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# BRADENTON HERALD

ANNA MARIA ISLAND • BRADENTON • CORTEZ • ELLENTON • LAKEWOOD RANCH • PALMETTO • PARRISH • SARASOTA

## Top county staffers to leave amid push to fire Coryea

BY RYAN CALLIHAN  
AND JESSICA DE LEON  
[rcallihan@bradenton.com](mailto:rcallihan@bradenton.com)  
[jdeleon@bradenton.com](mailto:jdeleon@bradenton.com)

**MANATEE**

At least two senior members of Manatee County's government staff are planning to leave shortly after the Manatee County Commission renewed its push to fire County Administrator

Cheri Coryea.

Coryea informed commissioners of the departures in a Monday evening email. She announced that Deputy County Administrator John Osborne has turned in his two weeks' notice and Director of Information Technology Services Paul Alexander plans to retire in March.

"Both of these gentlemen brought vast knowledge of their

professional training and skill to our organization," Coryea wrote. "I hope you will get the opportunity to see these two before they move on and thank them in person for their service."

Osborne's and Alexander's career changes follow an emotional and confrontational meeting last week that saw Commissioner George Kruse accuse

Commissioner Carol Whitmore of trying to blackmail him over an extramarital affair. He then said he believed Coryea to be part of the alleged scheme, and reversed his earlier decision to give Coryea a chance to meet certain goals and expectations.

"We hear campaign rhetoric about swamps and underhanded dealings, but you don't fully understand it until you've seen

it," Kruse said at the time.

While Whitmore and Coryea denied any knowledge of a plan to blackmail Kruse, Commissioner Misty Servia expressed concern over the impact that firing Coryea might have on the county's 1,900-employee workforce.

"This would be a disruption of business at the highest level," Servia predicted. "We're not just talking about Cheri. This is a disruption of business on a very deep level."

Osborne has more than 25 years of public and private experience in engineering and planning. He has served in many roles for the county, including as impact fee adminis-

SEE CORYEA, 9A



JAMES A. JONES JR. [jajones1@bradenton.com](mailto:jajones1@bradenton.com)

Anna Maria resident Cathy Tobias plans to unfurl a memorial ribbon chain on the beach Feb. 16, commemorating the more than 27,000 Floridians who have died of COVID-19. The chain is estimated to be more than two football fields long.

## Memorial to honor 27K COVID-19 victims

BY JAMES A. JONES JR.  
[jajones1@bradenton.com](mailto:jajones1@bradenton.com)

**ANNA MARIA**

Cathy Tobias wanted to do something to honor the lives of Floridians who died from COVID-19.

Last November, she began tying one

ribbon on a twine chain for each Floridian lost during the pandemic.

The chain stretches about 2½ football fields long, and is full of tightly bunched, color ribbons commemorating the almost 27,000 COVID deaths in Florida, including, as of Tuesday, 503 in Manatee County.

"My head couldn't wrap around all the

numbers. We are trying to keep up because the numbers keep growing," Tobias said from her home on the northern end of Anna Maria Island.

Tuesday, the chain criss-crossed over her driveway, blowing in the wind. On Feb. 16, she plans to take the ribbon memorial to a stretch of beach in front of the Sandbar Restaurant, 100 Spring Ave., where volunteers will open it up along its full length.

"We want to make this a time when we remember those who have died from this horrible disease," said Tobias, a career health care worker.

During the memorial observance, Tobias plans to distribute several hundred "we

SEE MEMORIAL, 8A

## More contagious UK coronavirus variant makes gains in Florida

BY BEN CONARCK  
[bconarck@miamiherald.com](mailto:bconarck@miamiherald.com)

The more infectious spin-off of the COVID virus known as the U.K. variant is gaining a foothold in Florida, where it

accounts for about 5% of cases, according to an estimate by the commercial lab that has analyzed the bulk of the cases of the mutated virus in the state.

That's up from about 1% of cases in Florida a month ago, according to estimates by Helix,

a California-based genomics and diagnostics company that runs about 25,000 COVID tests a week pulled from more than 90% of the state's ZIP codes. The company is responsible for flagging 84 of Florida's 147 known cases caused by the U.K.

variant, or B.1.1.7. The strain is thought to be spreading throughout the state, though cases are concentrated in South Florida.

The rapidly growing percentage of Florida COVID cases caused by the variant is "dismaying, but not unexpected," said Gigi Gronvall, an immunologist and senior scholar at the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security.

SEE VARIANT, 8A

## FBI suffers deadliest day in almost 35 years

BY DAVID J. NEAL, CHARLES RABIN,  
JAY WEAVER AND DAVID OVALLE  
[dneal@miamiherald.com](mailto:dneal@miamiherald.com)  
[crabin@miamiherald.com](mailto:crabin@miamiherald.com)  
[jweaver@miamiherald.com](mailto:jweaver@miamiherald.com)  
[dovalle@miamiherald.com](mailto:dovalle@miamiherald.com)

In the bloodiest day for the FBI in decades, two veteran agents were shot to death and three others wounded Tuesday morning when a gunman opened fire from inside his home as they attempted to serve a search warrant at an apartment in Sunrise as part of a child-pornography probe.

The gunman, not yet identified by the FBI, is believed to have monitored the approach of the agents with a doorbell camera and ambushed them through the unopened door with a hail of bullets from an assault-style rifle, law enforcement sources told the Miami Herald.

"There are several huge holes in the door going outward," one law-enforcement official said.

The killings of agents Daniel Alfin and Laura Schwartzenberger left the FBI reeling, as investigators began piecing together what went wrong in the type of raid that usually unfolds with little attention but is also fraught with danger for law enforcement.

Gunfire exploded just before 6 a.m. on Tuesday at the Water Terrace apartment complex in Sunrise in a neighborhood about five miles northeast of the Sawgrass Mills mall.

The FBI had not provided details of the case against the gunman, other than to say he was suspected of possessing illegal graphic images of children. The case was being investigated by the FBI's Internet Crimes against Children task force, and supervised by prosecutors based in Fort Lauderdale.

SEE FBI, 9A

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