

Ponte Vedra NewsLine

FEBRUARY 2024 Volume 11 Issue 2

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

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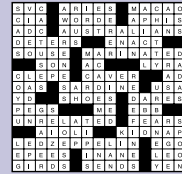
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Photo courtesy Lisa Farese

Landrum Middle School Spanish teacher Milka Rocha was awarded the Adult Volunteer of the Year Award.

Landrum teacher communicates community in all languages

By Lisa Farese
mail@floridanewsline.com

From morning greetings in Spanish as students breeze through her classroom doors, to cultural newsletters, clubs, and service projects, Milka Rocha, Landrum Middle School teacher for 16 years and this year's recipient of the Adult Volunteer of the Year Award, has taken foreign language at Landrum and added something special, something that can be appreciated in any language — community.

In addition to her teaching role, Rocha encourages her students, and those throughout the school, to give back and embrace community in

Landrum teacher cont. on pg. 9

Exploring the cat-human bond

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Lorri Reynolds would be the first to admit that she is a “glorified chauffeur” for her therapy cat Sooshi and that the American short-hair feline is a well-known celebrity. And that is just the way Reynolds, Pet Partners of Northeast Florida board chair, likes it.

“She is a big deal,” said Reynolds, who is a licensed instructor for Pet Partners to teach handlers how to be a part of a therapy team.

She has been volunteering with Pet Partners since 2017, and Sooshi is the first registered therapy cat for Pet Partners of Northeast Florida. Sooshi, she said, fills an important role by bringing comfort and joy to anyone she visits, often invited in by Hospice, businesses, schools, and other organizations.

Reynolds has been nominated for 2024 Pet Partners Pet of the Year for her support of Pet Partners and “for the amazing demonstration of the human-animal bond.” Sooshi, a rescue cat originally named Hope, is seven years old and got her name because she reminded Reynolds of the color of sushi with her white and brown patches. Reynolds sensed that Sooshi would be a perfect match for pet therapy, but she had to develop a trusting relationship first. To do this, Reynolds took Sooshi everywhere, essentially desensitizing the cat to attention and activity.

Their relationship is at the heart of a recent one-of-a-kind study focused on therapy cat teams and the benefits of time spent with cats. Reynolds, a former Ponte Vedra Beach resident who now lives in Green Cove Springs, participated in the study, and said it helps to break down the prejudices and stigma sometimes associated with cats.

“It also shows that you have to be really dedicated to that animal and to your relationship,” said Reynolds. “That’s



Photos courtesy Lorri Reynolds

Sooshi, a therapy cat lifting spirits wherever she goes.

what makes a really good therapy team.”

The study was conducted by Pet Partners and Cat Person and investigated the unique bond shared between people and their pet cats. Most importantly, the study, funded by Cat Person, highlighted the ways in which therapy cat teams impact communities through animal-assisted interventions (AAI) in a variety of settings. AAI is a goal-oriented and structured intervention that intentionally incorporates animals in health, education, and human service for the purpose of therapeutic gains and improved health and wellness.

Through a combination of survey responses and interviews, participants described the positive impact their cats had on their daily lives. They identified the traits that make their cat the right fit for therapy animal work as well as the measures they use to protect their cat’s welfare during therapy visits.

“Anecdotally, we’ve always known that

people share meaningful relationships with cats, reflected in the number of requests we receive from facilities wanting therapy cat visits. Now we have data to support this belief,” said Taylor Chastain Griffin, PhD, National Director of AAI Advancement at Pet Partners. “We are excited to have completed, to our knowledge, the most comprehensive study on cats as therapy animals and to share results that call for a greater appreciation of the cat-human bond.”

The information will be used to help recruit more cat therapy teams, to help people recognize that cats can be therapy animals and to offer more programs to communities everywhere, said Chastain. She added that the study was conducted over a four-month period with participants being very eager to share information about their cats.

“We teamed up with Pet Partners to put data behind what we know to be true: that cats are loving, intuitive

Cat-human bond cont. on pg. 8



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Living with Parkinson's Disease or Essential Tremor?

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Option 1

Date: Tuesday February 13, 2023 • 6:00pm

Location: Aloft Hotel, 4812 Deer Lake Drive West,
Jacksonville, FL 32246

Register to Attend in Person: <http://learndbs.com/1567>

Option 2

Date: Tuesday March 5, 2023 • 11:30am

Location: 351 Town Plaza Ave, Suite 205,
Ponte Vedra, FL 32081

Register to Attend: <http://learndbs.com/1566>

Hosted by: Elaine Keebaugh, PhD (c) 770-356-6410 | Speaker: Dr. Philip Tipton, MD, Mayo Clinic

Briefs

Chocolate And Beyond: A sweet way to support volunteers and teachers

The 31st annual Chocolate and Beyond event, a celebration of chocolate, desserts, and other delectable culinary treats, will be held on Saturday, Feb. 24 from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. at The Classic Car Museum of St. Augustine. Guests will sample tasty treats from some of the area’s finest restaurants and specialty shops, and tickets will include a tour of the museum. A silent auction and contests will also be part of this fun and exciting afternoon.

This event is hosted by TASK – Teacher’s Aid for Student Knowledge. Proceeds from Chocolate and Beyond are utilized to support RSVP of St. Johns County as they recruit, train, and recognize senior volunteers, as well as local teachers as they receive special project grants. Tickets can be purchased at <https://taskstjohns.ticketleap.com> and will also be available at the door.

St. Johns County announces polling places for 2024

The St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections has officially published the polling

place list for the 2024 election cycle. To accommodate growth in St. Johns County, the number of election day polling places has increased from 41 to 43. The number of precincts remains at 53.

Out of the 41 polling places used during the 2022 election cycle, several facilities were no longer available for use, and have been relocated. Two additional polling places have been added for 2024 to ensure safe, convenient, accessible voting for St. Johns County voters.

The 2024 St. Johns County Polling Place List is now available on the St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections website at www.votesjc.gov, and the website has been updated to reflect the polling place changes.

Affected voters residing in the precincts whose election day polling places have been relocated will receive updated voter information cards in the mail, and should review their new cards carefully. Voters are encouraged to visit www.votesjc.gov or contact the Supervisor of Elections Office at (904) 823-2238 for additional information regarding voting locations.

Council on Aging celebrates 50th Anniversary

This year, local nonprofit St. Johns County Council on Aging (COA) celebrates 50 years of service to older adults and caregivers in St. Johns County, Florida. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization was founded 50 years ago by local concerned citizens with a focus on providing essential nutrition, transportation, and independent living support services for our community’s elders.

Since serving the first home-delivered and congregate meals to seniors in 1974, COA has been on a journey to empower our community’s elders to live their best lives at every age. Now with six senior centers and lifelong learning centers, four memory care locations, and transportation to all 600 square miles of the county, COA is able to offer older residents a much wider array of life enhancing opportunities thanks to the continued support of the St. Johns County community.

While volunteers provided transportation for seniors in the early days, COA now offers door-to-door paratransit transportation services with a fleet of specialized vehicles. In 2000, COA also established the Sunshine Bus Company, providing the first public transportation services for the entire community as the St. Johns County Government contracted provider.

In 2003, COA created the Sunshine Center, licensed by AHCA #9081, a

therapeutic adult day care facility in St. Augustine serving adults with special needs, such as Alzheimer’s disease, dementia, and other disorders. The center also provides crucial respite time for caregivers. With seed money from a legacy gift received from St. Augustine resident Mary Peck, COA constructed River House in 2010, a lifelong learning center set on the Matanzas River in downtown St. Augustine.

Visit www.coasjc.org/coa-50th-anniversary for more information.

Tale Tellers to host “Liar’s Contest” at The Waterworks

Tale Tellers of St. Augustine will hold a “Liar’s Contest” on Sunday, Feb. 18, 2 p.m. at The Waterworks, 184 San Marco Ave. Community members are invited to tell their most outrageous stories at this event. The contest will be hosted by Pat Nease, a highly lauded liar. Sign up at the door; prizes will be awarded to the best liars.

Admission is \$10; advance tickets and sign up guidelines are available at www.taletellers.org. Call (904) 540-0402 for more information or reservations.

The Tale Tellers of St. Augustine is a performing guild devoted to the advocacy of storytelling as an art form and entertainment medium. The organization just celebrated its 30th anniversary. Visit www.taletellers.org for more information.

Advertise in the next issue
Call or email today!

Linda Gay

(904) 607-5062

Linda@FloridaNewsLine.com



Peripheral Neuropathy Breakthrough!

“My feet feel like they’re on fire.”
“Each step feels like I’m walking through mud.”
“I live in constant fear that I’ll fall.”
“I can’t sleep, my hands and feet tingle all night.”

What do all of these people have in common? They suffer from **peripheral neuropathy**. It’s estimated that more than 20 million people in the United States have peripheral neuropathy. Unfortunately this figure may be significantly higher as the disease is often misdiagnosed because of its wide array of symptoms.

Dr. Jann Turpin of Riverplace Acupuncture Integrative Health in Jacksonville shares this belief. “I’ve been treating neuropathy, in all its various forms, for over one decade and so often my patients come to me because of the symptoms, not because of the diagnosis. They saw one of my newspaper ads, or read the testimonial of another patient, or spoke to another patient and said to themselves, ‘hey, I feel the same thing’.”

Lisa B. testified to this. “Pain doesn’t wake me at night anymore and I can walk as much as I want to all day without pain. I’m going to start exercising on the treadmill, for the first time in years. These are things I couldn’t do before seeing Dr. Jann and getting acupuncture!”

Those diagnosed with peripheral neuropathy often face a very grim reality; Western medicine declares that there is no solution while most alternative therapies carry large price tags and offer little to no resolve. Which is why Dr. Turpin and the staff at Riverplace Acupuncture pride themselves on being ‘the last resort with the best results’.

Peripheral neuropathy is a result of damage to the nerves and this damage is commonly caused by lack of blood flow in the hands and feet. This shortage results in a lack of nutrients; the nerves then begin to degenerate and die which causes pain ranging from discomfort to debilitating. Because neuropathy is a degenerative condition, once the nerves begin to deteriorate they will continue to do so until they are completely expired, leaving those suffering with severe balance issues. “In this case, the absence of pain is not necessarily a good thing,” shares Dr. Turpin. “This usually means that your nerves are hanging by a thread.”

So how exactly is Dr. Turpin able to reverse the effects of this degenerative disease? “Acupuncture has been used to increase blood flow for thousands of years which helps to get the necessary nutrients to the affected nerves. But the real magic happens when I integrate ATP Resonance BioTherapy™. This is tech that was originally developed by NASA to expedite recovering and healing.”

“I just can’t say enough about Dr. Jann,” Lisa shared through tears of joy. “My husband and I moved here 3 years ago and he’s gone to the beach almost every day. I always stayed home because of the pain and discomfort. Yesterday I walked on the beach with him! And next week we’re starting ballroom dancing lessons. I am truly living life these days.”


By seamlessly blending the ancient science of acupuncture with modern medical solutions, Dr. Turpin has achieved a 90% success rate in reversing the effects of neuropathy. She starts each patient with an initial consultation during

which a sensory exam is performed. “This not only aids in making a proper diagnosis but it helps to define just how much nerve damage has occurred,” tells the doctor. “This is important because if a patient has suffered more than 95%, there is little that I can do to help them. I’m familiar with the medical miracle but I know my limits as a practitioner and the limits of my medicine.”

When it comes to treating peripheral neuropathy, regardless of its origin, early detection greatly improves your chances of a full recovery.

If you or someone you love is suffering with chronic pain that presents as burning, tingling or ‘pins and needles’ or you’ve recently been diagnosed with peripheral neuropathy, it’s important to know that there are options. There is hope!

Call (904) 720 - 8887 to schedule an initial consultation or visit www.RiverplaceAcupuncture.com to read more incredible success stories.



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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Breed:

Giant Schnauzer

Favorite Activity:

Playing with my toys

Favorite Treat:

Getting a pup cupcake

Favorite Friend:

My mommy

How did your BFF get her name:

She has spunky personality and is a giant cuddle bug!

Meet Betsy Boo!



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 March issue featuring our Spring Home Improvement Guide! Deadline 2/16/24

Call Linda Gay today to reserve your space! 904.607.5062

from your friends at Ponte Vedra NewsLine!

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MYSTERY PHOTO

Can you guess where this is?
Submit your answer to: mail@FloridaNewsLine.com.

Last month's Mystery Photo was Flagler Health at Nocatee.

Answers Puzzles PG 10

CRYPTO FUN

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904.246.6832
wbu.com/jacksonvillebeach

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

February

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: 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.

2nd: The GTM Research Reserve will hold a new volunteer orientation on Feb. 2 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.

3rd: Wellness events at Sawgrass Village will be held every Saturday in February 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.

6th: Vicar's Landing monthly Boutique Sale will be held Tuesday, Feb. 6 from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. at 1000 Vicar's Landing Way. The sale includes framed art, 14k gold, sterling silver, costume and designer jewelry, antique and household furnishings plus many decorative knick-knack items. 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.

6th: Bingo will be held at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, on Tuesdays from 1 p.m. – 2

p.m. for four weeks beginning Tuesday, Feb. 6. Contact Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for more information and to register.

6th: Purely Social Happy Hour hosted by Ponte Vedra Woman's Club will be held on Feb. 6 at 5:30 p.m. at Ponte Vedra Outdoors, 377 S. Roscoe Blvd. Attendees will order off of the menu for their drinks and food. Visit www.pontevedrawomansclub.com for more information.

6th: Essential Tremor Support Group Meeting will be held on Tuesday, Feb. 6 at 11 a.m. at Baptist HealthPlace at Nocatee, 400 Colonnade Drive, Suite 130. Stephen Morio with Insightec Focused Ultrasound will describe the incisionless treatment for ET and gives an update on their new Jacksonville location. RSVP (free of charge) to Jan Kary at jkary@verizon.net or (202) 438-6750.

7th: Coastal Friends will host its monthly luncheon at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Pkwy., on Feb. 7 from 11 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Guest speaker is Kelly Munoz, Astrologist, who will be speaking about astrology and how it affects our understanding of the psychology of people. The cost is \$25 and reservations must be made in advance by contacting bartshar@comcast.net as soon as possible.

8th – 17th: "Sound of Music" will be staged at Christ Church, 400 San Juan Drive. Tickets are available at CEC-som.ticketleap.com. Email barbiekroberts@gmail.com for more information.

9th: Food Truck Friday will be held on Feb. 9 and Feb. 23 from 5:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. This event is open to the public.

10th: Palentine Party hosted by Singles United will be held on Feb. 10 from 7 p.m. – 10 p.m. at Pussers Bar and Grill, 816 Highway A1A N. Singles United is a Christian singles ministry dedicated to bringing singles together. Visit www.singlesunited.org for more information.

10th: NE Florida Sisters in Crime will meet on Feb. 10 from 10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Library. Contact floridasistersincrime@gmail.com for

more information.

13th: Adult Coloring Club will meet at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library on Feb. 13 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.

14th: Teen Video Game Tournament will be held at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library from 5:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. on Feb. 14. Join the library staff for single elimination Nintendo Switch tournament featuring Mario Kart and Super Smash Brothers. 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.

15th: St. Johns County Republican Party District 4 monthly meeting will be held on the third Thursday of each month (this month, Feb. 15) at 6:15 p.m. at Palm Valley Community Center, 148 Canal Blvd. Visit stjohns.gop for more information.

17th: The Nocatee Farmers Market: Mardi Gras will be held on Saturday, Feb. 17 from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field. The Farmers Market is open to the public.

20th: Friends of the Ponte Vedra Beach Library Speaker Series continues at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library on Tuesday, Feb. 20 with New York Times bestselling author Lisa Black, who works as a latent print examiner for the Cape Coral, Florida police department. She's also an award-winning author and will discuss her newest release, "What Harms You." Doors open at 6 p.m. and the event begins at 6:30 p.m. The Speaker Series is free and open to the public.

21st: Ponte Vedra Woman's Club will host its general meeting with a luncheon on Feb. 21 at 11:45 a.m. at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Pkwy. Visit www.pontevedrawomansclub.com/eventregistrations.php to register to attend.

22nd: Free Tech Help with David

will be held on Thursday, Feb. 22 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.

22nd: "Exploitation of the Elderly and Disabled" a free lecture by Megan Wall, St. Johns County Legal Aid, will be presented at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, on Feb. 22 at 11 a.m. Contact Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for more information and to register.

23rd: The Savvy Job Hunters Ministry Workshop will host a free Zoom workshop, "Putting Your Professional Package Together and Preparing for the Interview," presented by Dr. Priscilla Berry, owner and president of Berry and Associates, on Feb. 23 from 10:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. Email potesen66@gmail.com to register.

24th: Ponte Vedra Writers Group welcomes award-winning poet and author Shutta Crum, who will discuss the truly important elements that every book for a young reader must have, the 4Hs — heart, hurt, hope and humor, at its meeting on Saturday, Feb. 24 at 11 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. It is free and open to the public. Visit www.floridawriters.org for more information.

26th: Ponte Vedra Democratic Club will hold its monthly meeting on Monday, Feb. 26, 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 Nate Monroe, columnist at the Florida Times-Union. Email PVDemClub@gmail.com for more information.

29th: Check your blood pressure with Nurse Fran at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center on Thursday, Feb. 29 from 10:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. There is no charge for this event. Contact Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for more information.



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with St. Johns County Commissioner Krista Joseph District 4

Q: Do you have any Town Hall meet-ings planned for 2024?

A: Yes. I was thinking about what I could do to start the New Year that would serve my constituents, who otherwise have to drive an hour to St. Augustine for meetings. So, I have a tentative date of March 21, at some time in the evening, set up for a Town Hall meeting at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. In the next issue, I'll be able to confirm this date and the time. I want to hear from my constituents, who will be able to just show up and ask any questions they have. I'll have part of our team from the county there to answer any questions I might not know the answer to and I also plan to keep a list of items for follow up.

Q: Do you plan to make this a regular event?

A: I would like to make this happen twice a year or maybe more, depend- ing on constituent demand. I want to be available to people in District 4 to answer questions and hopefully solve problems. I love this part of my job — the best part is seeing things get accom- plished.

Q: What can you tell us about play-grounds in Ponte Vedra Beach?

A: We have some exciting news: there is now a new and updated playground at Cornerstone Park, near the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall. We've needed this forever. My favorite part is the new slide, which is really unique and fun.

Q: What is the status of other play-grounds in Ponte Vedra Beach?

A: There is also a park within Dolphin Cove that not many people seem to know about. It has just undergone some interim improvements and upgrades including a shade structure. This park will be completely redone within the next two years.

Also, at Bird Island Park, the boardwalk replacement is almost complete. It is now sturdy and new. The landscaping has also been spruced up and this makes the park more enjoyable and accessible. And while you're there, be sure to stop in at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library! I was just appointed as the new County Commission liaison on the Li- brary Advisory Board ... so I'll see you at the library!

Q: What is the best way for our read-ers to contact you?

A: Readers can email me at bcc4kjo- seph@sjcfl.us or call me at (904) 679- 2620.



with St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer

Q: Do you have any legislative up- dates to share?

A: The Florida legislature is now in ses- sion and there are three bills related to Homestead Exemption and assessment caps that are worth noting. All relate to the legislature's concern for increases in property taxes for Florida property owners.

Q: What is the first bill?

A: The first one relates to the 10 percent non-homestead exemption cap. Cur- rently, school millages are excepted from this cap, meaning homeowners still pay the school millage. Bills introduced in both the House and the Senate would eliminate this exception. If these bills become law, homeowners would not pay school taxes on the cap.

Q: What is the second bill?

A: Again, there are both House and Sen- ate companion bills. Currently, when an owner applies for Homestead Exemp- tion on a currently owned non-home- stead property, deferred amounts related to the 10 percent assessment limitation

cap are removed. This could cause a significant increase in taxes when the property owner applies for Homestead Exemption. If this legislation passes, these deferred amounts would remain in place.

Q: Finally, what is the third bill you are watching?

A: Currently, the \$50,000 Homestead Exemption is in two \$25,000 bands. The first \$25,000 of value is exempt (the first band), the second \$25,000 in value is taxed and the third \$25,000 of value is exempt (the second band). If this legislation passes the second band would be increased to \$50,000 and indexed to inflation. This would effectively raise the Homestead Exemption on most houses in St. Johns County to \$75,000.

Q: What is the best way for our read-ers 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 Ed- die@sjcpa.us or call me at (904) 827- 5500.

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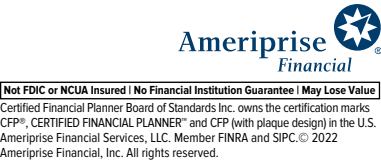
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with St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes

Q: When is our next election?

A: The first election of 2024 is the Presidential Preference Primary Election on March 19, 2024.

Q: Who is eligible to vote in the Presidential Preference Primary Election?

A: Only registered Republicans are eligible to vote in the March 19 election. Since Joseph Biden, Jr. is the only name submitted by the Democratic Party of Florida, there will not be a Democratic ballot in this election. Due to Florida's

closed primary laws, voters who are registered with no party affiliation (NPA) or a minor party are not eligible to vote in this election.

Q: Are there any upcoming deadlines ahead of the election?

A: February 20, 2024, is the last day to register to vote or change party affiliation for the Presidential Preference Primary Election. To register or change your party affiliation, visit our website at www.votesjc.gov.

Q: If I voted-by-mail in the 2022 elec-

tions, do I automatically get a mail ballot for 2024?

A: No, vote-by-mail requests expired after the 2022 General Election. If a voter plans on voting-by-mail in 2024, they must put a new request on file by visiting www.votesjc.gov or calling the Elections Office at (904) 823-2238. The last day to request a ballot to be mailed is March 7, 2024, by 5 p.m.

Q: When is early voting?

A: Early voting for the Presidential Preference Primary Election will take place from Saturday, March 9, through Saturday, March 16, 2024, which includes two Saturdays and one Sunday. St. Johns County voters can visit any early voting location during the hours of voting, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, to cast their ballot.

Q: Where do I vote on Election Day?

A: To find your Election Day polling place, visit our website www.votesjc.gov and click "Find My Polling Place." Voters can also call the Elections Office at (904) 823-2238. There have been some polling place changes for the 2024 elections. Out of the 41 polling places used during the 2022 election cycle, several facilities were

no longer available for use, and have been relocated. Two additional polling places have been added for 2024 to ensure safe, convenient, accessible voting for St. Johns County voters. Affected voters residing in the precincts whose Election Day polling places have been relocated will receive updated voter information cards in the mail and should review their new cards carefully.

Q: Where can we find more information about the Presidential Preference Primary Election?

A: St. Johns County voters can look forward to receiving the 2024 Presidential Preference Primary Election issue of the St. Johns County Citizen's Guide to Registering and Voting ahead of the upcoming March election. The guide will explain the difference between the three elections taking place this year, a list of early voting locations, important dates for voters, and more.

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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March 19, 2024

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February 20, 2024

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For registration and election information, call or visit:

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with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

Q: Can you share some information about the Seniors vs. Crime initiative?

A: This is a special initiative in collaboration with Attorney General Ashley Moody's office. SJSO is the 32nd office in the state to participate in this project and the third one under AG Moody. We officially kicked off our partnership on Dec. 19, 2023 and are currently working on cases.

Q: Can you describe the initiative?

A: Seniors vs. Crime is staffed

completely by volunteers and serves approximately 50,000 seniors in St. Johns County. The primary mission is to reduce the victimization of senior citizens by scams and crimes based on their age. There are three primary objectives. First, to provide education through various scam and crime prevention programs. We are able to tailor these presentations for group size and demographics. Second, to investigate complaints and seek restitution for seniors. The services are free of charge and any

Q&A with Sheriff Rob Hardwick cont. on pg. 10



Uniting the Community Through Helping Others in Need

Since 2007 the St. Johns County Community has supported St. Johns CARES, Inc. in aiding 40 non-profit organizations in St. Johns County. These partner organizations work with our target populations of the Elderly, Veterans, Homeless, Abused, Children and Animals. Thank you to all who have made this possible: host donation sites, individual donors, volunteers, and the caring staff of the non-profit organizations. Your generosity is so greatly appreciated.



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

Q: Do you have any updates on the Teacher of the Year?

A: We will announce the district's Teacher of the Year on Feb. 1. It's exciting that three of the five finalists are from District 4 this year. We have an elementary school teacher (Kristen Anderson, first grade teacher from Valley Ridge Academy), a middle school teacher (Samantha Gayso, an English/Language Arts teacher from Landrum), and a high school teacher (Duane Spears, Master Chief of NJROTC at Nease). We have so many deserving teachers and it's so fun to celebrate these finalists as well as all of our amazing teachers in St. Johns County.

Q: Are there any principal reassignments to announce?

A: I'm excited to announce that Dr. Jesse Gates has been selected to lead the new Beacon Lakes K-8 school, "OO" and Jill Hillier, previously assistant principal at PVPV Rawlings Elementary will step up and become principal of that school. We're excited to welcome her and while none of the staff at the school wanted to lose Dr. Gates, they are happy that Ms. Hillier was selected as the new principal. One of the hallmarks of growth is it provides opportunities for wonderful people to shine.

Q: Can you address absenteeism in our schools?

A: There have been lots of conversations lately about absenteeism in our schools. School leaders would like to encourage parents to cut down on recreational absenteeism. Of course, if your child is sick, they should stay at home. But we've worked so hard since COVID to overcome learning gaps and absenteeism is hard on students as well as the teachers who must re-teach material. We ask parents to try to avoid scheduling conflicts with school if possible.

Q: Do you have a legislative update?

A: The legislative session is underway and we are thankful that initiatives toward deregulation of education will continue and not be overshadowed by more regulations. I was in Tallahassee for a committee meeting before winter break, advocating for our schools and students. One bill addressing property taxes has implications for our schools and is concerning because our school district funds are already tight and school districts are limited in our variety of revenue sources. Our district office has already reduced expenses by 15 percent and our school sites are evaluating how to reduce expenses outside the classroom in order to balance this year's budget.

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.



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Mulch Madness in full swing

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewslines.com

The 15th annual Mulch Madness fundraiser is underway, and the Ponte Vedra High boys' lacrosse team stands ready to serve the community by hand delivering 16,000 bags of mulch during two days in March.

"Mulch Madness is one of my favorite weekends of the year. It is the one and only time both players and their families work hand-in-hand, and it is absolutely amazing to watch," said head varsity coach Chris Polanski. "It serves as a great team builder that forges our program, which is already very tight, even closer together."

Mulch Madness co-coordinator Kristina Greco, who has two sons on the team, said deliveries are made to about 600 residents of Ponte Vedra Beach and Nocatee.

"The amount of teamwork by parents, coaches and our boys both in the weeks leading up to the event, as well as the weekend, is truly exceptional," she said. "The boys are doing this during their season, with injuries and tired bodies taking a backseat to the work needed to be completed."

Greco said that Penske trucks are rented to make deliveries directly to homes and businesses. Parents also use their own trucks when needed.

Five different types of bagged mulch are sold by the team, and the PGA Tour provides an empty lot to stage the event.

The team will place the bags wherever instructed by customers and work from 7 a.m. until 5 or 6 p.m. to get the job done all weekend, she said. All money earned goes towards the program for travel expenses.

Greco said that she and the team are grateful to the repeat customers of

Mulch Madness over the years, adding that the team could not achieve state championship level lacrosse without the community support.

Orders are currently being accepted until March 6 and delivery will be March 23 – 24.

To place an order, go to [Pvlax.com/mulch-madness](https://pvlax.com/mulch-madness) or visit <https://pvlax.com/mulch-madness/buy mulch/>.

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Photo courtesy Kristina Greco
Ponte Vedra boys' lacrosse players working the Mulch Madness weekend.

Cat-human bond cont. from pg. 1
beings that improve the mental health and wellness of humans," said Meghan Knoll, Cat Person CEO.

Reynolds described the difference between cat and dog therapy this way: "Dogs are very engaging and want to receive love. When someone asks for cat therapy, they want to give love. It is a much quieter visit."

Reynolds added that there is no charge for Pet Partners' therapy services, and they train nine different types of animals.

[Author's note: For more information about Pet Partners locally or Sooshi, call or email Reynolds at (904) 612-8952 or eachday-ishis@gmail.com. To donate, send checks to P.O. Box 1485, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32004. For more information about Pet Partners or to read the complete study, go to petpartners.org and click on Publications.]



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Get to Know ...

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Patrick O'Donnell

Patrick O'Donnell and his family love adventure travel, healthy living, and making an impact. It all began when Patrick met his wife, Hunter O'Donnell, while the two were both on a college study abroad trip through Georgia Institute of Technology, meeting for the first time while studying in England. They both loved to travel, something they have since shared with their children, James, 17 and Davidson, 14, by spending a year traveling the world in 2017. Hunter homeschooled the boys while Patrick was able to run his marketing agency job remotely. While on that trip, the family realized how much they loved living on the coast and began to search for their next home. Also, while in New Zealand, Patrick journaled about his goals and envisioned his next job. "I wanted to make a massive impact," he said. He researched and found a company in St. Johns County, DLP Capital, whose owner held the exact same vision and values. Patrick accepted a job there as the chief experience officer, running the internal well-being program for the company's employees and sharing the "Fit Life Challenge" program. The family also chose to move to Ponte Vedra Beach because Hunter grew up in



Photo courtesy Patrick O'Donnell
Patrick O'Donnell

Mandarin and has family nearby. When COVID hit, the O'Donnells discovered a new mission while participating in a fitness and nutrition challenge that included avoiding processed, sugar-loaded, and gluten-filled food. "Our boys, 13 and 10 at the time, were great at eating healthy meals, but could not find any snacks that were challenge compliant that had a taste they loved," said Patrick. So, the O'Donnells created their own healthy snack, a granola (minus gluten, refined sugar, and artificial sweeteners), and Inrive Performance Nutrition was born. It has been fully vetted and endorsed by James and Davidson (who both play on their respective school baseball teams) along with friends and parents. The family plans to introduce a granola bar and a hydration stick this year, and they recently launched with Amazon.

Q: What was the most rewarding part of creating Inrive?

A: Being able to create the change we wanted to see by bringing truly delicious, nutritious products to the

world that student athletes (and their parents) love is fulfilling a dream, but to be able to do this with our family, our boys leading the taste tests with their friends, and especially my teenage son so instrumental in driving this forward, has been truly incredible.

Q: What is the meaning of the name Inrive?

A: It comes from the words "inspire" and "thrive." It means to make whole, mend or complete, derived from the words "in," meaning not and "rive" meaning to split apart, so to not split apart is to make whole or mend. Yes, we made up this word and its definition, but we love it, and we hope that others are ready to inspire, rise and thrive in life.

Q: During your year-long travel adventure, where was the family's favorite location?

A: Of all the places we've been in the world, all four of us would say our favorite location is New Zealand. Specifically, where we lived for nearly three months — in a small beach town on the North Shore, a couple hours east of Auckland, called Mount Maunganui, where we climbed an old extinct volcano, went fishing in the aptly named Bay of Plenty, hiked to waterfalls, and the boys joined baseball teams.

Q: What core values do you hold as a family?

A: Celebrate life, be the change, lead by example, take consistent action, and make a difference.

[Author's note: To listen to Patrick's podcast, go to "Live Fit, Ignite Change."]

Landrum teacher cont. from pg. 1

many ways, especially through example. Rocha serves on the Leadership Team and as the professional learning community lead for the Spanish Department at the school. She also oversees the interactive, monthly student newsletter "¿Qué Pasa en Español?", which is created by students and recaps activities occurring in the various Spanish classes, updates on the Latin and Culture Club, and cultural information. Finally, together Rocha and three other world language teachers created the school's Latin and Language Club this year.

It was after being inspired by one of her former students who had a passion for volunteering that she spearheaded her largest community project 11 years ago. Rocha heard about the City Rescue Mission on the news and their need for Shoeboxes of Love — and decided this was the perfect project for the middle school. Now, thousands of shoeboxes later, she continues this tradition each November through December. She collects anywhere from 400 to 500 Shoeboxes of Love each year, and students from throughout the community participate.

"Being involved at school has made me a stronger person and better teacher," said Rocha.

And with every shoebox assembled with love, she's helping build a stronger community and inspiring students and others beyond the everyday curriculum.

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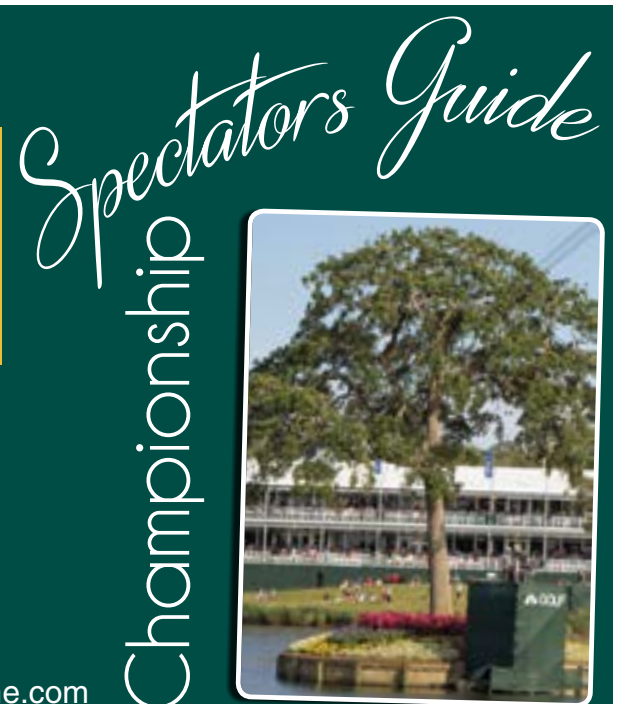
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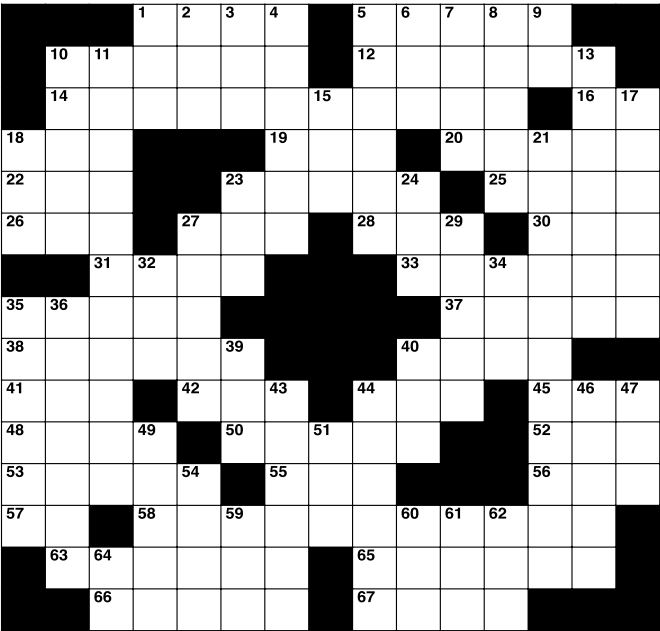
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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Gene type
- 5. Persian male given name
- 10. Type of protection
- 12. Cloud
- 14. One who returns to life
- 16. Gym class
- 18. General's assistant (abbr.)
- 19. Baby's dining accessory
- 20. Enchantress
- 22. Prefix denoting "in a"
- 23. Spiritual leader
- 25. Cavities
- 26. Relative biological effectiveness (abbr.)
- 27. Foot (Latin)
- 28. Sweet potato
- 30. Pharaoh of Lower Egypt
- 31. Land
- 33. More inquisitive
- 35. Dog breed: ___ Apso
- 37. Stood up
- 38. Direct and uninhibited
- 40. Authorless
- 41. Blocking type of drug (abbr.)
- 42. Retrospective analysis (abbr.)
- 44. Root mean square (abbr.)
- 45. Macaws
- 48. Actress Remini
- 50. Polynesian wrapped skirt
- 52. City of Angels hoops team (abbr.)
- 53. Fitzgerald and Baker are two
- 55. Bowling alley must-have
- 56. A way to cool down
- 57. Ethnic group in Asia
- 58. A way to alter
- 63. Set of five
- 65. Removes from the record
- 66. Dummies
- 67. Set period in office

CLUES DOWN

- 1. DC Comics superhero
- 2. Brew
- 3. Play
- 4. Single-celled animals
- 5. Rough to the touch
- 6. Small island (British)
- 7. Often noted alongside cons
- 8. Preparation of rootstock
- 9. Atomic #44
- 10. Egyptian unit of capacity
- 11. About secretary
- 13. Particular groups
- 15. Poke fun at
- 17. Make certain that something occurs
- 18. Financial term
- 21. Justify
- 23. Arbiter
- 24. 007's creato
- 27. Czech name for Prague
- 29. Groans
- 32. American time
- 34. No seats available
- 35. ___ Stahl, journalist
- 36. Cleft lip
- 39. Talk incessantly
- 40. Expresses atomic and molecular weights (abbr.)
- 43. A part of a river where the current is very fast
- 44. Curdled milk
- 46. Running competitions
- 47. A team's best pitcher
- 49. Carthaginian explorer
- 51. World-renowned city
- 54. Most common Japanese surname
- 59. The bill in a restaurant
- 60. They ___
- 61. City of Angels football team (abbr.)
- 62. Distinctive practice
- 64. One quintillion bytes

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B G A C L B H S L N D R B G E L I P F R
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L Y O T A Q W R N F F V R N S F A V D F
E L R N J E L N U Y R U O N F C T F E S
C N E A J F E M Y T A Q O L A R V S L I
F Q D M O R F V N R S I Q R F A P J N D
S M D O V B O T Y V T E D F L R D V T N
V H I R M M Y Y M A A S G E O Y O J N W
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W O O D L A R B B D I S L R Q U O S W S
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Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

WORDS

- BOUQUET
- BOYFRIEND
- CARDS
- CELEBRATE
- CHOCOLATES
- DATE
- DINNER
- ENAMORED
- FEBRUARY
- GESTURE
- GIFTS
- GIRLFRIEND
- HEART
- JEWELRY
- LOVE
- LOVING
- MOVIES
- PROPOSAL
- RED
- RELATIONSHIP
- ROMANTIC
- ROSES
- SPOUSE
- VALENTINE



Solve the code to discover words related to Valentine's Day.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 11 = C)

- A. 1 16 13 13 20 1
Clue: Candy
- B. 14 5 6 3 7 11 13
Clue: Excitement about love
- C. 11 3 14 9
Clue: Offers a greeting
- D. 11 15 5 11 5 18 3 20 13
Clue: Rich and creamy treat

Q&A with Sheriff Rob Hardwick cont. from pg. 7
money recovered goes back to the victim. Third, the initiative provides senior volunteers an opportunity to learn new skills and provide a service to our community's senior citizens.
Q: What is the background of the volunteers?
A: We found a retired FBI agent who

now runs this unit. We have specially trained volunteers in this project who are really subject matter experts since all are retired law enforcement officers, either local, state, or federal.
Q: What does SJSO provide to the Seniors vs. Crime project?
A: We provide office space and equipment. They actually have access to

all SJSO offices for work space for interviews with senior citizen victims to best serve our senior citizens. These volunteers, and our detectives, deputies, and staff all work side by side to help seniors in St. Johns County. Far too often we see our senior citizens taken advantage of and are thrilled to add this resource for our senior citizens.

Q: How can senior citizens contact Seniors vs. Crime volunteers if they think they are a victim of a senior crime?
A: Seniors who would like assistance on a potential case or who might be interested in being part of the volunteer team should contact stjohns@svcproject.org or call (904) 209-1432.

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By Scott A. Grant
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PopHistory

Beating the Nazis in basketball

Basketball became a competition sport for the first time at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. I have often wondered if the Germans added basketball as an inducement to get us to come. If so, it worked — despite some objections, the USA went to Berlin and participated in what has become known as the Nazi Olympics.

So many stories have come out of those Olympics. It seems like every time you turn around there is a new book or movie featuring some aspect of those games. The secret is that, as everyone in Hollywood knows, Nazis make great villains. Take a relatively mundane story about archaeology, rowing, or basketball and throw in some Nazis and you have drama!

In 1936, there were no real professional basketball teams and no nationwide NCAA Tournament. (The first NCAA tourney would not happen for two more years; Oregon beat Ohio State to claim the first National Championship in 1938.) The Olympic committee decided to have a tournament to deter-

mine who would represent the USA in those first Olympics. The best team in the country was probably Long Island University coached by the legendary Claire Bee. Long Island University was 25 – 0 that year and in the midst of a 40-game winning streak; however, the team was mostly Jewish and deter-mined to boycott the games. Many Jewish athletes boycotted those games, with good reason.

After a series of regional tournaments, the final eight gathered in New York City at Madison Square Garden. There were five college teams, the YMCA Champions, and two Industrial teams from the AAU championships. Those two teams were sponsored by corpora-tions and the players, usually former college stars, had jobs that allowed them to play basketball. One team represented Universal Pictures and the other represented the McPherson Globe Refiners, an oil refinery in Kan-sas. McPherson won the AAU champi-onship. Universal finished second.

Universal beat the University of Arkan-

sas in the first round and the Wilmerding YMCA in the second. Wilmerding is out near Pittsburgh. It is a company town built by Westinghouse Air Brake. Most of the YMCA players also played for Westinghouse. McPherson won its first-round game and then beat Uni-versity of Washington in the second round, setting up a repeat of the AAU final against Universal Pictures. This time, Universal won. In the end they took seven players from Universal, six from McPherson, and one from the University of Washington.

Getting to the Olympics proved dif-ficult. Both teams lost their corporate sponsorships. Neither Universal nor McPherson wanted to be associ-ated with the Nazi Olympics. Both teams had to play their way across the country to get to the ship to Germany. When they got to Berlin there were more problems. The Germans decided to limit each team to seven players. They also attempted to limit the size of players to six feet, two inches tall. We protested the height rule and split the team in half to comply with the seven-

player rule. The games themselves were played outdoors on a clay tennis court with old-fashioned lace-up basketballs. That was bad. Then it rained. Then it poured.

In the finals, a mixed team of players from both squads met the Canadi-ans in a typhoon. It was impossible to dribble and in the second half, we mostly just held the ball, winning 19 – 8. The Canadian team was from Wind-sor Ontario right across the river from Detroit. They were sponsored by Ford Motor Company and called themselves the “V-8s.” The medals were awarded by James Naismith, inventor of the game. Gold to the United States, Silver to Canada, and Bronze to Mexico. Those would be the only Olympic Medals Canada and Mexico would ever win in the Olympic games.

Scott A. Grant is a local historian and author. By day, he manages invest-ments at Standfast Asset Management. He welcomes your comments at scottg@standfast.com.

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