



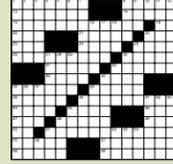
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Photo courtesy Michael Ballard

Artist Marie Shell with some of her artwork.

Art exhibit to feature work of longtime Fruit Cove resident and artist

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

An art exhibit highlighting the work of longtime Fruit Cove artist Marie Shell will be on display at the Bartram Trail Branch of the St. Johns County Public Library from Feb. 1 through March 12.

Shell was a prodigious and influential painter who called Fruit Cove home for more than 50 years. Working from her studio on the St. Johns River, she created more than 3,000 cataloged works of art. Her work has been featured in at least 11 art books and she was a signature member of several artists' societies including the National Watercolor Society, the Southern Watercolor So-

Art exhibit cont. on pg. 13

Meet New County Commissioner Sarah Arnold

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.com

NW St. Johns County resident Sarah Arnold was appointed by Gov. Ron DeSantis on Dec. 13 to fill the unexpired term of St. Johns County Commissioner for District 2 Jeb Smith, who resigned to become the president of the Florida Farm Bureau. She will serve the remainder of the unexpired term, until the 2022 election for the seat, at which time she could run for election to a full term if she chose.

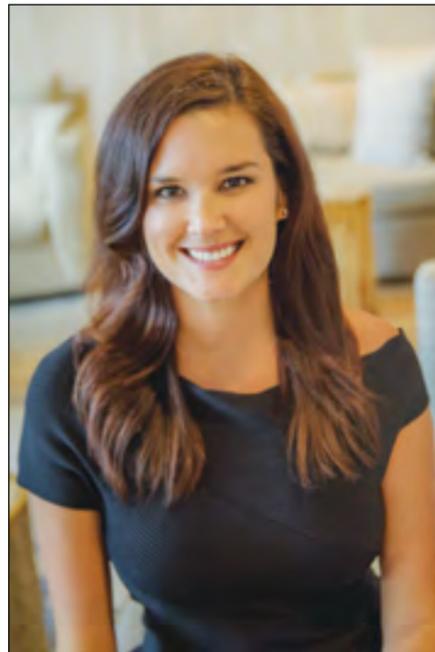
Arnold is a northeast Florida native who grew up in Mandarin. She is married to Casey Arnold, who also grew up in Mandarin, although she said they didn't start dating until they both attended the University of Florida. After Casey Arnold completed law school, the young couple moved back to Mandarin to be near their families. By the time they had their first child, they decided to move across the Julington Creek Bridge to St. Johns County for the well-regarded schools and quality of life.

Sarah Arnold remained busy as a stay at home mom to the family's four children, who now range in age from six to 13. Both she and her husband found time to volunteer at the United Way, which eventually led to a paid position for Sarah.

"After hurricanes Matthew and Irma, I began working part time at United Way," Arnold said. "Our youngest had just started preschool, so I worked the hours she was in school and the position grew from there."

Arnold, who said her passion is service, worked primarily with fundraising and fundraising events for United Way as she worked her way up to a full time position as the Resource Development Director.

"It was a great position, because it allowed me to see all the facets of our community via not only our donors, but also those we serve," Arnold said.



Photos courtesy Sarah Arnold

New St. Johns County Commissioner, District 2, Sarah Arnold.

She worked approximately three years until the pandemic hit and then, like so many parents, she became responsible for homeschooling her children. She came back on board with United Way last October to be the event coordinator for the agency's largest fundraiser, the Givers Gala, in late January. About the same time, Smith announced his resignation and she became aware of the County Commission seat being open.



The Arnold family.

and community."

So, in November, she filled out a written application and was interviewed for the position. The governor's office called her in mid-December to let her know she was selected, which she said was much quicker than she expected.

"I was surprised and most importantly, very honored," she said. "I'm glad to bring a woman's and a mother's perspective to the Board of County Commissioners. The governor's office said that I have 'skin in the game' with my children in public schools ... and I agree. It's important to me that we continue our high quality of life in St. Johns County."

Arnold was sworn in days after learning of her appointment and said she is experiencing a steep learning curve ("like drinking water from a firehose").

Arnold said she has three main priorities as commissioner. First, with the rapid growth of St. Johns County, she said she wants to make sure that projects that the County Commissioners approve have net benefit to the community. She mentioned making sure that infrastructure could support proposed development. Secondly, she said she is a huge advocate for veterans (both of her grandfathers were in the military) and is passionate

about making sure they have all the resources they need. And third, she believes that part of the reason people want to live in St. Johns County is because it is safe. She said it's important to do everything possible to support the first responders who are responsible for this.

In her spare time, Arnold loves to spend time with her family, especially on the water — whether it is playing on the beach with her kids or out on the river on their boat, or paddleboarding. The Arnold family also includes two dogs and a bunny.

"It was a natural extension of my work with United Way to be drawn to the opportunity to effect change in a greater way," Arnold said. "I truly thought I would make an excellent commissioner with my background in the local schools

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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet LuLu!



Breed:
Unknown, because he was adopted at a farm, but believe a Flemish giant mix.

Favorite Activity:
Running around in the backyard/playing

Favorite Treat:
Carrot

Favorite Friend:
He loves his cousin Oreo, who is also a bunny

How your BFF got his name:
LuLu was named after another adorable rabbit named Lu we saw on tv once!

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.

Love and Marriage Section



on page 11

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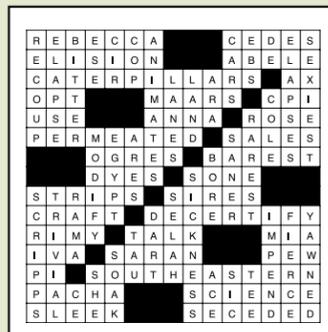


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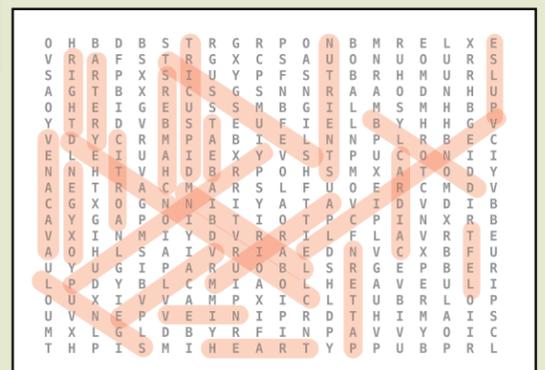
Can you guess where this is?
Submit your answer to: mail@FloridaNewsLine.com

Last month's Mystery Photo was the Shops at Aberdeen, under construction at Longleaf Pine Parkway and Shetland Drive. Our winner was William Rust. Congratulations!



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

Answers
to our
Puzzles
PG 14



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February

What's Going On in St. Johns? A modified calendar of events

Community Calendar

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 playinghookie31@gmail.com for more information.

Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet on Tuesday, Feb. 1 at 6:30 p.m. in Mandarin Presbyterian Church's Fellowship Hall at 11844 Mandarin Road. Robin Alison will be presenting "The Island of Misfit Scraps," where every scrap can find its place in a project. Mask-wearing requested. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

The CHARACTER COUNTS! 6K/3K Run/Walk will be held on Saturday, Feb. 5 at 9 a.m. The run/walk will begin and end at Palencia Elementary School located at 355 Palencia Village Drive. Walkers and runners will enjoy a course running through the neighborhoods of Kensington and Las Calinas and can choose to participate in the 6K (3.73 miles) or 3K (1.86 miles) distance. Race proceeds support CHARACTER COUNTS! initiatives throughout the St. Johns County School District. The run/walk is open to all ages. Visit <https://runsignup.com/Race/FL/StAugustine/CHARACTERCOUNTSInStJohnsCountySixPillars6K3KRunWalk> for more information and to register online.

NW St. Johns County United for Progress is planning to meet in person on Feb. 7 to elect at-large board

members. The monthly speaker will be Stephanie Patton from the Rethreaded organization. Social begins at 6:30 p.m. and meeting starts at 7 p.m. Email nwsjcp@gmail.com for more information. Visit www.nwstjohnsup.com for information about additional socials and coffee and conversation events.

The Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club will hold its meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, Feb. 8 at 11 a.m. at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club, 205 St. Johns Golf Drive off County Road 210. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. The program will feature Cindy Bennett, ambassador for Dress a Girl Around World, South Jacksonville who will give a presentation on the work she and volunteers do to hand-make and provide dresses for girls all around the world. The cost of the luncheon is \$23. Make checks payable to BTNC and mail to Deborah Russell, 12376 Fireberry Ct., Jacksonville, FL 32258. Payment must be received no later than Feb. 3, 2022, 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 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.

Herbal Medicine for Beginners will be offered on Feb. 19 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 All Star Quilters Guild will meet at 10 a.m. on Monday, Feb. 21 at the First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The program is to be announced. Sew and Tell is always a feature. Guests are welcome but masks are required. Visit www.allstarquilters.org for more information.

The Jacksonville Camera Club's photography outing will be held during the Scottish Games on Feb. 26 at the Clay County Fairgrounds. Great images of people in Scottish attire, out of the ordinary sporting competitions, the pipes and drums and the presentation of the Clans all offer unique captures. Visit jax.jaxcameraclub.com for more information.

Coming in the March issue!



Spring Home Improvement Guide

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

Q: Can you give an update on Beachwalk High School?

A: The school's mascot was just announced: the Barracudas. People are excited and can't wait for the merchandise to make an appearance.

Educator and staff positions are in the process of being filled. We always accept internal transfers first and then hire from the outside. Since Bartram Trail High School will get the most relief with the opening of Beachside, we expect a number of teachers to transfer from Bartram Trail to Beachside.

Q: What academies will be available at Beachwalk?

A: Beachside will offer an Academy of Global Logistics and Supply Chain Management, an Academy of Information Technology, and our first ever Academy of Veterinary and Biomedical Sciences. We are pleased to be able to offer more choices for our students. Beachside will also offer a brand new AICE program, like the one at St. Augustine High School. An interesting note is that St. Augustine High School was the first to offer AICE in the state. They will be able to provide a wealth of information and support to the program at Beachside.

Q: What is the latest on the high school application academy process for next school year?

A: We unfortunately had to cancel our annual in-person High School Showcase at World Golf Village as a precautionary measure. Each school will continue with its own Academy Night so students can make selections as to where they want to go. The application window for all Programs of

Choice and Career Academies closes at 5 p.m. on Feb. 10, 2022. Complete details are available at <https://cte.stjohns.k12.fl.us/>.

Q: Can you give us a recap of the Town Hall meeting you held at Freedom Crossing Academy?

A: Growth is definitely an issue in our part of the county. Freedom Crossing Academy is a school built for 1,750 students and it recently topped out at 2,200 students. Students from RiverTown and Aberdeen are both zoned for this school and both communities are still growing. Soon, the district will have to make a decision as to where to build the next K-8 school; sites are available in both Shearwater and RiverTown. For next year, though, we will have to look at some spot rezoning to provide relief. It is always our goal to make sure any zoning will last at least three years if possible. Freedom Crossing Academy does still have room for additional portables, so this remains an option and partial solution.

Q: Will this proposed K-8 be funded by the half cent sales tax?

A: Two of the promised components of the half cent sales tax are an expansion of South Woods Elementary as well as a new school in the south part of the county. The State Road 207 corridor is also experiencing a lot of growth. Although the half cent sales tax has generated more money than we anticipated, we have to spend the money on what was promised before shifting funds to new projects.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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



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 available 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. 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/.

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/. 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, 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.

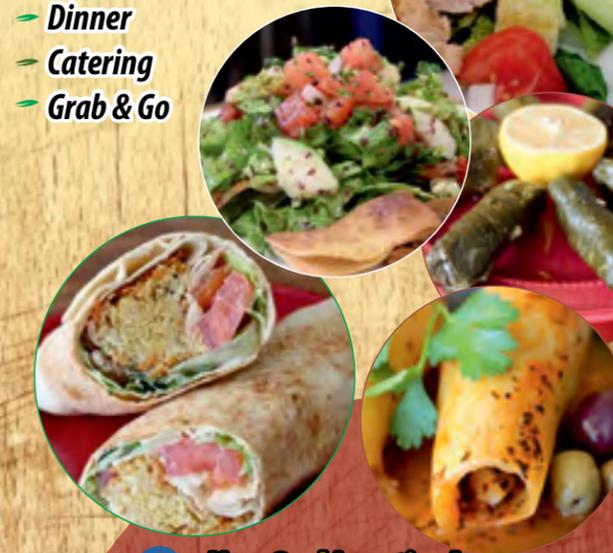
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Guest Column

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 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 non-partisan 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 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. Local candidates' information is available on our website (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 and submit your email address to subscribe. The best way to reach me is by email 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.



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 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 or call me at (904) 827-5500.



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



with St. Johns County Commission Vice Chairman Christian Whitehurst, District 1

Q: Can you give your general thoughts on growth in St. Johns County?

A: The subject of growth has been a hot topic in our county ever since I moved here in 1999. I think the best way to look at it is that growth has to provide a net benefit to our county to be acceptable.

Q: What do you consider when you decide to approve or disapprove projects?

A: It comes back to the net benefit, which can be financial. Does the ad valorem revenue of a project outweigh the services it would require? I also consider infrastructure: is there capacity on the roadway to support the project or will the developer build roads if capacity does not exist? I'm mindful of our environment, particularly the wetlands and delicate ecosystems near our waterways that make St. Johns County special. Also very important to me is what a developer is giving us in the way of parks and recreation.

Every commissioner is aware of concerns about growth, which is why we are holding the Growth Management Workshop in late January. This is not just a gesture of goodwill; we want to hear people's concerns and ideas.

Q: If someone missed that workshop [on Jan. 25], will there be others scheduled?

A: If we are able to determine that there are key issues that require more discussion, I'm sure we will. This is the No. 1 conversation that all commis-

sioners have with their constituents and is certainly not a one-time conversation. I'd encourage everyone to continue to email your commissioners with your thoughts and concerns.

Q: What can you tell us about the new addition to the litter ordinance in St. Johns County?

A: In January, by a 5 – 0 vote, the Board of County Commissioners voted to update the litter ordinance and prohibit the release of balloons and sky lanterns. St. Johns County is the first county in the state to ban these items, which are hazardous to our waterlife. When balloons burst high in the altitude, they fall to the ocean and look like jellyfish to sea turtles. We are a commission that cares about our environment and this new ordinance is another step in the process.

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

A: I'd like to highlight that [as of interview date of Jan. 19] we have three of the top high school girls' soccer teams in the county: No. 12 Ponte Vedra High School, No. 9 Creekside High School and No. 1 Bartram Trail High School. I believe this is a testament to all of our fine coaches as well as the competitive club soccer in our area. I encourage everyone to go out to support these teams and watch some quality soccer play.

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

A: Readers can email me at bcc1c-whitehurst@sjcfl.us or call me at (904) 584-5348.

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Briefs

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 and the new Facebook page, “St. Johns CARES Volunteer Organization” for more information.

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.sjcpls.org to learn more about the library system and programming.

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.

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.

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ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Strategize for a strong 2022

By Marge Cirillo
mail@floridanewsline.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.

Estate planning is for everyone

By Rose Marie Preddy, Attorney and owner,
Preddy Law Firm
mail@floridanewsline.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 every-

one 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@preddylaw.com or visit www.preddylaw.com for more information.

Chamber council celebrates third anniversary



Photo courtesy Julia Turner

On Jan. 6, 2022 the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce, Women with Vision Council celebrated its third anniversary at the Palencia Club. At the meeting, Jessica Huffman shared five ways to become "Ridiculously Empowered" in the New Year.

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PopHistory

The man who shot Charles Whitman

By Scott A. Grant
 mail@floridanewslines.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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Love and Marriage Guide

Pantry Raiders

A Valentine's Day dessert whipped up in an unusual way

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Decadent treats and Valentine's Day go hand in hand. Couples typically exchange gifts on Valentine's Day, and those gifts are often accompanied by something sweet. A 2017 survey from Statista found that 44 percent of respondents intended to purchase candy and sweets for their significant other on Valentine's Day. That made candy and sweets the most popular Valentine's Day gift by a considerable margin, well above the likes of other February 14th favorites like greeting cards (33 percent) and flowers (32 percent).

Romantic dinners still have a place at the Valentine's Day table, as the Statista survey found that 29 percent of respondents intended to sit down for a romantic meal as part of their celebration. Homemade desserts can be a great way to show that special someone just how much they're loved. If cooks want to employ the element of surprise, then this recipe for "Ginger Cake" from Will Budiaman's "The Essential Kamado Grill Cookbook" (Rockridge Press) won't disappoint. Firing up the grill is sure to pique a loved one's interest, and

the slightly spicy finished product marks a departure from more traditional desserts.

Ginger Cake
Serves 8

- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, cubed, plus more for the pan, at room temperature
- 2 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- 2 ½ tsp. baking powder
- 4 tsp. ground ginger
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1 ⅔ cups packed light brown sugar
- 4 large eggs
- ½ cup whole milk

1. Bring the grill to 350 F with the cooking grate and heat deflector installed. Butter the bottom and sides of a 10-inch cast iron skillet.
2. In a medium bowl, mix together the flour, baking powder, ginger, and salt.
3. In the bowl of an electric mixer, cream together the butter and sugar on medium speed for 3 minutes.
4. Reduce the speed to medium-low and add the eggs one at a time. Mix for 1 to 2 minutes or until light tan in color.
5. With the machine running, add the milk.
6. Add the flour mixture, scraping down



Photo courtesy MetroCreative

If cooks want to employ the element of surprise, then this recipe for "Ginger Cake" from Will Budiaman's "The Essential Kamado Grill Cookbook" (Rockridge Press) won't disappoint.

- the side of the bowl as needed, until fully incorporated. Transfer to the skillet.
7. Put the skillet on the grate. Close the lid and cook for 1 hour or until a knife inserted into the center comes out clean.
8. Put on a wire rack to cool completely before serving.

Did you know?

Valentine's Day symbols like heart-shaped boxes of chocolate, Cupid shooting his arrow and bouquets of roses are ubiquitous come February. Each of those symbolizes is meant to signify the love individuals have for their significant others, but perhaps no Valentine's Day image is more symbolic of love than doves.

According to LiveScience.com, doves have been a symbol of love since the Middle Ages, when many people believed birds chose their mates on Valentine's Day. But the history of doves and their affiliation with love dates back even further and can be traced to the days of Greek mythology. Aphrodite is the goddess of love in Greek mythology, and she is often depicted as being surrounded by doves. Doves' own traits also have helped them become symbols of love, as LiveScience.com notes that male doves help their female partners incubate and tend to their young, bolstering their image as caring, loving birds.



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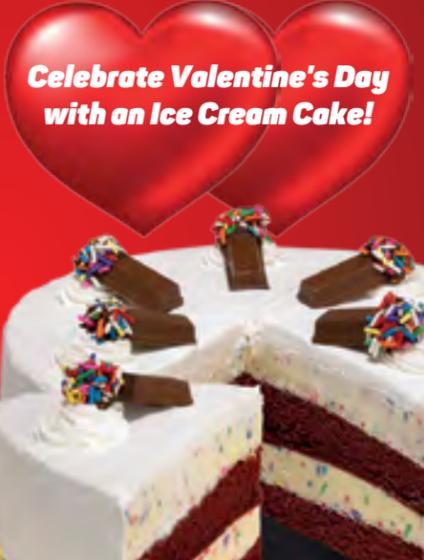
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Balloon releases now prohibited

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.

Local infant/toddler teacher honored as Teacher of the Year

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Deerwood Academy St. Johns teacher Amy Finkley was recently named the 2021 Infant/Toddler Teacher of the Year Award by the Early Learning Coalition of North Florida (ELC).

The ELC selected Amy Finkley from among many teachers in its six-county service area to win the award. A nine-year veteran educator at Deerwood Academy St. Johns, Finkley serves as Lead Teacher in the school's infant/toddler room.

"Amy Finkley is a truly excellent educator who is beloved by our youngest students and their parents alike," said Deerwood Academy owner Lucinda Chapin. "Her dedication and positive attitude brighten every school day, and I can't think of a more deserving teacher for this award."

Finkley's award-winning dedication to educational excellence appears in



Photo courtesy Deerwood Academy

Amy Finkley was recently named the 2021 Infant/Toddler Teacher of the Year Award by the Early Learning Coalition of North Florida (ELC).

every aspect of her classroom. She has an expert knowledge of infant care, development, expectations and milestones, placing new parents and

students at ease. Her coworkers enjoy her warmth and optimism. Plus, Finkley's attentiveness and experience have allowed her to alert parents to silent seizures and lactose intolerance in their children.

The Early Learning Coalition recognized Finkley at its Early Educators Conference on Jan. 29 at the Thrasher Home Center in Orange Park. The coalition manages and evaluates early child care and education programs in Baker, Bradford, Clay, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns counties.

"I am truly grateful for this award, but the greatest honor is when my former students come back to visit me," Finkley said. "It's just wonderful knowing that I have connected with the students and set them on the path to a lifetime of educational success."

BTHS to stage "Chicago" in March

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Bartram Trail High School Theatre Department will present "Chicago" (High School Edition), March 3, 4, 5 and 6 at 7 p.m. each evening except for a 2 p.m. matinee on Sunday, March 6 at the Bartram Trail High School Auditorium, 7399 Longleaf Pine Pkwy.

Set in 1920s Chicago, this musical follows "Merry Murderesses" Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly as they vie for fame, fortune, and acquittal.

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Get to Know ...

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Amanda Seeley

Amanda Seeley always knew that she wanted to be a foster parent one day. She even shared this plan with her soon-to-be husband at the time, and he agreed. One day, while attending a Bible study at her church, Fruit Cove Baptist, Seeley was asked to identify one thing that God had told her to “step out and do” that she had yet to do. “I could not sleep that night. I knew I had to do it,” said Seeley. That Sunday she called a friend who had foster care knowledge and on Monday she learned about foster care courses which ironically were starting that evening. Seeley and her husband, Matthew, began immediately. It was a seven-week course that had to be attended by both parents, and the Seeleys, married in 2003, had two biological children aged eight and six at home. Family and neighbors enabled them to attend the courses. And while the training was a big commitment of time, the couple never wavered in their belief that this was the right journey for their family – now a family of eight.



Photo courtesy Amanda Seeley
Amanda Seeley and family.

but that is not usually the norm. In July 2017, we welcomed 14-month-old Malachi into our family. This case was much more complicated, but we were able to adopt Malachi on Nov. 29, 2018. During this same time, we got pregnant with our surprise baby, Ben, who was born on July 7, 2018. In September 2019, we received news that Malachi’s sister was born July 31, 2019 and had gone into the system. We were prepared to get her, but then she was placed elsewhere. On her year birthday, July 31, 2020, we got a call asking if we were still interested in taking her. We had stayed in contact with the case worker the entire time to check in on her. We started to get her on weekends and then eventually she transferred to our home Dec. 18, 2020. Over Zoom with the judge on June 4, 2021, we adopted our Ella.

Q: How has this shaped your biological children, especially the oldest two?

A: The way they view the family concept and family unit is very different. They understand that it is not the blood that bonds you. They have learned that it is not all about you, but how you can help others. They are very protective over their siblings.

Q: What happened after you finished all the training and home inspections?

A: We got a phone call for Respite Care, which is assisting another foster family temporarily. So, we welcomed a three-year-old girl into our home for a few days. She left on a Sunday, and we immediately got a call about a newborn who was three days old. We said yes, and we met Isaac that Monday night when the Department of Children and Families brought him to us. He was born on July 15, 2016, came to us July 18, 2016, and we adopted him on Feb. 22, 2017. His case was very quick,

Q: You are very active in the fitness industry. Explain your passion for movement.

A: I grew up at the Dupont Family YMCA because my mom loved group fitness. I also took dance lessons and participated on dance teams from the age of two through high school. I began teaching group fitness about four years ago and currently teach BodyPump, Cardio Dance and SoulBody Barre. My main goal is to have fun and not take myself too seriously. I want everyone to get a good sweat on and have fun. For me, it is my sanity.

Q: What advice would you have for someone who is considering being a foster parent?

A: Our mission as foster parents is to work alongside the family towards unification. You want to provide a routine and security. You want what is best for the child. You have to be prepared to say goodbye. You cannot go in saying “I want to adopt.” You have to be selfless. It is a selfless act to show foster children love and security. You have to do what is in the best interest of the child — always.

[Author’s Note: Seeley said that there is a huge need for foster parents in St. Johns and Duval counties, and there are many ways to help whether it be through respite care, fostering, adopting, helping foster families, donating clothes, meals or furniture. Fruit Cove Baptist offers a program called “Fostering Hope,” and you do not have to be a member of the church to participate. Contact Karen Roy at Fosteringhope@fruitcove.com for more information.]

Get to Know ...

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

Art exhibit cont. from pg. 1

ciety, the Florida Watercolor Society, the Georgia Watercolor Society, the Kentucky Watercolor Society, the Mississippi Watercolor Society, the National Collage Society, the Georgia Collage Society as well as being a Charter Member of the Jacksonville Watercolor Society and the National League of American Pen Women. She never stopped growing and learning as an artist, and her works run the gamut from realistic portraits and still lifes to impressionistic



Photo courtesy Michael Ballard

Marie Shell’s artwork “Expect the Unexpected II” will be on display and raffled off to support the Bartram Trail Branch Friends of the Library.

works and abstracts. Her work has been featured at many local and national galleries, including Stellars, Trends, the Haskell Gallery at JIA, the Cummer Museum, the Cleveland Art Institute and others.

Marie Shell passed away in 2020 at 97 years old. There was nothing she liked more than sharing her art with the world, so to honor her memory and spirit this show is scheduled to coincide with what would have been her 99th birthday. Everyone is invited to come and enjoy some of her paintings. Shell’s family has also donated a piece of her artwork, “Expect the Unexpected II,” which will be on display and raffled off to support the Bartram Trail Branch Friends of the Library.

“I delight in the thought that part of me, a very valued gift, will live long after I’m gone.” - Marie Shell

An online gallery showcasing Marie’s artwork has been created at www.facebook.com/ArtOfMarieShell; anyone who has a piece of her artwork is invited to share a photo for inclusion. To view more of her artwork or for other inquiries, visit her website, marieshell.com.



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First flag raising held at Patriot Place

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

The United States flag was raised by members of the St. Augustine Honor Guard earlier today in a ceremony celebrating the creation of Patriot Place, a project of Flagler Health+ and St. Johns Housing Partnership that will benefit homeless veterans in our community.

Typically, a homeless veteran will face multiple barriers to find housing including navigating a complex system of resources, navigating a competitive housing market with record-high rental prices, pass stringent background-check requirements that often disqualify the veteran, and save enough money to move into a home, which often amounts to more than \$4,000.

Thanks to the partnership between St. Johns County Housing Partnership and Flagler Health+, many of these barriers will be removed. Additionally, Patriot Place will be administered by Flagler Health+'s social health program, Care Connect+, which connects people with vital resources like stable housing, food pantries, counseling services and transportation.

When it opens in early 2022, Patriot Place will be a six-unit complex for at-risk veterans who already live in St. Johns County. Each of the one-bedroom apartments will be 630 square feet.

"For years our local veteran's office has struggled to help local veterans who need a one-bedroom apartment to remain living in St. Johns County," said Bill Lazar, executive director of the St. Johns Housing Partnership. "Our hope is that this unique partnership with Flagler Health+ will provide a level of case management and stability for our residents to get back on their feet. This is an effort to thank them for their service and stand by them



Photo courtesy Flagler Health+
Michael Arnold, Flagler Health+ employee and Army veteran at the flag raising at Patriot Place.



St. Augustine Honor Guard at Patriot Place.

while they integrate back into the community."

Patriot Place will be more than just a home to these veterans — it offers a sense of community and support. Veterans will receive individualized case management from their Care Connect+ case worker for the duration of their time at Patriot Place. From workforce development, education, health-care and transportation, these case workers create a case plan based on the unique needs of each client and their goals. In addition, Patriot Place will collaborate with other veteran service organizations

to offer enrichment opportunities to foster mental health and wellbeing.

The land for Patriot Place, which is located at 79 Masters Drive in St. Augustine, was donated by MountainStar Capital, a major contributor, having donated more than \$100,000 to make the project a reality.

The property will be built to green building standards with the Florida Green Building Coalition, in part to make sure that water and power bills are as low as possible for residents.

Nutrition Check: Children's Dental Health Month

By Kristen Hicks-Roof PhD, RDN, LDN, CLC
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.

- 1 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.
- 2 Learn more about food hygiene. Check out an online platform (www.e-bug.eu), a community that helps adults and children learn about optimal oral health and nutrition.
- 3 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).
- 4 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.
- 5 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.
- 6 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.
- 7 Brush your teeth right before bedtime. All the food and beverages we consume all day leave residues on our teeth; it's important to brush them all away each morning and night. Brushing your teeth and flossing help to scrape away sticky residues, leaving a clean and healthy smile.

Kristen Hicks-Roof PhD, RDN, LDN, CLC, FAND is an assistant professor in the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Brooks College of Health, University of North Florida.

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Photo courtesy Jimmy Tomazinis
Nicely spotted redfish caught off Mandarin Point.

In North Florida, February is pretty much the month that says goodbye to winter and welcomes in spring. By month's end we should be seeing enough warm days to trigger the much-anticipated annual largemouth bass spawn in all our freshwater bodies of water.

Whether a novice or full time bass fishing enthusiast, the first few weeks of spring guarantee some of the best and easiest bass fishing of the year. Pre-spawn and post-spawn bites find bass both hungry and aggressive. Both artificial and natural baits will provide plenty of action wherever they are fished this time of year. Area ponds are a great and easy place to fish for kids to get their first bass light casting rod and plastic worm.

While spring bass fishing makes the scene for freshwater fishing, saltwater fishing is also beginning to heat up starting at the beach. Like bass fishing this time of year, some of the best surf fishing of the year takes place in the spring. Bluefish will usually show first with whiting close behind — or often a mix of both.

Both species will also be hungry and aggressive this time of year, making catches easy and plentiful. Fresh dead shrimp, sand fleas, or cut fish are all proper baits, with the whiting preferring shrimp and sand fleas, while bluefish will go flat out

crazy for cut fish baits. Simple fish finder rigs with a two- or three-ounce pyramid sinker fished just behind the breakers is all it takes. Once again, a great and easy way for kids to get out and actually catch something.

Springtime bites will also be on the increase for most all other species of fish in fresh and saltwater. Sheepshead, drum, trout, flounder, reds and more will become active in the areas of the river closer to the ocean, but will also be working their way closer to us as the season progresses.

As always, be sure to check the FWC's saltwater and freshwater regulations for size and quantity if you are keeping your fish (<https://myfwc.com>).

Fishing Report: Bass action on the rise in area freshwater. Blues and whiting at the beach.

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

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Travel

Famous trees to see in the South

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewslines.com

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.

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 approx-



Photo courtesy Debi Lander
Emancipation Oak in Hampton, Virginia.

imately 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



Photo courtesy Nancy Musser
Edison Ford Banyan Tree in Ft. Myers.

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@floridanewslines.com if you've encountered any trees on your travels that bring back memories.

Visit www.bylandersea.com to read more of local travel writer Debi Lander's stories and travel tips.



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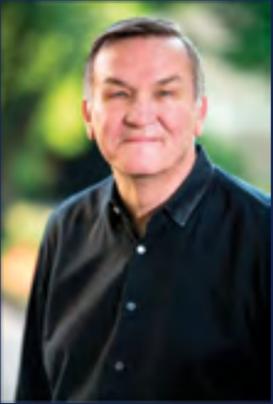
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Guest Speaker Dr. Richard Ross of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Richard Ross has served as professor of student ministry in the Jack D. Terry School of Educational Ministries since 2000. His entire life has focused on seeing Christ glorified in the lives of teenagers and their parents and leaders. He served as a local-church student pastor for 30 years. Overlapping part of that time was 16 years of service as the student ministry consultant at LifeWay Christian Resources.



Register for Lunch at FruitCove.com/ParentLife

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Gardening

Expect the unexpected

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale
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An odd title for a gardening column, but I find it's a constant when it comes to our weather! The lack of rain and higher than average temperatures most of us have been experiencing seem to have disrupted the natural world order. January is only 11 days old as I write this and already I'm seeing new shoots on deciduous shrubs, still-flowering cardinals guard, pentas, shrimp plant, pink gaura, and Indian shot canna. Spring weeds are already well on the way to being a nuisance.

One of the pleasures of a change in seasons is the migration of some of

our birds. Particularly significant is the appearance of American robins, in large noisy flocks, and the beautiful, less noticeable cedar waxwings. In our neighborhood we have quite a few Carolina cherry laurels (*Prunus caroliniana*), which are members of the rose family. The genus name prunus is shared by other flowering and fruiting trees, like plums and almonds, and like them the cherry laurel bears numerous small black fruits (drupes). In recent years those trees have fruited early; no longer do flocks of birds swoop in to pick the trees clean, because a lot of the fruits are on the ground before they arrive. I hope to

see the robins again this year, but worry that some of the food they depend upon won't be here.

My wildflowers set plenty of seed, and I've been raising some seedlings indoors to get ahead of the growing season. If you're interested in wildflowers, the website of the Florida Wildflower Association has helpful information on wildflower gardening and also on where to see roadside communities of wildflowers which are managed by the FDOT: <https://www.flwildflowers.org/explore/>. To find out how to support efforts to expand the FDOT wildflower roadside planting scheme, click the FDOT tab on the same page.

It's time to get going with summer vegetables, if you haven't begun already. Refer to the ever-useful Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide for guidance: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/VH021>. I'm still eating from my cool season garden and enjoying how clean the produce is; no insects have found my greens. While the vegetables were small, snails were a problem, but looking for a solution I found a product suitable for organic gardening. The small pellets contain an iron compound which is harmless to humans and very good at deterring snails.

Something else unexpected: we have at least one local snail that is a garden friend, the rosy wolf snail, and it's a predator which eats some of those nuisance snails (https://entnemdept.ufl.edu/creatures/misc/gastro/snail_eating_snails.htm). I've only ever found two in my yard, but it's heartening to know they're around. One was in an unused plant pot and the other in damp leaf litter at the base of a fence, so that's another good reason to let fallen leaves lie.

So much of what we do in our yards

disrupts the natural processes of life, death, and decay. The result is we can find ourselves living in a sanitized, somewhat sterile environment. That's understandably desirable in some ways, if we want to enjoy our outdoor spaces without pestilential mosquitos, for example; however, if we can give some space in our yards to the small creatures upon which our lives depend — to allow them to create the kind of environment in which they flourish — our entire yards can become more balanced and healthier places. And if you use a fan to move the air while enjoying your yard, any mosquitos will certainly be discouraged.

Late winter, before deciduous trees leaf out, is a good time to assess their structure to determine whether or not they need some remedial pruning. This applies both to young trees, to ensure they develop a strong structure as they grow, and to mature trees, to correct any problems like storm-damaged or dead limbs. Always make sure to choose a company that employs licensed arborists, who are qualified to give accurate advice. Check out www.isa-arbor.com to find arborists in Duval County.

Don't be tempted by advertisements for "weed and feed" products if you want the best for your grass and don't like to waste money. Check out the correct way to fertilize and treat your lawn here: <https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/care/fertilizer/right-fertilizer-right-place.html>.

So much of gardening is trial and error; what works one year won't necessarily work again, at least in quite the same way. There are unexpected failures, and wonderful, unexpected successes. A garden, a yard, is a constantly changing and maturing environment — it is never finished!



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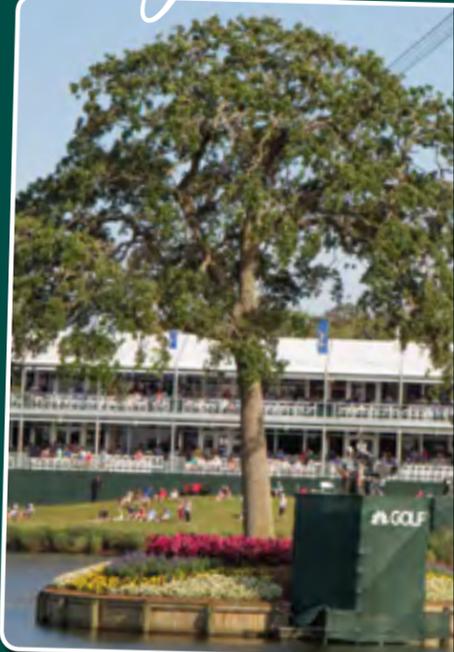
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