

Ponte Vedra NewsLine

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

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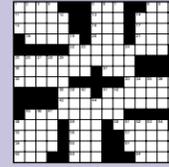
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Photo courtesy Charlotte King
Tai Chi human chain.

Schools celebrate Lunar New Year

By Sade Goodridge
mail@floridanewslines.com

Xin Nián Kuài Lè! Happy New Year from Ponte Vedra High School and Landrum Middle School! For the past month, both schools have participated in Lunar New Year — the Year of the Tiger — through events such as learning the discipline of Tai Chi and writing Chinese couplets. Lunar New Year, also known as the Spring Festival, is celebrated on the first day of the lunar calendar. Since the lunar calendar is based on the cycles of the moon, the dates of this holiday vary between January 21 and February 20 in Western calendars. This year,

Schools celebrate cont. on pg. 10

Changing faces, transforming lives

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewslines.com

Ponte Vedra Beach resident Scarlett Carson was in the third grade when she underwent her third brain surgery, leaving her face swollen, bruised and throbbing. During her recovery in New York City and in an attempt to get fresh air, she reluctantly attended a myFace gala held at the Central Park Zoo (shut down for the occasion) where others with facial differences were also in attendance. myFace is a non-profit organization dedicated to changing the faces and transforming the lives of children and adults with facial differences.

That moment of inclusion in 2014 impacted Carson deeply.

“I realized that I was not alone. I saw love and compassion from everyone around me. I realized how very lucky I am,” said Carson, now 17.

Today Carson is a myFace Ambassador, sits on the NYU Langone Sala Institute Youth Advisory Council and plans to help start a local support group. Her journey to this point has been a long one filled with 14 surgeries, long painful recoveries and time spent away from friends and family. Yet, she still sees a purpose.



Photos courtesy Suzette Carson

Scarlett Carson at a Ponte Vedra High School fundraiser for myFace, sponsored by the school's cross country team.

“All of this has taught me that I love helping people,” said Carson, a Ponte Vedra High School junior. “It is my past. It will always be who I am, but I am ready now to move on and help other people through these same struggles.”

Carson was born with craniosynostosis and was diagnosed when she was around two months old. It is a condition in which one or more of the fibrous joints between the bones of the baby's skull (known as sutures) prematurely fuses before the brain is fully formed. As the baby's brain grows, the skull can become misshapen. Carson's mother, Suzette, knew that something was wrong when she noticed that Scarlett's forehead bulged, one eye socket was lifted and she had a nose tilt.

At five months old, Scarlett had her first brain surgery in 2005 at Wolfson Children's Hospital. One year later, she was still having headaches, severe nose bleeds, short-term memory loss, vision issues and had facial differences.

“We knew in our gut that something was wrong,” said Suzette Carson, who has four other children with husband Cleigh.

In 2008, the Carsons found a new path in the most unlikely place. Cleigh Carson was coaching his son's baseball team when two dads asked him if Scarlett had

myFace cont. on pg. 11



Scarlett Carson with her mother, Suzette, during one of her hospital stays.

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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Ginger!



- BREED:**
Calico
- FAVORITE ACTIVITY:**
Watching the squirrels from her window perch
- FAVORITE TREAT:**
Pumpkin seeds
- FAVORITE FRIEND:**
Her mom and the squirrel
- HOW MY BFF GOT HER NAME:**
From a character on Gilligan's Island

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.com to enter your pet.

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ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Are you interested in promoting your business in St. Johns Business Monthly, a feature section included in both The CreekLine and Ponte Vedra NewsLine? Call Linda 904-607-5062

MYSTERY PHOTO

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

Last month's Mystery Photo was the outdoor patio area of Traylor Park in Nocatee Town Center. Our winner was Kathryn Rogers.

Answers to our Puzzles PG 10

CRYPTO FUN

Determine the code to reveal the answer!

Answers: A. spring B. mild C. flower D. blooming

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March

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

Community Calendar

Council on Aging offers interest groups at the COA Center at Flagler Health+ Village at Nocatee. Meetings are free and self-guided except for the Caregiver's Support Group. Advance registration for clubs and meetings is required; email pbrunell@Stjohnscoa.com or call (904) 819-3234. Tuesday clubs include: Caregiver Support Group, 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.; and Widows and Widowers social group, second and fourth Tuesday of each month, 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Wednesday groups include: Community Crafting, 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.; and Genealogy Group, 1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

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

The Newcomers Alumnae monthly luncheon with annual fashion show will be held on Wednesday, March 2 at 11 a.m. at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Parkway. This year's theme is "A Twist of Lemon" and clothes will be provided by Lemon Twist Boutique of Sawgrass Village. The cost of the luncheon is \$23; email bartshar@comcast.net as soon as possible to reserve a seat. Visit newcomersalumnae.wildapricot.org

for more information or to become a member.

The Friends of the Ponte Vedra Beach Library present Mandalla, a four-piece band from Jacksonville on Tuesday, March 8 at the library. They perform a wide range of musical styles from Latin to the top 40 hits and the band members are musical experts with more than 40 years of combined experience. The program starts at 6:30 p.m. and doors open at 6 p.m. The program is free to the public.

The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable will meet on Monday, March 14 at 12 p.m. via Zoom. Vice Chair of the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners Christian Whitehurst will be the guest speaker. Email info@sjcroundtable.org to register for the meeting or visit www.sjcroundtable.org for more information about the St. Johns County Civic Roundtable.

Ponte Vedra Democratic Club will meet on Tuesday, March 15 at 6 p.m. for Chat & Chew before the 6:30 p.m. meeting at Christ Episcopal Church, Room 106, 400 San Juan Road. The featured speaker will be Ed Warren, Ponte Vedra Democratic Club vice president, who will discuss the topic "Vote Your Pocketbook." Email janetkary@gmail.com

for more information.

The Friends of the Ponte Vedra Beach Library will host freelance nature and wildlife photographer Eloy Castroverde to speak on Tuesday, March 15, at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Castroverde loves to discover exotic sites and the challenge of creating a great photo, even when he can not control the weather or the subject. His photography trips have taken him across the US and to countries such as Puerto Rico, Panama, Japan, Honduras and Ecuador. The program starts at 6:30 p.m. and doors open at 6 p.m. The program is free to the public.

Ponte Vedra Woman's Club will hold its March General Meeting on March 16 from 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. At Southern Kitchen + Bar in Jacksonville Beach. The meeting will feature Linda M. Forte, Certified Financial Planner practitioner. Register for this event at www.pontevedrawomansclub.com.

The Savvy Job Hunters Ministry Zoom Workshop, "Putting Your Professional Package Together and Preparing for the Interview" will be held on March 18 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Email nwhite@christepiscopalchurch.org to register.

The Jacksonville Gem and Mineral Society will host its 34th annual Gem and Mineral Show and Sale on March 25, 26, and 27 (10 a.m. – 5 p.m.) at the Jacksonville Fair Grounds. The cost is \$5 per day or \$8 for all three days. Visit www.facebook.com/JacksonvilleGemandMineral/ for more information.

GTM Research Reserve will host its monthly Beach Cleanup on Saturday, March 26 from 9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. No registration is required; meet at the Visitor Center, 505 Guana River Road in Ponte Vedra Beach where gloves and trash bags will be provided. Visit gtmnerr.org for more information.

The Newcomers of North St. Johns will host a meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, March 29 beginning at 11:15 a.m. at Alhambra Dinner Theatre, 12000 Beach Blvd. in Jacksonville. The event features lunch and entertainment by the Alhambra Theatre Players. The cost for the luncheon and program is \$35 for members. All reservations must be received by March 18. Contact Sue Aird at sjaird@comcast.net to register. The Newcomers of North St. Johns offers a wide variety of activities, including smaller lunch groups, wine socials, golf, Mah Jongg, holiday parties, day trips and cultural events.



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

Q: As we are closing out this year and looking forward to next year, can you comment on some of the challenges the district has faced over the past two years?

A: We've faced a number of challenges. Schools have been working hard at keeping the fun in the classroom while health protocols are in place. All of our teachers deserve kudos for their hard work at keeping students engaged. We've had to be more creative with communication with parents and families. In the last few weeks, we've seen in many of the School Improvement Plans (SIP) that principals want to develop relationships with students, faculties, staff, and parents. This is important because before teachers and administrators can give students what they need (academically or socially) they need to know them.

It's important to note that even with the many challenges of COVID, due to the dedication of our teachers, administrators, and staff, our district's graduation rate has improved from 93 percent to 95 percent.

Q: Can you share upcoming changes to middle school social studies?

A: As we are working on our master schedule, we are reevaluating how we present middle school social studies. We have a plan that we will implement either next year or the year after: Civics will become the eighth grade capstone for middle school social studies, with World History taught in seventh grade and US History taught in sixth grade. We moved Civics to later so that students will have a firm foundation of World and US history knowledge beforehand.

Q: What addition is coming to District 4 high school career academies and acceleration opportunities?

A: As we continue to grow and with an emphasis on encouraging students to enter the teaching profession, Ponte Ve-

dra High School will have a soft opening for a new teaching academy, Future Educators Academy, next year. The school is also expanding its academic offerings with AP Capstone, which has 60 students already enrolled.

Nease High School is also expanding acceleration opportunities with more dual enrollment and career and technical education.

Q: Do you have any student honors to recognize?

A: We recognized the winners of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. essay and poster contest at our February board meeting. Ponte Vedra High School was well represented in the high school division: Ailani Valencia, first place – poster; Katrina Lukacs, second place – poster; Caleigh Monti, third place – poster; Gregory Constain, second place – essay; and Ella Reister, third place – essay.

Also, Ponte Vedra High School had two winners (they tied) at the district's annual STEM Fair held in February: Emma Chirila ("Alternating Metabolic Pathways to Override Drug Resistance in Cancer") and Andrew Lou ("Developing Anti-CLL-1 and MSLN Immunogens for CAR-T Cell Therapeutic Treatment of AML").

Q: What else do you have to share with District 4?

A: During COVID, we've seen more families looking for more resources, such as mental health, primary care, emergency dental, insurance help, and prescriptions. The St. Johns County School District is partnered with Flagler Health+ to provide CareConnect+ to address these needs. Families can visit www.careconnectplus.com for more information. To date, we have served more than 1,000 youth with this partnership.

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.



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

Q. We've seen a lot of news coverage lately about scams involving governmental entities including the Clerk of Courts. What's going on?

A. There are at least two active scams in which the scammer claims to represent the St. Johns County Clerk of Courts office. The first is a jury duty scam, in which the swindler pretends to be law enforcement or a clerk and claims that you've missed jury duty and must make immediate payment to avoid penalties. In some cases, the scammer indicates a warrant has been issued for your arrest and requests personal information, such as Social Security number and date of birth, for verification. Some scammers seek payment for failure to appear for jury duty.

In another con, the scammer sends a text message suggesting that you failed to pay a fine or fee and your balance

has gone to collections. The scammer wants you to click on a link to get your balance or to respond to the text.

Q. What do residents need to know to protect themselves?

A. First, the St. Johns County Clerk of Courts will never request personal information from you via email, telephone or text. We will not contact you by email, text or phone to elicit payment. Our clerks do not go door-to-door.

Regarding the jury duty scam, when residents don't respond to a summons for jury duty, they are contacted through an official letter from the St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller sent through the U.S. Postal Service. Failure to appear for jury duty requires

Q&A with Brandon Patty cont. on pg. 9



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Carolina Wren



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with St. Johns County Sheriff
Rob Hardwick

Q: What are your top priorities for the Sheriff's Office?

A: We just finished our strategic planning within our office, something we do annually to stay current, and we identified three priorities. The first one is to build and move into a facility for our Operations and General Services departments. We pride ourselves on delivering superior customer service to the citizens of St. Johns County, but we also want to have efficiency and be a nice place to work. The second is closely tied to the first, and that is to continue to prioritize compensation and benefits for all St. Johns County Sheriff's Office employees. We need to pay them adequately so they can afford to work, live and play in St. Johns County. Finally, refurbishing and expanding our jail — to prepare for the county's growth as well as provide the additional services required by our inmate population — will allow us to continue our mission to have people leave us in better shape than when they came.

Q: Can you give more details as to why a new sheriff's office is needed?

A: Currently, our departments that are housed outside of the new Training and Communications Center (off Interstate 95) are located in five buildings as well as assorted smaller buildings spread throughout the county — and, in addition to many of these buildings being older, none of them were designed to handle the work of the Sheriff's Office. For instance, our Youth Resources, Traffic, and Internet Crimes Against Children departments are housed in the old jail, built in 1953. The Office of the Sheriff and our Community Engagement Division are located in the old Wise potato chip building. Our Risk Management and Human Resources departments are housed in a building that originally was occupied by the county's medical examiner. Also, all these buildings had to be evacuated during recent hurricanes, which although we are grateful to our partner Ring Power, which allowed us to use its building, is not an ideal situation for the Sheriff's Office.

Q: What would the new office contain and where do you think it would be located?

A: The new building would contain the Operations Department (including Criminal Investigations) as well as General Services (including records, finance, risk division, IT, fleet, and the Office of the Sheriff). We would have office space for our command level team and the building would have space to allow us to hold meetings with the community. It would have to be a Category 5 building so that we don't have to evacuate in the event of a hurricane. We would possibly be able to locate this on the property where our new Training and Communications Center is located and we believe, based on current construction costs, that it would cost in the neighborhood of \$40 million – \$50 million.

Q: What would happen to the old buildings that you currently occupy?

A: If we can move the Sheriff's Offices out of the area, that would give us available real estate near the courthouse (which is mandatory) and the current jail to refurbish, expand, and connect to the current jail so it would all be one cohesive facility. Currently, we are occupying a jail built in 1986 (that replaced the 1953 jail) as well as four additional housing pods built in 1992, which bring our total beds in a piecemeal facility to 664. (Renovations were also done in 2010 and 2012 that added additional administrative space and the Community Work Release Center.) There are a lot of pieces to the puzzle as to how we must house inmates (gender/mental health/sentencing status etc.) and we really can't use even our 664 beds efficiently. On top of that, we need to prepare for the growth of the county and the inevitable growth we will experience in our prison population.

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

A: They can email me at sheriff@sjso.org or call me at (904) 824-8304.



with St. Johns County Property Appraiser
Eddie Creamer

Q: What are you busy with at your office this month?

A: Right now, tangible personal property filings are in the forefront since the deadline for businesses to file is April 1.

If you own a business in St. Johns County, whether you own real estate or not, you are required to file a tangible personal property tax return.

This is an ad valorem tax and applied to the value of your business assets like equipment, furniture and computers. Also, if you rent residential property, the furniture, fixtures, and equipment are subject to tangible personal property tax.

Q: How much is the tax?

A: If the value of your business' assets are \$25,000 or less, you are exempt from tangible personal property taxes, but you must still file one time. When you file the

first time, you will be exempted and not have to file again, unless your business assets grow to more than \$25,000. It's very important to file because if you don't file, or file late, there are penalties.

If your business assets are valued at more than \$25,000, the tangible personal property tax is applied at the same millage as real property.

Q: What is the deadline to file the tangible personal property tax return?

A: The deadline is April 1. If you notify our office in advance, we can give a 45-day extension. You can file your tangible personal property tax on paper or online on our website.

Q: What happens if a business doesn't file a tangible personal property tax return?

Q&A with Eddie Creamer cont. on pg. 14





Dr. Jimmy Glenos Dr. Craig Hadgis

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ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Hospital receives national 2021 Press Ganey Guardian of Excellence Award®

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Baptist Medical Center South has been named a 2021 Guardian of Excellence Award® winner by Press Ganey, the national leader in healthcare consumer and workforce engagement.

Press Ganey recognizes top-performing healthcare organizations achieving the 95th percentile or above for performance

in patient experience, which is measured by consumer ratings and how likely they are to recommend the medical center to others.

“Being named a national leader in patient experience is a great honor and something we strive to achieve every day,” said Kyle Dorsey, FACHE, hospital president of Baptist South. “The fact that this award is based on feedback from our patients

makes it especially noteworthy.”

The Press Ganey Guardian of Excellence Award® is a preeminent, competitive achievement for leading healthcare organizations. Presented annually, the award applauds hospitals and health systems that consistently sustained performance in the top 5 percent of all Press Ganey clients.

“Press Ganey is honored to recognize Bap-

tist South as one of the nation’s leaders in patient experience,” said Patrick T. Ryan, chairman and chief executive officer, Press Ganey. “This award reflects an unwavering commitment to earning the trust and loyalty of patients throughout unimaginable challenges. We are humbled by Baptist Health’s incredible efforts, and their ability to adapt to imperatives of COVID-19 on top of the increasing demand for consumerism in healthcare.”

Why mentoring is now a must-have: Nine benefits you can’t afford to ignore

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

As employers know all too well, it’s an employee’s market out there. Thanks to The Great Resignation, a shortage of skilled workers, and economic aftershocks from the pandemic, companies are struggling to hire (and hang on to) workers at a level we haven’t seen in 15 years. Bert Thornton and Dr. Sherry Hartnett say there’s a powerful recruitment and retention tool you may not have considered: mentoring.

“We tend to think of financial incentives first, but money is not always what motivates people,” reflects Thornton, coauthor along with Hartnett of the new book “High-Impact Mentoring: A Practical Guide to Creating Value in Other People’s Lives” (BookLogix, 2021, ISBN: 978-1-6653-0344-6, \$19.95, <https://highimpactmentoringbook.com/>). “We know young people really want to be developed. And we know that right now, people crave strong relationships and a sense of connection. Mentoring is the obvious answer.”

The authors wanted to meet the “huge and ironic need” for savvy leaders to share insights with the multitude of rising high achievers who crave that guidance. It makes sense for companies to bring the two groups together. But first they must know what good mentoring looks like, and they need a way to scale it in the organization. Their book helps on both fronts.

Part 1 is written by Thornton, the former president and COO of Waffle House, who offers “across the table” advice on one-on-one mentoring. Part 2 is written by Hartnett, founding director of the University of West Florida’s Executive Mentor Program, who lays out a framework to help companies put their own program in place.

“High-Impact Mentoring” serves as a blueprint for hardwiring the program into your culture so that every mentee gets a consistent experience every time. (This includes those who might be working remotely—there’s a whole chapter devoted to virtual mentoring.)

“Mentorship doesn’t happen on its own,” says Dr. Hartnett. “Individuals must make a conscious choice to become mentors and learn how to do it well. And companies need to plan and execute a mentorship program that delivers consistent, quality results to all new hires.”

Thornton and Hartnett say a good mentoring program can be the “silver bullet”

that helps you thrive despite the current talent shortage. Consider these nine powerful benefits:

- ◆ Mentoring helps attract and retain talent. Especially in today’s environment of uncertainty and upheaval, companies need a strong team of employees. And it’s just as crucial that, once hired, good people stay on board. A mentoring program shows them there’s a path for advancement inside your company.

“Millennials in particular deeply value training and development,” says Thornton. “By sharing their knowledge and experience with younger employees, mentors help them grow and progress. At the same time, they teach younger people how to navigate challenges specific to their workplace so they are less likely to leave.”

- ◆ It helps new employees hit the ground running a lot faster. We no longer have the luxury of long onboarding periods for new hires. The pace of business requires everyone to become a contributing member of the team almost immediately. Assigning new employees a mentor early on can help expedite progress while helping them avoid pitfalls.

- ◆ A solid mentoring program can help cushion training budget shortfalls. Quite often in times of economic turmoil (like now), training budgets are on the chopping block. Mentors play a huge role in transferring knowledge and vital skills. They are a great source of on-the-job training that costs very little.

- ◆ It sets the stage for the ongoing learning that will be needed in the future. Increasingly, we need our employees to have a “just-in-time” skill set. The education system can’t keep up, and companies will need to ramp up their training to bridge the skills gap. Mentors will likely play a vital role in helping employees perform well while they integrate new learnings.

- ◆ Mentoring helps people weather tough storms. COVID-19 has put incredible stress on leaders and employees. In fact, many organizations have moved beyond stress and into the realm of trauma. By

putting things in perspective (“We’ve lived through other hard times and survived”), providing a safe space for mentees to vent about their stresses and struggles, and sharing coping skills, mentors can go a long way toward helping employees build resilience while easing their loneliness and isolation.

- ◆ It engages employees. Mentoring makes it more likely that people will “lean in” to their work. They’re being challenged to learn new things, so they don’t become complacent.

- ◆ Mentoring sharpens a company’s ability to execute. Companies must be agile, fast-thinking, and fast-acting if they’re to survive. By sharing their years of accumulated wisdom, mentors help people broaden their perspective, cut through the information overload, and get to the heart of what matters. When we aren’t bogged down in extraneous details, we can move

quickly and purposefully.

- ◆ It helps people build the relationship skills today’s companies need to survive. Strong relationships—based on honesty, trust, transparency, and empathy—matter more than ever now.

- ◆ Mentoring helps organizations become more diverse and inclusive. There is a huge focus right now on these issues. In many organizations, older employees may need to learn how best to work with those from different racial and cultural backgrounds, belief systems, and orientations.

“Mentoring is no longer a ‘nice-to-have,’ but a ‘must-have’ for companies that need to navigate the current talent shortage and lower their turnover,” concludes Thornton. “And what many people don’t realize is that it’s an incredibly rewarding experience, not just for the mentee but for the mentor, also.”

Chamber meets Before Hours



Photos courtesy Erica Gore and Rebecca Thomson

Board & Brush Creative Studio sponsored the St. Johns County Chamber’s first Before Hours event in 2022. Studio partners Mary Stewart and Melody Van Zant hosted the event in Ponte Vedra Beach on Feb. 9. Visit www.sjchamber.com for more information.



ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

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

Call Linda 904-607-5062



Briefs

Chocolate and Beyond — A sweet way to support volunteers and teachers

Chocolate and Beyond, a celebration of chocolate, desserts, and other culinary sensations, will be held on Saturday March 5 from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. at The Classic Car Museum of St. Augustine. This year marks the 29th anniversary of the event.

Samples of chocolates, desserts, and savory fare will be available from some of the area's finest culinary artisans. Guests will cast their vote for the People's Choice Award winner and Guess the Chocolates. Great items will also be available for bid at the silent auction.

This event is hosted by TASK (Teacher's Aid for Student Knowledge), and proceeds assist RSVP of St. Johns County in recruiting, placing, training, and recognizing volunteers 55 years and older that mentor and tutor students. Proceeds also assist teachers with classroom grants.

Tickets for Chocolate and Beyond are \$25 per person (\$15 for children younger than 12) and can be purchased online at <https://rb.gy/zbdbho>. Tickets will also be available at the door.

COA announces IMEP™ Integrative Memory Enhancement Program

Council on Aging (COA) now offers its groundbreaking IMEP™ Integrative Memory Enhancement Program on Thursdays at the COA Center at Flagler Health+ Village at Nocatee, 351 Town Plaza Ave., Suite 205.

This is an original, research-based program developed to stimulate brain health and minimize the progression of memory loss and/or dementia. The program offers a structured curriculum of fun, engaging group activities designed to boost cognitive reserve and provide crucial opportunities for stimulation and socialization. IMEP serves those who are beginning to notice memory changes, or who are experiencing memory loss or symptoms

of early dementia, Alzheimer's, or other forms of brain trauma. The classes also serve as a valuable respite for caregivers.

IMEP classes will be offered on Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the COA Center at Flagler Health+ Village at Nocatee. Class sizes are limited to 12 and registration is required. The center is a lifelong learning center serving adults age 18 and up, presented by COA in partnership with Flagler Health+ with additional support from Republic Services.

Contact Catherine Tupper at (904) 729-9535 or via email at ctupper@stjohnscoa.com for more information and to register. Visit www.coajc.org/imepsjc to see additional locations where the program is offered.

"Public Speaking for Writers" at March Ponte Vedra Writers meeting

Writing is an activity that requires solitude, and most writers thrive in such an environment — but when it comes to getting out in public and marketing their books, the introverted writer needs to know how to hold and sell an audience. "Transforming Writers into Speakers" will be presented by author and speaker Nancy Quatrano at the Saturday, March 26 meeting of the Florida Writers Association (FWA) Ponte Vedra Writers group, 10:00 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Branch Library.

Quatrano says that "one of the most powerful ways to build fans and credibility is by speaking face-to-face with people. Whether you're holding a book signing event or speaking on a topic related to your book, public speaking can improve your value by fifty-percent." During her presentation, Quatrano will discuss how to pitch, prepare, and run a winning book signing event or develop topics writers can present to groups.

The Ponte Vedra Writers group is part of the Florida Writers Association, a state-wide, non-profit organization with nearly

1,500 members dedicated to the support of both aspiring and published writers in any genre. The March 26 meeting is free and open to members and non-members alike. Visit www.floridawriters.org for more information.

Newcomers Alumnae luncheon to feature fashion show

On Wednesday March 2, from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m., Newcomers Alumnae will hold its annual Fashion Show at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Pkwy. This year's theme is "A Twist of Lemon" and clothes will be provided by Lemon Twist Boutique of Sawgrass Village. This upscale boutique, established in 1977, offers an array of women and children's clothing that are perfect for beach and country club living.

Eight Newcomers Alumnae members will be modeling two outfits each while attendees feast on sunburst salad with grilled chicken and dessert. Additionally, each luncheon attendee will receive a bag filled with fun goodies. A few \$50 gift cards to Lemon Twist will be raffled off to the group, among other prizes.

The cost to attend the luncheon is \$23; for reservations, email bartshar@comcast.net as soon as possible to reserve a seat. Visit www.newcomersalumnae.fl.wildapricot.org, a social club formed in 1998, for more information or to become a member. Newcomers Alumnae is a women's group that encompasses Ponte Vedra Beach, Nocatee, Jacksonville Beach, Atlantic Beach, Neptune Beach, Jacksonville, St. Augustine and the surrounding area.

Tale Tellers return storytelling to area

The Tale Tellers of St. Augustine have returned "Theater of the Mind: Storytelling" to Limelight Theatre with new offerings after a hiatus of almost two years. "Travel Tips," to be performed on March 8 at 7:30 p.m., will enlighten listeners about adventures in paradise, the details of the great international towel incident,

and travel behind the speckled door. The program of music and stories features Chris Kastle, Margaret Kaler and Rose van der Berg.

General admission is \$10 and group rates available. For reservations or information, call (904) 540-0402 or (386) 439-9413. Tickets may be purchased in advance online at www.taletellers.org.

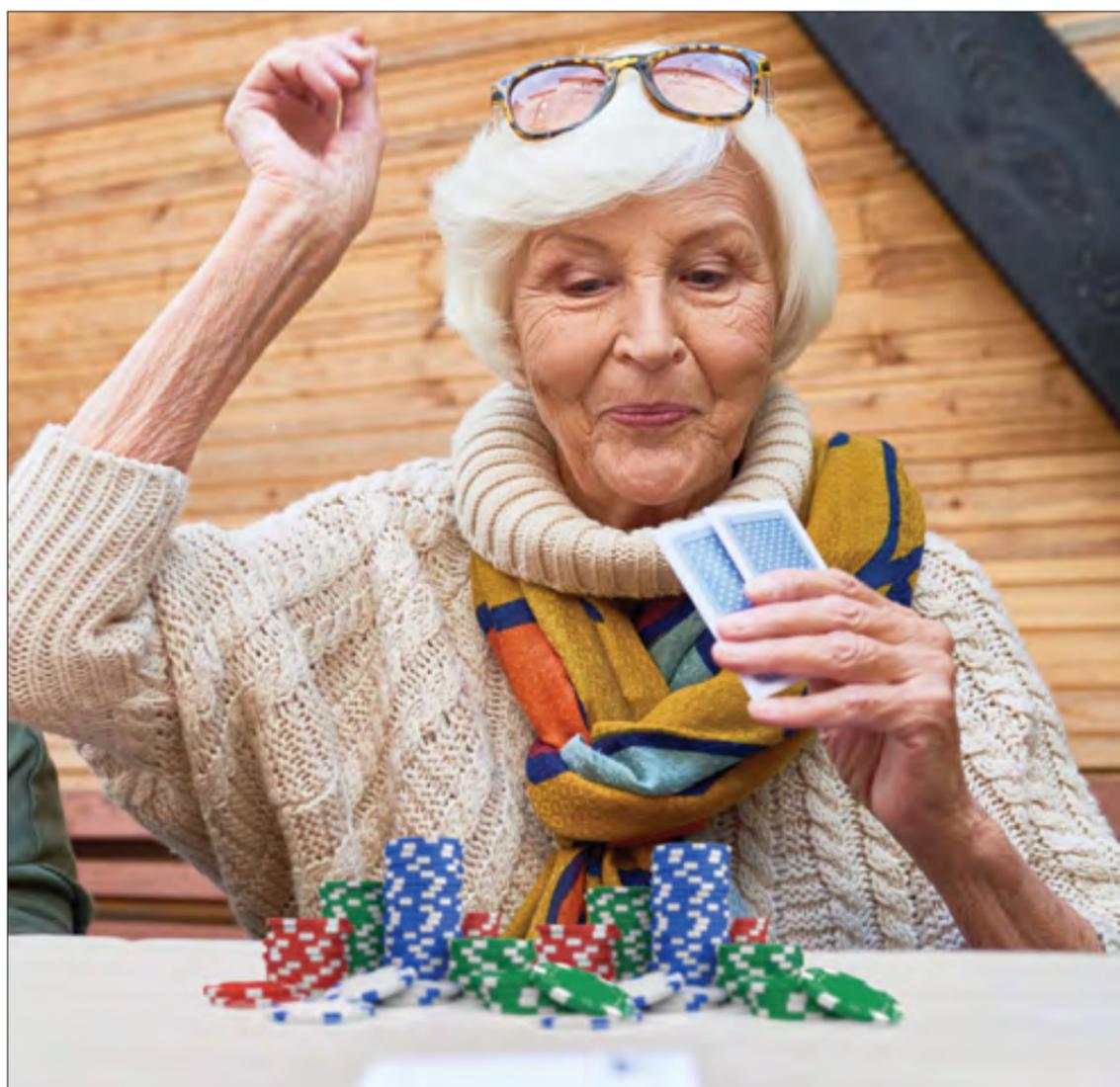
Survey to identify needs of older adults and caregivers

ElderSource, the Area Agency on Aging and Aging and Disability Resource Center for Northeast Florida is seeking input from the community to better understand the needs of older adults, persons with disabilities and their caregivers. Working with the Health Planning Council of Northeast Florida, the data will be used to identify what is important to older adults living in Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, St. Johns and Volusia counties in order to live and age well in their communities.

According to America's Health Ranking, 20.3 percent of Florida's population was over the age of 65 in 2020, ranking it in the top three in the United States. In a 2021 profile of older Floridians, 26 percent of the population is over the age of 60.

As an Area Agency on Aging and Aging and Disability Resource Center, ElderSource is required to submit an Area Plan to the Florida Department of Elder Affairs every three years that outlines and targets the needs and services to help people live and age with dignity in their homes and communities.

The 10-minute survey is open to every adult over the age of 55 and their caregivers living in the seven-county region. It can be accessed online by visiting the ElderSource website at www.MyElderSource.org. The deadline to participate is March 31, 2022. For more information about the survey and how to participate, call (904) 391-6692.



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Get to Know ...

Andrew Burk

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewslines.com

Andrew Burk's experience through Florida's public school system is one that he truly enjoyed, with teachers that he counted as some of the best. It is an experience that he wishes for every student, and he isn't certain that every child has this same experience. Burk is now a teacher who was recently named the St. Johns County Teacher of the Year, and he sees the award as the perfect platform to promote education equity statewide. "When you build a system of trust and you make the jobs attractive, what ultimately happens is the kids will be in good hands," said Burk, who has been Valley's Ridge's band director for the past three years. "Public school is awesome when we invest in it as a group and as a community. Everyone has to be all in." Burk, 28, grew up in Gainesville, attended Florida State University, and taught in South Florida for two years prior to teaching at Valley Ridge. He also has strong ties to Washington, D.C., both from having lived there briefly, but especially through his advocacy efforts that began while at FSU. He earned his degree in musical education but began with an interest in a social science degree — his political mind already in motion. "I am a very outspoken advocate for public education. I think that helped me stand out in the Teacher of the Year process," Burk said.

Q: What was your reaction when your name was announced as Teacher of the Year?

Get to Know ...

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



Photo courtesy Andrew Burk
Andrew Burk

A: I was excited and then immediately felt badly for the other finalists. I was very impressed by all the finalists. It is such an honor and so humbling to be this young and new to the county and to be able to represent teachers and the field of teaching.

Q: What is your teaching philosophy?

A: I like to concentrate on building a band family. It is important to build appropriate relationships with kids and to also help them build those relationships with each other. I like to break down barriers between social groups, and I set up an opportunity to rely on and trust each other. I use the words "family" and "team" a lot. I also make the students responsible for classroom tasks such as setting up the chairs in the room. I like to challenge my students, and I love to perform with them — a lot.

Q: How did you first get involved in band?

A: In the fifth grade, we had to choose an elective. My choices were PE, technology or band. I was too insecure to take PE and had no interest in technology. So, I chose band. I had no music background

at that time. Everything I learned came from my school band experience. That is the best part of a beginning band class. It is designed knowing that you may have zero knowledge. You get to learn an instrument, learn to read music and try out different instruments. I made all my best friends through band. It was such a good group of people in a very positive environment. I had great music and band teachers. I have not stopped playing since the sixth grade. My instrument is the trombone. From day one, I loved school and band was a big part of that experience. I was also part of the "Marching Chiefs" at FSU.

Q: What do you do in your free time?

A: I have a "Little Brother" with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northeast Florida. I volunteered in October 2020 because I wanted to feel like I belong in the community. We go canoeing a lot since I live on the St. Johns River and we cook often.

Q: You also work remotely for a law firm in Washington, D.C. Explain more about your passion for politics and education advocacy.

A: I have always been fascinated by policy and politics. I think it is important to address these education issues at the grassroots level. I was able to attend "Music Education Hill Day 2015" while at FSU through the National Association for Music Education and was given a chance to meet with and talk to senators. We wanted music to be listed as one of the core subjects in public school so that it would be eligible for federal dollars. I also interned at an education non-profit for literacy, 826DC, through The Washington Center. I partnered with the Florida Collegiate Music Education Association to create an Advocacy Day for Music Education in Tallahassee. I was so inspired by "Hill Day" that I wanted to help more teachers become engaged in the process. That is still my goal today.

Q&A with Brandon Patty cont. from pg. 5

attendance in court prior to any penalties being imposed, which would be ordered by a judge. I recommend just hanging up.

Be careful to not fall for the "Can you hear me?" scam, where the scammer aims to get you to say "yes." Once they have a recording of your voice saying "yes," a scammer can use it to authorize charges on bills, credit cards and more.

In the debt collections scam, don't click on the link or respond to the text. If you have an unpaid fine or fee that has been forwarded to a collection agency, call the Clerk's Office at (904) 819-3600 to verify the agency that is handling your case. You may also visit our website at stjohnsclerk.com/courts/traffic-parking/collections/ for information and authentic telephone numbers for collection agencies with whom we do business.

You also can help others by reporting any incidents to the Florida Office of the Attorney General at 866-9NO-SCAM (866-966-7226) or file a complaint on their website.

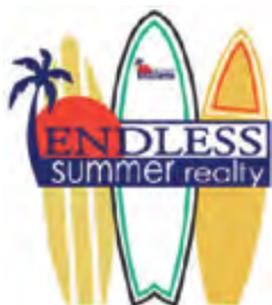
Q. Is there anything we can do proactively to reduce our risks?

A. In addition to learning more tips to protect yourself against scams, you can protect your property from fraud with Recording Activity Notifications. According to the FBI, property and mortgage fraud is among the fastest growing white-collar crimes. Although the alert system does not prevent the actual fraudulent activity from occurring, it does provide an early warning system for subscribers to become aware of what may have otherwise gone undetected. Subscribers are able to take prompt, appropriate action if they determine the recording activity to be fraudulent. Visit <https://apps.stjohnsclerk.com/Landmark/FraudAlert> to sign up.

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

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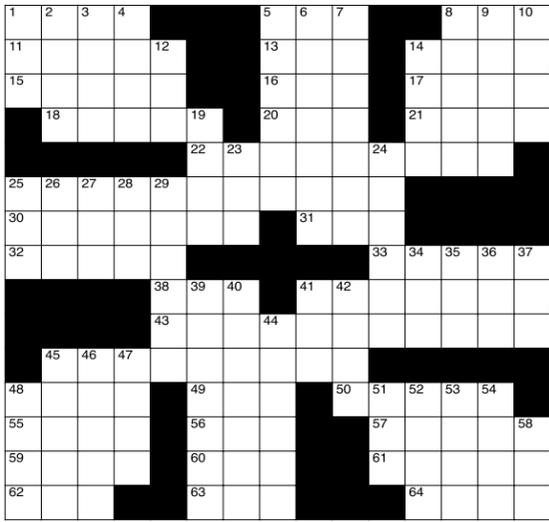


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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

1. One who regrets
5. Time zone
8. Subway dweller
11. Bend in a river
13. Alias
14. Isodor __, American Nobel physicist
15. Very (music)
16. Zero
17. Phil __, former CIA
18. Competitions
20. Unwell
21. Puts in place
22. Gets rid of
25. Allows light to pass through
30. Climbed quickly
31. We all have it
32. There's a North & South
33. Emaciation
38. Supervises flying
41. Very dark colors
43. Unwanted
45. Grants
48. Three visited Jesus
49. Wife of Amun
50. Broadway actress Daisy
55. A Spanish river
56. I (German)
57. French opera composer
59. Six (Spanish)
60. Last letter
61. Spiritual leader of a Jewish congregation
62. Noah had one
63. Make a mistake
64. Tall plant

CLUES DOWN

1. Computer memory
2. "Et __": "And wife" (Latin)
3. Ancient Syrian city
4. College army
5. Cassava
6. Talented
7. Capital of Estonia
8. Finger millet
9. In a way, assists
10. Men's fashion accessories
12. Misery
14. Skin disorder
19. Selling at specially reduced prices
23. Good friend
24. Stationary portion of a generator
25. Expression of disappointment
26. The 17th letter of the Greek alphabet
27. Where birds fly
28. Midway between north and northeast
29. Chaotic states
34. Comedic actress Gasteyer
35. Kids' dining accessory
36. Snakelike fish
37. Midway between south and southeast
39. Assign lifelike qualities to
40. One who cites
41. Midway between east and southeast
42. North wind
44. One or the other
45. Cavalry sword
46. Of the Hungarian language
47. Life stories
48. Flat tableland with steep edges
51. Swiss river
52. Plant that makes gum
53. French cleric
54. One point east of northeast
58. Free from

SPRING SEASON WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

- BIRTH
- BLOOM
- BREEZE
- BULBS
- BUNNY
- BUTTERFLY
- CHICK
- CROCUS
- DAFFODIL
- EGGS
- FLOWERS
- GREEN
- GROW
- HATCH
- HYACINTH
- LAMB
- MARCH
- NEST
- PUDDLES
- RAIN
- ROBIN
- SEASON
- SHOWERS
- SPRING

⊙ ☆ ☼ ☽ ♀ ♂ ♁ ♃ ♄ ♅ ♆ ♇ ♈ ♉ ♊ ♋ ♌ ♍ ♎ ♏ ♐ ♑ ♒ ♓

CRYPTO FUN

Determine the code to reveal the answer!

Solve the code to discover words related to spring.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 26 = L)

A. 12 11 16 5 24 22

Clue: One of the seasons

B. 25 5 26 2

Clue: Not severe

C. 10 26 18 1 14 16

Clue: Part of a plant

D. 21 26 18 18 25 5 24 22

Clue: State of flowering

Schools celebrate cont. from pg. 1
Lunar New Year fell on February 1, 2022. Lunar New Year is celebrated by China, Vietnam, Korea, and Singapore, to list a few.

Celebrating Lunar New Year comes with many traditions such as thoroughly cleaning one's house approximately 10 days before the Lunar New Year to remove any lingering bad luck. On New Year's Day, family members receive "red envelopes," or hóngbāo. Throughout the 15-day celebration, the days are marked with dances and fireworks, and culminate in the Lantern Festival, celebrated on the last day of Lunar New Year. On this night, lanterns are lit, and traditional foods such as yuánxiāo (sticky rice), yusheng (raw fish), and vegetable salad are eaten.

The origins of the Lunar New Year are thousands of years old and infused with legends. The most popular origin story is that Nian, an ancient monster, attacked thousands of villagers at the beginning of each new year. An old man, learning that Nian was afraid of loud noises and the color red, successfully scared away the monster by pasting red papers to the door (Chinese couplets), burning bamboo to make loud cracking noises (fireworks), and wearing red clothes. Once the villagers returned from fleeing, they were amazed to see that their village had not been destroyed.

The schools' celebrations began by learning the discipline of Tai Chi, or Taiji, by a Tai Chi master, Kam Lee. The Taiji event was hosted by the National Chinese

Honor Society and open to the entire school. In the Taiji event, students learned the basics of Tai Chi, which emphasizes constant movement in a slow, focused manner. Students also created a human chain by connecting their shoulders, knees, and arms to explain the importance of harmony.

Next, students wrote Chinese couplets, which are a pair of lines of poetry to bring good luck and fortune. These strips of paper are typically hung on the sides of doors leading to people's homes or as hanging scrolls inside the homes. Then, students presented projects of the 12 Chinese zodiacs, about Chinese provinces, or cities.

On February 1, students celebrated Lunar New Year with homemade food, laughter, and hóngbāo. Hóngbāo, also known as red pockets, are monetary gifts given to family members. Hóngbāos are given by elders as tokens of good luck and are received by children with both hands as a sign of respect.

Chinese paper cutting is a traditional folk-art form done by many individuals to symbolize good luck. These are often used to decorate doors and windows. The students this year cut out an image of a tiger.

Sade Goodridge is a student at Ponte Vedra High School.



Photo courtesy Yan Li
Students writing Chinese couplets.

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at home. Under NO circumstance should you send any money in advance or give the client your checking, license ID, or credit card numbers.

Also beware of ads that claim to guarantee loans regardless of credit and note that if a credit repair company does business only over the phone

it is illegal to deliver any money before requesting its service. All funds are based in US dollars. Toll free numbers may or may not reach Canada.

myFace cont. from pg. 1

craniosynostosis. One was a medical equipment supplier owner and the other a medical sales manager. They shared information about surgeons and who they would see if their own children had the condition.

Enter Dr. David Staffenberg in New York City. In one meeting, all of the Carsons' concerns were finally acknowledged, identified and a team of doctors stood ready to handle everything all in one location.

At four years old, Scarlett had her second brain surgery. Her third took place at nine years old and her last surgery was at 14 years old. During one surgery, a team of 40 doctors operated on Scarlett for close to eight hours.

"My doctors came in as a team and acted as a family," said Carson.

For two of the surgeries, the Carsons used the myFace Apartments across the street from the hospital which made a huge difference. Prior to that, the Carsons had to stay at hotels.

Once able, Carson preferred recovering at the apartment as opposed to the hospital. It was a true blessing and a lifesaver, said her mom, especially given the long stays and follow-up appointments.

"This organization helps with surgery expenses, partners with the airlines so families can fly for free and offers resources," said Suzette Carson.

Now fully recovered, Scarlett Carson is on the weightlifting team, runs, plays basketball and drives — acclimating to limited vision in her right eye and mild hearing loss in her left ear. She refuses to let anything hold her back.

Also, the Carsons credit Palmer Catholic Academy, Ponte Vedra High School, family, friends and New Yorkers with giving Scarlett Carson so much support. It was at Palmer that she was able to present a "Wonder Project" video to students, a presentation made for and in conjunction with myFace. "The myFace Wonder Project" was inspired by the book written by R.J. Palacio. ("Wonder" is based on a child with a rare genetic facial deficiency.) The book and movie by the same name underscore the power of kindness



Photos courtesy Suzette Carson
Scarlett Carson with one of her doctors.

which is fundamental to "The myFace Wonder Project" and its curriculum guide.

For Carson, the project helped her to understand who she was becoming and gave her a chance to connect with her peers. Dina Zuckerberg, myFace Family Programs Director, said there is power in a shared story.

"It makes you realize that you are on this journey with someone else," said Zuckerberg, who is also a myFace patient.



The Carson family.

Zuckerberg gives "Wonder Project" presentations about her own story in person and virtually. She said that Carson was the first person who chose to do the video on her own and take the lead.

Another goal of the "The myFace Wonder Project" is to help students unite against bullying and to implement acts of kindness in school.

"I like to promote being an active upstander, not a passive bystander. If you see bullying, stand up," said Zuckerberg.

Email Dina@myface.org for more information on myFace and to arrange a virtual "Wonder Project" school assembly.

Rotary Heroes receive honor medals

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

The Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra (Nocatee) presented medals of honor for the 2021 year to St. Johns County Firefighter of the Year, Engineer Katrina Silvia from Station No. 18 in Nocatee and to St. Johns County Sheriff's Office Deputy of the Year, Corporal Stacci Sastre. The club's Inaugural Rotary Heroes event was also presented by the Ponte Vedra Rotary Foundation, the club's charitable arm. The awards were given in celebration of excellence in Vocational Service which is Rotary's theme for January.

Silvia is an eighteen-year veteran of St. Johns County Fire and Rescue. When asked about what inspired her to be a firefighter, she said, "I wanted to be a firefighter after watching a film in fifth grade, but had let my dream fall to the wayside. It was the events of Sept. 11, 2001 that reignited a spark in me to become a firefighter."

Captain Jason Sheider, who nominated her for this award, said; "Engineer Silvia has been an example of empathy, caring and compassion to everyone she works with. She has dedicated herself to serving others and her coworkers. It reflects on every call for service we respond to and every interaction she has with community members."

Silvia is an avid endurance athlete and often runs marathons in her gear to raise funds for Code 3 For a Cure, a national nonprofit that assists firefighters with cancer.

Sastre has been a deputy with the St. Johns Sheriff's Office for more than six years. Sastre was awarded the Detective Dave White Memorial Foundation Scholarship to attend the police academy. She is a Field Training Officer for new hires, serves

on the Crisis Negotiation Team, is a member of the Promotional Review Committee and serves on the Peer-to-Peer Support Committee.

She was nominated for this award by Captain Tres Edenfield who said of Sastre: "Stacci has proven herself



Photo courtesy Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra
Engineer Katrina Silvia and Corporal Stacci Sastre

to be a servant leader through her putting those in her stead before herself and assuring their needs are met before her own. She is a teacher among her peers and is steadfast in assuring the new Deputy Sheriffs are mentored and taught the right way of doing things from the very beginning."

In addition to the Rotary International sanctioned medals presented to them, a donation was made to Code 3 for a Cure in honor of Silvia and a donation was made to St. Jude Children's Hospital in honor of Sastre.

The Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra, chartered in April of 2018, is one of 67 Rotary Clubs in North Florida that comprise Rotary District 6970. The club meets on Tuesday mornings at 7:15 a.m. at Treylor Park Restaurant in Nocatee Town Center. Email pontevedrarotary@gmail.com for more information.



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PopHistory

By Scott A. Grant

Moonshiners and Bootleggers at the Beach

People in Ponte Vedra like to drink. Life here can sometimes feel like an endless cocktail party. It has always been that way. Ponte Vedra and booze have a long and colorful history. This area was once known as Palm Valley on both sides of what is now the Intra-coastal Waterway. In the old days, Palm Valley was a haven for moonshiners and bootleggers.

Palm Valley was known for producing some of the best moonshine in this part of the country. Moonshiners flavored Palm Valley Shine with charred peaches and palmetto berries. The palmetto berries gave the moonshine its distinctive darker color and added an extra kick.

During Prohibition, the demand for Palm Valley Shine skyrocketed. They say that before Fred's Tavern got one of the state's first liquor licenses, Fred sold moonshine from Palm Valley out of the now iconic storefront.

For many years, Roy Landrum was the local sheriff in Palm Valley. His wife, Alice, has a school named after her. The sheriff always made a big show of busting up stills around election time. But that did not quench the demand for good moonshine.

During prohibition, bootleggers operated off Ponte Vedra Beach. Large ships, laden with booze from the Bahamas, would anchor off the coast outside territorial waters like floating liquor stores. Small, fast boats would transport the illegal whiskey to shore.

A thirsty public flaunted Prohibition and the Feds struck back. Led by Mabel Walker Willebrandt, the first female US Assistant Attorney General, federal agents fought the unstoppable flow of illegal booze vigorously and aggressively. Some in Congress thought a little too vigorously.

One day in September 1928, John Hysler was picking up some illegal booze in Ponte Vedra. Hysler was known as the "Whiskey King" in Jacksonville. A customs officer spotted Hysler and an accomplice traveling towards Jacksonville in a Chrysler Roadster with stolen Alabama plates. The Chrysler was laden with 180 bottles of red whiskey.

A Prohibition agent named Hope King set a trap for Hysler. He waited for the "liquor car" at the tollbooth on the old Acosta Bridge. Hysler resisted and tried to flee. In the ensuing shootout, the popular Whiskey King was shot dead. Hope King was hospitalized.

The public was outraged. Some wanted to see the Prohibition agent charged with murder. They had to post a police guard outside Hope King's hospital room to keep him from being dragged outside and killed by angry citizens. Over 1,500 people came to John Hysler's funeral to mourn the passing of the Whiskey King.

Scott A. Grant is a local historian and author. By day, he is president of fiduciary asset manager, Standfast Asset Management.

American History Essay Contest winners named

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

The Ponte Vedra Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) presented a bronze medal, certificate, and \$50 to each winner of the American History Essay Contest for grades five through eight at its chapter meeting on Feb. 1. Chapter winning essays are forwarded to the Florida State Society DAR American History Contest.

In honor of the 100th anniversary of the dedication of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, contestants were instructed to imagine that they had a brother who died during World War I, and to write a first-person account of their story, including their attending the dedication of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, D.C., and the significance of the event.

The outstanding essay writers were Nate Wolf, fifth grade, PVPV/Rawlings Elementary; Ethan Rozen, sixth grade, Landrum Middle School; Lincoln Rozen, seventh grade, Landrum Middle School; and Evren Agar, eighth grade, Landrum

Middle School. Lincoln Rozen has won three years in a row advancing to the state, regional and national level last year.

DAR is a non-political genealogical women's service organization whose purpose is to promote historic preservation, education, and patriotism. The Ponte Vedra Chapter has been active in organizing a Valentine's Day celebration for military dependents, assisting with reading in area



Photo courtesy Viky Divertie
Brandy Hibbard, American History Chairwoman; Nate Wolf; Ethan Rozen; Lincoln Rozen; Evren Agar; and Phyllis Baehrend, Ponte Vedra Chapter Regent.

schools, providing Christmas baskets to needy military families, participating in Wreaths across America, and purchasing benches for the Jacksonville National Cemetery in the last few months. Visit DAR.com or contact regent.darpontevedra@gmail.com for more information.

PVHS girls' wrestling takes first place at tournament

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

The Ponte Vedra High School girls' wrestling team earned first place out of 17 teams at the inaugural Clay Rotary Invitational girls' tournament at Clay High School on Feb. 5. Top placers from Ponte Vedra include senior Cynthia Kowitzki (first place at 110 lbs.), freshman Erin Rizzuto (first place at 115 lbs.), freshman Natalia Choquegonza (second place at 125 lbs.), and junior Olivia Richie (first place at 140 lbs.). Kowitzki pinned her way through all three rounds of competition, pinning Clay's MiKayla Wyrick (:52), Baker County's Makayla Johnson (2:44) and Toco Creek's Julia Rich (1:22). In her championship round pin over Johnson, Kowitzki gave up no points scored against en route to securing the win, scoring via takedowns in both periods and a pair of turns before



Photo courtesy Jessica Johnson

obtaining the pin-fall. As a team, Ponte Vedra outdistanced the rest of the field, with 79 team points over runner up Mainland's 57.



Ocean Palms welcomes additional assistant principal

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

Dr. Bradley Johnson embarks on a new journey at Ocean Palms Elementary School as its second assistant principal. And while this new opportunity hasn't taken him far from home — he previously served as the ESE Support Facilitation teacher at Ocean Palms — he has in fact come a long way, bringing with him experiences from around the globe.

in many places and amassed 18 years of teaching experience, both in Exceptional Student Education and higher education. Additionally, his doctoral focus in educational psychology will surely be an asset to this Otter team.



Photo courtesy Lisa Farese
Dr. Bradley Johnson, second assistant principal at Ocean Palms Elementary School.

Originally from California, this US Army veteran has traveled and lived

Nease NJROTC qualifies for Air Rifle national championships

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

Nease's NJROTC program reached a new level in program history in February as its Air Rifle team placed second at the NJROTC Area-12 Air Rifle Championships in Anniston, Alabama. The top two schools move on to national championships.

Hailey Pitches (team captain), Gabriel Mitchell and Chloe Westerlind. Westerlind was the team high shooter and placed sixth overall in the championship Sporter Division.



Photos courtesy Scott LaRochelle

Area-12 Manager Johnathan Shaw, Chloe Westerlind, team captain Hailey Pitches, Gunnery Sergeant Duane Hanson, Gabriel Mitchell and Nicholas Bohanon with second place trophy at the Area-12 Championships.

This achievement marks the first time for the Air Rifle team to make it to the national championships. Nease's drill team (third at the 2021 national championships), brain brawl team (third at the 2021 national championships) and orienteering team (competing in March at the 2022 national championships), have all qualified multiple times for making it to nationals.

"I could not be more proud of the cadets," said Naval Science Instructor and Air Rifle Coach Gunnery Sergeant Duane Hanson. "This group put the time and effort in beginning in August and stayed the course for the past five months."

The four cadets making up the team are senior Nick Bohanon, sophomores

Air Rifle is an authorized NJROTC activity that develops strong discipline, attention to detail and unwavering commitment in cadets. The Area-12 Air Rifle Championship brought together the best teams across the state of Georgia and northern Florida to the competition. During competition, cadets shoot from three positions — standing, kneeling and prone.

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New judge holds investiture ceremony



Photo courtesy Peret Pass

New St. Johns County Judge Lauren P. Blocker hosted her Investiture Ceremony at TPC on Jan. 21. She was welcomed to the bench by a majority of those currently serving in the 7th Circuit and surrounded by her family, friends, and colleagues. The Honorable Terence R. Perkins presided over the ceremony. Sheriff Rob Hardwick opened the proceedings, Judge Howard Maltz administered the oath of office, and Judge Charles Tinlin officially welcomed her to the bench. Blocker said, "I promise as a judge to remember the support of everyone that got me to this place, to treat everyone with respect, to always be impartial, and to be prepared for every proceeding."

Q&A with Eddie Creamer cont. from pg. 6

A: We are required by the state of Florida to estimate the value of your assets based on similar business filings and you will be taxed on that value with no opportunity for appeal.

Q: What are the penalties for filing late?

A: There is a 5 percent penalty per month until you file, up to a total of 25 percent.

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.

Guest Column

Securing Florida's elections

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

The legislative session ends on March 11, but there's a lot in the news lately regarding the election law changes that are currently before our state legislature. Of great interest is Gov. Ron DeSantis' new Office of Election Crimes and Security that would be created within the Department of State as proposed in Senate Bill 524. The purpose of the office is to aid the Secretary of State in completing her duties under s. 97.012, FS. If approved, the office would be responsible for:

- Receiving and reviewing notices and reports generated by government officials or any other person regarding alleged occurrences of election law violations or

election irregularities

- Initiating independent inquiries and conducting preliminary investigations into allegations of election law violations or election irregularities in the state
- Reviewing complaints and conducting preliminary investigations into alleged violations of the Florida Election Code or any rules pertaining to elections
- Overseeing the voter fraud hotline

Under our current law, when this office is made aware of voter fraud or voting irregularities, a complaint is filed with our local State Attorney's Office and the Division of Elections. Having one central agency to investigate election law violations and investigators who are specifically familiar with election laws and prosecut-

able violations would be a good thing.

This would also allow our State Attorneys to focus on more serious crimes such as robbery, assault, and murder.

In addition to the proposed new office, Florida has existing laws in place that help secure our elections. First is photo and signature ID requirements for those voting in person. If you vote by mail, your signature is required on the return envelope in order for your ballot to count. Think of it this way — when you vote by mail, your signature is your ID. Every signature is matched to the voter's record on each envelope to validate it. We use electronic poll books, which update your record as soon as you check in at any voting location and keep voters

from voting twice. Electronic poll books also track vote by mail ballots, marking a voter's record when requested or a ballot returned as voted.

People are often very quick to make accusations of voter fraud, but when asked for specifics or documentation rarely are ever willing or able to provide any valid proof. During the last five years in St. Johns County, we have received and filed 11 complaints with the State Attorney's Office. These were documented cases of voters casting ballots in two states. Once we confirmed that a voter had voted in St. Johns County and in another state, each voter was turned over for prosecution of a third degree felony.

That five-year period encompasses five elections, including those in 2018 and 2020, with thousands of votes cast during each election. The reality is that we are just not seeing evidence of massive voter fraud locally. We will discuss more about election security in future columns, but if you know of any voter fraud, I encourage you to bring it directly to me. I stand ready to prosecute anyone who violates our voting laws.

Do you want to keep up with current elections news? Sign up for my monthly e-newsletter, which will be launched in March. Use the sign up link on the front page of the website votesjc.gov and submit your email address to subscribe. The best way to reach me is by email voakes@votesjc.gov or call the office (904) 823-2238. Don't forget, our website is also a great resource, so visit it often.



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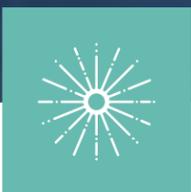


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