, who are newcomers to art.

A longtime fundraiser, consultant and volunteer in Palm Beach County who has worked with numerous artists, she decided to switch gears and create and promote her own artwork.

In her small studio space, she works with a variety of mediums. Some of her finished artwork already lines the walls.

“I fell in love with art through fundraisers,” said Capps, who founded an organization, Gravity for Good, that works to empower communities. “What I realized was I’ve always created art my whole life in the office. I do this for artists all the time, and I get them spaces. I wanted to do this for myself. This is my first big effort.”

Zero Empty Spaces is open daily from noon to 5 p.m. for tours and sales. Masks are required.

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CERABINO

From Page B1

“God is absent from the media’s message or Black Lives Matter or any other group out there that’s making themselves a spectacle, disrupting what we know to be our quality of life in this country,” Daniels said in the video.

“If you threaten to come to Clay County and think for one second, that we’ll bend our backs to you, you’re sadly mistaken ...” he continued. “We’ll have something waiting on you that you didn’t want.”

Daniels said he would deputize local gun owners “to stand in the gap between lawlessness and civility.”

The freshly arrested Daniels is on the ballot next week for re-election as Clay County Sheriff.

And when it comes to tough-guy showboating, we can’t forget Florida’s version of Joe Arpaio, Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd.

Judd’s another one with a tough-guy personality disorder, which he expresses by inventing ways to make his jail inmates miserable. He has denied them free underwear in jail, and taken away the jail’s basketball backboard and hoop.

“If they want to play basketball, they should stay out of jail,” he said. “I’m not going to have an environment where they feel like they’re at a fitness center.”

And when a hurricane approaches, Judd uses it as an opportunity to check the immigration status of those seeking refuge in the county shelters.

These tin-badge despots

These tin-badge despots who get aroused by their own cartoonish invective have their own group called The Florida Sheriffs Association, which occasionally imagines itself as a law-enforcement-optional body. For example, during the Obama administration, the association announced that Florida sheriffs “will not assist, support, or condone any unconstitutional infringement” of the Second Amendment’s right to bear arms in the state.

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For example, during the Obama administration, the Florida Sheriffs Association announced that Florida sheriffs “will not assist, support, or condone any unconstitutional infringement” of the Second Amendment’s right to bear arms in the state.

The proclamation was a ridiculous response to some executive orders issued by Obama that were hardly controversial or constitutionally problematic. Most of them helped the police.

“Improve incentives for states to share information with the background-check system. ... Launch a national safe and responsible gun ownership campaign. ...,” the list included. “Provide law enforcement, first responders, and school officials with proper training for active shooter situations. ... Release a letter to health care providers clarifying that no federal law prohibits them from reporting threats of violence to law enforcement authorities.”

These were the executive orders that alarmed the Florida Sheriffs Association. Go figure.

Lee County Sheriff Mike Scott, who seconded the motion on the proclamation,

told the Naples Daily News why it was a necessary statement to make.

“It’s a dangerous time if one man can change the Constitution through any type of executive order,” Scott said.

Scott retired two years ago as Lee County sheriff. If not he would have certainly been on my list of worst sheriffs in Florida.

Scott fought the local NAACP chapter in Lee County over its modest objection to the framed portrait of Gen. Robert E. Lee in his Confederate uniform hanging in the county commission chambers behind the dais.

The civil rights group suggested displaying a different portrait of Lee that didn’t show him garbed in the Confederacy uniform. Almost 9 percent of Lee County residents are black.

Scott used this request as a vehicle to attack local civil rights leaders for not being more supportive of George Zimmerman, a self-appointed vigilante who shot and killed an unarmed black teenager, Trayvon Martin, during a sidewalk encounter eight years ago.

“I find your resurrected fixation with the portrait of Robert E. Lee and the demand for its removal regrettable,” then Sheriff Scott wrote the local NAACP a year after the Martin killing. “The timing so proximate to the Zimmerman race-baiting

is certainly suspect.

“While I am not black, I continue to be amazed by what is deemed ‘racially offensive and/or insensitive’ and what is not. For example, the rampant use of the word ‘n-----’ (which he spelled out completely) in the wildly popular hip-hop culture that floods the ears of youth across this nation and is comprised primarily of black artists apparently stirs little to no emotion among blacks but the portrait of General Lee does?”

Oy. Are there enough human resources training sessions in the world to fix that?

Compared with these examples, Palm Beach County Sheriff Ric Bradshaw is like a combination of Mahatma Gandhi and Stuart Smalley.

But Bradshaw’s no prize package either.

He and his political patron Barry Krischer were essential players in the clandestine coddling of serial child rapist Jeffrey Epstein, who was given his own private wing in the Palm Beach County Stockade by Bradshaw, and privileges to come and go from the jail as if it were a hotel.

And Bradshaw never seems to have enough money in his department’s budget to equip his deputies with body cameras — a truth-revealing tool in officer-involved shootings — even though the sheriff’s offices in Miami-Dade and Broward counties have had body cameras for years.

But Bradshaw has the advantage of appearing to be relatively reasonable in this group of unreasonable lawmen.

It takes an awful lot to be the worst sheriff in Florida.

CRIME STOPPERS

The following fugitives were wanted as of Thursday:

Brian Major, 33, is wanted on felony charges of dealing in stolen property, grand theft and false



Major

verification of ownership. He was born Dec. 23, 1986, has brown hair, blue eyes, stands 5-foot-10 and weighs about 150 pounds. His last known address was on North 66th Street in West Palm Beach.

Otha Johnson, 34, is wanted on felony charges of vehicular homicide,



Johnson

reckless driving causing serious bodily injury, driving causing injury to a person, and contributing to the delinquency of a child. He was born Aug. 20, 1985, has black hair, brown eyes, stands 6 feet tall and weighs about 150 pounds. He also has multiple tattoos. His last known address was on Foxwood Circle in West Palm Beach.

Anyone with information on their whereabouts is asked to call Crime Stoppers at 800-458-TIPS (8477). Your information will remain confidential and you may be eligible for a cash reward of up to \$3,000.