

Ponte Vedra NewsLine

FEBRUARY 2023 Volume 10 Issue 2

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

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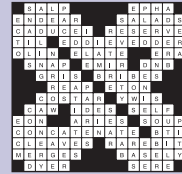
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PVHS hosts largest girls' wrestling tournament in North Florida

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

On Saturday, Dec. 10, the 2022 FHSAA Girls' Wrestling State-Runner Up team, Ponte Vedra High School (coached by Nadine Fiege and Alexa Christoforatos), hosted the largest girls wrestling tournament in North Florida. With 25 teams in attendance and 135 wrestlers, the third annual "Own The Ocean" tournament was not only the largest tournament, but also one of the toughest high school girls' tournaments in the state.

The tournament centered around 16-woman brackets for the 14 weight classes for high school girls. Each weight class was stacked with quality wrestlers, featuring at least three returning State placers from the inaugural 2022 FHSAA State tournament in each bracket, combined with many upcoming experienced wrestlers, as well as ranked wrestlers from other states who relocated to Florida. As a tribute to the ocean theme of Ponte Vedra High School and the tournament name, the champion for each weight class received a real Hawaiian flower lei in addition to a medal.

The top teams from the weekend

PVHS hosts cont. on pg. 12

Greenheart Exchange: Opening hearts and doors to exchange students

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Wendy Cruff became a host mom last year for Greenheart Exchange after seeing an ad seeking host families in her church bulletin at St. James Catholic Church.

"It was calling to me," said Cruff, whose adult daughter had been an exchange student in Taiwan. "I saw how much being an exchange student helped her grow."

Against that backdrop, Cruff accepted two students into her home — Matilde from Italy in September and Yohan from Brazil in October. They attend Baymeadows Charter School.

"I feel like I have gained a heart full of joy," said Cruff. "I feel a lot of gratitude to give them these experiences, and I feel blessed to have two students who bring so much joy into my home."

Cruff, who has two adult children and four grandchildren, said she tries to provide as many fun experiences for the students as possible. Some highlights and firsts so far: Watching their first live performance by seeing "The Nutcracker," watching a Jaguars football game (which just happened to be the game against the Tennessee Titans), attending a Jumbo Shrimp baseball game, going to the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens, and seeing St. Augustine Nights of Lights.

"This really is a bonding experience," she said.

Greenheart Exchange is a part of



Photo courtesy Wanda Cox

Greenheart Exchange students at a recruiting fair. a very strong support system for host families in the area and for making the entire process easy on everyone.

Cox first became involved with hosting exchange students with Greenheart Exchange while in Connecticut, filling a temporary housing need for two students from China and a student from Spain for three summer programs. When she moved to Florida a year and a half ago, Cox saw a job posting to be the local coordinator.

"It spoke to me," said Cox, who also hosted a student from Germany last year for a school year. "Our family has grown, and our hearts have been expanded from these experiences."

Cox helps to find host families for international high school students for a full or partial school year, depending on the needs of the exchange student. Students come from a range of cultures and backgrounds with more than 60 countries represented.

Greenheart Exchange cont. on pg. 12



Photo courtesy Wendy Cruff

Wendy Cruff taking Matilde and Yohan to their first Jaguars football game. Greenheart International and provides students with an opportunity to have an American high school experience and to be fully immersed in the English language. Since 1985, Greenheart Exchange has placed more than 25,000 International exchange students with host families in the United States.

Cruff credits Greenheart Exchange local coordinator Wanda Cox with providing

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BFF

Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Duke!



Breed:

Bernese Mountain Dog

Favorite Activity:

Walking through The Players Club community and checking all the new scents

Favorite Treat:

Cheese

Favorite Friend:

Ute Westwood, who provides yummy treats.

How did your BFF get his name:

Someone said he looked regal, so he became a Duke.

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



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Happy
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From your friends at
Ponte Vedra NewsLine

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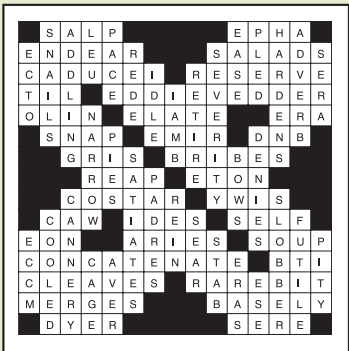
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MYSTERY PHOTO



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

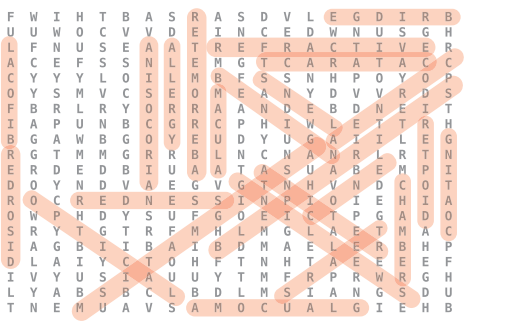
Last month's Mystery Photo was PV/PV Rawlings Elementary School.



Answers
Puzzles
PG 10

CRYPTO FUN

Answers: A. pancakes B. eggs C. sausage D. toast



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February

Community Calendar

What's Happening in Ponte Vedra

Council on Aging offers interest groups at the COA Center at Flagler Health+ Village at Nocatee. Meetings are free and self-guided except for the Caregiver's Support Group. Advance registration for clubs and meetings is required; email pbrunell@stjohnscoa.com or call (904) 819-3234. Tuesday clubs include: Caregiver Support Group, 1 p.m. – 2 p.m.; and Widows and Widowers social group, second and fourth Tuesday of each month, 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Wednesday groups include: Mah Jongg Meet-up, 1 p.m. – 3 p.m.; and Genealogy Group, 1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Palm Valley Market is held inside the Palm Valley Community Center at 148 Canal Road, every Tuesday from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. The market offers fresh produce, baked goods, local honey, tea, seasonal treats, soap, jewelry, plants and more. Visit the Palm Valley Market Facebook page for more information.

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

3rd: The GTM Research Reserve will hold a new volunteer orientation on Feb. 3 from 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Learn about volunteer rules and responsibility as well next steps to volunteering. Complete the volunteer application online (www.gtmnerr.org) before attending. Contact Abigail Kuhn at Abigail.Kuhn@FloridaDEP.gov to assure that your application was received.

4th: CHARACTER COUNTS! 6K/3K Run/Walk will be held on Saturday, February 4, 2023, at 9 a.m., beginning and ending at Palencia Elementary School, 355 Palencia Village Drive. Race proceeds support CHARACTER COUNTS! initiatives throughout the St. Johns

County School District. Visit RunSignUp.com to learn more and register.

4th: The Northeast Florida Chapter of Sisters in Crime will meet on Feb. 4 at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library, 101 Library Blvd. (FOL Room). The meeting starts at 12:15 p.m. and will include a presentation from a retired federal law enforcement individual who will provide a brief overview of his agency and should be able to answer questions to aid attendees in their writing endeavors. Bring your coffee and bring a friend. Visit www.nefloridasistersin-crime.org for more information.

7th: Vicar's Landing February Boutique Sale will be held on Tuesday, Feb. 7 from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. at 1000 Vicar's Landing Way. The public is welcome. The sale includes household items and furnishings as well as jewelry and framed art. The Vicar's Employee Scholarship Fund receives all of the proceeds. Cash or checks only please. Contact Rose Murdock at (904) 891-1777 or Beverly Webb at (904) 315-2610 for more information.

7th: The Friends of the Library present the Grass Menagerie on Tuesday, Feb. 7 at the Ponte Vedra Library. The Grass Menagerie was formed seven years ago for audiences desiring the bluegrass feel, but with an added factor: variety. The instrumentation lends itself to the strictly rooted bluegrass music, but the music selection takes it to another level including Jazz, pop, rock, and country music. Doors open at 6 p.m. and the program starts at 6:30 p.m.

7th: Bingo will be held at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, on Tuesdays from 1 p.m. – 2 p.m. for four weeks beginning Tuesday, Feb. 7. Contact Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for more information and to register.

7th: Essential Tremor Support Group Meeting will be held on Feb. 7 at 11 a.m. at Baptist HealthPlace at Nocatee, 400 Colonnade Drive, #130. Featured speaker will be

Movement Disorder Specialist/Neurologist Dr. Zhigao Huang, MD, discussing "Medicine, Technology, Treatment and Care for Essential Tremors." Contact Jan Kary at jkary@verizon.net or (202) 438-6750 for more information.

10th: Food Truck Friday will be held on Feb. 10 and Feb. 24 from 5:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. This event is open to the public.

13th: The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable will meet on Monday, Feb. 9 at 12 p.m. at St. Augustine Waterworks building, 184 San Marco Ave. in St. Augustine. Email info@sjcroundtable.org to register for the meeting or visit www.sjcroundtable.org for more information.

14th: Valentine's Day Party at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, Ponte Vedra Beach. Enjoy festive treats and a "love songs sing-a-long" with Lisa Atkinson from Home Instead on Tuesday, Feb. 14 from 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. Call Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for more information.

15th: Ponte Vedra Woman's Club General Meeting will be held on Feb. 15, from 12 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Pkwy. Mayo Clinic's Chief of Cardiology, Dr. Dominick Angiolillo and Women's Heart Program Director Gladys Velarde will discuss how to care for your heart in Women's Health. Registration and dinner payment is on the Ponte Vedra Woman's Club website under Events at www.pontevedrawomansclub.com/eventregistrations.php.

18th: The Nocatee Farmers Market with a Mardi Gras theme will be held on Saturday, Feb. 18 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. The Farmers Market is open to the public.

21st: Ponte Vedra Democratic Club will meet on Tuesday, Feb. 21 at 5:30 p.m. for Chat & Chew before the 6 p.m. meet-


ing at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. The program will feature speaker Ben Frazier, president of the Northside Coalition of Jacksonville, and his program, "Activism in Jacksonville: How can we bring about change in Florida?" Email jkary@verizon.net for more information.

23rd: "Exploitation of the Elderly and Disabled" will be presented by St. Johns County Legal Aid's Megan Wall, Managing Attorney on Thursday, Feb. 23 at 11 a.m. at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, Ponte Vedra Beach. Call Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for more information.

23rd: The Savvy Job Hunters Ministry Workshop will host "Must-Have Interviewing Tips and Mock Interview" presented by Buddy Webster, partner, LEADERS Professional Recruiting, Inc., on Feb. 23 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Sign in and networking begin at 9:45 a.m. The workshop is in-person and will be held at Christ Episcopal Church, 400 San Juan Drive, in Room 106 of the Formation and Arts Building. Email pottesen66@gmail.com to register.

25th: The Ponte Vedra Writers Group will meet on Saturday, Feb. 25 at 11 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Award-winning author, Sohrab Homi Fracis, will discuss his newest collection of short stories, True Fiction, and answer writers' questions. The meeting is free and open to members and non-members alike. Visit www.floridawriters.org for more information.


25th: The Speaker Series sponsored by The Friends of the Library, Ponte Vedra Beach presents Gail Dudack, chief equity strategist for the Dudack Research Group, on Saturday, Feb. 25 at 2 p.m. Her topic is "The 2023 Outlook for Stocks and a Discussion on the US Economy and Stock Market." Dudack was a panelist on "Wall Street Week with Louis Rukeyser" for more than years and on the PBS show "Wall Street Week with Fortune." The program is free and open to the public and the doors open at 1:30 p.m.



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with St. Johns County School Board
Member Kelly Barrera, District 4

Q: Can you give an update on the recent report you received from the Citizens' Advisory Committee regarding the half cent sales tax for the school district?

A: This report was very informational and contained details on what has been done with the funds in the last year as well as future plans. Some key highlights include:

South Woods school expansion to be implemented this year;

Several roof replacements have been completed and Ocean Palms Elementary is scheduled for roof replacement this year;

Purchased 568 computers, which were distributed to 24 schools;

Added transportation technology, including Zonar GPS and Mobile Eye Pilot on buses;

This year there will be a pilot program of Z Pass for student bus entry;

Last year and ongoing purchases of Centegix mobile panic alarm badges for teachers.

Looking ahead, we will continue to purchase safety and security systems for schools, to include cameras and door access systems, district wide.

I'd like to recognize our outstanding Citizens' Advisory Committee members who voluntarily serve from District 4. They are Chairman Jack Hardman, Damian Cook, Richa Jeetah, and alternate Javelyn Arvay. Each of these members use their financial and business backgrounds to oversee these capital expenditures. By law, the half-cent sales tax can only be spent on capital items and cannot be used for operating functions or personnel.

Q: What is the latest on the construction of the three new schools?

A: The furthest along is the Shearwater school (NN) where the power lines are being laid on the site. At the Beacon Lakes school (OO) site work is in progress after the contract was awarded in December. Finally, the bid for construction of the RiverTown school (PP) has been released and we anticipate awarding the contract in March.

Q: Do you have the winners of the county's Sunshine State Scholars?

A: This program recognizes Florida's top high school science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) students who plan to pursue their post-secondary education in Florida. This year's St. Johns County Sunshine State Scholars are Samay Soham Patel from Ponte Vedra High School and Hyde Kenney from St. Augustine High School, who will both be invited to attend the statewide event April 13 – 14, 2023. They will also receive the annual Elaine Crutchfield Math and Science Scholarship of \$250.

Q: What else do you have to share with District 4?

A: Three winners were recently awarded \$1,000 prizes in the Len Mattiace Foundation "Stop the Bullying" Contest. The winning entries were made by the WEB Leaders at Fruit Cove Middle School, the Dance Team at Mill Creek Academy, and Sydney Dickerson from Valley Ridge Academy.

Also, at the January School Board meeting, we recognized the Nease High School NJROTC as being awarded the most outstanding unit in the nation. They received a standing ovation for their hard work. Retired Captain Scott LaRochelle even came back for this ceremony.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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



Photo courtesy St. Johns County School District
School NN under construction.

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with St. Johns County Sheriff
Rob Hardwick

Q: Can you share some information about your office's Real Time Intelligence Center?

A: The Real Time Intelligence Center is housed at our new facility, the Emergency Communications and Training Center. We have a supervisor assigned to this unit, along with six criminal analysts, two sworn detectives and a tech support specialist, and they physically solve crimes from behind their keyboards.

Q: What types of technology do you use?

A: We use Fusus, a software aggregator that brings all the technology under one platform — such as Computer Aided Dispatch calls (CAD calls), our patrol cars, the FDOT traffic cameras, Waze for traffic, and license plate readers (LPRs).

Q: What can you tell us about Connect St. Johns?

A: Connect St. Johns (www.connect-stjohns.org) is a public safety program that enlists the help of residents and businesses to keep our communities safe. The website allows residents and businesses to register their home cameras so we know where they are located in the event of a crime. There is no direct access to privately owned cameras and we only use the registry to request footage if needed. Cameras may also be integrated using a special core device and written permission from the camera owner; in this way our authorized analysts would be able to tap into them real time to help solve a crime in progress. These programs are completely voluntary, but they provide another means of modern day electronic policing.



**with St. Johns County Property
Appraiser Eddie Creamer**

Q: Do you have an update on your December column, where you discussed the impact of storms Ian and Nicole on property owners' taxes?

A: Yes. When the State of Florida Legislature met for a special session in December, they approved a tax rebate for some property owners. If your home was damaged during Ian or Nicole and that damage prohibited the occupancy of the home for at least 30 days, you can apply for an abatement of your 2022 property taxes.

Q: How do affected homeowners go about getting this?

A: You have until April 3, 2023 to apply for the abatement. Your 2022 taxes must be paid current. To apply, you must fill out a form and provide evidence, such as an insurance claim or a contract and payments to contractors for repairs, that you were out of your home for at least 30 days. You should bring the form and your evidence to our office, or you could scan and email the documents to us, and we will review your claim. We have until June 1 to either approve or deny, but we will act on it very quickly once we receive it. If we approve, then we will for-

ward the information to the St. Johns County Tax Collector, who will rebate a pro rata share of the taxes paid while you were out of your home. If we deny your application, you can appeal to the Value Adjustment Board.

Q: Is there a maximum number of days that can be claimed?

A: If your home was damaged during Ian, you can apply for up to 95 days; if your home was damaged by Nicole, you can apply for up to 52 days.

Q: When can homeowners begin the application process?

A: Anytime between now and April 3. I'd recommend not waiting, because I have no authority to take an application after April 3. If there are any questions, homeowners can call our office and we will be happy to help.

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

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



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

Q: Can you describe your circuit's Operation Young Guns initiative?

A: We started this initiative in May of last year because we noticed that a lot of the violent gun crime, to include murder, attempted murder, armed robbery and drive-by shootings, was being done by young individuals between the ages of 12 and 25 years old. We decided to begin documenting these in our system so that we could appropriately and aggressively address and prosecute these cases, which have been dramatically increasing in number.

It's very disturbing because these kids are shooting and even killing each other over an issue as minimal as music preferences or "disrespect." So we said enough is enough and we began tracking these cases.

We suspected that some of these cases, including those where guns were fired but there was no victim, could be related. We started looking at social media and found that a lot of these individuals were glorifying gun violence with their posts. Via technology that compares shell casings, we have found that some guns reported as stolen were used in these crimes. As you know, we've had a rash of thefts from unlocked cars in the Northwest and Northeast areas of St. Johns County. Guns stolen in these areas have been used in crimes committed in other areas of the Seventh Circuit.

Q: Have you expanded the use of technology to identify firearms used in crimes?

A: A firearm will leave a "fingerprint" on the shell casing of a fired bullet. A semi-automatic firearm ejects shell casings and this process also leaves a unique mark. Previously, we have run these through a regional database, but have expanded to using a national database known as National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN). We've started using this technology even in non-murder cases where firearms have been used and are finding that casings at one crime site sometimes match another, so we can connect these crimes.

Q: Have you found success in prosecuting as a result of this initiative?

A: Yes. We have had three or four "Young Guns" trials in the past 60 days, all of which resulted in significant prison time. We are working closely with all the sheriffs in the circuit to ensure there is the most evidence available to prosecute.

Q: What would you say is the bottom line?

A: While crime is low in our circuit and we are fortunate to live in a low violence community, there are pockets of crime that we are focusing on because these can become a significant threat to all communities. We are making significant progress in cleaning up. Our duty is public safety and this is our number one priority.

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ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Business Briefs

Longtime hospital president retires; replacement named

Jarret Dreicer, FACHE, MHA, vice president of Operations for Baptist Beaches, assumed the role of hospital president as of Jan. 10, 2023. Joe Mitrick, FACHE, retired Jan. 9, 2023, after serving 28 years with Baptist Health.

Mitrick began his career at Baptist Health in 1995 and served as hospital president for Baptist Beaches for more than a decade. During his tenure, Baptist Beaches was named a World's Best Hospital by Newsweek, received a 5-star rating from the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services, received the Pinnacle of Excellence award for patient satisfaction from Press Ganey, and consistently received an A in patient safety from the Leapfrog Group.

In addition to serving as the leader of Baptist Beaches, Mitrick served as the president of Transitional Care for Baptist Health since 2011. In this role, he was the lead for ensuring that hospitalized patients requiring ongoing care or assistance with their day-to-day routines after discharge receive the support they need. He and his team have worked closely with many post-acute care providers to ensure excellent continuity of care.

"Joe's contributions to Baptist Health have been immeasurable, and his leadership has had a profound impact on the entire community. He has done a superb job of setting the stage for a smooth transition for Jarret to assume the role of hospital president of Baptist Beaches," said Matt Zuino, executive vice president and chief operating officer for Baptist Health.

Dreicer joined Baptist Health in 2005 as a research analyst and was named system-wide director of Operational Performance Improvement in 2013. Prior to his current position, he served as assistant administrator for Baptist Beaches as well as serving on the Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center leadership team for program implementation.

In November 2021, Dreicer moved to Baptist Beaches full time to work closely with Mitrick in preparation to assume the hospital president role. As vice president of operations, Dreicer has overseen the

Clinical Laboratory, Imaging, Cardiopulmonary Services, Rehabilitative Services, Wound Care and Hyperbaric Medicine, Environmental Services, Food Services, Plant Facilities, Security, Safety, Emergency Management and Construction.

"We couldn't have asked for a better choice than Jarret to continue a legacy of great leadership for the Beaches community," Zuino said. "Jarret brings a tremendous amount of passion and expertise to this vitally important and impactful role."

Dreicer earned a bachelor's degree in Marketing, a master's degree in Information Age Marketing from Bentley College in Waltham, MA, and a master's degree in Health Care Administration from the University of North Florida. He is deeply involved in the community, serving as a board member of the Beaches Division of the JAX Chamber, Baptist Home Health by Bayada, DLC Nurse & Learn and Jacksonville Country Day School. He was previous chair for Beaches Habitat for Humanity and the Baptist Health United Way campaign. Dreicer is a member of UNF's Health Administration Advisory Board and is a founding member of UNF's Health-care Administration department. In 2021, Dreicer received UNF's Distinguished Alumni Award. He is a graduate of Leadership Jacksonville Class of 2018 and was named to Jacksonville Business Journal's 40 under 40 list in 2017.

Executive leadership promotions announced

Flagler Health+ has announced the promotions of Angie Metcalf, who has been named the organization's Chief Administrative Officer, and Donna Wagner as Chief Nursing Officer.

Metcalf, who had previously served as executive vice president, chief human resources officer, has been promoted to executive vice president, Chief Administrative Officer. She will retain her previous responsibilities over the human resources and marketing communications function, in addition to responsibilities for the partnership integration.

Donna Wagner, who recently celebrated 10 years with Flagler Health+, has been named Vice President, Chief Nursing

Officer, a role she previously held on an interim basis. Wagner has an extensive nursing background including time spent as a nursing assistant, a bedside nurse in Med/Surg, ICCU, ICU, and open heart recovery, a nursing educator and adjunct professor, as well as experience in quality and patient experience.

Hospital named as a 2023 Best Place to Work in Information Technology

Baptist Health in Northeast Florida was among only eight health systems in the nation, and the only health system based in Florida, to be ranked as a 2023 Best Employer in Information Technology.

Computerworld publisher Foundry surveyed large (more than 5,000 employees), midsize (1,001 to 4,999 employees), and small (1,000 or fewer employees) organizations to discover the top employers for its 29th annual "Best Places to Work in IT" report. While in past years the survey has been offered only to U.S.-based companies, this year, organizations across the globe participated. Public and private companies in all industries were welcome to participate.

Baptist Health was recognized on two levels, ranking 11th overall among all large

companies, and also ranking among the following Computerworld Top 10 lists for 2023:

#2 in IT growth: Demonstrating leadership in growing the IT ranks

#3 in diversity: Demonstrating excellence in advancing workforce DEI

#4 in employee engagement: Fostering deeper connections and employee well-being

#9 in career development: Investing in IT employees to help them grow their skills and careers

These annual lists were compiled based on a 52-question comprehensive survey about company offerings including: diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practices; turnover, promotions and growth; retention and engagement programs; remote/hybrid working; benefits and perks; training and career development opportunities. The surveys were then scored and thoroughly vetted by a panel of industry experts. Responses to the company survey were collected and tabulated by a third-party research vendor and then vetted by a panel of industry experts.

Did you know?

Supporting small businesses ensures more money stays in the communities those businesses serve. The U.S. Small Business Administration says \$48 out of every \$100 spent at a small business stays in the community. On the flip side, when a person spends \$100 at a big-box store or a national chain, only \$14 remains in the community. Local businesses are more likely to utilize other local businesses, such as banks, service providers and even farms. Small businesses also pay employees, many of whom are local and shop local, thereby keeping even more dollars in their communities.

Are you interested in promoting your business in St. Johns Business Monthly, a feature section included in both The CreekLine and Ponte Vedra NewsLine?

ST. JOHNS Business Monthly



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St Johns County resident since 1993

Briefs

Palm Valley West Boat Ramp temporarily closed for improvements

St. Johns County has temporarily closed the Palm Valley West Boat Ramp for improvements until April 10, 2023.

Key improvements include:

- New concrete boat ramp
- New fixed wooden dock
- New floating dock with aluminum gangway
- New sidewalk
- Improvements to parking area and maneuvering area
- Improved kayak launch area

The Palm Valley West Boat Ramp is located on the west side of the Intracoastal Waterway underneath the Palm Valley Bridge.

St. Johns County announces new District 3 Commissioner and Interim Fire Chief

Gov. Ron DeSantis has appointed Roy Alaimo to represent District 3 on the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners. Alaimo fills the seat left vacant by the untimely passing of Commissioner Paul Waldron, 53, in October 2022. District 3 covers the southeastern portion of the county. Alaimo is a former District Representative for the U.S. House of Representatives and previously served as the chair of the St. Johns County Planning and Zoning Agency. He is also the owner of Alaimo Strategies, a St. Augustine-based consulting firm.

“I am honored and humbled to be appointed by Gov. DeSantis to serve on the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners,” said Alaimo. “I am excited for the opportunity, and I look forward to serving the community.”

Alaimo took the ceremonial oath of office during the Jan. 17, 2023, meeting. He will serve on the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners until the 2024 election.

The St. Johns County Fire Rescue Department has announced Raymond Scott Bullard as the new interim fire rescue chief. Interim Fire Rescue Chief Bullard’s appointment comes after the retirement of Chief Jeffrey Prevatt, who served St. Johns County for more than 40 years. Bullard is a 21-year St. Johns County Fire Rescue veteran who has served the department in various operational ranks, including firefighter, engineer, lieutenant, captain, and battalion chief.

“Serving the people of St. Johns County has been one of the greatest honors of my life. I’m looking forward to continuing that service as the Interim Fire Rescue Chief and leading the best fire department in Florida and the nation,” he said.

Interim Fire Rescue Chief Bullard was selected as the 2013 Fire Rescue Paramedic of the Year and has been instrumental in developing several department initiatives, such as the Firefighter Development Program and the Live Fire Instructor Training Program.

St. Johns County Administration will continue the process of selecting a permanent fire rescue chief. Once a selection has been made, it will be announced to the public.

Ponte Vedra Woman’s Club announces annual charities

The Ponte Vedra Woman’s Club will host its February General Meeting at Marsh Landing Country Club from 12 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. on Feb. 15, 2023. Speakers will be the UF Health Jacksonville’s Chief of Cardiology Dr. Dominick Angiolillo, and Women’s Heart Program Director Gladys Velarde, who will discuss how to care for your heart in Women’s Health.

The Ponte Vedra Woman’s Club is a charitable organization that raises money for five distinctive charities yearly

by holding social events in the beaches community. Women from all of the beaches in the area are welcome to join. For 2023, the Ponte Vedra Woman’s Club is raising money for its signature charity, the Florida School of the Deaf and Blind, and others are Betty Griffin Center (victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault), Hugs Across the County (impoverished children), Port in the Storm (homeless youth center), and BEAM (Beaches Emergency Assistance Ministry).

Women who want to help in charity work and enjoy friendship with others with similar interests may attend one of the group’s meetings; register for a meeting at www.pontevedrawomansclub.com/eventregistrations.php.

Friends of the GTM Reserve announces Color My Estuary calendar contest

The Friends of the GTM Reserve announced the “Color My Estuary” calendar contest for students in grades K-12. Eligible students must live in one of six counties: Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns.

“A lot of students enjoy hiking, biking and exploring the estuary,” said Ellen Leroy-Reed, executive director of the Friends of the GTM Reserve. “We are looking for bright-colored artwork showing a world that is enjoyed outdoors in the estuary, including a few words about what the estuary means to them.”

The contest opened on Jan. 16, 2023, with entries due by April 4, 2023. Thirteen artwork submissions will be selected for the Friends of the GTM Reserve’s 2024 calendar. Artwork will be chosen for the cover and 12 pieces of artwork for each month of the year.

The entry form and the rules are available on the Friends website (www.gtm-nerr.org), at the GTM Research Reserve

Visitor Center in Ponte Vedra Beach and at the GTM Marineland office.

Contact the Friends at (904) 380-8600 or email GTM_Friends@GTMNERR.org for more information.

President of Visit Jacksonville to speak at Coastal Friends luncheon

Michael Corrigan, president and CEO of Visit Jacksonville will be the guest speaker at the next Coastal Friends (formerly Newcomers Alumnae) monthly luncheon on Wednesday, Feb. 1, 2023 from 11 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. at Marsh Landing Country Club. Corrigan will speak on “Why Visit Jacksonville.” Visit Jacksonville’s mission is to grow awareness of Jacksonville and the surrounding beaches as a top leisure and business destination. His talk should be both entertaining and informative, as Jacksonville hosts more than 20 million visitors annually.

Marsh Landing Country Club, located at 25655 Marsh Landing Pkwy., will be serving a field green salad, herb-roasted sliced Bistro steak over mashed potatoes, broccoli and a delicious carrot cake. Open to the community, the cost to attend this luncheon is \$25. Reservations must be made in advance by contacting bartshar@comcast.net as soon as possible.

Coastal Friends is a social group of women who live in Ponte Vedra Beach, Nocatee, Jacksonville, Jacksonville Beach, Neptune Beach, Atlantic Beach, St. Augustine and the surrounding area. Formed in 1988, some of the activities offered are adventures and outings, book club, bunco, canasta, happy hour, lunch in, lunch out, Mah Jongg and wine socials. Luncheons are held the first Wednesday of every month except for July and August. New members are welcome throughout the year. For more information on how to join, contact brookemeister@msn.com or visit coastalfriends.wildapricot.org.



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Get to Know ...

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
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Bonnie Evans

Bonnie Evans discovered her love of traveling back when she was the wife of a naval officer, living in Jacksonville, Texas, California, and Iceland over a 10 year period. During her three years in Iceland, Evans was able to take “R&R” trips to Spain, England and Scotland. Evans got divorced in her 20s, but she continued to take as many trips as she could with her two sons throughout her 30s. Employed with Bank of America and living in Atlanta, Evans met her second husband, Joe, of 44 years there. He passed away in 2015 from two incurable blood cancers. She credits travel with prolonging his life, spending his last seven years on adventures all around the world. Now 77 and living in Nocatee, Evans continues to travel and learn about new cultures, food and perspectives. Her most recent trip took her on a 71-day Holland America “Grand Africa Voyage Zaandam” cruise that circumnavigated the African continent. Evans had visited Africa once before, falling in love with the wild animals and the people. It was the longest cruise that Evans had ever been on, and, while she would never likely cruise for that long again, she returned with some extraordinary memories, a suitcase full of souvenirs and absolutely no regrets.

Q: What were the highlights of your cruise?

A: The wild animals and going on photo safaris. We did three different ones on this cruise (Tanzania, South Africa, and Senegal). At one watering hole, we had a male lion and a female lion literally within a few feet of



Photo courtesy Bonnie Evans
Bonnie Evans at Al Mustafa Mosque in Sharm El-Sheikh
on the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.

the front of the vehicle nonchalantly walk across and stroll over to a pride of lions, a whole family. This was considered their spring, so there were a lot of babies. We saw baby hippos, baby elephants and baby wildebeest. It was just an incredible feeling, and that is what makes me keep going back.

Q: What was the most challenging part of the cruise?

A: One of the hardest things to grasp emotionally was the amount of poverty. We have no idea of what real poverty is unless you see it overseas. We have nothing like that in my opinion in the United States. No run-

ning water, no heat, no electricity, no sewage. It was very difficult for most of us to see how bad it was. We all tipped generously to anybody who assisted us in any way and gave away extra clothing that we had.

Q: You mentioned that you have hosted many people in your home over the years. What has that experience been like for you?

A: I have hosted adults since 2009 through Friendship Force International, which exists in 59 countries. I have hosted people from all over the world and was awarded the George Brown Medal in 2007 for the goodwill I promoted with people from other countries. I have hosted people from Egypt, The Republic of Georgia, Ukraine, Russia, Costa Rica, Japan, Australia and Chile. I have also visited a lot of these places to visit people as a result of hosting.

Q: What are some of your other hobbies?

A: I am a board member with Newcomers of the Beaches where we have 247 members. This is for anyone who has moved here in the last three years whether it is a move from another state or just moving from another area of town. It is a social club to find your new best friend. I am also a part of the Ponte Vedra Women's Club, BEAM and the Democratic Club.

Q: What is your next adventure?

A: I will head to Maui in February, which is where I feel closest to Joe. In March, I will fly to Auckland, New Zealand (a bucket list destination) and spend seven days exploring with two friends who live there. I will then do another Holland America cruise for 14 days to New Zealand and Australia. I will disembark in Sydney and stay with another friend where we will complete another two of my bucket list items: attend the opera “Madame Butterfly” at the Sydney Opera House and take an overnight snorkeling boat tour on the Great Barrier Reef and sleep under the stars.

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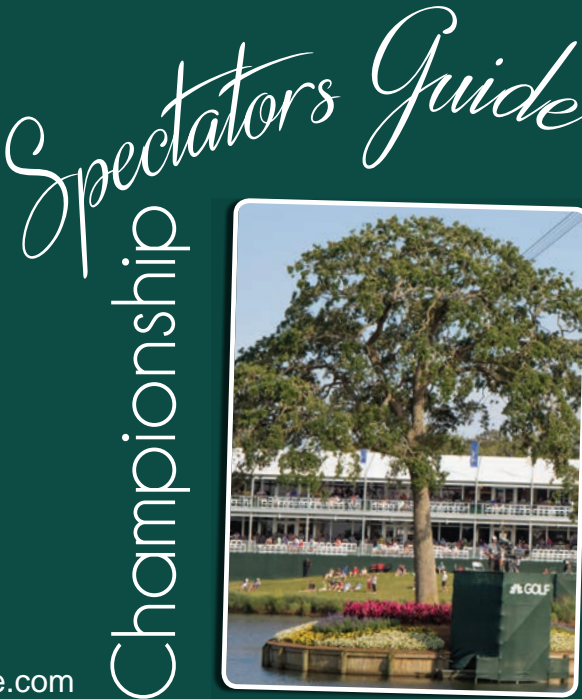
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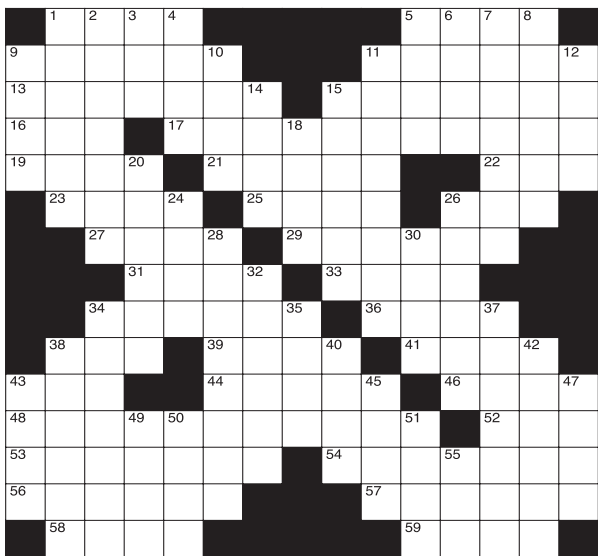
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Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

1. Sea grape
5. European public health group (abbr.)
9. A way to delight
11. Appetizers
13. Ancient heralds' wands
15. Make a booking
16. '___ death do us part
17. Pearl Jam frontman
19. Spider genus
21. Fill with high spirits
22. A major division of geological time
23. Catch
25. An independent ruler or chieftain
26. Electronic music style (abbr.)
27. Influential Spanish cubist painter
29. Illegally persuades
31. A way to derive
33. British School
34. Appear alongside
36. Surely (archaic)
38. Harsh cry of a crow
39. A day in the middle
41. Kansas hoops coach Bill
43. The longest division of geological time
44. The first sign of the zodiac
46. Appetizer
48. Link together in a chain
52. A bacterium
53. In a way, forces apart
54. Cheese dish
56. Combines
57. In an inferior way
58. Colors clothes
59. Dried-up

CLUES DOWN

1. Gastropods
2. Confusing
3. Romanian monetary unit
4. The rate at which something proceeds
5. A prosperous state of well-being
6. Asked for forgiveness
7. Makes less soft
8. Part of speech
9. Outside
10. Advice or counsel
11. Badness
12. Protein-rich liquids
14. Not moving
15. Call it a career
18. Poetry term
20. Not wide
24. Pastries
26. Turns away
28. Satisfies
30. Gift adornments
32. San Diego ballplayers
34. Manufacturing plant
35. Check or guide
37. Dogs do it
38. Chilled
40. Scorch
42. Unproductive of success
43. Electronic counter-countermeasures
45. Attack with a knife
47. Feel bad for
49. Enclosure
50. Assert
51. Geological times
55. Midway between east and southeast

VISION CHECK WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

ABERROMETER
ALLERGY
ANISOCORIA
ASTIGMATISM
BENIGN
BIFOCAL
BLEPHARITIS
BRIDGE
CATARACT
CHAMBER
COATING
CONE
CORNEA
DIOPTER
DISORDER
GLAUCOMA
LENS
MACULA
OPTICAL
REDNESS
REFRACTIVE
RETINA
SWELLING
TEARS



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

- A. 10 17 18 2 17 16 23 22**
Clue: Flapjacks
- B. 23 19 19 22**
Clue: From chickens
- C. 22 17 20 22 17 19 23**
Clue: Pork product
- D. 7 14 17 22 7**
Clue: Heated bread

Gravestone cleaning at Julington Creek Cemetery



Photo courtesy Viky Divertie

Members of the Ponte Vedra Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) cleaned 16 gravestones at Julatington Creek Cemetery recently. The project was part of the organization's mission to support historical preservation. During the past year DAR has supported historical preservation and education about history by cleaning gravestones, donating Revolutionary War Coloring Books to Ponte Vedra Palm Valley School, and supporting the national American History Essay Contest. DAR is a non-political genealogical women's service organization whose purpose is to promote historic preservation, education, and patriotism. The Ponte Vedra Chapter was founded in 1951 and membership is open to any woman who can trace her heritage to a Revolutionary War patriot. Visit DAR.com or contact regent.darpontevedra@gmail.com for more information.

Q&A with Sheriff Hardwick cont. from pg. 5

Q: How does your office use license plate readers (LPRs)?

A: This technology was actually developed in the 1970s in England and has been used by other states for years. The Florida Department of Transportation uses LPRs to collect tolls. In St. Johns County we've only utilized it since 2018.

I'd like to dispel some rumors about LPRs. The facts are that we only use LPR technology for public safety and criminal offenses. We do not issue any tickets or citations using LPRs. All data we receive from the LPRs, which we strategically place to protect the community such as around schools

and near large events, is owned by SJSO and we do not sell it to anyone. The LPR only taps the rear of the vehicle, not the occupant inside or any personal information. Our office is audited quarterly to make sure that any data is only accessed by our Real Time Intelligence Center.

Q: Have the LPRs been successful in helping you solve crimes?

A: Yes. Since the inception of using LPRs here, we have recovered 398 stolen vehicles and 97 pieces of stolen property, arrested 170 individuals with active warrants for their arrest, and apprehended 478 individuals charged with a

crime. We've also recovered 72 missing individuals. A double traffic homicide on Race Track Road in 2019 was solved when the driver who hit two bicyclists fled to his residence and hid the vehicle in the garage. Six hours later, we had a search warrant and were able to bring closure to the case.

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

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By Scott A. Grant
mail@floridanewsline.com

PopHistory

The day a pig ran for president

From flappers to hippies to the angry TikTokers of today, youth culture has always tried to redefine society in its own image. It turns out that changing the social order is harder than it sounds. Change happens slowly and never at the pace that youth demands.

On Aug. 24, 1967, Abbie Hoffman and other disgruntled youth invaded the New York Stock Exchange. They came in through the visitor's entrance and headed toward the visitor's gallery overlooking the floor of the Exchange. They planned an act of "Guerrilla Theater" to protest capitalism and the Vietnam War.

Most of the group was dressed conservatively and entered without issue. Hoffman looked like a hippie and was stopped by a guard who told him protests were not allowed. Abbie accused the guard of being antisemitic and snuck past with the rest of the crowd. Once inside, the protestors proceeded to rain dollar bills from the open gallery down onto the trading floor below.

Initially, traders cheered and scrambled to pick up the dollars. Then, as the reality of what was happening became clear, cheers turned to boos and

demands the protestors leave. Word of the event spread fast, and the protestors were greeted by a swarm of media as they exited. Hoffman delighted the reporters by burning a five-dollar bill symbolizing his rejection of capitalism. Two months later, the stock exchange put up a bulletproof glass barrier around the visitor's gallery.

Three months later, Hoffman and his gang were at it again. They assembled in Washington to exorcise the Pentagon. As part of the exorcism, they announced they would levitate the Pentagon 300 feet into the air. For most it was just theater, but some of the leaders believed they could actually do it. Fifty thousand hippies surrounded the building shouting "Out Demons, Out!" Paratroopers were called in to provide protection. In what became an iconic photo, protestors placed flowers in the barrels of their guns.

By the following summer, Hoffman had joined forces with Jerry Rubin and Tom Hayden, who would later marry Jane Fonda. Together the pair founded the Youth International Party or "Yippies." In August 1968, they arrived outside the Democratic National Convention in Chicago with

a pig they named Pigasus, a play on the word Pegasus. They demanded the pig be treated as a legitimate candidate, afforded Secret Service protection, and foreign policy briefings. The police arrived and arrested the pig and the leaders, just as Hoffman was reading his acceptance speech.

Hoffman, Rubin, and others were released after paying a \$25 fine. Two days later, the Yippies gathered at Chicago's Lincoln Park. The anti-war protest turned violent. Mayor Daly sent in police with billy clubs and riot gear to disperse the angry youths. A day later the violence spilled over into Grant Park. The National Guard was called in to restore law and order. Blood flowed. The leaders were arrested and tried for conspiracy to cross state lines to incite a riot. The trial of the Chicago Seven garnered national headlines. Eventually, each of the defendants was sentenced to five years in prison.

Scott A. Grant is a local historian and author. He hopes to use history to show that the things that unite us are greater than the things that divide us. By day he is the Chief Investment Officer at Standfast Asset Management and may be contacted at scottg@standfastic.com

Snow Day celebrated



Photo courtesy Bolles
Bolles Lower School Ponte Vedra Beach Campus students enjoyed a "Snow Day" on Jan. 6, during the school's annual WinterFest. The campus was transformed into a winter wonderland with patches of real snow for students to build snowmen and make snowballs as they played with their peers.

ElderSource Looking for Caring Connections volunteers

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Duval County resident Carla Furr says she believes in the importance of giving back to her community. It's something that was instilled in her by her mother who believed in the power of good deeds and helping others. After retiring from the computer industry, Furr has spent her time volunteering in different organizations, but found something special with the ElderSource Caring Connections Telephone Reassurance program.

ElderSource's Caring Connections program is an initiative that provides a friendly phone call from a volunteer

to an older adult who is living alone, homebound, or wants to receive a friendly call. The program helps to eliminate or reduce some of the concerns homebound older adults face such as isolation, loneliness, depression, and anxiety.



Photo courtesy ElderSource
Carla Furr

"The calls are not a permanent fix for

their loneliness, but it puts that in the background for a while and brightens their day. I can tell for a little while they've been lifted out of their loneliness," Furr said.

The cornerstone of volunteering with Caring Connections is being willing to establish a friendly, caring relationship with older adults over the phone. Volunteers must also have great listening skills, be willing to make a commitment to call a senior at least once a week for a minimum of six months and pass a background check. Orientation and free training sessions are provided.

Now going on her third year with Caring Connections, Furr calls on two different women once a week. The chats with the women vary, but for her it usually is

about a two hour a week commitment. The Caring Connections program is looking for more volunteers. There are currently more than two dozen older adults on the waiting list hoping to connect with a new friend.

An ElderSource staff member learns from each volunteer how many older adults they would like to be matched with and makes introductory calls. Seniors who receive the calls are 65 or older and reside in Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, St. Johns or Volusia County. People interested in becoming an ElderSource Caring Connections volunteer can call (904) 391-6631 or send an email to Volunteers@MyElderSource.org.



Jenna (Umlauf) Withington passed away unexpectedly on Dec. 30, 2022. She was born on Oct. 4, 1989 in Farmington Hills, Michigan and grew up in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. She graduated from Nease High School and attended Santa Fe College in Gainesville. Jenna was kind, compassionate and generous and was a loving mother to her adored daughter, Blake. She will be greatly missed by those fortunate enough to have known her and her family is deeply saddened by her sudden passing. Jenna is survived by her loving family, J.K. and Blake Withington; her parents, John and Charron Umlauf; sisters and brothers-in-law, Lindsey and David Stahl, Courtney and Chris Beatty; nieces and nephews, Madison, Jacob, Carter, Brooks and Kyler; grandmother, NoraLee Bolduc and many aunts, uncles and cousins. She was predeceased by her beloved grandparents, Roy Bolduc and Tom and Gwen Umlauf. A celebration of her life is being planned and will be scheduled at a later date.



PVHS hosts cont. from pg. 1
were No. 1: Freedom High School (2022 State Championship team), with 213 points earned, nearly double the next team behind them. Coming in second was Osceola High School with 108 points, followed by Ponte Vedra just seven points behind second place, with 101 points earned. Ponte Vedra's top placers at the tournament were Erin Rizzuto, Olivia Richie, Natalia Choquegonza, Sophia Mallon, and Josie Sagasser.

Girls wrestling is the fastest growing high school sport in the country.



Photo courtesy Jessica Berge
The Ponte Vedra High School girls' wrestling team.

Greenheart Exchange cont. from pg. 1
In addition to finding a host family, Greenheart Exchange also must find a school to accept the student. Currently, Greenheart Exchange students are enrolled at Beachside High, Fleming Island High, Matanzas High, and several Jacksonville charter schools.

Cox said prospective host families need only have "a willingness to open their hearts and home" to an exchange student. The basic requirements for host families are to provide a bed, three meals, local transportation, and a welcoming family atmosphere.

"A host family could be a single parent, someone who is retired, an empty nester, or a big family," said Cox.

The first step is to fill out an application where families can express their interests and indicate a country preference, she said. From there, a background check

will be conducted, and references will be checked with the goal of finding a safe and loving environment for the student. In addition, Cox checks in with both the student and family throughout the school year to make sure everything is going smoothly.

"Once you have the experience, it just opens your heart and makes you want to keep doing it," said Cox. "It is very exciting for the student and the family to make these memories."

For Cox, the experience makes the world seem a little smaller and gives her the opportunity to witness the excitement of someone trying new things.

For example, one student got to ride a go-kart for the first time, another really wanted to try Cheetos and another really loved having a Dr. Pepper soda, s'mores, and sweet potato fries.

Cox said that bonding also takes place with the parents of the student, often becoming an extension of the family with a lifelong connection.

Also, important to note, said Cox, is that the exchange student will have their own health insurance and a regular monthly amount of money to cover outside expenses such as school sports, uniforms and trips.

"You are not expected to be a tour guide. There are lots of free and affordable things to do in Florida," she said. "Most of these students are quite worldly with a great sense of independence and self-sufficiency in many ways."

[Author's note: Greenheart Exchange is currently accepting host family applications for the 2023 – 24 school year. For more information, call Cox at (904) 588-2338 or go to www.hostwithgreenheart.org.]

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Photo courtesy Bonnie Evans

Newcomers celebrate holidays, look forward to New Year

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

The New Year has Newcomers of the Beaches members excited about all the activities and events that are scheduled. New activities suggested by members adds new zest to the wide range of experiences available.

The Newcomers of the Beaches festive annual Holiday Party was held in early December at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club. The party started with a champagne toast before lunch for a great year and appreciation for all who volunteer their time and skills to benefit everyone in the club. Each member was given a handcrafted holiday favor, holiday-themed games were played and a delicious meal was served. New members were introduced and welcomed.

On Jan. 11, an informal luncheon was

held at Pussers in Ponte Vedra Beach, which gave members and guests the opportunity to mingle with Newcomer friends after the busy holiday season.

On Feb. 8 the monthly luncheon will have a Valentine's Day theme at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. The cost for the luncheon is \$33.50 and includes a complimentary glass of wine. The guest speaker will be Stephanie Vogt, Community Relations Manager K9s for Warriors. There will be prizes and gifts. Guests are welcome to attend to find out if the club is right for them.

Newcomers of the Beaches is a social organization with varied activities so one can find their new best friend. Visit www.newcomersofthebeaches.com to make a reservation for the luncheon or apply for membership.

Nutrition Check

Foods that boost your mood

By Kristen Hicks-Roof PhD, RD
and Rayonna Hills BS

The month of February is known as the month of love by many. For some, this means receiving and giving love to a spouse or friend, but this can also mean giving love to yourself. It may be hard to believe, but there has been scientific evidence that reveals eating specific foods can have a positive impact on your mood. This is possible due to food being able to promote dopamine and serotonin. (Cleveland Clinic)

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter in your brain that plays a role as a “reward center” in:

- motivation
- movement
- attention
- memory, and more.

Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that plays a key role in body functions such as:

- mood
- sleep
- happiness
- influencing learning

Foods that we consume daily can unlock your body's natural happiness. Some complex carbs that are important for stabilizing your mood include brown rice, beans, whole grain pasta, oats, and legumes.

Another great source of food that is packed with healthy fats and protein that contribute to healthy brain function and protect against depression are eggs. Other sources include whole grains, red meat, dairy, bananas, green vegetables, and beetroot.

Omega-3 fats are also important for brain function and the communication of dopamine and serotonin. These foods include oily fish such as sardines, salmon, trout, mackerel, and pilchards. Seafood like the fish mentioned above provides zinc to the body, which also is suggested to reduce anger and depression.

When dopamine and serotonin levels are low, you may experience a depressed mood, lack of motivation, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating. (Mayo Clinic) There are many food options that are shown to promote dopamine and serotonin and send positive vibes to the brain. Next time you're in the mood for a mood booster, give one of these foods a try.

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



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Travel

Walk Van Gogh's final days in France

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewslines.com

Unless you are a devoted fan of Vincent Van Gogh, you probably haven't heard of Auvers-Sur-Oise. The village, located in Normandy, France, near Vernon, rests about an hour's train ride from Paris. The picturesque spot inspired many Impressionist Masters: Van Gogh, Camille Pissarro, and Paul Cézanne. They all variously lived and worked in Auvers-Sur-Oise.

My Viking Seine River and Normandy Cruise included an excursion to the small town. Being curious, I signed on. Now, I am so thankful I took the opportunity to visit this town and learn about its history.

Auvers is where Vincent Van Gogh lived the last two months of his life in 1890. The area gave him such a source of creativity that he completed 80 paintings in 70 days.

When my group arrived, I spotted City Hall, called Hotel in Ville in France. The building looked like someone decorated it for Bastille Day with red, white, and blue French flags. As I gazed around, the entire village seemed frozen in time, a 19th-century time capsule.

A guide met my group and began to lead us along. Before strolling down residential cobblestone streets, we passed a few cutesy shops and restaurants. Then, we came upon shuttered homes with lace curtains hanging in the windows and flower boxes in bloom outside.

We traveled along a discreetly marked Van Gogh Trail and stopped at the Eglise Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption,



Eglise Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption.

the church Van Gogh famously painted. The interior seemed somewhat drab, but it held a copy of the well-known painting. I loved comparing the Gothic, 13th-century building to the artwork. In a letter to his sister, Van Gogh described the church saying, "the building appears to be violet-



Ivy-covered graves of Vincent Van Gogh and his brother Theo.



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Beautiful village of Auvers.

hued against a sky of simple deep blue color, pure cobalt; the stained-glass windows appear as ultramarine blotches, the roof is violet and partly orange. In the foreground, some green plants in bloom, and sand with the pink flow of sunshine in it."

As the tour left the graveyard, we noted the fields that inspired another Van Gogh masterpiece: The Wheatfield and Crows.

We proceeded on to Auberge Ravoux, the artist's final home. Only two or three people at a time could enter his tiny, dingy, rented attic bedroom. It was barely large enough to fit a small cot and seemed filled with an aura of sadness. Hard to think of such a colorful artist living in cramped and drab quarters.

The Viking tour group continued up a hill to the town cemetery, where we found the ivy-covered graves of Vincent and his brother Theo. Mystery surrounds Vincent's death, but the prevailing thought is suicide since he suffered from mental problems. He was supposed to be under a doctor's care. History says he shot himself in the fields and made it back to his room in the auberge (a French inn that provides meals). His brother was called and came from Paris. Vincent died soon afterward. Theo wanted to organize a funeral in the church at Auvers, but the priest refused as Vincent was protestant and committed suicide.

The tour at Auberge Ravoux also included an excellent video/slideshow of his art from the region. After seeing the area, I found it easy to imagine the scenes through the artist's eyes.

The way Vincent died doesn't truly matter; what matters is that the world lost the creative genius who gave us "Starry Night" and "Sunflowers." Vincent was only 37 years old. RIP.

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



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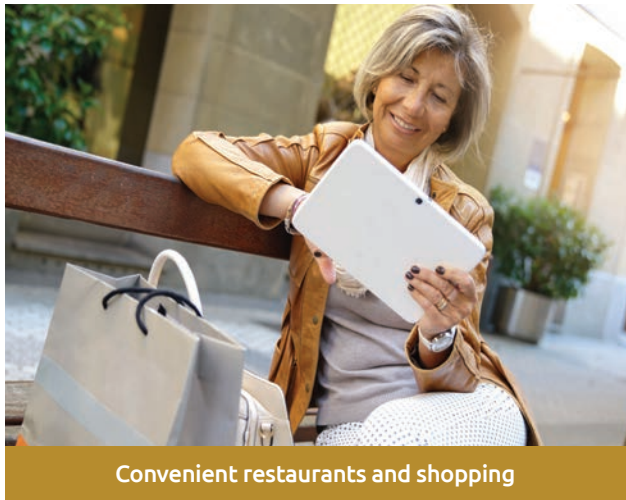
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