

NewsWorthy Drivers on SR-64 Finally Get Break



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Fatal Accident

A 76-year-old Ellenton man was killed in a two-vehicle crash on Sept. 13 after his car drifted into oncoming traffic. The victim, **John Hudspeth**, was traveling west on US 301 when he drove into east-bound traffic near 97th Avenue East. The road was wet from rain, but there was no standing water. The victim was driving to his home in Colony Cove. The vehicle struck another vehicle driven by Parrish resident **Lucienne Gauffillet**, a member of the Bradenton Architectural Review Board and the Planning Commission. Gauffillet suffered only minor injuries.

Narrow Escape

A Hillsborough County woman fled from a pickup early on Sept. 18 after fighting with her captor as the pickup weaved along Rogers Road near Parrish. She escaped when the truck hit a tree. The captor was described as 5-foot-7, 170 pounds. He ran from the incident.

Ranch Residents Fight Noise

Lakewood Ranch residents brought noise complaints to the joint meeting of Sarasota and Manatee Counties on Monday at Lakewood Ranch Town Hall. They were hoping for a ban on loud truck noise before 7 a.m. Trucks at issue are those accessing SMR Aggregates shell mining operations by way of University Parkway and Lorraine Road. Residents say the trucks are not supposed to start before 7 a.m., but often do so around 5 a.m. Manatee County Commissioner Joe McClash said he would consider options, including a sound barrier.

Pit Bull Attack

A mixed-breed pit bull was shot and killed by Manatee County police after attacking a 7-year-old boy and a police deputy. The dog's owner, **Hermelinda Zuvala Lopez**, was fined \$1,400. They were fined \$500 each for two citations of animal causing injuries, \$200 for having a dog at large, and \$200 for failure to vaccinate the dog against rabies. According to reports from the sheriff's department, a Daugherty Elementary School student was attacked on his way to school, and Deputy **Amy Hildreth-Rader** was attacked while responding to the scene.

Stabber Sentenced

A man who stabbed a 15-year-old student at a bus stop in Bradenton was sentenced to 21 months in prison. **Fred Delva**, 19, surrendered to police after the stabbing in the 2400 block of 53rd Avenue East on Jan. 27. He pleaded no contest to aggravated battery. The victim, **Francisco Merino**, was trying to break up a fight between Delva and another man before Delva attacked Merino, according to reports. Merino was stabbed in his shoulder and ribs.

Marijuana Bust

A Palmetto man who was arrested on charges he was growing marijuana in a warehouse pleaded no contest to a drug trafficking charge. **Robert McLachlan** was arrested in April 2005 after authorities seized 460 marijuana plants from a warehouse where he worked in the 2200 block of U.S. 301 North in Palmetto.

Woman Impersonates Officer

A woman impersonating a police officer was arrested at the Lakewood Ranch Medical Center. **Sim Hunt-Hanna** told hospital staff that she just wanted a private room and the best treatment for her husband, according to reports. She flashed a deputy's badge from Pitkin County, Colo., several times, and hospital

County officials reversed their expected veto of a \$33.5 million expenditure to widen State Road 64 from Lena Road to Lakewood Ranch Boulevard.

The plan hit a pothole last week when commissioners scrapped plans to widen the 1.9-mile stretch of road that has become a source of anger to motorists. The clogs on the road are especially troublesome when schools are starting and letting out, but commissioners were concerned that the cost of widening the road would be cost-prohibitive and voted 4-1 on Sept. 12 to back out of negotiations with the state. Manatee County would have funded the project and be reimbursed by the state at a later date, but Commissioner Joe McClash said the state wasn't willing to take on any additional cost.

The commission made a complete change of direction on Tuesday, voting unanimously to approve the funding if project bids are more than expected. The county will pay the \$33.5 million and the project, which is expected to begin in 2008, will go out to contractor bidding in May. Work to expand from two lanes to six could begin as early as Sept. 2007.

Florida Department of Transportation Commissioner Stan Cann said he could not guarantee that there would be no overrides of the \$33.5 million price tag, and that the county would be responsible for anything over that amount, but Cann also said the county could call off the arrangement if the bids exceeded that amount.

The cost of the project has increased several times over the past several years. When it was originally formulated, the cost wasn't expected to exceed \$24 million. In June, the commission delayed three projects that would have added more than 1,100 homes and 300 apartments.

Cann's attempt to appease the commission was received well.

"It keeps getting better and better every time we talk to you," McClash told Cann during the meeting.

Cann warned that the \$33.5 price tag was tenuous and could easily rise significantly based on a number of variables.

"We'll do our best to cover it," Cann said. "I can't say for sure. I can't guarantee it."

Cann cited possible impediments such as hurricanes.

The issue was a major point not only

to residents who have to endure endless traffic jams, but also to developers who are being battled to hold off on further development until county infrastructure is adequately prepared.

The expansion will be funded by a short-term, low-interest loan with the Florida League of Counties. Manatee County Finance Director Jim Seuffert said the county's out-of-pocket tab would be only around \$4 million.

McClash, who voted against the proposal last week, said that he was pleased with the settlement.

"The risk to the county is reduced," McClash said. "If there is a risk, it has to be to developers through impact fees or concessions."

Commissioners said that part of the reason for compromise was for the interest in public safety and to continue to nurture their relationship with developers that has been rocky at best.

"It's a public safety matter," Commissioner Pat Glass said. "It shows we have a vision for the future. It's only going to get more expensive. In another few years, we might not have enough money to do it."

Palmetto Can't Put Nail in Coffin

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Palmetto went into last Friday's game at a huge disadvantage. With only one loss, Palmetto coach Ray Woodie knew that the time had come to play against the big boys.

For one half, the Tigers held their own, but were eventually worn down by Sarasota in a 28-13 loss that was as much about team depth as anything on the field.

Sarasota (3-0) had the depth, but Palmetto played with spunk and trailed only 14-13 at the half before the lack of depth against the much larger school proved too much.

It didn't help that the Tigers turned the ball over four times. With 60 players to Palmetto's 39, the Sailors pulled away late,

capitalizing on Palmetto mistakes.

"You just can't beat a good team when you make four turnovers," Palmetto coach Ray Woodie said. "We knew they were bigger, but we had to be prepared for that."

Palmetto had a 13-7 lead late in the second half, but that's when the turning point of the game came after a fumble in the final minute.

"You have to know how to put the nail in the coffin when you get them down," Woodie said. "Especially against a school that's that much bigger than us."

The Tigers will host Cape Coral in their annual homecoming game on Friday.

At Lakewood Ranch, the Mustangs will finally play their home opener as Sarasota Riverview comes calling.

The Mustangs lost their first game

of the season, 21-7, to Manatee in their district opener, but the stakes are raised for Riverview this Friday. The Mustangs were tied at 7 with Manatee last week, but killed themselves with turnovers as Manatee sat on its lead and held on.

Lakewood Ranch had a chance to pull it off when they got the ball deep in Manatee territory late in the fourth quarter, but the Mustangs couldn't capitalize. They would be left soul searching after blowing several key opportunities after Manatee turnovers. The Hurricanes fumbled twice within the Lakewood Ranch 10-yard line in the first half alone, but the defense stifled the Mustang offense.

"Defensively we are young and it showed," Lakewood Ranch coach Shawn Trent said. "You just can't make turnovers and expect to win."

Lakewood Ranch VB Falls to Mooney

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It's been a long season for the Lakewood Ranch volleyball team, but on Wednesday, the Mustangs suffered one of their most crippling defeats yet.

In a game at Cardinal Mooney, the Mustangs were primed to pull off an upset. Mooney was missing three starters and the Mustangs came out of the gate flying high, but blew a chance to take a 2-0 lead in sets, and ended up losing 19-25, 26-24, 25-19 and 25-4.

It was a tough loss for the Mustangs who fell to 5-14 on the season. The thing is, the Mustangs had so many opportunities in a season of wasted opportunities.

With three starters missing up front for Mooney, the Mustangs were able to exploit it to their advantage, winning the first game behind the power of senior

Sheeva Noshirvan who had 10 kills on the night. The Mustangs never trailed and started pulling away in the second game.

Mooney hung close, though and Lakewood Ranch couldn't put it away, even with set point. Morgan Thomas had a kill for the Mustangs to give them a 24-22 lead and the chance to go ahead 2-0, but Mooney stormed back to close it out at 26-24.

It wasn't over quite yet for the Mustangs. They jumped out to a 14-7 lead and had momentum, but Mooney battled back, scoring 18 of the next 23 points to go ahead 2-1.

From that point, it was over. Mooney dominated the fourth game and coasted to a 25-4 win, scoring 41 of the final 50 points.

Lakewood Ranch still has a chance once postseason play starts in three weeks. The



Lakewood Ranch girls celebrate during a first-set victory over Cardinal Mooney on Wednesday.

Mustangs travel to North Port on Sept. 26 and host Southeast on Oct. 3.

employees were skeptical. She said she never exposed the badge and never said she was a law enforcement officer.

Officer Suspended

The son of a Manatee County sheriff's captain pleaded no contest on Sept. 14 to a misdemeanor charge that also resulted

in a 30-day suspension from the force for his father. **Aaron Dean Couch**, 22, reportedly kicked a deputy twice in the face during a scuffle at Rasher Tierney's Irish Pub in Bradenton in February. Just weeks later, Couch was arrested again in Gainesville for attempted rivalry and remained in jail until last month. His

father, **Ron Couch**, a 21-year veteran officer, was alleged to have interfered into the investigation of the bar fight for not reporting that he was in the bar shortly after the scuffle broke out. According to reports, Couch should have immediately reported the incident.