



The Stuart News

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DETAILS, C10

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Friday, September 29, 2006

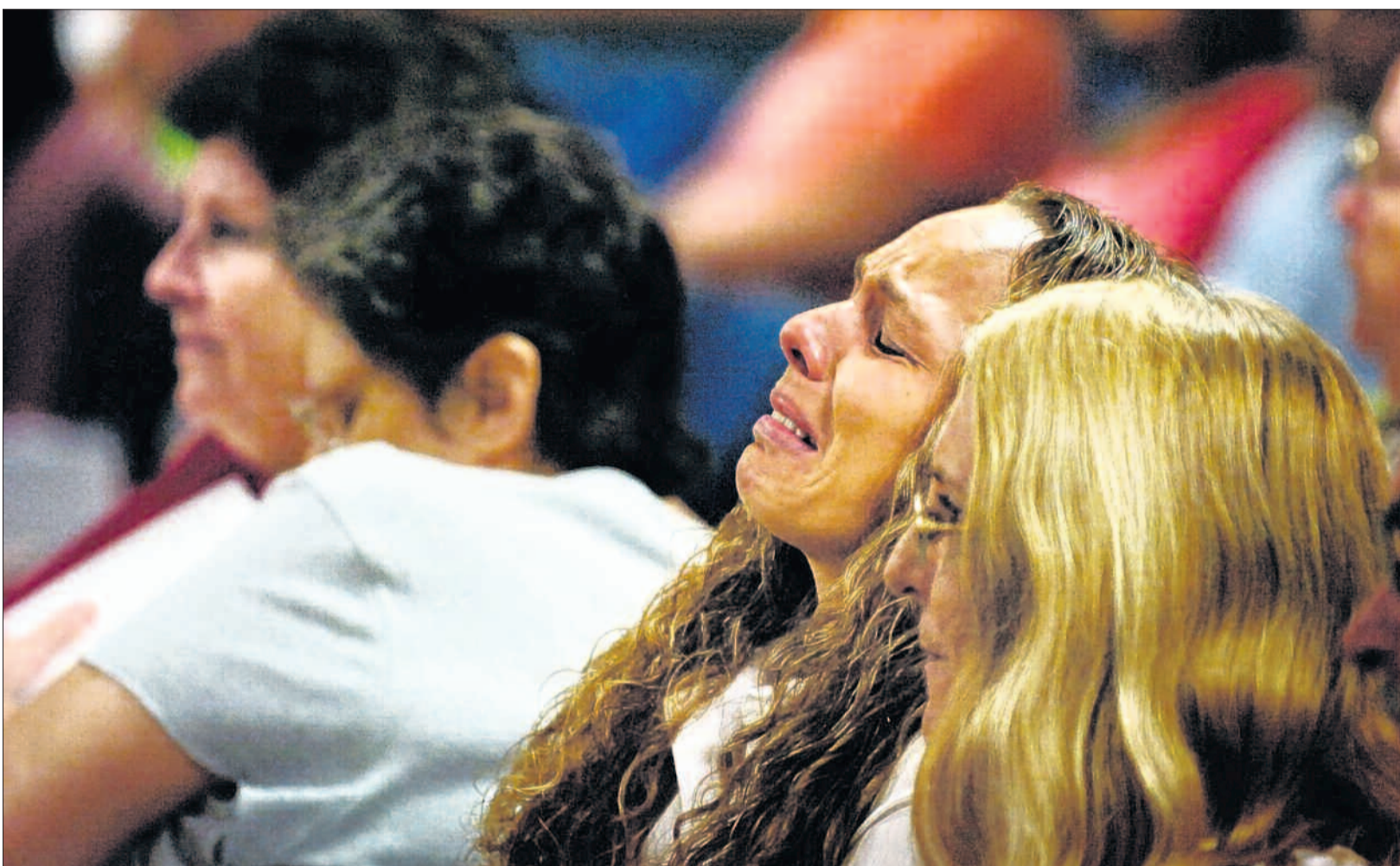
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CONVICTED ON THREE COUNTS EACH OF FIRST-DEGREE MURDER, SEXUAL BATTERY

McWatters found guilty of murders



Judge will decide whether 'Salerno Strangler' will be put to death in battery, killings of three women



Photos by JASON NUTTLE • jason.nuttle@scripps.com

Laura Crosby, second from right, cries Thursday as Eugene Wayman McWatters Jr. is declared guilty of murdering her mother, Jacqueline Bradley. McWatters was convicted of sexually assaulting and killing Carrie Caughey, Christal Wiggins, and Bradley in Port Salerno in 2004. Below: Prosecutor Tom Bakkedahl, foreground, puts his hands to his face as the guilty verdict is read and McWatters, center, looks on.

Prosecutors painted McWatters as a calculating killer who lured his victims to their deaths

BY MEGAN V. WINSLOW
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STUART —

Jackie's daughter cried and Carrie's mother uttered a quiet "yes" when the first guilty verdict was read.

As the convictions mounted — guilty of three counts of first-degree murder and three counts of sexual battery in the "Salerno Strangler" murders — tears welled up in Eugene Wayman McWatters' eyes.

It took a Martin County jury about two hours Thursday to find him guilty in the 2004 deaths of Jacqueline Bradley, 43, Christal Wiggins, 29, and Carrie Caughey, 18.

Dressed in navy slacks and a pale yellow checkered shirt with shackles around his ankles, McWatters, 28, sat silently while the verdict was read. His family, including his pregnant sister, Jessica Aleman, whose baby's due date was Thursday, and his

See **MCWATTERS**, page A18



TCPALM.COM: View a copy of the verdict form and more photos online.

TIMELINE

- March 31, 2004:** Jacqueline Clark Bradley's body is found. Martin County sheriff's detectives first interview Eugene Wayman McWatters Jr.
- April 2, 2004:** Detectives interview McWatters, and he later gives them a pair of black pants and a pair of white tennis shoes.
- April 15, 2004:** McWatters takes a lie detector test at the Martin County Sheriff's Office. Afterward, the sergeant administering the test says McWatters was deceptive when he answered "no" to the questions "Did you strangle Jackie Clark?" and "Did you help dispose of the body of Jacqueline Clark?"
- May 29 to 31, 2004:** Detectives believe Christal Dawn Wiggins and Carrie Ann Sandra Caughey were killed during this period.
- June 3, 2004:** Caughey's body is found on the east bank of a Port Salerno lake.
- June 7, 2004:** Wiggins' body is found. McWatters again is interviewed by Martin County sheriff's detectives.
- June 23, 2004:** McWatters is arrested on an unrelated sexual battery charge in a parking lot in Wedgewood Commons, Stuart. Detectives say he later confessed to the three murders that day.
- Sept. 11, 2006:** Jury selection for McWatters' triple murder trial begins.

State minimum wage to go up 27 cents an hour

- 25 states have a minimum wage of \$5.15.
- Florida's minimum wage currently is \$6.40.
- Washington's minimum wage is \$7.63.
- Kansas' minimum wage is \$2.65.
- Six states have no set minimum wage.
- The federal minimum wage is \$5.15.

AFL-CIO

400,000

Estimated Floridians who earn the minimum wage

The Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE — Florida's minimum wage will increase to \$6.67 an hour next year, a 27-cent increase to match inflation as required by an initiative passed two years ago.

The state's minimum wage went up to \$6.15 an hour in 2005 because of a constitutional amendment approved by voters in 2004, and then went up to \$6.40 this year.

The amendment tied the state's minimum wage to inflation, requiring an adjustment each year.

The \$6.67 rate will start Jan. 1, the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation announced Thursday.

The increase puts the state's minimum wage at \$1.52 more than the current \$5.15 federal minimum wage. At least 13 other states, however, have minimum wage rates higher than the federal standard.

Foley spokesman: E-mails sent to teen 'innocent' A3

NASA: Shuttle could launch night of Dec. 7 A8

State denies FEMA funds for Ernesto preparations

BY KEONA GARDNER
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Not one cent of the \$688,478 collectively spent by local governments on the Treasure Coast in preparation for Tropical Storm Ernesto will be reimbursed.

And, for that matter, neither will any other cities and counties in Florida get money.

That's because the state didn't sustain enough damage to qualify for reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, according to a memo from state officials.

ERNESTO COSTS

- Martin County:** \$200,000
- Port St. Lucie:** \$115,000
- St. Lucie County:** \$104,478
- Stuart:** \$72,000
- Jupiter Island:** \$5,000

"After reviewing local reports and data, this event did not exceed the (financial) capabilities of state and local governments to manage without Federal assistance," wrote Craig Fugate, the director of the state Division of Emergency Management in a Sept. 13 memo to Gov. Jeb Bush.

To qualify for federal money, cities and counties collectively in the state would have to show damages totaling \$20.5 million. Instead, the total damage was about \$19.6 million, the memo stated.

The late August storm, which briefly was a hurricane, was predicted to have winds of 70 mph and bring about 8 inches of rain to the state. But the storm fizzled out and later was downgraded to a tropical depression after failing to have sustained winds of 39 mph. The storm

See **FEMA**, page A19

TCPALM.COM: Read the memo from state officials denying reimbursement for Tropical Storm Ernesto.

Habitat to break ground on homes in Indiantown

Future residents can't wait to benefit from affordable housing

BY GEORGE ANDREASSI
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INDIANTOWN — Stuart resident Darla Butler said her family's only real hope for buying a home in Martin County was to qualify for one of the 58 houses Habitat for Humanity is building in the Booker Park section of Indiantown.

"After the hurricanes, the prices here really skyrocketed. The houses are double and triple what they used to be," Butler said. "If it weren't for Habitat, I'd have to leave this area because I couldn't afford to live here."

Butler and her family are among the future

See **HABITAT**, page A19

What: Groundbreaking for 58 affordable homes.
Who: Habitat for Humanity of Martin County.
When: 10 a.m. Saturday.
Where: Intersection of Palm Beach Street and 171st Drive, Booker Park, Indiantown.



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INSIDE

A month away from Halloween, Orlando's theme parks get their creep on.

Autopsy confirms girl's coma, death after dentist visit caused by anesthesia

The Associated Press

CHICAGO — Lack of oxygen to the brain caused by anesthesia caused the death of a 5-year-old girl who never awoke from sedation during a visit to the dentist, the Cook County medical examiner's office said Thursday.

Wednesday at Children's Memorial Hospital. She had been on life support for four days after her visit to Little Angel Dental, a storefront clinic, to have some teeth filled and others capped.

The dentist, Dr. Hicham K. Riba, moved his family out of his home after receiving death threats, said a spokesman for a

Chicago law firm the doctor has retained.

"There have been threatening calls made to his office, one of which was a bomb threat, and a caller threatened to come in and shoot up the office," Joshua Robbins said.

Robbins described Riba as "devastated for the family" of the girl.

MCWATTERS

FROM PAGE A1

mother, Jacqueline Wayman, sat behind him.

"The jury should drop dead," Wayman said as she entered a courthouse elevator after the verdict. "My son did never kill them people."

Wiggins' aunt, Barbara Lorenz, said she was "relieved" as she left the courtroom with Wiggins' mother, Karen, on her arm.

"He got what he deserved," said Lorenz, who is from Ohio.

Shaking, Karen Wiggins showed reporters a picture of Wiggins and her children at Disney World. The photo was taken two months before her death.

As hugging, teary-eyed spectators filtered out of the courtroom Thursday, Udell said he believed McWatters' own tears Thursday sprang from a "consciousness of guilt."

"It really doesn't matter — they've already found him guilty," he said.

After hearing closing arguments Wednesday, the jurors deliberated for about five hours and then went home for the evening at about 6 p.m. The jury, consisting of 10 men and two women, began

"Obviously, we're very pleased, but we need to move into the next phase, so we're focusing our energy on that now. It's a good feeling. You feel some level of comfort."

Tom Bakkedahl, prosecutor

deliberating again at 8:40 a.m. Thursday and reached a verdict at 11 a.m.

The prosecutors and defense rested their cases Monday afternoon — the defense without calling a single witness.

Throughout six days of testimony, prosecutors painted McWatters as a calculating killer who lured Bradley, Wiggins and Caughey to their deaths.

All three women were found unclothed from the waist down with their shirts shoved up into their armpit area, bras pushed over their breasts. The disarray of the victims' clothes and the fact that they were strangled led a forensic pathologist to conclude they were sexually assaulted and then murdered.

McWatters eventually admitted to killing the three women during a June 23, 2004, confession. He said he was having sex with each of them when he "lost it."

Because of the bodies' extensive state of decomposition, no concrete forensic evidence was collected from any of the crime scenes.

The jury will next hear attorney arguments in the penalty phase of the trial starting Tuesday and then recommend a sentence. Martin County Circuit Judge Larry Schack must ultimately decide whether McWatters will receive the death penalty.

The defense plans to have Aleman, Dr. Michael C. Rioridan and a former teacher of McWatters' testify on his behalf during the penalty phase, defense attorney Bob Udell said Thursday.

The defense also will play audio from a recorded jailhouse telephone conversation between McWatters and Wayman.

"Hopefully, somebody will realize that there is a person underneath there, that he isn't a sociopath, that he does feel his victims' pain," Udell said after the verdict was read. "Right now, we're going to try to save his life. That's all we have to do."

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Aces High #613



Amazing 8's #630



Bankroll #632



Big Bingo #635



Big Bucks #581



Blackjack #634



Doggie Dollars #624



Fast 5's #642



Jumbo Jackpot #610



Lucky Wheel #622



Money Tree #619



Ruby Red 7s #629



Snake Eyes #623

All these Scratch-Off games officially end September 29, 2006.

So play these great games now while there are still prizes to win. But remember, any winning tickets must be redeemed by Tuesday, November 28, 2006. Prizes less than \$600 may be redeemed at any Florida Lottery retailer. Prizes \$600 and over must be claimed at a Florida Lottery office. (For the office nearest you call 850-487-7777.) Thanks for playing these and the many other games of the Florida Lottery.



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