

local news

GROWTH

Continued from C1

“Once developed, it will attract a tremendous number of high-paying, quality jobs to Sumter County.”

Job growth isn’t the only benefit, either.

It contributes to the diversification of the tax base, an attractive incentive for a county commission that proposed a reduction in the 2018-19 property tax rate. Pending a final public hearing in September, it will be the 14th consecutive year the commission has adopted a tax rate at or below the rolled-back rate, the state’s definition of what constitutes a tax cut.

Consequently, industrial-commercial growth could influence the commission’s decision whether to consider future tax cuts, since the sector contributes more to the tax base than residential, Gilpin said.

“When you get industry to participate, it keeps residential taxes low,” he said.

Also: The expansion into industrial-commercial didn’t diminish The Villages’ home-building mission. It moved one step closer last week to rezoning 5,664 acres of under-used and undeveloped agricultural land it purchased earlier this year south of State Road 44 in the Southern Oaks region. The Wildwood City Commission heard a first reading of an ordinance that proposes a zoning map amendment on that acreage for multi-use, age-restricted development. The property includes two noncontiguous areas. One is roughly located south of Florida’s Turnpike and east of U.S. Highway 301 near what will become Village De Luna. The second and larger piece of property is several miles south of Warm Springs Avenue, formerly County Road 468, east of CR 501 and west of Florida’s Turnpike and then south of CR 470. The commission is scheduled to vote on the ordinance at its Aug. 27 meeting.

Also: The Villages filed permits to begin mass grading of a new 450-acre village about one-half mile south of Warm Springs Avenue and one-quarter mile northeast of the turnpike and then to the south and abutting the previously named Village of Bradford. Once approved, the permit would allow construction of a master stormwater management system to serve the community. The master plan for this unnamed community proposes up to 1,400

residential units. Wildwood’s special magistrate, W. Grant Watson, recently found sufficiency in the Developer’s site plan application and referred it to the city commission for consideration at an upcoming public hearing.

Also: It bears repeating that home values remain on a solid upward climb within The Villages metropolitan statistical area, irrespective of the growth, according to new data recently released by CoreLogic, the Irvine, California-based real estate data and analytics firm. Year-over-year single-family home values increased by 5.4 percent in June, according to this company that supports the S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller national home price index. That’s three-tenths of a percent above the readjusted 5.1 percent increase reported for May home values in The Villages MSA. The researchers also reaffirmed in the June data their ongoing conclusion that The Villages MSA is the healthiest residential market in Florida. It is the only MSA in the state classified as “normal,” a market where all levels of property are considered neither undervalued or overvalued.

Also: One other Irvine-based provider of property data reaffirmed the residential strength of The Villages MSA in an analysis of homes with a mortgage. Researchers at ATTOM Data Solutions found that The Villages MSA has a higher percentage of equity-rich properties than the Florida average of 23.7 percent. In ZIP code 32162, about 28.1 percent of all properties were classified as equity rich; 26.3 percent in ZIP code 32159 and 23.8 percent in ZIP code 32163.

Also: Another provider of real estate data found similar strength in The Villages MSA. New York-based SmartAsset ranked Sumter County and The Villages as the No. 1 county in the state where a homeowner was likely to be approved for a mortgage. It ranked Sumter with a loan funding rate of 63.59 percent, compared with Santa Rosa, 62.37 percent; St. Johns, 62.29 percent; Manatee, 61.35 percent; and Okaloosa, 60.53 percent. Also in the top 10, the researchers listed Lake County as having a 59.74 percent loan funding rate.

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Villagers’ Daughter Named Dean of UF College of the Arts

As the dean of the College of Arts, Onye Ozuzu said she wants to be a part of UF’s growth while emphasizing the importance of art.

By RACHEL STUART

Daily Sun Staff Writer

Art has always been a big part of Onye Ozuzu’s life.

The daughter of Villagers Sam and Joan Ozuzu, Onye has taken the next step in her artistic career as the new dean of the College of the Arts at the University of Florida in Gainesville.

“We are proud of her,” said her parents, of the Village of Piedmont.

Onye, now living in Gainesville, was announced as the new dean in June and officially started her new position Aug. 1.

As a graduate of Riverdale High School in Fort Myers and Florida State University in Tallahassee, Onye said she is excited to be back in Florida after living in Chicago for the past seven years.

“It feels like I’m coming home,” she said. “It feels like the right place to be.”

Graduating from FSU with a bachelor’s degree in English literature and a master’s degree in dance, Onye always has had a creative side.

She became the associate chairwoman and director of dance in the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Colorado Boulder.

From there, she served as the dean of the School of Fine and Performing Arts at Columbia College Chicago, where she also was the chairwoman of the department of dance.

“I love the arts, and I’ve dedicated my life to it,” she said. “I make works of art, and dance happens to be the medium that I use.”

With her experience as a contemporary choreographer, she has found a way to apply what she knows to her new role as a dean at UF.

“I’m really dedicated to building a community for people to participate in art and learn more about how the arts help build a person



Submitted photo

Onye Ozuzu has taken the next step in her artistic career as the new dean of the College of the Arts at the University of Florida. She is the daughter of Sam and Joan Ozuzu, of the Village Piedmont.

and a city,” she said. “That participation in the arts is the glue that fills all the spaces in our lives.”

Initially, Onye said, she was not looking to relocate from Chicago, but she said she was inspired by what is happening in Florida.

“This state is really thinking about building education for the future,” she said. “At UF, we’re actively preparing for the future in a state where the future is coming fast. I’m really excited to be a part of the Gators’ story, especially right now.”

As the dean of the College of Arts, she said she wants to be a part of this growth while emphasizing the importance of art.

While she continues to spread her passion for art in her new position, she also is able to feel comfort in knowing her parents are close by.

“We’re excited because she’s closer to us than she’s ever been since she left for college,” Joan said.

Knowing the experience their daughter has built up throughout the years, Sam said he is confident she will succeed in her new position.

“It’s a huge responsibility, but she’s very good at everything she wants to do,” he said.

Rachel Stuart is a staff writer with The Villages Daily Sun. She can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 5390, or rachel.stuart@thevillagesmedia.com.

Judge Who Uncovered Lawyer Bribes Dies at 83

By JEFF AMY

The Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss.

A Mississippi judge who helped bring down famed tobacco lawyer Richard “Dickie” Scruggs on bribery allegations has died.

Court system spokeswoman Beverly Kraft said 83-year-old Henry Lackey had been hospitalized for heart problems, dying Friday at Baptist Memorial Hospital in Calhoun City.

In 2007 Lackey was approached by friend Timothy Balducci. He asked Lackey to rule for Scruggs in a suit where other lawyers were suing Scruggs over \$26.5 million in disputed legal fees.

John Hailman, then a federal prosecutor, said Lackey contacted him after the meeting. Hailman said the FBI set up a video surveillance system concealed in a briefcase on Lackey’s desk to record multiple meetings with Balducci, in which Lackey collected \$40,000 in bribes.

“Henry was cool as a cucumber,” Hailman said Friday. “I thought it would scare him. He was the one who brought it up; he said ‘Do you want me to wear a wire?’”

FBI agents arrested Balducci, who in turn secretly recorded a conversation with Scruggs about paying Lackey another \$10,000.

The judicial bribery investigation widened to convict former state auditor Steve Patterson, Scruggs’ son Zach, Hinds County Circuit Judge Bobby DeLaughter and two other lawyers.

“I feel so unworthy,” Lackey said at an award ceremony honoring him in 2008. “I am ambivalent about my involvement in the investigation. Of course, I’m saddened about the impact on the careers of some bright young lawyers.”

Hailman praised Lackey for his honesty and modesty, but said his “country boy” demeanor camouflaged a “very sophisticated operator.” “He never wanted to be on the Supreme Court,” Hailman said. “He didn’t want to be rich. He just loved the life he had.”

That life revolved around Lackey’s hometown of Calhoun City, where his father ran a dime store. He graduated from Mississippi College, served in the U.S. Army and earned a law degree from the University of Mississippi.

Soon after, he won election for a term as Calhoun County prosecuting attorney. Lackey then accepted an appointment as Mississippi’s first public defender, overseeing three Ole Miss law students in a pilot program in the seven-county judicial district where he would later preside as judge.

Writer, Teacher Robley Wilson Dies at Age 88

ORLANDO

Writer Robley Wilson, a novelist and poet whose works won numerous awards and who also was an editor and teacher, has died at his home in Florida. He was 88.

His wife, writer Susan Hubbard, confirmed Sunday in an email that Wilson died on Aug. 7 in Orlando surrounded by “family, cats, books, and music.”

Wilson wrote three poetry collections, including “Kingdoms of the Ordinary,” and novels such as “After Paradise,” “The World Still Melting” and “Who Will Hear Your Secrets.”

Wilson taught creative writing at the University of Northern Iowa from 1963 to 1996 and also edited the literary magazine North American Review. In addition, he taught at the University of Iowa, Beloit College, Northwestern University, and Pitzer College. A memorial service is planned for late September in Maine

— The Associated Press

Bob Bass, Former GM in San Antonio Dies at 89

SAN ANTONIO

Bob Bass, the former San Antonio and Charlotte general manager who was an integral part of the front office for most of the Spurs’ first 20 years in South Texas, has died. He was 89.

Bass’ death was confirmed by the club Saturday in a statement from coach Gregg Popovich. The San Antonio Express-News reported that Bass died Friday at home in San Antonio after a series of strokes.

“Over the course of four decades, Bob Bass had a huge impact in both the ABA and NBA,” Popovich said in a statement released by the team. “BB was a true pioneer in the world of professional basketball. His knowledge, passion and dedication to the game were inspiring. We send our condolences to the entire Bass family.”

After getting hired as coach during the Spurs’ second season in San Antonio in 1974-75, Bass joined the front office as general manager when the club moved from the ABA to the NBA in 1976.

The two-time NBA Executive of the Year spent 20 seasons with the Spurs in various roles — returning three times as coach — before going to Charlotte as the GM in 1994. He spent nine seasons with the Hornets. Bass coached his alma mater of Oklahoma Baptist from 1952-1967, first joined the ABA as coach of the Denver Rockets in 1967-1968. He went back to college at Texas Tech from 1969-1971, then back to the ABA with the Floridians in 1971-1972 and the Memphis Tams in 1973-1974 before landing with the Spurs.

— The Associated Press

Studio Theatre Will Open Season 3 With ‘The Story Of My Life’

By KRISTEN FIORE

Daily Sun Senior Staff Writer

The Studio Theatre at Tierra Del Sol will open its third season Sept. 25 with “The Story of My Life,” a musical about the evolving relationship in a friendship between companions Thomas and Alvin.

The story is framed by Alvin’s death, and Thomas, now a successful writer, is tasked with writing Alvin’s eulogy.

As he stares at a blank page, he sifts through memories of his eccentric friend and comes to realizations about their relationship and how it changed based on the choices they made.

“It’s about them coming together and meeting as children and looking past any differences they have to be

friends,” said Jeremy Seghers, the show’s director. “It also explores how through life, the growth and changes and choices they make cause them to grow apart and lose touch.”

But there is also a deeper layer to the story, Seghers said.

“Throughout the play, as he’s trying to write the eulogy, he’s also trying to figure out why Alvin died and if he was responsible,” Seghers said.

Alex Jorth, who plays Alvin, will finish up his role as Skip next week in “Life Could Be a Dream” at the Studio Theatre.

“I think it’s a really universally relatable story about friendship and relationships in general,” Jorth said. “The Studio Theater is really a perfect venue for it because it’s so intimate. I think it will be a very moving and touching experience.”

“The Story of My Life” is also a musical that is not often produced or seen, according to Seghers.

“I think this might be the Florida premiere, but it’s definitely the Central Florida premiere of it,” Seghers said. “It’s kind of the antidote to the toxic masculinity that becomes so prominent in pop culture

and entertainment. These guys are dealing with emotions that aren’t often dealt with on stage or in entertainment.”

The show explores themes that affect a lot of people, but that musicals very rarely explore, Seghers said.

“It’s very rich, layered and complex. It’s not about the set or costumes. It’s really driven by the multifaceted characters that have been created,” Seghers said. “It’s a deceptively complex story, but very human and very real.”

Musically, the show has a beautiful score, according to Jorth.

“They’re really good songs,” Jorth said. “They’re funny, they’re touching. It’s really fun.”

Alan Gillespie, who plays Thomas, said the show is very

relatable for everyone.

“It’s about the important things in our lives — relationships and friendships with others,” Gillespie said. “I hope our show will inspire the audience to reconnect with those who are important in their lives.”

“The Story of My Life” opens Sept. 25 and runs through Nov. 4 at the Studio Theatre. View show dates and buy tickets online at thevillagesentertainment.com or at any Villages Box Office location.

“I’m really glad the Studio Theatre is doing this show,” Seghers said. “I think people in Orlando are discovering it’s worth the drive.”

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