



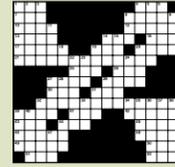
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Photo courtesy Gary Lawrence  
Darius Williams at Super Bowl LVI as a member of the LA Rams.

## Hometown football player earns Super Bowl ring

By Gary Lawrence  
mail@floridanewline.com

The road to the NFL for 70 percent of players begins in Pop Warner. It is here that many a young person has learned the fundamentals of the game and focused on making it all the way to the National Football League. Darius Williams is but one of those young men who set his sights on making it to the NFL — and the journey was not always an easy one. The road had its share of obstacles and challenges but Darius never lost sight of his dream.

Born the son of a Navy man, Williams has lived all across the United States,

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## Creekside brings home first girls' soccer state title

By Martie Thompson  
editor@floridanewline.com

The Creekside girls' soccer team defeated Cypress Bay at the FHSAA Class 7A State Championships in Deland on Feb. 25 to earn its first state title. According to the team's head coach, Joe Soto, the team had a good regular season in terms of results, but really came together as a team late in the season — which served them well in the playoffs.

"They wanted this one badly," he said. "I'm so proud of how they rallied around each other and got what they deserved."

Soto isn't the only one who noticed the building of the team's camaraderie during the season. Sophomore midfielder Lily Pierce said her favorite part of being on the team this year was being a part of the special bond all of the players had.

"This season we all came together and were playing for us as a whole rather than our individual selves, which created an amazing atmosphere that everyone could feel every time we took the field," she said.

Soto, in his first year as head coach at Creekside, was formerly an assistant coach at Bartram Trail and was with that team for two previous state championships. Soto said that given the proximity



Photos courtesy Lara Pierce  
The Creekside Knights girls' soccer team after its state championship victory.

of the two schools, the players on both teams know each other well and in fact often play club soccer together.

This year, Creekside had lost to Bartram Trail in the regular season and also in the District finals game. Fortunately, as the number two team in the district, the Knights still advanced to the Regionals — where they had to play the Bears again in the semifinals.

"We knew the game against Bartram would be our toughest game," Soto said. "Our team played so unbelievably hard.

They outplayed Bartram, the two-time defending state champs, and won 3 – 2."

After that, it was a win against Lake Brantley in the Regional finals and then a trip to the state final four. First, they won a home game against Palm Harbor University (high school) before the state championship win against Cypress Bay.

Avery Robinson, a sophomore center midfielder who scored two of the three goals in the championship victory, credited her teammates for the success.

"I think I helped the team win the state championship by creating chances and finishing them," Robinson said, "but honestly, I couldn't have scored the goals without my teammates. All the goals I've scored this season have just been a product of my amazing teammates."

Soto believes that the team's success this year was his philosophy of hard work at practice, but then giving the players the freedom to play during games. Despite a rough patch during the regular season, the team rallied and put the work in, especially after the loss to Bartram in the District final.

"That was a turning point," Soto said. "I'm so impressed with the way they came together. We always knew they had the talent."



Skye Turnbelty, Chloe Iliff, and Lily Pierce.



Sisters Avery Robinson and Brenna Robinson.

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# Easter Worship

## Shepherd of the Woods Lutheran Church & School

### Easter Worship

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## Briefs

### St. Johns County Commissioners vote to place proposed sales tax on November ballot

At the March 15 commission meeting, the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners voted 4 to 1 to send to referendum a proposed one-penny sales tax ordinance for voter approval on Nov. 8, 2022. Before election day, an independent certified public accountant will conduct an audit to examine several key factors. Those factors include the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the program and how the program will accomplish goals and objectives. The audit report will be available to the public 60 days before election day.

Should more than 50 percent of voters approve the proposed ordinance, the sales tax increase will begin for 10 years on Jan. 1, 2023. The proposed increase would take St. Johns County's sales tax from 6.5

percent to 7.5 percent of the sale of goods and services. For taxable personal property, the additional one-penny sales tax would only be collected on the first \$5,000. The additional sales tax would not apply to certain groceries, prescription drugs, medical products and supplies, or other goods and services exempt from taxation.

St. Johns County has developed a Frequently Asked Questions page regarding the proposed surtax increase. Visit <http://sjcfl.us/media/Surtax-FAQ.pdf> for more information.

### St. Johns County changes Hurricane Evacuation Zones

St. Johns County's hurricane evacuation zones have been updated as a result of data improvements by the National Hurricane Center. The new zones are effective immediately. Those living in coastal, water-

front, and low-lying areas will see the most significant changes.

In preparation for the Atlantic Hurricane Season that begins June 1, residents and business owners are encouraged to review the updated map to determine changes to their evacuation zones by visiting <https://www.gis.sjcfl.us/MYEZ/MYEZ.html>. The county's "My Evacuation Zone" website provides evacuation zone information for St. Johns County addresses. Residents should take this opportunity to also familiarize themselves with appropriate evacuation routes.

There's a difference between evacuation zones and evacuation routes, and the new zone changes do not affect residents' evacuation route. Additionally, the evacuation zone does not impact FEMA Flood

Briefs cont. on pg. 18

### Hometown football player cont. from pg. 1

which in itself creates challenges as he never knew when it would be time to move. But as fortune would have it, his family settled in St. Johns, building their retirement home in Julington Creek. This gave Williams the opportunity to attend Bartram Trail High School his freshman year before transferring to the newly opened Creekside High School the following year. It was at Creekside that he played basketball, ran track and played football.

Upon graduating from Creekside he went on to play one season of Division 3 football at Marietta College in Ohio. The following year he enrolled at the Univer-

sity of Alabama at Birmingham and was turned down after trying to join the football team as a walk-on. Some might have given up on their dream at this point but not Williams; the following year he again tried out as a walk-on and was accepted onto the team. Midway through the season he was awarded a scholarship. Once again, his dream took a detour — UAB dropped football the following year. It wasn't until 2015 when UAB brought back the program and Williams resumed his football career. During the next two seasons with the Blazers he played in 25 games and had 73 tackles, 26 passes defended, and six interceptions. He was named first team All Conference USA

and first-team All-American in 2017 with 50 tackles, 15 passes broken up and five interceptions.

After college he went undrafted, but was picked up as an undrafted free agent with the Baltimore Ravens. He played there until 2018 when he was claimed off waivers by the LA Rams — where he has played all the way to Super Bowl LVI. His family, neighbors, and friends can't wait to see that Super Bowl Championship ring.

*[Editor's Note: Darius Williams was signed in free agency by the Jacksonville Jaguars, Williams' hometown team, on March 16.]*

### THE TAYLOR TEAM



Kari Francom



Patti Taylor



Adam Taylor

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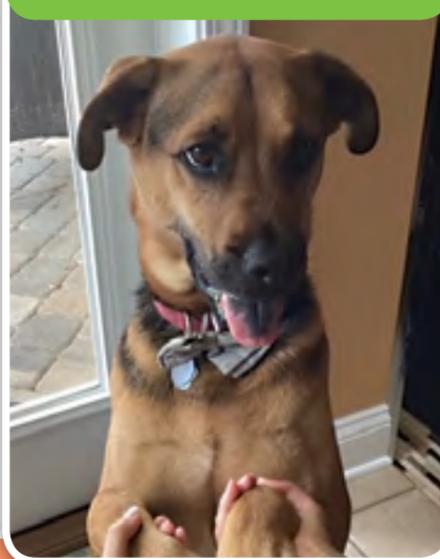
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# BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

## Meet Strider Roo!



- Breed:**  
German Shepherd and Lab mix
- Favorite Activity:**  
Chasing squirrels and other small animals
- Favorite Treat:**  
Peanut Butter and popcorn
- Favorite Friend(s):**  
His BFF, wiener dog Guinness!
- How our BFF got his name:**  
We anticipated him to be a fast runner!

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

**Appears on pages 12 - 15**

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Last month's Mystery Photo was Beluthahatchee, the former home of Stetson Kennedy. Our winner was Karen Roumillat. Congratulations!

## CRYPTO FUN

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Answers: A. mower B. weeds C. fertilize D. landscape

Answers to our Puzzles  
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# April

## Community Calendar What's Happening in St. Johns

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

**5th: Honeybee Quilters Guild** will meet on Tuesday, April 5 at 6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church in the Loft on the County Dock Road side of the church at 2501 Loretto Road. Dawn Burns, owner of the new local store Tilted Quilter, will be presenting. Wearing masks is encouraged. New members/guests welcome. Visit [honeybeequilters.org](http://honeybeequilters.org) for more information.

**7th: St. Johns County will host an Open House regarding the planned public library in World Golf Village** on Thursday, April 7 from 5 p.m. – 7 p.m. at Pacetti Bay Middle School, 245 Meadowlark Lane. Staff from St. Johns County Public Works and the St. Johns County Public Library System will be available to answer questions and share details about this future asset. No action will be taken during the open house.

**7th: The Jacksonville Camera Club** will meet on April 7 (print contest results) and April 21 (digital contest results) from 7 p.m. – 9 p.m. at Shepherd of the Woods Southside, 7860 Southside Blvd. Visit [jaxcameraclub.com](http://jaxcameraclub.com) for more information.

**8th, 9th: UF/IFAS St. Johns County Master Gardener Volunteer Program** is holding its

annual fundraising spring plant sale on April 8 and 9, from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. at 3125 Agricultural Center Drive in St. Augustine. Cash or check only. Call (904) 209-0430 for more information.

**9th: The 16th annual Bartram Bash** will be held on Saturday, April 9 from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. at Alpine Groves Park, 2060 State Road 13. This community event hosted by St. Johns County Parks and Recreation is fun for the entire family. There will be historical interpretive performances of William Bartram by Mike Adams and Native American performer Sawgrass. Musical guest Tommy Bledsoe will perform and there will be local vendors, educators, and tours of the Harris-Bennett House.

**9th: The Jacksonville Camera Club** plans an outing to Paynes Prairie State Park in Gainesville on April 9. Visit [jaxcameraclub.com](http://jaxcameraclub.com) for more information.

**9th: Time Out Florida**, with special feature Charlyn Thomasson and guest speaker Kelly Stigliano, will be held on Saturday, April 9 from 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. at Renaissance Hotel World Golf Village. The cost for the program is \$25 and includes brunch. RSVP by April 2 to Jo (904) 860-4008 or [jo.swallow@comcast.net](mailto:jo.swallow@comcast.net). This program is presented by St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra, Jacksonville Women's Connection, affiliated with Stonecroft.org.

**11th: The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable** will meet on Monday, April 11 at 12 p.m. via Zoom. The meeting will feature the annual State Legislative Delegation report on the outcomes of the latest legislative session and invitations to attend have been extended to Sen. Travis Hutson, Rep. Cyndi Stevenson,

and Rep. Paul Renner. Email [info@sjcroundtable.org](mailto:info@sjcroundtable.org) to register for the meeting or visit [www.sjcroundtable.org](http://www.sjcroundtable.org) for more information about the St. Johns County Civic Roundtable.

**12th: The Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club** will hold its meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, April 12 at 11 a.m. at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club, 205 St. Johns Golf Drive off County Road 210. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. Attendees are asked to dress in an Easter bonnet and enter the contest for Most Elaborate, Most Funny, and Most Creative. There will be a dice game of Left Center Right, and \$3 is needed to play. The cost of the luncheon is \$23. Make checks payable to BTNC and mail to Deborah Russell, 12376 Fireberry Ct., Jacksonville, FL 32258. Payment must be received no later than April 7, 2022, no exceptions. Be sure to indicate entrée choice on the check memo line. Visit [www.facebook.com/BTNC1](http://www.facebook.com/BTNC1) for food choices and updated information.

**18th: The All Star Quilters Guild** will meet at 10 a.m. on Monday, April 18 at the First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The program is "The Big Stitch" presented by Linda Hungerford. Sew and Tell is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit [www.allstarquilters.org](http://www.allstarquilters.org) for more information.

**19th: The Newcomers of North St. Johns** will host a meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, April 19 beginning at 11:15 a.m. at Al Dente's Ristorante Italiano, 90 Shops Blvd. in St. Johns. The event features games of bingo after lunch and great prizes. The cost for the luncheon and program is \$35 for members. All reservations must be received by April 8. Contact Sue Aird at [sjaird@comcast.net](mailto: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.

**22nd: The Northeast Florida Chapter of Sisters in Crime** presents Michael Wiley, Shamus Award-nominated author who will discuss "Writing Killer Dialogue" at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library, 101 Library Blvd. (FOL Room), at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, April 2, 2022. Bring your coffee and bring a friend. The group welcomes misters and sisters to learn more about writing, promoting, and enjoying crime fiction. Visit [www.nefloridasistersincrime.org](http://www.nefloridasistersincrime.org) for more information.

**23rd: Herbal Medicine from the Garden** will be offered on April 23 at 10 a.m. Attendees will learn about traditionally used herbs to promote wellness and health as well as how to create their own tinctures, teas, and salves. Included are guides, plant identification, lecture and herbal snacks. Pre registration is required via phone or text: (386) 972-1891.

**29th, 30th: Mandarin Garden Club will hold its annual Plant Sale** on Friday, April 29 and Saturday, April 30 from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. on both days. A huge variety of low cost, high quality plants and hanging baskets will be offered for sale. Master Gardeners will be available to answer your gardening questions. Cash only is accepted. The event features free parking and admission. The Masons' "Famous" Barbeque lunch will be for sale both days. The Mandarin Garden Club is located at 2892 Loretto Road. Visit [mandaringardenclub.org](http://mandaringardenclub.org) for more information.

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

**Q: Can you give an update on the Board of County Commissioners' plan to divide the funds allocated by the American Rescue Plan Act to St. Johns County?**

**A:** In total, we received around \$50 million from this one-time federal funding source. Phase One of those funds are already committed and at our board meeting yesterday [March 15] we planned to allocate \$20 million in Phase Two funding. One proposed allocation was \$6 million to upgrade the county's Enterprise Resource Planning System, an extremely antiquated internal system for our employees that includes things like time sheets (which are still paper) and provides other general efficiencies for our employees as they respond to our county's residents.

After more than an hour and a half of public comment, much of it from our area's non-profits, Chairman Henry Dean recommended that we pull the \$6 million for this upgrade and mull it over for a couple of weeks. So, we are going to have an ongoing conversation on the best way to spend these funds to the benefit of St. Johns County. We ended up allocating just \$14 million of the \$20 million at this meeting. There is still about \$28 million in funding that is uncommitted.

**Q: What can you tell us about the funding that St. Johns County was allocated by the Florida Legislature in its recent session?**

**A:** We have learned that the Florida Legislature allocated \$54 million to St. Johns County out of the state budget. I've been told that this is the largest amount ever allocated to our county to address infrastructure needs. It still needs to be signed by the governor and is subject to his line item veto, but I think this is a signal that the state legislature sees the needs we have in St.

Johns County. I would like to thank our legislators for bringing this money home to our county.

**Q: Yesterday's board meeting also contained the second and final reading of the proposed one cent local sales tax. Can you comment on that?**

**A:** I think our chairman, Commissioner Dean, said it best when he said we could do one of three things: we could raise property taxes; we could put a sales tax on the referendum and let the people of St. Johns County make the decision to address our infrastructure needs sooner; or we could kick the can down the road as previous commissions have done. The truth is that our infrastructure funding needs keep increasing. The number never comes down. We simply don't have enough money to meet the needs of this growing county.

**Q: Are there any other options like raising impact fees or what about the \$54 million just awarded by the state legislature?**

**A:** One thing that was discussed during the potential sales tax conversations over the past few weeks involves impact fees. I learned that we are already charging the statutory maximum for impact fees at this time — so raising these fees is not an option.

As for the \$54 million from the state, we are very happy to have it and it will be a big help. But for purposes of scale, our total infrastructure needs at this time are more than \$700 million, with about \$560 million for deficient roads. These deficiencies have been building for the past 10 – 15 years.

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

**A:** Readers can email me at [bcc1c-whitehurst@sjcf.us](mailto:bcc1c-whitehurst@sjcf.us) or call me at (904) 584-5348.

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with St. Johns County Sheriff  
Rob Hardwick

**Q: Can you explain the background and reason for the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office's mounted unit, one of your newest specialty units?**

**A:** As far as we can tell, the SJSO has never had a mounted unit; the City of St. Augustine had one in the 1980s and 1990s. Instead, the Sheriff's Office utilized a posse, where locals who owned horses could be sworn in to help with special circumstances when needed.

A mounted unit has been a vision of mine since I was with the St. Augustine Beach Police Department and so I brought the idea with me to the SJSO. There were a couple of reasons that a mounted unit appealed to me: first, it's innovative for marketing purposes and secondly, it's a way to establish bonds with all communities — especially with kids, who might be intrigued by a horse. A sheriff's deputy on a horse may be seen as less threatening to young children than a deputy in a police car. Also, in times of civil unrest, we know horses — which are massive creatures — are one of the best ways to control unruly crowds.

**Q: So how did you set about establishing a mounted unit?**

**A:** I wanted to budget for this unit without using any taxpayer dollars. It's a public/private partnership with the horses themselves, as well as saddles and even the stalls they live in. We have two members of the mounted unit and both of their salaries are paid via the Sheriff's Office like all the other deputies, since they are called in to perform other functions when they are not on mounted patrol.

**Q: Whose expertise have you been able to utilize to get this unit started?**

**A:** I identified one of our deputies, Johan Tschannerl, whom everyone calls "Deputy G." He is a nationally known horseback rider in Europe and South Africa and has been a trainer here in the U.S. He and his wife Andrea did most of the fundraising

for this unit themselves and he personally vetted more than 80 horses to find the two that were perfect for our program.

**Q: Tell us about these horses.**

**A:** Both horses came from the Amish Country in Ohio, from a breeder who specifically breeds horses for law enforcement. They are Percheron horses. We have Jackson, who weighs about 1,800 pounds and has been with us for about eight months and Mason, who weighs more than 2,000 pounds has been with us for about six months.

**Q: What are the plans and goals for this unit going forward?**

**A:** In addition to Deputy G, we have added Deputy Jacob Bradley, so we now have two full time deputies in our mounted unit. Deputy Bradley is currently undergoing an extensive, week-long training program by Deputy G and last week was the mounted unit's first joint patrol. The goal is for them to be out on patrol or doing something proactive in the community around four to five times a week. We have already heard from the St. Augustine Police Department and the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office with requests for help for special events. We plan to have the mounted unit patrol in all areas of the county, including in the Northeast, the Northwest, Nocatee, and Hastings in addition to St. Augustine. It's important for the horses to be around crowds and learn how to deal with them — and it's important for our citizens to see the horses and understand that the horses are working members of our Sheriff's Office.

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



Photo courtesy St. Johns County Sheriff's Office  
Deputy Tschannerl and Deputy Stewart with MU Deputy Jackson at Cracker Day.

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**Guest Column**

**Elections FAQs**

By St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes

For this month's article, I would like to address some frequently asked questions we receive on a regular basis at the Supervisor of Elections Office:

**Can I register to vote or update my registration at my local public library?**

Yes. All St. Johns County public libraries are voter registration agencies. Unlike most governmental agencies, they have business hours on Saturdays and in the evenings. Visit [www.sjcpl.org](http://www.sjcpl.org) for a listing of your local library branches and hours.

**If I request a vote-by-mail ballot for the upcoming election and then move, will my ballot be automatically forwarded to my new address?**

No. Vote-by-mail ballots are non-forwardable. They are returned to the Elections Office, and all future requests are canceled. It is your responsibility to keep the Elections Office up-to-date on your address.

**My neighbor moved away and her husband died. If I call your office can I just tell you to take them off the voter rolls since they do not live here anymore?**

No. Federal and state laws govern the removal of voters from the rolls. We cannot remove anyone from the rolls based on someone's word.

**There are a number of military bases in NE Florida and many St. Johns County residents are military or military dependents. How do members of our military and their families vote if they maintain their residence in St. Johns County, but are transferred elsewhere?**

If they lived here, own property, and intend to return to the county, they are permitted to use their permanent St. Johns County address. Vote-by-mail ballots are sent to their (other/separate) mailing address upon request.

**Are homeless people allowed to register to vote?**

Yes. It is against Florida and federal laws to discriminate against a homeless person. A person who is homeless, or without a permanent "traditional" home, but intends to permanently remain in the county, can register using an address where their mail is received, including the post office, a church, or a shelter.

**What about people who live on boats and in RVs? What can they use for their voter registration residence address?**

A resident with a nontraditional abode who have or had physical presence in the county and intend for the county to be his or her permanent residence address for voter registration purposes could use the following addresses: 1) a place where mail is regularly received, 2) the general delivery address at a specific post office, or 3) the address for the campground or docking site if mail is received there.

**I recently moved within the State of Florida. What do I need to do to update my address?**

You may use the online voter registration system at [www.registertovoteflorida.gov](http://www.registertovoteflorida.gov) or simply call the Elections Office to make your change by phone. If updating your driver license, you can also update your voter registration at the same time. Additionally, you may complete a registration application at your local public library.

*Sign up for my monthly e-newsletter to receive additional information from the Office of the Supervisor of Elections. Use the sign up link on the front page of the website [votesjc.gov](http://votesjc.gov) and submit your email address to subscribe. The best way to reach me is by email at [voakes@votesjc.gov](mailto:voakes@votesjc.gov) or call the office, (904) 823-2238. Don't forget, our website is also a great resource, so visit it often.*



**with State Attorney, 7th Judicial Circuit, R.J. Larizza**

**Q: The Florida Legislature just wrapped up their term and passed the 2022 budget. How was your office affected?**

**A:** Florida has the biggest budget ever passed, at more than \$110 billion. In fact, the last couple of years, the budget has set a record, with this year being a 10 percent increase over last year and last year being a 10 percent increase over the previous year. Florida is booming.

The new budget equated well for prosecutors. All state employees will receive a 5.38 percent raise to account for inflation, which was a nice gesture on the part of the legislature and will be very helpful to our office in light of our need to attract more prosecutors to work for us.

**Q: Is your office short of prosecutors?**

**A:** Yes. We have lost some employees to private practice, others to different government positions, and some have left the workforce. Then when you consider that law schools are at an all time low in enrollment, you can see that demand for prosecutors is greater than the sup-

ply. This is a recipe for a difficult time for retention and recruitment of new attorneys. We presently have approximately 72 prosecutors in the 7th Judicial Circuit, down from a high of 85. We have openings to fill and the increases in salary passed by the legislature will be very helpful to us.

**Q: What exactly can prosecutors expect as far as salary increases?**

**A:** First, I'd like to point out that Florida ranks 47th out of the 50 states in salary, as in our prosecutors are among the least paid. Prosecutors will receive the 5.38 percent salary increase that all state employees will receive and in addition they will receive not less than \$5,000 and no more than \$10,000 recurring annually. This is unprecedented and will go a long way in the attempt to make our salaries more competitive.

Other employees in our office will also see increases. No one will make less than \$15 per hour. We have 21 sworn state law enforcement officers in the 7th Circuit that serve as investigators and they will all get a 10 percent raise.

**CONGRATULATIONS**

**to my wife Rebekah and daughter Faith!!!**

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**with St. Johns County Commissioner Sarah Arnold, District 2**

**Q: Now about three months into your term as a St. Johns County Commissioner, can you share your thoughts on it so far?**

**A:** It's been wonderful. Everyone, from the other commissioners, to the staff, to the constituents, has been very gracious. I have a huge learning curve, but I think I've been coming up to speed quickly as I learn how all the agencies work together. I'm excited to be able to use this platform to improve St. Johns County and maintain our quality of life.

**Q: When you were first appointed, you said your three priorities as a commissioner would be making sure that the growth/projects approved had a net benefit to St. Johns County, support of veterans, and support of the first responders who keep our county safe. Do you have any additional thoughts on these with your experiences so far as a commissioner?**

**A:** I would say the biggest thing we have worked on, that ties at least a couple of those items together, is the sales tax referendum. I think giving this opportunity to the voters is very important. Our county's growth has outpaced our infrastructure for years. The roads we travel every day, that we drive our children on, are not safe in many cases. I hear from my constituents that they love their quality of life here and want to maintain it. I'm in favor of exploring the potential sales tax because not only

will infrastructure be addressed, but so will first responders. The referendum will address things for them like new equipment, new staff, and their salaries, which need to be adequate so they can live in our county.

This decision is up to the voters, as it should be, and not the commissioners. I know similar referendums have been voted down in the past, but we have a lot of new residents and I'm in favor of putting the question to the voters to let them decide.

**Q: Since the sales tax referendum has had its second reading at the March 15 Board of County Commissioners meeting, and was approved by the board, it will be placed on the Nov. 8 ballot. What will happen in the meantime?**

**A:** I hope the voters will take this time to educate and inform themselves about how the proposed \$500 million in revenue is to be spent: roads, parks and recreation, and first responders. All the details are on the county website, [www.sjcf.us](http://www.sjcf.us). Between now and Nov. 8, it's our job as commissioners to provide information to our constituents so they can make an informed decision.

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

**A:** Readers can email me at [bcc2sarnold@sjcf.us](mailto:bcc2sarnold@sjcf.us) or call me at (904) 325-4182.



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

**Q: Can you give some background on Senate Bill 1048 dealing with standardized testing, which Gov. DeSantis signed into law on March 15?**

**A:** This bill has strong implications as it eliminates the FSA (Florida Standards Assessment) and shifts to progress monitoring to measure students' growth. The FSA tests are taken at the end of the year and are a backwards look with no opportunity for remediation. The three progress monitorings will be spread throughout the year and will allow teachers, who will get results in a couple of weeks, the opportunity to help any struggling student during the school year.

This year will be the last year with FSA. Progress monitoring will begin with the 2022-23 school year as a benchmark year with no school grades given and then the school grades will return in the 2023-24 school year.

**Q: What are your thoughts on this change?**

**A:** The good news is that the big, cumulative annual test that causes so much stress is eliminated. We do progress monitoring in St. Johns County now. There's so much left to do, including the fact that it has not been identified which product the state will choose for its progress monitoring exams. But in concept, I think this is a good change.

**Q: Do you have an update on the Shearwater K – 8 School "NN?"**

**A:** The school board approved the plans for this new K – 8 school in early March. The construction bid is now out and we will have special meetings to approve a bid as soon as possible once the bids come back, which is scheduled for the late March/early April timeframe. Time is of the essence as this school is scheduled to open in fall 2023.

**Q: How is Beachside High School coming along?**

**A:** At the same school board meeting in early March, we learned from our facilities manager that some portions of Beachside will be delayed. We were assured that teaching and learning will be able to happen when the school opens in August as all academic areas will be open. The auditorium and some other ancillary facilities might be delayed due to an inability to get materials in a timely manner.

**Q: What are the school district's COVID protocols at this time?**

**A:** After the students returned from Spring Break, all COVID protocols were lifted. We will now allow 100 percent capacity at sporting events and parents can come to the school to have lunch with their student or to volunteer.

Q&A with Beverly Slough cont. on pg. 12

# Easter at Fruit Cove Sunday, April 17

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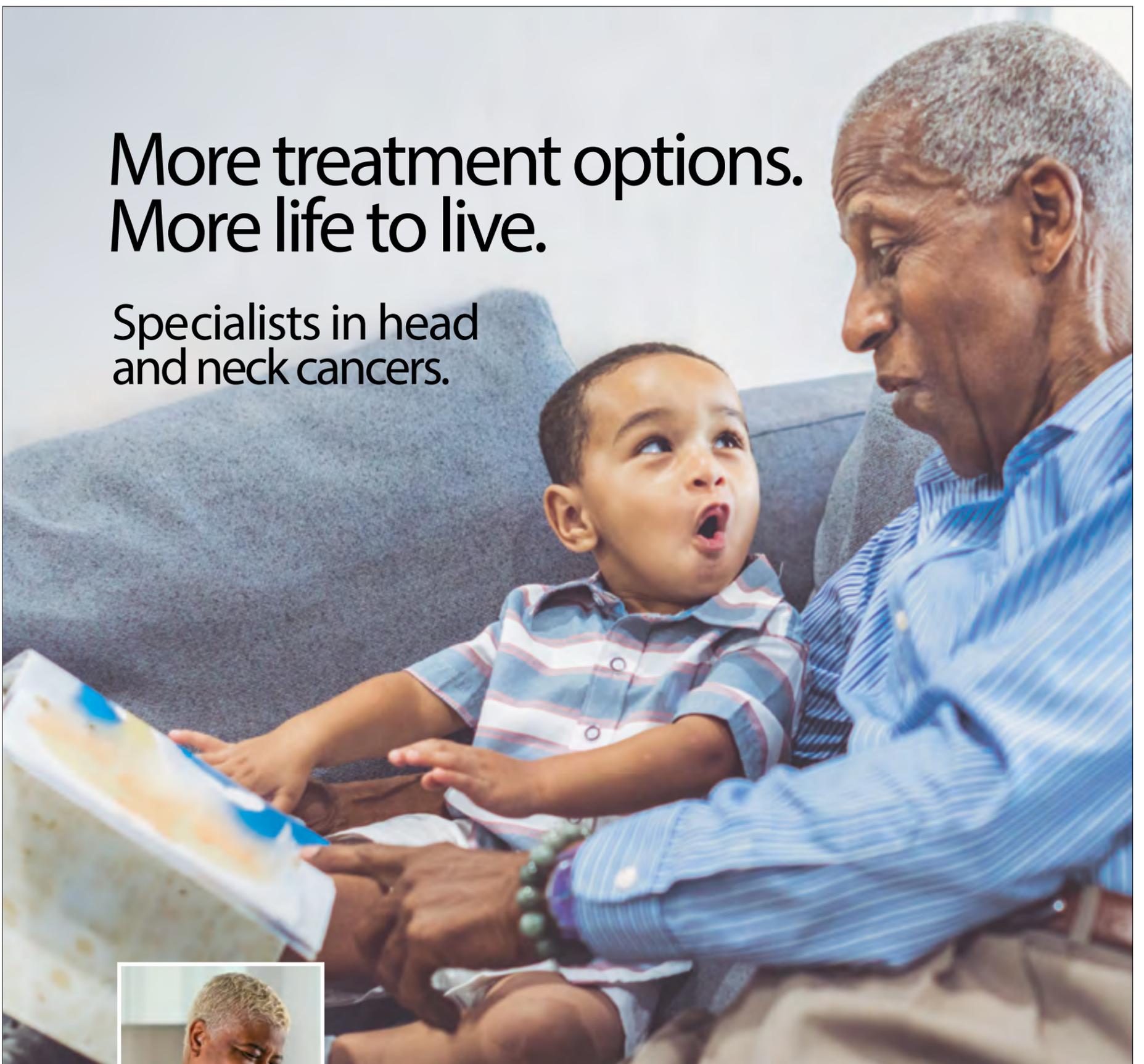
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## More than \$54 million in state funding secured for St. Johns County

By NewsLine Staff  
 mail@floridanewslines.com

The St. Johns County legislative delegation has secured \$54,777,323 in appropriations for critical county projects that will improve the quality of life for county residents. The state's budget includes dollars for road improvements, flood mitigation, special high growth-high performance funding for St. Johns County schools, septic-to-sewer installations, dune restoration, funding for the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind, and assistance for charities helping homeless pregnant women in the county.

Sen. Travis Hutson, Rep. Cyndi Stevenson, and Speaker-designate Paul Renner worked diligently to secure this much-needed funding for St. Johns County.

"We have seen unprecedented growth in St. Johns County. I'm proud to have worked with Speaker designate Renner and Rep. Stevenson to bring these dollars home to address our critical infrastructure needs, which will relieve pressure on our roads and schools," Hutson said. "Although we are still subject to a veto, we are in a great position to receive funding that will help our county. This money is going to make a huge difference."

Sidewalks on Palm Valley and St. Johns Parkway, four-lane construction for County Road 2209, and State Road A1A intersection improvements are among the infrastructure projects funded in this year's state budget.

"We are incredibly grateful for the strong and committed representation we have in Tallahassee. Every project funded by these appropriations is crucial to our county's future," said St. Johns County Administrator Hunter Conrad.

"On behalf of the St. Johns County legislative delegation, I am proud that our collective efforts allowed for legislative and budgetary victories benefitting local families, businesses, and our environment," said Speaker-designate Renner.

St. Johns County's coastal communities, such as the City of St. Augustine Beach would also receive a significant boost to fund drainage improvements and flood

protection projects. The City of St. Augustine also secured budget approval for two significant projects, the West Augustine septic to sewer project and a new fire station on Anastasia Island.

"This funding is going to make a difference for families and the people of St. Johns County for years to come. I look forward to discussing the items with the governor and continuing to work with our outstanding county delegation as we move forward," Rep. Stevenson said.

The St. Johns County projects and initiatives that have received appropriations include:

- High Growth, High Performing School Districts (SJCSD): \$11,422,223
- Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind, Kramer Hall renovation: \$3,500,000
- EPIC Recovery Center Women's Substance Use Residential: \$750,000
- BRAVE: Be Resilient and Voice Emotions: \$3,000,000
- Flagler Hospital CAIR Center: \$8,015,100
- FACT TEAM serving Putnam and St. Johns County: \$3,000,000
- Ponte Vedra Beach, North Beach, and Dune Restoration II: \$1,700,000
- City of St. Augustine Beach flood reduction: \$90,000
- City of St. Augustine Beach resiliency and flood protection: \$1,200,000
- West Augustine septic to sewer: \$2,000,000
- City of St. Augustine Fire Station: \$500,000
- Flagler College Institute for Classical Education: \$5,000,000
- Alpha Omega Miracle Home Campus: \$3,500,000
- St. Johns Parkway (County Road 2209) sidewalk: \$800,000
- County Road 2209 (four lane road construction): \$8,000,000
- Palm Valley sidewalk: \$800,000
- State Road A1A corridor intersection improvements: \$1,000,000
- tag! Children's Museum: \$500,000

On March 14, the Florida Legislature voted to approve the state's \$112 billion budget, known as the General Appropriations Act, which will now head to Gov. Ron DeSantis' desk for his final approval.

## Two new primary care practices open in Northern St. Johns County

By NewsLine Staff  
 mail@floridanewslines.com

Flagler Health+ has expanded its capabilities to provide care within the community with the announcement of the opening of two new primary care facilities in St. Johns County at Julington Creek, off of Race Track Road, and Greenbriar, off of County Road 210.

"The announcement of the opening of these two state-of-the-art facilities in the northern part of St. Johns County continues our commitment to providing lifelong care to our community," said Jason Barrett, CEO and President of Flagler Health+. "This expansion will help ensure that we can continue to best serve the physical, social and economic needs of our friends and neighbors."

Flagler Health+ Primary Care at Greenbriar opened on Monday, Feb. 14, and is located at 304 Ashourian Ave., Suite 105 just off of County Road 210. Flagler Health+ Primary Care at Julington Creek opened the following week on Tuesday, Feb. 22 and is in the Julington Creek area, located at 2570 Race Track Road.

Additionally, the two new practices will feature a pair of Primary Care physicians who have recently joined the Flagler Health+ team. Dr. Mark Michaels will practice at Flagler Health+ Primary Care at Greenbriar, while Dr. Tristan Imhof will practice at the Julington Creek location.

# ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

## Business Briefs

### Thompson earns 2021 Ameriprise Client Experience Award

Christopher Thompson has earned the 2021 Ameriprise Client Experience Award. Thompson holds Certified Financial Planner and Chartered Retirement Planning Counselor certifications and is an Associate Branch Manager and Financial Advisor with Ameriprise Financial, Inc. in Jacksonville.

Thompson was honored with this award because of his ability to consistently deliver personalized, goal-based advice and exceptional client service. Award recipients earned an overall client satisfaction rating equal to or greater than 4.9 out of 5.0 and maintained stellar business results. The award represents an elite group of Ameriprise advisors recognized as leaders for their commitment to making a difference in the lives of their clients.

### Groundbreaking held for WGV Office Park

Ground was officially broken on the new WGV Office Park development on Feb. 17. Located at the entrance of the King & Bear, this five-building office park will total more than 44,000 square feet of office space.

St. Johns County Commissioner Jeremiah Blocker joined Davidson Realty and community supporters to celebrate the groundbreaking ceremony.



Photo courtesy Davidson Realty

Occupants of the office park will have a space built to last as the buildings will have concrete block walls and Hollow Core System roofs. They will also be just across the street from Publix-anchored Shoppes at Murabella and a surrounding community that is growing fast both residentially and commercially. This project has been designed with spaces starting at 1,120 square feet and going up to 12,000 square feet, which allows for the ability to accommodate companies of all sizes.

“We are incredibly excited to kick off

this amazing project. We believe this will be another great addition to the World Golf Village. This project will bring much-needed services to our community,” said Sam Davidson, Realtor® at Davidson Realty and Vice President of Special Operations for Davidson Development.

### SCORE announces April workshops

SCORE is a national service organization that supports small businesses nationwide. SCORE has a network of more than 11,000 volunteers operating in more than 340 local chapters

around the country. The organization is supported by the US Small Business Administration (SBA).

Among the offerings by SCORE for the month of April are the following:

- Deep Dive into Facebook, April 21, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. In this session on Facebook, attendees will analyze if Facebook is really the best platform to drive their particular business. Attendees will learn about different types of content, where to find free or inexpensive tools to organize and assist them, and ultimately how to build a content calendar to stay consistent and relevant to your audience. No fee. Hosted on Zoom; Registration Link: <https://score.tfaforms.net/17?EventID=a105a000005qfUp>
- Get Started with QuickBooks, April 27, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. Learn about QuickBooks and why tracking your finances is important to being successful in your business. Attendees will learn the different types of QuickBooks subscriptions, determining the best one for you and the set-up options to help you get started right. No fee. Hosted on Zoom; Registration Link: <https://score.tfaforms.net/17?EventID=a105a000005qfUu>

Contact Melody Petraglia at [melody.petraglia@scorevolunteer.org](mailto:melody.petraglia@scorevolunteer.org) or visit [jacksonville.score.org](http://jacksonville.score.org) for more information.

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**Q&A with Beverly Slough** cont. from pg. 8

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

**A:** I want to highly encourage the early registration, going on now, of new students to the St. Johns County School District, especially kindergartners or those who were home-schooled or virtual learners who are now coming back to the classroom. This can be accomplished online at

[www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/student/enrollment/](http://www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/student/enrollment/) or by visiting the student's assigned school website. We've struggled all year with a teacher shortage and we need to start early with hiring teachers for next year.

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

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

## Begin planning kids' summer recreation now

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

Summer school recess will be here before you know it. Make sure you're prepared for camp and other recreational programs. Parents thinking ahead to swimming pools and days lounging on the beach can put their daydreams to practical use by planning ahead for their youngsters' summer vacations.

Youth recreational programs and summer camps can bridge the gap in care between the end of school and the day when classes resume. Due in part to high demand, parents who want to place their kids in summer rec programs or summer camps should be vetting such programs and camps well in advance of summer. The following are a handful of tips for moms and dads who want their kids to have fun and fulfilling summers.

- Inquire about camp schedules. While many camps are flexible, day camps do not have the same level of flexibility as after-school programs. Arrangements will need to be made if care is required after regular camp hours. Speak with camp staff to see which types of after-hours programs, if any, are available.

- Determine your camp budget. As varied as program offerings may be, camps also can vary greatly with regard to cost. Government-run camps may be less



Photo courtesy MetroCreative

Summer school recess will be here before you know it. Make sure you're prepared for camp and other recreational programs.

- Ask for recommendations. Speak with fellow parents and trusted friends about where they send their children. Personal recommendations can be helpful, providing firsthand insight into a particular camp or program. Schedule appointments to visit camps that fall within your budget. Take your son or daughter along so he or she can get a sense of what camp will be like.

- Explore all options. Camps come in more flavors than ever before. Certain camps may be faith-based ministries while others may focus on particular sports. Band camps and art camps may appeal to creative kids. Also, there are plenty of general-interest camps that offer various activities without narrowing in on any particular one.

expensive than those offered by private companies. Find out if a particular organization subsidizes a portion of camp costs. Scouting programs often have a dedicated camp and may offer affordable options for scouts. Martial arts schools and dance centers frequently offer camp schedules.

If camp seems out of reach, look into local summer recreation programs at parks or schools. Such programs may not be as extensive as those offered by camps, but they can quell kids' boredom and keep children occupied during the day.

In addition to camp, remember to plan for some free days so children can just enjoy some downtime. Such days can break up the monotony of a routine and provide kids and families time to relax together.

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# Timberlin takes first place ... again!

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewline.com

The Battle of the Books Elementary North competition took place on March 7, 2022. The virtual competition made it possible for family members from all over the country and different parts of the world to tune in and watch. With three teams making it to the bonus round this year, Timberlin Creek Elementary and Durbin Creek Elementary tied for first place in a

very tense final round.

With typical Durbin Creek sportsmanship, Media Specialist Andrea O'Brien shouted out to Media Specialist Elaine Roberson, "No one I would rather share it (the win) with."

"Ditto," responded Roberson as both coaches are fast friends.

In addition, the students at Timberlin Creek Elementary have made quite a name for themselves. This is the third year in a row they have taken first place. No one can even remember the last time this happened for an elementary, middle, or high school. With all the teams studying so hard for the competition, it is an incredible accomplishment. And this year, Timberlin had the first ever all-girl team.

"The girls worked really well as a team, were dedicated to giving their best and I am so

proud of each one of them," Roberson said.

So what is the secret to their success?

Captain Evelyn Fitzsimon said, "The secret to success is just practice. Everyone on our team practiced so much, and

because of that, we won." Congratulations to Captain Evelyn Fitzsimon, Leah Januchowski, Camila Suarez, Kiara Ferreira, Ashweja Mechineni, Saanvi Chinthalani and Mia Cherba on their first place win.



Photo courtesy Elaine Roberson  
This year, Timberlin had the first ever all-girl team.

## Summer classes and camp registration are now open

Afternoon classes run June 13 - July 16 for students from age two and up in ballet, tap, jazz, lyrical, contemporary, modern, acro and hip hop!

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# SUMMER CAMP AND ACTIVITIES GUIDE

## Start planning family-friendly vacations now



Photo courtesy MetroCreative

Camping makes for a fun, affordable and memorable family vacation.

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

Old-fashioned family vacations are a treasured part of many family traditions. Such excursions may be the only time families get to spend any extended time together.

Families have plenty of vacation prospects at their disposal. If this is the year your brood bucks tradition and tries a new vacation destination, explore these family-friendly possibilities.

- Find a location with hands-on activities. Children may grow bored of simply taking in the sights. Vacations that enable them to "do" instead of just "see" may be more enjoyable. Visit locations with "touch" museums or science centers that encourage kids to get in on the action. Historic locales may do demonstrations or reenactments of how life was in eras past. Remember to include children in the family activities and give things a try, such as helping paddle a canoe or light a fire on a camping trip.

- Don't overlook smaller theme parks. While kids may have their hearts set on traveling to the widely popular theme parks, do not rule out options closer to home. Smaller parks may not have every attraction, but they do boast a variety of activities and rides that can keep children occupied for hours. Remember that amusement parks reach peak capacity when kids aren't in school. It may be wise to vacation at off-peak times to avoid the crowds and save time spent waiting in line.

- Choose places of cultural impact. Family vacations do not need to be limited to riding roller coasters. Children can learn a lot and take away lasting memories from vacations that open children's eyes to something new. Visiting a large city, such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, or Atlanta, can be a vacation in education. Metro areas boast attractions that can excite children, including tall buildings, museums and public transportation hubs just waiting to be explored. Families venturing internationally may want to see the cultural centers of Rome, London or Athens.

- Consider a family resort. If a beach-side adventure is your family's idea of the perfect retreat, explore your options with regard to family resorts. For an all-inclusive price, these resorts may couple food packages with accommodations and activities to keep families happy. Check with popular hotel chains to see if they offer all-inclusive packages in destinations your family wants to visit. Parents who are pressed for time often find all-inclusive resorts offer great values and don't involve too much advanced planning.

- Go off the grid. A memorable family vacation does not have to be spent in a the heart of it all. Booking a campsite location and then spending a few days in the great outdoors allows families to get back to nature while enjoying an inexpensive vacation. Families can camp in lodges or basic cabins, or rough it outside in a tent. Some families enjoy the benefits of renting an RV and visiting various campsites on their vacations.

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## St. Augustine Wild Reserve acquires new white lions and a new baby jaguar!

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewline.com

This year, the St. Augustine Wild Reserve received a snow white lioness named Sahara. Since then, the Reserve has acquired four more white lions and lionesses — Zahra, Zuri, Pharaoh, and Aladdin. The white coloration is a rare color variant of the southern African lion. White lions are not albinos; they are leucistic, and vary in color from blonde to white.



Photos courtesy Deborah Warwick  
Ninja with Aladdin.

Ninja is the Reserve's new baby black female jaguar. She currently lives with her best friend, Aladdin, the white lion. According to St. Augustine Wild Reserve founder Deborah Warwick, Ninja lives up to her name, jumping and biting every chance she gets.

The St. Augustine Wild Reserve has finished a gorgeous habitat for one of its cougars, Loki. The habitat is 16 feet high, with ramps and firehose hammocks. Loki loves it, and spends most of his time on the uppermost platform, overseeing his "kingdom."



Hatari.

The Reserve's next project is to build a similar cage for Loki's father, who will be transported to the Reserve as soon as his 16 foot tall cage is finished in a week or two. After that, the plan is to build a new, enormous habitat for the little lioness, Hatari, who is only five months old.

"Hatari is a sweetheart," said Warwick. "She loves going for walks with her handlers, Sean and Britt."



Loki's new cage.

Staffed by a host of valuable volunteers, the St. Augustine Wild Reserve is always in need of new caging and animal supplies. Plans are to raise funds to construct an onsite veterinary clinic, and a barn for diet preparation. Additionally, the Reserve can always use the donation of supplies for its animals, including monetary donations. The Reserve's tour operation has increased since COVID emerged, but is still not back up to full attendance. To protect staff and guests, everything is sanitized, including our guest chairs and our limo golf cart. This is an open-air compound and is always breezy.

"We hope that more visitors will book a tour with us. Our tours are appropriate for children and adults. If you cannot visit, please help us through these slow times by sending a tax-deductible donation," said Warwick.

The St. Augustine Wild Reserve offers tours on an appointment-only basis. Call (904) 940-0664 for reservations, or, preferably, email WildReserve@aol.com. Tours are on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday at 2 p.m. by appoint-

ment only, as well as an 11 a.m. tour on Saturday mornings and a special VIP tour on Friday from 12 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. for an additional fee. To book a tour online, log onto [booeko.com/tigertours](http://booeko.com/tigertours). Donations may be sent to the St. Augustine Wild Reserve, 5190 Farm Creek Road, St. Augustine, FL 32092. To volunteer, contact [wildreserve@aol.com](mailto:wildreserve@aol.com). Visit [www.staugustinewildreserve.org](http://www.staugustinewildreserve.org) for more information. The Reserve is a 501©3 tax exempt organization.



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## PopHistory

By Scott A. Grant  
mail@floridanewslines.com

### The Greatest Story Ever Told

Marine archaeologists recently discovered the wreck of the “Endurance” off the coast of Antarctica, at the bottom of the Weddell Sea. How that ship got there and what happened to its crew is one of the greatest stories ever told.

Ernest Shackleton was one of several early nineteenth century adventurer-explorers seeking to “discover” the South Pole. In 1908, Shackleton got closer than anyone had so far. He made it within 97 miles of the coveted pole.

Unfortunately for Shackleton, in 1911, the Norwegian Roald Amundsen and Shackleton’s fellow Brit, Robert Falcon Scott, engaged in an epic race to be first to the pole. Amundsen brought all the right people and all the right stuff. He easily made it there first, returning safely. Scott brought the wrong people and wrong stuff. Scott and his party faltered on their return and eventually died atop the Beardmore Glacier. The final entry in his journal began with the chilling words “Had we lived...”

What is an Antarctic explorer to do once the Pole has been discovered? Shackleton came up with the idea of leading an expedition that would march across the continent. Shackleton raised money for the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition and acquired a ship, the “Endurance.” In late 1914, shortly after the beginning of World War I, Shackleton and 27 crew members set out.

It was a particularly cold summer at the South Pole and as the “Endurance” approached Antarctica it became stuck in the ice. The ice swelled, as ice tends to do, ultimately crushing the “Endurance” and sending her to the bottom. Shackleton and his men, now trapped on the ice, began to march toward the open sea, dragging their three lifeboats behind them. They made less than a mile per day, but soon realized that the currents in the Weddell Sea were moving counterclockwise pushing the ice out to sea near an archipelago off the Antarctic coast.

They decided to camp on the ice and let nature do its work. And so, they floated northwest on the melting ice until it became too unstable. They loaded everything into their three lifeboats and rowed hard toward Elephant Island. Captain Frank Worsley got them there and for the first time in months, the crew of the Endurance set foot on dry land. But they were far from safe. No one was coming to their rescue. No one even knew they were there.

Shackleton had the largest of the lifeboats, the James Caird, fitted with a sail and decking. Together with Worsley and four others he set out to sail 800 miles across the most dangerous ocean in the world to the whaling station on South Georgia Island off the coast of Argentina. Getting to South Georgia was a little like finding a needle in a haystack. Along the way, they were hit by a monstrous rogue wave, but the Caird somehow stayed afloat. After 17 days at sea in the tiny boat, they made landfall on South Georgia Island.

But they were on the wrong side. Rather than risk the sea again, Shackleton determined to hike across the island and its 3,000-foot-high central ridge. Three members of the party were too weak to continue. Shackleton left them in a cave and set out to cross the island with Worsley and one other. As they approached the top of the mountain, both Shackleton and Worsley had the distinct impression that a fourth, unseen figure, was traveling with them. As they crested the summit, they realized to their dismay that the descent was going to be more difficult than the ascent.

They were exhausted. It was getting dark. The situation was desperate. So, they made the decision to place their lives in the hands of providence and slide down a large glacier on their butts, not knowing what awaited them at the bottom. The next morning, they walked into the Norwegian whaling station. Shackleton had torn his pants on the slide down the mountain. He apologized profusely for arriving at the manager’s house in ripped pants.

The three crewmen on the far side of the island were quickly rescued. Those stranded in Antarctica would have to wait three more months. Shackleton begged and borrowed the service of three ships; none of them made it through the ice. Finally, on his fourth attempt aboard the Chilean tugboat “Yelcho,” the waters cleared. As the heavy fog lifted, the 21 stranded crewmen saw something they had given up hope of ever seeing: a rescue ship.

Shackleton brought home all 27 members of his expedition. Miraculously, no one died. Five years later, Shackleton made another attempt. He died of a heart attack on South Georgia Island. He is buried there.

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

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# Life

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## Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson  
editor@floridanewsline.com

### Evan Sinclair

Local teenager Evan Sinclair is a talented musician who can play lead guitar at a professional level in almost any genre with an affinity for improvisation. He currently plays with a jazz/funk band called SPOT. They have an album being released on April 9 and on the same day will be headlining at 1904 Music Hall in Jacksonville. Born and raised in Fruit Cove, he attended Julington Creek Elementary School before being homeschooled starting in fourth grade. He graduated from high school in 2021 and is working full time on his music career. In his spare time, he enjoys playing video games, practicing his guitar and working on writing original songs.

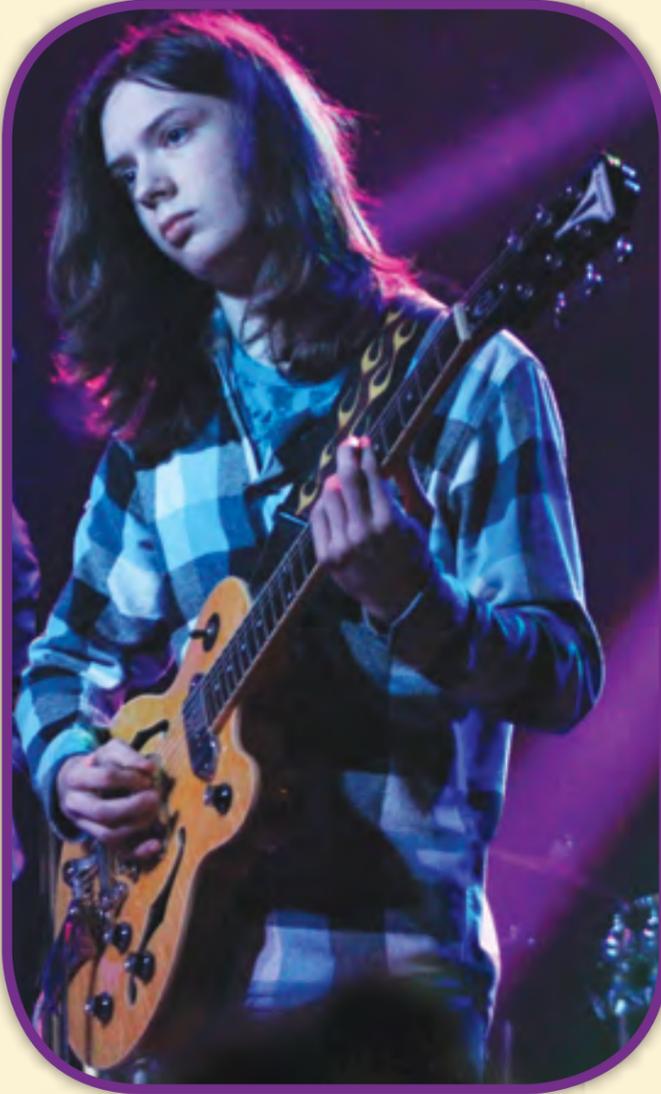


Photo courtesy Erik Mayo  
Evan Sinclair

**Q: How old were you when you started playing the guitar?**

**A:** When I was about 10 years old, I used to watch concerts on Netflix and pretend to be the guitarist, so my parents got me a real guitar. For the first couple of years, I was self taught, using online videos. When I was 12, I started studying under Shawn Pfaffman. With him, I developed my natural ear and music theory. He also taught me how to play with a band.

**Q: What bands have you played in?**

**A:** I started by playing in bands that Shawn had formed. In 2015 I played

bass as a member of Tone Revival, an alternative rock band, at the Jacksonville Public Library Battle of the Bands, which we won. We played a lot of originals and some covers. Then in 2016, I played guitar with Allie and the Kats, a blues/rock band that I helped form. Again we won the Jacksonville Public Library Battle of the Bands. In 2017, we represented Jacksonville at the International Blues Festival in Memphis.

At this point, I really wanted to play with a progressive metal band, so I

joined Haxprocess for about two years. Now I'm part of SPOT, a trio with Shawn Pfaffman on organ and Paul Griffin on drums. We play a fusion of jazz and funk that we call "junk."

**Q: How do you feel about your upcoming album being released?**

**A:** It's pretty cool because it's not often I get to record and refine my own music. I love improvisation, but when you get to refine the music to get it just how you want it, it's very satisfying.

**Q: What are your future plans?**

**A:** My focus is on music. I want to make a career out of it. I like playing jazz/funk, but I also hope to create a progressive metal band and play with that. Shawn has really helped me learn how to play a lot of different styles and I like playing them all.

**Q: Who would you consider to be your musical influences?**

**A:** I would say Eric Johnson for guitar playing. For bands, I would say Dream Feeder, Opeth, Led Zeppelin, Rush, and Steely Dan. We always listened to music at home when I was growing up and so I came to consider these bands as my influences.

*[Editor's Note: Visit evansinclair.com for more information about Evan Sinclair.]*

## Get to Know ...

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

**New primary care practices** cont. from pg. 10

Dr. Mark Michaels cares for patients, newborn and up, with an emphasis on disease prevention. He is an American Board of Family Medicine certified physician who obtained his Medical Degree from St. George's University after completing his B.S. in Brain, Behavior, and Cognitive Science at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor. He completed his residency training in Michigan where he joined the residency as a faculty member and eventually became Program Director before deciding to relocate his family to Florida.

Dr. Tristan Imhof cares for patients from birth through geriatrics, encouraging a healthy lifestyle to prevent the underlying variables that cause chronic disease in hopes of saving lives and creating a much healthier general population. He is a board-certified family medicine physician who joined the Flagler Health+ physician enterprise from Baptist Primary Care. He completed his residency at St. Luke's University Health Network after receiving his medical degree from University of Medicine and Health Services in New York city and his undergraduate degree from Isenberg School of Management at the University of Massachusetts.

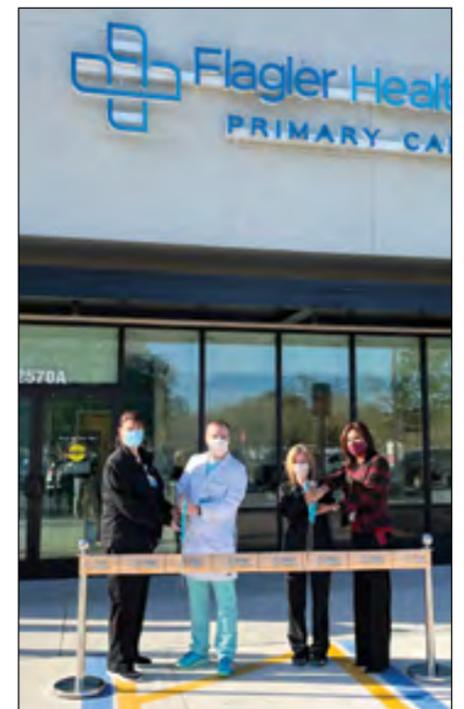


Photo courtesy Flagler Health+  
Flagler Health+ Primary Care at Julington Creek opened on Tuesday, Feb. 22 with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

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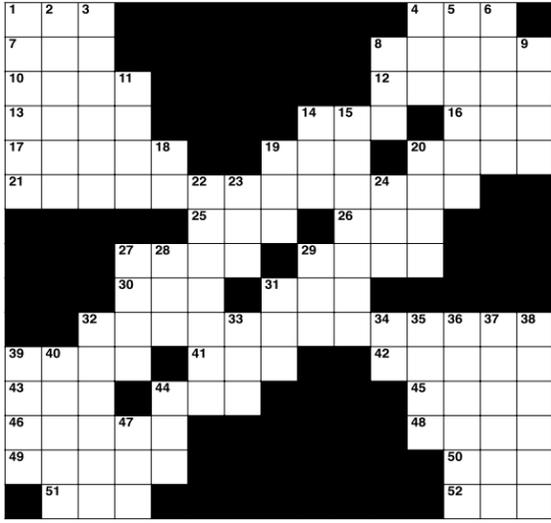
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# Puzzles

Answers on page 3  
Provided by MetroCreative



### CLUES ACROSS

1. Runs PCs
4. An entertaining, eccentric person
7. Small, faint constellation
8. Indigo bush
10. Not excessive
12. African antelope
13. A way to fly a glider
14. Tough softly
16. In the course of
17. Early Mesoamerican people
19. A way to drop down
20. Mistake!
21. Housing developments
25. Baseball stat
26. No (Scottish)
27. Type of cuisine
29. British Army infantrymen (abbr.)
30. Marry
31. Buffer solution
32. Legendary rock band
39. Recording industry show
41. A way to consume
42. Lake in Botswana
43. Political action committee
44. Field force unit (abbr.)
45. Very eager
46. Excessive fluid accumulation in tissues
48. Nocturnal insect
49. Challenged to perform
50. Thus far
51. Famed NYC arena
52. Commercials

### CLUES DOWN

1. Small, purple-black fruit
2. Baltimore ballplayer
3. Highly seasoned sausage
4. Split pulses
5. Northwestern Mexico town
6. Edible fruit
8. Upper-class southern young woman
9. Sums up
11. The most worthless part
14. Dash
15. Sufferings
18. Clearinghouse (abbr.)
19. Indian title of respect
20. Poems meant to be sung
22. Actor Cooper
23. Luke's mentor \_\_\_-Wan
24. Clumsy person
27. Figures
28. Polish Baltic coast peninsula
29. Old cloth
31. Explosive
32. Automobiles
33. 007's creator
34. The Volunteer State
35. Old Irish alphabet
36. Japanese city
37. Portrayed emotion
38. Observers
39. Mimicked
40. Polite reference to a woman
44. Male parent
47. Peter Griffin's daughter

## GREEN THUMB WORD SEARCH

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

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

### WORDS

- AERATION
- COMPOST
- CONTROL
- CRABGRASS
- DROUGHT
- ENRICHMENT
- FERTILIZATION
- GRASS
- GREENERY
- GRUBS
- HOSE
- IRRIGATION
- LEVELS
- MOLD
- MOLES
- MULCH
- PESTS
- PLANTS
- PRUNING
- RAINING
- RESEEDING
- SOIL
- WEEDS
- YARD



Solve the code to discover words related to lawn care. Each number corresponds to a letter. (Hint: 1 = E)

- A. 20 6 18 1 16  
Clue: Cuts grass
- B. 18 1 1 23 15  
Clue: Unwanted plants
- C. 21 1 16 10 26 11 26 7 1  
Clue: Feed greenery
- D. 11 3 4 23 15 12 3 24 1  
Clue: Visual features of a yard

Briefs cont. from pg. 2

Zones or FEMA Flood Insurance rates.

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

### Take Steps Walk: Ten years and counting

The annual Take Steps Jacksonville Walk will take place April 23 at the Beachwalk Club on County Road 210 with registration at 9 a.m. followed by the walk at 10 a.m. Patients, families, caregivers, and healthcare professionals across the country have been walking in support of those living with Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis for more than 10 years and raised more than \$85 million to move forward the work in research, patient services, advocacy, and professional education.

Supporters are encouraged to create a team and raise money to help to change the lives of the almost 18,000 residents of Northeast Florida affected. Needed are walk teams, participants and volunteers; visit [www.cctakesteps.org/jacksonville2022](http://www.cctakesteps.org/jacksonville2022) to register. There is no registration fee to participate, but all fundraising participants are encouraged to donate \$100 to receive a t-shirt and pennant and be eligible for the Pacesetter Club.

The Crohn's & Colitis Foundation is the largest voluntary non-profit health organization dedicated to finding cures for Inflammatory Bowel Diseases. Visit [www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org](http://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org) or call (888)

694-8872 for more information.

### Easter bonnets requested at Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club April luncheon

The Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club will hold its April meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, April 12 at 11 a.m. at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club, located at 205 St. Johns Golf Drive. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. The cost of the luncheon will be \$23; make checks payable to BTNC and mail to Deborah Russell, 12376 Fireberry Ct., Jacksonville, FL 32258. Payment must be received no later than April 7, 2022, no exceptions. Be sure to indicate your entrée choice on the check memo line; visit [www.facebook.com/BTNC1](http://www.facebook.com/BTNC1) for food choices and updated information.

Attendees are asked to dress in an Easter bonnet and enter the contest for Most Elaborate, Most Funny, and Most Creative. There will be a dice game of Left Center Right, and \$3 is needed to play.

The Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club meets the second Tuesday of every month from September to May for lunch. In addition to the monthly meetings, the club has a wide variety of interest groups, including Bridge, Continental Rummy, Pennies Canasta, Mexican Chicken Train dominoes, Bunko, Mah Jongg, golf, recipe exchange, monthly special events, book clubs, lunch and matinee, Lunch Divas, Ladies Night Out, a nature walk group and community

projects. Email [bartramtnc@gmail.com](mailto:bartramtnc@gmail.com) or visit [www.facebook.com/BTNC1](http://www.facebook.com/BTNC1) for more information.

### Newcomers of North St. Johns announces April luncheon

Newcomers of North Saint Johns (NNSJ) will host its April luncheon on Tuesday, April 19, beginning at 11:15 a.m. at Al Dente's Ristorante Italiano, 90 Shops Blvd. in St. Johns. The event features games of bingo after lunch and great prizes.

As part of this special luncheon event, NNSJ members are encouraged to bring a children's book as a donation to the St. Johns County Public Library System. "The last time we had our book drive, we were able to collect more than 40 books to give to the Main Library in St. Augustine and also generated nearly \$175 in cash donations," said Lyn Whitlock, co-president of the club. "We hope we can exceed our last book drive!"

Doors will open at 11:15 a.m. The cost for the luncheon and program is \$30 for members with a guest price of \$35. All reservations must be received by April 8, 2022.

Contact Sue Aird at [sjaire@comcast.net](mailto:sjaire@comcast.net) to register for the luncheon or for more information about membership. Newcomers of North St. Johns offers a wide variety of activities to get acquainted and have fun including smaller lunch groups, wine socials, golf, Mah Jongg, holiday parties, day trips and cultural events.

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# A dynasty? Nease JROTC is best drill team in northeast Florida



Senior cadets Brodie Mongon, Anthony Tuckers, Daniel Mahoney, Kaitlyn Boggs, Isabella Rivera and Emmelie Neff receive the Area-12 Academic, Athletic and Drill Championship trophy on March 5 in Douglas, Georgia.

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

Nease lost its last sanctioned drill meet in Area-12 more than 2,900 days ago. Since that defeat during the 2014 Area-12 Drill Championships, Nease has reeled off 29 consecutive drill championships — the last being the 2022 Area-12 Academic, Athletic and Drill Championship at Coffee County, Georgia on March 5. With eight straight state championships beginning in 2015, Nease established itself as arguably northeast Florida's most dominating high school championship program.

Competing against the very best 15 Navy high school JROTC drill teams in Area-12, an area which includes all of northeastern Florida and the entire state of Georgia, Nease swept first place in all five Drill events, all three Athletic events, Personnel Inspection and narrowly placed second only in Academics — thereby preventing a clean sweep across the board.

Nease competed in five previous drill competitions this year, winning at Sprayberry (Georgia), Lee County (Georgia), Martin Luther King (Georgia), Mandarin (Florida) and Flanagan (Miami, Florida).

“This team has improved exponentially since our first competition last October,” said senior naval science instructor Captain Scott LaRochelle. “We’re peaking at just the right time with the

national championships in early April.”

Nease’s individual drill commanders chose the right time to deliver their very best performances. Isabella Rivera (Color Guard and Unarmed Exhibition), Kaitlyn Boggs (Unarmed Basic), Daniel Mahoney (Armed Exhibition) and Brodie Mongon (Armed Basic) led their units to near perfect scores during the competition.

“One of the competition judges was previously assigned as a member of the Marine Corps Ceremonial Honor Guard in Washington, DC,” said Master Chief Duane Spears. “He commented that our cadets’ discipline and focus in drill was the best he had ever seen.”

“Being on this team has taught me so much about leadership and teamwork,” said Rivera. “As a freshman, I was just happy to be a part of the team. Now as a senior, I have the opportunity to command under pressure... and it’s awesome.” Her hard work paid dividends as she has already received appointments to both the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, Merchant Marine Academy, and a national NROTC scholarship to Virginia Tech.

Several cadets also garnered top honors for individual performance, including Ben Prohovsky – first in Academics, Anthony Tucker – first in Male Sit Ups, and Daniella Camacho – first in Female Sit Ups.



Nease's Armed Basic team under the command of Brodie Mongon performs its winning routine during the Area-12 Championships.

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# Garden of Excellence



Photo courtesy Dianne Battle, Garden Club of Switzerland

The Garden Club of Switzerland would like to congratulate Kathy and Charles Schwob of 1525 Pintail Drive on their excellent yardscaping. Their property has earned our Garden Excellence Award for the month of April. We would also like to recognize Mary Sue and Michael Wolf at 1484 Mallard Lake Avenue for their excellent landscaping. Next month you may see our members driving through your community. It is always a pleasure to see what our neighbors are doing to beautify their properties. Visit www.switzerlandgc.org if you would like more information or would like to nominate a noteworthy yard.

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## Nutrition Check

## Celebrating International Carrot Day!

By Kristen Hicks-Roof PhD, RDN and Caroline Jury BS  
[mail@floridanewslines.com](mailto:mail@floridanewslines.com)

We would like to feature this delicious vegetable in honor of International Carrot Day celebrated on April 4 each year. Carrots have now become an everyday staple in many households, dating back from the 10th century in Persia and Asia Minor. Did you know that carrots are the sixth most consumed fresh vegetable across the United States? (AGMRC)

Carrots can come in an array of colors including orange, red, white, purple, black, and yellow. One of the most popular carrots that we consume every day is the orange carrot. Orange carrots contain beta carotene, which helps keep your vision healthy. Two small-to-medium raw carrots provide 41 calories, 0.93 g protein, 9.58 g carbohydrate, and 2.8 g fiber. The color differences play an essential role in the nutritional contents of the carrots. Each color brings different nutrients and unique phytochemicals to provide nutritional boosts to our body and immune system.

What are some fun ways that you can add carrots into your dietary pattern?

1. Pack a small bag of carrots and your favorite dip (ranch, hummus, artichoke spread) as a healthy on-the-go snack
2. Shred carrot varieties into one of your regular dishes you cook. Some fun examples include meatloaf, spaghetti, soup, and roasts.
3. Try presenting carrots in different ways such as sliced vs. whole. You can also try cutting horizontal vs. vertical. Visual presentation is one of the five senses of how we enjoy food.
4. One of our favorite recipes to make are air-fried carrots with sprinkled parmesan cheese. If you don't have an air fryer, baking it will do just the trick! Add a splash of vegetable oil or vegetable spray and a dash of salt and rosemary and you will make the perfect combination.

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

## Card group seeks members



Photo courtesy Terry Brickhouse

A local card group, Jokers Wild, plays the game of "Hand, Knee, and Foot" on Wednesdays. If you are interested in joining, call (904) 230-6963 and leave a message.

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# Fishing

## Capt. David's Fishing Report

By Capt. David Lifka  
mail@floridanewsline.com

April showers may bring more flowers, but best of all it's time for flounder. Not only flounder, but many other species of fish that find their way down the St. Johns River this time of year.

Bridges and docks from downtown Jacksonville to Green Cove Springs are the most likely areas to locate this tasty favorite. Shrimp, jig heads tipped with shrimp, and even live finger mullet are all quality baits that can be used. Flounder can be caught at most any depth, but when fishing docks and bridge pilings, depths of about 15 feet or less might be more productive. Remember that the minimum size limit is now 14 inches with a daily bag limit of five per person.

Croaker is another species of fish that can be expected at any time in the river. This smaller cousin of the redfish is both plentiful and very good eating and should be plentiful all through the river during the upcoming months. Croaker make a great fish fry for friends and family as there are no restrictions to size and the bag limit can't be over 100 pounds. Dead shrimp or even earthworms soaked on the bottom is all that is needed to catch this fish.

Yellowmouth trout, now referred to as weakfish, can show as early as April in our parts of the river. Since they are a little more finicky regarding the salinity of the river, rainfall amounts can speed up or delay their arrival. Shrimp, cut bait, or jig heads tipped with either, should be fished on the bottom in holes and near ledges.

Weakfish make for another great fish fry catch as there is no size limit and a daily bag limit of 100 pounds per person.

If there was to be a kickoff month to our fishing season for the St. Johns, April would be most likely the month. With warmer weather and increasing water temperatures bait fish and their predators will definitely be on the increase. Flounder, croaker, and weak fish are just some of the species to be expected along with drum, sheepshead, and everyone's favorite, the redfish and more.

While our saltwater fishing in the river is still on warm and waiting to get hot, our area's freshwater fishing is already there. The bass bite has been strong in all our area freshwater locations, and it should continue into the summer. Surf fishing is also turned all the way up with whiting catches of 30 to 40 being reported.

Fishing Report: Freshwater fishing for bass continues to be very good, while fishing the beach for whiting seems to be at its best.

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

Email your Catch of the Month photo to catchofthemonthpictures@gmail.com. Be sure to include the name of the person(s) in the photo, the name of the person who took the photo, the type of fish and date and location of the catch. We will select a photo each month for publication.

## The Pantry Raiders

## Pecans give these cookies extra appeal

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewsline.com

Cookies may never be considered "health food," but there are ways to make them more nutritious. The addition of beneficial ingredients like pecans can do just that. This recipe for "Cowboy Cookies" from "Live Well, Bake Cookies" (Rock Point) by Danielle Rye includes oats, pecans and coconut in the mixture, adding flavor and nutritional appeal.



with the paddle attachment or in a large mixing bowl using a handheld mixer, beat the butter, brown sugar and granulated sugar together for 1 to 2 minutes, or until well combined.

- Mix in the eggs, one at a time, then mix in the vanilla extract until fully combined, making sure to stop and scrape down the sides of the bowl as needed.
- Mix in the dry ingredients until just combined, then mix in the chocolate chips, shredded coconut and chopped pecans on low speed until fully incorporated.
- Cover tightly and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.
- Preheat the oven to 350 F. Line large baking sheets with parchment paper or silicone baking mats and set aside.
- Using a 1½ tablespoon cookie scoop, scoop the cookie dough onto the prepared baking sheets, making sure to leave a little room between each one. Gently press each ball of cookie dough down to slightly flatten it.
- Bake for 10 to 13 minutes, or until the tops of the cookies are set and the edges are lightly browned. Remove from the oven, and allow the cookies to cool on the baking sheets for 5 to 10 minutes, then carefully transfer the cookies to a wire rack to cool completely.

### Cowboy Cookies

Makes 50 to 52 cookies

- 2 cups all-purpose flour, spooned and leveled
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup packed light brown sugar
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs, at room temperature
- 2 tsp. pure vanilla extract
- 1 ½ cups semisweet chocolate chips
- ¾ cup sweetened shredded coconut
- 1 cup chopped pecans

- In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, baking soda, ground cinnamon, and salt until well combined. Stir in the old-fashioned rolled oats and set aside.
- In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted

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# Gardening

## Gardens for Nature

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale  
 mail@floridanewsline.com

Information from the University of Florida, which master gardener volunteers rely on to inform the public, is research-based and reliable. Up-to-the-minute gardening advice and timely tips from UF can always be found in “The Neighborhood Gardener” (<https://tinyurl.com/39p7t8md>) and in our own Duval County newsletter “A New Leaf – Yard and Garden” (<https://tinyurl.com/2p899u5c>).

To go directly to the source, check out <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/>, where you can find links to Lawn and Garden information and Natural Resources. The Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide is invaluable (<https://tinyurl.com/ysmpahnk>).

If you prefer, you can call the Extension Office at (904) 255-7450, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. or 12:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. and ask to speak to a master gardener volunteer. They are available to give you friendly, informed advice whenever you need it.

There are other reliable online resources these days about gardening and related issues, which I've found can deliver fascinating, detailed information on how our yards and gardens can be both delightful for us and a welcoming habitat for our feathered — and other — friends.

Birds are the most obvious visitors to our gardens. Sadly, numbers of backyard birds have plummeted in recent years. The same might have been true of game birds, but with concerted efforts to improve their situation through wetland protection and restoration efforts, their numbers have rebounded.

So how can we make a difference nearer to home? First, we need to understand that the birds we see in our yards are primarily dependent on insects to feed their young — and that means mainly caterpillars. We are familiar with the milkweeds on which monarch butterflies lay their eggs, but many other butterflies and moths also lay eggs on one or a few species of plants and if we don't include those plants in our yards, then the birds won't have the caterpillars they need for their young to thrive.

Doug Tallamy is a noted expert on developing habitat in small spaces, like our yards, and recently he gave a talk to the Garden Club of Jacksonville: <https://>

[tinyurl.com/2n5xe4k3](https://tinyurl.com/2n5xe4k3). It's a comprehensive and fascinating explanation of why we should and how we can use native plants to effectively support our birdlife.

For a table summarizing which native plants are most useful — our “keystone species” — go to the National Wildlife Federation (<https://tinyurl.com/y22cyfmk>). You'll find that our oaks support hundreds of insects, and asters like goldenrods (*Solidago* sp.) are superstars in the border.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is another great resource. They offer online courses for a fee, but there is also a series of free videos on YouTube, and this is one that I've found useful: <https://tinyurl.com/wwwmfxu5>.

Check out the Xerces Society (<https://tinyurl.com/2p8fcfbm>), The Audubon Society (<https://tinyurl.com/mrxvuspe>), and from the USDA, a useful series of links to backyard conservation information (<https://tinyurl.com/2p9h8c2c>).

Here in Jacksonville, the Ixia chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society holds meetings and arranges field trips. Check them out here: <https://ixia.fnpschapters.org/>.

It was a warm and often too-dry start to our year. Clearing out some areas of my backyard in March, when it felt like high summer, I wondered just what the actual summer will bring. Cool season leafy vegetables have gone to seed more quickly than expected and aphids appeared at the end of February. I'm expecting the beneficial insects to show up, but their food source, the pests, arrive before the predators and I've only spotted two species of assassin bugs.

Our average last frost date now falls between March 1 and March 10. Ironically, on March 12, local temperatures fell to the low 30s. So, averages are just that — averages. I had recently trimmed back dead stems of various perennials, which made them more vulnerable to frost. Where practical, I covered some of them to protect the tender new growth they've already put on, but I was mainly concerned about potted plants, smaller plants and seedlings I've been propagating, potted citrus, and house plants. Luckily temperatures weren't as low as I had feared. Here's hoping that's the last cold snap of the season!



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# Travel

## World's first theme park for preschoolers: Peppa Pig

By Debi Lander  
mail@floridanewslines.com

I first encountered Peppa Pig, a children's TV show, when visiting my son and his family in Baltimore. My three-year-old granddaughter was watching, so I joined her. The charm of the animated characters speaking with British accents captivated me: Peppa, her brother George, and Mommy and Daddy Pig.

Preschoolers adore the show, and their parents approve; thus, Peppa gained a following and rose to fame. Now, she stars in her own theme park located in Winter Haven, Florida, adjacent to Legoland. I checked out the preschooler's playground, a Certified Autism Center, and found it "oinktastic," as Peppa might say.

Rides and attractions are sized for children five and younger and handicapped accessible, but some require a minimum height. Daddy Pig's Roller Coaster ranks as the most adventurous. Take a seat behind Daddy Pig's red car — and you're off. The caravan scoots participants up (not too high) and then rolls the vehicles down and around numerous swift curves. Once was enough for me, but Izzy Hough of Clermont, celebrating her fifth birthday, claimed the roller coaster as her favorite attraction in the park.

Grampy Rabbit's Dinosaur Adventure (very tame) gently rocks a seated child and adult around the dino quest grounds. High Striker slides seated riders up and down a bench attached to

a tower. You can ride in a boat or hot air balloon or let your kiddos pedal a tricycle (two sizes) within a confined path.

Allow time to explore the Fun Fair with traditional games, a playground with a giant sandbox, nature trail, maze, fort, and greenhouse.

Water's always a winner. Muddy Puddles Splash Pad tickles the piggies with cooling spray via sprouting fountains and watery showers. Here, I found Izzy's sister, Eden, sopping wet. Eden, celebrating her second birthday, was delighted. Eden's mom, Christina, suggested visitors bring towels for drying off.

The park gets direct sun, so bring plenty of sunscreen and hats. If you get hot (and you will), take a break and head inside to watch some episodes of Peppa Pig on the big screen. Peppa and her family also perform live shows on a stage covered by a tent throughout the day. Check the schedule for Peppa's personal meet and greet sessions.

You can save by purchasing single-day tickets online at \$30.99 instead of the \$35 price at the gate. Everyone two and older needs a ticket. I was pleased to



Peppa Pig.

hear you can bring food into the playspace, another way to keep costs down.

To avoid peak crowds (snort, snort), choose a weekday, arrive before the park opens at 10 a.m., or start your visit in the afternoon. Many families leave in the early afternoon.

I also spent a night in the Pirate Island section of the Legoland Hotel. Each room includes a king-size bed and a separate sleeping space (bunk beds with a trundle) for kids. Colorful pirate-themed murals cover the walls. Legos, of course — a container of them below the TV. The most fun thing about the room is following the treasure hunt that



Photos courtesy Debi Lander  
Park sign.



On the roller coaster.

unlocks hidden treats. While you might need to rob a treasure chest to afford the hotel rates, the facility offers many advantages: you can park and leave your car for free, walk only steps to Peppa Pig

or Legoland theme parks, go back to your room for nap time, and extend the day at the hotel's pool and waterpark. A mini-golf course and s'more fire pit are located on the property near the lake. Two restaurants await any hunger needs. The waiters serve complimentary breakfast at your table. The Shipwreck Restaurant serves bountiful family-style dinners — reservations suggested.

For a fun day and more information: VisitCentralFlorida.com.

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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- Dorothy



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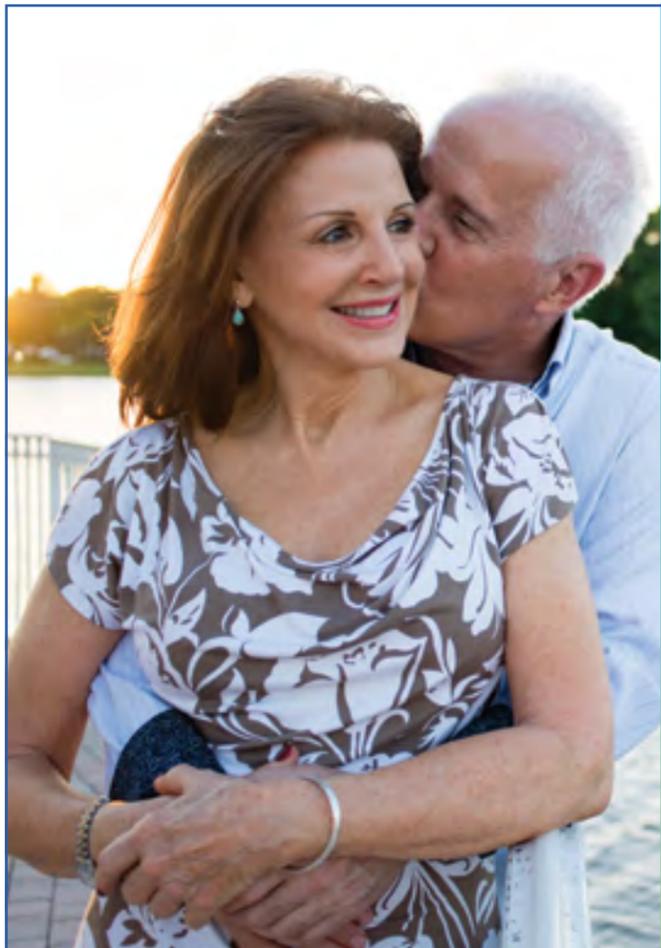
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