**STYLE & HOME** 

## How to teach pets house rules

Jameson: Texas-based veterinarian offers advice on ways to discourage unwanted behaviors. PAGE1





## SPORTS

## Orlando City turns down \$10M offer for Dike

Coach restates confidence that star striker will return to team for 2021 MLS season, as Lions hold to high price tag for player. PAGE1

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# **Orlando Sentinel**

#### **FINAL EDITION**

## **Saturday, March 13, 2021**

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## Aid gives state chance to spend big

## Florida lawmakers looking at \$10B windfall

#### **By Gray Rohrer** Orlando Sentinel

TALLAHASSEE — When Florida lawmakers kicked off the session last week they were concerned with how to close a \$2 billion shortfall. Now they're looking at a \$10 billion windfall, thanks to the \$1.9 trillion federal COVID-19 relief package signed by President Joe Biden on Thursday.

The package includes \$350 billion in aid to states and cities, and Florida's share is already upending lawmakers' approach to

the budget. Legislative leaders had pointed to the projected shortfall as a reason to look at cutting spending for higher education and for K-12 schools amid questions over how

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## Central Florida awaits \$846M in relief funds

**By Martin E. Comas** and Stephen Hudak Orlando Sentinel

Soon after President Joe Biden signed a \$1.9 trillion relief package into law on Thursday, local governments across Central Florida began anticipating the \$846 million expected to flow into the region to provide financial help to families and businesses battered by

the year-long COVID-19 pandemic. "We are looking forward to using that money to once again help our hardest hit individuals and businesses in Orange County," Mayor Jerry Demings said. "If there are opportunities, we'll create some incentives to get people working, get people fed and all those kinds of things.

Turn to Relief, Page 6

The Gamble family camps while spending time in Florida. Parents Grant and Jana moved into a 40-foot RV to travel full time with their two

## 'Schools of hope' charter can open in Apopka

School board vote unanimous despite officials' concerns

#### **By Leslie Postal** Orlando Sentinel

A high-performing charter school operator can open a campus in Apopka with the goal of attracting students now zoned to attend D-rated Wheatley Elementary School, the Orange County School Board has decided.

The vote for the "schools of hope" was unanimous but unenthusiastic. Board members voted yes on the advice of their attorney, who said if they turned down the Mater Academy application, they'd end up in court, lose the fight and then lose money.

"We are not voting to approve a charter," said board member Karen Castor Dentel on Tuesday. "We are voting to recognize the state authority to put their school of hope here, I guess. If we were to deny it, it doesn't matter, they will still come." A 2017 state law — one the Orange and other Florida school boards unsuccessfully fought in court – allows charter school operators with proven track records to open near "persistently low performing" public schools. Typically, school boards must approve the applications submitted by charter school operators, which are privately run but publicly funded. But with "schools of hope" charters, the board has no discretion to turn down one that wants to open a campus near a "persistently low performing" school or in an "opportunity zone," a federal designation for economically stressed communities. The state's goal is for "schools of hope" to offer options to parents whose children attend a school where academic performance has lagged for years as measured by state test scores and school grades. "No child in Florida should be denied a chance at their future because they have the misfortune to end up in the wrong school," Richard Corcoran, then the speaker of the Florida House and the proposal's champion, wrote in an opinion piece for the South Florida Sun Sentinel after the law passed. Corcoran is now Florida's education commissioner. Though one school board member called it a "treasure of the community," Wheatley Elementary has earned four Ds and a C since 2016 and been tagged "persistently low performing" by the Florida Department of Education. Its south Apopka neighborhood also is labeled an "opportunity zone." Mater Academy, based in Hialeah, is the first hope operator to target Orange County for one of its campuses. Mater has been in

## As pandemic continued, family sold home for RV

#### **By Patrick Connolly** Orlando Sentinel

During a time when many families were spending more time at home in a COVID-19 lockdown – perhaps thinking about household projects and family game nights - the Gamble clan had a different idea: What if home had wheels?

After all, the family's teenagers Jack, 16, and Stellie, 14, were already going to school remotely. Grant, an author and business strategist, and Jana, a creative director, had the ability to meet with clients virtually while pursuing their own projects. The moment seemed ripe with opportunity to do something drastic, like traveling the nation – including a month-long stay in Florida.

The thought of moving into an RV was hatched when Grant and Jana noticed how coronavirus restrictions and cabin fever were adversely affecting the whole family, especially the kids.

'You don't want to watch your children suffer, it's hard to do that," Jana said. "It was driven by the children and their well-being more than anything else."

## A 'big gamble'

The wheels were set in motion. Grant and Jana purchased a 40-foot, 15-ton recreational vehicle dubbed "Thelma," a motor home with lots of "character" and beige on the inside. Months of work went into their new home on wheels, bought for just over \$20,000, making it livable and highway-ready.

"We spent about two months repairing, restoring and refitting her and that

Turn to RV, Page 6

## Region's largest Boys & Girls Club opens near stadium

## **By Kate Santich**

Orlando Sentinel

From their apartment balcony a few blocks west of Camping World Stadium, 10-year-old twins Bella and Millie Donald-Stanley watched the first bulldozers start to transform a field of grass and weeds.

That was a year ago.

On Friday, they watched as civic leaders cut a ceremonial ribbon on a \$9 million, 30,000-square-foot Boys & Girls Club -Central Florida's largest – and talked about the dance studio, science projects and new friends that awaited them.

"Everyone at school – they're all excited," Millie said. "We can't wait."

Officially the Jacqueline Bradley & Clarence Otis Family Branch in West Lakes, the facility is named after Otis, the retired Darden Restaurants CEO, and his wife, both



Philanthropists Jacqueline Bradley and Clarence Otis cut the ribbon to officially mark the opening of the Boys & Girls Club in West Lakes, named in their honor, on Friday. JOE BURBANK/ORLANDO SENTINEL

longtime supporters of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America. They donated the initial \$4 million to get the project off the ground,

giving kids in the historically Black neighborhood what many described as a place of healing and promise.

"When you have a chance to liberate a child spirit, or help others, you must," Bradley said, addressing a small, socially-distanced crowd of supporters.

A striking cream-colored, stone and glass structure, the new club anchors a corner of the burgeoning West Lakes community near the stadium, across from Orange Center Elementary School, where Millie and Bella attend. The neighborhood is undergoing a large-scale redevelopment effort, led by nonprofit Lift Orlando and local residents, to spur overall well-being in what was once Orlando's most distressed ZIP code.

The club will provide space for more than 250 kids, ages 6 to 18, with study rooms, a full gymnasium, tech labs, a dance studio

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Turn to School, Page 6

## Time to spring forward

Daylight saving time begins at 2 a.m. Sunday, so remember to set your clocks and watches ahead one hour before you go to sleep tonight - well, at least the ones that don't automatically advance in this digital age. (Hint: Like the ones on your microwave, oven and car.)

## Vaccine timeline brings praise

Governors cheer as President Biden announces all Americans should be eligible for shots by May 1. Page 3

## YOUR NATION, YOUR WORLD

## GOP proposals target vote access

Lawmakers push legislation that would disproportionately affect groups that historically vote Democrat. Page 4

## Cuomo refuses to step down

New York governor faces political isolation after refusal to resign in wake of sexual harassment allegations. Page 7



## RV

from Page 1

was pretty much full-time. We invested a lot in her, more in labor than money," Grant said. "Thelma is big and beautiful, that's the way we describe her. And wellworn."

The family came to terms with selling their Charlottesville, Virginia, home of 18 years, as well as with downsizing from a 3,000-square-foot abode to a 300-square-foot bus.

At the same time, they started spreading the word of their plans to friends and family.

"We thought people would think we were crazy,' Jana said. "Pretty much everybody was like, 'What you're doing is amazing. It's what people dream of doing but don't really ever do.'"

### New perspectives

On Oct. 30, 2020, after weeks of packing, selling, sorting and consolidating the family's belongings, the Gambles hit the road, bringing along their Great Dane and two Labradoodles. There were pangs of, "What were we thinking?" but after selling the house, there was no going back.

Following stops in



The Gamble family checks out an airboat tour while spending time in Florida. GAMBLE FAMILY/ COURTESY

Roanoke, Virginia; Asheville. North Carolina and Massachusetts, the Gambles headed south to warm up on sunny Hilton Head Island before spending nearly a month exploring Florida.

"We were surprised by how diverse [Florida] was and how big it was. We didn't really have a perspective on that," Grant said. "When you drive the state, it's quite amazing how big it is and how much it has to offer. We did love the Everglades."

After visiting iconic land-

marks of the Southwest, including Big Bend National Park, White Sands National Park and Saguaro National Park, the family is now stationed in Los Barriles in the Mexican state Baja California Sur.

More than four months and 8,000 miles later, Grant and Jana have been able to recognize the rewards of traveling full-time, seeing communities and places they wouldn't experience on an ordinary vacation.

"Even now, when you look

back 100 days, oh my goodness – we're different people with a completely different perspective," Grant said, with Jana adding: "Full-time travel like this is like therapy on steroids. It's individual therapy, couples therapy, parents therapy, family therapy - it's kind of amazing in that sense."

And while being on the road and living in such a small space has presented its own set of challenges, such as finding reliable internet, the family has found free-

dom in a more minimalist lifestyle.

"Everything we have on this bus is what we need," Jana said. "It's amazing how quickly you adjust and how liberating that is in so many ways. In some ways, I don't want to see our storage units ever again."

## Pandemic precautions

While some might think it's risky to travel amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Grant and Jana determined that the mental health benefits for the entire family outweighed pandemic-related concerns. In fact, having a home on wheels has allowed the Gambles to avoid coronavirus hot spots.

"We've been able to look at the COVID maps and see where there's hot spots and where it's safer," Grant said. "We've been very COVID-conscious ... Our contact points with people have probably been a lot lower on the road than they would be in normal circumstances."

In their travels, the family has been sure to abide by guidelines on mask-wearing and social distancing while taking other approaches to a holistic, healthy lifestyle. Grant, Jana and the teenagers exercise and spend time outdoors to boost their immune systems while eating a healthy diet, staying hydrated and dialing down stress.

## **Finding a new** home

Spending time on the road, despite some trials and tribulations along the way, has yielded myriad benefits for all members of the Gamble family. Despite that, the epic road trip won't last forever.

"We're sort of hibernating in Mexico and as soon as the weather turns, we're going to head north and go explore and then hopefully end in Hawaii," Jana said. "This is not an indefinite thing. This is meant to be six to 12 months."

Ultimately, the goal is to find a new place to settle in time for the school year to start in the fall. But the lessons, perspectives and memories from the adventure will live on forever.

*To learn more about the* family's travels, visit gamblefamilyadventures.com.

Find me on Twitter @ PConnPie, Instagram @ PConnPie or send me an email: pconnolly@orlandosentinel.com.

## Relief

from Page 1

As the region's most populous county, Orange is expected to receive the lion's share – roughly \$270.3 million, or more than half of the total \$505.8 million for four Central Florida counties, according to estimates from the federal government.

Seminole will receive \$91.5 million, Osceola nearly \$73 million and Lake about \$71.2 million. In addition, a total of \$341.2 million is expected to be dispersed to 33 cities and towns in those counties. Orlando, for example, anticipates nearly \$58 million, and Sanford receiving \$12.6 million.

The National Association of Counties, however, said the U.S. Treasury Department could change those numbers.

Seminole Commission Chairman Lee Constantine said his county still needs to review all the guidelines in the American Rescue Plan Act before putting together a spending plan.

to the smaller counties and instead required them to apply for reimbursements. That forced many counties to dig into their reserves or modify their budgets to fund pandemic relief while awaiting state reimbursement checks.

Under the latest relief package, the U.S. Department of Treasury would oversee and administer the payments to state and local governments, and every county would be eligible to receive a direct allocation.

"Now, we will get it directly, which we believe is a much better benefit than the previous CARES money," Seminole Commissioner Jay Zembower said.

Seminole last year received \$82.3 million in CARES Act funding, of which \$19.5 million went for individual assistance and \$12.5 million for small businesses.

Zembower hopes the latest funds also could be used to upgrade and expand park lands and trails, "because we saw such huge usage during the pandemic."

age and what would qualify, according to county spokeswoman Samantha Shylkofski.

Lake last year allocated about \$13.7 million of the \$64 million it received from the CARES Act for rental, mortgage and utility assistance. However, about \$9 million of that is still earmarked for rent, and \$1 million for utilities.

"This could be that the need is not as great as anticipated or the federal requirements are too strict," Shylkofski said. "Business and resident assistance were the Board's [county commissioners] primary focus."

Cassandra Anne Lafser, press secretary for Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer, said her city also is awaiting more details from the federal government on what types of assistance programs would qualify for the \$58 million Orlando is estimated to receive.

"We will also need to evaluate what the current needs of our community are when the funding is actually available to use to distribute and

#### Club from Page 1

and an art studio.

Most critically, said David Brewer, a retired vice admiral of the United States Navy and former superintendent of the Los Angeles Unified School District, it will give kids the means to overcome the lure of street gangs and the waste of their enormous potential

recruited in the fifth grade, between the hours of 4 and 7 [p.m.], and then in the summer," said Brewer, who grew up in the neighborhood and lives there now.

### **Stimulus** from Page 1

many students will be in classrooms next year. They are also considering canceling an expensive project to build three major highways. But the federal money allows the state some major breathing room and a chance to spend big. "It clearly takes a lot of the pressure off a lot of the deeper cuts that were going to have to be made," said Senate President Wilton Simpson, R-Trilby. Simpson has stressed that the federal money is a one-time boon, so it should be spent on road and water projects and other singular uses instead of boosting annual programs that would face cuts in futures years once the federal money is gone. "The (Department of Transportation) trust fund took a pretty good hit because of sales tax collections in March, April, May of last year, and so by being able to put resources into those areas we would be able to stimulate job creation," Simpson said. Before lawmakers knew the COVID-19 aid payments were coming for certain, House Speaker Chris Sprowls warned K-12 school superintendents that the nearly 88,000 students missing from enrollment counts should be found and accounted for to help lawmakers draft an

"And the only antidote to that is to take them off of the streets" and provide them with guidance and opportunity.

Otis, who grew up amid gang territories in Los Angeles, agreed. "I went to elementary school with the founders of the Crips... Back in the day, I played football with the founders of the Bloods. And it's easy to demonize those guys. But I know that they were people that had incredible leadership skills, enormous charisma, and contrary to a lot of popular belief ... they were students that excelled in school. But there was something missing in their life. And what was missing

education budget for the coming year.

Federal CARES Act money allowed Gov. Ron DeSantis' administration to hold funding level for school districts this year, but Sprowls warned that might not happen next

is what the Boys & Girls Club provides."

The club will officially open to kids on April 12, a day that Gary Cain, president and CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Florida, said he eagerly awaits.

"You can either build prisons or you can build Boys & Girls Clubs and invest in children," he said. "A lot of our kids have experienced very traumatic events in their young lives, and some of them have never really belonged to anything. Here, we build the relationships that help them heal and flourish."

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could be spent.

At the same time, Jenne doesn't want the stimulus money to be used as an excuse to keep alive the three new arterial highways the Legislature approved last year.

Simpson and Sen. Gayle

"Our children are being

Still, he wants to see Seminole use the money for rental and mortgage assistance programs, small business grants and help for non-profit organizations.

"Seminole will use it to help those who are struggling," he said.

The first half of the money to local governments will be distributed within 60 days or by May 10 - and the second half no earlier than a year later. Governments would then have until Dec. 31, 2024 to spend the money on COVID-19 relief measures.

At a recent commission meeting, Seminole County Manager Nicole Guillet said that gives her staff more time to put together a spending plan. Seminole officials also said they were pleased that under this latest relief package the money will flow directly to counties.

Under the \$2.2-trillion CARES Act economic stimulus bill passed by Congress and signed into law by President Donald Trump in March 2020, counties like Seminole, Osceola and Lake with fewer than 500,000 residents had to rely on state government in Tallahassee to receive their shares.

Gov. Ron DeSantis' administration then said it would stop handing out payments

He pointed out that non-profit organizations greatly impacted by the pandemic shutdown could use a helping hand, such as the Central Florida Zoo and Harvest Time International, a humanitarian relief agency based in Sanford that provides food, clothing and other essentials to needy families.

The Central Zoo and Botanical Gardens, for example, lost about \$80,000 and \$100,000 a month last year because it was forced to close in March and April because of the pandemic. In October, it received \$1.5 million in CARES Act funding for protective equipment and replace lost revenues.

Osceola spokeswoman Krystal Diaz said the estimated nearly \$73 million for her county is still subject to change by the U.S. Treasury Department, which will coordinate the distribution of the funds.

Still, "we will continue to assist our residents, businesses, non-profits and schools in recovering and surviving the pandemic and its associated economic impacts," Diaz said in an email.

In Lake, officials have started evaluating details of the new stimulus packinvest," she said in an email.

Orange County, which received about \$243 million in the CARES Act relief last year, spent about \$95 million of that on social services and community needs, including \$1,000 grants to households economically impacted by the pandemic. It also directed about \$73 million on small business financial assistance, \$57 million on public safety and health needs, including the disposal face masks, hand-sanitizer and other personal protective equipment.

Over the next six to seven months, Orange County will look at the basic needs in the community as it plans how to distribute the funds.

Kurt Peterson, manager of Orange's Office of Management and Budget said the new relief package "talks about helping out impacted industries, such as tourism, travel and hospitality," which were devastated by the coronavirus shutdown

Demings said it is likely that some of the money will be spent on job retraining and to assist small businesses.

"We want our economy firing on all cylinders," Demings said.

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year. With the latest round of federal funding, cuts based on reduced enrollment might not be needed.

House Democratic Co-Leader Evan Jenne of Dania Beach said he agrees that road and water projects would be a good use of the money but that education and health care programs should get some of the money as well.

"We need to make sure that we protect what was already in there first and lessen the blow that could've been on schools, postsecondary, whatever it may have been," Jenne said.

Jenne specifically mentioned school maintenance and construction projects, known as Public **Education Capital Outlay**, or PECO dollars, as a use for the federal money. That would keep the money in the education system while ensuring it's spent on one-time projects, as Simpson outlined.

Even after covering the \$2 billion shortfall, the state's coffers could have billions more in new funding this year. Having just learned they are receiving the money, lawmakers haven't begun detailed talks about how the money

Harrell, R-Stuart, have pushed to stop the project, known as M-CORES, from moving forward.

One of the reasons cited was the anticipated tight budget year, but environmentalists have decried the project from its inception, saying the roads aren't needed and would disrupt key portions of the state's environment.

Lawmakers have until April 30, the last day of their regular session, to decide how to divvy up the money for the budget year that begins July 1. They'll also look for guidance from the federal government on how the money can be spent before making any decisions.

Jenne, though, wants his colleagues to think big.

"I would hope that we take this gift that we're being given right now and do something really positive that will affect generations moving forward rather than just trying to spackle over bad ideas, cracks in M-CORES, and things like that," he said. "I would hope we can do something that would have real generational change."

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## School

from Page 1

business for more than 20 years and currently runs 27 charter schools in Florida. Most of its schools are in South Florida, but three are in Osceola County.

In paperwork filed with Orange County Public Schools, Mater said its mission is to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds by preparing them 'for success in college and life." The schools said it offers top-notch academics, a "college-going" focus and lots of parental involvement to help children living in poverty find success.

Mater schools have "improved the educational trajectory of thousands of families," it said.

Mater students in Miami-Dade and Osceola counties, for example, have outperformed those in districtrun schools on Florida's standardized exams. The network has been designated a "high-performing" charter group by the U.S. Department of Education and won a \$19 million grant to help it expand, and it is one of five hope operators approved in Florida.

Mater Academy Apopka is scheduled to open in August 2022 and eventually serve students in kindergarten-through-12th grade, though it wouldn't be open to all grades initially. It doesn't have a site picked yet, and it could operate from more than one location in an area within a five-mile radius of Wheatley, located on Marvin C. Zanders Avenue.

It expects about 40% of its students would be youngsters now zoned to attend Wheatley. It could enroll up to 750 students in its first year and up to 3,000 eventually, its documents show. Mater would target students in Wheatley's neighborhood, though the school could be open to children from across the county.

Wheatley opened in 1952 as a school for Black children. During segregation, it was a K-12 campus that served Black students from a large swath of west Orange. Now its K-5 student population is 72% Black and 23% Hispanic. Almost all are from low-income families.

The school got a rebuilt campus in 2014. It is also one of nine OCPS campuses that gets extra attention from the district because of its students' academic struggles.

Board member Melissa Byrd, whose district includes Wheatley, said the board's approval of the Mater contract should not be viewed as a criticism of the school.

"There are tremendous things happening at Phillis Wheatley Elementary," she said, adding it is making "tremendous progress" under the leadership of a "fantastic" principal.

Wheatley, like all of Florida's public schools, was last issued a state grade in 2019. Because of the pandemic, the state canceled student testing last spring and then didn't issue 2020 school report cards, which are based on student performance on state exams.

"The school is a treasure to the community," Byrd added, and has a "loyal community around it that loves that school."

Orange school board members also offered no criticism of Mater, only

of the state law that they view as usurping local decision-making powers.

John Palmerini, an associate general counsel with OCPS, told the board it had no choice but to approve the agreement with Mater. If it didn't, the 2017 law would lead to it losing out on other state money and being forced to pay Mater's attorneys fees and costs after a hearing that was all but guaranteed to be unsuccessful.

"We must approve it," said Chair Teresa Jacobs. "We're going to end up in a course of legal action which we have no opportunity to prevail in."

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