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Firefighter Schultz must bury 3 who died in plane crash

BY DEBORAH BUCKHALTER
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The Jackson County Fire Rescue union is asking the community to pull together and give to help one of their own.

Alford Station firefighter/paramedic Tom Schultz is struggling with grief over the loss of his mother, his aunt and the stepson he'd raised from toddler age. The three died in a plane crash Sunday morning near the Bay/Jackson/Calhoun county lines.

He is also keeping vigil over his brother, Patrick Schultz, who pi-

lotted the downed plane and was the only survivor. As of Wednesday, Patrick remained in critical condition at an area hospital. According to JCFR Chief Scott Birge, Tom saw the crash happen and helped save his brother's life after the plane tumbled from the sky and caught fire.

Tom and his family are also shouldering the significant financial burdens associated with suddenly having to pay funeral expenses for three people, says JCFR union president and friend Ricky Winget. The JCFR team plans to carry out a boot drive

near a heavily-trafficked local store in the future, but in the meantime are accepting outright donations into the newly-established Jackson County Professional Firefighters' Schultz Family Benefit Fund at Suntrust Bank branches. Donors can simply reference the account name when they get ready to contribute in cash or with checks.

The funerals are scheduled to take place in Panama City Saturday morning at 10 a.m., and Winget is hoping Jackson County can help erase the debt that will be associated with those expenses.

Knowing that many people have been reaching for a way to help, Winget said giving in this effort is one way the larger community can express its sorrow and support.

According to Birge, Schultz is known not just for his competence in giving emergency care, but for his computer know-how, his good attitude and his dry and analytical sense of humor. He has worked at JCFR for the past 11 years.

Birge said he had arranged to get off shift about an hour early Sunday so that he could join his

family for day of plane rides in the 1974 Piper Cherokee Model PA 28 that his brother was piloting as a treat for the clan. Tom and his two youngest sons had gone up for a ride just moments before the plane took off again with his oldest son, 14-year-old Nicholas Hoang, his mother, Kathleen Schultz, and his aunt, Nancy Moore, aboard.

The plane departed from Maran Airfield, at 22303 Longleaf Road in Fountain, and crashed shortly after takeoff. Birge said

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'Eyes on the Kids' campaign promotes water safety

BY ANGIE COOK
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In Florida, drowning is among the leading causes of death for children ages 1-4, according to the state Department of Children and Families.

With that statistic in mind, DCF officials on Wednesday launched the first phase of the agency's statewide "Water Safety Campaign" with a Tampa press conference.

Since the start of this year, the Florida Abuse Hotline has taken 28 calls about alleged child drownings, a statement from DCF reports.

When children have access to water, the campaign urges, parents, guardians and caregivers should keep "Eyes on the Kids" — at all times.

Distractions — texting, phone calls, long conversations or simply dashing off to change the laundry from the washer to the dryer — are to be avoided when kids are in or even near water. A designated adult "Water Watcher" should be present at all times.

"Our state loses more children under the age of five to drowning than any other state in the nation," DCF Interim Secretary Mike Carroll said in a statement announcing the public safety campaign kickoff.

"Parents and caregivers must be vigilant about keeping their eyes on children around water. Taking extra precautions can save a child's life."

The campaign emphasizes the importance of every child in Florida learning to swim, noting that the American Association of Pediatrics recommends that all children ages 4 and up take swimming lessons. At Chipola College in Marianna, children's swimming lessons are set to begin in June.

"Keeping Florida's children safe in and around water is everyone's responsibility," State Surgeon General and Secretary of Health Dr. John Armstrong said in the statement. "Supervise consistently, use gates to prevent access to pools, and learn emergency CPR to help keep water activities safe for everyone this summer."

A state-run website — www.waterprooffl.com — offers more information on drowning prevention:

» **Supervision:** Someone should always be actively watching kids who are in or near the pool. Don't play around on your phone or get involved in a big conversation while watching them; drowning can happen in just a few minutes. Designate a "Water Watcher" to keep an eye on swimmers.

» **Barriers:** A child should never be able to enter the pool area un-



MARK SKINNER/FLORIDAN FILE

In this 2013 photo, Madilyn McNeil jumps in the water during a swimming lesson at the Chipola College pool in Marianna.

accompanied by an adult. Barriers — childproof locks on all doors, a pool fence with self-latching and self-closing gates, as well as door and pool alarms — physically block a child from the pool. Professional, fitted pool covers may be used, but not a simple canvas covering; those can be drowning hazards and entrap a child in the water. Florida law requires barriers for home pools.

» **Swimming Lessons:** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends children ages 4 and older learn to swim and encourages caregivers of children ages 1-3 to consider swim instruction for their child. Caregivers should learn to swim as well. To find swimming lessons in your area, contact your local officials or youth organizations. For information on lessons offered at Chipola College, call 718-2473 or visit www.chipola.edu.

» **Emergency Preparedness:** When a child stops breathing, a small window of time exists in which re-

suscitation may occur — but only if someone knows how. Even if you're not a parent, learn CPR. It can mean the difference between life and death. Also, in an emergency, it is critical to have a phone nearby and immediately call 911.

Swimming lessons set at Chipola

Chipola College will offer children's swimming lessons for ages 4 and up on the following dates:

» **Session 1:** June 16-26 (June 12 registration deadline).

» **Session 2:** July 14-24 (July 10 registration deadline).

» **Session 3:** August 4-14 (July 31 registration deadline).

When: Each two-week session includes eight 45-minute classes that meet Monday through Thursday.

Cost: \$55 per session. Pre-registration required (\$5 late registration fee).

Call 718-2473 or visit www.chipola.edu.



DEBORAH BUCKHALTER/FLORIDAN FILE

Tourist Development Council Director Pam Fuqua addresses Jackson County commissioners about efforts to increase tourism.

County eyes new tourism grant

BY DEBORAH BUCKHALTER
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Jackson County Commissioners agreed Tuesday to pursue a regional grant aimed at increasing tourism along the U.S. 90 corridor and spreading general public knowledge of its history and value.

Jackson and neighboring Washington County are each trying to obtain up to \$25,000 from the state's Office of Economic Opportunity for the project, and would use the money to hire a consultant. That individual would write a strategic promotional plan focusing on U.S. 90 assets. The idea is to get both counties on board so that they could work together toward a regional approach to the task, said Jackson County Tourist Development Council Director Pam Fuqua. She said Gadsden, Holmes and Walton counties have expressed interest in trying to get involved next year as well.

She said she learned about the grant program while talking with an OEO representative who took part in the recent RiverwaySouth Apalachicola/Choctawhatchee summit held at Chipola College.

Fuqua said a regional approach makes the most sense in trying to help the many small communi-

ties bring a piece of the tourism dollar into each of the neighboring counties. "Each town along U.S. 90 is very similar in that their courthouses or town squares are centered on 90," she said. "It has the things that tourists are looking for -- the historic aspects and the little shops that are unique mom and pop operations that they want to visit and experience. This grant would help us get started in putting the word out about them individually and collectively. If we work regionally to, we're going to be able to draw more people to more places along the way. When the tourist sees all the side-by-side opportunities laid out together, then we all benefit."

That wasn't Fuqua's only bit of business with the board Tuesday. Her annual contract was also up for renewal. The board approved that, too, unanimously. With that official action, she begins her third year as head of TDC, at an annual salary of \$42,500, the same amount she was making before.

Fuqua said she has several ongoing projects in the works to help Jackson County increase its presence among the tourist trade and that she was grateful to be able to continue the task.

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*12 years or under, with Jackson County ties. Include child's full name, parents' name(s) and city of residence. This is a free service. All entries subject to editing.



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