

LOCAL&STATE

Ranch offers victims safe place

January is National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month

Erica Van Buren
Fort Myers News-Press
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

At an early age, Tammy Toney-Butler was a victim of human trafficking. “As a trauma survivor, we don’t have a whole lot of memories,” said Toney-Butler. “But I know that I was being victimized way back in kindergarten and

probably earlier. My mother would have been considered my trafficker.” Toney-Butler, founder of A & K Ranch Ministries located in Fort Myers, decided to use her pain as motivation to help others. “I work with (human trafficking) survivors on my ranch,” she said. “We provide transitional living with tiny homes. As a survivor of human trafficking, heal-

ing is a lifelong process.” Her organization is one of several in Southwest Florida that help survivors and educate the public about human trafficking. Understanding the various forms of child sex trafficking can create opportunities for prevention, identification and

See **TRAFFICKING**, Page 15A



“It is a pervasive evil being perpetrated against our vulnerable children and adults. Human trafficking is a crisis of enormous proportions.”

Tammy Toney-Butler
Co-founder for Nurses United Against Human Trafficking



Mockup photo of the Lee and Penny Anderson Arena that will be finished in 2025. PROVIDED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS MEDIA RELATIONS

A \$75M gift for hometown school

Naples couple also supporters of wine festival

Kendall Little Naples Daily News | USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Naples couple Lee and Penny Anderson have financially supported the Naples Winter Wine Festival since 2002, a year after its inception. Now they’ve made history for the biggest donation to a university in Minnesota – one that neither attended. • Their \$75 million donation to the private Catholic University of St. Thomas will help build a new hockey and basketball arena.

The Andersons are from Minnesota, but retired to Naples. While they didn’t attend St. Thomas, both grew up in the university’s community near the Twin Cities.

Lee says the school has “a wonderful purpose and mission.”

Lee and Penny have donated \$140 million to the school since 1993. After the new arena is finished in the fall of 2025, there will be four buildings named after the Andersons on campus.

“The thing about the Andersons is, while they’ve helped make unbelievably beautiful buildings possible, it’s never about the buildings for them,” University President Rob Vischer said. “It’s about the students, and they know that having a campus that is beautiful and welcoming and comfortable is key to being a place where students grow and build relationships and find a home and develop both personally and professionally.”

Vischer says the new arena will allow St. Thomas to elevate its Division 1

See **GIFT**, Page 12A



Lee and Penny Anderson.
PROVIDED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS MEDIA RELATIONS

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Rob Vischer
Catholic University of St. Thomas president

Court schedule may delay abortion legislation

Decision not expected before end of session

John Kennedy
Capital Bureau | USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

TALLAHASSEE – The Florida Supreme Court will review a new, 15-week abortion law that Gov. Ron DeSantis and Republican lawmakers are considering making even tougher, but justices set a schedule that likely delays a decision on its constitutionality until much later this year.

The deadlines for filing briefs in the case means DeSantis and the Legislature will not have a decision on whether the 15-week limit is upheld until after the two-month legislative session is scheduled to end in May.

DeSantis, who has promised to “expand pro-life protections,” has avoided questions for months about how far he wants to limit abortion access in Florida until the court rules on the current standard, which he signed into law last April.

See **ABORTIONS**, Page 12A

Storms, fuel costs could boost FPL bills

Jim Saunders
NEWS SERVICE OF FLORIDA

TALLAHASSEE – Florida Power & Light customers could face increased electric bills in April after the utility got hit in 2022 by hurricanes and higher-than-expected natural gas costs.

FPL said Monday it will ask the state Public Service Commission to approve collecting \$1.3 billion from customers to recoup costs related to Hurricane Ian and Hurricane Nicole. It also will seek to collect about \$2.1 billion because of high natural gas prices in 2022 – though that would be partially offset by reducing the amount FPL expects to collect for 2023 gas costs by \$1 billion.

“FPL has a proven track record of keeping bills below the national average. When events beyond our control – like hurricanes and significant changes in fuel prices – force a change to customer bills, we try to do so in a

See **BILLS**, Page 16A



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Trafficking

Continued from Page 3A

response, according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Child sex trafficking is when a child under 18 is advertised, solicited or exploited through a commercial sex act. A commercial sex act is any sex act where something of value – such as money, drugs or a place to stay – is given to or received by any person for sexual activity, according to NCMEC.

Another form is familial trafficking in which a child is trafficked by a relative or a person who is perceived by the child to be a family member.

Toney-Butler recalls the man who later became her stepfather coming into her and her mom's life following the divorce and death of her father.

"I became a sex slave," said Toney-Butler. "It was a long walk down to the wooden shed that he built to service his needs. I told my mom what was happening, and her words were, 'Well, how will I survive?' 'How will I pay the rent?' 'You know, I have a nerve problem and I can't work.' 'What am I going to do?' 'You know, he supports us.' He finally went to prison because of child molestation. I didn't tell the truth. How do I tell that my mother knew what was happening and she let it happen. They would've taken my mom away."

January is National Human Trafficking Prevention Month. Every year since 2010, the President has dedicated the month to raise awareness about human trafficking and to educate the public about how to identify and prevent this crime.

Toney-Butler said forgiving her mother has been part of her road to recovery.

"She's passed away and I've moved past that and my faith in God is what set me free," she said. "I don't fault my mom. She was horribly victimized as a child. She didn't speak about what happened to her. So it was generational. She had her own generational trauma. She was parenting in survival mode. Her choices were not her choices."

Butler, founder of A & K Ranch Ministries located in Fort Myers decided to use her pain as motivation to help others.

"I work with (human trafficking) survivors on my ranch," said Toney-Butler. "We provide transitional living with tiny



Tama Caldarone, chief operating officer of The Shelter, works in her office in Naples on Jan. 18. JONAH HINEBAUGH/NAPLES DAILY NEWS

homes. As a survivor of human trafficking, healing is a lifelong process."

Toney-Butler and Dr. Francine Bononeri co-founded Nurses United Against Human Trafficking partnered to create a tool to educate healthcare providers.

"We built a comprehensive learning management system with modules on human trafficking," said Toney-Butler. "It starts with basic knowledge about how social media plays a role in human trafficking and exploitation. The system also links the opioid crisis and the intersections with the juvenile justice system and the pathway to healing."

Toney-Butler said domestic violence plays a role in human trafficking.

"You have to understand the severity of the trauma that is going on," she said. "Many victims don't disclose. Oftentimes, they don't understand that they're being trafficked. They don't realize it's a crime and that there's a way out. It is a pervasive evil being perpetrated against our vulnerable children and adults. Human trafficking is a crisis of enormous proportions."

Toney-Butler said domestic violence and human trafficking victims have different treatment plans.

"At a minimum victims need to be linked to mental health services, substance use providers, because we know that human trafficking is fueling the opioid crisis and vice versa," said Toney-Butler. "Opioids are used as a coercive tactic to manipulate an individual and bring them into the trafficking lifestyle. Using it as a means to cope with the sheer pain and the physical and mental torture that they are enduring."

Tama Caldarone chief operating officer at The Shelter for Abused Women

and Children in Naples, said the facility offers a residential program for adult sex trafficking female survivors.

"We have a clinical team that they can work with to get therapy," said Caldarone. "We have an economic empowerment team that they can work with to work on building their resumes and finding jobs. And of course housing once they're ready to graduate from our program."

Caldarone said survivors are referred to their shelter through multiple community relationships including law enforcement, recovery centers and other shelters.

"It's an approximately two-year program," said Caldarone. "We've done the research and looked into why domestic violence and human trafficking survivors need to be separate. They're going through different types of trauma than domestic violence survivors. Most of the time they need different services than domestic violence survivors. So we have designated a human trafficking program."

The Shelter is just a phone call or text away.

"A survivor can always reach out to us," she said. "I would highly suggest if they're at all thinking that they might be in this situation to give us a call. We are more than happy to speak with them about our program. Most of the time, they don't want to come in; they're not ready to commit to the residential program. That's perfectly fine. But we're here to give them support for whatever their needs are."

Lowell and Sally Senitz founders of Wings of Shelter Int'l located in Lee County accept minor female girls aged 11

through 17 who have been trafficked. The shelter has helped 350 girls in Southwest Florida over the past 16 years.

"We provide a safe house and rehabilitation for girls that have been rescued from child trafficking by police, FBI or the sheriff's department," said Sally. "We're licensed by the Department of Children and Families and vetted out of Washington, DC as a child witness protection program. We provide psychiatric services. Sometimes it requires psychotropic drugs regulated by the psychiatrist to help with the nightmares, night sweats, flashbacks and other anxiety difficulties."

Sally said emphasis is placed on teaching life skills.

"Our goal is to give the girls hope for the future and prepare them for some type of vocation or college," she said. "Most of them will have to become independent at 18. But if they have a safe family member after about a year we work with the family member through counseling to reunite the child if that's possible or they could be on an adoption track."

The statistics state that if a young girl is not rescued out of child trafficking her life expectancy is seven years."

Lowell said they often partner with other organizations in the community.

"We love training organizations, community groups and churches on human trafficking," he said. "We really want to educate the public. We felt like as Americans we needed to help American kids. It's not just international kids or adults."

For help or more information

The Shelter's 24-7 emergency hot line is (239)775-1101 (call or text). The National Human Trafficking Hotline is 1 (888) 373-7888 or SMS: 233733 (Text "BeFree")

For more information about A&K Ranch Ministries, LLC please call 239-404-7703.

For more information contact Wings of Shelter by email at info@wingsofshelter.com

For more information about Nurses United Against Human Trafficking call 341-22-NUAHT.

Erica Van Buren is the underserved communities reporter for The News-Press and Naples Daily News, part of the USA TODAY Network. Connect with her at EVanBuren@gannett.com or on Twitter: @EricaVanBuren32

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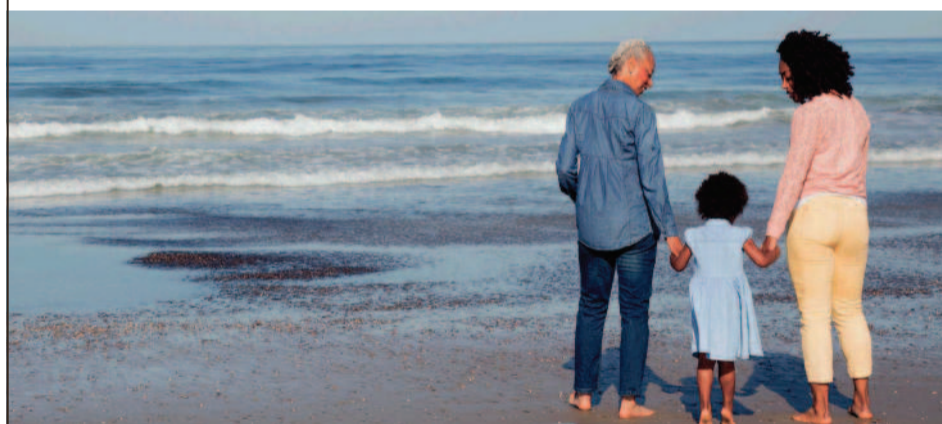
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