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Updated news online
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Losses from citrus greening

Tax incentive bill could help Florida citrus farmers replant

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WASHINGTON—The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced last week the Florida citrus crop for 2015-16 is expected to be 24 percent lower than last year's production level and the lowest since 1963-64.

The reason: a tiny insect from South Asia and the disease it spreads: citrus greening.

The day before the USDA estimate was released, U.S. Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Sarasota,

and 12 other Florida members from both parties introduced the Emergency Citrus Disease Response Act, aimed at giving growers and investors a tax incentive to get affected trees replaced with healthy ones.

"This commonsense legislation makes it less costly for citrus farmers to replant crops decimated by disease," Buchanan said in filing the measure, noting that citrus greening, also known as huanglongbing or HLB, has spread to all 32 citrus-growing counties in the Sunshine State.

The bill was hailed by citrus

“This terrible disease has brought us to our knees.”

Florida Citrus Mutual CEO Michael W. Sparks

industry officials and farmers who note that economists estimate 20 million trees will need to be replanted to get the iconic Florida industry back on its feet.

"It provides growers with an option for a financial incentive that, when they replant, they can basically expense the cost of replanting the tree itself, the labor to get the tree in the ground, and the preparation of the ground,"

Florida Citrus Mutual CEO Michael W. Sparks said. "All of those costs can be first-year costs."

Sparks explained those costs under current law would be depreciated over a 14-year period.

"This terrible disease has brought us to our knees," he added. Planting 20 million citrus trees could take the 10 years the bill provides for the tax break before it's terminated in 2025, he

said. "Here's an incentive, and it could not come soon enough."

But Sparks was realistic about the bill passing as a stand-alone measure despite its importance to Florida, Texas and California citrus growers. He said Buchanan, Florida's only member on the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee, will need to find legislative vehicle to "hook it" to.

Rep. Curt Clawson, R-Bonita Springs, still is examining the bill and wants to speak with Buchanan before signing on as a

See CITRUS, 15A

Naples Winter Wine Festival Volunteers have tables turned at lavish brunch

By Alexi C. Cardona
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Hundreds of volunteers dedicate countless hours of their time to making the Naples Winter Wine Festival possible.

They prepare invitations, stuff gift bags, set up and take down tents, direct traffic, deliver food, serve wine and greet guests.

The Naples Winter Wine Festival held a volunteer appreciation brunch for more than 100 volunteers Sunday. Under the pavilion at Waterside Shops, festival volunteers and staff enjoyed a lavish buffet ranging from muffins to salmon.

"This is our way of saying thank you," said Sandi Moran, festival co-chair and trustee for the Naples Children & Education Foundation.

The brunch also marked the official kickoff of the 2016 festival, which will take place Jan. 29-31.

Naples resident Patti Laree has volunteered at the wine festival for several years and has done everything from preparing invitations to cleaning glasses and registering guests.

"When I read the mission statement, it touched my heart," Laree said. "It's all about the children. I can't bid on things, but I can give my time."

The Naples Winter Wine Festival raises funds for the Naples Children & Education Foundation, which provides services to underserved children in Collier County, including early childhood education, after-school programs and pediatric medical services. Last year's festival raised more than \$12 million under the auction tent.

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special/wine-festival

Find all of our Naples Winter Wine Festival coverage.

Bark for Life



DAVID ALBERS/STAFF (2)

Bonita Springs residents Megan Neal, left, and Natalie Bachman pose for a selfie Sunday with dogs participating in Bark For Life at Mercato in North Naples. The event brought dogs and their owners together for a mini noncompetitive walk event benefiting the Relay For Life of Naples and its goal to raise funds and awareness for the American Cancer Society's fight against cancer.

Heeling and healing

■ Mercato event brings dogs, dog lovers together to raise money for cancer research

By Melissa Gomez
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Hera knows how to enjoy a good petting, and she knows how to make it last.

The 11-year-old bulldog with graying whiskers made it a point to plop down next to a stranger's feet when a hand smoothed the fur on her head Sunday afternoon in a patch of grass at Mercato.

"She retired in Naples," Hera's owner, Luz Burkhart, said jokingly.

Mercato hosted the sixth annual Bark for Life, which had about 200 canines and their owners in attendance, in support of people and canines with cancer.

Dogs of all sizes ran through agility courses, sampled treats and even raced with their owners, all in an effort to help raise money for the American Cancer Society.

Cancer survivors, both human and canine, did an opening lap around a set of bright orange cones before getting the chance to meet some of the local vendors and rescue



Angel Joy, a 1-year-old Morkie, sports a sticker for a hat with her owner, Naples resident Alisa Morgan, at Bark For Life.

organizations that lined the area.

Burkhart, with Hera, said she was there to meet new people and dogs. Hera was a little shy when it came to greeting other dogs the traditional way, but she wasn't when strangers came up to pet her.

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See more photos and a video from Bark for Life.

"I just want her to enjoy life," Burkhart said, who adopted Hera when she was 9. They visited the agility course, where Burkhart said her shorter friend made it through the low hurdles, but just barely.

Molly Woodworth, owner of Topcoat 'N Tails, told the committee she wanted to be the title sponsor of the sixth annual event. It was her second year participating, made more poignant because her mother recently died of cancer.

"(It's) my way of giving back in honor of my mother," she said.

The Rainbow Bridge house, a display where owners could donate \$1 to write down the name of a pet, was fashioned after a doghouse. About 50 names were written on bone-shaped papers, in memory of dogs

See BARK, 14A

Texas Roadhouse planned for Restaurant Row Naples

Q: What is the latest on restaurant row by Lely resort? Have any restaurants been solidified and when will any be open for business? A P.F. Chang's or a Houstons would be a welcome

addition to the area.

— Laura M., Naples

Q: I live in Ohio but own a condo in Lely. Just checking on an update for development in that area. I knew there was to be a restaurant row being developed, but have heard nothing more. Was that cancelled? What about a Starbucks



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in that area? Thank you.

— Connie Grossman, Lely Resort

A: Texas Roadhouse's first Collier County location will anchor Restaurant Row Naples, a 7-acre with at least eight restaurants planned along Freedom Square at U.S. 41 East and Collier Boulevard.

Drive-thru locations for the Starbucks coffee shop and Pollo Tropical grilled chicken chains are other

See KNOW, 12A

RESTAURANT ROW NAPLES



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