

Mandarin NewsLine

January 2024 Volume 19 Issue 1

A Florida NewsLine Publication



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BFF Best Furry Friend

Q&A

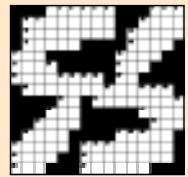
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Puzzles



Photo courtesy Mandarin Museum and Historical Society
Open Studio with Brenda Council will continue throughout January at the Historic Mandarin Store and Post Office.

Open Studio with Brenda Council continues in January

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Throughout the month of December, Mandarin Museum hosted Open Studio with Brenda Council at the historic Mandarin Store and Post Office. The space was transformed into an artist's studio, giving visitors the opportunity to interact with Council as she sculpted her newest piece, "Harriet Beecher Stowe in Mandarin," a life-size sculpture to be cast in bronze featuring Stowe and two young boys from her orange grove. Renowned for her 1852 novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Harriet Beecher

Open Studio cont. on pg. 9

Mandarin Rotary dedicated to "Service Above Self"

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

This fall, the Rotary Club of Mandarin actively participated in the Rotary Club's motto, "Service Above Self" by raising funds to help Lutheran Social Services provide a fresh start for a Ukrainian refugee family as well as helping the Mandarin Food Bank distribute holiday dinners.

In October, members of Mandarin Rotary presented a \$4,000 check to Lutheran Social Services of Northeast Florida to be used for temporary housing and other resettlement expenses of the family of Suleiman and Irina Bensieitov, who are refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine. The family is in the United States on parole status, which allows adult family members to work. Lutheran Social Services sponsors refugees upon arrival, and provides temporary housing and other assistance in adapting to life in the United States. The goal is that families will be self-sufficient as soon as possible.

To achieve this goal, the Lutheran Social



Rotary Club President Wesley Caldwell presenting a check to Lutheran Social Services Program Manager Sheema Zahir on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. Bensieitov and their five children.

Services Matching Grant Program has teams working closely with families to provide English classes, financial literacy workshops, job readiness training and

employment referrals. Matching grants are required for each sponsored family,

Mandarin Rotary cont. on pg. 13

New outdoor space at Greenland Pines is multipurpose

By Traci Gunston
mail@floridanewsline.com

With planning and fundraising completed, several volunteers met at Greenland Pine Elementary, early Saturday Dec. 2 to bring their goal project to life. The team, consisting of members of the PTA, parents, patrols, teachers, and Principal Michelle Hinkley, came together to complete the installation of a new outdoor picnic area for students, families, and teachers to enjoy.

The team first worked to clear and level the area. Next, they framed it, added mulch flooring and finished it off with several tables complete with umbrellas for shade. The new area, sponsored by the Greenland Pines PTA, was purchased using funds raised during the annual school improvement fundraiser held in October.



Photo courtesy Traci Gunston

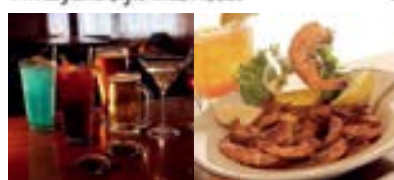
Heather Morris, Greenland Pines PTA Vice President, Ways and Means said, "The PTA wanted to provide something that everyone at the school could enjoy. We thought with an outdoor picnic area, parents could eat lunch with their children, and teachers could use the area to

teach part of their classes on a nice day."

In addition, the new outdoor space is already in use as a meeting space for groups to gather and share in learning activities like reading sessions, science lessons, and art.



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Briefs

Mandarin Women's Club welcomes on-air host Mia O'Brien

The Mandarin Women's Club will host Mia O'Brien as guest speaker at its luncheon on Jan. 25 at the Ramada Inn in Mandarin. O'Brien is a graduate of Ithaca College and joined First Coast News in 2018 as a sports anchor/reporter. In 2022 she joined 1010XL radio as an on-air host and the director of multimedia production.

This luncheon will be all about "Food, Friends, and Football." Attendees are invited to show their team spirit by wearing their favorite team (NFL or college) shirt or team colors.

Doors open at 10:30 a.m. and reservations for the luncheon are required. The luncheon cost is \$25 and must be received by Thursday, Jan. 18. To make reservations and obtain payment instructions, call Jo-Ellen at 904-635-8722 or email her at joshifty@aol.com. Visit www.mandarinwomensclub.com for more information on events, photos, and membership forms.

Mandarin Garden Club celebrates and gives back

The Mandarin Garden Club celebrated a Mix and Mingle Holiday Party at the clubhouse on Dec. 7 with lights around the room and a white Christmas tree decorated in turquoise in the center of the room. The Mandarin High School Brass Quintet, under the

direction of Pamela Chaffin, played holiday tunes for the gathering. A variety of desserts, appetizers and finger foods were contributed by the members.

All year long, the Mandarin Garden Club gives back to the community. Any time members gather at the clubhouse for a meeting or to work on crafts, they bring in items that can benefit others in the area. Since 2008, the Mandarin Garden Club has gathered and donated non-perishable items and hygiene products to the local food bank. The holiday gathering resulted in another large collection of items for the food bank.

The club has collected old cell phones since 2009, which are donated to the Duval County 4-H program. Donations of old eyeglasses and cases are taken to the Lions Club. In 2011, the garden club started collecting pop-tops from can items, which are



The Mandarin High School Brass Quintet played holiday tunes for the club's holiday gathering.

donated to the Ronald McDonald House. Retired flags that are brought to the clubhouse are presented to the Mandarin Community Club and are given proper disposal at their flag ceremony.

Visit www.mandaringardenclub.org for more information, including clubhouse rental opportunities.

Mandarin Community Club supports troops

For the fourth year, the Mandarin Community Club participated in Holiday Mail for Heroes, sponsored by the American Red Cross. More than 300 cards and holiday messages were collected this year.

"We are thankful to the community for supporting this worthwhile cause," Mandarin Community Club board member Lynn Cuda said.

Hospitals recognized for surgical patient outcomes

Baptist Health hospitals participate in the American College of Surgeons National Surgical Quality Improvement Program (ACS NSQIP[®]) as part of their commitment to continuous improvement in the quality of surgical care. This year, multiple hospitals within the health system were recognized by the organization:

Baptist Medical Center South was recognized as a Surgical Quality Partner and achieved "Meritorious Status" for its composite quality scores in

both "All Cases" and "High Risk" categories. Baptist South is one of only 46 hospitals nationwide to achieve the distinction of being recognized in both categories.

Baptist Medical Center Jacksonville was recognized as a Surgical Quality Partner, given to hospitals that demonstrate at least a year of commitment to ACS NSQIP.

Wolfson Children's Hospital was recognized as a Surgical Quality Partner in both the National Surgical Quality Improvement Program – Pediatric and the Trauma Quality Improvement Program for demonstrating a year of commitment to each program.

The honors celebrated this year are based on quality data from 2022. Each composite score is determined through a weighted formula combining outcomes in eight critical areas of surgical patient management.

"We want patients to have the best outcomes when they trust us to perform their surgery," said Jeremy Goodman, MD, FACHE, vice president and system quality officer. "That's why we participate in programs like this. It's part of our devotion to continuous improvement in quality and safety. We stay focused on implementing the best practices for high-quality surgical outcomes year-round and we're proud to receive these honors that exemplify that commitment."



RIVER CITY SCIENCE ACADEMY MANDARIN K-8

OPEN HOUSE

January 20:
Virtual meeting 10 am, 11 am
Self-guided school tour 1 pm

January 27:
Virtual meeting 10 am, 11 am
Self-guided school tour 1 pm

(details on the website rcsamandarin.org)



RCSA MANDARIN
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RIVER CITY SCIENCE ACADEMY SOUTHEAST K-7

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January 13:
Virtual Meeting 10 am, 11 am
Self-guided school tour 1 pm

January 20:
Virtual Meeting 10 am, 11 am
Self-guided school tour 1 pm

(details on the website rcsasoutheast.org)



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BFF

Best Furry Friend
of the month

Meet Bodie!



Breed:

Golden Retriever

Favorite Activity:

Hiking the Florida Trail with mommy

Favorite food:

Pepperoni

Favorite Friend:

Grammy

How did my BFF get his name?

Bodie is his name, but his nickname is Bodie Bear. When he was a puppy he looked like a polar bear cub!

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 Mandarin NewsLine. Your pet could be our BFF of the month and appear in Mandarin NewsLine! Email editor@floridanewsline.com to enter your pet.



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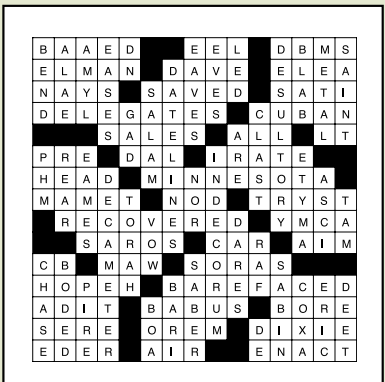
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MYSTERY PHOTO



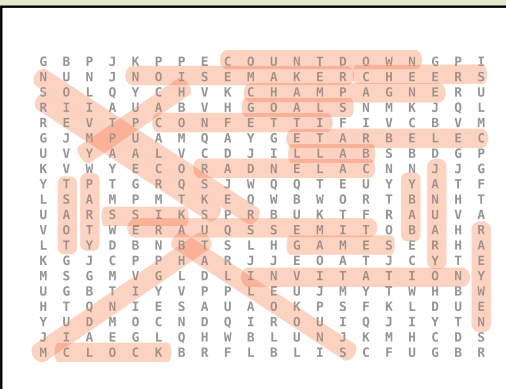
Can you guess where this is?
Submit your answer to: mail@FloridaNewsLine.com.
Last month's Mystery Photo was the South Mandarin Library.



Answers
to our
Puzzles
PG 10



A. champagne B. midnight C. resolution D. party



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January

Community Calendar

What's Happening in Mandarin

Shuffleboard is played on Tuesdays at 1:30 p.m. at Mandarin Park (now known as Hazouri Park). The courts are at the park entrance next to the tennis courts. Try to get there a few minutes early for court assignments. Beginners are welcome. Just show up (a few minutes before playing time), unless it rains.

Toast of Jax Toastmasters meets every Saturday, except on holiday weekends, at 7:30 a.m. at Mandarin Lutheran Church, 11900 San Jose Boulevard. Guests are welcome. The meetings can also be attended online at <https://toastofjax.toastmastersclubs.org/>.

Acoustic Jam Session is held on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. in the Kids' Building of Trinity Mandarin, located at 2955 Orange Picker Road. This jam is open to everyone and all levels of ability are welcome. Come to play with the group or just sit back and enjoy the music. For more information, contact Burt Coulliette at (904) 302-0423.

Playing HOOKie, a group for those who enjoy knitting, crocheting and looming (with all items donated to charity) meets every Wednesday from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at Maple Street Biscuit Company, 1627 Race Track Road in St. Johns. Visit the group's Facebook page (Playing HOOKie) or email playinghookie2022@gmail.com for more information.

2nd: Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet on Tuesday, Jan. 2 at 6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church at the Loretto Road Campus in the Kids' Space at 2501 Loretto Road. Guild members will make a presentation on organizing fabric scraps. Wearing masks is optional. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

6th: Walter Jones Historical Park buildings, including the 1898 St. Joseph's Mission Schoolhouse for African

American Children, the 1875 Webb Jones Farmhouse, the 1876 Barn, and the Losco Winery, will be open on Jan. 6 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. The Historic Mandarin Store & Post Office, located at 12471 Mandarin Road, will also be open. Museum volunteers will be inside each building for guided tours. Admission is free; Donations help support the museum's programming and operations. Visit www.mandarinmuseum.org for more information.

6th: Meet the Maple Leaf Divers at the Mandarin Museum, 11964 Mandarin Road, from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 6. This is an informal, conversational-style event; drop in anytime within the two hours to chat with Dr. Keith Holland and his team and view the museum's expanded Maple Leaf exhibit. Admission to Meet the Maple Leaf Divers and Mandarin Museum is free. Donations help support the museum's programming and operations. For more information, visit www.mandarinmuseum.org or call (904) 268-0784.

7th: Music Under the Oaks community music jam, hosted by the Mandarin Museum & Historical Society and North Florida Folk Network will resume underneath the beautiful trees in front of Mandarin Museum on Sunday, Jan. 7 from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. Bring a chair or blanket and relax and listen. Mandarin Museum and the 1898 Schoolhouse will be open to visitors. Visit www.mandarinmuseum.org or call (904) 268-0784 for more information.

7th: Chili Cook Off at Mandarin United Methodist Church will be held on Jan. 7 at 12:30 p.m. in Wesley Hall at the church, 11270 San Jose Blvd. Entry categories are Traditional, Non Traditional and Spiciest. Visit www.mumc.net to sign up to attend or enter as a contestant.

8th: Parent Support Group with Licensed Mental Health Counselor Pattie Pallay will be held the second

Monday of each month (this month, Jan. 8) at 6 p.m. in the Youth Hut of Lakewood Presbyterian Church, 2001 University Blvd. This group is for parents with children of all ages (birth – adult) who are seeking support with children who are neurodivergent, have physical disabilities, are struggling with mental illness or just daily life. There is no charge to attend; visit www.lpcjax.org/calendar to register.

11th: Raised Container Gardening: Vegetables and Flowers will be presented at 10 a.m. on Jan. 11 at the Mandarin Garden Club, 2892 Loretto Road. The public is invited to this free event. Visit www.mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

13th: Second Saturday Arts and Farmers Market at First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. on Jan. 13 from 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. Visit www.facebook.com/SecondSatMarket/ for more information.

13th: The Southern Genealogist's Exchange Society will meet Saturday, Jan. 13 at 10 a.m. at Mandarin Branch Library, 3330 Kori Road. Dr. Matthews of FSCJ will discuss the first ever local Jacksonville course offered to students and the community. This event is free and open to the public. Visit www.sgesjax.org or call (904) 778-1000 for more information.

13th: Southside Multiple Sclerosis group meets on the second Saturday of each month (this month on Jan. 13) at 2 p.m. at the JCA, 8505 San Jose Blvd. Every other month there is a speaker and on alternate months there are group discussions on the current situation with our MS. Call group leader Susan Armstron, (904) 396-1082 for more information.

15th: "Who was/is Jesus, really?" a multimedia-based discussion series to critically and honestly examine Je-


sus' claims will be hosted by Hope Lutheran Church at the Mandarin Senior Center on select Mondays beginning Jan. 15 at 10:30 a.m. Visit Jesus.HopeJax.org for individual discussions topics and schedule.

15th: The All Star Quilters Guild will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on Monday, Jan. 15 at First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The program will be the group's annual birthday celebration and there will be a \$6 fee for lunch. Sew and Tell is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit www.allstarquilters.org for more information.


25th: Mandarin Women's Club's monthly meeting and luncheon will be held on Jan. 25 beginning at 10:30 a.m. at the Ramada Inn Mandarin. The luncheon will feature on-air host and sports anchor Mia O'Brien. The cost of the lunch is \$25 and reservations and payment must be received by Jan. 18 by calling Jo-Ellen at (904) 635-8722 or emailing her at joshifty@aol.com. Visit www.mandarinwomensclub.com for more information and membership forms.


25th: Dreamscaping — Thematic Gardens will be presented at 7 p.m. on Jan. 25 at the Mandarin Garden Club, 2892 Loretto Road. The public is invited to this free event. Visit www.mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

26th: The Italian American Club of Jacksonville will hold its popular Spaghetti to Go on Friday, Jan. 26 from 5 p.m. until the spaghetti is gone at the club building, 2838 Westberry Road. Take out only; cash, credit and debit cards are accepted. No phone orders. Visit www.iacofjacksonville.com or call (904) 586-2700 for more information.



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Q&A

with Duval County School Board Member
Lori Hershey, District 7

Q: Do you have any updates on the renaming of a portion of RG Skinner Parkway in front of Atlantic Coast High School to Stingray Parkway?

A: This was proposed by the school’s SAC committee and over the summer, with the support of the Skinner family and the approval of the Jacksonville City Council, the name change was approved. As of mid-December, the new street signs signifying “Stingray Parkway” were installed and we will have an official celebration on Jan. 9 at 2:30 p.m. at Atlantic Coast High School. At this time, we will also unveil a historical marker that will recognize the history of the Skinner family in the area.

Q: Has the school board made progress on the Master Facilities Plan?

A: We plan to have a workshop to revisit the Master Facilities Plan and make any adjustments in February. The goal of the Master Facilities Plan is to right-size the district; some projects may be re-prioritized based on current student enrollment.

Q: Do you have any technology updates to share?

A: Greenland Pines Elementary has just had some IT upgrades to include the installation of interactive Smart Boards

in classrooms. I visited the school to see them and was very impressed. The features are incredible and they bring learning to life. This upgrade makes for an engaging learning environment. Teachers are excited to have this resource in their classrooms.

Q: Do you have any kudos to share?

A: We are very proud that two teachers from District 7 have been recognized as Top 5 finalists for the Duval County Public Schools’ Teacher of the Year. Congratulations to Ana Andematten from Mandarin Oaks Elementary and Katrice Shorter from Atlantic Coast High School. The district’s Teacher of the Year will be announced in January.

Finally, I am very proud of the Mandarin High School Mustangs, who competed in the state championship football game on Dec. 8. They fell a little short this year, and finished second in the state. It was so great to see the community show up and support the team and nice to see people travel for the games; this team had four consecutive games on the road on their way to the title game.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

A: They can email me at HersheyL@duvalschools.org or call me at (904) 390-2375.



Cadet Ensign Mya Gibbs of Mandarin High School has been accepted to the US Naval Academy. Capt. Herbert Hadley assisted her through the process.

Toastmasters host informative open house

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Mandarin Toastmasters’ recent Open House’s theme was “Friends and Family” and the group had the honor of having a local community member, Joanna Dufton, as a guest speaker. Dufton watched her father and two of his brothers die with dementia. She wondered if that was her destiny, so she spent a great deal of time researching the science of memory loss and discovered that memory loss is preventable. At the Open House, Dufton shared the six essential lifestyle habits to prevent memory loss.

One of the group’s newest members, Fred King, led the Open House program by serving as the toastmaster. Like a master in ceremonies, King’s role was to manage an engaging meeting by giving introductions, creating smooth transitions between each session, maintaining a positive atmosphere, welcom-

ing members to the lectern, and closing the program. He is a church elder who loves to serve others and believes this is his calling.

Mandarin Toastmasters, a subsector of Toastmasters International, was established in 2007 and meets the first and third Saturday of each month from 10:15 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the South Mandarin Regional Library, 12125 San Jose Blvd. Mandarin Toastmasters provides a supportive and positive learning experience to promote self-confidence and personal growth. During meetings, participants perform public speaking roles to enhance their communication and leadership skills. Visitors are invited to attend in person or via Zoom, and the club is open to anyone interested. Email toastmastersmandarin@gmail.com or visit the club’s website at <https://838510.toastmastersclubs.org> for more information.

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with Jacksonville City Council Member
Michael Boylan, District 6

Q: Are there any updates to the County Dock property [as of interview date of Dec. 14]?

A: While we have not officially confirmed this, many neighbors received an email recently with the news that a contract was pending on this property that would need to close by year end. Apparently, what is planned for this property likely will not require rezoning.

Q: How is the construction progressing on the corner of Orange Picker and Brady roads to include the rerouting of the road, expansion of parking at Alberts Field and the new dog park?

A: Drainage and retention pond work has begun in earnest. We will do our best to keep neighbors informed of the upcoming road closures associated with this work.

Nearby to this, perhaps some residents have noticed the selective clearcutting that has been done on Brady Road, between Orange Picker and Melrose Plantation Drive. Trees have been left, but the brush has been cleared out. I spoke with the owner of the property and he said he thought it was time to do some clearing, but has no specific plans for anything else.

Q: Can you give some insight into your idea to form a preservation society group for Mandarin?

A: I think it's time to establish a group, like exists in San Marco (San Marco Preservation Society) and Riverside (RAP), to advocate and promote the character and quality of life of Mandarin. I foresee a combination advocacy group and ambassadors who encourage the preservation of Mandarin. This type of work happens now on an ad hoc basis, but I think an organized structure and group would be advantageous. I've reached out to former City Councilmember Sharon Copeland to ask if she would be willing to help us establish our version of one of these groups.

The plan is to further explore this idea at an organizational meeting, open to the public, on the evening of Feb. 1 at

the Mandarin Senior Center on Hartley Road. I encourage residents who might like to become involved to attend this meeting. Please call our office for more details and information.

Q: What else do you have to share with Mandarin?

A: I'm happy to report that the playground facility at Chuck and Corky Rogers Park is complete and already being enjoyed by families. It's been a long time coming. Also, the playground equipment at Hazouri Mandarin Park is in the queue to be replaced.

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

A: Community members can email me at MBoylan@coj.net or call (904) 255-5206.

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Mandarin Art Festival returns March 30 – 31, 2024

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Mandarin Community Club continues its Easter Weekend tradition of the juried Mandarin Art Festival set for March 30 – 31, 2024. This year the family tradition marks its 56th anniversary.

“Of the many artists signing up, I’m especially excited about the new artists eager to join our returning favorites for 2024. Applications have been robust,” said Susie Scott, outgoing president of Mandarin Community Club. “It’s an incredible experience when you blend Mandarin’s beautiful old trees on this storied land with an explosion of artistic expression, and to share that with our greater community is an honor.”

Scott anticipates more than 100 artists will participate again this year across six categories of art — painting,



Photo courtesy Mandarin Community Club
Best in Show 2023, John Cheer, will return to the Mandarin Art Festival with more of his unusual wheel thrown and hand sculpted clay creations.

photography, mixed media, functional, sculpture, and jewelry. The jury process is meticulous; the resulting variety and complexity of work is impressive. The 2024 Festival will host six food trucks, musical entertainment, and lots of children’s activities, including a special children’s art show. There will also be a Green Market for locally produced and manufactured items. The volunteer bake sale returns for Saturday, while supplies last.

Event hours will be the usual 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. on Saturday, March 30 and 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. on Sunday, March 31, 2024.

The Mandarin Community Club is an independent, not-for-profit organization open to all, especially those who live in the Mandarin area. The club is dedicated to the preservation and beautification of Mandarin, to providing educational forums and enhancing the cultural and recreational life of the area and to maintaining its three historic properties.



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Children's choirs team up to raise funds for Nemours

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

On Saturday, Dec. 2, the St. Cecilia Children's Choir from San Jose Church and School teamed up with the children's choirs from San Juan Del Rio and Holy Family for a successful benefit concert that kicked off the Advent season. The concert was held in the main sanctuary of San Juan del Rio parish and all of the donations and money raised went to support Nemours children's hospital in Jacksonville. The choirs raised \$1,771 for Nemours through their efforts.

Emily Palaj (San Jose), Katherine Dennison (San Juan del Rio), and Kimberly Conway (Holy Family) are the directors of the three choirs that collaborated on this effort.

"This event was envisioned, or-



Photo courtesy Emily Palaj
Emily Palaj conducting.

ganized, and directed by me, and was a groundbreaking collaborative effort between the music ministries of these three parishes to serve the community," said Emily Palaj. "I would like to bring awareness to what we are capable of when we band together to present our gifts in the service of others who are in need. This endeavor demonstrated that each and every one of our children has something special to give, and that each of their gifts given to them by God have a purpose greater than themselves. I am a huge proponent that children learn that their voices should be used to serve, not just to entertain."

The concert include a candlelight processional with the kids entering the darkened church holding candles while singing "O Come O Come Emmanuel," presented seven scripture readings throughout the concert, and performed 13 pieces of music ranging in styles and historical periods from high Baroque to upbeat-Salsa with a Spanish text and Latin-flair. Also featured was a piece of music ("Make a Manger in Your Heart") which was sung and signed in ASL by all of the students from all three choirs.

Bikes for Kids at Crown Point Elementary

By Mary Eyster
mail@floridanewslines.com

Crown Point third graders were invited to participate in the Bikes for Kids program in mid-October. Since then, the students have been working on reading, discussing, and answering a variety of challenging questions from the book, "Think Big. Work Hard. Be Kind. No Excuses!" by Robert Krumroy. The students were tasked with reflecting on their dreams, which involved discussions on what they want to be when they grow up, their role in their community, and how to deal with the future challenges that they may face. The third graders turned their work into an essay that explored their dreams for their future careers and their active role as

members of the community.

On Dec. 4, an assembly was held at Crown Point Elementary to recognize and honor the students' hard work and leadership. Principal Brett Hartley introduced Justin Bruckel and Anthony Cadieux, co-CEOs of CoAqua, which teamed up with Bikes for Kids Foundation to bring this exciting opportunity to Crown Point. Hartley also introduced special guests, including Superintendent Dr. Dana Kriznar, Board Member Lori Hershey, Chief Academic Officer Paula Renfro, Region 1 Superintendent Dr. Marianne Simon, and Region 1 Executive Director Stephanie Manabat. Parker Kane, a former student of Crown Point, was also among the special guests. Kane

spoke about the importance of setting goals, working hard, and being kind. He also shared his personal experiences and struggles with the third graders.

Seven top essays were selected by teachers and read by the third-grade winners during the assembly. Although those seven students were honored as the winners of the new bikes, every third grader was awarded a brand-new bike and helmet. The students were surprised and excited that they were all rewarded for their hard work by the foundation.



Photos courtesy Mary Eyster
School Board Member Lori Hershey speaks to the assembly.

Bolles Science Expo showcases student innovation

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

More than 100 middle and upper school student researchers shared their projects at the annual Bolles Science Expo on Dec. 7 in Cain Gym on the Bolles Upper School San Jose Campus. A more comprehensive approach to an annual science fair, the event included displays of research projects and demonstrations from students in Honors and AP Biology as well as other science and technology classes and clubs. This is the first year middle school students participated in the Science Expo, with members of the Biomimicry Club bringing projects to the show.

Sarah Park '25 and Riya Kar '24, the school's returning International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF) veterans, also shared their new research projects

alongside fellow 2023 SPARK Scholars Christina Dovellos '25, Madeline Kaiser '24, Annika Mirjankar '24, Simran Naval '24, Krish Patel '25 and Amanda Tun '25.

According to the Mayo Clinic website, the SPARK Research Mentorship Program provides high school students with unparalleled mentored research experience in world-class laboratories at Mayo Clinic. SPARK, which stands for Science Program for the Advancement of Research Knowledge, started at Mayo Clinic in the summer of 2017 for students from Duval and St. Johns counties. During the program, SPARK scholars produce highly competitive projects that they enter in science fairs, and many have won regional and state awards, honors and prize dollars for their research.

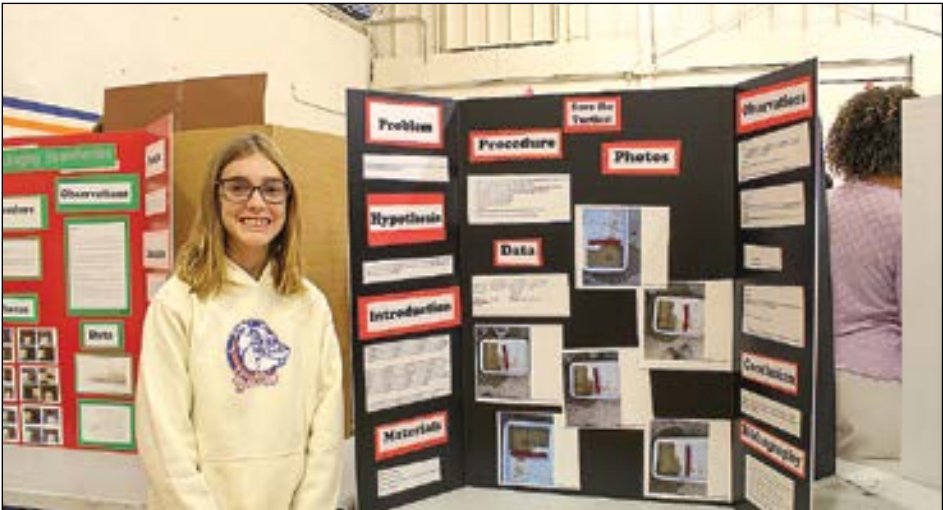


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Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

Stephanie Rennells

Stephanie Rennells said she has always been a voracious reader, so it's little surprise that she would become a librarian. She was born in Madison Heights, Virginia, in the Blue Ridge Mountains, but moved to Jacksonville as a teenager with her family in order to be closer to extended family. She graduated from Wolfson High School and the University of North Florida and said she considers herself a "bona fide Jacksonvillian." She serves as a Customer Experience Associate in Youth Services at the South Mandarin Branch of the Jacksonville Public Library and believes that the library can connect people to resources in many different ways, even beyond books. Stephanie is a "proud auntie" to nephews Michael and Alex, and she and her husband Andrew live with their two rescue cats, Ori and Arty.

Q: Did you always want to be a librarian?

A: I've always been a big reader, from a really young age. Big surprise! The librarian likes to read. In college I was taking philosophy classes and considered law school. Once I realized what the day-to-day life of a lawyer entailed, I thought it might be too isolating for me, because I really enjoy people and building relationships. After graduation from UNF, I worked in retail for a while and it clicked that working at a library could be just what I was looking for. I put in my application in



Photo courtesy Stephanie Rennells
Stephanie Rennells

late 2020, interviewed in early 2021, and have worked at South Mandarin Library ever since. I love going to work every day. We have a wonderful community and I'm very attached to our patrons.

Q: How did you meet your husband?

A: We met in the break room while we both worked seasonally at Target. We bonded over our love of board games and video games. We've been together eight years and were married in Silver Springs State Park in Ocala in March 2020. When we arrived for our wedding, they told us that just that morning, they were shutting down communal parts of the park due to the new pandemic. We really had to scramble, but luckily we had a small wedding. We were supposed to get married on one of the glass bottom boats, but found a small amphitheater we could use instead. We also had to postpone our honeymoon.

Q: What does your job as a youth librarian entail and what is your

favorite part?

A: I interact with patrons of all ages, but mostly children and teens in my position. We plan events, both educational and casual, drop-in type events that are conceived at the branch level. We make inviting book displays. We try to get people into the library and to love the library as we support their literary goals and life-long learning goals. There is something special to me about going to work at the library each day.

I love my coworkers and the people who come in that we get to know. The library does great work for the community and I love the influence we have, especially on kids and teens.

Q: What does the South Mandarin Library offer for teens?

A: We are very lucky at our branch that we have a great community of teens who come in for our programs. We have a weekly game day on Tuesday evenings that gives teens the chance to connect with other teens. A lot of our teens have become volunteers at the library, which is important for Bright Futures scholarships, and every other Friday our Teen Advisory Board meets for fun activities. For instance, one time the teens built mini catapults after reading about them in the Percy Jackson series of books.

Q: What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

A: Besides reading, I enjoy having friends over to play board games and card games. And I love getting to know our patrons and watch the kids who come to the library grow up. Some who start as toddlers in our storytime programs are now teens getting their Bright Futures volunteer hours.

Open Studio cont. from pg. 1

Stowe was a winter resident of Mandarin from 1867 to 1884. During her time spent in her adopted state of Florida, she lived on 30 riverfront acres along Mandarin Road, operated a commercial orange grove, and was a champion for the education of all children regardless of race following the U.S. Civil War. The bronze sculpture will depict Stowe instructing the two young orange grove laborers, symbolizing this commitment to education. Open Studio with Brenda Councill will continue throughout January, every Friday through Sunday, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. Visitors can follow Councill's progress as she begins with armature construction and ends with a full-size clay sculpture ready for the foundry.

Admission to Open Studio with Brenda Councill is free. Limited edition prints of Councill's popular Mandarin series will be available for purchase. All proceeds support "Harriet Beecher Stowe in Mandarin" and its eventual installation in Walter Jones Historical Park.

The Historic Mandarin Store and Post Office is located at 12471 Mandarin Road. Visit www.mandarinmuseum.org or call (904) 268-0784 for more information on this event or how to support the project.

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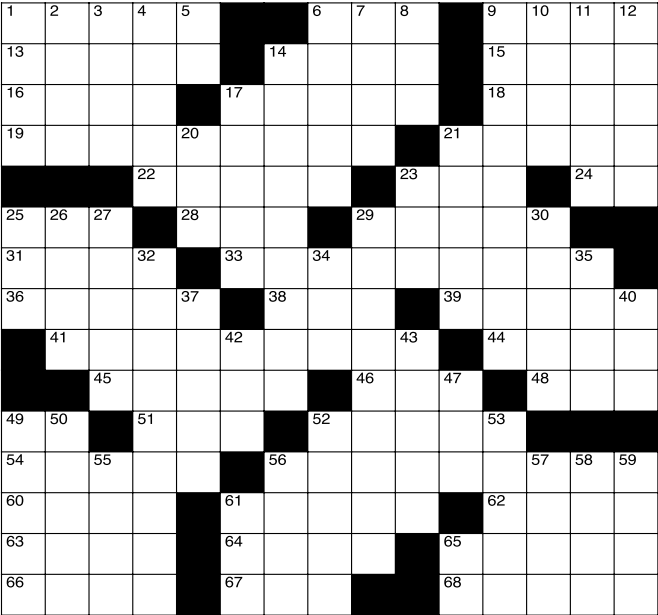
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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Bleated
- 6. Snakelike fish
- 9. Database management system
- 13. Russian-American violinist
- 14. Wendy’s founder Thomas
- 15. Ancient Italian-Greek colony
- 16. Negatives
- 17. Rescued
- 18. Self-immolation by fire ritual
- 19. Assigns tasks to
- 21. Island nation native
- 22. Trade
- 23. Detergent brand
- 24. Famed NY Giant
- 25. Before
- 28. Split pulses
- 29. Extremely angry; highly incensed
- 31. Body part
- 33. American state
- 36. David __, US playwright
- 38. Move one’s head slightly
- 39. Secret rendezvous
- 41. Improved
- 44. A place to exercise
- 45. 18-year astronomical period
- 46. Automobile
- 48. You can take it
- 49. A radio band
- 51. Jaws of an animal
- 52. Short-billed rails
- 54. Chinese province
- 56. Shameless and undisguised
- 60. Horizontal passage into a mine
- 61. Adult males
- 62. Fail to entertain
- 63. Dried-up
- 64. City in north-central Utah
- 65. Southern U.S.
- 66. German river
- 67. Oxygen
- 68. Make law

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Curved segment
- 2. Wings
- 3. From pentane (Chemistry)
- 4. Gradually gets into
- 5. Commercial document (abbr.)
- 6. Overhang
- 7. Christmas and New Year’s have them
- 8. Type of bulb
- 9. Lacking a plan
- 10. Tattle
- 11. Rockers like it “heavy”
- 12. One who’s been canonized
- 14. Indicate time and place
- 17. Nobel Prize winner in physics
- 20. The voice of Olaf
- 21. Fragmented rock
- 23. They __
- 25. Master of Philosophy
- 26. Backside
- 27. Landmark house in L.A.
- 29. An act of undue intimacy
- 30. From which a later word is derived
- 32. Equal to 10 meters
- 34. Neither
- 35. Computer language
- 37. Sacred book of Judaism
- 40. A woolen cap of Scottish origin
- 42. A way to dedicate
- 43. Challenges
- 47. British Air Aces
- 49. Large, influential bank
- 50. Portended
- 52. Cavalry-sword
- 53. Vaccine developer
- 55. Napoleonic Wars general
- 56. Italian Seaport
- 57. Hip joint
- 58. __ Clapton, musician
- 59. Insect repellent
- 61. Decorative scarf
- 65. Delaware

NEW YEAR’S WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

- BABY
- BALLOONS
- CALENDAR
- CELEBRATE
- CHAMPAGNE
- CHEERS
- CLOCK
- CONFETTI
- COUNTDOWN
- GAMES
- GOALS
- HAPPY
- INVITATION
- JANUARY
- KISS
- MIDNIGHT
- NEW YEAR
- NOISEMAKER
- PARTY
- RESOLUTION
- STREAMER
- TIMES SQUARE
- TOAST



Solve the code to discover words related to New Year's celebrations.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 17 = N)

- A. 1 9 13 23 24 13 5 17 4
Clue: Bubbly drink
- B. 23 26 25 17 26 5 9 16
Clue: Twelve a.m.
- C. 12 4 22 7 20 3 16 26 7 17
Clue: Plan to change
- D. 24 13 12 16 2
Clue: Fun event

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Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis
mail@floridanewsline.com

Happy New Year! Here's to hoping 2024 is a great one for all of you. Now let's look back on 2023 and see how we can further the goals that we set last year. I unfortunately did not get my river tarpon last year. I did see more than I have in years past and I actually jumped one, but I had to journey downtown to do it. I was hoping for one closer to home. I spent more time chasing them in the surf and I think if I had spent that much time in the river it may have been different. Keep your eyes on the prize as they say. So I'll be balancing my time better this year, especially in September. Long story short, I'll be having the same goal in 2024 — river tarpon or bust.

How about you? Did you achieve your goal(s) last year? If you're in the same boat as me at least you learned something to apply this year. That's a powerful thing and why it's okay to set lofty goals since the lessons you learn along the way are truly what you're after in the end. Maybe. A nice fish is a nice fish after all. Let's get after them then.

While you can still throw a shrimp net this month, it may be too cold and possibly not worth the effort for the few shrimp that are still around. Most of the forage we have this time of year are herring and shad which you can catch in a cast net, but they are not hardy baits. If you're wanting to target their predators as in stripers, flounder, and redfish, it might be better to throw a swim bait or Rat-L-Trap to imitate the bait fish. I like to "jig" a Rat-L-Trap to make it look like a cold stunned bait fish but remember to slow everything down. Winter fishing demands patience.

Speck fishing has been pretty good and more and more big fish should be showing up in the creeks every day. We've been catching them on minnows and jigs. Chartreuse is always a productive color, but silver has also been producing. If conditions allow, don't neglect trying the main river for them. They're eating the herring and shad too. If you're not getting snagged now and then you're not speck fishing. Tight lines.

4 fun facts about January

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

January marks the start of a New Year, and that sense of a new beginning is palpable for millions of people across the globe. New Year's resolutions are typically made at the start of January, and those can serve as a springboard to an enjoyable year. As the calendar turns to January, there's much to learn about this meaningful month.

1. The Roman god Janus is the namesake for the first month of the year. Janus was considered the protector of gates and doorways and the god of beginnings and transitions, among other things. Given those qualities, it's no wonder Janus is the namesake for the first month of the year.
2. Though it's not considered part of the holiday season, January boasts its fair share of holidays, and some Christians even consider it the end of the holiday season. Celebrated by some on Jan. 6, the Epiphany is a Christian feast day that commemorates the visit of the Magi, the baptism of Jesus Christ and the wedding at Cana. Though some Christian celebrants may take down their holiday decorations, including their Christmas trees, before the dawn of the new year, those who commemorate the Epiphany may wait until Jan. 6 to pack things up. In addition to the Epiphany,

the January calendar also features holidays such as New Year's Day and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

3. Though they might not be officially recognized holidays, two very influential figures in American history were born in January. Founding Father Benjamin Franklin, who helped to draft the Declaration of Independence, was born on Jan. 17, 1706, in Boston in what was then known as the Province of Massachusetts Bay. Nearly 230 years later, Elvis Presley was born on Jan. 8, 1935, in Tupelo, Mississippi. Though he was not official royalty, Elvis is still considered the "King of Rock and Roll," and one can only wonder what Benjamin Franklin might have thought about that designation had he been around to hear it.
4. The Farmer's Almanac reports that there is some folklore associated with January weather. Though some might welcome a warmer January than they're accustomed to, the prevailing folklore around January weather suggests a summer-like January will result in a winter-like spring. In addition, fog in January is associated with a wet spring. So anyone hoping for a warm and dry spring might want to hope for and subsequently grin and bear any cold weather that comes their way in January.

New community resource: “Sharing And Caring Closet”

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

ElderSource will be opening the doors to its newest resource, the Sharing and Caring Closet, a place where seniors and caregivers can receive free consumable medical supplies. The Sharing and Caring Closet will be inside the ElderSource office located at 10688 Old St. Augustine Road in Mandarin and open Jan. 30, 2024.

The closet was launched in December with a public request for donations. Community members and businesses responded to the “Shop and Drop” event held on Dec. 8 and 9 with generous donations of adult incontinence undergarments, waterproof pads for beds and furniture and other products. “Some of these older adults have expressed concerns to us that they feel alone, or that no one is looking out for them,” said Linda Levin, CEO of ElderSource. “I think this great turn-

out indicates that there are people in the community that do care, and we’re here to support them.”

Donations will continue to be needed throughout the year with the following items designated as “priority”: incontinence undergarments (both men and women, all sizes), waterproof pads for beds and furniture, Ensure nutritional drink (all flavors) and disposable, personal hygiene wipes. Clothing and food items will not be accepted as part of the needed donations.

The Sharing and Caring Closet located at the ElderSource offices will be open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. People may call the ElderSource Helpline or walk-in with a genuine request. Walk-ins will first meet with a Customer Service Specialist to assess their needs and help with connecting to resources in addition to the Sharing and Caring Closet. Closet items will be free to the public and available depending on current inventory. Items requested cannot be delivered and donations cannot be picked up. Donations can also be shipped directly to ElderSource through an Amazon wish list link on the ElderSource website, MyElderSource.org. A full list of requested items can also be found on the website. For more information email SharingCloset@MyElderSource.org or call the Helpline at (904) 391-6699.



Photo courtesy ElderSource

Dry Salt Therapy: An option for respiratory wellness

By Lilly Castro, LMT
mail@floridanewslines.com

Today, so many are suffering from respiratory issues — from pollution and smog to airborne diseases, pollens and toxins, never before has our society been faced with such a growing epidemic of respiratory ailments.

Dry salt therapy is also called “Halotherapy.” Europeans have known about this for quite some time, seeking treatments in the Polish salt mines since the 1800s. European salt miners thrived, rarely having any respiratory issues. In 1949 those sheltering in the salt mines and caves during World War II had respiratory health benefits as well.

Dry salt therapy is anti-bacterial, anti-inflammatory, and super absorbent. Dry salt therapy can have a positive impact on people suffering with conditions like allergies, asthma, bronchitis, cystic fibrosis, COPD and more.

How salt therapy works:

1. Absorbent: Dry salt acts like a sponge attracting foreign substances throughout the respiratory tract. As the salt travels through the room, it starts absorbing allergens and toxins, clearing the respiratory system and removing the build-up of foreign elements that cause the various respiratory ailments and conditions we suffer from today.
2. Anti-inflammatory: Inhaled dry salt particles may help to reduce inflammation in the entire respiratory tract and

widen the airway passages. A clean respiratory system naturally results in higher oxygen intake, increased energy, and an improved immune system.

3. Anti-bacterial: Dry salt particles act as an antibacterial agent, dissolving bacterial and pollutants lodged in the respiratory tract. These are then either coughed up or naturally expelled by the body. These antibacterial properties benefit skin with acne, psoriasis and eczema. The smaller particles land on the skin and absorb bacterial and foreign substances.

Dr. Norman Edelman, senior scientific advisor to the American Lung Association, says, “When fine salt particles are inhaled, they will fall on the airway linings and draw water into the airway, thinning the mucus and making it easier to expel, thus making people feel better. Also these environments are allergen-free and thus good for people with allergies affecting their lungs.”

Dry salt therapy is a natural complementary treatment that can be used in conjunction with your healthcare practitioner's recommendation of herbal remedies, supplements, and medications you are currently using.

Lilly Castro, LMT is co-owner of Life Force Energy Wellness Center in Mandarin. Visit lifeorceenergywellnesscenter.com or call (904) 323-4411 to learn more about their offerings, including dry salt therapy.



Photo courtesy Life Force Energy Wellness Center

Dry salt therapy can have a positive impact on those suffering from respiratory issues.



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Quiltfest makes donation from silent auction

By Sondie Frus
mail@floridanewsline.com

On Dec. 11, 2023, Quiltfest of Jacksonville donated a check for \$4,000 to Community Hospice and Palliative Care’s Pediatric Bereavement fund.

A full year earlier, local quilters began making homemade small sewn items and quilted fabric wall art. More than 200 items were donated by quilters from around northeast Florida, representing countless creative hours. During the annual Quiltfest of Jacksonville, which was held Sept. 14 – 16 at the Prime Osborn Convention Center, attendees placed bids for their favorite items. The proceeds from the sale of these donated items yielded this generous check.

Quiltfest of Jacksonville is an all volunteer nonprofit organization of six (soon seven) local quilt guilds in order to showcase quilts, to provide encouragement and education furthering quilting and fiber arts, and to support the community through caring acts. The 2023 show featured more than 400 quilts on display plus special exhibits, raffles, sales and a hands-on community service element. The silent auction is a prominent element of Quiltfest and the Community PedsCare Bereavement program was selected by the Quiltfest board as the local nonprofit recipient.

Since 2000, Community Hospice and Palliative Care has provided palliative and hospice care and support for children living with life-limiting and life-threatening conditions through Community PedsCare®, a nationally recognized and an award-winning pediatric care program in Northeast and North Central Florida. The program, one of only a few community pediatric programs in the United States offering both palliative and hospice care, provides clinical, social service, spiritual, child life, medical and volunteer support to improve quality of life for children from prenatal to age 21. With a family-centered care approach, the Community PedsCare® team enhances the lives of families through compassion and holistic care.

The funds donated will specifically enable the Pediatric Bereavement program to provide future “Finding Light Bereavement Workshops” to help pediatric families cope with grief and loss. In addition, funds will be used to create H.U.G. (Helping Us Grieve) baskets with items for soothing, expressing feelings, and comforting families including physical items like handprint molds, music with heartbeat sounds incorporated, and unique memory canvas creations.



Photo courtesy Sondie Frus
Silent Auction at Quiltfest 2023.



Check donation to PedsCare with Betsy Miller Jill Smith, Julie Miller, Pat D’Elia, Patrice Austin, and Jennifer Routh.

Mandarin Rotary cont. from pg. 1

and donations such as the Mandarin Rotary Club’s are vital to these resettlement efforts.

Continuing to serve the community, in the week leading up to both Thanksgiving and Christmas, 20 members of the Mandarin Rotary Club assisted the Mandarin Food Bank in putting together and handing out food baskets, including more than 400 turkey dinners with all the “fixins” for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners. This labor intensive effort was particularly rewarding because the food went to approximately 1,000 Mandarin residents who could not have otherwise afforded the dinners provided.

The Rotary Club of Mandarin meets for breakfast at 7:30 a.m. every Tuesday at the Ramada Inn on Hartley Road in Mandarin. Contact mem-

bership chairman Michael Sullivan at michaels@coj.org or visit the club’s website, Mandarinrotary.org, to learn more about the club and its opportunities for service and fellowship. If you would like to donate to the refugee resettlement effort, contact Director of Resettlement Laura Cook at laura.cook@lssjax.org or Wesley Caldwell at wescaldwell403@gmail.com.



Rotary Club of Mandarin members assisting at the Mandarin Food Bank.



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Start the New Year off right — at your library!

By Jeremy Yates
mail@floridanewsline.com

It's a New Year and you know what that means: All new Jax Stacks Reading Challenge categories have been announced! It's Jacksonville Public Library's only year-round reading challenge for adults. It's a great way to get introduced to a new author or series, try out a new genre or format (like audiobooks), or just read something you might have overlooked in the past.

To get started, pick up a Jax Stacks reading tracker bookmark at your library or visit jaxlibrary.org/jaxstacks. You can also sign up for the email newsletter or read the library's blog for monthly book recommendations.

Reading 12 books in 12 months may sound easy, but it's even easier if you get started now. Luckily, the Friends of Mandarin Library have a Used Book Sale Friday, Jan. 26, from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. and Saturday, Jan. 27, from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. at the Mandarin Branch Library (3330 Kori Road). You can fill a paper grocery bag full of books for just \$10 (the Friends will provide the paper bags). Individual items will be \$5 or less. There will be a wide selection of items for every age — children, teens, and adults.

You can use all that money you're saving from buying your books used and borrowing all the latest bestsellers free from the library and invest that into your future. Get a hands-on introduction to personal finance management with Life Lit: Financial Wellness on Tuesday, Jan. 30 at 6:30 p.m. at South Mandarin Library.

Get the little ones started on the path to reading (and future success) with Little Readers storytimes. At South Mandarin Library, there are three opportunities every week: Choose between Mondays at 1:30 p.m., Thursdays at 10:15 a.m. or Thursdays at 11 a.m.

At the Mandarin Library, pre-K friends and families can pick between the Little Readers storytime on Fridays at 10:15 a.m. or 11 a.m. We also have Sensory Friendly Storytime Wednesdays at 11 a.m.

For kids aged nine through 12, there's Snail Mail Lab Wednesdays at 4 p.m. at the South Mandarin Library or Thursdays at 3:30 p.m. at the Mandarin Library. Have fun making hand-crafted greeting cards, postcards and more.

Homeschoolers aged 10 – 14, are invited to Engineer Your Adventure Lab at South Mandarin Library Fridays at 11 a.m. (through Feb. 2). This program combines the fun of a fantasy roleplaying game with the problem-solving skills of an engineer.

Visit www.jaxpubliclibrary.org/events for more information.

Photo courtesy Jacksonville Public Library
Friends of Mandarin Library will hold a Used Book Sale Friday, Jan. 26, and Saturday, Jan. 27 at the Mandarin Branch Library.

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Gardening

A New Year and A Hope

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale
mail@floridanewsline.com

Happy New Year! I don't know how many of you read my gardening column, but I hope you find it useful. As well as discussing current topics and pointing out resources for you to investigate further, I hope it encourages you to think outside your "box." Whether you tend a regular city lot, 20 acres, or a patio or window box, the natural world has so much to offer.

It's timely this month to tell you that a potentially deadly disease called sugarcane mosaic virus has been detected in turf grass in southeast Duval County. If you value your lawn I strongly suggest you read this article: <http://tinyurl.com/2dyunytz>. Up until recently this virus was only found farther south, but since it's impossible to treat its spread has been inevitable. As you will see, using clean machinery is particularly important as the virus can be spread from yard to yard when maintenance crews use contaminated mowers. It's important to discuss this with your yard service.

To keep your turf resilient, follow best cultural practices: mow at the correct height, only water as needed, and don't over fertilize (<http://tinyurl.com/uesyxdd8>). At this time of year, mowing is not a once-a-week task and watering should be done as needed. (If your home address has an odd number, or has no address, you may water on Saturdays. If your home has an even numbered address, you may water on Sundays.) Note that a brown winter lawn is not necessarily a dead lawn. Grasses can go dormant like many other plants, and green up in spring with warmer weather.

Also recently, the USDA has updated the zones that help us determine what perennials and woody plants can be grown in our area (<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/>). Most of Duval County immediately along the St. Johns River and eastward has been reassigned to Zone 9b, moving us up a

category from 9a. This reflects changing temperature patterns. Historically our average last frost date has been around March 16, but will probably be a little earlier on average. Don't be lulled into thinking your garden is safe from late frosts. If you make an early start, always be prepared to protect spring crops and tender seedlings according to the weather forecast. Check out this section of the USDA website for further guidance: <http://tinyurl.com/bddhy8y3>.

If you have questions and problems, contact our Extension Service for advice. Master Gardener Volunteers are available from Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. and 12:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m., at (904) 255-7450. Alternatively, you can send emails, including photos, to duvalmastergardener@gmail.com. This is especially helpful if you are dealing with something like an insect or leaf problem.

Extension newsletters include: A New Leaf - Yard and Garden (<http://tinyurl.com/55czsu7e>) and The Neighborhood Gardener (<http://tinyurl.com/m6svfn>). Throughout the year Extension specialists offer classes both online and in person at 1010 North McDuff, and around town at various venues. There are two major events in spring: A Day of Gardening on Feb. 24 and The Master Gardener Volunteer plant sale on March 29 and 30. All programs will be announced in A New Leaf.

Gardening helps me understand where I fit in the natural world, discover what other creatures share my space, and how I can help, or hinder, them as they go about their lives. Small organisms that inhabit the soil we cultivate and the birds and other animals that visit from the dwindling natural areas dotted around town, increasingly need help from gardeners. So it is my "Hope" that more people discover what is going on around them in their yards and gardens, and learn how to make a difference.

The Pantry Raiders

Give this healthy dinner a Mexican twist

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

All kinds of resolutions are made at the start of a new year, and most of them involve some sort of healthy habit. Losing weight and eating better often top the list of health initiatives. "Health food" may evoke images of lots of leafy greens and bland grains, but diners can rest assured there are plenty of tasty options, even beef. Historically beef may not be seen as healthy fare, but when enjoyed in moderation, beef can be part of a healthy eating/weight loss plan. This recipe for "Tender Salsa Beef" can replace Taco Tuesday on your weekly menu. For a kid-friendly option, be sure to use mild salsa. Enjoy, courtesy of "Taste of Home Healthy Cooking Cookbook" (RDA Enthusiast Brands, LLC) by the Taste of Home Kitchen.

Tender Salsa Beef

Serves 8

- 1 ½ pounds beef stew meat, cut into ¾-inch cubes
- 2 cups salsa
- 1 tbsp. brown sugar
- 1 tbsp. reduced-sodium soy sauce
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 4 cups hot cooked brown rice

In a 3-quart slow cooker, combine the beef, salsa, brown sugar, soy sauce, and garlic. Cover and cook on low for 8 to 10 hours or until meat is tender. Using a slotted spoon, serve beef with rice.

Per serving: 259 cal., 7 g fat, 53 mg. cholesterol, 356 mg. sodium, 28 g carbs, 2 g fiber.



Photo courtesy MetroCreative
Tender Salsa Beef

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Travel

I thought I was going to Bristol, Tennessee

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewsline.com

I thought I was going to Bristol, Tennessee, but upon arrival, I realized the city lies within two states. The state borders of Tennessee and Virginia run down the middle of State Street. You can stand with one foot in the Volunteer State and the other in the Old Dominion. Rather fun! I also found the famous lighted Bristol Sign across from the railroad station proclaiming Bristol “A Good Place To Live.” The sign has been in place since 1915.

Those who watched Ken Burn’s documentary “Country Music” will be drawn to Bristol to learn more about the official Birthplace of Country Music. Back in 1927, a Victor Talking Machine music producer went to Bristol to record artists performing their songs. These recordings, known as the Bristol Sessions, were not recorded on multiple

tracks with numerous takes but captured in real-time into one microphone. The Birthplace of Country Music Museum, a Smithsonian affiliate, tells the story of these famous and groundbreaking “Sessions.” A superb introductory film explains how these recordings brought country music into mainstream households and catapulted the Carter Family and Jimmie Rodgers to fame. The attraction showcases interactive exhibits, a working radio station, fascinating memorabilia, theater experiences, and video clips. Plan to spend half a day having fun with the hands-on displays and take a turn recording a song in a sound room.

The city keeps its connection to country music, mountain music, old-time, bluegrass, gospel, and blues with an annual music reunion every September. The Bristol Rhythm and Roots Music Festival attracts thousands who come to

listen to performances on 10 different stages around town. For three days, the streets are closed to traffic, and people stroll along enjoying top artists.

If you are a NASCAR fan, you will know of another crowd-pleaser, the Bristol Motor Speedway. The popular

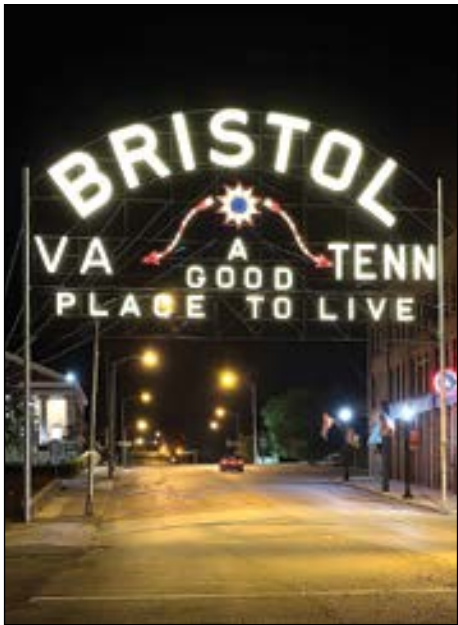
race track hosts two major races each year, plus multiple events at the Bristol Dragway, one of NHRA’s best venues.

For a change of pace, head to Bristol Caverns and take an invigorating underground tour of sublime rock formations. An underground river carved the beautiful caverns some 200 million years ago. Be sure to wear non-slippery shoes and plan on constant year-round temperatures between 50 and 60 degrees F.

I stayed at the Hotel Bristol, far above what I expected, and one of the most excellent hotels ever. The place makes ideal overnight lodging for a road trip. The former Reynolds building was turned into a boutique hotel. They kept the Roman arched entryway and provide oversized rooms, luxury bathrooms, and dreamy beds. The hotel restaurant surpasses your needs, and the rooftop bar naturally serves barrel-aged Tennessee whiskeys.

While in Bristol, consider lunch at the Burger Bar, a classic 1942 diner with some original décor. Another lunchtime choice is Bloom, a woman-owned business that’s become a favorite downtown eatery.

For dinner, don’t miss Union 41, a converted bus station offering culinary delights from the award-winning Chef T of the Food Network. Again, the quality and presentation of my meal blew me away, and, of course, there was live country music.



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
The famous Bristol Sign.

Bristol is part of The Crooked Road, a 300-mile trail dedicated to musical heritage. The trail winds through 19 counties, four cities, and more than 50 towns. It includes nine major venues and more than 60 affiliated venues and festivals. Carrie Beck, director of the trail, says, “The venues and musicians of the region are truly unique and bring musical traditions to the visitors and their communities. It’s authenticity at its best.”

Both Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia have a lot to offer travelers. ExploreBristol.com.

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



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