

Ponte Vedra NewsLine

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

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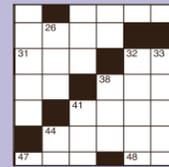
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Meet new St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

It's often said that timing is everything. With new St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick's career spanning military service and a variety of law enforcement positions, he believed the timing was right in 2020 for a new challenge. He decided to run for the office of sheriff upon the retirement of long-time Sheriff David Shoar and won nearly 70 percent of the vote in the Primary Election followed by another victory in the General Election in November.

"I'd like to thank voters for their overwhelming support," Hardwick said. "I'm not going to let them down. The sheriff's office will be involved in the community like never before."

Hardwick moved with his family to St. Augustine as a young boy when his father decided to move his business, Hardwick Fence, to the area. He attended Catholic schools and graduated from St. Joseph Academy, where he met his wife, Kendall, whom he calls his "best friend." The couple will celebrate their 30th anniversary in April and have two adult sons: Cole, a graduate of Florida State University and law school graduate who works locally, and Brett, a Flagler College graduate who is a Chinook helicopter pilot in the Florida National Guard.

Career-wise, Hardwick's experience is diverse. Upon graduation from St. Joseph Academy, he went into active duty with the US Army. As a paratrooper, his first combat tour was with the 82nd Airborne during Desert Storm. He served four years and then went into the

Rob Hardwick cont. on pg. 8

K-8 School MM will soon have a name, mascot

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

Following closely behind High School HHH (now known as Toco Creek High School) and adhering to many of the same procedures, the new Nocatee school, K-8 School MM, is currently in the midst of community meetings to select a name and a mascot. The school is scheduled to open in August 2021.

At the first community meeting, held via Zoom on Jan. 11, Principal Amanda Riedl said she went over the naming and mascot process with the 199 call participants. Then a survey was sent out to parents, which asked for their suggestions as well as if they would like to serve on a smaller committee that would ultimately narrow the name and mascot suggestions to the five to eight possibilities to be sent to the St. Johns County School Board for their consideration in early February.

"The architects had already submitted the color scheme for the school, which includes main colors of purple and

gray with accents of turquoise and gold," Riedl said. "So I asked the participants to look for names and mascots that would go with that."

During her Power-Point presentation, Riedl said she went over some of the history of the area in an attempt to give people some ideas as they decided on school names to suggest. For instance, Pine Island Road, where the school is sited, is actually on an island, bordered by the Tolomato River. Also of interest, Tolomato and Timucua Indians settled in the area and Deep River connects the Tolomato River to Pine Island.

"It's very interesting, where the school will be situated," Riedl said. "The area is



Photos courtesy St. Johns County School District
Aerial view of K-8 School MM, under construction in November 2020.

beautiful and has some great personality. I believe it will help guide our suggestions for a name and mascot."

Riedl pointed out that K-8 School MM will open in the fall as a K-7 school only. This means that eighth graders will remain at Palm Valley Academy, and while that might pose some inconveniences, the school district believes it is best for eighth grade students to not have to move twice in two years (i.e. to the new K-8 school and then to high

K-8 School cont. on pg. 9

PVHS weightlifting coach raises the bar

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Ponte Vedra High School senior Emily Libhart struggled to find a sport that she truly enjoyed until she tried weightlifting this year.

"Weightlifting keeps my mind clear amidst my busy week. The sport keeps you strong mentally and physically and for me it has been an outlet. Also, Coach Rush has worked hard to make the team inclusive," said Libhart.

Coach Mackensie Rush is the first female head coach of the girls' weightlifting team at Ponte Vedra High School and is one of only two female coaches in the district for girls' weightlifting. She spent her first year at the school building the roster from seven girls to 29 and is hoping for more next year.

Rush, also a special education teacher,

said weightlifting presents a unique dynamic because athletes not only cheer for their teammates, but also for others on opposing teams during meets.

"This is not something you typically see," said Rush, who has been coaching for eight years in multiple sports. "Weightlifting is more about individual performance and doing your personal best. Everyone encourages everyone else."

All athletes must be able to lift a 45-pound bar to qualify for the team, and Rush encourages beginners to join the team.

She uses her own experience with CrossFit, weightlifting, running and



Photo courtesy Mackensie Rush
PVHS weightlifting athlete Melanie Ryczko at a meet.

being a tri-athlete in high school (soccer, basketball and track) to train the girls during the October through January season, combining cardio, conditioning and strength training.

"We have seen huge improvements by training this way," said Rush.

PVHS weightlifting cont. on pg. 6

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PVHS freshman named to All American Team

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Jake Guarnera, a ninth grade football player at Ponte Vedra High School, was named to the 2020 Football University (FBU) Freshman All-American team. He played in the FBU All-American Bowl on Dec. 21 in Naples, Fla.

"I had a great experience at the FBU Adidas Freshman All-American Bowl," Guarnera said. "To be one of just 70 players from around the country selected to play in the game was a huge honor. We practiced all weekend to prepare for the game, which was tough because the practices were long but the coaches got us prepared for game night."

Since 2009 the FBU All-American Bowl has allowed freshman football players of the highest level a platform to assemble and compete in one place. Two teams are selected, comprised of the top 60 student-athletes in their graduating class. Tens of thousands of freshmen



Photo courtesy Jim Guarnera

strive for the prestigious honor of FBU All-American.

Guarnera, a 6'3", 255-pound offensive lineman, was the only freshman full-time member of the Ponte Vedra High School Varsity Football team this season. He is enrolled in all Honors and AP classes and currently holds a 3.93 GPA. He also plays JV basketball. He lives in Ponte Vedra Beach with his parents, Jim and Cheryl Guarnera, and three sisters Cali, Caia and Jena.

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Her Hazel eyes

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Love and Marriage
Special Section
PG 8

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Last month's Mystery Photo was the Marsh Landing Management Company building. Our winner was Debra Braschel. Congratulations!

CRYPTO FUN

Substitute the code to reveal the answer!

Answers to our Puzzles
PG 10

Answers: A. leaves B. brew C. cup D. boiled

FYI Contact Numbers

St. Johns County Local Government (www.sjcf.us)

Sheriff's Office: Sheriff Rob Hardwick
Ponte Vedra Field Office: (904) 209-2215

Property Appraiser: Eddie Creamer,
sjcpa@sjcpa.us; (904) 827-5500

Supervisor of Elections: Vicky Oakes,
voakes@votesjc.com, (904) 823-2238

Tax Collector: Dennis Hollingworth,
taxcollector@sjctax.us, (904) 209-2250

Clerk of Court: Brandon Patty, (904) 819-3600

St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners

District 1: Christian Whitehurst,
bcc1cwhitehurst@sjcf.us, (904) 584-5348

District 2: Jeb Smith,
bcc2jsmith@sjcf.us, (904) 209-0302

District 3: Paul Waldron,
bcc3pwaldron@sjcf.us, (904) 209-0303

District 4: Jeremiah Blocker,
bcc4jblocker@sjcf.us, (904) 209-0304

District 5: Henry Dean,
bcc5hdean@sjcf.us, (904) 209-0305

St. Johns County School Board (www.stjohns.k12.fl.us)

District 4: Kelly Barrera,
kelly.barrera@stjohns.k12.fl.us, (904) 547-7510

State of Florida Elected Officials

Governor Ron DeSantis, (850) 488-7146

State House District 17: Representative Cyndi Stevenson,
Cyndi.Stevenson@myfloridahouse.gov, (904) 823-2300

State Senate District 7: Senator Travis Hutson,
(386) 446-7610

Federal Elected Officials

U.S. Congress District 4: Representative John Rutherford,
(202) 225-2501

U.S. Senate:
Senator Marco Rubio, (202) 224-3041
Senator Rick Scott, (202) 224-5274

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with St. Johns County School Board Member, Kelly Barrera, District 4

Q: What do you have to share from the district level?

A: As a district, we are preparing for the new state standards, called BEST (Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking), with an emphasis on professional development. These BEST standards include new items like a reduction in standardized testing and civics being taught in every grade, and will be incorporated over the next few years.

Also, we have a joint meeting with the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners scheduled for Feb. 3. We plan to cover the county's growth and how we can work together to advocate for our community in Tallahassee. I'm looking forward to coming together and working together on behalf of our county.

Q: Have there been any recent student recognitions?

A: At our school board meeting in early January, we had a public recognition — that was actually in person — of our

Sunshine State Scholars. Andrew Ryan of Nease High School and Anderson Davis of St. Augustine High School were named Sunshine State Scholars; Alyssa Buckingham of Creekside High School was named an alternate; and Adam Dumas (Bartram Trail High School), Milla Mrozek (Pedro Menendez High School), Elizabeth Devault (Ponte Vedra High School) and Liam Guske (St. Johns) were named as representatives. It's so exciting to celebrate our kids, but even more when we can do so in person.

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

A: Online applications for our Academies are now available with a Feb. 5 deadline for all applications for Programs of Choice. These Academies give our students so many great options.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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



Photo courtesy Nocatee

Nocatee hosts annual Polar Plunge

More than 200 Nocatee residents braved the chilly 40 degree weather on Saturday, Jan. 9 and took the plunge into the cold waters at Nocatee's annual Polar Plunge. Afterwards, residents enjoyed a costume contest, a snowfall, coffee and hot chocolate, and music by a DJ. Jumper.

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with Florida State Representative
Cyndi Stevenson, District 17

Q: What's happening in the Florida Legislature as of today [interview date Jan. 21]?

A: We had our first committee week last week. There were organizational sessions and we were assigned to committees. We discussed some of the biggest issues facing Floridians: improving literacy programs to reach all of Florida's learners; making property insurance more affordable; and protecting our communities against sea level rise.

We were also updated on the COVID vaccine roll out. One bill that has already passed the first committee is HB 7, which protects businesses, schools, religious organizations and nonprofits from frivolous lawsuits relating to COVID. This bill excludes health care providers, since they have more detailed needs. Another bill will be coming to address health care providers.

Q: How does the legislature plan to address scams that are popping up regarding COVID vaccine charges?

A: COVID vaccines distributed at this time by any government provider are free. There is no charge for the administration of the vaccine since it is covered by the government. HB 9 is out of its first committee. It establishes criminal penalties to discourage fraudsters and protect Floridians. But the best protection is to remain informed and never give out financial information for a COVID vaccine. You can visit the official website, <http://stjohns.floridahealth.gov/> for more information.

Q: Can you give us any insight into the budget as a member of the Appropriations Committee?

A: Florida entered the pandemic with well funded reserves. Those reserves took years to rebuild after the 2008 recession and modest debt levels. The state is required to pass a balanced budget each year and it is the one task that we must complete

each session. We estimate revenues for the state four times per year and while the revenue outlook has improved from earlier projections, we still predict that it is going to be a difficult budget year. We have had a large increase in the number of people on Medicaid. The state's primary revenue source is sales tax and a significant amount of that is paid by tourists. Tourism is down now and therefore so are our sales and gas tax revenues.

Q: Have you introduced any bills yet?

A: I filed my first bill, HB 155 which addresses voter privacy. Currently, Florida's voter rolls are public record. We are one of only five states to follow that practice. This bill seeks to strengthen privacy laws by removing voter registration data, such as legal residence, date of birth, phone number and email address, from public records. The bill would limit who can request this data to: the individual whose records are confidential and exempt; a canvassing board or an election official in their official capacity; or a political party, party official, a candidate who has filed qualification papers, or a registered political committee for political purposes only.

Q: Do you have anything else to share?

A: I will soon be preparing a video on how constituents can research and follow bills as they move through the legislative process. We receive many emails about bills that are filed each session. We hope this effort will help our citizens have access to the actual bill language, amendments and staff analysis for bills that interest them. It will be on my Facebook page and emailed with my newsletter when it becomes available.

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

A: Readers can email me at Cyndi.Stevenson@myfloridahouse.gov or call my local office at (904) 823-2300.

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February

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

Community Calendar

Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), Ponte Vedra Chapter, will meet on Feb. 2, from 10:45 a.m. – 1 p.m. Contact pontevedrachapterns-dar@aol.com for additional details.

Newcomers Alumnae will hold its monthly luncheon on Wednesday, Feb. 3 from 11 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. at Marsh Landing Country Club. The guest speaker will be an FBI agent who will share anecdotes on their job. Contact brookemeister@msn.com or visit newcomersalumnae.wildapricot.org for more information.

First Coast Florida Lifestyles Newcomers Recreation Card Club will host a Super Bowl party at a World Golf Village area restaurant on Sunday, Feb. 7. Arrival time is 5:30 p.m. Social distancing will be followed and masks are to be worn. Call the club organizer at (904) 829-0643 (no texts) to RSVP or for information about the club. The club is open to both men and women and is a smoke- and drug-free club.

The Ponte Vedra Democratic Club will host its next meeting by Zoom on Feb. 10 at 6:30 p.m. Jacksonville University political science professor Dr. Austin Trantham will present a fascinating look at The White House and its role as the executive branch of government. This meeting will also feature the vote to accept the slate of candidates for PV Dems Club officers and board members presented at the January meeting. Contact Jan Kary at (202) 438-6750 or janetkary@gmail.com for more information and the Zoom meeting information.

The Ponte Vedra Woman's Club's next big FUNraiser will be a Cocktail Reception and Penny Preville trunk show on Feb. 11 from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. at Underwood's. There will be drinks, snacks, and a chance to win a diamond

necklace. Register online at PVWCEvents.com; a portion of sales proceeds will benefit the local charities of the Ponte Vedra Woman's Club.

Nocatee announces the following events, open to the public: Food Truck Friday, Feb. 12 from 6 p.m. – 9 p.m. at Splash Waterpark and the Farmers Market on Saturday, Feb. 20 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Town Center Field.

The Newcomers of North St. Johns will host a meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, Feb. 16 at 11:30 a.m. at Amici Italian Restaurant, 1915 A1A South, in St. Augustine Beach. Doors will open at 11 a.m. The event will feature veteran actor Mark Snitzer, who will entertain with a variety of Sinatra, Manilow and Broadway tunes. The cost for the luncheon and program is \$30 for members. All reservations must be received by Feb. 2. Contact Sue Aird at sjaird@comcast.net to register.

Living Health: Chronic Disease Self-Management Program will be held for people 60 years and older on Fridays, Feb. 26 – April 2, from 9:30 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. Get a free book and learn how to maintain or improve your quality of life. This online live webinar can also be accessed by phone.

To register, call Northeast Florida AHEC at (904) 482-0189 or (877) 784-8486.

The Savvy Job Hunters Ministry Zoom Workshop, "Taking the Plunge: Faith to Override Fear and Lessons from the Keys of Life" will be held on Feb. 25 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Email nwhite@christepiscopalchurch.org to register.

Northeast Florida AHEC announces free virtual tobacco cessation classes. Get a free four week supply of nicotine patches, gum and lozenges. A variety of options are available; call (904) 482-0189 to find a class that fits your schedule.

PVHS weightlifting cont. from pg. 1

Team members agreed.

"With Coach Rush's guidance, I have really been able to lift 20 pounds more than I could last season," said Madison O'Reilly, a 10th grader in her second year on the team.

Morgan Pratt, a 10th grader in her first year on the weightlifting team, shared similar thoughts.

"Coach Rush is a great coach who is always supporting and pushing me every time I walk into the weight room," said Pratt. "Being on the girls' weightlifting team is such a great opportunity because I'm surrounded by all these young, intelligent, strong and supportive women who are ready to work hard and have the same interests as me."

Rush said she sees her role as one of support and encouragement. And, as a female, she feels that team members relate to her as someone with the same mindset and physique, helping her build the team's confidence and camaraderie.

"It is nice to have this role and to be a mentor to the team," said Rush, who moved to Ponte Vedra Beach from central New Jersey. "All the athletes at PV High are so self-motivated. I didn't have to set any rules or restrictions as they exceeded everything that I wanted. I am coaching the best team around."

Rush, who is in her ninth year of teaching, is especially proud to have freshman Skyler Sharp on the team as the first ever varsity special needs athlete at the school. As Skyler's special education teacher, Rush encouraged her to join the team.



Photo courtesy Kayla Sharp
Skyler Sharp at a meet for Ponte Vedra High School.

"She brings a next level enthusiasm to the team. She is always happy," said Rush.

Sharp's mother, Kayla Sharp, said she and Skyler's father, Joshua, had their reservations about Skyler participating in the sport at first, but those quickly disappeared as Skyler gained strength and confidence through Rush's guidance.

"We have always pushed her to try new things and to put herself out there," said

Kayla, sharing that her daughter has Down Syndrome. "She loves it so much. She loves the team aspect of weightlifting and also the personal challenge."

Angelina Rappa, a junior, joined the team this year to physically challenge herself and

"to be a part of a like-minded team." In addition to all the physical benefits and motivation from Coach Rush, Rappa said she has learned many life lessons too.

"Weightlifting has proven to me that hard work pays off, and that you should do your greatest to reach your goals, no matter what the status quo is," Rappa said. "It has inspired me to take better care of myself and has made me a better person."



Photo courtesy Mackenzie Rush
PVHS weightlifting team.



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Send Two Coffins and a Doctor

By Scott Grant
ScottGrant@StJohnsBusinessMonthly.com

Jefferson Davis Milton was three years old when his famous father shot himself in the head. John Milton, the father, was the Confederate governor of the State of Florida. For more than 150 years, historians have argued about whether the old man committed suicide or if the fatal wound was an accident. What is clear is that on April 1, 1865, one day before Richmond fell, John Milton, who claimed to be descended from the English poet of the same name, went into the woods, and shot himself in the head. The family and local newspapers near the Milton plantation in Marianna reported the death as an accident. The New York Times pointed out that a week before, Governor Milton had advised the Legislature that the Yankees "have developed a character so odious that death would be preferable to reunion with them" and attributed his death to suicide. Recent scholarship has suggested that the New York paper was wrong. John Milton had fitted himself out to go hunting that day. The gunshot wound was most likely an accident.

Jeff Milton was the 14th child of the governor. After the elder Milton's death, the family suffered. At the age of 15, Jeff ran away to Texas. Two years later, he lied about his age and joined the Texas Rangers. Over the next 50 years, Jefferson Davis Milton carved out a celebrated career as a fast-drawing lawman in the old west. As a Ranger, he helped hunt down Geronimo. He became the chief of police in El Paso. It was there he faced down and arrested the infamous outlaw, John Wesley Hardin, the man "so mean, he once shot a man for snoring." Jeff Milton was known as "a good man with a gun." He had run-ins with other outlaws like cattle rustler Marty McRose and a train robber named "Three Fingered Jack" Dunlop. Milton shot and killed them both.

Jeff was working for the Wells Fargo Company in 1895 when he and a partner set out after "Bronco Billy" Walters and his gang. The gang had robbed a Wells Fargo stagecoach. Milton tracked the outlaws for weeks through the rolling plains and tumbleweeds of West Texas. Eventually, the two lawmen caught up with the gang near their hideout in Solomonville, Arizona. The outlaws refused to surrender without a fight. They got their fight. "Bronco Billy" was shot and arrested, and two other outlaws were killed. The rest fled in terror. It was at this point that Jeff Milton sent his legendary telegram "send two coffins and a Doctor."

In 1915, Jeff Milton went to work for the US Immigration Service. Initially, his title was "Mounted Chinese Inspector." His job was to pursue Chinese immigrants attempting to evade the Chinese Exclusion Act. In 1924, he became our nation's first Border Patrol Agent. He is recognized as the first on the Department of Homeland Security's website. He remained with the newly formed US Border Patrol pursuing his job "with unbridled enthusiasm" until he was forced into retirement at age 70 by the Economy Act of 1932.

Milton and his wife retired to Tombstone, Arizona and then later to Tucson. He survived until 1947, passing at the age of 85. His long active life made him something of a celebrity and he often told interviewers that "I never killed a man who didn't need killing and I never killed an animal except for meat." Many came. Jeff Milton once bought breakfast for western author Louis L'Amour. His wife recalled that every night, Jeff rode his horse up into the hills behind their house to watch the sunset.

Scott A. Grant is a local author, historian, columnist, and speaker. He is president of Standfast Asset Management in Ponte Vedra Beach. He welcomes your comments or questions at scottg@standfastic.com.

SCORE Jacksonville to host webinar series for business owners, conference for women entrepreneurs

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

SCORE is a national service organization that supports small businesses nationwide. SCORE has a network of more than 11,000 volunteers operating in more than 340 local chapters around the country. The organization is supported by the US Small Business Administration (SBA).

In February, SCORE Jacksonville will host a four-part webinar series entitled "Achieve Your Business Dream." This series of four interactive workshops is perfect for aspiring and emerging business owners. They are taught by SCORE mentors with decades of business experience in the topics they teach. The goal is to provide the necessary background aspiring entrepreneurs need to assemble a business plan, start a business and make an existing business succeed.

Session 1: Business Foundations – What Will Your Business Be?

Tuesday, Feb. 2, 5:30 pm. – 8:15 p.m.

Session 2: Marketing Basics & Social Media

Tuesday, Feb. 9, 5:30 pm. – 8:15 p.m.

Session 3: Financial Basics, Business Naming & Market Analysis

Tuesday, Feb. 16, 5:30 pm. – 8:15 p.m.

Session 4: The Business Plan, Financial

Projections & Funding

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 5:30 pm. – 8:15 p.m.

The cost of the full series is \$99, which includes all material and an invitation to the Exclusive Achieve Your Business Dreams Networking Facebook Group. Additional information and link to registration can be found at <http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?llr=gf156jcab&oeidk=a07ehic92mfd502e43a>.

Additionally, SCORE Jacksonville in cooperation with The Business and Leadership Institute for Early Learning and Children's Home Society of Florida will host a conference specifically geared towards women entrepreneurs on Saturday, Feb. 8, 2020 in the Advanced Technology Center on the Downtown campus of the Florida State College of Jacksonville.

The theme of the conference is "Engage, Educate, Empower" and will feature several presentations, panel discussions and breakout sessions offering guidance as to how best to launch and operate a business. Among the list of scheduled speakers is Pamela Starr, a leading authority on building customer loyalty and a professional speaker for Grow with Google, who will share actionable strategies on how to build and grow a successful business.

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Love and Marriage

Create a chocolate charcuterie board

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Charcuterie boards have become a staple when entertaining or dining out. Charcuterie boards traditionally feature a variety of cured meats, cheeses, bruschetta, and even olives — but boards can be adorned with any tasty morsel their creators desire. Borrowing from that idea, savvy home chefs can create a sweets-based charcuterie board that's sure to amaze.

- Chocolate bark
- Melted chocolate fondue and assorted dippers
- Classic chocolate candies
- Assorted nuts like almonds and cashews
- Fudge squares
- Homemade turtle candy
- Chocolate nut rolls
- Dried fruits, such as figs and dates
- Graham crackers or butter cookies

Just as you would for any charcuterie board, choose an attractive wood board large enough to hold all of the desserts. Arrange the chocolates and other foods with an eye for presentation. Use fresh berries or mint leaves to fill in any gaps and add a little extra flair to the arrangement.

To start out, figure out which nibbles your loved one will desire the most. The chocolate charcuterie board can be entirely sweet, or a mix of sweet, savory and even salty offerings. Some ideas for a chocolate charcuterie board include:

- Chocolate truffles
- Chocolate-dipped fruits
- Chocolate-covered pretzels

Rob Hardwick cont. from pg. 1

reserves with the Florida National Guard. He came home, got married to high school sweetheart Kendall, began taking college courses (something he did part time for several years before finally earning a bachelor's degree from Flagler College and a Masters from Barry University) and started working in the Florida Department of Corrections at the Tomoka Correctional Institute in Daytona Beach. He said this was his "first taste" of the corrections aspect of law enforcement and it remains a priority for him to this day.

While he enjoyed working at the jail, he felt he could make a difference as the first contact rather than after incarceration, so he became a deputy with the Flagler County Sheriff's Office and obtained experience with law enforcement.

"That was actually my first time wearing green," he said, referring to the uniform color of county sheriff deputies in Florida.

His career continued with a stint with the St. Augustine City Police Department in the mid-1990s. He enjoyed police officer work and helping families and eventually moved to a bicycle unit.

"That was possibly the best job I had in my career," he said. "It is truly 'in your face' policing, with no car to protect you and I found it very satisfying."

Hardwick was moved to the detective unit, where he worked closely with the State Attorney's office and often testified in court cases. This would lead to his next position — but a reactivation by the Florida National Guard in 2003 to go to war in the Middle East delayed those plans by nearly two years.

"I was actually hired by the State Attorney as assistant chief investigator while I was deployed," Hardwick said. "They swore me in over the phone from the country of Jordan."

His most recent position before he became St. Johns County's new sheriff

was as head of the St. Augustine Beach Police Department. During his tenure, the agency was accredited and re-accredited each year for his eight years.

Now as sheriff of St. Johns County, Hardwick has begun the task of molding SJSO into his vision. A believer in efficient command structures as a result of his military experience, Hardwick has five directors who report directly to him (Patrol, Criminal Investigation, Jail, Operations, and General Services) instead of a single undersheriff.

He cites the challenges of COVID as well as the rapid growth of St. Johns County (even during the pandemic) as reasons that efficiency and better processes are part of his vision. Relationships between the Sheriff's Office with the Board of County Commissioners, the St. Johns County School Board, local businesses and the faith community are all key, he said.

"I want to make sure we have the best partnerships with all these groups and everybody knows we are 'all in,'" he said.

Hardwick says he is a leader by "walking around" and has already walked the jail and ridden on patrol. Dealing with the mental health crisis is a priority. Among other initiatives, he plans to target human trafficking and drugs that are coming through the county on Interstate 95 as well as institute a pilot program for body cameras early this year.



Photo courtesy Caitee Hawker
Rob Hardwick and family on the morning of his swearing in as St. Johns County Sheriff, Jan. 5, 2021.

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Get to Know ...

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewslines.com

Donna McGinnis

Donna McGinnis has two passions: crocheting and dogs. In 2016, she found the perfect way to merge the two together to help rescue puppy mill dogs through the National Mill Dog Rescue. McGinnis uses her business, LadyByTheSeaCrochet, to make pretty much anything one could imagine out of yarn with all the proceeds going to the Colorado-based National Mill Dog Rescue. She has donated \$5,000 to the organization since 2016 and volunteers as an ambassador. McGinnis, who moved to Ponte Vedra Beach more than a year ago from California, said she has been deeply disturbed by dog cruelty ever since she was a child. It was always on her heart to find a way to help.



Photo courtesy Donna McGinnis
Donna McGinnis and rescue dog Quinn.

and often rescues 100 dogs at one time. McGinnis said it is an aggressive goal, and one that she will approach in the same way that she started this journey — with a crochet hook and a ball of yarn.

Q: What attracted you to National Mill Dog Rescue?

A: National Mill Dog Rescue caught my eye because I was astounded by what they do, and it opened my eyes to an industry that I did not realize is so cruel. Everyone's heart at National Mill Dog Rescue is in this mission. They have rescued 16,000 dogs to date. I spent four days volunteering with them in Colorado. I cleaned, cuddled the dogs, helped the rehab team and pretty

much did whatever they needed me to do. These dogs have never known kindness. They are basically feral and scared to death of people. They do not know love or the human touch. I call National Mill Dog Rescue the "boots on the ground" organization that goes directly into puppy mills across multiple state lines to rescue as many dogs as they can. The ultimate mission is to rehabilitate these dogs and rehome them.

Q: Talk about the story behind your dog Quinn.

A: When I was volunteering in Peyton,

Colorado, I saw this one Chihuahua with gorgeous blue eyes. He was deemed unadoptable after he failed three meet and greets. I decided at that moment that I would adopt this dog, and that he was the right pet for me. Quinn is four years old now. The transformation that he has made is amazing.

Q: You spoke at a Senate hearing on this topic. What was that experience like?

A: In 2017, I made the brave step to speak before the California Standing Committee on Professional Responsibility and Conduct to show my support of AB 485, a bill introduced to make it illegal for pet stores to sell puppy mill dogs (any dogs sold would have to be a shelter or a rescue). The majority of people in attendance represented shelters, rescue organizations and pet stores. I was the only one there to speak on behalf of the "parents" of the dogs repeatedly bred-for-profit. AB 485 was ultimately approved, and Gov. Brown signed the Bill into law. It was an amazing experience.

Q: What are the ways that you sell your products?

A: I sell on Etsy, through my website, and I have a vendor space in the Seaside Shoppes in Jacksonville Beach.

Q: What are your most popular crochet products?

A: Oddly enough, cat toys are very popular. I like to joke that cats are now helping dogs! Beanies are also very popular and recently sold out thanks to the cooler weather. I also accept custom orders.

[Author's Note: To learn more about McGinnis, visit LadyByTheSeaCrochet.com, check out her Etsy page by the same name or visit her at Seaside Shoppes.]

K-8 School cont. from pg. 1

school the following year.)

"Less transition for kids is better, which is why the K-8 model works so well," Riedl said.



Artist's rendering of K-8 School MM

Also, the new school will have a different start time from other K-8 schools in the county, since it will be sharing buses with Palm Valley Academy. Hours for K-8 School MM will be from 7:40 a.m. to 2 p.m., and then the buses will shift to Palm Valley Academy for its school hours of 8:25 a.m. to 2:45 p.m.

Riedl is looking forward to the busy time leading up to the opening of the new school. She is pleased that she has been allowed to work from Palm Valley Academy, where she said she is taking full advantage of the opportunity to meet "her" students (all students set to attend K-8 School MM will come from Palm Valley Academy) but also to learn the culture of the successful school.

"We will be continuing the proud tradition of excellence started at Palm Valley Academy," Riedl said. "We are just going to give it our own style."

Parents should keep an eye on the school's website (<https://www-mm.stjohns.k12.fl.us/>), particularly the Frequently Asked Questions page, which will be constantly updated. The presentations from the community meetings are also posted.

"We all know that change can be scary and uncomfortable, but one of the benefits is that K-8 School MM is a replica of Palm Valley Academy," Riedl said. "When kiddos are transitioning to their new school, they will already know where the gym and media center are. It will already feel like home."

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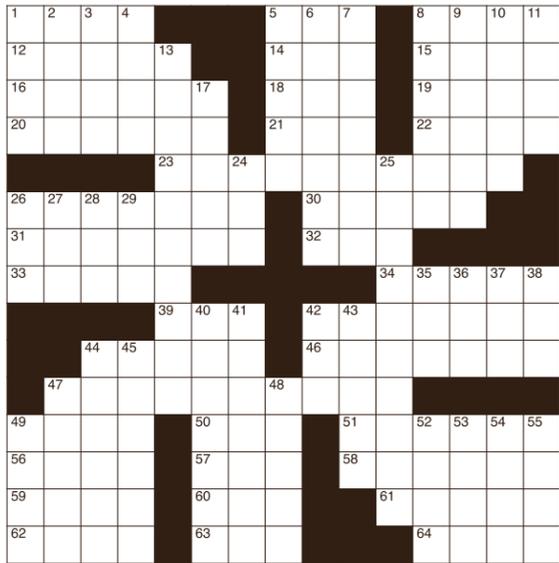
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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

1. Nuclear near reach weapon
5. Of she
8. Hyperbolic function
12. Rice dish
14. A team's best pitcher
15. Strong and healthy
16. Induces
18. Popular manga series
19. From a distance
20. Split
21. Consumed
22. Cushions
23. All over
26. One who provides food
30. St. ___ Girl, brand of beer
31. Walking slowly
32. Wood
33. Semitic gods
34. Bugle

39. 60-minute periods (abbr.)
42. Congressman
44. Plant of the heath family
46. Subdivision of an army
47. Having many different forms
49. Shellfish
50. Latin for hail
51. Between sixth and seventh
56. Maori war dance
57. Precious or semiprecious stone
58. Teeter totter
59. Deity
60. A major division of geological time
61. Fishing net
62. Small Caribbean bird
63. Field force unit
64. Japanese beverage

2. Monetary unit
3. The color of the sky
4. Dough used to make tortillas
5. Popular comic strip character
6. Distinct form of a plant
7. Replenishment
8. Has its own altar
9. Expedition to see animals
10. Group of related organisms
11. His and ___
13. Frenetically
17. Small integer
24. Unit of energy
25. Studies of culture
26. Taxi
27. Doctors' group
28. Don't know when yet
29. Former measure of length
35. Popular CBS series
36. Skin condition

37. Christian creator and ruler of the universe
38. They ___
40. Caused severe damage
41. Work done under harsh conditions for no pay
42. One point east of due south
43. Sea eagles
44. Drenched
45. State capital
47. Italian city
48. Sweetheart (archaic)
49. Brief talk
52. Popular disco group: Bee ___
53. First Chinese dynasty
54. Military vehicle
55. Chinese Moslem

CLUES DOWN

1. Prevents oil spills

TEA TIME WORD SEARCH

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

WORDS

- AROMA
- BITTER
- BLACK
- BLEND
- CAFFEINE
- CAMELLIA SINENSIS
- EARTHY
- FIRING
- FLAVOR
- GREEN
- HARVEST
- HERBAL
- LEAF
- LOOSE
- MATCHA
- OOLONG
- ORGANIC
- OXIDATION
- PEKOE
- PLUCK
- STEEP
- TASTE
- TEA
- WHITE

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



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Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 12 = E)

- A. 19 12 25 6 12 26**
Clue: Parts of a plant
- B. 18 24 12 1**
Clue: Make by soaking or boiling
- C. 23 5 11**
Clue: Vessel
- D. 18 2 16 19 12 8**
Clue: Heated water

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2020 - 2021 St. Johns County School Calendar

February 2021				
M	T	W	T	F
1	2	3	4	5
8	9	10	11	12
15	16	17	18	19
22	23	24	25	26

Total 179 Days

- Teacher Optional Planning
- 9 Teacher Planning (non-student day)
- 2 Teacher Inservice (non-student day)
- Classes Resume
- Student/Teacher Holiday
- End of Quarter



Photo courtesy Ocean Palms Elementary

Treat bags created by students at Ocean Palms Elementary School for local skilled nursing and assisted living patients.

Ocean Palms students embrace spirit of community

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

The fifth-grade student ambassadors at Ocean Palms Elementary School gave back to the community by delivering 72 treat bags to Bayview's skilled nursing and assisted living facilities. The student ambassadors crafted special cards out of recycled materials and attached them to treat bags with candy the students donated.

Additionally, the student ambassadors unveiled a special "Thank you" to area first responders at this year's Deck the Chairs. Their light-up installation, made from recycled materials they collected and repurposed, was aglow with two otters (the school's mascot), a message saying, "OPE loves our first responders," and backed by an American flag. The students are also creating special gifts they will deliver to area first responders this winter.

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