

Local news

On the roads

Woman hit by car dies; man hurt

A Eustis woman was killed and a man was seriously injured after they were struck by a vehicle while crossing the street Saturday night, police said. The crash happened at Edgewater Drive and County Road 452 in Eustis shortly after 10 p.m. Police said Christina Towers, 19, and Jacob Thomas, 22, were crossing the street when both were struck by a silver Ford Focus. Towers died at the scene. Thomas was flown to Orlando Regional Medical Center, where he was listed in critical condition Sunday. Eustis police have identified the driver as Joyce Welch, 66, of Eustis. Preliminary tests show that alcohol was not a factor in the crash. Police think Welch might have been unable to see the victims because lighting near the intersection is minimal. Criminal charges will not be filed, police said. Authorities were waiting for Thomas to regain consciousness to get more details.

— SATTIA SARMAH

Cop loses control of car; 3 injured

Two people were in critical condition and one was in serious condition after a marked patrol car struck a car stopped at an intersection on Maitland Boulevard early Sunday. Shortly after midnight, Mark Maupin, 49, of Altamonte Springs lost control of his Altamonte Springs police car while driving west on Maitland Boulevard, according to the Florida Highway Patrol. Meanwhile, a 2001 four-door Honda driven by Jennifer Hernandez, 18, of Apopka also was westbound on Maitland Boulevard, waiting at a light in the left-turn lane at Rose Avenue in Orange County. Maupin's car rolled, striking the back of the Honda and pushing it through the intersection. Hernandez and passenger Erskin Bell, 20, of Ocoee were taken to Orlando Regional Medical Center, where they were listed in critical condition. Maupin was in serious condition at Florida Hospital Orlando. All were wearing seat belts.

— AUDREA HUFF

Cops & courts

Home-robbery suspect in custody

A man suspected of breaking into a Daytona Beach home and robbing a woman and her daughter at gunpoint was arrested Sunday. Jonathan Pear-

son was arrested after the victim, Latasha Smith, called 911 on Sunday and said he was the suspect. Pearson has been living across the street from Smith for the past few days, according to the Volusia County Sheriff's Office. Smith told authorities she was in her bedroom and heard a noise coming from another room in her home shortly before 8:30 p.m. Saturday. She said she ran into the living room and found a man pointing a rifle at her 13-year-old daughter. The suspect turned his rifle away from the young girl and then pointed it at Smith, demanding money, she said. Smith gave money to the man, who fled through the front door. Smith also had three other children in the house, ranging from 2 months to 6 years old. Pearson faces charges of home invasion robbery with a firearm, grand theft, two counts of aggravated assault, three counts of aggravated child abuse and use of a firearm during the commission of a felony, the Sheriff's Office said.

— SATTIA SARMAH

Mobile-home fire kills woman

An 80-year-old DeLeon Springs woman was killed early Sunday morning when her mobile home caught fire. Authorities responded to a 911 call about a fire at 47 Valley Drive at 3 a.m. When firefighters and the Volusia County Sheriff's Office arrived, they found the mobile home engulfed in flames. Authorities entered the home and found Maxine Perry. She was pronounced dead about a half-hour later. Perry lived alone in the mobile home, authorities said. Officials are investigating Perry's death and the cause of the fire.

— SATTIA SARMAH

Elsewhere

Brush fire about 50% contained

Officials said the first sizable brush fire of the winter season has burned more than 300 acres, just east of Gainesville. Forestry officials said the fire, which was first spotted Friday evening near the border of Alachua and Putnam counties, was about 50 percent contained. It is affecting mostly grasslands. Crews from the Division of Forestry and nearby fire departments have been working to keep the fire from spreading. The fire is expected to burn itself out. Officials said Sunday's heavy rains should help keep the fire under control.

— THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



ORLANDO POLICE DEPARTMENT

Police released this photograph from security video showing the suspected armed robber at the Walmart on South Kirkman Road. The suspect fired 2 shots into the ceiling, but no one was hurt.

Suspected thief armed, costumed

By SATTIA SARMAH
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

An armed man dressed as an old woman fired two shots inside a Walmart during an attempted robbery Sunday, sending dozens of panicked shoppers scrambling at the South Kirkman Road store.

No one was hurt, and the shooter—who was dressed in a white, floral dress, short gray wig and black floral jacket—took off in a stolen car.

Authorities would not say Sunday whether the suspect got any money.

The suspect entered the store at 2500 S. Kirkman Road at 11:30 a.m. and attempted to rob an area inside the front of the store called the money center, where customers can pay bills, cash checks and transfer money.

The suspect threatened a store employee with a handgun and fired two shots into the ceiling before fleeing.

Customers in the back of the store initially didn't realize they had heard gunshots.

"I heard a bam and at first I

thought something fell down," said Brian Bowersox, 26, of Orlando.

Bowersox and his girlfriend, Rachel Gibson, 24, were shopping in the electronics section when they saw a large group of about 60 customers running in their direction, they said.

Bowersox, Gibson and others eventually escaped through an emergency exit.

Joyce Golden, 48, who traveled from Pennsylvania to Orlando to spend Thanksgiving with her family, was shopping in the store with her young grandchildren and daughter-in-law when the suspect began shooting.

"We were headed toward the cashier," Golden said. "I've never heard gunshots before in my life. I thought it was an explosion."

Golden and her family also escaped through a back exit, running through hedges to make their way to safety.

Golden's daughter-in-law, Tekesha Wiggins, 26, said she would shop at the store again, despite the shooting.

"This is the closest one near

my house, so I have no choice but to come back here. I'll just be more cautious," she said.

The suspect was described as a 150-pound, 5-foot-6-inch black male.

Authorities said the getaway car is a green, four-door Honda Accord. The vehicle was reported stolen from an area near Kirkman Road before Sunday's shooting. Police asked tipsters to call the Orlando Police Department or Crimeline at 1-800-423-TIPS.

This is the second time in recent months that a robber has targeted a local Walmart in Central Florida.

A man who robbed a payday loan store in Casselberry in September ran into a nearby Walmart on State Road 436 to hide from police.

The police and the suspect exchanged gunfire in the store and a pregnant woman suffered minor injuries when her back was grazed by a stray bullet.

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P082012 10/01/2008

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