

## Accomplishments and CHALLENGES

### Brenda Longshore reflects on her first year as superintendent

By **MARC VALERO**  
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — In 1993, Brenda Longshore started her full-time work with the School Board of Highlands County as a kindergarten teacher at Park Elementary School.

After one year as a kindergarten teacher, Longshore moved to third grade, then became a reading coach, assistant principal, principal and district office administrator before being elected superintendent and taking office on Nov. 22, 2016.

Now 15 months into her four-year term, Highlands News-Sun spoke to Longshore about the school district's challenges and efforts to improve student achievement.

**What is being done to improve the high school graduation rate at the district's high schools, particularly Avon Park High?**

Longshore said Avon Park High has lagged behind a bit in improving its graduation rate, but the school's staff is focused on the work it is doing to "capture their low achieving students."

The number of students in the AVID program, which helps students plan toward academic success, has gone up. Enrollment has increased in advanced placement classes.

"They are really being careful and strategic in trying to reach each one of those students," Longshore said. "We have reached out to the community to have additional community support in all of our schools, not just at Avon Park High."

The Highlands County Mentor program pairs community leaders with students, she said. The Highlands County Sheriff's Office has 40 employees who serve as mentors and spend 30 minutes one day a week with one or two students.

Others have offered to help and many at the school district office mentor a student one day a week.

"I am very hopeful that there will be other community members who would like to reach out in those



MARC VALERO/STAFF

**Highlands County Superintendent of Schools Brenda Longshore in her office. The number one of five strategic goals of the School Board of Highlands County is that all students will achieve at their highest level.**

ways," Longshore said. "I do believe relationships are key to student success and if students feel they have someone listening to them and spends some time with them, it really makes a difference."

**While there has been debate by the School Board on some of your initiatives such as the salary study and the administrative reorganization plan, the board has generally supported your efforts.**

REFLECT | 10



From left: Superintendent Brenda Longshore and Avon Park High students Jessica Eugenio and Kimberly Banegas at a lunchtime career event on Thursday in the Avon Park High auditorium.



JAY MEISEL/STAFF

**Martin E. Higgenbotham, owner of Higgenbotham Auctioneers, auctions off bathroom items Saturday.**

## Auction at Harder Hall attracts many

By **JAY MEISEL**  
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — Amy Campbell grew up in Clewiston, but from when she was a young child she remembers Harder Hall as a landmark.

"We passed the hotel on trips north from Clewiston since I was born," she said Saturday.

Campbell was among over 100 who showed up at the long vacant hotel for an auction of furniture and other items, in preparation for its transition to an independent living center for seniors.

Most of the items, including bathroom sinks, room furniture, carpet, couches, doors, bricks, air conditioners, pavers, and even the hotel registration desk, were bought about 10 years ago in a failed hotel rehabilitation attempt.

That there were so many failed rehabilitation attempts during the past 30 years led some attending the auction to question a representative of the buyers, South Florida Senior Living, over whether they would be successful.

But Claudia Heritier, vice president of Turnkey Development Services of Indianapolis, voiced confidence that the project will work. She said construction is scheduled to begin this fall and will last two years. There will also be a new pool, she said.

Heritier allowed people to get a peak inside the building, but they were restricted from going very far because of safety concerns.

Pat Walker attended the auction "just to see what they have." Walker said it was too bad the building had been vacant for so many years. "It's a shame because it was probably a beautiful building," Walker said.

Snowbird Joan Britenbaugh, an Essex, Ontario, resident, said she went to the auction "to just look at the building."

For others who came to do more than see a historic building, Martin E. Higgenbotham, owner of Higgenbotham Auctioneers of Mulberry, said they were buying items as is. Higgenbotham, who added a folksy touch, told them "You're going to get it (item they bid on) as you got your mother-in-law, as is."

During another point in the auction, Higgenbotham suggested the buyers were practically stealing the items they bid on when the bid was low. A gold couch went for \$10 and some air conditioners that sell for \$1,000 were sold for a quarter of that.

"Don't tell the sheriff what you bid for this or the sheriff will put you in jail," he quipped.

STREET | 2



JAY MEISEL/STAFF

**Former Highlands County Sheriff O.L. Raulerson was honored with a street named after him in Okeechobee County where he also served as sheriff.**

## Okeechobee street named after former sheriff

By **JAY MEISEL**  
STAFF WRITER

SEBRING — More than 40 years ago, Keith Albritton recalls that then-Highlands County Sheriff O.L. Raulerson Jr. was with him when they responded to a call south of Venus where a man held a woman hostage.

It was in a different era when the sheriff, rather than in large part being an administrator, was involved in the field. It was also a time when no SWAT team existed and regular deputies responded to crisis situations.

Albritton, who was a patrol deputy at the time and is now a court bailiff, remembered that they found the hostage taker had fallen asleep on a couch while the woman was locked in a bedroom.

They cut a screen in the door and rushed into the house where Raulerson grabbed the man's gun, Albritton said.

"If it was a life-threatening situation, he was right there beside you," Albritton said. "I would have trusted him with my life."



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