

PANAMA CITY NEWS HERALD



TVTIMES
TV's 'everyman' appeals to just about everyone
Inside

LOCAL
Hurricane Hunter whirls into Apalachicola Municipal Airport

1B

SPORTS
GCCC women fall 1 win short of title against Chipola

1C



50 cents

FRIDAY April 18, 2008

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Today	Saturday
Partly sunny	Sun & storms
HIGH LOW	HIGH LOW
77 61	74 58

► **AT A GLANCE**

LOCAL & STATE, 1B
Police seeking band of auto burglars
Bay County Sheriff's Office investigators said a group of juveniles has hit about 15 cars in Panama City Beach since April 10.

NATION & WORLD, 9A



The Associated Press

Polygamist sect case draws 100 lawyers
If the 416-child custody case involving a West Texas polygamist sect continues the way it proceeded Thursday, some of the subjects might not be children by the time it is over.

BUSINESS, 7C

Oaseas opens office in Panama City Beach
A new property and rental management company comprised of several former Royal American Hospitality managers has opened a Panama City Beach office.

► **YOUNG ARTIST**



Today's artwork is by Shawn McGowan, a student at St. Bernadette Catholic School.

► **INSIDE**

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► **SITE SEEING**

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PCB tram report blasted

Findings suggest tax to fund proposed transportation system

Archive online

Read past articles on the Front Beach Road CRA at newsherald.com

By Ed Offley
News Herald Writer
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PANAMA CITY BEACH

A consultant's report on options for establishing and operating a mass transit tram system servicing the Front Beach Road

corridor is complete. The contents of the report and the way in which the document materialized, however, prompted one city councilman to cry foul this week.

Last spring, the Beach City Council authorized Rural Transit

Consultants Inc. of Solvang, Calif., to draft a detailed operation plan for the proposed tram system that will utilize special lanes on Front Beach Road and Thomas Drive. The report states in its executive summary that "tourists and (resort) employees would be the primary focus of this general public transit system."

However, among the two administrative alternatives the

'It appears that this thing cannot be sustained without an ad valorem tax on the city residents. I am against that'

Ken Nelson
Ward 4 Councilman

See TRAM **2A**

New Bay County Emergency Operations Center under way



Photos by Andrew Wardlow / The News Herald

Jim Kerley, president of Gulf Coast Community College, speaks during the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Emergency Operations Center off County 2300 near Southport on Thursday. The EOC's current facility downtown is prone to flooding and unsafe during strong hurricanes.

Digging for the future

By Donna Vavala
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SOUTHPORT

Gulf Coast Community College really knows how to throw a groundbreaking party, and there was good reason for celebration Thursday.

The long-awaited construction of the 50,000-square-foot Bay County Emergency Operations Center soon will begin on five acres the college owns on County 2300, across from its North Bay Campus and beside its training center for firefighters and law enforcement.

On the Web

See video of the groundbreaking and a chronology of events at news.aherald.com

floods during storms and can be unsafe in strong hurricanes.

GCCC's President James Kerley deemed Thursday a "red-letter day." When the EOC building is completed, GCCC will offer training to the people who will work there and add new courses to provide more people with jobs.



Ground is broken Thursday at the site of Bay County's new Emergency Operations Center on County 2300 near Southport.

"It's your college, it's your community and we're here to serve you," Kerley said. "We always keep our visions large and keep pushing ourselves to go large. We're stretching the boundary on possibilities."

The new facility is a joint partnership between the college and the county, with \$3.5 million in funding coming from the state Department of Community Affairs and matched by the county. The college is using its land and paying about

\$10.5 million on construction and will use the facility for training unless there's an emergency. The state and federal emergency management agencies split the remainder of the cost. The estimated total expenditure is \$17.2 million.

A huge white canopy shaded Bay County dignitaries Thursday, as they dined on a gourmet lunch prepared and served by the college's culinary school students.

See EOC **2A**

Beach forum slams tram tax

Candidates speak out on how to pay for proposed mode of transportation

By Ed Offley
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PANAMA CITY BEACH

Candidates for Beach mayor and City Council were unanimous Thursday evening in opposing special taxes or assessments to pay for a proposed mass transit system servicing the Front Beach Road corridor.

During an hour-long candidate forum at the Beach Senior Center moderated by WPGX-TV's Tom Najjar, the candidates itemized their greatest concerns and top priorities for city government in the years ahead, debated how the Front Beach Road Community Redevelopment Area, or CRA, might continue to improve city streets and described how they would work with others on the council if elected. But the issue of financing the tram system sparked the sharpest comments overall.

A transit consultant to the Front Beach Road CRA said in a report obtained by The News Herald on Wednesday that the proposed tram operation for tourists and resort employees likely would fail without establishing a city ad valorem tax to subsidize operating expenses.

The candidates present Thursday generally agreed on the need for mass transit of some form but came down firmly against using taxes or even special property

See FORUM **2A**

On the Web

Get complete coverage of the 2008 elections, including stories, profiles of the candidates and more, at newsherald.com

