SOUTHWEST FLORIDA HIGHWAYS

Airport will get I-75 connector

$54.1 million project starts in fall, scheduled for spring 2016.

By Laura Ruane
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Skip over local traffic and possible road congestion near Southwest Florida International when taking Interstate 75 to and from the airport?

Southwest Florida International Airport will get an I-75 connector coming reality this fall when work begins on the $54.1 million construction project that will add a northbound on-ramp and southbound lanes at the Allen Road and Daniels Parkway/Dreilinden Avenue and a new traffic detector near the airport’s main entrance, Terminal Access Road. Spring 2015 is the target for completion. Motorists aren’t likely to be inconvenienced by the last stages of construction, said Debbie Tower, the Lee County-based communications manager for the Florida Department of Transportation, the major funder and overseer. “This is a priority project,” said Bob Ball, Lee County Port Authority executive director. “We’d really like to have direct access to the airport off the interstate, as most airports do.” Ball estimated this project, along with other projects for the international airport and airport, will generate more than 1,000 jobs in upcoming months.

Airport connector concept was conceived almost 20 years ago, when I-75 was a parking lot, from Sarasota to Fort Myers,” Ball noted. Since then, interstate lane additions and local road improvements have eased traffic. “This is a terrific project,” Ball said. “We’d really like to have direct access to the airport off the interstate, as most airports do.” Ball estimated this project, along with other projects for the international airport and airport, will generate more than 1,000 jobs in upcoming months.

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TROPICAL WEATHER

Isaac’s threat on our radar

It’s early, but forecasts say storm could very well cause problems for southwest Florida.

By Mary Wozniak
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At Tropical Storm Isaac lands along the Caribbean, forecasters are monitoring the storm’s potential for minor issues.4B

Lee County Emergency Management is in monitoring mode as Isaac is expected to become a hurricane by Friday afternoon, according to the National Hurricane Center.

“We’re doing all the things we tell everyone else to do, maintaining the weather closely,” said Gerald Campbell, chief of planning for Lee County Emergency Management. “We’re as ready as everyone else. We are at the mercy of the forecast.”

See ISAAC » A3

A VETERAN’S ONGOING BATTLE

At 90, still trying to prove his valor

Cape’s Harry Beeman is searching for the records he earned at a Purple Heart.

By Cristela Guerra
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Harry Beeman has been saving his memories all his life. As a young man, he documented the stories of his Navy service, and now, 70 years later, he wants to prove his valor.

Cape’s Harry Beeman is searching for the records he earned at a Purple Heart. By Cristela Guerra
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SOUTHWEST FLORIDA RESEARCH

FGCU prof, team search for root of fishborne illness.

By Kevin Lollar
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Mike Parsons, a professor at FGCU, secures a black grouper he’d speared. The fish will be tested for toxins that cause ciguatera fish poisoning. The project will be part of a $5 million study to investigate the root of ciguatera fish poisoning. The project will be part of a $5 million study to investigate the root of ciguatera fish poisoning.

Seafood toxins are the prey

By Kevin Lollar
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Hovering low over Tennessee Reef off Long Key earlier this month, Mike Parsons squeezed the trigger of his spear gun and drilled a black grouper.

As tasty as the fish would have been, it was destined not for the grill but for the lab. Not to eat, but instead, Parsons and his research team of marine scientists, FGCU investigator of CiguAAB, an international team of scientists conducting a five-year project to investigate the root of ciguatera fish poisoning. The $5 million study is financed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

CiguAAB researchers will work in the Keys and St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, for the first five years of the project and for Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. The funding for the project is the University of Texas Marine Biotechnology Division, University of South Alabama, University of the Virgin Islands, University of Vermont, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration Gulf Coast Seafood Laboratory on Dauphin Island, Ala.

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Vertebrates can come to toxin-laced fish and ingest them along with eaten by predatory fish. The toxins then move up the food chain when Gambierdiscus are ingested by larger fish, which are then eaten by predators. The toxins can be concentrated in the fatty tissues of the predator, making it dangerous to consume. Symptoms of ciguatera poisoning can include vomiting, diarrhea, fatigue, muscle pain, and numbness. If severe, it can lead to blurred vision, numbness, and even paralysis. The toxins can remain in the fish’s tissue for years, even after the fish has died. The toxins can also cause long-term effects, such as memory loss and depression. The best prevention is to avoid eating fish that are known to be toxic. If someone does ingest a toxic fish, it is important to seek medical help immediately.