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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Breed:
GoldenDoodle
Favorite Activity:
Going to the dog park and wrestling with other canine friends
Favorite treat:
Whatever treat her master has in his hand
Favorite friends:
Nancy and Bob O'Donnell who trained her lovingly during COVID
How did your best friend get his name:
Since we are senior citizens and didn't want to forget her name, our last three dogs have been named "Katie."

Meet Katie!



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.

Don't miss our April issue featuring our Summer Camp and Activities Guide!

Deadline 3/17/23



Happy St. Patrick's Day!

from your friends at
Ponte Vedra NewsLine



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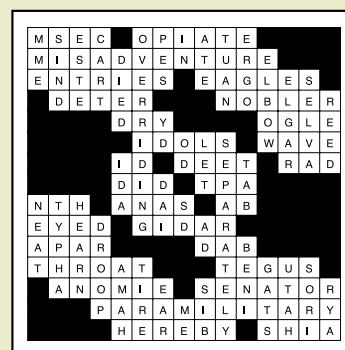
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MYSTERY PHOTO



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

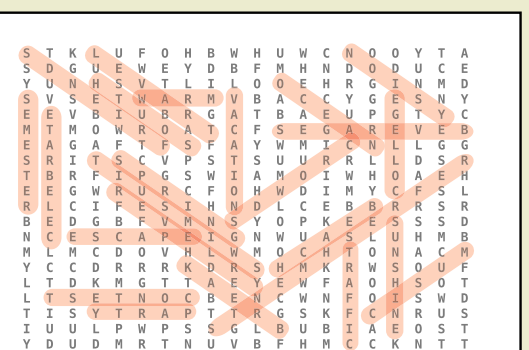
Last month's Mystery Photo was the Seaside neighborhood entrance off A1A.



Answers
Puzzles
PG 10



A. blooms B. flower C. warm D. rain



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(At Murabella)
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wwwbu.com/staugustine

March

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 will host its monthly luncheon on March 1 at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Pkwy. in Ponte Vedra Beach from 11 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Coastal Friends' members Donna Berger, Barbara Busby, Bonnie Chandler, Debra Dooney, Lynn Medis, Helen Perry, Nancy Scott and Jeanne Stevens will model Chico's clothing in a fashion show. 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 March 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: The Northeast Florida Chapter of Sisters in Crime will meet on March 4 at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library, 101 Library Blvd. (FOL Room). Nancy Ulrich-Suddath, founder of Ulrich Research Services which has conducted hundreds of mock juries, will share tips that will enhance your descriptive text and your enjoyment of reading intriguing court case dialogue. The meeting starts at 12:15 p.m. Bring your coffee and bring a friend. Visit www.nefloridasistersincrime.org for more information.

7th: Vicar's Landing March Boutique Sale will be held on Tuesday, March 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 Beverly Webb at (904) 315-2610 or Rose Murdock at (904) 891-1777 for more information.

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, March 7. Contact Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for more information and to register.

10th: Food Truck Friday will be held on March 10 and March 31 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, March 13 at 12 p.m. at St. Augustine Waterworks building, 184 San Marco Ave. in St. Augustine. The featured speaker will be St. Johns County Commissioner Sarah Arnold. Email info@sjcroundtable.org to register for the meeting or visit www.sjcroundtable.org for more information.

16th: Monthly Birthday Bash at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, Ponte Vedra Beach. Enjoy birthday cake and the music of Gary Coulette as March birthdays are celebrated on Thursday, March 16 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 March 15, from 5:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. at Sawgrass Village Shopping Center, 215 Tourside Dr., Suite 1750. Members will visit and thank area retailers for fundraising for local charities and enjoy refreshments while they shop. Retailers will donate a percentage of their sales to the club's annual charities and give patrons a discount. Those who want to have dinner will then walk over to Trasca & Company Eatery, 155 Tourside Dr #1500. Registration is on the Ponte Vedra Woman's Club website under Events at www.pontevedrawomanclub.com/eventregistrations.php.

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

21st: The Speaker Series sponsored by The Friends of the Library, Ponte Vedra Beach presents a Local Author Symposium featuring seven authors who will present their books and talk about their lives as an author on March 21 from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. at Crosswater Hall, 245 Nocatee Center Way. The seven authors are Vic DiGenti, Sohrab Homi Fracis, Ed Mickolaus, Nancy Quatrano, Elisabeth Randall, Kate Stollenwerck, and Eleanor Tremayne. Books will be available for purchase and the program is free and open to the public.

21st: The Friends of the Ponte Vedra Beach Library presents Now is the Time, an evening of jazz, blues, and funk, on March 21 at the Ponte Vedra Beach Public Library.

Doors open at 6 p.m. and the concert begins at 6:30 p.m. Featured musicians are Earnie Ealum on bass, Matt Johns on guitar/saxophone/vocals, Mike Spottswood on piano and Rick Kirkland on drums.

25th: The Ponte Vedra Writers Group will meet on Saturday, March 25 at 11 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Award-winning author and educator Janice Hardy will present a workshop entitled "Creating Stronger Conflicts in Your Story." The meeting is free and open to members and non-members alike. Visit www.floridawriters.org for more information.

28th: Ponte Vedra Democratic Club will meet on Tuesday, March 28 at 5:30 p.m. for Chat & Chew before the 6 p.m. meeting at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. The program will feature a panel with Bill Lazar, CEO of St. Johns Housing Partnership and others in the affordable housing industry who will discuss the status of affordable housing in St. Johns County. Email jkary@verizon.net for more information.

30th: "Living Wills and Guardianships" will be presented by St. Johns County Legal Aid's Megan Wall, Managing Attorney, on Thursday, March 30 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.

30th: The Savvy Job Hunters Ministry Workshop will host "Re-Emerging Post COVID: Tips and Tools for Success," presented by Coach J. Dianne Tribble, CPMCT, At the Table Certified Professional Health & Wellness, Business & Life Master Coach on March 30 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.



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

Q: Do you have any legislative updates?

A: It's legislative time again and the top priority the school district had on our legislative agenda for this year is to increase veteran teacher pay. The governor has done a wonderful job of increasing teacher pay, but our veteran teacher pay has held steady. We have amazing teachers in St. Johns County and they are the foundation of our students' and district's success. If you'd like to see our district's legislative platform, it's available on our website or by following this link: <https://tinyurl.com/4zw6scaz>

Q: Are there any upcoming events you'd like to share?

A: The third annual BRAVE Summit 2023 is scheduled for Wednesday, March 29. This event is for high school students only and they will be awarded four community service hours for attending. The BRAVE Summit aims to open a dialogue with teens to address the stigma associated with mental health and encourage teens to learn how to foster mental wellness for themselves and their peers. It will be held from 3 p.m. – 7 p.m. at the St. Augustine Amphitheatre. There will be giveaways, games, vendors, food trucks and photo booths. There will also be a workshop for parents/caregivers and guardians of all ages on Wednesday, March 29 at the Elks Lodge, 1420 A1A South in St. Augustine from 4:30 p.m. – 7 p.m.

Q: Do you have any kudos to share?

A: In District 4, the following

students placed in the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Poster and Essay contest: Cole Shapiro, 10th grade Ponte Vedra High School, first place in the high school division (poster); Dhruva Gadiparthi, seventh grade Landrum Middle School, second place in the middle school division (essay); Andrew Liu, 12th grade PVHS, first place in the high school division (essay); Kendall Owen, 12th grade PVHS, second place (essay); and Maresa Kanekkeberg, 12th grade PVHS, third place (essay).

Also, congratulations to the following District 4 students received awards at the secondary STEM Fair:

From Ponte Vedra High School: Sarah Wicker, Soejo, Iulia Berianu, Yun Han Shen, Ella McCarthy, Mary Kate Reynolds, Kathryn Shapiro.

From Nease High School: Lauren Pease.

From Landrum Middle School: Irene Park, Vennela Doppalapudi, Nat Bagnall, Jackson Miller, Vai Miller, Caroline Van Essendelft, Rylee West.

From Pine Island Academy: Nicolas Vazquez.

From Valley Ridge Academy: Mason Dunn, Ishaan Rao, Evangeline Viorritto.

Additionally, Nat Bagnall has been invited to the state competition.

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.



with St. Johns County Commissioner
Krista Joseph District 4

Q: How are the first few months of your term as a county commissioner going?

A: I think very well. I'm comfortable at the Board of County Commissioner meetings. I'm trying to be honest and listen to my constituents and represent their thoughts and views. I'm getting used to the rhythm of having problems directed to me by constituents and helping to solve them with my team. I prefer this word to "staff" because we really are a team. I think most people in St. Johns County have no idea how hard the county employees work. I get calls from constituents daily and I'm pleased that we are able to get things accomplished for them.

Q: What are some ideas of things you'd like to see implemented?

A: I'm in the early stages of working on this one, but I'd like to get the idea out there. I think litter is a huge issue in our county. Everywhere I go, I see it. Fortunately there are citizens who pick up litter regularly, but this can't go on forever and I think we need to address the root of the issue. When I was growing up, there were anti-litter campaigns

and I think that would be a great place to start now.

The reason for a campaign is to draw the entire community together with the same message and rally around keeping our area beautiful.

The idea I am mulling over is to engage with the academy students in the Marketing Academy at Ponte Vedra High School. I think it would be cool to see what they come up with in terms of a marketing campaign that addresses marketing anti-litter ideas to kids, to adults, and to construction workers. This would be a real-world project that could provide real-world experience. We'd also have to plan how to distribute materials for the campaign. Maybe we could get sponsors?

I'm interested in any and all ideas about this issue. I invite people to reach out to me if they have any.

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

A: Readers can email me at bcc4kjo-seph@sjcfl.us or call me at (904) 679-2620.



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

Q. What is the role of the Office of the Inspector General?

A: The Office of the Inspector General, under the supervision of the St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller, performs internal audits, provides oversight of legal guardianships, investigates public integrity complaints, and conducts fraud, waste, and abuse investigations of County operations and financial records.

Q. Does the Inspector General have any areas of focus for upcoming audits?

A: The Inspector General has roughly 20 audits scheduled for Fiscal Year

2023. The list of audits includes examining credit card fees countywide, auditing the Clerk's office and county's cash collection procedures, and protecting driver and vehicle information from unauthorized access. To access the Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Audit Plan, visit www.stjohnsclerk.com.

Q. What is the best way for people to get in touch with you?

A: Residents can call my office at (904) 819-3601 or my cell at (904) 599-8688. My email address is BPatty@stjohnsclerk.com. A lot of questions can be answered by visiting our website, www.stjohnsclerk.com, which is most commonly used to pay traffic citations or search court records.



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Guest Column

Elections Office off to a busy start in 2023

By St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes

St. Johns County residents may be noticing an influx of information regarding upcoming elections in Jacksonville, which are taking place on March 21 and May 16. It’s important to note that these elections are exclusive to Duval County registered voters and St. Johns County does not have any upcoming elections in 2023.

To kick off 2023, we began the exciting, much anticipated return of our Voter Education Program to St. Johns County high schools in January. To date, we have visited four high schools, and have had a wonderful experience. We plan on visiting every high school by the end of this school year. In addition, voter outreach continues to be an important part of the mission of the Supervisor of Elections, so plan to see our team out in the community this year, and please say hello when you do.

The 2023 Florida Supervisor of Elections Scholarship is being offered to eligible college students through March 10. The \$1,200 scholarship will be awarded to four eligible full-time students enrolled in a senior college or university in Florida, and who are majoring in Political Science, Public Administration, Business Administration, or Journalism/Mass Communication. For more information on eligibility requirements and how to apply, visit www.votesjc.gov.

Has your signature changed? At the

Supervisor of Elections Office, voter signatures are very important verification tools we use to check vote-by-mail ballots, petitions, and other election-relation documents. We know it’s common for personal signatures to change over the years and we recommend that voters update the signature on file with our office frequently. To update your signature, visit our office at 4455 Avenue A, #101, St. Augustine, or visit our website at www.votesjc.gov to print a Florida Voter Registration Application, fill it out, and mail it in.

The legislative session in Tallahassee begins March 7 and will end on May 5. We anticipate changes in our current election law and will monitor the session closely to see what is accomplished. We can expect some changes stemming from 2022’s Senate Bill 524, which discussed the creation of the Office of Election Crimes and Security, increased penalties for election law violations, revised the procedures for list maintenance, and changed the name of the “drop box” to “Secure Ballot Intake Station.”

We anticipate changes in the areas of vote-by-mail and our election auditing procedures. We will be watching and working with our state legislators regarding any approved election bills. We hope they will look to us for guidance as elections administrators are the experts. Elections are partisan; however, Election Administration is not.



with St. Johns County Tax Collector Dennis Hollingsworth

Q: When are property taxes due and how can they be paid?

A: Property tax payments are payable Nov. 1 through March 31 and will become delinquent April 1. Payments can be made in person, mailed in, paid online or placed in our drop box. Payments that are mailed in must be postmarked on or before March 31, 2023. There is a 2.5 percent credit/debit card convenience fee or a \$1 echeck fee if paid online.

Q: Can property taxes be paid in installments?

A: Section 197.222, FL Statutes allows a taxpayer to prepay property taxes by an installment payment method. Payments are made on a quarterly basis and based upon an estimated tax equal to the actual taxes levied on the property in the prior year. Your taxes must be more than \$100 to qualify.

The first installment is due June 30, the second installment is due Sept. 30,

the third installment is due Dec. 31, and the fourth and final installment is due March 31.

Installment applications must be received prior to May 1 of the year in which the taxpayer elects to prepay taxes in installments. If the first installment payment is not made, the account is removed from the installment plan and you will receive a tax notice on or around the first of November for the entire amount due.

If you have any questions, or to apply for the installment plan, visit www.sjctax.us or email taxcollector@sjctax.us

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

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

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Rep. Cyndi Stevenson files golf cart legislation

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

On Feb. 20, Rep. Cyndi Stevenson filed House Bill 949 to improve the safe operation of golf carts and other utility vehicles.

Golf carts are increasingly used off the golf course and are often viewed as a safe mode of transportation; however, experience and research show that they can cause significant injuries, particularly to children. Children are more vulnerable to serious golf cart related injuries, specifically, to the head and neck.

HB 949 would apply to drivers of golf carts and utility vehicles only when they are operating on public roads. The bill:

- Increases the minimum age of drivers from 14 to 16.
- Requires a learner's permit or higher

level of licensure.

"The passage of this bill will reduce accidents and serious injuries," said Stevenson. "I am grateful to St. Johns County Sheriff Robert Hardwick who brought this important issue to my attention."

St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick said, "The safety and security of our citizens and visitors is our No. 1 priority at the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office. This legislation will help to ensure those utilizing golf carts are better equipped to operate them. I am thankful Rep. Stevenson has agreed to lead the charge on this effort and I look forward to working with her on getting this bill passed."

For more information on this bill, as well as other bills filed during the 2023 Session, visit myfloridahouse.gov or contact the office of Representative Stevenson at (904) 823-2300.



with St. Johns County Property Appraiser
Eddie Creamer

Q: Can you shed some light on the rental of residential properties?

A: First of all, the Property Appraiser's Office has no jurisdiction over the rental of residential properties, either short term or long term. Those regulations come from the county, cities, homeowners associations, or CDD rules.

The only way we become involved is if a property is homesteaded. Specifically, if a homeowner rents his property, it might be subject to losing its homestead exemption.

Q: Can homesteaded properties be rented at all?

A: Yes, per statute, a homeowner may rent his homesteaded property for up to 30 days per year for no more than two consecutive tax years or he can rent up to six months in one tax year. Within these guidelines, a homeowner may keep his homestead exemption.

Our office actively monitors and investigates homesteaded properties that are rented. We use a

number of different sources to accomplish this.

Q: Have your investigations turned up any homesteaded properties that are not adhering to the statutes?

A: Yes, in my term here of the last six years, we've liened 452 properties for a total of \$2.8 million. Interestingly, of these 452 liens, 417 have paid the liens for a total of \$2.13 million.

Q: What if the property is not homesteaded?

A: The Property Appraiser's Office has no authority to look at it at all in this case. It all comes back to local ordinances. We have no jurisdiction over noise levels or trash at rental properties as this is handled by code enforcement.

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.

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Briefs

St. Johns County launches Recycle Coach app

Recycle Coach is live. St. Johns County teamed up with Recycle Coach to help educate residents on proper recycling. By downloading the Recycle Coach app or visiting recyclestjohns.com, residents can get their curbside collection schedule, sign up for alerts, and quickly learn how to dispose of different waste materials properly.

The Recycle Coach app also has image recognition software that can quickly identify if an item is recyclable.

Download the Recycle Coach app on the Apple App Store or Google Play.

TPC Sawgrass welcomes new executive chef Matt Voskuil

TPC Sawgrass, home of THE PLAYERS Championship, has welcomed its new executive chef, Matt Voskuil. With nearly three decades of experience, Voskuil will be responsible for managing the culinary operations for the entire property.

“We are thrilled to welcome Chef Voskuil to TPC Sawgrass,” said Kent James, vice president of food and beverage, PGA TOUR Golf Course Properties. “His experience, coupled with his passion for the industry, will be a major asset to the club and property. We look forward to seeing his fresh take come to life and watching him further enhance our elevated experience.”

A native of Wisconsin, Voskuil joins TPC Sawgrass most recently from the Ocean House in Rhode Island where he served as the Group Executive Chef since 2019. His prior experience includes leading culinary teams at The Chanler at Cliff Walk, The Venetian Resort, Aria Las Vegas, Bellagio, as well as being a part of the opening team for Joël Robuchon at the Mansion in MGM Grand, the first and only three-Michelin

Star restaurant in Las Vegas. “With a personal passion for golf and the culinary industry, I couldn’t think of a more ideal opportunity to lead the exceptional team at TPC Sawgrass,” said Voskuil. “We will strive to ensure our dining options are as remarkable as the stunning golf courses by crafting unique, memorable dishes for all facets of our club – from NINETEEN to THE PLAYERS Championship and all the events we host throughout the year.”



Photo courtesy TPC Sawgrass
New executive chef Matt Voskuil

Newcomers of North St. Johns announces Bingo and book drive luncheon

Newcomers of North St. Johns will host its monthly luncheon meeting on Tuesday, March 21, beginning at 11 a.m. at Al Dente’s Ristorante Italiano, 90 Shops Blvd. Doors open at 10:30 a.m. The event will feature games of Bingo and great prizes.

As part of this special luncheon event, members are encouraged to bring a children’s book as a donation to the St. Johns County Public Library System.

“Last year, we were able to collect more than 40 books to give to the Main Library in St. Augustine and also generated \$300 in cash donations,” said Pat Lett, co-president of Newcomers of North Saint Johns. “We were thrilled to be able to collect such a wonderful variety of children’s books. Because of

our members’ generosity, kids in our area will be able to keep up their reading skills during the summer and beyond.”

Following lunch, attendees will play three games of Bingo with the opportunity to win prizes. As always, raffles for gift baskets and a fun 50/50 drawing spice up the luncheon.

The cost for the luncheon and program is \$30 for members and \$35 for guests. All reservations must be received by March 13. Visit <https://newcomersof-northstjohns.org> for more information about the luncheon and membership.

The Newcomers of North St. Johns offers a wide variety of activities including smaller lunch groups, Bunco, Canasta, wine socials, golf, Mah Jongg, holiday parties, day trips and cultural events.

AAUW offers four scholarships

AAUW St Augustine Branch is offering three scholarships this year honoring Jean Luoma, Diane Boyce and Alice Bosselman for their years of dedicated service to St. Augustine and AAUW. Local college and university students who are residents of St. Johns County and have sophomore status in fall 2023 are eligible. Two scholarships are \$2,000 each and the third one is \$1,500.

The fourth scholarship is a nursing scholarship in honor of Lisa R. Braser, a compassionate nurse who passed away in 2021, offered by her parents Carol and Michael Rothfeld. Carol Rothfeld is a member of AAUW St. Augustine Branch. The awardee will receive \$1,000 per year throughout her nursing program until the achievement of an Associate of Arts Registered Nurse (AARN) or Bachelor of Science Nursing (BSN) degree. Upon graduation and entrance into the workforce, the awardee receives an additional \$500.

The scholarship criteria and application

can be found at the following website: <https://staugustine-fl.aauw.net/scholarship/>

Deadline for receipt of the completed application to the scholarship committee is March 30, 2023. Information about AAUW St. Augustine is available at staugustine-fl.aauw.net, aauw.org, and on Facebook, AAUW St. Augustine.

Coastal Friends’ March luncheon to feature fashion show

Chico’s fashions and accessories will be modeled at the Coastal Friends March luncheon on Wednesday, March 1, 2023 at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Parkway, 11 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. This year’s fashion show theme is “Coastal Friends Sail Into Spring In Style.”

Coastal Friends’ members Donna Berger, Barbara Busby, Bonnie Chandler, Debra Dooney, Lynn Medis, Helen Perry, Nancy Scott and Jeanne Stevens will model Chico’s clothing. Linda Fazio, Chico’s manager, will moderate the event.

Open to the community, members and guests of Coastal Friends, the cost to attend this luncheon is \$25. Reservations must be made in advance to reserve a seat by contacting the luncheon chairman at bartshar@comcast.net as soon as possible.

Coastal Friends (formerly known as Newcomers Alumnae) 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 and canasta lessons, happy hour, lunch in, lunch out, Mah Jongg, and wine socials.

Briefs cont. on pg. 11



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Get to Know ...

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Riette Gouws

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Artist Riette Gouws grew up in a very small town in South Africa with one school, one post office, one church and ranch families who made it a point to take care of each other. It was not uncommon in Herold to just pop in unannounced and sit for a cup of tea. "It is probably the smallest town that you will ever encounter. I loved living there," said Gouws. After grade school, Gouws attended Oudtshoorn High School, then the University of the Orange Free State, earning a Bachelor of Science degree with dual majors in computer science and applied math. After graduation, she went backpacking in Europe for a year. That trip shifted her perspective and prepared her for one day moving to the United States on her own at the age of 26. After accepting a job with an insurance company in South Africa as a computer programmer, a position came up in Chicago and Gouws said yes, sight unseen. It was meant to be a one year commitment, but it grew into much more over the next 20 years. Gouws ended up moving to New Jersey for a new job with CyberShift, working as a project manager implementing large IT systems for 16 years. At CyberShift, Gouws met her husband Warren Gouws, who is ironically also from South Africa. In 2002, Riette Gouws went back to South Africa on sabbatical



Photo courtesy Riette Gouws

for a year to complete her MBA from the University of Stellenbosch Business School. Riette and Warren married in 2004 and have one son, Jason, 16. The family moved to Ponte Vedra Beach in 2015, looking for warmer weather. Gouws stopped working to raise Jason and soon found herself drawn to yoga, becoming a certified instructor with a special focus on meditation. In this mindset, she next decided to start painting. She took an oil painting class in 2017 at the First Coast Cultural Center, feeling intimidated at first. She then tried an abstract painting class. "I loved it, and that kind of sparked it," she said. She has been painting, mostly Florida landscapes, ever since and plans to remain a student of the field forever. She had her first exhibition last year at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library and has an upcoming exhibit at the First Coast

Cultural Center in November for winning its Juried Artist Member Exhibit (JAME).

Q: You attended two art courses in England, one at West Dean College of Arts and Conservation in London and one at the Newlyn School of Art in Cornwall. What did you enjoy the most about these opportunities?

A: It is nice to have a community of artists. I like having that group of people that I know. You are not strangers for long because you have art in common. As an artist, you do a lot of your work on your own. I like the community aspect of the classes.

Q: When you are painting, how do you feel?

A: It makes me feel happy and at peace — it is definitely meditative. And it keeps me curious to keep learning and growing and challenging myself. It feels like it is exactly what I should be doing.

Q: What caused you to become certified in yoga and meditation?

A: I think it was because in business I was most of the time working with men. It was a very logical place for a long time. I think when I became a mom, I realized that there are a lot of softer things that I have really not paid attention to. When I had that wonderful feeling of being in meditation in Shavasana at the end of class, I thought, "Oh my gosh, I am breathing, and it feels so good."

Q: Describe your part-time job with Brit Rose.

A: It is a boutique in Highland Park, Dallas. All their proceeds go toward their Brit Rose Foundation, which is a registered not-for-profit in honor of the owner's daughter, Brittany Rose. The foundation advocates for mental health and anti-bullying. I do their website and online store, plus some social media, graphic design and email marketing.

Q: What is your life philosophy?

A: I like to challenge myself in things. I always have a little something that I want to either overcome or a new skill that I would like to learn. Maybe it is cliché, but I believe in being authentic. I feel that is the biggest place of freedom to be exactly who you are. There is no need for pretending.

[Author's note: Riette Gouws' opening night at the First Coast Cultural Center will be on Nov. 3.]

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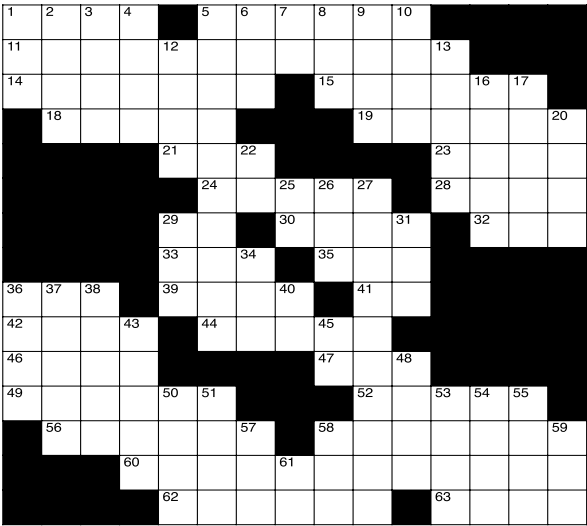
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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Millisecond
- 5. Narcotic drug
- 11. Accident
- 14. Formal submissions
- 15. Popular 70s rock band
- 18. Discourage from doing
- 19. More socially elite
- 21. Arid
- 23. A way to look
- 24. Heroes
- 28. A surfer rides it
- 29. Potato state
- 30. Insect repellent
- 32. Cool!
- 33. Have already done
- 35. Collegiate women's fraternity
- 36. To the ___ degree
- 39. Gasteyer and de Armas are two
- 41. Blood type
- 42. Looked over
- 44. Language of Cameroon and Chad
- 46. Species of armadillo
- 47. Touch softly
- 49. Part of your upper body
- 52. Large, stocky lizards
- 56. Lack of social or ethical standards
- 58. Congressman
- 60. Unofficial force
- 62. As a result of this utterance
- 63. A main branch of Islam

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Woman (French)
- 2. Province of Pakistan
- 3. This (Spanish)
- 4. Transportation device
- 5. Greater in importance or priority
- 6. The human foot
- 7. Within
- 8. Consumed
- 9. Respectful Malaysian term
- 10. Therefore
- 12. Ceased to exist
- 13. Type of macaroni
- 16. English composer
- 17. Wooded tract
- 20. Tall, slender-leaved plant
- 22. 36 inches
- 25. Take too much (abbr.)
- 26. Allow
- 27. Individually
- 29. Journalist Tarbell
- 31. Bar bill
- 34. Hong Kong food stall: ___ pai dong
- 36. Not messy
- 37. Species that includes reedmare
- 38. Former MLB catcher Ed
- 40. Northern U.S. state
- 43. Wilt
- 45. Commercial
- 48. Bolivian river
- 50. Nursemaid
- 51. A car needs four
- 53. Guns (slang)
- 54. American state
- 55. Clusters of fern fronds
- 57. Body part
- 58. A person's brother or sister
- 59. Breed of sheep native to Sweden
- 61. Of I

SPRING BREAK WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

- BEACH
- BEVERAGES
- BREAK
- CELEBRATE
- COLLEGE
- CONTEST
- CROWDS
- ESCAPE
- FRIENDS
- MUSIC
- NOISY
- OCEAN
- PARTY
- REFRESHMENTS
- REVELRY
- SEMESTER
- SOUTH
- SPRING
- SUNSHINE
- SWIMSUIT
- TRAFFIC
- TRAVEL
- VACATION
- WARM



Solve the code to discover words related to spring.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 9 = O)

- A. 23 8 9 9 4 14
Clue: Flowers
- B. 24 8 9 1 25 5
Clue: Petaled part of plant
- C. 1 2 5 4
Clue: Pleasant temperature
- D. 5 2 21 13
Clue: Precipitation

Bit of Faith cont. from pg. 1
ing a moms' night out as well as a moms' retreat. It is a place without judgment where moms can share similar struggles, offer advice and lift each other up, she said.

For the recreation component, the ranch also organizes movie outings, waterpark visits and a horse show where participants become "equestrians" — an official athletic title that some riders may not have experienced having before, said McGowan.

Over the past three years, Bit of Faith Ranch has had 60 volunteers, logging in 2,500 volunteer hours, McGowan said. Volunteers are essential as six volunteers are needed per session. Participants will usually spend 15 minutes riding and 15 minutes grooming the horse during

each session with some families returning for multiple seasons.

"It is a very organic approach. Once someone rides with us, they are a part of the community," said McGowan.

Volunteer Taylor Lumpkin, 14, has been helping at the ranch since 2020.

"I love Bit of Faith Ranch because I enjoy seeing the kids' faces light up whenever they arrive," said Lumpkin.

[Author's note: To learn more about Bit of Faith Ranch or to make a donation, go to www.bitoffaithranch.org. McGowan said the ranch is looking for a corporate sponsor and is always in need of volunteers.]

Rotary Heroes cont. from pg. 1
both agencies, fellow co-workers, and the 2021 Rotary Heroes attended the celebration.

Lieutenant Mike Pepper is the 2022 Rotary Hero Firefighter of the Year. Pepper represents St. Johns County Fire Rescue Station No. 18 in Nocatee. He was nominated to lieutenant within five years of being with the department, and now has a 20-year career under his belt. Pepper is a father of four (as well as a future grandfather) and enjoys mentoring the next leaders in the department. Captain Shawn Vitori, who nominated Pepper for the award, said, "Lieutenant Pepper puts absolutely 100 percent into everything that he does, and does so to the highest standard."

Senior Deputy Nate Datsko is the 2022 Rotary Hero Deputy of the Year.

Datsko represents the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office (SJSO) Delta Northeast sector. He's been with the SJSO since 2000 and is a 29-year veteran of law enforcement. Datsko is the father of six children, and works as a traffic homicide investigator as well as a DUI enforcement deputy with the Traffic Unit. Nominating Sergeant Scott Yeoman said, "Senior Deputy Nate Datsko has always gone above and beyond the call of duty. He has a genuine passion for protecting our citizens."

The Rotary Heroes awards honor first responders who display excellence in their profession, high ethical standards and demonstrate the Rotary motto of "Service Above Self."

Visit www.pontevedrarotary.com for more information about the Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra.

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Briefs cont. from pg. 8

Luncheons are held on the first Wednesday of every month except for July and August. New members are welcome throughout the year. Contact brookmeister@msn.com or visit coastalfriends.wildapricot.org for more information on how to join.

Housing market warms up for buyers and sellers

It may only be March, but when it comes to buying and selling homes in Northeast Florida, it seems that spring is already here.


“The weather is warming up and so is the market,” said Northeast Florida Association of REALTORS® 2023 President Diana Galavis, noting that it seems like the spring selling season has already landed in Northeast Florida. Active inventory gradually rose in January 2.6 percent to 5,011 units in the six-county region, and the month's supply of homes has risen 57.5 percent since December 2022. This demonstrates a further stabilization of the housing market, which is something both buyers and sellers can cheer about.

At 76, Northeast Florida's Home Affordability Index reflected a 4.1 percent increase in January from December's mark of 73, and a considerable improvement from 2022's low of 67 in October. The Housing Affordability Index measures housing affordability for the region — whether a typical family earns enough to qualify for a mortgage on a typical home, based on cur-

rent interest rates, median income, and median home prices. A higher number means greater affordability. An index value of 100 means that the average family has exactly enough income to qualify for a mortgage.

In January, the median sales price of single-family homes in Northeast Florida was \$360,000, a mild 2.7 percent drop from the previous month. Pending sales in January rose 29 percent to 1,698, while new listings jumped 34 percent to 2,650. The median number of days on the market in January was 55, a 14.6 percent leap from the prior month. Meanwhile, closed sales dropped to 1,074, which is a 34.9 percent decrease from December 2022.

In St. Johns County, January 2023 median prices fell slightly by 2.7 percent to a median price of \$526,500 for single-family homes. The median days on the market were 49, a 25.8 percent drop from the month before. Month-to-month, closed sales plummeted 38.5 percent to 259, pending sales climbed 32.2 percent to 390, and new listings shot up 42 percent to 612. Active inventory rose to 1,240 homes, an increase of 4.1 percent from December 2022, and 4.8-month supply. The affordability index inched up 4 percent to 52, demonstrating that St. Johns County became just slightly more affordable as it continues to remain the most expensive area to live in the region.



PopHistory

By Scott A. Grant
mail@floridanewslines.com

9300 Luftballons

Anyone who has ever flown to the west coast and then back knows that the trip home is shorter than the trip out. That is because of the jet stream. The jet stream is caused by the Earth's rotation and blows fairly consistently from west to east at a height of four to eight miles. The “river of air” can push an object, like a balloon, at speeds from 100 to 275 miles per hour.

The Chinese government recently took advantage of this to launch a spy balloon that passed over the United States from west to east riding the jet stream. Because the Chinese balloon flew at extremely high altitude, it traveled somewhat more slowly than a balloon would at lower altitude. This was not the first time that a foreign power has used the slower moving, high altitude jet stream, against the United States.

In 1944 and 1945, the Japanese launched 9300 “weather balloons,” each carrying an explosive charge. The concept was developed at the Noborito Laboratory, also known as the Imperial Japanese Army's Number 9 Research Lab. They called the bombs Fu-Go. Japanese scientists discovered the jet stream in 1927 and they attempted to use that knowledge against an enemy.

The Fu-Go were modified weather balloons fitted with incendiary and anti-per-

sonnel weapons. The idea was that they would float across the Pacific and then crash in the Pacific Northwest when they ran out of fuel to stay aloft. The Japanese hoped they would start fires, kill, and spread terror. Most of the bombs crashed harmlessly in the Pacific Ocean.

The trip across the ocean took three days, a distance of almost 5,000 miles. Only about 300 made it all the way. Those that did were the first intercontinental weapons used during warfare. A few exploded in Montana. One landed in Mexico. Some fell on Oregon and Washington, but did not start fires because the forests were too wet.

The US government knew about the weapons, but decided to keep that information a secret to avoid panicking the public. In May 1945, a group of Sunday School children stumbled upon a balloon bomb while on a picnic near Bly, Oregon. When they investigated their discovery, it exploded. Five children and the pregnant wife of the minister were all killed instantly. They were the first and only victims of the Japanese terror weapon.

Scott A. Grant is a local historian and author. He writes about things he finds interesting and welcomes your comments at scottg@standfastic.com.

DAR American History Essay Contest winners named

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

The Ponte Vedra Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) named the winners of this year’s American History Essay Contest at its February meeting held in Ponte Vedra Beach on Feb. 7. Each winner was presented with a certificate and \$50.

Students from grades five through eight were challenged to learn and write about the Second Continental Congress, which was instrumental in the founding of the United States. They were to imagine they were a delegate representing their colony, and to explain what they needed to accomplish for their colony and for the future of our country. One essay from each grade was selected as the outstanding essay by the Ponte Vedra Chapter DAR and forwarded to the Florida State Society DAR for state level competition.

Zack Hanburry, fifth grader from PVPV Rawlings Elementary School wrote as a delegate from North Carolina. From Landrum Middle School, Liam Puzey, sixth grade, represented Rhode Island; Kate Hurford, seventh grade, represented Pennsylvania, and Ella Spencer-Gardner, eighth grade, wrote her essay on behalf of the colony of Virginia. The students read their essays to the Ponte Vedra Chapter DAR members, guests,

families, teachers and principals at the meeting.

The National Society DAR selects the topic each year and the program is open to all students in fifth through eighth grade, from all public, private, parochial and home schools. All essays must be received by a local chapter before being forwarded for state consideration. Ponte Vedra Chapter received 288 essays this year. Florida has 112 active chapters.

If your student or school would like to learn more about the American History Essay Program, contact the Chapter Regent at regent.darpontevedra@gmail.com for additional information.

The DAR is a non-political lineage service organization whose purpose is to promote historic preservation, education and patriotism. The Ponte Vedra Chapter is active in the community supporting numerous projects. Ponte Vedra Chapter has a monthly social and a book club. The social is the third Tuesday each month at Pussers in Ponte Vedra Beach at 5:30 p.m. and everyone is welcome.

Visit DAR.org or contact the Ponte Vedra Chapter Regent at regent.darpontevedra@gmail.com for more information about DAR and the Ponte Vedra Chapter.



Photo courtesy Ponte Vedra Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution
Erika Carpenter, Lisa LaMonica, Principal PVPV Rawlings Dr. Jesse Gates, Regent Phyllis Baehrend, American History Chair Brandy Hibbard, Principal Landrum Middle School Guy Harris, Greg Arcuri, Zack Hanburry, Liam Puzey, Kate Hurford, Ella Spencer-Gardner, and Natalie Gavarrette.



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Success and safety of swim lessons using flotation devices

By Linda Bolger
mail@floridanewslines.com

Flotation Aided Swim Training is the newest program available in the United States to teach non-swimmers of all ages how to be comfortable and confident in the water by using United States Coast Guard-approved Type III life jackets. This is adaptable to all ages and abilities, and is approved and accredited by the Florida Department of Health.

Life jackets for young and old non-swimmers make sense. There are zero statistics related to drowning when a lifejacket is utilized properly. Additionally, you should always supervise your child within an arm’s length for safety.

Forced submersion is often used in swim lessons, but it has been known to traumatize both the young and the old, sometimes leading to drowning incidents both fatal and non-fatal. Both the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) state “make US Coast Guard life jackets and direct supervision by a responsible adult a must” for non-swimmers. Implement-

ing a lifejacket during lessons is just as essential.

Here are some things to consider when evaluating a potential swim program:

- 1) What water safety measures are utilized?
- 2) What is the student-to-teacher ratio?
- 3) How much instructional time does your child receive during each lesson?
- 4) How many students are participating in the swim lesson?
- 5) Are CDC and AAP water safety guidelines being enforced?
- 6) Search online for Florida Department of Health Swim Instructors Advisory Counsel to ensure the program is listed as approved. Liability is greatly increased should a non-listed program proceed with giving lessons.

Linda Bolger is the founder of the FAST Swim Program. Email jen@fastswim-program.com for more information.



Photos courtesy Jen Matthew
All ages can benefit from using flotation devices during swim lessons.

Ocean Palms hosts fundraising toss up!

By Lisa Farese
mail@floridanewslines.com

On Jan. 29, more than 20 teams lined up their boards and prepared to take home first prize as they tossed their way to success in the school’s first cornhole tournament. Families, friends and staff from Ocean Palms Elementary joined in for some competitive afternoon fun, all the while contributing to the school’s fundrais-

ing endeavors.

The event raised just under \$1,000 to support the school’s Sunshine State reading program. With first place earning a popcorn or popsicle party for their class, followed by second prize with 30 minutes of extra recess, and third prize, which gave the winner the opportunity to dress as the otter mascot for carline, it was a true toss off.



Photos courtesy Lisa Farese
The winners of Ocean Palms Elementary's first fundraising cornhole tournament.

The local scene



Here are some sights along A1A from Vilano to Ponte Vedra, to provide local appreciation of our surroundings — through the lens of local photographer Joseph Borkson

Young professional engineers give back to their alma mater

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.com

Determined to help solve what he calls a “workforce problem” in the engineering industry, Drew Kenyon, along with Creekside High School teacher Kevin Davenport and Dylan Scanlon, came up with the idea to train high school students to use the computer drafting program AutoDesk Civil 3D and to learn more about the civil engineering industry. Kenyon, a Creekside High School graduate who went on to earn a bachelor’s in civil engineering at the University of Florida, said that a big part of what he does in his professional engineering job is construction drawings using AutoCAD.

“I felt high schoolers could learn to do some of this work,” he said. “This helps engineers have time for higher level tasks and the added benefit for the student is that being a certified CAD technician can be a good career.”

Listening to a podcast about a similar initiative that had been structured as a foundation in Mississippi gave Kenyon the idea to replicate the non profit set up locally — and the Florida Civil Educators Foundation was born in 2022. The foundation’s mission is to provide hands-on training, mentorship and internships to high school civil engineering and construction students.

“We are trying to be a part of the solution by taking an interesting approach to this workforce problem,” Kenyon said.

Presently, Kenyon and Scanlon join Davenport, who is a professional engineer and their former teacher at the Creekside Engineering Academy, one morning a week before school starts to train academy students on basic Auto-Cad that can be applied to any business.

“We want to be in all schools,” Scanlon, also a Creekside High School graduate, said. “Anywhere we can reach out to the local community so that local engineer-

ing firms can have a pipeline of potential students to work and intern.”

Kenyon and Scanlon said that Pedro Menendez High School is currently upgrading its computers to accommodate the required software and that they will begin delivering their curriculum at that school in addition to Creekside in the fall.

Kenyon said that their plan is not just to teach concepts, but also provide real world working opportunities.

“This training isn’t just in a vacuum,” he said. “The best scenario is to get students placed in engineering firms, so we advocate for paid internships as well.”

Davenport recognizes the contribution of his former students to his profession.

“These young professionals in our community are giving back to the St. Johns County schools that educated them,” he said. “They are trying to help the students as well as their engineering companies.”

Davenport said there is a big need in the engineering industry for people to work — and not just as engineers.

“From a teacher’s perspective, it’s important when students leave high school that they have a skill,” Davenport said. “Not everyone goes to college; it’s just not for everyone. To have this hands-on vocational skill has been missing from school systems for the last several years.”

Davenport said he wants to bring the industry into the classroom and to that end, he welcomes representatives from various local engineering firms to make presentations regarding their firms to his students.

The Florida Civil Educators Foundation is actively seeking individuals and engineering firms with a desire to support the next generation’s workforce. Visit www.fcefn.com or email Andrew.Kenyon@fcefn.com for more information.



35 Creekside Engineering Academy juniors meet with volunteer mentors one day a week before school.

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Nutrition Check

National Nutrition Month

By Kristen Hicks-Roof PhD, RD and Rayonna Hills BS
mail@floridanewsline.com

March is National Nutrition Month, which is when it is important to focus attention on the importance of making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits. As part of this month's celebration, a goal is to increase the awareness of RDNs as the indispensable providers for food and nutrition services and recognize their commitment to helping people lead happy, healthier lives. In light of this month being about celebrating nutrition and

working towards improved eating habits, I thought we could go over a couple of inclusive, supportive eating habits.

1. Develop a mindful eating pattern: Mindful eating is an approach that focuses on an individual's sensual awareness of the food and their experience of the food. Ways this can be achieved is:

- Pay attention to food you eat to include balance, moderation, and variety
 - Eat slowly to enjoy the food's taste and flavors
 - Listen to your body's signals of fullness and hunger
- 2. Enjoy food traditions and social experiences:**
- Be creative when eating, try a new dish or cuisine to explore different taste and textures
 - Be open to cultural traditions while eating

- Pair eating with socialization with friends, family, or others

3. Appreciate foods' flavors:

- Savor each bite of your food
- Eat slowly, one bite at a time
- Try new flavors and experiment with diverse spices and seasonings

This month, step out of your comfort zone and try something new when it comes to how you eat and what you eat. The tips listed above are just a few ways that you can incorporate new ideas into your food culture. If you are ever unsure or would like to know more ways to improve your diet, do not hesitate to consult a registered dietitian nutritionist (RD/RDN). Visit www.eatright.org/find-a-nutrition-expert to find a nutrition expert.

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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The Pantry Raiders

Get into the Irish spirit

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

St. Patrick's Day began as an opportunity to honor St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, who was credited with bringing Christianity to this island nation. Through the years, St. Patrick's Day has transformed into a celebration of Irish culture as well as a day for fun and fanfare — and no celebration would be complete without delicious food.

Although corned beef may not be the most authentic representation of Irish cuisine, it certainly has become synonymous with St. Patrick's Day. During the early influx of Irish immigrants to North America, corned beef was more readily available than some other cuts of meat from the Emerald Isle. When cooking St. Patrick's Day dinner this year, the process can be made even easier with the use of a slow cooker. Try this recipe for "Corned Beef and Cabbage" from "Crock•Pot® 365 Year-Round Recipes" (Publications International) from the Crock•Pot kitchens.

Corned Beef and Cabbage

Makes 6 to 8 servings

12 new red potatoes, quartered
4 carrots, sliced

- 1 corned beef brisket (about 4 pounds)
- 2 onions, sliced
- 3 whole bay leaves
- 8 whole black peppercorns
- 1 head cabbage, cut into wedges

1. Place potatoes and carrots in bottom of slow cooker. Add brisket, onions, bay leaves, and peppercorns. Add enough water to cover brisket. Cover; cook on low 4 to 5 hours or on high 2 to 2 ½ hours.
2. Add cabbage. Continue cooking on low 4 to 5 hours longer or on high 2 to 2 ½ hours longer. Slice brisket against the grain, and serve with vegetables.



Photo courtesy MetroCreative
Corned Beef and Cabbage

Travel

Girlfriend Getaway in Louisiana

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewsline.com

Do you know that female friendships can actually increase your longevity? Research claims females receive physical, emotional, and mental benefits from spending time with like-minded women. That makes prioritizing friendships very worthwhile.

Girlfriend getaways (taking a trip with your female acquaintances) become one of the best ways to support and enjoy others and yourself. I suspect the same holds true for males, so it seems logical to encourage guy getaways and male bonding.

I recently attended a Sweet Magnolias-themed girlfriend getaway in Natchitoches, Louisiana. The small town in north-central Louisiana became the setting for the hugely popular movie (“Steel Magnolias”) released 35 years ago. The 1988 film maintains staying power because the story is real, written by Robert (Bobby) Harling, about his sister, Susan, and his family living in Natchitoches.

The female blockbuster cast featuring Sally Field, Shirley MacLaine, Dolly Parton, Olympia Dukakis, Daryl Hannah, and a very young Julia Roberts attracted attention and gained star power. While the authentic setting enhances the film’s impact, the emotional links and encouragement the characters give one another makes the poignant story timeless.

To my surprise, I learned the movie

was entirely filmed on location and on a sound stage in the area. Many local residents played parts.

I stayed in the gracious Sweet Magnolia House, a bed and breakfast inn that became the main character’s home and wedding reception site in the film. The grounds stood as the backdrop for the outdoor party, decorated with pink accents in Shelby’s favorite colors: blush and bashful.

The house next door acted as Ouiser’s house (Shirley MacLaine’s character), and the American Cemetery, a few blocks away, worked as the site for Shelby’s funeral. Today a pocket park rests between those locations, dedicated to Susan Harling Robinson, and features a flowing fountain and the Natchitoches walk of fame plaques to the stars.

Follow the Steel Magnolias Trail (pick up a copy at the Visitor’s Center), and you’ll recognize the beautiful hillside on either side of the Cane River as the location of the Christmas Festival and Easter Egg Hunt. Those two annual celebrations continue to be held there today.

Natchitoches makes a delightful getaway because almost everything is within walking distance except St. Augustine Church, where the film’s wedding ceremony took place. It’s an easy drive. I was fascinated to learn that Bobby Harling, the author, acted in



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Steel Magnolia House Bed and Breakfast.

the role of the priest. And I got to meet 91-year-old Lori Tate, who portrayed the groom’s mother.

Historic Front Street offers an array of fun, interesting shops, boutiques, and restaurants. Don’t miss Kaffie-Frederick General Mercantile Store, which features “good old days” items like hardware, housewares, cookware and kitchen supplies, classic toys, and gifts. The original freight elevator still works, and the 1910 cash register rings up sales.

While in Louisiana’s oldest city, drop into Fort St. Jean Baptiste, established in 1714. The state historic site tells the stories of the early Natchitoches settlement. A replica of the original fort, a museum and interpretation from period-dressed docents, brings the history to life.

Nearby Melrose Plantation is home to

nine historic buildings and a collection of work by world-famous African American folk artist Clementine Hunter, who lived and worked there.

No trip to Louisiana is complete without indulging in tasty cuisine. Meat pies are the local specialties, and La-syone’s Meat Pie Kitchen is the place to go. I recommend the crayfish pie, even for breakfast! The recipes have been handed down through generations with deep Southern roots.

I encourage you to visit Natchitoches, but even if you don’t get there, plan a girlfriend getaway soon.

More information: Natchitoches.com

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



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Cane River Park.



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Front Street.

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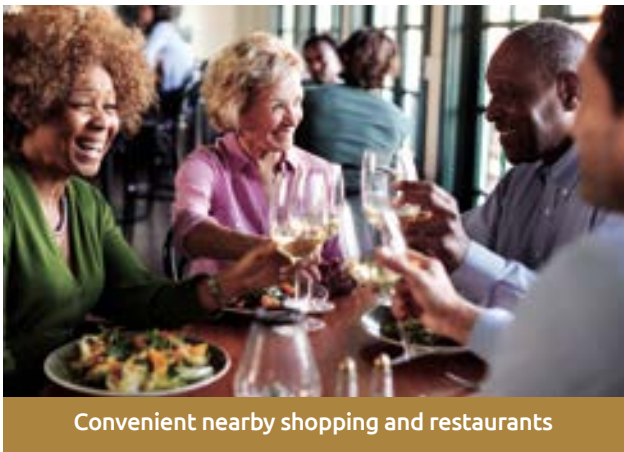
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