

# Ponte Vedra NewsLine

SEPTEMBER 2021 Volume 8 Issue 9

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

A Florida NewsLine Publication



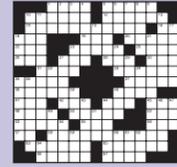
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## Golden Pineapple Hospitality Awards to be announced



Photo courtesy Leigh Cort

Last year's Golden Pineapple recipients: Sherry Stoppelbein, Lakita Spann, Wen Raiti, Sabine Juskowiak, Lorna Macdonald, Anne Urban, Laddie Dwyer, Faye Lance, Nancy Slatsky, Carrie Eagle, Rebecca Reed, Barbara Golden and Leigh Cort.

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewsline.com

The Womens Food Alliance will host the annual Golden Pineapple Gala Award Dinner on Sept. 29 at Deerwood Country Club. Now in its ninth year, the Womens Food Alliance cultivates and advances education, collaboration and networking for professional women in every career associated with the hospitality, food, beverage and event industry.

The Golden Pineapple Award Dinner recognizes women for their business accomplishments, courage to launch new companies, their dedicated hard work, creativity and support of others in hospitality.

The 2021 Golden Pineapple event will recognize nine career categories that have been voted on by the Womens Food Alliance membership.

**Pineapple** cont. on pg. 9

## Ponte Vedra heads back to school

By Martie Thompson  
editor@floridanewsline.com

Monday, Aug. 16 dawned bright and early for students in Ponte Vedra Beach and Nocatee — the first day of school for the 2021 – 2022 school year. The typical opening day heavy traffic occurred, as parents were more likely to drive their student to school for the first day. Officials with the school district and sheriff's office expect these delays to settle down as the school year progresses and everyone gets into a routine.

"I think our kids and families were very excited to be back in school," School



Photos courtesy Amanda Riedl

Inflatable dolphins, Pine Island Academy's mascot, greeted students on the first day of school.



Pine Island Academy students in the Wave Cafe on the first day of school.

Board member for District 4 Kelly Barrera said. "There was such a positive energy in the school buildings as I visited."

The student count for the St. Johns County School District the first day of school, Aug. 16, was 41,744, an increase of 4,986 students or 13.6 percent over last year's first day number of 36,758. St. Johns County continues to be one of the fastest growing school districts in the state; however, a portion of this extreme growth reflects students returning to in-person learning.

The high school student count was 14,051 with 3,096 students at Bartram Trail High School, 2,297 at Creekside High School, 1,336 at Pedro Menendez High School, 2,340 at Allen D. Nease High School, 1,814 at Ponte Vedra High School, and 1,642 at St. Augustine High School. The opening

**School** cont. on pg. 12

## Corvette Club revs up in Ponte Vedra Beach

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps  
mail@floridanewsline.com

Bert Rasmussen first wanted to own a Corvette when he was a child and watched the television show "Route 66."

"I never wanted anything else," said Rasmussen, who with his wife Wylie has three daughters, one son and 11 grandchildren.

It didn't happen right away, but eventually he purchased a C6, a C7 (2015) and now a 2021 C8. In fact, his wife picked out his first Corvette in 2007. Now Rasmussen has recently established the Ponte Vedra Beach Corvette Club, looking to bring together other Corvette enthusiasts.

Other than owning a Corvette, there are no requirements or dues to join the club, and that is a priority for Rasmussen, a Jacksonville lawyer. So far, there are eight members.



Photo courtesy Tiffany Merlo Phelps

Adrien Marsoni and Bert Rasmussen look at the engine of Rasmussen's 2021 C8.

"I want it to be something fun, to go on drives and maybe meet for lunch or coffee. That's my vision," he said, adding that he is working to find a sponsor. "We are also interested in using this as a way to have fundraisers for different causes."

One cause that is close to his heart is ALS because a close friend has the

disease and attended the Ponte Vedra Beach Corvette Club's First Drive in Rasmussen's Corvette.

The club took its "First Drive" on July 24, meeting at the Sawgrass Village Shopping Center parking lot and driving to Angel's Dining Car in Palatka. In late August, they met at the same park-

**Corvette** cont. on pg. 2

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Tracy Kuzajski  
The Senior Advocate

**Corvette** cont. from pg. 1  
ing lot and then drove to the “Caffeine and Octane Jacksonville” car show at The Avenues Mall. The next get together will be on Sept. 11, also a “Caffeine and Octane” car show, and all are welcome.

Rasmussen said he has enjoyed getting to know new folks from all walks of life through the club.

“These are super fun cars and super fun people. It just puts a smile on your face,” he said. “The common denominator is our love of cars.”

Rasmussen also shares his passion for cars with his 14-year-old grandson, Waylan.



Photo courtesy Bert Rasmussen  
Bert Rasmussen next to his 2021 C8 Corvette.

drivers navigate one at a time through a defined course) days,” said Marsoni, who owns a 2008 C6 Z06.

Marsoni, who has been racing cars and motorcycles for about 10 years, said he always loved American cars. Once he tried a Corvette, he was sold.

“Usually, the car or bike has a weakness — lack of power, stability, cornering speed. Those domains require constant improvements. When I tried my instructor friend’s C6 Z06, I could not believe that there was a Corvette out of the box that came with incredible power, speed, handling and braking.”

Marsoni is an amateur track racer at the Florida International Rally & Motorsport Park in Starke, racing around five times a year. He looks forward to racing even more once he gets his local construction company, Mistral Design+Build, up and running this fall.

“It is a rush of adrenaline, freedom and respect for the car,” he said. “I love going as fast as possible and driving faster than my peers.”

Rasmussen said he is open to all members’ ideas and wants the club to be a group effort where there isn’t one person necessarily in charge. And all ideas are welcome as the club hopefully expands its goals and mission. Whether it is a leisurely ride, a fundraiser or a trip to the track, there is something for everyone, Rasmussen said.

For more information on the Ponte Vedra Beach Corvette Club call Bert Rasmussen at (904) 422-5411.



Photo courtesy Bert Rasmussen  
A club member’s base C6 in Victory Red outside the National Corvette Museum.

“He recently turned 14, and he is my car buddy,” said Rasmussen. “We go to shows and auctions together whenever possible.”

Club member Adrien Marsoni, a former chef from France and current builder/developer, also loves meeting a variety of people with a similar passion for cars. Prior to living in Ponte Vedra Beach, Marsoni lived in Washington, D.C., for 15 years, running Marsoni Home Restoration.

“I would like the club to be more ‘performance’ oriented than ‘cruise ride.’ It would be nice to organize track and autocross (a timed competition in which



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# BFF Best Furry Friend of the month



Meet Tucker!

- BREED:**  
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- FAVORITE ACTIVITY:**  
Playing with his sister and his alligator stuffed animal
- FAVORITE TREAT:**  
Peanut butter
- FAVORITE FRIEND:**  
Everyone!
- HOW YOUR BFF GOT HIS NAME:**  
He tuckers us out with all his energy!

Do you have a cute pet? Send us your pet's picture and the answer to the five questions above before the 10th of the month. Also tell us you saw the BFF contest in Ponte Vedra NewsLine. Your pet could be our BFF of the month and appear in Ponte Vedra NewsLine! Email editor@floridanewsline to enter your pet.

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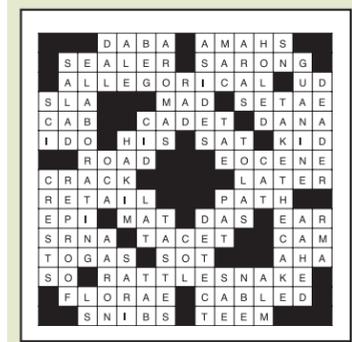
## ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

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### MYSTERY PHOTO

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

Last month's Mystery Photo was Palm Valley Baptist Church. Our winner was Ellen Emenheiser. Congratulations!

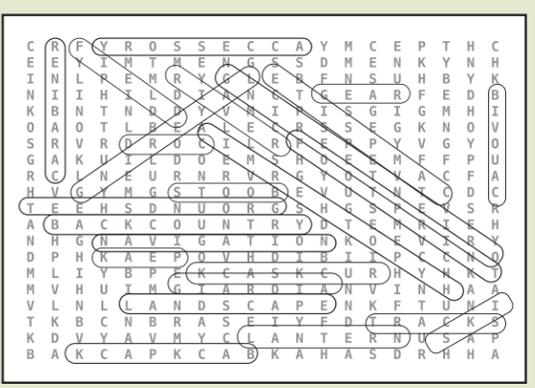


Answers to our Puzzles  
PG 10

### CRYPTO FUN

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Answers: A. animals B. forest C. nature D. explore



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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 his battle with cancer. He was preceded in death by his mother Margie K. 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 Haines; his brother, David Haines (Draak), of Louisville, Ind.; six children: of Naples, Fla.; Mark Pettus (Collen) of Havana, Fla.; Kim of Orlando, Fla.; Matthew Pettus (Angela) of Coral Springs, Fla.; Jeremy Pettus of Jacksonville, Fla.; Jeremy Pettus (Josh), of Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.; 10 grandchildren and 18 great grandchildren. He graduated from Rockport High School in 1958 and was later a partner in M&B Customs (stands for Main local car repair and customization facility. A memorial is planned for a date in his hometown of Rockport and following his wishes place on the banks of the Ohio River, which he loved.

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### with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

**Q: With school having just started in St. Johns County, can you go over the requirements for motorists and stopped school buses?**

A: Yes, with schools recently opened, our concern for the safety of our students is paramount. According to Florida Statutes, if a school bus is stopped on a divided highway, then only traffic traveling in the same direction as the bus is required to stop when the bus stops. A divided highway has the lanes of traffic in opposite directions separated by a raised median, such as Race Track Road. If the roadway is not divided by a median, then traffic in both directions must stop when the bus stops.

**Q: What other back to school safety tips would you like to share?**

A: When a motorist enters a school zone and sees the flashing lights, they must reduce their speed to the posted speed limit. The flashing lights come on approximately a half hour before the start of school and again for approximately half an hour after school dismisses. Check the signs at your school for exact times and heed them.

We have crossing guards and public safety assistants assisting with the ingress and egress to schools, as well as our traffic units and patrol deputies enforcing traffic and pedestrian safety in school zones. Keep in mind that we also have unmarked cars with deputies that move around to various schools to catch speeders.

It's important for motorists to back-plan their day now that school has started and give themselves more time to get to work or school. Be cognizant of your surroundings. We don't want to risk the lives of our

students because someone is in a hurry.

We want families to go to school safely and we want students to attend school safely. I encourage all families to meet the Youth Resource Deputy at your school. There is one at each school in St. Johns County this year. We want to make direct contact with families via this officer.

**Q: Can you clarify the use of sidewalks for bicyclists and pedestrians?**

A: If a particular sidewalk is not specifically designated for bicycles, then the pedestrian has the right of way. Having said that, we certainly encourage our young students to ride their bikes on the sidewalk for safety rather than the road (if there is no bike path), but we also encourage common courtesies. Be sure to alert pedestrians on the sidewalk if you are coming up behind them and slow down as you pass them. Also, helmets are required for bicyclists under the age of 16 in Florida.

**Q: Do you have anything else to share with northern St. Johns County?**

A: As neighborhoods in the northern part of the county continue to grow, I encourage all drivers to be patient with traffic. We want to make our county a safe place to work, live, and play. Slow down and pay attention.

**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@sjsoc.org](mailto:sheriff@sjsoc.org) or call me at (904) 824-8304. Also, our website, [www.sjsoc.org](http://www.sjsoc.org) has a wealth of resources, from alarm registration to Crime Stoppers to our Neighbors app.



### Q&A with St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer

**Q: Are there any legislative updates you'd like to discuss?**

A: Yes, Florida Statute 119.071 was amended this past legislative session and the new requirements go into effect on Oct. 1, 2021.

**Q: What does Florida Statute 119.071 pertain to?**

A: This statute provides for confidentiality and protection of information maintained by state agencies for certain individuals. These individuals include victims of violent crimes, sworn law enforcement officers, investigators with the Department of Children and Family, state attorneys, judges, public defenders, probation officers, tax collectors, etc. At this time, the personal information of these individuals is exempt from public viewing. So for example, if you went online and searched, either by name or by property address, you would find no records at all. Additionally, our response to a phone call to our office would be that we have no information.

**Q: What does the amendment allow going forward after Oct. 1?**

A: After Oct. 1, the only thing we will now protect is the individual's name. Parcels of

property will be publicly viewable online, we will just suppress the name and any link to official records. We will also protect the individual's name on any other real estate parcel, whether homesteaded or not. But the only way to find information is to search by the address of the property, not by the name, as that is still protected.

**Q: Why was this change made?**

A: Companies like title insurance companies, mortgage companies and general contractors didn't have access to parcel information that they needed to do their jobs.

**Q: Will these protected individuals be informed of the upcoming change?**

A: Our office will be reaching out to all protected status taxpayers shortly. But if they have any questions in the meantime, they can call our office for more information.

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

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



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

**Q: Can you explain list maintenance as it pertains to the voter rolls?**

A: To comply with Florida Statute 98.065, all Supervisors of Elections must conduct a general voter registration list maintenance program to protect the integrity of the electoral process by ensuring the maintenance of accurate and current voter registration records in the system. We have a number of processes in place to keep accurate and current voter rolls.

**Q: What are examples of these processes?**

A: Quarterly, we check our voter rolls against the National Change of Address (NCOA) list from the US Post Office. In this way, we can mail notices to voters who have moved to other Florida counties or out of state. Also, the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles provides us with information on voters who have received a driver's license in another state and we receive address change information from the Clerk of Courts based on jury notices.

**Q: What is ERIC?**

A: Florida joined the non-profit consortium of member states known as ERIC (Electronic Registration Information Center) in 2019. Its mission is to assist states in increasing voter participation and improving the accuracy of America's voter rolls. The consortium is governed and managed by the member states, of which there are currently 30. Our state laws actually had to be changed to allow us to become a part of ERIC, and I'm thankful that our legislators did this.

**Q: What is the benefit?**

A: It has greatly assisted our efforts in identifying and conducting list maintenance activities. For instance, this was the first year we received CrossState maintenance from ERIC. In St. Johns County in July, we sent out approximately 4,000 notices to voters who had moved to another state. I was surprised how many voters had moved out of state since the election.

**Q: Is there a timetable for performing list maintenance?**

A: We have to stop all list maintenance processes 90 days prior to any federal election; therefore, we send out most notices during off election years.

**Q: What happens if a voter does not respond to one of the notices?**

A: If they do not respond to an Address Confirmation Final Notice, they are placed on an inactive status. Florida Statute 98.065 (4) (c) allows for voters on the inactive list to be restored to the active list upon the voter updating their registration, requesting a vote by mail ballot, or appearing to vote; however, if they do none of these things by the second general election after being placed on the inactive list, the voter's name will be removed from the statewide voter registration. The voter would have to reregister to become active again at this point.

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

A: Readers can email me at [voakes@votesjc.com](mailto:voakes@votesjc.com) or call me at (904) 823-2238. Our website, [www.votesjc.com](http://www.votesjc.com) also has a wealth of information.

# September

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

### Community Calendar

**The Jacksonville Camera Club** will feature results of the recent print contest at its meeting on Wednesday, Sept. 1. The Sept. 16 meeting will be the results of the monochrome print contest. Visit [jax.jaxcameraclub.com](http://jax.jaxcameraclub.com) for more information and meeting location updates.

**GTM Research Reserve** will host a guided exploration hike on Saturday, Sept. 4 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](http://gtmnerr.org) for more information and to register.

**Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR)**, Ponte Vedra Chapter, will meet on Sept. 7, from 10:45 a.m. – 1 p.m. Contact [pontevedrachapternsdar@aol.com](mailto:pontevedrachapternsdar@aol.com) for additional details.

**Nocatee** announces the following events, open to the public: Farmers Market: Pirate Invasion on Saturday, Sept. 18 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field; and Food Truck Fridays on Sept. 10 and Sept. 24 from 6 p.m. – 9 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. Visit [www.nocatee.com/events](http://www.nocatee.com/events) for more information.

**The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable** will meet on Monday, Sept. 13 at 12 p.m. with guest speaker Carol Saviak, strategic partnerships manager of the St. Augustine-St. Johns County Airport Authority, Northeast Florida Regional Airport. Email [info@sjcroundtable.org](mailto:info@sjcroundtable.org) to register for the meeting or for more information about the St. Johns County Civic Roundtable.

Northeast Florida AHEC announces a free **Tools to Quit Tobacco Class**, which includes free nicotine patches, gum or lozenges on Monday, Sept. 20, from 4 p.m. – 6 p.m. at Flagler Health and Wellness Center, 120 Health Park Blvd. in St. Augustine. Call (904) 482-0189 for more information or to sign up.

**The Ponte Vedra Beaches Coalition** will meet on Sept. 20 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Visit

[www.pvbcoalition.org](http://www.pvbcoalition.org) for more information.

**The Ponte Vedra Democratic Club** will meet on Tuesday, Sept. 21 for a 6 p.m. social and 6:30 p.m. meeting at Christ Episcopal Church, Room 106, 400 Solana Road. This will be the first meeting of the fall in the club's new meeting location. The program will include campaign 2022 strategy with St. Johns Democratic County chair Robin Dion and campaign chair Marie Garnes. Email [janetkary@gmail.com](mailto:janetkary@gmail.com) for more information about the club.

**The Newcomers of North St. Johns** will host a meeting and first luncheon of the season on Tuesday, Sept. 21 at 11:30 a.m. at Queen's Harbour Yacht and Country Club, 1131 Queen's Harbour Blvd. in Jacksonville. Doors will open at 11 a.m. The event will feature renowned pianist Carl Grant. The cost for the luncheon and program is \$30 for members. All reservations must be received by Sept. 10. Contact Sue Aird at [sjaird@comcast.net](mailto:sjaird@comcast.net) to register.

Northeast Florida AHEC will host a free **arthritis exercise program** via an online live webinar for people 60 years and older on Tuesdays and Thursdays, Sept. 23 – Nov. 23, from 2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. Attendees will learn how to better manage arthritis pain. Call Northeast Florida AHEC at (904) 482-0189 or (877) 784-8486 to register.

**The Savvy Job Hunters Ministry Zoom Workshop**, "Taking the Plunge: Faith to Override Fear" will be held on Sept. 24 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Email [nwhite@christepiscopalchurch.org](mailto:nwhite@christepiscopalchurch.org) to register.

**First Coast Florida Lifestyles Newcomers Recreation Card Club** will play cards at Dunkins Cafe in St. Augustine on Saturday, Sept. 25. Arrival is at 2 p.m. and games will be played beginning at 2:15 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.



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**Q&A with Florida State Representative  
Cyndi Stevenson, District 17**

**Q: Can you give us an idea of where we are currently in the legislative calendar?**

A: Committee Weeks for next session will start the week of Sept. 20. Session starts on Jan. 11, 2022 and runs for 60 days, with a conclusion date of March 11. We have also set our legislative delegation meeting for St. Johns County, which features the county's state representatives (myself, Sen. Travis Hutson and Rep. Paul Renner) for Friday, Oct. 1 at the St. Johns County Auditorium. At this meeting, citizens can let us know their thoughts and priorities for the upcoming session. I just finished a series of mobile office hours around the county in August. Going forward, people can contact me at my office with any questions or concerns.

**Q: Redistricting is on a lot of people's minds. Can you let us know what citizens can expect?**

A: We will be working on redistricting this session, utilizing the 2020 Census data. It is constitutionally mandated that we complete the redistricting during the 2022 regular session. It is of utmost importance that the process is seen as fair and transparent.

My understanding is that the House will have a tight procedure and we have many state and federal laws with which we must comply. To the extent possible, we try to nest our districts with state senate and congressional districts. This is difficult, as

the district lines must be drawn to as close as one to two people.

There will be a Redistricting Committee as well as subcommittees that will do a lot of the work, such as using the sophisticated software available to us (as well as the public) to help draw the district boundaries. Members of this committee are expected to be announced, along with other committee members for the upcoming session, in early September.

**Q: Florida will be gaining a U.S. Congressional district, but how about the state districts?**

A: In Florida, we will keep our 120 house districts, we will just move the district lines to keep up with the population. Again, the districts need to be the same size down to just one to two people. At present, my district is the second largest one in the state, so I expect some changes to my district lines.

**Q: What are some other session priorities?**

A: Every year we have to present a balanced budget. So far, the numbers look promising, but we will have an increase in costs due to increases in Medicaid and social services costs.

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

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



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**Q & A with St. Johns County School Board  
Member Kelly Barrera, District 4**



Photo courtesy St. Johns County School District High School III under construction.

**Q: Can you share any insights from the first day of school on Aug. 16?**

A: I thought the day went surprisingly well, with just a couple of small hiccups. I visited all the schools in District 4 on either Monday, Aug. 16 or Tuesday, Aug. 17 and observed student drop off and pick up as well as lunch in the cafeteria. Schools just really come alive when there are students in the building. The first day of school is when you see everyone's hard work come to fruition.

**Q: What can you tell us about Pine Island Academy's first day?**

A: It is a beautiful school. There are still some minor construction projects being finished, like some flooring in the hallways and they were still working on painting over the weekend prior to the first day of school. Although not completely finished, the school was very welcoming and there was a lot of ambience.

I actually ran into Superintendent Tim Forson at both Pine Island Academy and Ocean Palms Elementary. It's his tradition to be out in the schools over the first two weeks of school. He was very pleased with the preparation that went into getting our schools ready for the first part of the school year.

**Q: Can you give an update on High School III?**

A: The tilt walls have started going up, so that's always an exciting time. Everything is on schedule so far. The school's principal, Greg Bergamasco was actually helping out at Landrum Middle School on the first day of school.

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

A: I'd like to spotlight the BRAVE program, which provides counseling and behavioral health services and support for our school families. Via a gift from THE PLAYERS, along with Flagler Health+ Care Connect, services in the BRAVE program are provided at little or no cost. For the 2019 – 2020 school year, 951 appointments in the school district were made and attended; for the 2020 – 2021 school year, 2,090 appointments were made and attended. To see our community really embrace and utilize this program is very rewarding.

Also, I'd like to congratulate and say thank you to Northrop Grumman, our Business Partner of the Year for St. Johns County Schools.

**Q: How can our readers contact you?**

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

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The ElderSource Caring Connections Telephone Reassurance Program needs volunteers to make friendly phone calls to seniors who are living alone or are homebound. Your call can go a long way to help someone who might be feeling lonely or isolated.

Caring Connections volunteers are trained, background screened and then matched with a special friend. Hours are flexible as you and your senior will set days and times convenient for you.

*"Phone calls from my volunteer Toni, helped me mentally and physically during the pandemic. Now I am feeling more like myself." – Ms. Kim, Telephone Reassurance Program Participant*



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Volunteers are needed in Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Volusia and St. Johns counties.



# ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

## Market Insight



### A Coke and a smile

By Scott Grant  
ScottGrant@StJohnsBusinessMonthly.com

At the height of the Great Depression, whole families were uprooted. Many wandered, seemingly aimlessly, about the country searching for work. They were indescribably poor. They were dirty and hungry and despondent. Some days, a 10-cent candy bar served as a meal for an entire family. A five-cent bottle of Coca Cola was a luxury. Even so, people still spent that five cents and indulged themselves. Sometimes you just have to spoil yourself.

At least one man noticed this phenomenon. He was a banker in Quincy, Fla. named Pat Munroe. He marveled at the fact that dirt poor farmers in his small hometown still seemed to have the money for the occasional Coke. He also marveled at the relatively cheap price of Coke stock. At the time, a single share went for \$19. The company had more money than that in the bank. He urged his customers to invest in the stock, even if it was just a single share.

“Mr. Pat” was a trusted member of the community. He was their banker. They relied on him for the loans that allowed them to plant each spring. Quincy is a little town northwest of Tallahassee. The population was about 3,800 during the Great Depression and about 7,000 today. The principal crop back then was tobacco. Some of Pat Munroe’s customers took his advice and bought what stock they could. Never a lot. Who had the money back then?

The investment paid off, probably even far beyond the wildest dreams of the town’s trusted banker and his following. Over the years, Coca-Cola stock grew and grew and then grew some more. The price went up. The dividends went up. Eventually, Quincy, Fla., named after President John

Quincy Adams, became the wealthiest city in America. At one time, the town boasted 67 “Coca-Cola Millionaires.”

A single share of Coke stock, purchased for \$19 in the 1930s would now be worth more than half a million dollars — more than \$10 million if you had reinvested the dividends. This year you would get more than \$15,000 a year in dividends alone. Even better, that dividend has gone up every year for the past 57 years. Not bad for a \$19 investment.

The good citizens of Quincy were not the only ones to benefit. SunTrust Bank was the underwriter of the initial public offering of Coca-Cola stock way back in 1919. The bank was paid \$100,000 of Coke stock for their troubles. A little over a decade later, the value of the stock had been cut in half. Many people might have panicked and sold. Cut their losses. SunTrust did not. They held the stock certificates in a vault for decades. Another vault at the bank held the secret formula for Coca-Cola.

In 2012, SunTrust finally sold those shares for nearly two billion dollars. The return on investment was nearly two million percent! Now, that may sound like a great deal — but the value of that stock has gone up another billion dollars since they sold.

*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](mailto:scottg@standfastic.com).*

## SBA announces opening of Paycheck Protection Program direct forgiveness portal

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

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) is launching a streamlined application portal to allow borrowers with Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans \$150,000 or less through participating lenders to apply for forgiveness directly through the SBA.

“The SBA’s new streamlined application portal will simplify forgiveness for millions of our smallest businesses — including many sole proprietors — who used funds from our Paycheck Protection Program loans to survive the pandemic,” said Administrator Isabel Casillas Guzman. “The vast majority of businesses waiting for forgiveness have loans under \$150,000.”

This new change will help rush relief to more than 6.5 million small businesses. The new forgiveness platform began accepting applications from borrowers on Aug. 4. Lenders are required to opt-in to this program through <https://directforgiveness.sba.gov>. In addition to the technology platform, the SBA is standing up a PPP customer service team to answer questions and directly assist borrowers with their forgiveness applications. Borrowers that need assistance or have questions should call

(877) 552-2692, Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 8 p.m. EST.

Overall, the SBA and lenders have worked to originate more than 11.7 million loans totaling nearly \$800 billion in relief to more than 8.5 million small businesses. In 2021:

- SBA approved more than 6.5 million loans totaling more than \$275 billion
- The average loan size was \$42 thousand (compared to \$101 thousand in 2020)
- 96 percent of loans went to businesses with fewer than 20 employees (compared to just 87 percent in 2020.)
- 32 percent of loans went to businesses in LMI communities (compared to just 24 percent in 2020)

Established by the CARES Act in 2020, the PPP was among the first COVID-19 small business economic aid programs and provided more than \$798 billion in economic relief to small businesses and nonprofits across the nation.

Visit [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov) for more information.

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## ST. JOHNS Business Monthly



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## Briefs

### ElderSource seeks St. Johns County representation for advisory council

ElderSource, a nonprofit organization that works to empower elders, adults with disabilities and their caregivers in order to age with dignity and independence, is seeking volunteer members to its Advisory Council, specifically seniors who reside in St. Johns County.

Duties for an Advisory Council member are to report on the needs of elderly and emerging issues in their respective counties; review and comment on the agency's Area Plan; study legislative issues and advocate on behalf of the elderly; assist in promoting the mission, programs and activities of the agency; and to educate the public about the needs and the contributions of the elderly.

"Our Advisory Council members are an important asset to our organization," said Linda Levin, CEO of ElderSource. "They are an active voice we need to hear in order for us to stay in touch on the senior issues affecting the communities in which they live."

Meetings are held the third Thursday of every other month from 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. and conducted virtually using the Zoom platform.

For more information about how to become an ElderSource Advisory Council member, call (904) 391-6631 or email Volunteer Coordinator Anita Thaxton at Anita.Thaxton@MyElderSource.org.

### Nemours opens new walk-in orthopedics and sports medicine location

Families in Nocatee and North St. Johns County now have even more immedi-

ate access to expert orthopedic care from Nemours Children's Health. Answering the need for pediatric orthopedics in one of the fastest-growing, family-focused communities in the nation, the Nemours clinic at Baptist HealthPlace at Nocatee offers appointments for a variety of orthopedic conditions. It also serves walk-in patients for orthopedic injury care, improving access to timely, specialized orthopedic services — just for children and adolescents — outside the hospital or emergency room setting.

"With so many active, young families in this geographic area, there was a need for an easily-accessible orthopedic injury care clinic," said Eric Loveless, MD, Chairman of Orthopaedics for Nemours Children's Health in Jacksonville. "We are committed to working with communities and families to ensure we create the healthiest future generations of children. This new clinic ensures that more children will have the critical orthopedic care they need even more quickly."

The new clinic can serve pediatric patients with urgent injuries and sports injuries with the Sports Medicine Team helping with general orthopedic care, bone and joint injuries, dislocations, durable medical equipment, casting, fractures, sprains and strains, and sports injuries. It also provides on-site imaging services for faster diagnosis and treatment. Visit [www.nemours.org](http://www.nemours.org) for hours and more information.

### COA's Ponte Vedra Memory Care Center now reopened

St. Johns County Council on Aging (COA) held the grand reopening of their Ponte

Vedra Memory Care Center at 1048 A1A N. in Ponte Vedra Beach on Aug. 17. The reopening comes after a closure of more than a year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Founded by COA in 2015, the center offers COA's groundbreaking IMEP™ program which serves individuals experiencing memory loss and symptoms of dementia, Alzheimer's and other forms of brain trauma. The IMEP™ program, which stands for Integrative Memory Enhancement Program, is an original, research-based program developed by COA to minimize the progression of memory loss and dementia. It offers a structured curriculum of fun, engaging group activities designed to boost cognitive reserve and provide crucial opportunities for stimulation and socialization.

In addition to its benefits for participants, the IMEP program is also a valuable resource for caregivers and family members. The program offers a welcome respite for caregivers, who often struggle to care for themselves or accomplish the smallest everyday tasks.

The five-hour IMEP™ program will be offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. at the Ponte Vedra Memory Care Center. Lunch is served daily during the five-hour program, prepared by Vicar's Landing. Both the five-hour program and the two-hour IMEP "Memory Module" program are also offered by COA in St. Augustine at Anastasia Baptist Church.

Contact Myra Fisher at (904) 209-3700 or [mfisher@coasjc.org](mailto:mfisher@coasjc.org) or visit [www.coasjc.org/imepsjc/](http://www.coasjc.org/imepsjc/) for more information or to register.

### First Coast Cultural Center begins new school year

First Coast Cultural Center (formerly The Cultural Center at Ponte Vedra Beach) has served the community for more than 26 years as a gathering place to learn, experience, and appreciate the arts and culture in its many forms. The nonprofit 501(c)(3) provides opportunities for adults, children and families through classes, exhibits, programs, services, activities, and memberships open to the local community, and beyond.

First Coast Cultural Center is starting its 16th year of music therapy for children with special needs. Sound Connections® Music Therapy has expanded from four St. Johns County schools to six, including two Title 1 schools. The outreach is provided at no cost to the school district or parents, and three nationally-board certified music therapists use music experiences to help children reach their educational goals. The expansion is supported by the Delores Barr Weaver Legacy Fund and The Community Foundation of Northeast Florida. Additionally, Sound Connections® private music therapy sessions are available. Contact board-certified music therapist, Minda Gordon MT-BC at (904) 993-8940 or email [MGordon@ccpvb.org](mailto:MGordon@ccpvb.org). Visit the website at <https://firstcoastculturalcenter.org/arts-outreach/outreach-programs>.

**Briefs** cont. on pg. 11



## Hip or knee pain?

### 5 symptoms you shouldn't ignore

You like to stay active, but sometimes hip or knee pain gets in the way. How do you know when it's time to see a doctor?

The experts at Jacksonville Orthopaedic Institute (JOI) offer **innovative new options** to relieve your pain and get you back to doing the things you love.

If you have any of these symptoms, you could be making your hip or knee worse by waiting:

- 1 Unable to maintain an active lifestyle
- 2 Pain that gets worse at night and interferes with sleep
- 3 Catching, popping or locking
- 4 Difficulty putting on shoes and socks
- 5 Swelling

**Why live with hip or knee pain?**  
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## Get to Know ...

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps  
mail@floridanewline.com

### Benny Chen

Benny Chen learned the value of hard work and dedication at a young age by watching his mother work overnight shifts in a New York clothing factory. Chen's father had been severely injured in a car accident and was not able to work, so his mother provided for the family. That family work ethic left a lasting imprint on Chen, one that led him to open two I Noodle Ramen and Dumpling restaurants in St. Johns County; however, his journey began first in Southern China where he was born, but then drastically changed when he moved with his family as a teenager to the United States in 2000. It was not an easy transition to move to New York. "I tried to go to school, but I was always getting in a lot of fights because they did not like Asian people at all in the area where we lived. I looked different. I was trying to learn a new language. It was all very difficult," said Chen. Instead of school, Chen helped his mom by taking his first job as a waiter at the Great Wall China Buffet, located in Kansas City (a 36-hour bus ride). Chen worked there for eight months. After that job, Chen took a series of jobs that ultimately led to owning a cell phone store. Everything changed when he was robbed at gunpoint in 2007, losing everything in the store. It was at this time that Chen turned his focus back to the restaurant industry, his love of cooking and his desire to learn as many kitchen skills and as much English as he could. He found this on-the-job training at Fushimi in



Photo courtesy Benny Chen  
Benny Chen with his wife, Zoe Zhou.

New York. He worked 16 hours a day as a busser, trying to improve his culinary skills. He was quickly promoted to food server, dessert maker and captain of the bussers. He eventually went to work for other restaurants in Manhattan and Long Island with a goal of becoming a manager. Chen accomplished this goal and, during this time, met his wife, Zoe Zhou. Together they run the I Noodle businesses with plans to open more throughout Florida, preserving recipes that Chen can trace back to his grandfather.

**Q: How did you and your family end up in Ponte Vedra Beach?**

A: I came here to help a friend with what was then Pacific Fusion (now Kamiya 86). I fell in love with Ponte Vedra Beach and knew that I had to move my family to this area. We moved here in the summer of 2015. We knew that we wanted to open a restaurant, and we thought that a ramen, dumpling, poke bowl and boba tea place would be well-received. The boba appeals to a younger market and allows us to introduce these customers to the restaurant.

**Q: What was the most challenging part of opening both restaurants?**

A: Ensuring the quality of the food we serve. We make everything from scratch. When we opened the Ponte Vedra Beach I Noodle on April 27, 2019, it was just me, Zoe and my now 18-year-old son. We decided to try it out, and, if we had success, then we would open a second location. Then Covid hit. We had to pause for four to five months, and then we got started on our second location off County Road 210 West (opened July 8, 2021). Again, we focused on quality, not quantity, with the food and listening to customer feedback.

**Q: What was the hardest item to perfect on the menu?**

A: The dough. The water to flour ratio is very difficult to perfect, and the humidity here really makes it hard. I tried 10 – 15 different flours before I found the right one. I learned how to make authentic noodles and dumplings from my uncle who learned from my grandfather in China. The greatest compliment that I can receive is an empty bowl after a meal is eaten at our restaurants.

**Q: What type of food do you like to eat when you are not cooking?**

A: I like to try all different types of restaurants for the experience and for inspiration. My family loves seafood, but we eat everything. Our favorite restaurant is a seafood place in China. We also enjoy cooking at home a lot. My son (Zikang which means "health", his English name is Zakary) and daughter (Audrey, 6) both love dumplings.

**Q: Do you have a life motto?**

A: Family comes first. I am working to create a better life for my children.

**Pineapple** cont. from pg. 1

Awards include surprising the winners who represent:

- Hospitality Lifetime Legend
- Specialty Food Originator
- Rising Gold Star
- Restaurant Pioneer
- Lifetime Celebrated Chef
- Creative Business Architect
- Golden Inspiration
- Hospitality Pillar
- Miss Congeniality

Announcing the winners this year is Mr. Henry Flagler, a legend of hospitality, portrayed by John Stavely. The Golden Pineapple Award sponsors include Culhane's Irish Pub, 5 Sisters Spirit Vodka and Visit Jacksonville!

For women who are interested in learning more about membership and background of the Womens Food Alliance, contact founder and president, Leigh Cort, at leigh@leighcort-publicity.com or (904) 806-3613. Visit [www.WomensFoodAlliance.com](http://www.WomensFoodAlliance.com) for more information.

### Get to Know ...

Interested in being featured? Email Martie Thompson at [editor@FloridaNewsLine.com](mailto:editor@FloridaNewsLine.com)

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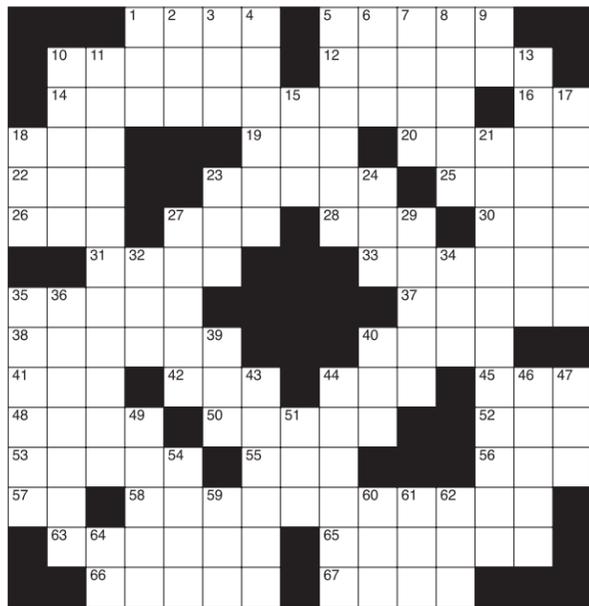
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# Puzzles

Answers on page 3  
Provided by MetroCreative



### CLUES ACROSS

1. Religion native to some in China
5. Nursemaids
10. Coats a porous surface
12. Garment of long cloth
14. Containing a broader message
16. University of Dayton
18. Patti Hearst's captors
19. Insane
20. Bristlelike structures in invertebrates
22. Taxi
23. Trainee
25. Comedian Carvey
26. Some couples say it
27. Belong to he
28. High schoolers' test
30. Young goat
31. You drive on one
33. Denotes a time long ago
35. Space between two surfaces
37. By and by

38. A way to sell
40. A line left by the passage of something
41. Indicates near
42. Where wrestlers compete
44. Prosecutors
45. Body part
48. Soluble ribonucleic acid
50. Indicates silence
52. NFL's Newton
53. Ancient Roman garments
55. Drunkard
56. Expression of satisfaction
57. Thus
58. Noisy viper
63. Plants of a particular region
65. Communicated with
66. Latches a window
67. Swarm with

### CLUES DOWN

1. Split pulses
2. Brew
3. Ask humbly
4. Distinctive smells
5. Digressions
6. Partner to cheese
7. Father of Araithyrea
8. Made a cavity
9. Tin
10. Appetizer
11. Presenting in detail
13. Compound in guano and fish scales
15. Cool!
17. "\_\_\_ than a doornail"
18. Popular literary form \_\_\_ fi
21. Be the most remarkable
23. "Final Fantasy" universe character
24. Buffer solution
27. Muslim physician using traditional remedies
29. Fantastical planet
32. S. American plant
34. Domesticated animal
35. The tops of mountains
36. Expression of disapproval
39. Skeletal muscle
40. Game show host Sajak
43. One's interests
44. Identify the existence of
46. Partner to "oohed" (abbr.)
47. Does not accept medical help (abbr.)
49. Hammerin' Hank
51. Lowest point of a ridge between two peaks
54. Elaborately draped garment
59. Check
60. Car mechanics group
61. One point east (clockwise) of due north
62. Austrian river
64. A command to list files

## WILDERNESS WORD SEARCH

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

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

### WORDS

- ACCESSORY
- BACKCOUNTRY
- BACKPACK
- BIVOAC
- BOOTS
- CAMPSITE
- CARABINER
- CORD
- FIELD
- FOOTPRINT
- GEAR
- GIARDIA
- GROUNDSHEET
- HYPOTHERMIA
- LANDSCAPE
- LANTERN
- LAYERING
- NAVIGATION
- ORIENTEERING
- PEAK
- RIVER
- RUCKSACK
- SKI
- TRACKS

## CRYPTO FUN

☉ ☼ ☽ ☿ ♀ ♁ ♃ ♄ ♅ ♆ ♇ ♈ ♉ ♊ ♋ ♌ ♍ ♎ ♏ ♐ ♑ ♒ ♓  
 A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z  
**CRYPTO FUN**  
 ☼ ☽ ☿ ♀ ♁ ♃ ♄ ♅ ♆ ♇ ♈ ♉ ♊ ♋ ♌ ♍ ♎ ♏ ♐ ♑ ♒ ♓  
 Determine the code to reveal the answer!

Solve the code to discover words related to the wilderness.  
 Each number corresponds to a letter.  
 (Hint: 14 = E)

- A. 5 19 11 25 5 7 15**  
Clue: Outdoor creatures
- B. 8 2 9 14 15 1**  
Clue: Woods
- C. 19 5 1 23 9 14**  
Clue: Plants, animals and landscape
- D. 14 24 20 7 2 9 14**  
Clue: Look around

## Nutrition Check

## Food Safety Education Month

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

Food safety helps to prevent foodborne illness and injury; it includes the process from food preparation to food handling to food storage. As the weather turns cooler and you begin to have barbecues and get-togethers, it is important to ensure that your food is safe that you are serving people. Food safety can best be remembered as the "Four C's": clean, contain, cook, and chill.

**Clean:** It is important to clean your hands for at least 20 seconds using soapy water. You can hum the "Happy Birthday" song to ensure you wash your hands thoroughly. Next, you want to clean all surfaces that will be used

in food preparation and while handing food. Surfaces may include cutting boards, counter tops, and cooking utensils.

**Contain:** Containment is ultimately used to prevent cross contamination. The best way to remember it is keeping all cutting boards and cooking utensils separate for raw meat and seafood, and all other ingredients. This ensures that no foodborne pathogens contaminate your cooking area or your meal.

**Cook:** Follow the USDA guidelines for minimum cooking temperatures for meat, poultry, seafood, and other cooked foods. You can always use a food ther-

mometer to check!

Food Safety Chart (<https://www.foodsafety.gov/food-safety-charts/safe-minimum-cooking-temperature>)

**Chill:** Once your meal is cooked, make sure that you keep it at the appropriate temperature. Hot food should stay hot and cold food should stay cold. Try to not leave perishable food out for more than 2 hours.

*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.*

Food	Type	Internal Temperature (°F)
Ground meat	Beef, pork, veal, lamb	160°
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**School** cont. from pg. 1  
 day number for the new high school, Toco Creek, was 1,281. There were also 221 students in attendance at St. Johns Technical High School.



First grade students enter Pine Island Academy on the first day of school.

Middle school attendance totaled 6,869, with student headcounts ranging from 676 at Sebastian Middle School to 1,301 at Pacetti Bay Middle School. The other first day figures were Alice B. Landrum Middle School with 1,162, Fruit Cove Middle School with 1,083, R. J. Murray Middle School with 563, Gamble Rogers Middle School with 835, and Switzerland Point Middle School with 1,249.

The district's K-8 schools totaled 9,398. Liberty Pines Academy had a first day headcount of 1,289, Patriot Oaks Academy with 1,153, Valley Ridge Academy with 1,136; Freedom Crossing Academy with 1,937, Palm Valley Academy with 1,358, Mill Creek Academy with 1,556 and new district's new K-8, Pine Island Academy, with 969.

Pine Island Academy had its share of traffic congestion the first week, but according to Principal Amanda Riedl, the whopping one hour and 15 minutes required for dismissal the first day decreased by 20 minutes per day so that by the third day, dismissal was much more efficient.

"I have the most amazing Dolphin Team that leads alongside me, and I could not have ever made this journey

without them," Riedl said. "The most exciting part has been the energy in the school and community. Although we are still working on the details, our focus of building relationships has made the first few days memorable for all."

The elementary school population totaled 11,282. This count only includes approximately 25 percent of all kindergarten students since schools stagger the kindergarten start date over a four-day period.

"The hard work and dedication from administration, teachers and support staff to make opening day the very best was impressive," said Superintendent Tim Forson. "As I visited schools it was wonderful to see the excitement of students as they entered the buildings eager to learn, engage with friends, and get acquainted with their teachers."

St. Johns County School District staff will continue to monitor attendance numbers, balance classrooms and refine bus routes throughout the coming weeks.





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# Nease cadets complete summer leadership training

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewsline.com

Nease NJROTC, the No. 1 program in northern Florida and the state of Georgia, and the No. 2 ranked program in the nation, strengthened its high-performing cadet leadership ranks as cadets completed significant training programs held across the country.

From June 9 – 17, Kaitlyn Boggs, Gabrielle Espedido, Olivia Kerrick, Bernadine Olivier, Isabella Rivera and Harley Shuster successfully completed Florida Girls State in Tallahassee.

From June 20 – 26, Juan Cervantes, Donovan Chapman, Christopher Debus, Nate Fagen, Khush Gandhi, Daniel Mahoney, Brodie Mongon and Ben Prohofska successfully completed the Florida Boys State program in Tallahassee. Cadet Fagen was elected as Attorney General



Nease NJROTC instructors and cadets completed the Area-12 Leadership Academy in Duluth, Ga.: GYSGT Duane Hanson, Cadets Braden Holmes, Nicholas Gallego, Peter Lemos, Anthony Tucker, John Alves, Hallie Spell, Isabella Rivera, Kaitlyn Boggs, Lauren Villarreal and Captain Scott LaRochelle.

and Cadet Gandhi was elected as Agriculture Commissioner.

From June 21 – 26, Cadets John Alves, Nicholas Gallego, Braden Holmes, Peter Lemos, Emmelie Neff, Anthony Tucker and Lauren Villarreal completed the week-long intensive academic, physical fitness, drill and leadership training at Duluth High School in north Georgia. Cadets Alves, Gallego and Holmes received

medals for outstanding Personnel Inspection; Gallego also received the outstanding Physical Fitness medal and Holmes received the top Academic medal. Senior cadets Kaitlyn Boggs, Isabella Rivera and Hallie Spell provided weeklong leader-

ship as cadre providing hands-on training to the 26 trainees from six different schools.

From June 28 – July 2, Cadet Braden Holmes attended the U.S. Air Force Academy Advanced Cyber Camp in Huntsville, Ala. Holmes serves as the captain for Nease's CyberPatriot competition team.

Finally, from July 11 – 16, Cadets Kaitlyn Boggs and Isabella Rivera participated and graduated from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy Introduction Mission program in New London, Conn. Cadet Rivera received the award for top female athlete among the 250 trainees from around the nation.

## PVHS Happenings: Class of 2025 splashes into high school

By Sade Goodridge  
mail@floridanewsline.com

The mood in the gym was filled with anticipation. LINK Crew leaders had formed a winding tunnel, the band stood poised ready to play, and the school dance team, Splash, were frozen with their poms together. This was it. After all the hard work and late nights spent by LINK crew coordinator, Katie Conklin and her associates, it had finally culminated on Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2021.

"They're here!" Everyone in the gym heard called from the entrance. Smiles appeared on faces, hands almost touched ready to clap, and the first rising freshman walked in causing the gym to erupt with noise. This was Freshmen Fest.

What is LINK Crew? LINK Crew is an organization, sponsored by Ullman Wealth Partners, that connects the current freshmen class with upperclassmen. Activities are held throughout the year, specifically designed to make the freshmen feel at home. One of the biggest events LINK Crew puts on is Freshmen

Fest. It is a one-day program where incoming freshmen receive a crash course on what high school is all about. They can receive their lockers and advice from their upperclassmen LINK Crew leaders. This year's Freshmen Fest had an attendance of 372 freshmen, about 82 percent of the incoming class.

Annaliza, a rising freshman, genuinely enjoyed the experience.

"I hadn't been to the [high school] campus before, so it was helpful to know the layout and get a general idea of where my classes are going to be," she said.

Another freshman, Ian, even shared that attending Freshmen Fest has inspired him to join LINK Crew himself when the time comes.

Although the sudden resurgence of the coronavirus lingers in the air, the current LINK Crew team has faith that they will still be able to hold fun yet safe events throughout the year. Good luck to the Class of 2025 and Go Sharks!

Sade Goodridge is a student at Ponte Vedra High School.

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# Travel

## Escape to the Mountains: Blue Ridge, Georgia

By Debi Lander  
mail@floridanewslines.com



Photos courtesy Debi Lander  
Mountain view from Mercier Orchards.

The railroad's arrival in 1886 brought the sleepy little town of Blue Ridge, Ga., to life. Located about 90 minutes north of Atlanta, Blue Ridge continued to grow and today, the gem offers refined yet rustic appeal. It's a welcoming place for a getaway to a cabin in the woods or a luxury downtown condo.

Over the years, railroad traffic decreased, so the city decided to save the train. Blue Ridge's own Scenic Railway makes just one run a day. The hour-long trip takes passengers to the developing river-town of McCaysville. Adults love riding in vintage cars, but kids prefer the open-air ones. The tracks run through the Chattahoochee National Forest and alongside the Toccoa River, where you'll likely see fishermen and people tubing along.

Before the train returns, passengers enjoy lunch and shopping in McCaysville and the adjacent town, Copperhill, Tenn. Be sure to take a quirky photo straddling the Georgia/Tennessee state line.

Fly fishing reigns big in Blue Ridge, the Trout Capital of the state. Coldwater streams provide ideal conditions for the fish. The catch and release rules help sustain the environment. If you need equipment or a fly fishing lesson, stop by Cohutta Outfitters. I did and signed up for a guided session that even included waders. My pro soon had me casting a line in an idyllic mountain stream.

In 1930, Blue Ridge acquired a lake when the dam was built for hydropower. You'll find a mix of log cabins and luxury homes overlooking the 11-mile long crystal clear beauty.

Many make popular vacation rentals while the marina offers pontoon boat rentals, ideal for cruising with family and friends. For a more energetic outing, rent a kayak or canoe.

Hikers and bikers take to the mountains on more than 300 miles of trails. The North Georgia area features 16 photo-worthy waterfalls.

An actual vacation means dining out, and Blue Ridge presents plenty of options. Pick from casual, down-home eateries to white tablecloth gourmet meals. Try the Fighting-town Tavern or Masseria Kitchen and Bar for casual dining. A gala evening might start with cocktails overlooking downtown from the new Hampton Inn rooftop bar. Then walk to indulge in a luscious repast at Black Sheep and perhaps an after dinner drink at Whiskey and Water.

Fun afternoons and evenings call for a stop into Grumpy Old Men, an authentic local brewery and hangout. Those who prefer wine can check out the lovely grounds of Bear Claw or Serenberry Vineyards. Shopping on Main Street brings surprises you don't find in chain stores. Look for country furniture and accessories, outdoor attire, boutique clothing, art galleries, antiques, and specialty gift shops.

Get a free trip app at Visit Blue Ridge, GA. The drive from Jacksonville to Blue Ridge is about seven hours.

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

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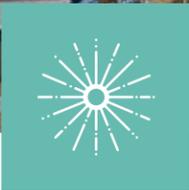
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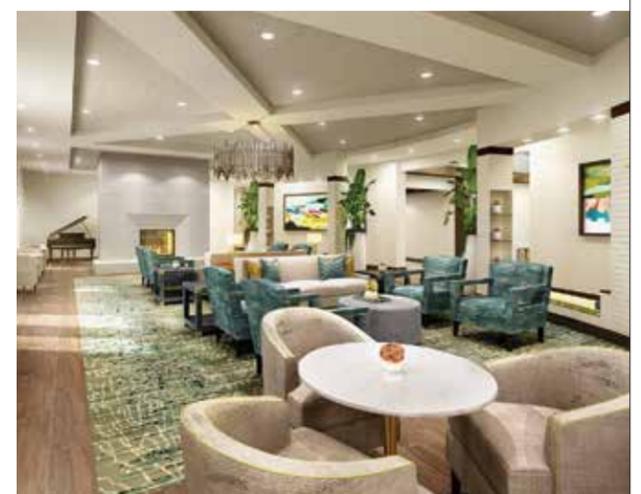
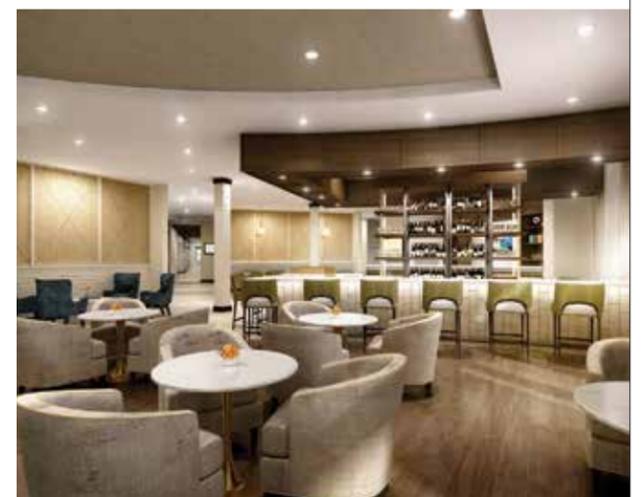
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