

# SUN

## Flames spark busy day for Fire District



Richard Owen/The Sun

Firefighters from South Walton Fire District and the Department of Forestry spray water on a wildfire on May 18 on U. S. Highway 98. A Department of Forestry official said the cause of the fire was undetermined.

By **DEBORAH WHEELER**  
SUN REPORTER

What began as just another day for South Walton Fire District on Wednesday, quickly escalated into an extremely busy afternoon.

District Chief Les Hallman said it began right after lunch with the call for a water rescue behind Camping on the Gulf park in Miramar Beach.

While rescue personnel were still at that site, a request came from Freeport Fire for mutual aid including a crew and tanker, which SWFD responded to.

While dispatching the requested aid to Freeport, Hallman was in the process of moving the Seagrove Station personnel to cover headquarters in Santa Rosa Beach when they noticed a spark fire on state land that had crossed County Road 30A at Grayton Beach. SWFD personnel stood by at the Grayton site until forestry

service arrived.

A call then came from Destin Fire District requesting mutual aid for a fire they had that was threatening three homes, which SWFD responded to.

Hallman said calm then returned to South Walton until around 6 p.m. when they responded to an auto accident at Seascape where a car was on its side. He said it turned out there were only minor injuries there.

Immediately following was another call from Seascape of a car leaving the road and hitting a tree. The driver of the auto had left the accident on foot when SWFD arrived.

Then, it quietened down again, said Hallman.

The chief said none of the calls were of consequence, with no more than minor injuries at any of them.

"Sometimes there are no calls, and sometimes the gates just open up," said Hallman.

## Panhandling the Panhandle, more than a drop in the bucket

By **PASHA CARROLL**  
SUN REPORTER

Walton County is just another stop on Deeper Life Church's fund-raising tour.

The church's solicitations have been well documented by newspapers from Texas to Virginia to Detroit. Each place they stop, with their orange vests and large white buckets waiting to be filled with money, they raise suspicion.

"We go to places based on laws that will allow it," said Gregory Phillips, a minister-in-training with Deeper Life Christian Church. Phillips and two others were soliciting money at the intersection at U.S. Highway 98 and County Road 393 on May 11. For weeks prior, other church representatives were at the intersections at Silver Sands Factory Stores.

Two to eight conserva-

“  
You are not allowed to talk about what you do.”

”  
**An unidentified man collecting money in South Walton.**

tively dressed men and women shake their buckets that say, "New Life Ministries help feed needy women and children" and approach vehicles. As the traffic slows they weave in and out between vehicles, knocking on windows and aggressively seeking donations.

When Phillips was questioned on May 11, he said he represented New Life Ministries in Tampa, which is under Bishop M.B. Jefferson's management. Phillips said sometimes he



Pasha Carroll/The Sun

After being questioned by The Sun, the two panhandlers gathered their day's earnings and quickly left. The group is part of Deeper Life Christian Church, which has congregations scattered throughout the east, and regularly makes "fund-raising" trips, to "help women and children."

raises barely \$30, sometimes \$50 in a nine-hour period.

"We don't get paid. As a matter of fact, I pay," Phillips said when asked if he was compensated for

his efforts.

Another man, who refused to give his name, was also posted at CR 393 and US 98. He said, "You are not allowed to talk about what you do."

His only other comment was that he was collecting money for New Life Ministry, to house, cloth and

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