

Saying Goodbye



Saying Goodbye To Ocala

By Kevin T. Sheilley

This past September marked 30 years of my work with chambers and economic development organizations and in January I celebrated my 27th year of leading these types of organizations. I consider myself incredibly fortunate and blessed to not only love what I do but to have “found my calling” so early. I do consider it a calling. I truly believe part of my purpose, part of the reason God put me on this earth, is to impact communities.

Growing up, I was constantly planning out “my city.” Literally, I had a three-inch binder that was overflowing with not only my sketched plans but list upon list of how my city ranked. Is it any surprise that I am today so enamored with following various rankings, lists, and data!?! I spent hours working, thinking, and researching about communities and growth. If you don't believe me, just ask my twin sister. However, I had no idea any of that work could one day relate to a career.

After college, I went to work for a statewide gubernatorial campaign in Tennessee. While I enjoyed the work, it certainly did not pay well. Note—don't believe everything you see on TV and movies upon campaign life. However, there was a plan. My candidate would win, and I would have a position in the new administration. While my candidate did win the primary, we all knew he was not going to win the general election. When my phone rang and a former college professor inquired if I would be interested in the communications job at the local chamber, I jumped at the chance. I had no idea what a chamber did, but it paid money!

However, I quickly discovered the Jackson (TN) Area Chamber of Commerce did the work of which I had always dreamed. They led the community's

Walts Brake and More 60th Anniversary



Ribbon cutting by the Ocala Metro CEP Chamber of Commerce was a success.

Commissioner Michelle Stone read the proclamation about Walts Brake and More.

There were hundreds in attendance. Photo by Tom Loury

economic development efforts and worked with the local school system and focused on transportation issues. This was my stuff! This is what I wanted to do for a career—I just never knew what it was called.

Fast forward now 30 years, and I have been doing work which I love. God willing, I will get to do this for another 18 years. (I would like to say 20 but my wife will kill me if I say that.) I have worked with incredible communities in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Florida. By the time you read this, I will have added my fourth state with South Carolina. However, there will always be only one Ocala.

For the last 12 years, Ocala has not only been where we work, but it has been where my family calls home. In fact, I think for two of my three children, Ocala will always be what they think of when discussing home. It is not hyperbole or trite for me to say we love Ocala.

I would offer two bits of advice. First, always remember that partnership is what has driven the incredible recovery, and now growth, this community has experienced over the last 12 years. Partnerships between the business community, local governments, and education providers. I would argue that no community in this state works as well together as this one. That is not to say that we always agree, but we find ways to partner to address the important issues.

Secondly, do not let anyone tell you Ocala is any less. This community takes a backseat to no one. Part of the Ocala charm and success has been to find uniquely Ocala ways to address our needs and challenges. We love coming up with our own approach, hearing the naysayers, and then smirking when our success becomes the one they all want to copy. Ocala can and Ocala will.

This is a place where things happen. At the CEP, the mission is to be the catalyst for a prosperous community, and this is becoming a more prosperous community by the day. As someone I greatly admire and respect is known to say, “Ocala = Opportunity.”

MEET JAMES UTHMIEIR



Governor DeSantis sworn in his new **Florida Attorney General** to take Ashley Moody's place.

About the Ocala DownTown (News)

by TomL

Our Ocala DownTown news has been in the UF digital library for years. We thank them for that. Our papers have been around for years. We have won hundreds of awards. The awards competition were against newspapers in the state of Florida, some of the competitors had very large staffs and a million circulation. Awards including photo's, ad design, Best editorial, best story, best ad campaign. Of course that is all history. We survived the COVID set backs, etc etc etc. COVID was probably the worst. Today have other very large competitors that get in your face, when they see you do something different they do it also.

We will print a story that will make

attorneys jump up! It is always true. We printed about Fauci and the Wuhan lab during Obama reign as president.

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Advertising in the newspapers helps us bring you information some times that no one else will print, advertising is a deduction on your income tax, so advertise and help us bring you information! Our job is to bring you good information & promote you the advertisers. We have printed press releases from local, state & federal agencies every month for many years. Half page of Governor / half page of Kat Cammack / Half page of Florida state attorney General. First it was Pam Bondi then Ashley Moony and now it will be James Uthmeier. Our columns have been from CEO of the CEP Ocala Chamber of Commerce Kevin Sheilley, he has moved to a new challenge, we are working to bring you the CEP Chamber column in the future, State attorney Dennis Baxley has retired so we are on the hunt for a state senator to write a column in our area. We are in the University of Florida library. So your ads can be seen there as well as on your computer and your smart phone. Our online library available to you goes back years. TomL Publishing said that! We are currently looking for two columnist to replace those who have retired or moved out of state. We have five websites. Four digital newspapers.

floury@att.net - tomllpublishing.com



Chair Chat

State Affairs:
by **Brigitte Smith**
**Chairman, Marion County
Republican Executive Committee**

The Marion County Republican Executive Committee Legislative Affairs committee traveled to Tallahassee for the special session. We have been sending prior emails regarding the immigration legislation, but below is a new rule to vehicle registration that we learned about during our trip.

New Rule 15C-1.015, FAC - Vehicle Registration Information, rule was established to define a “valid passport” when filing an application to register a motor vehicle; when filing an application for vehicle registration, an individual applicant must provide a valid driver license or identification card issued by this state or another state or a valid passport. For purposes of s. 320.02(2)(a), Florida Statutes, new Rule 15C-1.015, FAC, defines a “valid passport” as: (1) An unexpired passport or passport card issued by the United States government; or (2) An unexpired passport issued by the government of another country with: (a) A stamp or mark affixed by the United States Department of Homeland Security onto the passport to evidence and authorize lawful presence in the United States; or (b) An unexpired I-94, or current permanent resident card, or unexpired immigrant visa, issued by the United States Department of Homeland Security.

This was passed in direct collaboration with FLHP in an effort to stop illegals from obtaining vehicle registration tags.

GREAT NEWS: TODAY – Governor DeSantis signed into an agreement with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to allow Florida Highway Patrol to be trained & authorized by ICE to carry out immigration enforcement actions here in our State. This will allow state law enforcement officers in Florida Highway Patrol, to serve and execute warrants of arrest for immigration violations, arrest any alien attempting to enter our country unlawfully and deliver them to ICE without delay, and interrogate suspected illegal aliens and detain anyone found to be in violation of our immigration laws.

Also don't forget our meeting Feb 17th has been moved to the Ocala Police Dept in their community room. (402 S. Pine ave Ocala) Great space they have! Congresswoman Kat Cammack will be visiting!

Cardmember Service

Thanks again for contacting Cardmember Service.

We wanted to let you to know we're continuing to research your fraud claim on your AAA account ending 7614.If we need any additional information, we'll let you know either by mail or phone.

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About California!

By TomL

California has never taken responsibly for any of their disasters. Florida has a maintenance program with their forest. In the town where I live the State Park burns the underbrush to prevent a forest fire. They have crews especially trained for that. They watch it close and burn anything under the trees so there is no foliage. It help growth of the tree's and prevent out of control wild fire. That is half the battle. Why can't California do that? Why did they not plan for the dry season. Why was the reservoir dry, why did they not have water brought down from the north. It is probably to save a minnow or a frog or a bug something that might go extinct. They have been bailed out to many times. Instead they let whole town get wipe out, people died, animals died and the fat cat politicians say it's not my fault. YES IT IS! They say "We need a bail out!" Now California heads are asking what happened to the water? They know what happened they are just trying to save their butt! The people at the top should be charged with neglect.

**What say
YOU?**

Appointed Judge Stops Investigation

How does this happen? First he or she was not elected by the American Voter and should not have anything to say about the Federal Government. An appointed Judge not elected, from a state, stops the Federal investigation of the United States. That can't be what our forefathers meant when they appointed judges many years ago. Now they think they can OVER REACH and dictated to the whole United States. District judges should address matters for their district they are in. Federal judges should be elected by Congress or the people. When politician's try to stop Elon Musk you need to ask "WHY?" I think it's because they will be exposed. They need to get exposed. Elon is following the money! Elon Musk team is looking for efficiencies on how to save our tax money. When he finds a way to save money he turns it over to the President and The President and his team make the decisions. Elon Musk team is just an auditor to see how the money is being spent or laundered. Elon Musk team just show how to save money or efficiency. Please Elon save our tax money!

What say you? tloury@att.net

Reporting Fraud

I had a number of things going on at once. I received several fraudulent attempts on the internet, then I turned them in and my computer got hacked. I click on something and the computer started DONG DONG a siren I think and a voice saying don't turn your computer off. I push the button on the side of the mac which stopped everything. The silence was deafening, then I let the computer boot back up and the was no email response. My password was breached, I was sent help emails to click on I did not do that. I got really discourage. Turned the computer off and unplugged it. I thought about it all night. Next morning I tried to create a new password and at about 25 or more attempts I made some head way. My computer and email is back. That was Saturday AM

Sunday AM I get a text from the bank that I have my credit card with and it said we think there was fraudulent attempts to use my card. Sure enough there 5 fraudulent attempts. I called the bank it shut down my card and went over the charges with the bank and I said yes or no to the charges. All done over the phone. They said I would get a new card in two business days. They will investigate the fraud. The bank said I won't lose any money, it might take a little time. My card came in two business days. One week later they said all my money was put

back in my account and will report later with information about the hack or breach.

What do you think? Do you think someone is after me? I'll bet there is, I have been filing complaints and questioning fraudulent people. One of them is doing this and I hope they catch them. I'll file charges against them.

Columbia and Tariffis

By TomL

When I look at Columbia and tariffs I see coffee export and the farm / Marijuana by farmers & cartels. A very large portion of the Columbian money comes from drug farming. How do you put a tariff on drugs?

Columbia (COL) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners

The Observatory of Economic Complexity

The top exports of Colombia are Crude Petroleum (\$16.1B), Coal Briquettes (\$12.9B), Coffee (\$4.15B), Refined Petroleum (\$2.64B), and Gold (\$2.59B)

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Colombia exports a variety of products, including crude petroleum, coal, coffee, gold, and other minerals, as well as

Continued page 5

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Tom Loury *Tom Loury Long time member of CEP/Ocala Chamber of Commerce, Past President of the Ocala Business Leaders and current member, Co-Founder and past President of Select Business Associates, Past President of the Lady Lake Chamber and current member. If you want to make contact with the newspaper / Tom Loury email tloury@att.net*

PUBLISHER'S NOTES



The news media will go on for days on a subject, saying the same thing hour after hour, day after day. The jet that went down killing everyone. That was a shame, but the first video I saw I remember seeing

flames, I said something happened mid air. But the media danced around that subject for the day and finally I heard a pilot being interviewed that said the plane was on fire coming down. So that meant there was a mid air problem. Now they claim the helicopter was not where it was suppose to be, or was it? It was to high and off course. It was not suppose to be over the river! I always feel bad when there is loss of life. This was avoidable.

While I'm writing about the media, I am disappointed in Fox not having the football games on regular TV Channel. You have to

spend more money. We the working class is tap out. I don't anyone that can afford the tickets unless they are on federal relief money. I am disappointed!

Question??? Have you ever heard of a transsexual infant? Lets get real people and stop doing these thing to innocent children and babies!

Been getting fraudulent things happening? Let me know if you had a fraud tried on you.

tloury@att.net

I got a thank you note from Norton saying thank you for the ordering. I said I did not order anything from you, I responded and I said I think that is considered fraud. It was probably done by a sales person not Norton. My computer was hacked and I lost my email for a while. I guess if I had Norton it would have stopped that message.

My wife got a notice to pay a ticket for

running a red light by her tag number. She has no tag numbers! Take note of who they want you to send the check too. Send the information to the fraud department at the Shderiff department.

I still think the BOI was a hoax's or a mistake. I was told it was legal and by all standards it was coming from a government body. It cost people money to have it done until they closed down the website. The only explanation I could find is people from other countries that were registered after 2024 were registering LLC's and using it for money laundering. So someone in government got the bright idea to have everyone re-register so they could figure it out who was legal. Just another illegal cost to the business world.

Watch out for these hoax's they will keep coming. My email received a piece of mail and my mac usually will tell me not to click on that, so I don't. Last week I clicked on something that I thought I recognized and sirens went off. All kind of weird donging sounds desk top screen flashing. I hit the shut down on my Mini Mac and got it stopped! It took a whole day to get my email back. It said my password was breached and a few things I did not understand but we are back at it again. Thank God for the Mac.

President Trump wants to require some of Ukraine's valuable rare earth minerals in exchange for U.S. aid.

The minerals Ukraine has access to are critical in the manufacturing of batteries, radar systems, and armor – all key for the

U.S. and its allies. Trump has shown recent interest in Greenland's reserves as well. Both would go a long way to reducing the West's reliance on Chinese minerals.

The Senators that are saying RFK is not fit to run the HHS are the same ones that voted for the mentally ill guy who they put into office 4 years ago.

The new State Attorney General will be James Uthmeier, he was Governor DeSantis Chief of staff. Before being the Governors Chief of staff he was Governors attorney. He is a graduate of UF.

For people who say the illegals are not hurting anyone, the latest figures show.... data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed that 88% of all job growth in the past five years has gone to immigrants, with the majority of the workers lacking legal status and having no skills.

Tom Loury



Newspaper Deadlines

Editorial & Ad Copy for April

Seniors Voice & Ocala DownTown

Noon, March 25th

Lady Lake Magazine & Village Spectator

12am, March 30th

Seniors Voice of Ocala/Ocala Downtown Products of TomL Publishing, LLC

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Columbia

Continued from page 3

agricultural products (drugs), food, and manufactured goods

Mineral oils, and thermal coal, reaching an export value of 12.4 billion U.S. dollars and 7.65 billion dollars, respectively. Unroasted and not decaffeinated coffee was Colombia's fourth most exported product, with roughly 2.8 billion U.S. dollars' worth of exports.

Most exported products from Colombia in 2023

(in billion U.S. dollars)

Exports in billion U.S. dollars

Gold (including platinum gold), in unprocessed forms*

Other coffees not roasted, nor decaffeinated

Coke and semi-coke of coal, whether or not agglomerated**

Other fresh flowers and buds, cut for bouquets or decorations

Fuel oil, except waste oils and containing biodiesel

Gas oils (diesel), except waste oils, and containing biodiesel

Gasoline-type jet fuel, for reactors and turbines, except waste oils and those containing biodiesel

Bananas or plantains

History of Drug Production

Marijuana. The marijuana drug trade was the gateway to what would eventually make Colombia's drug industry so prevalent. ...

Cocaine. The scarcity of the coca industry and unique growing environment made cocaine production a very profitable industry for Colombia. ...Heroin.

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Boys n Girls Club Ribbon Cutting

Ocala Metro Chamber of Commerce: Congratulations to the Boys & Girls Club of Marion County, Florida on the grand unveiling of the COX Innovation Labs at the Dr. H.L. Harrell Youth Center! Thanks to a generous grant from Cox Communications and the James M. Cox Foundation, this incredible new space is set to inspire and empower the next generation of creators, thinkers, and innovators. Photo credit: Ocala Metro CEP Communications Team



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Walts Brake and More 60th Anniversary

PROCLAMATION
BOARD OF COUNTY
COMMISSIONERS OF MARION
COUNTY, FLORIDA

WHEREAS, 2025 marks the 60th anniversary of Walts Brake & More, a family-owned business founded by Walt Krumm Sr. in 1965 when he moved his wife and four young children to Ocala from Miami with only \$600, leasing a small location on Silver Springs Blvd. to establish Walts Brake Service; and

WHEREAS, through decades of dedication and growth, the Krumm family expanded the business from its modest

beginnings, acquiring property on South Magnolia in 1969, constructing a larger facility in 1972, and ultimately building the current 18,000-square-foot location on NW Gainesville Road in 1984, which now serves as a full-service facility for auto, RV, heavy-duty trucks, and fleet accounts; and

WHEREAS, as a Certified AAA facility for nearly 25 years, Walts Brake & More has upheld rigorous standards of excellence, maintaining annual inspections, employing ASE-certified mechanics, and earning and consistently maintaining exceptional customer satisfaction ratings through verified invoiced reviews; and

WHEREAS, the Krumm family's leadership has spanned three generations, with Walt Jr. joining his father in 1973, taking over day-to-day management in 1977, and expanding the scope of services, while Walter "Rusty" Krumm III, after serving in the Marine Corps, joined in 2008 and assumed leadership in 2024, continuing the legacy of this family-operated business; and

WHEREAS, Walts Brake & More has overcome challenges and celebrated milestones, including the loss of its founder, Walt Krumm Sr., in October 2020, and has thrived thanks to the loyalty of its

customers, the dedication of its staff, and the unwavering support of the Ocala community, making this 60th anniversary a testament to its resilience and success;

NOW THEREFORE, the Board of County Commissioners of Marion County, Florida, by virtue of the authority vested in us do hereby proclaim that February 13th, 2025 be known as

"WALTS BRAKE & MORE DAY"

DULY PROCLAIMED this 5th day of March 2025.



Walts Brake and More 60th Anniversary



FAIRtax



President Trump has said that he would like to eliminate the income tax and create the External Revenue

Service. But will tariffs be enough to finance the government even if it is reduced in size? Some have suggested a small flat income tax to supplement the revenue stream. This is a bad idea on more than one level.

First: It will never stay flat. In 1913 the government implemented a small flat income tax on the very wealthy and pundits said it would never effect the majority of our citizens. We all know how that turned out giving us the most convoluted, intrusive and inefficient tax system possible.

Second: It keeps the price of goods higher due to the hidden embedded nature of the income tax on those who produce the goods we purchase.

Third: It would allow lobbyists to continue to influence government representatives to manipulate the tax code to garner favors for their respective clients in exchange for financial input to campaign coffers.

Fourth: It keeps the IRS in place to implement it.

A much better partner for tariffs would be a consumption tax such as the FAIRtax. A consumption tax could readily be collected by states and remitted to the ERS. Millions of dollars have already been spent on researching the retail consumption tax concept by some of America's top economists resulting in HR25, the FAIRtax bill.

You pay the tax when you purchase an item with the tax stated visibly on your receipt. This visibility creates a natural limiter to the level of taxation. When you purchase a new item (used goods that have already been taxed when new are no longer taxable) your tax obligation is over - no need to keep receipts for tax purposes as there is no annual tax form to fill out. YOU, not the government, determine how much you pay in taxes by your spending habits. Although the stated maximum FAIRtax rate is at present 23%, with a reduction in spending and the tariff revenue added to the equation that percentage may be reduced as well.

Our current income tax system costs more than it collects when you include collection and compliance costs as well as the cost of less-than-optimal financial decisions for minimizing tax obligations. With the FAIRtax, those costs are reduced by 90%. With no business-to-business tax, the imbedded costs go away allowing prices to drop. And with no federal taxes withheld from your paycheck, you will have more purchasing power.

With any form of income tax you are applying a punishment for being productive, working hard, investing and saving. It is counterproductive for a society and economy to punish productive behavior and any form of income tax was rejected by our Founding Fathers as it should be by us now. A retail sales tax such as the FAIRtax returns the power to the people and reinforces our representative form of government.

For more information go to FAIRtax.org

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Ocala Metro Chamber of Commerce: HCA Florida West Marion Hospital hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate the opening of its new, larger operating suite, the first in a series of expanded treatment areas that will open in the hospital's new tower. This investment in state-of-the-art facilities is a huge step forward in enhancing care and supporting the health of our community. Photo credit: Ocala Metro CEP Communications Team

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VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR
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Love is just a leash away!!

The HSMC is here for you and the animals who depend on us. We wanted to share that we will continue to be here to help unwanted pets during this pandemic while following all Marion County and Florida state guidelines.

As this situation is constantly changing, we ask that you continue to visit our Shelter using the safety guidelines in place.

How can you help?

Pet Food Bank: Help stock our Pet Food Bank with pet food and supplies for people who cannot afford them due to job loss or other reasons. You can also bring donations to our Shelter daily from 10-6. Masks required please! If you need help keeping your pet with you during this time, our Happy Paws food program is here for you.

Volunteer: A small number of volunteers have returned to help in various departments. We are accepting volunteer applications but do not yet know when we will schedule orientations for new volunteers. Please contact us for more information about volunteering. We are currently working on a digital orientation.

Opt to adopt: According to the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization, there is no evidence that companion animals such as cats and dogs can spread the virus that causes COVID-19.

Donate: We know there is a lot of uncertainty right now but homeless and unwanted animals still need us. Donate to help the Humane Society of Marion County so we continue our lifesaving work and make them feel safe and loved.



Bilbie

Bilbie is a 14 weeks old male brought to the HSMC with her brother Wombat! We believe they could be Xoloitzcuintli, or Xolo, which is Mexican hairless dog breed.



Fuchsia is a 15 week old paralyzed kitten full of love.



Ninja is paralyzed in his hind legs but enjoys runs with his wheels.

Your donations make it possible to provide medical care, food and shelter to animals in need. On behalf of all the animals, thank you for caring.



Humane Society of Marion County
PO Box 1542 Ocala, FL 34478
Mail check or complete the credit/debit card payment form.



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Donations to the Humane Society are tax-deductible. Check with your accountant for more information. No goods or services have been provided to the donor as a result of this gift.

FROM THE DESK OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL MOODY



Actions Taken
By Attorney
General

There is a list of action taken by either Ashley Moody and James Uthmieir

February 14, 2025
Attorney General's
Office of Statewide

Prosecution

Secures a 5-Year Prison Sentence for Member of Romanian Crime Ring.

February 13, 2025 Florida Attorney General's Office Warns Floridians About Romance Scams Ahead of Valentine's Day.

February 13, 2025 Florida Attorney General's Office Secures Order Prohibiting MV Realty from Enforcing Liens or Encumbrances on Homes After Deceiving Florida Homeowners.

February 10, 2025 Florida AG's Office Announces Shutdown of Fraudulent SunPass Websites with FDLE and Releases New Scams at a Glance: SunPass Safety.

February 07, 2025 Florida Attorney General's Office of Statewide Prosecution Secures 12-Year Prison Sentence for Child Predator.

February 06, 2025 Florida Attorney General's Office Secures More Than \$350,000 for Florida Medicaid from Pharmaceutical Company Over Kickback Allegations.

February 05, 2025 Florida Attorney General's Office Secures More Than \$2.3 Million in Multi-state Action from Pfizer-Owned Bio-haven

Pharmaceutical Company.

January 28, 2025 Florida Attorney General's Office Launches Nicotine Dispensing Device Directory, Gives Retailers Until March 1 to Remove Listed Products.

January 27, 2025 Florida Attorney General's Office's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit Secures More Than \$2.2 Million for Florida Medicaid from Inpatient Behavioral Health Company.

January 24, 2025 Florida Attorney General's Office Files Criminal Charges Against Pool Contractors that Defrauded Hundreds of Floridians Out Millions of Dollars.

January 23, 2025 Florida Attorney General Secures \$7.4 Billion from Purdue Pharma and the Sackler Family for Fueling Opioid Crisis.

January 21, 2025 A G Moody Leaves Legacy of Fighting Fed Overreach, Protecting the Border, Prosecuting Traffickers, Combating the Opioid Crisis, Defending Life, Revolutionizing ORT Investigations, Recruiting Hundreds of LEOs, Modernizing Crime Reporting Nationwide and More. This is half of page one and there are 9 pages not seen.

Attorney General's Office of Statewide Prosecution Secures a 5-Year Prison Sentence for Member of Romanian Crime Ring

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—The Florida Attorney General's Office of Statewide Prosecution secured a 5-year prison sentence for a Romanian crime ring member. Vasile Bricage stole more than

\$38,000 in smartphones and other items from six Walmart locations across five Florida counties — all within the span of six days.

Acting Attorney General John Guard said, "This member of a Romanian crime ring targeted Walmart locations spanning five Florida counties — causing more than \$38,000 in losses. Now, thanks to our Statewide Prosecutors, he will pay for his crimes."

Vasile Bricage, working alongside co-defendant Antonio Briceag and two unknown female accomplices, stole smartphones and other items from Walmart locations in Citrus, Okaloosa, Pinellas, Santa Rosa and Sarasota counties. In several cases, Bricage and his accomplices

entered the stores and proceeded to the electronics department. Then, members of the group would distract employees or act as lookouts while using an unknown implement to defeat the anti-theft devices at the phone display.

In one Citrus County incident, the group used a different strategy. Bricage, after browsing the electronics department, proceeded to the hardware section of the store and selected a black crowbar. The defendant then went back to the electronics department and pried two locked phone cabinets open, and the group stole 26 iPhones — valued at more than \$22,000. The damage to the cabinets totaled more than \$1,600.

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Record Broken Again: Florida Announces The Highest Tourism Numbers In State History In 2024

TALLAHASSEE, Fla.— Governor Ron DeSantis announced that Florida continues

to be the top destination for travelers from all over the world as it welcomed a record-breaking 142.9 million visitors in 2024. This marks a 1.6% increase over 2023, the previous record annual visitation in the state's history.

The fourth quarter of 2024 also set a new benchmark with 33.1 million visitors, surpassing the previous record for a Q4 period—setting the highest visitation for any fourth quarter. The record-breaking visitation was fueled by 29.9 million domestic visitors, 2.5 million overseas visitors, and 742,000 Canadian visitors.

“The results are clear—Florida is the best place to visit, live, and do business,” said **Governor Ron DeSantis**. “Another record-breaking year is proof that leadership matters, and the Free State of Florida is a model for the nation.”

“Under Governor DeSantis' bold leadership, Florida's tourism industry remains world-leading,” said **Secretary of Commerce J. Alex Kelly**. “Tourism in Florida continued to break records in 2024, recovering from a challenging hurricane season, driving economic growth and improving quality of life for Florida's communities and families.”

Despite challenges posed by hurricanes Helene and Milton, Florida's tourism

industry remained strong, with hotel occupancy rising 6.7% in Q4 and annual room nights sold increasing 1.6% in 2024. Airports across the state also saw sustained growth, with total enplanements increasing 3.1% year over year.

Highlights from 2024 [data](#) also include:

- 142.9 million visitors traveled to Florida in Calendar Year (CY) 2024, marking a 1.6% increase from CY 2023 and the highest visitation on record.
- 130.7 million domestic visitors in CY 2024, reflecting a 1.3% increase from the previous year.
- 8.9 million overseas visitors in CY 2024, up 6.6% from CY 2023, and the closest to full recovery since 2019.
- 3.3 million Canadian visitors in CY 2024, representing a 1.2% increase from the previous year.
- Domestic visitors made up 91.5% of total visitation, overseas visitors accounted for 6.2%, and Canadian visitors represented 2.3%.
- Total enplanements at Florida's 19 major airports grew to 3.1% in CY 2024 from the previous year, with notable growth in airports like Tallahassee, Panama City, and Pensacola.

Governor Ron DeSantis Announces Pay Increases For State Law Enforcement And Firefighters In Focus On Fiscal Responsibility Budget

PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Fla.— Governor Ron DeSantis announced he is recommending pay increases for state law enforcement officers and firefighters in his Focus on Fiscal Responsibility Budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2025-26. “We support the men and women who keep

our streets and communities safe,” said **Governor Ron DeSantis**. “Throughout my time in office, I have delivered on my promise to support law enforcement and first responders. Therefore, in the coming fiscal year, I am recommending a well-earned pay raise.”

The Governor's Focus on Fiscal Responsibility Budget recommends \$118.3 million in pay increases for more than 4,700 state sworn law enforcement officers and more than 730 state firefighters. This includes a:

- 20% pay increase for state entry level sworn law enforcement officers; and
- 25% pay increase for veteran sworn law enforcement officers and all state firefighters.

These pay increases will build on the support already delivered to support law enforcement and first responders. As a result of these initiatives, Florida continues to have record-low crime rates; continues to be a great place to live, work, and raise a family; and remains the friendliest state in the country for first responders.



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FROM THE DESK OF

CONGRESSWOMAN KAT CAMMACK



Reps. Cammack & Steube Reintroduce The ACCESS Act

WASHINGTON, D.C. —

Representatives Kat Cammack and Greg Steube reintroduced their plan to expand

access to Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) for five million lower-income Americans.

The Affordable Care and Comprehensive Economic Support through Savings Act (ACCESS Act) empowers individuals by giving them the option to receive direct contributions to an HSA instead of relying on reduced cost-sharing under government-controlled health insurance exchanges. This commonsense reform removes bureaucratic restrictions imposed by the ACA, allowing individuals to take control of their health care dollars and use them as they see fit.

"Access to affordable care has diminished over the past decade, as the prices of medical care have skyrocketed and provider networks have shrunk," said Rep. Cammack. "But with money in an HSA, you can obtain the personalized services you need, and see the doctors you trust, even if they're not covered by your health insurance plan. For working families in my district and across the country this option is a lifesaver and will give many the flexibility to afford visits and procedures they may not be able to otherwise. I am proud to introduce the ACCESS Act today for many reasons, but mostly because it provides more access and

more freedom for families whose health care needs aren't being met by government-controlled health care programs."

"The ACCESS Act is a straightforward solution to lower health care costs and expand access for the millions of lower-income families struggling under rising inflation and medical expenses," said Rep. Steube. "This bill puts patients in control by offering a personal health care option that increases access to affordable treatments, trusted doctors, and essential therapies through tax-free, directly funded health savings accounts. At the same time, it streamlines existing health subsidies, saving taxpayers tens of billions of dollars. Conservative, results-driven reforms like this are what Americans can expect from Republicans in Washington."

"We are excited to endorse the ACCESS Act because it would expand access to high-quality medical care for millions of lower-income Americans without costing taxpayers a dime. Armed with a pre-funded health savings account they own and control, these patients will have more access to timely care from doctors they trust, including services and doctors their insurance doesn't cover. And they'll also have stronger incentives to shop for value and to take more personal responsibility for their health. All of which adds up to greater peace of mind. Congratulations to Congressman Steube and Congresswoman Cammack for coming up with a smart, fiscally responsible way to give vulnerable Americans a Personal Option—hassle-free

health care you can afford," said Dean Clancy Americans for Prosperity Senior Health Policy Fellow.

Rep. Cammack Leads Charge To Restore Navigability To McGriff Channel, Secures Presidential Action For Key Next Step

WASHINGTON, D.C. — This week, Congresswoman Kat Cammack (R-FL-03) announced significant progress for the future of the McGriff Channel, also known as 'Wadley Pass,' where the Gulf of Mexico meets the Suwannee River in Dixie County, Florida.

Mid-last year, Rep. Cammack secured the votes for inclusion of McGriff Channel in the 2024 Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). In December of last year, Senator Rick Scott (R-FL) included the matching provision in the Senate year-end package. This measure secured a federally required economic impact study by the Army Corps of Engineers for the McGriff Channel, which is a necessary step to keep the project moving. This move follows the 2021 study, which concluded that dredging was not

economically feasible and no action could be taken.

In recent years, the McGriff Channel has faced navigability issues, with missing markers and signage rendering it unsafe for even the smallest vessels. Years without dredging, coupled with the impacts of recent hurricanes and severe storms, have exacerbated these longstanding challenges, hindering both commercial activities and recreational boating.

The inclusion of the McGriff Channel in WRDA marks a critical step toward restoring its navigability and ensuring safe access for all users.

"I'm thrilled to have secured this crucial step in getting the challenges with McGriff Channel resolved," said Rep. Cammack. "This issue has persisted for far too long, and it's time we get the Jacksonville Army Corps back on track to advance this project. From here, we will be keeping the pressure on the Army Corps to ensure this project gets done in a timely manner. I look forward to sharing more updates later this year as we gather further information on potential dredging and restoration efforts."



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