

page 3 BFF Best Furry Friend









Creekside Best Presentation winning team at the end of the year competition.

ACE Mentor program aims to excite and enlighten **STEM** students

By Martie Thompson editor@floridanewsline.com

In an effort to enlighten high school students and encourage them to pursue careers in the design and build industry — to include architecture, engineering, and construction — the ACE Mentor program was founded in New York in 1994. Today, there are 75 affiliate programs nationwide, including the Northeast Florida Affiliate, which was founded during the 2006 - 07 school year. Ten full locations and one teacher-led program are made up of about 195 participating students and approximately 100 mentors. In St. Johns County, programs exist at Bartram Trail, Creekside, Pedro Menendez, Tocoi Creek, and Nease high schools.

According to Jacob Thurlow, Director of Operations, Risk and Con-

ACE Mentor cont. on pg. 2

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page 9 Get to Know ...

Relay for Life 2023 surpasses fundraising goal

By Martie Thompson editor@floridanewsline.com

"Lights, Camera, Cure" was the local theme at this year's Relay for Life of the First Coast, held on April 22 at Nease High School. According to the American Cancer Society's Senior Development Manager Jaclyn Rodriguez, it was a traditional Relay in a shorter time frame than years past, but all went smoothly.

"The weather was beautiful up until about 6 p.m., right before the luminaria ceremony, when we had a 15 minute downpour," Rodriguez said. "After that, though, we had a beautiful rainbow."

Relay for Life is the American Cancer Society's signature national fundraising event and it has been around locally for many years. According to Rodriguez, pre-Covid there were four Relays in the area, but post-pandemic they have combined them into one big event. This year, there were approximately 50 registered fundraising teams, with about 15 of them showing up with a tent at the



Teams along the track at Nease High School

event. (Teams can fundraise outside of the event itself.)

"We had about 250 people attend First Coast Relay, but we're working diligently to get attendance up in 2024 by partnering with more of the schools and other community groups," Rodriguez said.

The fundraising total for Relay for Life of the First Coast as of mid-May was

> \$92,066, well above the goal of \$80,000. The top fundraising team was the Chemours Company, which was still sending in donations as of press date.

World's Greatest Heating and Air of Nocatee participated in the event by giving away free cotton candy and snow cones to attendees from their purple truck. After the event, Rodriguez said they followed up with a generous \$1,000 donation.

Relay for Life of the First Coast featured traditional Relay activities like the Luminaria Ceremony to honor those lost to cancer

and the Survivors' Lap to celebrate those still fighting. Rodriguez said silly games like Cheeto Head and a frozen shirt race also entertained attendees. The Road to Recovery lap focused on the American Cancer Society's mission and programs; teams made a personalized vehicle to go around the track and earned spirit points as a way to keep the crowd engaged.

Rodriquez said donations raised help fund signature programs like Hope Lodge near Mayo Clinic, where patients receive free lodging during cancer treatment. The American Cancer Society Road To Recovery program provides free rides to medical appointments and treatment for people with cancer.

"This was a building year for us, post pandemic, as we came back to schools for Relay locations," Rodriguez said. "I can't stress enough how much our partnerships mean to us, especially Nease High School which hosted us."

Rodriguez said organizers are working already to get more schools and more community members involved for next year's Relay, which will again be held at Nease High School (date is to be announced.)

Visit RelayForLIfe.org/FirstCoastFL and www.facebook.com/groups/firstcoastrelay for more information about Relay for Life of the First Coast. Visit cancer.org for more information about the American Cancer Society and the programs it



One team's Road to Recovery lap vehicle.

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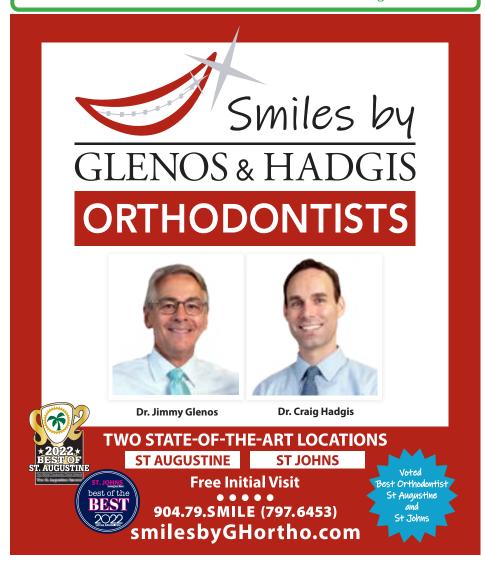
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ACE Mentor cont. from pg. 1

trols at Haskell and team leader for the ACE Mentor program at Creekside, he became involved because when he was a new high school graduate at Fletcher High School, he was unaware of the many opportunities available in these industries.

"It wasn't until I was headed to college that I considered the design build industry," Thurlow said. "Once I obtained my degree in building construction management, I was led to the ACE Mentor program so I could help enlighten students earlier."

Thurlow said the primary way the program works is for professionals in the industry to serve as mentors. They go into local schools and talk about what they do. They meet with interested students weekly beginning in December and then from January through April, begin work on a team project, which is presented at a year end competition.

"Local teams are provided a Request for Proposal (RFP) to work on," Thurlow said. "Just like the real world, the teams are expected to demonstrate that they should be selected to design and build the sample project."

Creekside's team, under the direction of Kevin Davenport, teacher at the Creekside Engineering Academy, was started in 2014. This year, 53 students participated (the most of any location), along with 10 mentors plus multiple guest speakers. Creekside had four regional competition teams and two national competition teams.

At the end of the year competition held on April 28 at the Schultz Center in Jacksonville, 20 Northeast Florida teams participated; each was responsible for a 10-minute presentation, which the professional volunteer board then reviewed and decided on the winners. Creekside sent two teams to the final competition and each won "Best Presentation" for their option (either School of the Future or Community Support Facility), one won "Best Proposal" for their option (School of the Future), and one won "Best Overall" for their option (Community Support Facility).

Senior students can also apply for scholarships, which are announced at the event.

"Of the \$42,000 total in scholarships, \$27,000 was awarded to St. Johns County schools with \$20,500 awarded to Creekside students," Thurlow said. "Creekside also had a \$32,000 national scholarship winner, Kendall Reckamp, who is Creekside's third winner of this national scholarship in five years."

Thurlow said ACE Mentoring also offers a springboard for summer internships; Haskell will have 14 high school students join the firm this summer.

"We are always seeking students for internships and school year activities," Thurlow said. "We are also always on the hunt for new mentors."

Visit www.acementor.org/affiliates/ northeast-fl/ for more information. Potential mentors should click on the link (northeastfl@acementor.org) to inquire about opportunities to help out.





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The CreekLine Community Newspaper is a free monthly publication distributed via mail to all addresses in Zip Codes 32259 and selected routes in 32092 and 32095. Submission of articles and photographs are received by mail or email, although email to editor@FloridaNewsLine.com is preferred. The writers' opinions do not necessarily reflect the opinion of Florida NewsLine. Advertising Rates are available by request. Florida NewsLine is not responsible for advertisement content or accuracy of information provided by its advertisers Nor does Florida NewsLine endorse any of the products or services included in this publication. Florida NewsLine reserves the right to refuse advertisement or copy from any advertiser. All rights are reserved and no portion of this publication October be copied without the express written consent of the publisher. @2023.













PaperChain



Best Furry Friend of the month

Breed:

Dutch rabbit

Favorite Activity:

Doing binkies all around the living room or chewing everything in sight.

Favorite Treat:

Bananas!

Favorite friend:

Her mama.

How did your BFF get their name:

Originally my son named her Mike Wazowski after "Monsters Inc." because we thought she was a boy at first until we took her for her first check up and found out he was really a she!



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@floridanewsline.com to enter your pet.



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MYSTERY PHOTO



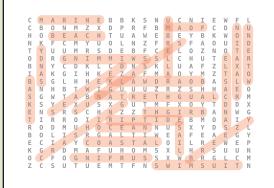
Can you guess where this is? Submit your answer to: mail@floridanewsline.com Last month's Mystery Photo was the RiverTown RiverHouse amenity center.



Answers Puzzles PG 10



A. sunshine B. shore C. boating D. waves





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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.

The Friends of Alpine Park will meet Saturday, June 3, at 11 a.m. at the Harris-Bennett Farmhouse in Alpine Groves Park, 2060 State Road 13. The meeting will conclude prior to 12 p.m., since tours of the historic farmhouse will be conducted from 12 p.m. – 2 p.m. The public is invited to both the meeting and the tours.

6th: Happy Hookers crochet group will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on June 6 and June 20 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.

6th: Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet on Tuesday, June 6 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 Jennifer Routh, who will present "Binding — It's not as hard as you think." Wearing masks is optional. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

Greet & Educate will be held on Tuesday, June 6 at 11 a.m. at Baptist Health-Place at Nocatee, 400 Colonnade Drive, Suite 130. In addition to tips and tricks from attendees, the featured speaker is Moses Taylor from Cala Trio, a non-invasive wristwatch-type device to treat ET. RSVP to Jan Kary at jkary@verizon.net or (202) 438-6750.

10th:Super Summer Saturday Morning Book Club at the Bartram Trail Branch Library will discuss "The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo" by Taylor Jenkins Reid on Tuesday, June 10 at 10 a.m. Register at www.sjcpls.org or call the library at (904) 824-6960.

10th: The Bartram Trail Genealogy Club meets the second Saturday of each month (this month, June 10) from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. in the Bartram Trail Library conference room, 60 Davis Pond Blvd. 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.

12th:The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable will meet on Monday, June 12 at 12 p.m. at St. Augustine Waterworks building, 184 San Marco Ave. in St. Augustine. The topic will be "What happened in Tallahassee during the Legislative Session." Email info@sjcroundtable. org to register for the meeting or visit www.sjcroundtable.org for more information.

12th:The Northwest St. Johns County United for Progress Club will meet on Monday, June 12 to welcome the National Organization for Women (NOW) for a discussion on equality. Social time begins at 6:30 p.m. followed by the meeting at 7 p.m. To attend, visit www.nwstjohnsup.com or email nwsjcp@gmail.com for more information.

den Fairy Wands will be held at 10 a.m. on June 16 at the Bartram Trail Branch Library, 60 Davis Pond Blvd. Dress up your summer garden with a magical fairy wand that you create. 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.

17th: Foods and Herbs from Field to Forest will be offered on June 17 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.

19th:The All Star Quilters
Guild will meet at 9:30 a.m.
for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting
on Monday, June 19 at the First Christian
Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The program
is to be announced. Sew and Tell is always

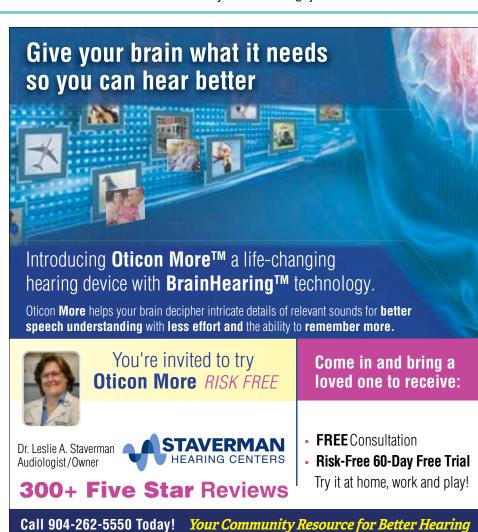
a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit www. allstarquilters.org for more information.

workshop, designed to help people older than 50 learn about the safety technology they are likely to find in their new cars, will be held on June 21 from 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. at River Garden, 11401 Old St. Augustine Road. Current and emerging technologies are being installed in most new vehicle models, and the goal of the Smart DriverTEK class is to extend the number of years drivers are able to safely stay on the road. The workshop is free and no advance registration is required. Call Kari Bell at (904) 288-7855 for more information.

21 St:Elder Abuse: It's More Than Scams, hosted by ElderSource, will be held on Wednesday, June 21 from 10:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the Mandarin Senior Center, 3848 Hartley Road. The program involves four presentations on a variety of scams and fraud schemes that target seniors, including romance scams, government imposter scams, and church and sweepstakes scams. The event is free and no registration is required.

26th:ESOL Learn to Read, with partners at Learn to Read St. Johns, will be held on Monday, June 26. 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.





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with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

Q: Can you shed some light on the background of the new state law regulating golf cart use?

A: We recognize that golf cart communities are popular in St. Johns County and we are in support of them, but our office has noticed an increase in younger drivers of the golf carts that just was not safe. The previous statute allowed drivers as young as 14 to operate golf carts on public roadways where the speed limit is 25 mph or less. Once we identified that youth with no driving experience were getting hurt driving golf carts, we approached Rep. Cyndi Stevenson and House Bill 949 was drafted. Sen. Erin Grall was our senate bill sponsor. Our team spent a lot of time educating them on the issues, including that we were not interested in regulating low speed vehicles, only golf carts.

It's interesting that this new law actually takes us back to a state law that was in place until the early 2000s, before it was changed to allow golf cart drivers as young as 14. We are basically returning to a previous law.

Q: What does the new law require?

A: The new law, which went through multiple committees in the House and Senate before being unanimously approved on the floor of both houses and signed into law on May 11 by Gov. Ron DeSantis, will be effective on July 1 of this year.

It requires golf cart drivers to be at least the age of 15 and with a learner's permit. The reason why is that all the legislators agreed that at least with a learner's permit, there has been some training on rules of the road.

Failure to abide by this law may result in a non-criminal, moving traffic violation citation, punishable with a fine and points assessed on the driver's license. (A moving violation standard fine is \$166 and three points on a license.)

Q: How does your office intend to enforce this new law?

A: The first thing we are doing is a big educational push. Once the kids are out of school, we will work through our community partnerships to educate them about it. This is also where we need the assistance of parents; they need to take a mentorship role.

We're not planning on writing tickets immediately and this law is not intended to be a punishment. It's the right thing to do to keep everyone safe. We know this will save lives.

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

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



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

Q. The County observed May as National Historic Preservation Month. How does this relate to the Clerk's Office?

A. The St. Johns County Clerk of Court has a rich history that dates back to 1821. The first Clerk's Office location in St. Johns County was at the Governor's House. This was established shortly after East Florida was transferred from Spain to the United States. The first deed recorded in the new U.S. Florida Territory was on Sept. 13, 1821. Even in the early 1800s, the clerk's responsibilities included recording official records relating to property transactions.

Historic Preservation Month was an opportunity for the Clerk's Office to showcase some of the records we've preserved since the establishment of St. Johns County. Many records remain available for viewing in our office and some are on display at the St. Augustine Historical Society.

Q. Does the Clerk's Office provide any opportunities for students to gain valuable professional experience while on summer break?

A. Our Internship Program is designed to expose college students and high school juniors and seniors, ages 16 and up, to a career in local government. This program will allow students to learn the vital roles the

Clerk's Office provides to residents by maintaining official records, collecting and distributing county funds, and many other important functions. All duties performed to assist the judiciary in court proceedings. There are paid and volunteer internship opportunities available. To apply, please email COCHumanResources@stjohnsclerk.com.

Q. Are there any opportunities for other members in the community to volunteer at the Clerk's Office?

A. The Clerk's Office recently launched the Clerk Ambassador Program which allows community volunteers to assist the office by greeting those seeking clerk services, assisting with wayfinding throughout the judicial complex, and support during jury selection. To apply, please visit our website.

Q. How can St. Johns County residents stay up to date on the latest developments with the local Clerk of Court and Comptroller's office?

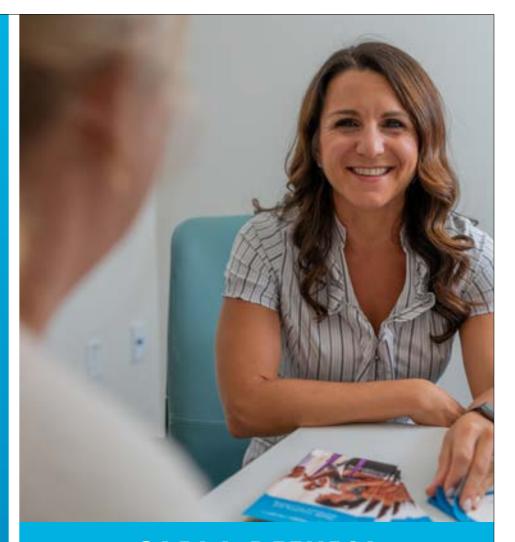
A. The Clerk's Office publishes a monthly email newsletter to share services, programs, and news with residents. To subscribe to the newsletter, residents can visit our website. Information about ongoing scams, jury summons information, and office updates are available on social media. Our office currently uses Facebook, Instagram, and Nextdoor to reach residents.



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

Q: Do you have an update on the property on State Road 13 that was identified by the LAMP board as a potential park?

A: As background, this property located at 600 State Road 13 North is owned by First Coast Energy and at one time was to be a gas station. In 2022, it was put on the LAMP list of recommended properties and that list was approved by the Board of County Commissioners in March 2023. This authorized staff to negotiate with the seller in an effort by the county to purchase the land. When staff reached out, they learned that the property owner was not only not interested in selling, but had in fact filed a commercial construction plan application in April to build an office building. Despite our hope that this property would be conservation land, it's important to note that the LAMP program is for willing sellers only.

Q: What can you tell us about how St. Johns County fared with funding in the latest legislative session?

A: We received another record round of funding this legislative session. You may recall that we received \$52 million last year; this year, pending the governor's signature on the bill, we are set to receive \$59 million, mostly for transportation infrastructure and coastal protection. Some of the projects we have already identified for these funds include a much needed traffic signal at the intersection of Pine Island Road and US 1 as well as the extension of County Road 2209 (St. Johns Parkway) from Silverleaf past International Golf Parkway, all the way to State Road 16. Approximately \$25 million is slated for beach renourishment of our Ponte Vedra beaches, which were so badly impacted last year by two storms in 43 days (Ian and Nicole).

Q: Speaking of infrastructure, what does the county currently have in progress?

A: I sat down with our staff this week and asked what projects we have moving forward. I learned that we have 100 active projects in St. Johns County, utilizing \$279.4 million. These projects include drainage infrastructure, road improvements, road widenings, and park improvements. We've never had this much underway before in our county's history. It's a lot of money, but I'm excited about the positive impact that will be felt all over St. Johns County.

Q: Do you have an update on the Twin Creeks DRI as it pertains to the traffic bottlenecks on County Road 210?

A: We as a board have authorized our attorneys to sue the developer of the Twin Creeks DRI (which includes Beachwalk) if our attorney deems it necessary. Our staff has pointed out that we have \$18 million in unfulfilled commitments by this developer, which range from widening County Road 210 East to bringing some of the roads that he has already built up to our county standards. Finally, the developer was also supposed to build a park with four multi-purpose fields, which he committed to build when this project was initially approved years ago. We will never let this developer off the hook. He will be held accountable by our board.

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

A: Readers can email me at bcc1cwhite-hurst@sjcfl.us or call me at (904) 584-5348. Also, I'm available to come out and speak to HOAs, organizations, and neighborhood groups if requested. Just call my office to make an appointment.

Guest Column

Tax roll, budget and TRIM notices

By St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer On June 1, my office will submit the 2023 St. Johns County Tax Roll to the Florida Department of Revenue for approval. We will also submit the Tax Roll to each of the local taxing authorities so that they may begin preparation of their 2023 – 2024 annual budgets.

At the same time we will submit our office's budget to the Florida Department of Revenue for approval. I am very pleased to report that our budget for fiscal year 2023 – 2024 has been reduced by 13.19 percent. The Property Appraiser's budget has increased by less than 2.5 percent per year during my tenure as Property Appraiser. Our approved budget and our monthly financial statements are available on our website.

The Just Market Value of properties for this year's Tax Roll is \$83.5 billion. That is a 30 percent increase over last year. The Taxable Value of properties

is \$46.8 billion, a 19 percent increase over last year. Taxable Value in our county has more than doubled over the past seven years. We assess 163,636 parcels, an increase of almost 20 percent over the past seven years. The Property Appraiser assesses parcels under the oversight and guidance of the Florida Department of Revenue and in accordance with the Florida Constitution and Florida law. When property values increase, especially as rapidly as they have in St. Johns County, without action by the taxing authorities (who set the tax rates), your taxes increase.

After approval and advancement of the Tax Roll by the Florida Department of Revenue, we will again submit the Tax Roll to the taxing authorities on July 1. At that time the taxing authorities will finalize their proposed budgets and tax rates and our office will prepare Truth in Millage (TRIM) notices for mail-

Business Monthly

Business Briefs

Higher mortgage rates impact summer selling season

Mortgage increases appear to be having a big impact as the Northeast Florida housing market heads into the busy summer selling season. Closed sales, pending sales, and new listings dropped in April, indicating that many homeowners who hold mortgages with low interest rates have decided to stay put, wait, and see what the future holds as far as mortgage rates go. Meanwhile buyers have been dismayed to discover that, although they may have a better selection of single-family homes on the market due to increased inventory, prices were also slightly higher in April.

"Just like the seasons, the market has changed," said 2023 Northeast Florida Association of Realtors President Diana Galavis. "The fluctuating interest rate has put some buyers and sellers on pause; however, there are still buyers who are choosing homeownership. This is reflected in a low month's supply of inventory, which has contributed to moving the median sales price up."

For Northeast Florida's six counties, the median price of single-family residences inched up 2.8 percent to \$370,000 with the price per square foot rising by \$4 to \$202 from March to April. Meanwhile, closed sales plummeted 19.2 percent to 1,757; pending sales fell 3.6 percent to 2,097, and new listings decreased 1 percent to 2,950. Active inventory rose 5.5 percent to 4,667 and the median days on the market quickened by 10 percent to 36 days.

In April, single-family homes became

slightly less affordable with the Home Affordability Index dropping from 76 the month before to 74. The Housing Affordability Index measures housing affordability for the region, as it measures whether a typical family earns enough to qualify for a mortgage on a typical home, based on current interest rates, median income, and median home prices. A higher number means greater affordability. An index value of 100 means that the average family has exactly enough income to qualify for a mortgage.

"Factors such as inflation, rising interest rates, and the cost of goods and services play a role in home affordability," Galavis said.

In St. Johns County, April 2023 median prices pretty much remained stable at \$555,000 for single-family homes. The median days on the market were 38, a 5.6 percent increase from the month before. Month-to-month, closed sales fell 8.6 percent to 426, pending sales dropped 2.3 percent to 520, and new listings decreased 4.7 percent to 751. Active inventory rose to 1,346 homes, an increase of 8.5 percent from March 2023, and 3.2-month supply. The affordability index remained the same at 49, demonstrating that St. Johns County continues to be the most expensive area to live in the region.

Small Business Week winners announced

The 31st annual Small Business Week Celebration took place this month at the University of North Florida on May 5. During this event, attendees heard keynote speaker Ron Hetrick, senior labor economist at Lightcast, speak about how the demographic drought will reshape business with the unprecedented labor shortage. Following the keynote, the U.S. SBA presented its Small Business Week awards, which spotlight outstanding contributions of North Florida business leaders, lenders and champions.

North Florida District Small Business Advocate of the Year: Ken Middleton, Chief Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Officer, Jacksonville Transportation Authority

North Florida District Rural Business Owner of the Year: Ashley Wood, owner, Simmons and Co. DBA Callie Kay's General Store

North Florida District, State of Florida and Region IV Overall Women's Business Center of the Year: Jacksonville Women's Business Center. Accepted by Jackie Perrault, Director

North Florida District Small Business

Person of the Year: Tomas Santos-Alejandro, owner and CEO, Advent Services LLC

Top 7(a) Lender by Dollar Amount: Live Oak Banking Company

Top 7(a) Lender by Number of Loans: TD Bank

Top Certified Development Company by Dollar Amount and Number of Loans: Florida First Capital Finance Corporation, Inc.

Top First Mortgage Lender: Ameris Bank

Top Community Lender by Dollar Amount and Number of Loans: Cogent Bank

Top Community Credit Union: McCoy Federal Credit Union

Top Micro-Lender: Black Business Investment Fund

New surgery center breaks ground



Photo courtesy Borland Groo

Durbin Crossing Endoscopy Center, a new location for Borland Groover, officially broke ground on May 8 at 150 Longleaf Pine Pkwy, on the corner of Longleaf Pine Parkway and St. Johns Parkway in the Durbin Crossing area.

The proposed new 35,000 square foot facility will feature an

ambulatory surgery center with seven procedure rooms and the second floor will house thirty- two medical office exam rooms. The medical facility is slated to open in summer 2024.

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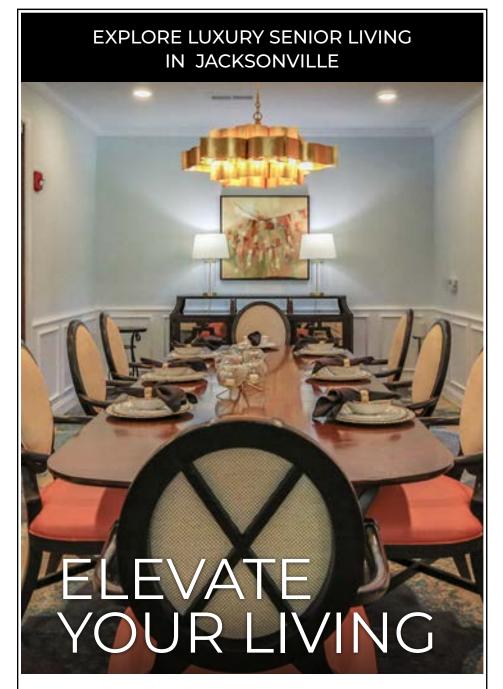
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with St. Johns County School Board Member, Beverly Slough, District 1

Q: As the school year winds down, do you have any administrative changes to share?

A: We are having some movement in administration in northern St. Johns County Schools. First, at Patriot Oaks Academy, Allison Olson is retiring. She is looking forward to traveling with her husband and spending time with her grandchildren. We wish her all the best and appreciate her time at Julington Creek Elementary and Patriot Oaks Academy. Replacing her as principal will be Drew Chiodo, previously the assistant principal at Tocoi Creek. He will be a fine leader at Patriot Oaks.

At Julington Creek Elementary, Jeanette Murphy will be moving to Pacetti Bay Middle School to replace Ted Banton as principal. Mr. Banton is moving to Pedro Menendez High School to replace Dr. Clay Carmichael, who is retiring. Northern St. Johns County families may remember Dr. Carmichael from his days leading Fruit Cove Middle School.

Replacing Jeanette Murphy at Julington Creek will be a familiar face: Dr. Joy Reichenberg, at one time the principal of Hickory Creek Elementary, will be moving over from Palm Valley Academy. Finally, replacing Dr. Reichenberg at Palm Valley Academy will be her assistant principal, Zach Strom, who at one time was a teacher at Cunningham Creek Elementary.

Q: What is the latest with the teachers' contract?

A: I'm happy to announce that we have come to an agreement with the teachers' union. As of today [interview date of May 18], we are just awaiting ratification of the contract. The school board is set to vote on it at our meeting on June 13. The teachers will be paid retroactively to July 1, 2022 and we look forward to successful negotiations for the

next school year, which will start in August.

Q: What can you tell us about the expansion of First Coast Technical College to Hastings?

A: We have a partnership with the county to expand First Coast Technical College (FCTC) to Hastings. We will use ARPA funds as well as some grant funding that we are applying for to renovate the old Hastings High School on Main Street. It is currently used as a library, but the library will be relocated elsewhere in Hastings. This renovation will be done in phases and we will be able to bring some new FCTC programs to Hastings. New programs being explored at this time include building trades, solar panel construction, power generation/small engine repair and possibly agriscience.

First Coast Technical College currently has 1,500 students, with the youngest aged 14 and the oldest aged 82. Approximately 30 percent of the school's students are non-St. Johns County residents. The school also serves 60 pre-K students in a program run by FCTC's early education students. I've been working on this FCTC expansion with Deputy County Administrator Joy Andrews for a couple of years and I'm happy to see it start to happen.

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

A: I'd like to say congratulations to all for a very successful completion of another school year ... to our students who have made great progress and to our teachers and staff for their very hard work to make this possible.

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.

 $\textbf{Guest Column} \ cont. \ from \ pg. \ 6$

ing Aug. 18. The TRIM notice will be available at www.sjcpa.gov on the same day. The TRIM will show each property owner what their taxes were last year, what they are proposed to be this

year, and what they would be if the taxing authorities rolled back rates. "Roll Back" indicates the tax rate the taxing authority would set to collect the same amount of money from the taxpayers as in the previous tax year. It should be a guide to assist taxing authorities in controlling budgets and keeping spending in line with measures such as inflation. The TRIM also contains the dates and times of public hearings held by each taxing authority to discuss their budgets.

I encourage property owners to carefully review their TRIM notices, contact our office or me personally at (904) 827-5520 or eddie@sjcpa.gov, to ask questions or discuss the information.

And please attend the budget meetings held by the taxing authorities. The taxing authorities and our elected officials need to hear from you. St. Johns County is a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family. We can assure it remains that way when each of us become involved in the process.



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Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson

Jill Flores said she has always liked trying new things. Born in Albany, NY, she decided to go to Florida for college and decided on the University of North Florida. Despite only spending a short time there, she became enamored of the weather and economy in Florida ... and remembered that when she and her husband relocated to Northeast Florida a decade later. She earned her accounting degree at Siena College in Loudonville, NY near her hometown of Albany and then worked in a number of industries, including insurance, teaching, property management, and real estate, before becoming the local franchisee for the Closet Factory, which designs and installs closet and other custom organization systems. The franchise is a true family business, with husband Marty serving as vice president and chief operations officer and daughter Sierra serving as senior designer. Son Logan, a student at the University of Central Florida, works in the business on school breaks. Jill and Marty Flores live in NW St. Johns County with their calico cat, Cali.

Q: How did you meet your husband, Marty?

A: We met when we were 17 years old

Get to Know . . .

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



Jill Flores with husband Marty.

and both worked at KMart. Talk about a Blue Light Special! We were married at 23 years old and had children in our

Q: What did you learn from the various industries you worked in that prepared you to own your own business?

A: I've always liked trying new things and jumping into new industries. Being in the insurance industry gave me a great overall business background. I became a teacher because I was passionate about kids and it provided me with a bit of a hiatus while I was raising my own children. I taught second and fifth grades at Bartram Springs, Hyde Grove, and Mandarin Oaks elementaries in Duval County. Property management taught me a lot about developing business. I worked in new communities in

St. Johns County and helped do things like set up amenity centers. When I was in real estate, I had a hand in selling new construction and learning about what homeowners need and want.

> I've also been active as a volunteer locally, helping with the opening of Liberty Pines Academy and Timberlin Creek. I was part of a team that did a lot of the fundraising for the schools and media centers.

Q: Why did you decide on Closet Factory as a franchise?

A: Since the age of 25, my husband and I had in mind to buy a franchise. We looked at several, but it was never the right time. We were looking for the right business that we felt passionate about and we would be proud of the finished product. A big reason we chose Closet Factory was because it allowed succession to our children. We also felt we had a unique opportunity to bring Closet Factory to our area. We became franchisees and opened our business in May 2022.

Q: What is your favorite part of owning a business and what is the most challenging part?

A: My favorite part is hearing from our clients that we changed their world with a closet system and usage of space. We love the opportunity to maximize people's space and make it beautiful at the same time. Definitely the most challenging part, and I know this is not unique to us, is staffing. We are always looking for good employees.

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

A: I like to go to the beach, read, spend time with my family and friends and cruise whenever I can!

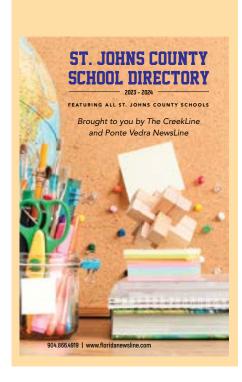
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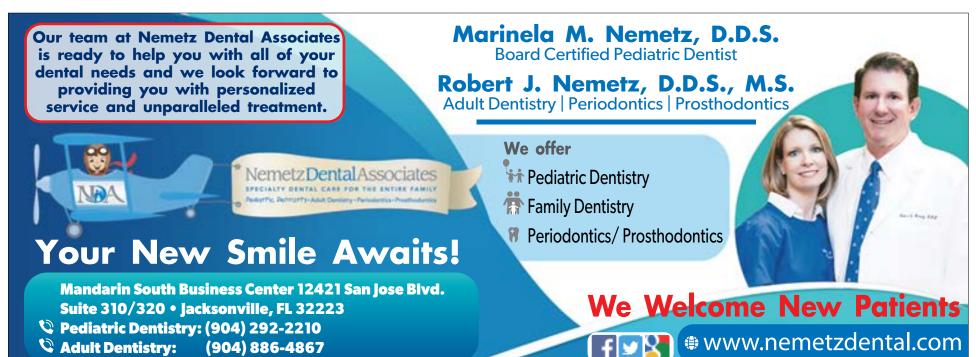
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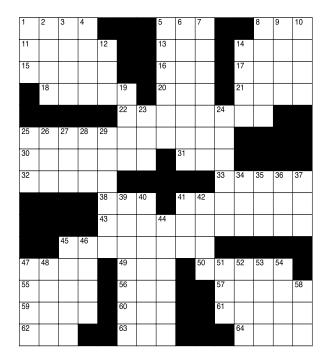
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Answers on page 3 Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. In a place to sleep
- 5. Chemical compound (abbr.)
- 8. A way to fish
- 11. Classic Linklater film " and Confused"
- 13. Legume
- 14. Indonesian island
- 15. Smooth, creamy substance
- 16. Arctic
- 17. Wood sorrels
- 18. Defied
- 20. Cattle 21. Tableland
- 22. Honorably retired and retaining one's title
- 25. Repossession
- 30. Danced
- 31. Adult males
- 32. A type of section

- 33. Type of Japanese animation
- 38. Satisfaction
- 41. Fit
- 43. "Ain't No Sunshine" singer
- 45. Failure
- 47. Israeli city
- 49. French river
- 50. Cavalry-sword
- 55. Nocturnal S. American rodent 56. Liquefied natural gas
- 57. Afflicted
- 59. Electronic countercountermeasures
 - 60. Popular HBO fantasy series (abbr. 61. Spiritual leader of a
 - Jewish congregation
 - 62. Large body of water
 - 63. kosh, near Lake Winnebago
 - 64. Impudence

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Payroll firm 2. Unit of transmission
- 3. Rockers Better Than
- 4. Bambi is one
- 5. Highest parts of something
- 6. Correct behavior
- 7. Batty
- 8. Cyprinid fishes
- 9. Expression of sorrow or pity 10. Site of the famous Leaning
- Tower
- 12. American rocker Snider
- 14. W. African language
- 19. Symbol to mark for removal
- 23. __ Squad
- 24. Resident
- 25. Federal savings bank
- 26. Paddle
- 27. Returned material authorization (abbr.)
- 28. One point south of due east
- 29. Winter melon

- 34. Last or greatest in an indefinitely large series
- 35. Anger
- 36. Central European river
- 37. First responders
- 39. Spanish noble
- 40. Persons with absence of skin pigment
- 41. Defunct airline 42. Small island (British)
- 44. The extent of something from beginning to end
- 45. Capital of Bangladesh
- 46. Dutch cheese
- 47. Imitates
- 48. A contest of speed
- 51. Swiss river
- 52. Prejudice
- 53. Actor Idris
- 54. UNLV's are Runnin' 58. Criticize

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

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Solve the code to discover words related to the beach. Each number corresponds to a letter.

10 4 2 25 24

23

Clue: Warm light

2 25 5

В.

Clue: Coastline

13 24 **5** 18 Clue: Water hobby

D. 22 **18 26** 14

Clue: Ocean swells

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Briefs

Summer reading volunteer opportunities available

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 and can be arranged around summer travel.

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.

St. Johns County launches new brand -Florida at First Sight

St. Johns County recently announced the launch of a new countywide brand developed to showcase and reflect the unique assets of the community. The new brand, created based on extensive community research, highlights the attributes that make St. Johns County unique, including its waterways, natural resources, history, and abundant opportunities for outdoor activities. The brand embodies those assets with its tagline — Florida at First Sight. The branding project has been supported and funded in part by the St. Johns County Industrial Development Authority (IDA).

"In St. Johns County's 200-plus year history, this is the first time that a brand has been developed for the county," said Hunter Conrad, County Administrator for St. Johns County.

The new brand, designed by St. Augustine-based company Future Friends, will be used throughout the various county departments and implemented in phases. In the coming months, residents can expect to start seeing the new branding reflected on the county website, social media, vehicles, and staff uniforms. The county seal will remain in use and will be limited primarily to official records

and documents pertaining to the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners.

The new brand will also be at the forefront of St. Johns County's economic development efforts when marketing to potential businesses looking to relocate or expand in St. Johns County. These marketing efforts aim to provide more high-wage jobs for St. Johns County residents and increase the county's commercial tax base. Having a brand that highlights the natural and historical assets of the community will strengthen that

Program to offer daily mental health support through text-based service

Flagler Health+'s BRAVE program will gift 800 subscriptions of Cope Notes to middle and high school students in northeast Florida. Cope Notes is an added resource BRAVE makes available to teenagers to improve their mental health, along with the BRAVE text line and an extensive list of qualified counselors. Flagler Health+ has purchased the yearly subscriptions to Cope Notes, which will be made available, free of charge. The text-based service, which is 100 percent anonymous and confidential, helps youth train their brains to combat stress, anxiety, loneliness, depression, and more. Reports show that 86 percent of users experience improved mental health within 30 days.

"Cope Notes is an invaluable resource for teenagers to combat the mental health issues they face daily," said Paige Stanton, executive director of Care Connect+, which administers BRAVE. "We are excited to be able to offer Cope Notes subscriptions to continue the great progress that is being made in making teens aware of the tools available to help improve their mental health."

BRAVE, which stands for Be Resilient and Voice Emotions, is designed to reduce stigma and create conversations around mental health. Initially launched in partnership with the St. Johns County School District, the program has already made a significant impact. Before BRAVE's implementation in St. Johns County Schools, only 35 percent of students referred to mental health providers were seen by a medical professional. With the BRAVE program, that rate has increased to 90 percent. Since its founding five years ago, and despite the pandemic, BRAVE has expanded into more school districts, including Clay, Nassau, Putnam, Flagler, and Volusia, with the ability to assist more than 167,000 students.

With a Cope Notes subscription, youth receive a text message each day that offers peer support, positive psychology, brain training, and digital

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Student Spotlight: Wesley Wolfe



Photo courtesy Lauren Wolfe Bartram Trail High School senior Wesley Wolfe was named St. Johns County Take Stock In Children "Super Senior" of the year for his outstanding character, work ethic and community service. He graduated with an unweighted GPA 4.0 (weighted 4.65+), 10 AP courses, 27 Dual Enrollment Courses and 225 hours of community service. He was in the VyStar Business Academy, was an intern at VyStar, a member of DECA and a National Merit Scholarship finalist. Wolfe will attend the University of Florida (Honors) in the fall. Wolfe is pictured with James Wheeler, Operations and Student Programs Director at Investing in Kids - INK.



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Julington Creek Elementary students attend STEM Expo



Johannah Cap, Evelyn Couch, and Ashlynn Greene represented Julington Creek Elementary at the St. Johns County STEM Expo on April 26, 2023 at Wards Creek Elementary School. They were able to display their science projects along with contributors from other St. Johns County elementary schools and participate in two STEM challenges along with

Student represents Julington Creek Elementary at speech contest



Winner of the University of Florida 4-H Club Speech Contest Caitleigh Calhoun represented Julington Creek Elementary in the district finals in St. Augustine.

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Butterfly garden at Alpine Groves Park undergoes renovation

By NewsLine Staff mail@floridanewsline.com

In Florida, there are 160 species of butterflies that breed here and about 200 species that migrate through the state. At Alpine Groves Park, one of the key features is the Ruth Harris Bennett Butterfly Garden, located next to the restored farmhouse. A major renovation of the garden was just finished, which includes a garden bench sitting area, Florida butterfly identification kiosk station, paved walkway, mulch, and flowers to attract pollinators. Also, this garden is now a member of the national registry as a monarch way station to support monarch butterfly habitat.

Local Boy Scout Troop 225 collaborated with Friends of Alpine Park to do a spring cleanup and to supply the finish touch of laying mulch.

The focus of the renovation was to build a true habitat for butterflies by

providing three items for support: nectar flowers for food, host plants, and a puddling station. Plants that are cultivated as a food source include firebush shrub, firecracker bush, penta, blanket flower, porter weed, yellow bush daisy, plumbago, hibiscus, salvia, lantana, hosta, and milkweed. Butterfly reproduction host plants include mint, parsley, milkweed, and dill. Lastly, the garden's puddling station, consisting of sand, rocks, salt, and compost, allows the butterflies easy access to water and minerals necessary for reproduction and survival. Volunteers also provide sliced apples, bananas, oranges, and other fruit for the butterflies' enjoy-

"I hope this may inspire you to build your own garden or come visit and enjoy Alpine Groves Park and the Ruth Harris Bennett Butterfly Garden," said Friends of Alpine Park board member, Teresa Sellner.



Photos courtesy Teresa Sellner Pathway through the Ruth Harris Bennett Butterfly Garden.









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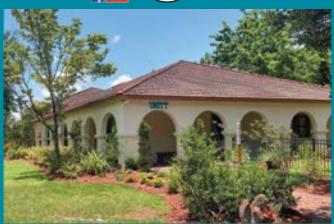
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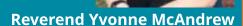


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Four local teens to be Rotary Ambassadors in 2023 - 24

By Al Kalter, Rotarian mail@floridanewsline.com

Each year, nearly 9,000 high school students are selected to participate in Rotary International's Youth Exchange Program, through which they get to spend a year in another country. These young ambassadors live with host families, attend high school, learn a new language and culture, make lifelong friends, and build extended family relationships.

The Rotary Club of Bartram Trail -Julington Creek has enthusiastically participated in Rotary Youth Exchange since the club's beginnings 20 years ago. Over that time, the club has sponsored 37 local high school students who went abroad for a year to one of 16 different countries. In return, we have welcomed 22 foreign students who attended either Bartram Trail or Creekside High School.

It takes a very special teenager to take part in this program — to travel halfway around the world to a place where they don't know the people, the culture, or the language, and dive right in. So it is very exciting to announce that four local high school students will be heading overseas for the 2023-24 school year, representing our community, our schools, and our Rotary Club:

- Natalie Cook, 17, has just completed her junior year at Creekside High School, and is looking forward to spending next year in Spain.
- Allie Grabowski, 15, was a freshman at Creekside this year. Her exchange year will take her to Sweden.
- Owen Scruggs, 17, attends Nease High School, where he just finished his

junior year. Owen will be hosted in the Netherlands.

• Andre Therrien, 16, is a rising junior at Creekside, and his destination is Germany.

This is an exchange program, so that means that foreign students will be welcomed into our community to attend our schools for the year. The Bartram Trail - Julington Creek Rotary Club will host a student from Germany while she attends Creekside High School. Other nearby Rotary Clubs will also be hosting foreign students, a total of nine in northeast Florida for the upcoming school year.

Rotary is always looking for families that might be interested in hosting an exchange student for part of the year (normally three to four months). It's preferred that the family have a child of their own attending the school where the exchange student will enroll, but that's not a requirement. And in a few months, we'll be looking for globalminded students to start the application process to go overseas for the 2024 - 25school year. Contact Youth Exchange Officer Candace Jackson at czlockett@ gmail.com for more information.

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

Newcomers of North St. Johns donates books to St. Johns County Public Library

By NewsLine Staff mail@floridanewsline.com

Members of the Newcomers of North St. Johns generously donated more than 70 children's books to the St. Johns County Public Library System. Additionally, more than \$230 in cash donations were also collected for the library.

"We were thrilled to be able to collect such a wonderful variety of children's books during our annual drive," said

Co-President Pat Lett. "We almost doubled the number of books collected last year. Thanks to our members' generosity, kids in our area will be able to keep up their reading skills during the summer and beyond."

Michele Oliver, co-vice-president, delivered the books and in-kind donations to Andrew J. Calvert, Youth Services Librarian, after the club's March luncheon.



Andrew J. Calvert, Youth Services Librarian, St. Johns County Public Library System.



Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis mail@floridanewsline.com

Happy shrimp season! While it will be a few months before we get any larger ones for ourselves, we get to enjoy some of the best fishing the river has to offer while we wait. I've started to take June 1 off every year just so my wife and I can go out and fish on the first day of the season together. It makes the start of the season a little more special that way.

You can fish the shrimp just about any way and anywhere you please, but we fish docks 80 percent of the time with the shrimp on jig heads. Match the jig heads to the size of the shrimp as well as current and depth. We're throwing 1/4 to 1/8 oz. most of the time. If you can get them in chartreuse, you might be onto something.

I'll probably throw mine on just an unweighted circle or live bait hook to encourage any up-feeders to come take a look because as I write this, I'm still in search of my river tarpon. There were already reports of some smaller ones at the end of April. They're around, but I have not found any in my searches ... yet. I did find a very nice snook on one of the hunts though. I can't be too mad about that one. That could've been a goal itself, but honestly, I'd say a tarpon would be more achievable. That statement could also come back to bite me, but I'm still optimistic. How are you coming along on your fishing goals for this year?

The stripers should be ready and



Bonnie with her youngest son Christian caught her very first fish by Six Mile Landing at Guana on Mother's Day. She hooked him and reeled him in as Christian netted and pulled him into the boat. They released the baby red back to his mom, so he could grow up to be a big fish.

waiting for a live shrimp around the bridges and even some docks. I've caught more on artificial than I ever have this year, so I anticipate the bite to be even better when they're offered the real thing finally.

Redfish have also been fairly consistent on live bait and artificials. The river has remained saltier than normal, so their seatrout cousins have been around too. Mostly on the small size, but I suspect some bigger fish could move in when we have more forage for them and if conditions allow. Unfortunately, I haven't seen too much eel grass yet this year and the increased salinity could be attributing to that as well.

Dust off the nets, ready the wells, the river crickets are here. Time to go fishing.



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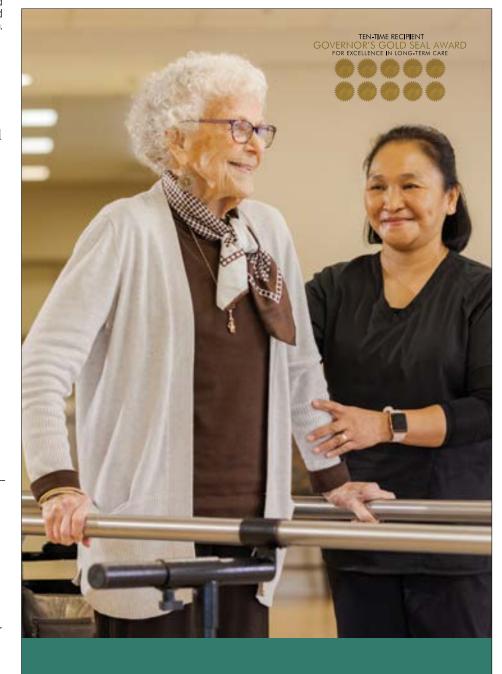
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Briefs cont. from pg. 11

journaling with no appointments, wait lists, or diagnoses necessary. The program works to train a user's brain to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy habits through repetition, disruption, and adaptation.

Flagler Health+ has already begun to distribute the subscriptions through BRAVE clients to middle and high school students in the five northeast Florida school districts it serves. Students can also obtain subscriptions directly through their respective schools.

St. Augustine Music Festival returns for 17th season at Cathedral Basilica

Each year, the Cathedral Basilica comes alive during the last two weeks in June with six free concerts of World Class Music in the beautiful and acoustically superior Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine. The St. Augustine Music Festival has grown over the years and for the third consecutive year, the St. Augustine Music Festival will also offer a seventh performance, the Juneteenth Recognition Concert on Monday, June 19, featuring Ann Marie McPhail singing spirituals and music from composers of African descent. The official 2023 Music Festival program begins on Friday, June 23. Featured artist Yukino Miyake,

pianist, will perform on the Mastriani piano, a 1917 Steinway Grand piano.

The Saturday, June 24 performance will introduce the "First of three B" composers — Johann Sebastian Bach during the Baroque Night concert. Concluding the first weekend on Sunday, June 25, A Night of Romance theme will star the "Second of three B" composers — Johannes Brahms.

A Brass and Organ Concert will fill the air on Friday, June 30. A brass quintet will join organist Tim Tuller, Canon for Music at St. John's Cathedral in Jacksonville, on the Casavant organ.

Musical Metamorphosis is the theme for the Saturday, July 1 concert featuring composers Osvaldo Golijov, Richard Strauss and John Adams. A Night with Nigel, the final concert of the season on Sunday, July 2 will highlight the "Third of three B" composers — Ludwig van Beethoven and music from Joseph Haydn. The featured artist is violinist Nigel Arm-

Concerts performances begin at 7:30 p.m. at the Cathedral Basilica on the Plaza de la Constitución in downtown St. Augustine. Visit www.SAM-Festival.org or call (904) 342-5175 for more information and to reserve your tickets.

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Launch a visit to Huntsville

By Debi Lander mail@floridanewsline.com

Huntsville, Alabama, utilizes the tagline, "Huntsville has Space," a play on words since Huntsville is home to the US Rocket and Space Center. The facility catches your attention along Interstate-65 with its soaring rocket garden. The garden's model Saturn V rises 363 feet, beckoning travelers to stop. And many do, making the space museum the most visited attraction in the state.

Anyone who recalls manned space flights will enjoy a trip back in time when exploring the museum's memorabilia and interactive displays. Visitors can squeeze themselves into a Mercury capsule as I did. The little Mercury pod housed the first round of our heroic astronauts flung into space. Bring kids too young to remember the space race; they will get excited about future space probes.

One of only three remaining Saturn V moon rockets, the missiles that launched the lunar landings, hangs overhead, grabbing everyone's attention. The enormity of the National Historic Landmark makes it the Smithsonian's largest artifact. It's hard to imagine the "right" few who agreed to climb aboard and flew in outer space.

If you or your children want to experience an out-of-this-world adventure, sign up for Space Camp on the Hunts-ville campus. Waiting lists fill quickly, so inquire early. Space Camp guarantees a blast of fun, education, and life-long memories.

Huntsville isn't all space-related; the city packs surprises. When I arrived, what immediately struck me was the cleanliness of the downtown. I saw no trash on the streets or greenways, just folks on a Sunday afternoon stroll along the water trail. Some crossed the photo-worthy red Japanese bridge, and others pushed strollers or lingered near the spraying fountains.

The water comes from where the city was founded — at the Big Spring. And that spring produces seven to 20 million gallons of fresh water daily. A canal connects the waterway to the Tennessee River, 10 miles away.

In the Twickenham Historic District, visit the Weeden House. I had no idea I would discover an extraordinary artist's work in her former home. Maria Howard Weeden was legally blind, yet painted watercolor portraits mainly of freedmen and women. Her works include such incredibly intricate detail you'll think they are photographs. After the Civil War, Weeden began to sell her paintings but signed them as Howard Weeden. (At the time, women artists were rare.) She captured her subjects so well that the costumers of "Gone with the Wind" used her artworks as the basis for creating the actor's wardrobes. Take the house tour, but go to see her fantastic works.

Head up to the Burritt Mansion on Round Top Road for sweeping city views, especially for sunset. Adults also



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
The author in a Mercury capsule.

enjoy a tour of the unusual X-shaped mansion house, and children love the 1800s farm buildings with animals and interpreters in period clothing.

Music lovers will find Huntsville's new state-of-the-art Orion Amphitheater an excellent venue for big-name concerts. The facility holds 8,000, all with unobstructed views of the stage. Many vendors sell food and drink before, during, and after the shows.

USA Today readers named the 118-acre Huntsville Botanical Gardens the fourth best in North America. The peaceful venue incorporates multiple indoor spaces, including a butterfly house and

various outdoor buildings. The family-friendly landscaped paths even include a children's garden.

The Lowe Mill, an old cotton warehouse, unleashes creative spirits. Today it houses 158 artists' studios and workshops. Visitors can watch them in action and purchase original artwork such as pottery, paintings, cigar box guitars, and other musical instruments.

If your vacation plans have space, head to Rocket City for a surprising getaway.

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



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