

Ponte Vedra NewsLine

JULY 2021 Volume 8 Issue 7

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

A Florida NewsLine Publication



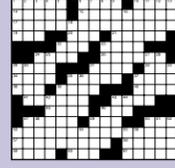
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Photo courtesy J. Lacey Taylor

Eagle Scout siblings Marina and Grant Mitchell

Brother and sister earn Eagle rank

By J. Lacey Taylor
mail@floridanewsline.com

Grant and Marina Mitchell, brother and sister, received their Eagle ranks at their Court of Honor on Wednesday, June 9 at Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church. The Eagle rank is the highest award in the Scouts BSA program. The Honorable Representative Cyndi Stevenson was the guest speaker and The Order of Arrow members within their troops presented the Four Winds ceremony, along with the Trail to Eagle and the Voice of the Eagle.

Marina Mitchell is with Troop 291, chartered by Ponte Vedra United Methodist Church. She was one of the original founding members when this all-girl Scouts BSA troop was started in February 2019. Marina was a Girl Scout prior to Scouts BSA and earned the Bronze Award. She wanted to move to Scouts BSA because of the ability to learn leadership, life skills, their outdoor programs and be listed as

Brother and sister cont. on pg. 9



Dream Big! Backyard Bash was held in Ponte Vedra in April

Local foundation helps cancer patients with travel expenses

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

When Anne Borngesser Bean and her late husband Jim Borngesser found out that he had appendix cancer in January 2013, Jim very quickly coined the term "cancer bonus."

"The day that you recognize your first cancer bonus is the day that you realize that cancer won't win every day," said Bean, explaining that finding something good that happened because of cancer is so important and impactful.

Jim and Anne would drive to cancer appointments early in the morning, which meant that the traffic was light and easy. Cancer bonus. Anne always wanted a Vitamix blender, but didn't want to splurge. Jim eventually needed



Photos courtesy Anne Borngesser Bean
Jim Borngesser

his food to be liquified, so a Vitamix was donated to them. Cancer bonus. Friendships were rekindled, and family relationships got stronger. Definite cancer bonus.

Anne said that the community gave so much to her family during Jim's cancer battle (gifts that Jim had a hard time accepting) that it motivated him to continue fighting. He wanted to be able to return the favor and help other families struggling to find travel funds for medical treatment.

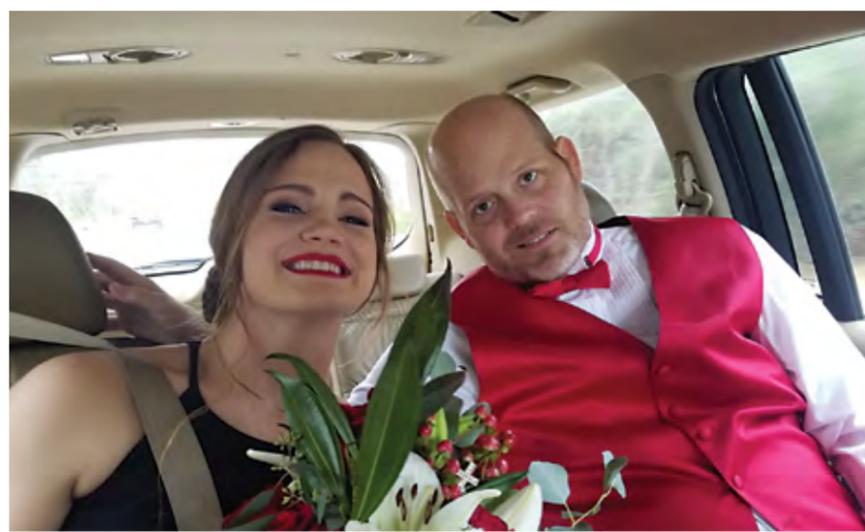
"When Jim moved to hospice and had a limited time to live, he expressed frustration that he didn't have enough time to do all the things he wanted to do to help people," said Anne.

Jim passed away on March 25, 2017, at the age of 51. By September, Anne and Jim's sister, Susan Kalmuck, started The Dream Big! Foundation to carry on Jim's legacy — one of kindness and always giving to others. The Dream Big! Foundation helps families financially who have to travel for cancer-related treatment (near or far).

"Our goal is to get people money as fast as we can," said Anne. "We have made it as unrestricted and as easy as possible."

Anne and Jim traveled to New York City for four years of treatment, so gift cards and cash from others made life out of town so much easier. Anne credits those treatments at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center under the care of Dr. Garrett Nash with giving Jim precious time to see two of their children graduate high school and to watch one child begin college.

Dream Big cont. on pg. 2



Jim Borngesser with daughter Maggie, while fulfilling her wish to be walked down a church aisle so that she could remember that feeling when she gets married one day.

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Dream Big cont. from pg. 1

Also, Jim asked his children to tell him something that they absolutely wanted to do with him before he passed. For Maggie (now 25 years old) it was the opportunity to walk down the aisle with her father so that she could hold onto that feeling for when her real wedding day took place one day. Once others found out about her wish, 250 people attended to watch and the choir sang as Jim walked Maggie down the aisle at San Juan Del Rio Catholic Church.

“He made it more about her. He gave that to her,” said Anne. “We were in a very good spot when he passed away. He helped us get there. It was an amazing gift.”

These memories drive Anne and her family to continue building Jim’s legacy.

After applying and providing cancer diagnosis verification, Dream Big! recipients must submit two other items: a recipe of their favorite comfort food during treatment and their cancer bonus, the silver lining that Jim so embraced. The recipes will soon be published in The Dream Big! Foundation Cookbook to raise further funds.

Dream Big! recipient and breast cancer survivor Liz Oliver, 39, said that when she received her cancer diagnosis in July 2018, Anne, who she knew through her brother, encouraged her to apply. The gift cards enabled her to travel from Panama City to Sarasota and California for treatments and paid for many costs that the insurance company did not cover, especially holistic treatments and supplements.

“They were a light in a dark moment. Just very good people doing great things for others,” said Oliver.

Her cancer bonus: “I became a better person. I learned to reprioritize my life. I experienced three years of growth, and I enjoy every day now, even on hard days. I am even closer with family and friends.”

John Hudson, a neighbor and friend of Jim and Anne’s, was so inspired by Jim and by The Dream Big! Foundation that he dedicated his 50th birthday party to the cause in June 2020. He had a backyard party with The Rivertown Band, invited 80 people, asked everyone to make a donation in lieu of a gift and raised \$2,500. It was such a success that Hudson suggested another event, The Dream Big! Backyard Bash, in Ponte Vedra Beach in April. Tickets were sold, 25 volunteers assisted, and \$10,000 was raised. Hudson hopes to make this an annual event.

“It was a fantastic community event for a great cause,” said Hudson, who met Jim at the Rotary Club of St. Johns in 2009. (Anne is also a Rotarian.)

For more information about The Dream Big! Foundation, email Anne at anne@dreambigshirts.com. Dream Big! t-shirts are also available for sale, and all proceeds are donated to assisting families. The St. Johns Rotary Jim Borngesser Memorial Dream Big! Golf Tournament will be held on Nov. 19, and those interested in playing should call Anne at (904) 392-9236. It will be held at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club with the Rotary Club of St. Johns supporting Dream Big! for the fifth year.



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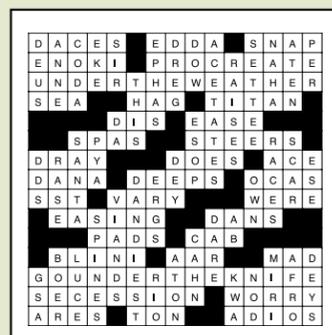
ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

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Last month's Mystery Photo was the Hello sign outside The Link building in Nocatee. Our winner was Julie Otto. Congratulations!

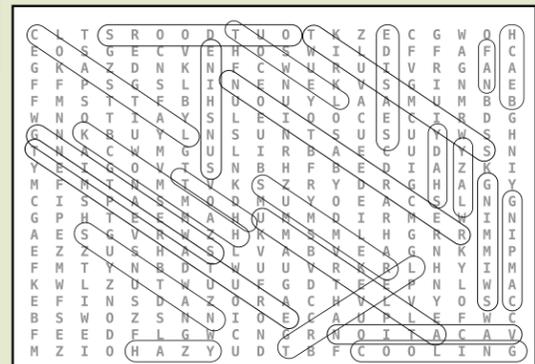


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PG 10



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with St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer

Q: It is budget time of year in St. Johns County. What are some of your thoughts on budgeting, expenditures, and taxation?

A: I think a lot has to do with quality of life. It's no surprise to anyone that St. Johns County has a high quality of life, with exceptional schools, law enforcement and recreation. It's also no surprise that our county is rapidly growing, with an estimated population now of 275,000; some estimates say that could double in the next 10 years. So, if we want to continue our high quality of life, we as a community and as government need to plan and forecast how we will keep up with things like schools, fire and rescue, parks — or we will find ourselves in a position less than where we are today.

Q: What can citizens do?

A: This is the time of year that taxing agencies are preparing their annual budgets, and we use these to establish millage rates. These budgets are all public record. Citizen and taxpayer input and constructive scrutiny is critical at this time. I think citizens should take the time and ask the questions of why we are spending money as we are and what we are doing to plan for growth while maintaining our quality of life. We must consider budgets, expenditures and even

other potential revenue streams if necessary.

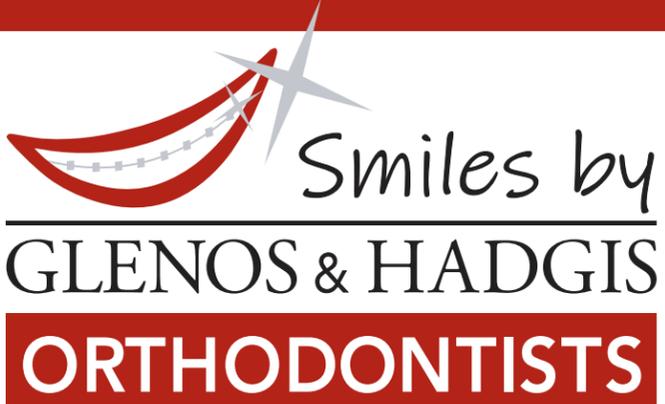
Q: How can citizens educate themselves?

A: Start by reviewing the draft budgets of the various county departments. Most, including my office's, are available on their website. Then it's time to begin the conversation with elected officials — we don't want money wasted, but we also realize to have what we want, we have to pay for it. At this time, property owners in St. Johns County are bearing the entire burden. Should we consider additional revenue streams to address the burden put on our infrastructure by the more than one million tourists per year that visit historic St. Augustine and our beaches?

Additionally, in August, each taxing authority will hold a public meeting. Citizens should attend those and ask questions. The dates and times of these meetings will be included in the TRIM notices sent out in mid- August.

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

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





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What you need to know about Florida Senate Bill 90

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

In late April, the Florida Legislature passed Senate Bill 90, an Election Administration bill revising certain sections of Florida's Election Law. Governor Ron DeSantis signed the bill into law on May 6, with immediate effect. Here is a brief summary of changes that may affect voters as it relates to voter registration updates, vote-by-mail requests, and ballot drop boxes:

Voter Registration Updates:

Address Changes: Voters must provide their date of birth and their Florida driver license number or Florida ID card number, or last four digits of their social security number when making an address change by phone or electronically. Alternatively, voters may change their address by submitting a Florida Voter Registration Application or signed written notice.

Name or Party Affiliation Changes: Voters are required to submit a Florida Voter Registration Application when making a name or party affiliation change and must include their Florida driver license number or Florida ID card number, or last four digits of their social security number.

Vote-by Mail Requests:

A voter must have a request on file to receive a vote-by-mail ballot. One request for a vote-by-mail ballot will cover all elections through the end of the calendar year of the next scheduled general election. Existing vote-by-mail requests on file are valid through the end of 2022.

A voter requesting a vote-by-mail ballot for themselves must provide the following information:

- Voter's name
- Voter's address

- Voter's date of birth
- Voter's Florida driver license number or Florida ID card number, or last four digits of social security number
- Voter's signature (written requests only)

An immediate family member or legal guardian requesting a vote-by-mail ballot on a voter's behalf must provide the following additional information:

- Requestor's name
- Requestor's address
- Requestor's Florida driver license number or Florida ID card number, or last four digits of social security number
- Requestor's relationship to the voter
- Requestor's signature (written requests only)

A request for a ballot to be mailed to an address other than the voter's address on file must be in writing and signed by the voter including the voter's Florida driver license number or Florida ID card number or the last four digits of their social security number.

Ballot Drop Boxes:

Secure ballot drop boxes must be continuously monitored by elections staff and will only be available inside the Supervisor of Elections Office and at all Early Voting sites during Early Voting hours.

Note: The 24/7 drop box located outside of the Supervisor of Elections Office will no longer be available; however, voters may still utilize the drop box inside the Elections Office during business hours, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.

It is unlawful for any person to physically possess more than two vote-by-mail ballots per election in addition to his or her own ballot or a ballot belonging to an immediate family member.



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with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

Q: Can you give us some insight into the Sheriff's Office budget you will be submitting to the county in mid-June [as of interview date of June 11]?

A: The budget does contain an increase, mainly due to the growth in St. Johns County. The federal minimum wage is going up and we have to keep up as well, so a big part of the increase is an increase in wages for sheriff's office employees below the executive level rank. Keeping up with necessary software accounts for some of the increase, and we're also dealing with an increase in the cost of firearms, ammunition, and fuel.

Q: Can you share some of the latest crime statistics for St. Johns County?

A: We report our statistics twice a year to the Federal Bureau of Investigation in what's called a UCR (Uniform Crime Report). We saw many substantial decreases in St. Johns County from 2019 to 2020: murder was down 20 percent, sexual battery was down 54 percent, and robbery was down 28 percent. We had an increase of 15 percent in aggravated assault, but the overall total index of offenses showed an 18 percent decrease.

We saw an increase in domestic violence of 18 percent, likely due to the lockdown. People were out of work and stuck in their homes; it was a very challenging time for families.

Q: Do you have any breakdowns for northern St. Johns County?

A: For the Northwest, we saw significant

decreases in calls for service (76,000 in 2019 vs. 59,000 in 2020) and arrests (602 in 2019 vs. 484 in 2020). In the northeast part of the county, which includes Ponte Vedra Beach, Nocatee, Palencia and Vilano, there was not as significant of a decrease (calls for service went down from 82,140 in 2019 to 81,451 in 2020 and arrests decreased from 780 in 2019 to 731 in 2020).

Q: Are there any statistics covering a larger period of time that you find interesting?

A: Something interesting to me is that between 2008 – 2020, with the significant population growth of St. Johns County, our violent crime is down 64 percent and non-violent crime is down 74 percent (when you compare 2008 to 2020).

I believe that the improving averages we are seeing in 2020 are a direct reflection of proactive policing, to include information sharing, the use of modern technology and also the repurposing of assets. I've pushed policing of the Interstate 95 corridor more than in previous years in an effort to save lives and target human trafficking, the transporting of illegal drugs, and aggressive driving. Many people don't know that we don't only police the 601 square miles of land that is St. Johns County, but also 221 square miles of adjacent water.

Our efforts to solve crime and keep these statistics low are greatly enhanced

by the relationships we have with the community. We rely on our community partnerships and ask that anyone with any information or tips call us. We are happy to check the information out and decide if it is critical to a case or not.

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

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

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

Q: What are your thoughts about the recently concluded school year?

A: It was an exceptional year and I have such gratitude towards all the students, parents, teachers, staff and administrators for all their hard work. Graduation ceremonies all went well and we look forward to next year.

Q: What is happening at the schools during the summer?

A: Over the summer, our schools are still busy. They operate with reduced hours, from 7:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. to reduce energy consumption. Building life cycle assessments are taking place and maintenance issues are being worked on, as well as security assessments. If you need to register your child for next year, you can visit your zoned school during these hours or register online.

There is a lot of teacher training taking place. Administrators are diving into data to find any learning gaps to make sure we have proper resources available to prepare our students for next year.

Q: Are there any safety improvements to announce?

A: We will have a school resource officer from either the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office or a local police department for every school next year. Previously, we had a few instances

with a representative from a private security company at a school with a shared school resource officer between a couple of schools.

Q: Do you have an update on Pine Island Academy?

A: Construction is very nearly complete and everyone is looking forward to having the building ready for the students. Staff will begin moving into the building in July and all is on track to open on Aug. 16, the first day of school. It's important to note that this start date does allow for completion of the first semester prior to Winter Break.

Q: Do you have any school administration shifts to announce?

A: Yes. We will welcome Dr. Joy Reichenberg as the new principal at Palm Valley Academy. She was formerly the principal of Hickory Creek Elementary. We also welcome Guy Harris to Landrum Middle School as the new principal. He was previously an assistant principal at Ponte Vedra High School. Both of these leaders are great additions to our District 4 schools.

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.

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John, Resident at Westminster St. Augustine

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July

Community Calendar

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

GTM Research Reserve will host a guided exploration hike on Saturday, July 3 from 9 a.m. – 11 a.m. Meet at the GTM Research Reserve Trailhead Pavilion (west of Guana Dam), 505 Guana River Road. Wear comfortable, closed-toe shoes. The event is free but parking is \$3 per vehicle. Visit gtmnerr.org for more information and to register.

The Jacksonville Camera Club will present digital contest results at its meeting on Wednesday, July 7. There will be a social hour prior to the 7 p.m. meeting. Visit jaxcameraclub.com for more information and meeting location updates.

The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable will meet on Monday, July 12 at 12 p.m. and feature Isabelle Renault, president and CEO of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. This meeting will be via Zoom video conferencing. Email info@sjcroundtable.org to register for the meeting or for more information about the St. Johns County Civic Roundtable.

Nocatee announces the fol-

lowing events, open to the public: Farmers Market on Saturday, July 17 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field and Food Truck Fridays on July 9 and July 30 from 6 p.m. – 9 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. Visit www.nocatee.com/events for more information.

First Coast Florida Lifestyles Newcomers Recreation Card Club will host board games (Rummikub or suggestions) at a Kookaburra Coffee South in St. Augustine on Sunday, July 18. Arrival is at 2:15 p.m. and games will be played beginning at 2:30 p.m. Masks must be worn while playing and one item must be purchased to satisfy restaurant management. 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 Beaches Coalition will meet on July 26 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Visit www.pvbcoalition.org for more information.



with Florida State Representative
Cyndi Stevenson, District 17

Q: Can you give us a budget summary from the recently concluded legislative session?

A: Every year the state of Florida is required by the state constitution to pass a balanced budget. Due to uncertainty over the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, revenue was expected to be down across the board, which would lead to a very tight budget year; however, through the fall and spring, revenue estimates continued to trend upwards leading to more optimism in the legislature for crafting the budget. Combined with the 10 billion dollars provided by the American Rescue Plan, the Florida House passed a better than expected budget. Some highlights of the \$100 billion budget Gov. DeSantis signed on June 2 include:

- \$6.7 billion for various projects (including infrastructure, environmental and education) with funding provided by the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund, all subject to receipt of the state's portion of these funds.
- \$2.1 billion for protection of Florida's water resources, including projects for Everglades restoration, springs, storm water and wastewater grants and the Resilient Florida Grant Program
- \$402 million for Florida Forever for the acquisition of conservation lands
- \$150 million for Beach Restoration Projects, which is the highest level of funding for these projects in history
- \$4.3 billion to fund the Medicaid Price Level and Workload. These funds will serve an anticipated 4.8 million beneficiaries with no reductions to eligibility groups or services. This is the highest caseload in Florida's history, with more than 20 percent of the state's population enrolled in Medicaid.
- \$22.8 billion in total funds for the Florida Education Finance Program, (\$12.9 billion in state funds and \$9.9 bil-

lion in local funds).

- \$53.42 increase in the base student allocation for total funds of \$4,372.91 per student
- \$50 million increase in the Teacher Salary Increase Allocation to support a minimum base salary of \$47,500 for all full-time classroom teachers.
- \$185.7 million to continue the State-wide Law Enforcement Radio System
- \$63.8 million for repair and maintenance of state buildings including the Capitol Complex
- \$30 million for cybersecurity initiatives to secure the state's IT infrastructure, systems and network.

Q: Can you share some funding highlights for local projects in St. Johns County?

A: We had success with local funding. Here is a list of projects in St. Johns County and the region for which we were able to secure funding totaling \$13,986,136:

- \$3,800,250 for mental health and substance abuse treatment and youth services;
- \$4,494,000 to rebuild damaged dunes in Ponte Vedra, West Augustine Septic to Sewer and St. Augustine Beach Flooding remediation;
- \$4,134,628 for intersection improvements in World Golf Village and Ponte Vedra, as well as maintenance for the St. Augustine Lighthouse;
- \$975,000 for the Northeast Florida 21st Century Workforce development project that engages youth in STEM opportunities and future career paths in a fun and inspiring way.

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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A Brief History of the Sneaker

By Scott Grant
 ScottGrant@StJohnsBusinessMonthly.com

Who was Chuck Taylor?

A lot of people think the popular Converse sneakers must be named after a famous athlete or specifically after legendary basketball Coach Fred Taylor who led Ohio State to the NCAA title in 1960. They are not. Chuck Taylor was a Converse salesman. He haunted gyms for decades selling shoes to every high school and college coach he met. He was so successful that Converse named the shoes after him.

Chuck, a former high school and semi-professional basketball star, would roll into a town with a trunk full of Converse All-Stars and arrange with the local coach to put on a basketball clinic for the kids. While he taught, he wore the shoes. Afterwards, everyone wanted a pair. Chuck also put out his own magazine featuring his own national champion and his own All-America

team. Converse All-Stars are the best-selling sneaker of all time.

Why are they called Adidas?

Adolph and Rudolph Dassler owned a shoe company in Nazi Germany called Dassler Brothers. Before the war, they made athletic shoes. They custom designed a pair for Jesse Owens during the 1936 Olympics. Owens wore the shoes to win two gold medals in the 200 and the long jump. Some credit that event with being the first celebrity endorsement of an athletic shoe.

The 1936 Olympics, held in Berlin, were meant to highlight Hitler's notions of Aryan Supremacy. The Germans collected their share of medals, but there was no question that the hero of those games was the son of a sharecropper and grandson of a slave. Owens won four gold medals, two of them in German

shoes.

After the war, the brothers had a falling out and went their separate ways. Some sources blame their wives. Adi Dassler called his new company Adidas. Rudy Dassler called his Puma.

Why are they called Nike?

Legendary University of Oregon track coach Bill Bowerman had a long history of crafting custom-made shoes for his distance runners like Steve Prefontaine. He was obsessed with making the shoes lighter and his runners faster.

One day in 1971 Bowerman was experimenting in his workshop making new rubber soles using his wife's waffle iron. The waffle iron was destroyed, but the new shoes, called "waffle trainers," would help launch an empire. They say Mrs. Bowerman was not happy.

Bowerman and a local businessman started a company to sell the new shoes. They named it Nike, after the Greek goddess of victory. The iconic swoosh logo was designed by a student at Portland State. She was paid \$35 for her efforts. Later, the company gave her some stock. That stock is now worth more than a million dollars.

Bowerman was obsessed with making runners faster, not making money. He gave away most of his shares to loyal employees. Still, he kept enough that when he died, he was worth \$400 million — which will buy a ton of waffle irons.

Scott A. Grant is a local columnist, author, speaker, and historian. By day he is a fiduciary asset manager and president of Standfast Asset Management. He welcomes your comments or questions at scottg@standfastic.com.

New hospital breaks ground in Durbin Park

By NewsLine Staff
 mail@floridanewslines.com

Flagler Health+ broke ground on June 10 on its new health and wellness campus located in NW St. Johns County's Durbin Park development. With targeted services slated to open in early 2023, the 42.5-acre campus will feature a state-of-the-art hospital and outpatient surgery center as well as the signature Flagler Health+ Village concept. The health village will incorporate family medicine, specialty care, urgent care, imaging, laboratory services, healthy lifestyle programming and community engagement space with an emphasis on integrating nature and technology to enhance experi-

ences. Flagler Health+ Durbin Park will also include a wellness facility, walking trails, and retail offerings.

"We are creating a premier health and wellness destination. The campus has been designed to create a sense of community, deliver uniquely personalized experiences, and achieve the best possible health outcomes for all people," said Flagler Health+ President and CEO Jason Barrett.

Flagler Health+ purchased the property located between Interstate 95 and State Road 9B from GATE Lands. It is anticipated that the campus will add approximately 1,300 jobs to the area at completion of its buildout.



Photo courtesy Flagler Health+

Local dignitaries participate in the ceremonial groundbreaking ceremony of the new Flagler Health+ Durbin Park.

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Briefs

New Florida state budget includes funding for a variety of St. Johns County projects

Governor Ron DeSantis recently signed the “Florida Leads” fiscal year 2021 – 2022 state budget, which totaled \$101.5 billion and includes \$169 million in tax relief. The “Florida Leads” budget focuses on education, environmental incentives, infrastructure improvements, and support

for military and veterans.

The budget contains funding for a variety of St. Johns County projects and initiatives including \$3.5 million for Ponte Vedra Beach/North Beach dune restoration, \$2 million for County Road 2209 and International Golf Parkway intersection and roadway improvements, and \$1.65 million

for improvements to the State Road A1A corridor from Mickler Road to Marsh Landing Parkway. In addition, \$300,000 was appropriated for the St. Augustine/ West Augustine septic-to-sewer program, \$694,000 for St. Augustine Beach resiliency improvements, \$1.3 million for the St. Johns County Sheriff’s Office detox program, and the county has acquired a new County Judge, the first to be allocated to St. Johns County since 1973.

Funding was also allocated to economic development, substance abuse treatment programs, health and human services programming, the St. Augustine Lighthouse, and law enforcement pay increases.

Visit www.boldvisionforabrighterfuture.com/HomeFY22.htm for more information on the 2021 – 2022 state budget.

The Council on Aging has taken a careful, phased approach to reopening its six senior centers throughout St. Johns County after a year of closures required to protect the health and safety of senior participants during the pandemic.

“It’s been a long and very difficult year for all — especially for seniors,” said Becky Yanni, executive director. “We are thrilled to be able to reopen our centers so that our community’s seniors can get back to enjoying each other’s company and living life to the fullest.”

Visit www.coajc.org or call (904) 209-3700 for more information on the Council on Aging’s extensive services and programs for seniors and caregivers throughout St. Johns County.

Newcomers Alumnae takes summer break

Newcomers Alumnae held its last monthly luncheon before the summer hiatus on June 2 at Marsh Landing Country Club. The luncheon theme was “A Trip Around The World” and a fun and challenging game of trivia based on the travel theme took place after an international menu of either chicken cordon bleu or beef stroganoff. As a treat for the attendees, a champagne toast and special dessert closed out the fiscal year. First and second-place prizes and gift cards were given out to the winning tables and lucky winners.

The next monthly luncheon will take place at Marsh Landing Country Club on Sept. 1. Over the summer, members are encouraged to renew their membership for the fiscal year July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022 by contacting brookemeister@msn.com to get a membership application. Potential new members are encouraged to visit newcomersalumnae.wildapricot.org for more information on this club or contact brookemeister@msn.com.

Newcomers Alumnae is a social group comprised of women who live in Ponte Vedra Beach, Nocatee, Jacksonville Beach, Atlantic Beach, Neptune Beach, Jacksonville and St. Augustine. It was formed in March 1998 to give graduates of other newcomer groups an opportunity to continue growing in the community and to foster friendships through social activities. Some of the activities offered are book club, Bunco, canasta, happy hour, lunch-in, wine socials, mahjongg, adventures and outings, and monthly luncheons held on the first Wednesday of each month with guest speakers. Newcomers Alumnae welcomes new members throughout the year.

Summer reading volunteer opportunity

If you are willing to spend a little time this summer helping others, there is an opportunity waiting for you: RSVP of St. Johns County is looking for community members to assist once a week in the St. Johns County School District summer reading program by remotely assisting in reading activities.

Hours are flexible, and you will be able to help from the comfort of your home. Volunteers will be meeting with students on their computers. Training for computer connection, reading strategies, and logistics will be provided.

“This year has been a very challenging time for students,” said Cheryl Freeman, RSVP director. “Assistance from community volunteers can make all the difference in helping these students succeed.”

Contact RSVP at (904) 547-3952 or Cheryl.Freeman@stjohns.k12.fl.us for more information.

THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center in Ponte Vedra Beach reopens

Council on Aging (COA) hosted the reopening of THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center on June 24. THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center is located in Ponte Vedra Beach at 175 Landrum Lane.

The center will begin by opening one day a week on Thursdays, with plans to increase program offerings over time. Initial programs will include Tai Chi, chair yoga, arts and crafts, Brown Bag Bingo, Wii Bowling, Book Club and more. Advance registration for programs is required as space is limited.

BMX stunt team wows at Nocatee Farmers Market



Photo courtesy Nocatee

The Nocatee Farmers Market went extreme on Saturday, May 15 at the BMX-Treme Extravaganza. Attendees enjoyed three different action-packed shows by the Perfection on Wheels BMX stunt team. Along with this exciting entertainment, the market included shopping from more than 70 local vendors including fresh produce, baked goods, and crafts.



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Get to Know ...

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewline.com

Liana McCormack



Photo courtesy Liana McCormack
Liana McCormack and her family.

Nocatee resident Liana McCormack has been playing tennis since she was five years old, courtesy of her late father, German Aguero, being a local tennis teaching pro. "It is kind of in my DNA," joked McCormack. She played all through Mandarin High School, graduated in 1996 and earned a scholarship to the University of Illinois. She was ranked number eight in Florida by the United States Tennis Association. "Tennis was my life. That was all I did. I ate, slept and breathed tennis," said McCormack. Two years into playing at the college level, McCormack got a stress fracture in one leg that ended her college tennis career; however, she was able to maintain her scholarship via medical leave and had a chance to fully embrace college life. It wasn't easy though — McCormack suddenly had to consider who she was outside of tennis. She graduated with a psychology degree, returned to Florida and worked in real estate for six years; however, she missed the game of tennis and the sport's vibe. She was offered the head pro position at the Julington Creek Country Club in 2007, where she worked for six years. When she became a mom of three, McCormack decided to stay home, but soon felt the desire to do something more. That's when she bumped into a friend familiar with her background who expressed an interest in learning how to play tennis. McCormack agreed and taught a lesson to two friends just for fun at the Nocatee tennis courts. Within a month, two friends became 20 women

wanting to take lessons, and McCormack had a new job. That was just the beginning for a group of women who ended up forming the Beachwalk Women's Weekday Tennis Team. They entered as the underdog and then took the number one spot in the Country Club D Team League for the 2020 – 2021 season.

Q: Explain how you became part of the Beachwalk Women's Weekday Tennis Team.

A: Six months into giving lessons, I petitioned the league to get a travel team started because we did not have enough courts at Nocatee to host as a club. By the second year, we were starting to win some matches. By the third season, we finished in the top five. Then COVID cut the season short. That's when I heard about six new clay courts at Beachwalk. After speaking to Beachwalk, they were able to create a membership that all my ladies joined, which gave us a place to play and host tournaments. I became the team coordinator of women's tennis in Beachwalk and now give beginner clinics to homeowners there. I coach 60 women, and I went from one to four teams.

Q: What is your teaching method?

A: You cannot teach how you play. I teach in a way that when you walk off the court you are feeling incredibly successful. I teach the basics first and get you to the point where you can compete. From there, you can polish your skills, and then you want to play more. You have to be in competition to stay with it and to work for it.

Q: What did tennis teach you?

A: Tennis completely changed my life. I did not realize it at the time. My college scholarship was based on my per-

formance, so the stakes were very high. I don't think that I really realized how much pressure I was under at the age of 17. It definitely taught me resiliency at a young age, and it taught me to be mentally tough. Tennis is a metaphor for life: facing adversity, ups and downs and sometimes you don't win, but you have to keep going.

Q: You mentioned giving tennis lessons in the Hamptons. Who did you teach?

A: It was pretty much like teaching tennis to the stars. I taught Star Jones, Christy Turlington, Ed Burns, Paul McCartney, Jimmy Buffett's son and NBC anchors. I felt like I was vacationing in the Hamptons for four months.

Q: How do you feel about your Beachwalk team?

A: I love my ladies, and they have become like family. They are so sweet, and they work so hard. I am so proud of them, and I get so much happiness from teaching. I tell them to never minimize the impact they are having on their children by winning, losing and facing adversity through tennis.

[Author's note: For more information on the Beachwalk Women's Weekday Tennis Team, McCormack can be reached at tennislina904@gmail.com.]

Brother and sister cont. from pg. 9

a female Eagle Scout. Her Eagle project was to build two picnic tables and five benches for the Duval Audubon Society in Orange Park.

Grant Mitchell is with Troop 288, also chartered by Ponte Vedra United Methodist Church. Grant started scouts as a Tiger in Cub Scouts with Pack 291; he earned his Arrow of Light and crossed over into Troop 288 in February 2018. His Eagle project was to build four picnic tables for Alice B. Landrum Middle School.

Both Marina and Grant attended National Youth Leadership Training and both are in BSA's Order of the Arrow. Grant has earned the Cub Scout religious medal, Parvuli Dei, and Marina is one of 1,000 young women across the nation that have made the list of inaugural female Eagle Scouts 2020.

Visit www.troop288PVB.org or www.troop291pvb.org for more information about Troop 288 or Troop 291.

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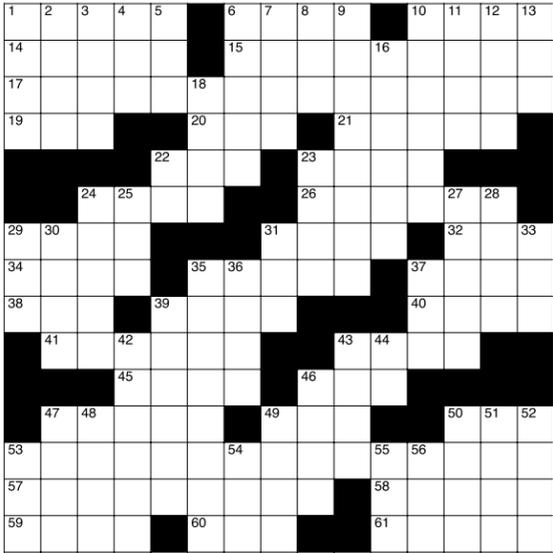
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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Cyprinids
- 6. Icelandic literary works
- 10. Break in half
- 14. Japanese mushroom
- 15. Have offspring
- 17. Not feeling well
- 19. A very large body of water
- 20. Witch
- 21. Behemoth
- 22. Speak negatively of
- 23. Absence of difficulty
- 24. Pampering places
- 26. Drives
- 29. Truck that delivers beer
- 31. Makes
- 32. A team's best pitcher
- 34. ___ Carvey, comedian
- 35. Seas
- 37. S. American plants
- 38. Time zone
- 39. Deviate
- 40. No longer are
- 41. Moving in slowly
- 43. Patrick and Glover are two
- 45. Living quarters
- 46. Taxi
- 47. Pancake made of buckwheat flour
- 49. Swiss river
- 50. Not happy
- 53. Have surgery
- 57. Formal withdrawal
- 58. Give way to anxiety
- 59. Greek war god
- 60. 2K lbs.
- 61. Word of farewell

CLUES DOWN

- 1. ___ ex Machina
- 2. WWII diarist Frank
- 3. Concluding passage
- 4. Supplement with difficulty
- 5. Title of respect
- 6. Cubic measures
- 7. Remnant
- 8. ___ Jones
- 9. Salts of acetic acid
- 10. Long, upholstered seat
- 11. Capital of Okinawa Prefecture
- 12. A one-time aspect of Egyptian sun god Ra
- 13. Prefix denoting "in a"
- 16. Propels upward
- 18. What we are talking about
- 22. Prosecutor
- 23. Employee stock ownership plan
- 24. He brings kids presents
- 25. Burmese monetary unit
- 27. Hurries
- 28. Injury remnant
- 29. Tooth caregiver
- 30. Elvis backup singer Betty Jane
- 31. "The Partridge Family" actress Susan
- 33. Midway between east and southeast
- 35. Most excellent
- 36. Heat units
- 37. Possess legally
- 39. Food items
- 42. Skeletal structures
- 43. Challenge to do something bold
- 44. Blood type
- 46. Sammy ___, songwriter
- 47. Farmer (Dutch)
- 48. Clare Booth ___, American writer
- 49. Piers Anthony's protagonist
- 50. Malaysian coastal city
- 51. Hairstyle
- 52. NY-based department store
- 53. Geosciences organization (abbr.)
- 54. Brazilian city
- 55. Niger-Congo languages
- 56. Gesture

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

WORDS

- BEACH
- CAMPING
- COASTAL
- COOLING
- FAN
- HAMMOCK
- HAZY
- HOT
- LAZY
- OUTDOORS
- RECREATION
- SEASIDE
- SHADY
- SUMMER
- SUNSHINE
- SUNTAN
- SWEATING
- SWIMMING
- SWIMSUIT
- TEMPERATURE
- TOWEL
- TRAVEL
- UMBRELLA
- VACATION

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



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Solve the code to discover words related to ice cream.
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- A. 8 15 7 5 14 26
Clue: Iced over
- B. 9 14 4 4 14 15 2
Clue: Sweet treat
- C. 6 15 14 19 25 22
Clue: Thick and smooth
- D. 4 3 26 9 19 14
Clue: Ice cream with toppings

Saving bluebirds – one nest box at a time

By Brad Buck
mail@floridanewsline.com

As pest-eaters, Eastern bluebirds benefit Florida farmers. Not only that, they're cute. Two good reasons Hance Ellington has started a program to preserve them. As a UF/IFAS assistant professor of wildlife ecology and conservation, Ellington started a bluebird nest-box building program. A faculty member at the Range Cattle Research and Education Center (REC) in Ona, Fla., he conducts in-person and online webinars to teach the public how to build better bluebird nesting boxes.



Photo courtesy Hance Ellington

"Eastern bluebirds are a frequent study species in her research program, and she will talk about some of the fascinating bluebird research her lab is conducting."

The guest appearance by Sieving is part of Ellington's educational video program called "Become a Bluebird Watcher." Through six sessions, more than 600 people have participated. In the previous sessions, the UF/IFAS researcher covered topics including:

- Bluebird biology and ecology.
- How to build a bluebird nest box.
- Where to deploy the nest boxes.
- How to safely monitor them.

On July 10, from 1 p.m. – 2 p.m., Ellington will be joined on a webinar by Katie Sieving, a UF/IFAS professor of wildlife ecology and conservation, who works from the main UF campus in Gainesville. (Register for the free virtual program at <https://tinyurl.com/uv34883m>)

"Dr. Sieving's research focuses on avian ecology and behavior and how it relates to interactions between birds and the human environment," Ellington said.

The roles of birds in rangeland ecosystems. Bluebirds are called "cavity nesters." That means they compete for nests with native birds such as chickadees, tufted titmice, nuthatches and Carolina wrens as well as nonnative birds such as house sparrows and European starlings. Natural nesting cavities have declined over the years because of habitat loss, the removal of dead trees and limbs and a shift from the use of wooden fence posts to metal posts, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Ellington is combining a research program with his outreach effort.

"When we try to help the bluebirds' habitat by deploying nest boxes, and we combine that with a scientific study, it can also become a learning opportunity for people of all ages," Ellington said. "Thus, we developed our nest box research program in conjunction with an Extension program."

Brad Buck is with the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS).

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Keep your family safe this summer: Tips from your poison control center

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

As we swing into summer, Florida's Poison Control Center Jacksonville is providing some helpful tips to keep your family safe.

"From snake bites and jellyfish stings, to pool chemical accidents and foodborne illnesses, poisonings increase during the summer," said Dr. Dawn Sollee, Center Director. "The kids are home from school, families are traveling and more people are outdoors — this leads to more exposures. We want Floridians to know we are here for them, 24 hours a day, at 1-800-222-1222 to provide free help with any poisoning, bite, or sting."

Florida's Poison Control Center in Jack-

sonville is sharing these important summer safety tips:

Pool chemical safety:

- Ensure you are in a well-ventilated area when using pool chemicals.
- Follow the product instructions carefully.
- Do not store chemicals where flammable items may mix with them (i.e. pool chemicals and fertilizer).
- Never mix pool chemicals because they could create a toxic gas.
- Always keep pool chemicals stored up and away from children.

Snake bites:

- Call the poison control center (or 911, if unarousable, convulsing, or stopped

breathing) if someone has been bitten by a venomous snake, such as the pygmy rattlesnake, cottonmouth (water moccasin), eastern diamondback rattlesnake, canebrake (timber) rattlesnake, copperhead, or coral snake.

- If bitten by a snake, remove jewelry and tight clothes, immobilize the extremity if possible, keep the affected area at or below the heart, and wash the area gently.
- Do not feed the victim, place ice on the bitten area, or apply a tourniquet.
- Insect repellent usage:
- Read and follow product instructions carefully; some products are not meant to be applied to the skin.
- Do not apply onto a child's hands, eyes,

mouth, or cut/irritated skin; spray repellent onto an adult's hands then apply to child's face.

- Do not use combination sunscreen/insect repellent products. Sunscreen needs to be reapplied every two hours, but repellent should not be reapplied.
- DEET should not be used on children younger than two months old.
- After returning indoors, wash treated skin with soap and water.

Experts staff the Poison Help Hotline at 1-800-222-1222 that provides free, confidential, expert medical advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year from toxicology specialists, including nurses, pharmacists, physicians, and poison information providers.

Vicar's Landing again presents scholarships to staff

By Carolee Bertisch
mail@floridanewslines.com

Vicar's Landing Retirement Community in Ponte Vedra presented scholarships for more than \$315,000 to its student employees this year. Awards of \$2500 to \$5250 were given to assist with education, including to two daughters of employees. Scholarships are used for expenses related to college, trade schools, English as a second language, nursing school and others.



Photo courtesy Carolee Bertisch
Thanh Ngo of the housekeeping department with her scholarship certificate.

Martine Slem, chair of the Scholarship Committee, announced the amount to the membership, and thanked her committee: Carolee Bertisch, Sue Foley, Jim Marx, Jim Munson, Laurie Reeves and Jim Van Vleck.

George Bockmeyer, Charles Gamble, Admiral David Frost, Mary Hoban, Mary Linden, Charlotte Miller, Betsy Mills, Ron Giddens, Joy Ward and Mary Emma Wilson.

A substantial portion of the funding comes from generous donations by Vicar's members, associate members and others. For this past year, donations were made by friends and relatives of the following members, who designated the Scholarship Funds as their memorial: Ralph Chilton, Walter Goetz, Bud Roemhild, John Slem and Van MacDonald.

Vicar's Landing Boutique, although restricted by COVID from holding a sale open to the public, earned more than \$50,000 through sales to residents, and donated to the fund. Many thanks to the committee: Rose Murdock, Ginny Elliot, Sue Foley, Kay Zolezzi, Sherrie Russell, Wanda Keyser, Sandra Burnaman and Jean Cowell.

Contributions were also received in memory of Dean Beckwith,

Scholarship winners received certificates and brochures honoring them.



Newcomers of the Beaches changes leadership

Photo courtesy Bonnie Evans

Bonnie Currier, the pandemic-era president, turned over her Newcomers of the Beaches gavel on June 9, 2021 to Penny Dollar, who was installed as the 2021 - 2022 president along with her new board members during the luncheon at Marsh Landing Country Club. The past year was challenging, especially since Newcomers is a social club where you make new friends and have fun doing it. It is remarkable that the club added over 50 new members during this period. Fond farewells were also said to the five year graduates who become members of the Alumni group. Visit www.newcomersofthebeaches.com to see how you can make new friends and participate in a variety of activities.

Ponte Vedra YMCA Jr. Pros headed to AAU World Championships



Photo courtesy Ponte Vedra YMCA

The Ponte Vedra YMCA Third Grade Jr. Pros Academy Team defeated The Skills Center 32 - 30 to win the Division I AAU State Championship, held May 14 - 16 in Orlando. They are headed to AAU World Championships on July 4 - 6, 2021 at ESPN Wide World of Sports. The team has eight players from the St. Johns County area. Phil Tensley is the head coach of this team, which trains and practices at the Ponte Vedra YMCA.

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Palmer Catholic Academy girls are league champs



Photo courtesy Will Mayer

For the fourth consecutive year, the girls' basketball team at Palmer Catholic Academy won the league championship, this time with a 29 - 16 victory over Assumption at Bishop Kenny. Reese Mayer (No. 4) led the team with 17 points, six rebounds and five steals and was named tournament MVP. The Palmer Catholic Academy team has a 53 - 2 record over the four year span.

Nutrition Check

Power packed nutrition when eating plant-based

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

One of the most popular health trends that is currently on the rise worldwide is adopting a "plant-based diet." The term "plant-based" does not necessarily mean vegan or vegetarian (eliminating animal products), but rather incorporating more plants and less animal products in your diet. If planned well, plant-based diets can support health and decrease risk of disease for all stages of life. Part of having a well-balanced plant-based diet is knowing which nutrients are found in various plant-based foods to reap the health benefits. If you are considering changing your diet to a plant-based approach, it is recommended to consult a Registered Dietitian to help you be successful.

Here is a list of foods that consumes high amounts of these powerful nutrients:

Iron: Green veggies (e.g. spinach), nuts, seeds, whole grains, fortified foods, lentils, and dark chocolate. (Note: Adding vitamin C to your iron sources will help your body absorb iron more efficiently)

Protein: Legumes (beans and lentils), nuts and seeds, soy milk, tofu, peas, edamame, peanut butter, chickpeas, nutritional yeast, and quinoa.

Zinc: Chickpeas, cashews, almonds, hemp, pumpkin seeds, oatmeal, baked beans, and whole grain products.

Vitamin B12: Nutritional yeast, fortified foods, and supplements.

Vitamin D: Most food sources of vitamin D include meat, fish, liver, and egg; however, there are fortified plant-based foods that contain vitamin D such as fortified plant-based milks and fortified cereals.

Omega 3: Fatty fish (e.g. salmon, mackerel, sardine), chia seeds, ground flaxseeds and oil, hemp seeds and oil, walnuts, edamame, and kidney beans.

Calcium: Calcium is found in high amounts in dairy foods and is arguably one of the most important minerals in our body. Calcium can also be consumed in plant sources such as broccoli, kale, collard greens, bok choy, tahini, soy products, and fortified foods.

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

Ocean Palms celebrates "nacho average" teachers and staff



Photos courtesy Lisa Farese

Ocean Palms Elementary School celebrated its teachers and staff with a "nacho average" teacher and staff appreciation week fiesta from May 24 - 28. Each day of the week brought a special surprise for the staff such as a salsa and guacamole bar, a donut truck, lunch from Tacolu, a snack cart delivery, and a Metro Diner breakfast. A special gift from the PTO and daily drawings for prizes were also part of the lineup.



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In loving memory of
John Lee Haines

In loving memory of...

JOHN LEE HAINES
John Lee Haines, formerly of Rockport, Ind., passed on December 21, 2020 at his home in Orlando, Fla., surrounded by his loving family after losing his battle with cancer. He was preceded in death by his mother Marjorie Haines who passed in 1982 and his father John W. Haines who passed in 1948. He was a loving husband and father. His survivors include his wife of 36 years, Ann Carter Haines; his brother, David Haines (Dinah), of Naples, Fla.; Mark Pettus (Collen) of Havana, Fla.; & (Kim) of Orlando, Fla.; Matthew Pettus (Angela) of Coral Springs, Fla.; Tim Pettus of Jacksonville, Fla.; Jeremy Pettus (Josh), of Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.; 10 grandchildren and 18 great grandchildren. He graduated from Rockport High School 1958 and was later a partner in H&B Customs (stands for Haines & Byrbe), a local car repair and customization facility. A memorial is planned at a later date in his hometown of Rockport and following his wishes will take place on the banks of the Ohio River, which he loved.

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Travel

New River Gorge: Our newest National Park

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewline.com



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
The author at a New River Gorge overlook.



Dawn over the Gorge.



Bridge Walk participants.

Many U.S. National Parks recorded their highest visitation rates in 2020, the pandemic year. Seems that after lockdown, Americans want to venture out, get away from computers and TV, and rediscover the joys of outdoor recreation. I felt the same need, so I flew to Charleston, W.Va., to explore our newest national park: New River Gorge National Park. The 53-mile section of the north-flowing river was previously designated a National River, but upgraded to an official national park in December 2020, joining 62 other national treasures.



Rafting the lower course.



New River Gorge from the Bridge Walk.

The designation gives new recognition to West Virginia, provides new jobs, and more money to the old coal mine region. It means a national park with-

in driving distance of the east coast, albeit nine hours from Jacksonville. (Perhaps stop in North Carolina or

Virginia to break up the trip.)

The almost heaven gorge itself is majestic. Lush green mountains rise high above the gushing flow of the New River, oddly named as it's the second oldest in the world. The New River Bridge stands as the park icon, the largest single-arch bridge in the Western Hemisphere, resting 876 feet above the water. Sign up for the fun and honestly non-scary Bridge Walk. You step along a catwalk below the bridge roadway, safely tethered in with access to handrails on each side. A guide shares the history of the area and interesting facts about the engineering marvel. The view — breathtaking.

The third Saturday in October draws thousands to Bridge Day. They come to walk, join a 5K run, or watch the thrill-seekers who zip-line, rappel, or BASE jump — a very brief free fall with a parachute landing off the bridge. These activities are legal only on Bridge Day.

Naturally, hiking attracts all ages, and the park offers more than 100 miles of forested foot, mountain bike, and equestrian trails. Some paths follow the old rail lines, and others go down to ruins of coal mining towns. Rock climbing in the “Grand Canyon of the East” appeals to enthusiasts year-round, and hunting is permitted in some areas of the park. Fishing, with a license, promises a variety of bass, walleye, crappie, bluegill, carp, and catfish. And, photographers love it, too.

Whitewater rafting, however, claims the most excitement. The upper course works for families or those wanting smaller rapids or a gentle

paddle. The big-water lower run brings thrills and, as I found out, spills. I decided to try the famed lower course and fell off my raft in class 4–5 rapids — and a swirling vortex. Pretty scary. Perhaps I should have left rafting to the more experienced crowd, like those who challenge the Gauley River, also within the national park's grounds. It ranks as one of the top five rafting rivers in the world.

Lodging options run from bare-bones platforms for tent camping to comfy log cabins with outdoor hot tubs. Adventures on the Gorge is the premier outfitter offering everything from accommodations to guided activities with transportation, restaurants, swimming pools, and adventure gear. You'll find cabin rentals and bed and breakfast rooms in the nearby town of Fayette or numerous RV parks and campgrounds in the region.

I highly recommend a visit to the Beckley Exhibition Coal Mine to better understand the dangerous work done by coal miners. You ride through the dark passages of a vintage coal mine with a veteran miner. At various stops, this guide provides firsthand accounts of how past miners spent their days. The idea of working in a space no higher than three and a half feet astounded me. You can also visit the period coal camp buildings throughout the grounds. Kids will enjoy the adjacent Youth Museum highlighted by Thomas the Tank Engine exhibits.

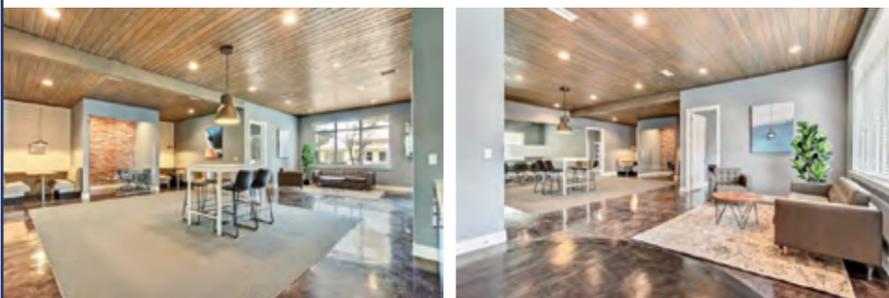
For further information: www.nps.gov/neri

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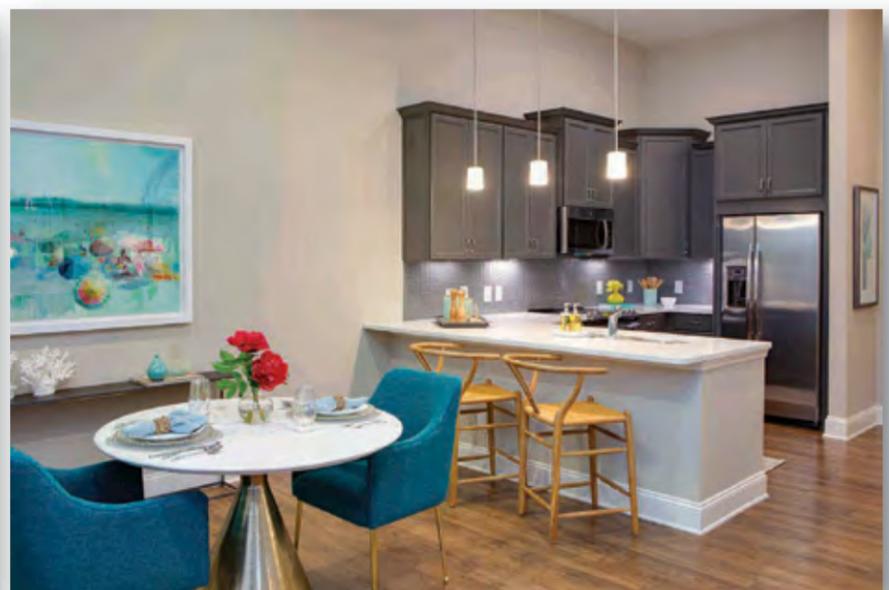


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