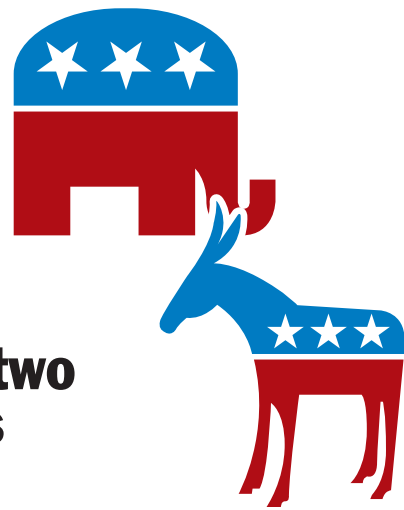




NEWS-SUN

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Title hunt starts for LP

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Second APMS teacher credited for saving a life

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A tale of two parties

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Friday-Saturday, September 26-27, 2008

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Volume 89/Number 115 | 50 cents

Forecast



Mostly sunny and pleasant

High Low

89 63

Complete Forecast PAGE 10A

Online



Question:

Does the Highlands County Sheriff's Office need a new facility?



Total votes: **61**

Next question:

Should Florida universities cap the number of incoming freshmen?

Make your voice heard at

www.newssun.com

Obituaries

Norman E. Burns
Age 93, Lake Placid

John T. Fike
Age 95, Sebring

Willis E. Fouts
Age 87, Sebring

Lorna C. Silvera
Age 83, Sebring

Gary Welch Jr.
Age 36, Orlando

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Religion	3B
Sports	1C
Stocks	4C
Sudoku Puzzle	2B
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Good Morning To
News-Sun subscriber
John B. Taylor
Sebring



News-Sun photo by CHRISTOPHER TUFFLEY

Gabe Smoak joined his mother, Tracee, in accepting the first Mason G. Smoak Award, which will now be presented to a friend of agriculture every year. Gabe is 8 and attends Lakeview Christian School. Mason Smoak, who died in a June plane crash, has been voted into the Florida Agriculture Hall of Fame and will be inducted in February.

Farm Bureau honors Smoak, looks to future

By CHRISTOPHER TUFFLEY
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SEBRING — Mason G. Smoak was remembered and honored Thursday night at the 68th Highlands County Farm Bureau Annual Dinner Program.



Mason Smoak

Smoak, a respected and beloved member of one of the county's leading citrus families, died June 20 in an airplane crash while helping inventory black bears in the area. Tom Andrews, outgoing president of the Farm Bureau, had to work to keep his emotions in check as he spoke of his friend. "Mason was a man of vision, who could see through and around problems. He could talk to anyone at any level, and would do what it took to get things done even if that meant stepping aside. He

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2008 CHAMPION FOR CHILDREN



News-Sun photo by TREY CHRISTY

Kevin J. Roberts, chief executive officer of the Children Services Foundation, hands Jacquelyn Rawlings the microphone to say a few words after she won the 2008 Judge Clifton M. Kelley Champion for Children award Thursday night. "Coming to the county was the best thing that happened to me," she told those in attendance at Thursday's awards gala.

Rawlings wins coveted Champion For Children award

By TREY CHRISTY
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SEBRING — For the winner of the 2008 Judge Clifton M. Kelly Champion for Children award, Thursday was more than a special night.

"It's so personal ... it goes beyond the honor," winner Jacquelyn Rawlings said. "It has a personal significance to me."

As a social worker, Rawlings worked with Judge Kelly, presenting cases to him on behalf of abused or neglected children.

"He really, really appreciated the voice of the social workers," she

said. "He knew we were out there face to face with them."

Rawlings has been nominated for the award before, including 2002.

Unfortunately, Kelly passed away in 2005 and was not able to see Rawlings' service to the children of Highlands County recognized.

"The only thing that would have made it better is if the Judge was here," Rawlings said. "He was always special — so special."

The award was created nine years ago to recognize outstanding service by people who have greatly improved the quality of life for local

children.

The event raises money for various Children's Services Foundation programs including the Children's Advocacy Center, Family Safehouse, Emergency Rescue Fund and the Kinsley L. Cox Living Memorial Fund.

Sheriff Susan Benton was at the award dinner and has known Rawlings for about 30 years, she said.

"She truly deserves this recognition," Benton said. "I'm honored to be a friend of hers for all these years."



News-Sun photo by KATARA SIMMONS

As important as the contestants, Heartland Idol's screaming, cheering and judge-boogie crowds seem to grow every year.

Five teens, five juniors advance to Heartland Idol finals

By KEVIN J. SHUTT
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SEBRING — To kick off Heartland Idol's semi-final round for teens and juniors and second-to-last qualifying round for adults, master of ceremonies Don Elwell dedicated the Alvin and the Chipmunks version of Daniel Powter's "Bad Day" to Sheriff Susan Benton and Commissioner Barbara Stewart.

They traded barbs, joked about parking spots but didn't throw a single punch in sending five teenagers and five juniors to next week's finals.

Another five adults were added to the mix of semi-finalists.

Their qualifying ends after next week.

For better or worse, the permanent judges are Melanie Boulay, Vickie Jones, Jim McCollum and Rooter Rush.

Martile Blackman, known for her work with Highlands Art League, Restoration Center and Highlands Little Theatre, was the celebrity guest judge.

The junior and teen division were more upbeat with the addition of music.

All qualifying has been a capella, and though contestants are allowed music accompaniment, it's not required.

Angelise Pintor took a chance singing "Heaven Sent" a capella.

Elwell called it "bold and brave."

Jones said the 14-year-old was beautiful but the lack of music worked against her, despite her voice.

Idol's 2007 Junior champion, Christopher Hawthorne, 13, didn't advance to the

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Non-instructional school personnel to get 2 percent raise

By TREY CHRISTY
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SEBRING — After spending Wednesday morning at the bargaining table, the School Board of Highlands County has agreed to give its non-instructional personnel a 2 percent raise.

The term non-instructional personnel includes para-professionals, custodial or clerical positions and workers in departments such as transportation, food service and maintenance.

"The board tried real hard to squeeze blood out of a turnip to give them a little bit of a raise," said Rodney Hollinger, deputy superintendent, about the already sparse moneys coming from the state.

"This is the first time we have had an actual cut in funding (from the state) — that is, the per pupil funding went down," Michel Bernier said. "That just hasn't happened in 35 or 40 years."

Bernier negotiated on behalf of the Highlands County Educational Support Personnel Association, the group's union. He represents four other counties as the Peace River Basin Service Unit director.

The raise covers an estimated 700 employees under the umbrella of the HCESPA.

The talks were originally scheduled for June, but with the budget crisis the negotiations were tabled until a later date.

"This gave us time to come back and see what the state was allowing and what cuts were being made," Hollinger said. "To give us a better look at our financial picture with FTE (full time enrollment)."

A district's funding is based on its student population for the current year, which regularly isn't decided until after the first week of school and after the budget is set.

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