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SUNDAY

TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

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TRANSITION INTO FALL WITH VIBRANT COLORS
In Style

Marine lab to stay put

Ray Bye, FSU's vice president for research, said rumors that the university has struck a deal to move the Turkey Point marine lab are false
Local, 1B

SCHOOL DAYS
Bus schedules and more in the special Back to School section in today's paper

Second West Nile case reported

64-year-old Madison County woman hospitalized

By Jeff Burlew
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

Health officials walked door-to-door Saturday in Madison County looking for sick people amid news that a woman there has become the second person in the state to come down with the dangerous West Nile virus.

The 64-year-old woman, whose name has not been released, is in the hospital with fever and other symptoms consistent with encephalitis, according to Dr. Steven Wiersma, acting state epidemiologist.

"It's not all that surprising," Wiersma said of the latest West Nile diagnosis, which was announced Saturday. "Certainly we knew (the) virus was in that area."

Wiersma and state and county health care workers visited some 40 homes to see whether anyone had untreated West Nile symptoms, he said. They found no one with symptoms.

The workers also wanted to make sure people knew how to protect themselves from the West Nile virus.

"There was some fear," Wiersma said. "But we were able to calm some of that with education."

Environment a factor

The Madison County woman lived in a wet, rural area, Wiersma said. She was exposed to the virus in mid-July but didn't see her doctor until later, he said. Health officials declined to say where in Madison County the woman lived or where she was hospitalized because of patient confidentiality.

Seymore Carruthers, 73, also of Madison County, was the first person in Florida to be confirmed with the West Nile virus. He was released last week from Tallahassee Memorial Hospital after coming down with encephalitis in mid-July.

Encephalitis, or swelling of the brain, is brought on by the West Nile virus. Health officials have said that less than 1 percent of people infected will develop symptoms, which can include headache, fever, stiff neck, muscle weakness, fatigue, confusion, memory problems and coma.

Since the disease first came to America, 11 people in the New York City area have died from West Nile illness. It is transmitted by mosquitoes that have fed on infected birds.

MORE INFORMATION

- For more information on mosquito-borne illnesses such as West Nile, visit the Web site www.doh.state.fl.us/disease_ctrl/epi/htopics/arbo/index.htm . People may also call the state Department of Health's hot line at 1-888-880-5782 for recorded information.

Risk reductions

People can reduce their risk of mosquito bites by using insect repellent with the ingredient DEET, by wearing long pants and long-sleeved shirts when outside and by limiting outdoor activities during dusk and dawn, when the bugs are most active.

Health officials said the risk of people developing serious West Nile symptoms may be related to the number of times they are bitten by infected mosquitoes. Chances go up the more someone is bitten, Wiersma said.

Older people and those with pre-existing health conditions are

Please see VIRUS, 2A

Lobbyist falls for big cats

MARK WALLHEISER /Democrat

Upon arriving at the Savage Kingdom Rare Feline Breeding Center, Gloria Johnson immediately rushes to greet Nadia, left, and T.J., two yellow Siberian tigers, while they rub faces inside their cage.

Felines are dangerous but also her life's passion

By Mark Hinson
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

CENTER HILL — "No Visitors."

"Danger: Enter At Own Risk."

"Don't Feed Your Fingers to the Tigers."

If the signs clearly posted around the privately run Savage Kingdom Rare Feline Breeding Center, located in a remote corner of Sumter County in the middle of the state, don't put you on full alert, the roars of the tigers coming from inside the compound certainly will.

"You need to stay in the back part of the park right now because they're moving Bella to a new pen, and she's decided she doesn't want to go," animal trainer Gloria Johnson said during a visit to the 41-acre park in mid-July. "She's got the other tigers worked up, so it's best not to add to it by having strangers around. They can sense tension."

Johnson, a Tallahassee lobbyist who lives near Havana, has spent the past four years commuting to Savage Kingdom south of Ocala to learn how to feed, handle and care for big cats.

Despite the obvious risks involved, it has become her driving passion.

The oak tree-draped park — which is home to more than 50 white and yellow tigers, leopards, cougars, bobcats and pumas — has been operated for nearly 50 years by Robert Baudy. The 79-year-old French animal trainer is recognized as one of the world's leading experts on tigers and has even

Please see TRAINER, 14A

EDITOR'S NOTE

- Democrat reporter Mark Hinson and photographer Mark Wallheiser visited the Savage Kingdom Rare Feline Breeding Center to report a feature story only 10 days before volunteer Vincent Lowe was killed by a tiger there Tuesday. Here's a look at what they encountered.

MARK WALLHEISER /Democrat

Savage Kingdom houses white tigers, which don't exist in the wild, animal trainer Gloria Johnson said. Leopards and cougars are also raised at the facility.

More photos, 15A

Missing persons not lost causes

Families hold out hope for loved ones

By Tony Bridges
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

By now, there should be no one in America who doesn't know that Chandra Levy is missing. Her disappearance — following a dalliance with a Democratic Congressman — has become America's soap opera du jour.

But for some North Florida families, Chandra Levy is more than a headline: She's a hurtful reminder of loved ones who have vanished.

Though they are few, they include a Tallahassee real estate appraiser who never returned from a duck hunting trip; a local disc jockey who disappeared on his way home to Jefferson County; and a mentally disturbed Leon County man who simply wandered away one day.

The vanished have left behind anguished families tormented by uncertainty and frustrated investigators who have few leads. Cops say that while most disappear by choice, not chance, there are occasionally those who've been taken by foul play or accident. It's always difficult to tell the difference.

"Having a missing persons case is like being out in the unknown," said Sgt. Leonard Reeves of the Leon County Sheriff's Office. "It puts a lot of stress on the families. The not knowing is just as traumatic as if we'd found a body."

Since January, Tallahassee police have investigated 54 missing adult cases. Of those, one is still open — and in that case, the person may not actually be missing. In all the other cases, the "missing" have been found or returned on their own, police say.

The Sheriff's Office has investigated 57 cases. Again, they've all been located.

"Ninety-nine-point-nine percent of these cases resolve

Please see MISSING, 2A

KNIGHT RIDDER

Today: high 80s
Tonight: low 70s
Rain: 60%
Weather, 10C

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Malcolm X, youth and redemption

Eugene Kane writes about the case of 14-year-old Nathaniel Brazill and a book that changed Kane's life: "The Autobiography of Malcolm X."

COMMENT, 1E

MORE INSIDE

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