

Ponte Vedra NewsLine

AUGUST 2022 Volume 9 Issue 8

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

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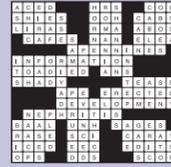
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HUGS St. Johns expects to clothe 500+ local kids-in-need this upcoming school year

By Brette Reiman
mail@floridanewslines.com

Local nonprofit HUGS St. Johns expects another busy school year providing emergency food, clothing, school supplies and more to hundreds of St. Johns County children-in-need. Founded in 2009, HUGS (formerly Hugs Across the County) works closely with St. Johns County school counselors, as well as non-profit partners like the Betty Griffin Center domestic violence shelter to provide children-in-need with basic necessities, from food to shoes to toiletries.

According to Jessica Gamble, child advocate with the Betty Griffin Center safety shelter, "The emergency clothing bags from HUGS help provide a sense of normalcy for the children, and ease the difficult transition into our shelter by meeting some of their most basic needs."

This year, HUGS expects to pack emergency clothing bags for more than 500 local children who face poverty, homelessness or domestic

HUGS cont. on pg. 2

A NEW LIFE: HELPING UKRAINIAN FAMILIES

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewslines.com

When the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, all Natalia Plyam could do was cry for the first few weeks. Then she decided that she wanted to do something locally to help and saw a Facebook post about Ukrainians coming to this area and needing assistance. She responded to that post and began finding neighbors via a local social media site who wanted to assist Ukrainian families. She began by posting a need for furniture, next housing and then jobs.

The response was immediate and overwhelming.

"It is a wonderful community, and everyone has been so generous. Little by little, we are getting somewhere," said Plyam, who is from East Ukraine. "Honestly, it took on a life of its own. It has become a movement."

Plyam said 28 people from nine different families have been helped so far. One neighbor donated \$2,000, another resident donated a condo for three months to a family and a lot of furniture has been donated, Plyam said. Also, Plyam's best friend is a partner in a local law firm and has offered to do pro bono legal work for Ukrainians in need of legal advice. Residents continue to ask Plyam how they can help, and she intends to act as intermediary for as long as necessary.

Plyam, who has lived in Ponte Vedra Beach for four years, came to the United States when she was 19 years old as a Jewish refugee. At that time, Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union.

"I was one of the lucky ones," she said, adding that her husband arrived in the United States when he was seven years old. The couple, who have three children, lived in California prior to moving to Ponte Vedra Beach.



Photo courtesy Alex Stozhok

Alex Stozhok greeting friends who had just arrived from Ukraine.

Alex Stozhok moved to the United States from Ukraine in March and said he felt very welcomed by the Ponte Vedra Beach community via Plyam's outreach efforts.

"This is an amazing area with amazing people," said Stozhok, who moved with his wife, three young daughters and mother-in-law. "I came here with \$2,000 in my wallet. I did not expect all the help that we received."

In Ukraine before the war, Stozhok ran three businesses with his six brothers. He had built a new house for his family, and they had only lived in it for four months before the family had to flee. Now three brothers are in Ponte Vedra Beach and three brothers remain in Ukraine along with his sister and parents.

Stozhok is focused on helping other Ukrainian families as they arrive, continuing to assist his brothers with restarting the businesses in Ukraine once the Russians are gone, and making enough money now to pay for daily living expenses. His wife, Olena, cleans houses, and he plans to start a business in Ponte Vedra Beach.

Plyam said many residents have stepped up to sponsor Ukrainians, which is a requirement to be able to move to the United States. Stozhok's 18-year-old brother is being sponsored by Ponte Vedra Beach resident Audrey Costabile. While it was a lot of paperwork, Costabile said it was an easy task for an incredibly amazing purpose.

"I am so happy to reunite him with his

Helping cont. on pg. 2

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HUGS cont. from pg. 1

violence. Each bag includes five to seven outfits, new underwear, new shoes, full size toiletries and school supplies so that children can attend school with dignity.

“Each year in the St. Johns County School District, approximately 800 students are identified as homeless per the McKinney-Vento Act. Some of the many priority needs of identified students are clothing and hygiene supplies,” said Michael Israel, St. Johns County McKinney-Vento Liaison. “HUGS St. Johns has been a huge support in meeting the needs of hundreds of students each year. Their thoughtfulness is shown in each package they provide, and the sense of pride that our identified students have when they can put on a fresh set of clothing items each day is invaluable.”

HUGS clothing program volunteers help organize its clothing warehouse,

pack emergency clothing bags for kids referred by counselors, or deliver clothing bags to local schools. HUGS also appreciates when neighbors, book clubs, and civic groups coordinate clothing, toiletry or food drives for the organization.

“As an all-volunteer organization, we cannot do what we do without the support of the incredibly huge-hearted St. Johns County community,” said volunteer clothing program coordinator Karen Burke. “Our tiny team especially needs more volunteers to help us with our very busy and impactful clothing program — even just one to two hours each month is a huge help!”

For more information about volunteering or donating, HUGS can be reached at info@stjohnshugs.org or (904) 580-4847. Visit www.stjohnshugs.org or follow on social media for more information.



Photo courtesy Alex Stozhok

Olena Stozhok waiting to enter the United States with her daughters.

Helping cont. from pg. 1

family,” said Costabile, whose mother is from Ukraine. “I encourage residents to sponsor so that they can get people out of harm’s way.”

Costabile said that there is no financial obligation tied to the paperwork, and each person must have an individual sponsor.

Plyam, who often serves as a translator, said Ukrainian families continue to need help because they are “still very much in no man’s land.” For example,

finding VPK for young Ukrainian children is difficult. They do not qualify for it through the state and can’t afford to pay for it privately, she said.

Also, many families are in need of dining room chairs and tables. In addition, Plyam suggests the purchase of gift cards for groceries as many of the families are struggling with daily living expenses.

[Author’s note: Anyone wishing to help Ukrainian families may contact Plyam at nplyam@gmail.com.]



Photo courtesy Brette Reiman

HUGS board member Martine Smith, who is with the St. Johns County School District.



Photo courtesy Natalia Plyam

Celebrating Daryna Stozhok’s fourth birthday; Natalia Plyam pictured in the middle.

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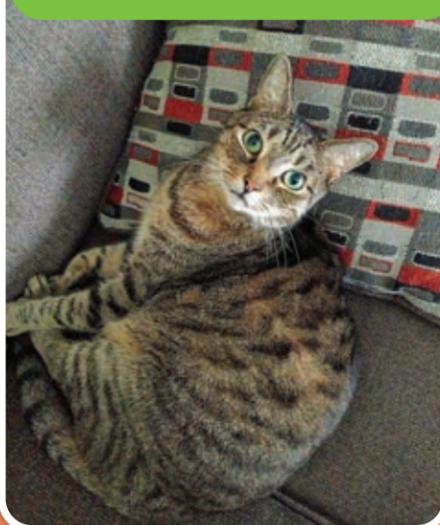
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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Tom!



Breed:

Tabby Cat

Favorite Activity:

Chasing lizards

Favorite Treat:

Temptation treats

Favorite Friend:

My Daddy - even though I love Mom very much, too!

How your BFF got their name:

Tom just seemed appropriate and fitting for a cat with a human personality!

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



Primary Election Guide in this issue! Pages 8 - 12

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Back to School Guide returns in the September issue!
Call (904) 886-4919 to include your business.

MYSTERY PHOTO

Can you guess where this is?
Submit your answer to: mail@FloridaNewsLine.com.
Last month's Mystery Photo was the courts at Nocatee.

Answers to our Puzzles PG 14

CRYPTO FUN

Determine the code to reveal the answer!

Answers: A. tee B. clubs C. course D. handicap

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Jax Beach: 4138 Third Street South (between Trader Joes & Staples) 904.246.6832 wbu.com/jacksonvillebeach

World Golf Village: 180 Capulet Drive #5 (At Murabella) 904.209.5754 wbu.com/staugustine

August

Community Calendar

What's Happening in Ponte Vedra

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

4th: **Bingo will be held at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center**, 175 Landrum Lane, on Thursdays from 1 p.m. - 2 p.m. for four weeks beginning Thursday, Aug. 4. Contact Amanda Jones at (904) 280-3233 or ajones@coasjc.org for more information and to register.

5th: **The GTM Research Reserve** will hold a new volunteer orientation on Aug. 5 from 10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. Learn about volunteer rules and responsibility as well next steps to volunteering. Complete the volunteer application online (www.gtmnerr.org) before attending. Contact Shannon Rininger at Shannon.Rininger@FloridaDEP.gov to assure that your application was received.

8th: **The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable** will meet on Monday, Aug. 8 at 12 p.m. via Zoom. The meeting will feature guest speaker Reuben Franklin, Public Works Director, City of St. Augustine. Email info@sjcroundtable.org to register for the meeting or visit www.sjcroundtable.org for more information about the St. Johns County Civic Roundtable.

10th: **First Day of School** for St. Johns County Schools.

11th: **Ponte Vedra Woman's Club** will hold its annual New Membership meeting on Aug. 11 from 6 p.m. - 8 p.m. at a board member's home. Women interested in attending should register on the PVWC website under Events at pontevedrawomansclub.com/eventregistrations.php. Appetizers and beverages will be served attendees will learn the club's schedule of upcoming meetings, events, fundraisers, and charities for the 2022-2023 year.

13th - 20th: **Early Voting location** at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library, 101 Library Blvd., from 9 a.m. - 6 p.m. daily.

16th: **Ponte Vedra Democratic Club** will meet on Tuesday, Aug. 16 at 6 p.m. for Chat & Chew before the 6:30 p.m. meeting at Christ Episcopal Church, Room 106, 400 San Juan

Road. The featured speaker will be St. Johns County School Board Chair Patrick Canan. Email jkary@verizon.net for more information.

18th: **"Is Probate a Dirty Word? What is It?"** will be presented by St. Johns County Legal Aid's Megan Wall, Managing Attorney on Thursday, Aug. 18 at 11 a.m. at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, Ponte Vedra Beach. Call Amanda Jones at (904) 280-3233 for more information.

20th: **The Nocatee Farmers Market** - Gatorland will be held on Saturday, Aug. 20 from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. The Farmers Market is open to the public.

25th: **The Savvy Job Hunters Ministry Workshop** will host "Style, Presence, and Power: Know and understand your purpose, find your path, and formulate your plan," presented by Dr. Priscilla Berry, owner and president of Berry and Associates Consulting Firm on Aug. 25 from 10 a.m. - 12 p.m. Sign in and networking begin at 9:45 a.m. The workshop is in-person and will be held at Christ Episcopal Church, 400 San Juan Drive, in Room 204 of the Formation and Arts Building. Email pottesen66@gmail.com to register.

27th: **The Ponte Vedra Writers Group** will meet on Saturday, Aug. 27 at 10 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Featured speaker will be Dorothy K. Fletcher, poet, novelist, and writer of Jacksonville's history, who will talk about the joys of research. The meeting is free and open to members and non-members alike. Visit www.floridawriters.org for more information.

27th: **GTM Research Reserve** will host its monthly Beach Cleanup on Saturday, Aug. 27 from 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. No registration is required; meet at the Visitor Center, 505 Guana River Road in Ponte Vedra Beach where gloves and trash bags will be provided. Visit gtmnerr.org for more information.

29th: **W.A.V.E. self defense course** for women and female high school students will be held at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library on Monday, Aug. 29 from 5 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. This course is presented by the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office and registration is done by a lottery system. Registration opens on Aug. 1 at the Adult Reference Desk at the library or by calling the library at (904) 827-6950.



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with St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer

Q: What can you tell us about the proposed new exemption for first responders?

A: There is a proposed Constitutional Amendment that will appear on November ballots which seek to provide an additional homestead tax exemption for first responders of \$50,000 on the assessed value of homes between \$100,000 and \$150,000. It would apply to property owned by classroom teachers, law enforcement officers, correction-

al officers, firefighters, emergency medical technicians, paramedics, child welfare service professionals, active duty members of the US Armed Forces and Florida National Guard.

Q: How did this proposal come about?

A: State Sen. Jason Brodeur, R-Lake Mary, and State Rep. Josie Tomkow, R-Polk City, championed the bill in the Legislature, implementing HB 1563, companion bill HJR 1. If

passed, it will create Florida Statute 196.077.

Since homestead exemption is in the Florida Constitution, exemptions must be passed by voters as Constitutional Amendments, which require at least 60 percent of the vote.

Q: What are the details of the proposed exemption?

A: It would provide an additional \$50,000 homestead tax exemption on values between \$100,000 – \$150,000. It does not apply to school district levies and it applies only to property owned by individuals working in these certain enumerated professions. Applicants must be employed on Jan.

1 in a full-time position in one of the qualifying professions and annual applications will be mandatory.

Q: When would the exemption be effective?

A: It would be effective as of Jan. 1, 2023 if the amendment is approved by at least 60 percent of the voters at the November 2022 general election.

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

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



with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

Q: With school starting back this month, can you give us some information about your office's Youth Resource Deputies?

A: First, I'd like to challenge our students and families to meet our Youth Resource Deputies in their area schools. They are very approachable; introduce yourselves and get to know them.

We have 56 deputies assigned to our Youth Resource Division under Captain Peggy Tennyson. Included in the 56 deputies are Lt. David Tarbert and Lt. Wes Kennedy. Additionally reporting to Capt. Tennyson are our school crossing guards. We have 73 crossing guards who are part time and seasonal and two supervisors, Nick Dekrell and Nancy Heburn.

Our Youth Resource Officers are assigned to 40 public schools; there are a total of 43 schools, but three of them are within the city limits of St. Augustine, so they are covered by deputies with the City of St. Augustine Police Department.

Q: Will you be making any changes this year?

A: Different this year will be that within the 56 deputies, some will be "floaters." All high schools will have one assigned deputy plus one floater. Our goal is to have two Youth Resource Deputies at each high school.

Q: How does your office view its role in protecting our schools?

A: It's all about partnerships. We have a partnership with the St. Johns County School District to work hand-in-hand and provide expertise on the security of each individual school. We want to have a partnership with our families and students, who need to know that we have

safe spaces for learning, but if anyone sees anything suspicious, they need to let us know and let us triage. Call either the non-emergency number, (904) 824-8304 or 911 immediately and provide us with as much information as possible as soon as possible. Our deputy sheriffs have lots of training and are well armed and equipped — but it's still a partnership and this is where getting to know and form a relationship with the Youth Resource Officer is so important.

Q: Do you have any safety tips for Back to School?

A: I encourage all community members to sign up for the Fortify Florida app (www.getfortifyfl.com) where you can report a tip or call 911, which immediately is routed to our emergency communications center.

As the school year approaches, let's not get complacent. I'd like to remind school employees and volunteers to ensure that their school is secured at all times. Parents, please plan your route to school and leave in plenty of time so that you are not rushing or speeding to get there. Plan for how to meet and get in touch with your children after school. Be open, honest and transparent in discussions with your children and advise them to always pay attention to their surroundings.

If you see something (person, place or thing) that is suspicious, call us immediately or tell a school employee.

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

A: They can email me at sheriff@sjso.org or call me at (904) 824-8304. Also, our website, www.sjso.org has a wealth of resources.



An Even Brighter Future

Recent years have taught us that life is fragile, a hug is priceless, and that a virtual visit is good but being together in person is the best. Throughout our 76 years of continuous excellence, we've learned many things. Importantly, that by working together with an unwavering commitment to our mission, we'll ensure an even brighter future for our community's seniors.



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Visit www.floridanewsline.com



with St. Johns County School Board Member Patrick Canan, District 5

Q: Do you have any information about the construction bid for the new K – 8 School NN?

A: We approved the bid for this school to be built in the Shearwater neighborhood. It's a lot of money; more than we've ever paid before. This school is scheduled to open for the 2024 – 25 school year.

Q: What is the status of K – 8 Schools OO and PP?

A: They are on hold for now. We definitely have a need for these schools and will be revisiting them in the near future.

Q: Can you give any insight into the state statistics released over the summer?

A: St. Johns County was once again the No. 1 school district in the State of Florida, which is something to celebrate. I believe it's the 14th year in a row. I always say that a school's grade or a school district's grade from testing doesn't necessarily signify success, but it certainly an indicator, especially considering the growth we've experienced. This year, we had 29 "A" rated schools, seven "B" rated schools and three "C" rated schools, with no "D" or "F" rated schools.

A couple of tidbits: in the past 10 years, our school district has grown by 45 percent, or more than 10,000 students. In the coming 10 years, the anticipated growth is another 15,800 students. This equates to approximately eight more schools of students.

Q: What can you tell us about the end of summer happenings and the upcoming school year?

A: Our newest school, Beachside High School, will be opening this school year and there is a lot of excitement about that.

Principals, who we consider to be the "captains of their ships," are very busy attending leadership conferences, hiring staff, and managing their budget. There

is a lot going on at the end of the summer while students enjoy the last few weeks of their break. We are looking forward to everyone returning to school refreshed and ready to go.

I'd like to remind parents about the State of Florida's Back to School Tax Holiday, which runs through Aug. 7 and will provide some financial relief on the purchase of back to school items. Be sure to check with your child's school at orientation or the school's website to determine what supplies are needed.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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

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John, Resident at Westminster St. Augustine

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

Q. You recently launched an electronic newsletter to residents of St. Johns County. What is the purpose of the newsletter? How do people sign up?

A. We launched our monthly informational newsletter in early June. It is distributed just once a month, and our goal is to share information about valuable services we offer and Clerk and Comptroller news that can impact residents. We focus on topics that are actually useful to St. Johns County residents, like our free property fraud alert service, the unclaimed funds being held by our office, and real-life scams happening here in St. Johns County and in counties nearby. We also offer a "service spotlight" each month that shares a service or program that offers real-world benefits to taxpayers and residents. Keeping the newsletter current and genuine is important — we want it to be worthy of the time our subscribers invest in reading it. Subscribe by emailing communications@stjohnsclerk.com or directly from last month's newsletter, <https://conta.cc/3lhg5MG>.

Q. What can you tell us about Passport Saturday?

A. Passport Saturday is a special event where our St. Johns County courthouse location will be open on Saturday, Aug. 6 from 9 a.m. to 2:30

p.m. to process new passport applications or take passport photos for new and renewed passport applications. We recognize the challenges of getting away from work to do business at the courthouse, particularly for people who work standard Monday through Friday business hours or want to bring in their minor children to get a passport. Holding a special Saturday event is a great way that we can meet the needs of our residents, particularly before school resumes and before the holiday travel season. If you're planning to get a passport, we strongly encourage folks to review our webpages at <https://stjohnsclerk.com/passports/> in advance to gather the required documentation and bring the correct forms of payment (<https://stjohnsclerk.com/passports/passport-fees/>), as the U.S. Department of State only accepts checks or money orders.

Q. How do people get in touch with you or your office?

A. Call the office at (904) 819-3600 for general information or call me directly at (904) 599-8688 if I may ever be of service. The St. Johns County courthouse, the Richard O. Watson Judicial Center, is located at 4010 Lewis Speedway, along U.S. 1 just north of the city of St. Augustine.

Ahoy Mateys! I'm Captain Reducio, the newest buccaneer to the crew here at the St. Johns County Solid Waste Division. I've got a treasure chest full of fun facts about recycling, including the three Arrrrghhs, "Reduce, Reuse, & Recycle!"



To schedule a presentation with Captain Reducio, please contact his First Mate, Matthew "Peg Leg" Denny at 904.827.6980 or mdenny@sjcfl.us. Are you an advocate for recycling and interested in helping your neighbors gain a better understanding of recycling? Please contact us at solidwaste@sjcfl.us to learn more about the Recycling Resource Program. For more information regarding residential curbside services or the Solid Waste Division's outreach programs, please visit www.recyclestjohns.com!



ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Upcoming SBDC at UNF training events announced

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

The Florida Small Business Development Council at the University of North Florida's programs deliver up-to-date management advice, training and information to help business owners make sound decisions and to assist potential owners in getting started on the right foot. The Florida Small Business Development Center at University of North Florida serves 18 counties with full-time offices in Duval, Clay, Marion, St. Johns, Nassau, and Putnam counties and is part of the Florida SBDC Network and the national Association of Small Business Development Centers.

Here are some of the training events scheduled for this month:

QuickBooks 101 - Hands-On Workshop, Aug. 5 from 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. at UNF Hicks Hall

You've made the first step and decided to utilize the QuickBooks program for your business, now what? Not sure where to start? This introductory workshop will provide you with the information you need to get started on the right foot. Learn how to use QuickBooks in this easy-to-understand, hands-on class. Attendees will work in a computer lab with a Quick-Books Pro Advisor Instructor, Lisa Barnidge of Sharkbooks Consulting, LLC, on examples for real experience using QuickBooks for PC.

(This class will use the QuickBooks Desktop version, not to be confused with the QuickBooks Online version – they are different products.)

Visit www.sbdc.unf.edu/events/quickbooks-101-in-person-event/ to register.

How to STARTUP Your Own Business Webinar, Aug. 23 from 1 p.m. - 2 p.m.

This no-cost webinar workshop will give an overview of the seven basic requirements for business STARTUP: Selecting an idea, Testing the market, Acquiring capital, wRiting a plan, Turning for help, Understanding legal requirements and Putting it all together.

Visit <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/7814427471384520462> to register.

Navigating QuickBooks Online, Sept. 23 from 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.

Identify the benefits of using QB Online and determine which subscription level is best for your business in this no-cost webinar. The webinar will also include examples showing what businesses would be a good fit for each version. Setting up the QuickBooks Online company correctly is so important. In fact, the way you set up the file has the greatest impact on your experience with QuickBooks Online. Take the time to establish your business plan and workflows. Then choose a subscription level and begin setting up the company. This is an interactive session with a demo file and your live file if you have it set up already.



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Mike Wynn
Financial Advisor
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with St. Johns County Tax Collector Dennis Hollingsworth

Q: With the start of school this month, what can you tell us about your office's driver education offerings?

A: The St. Johns County Tax Collector's Office is one team of 65 – 70 employees working out of four locations. All of our driver education training is handled by our employees and I'm excited that we just came out with the schedule for the next school year. We will be offering driver education at each of our county's high schools.

Q: How did your office begin handling driver education in the county?

A: Several years ago, I noticed we were having a high failure rate for our learners' permits. I went to the School Board and convinced them that we could do the best job educating our future drivers. So, via an intralocal government agreement with the school district, we now offer driver education three times per year at each high school.

Q: What do the classes involve?

A: Phase I is a classroom setting. We offer 24 of these per year, three times at each of our eight high schools. The first set of classes (10 days each) begin in

August, with classes scheduled to begin Aug. 11 at Nease, Aug. 12 at Bartram Trail, Aug. 29 at Creekside, Aug. 30 at Ponte Vedra High, Sept. 19 at Beachside, Sept. 20 at Toco Creek, Oct. 7 at Pedro Menendez, and Oct. 10 at St. Augustine High.

Successful completion and passing of the test will result in the issuance of the student's learner's permit.

Then, a year later, we offer Phase II, which is behind the wheel driver training for a permanent license. Also, on six Saturdays throughout the year, we offer defensive driving at the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office track.

Q: How does one sign up for the classes?

A: Sign up and more information is available on our website, www.sjctax.us under Featured Resources and then select Driver Education. These classes fill up quickly, so register early.

Q: Has the program been successful and resulted in fewer driving test failures at your office?

A: Yes, we have a good record. In fact,

the State of Florida recognized St. Johns County as having one of the highest passing rates in the state. Last year, we offered 3,949 road tests, 191 driver education written tests and 145 driver education driving tests.

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

A: A lot of questions can be answered by visiting our website, www.sjctax.us. I may be reached by calling (904) 209-2250 or emailing taxcollector@sjctax.us.

Did you know?

Supporting small businesses ensures more money stays in the communities those businesses serve. The U.S. Small Business Administration says \$48 out of every \$100 spent at a small business stays in the community. On the flip side, when a person spends \$100 at a big-box store or a national chain, only

\$14 remains in the community. Local businesses are more likely to utilize other local businesses, such as banks, service providers and even farms. Small businesses also pay employees, many of whom are local and shop local, thereby keeping even more dollars in their communities.



Primary Election Guide

Meet your local candidates

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

In advance of the Primary Election to be held on Tuesday, Aug. 23, Ponte Vedra NewsLine invited each of the candidates that will appear on northern St. Johns County voters' ballots for State Senate District 7, County Commission Districts 2 and 4, and School Board District 4 to submit a statement for this Primary Election section.

Ponte Vedra NewsLine offered this opportunity to all candidates for these Primary Election races as a community service; no purchase of advertising was required. The content of the statements was left up to each candidate; the only stipulation was that the statement could not exceed 200 words. No editing of the statements took place. Each statement is printed in its entirety, as submitted by the candidate.

State Senate, District 7 Travis Hutson (R)

Senator Travis Hutson is honored to serve our 7th district in the Florida Sen-

ate. Governor Ron DeSantis endorsed Travis Hutson for his proven leadership.

In Tallahassee, he has been focused on the economy, education and public safety. He helped craft enhancements to Florida's Career and Professional Education Act, responding to Florida's critical workforce needs. He closed loopholes in the release of sexual violent predators making northeast Florida's most vulnerable citizens safer. In addition, Travis fought for improved water quality in Florida, as he successfully championed water policy reform and hurricane recovery.

Travis Hutson is A-rated by the NRA, and has earned the endorsements of Congressman Mike Waltz, Right to Life PAC, Florida Fraternal Order of Police, American Conservative Union Foundation, Associated Industries of Florida, Florida Chamber of Commerce, NFIB, and many others.

Gerry James (R)

I am running for office because my opponent, the incumbent, is using his of-

ice to destroy our quality of life in this district. He uses his political access to essentially force mega-developments to be approved for his family business, and with that comes traffic and increased crime. Our schools cannot handle the uncontrolled rate of growth, and our children are suffering — that is unacceptable!

My opponent uses his elected office to write bills that benefit his family's land development business. I am not anti-development, but I am anti-overdevelopment and cronyism.

In other areas, my views are aligned with Governor DeSantis. I believe in medical freedom, free speech, and smaller government with lower taxes. I am the most conservative grassroots candidate running for Senate.

My opponent publicly stated that he was against an audit. If I am elected, I will push for real election reform, not the watered-down reform the incumbents have passed. There should be no mail-in ballots besides verified absentees,

and no Dominion voting technology or any other machines.

Many of our elected officials are not following the wishes of their constituents and so they need to be replaced. I hope I can count on your vote.

County Commission, District 2 Sarah Arnold (R)

My name is Sarah Arnold, and I proudly represent District 2 on the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners following my appointment by Governor Ron DeSantis. As a wife and mother of four children, my faith and family are most important to me. I'm a lifelong Republican, a defender of the Second Amendment, and am invested in the future of St. Johns County.

On the Commission, I have been a champion of smart growth practices and will always hold the line on overdevelopment. I support our first responders, our Sheriff's office, and our firefighters, and

Candidate Statements cont. on pg. 9

Faith & Allegiance to the Constitution

Raised in a military family, Casey Woolsey knows what it means to protect the Constitution and do one's duty to Country. As County Judge, Casey Woolsey will bring those same values to the bench.



Meet Casey



PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY VETERANS & PROSECUTORS

CASEY WOOLSEY
FOR COUNTY COURT JUDGE

Paid by Casey Woolsey for St. Johns County Court Judge Group 2

SARAH ARNOLD
COUNTY COMMISSION



APPOINTED BY GOVERNOR DESANTIS

MEET SARAH

THE RIGHT PATH FOR ST. JOHNS COUNTY

Paid for by Sarah Arnold, Republican, for St. Johns County Commission, District 2.

Primary Election Guide

Candidate Statements cont. from pg. 8

I believe it is our duty to provide critical support and care to our veterans, who have ensured our freedom and safety.

Additionally, as a fiscal conservative, I have been a leader for managing and balancing our county budget to ensure all resources are spent responsibly, and I will continue fighting through the bureaucratic red tape and wasteful spending to ensure our tax dollars work for us, and not the government. Let's keep St. Johns County on the Right Path. I kindly ask for your vote on Aug. 23.

Nelson David Cline (R)

Did not submit a statement.

Johnny Coe Counts (R)

I am a seventh generation Floridian, married 31 years to my wife Gina. We have two sons, two daughters, and two granddaughters, all part of a pioneer family ranch operation. I am a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. I am also a small business owner of 34 years.

I propose a moratorium on large development projects to redress the \$500 million deficit of "infrastructure" in one of the most prosperous counties in Florida.

"We the People" should vote "no" on 1

cent added sales tax. I believe government needs to reduce to what is necessary as we all do in tough times. This "power" to tax is what needs to be carefully guarded. We cannot succeed as a free society without personal and public solvency.

Let's look at procurement, spending, and the budgeting process by first getting an accurate audit of the public purse that is the authority we have given to the Clerk of Courts.

An Enterprise Financial System that the County Administrator has been requesting is needed to allow the free flow of information between departments that can be accessed and reported more accurately and efficiently. Make your vote4counts.com on Aug. 23.

Charles (Chuck) Labanowski (R)

I'm a Marine Corps combat veteran. I have lived in the county for 15 years with my wife Carol.

Now my goal is to protect the quality of life that we cherish here in St. Johns County, as we watch development exploding countywide. We need to make the infrastructure (schools, roads, parks) before the development. The infrastructure credits that developers are receiving are just one of the reasons that our infrastructure is deficient.

I am not in favor of the new proposed sales tax increase. We do not need to burden families anymore that are facing the ever-rising cost of living like gas and food costs. Our commissioners are now asking us to pay what developers should have paid when their projects were approved.

Law enforcement runs deep in the Labanowski family. I'm a proud father of a deputy sheriff. I was also honored to attend the St. Johns County Citizen Law Enforcement Academy.

We need to support and help our local farmers sustain their business for the betterment of St. Johns County and the state of Florida. I fought for my country and now will fight for you and St. Johns County.

LaShawnda L. Pinkney (R)

I was born and raised in St. Augustine, attended local schools. I'm the proud mother of five wonderful adult children and seven beautiful grandchildren.

After receiving my MS in Criminal Justice, I became a Child Protective Investigator for the State of Florida. I was also a District Resident Services Supervisor, serving Urban Development-subsidized apartment complexes in seven counties. Currently, I'm a Human Resources Generalist for the City of St Augustine,

Candidate Statements cont. on pg. 10

A+ Schools for St. Johns Students

Keep St. Johns County Schools # 1 in Florida



Kelly Barrera
ST. JOHNS COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD

Empowering Parents in their Children's Education

- ✔ Protecting Students
- ✔ Fostering Academic Excellence
- ✔ Increasing Parental Involvement
- ✔ Keeping our Best Teachers
- ✔ Preventing School Overcrowding
- ✔ Expanding Vocational Programs

See Kelly's Record ▶



Paid for by Kelly Barrera for St. Johns County School Board District 4

Senator/developer Hutson has only one interest: self-interest.

"The unseen leak in your home has powerful allies in Tallahassee" - Orlando Sentinel

Feb. 4, 2022

"A law that makes it difficult to sue builders over construction flaws is about to get worse, The legislator behind this monumentally bad bill (SB 736) works in a family construction company, with 20,000 home sites in northeast Florida and plans for [12,000] more."

"The law will become more tilted in favor of shoddy builders and against homeowners... the bill cuts the 10-year latent defect deadline to five years for single-family homes..."

"It's about as anti-consumer as you can possibly get."

"Who's behind it? The Sponsor of this fast-moving bill is Travis Hutson, R - St. Augustine, a vice president of the Hutson Companies, whose website claims some 20,000 Jacksonville area homesites..."

"Specifically in north Florida where Hutson is located... the houses are built over wood frames and they apply stucco. If they don't do it properly, water will penetrate - but it doesn't show up until six, seven or eight years until after the home is built."

"The legislature does not require members to avoid conflicts of interest unless the issue in question would benefit a specific legislator and no one else."



This article says it all. Travis Hutson is using his senate seat to benefit his business, and make us pay the price.

Fortunately, this bill died. But it's one of many self-serving bills that he has tried to push through. And some of them succeed.

We need a senator who will work for us, not for the Hutson Companies.

Gerry James will write legislation to strengthen laws limiting conflicts of interest. He's a constitutional conservative with a fierce commitment to fighting for the people of Florida. A true patriot, Gerry will work to preserve our God-given rights.



We need a senator who will work for us. Gerry4Senate.com

Primary Election Guide

Candidate Statements cont. from pg. 9

responsible for employee records, administering benefits and payroll, recruitment, pre employment screenings and new hire orientation.

Board member of several other organizations in West Augustine: West Augustine CRA Steering Committee, served as Cultural and Quality of Life Chair, West Augustine Community Development Cooperation, West Augustine Improvement Association, American Legion Auxiliary, Post #194 and founder of Off Limitz Ladyz Riders motorcycle organization. I play a key role in the annual West Keep Calm and Walk for Cancer, annual Domestic Violence Awareness Brunch, Site Coordinator for the annual Toys for Tots giveaway and Christmas in the Park.

My priorities if elected would include Voting No! for the sales tax increase, stop overdevelopment, jobs, jobs, jobs, support for our veterans, first responders and youth. Faith, Family, and Community is who I am!

County Commission District 4
Jeremiah P. Blocker (R)

My name is Jeremiah Blocker and I am running for re-election as your St. Johns

County Commissioner representing District 4. I am a combat veteran, father, business owner, and former prosecutor. My wife and I live in Nocatee with our two children and God has blessed us with a third child on the way!

I am committed to the best interests of St. Johns County and its residents. During the last four years, I have consistently put St. Johns County first by improving our public safety through increased funding for law enforcement and first responders. Additionally, the Commission has ensured that thousands of acres in the county are forever preserved and protected as well as nourishing our beaches. We have improved infrastructure and fostered a business climate to create jobs while still lowering taxes and fees. Finally, I carefully review development projects on a case-by-case basis, only supporting smart and controlled growth; consistently voting against overdevelopment.

You can find more information on our website at jeremiahblocker.com. Please consider voting for me on Aug. 23 in the Republican primary!

Krista Keating-Joseph (R)

1. Slow down growth. My opponent

approved 71 out of 73 proposals to develop undeveloped land in his first three years. This unacceptable rate of growth is compromising our quality of life.

2. Save our children from learning in unsafe, unsecure portable classrooms (according to FDLE) and being bused to schools out of their areas. We have more developments being approved than our school system can handle.

3. No to a 15 percent sales tax increase. The last thing we need is to raise the sales tax on our hard-working families, especially as we face high gas and food prices and inflation. Our budget surplus does not justify burdening residents with a sales tax.

4. Developers must cover the costs of infrastructure so that St. Johns County taxpayers are not stuck paying for their roads and recreational areas. We also need a new tree code to discourage clear-cutting.

5. Put our First Responders first. They should not have to leave the county to get a pay raise.

I'm a mom of five including two Navy SEALs, a Marine and a teen. I can say "no" to unbridled development and take St. Johns County back for the people who live here now.

School Board District 4
Kelly D. Barrera (N/P)

My name is Kelly Barrera, and it has been my honor representing you on the St. Johns County School Board as a voice for parents, students, and teachers alike. I am proud of St. Johns County's #1 ranking in Florida for schools because I believe quality education equals opportunity for every student and family in St. Johns County.

Over the past four years, I have been a leader on implementing school safety measures; increasing parental involvement in their children's education; improving academic excellence growth; recruiting, training, and retaining our

best teachers; fighting against school overcrowding; and expanding vocational academy programs.

And, in spite of Covid and continued growth, we have achieved great success — our school district has expanded our college credit, workforce and career opportunities, raised our graduation rates, and increased a variety of programs, partnerships, and support services.

Although we have met and overcome many challenges, we are far from finished. The leadership of our school district directly affects the quality of our schools, and the work on behalf of our students never ends. I ask that you consider me your candidate of choice and would appreciate your vote on Aug. 23.

Yvonne Lockbaum (N/P)

I am running for School Board in Saint Johns County, District 4. I have been married for over 35 years and have raised three grown children. My son is serving in the US Navy as a Naval Aviator. My husband and I are retired Naval Officers.

I also recently retired as a high school American Government and Special Education teacher. I personally experienced the problems in our schools due to government overreach and indoctrination by the National Education Association.

As your representative on the school board, I will protect and ensure parental rights. They are currently being dismissed by the School Board. I will bring back our schools to focusing on Reading, Writing and Arithmetic, not the Socialist/ Marxist agenda currently being taught in our schools. I believe in keeping our children innocent throughout their school years. I will make a top priority in removing all inappropriate literature in the schools. School safety is a real concern. I will take immediate action in adding a brick and mortar addition to the main school building, so all children and the facility are in one main building.



JEREMIAH BLOCKER
FOR ST. JOHNS COUNTY COMMISSION

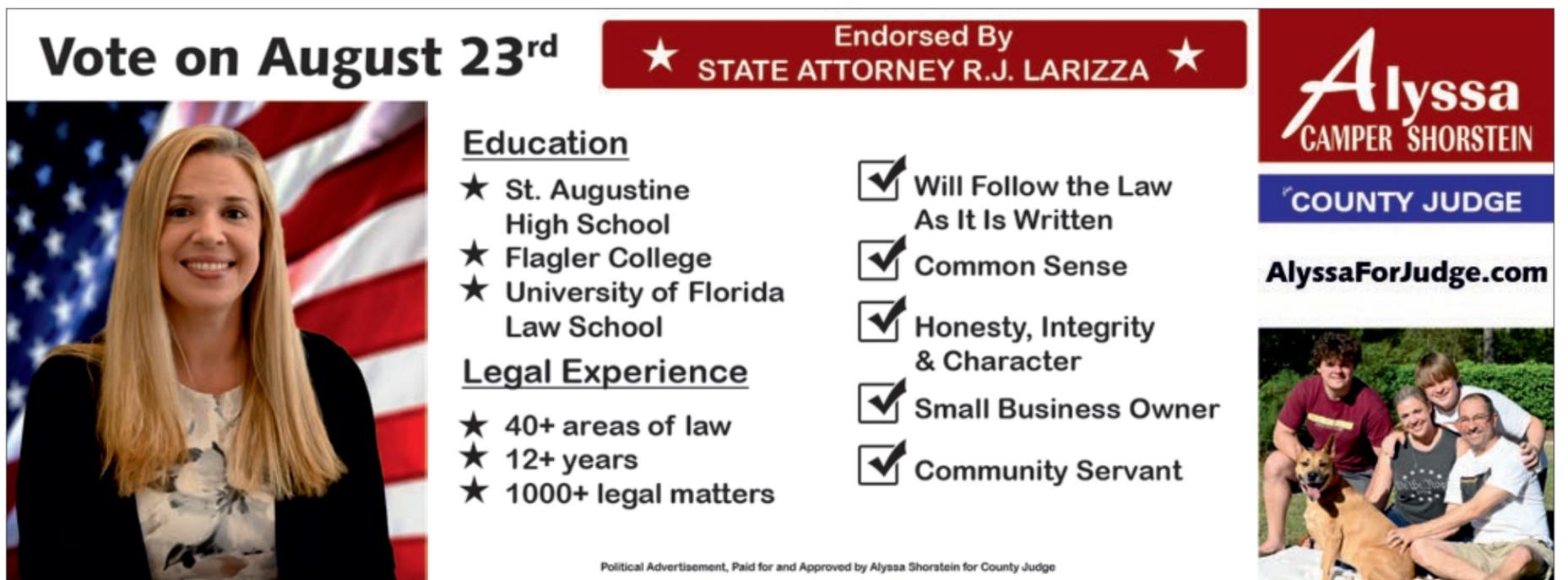
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- ▶ Ensuring Responsible, Smart Growth
- ▶ Protecting Taxpayer Dollars

Republican Primary: Tuesday, August 23

JeremiahBlocker.com

Paid For By Jeremiah Blocker, Republican, for St. Johns County Commission District 4



Vote on August 23rd

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Alyssa CAMPER SHORSTEIN
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- ★ Flagler College
- ★ University of Florida Law School

Legal Experience

- ★ 40+ areas of law
- ★ 12+ years
- ★ 1000+ legal matters

- ✓ Will Follow the Law As It Is Written
- ✓ Common Sense
- ✓ Honesty, Integrity & Character
- ✓ Small Business Owner
- ✓ Community Servant

Political Advertisement, Paid for and Approved by Alyssa Shorstein for County Judge

Primary Election Guide

Voter Bill of Rights

- Vote and have his or her vote accurately counted.
- Cast a vote if he or she is in line at the official closing of the polls in that county.
- Ask for and receive assistance in voting.
- Receive up to two replacement ballots if he or she makes a mistake prior to the ballot being cast.
- An explanation if his or her registration, or identity, is in question.
- If his or her registration, or identity, is in question, cast a provisional ballot.
- Written instructions to use when voting, and, upon request, oral instructions in voting from elections officers.
- Vote free from coercion or intimidation by elections officers or any other person.
- Vote on a voting system that is in working condition and that will allow votes to be accurately cast.

Voter Responsibilities

- Familiarize himself or herself with the candidates and issues.
- Maintain with the office of supervisor of elections a current address.
- Know the location of his or her polling place and its hours of operation.
- Bring proper identification to the polling station.
- Familiarize himself or herself with the operation of the voting equipment in his or her precinct.
- Treat precinct workers with courtesy.
- Respect the privacy of other voters.
- Report any problems or violations of election laws to the supervisor of elections.
- Ask questions in needed.
- Make sure that his or her completed ballot is correct before leaving the polling station.

NOTE: Failure to perform any of these responsibilities does not prohibit a voter from voting.

Guest Column

What you need to know about voting in St. Johns County

By Vicky Oakes

It's Election Time! Are you ready to vote? Visit our website at www.votesjc.gov and use My Voter Status to access your voter record and view your sample ballot. Sample ballots are currently available online and will be mailed to every registered voter on Aug. 2, so look for yours to arrive in your mailbox soon. There are three ways to vote: By mail, during early voting, or at your precinct on Election Day.

Vote-by-Mail: The deadline for requesting a vote-by-mail ballot to be mailed is 5 p.m. on Aug. 13. The law has changed for vote-by-mail drop boxes. Now called Secure Ballot Intake Stations, they are monitored by an Elections Office staff member at all times and are available at early voting locations only during voting hours. The secure ballot intake station in front of the Elections Office is no longer available. If you wish to return your ballot to the Elections Office, it may only be returned during the regular business hours of 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. In order to be counted, vote-by-mail ballots must be in the Elections Office no later than 7 p.m. on Election Day, Aug. 23.

Early Voting: There are eight days of early voting between Aug. 13 and Aug. 20, including two Saturdays and a Sunday. All six locations are open daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. The best thing about early voting is there is no wrong place to vote as long

as you vote within your county. Pick the location and time which is most convenient for you.

Election Day: Many changes have occurred since the last election. The 2020 Census and the 2021 redistricting process brought us new voting districts, new precinct lines, and some new polling locations. If you plan to vote on Election Day, please verify your voting location before going to vote as your polling location may have changed since the last election.

Are you a prepared voter? Ensure a smooth voting experience by making sure your address is current on your voter record. You can update it prior to voting with a quick call to the Elections Office before heading out to vote. This is especially important for voters who choose to vote on Election Day. Staff can process your address change on the phone and route you to your correct polling location the first time. This can be a real time saver. View and mark your sample ballot before going to vote so you are ready to vote when you arrive. Be sure to have a photo and signature ID ready to hand workers when entering the polling room.

For more information on the August 23 Primary Election, please see our ad in this paper, visit our website at www.votesjc.gov, or call the office at (904) 823-2238 for assistance with any questions. Looking forward to seeing you at the polls!



KRISTA Keating-Joseph ElectKrista.com

CHUCK Labanowski ChuckForCommissioner.com

Had enough?

Aug. 23rd, vote twice to stop overdevelopment that is destroying our county.

Had enough clear-cutting? Had enough traffic? Had enough portable classrooms? Had enough of kids being bused out of neighborhood schools? Have you had enough developer-driven government?

Krista believes Commissioner Blocker's 71 out of 73 approvals of new development (in his first three years alone) is excessive and harmful to our quality of life. Learn more about this mom of two U.S. Navy SEALs, her experience and qualifications, and why she's so committed to taking back St. Johns County. ElectKrista.com

Chuck will NOT continue Commissioner Arnold's uncontrolled approvals. In her first 5 months, she voted for more acreage to go under the bulldozer than any other commissioner. That's 2960 acres! Chuck has 8 years county experience. And as a former Marine and combat vet, he's ready to fight for our county. ChuckForCommissioner.com

PRIMARY ELECTION ★ August 23, 2022

OPEN TO ALL REGISTERED VOTERS IN ST JOHNS COUNTY



4455 Avenue A, Suite 101
St. Augustine, FL 32095
(904) 823-2238
www.votesjc.gov

We are here to serve you. Please visit our office, call or use our online forms and resources to help you prepare for Election Day.

Due to the 2020 Census and Redistricting process, voting districts, precinct lines, and some Election Day polling locations have changed. Visit **VOTESJC.GOV** for more information.

ON OUR WEBSITE www.votesjc.gov

- Register to vote
- Check your voter status
- Change your address before you vote
- Verify your polling place
- Track the mailing and receipt of your vote by mail ballot
- View and print your sample ballot

FLORIDA IS A CLOSED PRIMARY STATE

- Democrats receive a Democratic ballot
- Republicans receive a Republican ballot
- Voters registered with no party affiliation or a minor party receive a nonpartisan ballot
- Universal Primary Contests are the exception. There are two on the Primary ballot, both Republican races. Representative in Congress, Dist. 5 and State Representative, Dist. 20. If you live in these districts, regardless of your party affiliation these Republican races will appear on your ballot.

Vote: It's Your Choice!

Call 904-823-2238 for your vote by mail ballot today! You can also use the online request form on our website www.votesjc.gov. Deadline to request a ballot to be mailed is 5 PM August 13th.

Make sure your vote counts!

Has your signature changed? If your signature on your voter record and signature on the vote by mail ballot certificate envelope do not match, your vote by mail ballot may not count. Update your signature using a Florida voter registration application.

Drop your mail ballot in a secure ballot intake station at any early voting site during the hours of voting. Your voted mail ballot is due in the Elections Office no later than 7 PM on Election Day. If it is late, it will not count.

EARLY VOTING LOCATIONS

★ DATES & TIMES ~ August 13th – 20th ★ Hours: 9 AM – 6 PM Daily At All Locations

Julington Creek Annex
725 Flora Branch Blvd.
St. Johns, FL 32259

Supervisor of Elections Office
4455 Avenue A, Suite 101
St. Augustine, FL 32095

Southeast Branch Library
6670 US 1 South
St. Augustine, FL 32086

Ponte Vedra Branch Library
101 Library Blvd.
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32082

St. Augustine Beach City Hall
2200 A1A South
St. Augustine, FL 32080

Hastings Branch Library
6195 S. Main St.
Hastings, FL 32145

ELECTION DAY

- ★ Tuesday, August 23, 2022
- ★ Polls are open 7 AM – 7 PM
- ★ When voting on Election Day you **MUST** vote at the precinct of your legal residence.

KNOW WHERE TO VOTE BEFORE YOU GO

To locate your polling place visit www.votesjc.gov or call the Elections Office at 904-823-2238.

Get to Know ...

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewslines.com

Pastor Justin Yawn

Pastor Justin Yawn had a dream when he was 16 years old that changed the course of his life. He dreamt that he was looking into a '50s style diner with a lit up "priest" sign, just standing outside observing a restaurant full of clergy. Raised Episcopalian in St. Simons Island, Georgia, Yawn shared his dream with his mother who brought him to the Reverend Douglas Renegar to discuss the ministry. Prior to this, Yawn, an Eagle Scout, was on track to head to the United States Air Force Academy with plans of becoming a pilot. After meeting with Rev. Renegar, Yawn worked with the church during the summer and found that something was "coming alive" inside of him. From there, Yawn attended the University of Georgia, securing a degree in Business Administration with a focus in Risk Management. Yawn did a stint at SunTrust Bank, and, while he enjoyed that job, he soon realized that something inside of him was not fulfilled. "I said, 'Alright God, I am yours.'" He then attended The Candler School of Theology at Emory University and was called to Christ Church in Ponte Vedra Beach as the Associate Rector, serving from 2012 to 2015. Next, Yawn and his wife Vanessa, a dermatologist, went on a journey to Texas — both spiritual and personal



Photo courtesy Justin Yawn
Justin Yawn and family.

— that would ultimately lead them right back to Ponte Vedra Beach. Yawn, 37, is currently the head pastor at St. Francis in the Fields Episcopal Church in Nocatee.

Q: You left Florida to serve several parishes in Texas. What were the highlights and challenges during this time?

A: I served at Christ Church and St. Luke's on the Lake in Texas. The three years at Christ Church in Temple, Texas, were formative and challenging years. There was a bad departure of my predecessor, so I spent a lot of time rebuilding. The church is doing great now. St. Luke's on the Lake in Austin was an incredible experience. It was healing in more ways than we knew at the time.

Q: What brought you back to Ponte Vedra Beach?

A: In August 2020, I started to have moments of heaviness out of the blue. Under the Diocese of Texas, rectors are required to have a spiritual director and to see a mental health therapist. Those moments of heaviness continued to come and go, and I was asked by the director and therapist "Are you happy?" I responded that I loved St. Luke's and felt that I was happy. Then our family got Covid, including our daughter Brooklyn who was four months old at the time. We felt incredibly isolated; no family members could fly to see us. In March 2021, the same two people asked me if I was happy, and I said, "I don't know." I was getting more depressed, and I eventually tried an antidepressant and began to feel so

much better; however, we were still working a lot and trying to find that balance. We went for a walk on Labor Day 2021, and my wife said maybe we should go back to one of our "happy places," which for us was the Jacksonville area. We loved it there, and it was much closer to both sides of our families. The next day at 9 a.m., I got a Facebook message from two friends who I had known at Christ Church in Ponte Vedra Beach asking me to be the Rector at St. Francis. I had always had my eye on St. Francis. Everything was so divine. Our house sold in three hours, and my wife's work created a telemedicine wing for her to be able to work from home. We have a better work/life balance now. I just want to be happy and do my best work.

Q: What is your life philosophy?

A: I love to bring people of opposite viewpoints together around a table to realize that they can love each other in disagreement. Be honest about your journey and be authentic.

Q: What are your hobbies?

A: We are foodies and love to watch cooking shows like "Top Chef" and "Chef's Table" together. We love to travel as a family, and we love to do it as cheaply as we can. We work to live. Lennox, 4, traveled with us to six countries prior to Covid. We love outdoor everything, and my wife and I work out together. We have two rescue dogs: Herschel Walker, a Labrador Retriever and Briscoe, an English Pointer.

Q: What are your goals for St. Francis in the Field?

A: St. Francis is growing like crazy. We have a special story of Jesus that we want to start telling to more people. We are dynamic, inclusive, and warm. This is authentic Christianity. In our imperfections, we find God.

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The Pantry Raiders

A simple, flavorful salad to whip up in a snap

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

When preparing meals at home, cooks know that it helps to have a few simple, easily prepared dishes in their culinary repertoire. These are dishes that don't require too much planning and utilize certain staples that are present in everyone's pantry. Such is the case with this recipe for "Crunchy Cucumber Salad with Crushed Peanuts" from Ruta Kahate's "5 Spices, 50 Dishes" (Chronicle Books). Most of the ingredients for this flavorful salad are likely already in your kitchen, and it won't be long after you begin preparing the recipe that you'll be sitting down and enjoying a meal with family and friends.

Crunchy Cucumber Salad with Crushed Peanuts

Serves 4

2 English or other unwaxed cucumbers, chopped into 1/4-inch dice (about 3 cups)

1 medium green serrano chile, minced (seed first if you prefer)

1/2 cup peanuts, preferably raw (but toasted, unsalted ones will do)

2 tbsp. lemon juice, or more if needed

1 tsp. salt

1/2 to 3/4 tsp. sugar

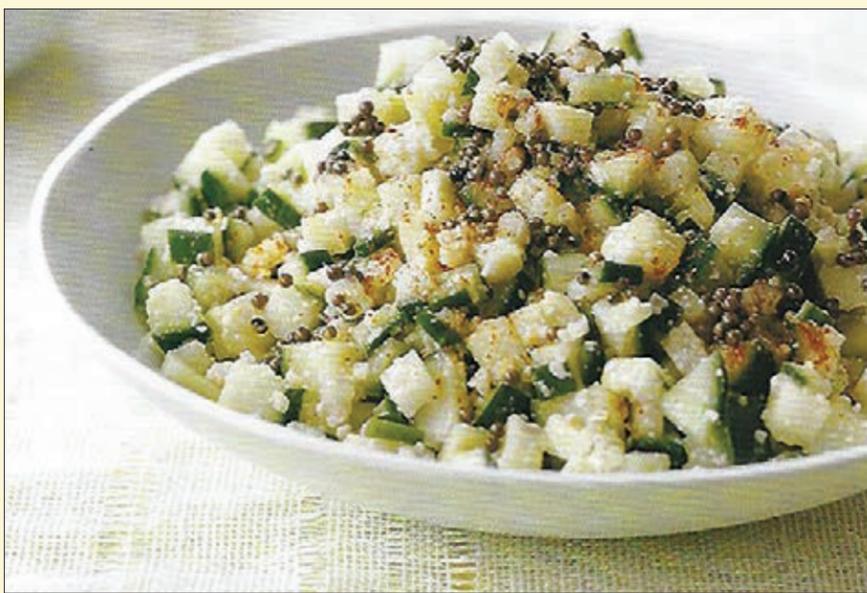
1/8 tsp. cayenne

1 tbsp. canola oil

1/4 tsp. mustard seeds

Place the diced cucumbers in a medium bowl along with the chile. Using a coffee grinder or food processor, pulse the peanuts until they are reduced to a coarse powder. (You don't want big chunks of peanuts, nor do you want a fine powder; stop grinding somewhere in between!) Add the peanuts to the cucumbers along with the lemon juice, salt and sugar, and mix well. Taste and adjust the salt, sugar and lemon juice as needed. The salad should be slightly tart.

Make the tadka: Place the cayenne in a little pile on top of the salad. Do not stir it in yet. Heat the oil in a small skillet or butter warmer over high heat. When it begins to smoke, add the mustard seeds, covering the pan with a lid or spatter screen. As soon as the seeds stop sputtering, pour the oil over the cayenne. Stir the dressing in and serve at room temperature or cold.



PopHistory

By Scott A. Grant
mail@floridanewsline.com

No one remembers who finished second

On Aug. 5, 1936, in the Olympic 200 Meters finals in Berlin, a young African American named Matthew "Mack" Robinson ran a blazingly fast race. Unfortunately for Mack, another African American, named Jesse Owens, ran faster. Robinson had to settle for the silver. And to this day, almost everyone remembers Jesse Owens and almost no one remembers Mack Robinson.

Robinson ran in the same shoes he wore at Pasadena City College. Owens ran in custom track cleats provided to him by Adolf "Adi" Dassler and his younger brother Rudolf. After the war, the brothers parted company. They each formed separate shoe companies; Adi Dassler called his company Adidas and Rudolf named his new company Puma.

Winning an Olympic silver medal is an impressive feat. As Robinson put it, "It's not too bad to be second best in the world at what you're doing. That makes you better than an awful lot of people." Still, Americans have a thing for winners and we almost never remember who finished second. It is sometimes said that the Daytona 500 has one winner and 32 losers.

After the 1936 Olympics ended, Mack Robinson attended the University of Oregon, but never graduated. The family needed money and Robinson went to work to help his widowed mother feed her large family. He

returned home and took a variety of jobs working for the city. He was often seen sweeping the streets of Pasadena in his Olympic sweatshirt.

"If anybody in Pasadena was proud of me, other than my family and close friends," he said, "they never showed it. I was totally ignored."

One person was proud of Mack Robinson's accomplishments. Inspired by Mack's athletic success, his younger brother followed in his footsteps and attended Pasadena City College. He then went to UCLA where he lettered in a record four sports. He left college without graduating in 1941 to play professional football for the semi-pro Honolulu Bears.

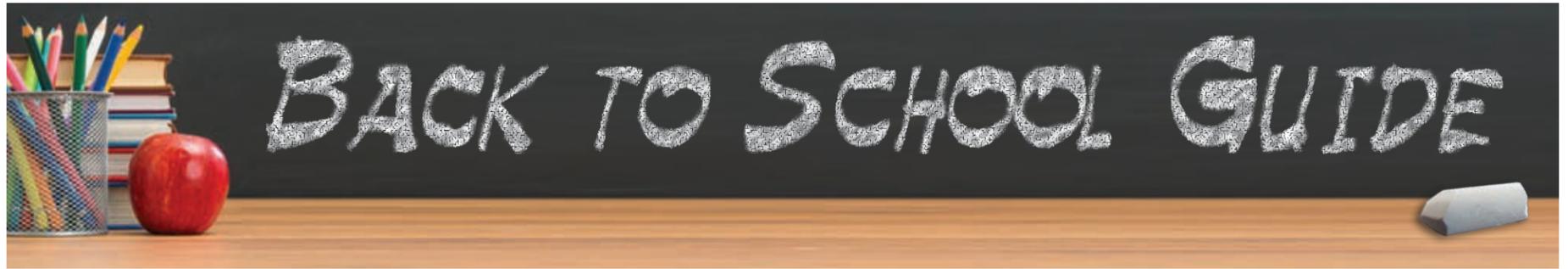
After one season as a professional football player, the younger Robinson entered World War II to fight Hitler. He was one of the first African Americans admitted to officer candidate school and was ultimately promoted to Captain. After the war, he joined the Kansas City Monarchs of the old Negro Baseball League. And then, in 1949 Mack's younger brother, Jackie Robinson, broke the color barrier and became the first African American to play Major League Baseball.

Scott A. Grant is a local historian and author. He welcomes your comments at scottg@standfastic.com

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Tryouts as life lessons

By Susan Rieger
mail@floridanewsline.com

It is well known that tryouts can be tough on student athletes, but said difficulties can also serve as useful life lessons regarding preparation for circumstances such as college applications, auditions, or job interviews.

According to Jim Thompson, founder and CEO of Positive Coaching Alliance, “Disappointment is a great opportunity to reinforce positive character traits like determination and resilience.”

If our athletes can learn to reshape their disappointments into determination, Thompson says other positive attributes are likely to follow.

Some guidelines for the big day are:

Focus on effort. As our athletes prepare for the tryout season, reminding them that they cannot control the outcome is important. Instill in them that instead of focusing on what is out of their hands, focus on what they can

control — their effort and attitude. Remind your athletes to “stay in their lanes” and focus on themselves, not the other students.

“I am” and “I will” statements can help kids manage the ups and down of not performing perfectly. “I am” or “I will” statements encourage positivity and focus rather than casting a shadow of doubt or self-deprecation. Using these statements to help shape your athlete’s self image in the face of disappointment will help them to move on and celebrate more triumphantly in the face of success.

Have fun! Making friends, learning new skills, and creating memories are all inclusive to the tryout process. Tryouts are meant to be engaging events for kids in which they display their skills and connect with their fellow athletes regardless of the outcome. Tryouts are not engineered to be stressful experiences. Remind your athlete to breathe, make new friends, and put their best foot forward.



Photo courtesy Susan Rieger

Difficulties with tryouts can serve as useful life lessons.

Find Your Frugal:

Six ways to save on school supplies

By Lourdes Mederos
rodriguez@ufl.edu

School supplies will be top-of-mind soon as parents and teachers grapple with getting their students and classrooms ready for a new school year.

The ripple effects of the yearslong COVID pandemic continue to surface in economies worldwide, and school supplies are not exempt.

To help parents and teachers find ways to save, experts at the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Science offer research-based information and tips to keep expenses down when stocking up on school supplies.

From July 25 through Aug. 7, Florida will hold its annual school sales tax holiday. During that period, consumers can curb school supply costs with savings designated by the Florida legislature.

“Taking advantage of the Sales Tax Holiday is one way to make reductions in back-to-school supplies, as needed, purchasing only the essentials so that income equals expenses plus savings,” says Jenny Rodriguez, one of several UF/IFAS Extension agents throughout the state specializing in family and consumer sciences. “If you’re not sure where to begin, consider the following money management strategies to help manage your finances.”

Here, Rodriguez adds six strategies to keep costs down when shopping for school supplies throughout the summer.

1. Take inventory of your stock supplies at home first. Often, you already have many of the school supplies your kids need at home. See if you have highlighters, pens, pencils, notebooks, and other school supplies saved up from prior years before buying more of the same. The savings may seem small, but it will add up and every little bit helps.
2. Look for weekly deals on select prod-

ucts. If purchasing supplies for more than one child, you can also seek out weekly deals that highlight a small handful of products each week, sometimes as low as 25 cents.

3. Avoid using store credit cards. If you are offered one while checking out, politely decline. While those sign-up bonuses can be great and tempting, if you carry a balance on one of these cards, the interest you pay with those high APRs (averaging 24.24 percent APR) will easily exceed what you saved with that initial discount the store offered you.

4. Swap school supplies and spread the savings. If done right, setting up a swap system of items with other families has plenty of perks. Start by trading items with other families like a surplus of supplies, kids’ clothing, shoes, and accessories. Here is how it works. Gather your friends and neighbors with kids around the same age and everyone brings gently used clothing, books, school supplies, toys, etc. Everyone receives a ticket for each item they bring. Each ticket entitles you to one item from the swap meet. If you contribute six books, you can leave with up to six new-to-you books. If you contribute seven items of clothing, you can leave with up to seven new-to-you items of clothing. All leftover items are donated. Giving is good.

5. Try secondhand shopping. Consider shopping second-hand through places like Offerup.com, Goodwill, Salvation Army and thrift stores. Don’t forget to look for deals and sign up for emails strategically.

6. Don’t forget UF/IFAS Extension has tools to help you save. Did you know that UF/IFAS Extension has money management class and tools to help you budget? Obtain a free money management calendar to help you track your expenses or sign up to take a money management class by reaching out to your local UF/IFAS Extension Family and Consumer Sciences agent or email jennyarodriguez@ufl.edu.



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Travel

Make Memories in Mid- Maine

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewsline.com

Visit Maine in the summer, and you'll wish to spend June through August in the New England state. Cool temperatures and low humidity create an ideal environment, not to mention the scenic beauty.

Maine's landscape runs from evergreen pine forests to tall craggy mountains and rocky coasts studded by lighthouses. The Atlantic provides pristine breeding grounds for lobsters, mussels, clams, and scallops. Wild blueberries thrive, especially in northern Maine.

The state's crowning jewel, Acadia National Park, ranks among the most beloved and visited of our 63 natural treasures. Hike from a sand beach to outcroppings on boulders battered by the sea and climb (or drive) to the summit of Cadillac Mountain, the tallest peak on the east coast. Kayak on serene Jordan Pond and bicycle along the historic carriage roads. I suggest two to three days, depending on your desired activities.

Acadia sits on Mount Desert Island in mid-Maine, along with Bar Harbor, a small town that's unfortunately been overrun with souvenir and tacky tee-



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
The Lewis R French.

shirt shops. Stay there for quick access to the park, or consider quieter respites in Southwest Harbor.

Drive fewer than two hours and arrive in a quintessential Maine village, Camden. White steepled churches, non-chain restaurants and shops, and art galleries dot the two-block main street overlooking Penobscot Bay. There, pleasure boats and windjammer schooners fill the docks.

I boarded the Lewis R French, a sailboat, for a three-night cruise. The French, the oldest known two-masted schooner in the United States, remains one of the few in active service. She operates much as she would have when she was built in 1871.

She carries 20 passengers in single, double, and bunk bed cabins. Each cabin included a sink, a window, reading lights, and a USB charger, but no toilet. Two heads (bathrooms) were located on the main deck. The cabins felt cramped, but I reminded myself I was aboard a historic sailing ship. I spent most of my daylight hours on deck. The sound of the waves and creaking of the wooden boat made it easy to imagine stepping back in time on a similar journey.

Once we set out into Penobscot Bay, the wind, weather, and tide dictated the destination. Captain Becky let Mother Nature determine the path as the French is pure sail and carries no inboard engine. A small boat in the rear uses a motor to help guide the schooner in and out of the busy Camden harbor.

The passengers help raise and lower the sail and anchor, but the rest of the time is spent watching the coastline, relaxing, and dining. Chef prepares fine meals on a wood-burning stove. One evening,



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Maine coastline — Acadia National Park.

we anchored near an uninhabited island and devoured a lobster bake prepared by the crew.

Camden's neighbor, Rockland, a mere 10 minutes away, features a lighthouse that rests almost a mile offshore. It's accessed by a massive granite breakwater path. When you walk out, you understand why this project took 18 years and a billion and a half pounds of granite to complete.

Rockland's other highlight sits downtown — the fabulous Farnsworth Art Museum, home to hundreds of artworks by Andrew, N.C., and Jamie Wyeth, among others. The Wyeth family sum-

mered in the area, and numerous paintings reflect the New England coast.

I flew in and out of Bangor, an ideal small airport with excellent access to Acadia — but I can't recommend much to see or do in Bangor. Other gateway options are Boston or Portland, Maine.

I'm not ready for a sailor's life, but I cherish the memories of my unforgettable windjammer adventure, hikes in Acadia National Park, and eating lots of lobster and blueberry pie.

Visit www.bylandersea.com to read more of local travel writer Debi Lander's stories and travel tips.



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Helping with the sails.



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Nocatee pickleball featured on national news



Photos courtesy Maris Kirs Photography
The "Good Morning America" segment featured many local adult and children pickleball players.

By Emma Masur
mail@floridanewsline.com

Ponte Vedra recently received national recognition for two recent pickleball segments shown on "NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt: Kids Edition" and "Good Morning America." Taking place at the Nocatee community pickleball courts, resident Laura Gainor and her brand, Pickleball in the Sun, had the opportunity to represent the sport on national television by showcasing the active yet social environment that pickleball brings to communities throughout the country.

The "NBC Nightly News: Kids Edition" segment captured more than 30 children playing pickleball on the courts at Nocatee. The kids ranged from age four to 23 with varying levels of experience playing the game. Throughout the segment, viewers can see the kids playing pickleball, being instructed by USA Pickleball Ambassador Mike Guyot, and one of Nocatee's certified pickleball instructors, Ivan Ramirez. With their true reactions of either playing the game for the first time or having fun playing multiple games with their friends, the segment showed just how well the sport of pickleball is able to bring the Nocatee community together under a collective love of the game.

Likewise, the "Good Morning America" segment featured many local adult pickleball players and interviews from Nocatee players Garrett Gainor and Barry Sams. "Good Morning America" correspondents, Eva Pilgrim and Will

Ganss, had the chance to learn how to play pickleball at the Brooklyn Bridge Park courts as the segment highlighted both the athletic and social side of the sport, providing viewers a means to see how they themselves can fit into the mix of millions of pickleball players across the country.

When asked what they love about playing pickleball at Nocatee, Garrett Gainor said, "Anybody can play. It doesn't matter about your age. If you're very old or very young, you can still play the game. It's a really fun and easy sport!"

Laura Gainor, Garrett's mom, said, "Thank you to all of the Nocatee pickleball players for coming together for these national news features to highlight how pickleball is a fun, social and great sport to bring together a community. Since moving to Ponte Vedra two years ago, if it wasn't for pickleball, our family wouldn't have had the chance to meet as many friends as we have to truly feel like home."

Nocatee residents can visit the Welcome Center for details about signing up for pickleball lessons for all ages at the Nocatee pickleball courts. For Ponte Vedra residents, visit www.playtheyards.com for details on the newly opened courts at The Yards, which are open to the public.

To watch both national news segments, visit PickleballintheSun.com.

Emma Masur is Digital Marketing Manager, Vossberg Gainor.

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Patriotic Ponte Vedra group displays American flags



Photo courtesy Kristina Greco

Ponte Vedra High School freshman Luke Greco helped install new brackets and flags along Ponte Vedra Boulevard last month for Independence Day. Through the organization "Patriotic Ponte Vedra," close to 175 flags adorned the boulevard all the way up to the county line. The flags will be displayed every Memorial Day, 4th of July, and Veterans Day to honor the United States and all those who have served. Volunteers erect and take down the flags and need donations to purchase 50 more flags to complete phase two of the project to finish at Mickler's Landing. Anyone interested in donating may make checks payable to Patriotic Ponte Vedra and mail to P.O. Box 242, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32004.

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Briefs

Volunteer opportunities available with St. Johns County boards

The St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners provides residents interested in serving their community and participating in local government with a variety of board and committee opportunities. The volunteer positions consider and make recommendations regarding various topics, including planning and zoning issues, development projects, libraries, parks and recreation facilities and programs, arts, culture and tourism. The following boards and committees are currently accepting applications:

- Contractors Review Board (application deadline Aug. 8, 2022)
- Library Advisory Board (application deadline Aug. 1, 2022)
- Northwest Communication Tower Advisory Board (application deadline Aug. 5, 2022)
- South Anastasia Design Review Board (application deadline until filled)

Visit the Boards and Committees webpage at www.sjcf.us/boards to view the requirements and duties of each board and committee, download an application, or contact the Board of County Commissioners office at (904) 209-0300 or jspencer@sjcf.us for more information.

Palm Valley Road sidewalk funding approved

The Palm Valley Community Association announced in July that the state and county have included funding in their

2023 budgets to fill the sidewalk gaps along the west side of Palm Valley Road to the State Road A1A intersection from Landrum Road.

“When completed, the sidewalk will connect the community from the east side of the Palm Valley Bridge to the State Road A1A intersection and north through Ponte Vedra Beach,” said Garry Phillips, Palm Valley Community Association president. “People can enjoy walking to school, church, work, or run errands.”

In April, the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners reached a consensus that, contingent upon the sidewalk project being in the House Bill approved on July 1, they would finance the remainder of the project and move forward without delay. The sidewalk project has now been approved.

“It has taken the Palm Valley Community Association about 10 years of community engagement working with the Board of County Commissioners and staff to bring this crucial road safety project to fruition,” said Jayne Evans, Palm Valley Community Association Sidewalk Committee Chair. “We appreciate the work of many neighbors and elected officials who recognized the need and supported this project.”

Florida Rep. Cyndi Stevenson helped secure the \$800,000 in the Florida State House Appropriations Bill for the Palm Valley Road Sidewalk Project. Rep. Stevenson said, “I am delighted that we were able to get state funding for this sidewalk for Palm Valley, and for the community

and county support that made the project possible.”

“The Palm Valley Community Association looks forward to celebrating the project’s ground-breaking and finally the sidewalk’s completion with a Palm Valley Road Community Walk,” said Evans.

Higher mortgage rates begin to put brakes on housing market’s wild ride

Although house prices rose higher in June, there was tangible evidence that higher mortgage rates and inflation are beginning to put the brakes on the wild ride that Northeast Florida’s housing market has taken over the past two years.

The median sales price for single-family homes in the region settled at a historically high \$400,000 in June, a 2.3 percent increase over the month before; however, this number is based on closed sales that included offers from a few months ago before the market began to feel the impact of rising mortgage rates.

Meanwhile, the number of closed sales, pending sales, and listing prices received have all started dropping, tangibly demonstrating that the market is slowing down. Added to that is active inventory, which increased 17.4 percent, as well as a 46.2 percent increase in the median number of days on the market. These are all indications that prices may slowly begin to “normalize” in the coming months.

“This is good news for both buyers and sellers as we move into the third and

fourth quarters of 2022,” said 2022 NEFAR President Mark Rosener. “It’s encouraging for buyers, as they now have more homes from which to choose. On the flip side, while we still have a significant “seller’s market” at just 1.8 months’ supply, sellers need to heed the counsel of their REALTORS® to price their homes accordingly.”

Specifically in June, closed sales on single-family residences registered at 2,336, a 4.1% decrease since May. June also registered 2,077 pending sales, a 13.2% decline from May when there were 2,393. And the list-price-received category dropped from 101% in May to 100.6% in June, with 38.9% of sellers getting above their asking price, a decline of 8.7% from May. Meanwhile, the active inventory of single-family homes increased to 4,109 in June, a significant increase from May 2022 when only 3,501 homes were on the market. June’s inventory represents 1.8 months of active inventory.

In St. Johns County, prices began to drop in June with \$554,900 coming in as the median price of single-family homes, 4.1 percent less than May. The median days on the market was 21, a 61.5 percent increase from the month before, and the active inventory rose to 1,099 homes, a 26.9 percent increase from May and 1.8 months’ supply. Approximately 35 percent of sellers received more than their listing price in June. Although the affordability index inched up to 56, St. Johns County continues to remain the least affordable area to live in the region.



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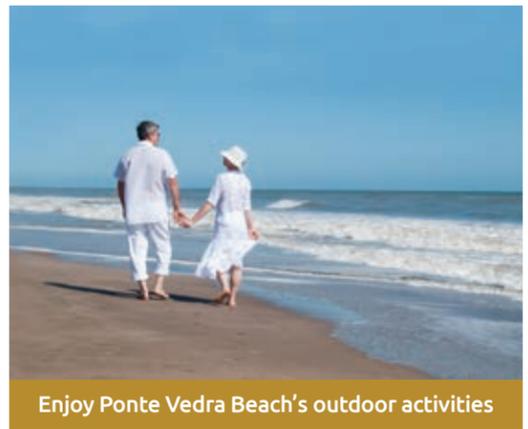
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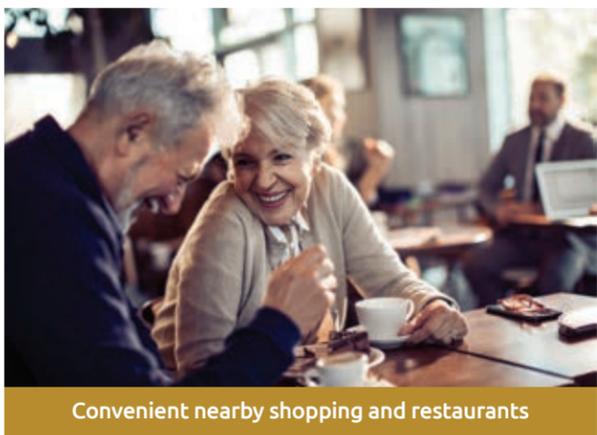
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