

## St. Johns Reads 2023 book announced

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

The St. Johns County Public Library System has announced its St. Johns Reads 2023 title — “Buttermilk Graffiti,” by author and chef Edward Lee, for this year’s community reads event.

In addition to a variety of book discussions and virtual and in-person programming throughout the month of January 2023, Chef Lee will visit St. Johns County for a special author talk at 2 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 14, in the Character Counts Conference Center at First Coast Technical College, Building C, located at 2980 Collins Ave. in St. Augustine.

According to the book’s publisher, “American food is the story of mash-ups. Immigrants arrive, cultures collide, and out of the push-pull come exciting new dishes and flavors. But for Edward Lee, who, like Anthony Bourdain or Gabrielle Hamilton, is as much a writer as he is a chef, that first surprising bite is just the beginning. What about the people behind the food? What about the traditions, the innovations, the memories?”

A natural-born storyteller, Lee decided to hit the road and spent two years uncovering fascinating narratives from every corner of the country. There’s a Cambodian couple in Lowell, Massachusetts, and their efforts to re-create the flavors of their lost country. A

**St. Johns Reads** cont. on pg. 7

## Finding a Port in the Storm: Homeless youth center provides safe haven for young people

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps  
mail@floridanewslines.com

There are more than 800 homeless students in the St. Johns County School District. Out of that number, 186 are unaccompanied youth — without a parent or guardian. The statistics tell the story of a homelessness trend that is currently reflected across the country.

In St. Johns County, Port in the Storm Homeless Youth Center is trying to change that story line and provide a place where youth can find shelter, food, clothing, and, most importantly, a plan to a better life.

“We serve ages 18 to 24. That age range is the fastest growing subset of the homeless nationwide,” said St. Augustine Society (St. Francis House/Port in the Storm) Executive Direc-



Photos courtesy Karen Hensel

Team St. Johns County Sheriffs Office, grand champion winner for Port in the Storm fundraiser.

tor Judy Dembowski. “We are a low barrier emergency shelter. We use as few reasons as possible to say no at the door. We really want them to come in and be safe.”

Dembowski said staff members engage with the youth to find out what they want to do, where they might find “natural support” in the family and then review education, mental health, and vocation goals.

“It is incumbent upon the staff to help these young people want more for themselves,” she said. “We are changing their trajectory.”

To that end, Port in the Storm offers case management, daytime drop-in programs and life-skills programs to provide the tools and support needed to move forward. In one case, a graduating high school student was accepted into a college, but just needed a place to stay until school began in the fall.

“They deserve the same shot at a productive healthy loving life as kids who come from other backgrounds. They deserve this opportunity, and we help show them that they do in fact deserve it,” said Dembowski.

Dembowski, who has worked with homeless youth since the mid-1990s, said that the job sometimes takes its toll on her and the staff, but it is also what keeps them motivated to do more.

“We are in this for a reason. We celebrate successes, and we cry about losses very privately,” she said. Dembowski said that there are a lot of misconceptions about the type of youth that run away.



Photos courtesy Karen Hensel

Team Whitesell, Round 2 winner.

**Port in the Storm** cont. on pg. 6

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**Briefs**

**Human trafficking to be discussed by panel**

The AAUW St. Augustine Branch has assembled several experts in the field of human trafficking to participate in an Awareness and Prevention Panel Discussion on Jan. 14 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at St. Johns County Health and Human Resources Building, 200 San Sebastian View in St. Augustine. The public is encouraged to attend the forum.

Karen Zalkin, Director of Public Policy for the branch, explains that victims of human trafficking include children, women, and men who are subjected to sexual exploitation or forced labor through fraud or coercion. Florida ranks third in the nation in calls to the National Human Trafficking hotline. According to the State of Florida Human Trafficking Task Force, the average age that a trafficked victim is first used for commercial sex is 12 to 14.

The forum is designed to educate the public to recognize indicators of human trafficking. Its purpose is to prevent and disrupt human trafficking and to discuss how this problem is being met by different parts of society, such as police departments, school officials, and charitable organizations.

Christy Gillis, Community Development Administrator of Circuit 7 and a member of Freedom 7 HT Task Force, will serve as moderator for the forum. Panelists include Roberto Hugh Potter, Ph.D. Director for the University of Central Florida Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery; Lindsey Page, EdD, Coordinator of

School Counseling Services, St. Johns County School District; Tania Schmidt-Alpers, JD, who consults with the Betty Griffin Center; Deputy Ed Scoggins, St. Johns County Sheriff's Office, Criminal Investigations Division; and Kelly Posze, National Director of Her Song, an organization that provides residential survivor services. Care Connect Plus is a forum sponsor and will provide information about its services at a table. Other organizations with tables will be St. Johns County School District, Betty Griffin Center, Her Song, UFC Center for the Study of Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery, and AAUW St. Augustine Branch Human Trafficking Committee. Other sponsors include St. Johns County Main Public Library, St Johns County, Silver Creek, Regency Printing, and Starbucks of Palencia.

**U.S. Small Business Administration to offer disaster loans with no interest and no payments for first year**

The U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has announced the agency will waive the interest rate for the first year on new disaster loans and extend the initial payment deferment period automatically to 12 months.

New disaster loan borrowers will now have up to one year from the date of the note to begin making payments, instead of the standard five months. Interest on the loan will not begin to accrue until 12 months from the date of the initial loan disbursement. Previously, interest began to accrue on all disbursed loan funds including during the initial payment deferment period. This will benefit disaster survivors and help them to decrease the

overall cost of recovery by setting the interest rate to 0 percent for the first 12 months and reducing the overall amount of accrued interest they must repay. SBA disaster loans offer individuals and businesses direct access to affordable financial assistance to help fully repair or replace disaster-damaged property. By offering affordable loans with no interest and no payments for the first year, and low fixed-interest rates for the remaining 30-year term, SBA is maximizing disaster survivors' likelihood of a successful recovery and minimizing further financial hardship.

The extended deferment to 12 months is automatic and loan borrowers do not need to take any additional action. There is no prepayment penalty and borrowers can begin making loan payments during the deferment period if they choose.

Applicants may apply online prior to Jan. 12, 2023 by using the Electronic Loan Application (ELA) via SBA's secure website at <https://disasterloanassistance.sba.gov/ela/s/>. Disaster loan information and application forms may also be obtained by calling the SBA's Customer Service Center at (800) 659-2955 or by sending an email to [DisasterCustomerService@sba.gov](mailto:DisasterCustomerService@sba.gov). Loan applications can be downloaded from the SBA's website at [sba.gov/disaster](https://www.sba.gov/disaster). To learn more, visit [www.sba.gov](https://www.sba.gov).

**Gallery announces January's featured artist**

Ron Vellucci is Butterfield Garage's January featured artist. He will present an Artist Talk discussing his new collection of work, "Tokens of Affection," during

First Friday Art Walk on Jan. 3, at 6 p.m.

To experience Vellucci's wall constructions is taking a journey into an uncharted universe, full of mysteries and unexpected materials. His work is inspired by patterns and images, which he creates using combinations of wood, metal, stone, photographs and other materials. Shaping his "personal language of materials" results in always surprising works that encourage the viewer to ponder; examining the balance and harmony constructed from layers of tactile materials and subtle details.

Vellucci has always loved making things and working with his hands. His father was a cabinet maker and his woodshop was Vellucci's playground as a child. From an early age he learned a dedication to craftsmanship, an appreciation for materials, and a proficiency with wood-working tools.

Travels in Europe sparked a heightened appreciation for art and craftsmanship. Freshly retired, Vellucci's passion for creating, growing as an artist and exploring new horizons has begun anew. A collection of these will be on display throughout the month at Butterfield Garage.



Photo courtesy Butterfield Garage  
Token of Affection.



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# BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

**Breed:**  
Chihuahua  
**Favorite Activity:**  
Taking advantage of our beautiful beach on Anastasia Island  
**Favorite Treat:**  
The occasional PUP CUP at Starbucks  
**Favorite Friend:**  
My mom (don't tell my dad)  
**How Your BFF Got Their Name:**  
I was named after Mom's favorite Reality Star



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 St. Augustine NewsLine. Your pet could be our BFF of the month and appear in St. Augustine NewsLine! Email editor@floridanewsline.com to enter your pet.

**HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

From your friends  
at St. Augustine  
NewsLine!

### Table of Contents

- 2 Briefs
- 4 What's Happening in St. Augustine
- 5 Supervisor of Elections
- 8 St. Johns County School of the Arts

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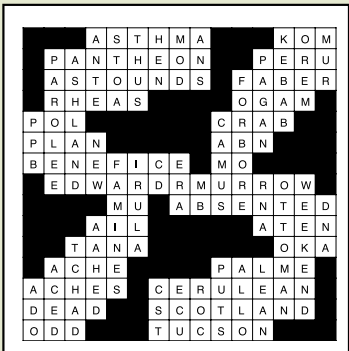
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## MYSTERY PHOTO

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

Last month's Mystery Photo was the Renaissance Hotel near downtown.

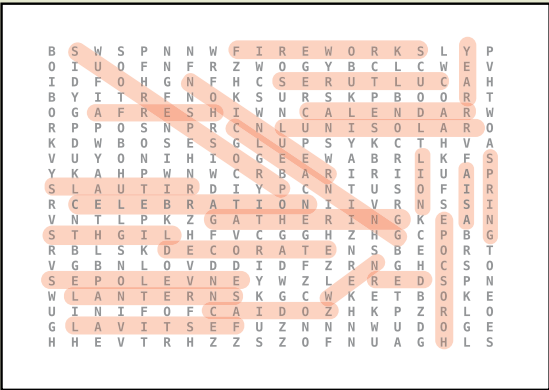


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PG 6

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# January

## Community Calendar

### What's Happening in St. Augustine

- 3rd: Line Dancing** will be held at COA's River House, 179 Marine Street, St. Augustine, on Tuesdays from 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. for four weeks starting Tuesday, Jan. 3. Call (904) 209-3655 or email [tharris@coasjc.org](mailto:tharris@coasjc.org) for more information.

**3rd: R.E.A.D. Book Club** featuring the St. Johns Reads pick, "Buttermilk Graffiti: A Chef's Journey to Discover America's New Melting Pot Cuisine" by Edward Lee, will be held at the Southeast Branch of the St. Johns County Public Library, 6670 US Highway 1 South, on Jan. 3 at 10:15 a.m. Registration at [sjcpls.org](http://sjcpls.org) is required for these events.

**5th: Jr. LEGO Robotics - Plants and Pollinators** for ages seven through 10 will be held on Jan. 5 from 4 p.m. – 5 p.m. at the Main Library, 1960 N. US Highway 1 South. Space is limited and registration is required. Email Andy Calvert at [acalvert@sjcfl.us](mailto:acalvert@sjcfl.us) for more information and to register.

**7th: The Northeast Florida Chapter of Sisters in Crime** will meet on Jan. 7 at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library, 101 Library Blvd. (FOL Room). The meeting starts at 12 p.m. and will include the group's final Mini-Workshop No. 3 – reviewing and critiquing Mini-Workshop No. 1 (Streaming Consciousness) and Mini-Workshop No. 2 (Developing Characterization). Input for 2023 programs will also
- be solicited. Bring your coffee and bring a friend. Visit [www.nefloridasistersincrime.org](http://www.nefloridasistersincrime.org) for more information.

**11th: STA Strong BHOF (Bone Health and Osteoporosis Foundation)** Education Group will meet on Jan. 11 from 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. at COA's River House, 179 Marine Street, St. Augustine, to learn about the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of osteoporosis. Call (904) 209-3655 or email [tharris@coasjc.org](mailto:tharris@coasjc.org) for more information.

**11th: Kids Winter Crafts** will be held at the Southeast Branch of the St. Johns County Public Library, 6670 US Highway 1 South, on Jan. 11 at 4 p.m. Celebrate the winter season with three fun crafts. No registration is required for this free program.

**14th: The St. Augustine Genealogical Society** will meet on Jan. 14 at 1 p.m. at the Southeast Branch of the St. Johns County Public Library, 6670 US Highway 1 South. Practical genealogist Joel Warner will discuss four situations from his own family history research that provide learning opportunities for all family historians. Visit <https://stauggensoc.org/> for more information.

**14th: Human Trafficking Awareness** and Prevention Panel, sponsored by the AAUW St. Augustine Branch, will be held on Jan. 14 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at St. Johns County Health and Human Resources
- Building, 200 San Sebastian View in St. Augustine. The public is encouraged to attend the forum.

**14th: St. Johns Reads: Author Event** with Chef Edward Lee, author of "Buttermilk Graffiti" will be held on Saturday, Jan. 14 at 2 p.m. at First Coast Technical College Character County Conference Center, Bldg. C, 2982 Collins Ave. in St. Augustine. This event is free and registration is not required. Visit <https://sjcpls.org/st-johns-reads-2023/> for more information.

**18th: Art Workshop for ages 13 and older** will be held on Jan. 18 from 4 p.m. – 5 p.m. at the Main Library, 1960 N. US Highway 1 South. This month's workshop, presented by Kathryn, is "Drawing Basics." Supplies are provided by the Friends of the Main Library and no experience is required. Email Kathryn at [krosenburg@sjcfl.us](mailto:krosenburg@sjcfl.us) for more information.

**21st: Beach Exploration with GTM Research** Reserve docents will be held on Jan. 21 from 9 a.m. – 11a.m. The hike begins at the GTM Research Reserve Visitor Center, 505 Guana River Road. This is a "Beaches 101" experience the entire family will enjoy. Visit [gtmnerr.org](http://gtmnerr.org) for more information.

**27th: "What Happens When You Die without a Will"** will be presented by St. Johns County Legal Aid's Megan Wall, Managing Attorney, on Friday, Jan. 27 at 11 a.m.
- at COA's River House, 179 Marine Street, St. Augustine. Call (904) 209-3655 or email [tharris@coasjc.org](mailto:tharris@coasjc.org) for more information.

**28th: Ann Browning Masters:** Cheese Grits and Datil Peppers will be held on Jan. 28 at the Southeast Branch of the St. Johns County Public Library, 6670 US Highway 1 South. Doors open at 1: 30 p.m. Join author and historian Ann Browning Masters to learn about the history of the Menorcan immigrants and their shaping of local cuisine. No RSVP required.

**30th: Yoga for all** will be held at 2 p.m. on Jan. 30 at the Southeast Branch of the St. Johns County Public Library, 6670 US Highway 1 South. Register at [www.sjcpls.org](http://www.sjcpls.org) or call the library at (904) 824-6900. Space is limited to the first 24 patrons.

**30th: St. Augustine Jewish Historical Society** will celebrate its 10th anniversary on Monday, Jan. 30 at 12 p.m. with a lunch at Taco Libre #3, 2600 N. Ponce De Leon Blvd. in St. Augustine. The event will include a retrospective of the society's 10 year history and there is no charge for lunch. Visit [www.sajhs.com](http://www.sajhs.com) for more information.
- Have an event you'd like included in our community calendar? Email the information to [editor@floridanewsline.com](mailto:editor@floridanewsline.com). Deadline is the 10th of the month for the next month's issue.

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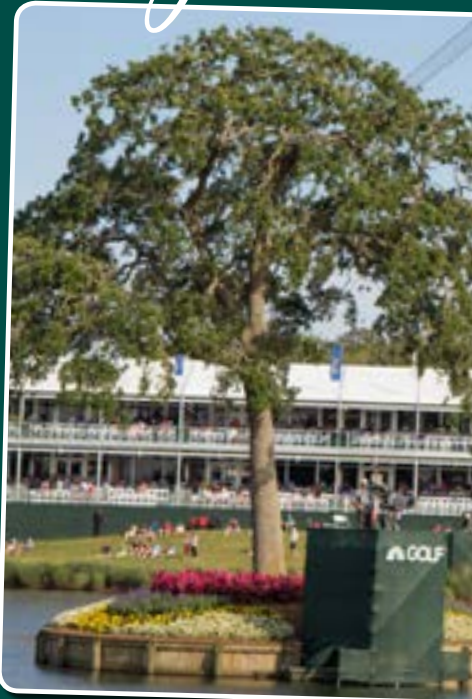
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We recommend that the seller meet the buyer at the Tax Collector's Office at the time of transfer. This ensures that transfer of ownership is completed. If

you are unable to meet the buyer for the transfer of ownership, be sure and fill out a notice of sale. Form 82050 can be found on our website, [www.sjctax.us](http://www.sjctax.us), and brought into an office, mailed or emailed to our office. Note that ownership status is not changed until the buyer transfers the title into their name. The seller can still be held liable until this is complete.

**Q: Do you have anything else to share?**

A: Remember a 2 percent discount is applied to property tax payments in the month of January.

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

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



### ANNUAL CHRISTMAS TREECYCLING

Help reduce the amount of waste that ends up in the landfills during the holidays by bringing your real Christmas tree to designated county sites to be recycled. Recycled trees will be used as mulch in our parks. Only clean, real trees free of decorations will be accepted.

#### DROP OFF LOCATIONS

- Ron Parker (By the Community Garden and Dog Park): 607 Old Beach Rd.
- Mills Field: 1805 Racetrack Rd. (In the back of the east parking lot)
- First Tee Site at St. Johns County Golf Course: 4401 Cypress Links Blvd. (Right off the main road to the golf course)
- Davis Park: 210 Davis Park Rd. (In the first parking lot)
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Guest Column

New Year at Supervisor of Elections office

By St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes

Happy New Year, St. Johns County voters! I hope you had a wonderful holiday season with your family and friends. We are excited about what 2023 has in store for the Supervisor of Elections Office. While there are no elections scheduled this year, we are still going to be very busy changing our processes to comply with new laws which just took effect, updating voter rolls, and providing voter education.

We will also spend a significant amount of time this year recruiting new poll workers in preparation for the 2024 elections. We currently have about 475 poll workers on the roster, but as with any workforce, there is constant change as some workers retire and new faces join our team. The continual growth in the county also necessitates more workers as we expect between 240,000 and 250,000 registered voters to participate in the Nov. 5, 2024 Presidential General Election in St. Johns County.

Our goal in 2023 is to increase our workforce and communication with poll workers to ensure they have the information they need to be prepared when training begins in January 2024. Want to join the elections team? Visit [www.votesjc.com](http://www.votesjc.com) and fill out a poll worker application to be considered for poll worker and election technician positions.

This year will also be a good time for vote-by-mail voters to request their ballots for the 2024 elections. Due to a change in the law, all vote-by-mail ballot requests on file this year expired following the November 2022 election. If you vote by mail, please visit [www.votesjc.gov](http://www.votesjc.gov) to check your voter status and make your request for 2024 if you wish to continue to vote-by-mail. Vote-by-mail remained one of our most popular voting methods in 2022 and we want to ensure it remains available for any voter who wants to use this convenient option to cast their vote.

We have also resumed Elections Office tours this year. If you are interested in learning the facts about how elections are conducted locally and in Florida, visit the Office Tours page on our website, [www.votesjc.gov/office-tours](http://www.votesjc.gov/office-tours), to see scheduled dates and times and book your tour. If you have a small group who would like to schedule a tour, please contact our office and we will be happy to make arrangements.

We will also spend a significant amount of time next year preparing for a busy 2024 when we will hold three elections, including a Presidential Preference Primary on March 19, a Primary on Aug. 20, and a General Election on Nov. 5. Generally speaking, it takes about four months of planning, communication, and execution to hold an election. So, we're preparing to be in election mode for the entirety of 2024!

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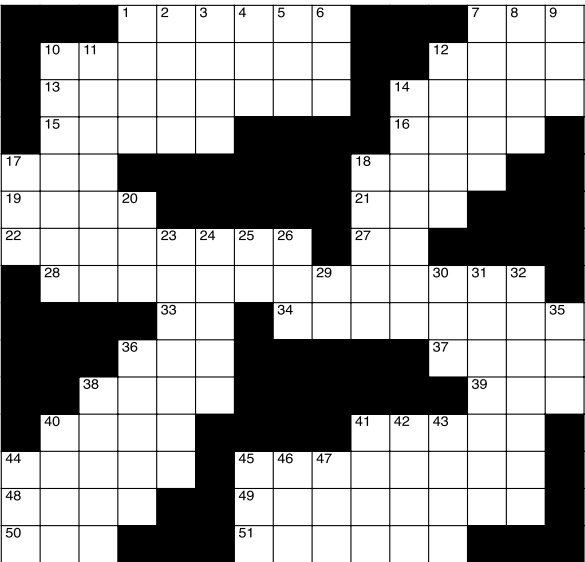


Email us today! [editor@floridanewsline.com](mailto:editor@floridanewsline.com)



Puzzles

Answers on page 3  
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Respiratory disorder
- 7. Bulgarian mountain peak
- 10. Group of important people
- 12. South American nation
- 13. Amazes
- 14. \_\_\_-Castell, makers of pens
- 15. Perlman and Seehorn are two
- 16. Early medieval alphabet
- 17. Legislator (slang)
- 18. Tasty crustacean
- 19. Course of action
- 21. Airborne (abbr.)
- 22. Permanent church appointment
- 27. Larry and Curly's pal
- 28. Famed American journalist
- 33. 12th letter of Greek alphabet
- 34. In a way, vanished
- 36. Afflict in mind or body
- 37. Egyptian Sun god
- 38. Source of the Blue Nile
- 39. Egyptian unit of weight
- 40. Be the source of pain
- 41. Esteemed award \_\_\_ d'Or
- 44. Partner to pains
- 45. Deep blue
- 48. No longer living
- 49. Country in the UK
- 50. Not even
- 51. Arizona city

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Wager
- 2. Classical portico
- 3. As a result
- 4. Bird
- 5. A type of "Squad"
- 6. Autonomic nervous system
- 7. Dish with food on a stick
- 8. City northwest of Provo
- 9. C. European river
- 10. One out of jail
- 11. Henry Clay estate
- 12. Heathen
- 14. Refrained
- 17. Parts per billion (abbr.)
- 18. "The Stranger" author
- 20. Not old
- 23. Periods of starvation
- 24. Language of tribe in India
- 25. Savings account
- 26. Pitching stat
- 29. Megabyte
- 30. Ribonucleic acid
- 31. A place to put your feet
- 32. The fun part of a week
- 35. We all have our own
- 36. Partner to "oohed"
- 38. African nation
- 40. Breezed through
- 41. Sets out
- 42. Other
- 43. Not fattening
- 44. "Much \_\_\_ about nothing"
- 45. Central Time
- 46. Former EU monetary unit
- 47. Charles S. Dutton sitcom

LUNAR NEW YEAR WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

- AFRESH
- ASIA
- CALENDAR
- CELEBRATION
- CLEANING
- CULTURES
- DECORATE
- ENVELOPES
- FESTIVAL
- FIREWORKS
- GATHERING
- HOROSCOPE
- LANTERNS
- LIGHTS
- LION
- LUNISOLAR
- NEW
- PROSPEROUS
- RED
- REUNION
- RITUALS
- SPRING
- YEAR
- ZODIAC



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

- A. 7 14 24 17 13  
Clue: Relating to the moon
- B. 3 19 13 19 23 6 19 5 26  
Clue: Prediction based on stars or symbols
- C. 6 3 11 24 17  
Clue: Asian country
- D. 10 26 23 22 11 12 17 7  
Clue: Large celebration

Port in the Storm cont. from pg.1

“There is a false narrative about there being bad teen runaways who are out of control. Kids don’t run to the street. They run from something,” she said. “It is not fun and games. It takes a lot to leave your bed, your food, your shower.”

Another challenge then becomes to live life and blend in with your peers at school while being homeless.

“They are called the hidden homeless for a reason,” she said. “They have been mistreated and ill-used by adults in their life and on the streets too. It takes a while to gain their trust.”

Michael Israel, St. Johns County School District Homeless Liaison, said his job is to identify students who are in transition, assess their needs, remove barriers, and assist in providing educational opportunities. This includes finding resources for housing, school supplies, transportation, free and reduced lunches and partnering with civic and faith-based organizations and the community to provide for needs that occur outside of school.

“We live in a very blessed county and people want to help. We have a great school district, superintendent, and community,” said Israel, who is also a pastor.

Dembowski said that she is grateful to the St. Johns County School

District for its approach to helping homeless youth.

“We have a great relationship with the school district. I have never seen a school system like St. Johns County. They wrap around these kids. They are phenomenal. They invest in these homeless kids. They do not treat them as an issue,” she said.

Israel said that he sees his job as a ministry and has always had a strong desire to help children that could not help themselves. He also said that he is constantly impressed by the young people that he meets and the strength that they possess.

“They are very resilient, highly independent individuals. They want so much more for themselves. They are sometimes reluctant to accept help,” said Israel. “We do not impose on anyone. We find out their needs and meet them where they are at. We want them to know that we are here.”

[Author’s note: For more information about Port in the Storm, visit [www.stfrancisshelter.org/port-in-the-storm](http://www.stfrancisshelter.org/port-in-the-storm). For those interested in donating, there is always a need for granola bars, snack size chips, pop top canned food and any non-perishable food. Gift cards (\$10) for Walmart, Target and grocery stores and \$5 gift cards to Dunkin Donuts, Chick-fil-A and McDonald’s are also appreciated.]

Sebastian Middle School ELA classes get creative



Photo courtesy Sebastian Middle School  
Sebastian Middle School ELA classes get creative

At Sebastian Middle School, the ELA classes used Makerbots that librarian Rowena Barnard received through several grants to make 3D printed pumpkins for Halloween. Students first created the designs using Tinkercad. The students also created buttons with words of kindness. They brainstormed the words, then printed out the words and used the button maker to complete the buttons. Literacy Week is Jan 23 – 27, 2023. They plan to wear their buttons for the activity "Wear your Words of Kindness."



Get to Know ...

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps  
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Dr. Jhonny Perusina



Photo courtesy Dr. Jhonny Perusina  
Dr. Jhonny Perusina with his parents.

Dr. Jhonny Perusina knew from a young age that he wanted to become a doctor after watching his own father practice medicine in El Salvador. “As a kid, I remember spending time at my dad’s office, seeing how he treated people. To this day, I am still amazed to see how far he goes to help others in our small hometown of Santa Ana,” said Perusina. “I used to say ‘Some-day I want to do what he is doing.’” Perusina followed that dream and attended medical school at Universidad Evangélica de El Salvador, graduating in March 2019. “When I joined med school, my dad was like my tutor. He was such a great support throughout my years in med school,” said Perusina. After passing all his board exams, Perusina decided to follow his next dream to move to the United States. He first moved to Arizona where his older brother lives and works as an industrial engineer for Boeing. Next, he moved to St. Augustine where his uncle lives and began working on taking his board exams to become an American doctor. He did just that and is now interviewing for residency programs. Perusina credits Learn to Read of St. Johns County, where he has been working with tutor David Alvarez, with helping him learn his conversational English and prepping him for interviews. Perusina dedicates every Thursday to meeting with Alvarez as he looks forward to practicing medicine as a general physician, proudly following in his father’s footsteps.

Q: How did Learn to Read of St. Johns County help you on your journey?

A: I joined Learn to Read to improve my conversation skills. We started to practice my conversation skills from the first lesson with my tutor. Before my real interview, he agreed to do a mock interview to gain some confidence in the way that I should speak, such as some words that I should or should not use. I have learned that the more you practice, the more you improve. Confidence is something that you gain every day. Learn to Read has been such a great help for

me, especially during the period that I was getting ready to submit my applications for my residency. I have been improving my grammar, reading and conversation skills.

Q: What are some of your hobbies?

A: I love outdoor activities such as kayaking, biking, camping, beach volleyball and dancing to Latin music, of course. I love traveling and practicing sports, mainly basketball and soccer. Every time I can and have the time, I like to do community service. I volunteer every Saturday at my church (Anastasia Baptist Church). We have this “Manos a la obra” project where we give away food to about 180 – 200 families every weekend. I have been helping them since February 2021.

Q: What keeps you motivated?

A: There is nothing impossible if you really want it. Work hard and focus. The limitations are only in your own mind. You must have discipline in everything you do. Conquer your goals. My family has really helped me to develop this mindset.

Q: What do you like about St. Augustine?

A: I pretty much loved Florida and St. Augustine from the first day that I moved here. The weather is similar to my country, tropical. Although St. Augustine is a small town, I fell in love with the fact that there are many places to go. It was a difficult decision to leave El Salvador, especially not really knowing anyone here. It was hard in the beginning; however, I am making friends, and I am looking forward to my future here.

Q: What are your future plans?

A: In the near future, I see myself taking on greater clinical and research responsibilities as a board certified physician, building my reputation among local and Hispanic communities. I would like to have a volunteer engagement where I can help people in underserved communities both locally and overseas.

New member for Women’s Food Alliance

By NewsLine Staff  
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The Women's Food Alliance recently welcomed Bethany Mitidieri, creator and owner of Cutie Pies Bake Shop in St. Augustine’s historic district, as a new member. Her “from scratch bake shop” is tucked away on tiny Cuna Street and focuses on pie, which is a tribute to generations of women in her family who used the best ingredients and never compromised quality.

While she is new to the bakery business, Mitidieri and her husband Rick have owned and operated other types of business, including an organic farm and property management.

Mitidieri retired during the summer of 2022 from her 28-year career as an educator, primarily as an elementary school principal in St. Johns County, leading and managing schools with more than 700 children and 100 employees. She still has a desire to support young people, and intends to give



Photo courtesy Leigh Cort  
Bethany Mitidieri, creator and owner of Cutie Pies Bake Shop.

a portion of the bakery’s profits back into the community through teachers and underserved youth in the school district which has been her home for more than 15 years.

St. Johns Reads cont. from pg. 1

Uyghur café in New York’s Brighton Beach serves a noodle soup that seems so very familiar and yet so very exotic — one unexpected ingredient opens a window onto an entirely unique culture. A beignet from Café du Monde in New Orleans, as potent as Proust’s madeleine, inspires a narrative that tunnels through time, back to the first Creole cooks, then forward to a Korean rice-flour hoedduck and a beignet dusted with matcha. Sixteen adventures, sixteen vibrant new chapters in the great evolving story of American cuisine. And forty recipes, created by Lee, that bring these new dishes into our own kitchens.”

In its 18th year, St. Johns Reads is the St. Johns County Public Library System’s annual “One book, One

community” event focused on creating a shared conversation of a selected novel. Funding for this program was provided through a grant from Florida Humanities with funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Any views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this program do not necessarily represent those of Florida Humanities or the National Endowment for the Humanities. St. Johns Reads is also generously sponsored by the SJCPLS Friends of the Library groups.

“Buttermilk Graffiti” is available for checkout in a variety of formats including print, digital audiobook, and e-book. To view a full schedule of St. Johns Reads 2023 events, visit [www.sjcpls.org/st-johns-reads-2023](http://www.sjcpls.org/st-johns-reads-2023) or call your local branch library.



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# Applications being accepted for St. Johns County Center for the Arts

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewsline.com

All students in St. Johns County are welcome and encouraged to apply to attend the St. Johns County Center for the Arts (SJCCA) at R.J. Murray Middle School — which offers a “best in the state” arts program, the globally recognized Cambridge Advanced Academic Programme, and a robust menu of STEM options to meet the interests of the school’s diverse student population. The application window for rising sixth graders opens Jan. 5, 2023 and closes on Jan. 31.

The first semester has been full of opportunities and experiences for students in the performing and visual arts at R.J. Murray Middle School:

Theatre: In October, all theatre stu-

dents participated in an “In House Thespian Festival.” This one of a kind event allowed students to prepare for the district Junior Thespian Festival, where they earned nine of the 13 top honors awarded to St. Johns County School District schools. One major highlight of the spring semester is a trip to New York City to attend classes with Broadway performers and then watch multiple Broadway shows.

Dance: R.J. Murray Middle School has two dance studios and two talented dance instructors. The advanced dance class recently auditioned and was accepted into Disney Performing Arts this spring. In December, all dance students participated in our inaugural “RJMMS Dance Convention” and attended sessions taught by nation-



Photo courtesy Travis Brown



Photo courtesy Travis Brown

ally recognized experts in the fields of ballet, hip hop, west african, modern, jazz, musical theatre, and a special class taught by a former Radio City Rockette.

Chorus: Students were invited to sing for the tourists at the St. Augustine Visitors Center in November and have been traveling around St. Johns County performing at various elementary schools during parent pick-up. They have also previously qualified to perform at Disney World.

Band: Students were invited and performed to large crowds at the St. Augustine Visitors Center in November and had an outstanding concert on Dec. 8. The school offers three levels

of band (Beginning, Concert, and Jazz Band) to meet the needs and experience levels of all students as well as multiple levels of guitar classes.

Visual Arts: Visual Arts students have a variety of skill levels and often leave with professional abilities and qualifications. The Draw/Paint and Graphic Design classes have multiple levels from introductory all the way to advanced high-school credit options.

As the only middle school in St. Johns County that accepts applicants from out of zone, all interested fifth grade families should Principal Travis Brown at [travis.brown@stjohns.k12.fl.us](mailto:travis.brown@stjohns.k12.fl.us) or call the school at (904) 547-8470 for more information.

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Have community news to share? Email [editor@floridanewsline.com](mailto:editor@floridanewsline.com)



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