

Pets »From 1A

“With all the returned dogs, we’ve only been able to take 10 or so from the track this year, instead of 75 or 100 as we would in a normal year,” Farrell said. “This is the worst we’ve ever seen.”

“We’re getting lots more pets from foreclosures,” said Michael Simonik, executive director of the Humane Society Naples. “Particularly, when someone is renting, and their landlord didn’t pay the rent, it’s an immediate eviction, often through no fault of the pet owner.”

“We have a wait list because we’re a no-kill shelter, with a couple hundred dogs and a couple hundred cats,” he said. “We have to tell people it could be months before they can surrender their pets to us.”

Mary Ellen Metro, president of Golden Rescue in Naples, specializes in placing older and special needs golden retrievers.

“A lot of people are relinquishing their

senior goldens. They can’t afford to take care of them as they get older,” she said. “We get people e-mailing us saying, ‘We’re sorry, we wish we could help.’ And then more dogs come in. It’s a vicious circle.”

Lee County has been particularly hard hit. “Our situation has changed dramatically. There are more pet owners than ever in need,” said Donna Ward, director of Domestic Animal Services in Lee County. “Our adoption numbers are down 11 percent.”

The county, she said, has implemented new programs to help with the increased need. “We have 173 pet owners, with 803 animals, in our Community Pet Pantry program, that we provide with pet food through Animal Services. That’s 803 animals not surrendered to shelters.”

“We have a low cost/no cost spay and neuter program. If they are receiving any kind of public assistance, they can get their pets sterilized free, just by paying the \$8 for the license.”

In Collier County, county spokeswoman Camden Smith said intake numbers for unwanted pets are down from last year at the county’s kennel. But like almost all pet-related agencies, they are actively fundraising. The annual Howl-A-Day event to benefit the Collier County Domestic Animal Services trust fund is scheduled for Saturday at Veterans Community Park.

“We are always looking for donations — foster homes, volunteers, money or food — but a lot of people are not able to help or are giving less,” said Bechtol of Brooke’s Legacy. “Everyone has their hand out.”

“We’re limited in what we can do, but we push it,” she said. “Personally, my husband and I are fostering six pets, instead of our usual three. I wish we could save them all. All of the animals we rescue are scheduled for euthanasia.”

E-mail Lance Shearer at lancs22@gmail.com

Cameras »From 1A

“We also may include program information as an insert in an upcoming monthly water bill cycle,” Torre wrote.

Jane and George Palmer, who have been coming to Florida in January for about 20 years, decided to make the trip a little early this year. They recently learned about the red-light cameras from a friend.

“We wouldn’t have known otherwise,” Jane Palmer, 71, said.

The Palmers, who live most of the year in Braintree, Mass., said informing part-time residents “can’t hurt,” and George Palmer, 74, said it may make people more cautious on the road. They suggested the county take out ads in local newspapers and run commercials on television.

Don Clarke, 63, of London, Ontario, agreed that informing seasonal residents about the cameras could help make them aware of their own bad driving habits. Clarke, who has been coming to Collier County with his wife for 20 years, said he learned of the cameras from friends at his tennis club.

“I don’t have any problem with them. I think they’re a good idea,” Clarke said. “People are habitually running red lights down here, certainly more than back home.”

The county is also taking steps to notify tourists.

The Tourism Department’s most recent newsletter encouraged hotels and other tourism industry businesses to download and distribute a red-light running flyer, Torre said. The county is also working with the Collier Lodging Association and will be distributing flyers to local rental car agencies.

“We want to make sure that people have a fond memory of their visit to the Collier County area, versus a ticket,” said JoNell Modys, spokeswoman for the Naples, Marco Island, Everglades Convention & Visitors Bureau. “We don’t want that to be the last impression of our destination.”

Bob Davis, of Vancouver, Wash., who vacationed in Naples recently, didn’t know about the cameras. He said it would be a good idea to inform visitors, especially for an economy dependent on tourists.

“Why would you upset people?” he asked.

However, Ron Polzer, 56, who visited recently from Ohio, didn’t think a red-light camera campaign was necessary.

“You shouldn’t be running red lights,” he said. “If you do, you should get caught.”

For its part, the Collier County Sheriff’s Office is hosting an educational campaign on red-light safety, including sending out 90,000 flyers in Valpak mailers and distributing bookmarks at local libraries.

There are currently 12 red-light cameras in place at eight intersections in Collier County. The county is slated to have 24 red-light running cameras in place by February 2011. Through Nov. 12, the county has issued 11,251 citations since ticketing began at the end of May.

Although it wasn’t the intent of county commissioners, the majority of citations that have been issued have been for people who roll through right turns on red. In October the County Commission reduced the cost of the citations from \$125 to \$62.50 for a first offense, \$75 for the second and \$100 for the third.

Commissioner Donna Fiala, who chairs the Tourism Development Council, said she doesn’t want to chase off any winter residents or visitors because of the cameras.

“Our winter residents, it’s amazing, not only do they give our businesses a boost, which is wonderful, but they’re a great volunteer core,” Fiala said. “They’re a great asset to us, and I want to make sure they’ll keep coming back again and again and again.”

Connect with Ryan Mills at www.naplesnews.com/staff/ryan_mills



Rebecca Dolce, second from right, and her friend Amber Perkins, second from left, gather with others in the courtyard of Golden Gate High School before school earlier this month. Rebecca and her friend meet here every morning to catchup and talk about weekend plans. **Manuel Martinez/Staff**

IN THE NAVY

Dolce »From 1A

wasn’t for the colonel (Paul Garrah, JROTC instructor), I wouldn’t be here. If I did not have all the people here in my life, this would not have happened. There were times that were really tough for me in the last year. If it wasn’t for them, I wouldn’t be here now.”

Rebecca knew she would be accepted on a Friday last month. When the day came and dragged on and she didn’t hear anything, she thought acceptance wasn’t coming.

When she went to her fifth-period class, JROTC, she noticed Garrah wasn’t in class. Sgt. Maj. William Barchers was addressing the class and Rebecca said she heard people coming into the room, but she didn’t turn around.

“I was listening intently,” she said. “(Barchers) intimidates me, so I didn’t turn around.”

But when the guests in the room revealed themselves — Garrah, Rebecca’s mother and Principal Jose Hernandez — she realized what was happening. In front of her entire class, Rebecca was informed that she received a \$350,000 scholarship to attend the school.

She hopes to become a Marine Corps officer. The Marine Corps are a component of the Department of the Navy.

“I think the U.S. Naval Academy and the Marine Corps are getting way more than they are investing,” said math teacher Steve Thomson. “Let’s put it this way, I wouldn’t want to be on the other side of a war from her. ... She is fearless. She is not afraid to try anything to get where she needs to be.”

“If I had to pick a person most likely to succeed, it would be her.”

As a child, Rebecca remembers bringing home her school assignments and having her mother erase her answers, so she could do them again. In middle school, her mother, who is a Creole translator at Golden Gate High, would bring home high school work for Rebecca to do.

“(My parents) pushed me as a child to take advantage of my education,” she said.

Her parents — her father is an audio sound technician for the district — came to the United States from Haiti. Rebecca said her parents taught her the most important thing one can do with a life is to give back.

“I feel like that is my calling,” she said.

But entering high school, Rebecca remembers a girl who had a lot of stress and self-doubt.

“Four years ago, I would let things build up and I would sit in this office and cry,” she said, sitting in Garrah’s office.

Garrah remembers those times and said

the student he sees in his class today is not the student who walked into his program four years ago.

“She is focused. She has been able to push past her challenges. She has a desire to make the world better. She’s just wonderful,” he said.

Rebecca, who admits part of the attraction to JROTC at first was the uniform, said JROTC has made her a better person.

“It’s taught me how to lead and follow,” she said. “I used to be a quiet girl and reserved. I would hold things inside until I couldn’t anymore and then I would lash out. (JROTC) feeds me, it gives me a way to channel my energy and stress.”

Originally, Rebecca said she thought about enlisting but said Garrah told her she needed to get an education. He encouraged her to apply to the Naval Academy.

Mike Pedersen, a Blue and Gold officer — a volunteer who assists in the candidate admissions process with the Naval Academy — helped Rebecca file her application. He had been told about Rebecca through a member of the local Naval Academy alumni association.

“The first time I met her she told me she wanted to go to the Naval Academy and that she wanted to be a Marine Corps officer. I just could not believe this poised junior standing in front of me,” he said.

Pedersen said it was his job to evaluate Rebecca to see if she was “mentally, morally and physically” capable of handling the demands of the Naval Academy.

“Rebecca is that unique mix of good student, varsity athlete and is involved in JROTC. That doesn’t happen very often,” he said. “She’s definitely someone we want in the academy.”

Each year, about 10,000 students express interest in the Naval Academy. Of those, 4,000 students are academically and physically qualified to apply, Pedersen said. Of the 4,000 who qualify, about 1,200 students are accepted each year. The first step to getting Rebecca accepted, Pedersen said, was getting her into the Naval Academy Summer Seminar, a summer program that allows students to see if life at the academy is right for them.

“I loved it,” Rebecca said of the summer she spent at the academy. “I wasn’t too excited to be up at 5 a.m. to do physical training, but I loved it.”

While there, Rebecca said she received a coin from a three-star general, which she said she treasures. Pedersen said Rebecca will be among about 20 percent of Naval Academy graduates to go into the Marine Corps, if she chooses. She will have to serve in the military for a minimum

of five years following the completion of her education, he said.

“Her \$350,000 tuition is the value of what the government expects to spend per cadet for the four years she is here,” he said.

Pedersen said Rebecca will be among the 20 percent of minority females in officer training in the military.

Golden Gate High School math department Chairwoman Kim Ragusa said Rebecca is everything a teacher wants — she is respectful, reliable and dependable. Ragusa said she knows those qualities will serve Rebecca well in the military.

“She’s just an overall wonderful student,” she said. “If you could have 30 Rebeccas in the classroom, that would be a beautiful thing. It is nice to see her being rewarded in the end for her hard work and effort. Sometimes, the kids work hard and it doesn’t work out for them in the end.”

Ragusa said she plans to have Rebecca back in her classroom to share her experience with future classes of Golden Gate Titans. She said Rebecca is a role model to her fellow students.

“I want her to impress upon them the importance of the hard work that it takes to get you where you want to go,” she said.

The secret to her success, Rebecca said, is that she doesn’t let anyone stand in her way. When she was told by a local scholarship organization, which she refuses to name because she doesn’t want to “sink to their level,” that she should consider colleges other than the Naval Academy, she refused to drop her plans.

“Your worst critic is yourself. My worst critic is myself,” she said. “If I say I can do something, I can. If you don’t believe in me, I want to prove you wrong. The problem with teenagers today is that they don’t believe they are good enough or smart enough. Everyone is smart. You just have to find where your intelligence is.”

Rebecca said she chooses to focus on school work, sports and being active in her community. She said her choices don’t make her better than anyone else. They just make her who she is.

She admits the notoriety her achievement has brought to her is something she doesn’t necessarily want.

“I just worry that everyone else who got a scholarship that (is not as big as mine) will feel bad, and I don’t want anyone to feel like that. Because they have accomplished the same thing I have,” she said. “Don’t get me wrong, I am excited and proud I got that scholarship. I took a long time applying and I worked for it. I am still in shock I was accepted. But I don’t want to bring down anyone else’s confidence.”

Camera locations

Here are the intersections where red-light cameras are in place in Collier County:

- Eastbound Pine Ridge Road at Airport-Pulling Road
- Westbound Pine Ridge Road at Airport-Pulling Road
- Northbound Airport-Pulling Road at Davis Boulevard
- Eastbound Pine Ridge Road at Livingston Road
- Westbound Pine Ridge Road at Livingston Road
- Northbound Airport-Pulling Road at Immokalee Road
- Eastbound Immokalee Road at Airport-Pulling Road
- Northbound Collier Boulevard at Golden Gate Parkway
- Eastbound Golden Gate Parkway at Collier Boulevard
- Eastbound Immokalee Road at Livingston Road
- Westbound Pine Ridge Road at U.S. 41 North
- Westbound Vanderbilt Beach Road at U.S. 41 North