

Ponte Vedra



DECEMBER 2021 Volume 8 Issue 12

Ponte Vedra, Palm Valley, Nocatee and South Ponte Vedra Beach

A Florida NewsLine Publication



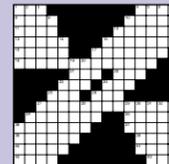
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Choose your Nutcracker

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

“The Nutcracker” is believed by many to be a time-honored holiday tradition. In Northeast Florida, the tradition continues with five productions of the ballet this December.

Since each performance is unique, following is a guide highlighting the dates, times and locations of each to help you choose “your” Nutcracker.



Graphic courtesy MetroCreative

Community Nutcracker

Dec. 10 at 7:30 p.m.
Dec. 11 at 1 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.
Florida Theatre
www.jaxnutcracker.org
Artistic Directors Dulce Anaya, Debra Rankin and Mark Spivak continue this holiday tradition which began in 1992. Community Nutcracker is the only nonprofit, volunteer-run organization that offers a portion of its proceeds to local charitable agencies with each performance — and has donated more than \$750,000 in the past 28 years. The performing company is made up of local talent with more than 200 dancers ranging in age from nine to adult from Northeast Florida auditioning and performing

Choose Your Nutcracker cont. on pg. 9

Palm Valley Boat Parade kicks off the season



By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Often referred to as “Not Your Average Boat Parade,” the Palm Valley Boat Parade is set to make this year’s annual holiday tradition the best one yet on Dec. 4 at 6 p.m.

“We had a great time last year, and we are expecting fantastic things this year as well,” said parade coordinator Beacham Still. “This is a beloved annual tradition that is very unique.”

Capt. Bob Brindle, who has been driving boat No. 77 in the lighted boat parade for the past 21 years, agreed.

“I am working on the boat, and I am very excited as this is one of my favorite boat parades in the area,” said Brindle, adding that the interaction between boats and people on the docks adds to its charm.

The parade will begin at 6 p.m. and start at Marker No. 3 just south of the Palm Valley Bridge. From there, the procession will continue north and is anticipated to reach Marsh Landing around 8:05 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. Brindle, who is on the lead boat, said live updates on pacing and expected arrival times at various landmarks will be given out as well. Water safety assistance is also provided during the event by the St. Johns County Sheriff’s Office, St. Johns County Fire Rescue and Florida Fish and Wildlife, Brindle said.

Wendy Patton, parade co-chair, said the best places to view the parade are the restaurants along the seven-mile boat route of Palm Valley’s Intracoastal Waterway: Palm Valley Outdoors, Barbara



Photos courtesy Wendy Patton

The Palm Valley Boat Parade will be held Dec. 4 at 6 p.m.

Jean’s On the Water, Palm Valley Fish Camp, Lulu’s Waterfront Grille and Valley Smoke. Also, Mickler’s Wharf and under the Palm Valley Bridge are perfect public viewing locations, she said.

Cash prizes will be given to boat winners in different size categories and to the best decorated docks.

“We blow the horn a lot,” said Brindle, who also participates in Jacksonville’s Light Boat Parade. “To me, the Palm Valley Boat Parade is more fun than any of the other parades around. It is open to anyone — you don’t have to have fancy decorations. You just come out and enjoy yourself — boaters and spectators.”

Still said typically 20 to 30 boats participate in the parade, and this year is looking strong with a lot of new boat owners who will participate for the first time. The pandemic caused many people to look for outdoor activities, which resulted in more boat owners in the area, he said.

“We are always looking to expand the event in such a way that it allows for continuity and growth,” said Still. “The parade’s real mission is to support the community by creating scholarships for local high school students at Ponte Vedra and Nease.”

He added that the parade is funded by generous participants, businesses and neighbors, and it also benefits the Palm Valley charities via the Palm Valley Community Association board.

“We like to give back to our local communities,” said Still, adding that he is interested in finding a title sponsor for future boat parades.

The deadline to enter a boat in the parade is Dec. 1, and the awards ceremony will be held on Dec. 12. For more information, visit palmvalleyboatparade.com or look for parade updates on their Facebook group page www.facebook.com/groups/Palmvalleyboatparade. Still can be reached at bstill@syncworks.com.

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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Phoebe!



Breed: Maltese

Favorite Activity:

Phoebe is a therapy dog at Mayo as well as a UNF Campus Canine and she makes visits to schools, nursing homes and many other places. She loves to hear people tell her that she made their day!

Favorite Treat:

Whatever daddy gives her

Favorite Friend:

She has so many she loves and adores, but Mrs. Joyce has a very special place in her heart.

How your BFF got her name:

Phoebe from the TV show, "Friends"

Do you have a cute pet? Send us your pet's picture and the answer to the five questions above before the 10th of the month. Also tell us you saw the BFF contest in Ponte Veda NewsLine. Your pet could be our BFF of the month and appear in Ponte Veda NewsLine! Email editor@floridanewsline.com to enter your pet.



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ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Are you interested in promoting your business in St. Johns Business Monthly, a feature section included in both The CreekLine and Ponte Veda NewsLine? **Call Linda 904-607-5062**

MYSTERY PHOTO

Can you guess where this is?
Submit your answer to:
mail@FloridaNewsLine.com.

Last month's Mystery Photo was the Flagler Health+ Village at Nocatee. Our winner was Ilse Swart. Congratulations!

CRYPTO FUN

Determine the code to reveal the answer!

Answers:
A. wrapping
B. receipt
C. ribbon
D. purchase

Answers to our Puzzles
PG 14

CHAMPIONSHIP SPECTATORS GUIDE

will be inserted in the March 2022 issue of Ponte Veda NewsLine!

Linda Gay
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Riverwood Women's Club recognizes Breast Cancer Awareness Month



Photo courtesy Linda Ommerborn

On Oct. 12, in recognition of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the Riverwood Women's Club in Nocatee welcomed guest speaker Jeannie Blaylock, First Coast News anchor. Blaylock, who started the Buddy Check 12 program, spoke about breast cancer awareness and the latest update on the "Buddy Bus." Members took part in a breast cancer memory board, a split-the-pot raffle and a best decorated bra contest. The meeting, sponsored by the Canopy Oaks neighborhood, benefitted the Buddy Bus with a check for \$2,190. Pictured are Celeste Venters and Cheryl Doss presenting Jeannie Blaylock with a check for \$2,190.



with St. Johns County School Board Member Kelly Barrera, District 4



Photo courtesy Kelly Barrera

Students from the Ponte Vedra High School BioTech Academy placed second and the International Business and Marketing Academy placed third at the county's career academy competition, "Project Innovation."

Q: Can you share the names of the students who were recently named National Merit Semifinalists?

A: We had 26 National Merit Semifinalists in St. John County, and 19 of them were from District 4 schools. Congratulations to Nease students Manas Adepu, Arnav Ajay Jadav, Parker Anderson, Abriham Bommineni, Tyler Covell, Peyton Cravasse, Anuraag Gandepalli, Tianyu Jiao, Nora Menon, Benjamin Prohofsky, Allison Roggen and Andrew Ryan. Congratulations also to Ponte Vedra High School students Tucker Dimberg, Lamia Festic, Luke Hargitai, Matthew Hurford, John Kelly, Roberto Lachner and Matthew Sides.

Q: Who are the recently announced Teachers and Rookie Teachers of the Year?

A: Each school has recently named the school-level Teachers and Rookie Teachers of the Year, who will advance to the county level. Congratulations to the following from District 4:
Landrum Middle School, Trisha Kee and Emily Gray
Nease High School, Kasey Mietzner and Margaret Bell
Ocean Palms Elementary, Stella Della Porta and Rodney Korn
Palencia Elementary, Martha DeVane and Danielle Hoffman
Palm Valley Academy Elementary, Sarah Lombardi and Nadia Sher
Palm Valley Academy Middle, Katie LaCoste

Pine Island Academy Elementary, Cindy Anderson and Lexi Leitman
Pine Island Academy Middle did not select Ponte Vedra High School, Linda Green and Daniel Lezcano
PVPV/Rawlings, Matt Sparks and Amy Pattison
Valley Ridge Academy Elementary, Leah Davis and Brooke Lovelace
Valley Ridge Academy Middle, Andrew Burk

Q: Is the St. Johns County School District still hiring?

A: Yes, especially in light of the new high schools that are opening. We are hosting a virtual teacher recruitment fair on Dec. 4. There will be another recruitment fair at Nease High School from 8 a.m. – 1 p.m. on Feb. 26, 2022. Also, our Come Drive the Bus with Us event held in October was very successful and we recruited two classes of bus operators. At this family friendly event, there were pumpkins to paint, music, and refreshments. Adults were able to practice driving a school bus.

Q: Do you have any upcoming events to announce?

A: Our County Spelling Bee will be held at the First Coast Technical College auditorium on Dec. 15 at 4 p.m.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

A: They can email me at kelly.barrera@stjohns.k12.fl.us or call me at (904) 547-7510.



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December

What's Going On in Ponte Vedra? A modified calendar of events

Community Calendar

Field of Dreams registration for 2022 is now open online. Field of Dreams is a specially designed baseball field located in Aberdeen that allows children with intellectual or physical disabilities the opportunity to play baseball, wear a uniform and play as a member of a team. For players to be guaranteed a uniform by opening day, registration must be completed by Dec. 31. Opening day is Feb. 5, 2022. Visit www.FOD-baseball.com to register online.

GTM Research Reserve will host a guided exploration hike on Saturday, Dec. 4 from 9 a.m. – 11 a.m. Meet at the GTM Research Reserve Trailhead Pavilion (west of Guana Dam), 505 Guana River Road. Wear comfortable, closed-toe shoes. The event is free but parking is \$3 per vehicle. Visit gtmnerr.org for more information and to register.

The Ponte Vedra Beaches Coalition will hold its December meeting on Dec. 6 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library.

Visit www.pvbcoalition.org for an agenda and more information.

Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), Ponte Vedra Chapter, will meet on Dec. 7, from 10:45 a.m. – 1 p.m. Contact pontevedrachapterndar@aol.com for additional details

The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable will meet on Monday, Dec. 13 at 12 p.m. via Zoom for an end of the year review of 2021 and a look forward to what the Roundtable wants to achieve in 2022. Email info@sjcroundtable.org to register for the meeting or for more information about the St. Johns County Civic Roundtable.

Nocatee announces the following events, open to the public: live music with the Bold City Brass Band on Dec. 12 from 3 p.m. – 4 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field and Nocatee Farmers Market on Saturday, Dec. 18 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. Visit www.nocatee.com

for more information.

The Newcomers of North St. Johns will host a meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, Dec. 14 at 10:30 a.m. at The Club Continental, 2143 Astor Street in Orange Park. The event will feature entertainment by Roger Dodd and Johnny Piantadosi, who will be singing traditional holiday favorites. The cost for the luncheon and program is \$31 for members. All reservations must be received by Dec. 3. Contact Sue Aird at sjaird@comcast.net to register. The Newcomers of North St. Johns offers a wide variety of activities, including smaller lunch groups, wine socials, golf, Mah Jongg, holiday parties, day trips and cultural events.

Ponte Vedra Woman's Club presents Table Settings Extraordinaire, designs by Angela Seija, on Dec. 15 at 12 p.m. at Southern Kitchen and Bar, 831 1st Street North in Jacksonville Beach. Register for this event at www.pontevedrawomansclub.com.

Pets seek "forever" homes this holiday season



Photo courtesy Jean Gleason

SAFE Pet Rescue will host a holiday pet adoption event on Saturday, Dec. 18 from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. at Pet Supermarket in Ponte Vedra Beach, 880 A1A North. SAFE will bring its mobile adoption van loaded with wonderful dogs and puppies who are hoping they will be adopted and join you and your family this holiday season in their "forever" new home. Santa will be available for pet photos, along with live holiday guitar music and a bake sale.



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

Q: What can you tell us about the Reentry Program?

A: This program seeks to offer county-sentenced (all sentences are less than one year and for non-egregious crimes) offenders the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and make improvements to their lives so that they can become productive members of society. My goal as sheriff is to make these people better than when they came to jail.

Q: What does the program offer?

A: We offer mental health services if needed and also education. Many of these folks, while in jail, have participated in jobs such as in the culinary department or on work squads doing labor such as carpentry or landscaping. In fact we've teamed up with First Coast Technical College and principal Chris Force to offer a certificate program for skills such as small engine repair and culinary. We also offer resume advice and interview training.

Q: How can local companies help?

A: Our goal is to help these people get good employment after they are released from jail, preferably near where they live. We have people in the jail from every walk of life and from every area and community of St. Johns County.

We are seeking local businesses, especially in northern St. Johns County, to partner with. We know businesses are looking for people to work, and we have many qualified and motivated people who will soon be released that could be interviewed for open positions. We allow our partner businesses to come into the jail for interviews and plan to have a job fair soon.

Q: If a local business is interested in partnering with SJSO for this program, what should they do?

A: Our Reentry Coordinator, Lt. Keith Melton, assesses each individual to determine the best solution for his or her future, so businesses can be assured that we have spent months choosing the best candidates who sincerely want to work and change their future. Businesses that are interested in partnering with us for this program should contact him at (904) 209-1983.

Q: What is the best way for our readers to contact you with any questions or suggestions about this article?

A: They can email me at sheriff@sjsoc.org or call me at (904) 824-8304. Also, our website, www.sjsoc.org has a wealth of resources, from alarm registration to Crime Stoppers to our Neighbors app.

Guest Editorial

By St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes

I fully support the following message to the voters of Florida, recently released by our Florida Supervisors of Elections Association. Should you have any questions or concerns about how elections are conducted in St. Johns County, please reach out to us directly to get the facts. You might be surprised to learn about processes we already have in place to secure your vote!

Florida Supervisors of Elections Message to Voters on Election Integrity

The strength of our nation rests on the ability that "We the People" have a voice in its governance and are confident in the integrity of our elections. In this hour, public trust in our elections is being systematically undermined, to the detriment of all Americans. During and after the 2020 Presidential Election, the integrity of our democracy has been challenged by misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation that sows discord and undermines trust in America's electoral process.

As your Supervisors of Elections, and citizens of our own communities, we have dedicated our public service to the impartial administration of Florida's election laws and conducting fair, honest, and accurate elections. Those laws make it easy to vote and hard to cheat. Florida voters can be confident in the professionals they elected to administer our elections, and the protections that ensure every ballot is counted accurately and only eligible Floridians are on the voter rolls.

machines that have been publicly tested before and after each election. And after every election, we always conduct a public audit to verify that the results are accurate.

Officials throughout Florida are confident in the integrity of our system. Governor Ron DeSantis recently stated that "What we do in Florida is, there's a pre- and post-election audit that happens automatically. So, that has happened. It passed with flying colors in terms of how that's going."

Similarly, Secretary of State Laurel Lee, Florida's Chief Election Officer said "We have already completed an audit of all 67 counties. And that audit demonstrated an exceedingly high level of election integrity and, again, demonstrated that our results were accurate, reliable."

In the Gettysburg Address, President Lincoln proclaimed that the American people must dedicate themselves to ensuring that "Government of the people, by the people, for the people must not perish from the Earth." It is through elections that government by the people is accomplished. In this spirit, we call on our fellow voters to dedicate themselves to learning about the many safeguards already in place that guarantee the accuracy of Florida's elections.

We encourage you to get the facts from the trusted election experts in Florida. Contact your local Supervisor of Elections or visit their website to learn more about how elections are administered and the security measures in place that protect our votes.

Florida law requires that all voting in Florida is done using paper ballots. Those ballots can only be counted using certified

[Editor's Note: Visit www.votesjc.com for more information about elections in St. Johns County.]

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Knitting group finds the right pattern

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewslines.com

Dorothy Flannery loves to knit, so about three months ago she decided to see if anyone else shared her interest in Ponte Vedra Beach. Turns out quite a few people responded to a message she posted on Palm Valley Next Door, and a knitting group formed. Now, every Wednesday night at Panera Bread in Ponte Vedra Beach, a group of ladies gather to knit, share patterns and socialize.

Flannery learned to knit from her mother and still references a 1979 copy of the



Maria Carletta with Dorothy Flannery looking at Carletta's first knitting project.

“Reader’s Digest Complete Guide to Needlework” when she has questions about patterns. It is complete with an inscription from her mother that she holds near to her heart: “A treasure found and put to good use by Dorothy. Love, Mer.”

“Knitting is timeless. It hasn’t changed. The fibers have changed, but the technique is the same,” said Flannery, who is also a longtime travel agent.

Mary Beth Goodspeed saw Flannery’s post right before she moved to Ponte Vedra Beach from Denver, Colo. She learned to knit from her mother and grandmother, beginning in the first grade.

“I thought this would be a great way to meet new people and socialize,” said Goodspeed, whose current project is a child’s sweater.

Knitting group members say that most of what they create they give away as gifts, and the best part of knitting is the “zen” feeling that it creates.

Member Elaine Lacy, who learned to knit as a child, is currently working on baby afghans using a bamboo cotton blend, which tends to be softer and easily washable.

“It’s fun because you get to work with so many colors,” said Lacy, referring to the grid pattern of the afghan. “You don’t get bored.”



Knitting group members look at a baby afghan that knitter Elaine Lacy made. Photos courtesy Tiffany Merlo Phelps

Lacy is from New Hampshire where she said everyone would knit because of the long winters. When she moved to Florida four years ago, she found very few fellow knitters in the area.

Maria Carletta, who knows how to crochet, always wanted to learn how to knit, so she joined the group right away. Carletta, originally from Portugal, moved to Ponte Vedra Beach in 1996 after living in Connecticut and New York.

“All my friends in Connecticut used to knit, and I always wanted to learn,” said Carletta.

Flannery started Carletta with a classic “My first knit sweater” pattern, and Carletta quickly took to it. Flannery went with Carletta to the store to pick out the pink yarn.

Flannery said that she prefers buying her yarn in person as opposed to online, so that she can see the yarn clearly.

“You really want to see the yarn in daylight, and you want to feel the fiber,” she said. “When you consider the amount of time you will invest in making something, you want to make sure that you don’t knit with cheap yarn.”

Club member Robin Stetler said knitting provides her with relaxation as she normally knits throws. “It is mindless the way that I do it. I love to knit on long drives,” she said.

Anyone interested in joining the knitting group should email Flannery at dorothy@topsailjourneys.com.

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Holiday **GIFT** GUIDE



Unique reasons to shop at small businesses

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

The numbers don't lie. Locally owned businesses may be classified as "small," but they have a big impact on the national economy.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Business Employment Dynamics report, small businesses created 10.5

million net new jobs between 2000 and 2019, accounting for 65.1 percent of net new jobs created since 2000 in the United States.

Supporting locally owned businesses is a great way to support a neighbor, but that's not the only attraction. Here are several reasons to shop small.

The feel-good factor: Doing for others

certainly has an impact on the person on the receiving end, but also benefits the do-gooders. A November 2020 survey by Union Bank found that 72 percent of Americans said supporting small businesses was more important than getting the best deals. That may be due to the feeling of helping out a fellow neighbor.

Create job opportunities: Shopping at small businesses keeps those establishments afloat, and it also keeps their employees afloat. Small businesses are the largest employers in the United States. A person may never know when he or she — or a relative — will need a job. Keeping small businesses viable provides a strong job market for locals.

Keep more money in the community: The Small Business Administration says \$48 out of every \$100 spent at a small business stays in the community. Spend the same \$100 at a national retailer and only \$14 stays.

Enjoy a more local flavor: National retailers and other businesses follow a global business model that may not allow for much customization, but small businesses can provide products or services that relate directly to the needs of the communities they serve. These same small businesses also may be more inclined to work with local vendors and start-ups than national companies that have global supply chains.



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By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

During this year's season of hope and giving, Wreaths Across America Radio invites troops from across the country and overseas, as well as their loved ones at home, to send a holiday greeting to one another in the form of an internet radio greeting. This is called the "Remembrance Ring" program.

The "Remembrance Ring" provides American military families the opportunity to extend holiday greetings and thanks to service members and veterans through Wreaths Across America Radio, a stream you can listen to anywhere, 24/7 at www.wreathsassamerica.org/ radio, and via the iHeart Radio app, or download it at the App Store or on Google. Last year the program connected many families from all over the globe.

"The United States currently has 1.3 million active duty members, reservists and guards serving within our borders and abroad. Additionally, more than 24 million veterans have faithfully served

our country in the past," said Karen Worcester, Wreaths Across America executive director. "I am honored and thrilled to be able to offer these soldiers and their families the opportunity to share their holiday greeting. The Remembrance Ring is a wonderful gift to give and is especially important for sharing love and support for their sacrifices at this special time of the year."

Anyone can participate by calling (888) 348-3352 to record a short holiday greeting. Wreaths Across America Radio will play that message on-air during the holidays to help bring families, loved ones, members of our military, and Americans closer together for the holiday season. These special Messages will be broadcast between Nov. 22 and Dec. 31, 2021.

You can sponsor a wreath for \$15 at www.wreathsassamerica.org/. Each sponsorship goes toward a fresh balsam veteran's wreath that will be placed on the headstone of an American hero on Saturday, Dec. 19, 2020, as part of National Wreaths Across America Day.



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Holiday GIFT GUIDE



Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library to host Holiday Giving Trees

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

In the spirit of the holiday season, the St. Johns County Public Library System will once again host St. Johns CARES, Inc. "Giving Trees" at four branch libraries including the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch through Dec. 7, 2021. This annual initiative has been held each year since St. Johns CARES, Inc. was established in 2007 as an all-volunteer organization committed to assisting local charities in St. Johns County.

Patrons are invited to fill "wishes" placed as paper ornaments on seasonal trees. Each ornament contains a client wish from one of 40 local non-profit orga-

nizations serving the elderly, veterans, those experiencing homelessness, children, and animals in St. Johns County.

Collection boxes and "Giving Trees" are located at the Anastasia Island Branch, Bartram Trail Branch, Ponte Vedra Beach Branch, and Southeast Branch libraries. Donations will be collected, sorted, and boxed for the non-profit organizations by St. Johns CARES, Inc. Monetary donations are accepted and will be used to purchase unfulfilled wishes and needs.

Visit www.stjohnscares.org for more information about St. Johns CARES, Inc. or to make a monetary donation.

Did you know?

Lights on a Christmas tree may seem like a relatively recent phenomenon, but people who can't wait to deck the halls each December may be surprised to learn that this beloved tradition dates all the way back to the late nineteenth century. Edward Johnson, a friend and colleague of Thomas Edison, introduced holiday light bulbs in 1882. Prior to that, candles were lit on trees and families would briefly gaze at this awe-inspiring bit of holiday decor before the candles were quickly extinguished. Johnson is credited with being the first to suggest light bulbs, which were invented by his friend Edison, be used to light trees in place of candles. While many were impressed by Johnson's eight-bulb holiday display, it remained a novelty until the 1920s, when preas-



sembled lights became more accessible. Since then, Christmas tree lights have taken hold as a must-have piece of holiday decor in households across the globe.

Choose Your Nutcracker cont. from pg. 1 in the production. In an effort to promote the arts in schools, Community Nutcracker also offers matinee performances for school groups as well as a Community Service Night (invitation only).

Christ Church Nutcracker Ballet

Dec. 11 at 6 p.m.
Lazzara Theater, UNF Fine Arts Department
www.missfeliciasdance.com

This year marks the 26th performance of the Christ Church Nutcracker Ballet, directed by Felicia Rhoden of the Christ Church Dance Ministry as well as owner of Miss Felicia's Dance. Nearly 300 performers, aged two to 90 years old, will take the stage.

Jacksonville Symphony's First Coast Nutcracker

Dec. 17 at 8 p.m.
Dec. 18 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.
Dec. 19 at 2 p.m.
Moran Theater at the Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts
www.jaxsymphony.org/first-coast-nutcracker/
Jacksonville Symphony's First Coast

Nutcracker has been a tradition in North Florida for more than 40 years. Under the direction of choreographer and artistic director Rhonda Stampalia, the First Coast Nutcracker showcases internationally renowned principal dancers, the area's finest young dancers, and Tchaikovsky's best-loved melodies performed by the Jacksonville Symphony. Educational performances are offered on Dec. 16 – 17 in an effort to introduce school children to the symphony, the ballet and how to be a good audience member.

The Nutcracker 2021 by the Florida Ballet

Dec. 17 at 7:30 p.m.
Dec. 18 at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.
Dec. 19 at 2 p.m.
Lazzara Theater, UNF Fine Arts Center
floridaballet.org

The Florida Ballet's Nutcracker features swirling snowflakes, waltzing flowers, and dancing bonbons. From the captivating dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy to the iconic snow scene, this enchanting classical ballet is set to the beloved music of Tchaikovsky and features more than 100 local dancers.

St. Augustine Ballet Nutcracker

Dec. 18 at 1:30 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Dec. 19 at 2 p.m.
Lewis Auditorium at Flagler College
www.saintaugustineballet.com
This year's production of "The Nutcracker" marks the 13th annual performance by the St. Augustine Ballet and features sparkling snowflakes, dancing dolls and mischievous mice. The St. Augustine Ballet, under the artistic

direction of Luis Abella, is a non-profit organization with a mission to involve community members of all ages in meaningful dance experiences.

All of these performances are designed to enchant, enthrall, and bring families and community members together for the holiday season. Which one is right for you?



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Palm Valley Baptist Church

Candlelight Communion



6:00 PM on Christmas Eve



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www.PalmValleyBC.org



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ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Florida Farm Bureau elects St. Johns County Commissioner as its new president

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Commissioner Jeb S. Smith formally announced his resignation as District 2 commissioner at the Nov. 2, 2021, regular meeting of the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners. His resignation comes shortly after being elected as the President of the Florida Farm Bureau. The Florida Farm Bureau is the state's largest agricultural organization with more than 136,000 members. The organization represents farm owners who produce all 300 of the state's agricultural commodities.

Commissioner Smith is a fifth-generation cattle, hay, and sod farmer whose family has farmed the land in St. Johns County for more than a century. He currently serves as pastor of God's Way Baptist

Church in Hastings, which he founded in 2005.

"It's been a great honor and a privilege to serve the people of St. Johns County these past seven years, and it's been a pleasure to serve with the members past and present of this board," he said. "May God bless St. Johns County and its residents."

Commissioner Smith was first elected to the Board of County Commissioners in 2014 and subsequently re-elected in 2018. His district contains a large portion of rural St. Johns County and includes Hastings, Elkton, West Augustine, and Flagler Estates. The District 2 seat will now be filled by a Governor Ron DeSantis appointee for the remainder of Commissioner Smith's term.

Questions to ask when soliciting customer feedback

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

The value of customer feedback is significant. According to Dimension Data's 2017 Global Consumer Experience Benchmarking Report, 81 percent of organizations credit improving the customer experience with differentiating them from their competitors. In addition, 84 percent of firms reported a growth in revenue after implementing strategies to improve the customer experience.

In order to improve the customer experience, business owners must first recognize what their customers want. Soliciting feedback from patrons can help business owners identify what their customers want. Thanks to email, social media and online services like Google Reviews, it's now easier than ever for businesses to solicit and identify customer needs. In addition to asking patrons to review their experiences online, business owners can ask the following questions to improve experiences for their customers.

- How did you hear about us?

- Did we meet your expectations?
- Was the staff helpful?
- How could staff be more helpful?
- What was the most enjoyable part of your experience with our business?
- What do you most enjoy about our products or services?
- Did you shop online or in store or both?
- How can we improve your in store or online shopping experience?
- Are you likely to recommend us to friends and family?
- What would you change about your experience?

These questions are straightforward and can be answered in a matter of minutes, but honest feedback from customers can be incredibly valuable to business owners. Feedback also can be valuable for customers, especially when they feel their voices have been heard. In fact, a recent report from Apptentive, who specialize in customer feedback services, indicated that 97 percent of customers are somewhat likely to exhibit brand loyalty to a company that implements their feedback.

Business Briefs

New veterinary urgent care option for St. Johns

UrgentVet, the first dedicated urgent care clinic for pets, is expanding its presence in Florida with the opening of a clinic in St. Johns at 855 County Road 210 West — in the new Beachwalk retail center. The new clinic will be UrgentVet's 12th nationally and the ninth to open in Florida.

Pet parents can use the website to check their pet in, and text, call or use the clinic's intercom to alert staff once they arrive. If they prefer, pet parents can remain in their car or be escorted by a member of the UrgentVet staff directly to an exam room.

UrgentVet fills the widening care gap that exists between traditional daytime veterinary practices and specialized 24-hour emergency hospitals, providing affordable after-hours relief on weeknights, weekends and holidays year-round. The vision behind the UrgentVet practice model is to provide dogs and cats with trusted after-hours acute care just like an urgent care for humans. Pet parents in the area should continue to take pets to their primary care veterinarian for wellness care and routine visits, but UrgentVet offers a trusting and compassionate option after-hours.

The clinic itself is 2,450 square feet with a total of six exam rooms—two for large dogs, three for small dogs and one exclusively for cats—in addition to a separate comfort room. Other features include an in-house diagnostic lab, digital X-ray machine, ultrasound and cloud-based medical record-keeping software. The large dog rooms contain state-of-the-art lift tables, which also double as a non-slip scale, that lower to the floor for easy access for dogs who may be too heavy to pick up.

The Morris Center opens in Ponte Vedra Beach

Community and business leaders, families and clients attended the grand opening of The Morris Center Ponte Vedra Beach at 50 Executive Way in Ponte Vedra Beach on Thursday, Oct. 28. Following a ribbon cutting ceremony, guests participated in tours of the state-of-the-art center to learn about its innovative and evidence-based transdisciplinary-team approach to diagnosing, treating and remediating dyslexia.

Participants had the opportunity to participate in several interactive activities to experience first-hand the struggles people with dyslexia are challenged with every day. The tour also included a visit to its one-of-a-kind, Sensory Gym used for occupational therapy to improve weak sensory and motor skills like tying shoes, cutting with scissors, hand-eye coordination and other challenges that often co-occurs with dys-

lexia. Members of the Occupational Therapy, Speech-Language Pathology, Clinical Psychology/Neuropsychology Transdisciplinary Team were on hand for attendees to learn more about how the center improves the skills of children and adults who have difficulty with school or job success due to poor reading, spelling, comprehension, writing, speech, math, sensory processing, attention, behavior and/or social skills.

The need continues to be great for accurate diagnosis and scientifically tested and proven effective treatment and remediation for the best outcomes of each client. Children and adults with improperly diagnosed, undiagnosed or improperly treated dyslexia commonly suffer from low self-esteem, academic struggles, employment difficulties and even incarceration. The Morris Centers' dyslexia program is backed by medical grade research proof of efficient effectiveness for even severe dyslexia in children, teens and adults.

Medical center named High Performing Hospital

Baptist Medical Center Beaches has been recognized as a High Performing Hospital for 2021 – 22 by U.S. News & World Report for treating a variety of procedures and conditions.

Baptist Beaches earned High Performing ratings in these areas:

- Congestive heart failure
- Colon cancer surgery
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
- Diabetes
- Heart attack

The High Performing rating is in recognition of care that was significantly better than the national average, as measured by factors such as patient outcomes. High Performing is the highest rating U.S. News awards for these types of care.

The annual Procedures & Conditions ratings, now in their seventh year, are designed to assist patients and their doctors in making informed decisions about where to receive care for common conditions and elective procedures. These ratings extend the U.S. News mission of providing consumers with patient decision support beyond the Best Hospitals rankings, which are geared toward complex specialty care.

For the 2021 – 22 ratings, U.S. News evaluated more than 4,750 medical centers nationwide in 17 procedures and conditions. Fewer than a third of all hospitals received any high-performing rating, and only 11 earned this rating in all procedures and conditions. The state and metro area rankings recognize hospitals that received high-performing ratings across multiple areas of care.

Are you interested in promoting your business in St. Johns Business Monthly, a feature section included in both The CreekLine and Ponte Vedra NewsLine?

ST. JOHNS Business Monthly



Call or email Linda Gay
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(904) 607-5062

PopHistory

The Anarchists

By Scott A. Grant
mail@floridanewsline.com

During a 40-year period that evenly overlapped the turn of the 20th Century, a group of radicals terrified the established world. They called themselves Anarchists and despite the name, they were actually organized. They had meetings and newspapers and an agenda. That agenda was decidedly anti-government and anti-capitalist.

The Anarchists expressed their dissatisfaction through assassinations. They called the attacks "Propaganda of the Deed." The idea was that lone assassins sacrificing their lives for the cause and killing government and business leaders would prompt a revolution that would bring down the corrupt institutions of power.

In 1881, an Anarchist exploded a bomb killing Tsar Alexander II. In 1892, a different Anarchist attempted to shoot Carnegie Steel president, Henry Frick. Frick survived and nearly beat his attacker to death. Four attempts were made on the life of John D. Rockefeller. In the 1890s, the president of France and the prime minister of Spain were both assassinated.

In 1901, an American Anarchist with the unpronounceable name of Leon Czolgosz shot President William McKinley. Despite heightened security following the Anarchist assassination of King Umberto II of Italy earlier that year, Czolgosz was able to approach McKinley in a receiving line with a pistol bandaged in his hand.

Vice President Teddy Roosevelt was sworn in as the new President. Eleven years later, Teddy had his own run in with an Anarchist. On the way to give a speech in Milwaukee, Roosevelt was shot. His lengthy 50-page speech, folded in his breast pocket slowed the bullet and saved his life. Famously, Teddy went and gave his speech despite a bullet hole in his chest.

Meanwhile, in the heart of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Hapsburgs were suffering through their own version of hell. Crown Prince Rudolf, the only son of Emperor Franz-Josef and his spouse, the Empress Elisabeth, was unhappy. He did not like his pretty wife. Like many unhappy men, he sought solace in booze and other women. He contracted a venereal disease that made him infertile. Princess

Stephanie of Belgium had borne him a daughter. Now, she too was infected and infertile.

Rudolf wanted to ask the Pope for an annulment, but Franz-Josef forbade it. The 30-year-old Crown Prince locked himself away in his grand hunting lodge with his favorite mistress, a curvy 17-year-old Baroness named Maria. They wrote each other emo-like letters expressing their soulful angst. Then one day, overcome by their misery, they entered into a suicide pact. They were found dead in a pool of their own blood. The Empress Elisabeth never recovered. She wore black for the rest of her life.

This left the Empire without a direct heir. The crown would now pass to Franz-Josef's younger brother and when he died in 1898, to his nephew Archduke Franz Ferdinand. That same year, the Empress Elisabeth was vacationing incognito in Switzerland. When a local paper announced her presence, she caught the attention of an Anarchist. Luigi Lucheni had travelled to Geneva hoping to kill the French Dauphin. The Dauphin slipped through his fingers. The distraught Empress presented a second opportunity. He stabbed her through the heart with an industrial file.

In June of 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand travelled to Sarajevo with his wife. Bosnian Anarchists planned to blow up his car. They failed but injured some of the guards in the trailing vehicle. Franz Ferdinand insisted on visiting the injured in hospital. He got lost on the way and ran into another Bosnian Anarchist named Gavrillo Princip. Princip shot him dead. The world was plunged into a bloody war that brought down four monarchies and killed about 20 million people. Arguably, that war led to an even bloodier second that killed more than 70 million more.

People believe what they want to believe. Each generation imagines that their travails are worse than those that came before. We want to imagine that everything is new. History begs to differ. It does repeat and we as a society are sadly doomed to repeat it.

Scott A. Grant is a historian and author. By day, he is the Chief Investment Officer of Standfast Asset Management.

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Briefs

Library announces St. Johns Reads 2022

The St. Johns County Public Library System has announced a new approach to the 17th annual St. Johns Reads community-wide reading program. Featuring four titles across four different genres, “St. Johns Reads: Secrets” will interest not only fans of fantasy, mystery, or historical fiction, but those who enjoy stories of the complicated relationship we have with ourselves and others. The titles for “St. Johns Reads: Secrets” are:

- “Crossing the Creek: The Literary Friendship of Zora Neale Hurston and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings,” by Anna Lillios
- “Children of Blood and Bone,” by Tomi Adeyemi
- “Little Fires Everywhere,” by Celeste Ng
- “The Vanishing Half,” by Brit Bennett

Titles will be available to enjoy in print, large print, audiobook on disc, digital audiobook, and ebook formats. A variety of virtual and in-person programs inspired by all four titles will be offered throughout the month of January 2022, including food and art programs, author interviews, and much more.

As in the previous two years, the St. Johns County Public Library will also host the “Lace Up for Libraries” 5K event as the big finale to St. Johns Reads 2022. The race will begin at 8 a.m. on Saturday, Jan. 29, 2022 at the

Nocatee Station Field, 400 Nocatee Center Way. Participants will help raise funds for programming and author visits for future St. Johns Reads events. Visit www.laceupforlibraries5k.itsy-ourrace.com to learn more about this event, including the virtual participation option. Contact your local branch library or visit www.sjcpls.org to read any one or all of this year’s titles and discover more about “St. Johns Reads: Secrets” events and programs.

Cooler temperatures do little to temper hot housing market

Although the bidding wars that drove up housing prices in Northeast Florida this summer have cooled somewhat, the region’s hot residential market shows no signs of diminishing, even as temperatures outside become colder.

Nationally, existing home sales continue to be plentiful, buoyed up by strong demand, low interest rates, and a slight tick in new listings in recent months, according to the National Association of Realtors®. In Northeast Florida, the median price of single-family residential housing hit \$339,000 in October, an 18.9 percent increase since October 2020. Active inventory hovered at 3,252 homes, a 6.8 percent decrease from September, leaving 1.4 months-worth of inventory available to buyers, a 7.6 percent decrease from September 2021.

Single family homes in Northeast Florida continued to be less affordable,

registering 104 on the affordability index, a measure that accounts for housing affordability within the region. The index aims to measure the ability of a typical family to earn enough to qualify for a mortgage on a home based on current interest rates, median income, and median home prices. Higher numbers mean greater affordability.

In St. Johns County, October’s median sale price of single-family residential housing was \$465,000, a 2.1 percent increase from September’s mark of \$455,000 and a 17.7 percent jump from October 2020. The affordability index in St. Johns County was 76, and its active inventory represented 765 single family homes, a 4 percent drop from the 797 homes on the market in September. The typical single-family residence spent a median of 21 days on the market and all sellers of single-family residences — 100.3% — received their asking price or more with 29 percent closing over list price.

Irrigation system schedule should change with time change

As of Sunday, Nov. 7, homeowners and businesses across the 18 counties of the St. Johns River Water Management District should reset their automatic sprinkler systems to water no more than once a week. When “falling back” — turning your clocks back an hour — it’s also time to change your irrigation system timer to water your lawn only on your designated watering day.

“Research shows that, in Florida’s cooler months, grass and plants don’t need as much water to be healthy — you can save water and money and still have a beautiful lawn,” said St. Johns River Water Management District Executive Director Mike Register.

Public water supply is the largest category of water use in the District’s 18-county region — about 565.5 million gallons of water a day. Most of this water is for residential water use, and many people don’t realize that more than half of total residential water use is used outdoors if the home has an automatic irrigation system. Efficient irrigation systems that are scheduled correctly can save up to half of that outdoor water use.

Because lawns need significantly less water in Florida’s winter months, watering restrictions are in place to ensure that water used for irrigation is used efficiently. During Eastern Standard Time (early November through mid-March), landscape irrigation is limited to no more than one day a week on the following schedule:

- Saturday at addresses that end in an odd number or have no address
- Sunday at addresses that end in an even number
- Tuesday at non-residential addresses
- No irrigation is allowed between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Visit www.WaterLessFlorida.com for more information and water-saving tips.

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Get to Know ...

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Lauren Blocker

Lauren Blocker initially planned to pursue medicine in college, majoring in Environmental Science and even taking the Medical College Admission Test. “However, I still felt the pull of a legal career and ultimately decided to go to law school,” said Blocker, now a recently appointed St. Johns County court judge. Blocker’s attraction to the law came to her organically with her grandfather, aunt, stepfather and her mom all working as lawyers. And while her father died before she was born, his stellar reputation as a lawyer left its mark on Blocker, 37. “I keep that memory in my mind always. I hope they are both proudly looking down on me,” said Blocker, whose grandfather passed away in 2010. A picture of her grandfather sits in her office as a reminder of his influence, and she carries her father’s briefcase (her uncle saved it and had it refurbished for her) with her to work every day. “I understand that it is a huge responsibility, and I take it very seriously. I am excited to get to work,” said Blocker, who is with the Seventh Judicial Circuit representing Flagler, Putnam, Volusia and St. Johns counties. She began her judgeship Oct. 11 after the Florida Legislature created the additional county judge position. St. Johns County officials favored this added position because of the tremendous population growth in the area, which put a strain on the court system. Appointed by Gov. Ron DeSantis, Blocker is the third county



Photo courtesy Lauren Blocker

judge to be appointed after the state law was created (the last time such a position was added in this area was in the 1970s). Blocker was previously working as corporate counsel to Fidelity Information Services.

Q: How did you get interested in the law?

A: I have always been interested in the law and had a great respect for it. I liked the fact that we have one set of laws, and we are all treated the same under these laws. I have always had a strong desire to serve, and this is my chance to do so as a neutral arbitrator. I was incredibly humbled to be chosen

and excited to be the representative of the citizens.

Q: You attended the University of Florida for your undergrad degree and Florida Coastal for your law degree. Talk about your college experiences.

A: I had a great college experience at the University of Florida. I became a fan of college football, met my best friend (my husband), and learned the Italian language. I also had a good experience in law school, participating in moot court, law review, and a variety of different externships, with the judiciary as well as a law firm that

practiced environmental law. That was initially the area of the law that I was interested in given my college major.

Q: You served as a judicial law clerk. What did you learn from this experience?

A: I served as a judicial law clerk to U.S. Magistrate Judge Carol Mirando, U.S. Magistrate Judge Patricia D. Barksdale and U.S. District Judge Marcia Morales Howard. I really enjoyed working on as many different areas of the law as possible. It was a unique opportunity to see the court from inside the chambers. It gave me a 360-degree view of the legal system. I think I have had an atypical trajectory to the bench, but all of that experience helped me. I learned so much from all these role models. That’s what I am most excited about now — having the chance to serve as a county court judge, hearing both civil and criminal cases.

Q: You are married to St. Johns County Commissioner Jeremiah Blocker. How did you meet?

A: He was actually the first person that I met when I moved into the apartment next door to him my first year of college at Florida. We used to stay up on his porch having long conversations, and our relationship grew from there.

Q: What was the best advice that you got from your grandfather?

A: Be true to yourself always, present yourself accurately and remember that your reputation is everything. Most of this I learned simply by watching my grandfather and witnessing his hard work ethic. My personal belief is to always try to do your best with what you have.

Get to Know ...

Interested in being featured? Email Martie Thompson at editor@FloridaNewsLine.com

CHAMPIONSHIP SPECTATORS GUIDE will be inserted in the March 2022 issue of Ponte Vedra NewsLine!



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Ocean Palms Elementary falls into Family Night



Photos courtesy Lisa Farese

Ocean Palms Elementary School welcomed students, families, and staff back to the school for an evening of fall fun on Nov. 1 for its Fall Festival. With dinner from Trasca & Co Eatery, games such as ring toss and skeet ball, a candy walk, an inflatable slide, face painting, balloon creations, a DJ, and, of course, an opportunity to slime one's teacher, it was a night to remember. Additionally, parents and their children could shop at the book fair. All proceeds from the Fall Festival will be used to support STEM, the science lab, and new technology for the school.



Photo courtesy Buzz Wood
Participants in the GreenWise 5K for Finn.

Nocatee community comes together to raise funds for young cancer patient

By Laura Gainor
mail@floridanewslines.com

On Sept. 25, more than 100 Nocatee community members participated in a dual fundraising event to help raise funds for Finn Halloran, a four-year-old Nocatee resident who was diagnosed with a brain tumor one year ago at the age of three. More than \$5,300 was raised to help alleviate the stresses of his growing medical bills and in honor of September being Childhood Cancer Awareness Month.

The events included a 5K run starting at GreenWise in Nocatee's Town Center, followed by a Kidz Boot Camp hosted at Burn Boot Camp, in which Finn himself showed how strong he is to fight this cancer by finishing both the 3.1 miles and the 30-minute boot camp.

"We feel really honored by our community's generosity — in giving their time, their

resources, and their support," said Finn's parents, Evan and Ann Halloran. "We've felt so much love over the past year from our friends, neighbors, families, colleagues. The pediatric cancer journey is long and full of questions... but it's been made a bit easier thanks to all the help our family has received. You look at Finn and you can see how much he's benefited from all the support."

Since Finn's initial diagnosis he has gone through chemotherapy treatments to help shrink the size of the tumor and this past March, he and his family traveled to Boston Children's Hospital where he underwent brain surgery. Doctors were miraculously able to remove more than 90 percent of his tumor.

Visit the family's GoFundMe page www.gofundme.com/f/finn-halloran for more details about Finn's story and if you would like to show your support for the Halloran family.

Newcomers of the Beaches serve community with Volunteer Day

By Bonnie Evans
mail@floridanewslines.com

The members of Newcomers of the Beaches spread themselves across the Jacksonville metropolitan area on their community service day to do volunteer work for a wide range of charities.

At BEAM, 17 members broke into two groups. One group created beautiful baskets of items for the Beam of Light Beach Ball. The other group spruced up the courtyard area in weeding, planting and adding pine straw. They weeded the vegetable areas where food is grown for the food pantry.

Three members served at the Cummer Museum, where they organized supplies for the studios for an upcoming paper making activity. Six animal loving members volunteered at Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services, where they socialized outdoors with dogs awaiting adoption. Two Newcomer volunteers worked at the Foster Closet, where they unpacked and organized Halloween costumes for foster children.

At Port in the Storm, eight members worked as a great team in making and

delivering 175 brown bag meals, which helped feed young homeless women. Three of the creative craft members were at Ponte Vedra Gardens, where they assisted 10 mentally impaired residents in decorating birdhouses for Halloween using stickers.

At Rethreaded, there were volunteers who dismantled the leather covers of donated airline seats which will be used to make something new such as purses, bags, wallets, key chains, jewelry pieces and journals, which are sold to raise funds for victims of human trafficking.

Another group of members volunteered at the Betty Griffin Center, which meets the needs of victims of domestic violence. The volunteers cleaned and organized the extensive pantry. They also sanitized the furniture and toys in the children's playroom.

Newcomers of the Beaches is a social group of women looking to make friends since they recently moved to the beaches area or had a life changing event such as retirement or loss of a spouse. Visit www.newcomersofthebeaches.com for more information.



Photo courtesy Bonnie Evans



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Spotlight on Nease athletes



The Nease boys' swim and dive team.



Sydney Gomes, Savannah Gomes and Alli Fifield of the Nease girls' basketball team.



Photos courtesy Laurel Madson
Senior lacrosse player Tyler Moltisanti.

By Laurel Madson
mail@floridanewslines.com

This fall has been an exciting time for Nease athletes. Here are just a few of the highlights from the last few months:

Nease football has qualified for the FH-SAA 7A Playoffs with a record of 4-1 in the District, and 7-3 overall. Ben Bogle (senior) has 150 tackles this season, which ranks second overall in the state. Dom Henry (senior) had more than 1,000 receiving yards and 57 receptions. Grant Stevens (senior) has committed to UCF to play tight end and Evan Crenshaw (senior) has committed to Coastal Carolina and was selected to play in the All-American game.

Nease swim and dive boys team won districts and finished second in the region. The girls were runner-up in their district and fourth in the region. Both teams have 16 students who will go on to compete in the state championship. Haven Hinkle (senior) is committed to Colorado Mesa University.

Representing the cross country/track and field team, Rheinhardt Harrison (senior) committed to the University of Oregon. He is one of Florida's fastest distance runners with a 14:45 5k

personal best. He will compete with the boys' team in the state championship. On the girls' side, cross country qualified for the state finals for the first time since 2017. Senior thrower Hannah Sutter is committed to Hillsdale College.

The girls' golf team placed fifth in districts, and Shanya Arasu (junior) advanced to regionals. The varsity boys' team competed at the District Champi-

onship, and Jackson Klauk (junior) will be heading to state. Earlier this season, Jackson shot a 29 over nine holes, which set a Nease school record.

Basketball season is underway, so come out and support these talented players. Logan Ryan (senior) has committed to Saint Leo University, while the girls' basketball team has Alli Fifield (senior) committed to Ave Maria University and

Sydney Gomes (senior) committed to Florida Southern College.

Boys' lacrosse begins this spring, and Tyler Moltisanti (senior) has committed to Wingate University. He averages more than two goals per game.

The community is invited to come out and support all of the Nease teams. All sport schedules are on NeaseAthletics.com.



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Travel

Birmingham surprises

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewsline.com

I'd made the mistake of overlooking Birmingham, Ala., until a recent trip. I found the city packed with delightful surprises ranging from an extraordinary culinary scene to the poignant Civil Rights history to a mammoth statue of Vulcan.

Birmingham earned the title "Dining Table of the South" for a good reason. James Beard Award winners and nominees are everywhere, and their creations taste yummy. Chef Chris Hastings, a most hospitable man and owner of the Hot and Hot Fish Club, creates innovative dishes such as the Fish in a Fish in a Fish. Trust me — just try it. Frank Stitt, known as the iconic "Godfather of Southern Cuisine," appeared as a caring, dedicated, and soft-spoken chef. He and his wife own and manage four top city restaurants, including the Highlands Bar and Grill, known for its exceptional service. Stitt employs award-winning pastry chef Dolester Miles, who makes the super scrumptious coconut cake at Bottega Café. Another vivacious foodie, Becky Satterfield, makes magic happen at Satterfield's Restaurant. Pick any of these dining establishments for dinner and you won't be disappointed.

The city attracted many Greek residents over the years, and they tended to start breakfast and lunch eateries. Don't miss Demetri's Barbecue for breakfast. Yes, you can order BBQ in the morning, but I preferred the feta and tomato-filled Greek omelet. For lunch, try Johnny's Restaurant in Homewood for their beloved Greek-inspired brunch/lunch menu run by Chef Tim Hontzas.



Birmingham: Dining Table of the South.

Sadly, Birmingham's past includes horrific civil rights conflicts, including the tragic 16th Street Baptist Church bombing that killed four young African American girls in 1963. I toured the site studying the educational timeline, and watching the documentary film in the church basement. Directly across the street, you'll find the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, a must-see modern museum. The facility houses interactive displays, archives, and videos, so plan on spending a few hours. Kelly Ingram Park fronts both sites, the former staging area for non-violent demonstrations where participants were besieged by police dogs and powerful fire hoses.

For a calm respite, head to the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. Roam the 67 acres, free to the public, or bring children and let them run. The Japanese Garden, a highlight, contains a traditional tea house, waterfall, bamboo groves, and Japanese maples. The seasonal changes make return trips to this tranquil setting worthwhile.

One of the fun spots in the city, at least for



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
16th Street Baptist Church.

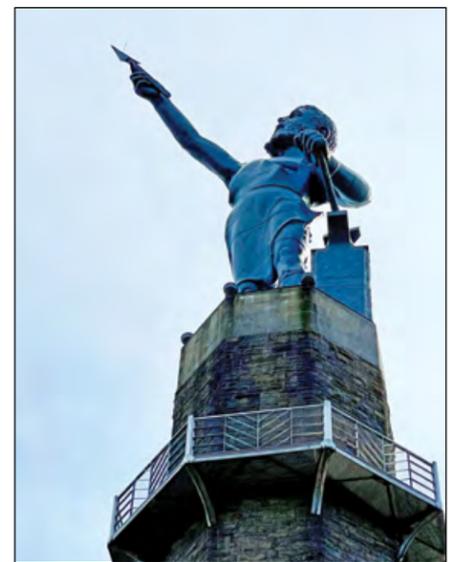
me, was Vulcan Park. I was astounded to learn that Birmingham was founded after the Civil War. The abundance of limestone, coal, and iron ore provided jobs and made steel manufacturing possible. These industries attracted so many workers that the population grew quickly; indeed, so fast that the Magic City nickname arose as Birmingham appeared on the map almost overnight.

The city wanted to make its presence known at the 1904 World's Fair so they commissioned sculptor Giuseppe Moretti to create the largest cast-iron statue in the world. Vulcan, the mythological Roman god of fire and forge, was such a hit the city kept him, and the burly, bearded statue now overlooks downtown. Tour Vulcan Park Museum to learn about Birmingham's and the statue's history. You can also ride an elevator to the top of the monument for a panoramic view; however, the only picture of the 56-foot tall casting you can see from on high happens to be his rearview!

On Saturday morning, I took in the Farmers Market. I enjoyed many murals

and Civil Rights markers downtown. Still, I did not have time for the McWane Science Museum or the Museum of Art. Like a magician, the Magic City brought me surprises and if you haven't been, put it on your list. For more information: www.birminghamal.org

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