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Photos courtesy Becky Kimball
Survivors' Walk.

Relay for Life returns to St. Johns County

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.com

“Lights, Camera, Cure! Take Action Against Cancer” will be the theme of Relay for Life of the First Coast, scheduled for Saturday, April 22, from 4 p.m. – 10 p.m. at Nease High School. Sponsored by the American Cancer Society, Relay for Life’s mission is to end cancer as we know it, for everyone. The entire community is welcome and encouraged to attend the family-friendly event.

The event will kick off with an opening ceremony and there will be a survivor and caregiver reception with games and activities. Attendees will enjoy entertainment, food, and fun. The evening will conclude with a beautiful Luminaria Ceremony where loved ones touched by cancer will be honored.

Relay For Life is a volunteer-led experience that unites communities across the world to celebrate cancer

Relay for Life cont. on pg. 2

Bartram Trail brings home third girls' soccer state title in four years

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.com

The Bartram Trail girls' soccer team defeated Boca Raton at the FHSAA Class 7A State Championships at Spec Martin Stadium in Deland by a score of 3 – 0 on Feb. 24. This championship is the third in school history for the team, having previously won it all in 2020 and 2021. According to the team’s head coach, Jen Rodriguez, who has coached at Bartram Trail since the school opened in 2000, this was one of the best seasons the school has had, as they finished with a 21 – 0 – 2 record.

“We had nine seniors this year. Five of them, Grace Ivey, Malia Roberts, Emma Revels, Olivia Bori, and Anna Bachman, were on the team for all three state championships,” Rodriguez said. She credited the leadership of the seniors as a contributing factor to the team’s success.

She said the girls’ beginning of the year goal was to win the championship this year — not her favorite goal since it leaves no room to stumble. But she agreed that it was good to strive high.

“After the disappointment of last year [when the team lost to rival Creekside in the second round of the state playoffs],



Photos courtesy Jen Rodriguez
State Champion Bartram Trail High School.

the girls were extra motivated,” Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez admitted to scheduling a tough regular season because she knew she had a strong group of players returning this year and that they would need the challenge. By the time the playoffs rolled around, she knew her team was ready.

“We have goals and strategies for each game,” Rodriguez said, “but during the

game, it’s up to the players to execute.”

And execute they did. The team scored its 100th goal of the season as the first goal in the state championship game. They concluded the season with a total of 102 goals scored and only seven goals given up.

Coming up for the team now that the season is over is a recognition at the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners meeting in April and a presentation for a Rotary Club. Rodriguez said both of these events will give the athletes a chance to practice their leadership skills and talk about their journey.

Five of the graduating seniors will be continuing their athletic endeavors by playing soccer at Division 1 colleges. Rodriguez said that Bartram Trail will be returning 12 players for next year’s team and she’s sure they will have similarly lofty goals to this year’s team.

“They will understand what it means to be state champions and even more importantly, they will understand what it takes to get there,” she said.



The team celebrating its win.

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The Color Guard leads the Survivors' Walk.

Relay for Life cont. from pg. 1

survivors, remember loved ones lost to cancer, and raise funds to improve the lives of people with cancer and their families through advocacy, research, and patient support, to ensure everyone has

an opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer.

“We share a passion to save lives, celebrate lives, and work to end cancer as we know it — for everyone,” said Becky Kimball. “In 2023, more than 1.9 mil-

lion new cancer cases will be diagnosed in the United States and more than 600,000 Americans will die from cancer. Being there for anyone impacted by cancer is year-round work, and we’re excited to kick-off the Relay season for 2023.”

Relay for Life of the First Coast raised more than \$90,000 for the American Cancer Society’s mission in 2022 and this year’s goal is to raise \$60,000. “We’re partnering with our local Jacksonville Hope Lodge to let our community know how their donations make a difference in the lives of cancer patients and their families by providing a home away from home while receiving life-saving treatments,” Kimball said. “We are asking our supporters to bring canned goods and supplies to Relay For Life to help support our local Hope Lodge.”

Since 1985, Relay For Life has raised \$6.8 billion, allowing the American Cancer Society to invest \$3.1 billion in cancer research, contributing to 3.5 million fewer cancer deaths. Dollars raised each year by more than 250,000 Relay participants across the country help support the American Cancer Society’s

mission in countless ways — providing education and advocating for the needs of cancer patients and their families and providing essential services throughout their cancer journey.

“On the First Coast, Relayers come together because of a shared passion for ending cancer as we know it. No matter how cancer has impacted your life and how you want to get involved, you have a team here, ready to welcome you,” said Jaclyn Rodriguez, senior development manager of the Southeast Region for the American Cancer Society.

There are many ways to get involved.

- Join a Relay community to connect with survivors, caregivers, and others impacted by cancer in your local community. Visit RelayForLife.org to sign up for Relay and join your community in the fight against cancer.
- Donate: Your donation fuels the American Cancer Society’s fight against cancer. Visit RelayForLife.org/Donate or donate to your own team today.

Visit RelayForLife.org/FirstCoastFL to learn more about Relay For Life.

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Relay for Life of the First Coast is scheduled for Saturday, April 22, from 4 p.m. – 10 p.m. at Nease High School.



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BFF

Best Furry Friend of the month

Breed:

Black domestic

Favorite activity:

Boxes and playing with his toys

Favorite treat:

Purina Dental Life

Favorite friend:

His buddy A.J.

How my BFF got his name:

I was writing names with a black Sharpie pen after we adopted him at six weeks.

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

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Summer Camp and Activities Guide

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Pages 12 - 14

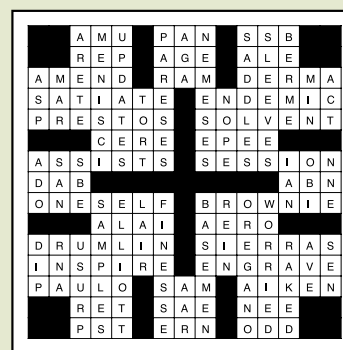
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MYSTERY PHOTO



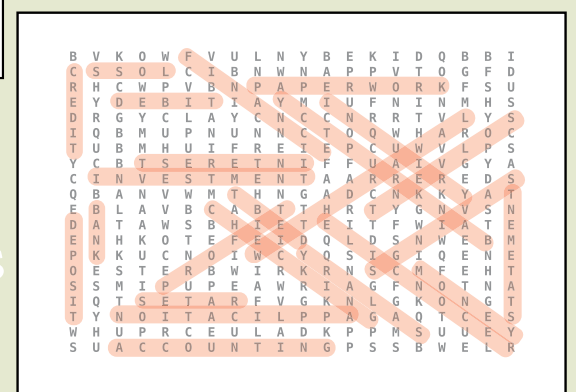
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April

Community Calendar

What's Happening in St. Johns

Trout Creek Senior Center offers activities for seniors on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings at 6795 Collier Road in Orangedale. Cards, crafts and games start each day at 9 a.m. with trivia, nutrition/exercise, Bunco and Bingo among the additional activities before lunch at 11:30 a.m. each day. Contact Program Coordinator Myra Fisher at (904) 209-3658 or mfisher@coasjc.org for more information.

Playing HOOKie, a group for those who enjoy knitting, crocheting and looming (with all items donated to charity) meets every Wednesday from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at The Table Cafe, 10391 Old St. Augustine Road. Visit the group's Facebook page (Playing HOOKie) or email playinghookie2022@gmail.com for more information.

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

1st: Joyful Spring Day and Night Markets will be held at Trout Creek Community Center on Saturday, April 1 from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. (children's day market) and 5 p.m. – 9 p.m. (adult night market). The events will include more than 50 local shopping vendors per market, as well as food, games, contests, giveaways and special spring/Easter activities. Admission is free, but tickets are required; visit www.joyfullythankful.com/spring for more information.

1st: Friends of Alpine Park will meet on Saturday, April 1 from 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the Harris-Bennett Farmhouse at Alpine Groves Park, 2060 State Road 13. Email friendsofalpinepark@gmail.com for more information.

1st: Geneva Presbyterian Church's annual Spring Fling will be held on April 1 from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the church located at 1755 State Road 13 in Switzerland. Breakfast, games, arts and crafts, and photos with the Easter Bunny will be held at 9 a.m. followed by a petting zoo at 10 a.m. and an Easter Egg

hunt at 11 a.m. The event is free and the community is invited to attend.

4th: Happy Hookers crochet group will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on April 4 and April 18 from 5:30 p.m. – 6:45 p.m. The group crochets or knits blankets for cancer patients at area hospitals. All skill levels are welcome. Visit www.sjcpls.org or call (904) 827-6960.

4th: Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet on Tuesday, April 4 at 6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church in the Loft on the County Dock Road side of the church at 2501 Loretto Road. The Tilted Quilters will be demoing at a pop-up shop. Wearing masks is optional. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

8th: The Bartram Trail Genealogy Club meets the second Saturday of each month (this month, April 8) from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. in the Bartram Trail Library conference room, 60 Davis Pond Blvd. The topic will be a general discussion on brick walls and great finds. Every level, beginners to experts, are welcome. If interested, come to a meeting or send a request to join the club at www.facebook.com/groups/BTGenClubGroup.

10th: The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable will meet on Monday, April 10 at 12 p.m. at St. Augustine Waterworks building, 184 San Marco Ave. in St. Augustine. The featured speaker will be St. Johns County Administrator Hunter Conrad. Email info@sjcroundtable.org to register for the meeting or visit www.sjcroundtable.org for more information.

10th: The Northwest St. Johns County United for Progress Club will meet on Monday, April 10. In celebration of Women's History Month, the National Organization of Women will speak on continuing efforts for full equality for all. Contact nwsjcp@gmail.com for reservations if you'd like to attend.

11th: Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club will hold its meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, April 11 at 11 a.m. at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club, 205 St. Johns Golf Drive off County Road 210. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. Attendees are encouraged to wear Easter Bonnets as the theme is "Easter Glamour." The cost of the luncheon is \$32. Make checks payable to BTNC and mail to Deborah Russell, 12376 Fireberry Court, Jacksonville, FL 32258. Payment must be received no later than April 6, no exceptions. Be sure to indicate entrée choice on the check memo line. Visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 for food choices and updated information.

15th: "Sew"cial, hosted by Jacksonville Quiltfest and Cinnamon's Quilt Shoppe, will be held on Saturday, April 15 from 1:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. at 4220 Hood Road. The six guilds who host the annual Quiltfest will be on hand to socialize, share information about Quiltfest and their guilds, and provide demos. Visit www.quiltfestjax.com for more information.

15th: Healing with Herbs and Foods will be offered on April 15 at 10 a.m. Attendees will learn about traditionally used herbs to promote wellness and health as well as how to create their own tinctures, teas, and salves. Included are guides, plant identification, lecture and herbal snacks. Pre registration is required via phone or text at (386) 972-1891.

17th: ESOL class at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on April 17 at 3:15 p.m. and at 4:30 p.m. These classes are offered twice a month; sign up by phone, in person, or online. There is no charge, but a St. Johns County Public Library card in good standing is needed to sign up. Call (904)

17th: The All Star Quilters Guild will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on Monday, April 17 at the First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. Deb Strain will talk about the design process at Moda fabrics. Sew and Tell is always a feature. Guests are

welcome. Visit www.allstarquilters.org for more information.

20th: William Bartram Scenic Highway Group will meet on Thursday, April 20 beginning at 6:30 p.m. at the St. Johns County Annex, 725 Flora Branch Blvd. Join the discussion to keep NW St. Johns County Scenic and Historic and preserve the State Road 13 Scenic Highway. Virtual meeting access is available; contact alabbat@comcast.net or call (904) 699-8475.


21st: Bear Bash, Bartram Trail High School's annual booster event, will be held on April 21 from 6 p.m. – 10 p.m. at Marywood Retreat Center. Support the Bartram Athletic Booster Club and enjoy dinner, drinks, music and auction items. Tickets are limited; visit <https://tinyurl.com/bder3aws> for more information.

22nd: Earth Day Recycle presentation with Chris Benjamin of the county recycling department, will be held at 11 a.m. on April 22 at the Bartram Trail Branch Library, 60 Davis Pond Blvd. Bring your damaged/worn American flags to exchange for a free flag. Register at www.sjcpls.org or call the library at (904) 824-6960.

27th: The Newcomers of North St. Johns will host a luncheon featuring a full presentation of "Jersey Boys" on Thursday, April 27 beginning at 11:15 a.m. at Alhambra Dinner Theatre, 12000 Beach Boulevard in Jacksonville. The cost for the luncheon and show is \$45 for members. All reservations must be received by April 11. Visit <https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org> for more information.

28th: Adult Craft — summer decor will be held at 10 a.m. on April 28 at the Bartram Trail Branch Library, 60 Davis Pond Blvd. Bring your pliers to bend bottle caps into flower petals. All supplies are provided by the Bartram Trail Friends of the Library. Register at www.sjcpls.org or call the library at (904) 824-6960. Space is limited to the first 20 patrons.

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

Q: What can you share about your recent meeting with US Congressman Aaron Bean, chairman of the US Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education?

A: I had the opportunity to participate in a roundtable of school board members in Congressman Bean’s district over Spring Break. There were about 10 of us and we learned about upcoming House Bill 5, which is basically a Parents’ Bill of Rights on the federal level. We had a good discussion and provided input on that as well as women’s rights within Title IX. Also in attendance was the chair of the US House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Congresswoman Virginia Foxx from North Carolina. (This is the US House Committee that Congressman Bean’s subcommittee is under.)

We discussed teacher shortages extensively, which are pervasive throughout our nation. The school board members were asked on a scale of one to 10, with one being “no problem” and 10 being “we might have to shut down schools,” to quantify this problem in our districts. Every school board member in attendance answered with “eight.” We brainstormed a lot of different things about the shortage of teachers and how we could get federal focus on the issue. We identified and discussed as two of the causes: 1) the lack of respect for the profession as a whole and 2) difficulty of discipline in the classroom.

The congress members were appreciative of our input as they returned to Washington to craft legislation. I thought it was a great opportunity to advocate for our children and try to gain whatever influence we can get on a federal level for our St. Johns County students.

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

A: Much as I hate to share this news, and I even said at the school board meeting how very disappointed this makes me, we have made the decision to postpone completion of the RiverTown school from 2024 to 2025. As background, when we bid out the Shearwater school, we received four responses and settled on a price of \$59 million. A couple of months later, the Beacon Lakes school bid only received one response, for \$65 million. We think we won’t get any bids at all on the RiverTown school due to the short timeline, so we felt we needed to postpone it.

Meanwhile, we are grateful that the first two schools are coming along. The Shearwater school is getting ready to have walls tilted up and the Beacon Lakes school has the pad formed and compacted. It won’t be long until we see vertical construction with this school too.

Q: Speaking of teacher shortages, how did the district’s teacher recruitment fairs go last month?

A: The district is actively seeking new teachers for next year and our two teacher recruitment fairs went well. We attracted candidates from across the country and some of them were even hired on the spot.

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

A: We are looking forward to the final quarter of the school year with less vigorous end of the year testing for our students and graduation for our seniors. It’s hard to believe the school year is nearly over!

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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



with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

Q: What is your office doing to combat child exploitation and human trafficking?

A: Around the end of 2022, we joined the NE Florida Intercept (Inter-agency Child Exploitation and Person Trafficking) Task Force. This is made up of seven Northeast Florida law enforcement agencies including local, state and federal agencies all working together (Homeland Security Investigation, the US Attorney, and Clay, Putnam, Nassau, Duval and St. Johns County sheriff’s offices). At our office, we’ve dedicated a full time detective to the task force to combat childhood exploitation and human trafficking within our region.

This taskforce has partnered with Operation Light Shine, based out of Nashville, Tennessee, in a unique public/private partnership.

Q: Can you give us some background on Operation Light Shine and your office’s partnership with the organization?

A: Operation Light Shine is a non profit organization committed to combat child sexual exploitation in human trafficking. It was started in Nashville by Matt Murphy, a US Army Green Beret combat veteran. He had a very personal reason to start Operation Light Shine as his sister was trafficked for sex and drugs and found deceased in 2019.

Operation Light Shine is the backbone of our NE Florida task force as it provides financial and technical support as well as other resources. Operation Light Shine in turn partners with the Tim Tebow Foundation.



Maundy Thursday Service -
Thursday, April 6th, 7:30pm - Sanctuary, Loretto Road Campus
Join us for a unique worship experience that will allow you to connect with Christ’s sacrifice in an intimate way. A separate event for kids will be available for kids 1st - 5th grades and nursery will be available for kindergarten or younger. Email wgreer@mandarinpres.com to register your child.


The Sanctuary will remain open for 1 hour following the Maundy Thursday Service. For your safety, deacons will be in the Lobby and can escort you to your car.

Easter Sunday -
Sunday, April 9th
This Easter season we will have the following services available:

- Sunrise -** 6:30am - Mandarin Cemetery.
- Traditional Service -** 9:00am with music led by the Sanctuary Choir & Brass.
- Contemporary Service -** 10:30am with music by the Worship Team.

Nursery and kid’s programs are available for Traditional & Contemporary services.
A shuttle service is available from the Loretto Road Campus for the sunrise service beginning at 6:00am and from the Mandarin Road Campus from 8:30 to Noon for the Traditional and Contemporary services.

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with St. Johns County Commission Chairman Christian Whitehurst, District 1

Q: What can you tell us about the road construction on Veterans Parkway ... why it's taking so long and is there an estimated completion date?

A: People are not wrong to be upset about this situation. I too am frustrated. I have had many conversations with staff and the contractor to try to get to the bottom of this. First, we had an engineering design flaw that caused a six-month delay in 2021. The following year, we learned that the JEA utilities needed to be moved. How and where to move them were ongoing issues in 2022. We also had issues obtaining aggregate for the roadway. None of these are acceptable in my mind as excuses, but they are some of the reasons. As to when completion is anticipated, I've been told in the next three months, but I've been given deadlines before and I'm hesitant to rely on this. I plan to continue my regular conversations with our transportation manager.

Q: Can you give an update on the Transportation Summit that was held on March 3?

A: I've been told this is the first time that federal, state, and local officials have been together to discuss this single issue: transportation in St. Johns County. I'd encourage readers to view the GTV link to the meeting that is on the county website (www.sjcl.us). We discussed both north/south transportation corridors and east/west transportation corridors. Since the summit, we have heard from Congressman Rutherford's office that we will be getting a few million dollars towards our greatest needs. Also, the Florida state legislative session began the Tuesday following the Transportation Summit and I have followed up with our St. Johns County delegates regarding some of the projects we discussed. I want citizens to know

that this is just the beginning of our requests of our federal and state partners. It will be an ongoing conversation.

Q: What is the latest on the Grand Oaks development?

A: At our last Board of County Commissioners meeting in February, the developer of this project located on State Road 16 brought forth an amendment to relieve them of their obligation to widen State Road 16 from two lanes to four, which was part of the original agreement approved by the BCC in 2018. The three miles of widening is required per that original agreement since the development has met a number of homes constructed threshold. Not only did the commissioners deny this amendment by a vote of 5 – 0, but Commissioner Sarah Arnold made a subsequent motion, which passed, to hold the developer in default. This allows the county to retain the \$5.4 million that the developer had already paid into the transportation obligation. We are not letting them off the hook.

Q: Do you have anything else to share with District 1?

A: Yes. The Bartram Trail High School girls' soccer team just won their third state championship in the last four years. They have also been ranked No. 1 in the country for the whole year. The Board of County Commissioners will honor them at our April meeting to congratulate them on behalf of the county on their achievements.

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

A: Readers can email me at bcc1c-whitehurst@sjcl.us or call me at (904) 584-5348.

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

Our task force is the first of its kind in Northeast Florida and only the second to partner with Operation Light Shine.

Q: Do you have any statistics for child exploitation and human trafficking in our area?

A: First, nationally, the cybertip line of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (called "NCMEC") had 29.3 million reports in 2021 of which 99 percent were suspected child sexual abuse materials.

In Northeast Florida in 2022, there were 2,300 reports combined of child exploitation and human trafficking.

In this same year, 2022, the St. Johns Sheriff's Office received 200 cyber-tips from NCMEC and local citizen complaints. After our subject matter experts screened the tips, we ended up with 65 child exploitation and 13 human trafficking reports that we assigned out. Of those, seven child exploitation and five human traffick-

ing cases have been handed over to the state or federal government for prosecution and an additional 13 cases are active with charges forthcoming.

Unfortunately, we are not exempt from the criminal element here in St. Johns County.

Q: What should citizens do if they suspect child exploitation or human trafficking?

A: The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) cybertip line is 1-800-843-5678 or you can report a concern online at report.cybertip.org.

Q: What is the best way for our readers to contact you with any questions or suggestions about this article?

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



with St. Johns County Property Appraiser
Eddie Creamer

Q: What can you tell us about veterans’ disability exemptions?

A: As with all exemptions, the deadline to file is March 1, but with extenuating circumstances, the Property Appraiser can extend the deadline through the end of the TRIM period, which is typically the first part of September.

Most veterans’ exemptions are disability-based and are not just an exemption for serving or retired military members.

1) Disabled Veteran Exemption, \$5000. This is for a service-connected disability of 10 percent or more. The percentage is determined by the Veterans Administration, which will provide a letter to that effect to the veteran.

2) Totally and Permanently Disabled Veteran Exemption. This is a total exemption from property taxes and it’s for veterans who have been honorably discharged with a total and permanent service-connected disability as determined by the Veterans Administration.

3) Seniors Combat-Related Disabled Veteran Exemption. This is for veterans aged 65 or older who have been honorably discharged. The exemption percentage is equal to the veteran’s disability as determined by the Veterans Administration. So, if the disability is 40 percent, then the veteran receives a 40 percent exemption on taxes.

Q: Are any of these exemptions available to surviving spouses?

A: Yes. It’s important to note that all of these exemptions are also available to the surviving spouse of a qualifying service member, as long as they are not remarried. Additionally, the surviving spouse of a military member who died while on active duty is totally exempt from taxes as long as they are not remarried.

Q: Are there any exemptions for military members that do not include disability?

A: The only veterans’ exemption not requiring disability is for deployed service members. If you are on active duty and deployed outside the United States for the prior tax year on a qualified military operation, you may qualify for an exemption based on the number of days deployed.

Q: What proof is required for all these exemptions?

A: Required are proof of Florida residency and the appropriate letter from the Veterans Administration. We are thankful for and appreciative of our veterans and want to make sure they are aware of these exemptions that they may qualify for. Veterans are invited to call our office at (904) 827-5500 with any questions.

Guest Column

Supervisor of Elections Office keeps close eye on legislative session

By St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes
In mid-March, the St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Office met with other Election Supervisors and their staff from across Northeast Florida to reflect on the 2022 elections, talk about processes, and share insight.

During the meeting in Clay County, the supervisors discussed potential changes to election law anticipated to come from the 2023 Legislative Session that will finish May 5, 2023. The supervisors expect possible changes to vote-by-mail and audit procedures, judging by the changes made by Senate Bill 524 in 2022. The session provided invaluable information that will be used by all to grow, innovate, and improve. We will continue to monitor the legislative session and ensure St. Johns County voters are aware of and prepared for any impacts to the voting process.

We’re also beginning poll worker recruitment this month. As the county continues to grow, our need for poll workers increases as well. We invite any eligible, interested, and registered St. Johns County voters to visit our website at www.votesjc.gov to learn more about being a poll worker

and poll worker requirements, and to fill out a poll worker application. For questions, please call the Supervisor of Elections Office at (904) 823-2238 or email the Poll Worker Department at pollworker@votesjc.gov.

For those who have already expressed an interest, we are excited to soon re-introduce our Poll Worker Orientation classes. Keep an eye on our website or subscribe to our email newsletter to find out details on the class schedule and curriculum. Our first election of 2024, the Presidential Preference Primary, is less than a year away and we plan to have a highly qualified, well-trained team of poll workers ready to serve our community.

As a friendly reminder, there are no scheduled elections in St. Johns County for 2023. In 2024, we have the Presidential Preference Primary on March 19, 2024, the 2024 Primary Election on Aug. 20, 2024, and the 2024 General Election on Nov. 5, 2024. For more information on the 2024 elections, as well as local offices scheduled for election in 2024, visit www.votesjc.gov/election-dates.

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Rotary Club of Bartram Trail – Julington Creek: Two decades of service

By Rotarian Al Kalter
mail@floridanewsline.com

This is the 20th year that the Rotary Club of Bartram Trail – Julington Creek has been serving the community and the world. This energetic, friendly group meets each Thursday morning at 7:30 a.m. at Westminster Woods retirement community — but this Rotary Club is far from retiring. With projects that range from providing water in Central America to building wheelchair ramps for local citizens, Bartram Trail Rotarians truly live the Rotary motto, “Service Above Self.”

Later this year, the club will officially celebrate its 20th anniversary, so this is a good opportunity to look back on how it all began.

Way back in 1905, Paul Harris gathered with three friends in his office in Chicago in what is recognized as the first Rotary meeting. Seven years later, on Feb. 13, 1912, a group of 14 businessmen met at Hemming Park in downtown Jacksonville to organize the Rotary Club of Jacksonville, the 41st Rotary Club in the world.

In 1955, the Jacksonville Rotary Club recognized the growth of the area across the river from downtown, and sponsored the formation of the Rotary Club of South Jacksonville. Twenty years later, as the population continued to spread, South Jax Rotary gave birth to the Rotary Club of Mandarin. And that club, in turn, begat the Rotary Club of Bartram Trail, which was officially chartered on Nov. 5, 2003.

The effort to form this club was initiated by two Rotarians — Jim Register, then a member of the West Jacksonville club who represented the Rotary District, and Judy Jennings, a Mandarin Rotarian who would serve as the first club president for Bartram Trail. Jennings was a realtor, who worked out of the small office building on the corner of State Road 13 and Warren Circle, next to the current location of Broudy’s Liquors. During the formation period, when

a club is called a “Provisional Rotary Club,” meetings were held in a conference room in her office. After reaching the Rotary minimum of 25 members, the club was granted a charter and celebrated that with a dinner at the San Jose Country Club. As is customary for those events, representatives of the District and many nearby clubs attended, and many of the area’s clubs presented gifts to the newest Rotary Club in District 6970. One of those gifts was the bell that is rung each week to open and close our meetings.

Since the small conference room would not hold all the members, the club started meeting at the clubhouse in what was then called the Champions Golf Club, now known as the Julington Creek Golf Club. While that was a great location geographically, a weekly breakfast meeting did not quite fit in with the operation of the golf course. So, in the spring of 2005, Rotarian Mike Sweeney, then the executive director of Westminster Woods, invited the club to move its meetings to the River Lounge in their community, where they have met ever since, except during Covid.

There are no current members who were in that original charter group, but the first individual who was inducted after that, Michael Andreoni, remains a club member to this day. The club is stronger and more diverse than ever, with approximately 45 members who enjoy club meetings, social outings, service projects, and friendship with others who share their commitment to service. There’s every reason to expect that the next 20 years will be even better.

The Rotary Club of Bartram Trail – Julington Creek meets every Thursday morning, from 7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m., at Westminster Woods on Julington Creek. Guests and prospective members are always welcome. There are more than 34,000 Rotary Clubs around the world, with more than 1.4 million Rotarians, making Rotary the oldest and most international service club in the world.



Photo courtesy Rotary Club of Bartram Trail – Julington Creek
Rotary Club of Bartram Trail – Julington Creek President Jose Gavarrette addressing the club during one of the club's weekly breakfast meetings.

Preserving Florida heritage for future generations

By Dianne Battle
mail@floridanewline.com

Between 1763 and 1783, East Florida was ruled by Britain’s King George III. Wishing to consolidate his hold on it, he commissioned colonial botanist John Bartram and his son, William, to explore Florida territories in 1765 and 1766 and describe its flora and fauna. During the journey, William Bartram became infatuated with East Florida and claimed 500 acres of land near Little Florence Cove with the intention of starting an indigo and cotton plantation when he returned.

Although he never established a successful farm, William Bartram left a legacy far more valuable to us today. His journal, “Bartram’s Travels,” provides an important account of Florida history, along with drawings and descriptions of its plants and animals. It earned him the native American nickname, “Puc Puggy” (flower hunter).

The clubs affiliated with the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs have installed Bartram Trail Markers throughout Florida to commemorate the areas he documented on his second journey from 1773 – 1776. Putnam County hosts more than 30 markers installed by the Garden Club of Palatka and local organizations. The Garden Club of Switzerland installed five markers along State Road 13, the William Bartram Scenic and Historic Highway, including one marker located at William Bartram’s failed plantation and another at New Switzerland Planta-

tion, owned by Swiss land owner Francis Philip Fatio, who provided lodging for Bartram. Fatio was so influential in colonial Florida’s history, the area retained the name, “Switzerland.”

In addition to marking Bartram’s travels, both Palatka and Switzerland garden clubs help commemorate William Bartram with public events. “Bartram’s Frolic,” held in Palatka between April 21 and 23, features boat rides, kayaking and canoeing to Bartram’s trail markers along the St. Johns River. Bicycle rides and hikes trace his land-based travels. Bartram reenactors, symposiums, and feasts add dimension to the weekend.

Switzerland Garden Club participates in the “Bartram Bash,” on May 6 at Alpine Groves Park. Year round, the club preserves Old Florida in the form of native plants that William Bartram would have discovered and perhaps documented during his travels in East Florida. The plants in the club’s Alpine Groves garden include Firebush, native



Photo courtesy Dianne Battle
Bartram's ixia

azalea, Chickasaw plum, pawpaw, and coontie; these attract Florida butterflies, including skippers, zebra longwing, and fritillaries. The garden’s mission is an extension of Bartram’s original purpose: to celebrate the native wildlife in this part of Florida.

We hope you can make plans to attend the Bartram Frolic and the Bartram Bash and learn more about Old Florida and its first naturalist, Puc Puggy.

Dianne Battle is president of the Garden Club of Switzerland.

Local brewery brings home medal



Photo courtesy Kristen Dean

Kristen and Bryan Dean, owners of 2nd Bay Brewery in Fruit Cove, earned a bronze medal on March 1 at Tampa’s Best Florida Beer competition with the brewery’s Lucius chocolate stout. This is just the latest successful competition for the Deans, who have been brewing beer first at home and now at their brewery for more than 11 years.



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Local church and school partner to support Isaiah 117 House

By Gloria Satterlee Alford
mail@floridanewslines.com

The number of children removed from homes of abuse and neglect are increasing every year. In 2019, 24,563 children

Methodist Church volunteers, who then filled the backpacks with hygiene and special items such as snacks, blankets, small toys and a note reminding the children that they are loved.



River Oak Academy students adding snacks to the backpacks

Isaiah 117 House will provide these filled backpacks to children who are removed from their homes to help make the transition a little easier. On this specific occasion the project team of River Oak Academy and River of Life Methodist Church provided 24 backpacks, but the contributions will continue with a focus on children who are the victims of child abuse and making it easier to service more children in the local area because of this partnership.

Visit www.rolumc.com, for more information about River of Life United Methodist Church and www.Isaiah117house.com for more information about

Isaiah 117 House. in Florida were removed from their homes to protect their safety. The reasons range from parents being addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, domestic violence in the home to lack of funds due to unemployment. When children are removed from their homes, out of concern for their welfare, they are usually brought to the child welfare offices to await placement with a foster family. This wait can be several hours to nearly a full day. These children will often have nothing with them and are scared, lonely, hungry, dirty, and in desperate need of love and support.


A local organization called Isaiah 117 House is building a home in the Mandarin area to provide a comfortable place for the children to wait for a placement that is full of friendly and loving volunteers.

In an effort to support the mission of Isaiah 117 House, a joint project with River Oak Academy and River of Life United Methodist Church was developed to assist in making this experience a little less traumatic. The students at River Oak Academy collected 24 backpacks and provided them to River of Life United


Isaiah 117 House.



River of Life United Methodist Church volunteers filling backpacks



ST. JOHNS COUNTY
PROPERTY APPRAISER
Eddie Creamer



NOTICE OF CERTIFICATION OF TAX ROLL

Pursuant to Sections 193.122 and 197.323, Florida Statutes,
Notice is Hereby Given that the Tax Roll for St. Johns County was Re-Certified to the St. Johns County Tax Collector on the 23rd of March, 2023, for the Collection of 2022 Taxes, to reflect all changes made by the Value Adjustment Board.

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For additional information, please visit our website at www.sjcpa.gov or contact us at (904) 827-5500

ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Financial planning for a family member with special needs

By Chris Thompson, CFP®, CRPC®

Having a child with special needs presents unique challenges. You may worry about his or her physical and mental wellbeing. You may also worry about their financial future if their condition limits their ability to earn a living and pay for living expenses upon reaching adulthood. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to help ensure your child has sufficient financial resources along with a dedicated support system:

1. Fund an ABLÉ account. Thanks to The Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act of 2014, families can participate in a tax-advantaged savings program for a family member with a qualifying disability that occurred before age 26. As the owner and designated beneficiary of the account, your child can withdraw funds tax-free to pay for eligible disability-related expenses. They also may be eligible for a tax credit for contributions you make to the plan. An ABLE account is very similar to a 529 college savings plan. Anyone can contribute to the ABLE account, including grandparents and non-relatives, up to the annual

gift tax exclusion (unless limited by your state). Contributions are made with after-tax dollars and are not tax deductible at the federal level. Not all ABLE plans are equal; shop around to find the most advantageous plan for your child’s needs.

2. Establish a special needs trust. A special needs trust (SNT) can provide financial security by creating an income stream to a loved one with special needs. Having funds in this type of trust would not disqualify your child, as beneficiary, from receiving government assistance. Note that he or she would not have direct control over funds in an SNT, which may not be ideal if he or she is capable of managing their own finances. There are several different types of SNTs (first-party, second-party and pooled), each of which is governed by various requirements. Because of their complexity, SNTs are usually prepared by a licensed attorney and may cost several thousand dollars to set up.

3. Buy a life insurance policy. Consider purchasing a whole or term life insurance policy that names your loved one as the

beneficiary when you die. To ensure the payout does not disqualify the recipient for federal and state resources, set up the policy to pay proceeds into a special needs trust.

4. Ask the courts to appoint a guardian. When an adult family member with special needs has significant assets or property and is unable to manage their own financial affairs, a guardianship may be appropriate. When a guardian of the estate is appointed, all financial matters are managed for the person with disabilities. This person will pay bills and is required by law to maintain detailed records to account for all spending. A family member is often appointed to this role; however, in some cases the court will appoint an unrelated individual.

5. Watch out for scammers. Individuals with disabilities may be more vulnerable to identify theft and other scams. Monitor credit reports to keep an eye out for unauthorized accounts. Consider enrolling your child in an identity theft protection program. Be aware that phone and internet scammers routinely target

recipients of government checks by impersonating government agents.

6. Consult the experts. Talk to your financial advisor for ideas and guidance on ways to safeguard the financial wellbeing of your special needs child. Your advisor will be able to recommend a qualified attorney if you decide to open a special needs trust. A tax specialist can also be a valuable resource to help with tax planning for you and your child.

Chris Thompson, CFP®, CRPC® is a Managing Director and Associate Manager with Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC, in Jacksonville. He specializes in fee-based financial planning and asset management strategies and has been in practice for 30 years. To contact him, visit www.ameripriseadvisors.com/chris.thompson or email chris.thompson@ampf.com.

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Alpha-Omega Miracle Home breaks ground on new campus

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Alpha-Omega Miracle Home’s mission of housing single mothers, their children and senior women facing homelessness broke ground on their new campus on Feb. 28, joined by key governmental advocates of the project, Senator Travis Hutson, State Representative Cyndi Stevenson, and local advocates Rob Hardwick, St. Johns County Sheriff; Chris Shee, founder and CEO, Master-Craft Builder Group; and Bobby Crum,

president, board of directors for Alpha-Omega Miracle Home; and Alpha-Omega Miracle Home CEO, Lisa Franklin.

Alpha-Omega Miracle Home regularly has a waiting list of more than 80 women in need of housing assistance. This new campus will triple the organization’s safe bed night capacity, double the number of affordable housing units, and provide a community center to serve residents and the larger community. When completed the new campus will include 20 two-bedroom apartments, 12

efficiency apartments, and six dormitory style rooms, housing up to 100 residents while offering comprehensive support services through Alpha-Omega Miracle Home’s programs.

“An undertaking like this one is dependent on donors and supporters of Alpha-Omega Miracle Home. With help from the \$3.5 million allocation from the Freedom First budget which was supported by our distinguished guests — Senator Hutson and Rep. Stevenson — Alpha-Omega Miracle Home has

secured an additional \$1.5 million in grants and fundraising to break ground today,” said CEO Lisa Franklin. “We thank all our donors and supporters for their continued commitment to our mission.”

An additional \$10 million is still needed to complete the project. Those interested in supporting the completion of Alpha-Omega Miracle Home’s new campus and their mission donate directly at www.aomh.org/give-to-aomh/.



Summer Camp and Activities Guide!



Nease summer sports camps provide health, social and academic benefits

By Susan Rieger
mail@floridanewslines.com

As summer approaches, many parents seek ways to keep their school-aged children active and engaged during the break. One popular option is enrolling kids in summer sports camps, which offer a range of benefits beyond just physical exercise.

According to a recent study, children who participate in sports camps during the summer experience improved physical health, increased social skills, and even academic benefits. The study found that children who attended summer sports camps had higher physical activity levels and better physical fitness than those who did not participate.

In addition, sports camps provide opportunities for children to develop important social skills, such as teamwork, communication, and leader-



Photo courtesy Susan Rieger
Nease offers a variety of summer camps this summer.

ship. These skills can help children build confidence and develop positive peer relationships.

Sports camps can also have a positive impact on academic performance. The study found that children who participated in sports camps during the summer had higher academic achievement than those who did

not. This may be because physical activity has been shown to improve cognitive function and academic performance.

Nease athletic sports camps offer students a wide range of activities, including football, basketball, soccer, wrestling, and more. The camps offer specialized programs for specific sports or skill levels, allowing children to develop their abilities and gain a deeper understanding of the game. Save the date for Summer Camps 2023 for more information and links to all the camps can be found on the individual sport website, www.neaseathletics.com

June 5 – July 28: Football Summer Camp, rising ninth graders – 12th graders

June 6 – 8: Girls’ and Boys’ Basketball Camp, third through ninth graders, multiple dates and times

June 19 – 22: Girls’ Soccer Camp

June 19 – 21: Mini Pantherette Dance

July 11,12,13: Green and Gold Youth Football Camp, kindergarten through eighth grade

July 17 – 20: Boys’ Lacrosse

July 18 – 20: Cheerleading Cub Camp

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Summer Camp and Activities Guide!



Fun ways to keep kids occupied over summer break

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Kids look forward to summer vacation every year. The last day of school gives way to less structured days when kids can spend more time outdoors and less time cracking the books. Summer vacation can be a dilemma for parents, especially in households where both parents work full-time. A pandemic-related increase in remote working has made that problem somewhat more manageable, but even parents working from home must find a fun way for kids to stay occupied until the new school year begins. No two kids are the same, so parents may need to try various activities on for size until they find something their children enjoy doing during the lazy days of summer.

• Day camp: Day camps provide much of the structure of school without all the home-

work or time spent indoors. Many parks and recreation departments run summer day camps for kids. Camps can be generalized or specialized. For example, some may offer an array of activities, including sports and nature walks, while others may focus on a single activity, like musical lessons or science-based programs. Camps run by local parks and rec departments do not typically last all summer long, which parents should

keep in mind when enrolling youngsters.

• Reading: Parents may be surprised by how much their children enjoy a good book. A recent poll from the National Education Association found that 70 percent of middle school students read more than 10 books a year. The

National Literacy Trust reports that roughly 45 percent of children between the ages of eight and 11 enjoy reading “very much.” When suggesting to children that they read more this summer, parents can note the many ways that reading for pleasure differs

Fun ways cont. on pg. 14



Photo courtesy MetroCreative

Parents who don't want summer relaxation to turn into boredom can look to various activities to occupy their children's time until a new school year begins.

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Summer Camp and Activities Guide!



Make the most of the summer camp experience

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Summer camp season will soon be here, and throngs of children will board buses each morning or pack their parents' cars full of essentials to survive a few weeks away from home. Looking back, many adults who experienced summer camp have fond memories of their adventures — whether they all went according to plan or there were some hiccups along the way. Parents want their children to make their own summer camp memories. Even if the canoe capsizes or the cabin leaks during a summer thunderstorm, such experiences can build character and strengthen friendships.

According to RegPack, an online registration software company, more than six million American children participate in some form of camp each year, including sleep-away camp or day camp. The American Camp Association says that number is closer to 14 million, with the most popular camp session length around one week or less. Families getting prepared for camp can follow these guidelines to ensure the experience is one kids won't soon forget.

Search for an accredited camp: Accredited camps must meet more than 300 standards related to program quality, safety and health, according to the American Camp Association. An accredited camp will likely give parents the most peace of mind.

Consider children's readiness: There's no magic age when a child may be ready to go to camp, but generally kids who are ages seven or eight may be fine to start



Summer camp can be a great experience, especially when families take some pre-camp measures aimed at ensuring kids have a fun season.

a resident sleep-away camp. Day camp kids can begin as early as age three, the same age kids often begin preschool programs. Gauge whether the child has spent time away from home at friends' or family members' homes to decide if a resident camp will be the right fit or if a day camp is more appropriate.

Connect with fellow campers: If possible, attend a meet-and-greet prior to the start of the season. Neighborhood day camps tend to draw kids from local communities, so there's already a chance kids will know a few fellow campers.

Get to know camp counselors early on: Campers can introduce themselves to

camp counselors and other program directors and are urged to ask questions about specific programs. Counselors can direct campers toward activities they may enjoy.

Make the most of all situations: Much of summer camp will likely be smooth-sailing, but it's reasonable to expect some bumps along the way. Campers shouldn't expect perfection, but use the situations that may go awry as learning experiences on how to handle adversity — trying to find the fun in them anyway. Even a medical situation can be overcome, particularly because camps staff qualified medical personnel to ensure campers are safe and well.

Fun ways cont. from pg. 13

from reading for school. Point out that kids won't have to submit book reports and emphasize that they can choose their own books. Depending on children's ages, introduce kids to a series like "Harry Potter," which is a set of seven fantasy novels that has helped millions of young people across the globe discover and develop a fondness for reading. Weekly visits to the library, where kids can pick from hundreds of books, can get youngsters even more excited about reading.

- **Play dates:** Play dates are a great way to make kids happy and take a little off of parents' daily plates. Arrange routine summer play dates with children's school friends, neighbors and/or cousins. Parents can alternate hosting responsibilities so they can get work done at home and enjoy a break when it's not their turn to host.

- **Find something free:** Perhaps in recognition of the need for affordable, family-friendly fare, many communities now host free events for kids and their parents each week. Weekly movie nights under the stars and concerts in community squares are popular in many communities, but those same towns also may host events specifically for kids during the daytime. A simple internet search of "free events near me" may unveil a host of activities that can keep kids happy and occupied on summer days when their schedules are open. Local libraries can be great resources for free events as well.

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Bolles Upper School students explore history, contributions of Afro-Latinos

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Upper school students taking Spanish 4 and Spanish 5 at The Bolles School traveled with members of the Bolles Black Student Union on a trip to St. Augustine to explore Fort Mose State Park and the Best-Richardson Museum of the African Diaspora on Feb. 23.

Upper school teacher Carrie Ezzell, who organized the trip, said this learning experience served as a kickoff to a unit of study in her upper-level Spanish classes in which her students will explore the



Photo courtesy Bolles

history and cultural contributions of Afro-Latinos.

The group started the day at Fort Mose State Park, the first free black settlement in North America, recognized by the National Underground Railroad Network as the earliest stop — even pre-dating the establishment of the U.S. — and one of the few that ran from north to south. Ezzell noted that the governor of Spanish Florida granted escaped slaves from the Carolinas and Georgia their freedom in exchange for converting to Catholicism and their commitment to the defense of the city of St. Augustine. At the park, students were given the site’s history by a guest speaker from the Fort Mose Historical Society, and they collaborated in groups to complete a digital scavenger hunt.

After lunch, the students visited the Best-Richardson Museum of the African Diaspora, where they were introduced to the founder, Gigi Best. She described her own journey with African-American history, culture and literature as well as her exploration of her ancestry.

Palencia Elementary announces annual silent auction fundraiser

By Tiffany Trivedi
mail@floridanewslines.com

Get your flapper dresses, fedoras and zoot suits ready: it’s time for the eighth annual Palencia Elementary School Silent Auction — ‘20s style. This event will have all the glitz and glam you would want in an evening out. The big event will be Friday, April 21 at the Palencia Club. The evening will feature food, cocktails, music, games, and both a live and silent auction aspect. The event chairs this year are Brooke Paarlberg, Amy Gramatges and Emily Turner.

Gramatges said, “This year’s auction is going to be a great time! We have a fun theme, and we will have lots of amazing items to bid on, including an extremely diverse display of items from jewelry, art, vacations, services, camps, and more.”

Additionally, there will be a grade level basket drawing on April 24 and each entry can be purchased ahead of time

for \$10. All baskets have a value of \$300 – \$500 apiece with a unique and fun theme that parents from each grade level are graciously donating. Other very unique and popular bidding items include Principal for the Day, Art, Music, PE Teacher for the Day, and even a Veterinarian of the Day sponsored by Palencia Vet Clinic or a fun “late night” in the school for second grade and higher.

All the money raised this year will go towards funding essential school needs such as digital classroom enhancements, which will aid in innovating the classroom and improving the technology and learning environment. The proceeds will also go towards the continued playground improvements and outdoor classroom plans.

Visit palenciapiratespto.com or email pes.ptopresident@gmail.com to buy tickets to attend the auction or to donate an item.

Students take creative approach to music

Photos courtesy Kathe Isabelle

All the second graders at Julington Creek Elementary School worked in groups creating a “Candy Word Chain” in music class. After creating the word chain, they transformed their word chain into a “Rhythm Chain” using Duplos, Legos, and Play-Doh. As a completion to the lesson, the children had fun walking around the room observing each group clapping and speaking their creations.



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Briefs

Clerk’s office to hold special Passport Saturday event on April 1

The St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller will hold a special Passport Saturday event on April 1, from 8:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. at the Richard O. Watson Judicial Center, 4010 Lewis Speedway in St. Augustine. The extended business hours make applying for a passport more convenient for those seeking to travel this upcoming season.

The Clerk’s Office’s recording department will be open on April 1 to accept and review applications for first-time passports or new passports for persons whose previous passport was issued more than 15 years ago, minors under age 16, or whose passport was lost, stolen, or damaged.

Other passports must be renewed by mail using Form DS-82, which is available at <https://stjohnsclerk.com/passports/>.

Anyone traveling internationally must have a passport book, including infants, and every applicant for a new passport must appear in person, regardless of age.

Adults must bring a valid driver’s license or state identification card. If your identification was issued within the last six months, a second form of identification is required. You must also bring an original or certified copy of your birth certificate or consular birth abroad certificate with the name of both parents listed and, if applicable, a previously issued, non-damaged passport or passport card or naturalization certificate. Children 15 years or younger must be accompanied by both parents or legal guardians. For 16 or 17-year-olds, one parent or guardian needs to be present.

Two separate forms of payment are needed for each application. A personal check, money order, or cashier’s check made payable to the U.S. Department of State for the passport fees, and a separate form of payment for the \$35 execution fee for the St. Johns County Clerk of Court. The Clerk’s office accepts cash, money order, check, and credit cards for their fees. Passport photos will be available to the public for \$10.65. You may use your own photo if it meets U.S. Department of States guidelines.

For more information and details on

what is required, visit <https://travel.state.gov> or call the Clerk’s Office Recording Department at (904) 819-3632.

AAUW St. Augustine presents LUNAFEST 2023

The St. Augustine branch of the American Association of University Women is hosting LUNAFEST 2023 on Saturday, April 15, 2023, from 5:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. at the Lincolnville Museum and Cultural Center, 102 Martin Luther King Ave, St. Augustine. Tickets are \$25 and may be purchased at www.lunafest.org/screenings/in-person-aauw-st-augustine-fl-041523

Monies raised will go to support AAUW Florida Tech Trek camps for eighth grade girls who have demonstrated an ability in science, technology, engineering, or math. Last year, 23 eighth grade girls from St. Johns County attended virtual Tech Trek camps. The students only pay a \$25 registration fee. This coming June there will be two in person Tech Trek camps.

The branch also raises money for college scholarships for students who have finished one or more years of college and live in St. Johns County. This year the branch is offering four scholarships, one to a nursing student to continue through graduation.

Festival guests will enjoy a dessert bar during intermission. Water is complimentary and wine and beer will be sold by Lincolnville Museum. Tickets for raffle baskets will be sold to be distributed at the end of the evening.

LUNAFEST is a traveling film festival celebrating, showcasing, and championing women. This year’s films challenge our perceptions about the world and spark conversation. Stories reflect the diverse perspectives of the filmmakers and their subjects. It is advised that some material may not be suitable for children under 13. This year’s festival is comprised of seven short films for a running time of 90 minutes.

Visit www.lunafest.org and www.staugustine-fl.aauw.net for more information.

St. Johns CARES announces annual Pet Food Drive

Not only are animal shelters in great need of pet food, individuals seeking assistance at local food pantries are also concerned about their pets. Unfortunately some are forced to make very hard decisions to give up their furry companions or give part of their own meager food supplies to their pets. Senior citizens in particular are more likely to give up their own food to feed their pets, at the cost of their own nutritional needs.

St. Johns CARES, Inc. is holding its annual Pet Food Drive from April 1 – April 28. Numerous locations will serve as host donation collection sites including local Public Library Branches, schools, fitness centers and other businesses and organizations. Donations will be distributed to six animal organizations in St. Johns County: Ayla’s Acres, Feline Canopy of Care, S.A.F.E., St. Augustine Humane Society, Swamp Haven and Wags & Whiskers. Donations will

also be shared with local food pantries and the Pie in the Sky organization that provides produce and canned goods to homebound elderly in St. Johns County.

Monetary donations to purchase pet food can be made at www.stjohnscares.org. Individuals wishing to hold a neighborhood pet food drive should contact president@st.johnscares.org.

Newcomers of North St. Johns’ luncheon to feature “Jersey Boys”

Newcomers of North Saint Johns’ next luncheon is scheduled for Thursday, April 27, 2023. Doors open at 11:15 a.m. at Alhambra Dinner Theatre, 12000 Beach Boulevard in Jacksonville. The event features a delicious lunch and entertainment by the Alhambra Theatre Players with the full four-act presentation of the Tony and Grammy Award-winning show, “Jersey Boys.”

The cost for the luncheon and program is \$45 for members and \$55 for guests. All reservations and payments must be received by April 11. Visit <https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org> for more information about the luncheon and membership.

The full Alhambra menu will be available for ordering the day of the event with water, iced tea, coffee and hot tea included. A cash bar is also available. Newcomers of North Saint Johns members and guests will be seated in an area especially reserved for the group; seats will be chosen upon arrival.

The Newcomers of North St. Johns offers a wide variety of activities for you to get acquainted and have fun including smaller lunch groups, Bunco, Canasta, wine socials, golf, Mah Jongg, holiday parties, day trips and cultural events. Visit <https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org> for more information.

Bartram Trail Newcomers’ and Women’s Club announces April luncheon

The Bartram Trail Newcomers’ and Women’s Club will host its April meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, April 11 at 11 a.m. at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club, located at 205 St. Johns Golf Drive. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. Renowned lead vocalist of the Last 2 Leave band, Angel Shapiro, will provide musical entertainment. Attendees are encouraged to wear Easter Bonnets as the theme is “Easter Glamour.”

The cost of the luncheon will be \$32. Make checks payable to BTNC and mail to: Deborah Russell 12376 Fireberry Ct., Jacksonville, FL 32258. Payment must be received no later than April 6, no exceptions. Indicate entrée choice on the check memo line; visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 for food choices and updated information.

The Bartram Trail Newcomers’ and Women’s Club meets the second Tuesday of every month from September to May for lunch. In addition to the monthly meetings, the club has a wide variety of interest groups, such as Bridge, Continental Rummy, Pennies Canasta, Mexican Chicken Train dominoes, Bunko, Mah Jongg,



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Life

Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

Jack Avery

Jack Avery is celebrating his 15th year participating in the Fight For Air Climb, an annual event to support the American Lung Association's mission to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease. During the event, participants climb to the top of the Bank of America tower in downtown Jacksonville. Avery said he "climbs for those who can't" and is thankful that he is still able to participate in the event at the spry age of 80. "It's amazing how as you age, it takes longer to get up the stairs," he said in jest, pointing out that his times have ranged from 12:59 minutes his first climb to 22 minutes last year. This year, he is preparing for his 15th climb on March 18 and said that, "God willing," his 16th climb would be after that.

Q: How long have you lived in Jacksonville?

A: I say that I've lived here longer than most natives. I was raised in Jacksonville since my father was in the Navy. I went to Bishop Kenny High School and Jacksonville University. I took a brief stint away from the area as I worked as a bank examiner in Bellevue, but my wife and I moved back to the area when I worked for American National Bank. I worked for a number of banks and retired as a branch manager.

Q: How did you meet your wife, Maggie?

Get to Know ...

Interested in being featured? Email Martie Thompson at editor@FloridaNewsLine.com

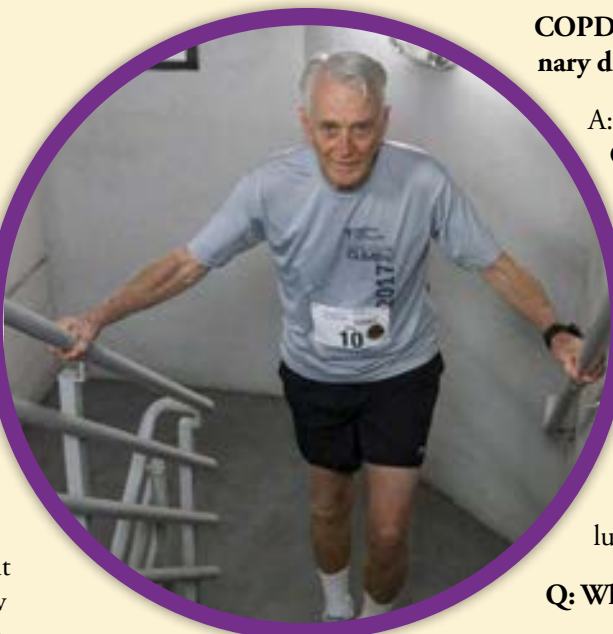


Photo courtesy Jack Avery
Jack Avery

A: She worked in a sandwich shop and I guess I caught her eye. We've been married 50 years as of last December. We have four children, seven grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

Q: How did you first get involved in the Fight For Air Climb?

A: A colleague at the bank I worked for found out about it and asked me if I wanted to participate. I thought it sounded like fun. So we went to the first practice at the Bank of America tower (they open up the tower a couple of nights a week in the months prior to the climb for participants to practice). I walked up 20 flights of stairs and said, "I'm done." But we kept practicing. In the four months practicing before the event, I lost 20 pounds and two inches in the waist. I fell in love with stair climbing. I had a bad knee and wore knee braces all the time. On the day of the first climb event, I forgot to put the knee braces on and had to do the climb without them. I haven't worn them since.

Q: When were you diagnosed with

COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)?

A: After the first Fight For Air Climb, I developed a cough that I couldn't get rid of. I went to a pulmonologist for tests and he made the diagnosis and said I had 60 percent lung capacity. My first question to him was, "Can I still climb?" and he said yes, he thought that would be good for me. Two years of practicing and climbing events later, I had 80 percent lung capacity.

Q: What is your training regimen?

A: I'm part of a climbing team and we climb the stairs at the Bank of America tower a couple of nights a week for about three months prior to each annual climb event. In the off season, I go to the gym and always do some work on the stairmaster. It's not quite the same, but it's close.

Q: What is your favorite part of participating in the Fight For Air Climb?

A: I'd say my favorite part is knowing that I can do it! I also like being part of my team; I call them my "Climb Family." Each one of them cares about the Climb and the reason for it. Altogether we have raised \$107,000 in the past 15 years for the American Lung Association, which ranked us No. 14 last year nationally out of 2,500 fundraising teams. What really impresses me about the American Lung Association is that 90 cents of every dollar goes to research and education. The American Lung Association has so many free resources; I encourage everyone to visit lung.org to learn more.

[Editor's Note: Visit climbjax.org for more information about the annual Fight For Air Climb.]

Expanded transportation for Trout Creek Senior Center

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

St. Johns County Council on Aging (COA) has announced that transportation services to and from COA's Trout Creek Senior Center will now be available for registered participants of the Trout Creek Senior Center each day the center is open: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

COA's Trout Creek Senior Center is located at 6795 Collier Road in Orangedale. The center offers lunch, activities, exercise, special events, and socialization for adults age 60 and up.

The following are a few of the fun programs planned at the Trout Creek Senior Center beginning in April 2023. Visit www.coajc.org/trout-creek-center to view a complete calendar of events.

- Wednesday, April 5: Easter Gift Basket Raffle Fundraiser and Wacky Waffle Wednesday
- Friday, April 7: Trout Creek Senior Center closed in observance of Good Friday
- Friday, April 14: Picnic Lunch at Alpine Groves Park
- Monday, April 17: Starting an Herb Garden at the Center
- Friday, May 5: Garage Sale

For more information and to register to attend, contact COA's Myra Fisher at (904) 209-3658.

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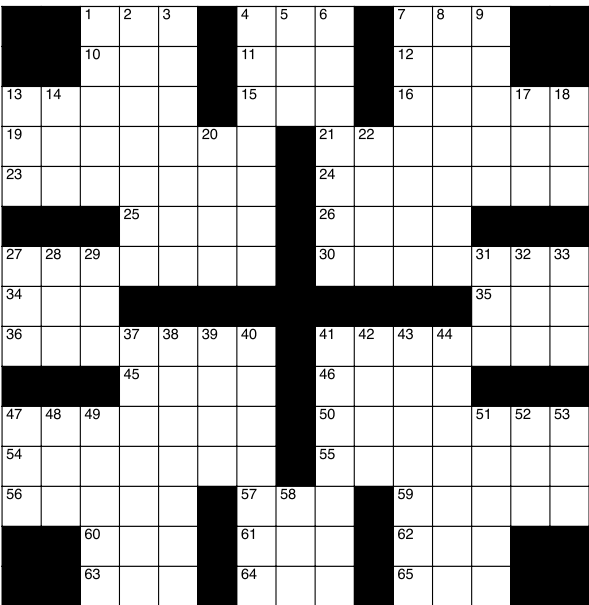
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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

1. Atomic mass unit
4. Criticize mightily
7. Sino-Soviet block (abbr.)
10. Stand in for
11. Everyone has one
12. Brew
13. Rectify
15. Popular Dodge truck model
16. Beef or chicken intestine
19. Satisfy
21. Of a particular people or localized region
23. Movements in quick tempos
24. Able to pay one's debts
25. Fleishy bird beak covering
26. Dueling sword
27. Helps
30. Court is in it
34. Touch lightly
35. Airborne (abbr.)
36. Of one
41. Baked good
45. Jai __, sport
46. About aviation
47. Low oval mound
50. Rugged mountain ranges
54. Compel to do something
55. A way to carve
56. Sao __, city in Brazil
57. Mustachioed actor Elliott
59. American Idol runner-up Clay
60. A way to soak
61. Car mechanics group
62. Born of
63. Time zone
64. Sea eagle
65. Even's opposite

CLUES DOWN

1. Sharp mountain ridge
2. Thin, fibrous cartilages
3. Provides new details
4. Muscular weaknesses
5. Ottoman military title
6. Banes
7. Horse-riding seats
8. Arms of a shirt
9. Narrow path along a road edge
13. Viper
14. Disfigure
17. Variety of Chinese language
18. Portray in a show
20. Wrongful act
22. No (slang)
27. State of agitation
28. __ Diego
29. One point east of due south
31. 007's creator
32. The NBA's Toppin
33. Midway between north and northeast
37. Examples
38. __ Gould, actor
39. The habitat of wild animals
40. Artful subtlety
41. Infielders
42. Keep under control
43. Herb
44. Distressed
47. A way to go down
48. Type of acid
49. Take by force
51. Collected fallen leaves
52. Shout of welcome or farewell
53. Monetary unit
58. Swiss river

MONEY & FINANCE WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

- ACCOUNTING
APPLICATION
BANK
BANKRUPTCY
CHECKING
CREDIT
DEBIT
DEBT
DEPOSIT
FINANCE
INQUIRY
INTEREST
INVESTMENT
LOSS
MONEY
PAPERWORK
PROFIT
RATES
RECONCILE
SALARY
SAVINGS
SOLVENT
STATEMENT
WITHDRAWAL

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Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 12 = E)

A. 18 5 23 12 21

Clue: Currency

B. 4 6 6 5 2 23 13

Clue: Banking relationship

C. 14 4 22 4 23 6 12

Clue: Make even

D. 20 12 14 16 13

Clue: Payment made or owed

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Easter weekend Mandarin Art Festival to be held under canopy of oaks

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

This year, the Mandarin Community Club is celebrating its 100th anniversary — and as part of the year of celebrations, invites the community to the Mandarin Art Festival on Easter weekend, April 8 and 9, on the grounds of the Mandarin Community Club at 12447 Mandarin Road. The family-friendly event serves as the premier fundraiser of the Mandarin Community Club, a non-profit identified as the oldest civic organization in Jacksonville, with proceeds supporting the club's preservation, education and beautification efforts throughout the Mandarin community.

The Mandarin Art Festival will be open from 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. on Saturday, April 8 and from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. on Sunday, April 9. Free parking and shuttle service is available from Albert

Field at Orange Picker and Brady roads and at the Mandarin Masonic Lodge on Loretto Road. This is an outdoor, rain or shine event, but no pets are permitted. A \$2 donation per person is requested at the gate.

The largest community event in Mandarin, the Mandarin Art Festival has been an Easter tradition for generations of families. Over the years, tens of thousands of guests have strolled under the oaks of the historic Mandarin Community Club to peruse the artwork of more than 100 local and nationally-known artists working in a variety of media. A juried fine art and fine craft show, awards will be given in the categories of Functional Fine Craft, Jewelry, Mixed Media, Painting, Photography, Sculpture and Best in Show.

The Children's Art Show, a beloved favorite of festival patrons, will

display the creations of talented students from area elementary and

Ackerman Cancer Center and Ackerman Cancer Foundation; Watson Realty



Photos courtesy Mandarin Art Festival
The Mandarin Art Festival will be held April 8 – 9.

middle schools. Other features include a Green Market of unique locally sourced and made items, a bake sale with homemade goodies from the kitchens of club members, food vendors providing an array of cuisine and a chance drawing for items contributed by Mandarin area businesses. Live entertainment will be provided and the historic, 100-year-old Post Office and General Store will be open and manned by the Mandarin Museum and Historical Society so that guests may stroll through its doors and back into history.

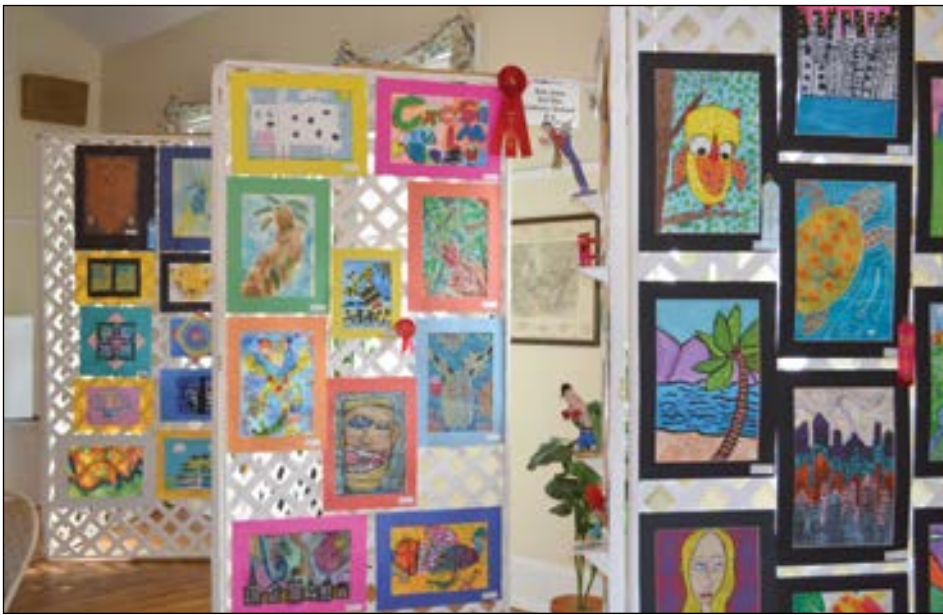
Festival chair Susie Scott leads the all-volunteer Mandarin Art Festival planning committee. The festival is made possible, in part, by support from

Corp. Kathy Akel Realtor; State Farm, Jim Register Agent; Renewal by Andersen; The Bolles School; Hagan Ace; and Hardage-Giddens.

Visit www.mandarinartfestival.org or contact the festival at mandarinartfestival@gmail.com for more information.



The Mandarin Art Festival will be held under a canopy of oaks on the grounds of the Mandarin Community Club.



The Children's Art Show is always popular

Sifting the sand: BeBot is ready to clean below the surface

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewslines.com

Keep St. Johns County Beautiful is on a mission to not only keep local beaches clean, but to also educate others to want to do the same.

To that end and in honor of Earth Day this month, three locations in St. Johns County (Mickler’s Beach, Vilano Beach and Crescent Beach), will host a demo by BeBot, the sand sifting, microplastic

grabbing robot. BeBot sifts the very surface layer of sand, no more than two inches deep, collecting debris that sometimes goes unnoticed such as cigarette butts, bottle caps, food wrappers, straws and other plastic fragments.

“The beaches might look clean, but once you get past the top level, there are micro plastics underneath,” said Ginger Baker, Keep St. Johns County Beautiful executive director. “We want

to use this demo to promote litter prevention, reduce marine debris and underscore sustainability. Basically, we all need to clean up after ourselves.”

BeBot can clean up to 32,000 square feet of beach in an hour, roughly the size of seven basketball courts. About the size of a small golf cart, BeBot runs on a mix of solar and battery power and operates silently. It is manufactured by Poralu Marine, a world leader in the design and construction of aluminum marinas, and is part of the Searial Cleaners brand.

BeBot, valued at \$68,000, is operated by trained staff using a remote control. Baker said that it is intended to be used by local Florida affiliates such as Keep Florida Beautiful in controlled areas as a way to capture attention and educate the public. BeBot was donated to Keep Florida Beautiful by Surfing’s Evolution and Preservation Foundation, an organization funded by the Endless Summer specialty Florida license plate. Keep St. Johns County Beautiful falls under the umbrella of Keep Florida Beautiful.

Baker said that BeBot is currently on its Florida tour and is not meant to routinely clean beaches or to replace volunteers. Also, she said, BeBot causes no harm to the environment and went through the Department of Environmental Protection permitting process, which ensures there is no disruption to the local environment and wildlife.

“We plan to have beach clean-ups taking place right alongside the demo,” said Baker. “Often, seeing a demo like this will motivate people to want to clean up as well.”

Monthly clean-ups are planned by Keep St. Johns County Beautiful, and



Photos courtesy Ginger Baker
The BeBot demo is open to the public and will take place on Thursday, April 20 from 5 p.m. – 8 p.m. at Mickler’s Beach.

Baker said that roundtable discussions are frequently held with community members to “customize goals for the area.”

Ponte Vedra Beach resident Bob Davenport, also known as “Bucket Bob,” who regularly picks up trash on Mickler’s Beach, has been included in these discussions.

“It truly bothers me to witness the result of apathy towards our treasures — i.e. beaches, green spaces, environment. This is a moral choice to do what’s right for the spaces we occupy at any given time,” said Davenport. “I am most disappointed when I see toys and juice boxes on the beach. Kids knowingly or unknowingly learn by example from their role models (parents/adults). They learn it’s okay not to be responsible for belongings they leave on the ground. It is an ‘opportunity lost’ to make a child a better person.”

Ponte Vedra Beach resident Elizabeth Joshi has also been a part of the roundtable discussions as she picks up trash along Palm Valley Road on a daily basis.

“It is ironic to me that people love to escape to the beach to enjoy the natural beauty and yet, when they exit that setting, they often leave behind trash that threatens that very environment. When beachgoers leave behind bottles, cans, wrappers, and beach toys, these items can easily be swept into the ocean during high tide or further degrade on the sand and pose a hazard to sea turtles and other wildlife,” said Joshi. “While the use of the BeBot will be an amazing step forward in cleaning up beach trash while not threatening wildlife like bigger equipment may, it still should be incumbent upon anyone visiting the beach to leave with everything they arrived with or better yet, leave with more than they arrived with such as an extra piece of trash that some other beachgoer may have left behind.”

Baker agreed and welcomed all residents to attend a demonstration at one of the locations and to celebrate Earth Day every day by routinely joining in clean-ups.

[Author’s note: The BeBot demo is open to the public and will take place on Thursday, April 20 from 5 p.m. – 8 p.m. at Mickler’s Beach; Friday, April 21 from 5 p.m. – 8 p.m. at Vilano Beach and Saturday, April 22 from 9:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the Crescent Beach Pavilion. Visit ksjcb.org for more information about routine clean ups organized by Keep St. Johns Beautiful.]

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Fishing

Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis
mail@floridanewslines.com

I hope everyone is doing well and enjoying the wonderful weather we've been having. I might break a record for days fished in shorts this year since we got such an early warm up. It's going to be really interesting to see how that affects the fishing the rest of the year.

As for right now the redfish have piled into the river in great numbers, but size might be a little on the small side. They'll grow and larger ones will show up more each day. If you want to throw artificials for them try a rattle trap or your favorite soft plastic jigs. Dark colors with a chartreuse highlight work well. Crab, mullet, and dead shrimp will have you covered on the natural bait side of things.

Stripers are biting around the bridges on fresh dead shrimp. You might also find them around bait schools on calm days. Keep an eye out for birds. They were one of the most consistent bites last year, so we'll see what happens this year.

Sheepshead will be showing up after their exploits near the inlet and offshore. While most people think of sheepshead being a wintertime thing, here our sheepshead fishing in the

river is best April – November and pretty much nonexistent outside of those months. April can be exceptional since the fish can be very hungry after spawning. I caught my biggest sheepshead to date in April which weighed 12 lbs. Fiddlers, clams, and blue crab will entice most of them. You can also catch some giant bream at the same time.

Whiting and pompano are in the surf if you need more of a reason to enjoy a nice day at the beach. Just remember to find the most favorable conditions before staking your claim on the sand. Water clarity is the biggest thing I look for because you can't necessarily walk down the beach to find cleaner water but you can usually hit multiple troughs and bars in one stretch of beach after you find clear water there. Keep moving until you find fish or roll the dice on them finding you.

My gut tells me we're in for some good fishing since everything got an early start, but I'm hoping that doesn't mean we're in for an early end to our warm fishing season. Time will tell, but I'm excited to see where it goes either way. Be safe out there and until next time, tight lines.

Briefs cont. from pg. 16

golf, recipe exchange, monthly special events, book club, lunch and matinee, Lunch Divas, Ladies Night Out, a nature walk group and community projects.

For club information, email Linda Beard, bartramtn@gmail.com. Visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 to see pictures of the meetings and download a membership form.

Knights of Columbus host benefit golf tournament

The Knights of Columbus Council 16492 from St. John Paul II Nocatee is hosting its annual Spring Golf Outing on May 5 at the St. Johns Golf & Country Club in St. Johns. Proceeds from the outing, which will include fun, food, and fellowship, will go towards the SJPII Catholic Church new building fund.

The Clyde Johnston-designed 18-hole course at St. Johns Golf & Country Club is a community centerpiece and has been nationally ranked for customer satisfaction and loyalty. The event includes lunch, golf, dinner, prizes, raffles, and various on-course contests and competitions. The day will conclude with an inspirational message by Father Richard Pagano and complimentary beverages.

Sponsorship opportunities are available, and individuals or teams can register online. Sponsors will have their tables featuring adult beverages and giveaways. For advertising, sponsorship, or donation information, contact Pete Falcone at pfalcone5369@gmail.com. Visit www.kofc.org to learn more about this event and future events hosted by the Knights of Columbus.

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Nutrition Check

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

Benefits of Gardening

The month of April is recognized as National Gardening Month. Many people think about starting their own garden, but feel that it will be too much maintenance. While it may require maintenance, the result of planting a seed and watching it grow through different stages into its full potential can be very rewarding. In addition to adding nutritious fresh fruits and vegetables to your kitchen, gardening offers a variety of health benefits. To name a few:

- **Healthy Eating:** Having access to freshly grown produce, or “farm-to-table” produce is a great way to have healthier options at your disposal. It is a simple way to get more fruits, vegetables, herbs and spices into your diet. UF IFAS Extension put together a North Florida Gardening Calendar that will help you determine what and when to grow: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/EP451>
- **Vitamin D Exposure:** Vitamin D increases calcium levels and positively affects our bones and our immune system. Exposure to sunlight helps everyone, especially older adults, to achieve adequate amounts of vitamin D.
- **Aerobic Exercise:** Gardening is a form of exercise and all muscle groups are involved. It requires you to move, get your heart pumping, pump your blood quickly throughout your body, and allow your lungs

to take in more oxygen.

- **Reduces Stress:** Studies conducted have shown that people have reported having better moods and blood tests showed lower levels of the stress hormone, cortisol, after gardening.

You can garden from inside or outside, as long as you have the necessary items. If you are interested, all you need is a form of sunlight (window or fluorescent light), potting soil, containers or ground level space, and specific supplies relating to what you decide to grow. If interested, step out of your comfort zone, and start by growing something small. Gardening is good for the mind and body. If you live close to UNF, you can learn more by touring the UNF Ogier Gardens and even participating in volunteering or some workshops. Visit www.unf.edu/recwell/ogiergardens/index.html for more information.

As a Registered Dietitian and mother, I also wrote this simple children’s book to encourage parents and children to garden together and try new foods; feel free to check it out: <https://tinyurl.com/2dnstxb>.

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.

The Pantry Raiders

A sweet treat for get-togethers

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Pecans are a species of hickory native to northern Mexico and the southern United States. Pecan trees are cultivated for their edible nuts, and it can take 12 years for a tree to reach maturity and begin producing. The history of pecans, which are the only major tree nut that grows naturally in North America, can be traced to the 16th century. Pecans are frequently enjoyed in southern cooking, particularly in desserts.

There are many different ways to incorporate pecans into recipes, such as in delicious, chewy cookie bars. Enjoy this recipe for “Pecan Praline Cookie Triangles” from “The Pampered Chef Stoneware Inspirations (The Pampered Chef®, Ltd.)” by The Pampered Chef® Test Kitchens.

Pecan Praline Cookie Triangles

Yields 64

Crust

- 2 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- ¾ cups powdered sugar
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- ¾ cups butter or margarine, melted

Filling

- 3 cups pecan halves, divided
- 2 cups packed brown sugar
- 3 eggs
- 4 tbsp. butter or margarine, melted
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- ¼ tsp. salt
- Powdered sugar, optional

Preheat oven to 350 F. For crust, combine flour, powdered sugar and baking soda in a batter bowl. Add butter; mix until crumbly. Lightly press crumb mixture over bottom of stoneware bar pan; roll lightly. Bake 15 minutes; remove from oven to a cooling rack.

Meanwhile for filling, reserve 1 cup of the pecans for garnish; chop remaining pecans. Combine chopped pecans, brown sugar, eggs, butter, vanilla, and salt; mix well. Pour filling over warm crust, spreading to edges of pan. Arrange remaining pecan halves over filling. Bake 17 to 19 minutes, or until filling is set in center. Remove from oven; cool completely.

Sprinkle with additional powdered sugar, if desired. Cut into 32 squares using a utility knife; cut each square in half diagonally.

Gardening

Welcome to Spring

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale
mail@floridanewslsine.com



Blanket flower

Spring seemed to come early. Just as our clocks changed, we had a little more rain and cooler weather. But as I write, we have a frost warning, which is consistent with our last average frost date.

The Extension Service bimonthly newsletter, A New Leaf – Yard and Garden, is always worth checking for timely tips: <https://tinyurl.com/42rc3axu>. Another good resource, The Neighborhood Gardener, <https://tinyurl.com/yc7bdh4d>, also gives access to our educational webinars. They cover a variety of topics which you may find interesting.

In my backyard, there is a large patch of pink shrimp plant (*Justicia brandegeana*) near a firebush top-killed

by the freezes, where I regularly see a male ruby-throated hummingbird either feeding on the shrimp flowers or perching on a slender twig. He might be waiting for a potential mate. If a likely female appears, there is a chance that he will begin his mating “dance.” Swooping up and down again repeatedly, in a pattern specific to the species, he’ll finish by darting back and forth in front of her in short arcs. I’d love to see him in action!

With the early heat and a little rain, some plants are already looking very lush. My dwarf Simpson’s stoppers (*Myrcianthes fragrans*) have lots of flower buds on new growth, which should be beautiful, if the cold weather doesn’t damage them. The crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*), which clambers through a couple of large old beautyberry shrubs, has almost finished its flush of trum-



Trumpet honeysuckle



Phlox

pet flowers. Every spring the bees take advantage of its early blooms. Some larger species cannot squeeze into the tubular flowers, and pierce them at the base, robbing the nectar within. It’s the smaller bees and other pollinators which are doing the work.

My native Darrow’s blueberries (*Vaccinium darrowii*) have seen plenty of bee action. Hopefully it will mean a good supply of fruit for the birds, but it also looks like some of their flowers have been robbed.

Also a native, the trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*), is proving to be happy where I planted it last year, climbing an obelisk. I’ll probably need to prune it quite heavily to prevent it becoming too heavy for its support, but I like the look so far.

I have some wild phlox (*Phlox drummondii*) blooming too. If you drive out of town at this time of year, you’ve probably seen great swathes of pink and yellow along the roadsides, courtesy of



Photos courtesy Lesley Arrandale
Lanceleaf coreopsis

the FDOT. That’s what my husband asked me to try to achieve at the front of our very modest yard! This year just a few phlox are flowering near a clump of lanceleaf coreopsis (*Coreopsis lanceolata*) and some Virginia spiderwort (*Tradescantia obiensis*). And blanket flowers (*Gaillardia sp.*) are also blooming. Small triumphs, but I do need to establish more plants to make a real show.

As the year unfolds there are always things in the yard to grab my attention and remind me that a garden is not static. I check on my wildflowers and shrubs almost every morning, watching their progress. They produce their buds, flowers, fruits, and seeds, and each stage is a delight. The insects they attract can be “good” or “bad,” but they are all part of the natural world and if there is a semblance of balance I am grateful. I hope you enjoy your labors, wherever your gardening journey takes you.



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Travel

The Magic of Monarchs

By Debi Lander
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Gazing at millions of monarch butterflies fluttering around their remote Mexican winter sanctuaries becomes an incredible dream-like encounter, an adventure I'll never forget.

Monarchs are one of the most recognizable butterflies. Surprisingly, the fragile insects' migration location remained a mystery until 1975. Researchers knew they flew south to Texas and on into Mexico, but exactly where no one knew. A program to tag the monarch's wings led to the previously hidden habitat.

Every fall, as the weather turns cooler and the sun's angle dips, the monarch butterflies start their 2,800 - mile journey from eastern North America to the sanctuaries in Mexico. The monarchs cluster in the oyamel fir forests in the volcanic mountains of Central Mexico, not a place easily accessible.

The late summer migrating generation of the monarchs is known as Methu-



Beautiful Monarchs.

selah after the biblical man who lived for 987 years. These butterflies live five to eight times as long as their parents and grandparents. They develop flight muscles and store lipids for their hazardous journey to the ideal high mountain habitat. They do not reproduce until the following spring.

Mexico now protects these tiny creatures in the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve. From November to April, the Reserve provides a rare opportunity to immerse yourself in the monarch's world.

My journey with Craftours started in Mexico City and involved a multi-hour drive up switch-backed mountain roads to an altitude of around 7,000 feet.

Upon arrival at the sanctuary, I climbed on a horse and let him do the huffing and puffing up the steep incline. Very fit men lead the tethered horses up and down the trail. The approximate 15-minute ride follows a path into the canopy of oyamel trees that only grow at very high altitudes. Then, a required sanctuary guide leads the way to the best viewing spots, possibly hiking another 2,000 feet higher.

If the temperature at this altitude reaches around 60 degrees, listen for the soft fluttering of gossamer wings as thousands of butterflies search for nectar and water. The sight, a popcorn-like explosion, brings some to tears. Oth-



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Hiking to see the Monarchs.

ers say they feel they have stepped into a National Geographic documentary. I looked down at the dirt trail and saw shadows dancing like jumping polka dots. I looked up and was mesmerized by the sheer beauty of the mountains in the distance and the colorful flutter-bys (as my toddler son used to call them).

If the temperature drops below 55 degrees or the sky is cloudy or misty, the butterflies cluster together, one on top of another, with tightly closed wings that appear black. High up in the fir trees, the branches bend downward with what resembles a dangling, giant termite nest or a swollen beehive. The butterflies snuggle and remain motionless with the exceptional arrival or departure of one of the species. The butterfly groups blanketing the tree trunks look more like rusty autumn leaves. The overall sight

is mystifying but slightly disappointing compared to witnessing the confetti-like flitting of monarchs on a warm day.

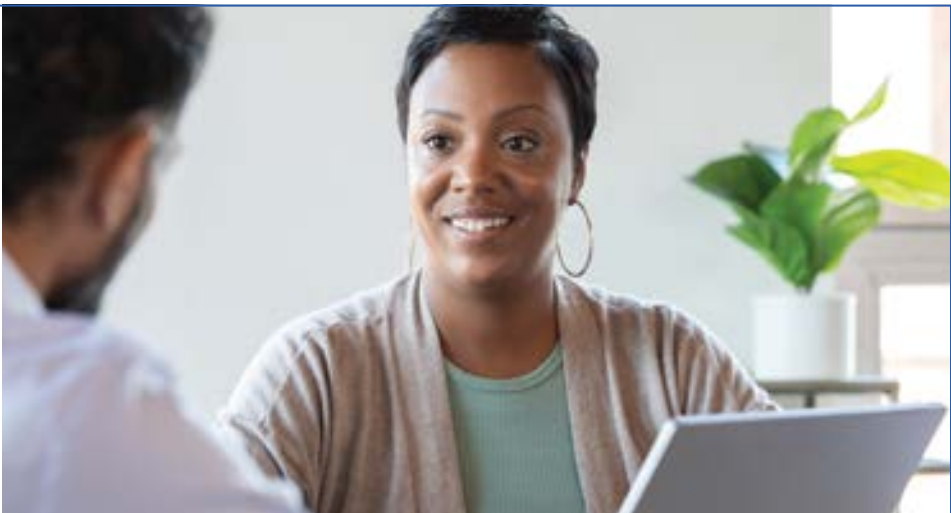
The strenuous climb and guided tour allowed me and others to observe one of nature's most magical sights. Comments overheard on the trail were, "a once-in-a-lifetime-moment, simply stunning, a miracle of wonder, being one with nature, and exhausting but excellent."

Now that I'm home, I long to return for another hour in swirling butterfly heaven.

Craftours: <https://craftours.com/tour/mexico-monarch/>

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

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