



# The Stuart News

High: 87 Low: 68  
Rain chance: 15%  
DETAILS, C10

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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.

"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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### INDEX

Advice.....E9  
Business.....D1  
The Buzz.....A2

Classified.....F1  
The Guide.....E2  
The Lineup.....C2  
Local.....B1  
Lottery.....A2  
Movies.....E8  
Obituaries.....B4  
Opinion.....A6

The Record.....B2  
Sports.....C1  
Television.....E11  
Weather.....C10

### INSIDE

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