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Dear John: Think twice before picking up that Sanford hooker

BY AMY PAVUK
Staff Writer

Dear John: If you were hoping to have a quick "date" with the woman standing on the street corner in Sanford, you may want to think again.

Starting this week, the Sanford

Police Department will send "Dear John" letters to registered owners of vehicles spotted lingering in areas known for prostitution.

The letters, which include a photograph of the vehicle and a close-up of the license plate, remind the recipient of the dangers associated with prostitution, in-

cluding sexually transmitted diseases and other criminal activity.

Police officials said they hope the program will deter and reduce the demand for prostitution, "by stripping away the anonymity of the exchange."

Sanford police said Monday that

letters will only be generated when an officer is confident the driver is circling the block looking for a prostitute, and not, for example, driving around lost.

Automated license-plate readers placed on patrol vehicles will be

Please turn to **HOOVER, A8**

'WE'VE REALLY SEEN GROWTH IN THESE KIDS'



PARRAMORE KIDZ ZONE MOLDS AMAZING ADULTS

BY MARK SCHLUBER
Staff Writer

Johnny Germaine, son of a single mother living in Parramore, hated school. As a high-school freshman, his GPA was "zero-point-something."

So how did a teen who seemed destined to be another dropout graduate from high school with a 3.5 GPA?

His turnaround happened because of Parramore Kidz Zone, a multitacled program showing such impressive results in Orlando's toughest neighborhood that it's drawing attention across the country.

"When I came across PKZ, it was like a 360 in my life: Everything changed," Germaine said.

Please turn to **KIDZ ZONE, A8**

Loena Johnson, 13, gets homework help recently from Johnny Germaine, 22, at Parramore Kidz Zone in Orlando.

GARY W. GREEN/
STAFF PHOTO-GRAPHER

2 arrested in bullied girl's death

Facebook post spurs stalking charges

BY ARELIS HERNÁNDEZ
AND JERRIANN SULLIVAN
Staff Writers



WINTER HAVEN — For more than a year, Rebecca Ann Sedwick's bullies tormented the girl by calling her ugly and urging her to drink bleach and die.

The harassment didn't stop — even after Rebecca's parents moved the 12-year-old Lakeland girl to a different middle school. The bullies reached her on her smartphone.

Rebecca brought it all to an end by jumping to her death from a silo at an abandoned concrete factory Sept. 10. But even after her suicide, the cruelty didn't cease, family members and investigators say.

Please turn to **BULLY, A8**

Inside

Ten tips on how to respond to cyberbullies. A8

2 parents + 1 lawsuit = Big face-off in Seminole on making son switch class

BY RENE STUTZMAN
Staff Writer

SANFORD — Jonathan Hefley was an eighth-grade math whiz, so when he started ninth grade, he wound up in an honors Algebra 2 class designed to prepare kids for math contests.

But in that Seminole High School class, Jonathan has flourished and is getting a D. After weeks of complaints from his parents about his teacher and the course work, the principal decided to move him to a slightly easier class.

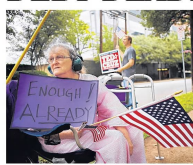
Now his parents have sued. Their son doesn't want to be pulled away from his "mathlete" buddies, the lawsuit says.

Today, Jonathan's mom and dad — Heathrow lawyers Aimee and William Hefley — are expected to ask a judge to prohibit the Seminole County School Board and Seminole High Principal Connie Collins from making the change.

Moving the boy, according to the suit, "will emotionally scar" him, remove him "from his trust-

Please turn to **ALGEBRA, A8**

DISCORD RULES DAY AS DEBT DEADLINE NEARS



G.J. MCCARTHY/MCLATCHY-TRIBUNE
Sheila Helton protests Tuesday near Sen. Ted Cruz's Dallas office.

After House conservatives refused to back a compromise from Speaker John Boehner, a vote was scuttled Tuesday on his proposal to lift the debt ceiling before Thursday. Meanwhile, Senate leaders restarted their own negotiations. A3

■ **Veterans weigh in:** In Washington, a coalition of 33 groups serving veterans and members of the military spoke at the World War II Memorial to demand an end to the federal shutdown. A3

Get the latest on talks to end the government shutdown and raise the federal-debt limit at OrlandoSentinel.com

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KIDZ ZONE

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"They saw a lot of potential that I didn't see in myself." Parramore's troubles are so deep-rooted, so grounded in generations of poverty, that earlier efforts have had little overall impact on the neighborhood west of downtown.

The median household income is \$13,613. About half of the kids living there never finished high school. There are more than 2,000 children in Parramore, and 84 percent live in single-parent homes. Nearly three-quarters of the kids live below the poverty line.

PKZ was launched by the city in 2006, modeled after the successful Harlem Children's Zone in New York. It aims to shift the paths of so many wayward kids that it will create a cultural shift. As more children move through PKZ's programs, its workers and volunteers hope that eventually there will be more examples of achievement than failure in Parramore.

"We're trying to move the needle," said Lisa Early, director of the city's Families, Parks and Recreation department.

Now in its seventh year, PKZ is having an impact. Nearly 4,200 kids have participated in at least one program since its start.

Juvenile arrests in Parramore have declined from 96 in 2006 to 12 in 2012, an 88 percent drop. High-school FCAT scores still lag behind the countywide average but have increased each year. And teen-pregnancy rates have fallen 32 percent.

PKZ takes a "cradle to career" approach, working with nonprofits on initiatives that target children from birth to adulthood. It's moved more young kids into pre-kindergarten programs. For school-age children, there's tutoring and help with homework at three community centers and New Image Youth Center. The University of Central Florida provides an intensive reading program



GARY W. GREEN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Johnny Germaine assists Jalen Neil, 12, with his homework last week at Parramore Kidz Zone in Orlando.

taught by master's-level education students.

"I've seen them start with D's and F's, and these kids now have A's," said Phil Zoshak, programs coordinator for Page 15, a nonprofit that runs the Homework Room at the Downtown Recreation Complex.

"We've seen their grades improve; we've seen their attendance improve. We're really seeing growth in these kids."

There are arts programs, too, including a UCF program that teaches digital storytelling. There are also places for children, particularly older ones, to just hang out in a safe environment.

The Teen Shack at the Downtown Recreation Complex was designed by the kids, who also contributed much of the labor to transform it from a storage room to a hangout with computers and video games.

It's a far different situation than before PKZ was established; despite its location in the most troubled neighborhood in town, the city-owned Downtown Recreation Complex was adults-only until 2006.

"I used to figure out excuses to get into the center. Unless you were using the restroom or getting a drink of water, they'd make you leave," said Germaine, now 22 and a PKZ employee.

Few kids are naturally inclined to walk through the door looking for tutoring. Most are attracted by PKZ's sports programs — football, basketball and baseball — before they're roped into academic programs.

"It's like dangling a car-

rot to get the kids involved," Children and Education Manager Brenda March said.

That's what drew Mario Fountain as a ninth-grader: "I had tunnel vision: sports. Nothing else mattered to me."

His grades were terrible at the time, but tutoring, counseling and support changed that. In May, he became one of the first PKZ participants to earn a four-year college degree, with a bachelor's in kinesiology from East Central University in Oklahoma.

PKZ provides college tours and help with college and financial-aid applications, among other things. A record 27 participants entered college this year.

Kidz Zone is a city-run program, but it works closely with Orange County Public Schools. PKZ has an annual budget of \$1.4 million, with about \$100,000 from the city and \$400,000 from corporate donations and grants. Much of the budget is distributed to nonprofit partner organizations that offer services in the neighborhood.

Working with the schools, PKZ gathers data on each student's performance, allowing it to tailor assistance to specific individuals.

Mayor Buddy Dyer, who raises money for PKZ, said that also makes it possible to gauge its effectiveness.

"We have measurable results, not just anecdotal results," he said.

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Medical device-makers using gridlock for gain

By JOSEPH TANFANI
Tribune Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Leaders from the medical-device industry listened when President Barack Obama vowed in 2009 that there would be shared sacrifice and "no sacred cows" to help pay for his health care law.

But unlike the pharmaceutical industry, insurers and others at that health care summit, the device-makers never shook hands on a deal. Instead, after a 2.3 percent tax on their revenues was included in the 2010 Affordable Care Act, they launched a drive to repeal it. Now, with Washington paralyzed in a government shutdown and a fight over the debt limit, the device-makers have seized on the impasse as a chance for victory.

Whether the tax will be delayed or repealed is still uncertain amid the rolling negotiations. But its prospects for longevity as part of Obamacare appear to be diminishing.

The industry has waged a relentless campaign, powered by millions spent on lobbying, campaign contributions and appeals by manufacturers targeted to their members of Congress.

The industry has also financed studies that claimed the tax would cost more than 43,000 jobs, though critics say those figures are inflated.

Democrats in the House and Senate, saying the levy is hurting businesses in their states, have already joined with Republicans to call for delaying it, or quashing it outright.

"The medical-device industry is very aggressive and efficient in their lobbying, and they smell blood at this point," said Paul Van de Water, a senior fellow at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a left-leaning think tank in Washington.

"It's clearly in jeopardy."



TERRENCE ANTONIO JAMES/TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS PHOTO

Under Obamacare, makers of medical devices, such as artificial hips, pay a 2.3 percent tax on their revenues.

"I think it's Pandora's box."

—Jeff Cohen, of the Federation of American Hospitals

The tax, which took effect in January, covers an array of medical equipment, such as hip implants, cardiac stents and defibrillators. (Most items bought directly by consumers, such as glasses and hearing aids, are exempt.) The tax collected from device firms, both domestic and foreign, is expected to raise some \$30 billion over 10 years to help pay for the expansion of health insurance coverage.

But the industry never accepted the tax. Since 2008, it has spent about \$30 million a year on lobbying and ramped up contributions to federal campaigns, from \$6.4 million in 2010 to \$10.4 million last year, according to data analyzed by the Center for Responsive Politics.

The industry argues that the tax discourages research on new products and drives jobs overseas.

"Our argument was, in effect, it was a tax on innovation," said David

Gollagher, president and CEO of the California Healthcare Institute, an industry research and advocacy group based in La Jolla, Calif.

Whether the tax is harming the industry is a matter of debate. Some studies have found the industry will benefit as more people get access to better health care; industry representatives, though, say they don't expect to sell as many new hips or heart valves to young people newly insured under Obamacare.

But if the tax is repealed, other industries may seek similar treatment.

"I think it's Pandora's box," said Jeff Cohen, executive vice president of the Federation of American Hospitals. "If they open this up and it succeeds, I think it says to everybody out there they are going to be revisiting all of these policies."

If so, Cohen's group will be at the head of the line. He says the hospital industry is facing \$300 billion in cuts because of provisions related to the law.

"If there's going to be any revision of the law, hospitals should be number one," he said.

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HOOKER

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used to capture images of the suspect vehicles, police spokeswoman Shannon Cordingly said.

"Cracking down on prostitution is an important step toward ensuring the safety and well-being of our community," police Chief Cecil Smith said in his agency's news release.

"You can do your part by refraining from bringing your vehicle into this area unnecessarily," the "Dear John" letter states, in part.

Some lawyers are criticizing the initiative, which they say could have negative repercussions if police erroneously send the letter to someone who was not looking for a prostitute.

Orlando criminal-defense attorney Richard Hornsby said Sanford police are "likely to expose themselves to civil-liberty complaints should they send these notices to innocent persons and inadvertently cause marital disruption."

"If they have sufficient evidence to believe a person is not lost but, in fact, circling the block looking for a prostitute," they have a sufficient basis to make an investigative detention for the crime of solicitation of prostitution," Hornsby said.

Sanford's city attorney reviewed and signed off on the initiative, Cordingly said, adding that the success other cities have experienced with similar programs prompted Sanford police to implement the letters.

Police agencies in Baltimore and Oakland, Calif., are among those that send out "Dear John" letters.

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BULLY

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"Yes I [know] I bullied Rebecca and she killed her self but IDGAF [I don't give a f---] (expletive)!"

That message posted Saturday on Facebook by Rebecca's 14-year-old persecutor — ended with a heart symbol. And resulted in an arrest.

On Monday, Polk County deputies charged the author of the post and another 12-year-old girl with aggravated stalking. The online remark goaded detectives into arresting the two girls earlier than they had anticipated.

"That post was the tipping point," Polk Sheriff Gary Judd said during a Tuesday news conference. "She forced this arrest."

The 14-year-old instigated the bullying after she started dating Rebecca's ex-boyfriend, Judd said. The 12-year-old girl was once Rebecca's friend — but the other girl turned her against Rebecca.

The girls "repeatedly and maliciously" harassed Rebecca while all three attended Crystal Lake Middle School in Lakeland, investigators said.

"Several students corroborated stories of both girls bullying Sedwick on different occasions, through name-calling, intimidation,

Responding to cyberbullies: 10 tips

- **Talk about it:** Tell someone if you're the target of cyberbullying — your parents, a friend, teacher.
- **Ignore them:** Cyberbullies who do not get a response from their target may just move on.
- **Never retaliate:** Retaliation does nothing to solve the problem and could get you in trouble.
- **Tell them to stop:** Let them know that what they are doing is hurtful, lame and uncool.
- **Laugh:** Try to laugh it off — maybe they are just trying to be funny and not hurtful.
- **Save the evidence:** Print out Facebook messages, emails; save text messages.
- **Block access:** Most websites and programs allow you to block certain users from messaging or even "seeing" you online.
- **Report it:** If you don't know who the cyberbully is, contact the content provider (Facebook, Google, YouTube) and make a report.
- **Never pass it along:** If you receive hurtful or embarrassing messages or photos of someone else, delete them and don't share them with friends.
- **Call the police:** If you think you are in danger, call authorities.

SOURCE: Cyberbullying Research Center

threats to beat her up, and at least one actual physical fight," a Sheriff's Office report said.

Judd said neither family cooperated with investigators, so the girls were placed under arrest Monday and charged with the third-degree felony. The 12-year-old, who is on house arrest, was released to her parents because she demonstrated remorse to the judge, but she can't go back to school.

The 14-year-old is in the custody of the Department

of Juvenile Justice until her next hearing.

After their arrests, Judd said, the girls admitted the abuse. The Orlando Sentinel is not naming them because of their ages.

Under Florida law, a range of options is available to punish juveniles convicted of felony aggravated stalking.

Brian Haas, State Attorney's Office spokesman for the judicial circuit that includes Polk County, would not talk about the case specifically. But he said the

Rebecca was jumped in school and later bombarded with such hateful messages via a cellphone application as "You're ugly," "Why are you still alive?" and "Go kill yourself"

charge carries a maximum penalty of juvenile probation or placement in a residential-commitment program for five years or until the 19th birthday — whichever comes first.

Judges have a variety of options for sentencing, including counseling and rehabilitation.

According to investigators, the 14-year-old had several arguments with Rebecca via Facebook, as well as verbal confrontations with her at school.

Witnesses said that the girl sent messages to Rebecca, calling her ugly, telling her to drink bleach and die, and saying Rebecca should kill herself.

Rebecca was jumped in school and later bombarded with such hateful messages via a cellphone application as "You're ugly," "Why are you still alive?" and "Go kill yourself."

In February, the 12-year-old was suspended from school after allegedly attacking Rebecca physically, Judd said.

Rebecca's mother decided to home-school her, and eventually Rebecca transferred to Lawton Chiles Middle Academy, but detectives found evidence that the bullying continued on her cellphone.

The morning Rebecca took her life, she posted a message to a North Carolina boy whom she reportedly met once at the airport: "I'm jumping and I can't take it anymore," the text read.

Judd said bullies must be held accountable, especially in today's instant-message, social-media environment.

"As I child I can remember my mother telling me, 'Sticks and stones can break your bones but words can never hurt you,'" Judd said. "Today, words stick, because they're printed. And words are as hurtful — and sometimes more hurtful — as sticks and stones."

"Ask Rebecca's family,"

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"It seems that you want Mr. Vong to put 90 percent of the class on an academic standstill while Jonathan catches up."

Connie Collins, Seminole High principal

"Mr. Vong is teaching with the goal to win trophies," the suit alleges.

But Collins, the principal, wrote, "It seems that you want Mr. Vong to put 90 percent of the class on an academic standstill while Jonathan catches up." Changing him to a different class, she wrote, would "help [Jonathan] find some relief from the

stress that must be his as a result of this constant pressure."

Until Jonathan was placed in Vong's class, the boy "loved math and enjoyed participating in Mu Alpha Theta," according to the suit.

Last year, Jonathan was a "mathlete" in the gifted program at Sanford Middle School and got an A in

honors algebra, according to the suit.

But in order to take part in Mu Alpha Theta's next round of competition in January, he must raise his math grade to a B, according to the group's rules.

Brandi Williams-Hillard, who is not involved in this case but teaches at Vero Beach High School and prepares students there for math contests — said she's never heard of a parent suing a school because a student was transferred out of an advanced-class class.

"Usually the parent always wins the argument,"

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ALGEBRA

Continued from Page A1

ed companions" and "irreparably damage ... [his] psyche and reputation."

The Heffleys would not discuss the dispute with the Orlando Sentinel. Neither would school officials, so it's not clear whether the student has already been forced to switch classes.

But in an email to Jonathan's parents that's attached to the lawsuit, school officials say the move is best for Jonathan. "I'll take pressure off him, give him a fresh start with a new teacher, and he'll wind up with the same academic

credit because he'll still be taking an Algebra 2 honors course."

Before deciding on the change, the school lined up daily tutoring sessions. It also offered to let Jonathan retake two key tests and throw out all of his pop quiz scores if he moves to the other class, according to email between school officials and his parents.

At the heart of the dispute are a series of contests sponsored by a national honor society for math students, Mu Alpha Theta.

Four years ago, Jonathan's current teacher, Trung Vong, coached a Seminole High student who won a national Mu Alpha Theta competition.