

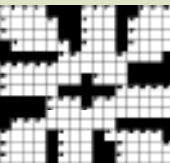

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Graphic courtesy MetroCreative

Choose your Nutcracker

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.com

“The Nutcracker” is believed by many to be a time-honored holiday tradition. In Northeast Florida, the tradition continues with five productions of the ballet this December. Since each performance is unique, following is a guide highlighting the dates, times and locations of each to help you choose “your” Nutcracker.

Community Nutcracker
Dec. 8 at 7:30 p.m.
Dec. 9 at 1 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.
Florida Theatre
www.jaxnutcracker.org

Artistic Directors Dulce Anaya, Debra Rankin and Mark Spivak continue this holiday tradition which began in 1992. Community Nutcracker is the only nonprofit, volunteer-run organization that offers a portion of its proceeds to local charitable agencies with each performance — and has donated more than \$800,000 in the past 32 years. The perform-

Choose your Nutcracker cont. on pg. 11

Boat Parade of Lights kicks off holiday season

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.com

Since 1988, the Julington Creek Prop Club has presented the Julington Creek Boat Parade of Lights for everyone to come out and enjoy. This year’s event will take place on Saturday, Dec. 2 beginning at 7 p.m. The highly anticipated night is for all families to gather and enjoy the beauty of color, lights, and sounds of the season along Julington Creek.

This festive annual event has an estimated 40 boats of all shapes, sizes, and themes participating in the event. Boats decked out in all their holiday finery navigate the parade route, which begins at the Julington Creek Marina, goes underneath the Julington Creek Bridge and motors around Bulls Bay, then returns under the bridge and continues down Durbin Creek. Spectators can view it from the Julington Creek Bridge walkways.

Homeowners with docks located on the parade route are invited to join in the fun too. Decorated docks can vie for a variety of prizes. Tradition holds that the boaters judge the docks. The best holiday decorated boat gets a \$300 cash prize, while second place gets \$200 and third place \$100. All boaters participating will also receive a Captain’s Gift Bag. Prizes are also awarded for “Best Dock” along the parade route.

“The people along the shores of the creek put on quite a show for us every year,” said Julington Creek Prop Club Commodore Rob Ponik.


According to Ponik, there is a great deal of planning and organizational prep work done before the boat parade. In October each year, the Prop Club starts contacting boaters, area merchants and residents gathering donations for the event. Some of the boats participating in the parade are Prop Club members and others come from all over the area. Boats range in size from 17 to 40 feet in length.

“Annual dues provide some of the funds for the Julington Creek Boat Parade of Lights, but we depend and appreciate many local business’ and waterfront owners contributions as well,” said Ponik. “We look forward to seeing everyone at the boat parade.”

The Prop Club is a social organization of boaters that meets on the second Saturday of each month at 5:30 p.m. at the Julington Creek Marina dock. All interested boaters are invited to join for boating information and fun at the creek. Visit www.jcpropclub.com for more information.



Photos courtesy Julington Creek Prop Club





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Fourth annual Ruck St. Johns raises funds for ASSIST

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

On Veterans Day, Nov. 11, Longleaf Church and Training For Warriors – Julington Creek hosted Ruck St. Johns to benefit St. Johns County’s in-transition and homeless students at the St. Johns County A.S.S.I.S.T Program. Rucking is the action of walking with weight on one’s back. Hiking is rucking in the mountains and urban hiking is simply called rucking. Walking with a weighted rucksack (or backpack) is a low-impact exercise based on military training workouts.

For the Ruck St. Johns, participants

warmed up with Coach Colin Woodmansee of Training For Warriors at 8:45 a.m. and then began the ruck at River-Town Amenity Center at 9 a.m. Nearly 80 people of all ages participated in the ruck, which followed a 3.25 mile course through RiverTown.

“We always schedule this ruck around Veterans Day,” said Jeff St. Clair, pastor at Longleaf Church. “We start with a tribute to our veterans including saying the Pledge of Allegiance and then we all ruck together, following the military mindset of no one left behind.”

St. Clair said each participant carried his

or her own weighted backpack and then for an added challenge, there were about three kettlebells that the walkers took turns carrying. Additionally, at various checkpoints along the ruck, Woodmansee offered various partnered physical fitness challenges such as pushups or squats.

After the ruck, there were fun activities, refreshments and an opportunity to win prizes — all in an effort to promote camaraderie among participants.

“What really stood out to me this year was the number of young people participating,” St. Clair said. “We try hard to make it a family friendly event.”

St. Clair said that between registrations and sponsorships, the organizers expect to have a donation of approximately \$3,000 for the ASSIST program. ASSIST, which stands for “Aid and Support for Students in Sudden Transition,” offers supportive services and emergency assistance for homeless students in St. Johns County.

“The vision behind this event is to build community,” St. Clair said. “Sometimes



Photos courtesy Jeff St. Clair
Walkers of all ages participated in Ruck St. Johns on Veterans Day.

people are confused about what a ruck is, but we want people to know it’s a team effort and an incredible way to build community within St. Johns to include local businesses, residents, and the school community — all while supporting a great cause.”

Visit www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/homeless/ to learn more about the ASSIST program and visit longleafchurch.net to learn more about Longleaf Church and next year’s fifth annual Ruck St. Johns.



Ruck St. Johns is a partnership between Longleaf Church and Training For Warriors that aims to build community in St. Johns.

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BFF

Best Furry Friend
of the month

Meet Charlie!



Breed:

Mini Golden doodle

Favorite Activity:

Chasing my human brothers and sister in
the yard.

Favorite Treat:

Puppy Patty at Palm Valley Outdoors.

Favorite Friend:

My Dad!

How Did Your BFF Get His Name:

Our last name is Brown so we chose
Charlie for Charlie Brown

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@floridanewline.com to enter your pet.



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Holiday Gift Guide
in this issue!
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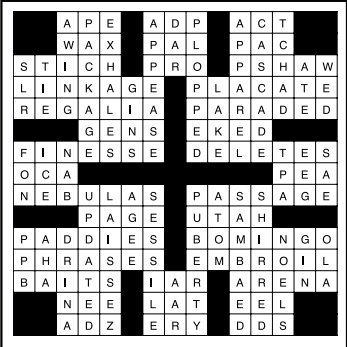
MYSTERY PHOTO



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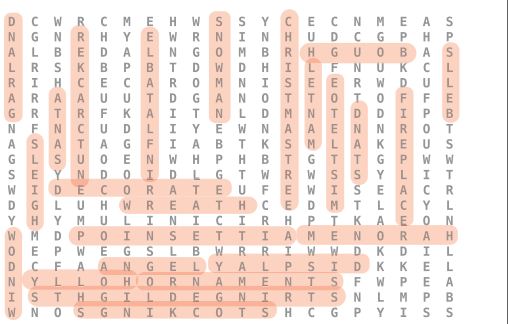
Last month's Mystery Photo was the field house at Plantation Park.



Answers
to our
Puzzles
PG 14



A. tinsel B. candles C. lights D. wreath



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19th: The Northwest St. Johns County United for Progress Club will host a social on Tuesday, Dec. 19 from 5:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. at Moon Dog Pie House in Bartram Walk in Fruit Cove. Visit www.nwstjohnsup.com or email nwsjcp@gmail.com for more information.



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

Q: Can you share any insight on the joint meeting of the St. Johns County School Board and the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners held on Oct. 26?

A: I thought it was a good meeting and allowed all of us to express our thoughts. We heard presentations from both the school district and the county regarding growth. The county commissioners made the point that this board has not approved everything that comes in front of them and that much of the present growth, such as in Silverleaf and Beachwalk, was approved back in 2008 – 2009. The school board members made the point that everything the county commission does affects us and we have to react.

Q: Does the school district have a say in the approval of new developments?

A: There is a mechanism for approval known as Proportionate Share Mitigation for schools, which is a formula prescribed by the state. Similar to roads and other infrastructure, developers have to meet this requirement. If the school district determines that we don't have room for the expected number of students, the developer must either pay money and/or donate land for a school site. The school district's planning department works with every proposed development, whether it is one house or many, on this. If the developer meets the formula by doing one of these things, we have to sign off that they did indeed meet the formula. That then goes to the Board of County Commissioners as part of the approval process.

Q: Do you have an update on the new

schools under construction?

A: Land has just started being cleared for the RiverTown school, K-8 PP. This will be a transitional K-8 school and so will have the smaller footprint because it will convert to a middle school when we can build an elementary school in RiverTown. (There are actually two elementary school sites in RiverTown.) The Shearwater school is slightly ahead of the Beacon Lakes school at this point, since it started construction earlier, but both are on schedule to be completed by August 2024. Finally, we are beginning to put together the bid materials for the two schools slated to open in 2026 in Nocatee and Silverleaf.

Q: Do you have any legislative updates?

A: The Florida Senate has filed three deregulation bills as a result of input over the summer by the Department of Education. The senate is now asking all the school boards for their input. We're hopeful that redundant and burdensome regulations can be streamlined as a result of these bills, which will be considered during session next year.

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

A: In mid-November, we had our reorganizational meeting of the school board. I was elected chair for this year and Tony Coleman, who represents District 2, was elected co-chair.

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.

Guest Column

Election fun facts

By St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes

This December, I would like to take the opportunity to wish the residents of St. Johns County a warm, happy holiday season. I hope you enjoy this time with your loved ones and have a safe New Year. January will bring excitement as the 2024 election cycle speedily approaches. Residents can expect to hear more from the Elections Office regarding the Presidential Preference Primary Election, deadlines, potential polling place changes, and more.

For our trivia lovers, I have included some election fun facts to wow your families with during the holidays:

1. Election Day was established in 1845. Congress passed a federal law designating the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November as Election Day.
2. Did you know Congress chose a date in November for Election Day to accommodate farming? Spring and early summer would interfere with the planting season, and late summer and early fall elections overlapped with

the harvest. November was the perfect time — after the harvest was complete, but before winter.

3. Voting on Tuesday was also chosen to accommodate farming. In the 1800s, most citizens worked as farmers and lived far from their polling place, which meant lawmakers needed to consider a day's travel. Most attended church on Sundays, so a Tuesday election would give voters all day Monday to travel.

4. In the 1700s and 1800s, votes were often counted by raising hands or speaking out loud. It wasn't until 1890 that secret ballots were widely used.

5. Rather than receiving an "I Voted" sticker, in the time of the American Revolution, it was tradition that each voter would receive a slice of Election Cake while waiting for results and for those who traveled long distances to vote. The first recipe for American Election Cake appears in 1796 in the first U.S. cookbook, Amelia Simmons' "American Cookery." Recipes for the cake are easily found on the internet.

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

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

A: The PAFR summarizes the 400-page Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) and uses terms that allow residents to understand the county’s financial position. It features highlights from the comprehensive report and is designed to be straightforward and user-friendly for taxpayers without a background in public finance. To read the PAFR, visit our website (www.stjohnsclerk.com). We published a PAFR this fall for Fiscal Year 2022 to show how tax dollars are collected and spent, as well as recent trends on demographics, housing, taxes, and more.

Q: Why is the PAFR important for residents?

A: Annual financial reports issued in conformity with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) are essential if governments are to meet their obligation to be accountable to their citizens. Unfortunately, the comprehensive level of detail found in many GAAP reports may confuse or discourage those unfamiliar with accounting and financial reporting. A PAFR is a way to communicate selected financial data to a broad audience.

Q: What is the Clerk and Comptroller’s role in handling county govern-

ment’s finances?

A: Our office serves as the county’s accountant, internal auditor, and custodian of funds. We manage its investments, handle payroll, pay its bills, internal auditing, and prepare the ACFR and PAFR.

Q: How does your office help protect taxpayers and ensure accountability?

A: The clerk’s Office of Inspector General (OIG) performs internal audits and conducts fraud, waste, and abuse investigations of the operations and financial records of local government agencies, departments, employees, and others under the authority of the Board of County Commissioners. The OIG also performs audits and enforcement activities of the county Tourist Development Tax and conducts enhanced audits of guardianship inventories and accountings.

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

A. Residents can call my office at (904) 819-3601 or my cell at (904) 599-8688. My email address is BPatty@stjohnsclerk.com. Many of your questions can be answered and many services are provided, such as paying traffic citations or searching records, by visiting our website, www.stjohnsclerk.com.



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

Q: What is the number one question your office is receiving now that tax bills have been mailed?

A: The number one question I receive is from people who call and say that their tax bill has increased, sometimes dramatically. Dramatic increases are almost always because the person has bought an existing home in the past year and they are comparing their taxes owed to the taxes owed by the previous homeowner.

Q: How does this happen?

A: It has to do with assessment limitation caps, particularly as it relates to residential properties. If you own a home in St. Johns County, you pay property taxes based on the value of your home. In St. Johns County, the last few years the value of the home has likely increased and it will likely continue to increase. As this value increases, so does the property tax, without regard to tax rates.

If your property is homesteaded, the most the assessed value can increase is 3 percent and if the property is not homesteaded, the most the assessed value can increase is 10 percent. The tax rate is then applied to the assessed value. There is sometimes some confu-

sion on the part of the taxpayer that the cap is the amount of taxes, but it is actually on the assessed value.

Q: What about the dramatic increases you mentioned earlier?

A: Each of these assessed value caps accumulate over time. The homestead exemption cap is also known as Save Our Homes and has portability, so it may be taken with you to another homestead with certain limitations. (Non-homesteaded caps may not be taken with you.)

So, if you buy an existing home, the caps accrued are to the seller and will auto-reset on January 1 of the following tax year. When estimating your future taxes, it’s very important to look at any accumulated caps that the previous owner may have, because they will be removed when you become the new owner.

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

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

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Photos courtesy Kelli Gallant

Timberlin Creek Elementary’s Fun Run, the school’s biggest fundraiser each year, was held on Oct. 11 for third through fifth graders and Oct. 18 for Pre-k through second graders. The money raised goes towards purchasing new technology for the school, buying materials for resource teachers, and helping with staff appreciation activities throughout the school year. Teachers earn 10 percent of what their class raised and the top earning class (this year, Aaryn Bell’s kindergarten class) earns 20 percent of the amount they raised.

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Briefs

ACT and SAT prep course offered

Friends of the Bartram Trail Library will sponsor a series of ACT and SAT prep classes to be held at the Bartram Trail Public Library on Jan. 11, 18, 25, and Feb. 1, 15. Classes are one hour and 15 minutes each. Students may sign up for either or both series. SAT classes will be from 5 p.m. – 6:15 p.m. and ACT classes will be from 6:30 p.m. – 7:45 p.m.

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

– 7:45 p.m. for Math. Students should bring calculators. Each series of five sessions will cost \$50, or \$100 to attend both series. These proceeds are a

donation, and with other donations are used to fund all library programs at the Bartram Trail Public Library. Purchase of a specific review/prep book is also required.

There is a cap of 20 students per series. The last day to register is Jan. 6, 2024, unless the cap is reached prior to this date. Registration information can be obtained at the Bartram Trail Library reference desk or by contacting Phyllis Macy at macyp17@yahoo.com

St. Andrews Society of Jacksonville to hold garage sale in Fruit Cove

The St. Andrews Society of Jacksonville will hold a special garage sale on Saturday, Dec. 9. Sale proceeds will go to benefit the Society’s scholarship program, which provides financial assistance to dancers, musicians and students or researchers of Scottish history and culture. The garage sale will be held at 1392 Fruit Cove Forest Road, North in Fruit Cove from 8 a.m. – 2 p.m.

“We’ll have a variety of items from household goods to books and collectables along with some Scottish-themed items,” said Ann Taylor, president of the local society. “A bit of something for everyone!”

Taylor said anyone interested in Scottish heritage or culture is welcomed to join the St. Andrews Society. Visit <https://jaxsaintandrews.org/> for more information.

Joy Andrews selected as County Administrator

On Oct. 31, the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners selected Joy Andrews as County Administrator after conducting interviews with the four finalists during a special meeting. A contract is pending county commission approval. This concludes a public engagement process of recruitment and interviews managed by the County’s Human Resources Department, which featured public meetings, live video broadcasts of the meetings, and a “Get the Scoop on County Administrator Finalists” ice cream social for the St. Johns County community.

Andrews has served as Interim County Administrator for St. Johns County since July 2023. She has been with the County for the past 17 years, including the previous seven years specifically as the Deputy/Assistant County Administrator. Andrews has led a wide range of departments such as Growth Management, Economic Development, Tourism Development, Health and Human Services, Fire Rescue, Arts and Culture, Grants and Legislative Affairs, Emergency Management and Disaster Recovery, Coastal Management, Public Library System, Parks and Recreation, and Community Redevelopment. Her education includes a Master of Public Administration (Public Financing) from Kansas State University and an LL.B. (Bachelor of Laws) in International Commerce and Trade Law from Nanjing University, School of Law.

Santa making his list of phone calls

St. Johns County Parks and Recreation is hosting phone calls from Santa at the North Pole this holiday season for children eight years old or younger. Santa will make his phone calls from the North Pole between 6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. nightly, Dec. 5 – 7. Parents must register children by Dec. 4 by visiting secure.rec1.com/FL/stjohns-county-fl/ catalog and selecting a date under the Special Events tab. For more information or registration assistance, call (904) 209-0379 or email abrown@sjcfl.us.

St. Johns County has announced that the Food for Fines program has returned this year to St. Johns County libraries and bookmobiles. An opportunity to eliminate most library fines, Food for Fines will run through Friday, Dec. 22. The food items collected will be used to stock the St. Johns County Health and Human Services Food Pantry, providing food for St. Johns County families in need.

A donation of one non-perishable, unexpired food item will remove \$2 of fines from a patron’s library record. This fine-reduction program applies only to overdue fines, and patrons may bring in as many items as needed to reduce overdue fines. Fees related to damaged or lost items are not included in the Food for Fines program. Any library user is welcome to make donations, and food may be dropped off at any of the St. Johns County library branches or bookmobiles.

Last year, St. Johns County residents provided more than 3,500 non-perishable items through the “Food for Fines” program. Visit www.sjcpls.org for more information.

Share a moving moment with a manatee adoption

Searching for the perfect gift that not only moves the heart, but also contributes to a great cause? Look no further than Save the Manatee Club’s Adopt-A-Manatee® program. Adoptions offer a unique opportunity for individuals to symbolically adopt a real manatee and support the protection and well-being of these aquatic mammals.

Save the Manatee Club is an international 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting imperiled manatees and their aquatic habitat. For more than four decades, the club has been at the forefront of manatee conservation efforts, working tirelessly to ensure the survival and well-being of these gentle giants.

Each adoption package includes a personalized certificate of adoption, a touching biography that shares the manatee’s unique story, and a comprehensive membership packet. One of the many perks of adopting a manatee through Save the Manatee Club is a subscription to “The Manatee Zone.” This quarterly newsletter provides adoptive parents and gift givers with the latest manatee news, updates on each adoptable manatee, and heartwarming stories about these aquatic mammals.

Adoptions start at just \$25 per year. For a limited time, a free educational 2024 manatee wall calendar can be included at any adoption level, making the experience even more memorable. Visit savethemanatee.org for more information.

Newcomers of North St. Johns announces December Luncheon

Newcomers of North Saint Johns will host its December luncheon on Tuesday, Dec. 12 beginning at 11 a.m. at Maggiano’s Little Italy – Town Center, 10367 Midtown Pkwy. The event

Food for Fines program is back

Briefs cont. on pg. 15

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ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Steps to manage your tax burden before year end

By Chris Thompson, CFP®, CRPC®

Taxes are a critical expense category in retirement and the clock is ticking on making timely, tax-saving moves before year-end. If you're retired, now is a good time to take a closer look at your investment portfolio and determine if any changes are appropriate. Keep in mind that some changes may need to be implemented by Dec. 31, 2023 to avoid negative tax implications — which is all the more reason to get started today.

Here are five steps to consider:

1) Actively manage retirement plan distributions. All distributions from workplace retirement plans made with pre-tax contributions are subject to tax at your ordinary income tax rate. For IRAs funded with after-tax contributions or annuities, the portion of the distribution attributable to earnings growth inside those accounts is subject to tax. You want to balance distributions from pre-tax and after-tax accounts to avoid moving into a higher tax bracket (if possible), which would increase your tax liability. Utilizing tax-free Roth IRA distributions to fulfill

your cash flow needs is one way to help manage your tax burden.

2) Be aware of RMD rules. If you turn 73 in 2023, you have to begin taking required minimum distributions (RMDs) from traditional IRAs or workplace retirement plans with the first RMD due by April 1, 2024. Beginning in the 2024 tax year, RMDs must be taken by Dec. 31. That means if you wait and take your first RMD in 2024 before April 1, you will have two RMDs in 2024. To check when RMDs start for you (based on your birth year), visit IRS.gov.

3) Make tax-smart charitable gifts. If, like most people, you don't itemize tax deductions and claim a standard deduction on your tax return, you can make charitable contributions and generate tax savings using other strategies. If you are age 70½ or older, you can arrange qualified charitable distributions (QCD) from your IRA, which go directly from the IRA custodian to the qualified charitable organization. This approach is beneficial if you must take RMDs and don't need the money for your own needs because you can avoid

claiming the RMD as taxable income by directing the QCD to a qualified charitable organization. Individuals can direct up to \$100,000 in gifts to qualified charities from their IRAs annually (that number will be indexed to inflation beginning in 2024). Another option is to gift appreciated assets, such as stock, to a charitable organization. By gifting the asset, you avoid realizing the capital gain that would result from selling it. Your tax burden can be reduced while supporting a favored cause.

4) Consider tax harvesting. If you do not yet collect Social Security (you have until age 70 to begin) and are not yet age 73 (to begin RMDs), it might be time to tap some investment gains in your portfolio. Realizing gains by selling appreciated assets (in taxable accounts) will add to your tax burden this year, but can help lower your tax liability in future years when other sources of income kick in. You can also look for opportunities to sell positions at a loss and offset some of your capital gains.

5) Manage your Medicare premiums. Along with managing your tax burden, strategically maneuvering in-

come streams can help you stay below thresholds that could result in higher premiums for Medicare Part B. Single people with income over \$97,000 and married couples with incomes exceeding \$194,000 (2023 levels) might have to pay higher Medicare Part B premiums in 2025 as a result. If you can keep income below those levels, you may maintain the most favorable Part B premium. Even if your income is higher, there are multiple premium tiers based on income level, so any steps you can take to limit your income in a given year may help reduce your premium.

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

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ameripriseadvisors.com/chris.thompson
St Johns County resident since 1993



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Tax Collectors office receives award

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

The office of Dennis W. Hollingsworth, St. Johns County Tax Collector, was recently awarded the 2023 Excellence Award in Financial Operations by the Florida Tax Collector's Association, Inc.

"Receiving this award is a true demonstration of the transparency we require within our organization," said Tax Collector Dennis W. Hollingsworth.

Four areas are considered for the Excellence in Financial Operations Award: innovation and automation, the annual audit report, customer

focus, and budgeting. To be eligible for this award, the tax collector's office must demonstrate a practice or procedure that utilizes a new concept that increases productivity and decreases costs, the audit report must be clear of any findings, the office must demonstrate internal and external customer satisfaction, and the office must ad-

here to the original budget.

The Tax Collector's office is committed to delivering services through innovation, integrity and expertise.

Email taxcollector@sjctax.us or call (904) 209-2250 with any questions or comments.

Holiday Guide



St. Augustine’s iconic Nights of Lights now aglow

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

St. Augustine has celebrated the holiday season festively for more than 30 years — during the annual Nights of Lights, millions of twinkling white lights come to life and illuminate the historic architecture of the nation’s oldest city. The festival has roots in the Spanish tradition of placing lit white candles in the windows of homes to mark the Christmas season. Today, Nights of Lights has a global audience, recognized by National Geographic,

Conde Nast Travelers, and AAA Auto Club as one of the best cities for holiday lights displays. The City of St. Augustine offers a free Park & Ride Shuttle during peak days throughout the holidays. Multiple pick-up and drop-off locations are available. Visit www.visitstaugustine.com/event/park-and-ride-shuttle for dates and times.

With the festival encompassing more than 20 blocks of the historic district, there are many ways to experience the Nights of Lights. Historic buildings, museums, inns, hotels, restaurants, boats, carriages, trees, and more are all lit with soft white lights. The decorated tree in the middle of the Plaza de la Constitución is a holiday staple, while the scenery from the top of the Bridge of Lions provides an expansive shot of the lights.



Photo courtesy St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches Visitors and Convention Bureau
Nights of Lights glows through Jan. 31, 2024.

Lesser known Chanukah traditions

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Chanukah is a relatively modern holiday in regard to the Hebrew calendar. Unlike Yom Kippur or Passover, which are steeped in rich traditions, there are few Chanukah customs.


Chanukah celebrants still participate in various customs each year, some of which are customized according to family preferences. While some traditions, such as the lighting of the Chanukah menorah, are familiar, others may not be as widely known — especially to those outside of the faith. Here’s a look at a select few.


- Saying the Shehecheyanu blessing: Traditionally, there are two blessings that some people say each night while lighting the candles. The first is recited while holding the lit shamash, and the second is said while lighting the candles. Another blessing, known as the “Shehecheyanu,” is said the first night. According to 18Doors, a resource on the Jewish faith, it’s the

same blessing traditionally said on the first night of all Jewish holidays and other special occasions.

- Display or use of the shofar: A shofar is a type of instrument made from a ram’s horn. It is a symbol of the ram that Abraham offered as a sacrifice in place of his son Isaac, exemplifying heroic faith of the fathers of the Jewish people. The shofar also serves as a reminder of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and calls people to strive for Israel’s renewal and fellowship with God.
- Singing “Ma’oz Tzur”: Chanukah songs may not be as numerous or as widely sung as Christmas carols during the holiday season, but there are a select few that are part of the festivities. “Oh Chanukah Oh Chanukah” and “The Dreidl Song” are some of the most widely known songs, but some people also follow the custom of singing “Ma’oz Tzur (Rock of Ages)” around the menorah.

Chanukah traditions cont. on pg. 12





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Level 4: \$35 per service (total spend: \$670 with \$720 - \$960 value)





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CHRISTMAS MUSIC CELEBRATION
refreshments at 6:30pm
December 10th | 7pm

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES
December 24th | 10am, 4:30pm, 7pm, 9pm

FAMILY CELEBRATION WITH LIVE NATIVITY
December 24th | 4:30pm

Visit mandarinpres.com/christmas for more details

Holiday Guide



Choose your Nutcracker cont. from pg. 1

ing company is made up of local talent with more than 200 dancers ranging in age from nine to adult from Northeast Florida auditioning and performing in the production. In an effort to promote the arts in schools, Community Nutcracker also offers matinee performances for school groups as well as a Community Service Night (invitation only).!

Christ Church Nutcracker Ballet

Dec. 9 at 6 p.m.
Lazzara Theater, UNF Fine Arts Department
www.missfeliciasdance.com

This year marks the 28th performance of the Christ Church Nutcracker Ballet, directed by Felicia Rhoden of the Christ Church Dance Ministry as well as owner of Miss Felicia's Dance. Nearly 300 performers, aged two to 90 years old, will take the stage.

Jacksonville Symphony's First Coast Nutcracker

Dec. 15 at 8 p.m.
Dec. 16 at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.
Dec. 17 at 2 p.m.
Jacksonville Center for the Performing Arts
www.jaxsymphony.org/first-coast-nutcracker/

Jacksonville Symphony's First Coast Nutcracker has been a tradition in North Florida for more than 50 years. Under the direction of choreographer and artistic director Rhonda Stampalia, the First Coast Nutcracker showcases internationally renowned principal dancers, the area's finest young dancers, and Tchaikovsky's best-loved melodies performed by the Jacksonville Symphony with conductor Kevin Fitzgerald.

The Nutcracker 2022 by the Florida Ballet

Dec. 15 at 7:30 p.m.
Dec. 16 at 4:30 p.m.
Dec. 17 at 2 p.m.
Lazzara Theater, UNF Fine Arts Center
floridaballet.org

The Florida Ballet's Nutcracker features

swirling snowflakes, waltzing flowers, and dancing bonbons. From the captivating dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy to the iconic snow scene, this enchanting classical ballet is set to the beloved music of Tchaikovsky and features more than 100 local dancers.

St. Augustine Ballet Nutcracker

Dec. 15 at 7 p.m.

Dec. 16 at 1:30 p.m. and 7 p.m.
Dec. 17 at 2 p.m.
Lewis Auditorium at Flagler College
www.saintaugustineballet.com

This year's production of "The Nutcracker" marks the 15th annual performance by the St. Augustine Ballet and features professional ballet dancers as well as dance students from St. Augustine and surrounding areas. The St. Augustine Ballet, under the artistic direction of Luis Abella, is a non-profit organization with a mission to involve community members of all ages in meaningful dance experiences.

Christmas FANTASTIQUE

Dec. 20 at 7 p.m.
Dec. 21 at 7 p.m.
Lewis Auditorium at Flagler College
www.zoikasdance.com

This original production by Zoika's Dance tells the classic holiday story of "The Nutcracker" through the language of dance, featuring classical ballet, as well as tap, hip hop, acro, and contemporary dance. Professional dancers join young, local dancers on stage for the holiday extravaganza.

Nutcracker! Magical Christmas Ballet

Dec. 27 at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.
Florida Theatre
www.nutcracker.com/your-city/get-tickets/jacksonville

Nutcracker! Magical Christmas Ballet is a national touring production that features an international cast and prop designers. The production features larger-than-life puppets, breath-taking acrobatics and dazzling costumes. Dancing alongside the full international

professional cast are local Jacksonville children from Alius Dance School.

All of these performances are designed to enchant, enthrall, and bring families and community members together for the holiday season. Which one is right for you?



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Christmas at Longleaf Church

Journey through Bethlehem at Mandarin United Methodist Church
December 9th 4pm- 6:30pm

This event features a walk through Bethlehem during Bible times. Featuring an interactive journey through the marketplace with tradesmen. Then visit the shepherds, wise men, stable with live animals and finally the Manger. Join us at the end of your journey for refreshments and enjoy Christmas music performed by our choirs.

Community Christmas at Longleaf Church
December 23rd 5pm
1365 Shetland Drive, Saint Johns, FL 32259

Christmas Eve at Mandarin United Methodist Church
December 24th

4pm Family Service – Worship Center
6pm Candlelight – Sanctuary
8pm Communion & Candlelight – Sanctuary

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Christmas Eve Services

December 24th
9:30 am & 7 pm



River of Life
United Methodist Church
2600 Race Track Road
St. Johns, FL 32259
(904) 230-2955
www.ROLUMC.COM

H oliday Guide

7 ways to organize and store holiday decorations

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Decorating a home for holidays is quite popular. Lombardo Homes polled 1,000 Americans in 2021 and 94 percent said they celebrate Christmas in at least some way, and 84 percent said they decorate. With so many avid holiday decorators, individuals will need to find ways to organize and store their seasonal items. Holiday decor comes in many different sizes — from the smallest tree ornaments to illuminated statues for the yard or inflatable items. Figuring out a storage plan can take a little effort. These seven tips can help.

1. Purchase clear, similarly sized storage bins and shelving racks, hanging them where you plan to keep the decorations. Most people prefer an out-of-the-way spot, such as in the garage, attic or basement. Label each bin by holiday and put the bins in chronological order to make finding items more convenient. Uniform bin sizes make it easier to stack and store.
2. Store smaller items inside larger decor items. Decorative baskets or wrapped boxes brought out for

Christmas or Chanukah are ideal places to keep smaller tchotchkes like ceramics, dreidels, candlestick holders, or mantel hooks. Delicate items can be tucked into Christmas stockings or wrapped and stored in a fluffy tree skirt. Egg cartons can be used to keep small items safe as well.

3. Label everything so you will not need to dig through boxes or bins to know what is inside. This might be a good year to ask for a label maker for the holidays!
4. Use overhead or wall storage for holiday decor. Overhead spaces in the garage or basement walls can be good spaces to keep holiday decorations. Always keep bins and boxes off the floor so they are not vulnerable to damage related to leaks or floods.
5. Garment bags can protect larger decorations, such as wreaths, artificial trees or signs. If you have a large number of mechanical, illuminated or inflatable



Photo courtesy MetroCreative
 Storing holiday decorations will take some time, but once you establish a system, things will be simple year after year.

lawn ornaments, consider investing in a small shed where these items can be safely kept. Wrap the extension cords and any bracing stakes or strings used with the decorations so it's easy to find.

6. Utilize pieces of cardboard as well as toilet paper or paper towel tubes to keep lights and wires tidy. Tuck cords into the toilet paper tubes, and wrap lights around the cardboard to avoid tangles.
7. Each year, take inventory of your decoration collection and toss out anything that is damaged or has seen better days.

Chanukah traditions

cont. from pg. 10

The words were composed in the 13th century, and the song summarizes historical challenges faced by the Jewish people that were overcome with God's help.

- Use of oil in Chanukah feasts: It's well known that latkes, or fried potato pancakes, are served around Chanukah. The reason is due to the oil used to fry them, which tradition-

ally is olive oil. Fried foods call to mind a specific Chanukah miracle. After the Greeks destroyed the sanctuary and defiled what was thought to be all of the oil, one jug sealed with the imprint of the High Priest was found. That one jug managed to keep the Temple's menorah lit for eight days, despite it being insufficient to handle this task. This was considered a miracle and celebrated in subsequent years.

Christmas Eve Candle Lighting Service

Sunday, December 24th 10:30 AM
Find the peace, calm, and oneness you desire as we join together in celebrating the light of Christ on Christmas Eve Morning.




unity
Church for Creative Living in St. Johns

New Years Eve Burning Bowl Service

Sunday, December 31st 10:30 AM
A Time To Release and Renew!




White Stone Service

Sunday, January 7th 10:30 AM
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Unity Church for Creative Living
2777 Race Track Road, St. Johns, FL 32259
904-287-1505, www.unityinjax.com



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Life

Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.com

KD Bender

KD Bender was born and raised in Binghamton in upstate New York. She met her husband, Chris, when she was 15 on a marine biology field trip to Montauk on Long Island and they've been together ever since — true high school sweethearts. KD has a degree in mass communications from Boston University and a master's degree in higher education leadership from the University of Florida. She currently works as a substitute teacher in St. Johns County and serves as the co-coordinator for clothing for HUGS St. Johns, a local volunteer organization with a mission to raise awareness throughout the county about student poverty and work closely with school counselors to ensure these students have access to clothing and food. She and Chris live in NW St. Johns County and have two children: Zack, now a student at Bryant University in Rhode Island; and Zoe, a senior at St. Johns Virtual School. They have two dogs, Kai (a husky rescue) and Brownie (a retired greyhound rescue).

Q: How did you come to live in Florida?

A: After Chris and I graduated from college, the University of Florida offered Chris an opportunity we couldn't refuse: a fellowship master's and PhD program in Coastal Engineering. So we moved to Gainesville, where we lived for four years. While there, I also obtained my master's degree while working in the office of the university

Get to Know ...

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



Photo courtesy KD Bender
KD and Chris Bender

registrar and for the office of admissions. By the time we left, I was the assistant director of admissions for the university. In 2003, when Chris graduated, we visited a coastal engineering firm in Jacksonville and didn't look back. We moved here to St. Johns County.

Q: What positions have you held since you've lived in St. Johns County?

A: Well, first I took a break to raise our kids. I went back to work when they got older and was an assistant teacher at a local preschool. Then I went on to substitute in St. Johns County and work as a paraprofessional at Julington Creek Elementary. Now I'm back to subbing and I also work part time virtually for the University of Florida.

Q: How did you get involved with HUGS St. Johns?

A: As our kids got older and needed me less and less, I started looking for a way to be hands-on with helping oth-

ers. I saw a social media post for HUGS and reached out to Brette Reiman. I asked what she needed. So, now along with Karen Burke in Ponte Vedra, I am the co-coordinator for our clothing program.

Q: What is the clothing program and what do you do as co-coordinator?

A: Counselors and St. Johns County schools, as well as our partner agencies, let us know when they have a student in an emergency need of clothing. We have a warehouse in St. Augustine where we organize

and store our donated clothing. So, when we get the call, we have volunteers who pack a duffel bag with shoes, new socks and underwear, and a week's worth of gently used clothing. We also include toiletries and sometimes school supplies. We work with the counselors so that each student receives items they are excited to wear and that they feel comfortable and confident in. So far this school year, we have packed more than 250 duffel bags and expect to pack and deliver more than 600 by the end of the school year. As co-coordinator, I schedule the volunteers and also make sure we have drivers who deliver the duffel bags to the schools.

Q: What else does HUGS St. Johns provide?

A: We also stock a food pantry at 22 St. Johns County schools. We sponsor HUGS Clubs at a few of our high schools who help us by holding food and clothing drives. We're getting ready for our No Hungry Holidays event, where we provide the breakfasts and lunches that students would normally have at school over the winter break.



Photos courtesy Julington Creek Elementary School

JCE students fundraise through kind acts

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

On Nov. 2, Julington Creek Elementary began its annual fundraiser, Jaguar Challenge, in partnership with Raise Craze, an organization based on "fundraising through kindness." Students and their families were encouraged to participate in service projects and complete random acts of kindness to show their appreciation for donations. Among the most popular activities, JCE students read to animals awaiting adoption at the Jacksonville Humane Society, played board games with residents of Westminster Woods, and made hundreds of holiday and thank-you cards for deployed service members and veterans. Additionally, each

JCE students cont. cont. on pg. 15

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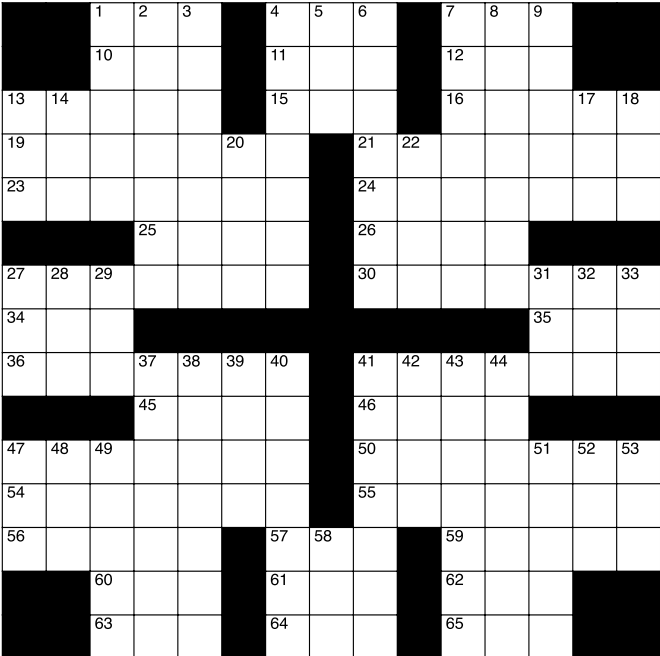
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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

1. Mimic
4. Payroll firm
7. Perform in a play
10. Opine; __ philosophical
11. Crony
12. Political action committee
13. 1991 Wimbledon winner
15. Affirmative
16. Exclamation of disgust
19. Action of connecting
21. A way to calm
23. Especially fine or decorative clothing
24. Walked proudly
25. Group of people related through male heir
26. Supplemented with difficulty
27. Soft touch
30. Erases
34. Spanish river
35. A princess can detect it
36. Clouds of gas
41. A way to get through
45. Part of a book
46. Southwestern US state
47. Fields where rice is grown
50. Area in Ghana
54. Sayings
55. Involve deeply
56. Compels to act
57. "Ignore all rules"
59. Indoor entertainment space
60. Born of
61. Back muscle
62. Sea dweller
63. Tools that resemble an axe
64. Prefix denoting class or kind
65. Tooth caregiver

CLUES DOWN

1. Inspiring
2. Put into a box
3. Breathes out
4. Pacify
5. Patriotic society for women
6. Fell down
7. Clothing
8. Dishwasher detergent brand
9. Former French republic
13. Single lens reflex
14. Men's fashion accessory
17. Consumed
18. Marry
20. __ up: intensifies
22. Body of water
27. People of southern Benin
28. Decorate a cake with frosting
29. Snag
31. Yearly tonnage (abbr.)
32. Records brain activity (abbr.)
33. Car mechanics group
37. Brought up to snuff
38. __ faire: Economic approach
39. Phil __, former CIA
40. Affixed
41. Period of adolescence
42. Substance
43. Danced
44. Baked without its shell
47. Parts per billion (abbr.)
48. Satisfaction
49. Balkans river
51. Christmas carols
52. Partner to tonic
53. "The Godfather" character
58. Swiss river

DECK THE HALLS WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

- ANGEL
BELLS
BOUGH
CHRISTMAS TREE
DECORATE
DISPLAY
FIREPLACE
GARLAND
HOLLY
INFLATABLE
MANTEL
MENORAH
MISTLETOE
NUTCRACKER
ORNAMENTS
POINSETTIA
SANTA
SLEIGH
SNOWMAN
STAND
STOCKINGS
STRINGED LIGHTS
WINDOW
WREATH



Solve the code to discover words related to holiday decorating.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 18 = I)

A. 16 18 25 23 26 4
Clue: Metallic strips

B. 8 24 25 7 4 26 23
Clue: Wax illumination

C. 4 18 14 17 16 23
Clue: Strings of bulbs

D. 1 11 26 24 16 17
Clue: Evergreen door or wall hanging

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Briefs cont. from pg. 6

features lunch and entertainment by Roger Dodd and Johnny Piantadosi, who will be singing traditional holiday favorites. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m.; the cost for the luncheon and program is \$35 for members and \$40 for guests and non-members. Visit <https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org> for more information. As always, raffles for gift baskets and a fun 50/50 drawing will be part of the luncheon.

The "Family Style" luncheon includes appetizers of stuffed mushrooms, bruschetta, Maggiano's salad (with crumbled blue cheese on the side) and freshly baked ciabatta rolls. Entrées include mom's meat lasagna, chicken piccata and eggplant parmesan. Beverages include coffee, decaffeinated coffee, hot tea, iced tea and assorted sodas. Dessert is New York style cheesecake and tiramisu and a cash bar is also available.

Newcomers of North St. Johns offers a variety of activities for St. Johns County residents to get acquainted and have fun including smaller lunch groups, wine socials, golf, Mah Jongg, holiday parties, and a day trip next March to include a boat ride from Amelia Island to view Cumberland Island.

Bartram Trail Newcomers to host "Christmas Caroles on the River"

The Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club will hold its meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, Dec. 12 at 11 a.m. at the Club Continental, 2143 Astor Street in Orange Park. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. Checks for \$32 should be made payable to BTNC

and mailed to Brenda Jenkins, 2204 Fort Mellon Court, St Augustine, FL 32092. Payment must be received no later than Dec. 5, 2023. Be sure to indicate your entrée choice on the check memo. The December luncheon theme is Christmas Caroles on the River. Festive dress is encouraged. Musician Craig Seaton will sing some of the classic Christmas songs that will bring back those nostalgic memories and put you in the holiday spirit for this year.

The luncheon menu includes lemon baked chicken breast with fresh California spinach and lemon caper sauce, with house salad chef's choice of starch and vegetable; or baked tilapia with hot lump crab and artichoke salad topped with a crispy potato garnish with house salad; or roast vegetable open faced ravioli with tomato coulis and asiago cheese with house salad. Assorted cakes will be available for dessert.

The Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club meets the second Tuesday of every month from September to May for lunch. In addition to the monthly meetings, the club has a wide variety of interest groups, including Bridge, Continental Rummy, Pennies Canasta, Mexican Chicken Train dominoes, Bunko, Mah Jongg, golf, recipe exchange, monthly special events, book club, lunch and matinee, Lunch Divas, Ladies Night Out, a nature walk group and community projects. Email Linda Beard at bartramtnc@gmail.com for club information or visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 to see pictures and download a membership form.

JCE students cont. from pg. 13

grade at JCE sponsored a collection drive; students gathered needed items for the Ronald McDonald House, The Crayon Initiative, INK, Christ Cupboard's Food Pantry, Cup of Love Ministry, Riverwood, and St. Johns Pet Center. On Nov. 13, Jaguar families celebrated World Kindness Day with a park clean-up in Julington Creek Plantation. Also, students from Karen Rippa and April O'Donnell's class decorated Veteran's Park for Veteran's Day.

By the end of the fundraiser on Nov. 17, students and teachers had surpassed their goals and completed 5,400 acts of kindness, and raised \$52,054. The school celebrated with a Teacher Lip Sync



and a visit from Jaxson de Ville, and will have a field day for all students in December. Funds will be used for improvements to school technology and enhancing outdoor spaces, among other needs.





Center for Innovation coming soon to Bolles

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Dr. Dana Fender and his wife Hope signed a commitment on Oct. 30 to match a \$5 million gift from Frank Sanchez to build the Center for Innovation on the Bolles Upper School San Jose Campus. The 47,000-square-foot, three-story building marks the most expansive construction undertaking on the San Jose Campus property since the building now known as Bolles Hall was constructed as the San Jose Hotel in 1925.

Groundbreaking on the \$26 million building began in June 2022 with construction expected to finish by spring 2024.

The \$5 million donations from the Fenders and Sanchez are the largest single gifts to The Bolles School in its history. The state-of-the-art structure will now be called the “Frank R. Sanchez & Hope and Dana E. Fender Center for Innovation” in honor of their generosity.

“The Center for Innovation is an exciting work of both art and engineering, but like all campus structures, it exists to support the learning that happens within its footprint,” said Bolles Presi-

dent and Head of School Tyler Hodges. “In this case, this means collaborative hands-on learning, academic exploration with inspirational faculty and the ability for students to experiment and gain practical experience as they work toward their highest potential to serve our community and the world.”

The state-of-the-art structure is being constructed on the San Jose Campus’ last prime development site adjacent to Bolles Hall on a bluff overlooking the St. Johns River. The building will house Bolles’ science, math and technology programs, as well as expansive areas for advanced courses in robotics, computer programming, information technology, engineering and design. Designs for the facility accommodate opportunities for new offerings and provide space for collaboration and dialogue across disciplines. The new academic areas will deepen Bolles’ curriculum and cultivate the country’s next generation of innovators, according to department leaders.

The Frank R. Sanchez & Hope and Dana E. Fender Center for Innovation is expected to be completed this spring with students beginning classes upon their return from spring break this school year.



Artist's Rendering courtesy The Bolles School

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Gardening

Winter Wonderland

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale
mail@floridanewsline.com

I can't help thinking of warm sweaters, gloves, and wooly hats once temperatures start to moderate, but we really don't have much of a winter here in northeast Florida. Maybe that's just as well!



Photo courtesy Lesley Arrandale
Yaupon holly (Ilex vomitoria).

What we do have is the opportunity to grow a variety of healthy vegetables, largely free from the plagues of summer insects and diseases, and hardy flowering plants to mark the seasonal changes. Last year my neighbor had two large pots of crimson cyclamen flanking her front door and their stunning flowers lasted for months. For inspiration,

check out <https://tinyurl.com/2f5p6pky>.

My backyard is in flux. What has become overgrown is slowly evolving into a more manageable and wildlife welcoming yard — but being almost surrounded by golden rain trees and cat's claw vines means that I find their offspring in every square foot of soil. Small seedlings come up easily, but vines that embed themselves close to other plants are notoriously difficult to pull. Consequently, I've resorted to very careful, but minimal, use of triclopyr, a chemical brush and stump killer, but it's far from my ideal. The lesson: weed diligently and regularly and use mulch to deter seedlings from getting established.

The Florida Gardening Calendar is a good resource for advice on topical gardening activities: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/ep451>. This year, I will dress up my front yard a little to divert attention from the standing seedheads and native perennials that are dying back for the winter. These are farther up, toward the house, so that's a plus. Although the habitat they provide for wildlife is indisputably valuable, not everyone appreciates that. I'll choose less flamboyant plants like violas which are understated enough;

not many native plants are particularly flamboyant and combining them with exotic plants takes skill.

"A New Leaf – Yard and Garden," the Extension newsletter for Duval County, also offers timely advice. Current and past issues can be found here <https://tinyurl.com/2ycs3yp5>.

Although it's a good time to plant woody shrubs and trees, we should pay careful attention to watering, since the weather seems to change from very dry to wetter periods. This is a useful "how to": <https://tinyurl.com/2defmueb>.

We can divide clumping perennials, as long as our milder weather continues. It's a way to both revitalize aging plants and to get more plants for free, which is always a good thing! Strictly speaking this is a task for early fall, but since our climate is generally mild until later in the season it should be worth the effort (<https://tinyurl.com/437c9a6h>). As with woody plants, make sure to water divided perennials as needed, until they are properly established.

With the winter holidays fast approaching, I find myself thinking about the traditional greenery my family used to decorate our home. Sprays of holly full

of berries above the mantelpiece, sprigs of mistletoe hung in doorways, and the modest freshly cut Christmas tree that came home — on a bicycle! — often covered with a dusting of snow. Whatever your family beliefs and traditions, in a time of such uncertainty, hold your nearest and dearest close and cherish your wider community too. We all need peace, tolerance, and to know we belong.

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Fishing

Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis
mail@floridanewsline.com

Happy holidays to you and yours. December seems to roll around sooner than it used to. While it signals the peak of the frantic holiday season, I hope we all can find some time to retreat to our local waters to relax and spend time with friends and family. Some of my favorite fishing memories have taken place around the holidays. The fishing may not have been the greatest, but the company was.

Shrimp should still be around, but you will probably have to work for them. Just remember that each one can equate to a quality fish. There's a lot less bait stealers around this time of year, so you shouldn't lose too many baits.

Stripers, redfish, and catfish will be happy to have any shrimp you put out. Yes, I said catfish — but I think they are greatly unappreciated in the river. They are one of the most consistent fish we have. Two of the most common are white catfish and channel catfish. White catfish are a smaller species maxing around three to five pounds. Channel catfish are larger and can be very athletic reaching weights of more

than 20 lbs. I've had multiple channel cats convince me they were redfish before I laid eyes on them. I've even seen them jump out of the water when hooked. On some of the toughest of fishing days my brother and I would say, "Catfish better than no fish." I still stand by that.

Now it's not a sure thing, but if you can find them you will have some of the most fun you can have in the river this time of year — the schooling largemouth bass. I find a lot of them around creek mouths, but they can also be on a particular dock or shoreline. Just think of where you've caught bass before and keep checking until you find them. They'll be mixed sizes from 12 inches to six pounds, so you never know what you're going to get. A rubber worm or my favorite — a live shrimp — will entice most. The best part about the shrimp is that it comes to the surface trying to evade the bass, so you get to watch a top water show unfold as the bass tries to chase down the shrimp. The kind of stuff you live for as an angler. Like I said, not a sure thing, but worth the effort if you find them. Tight lines.

Rotary Club of Bartram Trail celebrates 20th anniversary

By Rotarian Al Kalter
mail@floridanewsline.com

In the two decades since the Rotary Club of Bartram Trail was formed, local Rotarians have become involved in countless projects that have served our community and our world. Last month, the club celebrated its 20th anniversary with a banquet and program at Maggiano's Little Italy restaurant in the St. Johns Town Center.

Channel 4 News anchor Kent Justice served as the emcee for the event. John Tabor, current Rotary District Governor for Northeast Florida, recognized the club for its dynamic history of service, leadership in youth programs, strong membership growth, and continuing support of Rotary International's goals. Past Club President Jamie Mackey then

presented a brief history of some of the service projects undertaken by the club, both locally and internationally.

Michael Andreoni, the longest-tenured club member, talked about the club's history, from the early days when it was first being formed, through some years of declining membership, and then the growth that has made the club so strong today.

Next up was current club President David Goldman, who talked about everything going on this year, from frequent social outings, including the annual Fruit Cove Pub Crawl, to the important work being done in Honduras to bring water to a needy village. Throughout the evening, a slide show highlighted many of the various projects undertaken

by the club and featured memories and updates from some of the dozens of exchange students the club has sponsored and hosted over the years.

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. Visit www.bartramtrailrotary.org for more information.



Photo courtesy Al Kalter

Celebrating 20 years of service by the Rotary Club of Bartram Trail – Julington Creek are Rotary District Governor John Tabor, Club President-Elect Molly Paxton, Club President David Goldman, and the event emcee, Channel 4 News anchor Kent Justice.

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Food safety expert gives the scoop on holiday leftovers

By Kirsten Romaguera, UF/IFAS
mail@floridanewsline.com

When it comes to holiday planning, the last thing on anyone’s list is a bout with food poisoning.

“Most people are lulled into a false sense of security because foodborne illnesses are rare,” said Keith Schneider, a University of Florida food safety expert in the UF/IFAS food science and human nutrition department. “You think, ‘I’ve never gotten sick. Why should I do anything differently?’ Well, you don’t want this year to be the one time you lapse in your food safety practices and Grandma gets sick.”

Below, Schneider shares his top tips for holiday leftovers.

- Keep cooked foods out of the “danger zone.”

Bacteria multiply between 40 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit, but since most people aren’t monitoring those temperatures closely, you want to be sure to refrigerate any leftovers within two hours of being cooked or being removed from the heating source. If you’re going to leave a dish on a warming tray or in the oven, you’ll want to cool it down before putting it in the refrigerator.

- For foods that are served cold, the same “danger zone” applies.

Your refrigerator is typically set at 38

to 40 degrees. Any of the pathogens of concern are not going to grow below 40 degrees. So, when you take out a salad or a pumpkin roll with cream cheese filling, that also shouldn’t spend more than two hours above 40 degrees. The higher the temperature outside the refrigerator, the shorter the time it should be out. Here in Florida, we can have some warm, humid holidays — be aware when you’re eating dinner on the back porch and shorten that time out of the fridge.

- Most items can go into either the refrigerator or the freezer.

If you think you might not eat something within three to four days, which is the general limit in the refrigerator, freezing would be a better choice.

- The “smell test” isn’t good enough.

Pathogens typically don’t grow to a density where they’re going to have an odor. The odor typically occurs from spoilage. So, if it smells bad, of course, don’t eat it. But if it’s been a few days and still smells fine, it still may not be safe.

- Reheat leftovers to 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

What you want to do is take out the portion that you’re going to eat, as opposed to the entire dish. Whatever you plan to consume, you want to get to that temperature to kill any pathogens that may have germinated. For

turkey, as an example, the organism of concern post-cooking is clostridium, which will die at 165 degrees.

- Minimize heat-thaw cycles.

Foods served cold don’t have that kill step option. You want to be sure that you’re preventing cross-contamination for these foods. Ensure that they’re in sealed containers and be aware that every time you remove from the refrig-

erator, each thawing cycle adds heat energy that allows pathogens to grow.

The mission of the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) is to develop knowledge relevant to agricultural, human and natural resources and to make that knowledge available to sustain and enhance the quality of human life. Visit ifas.ufl.edu for more information.

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Travel

Discover Hidden Treasures on Milos

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewslines.com

If a gorgeous Greek island with few crowds, remarkable attractions, mysterious landscapes, and active adventures interests you, read on. Milos, a lesser-known volcanic island in the Aegean, became one of my greatest travel discoveries. It includes the very spot where a 19th-century farmer unearthed the famous Venus de Milo (s) statue — but somehow the “s” has been lost beyond the shores of its island namesake.

I took a Celestyal Cruise excursion to the harbor named Adamas. There, my group met Andreas, an expert guide and a life-long resident of Milos.

First stop: the Mining Museum. May sound boring, but the introductory video proved brilliant. The documentary featured men and women reminiscing about their former work in the obsidian, perlite, and dangerous sulfur mines. The economy of Milos depended on mining so this background proved helpful for understanding the isle’s geological wonders.

We looked next into the island’s volcanic origins at Papafranga. Peering down a breathtaking ravine revealed kayakers and swimmers emerging seemingly from nowhere. Hiking and kayaking are some of the most popular adventure options on Milos.

The landscape offers rolling hills, terraced gardens, jagged coastlines, and the most unforgettable beach I have

ever seen. Pearly white, not black, lava flow created Sarakiniko Beach. Over centuries, Mother Nature’s powerful winds eroded the coastline forming mysterious and marvelous shapes. Its lunar-like white/beige terrain resembles something you might see in a Dr. Seuss book. The wispy mounds make a dreamy contrast to the crystal clear turquoise water. Although the landscape looks like sand, it’s as firm as stone. This unusual beach begs me to return.

Thankfully, we were given time to venture down toward the water, finding sunbathers, swimmers and caves built by Germans as protection from Allied aircraft during WWII.

Milos, inhabited since the Neolithic Age, endured frequent wars; however, during the Hellenistic Age (323 BCE – 31 BCE) Milos entered a peaceful period, one that produced great works of art. One example is the treasured statue of Poseidon — the bronze giant in the National Archeology Museum in Athens. This era also brought the creation of one of the world’s most famous statues. Aphrodite was later given the Roman name Venus — with de Milos added to tell whence she came.

My group ventured to the place where in 1820, a farmer digging for building materials discovered the statue. Legend says he was disappointed to find the useless relic. She was in two pieces, upper and lower body, with both arms



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Sarakiniko Beach.

missing. Myths still surround her lost limbs. A French naval officer bought the pieces and shipped them to Paris. Eventually, a Marquis presented the statue to French King Louis XVIII. After he became bored with her, the king gave the figure to the Louvre, where she remains one of the museum’s most magnificent treasures.

A short walk from the discovery spot brings an eagles-eye view of another ancient treasure — this one still in place. An ancient theater, now partially reconstructed, rests down a steep hill. The theater abuts yet another stunning panorama of the coast. Underground catacombs lie nearby from some of the earliest Greek Christian burials. They are considered the third most impor-

tant after those in Rome and the Holy Land.

Our last stop brought us to a little village of restaurants, shops, and local dwellings. Plaka’s narrow streets run at odd angles up and down inclines and provide still another spectacular overlook.

I could have lingered, but we needed to return to the ship. For the moment, Milos remains undiscovered for most Americans, but it is one you will hear more about in the future. If you cruise with Celestyal, don’t miss this exceptional excursion.

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

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