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January 13 & January 20

Virtual Meeting 10 am, 11 am | Self-guided school tour 1 pm

Details on the website rcsasoutheast.org

Briefs

Tickets on sale for historic 50th anniversary of THE PLAYERS Championship
In celebration of the 50-year anniversary of THE PLAYERS Championship, tournament officials have announced that tickets are on sale for THE PLAYERS 2024.

While fiercely competitive golf remains the centerpiece of the tournament, THE PLAYERS consistently offers an unrivaled lineup of entertainment options for fans, including its annual Military Appreciation Day which will take place on Tuesday, March 12, and feature a concert on the course's famed 17th hole island green.

THE PLAYERS 2024 will take place on March 12 – 17 and fans are encouraged to purchase tickets early to guarantee the lowest price; tickets can

be purchased at [THEPLAYERS.com/tickets](https://www.theplayers.com/tickets). Fans can purchase up to six tickets, per day, per account. Tickets are dynamically priced and start as low as \$30 plus taxes and fees.

New this year is the Intracoastal Club, which will provide fans with a new destination to relax and refuel while enjoying the tournament. The venue, located between Holes No. 12 and No. 13, offers a blend of sophistication and sport with abundant TVs, bar-style seating and the ability to purchase upscale food and beverage, including beer, wine and signature cocktails. Military tickets will launch in early 2024 and will be available while supplies last. Additional military appreciation offerings for THE PLAYERS 2024 include access to the Patriots' Outpost, a lounge dedicated to service members and their families.

Parking passes are not included in any ticket purchases. A separate parking pass is required each day of tournament week and must be purchased online in advance via [THEPLAYERS.com/parking](https://www.theplayers.com/parking).

Visit www.theplayers.com/tickets/faq for more information.

NE Florida Sisters in Crime to learn about cold case resolution
The Northeast Florida Sisters in Crime group will meet on Jan. 6 from 10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at the Ponte

Vedra Beach Library. Featured speaker Jason Futch will discuss cold case resolution in North Florida.

Futch has been intrigued since childhood with true crime. His first exposure to realities of the unknown came when he was a criminal justice student at Florida Gateway College. When he heard about an unidentified torso found in 1994, he was able to uncover details never released to the public. His postings on Websleuths, coupled with a poster from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, enabled the victim's family to finally find closure. The victim was identified and his killer arrested in 2017.

Futch established first a podcast called "True Cold Case Files," then a Facebook page for Suwannee Valley Unsolved, and then a database for local unsolved homicide and missing persons cases in the Suwannee Valley. SVU is now a non-profit charity which has contributed to cold case resolution through an interactive map, road signs and relationships with law enforcement and forensics personnel.

Bring your coffee and bring a friend. The group welcomes misters and sisters to learn more about writing, promoting, and enjoying crime fiction. Contact floridasistersincrime@gmail.com for more information.

2024 FOL Speaker Series returns with Florida Times-Union sports columnist Gene Frenette

The FOL Speaker Series returns with a wide-ranging and impressive lineup of speakers. The series kicks off on Tuesday, Jan. 23 at 6:30 p.m. with Florida Times-Union sports columnist Gene Frenette. In his talk, Frenette will provide insights to the Jacksonville Jaguars season and share stories of the athletes and sports he's covered.

Serving as a columnist since 1988, Frenette has covered everything from college football to the Summer Olympics, along with several Super Bowls and World Series games. Married for 32 years to his wife Dot, they have four children ranging in age from 22 to 36. They reside in Ponte Vedra Beach.

Future speakers include New York Times bestselling author Lisa Black, Timothy J. Corrigan, the Chief Judge for the Middle District of Florida, Jacksonville Mayor Donna Deegan, former Duval County Sheriff Nat Glover, and local historian, entrepreneur, and storyteller Gary Sass.

Each of the programs is free and open to the public, made possible by the Friends of the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Each of the Speaker programs begins at 6:30 p.m. in the library's FOL Community Room. Doors will open at 6 p.m.

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Spectators Guide

Championship



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BFF

Best Furry Friend of the month

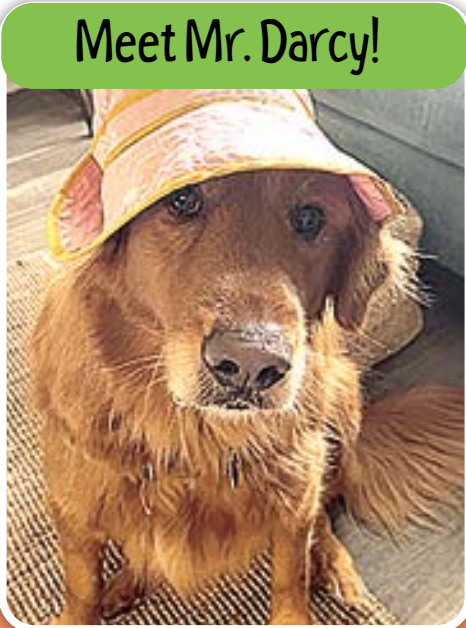
Breed:
Golden Retriever

Favorite Activity:
eating ice cream

Favorite Treat:
spa day

Favorite Friend:
my mommy

How did your BFF get his name?
Mommy is English and he's the handsomest boy!



Meet Mr. Darcy!

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

When you advertise, you encourage repeat business, create traffic, and attract new customers!

Don't miss our February issue featuring our Love and Marriage section!
Deadline 1/19/24

Call Linda Gay today to reserve your space!
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Happy New Year

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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 Publix and the roundabout in Palm Valley.

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Answers
Puzzles
PG 10

CRYPTO FUN

Determine the code to reveal the answer!

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

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World Golf Village
180 Capulet Drive #5 (At Murabella)
904.209.5754
wbu.com/staugustine

January

Community Calendar

What's Happening in Ponte Vedra

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

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

3rd: Coastal Friends will host representatives from the Council on Aging of St. Johns County on Jan. 3 at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Pkwy. in Ponte Vedra Beach from 11 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Executive Director Becky Yanni and Development Manager Amy Robinson, will speak about the Council on Aging's mission and the many programs and services they have been offering since 1973. The cost is \$25 and reservations must be made by contacting bartshar@comcast.net as soon as possible.

4th: Bingo will be held at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, on Thursdays from 1 p.m. – 2 p.m. for four weeks beginning Thursday, Jan. 4. Contact Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for more information and to register.

5th: The GTM Research Reserve will hold a new volunteer orientation on Jan. 5 from 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. Learn about volunteer rules and responsibility as well next steps to volunteering. Complete the volunteer application online (www.gtmnerr.org) before attending. Contact Abigail Kuhn at Abigail.Kuhn@FloridaDEP.gov to assure that your application was received.

6th: NE Florida Sisters in Crime will meet on Jan. 6 from 10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Library.

Featured speaker Jason Futch will discuss cold case resolution in North Florida. Contact floridasistersincrime@gmail.com for more information.

6th: Ponte Vedra Writers Group welcomes award winning author Kim Bradley, who will discuss how to build a short story with what we already have in our writer's cupboard — memories that haunt us, and evocative settings we know and love, at its meeting on Saturday, Jan. 6 at 2 p.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. It is free and open to the public. Visit www.floridawriters.org for more information.

6th: Wellness events at Sawgrass Village will be held every Saturday in January from 10 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Hosted by Mind Body Social, all events are free and open to the community. Events include wellness classes such as yoga and barre, all held on the lawn in front of ABC Liquors. Visit <https://mbs.events/sv/> for more information and to register.

8th: The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable will meet on Monday, Jan. 8 at 2 p.m. at St. Augustine Waterworks building, 184 San Marco Ave. in St. Augustine. The featured speaker will be St. Johns County Commissioner Roy Alaimo. Email info@sjcroundtable.org to register for the meeting or visit www.sjcroundtable.org for more information.

9th: Vicar's Landing monthly Boutique Sale will be held Tuesday, Jan. 9 from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. at 1000 Vicar's Landing Way. The sale includes antiques, household items, home furnishings, framed art, as well as designer and costume jewelry. Storage containers of all sizes will be a featured item for January's sale. The public is welcome. Checks or cash only please. The Vicar's Employee Scholarship Fund receives the proceeds. Call Mary Lane Johnson at (904) 612-9277 or Beverly Webb at (904) 315-2610 for more information.

9th: Purely Social Happy Hour hosted by Ponte Vedra Woman's Club will be held on Jan. 9 at 5:30 p.m. at Refinery Jax Beach, 821 1st Street North in Jax Beach. Attendees will order off of the menu for their drinks and food. Visit www.pontevedrawomansclub.com for more

information.

10th: Teen Trivia Night will be held at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library from 5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. on Jan. 10. Join the library staff for fun, snacks, and prizes for first, second and third place teams. This program is for students in grades six through 12. RSVP is not required. Visit sjcpls.org/branches/ponte-vedra-beach-branch/ for more information.

12th: Food Truck Friday will be held on Jan. 12 and Jan. 26 from 5:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. This event is open to the public.

14th: Know Your Volunteers at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center on Tuesday, Jan. 30 from 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. Join the staff for refreshments and a fun presentation highlighting the center's wonderful volunteers. Contact Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for more information.

16th: Friends of the Ponte Vedra Beach Library presents Chamber Duo Rhonda Casasano on flute and Rose Shlyam Grace on piano at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library on Tuesday, Jan. 16. Doors open at 6 p.m. and the concert begins at 6:30 p.m. Casasano has been a member of the Jacksonville Symphony since 1979, and formerly the adjunct professor of flute at the University of North Florida. Grace, a Russian-born pianist, has concertized throughout the United States as a soloist, chamber musician and a collaborative artist.

16th: Adult Coloring Club will meet at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library on Jan. 16 from 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. No RSVP is required; bring a snack or drink for yourself or to share. Visit sjcpls.org/branches/ponte-vedra-beach-branch/ for more information.

17th: Ponte Vedra Woman's Club will host its general meeting on Jan. 17 at 6 p.m. at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Pkwy. Visit www.pontevedrawomansclub.com/event-registrations.php to register to attend.

18th: St. Johns County Republican Party District 4 meeting will be held on Jan. 18 at 6:15 p.m. at Palm Valley Community Center, 148 Canal Blvd.

Visit stjohns.gop for more information.

19th: Caregivers Of Adults Conversation Circle will be held at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library on Jan. 19 from 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. This St. Johns Reads program for caregivers features Paulette Kozlowski, Adult Day Health Care and Community Care-Giving Manager for St. Johns County Council On Aging (COA). She will share valuable resources that will help your adult loved ones while also helping yourself. Register to receive a reminder for the event. Registration is not required, but space is limited; visit sjcpls.org or call (904) 827-6950 for more information.

20th: The Nocatee Farmers Market: Kick Off to the New Year will be held on Saturday, Jan. 20 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. The Farmers Market is open to the public.

22nd: Ponte Vedra Democratic Club will hold its monthly meeting on Monday, Jan. 22, at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library 101 Library Road. Chat and Chew begins at 5:30 p.m. before the meeting begins at 6 p.m. Featured speaker is Donna Deegan, Mayor of the City of Jacksonville. Email PVDemClub@gmail.com for more information.

25th: Free Tech Help with David will be held on Thursday, Jan. 25 from 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Drop in for tech assistance with your Android, Apple, and Reader devices; no RSVPs required. Visit sjcpls.org/branches/ponte-vedra-beach-branch/ for more information.


26th: The Savvy Job Hunters Ministry Workshop will host a free Zoom workshop, "Do What You Are: Connecting Personality types to Careers Using MBTI," presented by Margaret MacNaughton, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) Qualified Practitioner, on Jan. 26 from 10:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. Email pottesen66@gmail.com to register.


30th: Book Discussion with Sara Nisha Adams, St. Johns Reads featured author, at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library on Jan. 30 from 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. Space is limited, register to reserve a seat by visiting sjcpls.org or calling (904) 827-6950.

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

Q: Can you go over the information to apply for Programs of Interest for next school year?

A: Eligible students may apply to a Program of Interest during the application window which opens Jan. 4, 2024, and closes Jan. 31, 2024 at 5 p.m. Programs of Interest include High School Career Academies, JROTC, AICE/IB programs, Early College Program, Early Career Program, the St. Johns County Center for the Arts at St. Augustine High School, and the St. Johns County Center for the Arts at Murray Middle School. Be sure to visit <https://cte.stjohns.k12.fl.us/apply> for all the details about how to apply.

Q: Does District 4 have any Sunshine State Scholars this year?

A: Yes. Daniel Benton from Beachside High School and Arianna Rahmathulla from Ponte Vedra High School have been selected as the 2023 – 2024 St. Johns County School District Sunshine State Scholars. Abhinav Gottipati from Nease High School has been selected as the 2023 – 2024 SJCS District Sunshine State Scholar Alternate. We will recognize them, plus the representatives from all of our high schools, at our January School Board meeting. Sunshine State Scholars are high school juniors with a weighted GPA of 3.9 or higher who are planning to pursue a career in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) related field.

Q: Do you have any other accomplishments to recognize?

A: The Mayo Clinic SPARK program scholars recently completed their projects and were recognized at a ceremony on Dec. 5. This incredible program allows students to work alongside esteemed researchers at Mayo to solve real world problems. From Ponte Vedra High School, participants were Mira Bhutani, Diana Chirila, Carter Maggiano, and Emi Varghese. Jay Dalvi from Beachside High School and Abhinav Gottipati, Shreya Kalarikkal and Shubhangi Maitra from Nease High School were participants.

Also, the regional Incubate Debate tournament was held in November at The Bolles School. Rodrigo Delon Ruiz of Nease High School secured the championship title from among the 100 students from St. Johns, Flagler, Putnam, Clay, Duval, Alachua, and other counties who participated. They were judged by professors from Flagler College, University of North Florida, and Edward Waters College as well as attorneys from all over Northeast Florida and members of local government. On Jan. 13, 2024 another regional Incubate Debate is scheduled and several of our St. Johns County School Board members will serve as judges.

Finally, the winner of the St. Johns County Spelling Bee was Sree Vidya Siliveri, a seventh grader from Landrum Middle School. She spelled “bittern”

correctly and will go on to the regional Spelling Bee.

Q: Do you have anything else to share with District 4?



A: The 11th annual Character Counts! 6K/3K Run/Walk will be held on Saturday, Feb. 3 at 9 a.m. The run/walk will begin and end at Palencia Elemen-

tary School, located at 355 Palencia Village Drive. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/52nb22se> for more information and to register.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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

DEMOLITION SALE - 422 PONTE VEDRA BOULEVARD
Saturday, January 13th & Sunday, January 14th
10:00am-4:00pm



Fully Renovated Beach Home 2015: All purchased items must be disassembled and removed by Sunday, January 14th.

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Cabinetry/Banquette - 99x42
Fantasy Brown Marble Island
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Delores, Resident at Westminster St. Augustine

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with St. Johns County Property Appraiser
Eddie Creamer

Q: Can you give us the basic information for homestead exemption in Florida?

A: Between now and March 1, it is time for qualifying homeowners to file for homestead exemption. To qualify, you must have owned the property as of Jan. 1, 2024 and occupied it as your primary residence. Evidence of this is your Florida driver's license with that address. You may not claim or be eligible to claim a homeowner's tax exemption in Florida or any other state.

Q: Why is it important to apply for homestead exemption?

A: It's important because it reduces your property's taxable value by \$50,000 — which can result in a savings of approximately \$650 for the average homeowner in St. Johns County. It also sets the base for the 3 percent "Save our Homes" cap, which limits the assessed value of your home from rising more than 3 percent per year. For the past couple years, we have seen property value increases that are higher than this cap.

Q: How should a homeowner file for homestead exemption?

A: Homeowners can file in person in our office or online at www.sjcpa.gov. Presently, about 65 percent of homeowners are filing online, com-

pared to about 10 percent just four years ago.

Q: Are there other exemptions?

A: There are many different and specific exemptions designed to provide tax relief to certain homeowners. Examples include exemptions for widow/widowers, totally and permanently disabled veterans or first responders, those who are blind or have other permanent disability, deployed service members, surviving spouses of first responders, and low income seniors. Please call our office for more information if you think any of these might apply to you.

Q: What is the most important thing to remember?

A: It is mandatory that you apply for any exemption by March 1. Even if you qualify, if you don't apply for it — we can't grant the exemption. Florida Statute is clear that the homeowner must apply.

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

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



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

Q. As you reflect on the past year, what are some highlights from the clerk’s office you can share?

A. As we close out the year, I would like to take a moment to share some of the many accomplishments our office achieved in 2023. Our team of deputy clerks work hard to fulfill our mission while providing world-class customer service to residents and our judicial and county partners. Some quick statistics to share: Through December 2023, our office issued 2,236 marriage licenses, performed 1,673 marriage ceremonies, processed over 13,000 passport applications, and registered approximately 14,000 residents to receive property fraud alerts. The Criminal Department processed 2,600 warrants and created 8,195 cases. Jury Coordinators issued 7,105 jury summonses with a roughly 85 percent response rate. Our comptroller’s office processed more than 52,100 invoices. And this is just a glimpse of our efforts as our office performs more than 1,000 different duties and functions.

Q. What has the clerk’s office done over the past year to ensure transparency and accountability?

A. We have invested heavily in our internal auditor function. In 2023, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) received a funding increase from the county, added four additional full-time employees, and obtained a comprehensive case management system. The

OIG also entered into an agreement with the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation to pursue accreditation. This year the OIG intake unit received 30 fraud, waste, and abuse complaints and closed 26 of them, plus finalized two audits and three audit follow-ups. We are excited about the great team being built and look forward to them continuing to promote transparency and accountability in 2024.

Q. What are your plans for the coming year?

A. We will continue to seek ways to protect taxpayer dollars and lower the barriers and burdens for residents to access our services in 2024. You are my and our boss, and it is very important to me that your time is not wasted due to inefficient processes. We have some great initiatives being rolled out in 2024 that will lower the time burden required to get things done at our office.

Q. How do people get in touch with 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 State Attorney, 7th Judicial Circuit, R.J. Larizza

Q: Does your office work with the area school districts for educational resources for students?

A: I have just finished meeting individually with all of the superintendents of schools in our district (the 7th Judicial Circuit), including St. Johns County Superintendent Tim Forson and School Board Chair Beverly Slough, about a new initiative to educate students and parents, prevent crime, and empower students to learn about what we do at the State Attorney’s Office for possible careers.

Q: With regards to education, what ideas do you have?

A: I’d like to make sure students understand the consequences of bad judgment and crime, to include threats of violence, bomb threats, hoaxes, gun violence, dating violence, and online bullying. We want students to know that if they engage in any of these activities, there’s a strong chance they will be tried as an adult — with adult consequences. As far as some of the threats, kids who do them often think, “I was just kidding,” but it is not a joke and we do charge students. We’re hopeful to get some kids into the courtroom to see real

time sentencing proceedings as well as utilize video from court proceedings in the school curriculum. Employees from my office can also come and speak at PTO meetings to parents. All of this is in an effort to try to prevent kids from making bad decisions and hopefully prevent crime.

Q: From a more positive aspect, what ideas do you have to empower students on a career path?

A: Our office encompasses many different professions, from paralegals to law enforcement to attorneys. I’d like to set up externships for students interested in any of these career paths. We could have students who are interested in the law, for instance, attend trials to see what it’s like in the courtroom.

Q: What will happen next?

A: The next step is for a joint meeting with all of the school district superintendents and representatives and me. At that time, we can come up with a collaborative and comprehensive approach, as well as a name for the initiative. I think this is very timely and I’m very excited to see this through.



with St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes

Q: Are there any important dates St. Johns County voters should know for the Presidential Preference Primary Election?

A: Yes. The Presidential Preference Primary Election is on Tuesday, March 19, 2024. The deadline to register to vote or change your party affiliation is Feb. 20, 2024. Early voting will be conducted Saturday, March 9 through Saturday, March 16, which includes two Saturdays and one Sunday.

Q: Who will be eligible to vote in the Presidential Preference Primary Election (PPP)?

A: Only registered Republican voters will be eligible to vote in the PPP. The Democratic party only submitted one candidate to the Secretary of State, and therefore, Democratic voters will not be participating in the PPP. Due to Florida’s closed primary laws, voters who are registered with no party affiliation (NPA) or a minor political party are not eligible to vote in the Republican Primary.

Q: What candidates will be on my Presidential Preference Primary Election ballot?

A: The Republican presidential candidate list (in alphabetical order by last name) is Ryan L. Binkley, Chris Christie, Ron DeSantis, Nikki R. Haley, Asa Hutchinson, Vivek Ramaswamy, Donald J. Trump.

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. is the only Democratic candidate for president, and therefore, there will not be a Democratic ballot in the PPP.

Q: I would like to vote-by-mail. When is the deadline to request a ballot to be

mailed?

A: The last day to request a vote-by-mail ballot to be mailed is March 7, 2024. Remember, due to state law changes, vote-by-mail requests expire after each general election. Even if you have voted by mail in past elections, you still need to make a new request for 2024.

Q: What should I be doing to prepare for the Presidential Preference Primary Election?

A: Check your voter status on our website, www.votesjc.gov and make sure that you are registered and that your voter information is current, including your address. Make a voting plan: In St. Johns County, there’s three ways to vote. Will you be voting on Election Day, early, or voting by mail?

Lastly, know where to go for trusted election information. There is a lot of misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation that gets shared around election time, and your Supervisor of Elections is the trusted source of information for Florida elections. Visit our website at www.votesjc.gov, or call the Elections Office with any questions you may have. For updates, subscribe to my monthly newsletter and follow the St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Office on Facebook, X, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

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

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

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Right Whales cont. from pg. 1

keeping binoculars on the water. Weather and sea conditions, wildlife activity and other unusual sightings such as sunfish, humpbacks, sharks, gofer tortoises and various shorebirds are all documented.

Jacomo said she felt a pull to volunteer and, after attending one meeting at Marineland’s Whitney Laboratory, she knew she had found her purpose. Shea L. got involved after responding to a social media post by Jacomo and was driven by a sense of social and environmental responsibility.

“The Atlantic Right Whale is one of the most critically endangered whales on the planet. To just be a part of that to bring back their numbers as well as be out on the beach, it is the perfect

combination,” said Shea L. “We live in Florida. At our doorstep is an amazing ecosystem, and it is our job to take care of it.”

Jacomo and Shea L. said the experience is very personal, and they often know the Right Whales by name and feel the loss of any Right Whale deeply. Vessel strikes and fishing line/ trap entanglements tend to be the biggest obstacles for Right Whales on their journey. Progress, albeit slow, said Shea L., is being made to help prevent these injuries and to raise more awareness.

[Author’s note: If you see a right whale, call 888-97-WHALE. If you are interested in volunteering, call Kim at (703) 795-6122 or Shea at (618) 978-7841.]



with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

Q: Can you give some background on your agency’s Property Crimes Unit?

A: They are truly the unsung heroes of our organization. This unit currently has one working sergeant, two working corporals and seven detectives. With the new budget, we plan to add two additional detectives and a sergeant with the goal of making two full units, one serving the north part of the county and one for the south. Two of these detectives are subject matter experts in financial crimes. In addition to felony and misdemeanor theft, this unit works cases in agriculture, arson, burglary (both residential and commercial), criminal mischief (vandalism), crimes against the elderly, counterfeiting, racketeering, credit card crimes, impersonation, vehicle theft, and especially right now, retail theft. We’ve seen a 70 percent increase in retail theft, mostly due to the increase our county has seen in retail establishments.

Q: Do you have any statistics to share?

A: In 2021, 2,792 total property crimes were reported with the top three areas being some type of theft, fraud, and burglary. In 2022, we saw an 18 percent increase in total property crimes to 3,305 reported. The top three categories remained the same. So far in 2023, total property crimes are 3,267, but the top three categories have changed to now include retail theft (under \$750) as the third highest category. This year, of the total property crimes reported, 464 were assigned to a detective for follow up; 265 cases are still active as of this date, and 60 cases were cleared by arrest.

Q:What else do the Property Crimes Unit detectives work on?

A: In addition to working active cases, the detectives take on lots of proactive activities, including following up with unlicensed contractors, working on mail fraud, and working with loss prevention specialists in specific retail stores.

Q: What are some of the big cases that this unit has solved?

A: There are a number of them including the extortion and threat to kill a prominent business owner, three major RICO cases involving contractor frauds with hundreds of victims, and the arrest of a major ring of South American burglary suspects who had been operating all over the US — but we caught them here. We also arrested two suspects in a massive mail theft ring and recovered \$242,000 of the \$382,000 lost in a romance scam that we were able to return to the victim.

Q: Do you have any reminders for our readers?

A: Don’t hesitate to call us if you see something suspicious. If you see something, say something.

Also, remember to secure your valuables and lock your doors. Remove your firearms from your vehicles and lock your car doors at night.

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

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

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Rotary Club donates exercise equipment stations in Nocatee

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

The Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra co-operated with Nocatee leaders to fund additions to the area’s Greenway Path. Workers recently installed five new exercise stations along the Greenway path around Nocatee’s Community Park.

The stations are a coordinated gift between the Ponte Vedra Rotary Foundation of the Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra and Nocatee’s Tolomato Community Development District (CDD). The Ponte Vedra Rotary Foundation donated \$5,800 to buy the equipment and the CDD installed it at strategic locations along the wooded pathway.

“These exercise stations provide an exciting new amenity for the Nocatee community,” says Josh Hull, president of the Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra. “At Rotary, one of our service areas is to carry out projects that enhance economic and community development. We’re proud to provide our Nocatee neighbors with a diverse, durable, and safe exercise trail



Photos courtesy Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra

experience.” The Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra meets every other Tuesday morning at the Treylor Park restaurant in Nocatee. Visit www.pontevedrarotary.org or email pontevedrarotary@gmail.com for more information, including how to join.





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Ocean Palms shines bright with stellar staff

By Lisa Farese
mail@floridanewsline.com

The staff at Ocean Palms Elementary School recognized their standout team members by naming their Teacher of the Year, Jennifer Smith; Rookie of the Year, Kali Wiley; and School-Related Employee of the Year, Michelle Cardona. Additionally, the school’s principal, Tiffany Cantwell, was named Outstanding School Principal of the Year by the St. Johns County School District.

Smith works as an ESE support instructor and has been a part of the Ocean Palms team since 2018. Meanwhile, Wiley is a fourth-grade math and science teacher who has been at the school since 2022. Finally, Cardona works as a paraprofessional in the pre-k department and has been on staff at Ocean Palms since 2021. Each was chosen from among their peers as stars in their field, and it comes as no surprise that the leadership of the school was also recognized at the district level.

Cantwell has served as principal of Ocean Palms since 2018. Formerly, she served as the assistant principal of The Webster School and was



Photos courtesy Lisa Farese
Ocean Palms Elementary School principal, Tiffany Cantwell, was named Outstanding School Principal of the Year by the district.

recognized there as the Outstanding Assistant Principal of the district. She has worked in the school district since 2001, where she started as a fourth-grade teacher and later became a curriculum resource coordinator before moving into an assistant principal and later principal role. She is a true champion of the school’s motto, “Every day, everyone, and everything matters.”



Ocean Palms staff named their school's Teacher of the Year, Jennifer Smith; Rookie of the Year, Kali Wiley; and School-Related Employee of the Year, Michelle Cardona.

St Johns Reads cont. from pg. 1

the St. Johns County Public Library System’s annual “One Book, One Community” event focused on creating a shared conversation on a selected novel.

Taking place in January, St. Johns Reads 2024 features a month-long celebration with a variety of programs inspired by “The Reading List,” including special events with the author, Sara Nisha Adams, at each branch library from Jan. 30 to Feb. 2. The Ponte Vedra Beach Branch will host Adams on Tuesday, Jan. 30 at 11 a.m. Visit <https://sjcpl.org/event/meet-sara-nisha-adams-author/> to register for this special event.

St. Johns Reads is generously supported by the St. Johns County Public Library System’s Friends of the Library groups.

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Get to Know ...

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Tre Peterson

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Tre Peterson entered the Boy Scouts when he was in the first grade, joining along with a group of friends as a shy Cub Scout looking to have some family fun and go camping. He emerged as a confident 18-year old who is now an Eagle Scout with 138 merit badges collected — an honor achieved by very few. To be more specific, fewer than 550 scouts of the 100 million participants have completed this accomplishment. It takes 23 merit badges (which help scouts learn about sports, crafts, science, trades, business, and future careers) to become an Eagle Scout. Peterson moved from Cub Scouts into Boy Scouts at the end of the fifth grade and earned the Eagle rank at the end of the seventh grade. For his merit badge distinction, Peterson was honored at a Boy Scouts of America (BSA) Troop 277 Court of Honor Ceremony at Christ Church where he felt the emotion of the moment. “I was surprised by the speakers...They made it very personal. I was on the verge of tears,” said Peterson, who is a Ponte Vedra High School senior. Peterson, a Nocatee resident, said his den leader from the Cub Scouts, a best friend, and a parent who went on one of his scout hikes were among the



Photo submitted by Tom Peterson
Tre Peterson

the presence of the CEO of the North Florida Boy Scouts. “I was happy and very relieved to have that weight lifted. It was a lot of hours put in,” he said. Peterson, who especially enjoyed the metalwork, welding, and personal management merit badges, plans to attend Stetson University and pursue a degree in finance.

Q: What was one of your best memories from your time in the scouts?

A: Florida National High Adventure Sea Base that we did when I was 13 years old. Sea Base is in Key West, and we lived on a sailboat for a week. We cooked our own food, caught fish, snorkeled, and it was all boy-led crew by just a handful of us with two Dads and a captain. It was just a lot of fun and good bonding, plus we learned self-dependence.

Q: What was your Eagle Scout service project?

A: I am big into pets and animals, so I wanted to help out. I built six dog houses for the Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services. I raised more than \$1,000 to build the houses,

and then wrote a check to the organization for the leftover funds. Those dog houses are then given out to people in need via dispatchers.

Q: You have worked at the Palm Valley Golf Course and Practice Range since you were 16. Describe your job there.

A: I am a maintenance technician and picker. You know that person that drives the cart at Top Golf and you aim for that person and try to hit him? Yeah, I’m that guy at the Palm Valley Golf Course. I used to take golf lessons there when I was younger, and golfing is one of my passions and interests. I work 16 hours a week, and three days a week my shift begins at 6 a.m. I mow the greens before the sun comes up, edge grass, and prep the course for the day.

Q: Will you continue being involved with the scouts in some fashion while at Stetson?

A: I want to join the Bonners Program, which is a community-related initiative in which I would join a local troop as a mentor. I wanted to get involved in Deland with a troop and try to help them grow.

Q: Would you recommend the scouts to boys?

A: Yes. When you first start in Cub Scouts, it is fun and very family oriented. And then as you mature and grow, you get to learn to be more independent. That’s where the “scout led” aspect comes into play. In Boy Scouts, the adults are really only there to supervise and make sure no one gets hurt. As you grow and learn all these skills, you become independent. Ultimately, it becomes about learning life skills.

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

January facts cont. on pg. 10

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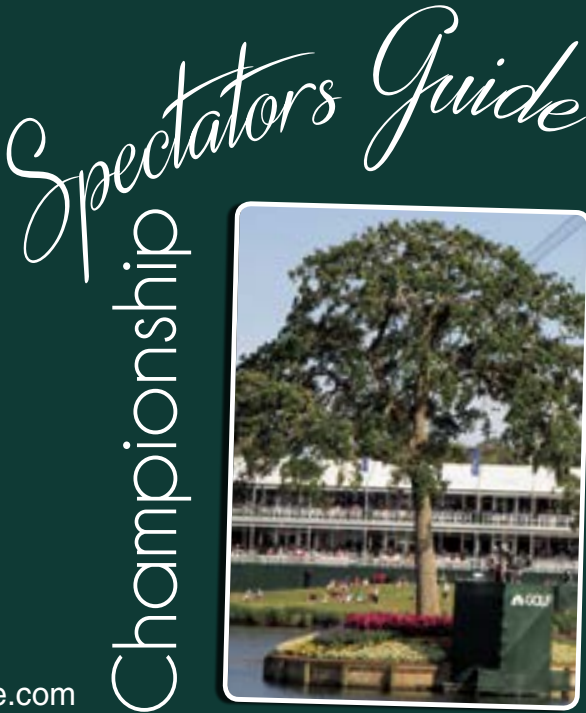
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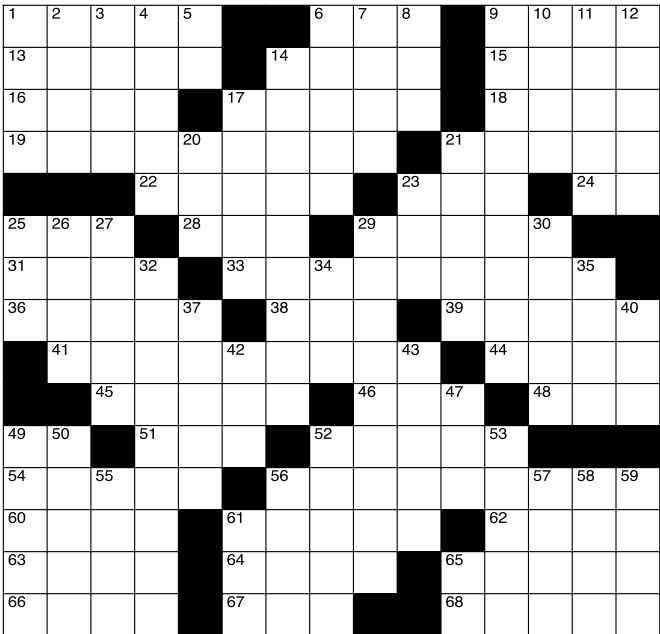
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Puzzles

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

NEW YEAR’S WORD SEARCH

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

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ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

CRYPTO FUN

📅 ⌚ 🕒 🎊 🎆 🎇 🎈

Determine the code to reveal the answer!

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

January facts cont. from pg. 9

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.

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PopHistory

By Scott A. Grant
mail@floridanewsline.com

Running for the White House from prison

In the late 1800s carrying over in the next century, the Socialist Party in the United States reached the apex of its popularity. It was a time of pronounced wealth disparity and atrocious conditions for workers. Robber barons like Rockefeller and Carnegie amassed immense fortunes. At the same time, many poor women and children labored 10-hour days, six days a week for mere pennies.

Angered by these seeming inequities, downtrodden Americans embraced a variety of leftist movements like labor unions, anarchism, and socialism. The pre-eminent socialist of the time, Eugene V. Debs of Indiana, would run for President five times, the fifth and final time from the confines of a federal prison in Atlanta.

Debs became famous as a union organizer. He co-founded the International Workers of the World (IWW) and the American Railway Union (ARU). In his role at ARU, Debs was seen

as a leader of the debilitating Pullman Strike of 1894. When President Grover Cleveland sent troops to break that strike, Debs was charged and convicted of contempt of court and sentenced to six months in prison.

His jailing just made him more popular with the disgruntled working class and led directly to his first run for President in 1900. Debs ran as the standard bearer for the Social Democratic Party of America. He received 0.6 percent of the vote. He ran again in 1904 and 1908 receiving about three percent of the vote in each of those elections.

In the election of 1912, the Socialist ticket carried six percent of the vote nationally. This is still the most successful performance by a Socialist candidate in American history. Debs found himself running against three Presidents: former President Teddy Roosevelt, current President William Howard Taft, and soon to be future

President Woodrow Wilson.

Despite this formidable opposition, Debs did well nationally and even better in some states. In Florida, he finished second to Wilson, ahead of both Roosevelt and Taft with more than nine percent to the total vote. Taft and Roosevelt split the tiny Republican minority and Debs took advantage of rising pro-socialist sentiment in the poorer sections of the state. In St. Johns County, he received more than 10 percent of the vote.

Eugene Debs sat out the 1916 election, but became a vocal opponent of America's involvement in World War I. Following a speech in Canton, Ohio in 1918, he was arrested and convicted of sedition under the Espionage Act of 1917. Debs lost his citizenship and was sentenced to 10 years in the federal penitentiary in Atlanta.

Debs ran for a fifth and final time

for President in 1920 from his prison cell. Warren G. Harding ran a "Front Porch Campaign." Neither man campaigned actively. Harding ran on a campaign slogan of "America First," and promised a "return to normalcy." Debs ran as convict No. 9653. Democrat James M. Cox and his running mate Franklin D. Roosevelt won most of the south. Harding took the rest.

This was the first election where women were allowed to vote. With an expanded electorate, Debs polled a record 914,000 votes. No Socialist candidate before or since has gotten as many votes. President Harding commuted Debs' sentence and freed him on Christmas Day 1921. His US citizenship was returned posthumously in 1976.

Scott A. Grant is a local historian and author who enjoys telling the forgotten stories of our past. He welcomes your comments at scottg@standfastic.com



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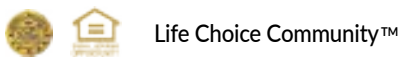


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