

SunSentinel LOCAL

TODAY'S MONEY STORIES CAN BE FOUND INSIDE THIS SECTION

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK

State adds 7,650 cases as tests restart

BY MARC FREEMAN

Florida reported some encouraging news on the COVID-19 front Thursday, with the lowest percentage of positive tests in over six weeks.

The state Department of Health reported 7,650 new cases of the disease in its latest coronavirus pandemic report. That pushes the overall total to 510,329 confirmed infections.

But officials reported a testing positivity rate of 8.3% among people who tested positive for the first time in the most recent statewide results. That's the lowest daily mark since June 21, when it was 7.7%.

It happened as Florida counted 104,144 test results for the previous day, after three consecutive days of fewer than 61,000 tests. That was due to the temporary closure of testing sites because of Tropical Storm Isaias.

The test results reported on a single day typically reflect tests taken over several days.

Also Thursday, Florida reported another 120 coronavirus fatalities. That's down from 225 deaths listed on Wednesday's report. At least 7,871 people have died from COVID-19 complications since the start of the pandemic.

The latest daily total is not reflective of

deaths in the past 24 hours, but rather recent weeks. The most deaths on a daily report — 257 last Friday.

South Florida

South Florida, which accounts for 29% of Florida's population, reported 2,886 new cases in the past day, or 37.7% of the daily total for the state.

Broward County: 704 new coronavirus cases were reported Thursday, bringing the total to 60,058. A total of 803 people have died; the death subtracted the report of one resident death from the previous day.

Palm Beach County: 454 new cases, bringing the total to 35,737. A total of 907 people have died, 10 more than reported on Wednesday.

Miami-Dade County: 1,728 new cases, bringing the total to 127,677. A total of 1,800 people have died. That's nine more than reported Wednesday.

Testing and positivity rate

A total of 3.86 million people have been swabbed in Florida since the pandemic be-

See TESTS, 5B



JOE RAEDLE/GETTY

KILLER ROBOT

Melinda Hart, spokesperson for Xenex Disinfection Services company, demonstrates the companies LightStrike Germ-Zapping Robot at the Paramount Miami Worldcenter residential building on Thursday in Miami. The residential building management team announced that it is the first in the U.S. to debut and deploy the world's "most-advanced COVID-Killing Robot" to disinfect the building's public areas and private residences. The company says the Xenex Disinfection Services robot emits broad-spectrum ultraviolet light to destroy viruses and bacteria within minutes.

Homeless man faces murder charge

Advocacy group paid for his stay at Rodeway Inn where guest was killed, police say

BY SUSANNAH BRYAN

DANIA BEACH — A feel-good program aimed at getting the homeless off the streets during a global pandemic has now been marred by murder.

A homeless man was staying at the Rodeway Inn as part of a humanitarian effort to stop the spread of the coronavirus. The man killed another guest Sunday in Room 3104, police say.

The male victim was found dead in the bathroom, stabbed several times.

For three days, accused killer Alphonso Washington was on the lam. Then on Wednesday, Broward sheriff's deputies found him hiding in his Dania Beach hotel room and booked him on a murder charge.

Washington, 59, wound up at the Rodeway Inn after Fort Lauderdale handed out free hotel vouchers in early May to dozens of homeless people to get them off the streets and help curb the spread of the coronavirus.

The program ended in mid-July when the city ran out of money.

Several of the homeless guests were taken to shelters or chose to return to the streets.

But 38 people, including Washington, stayed behind at the hotel after the political group New Florida Majority agreed to pay for their rooms.

According to its website, the racial justice and political action group stepped in to help after Fort Lauderdale moved to evict the hotel's homeless guests "in the midst of the worst of the pandemic."

A hotel manager says New Florida Majority stopped paying for the rooms on Sunday — the same day of the killing.

Organizers for New Florida Majority could not be reached for comment despite calls on Wednesday and Thursday.

Izzy Fintz, the Rodeway's vice president of hospitality, said he was out of town when the murder happened and didn't have too many details.

"There was a fight between people," he said. "I don't know the whole story. They might have fought over money."

Shana Cartwright, one of the homeless women who's been staying at the hotel, said the victim was homeless. So did another man, who requested anonymity.

The Sheriff's Office is withholding the victim's name. The agency cited new constitutional protections for crime victims that allow police to hold back information that could be used to locate or harass victims and their families.

See HOMELESS, 4B

Miami-Dade, Broward OK'd for schools fully online

BY SCOTT TRAVIS

Despite the governor's urging that schools open in person, the state has approved plans by Broward and Miami-Dade school districts to start the new school year using distance learning only to contend with COVID-19.

Palm Beach County School District also expects to get approval from the Department of Education to start the school year online, district spokeswoman Claudia Shea said.

Palm Beach County moved the first day of school from Aug. 10 to Aug. 31, while Miami-Dade moved it from Aug. 21 to Aug. 3. Broward plans to stick with its plan to open Aug. 19.

All three districts say they are working with county health officials and hope to resume on-campus learning as soon as possible once conditions improve.

All public schools closed their campuses and switched to online learning in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But state and federal leaders have pressured districts to reopen. Most districts in the state plan to give parents the option of in-person or distance learning.

A state order last month from Education Commissioner Richard Corcoran said parents should be allowed to attend an actual school campus if they desire, and many parents have pushed local districts to give them that option. However, the order ultimately left the decision to local officials based on health considerations.

South Florida school officials say it would be difficult to have everyone return to school safely as cases continue to spread.

Charter schools aren't required to follow the plans outlined by districts, although most of them said they, too, will start out online only until local health conditions improve. An exception had been Charter Schools USA, which operates 21 South Florida schools, many under the name Renaissance.

The charter school provider said last

See ONLINE, 3B

Organizers: Fright Nights in West Palm Beach canceled

BY PHILLIP VALYS

Fearing that visitors can't keep their distance in dark haunted houses, organizers of Fright Nights in West Palm Beach have canceled their 2020 bash at the South Florida Fairgrounds.

Fright Nights, which typically hosts its annual carnival-haunted house gathering over multiple weeks in September and October, is not programming its bash for the first time after 18 consecutive seasons of terrorizing Halloween thrill-seekers.

"Given the nature of this event, where large groups of people walk closely together through dark corridors in the haunted houses, we could not ensure social distancing," Vicki Chouris, South Florida Fairgrounds' president and CEO, said on Tuesday. "The safety of our guests, volunteers and staff will always be first and foremost."

Fright Nights will return in 2021, Chouris adds.

The cancellation is the latest in a rash of similarly scuttled October festivals across Florida. In July, organizers canceled the 41st edition of Fantasy Fest (Oct. 16-25), the annual masking and costuming bash in Key West. In Orlando, Universal Studios likewise canceled its annual Halloween Horror Nights event, citing "business restrictions" linked to the pandemic.

Organizers of Wicked Manors in Wilton Manors and Moonfest in West



SOUTH FLORIDA FAIRGROUNDS/COURTESY

West Palm Beach organizers have canceled the 2020 edition of Fright Nights at the South Florida Fairgrounds because of rising COVID-19 cases.

Palm Beach — all major local festivals — have yet to announce plans for October.

At Fright Nights, among the biggest Halloween spectacles in South Florida, thousands of guests tour four themed haunted houses. There are also costumed frighteners posted around the park in designated "scare zones," along with carnival rides, midway games and deep-fried fair food.

Meanwhile, Chouris says organizers are trying to salvage Spookyville, Fright Nights' family-friendly offshoot at the Fairgrounds' Yesteryear Village. That event, which takes place over several days in October, features trick-or-treat stations, games and other live entertainment. Organizers plan to announce plans for Spookyville later in August.

The Pig and the Pie pizzeria pops up inside burger joint Brgr Stop

BY PHILLIP VALYS

Michael Buchinski's new over-the-top pizzeria, The Pig and the Pie, came to him as he sat in quarantine, too terrified for months to leave the house or step foot inside his struggling restaurants.

Sales plummeted at Brgr Stop, his hamburger joints in Fort Lauderdale and Coconut Creek, but an eleventh-hour check in May from the federal government's Personal Paycheck Program kept his restaurants alive. When he realized federal unemployment checks would run out in July, Buchinski sliced up a radical idea: Why not make

up lost revenue by putting a pizzeria inside his burger restaurant?

The Pig and the Pie debuted Thursday, sharing its space with Brgr Stop Fort Lauderdale at the Gateway Shopping Center at 1930 E. Sunrise Blvd. Along with New York-style slices, the pizzeria will boast a menu of 10 eye-popping pies and six hoagies, served alongside Brgr Stop's usual menu of carnivalesque hamburgers, boozy milkshakes and root-beer-sriracha chicken wings.

"I got decimated when the pandemic hit," recalls Buchinski, who created the pizzeria with Brgr Stop partners Mark Haig and Devin Cahow. "We basically rushed this



SHAUN CRUZ/COURTESY

The Everybody's Trufflin is one item on the menu at The Pig and the Pie opens.

thing into existence. These are crazy times and we had to do something, so I thought, 'Let's do funky pizzas, some Italian soul food.'

See PIZZERIA, 5B