

LOCAL & STATE

QUESTIONS? Contact Editor Susan Smiley-Height at susan.smiley-height@ocala.com

COMMUNITY

IHMC speaker

The Institute for Human and Machine Cognition and College of Central Florida will host Dawn Korrakis as its first evening lecture of the 2017 Spring Series at 5:30 p.m. Jan. 19 at 15 SE Osceola Ave., Ocala. The talk, "NEEMO 21 Mission: Going Undersea to get to Outerspace," is about an undersea NASA mission. Free to attend, but registration requested at ihmc-20170119.eventbrite.com. Refreshments will be provided. For more information, call 387-3065.

Co-op opening

The Rainbow Springs Fine Art Association will host a grand opening at 10 a.m. Jan. 20 for the Rainbow Springs Artist Cooperative at 20804 W. Pennsylvania, Dunnellon. Hours will be 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesdays to Saturdays. For more information, call 445-8547 or visit rainbowspringsart.com.

Honky tonkin opry

The Church at Triple Cross Ranch will host the Honky Tonkin Opry at 7 p.m. Jan. 20 at 20736 NW 100th Ave. Road, Shiloh, in northwest Marion County. The event is hosted by Norm Edwards and the Jayc Harold Band. Set to perform are Adrianna Haupt, local musicians and comedy acts. The cost is \$10 and concessions will be available. For more information, call 863-899-7411.

Cat show

The International Cat Association will sponsor a cat show 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Jan. 21 and 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Jan. 22 at Jumbolair, 1201 NE 77th St., Ocala. Cats will be judged both days. Admission is \$4-\$6 with \$1 from each ticket going to the Humane Society of Marion County and there will be a food and litter drive for the organization as well. For more information, call 919-793-3491.

Soup-a-thon

The Dunnellon Chapter of Eastern Star will host its annual Soup-A-Thon 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Jan. 21 at the Masonic Lodge, 20751 Powell Road, Dunnellon. The cost is \$7 and includes drink, dessert costs extra. For more information, call 436-4148.

'Cocktail hour: the show'

Performed by Ballets with a Twist, "Cocktail Hour" reinvents the glamour and excitement of Hollywood's Golden Age through 21st-century sensibility as a pop-infused performing arts experience. The show will begin at 7 p.m. Jan. 22 at the Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center, 1051 Main Street, Spanish Springs, The Villages. Tickets are \$20-\$45 and can be purchased by calling 732-3229 or by visiting thesharon.com.

CORRECTIONS

The Public Policy Institute is an independent, 501(c)(3) organization and is no longer affiliated with the College of Central Florida. A brief in Thursday's paper included incorrect information.

The Ocala Star-Banner promptly corrects errors of fact. If you believe we have made an error, call the news department at 352-671-6412. If you have a question or comment about coverage, write to Jim Ross, Managing Editor, 2121 SW 19th Ave. Road, Ocala, Florida, 34471-7752. Email: jim.ross@starbanner.com or call 352-671-6412.

MARION OAKS

MCSO: Man rented vacant homes

Investigators believe Thomas S. Pratt rented out properties that didn't belong to him

By Austin L. Miller
Staff writer

A Silver Springs Shores man was arrested Wednesday and charged with renting homes he does not own to people and then pocketing the rent money.

Marion County Sheriff's Office officials believe there may be more victims here and in the surrounding counties.

Taken into custody was Thomas Scott Pratt, also known as Steven Malaka, a convicted

felon. He was charged with one count of fraud, two counts of trespassing, one count of grand theft and possession of drug paraphernalia.

The 42-year-old was released early Thursday morning on a \$7,000 bond.

State records show he was released from prison in November 2011 after serving time for drug possession.

According to Detective Tanya Rodriguez's report, a deputy went to the 12800 block



Pratt

of Southwest 40th Terrace last month in Marion Oaks to investigate a fraud report. The owner of the home, which was supposed to be vacant, reported that people were living there. When interviewed by the detective, the occupant of the house said she rented it from a man known to her as Malaka and showed a copy of the lease. She said she met Malaka through a family friend. The woman said she was supposed to pay an initial \$2,250, which included

security and a pet deposit. She said Malaka reduced the amount to \$1,100 because the home did not have a refrigerator. She said she paid him \$300.

After moving in, she said, a woman showed up at the home claiming she and her husband were going to rent the home but they decided not to because Malaka didn't seem trustworthy. When the occupant asked Malaka about the woman, he said she did not pass his background check and probably was mad he didn't rent the home to her, according to the Sheriff's report.

SEE PRATT, B4

YOUTH CAREER EXPO

Early exploration



The Forest High School EMIT team's robot greets students Thursday as they enter the Employer Expo area during the Youth Career Expo at Circle Square Cultural Center in Ocala. The Marion County School System teamed up with CareerSource and a number of area companies and agencies to bring 400 middle school students together to learn about careers and job opportunities in Marion County. STAFF PHOTOS BY ALAN YOUNGBLOOD



Students learn about different industries in a "speed dating" type environment as employers rotate through and answer questions in a limited time at the Youth Career Expo.

COMMENTARY

Soviets, Presbyterians and one nasty finger

Perhaps it is a coincidence that I received a test tube filled with green goop and a severed finger in the mail on the same day I learned comic book villains have a secret lair in Ocala.

Before I launch into my thoughts on these strange events, let me try to explain: (1) Last month, I started getting odd mail. First came a letter from "Dr. Anna Zharkova" about some long-deceased relative of mine who did some secret experiments in Aralsk-7, an off-the-radar Soviet test site. More letters arrived documenting a serum that Mystery Deed Schlenker



DAVE SCHLENKER

Relative developed. People died, according to the yellowing letters, but then one of the dead became undead.

Then, on Wednesday, I received a small crate in the mail with more letters — this time documenting my relative's time in hiding decades after the whole

waking-the-dead thing. Inside the crate was a test tube with a nicely aged finger.

Conclusion: I suspect I am the target of a prank or a fictional, elaborate and intentional mystery. The letters have prompted me to do some research and ask for translations, and I am having a blast with this. The person behind all this must be having fun watching me scramble.

(2) Also on Wednesday, I saw a post on Facebook with a picture of a comic book page. It was from "The X-Men," a wildly popular series about

SEE SCHLENKER, B4

ROAD RAGE?

Troopers: Ocala driver shot at truck

By Austin L. Miller
Staff writer

Florida Highway Patrol troopers arrested an Ocala man Wednesday on suspicion of firing a shot at a tractor-trailer while driving on the Florida Turnpike.



Dunn

The suspect's wife told troopers her husband was upset because he could not pass the truck.

Charles Anthony Dunn, 52, was charged with discharging a firearm from a vehicle.

Dunn's wife told troopers on Wednesday that she was a passenger in the vehicle when Dunn fired a Ruger 9 mm once at a tractor-trailer on Tuesday, according to FHP. The woman said Dunn was upset but was not trying to shoot the driver. Dunn's wife said her husband grabbed the gun, which belongs to her, from under the driver's seat.

Officials said the woman does have a concealed firearm permit.

Shortly before 7 a.m. on Tuesday, the Lake Worth Regional Communication Center received a complaint from the driver of the tractor-trailer. The driver said that while driving south on the Florida Turnpike near the Leesburg exit, his vehicle was shot at by someone driving southbound in a Toyota Rav4. The truck driver said there was a man in the vehicle and a woman who was screaming, according to the FHP report.

The truck driver told troopers he felt the driver may have been upset because he was unable to pass the truck because there was another tractor-trailer in the left lane. He said Dunn flashed his high beams at the truck in the left lane.

The truck driver said he slowed down to allow the other truck to pass him to the left and when he did that, Dunn's vehicle pulled up beside him. He reported seeing a firearm in Dunn's hand and then he heard three shots. The truck driver said he was able to snap pictures of the vehicle Dunn was driving.

Troopers also were able to get pictures of the vehicle

SEE GUN, B4

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