



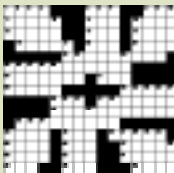
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Choose your Nutcracker

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.com

“The Nutcracker” is believed by many to be a time-honored holiday tradition. In Northeast Florida, the tradition continues with five productions of the ballet this December.

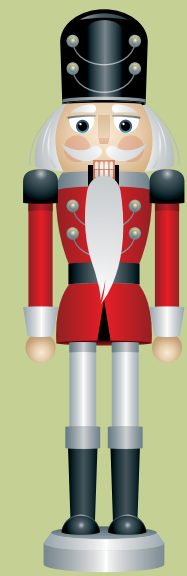
Since each performance is unique, following is a guide highlighting the dates, times and locations of each to help you choose “your” Nutcracker.

Community Nutcracker

Dec. 9 at 7:30 p.m.
Dec. 10 at 1 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.
Florida Theatre
www.jaxnutcracker.org

Artistic Directors Dulce Anaya, Debra Rankin and Mark Spivak continue this holiday tradition which began in 1992. Community Nutcracker is the only nonprofit,

volunteer-run organization that offers a portion of its proceeds to local charitable agencies with each performance — and has donated more than \$750,000 in the past 31 years. The performing company is made up of local talent with more than 200 dancers ranging in age from nine to adult from Northeast Florida



Nutcracker cont. on pg. 14

It's the holiday season!

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.com

NW St. Johns County residents will once again be able to enjoy the annual Julington Creek Boat Parade of Lights (formerly Christmas on the Creek) to begin the holiday season's annual festivities. This year's event is scheduled for Saturday, Dec. 3 beginning at 7 p.m.

“The community is invited to come out and enjoy the display,” said Commodore Bill Flynn of the Julington Creek Prop Club, which is the sponsor of the boat parade.

Established in 1988, this annual boat parade will feature an estimated 40 boats of all shapes, sizes, and themes. Boats decked out in all their holiday finery navigate the parade route, which begins at the Julington Creek Marina, goes underneath the Julington Creek Bridge, motors around Bulls Bay, then returns under the bridge and continues down Durbin Creek. Spectators can view the festivities from the Julington Creek Bridge walkways.

Houses and docks along the creek are eligible for prizes for the best decorations and cash prizes are given to the top three



Photo courtesy Julington Creek Prop Club

decorated boats as determined by the judge boat. The judge boat posts itself almost out in the St. Johns River to view the parade of boats as they go by, and then falls in line behind the final boat to view the houses and docks along the way into Durbin Creek. Homeowners with docks located on the parade route also join in the fun. Decorated docks can vie for a variety of prizes.

According to Flynn, there is a great deal of planning and organizational prep work done before the boat parade. In October each year, the Prop Club starts contacting boaters, area merchants and residents gathering donations for the event. Some

of the boats participating in the parade are Prop Club members and others come from all over the area. Boats range in size from 17 to 40 feet in length.

The Julington Creek Prop Club is a social organization of boaters that meets on the second Saturday of each month at 5:30 p.m. at the Julington Creek Marina dock. All interested boaters are invited to join for boating information and fun at the creek. Annual dues provide some of the funds for the Julington Creek Boat Parade of Lights, but Flynn said the Prop Club depends on and appreciates many local business' and waterfront owners' contributions as well.

The Sounds of the Season: St. Augustine Orchestra celebrates 61st season

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewslines.com

While St. Augustine Orchestra members come from every walk of life, they are united by one passion: the love of making music and sharing it with others.

“Community-based orchestras like the St. Augustine Orchestra are comprised of musicians from disparate backgrounds — from amateurs that started playing their instrument in school, but gravitated to careers outside of music but still wanted to engage with a group, to retired and current professional musicians that have



Photo courtesy Larry Tallis

The St. Augustine Orchestra under the direction of Scott Gregg.

spent their entire lives in music,” said Maestro Scott Gregg, artistic director

Sounds cont. on pg. 2

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Sounds cont. from pg. 1

since 2016. “It’s a unique group of people that make the experience very special.”

This year marks the 61st season for the St. Augustine Orchestra with a special focus on expanding its reach into the community through a performance series at Toco Creek High School. Band students at Toco Creek will assist with set up.

“Every year brings something new, and this year is no exception,” said Allyson Breger, St. Augustine Orchestra executive director. “This is an effort to branch out and garner a larger audience.”

Another highlight of the season is a holiday event, Sounds of the Season, being held at Kelly Farm on Dec. 16. Sounds of the Season will include a silent auction, concession offerings, VIP and general seating.

“It is a gorgeous property, a 90-acre working farm,” said Breger. “This will be our annual holiday event now and will include multiple events such as Tea with Mrs. Claus and Breakfast with Santa.”

Breger said performing outside comes with its own set of challenges and risks, but it is a beautiful venue and an opportunity to share a holiday pops concert with the community (a rain date has been set for Sunday, Dec. 18). Two more concert series are planned for the winter, one on March 30 at the Lightner Museum and one on March 31 at Toco Creek High School.

The St. Augustine Orchestra is a not-for-profit, semi-professional orchestra located in St. Augustine. Public and private concerts are held during the season, which runs from September through May.

Breger said the members make the orchestra special, and she continues to be impressed with their incredible dedication.

“Unlike a professional symphony where members are paid to practice and that is their job, our community group is voluntary. They practice at home, and they attend rehearsals,” said Breger. “It is amazing how much our members give because they want to make music.”

Gregg said that concerts are the culmination of weeks of rehearsal for the orchestra, once a week for seven to eight weeks before a concert series.

“Of course, my own preparation is well in advance of even the rehearsals with planning a program that makes sense and is artistically gratifying for the orchestra and audience alike,” he said. “I have to know what I’m doing as a conductor before I ever stand in front of the orchestra, and the orchestra has to know what it’s doing before ever sitting in front of an audience. So, by the time we get to a concert, hopefully all the hard work is over and we can enjoy the experience.”

[Author’s note: For more information about the St. Augustine Orchestra, visit www.stagustineorchestra.com.]

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

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BFF

Best Furry Friend of the month

Breed:
Snowshoe Siamese
Favorite activity:
Sleeping
Favorite Treat:

Kitty Treats. Sometimes when my mom forgets to put them away, out of my sight, I break into them and have a snack!

Favorite Friend:
My brother Duke

How your BFF got their name:
My human brothers and sisters loved the Lion King movie.



Meet Simba!

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

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Holiday Gift Guide

Pages 13 - 15

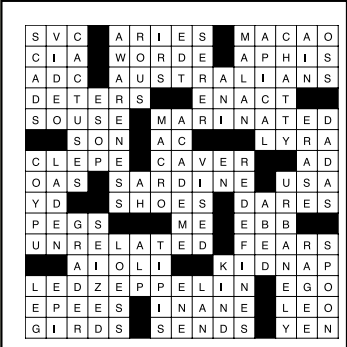
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MYSTERY PHOTO



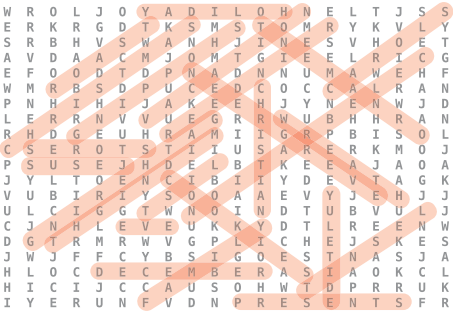
Last month's Mystery Photo was Jeremiah's Italian Ice on St. Johns Parkway.



Answers to our Puzzles
PG 18



A. holiday B. Santa C. celebrate D. jolly



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December

Community Calendar

What's Happening in St. Johns

Trout Creek Senior Center offers activities for seniors on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings at 6795 Collier Road in Orangedale. Cards, crafts and games start each day at 9 a.m. with trivia, nutrition/exercise, Bunco and Bingo among the additional activities before lunch at 11:45 a.m. each day. Contact Program Coordinator Anne Marie Forsythe at (904) 552-1611 for more information.

Playing H00Kie, a group for those who enjoy knitting, crocheting and looming (with all items donated to charity) meets every Wednesday from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at Panera Bread in the RiverPlace shopping center, 11111 San Jose Blvd. Visit the group's Facebook page (Playing H00Kie) or email playinghookie31@gmail.com for more information.

Jokers Wild, a local card group, plays the game of "Hand, Knee, and Foot" on Wednesdays. If you are interested in joining, please call (904) 230-6962 and leave a message.

1st: Garden Club of Switzerland monthly meeting will be held on Dec. 1 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the Bartram Trail Branch Library at the entrance to Julington Creek Plantation. "Plant adaptations for environmental changes" by horticultural expert Keith Fuller will be the program. Visit www.switzerlandgc.org for more information.

6th: Happy Hookers crochet group will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on Dec. 6 from 5:30 p.m. – 6:45 p.m. The group crochets or knits blankets for cancer patients at area hospitals. All skill levels are welcome. Visit www.sjcpls.org or call (904) 827-6960.

6th: Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet on Tuesday, Dec. 6 at

6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church at the Mandarin Road Campus in the Woody Room at 11844 Mandarin Road for a holiday meal. The cost of the catered meal is \$15. Wearing masks is optional. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

7th: River City Ringers bring their holiday spirit to Geneva Presbyterian Church on Wednesday, Dec. 7 for a free concert, open to the public, at 7 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall. Geneva Presbyterian Church is located at 1755 State Road 13 in Saint Johns. Visit www.genevapresbyterian.org for more information.

10th: The Bartram Trail Genealogy Club meets the second Saturday of each month (this month, Dec. 10) from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. in the Bartram Trail Library conference room, 60 Davis Pond Blvd. Every level, beginners to experts, are welcome. If interested, come to a meeting or send a request to join the club at www.facebook.com/groups/BTGenClubGroup.

10th: Bartram Trail Friends of the Library Book Sale will be held at the Bartram Trail Branch Library, 60 Davis Pond Blvd., on Dec. 10 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. This month will also include a Friends of the Library membership drive and bake sale.

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

13th: Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club will hold its meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, Dec. 13 at 11 a.m. at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club, 205 St. Johns Golf Drive off County Road 210. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. The theme of the luncheon is Holiday Spirit and Lisa Jackson, a local ventriloquist, will entertain attendees with her "friends" Disco Dolly and Sister Myrtle. The cost of the luncheon is \$32. Make checks payable to BTNC and mail to Deborah Russell, 12376 Fireberry Ct., Jacksonville, FL 32258. Payment must be received no later than Dec. 8, 2022, no exceptions. Be sure to indicate entrée choice on the check memo line. Visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 for food choices and updated information.

13th: The Newcomers of North St. Johns will host a holiday luncheon on Tuesday, Dec. 13 beginning at 10:30 a.m. at Maggiano's Little Italy in the St. Johns Town Center. The event features a delicious lunch and entertainment by Roger Dodd and Johnny Piantadosi, who will be singing traditional holiday favorites. The cost for the luncheon and program is \$35 for members. All reservations must be received by Dec. 5. Visit <https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org> for more information.

15th: The Jacksonville Camera Club will meet on Dec. 15 from 7 p.m. – 9 p.m. at Shepherd of the Woods Southside, 7860 Southside Blvd. There is a social "hour" of 30 to 45 minutes before the meeting. Visit jax.jaxcameraclub.com for more information.

15th - 17th: "Unity through the Nativity" will be sponsored by the Village Church, 4229 Pacetti Road on Thursday and Friday, Dec. 15 and 16

from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. and on Saturday, Dec. 17 from 4 p.m. – 8 p.m. This event containing nativity scenes from around the world is open to the community, free of charge.

17th: A Joyful Christmas will be held on Dec. 17 from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. at Alpine Groves Park, 2060 State Road 13 in Switzerland. The event will include vendors with handcrafted items, Christmas caroling, a children's scavenger hunt, cookie decorating and gingerbread house competitions, and a tour of the historic Bennett Farmhouse. Proceeds will benefit Christ's Cupboard Food Pantry, Friends of Alpine Groves Park and Noah's Agape Cafe. Visit www.joyfullythankful.com/Christmas for more information.

18th: Geneva Presbyterian Church's Christmas Cantata, inspired by the James Webb Telescope's new color-filled views of the cosmos, will be presented on Sunday, Dec. 18 at 10:30 a.m. and 2 p.m. at the church, located at 1755 State Road 13 in St. Johns. The cantata features local student instrumentalists on music selections ranging from traditional carols to David Bowie and Mariah Carey; readings include scripture and poetry from St. Johns residents, Karen Bhola and Fran McCormack. Seating is on a first come, first served basis and tickets are free. To RSVP, call the church office at (904) 287-4865.

19th: The All Star Quilters Guild will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on Monday, Dec. 19 at the First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The program will be "Winter Wonderland" with a variety of holiday themed activities and exhibits. Sew and Tell is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit www.allstarquilters.org for more information.





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Guest Column

General Election wrap up

By St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes
The Nov. 8 General Election in St. Johns County was a success with 64.8 percent of registered voters turning out to vote.

Here’s how the votes were cast:

31,673 Vote-by-mail Ballots
54,180 Early Voting Ballots
59,118 Election Day Ballots

A heartfelt thank you to the incredible elections team of approximately 500 staff and volunteers it took to conduct the election. This included front desk staff, warehouse staff, voting technicians, poll workers, vote-by-mail staff, IT and GIS staff, temporary staff, and our community partners who allowed their locations to be used as polling places. We are so grateful for your dedication and service to St. Johns County and our community.

Our polling places were busy places on election day. All locations were fully staffed with workers and plenty of ballots. Upon opening, many of our locations had lines, but that is normal with so many voters stopping by to vote on their way to work. Our poll workers really appreciated voter patience throughout the day as they worked diligently to process votes and get them in and out as quickly as possible. A few of our locations even had lines at 7 p.m., but every voter in line was able to cast their ballot before heading home for the night and one location even stayed until 7:45 p.m. to ensure every vote was cast.

Eight of our precincts processed over 2,000 voters on election day. Some of our busiest election day locations included:

2,414 voters at Village Church, 4229 Pacetti Road, St. Augustine
2,387 voters at Celebration Lutheran Church, 810 Roberts Road, St. Johns
2,327 voters at St. Francis in the Field, 895 Palm Valley Road, Ponte Vedra Beach
2,191 voters at The Clubhouse at Beacon Lake, 850 Beacon Lake Pkwy, St. Augustine
2,158 voters at Switzerland Community Church, 2179 State Road 13 N., St. Johns
2,058 voters at Good News Church, 1357 Wildwood Drive, St. Augustine
2,028 voters at RiverHouse at River-Town, 140 Landing St., St. Johns
2,010 voters at The Palencia Club, 600 Palencia Club Drive, St. Augustine

Congratulations to those who won their elections and will begin their terms soon. There were many long hours put in on the campaign trail so I know there were a lot of weary people happy to see 7 p.m. arrive on Nov. 8; however, our work at the Elections Office never ends. We will take a short break for the holidays, but 2023 is our year of planning for the 2024 elections and implementing new list maintenance laws to improve the accuracy of our voter rolls.

There will be three elections in 2024 including the March Presidential Preference Primary, the August Primary and the November General Election. With such a busy year, we cannot start planning soon enough to ensure St. Johns County voters have safe, accessible, and successful elections. I sincerely hope you and your loved ones enjoy a peaceful holiday season. We will see you again in 2023 with more election news!



with St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer

Q: How have storms Ian and Nicole impacted the work of your office?

A: Late in the season, we have had two reasonably severe storms. Many property owners have unfortunately had damage to their homes. After Ian, our office reached out to affected homeowners to see what we could do to help, assessment-wise and then did the same thing after Nicole.

Q: Will property owners see a decrease in their property taxes this year if their homes sustained damage?

A: There is no relief available for the payments due for this year, but depending on the severity of the damage and whether repairs are made by Jan. 1, 2023, there may be some relief for next year. I’d ask that homeowners who have received communication from our office please respond, and if you haven’t heard from us and have sustained damage, please contact us so we can assess the property as early as possible next year. Of course, also don’t hesitate to contact our office with any questions.

Q: Can you explain Gov. DeSantis’ executive order as it pertains to tax payment due dates for homeowners impacted by the storms?

A: After Hurricane Ian, the governor issued an executive order delaying payment of property taxes for those properties either destroyed or uninhabitable. This only affects properties in counties named by FEMA, of which St. Johns County is one.

Note that this just delays payment by extending the deadline to pay to June 1, 2023; it does not eliminate or reduce the taxes due for 2022. The discounts for early payment are extended as well. While the governor has not said if this will also include properties destroyed or severely damaged by Nicole, our expectation is that the executive order will be amended to include Nicole. Be sure to stay tuned.

The governor has gone on to say he plans to call a special session of the legislature in December to address property taxes as a result of these late season storms.

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.

Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!

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

Q: Can you give an update on the district's three newest schools scheduled to be under construction shortly?

A: At our School Board meeting on Nov. 8, we approved the site plan for the second of three new schools that are to open in 2024. All are K – 8 schools, at least initially. The first, on the site in Shearwater, is in the earliest stage of construction, with dirt being turned. The second, to be built in Beacon Lakes, part of the Twin Creeks development on County Road 210E, is the one we just approved the site plan for. This is key, because it means that now we can put the project out to bid. Both of these schools will be designed for 1,500 kindergarten through eighth grade students with a three-story academic building, like Freedom Crossing Academy.

The third school we have scheduled to open in 2024 will be located in River-Town. It will be built as a transitional K – 8 school for 1,200 students on a middle school site. RiverTown also has two elementary school sites, but not enough elementary students to build on them yet. This is why we are doing the transitional K – 8; it will eventually become a middle school once the elementary school is built. We did this successfully a number of years ago when Fruit Cove Middle School first opened as a K – 8 school prior to Durbin Creek Elementary being built.

We are very much looking forward to having relief from overcrowding in some of our other schools when these new schools open. Another benefit will be that students from the County Road 210E area will be brought back closer to home to go to school; presently they are zoned for Landrum Middle School and Ocean Palms Elementary in Ponte Vedra Beach.

Q: What can you tell us about the recent Character Counts! honor bestowed upon the St. Johns County School District?

A: This is so exciting. We were just recognized as a Character Counts! Exemplary School District for our commitment to teach, enforce, advocate and model the six pillars of character. Executive Director Scott Raecker of the Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University, home of the Character Counts! program, came to the county personally to give us this award on Oct. 18 at our Community Partners recognition event at First Coast Technical College. At this event, we also honored our eighth graders who were selected by their schools as Character Counts! representatives and we recognized our business partners. It was wonderful to hear the eighth grade students speak; they all did a great job.

Q: Do you have anything else to share with our readers?

A: Yes, a few things. First, at our Nov. 8 school board meeting, we recognized our largest number of National Merit SemiFinalists ever: 51!

Also, on Dec. 8, there will be a military inspection at Nease stadium to celebrate the school's NJROTC's national first place ranking, which the cadets earned at the end of last school year. We are so pleased to have them as national champions.

All of our high school academies continue to do great things. It is rewarding for me when I tour the academies at all of our high schools to see the opportunities our students have to experience and explore fields as diverse as cyber security, hospitality, engineering, banking, and teaching.

Finally, we will all really miss our school board colleague, Bill Mignon from District 3, who retired after 12 years on the school board. He was actually involved with the St. Johns County School District for 52 years, beginning at Hastings Elementary and going on to be principal of RB Hunt Elementary, Nease, and Pedro Menendez during his career. He brought a wealth of knowledge to our proceedings.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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

Character Counts! Run/Walk registration open

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

The Character Counts! Steering Committee is calling all walkers, runners and fitness enthusiasts to participate in the Character Counts! 6K/3K Run/Walk on Saturday, Feb. 4, 2023, at 9 a.m. The run/walk will begin and end at Palencia Elementary School located at 355 Palencia Village Drive, St. Augustine.

Walkers and runners will enjoy a course running through the neighborhoods of Kensington and Las Calinas and can choose to participate in the 6K (3.73 miles) or 3K (1.86 miles) distance.

Registration fees for the 6K are \$30 before Jan. 1, 2023, \$35 between Jan. 1 and Feb. 2, or \$40 on race day. Registration fees for the 3K are \$25 before Jan. 1, 2023, \$30 between Jan. 1 and Feb. 2, or \$35 on race day.

Race proceeds support Character Counts! initiatives throughout the St. Johns County School District. The run/walk is open to all ages. Register before Jan. 6, 2023 to receive a race t-shirt.

Registration forms and more information are available online at www.racesmith.com.

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with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

Q: Can you give some insight into the problem of drug overdoses in St. Johns County?

A: The overdose problem seems to be getting worse and we really can't put enough educational pieces out to the public. Most importantly, I want the community to know that if people are in need of help, my office is here for that.

I believe that drugs are truly the root of all evil. When you talk about crime, drugs are often involved. In fact, of the average of 400 arrests by the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office each year, the majority involved some sort of illegal narcotics use.

Q: Do you have any statistics to share?

A: The number of deaths and near deaths are increasing in our county. So far in 2022, we have had 28 fatal overdoses, which is ahead of all of 2021 when we had 21. We have had 83 non-fatal overdoses; these are victims that we brought back using Narcan. This is ahead of 71 for all of last year and these numbers are just for SJSO responses and don't include Fire and Rescue.

In the past seven days, our narcotics unit seized half a kilo of cocaine, 760 grams of methamphetamine, and 100 grams of fentanyl. This doesn't include our patrol unit, which typically seizes even more.

When combined with St. Johns County Fire and Rescue, we responded to more than 600 overdose cases in 2022. Out of these 600, we had 400 deployments of Narcan. The average age of people that had Narcan administered was 51 and males are ahead slightly of females.

Q: What can the SJSO offer to help?

A: We are not trying to arrest our way out of the abuse of narcotics, but feel that it's sometimes the best way to get people into substance abuse programs. I would invite anyone who needs help in this regard to call our non-emergency number, (904) 824-8304, and a deputy can come and talk to you to help point you in the right direction for services.

I'd like to highlight some of the St. Johns County non-profits who offer services and with whom we partner: SMA Healthcare, which is located in our Health and Human Services Building; EPIC Behavioral Services; and also Flagler Health+, which now has a walk-in patient center on its main campus.

Q: Do you have any final thoughts?

A: It's important to note that narcotics abuse does not discriminate as it pertains to age, race, gender, or socio-economic status. We as St. Johns County community members need to identify friends and/or family members who need help and assist them in getting it. Don't be ashamed about this addiction which is a sickness; seek help with wraparound services as soon as possible.

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@sjsso.org or call me at (904) 824-8304. Also, our website, www.sjsso.org has a wealth of resources, from alarm registration to Crime Stoppers to our Neighbors app.

Legislative Delegation meeting date set

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Florida State Representative Cyndi Stevenson, chair of the St. Johns County Legislative Delegation, has announced that the St. Johns County Legislative Delegation meeting will be held on Monday, Dec. 19, 2022 from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the St. Johns County Commission Chamber Auditorium, located at 500 San Sebastian View in St. Augustine. The proceedings will be available on GTV to watch live. Discussion of issues regarding local legislation for the 2023 Legislative Session will be held at this time. St. Johns County Delegation meetings are open to the public.

If you would like to participate in the meeting during the public comment section, contact Rep. Stevenson's office at (904) 823-2300.

To be placed on the agenda for the Dec. 19 meeting, contact Rep. Ste-

venson's District Office staff prior to Dec. 15. Those that would like to provide materials or handouts to the St. Johns County Delegation members may mail or hand deliver them to Rep. Stevenson's District Office, located at 309 Kingsley Lake Drive, Suite 902, St. Augustine, FL 32092. These materials may also be emailed to Shorty Robbins (shorty.robbs@myfloridahouse.gov). All handouts or materials must be received by 12 p.m. on Dec. 15.

In accordance with the Americans with disabilities act (ADA), and Chapter 286.26, Florida Statutes, persons in need of special accommodations to participate in the meeting, including agendas, interpreters or assisted listening devices, should contact Rep. Stevenson's District Office staff at (904) 823-2300 before Dec. 15. Compliance with current CDC guidelines is required for the health and safety of all those in attendance.



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

Q. Your office and St. Johns County recently received a major recognition from a national organization for excellence in financial accountability. What is a “Triple Crown?”

A. The Triple Crown is among the highest honors in government finance and demonstrates St. Johns County’s commitment and dedication to achieving the gold standard in transparency, financial responsibility and public outreach. This is the first time we have achieved this award and we are among just 317 governmental entities nationwide who received the Triple Crown for Fiscal Year 2020 from the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada. I’m really proud of our team and the county — this was a whole-of-government effort and exemplifies our pledge to protect the public trust in our stewardship of tax dollars.

Q. Has your office initiated any new projects that would benefit our readers?

A. We’ve launched our own YouTube channel, youtube.com@stjohnscountyclerk, and some of our first videos chronicle the stories of St. Johns County veterans who’ve recorded their separation documents, or DD-214s, with our office. Retired USMC Col. Ken Russom and former Marine Captains Thomas Upchurch and Ben Reep shared their stories with us, and we’re honored to share their recorded interviews with viewers. Our office has recorded military discharge

papers for more than 100 years, and these important records help tell the stories of St. Johns County heroes over the decades. We showcase more than a dozen soldiers and sailors in our 2022 Virtual Veterans Exhibit, which also can be found on our YouTube channel. Another video on our channel is from our St. Johns County-Israel Friendship Day, which featured timely remarks from Board of County Commission Chairman Henry Dean, Sheriff Robert Hardwick and Rabbi Mendel Sharfstein.

Q. Can you tell us more about St. Johns-County-Israel Friendship Day?

A. It started last year when we changed our investment policy to remove companies on Florida’s List of Scrutinized Companies that boycott Israel. We were the first local government in Florida to address discriminatory anti-Israel practices by updating our investment portfolio. This year, our focus is on the fight against antisemitism. Here in St. Johns County, we do not support discriminatory practices counter to our American values and stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Israel and our Jewish friends and neighbors in promoting freedom, human rights and security.

Q. How do people get in touch with you?

A. Our office number is (904) 819-3600 or call my cell phone at (904) 599-8688 if I may ever be of service.

**Healthcare delivery
company expands to St.
Johns County**

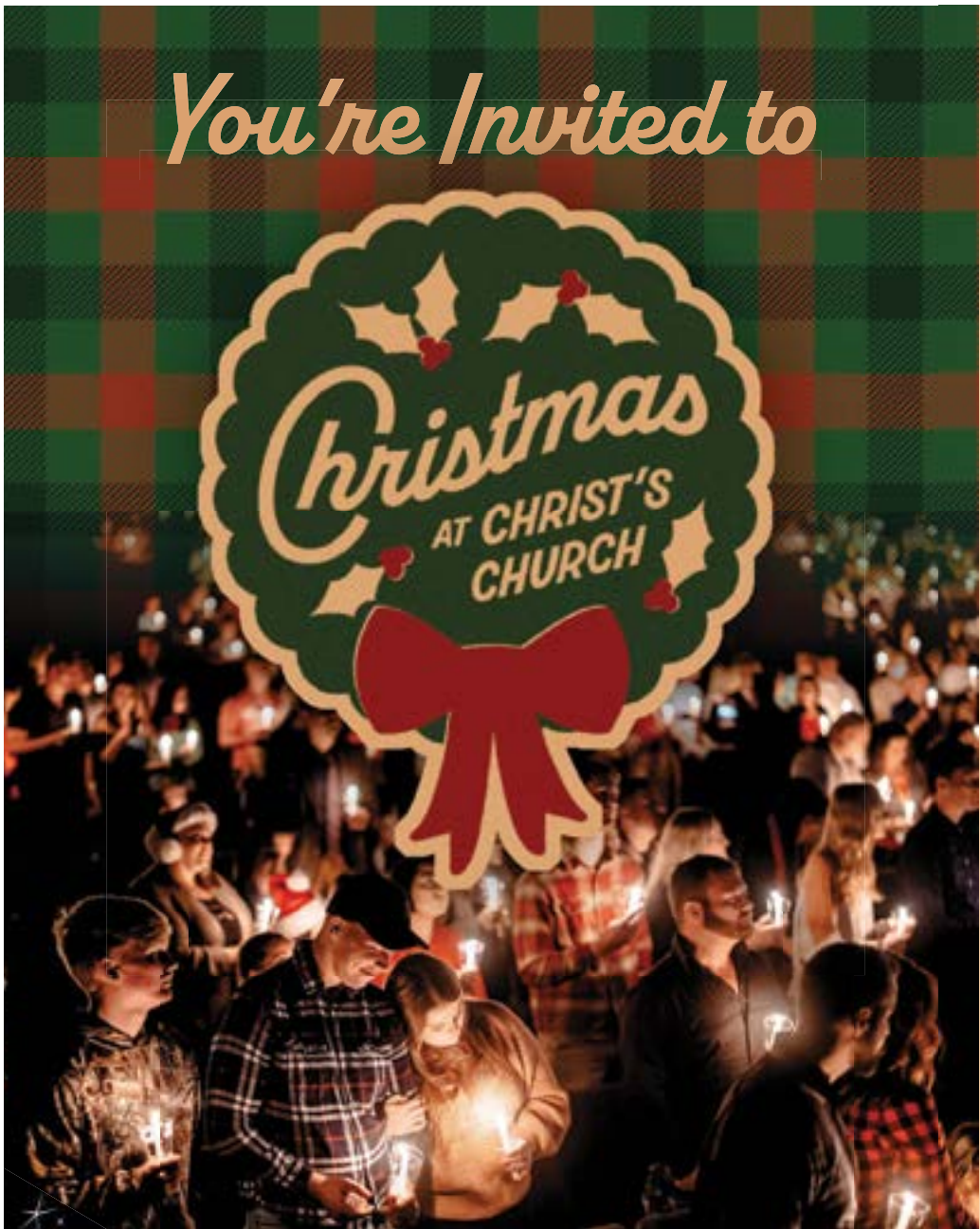
CarePlus Health Plans, Inc., a recognized leader in healthcare delivery that has been offering Medicare Advantage health plans in Florida for more than 22 years, is expanding both its footprint in Florida as well as the variety of plan offerings that will be available to Medicare beneficiaries in the state enrolling in 2023 plans.

“We are thrilled to be able to reach additional Floridians by offering our CarePlus Medicare Advantage plans, designed to provide robust coverage for high quality healthcare, in a total of 21 counties across the state for coverage starting in 2023,” said Bruno Piquin, CarePlus president. “We’re also excited to introduce new plan offerings and features, which we believe will add value and lower costs for members, many of whom are being impacted by the challenging economic times.”

For the first time, this year residents of three Florida counties — St. Johns, Flagler and Hernando — can select a CarePlus Medicare Advantage plan during Medicare’s Annual Enrollment Period, which runs from Oct. 15 through Dec. 7, 2022 for plan coverage taking effect Jan. 1, 2023.

In St. Johns, Flagler, and Hernando counties, CarePlus is offering up to nine Medicare Advantage plans to help meet different health and budget needs for area residents. In all the counties CarePlus will now serve, options include special plans for people living with certain chronic conditions (Chronic Condition Special Needs plans) and for people who are eligible for both Medicaid and Medicare (Dual Special Needs plans), as well as plans broadly available to all Medicare beneficiaries.

Also new for 2023 is the CareContigo Tablet Benefit for members enrolled in CareBreeze (HMO C-SNP) or CareComplete (HMO C-SNP). This locked device, loaded with calling, texting and webpage-based apps, is designed to help members more easily communicate with their loved ones as well as their health plan and healthcare providers and use digital plan resources for their health. For example, a member can use the tablet to attend a telehealth visit, to call a mental health provider, and to schedule rides to select locations, such as medical appointments covered by the plan. Members must have a qualifying chronic condition to enroll in CareBreeze or CareComplete.



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Briefs

Phone calls from Santa coming soon

The St. Johns County Parks and Recreation Department and the North Pole are holding their annual Santa calls. Parents with children aged eight years and younger, residing in St. Johns County, can sign up to receive a phone call from Santa Clause this holiday season. Calls may be scheduled from 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 6, Wednesday, Dec. 7, or Thursday, Dec. 8.

Visit <https://tinyurl.com/bdz2y9d5> to register.

Public Library System’s Food for Fines program returns

The popular Food for Fines program returns this year to St. Johns County libraries and bookmobiles. An opportunity to eliminate most library fines, Food for Fines will run through Monday, Dec. 19. The food items collected will be used to stock the St. Johns County Health and Human Services (HHS) Food Pantry, providing food for St. Johns County families in need.

A donation of one non-perishable, unexpired food item will remove \$1 of fines from a patron’s library record. This fine-reduction program applies only to overdue fines and patrons may bring in as many items as needed to reduce overdue fines. Fees related to damaged or lost items are not included in the Food for Fines program. Any library user is welcome to make donations and food may be dropped off at any of the St. Johns County library branches or bookmobiles.

Last year, St. Johns County residents provided more than 3,500 non-perishable items through the “Food for Fines” program. Visit www.sjcpls.org for more information about this program and other services of the St. Johns County Public Library System.

Military Tribute held to honor fallen veterans

The Fallen Heroes Military Tribute was held on Nov. 6 at Faith Community Church in St. Johns. The 351 crosses, each with a Florida soldier’s name, were displayed with military perfection as well as the eight large crosses which represented everyone who fought and died for this country. A bell was rung for each soldier and the 13 that perished on Aug. 26, 2021 during evacuation out of Afghanistan. A beautiful plaque with their names is the new addition to this tribute.

Several hundred have visited the memorial and walked the Field of Crosses. The display remained up until Nov. 16 and organizers hope it will be repeated for Memorial Day.

“Our thanks to our community partners who have helped this year and many since 2015 when it was first proposed by Helping Hands of St. Johns,” said Jackie Valyou, one of the organizers. “This year L. Bruce Van Dam of BSA 718/464 was the coordinator and it could not have been done without his guiding hand. His scout troop and many others in the community erected the crosses and were ushers at the Sunday program.” Valyou

continued, “Our gratitude goes out to the following contributors: Faith Community Church, Pastor Dusty Phillips, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, David Bennion and sons, Knights of Columbus/San Juan Del Rio, Msgr. Herbert Shaw USMC (ret), James Steele, Lou Henningson, Craig Dewhurst State Farm WGV, Cronin Ace Hardware 210, Mydogtag.com, Malia Maioho, Copper Peach Signs, Anne Kourtvas, Liz Keveney, Terri O’Connell and Winn Dixie 210.

Bartram Trail Newcomers’ and Women’s Club announce December luncheon

The Bartram Trail Newcomers’ and Women’s Club will hold its December meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, Dec. 13 at 11 a.m. at the St. Johns

Golf and Country Club, located at 205 St. Johns Golf Drive. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. The theme of the luncheon is Holiday Spirit.

Lisa Jackson, a local ventriloquist, will entertain attendees with her “friends” Disco Dolly and Sister Myrtle.

The cost of the luncheon will be \$32. Make checks payable to BTNC and mail to Deborah Russell, 12376 Fireberry Ct., Jacksonville, FL 32258. Payment must be received no later than Dec. 8, 2022; no exceptions. Indicate your entrée choice (visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 for food choices and updated information) on the check memo line.

The Bartram Trail Newcomers’

and Women’s Club meets the second Tuesday of every month from September to May for lunch. In addition to the monthly meetings, the club has a wide variety of interest groups, including Bridge, Continental Rummy, Pennies Canasta, Mexican


Chicken Train dominoes, Bunko, Mah Jongg, golf, recipe exchange, monthly special events, book club, lunch and matinee, Lunch Divas, Ladies Night Out, a nature walk group and community projects. Email First Vice President Linda Beard at bartramtnc@gmail.com for club information. Visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 to see pictures of the meetings and download a membership form.

Newcomers of North St. Johns to host holiday luncheon

Newcomers of North Saint Johns will hold its December luncheon on Tuesday, Dec. 13, beginning at 11 a.m. at Maggiano’s Little Italy in the St. Johns Town Center. The event features a delicious lunch and entertainment by Roger Dodd and Johnny Piantadosi, who will be singing traditional holiday favorites. As always, raffles for gift baskets and a fun 50/50 drawing will be held at the luncheon.

Doors will open at 10:30 a.m.; the cost for the luncheon and program is \$35 for members and \$40 for guests and non-members. All reservations must be re-


Briefs cont. on pg. 20



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ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Business Briefs

SCORE Jacksonville to host zoom workshops

SCORE is a national service organization that supports small businesses nationwide. SCORE has a network of more than 11,000 volunteers operating in more than 340 local chapters around the country. The organization is supported by the US Small Business Administration (SBA).

In December, SCORE Jacksonville will host two free Zoom workshops for business owners. The first, “Use YouTube to Grow your Business in the New Year,” will be held on Dec. 9 from 9 a.m. – 10 a.m. Attendees will learn how to tap into the power of YouTube. Get best practices for creating a YouTube Channel and compelling video content that promotes your products and services and drives engagement with your brand. Led by Pamela Starr, a professional trainer for Grow with Google, this is a presentation for people who already have a YouTube channel for their business as well as people who are curious about creating one. Visit <https://jacksonville.score.org/event/use-youtube-grow-your-business-new-year-0> to register or contact Melody Petraglia at melody.petraglia@scorevolunteer.org or (904) 443-1911 for more information.

The second workshop is “Build Your Brand,” to be held on Dec. 15 from 7 p.m. – 8 p.m. A strategic branding plan

is both your best protection to prevent failure and your most effective asset to create success. Presenter David Harrison currently teaches MBA students full-time, in all business subjects as well as serving as a SCORE mentor. Visit <https://jacksonville.score.org/event/build-your-brand-2> for more information.

New aesthetic center announces new hires

Modern Aesthetic Centers, which will hold its grand opening on Dec. 2, is located at 2050 Saint Johns Parkway, Suite 106.

Jacksonville native Paul Hassan is the chief executive officer. He graduated from the University of North Florida, majoring in International Business. After college, he became a principal in a local occupational health practice that offered comprehensive healthcare solutions for employers that were cost effective and efficient. Interested in enhancing the wellbeing of Northeast Florida’s residents, Hassan recently started Modern Aesthetic Centers, offering a full suite of aesthetic procedures and skin care products including body contouring, laser treatments, injectables and skin rejuvenation.

Lisa Farides is co-founder and chief operating officer for Modern Aesthetic Centers. Her dedication to quality care

goes beyond the office. Farides previously served on the board of the Medical Group Management Association and is currently a member of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. What she loves most about serving the community through Modern Aesthetic Centers is the direct impact their work has on the individuals who visit.

Tanya Temple is the center’s nurse practitioner. She has vast experience including emergency medicine, vascular specialty, dermatology, and aesthetics. She enjoys the challenges, rewards and artistry of aesthetics and looks forward to continuing to build her practice and relationships with her patients.

Aesthetician Bobbie Stewart spent 15 years as a registered nurse before getting her license as a massage therapist. She

then moved on to the aesthetic field and has spent the last 20 years as a licensed aesthetician. Her approach to clients’ goals and challenges starts with building a trusting relationship through professionalism, kindness, and respect.

Kristen Parker serves as client coordinator. She graduated from UNF with a degree in health science and a focus in nutrition. She enjoys talking about the connection between being healthy and looking good on the outside.

Marketing Coordinator Parth Patel is currently an MBA student at the University of North Florida majoring in Marketing.


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No Excuses Running Club athletes take top spots at state championships



Photo courtesy Jill A. Benavides

On Oct. 28 – 29, No Excuses Running Club competed in the FLYRA MS XC State Finals. No Excuses Running Club elementary girls’ and boys’ teams earned second place in the Elementary Open State Championship with six runners medaling in the top 20 as well as Brianna Motycka winning the girls’ race. Nineteen No Excuses Running Club middle school boys competed in the Boys Middle School Open Championship, placing second. No Excuses Running Club Elite Middle School boys — Luke Ross, Graham Moore, Sam Cassiani, Bryce Motycka, Ethan

Courson, Chase Petrick, and Cameron Newkirk — earned first place in the Club Division and runner up Overall State Champions when all four divisions were merged. All the training, sacrificing, challenges, grit and determination came together for the No Excuses Running Club Girls Elite Middle School team, as Avery Hartley, Eva Delaney, Sydney Johnson, Piper Ross, EK Longmire, Abigail Clark, and Lilly Potts stepped to the line of the club division Championship Race and earned first place as well as Overall Middle School Girls XC State Champion when all four divisions were merged.

Nease NJROTC: Continued excellence

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

After being recognized as the top program in the nation last year, beating out more than 600 units, Nease’s NJROTC program had high expectations coming into this year. Senior Naval Science Instructor Captain Scott LaRoche retired and 63 seniors graduated, but the cadets were up for the challenge that comes with change. Nease NJROTC started this year off with a sweeping victory at its first major drill competition of the 2022 – 23 school year at the annual South Effingham High School Drill Meet in Guyton, Georgia on Nov. 5.

In addition to claiming the overall trophy, Nease earned first place trophies in nine out of 12 events for Personnel Inspection, Academics, Unarmed Exhibition Drill, Armed Basic Drill, Armed Exhibition Drill, Athletics Overall, Pushups, Curl Ups and the 16 x 100 as well as second place in Drill Overall and Unarmed Basic Drill. A highlight was Cadet NS3 (junior) Caden Byas competing in the Curl Up event and completing

437 curl ups — earning him the medal for first place in that event.

Nease placed second and third out of 26 teams in South Effingham’s Air Rifle Meet on Oct. 22, qualifying for Regionals in Shoulder to Shoulder. Cadets Hailey Pitches, Danielle Reynolds and Kamrayn Schultz all shot their personal best and team high scores. Nease’s Orienteering Team also qualified for Regionals in October by placing sixth and seventh in Brunswick, Georgia’s hosted sanctioned meet. Cadet NS3 Diann Taylor completed the hardest course, finishing in second place which was a personal best for her on that level course.

Nease also welcomed their newest member of the team with CWO3 Michael Donato joining as the new Senior Naval Science Instructor in October.

If you are interested in seeing what Nease’s NJROTC program is all about, Nease is hosting a sanctioned drill meet Saturday, Dec. 17 at Nease High School, which is open to the general public.



Photo courtesy Michael Donato

Master Chief Spears and the Nease Cadets posing with all their trophies from the South Effingham Drill Meet.

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Tips to prepare to host holiday guests

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

They're back! Family, friends and acquaintances are once again taking up residence on cots and fold-out sofas across the country as loved ones gather to celebrate the holiday season. That's welcome news nearly three years after a pandemic first restricted such gatherings. But hosts must ask themselves: Am I ready to host house guests?

Travel is a big component of the holiday season. According to a 2021 survey by The Vacationer, a travel tip and vacation guide, nearly 63 percent of Americans age 18 or older planned to travel for at least one holiday in 2021, with most traveling in December. That marked a 37 percent increase in travel from a year prior and holiday travel for 2022 may be even higher.

As individuals get ready to host holiday guests, here are some strategies to maximize space and make guests feel comfortable.

- Discuss plans in advance. Every traveler is different. Some people thrive on making lists and following itineraries. Others fly by the seat of their pants. It's reasonable to ask potential house guests how they envision their visit, including if they plan to stay long and if it will

include sleeping over. This way you can make accommodations accordingly, particularly if guests request to borrow a vehicle or want to see the sights.

- Create some extra privacy. While some homes are equipped to handle guests comfortably, smaller homes may not be equipped with such luxuries. Folding screens can be used to create a barrier and add some privacy in open spaces where guests will be staying.

- Stash away travel samples. Travel-size soaps, shampoos and lotions can make guests feel more welcome. Stock up at the grocery store or pharmacy and leave them in the room where guests will be staying.

- Stock up on new linens. Treat guests to fresh fluffy towels and new bed linens, especially if it's been awhile since you have restocked these items.

- Ask about food preferences. Your guests may not want to munch on kale chips and tofu hot dogs apart from the holiday meal. Don't push your food restrictions on others. Ask guests what they typically eat and then fill the pantry and refrigerator with some of the items they mention. When guests need snacks, they'll have familiar foods on hand.

- Be mindful of bedtimes. Consider guests' preferences about bedtimes. While you may be a night owl, some guests may hit the hay much earlier,

particularly older relatives or those with young children. If need be, make an effort to be quiet when kids or early birds are staying over.

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First Coast Cultural Center - 3972 3rd Street South - Jacksonville Beach FL 32250

When did Christmas lights become so popular?

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Holiday lights are now everywhere during the holiday season. Though it might seem like a tradition without a deep history, decorating a Christmas tree with electric lights can be traced all the way

back to the 19th century.

In 1882, Edward Johnson (who was a friend and colleague of the man who invented light bulbs, Thomas Edison) replaced candles, which had tradition-

Christmas lights cont. on pg. 14

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Nutcracker cont. on pg. 14

auditioning and performing in the production. In an effort to promote the arts in schools, Community Nutcracker also offers matinee performances for school groups as well as a Community Service Night (invitation only).

Christ Church Nutcracker Ballet
Dec. 10 at 6 p.m.
Lazzara Theater, UNF Fine Arts Department
www.missfeliciasdance.com

This year marks the 27th performance of the Christ Church Nutcracker Ballet, directed by Felicia Rhoden of the Christ Church Dance Ministry as well as owner of Miss Felicia's Dance. Nearly 300 performers, aged two to 90 years old, will take the stage.

floridaballet.org

The Florida Ballet's Nutcracker features swirling snowflakes, waltzing flowers, and dancing bonbons. From the captivating dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy to the iconic snow scene, this enchanting classical ballet is set to the beloved music of Tchaikovsky and features more than 100 local dancers.

St. Augustine Ballet Nutcracker
Dec. 17 at 1:30 p.m. and 7 p.m.
Dec. 18 at 2 p.m.
Lewis Auditorium at Flagler College
www.saintaugustineballet.com

This year's production of "The Nutcracker" marks the 14th annual performance by the St. Augustine Ballet and features sparkling snowflakes, dancing dolls and mischievous mice. The St. Augustine Ballet, under the artistic direction of Luis Abella, is a non-profit organization with a mission to involve community members of all ages in meaningful dance experiences.

Nutcracker! Magical Christmas Ballet
Dec. 21 at 4 p.m. and 8 p.m.
Florida Theatre
www.nutcracker.com/your-city/get-tickets/jacksonville

It is a year of rebirth after a two-year touring hiatus for Nutcracker! Magical Christmas Ballet, a national touring production that features an international cast and prop designers. The production features larger-than-life puppets, breath-taking acrobatics and dazzling costumes. The globe-spanning team includes puppeteers from the Czech Republic and South Africa, Chuvash, and St. Petersburg all the way home to New York. Dancing alongside the full international professional cast, featuring stars of Ukraine ballet, are local Jacksonville children from Alius Dance School.

All of these performances are designed to enchant, enthrall, and bring families

Jacksonville Symphony's First Coast Nutcracker
Dec. 16 at 8 p.m.
Dec. 17 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.
Dec. 18 at 2 p.m.
Jacksonville Center for the Performing Arts
www.jaxsymphony.org/first-coast-nutcracker/

Jacksonville Symphony's First Coast Nutcracker has been a tradition in North Florida — and this year celebrates its 50th anniversary. Under the direction of choreographer and artistic director Rhonda Stampalia, the First Coast Nutcracker showcases internationally renowned principal dancers, the area's finest young dancers, and Tchaikovsky's best-loved melodies performed by the Jacksonville Symphony. Educational performances are offered on Dec. 16 – 17 in an effort to introduce school children to the symphony, the ballet and how to be a good audience member.

The Nutcracker 2022 by the Florida Ballet
Dec. 16 at 7:30 p.m.
Dec. 17 at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.
Dec. 18 at 2 p.m.
Lazzara Theater, UNF Fine Arts Center

Christmas lights cont. from pg. 13

ally been used to briefly light Christmas trees, with light bulbs. But at the time of Johnson's innovation, the high cost and relative infancy of light bulbs ensured the idea did not catch on. And though United States President Grover Cleveland used electric lights to illuminate a Christmas tree in the White House in 1895, it would be another eight years before General Electric would begin selling Christmas light kits. Those kits cost \$12 in 1903, which equates to several hundred dollars today. The first outdoor Christmas light shows started to become popular in the 1920s, and this is the same time when commercial sales of Christmas lights picked up. In the 1960s, GE's decision to begin manufacturing Christmas lights overseas helped reduce the price of outdoor lights even further,

thus paving the way for the tradition of decorating home exteriors with string lights during the holiday season to take a firm hold. And that tradition remains wildly popular today.



Simple ways to involve kids in holiday decorating

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Millions of people across the globe feel that the holiday season is a magical time of year. Though those people come from all walks of life, it's likely that no group is as taken by the unique spirit of the holiday season as much as children. Whether they're looking forward to Santa's arrival or preparing for a school holiday pageant, kids have much to be excited about come December. Parents can channel that enthusiasm by involving kids when decorating around the house this holiday season.

- Make homemade ornaments. The options are limitless when making holiday ornaments with children. From simple ornaments made from pine cones picked up outside to more complex projects designed for children nearing adolescence, parents can look to the internet to find design ideas and directions for hundreds of ornaments.
- Families that celebrate Christmas can let kids lead the way when decorating their Christmas tree. Kids are likely to spend the weeks leading up

to Santa's arrival gazing in awe at the tree, and knowing they decided where to place the various ornaments on it might make the season even more special for youngsters.

- Take kids along when choosing lawn ornaments. It's not safe to involve children when installing lighting displays, but kids will get a kick out of choosing inflatable lawn decorations and other items to place around the yard. Take kids along when buying new items and then seek their input when placing Frosty, Santa and his reindeer friends around the yard.
- Include kids in culinary decor. Many celebrants cannot imagine a holiday season without gingerbread houses and cookies. These traditions provide another great opportunity to involve children in holiday decorating. Set aside some time to make homemade gingerbread houses, which can be used as decorations before they're ultimately eaten. Cookies may not have the shelf life of a typical gingerbread house, but kids can pitch in and decorate cookies prior to a holiday party or family meal.



Photo courtesy MetroCreative

Inviting kids to pitch in when decorating for the holidays can make the season even more special for its youngest celebrants.

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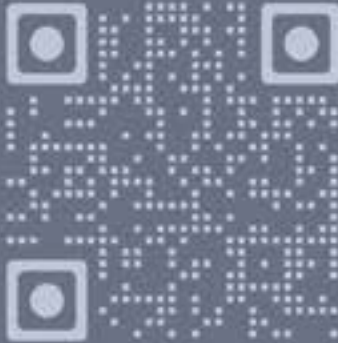
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HUGS St. Johns and United Way team up to help food-insecure students

By Brette Reiman, HUGS St. Johns
mail@floridanewslines.com

HUGS St. Johns was recently honored to receive a financial grant for its 17 school-based emergency food pantries from the United Way of St. Johns County. HUGS school pantries provide child-friendly items for food-insecure students (identified by their school counselors) who arrive at school hungry or who need to bring food home to prepare for dinner. The pantries are restocked each month by HUGS volunteers, and the United Way donation allows them to purchase needed food items that are combined with non-perishable food donations from the community.

“Our school-based pantry program has grown since the program began in 2017, and significantly since 2019. The funds from United Way make it possible to continue to provide for the growing need here in St. Johns County,” said volunteer food program coordinator Holly Ross.

United Way of St Johns County President and CEO Mark LeMaire said, “The team at HUGS does an amazing

job of working to address a growing need with a mighty group of caring volunteers in our community. United Way is proud to support this important hunger program serving children in St. Johns County.”

“We are incredibly thankful for our new food pantry for our students that are experiencing food instability,” said Pedro Menendez High School counselor, Stephanie Toffaletti. “This service gives them peace of mind knowing that their school community cares about them and their well-being, while giving them one less thing to worry about at school.”

United Way of St. Johns County supports health, education and financial assistance through their support of nonprofits throughout St. Johns and Putnam Counties. HUGS St. Johns is an all-volunteer 501c3 that provides food, clothing, shoes and more to thousands of St. Johns County children-in-need identified by school counselors, social workers and agency partners. Email info@stjohnshugs.org to donate food, host a food drive, or volunteer to help restock school pantries.



Photo courtesy HUGS St. Johns
HUGS St. Johns received a financial grant for its 17 school-based emergency food pantries from the United Way of St. Johns County.

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Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

Tony Bonaro

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

Tony Bonaro, director of youth activities for Florida United Numismatists (FUN), was recently honored by the American Numismatic Association with the 2022 Lawrence J. Gentile, Sr. Memorial Award for Outstanding Adult Advisor. Bonaro, who was born and raised in Niagara Falls, NY, said he had a coin collection when he was a young boy, but that his interest faded over time. He knew at the age of 13 that he wanted to join the Marine Corps and so he did, at age 18. He spent six years enlisted and 16 years as an officer before retiring as a Chief Warrant Officer 4 in 1992. He then began his career, first with Chrysler Corporation and then with the Luther Coggin dealerships, as a management and leadership skills trainer. He moved on to contract work with CSX and then finally with Southwest Signal Engineers as quality, safety, and training director supporting all the major railroads in the design and installation of railroad crossings. "If you see a railroad crossing, I probably had something to do with it," he said. He retired in 2017. He has served as a scoutmaster with Boy Scouts of America for 42 years and is presently one of the St. Johns County representatives who can approve rank advancement to Eagle Scout. Bonaro met his wife Valerie on a blind date while he was stationed in Washington DC and they have three sons and a daughter as



Photo courtesy Tony Bonaro
Tony Bonaro with two of his favorite coins.

well as eight grandchildren.

Q: How was your interest in coin collecting rekindled?

A: In 2002, I attended the American Numismatic Association's coin show in Jacksonville. I went with my son and it was our first coin show. We were captured and fell in love with coin collecting immediately. I learned about the Florida United Numismatists, who put on the largest coin shows in Orlando and brought two more of my sons with me. We all started collecting coins. At one of those shows, I learned about their children's program called Young Numatists (YN). I was asked if I knew anything about the Boy Scouts'

coin merit badge. Of course I did, and so for the last 18 years I've presented for the coin collecting merit badge for the Boy Scouts and the Fun with Money patch for the Girl Scouts.

Q: What is it about coin collecting that fascinates you?

A: I love history. There is a story behind every coin. For instance, starting this year, the US Mint will release five different quarters, each featuring a prominent American Woman. I collect primarily US coins.

Q: What is your favorite coin that you own and do you have a "dream" coin?

A: My favorite would be my United States Marine Corps commemorative \$1 coin, issued in 2005. Two of these commemorative coins are produced annually by the US Mint and they cover historical US events and people. They each contain one ounce of silver. My dream coin is an 1849 \$20 gold piece issued by the Mormon Church of Salt Lake City. I say it is my dream coin because right now, the cheapest one is available for \$375,000!

Q: What does the Florida United Numismatists (FUN) offer kids interested in coin collecting?

A: If you join FUN (membership dues are \$5 annually; visit www.funtopics.com) you will receive our newsletter. I write an article on a different topic for each issue for the kids and in 2022 our theme is Famous Americans on coins. We've covered George Washington, John F. Kennedy Jr., Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson and we discuss why each is on a coin as well as information about the coin. I include a trivia contest that requires older kids to do a bit more research than just what's in the article and for each kid who sends me the answers, I send them a coin to add to their coin collection.

Q: What would you like to do locally to engage kids in numismatics?

A: I'd like to start a coin collecting club for local kids aged about 10 to 17. There are so many things kids can do these days, but coin collecting includes history, math, science and vocabulary skills. It's just a great hobby! If anyone is interested in joining, please just send me an email at tonybonaro@gmail.com.

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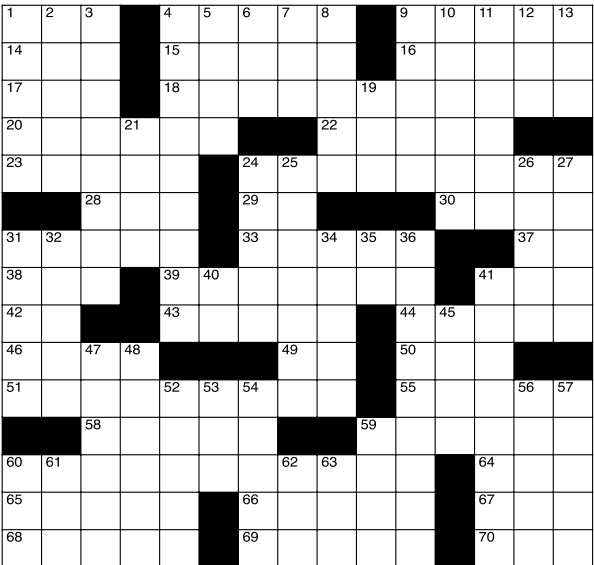
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CLUES ACROSS

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Product or ___ (abbr.) | 41. "Land of the free" |
| 4. Zodiac sign | 42 36 inches |
| 9. S. China seaport | 43. Footwear |
| 14. Former OSS | 44. Challenges |
| 15. Early English printer | 46. They hold things together |
| 16. Aphid genus | 49. Of I |
| 17. General's assistant (abbr.) | 50. Partner to flow |
| 18. Aussies | 51. Not connected by kinship |
| 20. Dissuades | 55. Worries |
| 22. Make law | 58. Garlic mayonnaise |
| 23. Drench | 59. A way to take by force |
| 24. Soak in a liquid | 60. Legendary English rockers |
| 28. Male child | 64. Your consciousness of your
own identity |
| 29. It cools your home | 65. Fencing swords |
| 30. Small constellation | 66. Silly |
| 31. To call (archaic) | 67. Actor DiCaprio |
| 33. Explores beneath the Earth | 68. Encircles with a belt |
| 37. Commercial | 69. Mails a message |
| 38. W. hemisphere organization | 70. Longing |
| 39. You can find it in a can | |

CLUES DOWN

1. Horse mackerels
2. It can be viral
3. Prickly plants
4. Consciousness
5. Type of sarcoma
6. Tax collector
7. Sun up in New York
8. One who scorches
9. Influential psychotherapist
10. Situated at an apex
11. Communicative
12. Forearm nerve
13. Former CIA
19. Folk singer DiFranco
21. Employee stock ownership plan
24. Large-scale
25. School environment
26. Remove
27. Male parents
31. Large rodent
32. Weighed down
34. Held tightly
35. ___ route: going there
36. Explains again
40. Exclamation of surprise
41. Courteously
45. Lying down
47. Judge
48. Forcefully took
52. Loosely compacted sediment
53. High mountain
54. Portable conical tents
56. Cereal grass
57. Dining utensil
59. Thoughtful
60. Helps you walk
61. Indicates near
62. Midway between northeast and east
63. Local area network

CHRISTMAS WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

CAROLS
CELEBRATION
CHRISTIAN
CHRISTMAS
COOKIES
DECEMBER
EVE
EVERGREEN
FAMILY
GATHERING
HOLIDAY
JESUS
LIST
MIDNIGHT
ORNAMENT
PRESENTS
REINDEER
ROAST
SHOPPING
STORES
TINSEL
VACATION
WREATH
YULETIDE



Solve the code to discover words related to Christmas.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: **17 = A**)

- A. 26 13 18 5 1 17 23**
Clue: Special day
- B. 19 17 22 25 17**
Clue: Bearded gift-giver
- C. 15 8 18 8 3 7 17 25 8**
Clue: Engage in fanfare
- D. 21 13 18 18 23**
Clue: Happy and cheerful

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Travel

23 Florida places to visit in 2023

By Debi Lander mail@floridanewslines.com

While I love traveling to foreign countries, my home state of Florida offers many rich travel destinations. I didn't include St. Augustine or Disney World, as I hope everyone in Northeast Florida has explored those. How many of the 23 mentioned below have you experienced? Be sure to add one to your travel plans for 2023.

- Everglades National Park and a trek across Alligator Alley
- Salvador Dali Museum and other museums in St. Petersburg
- A Grapefruit Baseball League game
- A swim with the Manatees, Crystal River



Photos courtesy Debi Lander Ca d'Zan, Ringling home.

- Watch a race at Daytona Beach Speedway
- See a rocket launch from Kennedy Space Center
- Stroll the gardens at Bok Tower
- Visit Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings' home, author of "The Yearling"
- See Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture at Florida Southern College in Lakeland
- Explore cigar history and the original Columbia Restaurant, Ybor City
- Tour Henry Plant's old hotel, Tampa Bay Hotel
- Watch re-enactment of Civil War battle at Olustee Battlefield
- Gamble Mansion, an Old Florida plantation in Ellenton
- Ringling Museums: Circus Museum, Ringling Museum of Art, and the Ca d'Zan, home of John and Mabel Ringling, Sarasota
- Vizcaya, Miami, the magnificent winter home of John Deering
- Gilbert's Bar House of Refuge, Hutchinson Island
- See the wizard's lab, Edison and Ford Winter Estates, Fort Myers
- Did DeSoto land at De Soto National Memorial, Bradenton
- Stetson Mansion, DeLand, Gilded Age home built for the famous hat manufacturer
- Fort Clinch, see living history in a North Florida State Park
- Mount Dora offers a bit of New England in Central Florida
- Discover Florida's history at the Old Capitol, Tallahassee
- Florida Keys, visit Hemingway House and Dry Tortugas National Park

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

Fishing

Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis mail@floridanewslines.com

The river and area creeks may still be recovering from the one – two punch they received from Ian and Nicole recently. Ian surprisingly left a decent amount of shrimp to still be found in the river, but water levels remain high and fish can remain highly dispersed because of it. Nicole added to that and I'm remaining hopeful that the valuable eelgrass in our area doesn't get knocked back like it did following Irma. It had finally started showing some recovery this year.

As I mentioned in last month's report, this time of year if you're still going to fish a good bit locally, you'll have to transition towards targeting the fish that still maintain a consistent appetite through the colder months. Lots of those fish in our area happen to be the freshwater species: speckled perch, bass, bream, and catfish to name a few. Stripers can be thrown in that group as well, but they could head for saltier waters if they wanted to. Because of this you'll want to transition to fishing area creeks more. Not that the main river doesn't hold plenty of these species, but it can be difficult to fish with the fickle weather we get (the winds being the biggest aggravation).

I focus most of my attention towards the speckled perch or specks which requires a downsizing of tackle. Small spinning reels spooled with 4 – 8 lb. line matched with light action rods will make the most fun of the smaller fish. You can use live minnows or a variety of small artificials to catch them. Anything chartreuse seems to work well. Trolling can be an effective way to locate fish in new areas and they tend to congregate around structures such as trees and docks.

So to summarize, look for the freshwater residents of the river to step up this month and target them in the local creeks, but if we get a calm day don't miss trying the main river for them. If you're dedicated to the summer pattern you'll probably still find a few shrimp. Even if it's only one a cast it may be worth it for bait, since the likelihood of those shrimp turning into quality fish is a lot higher this month. Tight lines and happy holidays.

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Briefs cont. from pg. 10
ceived by Dec. 5, 2022. Visit <https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org> for more information about the luncheon and membership.

The Newcomers of North St. Johns offers a variety of activities for St. Johns County residents to get acquainted and have fun, including smaller lunch groups, wine socials, golf, Mah Jongg, holiday parties, day trips and cultural events.

St. Johns Housing Partnership director receives national award
St. Johns Housing Partnership Executive Director Bill Lazar has received the Jean Diggs Weatherization Champion Award from the National Association for State Community Services Program. This award is presented at the association's Annual Conference to individuals who are true champions for the cause of weatherization. The St. Johns Housing Partnership has been a weatherization provider in Northeast Florida since 1998.

"We always want to be at the front end of building industry trends. Our weatherization training has always been a key part to our success. Working in hot humid climates has more challenges with mold mildew and indoor air quality," said Lazar.

The Department of Energy's Low-Income Weatherization Assistance Program administered by St. Johns Housing Partnership works to increase the energy efficiency of homes owned or occupied by low-income persons by reducing their

total residential energy expenditures and improving their health and safety.

The St. Johns Housing Partnership not only rehabs homes, but is building new green certified homes and infill rental property for low-income households. Energy and water conservation along with accessibility are the baseline of St. Johns Housing Partnership green building certifications.

Lazar has built his career around improving substandard housing and providing clean, safe, affordable housing. He attributes a major part of that to the training he has shared over the years from weatherization.

For more information on the St. Johns Housing Partnership Weatherization Program contact the St. Johns Housing Partnership at info@sjhp.org or (904) 824-0902.



Photo courtesy St. Johns Housing Partnership Incoming National Association for State Community Services Programs Executive Director Cheryl Williams and St. Johns Housing Partnership Executive Director Bill Lazar.

Julington Creek Elementary celebrates 50 years!



Photos courtesy Julington Creek Elementary School

Current and former staff of Julington Creek Elementary gathered on Oct. 20 to celebrate the school's 50th birthday. Many dressed in their "70s Best" and a wonderful time was had by all. Current principal, Jeanette Murphy, opened the festivities, and St. Johns County School Board member Bev Slough and St. Johns

County School District Superintendent Tim Forson spoke for a few minutes about their respective histories with Julington Creek Elementary. Many former staff members and administrators were in attendance, reminiscing about their experiences at the school and the changes through the years.



Gardening

Winter in the garden

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale
mail@floridanewsline.com

It's increasingly obvious that there are disturbing changes going on with our climate. As always, gardeners have to deal with whatever the weather sends in our direction, but nowadays we should be thinking outside the box.

The usual concerns might be how to protect tender plants from the cold. If we love tropical plants, then frost cloths and similar are our first line of defense. Tender potted plants can be grouped under them and if we make sure the edges come down to the ground and are weighted in case of wind, we can be confident that we've done what we can. Inground plants can also be protected like this.

It helps to understand which perennials and shrubs normally die down during the winter, even if the weather isn't severe. Some perennials will die down completely, waiting till spring to regrow, and others will overwinter keeping a rosette of basal leaves. Those that die back completely need to be marked. If there are standing flower stems carrying seedheads, they can be left till spring growth begins before being tidied away, as they indicate the locations of the plants as well as shelter overwintering insects. If that looks too untidy for you, cut back stems and put them in an out-of-the-way area to keep hibernating insects safe and provide food for the birds. For me, the look of a plant during its winter rest can be attractive.

If traditional houseplants have spent the summer outside, examine them carefully to make sure they aren't carrying unwanted pests when you bring them into the house. If you find any it's best to treat plants before bringing them indoors. There are insecticidal soaps or systemic

products available. Pull any weeds, trim back untidy growth, and wipe down the outside of the pots. Place them where they get the amount of light they need. If possible, don't put them near plants that have been indoors all year in case you have overlooked any insects; indoors pests can spread quickly. After a month or so you will know if there are any problems.

Mercifully, outdoor pests are few at this time of year. It's not only the cooler weather that affects them, but day length too. Like other creatures they have predetermined life cycles. Those caterpillars that were a nuisance in early summer will have descendants that are now in chrysalis form, perhaps sheltered in leaf litter or in cracks in tree bark. Come spring they'll turn into moths or maybe butterflies, and their eggs will hatch into caterpillars. But these are not just potential pests. In spring birds are nesting and eggs are hatching. Most of a young bird's diet will be caterpillars and other insects and for them to flourish it is important that this high protein food source is readily available.

For timely tips on what to plant in November and December, as well as helpful articles, see our newsletter, A New Leaf Yard & Garden: <https://tinyurl.com/ycyte65r>.

If you need advice on dealing with your landscape after a storm, check out the September/October edition of The Neighborhood Gardener: <https://tinyurl.com/5xmjn4pt>.

Wishing you all a very safe and happy holiday season, however you celebrate.

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— Resident Mary M. (with her dog, Jade)

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Pedro Menendez business students take third place



Pedro Menendez High School VyStar Academy of Business students placed third in the district Project Innovation competition. This competition promotes project-based exploration of innovative concepts and the application to solve problems within our community or the world. As students of the Business and Entrepreneurial Principles class they developed the "Autospotter" as "The Next Generation Of Weightlifting." Pictured are Ja-Bri Stewart, Nathan Carr, Maria Perez, Ben Johnson, and Ethan Mobley.



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The “Region of Death” has a new conqueror



"This is what the FHSAA 4A Cross Country region is labeled by coaches," said Creekside's head cross country coach Bernie Berania. It is the top Florida region made up of the most hard and fast, and the varsity boys' cross country team at Creekside High School just went undefeated in 4A this season to make school history. The varsity team took first place at every race against any 4A team this season all the way through the state race in Tallahassee. Further, even the school's junior varsity team of ninth and 10th graders won first place in the Northeast Florida JV Champs Race. This is the first time in Creekside history where the team went all firsts. In 2015, the school was just 3A and pulled out something similar. The State team was made of seven runners and three alternates: junior Tanner Simonds (sixth place finish), senior Jack Dravo (11th place finish), senior Hudson Finocchio, senior Mac Williams, senior Jacob Harvey, sophomore Jack Zurn, and senior Miles Yates, with alternates freshman Asa Swope, junior Jack Singletary, and senior Luke Fischer.

Timberlin Creek students make cards for seniors



Kelli Gallant's second grade students at Timberlin Creek Elementary helped spread joy and lifted spirits by creating homemade cards with heartfelt messages for home-bound senior citizens in advance of the Thanksgiving holiday. As part of Pie in the Sky's senior program, the cards will accompany Thanksgiving meals delivered to low-income seniors in St. Johns County.

Freedom Crossing Academy “Rocks!”

By Lauren O'Shell
mail@floridanewslines.com

Peace signs, flower power and “groovy” inspiration filled the hallways at Freedom Crossing Academy on Oct. 21. Teachers, staff, students and parents collaborated together to celebrate “Rock Your School Day 2022.”

Rock Your School Day is an international initiative that challenges schools around the world to create highly engaging lessons and outside-the-box learning experiences for students. Participating for the fifth year in a row, this year’s theme was “groovy” and fun ‘70s inspired décor made for a day of fun learning. More than 70 parent volunteers decorated classroom doors and hallways to add to the theme. Teachers and students wore tie-dye and ‘70s-inspired attire and accessories. The Freedom Crossing PTO purchased t-shirts for all staff members with the day’s motto: “Peace, Love, & Curriculum.”

Throughout the day, students were inspired by themed lessons, special performances, cooperative learn-

ing activities and the release of the school’s theme song “That’s the Way at FCA, I Like It.” With the help of middle school theater teacher Lauren Hunsinger, science teacher Sarah Holman, and a handful of talented Falcons, this year’s theme song came to life in the recording studio and filled the hallways of Freedom Crossing. The catchy song was a quick favorite by all K – 8 students with lyrics like, “When you get to school, at FCA, Greet me, it’s all okay! Break a barrier! Take a stand! Take FLIGHT, the very best you can!”

In classrooms, students created friendship bracelets with inspirational words to remind them they are loved. Students wrote about when they feel “peace, love and happiness” and teachers incorporated science standards while tie dying t-shirts for students to wear. St. Johns County School Board member Beverly Slough attended Rock Your School Day events and visited and read to classrooms of students.

Vice Principal Melissa Lime looks forward to this annual event each year.



Photos courtesy Lauren O'Shell
Students show off their friendship bracelets.

“I am so proud of our staff for creating one of the most memorable and magical learning experiences for our students,” Lime said. “Many students said it was one of the best days of their lives.”

Second grade teacher Brooke Dougherty said, “Our second-grade students had a groovy time dancing to ‘70s music, creating tie dye milk and coffee filters, and even made their own

lava lamps!”

Freedom Crossing Academy, Florida’s only Capturing Kids Hearts National Showcase Model School, uses opportunities like “Rock Your School Day” to go the extra mile for its students.

Lauren O'Shell is a fourth grade teacher at Freedom Crossing Academy.



Photos courtesy Lauren O'Shell
A groovy group at Rock Your School Day.



Photos courtesy Lauren O'Shell
Freedom Crossing Academy teachers got into the '70s theme.

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2/20/2023: "River Cruising with AmaWaterways" at 7pm at the Mandarin Garden Club. Our AmaWaterways rep will share with you the many great itineraries and benefits of sailing with Ama in Europe, Egypt, Africa and Vietnam/Cambodia. RSVP by 2/17/22 space is limited

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