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★★★★ Sunday, January 11, 2026 | 1B

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Alexa Ringo, 16, was killed in a crash deputies say was caused by a drunken driver on Dec. 26. (Courtesy of Christina Ringo)

Teen killed in Apollo Beach crash was 'smart' and 'spunky'

Family and friends of 16-year-old Alexa Ringo remember her as a loving daughter and model student.

BY ANTHONY NICOTERA
Times Staff Writer

Bradley Clark, a junior at East Bay High School, watched his 300-day Snapchat streak with one of his close friends slowly expire.

"She's never going to Snap me back again," Clark said.

He wouldn't sit next to her again in English class, seeking help for last-minute answers. She wouldn't be there to give him frosted cookies on his birthday.

"All those memories, I just treated them like they were guaranteed, but they're not," Clark said. "I'm never going to have the opportunity to make those again."

An Apollo Beach community continues to grieve after 16-year-old Alexa Ringo was killed in a crash deputies say was caused by a drunken driver.

POWER ⚡ STRUGGLE



Rayford Dennis, a retired Navy veteran, installed a solar panel system on his residence in Largo. The panels cost him about \$14,000, and he expects them to pay for themselves through his energy savings in about seven years. (JEFFEREE WOO | Times)

These Floridians waged

WAR

BY EMILY L. MAHONEY AND MAX CHESNES
Times Staff Writers

Dave Wilkins' garage looks like something out of a utopian sci-fi novel.

Cyan lights glow from two futuristic white batteries affixed to the wall, storing power from the solar panels that span the roof of his Safety Harbor home.

After more than a decade of watching his Duke Energy electric bill tick higher, he decided to break up with his reliance on the grid.

"To be able to take this energy from a source in the sky, that still has hundreds of thousands of years left of life, and not use any type of fuel — that is a pretty big deal," he said.

All in, Wilkins said he spent about \$60,000 for his setup, which a Tampa company installed in August. Wilkins

He's been producing more energy than he uses for four months and already has about 2,000 kilowatt-hours — enough to power an average home for roughly two months — banked in credits. Once a month, he detaches from the grid entirely to make sure he can become fully independent at a moment's notice.

"You never know what's going to happen. Geopolitical issues, cyber attacks. I'm now prepared against weather and any societal changes," said Wilkins, who works in tech sales. "I'm very happy with it."

As electricity costs have continued to rise — with many Tampa Bay residents saying they paid more in 2025 than ever — some people have gone to war with their bills. They've battled air leaks, wrestled down their kilowatts with extra-efficient appli-

Christina Ringo was driving her daughter home from golf practice on Dec. 26 when the driver of a Ford F-150 struck their car at the intersection of Covington Garden Drive and 30th Street Northeast.

The driver, 21-year-old Dominic Frye, ran a stop sign as Ringo entered the intersection with the right of way, according to a Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office search warrant.

The truck crashed into the front passenger door of their car, causing "significant intrusion into the passenger compartment," the warrant states.

Alexa Ringo was taken to Tampa General Hospital, where she was later pronounced dead.

Frye told deputies he saw the stop sign and did a "touch and go," slowing down to roughly 4 or 5 mph before accelerating into the intersection, according to the search warrant.

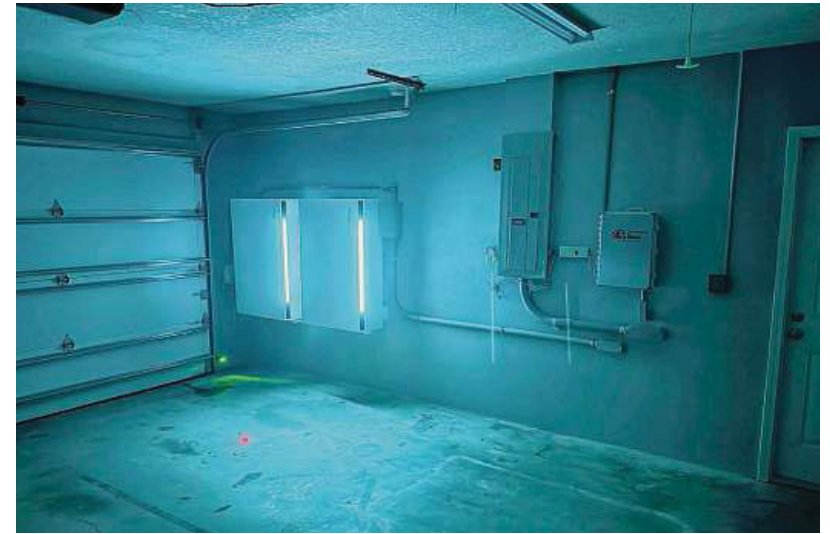
Investigators noted that Frye had "watery and glassy eyes" **See RINGO, 2B**

on their electric bills. Only some of them won

From futuristic battery setups to washing dishes at night, here's how Tampa Bay residents tried to lower costs.

views going solar as a long-term investment: His Duke bill is the same every month now, around \$30 in fees to keep him hooked up to the grid.

ances and severed their dependence on the grid by installing solar panels. Not everyone has been as successful. **See POWER, 3B**



Dave Wilkins' garage glows with the cyan lights of two batteries he installed in 2025 to store solar power being generated from panels on the roof of his Safety Harbor home. (Courtesy of Dave Wilkins)

As horseshoe crab populations decline, do they need stronger protections?

An environmental nonprofit files lawsuit in federal court urging better safeguards.

BY MAX CHESNES
Times Staff Writer

The humble horseshoe crab, an ancient species crawling sea-floors since before the dawn of the dinosaurs, was durable enough to survive the mass extinctions of eons past.

But now, hundreds of millions of years since their origin, the living fossils face a dire threat that could jeopardize their lengthy existence: humans.

A lawsuit filed Monday in federal court alleges humans are pushing horseshoe crabs toward extinction through habitat loss, overexploitation and failing regulations.

The national environmental nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity says in its lawsuit



In Florida, horseshoe crabs are found with the highest concentrations in the Northern Indian River Lagoon, Cedar Key and Apalachee Bay. (Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission)

that the federal government has delayed granting horseshoe crabs greater protections under the Endangered Species Act as populations have plummeted by more than 70% in recent decades.

The group joined about two dozen other organizations in a

February 2024 petition urging the National Marine Fisheries Service to give the species stronger protections. When the agency missed the deadline, the Center for Biological Diversity had no choice but to sue, the group said. **See CRABS, 4B**

Tampa will no longer have a free bus route. What comes next?

This year the city will fund other changes to Route 1, Hillsborough County's most popular line.

BY SHAUNA MUCKLE
Times Staff Writer

Hillsborough County's Route 1 bus line reached the highest ridership in Tampa Bay after it became free in 2025.

But starting Monday, riders must return to paying a \$2 one-way fare.

The city of Tampa funded one year of free fares and increased weekday frequency last year, to the tune of \$1.6 million. Route 1, a key bus line along Florida Avenue from downtown Tampa to the University of South Florida, gained about 2,000 daily riders as a result. The route's current average of more than 5,000 riders per weekday makes it the most popular bus line in Tampa Bay.

Tampa is still subsidizing the

route this year. But instead of funding free fares, the city is making sure buses reliably stop every 15 or 20 minutes.

City Council allocated \$1.3 million toward maintaining 15-minute frequency on weekdays and increasing the service's frequency on weekends and evenings.

Buses are now scheduled to come by every 20 minutes from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. on weekends. They previously came by every half hour during that time frame.

Buses are also slated to come every 20 minutes on weekday evenings from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m., improving upon the previous 30-minute frequency.

Fare-free routes are a common strategy in Tampa Bay to entice otherwise reluctant riders to try out the bus.

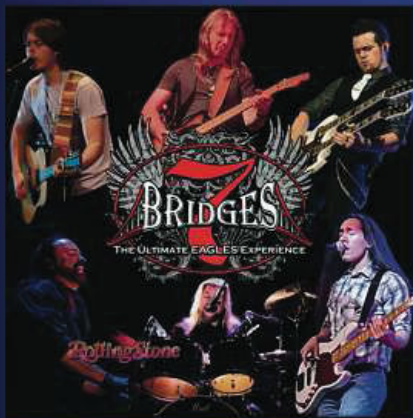
"A lot of people that would consider using transit feel awkward" learning to pay fares as they board, said Christine Acosta, a board member for Walk Bike Tampa.

See BUSES, 5B

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From left, Tim Ringo, Christina Ringo, Alexa Ringo and Brandon Ringo pose for a family photo. (Photos courtesy of Christina Ringo)

RINGO continued from 1B

and that his breath had the “distinct odor of an alcoholic beverage.” Frye was arrested and taken to a breath testing facility after a field sobriety test showed further signs of impairment, according to the warrant.

A breath analysis measured Frye’s blood alcohol levels at 0.156, 0.130 and 0.133. Under Florida law, a driver is presumed impaired at a level of 0.08 or higher.

Frye is charged with DUI manslaughter and DUI resulting in injury or property damage. He was released from jail on Dec. 28 after posting bond of \$27,500, records show. He has pleaded not guilty.

Friends and family described Alexa as a teenager with lofty dreams, an enviable work ethic and a passion for volunteering her time.

After an ankle injury from cheerleading that never fully healed, she decided she wanted to attend the University of Florida and become an orthopedic surgeon.



Alexa Ringo volunteered at Sarasota Memorial Hospital’s discharge lounge. She would often be the last face that patients saw before they left the hospital.

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Her parents believe she was inspired to become a doctor at the age of 5 after the time she spent on a Navy base in San Diego, where she would regularly see health care workers.

Her father, Tim, served for 30 years between the Navy and the Marine Corps.

The family has lived in Waterset, a suburban community in Apollo Beach, for over 10 years.

Alexa, a star student, was twice voted class president at Winthrop College Prep Academy.

Lanitra Moore taught Alexa in both middle school and high school. Alexa called Moore her “school mom” and would often have lunch with her and a group of students they dubbed the “lunch bunch.”

Alexa would often take attendance for her class in the mornings.

“She was super smart, super spunky,” Moore said.

When Moore’s son, a classmate, was in the hospital undergoing kidney dialysis, Alexa would video call from the classroom to express her support.

Jewel Breard, a family friend of the Ringos, said Alexa’s ambition was infectious. She believes her son would not have pursued a role in student government without Alexa’s example.

“She knew the sacrifices she had to make to meet her ultimate goals, and she was willing to do those things,” Breard said. “It was pretty amazing.”

Christina Ringo said her daughter had logged more than 600 volunteer hours with Metropolitan Ministries, Sarasota Memorial Hospital and as a coach with the First Tee golf program. In the hospital’s discharge lounge, Alexa would often be the last face that patients saw before they left, talking with them and helping to gather their things.

Her friends remember her as someone who would



Alexa Ringo played for East Bay High School's golf team. She also coached and mentored young golfers for the local First Tee golf program.

move easily between the often- cliquish groups of high school to bring people together. She threw a “Hamilton” karaoke party for her friends and had begun planning a murder-mystery-themed bash.

Many of her friends got to know her best from their time together on East Bay High School’s golf team.

Makayla Perkins saw Alexa as a mentor on the team and always enjoyed being paired up with her on the course.

“She really just helped and motivated you,” Perkins said.

Despite Alexa’s ambitions, her friends and family said, she was still a young girl who enjoyed Marvel movies and spending time with loved ones.

“She still had the little kid in her,” said Chris Holman, her longtime golf coach. “She was able to connect

with a lot of people because of that, too.”

A celebration of life is scheduled for Jan. 18.

The Ringos set up a GoFundMe to establish a scholarship in their daughter’s name for students pursuing a medical degree at UF. As of Wednesday, it had raised over \$100,000. In the future, the family hopes to launch a charity to award scholarships in perpetuity.

Tim Ringo said his family’s faith has been crucial in navigating their loss.

“She was a gift from God,” Ringo said of his daughter. “For the last 16 years, He allowed us to hold Lexi and raise her. What keeps us up and going is the fact that she was saved. She’s with Jesus right now, and we’re going to see her again one day.”

Contact Anthony Nicotera at nicotera@tampabay.com.

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