

LOCAL & BUSINESS

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SECTION B | FRIDAY, APRIL 15, 2011

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FAMILY FUN

Taking kids to SunFest?
We've got some ideas.

pbpulse.com



Protestors want FAU to dismiss professor
Backers of Bassem Alhalabi see 'witch hunt.' Story, 5B

SUSTAINABILITY SUMMIT SATURDAY CityPlace site of 'green' event. Story, 3B

CERABINOFRIDAY



FRANK CERABINO

Let's hit rewind and review state's unusual weapons

I'm an avid reader of crime stories involving unusual weapons.

We're blessed with so many of these stories that I wouldn't be surprised if Florida led the nation in this grossly under-analyzed statistic.

The state's reigning champion for the past six years has been Fred Simunovic, who held up a Key West credit union with a pitchfork. This sort of creativity, in what might best be described as *Dog Day Afternoon* meets *American Gothic*, has been tough to top.

Simunovic made off with nearly \$1,900, but was later caught and held without ... bale.

See what I mean? Tough to top.

Attack with a deadly remote control

But this week, Simunovic's title was put to the test by Rita Sharon Counts, 48, of Wellington, who relied on a most unusual weapon during a domestic skirmish with her husband.

Counts brandished a TV remote control. And bashing her husband with the TV remote got her a trip to jail on a charge of "aggravated battery with a deadly weapon."

I didn't know that TV remote controls were deadly weapons. Frustrating, yes. But deadly?

If so, I've got an arsenal in my home. Maybe I should get one of those burglar-warning signs for the front lawn: "Caution: Homeowner packs a Panasonic."

But I'm a little confused, because in order for a weapon to be deadly, I would imagine you would have to be able to kill somebody with it. And I've yet to find a story that said, "homicide detectives have begun dredging the lake in hopes of finding the murder remote."

I guess it's theoretically possible that if you programmed a TV remote control to select either MSNBC or Fox News, no matter what button you press, you might be able to induce political partisans to have fatal strokes. But most people would probably find a way to break the TV before that happens.

Cottage cheese and a frying pan

Maybe that's why Counts' public defender was in court Thursday questioning why she was facing a deadly-weapons charge.

I'm not a lawyer, but I would put the TV remote in the same sort of weapons class as a container of cottage cheese, which figured into another recent domestic dispute in Florida.

Last month, Harold McCleery, 43, of Crestview, attacked his girlfriend with a container of cottage cheese and then locked her in a tool shed, according to the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office.

McCleery didn't face a deadly-weapons charge with the cottage cheese. (Maybe the curd size was too small.) And I suspect that the cottage cheese-tool shed combination might actually be a North Florida mating ritual.

Over the weekend, we had a frying pan being used effectively as a weapon in Jacksonville. According to police, Bobby Smith, 81, used the frying pan loaded with potatoes to bash a would-be robber "upside the head." Especially in the mouth area, which explains the lost teeth.

Counts' husband didn't lose any teeth in the TV remote attack. The arrest report said he had some red and black bruises after being bashed by the remote in an attack that "continued for two hours" in the couple's bedroom.

On further review, I'm moving that pitchfork bank robbery down to second place.

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TRAFFIC

Boynton gets red light cameras

Enforcement begins today; warnings will be given for first month.

By ELIOT KLEINBERG
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

BOYNTON BEACH — You've been warned.

Starting today, cameras will snap photos of motorists running red lights at two key intersections, Boynton Beach Police Chief Matt Immel said Thursday.

For the first month, the registered owner will only get a warning. After that, it's a \$158 ticket.

Cameras will operate 24 hours a day and capture still images and video of every vehicle flying through a red light in both directions of South Federal Highway at Southeast 23rd Avenue and West Boynton Beach Bou-

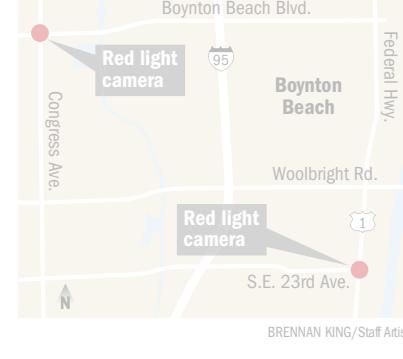
levard at North Congress Avenue.

For red light runners, it gets worse in two weeks, when cameras start snapping at both East Gateway Boulevard at North Congress Avenue and West Woolbright Road at South Congress Avenue.

According to the city, about 700 people were killed and 113,000 injured in 2009 in red light-running crashes nationwide.

A recent study by the Insurance Institute of Highway Safety found that from 2004-08, cameras saved 159 lives in 14 cities with large populations and

See CAMERAS, 4B ▶



■ How will Boynton Beach's red light cameras work? Will getting caught on film affect my insurance rates? Q&A, 4B

RECREATIONAL VEHICLES



BRANDON KRUSE/Staff Photographer

A recreational vehicle is tucked conspicuously behind a fence at the corner of Coralwood Court and Old Cypress Trail in Wellington.

HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

One Wellington law says RVs must be shielded from sight, but another says fences can't be taller than 6 feet.

By MITRA MALEK
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

WELLINGTON — They are wide and tall — especially, tall — and make a mockery of the fences and shrubs meant to shield them.

They aren't supposed to. Actually, they shouldn't even be noticeable. Or can they be?

For years Wellington has enforced its laws so that a recreational vehicle or boat must be parked on the side or rear of a lot and behind a 6-foot wall, fence or landscaping — the maxi-

■ How other communities in Palm Beach County are governing the issue, 5B

mum height village rules allow.

But, perplexingly, village rules also say that the vehicle must not be "clearly visible" to drivers or neighbors.

"If it's 15 feet high but behind a 6-foot fence, then I'm sorry, but my sight says it's clearly visible," resident Donna Weaver said.

The rules are clearer in other Palm Beach County towns, though they

vary widely.

Wellington residents' frustration with the contradiction is nothing new, Mayor Pro Tem Carmine Priore said.

Neither is his own.

"You cannot have a requirement that says you can't have a hedge that's more than 6 feet and then expect to obscure a motor home or a travel trailer," Priore said. "You can't cut the whole top of the boat off and set it beside it. You can't take the top of a travel trailer off."

See HEIGHT, 5B ▶

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Diocese could merge schools

As enrollments fall, officials ask campuses to cut their expenses.

By KEVIN D. THOMPSON
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

To keep some of its struggling schools open, the Diocese of Palm Beach is considering merging Catholic schools or asking them to share costs to keep expenses down, according to a church deacon and task force member studying the problem.

Last year the diocese, which has 14 elementary schools (for grades kindergarten-eight) and three high schools, formed a 15-member task force to find ways to keep schools suffering shrinking enrollment from closing.

In a down economy, school enrollment is also down by as much as one-third in some schools, said Martin Serraes, a

Schools look to share costs

The Diocese of Palm Beach has 14 elementary schools. Five within several miles of each other are battling falling enrollment as families move west.

A. St. Ann School

324 N. Olive Ave.
West Palm Beach

B. Holy Name of Jesus School

345 S. Military Trail
Suburban West Palm Beach

C. St. Juliana School

4355 S. Olive Ave.
West Palm Beach

D. St. Luke School

32892 S. Congress Ave.
Near Palm Springs

E. Sacred Heart School

410 N. M St.
Lake Worth



CHRISTOPHER SMITH/Staff Artist

deacon at Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church and School in suburban West Palm Beach.

"When we speak to parents, they say it's the economy," Serraes said.

Annual tuition for elementary schools is about \$5,000. For high schools, it's \$10,000. Serraes said tuition has increased about \$700 the past few years.

See CATHOLIC, 2B ▶

LAKE WORTH

Meters ease payment for parking

City soon to have new machines at the beach.

By WILLIE HOWARD
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

LAKE WORTH — Paying for parking at Lake Worth Beach is expected to become simpler this month after the city installs solar-powered parking meters that take credit cards and cellphone payments.

Beach parking spaces have been numbered, so visitors will be able to punch in their space number, pay and walk away. They'll no longer have to walk back to the car to place a parking time slip on the dashboard.

The days of struggling to feed soggy dollar bills into beach parking meters also will end. The new meters

See PARKING, 2B ▶

Protesters want FAU professor fired

A supporter decries claims of terrorist ties as a 'witch hunt.'

By LONA O'CONNOR
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

BOCA RATON — About 50 protesters at the entrance to Florida Atlantic University on Thursday called for the firing of a Syrian professor, claiming he has terrorist ties.

At the same time across campus, a similar number of students and professors gathered to support Bassem Alhalabi, an associate professor of computer science and engineering who has worked at FAU since 1996.

The university issued a statement Wednesday supporting Alhalabi.

Joe Kaufman of Americans Against Hate, who describes himself as an investigative journalist, targeted Alhalabi more than a decade ago.

According to Kaufman, Alhalabi has troubling connections to terrorist groups, including the Islamic Center of Boca Raton, of which he was a co-founder. Kaufman said that the center was bankrolled by Saudi Arabians and that several members, including its former imam, have been arrested.

Kaufman was joined at a brief news conference Thursday by the Rev. Mark Boykin, who heads the Church of All Nations in Boca Raton, a few blocks from the Islamic Center and across the street from the Assalam Center, another Muslim organization.

Boykin said he joined Kaufman's crusade because he has seen enough hard evidence to be convinced that Alhalabi should be fired.

At the center of Kaufman's case against Alhalabi is an alleged incident last year at a Muslim Day celebration at the state Capitol.

Kaufman claims that Alhalabi grabbed his arm and shoved him into a corner. Kaufman pressed charges and a battery complaint was filed.

"Bassem Alhalabi has committed violent crimes and is therefore a criminal," Kaufman said. "Shame on FAU and FAU President Mary Jane Saunders for misrepresenting the truth and for harboring this violent individual who cannot keep his hands to himself. By doing so, FAU is teaching its students that violence pays."

Rabbi Barry Silver stood quietly at the edge of the crowd. He and Boykin have appeared together at interfaith forums, including one in August at Congregation L'Dor Va Dor, Silver's congregation.



Staff photos by LANNIS WATERS

While students and members of FAU's campus interfaith committee (top) rallied in support of Bassem Alhalabi, an associate professor, on Thursday, opponents including Joe Kaufman (bottom, left) and the Rev. Mark Boykin (right) called for his ouster.

■ **Video online:** Hear from both sides of the FAU issue and see a brief interview with Alhalabi at [PalmBeachPost.com/video](#)

"I share the concerns about Islamic fundamentalism and about the Islamic Center, but I do not share Joe Kaufman's tactics of mixing truth and fiction," Silver said.

One of Kaufman's key allegations is that Alhalabi pleaded guilty to the battery charge.

But Silver did a little investigative reporting of his own, producing a "deferred prosecution agreement" from the case, in which an "admission of guilt" paragraph had been scratched out. The document was signed by the diversion program coordinator and by Alhalabi.

Alhalabi came out to announce to his supporters that he had just ap-

plied Thursday for U.S. citizenship.

The group of students and professors cheered the news.

"I think I will make a much better citizen than him," a smiling Alhalabi said of Kaufman.

One of Alhalabi's students, Joseph Gundel of Greenacres, chose FAU because he wanted to study with Alhalabi, whom he chose as his graduate studies adviser.

Boris Bastidas, a political science undergraduate, serves with Alhalabi on a university interfaith committee and by Alhalabi.

"This is a witch hunt," Bastidas said.

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Woman charged in bug spray assault

By CYNTHIA ROLDAN
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

A Riviera Beach woman is facing aggravated battery charges after police say she sprayed the father of two of her children in the face with roach spray.

Tiffany Taylor, 31, was arrested by Riviera Beach police after the 43-year-old victim — whose name was withheld in the arrest report

— told police that he was attacked after a verbal argument turned physical Wednesday afternoon.

When Taylor was interrogated by police, she said the victim "fake tossed" the basket of their children's clothes at her and "she decided to spray (the victim) with the roach spray," according to the report. A fistfight ensued.

On Thursday, Taylor begged Palm Beach County Circuit Judge Ted S. Booras not to set her bail too high because she — not the father — was the victim.

"I've been running from him for the last six months," Taylor said, adding that she's living in a domestic violence shelter.

Taylor is being held in lieu of \$10,000 bail.

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If RV visible, move it, says mayor

► HEIGHT from 1B

His solution, which he's promoted for years without success, is to change the rules limiting how tall landscaping can be.

"Allow the hedges to grow to hide whatever the homeowner wants them to cover," Priore said. "But they've got to maintain them. They've got to get someone out there on a tall ladder."

That could lead to trouble, Councilwoman Anne Gerwig said, because huge plants often have huge roots, and that might rip up sidewalks and streets.

"I don't want to solve one problem and create a bigger problem," Gerwig said.

Abundant roots haven't been a problem in Juno Beach, though, which allows landscaping to grow high as needed to block a boat or RV.

"If you could see the tippy top of it, we don't find that's a violation," said Damian Peduto, the town's planning and zoning director.

Palm Beach Gardens is another city that doesn't limit the height of landscaping. Others, such as Lantana — which prides itself as a fishing village — don't care if RVs or boats are screened at all.

No matter how Wellington's rules read, it's important not to prevent residents from being able to store their vehicles on their land, Councilman Howard Coates said.

"If we start tinkering with the rules, we'd be altering some of the fundamental bases on which some of the people in this

What other communities do

Municipal rules for buffering of RVs and boats stored on residential lots vary throughout Palm Beach County.

Wellington: Must be stored on side or rear of property, 'not clearly visible' from the street or abutting properties and screened by a masonry wall, fence or landscaping at least 6 feet high. But Wellington's land development regulations say that walls, fences and landscaping along property perimeters can be no higher than 6 feet.

Juno Beach: Must be completely screened on three sides in side or rear yards. Screening can be a building, wall, fence or landscaping.

Palm Beach Gardens: Must be stored on side or rear of property and screened 'from direct view' by a 6-foot wall or fence and 'dense hedge' at least 6 feet tall within two years of planting. In general, there are no maximum heights for the hedge.

Lantana: No screening required. Must be parked on a paved surface anywhere on lot.

Boynton Beach: No screening required. Can be stored in a carport or driveway. Also can be stored in back yard, not closer than 5 feet from the lot line or in the side yard not projecting beyond the front roof line.

Royal Palm Beach: No screening required. Can be stored on driveway or side of property. Boats parked on the sides of corner lots must be on pavement.

community purchased out of luck. You have to put their property," Coates said.

In fact, that was how the rules worked in Wellington before the community incorporated in 1995.

"It had to be unseen," Bowen said. "If we knew it was there, or saw it there, it had to go to a storage place."

That's how Donna and Alan Weaver, who bought their lot in 1976, remember it. Their suggestion: the village could mark a piece of land for storage and charge users a minimal fee.

"It's a way for the village to make money and for the village to stay nice looking," Donna Weaver said.

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Widow of diet doctor Atkins settles lawsuit

By MICHELE DARGAN
Palm Beach Daily News

Veronica Atkins Mersentes has reached a confidential settlement with former attorney/trustee John Corrigan in a lawsuit where she alleged he sought to reap millions from helping her manage the estate of her late husband, the diet doctor Robert Atkins.

Both sides issued a statement saying "an apology set the stage for a global settlement." The amount was not made public but is described as substantial and "a clear victory" for Atkins Mersentes.

The Mersentes' are regulars on the Palm Beach social scene and were honored at December's Lady in Red gala.

WELLINGTON – HORSE COUNTRY

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NO. 5962843R

CITY OF WEST PALM BEACH PROPOSED SUBSTANTIAL AMENDMENT TO THE ONE-YEAR ACTION PLANS for FISCAL YEARS

2001/02, 2004/05, 2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08, 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11

The City of West Palm Beach has submitted its Consolidated Plan One-Year Action Plans each fiscal year to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This substantial amendment describes allocations for the provision of public improvements, housing, rehabilitation, demolition activities through the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program.

In accordance with 24 CFR 91.505 it is the intent of the City of West Palm Beach to amend the above mentioned Plan as follows:

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM

From: Improvements Other Than Buildings

From:	Year	Estimated Amount
Public Service Activities	2004/05	\$ 12,500

Agency	Year	Estimated Amount
CCCS	2008/09	\$ 20,677
CCCS	2009/10	\$ 2,941
Urban Youth Impact	2007/08	\$ 13,599
Urban Youth Impact	2009/10	\$ 98
Children's Coalition	2008/09	\$ 16
Aspira of Florida	2007/08	\$ 5,585
Aspira of Florida	2008/09	\$ 1,947
Aspira of Florida	2009/10	\$ 10,056
Urban League of PB County	2006/07	\$ 12,250
Elders on the Edge	2006/07	\$ 10,812
Elders on the Edge	2007/08	\$ 85,199

From: Commercial Facade

From:	Year	Estimated Amount
Commercial Facade	2001/02	\$ 5,469
Commercial Facade	2004/05	\$ 12,219
Commercial Facade	2005/06	\$ 61,461
Commercial Facade	2006/07	\$ 112,265
Commercial Facade	2009/10	\$ 140,000

From:	Year	Estimated Amount
Program Income Reserve	2007/08	\$ 369,518
Program Income Reserve	2008/09	\$ 84,611
Program Income Reserve	2009/10	\$ 53,713

GRAND TOTAL \$ 936,955

To: Housing Rehabilitation Services

To:	Year	Estimated Amount
Housing Rehabilitation Services	2010/11	\$ 586,955

To:	Year	Estimated Amount
Public Improvements	2010/11	\$ 300,000

To:	Year	Estimated Amount
Demolition Activities	2010/11	\$ 50,000

GRAND TOTAL \$ 936,955

The proposed substantial amendment will be available for public review for a 30-day period, beginning on April 15, 2011 and ending on May 15, 2011 at the following locations:

City of West Palm Beach Website: <http://www.wpb.org/housing/index.php>
City of West Palm Beach Department of Housing and Community Development, 401 Clematis Street, 3rd Floor, West Palm Beach, Florida
City of West Palm Beach Library, 411 Clematis Street, West Palm Beach, Florida 33402

A public hearing will be held first floor of City Hall, 401 Clematis Street, West Palm Beach, Florida. These amendments to the respective One-Year Action Plans will become final after the approval of the City Commission. All interested agencies, groups and persons who wish to comment on the proposed changes are invited to submit written comments to the Housing and Community Development Department, City of West Palm Beach, P.O. Box 3366, West Palm Beach, Florida 33402.
Citizens may submit oral or written comments on the proposed activities. Any such comments should be directed to Valmarie H. Turner, Director, Housing and Community Development Department located at 401 Clematis Street, Third Floor, West Palm Beach, Florida, 33401, Telephone, (561) 822-1250. Mailing address: P.O. Box 3366, West Palm Beach, Florida 33402. Office hours are Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Any person requiring a special accommodation at the public meeting because of a disability, physical impairment or English language deficiency, should contact the Department of Housing and Community Development at (561) 822-1250 at least five calendar days prior to the public hearing meeting to be held on May 16, 2011 so that assistance may be provided. IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA), THIS DOCUMENT MAY BE REQUESTED IN AN ALTERNATE FORMAT BY CONTACTING THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AT (561) 822-1250.

Para información en español favor de llamar Luz Rivera 561-822-1250

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