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FRIDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2009

Weekend

INSIDE TODAY



Air date changed

Due to a network schedule change, the "America's Most Wanted" program featuring local teacher Jed DuBose will air on Saturday, Dec. 12.



Home again

The Wildcats will get home field advantage tonight in the fourth round of the Class AAAAA state high school football playoffs see page 1B

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Cisco sold, but stations will not reopen yet

By ELLEN ROBINSON
Tribune & Georgian Staff

While officials were disappointed that Cisco fuel stations will not reopen immediately after being sold at auction on Tuesday, they are still considering the sale a positive step.

The sole bidder for the businesses on Tuesday was the current note holder, Al-

abama businessman Michael Nicholson, who bid \$17.3 million. Keating said he believes Nicholson's intention is to sell the businesses rather than reopen them.

"There were others who were interested in one of the businesses, but they were being auctioned as a three-business package. But this action clears up the lien and title issues, which clears the

way for it to be sold," said David Keating, Camden County Joint Development Authority director. "This makes the businesses more marketable to potential buyers."

Keating says the businesses can be marketed to potential purchasers now without strings attached.

Prior to Tuesday's auction on the courthouse steps in

Woodbine, a prospective buyer would have had to commit to not only purchasing the three properties as a package, but also would have been obligated to pay more than a quarter-million dollars in back taxes. One of the conditions for purchasing the businesses at auction was to pay the county and cities the taxes owed to them before the doors could

be opened to customers.

According to Mike Fender, county finance director, the auction on Tuesday will have a profoundly positive impact on the county's current funding shortfall. The back taxes on the property were estimated at \$281,000, which is nearly the amount the county

See AUCTION, page 12A

Complex will add 196 units to city

By EMILY HEGLUND
Tribune & Georgian Staff

Those traveling between St. Marys and Kingsland may have noticed that the landscape is changing — and fast.

Brant Creek Apartments, a 196-unit complex, is rapidly being constructed across the street from Saturday Park in St. Marys. The development was on the city's water/sewer waiting list for years and was finally issued a building permit in July.

Tom Purdie, developer and owner of the Jacksonville, Fla.-based Springfield Capital, said he learned of the need for local multi-family housing several years ago.

"We spent some time a couple of years ago talking to people in the area," Purdie said. "Everyone said that there wasn't enough housing in

See PROJECT, page 12A

White Lighting



SANTA CLAUS SPEAKS with 5-year-old St. Marys resident Kaley Lakotta during the St. Marys White Lighting Ceremony on Tuesday. Lakotta rode briefly in the Clauses' horse-drawn carriage as it made its way down Osborne Street to the waterfront. (Tribune & Georgian photo/Emily Heglund)

Christmas in the Park offers free family fun

By SUSAN RESPESS
Tribune & Georgian Staff

Saturday's agenda at the St. Marys waterfront is total merriment, and one of the broadest smiles will be on Alton Dixon's face.

It's his third Christmas in the Park party from noon to 8 p.m., and he's expecting several thousand guests at

Howard Gilman Memorial Park. He wasn't out to prove that there is a free lunch, but on this day there will be. In fact, it's free everything for children and families who want a full day of sheer fun.

"This isn't your typical festival," said Dixon. "There are no vendors." Instead, there are homemade games, a Santa visit and stocking

giveaway for 1,700 children, a Gingerbread House contest and holiday cookies, kids' crafts to make, dancing and music performances and a sun-down, outdoor movie with hot chocolate and popcorn.

The Camden County Antique Tractor Club will be pulling wagons for hayrides. And all of it is a gift to the community. No wallets required.

"It started when I wanted to give memories to my children, something that was free, that families could afford," said Dixon, who has three children, Skyler, 12, Sadie, 10, and Dayler, 7. He and his wife, Wendy, thought up the idea of handing out stockings in the park three years ago

See PARK, page 10A

Young rider, horse combine for gold-medal performance

By ELLEN ROBINSON
Tribune & Georgian Staff

William Sylvester says the first-place medal he won during this year's Special Olympics State Horse Show belongs as much to the horse he rides as it does to him.

"When I won, I looked at Indy (a white quarter horse) and I told her, 'you did this,' but then she looked at me and she was saying 'no, you did it,'" said 12-year-old Sylvester, who was diagnosed with autism two years ago.

His father, Ken Sylvester, says he has seen dramatic improvements in his son's development ever since he began working with Indy three years ago in a therapy program at

She's a great horse, but just like me, she makes mistakes sometimes, too.

William Sylvester, Horseback rider, about his horse, Indy

the Lighthorse Learning Center in Kingsland.

"He really started coming out of his shell about two years ago after we implemented a regulated diet that is low in sugar and chemicals. The combination of this change and working with Indy has helped him make

unbelievable changes," Ken Sylvester said.

William Sylvester says he relates well with Indy, and that she has helped him make friends.

"Indy has horse friends and she's friends with other people too. She's a great horse, but just like me, she makes mistakes sometimes too," Sylvester said.

Thanks to the donations made to the Lighthorse Learning Center, Sylvester, his father, Indy and a small team of support staff traveled to the Special Olympics State Horse Show in Perry last month. This year was Sylvester's first year to com-

See STATE, page 10A



WILLIAM SYLVESTER, A 12-year-old St. Marys resident who was diagnosed with autism two years ago, won first- and second-place medals at the Special Olympics State Horse Show in Perry held in late November. Sylvester credits Indy, his favorite quarter horse, for his success. (Special to the Tribune & Georgian)

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Here comes Santa



SANTA CLAUS WAVES at parade-goers Tuesday during the St. Marys White Lighting Ceremony. A horse-drawn carriage carried Santa and Mrs. Claus to the waterfront where the couple lit the city Christmas tree. Ava Lasley, 17 months, was equally enthralled with the Christmas-light reindeer. (Tribune & Georgian photos/Emily Heglund)



Project: St. Marys development is not Section 8 housing

■ continued from 1A

St. Marys and Camden County. Even as times got worse and the market conditions fell, we still felt this was going to be a need."

The complex is not subsidized or low-income housing, though the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Federal Housing Administration (FHA) are involved in financing the construction.

Roger Weaver, St. Marys planning director, said Brant Creek will be open to anyone able to afford the rental rates.

"It is market-rate housing, meaning the rent will be set at what the market will support," Weaver said. "It is not Section 8 [housing]."

Purdie spent several years at No. 2 on St. Marys' water/sewer waiting list, which was compiled in the mid-2000s when the city's treatment plants were almost at capacity.

More than a dozen developers signed up to receive future capacity, though many of those projects were later scrubbed, Weaver said.

"Some of the developers on the list stuck with us," he said. "Some of the projects went away. Brant Creek was one of those projects that kept moving forward."

The city charged tap fees equivalent to those on the fe

schedule at the time the development was placed on the water/sewer waiting list, Weaver said. Purdie and his staff completed environmental, traffic and market feasibility studies before the building permit was issued.

"The [Georgia Department of Transportation] had to approve the traffic study," he said. "The nice thing about having traffic lights on either end is that it pulses the traffic."

Construction is happening so rapidly, Weaver said, that his inspector has been on site almost every day examining the site prep, electrical wiring, plumbing and framing work. "He's keeping up with them," Weaver said. "He's checked all the roof, everything."

According to a market feasibility study conducted in 2008 by a North Carolina-based consulting firm, demand for multi-family housing in St. Marys will see strong growth over the next five years.

"Based upon the demand estimates, the subject property should be fully absorbed and at stabilized occupancy within 15 to 18 months of the completion of construction," the study states.

Contact assistant editor Emily Heglund at (912) 882-4927 or emily@tribune-georgian.com



CONSTRUCTION IS FLYING on the three-story apartment complex going in across from Saturday Park in St. Marys. The Brant Creek Apartments will be market-rate, which means rental rates will be controlled by market forces. The Web site, which is also under construction is www.brantcreek.net (Tribune & Georgian photo/Emily Heglund)

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Auction: County to receive its back taxes

■ continued from 1A

needs to stabilize the 2010 budget shortfall.

"Even after adopting more budget cuts on Tuesday, we were still about \$200,000 shy. We are hoping this alleviates that shortfall. Another good aspect that will come from this is when the stations are reopened, that will immediately help in the [Local Option Sales Tax] revenues for the county and the cities," Fender said.

According to Fender, the three Cisco fuel stations located off two interstate exits generated nearly \$4 million annually in sales tax revenues for the county. Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) funds have been suffering from the closure of the fuel stations also April 2008.

"This is good news for taxes and it's good news for the jobs that will hopefully follow when the stations are finally sold and reopened," Fender said.

The Cisco fuel stations, located off Exit 1 and Exit 6, have been entangled in litigation ever since the state closed them in early 2008, when an investigation began into charges accusing the former owner Fairly Cisco and his partners of defrauding customers and paying off state inspectors. They were recently indicted on 14 criminal counts by a federal grand jury.

A civil lawsuit by the businesses' customers is also pending.

A second owner purchased the businesses and reopened them for a short time before they were permanently closed in April 2008.

Contact assistant editor Ellen Robinson at (912) 882-4927 or ellen@tribune-georgian.com

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