



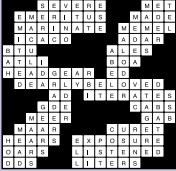
page 3
BFF Best Furry Friend



page 5
Q&A with Sheriff Rob Hardwick



page 9
Get To Know ...
Mary Kate Reynolds



page 10
Puzzles



Photos courtesy Lisa Sheaffer

All smiles for the first day of school at Ocean Palms Elementary.

St. Johns County goes back to school

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.com

For the first time in three years, St. Johns County students returned to school on Aug. 10, the earliest date allowed by state law and the preferred date by school district officials since it allows students to complete the first semester prior to winter break. Due to some minor construction delays, the county’s newest school, Beachside High School, opened a few days later on Aug. 15.

“From everything I’ve heard, the first day of school around the county went smoothly,” School Board member Patrick Canan said. “Kudos especially to everyone at Beachside High School for working all weekend and getting the doors opened to students on Aug. 15.”

At Nease High School, Principal Lisa Kunze said the first day went well. She said that the school’s car line was empty at 9:16 a.m. and everyone was in class at 9:20 a.m.

School cont. on pg. 2

Growing more than Greens: Educating the community at local farm

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewslines.com

Matthew Schinsing first noticed the Gyo Greens farm when he attended a nearby middle school, driving past it every day. When he entered a research-based science class at Episcopal High School years later, Schinsing had a reason to visit: his interest in research and sustainable agriculture. His friend, Natalie Bryant, connected him with the Gyo Greens staff and soon he had an opportunity to conduct a science project involving plant science at the farm during his senior year.

This type of partnership is at the heart of Gyo Greens, an aquaponics farm off Canal Boulevard that opened in 2014. At the end of this year, the farm will celebrate 10 years since Gyo Greens owner Helga Tan Fellows purchased the land with the garden/education vision in mind.

According to Gyo Greens, the farm uses a sustainable farming method that combines traditional aquaculture (raising aquatic animals such as koi fish in tanks) with hydroponics (cultivating plants in



Closeup of the many herbs and plants grown at the facility off Canal Boulevard. Photos courtesy Helga Tan Fellows

water) in a symbiotic environment. It is a constant loop with the plants benefiting from the fish water, and the fish getting quality water in return. The farm is named for the Japanese word for fish, gyo.

“It is amazing that after all these years, we still have the same principles and mission,” said Tan Fellows. “Education is the reason we are still around. We keep learning through our students and their endless curiosity and questions. We also learn via our customers who keep us challenged to consistently deliver top quality, natural and organic produce. In exchange, we teach all of them about the importance of sustainable farming and our precious environment.”

The farm also partners with the University of North Florida, working with interns and volunteers.

In January, Gyo Greens became a nonprofit organization with the hopes of raising funds through donations and events to expand its educational outreach programs. The farm, which uses no pesticides or chemicals, sits on one acre, and includes a 3,000 square foot

greenhouse.

In addition to education, Gyo Greens Farm also delivers produce to about 30 local restaurants, using a rafting system to ensure that chefs get the freshest ingredients. Produce arrives “live” and is grown at each chef’s request. All profits go right back into the farm, said Tan Fellows.

“We are a very niche farm. Most of what we have is all pre-sold,” said Gyo Greens farm manager Reed Hepperly. “Chefs are looking for high quality produce and things they are not likely to find anywhere else. We try to accommodate what they want.”

Amaranth, blue pea flowers, micro-greens and marigolds tend to be popular with chefs, said Hepperly.

“We provide the raw materials,” said Hepperly. “Each chef has their own expression and way of taking it to the next level.”

Hepperly, who has been the farm manager for one year, said he began at

Greens cont. on pg. 2



Photos courtesy Helga Tan Fellows

Natalie completed an internship at the farm last summer. She is a rising senior at Scarsdale High School in NY.

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Greens cont. from pg. 1

Gyo Greens as a volunteer and then realized that he had more to offer. Later, he learned that he and Tan Fellows were both from the same town in Puerto Rico (Mayaguez), a happy coincidence. Hepperly and his seven-year-old daughter both enjoy gardening and farming together. Tan Fellows added that Hepperly’s daughter “can honestly almost do a tour to visitors on her own.”

Hepperly, who had a garden and focused on composting in Puerto Rico, said he likes the challenge of farming.

“It changes every day. Right now, we are fighting the heat,” said Hepperly, adding that the farm is at its busiest during THE PLAYERS and during the fall to winter transition. “Every time of the year provides a different transition. It is never boring, and it always keeps you occupied.”

For Schinsing, now a freshman at University of California, Los Angeles,

the research he conducted at Gyo Greens earned him third in the state and he placed as a qualifier for internationals in his category. He was able to build his own aquaponics system at Gyo Greens to test a compound protein that enters the system and lowers the stress conditions around the plant and increases the growth rate. The goal, he said, is to optimize aquaponics farming in what is “a very fragile system.”

Schinsing said the project involved an intense amount of research and lab work over a three-week period, and Hepperly was incredibly helpful throughout his time at Gyo Greens. The experience also prepared him well for his current goals. He has a double major of computer science and biology and would like to be a software engineer for a commercial scale farm or for a large tech company one day.

[Author’s note: For tours and hands-on training, contact Gyo Greens at education@gyogreens.com.]



Photos courtesy Helga Tan Fellows
Andrea Acosta is the Operations lead but started as a high school volunteer.

School cont. from pg. 1

“Students seemed excited about being back on campus and starting a new school year,” Kunze said. “Students met all their teachers, we fed them, and they all returned home safely. A great first day!”

Kunze said Nease has adopted a new cell phone procedure this year at the request of the leadership team, who had asked for a school-wide policy to ensure consistency from classroom to classroom.

“We purchased pocket holders for each classroom and require students to place their phone in the pocket holder upon entering,” Kunze said. “This new procedure will help students maintain their academic focus without the distraction of their cell phone.”

According to the school district, the student count for the St. Johns County School District on the first day of school, Aug. 10, was 43,409, an increase of 1,665 students or 4 percent over last year’s first day number of 41,744. This count only includes approximately 34 percent of all kindergarten students, since schools stagger the kindergarten start date over a three-day period. St. Johns County continues to be one of the fastest growing school districts in the state.

The St. Johns County School District’s first day counts included a high school student count of 13,601 with 2,260 students at Bartram Trail High School, 2,383 at Creekside High School, 1,371 at Pedro Menendez High School, 2,119 at Allen D. Nease High School, 1,863 at Ponte Vedra High School, 1,615 at St. Augustine High School and 1809 at To-

coi Creek High School. There were also 181 students in attendance at St. Johns Technical High School.

Middle school attendance totaled 7,136, with student headcounts ranging from 634 at Sebastian Middle School to 1,382 at Pacetti Bay Middle School. The other first day totals were Alice B. Landrum Middle School with 1,090, Fruit Cove Middle School with 1,182, R. J. Murray Middle School with 641, Gamble Rogers Middle School with 835, and Switzerland Point Middle School with 1,372.

The district’s K-8 schools totaled 10,262. Liberty Pines Academy had a first day headcount of 1,581, Patriot Oaks Academy with 1,298, Valley Ridge Academy with 1,188; Freedom Crossing Academy with 1,775, Palm Valley Academy with 1,363, Mill Creek Academy with 1,691 and Pine Island Academy with 1,366.

The elementary school population totaled 12,042 and another 368 students attended the district’s alternative, charter and Department of Juvenile Justice schools on the first day of school.

“The preparation from administration, teachers and support staff to welcome students on the first day was amazing,” said Superintendent Tim Forson. “As I visited schools it was wonderful to see the excitement of students as they greeted school staff, engaged with friends and started getting acquainted with their teachers.”

School district staff will continue to monitor attendance numbers, balance classrooms and refine bus routes in the coming weeks.



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BFF

Best Furry Friend of the month

Breed:

English Cream Golden Retriever

Favorite Activity:

Chasing balls into the ocean

Favorite Treat:

Peanut butter

Favorite Friend:

My four human brothers: Finn, Callum, Henry and Jack

How your BFF got their name:

Duke was born in North Carolina, so we thought it was fitting!

Meet Duke!



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

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Back to School Guide Page 13



Table of Contents

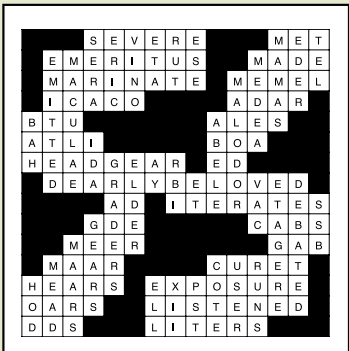
- 4 What's Happening in Ponte Vedra
- 6 Q&A with Patrick Canan
- 7 St. Johns Business Monthly
- 10 PopHistory
- 15 Travel

MYSTERY PHOTO



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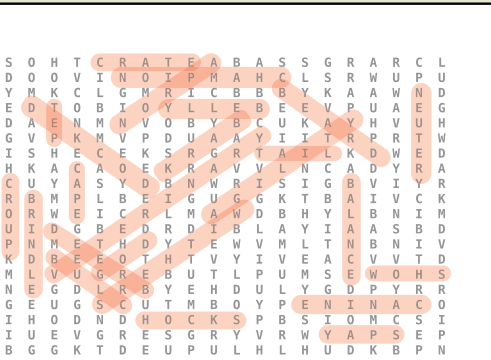
Last month's Mystery Photo was Flagler Health+ in Nocatee.



Answers
to our
Puzzles
PG 10



Answers: A. canine B. bark C. care D. owner



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September

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.

2nd: The GTM Research Reserve will hold a new volunteer orientation on Sept. 2 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.

6th: Bingo will be held at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, on Tuesdays from 1 p.m. – 2 p.m. for four weeks beginning Tuesday, Sept. 6. Contact Amanda Jones at (904) 280-3233 or ajones@coasjc.org for more information and to register.

7th: Coastal Friends (formerly Newcomers Alumnae) will host its monthly luncheon on Sept. 7 at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Pkwy. in Ponte Vedra Beach from 11 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. The guest speaker will be Nicole Woodsmall, donations manager at BEAM Thrift in Jacksonville Beach. The cost of the luncheon is \$25 and reservations must be made in advance by contacting bartshar@comcast.net as soon as possible. Visit <https://coastalfriends.wildapricot.org> for more information.

7th: "Give Me a Break! How Respite Care Can Support You and Your Loved One," a free workshop offering information about the different types of respite care available, associated costs, and what to ask or look

for in a respite care provider and presented by Caregiver Coalition of Northeast Florida, a program of ElderSource, will be held from 11 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. on Sept. 7. The program will be presented both in person and online. Registration via Eventbrite (<https://bit.ly/3pnSK3b>). Call (904) 391-6603 for more information.

12th: The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable will meet on Monday, Sept. 12 at 12 p.m. via Zoom. The meeting will feature guest speaker Bill Lazar, executive director of St. Johns Housing Partnership. Email info@sjcroundtable.org to register for the meeting or visit www.sjcroundtable.org for more information about the St. Johns County Civic Roundtable.

12th: A Postural Workshop for dizziness, headaches, and neck pain will be held on Sept. 12 from 6 p.m. – 7 p.m. at John Goetze Physical Therapy, 1400 Marsh Landing Pkwy, Ste. 112. This workshop is free and open to the public. Call (904) 280-2001 for more information and to register.

13th: Beaches Go Green Eco-Cinema Series continues with Part 3: Endangered Mermaids on Sept. 13 at the St. Augustine Yacht Club, 442 Ocean Vista Ave. in St. Augustine. Gates open at 6 p.m. and the show starts at 7 p.m. Visit beachesgogreen.org for more information.

13th: Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), Ponte Vedra Chapter will meet on Sept. 13 from 10:45 a.m. – 1 p.m. Contact pontevedrachaptersndar@aol.com for additional meeting details.

14th: Newcomers of the Beaches will hold its Kick Off Luncheon on Sept. 14 starting at 11 a.m. at St. Johns Country Club. Visit newcomersofthebeaches.com to register and for more information.

15th: "Spouse in a nursing home? Do you have to go broke?" will be presented by St. Johns County Legal Aid's Megan Wall, Managing Attorney on

Thursday, Sept. 15 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.

15th - 17th: Annual Jacksonville Quiltfest will be held at the Prime Osborn Convention Center in downtown Jacksonville from Sept. 15 – 17, daily from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. with admission price of \$14 per person. More than 400 quilts will be on display as well as special exhibits, vendors, small charity auction quilts, a quilt sale room, a quilt appraiser, and more. This all volunteer event is hosted by six sister quilt guilds. Visit www.quiltfestjax.com for more information.

17th: The Northeast Florida Chapter of Sisters in Crime will meet on Sept. 17 at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library, 101 Library Blvd. (FOL Room) on Saturday, July 9. Doors open at 10 a.m. and the meeting starts at 10:15 a.m. The program is "Mini-Workshop #1: Streaming Consciousness: A tool for helping the development of your writing skills." 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 for more information.

17th: The Nocatee Farmers Market — BMX will be held on Saturday, Sept. 17 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. The Farmers Market is open to the public.

17th: The Friends of the Ponte Vedra Beach Library present the Speaker Series with Raymond Wong, who will give the insights into the "Spy of the Century," Robert Hanssen. The program is presented at 2 p.m. on Sept. 17 in the Ponte Beach Library's FOL Room. The program is free and open to the public.

20th: Ponte Vedra Democratic Club will meet on Tuesday, Sept. 20 at 6 p.m. for Chat & Chew before the 6:30 p.m. meeting at Christ Episcopal Church, Room

106, 400 San Juan Road. Featured speakers will include an Imam, Rabbi, and an Episcopal Priest, who will discuss "How to disagree without being disagreeable." Email jkary@verizon.net for more information.

21st: Ponte Vedra Woman's Club will hold its Fall Kick-Off general meeting on Sept. 21 from 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. at Pusser's Bar & Grille, 816 A1A North in Ponte Vedra Beach. Women interested in attending should register on the PVWC website under Events at pontevedrawomansclub.com/event-registrations.php.

24th: The Ponte Vedra Writers Group will meet on Saturday, Sept. 24 at 10 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Featured speaker will be Darlyn Finch Kuhn speaking on "Weird Characters, Strange Places, and Tough Times: Writing NEW Southern Gothic." The meeting is free and open to members and non-members alike. Visit www.floridawriters.org for more information..

24th: GTM Research Reserve will host its monthly Beach Cleanup on Saturday, Sept. 24 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: The Savvy Job Hunters Ministry Workshop will host "Networking for Job Leads" presented by Chad V. Sorenson, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, president of Adaptive HR Solutions, on Sept. 29 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.

30th: Food Truck Friday will be held on Sept. 30 from 5:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. This event is open to the public.



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with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

Q: Have we been seeing an increase in crime in St. Johns County?

A: We do have an increase, but it is not violent crime. Our increase has been in property crime, and it can largely be prevented with proper action by citizens.

What we at SJSO want everyone to remember is the 9 p.m. Routine: Lock it Up. This means that every night at 9 p.m., before you go to bed, get in the habit of locking your car, securing any valuables inside your car, and locking the doors to your home.

Q: Can you share any recent statistics?

A: From Jan. 1, 2022 to Aug. 1, 2022, we had 75 firearms stolen in burglaries, including motor vehicles, residential, and commercial properties. Out of the 48 firearms stolen out of vehicles (11 firearms were stolen from just one vehicle), 46 of them had unlocked car doors. Only two were stolen in smash and grabs.

What this says is we in St. Johns County are making ourselves a soft target for the criminal element. We are known for leaving firearms, as well as credit cards, valet keys, laptops and golf clubs in our unlocked cars, and often in a visible area.

Keep in mind too, that if you leave your car unlocked, your home is also vulnerable since many people have garage door openers in their cars.

Q: What suggestions do you have?

A: Again, at 9 p.m., do the 9 p.m. Routine: Check to make sure your doors are locked and your cars are locked every night.

Also make sure to take a picture of the serial numbers on your firearms so you can provide that information in the event they are stolen. We can then make an accurate report to the National Crime Information Center. In two days recently, we had nine firearms stolen from unlocked cars — and none of the owners knew their serial numbers.

If you must leave your firearm in your car, leave it out of sight and locked in your trunk and remember to lock your car doors as well.

If you see something suspicious, report it to us immediately and let us triage or investigate. Even if nothing of real value is taken if your car is burglarized, report it to us as we may be able to get a fingerprint or DNA sample that could help with other burglaries.

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, from alarm registration to Crime Stoppers to our Neighbors app.



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

Q. You recently presented the county's annual financial report to the Board of County Commissioners. What was the takeaway message?

A. The Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2021 is a detailed 272-page analysis of the county's financial condition at the end of the last full fiscal year. The big picture message from our independent auditor is that St. Johns County is in a very healthy financial position overall. The full report is online at stjohnsclerk.com/county-annual-financial-report/ and in mid-September, our public-friendly "snapshot" version, the Popular Annual Financial Report, will be available online and in print.

Q. How did the recent Passport Saturday special event go? Any surprises?

A. We had a great turnout, with nearly 700 residents and visitors coming through our doors, so we're excited about doing it again soon. We processed nearly 200 passports. Perhaps the biggest surprise was that many people didn't realize we process passports Monday – Friday on a walk-in basis at the courthouse location, 8 a.m. – 4 p.m., and by appointment at our annexes in Julington Creek and Ponte Vedra. Our passports webpage has all the details: stjohnsclerk.com/passports/.

Q. Is St. Johns County having any issues with jury duty scams?

A. We receive calls regularly from residents who've been contacted by scammers impersonating law enforcement or our staff, claiming that they missed jury duty and must pay a financial penalty. Some claim there's a warrant out for the resident's arrest. Scammers may even use the real names of local officers and be quite realistic, so the phone call can sound very real. A few things to remember: We'll never phone, text or email a resident to request payment for failure to appear for jury duty. When residents don't respond to a summons for jury duty, we contact them through an official letter sent through the U.S. Postal Service. Before penalties would be imposed, you would be required to appear in court, where a judge would order any penalties. And you'd never be asked by our office to pay using gift cards. Please report scams to the Florida Office of the Attorney General. For information about jury duty, call (904) 819-3629.

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

A. Our office number is (904) 819-3600 or call me directly at (904) 599-8688 if I may ever be of service. The Richard O. Watson Judicial Center is located at 4010 Lewis Speedway in St. Augustine.

Guest Column

General Election: Important upcoming dates

By St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes

Now that the August Primary Election is behind us, it's time to focus on the quickly approaching November 8 General Election. It's not too early to begin preparing. Here are some important dates:

- Sept. 24: Vote-by-mail ballots mailed to overseas and military voters
- Sept. 29: Vote-by-mail ballots mailed to domestic voters who request them
- Oct. 11: Last day to register to vote
- Oct. 26 – Nov. 5: Early Voting
- Nov. 8: Election Day with polls open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

Eight early voting locations will be open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily in St. Johns County. Locations will be announced soon. Early voting dates include two Saturdays and a Sunday, so you can vote at your convenience.

Because the General Election is an open election, party affiliation does not matter. All voters receive the same ballots, all candidates and parties are listed on the ballot, and voters may

vote for whomever they choose. Several retention questions regarding the Supreme Court Justices and the 5th District Court of Appeal Judges will appear on the ballot. There will also be three constitutional amendments on the ballot and one local referendum. Sample ballots will be mailed to all voters approximately three weeks prior to the election, so you will have plenty of time to study your ballot and prepare to vote.

For those of you who missed the opportunity to vote in the August Primary but plan to vote at your precinct on Election Day, it's important you remember things have changed since the 2020 General Election. Due to the 2020 Census and the 2021 redistricting process, St. Johns County has new voting districts, new precincts, and some new polling locations. If you plan to vote on Election Day, be sure to verify your polling location as it may have changed.

My staff and I look forward to serving you and we will make it easy for you to vote. For more registration and election information visit our website at www.votesjc.gov or call the office at (904) 823-2238 for assistance with any questions.

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

Q: Can you share any insight on the first day of school in St. Johns County?

A: Everything went well. I do have some statistics to demonstrate the growth we are seeing in our county. As of the fourth day of school this year, we have 48,384 students. Last year, on the fourth day of school, we had 45,369 students, which is an increase of 3,015 students in just one year or a 6.65 percent increase.

Q: Have you visited the new Beachside High School?

A: I did visit Beachside High School early in the week before it opened on Aug. 15. They were working on punch list-type items as well as getting internet working. Also, they have been having trouble getting supplies of asphalt, so they were still working on the parking lot. It looked to me at the time like they still had a lot to do. But work continued all weekend and they were able to open the doors on Aug. 15, as planned (still after the Aug. 10 start date of the other schools in the district).

I traditionally visit all the schools in my district on the first day of school, but this year was unable to do so. I plan to visit them during the second week of school.

Q: Can you tell us what changes have been made and what directions given to teachers with regard to compliance of the newly signed HB 7?

A: Yes, directions have been given to our teachers from the district and they are aware of these new requirements. I can say that I sympathize with the teachers, as it appears to me that they are somewhat on edge about what they can and cannot say. This is a vague law that offers unclear direction.

Q: Have school libraries removed any books as a result of HB 1467?

A: There hasn't been a lot of direction on this to our educators because the Department of Education is heading up the process and will be training the state's media specialists themselves later in the school year. At this time, the acquisition of new materials is on hold; we've asked the media specialists not to order any new titles. Any removal of titles is happening through the committee process already in place.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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

St. Johns County Tax Collector Dennis Hollingsworth and staff wish you a happy birthday!

Remember to renew your vehicle registration and tag, or boat registration and decal before midnight on your birthday (or the expiration date on your auto or boat registration).

Generally, auto and boat registrations expire annually on the birthday of the first owner listed on the registration. This applies to passenger cars, recreational vehicles, light trucks under 7,999 lbs., small trailers, motorcycles and boats.

Some exceptions include company owned vehicles which are renewed in June; some lease vehicles; and truck-tractors, semi-trailers, trucks over 7,999 lbs., and nine-passenger automobiles for hire which must be renewed in December.

Vehicle registrations and tags may be renewed 90 days prior to their expiration.

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ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Grandparents: Four tips for spending on your grandkids

By Chris Thompson, CFP®, CRPC®

Many grandparents spend money on their grandkids, whether by chipping in on big expenses like tuition bills and travel expenses or covering smaller costs like meals and holiday gifts. The inclination to be generous is understandable, and many seniors say it brings them joy to support (or even occasionally spoil) their grandchildren. But lavishing them with gifts shouldn't come at the expense of your own financial security. If you're seeking to find the balance between supporting your grandchildren and ensuring your own finances stay in healthy shape, here are four tips to keep it all in check:

1. Know what you can afford. No matter how much you enjoy splurging on your grandkids, your financial security should remain your first priority. There are many unknowns in retirement, including your longevity, the fluctuation of markets and the impact of inflation on purchasing power (a factor that's

particularly pronounced at the moment, with inflation rates at their highest in 40 years). Spend and gift within your means to maintain your own financial health in the future.

2. Determine if you're giving or loaning. If you're giving a gift, understand current federal tax rules, which are based on the calendar year. In 2022, you can give up to \$16,000 to each family member before the federal gift tax is applied. If you are married, both you and your spouse may gift \$16,000 (for a total of \$32,000). And make certain the recipient knows it's a gift for their own tax purposes, and so there is no uncertainty about whether or not they need to pay you back. If you are loaning money to a grandchild, be very specific about the terms and repayment, and consider having a written document that both parties sign and date. This can help safeguard your financial situation and ensure both of you are on the same page — now and in the future.

3. Talk about it. Many people tend to shy away from discussions about money and finances with their family. If you would like to help support your grandchildren or save for their future goals like college or a down payment on a home, be sure to communicate this with their parents. This can help your adult children do a better job with their own financial planning. For example, if the parents of your grandchild know how much you are expecting to contribute to their child's education, they may be able to decrease the amount allocated to a 529 Plan and invest more toward other goals, such as their own retirement.

4. Establish boundaries. Even if you want to help your grandchildren financially, depending on their situation, it may not be appropriate to do so, or to repeatedly provide support. Everyone appreciates help, but if your grandchild needs to learn financial independence, there can be value in letting them live within their own means. Keep in mind

the smart — and sometimes tough — financial lessons you learned as you made your own way as a young adult, and the pride that came with successfully overcoming challenges.

If you want to provide financial support to a family member, but haven't incorporated it into your overall financial plan, consider consulting a financial professional.

Chris Thompson, CFP®, CRPC® is an Associate Manager and Financial Advisor with Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC. in Jacksonville. He specializes in fee-based financial planning and asset management strategies and has been in practice for 29 years. To contact him, visit www.ameripriseadvisors.com/chris.thompson or email chris.thompson@ampf.com.

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Guest Column

Property taxes in St. Johns County and the importance of homestead exemption

By St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer, CFA

I have had the honor and privilege of being the St. Johns County Property Appraiser for the past five and a half years. During this period our county has grown dramatically, from 141,000 assessed properties in 2017 to 162,000 assessed properties in 2022. During this time, taxable values in the county have increased 71 percent, from \$24 billion in 2017 to \$41 billion in 2022. What does this mean to you as a property owner? Simply put, your taxes have increased. With no change in the millage rates set by the taxing authorities, your taxes have increased because your value has increased.

While there are several exemptions from property tax available to homeowners, the most important is Homestead

Exemption, which is available to all homeowners who own and reside in their property as their primary residence on January 1 of the tax year and receive no other homestead tax benefit in Florida or the United States. Homestead Exemption reduces the taxable value of the property by \$50,000 and places a 3 percent cap on the amount that taxable value can increase each year. The assessment cap limitation on non-homestead properties is much higher at 10 percent.

Property appraisers in Florida's 67 counties are bound by law to appraise your property at just market value as of January 1 each tax year. Your taxable value each year is your just market value less any assessment cap limitations, less Homestead Exemption.

For example, if you owned a home-

steaded property on Jan. 1, 2017 with a just market value of \$250,000, your taxable value was \$200,000 (\$250,000 just market value less \$50,000 homestead exemption), and your property taxes were approximately \$2,500. Moving forward to Jan. 1, 2022, based on the increase in the market value of properties in St. Johns County, your just market value would now be \$462,500, your taxable value would be \$237,500 (\$462,500 less \$50,000 Homestead Exemption, less \$175,000 homestead assessment cap limitation at 3 percent) and your property taxes would be approximately \$3,000, an increase of 20 percent.

If this same property was not homesteaded, in 2022 your taxable value would be \$402,268 (\$462,500 just market value less \$59,873 non-homestead assessment cap limitation at 10 percent) and your property taxes would be approximately \$5,000, a 61 percent increase. You can see the importance of the Homestead Exemption limiting your tax increases due to increases in value (ad-valorem).

More than half of the properties in St.

Johns County do not receive Homestead Exemptions. Most of these properties are businesses and residential rentals where tax increases are most certainly passed along to consumers.

Without action by the taxing authorities on millage rates during times of significant growth and market value increases, property taxes increase. And as the example above shows, this increase can be significant.

My office is constitutionally mandated to ensure that you receive all exemptions you are entitled to. Detailed information on exemptions, TRIM notices, tax bills and a tax estimator are available on our website at www.sjcpa.us. You may also view property record and valuation information and apply for Homestead Exemption online.

[For purposes of calculations, the millage rate used in the examples above was 12.5. Millage rates vary by municipality and taxing district and do not include CDD fees and other non-ad-valorem fees. Market value growth over the period is 85 percent.]

Briefs

Type O blood urgently needed

OneBlood is experiencing an increased need for Type O blood. Multiple hospitals throughout OneBlood’s service area are experiencing high usage of Type O blood and it is putting increased pressure on the blood supply.

“It is vital that a robust supply of Type O blood is available at all times. OneBlood is urging all eligible donors with Type O blood to please visit a OneBlood donor center or Big Red Bus blood drive as soon as possible,” said Susan Forbes, senior vice president of corporate communications and public relations.

Forty five percent of the U.S. population has Type O blood, making it the blood type in the highest demand by hospitals. Additionally, Type O blood is the blood type used to help save trauma patients.

“Summer is a challenging time for blood donations. Despite the challenges, the need for blood does not stop. Every day patients in local hospitals depend on blood donors to survive. To ensure a ready blood supply is available, it requires donors to donate on a regular basis,” said Forbes.

Visit oneblood.org or call 1-888-9Donate to find a donation center near you.

Newcomers of North St. Johns announces September 2022 luncheon

Newcomers of North Saint Johns will hold its monthly luncheon, open to

any resident of the St. Johns County area, on Tuesday, Sept. 20 at the exclusive members-only Serenata Beach Club, 3175 South Ponte Vedra Blvd in Ponte Vedra Beach. The event features lunch and renowned pianist Carl Grant. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. with the meeting beginning at 11 a.m.

The cost for the luncheon and program is \$35 for members and \$40 for guests. All reservations must be received by Sept. 12, 2022.

“This is our first luncheon of the season and we’re thrilled to be back together and catch up on news and vacation travel after this long hot summer,” said Co-President Pat Lett.

“We’re looking forward to a lot of fun and fellowship and, of course, the talented Carl Grant who is opening for us,” said Co-President Judy Porter.

As always, raffles for gift baskets and a fun 50/50 drawing spice up the luncheons. If you are interested in a registration form for the luncheon, membership information or about upcoming activities, email membership@newcomersofnorthstjohns.org. The group offers a wide

variety of activities including wine socials, golf, Mahjonn, holiday parties, day trips and cultural events. Visit www.newcomersofnorthstjohns.org to learn more about the club and view the upcoming calendar of events.

Coastal Friends, formerly Newcomers Alumnae, hosts September luncheon

Coastal Friends, formerly known as Newcomers Alumnae, announces that the group’s popular monthly luncheon will be held on Wednesday, Sept. 7, at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Pkwy. in Ponte Vedra Beach from 11 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

This month’s guest speaker will be Nicole Woodsmall, donations manager at BEAM Thrift in Jacksonville Beach. This luncheon is open to all members of Coastal Friends, their guests and anyone interested in joining this ladies’ social club, which has been in existence since 1998.

Marsh Landing’s luncheon will consist of Caesar salad, chicken parmesan with linguine, and a mouth-watering tiramisu for dessert. The cost to attend the luncheon is \$25 and reservations must be made in advance to reserve a seat by contacting the luncheon chairman (bartshar@comcast.net) as soon as possible, since the deadline to reserve is Friday morning Sept. 2. For details on how to join Coastal Friends, contact brookemeister@msn.com or visit <https://coastalfriends.wildapricot.org>.

Ponte Vedra Woman’s Club kicks off fall season

The Ponte Vedra Woman’s Club is having two of the chosen charities for this club’s 2022 – 2023 year speak at our Fall Kick-Off General Meeting on Sept. 21 from 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. Hugs Across the County Vice President Sandy Calvin and Port in the Storm Assistant Director Karen Hensel will serve as speakers to Ponte Vedra Woman’s Club members about what their organizations are doing to improve the lives of the orphaned and homeless children they serve.

Donations are requested for Port in the Storm, a homeless youth center, from the women attending our Fall Kick-Off General Meeting. Items requested are bug spray, sunscreen, rain ponchos, bike locks, and bike lights. Also \$10 gift cards from Walmart, Dunkin Donuts, and Target are requested to be brought to the meeting.

The Ponte Vedra Woman’s Club will meet at Pusser’s Bar & Grille, 816 A1A in Ponte Vedra Beach for all General Meetings this year. Meeting times will alternate between 12 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. and 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. to give more

opportunities for members and prospective members to attend.

The Ponte Vedra Woman’s Club fundraisers for this club year start off with a Sip-n-Shop on Sept. 29 at Kendra Scott at St. Johns Town Center, 4812 River City Drive #107 from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. Attendees will enjoy sweets, rose wine, champagne, and shopping. Kendra Scott will be donating 10 percent of this event’s sales to the club’s charities and giving 10 percent off for each purchase at the event. This event is a pre-sale to our Premiere Charity Fundraiser, Diamonds and Denim, to be held on Oct. 1 at the Ribault Garden Club, 705 2nd Ave. N. in Jacksonville Beach. Tickets to this Charity Fundraiser Diamonds and Denim are \$125 per ticket or two tickets for \$200. Entrance to Diamonds and Denim includes food, drinks, entertainment, and a silent auction, among other features.

Event registrations for these three events — the Fall Kick-Off General Meeting, Sip-n-Shop at Kendra Scott, and Charity Fundraiser Diamonds and Denim — are under Events at pontevedrawomansclub.com/eventregistrations.php

Ponte Vedra Writers group welcomes Southern Gothic author

The Ponte Vedra Writers group will meet on Saturday, Sept. 24 at the Ponte Vedra Library at 10 a.m. to hear Darlyn Finch Kuhn speaking on “Weird Characters, Strange Places, and Tough Times: Writing NEW Southern Gothic.”

Traditional Southern Gothic literature has earned its place in the literary canon through classic works by authors like William Faulkner, Harper Lee, Carson McCullers, Tennessee Williams, Flannery O’Conner, and Shirley Jackson.

At the September meeting, the group will discuss how current writers are rediscovering this fascinating sub-genre dealing with disenfranchised voices in warped communities — not necessarily set in the American South. This workshop examines several much-beloved Southern Gothic works, moves into current examples, and ends the day with attendees generating new material of their own that embodies some of the characteristics of the Southern Gothic Revival.

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Get to Know ...

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Mary Kate Reynolds

Mary Kate Reynolds has always had an interest in the medical field, specifically medical research that continually provides new discoveries. Once in high school, the Ponte Vedra High senior entered the Academy of Biotechnology and Medical Research, which only heightened her level of interest. “The first year in Biotech we got to learn about DNA and then proteins and then genetics. Every year it gets more and more interesting. I have realized that this is where I want to be,” said Reynolds, 17. “I am really interested in genetics and gene therapy. It is just such a growing field.” Reynolds participated in the Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA) competition with Ponte Vedra High School, ultimately making it to Internationals with 7,000 other students in Nashville, Tennessee. She placed in the Top 10 in the Biomedical Laboratory Science Category, doing an agar plate procedure and putting on personal protection equipment. Reynolds was one of only two students from Florida competing in her category in June. Reynolds has a 4.58 GPA and a strong interest in attending the University of Florida and is Bio Tech certified. When she is not at school and



Photo courtesy Shelby Phillips Photography
Mary Kate Reynolds and Mia.

studying, Reynolds can be found riding and showing her horse, Mia, something that relieves stress even on a busy school day. Reynolds has two younger brothers, Garrett, 15, and Carter, 11, plus four dogs (Roxi, Jasper, Pixie and Maple) who started out as fosters. “We are not very good fosters, I guess,” said Reynolds jokingly. “We love our animals.”

Q: What did you learn about yourself by competing at HOSA?

A: I learned that I worry too much about my competition and my peers when I ultimately do the best when I remind myself what I am able to accomplish when I work hard. I was very excited at the competition, and I was surprised when I did the category by how much I already knew from the

Biotech Academy.

Q: You mentioned your excitement over potentially being a part of “the science of the future.” How does it feel to be getting so close to fulfilling this goal?

A: The Academy of Biotechnology and Medical Research has presented me with so many opportunities to learn about the industry and ways I can get involved in the future. Earlier this year, one of my classmates and I procured a patent for our Project Innovation idea that we came up with in Biotech. We had the idea to use mosquitoes for virology, recombinant DNA, and vaccine technology. It was such a great learning experience and opportunity for me to put me name on something that has the

potential to be used in Biotechnology in the future.

Q: What got you interested in riding and showing horses?

A: I knew my mom had done it growing up, so she used to always tell me about it. I had never really found a sport that I connected with before, so I wanted to try it when I was nine. There is just something about getting on this animal and being able to communicate with it and trust it. It is not just a pet; it is your partner. I felt that when I first started riding, but even more when we got Mia. I connected with her, and she is my heart horse.

Q: You volunteer with an equine organization, Horse Sense and Sensitivity, a nonprofit that provides therapeutic riding lessons to special needs individuals. What do you like about this experience?

A: I love seeing all these kids riding the horses. I have become invested in it because I get to connect with both the kids and the horses. My job is a side walker, especially during Special Olympics. I remind the kids of what they are supposed to be doing, and I try my best to make it a good experience for everyone.

Q: How has your family helped you find your way?

A: My grandparents and my parents have raised us to be very responsible and to be the best we can be. They are always supportive of whatever makes me happy and whatever I am good at. My grandparents have always helped me out so much and given me solid advice all throughout my childhood. My parents and my grandparents are the smartest people I know, and I trust them so much.

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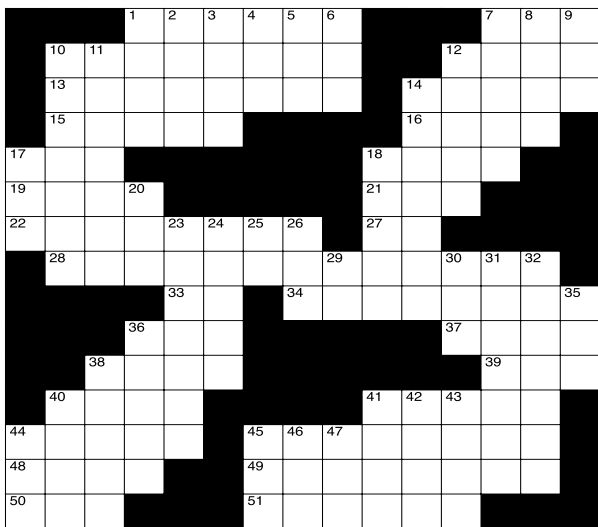
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Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

1. Grievous
7. Queens ballplayer
10. Honorable title
12. Created
13. Grillmasters do it
14. Wartime German cargo ship
15. Cocoplum
16. Hebrew calendar month
17. British thermal unit
18. Brews
19. One of Thor's names
21. Decorative scarf
22. Clothes
27. _ _ _ : denotes past
28. A way to address a lover
33. Commercial
34. Utters repeatedly
36. Google certification (abbr.)
37. Taxis
38. Belgian village in Antwerp
39. Talk excessively
40. Broad volcanic crater
41. Surgical instrument
44. Listens to
45. Revelation of a fact
48. Paddles
49. Heard
50. Tooth caregiver
51. Metric capacity units

CLUES DOWN

1. Protein-rich liquids
2. Musician Clapton
3. Wine
4. When you hope to arrive
5. Something one can get stuck in
6. Midway between east and southeast
7. Mothers
8. German river
9. Israeli city __ Aviv
10. Discharged
11. Areas near the retina
12. Greek mythological sorceress
14. Very unpleasant smell
17. “__ Humbug!”
18. White poplar
20. Journalist Tarbell
23. Teachers
24. One older than you
25. Long Russian river
26. Run batted in
29. Beloved Hollywood alien
30. Holiday (informal)
31. Furniture with open shelves
32. Argued
35. Sino-Soviet block (abbr.)
36. Cars have them
38. Volcanic craters
40. Made of fermented honey and water
41. Shelter for mammals or birds
42. One who utilizes
43. Moves swiftly on foot
44. Builder's trough
45. Architectural wing
46. 12
47. Pacific Standard Time

GOOD DOG WORD SEARCH

[illegible]

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

WORDS

AGILITY
APRON
BALANCE
BARK
BEARD
BELLY
BREED
BRINDLE
CANINE
CAPE
CHAMPION
CLUB
CRATE
CROUP
DOCKED
DOG
HOCKS
NEUTER
PET
SHOW
SPAY
TAIL
VETERINARY
WITHERS



Solve the code to discover words related to dog ownership.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 15 = E)

- A. 21 8 17 25 17 15**
Clue: Companion animal
- B. 7 8 23 24**
Clue: Dog sound
- C. 21 8 23 15**
Clue: Provide for health
- D. 22 14 17 15 23**
Clue: One who has a pet



PopHistory

By Scott A. Grant
mail@floridanewsline.com

Rescue at Sea (or how a 450-year-old Italian admiral came to reside in Fernandina)

Shortly after 11 p.m. on the night of July 25, 1956, Alexander and Elisabeth “Bess” MacKerell were enjoying their last night aboard the “Andrea Doria.” They were with friends in the first-class lounge near a life-sized bronze statue of the famous Italian admiral for whom the ship was named. The horrifying sound of metal ripping into metal interrupted the frivolity. Dessert plates and champagne glasses tumbled to the ground and shattered.

“Andrea Doria” was the pride of the Italian Line and was considered the most beautiful ship afloat. She was named for a 16th century Italian admiral — Andrea Doria commanded a wing of the Christian Fleet at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571. It was there that the united Christian fleet defeated the Muslims of the Ottoman Empire. The battle was so significant that Pope Pius V announced the result before messengers arrived. He claimed he had a vision of the great victory from God.

Aboard the ship that carried his name, it quickly became apparent that something was horribly amiss. In the fog off Nantucket, the ship had collided with the “Stockholm,” the pride of the Swedish Line. Although the “Stockholm” was only about half the size of the “Doria,” she was equipped with a heavy steel bow designed to break

ice. That heavy bow now tore into the side of the Italian ship leaving a giant hole and ripping a young girl from her berth. She would later be found alive and well amongst the wreckage.

“Andrea Doria” listed hard to starboard rendering most of her lifeboats inoperable. She was sinking. Nearby ships rushed to the rescue. Three long hours went by before they began to abandon ship, women, and children first. Alexander and Bess MacKerell, my grandparents, went to their stateroom to collect their life vests and raincoats.

Crew directed my grandmother into a lifeboat. The women were instructed to leave their shoes in a large pile before descending. My grandmother was proud that she decided her shoes might come in handy later and stuffed them into the pockets of her raincoat instead. She would be rescued by a US troop transport, the “Private Willie Thomas.” Bess would be the only woman aboard with shoes. Later she would be quoted in an AP story that ran nationally.

Back on the “Doria,” my grandfather prayed. He prayed for strength for himself and for the rescuers. He was scared. He specifically prayed for strength to descend a rope ladder if he had to. He had never been able to

climb the rope in high school.

Meanwhile, hours to the east and headed in the wrong direction, the “Ile de France,” pride of the French Line, heard the distress calls. Legend says that the home office forbade the captain turning around to render aid. Time was still essential in those days. Today we cruise for fun. Back in the old days, it was still a mode of travel.

Aboard the French ship, the captain, Baron Raoul de Beaudean made a fateful decision. Radio transmissions indicated there were not enough lifeboats. Thinking to himself that "There but for the grace of God, go I," the baron turned his ship around and made full steam back to the stricken vessel.

A thick fog lay across the Atlantic that night. The men still huddled onboard awaiting rescue could see nothing. As the “Ile de France” approached, they could not discern which radar blip to head toward. Then, miraculously, the fog began to lift. De Beauden maneuvered his ship near the “Andrea Doria” and turned on the bright advertising lights that were normally reserved for port. Giant letters spelling “ILE DE FRANCE” lit up the night.

Those lights piercing through the lifting fog were like a beacon of hope to those still aboard. It was at that moment that my grandfather knew that he would live. He made it down the ladder and from the luxury of the French ship, sent a telegram to my mother at their home in Merchantville, NJ saying they were both safe.

My mother was frantic. News of the sinking spread quickly. The 23-year-old

felt an overwhelming need to get to New York City and save her parents. She reached out to the most reliable man she knew seeking help. Leonard Grant was a young minister serving two churches in the already decaying inner city of Camden. He borrowed a 1956 Chevy Belair from his older brother. The car was two-toned, white and copper, and it was the first truly new car Uncle Hobie ever owned. Together, my mother and father raced to New York to rescue Nancy's parents. A few months later, they became engaged. A few years later, I was born.

Part of the miracle of the “Andrea Doria” was that only 46 people died in the sinking. More than 1,700 lives were saved that night, almost half by the “Ile de France.” The ship settled on the bottom at a depth of 200 feet, in treacherous waters. Twenty-two more people died trying to extract her treasures. She became known as the “Mount Everest of scuba diving.”

In 1964, a successful dive led by Dan Turner managed to retrieve the statue of Andrea Doria from the main lounge. In order to salvage the statue, they had to cut Doria off at the ankles since the base was too heavy to lift. For decades, that statue resided at the Palace Saloon in Fernandina Beach. At first, he was inside. Later he was outside like a lawn ornament in cowboy boots. Recently, another dive team recovered the base, and the statue of Andrea Doria was sent back to Italy where he was reunited with his feet.

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

Second Alarmers: Saying thank you to First Responders

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps

David Kirschbaum grew up in Philadelphia, becoming a volunteer firefighter when he was 40 years old. It was something he wanted to do most of his life and his energy for the job earned him the “Rookie of the Year” award.

“It is an amazing feeling to be able to help someone in their time of need,” said Kirschbaum, who served for 10 years.

When Kirschbaum became a St. Johns County resident in 2006, he took that same energy to local firefighters, looking for a chance to both support and thank them for a job well-done. In 2015, he created the 2nd Alarmers Association of St. Johns County to do just that.

“The organization’s focus is on providing whatever services to the firefighters we can give while the first responders are on the scene of an emergency incident,” said Kirschbaum. “We do not do any firefighting, medical or rescue work, but we do provide the firefighters with the means to rehydrate as well as refill and replace their air tanks once they have exited a burning structure.”

There are currently 30 members of the organization, some with a firefighting background, some with none; however, all members have the same mission: take care of first responders.

“My motto is ‘you can take care of the fire, we take care of the firefighters,’”

said Kirschbaum. “We like to fill in the gaps.”

Member Lee Gilbert has been volunteering for five years, and he is willing to go to any call even when it takes him 50 minutes to get there. Gilbert lives in the southern part of St. Johns County.

“Anything we can do to help make the job easier,” he said. “I would not be doing this if I did not feel appreciated.”

Gilbert has an emergency services background that began when he was just 15 years old as a fire cadet. He was a volunteer firefighter for 38 years and retired in 2013 as a 911 Communications Supervisor in Virginia.

Kirschbaum, who lives in the north end of St. Johns County, said he was familiar with 2nd Alarmers from his time in Philadelphia, but very few places have such an organization. When he first approached St. Johns County fire stations with the idea, he sensed some skepticism initially. Once the idea was approved, the group grew and became very much accepted. Kirschbaum said he is deeply touched anytime he is thanked by firefighters, and he is constantly trying to find more ways to help.

“The biggest reward I get is when a firefighter comes up to me and shakes my hand and says thank you. It takes my breath away. It is not expected, but it certainly makes me feel very proud,” said Kirschbaum, adding that a new truck, not yet in service, has the 2nd



2nd Alarmers members who volunteered to help with Covid paperwork at a vaccine site, Solomon Calhoun Center. Photo courtesy David Kirschbaum

Alarmers logo on it which is a true honor.

The 2nd Alarmers are alerted to an emergency incident through a text message and arrive on scene in personal vehicles. They are available 24/7 all year long, he said.

“It is not uncommon to get called out in the middle of the night,” he said.

Members also help at trainings, at THE PLAYERS, and assisted with paperwork when Covid vaccines were first administered, logging 5,000 volunteer hours during that time.

“We all really worked as a team,” he said. “We have a great group of volunteers.”

Kirschbaum noted that no money from

the county is used for the organization, and there are no member dues. Kirschbaum said the group conducts its own fundraising efforts and does accept donations to buy things like electrolyte powder and towels for the firefighters. The group also purchased a wagon to use on site to hold air bottles.

The 2nd Alarmers also help wrapping toys for the Firefighters for Families organization during Christmas time. Again, the group is eager to help in any way, said Kirschbaum.

[Author’s note: Kirschbaum said the organization is always looking for new members (21 years of age and older). The first step is to fill out an application with St. Johns County. For more information, email Kirschbaum at 2ndalarmers@gmail.com.]



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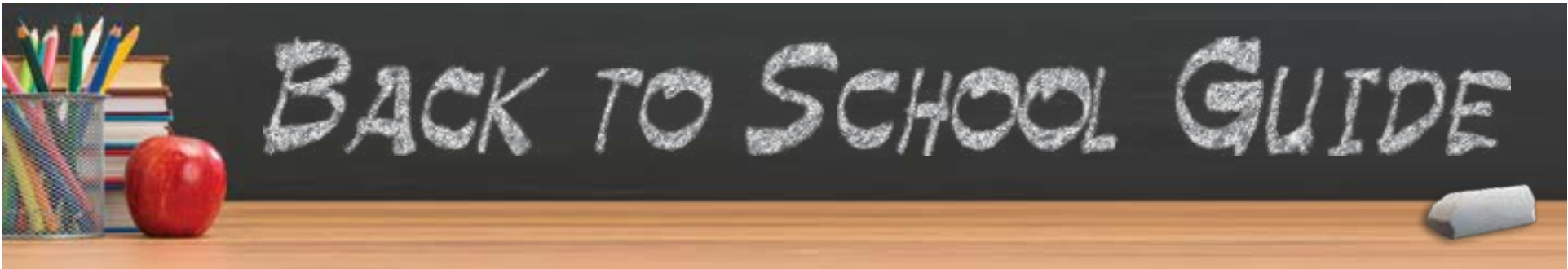
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Find Your Frugal: Save on school lunches

By Kirsten Romaguera, UF/IFAS Extension
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As parents ready their children for the start of a new school year, the daily challenge of preparing packed lunches returns.

“There are 180 days in the school year, so that’s up to 180 lunches some parents may have to pack, per child,” said Rebecca Elliott, UF/IFAS Extension Marion County family and consumer sciences agent. “But planning ahead can mean savings throughout the year, and it can be simpler than you think. Plus, involving your kids in the process can empower them to make healthy food choices at other times.”

Below, Elliott shares ideas to minimize food and packaging waste in a healthy school lunch while maximizing parents’ cost savings.

Rethink packaging: Do you use zip-top bags, paper bags, wax paper or aluminum foil to pack your kid’s lunch? You can save money by changing from disposable packaging to reusable packaging. Reusable lunch and drink containers help reduce food waste, since any leftovers can return home, and you can save about \$250 per child a year, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Consider stackable containers of various sizes or compartmented bento-style boxes, which are a great tool for portion control and ensuring different food groups are represented in your child’s meal.

Leftovers for lunch: Consider turning dinner leftovers into school lunches. You won’t waste food, and your kids will enjoy the school lunch, since it is a known entity. Separate leftovers into smaller reusable containers or bento boxes, and there’s no need to think about lunch the next morning. Use your imagination — tonight’s roast can be tomorrow’s sandwich or taco, or add it to noodles and salads. Leftover chicken can turn into a stir-fry. Extra

vegetables, beans, or pasta can become vegetable soup, stew, a pasta dish, or salad. For food safety, just be sure that leftovers are kept in the refrigerator for up to four days or in the freezer for up to four months.

Buy in bulk instead of pre-packed foods: Sometimes saving money sacrifices convenience. For example, it is easier to buy baby carrots instead of a pound of whole carrots and prepare them yourself. Pre-prepared foods are more expensive than buying in bulk. This is also true for other items you may pack in your kid’s lunch: cheese sticks are more expensive than buying a cheese “brick,” and filling a reusable drink container is more economical than buying single-use juice packages.

Consider more affordable proteins: Recent price fluctuations have been more prevalent in meat sources of protein. Therefore, try other less affected protein sources, such as lentils, beans, garbanzo beans/chickpeas (including hummus), or hard-boiled eggs. For example, one pound of lentils costs an average of just \$2 and can last a long time. Try a lentil taco recipe (go.ufl.edu/lentil-taco) from the UF/IFAS Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program or black bean and vegetable quesadillas (tinyurl.com/3dnm2fkm) from the UF/IFAS Extension Family Nutrition Program.

Get your children involved: Prepare the weekly meals on Sunday to avoid the weekday morning hassle, and involve your kids in the planning and preparations. You can pack separate containers with dry food, pre-cut veggies and appropriate leftovers. Fill up reusable bottles with water, 100 percent juice, low-fat yogurt, or home-made smoothies. Ask your children what their favorite healthy foods are, and even let them build their lunch boxes. You’ll find less food waste as a result.

HUGS restocks schools’ emergency food pantries

By Brette Reiman
mail@floridanewslines.com

To kick off the new school year, local all-volunteer nonprofit HUGS St. Johns restocked emergency food pantries at more than 13 St. Johns County schools and after-school programs, thanks to a generous donation from the Winn-Dixie Gives Foundation. The HUGS pantries serve hundreds of food-insecure children every month by providing kid-friendly, grab and go items that students can discreetly bring home as needed.

“It gives me great relief to no longer worry about whether families have food to eat when our doors are closed, and I look forward to our continued partnership with HUGS,” said Rona Welch, Unit Director, The Players Championship Boys & Girls Club, a HUGS Pantry Partner for three years.

According to HUGS volunteer food program coordinator, Holly Ross, “We tailor the program to each school’s needs by providing after-school snacks and meals, weekend meals or late-arrival breakfasts. We are so thankful for the incredible support from Winn-Dixie and in-kind donations from families, and also feel so fortunate to have a dedicated, high-energy volunteer team that delivers to schools each month.”

With the addition of more school locations and the rise in food costs, the Winn-Dixie donation is impactful.

“As inflationary pressures continue to impact our communities, we want to do our part to aid organizations like HUGS that support families as they plan for the school year ahead,” said Shawn Sloan, North Florida region vice president for Winn-Dixie. “We are grateful for this opportunity to serve our neighbors inside and outside of our stores to help restock pantry shelves and cultivate positive learning environments as students head back to class.”

St. Johns County has more than 400 children considered homeless each year, and thousands more who are affected by poverty, domestic violence or parent incarceration.

“The help our Title 1 school receives from HUGS is invaluable to our students. By stocking our pantry with nutritious food that is easy to prepare, we are able to send food home with students each Friday who might otherwise have nothing substantial to eat until Monday morning. We are also able to add food to their backpacks midweek for our most food insecure students,” said Julie Conoscenti from Gaines Transition School in St. Augustine.

Visit www.stjohnshugs.org or call (904) 580-4847 for more information about donating to or volunteering with HUGS food programs or clothing programs benefiting St. Johns County children.

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Newcomers host Kick Off Luncheon

By Bonnie Evans
mail@floridanewsline.com

After two years of not traveling at all, Newcomers of the Beaches members took off to visit family and take those long planned fabulous vacations. Activities slowed down in the summer since members were otherwise engaged, but the new board and volunteers of Newcomers of the Beaches have been busy in creating new experiences and bringing back many favorite ones. At the Sept. 14 Kick Off Luncheon at St. Johns Country Club, leaders will be creating displays to show members what activities will be available for the next year. Mem-

bers can ask questions and even make suggestions of events that they would like to have.

Some summer activities still took place. The bi-monthly bike rides through the various Beaches neighborhoods have been popular. Book Club members continued to read selected books, which they discussed in person or via Zoom. Members continued to do beach walks, which included Jacksonville Beach and Atlantic Beach; Happy Hour continued monthly at various locations. You will find members playing Mah Jongg, Canasta, Samba, Bunco and Euchre. Many members enjoyed a cooking

demonstration at the Publix Aprons Cooking School on San Jose Boulevard where they enjoyed a Jamaican light four course meal with four wines to taste. Let us not forget the avid golfers who braved the summer heat to play golf. The ladies know how to have fun.

For more information about Newcomers of the Beaches and membership application, visit newcomer-softhebeaches.com. The primary objective of the group is to make new friends. If you are new to the Beaches area or have had a life changing event such as newly single or recently retired, then come join the fun.



Photo courtesy Bonnie Evans
Bi-monthly bike rides through the various Beaches neighborhoods remain popular with Newcomers of the Beaches members.

“Considering these difficult and challenging times, we find great benefit from living here. This was a terrific decision and we’re glad we did it!”



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Sawgrass Ladies 3.5 USTA tennis team finishes in Top 4



Photo courtesy Lisa Farese

The Sawgrass Country Club Ladies 3.5 USTA team (aka Glamorous Ladies of Sawgrass or “GLOS”) finished in the top four teams in the state of Florida after establishing a 4 – 1 record at the USTA National Tennis Center in Lake Nona. In their final match, two courts went to a deciding third set super tie-breaker in a close loss to Escambia.

Team members were Alicia Sprecher, Lisa Pella, Blair May, Betsy Delcour, Danielle Wright, Kim McCall, Lorraine Carless, Rhonda Gummerman, Aisling Toby, Mary Anne Orenchuk, Jennifer Werba and Janet Zborowski.

Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra Beach distributes funds to charities



Photo courtesy Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra Beach

Members of the Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra Beach join with club Foundation Chair Billy Wagner and club President Ronald “Doc” Renuart to celebrate the success of the club’s annual Mineral City Celebration charity gala. As a result of the gala’s success, the Ponte Vedra Beach Rotary Club Foundation recently distributed \$95,000 to Beaches-area charities to support their missions and strengthen local communities.

Travel

River cruising on the Seine:
Paris and Normandy

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewsline.com

Most Seine River cruises start in Paris, then head into Normandy toward the English Channel. Guests take excursions to explore Normandy's highlights: Rouen Cathedral, the 950-year-old Bayeux Tapestry, and the stirring WWII D-Day landing sites. Honfleur is the last stop before turning around, and the climax of the return route becomes Claude Monet's House and Gardens.

When I saw the Riviera River Cruises itinerary, I knew this trip was for me — an art, history, wine and cheese lover. I flew to Paris and boarded their ship, the "Jane Austen," which carries a maximum of 140 passengers. I prefer fewer people and the smaller river cruise to mega ocean-liners. The cruise commenced with dinner in the evening. After a late sunset, the captain moved the boat near to the small replica of the Statue of Liberty and the glittering Eiffel Tower in the distance.

It's magical to see the illuminated icon sparkling like a fireworks display. The next morning, we reached the village of Les Andelys, seeing Chateau Galliard on the hillside. The buildings are ruins of Richard the Lionhearted castle built between 1196 – 1198. Riviera took guests on an excursion to the site in the afternoon; then, we walked downhill into the charming town with half-timbered buildings.

The cruise moved to the medieval city of Rouen in time to see the evening sound and light show projected onto the cathedral's façade. The explosion of vibrant colors and technological mastery mesmerized the audience, who watched in stunned silence. Incredible! The following morning guests took a guided walking tour of the city, learning about the cathedral's long history and Joan of Arc. Joan was burned at stake in Rouen after her trial.



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
The "Jane Austen."



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Chateau Galliard ruins.

A modern church stands on the site, architecturally unappealing to me, but once side, aglow with a wonderful wall of stained glass windows.

My cruise traveled to dock in Caudebec, and the guests were bused to Bayeux the following day. The little town contains another great cathedral, but its calling card is the priceless Bayeux Tapestry. Having done needlework in my younger years, I appreciated the intricate detail and symmetry throughout the 230-foot-long exquisite masterpiece. It tells the story of William the Conqueror and the Battle of Hasting.

The D-Day landing sites came next, starting at Pointe du Hoc. Here the U.S. soldiers climbed the steep cliffs while encountering enemy fire. The courage of these young soldiers overwhelms you when you see the bombed-out landscape and base of the German artillery guns. We moved on to Omaha Beach, another landing site. The sandy expanse surprised me; it was full of sunbathers and swimmers. A stunning memorial remembers the critical events along this lovely beach in 1944.

The last stop was the 172-acre American Cemetery, with 9,387 American War Dead graves. The cemetery honors those lost in the Normandy battles. It's an emotionally difficult place to visit, but one that keeps alive the memory of those who lost their lives during their brave fight for global freedom. We owe them much.

Honfleur, a medieval town with narrow cobblestone alleys and a central rectangular harbor in the middle of the old village, provided the next day's visit. It was market day, so overly crowded for my liking.

Monet's House and Garden named Giverny became a delight as we neared Paris. His colorful home features a yellow dining room and a blue and white tiled kitchen. Of course, the water lily ponds that he painted remain favorites.

The cruise returned to Paris, a city that never disappoints. Viva la France.

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

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