



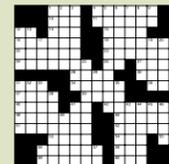
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Photo courtesy William Bartram Scenic Highway Group
Rendering of proposed restoration of the Switzerland Community Center.

Historical group plans restoration of former Switzerland Community Center — with community's help

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

The William Bartram Scenic Highway Group is now earnestly moving forward with plans to restore the former Switzerland Community Center building and is asking the community for volunteers to help in the work. The group has a lease with St. Johns County permitting it to do the work necessary on behalf of the

Center cont. on pg. 2

Community celebrates first playground designed for children of all abilities

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewline.com

The St. Johns County community came together on Saturday, April 30 to celebrate the opening of the Field of Dreams Playground. In attendance were multiple county commissioners, Sheriff Rob Hardwick and representatives from St. Johns County Parks and Rec, the NW Tower Committee and the Cunningham Creek Elementary PTO. But according to George Vancore, one of the five founding fathers of Field of Dreams baseball, the most important attendees were the Field of Dreams baseball players and their buddies, who took time between games on this Saturday morning to celebrate the playground's opening.

"I was so happy to see these kids going from playing baseball to then going over to play on the new playground," Vancore said.

It's important to note that no tax dollars were spent to build and outfit the park. All the money was raised by the community and the county was instrumental in coordinating bids and getting the work done. According to Vancore, it was a true community effort.

"After about the fifth year of playing Field of Dreams baseball, we realized we were not only covering our costs but we had a surplus, since 'all things are free at Field of Dreams' and people regularly make donations," Vancore said. "So we decided to go 'beyond the white lines' and



Photo courtesy Ericka Brandt

build a playground for children with special needs."

During his opening remarks, Vancore described some of the unique donations that contributed to the \$350,000 cost of building the playground — from the 10-year-old boy who resold used golf balls on the Julington Creek Plantation golf course to his own granddaughter, who donated money she had received for good grades to the cause.

At the Field of Dreams Playground at Aberdeen Park, all children have the opportunity to play regardless of their physical abilities. This is St. Johns County Parks and Recreation's first-ever all-inclusive playground, which is customized with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible play. It includes an all-inclusive whirl, ADA swings, a sensory dome, musical pieces, and cantata chimes for sound. The play areas are wheelchair-accessible, with wide paths and ramps. The playground is surrounded by mature trees and offers shaded areas and a pavilion nearby. Children



Photo courtesy Brian Wilson



Photo courtesy St. Johns County Parks and Rec

of all abilities can experience creative play through motion, sensory, and socialization that encourages everyone to come together.

The all-inclusive playground was made possible thanks

to the collaboration of St. Johns County Parks and Recreation, Northwest Tower Committee, the Field of Dreams Board of Directors, members of the Creeks Athletics Association, parents, coaches, and volunteers.

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Center cont. from pg. 1
county and the residents of NW St. Johns County. The Switzerland Community Center sits behind the old volunteer firehouse that is across State Road 13 from Alpine Groves Park.

The old Switzerland Community Center was originally built as a church around 1900 in the New Switzerland area of St. Johns County. In the 1940s, a new church was built and the original building was converted into a community club, serving as a recreational center until the 1990s.

The club hosted many local functions including Sunday dinners, dances, square dances, parties, and other events that raised money for community charities.

This historic structure had a vital role in the social history of the community, serving as a school for all races and religions and as a voting precinct where the first registered African American vote was cast in St. Johns County in 1950.

In 1952, a concrete block building that was used as a volunteer fire station was built adjacent to the community center. In 1999 the block structure was abandoned when the fire department turned professional, and a new fire station was built nearby. The community center continued serving as a recreation facility and antique storage until 2005 when it was abandoned and fell into disrepair.

Through a negotiated lease agreement with St. Johns County, the William Bartram Scenic Highway organization is

working to restore the building as a community center, welcome/ education center, and site for senior activities. A recent engineering study of the existing building determined it is structurally sound. The by-way organization seeks funding to implement Phase 1 of this restoration project to include roof and wall repairs, new electrical panel plus structure rewiring, security system, painting, repair of utilities and HVAC service.

The mission of William Bartram Scenic Highway Group is, in part, to preserve the history and heritage of the St. Johns River region of St. Johns County and to serve as a vehicle to help build the local economy. Anticipated benefits that will be the result of this project are the preservation of a unique, historic byway resource which will help tell the story of northeast Florida and the byway, while serving as a gathering point for the Switzerland community.

“We need your help to volunteer with our present community activities,” said Al Abbatiello of the William Bartram Scenic Highway Group. “Please join us!”

Membership dues for 2022 for the William Bartram Scenic Highway Group are \$15 for a single or \$40 for a family. Specific donations to help with the restoration of the community center are also accepted. Contact Al Abbatiello at (904) 699-8475 or email alabbat@comcast.net for more information or to make a donation.



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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Graham Cracker!



Breed:

Champagne tabby domestic shorthair

Favorite activities:

Eating and watching lizards outside

Favorite treat:

Temptations cat treats

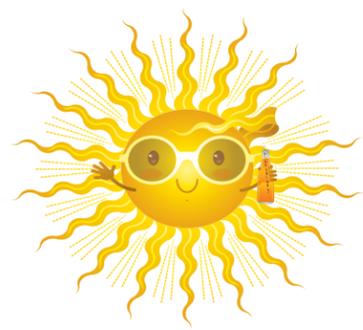
Favorite friends:

His sister Oreo and his human mom Cassie

How your BFF got his name:

After the cookie he resembles; his sister is named Oreo.

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.



Happy Summer!
from your friends at
The CreekLine

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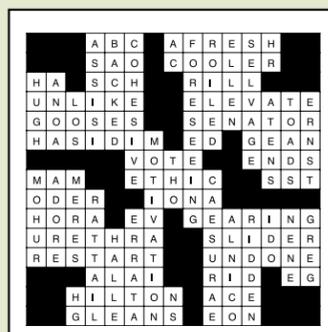
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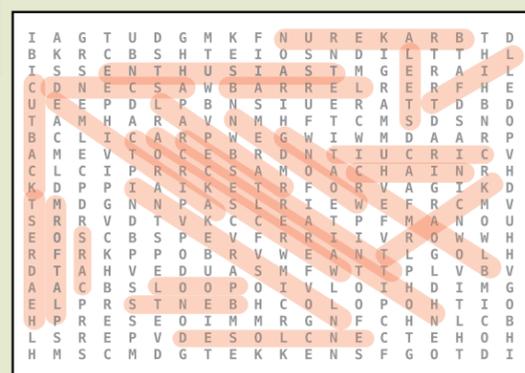


Last month's Mystery Photo was the Center for Health & Sports Medicine on Village Oaks Drive in Fruit Cove. Our winner was Cindy Mellne. Congratulations!



Answers: A. drop B. speed C. thrills D. ride

Answers
to our Puzzles
PG 18



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June

Community Calendar What's Happening in St. Johns

Playing HOOKie, a group for those who enjoy knitting, crocheting and looming (with all items donated to charity) meets every Wednesday from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the outside eating area at Belgian Sweet House Bistro, 12276 San Jose Blvd. (next to Harbor Chase). Visit the group's Facebook page (Playing HOOKie) or email playinghookie31@gmail.com for more information.

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.

2nd: The Jacksonville Camera Club will meet on June 2 and June 16 from 7 p.m. – 9 p.m. at Shepherd of the Woods Southside, 7860 Southside Blvd. Visit jax.jaxcameraclub.com for more information.

6th: The North Florida Chapter of the National MS Society and Bike MS cycling team Big Bananas will host the 10th annual Multiple Sclerosis Awareness silent auction on June 6 at Mr. Chubby's Wings, 150 Valley Circle, Ponte Vedra Beach. The event is free to the public and offers more than

250 items from Beaches retailers, restaurants and service providers valued at over \$33,000. There's also a 50-50 drawing. All proceeds benefit the more than 18,000 North Floridians impacted by MS.

7th: Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet on Tuesday, June 7 at 6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church in the Loft on the County Dock Road side of the church at 2501 Loretto Road. Wearing masks is optional. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

11th: The Northeast Florida Chapter of Sisters in Crime presents award-winning author Janet Kuchler (aka Janet Cooper) at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library, 101 Library Blvd. (FOL Room), at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, June 11. 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 for more information.

13th: The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable will meet on Monday, June 13 at 12 p.m. via Zoom. The

meeting will feature guest speaker St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick. Email info@sjcroundtable.org to register for the meeting or visit www.sjcroundtable.org for more information about the St. Johns County Civic Roundtable.

13th: The Northwest St. Johns County United for Progress Club will meet on Monday, June 13 at 6:30 p.m. Special guests Phil and Ellen Peterson will speak and lead a discussion on "Reducing Our Carbon Footprint." Contact nwsjcp@gmail.com for more information if you'd like to attend.

18th: Herbal Medicine for Beginners will be offered on June 18 at 10 a.m. Attendees will learn about traditionally used herbs to promote wellness and health as well as how to create their own tinctures, teas, and salves. Included are guides, plant identification, lecture and herbal snacks. Pre registration is required via phone or text: (386) 972-1891.

20th: The All Star Quilters Guild will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the

10 a.m. meeting on Monday, June 20 at the First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The program is "Color" by Kathryn D'Elia. Sew and Tell is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit www.allstarquilters.org for more information.

21st: The Happy Hookers crochet group will meet at Bartram Trail Branch Library, at the entrance to Julington Creek Plantation, on June 21 from 5:30 a.m. – 6:45 p.m. Adults and teens (older than 14) meet to crochet or knit blankets for cancer patients at area hospitals. All skill levels are welcome.

29th: Marineland presents: Marine Life of Northeast Florida at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on June 29 from 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. Learn about some of the most iconic marine animals living in the waters of Northeast Florida and how to be good neighbors and protectors to this beautiful wildlife. For elementary grades; registration is required for every child and adult in attendance. Contact Youth Services Librarian Caitlin Turecek at cturecek@sjcfl.us or (904) 827-6963 for more information.

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Guest Column

New website and Citizen's Guide to Voting designed to help voters stay informed

By St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes

Have you visited www.votesjc.gov lately? We launched a new website in May with a focus on transparency, streamlined navigation, and efficient service delivery. Our new site is designed to assist residents, voters, candidates and elected officials in quickly accessing relevant and timely information regarding a variety of election related topics. It's informative, easy to navigate, and will ensure voters and those running for office have convenient access to the information they need to participate in the democratic process. If you haven't seen it — check it out!

Have you received your 2022 Citizens Guide to Registering and Voting in your mailbox? The guide was mailed to every residential mailbox in St. Johns County at the end of May to help residents prepare for the 2022 elections. The publication is especially important this year as many changes have occurred since the last election in 2020. Due to the 2020 census and the redistricting process, voting districts, precinct lines, and some election day polling locations have changed. The 2022 Citizens Guide to Registering and Voting also serves as pre-notification of the new voter information cards that are being mailed to all registered voters in the county in early June. If you missed the guide, its available on our

website at www.votesjc.gov. It's important reading, and worth your time.

Now that the precinct lines and polling places have been finalized for the 2022 elections, new voter information cards will go in the mail the first week of June. Be sure to watch for yours. Your new voter card will replace any other voter cards you have received in the past. When voting in person, you do not need to bring your card. Instead, you must present current and valid photo and signature ID, or you will be required to vote a provisional ballot.

The election season is upon us. Candidates running for office this year must file their qualifying documents with our office or the Division of Elections in Tallahassee by noon on June 17. Once the noon deadline passes, the ballot will be set for the primary election and our staff will move forward with programming the election. The first vote-by-mail ballots go in the mail on July 9. Curious as to who is running for office? Visit our website for up-to-date election information on the upcoming Aug. 23 primary election.

Readers can contact me at the office by calling (904) 823-2238 or emailing me at voakes@votesjc.gov. Our website also has a wealth of information, and a sign-up form for our newsletter.



with St. Johns County Commissioner Sarah Arnold, District 2

Q: Do you have an ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds update for District 2?

A: We are moving forward with the county's allocation of ARPA funds and had two big wins for District 2. First, we allocated \$5 million towards funding the construction of a much needed medical clinic in West Augustine. This is a historically impoverished area and this need has existed for some time. The medical clinic will be in partnership with Flagler Health+ and the Y.

Secondly, we allocated \$7 million towards bringing the southwest campus of First Coast Technical College (FCTC), a vocational school, to Hastings. We are early in the process, but the hope is to renovate and restore the historic Hastings High School for this purpose rather than build new. I think it's important to preserve this history if possible.

Q: Can you give an update on the budget process [as of interview date of May 16] and what you hope to glean as a new commissioner?

A: The St. Johns County Fiscal Year 2023 Administrator's Budget Workshop will be held May 23 – 25. I expect to have an intensive learning curve and I'm excited to soak it all in. Of particular interest to me is the growth we're experiencing in our county — and how do we keep up with it? Especially in the area of public safety to include our first responders. They need all of the resources to do their job effectively and they need to be compen-

sated fairly. Public safety also includes our roadways and infrastructure.

For instance, consider the stretch of County Road 210 between Cimarrone and Greenbriar. It seems there is an accident there every day and I think it's one of the most dangerous roadways in the county. I'm working hard to get it fixed. The bid to widen it just came in higher and taking longer to complete than we had originally planned, but I'm working with staff to see if we can expedite it in any way.

Q: As a county commissioner, what would you say are your three budget priorities?

A: I think we've already talked about two of them that concern public safety: first responders and infrastructure. I would next include parks and recreation. Our kids don't have enough field space. We need to add more park space.

Q: Do you have anything else to share with District 2?

A: With the warmer weather of summer upon us, many residents will be out enjoying our beautiful beaches and waterways. I'd like to encourage parents to be very careful with their children in these settings, as we know that our emergency calls spike during the summer months.

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

A: Readers can email me at bcc2sarnold@sjcfl.us or call me at (904) 325-4182.

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2022 ELECTIONS

2022 ELECTION DATES

- Primary Election
August 23, 2022
- General Election
November 8, 2022

REGISTER TO VOTE

You can register to vote, update your voter information, or request a new voter card at www.registertovoteflorida.gov

NEW PRECINCTS AND POLLING LOCATIONS

Due to the 2020 census and the redistricting process, voting districts, precinct lines, and some election day polling places have changed.

VOTER INFORMATION CARDS

New voter information cards are being mailed to all registered voters in St. Johns County. Watch for yours in early June!

For voter registration and election information, call 904.823.2238 or visit www.votesjc.gov



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

Q: Can you give an update on the budget process [as of interview date of May 13]?

A: The St. Johns County Fiscal Year 2023 Administrator's Budget Workshop will be held May 23 – 25. This is the first step for us to see the proposed budget for next year as we will hear in detail from every county department head what their needs are and why. This is not the last opportunity for public comment; there will be opportunities for discussion at the Board of County Commissioners meetings in July and August. This is a multi-month process. I think especially with the proposed one penny sales tax on the November ballot, this is a good way for everyone to see the condition of the county budget. The information will also be available online at www.sjcfcl.us.

Q: As a county commissioner, what are your budget priorities?

A: My budget priorities really haven't changed. I would say we need money for roads, we need money for ballparks, especially in the Northwest, and we have many drainage needs to address.

Q: Do you have any new information regarding the widening of a portion of County Road 210?

A: We have just received the bid back to widen that portion of County Road 210 between Cimarrone and Greenbriar Road from two lanes to four. The price went up from \$24 million to \$30 million for this project. Fortunately we have the money to handle this increase and residents should start seeing work start in the next several months. The county's public works director

has told the commissioners that the work would be finished in under 700 days.

I think we can expect to see more cost increases with the current economy. The Florida Department of Transportation just tripled its construction estimate for building roads in Florida.

Q: What can you tell us about workforce housing in the county?

A: When I was sworn in, affordable housing was a problem, but now it's a full-blown crisis. St. Johns County just landed on a list as the 11th least affordable place to live in the country, and that was based on the median home price in 2020 of \$392,000. Now that median home price is \$550,000. Our teachers, sheriff's deputies and firefighters can't afford to live here. But we had some good news recently. Our partners at Ability Housing have been fighting for state funding and they were finally awarded it. Part of getting this workforce housing designation is the requirement to build close to where most people utilizing it will work, so as of now all of these developments are near downtown St. Augustine. Our Board of County Commissioners has approved every workforce housing project brought before us, but we need more. This will certainly help.

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

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



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

Q: Do you have an update on the re-bid for K – 8 School NN [as of interview date of May 16]?

A: We hope to put the bid out by the end of May. We are still hoping to be able to bid two schools and possibly three at the same time. Staff is still working with the finance department on details. By extending the construction timeline, adding additional schools, and picking things in advance like colors so that the contractor will be able to place pre-orders, we hope to have a more successful and affordable bid.

Q: What is the latest on the construction of Beachside High School?

A: Beachside is coming along. I am assured every time I ask that the school will be ready for teaching and learning when school starts in August, but that some ancillary structures, such as maybe the gym or the auditorium, might not be quite open. At this time, parent and student groups are forming in anticipation of the school's opening. It's becoming "their" school. Athletic Director Jen Harman is busy setting up summer athletic practices.

Q: It's nearly the end of the school year. What is the school district busy doing?

A: While our students and teachers are busy with celebrations and award ceremonies on their campuses, we are busy at the district level working towards next year. Associate Superintendent for Human Resources Cathy Hutchins has challenged all principals to be 95 percent completed with hiring for 2022 – 2023 and most principals have said they will meet the challenge.

The district also just approved the contract with teachers and staff for

this school year (yes, 2021 – 22). Every three years, of which this was one, we look at the full book of rules and both sides can bring any number of changes, so that's why this was so time intensive. We regret the delay, but I'm happy to report we came to an agreement and all retroactively earned money back to last July will be distributed to teachers and staff as soon as possible. With this ratified contract, all of our teachers are at the \$47,500 minimum required by the state. We want to continue to retain our experienced teachers, so our hope is next year to be able to add more increases to their salaries, if the legislature will allow. Our goal now is to start negotiations ASAP for next year. There likely will not be as many issues to negotiate since we had such comprehensive negotiations this year. And the legislature was generous to us this past year, so we will have money to work with. One new thing is a provision in one of the new bills to increase the starting salary for support (hourly) staff to \$15 per hour.

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

A: By June 1, all of our seniors will have graduated. We wish the Class of 2022 much success as they go on to college, career, or military service.

Finally, if you have not registered your children for next school year (or if you have a new neighbor!) please do so immediately. Visit www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/student/enrollment/ or visit the student's assigned school website.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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



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

Q. Last month we covered your Property Fraud Alert program — how are the signups going? How big of a problem is property fraud in Florida?

A. We doubled the number of subscribers over the last few weeks, so we are getting the word out, thank you! Property fraud is when someone illegally uses your property for financial gain — for instance, someone recording a fraudulent deed, mortgage or lien against your property in the Official Records of the St. Johns County Clerk's Office. Two real-life examples have made news recently in Florida — a South Florida woman sold properties she didn't own in an elaborate scheme that defrauded 45 people across six counties, including Flagler, and an Oviedo man nearly lost his property to an identity thief who used a fraudulent deed to take possession of it. In the second case, it was the county comptroller's office that alerted him to the recording activity.

Our free property fraud alert service provides an early warning system for subscribers to take prompt action if they are notified of recording activity in their name. If you know you didn't record it and recognize it as fraudulent, you know to immediately contact law enforcement.

Our service is free, it's safe, and it's easy to sign up at <https://apps.stjohnsclerk.com/Landmark/FraudAlert>.

Q. You recently announced that St. Johns County received recognition for transparency and financial reporting for 29 consecutive years. Why is this a big deal for St. Johns County?

A. The Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting is the gold standard for reporting, transparency and disclosure about the county's finances. To produce the required information






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with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

Q: Can you give an update on this year's activities for National Police Week, observed May 11 – 17?

A: This has been a big week and my wife and I just returned from Washington, DC, where we joined others to memorialize our warriors across the nation who died in the line of duty. The highlight event is the engraving of the names of those officers we have lost this year on the walls of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial on the National Mall.

This year, the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, which sponsors the events, identified COVID deaths as in the line of duty deaths, since we police officers continued to protect and serve throughout the pandemic.

Q: Were there any local law enforcement officers who had their name added to the wall this year?

A: Yes, this year we lost Deputy Jody Hull, Jr., who was a Youth Resource Deputy at St. Augustine High School, to COVID and his name was added to the wall in Washington DC. This was my first in the line of duty death as sheriff or as police chief and it was very humbling. Many families have been affected, including not only the Hull family, but also the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office family and the St. Augustine High School family as well as the community at large. The outpouring of love and support from the community upon his death was overwhelming.

Since it was founded in 1821, the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office has had 10 in the line of duty deputy deaths and one canine.

Q: How many names were added to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial this year?

A: This year, 619 names were added, of which 472 died in 2021 and 319 of those were COVID-related. (Remainder were deaths added prior to this year.) Typically, the average of names added annually is between 100 and 150.

Q&A with Brandon Patty cont. from pg. 6

for the auditor's review is a whole-of-government effort by county government and the five constitutional officers each year. The audit process is not easy or quick — it's kicked off in the first quarter of each fiscal year and requires a heavy lift from all agencies and entities. Nonetheless, the process and resulting report is critical to maintaining the public's trust in our stewardship of their tax dollars.

Q. It's been said that the Clerk and Comptroller's office performs more than a thousand functions and services. How can people learn more about what a clerk and comptroller does?

A. We are soon launching an informational newsletter so residents can learn more about their Clerk and Comptroller's office and the

Q: What type of support is available to families left behind by these law enforcement officers?

A: One non-profit called C.O.P.S. (Concerns of Police Survivors) really steps up and helps families when they lose a loved one in the line of duty. C.O.P.S. programs for survivors include the National Police Survivors' Conference held each May during National Police Week, scholarships, peer-support at the national, state, and local levels, the "C.O.P.S. Kids" Summer Camp, special retreats for spouses, parents, siblings, adult children, extended family, and co-workers, trial and parole support, and other assistance programs.

Q: What is done locally to recognize officers who die in the line of duty?

A: Every year, the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office holds our own memorial service to recognize any officer, regardless of agency, killed in the line of duty within St. Johns County. We have a memorial wall outside our office on Lewis Speedway.

Additionally, I am establishing a "Gold Star Family" status, borrowing from the military's idea. We will include even families of deputies who died from health issues or by suicide and don't qualify at the national level in addition to those who died in the line of duty. I think it's important to maintain community with all these families and they will be honorary lifetime members of the SJSO family and invited to attend all of our events, like swearing-ins or picnics.

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

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

services we offer. Our goal is to be transparent, offer opportunities to access records and information, provide services to St. Johns County residents, and to make sure that we are meeting your needs. Sign up for our first newsletter at communications@stjohnsclerk.com. We do want to emphasize that if you receive the newsletter and aren't interested, know there is an easy opt-out. You can also email us and let us know what Clerk and Comptroller topics would be helpful to you, your family or your business.

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

A: A lot of questions can be answered by visiting our website, www.stjohnsclerk.com. People can also call our main office at (904) 819-3600.

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Guest Column

Legislative wrap-up: Some lesser known but important bills passed

By Rep. Cyndi Stevenson

This session we passed a large amount of public policy bills. Of the thousands of bills that were filed by legislators, just 285 bills passed the House and Senate and have been sent to the governor. Some of them were doomed from the start because the member that filed it failed to get a companion bill filed in the Senate or the House. House mem-

bers are generally able to file six policy bills each year. There is no limit to the number of bills that can be filed in the Senate. Of the 285 bills we passed, many have already been considered and signed into law. Some are still subject to approval or veto by Gov. Ron DeSantis.

There were a cluster of bills passed again this year that were shaped by our experience with COVID. This includes

adding Pharmacy Technicians to the medical professionals who can administer vaccines in Florida, a bill extending Covid 19 liability protection to health care providers, giving flexibility to nursing homes on ways to meet daily direct care needs of patients, expanding authority for telehealth services while balancing patient safety and the No Patient Left Alone Act that ensures visitation rights for patients facing critical situations.

In Pre-K – 12 education, we had record per student funding that enables more money to sustain past teacher pay and additional funding to increase them. For St. Johns County, we were awarded \$9.7 million to assist the district with the high rate of growth. We also replaced the outdated statewide end of year Florida Standard Assessment (FSA) with performance monitoring to support the unique needs and goals of students and gives teachers and parents timely feedback throughout the year. Beginning with ninth graders in the 2023 – 24 school year, students will be required to earn a half credit in personal financial literacy.

We passed a law raising fines for public adjusters who fail to comply with investigations to prevent insurance fraud and added requirements that insurance companies report fraudulent acts to the state for investigation and prosecution.

We passed a consumer protection bill that ensures that service contracts with an automatic renewal provision can be canceled in the same manner that they were entered.

To curtail those pesky vehicle warranty calls, they are now required to state their name, license number and telephone number if they call you.

We updated Florida law to keep up with rapid development of new technologies including “deepfakes,” which are realistic images or videos that are created using artificial intelligence that can depict a real person saying something that they did not say or engaging in behaviors they did not engage in, blurring the lines between reality and fiction.

We passed legislation that offers qualifying juveniles a second chance — while protecting the public. This is a one time chance by authorizing an expungement of their qualifying arrest records after completing a diversion program.

From May 28 to June 10, there will be a disaster preparedness sales tax holiday on certain items including coolers, radios, batteries and flashlights, generators priced at \$1,000 or less, pet supplies, carbon monoxide and smoke detectors and fire extinguishers.

Florida has term limits for governor, state representatives, state senators, the lieutenant governor, and Florida cabinet members. This year the state added 12 year term limits for school board members.

This is by no means a comprehensive list of all the bills passed, but merely some of the highlights of some of the lesser-known bills.

I have a legislative newsletter that I use to help keep people up to date. When we get our final budget approved, I will send a newsletter with both summary and detailed information that may be of interest to you, along with reminders of upcoming tax holidays and items of interest. Contact my office at (904) 823-2300 if you'd like to get on the mailing list.



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St. Johns County students chosen for tech camp

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

A total of 23 eighth graders from St. Johns County middle schools will attend the American Association of University Women's (AAUW) Florida Tech Trek camp for girls, which will be held June 19 – 24. The 2022 Tech Trek Camp will be a virtual camp held via Zoom.

AAUW St. Augustine branch STEM Director Maureen Ballard and her committee interviewed 42 girls who were nominated by their math and science teachers from 11 schools before making the recommendations to the camp. The cost per girl to attend the week-long virtual camp is approximately \$750; however, those chosen by the AAUW are only responsible for a \$50 registration fee. Corporate sponsors, AAUW

branches and individuals provide financial support.

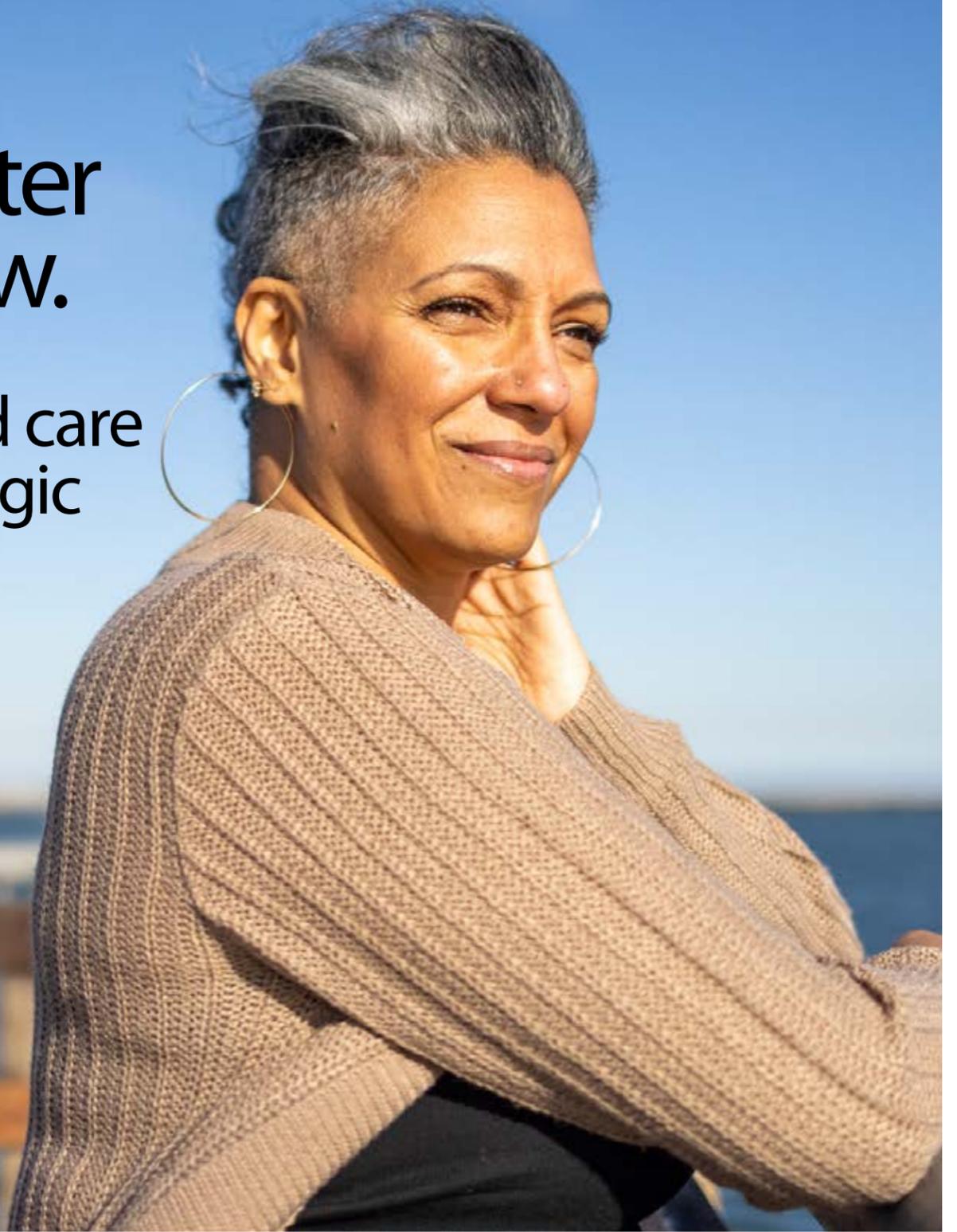
Campers will have a choice of core classes in Engineering/Architecture, Neuroscience, Computer Science, Robotics and Marine Biology. They will participate in a variety of workshops and field trips, share video projects with other campers, and interact with professional women in STEM fields.

This one-week summer camp is backed by AAUW's research and is designed to make STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, math) exciting and accessible to girls in middle school — the age when girls' participation in these fields statistically drops.

Visit staugustine-fl.aauw.net for information about AAUW St. Augustine or visit techtrek-fl.aauw.net for information about AAUW Florida Tech Trek.

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Briefs

Summer reading volunteer opportunities available

RSVP of St. Johns County is looking for community members to assist once a week in the summer reading or algebra programs in the St. Johns County School District. Hours are flexible. If you are traveling this summer, you can help out while you are in town.

Orientation for volunteers will be Thursday, June 16 from 1 p.m. – 3 p.m. at the Fullerwood Auditorium, 10 Hildreth Drive in St. Augustine.

“There are students who can greatly benefit from the help of those willing to give just a small amount of their time,” said Cheryl Freeman, RSVP director. “Assistance from community volunteers can make all the difference in helping these students succeed.”

To make a training reservation or for more information, contact RSVP at (904) 547-3952 or Cheryl.Freeman@stjohns.k12.fl.us.

Elder abuse: It's more than scams

June 15 is National World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. Elder abuse affects one in 10 adults over the age of 60, yet only one in 24 cases are reported to authorities. It's estimated that up to five million older Americans are abused every year totaling a loss of at least \$36.6 billion.

ElderSource and six other Florida Area Agencies on Aging are presenting “Elder Abuse: It's More Than Scams,” a free virtual workshop on Wednesday, June 15, from 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. The free workshop features several experts providing informa-

tion and tips on how to report elder abuse, how to protect yourself against cyber-crimes and how to uncover the unsuspecting traps of financial scammers.

The purpose of this workshop is to provide older adults with the information they need to make informed decisions to protect themselves and others against elder abuse. While this silent problem can often rob older adults of their dignity and independence, this workshop will help empower them instead.

The workshop is presented in collaboration with Senior Connection Center, Area Agency on Aging for Southwest Florida, Area Agency on Aging Palm Beach/Treasure Coast Inc., Advantage Aging Solutions, Area Agency on Aging of Broward County Inc., and Area Agency of Pasco-Pinellas Inc.

Visit <https://bit.ly/3rFNSaY> to sign up for the workshop.

2022 Point in Time Count shows decrease in county homelessness

Each year a survey is conducted to gauge the amount of homeless individuals within St. Johns County. The Point in Time (PIT) Count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night. The PIT Count is traditionally held in January, but due to challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, this year it was held on February 28.

The St. Johns County Continuum of Care, led by Flagler Health+, conducts the PIT Count as a requirement of the

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for those who seek federal funds. The goal is to have an accurate depiction of all those who are utilizing temporary housing including emergency shelters and transitional, plus persons who are living in places not meant for human habitation including cars, parks, and other similar locations.

This year's PIT Count was a community effort with volunteer staff from Care Connect+ (a program of Flagler Health+), Alpha-Omega Miracle Home, Department of Health & Human Services, Veterans Administration, St. Francis House, Wildflower Clinic, and the SOS Street Outreach Services team. The teams started at 7 a.m. and canvassed all of St. Johns County with a focus on areas identified by street outreach teams where they commonly interact with people experiencing homelessness. Surveys were conducted interview-style on tablets.

The PIT Count results showed that on Feb. 28 there were 349 individuals experiencing homelessness in St. Johns County. Of those, 242 were experiencing unsheltered homelessness and 107 were residing in shelter. This total was a decrease of 17 percent from the 419 individuals who were experiencing homelessness on the day of the 2021 count. Overall the number of homeless decreased year-over-year, but there was a 16 percent increase in the number of those who were chronically homeless.

While the PIT represents a one-day snapshot, the St. Johns County Continuum of Care works year round in an effort to prevent and end homelessness, bringing together resources and partnerships to make homelessness rare, brief and one time.

In 2021, there were 6,682 people who were served by all programs within the Care Connect+ Information Network, a decrease of 20 percent from 2020. Of those, 27 percent of adults reported that they were literally homeless at the time of requesting assistance.

Additionally, it should be noted that homeless school children are counted by the St. Johns County School District using a different homeless definition under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. To date, in 2022, the St. Johns County School District has identified 780 Homeless Children and Youth in our schools. This total changes daily as new students are identified and is an on-going count until the end of the school year.

St. Johns County urges beachgoers to take precautions to protect sea turtle nests

Sea turtle nesting season is officially underway in St. Johns County through Oct. 31. Residents, visitors, and businesses are asked to help protect natural sea turtle habitats by observing all nesting season laws and regulations.

Vehicular beach traffic is only allowed from 8 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. All beachfront properties must reduce their impact by eliminating interior and exterior lights that may disrupt nesting sea turtles. Volleyball court lights at St. Johns County Ocean Pier Park will turn on at sunset and turn off at 9 p.m. during sea turtle nesting season.

Beachgoers can also have a positive impact on nesting sea turtles by taking the

following precautions:

- Refrain from using fireworks and open fires.
- Remove ruts and sandcastles.
- Flashlights are strongly discouraged as they can harm sea turtles.
- Avoid entering dunes and conservation zones (15 feet seaward of the dune line).
- Refrain from releasing balloons or sky lanterns, as they can fall into the ocean and harm marine life.
- Never approach sea turtles emerging from or returning to the sea. Nesting sea turtles are vulnerable, timid, and can be easily frightened.
- Leave only your footprints at the beach.

Never push an injured animal back into the ocean. If an injured, sick, or deceased sea turtle is located, call the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office non-emergency dispatch line at (904) 824-8304. For more information, call St. Johns County Habitat Conservation and Beach Management at (904) 209-3740 or visit www.sjcff.us/hcp.

St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections launches new website in preparation for 2022 Election Season

The St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections has launched a new website with a focus on transparency, streamlined navigation, and efficient service delivery. Located at www.votesjc.gov, the new site is designed to assist residents, voters, candidates, and elected officials in quickly accessing relevant and timely information regarding a variety of election-related topics.

Key data-driven navigation streams are outlined to provide the essential informational points those visiting the website have historically accessed. Primary drop down links, including Elections, Voters, Voter Education, Current Elected Officials, and Candidates, were designed to provide convenient access to frequently searched information and documents within just a few clicks.

“Free, fair, and open elections are the cornerstone of our democracy, and as a public servant I am dedicated to transparency,” said Vicky Oakes, St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections. “Our new website is informative, easy to navigate, and will ensure voters and those running for office have convenient access to the information they need to participate in the democratic process.”

The Supervisor of Elections began the redesign process in January with an understanding that the core audiences of residents and voters continue to rely more and more on convenient electronic and digital information channels. The four-month design process involved an internal design team and input from communication and web design professionals as well as St. Johns County residents and voters. The new website is one part of the Supervisor of Elections' evolving communication program that also includes a new newsletter, new social media platforms, and additional community outreach.

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ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Smart moves to manage an inheritance

By Chris Thompson, CFP®, CRPC®

Losing a loved one can be a painful experience. Even when expected, the finality of death can be difficult to comprehend. It's no wonder that people who are grieving often feel overwhelmed and unable to process information with the same mental clarity that they have under more normal circumstances.

Adding financial decisions into the mix can further complicate matters. For many people, even the welcome news that they are the beneficiaries of a loved one's estate can bring waves of sadness and uncertainty. If you are set to receive money or other assets from a loved one who has passed away, you may benefit from the counsel of a financial advisor, estate attorney and tax expert who can help you determine the best course of action to wisely manage the gift you've been given. Here are some factors you might want to consider with their help:

First, consider the form of inheritance you received:

- **Cash:** If the assets you inherited are

in the form of cash, there tend to be few complications. There is no federal tax on inherited amounts, though a handful of states do apply an inheritance tax.

- **A life insurance settlement:** If the deceased named you as a beneficiary of a life insurance policy, the payment you received is generally not subject to tax. You also may have the option to have the benefit paid out to you over a number of years rather than in one lump sum.

- **A retirement plan:** If you inherited an IRA or an individual's workplace retirement plan, you will have 10 years to withdraw all of the money (this time limit does not apply to spouses or minor children). Failure to do so can result in a significant penalty. Taxes are due on distributions from traditional IRAs or workplace plans.

- **Appreciated stock or other assets:** If you inherited assets such as stock or real estate, the cost basis for the asset is stepped-up to the value at the time of the grantor's passing. That can

result in a major tax savings when you sell the asset.

Particularly if you're in a state of heightened emotion, don't feel rushed into making decisions about what to do with the money. Slow down, seek advice and consider your options within the context of your overall financial situation and goals for the future.

If you were in a comfortable financial position before you received the inheritance, perhaps you'd like to spend some of the money on a family trip or to purchase a major item in memory of your loved one. On the other hand, if you want to put part or all of the money toward funding your major financial goals, there are myriad ways to do so and honor the legacy of your loved one in the process. Perhaps you want to set up a 529 plan to help pay for your children's college education in memory of the deceased. Alternatively, the money may be useful in making a down payment on a home or a cash infusion into your diversified portfolio that you'll one day lean on in retirement.

It's not uncommon to experience some challenges or complications if an inheritance has arrived or is coming your way. This is all the more reason to consider consulting with a financial advisor, estate and tax professional to make sure you understand what you've received and how to best put it to work. They can bring a sense of clarity and calm that you may be in need of as you grieve the loss of your loved one.

Chris Thompson, CFP®, CRPC® is an Associate Manager and Financial Advisor with Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC. in Jacksonville. He specializes in fee-based financial planning and asset management strategies and has been in practice for 29 years. To contact him, visit www.ameripriseadvisors.com/chris.thompson or email chris.thompson@ampf.com.

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Julington Creek Golf Club closed for summer renovation

By Ward Clayton
mail@floridanewslines.com

Julington Creek Golf Club, the centerpiece of the Julington Creek Plantation community since the late 1980s, has closed for the summer to renovate the course and is scheduled to reopen in the fall.

Ownership group Brown Golf Management made the announcement internally in December 2021 and posted the news on the www.julingtoncreekgc.com website in early May. The course was scheduled to partially close on Monday, May 16 with work to begin on the front nine first and the back nine still available for play for approximately another week. By the end of May, the entire course and practice facility were scheduled to close with a reopening tentatively scheduled for October 1. The course is not operated by Julington Creek Plantation.

“We foresee a golf course that is more player and maintenance friendly and lives up to the standards that the neighborhood expects,” Brown Golf Regional General Manager Sarah Minnis said on May 6. “This was a few years in the making and was necessary work for this course.”

Minnis and Brown Golf CEO John Brown made the website announcement of the work, which they estimated would cost more than \$1 million considering the renovation and course closure loss of revenue. The renovation is scheduled to be carried out by Westscapes Golf Construction of St. Petersburg, Fla., and includes irrigation work, redoing the greens, bunkers and tees, enhancement of the driving range with a new teeing area and enlarged putting green and tree and sod work around the course, which hasn't been renovated since the course opened in 1987. James Puckett, the Julington Creek golf course superintendent, has been involved with Westscapes during renovations at other courses and Westscapes was chosen from among seven renovation company candidates, according to Minnis.

Minor irrigation work began in January, most of the fairway bunkers on the course were eliminated over the next three months and 1,200 tons of sand

were loaded into the parking lot in April to prepare for the course work to begin. The greens are scheduled to be renovated by demoing and coring out the putting surfaces and using TiffEagle bermudagrass as the new surface.

As a result of the pending work, 2022 memberships were suspended, and it is not clear if membership opportunities will return. Greens fees this spring were a high of \$42 for weekday play and \$55 on weekends. In comparison, golf courses nearby in the County Road 210 area this spring ranged from \$49 – \$86 on weekdays and \$61 – \$99 on weekends.

“We believe we will be able to relaunch a brand-new asset that delivers an upgraded experience,” Brown and Minnis said in the website memo, dated Dec. 17, 2021. “We appreciate the opportunity to evaluate our market position and pricing as we get ready to reopen this fall.”

According to Brown Golf, capital projects post-2022 will include repaved cart paths, bridge updates and repair, full irrigation replacement, clubhouse building updates and parking lot updates. Sister course Windsor Parke Golf Club in Jacksonville will also undergo a renovation after 2022. Brown Golf operates 27 courses in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Minnesota, Missouri, Vermont and Pennsylvania.

Originally named The Champions Club at Julington Creek, the course debuted its front nine in 1987, designed by golf course architect Robert Walker of Atlantic Beach and managed by Riverside Golf Group. Jacksonville's Steve Melnyk, a former U.S. Amateur and British Amateur champion and ABC golf broadcaster, designed the back nine a couple years later as his company, Riverside Golf Group, managed the facility. Pacific Life Insurance Company bought the course and Windsor Parke from Riverside in 1999 for \$13 million. Current owner Brown Golf, based in Camp Hill, Pa., purchased Julington Creek and sister course Windsor Parke, located off J. Turner Butler Boulevard in Duval County, in May 2015 for \$2.7 million (\$1.2 million for Julington Creek).

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Photos courtesy Julington Creek Golf Club
Hole 8 green of the Julington Creek Golf Club.

New Memorial Garden honors victims and survivors of violence

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

Members of the community joined local elected officials, judges and law enforcement in a ribbon-cutting ceremony in late April for the new St. Johns County Memorial Garden, a tranquil courtyard garden at the St. Johns County Judicial Center dedicated to victims and survivors of violence.

“The new St. Johns County Memorial Garden is the centerpiece of the judicial complex courtyard and a place for courthouse visitors and staff to pause and reflect,” St. Johns County Clerk of Court and Comptroller Brandon J. Patty said. “With this garden, we remember those in our community who have suffered at the hands of others and offer families and friends a safe, serene place to find comfort and healing.”

The memorial garden project has been a year-long collaborative initiative between the St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller, the Seventh Judicial Circuit, St. Johns County and the Sheriff’s Office, State Attorney’s Of-

fice, St. Augustine and St. Augustine Beach police departments and the Betty Griffin Center.

For a decade, a small garden and monument dedicated to the memory of two members of the St. Johns County community, Stephanie “Theresa” Singleton-Gilliam and Laura Messina, was located outside the courthouse’s south entrance. Over the years, the garden had begun to deteriorate, and its location made maintenance difficult, Clerk Patty said.

In addition to moving the garden inside the courthouse walls, the project added a memorial plaque, benches and new landscaping to the courtyard.

Every year, about 10 million people become victims of domestic violence, which equates to around 20 people every minute. Last year, 279 domestic violence injunctions were filed in St. Johns County, and nearly 72,000 were processed statewide. Many of these resulted in temporary and permanent injunctions.



Photo courtesy St. Johns County Clerk of Court
Local dignitaries participated in a ribbon-cutting ceremony in late April for the new St. Johns County Memorial Garden.

Trout Creek Seniors celebrate Dr. Seuss



Photos courtesy Anne Marie Forsythe
Seniors enjoyed a storyteller and Dr. Seuss themed activities in April. The Trout Creek Senior Center offers activities for seniors on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings at 6795 Collier Road in Orangedale. Contact Program Coordinator Anne Marie Forsythe at (904) 552-1611 for more information.



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

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

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|--|--|---|

Nease summer camps announced

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

The sweet days of summer are approaching; do you have a plan in mind for how to fill the time? Nease High School has the answer — summer camps. Here's a look at what's happening in June and July:

Basketball boys and girls camp: June 6 – June 10; June 13 – June 17; June 20 – June 24; July 11 – July 15; July 25 – July 29.

Green and Gold Youth Camp: June 21, 22, 23 and July 12, 13, 14, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Football Camp: June 13 – June 29; July 12, 13, 14, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. for ninth – 12th graders,

Dance Camp: June 27 – 29 for kindergartners – fifth graders

Soccer girls camp: June 20 – 23, 8:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. for kindergartners – eighth graders

CyberCamp: July 11 – July 15, 9 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. for ninth – 12th graders

Lacrosse Camp: July 11 – July 14, 9 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Cheer Cub Camp: July 20 – July 22, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. for kindergartners – fifth graders

These camps are used as fundraisers for their prospective sport. Visit www-nhs.stjohns.k12.fl.us/panther-press for more information.

Creekside's High School High Tech places second in state competition

By Meliza Turlington
mail@floridanewslines.com

Creekside High School's High School High Tech (HSHT) aims to prepare students for the future by developing their skills through leadership, team building, and career readiness training. This program has various opportunities to gain a wide variety of skill-building experiences through activities that involve interactions with others, including on-site events with the Jacksonville Zoo and the Jacksonville Jaguars.

Towards the end of the school year, High School High Tech participated in one more event — a competition called Project Venture, whose focus was to create a business plan, including planning product commercials. The Creekside group met every Friday for six months to work on this project.

High School High Tech spent most meetings developing its product — an app and website called Guide Right, which helps visually impaired individuals access transportation or other needs, such as shopping or travel. In the last two months, they focused on develop-

ing their presenting skills.

Ten schools, all in different counties, entered the program with their product, and only three teams qualified to compete in the finals in Orlando. Once the Creekside team was notified in March that they were one of these three teams, they spent time focusing on the details to perfect their presentation, while continuing to work on the app.

On April 29, HSHT presented its project to the judges — four judges in the first round and six judges in the next round. All the judges are highly respected participants in their company. Students of Creekside, Sarah Hutchinson, Jonathan Rodriguez, Connor Muniz, and River Turlington spoke to all the judges about their app and website. By the afternoon, the team learned they had won second place and went to meet up with the judges again, along with their program leader, Jessica Tucker. Their second place prize was \$750 to be used to improve their club for upcoming years.



Photo courtesy Meliza Turlington
Creekside High School's High School High Tech team won second place at the Project Venture state finals.

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Local teacher selected as Exemplary School Champion

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Kevin Davenport, a teacher at Creekside High School has been selected as one of six National 2022 ACE Exemplary School Champions. Other winners of the award come from Seattle, New Jersey, Los Angeles, Dallas-Fort Worth, and Cleveland.

Since beginning the ACE Mentor Program at Creekside High School during the 2015 – 16 school year, Davenport has been a tireless advocate and promoter. He understands the impact the program has on his students and has been responsible for its growth within the St. Johns County School District.

Following a successful career in civil engineering, Davenport began his second career as an educator in 2010. In addition to his civil engineering degree, he also holds a master's degree in construction management. This experience has equipped him with extensive engineering and business insight that he passes along to his students. He currently teaches applied engineering to 10th – 12th grade students and leads the county in the number of students receiving industry certifications in programs such as AutoCAD, Revit and Inventor.

In 2014, Davenport was introduced to the ACE Mentor Program. This current school year, the program expanded to two classrooms, growing participation from 30 to 42 students, which makes

Creekside High School the largest program within the Northeast Florida affiliate. Since the program began, more than 100 students have moved forward to pursue a career within the AEC industry.

“I owe my success both financially and academically to Kevin Davenport,” said Daniel Paul, graduate of Creekside High School’s class of 2018. “As a student at Creekside, he went out of his way to consistently improve my capabilities, and even adapted the full curriculum to include more of what I had a passion for (that being architecture). He not only teaches his students, but learns from them as well, something all excellent leaders need to be capable of.”

Visit www.acementor.org/northeast-fl to learn more about the ACE Mentoring Program of Northeast Florida.



Photo courtesy ACE Mentoring Program of Northeast Florida
Creekside High School teacher Kevin Davenport.

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Hear her voice: Finding hope for military women

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

When Lynn Geiser left the military in 2004, she found herself homeless, unemployed, and lacking in resources. She fought for years to get healthy and finally reclaim her life.

“I lost my voice, my integrity, but I did not lose my dignity,” said Geiser, who served in the U.S. Army from 1993 – 2004.

She discovered a new purpose — helping other military women find help and, most importantly, hope.

Geiser started the St. Augustine-based not-for-profit organization called Hope 4 Veterans three years ago. The organization assists military women in seven Northeast Florida counties, helping both active and inactive military women, with 250 women served in the last two years.

“We want to give hope to our military women,” said Geiser, Hope 4 Veterans CEO. “We are not a mental health provider. Our goal is to bring women out of isolation, prevent suicide and preserve honor. We connect with our sisters, and then they start to tell us what is really wrong and what they need.”

Hope 4 Veterans serves women through three programs: Peer 2 Peer Sister, Laptop, and Financial Assistance. The Peer 2 Peer Sister Program uses mentors — other military women — to help participants learn about self-care, resources and just being a sister. Refurbished laptops are provided to women veterans in the state of Florida

seeking technology for school or business or if they are just isolated from resources. Financial assistance is offered through grocery gift cards in collaboration with food banks along with gas gift cards and utility assistance.

Geiser said the response she receives from those helped by the assistance is heart-warming and cathartic.

One woman, who wished to remain anonymous, said that Hope 4 Veterans got her family through a very difficult situation.

“The support received not only eased the burden we were facing, but the simple fact of knowing someone was there and happy to help was the greatest gift of all.”

Military veteran Lizajo Montgomery said last November she spent the last of her savings to move herself and her grandchildren to the Jacksonville area. The children had been living with her for about eight months prior to the move. Christmas was nearing, and Montgomery said she needed help with toys and food. She learned about Hope 4 Veterans from her sister, so she reached out.

“I would have never imagined all the wonderful gifts that were given to the children, including clothing, toys, and shoes. These are things that I could not afford with the move,” said Montgomery. “And the awesome thing about them is that they keep on giving. They email, text, and even call to check on the kids; the support has never stopped.”

Hear her voice cont. on pg. 17

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PopHistory

Remembering the SS Gulfamerica

By Scott A. Grant
mail@floridanewsline.com

On April 10, 1942, a US oil tanker, the SS Gulfamerica, was cruising north along the Florida coast on her maiden voyage. She was en route from Port Arthur, Texas to New York City laden with 90,000 barrels of heating oil. She sailed past Jacksonville Beach just before 9:30 p.m. on a Friday night. The beach was lit up like any other Friday night. People were riding the roller coaster, merry go round, and Ferris wheel. Some were dancing on the pier to the music of the Rusty Allen Orchestra.

No doubt, some of the seaman on the merchant ship looked out wistfully to the well-lit beach and imagined they were dancing on the pier or one of the rooftops or just walking down the boardwalk arm-in-arm with a pretty girl. They had no idea they were being hunted. For the past 45 minutes, a German U-Boat, the U-123, had been chasing the ship up the coast. As she drew abreast of the city, the commander of the Nazi submarine, who was already famous in Germany and about to become more so, made a fateful decision. He would launch one of his last torpedoes at a desperate angle in an attempt to bring down the ship in front of the crowded beach.

At the extreme range the torpedo took four minutes to find its target, but when it did it created a huge explosion that rattled windows on shore and could be seen up and down the coast for miles. Everyone ran to the boardwalk to see what had happened. At first, people on shore thought it was an accident of some sort. The idea that a Nazi submarine had come this close to our coast was incomprehensible. Aboard the ship, they knew what had happened and they knew they were

sinking. The Gulfamerica listed hard to starboard and began to go down by the stern. The crew began an orderly effort to abandon ship.

At this point, the commander, Reinhard Hardegen, did something that has created controversy ever since. He took his boat to the landward side of the stricken tanker so that everyone on shore could see the outline of his sub as he shelled the Gulfamerica with his 10.5 cm deck gun a dozen times. Simultaneously, they opened up with their machine gun to take out Gulfamerica's radio antenna so she could not send a distress signal.

What had started as an orderly effort to abandon ship now devolved into utter chaos. Men jumped off the ship into the burning water. Lifeboat No. 2 capsized. Everyone on the ship was in a panic. Many thought the Germans were trying to kill them. On shore, the tourists and locals watched in horror. Rescue efforts would take several hours to make their way out to the sinking ship. Nineteen brave Americans died in the attack.

Eighteen died that night. One survived for more than 30 hours before finally succumbing to his wounds. They say that when they pulled William Glenn Rhodes' burnt and blackened body from the ocean that the skin literally peeled off his arm. Because of wartime security, no one in his family knew he was injured and suffering.

Several years ago, the Daughters of the American Revolution and the City of Jacksonville Beach joined forces to install a memorial honoring those 19 dead American heroes. It is located at Oceanfront Park.

Scott A. Grant is a local historian and author. By day, he is a fiduciary asset manager with Standfast Asset Mgmt. He welcomes your comments at scottg@standfastic.com.

Newcomers group welcomes new members



Photo courtesy Michele Oliver

The Newcomers of North St. Johns County recently hosted a New Member Coffee at Cimarrone Golf Club. The group welcomed 15 new members this quarter with 11 able to attend the reception. To date, there are more than 245 members in Newcomers of North St. Johns County — with growing interest! Pictured are Laura Haller, Esther Snader, Susan Luth, Barbara Graf, Stephanie Stalvey and Donna Weitz, Monica Tindall, Stephanie Bornhorst, Marta Maso, Maria Mroz and Margo Berzito.

Life

travel • pantry raiders • gardening
fishing • entertainment • puzzles

Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewline.com

Capt. David Lifka

David Lifka remembers fishing with his father starting at the young age of four. Of his two brothers and a sister, he said he was the one who enjoyed it the most and so he spent many hours fishing the beach, the Intracoastal Waterway and the Florida Keys from his home in Hollywood, Fla., with his dad. At the age of nine, the family moved to Jacksonville and settled in the Goodby's Creek area — which became Lifka's new fishing ground. His dad also took him out in the St. Johns River as far as Mayport to fish. It's been a lifelong passion and one that he plans to continue, even upon his retirement to the Flagler County area ... just another new place to drop in a line.

Q: What was your career and how were you able to balance fishing with working?

A: I'm now retired from the Florida Air National Guard. I used to work the night shift and so I would get up and fish until 1 p.m., haul the boat out of the water and take it and any fish I caught to work. Then I'd get off at midnight and take the boat and the fish back home — then get up the next day and repeat. After I retired I got my captain's license and worked as a fishing guide for about 15 years. I used to take visiting missionaries from overseas out fishing as a part of a church retreat. One time I had the opportunity to take a missionary from a northern Africa desert country out fishing. He had never seen an ocean, a river, a fish or a crab. He managed to hook a blue crab and reached over and started to just pick it up. We were able to get him to stop before he was pinched!

Q: How did you meet your wife, Sherry?

A: She was introduced to me by my

brother. I was looking for a fisherwoman and when we were dating I took her deep sea fishing in the Keys. She managed to hook herself in the arm somehow — and she was brave enough to let the captain of the vessel pull the hook out. I knew I'd found the right one for me. We've been married for 27 years and have a son and a daughter and two grandsons.

Q: What is your favorite spot to fish?

A: Wherever I can — off a dock, off boats. I've fished the St. Johns River as long as I have lived here and I return to the Keys as often as I can because I love fishing there. I also enjoy surf fishing, maybe even more so now because it's so easy. I can just throw out a line.

Q: What are your favorite fish to catch?

A: I guess it depends on where I am. In the river, I like redfish; in the Keys, I like yellowmouth snapper; and in the surf, I like whiting. I eat all of them. We always have fish in the freezer.

Q: How did you decide to write a fishing column for The CreekLine?

A: In all my years fishing, I've read so many articles. I would read them and wonder how people could come up with



Photo courtesy Sherry Lifka
Capt. David Lifka

so many ways to talk about the same thing over and over. Then I thought, well, I have the knowledge to do that. And I thought it might be a fun thing to do. So, I inquired about the column and the rest is history.

Editor's Note: This issue contains the final fishing report by Capt. David. Read his farewell column on page 20.

Hear her voice cont. from pg. 16

Geiser said Hope 4 Veterans will soon start a therapeutic art program that will be offered every two weeks for three months and cooking classes. This will include a meet and greet, wine tastings and art shows.

Upcoming events include the Women's Veteran Conference on June 4 and a Soldiers Freedom Outdoor event on June 25 for Military Family Day in Melrose from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. This will include outdoor activities such as boating, skiing, swimming, and kayaking plus games for children and breakout sessions for adults. Everything is free except for horseback riding (\$25 per person) and the optional food truck. Hope 4 Veterans will sponsor the food and drinks for this event.

For more information, contact Geiser at lgeiser@hope4veterans.org or call (920) 471-2119.

[Author's note: Geiser said that Hope 4 Veterans is always in need of baby supplies, household goods especially tall dressers, upgradeable laptops and family support/donations at Christmas (sponsor a family). Each year, Hope 4 Veterans puts together a very personalized donation package for each family. Last year, there were five sponsors and 17 families.]

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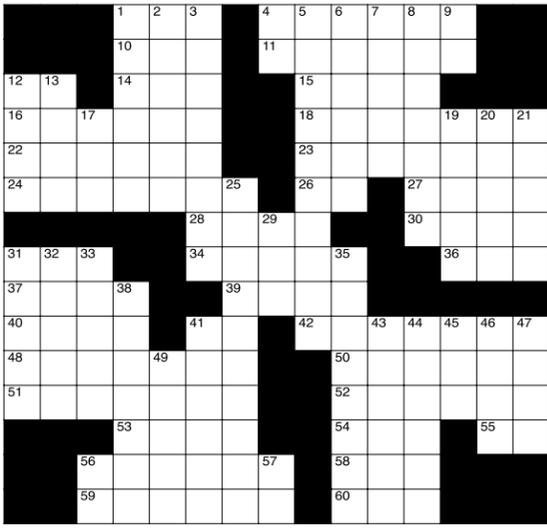
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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

1. Basics
4. In a new way
10. __ Paulo, city
11. Jailhouse
12. Expresses surprise
14. Trigraph
15. A small stream
16. Dissimilar
18. Promote
22. Gives a boost
23. Lawmaker
24. Orthodox Jews
26. Actor Harris
27. Wild cherry
28. Participate in democracy
30. Opposite of begins
31. A Brit's mother
34. Set of moral principles
36. Very fast airplane
37. Czech river
39. Private school in New York
40. Israeli dance
41. Electron volt
42. Adjusting
48. Duct by the bladder
50. Small burger
51. Begin again
52. Unstuck
53. Jai __, sport
54. Get free of
55. For instance
56. Hotel chain
58. A team's best pitcher
59. Extracts from various sources
60. Indefinite period of time

CLUES DOWN

1. St. Francis of __
2. Supported
3. United in working
4. It cools your home
5. Predicting
6. Irritated
7. Popular talk show host
8. Fabric edge
9. A resource for employees
12. Broadway's Jackman
13. Small water buffalo
17. City of Angels: __ Angeles
19. Asteroids
20. Tailless amphibians
21. German expressionist painter
25. What drives you
29. N. Vietnamese ethnic group
31. Gold coin used in British India
32. Have deep affection for
33. Ponds
35. Breaks between words
38. Hairstyle
41. Print errors
43. Family of iron alloys
44. Sidelined in bed
45. Many couples say it
46. Brazilian hoopster
47. Allman Brothers late frontman
49. German city
56. One hundred grams (abbr.)
57. One billionth of a second (abbr)

ROLLER COASTER WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

- ACCELERATION
- AIRTIME
- ASCEND
- BARREL
- BENTS
- BOOMERANG
- BRAKE RUN
- CARS
- CHAIN
- CIRCUIT
- CORKSCREW
- CUTBACK
- ENCLOSED
- ENTHUSIAST
- HEADREST
- INVERSION
- LAPBAR
- LIFT
- LOOP
- PLATFORM
- RESTRAINT
- STEEL
- TRACK
- WOODEN

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Solve the code to discover words related to roller coasters.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 12 = D)

- A. 12 6 1 16
Clue: Fall vertically
- B. 9 16 14 14 12
Clue: Velocity
- C. 17 10 6 25 19 19 9
Clue: Exciting experiences
- D. 6 25 12 14
Clue: Amusement structure

Did you know?

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

If the 1927 song, "I Scream, You Scream, We All Scream for Ice Cream" by Howard Johnson, Billy Moll and Robert A. King is correct, then the world has been a noisy place for quite some time. Though the exact origins of ice cream are unknown, historians agree this popular treat has been around for a very, very long time. The International Dairy Foods Association says the origins of ice cream may reach as far back as the second century B.C. Though he wasn't around back then, the fifth Roman Emperor Nero, who ruled from 54 to 68 A.D., might have been so fond of iced treats that he routinely sent runners into the Apennine Mountains to retrieve snow that he would then flavor with fruits and juices. That tale might be apocryphal, but there's no denying ice treats have been enjoyed for a long time. And based on a 2018 report from Grand View Research, Inc. that projected the global ice cream market would reach roughly \$79 billion by 2025, it's fair to say ice cream will remain popular for a long time to come as well.



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Pantry Raiders

Dad's Day dining he's bound to love

By NewsLine Staff
 mail@floridanewsline.com

Father's Day is an opportunity to shower Dad with extra love and attention. Special outings and heartfelt gifts typically are part of the celebration. Some children may want to go above and beyond by whipping up a meal that Dad is sure to enjoy — particularly a father who spends his fair share of time by the stove or in front of the grill.

Individuals may be quick to think steaks or chicken when considering grilled fare, and these foods certainly can be delicious offerings; however, juicy and flavorful lamb also tastes great when cooked on the grill. This recipe for "Lamb Chop Lollipops with Jalapeño Mustard" from "Jon Bonnell's Texas Favorites" (Gibbs Smith) can be eaten by hand right off the bone when tailgating with Dad or served more traditionally at home with the family.

Lamb Chop Lollipops with Jalapeño Mustard
 Serves 6-8

- 2 frenched* racks of lamb (8 bones each)
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary
- 2 tbsp. Chinese hot mustard
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 ½ tsp. kosher salt
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp. olive oil

Jalapeño Mustard

- 1 sprig fresh rosemary
- 8 tbsp. Dijon mustard
- 1 fresh jalapeño, seeded and diced
- Juice of 1 lemon

* Frenched refers to meat cut away to expose part of the bone.

Rinse the racks of lamb lightly under cold water. Pat dry with paper towels, then cut into individual chops by cutting between the bones. Strip the rosemary leaves from the stem and chop;

discard the stem. Combine the hot mustard with the garlic, salt, pepper, oil, and half of the chopped rosemary. Rub the lamb chops with this mixture and let them marinate in the fridge for 2 hours before grilling. Grill or broil the lamb chops quickly to desired doneness. Serve hot with Jalapeño Mustard as a dipping sauce.

For the Jalapeño Mustard: Strip the rosemary leaves from the stem and chop; discard the stem. Combine the rosemary with the Dijon mustard, jalapeño, and lemon juice.



Photo courtesy MetroCreative
 Lamb Chop Lollipops

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Photos courtesy David Lifka
Abram Carter, grandson.

Fishing

Capt. David's Fishing Report

By Capt. David Lifka
mail@floridanewline.com

So sad to say, but this is my final and farewell article. When I was first given the opportunity to write this monthly article, I was asked to keep it around 400 words. I was thrilled to think that this "bucket list" item had been offered to me, but 400 words seemed like an awful lot and I didn't know if I could do it.

I wanted to share my passion for fishing with others. My hopes were that maybe just a little bit of this passion would be recognized by the readers enough to actually give fishing a try. I wanted families to know that fishing could be a family event.

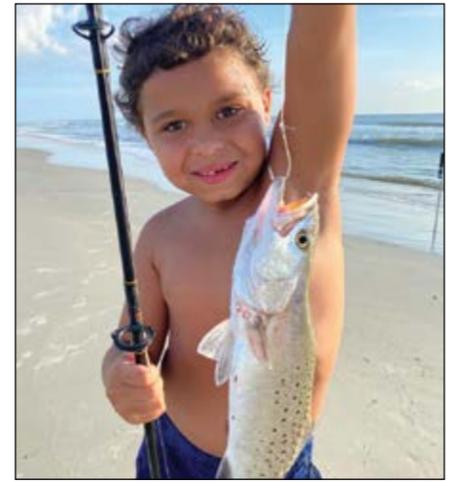
When writing this article, I mostly targeted area fishing to let readers know what was available in our own backyards. That fishing didn't have to be complicated or expensive, and that it was an activity that practically anyone could enjoy.

Often I tried to introduce the basics of catching the many different species of fish in our local waters, hoping by keeping it simple, would encourage them to actually go out and give it a try.

If nothing else, I had hoped to just get people and families outdoors to see and experience how beautiful Florida is, and how they can enjoy Florida's great outdoors with a fishing pole in hand.

In the beginning, 400 words seemed like an awful lot; however, it did not take long for me to learn that four hundred words was not near enough to express what I wanted to pass on to readers. Hopefully the articles were enjoyed, somewhat helpful, and there are a few more folks and families that now enjoy fishing because of them.

My heartfelt thanks to Martie Thompson, editor of The Creekline and Mandarin NewsLine, and all the readers, for allowing me the past decade or more to write this article. Also, thank



Photos courtesy David Lifka
Ezra Carter, grandson.

you to my dad, who 60 plus years ago started taking me fishing with him on weekends. We are now into the fourth generation of fishing families. Here's to wishing everyone tight lines and God's Blessings.

Fishing Report: Fishing should be really heating up in the St. Johns. With a similar weather pattern this year as to last year's spring, fishing got really wild until late June when heavy rains slowed fishing for much of the summer. High salinities had everything biting, including a large number of yellowmouths and even snook at the Buckman. Time to get out and give it a try and hope for a repeat.

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

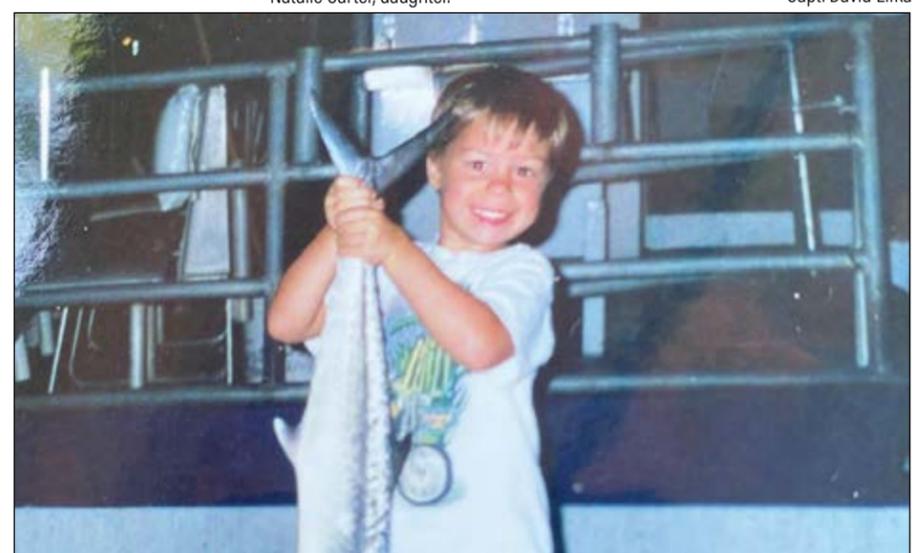
[Editor's Note: It has been our pleasure to feature Capt. David's fishing articles for the past decade. He has provided fishing advice for thousands of readers over the years and hopefully has imparted his love for fishing and the outdoors. We wish Capt. David all the best as he sails on to his next adventure!]



Photos courtesy David Lifka
Natalie Carter, daughter.



Photos courtesy David Lifka
Capt. David Lifka



Photos courtesy David Lifka
Andrew Lifka, son.

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Gardening

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale
mail@floridanewsline.com

It's early May and I've been watching the ground become parched. Our rain gauge measures zero for the past week's total, which is miserable enough, but it has been even longer without rain. I've been hand-watering the Simpson's stoppers (*Myrcianthes fragrans*) and Darrow's blueberries (*Vaccinium darrowii*), which were planted less than a year ago. A length of soaker hose around the Shumard oak (*Quercus shumardii*), which has been in the ground a little longer, will give it a long slow drink when needed. Last year's perennial wildflowers are holding their own with just a little help and I'm delighted to see them growing so well, but plants installed this spring need close attention. It's a trade-off between using potable water in a landscape that I've been hoping will be able to survive drought periods and losing precious plants that would be costly to replace.

Some wildflowers that have volunteered unexpectedly in my garden are the sort that probably get overlooked. They have small flowers and delicate foliage but are pretty nonetheless. Blue toadflax (*Linaria canadensis*, www.flawildflowers.org/flower-friday-linaria-canadensis) first caught my eye about 25 years ago, flowering in the grounds of my daughter's primary school. About a foot tall, it covered the field in a haze of lavender blue. About the same time, I found clasping Venus' looking glass (*Triodanis perfoliata*, www.flawildflowers.org/flower-friday-triodanis-perfoliata) while browsing in a native plant nursery. It wasn't for sale, but growing quite happily in a small display garden; the owner seemed to think I was a bit sad, for finding it so lovely! Oakleaf fleabane (*Erigeron quercifolius*) is a diminutive member of the aster family that I would also like to see in my yard. Its flowers can be white or lavender, with a yellow center, but the lavender is most appealing. These wildflowers are hosts and nectar sources for insects that we barely notice, but which are all part of a balanced ecosystem.

Drought is a potent reminder to add compost and replenish mulch to enhance the ability of soil to hold water.

Consider the soil

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale
mail@floridanewsline.com

Adding organic matter also supports the "SFW," or the soil food web. If you're unfamiliar with the term, it refers to myriad organisms that dwell in healthy soils. This article gives a very clear explanation, and I encourage you to check it out: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/ss664>.

During Earth Month I discovered a movie called "Kiss the Ground," about regenerative farming. It was heartening to see how some farmers have employed techniques, including no-till sowing, to turn their businesses around. Back in the '90s, one farmer in the rural heartland suffered catastrophic crop losses for three or four consecutive years and decided things had to change. Now he runs a profitable mixed farm, takes no government subsidies, and has beautiful fertile living soil which enables him to do so. His land is also home to innumerable birds and other wildlife, as well as native plants. No mean feat. The answer is in the soil.

For the homeowner, composting, mulching, leaving fallen leaves in place and grass cuttings on the lawn go a long way to building up soil. But, as with regenerative farming, an important step is to cut way back on chemical use and avoid physically disturbing the soil unnecessarily. Every assault on the soil, which includes pesticide applications, reduces the numbers and the health of soil-dwelling organisms. Bacteria and fungi, as well as the tiny animals living in soil, together make it healthy and supremely able to support healthy plants. And healthy soils keep carbon in the ground — which is an absolute necessity if we are to rein in rising global temperatures.

Rethinking gardening from the soil up is fundamentally what we all need to do.

As always, timely advice is available in "A New Leaf – Yard and Garden": <https://tinyurl.com/2p899u5c>, and the Master Gardener Volunteer newsletter, "The Neighborhood Gardener": <https://tinyurl.com/2p8bmajf>. And there is also the UF/IFAS gardening calendar, <https://tinyurl.com/3fyzv79w>, to keep us moving along.



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Nutrition Check: Celebrating fruits and vegetables

By Kristen Hicks-Roof PhD, RDN and Caroline Jury BS

Let us celebrate National Fruits and Vegetable month by putting the rainbow on our plates.

Both fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of vitamins and minerals, fiber, and even water. Adding produce will make the plate more colorful, add a

great taste, and provide additional health benefits. The challenge most individuals have these days is to get themselves and their families to eat these nutrient-dense foods. Here are some tips to encourage them:

1. Be a good example. Both adults and children learn more by observing their caregivers/peers; another person is more

likely to eat them if they see you enjoying fruits and vegetables.

2. If you take your child(ren) grocery shopping, let them help you pick one or two vegetables or fruits for the week. This allows them to have shared decision making for meals and snacks that include produce. It may take a bit longer than your usual grocery run, but this will give your child(ren) a new appreciation of these healthy treats.

3. Eating fruits and vegetables for snacks, why not? Some examples include:

1. Celery sticks, carrots, bell peppers, broccoli, cauliflower, squash slices or peas with natural peanut butter, hummus or a salad dressing of your choice. To add some sweetness, add some raisins in the mix.

2. Fruit slices or whole fruits (apples, bananas, avocado, mango, pineapple, papaya, melon)

4. Provide positive reinforcement by praising your child, friend, and family members when they eat fruit/vegetables,

especially if they try something new.

5. Try a new vegetable or fruit every time you go to the grocery store, or you can make it one to two a week. Another option is to visit a non-chain grocery store to see what varieties you may try. Some non-chain grocery stores include international markets (African, Caribbean, Spanish, Asian etc.)

Exploring the different colors of fruits and vegetables is an excellent way to put the rainbow on your plate. It adds color with a bonus of much-needed nutrients like vitamins and minerals to help our bodies be in their best condition, regardless of our age. So what color are you going to try today? You can also visit Florida Medical Association's Healthy Living Toolkit to get more ideas of fruits and vegetable colors and their benefits: www.flmedical.org/Florida/Florida_Public/Docs/Healthy-Living-Toolkit.pdf

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

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Garden of Excellence for June



By Dianne Battle, Garden Club of Switzerland
 mail@floridanewslines.com

The Garden Club of Switzerland recognizes Kenneth and Claire Van Till of 1045 Buckbean Branch Lane West for their excellent yard scaping. Lively splashes of color from mounds of yellow daisies bordered by dancing pink

caladium invite the eye to the dark green foundation plants around the doorway. Cheerful and welcoming, their yard has earned the Garden Excellence Award for the month of June. If you would like to nominate a noteworthy yard, or are interested in being a part of the Garden Club of Switzerland, visit www.switzerlandgc.org.

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Travel

Majestic Morocco

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewslines.com

Finding Florida's Forgotten Coast

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewslines.com

I'm always excited to discover new destinations, especially in my home state. Florida's Forgotten Coast remains a relatively quiet, under-developed region on the southern tip of the Panhandle, below Panama City and Mexico Beaches. "Forgotten" because travelers bypassed the area due to the smelly paper mill. In 1999, the St. Joe mill curtailed operations, the smell disappeared, and the town reinvented itself.

Today, you'll find 244 miles of coastal shores, nearly empty powdery-soft beaches, and many water activities in Gulf County. While the drive from Jacksonville takes about five hours, it's worth the effort. Gulf County makes an ideal place to relax and unwind.

Cape San Blas, located on St. Joseph Peninsula, rests on a 750-acre narrow stretch of land. It extends out from Port St. Joe and curves around St. Joseph Bay. The nine-mile-long state park offers some of the most dramatic sand dunes I've seen — towering about 15-feet high. Follow the path through the dunes on soft, sugar sand to reach the rolling waves of the Gulf of Mexico. The shimmering bay lies on the opposite side of this skinny land strip. Cabins and an

RV park are currently being remodeled after the hard-hitting Hurricane Michael in 2018. Surf fishing is another popular option, as are the park's hiking and nature trails.

I stayed in a rental property named The Grove on Indian Pass, eight miles beyond Port St. Joe. The location allowed both sunrise and sunset views and an easy walk to the beach. The "Old Florida" feel of the place provided a refreshing stay with all the comforts imaginable. The complex made me wish my extended family could join me.

Any beginner kayaker or child will feel safe on the shallow waters of St. Joseph Bay. The bottom is clearly visible, and I spied scallops, whelks, starfish, and a ray among the seagrass. Also, off-road biking trails stretch along the bayfront.

Those interested in horseback riding can trot along the beach during a sunset ride. The horses don't go into the water, but the experience is undoubtedly memorable.

Roasting marshmallows over an open fire ranks as tradition on many family vacations. As the sun sets, enjoy a beach bonfire without doing any work. Light Up Your Night crew will set up, light the fire, and return for clean-up. S'mores



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Cape San Blas Lighthouse in Port St. Joe.

ingredients included!

The 1884 Cape San Blas Lighthouse was moved to Port St. Joe in 2014 due to its precarious position on the peninsula. Climb the 85-foot high metal structure to get some birds-eye views of the coast. While in Port St. Joe, try some fantastic restaurants famous for their local oysters and fresh-caught fish.

I made a short drive to Wewahitchka, a small town with a Seminole name, and took a pontoon boat ride on the Dead Lakes. Thousands of stumps were left in the water when the cypress trees were cut for the paper mill. Naturally, new trees grew around them, resulting in a haunting, mystical scene. Many trees reminded me of overgrown bonsai with artistically arranged branches supporting delicate foliage.

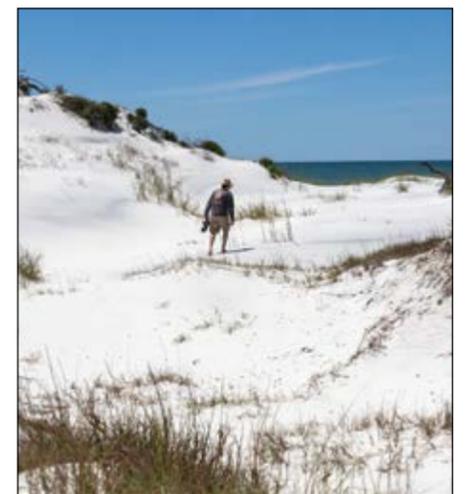
Also in Wewa, as the locals call it, you'll find local tupelo honey. The white tupelo tree's blooms produce the most pleasing taste, and many of those trees grow in the Dead Lakes. Visit an apiary, talk to a beekeeper or watch the liquid

gold bottled.

Water is the theme of Gulf County, and it's always close. If you're looking for a beach, fishing, or boating vacation, your desires will be fulfilled.

For info: VisitGulf.com

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



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
The dunes



"The staff are wonderful and there are lots of activities. It feels like I am at a resort — the pool is beautiful and big. I am happy I'm here and it's perfect for me."
- Dorothy



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