



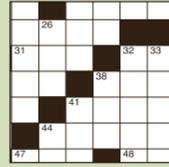
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## Family plans social distancing graduation ceremony

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

The senior class of 2020 will be graduating this year without the pomp and circumstance associated with a traditional graduation ceremony.

Kelsey Zweibohmer of Creekside High School is one of the seniors graduating in these unusual times. St. Johns County Schools scheduled virtual graduations for its high school seniors; Creekside's virtual graduation took place Tuesday, May 19.



Photo courtesy Britta Lee Zweibohmer  
Kelsey Zweibohmer, Class of 2020, Creekside High School

"Kelsey was born the week of 9/11 and is graduating high school in the midst of a pandemic," said Britta Lee Zweibohmer, Kelsey's mom. "What should have been joyful occasions for our family, have twice been overshadowed by horrific worldwide events."

In an effort to remain positive, the Zweibohmer family was determined to make Kelsey's graduation as "normal" as possible given the circumstances. "We've hung personalized banners and placed yard signs out front, we've put together a small candy buffet for our immediate family and her online graduation will be attended by extended family around the country," said Britta

Graduation ceremony cont. on pg. 11

## Bittersweet promotion for Palencia fifth graders

By Tabitha Pattishall  
mail@floridanewslines.com

A.A. Milne, author of the Winnie the Pooh series, wrote, "You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think." The fifth grade graduates of Palencia Elementary School have lived out these words as they have embraced distance learning and came to grips with the fact the promotion they had envisioned for the past six years would be much different than they had anticipated.

Ilene Bomser, mother of a Palencia Elementary fifth grader, said, "I do feel bad that these kids worked so hard all year and are missing out on so many year-end events. I am even a little sad for myself, as my youngest is finishing up at the school we have been a part of since they first opened their doors eight years ago. I was looking forward to volunteering for the fifth grade graduation dance, but like everything else, the dance has been canceled. I know the school and the PTO are working on some things to make the end of fifth grade a little bit special for these kids, and it will be interesting to see what they come up with."

The last day of the school's fifth graders got together before learning of school closings was for their fifth grade field trip to SeaWorld in early March. In the past, these fifth grade field trips have been later in the school year. The earlier date this year was a blessing in disguise as it meant the last day the Palencia Elementary School class of 2020 spent together physically was having fun hanging out with their friends.

Fifth grader Evan Mills said, "It's disappointing and upsetting to learn that I will not be having my fifth grade kick-

ball tournament or my fifth grade graduation; however, I'm so happy that I was able to have my field trip to SeaWorld and was able to have some fun with my friends before graduating."

Parent Jamie Donaldson said, "The way Palencia Elementary has supported our



Harlow Donaldson hard at work.

kids through a time that is new to all of us has been absolutely wonderful. It is sad to think what they have missed, but it teaches us to be grateful for what we do have. Faith, family, and community."

Palencia Elementary Principal Catherine Goodrich said she has long been fascinated by the way each grade level class of students has its own personality. She said when she thinks of the fifth grade class of 2020, she thinks the students are problem solvers, well-rounded, and fun-loving.

"It's beyond disheartening when I think about the celebrations the students will miss out on due to the far reach-



Photos courtesy Palencia Elementary School  
Fifth graders Max Weiss, Evan Mills, Mitchell Davis, Wade Fritz, and Ben Mirabito enjoyed a field trip to Sea World before school was closed for the year.

ing impacts of COVID-19 and CDC guidelines; however, this class has the perfect balance of sensitivity and depth," Goodrich said. "To the Palencia Elementary fifth grade class of 2020: Continue to love life, others, and your dreams deeply. We know you will continue to make us proud."

While the fifth grade celebration activities are still being planned in a way that follows the guidelines set forth by the St. Johns County School District, one special item is a go: each fifth grade graduate will receive a commemorative sign with the student's name and photo that they can display at home. The signs will be provided at no cost to the Palencia Elementary families.



Maggie Seifart catches a blueberry on an outing to the blueberry patch.

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**FAVORITE ACTIVITY:**  
Loves chasing small lizards in the backyard

**FAVORITE TREAT:**  
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**FAVORITE FRIEND:**  
Sam, her Border Collie-mix brother and Reagan, our neighbor's Golden Doodle

**HOW YOUR BFF GOT THEIR NAME:**  
Our "Miss Sophie" was a girlie-girl from the day she was adopted into our family.



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Last month's Mystery Photo was Woodpeckers Backyard BBQ. Our winner was Joseph Hall. Congratulations!

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## with St. Johns County School Board Chairman, Beverly Slough, District 1

**Q: Can you give us some insight into the district's decision to schedule virtual graduations for the class of 2020?**

A: The superintendent made this choice for virtual graduations for the sole reason of keeping our students safe. We all wholeheartedly empathize and share in the disappointment of families and students of not having traditional graduation ceremonies.

**Q: How did the virtual ceremonies turn out?**

A: The virtual graduations that I have seen to date went well and were beautifully done. Students did an exceptional job with their speeches and valedictorians and salutatorians were honored. Of note, the ceremonies can be watched later and can be accessed via the district website. None of us wished we were graduating kids virtually, but if it must be done, I feel it was done well.

**Q: Are there any other events to honor seniors planned?**

A: Each school is making its own plans. Principals are working with senior class officers to schedule some senior events for later in the summer. Typically, each high school plans, executes, and pays for its own graduation ceremony. This year, the district is paying for the virtual graduations, leaving the funds the individual schools would have paid available for other activities to honor their seniors when it is safe to do so.

**Q: Do you have a construction update**

**for Middle School MM and High School HHH?**

A: Both schools under construction are moving ahead at a great pace. Footings are installed, pads are poured and they are forming the tilt walls.

**Q: What else is happening at the district level?**

A: We are beginning to consider what opening school in the fall will look like. All the uncertainty makes it exceedingly difficult to plan. We possibly will have to consider bus schedules and staffing. We are also watching our budget very carefully.

I'd like to encourage early registration of new students, including kindergarteners for next year. The vast majority can be done online at [www.stjohns.k12.fl.us](http://www.stjohns.k12.fl.us). We really need to get new students registered as early as possible so we can try to plan for next year.

**Q: Do you have anything else to share with District 1?**

A: We are saying goodbye to one of our district's finest, Cathy Mittelstadt, who starts a new job as Superintendent of Flagler County Schools on June 1. Her work ethic is stellar and she has been our go-to person for crises. We are going to miss her tremendously, but wish her every success in her new position.

**Q: How can our readers contact you?**

A: They can email me at [beverly.slough@stjohns.k12.fl.us](mailto:beverly.slough@stjohns.k12.fl.us) or call me at (904) 547-7510.

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**with St. Johns County Clerk of Circuit Court and Comptroller Brandon Patty**

**Q: To what extent is the Clerk of Court's office open at this point?**

A: As of May 11, our office has been issuing marriage licenses and processing passport applications for St. Johns County residents by appointment only at our office in the St. Johns County Courthouse at 4010 Lewis Speedway in St. Augustine. Beginning in early June, we anticipate offering additional court functions and by early July, we tentatively plan for jury trials to resume. The vast majority of our offerings can be completed online, but we will share the expanded list of limited court proceedings via social media and our website as they become available for in person access.

**Q: Can you clarify the duties of the Clerk of Court?**

A: Since taking office in December, I've been focused on telling our story. The clerk's office is known, but not widely understood. We are basically the backbone of county government; we partner with the court system, we act as the county comptroller and are the custodian of county funds, and we act as the county recorder, including taking minutes at the Board of County Commissioners meetings. There are actually more than 1,000 different functions delineated in Florida Statute and in the Florida Constitution.

**Q: What are you doing to get the word out about the duties of the clerk's office?**

A: We have a weekly video series on our Facebook page. Each video is about a minute to a minute and a half long and covers a Clerk of Court topic. I've also been speaking recently via Zoom call to Rotary Clubs. We just want to let the public know how we serve them.

**Q: Are there any particular topics of interest?**

A: With us being so connected with the court system, and in our position as a check and balance to maintain the integrity of county government, we are in a unique position to spotlight the lack of judicial capacity in St. Johns County and the need for additional county and circuit judges. St. Johns County hasn't added a new county judge since 1974, despite the huge population increase the county has experienced. The Florida Supreme Court uses a weighted case average as it considers adding judges, but these models don't consider some of our unique circumstances, including the enormous population growth. Over the next few weeks my plan is to release additional information and advocate with the state legislature in an effort to highlight the need for additional judicial capacity in our county.

**Q: What is the best way for our readers to contact you or your office?**

A: A lot of questions can be answered by visiting our website, [www.sjccoc.us](http://www.sjccoc.us). People can also email [coc@sjccoc.us](mailto:coc@sjccoc.us) or call our main office at (904) 819-3600.

**Nease named #1 NJROTC program in Northern Florida and all Georgia**

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewline.com

The coronavirus pandemic has dampened the spirits of high school students across the area with the loss of spring sports, graduation and prom. Yet amid the shelter in place directives and social distancing requirements, a ray of bright news has shown down on Nease High School.



Photo courtesy Scott LaRochelle  
Nease NJROTC's cadet staff lead the cadet corps during Annual Military Inspection.

Commander Rustie L. Hibbard, Navy JROTC Area-12 Manager, announced Nease High School as the Most Outstanding Unit in Area-12, a region that encompasses 60 schools covering the 13 schools in northeastern Florida and the 47 across the entire state of Georgia. This marks the eighth time in the past nine years the Navy has recognized Nease NJROTC for its overall excellence.

The award is based on the total achievement of the program, which includes academic performance, community outreach, campus leadership, graduation plans, physical fitness and competition results.

"We (seniors) came into JROTC as the number one program back in 2016," said former Battalion Commander Anna Hampton who will be attending Northeastern University in the fall. "And our

goal and our legacy was to leave the unit on top. Mission accomplished."

Among Nease's noteworthy achievements this past year: First place championships at McFarland Drill Meet, Mandarin Drill Meet, Terry Parker Drill Meet, Sprayberry (GA) Drill Meet, Area-12 Drill Championships, Bishop Kenny Academic Brain Brawl, Bishop Kenny Drone Challenge, and Lee Ultimate Challenge; qualifying for both Drill and Academic national championships, graduating seven seniors with Service Academy appointments or ROTC Scholarships; and the completion of more than 13,000 hours of community service.

By virtue of finishing #1 in Area-12, Nease is now competing for the Most Outstanding Unit in the Nation.

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with St. Johns County Commissioner  
**Jimmy Johns, (District 1)**

**Q: Is the new Fire Station 19 on Veterans Parkway near Race Track Road finally open?**

A: Yes, the station officially opened in mid-May. We didn't have a traditional ribbon cutting, but I'm glad that they will be able to provide quicker response times for the Northwest as well as insurance cost savings for homes nearby. This fire station was 12 years in the making.

**Q: What can you tell us about the many hospitals that are announcing plans to build in the northern part of the county?**

A: At our Board of County Commissioners meeting on June 2, we will be considering a request not for rezoning, but for a kind of rearranging of the puzzle pieces within a Development of Regional Impact (DRI) with no increased demand on our infrastructure for one of the healthcare facilities. I would like to know what people think about having a full healthcare campus in our area? It's important to consider this from a business perspective as well, as hospitals do not bring in tax dollars, but they do attract associated businesses around them, as well as provide stable and generally high paying jobs.

**Q: Where are we in the county budget cycle?**

A: We had the annual review of the first draft of the budget in mid-May. It is available for review on the county website. We still need to hear from residents as to where recommended adjustments can be made. We are expecting a double digit percentage loss of revenue from state and

federal governments to local governments, due to the shutting down of the economy for two months amid the coronavirus. We've asked staff to be very conservative in their recommendations, but we do expect to have to cut expenditures and I'd like to know what's important to St. Johns County businesses and residents.

Additionally, I'd like to know what people need to feel safe in these uncertain times. What do our businesses need to be successful? The Board of County Commissioners recently approved an emergency assistance grant for small businesses and we have hotlines set up to assist both individuals (904-209-1250) and businesses (904-209-6050).

**Q: How is the business of government continuing during this time?**

A: We've been creative in finding ways to conduct business in person; we have not stopped having BCC meetings, PZA meetings etc. in person. We are safely conducting business in our 300 seat auditorium — with about 75 seats available for the public — while catching up on a backlog of agenda items. We are separating agenda items across the day to spread out public attendees and people can call in and do live presentations. It's working. We are trying to lead by example to show how businesses can do the same.

**Q: What is the best way for our readers to contact you?**

A: Readers can email me at [bcc1jjohns@sjcl.us](mailto:bcc1jjohns@sjcl.us) or call me at (904) 615-7437.



with St. Johns County Property Appraiser  
**Eddie Creamer**

**Q: What is the status of your office in St. Augustine as of late May?**

A: Our office is back open to the public, although we still as always encourage people to do business via our website or via telephone for convenience. Our staff will be wearing masks, we are encouraging social distancing, and we are disinfecting between customers. We are conducting business as usual and are on time and on schedule with submission of the county's tax rolls.

**Q: Are staff from your office back to working in the field?**

A: We had suspended field work, but now our workers are back in the field. They are always in clearly marked vehicles and wear clearly marked uniform shirts. I have asked them not to knock on doors or interact with the public to limit contact. So if someone knocks on your door, it won't be a worker from the property appraiser's office. Also, there are unfortunately a lot of scams going on right now, via telephone and door to door. If anything seems suspicious, contact our office right away.

**Q: Have any of the deadlines for exemptions or filings been relaxed?**

A: While there are imposed deadlines for applying for and receiving all the exemptions, they can be waived at the discretion of the property appraiser for "good cause." I believe the coronavirus is "good cause," so we have extended

the deadline to apply for any of the exemptions up to 25 days past the TRIM notices. This new deadline would then be in early September.

We also automatically extended the deadline for filing for Tangible Personal Property taxes for 45 days, so the new deadline was May 15. But again, with "good cause" this can be extended longer if requested. The property appraiser's office is trying to be flexible and considerate until TRIM.

**Q: What else should homeowners be doing regarding their property at this time?**

A: I'd like to encourage people to take some time to look on our website at the valuation and exemptions applied to their property. If there are any questions, please reach out to our office. We will fix a valuation if it is wrong and we will give an exemption if it is needed. Basically, if leeway if allowed, we will always decide in favor of the property owner.

**Q: What is the best way for our readers to contact you?**

A: Our office is located at 4030 Lewis Speedway Ste. 203, (904) 827-5500. It is open Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. Also, readers can email me at [Eddie@sjcpa.us](mailto:Eddie@sjcpa.us) or call me at (904) 827-5500.

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## What's going on at the library?

By Mary Rice  
mail@floridanewsline.com

The St. Johns County Library is now offering curbside service for holds pickup. Curbside Service will now be offered at all St. Johns County Public Library System branches, including the Bartram Trail Branch, on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. While the actual library buildings remain closed as a result of the pandemic, patrons will now be able to select items online or call for a specific item to be placed on hold. When items are ready for pickup, patrons can follow a simple and safe procedure to pick up holds with curbside service. Visit <https://sjcpls.org/curbside-service/> to learn more.

Also, the St. Johns County Library is offering virtual programs daily on its Facebook page <http://facebook.com/sjcpls/>. There is something for everyone — storytimes and art projects for children and seminars on various subjects such as



Photo courtesy Mary Rice

gardening, cooking, and small business for adults.

Finally, the Friends of the Bartram Trail Library recently purchased new hard copy and digital Sunshine State Readers. These book donations are made possible by contributions from you through membership, book sales and donations. The Friends of the Bartram Trail Library are always seeking new members. Email [mjcgswell@gmail.com](mailto:mjcgswell@gmail.com) for more information.

*Mary Rice is with the Bartram Trail Friends of the Library.*

## Drive-through food drives benefit local food pantries

By Lorie Shvets  
mail@floridanewsline.com

St. Johns County, in partnership with United Way of St. Johns County, recently held two drive-through food drives to restock critically-low local food pantries. The events took place on two Saturdays in May at the St. Augustine Amphitheatre and the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall. More than one thousand cars were welcomed and tens of thousands of pounds of non-perishable items were collected to benefit 16 local food pantries.

“Our role in this community is to fight for those that are food insecure in our



Photo courtesy United Way of St. Johns County

community every day,” said Melissa Nelson, President/CEO of United Way-SJC. “Now, more than ever, we understand that many of our neighbors are counting pennies due to the pandemic. We all would prefer that they don’t have to count servings for their children, as well.”

## Backpacks for Seniors provides 20 backpacks

By Anne Russell  
mail@floridanewsline.com

St. Johns CARES’ “Backpacks for Seniors” initiative provided 20 graduating seniors with a backpack, a planner, insulated water bottle and a gift card for academic expenses. Despite the challenges of the final two months of school, these students completed their studies and will continue their education. This is an impressive achievement for these graduates who have overcome some serious obstacles — they lack a fixed stable and adequate nighttime address.

Working in partnership with the county school program ASSIST (Aid and Support for students in sudden transition), St. Johns CARES hopes this acknowledgment of their success supports their future ambitions.



Photo courtesy Anne Russell

One of the 20 Backpacks for Seniors is delivered.

One student expressed that he is looking forward to majoring in pre-law and possibly becoming an attorney and a philanthropist one day so that he can give back to the community and help other kids in his similar situation.

St. Johns CARES is an all-volunteer organization with a mission to Unite the Community Through Helping Others in Need. Visit [www.stjohnscares.org](http://www.stjohnscares.org) for more information on other initiatives.



Photo courtesy Patty Calamungi

## Compassion appreciated in time of crisis

Patty and Cal Calamungi live in the Crosswinds neighborhood in Orange Dale. During the recent “Safer at Home” requirement, their mother passed away from the virus while living in memory care. Patty Calamungi said, “Our neighbors could not come to give their condolences. This is what we found at the end of our driveway. What a beautiful gesture!”

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# Student writer graduates

By Martie Thompson  
 editor@floridanewslines.com

The end of the school year is the traditional time of progression for seniors who will be leaving high school for new adventures and it is the same for *The CreekLine's* student writers.

Meet a graduating writer from Bartram Trail High School who has been a part of *The CreekLine's* editorial team for four years and is now moving on, leaving a legacy of high quality and engaging writing for the next student reporter:

### Delaney Cantrell (BTHS Happenings)

Delaney Cantrell has written the BTHS Happenings column for the past four years. While at Bartram Trail High School, she served as the president of Beta Club and vice president of DECA, where she competed in events at the district, state and international levels. She was an intern for the school's VyStar Credit Union for three years, and was this year's managing intern at the school's branch. She is graduating eighth in her class of 660 and is in the top 3 percent academically of St. Johns County seniors.

Cantrell volunteered at Westminster Woods by playing the piano for residents at dinner hour. She said she enjoyed hearing the residents' stories and the memories they recalled through the songs she played.

In the fall, Cantrell will attend the University of Florida as a member of the Honors Program. She plans to major in finance and actuarial science.

For advice for future student writers, Cantrell said, "I would advise future high



Photo courtesy Delaney Cantrell  
 Delaney Cantrell

school writers to look at their high school experience through their journalistic eye and find any opportunity to write about stories to share with the community. More people are interested than you think! I had multiple people throughout the years come up to me and tell me how they found my last article very interesting. This was always rewarding and felt good that my articles were actually being read. My advice would also be to stick with it, because after my first year, people began to notice that I wrote for *The CreekLine* and would approach me when they would have a specific story to share."

*[Editor's note: If you attend Bartram Trail, Creekside, Ponte Vedra or Nease High School and are interested in being a student writer next year, email editor@floridanewslines.com for more information.]*

## BTHS Happenings

### Student raises awareness for the Alzheimer's Association

By Delaney Cantrell  
 mail@floridanewslines.com

The Bartram Trail Theatre Department is known for its entertaining shows showcasing students with extreme talent, earning themselves many awards. Prior to the current coronavirus pandemic, they had planned to add philanthropy to their list of credits by creating a show to benefit the Alzheimer's Association. Unfortunately, the show was not able to be held due to the coronavirus; however, other measures have been taken to ensure that awareness is still raised. The orchestration of this new production and its purpose was designed by theatre student David Watt.

"Kittery" is an original stage play that was to be performed by the school's theatre department and was completely written and directed by Watt.

"The show discusses two siblings making the best of a situation in which their father has Alzheimer's," said Watt. "The brother has traveled hundreds of miles to his hometown in Maine for the sole purpose of relieving his sister — a drug addict — of her only form of employment: taking care of their father when no one else would."

Watt said the play highlights the topics of addiction and death and is a rather desperate situation.

"Kittery" has won critic's choice at the International Thespian Society (ITS) district level and was given "Top Honors" at the state level. These are the highest honors that can be given at either competition.

All funds that were to be raised on the night of the performance of "Kittery" would have gone straight to the Alzheimer's Association. Watt chose to support such an organization to honor his grandfather who passed away from Alzheimer's this past December. Although the show is cancelled, Watt plans to continue the project by recording a podcast edition in May or June as long as the coronavirus permits.



Photo courtesy David Watt  
 David Watt

Watt is also contributing to The Longest Day initiative. This fundraiser sponsored by the Alzheimer's Association takes place on the summer solstice on June 20 — the longest day of the year — and is a time when people come together to fight the disease of Alzheimer's through the fundraiser of their choice.

To raise even more awareness, Watt sold lollipops for \$1 each to students at the Bartram Trail bus loop every week before show night while school was still in session.

"If I had to come up with any message," said Watt, "it would be that we become parents twice. Once for our children, and once more for those who raised us. 'Kittery' highlights the difficulties of caregiving and caretaking. This cycle of dual parenting isn't a good or bad thing, it just is. And I think people should be reminded that it exists."

While Watt didn't get to spotlight his passion for the Alzheimer's community in the way he intended, he has made every effort to keep the project going in spite of the difficulties this world is facing.

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# ST. JOHNS Business Monthly



## The Wolfsons

### MarketInsight

By Scott Grant  
ScottGrant@StJohnsBusinessMonthly.com

The Wolfson family moved to Jacksonville from St. Louis just before World War I began in Europe. Samuel Wolfson was four, younger brother Louis, just one year old. They were the sons of a Jewish immigrant from Lithuania. The father, Morris David Wolfson, was in the scrap metal business. One man's trash is another man's treasure. Trash was very profitable for the Wolfsons.

Sam and Louis followed their father into the junk business. They made their first big score in a deal with department store magnate J.C. Penney. The great depression had stopped construction at Penney Farms out near Starke. Sam and Louis bought a pile of plumbing fixtures from Penney for \$275. They would later resell them for more than \$100,000.

Sam Wolfson is best remembered for his forays into baseball. In 1953, Wolfson bought the local baseball team, the Jacksonville Tars. Sam affiliated the club with the Milwaukee Braves, who had just moved from Boston, and moved the newly minted Jacksonville Braves into the venerable South Atlantic League. The son of a Jewish immigrant then made the momentous decision to integrate the Deep South's "Sally League."

Three black players joined the club. One of those players, 18-year-old second baseman Hank Aaron, led the league in just about everything. Ironically, the field was integrated, but the stands were not. Many white fans booed, released black cats onto the field, and wore mops on their heads. Out in the colored section in the left field bleachers, it was a different story. Fans whooped and hollered like "they had won the World Series." So many African-Americans showed up at one road game that the bleachers collapsed.

Louis Wolfson made his first million at the age of 28. He was known, in some

circles, as the "Wizard of Wall Street." One of Wolfson's companies built the USS Kitty Hawk, another financed Mel Brook's film "The Producers." In 1967, Louis was convicted of stock fraud and sent to jail for nine months. For the rest of his life, Wolfson would vehemently complain that the charges were politically motivated.

In 1957, having made his point and already suffering from the ill health that would take his life at 54, Sam Wolfson sold the Braves to a group of investors led by Hall-of-Famer Bill Terry. The former NY Giant great retired here after his baseball career and bought a Buick dealership. Bill Terry Buick was an iconic Westside landmark for decades.

Later in life, Louis took a fancy to race-horses. He had a big horse farm out near Ocala called Harbor View. He raised thoroughbreds. One of his horses, Affirmed, won the Triple Crown in 1978, finishing first in the Kentucky Derby, the Preakness, and the Belmont Stakes. Until recently, Affirmed was the last horse to win all three races.

In 1946 Morris Wolfson, the scrap dealer, wrote a letter to his sons announcing his intention to found a children's hospital in Jacksonville and endow it with \$500,000 (roughly \$6.5 million in today's dollars.) "Pops" passed away before his vision could be realized, but his sons fulfilled his wishes and in 1951, they broke ground. Wolfson Children's Hospital opened in 1955 as a place for all children to be admitted and treated without regard to creed, religion, race, or financial position. That original mission remains today.

*Scott A. Grant is a local author, historian, columnist, and speaker. He is president of Standfast Asset Management in Ponte Vedra Beach. He welcomes your comments or questions at scottg@standfastic.com.*

### Briefs

#### Real estate sales down, pricing up in Northeast Florida

As COVID-19 continued to assert itself throughout April, real estate activity in Northeast Florida kept to a steady pace. There were 2,334 closed sales, similar to February (2,348 sales) or November 2019 (2,354 sales), but a 22.9 percent drop from a year ago in April 2019.

While the quantity of sales were down, pricing took an opposite track. The median for April was \$250,000 and the average sales price topped out at \$298,438. Of all the sales that occurred in April, 15.2 percent were for more than the original listing price.

Surprisingly, although Realtors and others involved in the industry were faced with conducting business using vastly different methods than are considered traditional, sales still took place in an average of 67 days, the exact same number of days as a year ago.

Not surprisingly, the number of sellers adding their home to the market in April dropped 22.4 percent from a year ago, resulting in 3,107 new listings.

Overall inventory dropped to 8,545 properties, or 14.2 percent less than the same month last year. Here's a breakdown, by price, of the 8,545 homes in inventory:

2,243: less than \$200,000  
2,388: \$200,000 – \$299,999  
2,263: \$300,000 – \$499,999  
1,244: \$500,000 – \$999,999  
407: \$1,000,000 or more

April 2020 real estate market reports for Northeast Florida are now on NEFAR.com (Market Stats tab). The Northeast Florida Association of Realtors (NEFAR) provides professional development, political advocacy, professional standards administration, media relations, and promotional activities and exchange of information among its members.

#### Hospital nationally recognized with "A" rating for dedication to patient safety

Baptist Medical Center South received an 'A' rating in the spring 2020 Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grades, a national distinction recognizing achievements in providing the safest health care for patients. Baptist Beaches, Baptist Nassau and Baptist Jacksonville also received A

safety ratings.

The Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade assigns an A, B, C, D or F grade to hospitals across the country based on their performance in preventing medical errors, infections and other harms among patients in their care. Developed under the guidance of a national expert panel, the Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grade uses 28 measures of publicly available hospital safety data to assign grades to more than 2,600 U.S. acute-care hospitals twice per year.

"We're committed to providing quality care that exceeds the expectations of our patients and their families, especially when it comes to safety," said Nicole Thomas, FACHE, hospital president of Baptist South. "Our team members and physicians are dedicated caregivers, making sure they adhere to the highest safety standards every day. We monitor, measure and make constant improvements year-round."

Baptist Health's safety and quality protocols have been further enhanced during the COVID-19 crisis through a number of additional measures. Separate respiratory care units for COVID-19 patients, designated staff and equipment for COVID-19 rooms, and using advanced UV technology for decontamination are among the many safety reinforcements.

#### Fire Watch Program launches mobile app to help veterans

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, approximately 20 veterans die by suicide each day in the United States. In an effort to respond to this national epidemic, St. Johns County has joined surrounding communities and local organizations in Fire Watch, a program that provides a support system for veterans in crisis.

The Fire Watch launched a mobile app that enables veterans and volunteers to foster positive relationships and ensure veterans get the help they need. Available on both the Apple App Store and Android Google Play, the app will allow veterans in crisis to quickly receive emergency assistance and connect them with a variety of local resources and allies that will help them build relations and provide one-on-one counseling and support. Visit [www.thefirewatch.org](http://www.thefirewatch.org) for more information.

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Photos courtesy Peggy Williams

## United together separately

The homes of Boneset Branch Lane in Deer Run in Julington Creek Plantation have been flying American flags daily for five to six weeks as a show of strength together, separately.

# Fishing

## Capt. David's Fishing Report

By Captain David Lifka  
mail@floridanewslines.com

We are finally reaching the summer months when the best St. Johns River fishing action begins to occur. So far this spring, a noticeable increase of baitfish, such as finger mullet and early shrimp, are positive indicators of good fishing soon to come.

Like every summer, we can expect a croaker run to start early and last through fall. Redfish will be on docks and pilings, and eventually end up schooling in the river's channels. Flounder, weakfish, and numerous other saltwater species will also be part of the mix.

For many, their favorite time of our summer fishing season is when the shrimp begin to run in the river. Usually by middle or late July, shrimp will have begun their exodus from St. Johns. As the summer progresses, the quantity and quality (size) of the shrimp will increase.

Salinity and the presence of shrimp will be the greatest contributors to the success of this year's fishing season. Too much rain usually has the most influence on both these contributors. Normal summer thunderstorms are just fine and needed, but any kind of tropical disturbance anywhere

along the river can often disrupt good fishing and a summer shrimp run. Remember, the St. Johns River flows north. At any time, 10 or 12 inches of rain in Central Florida will end up coming this way.

Remarkable numbers of folks have been taking advantage of the outdoors in recent weeks as an apparent response to the loss of other activities due to coronavirus restrictions. Boat ramps on weekdays now look like how weekends used to, and weekends now look like the 4th of July. Whether it be hiking, biking, paddling, fishing from a boat, fishing from the surf, or a round of golf, people now seem to be getting outside more and learning to enjoy the great outdoors. Perhaps this could be one positive change in lifestyle that will last long after the pandemic has passed. Wouldn't that be great?

Fishing report: Time to start looking for a croaker or two in the river. Whiting in the surf along with a few bonnethead sharks. Plenty of bream in the shade of area creeks.

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# Life

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## Get to Know . . .

### Father Guy Noonan

By Martie Thompson  
editor@floridanewsline.com

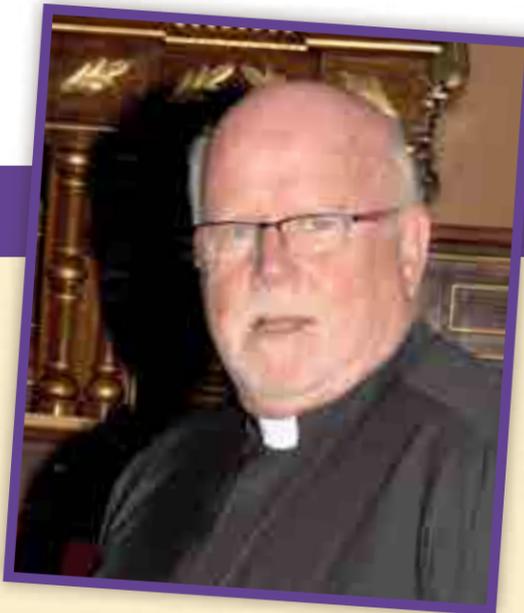


Photo courtesy Father Guy Noonan  
Father Guy Noonan

Father Guy Noonan, pastor of Our Lady of Good Counsel Catholic Church in the World Golf Village area, took a winding path to his present position. He was born on Christmas Day 1949 in Brooklyn, NY and was raised in the suburbs of New Jersey throughout grade school and much of high school. He graduated from Franciscan Preparatory Seminary in Hollidaysburg, Penn. before moving on to the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. There he earned both bachelor's and master's degrees in religious studies and theology before being ordained in 1976. As a member of the Franciscan order, he said he was not geographically based as he would have been had he been in a diocese and this allowed him to move around the country and even the world as a priest. A mid-career leadership grant allowed him the opportunity to go to Europe; he earned a degree in International Business at the University of Caen in Normandy, France. While there, he pursued a doctorate in theology before being assigned to Rome for a year of research. Ultimately, he came back to the states and joined the Diocese of St. Augustine.

**Q: Tell us about your time spent as a pastor in Minneapolis in the mid-'80s to mid-'90s?**

A: First, it was very cold! I was a pastor in a middle class parish that experienced urban change when a highway bypass was built through the neighborhood. What started out as a nice neighbor-

hood with single family homes and parks was soon challenged with unstable rentals and deteriorating safety and schools. I had to run the parish in a new way since the needs of the parishioners changed. I had to learn about community organizing and I worked with several other churches, of all Christian denominations, to address housing, education, and crime.

**Q: How did you end up in northeast Florida?**

A: After my year in Rome, I moved from the Franciscan religious community to a geographical diocese because I felt my particular group of Franciscans were in significant decline. I felt I could use my talents and energy for something better. I had previously lived in Orlando and my parents lived in St. Augustine. I thought there was a nice feel in the St. Augustine Diocese among clergy and people. I served at Christ the King Catholic Church in Jacksonville, then for three years at St. Augustine in Gainesville before moving to St. Ambrose in Elkton. Our Lady of Good Counsel was a mission of St. Ambrose and became an official separate parish in 2008. I've been here the whole time.

**Q: What do you like best about Our Lady of Good Counsel?**

A: I'd say three main things: it's very welcoming, the parish is young (only in existence for 14 years) and I like the parish's social consciousness. We run our food pantry, we have a community garden which provides for the food pantry, we participate in Dining with Dignity in conjunction with other churches to feed the homeless in St. Augustine, and once a year, we provide 5,000 pounds of food for

migrant workers. As for being welcoming, I've actually been told by two bishops that our sense of community welcome was palpable. We like to invite people to our premises.

**Q: Tell us about your church's grounds.**

A: I think they contribute to our parish being welcoming. We like to have places for people to sit, pray, and share. We have the 14 Stations of the Cross, with benches, on our front lawn; Mary's Garden with a gazebo that was built by parishioners; and a new shrine with a statue of St. Francis that overlooks our pond. Everyone is welcome to come and enjoy the tranquility of our grounds.

**Q: What do you like to do in your spare time?**

A: I enjoy being outdoors. I love to walk and have recently taken up short bike rides. I'm very interested in nature and ecology and I like to watch documentaries about nature. Sometimes I like to just sit on the grounds of the Alligator Farm in St. Augustine. I also enjoy hospitality. I'm open to welcoming people to meals both personally — I'm a decent cook, but overrated — and with the church. I often have the local priests over for dinner. I'm always encouraging people to feel free to speak about any topic, but always doing so respectfully. The only person not welcome at my table is someone incapable of civil conversation. Finally, I enjoy reading a wide variety of subjects.

Graduation ceremony cont. from pg. 1

Lee Zweibohmer. "We've even managed to add a little humor to her graduation photos to adequately portray what we're all going through with masks and gloves. There is still much to be thankful for!"

Kelsey was to have attended summer school at the University of Central Florida, but classes have been switched to online. She is hopeful that she will be living in a campus dorm for the fall semester.

**Rob Hardwick**  
For St. Johns County Sheriff

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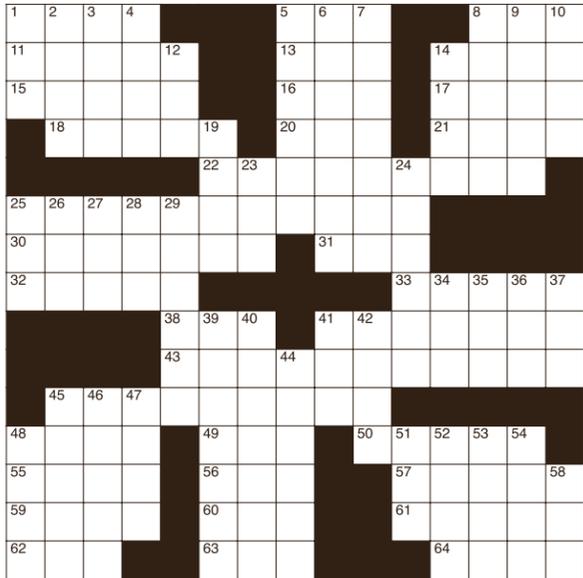
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# Puzzles

Answers on page 3  
Provided by MetroCreative



**CLUES ACROSS**

- 1. Swiss shoe company
- 5. \_\_\_ Caesar, comedian
- 8. \_\_\_ and flow
- 11. Horsefly
- 13. Egyptian pharaoh
- 14. African nation
- 15. Tony-winning actress Daisy
- 16. Initial public offering
- 17. Long-winding ridge
- 18. Guinea peoples
- 20. Fellow
- 21. About aviation
- 22. Able to make amends
- 25. Easy to perceive
- 30. Cut off
- 31. Northeast Thai language
- 32. Earthy pigment
- 33. Water nymphs

**CLUES DOWN**

- 1. Indicates a certain time (abbr.)
- 2. Expression of sorrow or pity
- 3. Central American lizard
- 4. Muslim military commanders
- 5. One who takes to the seas
- 6. Select jury
- 7. Parts of the small intestine
- 8. Painter's accessory
- 9. Honk
- 10. Ballpoint pen
- 12. Large, dark antelope
- 14. Ancient kingdom near Dead Sea
- 19. Exhausts
- 23. \_\_\_-bo: exercise system
- 24. Not written in any key or mode
- 25. Chinese principle underlying the universe
- 26. Corpuscle count (abbr.)
- 27. Powdery, post-burning residue

- 28. Company that rings receipts
- 29. Rugged mountain range
- 34. Commercials
- 35. NY football player
- 36. A form of be
- 37. Soviet Socialist Republic
- 39. Kindnesses
- 40. Natural electrical phenomenon
- 41. Your
- 42. Diana \_\_, singer
- 44. Upper surface of the mouth
- 45. National capital
- 46. Fluid in Greek mythology
- 47. Renowned jazz trumpeter
- 48. Freedom from difficulty
- 51. Swiss river
- 52. Prejudice
- 53. Actor Idris
- 54. Revolutionaries
- 58. Criticize



Solve the code to discover words related to fireworks.  
Each number corresponds to a letter.  
(Hint: 12 = L)

- A. 10 4 9 21 25 18 9 20 2**  
*Clue: Pyrotechnics*
- B. 12 4 11**  
*Clue: Ignited*
- C. 26 4 2 16 12 22 13**  
*Clue: Showcase*
- D. 2 16 22 9 20 12 21**  
*Clue: Shine bright with flashes of light*

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 I H L N D I T M U M E H T N A S Y R H C  
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 L S L I A T N A S E B D S U N T L E K G  
 R E D I P S L O D M V K B Y Y W N A L S E  
 O Y S G O B O A P O P E O N Y H U P E U  
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**WORDS**

- BROCADE
- CAKE
- CHRYSANTHEMUM
- CRACKLING RAIN
- CROSSETTE
- DAHLIA
- FALLING LEAVES
- FARFALLE
- FIREWORKS
- FISH
- FLARES
- GLITTERING
- MINE
- PATTERN
- PEONY
- PISTIL
- ROMAN CANDLE
- SALUTE
- SHELL
- SPIDER
- STROBE
- TAILS
- TOURBILLON
- WATERFALL

Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

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# Travel

## A Ferry to Dry Tortugas National Park

By Debi Lander  
mail@floridanewsline.com

“You’re standing in front of Dr. Mudd’s cell,” said the park ranger at Dry Tortugas National Park. “He was an inmate for four years.” During the Civil War, Fort Jefferson served as a prison and physician Samuel Mudd, found guilty of conspiracy in President Lincoln’s assassination (he claimed innocence), was its most famous prisoner. He’s the doctor who set John Wilkes Booth’s broken leg.



Today, the fort, an immense structure of repetitive brick columns and arches, lies within Dry Tortugas National Park, pretty much in the middle of nowhere. Not surprisingly, it’s one of the least visited National Parks.

I boarded an early morning National Park ferry in Key West, already the southernmost tip of the U.S., for the 70-nautical mile ride farther out. The day trip includes breakfast and lunch, as no food or water is available on the island. No sooner had I finished my cup of coffee when the boat crossed into a flatness of water. I felt like a shrunken sailor, minimized by the sur-

rounding gray skies and a watery abyss. I could see nothing in any direction except for the fog and the sea.

About two and a half hours later, the captain announced our impending arrival.

Ahead, the skeletal remains of the fort rose from the Gulf like a ghost town set within tropical terrain — the bizarre ruins of Fort Jefferson encompassing nearly all of the small island.

I joined the others leaving the ferry and unpacked my camera despite the dark clouds and drizzling rain. I’d come to investigate a National Park few are fortunate enough to see. And fortunate I was; soon the clouds cleared and the sun began to shine.

As I wandered around the grounds, the walls of this behemoth six-sided structure began to speak. They moaned with pain and hardship from those who died here due to the lack of freshwater and rampant yellow fever. Dr. Mudd helped out during the yellow fever epidemic and was later

pardoned; however, he was never accepted back into society, which many believe is the origin of the phrase “your name is mud.” A quick check reveals the falsehood.

Today, the National Park in the Gulf of Mexico protects 64,000 acres, but only 93 of those acres float above water. It’s the farthest offshore National Park in the U.S. system. Transport by ferry boat or seaplane is the only way to arrive.

The park survives mainly as a bird and marine sanctuary, drawing birders to the migration of terns. Snorkelers and scuba divers like to explore the shipwrecks and some of the most pristine coral reefs in North America. The islands sport more loggerhead and green sea turtle nests than anywhere else in North America. Unobstructed dark starry nights attract some astronomy enthusiasts who camp out with park permits. Historians love the site, too, but most are day-trippers.

The park ranger’s guided tour tells the story of 16 million bricks. “The structure is a 45-foot-high, three-level hexagon, whose 2,000 archways run half a mile around. Still unfinished after nearly 30 years of on-and-off construction, the nicknamed



Photos courtesy Debi Lander

‘Gibraltar of the Gulf’ succumbed in 1874 to yellow fever, hurricane damage, and the new rifled cannon, which rendered its eight-foot-thick walls obsolete.”

The fort was revived in 1898 as a Navy coaling station and then permanently abandoned in 1907. In 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt named it a national monument, and it became a U.S. National Park in 1992. A visit makes a great escape.

Check for park opening/closing information: <https://www.nps.gov/drto>

Florida Keys information: <https://fla-keys.com>

Visit [www.bylandersea.com](http://www.bylandersea.com) to read more of local travel writer Debi Lander’s stories and travel tips.

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