

Ponte Vedra NewsLine

OCTOBER 2023 Volume 10 Issue 10

Ponte Vedra, Palm Valley, Nocatee and South Ponte Vedra Beach

A Florida NewsLine Publication



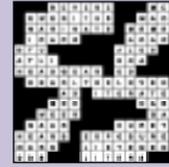
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Photo courtesy Sheila Kolesaire

Ponte Vedra's original pumpkin at Lord of Life Lutheran Church is now open.

Plethora of pumpkins coming to the original Ponte Vedra patch

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

The original pumpkin patch in Ponte Vedra Beach, now in its 24th year, is located at Lord of Life Lutheran Church on Roscoe Boulevard. This year, the pumpkin patch will open on Sunday, Oct. 8 and will sell pumpkins every day up until 5 p.m. on Halloween.

“Every year we get a great assortment of pumpkins in unusual shapes and colors that are very popular, such as green, gray, cream, or with warts on orange ones — along with the classic, perfect carving pumpkin,” said Deb Nye, the head organizer of this annual event, which is the largest fundraiser that the church holds.

This year the church will give 10 percent of the profits from pumpkin

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Protecting Wildlife: Local organizations rescue, rehab and release

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Two events changed the course of Jonathan Howard's life in 2010: battling cancer and finding a baby deer, ultimately named Lily, in his yard.

The first taught him the fleeting nature of life and the second reinforced that message to such a point that he eventually opened The Ark Wildlife Care and Sanctuary (The Ark) in 2014.

“It really changes how you look at life,” said Howard, adding that Lily was released back into the wild when ready.

Today the facility, which includes an on-site hospital, is home to 118 animals on a permanent basis with the majority handicapped in some way. The 21½ acre site houses a variety of wildlife including bobcats, deer, skunks, emu, squirrels, otters, raccoons and foxes. Veterinarians Dr. Michael Payne and Dr. Alicia Emerson work with The Ark

around the clock to provide care.

“We give them the best life that we can,” said Howard, whose wife Mendy assists in the mission. “We found that there is nowhere else to send these animals. If it has a will to live, then I want to save it.”

While some animals are permanent residents, The Ark's goal is to release wildlife back into the wild when possible. Annually, 300 – 500 animals are treated and released. Animals in rehabilitation must be released by law after 180 days

unless a medical necessity dictates otherwise, said Howard. Releases, he said, can be both beautiful and difficult.

“It is very heart-wrenching,” he said. “There is no greater feeling than taking a fragile, tiny life and seeing it grow and flourish and then go free.”

Howard has 10 offsite volunteers that assist with The Ark's mission and are on call for those who have found a baby, injured or trapped animal. Some volunteers help on site as well, starting their day at 5 a.m., often bottle feeding the babies, cleaning cages and sanitizing feeders.



Photos taken by Tiffany Merlo Phelps except for two bird photos that were submitted by Mary Foulks
Photo courtesy Tiffany Merlo Phelps Jonathan Howard holds Nooty, a cross between a beaver and a rat known as a Coypu.

The Ark, based in Hilliard, serves the state of Florida, including St. Johns County where many calls originate because of the rapid development in the area. Howard said that he is available 24/7 to respond to injured wildlife, but not for nuisance control.

“There is a huge volume of displacement in Northeast Florida,” said Howard. “Lots of people are not compassionate toward wildlife. You must learn to coexist with them.”

Howard said his organization does not accept birds or reptiles.

That's where Karen Ward-Lynch, who founded The Ark Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation in St. Augustine (a separate facility from The Ark in Hilliard),

Protecting Wildlife cont. on pg. 2



Photo courtesy Mary Foulks

The Ark Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation volunteer Mary Foulks feeds Northern Gannets in St. Augustine.

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Protecting Wildlife cont. from pg. 1

comes in. She and her volunteers work primarily with ill, orphaned, or injured birds in seven area counties, including St. Johns. During their busiest season from March to August, her organization will receive 83 calls per day. In response, they have a 24-hour veterinarian service available, including weekends and holidays. About 170, primarily birds, are in the care of Ward-Lynch and her offsite volunteers right now. Every year, 2,500 birds (songbirds account for about 1,000) are released back into their natural habitats.



Brown pelicans gathered at The Ark Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation in St. Augustine.

Photo courtesy Mary Foulks

Ward-Lynch started the organization in 1999 after a neighbor found an injured baby bird and she decided to help. The day before she encountered the injured baby bird, she had prayed for God to help her find her true calling.

“The very next day, I found the baby bird,” she said.

Ward-Lynch said The Ark also cares for squirrels, marsh bunnies, gopher tortoises and turtles.

Both Howard and Ward-Lynch do not receive any state funding and often spend their own money to survive. Howard said that it costs \$45,000 a year to operate the Hilliard facility and that he has no paid employees with 100 percent of donations being dedicated to the cause. Ward-Lynch spends \$60,000

a year to keep her facility running also with unpaid volunteers and donations going to wildlife care.

[Author’s note: Howard’s most needed items are paper towels, bleach, cleaning supplies, dry Meow Mix seafood flavor cat food, and puppy chow. To report an injured animal, call Howard at (904) 424-6543. For more information, email Howard at vkinstream@gmail.com. For Ward-Lynch, the most needed items are paper towels, regular facial tissue, laundry detergent, pecans, and grocery store gift cards. These items can be sent to The Ark Wildlife Rescue at 171 Green Turtle Lane, St. Augustine, FL 32086. To report injured wildlife, call Ward-Lynch at (904) 679-1533.]

SoleMates share common desire to be champions for girls

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Girls on the Run SoleMates are leveraging their love of movement to train with a purpose to raise critical scholarship funds for girls in their community. Studies show that a girl’s self-confidence begins to drop by age nine, but SoleMates know that it doesn’t have to be that way.

In addition to cultivating meaningful and healthy relationships, participating in Girls on the Run transforms girls’ lives by helping them increase their self-confidence and teaching them critical skills to manage emotions, resolve conflict, help others, and make intentional decisions. In fact, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy highlighted Girls on the Run as an example of a program for girls to learn life skills through engaging activities and lessons.

SoleMates help to advance this powerful mission while training for a physical activity. In March 2023, Girls on the Run SoleMates raised \$45,938, which translates to 306 Girls on the Run scholarships.

Whether they are counting miles on the trail, laps in a pool, reps in the weight room, or downward dogs in the studio, SoleMates can train for any athletic activity of their choice. SoleMates that choose to train for the 2024 Gate River Run in Jacksonville



Photo courtesy Girls on the Run

SoleMates help fund scholarships for Girls on the Run while they train for a physical activity.

or the 2024 Shark Bite Half Marathon in New Smyrna Beach will have access to the exclusive SoleMates VIP Experience. The SoleMates VIP Experience is a private party for SoleMates and a guest before and after the race in the air-conditioned WJCT building and includes food, beverages, parking, indoor restrooms, gear storage, and plenty of post-race pampering.

Visit www.gotrnefl.org/solemates to register or learn more about becoming a SoleMate.

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Ponte Vedra NewsLine Community Newspaper is a free monthly publication distributed via bulk mail to all addresses in Zip Codes 32081 and 32082. 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 may be copied without the express written consent of the publisher. ©2023.



BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet BB!



Breed:
Chihuahua Mix

Favorite Activity:
She loves to go for a ride in the car and chase her hedgehog stuffed animal

Favorite Food:
Bison

Favorite Friend:
Her Owner

How did your BFF get their name:
She buzzes around like a Bee

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

Happy Halloween
from your friends
at Ponte Vedra
NewsLine!

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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 sign in the GTM Reserve North parking lot.

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A	R	A	B	S		A	L	I	P	A	I	N			
P	A	R	E	R		D	A	M	A	D	I	T			
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R	E	D			S	S	R		S	A	S	S			

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A. animal B. safety C. humane D. foster

Answers Puzzles PG 10

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October

Community Calendar

What's Happening in Ponte Vedra

Council on Aging offers interest groups at the COA Center at Flagler Health+ Village at Nocatee. Meetings are free and self-guided except for the Caregiver's Support Group. Advance registration for clubs and meetings is required; email pbrunell@stjohnscoa.com or call (904) 819-3234. Tuesday clubs include: Caregiver Support Group, 1 p.m. - 2 p.m.; and Widows and Widowers social group, second and fourth Tuesday of each month, 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Wednesday groups include: Mah Jongg Meet-up, 1 p.m. - 3 p.m.

Palm Valley Market is held inside the Palm Valley Community Center at 148 Canal Road, every Tuesday from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. The market offers fresh produce, baked goods, local honey, tea, seasonal treats, soap, jewelry, plants and more. Visit the Palm Valley Market Facebook page for more information.

3rd: Vicar's Landing monthly Boutique Sale will be held Tuesday, Oct. 3 from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. at 1000 Vicar's Landing Way. The sale includes antiques, household items, home furnishings, framed art, as well as designer and costume jewelry. The public is welcome. Checks or cash only please. The Vicar's Employee Scholarship Fund receives the proceeds. Call Mary Lane Johnson at (904) 612-9277 or Beverly Webb at (904) 315-2610 for more information.

3rd: Essential Tremor - Meet, Greet & Educate will be held on Tuesday, Oct. 3 at 11 a.m. at Baptist HealthPlace at Nocatee, 400 Colonnade Drive, Suite 130. Speaker Elaine Keebaugh, PhD, will discuss the hereditary aspect of ET - will your children, and your children's children have it as well? RSVP to Jan Kary at jkary@verizon.net or (202) 438-6750.

3rd: Ponte Vedra Woman's Club will host Purely Social Happy Hour on Oct. 3, from 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. at Palm Valley Outdoor, 377 S. Roscoe Blvd. The meeting will provide an opportunity to meet and socialize with members. Everyone will order

off the menu. Registration and required dinner on the Ponte Vedra Woman's Club website under Events at www.pontevedrawomansclub.com/eventregistrations.php to register.

4th: Coastal Friends will host its monthly luncheon on Oct. 4 at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Pkwy. in Ponte Vedra Beach from 11 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. Guest speaker Lisa Rinaman, St. Johns Riverkeeper, will discuss the St. Johns River, its status and care. The cost of the luncheon is \$25 and reservations must be made in advance by contacting bartshar@comcast.net as soon as possible.

5th: Chair exercise will be held for four weeks on Thursdays, beginning Oct. 5, from 9:30 a.m. - 10 a.m. at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, Ponte Vedra Beach. Call Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for more information.

5th - 7th: "Disney's Aladdin, Jr." will be presented by the Creative Academy at Christ Church, 400 San Juan Drive, at 7 p.m. on Oct. 5, 6, and 7. In addition there will be a matinee at 3 p.m. on Oct. 7. Tickets are available at cec-aladdinjr.ticketleap.com or at the door and cost \$20 - \$30. Email barbiekroberts@gmail.com for more information.

6th: The GTM Research Reserve will hold a new volunteer orientation on Oct. 6 from 10 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. Learn about volunteer rules and responsibility as well next steps to volunteering. Complete the volunteer application online (www.gtmnerr.org) before attending. Contact Abigail Kuhn at Abigail.Kuhn@FloridaDEP.gov to assure that your application was received.

7th: Wellness events at Sawgrass Village will be held every Saturday in October from 10 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. Hosted by Mind Body Social, all events are free and open to the community. Events include wellness classes such as yoga and barre, all held on the lawn in front of ABC Liquors. Visit <https://mbs.events/sv/> for more information and to

register.

12th: Free Tech Help with David will be held on Thursday, Oct. 12 from 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Drop in for tech assistance with your Android, Apple, and Reader devices; no RSVPs required. Visit sjcpls.org/branches/ponte-vedra-beach-branch/ for more information.

13th: Food Truck Friday will be held on Oct. 13 from 5:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. This event is open to the public.

16th: Ponte Vedra Democratic Club will meet on Monday, Oct. 16 at 5:30 p.m. for Chat & Chew before the 6 p.m. meeting at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library, 101 Library Road. Featured Speaker Vicky Oakes, St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections, will speak about the 2024 voting changing protocols. Email jkary@verizon.net for more information.

17th: Friends of the Library Book Sale will be held at Seymour's Bookstore at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library on Oct. 17 from 10 a.m. - 8 p.m. There are games and puzzles as well as books for all ages and interests. All proceeds go directly to books, materials and programs at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Call Seymour's Bookstore at (904) 273-3990 for more information.

21st: The Nocatee Farmers Market featuring Halloween Harvest will be held on Saturday, Oct. 21 from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. The Farmers Market is open to the public.

21st: Northeast Florida Chapter of Sisters in Crime will meet on Oct. 21 at 10 a.m. in the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library, 101 Library Blvd. (FOL Room). Christi Bachara Petrie, an investigator and Florida State Attorney, will be the featured speaker. Bring your coffee and bring a friend.

Visit www.nefloridasistersincrime.org or email floridasistersincrime@gmail.com for more information.

21st: Auditions for "The Sound of Music" to be presented by the Creative Academy at Christ Church in February 2024, will be held on Saturday, Oct. 21 at 1 p.m. in the choir room at Christ Church, 400 San Juan Drive. Contact Barbiekroberts@gmail.com with any questions.

26th: "Should You Ever Put Someone Else's Name on the Deed to Your Home?" a free lecture by Megan Wall, St. Johns County Legal Aid, will be presented at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, on Thursday, Oct. 26 from 11 a.m. - 12 p.m. Call Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for more information.

28th: The Ponte Vedra Writers Group will meet on Saturday, Oct. 28 at 11 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Author Vic DiGenti (aka Parker Francis) will share what he's learned about the demands and rewards of writing biographies, illustrate examples with excerpts from his books and answer your questions about the ghostwriting business. The meeting is free and open to members and non-members alike. Visit www.floridawriters.org for more information.

28th: GTM Research Reserve will host its monthly Beach Cleanup on Saturday, Oct. 28 from 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. No registration is required; meet at the Visitor Center, 505 Guana River Road in Ponte Vedra Beach where gloves and trash bags will be provided. Visit gtmnerr.org for more information.

31st: Halloween Party with entertainment by comedienne Mama Marge at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, Ponte Vedra Beach. Enjoy a costume party with prizes on Thursday, Oct. 31 from 11 a.m. - 12 p.m. Call Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for more information.



WHERE ARE YOU SPENDING THE WEEKEND? PAR 5 OR AISLE 4?

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Q&A with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

Q: Do you have any Halloween safety tips?

A: Yes. First, plan a route in advance and only trick or treat at homes or businesses that you are familiar with. It's best to go while it's still light outside, but definitely stay in well-lit areas and with a group. Establish a curfew and stick to it, so your family will know when you will be home. Be sure to take your cell phone as it can be used not only for communication, but also to provide a flashlight.

Make sure your child's costume, including masks and wigs, are flame resistant. They should also be light in color and reflective so they are clearly visible to motorists. Avoid costumes that are oversized and high-heeled shoes that can cause a child to trip. Instruct your child not to eat any treats until an adult can examine them.

If you will be out driving on Halloween, take extra time and watch for children darting in and out from between parked cars. Slow down and pay attention. Watch for children walking on roadways, medians and curbs. Enter and exit driveways and alleys very carefully. Remember, if you see suspicious activity, call the Sheriff's Office and report it.

Q: What should parents know about sexual offenders/predators in the area?

A: We have 211 active sexual offenders/predators in St. Johns County. We have a county ordinance, "Prohibited holiday ac-

tivity for sexual offenders," which details activities that a registered sexual offender cannot participate in. They are not allowed to participate in Halloween activities by wearing a costume or decorating their home to entice children. They must turn off their outside lights by 5 p.m.

We will have a detail from SJSO doing spot checks for compliance on Halloween. You can visit our website, www.sjsoc.org, select Resources at the top, and then select Locate Sex Offenders to determine if any are in your area.

Q: What is the Sheriff's Office doing for Halloween?

A: For the third year, we are hosting a haunted house called "Sheriff Hardwick's Haunted Jail," on Oct. 20, 21, 27, and 28 from 6:30 p.m. – 10 p.m. at 4025 Lewis Speedway in St. Augustine. There will be concessions, photo opportunities and more spooky but safe fun for all ages! New this year will be a Trunk or Treat with the sheriff deputies.

Tickets are available on Eventbrite at: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/sheriff-hardwicks-haunted-jail-tickets-718112111657>

The Haunted Jail was organized and created by Sheriff's Office employees as a 501.3c fundraiser for the SJSO Special Teams Association Inc. This is the safest place in town to enjoy a fun night for a good cause.



Q&A with St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes

Q: St. Johns County voter registration numbers dropped by approximately 15,000 voters since last month. What caused this?

A: The drop in numbers is a direct result of our bi-annual list maintenance required by FS 98.065. Supervisors are required to send a notice to all voters who have not voted during the last two general elections (2020 and 2022) and have not contacted our office since November 2020. Notices were mailed to 16,688 St. Johns County voters on Aug. 4. Voters can respond to the notice by calling the Elections Office or returning the postcard (which is postage paid) to acknowledge our request to confirm their legal residence is correct, update their voter record with a new address, or request their voter registration be canceled.

Q: What happens if a voter doesn't respond to the notice you send them?

A: If the notice is returned undeliverable or no response is received from a voter after 30 days, they are moved to the inactive list, which begins the voter on the path to removal from Florida's voter rolls. Following two federal general elections (2024 and 2026), if an inactive voter does not vote, update their address, or have any contact with our office, they will be removed from the rolls in December 2026.

Q: Were unresponsive voters removed from the voter rolls?

A: No, voters whose notice was returned undeliverable or did not respond within 30 days were moved from active registered voters to a status of inactive.

Q: Is an inactive voter eligible to vote?

A: Yes, but the voter must first confirm their local address prior to voting, requesting a vote-by-mail ballot, or making any changes to their voter record.

Q: Is this a new law?

A: No, we have been doing bi-annual list maintenance for many years; however, new laws went into effect July 1 that changed the notices that Supervisors mail, and the action taken from results of the mailing.

Q: Have other new laws helped Supervisors improve the accuracy of our voter rolls?

A: Yes. Supervisors now receive weekly reports from the Clerk of Courts on persons convicted of a felony the previous week so we can begin the removal process of the convicted felons. New laws now require the Florida Division of Driver Licenses to report voters who have updated their driver license

Q&A with Vicky Oakes cont. on pg. 9

Your family's health is my priority

Sarah Adams, MD
Family Medicine Physician

Baptist Primary Care in Nocatee is pleased to welcome family medicine physician, **Sarah Adams, MD**. Dr. Adams enjoys treating the entire family, from newborns to seniors, and has training in family medicine, pediatric and adolescent care and more. So, whatever age or stage of life you and your loved ones are in, Dr. Adams is ready to see you now.

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Dr. Adams joins the primary care office with Casey Bonaquist, DO, Joshua Harrison, MD, Robert Kawa, DO, Elizabeth McQuagge, APRN and Rachael Kelly, PA-C.

Baptist Primary Care physicians are employed by Baptist Primary Care, Inc. © Baptist Health 2023

Leadership takes flight at Ocean Palms

By Lisa Farese
mail@floridanewsline.com

The newly appointed fifth grade ambassadors at Ocean Palms Elementary School kicked off the school year with their first meeting on Sept. 6, during which they received their assignments for the year and took part in a school cleanup project.

The ambassador program, a long tradition at Ocean Palms, engages fifth grade students in leadership and community-based projects throughout the year. Students assist in classrooms, help with the car line, lead the canned food drive, lend a hand for Treats for Troops, implement the Kindness Card Project, execute the First Responders Project, and more each year.



The 2023 - 2024 fifth grade ambassadors at Ocean Palms Elementary. Photo courtesy Lisa Farese

“Before moving here, I had to weather several storms. I was alone and I was afraid. But here, I was not afraid. Feeling safe and secure made all the difference during the storm.”

Delores, Resident at Westminster St. Augustine

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

Q: Do you have an update on the construction of K-8 School OO?

A: On Sept. 20, we will have the topping off ceremony for this new school under construction in the Beacon Lakes community. It's an exciting time. This facility will be approximately 190,000 square feet and contain 73 classrooms with 1,500 student stations on a 43-acre parcel. STG Contracting Group is the construction company and they have built facilities for us before. When this school opens next school year, it will provide relief to Landrum, Ocean Palms, and Liberty Pines Academy.

Q: Can you comment on the overcrowding of current schools and subsequent rezoning?

A: We are always looking to balance out our growth. Even as we are constructing new schools, we are currently working on obtaining bonding for our next school. In anticipation of this next new school, we're looking at balancing out attendance of our current schools. In District 4, we are looking at a proposal to relieve Pine Island Academy with the projected growth in its attendance zone. It's like a big puzzle and we're trying to provide this balance as best we can. Our attendance zone design team welcomes and considers all feedback and suggestions that they receive.

Q: Do you have any kudos to share?

A: I'd like to recognize Gus Calado, Nease swim and dive coach and Zane Guile, Ponte Vedra track and field coach, who were awarded the Jeff Holt Coach of the Year Award for Pursuing Victory with Honor.

Q: What else do you have to share with District 4?

A: I'd like to congratulate our National Merit Semifinalist in our District. From Nease High School: Jack Hilbert, Shreya Kalarikkal, Alan Li, Roberto Russo, Vincent Schifiano, Lucian Slayden and Zarrar Talukdar. From Ponte Vedra High School: Mira Bhutani, Lila Kirkley, Spencer Lewis, Alexandra Lin, Emaad Rahmathulla, and Samuel Ray.

I'd also like to recognize the passing of Mike Parrish, former principal of Ocean Palms Elementary School. He opened that school and served as principal for 15 years. Prior to that he was principal at PVPB Rawlings. Mike was a strong educational pillar in the community. He knew every student's name and created the culture that exists to this day at Ocean Palms.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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



Dignitaries at the topping off ceremony for K-8 School OO on Sept. 20. Photo courtesy St. Johns County School District

Briefs

THE PLAYERS Championship announces open auditions for National Anthem performers

As THE PLAYERS Championship makes preparations to celebrate its 50th Anniversary, the tournament is inviting the talent of Northeast Florida to audition to perform the National Anthem before its annual Military Appreciation Ceremony and concert on Tuesday, March 12, 2024.

Local performers of all ages are encouraged to participate and share their rendition of the National Anthem. Interested musicians are asked to upload a video and submit an application by 5 p.m. on Monday, November 6, 2023. Once submitted, auditions will go through a judging process and if selected, the winner will be notified by the tournament via email. All questions regarding the application process should be directed to mirandarossum@pgatourhq.com

Visit www.theplayers.com/anthem to apply.

St. Johns County making progress on 195 capital projects of \$504 million

At the St. Johns County Board of County Commission meeting on Sept. 5, the new infrastructure delivery team presented an update on selected capital projects among the 195 projects either being designed or already under construction totaling more than \$504 million in infrastructure improvements for the St. Johns County community.

Led by Interim Assistant County Administrator Colin Groff, the infrastructure delivery team is taking a more cohesive, innovative approach to completing capital improvement projects. The team includes the Office of Management and Budget, Land Management, Procurement, Growth Management and Public Works.

“This new team will implement cross-

functional team concepts to break down silos and build collaboration,” Groff said. “We will encourage and reward innovative ideas from both our own staff and the consultants we hire. This team will be the catalyst to complete projects on time and hopefully under budget in St. Johns County.”

The county has 75 capital projects in design that total nearly \$103 million and another 120 capital projects under construction that total more than \$401 million. The highlighted projects included a Countywide Signal Optimization Study, the Hastings Community Center and Library as well as Mill Creek Regional Park and the widening of County Road 210 East.

“We plan to present an update of critical projects every month which will highlight three or four projects,” Groff said. “The goal is to communicate to the public important project milestones, the progress we are making on projects and what is being built by St. Johns County to improve their quality of life.”

St. Johns Cultural Council announces Arts for All grant program

The St. Johns Cultural Council has announced its new “Arts for All” grant program (AFA). With support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Cultural Council will award a total of \$80,000 in grant funds to arts, culture, heritage organizations, and individual artists in St. Johns County. The goal of the Arts for All grant program is to improve funding for programming that is primarily for the benefit of county residents.

Arts organizations with annual revenues of less than \$200,000 are eligible to apply for between \$5,000 and \$10,000, and individual artists can apply for up to \$5,000. Arts, culture, and heritage projects can be of any discipline and must take place in St. Johns County between Jan. 1, 2024

and Dec. 31, 2024.

“By limiting eligibility to small organizations and individuals, Arts for All grants are more accessible to local artists and emerging cultural organizations from rural, minority, and underserved communities in our County. Because of this, we hope to share more of the County’s varied arts, culture and heritage with our residents,” said Christina Parrish Stone, the Cultural Council’s executive director.

Online applications are open now and will close on Wednesday, Nov. 15. After review by a panel of local arts educators, consultants, and organization leaders, grant awards will be announced in December. Applicants must be St. Johns County residents or organizations based in St. Johns County and meet basic eligibility requirements included in the AFA Guidelines. Visit <https://stjohnsculture.com/arts-for-all-grants/> for more information.

St. Johns Riverkeeper to speak at Coastal Friends luncheon

Coastal Friends will hold its next monthly luncheon on Wednesday, Oct. 4, 2023 at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Pkwy. from 11 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. This month’s guest speaker will be Lisa Rinaman, St. Johns Riverkeeper, who serves as the chief advocate and public’s voice for the St. Johns River. She will talk about all things regarding the river and the status and care of it.

The luncheon is open to members as well as the community; the cost to attend this luncheon is \$25. Reservations must be made in advance by contacting the luncheon chairman at bartshar@comcast.net as soon as possible.

Coastal Friends is a social club that was formed in 1998 and just celebrated its 25th year. It consists of women

who live in Ponte Vedra Beach, Nocatee, Jacksonville Beach, Neptune Beach, Atlantic Beach, St. Augustine, Jacksonville and the surrounding area. Some of the activities offered are adventures and outings, book club, Bunco, canasta, happy hour, lunch in, periodic lunches at local restaurants, Mah Jongg and wine socials. Monthly luncheons are held on the first Wednesday of every month except for July and August. New members are welcome throughout the year. Contact brookemeister@msn.com for more information on how to join.

Northeast Florida Sisters in Crime welcomes investigator

The Northeast Florida Sisters in Crime will feature Christi Bachara Petrie, an investigator for a Florida State Attorney, at its meeting on Oct. 21 at 10 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library.

Whether a crime of passion, a premeditated, or a spontaneous act, there will be traces of what happened at a crime scene. That evidence is critical to formulating a strong legal case for prosecution. Petrie is well acquainted with the legal and criminal community. A longtime investigator for the Florida State Attorney, Fourth Judicial Circuit, her brother, Henry (Chip) Bachara is an attorney, as was her late husband, Gayle Petrie. As an investigator, Petrie has been responsible for gathering and evaluating crime-scene evidence, assisting local and state law enforcement agencies, making arrests, and testifying in court. During her tenure, she has worked high-profile cases and will describe some of her experience and her responsibilities, plus answer questions.

The group welcomes misters and sisters to learn more about writing, promoting, and enjoying crime fiction. Contact floridasis-

Briefs cont. on pg. 8

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Briefs cont. from pg. 7

tersincrime@gmail.com for more information.

Newcomers of North St. Johns announces October luncheon

Newcomers of North Saint Johns will hold its October luncheon on Tuesday, Oct. 17 at Jacksonville Golf & Country Club, 3985 Hunt Club Road in Jacksonville. The event features lunch and presentation by Terri Rampone, owner of Nouveau Image Permanent Cosmetics. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. The cost for the luncheon and program is \$35 for members and \$40 for guests; all reservations must be received by Oct. 7. Visit <https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org> for more information.

Lunch includes a choice of entrée as follows: chicken marsala served with mushroom risotto and green beans; parmesan-crusted salmon served with roasted potatoes and asparagus; or chef's choice market vegetarian entrée. All entrées come with a house salad with ranch and balsamic dressings available on the table along with fresh rolls and butter. Dessert features a chocolate crème brulee timbale. Beverage choices include water, tea and coffee. A cash bar is also available.

Newcomers of North St. Johns offers a variety of activities for St. Johns County residents to get acquainted, including smaller lunch groups, wine socials, golf, Mah Jongg, holiday parties, day trips and cultural events.

Local Boy Scout achieves historic feat

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Tre Peterson, a 17-year-old from Boy Scouts of America (BSA) Troop 277 in Ponte Vedra Beach, is joining a rare group that few scouts in the whole country have ever achieved since the BSA started 113 years ago. He will be recognized Oct. 2 at a BSA Court of Honor Ceremony at Christ Episcopal Church for completing all 138 Merit Badges that the BSA offers. Since the BSA was founded in 1910, fewer than 550 scouts of the more than 130 million participants have accomplished this feat (less than 0.00042 percent).

Peterson joined Cub Scout Pack 277 in first grade, moved into Boy Scouts in fifth grade, and earned Eagle rank by the end of seventh grade. To earn the Eagle rank, Scouts must earn 23 merit badges; most scouts typically earn 30 – 40 badges. Peterson had earned 86 merit badges by this point. He built dog houses for Jacksonville's Animal Care and Protective Services as his Eagle Scout project.

Since then, Peterson continued to challenge himself to pursue every merit badge, which help scouts learn about sports, crafts, science, trades, busi-

ness, and future careers, among many. His favorites were metalwork, personal management, and welding.

"It's taken me many years to earn all the merit badges, but it has definitely been worth the journey, and I believe I've inspired younger scouts along the way to stretch what they think is possible to do," Peterson said.

Both his father and grandfather were Boy Scouts. Peterson is a senior at Ponte Vedra High School and would like to major in Finance at Stetson University in Deland next year.

Visit www.scouting.org/skills/merit-badges/all/ to see the full list of merit badges scouts can earn.



Photo courtesy Sheila Kolesaire

Tre Peterson has earned all 138 Merit Badges that the BSA offers.





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Get to Know ...

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Jess Chard

Jess Chard has always been attracted to helping people. While in college at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, Chard ended up following that instinct and switching from an art history/business degree (with plans to become an art curator since she is fluent in Italian) to nursing. Not long after she graduated, Chard noticed that there were openings on Mayo Clinic's Florida campus. She got a job as a surgical nurse in the operating room at the age of 22, moving to Florida in 2012 sight unseen. She moved with her now husband Brad Chard. Her altruistic side felt fulfilled. "I really liked working in surgery. You are helping patients when they are at their most vulnerable. You have to be their advocate," said Chard, 35. The Chards, who moved to Nocatee in 2014, got married in 2015. The couple had twins, Calla and Rynn, in 2017 at which time Jess Chard became a stay-at-home mom. Their third daughter, Murphy, was born at the start of the pandemic in 2020. Soon, Chard felt a need to connect with the community in a meaningful way. That's when she recalled watching her mom and sister work at a balloon company in Minnesota. While she had never created any balloon art before, Chard tapped into her past art educa-



Photo courtesy Jess Chard
Jess Chard

tion and gave it a try. She posted in a Nocatee Facebook group, offering to make displays for cost to build up her portfolio. "It really blew up, no pun intended," said Chard. She worked while her children slept, watched a lot of videos and invested in classes to learn more, slowly developing her own personal style and technique (all the while filling her house with balloons and supplies). In August 2020, she officially started To The Moon Party Designs, a bespoke balloon company.

Q: Why do you think balloons are so popular?

A: Balloons are a timeless staple for a birthday or really any event. It is appropriate at any age. My demographic is everyone. I love being a part of these special precious moments and memories. That is very rewarding.

Q: Share about the balloon display you made for the community to use for free on the first day of school.

A: I started setting up at 4 a.m. at the Greenleaf Village park and made a bal-

loon display with a chalkboard, disco balls, and a vintage desk for people to use all day for pictures. With the help of friends, we were able to man the area all day. There is something exciting about the first day of school. Everything is fresh and new. This was another opportunity to be a part of those precious memories.

Q: Where are you from?

A: I was born in Boise, Idaho, and I lived there until I was five years old. My dad, who was a banker, moved us to Minnesota, and I grew up there until the seventh grade. Then I returned to Boise and was able to spend my junior year as an exchange student in Italy. I ultimately ended up moving back to Minnesota and graduating from high school in Monticello.

Q: Share something about your family and how you like to spend your time.

A: The girls are in dance and tumbling. We do a lot of pool time and play around the neighborhood. We love going on golf cart rides and going to get ice cream. Nocatee offers so much, so we are always around town. Also, I enjoy working out at the Nocatee YMCA. I just like feeling good, empowered and strong.

Q: What is your approach to life?

A: I had this awesome choir instructor in high school, and he had this saying up on the wall that always stuck with me. It is a Hindu proverb: "Nobility is not being superior to other people. True nobility is being superior to your former self." I really feel like that is my goal, to be a better version of myself every day.

Q&A with Vicky Oakes cont. from pg. 5

address, but not their address on their voter record, to the Supervisors and the Department of Health updates us daily when voters on our rolls pass away so we can remove them from the rolls.

Q: What else do you do to keep our voter rolls current?

A: St. Johns County voter rolls are sent out every 60 days to the Post Office National Change of Address (NCOA) matching, so we are notified of voters who changed their address with the Post Office. This information is used to contact the voter and update addresses.

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

A: Readers can email me at voakes@votesjc.com or call me at (904) 823-2238. Our website, www.votesjc.com also has a wealth of information.

Pumpkins cont. from pg.1

sales to the St. Johns County charity Pie in the Sky, which provides fresh produce, eggs, bread, soup and other staples to 1,200 seniors in the county who don't have enough to eat.

Along with large pumpkins, the church has a very good assortment of mini pumpkins and gourds and sells homemade baked goods and its famous pumpkin pies baked using pumpkins from the patch. Last year Nye baked 150 pumpkin pies, which sold out almost as quickly as they came out of the oven.

Patch hours are Monday through Friday from 1 p.m. to dusk, Saturdays from 9 a.m. to dusk, and Sundays from 11 a.m. to dusk. Family Fun Days will be held the weekend of Oct. 14 and 15, with a slide, bounce house, face painting, games, and a craft. New this year will be tractor rides every weekend from 12 p.m. – 4 p.m. The patch will also be open all day on Monday, Oct. 16, a day students are out of school.

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PopHistory

By Scott A. Grant
mail@floridanewslines.com

Josiah Walls, the forgotten Congressman

In 1870, Josiah T. Walls became the first African American to be elected to the United States House of Representatives from the State of Florida. Walls, a Republican, would remain the only Black person elected to congress from our state until 1992.

At that time, Florida had only one seat in Congress. Walls won in a statewide election over a former plantation owner, Silas Niblack. Niblack contested the results of the election and eventually won a lawsuit to replace Walls late in the term. By the time Niblack won his suit before the House Committee on Elections, Walls had already won his "re-election" campaign in 1872.

Two months after being unseated, Walls was back in Congress. He served out that second term and ran and won again in 1874, this time for a seat in Florida's newly formed Second Congressional District. Following the census of 1870, Florida was awarded a second seat in Congress. Walls' 1874 election was again contested by his opponent, Jesse Johnson Finley, a former Confederate General. And in April 1876, the US House of Representatives, finding election irregularities,

unseated Walls in favor of Finley.

By many accounts, Walls, who referred to Florida as "my own sunny state," was an effective congressman. He was praised by Jacksonville's Democratic Florida Union newspaper and engaged in an extremely eloquent debate with a congressman from Georgia who opposed a national education bill on the grounds of "states' rights." "We know what the cry about states' rights means," he argued, "especially when we hear it produced as an argument against ... the education of the people."

All of this took place during a period known as "Military Reconstruction." It is not a particularly popular period of history. We do not talk about it much. US troops occupied much of the South. Florida was part of the third Military District, along with Alabama and Georgia, governed by General George Gordon Meade. Meade had commanded the Union Army at Gettysburg. Voter turnout was scant. Many whites were either prohibited from voting or refused to vote because of their allegiance to the defeated Confederacy. Out of more than 270,000

residents, 43 percent of whom were Black, only just more than 24,000 men actually voted in 1870.

Prior to his election in 1870, Walls had served in the Florida Senate in 1869 and in the Florida House of Representatives in 1868. That 1868 class was substantially made up of African-American Republicans, mostly recently freed slaves, a fact that troubled Florida's first lieutenant governor, William H. Gleason. He saw the newly elected "negroes" as "incompetent" and "ignorant;" and ominously prophesied that "[t]he time must soon come when the race question will overpower every other subject in the south..."

During this period, the South saw a proliferation of Black freedmen serving in public office. The South Carolina Legislature of 1868 featured 50 African Americans out of a total body of 63. That legislature was later ridiculed in the infamous 1915 film "The Birth of a Nation."

Walls lost the Republican nomination in 1876 to a "carpetbagger" named Horatio Bisbee. He then went back home to Alachua County and won a

seat in the Florida Senate, where he served until 1881. He retired, became a farmer, and mayor of Gainesville for a time. He also became a lawyer and a newspaper publisher. His farm flourished until the "big freeze" of 1894 - 95. After that, he took a position as an instructor of farming at the State Normal & Industrial College for Colored Students, which we now call Florida A&M.

Josiah Walls was born a slave in Virginia in 1842 to unknown parents. He was drafted into the Confederate Army as an unpaid laborer or servant until his unit was captured in 1862. He then enlisted in the United States Colored Troops where he rose to the rank of Sergeant Major. After the war, he settled in Alachua County and became a teacher before pursuing politics.

Walls died in Tallahassee in 1905 and is believed to be buried somewhere in the city. No one knows for sure. His grave is unmarked.

Scott A. Grant is a local historian and author. He welcomes your comments at scottg@standfastic.com.

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