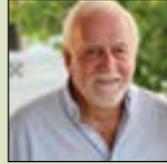




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Puzzles

## All about the library's Summer Reading Program

By Sade Goodridge  
mail@floridanewslines.com

What event is free, lasts all summer, offers amazing prizes, and hosts enjoyable events? Well, it can only be the St. Johns County Library Summer Reading Program! The Bartram Branch Library, and other libraries across St. Johns County, aim to create an exciting summer at the library with story times, special events, teen crafts, and the opportunity to win book prizes each week.

This year's theme is Oceans of Possibilities and lasts until Aug. 6. To participate, one can either download the READsquared app or visit the library to pick up a paper log and begin tracking one's reading by days read — not hours, pages, or numbers of books. Every six days, or 60 points on the app, one is eligible for a free book prize. Points can also be earned by attending events and completing missions on the app.

Prizes for reading and participating in other activities are a grand selection of books, generously donated by members of the community, ranging from children to adults. To take advantage of this prize, participants bring their reading log or mobile device with the READsquared app to the information desk so the

Library summer cont. on pg. 18

## Creekside track and field team brings home multiple medals from State Championships

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

The Creekside track and field team completed an awe-inspiring season at the FHSAA Class 4A State Championship in Gainesville on May 14.

The Creekside boys' 4 x 800-meter relay team not only beat the school's record, but earned its first state title in this event. According to the FHSAA officials, the relay team, which is now ranked No. 1 in the state, is also ranked No. 9 in the nation with a finishing time of 7:46.86 (mm:ss).

Senior Jesse Benavides blazed the final leg with about a 50-meter lead into the finish line. The event was stacked with Florida's 18 fastest running teams, some of which had seeded times faster Creekside's. First time runner and sophomore Tanner Simonds led the first leg, followed by veteran junior McCall Williams who created a large gap from the crowded field, where another veteran junior, Hudson Finocchio, maintained the lead on the third leg.

"It was phenomenal to watch these boys leave everything on the track. It's been a long time coming from these young



Photos courtesy Bernie Berania

Creekside boys' 4 x 800-meter relay team (Hudson Finocchio, Tanner Simonds, Jesse Benavides, McCall Williams along with Coach Cash Tampa) wins state championship.

men," said middle-distance coach, Cash Tampa, a graduate and former runner at Creekside.

A couple hours later in the 200-meter race, sophomore Christian Miller ran his personal best to win the State Championship in this event with a time of 20.82 seconds — while breaking the school record which was held since 2017. Prior to this event, Miller finished the 100-meter race with another school-breaking record to finish fifth on the

podium with a time of 10.69 seconds.

Long time track head coach, Ricky Fields, said, "What Christian did was very difficult for any athlete, but completely unexpected."

Along the same line of difficulty with two more medals was Jesse Benavides accomplishing his personal bests in the 800-meter and the 1600-meter races.

The evening came to a perfect conclusion with senior Sydney Campbell winning the most medals in Creekside's track and field history at a state meet. Campbell placed fourth in the 100-meter, sixth in 200-meter, third in 400-meter, and was the final leg on the 4 x 400 meter relay team with a sixth place team finish.

"The success of Creekside's track team is part of a philosophy and culture of putting in the time to do the hard work with coaches who give you their all," said Creekside Coach Bernie Berania. "The past couple years have been nothing but normal, but this year sets a solid foundation for a fast and exciting 2023 for Creekside's track program."



Photos courtesy Bernie Berania

Sydney Campbell and Christian Miller.

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**COMING IN AUGUST!**

# Back to School Guide

Contact Linda Gay at  
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**(904) 607-5062**



## Add "donate blood" to hurricane readiness checklist

By NewsLine Staff  
[mail@floridanewsline.com](mailto:mail@floridanewsline.com)

Hurricane season is right around the corner, and according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the 2022 Atlantic hurricane season is predicted to be very active with a higher than average number of hurricanes. As First Coast residents begin their preparations, LifeSouth encourages all eligible donors to add "donate blood" to their checklist.

Every two seconds, someone needs blood — and just one donation can save up to three lives in our local community. LifeSouth provides blood to 70 percent of hospital beds in Northeast Florida, so when you give blood to LifeSouth you give the gift of life to someone close by. When severe storms threaten our area, a strong blood supply is crucial to ensure local patients get the best care.

Over the summer, LifeSouth will host several community blood drives and Northeast Florida residents can donate at one of LifeSouth's regional donor centers, or at a mobile blood drive. For a full listing of mobile drives, visit [LifeSouth.org](http://LifeSouth.org). Following is a list of regional donor centers:

### Julington Creek Donor Center (445 State Road 13, Suite 25)

- Tuesday - Friday hours: 10 a.m. - 6 p.m.
- Saturday hours: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- \$20 e-gift card for all donors



Photo courtesy LifeSouth

Every two seconds, someone needs blood — and just one donation can save up to three lives in our local community.

### Northeast Florida Donor Center (7840 Baymeadows Way)

- Monday/Tuesday/Thursday/Friday hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
- Wednesday hours: 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- Saturday hours: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- \$10 e-gift card for all donors

### Fleming Island Donor Center (1605 County Road 220, Unit 160)

- Wednesday/Thursday/Friday hours: 11 a.m. - 7 p.m.
- Saturday/Sunday hours: 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
- \$20 e-gift card for all donors

Donors must be 17 years or older, in good health and have a photo ID. Visit [LifeSouth.org](http://LifeSouth.org) for more information, including donor center hours and online donation scheduling.



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# BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

## Meet Lulu!



**Breed:**  
Eastern cotton tail mix

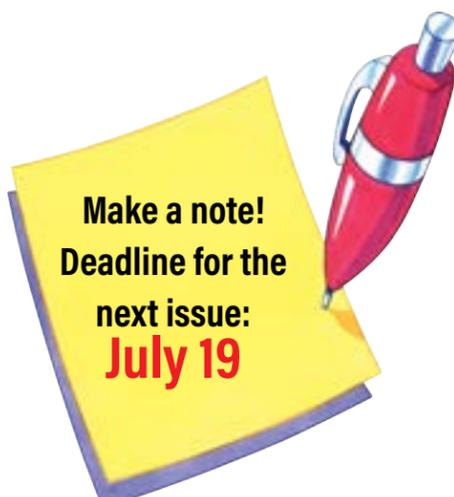
**Favorite Activities:**  
Going on walks and running around the yard

**Favorite Treat:**  
Dried sweet potato

**Favorite Friends:**  
His rabbit cousin Oreo

**How is your BFF got his name:**  
We thought the name was cute for a bunny

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.



Make a note!  
Deadline for the next issue:  
**July 19**

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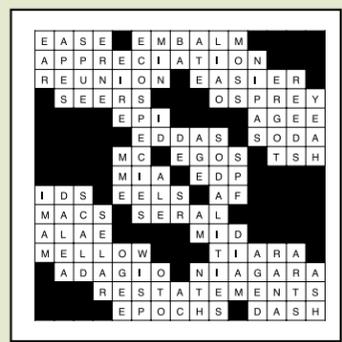
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## MYSTERY PHOTO



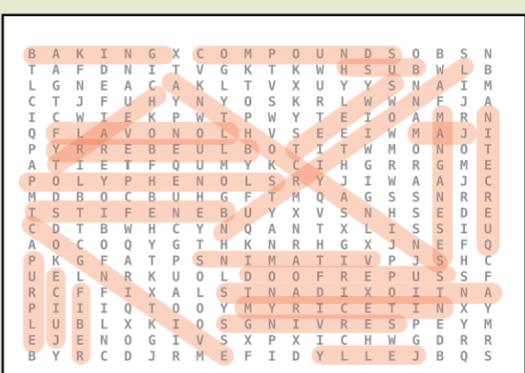
Last month's Mystery Photo was the Shoppes at RiverTown. Our winner was Joel Borax. Congratulations!



Answers to our Puzzles  
**PG 18**



Answers: A. health B. berry C. nutrients D. delicious









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# July

## Community Calendar What's Happening in St. Johns

**Trout Creek Senior Center** offers activities for seniors on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings at 6795 Collier Road in Orange-dale. Cards, crafts and games start each day at 9 a.m. with trivia, nutrition/exercise, Bunco and Bingo among the additional activities before lunch at 11:45 a.m. each day. Contact Program Coordinator Anne Marie Forsythe at (904) 552-1611 for more information.

**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 play-inghookie31@gmail.com for more information.

**Jokers Wild**, a local card group, plays the game of "Hand, Knee, and Foot" on Wednesdays. If you are interested in joining, please call (904) 230-6962 and leave a message.

**5th: Honeybee Quilters Guild** will meet on Tuesday, July 5 at 6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church in the Loft on the County Dock Road side of the church at 2501 Loretto Road. An FAQ discussion about Quiltfest, scheduled for September, will be held. Wearing masks is optional. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

**7th: The Jacksonville Camera Club** will meet on July 7 and July 21 from 7 p.m. – 9 p.m. at Shepherd of the Woods Southside, 7860 Southside Blvd. There is a social "hour" of 30 to 45 minutes before the meeting. Visit [jax.jaxcameraclub.com](http://jax.jaxcameraclub.com) for more information.

**9th: Bartram Trail Friends of the Library Book Sale** will be held at the Bartram Trail Branch Library, 60 Davis Pond Blvd., on July 9 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

**9th: The Northeast Florida Crime Chapter of Sisters in Crime** presents multi-award-winning author Judith Erwin at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library, 101 Library Blvd. (FOL Room) on Saturday, July 9. Doors open at 10 a.m. and the meeting starts at 10:15 a.m. Bring your coffee and bring a friend. The group welcomes misters and sisters to learn more about writing, promoting, and enjoying crime fiction. Visit [www.nefloridasistersincrime.org](http://www.nefloridasistersincrime.org) for more information.

**11th: The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable** will meet on Monday, July 11 at 12 p.m. via Zoom. The meeting will feature guest speaker Kyle Dorsey, president of Baptist Medical Center South. Email [info@sjcroundtable.org](mailto:info@sjcroundtable.org) to register for the meeting or visit [www.sjcroundtable.org](http://www.sjcroundtable.org) for more information about the St. Johns County Civic Roundtable.

**16th: Family-friendly Porch Talk and Garden Grazing** at Alpine Groves Park. On July 16, celebrate 50 years of County Parks and Recreation with Friends of Alpine Groves at the Bennett House by the St. Johns River (9 a.m. – 11 a.m.) and enjoy refreshments courtesy of the Garden Club of Switzerland (11a.m. – 12 p.m.) at the Freedom Butterfly Garden. Alpine Groves Park is located at 2060 State Road 13 in Switzerland.

**18th: The All Star Quilters Guild** will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on Monday, July 18 at the First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The program will be the Challenge Reveal. Quilters were invited to create a small quilt from a Beatles song title. Sew and Tell is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit [www.allstarquilters.org](http://www.allstarquilters.org) for more information.

**19th: Herbal Medicine from the Garden** will be offered on July 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 at (386) 972-1891.

**21st: Teen Craft – Seahorse canvas** will be held at the Bartram Trail Branch Library, at the entrance to Julington Creek Plantation, on July 21 from 3 p.m. – 4 p.m. Grades six through 12 will paint a seahorse canvas to celebrate the summer theme, "Oceans of Possibilities." Supplies provided by Bartram Trail Branch Friends of the Library. Registration is required; call (904) 827-6960.

**24th: Hopefull Handbags** will host its Women's Expo 2022 on July 24 from 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. at Classic Car Museum of St. Augustine, 4730 Dixie Highway in St. Augustine. All net proceeds go directly to Hopefull Handbags Global to further its mission for survivors of domestic abuse and their children, specifically to purchase land and build a new building for survivors and their children called Carolyn's Haven of Hope. Tickets are \$7 and are available online (<https://form.jotform.com/221074808209151>). Visit [www.hopefullhandbags.org](http://www.hopefullhandbags.org) for more information.

**29th: Gentle yoga and meditation** for adults at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on July 29 from 10 a.m. – 11 a.m. Gentle yoga is a great way to increase flexibility, lower stress, and improve energy. Dress comfortably and bring along your favorite yoga mat. Register online at [www.sjcpls.org](http://www.sjcpls.org) or call (904) 827-6960.



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**with St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes**

**Q: Do we have a Primary Election this year?**

**A:** Yes. The Primary is scheduled for August 23.

**Q: Have candidates that are running for office filed their papers?**

**A:** Yes. Candidate qualifying ended June 17 and the Primary Election ballot is finalized.

**Q: How can I find out who will be on my ballot?**

**A:** A sample ballot will be mailed, or emailed, to every registered voter unless you requested a vote-by-mail ballot. Sample ballots are mailed three weeks prior to an election and are also available on our website. You can access yours by using My Voter Status and looking up your voter record. A list of Primary Election candidates is also available on our website along with a full list of candidates who qualified with our office.

**Q: When will vote-by-mail ballots be mailed?**

**A:** Vote-by-mail ballots go into the mail on July 9 for overseas and military voters. They are the first to be mailed their ballots, 45 days prior to the election. The ballots for all other voters who requested vote-by-mail ballots will be mailed around July 18.

**Q: I don't remember if I requested a vote-by-mail ballot. How can I check?**

**A:** Visit [www.votesjc.gov](http://www.votesjc.gov) and use My Voter Status to look up your voter record. You can verify your address on file with the Elections Office, update it if you need to, and see if you have a request on file. If you haven't requested a ballot, it's not too late. You have up until 10 days before the election to request a ballot be mailed to you.

**Q: Will there be early voting for the Primary?**

**A:** Yes. Early voting is available from 9 a.m. – 6 p.m., Aug. 13 – 20, at these six locations: Ponte Vedra Branch Li-

brary, Julington Creek Annex, Supervisor of Elections Office, St. Augustine Beach City Hall, Southeast Branch Library, and the Hastings Branch Library.

**Q: I heard some election day polling locations have changed. Will I be notified if mine changed?**

**A:** Yes. Due to the 2020 Census and the 2021 redistricting process, we have new voting districts, new precinct lines, and some new polling locations. All registered voters were mailed new voter information cards in June to notify them of the changes. If you did not receive your new card, visit [www.votesjc.gov](http://www.votesjc.gov) and use My Voter Status to look up your registration and verify the address on file with the Elections Office is correct. Your polling place is also listed.

**Q: A candidate I want to vote for is registered in a different party than I am. What do I have to do in order to be able to vote for them?**

**A:** Due to Florida's closed primaries, you received the ballot of the party in which you are registered. Unless the candidate is from your same party, you must change your party in order to be able to vote for them. The only exception is nonpartisan races on the Primary ballot, such as County Judge and School Board. These races appear on all ballots.

**Q: Is there a deadline for registering to vote or changing my party for the Primary?**

**A:** Yes. The deadline for new registrations and party changes is 29 days prior to an election. In the case of the Aug. 23 Primary, the deadline is July 25.

Be sure to visit [votesjc.gov](http://votesjc.gov) often for updated election information. The Frequently Asked Questions provide answers to questions asked most often, and there is a special section for vote-by-mail questions. My staff and I are here to serve you, and we will make it easy for you to vote. Sign up for my newsletter by visiting our website or call the office for assistance at (904) 823-2238.



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

**Q. Can you tell us about the awards your office has received for reporting the county's finances?**

**A.** We learned in June that we received a second award from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) of the United States and Canada, this time for our Popular Annual Financial Report (PAFR). The first award was the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting, which I call the gold standard for reporting, transparency and disclosure about the county's finances — we've gotten it for 29 consecutive years, which is an achievement in itself. But this second award is for our first-ever PAFR, a shorter, more reader-friendly booklet than the detailed 400-plus-page Annual Comprehensive Financial Report on which it's based.

The PAFR, titled "Tracking Your Tax Dollars: A Guide to St. Johns County's Finances," features highlights from the comprehensive report and is designed to be straightforward and user-friendly for taxpayers without a background in public finance. It is for Fiscal Year 2020 so some of the data is outdated. You can read it at [stjohnsclerk.com/pafir/](http://stjohnsclerk.com/pafir/). We will produce a new PAFR this fall for Fiscal Year 2021 showing how tax dollars are collected and spent, as well as more recent trends on demographics, housing, taxes and more.

**Q. Knowing that the Clerk of Courts receives monetary judgments and payments related to court cases, how can readers learn whether they have unclaimed funds with your office?**

Brandon Patty cont. on pg. 6

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2. Vote out the senator who's a developer.
3. Vote out the senator who's a developer.

It bears repeating. Senator Hutson is a major developer who uses his senate seat to benefit his company. Did you know he tried to pass a law that would make it harder for homeowners to sue builders for hidden construction flaws?

His company and associated PACs have put tens of thousands of dollars into the campaigns of our county commissioners to influence them to approve the destruction of rural and other undeveloped land. Gerry James will propose legislation to limit this influence peddling: In his own words: "I am committed to preserving our communities in District 7. We must stop this massive, unstructured overdevelopment. This is not an attack on private property rights, but about government collusion with big development, at the expense of taxpayers."

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

**Q: Can you give your thoughts on the large number of apartments under construction on Race Track Road?**

**A:** The apartment complex under construction near the intersection with St. Johns Parkway was approved in 2019, before I became a county commissioner. I'm not privy to the details, but being a longtime resident, this does seem like an odd fit for the area. I'm not sure I would have approved it since it is in the middle of single family homes in addition to the amount of traffic it will generate along that stretch of Race Track Road.

Another apartment complex is under construction near the intersection with US Highway 1. I was part of the commission that approved this project unanimously, for several reasons. First, it's near US 1 and across the street from another apartment complex so it fits the area. Secondly, the old Best Bet, which was torn down on this piece of land, had been vacant for years and was an eyesore and we had safety concerns. These apartments will be at market rate, not low income.

We do need apartments in the northwest part of the county to house some of our teachers and first responders. The apartments just need to be in the right place.

**Q: What reasons did you consider for your approval in May of the additional homes to the Silverleaf project?**

**A:** First, the original 10,800 units in Silverleaf were approved in 2006. In May, this commission approved 5,600 more homes and most won't begin construction until 2030. The project is scheduled for a 25-year build-out, which gives the county time to manage and plan for the growth.

Additionally, Silverleaf developers gave us more upfront infrastructure than any other project I've seen. They will spend \$150 million on roads upfront, before construction begins. They donated three school sites. These sites are donated, not offered

in lieu of impact fees. There will be 198 acres of parks and 4,700 acres of conservation and open space.

For the part of the project that is along the William Bartram Scenic Highway, a drive that everyone enjoys and must be preserved, they listened to our requirements. Anything that abuts this scenic highway will be one unit per five acres and a 75-foot buffer, which is three times the required amount. This is the lowest density of any development I've ever seen.

If every development application in the last 20 years gave us this much infrastructure and this much time to plan, we would not have the deficiencies we now have.

**Q: What are your thoughts on the sheriff's proposed budget that he presented at the June commission meeting?**

**A:** Sheriff Hardwick's proposed budget for 2023 includes a significant increase in pay for his rank and file deputies, not the command staff. These are the deputies charged with keeping us safe. The salary increase will hopefully make these positions more competitive and allow for some inflation. I will be supporting his proposed budget.

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

**A:** Borland Groover is coming to District 1. They will be building a new facility off St. Johns Parkway, which is already properly zoned. They applied for an economic incentive package, which the commission just approved because they will be bringing high paying jobs to the area. It's also a new service for our community so I'm excited. They plan to break ground in a few months and hopefully open sometime next year.

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

**A:** Readers can email me at [bcc1whitehurst@sjcfl.us](mailto:bcc1whitehurst@sjcfl.us) or call me at (904) 584-5348.

**Brandon Patty** cont. from pg. 5

**A.** One in five Floridians has unclaimed funds from a forgotten financial account, according to Florida CFO Jimmy Patronis. In May 2022 alone, more than \$36 million in unclaimed property was returned to Floridians, with about \$1.4 million of it coming from the Jacksonville region. As of the end of April, our office had unclaimed funds totaling nearly \$328,000. A quick visit to our webpage, <https://stjohnsclerk.com/clerk-unclaimed-funds/>, will show you if your name is on the current list. Unclaimed funds can range from a few dollars to tens of thousands of dollars, so I would encourage your readers to check on a regular basis. If you have a claim to money held by the St. Johns County Clerk of Courts, contact my office as soon as possible, because each year we send unclaimed funds to the State of Florida. Once funds are sent to the state, we can't assist you in recovering those funds.

If your name appears in the document for annual unclaimed funds turned over to the State of Florida, visit [www.fltreasurehunt.org](http://www.fltreasurehunt.org) to claim your funds.

**Q. Do you have an update on county**

**property owners who have signed up for your office's free fraud alerts?**

**A.** We are about a fifth of the way to our goal of 10,000 subscribers and working hard to get out the message. In the coming weeks, we are looking to partner with our fellow Clerks of Court in north-east Florida in a shared message about protecting our residents' properties from scammers through our free notification services. It's easy to sign up and it's totally free. Our service provides an early warning to a property owner, alerting them to check their records online and take action if a property record or mortgage document has been fraudulently altered. Sign up at <https://stjohnsclerk.com/recording-activity/> and let your friends and families know that their county may also offer similar free services.

**Q. How can residents get in touch with you?**

**A.** You can call me on my cell phone at (904) 599-8688, the Clerk's Office at (904) 819-3600 or visit us online at [stjohnsclerk.com](http://stjohnsclerk.com). I also invite you to check out our recently launched monthly newsletter at <https://conta.cc/3y4se4p> and sign up to receive it monthly via email.



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**with State Attorney, 7th Judicial Circuit,  
R.J. Larizza**

**Q: Can you describe some of the scams that have come to your attention?**

**A:** We've had some interesting fraud pop up lately that has to do with real estate: vacant property, home improvement, and vacation rentals would be the broad categories.

**Q: What fraud are you seeing with vacant property?**

**A:** Most people think you can't steal a home, but it can be done — and we've prosecuted some cases in St. Johns County. Vacant property is typically the target and a quit claim deed along with the legal concept of adverse possession is how it is done. For example, a dishonest person might illegally live in a vacant home for awhile and then utilize a quit claim deed to turn the property over to themselves and then sell or rent the property fraudulently. If they sell the property, they will offer owner financing, so that title insurance is not required as with a mortgage company. When the rightful owner shows up at the property, surprised that someone is there, they often call law enforcement, who is then shown the quit claim deed. This then looks like a civil matter, but it's a fraud to illegally record documents.

My advice if you have vacant property: ask someone you trust to keep an eye on it to ensure no one is living there illegally and also check with the county regularly to make sure there have been no documents filed on the property such as quit claim deeds. Consider this as you would check up on your credit report.

**Q: What about home improvement fraud?**

**A:** Recently we had 50 victims in our district of a roofing scam. As you know, there is a shortage of labor and many reputable contractors are quoting long periods of time to complete a project. Some homeowners may then seek out other contractors and come across some that are not so reputable. Scammers are always ready to take advantage. It's a red flag if the contractor asks for all the money for a job up front. Make sure any deposit requested seems reasonable and do your due diligence as it pertains to licensing and insurance. You can call the county and find out if a contractor is licensed to work here and in addition to asking to see the proof of insurance, maybe take the additional step of actually calling the insurance company to verify coverage.

**Q: Finally, what can you tell us about vacation rental property fraud?**

**A:** If you're going on vacation, always use a reputable agency to find the property you want to rent. Be careful searching online because sometimes what is represented on the internet is not reality — and you won't know it until you show up ready for your vacation. Plus, by then the scammer will already have your personal information and even your money. One thing you can do to verify the accuracy of the rental property listing is to look up the property by address on the county's property appraiser's website. You can also contact a local realtor that specializes in rental properties and ask them to check it out. If it turns out that the listing is fraudulent, they may end up helping you find a legitimate rental property. A little prevention/work up front can really pay off.



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

**Q: Can you give some insight into your recent budget presentation to the Board of County Commissioners for the next fiscal year?**

**A:** As background, before the budget process started, my entire command staff met with the county commissioners one-by-one because our relationship with them is so important. We went over my three budget priorities, which are increasing compensation and benefits for our employees so that we can recruit and retain top talent; maximizing technology to decrease crime in St. Johns County; and after we've assessed the entire county, add additional personnel. Then I proposed my budget of nearly \$103 million, which represents an \$8.8 million increase over last year. None of the increase is for capital improvements.

**Q: Can you describe what items are included in the increase?**

**A:** Nearly all is going towards increasing the base pay for sworn deputies from \$45,000 to \$50,000. This will be for approximately 490 deputies at the rank of lieutenant and below. As background,

there are approximately 100 of our deputy sheriffs who live in touching counties because they can't afford to live in St. Johns County. Additionally, in a recent 30-day period, we had four 10-year deputy sheriffs leave for a variety of reasons, but all were for higher paying jobs. I also propose to increase the base pay for our civilian staff \$3,000 to \$35,000.

Other items included in the requested increase include nearly \$2 million to the Florida retirement system, \$450,000 for an increase in health benefits for employees, \$500,000 due to an increase in fuel costs across all agency vehicles, boats and helicopters, \$500,000 for an increase in the inmates' medical fund and \$100,000 for the increased cost of ammunition.

I also propose adding 10 additional deputies (mostly for patrol, but one will be the deputy at the new Beachside High School) and one civilian. According to County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer, since 2016, more than 25,000 homes have been



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

**Q: What is coming up on the calendar of the Property Appraiser's Office?**

**A:** Our office has completed valuations needed for the creation of the tax roll. This tax roll was submitted to the county taxing authorities and the Florida Department of Revenue on June 1. With that submission, we also submitted our annual budget, since the taxing authorities fund our office.

**Q: Can you give us any insight into the numbers on this year's tax roll?**

**A:** This year, the Just Market Value of the tax roll is \$61.2 billion, which is the largest tax roll ever for St. Johns County. The Taxable Value is \$40 billion, which represents a 15.26 percent increase over the initial submission in 2021. These increases are due to a combination of an increase in property values as well as the addition this year of \$1.9 billion in new construction.

**Q: What happens next?**

**A:** The Florida Department of Revenue has 30 days to review the tax roll and the taxing authorities use the tax roll to create their budgets. We will resubmit the First Final Tax Roll on July 1. This 30-day window allows our team to do quality control work and make any adjustments as well as answer any questions from the Florida Department of Revenue. Then, TRIM notices will be mailed.

**Q: What can you tell us about TRIM notices?**

**A:** TRIM is the most important document a property owner will get in St. Johns County. They will be mailed by our office on Aug. 19 and are also available online ([www.sjcpa.us](http://www.sjcpa.us)) as of that date. Within the mailing, property owners will receive a copy of the State of Florida Taxpayer's Bill of Rights and

a list of exemptions in addition to the TRIM notice. The TRIM notice also contains the date and time of the budget hearing for each of the taxing authorities, so property owners can attend to learn more.

**Q: What will the TRIM notice contain?**

**A:** The TRIM notice shows the market value, the assessed value and the taxable value of your property for 2021 and proposed for 2022. It will also show any exemptions for the property. Make sure you check your TRIM notice for accuracy as to values and exemptions. The taxes are listed by taxable authority and will show what the taxes would be if the county made no changes to the budget. This is called the "rollback rate," essentially what your taxes would be this year to allow the county to collect the same amount of money as last year. TRIM will also show the proposed taxes if the proposed budget is passed; this is what would be on the tax bill.

**Q: What should property owners do if they disagree with the value assessed by your office?**

**A:** When the TRIM notice is mailed, a 25-day clock starts. If the taxpayer has any discrepancy with the Property Appraiser's Office, they should contact us to discuss. If we can't come to an agreement, the taxpayer can file an appeal with the Value Adjustment Board. It is very important to do this within the 25-day window, because if not, a taxpayer will lose his or her right to appeal.

**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.

**Guest Column**

**Switzerland Community Center**

By Al Abbatiello

The William Bartram Scenic Highway Group continues its restoration project of the former Switzerland Community Center. District 1 does not have a single community center within our boundaries. There was a time when the Trout Creek Park facility was considered a District 1 community center, but with the recent change in district boundaries (due to the 2020 census) that facility is now in District 2. In fact, District 2 now has three community centers, the St. Augustine area has three centers, and Ponte Vedra has one.

County districts are drawn based on population in an effort to have each of the five districts as even in population as possible. Because of the very rapid growth in the northwest part of the

county, District One was significantly reduced in geographic size, and we are now without a community center.

At one time, the St. Johns County Parks Department attempted restoration of the Switzerland Community Center, but they were unable to get funding. Now, the William Bartram Scenic Highway Group is working hard to bring a community center to our community. Sometime in the fall of this year, the group will make a presentation to our Board of County Commissioners to showcase our past achievements and plans for future projects to enhance the scenic and historic corridor of State Road 13. Come join us in our efforts. Visit <https://bartramscenichighway.com/> for more information.

**Q&A with Rob Hardwick** cont. from pg. 8 added to the tax roll, so more deputies are needed.

**Q: What is the next step?**

**A:** During the commission meeting, while I was making my presentation, I told them that my goal was actually to increase the base pay for the deputies and civilians even more than was in my presentation, to \$52,000 and \$37,000 respectively. This would add approximately another \$2 million to the increase requested. We received support from Commissioner Blocker to amend our presentation and now

we are working closely with the Office of Management and Budget to figure out the best way to handle this. It will need to be done in July, prior to the commission's vote at the first reading.

**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.



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**Had enough?** Aug. 23rd, vote twice to stop overdevelopment that is destroying our county.

\* Paid for by Krista Keating-Joseph, and Charles "Chuck" Labanowski, Republican candidates for St. Johns County Commissioners, Districts 4 and 2

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**Briefs**

**Army's Second Infantry Division seeks former members for reunion**

The Second (Indianhead) Infantry Division Association is searching for anyone who served in the Army's 2nd Infantry Division at any time.

For information about the association and our 99th annual reunion in Kansas City, Missouri from Sept. 28 – Oct. 2, 2022, contact Mike Davino at [2ida.pao@charter.net](mailto:2ida.pao@charter.net) or (919) 498-1910.

**New hair salon in Fruit Cove**

Frangipani Hair Studio was first opened by Shanna Swing Leynes in Jacksonville Beach in 2002. Following great success and remarkable growth, Leynes went on to open two more locations within the last six years — one in Historic Avondale, another on Atlantic Boulevard.

Kelly Weary has been a staple within the Frangipani family since her onboarding in 2006, a year after she moved here with her husband, Fred. Weary is a natural born leader and always exudes qualities of confidence, responsibility, focus, honesty and creativity. These qualities led her to become a manager for Leynes in 2012.

Weary always had a dream and longing to bring the "Frangipani Experience" to her own community, Saint Johns. When Leynes learned that the owner of Panache was ready to retire, she knew it was time to bring Weary's dream to fruition. Timing, location, and readiness was on their side, which led Leynes and Weary to join forces and partner to open

Frangipani Julington. The duo took on ownership in March, and are already bringing changes in aesthetic, culture, and guest experience to this community.

"At Frangipani Julington you will witness that professionalism and art are one in the same," Weary said. "From advanced color, to cuts, scalp health, hair therapy, extensions, smoothing treatments, and at home care, Frangipani prides itself on taking a customized approach that fits every guests' needs. The staff will not only achieve all of your hair dreams, but will exceed all expectations in customer service and customer satisfaction under this unparalleled management and ownership."



Photo courtesy Kelly Weary  
Kelly Weary and Shanna Swing Leynes

**Church welcomes new pastor**

River of Life United Methodist Church, located at 2600 Race Track Road, will welcome new Pastor Rev. Steve Painter on July 3.

Painter served as the pastor at San Marco Church in Jacksonville for the last eight years. He is a native of Jacksonville and a second generation pastor. He

graduated from the University of North Florida and continued his education at Chandler Theological Seminary. His hobbies include scuba diving, golfing, enjoying God's creation, and spending time with his wife of 31 years, Stella, and two grown children.

Worship service at River of Life United Methodist Church is Sundays at 9:30 a.m. and all are welcome.

**Explore Florida state parks through your library**

The St. Johns County Public Library System has partnered with Florida State Parks, the Florida Department of State, and Florida's Division of Library Services to offer library patrons access to Florida State Parks through the Real Florida Reader Program. Now through Sept. 12, 2022, St. Johns County Public Library System card holders may check out a Real Florida Reader day pass for free admission for up to eight people at more than 170 participating state parks.

Passes may be checked out for seven days, with no holds or renewals, at any of the St. Johns County Public Library System library branches. They do not cover activity fees or entry into special events, museum or boat tours, instructor certification diving, boat launching, rentals of picnic pavilions and other facilities, rentals of equipment such as canoes and kayaks, overnight camping, or lodging. Access to Ellie Schiller Homosassa Springs Wildlife, Skyway Pier, and Weeki Wachee Springs state parks is also excluded from this program.

Visit [floridastateparks.org/RealFloridaReader](http://floridastateparks.org/RealFloridaReader) for more information about this program or contact your local branch library. Visit [sjcpls.org](http://sjcpls.org) for information on other services the St. Johns County Public Library System offers.

**New app helps patients navigate their health care journey**

Baptist Health has launched Baptist Access, a new app designed to help patients navigate their health care journey, whether digitally or in-person.

The new app, powered by the Gozio Health platform, provides all-in-one access to Baptist Health hospitals and outpatient locations.

With Baptist Access, patients can:

- Find a Baptist Health provider or location
- Schedule an appointment
- Get directions from their home to their health care destination
- Find any location within hospital campuses including indoor wayfinding with turn-by-turn directions to patient care, parking, food, restrooms, ATMs and more
- View insurance plans
- Access medical records
- Pay bills

"We're excited to introduce the Baptist Access app, underscoring our commitment to innovatively improving patient experiences," said Michael A. Mayo, DHA, FACHE, president and CEO of Baptist Health. "In addition to providing in-person assistance, we are leveraging the convenience of mobile phone technology to make it easier for patients to navigate our health system, inside and out. On our two largest hospital campuses, patients will even be able to find their way from where they parked to their appointment, and back."

**Annual Backpack Challenge scheduled through Aug. 1**

Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Network Realty will host its 23rd Annual Backpack Challenge through Aug. 1.

The Northeast Florida real estate firm is collecting new backpacks and school supplies for students in kindergarten through high school at Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Network Realty offices. The company is also collecting cash and check donations to purchase backpacks and school supplies, which will be provided to local charities that serve Northeast Florida children.

Donations may be dropped off at the following office locations:

- Mandarin/St. Johns - 12636 San Jose Blvd., Jacksonville
- MuraBella at World Golf Village – 196 Capulet Drive, Suite 3, St. Augustine
- Ponte Vedra/Nocatee – 333 Village Main St., Suite 670, Ponte Vedra Beach
- St. Augustine - 112 Sea Grove Main St., Suite 210, St. Augustine Beach

Briefs cont. on pg. 19

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# ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

## Prepare now for emergencies later: 2022 hurricane season is here

By Marge Cirillo  
mail@floridanewsline.com

The Florida Small Business Development Center (SBDC) urges small business owners to prepare for the 2022 Atlantic hurricane season, which extends through Nov. 30. According to a forecast by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the 2022 season is predicted to be above-normal, with a range of 14 to 21 named storms, of which six to 10 could become hurricanes, including three to six major hurricanes.

Businesses should consider several elements in preparing for a disaster. Not only is it important to protect staff, their building, data, and inventory, it is also critical to prepare a plan to continue operations following the disaster. A good plan may include provisions to relocate to a pre-identified site, retrieve data, including employee, customer and vendor records; and a way to operate efficiently with a smaller staff of key individuals. The Florida SBDC also strongly encourages businesses to back up data and ensure they have access to important files, such as tax records, legal, and financial documents.

As a principal responder in the state's Emergency Support Function (ESF) 18 for Business and Industry, the Florida SBDC Network helps small businesses prepare and recover from disasters. Through the network's service offering, professionally certified business consultants can help small business owners develop comprehensive business continuity, emergency preparedness, and disaster recovery plans at no cost. Florida SBDCs also offer training on

disaster preparedness, templates, tips, and resources.

In the event of a disaster, Florida SBDC disaster specialists help affected businesses prepare disaster loan applications. The network will also deploy its mobile assistance centers into communities for affected businesses to receive on-site assistance with disaster loans and other post-disaster challenges.

### Preparedness resources:

- For preparedness resources from the Florida SBDC Network, visit <https://floridasbdc.org/services/business-continuation/preparedness/>
- [www.FloridaDisaster.org](http://www.FloridaDisaster.org) — The state's official source of information for individuals and businesses from the Florida Division of Emergency Management.
- [www.FloridaDisaster.biz](http://www.FloridaDisaster.biz) — The Florida Department of Economic Opportunity's website to provide businesses access to critical information before, during, and after a disaster.
- For a hurricane preparedness checklist and other resources from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), visit [www.sba.gov/business-guide/manage-your-business/prepare-emergencies](http://www.sba.gov/business-guide/manage-your-business/prepare-emergencies)
- For more information about the Florida SBDC Network and to find an SBDC near you, visit [www.FloridaSBDC.org](http://www.FloridaSBDC.org)

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

## SCORE to offer CEO peer group forum

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewsline.com

Kicking off this July, SCORE's Jacksonville Chapter will host the CEO Forum, a program for established CEOs seeking a consortium of their peers.

The CEO Forum itself is nothing new to SCORE; the initial iteration was launched by the Orange County, California SCORE chapter with a resounding influence that continues to promote growth and camaraderie across the business community.

SCORE Jacksonville will launch the program here on the First Coast and looks forward to a long legacy of continued support for small businesses and those that run them.

The CEO Forum will be held monthly over lunch at The Capital Grille, St. John's Town Center, Jacksonville. Agendas are member-driven, creating an atmosphere for networking, sharing of best practices, and the potential for innovative solutions to the ever-changing issues that affect the potential success of businesses.

The CEO Forum is a new offering to

the Jacksonville community based on the tried-and-true philosophy that although you may be succeeding well enough on your own, we are always better when we work, learn, and develop together.

If you or anyone you know would be a good fit for this monthly meeting of the minds, more information and requirements for selection can be found at [www.jacksonville.score.org/CEO-Forum](http://www.jacksonville.score.org/CEO-Forum)

SCORE is a national organization with hundreds of community-focused chapters sprinkled throughout the country serving thousands of individuals annually. The Jacksonville chapter, like its counterparts across the United States, is composed mostly of retired and semi-retired CEOs and executives who volunteer their time to guide new and prospective business owners on their journey to the top of their respective fields. Traditionally, SCORE volunteers offer their services through one-on-one mentorship, conferences, and a vast array of webinars which have proved their longevity throughout the pandemic and are still going strong.

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

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## United Way of St. Johns' CEO accepts position with United Way of Florida

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewsline.com

Melissa Nelson, current CEO and president of United Way of St. Johns County, has been named the new CEO and president of the United Way of Florida, the state organization of 28 local United Ways.

"We conducted a comprehensive search for a leader who can take the United Way of Florida to new heights and found the skill set we need in Melissa Nelson," said Jeff Hayward, United Way of Florida board chair. "As a local United Way CEO who transformed the United Way of St. Johns County, Melissa possesses the interpersonal skills, business acumen and Florida legislative advocacy experience that make her the perfect choice to lead the organization," he added.

Nelson has been with United Way of St. Johns since March 2014. During that time, the organization has more than doubled in its efforts. Annual support has increased from \$1.12 million in 2015, to \$2.37 million in 2021. In 2019, the organization expanded to include Putnam County. Known for the traditional annual funding of nonprofits, during Nelson's tenure with the organization, the organization also administered \$1.2 million in CARES funds to individuals in Putnam County; added rolling Strategic Grants that focus solely on food insecurity, housing and mental health; and was recently tapped

by St. Johns County Board of County Commission to handle the vetting and distribution of \$7.7 million in American Rescue Plan Act Funds in St. Johns County.

"When I joined United Way, I committed to building relationships within our community, but underestimated the depth, strength and breadth of these connections. Similarly, I could not have imagined the passion I would feel for our mission today," said Nelson. "This very passion led to my acceptance of the position as CEO of United Way of Florida, where I will have the best of both worlds — the continued mission of St. Johns and Putnam County and an expanded focus to all parts of our state. Of course, I must also share how much I appreciate the trust, support and generous friendships of our board, staff, partners and community. Thank you to all that allowed me to be part of what we have built together."

United Way of St. Johns will immediately launch the search for the organization's next president and CEO. Throughout this search and transition, United Way and its community partners will continue their important work addressing immediate challenges of individuals and families in Putnam and St. Johns County while also making long-term investments that tackle the root causes of these issues.

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## Bolles announces new Center for Innovation

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

Leaders of The Bolles School have announced plans for the new Center for Innovation facility on the Bolles Upper School San Jose Campus. The 47,000-square-foot, three-story building marks the school's most expansive construction undertaking since the completion of historic Bolles Hall in 1925.

Groundbreaking on the \$25 million building, designed by Miami-based Zyscovich architects and constructed by Jacksonville-based Stellar design-build company, began in June with construction taking two years or more to complete. The Center for Innovation was made possible by a generous gift from Frank Sanchez, whose \$5 million landmark contribution is the largest single gift The Bolles School has received in its history.

"The Center for Innovation is an exciting work of both art and engineering, but like all campus structures, it exists to support the learning that happens within its footprint," said Bolles President and Head of School Tyler Hodges. "In this case, this means collaborative hands-on learning, academic exploration with inspirational faculty and the ability for stu-

dents to experiment and gain practical experience as they work toward their highest potential to serve our community and the world."

The state-of-the-art structure is being constructed on the San Jose Campus' last prime development site adjacent to Bolles Hall on a bluff overlooking the St. Johns River. The building will house Bolles' science, math and technology programs, as well as expansive areas for advanced courses in robotics, computer programming, information technology, engineering and design. Designs for the facility accommodate opportunities for new offerings and provide space for collaboration and dialogue across disciplines. The new academic areas will deepen Bolles' curriculum and cultivate the country's next generation of innovators, according to department leaders.

Construction of the Center for Innovation, and the subsequent relocation of programs from classroom space in Bolles Hall and other buildings, also provides space for other areas of academic advancement and Resident Life — including the expansion of the new Llura "Lulie" Liggett Gund '58 Residence Hall for Girls on the second floor of Bolles Hall. Once

the Bolles math department moves into the Center for Innovation building, the residence hall can be expanded to accommodate 60 students — a big jump from its current 28-student capacity. This figure represents added space but does not denote an increase in student population overall.



Rendering courtesy The Bolles School  
Artist's rendering of the new Center for Innovation.

## Newcomers of North St. Johns announces 2022 - 23 board of directors

By Michele Oliver  
mail@floridanewslines.com

Newcomers of North St. Johns announced its board of directors for 2022 - 23 at its May luncheon held at Marsh Landing Country Club.

Serving for the coming year are Co-Presidents Pat Lett and Judy Porter; Co-Vice Presidents Charlene Lim and Michele Oliver; Co-Secretaries Carolee Thomason and Jean Weller; and Co-Treasurers Judy Belluso and Casey Yeomans.

Newcomers of North St. Johns was established in April 2004 to offer people the circumstances to become acquainted with others while finding their place in the community.

"We're a very friendly, welcoming group that offers many opportunities to enjoy social activities and help form life-long friendships," said Co-President Pat Lett.

According to Co-President Judy Porter, "We have had a lot of fun planning events this year and look forward to a great year ahead. We invite anyone from the St. Johns County neighborhoods interested in membership to contact us for more information."



Photo courtesy Michele Oliver  
Co-Vice-Presidents Michele Oliver and Charlene Lim; Co-Secretaries Carolee Thomason and Jean Weller; Co-Treasurers Judy Belluso and Casey Yeomans; and Co-Presidents Judy Porter and Pat Lett.



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# Creekside senior named third place winner of Bridging Cultures Scholarship

By NewsLine Staff  
 mail@floridanewsline.com

International Cultural Exchange Services (ICES) has selected Pravalika Eluka, 18, of St. Johns as a third place winner of the 2022 ICES Bridging Cultures Scholarship. Eluka is a senior at Creekside High School. The scholarship included a contest in which applicants shared their thoughts in an original 300 – 500 word essay on the topic: "How does knowing people from other countries and cultures make our lives better?" The scholarship was open to high school students nationwide who competed for seven scholarships totaling \$13,500.

Out of nearly 700 applicants, Eluka was selected as a third place winner, and will receive \$1500 toward her college education.

Regarding her thoughts on building bridges of cross-cultural understanding, Eluka said, "By making friends from other countries and cultures, we become children again, taking in all the things the people in our world have to offer without prejudice or judgment."

Eluka's full essay can be found at <https://blog.icesusa.org/2022-bridging-cultures-scholarship-winners>

Eluka will attend the University of South Florida in the fall to major in Computer Science. She intends to be a software developer and is interested in exploring game design and virtual reality.



Photo courtesy International Cultural Exchange Services  
 Pravalika Eluka.

ICES is a non-profit youth exchange organization that provides high school students the opportunity to study abroad. Each year, ICES brings students from more than 30 countries to the United States, as well as offering study-abroad opportunities to American students.

ICES is currently accepting applications for host families and study-abroad applicants for the 2022 – 23 academic year. Visit [www.icesusa.org](http://www.icesusa.org) or call (800) 344-3566 for more information.

## Local Girl Scout earns Gold Award

Brooke Vlaun has earned the Girl Scout Gold Award, the highest award in Girl Scouts. Her project was titled, "Surf Like A B.R.A.T." In 1921, a book assigned the term "BRAT" (British Regiment Attached Traveler) to children who traveled abroad with a parent soldier. (Brooke knows the term because in her 17 years, she has moved eight times.) Brooke learned that in 2019, there were 71,034 beach rescues in the United States and 152 deaths. According to the United States Coast Guard statistics, nearly two-thirds of all search and rescue cases occurred in the southeast United States, with the majority of those in Florida. Those with the ability

to swim, surf, kayak or paddle board safely are far less likely to be among those statistics. For her Girl Scout Gold Award project, Brooke combined her personal experience as a military BRAT and her love of surfing to organize a surf camp at NAS Mayport for 14 military/DOD dependents. She partnered with the United States Coast Guard Sector Jacksonville, which provided seven active-duty volunteer surf instructors; NAS Mayport, which provided five lifeguards and helped promote the event through their Teen Center; and Timucuan Parks Foundation, which increased campers' awareness of how to respect and protect our oceans.



Photo courtesy Kristen Vlaun  
 Local Girl Scout earns Gold Award

## Nease named best NJROTC unit in the Nation

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

The Naval Service Training Command selected Nease as the Most Outstanding NJROTC Unit in the Nation for 2021 – 2022, taking top honors over the 583 NJROTC programs worldwide.

The Nease program has been a perennial contender for national honors, having finished as the number two program in 2021. The selection is based on an evaluation of academic achievements, competitions, orientation activities, summer training programs, school service projects, community service activities, extracurricular activities, and annual inspection results.

This announcement followed Commander Johnathan D. Shaw, Navy JROTC Area-12 Manager, announcing Nease as the Most Outstanding Unit in Area-12, a region encompassing 60 schools covering the 13 NJROTC programs in northeast Florida and 47 across the entire state of Georgia for the fifth consecutive year.

“There’s immense pressure every year for the seniors to keep Nease on top,” said Battalion Commander Isabella Rivera who accepted an appointment to the United States Coast Guard Academy.

“We take our leadership roles seriously. And now we can pass on the torch to next year’s class with our mission completed.”

This year marks the second time Nease has taken home top honors. In 2015 Nease was named the Most Outstanding Unit in the Nation.

“They say it takes a village to feed a child; well in the JROTC world, it takes a community of cadets, parents, school administrators and instructors pulling in the same direction to ascend a program to this height,” said senior naval science instructor Captain Scott LaRochelle who is retiring after eight years at the helm of the program. “Nease NJROTC epitomized a ‘one team, one fight’ unified effort.”

Nease’s main identity is its Drill team that competes in a compilation of 10 academic, athletic and drill individual events at 12 – 16 school meets. Among other noteworthy achievements, Nease also won first place in athletics, academics, air rifle and orienteering competitions across Florida and the state of Georgia. Cadets completed 5800 community service hours. And nine seniors received service academy appointments or ROTC scholarships.



Photo courtesy Scott LaRochelle

Nease’s drill team celebrates with RADM Peter Garvin following the Navy National Academic, Athletic and Drill Championships in Pensacola.

## New Character Counts! Book display at Julington Creek Elementary

The students at Julington Creek Elementary are going to enjoy this new Character Counts! book display when they return to school in August. This project was fully funded by a grant from THE PLAYERS to support the county’s Character Counts! program in schools. Each of the six pillars have books that correspond with the pillar traits. Students are recognized on a monthly basis by their teachers depending on the character trait focus for a certain month. Media Specialist Jackie Clarke wanted to create a section in the library where students could read about the pillars and this display is a wonderful addition to the Media Center. A former JCE parent, Megan McCain of Megantotallycrafts created the wall decal pillars, highlighting each shelf. Visit [charactercounts.org](http://charactercounts.org) to learn more about the Character Counts! program.



Photo courtesy Julington Creek Elementary

tercounts.org to learn more about the Character Counts! program.

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## INK! recognizes St. Johns County students, mentors, and educational leaders at Take Stock in Children® graduation

By NewsLine Staff  
[mail@floridanewsline.com](mailto:mail@floridanewsline.com)

The St. Johns County Education Foundation, which operates as INK! (Investing in Kids), is the exclusive umbrella agency for Take Stock in Children® (TSIC), a state-wide non-profit organization that offers deserving low-income students a unique opportunity to escape the cycle of poverty through education, mentorship, college success coaching, and the opportunity to earn college scholarships.

This year, the TSIC graduation event was held on May 23 at St. Augustine High School and 18 TSIC students graduated with a special program highlighting the academic achievements each earned over the course of their high school careers.

Graduating scholars earned college scholarships funded by individual donors, corporate sponsors, and fundraising partners. Tim Forson, Superintendent of the St. Johns County School District, delivered opening remarks and recognized students, mentors, teachers, high school principals, school board members, INK! staff, and volunteers, among others.

Students are selected for TSIC when they are in the eighth grade in St. Johns County public schools. Upon acceptance into the program, students sign a contract to maintain a 2.5 grade point average (GPA), maintain good behavior and attendance, and remain drug and crime free. The program continues to be the only public-private partnership of its kind in the U.S.

One hundred percent of all monetary donations received by INK! for the Take Stock in Children program are directed to the purchase of scholarships for St. Johns County students and fully matched by the Florida Prepaid Foundation.

According to Donna Lueders, INK! executive director, the graduation event serves as a meaningful recognition of an outstanding group of graduates from the class of 2022.

“Our event also honored TSIC mentors who are exceptional volunteers. They give their time, experience, and listening skills to students at critical points in their young lives. A mentor’s impact is truly profound,

lasting well beyond the high school years of our young scholars,” said Lueders. According to James Wheeler, INK! Operations & Student Programs Director, all graduating seniors received scholarships, while several students were recognized for exceptional achievement during the ceremony.

Jessica Fader from Pedro Menendez High School received a Flagler Health+ Scholarship. She is graduating with a GPA of more than 4.0 and will complete her Associate of Arts degree at St. Johns River State College in St. Augustine this summer. Fader participated in the Health Sciences Academy at the high school. She plans to pursue studies in nursing and attend the University of North Florida in the fall.

Horace Taylor from Nease High School received a Flagler Health+ Scholarship. He is graduating from high school and from St. Johns River State College with his Associate of Arts degree. Taylor’s cumulative high school GPA is more than 4.2. In addition to earning the Bright Futures Scholarship, Taylor has been offered multiple scholarships by the University of Florida. He will be attending the University of Florida in the fall.

Aidan Bryant from St. Augustine High School received the Beaver Toyota Scholarship. Bryant is graduating with a cumulative high school GPA of 4.68. He completed his high school career with “A” grades in every class including 14 Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) Program and advanced placement (AP) classes. Bryant earned the prestigious AICE Diploma. In addition to earning the Bright Futures Scholarship, he has been awarded the Machen Scholarship which is the highest scholarship offered by the University of Florida. Bryant will be attending the University of Florida in the fall.

The Take Stock in Children, St. Johns County Outstanding Senior Academic Achievement Awards were presented to Taylor and Bryant. They will each receive a \$500 award for books during their first year of college as bestowed by the Davidson Cares Foundation.

Visit [www.ink-stjohns.org](http://www.ink-stjohns.org) for more information.

## Palencia second graders present “Bugz”



Photo courtesy Tiffany Trivedi

Second graders at Palencia Elementary School staged the first full production at the school since the onset of the pandemic — on May 19 they performed the musical “Bugz” to rave reviews from family and friends.

# Life

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## Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson  
editor@floridanewslines.com

### George Vancore

Many people in NW St. Johns County know George Vancore as the Voice of the Bartram Trail Bears and co-founder of the Field of Dreams. Born in Brooklyn, NY, Vancore moved with his wife Mary to Florida in the early 1980s. He's been volunteering in youth sports ever since. He feels it is very important to give back to his community and has deep feelings for youth sports and the many benefits they provide to kids. But also, when asked why he does what he does, he will say, "Because I enjoy it!" Vancore is a big believer in leading by example and believes that whatever one chooses to do in life, one should love it. "Have a passion for what you do, or don't bother doing it," he tells Field of Dreams Buddies at their orientation. "It's really that simple." George and Mary have two grown children, George III, a property manager in World Golf Village, and Lauren, a graphic designer. They have two grandchildren, Maggie, 10 and Charlie, 3. The Vancores share their home with their pitbull/terrier dog, Buddy.

**Q: How did you meet your wife?**

**A:** We met in college in Potsdam, NY. It was the only State University of New York that offered a degree in computer science. Mary was going out with one of my fraternity brothers, and he would occasionally stand her up. I would have to take her home and eventually, my fraternity brother and I had a mano-a-mano conversation — and then Mary and I started dating. We were married in 1974 and just celebrated our 48th anniversary on May 25.

**Get to Know ...**

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

**Q: What brought you to Florida?**

**A:** I was working for AT&T in Boston at the time of the divestiture [when the Bell System was officially broken up by the government]. I was offered to either go to New Jersey or Florida and we decided to come to Florida. I worked in IT at American Transtech and we thought we'd only stay here a few years. At the time we had our four-year-old son and newborn daughter and we moved to Mandarin. We moved to St. Johns County a couple of years later when our son was ready to start school.

**Q: How did you get involved with youth sports?**

**A:** I was initially involved with baseball, since it's a popular first sport and I had young kids. I served many years as a volunteer Little League umpire. Over time, I was the founder and first president of Julington Creek Little League and we played at Mills Field. I also founded the youth flag football league here and over the years was a Pop Warner coach as well as a Little League and softball coach. Most recently, I was one of five co-founders of the Field of Dreams, a league for children with

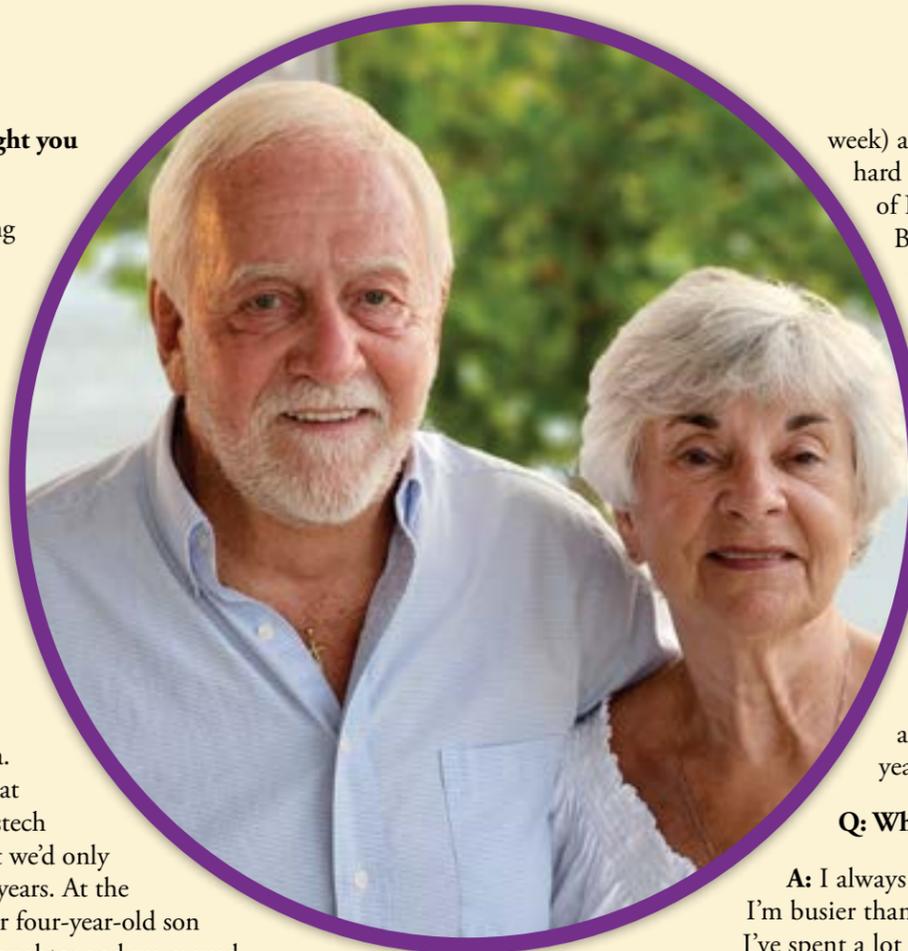


Photo courtesy George Vancore  
George Vancore with wife Mary.

week) and volunteers worked hard to convert the green of Nease to the blue of Bartram within the stadium. I still get choked up when I recall the first Bartram game and the bus with the football players pulled up and they saw the stadium with their new school colors. They were so surprised. My daughter said, "Thanks, Dad." And that's why we do what we do. I still volunteer at Bartram Trail now, 22 years later.

**Q: What's next for you?**

**A:** I always say, "I'm retired, but I'm busier than I've ever been." Lately I've spent a lot of time with Field of Dreams and getting the Field of Dreams playground opened. We went "beyond the white lines" opening the playground and the next step is we plan to get donors and sponsors for picnic tables there and a fence. I also envision an entranceway with a sign that says, "Field of Dreams — Brought to you by your community" because no taxpayer dollars were spent on it.

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

**A:** I love working in my yard — I cut the grass and trim the bushes. I'm a "putterer." I also enjoy afternoon naps in my pool with my dog Buddy and watching the Yankees and Seminoles.

special needs.

**Q: Tell us about your experience at the high school level?**

**A:** As my kids got older, I saw a definite need for volunteers at the high school level. I became the announcer for Nease's varsity and junior varsity football games because my son played football. When my daughter was a rising senior at Nease, Bartram Trail High School opened and she chose to go there for her senior year. She was a cheerleader. The two teams shared the Nease stadium that first year (each school played a home game every other

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**Briefs** cont. from pg. 10

• Beaches/Intracoastal West/Southside - 375-1 Atlantic Blvd., Atlantic Beach

Mesh and clear backpacks are appreciated since some schools have adopted a clear bag policy. Label the outside of the backpack(s) with the suggested grade level. Visit [FloridaNetworkRealty.com/Backpack](http://FloridaNetworkRealty.com/Backpack) for a list of recommended school supplies by grade level.

**New center to provide increased access to mental and behavioral health services**

Recognizing a significant need for increased access to mental and behavioral health services, especially for those individuals in crisis or in urgent need of mental health care, Flagler Health+ has opened the CAIR (Crisis Assessment Intervention and Referral) Center at Flagler Health+.

Serving both youth and adults, the Flagler Health+ CAIR Center is designed to provide access to, and coordination of, mental and behavioral health services in St. Johns and surrounding counties. The CAIR Center serves as a supportive, compassionate place to access crisis assessment, brief interventions, referral services, care coordination support will work with individuals to establish a long-term connection with a provider.

CAIR Center professionals work together to give each client the most personalized approach to obtaining mental health services. Often, the mental health struggle is tied to other needs in the household — food insecurity, lack of stable housing, difficulties obtaining prescriptions, and more. The CAIR Center then utilizes Care Connect+, a program established by Flagler Health+, to connect patients to other critical resources. Care Connect+ then helps clients navigate the process to clarify questions, remove barriers, and connect the patient to social health services, as needed.

Coordinating with mental health partners in the community, the CAIR Center aims to reduce unnecessary Baker Act admissions, increase diversion from the criminal justice system, and reduce recidivism to hospitals while providing

those in mental health crisis a supportive and approachable environment to receive support.

The CAIR Center at Flagler Health+ is located at 300 Health Park Blvd., Suite 1008 on the campus of Flagler Hospital and is open Monday – Friday from 8 a.m. – 6 p.m. It is anticipated that operating hours will be expanded this summer with a hope that the center will soon be open 24/7.

Visit [www.flaglerhealth.org/CAIR](http://www.flaglerhealth.org/CAIR) or call (904) 819.5204 for more information.

**Clerk launches monthly newsletter to share services, programs with county residents**

St. Johns County Clerk of Court and Comptroller Brandon J. Patty has launched a monthly email newsletter to share services, programs and news from the Clerk of Court office with St. Johns County residents.

“From valuable services that can keep you safe, to county and court news that could impact you, we plan to deliver relevant and useful information to residents living in St. Johns County,” said Clerk Patty. “What’s more, our newsletter will be published just once a month so we won’t overwhelm your inbox.”

The inaugural newsletter highlights the Clerk’s free property fraud alert program, the official opening of the new St. Johns County Memorial Garden, a service spotlight on where to get information to appeal your property value assessment, recent scams here and across Florida, and more.

Sign up by emailing “Subscribe” to [communications@stjohnsclerk.com](mailto:communications@stjohnsclerk.com) or visit <https://conta.cc/3Nn88av> to join the email list directly from the first newsletter.

**“Age Your Way” educational series for LGBTQ seniors offered**

Age Your Way is the name and theme of a new five-part series of online educational series for LGBTQ older adults. The third in the series, “Accessing the Best Caregiver Support Services,” is scheduled for Wednesday, July 13 live at 11:30 a.m. until 1 p.m. The workshop is free,

but registration is required by going to [MyElderSource.org/AgeYourWay](http://MyElderSource.org/AgeYourWay). The 90-minute workshops will be presented live using Zoom online meeting software.

Whether you are the caregiver or the person receiving the caring, it is important to know the wishes of your loved one and how to plan for your care in the event you cannot care for yourself. Issues discussed in this session include the resource available to make sound decisions for you or your loved one. Subject matter experts include Jackie Boyd, author of the Caregiver Guide and long-time aging specialist and LGBTQ advocate; and ElderSource CEO Linda Levin.

The recording and resources presented in the first two workshops are available on the ElderSource website. The sessions, sponsored by the LGBTQ Fund at the Community Foundation for Northeast Florida, are presented by ElderSource and SAGE, a national advocacy and services group for LGBTQ elders.

Visit [MyElderSource.org/AgeYourWay](http://MyElderSource.org/AgeYourWay) for more information and to register.

**500 volunteers needed for Feed My Starving Children meal packing**

Northeast Florida area residents will come together Aug. 12 – 13 to combat world hunger through a partnership between Ponte Vedra Presbyterian Church and Feed My Starving Children, a Christian non-profit

dedicated to providing nourishing meals to starving children worldwide. Seven million emergency meals were just sent to Ukraine by Feed My Starving Children.

A projected 500 community volunteers will pack 102,000 meals with their own hands in two days in four two-hour sessions. This is a great opportunity to serve individually, with your family, friends and coworkers.

The event will take place at Ponte Vedra Presbyterian Church, located at 4510 Palm Valley Road.

Volunteer meal packing registration is available now online. Visit <https://give.fmsc.org/jacksonville> to view session hours and to register to volunteer.

**Jury duty scam warning issued**

By NewsLine Staff  
[mail@floridanewslines.com](mailto:mail@floridanewslines.com)

The St. Johns County Clerk of the 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.

The Clerk’s office has received calls from concerned residents who say a scammer claims that the individual has missed jury duty and must make immediate payment to avoid arrest. The scammer indicates a warrant has been issued for the resident’s arrest and demands payment for failure to appear for jury duty.

“I want to be extremely clear: Clerk staff will never phone a resident to request payment for failure to appear,” St. Johns County Clerk Brandon J. Patty said. “If you receive one of these calls, please provide no information to the caller, end the call immediately, and report the incident to the Florida Office of the Attorney General. As always, please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about jury duty or services we provide.”

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 by an official letter from the St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court sent through the U.S. Postal Service.

For questions regarding jury duty in St. Johns County, call (904) 819-3629. [stjohnsclerk.com/alerts](http://stjohnsclerk.com/alerts) to learn about other common scams.

## Find Your Frugal: Five tips to help you save on hurricane preparedness expenses

By Lourdes Mederos, University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS)  
mail@floridanewslines.com

Hurricane season launched June 1, and the first glimpses of stormy weather already passed through parts of the Sunshine State. As prices continue to increase, people will have to pay more for everything, including storm supplies.

“Purchasing perishable and non-perishable supplies to successfully weather a storm comes with additional expenses that can impact an already tight budget,” said Brenda Marty-Jimenez, one of several UF/IFAS Extension agents throughout the state specializing in family and consumer sciences. “It can be challenging to find the time and resources necessary to feed our families nutritious food and stock up on recommended supplies.”

Thinking ahead is key, she said.

“There are plenty of cost-saving measures you can adopt now that will save you money over time, such as creating hurricane menus and shopping for what you can ahead of time,” Marty-Jimenez said.

Here, Marty-Jimenez adds her top five strategies to keep disaster preparedness costs under control during the 2022 hurricane season:

1. Planning saves time and money. Eating healthy, managing food dollars and cooking at a lower price tag

require meal planning, a key step to managing resources. Before heading to the store, set up a grocery list that will yield multiple recipes and falls within your budget. Be prepared that substitutions may be necessary — due to ongoing supply chain challenges, stores may not have all items in stock. Keep a copy of your disaster menu plan stored with your disaster supplies. Some find it useful to take a photo of their grocery list to keep in their smartphone in case the list gets misplaced, especially during stressful moments.

2. Remember MyPlate. When planning meals, be sure to include plenty of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy and lean proteins to stock your pantry with disaster supplies. Don't buy lots of perishable food if you cannot eat it in time or freeze it before it expires — and remember, frozen food has a time limit if your home loses power.

3. Check your supplies. It is tempting to put off shopping and delay the expense of purchasing supplies when money is tight. Spreading your costs over time, if possible, can be the most efficient management strategy. Track spending like you track a storm: One week, plan to purchase non-perishable food supplies and bottled water — and, remember, these items are generally not taxable; the next week, buy paper products; perhaps followed

**Find Your Frugal** cont. on pg. 21



By Scott A. Grant  
mail@floridanewslines.com

## PopHistory

### The Confidence Man

We have a deep and abiding fascination with scammers and con men. In our modern society, scams run rampant and some are even revered. It was always thus.

The first con man appeared on the streets of New York City in the 1840s. His name was William Thompson, but he went by many aliases. He was well dressed and targeted similarly well-dressed victims. Thompson would approach his mark and strike up a conversation pretending they knew each other.

At some point, Thompson would ask if his intended victim had enough “confidence” to lend him his watch. When he got the watch, Thompson would walk away, never to be seen again. For almost a decade, he got away with his crimes until he was spotted by a prior victim named McDonald. The New York Herald labeled him a “confidence man.” Most agree it was the first time the term was used and the derivation of the term “con man.”

Scams take many forms. Most rely on the gullibility of the victim. In 1925, a man named Victor Lustig sold the Eiffel Tower — twice. Both times he sold the structure to scrap metal dealers. The first time, his victim was too embarrassed to go to the police. The second attempt attracted the attention of the authorities, but Lustig managed to escape to America. A list of rules for con men is attributed to Lustig. He advised letting the victim reveal political and religious views and to then “agree with them.”

Lustig's equivalent here in the US was a man named George C. Parker, famous for selling the Brooklyn Bridge. He would tantalize his victims with the promise of passive income. Once they owned the Bridge, they could charge everyone a fee to cross. On several occasions,

the police had to stop would-be buyers from erecting toll booths on the structure. He sold the bridge numerous times for prices ranging from \$75 – \$50,000. His antics led to the popularity of the phrase, “If you believe that, I have a bridge to sell you.” Parker also “sold” Madison Square Garden, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Grant's Tomb, and the Statue of Liberty.

Over a 70-year period ending in 1936, 28 con men operating out of Pittsburgh ran a recurring con similar to the modern Nigerian Prince scam. They would send letters to people with the last name of Baker across the country claiming they represented the unclaimed estate of a Philadelphia millionaire named Jacob Baker. For a fee, they would help them claim their share. The gang collected more than \$3 million from more than 3,000 victims. At the time it was the largest mail fraud in history.

The most famous scammer of all time was Charles Ponzi, who invented the Ponzi scheme. Ponzi promised his investors huge returns for buying postal coupons in Spain and then selling them in the US for a five-cent profit. In the early 1920s, Ponzi took in \$20 million from “investors.” He was caught and sent to jail. When they let him out, he moved to Jacksonville and sold worthless swampland west of the city to northern investors. If he had just sold the land, he would have gotten away with it. But, he again took in investors and ended up being sentenced to hard labor.

Beware of get rich quick schemes. Getting wealthy is rarely quick or easy.

*Scott A. Grant is a local author and pop-historian. He has written more than 150 published newspaper and magazine articles. By day, he is president of Standfast Asset Management, LLC.*

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# Soccer tournament raises funds for K9s For Warriors



Photo courtesy Jerry Della Porta

Florida Elite Soccer Academy held its second annual K9s For Warriors 3v3 tournament on Sunday, May 22. Forty-seven teams entered the event and \$6,500 was raised for K9s For Warriors. In attendance were K9s For Warriors staff, Sheriff Rob Hardwick and his staff, and responders from St. Johns County Fire Rescue Station 19.



Photo courtesy Jerry Della Porta

**Find Your Frugal** cont. from pg. 20  
by batteries, flashlights and lanterns. Remember to stock up on what you need, but don't overbuy.

4. Take advantage of in-store specials and use coupons. Do not buy what your family will not eat just because it is on sale or you have a coupon. Purchasing "buy one, get one free" items can save money. Coupons can be found in several places, like the Sunday newspaper, online printable coupons, weekly store flyers, manufacturer and store websites, in-store coupons and store loyalty cards.

5. Prepare your car. Keep your gas tank

half full during hurricane season. Plan where you will do your shopping based on where you will find the best deals and how far you will have to travel. This may take some extra research but will save you time and money in the end. Travel, buy and plan in advance, while the shelves are still stocked. When a storm is approaching, gas lines can become long, and supplies may run out. Download a gas availability app now such as the GasBuddy app. This may save time and money when looking for gas and supplies are running low. Turnpike tolls are often suspended when evacuation orders are active.

## Nutrition Check

By Kristen Hicks-Roof PhD, RDN and Caroline Jury BS  
mail@floridanewsline.com

## July is National Blueberry Month

Did you know that the history of celebrating these juicy fruits would not have been possible if a woman did not notice them? Before 1911, blueberries grew in the wild, and people ignored them. The partnership between Dr. Frederick Coville, a USDA botanist, and Elizabeth White successfully cultivated blueberries on her farm in 1911. Four years later, they became commercially available; however, it was not until July 2003 that the USDA declared July as National Blueberry Month. Learn more about blueberries: <https://blueberry.org/about-blueberries/history-of-blueberries/>

Aside from their sweetness and deep color, blueberries have a lot to offer. So, what makes these tiny powerhouses unique? It is one of the only naturally blue fruits, thanks to anthocyanin that renders the blue color, protecting against cancer-causing free radicals in the body. The deeper the color, the more antioxidants, vitamins, and other rich minerals they contain. The antioxidants they contain also prevent infection and improve the immune system. Blueberries are packed with nutrition — one cup of blueberries has fewer than 100 calories and contains nutrients such as dietary

fiber, vitamin C and potassium.

Aside from being nutrient-dense, it is also very versatile and may be used in both hot and cold dishes. It can be enjoyed as is, or you can make a yogurt parfait or on top of your cereal, or they can be baked into muffins, sauces, or sandwiches. Blueberries thrive from April to late September, which is usually when you can get a good deal at the grocery store, you can always buy extra to freeze them for the remainder of the year. So, let's celebrate National Blueberry Month by grabbing a container or two from your favorite supermarket and farmer's market.

*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.*



Photo courtesy MetroCreative  
July is National Blueberry Month.

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# The Pantry Raiders

Few things are as delicious and refreshing as watermelon on a warm day. Watermelon grows quite readily in summer and is often ready to pick after three months of growing time. Harvesters look for a pale buttery yellow spot on the bottom of watermelon (the ground spot), indicating ripeness; however, shoppers can do their part and pick perfect watermelon at the store. The fruit should be firm, symmetrical and free from bruises, cuts or dents. The melon also should be heavy, as it is comprised of 92 percent water.

Most people immediately think of watermelon as a sweet snack or as a palate cleanser after an evening meal, but watermelon is equally at home in savory dishes as it is in sweet offerings. You may enjoy this recipe for “Zesty Watermelon Chicken Salad Tortilla Cups” courtesy of The National Watermelon Promotion Board and recipe author Shannon Kohn. This is a great warm weather meal that looks impressive and is both cool and filling for summer entertaining.

## Zesty Watermelon Chicken Salad Tortilla Cups

Makes 12 servings

4 8-inch flour tortillas

## Make watermelon the centerpiece of meals

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewsline.com

- ¼ cup softened cream cheese
- 2 tbsp. mayonnaise
- 1 tbsp. cayenne pepper sauce
- 2 tbsp. chopped green chiles
- 1 cup cooked, chopped chicken
- 1 ½ cups chopped watermelon
- ¼ cup roasted, salted pumpkin seeds (pepitas)
- ¼ cup sliced green onions

1. Preheat oven to 375 F.
2. Using a 4-inch cookie cutter or cup, cut rounds out of each tortilla. Press one tortilla round down into each cup of a 12-cup muffin pan.
3. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes or until tortilla cups are light brown and crispy. Remove from oven; allow to cool.
4. In the bottom of a large bowl, combine cream cheese, mayonnaise and pepper sauce until smooth.
5. Stir in chicken and green chiles. Fold in watermelon.
6. Divide and fill each tortilla cup with an extra amount of the watermelon-chicken mixture.
7. Divide and garnish with an equal amount of pumpkin seeds and green onion, respectively.

# Gardening

## Summer gardening, and some problems

By Lesley Arrandale  
mail@floridanewsline.com

It's officially hurricane season and the weather is beginning to change. We've had relief with some rainfall, but the accompanying humidity is here to stay, and the weather will get more oppressive as the summer goes on. We must be prepared for storms and worse.

I find myself eyeing the somewhat unkempt wildflowers in my front yard and hearing my husband's assessment of the situation — some of them need to go. “Editing” a garden is not something I'm good at, even though I know that some perennials and annuals that are over their first flush can be cut back and will be revitalized. So the blanket flowers, Virginia spiderwort, and wild petunias will all get a trim, and pulling annual weeds will go along with that task.

I won't worry too much about the insects being displaced. Now, in early June, the beautyberry bushes and Simpson's stoppers are blooming. I have a lovely stand of sunflowers (*Helianthus* sp.), which are insect magnets, all volunteers from last year's plants. These are about four-and-a-half feet tall, although my neighbor who gave me the original seed was told when she received them as a gift that they are the gulf coast version of our local ground-cover beach sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*). Clearly they are something else, but after some research, I still can't identify them. As they bloom well in dry soil with little care I don't much mind, but I'm still curious.

Some of my vegetables are doing well. One Sweet 100 cherry tomato plant is looking very healthy, but the Everglades currant tomato developed brown, crinkly edges on some of its leaves and I decided it had to go. I had hoped to identify the problem but referring to this document: <https://tinyurl.com/v3szmyh5>, I found it impossible. The best advice is to choose tomato varieties specifically bred for resistance to as many diseases as possible.

Follow good cultural practices, including crop rotation, watering and fertilizing correctly, and scouting for insect pests. If you intend to grow a late summer crop, refer to <https://tinyurl.com/2p9fznsf> for more details.

A miserable parsley plant turned out to have its roots full of root knot nematodes, just where I had hoped to put in some okra. Okra is very prone to damage from nematodes, so I found a home for them elsewhere. Unfortunately it's impossible to eradicate nematodes completely without removing and replacing the soil. They do tend to be quite localized and the addition of organic matter, like good compost, can help keep numbers down since nematodes flourish in sandy soils. There is a commercially available soil drench, approved for organic gardens, which is formulated to suppress them, but a cheaper method of control is by soil solarization: <https://tinyurl.com/4fvdhcx3>. This is best done during the summer, to ensure the soil gets good and hot. And choose nematode resistant varieties of vegetables thereafter!

I'm growing a couple of tomatillo plants again. Last year they did very well, and I had a good crop of the small papery husked fruit for salsas. Occasionally we used them in place of tomatoes in stews. I'm hoping the eggplant, chili and sweet pepper plants do well; they are in good shape so far. Even the cool season kale plants are holding up, but I'm not sure for how long in the heat.

The summer solstice isn't far off as I write, but we have a long way to go before fall and our temperatures begin to moderate. In the meantime, take care to look after yourself and check out this resource for practical tips for working safely in your garden: <https://tinyurl.com/vss7xb64>. My strategy is to work for a short time, on most days, but I need to get out earlier in the day!



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# Travel

## Curious About Curacao?

By Debi Lander  
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Every summer, Floridians prepare for the possibility of hurricanes. Not so for those in the ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao) in the Caribbean. They lie just off the coast of Venezuela, beyond the hurricane belt, so if you want to visit the Caribbean in the summer or late fall, head in their direction.

I recently returned from Curacao and was awe-struck by the waterfront in the capital city of Willemstad. Rainbow-hued historic houses in the Dutch architectural style create an unforgettable scene and are protected as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Unlike the white buildings that dominate many Greek and Mediterranean isles, Curacaoans prefer bright colors.

To cross over the waterway into the downtown, you use the Queen Emma floating footbridge. The bridge swings to one side if a ship needs to pass through. It's fun to watch, but you can get stranded before it closes again. As the locals call her, the "Old Swinging Lady" gets illuminated at night.

Of course, all Caribbean islands brag about their white sand beaches, clear

turquoise water, and vibrant sea life. Thirty-five smaller, more intimate beaches and coves dot the shoreline in Curacao. You won't find a string of resort hotels off a boulevard or one long beach. The little coves permit snorkeling off the beach, and many scuba divers find they can dive without the need for a boat.

Curacao receives little rain, so the landscape remains dry, again helping to keep those hurricanes away. Cacti and scrub bushes grow all over the place, as does aloe vera. You can visit an aloe farm and learn about its multiple uses.

Two national parks offer very different experiences. If you want to climb to the highest point on the island, arrive early at Christoffelpark. A round-trip hike to the summit will take about three hours and rewards with a 360-degree panoramic view. Shete Boka Park, however, provides a much more dramatic picture. This park rests on the northernmost point, and massive waves constantly bombard and send spray skyward. The boardwalk and viewing platforms offer great photo ops, but be careful and hang on to the little ones.

If you take children, consider staying at an all-inclusive property like the Corendon Mangrove Beach Resort with its incredible waterpark. They offer exciting rides with twists and turns for all ages and a child-friendly area for the young ones. The King Cobra drops and flings daredevils. The waterpark is rarely crowded, so the kids will get plenty of



Photos courtesy Debi Lander  
Jeremi Beach.



Photos courtesy Debi Lander  
Powerful waves at Shete Boka.

rides. The resort also offers a fantastic main swimming pool, swim-up bar, a lap pool that tends to stay quieter, and its own beach.

One of my favorite moments was discovering wild flamingos. If you are lucky, you may find them close to the road. The quirky creatures twist and curl their necks around like backyard hoses. Their coral color reflects against the tranquil water in a lake, creating a beautiful scene.

Curacao offers a variety of lodging options from AirBnB rentals, villa rentals, boutique hotels, resorts, and all-inclusive properties. I suggest you plan to rent a car. It takes just two hours to drive from tip to tip.

Take a nonstop flight to Curacao from Miami. Remember your sunscreen and appetite; the local cuisine blends Creole,

African, Spanish, Dutch, and Caribbean flavors. Enjoy!

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



Photos courtesy Debi Lander  
Queen Emma Floating Bridge.



Photos courtesy Debi Lander  
Three flamingos.

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