



# THE NEWS-PRESS

A GANNETT COMPANY

## PLANE CRASH KILLS MAN WALKING ON VENICE BEACH » A12

### EDUCATION



Brittney Tanner hands a practice baby to Carsi Bellamy during a fetal presentation lesson at the Fort Myers Institute of Technology.

# Trade school secret to many folks' success

Institute of Technology among best in state

By Emily Atteberry  
eatteberry@news-press.com

After 15 years in the car business, Shannon Rousey was burnt out. His blood pressure was soaring, he was losing sleep and he knew he was in a dead-end industry.

So, he decided to make a dramatic change: He was going to become an appliance repair technician.

He enrolled himself in a year-and-a-half appliance repair program at the Fort Myers Institute of Technology, the district's vocational secondary education center, and dove into a world of gadgets and tools he knew nothing about.

"People thought I was crazy because I was good at my job and making a lot of money," Rousey said. "But the second I quit the car business, my blood pressure medication got cut in half."

Rousey is not alone in his success. A recent study found that 77 percent of institute graduates are employed, the highest rate of all 47 technical centers in Florida.

See SCHOOL » A10



Practical nursing student Jennifer Kubesh gets rid of air bubbles in a saline-filled syringe at the Fort Myers Institute of Technology. PHOTOS BY SARAH COWARD/THE NEWS-PRESS

### FORT MYERS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

1,400

Annual enrollment

29

Average student age

54

Percentage who receive financial aid

\$2 million

Financial aid distributed annually

30 acres

Campus size

1966

Year opened

### NORTH FORT MYERS

# Troubled tourist spot is saved

Shell Factory raises enough clams to pay its key creditor

By Laura Ruane  
lruane@news-press.com

The 76-year-old Shell Factory & Nature Park has a new lease on life, thanks to a \$2.5 million loan from a group of supporters that closed Friday.

"It's a huge relief. Now I can sleep at night," said Tom Cronin, owner and general partner.

Less than four months ago Cronin and his 85 employees faced possible foreclosure on the sprawling property sandwiched between U.S. 41 and Business 41 in North Fort Myers.

The iconic Southwest Florida tourist attraction hit a brick wall this spring, even as its parking lots were full of customers: A \$1.2 million mortgage note had come due.

Lender Branch Banking & Trust wasn't willing to extend the repayment period, and on April 11 filed notice of its intent to sue the Shell Factory.

That's the same day The News-Press published an exclusive story in which Cronin disclosed his predicament.

Although the Shell Factory was recovering nicely from the recession and was current on its mortgage payments, Cronin said he couldn't meet the bal-

See FACTORY » A11



## THE WIZARD AND THE WIZ

Quality Life Center's theater program has upcoming show.

INSIDE » CAUSES

### FOLLOW-UP

# She's given up on adoption

Teen's assaults — and a claim that the system misled and forgot her — lead to decision

By Janine Zeitlin  
jzeitlin@news-press.com

Michelle Start's voice wavered in juvenile court as she asked a judge to protect her from her 16-year-old daughter.

"I'm tired of being beat up," Start told Lee Circuit Judge Nick Thompson.

The 41-year-old was there be-

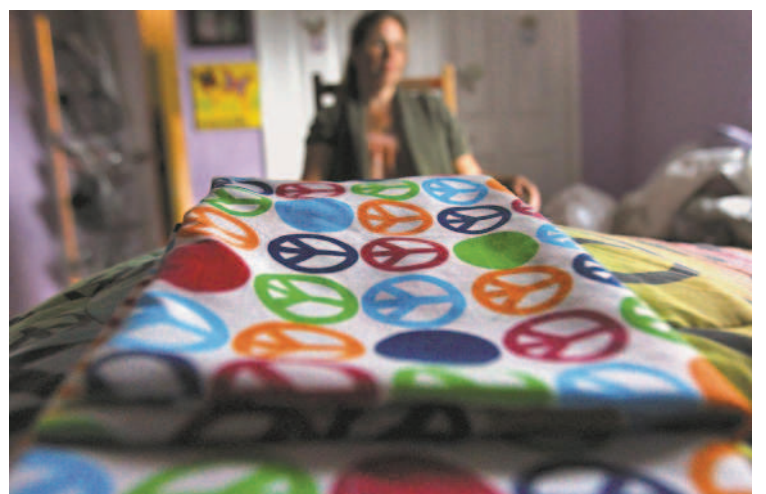
cause she was again listed as a victim in a battery case filed against the girl, who stood silently on the opposite side of the Fort Myers courtroom packed with teenagers and grim-faced parents. She had pleaded not guilty through a public defender. Start still had marks on her arm from where she said the girl bit her and photos showing welts on her breasts.

Four years ago, she adopted the girl because she wanted to be a mother.

This July morning, Start asked the judge if he could prevent the girl from attending the Lehigh Acres high school where she works as an English teacher. He could not provide that assurance.

"I'm trying," Start sighed. "I know you are," Thompson said, gently from the bench. "She's probably trying in some ways, too, but it's not visible or she's thinking about trying."

See DISSOLVE » A8



Buckingham resident Michelle Start had hoped to salvage the relationship with her adopted daughter, but she has since decided to surrender her rights because of repeat violence. THE NEWS-PRESS FILE

HIGH 91  
LOW 77



Live Doppler radar and weather updates at [news-press.com](http://news-press.com)

Business » A14, 5B  
Need to Know » A2  
Classifieds » C9

Lottery » A4  
Nation » A4  
Obituaries » A12

Views » A16  
Causes » D1  
Weather » C10



\$1.00 Retail

THE NEWS-PRESS  
Published since 1884  
Copyright 2014

**FOUNDERS**  
BILL & MARY ALICE SMITH

est. 1954

# BILL SMITH

Appliances & Electronics

## Appliance & Electronics Sale!

12-Month No-Interest Financing

Celebrating 60 Years of serving SW Florida

Voted Best Place to Buy!  
104 First Place Reader's Choice Awards

Outstanding Customer Service!

Professional Set up & Installation!

We Service What We Sell!

Low Price Guarantee!

**billsmith.com**

US 41 FORT MYERS  
5216 Cleveland Ave.  
M-S 10am-9pm, Sun 11am-6pm  
239.275.5555

BONITA SPRINGS  
3251 Woods Edge Pkwy.  
M-S 10am-7pm, Sun 12am-5pm  
239.495.1970

NAPLES NEAPOLITAN  
782 Neapolitan Way  
M-S 10am-6pm, Sun 12am-5pm  
239.261.6158

PORT CHARLOTTE  
1700 Tamiami Trail  
M-S 10am-6pm, Sun 12am-5pm  
941.624.5555

MARCO ISLAND  
816 Bald Eagle Dr.  
M-S 10am-6pm, Sun closed  
239.394.1963

CAPE CORAL  
2134 Del Prado Blvd.  
M-S 10am-6pm, Sun closed  
239.458.8550

RIVER DISTRICT FT. MYERS  
1651 Fowler St.  
M-F 10am-5pm, Sat-Sun closed  
239.334.1121

## School

Continued from A1

Institute graduates also enjoy the highest first-year median salary of all the centers, according to a recent state-commissioned study, "Higher Education Pays: Measuring the Economic Security of Florida's Postsecondary Graduates."

They make \$38,064 on average, the study reported, compared to the \$28,884 salary earned by students with associate degrees from state colleges.

Bill McCormick, the school's director, said the recent findings were even better than he had hoped. He attributed the school's success to its ties with the Southwest Florida business community and the school's large alumni network.

Take, for example, the institute's partnership with TGM Inc., a turbine generator company based in Cape Coral that works across the U.S. and Latin America.

David Branton, the company's CEO, was at FMIT for a seminar a few years ago when he met McCormick. Branton mentioned he was having a hard time finding young, trained mechanics.

"Bill didn't even know what a turbine generator was but said he wanted to help," Branton said.

Branton and McCormick created a course at the institute to teach students turbine generator maintenance and repair. Though the curriculum was approved for use across the state, FMIT is the only vocational center that offers it.

"We've graduated three classes so far (at FMIT) and hired the best of every group," Branton said. "We're paying \$20 an hour right now off school to do these jobs, and they get travel all around the Southern Hemisphere."

Rousey's courses at the institute began with the basics. Soon, he could fix



Nursing student Jennifer Kubesh, left, wincing as she injects fellow student Milad Mikhail under the watchful eye of instructor Denise Patak. SARAH COWARD/THE NEWS-PRESS

### A handful of companies in the area actively recruit institute students.

just about anything — and, it turned out he was good at it. He won first place awards at regional and state appliance repair competitions.

After graduating in May, Rousey made another bold choice: He would open his own repair business in Lehigh Acres.

The first few months at Appliance Medic were tough, he said. His wife's job kept the family afloat. But after he started getting to know people, the phone began to ring — a lot. His wife left her job to join Appliance Medic, and now business is "fantastic," he said.

A handful of companies in the area actively recruit institute students including Sunstreaks Salon, Fox Electronics, Micro Control Systems Inc. and Everglades Farm Equipment.

Ron Andersen, the vice president of Micro Control Systems, said his company has hired about 20 institute graduates within the past 10 years.

"We needed people who were electronic tech-

nicians. We put an ad out in the paper, and many people said they did electronics, but they really didn't... So then we looked at students at FMIT," Andersen said. "We find that the level of their training is very, very good — extremely good, actually."

McCormick said the school prides itself on its low cost. Almost all of the institute's courses cost less than \$5,000 and the majority of students receive Pell Grants that cover their education in full.

#### Workforce shift

Given the rising cost of a college education and a tough job market, more people are questioning the value of a college degree, McCormick said.

"More and more people are beginning to realize the value of a skills-based education rather than a four-year education, not just here in Southwest Florida" he said. "The pendulum has sort of swung, and it doesn't make economic sense to spend sixty-five to eighty-five thousand dollars on

college anymore."

Other programs that have "exploded in popularity" at the institute in the last few years include nursing, appliance repair, and HVAC. Graduates of these programs can usually expect to make \$15-20 an hour immediately after graduation, he said.

McCormick said the institute's high employment rate is a testament to the country's shortage of young, skilled workers.

"Any mechanical trade is kind of a dying breed," Branton said. "Kids get out of high school and they don't know what they want to do, and these kinds of options aren't presented to them."

McCormick said people usually associate vocational school with shop class and goggles, but he said the institute is much more than that, calling the school a "hidden secret."

Rousey, the owner of Appliance Medic, urged high school students to consider all their options.

"Everybody's telling these kids in high school, 'you gotta go to college, you gotta go to college.' But not everyone can push paper and pens, and people have to be in the field. We have to have electricians and plumbers," he said.

**HEARING AID CENTERS OF SW FLORIDA, INC.**

**\$799** HEARING AID SINGULAR

SALES & SERVICE  
 ■ STARKEY ■ OTICON  
 ■ UNITRON ■ PHONAK  
 ■ RESOUND ■ SIEMENS

**239-481-HEAR**

1469 Colonial Blvd. #110 | Fort Myers  
 HearingAidCentersofSWFL.com

**Hurricane Safe Shutters, Inc.**

HIGHEST QUALITY MATERIALS  
 BEST PRICES

End Retention Rolldown ..\$21<sup>99</sup> SQ. FT.  
 High Velocity Accordion...\$13<sup>99</sup> SQ. FT.  
 Hurricane Screen.....\$9<sup>99</sup> SQ. FT.  
 Lexan Panel.....\$9<sup>99</sup> SQ. FT.  
 Steel Panel.....\$4<sup>00</sup> SQ. FT.  
 Bahamas.....\$4<sup>00</sup> SQ. FT.

**INSTALLED IN AS LITTLE AS 2 WEEKS**

**13 YEARS IN BUSINESS**

DEAL DIRECTLY WITH OWNER  
 • Save On Costly Sales Commissions

We Manufacture Our Own Shutters!  
 Best Price Guaranteed

NO SUB-CONTRACTORS

For A Free Estimate No Pressure  
**275-8844**

2012 & 2018 Earl Road • Ft. Myers, 33901  
 www.hurricanesafeshutters.com

**SUMMER SPECIAL**

**FIRST FINANCIAL GROUP**

MONEY MARKET ACCOUNT **1.25% APY\***

12-MONTH CD **2.65% APY\***  
 Insured & Guaranteed

**Fort Myers (239) 936-1939**

**We Specialize In IRAs, 401(k)s, Fixed Annuities & Life Insurance**  
 Naples (239) 263-1680 • Sarasota (941) 552-5771

\*Annual Percentage Yield. Yield and deposit amount subject to availability. Penalty for early withdrawal. Promotional incentives included to obtain yield. Certain restrictions apply. Rates may vary depending on deposit amount. All bank deposits are insured and guaranteed up to \$250,000.

## ZOUNDS®

# The Hearing Aid Company with Superior Technology ...and Heart.

**Sam Thomasson** describes the day his daughter Kate was born as the happiest of his life. When Kate was a toddler she lost most of her hearing due to a sudden illness. Through the years, it became clear that the costly traditional aids that were fitted for Kate were ineffective, causing discomfort as well as affecting her speech development. Sam decided that something had to be done to improve Kate's life. An accomplished electrical engineer who worked on products from computer chips to pace makers, Sam began poring over design specifications of the leading hearing aids. He installed an electronics lab in their home and worked nights and weekends — with Kate often at his side — to develop hearing aids that would solve issues like feedback, background noise and poor sound quality. When Kate was sixteen, she put on the first Zounds® prototype, which immediately transformed her life. She could finally hear high pitch sounds, enjoy music and speak more clearly. Ultimately, Sam and his team of dedicated engineers amassed 57 ground-breaking patents with state of the art technology that can only be found in Zounds® hearing aids.



Zounds® Founder and CEO, Sam Thomasson and his daughter, Kate



**Look hard. It's there.**

Discreet  
 Intelligent  
 Advanced

- Rechargeable! Never Buy or Change Batteries Again\*
- Have the confidence to enjoy group conversations again with up to 90% reduced background noise
- Cherish special moments with loved ones — you'll hear even soft voices clearly
- Same Day Fitting

**Offer Expires 8/1 CALL TODAY to SAVE!**

**CLAREZA® 8**  
 8 Programmable Channels  
 Superior Digital • Rechargeable

**FREE** Charging Station  
**FREE** Remote Control<sup>(1)</sup>  
 when you purchase a pair of  
 Clareza® 8 Hearing Aids

Just **\$999** per aid  
 MSRP: \$2699 each



**Call Today for a FREE Hearing Exam! Hear Better Today!**

**Over 125 Locations, Coast to Coast!**

#### Fort Myers

9131 College Parkway Suite 110  
 (Next to Walmart Neighborhood Market)  
**(239) 935-8087**

#### Bonita Springs

3409 Pelican Landing Pkwy#1  
 (Old US 41 & Pelican Landing)  
**(239) 494-6850**

#### Cape Coral

1751 NE Pine Island Rd Suite F1  
**(239) 205-7700**

**ZOUNDS®**  
 Hearing Aids Worth Wearing™

www.ZoundsHearing.com



\*Zounds® will replace the rechargeable batteries free for the life of the Clareza® aid. <sup>(1)</sup>Limit one free remote and charger per customer with purchase of a pair of Clareza® hearing aids. Present this ad at Zounds Hearing Center. Expires 8/1/14. Not valid with other offers. Void where prohibited. © 2014 Zounds Hearing, Inc.