

Regional Report

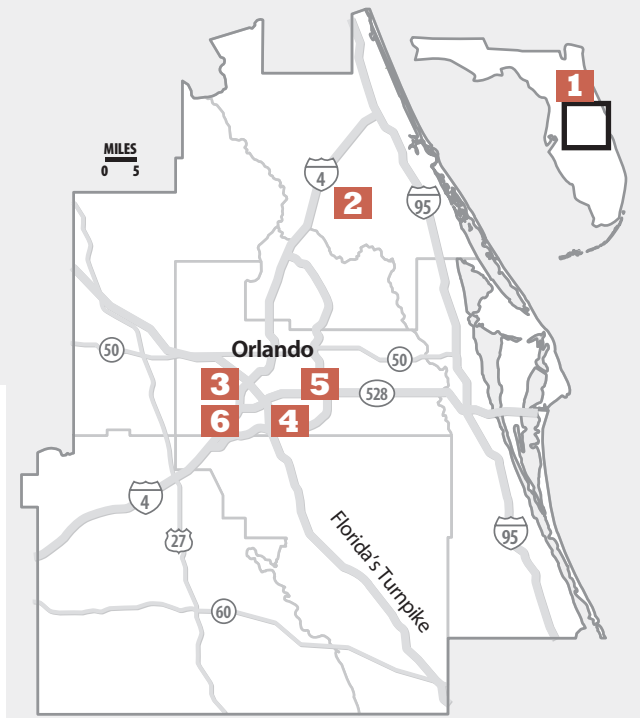
SATSUMA

Girlfriend of Haleigh's father appears on television's 'Today'

1 Misty Croslin, who was the last person to see missing 5-year-old Haleigh Cummings of Putnam County, appeared on NBC's *Today* show Friday and said one of her relatives had been in Satsuma about the time Haleigh disappeared and that she didn't trust him. Lt. Johnny Greenwood confirmed that investigators spoke to the relative, identified only as "Joe," at his home in Tennessee but would not release other details, including his last name and whether he was in Satsuma recently. "He's a criminal, pretty much. He's been in trouble his whole

life," said Croslin, 17. Also on Friday, investigators, acting on tips, conducted two ground searches but didn't find anything of significance. Croslin has told investigators that she last saw Haleigh when the child went to bed Feb. 9. Croslin said she woke up about 3 a.m. Feb. 10 and Haleigh was gone. Anyone with information should call Crime Stoppers of Northeast Florida at 1-888-277-8477. A reward offered for information that leads to Haleigh has increased to \$20,000.

— HELEN ECKINGER



MULDER

Deltona: Put slander suits on taxpayer tab

By **SATTA SARMAH**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

2 DELTONA — A proposal to use taxpayer money to pay for legal fees of city officials who sue for slander or libel has elicited outrage this week from city residents who object to using public money to finance the lawsuits.

And some are worried they won't be able to freely criticize their elected officials.

"These are my tax dollars," said Nancy Schleicher, chairman of Deltona Citizens Action Committee, a government watchdog group. "I pay my personal property taxes for things that are going to improve my city. To pay for litigation, that's a personal thing."

The motion, which passed 4-3 late Monday, was proposed by Mayor Dennis Mulder, who said that an organized group of residents has ventured from the usual political mudslinging and is spreading outright lies that must be stopped. Mulder threatened to resign if his motion wasn't approved.

One Web site has accused Mulder of being a habitual marijuana user, criminally corrupt and a "weird rodent immune to reason." Vice Mayor Michael Carmolingo and Commissioners Janet Deyette and Paul Treusch, who often vote with the mayor, have also been subjected to political jabs. Mulder, who denies all of the allegations, said Friday that it wasn't intended to suppress public disapproval of government officials.

Residents 'in an uproar'

"It has nothing to do with criticism or political satire," he said. "You start accusing people of criminal acts and that gets out into the community. It does a lot of damage to the sanctity of the office and the community."

Giving city officials the freedom to sue people for slander and libel at taxpayers'

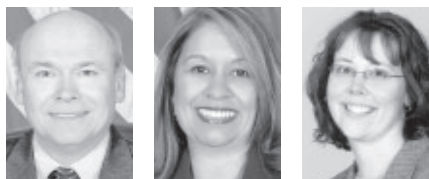


ORLANDO SENTINEL FILE

“He needs to stop blaming citizens for his failure and focus on city business.”

— JEFF ENSMINGER
MANAGER, DELTONABONAFIDE.COM

Voting no:



ZISCHKAU

DENIZAC

McFALL

expense is at best unethical and at worst illegal, said Herb Zischkau, one of the commissioners who voted against the measure.

Two other commissioners — Zenaida Denizac and Michele McFall-Conte — also voted against the motion, calling it wasteful spending and a violation of free speech. All three asked not to be included in the motion if it passed.

Zischkau said Friday that many Deltona residents are baffled by the measure.

"They're in an uproar. They're hiring attorneys," he said.

"They're talking about taking political

Legal eagles?

What do you think about Deltona approving taxpayer-funded lawsuits? Take the poll at OrlandoSentinel.com/deltonalawsuit.

One person who has hired an attorney is Deltona resident Jeff Ensminger, who runs a community Web site called DeltonaBonaFide.com. Ensminger, one of the mayor's harshest critics, said Mulder needs to channel his efforts toward improving Deltona, not filing lawsuits.

"He needs to stop blaming citizens for his failure and focus on city business," Ensminger said.

Counterintuitive . . . but legal?

Darren Elkind, DeLand's city attorney, said Mulder's request for legal fees is the first he's heard of like it.

"I've never heard of that being done anywhere in Florida," Elkind said. "The idea that government would spend money to quiet political dissent is counterintuitive."

However, Elkind said the commission's actions may not be illegal. If they can prove that slander or libel has dramatically hindered the functioning of city government, he said, then they could be allowed to use taxpayer money to pay or get reimbursement for legal fees.

How much will it cost?

Mulder said he doesn't know how much the measure will cost taxpayers in Deltona. He doesn't expect legal fees to reach "tens of thousands of dollars" and doesn't intend to sue any citizen who criticizes his job performance, he said.

"These are not normal taxpaying citizens of Deltona. This is a very organized group of people who are conducting organized harassment," Mulder said.

"I do plan on clarifying the authority I asked for," he added.

Satta Sarmah can be reached at 407-420-5359 or ssarmah@orlandosentinel.com.

ORANGE COUNTY

Man charged in killing of pregnant woman

4 Orange County deputies on Friday arrested a 27-year-old convicted felon they say killed a pregnant 19-year-old in her home near Lake Nona. Suzette Aponte's body was found Wednesday in the Malverns Loop house she shared with her fiancé. Investigators have not revealed how she died. Edwin Christopher Quintana was held without bail at the Orange County Jail on a first-degree murder charge. Deputies arrested him about 4 a.m. at a La Quinta Inn & Suites near Orlando International Airport. The Sheriff's Office said Aponte's fiancé, who was severely beaten during the attack that killed her, had connections to the drug world. He knew at least one of the attackers, a homicide detective said.

— SUSAN JACOBSON

ORLANDO

Crist appoints 2 to expressway board

5 Gov. Charlie Crist on Friday reappointed Tanya T. Juarez, 35, and appointed Walter A. Ketcham Jr., 60, to the Orlando-Orange County Expressway Authority board. The selections come in time for a key meeting next week, during which the five-person board will consider 25-cent toll increases because of declining traffic. Juarez manages external affairs at TECO Peoples Gas Inc. Ketcham, an Orlando attorney, replaces Harvey Massey. Their appointments are for four years.

— KEVIN SPEAR

ORANGE COUNTY

FHP: Often-ticketed driver hit woman

6 A pregnant Polk County woman lost her baby Friday after she was hit by a car in south Orange County late Thursday. Berlandecia Dor, 20, of Davenport was walking across State Road 535 near Interstate 4 to get to a bus stop about 10:35 p.m. Thursday when she was hit by a car, according to Florida Highway Patrol. The driver of the 2005 Lincoln, Philip R. Costanzo, 62, of Orlando, told troopers he didn't see Dor crossing the road. Dor, who was 22 weeks pregnant, was taken to Orlando Regional Medical Center. The baby did not survive, troopers said. Hospital officials said Friday that Dor was in critical condition. Costanzo has been ticketed 11 times in the past 10 years, according to state records. His last ticket, for speeding, was issued Feb. 9 in Osceola County for going 54 mph in a 45 mph zone, records show.

— BIANCA PRIETO

Week's 5th armed invasion ends in rape

By **WALTER PACHECO** and **GARY TAYLOR**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITERS

3 Another woman was raped Friday in the fifth violent and armed home invasion in Central Florida this week.

Orange County Sheriff's Office investigators released few details about the home invasion, saying only that it happened in the Hamptons subdivision, an upscale neighborhood near the MetroWest community.

Sheriff's Commander Julia Blackman said the armed men walked into the house through an open garage door. They woke the victim from her sleep, tied her and ransacked the home. When her boyfriend arrived, the suspects bound him as well.

It is unclear when the suspects raped the woman.

Detectives in Orange County and Sanford are busy trying to find the suspects involved in the five separate home invasions.

On Tuesday, a 19-year-old student was raped when two home invaders burst into the upscale Avalon Park home she shares with several University of Central Florida and Valencia Community College students.

The men broke into the home at 3 a.m.

Track crime

To read about crimes in your area, click on OrlandoSentinel.com/policeblog.

and ordered several of the students into a bathroom at gunpoint. The woman was pulled out of the bathroom and raped by the two men in another part of the house, deputies said.

The suspects stole laptops and cell phones.

The victims didn't call 911 until three hours after the intruders left their home because they were afraid to walk out of the bathroom.

In another home invasion, Orange County deputies arrested the victim. They said he admitted that he was storing marijuana in a jacket.

UCF student Kegan Evan Williams, 20, told deputies four suspects held him at gunpoint Monday at his Woodbury Road home and robbed him of his pot and electronic devices.

Williams was busted on drug charges and released from jail on a \$1,100 bond.

Also on Monday, four men attacked a Full Sail University student by pulling a shirt over his head, punching him in the face and then stealing a television, an Xbox and other personal items from his Maitland home.

A homeowner in Sanford retaliated

against home invaders by opening fire on the men, shooting one of them in the face.

Phyllis Field fired twice at the men when they forced their way into her home on North Scott Avenue, Sanford police said.

A surveillance video from a home on a nearby street showed a man walking through that yard and then leaving after one of the men looked directly into the camera and realized what it was, police said.

The Seminole County Services Building was locked down Tuesday morning because of the possibility the men were inside the facility at First Street and Mellonville Avenue, but they were not found.

It wasn't until Wednesday that a suspect, Vandrae Terrance Wright, was arrested when he sought medical treatment at Florida Hospital Orlando.

Wright, 18, of Midway, faces charges of burglary to an occupied dwelling and attempted grand theft, according to police reports.

The second suspect is still at large.

Walter Pacheco can be reached at 407-420-6262 or wpacheco@orlandosentinel.com. Gary Taylor can be reached at 386-851-7910 or gtaylor@orlandosentinel.com.

Central Florida Political Pulse

OrlandoSentinel.com/politicalpulse

Outlook uncertain on questioned contribution

WASHINGTON — Earlier today [Friday], U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., (right) said he would donate nearly \$46,000 to the Jacksonville charity Dignity U Wear in order to purge \$45,900 from his campaign that he received from the firm of financier R. Allen Stanford, who has been accused of a massive investment fraud.

That may no longer be the case. Lawyers assigned to recoup losses from the \$8 billion fraud case have encouraged lawmakers, including Nelson, to give the money back to them. Nelson spokesman Dan McLaughlin said the office was reviewing the request to decide what to do.

"We've selected a charity to send an amount equal to \$45,900 in campaign contributions associated with Stanford. But we're also seeking guidance on whether it can be returned to the Stanford company's court-appointed receiver," he wrote in a statement.

— MARK K. MATTHEWS



Sentinel School Zone

OrlandoSentinel.com/schoolzone

It's getting a little cloudy in here

Chalk it up to what you will, but getting records from Orange County Public Schools is never the easiest thing to do.

Case in point: the new transportation task force committee. I can't make all the meetings, so I was gearing up to ask for the tape of the first gathering. A member of the committee beat me to the request.

Neither of us can get it. The district's response?

"The button was not pushed on the recorder that night so we don't have an audio of the first meeting. We do have the other meetings on audio."

So much for the sunshine.

— ERIKA HOBBS