

# Ponte Vedra NewsLine

FEBRUARY 2022 Volume 9 Issue 2

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

A Florida NewsLine Publication



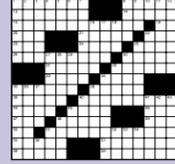
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## Valley Ridge Academy's band director is Teacher of the Year



Photo courtesy INK!

2021-2022 St. Johns County Teacher of the Year  
Andrew Burk

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewsline.com

INK!'s (Investing in Kids) 2021-2022 St. Johns County Teacher of the Year awards campaign culminated on Jan. 20 with a special recognition banquet and program, along with honors and a tribute to Andrew Burk, band director at Valley Ridge Academy, who was named as the Teacher of the Year among teacher finalists from St. Johns County public schools. Kaitlyn Holle, a middle school science teacher at Mill Creek Academy was named as this year's Rookie Teacher of the Year.

Teacher cont. on pg. 11

## V for Victory improving lives

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps  
mail@floridanewsline.com

*Never underestimate the power of neighbors helping each other through a struggle.*

That's the basic premise of a local organization known as V for Victory, a non-profit dedicated to activating local businesses and neighbors in support of families battling cancer right in their own community.

It all began in 2017 as a result of a businessman, one of three owners of V Pizza, having to face the cancer diagnosis of his young son. That businessman, Ponte Vedra Beach resident Paul Scott, quickly realized that battling cancer is incredibly overwhelming for a family — and then added to that are the everyday responsibilities that must continue.

“The entire family battles cancer when one member of the family is diagnosed. We are for anyone in the family who is impacted by that cancer diagnosis,” said Scott, adding that this organization is for families with pediatric and adult cancer patients.

Scott decided to use his business background and apply it to V for Victory to

Victory cont. on pg. 10



Photos courtesy Jacklyn Overby

V for Victory makes a LEGO set available for every child battling cancer after every cancer related treatment or procedure.



V for Victory believes in supporting the entire family unit. Bella Lei Spa in Fleming Island discounts one service a month to a family. Cancer fighter Lily's mom was able to get some much needed self-care there.



Publix Aprons has been an amazing partner and donated gingerbread making classes for four families this holiday season. Publix Aprons Cooking School has also donated parent/child cooking classes, giving families some much needed one-on-one family time.

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**Briefs**

**Rotary Club packs bags for Blessings in a Backpack**

The Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra is partnering with Blessings in a Backpack to pack bags full of nutritional food and goodie bags for kids in need in our area. The club is collecting donations until Feb. 14. The Rotary Club will be putting the backpacks together at the weekly club meeting on Feb. 15.

More than 13 million children in America are at risk of going hungry on the weekends; that is 1 in 6 children who struggle to access food for the 48 hours they are not at school. Blessings in a Backpack provides bags full of nutritious food every Friday to those kids who are at risk of going hungry over the weekend.

The bags packed by the Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra in this effort will be provided to students who qualify at Pine Island Academy, Palm Valley Academy, Valley Ridge Academy, Landrum Middle School, Ocean Palms Elementary and PVPV - Rawlings.

Visit the Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra's shopping list on Amazon (<https://tinyurl.com/Blessings-in-a-Backpack>) to purchase items and support the club's efforts.

**New rector at St. Francis in the Field Episcopal Church**

Father Justin Yawn, formerly of Austin, Texas, is coming home to Northeast Florida as the new rector of St. Francis in the Field in Palm Valley. Father Yawn grew up in St. Simons Island, Georgia. He graduated from the University of Georgia with his bachelor's degree in Business Administration in Risk Management and Insurance. After college he attended The Candler School of Theology at Emory University.

From 2012 – 2015, Father Yawn served as the Senior Associate Rector for Youth and Families at Christ Church Episcopal in Ponte Vedra Beach.

He and his wife Vanessa are excited to be back in this familiar area and to serve the community in a variety of ways. With Father Yawn's 12 years of experience as an ordained priest he has covered a plethora of ministries ranging from corporate church, pastoral care and youth.

Father Yawn's first Sunday is Feb. 6.

**St. Johns County Clerk of Courts warns against jury duty scam**

The St. Johns County Clerk of Circuit Court and Comptroller's Office is warning residents about fraudulent phone calls from scammers claiming to be representatives of the Clerk's office or law enforcement.

Many scammers claim that the individual has missed jury duty and must make immediate payment to avoid penalties. In some cases, the scammer indicates a warrant has been issued for the resident's arrest and requests the individual to provide personal information, such as Social Security number and date of birth for verification. Additionally, some scammers seek payment of a bond or fine for failure to appear for jury duty.

Clerk's office employees will never phone a resident to request payment for failure to appear. Failure to appear for jury duty requires attendance in court prior to any penalties being imposed, which would be ordered by a judge.

When residents don't respond to a summons for jury duty, they are contacted through an official letter from the St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court sent through the U.S. Postal Service.

If you receive a suspicious call, the Clerk's Office advises that you provide no information, end the call immediately, and report the incident to the Florida Office of the Attorney General at 866-9NOSCAM (866-966-7226).

For questions regarding jury duty in St. Johns County, call (904) 819-3629.

**Food for Fines program collects more than 3,500 items**

St. Johns County Public Library patrons were exceptionally generous over the holiday season, donating more than 3,500 non-perishable food items for St. Johns County's Health and Human Services Food Pantry through Food for Fines. The Food for Fines annual program enables patrons to donate food to local families in need and help "pay down" their overdue fines during the holiday season.

"It's a real benefit to the community we serve to have the Food for Fines program," said Tracy Dillon, Social Services Manager for St. Johns County. "The food donated by library patrons replenishes our dwindling food supplies and allows us to operate our Food Pantry for nearly the whole year." Health and Human Services provides a wide variety of services for approximately 10,000 clients in St. Johns County throughout the year.

"We've seen the Food for Fines program grow every year since we first implemented it in 2007," said Library System Director Debra Rhodes Gibson. "For each item of food donated, a dollar of fines is taken off on their account. It's even supported by our patrons who don't have fines. The whole community gets behind it."

Food for Fines is one of several collaborative programs that the St. Johns County Public Library System participates in with other county departments, extending its reach to St. Johns County residents. Visit [www.sjclps.org](http://www.sjclps.org) to learn more about the library system and programming.

**Food Drive and Giving Tree initiative benefitted many**

The generosity of the St. Johns County community in supporting the St. Johns CARES, Inc. Food Drive and the Giving Tree Initiative was record breaking in a year that has seen so many in need. Donations at 29 Food Drive donation

sites and by individual donors resulted in \$18,100 of food distributed to five food pantries in the county in October and November.

Donations at 58 Giving Tree host donation sites and by individual donors resulted in distribution of \$64,207 in needed items and gift cards to 41 non-profit organizations serving the Elderly, Veterans, Abused, Homeless, Children and Animals in the county in December. For these organizations, the donations received will help their clients for many months in 2022.

Visit [www.stjohnscares.org](http://www.stjohnscares.org) and the new Facebook page, "St. Johns CARES Volunteer Organization" for more information.

**Apply now for individual artists grants**

Applications are now open for individual artists in Northeast Florida to apply for an Art Ventures grant of \$3,500. Interested artists who reside in Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns County are encouraged to apply for funding to help them develop the next level of their artistic careers. Applications are due by 5 p.m. on Feb. 15, 2022.

Black artists have additional opportunities this year with the recently-created Delores Barr Weaver Black Artists Endowment. This will specifically fund three Black artists each year. These will be additive to the Art Ventures cohort of grantees, which has always supported Black artists and has made grants from the Independent Life Minority Arts Fund. Applications will be judged on the applicants' artistic accomplishments, their proposal to use the funds to advance their work, and the extent to which their artistic practice is rooted in Northeast Florida.

More information, including the application, is available

[https://jaxcf.formstack.com/forms/individual\\_artist](https://jaxcf.formstack.com/forms/individual_artist)

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# BFF

## Best Furry Friend of the month

### Meet Opie!

**BREED:**  
Golden Retriever / Lab

**FAVORITE ACTIVITY:**  
His happy place, daily beach walks saying hi to all his human and four legged friends

**FAVORITE TREAT:**  
Blueberries and apples

**FAVORITE FRIEND:**  
His Mom/Dad, and his beach walking buddy, Max

**HOW YOUR BFF GOT HIS NAME:**  
Opie was named by his Canine Companion breeder/caretakers, Katie and Paula

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 Vedra NewsLine. Your pet could be our BFF of the month and appear in Ponte Vedra NewsLine! Email [editor@floridanewsline.com](mailto:editor@floridanewsline.com) to enter your pet.

Happy Valentine's Day!

from your friends at  
Ponte Vedra NewsLine

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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 Vedra NewsLine? **Call Linda 904-607-5062**

### MYSTERY PHOTO

Can you guess where this is?  
Submit your answer to:  
[mail@FloridaNewsLine.com](mailto:mail@FloridaNewsLine.com).

Last month's Mystery Photo was the sign for Ponte Vedra Lakes. Our winner was Lori Blevins. Congratulations!

### Answers to our Puzzles PG 10

#### CRYPTO FUN

Determine the code to reveal the answer!

Answers: A. heart B. pulse C. monitor D. muscle

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

## Community Calendar

**The Newcomers Alumnae** monthly luncheon will be held on Wednesday, Feb. 2 at 11:30 a.m. at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Parkway. The guest speaker will be Stacey Pierce from Waste Pro USA. The cost of the luncheon is \$23; email bartshar@comcast.net as soon as possible to reserve a seat. Visit newcomersalumnae.wildapricot.org for more information or to become a member.

**The Great Pink Challah Bake** will be held on Feb. 3 at 7 p.m. at Chabad at the Beaches, 521 A1A North in Ponte Vedra. This women's event is designed to support, honor, and remember those affected by breast cancer in the community. Register at chabadbeaches.com/pinkchallah or call Dafne at (904) 770-0502 for more information.

**Nocatee** announces the following events, open to the public: Food Truck Friday featuring live music by Ryan Campbell on Feb. 11 at Nocatee Station Field and Nocatee Farmers Market on Saturday, Feb. 19 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. Visit www.nocatee.com/events for more information.

**The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable** will meet on Monday, Feb. 14 at 12 p.m. via Zoom. Chairman of the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners Henry Dean will be the guest speaker. Email info@sjcroundtable.org to register for the meeting or visit www.sjcroundtable.org for

more information about the St. Johns County Civic Roundtable.

**The Newcomers of North St. Johns** will host a meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, Feb. 15 beginning at 11:15 a.m. at San Jose Country Club, 7529 San Jose Blvd. The event features lunch and entertainment by the dynamic duo of Sass N Brass. The cost for the luncheon and program is \$30 for members. All reservations must be received by Feb. 5. 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.

**The Friends of the Ponte Vedra Beach Library** present Frank and Mary Lee Sweet on Tuesday, Feb. 15, at the library. The program will be "BACKINTYME: Stories and Music about the People that Fill the Pages of Florida History." The program starts at 6:30 p.m. and doors open at 6 p.m. The program is free to the public

**Ponte Vedra Democratic Club** will meet on Tuesday, Feb. 15 at 6 p.m. for Chat & Chew before the 6:30 p.m. meeting at Christ Episcopal Church, Room 106, 400 San Juan Road. Ponte Vedra Democratic Club members and attorneys Rhona Di-Camillo and John Miller will debate "End the Filibuster, pro and con."

**Ponte Vedra Woman's Club** presents Kelly Franklin, CEO

of the Betty Griffin Center, who will introduce speaker Katelin Maloney, domestic violence survivor and author of "Drowning" on Feb. 16 from 12 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. at Southern Kitchen + Bar in Jacksonville Beach. Register for this event at www.pontevedrawomansclub.com.

**The Savvy Job Hunters Ministry Zoom Workshop**, "How to Start Up Your Own Business" will be held on Feb. 25 from 10 a.m. — 12 p.m. Email nwhite@christepiscopalchurch.org to register.

**The ninth annual Faithful Servant Missions "Run with a Mission"** 5K, 10K and 1 mile fun run will be held on Saturday, Feb. 26 at 8:30 a.m. through the Nocatee Greenway Trails. This race helps support the Faithful Servant Missions in Costa Rica. The race will be followed by the FSM Family Fun Festival. There will be a cook-out, bouncy house, face painting, food, silent auction and more. Visit runsignup.com/runwithamission to register.

**GTM Research Reserve** will host its monthly Beach Cleanup on Saturday, Feb. 26 from 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. No registration is required; meet at the Visitor Center, 505 Guana River Road in Ponte Vedra Beach where gloves and trash bags will be provided. Visit gtm-nerr.org for more information.

## Balloon releases now prohibited

On Jan. 18, the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners voted 5-0 in favor of amending the county's litter ordinance to prohibit the release of balloons and sky lanterns.

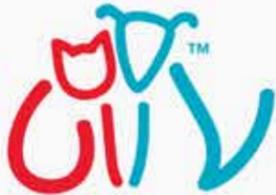
The accidental or intentional release of balloons and sky lanterns into the atmosphere poses a danger and nuisance to the environment and wildlife that may ingest this debris. These items could also pose a threat to aircraft.

Those who violate the ordinance could face a fine of up to \$500.

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**Q & A with St. Johns County School Board Member Kelly Barrera, District 4**

**Q: What is the latest information from the Citizen Advisory Committee regarding the half cent sales tax?**

A: The Citizen Advisory Committee's recent annual report highlights how much this sales tax was needed because of all the projects that funds are supporting, including \$13 million toward the construction of Pine Island Academy, along with a dining room expansion at Liberty Pines Academy and roof replacements at Landrum Middle School and Osceola Elementary.

On the technology side, approximately \$2 million went to the installation of 983 classroom interactive TV panels across the district. Also funded were 878 new student computers to multiple schools and 3,100 new teacher laptops just this year.

**Q: What would you consider to be a highlight of items purchased with the sales tax funds?**

A: I'd like to highlight the installation of a new security system enhancement by Centegix. This is a mobile alert system that is fulfilling part of Alyssa's Law. The system gives real time coordinates between multiple first responder agencies and provides a badge to all teachers and staff that allows them to activate a mobile alert from anywhere in the school. The cost of this system is nearly \$1.7 million and installation is in progress and will continue in all schools over the next couple of months.

I'd also like to recognize the District 4 members serving on the Citizen Advisory Committee, Jack Hardman (chair), Damian Cook and Richa Jeetah. Javelin Arvay serves as an alternate. These

individuals attend meetings and give of their time in this important service to our community.

**Q: Do you have an update on Beachside High School?**

A: Things are moving along rapidly with our newest school. The school construction is coming together and the hiring of key personnel has begun. The school announced its mascot: the Barracudas. Community engagement is really ramping up.

**Q: Do you have anything else to share with District 4?**

A: I'd like to congratulate St. Johns County Teacher of the Year finalist Andrew Burk, who is the band teacher at Valley Ridge Academy.

From District 4, we had two students recognized as part of the Elaine Crutchfield math and science scholar part of the Sunshine State Scholars program. This program recognizes our top students in science, technology, engineering and math who plan to pursue their post secondary education in Florida. Tabitha Gottipati from Nease High School is the district alternative and is receiving a \$150 scholarship. In addition, Iulia-Maria Beriau was a finalist from PVHS and received a \$100 scholarship.

Congratulations to Jocelyn Chambers of Valley Ridge Academy who placed second in the Middle School Art in the Capitol contest. Her art teacher is Lauren Bayliss.

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

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



**Q&A with St. Johns County Commissioner Jeremiah Blocker, District 4**

**Q: Have you been able to schedule the local office hours again yet?**

A: Yes. I was available to meet with constituents at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library in January for the first time in a while. In February, I have office hours scheduled at the library on Feb. 28 from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. I ask that interested parties call my office first for an appointment so that we can be prepared to discuss whatever the specific issue is. I will also hold local office hours in March on March 25 for those who like to plan ahead.

**Q: Can you give an update on the FEMA berm project?**

A: So far this is moving along smoothly and hasn't been too disruptive. I think people are starting to notice a nice berm rising in the background when they visit the beach, which will hopefully protect us from nor'easters. This project will take a few more months to complete.

**Q: What can you tell us about the recent Growth Management Workshop offered by the county in January?**

A: We plan to build on feedback received at this workshop and will schedule additional workshops in the spring or summer. The dates have not been picked yet. In the

meantime, I'd encourage everyone to email their commissioners with any thoughts or concerns they may have.

**Q: What is happening now as far as the county-wide redistricting is concerned?**

A: We approved a new district map for St. Johns County along with the school board and it has been sent to Tallahassee. The next step will include new voting precincts and polling locations, which will be coordinated by Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes. People should keep their eyes out for communication from her with updates in this area.

**Q: Do you have anything else to share with District 4?**

A: St. Johns County continues to offer COVID testing for work or school purposes at the Wind Mitigation Building, 3111 Agricultural Center Drive. The testing site's standard business hours are 7 a.m. – 4 p.m. Monday through Sunday. It's best to pre-register online to expedite the process. Visit [www.sjcf.us/coronavirus](http://www.sjcf.us/coronavirus) for more information.

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

A: Readers can email me at [bcc4jblocker@sjcf.us](mailto:bcc4jblocker@sjcf.us) or call me at (904) 679-2620.



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**Q&A with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick**

**Q: Can you give us a year in review recap for 2021?**

A: This past year, we introduced new leadership to the Sheriff's Office, which included a new organizational structure and some new ideas, although we did keep some of the agency's institutional knowledge. We are not a traditional sheriff's office in that we do not have an undersheriff; instead, I have five divisions that report directly to me: Corrections, Criminal Investigations, Patrol, General Services, and Operations. I don't occupy the same physical office as the previous three sheriffs and I think it's important for effective leadership to have my leaders close for impromptu meetings.

We also restructured with our vision to break up the county into three regions rather than four districts and moved Operations and the Comm

Center to the new building off Interstate 95.

**Q: What are some other changes and updates that have been made this past year?**

A: We continue to increase pay for all employees as a recruiting and retention tool.

We refreshed the graphics on our patrol cars and rebranded the Sheriff's Office logo.

We updated our offices and the jail with fresh paint, new flooring, and new landscaping so employees can have pride in their workplace. We also added better lights and cameras to the jail.

**Q: What other changes were made in the Corrections division?**

A: The pay for deputies in Patrol and Corrections is the same. I think this is important. Also new is that the bailiffs

and courthouse security are now under the Corrections division, which gives employees in Corrections more employment options.

**Q: Can you describe some of the changes in Operations and Patrol?**

A: In Operations, we launched our brand new Internal Leadership Academy, which all employees whether sworn or civilian, will attend. The county has approved for us to move fleet operations and central receiving and supplies to a new building to be built on the Training Center property off Interstate 95.

For Patrol, we recently acquired more than 30 acres of land for our Police Athletic League and plan to consolidate our fields, storage, and office space there. Our mounted unit just acquired two new horses, Mason and Jackson and we hope to have them patrolling in neighborhoods by mid-year. We started our bicycle patrol last year and plan to add them to additional neighborhoods this year.

**Q: What type of strategic planning are you doing for 2022?**

A: As the fastest growing county in the state, I'm planning to present to the county for additional personnel in 2022 as well as increased pay again for the entire agency. With the CPI up by 7 percent, we need to continue to increase pay to attract and retain our employees. We also believe that after a thorough cost/benefit analysis, it is time for the Sheriff's Office to move to a more feasible building. We still have space at the Training Center for some divisions, but I believe a newer facility with better infrastructure for the Office of the Sheriff, the Criminal Investigations Division, General Services and Community Engagement should be sought, probably somewhere in the World Golf Village area.

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



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

**Q. Modernizing access to traditional courthouse services has been one of your initiatives. What new online services are available?**

A. Making services more available and more secure has been a priority that, frankly, was moved to the top of the to-do list when COVID-19 started and then has continued to linger. Our newest online service is E-Certify, which we launched in late October 2021 and provides easy, affordable access to certified county records. While non-certified copies of court documents and official records are avail-

able online for free, customers often need certified copies of documents to prove authenticity — for instance, wills, divorce decrees, marriage licenses or satisfaction of mortgage documents. Through E-Certify, many certified records are available electronically for purchase 24 hours a day through our website at [stjohnsclerk.com/ecertify](http://stjohnsclerk.com/ecertify). In addition to convenience and immediacy, benefits to online access include increased security and less risk of document fraud.

**Q. Which online Clerk of Court services are accessed most frequently?**

A. Although you can still visit us at the courthouse to pay a traffic ticket or a court fine, the online options to pay traffic, criminal and non-criminal citations are very popular and convenient because it's available 24 hours a day year-round. We offer numerous online services around the clock — you can find a list at [stjohnsclerk.com/st-johns-county-clerk-of-courts-online-services-available-24-7-over-the-holidays/](http://stjohnsclerk.com/st-johns-county-clerk-of-courts-online-services-available-24-7-over-the-holidays/).

**Q. With Valentine's Day coming up, are you seeing an increase in marriage licenses?**

A. Marriage license applications have been trending upward over the past five years. As you might expect, Valentine's Day is a popular time for weddings, so I want to remind readers that Florida has a three-day waiting period for residents unless they show completion of a

premarital course when applying for a marriage license. Applying for a marriage license must be done in-person in the Recording Department of our office in the Richard O. Watson Judicial Complex. Our website gives all the details and requirements at [stjohnsclerk.com/marriage-licenses-ceremonies/](http://stjohnsclerk.com/marriage-licenses-ceremonies/). What's more, our deputy clerks are authorized to perform marriage ceremonies at the courthouse during business hours for a nominal fee (\$30). No appointment is needed.

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

A: Visit our website, [stjohnsclerk.com](http://stjohnsclerk.com), follow us on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, call our main number at (904) 819-3600 or visit us at the Richard O. Watson Judicial Complex at 4010 Lewis Speedway in St. Augustine.

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# ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

## Strategize for a strong 2022

By Marge Cirillo  
mail@floridanewslines.com

If you want your business to thrive in the new year, it's essential to get your game plan in place now and create a strong strategy for 2022. Before you know it tax time will be here and you need to start getting your year-end information together. Do it now! The following are some ideas you might want to think about for 2022.

Reflect on what didn't work. While you should celebrate your wins of last year,

now is a good time to reflect on the projects and situations that could have gone better. It's important to tally what worked and what didn't. This is going to require some real honesty, but if it's done correctly, you'll set yourself up for a great start in 2022.

Define a quarterly focus. Sometimes the best preparation strategy is to look at the bigger picture and map out your entire year. Set your big quarterly goals at the beginning of the year. Each quarter, focus on one of these four areas: getting new customers, getting

referrals from customers, getting customers to purchase again and getting B2B connections.

Create a monthly one-page action plan. Once you've planned your quarters, you can drill down even further and create a one-page action plan for each month of the year. It keeps things simple and measurable. A one-pager of your goals for yourself and each team member will help you clearly visualize everyone's tasks. This will help you keep track of which goals are being accomplished and which ones are not.

Look at future trend predictions. Many of these are best taken with a grain of salt, but no matter what industry you're in, there are bound to be valuable resources online that can help you prepare for the coming year. Read widely and educate yourself on what to expect in the new year.

*Marge Cirillo is the Florida Small Business Development Center consultant for St. Johns County. She can be reached at m.cirillo@unf.edu or (904) 209-1295.*

## What small businesses can do to engage their communities

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

Community engagement can benefit small businesses in various ways. By engaging with their communities, business owners can build brand awareness and inspire trust among residents. Trust in a brand leads many consumers to share positive word-of-mouth, and it also can inspire brand loyalty, a potentially lucrative benefit that can pay dividends for years to come.

A recent study from Bain and Company found that the average repeat customer spends 67 percent more in months 31 through 36 of their relationship with a business than they do in the first six months of that relationship. That underscores how lucrative a long-term relationship with a customer can be for a business. When paired with reliable products and great customer service, community engagement strategies increase the likelihood that businesses will create a loyal customer base, thus laying the foundation for a successful business that can grow for years to come.

Businesses can engage with their communities in various ways. Many engagement strategies give business owners a chance to communicate directly with their customers, and these interactions can be especially valuable.

- Participate in local events. Local events like holiday bazaars and town festivals provide great chances for business owners to communicate directly with new and existing customers. Take advantage of the chance to set up a booth at such events, and make a concerted effort to reach out to consumers who stop by the booth. The customer

feedback experts at Apptentive found that 97 percent of consumers are somewhat likely to become more loyal to a company that implements their feedback. Setting up a booth at a bazaar or festival provides a great chance to solicit feedback that businesses can then implement to retain more customers.

- Sponsor a local youth sports team. Youth sports team sponsorships are a relatively inexpensive way to create brand awareness. The National Alliance for Youth Sports, Inc., reports that sponsorship costs vary from organization to organization, though they may cost as little as \$100 to around \$5,000 for the season. In return for that investment, businesses gain exposure to athletes, athletes' families and friends, volunteers, and countless others who may see players in uniform on game day. When compared to the cost of advertising online, on television or on the radio, youth sports sponsorship provides a great return on investment.
- Offer your space. Another way business owners can engage their communities is by offering their spaces for community-based events. For example, business owners with ample parking lots can offer those lots as registration sites for charity 5Ks or other events that can utilize large and open outdoor spaces. This approach addresses a community need and draws a crowd of locals to your establishment, thus increasing the chances they will patronize the business during and after the event.

## Estate planning is for everyone

By Rose Marie Preddy, Attorney and owner, Preddy Law Firm  
mail@floridanewslines.com

Will this Valentine's Day be the day you finally tell your life partner it's either you or their estate plan?

I say "life partner" because many couples in our area live together and/or work together, but have not yet married. Maybe your loved one has an estate plan, but has not taken the time to update it to include you in it. You both are too busy to focus on estate planning. But this will work out, right? After all, you make a great team together.

When you first got together neither of you were worth much. Maybe there was a fledgling small business that was not yet profitable. You were just helping your life partner pursue a dream. No need to get any paperwork showing you own anything, because nothing may have come of this business venture. You just wanted to be a supportive, loving partner, though you were literally not a business partner.

Some years pass and the business becomes successful. You draw a nominal salary only because you are cautious about the company. This is your baby too, and you do not want to take any more money out of the business than is necessary.

To take the business to the next level, you and your life partner agree to bring in a business partner who has skills, ideas and capital. A partnership agreement is drawn up. You are not on the

agreement, but everyone knows you are the reason why the business runs like a well-oiled machine. You are listed as an officer in the business' annual reports.

All of this matters, right? Actually, no. You have no rights or interests in the business just because you gave your time and effort to make it successful, or because you are listed as an officer of the company on a business report.

Years later, your life partner suffers a stroke or worse yet, dies. What now? Everyone knows you are key to the company running so well. Unfortunately, that does not matter in the law. If your life partner has not named you in their estate plan, or given you shares in the company while alive and well, you are out of luck.

Florida Law does not refer to a "life partner," a "good person," a "girlfriend," or a "boyfriend." You are either a spouse, an heir, or are named as a beneficiary. You have no rights to the estate regardless of how long you have been together and/or worked together. Morally you win, but legally you would lose.

As Valentine's Day approaches, it may be the time to determine if there is enough room in the relationship for both you and your partner's estate plan. On second thought, enjoy dessert, and start the conversation for the next day.

Contact rpreddy@preddy.com or visit www.preddy.com for more information.

## ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

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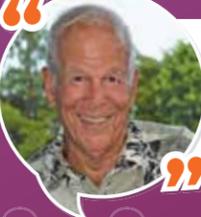



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## Guest Column

# What you need to know about 2022 elections

By St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes  
mail@floridanewsline.com

It’s 2022, and officially an election year. The Primary Election will occur on Aug. 23 and the General Election is scheduled for Nov. 3, so mark your calendars.

Note that Duval County is conducting a Special General Election on Feb. 22 that does not involve St. Johns County voters. If you have recently moved to Duval County, contact their Elections Office at (904) 255-8683 to transfer your registration so you are eligible to vote in their election.

If you have recently moved to St. Johns County, visit [votesjc.gov](http://votesjc.gov) to register to vote or update your registration. You can also call the office at (904) 823-2238 if you have questions or need assistance. It’s important to keep your information up to date with our office since we will be doing several mailings this year — including new voter information cards and prior to each election, polling place change notices and sample ballots.

As a reminder, Florida is a closed primary state. In a primary you may only vote the party of your official registration. The purpose of a primary election is for the parties to choose their nominees for the general election ballot. Republican voters receive a Republican ballot and Democratic voters receive a Democratic ballot. Voters registered with no party affiliation (NPA) or with a minor party may only vote a nonpartisan ballot. There are a few races that are designated by law as nonpartisan offices, such as Judges and School Board members, and appear on all ballots.

Some of the offices on this year’s ballot include: US Senate, Congressional Representatives, Governor and Cabinet, State Legislators, County Commission, School Board members, and many special district offices and Community Development District Supervisors. Visit [votesjc.gov](http://votesjc.gov) for a complete listing of the offices scheduled for election in 2022.

It’s already shaping up to be an exciting election year as many candidates have signed up to run for office at the federal, state and local level. Fundraising for campaigns actually started in 2021, and is now in full swing. Curious about who has filed and money being raised by the candidates? Information on federal and state candidates can be found on the Division of Elections website, [dos.myflorida.com](http://dos.myflorida.com). Local candidates’ information is available on our website ([votesjc.gov](http://votesjc.gov)).

Two constitutional amendments were placed on the November ballot by the State Legislature during the 2021 session. In addition, special interest groups are attempting to obtain a position on the General Election ballot by petition and the legislature is in session through March 11, so additional amendments are most likely forthcoming.

In addition to published articles, the easiest way to keep up with current elections news is to sign up for my monthly e-newsletter, which will be launched in March. Use the sign up link on the front page of the website [votesjc.gov](http://votesjc.gov) and submit your email address to subscribe. The best way to reach me is by email [voakes@votesjc.gov](mailto:voakes@votesjc.gov) or call the office at (904) 823-2238. Don’t forget, our website is also a great resource, so visit it often.



### Q&A with St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer

**Q: Do you have an overview of single family home sales in 2021?**

A: Yes, here is an overview of what our office has seen last year:

There were 32,711 single family home sales that closed by Dec. 31, 2021. As of that date, there were also 2,235 pending sales.

The average sales price for a single family home in St. Johns County increased from \$321,000 to \$378,000 last year. That’s a 17.8 percent increase.

Another interesting thing is the percentage of list price received: 99.4 percent.

**Q: What does it look like for 2022?**

A: There are currently 3,102 active listings of homes for sale, what we would call inventory available. At the current pace of sales, that’s only 1.1 months of inventory, which is very low. It’s clear we will continue to see increasing prices due to the low inventory and the

increased demand of so many people moving to our county.

**Q: What about new construction of single family homes in 2021?**

A: We added 5,000 newly constructed homes to the tax roll in 2021. The value of these newly constructed homes was \$1.6 billion. Even this early in our 2022 tax year, our tax roll is up 11.67 percent and we still have five months of valuation to go until the tax roll year-end of July 31.

**Q: What are some statistics regarding Homestead Exemption?**

A: In 2021, our office processed 18,100 new Homestead Exemption applications. Recall that for homeowners in our county that have Homestead Exemption on their property, as part of Save Our Homes, each year the assessed value of their home can only increase by the lower of 3 percent or the cost of living

**Creamer** cont. on pg. 9

# Life

travel · pantry raiders · gardening  
fishing · entertainment · puzzles

## Get to Know ...

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps  
mail@floridanewslines.com

Molly Hunt

Ponte Vedra Beach resident Molly Hunt credits her parents with teaching her the art of public speaking. As the youngest of six children, Hunt observed her late father, Ty Boyd, work in radio and television, go into professional speaking and then teach others to do the same. Hunts' parents parlayed that into Ty Boyd Inc., a globally known executive communications and coaching company that began in North Carolina. More than anything though, Hunt's parents led by example in how they both treated other people. This lesson was not lost on Hunt. "They had a true calling to help others learn," said Hunt. "My father was the most humble, kind, compassionate and others-focused person I have ever known up to the day he died, literally to the day he died." Hunt's path to joining the family company was not immediate; however, her family ties and own desire to help others prevailed, and she joined the company 22 years ago. Most importantly to Hunt (now the chief executive officer), her father's legacy lives on through a "very gifted staff" at the 40-year-old company. "I am nothing without them."

**Q: Did you picture yourself working in this role when you were younger?**

A: Heck no! I wanted to be a golfer. I thought golf would be my life and my career. I ultimately earned a psychology degree from Queens University, and I ended up working at a television station in St. Petersburg doing voiceover work and

**Get to Know ...**

Interested in being featured? Email Martie Thompson at [editor@FloridaNewsLine.com](mailto:editor@FloridaNewsLine.com)



Photo courtesy Molly Hunt  
Molly Hunt with her mother.

promotional pieces. I missed my family so much. My mom said, "Look, we are trying to grow the company; why don't you join us?" So, I did. I took out the garbage, did filing, basically grunt work and made no money for a while. I kept growing with the company and developing and eventually took our signature Executive Public Speaking course.

**Q: Were you nervous when you took your first course?**

A: Absolutely! I have been to that debilitating place. When I went through that first course, I had the added pressure of having my mom, dad and sister present in the back of the room on the third day. I wanted so badly to wake up with the flu, but no luck. Once I delivered my final speech, I was elated. Not because class was over, but I proved to myself that I could do it.

**Q: You were closest to your late sister, Anne, who was the oldest and also worked at Ty Boyd Inc. as your boss. Explain that relationship and how Anne's legacy continues today. (Anne was diagnosed with anaplastic thyroid cancer in 2016 and passed away in October 2017.)**

A: We were 12 years apart, so we were considered the bookends. She is my soulmate and always will be. We traveled 22 years together and traveled the globe multiple times and never argued. She was the heart-beat of Ty Boyd and will always be a deep part of who we are as individuals and as a company. Anne embraced our clients as family. She now carries the title of Chief Angel Officer, and we created the Anne Boyd-Moore Scholarship to honor her.

**Q: What is your life philosophy?**

A: God first, family second and work third. This is a common thread with everyone we hire.

**Q: Share one public speaking tip.**

A: Remember that it is not about you. We put so much focus on ourselves and that is not where the focus needs to be. Think about what the audience needs. Think about being more like a teacher and also being interactive. It is like you are having a mini-conversation with many people rather than a presentation to a crowd.

**Q: Identify one childhood memory that really impacted you.**

A: Dad had to go into the office one Saturday at the television station and he was bringing me and my brother Elliott with him. We always cut through this one neighborhood. This particular day there was a major downpour, and we passed this man who clearly wasn't from the neighborhood. He was maybe waiting for a bus, but my Dad backed up and never once said anything to us. He rolled his window down and said, "Hey man, hop in. Where are you going?" The guy was both scared and relieved. He had no umbrella and he was just standing there. He told my dad where he needed to go, and that is where we went. He was somebody who needed help, and that was all that mattered. This really epitomizes my family and our company — others focused.

**Creamer** cont. from pg. 8  
index (CPI). For the past five years, the CPI has been significantly below 2 percent, so that has marked the value increase. This year's CPI was just published and it is 7 percent, the highest since Save Our Homes started in 2002. So it looks like this year, the assessed value increase will be utilizing the 3 percent figure.

**Q: What do you see ahead for this year?**

A: Every indication points to our county still growing, prices still increasing — and another busy year for 2022.

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

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

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



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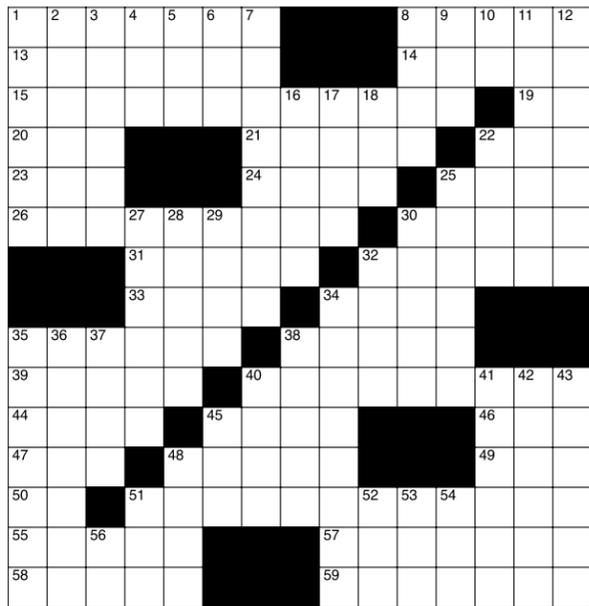
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# Puzzles

Answers on page 3  
Provided by MetroCreative



### CLUES ACROSS

1. \_\_\_ de Mornay, actress
8. Surrenders
13. Omission
14. The white poplar
15. They become butterflies
19. Used to chop
20. Select
21. Volcanic craters
22. Consumer price index
23. Utilize
24. "True Blood" actress Paquin
25. Got up
26. Sank in
30. Retail
31. Giants
32. Most bald
33. Changes color
34. Unit of loudness
35. Undresses

### CLUES DOWN

38. Fathers
39. Learned skill
40. Remove qualification
44. Covered with frost
45. Speak up
46. Nowhere to be found
47. Part of surgery (abbr.)
48. Type of wrap
49. Church seating
50. Mathematical figure
51. College football conference
55. Turkish officer title
57. Organized body of knowledge
58. Smooth and glossy
59. Left

### CLUES DOWN

1. Get back
2. Pass or go by
3. Having a sharp taste
4. Midway between east and southeast
5. Cairo Regional Airport
6. Peace officer
7. Brings to life
8. Automotive vehicles
9. One point south of due east
10. Football position
11. Goes by
12. Most attractive
16. Road divisions
17. Not the sea
18. Small, faint constellation
22. Cabbage
25. Least frequent
27. Change slightly
28. A country in NE Africa

29. Metric units of measure
30. More coherent
32. Make uninteresting
34. Nausea
35. Institution of Oceanography
36. Of little value
37. Hindu model of the ideal man
38. Biblical exclamation
40. You throw it at a board
41. Be about to happen
42. Brutal
43. Opened one's mouth widely
45. 19th letter of Greek alphabet
48. Saturate
51. The woman
52. Someone who is highly skilled
53. A way to launch an attack on
54. Where golfers begin
56. Atomic number 58

## HEART FUNCTION WORD SEARCH

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

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

### WORDS

- AORTIC
- ARTERY
- ATRIUM
- BEAT
- BLOOD
- CARDIAC
- CHAMBERS
- COORDINATED
- HEART
- LEFT
- LUNGS
- MITRAL
- NUTRIENTS
- OXYGEN
- PATTERN
- PULMONARY
- PULSE
- RIGHT
- TISSUES
- TRICUSPID
- VALVE
- VEIN
- VENA CAVA
- VENTRICLE

## CRYPTO FUN

Determine the code to reveal the answer!

Solve the code to discover words related to heart health. Each number corresponds to a letter. (Hint: 26 = E)

- A. 4 26 6 11 20  
Clue: Beats in chest
- B. 5 12 13 22 26  
Clue: Rhythm of blood flow
- C. 10 23 3 8 20 23 11  
Clue: Watch and see
- D. 10 12 22 2 13 26  
Clue: Tissues that contract

### Victory cont. from pg. 1

create a system of service delivery. The organization connects with local businesses in every community where there is a V Pizza and asks that they back one family once a month, simply offering a service or product that they already provide. This could be for plumbing, electrical, dental, massage therapy, dry cleaning or landscape services just to name a few. V for Victory takes care of the rest.

"We handle it all so that it is a seamless process for the business," said Scott. "We ask that if the business incurs a cost above what they offered, that they bill us so the family never gets a bill. Give a significant discount is all that we ask."

In addition, everyone in the family of the person battling cancer eats free at any V Pizza with 7,000 free meals given out to 200 families this past year. There are currently six V Pizza locations in and around the Jacksonville area, including one in Ponte Vedra Beach.

"At V Pizza, we feed every family, every week for free," said Scott, who is in the process of opening two more V Pizza restaurants (one in St. Augustine and one in Fleming Island).

Customers at V Pizza also have the option of donating to V for Victory when they pay their bill, with 100 percent of that donation going to families.

"We pay for all costs associated with V for Victory out of pocket," said Scott, who has lived in Ponte Vedra Beach for 10 years.

Scott said that customers in Ponte Vedra Beach are especially generous and well-

versed when it comes to V for Victory. Jacklyn Overby, V for Victory executive director, said last year there were 150 to 250 services completed each month by local small businesses. More than 550 families received monthly free services also last year, she said.

"Oftentimes, our Ponte Vedra Beach businesses go next level with us. They are looking for a charity or cause to support, and they go above and beyond the monthly ask when partnering with us," said Overby.

One Jacksonville Beach mom, whose family received help from V for Victory, explained why this organization has been a gift during a very difficult time.

"V for Victory is a lifeline for relief. They find a way to make the wants and needs of a family available without drawing attention to the cancer and the treatments. They have our lawn mowed, make family outings available to local attractions, provide meals and send personalized gifts to our children on special occasions," said the mom, who wished to remain anonymous.

In addition to the services provided by so many businesses, Scott recently added LEGO to the business donor list. Scott reached out to LEGO to ask if he could purchase LEGO sets at cost so that every pediatric oncology patient could select a LEGO set after every treatment or cancer-related procedure. Instead, LEGO opted to give V for Victory 6,800 sets for free two months ago. This will continue yearly.

"That is \$700,000 worth of LEGOS that we now keep in a warehouse," said Scott, who used to get his son a LEGO set after every cancer treatment or visit to make

the frequent visits to the hospital special instead of dreaded. "It gave him something to look forward to."

Scott, whose son is now in remission, wanted to bring this same magic to any child fighting cancer. V Pizza also paid for a V for Victory LEGO room that will open at Nemours Children's Health at Wolfson Children's Hospital at the end of 2022/beginning of 2023. Adult oncology patients are also welcome to select one LEGO set for their family for special occasions and events.

Overby said she is so grateful to work at V for Victory and is constantly impressed by the generosity of community members.

"People want to help," she said. "Sometimes even when we are compassionate, we get disconnected. This gives everyone an opportunity to help your neighbor, people you know but you maybe didn't know the struggles that they are facing; that they are battling for their lives. You get to serve your own community."

Businesses and families need only go to [vforvictory.org](http://vforvictory.org) to sign up or email [info@vforvictory.org](mailto:info@vforvictory.org) for more information.

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# JaxTHRIVE offers tutoring and friendship to refugee students

By Elizabeth Paul  
mail@floridanewline.com

JaxTHRIVE, a local, student-led non-profit organization, welcomes refugee children to America through tutoring and mentoring. Founded in 2017 as a one-on-one, in-person Saturday learning program, the organization transitioned to virtual tutoring with the emergence of COVID-19. Although anxious to get back to in-person tutoring, JaxTHRIVE found that by offering a virtual option, it could engage volunteers and refugee students from all over the world.



Photos courtesy Elizabeth Paul  
The JaxTHRIVE leadership team.

Believing in the power of collaboration and collective voice, this charity partners with Lutheran Social Services, Kim's Open Door, and other organizations in the refugee resettlement arena to make a difference. Most recently, it announced a new partnership in Miami with the Refugee Assistance Alliance. JaxTHRIVE boasts a current virtual enrollment of 25 students but expects that number to increase as more Afghanistan Special Immigrant Visa refugees are resettled into the U.S.

Founded as a youth-led movement, JaxTHRIVE's Leadership Council is led by co-presidents Hope Freedman and Alexis Magnano who work to bring together a group of talented and diverse individuals who engage their community, show leadership, and work together to spread their mission. JaxTHRIVE is unique in its approach as it offers comprehensive services including SAT/ACT test preparation, financial literacy boot camps and college admission strate-

gies in addition to academic tutoring. Its goal is to help students advance in the classroom and flourish in the community.

Finding opportunities to get to know some of the local refugee youth outside of tutoring important so during a day off from school last November, JaxTHRIVE partnered with Lutheran

Social Services and enjoyed an amazing afternoon. With funds awarded from the America's Promise Power of Youth Award, they met for a delicious lunch in the park and then a trip to the Cummer Museum. Discussing the art and getting to know these students on a more personal level was an incredible experience.

Looking for another way to support the community, JaxTHRIVE volunteers have been helping to set up new apartments for the families coming from Afghanistan. Volunteers have reached out to their friends, family members and colleagues on many occasions to gather items to help make these new homes a bit more welcoming. JaxTHRIVE hopes this will help these families start their new lives in Florida in a stronger position.

JaxTHRIVE always welcomes donations to support their mission. Visit [www.jaxthrive.net](http://www.jaxthrive.net) for more information.

**Teacher** cont. from pg. 1

During the event, Tim Forson, St. Johns County Superintendent of Schools, spoke and congratulated Burk and Holle, along with accolades from local business leaders, and recognition for all Teacher of the Year finalists. Additional presentations included Burk's comments and affirmations from many educators who were previous award winners along with attendance by families, friends, and students who joined the evening event at World Golf Village Renaissance St. Augustine Resort.

As Teacher of the Year, Burk will be awarded a car to drive from Beaver Toyota and a \$500 gift certificate from Staples. He also becomes the representative from St. Johns County in the State of Florida Teacher of the Year competition. Burk will begin a yearlong professional development and leadership program with fellow Teachers of the Year from all 67 counties around the state.

Burk has received awards as an outstanding educational leader, and for high academics, and is a member of several professional educator associations. He is a volunteer mentor with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northeast Florida. Burk's focus is helping students learn how to play instruments through world-renowned music programs. The method allows students to start on specific instruments for faster learning so they can play harder, more impressive music as they grow, and to play additional instruments.

As a music teacher, Burk's philosophy is to focus on students working together, exerting effort, and making sacrifices as a team. He requires all students to help set up chairs and stands each morning, with responsibilities to move equipment, perform instrument maintenance, and organize paperwork for the band to emphasize personal ownership of the program. Burk assigns every student to perform three minutes throughout the year to present their favorite song to the band and to help build a caring, supportive band family. Burk teaches students that as individuals and through cooperation, they will benefit from their class experience as they work to provide value to the group.

Burk said, "I am honored and humbled to receive such an amazing distinction as Teacher of the Year. We have an exceptional group of educators in St. Johns County and it is a privilege to collaborate with them each day," said Burk. "The school year has been challenging in many ways. Yet, it has provided us with a unique opportunity to reflect on our teaching practices and think about our relationships with our students. And it reminds us that what matters most is to help students truly engage in their own learning experiences," he said.

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# Nease basketball teams ranked in Class 6A Top 10



Photos courtesy Laurel Madson

Senior Logan Ryan is averaging more than 20 points and five rebounds per game.

By Laurel Madson  
mail@floridanewline.com

Led by Coach Joshua Bailen, the Nease boys' basketball team is currently ranked in the top 10 in the state of Florida for Class 6A with a record of 11 – 4. The Panthers placed second in the fourth annual Fortegra Invitational Tournament last month. Senior Logan Ryan is averaging more than 20 points and five rebounds per game and has scored more than 1,000 points in his career at Nease High School. Ryan will be continuing his basketball career next year at St. Leo University. Another leader on the team is All St. Johns County player Matthew Guzie. He is averaging 10 points and four assists per game, while having a GPA of more than 4.0. He

plans on attending college in Florida next year and pursuing a career in medicine.

The Lady Panthers are also having a stellar season with a 12 – 3 record. They are currently ranked ninth in the State for Class 6A. This is no surprise as they are led by head coach and 12-time Coach of the Year, Sherri Anthony. In July 2021, the National High School Athletic Coaches Association inducted her into the Hall of Fame, honoring the work she's done over her impressive 36-year career at Nease. Coach Anthony recently achieved her 650th win on Dec. 29 vs. Lakewood Ranch High School.

Senior captain Sydney Gomes also hit an amazing milestone when she was

## Jodie Raymond honored posthumously

*"If there is good I can do, let me do it now for I shall not pass this way again."*

Jodie Raymond lived true to her favorite saying much more than most. The Daughters of the American Revolution (DARs) awarded Raymond the National Women in American History award posthumously for her many amazing accomplishments. Raymond was an active member of the Ponte Vedra Chapter of DARs since 1998. She helped raise money for benches in the Jacksonville National Cemetery and was very involved in promoting the Wreaths Across America to honor area veterans every December. Early in her life, Raymond was instrumental in convincing the major networks to offer closed captioning on TV for hearing impaired people. She donated her RH negative blood monthly for more than 30 years for RH positive babies' lifesaving RHoGAM treat-



Photo courtesy Ponte Vedra Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution

ments. She founded her own business, Jodie Raymond Originals, designing and creating unique clothes using a knitting machine she taught herself to use. Later she traveled worldwide to teach others her creative techniques.

recently recognized at a home game and presented with a game ball after scoring 2,000 total points. She averages 19.5 points per game and is only the second player at Nease to reach that milestone. Gomes will continue her basketball career next year at Florida Southern College. The second highest scorer is junior Cami Robinson, who averages 15.2 points per game. Another leader on the team is senior captain Alli Fifield, who averages 11.5 points per game and will continue her basketball career next year at Ave Maria University.

The team went 2 – 0 in the KSA Tournament in December and 2 – 1 in the Tampa Invitational Tournament over the holiday break. This was one of the most prestigious tournaments in the country, with more than 125 girls' teams in attendance. The team was happy to have star player and senior Savannah Gomes back on the court the last few games after suffering an ACL injury earlier. Their record since her return is 6 – 1.

*Come out and support the teams by buying tickets on the GoFan app for the remaining games. Go Panthers!*



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# Travel

## Famous trees to see in the South

By Debi Lander  
mail@floridanewsline.com



Photo courtesy Nancy Musser

Edison Ford Banyan Tree in Ft. Myers.

While I don't consider myself a tree hugger (environmental campaigner),

I am very fond of trees. I'm especially attracted to those with historical significance or those of considerable size. Here is a list of some significant trees I have encountered in the South.



Photo courtesy Debi Lander

Emancipation Oak in Hampton, Virginia.

Let's start in Jacksonville. The Treaty Oak, located downtown in Jessie Dupont Park, was saved by what we'd now call fake news. In the 1930s, developers started eyeing the land around the tree. Florida Times-Union journalist Pat Moran devised a story about a treaty between Native Americans and white settlers being signed under the oak, making it a local landmark. Together with the extensive efforts of the Garden Club of Jacksonville, this story ensured that the magnificent oak was saved.

Farther south in Fort Myers, Florida, you will find the largest banyan tree in the Continental United States. It stands, along with a statue of Edison, on the garden-like grounds of the Museum. Banyan trees only grow in the farthest reaches of the state, as they are not cold tolerant. The multi-footed tree at Edison Ford, believed to have been planted around 1925, has grown a canopy covering at least one acre of land.

Moving slightly north to the historic district of Jekyll Island, you'll find a regal live oak. The Plantation Oak dates to the mid-17th century, making it approximately 375 years old. The trunk spans seven feet eight inches in diameter.

At the southern end of nearby St. Simons Island, look for the Avenue of the Oaks. Planted in 1826, the lane of trees now forms the grand entrance to the Sea Island Golf Club.

The Angel Oak, near Charleston, South Carolina serves a whopping 17,200 square feet of shade and is believed to be somewhere between 500 to 1,500 years old (its exact age remains contested). The tree carries historical significance as well. During segregation, both African-American and white families would picnic under the sheltering limbs, making the area a small haven from racial strife. Drive 12 miles southwest of the city to Johns Island to find it.

In Hampton, Virginia (near Norfolk), I discovered the Emancipation Oak. The tree lies on the campus of Hampton University and marks the spot where, in 1863, the first Southern reading of the Emancipation Proclamation occurred. At this location, Union General Benjamin F. Butler gave shelter to fugitive slaves as "contraband of war" early in the Civil War. Then, the sprawling oak served as the first classroom that newly free children and adults could attend. By 1863, the Butler School was constructed beside the tree. Standing under its limbs brought a poignant experience; I personally felt I was nestled deep in history. Indeed, climbing is prohibited today, but I'm sure many found a cozy spot to sit within the branches of this oak.

If you head toward Louisiana, you can walk up the famous entryway of arching branches at Oak Alley. Over at nearby Evergreen Plantation, still a working sugar cane producer, you will find similar oaks lining the entry to the slave cabins. While thousands of these buildings were once scattered across the American South, they are now exceedingly rare. This is the only place where they exist unchanged, except for slight repairs and stabilization efforts. This site has been used in several movies and is, no pun intended, moving. The trees and village remain to tell their story.

Feel free to write to me at mail@floridanewsline.com if you've encountered any trees on your travels that bring back memories.

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

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# PopHistory

## The man who shot Charles Whitman

By Scott A. Grant  
mail@floridanewline.com

On Aug. 1, 1966, Charles Whitman rode the elevator to the top of the University of Texas Clock Tower in the middle of campus with a deadly intent. The former Marine sharpshooter was dressed in overalls and a white headband and hauling a footlocker of guns and ammo. The night before, the Eagle Scout from Lake Worth, Florida, had murdered both his wife and his mother. He stabbed them both through the heart while they slept.

Whitman barricaded himself on the observation deck and began firing rapidly. Observers recounted puff after puff of white smoke emitting from the sniper's nest as Whitman aimed and reloaded. Whitman was a good shot. He would kill 14 people and wound 30 more, most of them in the first 15 minutes of the bloody hour and a half of terror.

The event is remembered as the first mass shooting in US history. Today, mass shootings are commonplace. The

United States endures more than one a day on average. But, in 1966, the idea of a man taking a high-powered rifle and shooting strangers for no reason at all was wholly incomprehensible.

Citizens of Austin gathered around the base of the Tower with weapons of their own, returning fire. This allowed three Austin Police Officers and a civilian to enter the building and begin climbing the 28 floors to the top of the tower, passing the dead bodies of a receptionist and two tourists along the way.

Ramiro Martinez and Houston McCoy met each other for the first time that day on the 28th floor of the Tower. They had no plan. They nodded at each other as Martinez broke open the door to the observation deck and began to move toward Whitman.

As they rounded the final corner, Martinez leapt out and rapidly emptied his service revolver. Whitman whirled to face the two and raised his rifle. Houston McCoy, like a real-life John Wayne,

leveled his shotgun and took dead aim at Whitman's head. Whitman's white headband turned red. McCoy fired a second round into the killer's chest.

Martinez then grabbed McCoy's shotgun and ran over to Whitman and shot him a third time before running around the deck hollering, "I got him. I got him!" McCoy pulled his fellow officer down because people on the ground were still shooting up at the deck. Martinez ran down to the ground to make a report. McCoy leaned back against the cool Indiana limestone and lit a cigarette.

Ramiro Martinez was hailed as the hero of the day. They named a building after him. He became a Texas Ranger. Houston McCoy left the force two years later and for the rest of his life he suffered from depression and alcoholism. The memories haunted him. He could not get past the thought that if he had just gotten to the top of that tower faster, he might have saved more lives, especially

that of fellow officer and friend, Billy Speed.

From the beginning there were questions about who fired the shot that killed the sniper. Who was the real hero? The answer, of course, is that they were both heroes. Yet, the debate lingers on today. The autopsy suggests Martinez hit Whitman in the left arm and that the cold-blooded killer died from a shotgun blast to the head or to the heart.

"Rey" Martinez says Whitman was still moving when he fired that third shot. McCoy says he was dead after the first. Advocates for both sides argue the incident vehemently. Monika McCoy followed her father into the Austin Police Department and even walked his old beat by the University for a bit. There is not a day that goes by that she does not think about her father as a hero on that fateful day.

*Scott A. Grant is a local pop historian. By day he is Chief Investment Officer for Standfast Asset Management.*

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## Nutrition Check

## Children's Dental Health Month

By Kristen Hicks-Roof PhD, RDN, LDN, CLC and Crystal Liebenberg BS  
mail@floridanewline.com

Healthy eating habits and routine dental care go hand-in-hand for optimal oral health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that nearly 20 percent of children aged five through 11 have at least one untreated dental cavity. You may be wondering how you can boost yours or your children's oral health by improving your dietary habits and here are a few suggestions to get you started.

Limit juice and sugary beverages (e.g., sweetened coffee, sports drinks, fruit juice, soda). The sugars in these beverages stay on your teeth and contribute to dental decay. Opt in to eliminating these sugary drinks between meals and/or brush one's teeth immediately after consuming them to help prevent cavities.

Learn more about food hygiene. Check out an online platform ([www.e-bug.eu](http://www.e-bug.eu)), a community that helps adults and children learn about optimal oral health and nutrition.

Consume calcium-rich foods for bone health. Calcium rich foods help promote strong teeth and bones; add in dairy (milk, yogurt, cheese) or other calcium sources (canned salmon, almonds, dark leafy greens).

Practice moderation of chewy, sticky foods. Sticky foods such as raisins, jellybeans, and caramel stick to the teeth and get in the crevices between the teeth.

Boost Vitamin C consumption for gum health. Vitamin C is an important dietary oxidant for periodontal health. Add in foods such as kiwi, citrus, tomato, broccoli, and strawberries to support gum health.

Drink plenty of water. Water helps to wash away any bacteria in the mouth and rinse the teeth. It's important to drink water both with meals and between meals.

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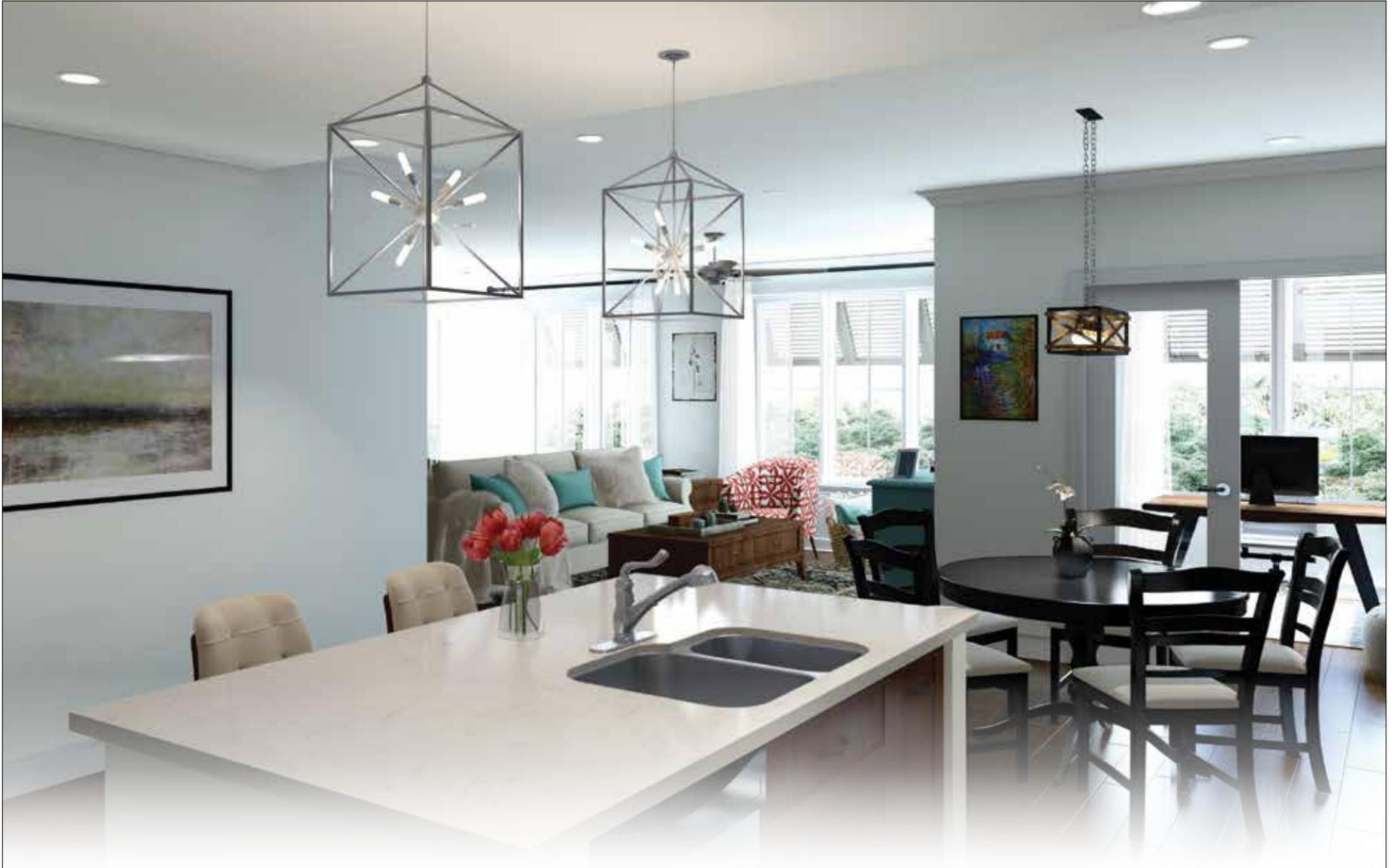
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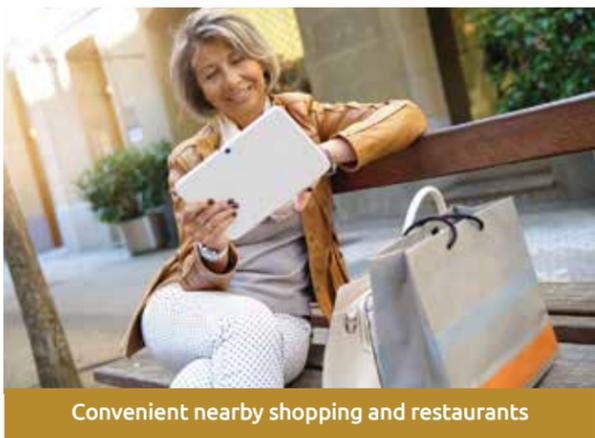
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