



J.T. WILCOX ON SPORTS | B1
NBA is going the way of brash young star Victor Wembanyama, and it's great.

5 a.m. 8 a.m. 11 a.m. 2 p.m. 5 p.m. 8 p.m.
67° 67° 79° 86° 85° 78°

OUT & ABOUT IN THE VILLAGES | A4
Senior writer Taylor Strickland shares observations from a day in The Villages.



WORLD NEWS | A2

2 U.S. AIRCRAFT SHOT DOWN AS WAR IN IRAN ESCALATES

The planes were shot down in separate attacks Friday in a major escalation of the conflict. One fighter jet was shot down in Iran, where one crew member was rescued and another remains missing, while the other plane reportedly crashed in the Persian Gulf.

SPORTS NEWS | B1

GAMECOCKS HANDCUFF HUSKIES, ADVANCE TO WOMEN'S TITLE GAME

South Carolina defeats UConn 62-48 in the women's Final Four, snapping the Huskies' 54-game winning streak.

ONLY IN THE VILLAGES
By Taylor Strickland

World-renowned saxophonist Eirinn Abu and Grammy Award-winning artists Manny Lopez and Pedro Alfonso performed a benefit concert March 27 at Live Oaks Community Church to raise money for A Brighter Light Foundation, a new nonprofit dedicated to suicide awareness and prevention.

The concert raised almost \$30,000. Abu founded the 501(c)(3) organization to raise national awareness about suicide prevention, intervention and life-saving

Please See **CONCERT, A8**

Top of the News

Consumers Hop Into Stores Before Easter



Bill Mitchell | Daily Sun

Mary Fish, of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, holds a Jellycat bunny plush Tuesday while shopping at Gifts & More at The Paper Store in Lake Sumter Landing. The brand is one of the store's biggest sells for Easter.

About \$24.9 billion will be spent this Easter on baskets, gifts and candy, according to the National Retail Federation.

By **SUMMER JARRO**
Daily Sun Senior Writer

Consumers are hopping around The Villages to do some Easter shopping.

Spending for this Easter, which is Sunday, is expected to reach a record total of \$24.9 billion, according to the National Retail Federation and Prosper Insights & Analytics. The amount surpasses the previous

record of \$24 billion set in 2023. About \$195.59 will be spent per person, a new record beating the previous one held in 2023 too.

"While economic uncertainty remains on the minds of many, consumers are still focused on holiday celebrations like Easter," said Mark Mathews, chief economist and executive director of research at the NRF. "Holidays provide an important opportunity for families to reconnect and create lasting memories, even as economic conditions fluctuate."

Candy and sweet treats are the most popular item on consumers' shopping lists this year. About 92% of customers plan to purchase something sweet, totaling about \$3.5 billion in spending, according to the NRF.

Staff at Peterbrooke Chocolatier in Lake Sumter Landing are seeing that demand for holiday treats.

"We have been busy, busy," said Ashlee Burdick, general manager of

Please See **EASTER, A7**

LOCAL NEWS

One Down, More to Go For Sumter Road Project

By **JAMES DINAN**
Daily Sun Senior Writer

The first step of a massive plan aimed at widening and realigning portions of U.S. Highway 301 from County Road 470 to Florida's Turnpike is complete, and work is already starting on the next steps.

The Florida Department of Transportation announced last month the initial part of the first phase in a three-phase plan is complete. The work, which began last fall, involved adding a through lane in each direction beneath the bridge and extending the southbound U.S. 301 left turn lane to southbound Florida's Turnpike to increase capacity and improve traffic flow.

"These moves will help relieve congestion for drivers looking to get on or off the Turnpike," said Cindi Lane, public information officer for FDOT District 5, which includes Sumter County.

Work is underway on

Please See **PROJECT, A6**

IN AUTO EXTRA | C1

VILLAGER'S CAMARO IS COMFORTABLE, RARE AND FAST ENOUGH

The car is one of 717 convertibles built in the Camaro's 50th anniversary package with a LTI V8 engine package.

LOCAL NEWS | D1

TEMPLE SHALOM'S SISTERHOOD HOLDS WOMEN'S SEDER

From Miriam's Song to honoring Rebecca Gratz, the ritual blends Passover rituals with inclusion and female leadership.

HEADLINES & DATELINES

CONSUMER NEWS

AN ICONIC MARSHMALLOW CONFECTION TAKES THE NO. 1 NON-CHOCOLATE CANDY SPOT IN AMERICA'S EASTER BASKETS

With Florida grocery stores and pharmacies stocking shelves for Easter shoppers each spring, millions of a certain marshmallow morsel find their way into baskets, recipes and seasonal traditions across the region.

The company behind Peeps produces approximately 5.5 million Peeps per day and about 2 billion per year. That works out to roughly six marshmallow chicks for every person in the United States.

More than 1.5 billion marshmallow Peeps are consumed each spring, and the iconic sugary treats have held the title of most popular non-chocolate Easter candy for more than 20 years.

— *Tribune News Service*



27

In 1953, it took 27 hours to hand-craft a single Peep. The automated production process now takes six minutes.

70%

Easter accounts for 70% of annual sales for Just Born, the company behind America's favorite non-chocolate Easter candy.

ALSO FEATURED INSIDE TODAY

World News	A2
Lottery	A3
Public Safety	A5
Coast to Coast	A6
Sports	B1
Auto Extra	C1
Local News	D1
Weather	D2-3
Recreation	D10
Lifestyle	E1
On The Squares	E3
Comics & Puzzles	E4-6



FLASH BACK TO THE DISCO ERA, THE GOLDEN AGE OF DANCE

Break out your bell bottoms for this week's edition of Classics, featuring stars like Village People and the Bee Gees.