



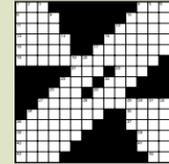
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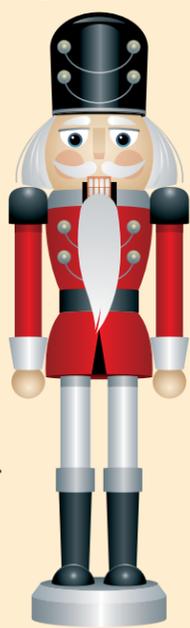
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Puzzles

Choose your Nutcracker

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.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 in the production. In an effort to promote

Choose your Nutcracker cont. on pg. 12



Photos courtesy Julington Creek Prop Club

“Christmas on the Creek” returns Saturday, Dec. 4 at 7 p.m

Holiday season festivities begin with annual boat parade

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.com

The annual Julington Creek Boat Parade known as “Christmas on the Creek” returns Saturday, Dec. 4 at 7 p.m. to delight spectators with festive lights and holiday cheer. The community is invited to come out and enjoy the display.

Established in 1988, this annual event has an estimated 40 boats of all shapes, sizes, and themes that participate in the event. Boats decked out in all their holiday finery navigate the parade route, which begins at the Julington Creek Marina, goes underneath the Julington Creek Bridge and around Bulls Bay, then returns under the bridge and continues down Durbin Creek. Spectators can view the boat parade from the Julington Creek Bridge walkways.

“This parade often signals the start of holiday entertaining,” Julington Creek Prop Club Commodore John Seybold said. “Many homes along the creek plan their holiday parties around the light parade and what makes the parade great is we get such good participation from the homes along the creek.”

Houses and docks along the creek are eligible for prizes for the best decorations and cash prizes are given to the top three decorated boats as determined by the judge boat. The judge boat posts itself almost out in the St. Johns River to view the parade of boats as they go by, and then falls in line behind the final boat to view the houses and docks along the way into Durbin Creek. Seybold said that after



the parade, which lasts about two hours, boating participants return to the marina for a party with food and live music.

The parade is hosted by the Julington Creek Prop Club, but Seybold said it is not necessary to be a member of the club to participate. He said preregistration and attending the Captain’s Meeting on Dec. 2 at the Julington Creek Marina is recommended.

“Of course we actively encourage participation in the Prop Club, whether you own a boat or not,” Seybold said. “There is no minimum skillset required to join, just a general interest in boats and the desire to be sociable with like-minded people.”

Seybold has been a member of the Prop Club for 15 years and this is his second

stint as commodore. He previously lived aboard a 50-foot trawler, but now owns a small daysailer. He said the Julington Creek Prop Club meets on the second Saturday of each month at 5:30 p.m. at the Julington Creek Marina and all are welcome to stop by and join the potluck dinner. Visit www.jcpropclub.com for more information.

The Christmas on the Creek boat parade takes place rain or shine and the Julington Creek Prop Club is grateful to sponsors O’Steen Volkswagen, Julington Creek Marina and Culhane’s Irish Pub, as well as many local restaurants and businesses.

“We hope everyone comes out to see the boat parade,” Seybold said. “It’s a great deal of fun for the participants and the community to get in the Christmas spirit.”

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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Chessie!

Breed:
German Short Haired Pointer / Pit Bull

Favorite Activity:
Sitting in the garden

Favorite Treat:
Snacks from Linda

Favorite Friend:
Linda

How your BFF got their name:
Chessie Railroad



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 The CreekLine. Your pet could be our BFF of the month and appear in The CreekLine! Email editor@floridanewsline.com to enter your pet.



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Holiday GIFT GUIDE

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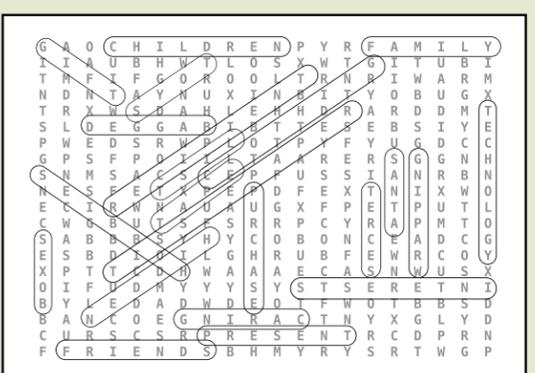
Last month's Mystery Photo was the bridge at the entrance to St. Johns Golf and Country Club. Our winner was Anisia Dawes. Congratulations!

Answers to our Puzzles PG 16

CRYPTO FUN

Determine the code to reveal the answer!

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



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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.

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

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.

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

Coming in the January issue!

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December

What's Going On in St. Johns? 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.FODbaseball.com to register online.

Playing HOOKie, a group for those who enjoy knitting, crocheting and looming (with all items donated to charity) meets every Wednesday from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the outside eating area at Belgian Sweet House Bistro, 12276 San Jose Blvd. (next to Harbor Chase). Visit the group's Facebook page (Playing HOOKie) or email playing-hookie31@gmail.com for more information.

The Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet on Tuesday, Dec. 7 at 6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church in the loft on the County Dock Road side of the church at 2501 Loretto Road. The guild will celebrate with a holiday party. Masks are optional. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

Herbal Medicine for Beginners will be offered on Dec. 11 at 10 a.m. Attendees will learn about traditionally used herbs to promote wellness and health as well as how to create their own tinctures, teas, and salves. Included are guides, plant identification, lecture and herbal snacks. Pre registration is required via phone or text: (386) 972-1891.

The St. Augustine Community Chorus will present "We Need a Little Christmas" on Saturday, Dec. 11 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, Dec. 12 at 2 p.m. at the Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine. Tickets cost \$25 or \$12 for youth aged 11 – 17 (children 10 and younger are free.) Visit staugustinecommunitychorus.org for more information.

Hugs St. Johns (formerly Hugs Across the County) will host its seventh annual No Hungry Holidays event Dec. 11 and 13. Each year, Hugs St. Johns partners with local businesses and neighborhoods to provide 1,200 winter break food bags to students in need in St. Johns County schools. These food bags contain the 10 breakfasts and 10 lunches the students would have received if they were in school over winter break. Student volunteers from the Hugs Clubs at Creekside, Ponte Vedra, Bartram and Nease will pack the bags on Dec. 11 and adult volunteers will de-

liver the bags on Dec. 13 to the schools. Contact info@stjohnshugs.com for more information or to find out how you or your neighborhood can help.

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.

NW St. Johns County United for Progress Club will host a Zoom Book Club on Dec. 13 at 7 p.m. Fiona Hill's book, "There is Nothing for You Here" will be discussed. Email nwsjcp@gmail.com for Zoom details. The club also looks forward to welcoming members and new friends back in person in January 2022. Jan. 8, 2022 at 7 p.m. will be the next general meeting.

The All Star Quilters Guild will meet at 10 a.m. on Monday, Dec. 13 (different week due to the holidays) at the First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The program is the group's Holiday Extravaganza. Guests are welcome, but masks are required. Christmas quilt raffle tickets are available for \$1 each. Visit www.allstarquilters.org for more information.

The Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club will hold its meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, Dec. 14 at 11 a.m. at the Serenata Beach Club, 3175 S. Ponte Vedra Blvd. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. Holiday entertainment will be provided by Harry & That Blonde. The cost of the luncheon is \$23. Make checks payable to BTNC and mail to Lin Collier, 6409 Autumn Berry Cir., Jacksonville, FL 32258. Payment must be received no later than Dec. 7, 2021, no exceptions. Be sure to indicate entrée choice on the check memo line. Visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 for food choices and updated 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.



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

Q: Can you give some insight into the decision to name High School III “Beachside High School?”

A: This was not a capricious decision and a lot of input from the community was considered. After our previous meeting where the five finalist names were announced, I started hearing from many people who were not in favor of the Sampson Creek name. People who lived in St. Johns Golf and Country Club didn’t want it since their CDD is named Sampson Creek; other people thought we had enough “Creek” school names and still others mentioned that there is a Sampson Cemetery and they didn’t want the high school to have the same name.

Then, I started receiving emails advocating for the “Beachside” name. There was also a petition with hundreds of signatures, not only from the Twin Creeks area, but also from the west side of Interstate 95. Additionally, we received calls during the public comment portion of the school board meeting from people in Cimarrone and Shearwater who wanted this name.

Q: So how did the vote go at the board meeting?

A: We did have a large discussion. Two board members wanted the name “St. Johns High School,” but we already have a “St. Johns Technical High School.” At the end of the discussion, the vote was 3 – 2 in favor of Beachside High School. I voted in favor and what

tilted me, in addition to the public support, was the school colors of navy, gray and lime green, which seem like “water” colors to me.

Q: Do we know what the mascot will be?

A: As of today [interview date of Nov. 15], the principal is continuing to poll the community for their preference. The selection of a mascot is a school-based decision and not the responsibility of the school board.

Q: What is the latest on the redistricting that is required as a result of the 2020 Census?

A: At this time, the proposed redistricting plans are A, B, C, D, E, E1, and F. They are all available for viewing on the school district website. We have had two joint meetings with the Board of County Commissioners and requests made by representatives of both bodies resulted in a couple of new proposed plans being added. We will lose geographic area in District 1 in all plans as a result of our increase in population, but will still have the highest population of any district (although within the required 10 percent deviation). Both boards plan to vote at the Dec. 9 joint meeting. The process needs to be finalized by the end of the year.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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

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.

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

Q: What's next on the calendar for the Property Appraiser's Office?

A: As we finish out the year, I'd like to remind everyone that they have until March 1, 2022 to file for homestead exemption or any other exemption for which they qualify.

Q: What's the best way to do this or to contact your office to conduct business?

A: Our website has recently been remodeled for ease of use and citizens can file for all exemptions online. Additionally, our office is open from 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m., Monday through Friday and there is always someone here to help. No appointment is needed. If you call the office, we can do most everything over the phone that could be done in person. If you do need to leave a voice message, our office policy is to return all calls before we leave for the day. I am also always available to help. If you call our office and select option 4 on our automated attendant, it rings directly to me and I answer my own phone.

Q: Do you have anything else to share?

A: I would just like to make sure people know that there are businesses that will contact property owners and charge them a fee for services that our office can provide for free, such as getting copies of a deed, TRIM notice, tax bill, valuation information, zoning, and flood maps. This is all available without charge on our website or by calling our office; we can email you the information or mail it to you or you can print directly from our website. About 97 percent of our data is public information, and there is nothing a company can get for you for a fee that we can't give you at no charge.

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

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



**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@sjso.org or call me at (904) 824-8304. Also, our website, www.sjso.org has a wealth of resources, from alarm registration to Crime Stoppers to our Neighbors app.



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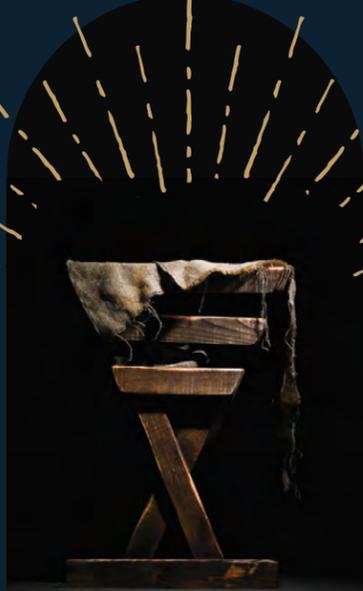
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with St. Johns County Clerk of Circuit Court and Comptroller Brandon Patty



Photo courtesy St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller's Office

Mariam Feist, CEO, Jewish Federation and Foundation of Northeast Florida; Jennifer Plotkin, president, Jewish Federation and Foundation of Northeast Florida; Rabbi Fred Raskind, adjunct Rabbi, Congregation Ahavath Chesed and St. Johns County resident; Rabbi Mendel Sharfstein, Chabad St. Johns County; Rabbi Nochum Kurinsky, Chabad at the Beaches; Rabbi Levi Vogel, Chabad in St. Augustine; and the Rev. Lee Weaver, board member, St. Augustine Historical Society look on as County Commission Chairman Jeremiah Blocker and Clerk of Court Brando Patty sign the proclamation.

Q: Can citizens get certified records electronically?

A: We just launched E-Certify, which makes certified records available electronically for purchase 24 hours a day via our website, stjohsclerk.com. Non-certified copies of court documents and official records are available online for free, but citizens often need certified copies of documents, such as wills, divorce decrees, marriage licenses or satisfaction of mortgage documents to prove authenticity. In addition to convenience and immediacy, benefits to online access include increased security and less risk of document fraud. Each electronic certified document uses advanced encryption to produce a tamper-proof electronic certified document that will include a unique Clerk of Court digital signature and tracking number.

Q: What is the cost of these records?

A: To access documents via E-Certify, costs include a \$2 certification fee and \$1 per page (statutory fees), plus a \$6-per-document service fee (vendor fee) and 3.5 percent credit card fees. By downloading and saving the document, it can be printed and reprinted as many times as desired.

Entities verifying an electronically certified document may do so online around the clock, free of charge.

Q: Can you explain the service that you offer to veterans for their separation records?

A: Veterans may file their separation records — called a DD 214 — for free with the St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller for safekeeping and easy future access. It is secure, fast and free of charge, and just one of the services our office provides to say thank you.

A DD 214 contains valuable information that can help veterans with benefits related to VA healthcare, GI Bill, Social Security, VA loans, military funerals, veterans' preference and more. By recording your DD 214 with the clerk's office, a copy is readily available to you in case the original is lost or destroyed.

Q: How should a veteran take advantage of this free filing?

A: The original document can be filed at no cost with the clerk's Recording Department, located in the Richard O. Watson Judiciary Complex, 4010 Lewis Speedway, St. Augustine. The document will be digitally recorded onsite and returned immediately. It's important to know that only certain individuals may access or obtain copies of your DD 214: You, your parent(s), your spouse, your dependent or child, a representative of the estate of a deceased veteran, a public official acting in his or her official capacity, or a person authorized in writing by the veteran.

Q: Do you have anything else to share with northern St. Johns County residents?

A: On Monday, Nov. 8, we celebrated the long-standing alliance between the United States and Israel — and the Jewish community's even longer history in St. Augustine — with a St. Johns County-Israel Friendship Day proclamation before a crowd of more than 60 residents and supporters. This proclamation came after the recent adoption of a county resolution to revise its investment policy to remove companies on Florida's List of Scrutinized Companies that boycott Israel, including Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream and its parent company, Unilever. Citizens may not know that the Clerk's office manages the county's surplus fund as investments according to policy. On Nov. 10, the asset manager for St. Johns County divested more than \$370,000 in Unilever assets; those dollars will be invested instead in other companies with similar or better rates of return.

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.stjohsclerk.com, which is most commonly used to pay traffic citations or search court records. A little known fact is that it also has an option to report government fraud or abuse, as the clerk's office is a government fraud/waste/abuse auditor. People can also call our main office at (904) 819-3600.

ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

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 dyslexia. 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
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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.

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Holiday **GIFT** GUIDE



Tips to keep your tree fresh this holiday season

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Christmas trees are often the pièce de résistance of holiday decor. Few things draw the attention of holiday guests quite like an awe-inspiring Christmas tree, especially when that tree maintains its fresh, healthy sheen throughout December.

Many families purchase fresh trees over Thanksgiving weekend or during the first weekend of December. Though the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas Day may seem like a long time to keep a tree looking great, there are a handful of ways for holiday celebrants to help their trees maintain that undeniable appeal for the long haul.

- Pick the right tree. Choosing the right tree is one of the simplest ways to keep a tree looking good throughout the holiday season. A freshly cut tree that buyers choose and cut down themselves or have cut down can reassure them that the tree is likely to stay strong throughout December. Trees purchased from a tree lot may have been cut down long before they made it to the lot, which can make it harder to keep them looking good until Christmas Day.

- Cut an inch off the base of any tree that is not freshly cut. MSU Extension at Michigan State University notes that all Christmas trees are conifers, which means they have resin canals in their trunks. Once a tree is cut, the resin can block the pores and make it harder for the tree to take in water. Cutting an inch off the base of a tree that was not freshly cut just before putting it in the stand can help ensure it gets the water it needs to stay healthy and firm. MSU Extension notes that this approach should be taken with any tree that was not cut within six to eight hours of being put in a stand.

- Replenish the water supply every day. Fresh tree veterans recognize that Christmas trees can be very thirsty, especially within the first week or so of being cut and brought home. Fill the stand with water each morning and, if necessary, refill it each night before going to bed. The more water a tree gets and drinks,



Photo courtesy MetroCreative
Help your tree maintain its fresh, healthy sheen throughout December.

the more likely it is that the tree will look healthy all the way to Christmas Day. MSU Extension notes that many decorative or antique tree stands do not hold much water, so anyone with such a stand may need to replenish the water supply more than once or twice per day.

- Keep the tree away from a heat source. For safety's sake, trees should be kept away from heating vents, fireplaces and space heaters. But keeping trees away from such heat sources, and ensuring they are not spending the daytime in direct sunlight, also decreases the chances they will dry out before Christmas Day.

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Remembrance Ring program provides safe and easy way for families to connect this holiday season

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.wreathscrossamerica.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.wreathscrossamerica.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.

Holiday GIFT GUIDE



Great homemade food gifts

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Gifts from the heart are among the most coveted and appreciated come the holiday season. Hobbyists from all walks of life can turn their passions into handmade gifts, but few gifts may be as welcomed as those that can be eaten.

Cooking and baking ramps up during the holiday season. People can turn extra time in the kitchen into opportunities to create festive treats that are ideal for gifting. But which items are the best of the best? Even though tastes are singular, these items will appeal to most foodies and others on your gift list.

- **Jams and preserves:** Fruit jams and preserves are versatile foods. They are as at home on toast and biscuits as they are as fillings in cookies and tarts. Jams and preserves can be made with relatively few ingredients and work well with seasonal fruits.



Photo courtesy MetroCreative

Handmade treats from the heart show loved ones how just much you care.

- **Cinnamon rolls:** Warm, sticky and full of aromatic spice, cinnamon rolls are the perfect comfort foods. These rolls do not typically have a long shelf life, so be sure to present them promptly before they get stale.

- **Pancakes (or cookies) in a jar:** If you have a fantastic recipe that you can't resist sharing, try turning it into a gift. Measure and package the ingredients into mason jars, tie with ribbons and include directions for preparation and cooking.

- **Mini bundt cakes:** Fruit cakes may be a holiday standard, but bundt cakes make for great and traditional offerings as well. Miniature bundts filled with chocolate chips, dried fruits or even those soaked in a favorite boozy-butter glaze can be moist and delicious.

- **Chocolate barks or fudges:** Seasonal flavors can come to life in chocolate treats. White chocolate filled with peppermint pieces or dark chocolate and

cherry chunks are tasty pairings. Break apart portions of the bark or cut the fudge with cookie cutters and gift inside cello bags tied with ribbons or in cardboard candy boxes.

- **Cocktail syrups:** Create spicy or sweet syrups that are tailor-made for enhancing cocktails. Anyone on your gift list can then become a master mixologist.

- **Shortbread cookie ornaments:** Circular shortbread cookies can be decorated with royal icing to look like Christmas ornaments. They can be eaten or even placed on trees to complete holiday decor.

- **Festive cookie pops:** Cookie pops can be made by mixing homemade or pre-purchased crumbled cake with frosting or softened cream cheese and formed into balls. Insert a lollipop stick and dip the balls into melted chocolate or candy melts. Sprinkles, nonpareils or luster dust can be used to enhance the covered pops.

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 preassembled 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.



Photo courtesy MetroCreative



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Bartram Trail Branch Library to host Holiday Giving Trees

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.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 Bartram Trail 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.



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Holiday **GIFT** GUIDE



Simple ways to prolong the life of poinsettias

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

Poinsettias and their rich red, white or variegated color schemes are the ideal backdrop for Christmas celebrations. In fact, poinsettias are among the most popular decorative flowers during the holiday season.

According to the 2013 USDA Floriculture Statistics report, poinsettias accounted for about one-quarter (23 percent) of all flowering potted plant sales that year. Roughly 34 million poinsettia plants are sold in a given season. Indigenous to Central America, the plant was introduced to North America in the 1820s when Joel Roberts Poinsett, the first United States Minister to Mexico, brought the red-and-green plant back with him from a trip abroad.

While millions of poinsettias will be purchased for the holiday season, many mistakenly think their utility ends once New

Year's Day has come and gone. But with proper care poinsettia plants can continue to thrive and bring warmth and beauty to a home long after the holiday decorations have been tucked away.

- Choose a hearty plant. Experts with the University of Vermont Extension Department of Plant and Soil Science say that many people mistake the plant's leaves for its flowers. The red, white or pink bracts are actually modified leaves. The flowers of the plant are the yellow clustered buds in the center called "cyathia." Choose poinsettia plants that have buds which are, ideally, not yet open.
- Keep the temperature consistent. Poinsettias prefer a room temperature between 60 and 68 degrees F during the day and 10 degrees cooler at night. Humidity levels between 20 and 50 percent are ideal. Group plants on water-filled trays full of



Photo courtesy MetroCreative

The red foliage on poinsettias are actually modified leaves called bracts. The flowers are the small, yellow buds in the center of the plant.

pebbles to help increase humidity levels.

- Place near sunlight. The United Kingdom-based Perrywood floral company advises placing poinsettia plants near a bright windowsill but not in direct sunlight. Do not let a poinsettia touch cold window panes.
- Avoid drafts. The plants are sensitive to drafts and changes in temperature. So it's best to keep poinsettias away from drafty doors, windows, radiators, or fireplaces.
- Don't drown the roots. Wait until the

surface of the compost dries out before watering the plant anew. Also, the decorative foil wrapper that covers pots can trap water and lead to root rot. Remove it or poke holes in the bottom to allow for drainage.

- Cut back plants. Come mid-March, cut back the plant by half to encourage new shoots, suggests the University of Illinois Extension. The plants also can be placed outside in the spring after the risk of frost has passed. Bring poinsettias back in around mid-September to early October to force them to bloom again.

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Choose your Nutcracker cont. from pg. 1
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?

Holiday **GIFT** GUIDE



Deck the halls with DIY decor

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Decorating is one of the joys of the holiday season. A day spent making homemade ornaments is a great way to decorate and spend quality time together as a family during the holiday season. Though families can let their imaginations run wild when

making ornaments at home, the following are some great starting points that can serve as springboards for holiday crafting sessions.

• **Snowmen:**

Homemade snowmen can be made out of ping pong balls, which are the ideal size when making ornaments for the Christmas tree. Those who want to go a little bigger can glue wiffle balls or large polystyrene balls together or create their own papier mâché snowmen to display on mantles or on console tables in a foyer or hallway.

• **Santa Claus:** A paper plate Santa Claus with a cotton ball beard glued on can make for a fun Christmas craft, especially for young children who can't wait for the big guy to appear on Christmas Eve.

• **Penguins:** Though they might not have a direct link to the holiday season, penguins evoke feelings of cold weather, making them an ideal addition to holiday decor schemes. Make your own penguin

family using polystyrene craft balls in assorted sizes and then hang them on the tree or place them around the house.

• **Reindeer:** Popsicle stick reindeer projects can be fun for kids of all ages and a great way for youngsters to recognize the efforts of Dasher, Dancer, Comet, Cupid,



and, of course, Rudolph, among others.

• **Cookie cutters:** Family baking sessions are a holiday tradition for millions of people. Though that often leads to batches upon batches of tasty cookies, it also means families tend to have a surplus of holiday cookie cutters around the house. Surplus cookie cutters tend to be discarded or relegated to the miscellaneous items drawer in kitchens, but a more awe-inspiring fate can await them. A coat of paint, some glitter and a little bit of string or twine is all families need to transform their extra cookie cutters into colorful tree ornaments.

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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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.itsoyourrace.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.

“Prices continue to slide upward, while average days on the market and inventory continue to slide downward,” said Missi Howell, president of the Northeast Florida Association of Realtors® (NEFAR). “The historic market that we saw earlier this year, with double digit offers on almost every sale and more than 100 percent of the homes receiving offers of at least the asking price or more, has calmed just a bit, more from buyer fatigue and increasing prices. However, we are far from seeing this sellers’ market end. In October, we had barely a month’s inventory available for buyers, and this challenge does not appear to have any hope of waning.”

Single family homes in Northeast Florida continued to be less afford-

able, 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 Duval County, the median sales price in October of single-family residential housing weighed in at \$301,050, a slight increase from \$300,000 in September. Duval’s affordability index measured 117, and its active inventory represented 1,748 homes, an 8.1 percent drop from 1,903 residential units in September. The typical single-family residence spent a median of 20 days on the market and nearly all sellers — 99.3 percent with single-family homes sold — received their asking price with 29.3 percent closing over list price.

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.

Library’s Food for Fines program returns

An opportunity to eliminate most library fines, Food for Fines will run through Monday, Dec. 20. The food items collected will be used to stock

the St. Johns County Health and Human Services (HHS) Food Pantry, providing food for St. Johns County families in need.

A donation of one non-perishable, unexpired food item will remove \$1 of fines from a patron’s library record. This fine-reduction program applies only to overdue fines and patrons may bring in as many items as needed to reduce overdue fines. Fees related to damaged or lost items are not included in the Food for Fines program.

The Library welcomes additional donations made in the spirit of the holiday season. Food donations, and pet supplies and food may be dropped off at any of the St. Johns County library branches or bookmobiles.

Last year, St. Johns County residents provided more than 3,500 non-perishable items through the Food for Fines program. Visit www.sjcpls.org for more information.

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.

Briefs cont. on pg. 15

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Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

Lauren Blocker

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

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 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.



Photo courtesy Lauren Blocker

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

Briefs cont. from pg. 14

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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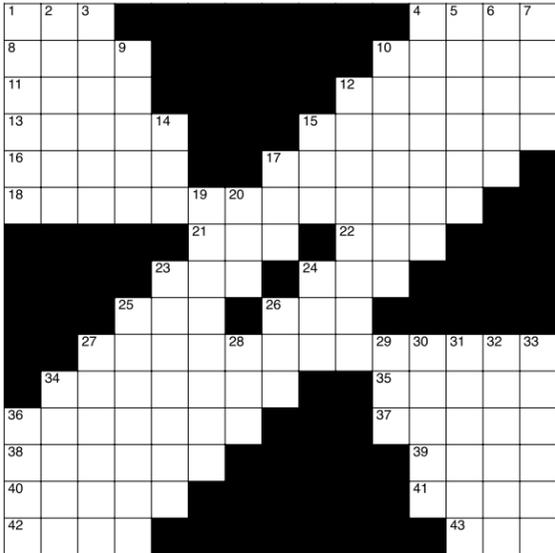
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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

1. You fry food in it
4. Pesky insect
8. Gets older
10. __ Dern, actress
11. Uncouth man
12. One who sulks
13. Napoleon's king of Naples
15. One who swims underwater
16. Make amends
17. Expressions
18. Document format
21. What a beaver makes
22. Limb
23. Photograph
24. Golf score
25. Moroccan mountain range
26. Wrinkled dog breed: Shar __
27. 20th century sex symbol
34. Remedy for all diseases
35. Bluish greens
36. Moved swiftly
37. Type of units
38. Madames
39. Indian religious god
40. Potentially hazardous asteroids
41. Leak slowly through
42. An association of criminals
43. A way to push content (abbr.)

CLUES DOWN

1. Town in central Brazil
2. Large burrowing rodent
3. Nerve cell
4. Estimating
5. Bakers use it
6. Regions
7. Small lake
9. Environmentalist nun
10. More kookie
12. Announce officially
14. Israeli city __ Aviv
15. Title given to friar
17. Inches per minute (abbr.)
19. Buildings
20. Pouch
23. They steal on the high seas
24. It's mightier than the sword
25. Going off on a tangent
26. Monetary unit
27. Young woman
28. Type of bulb
29. Type of drug (abbr.)
30. City opposite Dusseldorf
31. Animal disease
32. Martini necessities
33. Elude
34. La __: Buenos Aires capital
36. An oft-enduring symbol

GIFTING TIME WORD SEARCH

G A O C H I L D R E N P Y R F A M I L Y
 I I A U B H W T L O S X W T G I T U B I
 T M F I F G O R O O L T R N R I W A R M
 N D N T A Y N U X I N B I T Y O B U G X
 T R X W S D A H L E H H D R A R D D M T
 S L D E G A B I B T T E S E B S I Y E
 P W E D S R W P L O T P Y F Y U G D C C
 G P S F P O I I L T A A R E R S G G N H
 S N M S A C S C E P F U S S I A N R B N
 N E S F E T X P E P D F E X T N I X W O
 E C I R W N A U A U G X F P E T P U T L
 C W G B U T S F S R R P C Y R A P M T O
 S A B B B S Y H Y C O B O N C E A D C G
 E S B D I O I L G H R U B F E W R C O Y
 X P T T C D H W A A A E C A S N W U S X
 O I F U D M Y Y Y S Y S T S E R E T N I
 B Y L E D A D W D E O T F W O T B B S D
 B A N C O E G N I R A C T N Y X G L Y D
 C U R S C S R P R E S E N T R C D P R N
 F F R I E N D S B H M Y R Y S R T W G P

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

WORDS

- BAGGED
- BOXES
- CARING
- CHILDREN
- CLOTHING
- FAMILY
- FRIENDS
- GIFT
- HIDDEN
- HOBBIES
- INTERESTS
- LIST
- PRESENT
- PURCHASE
- RECIPIENT
- SANTA
- SECRET
- TAPE
- TECHNOLOGY
- TISSUE PAPER
- TOYS
- WRAPPING

CRYPTO FUN

⊙ * ✎ ⊕ ~ ⌚ ⚡ ✖ ✚ ✛ ✜ ✝ ✞ ✟ ✠ ✡ ✢ ✣ ✤ ✥ ✦ ✧ ✨ ✩ ✪ ✫ ✬ ✭ ✮ ✯ ✰ ✱ ✲ ✳ ✴ ✵ ✶ ✷ ✸ ✹ ✺ ✻ ✼ ✽ ✾ ✿ Ⓜ Ⓝ Ⓞ Ⓟ Ⓠ Ⓡ Ⓢ Ⓣ Ⓤ Ⓥ Ⓦ Ⓧ Ⓨ Ⓩ

Determine the code to reveal the answer!

Solve the code to discover words related to gifting.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 14 = P)

- A. 5 18 23 14 14 11 21 13
Clue: Outer covering
- B. 18 6 10 6 11 14 24
Clue: Proof of purchase
- C. 18 11 7 7 2 21
Clue: Strip of fabric
- D. 14 9 18 10 22 23 17 6
Clue: Acquire something

Early Learning Coalition of North Florida provides kids with books

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

Read for the Record, presented in partnership with the Pearson Foundation, is the annual event when millions of individuals come together to celebrate literacy by breaking the world record of reading the same book on the same day. On Oct. 28, 6,235 adults and children across the United States read the official campaign book, "Amy Wu and the Patchwork Dragon" by Kat Zhang. In this sweet and brightly illustrated picture book, Amy Wu must craft a dragon unlike any other to share with her class at school in this unforgettable follow-up to "Amy Wu and the Perfect Bao."

Ninety-two childcare providers and schools participated, including the three school districts Putnam, Clay, and St. Johns County. The ELC of North Florida provided every child care provider in Clay, Nassau, Baker, Bradford, Putnam and St. Johns with a free copy of "Amy Wu and the Patchwork Dragon," along with a packet of activities to do along with the book. The packet included a template that could be used to copy Read for the Record participation certificates to give each child.

The Early Learning Coalition is the leading voice in six counties for child care and works with many other local agencies to ensure that all families have access to quality, affordable child care. Visit www.elcnorthflorida.org for more information.

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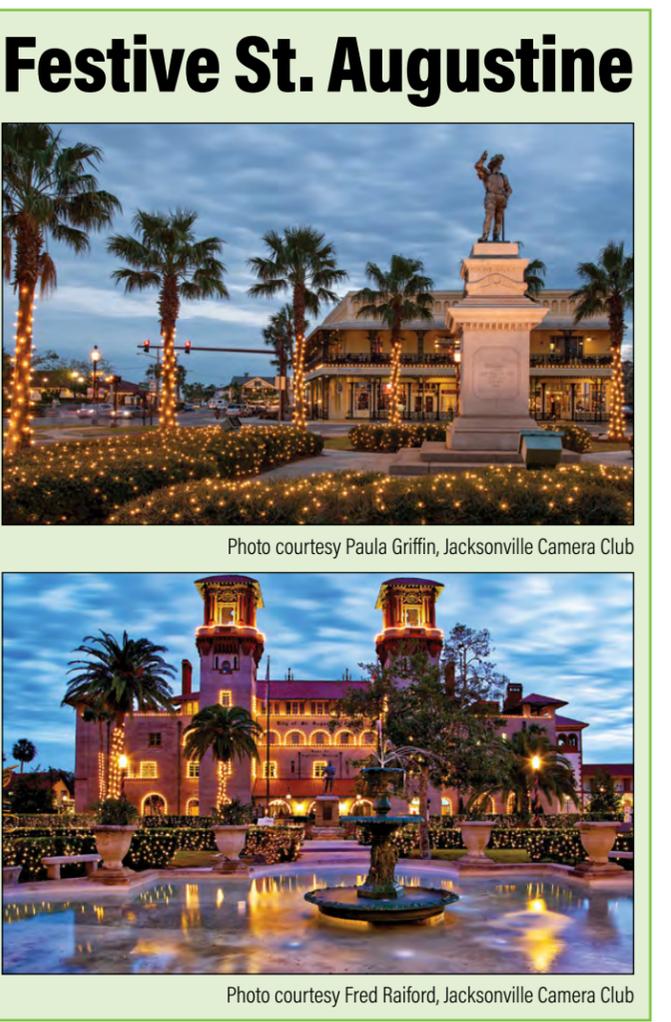
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PopHistory

The Anarchists

By Scott A. Grant
mail@floridanewslines.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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Celebrate a popular chocolate dessert

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

Brownies are one of North America's favorite baked treats. They actually are classified as a bar cookie rather than a cake, and the dessert earned its name from the deep, brown color of its main ingredient.

There have been many variations on the brownie through the years, and the lively debate whether crunchy end pieces or chewy middle slices are preferred continues. There may be less debate about how flavorful it can be to mix cheesecake with brownies, which is just what happens in this recipe for "Marbled Chocolate Cheesecake Brownies" from "Chocolate" (Love Food), by the editors of Parragon Books, Ltd.



Photo courtesy MetroCreative

Marbled Chocolate Cheesecake Brownies

Marled Chocolate Cheesecake Brownies Makes 12

- ¾ cup unsalted butter, plus extra for greasing
- 3 tbsp. unsweetened cocoa
- 1 cup superfine sugar
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1 cup all-purpose flour

- Cheesecake mix
- 1 cup ricotta cheese
- 3 tbsp. superfine sugar
- 1 egg beaten

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Grease an 11 x 7-inch cake pan and line with parchment paper.

Melt the butter in a medium saucepan,

remove from the heat, and stir in the unsweetened cocoa and the sugar. Beat in the eggs, then add the flour, and stir to mix evenly. Pour into the prepared pan.

For the cheesecake mix, beat together the ricotta, sugar and egg, then drop teaspoonfuls of the mixture over the chocolate mixture. Use a metal spatula to swirl the two mixtures tightly together.

Bake for 40 to 45 minutes, until just firm to the touch. Cool in the pan, then cut into bars or squares.

Nutrition Check

Health benefits of cocoa powder

By Kristen Hicks-Roof PhD, RDN, LDN, CLC and Kristi Chapman DCN, RDN, LD mail@floridanewline.com

December 13 is National Cocoa Day. Cocoa was first cultivated in South America and is now consumed worldwide, with nearly 4.5 million tons of cocoa being consumed every year worldwide. Most packaged hot chocolates and chocolate bars are actually full of sugar and contain little cocoa, and therefore do not have many of the health benefits cocoa can offer; however, 100 percent cocoa powder can provide many nutritional benefits, let's dive into some of those.

Reducing Inflammation: Cocoa powder has polyphenols, which are naturally occurring antioxidants that can help to reduce inflammation and improve cholesterol; however, when cocoa is processed into chocolate, the polyphenol content is decreased by 60 percent (Ludovici et al. 2017).

Heart Health and Insulin Resistance: Cocoa powder and dark chocolate are high in flavanols that have been associated with a lower risk of heart disease and some studies have suggested a lower risk of insulin resistance and high blood pres-

sure in adults (AHA 2019). Only one small serving of high cocoa dark chocolate can result in reducing risk of heart attack and stroke.

Cognitive Health: Research suggests that cocoa powder can help improve your attention span, verbal learning, memory, and attention. (Martin, Goya, and de Pascual-Teresa 2020)

Eating processed milk chocolate does not have nearly the health benefits of pure cocoa or dark chocolate, but cocoa is easy to include in your diet. This unsweetened powder can be added to a variety of foods. How can I do this?

- Consuming one small piece of dark chocolate that is at least 70 percent cocoa.
- Add 100 percent cocoa powder over chocolate syrup to milk or ice cream to make hot chocolate or a milkshake.
- Use cocoa powder to make homemade pudding.
- Add cocoa powder into baked goods to boost nutrient profile with little caloric additions.

Happy holidays, neighbors.



I wish all my neighbors a safe and happy holiday season and the very best in the New Year. It's a true joy to be part of such a wonderful community.

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Fishing

Capt. David's Fishing Report

By Captain David Lifka
mail@floridanewline.com

As we are about to enter the coolest part of the year, fishing our area waters becomes much less predictable. One reason is, fish are a lot like us. Some species head south for the winter to enjoy warmer waters. Others suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder ("S.A.D") where they don't feel like eating, don't have much energy, and hunker down somewhere warm and deep waiting for warmer weather to return. And then there are some that seem to enjoy the cooler temps and continue with their normal activities.

As many species of fish head south for the winter, the end result is much slower fishing for these fish in our area waters (especially nearshore and offshore species). The good news is that fishing just a few hours south of here really picks up during the winter months. If you just happen to be one of those folks that suffers from winter anxiety, or lack of fishing depression, a weekend or even longer fishing trip can easily be accomplished with a quick trip to most anywhere in South Florida or the Keys, where you can enjoy warmer weather and some pretty good fishing.

For the species that are still around but suffer from S.A.D., the good news for us is, they are still around. Trout, reds, flounder, sheepshead and others remain available all year long, and like many of us, they prefer to come out of their winter retreats when mild and warmer days come up. During these days they may be out to enjoy a dinner or two which hopefully happens to be on a hook tied to the end of our fishing line.

We also have some species of fish that apparently don't mind winter weather too much. As a matter of fact, these fish are probably targeted more over the winter than the rest of the year. Striped bass on the freshwater/saltwater side, and speckled perch (also known as crappie) on the freshwater side are renowned for their winter bites.

Striped bass or stripers often like poor, damp, cool, and cloudy days. They are most commonly caught at the deepest depths or somewhere in-between. From any of the downtown Jacksonville bridges to all the other bridges as far south as Shands, working plugs or lures at various depths or cut bait or a live shiner will



Photo courtesy Marc Herbert

Jameson holding one of 13 fish caught on a private dock at Mandarin Point.

catch them.

For many an angler, the speckled perch is what North Florida winter fishing is all about. They own boats that are specifically rigged for speck fishing with multiple rod holders mounted from bow to stern, with rods and reels that are designed to catch just speckled perch. Arguably the best tasting freshwater gamefish in these parts, these fish are known to bunch up during winter months on lake and creek beds providing excellent catches for those who go after them. Slow trolled or drifted speck jigs or live minnows are used to catch them. Area creeks, but especially inland lakes in the Keystone, Palatka, Ocala, and Gainesville areas of the state should provide enough fishing to get anyone suffering from a lack of fishing deficiency through the winter.

Fishing Report: The river is slowing down; fishing docks for reds and trout are always worth a try. Bass and bream in area freshwater locations still provide decent catches.

Whether you catch one, some, or none, the family time spent fishing will last a lifetime.

Email your Catch of the Month photo to catchofthemonthpictures@gmail.com. Be sure to include the name of the person(s) in the photo, the name of the person who took the photo, the type of fish and date and location of the catch. We will select a photo each month for publication.

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Gardening

Gardening for diversity

By Master Gardener Lesley Arrandale
mail@floridanewslines.com

Some years ago I found a small tree growing in my yard. Larry Figart, our Extension Urban Forester, identified it as a southern hackberry or sugarberry (*Celtis laevigata*). I dutifully read about it and was pleased that it had found a home here. Since it produces small berries, clearly a bird had deposited the seed, and a self-sown seed of anything that survives without my intervention ultimately does well.

The tree grew. Birds found insects in the canopy, hummingbirds used the thin, sometimes sparsely foliated twigs as resting places, butterflies came and went, and squirrels made it their playground. Current inhabitants include lady beetles. I enjoyed seeing the knobbly bark develop and its weeping form is very pleasing to the eye. But all things must change. Although I knew, intellectually, that it could become a large tree (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf/ST/ST13800.pdf>), I couldn't visualize the impact it would have in my relatively small yard. It has grown to take up about a quarter of the air space and has done that in a mere 10 – 15 years. It's just in the wrong place.

According to Terra Freeman, Horticultural Extension Agent in St. Johns County:

This fast grower ultimately reaches 50 to 80 feet tall by 40 to 50 feet wide and forms a rounded to vase-shaped crown. Hackberry's greatest attribute lies in its wildlife value, serving as a larval host plant for Question Mark, Mourning Cloak, and American Snout butterflies. The sweet fruits are consumed by many birds, including cedar waxwings, woodpeckers, pheasants and quail.

So — how could I miss that!? My research merits a failing grade, but I bring up my lack of judgement to illustrate how we can really impact our immediate environment by choosing the wrong tree. I can't stress this enough. The wildlife Terra mentions is soon to be deprived of their home and food source. (No, I don't see pheas-

ants in my neighborhood, although years ago I was astonished to see a few quail!)

A living tree will go. To compensate, in a small way, I'm waiting for the leaves to fall. They will make a valuable soil amendment, spread around as mulch. Maybe there will be some insects that survive among the leaves. I'll keep as much of the rest of the tree as is reasonable in a small yard. I'll make some brush piles from branches and twigs, hoping that any insects hunkered down in bark crevices will have a chance at survival. Larger branches placed in out of the way places in the yard will make good habitat for other wildlife. Fungi and wood-boring insects will help the wood to decompose, adding nutrients back into the soil. Lizards, snakes, and small mammals might use the brush piles as shelter. I already know there are legless lizards, garter snakes, and black racers here. (Skinks have been absent for quite a while — probably because of the local feral cats — which is disappointing. Maybe they'll return, now that we've installed some fencing to thwart those darn cats.)

If I leave the trunk standing as a snag, cutting through the living layers of bark near the ground to hasten its demise, it could also host some of the diverse wildlife we need. It's not enough to encourage hummingbirds, bees, and butterflies into our yards. We need to help support a species-rich web of life, from the tiniest microbes in our soils to the tallest trees, in all our yards.

Now I'm looking for one or two smaller native trees or shrubs that would be wildlife friendly, and more in keeping with the yard. Candidates include Walter's viburnum (*Viburnum obovatum*), Florida privet (*Forestiera segregata*), and flatwoods plum (*Prunus umbellata*) — and it's a good season for planting!

Happy holidays, to one and all.



"If I were still in my house I would not be doing half of what I'm doing here. And I've never had so many friends in my life."

— Resident Mary M. (with her dog, Jade)

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Travel

Birmingham surprises

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewslines.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



Birmingham: Dining Table of the South.

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.

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



Fish in a Fish in a Fish.



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
16th Street Baptist Church.

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 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



Vulcan, the blacksmith.

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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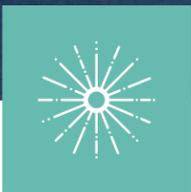
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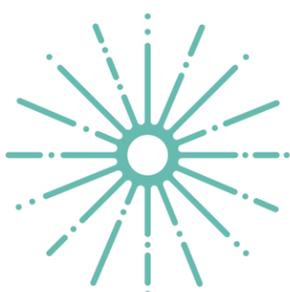
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5 symptoms you shouldn't ignore

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