

# School News

HAPPENINGS FROM OUR CLAY COUNTY SCHOOLS

October 2017

Vol. 6 — Issue 2

## Hunger Fight increasing its Clay presence

By Jesse Hollett  
School News

ORANGE PARK – Pinto beans and rice, macaroni and cheese and oatmeal.

It's what can be on the menu for the more than 18,000 Clay County students who, otherwise, might not eat each weekend.

After a growth spurt last year, Jacksonville-based meal distribution nonprofit Hunger Fight is expanding its presence in Clay County to include weekend meals for the county's students who eat free or reduced lunches.

The nonprofit's growth has allowed it to increase its student meal backpack program in the county.

"We know that there's a need, because the teachers and administrators and educators that we're working with are asking for more," said Bryan Butterstein, who does community development for Hunger Fight in Clay County.

Previously, he said, the organization donated meals mostly to local food pantries in Clay County. The organization services 16 counties in Northeast Florida, and until recently lacked the staff to orchestrate larger programs in smaller counties.

Hunger Fight grew 40 percent last year, according to Butterstein, a Clay County resident hired in August in large part to increase the charity's activity within the county.

"We're trying to take more of an active role in Clay County," Butterstein said. "It's just in the



PHOTO PROVIDED BY DEAN PORTER

*At the second Annual Thanksgiving Food Packing Event held last year at the Seventh Day Adventist Church on Fleming Island, volunteers carefully measured ingredients that would go nourish the needy. Members of 26 area businesses and organizations along with 180 volunteers packaged more than 52,000 meals for area food pantries. Hunger Fight organizers hope to expand their Clay County operations to provide more meals for area students this year.*

past it's been manpower. We're all doing nine different things and wearing many different hats."

The nonprofit will hold its Third Annual Thanksgiving Food Packing Event Nov. 18 and 19 at Orange Park High. Last year's event brought in members from 26 organizations and

created 56,000 meals for area residents.

The nonprofit generally sells tables at its packing events to businesses and community organizations as a way for paying for the supplies.

Volunteers pack every meal, and Butterstein said one table typically produces 4,000

"We know that there's a need, because the teachers and administrators and educators that we're working with are asking for more."

– Bryan Butterstein, who does community development for Hunger Fight in Clay County

meals during a packaging session. Those 4,000 meals will then help feed 28 kids throughout the entire school year. The students will come from Title 1 schools throughout the county. To qualify as a Title 1 school, a school must have high percentages of children from low-income families.

Hunger Fight reports its November event in Orange Park has 40 businesses signed up so far – about half of what is needed to have a successful event.

Hunger Fight projects this year's event will create 160,000 meals in two hours if the nonprofit receives the community support it needs. Hunger Fight organizes roughly 60 of these events a year, including its annual event at the Prime Osborn Convention Center in Jacksonville. That event attracts around 800 volunteers to pack the meals.

There are other smaller packing events in Clay County throughout the year – however,

**SEE HUNGER, 11**

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**Fleming Island Elementary**  
Jennifer Collins, Principal  
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Tiffany Outman, Principal  
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(904) 213-2966

**McRae Elementary**  
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**Middleburg Elementary**  
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**Montclair Elementary**  
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Carole McCullough, Principal  
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**Wilkinson Junior High**  
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Jim Fossa points to a point on the Clay County map where a housing development is planned. The multiple maps in his office guide him in his daily work with the Clay County School District where he has to track housing starts in order to plan where new Clay County Schools should be built.

## Fossa has his eye on every new housing development

By Jesse Hollett  
*School News*

GREEN COVE SPRINGS – As Clay County expands and new housing developments come online, the county inevitably has to build new schools to accommodate the influx of new students.

But how a school district goes from soil to new school house is often shrouded in mystery to outsiders, and mired in red tape, studies, maps and projection upon projection for insiders.

That's where James Fossa comes in.

Fossa, referred to colloquially as Jim, is the Clay County School District's planning and

intergovernmental affairs coordinator.

His position represents an imperceptible and often underappreciated aspect of the district that connects the school system to county, state and federal governments.

Fossa's position also ropes him in as an intermediary between builders, which makes his role indispensable for the district. He has to track up-to-date school occupancy numbers and prevent a long-held desire to place students in portable classrooms.

And for two years his chair sat empty.

Development slowed following the Great Recession, and according to Fossa, his position took a sideline. In those two years, his position

SEE DEVELOP, 9

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# Dads go back to school in Clay County

By Kile Brewer  
School News

MIDDLEBURG – Dads, stepdads, grandfathers, brothers and other guardians throughout Clay County were invited to take some time off work and visit their child at school on Sept. 27 during the school district's version of the national Dads Take Your Child to School Day campaign.

Most elementary schools, and some junior high schools, hosted events to promote fathers visiting their children. Many of the schools planned events during the students' lunch periods, while others invited dads to drop their kids off, especially if it isn't part of the dad's daily routine to drop the kids off at school.

Middleburg Elementary School hosted lunchtime activities including a photo booth where dads could pose with their student, and an outdoor obstacle course where dads could race their students over a balance beam, hurdles and cones.

"You should've seen them when they walked in and saw their dads," said Principal

Becky Wilkerson. "We really wanted dads to feel like they're just as important and needed as our moms."

Wilkerson said she received 88 responses from dads interested in attending the special event. Some dads worked double, or even triple duty, with multiple kids in multiple grade levels, and stuck around for consecutive lunch periods. Some dads brought their kids a favorite meal, and others tried out the school's menu for themselves.

"I'm here with her and I've got another one later today with her older brother," Owen Fagan said while standing with his five-year-old kindergartener Elise. "It's nice to be able to get away [from work] and see her."

"It's very, very fun," Elise said about seeing her dad at school. Her favorite part of the lunch period was, in her words, "just talking to him."

Wilkerson said they have a lot of military families at their school, so, dads who currently serve in the military were asked to wear their uniforms if they wanted. The school works hard

**SEE DAD, 7**



STAFF PHOTO BY KILE BREWER

Owen Fagan and his daughter Elise attempt the balance beam that was set up as part of Middleburg Elementary School's Dads Take Your Kids to School Day.

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# Family is what it's all about after Irma

By Kile Brewer  
School News

MIDDLEBURG – In the wake of Hurricane Irma storm, teachers at Wilkinson Junior High School started thinking about their students.

A few teachers came together and took to social media to seek out donations for the students and families at the school, where more than 60 percent of their students receive school meals either free or at a reduced rate. With school being cancelled through Sept. 15, that meant a majority of the school's students would not be receiving those meals.

"When it comes to these kids, there's nothing we won't do," said Ryan Vaughan, the school's ESE director.

As donations started to come through, Vaughan spoke with his wife, who works with Lutheran Social Services. The nonprofit organization has a program that helps Duval County school students by providing schools with tied bags of foods that are designed to get a student through the weekend. The bags are handed out discreetly by teachers and placed directly in the students' backpacks.

Vaughan thought this would be a great way to give to the community, so he pitched the idea to LSS on Wednesday, and by Thursday, the agency was on board. The school announced the donation and invited members of the community to come by on Sept. 15 between noon and 6 p.m. to pick up a bag of food for each student. Teachers also asked donors to shop for laundry soap, pet supplies, and items such as baby wipes that come in handy when your hot water heater doesn't have power and prefer not to take a cold shower.

"Even though they prepared for the storm, they didn't know [the effects] would last this long," said Jason Clark, a nourishment network coordinator with Lutheran Social Services. "Our goal is to get them through the weekend."



PHOTOS BY KILE BREWER

Middleburg residents "shop" for food and sanitary supplies last Sept. 15 at Wilkinson Junior High School in Middleburg. The school's staff, in partnership with Lutheran Social Services, provided a bag of food that would get one student through the weekend following Hurricane Irma.

Each bag contained snacks and food staples that are designed to provide about seven basic meals, one for Friday night and three for both Saturday and Sunday. A box truck delivered hundreds of these bags last Friday morning at Wilkinson.

"This is just our way of giving back to the community in this time of need," Clark said. "A lot of people spent their money on other things to prepare for the storm."

After the donations from the Jacksonville-based Lutheran Social Services arrived, Wilkinson's cafeteria was half-full of bags of food. What started as one table of donated food and supplies had expanded and filled almost all the table space in their lunch room.

There was enough extra food that Wilkin-

son sent 200 bags to Clay Hill Elementary and another 300 to Middleburg Elementary. Following Friday's pop-up shop at Wilkinson, any remaining food and supplies were taken across the parking lot to Wilkinson Elementary where they would be given away at the school's block party, which was thought up as an escape for families who had been dealing with the effects of the storm all week long.

"We wanted to have a party for our families to come together and have a good time, to distract them from what has been going on," Wilkinson Elementary Principal Heather Teto said. "That's what we're all about in Middleburg – family."

In addition to donated food, supplies and the bags donated through LSS, there were also



Cookies and cupcakes were provided to anyone picking up food and supplies last Friday at Wilkinson Junior High School during the school's efforts to help the community following the damage and loss of power caused by Hurricane Irma. These special treats were provided by the school's FCCLA chapter.

some items up for grabs that were intended as a small, comforting gesture from the school.

The junior high's FCCLA chapter came together to create something special for those who showed up at the school for food and supplies. Student club members baked cookies and cupcakes, all artfully decorated and wrapped individually in cellophane as a sort of free bake sale for people who, after a week of power outages and weather-related issues, would appreciate fresh home-baked treats.

"It adds that home feeling, it's not just a bag of food, it's something special," said Christina Cornwell, Wilkinson Junior High principal. "Hopefully they get the feeling that we love them."

As the teachers bagged bread and helped shoppers find the items they need, there were smiles on every face in the room. Endless

SEE FAMILY, 6

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## Davis' nonprofit helps families after Irma

GREEN COVE SPRINGS — Over the last eight years, the nonprofit Jacksonville and Florida Storm Softball organization has helped hundreds of female athletes play softball at the collegiate level. The nonprofit, which is run by Clay County School Superintendent Addison Davis and his wife Natalie, over the years, has built relationships with numerous similar associations. On Sept. 16, the Virginia Chesterfield Fusion Fastpitch organizations donated two 53-foot tractor trailers full of items to assist with Hurricane Irma relief.

"As the leader of this organization, I am donating this to Clay County!" Davis posted on his Superintendent Facebook page. Davis said, after seeing firsthand the needs that Clay County has in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, the items could help many people here get back to normalcy. "This week, staff members worked hard to organize thousands of donations for Clay County employees affected by Hurricane Irma. In the past two days, employees have been able to stop by and pick up supplies to help them through the recovery process," Davis stated on Facebook.



## Bringing home the win

JACKSONVILLE — It all began as a seed that was planted last school year and on Sept. 17, it paid off for the students from Team Lakeside Elementary as they got to attend a home game of the NFL's Jacksonville Jaguars. The Lakeside students won the Play 60 Challenge during halftime and brought home a check for \$2,000 plus they received another \$1,500 grant from the Jaguars Foundation. The Play 60 Challenge is a six-week program that encourages sixth-grade students to become more involved in physical fitness through hands-on activities and journaling. Teachers challenge students to exercise 30 minutes during the school day and 30 minutes after school. Lakeside first became involved in the program in December 2016.

## Six Clay students named National Merit Semifinalists

EVANSTON, Ill. — Four students from Fleming Island High and two from Ridgeview High have been named Semifinalists in the 2018 National Merit Scholarship Program, sponsored by the National Merit Scholarship Corp.

Fleming Island High students Nathan Campbell, Corrina R Laird, Sara M. Phillips

and Samantha E. Zima and Ridgeview High students Evan Collins William J. Kortright join approximately 16,000 Semifinalists in the 63rd annual National Merit Scholarship Program.

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**SEE MERIT, 8**

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# Family

from page 4

exchanges of, "Thank you," and "we're here to help," could be heard.

"We want everyone to feel at home whether they're a student, parent, or faculty member," said Tina Norris, a teacher at Wilkinson Junior High. "This is a family, not just a school, and we have to help our people."

Norris smiled as she watched students and staff carrying groceries for shoppers, and loading up trucks outside to would be delivered to other schools and to families who couldn't get

out of their homes.

"We have faculty members here who don't even have power themselves, but they're here volunteering," Norris said. "I'm so proud of our kids. These students are volunteering their time when they're out of school to help the community. They've come together to help those in need."

PHOTO BY KILE BREWER

Wilkinson Junior High School teacher Tina Norris, center, carries some bags for a woman who stopped by the school Friday to pick up some food, pet supplies and cleaning products after the school opened up to the community to provide donations for those in need following Hurricane Irma.



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# Dad

from page 2

uniforms if they wanted. The school works hard to recognize military parents and coordinate with their evolving and sometimes busy schedules.

"When [a child's] dad serves in the military, the family serves too," Wilkerson said.

After lunch, dads posed for photos with their kids and then everyone headed outside to enjoy a brief after-lunch recess. Most dads talked while their kids stumbled their way through the obstacle course, their kindergarteners' legs tangling up in hurdle blocks and hopscotch ladders. Other dads spent one-on-one time with their child, especially the first-time dads.

Jake Boyles and his five-year-old son Jacob walked over to a swing set and challenged each other to see who could swing higher. They laughed and talked until the bell rang to send Jacob back to class, and his father back to work.

"I'm normally at work and can't see him at school, or even take him to school," Boyles said. "It's nice to be able to spend time with him."

The event saw participation throughout the school district, and even led some parents to ask why their specific school didn't participate. With the event still in its infancy, there is still



STAFF PHOTO BY KILE BREWER

*Jake Boyles, left, and his son Jacob see who can swing higher recently at Middleburg Elementary when dads were encouraged to come spend lunch with their students as part of a national campaign.*

room to grow and unify the effort in future years. The event will continue to be held annually in September in coordination with the national event, so interested dads should keep an eye out next school year for a glimpse into the lives of their students.

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### Showing support for the hardest hit

MIDDLEBURG — Students from Orange Park High traveled south to the campus of Middleburg High to hang banners of encouragement in the wake of the damage caused to the Middleburg community by Hurricane Irma. Posing in the new motto “Swords Up,” OPHS Raiders, sponsors and coaches took part in the banner hanging during the week of Homecoming at Middleburg. Swords Up + Bronco Up = #OneClayOneFamily

### Group names Davis 'Superintendent to Watch'

ROCKVILLE, Md. – Clay County School Superintendent Addison Davis is among a group of 26 school superintendents nationwide recently honored by the National School Public Relations Association.

Davis and his colleagues made the list of “2017-2018 Superintendent to Watch” for his innovative and effective ways he uses communication technology.

Davis was also recognized for his dynamic, fast-paced leadership and strong communication skills. NSPRA chose Davis because he “engages and informs his school community with new communication technology tools combined with tried-and-true techniques.” As a new superintendent, NSPRA commends Davis’ efforts to expand two-way communication and outreach efforts throughout Clay County Schools.



Addison Davis

“As I near the completion of my first year as superintendent, I am honored and humbled by this national recognition. I believe communication is key to the function and success of our organization.

I work hard every day to integrate new technology into our communication platforms while keeping traditional forms of communication to make sure we reach all audiences, internally and externally. I will continue to look for innovative and effective ways to lead Clay County Schools,” Davis said.

# Your hard work is building futures.

We recognize the teachers and administrators of the Clay County School System for their commitment to academic success. Their dedication is an inspiration to us all.



MT-1133618.1 8/17

## Merit

from page 5

million that will be offered next spring.

To be considered for a Merit Scholarship award, Semifinalists must fulfill several requirements to advance to the Finalist level of the competition.

About 90 percent of the Semifinalists are expected to attain Finalist standing, and about half of the Finalists will win a National Merit Scholarship, earning the Merit Scholar title.

Based in Evanston, Illinois, NMSC, is a not-for-profit organization that operates without government assistance, and was established in 1955 specifically to conduct the annual National Merit Scholarship Program.



Using that data, and other projections like it, the district can help make its case to the state that a new school is needed.

Fossa calls the process “legal gymnastics” that help ensure school boards are good stewards of taxpayer money. But there are times when expectations don’t meet up to reality. For example, Shadowlawn Elementary was built on County Road 218 with the expectation that housing developments would pop up around it. The Great Recession hit shortly thereafter, and those developments never came. With the recovery of the economy has come the resurgence of possibility that the school will be more utilized.

With an average of 67 new homebuilding permits being issued per month, the school district is more vigilant than it has been in 10 years in terms of watching out for the need to build new schools.

*Jim Fossa remains constantly aware of every planned new housing development in Clay County by connecting with county planning department staff. He uses the info to calculate where new Clay County schools should be built.*

## Develop

from page 2

was filled by other employees who undertook his role in roles split across district staff.

The school district decided to refill the position after former Superintendent Charlie Van Zant Jr. was defeated in last year’s elections. Fossa said his role has to be aware of the past while looking to the future.

“We want to be better prepared,” Fossa said. “I think in the past the way we’ve been doing things is moving portables around, that’s been sort of our way of doing things, and I think we want to get away from being in the business of moving portables. We want to have more of a permanent fixture in some areas. It’s a better way of doing business I think.”

Fossa tracks state, federal and local housing development plans to guide him in decision making. For example, Green Cove Springs and Lake Asbury are expected to explode in population over the decade. This increase in density will require new schools be built.

The boom is expected in part from the construction of the First Coast Expressway. However, before the February announcement that the district would build a new school in Oakleaf, named Elementary School ‘Y’, it had been 10 years since the district had built a new school.

Currently, Fossa said, Clay County boasts the dubious title as having the fourth highest number of portable classrooms in the state. Clay currently operates 942 portables of which 780 are more than 20 years old.

‘School Y’ is proposed to meet the current needs for growth in the area without the need for portables. Fossa said proper planning helps insure that, as the county grows, it can do so

without as much future reliance on portable classrooms.

His school district job requires Fossa to sit on county government’s Development Review Committee where he gets to see neighborhoods when they are mere ideas on a piece of paper. The district uses a projection formula that supposes there will be 23 children per 100 homes built. The formula allows the district to plan more accurately when the need for a new school will present itself.

The district is currently examining properties for school construction on Tynes Boulevard and another on Magnolia West that he expects will be hotspots of growth within the next seven years.

“His role is critical in the planning aspect and making sure that we’re looking at the right properties,” said Michael Kemp, assistant superintendent of operations for the Clay County School District. “Picking a property, it’s not like throwing a dart at a map. It’s not a guess.”

“It’s about making sure our schools stay as balanced as we can...as schools start getting more students we start addressing them as needed,” Kemp said.

When those properties are identified and the area matures to meet the need of a new school, Fossa’s work truly begins.

To build a school, the district must first prove a need exists in the community. Fossa acts as the emissary in this conversation. The state will want what’s known as a spot study, a report with data that proves there is capacity based on population projections and a throng of other data sets.

For example, if an area expected a growth of 1,000 housing units, the school district can assume that there will be 26 children per 100 homes. In this example, the officials could expect an additional 260 students.

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*“The academic skills and education he has received could not have been better, but, more importantly, the increase in self-reliance, attitude, happiness and self-worth simply cannot be measured or accurately described in words”* - Mary J.

## Fleming Island High athlete dies after cardiac arrest

JACKSONVILLE – Officials at Wolfson Children's Hospital report that Fleming Island High football and baseball player Ben Johnson passed away Sept. 22 at 11:55 a.m.

Johnson, a sophomore, had cardiac arrest and irreversible brain damage, according to a prepared statement from hospital staff.

"An autopsy will be performed to determine the cause. The family appreciates prayers and asks for time to grieve privately with their close friends and family," stated the news release.



Ben Johnson

The Johnson family declined to publicly comment on their son's death and instead asked the hospital to share a statement with the community.

"Ben went to be with his Lord and Savior today. While we mourn, we find peace knowing



he is with Jesus. We also find hope in Ben's selfless decision to donate his organs. Please pray for healing for our family. Our hearts are broken," stated the Johnson Family.

Clay County School District spokeswoman Nicole Snyder said Johnson passed out on Sept. 19 while he was working in the weight room during school hours. Emergency rescue crews were called to render aid to Johnson who was

transported to Wolfson Children's Hospital where he was in critical condition.

"In the last two weeks, Clay County has suffered a number of scenarios that have impacted our community. We are devastated to hear about the incident involving our student, Ben Johnson. He was known as a kind, caring friend and son, who was a leader inside and outside the classroom. Our thoughts and

prayers are with Ben's family," said Addison Davis, Clay County School Superintendent.

At the Sept. 21 game between Fleming Island and Ridgeview High, students and others took to the football field at half-time and formed the No. 78, the number Johnson wore on the junior varsity team at Fleming Island High.

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# Hunger

from page 1

the Thanksgiving event is the largest.

Orange Park High has its own food pantry and clothing depot on campus born out of the need to help students focus on education rather than having to worry where their next meal is coming from. Administrators expanded the food pantry last year to include more items in a larger space due to the population of underserved students that attend the school.

"Every community has a need," said Dean Porter, development director for Hunger Fight. "Every school, Title 1 or not, has Title 1 students, so even the charter and private schools have Title 1 students, just not as many."

The nonprofit sources ingredients from nine distributors and creates the meals to both be nourishing and easy to make. Parents need only access to boiled water to make the meals.

The nonprofit has distributed more than 3.6 million meals since its creation in 2012.

Porter and his wife Sherri Porter – who serves as the nonprofit's president and chief executive officer – created Hunger Fight to give back to the less fortunate after successful



careers in marketing.

"This is where we're supposed to be, this is where God has put us...to make a difference in the lives of people who are less fortunate," Dean said.

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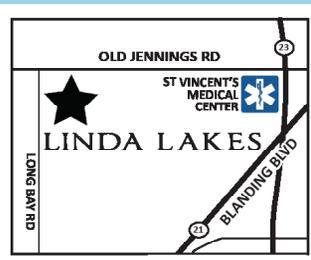


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**The Willowood D** - lot 1-7  
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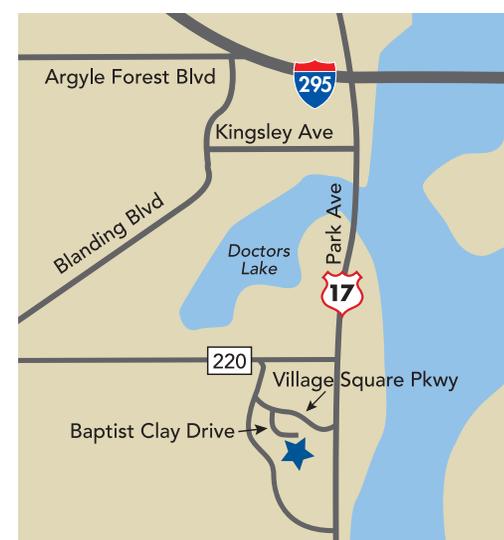
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