

# The CreekLine

MAY 2023 Volume 23 Issue 5

A Florida NewsLine Publication



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Photos courtesy INK!  
Ali Pressel and Ila Nena Barrett.

## World Water Day observed

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewsline.com

Students and teachers revealed new additions and upgrades to the outdoor learning classroom on World Water Day, March 22 at Julington Creek Elementary School. The outdoor space officially opened on World Water Day last year, and was funded with grants provided by Wells Fargo and the Community First Cares Foundation through a partnership between the Consortium of Florida Education Foundations and local education foundation, Investing in Kids (INK!).

In 2022, Creekside High School students, teachers, and volunteers opened the outdoor learning space and hands-on learning projects at

World Water Day cont. on pg. 16

## Bartram Bash to celebrate history of NW St. Johns County

By Martie Thompson  
editor@floridanewsline.com

The annual Bartram Bash, a unique, family friendly event celebrating naturalist William Bartram and his influence on the history of NW St. Johns County, will be held at Alpine Groves Park on Saturday, May 6 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. This event has been held nearly annually since its inception in 2005, with a hiatus during the pandemic, according to St. Johns County Parks and Rec Supervisor of Environmental Education and Outdoor Recreation Kelly Ussia.

“The event was started originally by well-known former St. Johns County Park Naturalist Beverly Fleming,” Ussia said. “Her vision was to celebrate William Bartram and Alpine Groves Park, and the event has evolved over the years.”

On May 6, members of the Friends of Alpine Park will conduct tours of the historic Harris-Bennett Farmhouse from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. during Bartram Bash.

“Our docents will share the history of Alpine Groves Park, including families who lived in the farmhouse or merely used it as a weekend getaway,” said Marti Roesse, president of the Friends of Alpine Park. “We will also educate our



Photos courtesy St. Johns County  
Historical reenactors including Mike Adams as William Bartram and Jimmy Sawgrass at a previous Bartram Bash.

visitors on some of the items that have been acquired in furnishing the farmhouse.”

Also during the morning, there will be live demonstrations with historical reenactor Mike Adams as William Bartram. Adams will share his knowledge of Bartram and life during his time. Native American History will also be celebrated with Jimmy Sawgrass.

The Stetson Kennedy Foundation will present its annual Fellow Man and Mother Earth Award at a ceremony beginning at 12 p.m. After the award ceremony, attendees are invited to bring chairs, blankets and picnics and enjoy folk music performed on the porch of the farmhouse by the band Skin and Bonz until 2 p.m.

Parking is available at both parking lots within the

park and the event is free of charge.

According to Al Abbatiello, chairman of the William Bartram Scenic & Historic Highway Management Group, his group’s members including Fleming did the planning, organizing, cooking, and serving food at the first few Bartram Bash events.

“It was felt that serving food was necessary to attract and encourage residents to attend,” Abbatiello said. “We served hotdogs and burgers, water, and potato chips — and a big birthday cake in honor of William Bartram’s birthday. The cake was always donated by Publix and cash contributions helped pay for the music groups that entertained the crowd.”

Food is no longer served, but the event continues to thrive today with live music and many displays of earth-friendly goods and services.

“The Bartram Bash is unique to the northwest part of St. Johns County, with all groups integral to the area coming together to put on the event,” Ussia said. “It provides a great opportunity for everyone to come out and explore and learn more about the park that they have likely already visited. We hope to see the whole community there!”



A historical reenactor at the 2014 Bartram Bash in front of the Harris-Bennett Farmhouse.

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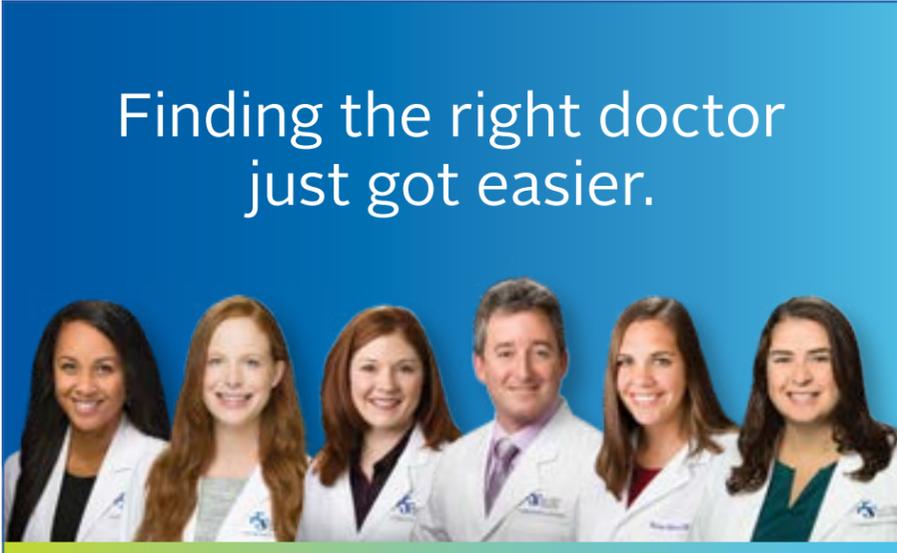


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## Guest Column

# Potential passive park land for Fruit Cove

By Al Abbatiello, Chairman, William Bartram Scenic & Historic Highway Management Group

Several years ago, a Daily's gas station was being planned on the site of the former nursery on State Road 13 directly in front of the Fruit Cove Estates neighborhood. Thankfully, because of the probable negative effects of gas spillage affecting well water, the St. Johns River, and the health of Fruit Cove Estates residents, our County Commission denied the planned gas station. The 7.7 acres of land still stands vacant.

Recently, the St. Johns County Land Acquisition and Management Program (LAMP) Conservation Board identified part of that vacant land as potential open space to be used for passive recreation in Fruit Cove. The smaller of the two parcels (north of Otoe's Place) is apparently available to be sold, but the larger, southern parcel is not for sale since the owner has no interest in selling

the land at this time.

The smaller of the two parcels is number five on a list of five parcels the LAMP board suggested for the county to consider acquiring for open space and passive recreation. County commissioners have asked staff to start some talks with the owner about possible acquisition. The William Bartram Scenic Highway Organization will continue following this passive park potential for the Fruit Cove area.

It's possible the landowner is still planning a neighborhood commercial center on the larger parcel; however, there has been no recent activity suggesting development is pending. In the interests of keeping the William Bartram Scenic Highway scenic and historic, we will attempt to learn the intentions of the property owner, First Coast Energy, for the larger parcel of vacant land.

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# BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

## Meet Jax!



**Breed:**

Yorkie

**Favorite Activity:**

Skateboarding around the pond with his sister or catching lizards

**Favorite Treat:**

Pupperoni (if you ask him, lizards!)

**Favorite Friend:**

His sister Laney, another yorkie

**How did your BFF get their name:**

After the city Jacksonville that we moved to from Virginia – that eventually introduced us to St. Johns.

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.

## Summer Camp and Activities Guide in this issue! Pages 10 - 12

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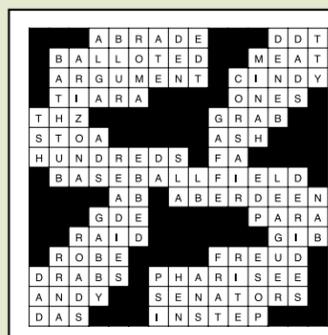
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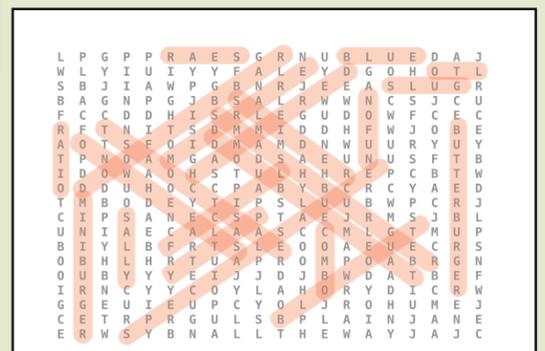
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PG 14



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# May

## 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 Maple Street Biscuit Company, 1627 Race Track Road in St. Johns. 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.

**2nd: Happy Hookers crochet group** will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on May 2 and May 16 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.

**2nd: Honeybee Quilters Guild** will meet on Tuesday, May 2 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. This meeting will feature the traditional "Ugly" Auction of member-provided sewing related items (not magazines). Bring a checkbook for your new treasures. Wearing masks is optional. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

**8th: The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable** will meet on Monday, May 8 at 12 p.m. at St. Augustine Waterworks building, 184 San Marco Ave. in St. Augustine. The featured speaker will be St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick. Email info@sjcroundtable.org to register for the meeting or visit www.sjcroundtable.org for more information.

**8th: The Northwest St. Johns County** United for Progress Club will meet on Monday, May 8 to celebrate its sixth birthday with a picnic and social at 6 p.m. To attend, visit www.nwstjohnsup.com or email nwsjcp@gmail.com for more information.

**9th: Adult Book Club at the Bartram** Trail Branch Library will discuss "Malibu Rising" by Taylor Jenkins Reid on Tuesday, May 9 at 5 p.m. Register at www.sjcpls.org or call the library at (904) 824-6960.

**9th: Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club** will hold its meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, May 9 at 11 a.m. at the Serenata Beach Club, 3175 S. Ponte Vedra Blvd. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. At this meeting, outgoing board members will be thanked and incoming board members will be welcomed. The cost of the luncheon is \$32. Make checks payable to BTNC and mail as soon as possible to Donna Holland, 512 Candyroot Ct., St. Johns, FL 32259. Be sure to indicate entrée choice on the check memo line. Visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 for food choices and updated information.

**10th - 13th: Friends of the Bartram** Trail Library Book Sale will be held May 10 – 13 at the Bartram Trail Branch Library during regular library hours. Friends members get early access on Tuesday, May 9 from 5 p.m. – 7 p.m. Friends

can also fill a provided bag on Saturday, May 13 for the Member Only Price of \$5. Non-members can shop at regular donation pricing; suggested donations are \$1 per item.

**11th: Mother's Day Gala** will be held on May 11 from 4 p.m. – 7 p.m. at Modern Aesthetic Centers, 2050 St. Johns Pkwy., Suite 106. The event will feature food, wine and champagne, local vendors, swag bags, and live demos as well as promotional specials. Visit macflorida.com for more information.

**13th: The Bartram Trail Genealogy Club** meets the second Saturday of each month (this month, May 13) 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/BT-GenClubGroup.

**15th: The All Star Quilters Guild** will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on Monday, May 15 at the First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. Linda Sill of Creative Quilting will present "A Quilter's Journey." Sew and Tell is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit www.allstarquilters.org for more information.

**16th: The Newcomers** of North St. Johns will host its May luncheon at DoubleTree by Hilton, 116 San Marco Ave. in St. Augustine beginning at 11 a.m. on May 16. During lunch, accomplished pianist Carl Grant will entertain members with a medley of soft ballads and love songs. Also featured will be the installation of the club's board of directors for 2023 – 24. The cost for the luncheon is \$35 for members. All reserva-

tions must be received by May 5. Visit <https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org> for more information.

**18th: The Garden Club of Switzerland** will feature guest speaker Steven Davies talking about gopher tortoises at 10:30 a.m. at the Bartram Trail Branch Library, located at the entrance to Julington Creek Plantation. The public is invited. Visit <https://switzerlandgc.blogspot.com/> for more information.

**18th: William Bartram Scenic Highway Group** will meet on Thursday, May 18 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.

**19th: Adult Craft – Wine cork birdhouse** will be held at 10 a.m. on May 19 at the Bartram Trail Branch Library, 60 Davis Pond Blvd. The birds will love you if you come and build a wine cork birdhouse. Bring wine corks if you have them, but we have plenty. 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.

**20th: Foods and Herbs from Field to Forest** will be offered on May 20 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.



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**Guest Column**

# What you need to know about Florida's Constitutional Amendments

By St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes

Did you know that citizens may propose amendments to the Florida Constitution through an initiative petition process? The initiative petition process, in addition to other requirements, requires a specific number of petitions to be signed by registered Florida voters before the proposed amendment can appear on the ballot. Per the Florida Constitution, the number of signatures needed is based on 8 percent of the voters who cast votes in the last Presidential election. In addition, the signatures must also come from voters in at least one half of the congressional districts of the state. The statewide total valid signatures needed for the initiative to make it to your ballot in 2024 is 891,523. A proposed amendment requires at least 60 percent approval from Florida voters to pass.

Statewide, groups often submit over a million signatures on the initiative petitions. In order to be valid, the signature submitted must be that of a registered voter in the county to which the signature has been submitted, and the signature on the petition must match the signature on the voter's record.

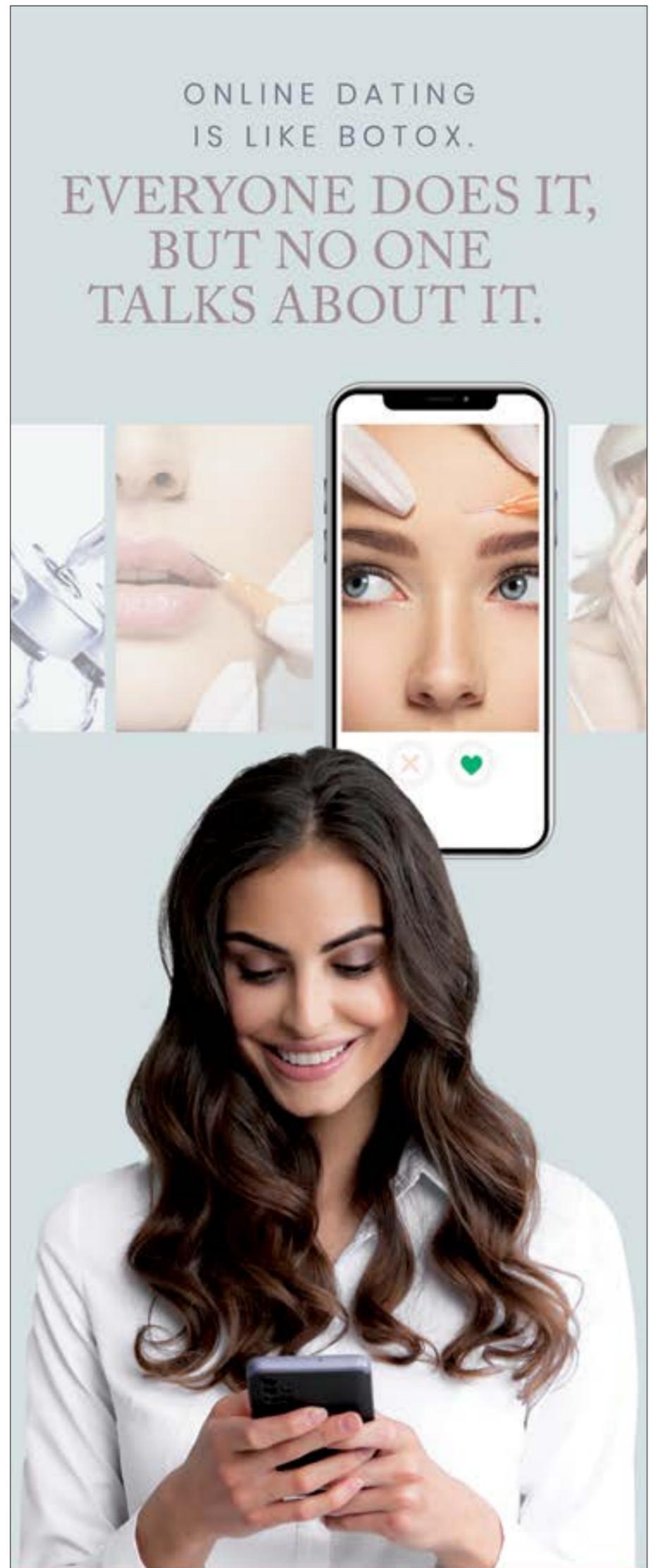
Once proponents obtain 25 percent of the total number of required signatures, the Secretary of State sends the initiative language to the Attorney General, who then forwards the language to the Florida Supreme Court. The Supreme Court will determine if the initiative is legal. During the review by the Court, proponents may continue gathering the remaining signatures needed to place it on the ballot. If the Court declares the initiative invalid because it is unconstitutional, violates Florida's strict

single-subject requirement, or any other reasons, the initiative is dead.

Throughout the year, the St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Office verifies thousands of initiative petitions signed by St. Johns County voters. Pursuant to Florida Statute 100.371(11)(b), St. Johns County's actual cost of signature verification of an initiative petition is \$0.55. Since January 2023, our office has received and verified almost 19,000 signed petition forms. The most popular petitions currently circulating are "Adult Personal Use of Marijuana" and "Right to Clean and Healthy Waters." Once a month, an Initiative Petition Summary is uploaded to our website at [www.votesjc.gov](http://www.votesjc.gov) for public viewing.

After the petitions are verified by the Supervisor of Elections Office, they are forwarded to the Secretary of State. Once the Secretary of State has determined that the required number and distribution of valid signatures has been obtained, the Secretary will issue a certificate of ballot position for that proposed amendment.

Initiative petitions are circulated by either paid petition circulators or volunteer petition circulators. To become a paid petition circulator, one must visit the Florida Division of Elections website and complete an online application. Petition circulators are working in St. Johns County, so don't be surprised if you are approached at a public library, government building, grocery store, or gas station by a circulator asking for your signature on a constitutional amendment petition. Initiative petitions must be filed no later than February 1, 2024 in order to obtain ballot position for the 2024 General Election.



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

**Q: Is it too early to register children for the next school year?**

A: Not at all. We really need parents to register their children, especially incoming kindergarteners, as soon as possible. Unless parents register, we have no way of knowing how many teachers we will need to hire for next year. Also unknown to us at this point is how many students we will lose to vouchers due to the recently passed HB 1.

We had two teacher job fairs this spring and feel so fortunate that we were able to hire 103 teachers from outside the school district — from all over the United States, actually.

**Q: How can parents register their children for school?**

A: They can check with their local school, and most of the paperwork is done online. There is an address locator on our main website ([www.stjohns.k12.fl.us](http://www.stjohns.k12.fl.us)) that will let residents know exactly which schools their home is zoned for. We encourage parents to register as soon as they can.

**Q: What is the status of the new schools under construction?**

A: The walls of the Shearwater school have been tilted up and it is beginning to look like a school. At Twin Creeks, the horizontal construction is finishing up and walls will be tilted up soon.

We discussed this last month, but to recap, the RiverTown school has been postponed for one year. We will open the bid process in early June and award the bid later that month. Construction

can start immediately after that, giving a two year window before the school is scheduled to open at the start of the 2025 – 26 school year. We are hopeful that this will result in us getting multiple bids for the work.

**Q: What else is happening in the school district at this time?**

A: We are gearing up for graduation, which will be here before we know it. This is the time of year that we have student recognitions. We just had our Star Awards for the top 3 percent of graduating seniors and learned about their future plans. Coming up is the Honor the Graduate ceremony, where two seniors from each high school are nominated by their peers as spiritual leaders of their class. This is sponsored by the Christian Educators of St. Johns County. Also coming up is the American Youth Character Awards banquet. Seniors will receive scholarships and juniors will be recognized, all based on their character. At this event, we recognize both public and private school students. Of course, each school will also be holding its own Senior Awards.

Finally, the third annual Pedro Menendez National Signing Day will be held on May 4. Similar to an athletic signing, academy students going straight to the workforce will sign on with their future employers and commit to skilled trades careers or advanced training.

**Q: How can our readers contact you?**

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



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

**Q: Is your office, like many businesses, in need of employees?**

A: The 7th Judicial Circuit covers Volusia, Flagler, St. Johns, and Putnam counties. We are struggling to fill prosecutor positions. We currently have approximately 68 Assistant State Attorneys, but we are about six or seven short. It's difficult to find people to apply for a number of reasons, but for one thing, enrollment is down at law schools due to the high cost and then when students graduate, they often have a lot of student loans. Seven years ago or so, we would interview at the University of Florida and Florida State University and get between 10 and 15 candidates interested in an interview. Last year we had just one.

**Q: How are you addressing this to try to attract qualified candidates?**

A: We have raised the starting Assistant State Attorney salary to a minimum of \$65,000, but you can easily add \$20,000 to \$25,000 on top of that if you consider benefits we offer like health insurance and retirement.

Inexperienced prosecutors start in misdemeanor, and that pays the \$65,000 minimum. A felony line attorney makes \$75,000 minimum and for drug prosecutors, the minimum is \$82,500. Felony intake attorneys, who make the filing decisions, earn a minimum of \$90,000 and criminal prosecutors earn a minimum of

**State Attorney** cont. on pg. 13

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**Q: Can you give background on the deceptive mail campaign posing as the County Records Office?**

A: Several residents have reached out to my office about a letter from a Tampa-based company claiming to be the County Records Office. The letter informs the recipient their deed has been recorded in the Official Records and lists the new property owner's name. The company offers to sell the property owner a copy of the recorded deed for \$89.

In Florida, the Clerk of Courts and County Comptrollers are the record-keepers for official records, such as deeds and mortgages. Residents are encouraged to contact my office or visit our website to obtain a free copy of their deed.

**Q: If a deed or document is recorded with a property owner's name on it, how can the property owner be notified?**

A: The Clerk's Office provides a free recording notification service. If you subscribe to the Property Fraud Alert system, you will receive an email alert when a document including your name is recorded into the Official Records of St. Johns County.

The alert provides an early warning system for subscribers to become aware of what may have otherwise gone

undetected. Subscribers armed with this notification system will be able to take prompt, appropriate action if they determine the activity to be fraudulent.

**Q: With summer travel around the corner, do you have any updates on the timelines to apply for and receive a passport?**

A: Yes, at this time, the U.S. Department of State has stopped accepting expedited applications for passports. If you are traveling in less than nine weeks, you must call the National Passport Information Center at 1-877-487-2778 in order to make an appointment for passport services at a U.S. Department of State Passport Agency. If you are planning to travel in more than nine weeks and need a new passport, consider visiting our recording department in the St. Johns County courthouse or making an appointment at our annex locations in Julington Creek or Ponte Vedra Beach. To schedule an appointment, call (904) 819-3632. F

**Q: What is the best way for residents to contact you?**

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



**with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick**

**Q: You are well known for being visible in the community. Why do you think that is important?**

A: I think it is important to be seen frequently and also that is how I receive feedback from the community. If there's something we can do better, I want people to let me know, as partnerships with the community are important. It also gives me the opportunity to share how we're policing and let the community know how they can help us make the community safer.

**Q: What are some types of community engagement that your office participates in?**

A: In the past month, I attended the grand opening of the pickleball courts in Julington Creek and some of my deputies and I have been outside Publix in Fruit Cove, RiverTown, and Nocatee. We hand out information and various SJSO items as we try to form relationships and bonds with the community.

I also regularly speak to homeowners and condo associations. These are all unique and give me the opportunity to address specific issues based on their particular needs. I also visit civic organizations like Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs and Boy Scout troops. I coach football at multiple schools and this gives me the opportunity to talk to the parents of the athletes as well as the

athletes themselves. I try to reach out to all ages.

**Q: What can you tell us about the Citizen Law Enforcement Academy (CLEA)?**

A: This is a 11-week course that meets each Tuesday evening from 6 p.m. – 9 p.m. and is offered twice per year. It gives an insider's perspective on law enforcement and is designed to give participants a working knowledge of our office's mission, operation, policies, and personnel. There is no charge for the academy, but class size is limited. There is more information on our website about dates and how to sign up to attend.

**Q: How can organizations invite you to speak to their members?**

A: My style is to lead by walking around, so visiting with organizations and community members is something I enjoy doing. Interested people should email me at sheriff@sjsso.org or call our non-emergency number, (904) 824-8304 and ask for the office of the sheriff to schedule a visit from me. I can address a specific topic or give a kind of "State of the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office" type of presentation.

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

A: They can email me at sheriff@sjsso.org or call me at (904) 824-8304.

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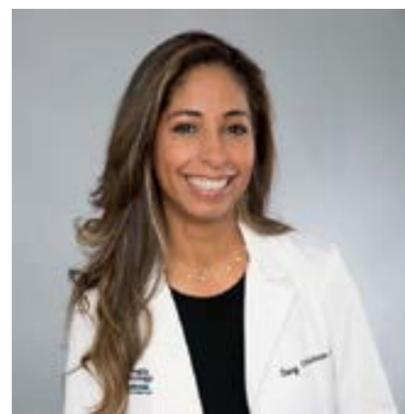
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## Briefs

**Summer reading volunteers needed**  
RSVP of St. Johns County is looking for community members to assist once a week in the summer reading program in the St. Johns County School District. Hours are flexible. If you are traveling this summer, you can help while you are in town. Orientation for reading volunteers will be Monday, June 5 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the Fullerwood Auditorium, 10 Hildreth Drive in St. Augustine.

“There are students who can greatly benefit from the help of those willing to give just a small amount of their time,” said Cheryl Freeman, RSVP director. “Assistance from community volunteers can make all the difference in helping these students succeed.”

To make a training reservation or for more information, contact RSVP at (904) 547-3952 or Cheryl.Freeman@stjohns.k12.fl.us.

### Church collects insect repellent for homeless

St. Patrick's Episcopal Church is once again collecting bug spray and sunscreen for those experiencing homelessness in St. Johns County. Volunteers at Home Again and Wildflower Clinic distribute the insect repellent and sunscreen to the homeless — and change lives.

Please drop off your donations to the church at your convenience and church volunteers will ensure they are delivered to Home Again and Wildflower Health to help those in need. St. Patrick's Episcopal Church is located at 1221 State Road 13 in Fruit Cove. Call (904) 287-2807 for more information.

### COA announces expanded transportation services to Trout Creek Senior Center

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 aged 60 and up.

Contact COA's Myra Fisher at (904) 209-3658 for more information and to register to attend. Visit [www.coasjc.org/trout-creek-center](http://www.coasjc.org/trout-creek-center) to view a complete calendar of upcoming events at the center.

### Paper shredding event scheduled

It's that time of year — time to clean out and securely shred older personal and confidential records. Knights of Columbus Charities has a quick, easy and inexpensive solution. For a \$20 donation to Knights of Columbus Council 12664 Charities (25 percent of net proceeds will support Pregnancy Support Centers), you'll receive a quick fill, Seal and Shred Bag that holds up to 40 pounds of paper.

Purchase your bags at San Juan Del Rio on April 29, 30 or May 6, 7 after mass, fill the bags with your old records, seal them, and bring them to the shred-truck on May 13 between 8:30 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. at San Juan Del Rio. The Shred-Truck provides secure on-site shredding of your documents.

If you cannot pick up a bag from the church, email [rebridenjax@live.com](mailto:rebridenjax@live.com) and we will deliver in the NW St. Johns area

### Senior living facility receives Governor's Gold Seal Award for Excellence in Long-Term Care for 10th time

River Garden Hebrew Home has once again been awarded the Governor's Gold Seal Award for Excellence in Long-Term Care, a clear indicator that the agency remains on-track as a premier care facility for seniors in

northeast Florida. The award was presented by Kimberly R. Smoak, deputy

secretary of Health Quality Assurance at the Agency for Health Care Administration to Dr. Lawrence Goldberg, River Garden Hebrew Home board president, during the River Garden Senior Services annual meeting on March 26. River Garden Hebrew Home has proudly achieved this esteemed status since the award was created 21 years ago.

The Gold Seal Award for Excellence in Long-Term Care was created in 2002 by the Florida State Legislature to recognize Florida's premier quality nursing homes that have exceptionally high standards and display excellence in the quality of care delivered to their residents. Prior to receiving the award, a nursing facility must undergo a rigorous examination to ensure strict regulatory compliance and the provision of enhanced programming and services. In addition, a site visit is made to the facility by representatives of the Governor's Panel on Excellence in Long-Term Care.

Currently, there are more than 700 nursing homes in the state of Florida and only 10 are recognized with the Governor's Gold Seal Award for Excellence in Long-Term Care. River Garden and one other facility have maintained the recognition since its inception in 2002.

### Florida libraries launch local author contest

The St. Johns County Public Library System will participate in the sixth annual Florida Author Project contest, which creates opportunities for indie-published authors. In partnership with “Library Journal” and BiblioBoard, the Florida Author Project gives libraries a chance to engage with a growing group of fresh literary voices in their communities and an opportunity to play an active role in the discovery and promotion of new works.

Submissions will be accepted through May 31, 2023, for local authors of adult and young adult fiction to be recognized as the top indie-published eBooks in Florida. Winners in each category will receive \$1,000 as well as:

- Honors at the 2023 Indie Author Day Reception
- Opportunities to promote the winning title in participating Florida public libraries

• Inclusion in a full-page spread in “Library Journal,” one of America's oldest and most renowned trade publications for library news

• Opportunities to earn royalties through the IAP Select collection (ePUB format required for eligibility)

For indie-published authors, the contest is a fantastic prospect to elevate their careers and expand their readership. Along with the accolade of the award and its perks, being recognized by librarians creates credibility and visibility in the growing marketplace of digital content and indie-published books.

Authors may submit their work at [indie-authorproject.librariesshare.com/florida](http://indie-authorproject.librariesshare.com/florida). Each book submitted to the contest must be independently-published, in the category of adult or young adult fiction, written by a Florida resident, and available in either ePUB (strongly encouraged) or PDF format.

To learn more about writer's resources at the St. Johns County Public Library System, visit [sjcpls.org/writers-resources](http://sjcpls.org/writers-resources).

### Fort Mose historical and artistic event to be held

Fort Mose Historic Park will host the St. Augustine History Festival, an event for the community, on May 12 – 13 to celebrate the historical significance of the park.

An Afro-Cuban art exhibit will be held from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. each day. Working with the Fort Mose Historical Society, the St. Augustine Friendship Association will display works by Afro-Cuban artists Orlando Piedra, Roel Caboverde, Mildo Matos, Laurence Zuniga, Oscar Lasseria and others on the grounds of Fort Mose.

The Fort Mose Militia reenactment will occur at 11 a.m., 12 p.m., and 1 p.m. each day.

Historian Jane Landers will speak on ties between St. Augustine, Fort Mose and Cuba on May 13, 2 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. St. Augustine historian Susan Parker, PhD, will be the interlocutor.

Many know that Fort Mose was the first community of free Africans recognized by European powers in what would become the continental United States.

Briefs cont. on pg. 15



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# ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

## Business Briefs

### 31st annual Small Business Week Celebration to be held

The U.S. Small Business Administration will present the Small Business Week Awards and Top Lender Awards at the 31st annual Small Business Week celebration on May 5 at the Herbert University Center on the campus of the University of North Florida.

In recognition of the small business community's contribution to the economy and society, the President of the United States designates one week each year as National Small Business Week. The U.S. SBA, in conjunction with the FSBDC at UNF, will host this special event at the local level to honor and present awards to local entrepreneurs and those who support and advocate for small businesses.

The keynote presentation will be "Who's Going to Do the Work? How the Demographic Drought Will Reshape Small Business in America," during which attendees will hear about the declines in the working-age population and why companies are finding that many people are choosing to stay out of the workforce and what can be done about it. The presenter is Ron Hetrick, Senior Labor Economist with

Lightcast, a global leader in labor market analytics. Visit [www.sbdc.unf.edu/events/sbw2023](http://www.sbdc.unf.edu/events/sbw2023) for more information.

### Hospital appoints six new members to board of directors

Baptist Medical Center South has welcomed six new members to its board of directors. The new members add a diverse range of skills, knowledge and experience to the board.

"Unlike many health systems, Baptist South has its own local board who play a vital role in setting the strategic direction of our hospital to ensure we are meeting the health care needs of our residents," said Kyle Dorsey, FACHE, hospital president of Baptist South. "Our new members are entrenched in our community and have a deep understanding of our area. I know they will help us shape our decisions in the best interests of our patients so they get advanced, high-quality care."

The newly appointed board members begin their terms March 27, 2023, and will serve three-year terms.

Allison Bovee, MBA, is a commercial relationship manager and a senior vice president at Synovus Bank.

Emily Dawkins is North Florida regional president for Truist Financial Corp. Veronica Lee, MBA, is senior vice president and global head of accounting products for State Street Corp.

Hugh Matthews, PE, is chief executive officer for England-Thims & Miller, Inc.

Julie Merten, PhD, is an associate professor of Public Health at the University of North Florida and director for the interdisciplinary health studies program in the Brooks College of Health.

Jeremy Wood, MD, is chief of emergency medicine for Emergency Resource Group.

### SCORE Jacksonville recognized as Chapter of the Year for Central/North Florida

SCORE Jacksonville has received the Central/North Florida District Chapter of the Year Award for outstanding performance in 2022.

"We are honored to receive recognition from the district," said Jacksonville SCORE Chapter Chairperson Derrick Smith. "Our volunteers have a passion for helping small businesses. They are committed to the success of the businesses in this community. We are proud to be recognized for the exceptional growth in the services provided as well

as the high levels of client satisfaction because of our outreach."

SCORE has been a part of the local small business community for 57 years. In 2022, the chapter's volunteers provided free face-to-face mentoring as well as free or low cost workshops for 8,868 new aspiring entrepreneurs and small business owners. Last year also saw the launch for the JAX CEO Forum, a consortium of business owners who meet monthly to network and share cutting-edge new ideas and solutions specifically curated to bolster and enhance their own senior management skills.

The 61 dedicated SCORE Jacksonville volunteers conducted 2,177 mentoring sessions and hosted an extensive number of workshops that helped lead to the creation of 248 new businesses and 1,007 new jobs. SCORE data shows that entrepreneurs who receive three or more hours of mentoring report higher revenues and increased business growth. In addition, SCORE Jacksonville offers a wealth of resources to guide entrepreneurs in every phase of their small business journey.

Visit [www.score.org/jacksonville](http://www.score.org/jacksonville) for more information about the services provided, how to request a mentor, workshop registration or volunteer opportunities.

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# Summer Camp and Activities Guide!



## Factors to consider before choosing a summer camp

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewline.com

Adults often look back fondly on their childhood experiences at summer camp. Camps can provide the opportunity to form lifelong friendships and discover rewarding hobbies that can enrich campers' lives for decades to come.

Choosing a summer camp is no small task, as the options at families' disposal range from overnight camps to weekday afternoon camps to camps that specialize in certain programs, such as music or dance. Cost also is likely to factor into families' decisions, as the American Camp Association notes that cost can vary greatly depending on which camp families choose. For example, the ACA

notes that the average daily fee at a resident camp is \$85, while the same fee at a day camp is \$43.

When looking for a summer camp for kids, families should make the decision together. Kids should be involved in the selection process, as they're more likely to have an enjoyable camp experience if they had a say in where they will be spending their summers. The following are some factors families should consider as they look for summer camps, courtesy of the ACA.

**Kids' interests:** The ACA urges parents to consider the child's interests and personality before choosing a summer camp. Parents might want their children

to attend the same summer camp they visited as youngsters, but each child is different. Just because mom and dad liked a particular camp does not mean their children will. The ACA notes that summer camps should align with children's interests and maturity level.

**Locale:** Locale may only be a consideration for families considering overnight camps. Kids will likely be familiar with the locations of local day camps, but overnight camps might be set in mountain ranges, near the ocean or environments less familiar to youngsters. Kids who love the ocean might benefit from oceanfront camps that focus on marine biology, boating or other activities involving the water. In the same vein,

youngsters who like camping and hiking might be more likely to embrace camps located in mountainous regions.

**Session length:** Camps may last as little as one week or up to a couple of months. Session length should be considered by families looking at both local day camps and overnight resident camps. Parents who want their children to enjoy a largely schedule-free summer might not want to commit their children to lengthy camp sessions, even if those sessions are close to home. If parents think their children can benefit from the same structure they're accustomed to during the school year, then an overnight camp that stretches for several weeks might be what they're looking for.



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# Summer Camp and Activities Guide!



## Summer camp by the numbers

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewsline.com

Summer camp is a rite of passage for many children. Each year, campers of all ages head off to nearby recreation centers or travel to rural areas to claim their cabins and bunks. Here's a deep look at some of the statistics surrounding summer camps.

**1,467:** The number of day camps in the United States run by the YMCA. (YMCA)

**\$3.91 billion:** The peak market size of the summer camp sector in the United States in 2019, before stay-at-home-restrictions affected statistics in subsequent years. (Statista)

**14 million:** The average number of American summer camp registrants each year. (American Camp Association)

**1 week:** The most popular session length for summer camp, although the majority of independent camp

operators offer four-, six- and eight-week sessions. (American Camp Association)

**50:** The percentage of respondents whose camps charge \$1,000 or more per session, with most programs costing between \$1,000 and \$1,500. (CampMinder)

**58 to 63:** The percentage of female staff members at overnight and day camps, respectively. (American Camp Association)

**200 to 300:** The average number of campers served each session. (CampMinder)

**7 in 10:** The number of camps that run 10 or more different programs. (CampMinder)

**79:** The percentage of camps that maintain a screen-free environment. (CampMinder)

**22:** Number of YMCA camps across Canada. (YMCA)

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# Summer Camp and Activities Guide!



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## Strategies to encourage kids to read more

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

Many adults feel there's no better way to relax than curling up with a good book. Though a relaxing afternoon of reading may appeal to adults, kids could prove a little more reluctant to crack a book.



Photo courtesy MetroCreative

Reading benefits children in myriad ways. Parents can look to various strategies to foster a love of reading in their children.

Children have much to gain from reading and being read to. According to the Children's Bureau of Southern California, a nonprofit organization devoted to strengthening vulnerable children, their families and the communities where they live, reading aloud to children supports their cognitive development; improves their language skills; prepares them for academic success; increases their discipline and ability to concentrate; and improves their imagination and creativity. Many of those same benefits apply to kids who read on their own, which may be more appealing as kids advance through elementary school and aspire to become more independent.

Since children have so much to gain from cuddling up with a good book, parents can try these strategies to encourage kids to read more.

- Allow kids to read the same book. Parents of young readers or children learning to read undoubtedly know how much children like to read the same book over and over again. Though that might not engage moms and dads, experts note that allowing kids to read the same books again and again is an effective way to foster a love of reading in children. Researchers have linked reading the same books again and again to greater vocabulary acquisition and improved reading comprehension, among other benefits. Kids are more likely to enjoy reading if they recognize more

words and can better understand the stories, so parents can encourage kids to read the same books again and again.

- Take a book along when running errands or traveling. The Children's Book Review notes that books can be just as handy in cars as tablets and other devices kids use to watch movies while on the go. Though some children may get car sick when reading while a car is in motion, those who don't have plenty of time to read while in the backseat. On long road trips, promise a movie after kids have read for an hour. When running errands with the kids in tow, encourage them to read by keeping a couple of books or magazines in the backseat at all times.

- Practice positive reinforcement with emerging readers. Another way to encourage young readers to pick up a book more often is to praise their efforts even if they struggle with words. Patience can go a long way toward instilling a love of reading in children. If kids are struggling with a word or words, read the sentence aloud with them. Reading also has a tendency to pique readers' curiosity, so parents can encourage kids to ask questions about the books they read and help them find answers to those questions if necessary.

- Enroll kids in library reading programs. Summer reading programs sponsored by local libraries have been found to be conducive to promoting reading in young children. In its report titled "The Role of Public Libraries in Children's Literacy Development," the Pennsylvania Library Association indicated that preschool and summer reading programs encourage children to spend significant amounts of time with books and also encourage parents to play a greater role in their children's literacy development. Participation in such programs is typically free of charge, so there's no reason why families cannot take advantage of these highly effective programs.

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## Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson  
editor@floridanewsline.com

*Rev. Yvonne McAndrew*

Rev. Yvonne McAndrew has been the minister at Unity Church for Creative Living on Race Track Road since 2016. Born and raised in Chicago, she said she was basically unchurched growing up, although her mother did occasionally attend a Unity Church there. By the time Yvonne was in her mid to late 20s, she said she was really struggling with her life and ended up checking out that Unity Church. "It was exactly what I needed," she said. "They spoke my language and I felt like I was home." Over the next several months she became more involved and eventually became a minister with the church. She has served churches in Columbus, Ohio and Norman, Oklahoma before coming to St. Johns. Previously married for 36 years, she said she is still friends with her ex-husband. They share a daughter, Shavonne, who lives in Tallahassee.



Photo courtesy Yvonne McAndrew  
Rev. Yvonne McAndrew

**Q: How did you become more involved and eventually a minister with Unity Church?**

A: After I had been attending the church for about eight months, I had a blind faith moment and signed my then-husband and myself up for classes at Unity Village, outside of Kansas City. We spent our vacation time there and my husband was unsure about it at first. But after the first day, we knew where we needed to be and signed up

**Get to Know ...**

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

for more classes for the following year. After a series of classes and a couple of years, I obtained my Licensed Unity Teacher certification, which meant I was licensed, but not ordained. I could do most things that a minister could do. I resisted for awhile, but eventually in 2012 I graduated from the ministerial program at Unity Village, so I am a minister now.

**Q: Why did you choose to become a minister?**

A: My life took a 180-degree turn when I started going to Unity and I wanted to give back. Unity has changed my life for the better. I'm filled with gratitude for the opportunity to give back and love the community. Unity gave me hope and direction and I now have a personal relationship with God. I realized that life doesn't

have to be difficult all the time.

**Q: How did you end up here in St. Johns?**

A: I had gotten the nudge that it was time to move on. I prayed about it and my guidance was to go to Florida. I went online and saw that Unity had five openings at churches in Florida, so I sent my resume to all of them and then interviewed with three. When I came here, I knew this was where I'm supposed to be. The people were warm and welcoming. I love the church building; it's similar to the Mediterranean style of the buildings in Unity Village.

**Q: What would you say is special about Unity?**

A: Unity is a positive, practiced, and progressive approach to Christianity. It's based on the teachings of Jesus and the power of prayer and meditation. Our affirmation is "God is good. All the time."

**Q: What do you like to do in your spare time?**

A: I enjoy reading and painting. I like to take painting classes at places like Painting with a Twist. It's therapeutic for me to follow the instructor and be focused on the art. I like to connect with friends and I love being out in nature — being present in the beauty that surrounds us. I like taking photos of nature's beauty as well.

*[Author's Note: For more information about Unity Church for Creative Living, visit www.unityinjax.com.]*

**State Attorney** cont. from pg. 6

\$100,000. Finally, homicide attorneys and managing attorneys each make a minimum of \$120,000.

The 7th Circuit is the highest paid in the state. I want people who work with us to be able to take care of their families and be comfortable ... and to stay with our office.

**Q: What is a unique benefit of working with the State Attorney's office?**

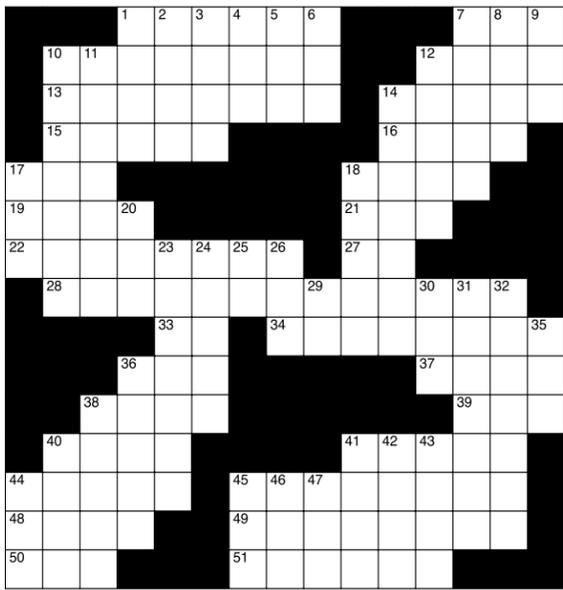
A: There's an emotional and mental satisfaction of a well-prosecuted case. We are serving the victim and the community. When you successfully prosecute, for example, someone who has sexually assaulted a child or an adult, and when you get justice for that victim, there's a special satisfaction of getting the crime element off the streets. It's like nothing else.

**Q: How should interested parties learn more about employment opportunities with your office?**

A: All of the information about the positions, including how to apply, may be found on our website, www.sao7.com

# Puzzles

Answers on page 3  
Provided by MetroCreative



### CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Wear away by friction
- 7. Insecticide
- 10. Elicited a secret vote
- 12. Beef
- 13. Disagreement
- 14. \_\_\_ Crawford, supermodel
- 15. Jeweled headdress
- 16. Digits
- 17. Trillion hertz
- 18. Snap up
- 19. Classical portico
- 21. Residue after burning
- 22. Large integers
- 27. Free agent
- 28. Where ballplayers work
- 33. Blood type
- 34. Scottish city
- 36. Google certification (abbr.)
- 37. Serbian monetary unit
- 38. Make a sudden surprise attack on
- 39. Wood or metal bolt
- 40. Relaxing attire
- 41. Famed neurologist
- 44. Dullish brown fabrics
- 45. Member of ancient Jewish sect
- 48. Griffith, Rooney
- 49. Lawmakers
- 50. Government lawyers
- 51. The arch of the foot

### CLUES DOWN

- 1. Nonflowering aquatic plant
- 2. Britpop rockers
- 3. National capital
- 4. Consumed
- 5. The habitat of wild animals
- 6. Sun up in New York
- 7. Cygnus star
- 8. Male parents
- 9. Talk to you (abbr.)
- 10. A place to clean oneself
- 11. Southwestern US state
- 12. South Korean idol singer
- 14. Pirate
- 17. Pituitary hormone (abbr.)
- 18. Mistake
- 20. Promotions
- 23. Prepares
- 24. Partner to flowed
- 25. State lawyer
- 26. Patti Hearst's captors
- 29. Pound
- 30. Electronic data processing
- 31. Sports player
- 32. Treats with contempt
- 35. Apprehend
- 36. Excessively talkative
- 38. Highways
- 40. Ribosomal ribonucleic acid
- 41. College organization for males
- 42. Any customary observance or practice
- 43. Employee stock ownership plan
- 44. Male parent
- 45. The 23rd letter of the Greek alphabet
- 46. Female bird
- 47. Autonomic nervous system

## BURGER JOINT SLANG WORD SEARCH

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

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

### WORDS

- ALL-THE-WAY
- BLOWOUT
- BLUE
- BUTTER BURGER
- COMBO
- DOUBLE MEAT
- EAST COAST
- FACIAL
- HAMMERED
- LTO
- MID-RARE
- MINIBURGER
- NO FUN
- ON WHEELS
- PATTY
- PLAIN JANE
- RABBIT FOOD
- RATIO
- SALLY
- SEAR
- SLIDER
- SLUG
- SMASH BURGER
- SPECIAL SAUCE



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

- A. 24 19 6 6 14 9 17 21  
Clue: Lettuce and tomato are two
- B. 17 18 14 5 5  
Clue: Cooking device
- C. 15 13 24  
Clue: Oily or greasy matter
- D. 3 16 9 21  
Clue: Burger breads

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Briefs cont. from pg. 8

Florida's Spanish colonial government created the community in 1738 to encourage enslaved Africans in the English colonies to flee the north to escape to St. Augustine, where in exchange for conversion to Catholicism and males' military service to the Spanish colony, runaways received freedom and land. Women and children farmed the land and occasionally sold extra produce in St. Augustine.

Less well known is the fact that when England gained control of Florida from 1763 - 1783, the community of Fort Mose faced a dire crisis. It was doubtful that England would recognize community members' freedom, so community members had to choose between flight or possible punishment and re-enslavement. Most chose to follow the evacuating Spaniards to Cuba, where some established the community of San Agustin de la Nueva Florida - St. Augustine of New Florida.

Visit <https://fortmose.org/> for more information.

**Grant funding available for Northeast Florida nonprofits**

The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida has opened its spring competitive grantmaking process and invites nonprofit organizations working in the six-county Northeast Florida region to apply for funding in areas detailed below. Last year, The Community Foundation awarded more than \$2 million in grants through its Foundation-directed grantmaking, supporting organizations large and small across a breadth of issue areas, including young children, aging adults, individual artists, and more. A complete list of competitive grants made

last year is available at [www.jaxcf.org](http://www.jaxcf.org).

**Program Support Grants (Now open)**

- Purpose: Support for launching, expanding or improving services that support vulnerable populations and address unmet community needs.
- Amount: Up to \$25,000
- Location: Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau, St. Johns and Putnam counties.

**Capacity Building Grants (Now open)**

- Purpose: Help organizations better achieve their missions, promote continuous improvement and increase effectiveness.
- Amount: Up to \$10,000
- Location: Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau, and St. Johns counties

**Individual Artist Grants (Opening May 1)**

- Purpose: Individual Artist Grants are designed to help Northeast Florida artists emerge to the next level of their artistic careers.
  - Amount: Up to \$5,000
  - Location: Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau, Putnam or St. Johns County
- LGBTQ Community Fund Grants (Opening May 1)
- Purpose: The LGBTQ Community Fund makes grants to nonprofit organizations in Northeast Florida that build

- greater togetherness within LGBTQ communities and support Northeast Florida welcoming and celebrating its LGBTQ population.
  - Location: Duval, Nassau, Baker, Clay and St. Johns counties
  - Amount: Up to \$25,000
- Small organization grants and Beaches Community Fund grants have already closed for the year. Visit [www.jaxcf.org](http://www.jaxcf.org) for more information about the above grant opportunities.

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**World Water Day** cont. from pg. 1

Julington Creek Elementary School including in-ground and raised garden beds, native landscaping, and sensory learning experiences.

According to INK's executive director Donna Lueders, teachers, administrators, and volunteers continued to support the ongoing service-learning project and the second annual World Water Day celebration, in collaboration with the Academy of Environmental Sciences and the Teaching Academy at Creekside High School.

This year, Creekside students added a butterfly science chamber with screened-in room, more native plants and landscaping, and various species of regional butterflies. New totems were also built with a variety of highly

tactile materials for exceptional student education (ESE) students at the elementary school.

According to the international non-profit organization, Pure Water for the World, this year's World Water Day follows the campaign theme, "Accelerate Change." Locally, the program included Academy and elementary school students in rotational learning groups with hands-on learning activities including a Wacky Watersheds and Fun 2.0 space where students learn about the water cycle, and a Nifty Natives area featuring the importance of native landscaping in the community, and pollination through a student-developed sensory activity.

The Rock N' Roll activity encourages students to understand rock cycles, rock types, and the importance of

limestone in the development of the Florida aquifer. Sifting through Soils helps students learn about soil layers and the importance of soil resources in water filtration. Green ThumbsUp! features gardening basics and the opportunity for students to plant their own seeds.

St. Johns County 2020-2021 District Teacher of the Year Ali Pressel initiated the place-based learning plan and outdoor classroom project in 2020 with Jeanette Murphy, Julington Creek Elementary School's principal. Pressel is an environmental sciences educator in the Academy of Engineering and Environmental Sciences at

Creekside High School.

Pressel implemented the World Water Day educational program focusing on water resources and water conservation with Creekside's Academy of Future Teachers instructor, Regan Ashker. Under the guidance of Pressel and Ashker, Creekside students implemented upgrades to the outdoor learning space, developed sensory learning experiences, and designed new engaging lessons to share with younger students for this year's Water Day event.

Visit [www.ink-stjohns.org](http://www.ink-stjohns.org) for more information.



Creekside High School and Julington Creek Elementary students at Green ThumbsUp! location.

## Second graders send cheer to ill children



Photo courtesy Kelli Gallant

Patricia Tople's second grade class made blankets and sent them to Ryan's Case for Smiles, which then passed them on to ill children at Nemours Children's Speciality Care, UF Proton Therapy Center, and Community Peds Care.

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## Bartram Trail Winterguard finishes season 10th in nation

By Cindy Kee  
mail@floridanewslines.com

More than 14,000 students, 40 states and four countries were represented at the WGI (World Guard International) competition held April 13 – 15 in Dayton, Ohio, and Bartram Trail High School Winterguard placed 10th in the Scholastic A Division. They were the only team (of the more than 120 teams competing in this class) from Florida to make it to the finals in Scholastic A.



Photos courtesy Cindy Kee  
The Bartram Trail High School Winterguard team performed "Lights Will Guide You" at the WGI competition in April.

Their program, entitled "Lights Will Guide You" was set to a rendition of "Fix You." The program began with a performer being carried over her teammates and lifted onto the floor. Utilizing just one piece of equipment at a time, the program showcased the ensembles' ability to confidently command their choreography. The program also included full ensemble sabre and rifle with a flag feature to conclude the show, as the performers finished looking into the light, towards home.

Bartram Trail Winterguard earned first place at every local competition this season, were WGI regional champions in Palm Beach, and gold medalists in the Florida division for Scholastic A Class. They are the first Winterguard team in Bartram Trail High School history to

place in the top 10 and only the second team in the school's history to make it to finals (first was in 2007) at WGI Championships.

The program is under the direction of Rick Krystofiak, who has been with Bartram Trail Guard for more than 10 years.

Creekside High School competed in the preliminary round, but did not advance to semifinals; however, they did earn a level 1 superior rating and improved their overall ranking in the WGI circuit. This was Creekside's first ever trip to this competition. Both Bartram and Creekside were given a police escort by the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office on Tuesday, April 11 when they departed for the competition.

## A keystone species and ultimate host: The gopher tortoise

By Dianne Battle

The largest economic driver in Florida is tourism, often referred to as "heads on beds." If wildlife made a contribution to this industry, the gopher tortoise would certainly qualify for an award for the number of "heads in burrows" it accommodates.

Gopher tortoise burrows are used by at least 350 species as permanent homes or temporary emergency shelters; the species list includes some strange bedfellows such as the venomous eastern diamondback, gopher frog, Florida mouse, and numerous insects. Burrows can be up to 40 feet long and 15 feet deep, big enough to accommodate a lot of critters and protect them from threats like fire.

Gopher tortoises have been around for about 60 million years, and up until 50 years ago, were so numerous indigenous peoples and European settlers used the shells for implements and the meat for food. As human populations increased, gopher predation and loss of habitat caused their numbers to plummet. The eastern gopher tortoise has not been listed for federal protections; however, like the monarch butterfly, the Federal Wildlife Service recognizes the gopher's precarious status but does not have enough funding to provide protections throughout its entire range.

The gopher tortoise is a keystone species, meaning it is critical to the existence of other species, among them

the 350 full and part-time residents in their burrows. These burrows can be identified by the semi-circle forming the tunnel entrance under the sandy soil. Their preferred habitat includes upland longleaf pine forests. Regular small fires ensure that both the longleaf pines and the wiregrass regenerate regularly. The gopher tortoise benefits from the new vegetation sparked by these fires. It sounds like an unusual partnership, but it has worked for thousands of years. Gopher tortoises' favorite foods include fire-dependent grasses, cacti, and broad-leaved vegetation. These plants supply all the hydration the tortoise needs.

The state of Florida has an abundance of water, surrounded by salt water, lakes, and rivers. Its five species of sea turtles and 30 species of freshwater turtles are adapted to this environment with light streamlined shells and webbing between clawed feet which allow these turtles to swim and manage their buoyancy. Land-based tortoises have heavy rounded shells, and clawed feet adapted to digging.

The gopher tortoise's environmental engineering prowess (burrowing) makes it worth protecting — and keeping wild. In fact, this animal has its own special day of recognition: April 10 is Gopher Tortoise Day. Visit [myfwc.com/education/wildlife/gopher-tortoise](http://myfwc.com/education/wildlife/gopher-tortoise) for more information.

*Dianne Battle is president of the Garden Club of Switzerland.*

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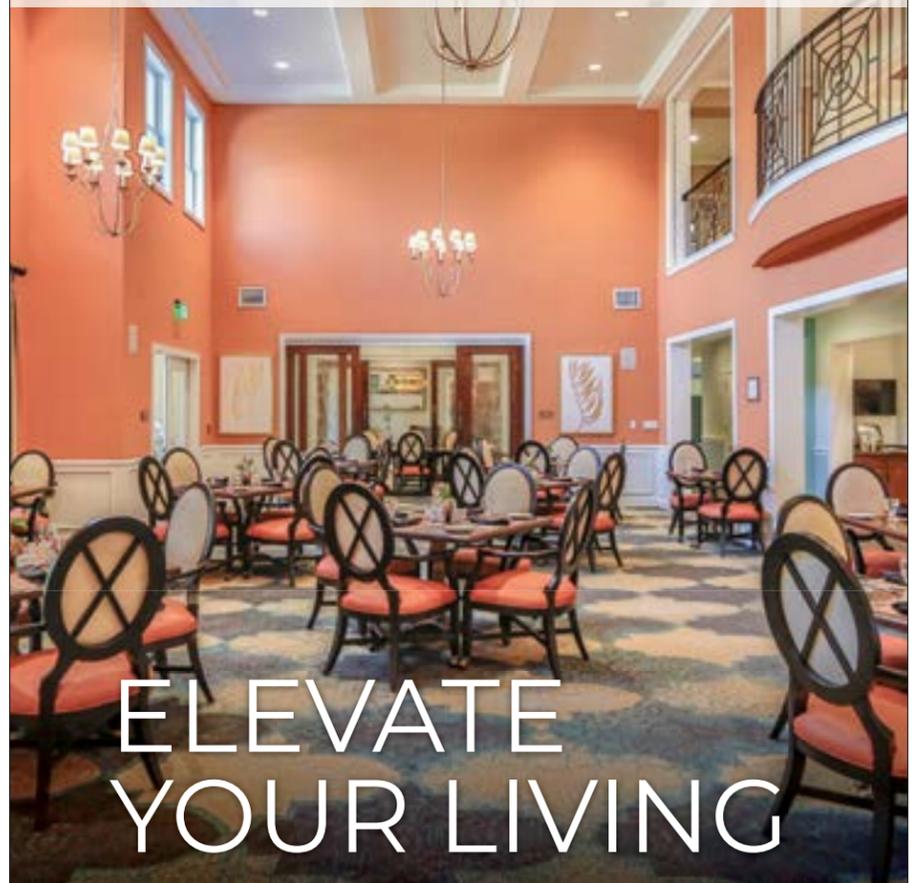
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## Nutrition Check

## Eliminating diet culture

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

Have you ever heard of diet culture? The term diet culture is a social exception that tells us how we are expected to eat, look, and that only when our bodies look a certain way, we are accepted. It is a system of beliefs and rules that promote weight-loss at any cost to achieve the “desired” appearance, which can impact all genders and all aged individuals from adolescents to older adults. During this month, May 6 is recognized as “National No Diet Day.”

### Examples of diet culture are:

- Categorizing calories and labeling foods as “good or bad”
- Commenting on/criticizing another persons’ weight (children and adults)
- Diets that cut out food groups (e.g., fruits, whole grains)
- Influencers who glorify “health” by adopting unhealthy eating behaviors

Diet culture can be very dangerous, not only emotionally, but also physically. It often fuels guilt and shame around eating, encourages body discrimination, and can lead to disordered eating habits and in some cases, eating disorders such as bulimia, binge

eating, anorexia, or many others.

### In order to avoid diet culture, we can:

- Removing labels such as “good or bad” when it comes to foods. All foods can be good and enjoyed in moderation; let’s focus on food positivity over food negativity.
- Focusing on your overall diet and acknowledging foods that make you feel good, recognizing that all foods provide value and benefit to our bodies, some more than others.
- Try to avoid being exposed to diet culture (this is really hard!), such as unfollowing those on social media who promote strict diets/restrictions/eliminations or ending a conversation with someone who may be talking about it
- Be mindful of how you speak about foods and others in terms of their looks; be kind and seek to be a supportive friend or family member to those who feel diet pressures.
- Think more about intuitive eating. Visit [www.intuitiveeating.org/10-principles-of-intuitive-eating/](http://www.intuitiveeating.org/10-principles-of-intuitive-eating/) to learn more.



## Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis  
mail@floridanewsline.com

I hope everyone is doing well and staying cool as the warmer part of the year begins to ramp up. With the hot temperatures and Memorial Day later this month, May can mean the beginning of the busy boating season in Northeast Florida. Considering this I wanted to take a few words and remind everyone of the wonderful water resources we have available to us here and that it’s everyone’s responsibility to keep them safe and enjoyable places for everyone.

While no and minimum wake zones can seem like inconveniences, they were placed there for the safety of people and wildlife and are not optional. We have plenty of space in our area of the river, so be courteous to others and don’t crowd them while they enjoy their own little slice of paradise. If you

must pass someone at a close distance, please be mindful of your wake and know that you are liable for it. Kayaks, paddle boards, canoes, and other small watercraft are much more sensitive to boat wakes than larger boats, so think of how they will be impacted after you pass them.

If you are new to boating or have never taken one before I would highly recommend taking a boater safety course. An FWC-approved course can be found online at [www.boatus.org/florida](http://www.boatus.org/florida). Another valuable resource for in-person courses and vessel safety inspections would be our local Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla. You can reach out to them via email at [division07014@gmail.com](mailto:division07014@gmail.com) for a schedule of courses and any other information.

One last thought is to be aware of your trash while on the water and if you see some in the water, please remove it so we can continue to leave the river better than when we found it.

Now let’s talk fishing. The larger redfish have shown up and many over slot fish are being caught on crab around dock lines and shell bars. Sheepshead are around if you want to move a little closer to the docks and present them with a smaller piece of crab or a clam. The stripers are still hanging on the bridges, biting on frozen shrimp and I’m sure they are partaking in the live shrimp that we no doubt have around already. We just can’t throw the nets for them yet. That all starts next month. Until then stay safe, think of others, and tight lines.

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# Gardening

## Unexpected beauty from a “weed” and a bean plant

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale  
mail@floridanewsline.com

It’s the second week in April and we’ve had a good amount of rain. No torrential downpours, just the steady soaking type and some refreshing brief showers. While venturing into the backyard one day, I glanced along the back of my house, where I’ve laid some long branches to edge an informal bed. Sitting on one of them was a lovely red and black butterfly. I’ve seen the species before, but not often; it was a red admiral.

So why did it appear in my yard? Like most butterflies, it needs specific plants on which to lay eggs, so I did some research (<https://tinyurl.com/yxr5u3tu>). Red admirals can be found in many areas of the world, and they are one of the butterflies I saw as a child in the UK. There they lay their eggs on stinging nettles (*Urtica sp.*), and on this continent there are similar plants for them to utilize. In my yard, though, Florida pellitory (*Parietaria floridana*) is its host plant — a weedy thing that I’d been pulling out without a second thought, and certainly without bothering to learn what it was first. Well, I’ve decided to keep some of it and hope for more red admirals. I’ll be more cautious in future about what I edit from my yard, and this article could help: <https://tinyurl.com/mr2mmd3j>. The website is full of information for wildflower enthusiasts and is worth investigation.

As more insects emerge for the summer, I know there’s more to discover. Before our Shumard oak leafed out I noticed it had two egg-shaped “things” dangling from its outer twigs. I’ve recently learnt that they were cocoons of the polyphemus moth, one of our largest and most beautiful silk moths (<https://tinyurl.com/mazr9zv2>). It might sound strange, but I am hoping our tree will host a small army of polyphemus caterpillars — it won’t suffer — as they could be food for hungry baby birds.

I recently planted out some hyacinth beans (*Lablab purpureus*) at the base of a bamboo “teepee” frame. As well as being

decorative plants, the leaves can be eaten like spinach. The beans are edible, with a good amount of protein, but must be boiled before eating as they contain a toxin. Another experiment. For more information, check out <https://tinyurl.com/4hr7wyc7>.

A reminder — the Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide (<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/vh021>) is a great source of information on choosing and growing our more usual summer crops.

If you are having a difficult tomato season, information here could help identify possible diseases: <https://tinyurl.com/45ypukb3>. Although a popular crop, tomatoes are not always easy to grow, and I’ve had little joy recently. Next year I’ll try one or two varieties bred by the University of Florida. There are three available from Proven Winners, in their “Tempting Tomatoes” series. They get great reviews based on flavor and disease resistance.

Some of the plants flowering in my garden include wild petunias (*Ruellia caroliniensis*), Simpson’s stoppers (*Myrcianthes fragrans*), lance leaf coreopsis (*Coreopsis lanceolata*), blanket flower (*Gaillardia sp.*), sunflowers (*Helianthus sp.*), wild red salvia (*Salvia coccinea*), starry rosinweed (*Silphium asteriscus*), and — a mixed blessing — beggar’s ticks (*Bidens alba*), one of the very best native plants for a huge variety of pollinators. It’s vital to keep it in check. If you remove its seedheads before the seeds mature, then it’s a great plant. But if those seeds spread, it will live up to the definition of a weed — there will be plants aplenty in the wrong places.

The native passion vine or maypop (*Passiflora incarnata*) has begun to flower, and the gulf fritillary butterflies that have been flitting around for weeks, have clearly been laying eggs. Their caterpillars are making a meal of the tender new leaves and are growing daily. This native vine can spread too, but it’s simple to pull up when spotted in the wrong place.

## Trout Creek celebrates Easter



Photo courtesy Carolyn Karger

Trout Creek Senior Center participant Maureen was delighted to win an Easter gift basket in the center’s raffle. The 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](mailto:mfisher@coasjc.org) for more information.



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# Travel

## A family trip to an Arizona Dude Ranch

By Debi Lander  
mail@floridanewline.com

While spring break brings thousands of visitors to Florida beaches each year, thousands of Floridians pack up and travel west. They often leave the state to go skiing or explore the desert surroundings.

I recently flew to Tucson, Arizona, where I met my son, his wife, and their four children. We were all headed to the White Stallion Dude Ranch, a three-generation family-owned and operated guest ranch. The facility follows a legacy of the founders: to preserve the Western way of life and provide guests with an authentic Western experience. I can tell you they succeed.

Less than an hour after we arrived, all seven of us were in the saddles and taking a trail ride across the prickly pear and giant saguaro cactus landscape. The view became a pinch-me moment. I was riding horses with my family in Arizona! The

Sonoran Desert and Rincon Mountains ahead of us made an extraordinary backdrop, so much so that the location has appeared in many Hollywood movies.

While at White Stallion, we did much more than ride horses; we shot arrows at targets on the archery range and went rock climbing. The two older girls rode E-bikes (electric) while others hit the heated pool. I shot a 22-caliber rifle and pistol (at targets) for the first time. And one morning, I rode up and down Suicide Pass as my horse carefully placed his hooves on the rocky terrain. It was a bit scary but rewarding, too.

We were busy and having fun from sunup to sun down, and the kids never missed television (they are not in the guest rooms). Instead, they met others and played chess, air hockey, and basketball; we sat around a campfire, listened to a country western singer, and tried



Photos courtesy Debi Lander  
Trail ride.



White Stallion Dude Ranch.

line dancing another night.

The strange thing was while we were active, we were relaxed. No need to cook or clean up, no need to carry a wallet, adults can help themselves to cocktails at the honor system bar, and everyone lays back and basks in the starry night sky. I now understand how a family dude ranch vacation may be one of the best getaways ever. It certainly ranks high in my memories (and I have experienced many exotic trips).

What made our days notable were the welcoming and helpful staff at the White Stallion. The wranglers know how to pick an appropriate horse for every rider. They match your weight and equestrian experience (or lack thereof) with the correct steed. I rode Custer, a Norwegian Fjord horse that was slow but steady. My granddaughter Kate qualified for and took her horse, Comanche, on a fast trail ride.

The grounds are immaculate since gar-

deners tend to the plants every morning. The dining room features indoor and outdoor tables, buffet meals, or custom orders for breakfast. Steaks were pre-ordered at lunch and grilled rare, medium, or well done at dinner. The cooks made and presented my son with a surprise birthday cake.

On our last morning, we took a breakfast trail ride, dismounting our horses at a picturesque area with red and white plaid tablecloths draped over picnic tables. The staff, including the ranch owners, cooked blueberry pancakes, eggs, bacon, and sausage on the outdoor grills and served coffee in blue tin cups. I didn't become a cowboy in such a short time, but I sure felt the allure of the Western ways.

For more information: White Stallion Dude Ranch: whitestallion.com.

Visit [www.bylandersea.com](http://www.bylandersea.com) to read more of local travel writer Debi Lander's stories and travel tips.

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