

**SATURDAY**  
 TODAY & next morning  
**HIGH 81** Breezy and partly cloudy.  
**LOW 63**  
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# CITRUS COUNTY CHRONICLE

www.chronicleonline.com



NOVEMBER 21, 2020 Florida's Best Community Newspaper Serving Florida's Best Community 50¢ VOL. 126 ISSUE 44

## NEWS BRIEFS

### Citrus County COVID update

According to the Florida Department of Health, 93 new positive cases were reported in Citrus County since the latest update. Two new hospitalizations were reported; two new deaths were reported. To date in the county, 4,218 people have tested positive (including 21 non-residents), 391 have been hospitalized and 157 have died.

### Citrus' jobless rate up 0.2%

According to the preliminary jobs data for October, released Friday, Nov. 20, 2020, by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, Citrus County's jobless rate was 6.5%, 0.2% higher than September.

Neighboring Levy County continues to hold the lowest jobless rate in the region at 4.9%, up 0.4 percentage point over the month; followed by Marion County at 5.6%, an increase of 0.3%. Citrus County's labor shrank by just 8 to 45,592; the number of people employed decreased by 112 to 42,614 and the number of unemployed rose by 104 to 2,978. In October 2019, the jobless rate was 4.3%.

### Unity of Citrus offers meals

Unity of Citrus will be providing free Thanksgiving dinner bags while supplies last from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 21, at 2628 W. Woodview Lane, Lecanto.

### Food giveaway at CR Mall

The New Church Without Walls annual Thanksgiving turkey and food giveaway will begin at noon Saturday, Nov. 21, at the Crystal River Mall parking lot (by the former Belks store) — drive-through only. First come, first served until the supply runs out. To participate, you cannot be registered at other food pantries. Call 352-344-2425 for more information.

— From staff reports

# Vaccine on the horizon

*Pfizer, BioNTech formally seek emergency use of COVID-19 shots in US*

**LAURAN NEERGAARD**  
*AP Medical Writer*

Pfizer formally asked U.S. regulators Friday to allow emergency use of its COVID-19 vaccine, starting the clock on a

process that could bring limited first shots as early as next month and eventually an end to the pandemic — but not until after a long, hard winter.

The action comes days after Pfizer Inc. and its German

partner BioNTech announced that its vaccine appears 95% effective at preventing mild to severe COVID-19 disease in a large, ongoing study.

The companies said that protection plus a good safety record

means the vaccine should qualify for emergency use authorization, something the Food and Drug Administration can grant before the final testing is fully complete.

See **VACCINE/Page A8**

# LIGHT IT UP!

*"It's truly amazin' ... that spirit of Christmas."  
 — Ray Charles*



MATTHEW BECK/Chronicle

**Eighteen-year-old Dominic Simmons** assists his father Friday afternoon, Nov. 13, 2020, as the two hang some of the 50,000 lights that are spread out across their property. "People love it," Frank Simmons said. "Everything we do is to bring smiles and happiness to people," the homeowner said as his son adjusted white lights along the roofline, finishing the synchronized-light display. "It spreads joy."

## Lecanto family goes all out to deck their halls for the holiday season

**JEFF BRYAN**  
*Staff writer*

**A**s a boy growing up in South Florida, Frank Simmons remembers the moment "he saw the light." To be more appropriate, it was the "lights." Thousands of them.

"I was real small, 8 years old or so, and there was a huge display along Interstate 95," he said about a Christmas light display in Hollywood, Florida. "There was a house, they went all out; there was probably about three houses. We went one year. I just absolutely fell in love with it." Simmons more than fell in love; the hobby of decorating his house for Christmas has become

a passion. "I never thought it would get this crazy," he said. "I guess it's just a happy memory from childhood."

For 20-plus years, Simmons has been going full "Clark Griswold" when it comes to Christmas light displays.

See **LIGHT/Page A5**

## County Education Association pushes for members

**BUSTER THOMPSON**  
*Staff writer*

Leaders of the Citrus County Education Association are confident they will have enough members in the local teachers' union for recertification before 2021.

Victoria Smith, president of the association (CCEA), said Wednesday, Nov. 18, 2020, the organization

had 21 members in its ranks.

It has to reach a roster of 25 — 50% of its membership — in order for the Teacher Evaluation Review Committee, or TERC, to qualify the CCEA as a bargaining unit, giving it the ability to negotiate employment terms and conditions for union and non-union instructors.

"I think a lot of people don't understand we bargain for

everybody," said Smith, who's also a Citrus High School teacher. "We make sure your working conditions are good, and your salary is increased the best we can."

If the CCEA fails to meet its enrollee threshold by the TERC's Dec. 20 deadline, it will lose its ability to fight for employee rights, like: duty-free lunches, guaranteed planning time, class size

limits, more duty pay, prioritizing transfers of senior teachers and leave pay.

"We're not there to advocate for you anymore," Smith said. Florida is a right-to-work state, meaning it doesn't require people with jobs to also have a union membership and pay its dues.

See **MEMBERS/Page A8**

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