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Rotary Club President 2022 – 23 José Gavarrette passes the gavel to new President David Goldman as the new Rotary year gets underway.

Rotary Club installs new officers

By Rotarian Al Kalter
mail@floridanewsline.com

July is a time of transition for Rotary Clubs around the world, as each club turns over its leadership to a new club president, slate of officers, and board of directors. Locally, the Rotary Club of Bartram Trail – Julington Creek celebrated the beginning of the new Rotary Year with its annual “Pass the Gavel” event, as the club presidency transitions from José Gavarrette to David Goldman.

There is much for Past President José and club members to be proud of, as the 2022 – 23 year featured weekly meetings and programs, membership growth, many community service projects, monthly social events, and international involvement.

Looking forward, Bartram Trail Rotarians are planning another year of local and international

Rotary Club cont. on pg. 11

Fruit Cove Middle School’s Florida Future Educators chapter earns Outstanding Chapter award

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Students at Fruit Cove Middle School have successfully created and registered for a Florida Future Educators of America (FFEA) Chapter. Adrienne Hilts, assistant principal at Fruit Cove Middle School, applied for the chapter through the Department of Education. Fruit Cove Middle is the first middle school to have a Florida Future Educators of America Chapter in the St. Johns County School District.

“The goal of FFEA is to encourage students to get involved in the community, focus on leadership skills and foster an interest in teaching,” said Hilts. “We love that students are encouraged to be part of this club and get involved in supporting their community. We also love that there is an interest in teaching and hope that these students become our future educators and leaders.”



Photos courtesy Adrienne Hilts

Fruit Cove Middle School's Florida Future Educators of America (FFEA) Chapter.

The chapter at Fruit Cove Middle School has been busy organizing leadership roles, committees, community service and recruiting new members this year. Leaders have been elected to positions in the school chapter and have run the meetings on their own with only the guidance of faculty sponsors.

“I love the idea of becoming a teacher and a leader. The Florida Future Educators of America Chapter at Fruit Cove Middle School provided an opportunity for me and my friends to explore what it’s like to be a teacher,” said Sandhya Kumar, president of the chapter. Ku-

Future Educators cont. on pg. 9

No Excuses Running Club girls are state champions

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

The No Excuses Running Club girls’ team claimed the Florida Middle School girls’ team track “State Champions” title at this year’s Florida Middle School Track State Championship on May 13 in Bradenton, Florida. Sydney Johnson earned 22 points for the club: second in the 1500, third in the 3000, sixth in the 800m, first in 800 relay and four medals. Avery Hartley earned 20 points: second in the 3000, third in the 1500m, eighth in the 800m, first in the 800 relay and four medals.

EK Longmire, Sydney Johnson, Lilly Potts and Avery Hartley took gold in the 800 relay earning 10 team points: State Champions!

Camille Andrews earned silver in pole vault, earning eight points, and Eva Delaney earned one point in the 1500m.

The No Excuses girls team has great depth as their elementary runners, Brianna Motycka and Piper Ross earned top marks as well. Motycka is the State Champion in the 1500 as well as earning second place medal in the 800m. Ross earned fourth in the 800 and fourth in the 1500m.

Now the No Excuses girls team have their eyes focused on their next goal: the 2023 Cross Country Championship season.



Photos courtesy Jill Benavides

Entire No Excuses Running Club girls’ team who are overall team State Champions.

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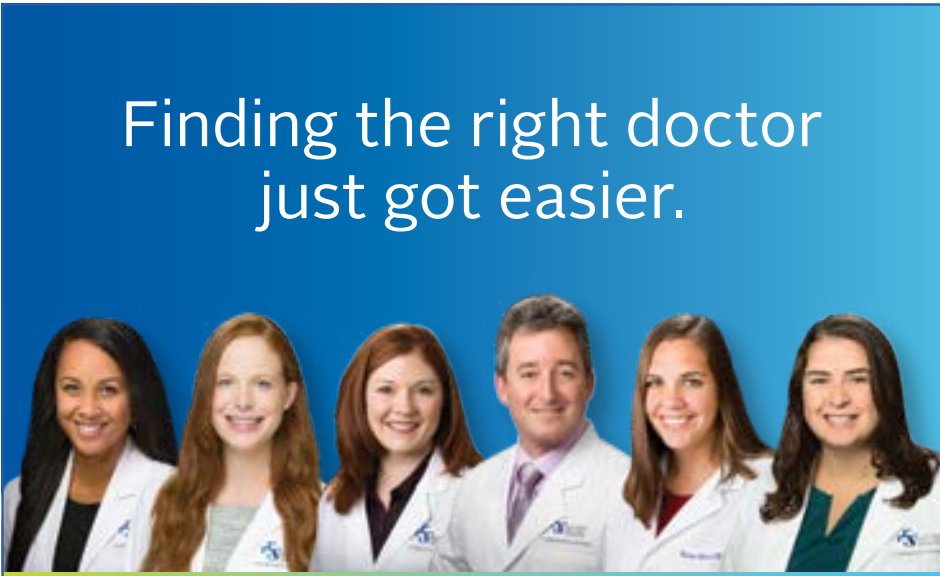
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with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

Q: Can you share some information about the recent appropriation received from the state for the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office Police Athletic League?

A: The Police Athletic League (PAL) is its own 501 c 3 non profit that operates with its own board of directors. Funding for PAL is very restricted and it basically has to be self-funded. A long time dream of mine is to have a PAL complex to better be able to offer more athletics and classes with a goal of giving underserved kids a safe space to go after school and during the summer. I took my vision to our Florida legislative delegation, Rep. Stevenson, Rep. Renner and Sen. Hudson, and made a proposal for funds for field space and office space. They agreed with me and were able to get funds added to the state budget. We submitted a request for \$5.9 million for the governor and I am so pleased that he signed off on the request last week.

Q: What does your vision for this facility include?

A: Last year, we moved PAL to a 35-acre site off Allen Nease Road in the southwest part of the county. We funded some portables with a goal to hold fundraising campaigns to improve the project. With the appropriation we just received from the state, we can proceed with the first two phases of the project, which will include one to two artificial

turf fields surrounded by a track, parking, and an office/classroom building built to Category 4 hurricane specifications with an indoor basketball court and boxing ring. Within the building, we will be able to expand our PAL offerings to include after school educational classes, Character Counts! clubs, a leadership council, PAL band, and a fishing club. Outside, we will offer track and field, walking and running clubs, tackle and flag football, cheer, our Police Explorer program and numerous summer camps. The idea is to offer youth options other than just going home after school and doing nothing.

Q: When do you anticipate beginning construction and then opening the complex?

A: We are already undertaking some pro bono work with some of our partners, and hopefully construction will begin by the end of the year. It should take two years to complete the first two phases and we are hopeful that once we show the community the progress being made, it will inspire donations for phase three, which would include a special needs baseball field (similar to Field of Dreams in the Northwest), traditional baseball fields and additional field space.

Q: Can you give us some background on PAL and why it is so important to you?

Q&A with Sheriff Rob Hardwick cont. on pg. 11



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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Breed:

Labrador Retriever Mix

Favorite Activity:

Going on the boat and for car rides.

Favorite Treat:

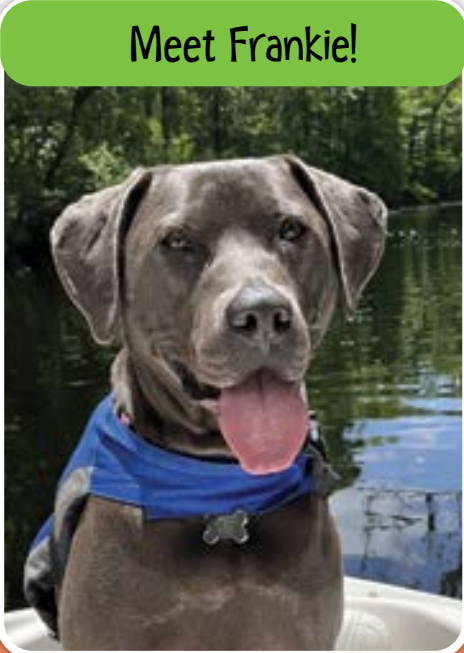
A Pup Cup from Starbucks!

Favorite Friend:

Her daddy; she follows him everywhere.

How Did Your BFF Get Their Name:

As a puppy, she had blue eyes and since we were fans of Frank Sinatra, we decided to name her after him.



Meet Frankie!

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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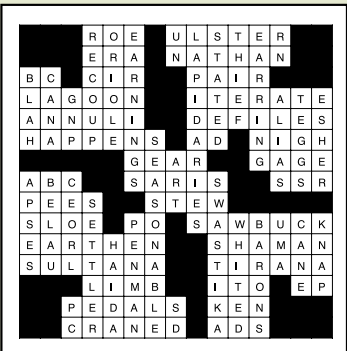
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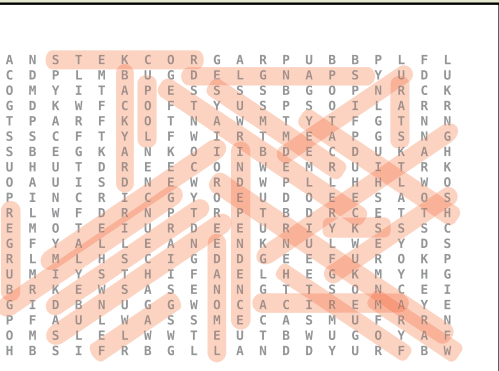
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July

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.

6th: Teen Game Time at the Bartram Trail Branch Library featuring snacks and Switch video games will be from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. on July 6. Teens should bring their own controller if possible. The event is for teens aged 13 – 18 only and no registration is required. Contact Youth Services Librarian Caitlin Turecek at cturecek@sjcfl.us or (904) 827-6963 for more information.

8th: Plants for Pollinators will be presented by Master Gardener Dianne

Battle at 11 a.m. at the Bartram Trail Branch Library at the entrance to Julington Creek Plantation. This presentation is open to the public.

8th: The Bartram Trail Genealogy Club meets the second Saturday of each month (this month, July 8) from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. in the Bartram Trail Library conference room, 60 Davis Pond Blvd. This month's topic will be "Questions and Answers," asked by and answered by members. 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, July 10 at 12 p.m. at St. Augustine Waterworks building, 184 San Marco Ave. in St. Augustine. An Education Update featuring Superintendent Tim Forson will be presented, including schools, teachers, and students. Email info@sjcroundtable.org to register for the meeting or visit www.sjcroundtable.org for more information.

11th: Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet on Tuesday, July 11 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. September's QuiltFest JAX information and volunteer signups will be covered. Wearing masks is optional. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

15th: Super Summer Saturday Morning Book Club at the Bartram

Trail Branch Library will discuss "The Guest List" by Lucy Foley on Saturday, July 15 at 10 a.m. Register at www.sjcpls.org or call the library at (904) 824-6960.

15th: Foods and Herbs from the Garden will be offered on July 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: The All Star Quilters Guild will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on Monday, July 17 at the First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. Vicki Zoller will oversee the reveal and vote on this year's submissions for the "Recycled" challenge by members. Sew and Tell is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit www.allstarquilters.org for more information.

17th: ESOL Learn to Read, with partners at Learn to Read St. Johns, will be held on Monday, July 17. The beginner class is from 3:15 p.m. – 4:15 p.m. and the intermediate and/or conversation class is from 4:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. Register at www.sjcpls.org. Walkins will be welcome as space allows. Call 904-827-6960 or email Donna at dbraasch@sjcfl.us for more information.

18th: The Northwest St. Johns County United for Progress Club will

meet for a social on Tuesday, July 18 at 5:30 p.m. Visit www.nwstjohnsup.com or email nwsjcp@gmail.com for more information.

18th: Happy Hookers crochet group will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on July 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.

21st: Adult Craft – Bead Flower Decor will be held at 10 a.m. on July 21 at the Bartram Trail Branch Library, 60 Davis Pond Blvd. Enjoy nature inside with this trendy flower piece for your table or bookshelf. It's pretty beads and pretty fun. 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.


24th: The Northwest St. Johns County United for Progress Club will meet for coffee and conversation at 10 a.m. Visit www.nwstjohnsup.com or email nwsjcp@gmail.com for more information.

29th: The Northeast Florida Chapter of Sisters in Crime will meet on July 29 at 1 p.m. in the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library, 101 Library Blvd. (FOL Room). Sarah Bewley, infrastructure security consultant and author of "Burning Eden," will be the guest speaker. Bring your coffee and bring a friend. Visit www.nefloridasistersincrime.org for more information.




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

Q: Do you have an update on the contract for the new school to be built in RiverTown?

A: At our June 13 school board meeting, we accepted a bid to construct the RiverTown school for a cost of \$59.4 million. We'll be using a new contractor to us, Wharton-Smith. This will be a transitional K – 8 school, built with the same footprint as our smaller K – 8 schools, like Liberty Pines and Patriot Oaks. This school is scheduled to open at the start of the 2025 – 26 school year, basically a year behind the Beacon Lakes and Shearwater schools. When there are enough students to warrant, we will build an elementary school in RiverTown and then this school will become a middle school.

Q: What is the status of the two other schools under construction?

A: On May 30, we held the topping off ceremony for the Shearwater school. Walls are presently scheduled to be tilted up at the Beacon Lakes school, making it just behind Shearwater. Both schools are scheduled to open in time for the 2024 – 25 school year.

Q: Can you share about the recently ratified teacher contract?

A: We are very pleased that at our June 13 school board meeting, we signed off on the 2022 – 23 teacher contract. Pay increases will be retroactive to July

1, 2022. The contract also included one month's insurance forgiveness for employees and a provision for differentiated pay for hard to fill positions. In July, we'll begin the process again for the 2023 – 24 school year. We look forward to a positive negotiation with our teachers and staff. I and the rest of the board remain committed to compensating our employees to the highest level we are able.

Q: What else is happening in the district over the summer?

A: While we continue to host virtual and in person employment fairs, local principals report to me that they have most if not all of their vacancies filled.

Over the summer, our administrators and teachers are busy trying to better understand the new standards by attending workshops to learn how to deliver them, especially in reading.

We are also getting ready for our budget hearings. Our budget department has been working hard to balance the needs of increased teacher salaries with other needs and costs in the district.

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

A: Please register your children, especially incoming kindergarteners, for school as soon as possible. This goes

especially for new families who are moving into the area over the summer. Registration may be done at 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) that will let residents know exactly which schools their home is zoned for. We encourage parents to register as soon as they can.

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.

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

Q: What is the Clerk and Comptroller's role in handling county government's finances?

A: Our office is essentially the county's accountant, internal auditor, and custodian of funds. We manage its investments, handle payroll, pay its bills, internal auditing, and prepare the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR).

Q: Can you describe the CAFR further?

A: The CAFR is a detailed financial report published at the end of each fiscal year detailing St. Johns County's revenue and spending. It contains financial information including statements of net assets, the balances of county funds, debt information, and more. The report is presented in three sections: introductory, financial, and statistical. It includes basic financial statements as well as the independent auditors' report.

Q: What is the Popular Annual Financial Report (PAFR) and where can residents review the latest one?

A: The PAFR summarizes the 400-page CAFR and uses terms that allow residents to understand the county's financial position. It features highlights from the comprehensive report and is designed to be straightforward and user-friendly for taxpayers without a

background in public finance. To read the PAFR, please visit our website. We will publish a PAFR this fall for Fiscal Year 2022 to show how tax dollars are collected and spent, as well as more recent trends on demographics, housing, taxes, and more.

Q: Has your office received any recognition for this work?

A: The comptroller's office publishes two reports annually: the CAFR and the PAFR. In June, the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) awarded our office a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for each of the reports published for Fiscal Year 2021. This is the 30th consecutive year the St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller has received the award for the CAFR — the gold standard for reporting, transparency, and disclosure about the county's finances. The PAFR has only been published twice and following each submission, the GFOA has presented the office with this award.

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.


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

Q: Does Florida offer an exemption for first responders?

A: Yes. As with all exemptions, the deadline to file is March 1. The totally and permanently disabled first responder exemption makes a homesteaded property totally exempt from ad valorem taxation. The first responder must be totally and permanently disabled as a result of injuries sustained in the line of duty to be eligible.

Q: What proof is required for this exemption?

A: Required are an employer’s certificate of disability, certificate of permanent and total disability from the Social Security Administration, and a Florida physician’s certificate of total and permanent disability. Since this exemption applies only to homesteaded property, Florida residency is also required.

Q: Is this exemption available to a surviving spouse?

A: Yes, an unmarried surviving spouse of a qualifying first responder is also eligible.

Q: Is this exemption available to totally and permanently disabled first responders from out of state?

A: We get a lot of questions on this and while legislation has been introduced, it hasn’t become law. This exemption does not extend to first responders who are totally and permanently disabled as a result of service at out of state agencies.

We are happy to discuss the details with first responders who think they might be eligible. I invite them to call our office.

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

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



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

Q: Can you comment on the recent \$59 million that St. Johns County received in appropriations from the state of Florida now that the governor has signed the budget into law?

A: It’s another record for our county. We owe a debt of gratitude to our legislative delegation and we will be asking for more money next year.

Q: What are some of the highlights?

A: The funds include \$25 million for beach restoration, which is really coastal protection. Sand protects not only property, but roads like State Road A1A. This project will protect billions of dollars of property and infrastructure, not just beaches. St. Johns County derives a lot of income from our coastline; property taxes from the northeastern part of our county fund our sheriff’s office and fire rescue department for instance — more than just items in Ponte Vedra Beach. Plus we are competing for tourism with counties up and down the Atlantic coast. We want our beaches to be as beautiful, if not more so, than the surrounding counties. Also included is

\$15 million for a two-mile extension of County Road 2209 (St. Johns Parkway) to International Golf Parkway. This road has been in St. Johns County’s long range plans for decades. With this money, the state is paying to extend our county road and help relieve north/south pressure from US Highway 1 and Interstate 95.

There is a \$6 million appropriation for intersection improvements along State Road A1A at multiple points. This road has been heavily congested for years. This funding will reimagine some intersections, using inventive ideas from the Florida Department of Transportation, to improve traffic flow along A1A in lieu of widening the roadway, which citizens in the area said they were not in favor of. Pine Island Road’s intersection with US Highway 1 will be signalized and reconstructed. This has been a dangerous intersection for many years.

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

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



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Guest Column

New election bills explained

By St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes

Several election related bills were passed by the State legislature this year and have been signed into law. Senate Bill 7050 was the largest: a 96-page bill that takes effect July 1 increasing the security of vote-by-mail ballots, making changes to enhance the accuracy of Florida’s voter rolls, and improving access to reports and data to boost voter confidence.

Voters voting by mail will soon be required to make their vote-by-mail requests on a uniform statewide application form. This form is not yet available, but must be completed by the Florida Division of Elections by Oct. 1, 2023. All requests made after the 2022 General Election through Oct. 1, 2023, are valid, and voters do not need to re-request their 2024 vote-by-mail ballots if they have done so already. As a reminder, all vote-by-mail requests expired following the November 2022 election, and requests are now required to be made for each election cycle. If you intend to vote-by-mail in the upcoming 2024 elections and have not made a request for your ballot, now would be a great time.

Vote-by-mail ballots will now be printed with “Do Not Forward” on the mailing envelope, and in the circumstance that two or more ballots are returned in the same vote-by-mail envelope to the Supervisor of Elections Office, neither will be counted. Please make sure you are requesting your ballot to be mailed to the correct address and be careful when completing and mailing your ballots back if multiple household members are also voting by mail.

Senate Bill 7050 has made great improvements to our list maintenance

processes. The law has increased and regulated the frequency in which other government agencies such as the Department of Health, Clerk of Courts, Department of Highway and Motor Vehicles, Department of Law Enforcement, Florida Commission on Offender Review, and Department of Corrections to report to the Department of State and Supervisor of Elections weekly with information on persons who may not be included in the voter rolls due to death, adjudication of mental incapacity, felony conviction, or lack of U.S. citizenship.

Prior to Senate Bill 7050, the Supervisor of Elections was required to conduct list maintenance to ensure accurate and current voter registration records at minimum once each year, completed no later than 90 days prior to the date of any federal election. SB 7050 now requires each annual list maintenance program to begin by April 1. Supervisors must also conduct an annual review of voter registration records to identify any in which a voter may be registered at an address that may not be a legal residence address, and initiate list maintenance for such records.

Additionally, two bills regarding School Board members were passed and have been signed into law. HB477 limits the term of School Board members to eight years. HJR31 places a question on the Nov. 5, 2024 General Election ballot to amend the Florida constitution to change School Board members from nonpartisan to partisan election. Voters, this one is for you to decide! For more information on legislation passed this year, visit www.flsenate.gov.

For voter registration or election information call (904) 823-2238 or visit www.votesjc.gov.

ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Business Briefs

Florida SBDC staff recognized at annual Regional Performance Awards

Every year the Florida SBDC Network presents its Performance Excellence Awards. This is an opportunity to recognize and demonstrate appreciation to network personnel, students, volunteers, partners, centers, and legislators who contribute to the success of the FSBDC mission-to help Florida businesses succeed and create positive impact for our economy.

This year, the Regional Performance Excellence of the Year Award was earned by Marge Cirillo, consultant for St. Johns County. This award recognizes one consultant from each SBDC region for their demonstrated commitment to performance excellence demonstrated by their con-

tribution to customer growth and success.

SCORE announces July events

SCORE is a national service organization that supports small businesses nationwide. SCORE has a network of more than 11,000 volunteers operating in more than 340 local chapters around the country. The organization is supported by the US Small Business Administration (SBA).

• Starting Your New Business, a workshop designed to guide attendees through the steps necessary for starting a business, will be held on July 15 from 9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. The workshop will cover the different legal business entities, licenses needed, taxes, and insurance. Learn how to

write a business plan, collect business information and perform business research. Discover more about capital funding and the lender's view of the borrower. There is no charge for this virtual workshop. Visit www.score.org/jacksonville/local-workshops to register.

• Marketing Your Business, for people who want to engage customers and grow their business, whether they offer a product, service, or both, will be held on July 19 from 6 p.m. – 9

p.m. Attendees will learn various marketing strategies and practical tips. After this workshop, attendees will clearly analyze their situation, define their mission, conduct market research, identify their target market, and develop a unique marketing mix for their business. There is no charge for this virtual workshop. Visit www.score.org/jacksonville/local-workshops to register.

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Briefs

College exam prep classes announced

Friends of the Bartram Trail Library are sponsoring a series of ACT and SAT prep classes to be held at the Bartram Trail Public Library on Aug. 17, 24, 31 and Sept. 7 and 14. Classes are one hour and 15 minutes each. Students may sign up for either or both series. ACT classes will be from 5 p.m. – 6:15 p.m. and SAT classes will be from 6:30 p.m. – 7:45 p.m.

The sessions will include two English/Reading and two Math. Following a practice test completed at home, the fifth and final session will be a review session from 5 p.m. – 6:15 p.m. for English/Reading and from 6:30 p.m. – 7:45 p.m. for Math. Students are encouraged to bring calculators.

Each series of five sessions costs \$50, or \$100 to attend both. There is a cap of 20 students per series. The last day to register is Aug. 12, 2023, unless the cap is reached prior to this date. Registration will begin July 5, 2023. Registration information can be obtained at the Bartram Trail Library or by contacting Phyllis Macy at macyp17@yahoo.com.

Snacks to be provided for students with food insecurities

Beginning with the 2023 – 24 academic year, St. Johns CARES will regularly supply snacks to a St. Johns County school with a high concentration of students with food insecurities. Studies have shown that children and teens need to eat every three to four hours, making snacks an important part of their day. Snacks can help improve students’

school engagement, sense of belonging, equality among students, improvement in attendance and retention.

Community assistance will be needed to help supply the snacks. Donations from individuals, work groups and other organizations and neighborhood drives will be needed to make this program successful. Contact president@stjohns-cares.org if your group or organization is interested in donating snacks on a one time or on-going basis.

St. Johns County’s 2023 Hurricane Preparedness Guide now available

The 2023 Atlantic hurricane season is underway, running through Nov. 30. St. Johns County Emergency Management’s 2023 Hurricane Preparedness Guide and other preparedness materials are available to the public at www.sjcemergencymanagement.com/pdf/SJC-Hurricane-Preparedness-Guide.pdf. Printed copies of the guide are also available for free at St. Johns County Public Library System branches.

Residents are encouraged to sign up for emergency notifications at www.alert-stjohns.com, which enables St. Johns County to provide residents with critical information in a variety of emergency situations, such as severe weather, unexpected road closures, water advisories, missing persons, evacuations of buildings or neighborhoods, and incidents that may pose a threat to public safety. By signing up, residents can choose to receive time-sensitive messages via phone call, text message, or email.

Residents are also encouraged to take

advantage of the next Disaster Preparedness Sales Tax Holiday, which runs from Aug. 26 through Sept. 8. Many vital supplies (such as batteries, generators, soaps, trash bags, and more) are tax-free during these time periods. Visit www.floridarevenue.com/disasterprep for a full list of tax-free items. Visit www.floridadisaster.org/kit for a complete disaster supply kit checklist.

Clerk’s Office launches Volunteer Clerk Ambassador Program

The St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller has announced its new Volunteer Clerk Ambassador Program. The program allows residents to become actively involved in local government by providing those seeking clerk services with assistance by serving as administrative and informational liaisons.

The Clerk Ambassador Program allows volunteers to fill vital roles and contribute to the success of the organization. Volunteers may perform duties such as greeting those entering the judicial complex, assisting with wayfinding, and serving as support during high-volume operations.

“Government can be difficult to navigate and St. Johns County residents deserve a harmonious experience when obtaining services offered within the judicial complex,” said Brandon J. Patty, Clerk of Courts and County Comptroller.

The Clerk’s Office is seeking customer-service-oriented ambassadors with flexible schedules and previous profes-

sional experience. All applicants will be screened for qualifications. Candidates whose applications match the volunteer requirements will be contacted for interviews and other pre-selection processes. To learn more about the program and apply, call (904) 819-3605.

St. Patrick’s welcomes new Rector

St. Patrick’s Episcopal Church has introduced its new Rector, Reverend Kimberly Knight. Mother Kimberly comes to St. Johns from Ocklawaha, Florida, near Ocala. A graduate of Florida State University and University of Miami, she received her Masters of Divinity in



Photo courtesy Lori Sullivan
Reverend Kimberly Knight.

Virginia and was ordained in 2001.

She has a strong background in youth ministry and education and spent many years as Priest in Charge/Head of School at All Angels Episcopal Church in Miami Springs. She will make her home here in St. Johns County along with her

Briefs cont. on pg. 11



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Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

Sally Reyes

Sally Reyes credits the fact that she's one of three sisters and the mother of three daughters for her interest in empowering women. "I think I'm a magnet for uplifting women," she said. Born in Guatemala, Sally is the middle sister. Her father moved to the US to work for the Post Office when she was four years old. Finally at the age of 15, her mom brought her and her sisters to join him in California. Sally finished high school in California and was married at the age of 18. She earned her associate's degree and was working on her bachelor's when she took some time off to raise her daughters (Brianna, Vanessa, and Samantha) and work in the corporate world. Currently single, she now works in the corporate office of Winn Dixie in the human resources department, and has gone back to school to finish her bachelor's degree, but with a new course of study: human resources. She also runs her own wellness company, where she says she helps women love themselves unconditionally and live joyfully. She has two daughters currently living at home with her along with two cats, Luna and Gypsy.

Q: How did you come to live in St. Johns County?

Get to Know ...

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



Photo courtesy Sally Reyes
Sally Reyes

A: When our youngest was three years old, we sold our house in Thousand Oaks, California, to live in Florida and be closer to my then-husband's family. First we moved to Neptune Beach, but after some research, we found that St. Johns County was very similar to Thousand Oaks — good schools with lots of parental involvement and nice neighborhoods. We moved here a year later, in 2008.

Q: How did you start your wellness company?

A: I was working in accounting at the time and wanted to be more involved with my children. My goal was to be a stay-at-home mom and volunteer in their schools. In 2010, I became a Zumba instructor and I was always trying to instill in people the importance of the component of mental wellness in addition to physical fitness. I also became a certified personal trainer and became involved with the community including the First Coast Hispanic

Chamber of Commerce. I would talk to everyone about the importance of nutrition, exercise, and spirituality. Everything just flowed into me becoming a wellness coach in 2011. I'm a mobile trainer and I go by Sally FitFit. I believe in a holistic approach — many people forget the mental aspect of wellness, which is just as important (if not moreso!) in this day and age. Balanced life is so important.

Q: Was this something you felt you had always wanted to do?

A: I believe this desire has always been in me. My mom is not very healthy and in general the Latino culture is not very active nor do they pay much attention to healthy eating habits. I wanted to encourage particularly this group of people to change that.

Q: What is your message to women?

A: We are the epitome of humanity; without us, humanity wouldn't exist. Take time to take care of yourself and go after your dreams. It doesn't matter what stage in life you are in, you have what it takes to accomplish every goal that you desire. Love yourself unconditionally and never forget that your body, your mind and your spirits are important components of your whole being. Honor and take care of them on a daily basis as that is self love which will reflect in everything that you do. It will also strengthen every relationship that you have.

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

A: I make a point to even just take five to 10 minutes out of my day for me. I enjoy the outdoors — the beach, all the beautiful parks we have in St. Johns County. I love Latin dancing too!



FFEA Chapter members at Fruit Cove Middle have inspired each other to pursue a career in teaching.

Future Educators cont. from pg. 1

mar is a rising ninth grade student who attended Fruit Cove Middle from sixth through eighth grades.

Each year the Florida Department of Education awards schools with an FFEA Chapter that have met the criteria of outstanding chapter through their community service, recruitment and activities that support the teaching profession. Fruit Cove Middle School received the Outstanding Chapter Award on June 2, 2023. The school is recognized for exceptional service in education.

According to Kumar, the FFEA Chapter members at Fruit Cove Middle have inspired each other to pursue a career in teaching and have also inspired each other to apply to the Teaching Academy at their high school next year. Every month, they have tutored students at Durbin Creek Elementary and inspired younger students by providing academic support after school.

"I love interacting with the kids and how excited they get when we come. I also like how much we help the kids. Overall, I just love the experience," Kumar said.

Students have also organized teacher recognition nights at the school after volleyball and basketball games.

"The FFEA Chapter at Fruit Cove Middle School has allowed me to make many friends, learn about becoming a teacher, learn about being a leader and helping others," Kumar said. "I would recommend this opportunity to anyone."

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Q&A with Sheriff Rob Hardwick cont. from pg. 2

A: PAL is very personal to me. I coached my own sons in this league when they were young. PAL serves a population of approximately 50,000 youth in the county under the age of 18; about 2,500 of these youth participate in PAL programs throughout the year. Approximately 20,000 people in all of St. Johns County fall below the poverty level and 40 percent of them live in the southwest part of the county, right where our complex will be located. We do welcome kids from all over the county. Those who don't qualify for free and reduced lunch pay

\$150 per sport to participate as compared to an average of \$350 for other leagues. One hundred percent of what we take in goes into our programs.

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.

Briefs cont. from pg. 8

two children and two cats.

Mother Kimberly's first Sunday with the church will be July 2, 2023.

Local Audubon chapter expands to eastern Putnam County

The St. Johns County Audubon Society has expanded its geographic reach into a portion of eastern Putnam County and changed its name to St. Johns Regional Audubon to reflect the expansion.

"We are so delighted about this expansion. It will allow us to serve the local

communities in eastern Putnam County not currently part of an Audubon Chapter, while giving us ad-

ditional opportunities to introduce our current members to new birding areas and other birders," said the chapter's president, Amy Koch.

The areas affected include East Palatka south to Volusia County line, including Crescent City, Georgetown, and Welaka. Since chapters are organized by zip code, St. Johns Regional Audubon now includes the additional zip codes: 32187, 32189, 32181, 32193, 32112, and 32139.

Established in 1979, St. Johns Regional Audubon offers bird walks and field trips from September through May.

Contact Amy Koch at president@st-johnsaudubon.com or (904) 770-5484 for more information.

Rotary Club cont. from pg. 1

service, inspired by the Rotary International Theme for 2023 - 24, "Create Hope in the World." Leading the way will be President David's team, including President-Elect Molly Paxton, Treasurer Frank Gwaltney, Secretary Ray Berger, Sergeant-at-Arms Tommy Rhodes, and Director-at-Large Jack Murray. Significantly, the club will mark

its 20th anniversary this fall, with a big celebration planned to recognize this landmark event.

The Rotary Club of Bartram Trail - Julington Creek meets every Thursday morning from 7:30 - 8:30 a.m. at Westminster Woods on Julington Creek. Guests and prospective members are always welcome. Visit www.bartram-trailrotary.org for more information.

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Odyssey of the Mind super teams return from World Finals



Photo courtesy Shalini Nair

By Shalini Nair
mail@floridanewsline.com

Two St Johns County teams of elementary fourth and fifth graders recently represented Florida in the World Finals of “Odyssey of the Mind.” The competition took place at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan. This program that started about 50 years ago brings youngsters together from around the world to showcase projects that they designed and built that involve science, technology, engineering, math, creativity and the arts to solve everyday problems. The 13 students representing the two teams all attend Julington Creek Elementary School. Both teams placed in the top 15 out of around 70 teams in each of their individual problem categories.

Each year Odyssey of the Mind headquarters in New Jersey publishes six new long term problems for students to select. Starting in September last year, the two teams, without guidance or coaching assistance, worked after school and off campus to develop their own projects that fit Odyssey’s rigid criteria.

Both teams began their journey last fall and competed at regional competition in St. Augustine where they earned outstanding scores and qualified for state competition in Orlando. Again, they excelled and were extended invitations to compete in the Odyssey of the Mind World Finals.

Team One chose a pirate themed project in which they designed — and built from scratch — a wooden pirate ship complete with steering wheel made from the bottom of a revolv-

ing chair. The propulsion system for the pirate ship was a push-and-pull mechanism attached to the wheel. They created a carrot-fearing sea monster character using a pool float and pool noodles. The students designed a mechanism to launch carrots at the creature. One of the highlights of their performance was a dialogue between “Harry” the tortoise and the narrator that included pirate jokes.

The challenge for Team Two was to create a device that would complete a series of chain reactions without team assistance. This was accomplished by creating a French ice cream laboratory setting controlled by an evil inventor who planned to destroy France through a series of chaotic events. To accomplish their task, they built and designed a Rube Goldberg Machine that included spinning an Eiffel Tower made of popsicle sticks, obtaining a magic gem from the Louvre Museum made from cardboard, and luminating cotton clouds with LED “fireworks.” Each team created their own costumes, and designed and built their props and devices to develop their storyline.

In addition to all of the work on their individual problems, they also were able to raise money to help pay for this once in a lifetime opportunity. The students fundraised through multiple neighborhood bake sales, online fundraising, private donations and corporate sponsors including Winn-Dixie and Johnson & Johnson.

Students from around the globe qualified for the Odyssey of the Mind World Finals including competitors from Mexico, South Korea, Switzerland, Poland, China, Russia and almost every state in the United States. A popular activity for the competitors was trading specially designed pins with other students from around the world. This has been a tradition throughout the 40 year history of the competition.

Members of Team One are: Tatsa Balaji, Ian Davies, Owen Gyorkos, Elias Jedraszczak, Mudil Nair, Naomi Porter and Ananya Singh. Coaches: Anne Marie Jedraszczak and Shalini Nair.

Members of Team Two are: Madelyn Andrioli, Harrison Chapman, Levi Hatcher, Lucca Leo, Amaya Li and Nicholas Pippin. Coaches: Mojan Kazemi and Jennifer Pippin.

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Successful pet food drive held



Photo courtesy St. Johns CARES

The St. Johns CARES recent pet food drive netted \$5,100 of pet foods and treats, which were distributed to six animal organizations in St. Johns County and to Pie in the Sky for the homebound elderly with pets. Each location received full car loads of foot. The pet drive encompassed 22 host donation sites as well as drives held in two neighborhoods in April and May. The generosity shown helps with St. Johns CARES mission of "Uniting the Community Through Helping Others in Need."

High school facilities open to public on Wednesdays

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

In an effort to promote community health and well-being this summer, the St. Johns County School District will open its high school facilities to the public on select Wednesday evenings throughout the summer. Outdoor facilities at Allen D. Nease, Bartram Trail, Beachside, Creekside, Pedro Menendez, Ponte Vedra, St. Augustine and Toco Creek high schools will be open the following dates and times.

Wednesday, July 12, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Wednesday, July 19, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Wednesday, July 26, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m.

Access to the tennis courts, track, and outdoor basketball courts will be allowed. Access will not be provided to the gymnasiums, stadium fields, batting cages, baseball fields, soft-ball fields, or multi-purpose fields. The facilities will not be open to any organized practices, games or sport-sponsored, fee-based training and pets are not permitted. All campuses will be locked at 8 p.m. and all St. Johns County School Board Policies will apply.

Newcomers of North St. Johns installs new board



Photo courtesy Michele Oliver

Mona Arslanian, Jean Weller, Denise Miller, Judy Porter, Kristen Cohen and Judy Belluso. Missing are Priscilla Cobbs and Carolyn Hamilton.

By Michele Oliver
mail@floridanewslines.com

Newcomers of North St. Johns installed its executive board of directors for 2023 – 24 at its May luncheon held at Doubletree by Hilton in St. Augustine. Serving for the coming year are Co-Presidents Judy Porter (Cascades resident) and Priscilla Cobbs (King and Bear resident); Co-Vice Presidents Jean Weller and Mona Arslanian (both Shearwater residents); Co-Secretaries Denise Miller (Shearwater resident) and Carolyn Hamilton (South Hampton resident); and Co-Treasurers Judy Belluso (Cimarrone resident) and Kristen Cohen (Palencia resident).

Newcomers of North St. Johns was established in April 2004 to offer people the circumstances to become acquainted with others while finding their place in the community.

"Our Club Motto is 'Friendship is a Gift to Be Shared With Others' and we strive to be a very friendly, welcoming group that offers many opportunities to enjoy social activities and help form life-long friendships," said Co-President

Judy Porter. "We've added a lot of new activities this season to include special social trips to the Jacksonville Symphony, day trip to Mt. Dora and to enjoy a play at St. Augustine's Limelight Theater."

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

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Bert Watson honored at Mills Field



Photos courtesy Beverly Slough
Family, friends and community members came together on June 24 at Mills Field Park to honor the legacy of Bert Watson with the dedication of a memorial plaque presented by Creeks Athletic Association and St. Johns County Parks and Rec. Watson served the community as an advocate for the youth of St. Johns County through his leadership in creating Creeks Athletic Association and 12 years of service as a Recreation Advisory board and Northwest Tower Committee Advisory board member. Additionally, his passion for the expansion of parks and recreation within St. Johns County was evident through his work in establishing the St. Johns County Park Foundation.



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Gardening

Summer, a time of change

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale
mail@floridanewsline.com

In early June, the nightly news brought pictures of the frightening air pollution affecting the northeast of the country. The seasonal wildfires in Canada were far worse than usual and there was little sign of them being extinguished. Here in Florida, we are also subject to dry season fires, but as the summer progresses, storms and hurricanes are more likely to be in our forecasts.

Some flowers blooming around town include sunflowers (*Helianthus sp.*), wandflower (*Gaura sp.*), Stoke's aster (*Stokesia laevis*), blanket flower (*Gaillardia sp.*), wild petunia (*Ruellia caroliniensis*), tall red starflowers (*Pentas sp.*), coneflowers (*Echinacea purpurea and cultivars*), society garlic (*Tulbaghia violacea*), Lily of the Nile (*Agapanthus sp.*), coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*), firecracker plant (*Russelia equisetiformis*), and shrimp plant (*Justicia brandegeana*). Most provide food for a wide variety of pollinators as well as hummingbirds, which are regular visitors to my shrimp plants. After seasonal rain, the lovely pink trumpets of rain lilies (*Habranthus sp.*) pop up to surprise and delight.

A trip to the nursery can be a real sensory treat at this time of year; all those colors, shapes, and perfumes are wonderful! Plan on buying what you really need, though. I've found that shopping for plants on a whim can be a bit like food shopping while hungry. If you need further inspiration, check out this expansive list of recommended plants: <https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/>. Know the conditions in your yard, in relation to soil type, and sun and shade, and narrow down your options before you go to the nursery. The only other recommendation I would make is to try to purchase pesticide-free perennials and annuals, to protect our bees and other pollinators. Even milkweeds, which many people

buy to feed monarch caterpillars, may be treated with systemic pesticides, which can remain in plant tissues, including pollen, for a considerable time. Thankfully some companies are beginning to grow plants without the use of pesticides and will usually state that on their labels, but asking knowledgeable staff at a nursery is always an option. They might also take action on sourcing pesticide-free flowering plants if enough people ask for them.

For the vegetable growers, the University of Florida has a wealth of information to draw upon, and this link will take you there: <https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/edibles/vegetables/>. And a phone call to a Master Gardener Volunteer can be really helpful if you're struggling with a problem (904-255-7450, Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.).

With rainier weather, pests and diseases become more prevalent. Checking plants regularly — scouting — will alert a gardener to problems before they become difficult to control. Combined with an early morning stroll around the garden with a cup of coffee in hand is a good way to start the day. Above all, enjoy your garden and feel proud of your handiwork!



Photo courtesy Lesley Arrandale
Stoke's aster

Fishing

Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis
mail@floridanewsline.com

When I sit down after throwing the net a few times and I can feel the sweat running down my legs, I can tell it's officially uncomfortably hot. It definitely makes you appreciate the days you can get enough bait with just a couple throws. That being said, if you can stand the heat there's fish to be had.

Shrimp started off a little slow this year and we even got skunked throwing for them on June 1. They showed up in reasonable numbers shortly after and of a better size, so I'm glad they're here.

What I have been catching a lot of with the net are comb jellies. These little ctenophores are just one sign that our stretch of the river is saltier than normal. All I can say is make sure you rinse and flush your equipment right now.

As I expected the stripers have been biting really well on the bridges along with a few redfish. I'm glad they're adjusting to the salinity levels because they can save a slow day of fishing more often than not.

I also need to make mention of the yellowmouth trout bite going on. It's been a few years without them showing up in

their usual numbers, but this year might make up for that. They are being caught on channel edges and deeper shell beds. Before shrimp season started, they were eating store bought shrimp really well, but I'd imagine some river shrimp would make the bite even better. This is a great fish to target with the kids since they can bring a lot of consistent action and you can literally drop baits over the side of the boat. If we get some sizable croakers in the mix that would be something special.

The usual suspects in redfish, flounder, and sheepshead can be caught around docks on our river shrimp. The redfish and flounder will also take artificials, but why not please all of them and put a shrimp down?

I haven't heard anything about tarpon other than sightings here and there. They really are like a silver ghost for me because I've yet to see one myself. A big murky river is a great place to hide I guess.

I'm sure I missed a few things, but most importantly stay hydrated out there. Tight lines.

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Travel

Beautiful Bali: Rice Terraces and Temples

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewsline.com

Most people imagine Bali as an exotic and enchanting paradise with emerald-green terraced rice fields, gorgeous sandy beaches, and volcanic peaks. I can affirm that the magical, lush landscape lives up to the dream, but getting to the isle is a seemingly endless series of flights. But, worth the time!

Bali, Indonesia, is known as the Island of the Gods for its multitude of temples. Hundreds of temples, shrines, and monumental decorative gates lie scattered throughout Bali's cities, villages, and countryside. Some are ancient, some covered in moss, and others decorated with flowers.

Ninety percent of the Balinese are Hindu, and this architectural style remains an essential component of the culture. Every village also maintains a main temple, a large ceremonial and gathering pavilion, and a drum tower to call the residents. And each family compound has an outdoor family temple.

Art and craftsmanship are highly valued and practiced on the island. Entire villages frequently produce a particular art form, such as woodcarving, stone cutting, jewelry making, drawing and painting, basketry, weaving, and textiles. Extended families, often three generations, work together, the youngest learning from their elders. At an art gallery, I watched the patriarch bent over a complex pen and ink scene, the

son painting with watercolors, and the youngest working with acrylic paints. While the arts are evolving, the communal environment nourishes the talent.

Water is critical to life on the island for Bali's iconic rice fields. They use a thousand-year-old system to keep the supply available when and where needed. Each farm belongs to a local water-sharing association, and each chapter's head works out a planting schedule so farmers can flood and drain the rice fields at precise stages of the growing cycle.

The verdant and artistically shaped rice terraces attract tourists and lots of photographers. Here again, the communal spirit is at work. While standing above the fields provides a majestic sight, just looking earns a few tourist dollars. The community-based tourism association wisely built swings, zip lines, photo ops, restrooms, and snack huts. Visitors buy tickets to interact with nature while having fun and bring income to the area. I purchased my ticket for a ride on a giant swing soaring over the rice paddies — a moment I won't forget. I wish I'd had time to trek among the terraces (another paying tourist option.)

Many women in my group were quilters interested in learning about batik fabric. We took a class at a family-owned batik shop where we



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Swinging over rice terraces.

dipped a cloth into dye, scrunched it, drizzled on a different color dye, and then sprinkled it with ash to create a marbling effect. The second process involved placing a copper template into hot wax and stamping it on the fabric to transfer a design. Afterward, the cloth is re-dyed, the paraffin is boiled off, and beautiful printed material appears.

I also wandered through the Sacred Monkey Forest Sanctuary, a lush jungle with gigantic Banyan trees. About 1,000 monkeys roam free, the babies mischievously frolicking.

Bali ranks high for wellness and yoga retreats; spa treatments come at bargain prices. I stayed busy participating in a

water purification ritual and visiting the picturesque lake temple on Mount Batur's caldera. I also took a cooking class, learning to make a spicy salad and satay with ground chicken cooked on a grill.

I lodged in a colorful boutique hotel in Ubud, the cultural and artistic heart. Then I moved to a luxury beach resort hotel in Nusa Dua. I left the magical island too soon but hope to return someday.

I purchased the tour from Craftours.com and highly recommend it.

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

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