

Tampa Bay Times

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Concerned residents gather to learn more about a proposed Citrus County data center at a town hall event on May 23 in Hernando. (LUIS SANTANA | Times)

IN RURAL FLORIDA, THE ANTI-DATA CENTER MOVEMENT GATHERS STRENGTH

“I’m mad as hell,” said one resident at a packed Citrus County event where locals organized against a data center proposal.

BY EMILY L. MAHONEY
Times Staff Writer

When Citrus County retirees and activists started to organize against a nearby data center proposal, they weren’t sure how many of their neighbors would show up.

They had been trying to gin up support on Facebook and Nextdoor. They had explained the harms of data centers to confused residents. They set up a flea market booth and sent residents into neighborhoods bearing clipboards.

When the date rolled around for their May town hall, the strength of their coalition became clear. About 200 people packed into a historic schoolhouse in the town of Hernando, ready to listen to hours of presentations about how they could fight back against the data center industrial park proposed in Holder,

half an hour inland from Crystal River.

The turnout was a triumph for a rural area whose entire county has less than half the population of Tampa. It’s also representative of the momentum building in opposition of data centers throughout Florida’s sleeper pockets. Floridians of all political stripes are getting organized, many of whom have never led any kind of grassroots campaign before.

“As a matter of fact, I was almost what you’d consider a shut-in,” said Raul Alfonso, 53, one of the organizers behind an anti-data center group in Fort Meade, about 40 minutes south of Lakeland.

He started rallying his neighbors when they learned their small town could become the site of Florida’s first hyperscale data center, slated to stretch 4.4 million square feet.

See **CENTERS, 13A**

She was pregnant and had a brain tumor. How would doctors handle care?

When the Tampa woman experienced nausea and dizziness, she thought they were pregnancy symptoms.

BY LAUREN PEACE
Times Staff Writer

When her phone rang an hour after the MRI scan, Mallory McLean knew the news wouldn’t be good.

A tumor had formed at the base of her skull, deep within the brain, the size of a golf ball.

The mass, the doctor said, was a “vestibular schwannoma,” a growth on the nerve that affects hearing and balance. Benign — that was a relief. McLean, 36, had lost her mother to cancer a year prior.

But it pressed up against critical arteries in her brain. The blurry vision and dizziness that had landed her at Tampa General Hospital would only get worse without surgery.



Mallory McLean learned she had a golf ball-sized brain tumor while pregnant with her second child. (DIRK SHADD | Times)

And there was a bigger complication. She was about 20 weeks pregnant with her second child, and she wanted to carry to term.

McLean and her doctors

embarked on a treacherous waiting game.

What would develop faster, the tumor or her baby?

See **TUMOR, 16A**

After scandal, ties helped ex-deputy land schools job

Anthony Collins beat 37 others to get gig as Hillsborough district’s director of security.

BY DAN SULLIVAN
AND DIVYA KUMAR
Times Staff Writers

How does a disgraced former cop, tainted by an academic cheating scandal, go on to become the chief of security for one of the nation’s largest school districts?

For Anthony Collins, the answer appears to be rooted in deep ties to powerful community leaders and public offi-

cial, who were instrumental in keeping public scrutiny of his candidacy quiet while ensuring he got the job.

Hillsborough Schools Superintendent Van Ayres announced Tuesday that he’d selected Collins for the high-level position overseeing security and emergency management for the county’s more than 300 school facilities.

See **COLLINS, 2A**

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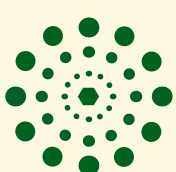
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