

STATE & LOCAL

CITRUS COUNTY CHRONICLE

Bring Bowe Home' group to meet Held captive since 2009

Chronicle

Organizers of the Bring Bowe Home Project, seeking the return of Amy Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl — a prisoner of war in Afghanistan for more than 4 1/2 years — will have a volunteers meeting at 11 a.m. Monday, Feb. 10, at the Citrus County Transit building on County Road 491, Lecanto.

An ongoing matters up for discussion are the details for the Feb. 24 event when U.S. Rep. Rich Nugent, R-Brooksville, will be coming to Citrus County to accept the petitions calling for Bergdahl's return.

According to project organizer Cynthia Holden, close to 3,000 signatures have been collected to date and hopes are to reach 5,000 by Feb. 24. Project volunteers are asked to bring any signed petitions they have with them to the meeting.

Participants may RSVP by calling Mary at 860-335-2681.

Events/activities scheduled where petition signatures will be gathered and "Bring Bowe Home" items will be made available include:

From 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 8, at the Wellness Fair at the Crystal River Mall.

From 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 15, at the Purple Heart ceremony at the National Guard Armory in Crystal River.

Those interested in making a donation to the Bring Bowe Home Project, being done under the auspices of the non-profit Center for Victims Rights, can go to the website advocate4victim.org and donate through PayPal or go to

No hurry on future state roads

CHRIS VAN ORMER Staff writer

LECANTO — Future highways don't feel much closer, an update Wednesday on three projects revealed.

The highways in the decades ahead are long-term visions, "but we need to keep an eye on it," the Transportation Technical Advisory Council (TAC) of the Citrus County Transportation Planning Organization heard at its monthly meeting.

Christina Knight Kopp, principal planner, and Bob Clifford, executive director of the Tampa Bay

Area Regional Transportation Authority (TBARTA), updated TAC members about three state projects: Florida's Future Corridors, Nature Coast Parkway and Suncoast Parkway 2.

The Florida's Future Corridors project in this region is looking at a wide swath area from Tampa to Interstate 10 toward Jacksonville to connect the economic centers, Kopp said.

A current major problem is congestion on Interstate 75. Solutions could be truck-only lanes and other connections to siphon off traffic. The Nature Coast Parkway, a 47-mile toll road extending

from the existing northern end of Florida's Turnpike at I-75 going northwest to U.S. 19 north of Inglis to an intersection known as Lebanon Station, is seen as relieving I-75 congestion of traffic that would be headed toward the Florida Panhandle.

Nature Coast is something that's been around for a while," Clifford said. "I-75 is really becoming congested. In the Gainesville and Ocala area, it's becoming a statewide bottleneck."

That bottleneck is guiding the early concepts of Future Corridors, Clifford said, and Suncoast

Parkway 2 could have some limited affect on relieving I-75 congestion. But other than allocating funding for advanced right-of-way purchases, Clifford had no update about Suncoast 2.

As the projects are in the early stages, "We are not at any evaluation with data yet, we're just looking at concepts," Kopp said.

FDOT has been receiving feedback on the concepts and will be talking to the public and various stakeholders about the plans, Clifford said.

Contact Chronicle reporter Chris Van Ormer at 352-564-2916 or cvanormer@chronicleonline.com.

Postmarked 'retirement'

Popular long-time post office employee says goodbye

NANCY KENNEDY Staff writer

INVERNESS — She has dressed up as Audrey Hepburn, Lucille Ball, Tinkerbell, Dorothy from the "Wizard of Oz" and a Mouseketeer and a credit card.

Every time a new themed postage stamp came out, postal customer service clerk Alice Neal's first thought has been, "Hmm, what can we do that's fun?"

The top shelf behind the front counter at the Inverness Post Office has been lined with lunch boxes, baseball memorabilia, toys, work from local artists, books from local authors and decorations for every holiday.

And she always kept a basket of candy nearby to sweeten her customers' day.

For 38 years, Neal has been the head cheerleader and spirit booster of the Inverness Post Office. She retired Feb. 1.

"I've been fortunate to have had postmasters who have allowed me to do these fun things," she said. "It's been really fun, because the whole front (employees) participated. We all dressed up and had fun."

Her philosophy: If you make work fun, it's no longer work. If the customer has a good experience, you've done your job.

Neal has also organized employee socks, underwear and toys drives to benefit the Family Resource Center, teddy bears for the sheriff's office and has organized blood drives.

From a post office family, Neal began her career in Fort Lauderdale in 1975. She and

