



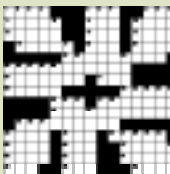
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Photos courtesy St. Johns County Sheriff's Office

Sheriff Rob Hardwick makes remarks at the PAL facility groundbreaking.

New PAL facility coming soon

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

On Dec. 29, St. Johns County Police Athletic League (PAL) hosted an official groundbreaking ceremony at the new PAL facility grounds located on Allen Nease Road in Elkton. The 35-acre site was donated by the county and \$5.9 million in state funding for improvements was acquired when St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick took his vision for the facility to the St. Johns County Legislative Delegation of Rep. Cyndi Stevenson, Rep. Paul Renner and Sen. Travis Hutson.

Phase 1 of the project will include three multipurpose fields and one will be encircled by a track to allow for track and field events. Upon the completion of future phases, there are plans to host soccer, flag and tackle football and baseball as well as boxing programs, basketball, and cheerleading.

Sheriff Robert Hardwick, Rep. Stevenson, Commissioner Roy Alamo, Commissioner Krista Joseph and her husband, Ron, as well as young

New PAL facility cont. on pg. 8

"Hidden in Plain Sight" encourages and educates parents

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.com

The Prevention Coalition of St. Johns County is offering a relatively new interactive presentation that is intended to help parents and caregivers identify potential indicators of drug and alcohol abuse in their homes, as well as mental illness. Called "Hidden in Plain Sight," the evidence-based program is housed in a 16-foot trailer that has been outfitted as a teenager's bedroom. Only adults may enter to potentially discover items and paraphernalia that have been hidden.

"Some sheriff's offices in Florida have outfitted trailers similarly, which is where we got the idea," said Sue Ellen Jackson, Prevention Coalition of St. Johns County's executive director. "Kids are dying from fentanyl and kids are being kidnapped for sex trafficking ... right here in St. Johns County. We want to educate parents and caregivers and encourage them to give themselves permission to enter their kids' bedrooms. We want them to feel comfortable knowing they're being good parents."

Jackson said that when adults go inside the trailer, they are encouraged to open drawers, look under the bed, and check out the trash can. Literature available at the exhibit explains things to look out for.



Photos courtesy Sue Ellen Jackson

A Steve DeKorte debriefing adults after their visit to the Hidden in Plain Sight trailer.

"We work closely with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the public health department and school resource officers to stay on top of trends," Jackson said. "For instance, something that looks innocent, like a bottle of sun-tan lotion, could be a stash. If you see a lot of used Band-Aids in your child's room, it could be an indication that they are cutting themselves. This is a mental health concern. A large amount of cash that you didn't give your child could be a sign of sex trafficking."

Jackson said since the program is only about six months old, they are still trying to get the word out. The Hidden in Plain Sight trailer is available to be parked in front of local businesses or schools. Jackson said they will make presentations at clubs, churches, adult events and meetings. Interested parties should contact the Prevention Coalition via their website (<https://preventioncoalitionofstjohnscounty.com>) to schedule a booking.

The Prevention Coalition of St. Johns County is a small agency that Jackson said is growing rapidly due to increased need. It focuses mainly on youth and seniors. It is designed for primary prevention and outreach only, but partners with secondary and tertiary agencies like Betty Griffin Center if needed.

Jackson stressed that the Prevention Coalition's mission is to nurture, educate and encourage — not to judge.

"We need to love each other and be educated," she said. "We hope that this exhibition will go a long way towards educating the community."



A small peek inside the Hidden in Plain Sight trailer.


Steve DeKorte is the Hidden in Plain Sight program specialist. Now a grandfather, Jackson said he is passionate about this program and wants his grandchildren to make healthy and informed decisions. Jackson said DeKorte is often at the trailer when it is on location, talking to attendees and helping with debriefing after the adults have viewed the mock bedroom.



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

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:

Border collie

Favorite Activity:

Chasing balls or frisbees

Favorite Treat:

Peanut butter

Favorite Friend:

Everyone she meets

How did your BFF get her name:

Lady got her name from her grandmother.



Meet Lady!

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



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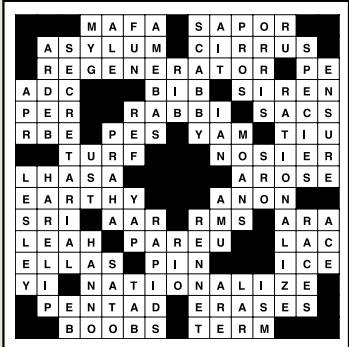
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MYSTERY PHOTO



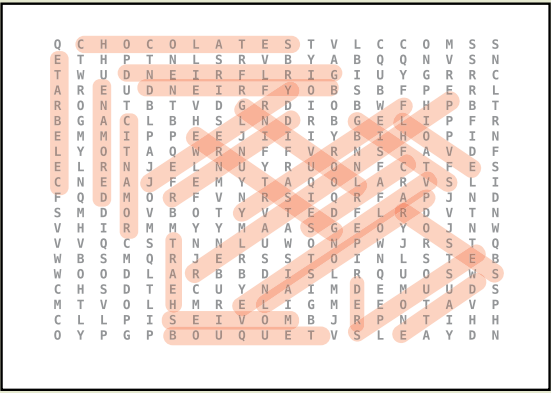
Can you guess where this is?
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Answers to our Puzzles PG 10



A. sweets B. romance C. card D. chocolate



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(At Murabella)
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wbu.com/staugustine

February

Community Calendar

What's Happening in St. Johns

Trout Creek Senior Center offers activities for seniors on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings at 6795 Collier Road in Orange-dale. Cards, crafts and games start each day at 9 a.m. with trivia, nutrition/exercise, Bunco and Bingo among the additional activities before lunch at 11:30 a.m. each day. Contact Program Coordinator Myra Fisher at (904) 209-3658 or mfisher@coasjc.org for more information.

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

Jokers Wild, a local card group, plays the game of "Hand, Knee, and Foot" on Wednes-days. If you are interested in joining, please call (904) 230-6962 and leave a message.

5th: ESOL Learn to Read, with partners at Learn to Read St. Johns, will be held on Monday, Feb. 5. The begin-ner class is from 3:15 p.m. – 4:15 p.m. and the intermediate and/or conversation class is from 4:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. Register at www.sjcpls.org. Walkins will be welcome as space allows. Call 904-827-6960 or email Donna at dbraasch@sjcfl.us for more information.

6th: Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet on Tuesday, Feb. 6 at 7 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church at the Loretto Road Campus in the Kids' Space at 2501 Loretto Road. Guild members will make a presentation on Harbor Freight Notions. Wear-ing masks is optional. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

6th: Happy Hookers crochet group will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on Feb. 6 and Feb. 20 from 5:30 p.m. – 6:45 p.m. The group crochets or knits

blankets for cancer patients at area hospitals. All skill levels are welcome. Visit www.sjcpls.org or call (904) 827-6960.

7th: Widow to Widow, support group for widows by widows is held at Council on Aging (COA) River House, 179 Marine Street in St. Augustine on Wednesdays beginning Feb. 7 from 11:45 a.m. – 12:45 p.m. Call (904) 209-3655 (Monday – Thursday) or email tharris@coasjc.org for more information.

7th –10th: Friends of the Bar-tram Trail Library Book Sale will be held Feb. 7 – 10 at the Bartram Trail Branch Library, 60 Davis Pond Blvd., during regular library hours.

8th: Open Card Play at Council on Aging (COA) River House, 179 Marine Street in St. Augustine. Bring your deck of cards and socialize over a friendly card game of your choosing every Thursday beginning Feb. 8 from 12:15 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. Call (904) 209-3655 (Monday – Thursday) or email tharris@coasjc.org for more information.

10th:The Friends of Alpine Park meets the second Saturday of each month (this month, Feb. 10) at 11 a.m. at the Harris-Bennett Farmhouse in Alpine Groves Park, 2060 State Road 13. Docents will conduct tours of the historic farmhouse from 12 p.m. – 2 p.m. As always, the public is invited. Email friendsofalpinepark@gmail.com for more information.

10th:The Bartram Trail Gene-alogy Club meets the second Saturday of each month (this month, Feb. 10) from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. at the Bartram Trail Branch Library. The meeting will feature a presentation by member Bill Sherman on the recent and future changes and preparation for the impact digital security has on access to individual ac-counts, research data and protecting valuable work. Email ginglish@comcast.net for more

information. Visit www.facebook.com/groups/BTGenClubGroup to send a request to join the club.

12th:The Northwest St. Johns County United for Progress Club will meet on Monday Feb. 12 at 6:30 p.m. Annual board elections and a special guest speaker will be featured. For more information, visit www.nwstjohnsup.com or email nwsjcp@gmail.com.

13th:Bartram Trail Newcom-ers' and Women's Club will host its meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, Feb. 13 at 11 a.m. at St. Johns Golf and Country Club, 205 St. Johns Golf Drive. This month's theme is "Ideas to Make Your Spring Garden Bloom." Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. Downton Abbey "High Tea" is the theme and the luncheon will be a buffet. Checks for \$32 should be made payable to BTNC and mailed to Brenda Jenkins, 2204 Fort Mellon Court, St. Augustine, FL 32092 no later than Feb. 6. Visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 for food choices and updated information.

15th:William Bartram Scenic Highway Group will meet on Thursday, Feb. 15 beginning at 6:30 p.m. at Westminster Woods, Gathering Place Room. Join the discussion to keep NW St. Johns County Scenic and Historic and preserve the State Road 13 Scenic Highway. Virtual meeting access is available; contact alabbat@comcast.net or call (904) 699-8475.

15th:Growing and Appreciat-ing Orchids will be presented by long-time gardener Jim Shine, who will talk about his favorite orchids and what it takes to grow them on Feb. 15, at 10 a.m. at the Bartram Trail Branch Library. All are invited. Contact switzerlandgc@gmail.com or visit www.switzer-landgc.org for more information.

19th:The All Star Quilters Guild will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on

Monday, Feb. 19 at First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The program includes show and tell of Jelly Roll quilts. Sew and Tell is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit www.allstar-quilters.org for more information.

20th:Newcomers of North St. Johns will host a luncheon featuring entertainment by pianist Matt Hall on Feb. 20 beginning at 11 a.m. (doors open at 10:30 a.m.) at Stonewood Restaurant, 3832 Baymead-ows Road. Attendees are encouraged to bring a children's book to donate to the St. Johns County Public Library System Hastings Branch Library. The cost for the luncheon and program is \$35 for members; all reservations must be received by Feb. 9. Visit <https://newcomersof-northstjohns.org> for more information.

21st:Coin Collecting for Kids will be held at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on Feb. 21 from 4 p.m. – 5 p.m. Join Tony Bonaro from the Florida United Numismatists to learn about history, geography, math, and science while studying coins. Call the library at (904) 827-6960 for more information.

23rd:"Exploitation of the Elderly and Disabled" a free lecture by Megan Wall, St. Johns County Legal Aid, will be presented at Council on Aging (COA) River House, 179 Marine Street in St. Augustine, on Friday, Feb. 23 from 10 a.m. – 11 a.m. Call (904) 209-3655 (Monday – Thursday) or email tharris@coasjc.org for more information.

24th:Dress a Girl Around the World at the Bartram Trail Branch Library will be held on Saturday, Feb. 24 at 10 a.m. Learn to make dresses and shorts for girls around the world. You can pick up a kit to create at home, or turn in dresses you created to the Bartram Trail Branch. We also accept fabric and notion donations. Call the library at (904) 827-6960 for more information.



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

Q: What is your office’s role in providing marriage services for residents?

A: Our clerks have the important, and fun, responsibility of assisting in filing marriage applications, issuing licenses per Florida Statute 741.01, performing wedding ceremonies, and providing copies of Marriage Records. Last year our staff issued more than 2,400 marriage licenses. We take great pride in helping couples navigate the process and beginning their married lives together.

Q: Last year the clerk’s office held its inaugural group Valentine’s Day wedding ceremony. What is your office’s plan for this year’s event?

A: Our office will be hosting its annual Valentine’s Day group wedding ceremony in partnership with the Seventh Judicial Circuit. Last year’s event was special as seven couples exchanged vows, and we look forward to supporting the same this year. The ceremony will take place on Wednesday, Feb. 14, 2024, at 1 p.m. at the Richard O. Watson Judicial Center located at 4010 Lewis Speedway. The Honorable Judge Howard O. McGillin, Jr. will officiate the ceremony.

Q: Can you provide details for couples interested in registering?

A: To tie the knot on Valentine’s Day, couples can register for the event online by visiting <https://stjohnsclerk.com/>

wedding or calling (904) 819-3604, no later than Sunday, Feb. 11. The ceremony is limited to the first 50 couples.

Participating couples will receive a digital photograph and video of the event. Couples are still required to pay for a marriage license. Participating couples will have to purchase their marriage license from the clerk’s office no later than Feb. 11. Marriage licenses are not valid until three days after issuance (applies to Florida residents only).

Even if you can’t make it to our special Valentine’s Day event to get married, our office conducts marriage ceremonies Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. for \$30. Walk-ins are welcome or you can even book an appointment online. More information about marriage services offered at our office can be found on our website:

<https://stjohnsclerk.com/marriage-licenses-ceremonies/>

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 St. Johns County Commissioner Christian Whitehurst, District 1

Q: Can you comment on the number of temporary business signs that seem to be proliferating NW St. Johns County roadways?

A: According to St. Johns County code, these signs are not permitted — and our code enforcement officials are overwhelmed with calls for service. We ask business owners and residents to only put signs on their own private property in accordance with county code. This will help keep our community as beautiful as we would like it to be and not cluttered with signs.

Q: What can you tell us about the recent approval by the Board of County Commissioners on Jan. 16 for the Sandy Creek neighborhood (on County Road 210 East)?

A: This was an interesting approval that was actually requested by the residents of the neighborhood. They asked to switch from light industrial to more single family homes and multifamily units within the Planned Unit Development (PUD). They didn’t want the already permitted light industrial near their homes. Also approved was a second entrance to the community, which will ensure that all 600 present homeowners (and 400 more in the future) will be able to exit their neighborhood at a traffic light. This should improve traffic flow in the neighborhood.

Q: Can you explain the North Florida TPO, of which you were recently named chair?

A: The North Florida Transportation Organization (TPO) provides a way to advocate regionally for transportation infrastructure. It basically amplifies our voices to Tallahassee; when we are asking for state funds, they are more likely to approve the dollars regionally than county-by-county. Representatives from Duval, St. Johns, Clay and Nassau counties meet 10 times per year with TPO staff and a representative from the Florida Department of Transportation to adjust transportation priorities. It’s always very fluid and we get a lot of input from county governments as well. St. Johns County has two other representatives on the board besides me, one from the City of St. Augustine and one from the Airport Authority. I have served on the North Florida TPO board since I was elected to the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners three years ago. The board meetings are open to the public; visit <https://northfloridatpo.com> for more information.

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

A: Readers can email me at bcc1c-whitehurst@sjcfl.us or call me at (904) 584-5348.



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Vicky Oakes
St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections


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March 19, 2024

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February 20, 2024

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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 elections, 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

St. Johns County Supervisor cont. on pg. 8



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

Q: Do you have any legislative updates to share?

A: The Florida legislature is now in session 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. Currently, 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 Senate companion bills. Currently, when an owner applies for Homestead Exemption on a currently owned non-homestead 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 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.

ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

SCORE events announced

By Ale'ta Turner, SCORE Jacksonville
mail@floridanewslines.com

Starting a business is exciting but can also be overwhelming — and staying in business means you're faced with many new challenges, growing pains and sometimes threats. As a SCORE client, your business success is our focus and you are not alone on your journey. SCORE Jacksonville invites business owners and entrepreneurs at every stage to join us for our upcoming events.

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SCORE Jacksonville and the Jacksonville Women's Business Center present "Achieve Your Business Dream." This four-part weekly workshop series is tailored for aspiring and emerging business owners and entrepreneurs, regardless of

who or where they are on their journey. It costs only \$99 to participate for up to two team members.

Women's Conference: Resilience, Learning, and Collaboration

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SCORE Jacksonville, working with other resource partners, is hosting a Women's Conference at the FSCJ Advanced Technology Center. Join us for networking and hear subject matter experts discuss business planning, work-life balance, funding and more. We aim to inspire and equip women with the knowledge and resources to accelerate their businesses and dreams. Advance registration tickets are \$35 per person or two tickets for \$50.

Visit score.org/jacksonville for more details and online registration.

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Q&A with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

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

A: This is not a new initiative. It 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. I had prior knowledge of this project since we had a successful unit at the St. Augustine Beach Police Department and I wanted to bring it to SJSO. 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 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. The Seniors vs. Crimes volunteers report to the regional director of Attorney General Moody's Seniors vs. Crime unit, but they work directly with our SJSO detectives in the South Regional Operations Center. They actually have access to all SJSO offices for work space for interviews with senior citizen victims to best serve our senior citizens. The great thing is that 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

Q&A with Sheriff Rob Hardwick cont. on pg.9

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

Q: What is the latest on new school construction?

A: The two new schools opening this fall, located in Shearwater and Beacon Lake, are coming along beautifully and on schedule. Following the announcement last month of the principals for each school, we are in the process of hiring staff. The positions are advertised internally at first, since we are reducing students at some other schools. Later in the spring, the positions will be opened up to outside candidates. We have outstanding leaders at both schools who will do a great job launching. The schools will open as K-7 schools the first year so that eighth graders can stay at their existing school.

For the new school in RiverTown, clearing of the land has finished and site prep has begun. This school is on schedule for an August 2025 opening.

The next step for the schools opening in 2026 in Nocatee and Silverleaf will take place this spring when we begin the process of issuing bonds to pay for the construction. We are so grateful for the local half-cent sales tax (and the visitors and tourists who help pay it) because this helps us fund the construction of all these new schools.

Q: Do you have a legislative update?

A: We are just now [as of interview date of Jan. 16] in the second week of session. School Board member Tony Coleman and I will be traveling to Tallahassee later this week as members of the Florida School Boards Association. This year will be a year of deregulation for education. The Florida Senate has

been working hard all summer to find ways to eliminate unnecessary regulation. On the House side, they have two deregulation bills, but they are much less vigorous than the Senate bills. My mission this week is to talk to House members to try to get them to consider the Senate bills. For instance, the House supports the current law, which requires passing End of Course (EOC) exams in Algebra 1 and English Language Arts for 10th graders. The Senate wants to take this requirement out and just require students to pass their regular courses. Our Director of Government Relations for the St. Johns County School District, Logan Lowery, is working hard on our behalf in Tallahassee. There are a number of bills still being filed that we will have to keep an eye on. Also, a lot of times, one issue will be combined with others in a single bill... again, we have to pay close attention.

Q: How has the end of the first semester and beginning of the second semester gone for St. Johns County schools?

A: We had a very successful first semester and an exciting beginning to the second semester with that winter storm hitting on the second day of school. We were carefully watching the timing of the storm and determined that it would hit our area around 4 p.m., which allowed us to dismiss students and staff just one hour early.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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

St. Johns County Supervisor cont. from pg. 6

early voting locations, important dates for voters, and more.

Q: What is the best way for our read-

ers 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.

New PAL facility cont. from pg. 1

members of the PAL program, including Brooks Barnett, attended the groundbreaking ceremony.

“When I am older, I will not talk about the championships, but the friendships I made,” Barnett said. “The Police Athletics League has given me the opportunity to compete as a student-athlete at a high level while teaching us the importance of hard work and leadership.”

PAL is one of the oldest character-building youth organizations in the country and fosters an environment for positive interaction between law enforcement and children within the community. This new complex is intended to support the needs of a youth recreational facility in an area of St. Johns County that needs it the most. Presently, PAL services approximately 2,500 participants annually, and with the population growth of the county, that number is expected to double.



Dignitaries shovel dirt at the groundbreaking ceremony of the new PAL facility in Elkton.

The state funding of \$5.9 million will not cover the entire first phase of construction, but will be a good starting point. PAL is presently working with businesses and community members to raise the remaining required funds for the first and second phases of the project.

Life

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Get to Know...

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

Michele Oliver

Michele Oliver is the publicity chairman for Newcomers of North St. Johns, a social group for both newcomers to the area and for those who have recently experienced a life change, that is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. Retired since 2019, she worked a variety of jobs in her career and said she learned something from each and every one — public speaking skills from working at the National Institutes of Health, event planning from working for Deerwood Country Club and Palencia Club, marketing skills from serving as the marketing manager for NE Florida Weight Watchers franchises and writing skills from Robinson and St. Johns. Her degree in Mass Communications and PR from the University of South Florida set her up to succeed in her varied career, but she said right now she is enjoying her retirement since it gives her time to do whatever she wants to do. She lives in Fruit Cove with her husband Ben, a dachshund named Chloe and Anna, a yellow lab rescued during the pandemic in 2020. Son Charlie and his wife Lisa live nearby with their two children.



Photo courtesy Michele Oliver
Michele Oliver

Johns County?

A: Ben had a job in Jacksonville, so we moved to Arlington. Once our son was school aged, we wanted a better school system so we moved to Fruit Cove. We've lived in the same house now for 34 years. Charlie attended Julington Creek Elementary, Swiss Point Middle, and Nease. In a full circle moment, Charlie's son also attended Julington Creek Elementary.

Q: How did you become involved with Newcomers of North

St. Johns?

A: After I retired, I didn't want to be bored, so I looked for opportunities for activities. I heard about Newcomers of North St. Johns and went to a luncheon. I liked the people immediately and have been part of the group ever since. They offer so much to do. I previously served as co-vice president and now am publicity chairman.

Q: What are your hobbies?

A: I love photography and am a voracious reader. I'm a member of the St. Andrew's Society of Jacksonville, which is a social and philanthropic group that promotes Scottish heritage and culture. I'm Scottish on my grandmother's side; we are a part of the MacGregor clan. We also love to travel. We just took a cruise to Alaska. We've also visited Yellowstone, the Grand Tetons and New England. Now that Ben is also retired, we will have time to travel more.

Q: Where did you grow up and go to school?

A: My dad was in the Navy and retired when I was four. I was the last of

Q: How did you meet your husband?

A: Ben was also a student at USEF. We met in the TV room in our co-ed dorm and have now been married for 45 years. He graduated before me, but I stayed and finished my degree. We were married one week after I graduated.

Q: How did you come to live in St.

Sheriff Rob Hardwick cont. from pg. 7

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.

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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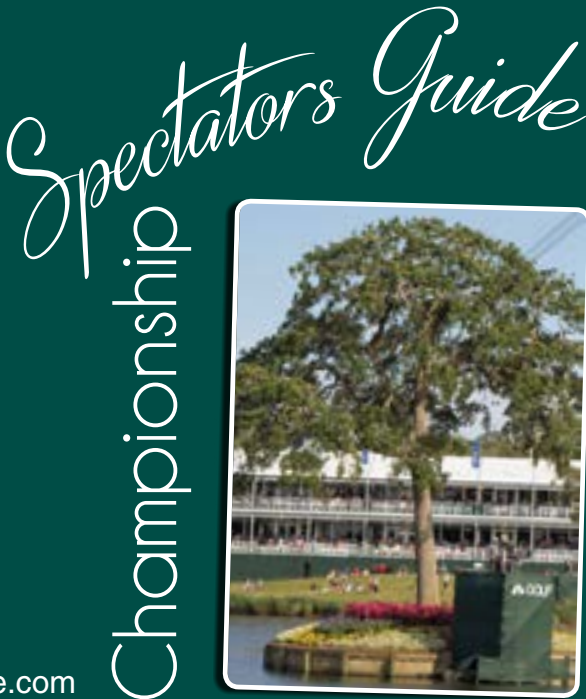
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Briefs

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

The 31st annual Chocolate and Be-yond 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.

ACT and Digital SAT Prep Classes to be offered

Friends of the Bartram Trail Branch Library will offer ACT and Digital SAT Prep Classes on March 21, 28, April 4, and 11. Registration will begin in early February. Classes are one hour 15 min-utes each and students may sign up for either or both series. (ACT classes will be from 5 p.m. – 6:15 p.m. and SAT classes will be from 6:30 p.m. – 7:45 p.m.

The sessions will include two English/ Reading and two Math. Following a

practice test completed at home, the fifth and final session will be a review from 5 p.m. – 6:15 p.m. for English/ Reading and from 6:30 p.m. – 7:45 p.m. for Math. Students should bring their calculators.

Each series of five sessions costs \$50 or \$100 to attend both series. These pro-ceeds are a donation, and with the other donations are used to fund all library programs at the Bartram Trail Public Library. Purchase of a specific review/ prep book is also required.

There is a cap of 20 students per series. The last day to register is March 17, unless the cap is reached prior to this date. Registration information can be obtained at the Bartram Trail Library reference desk or by contacting Phyllis Macy at macyp17@yahoo.com.

St. 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.

Bartram Trail Newcomers look forward to spring

The Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club will hold its meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, Feb. 13 at 11 a.m. at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club, 205 St. Johns Golf Drive. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. The February luncheon theme is "Make your Spring Garden Bloom." Valentine theme/color attire is encouraged.

Patty Plourde, retired educational specialist, and Lauren Gilmore, retired physical therapist, are Master Garden-ers who created an Enchanted Garden at the St. Johns County Agricultural Center, which contains almost two acres of Florida friendly plants and 75 fairy house structures. They will explain the term Florida Friendly Landscape as well as the current condition of home gardens due to winter frost and chilly

weather and what to do and not do while waiting for warmer spring tem-peratures.

Checks for \$32 should be made payable to BTNC and mailed to Brenda Jenkins, 2204 Fort Mellon Court, St. Augustine, FL 32092. Payment must be received no later than Feb. 6, 2024. Be sure to indicate your entrée choice on the check memo.

Email Linda Beard at bartramtnc@gmail.com for club information. Visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 to see pictures of meetings and download a membership form.

Newcomers of North St. Johns announces February luncheon and book drive

Newcomers of North Saint Johns will host its February luncheon on Tues-day, Feb. 20 at 11 a.m. at Stonewood Restaurant, 3832 Baymeadows Road. The event will feature lunch and en-tertainment by talented pianist Matt Hall. Attendees are also encouraged to bring a children's book as part of a collection drive to benefit the St. Johns County Public Library System Hast-ings Branch.

Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. The cost for the luncheon and program is \$35 for members and \$40 for guests and non-members. All reservations must be received by Feb. 9. Visit <https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org> for more information about the luncheon and membership.



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.

Rotary makes a difference in our local community

By Rotarian Al Kalter
mail@floridanewslines.com

As part of a worldwide organization dedicated to service to humanity, the Rotary Club of Bartram Trail — Julington Creek does its part. Efforts include providing water to remote areas of Honduras, contributing to the global eradication of polio, sponsoring high school students for international exchanges, and more. The club is locally focused as well, with several projects that benefit our local community and its citizens. Here are some of the grants and projects that our local Rotary Club took on this past year:



Photo courtesy Al Kalter
Rotarian Gary Williams presents a chef knife and sharpener to K9s for Warriors

Betty Griffin Shelter: Funded room renovations at the shelter where domestic violence and sexual abuse survivors and their children can start their new life.

Mission to End Student Homelessness (MESH): Worked together with the Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra to financially support this organization dedicated to helping St. Johns County students who are homeless or at risk for becoming homeless.

K9s for Warriors: Purchased a kitchen chef's knife and professional knife sharpener for this well-known local non-profit with outreach across America, to help them continue to fulfill the mission of providing dogs for veterans and first

responders in need of PTSD support.

St. Johns Ecumenical Ministries Food Pantry: Donation of cash and items for donation to an organization that promotes public awareness of local hunger issues and offers emergency food assistance to residents of St. Johns County.

Rethreaded Serenity Garden: Purchase of a sponsorship brick for a group of volunteers which provides jobs, career development, and a supportive community for survivors of human trafficking within Jacksonville.

Homeless Coalition of St Johns County: Provided funding for future projects as they work together with several other local non-profits.

All of these local grants were brought to the club by one or more Rotary members. Our club is always looking for opportunities to make a difference in our community and our world. If you'd like to help in that mission, we invite you to visit one of our weekly meetings, or contact Club President David Goldman at Rotary.BartramTrail@gmail.com.

The Rotary Club of Bartram Trail — Julington Creek meets every Thursday morning from 7:30 a.m. — 8:30 a.m. at Westminster Woods on Julington Creek. Guests and prospective members are always welcome. Visit www.bartramtrailrotary.org for more information.

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Alpine Groves Park and Treaty to benefit from improvement projects

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

At the regular meeting on Jan. 16, the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners approved construction contracts totaling \$2,545,486.81 for capital improvement projects benefiting Alpines Grove Park in Switzerland and Treaty Park in St. Augustine.

The project at Alpine Groves Park, 2060 State Road 13, will involve the design, permitting, and construction of a rock revetment to stabilize the shoreline. Work will include mapping the area's environment resources before designing and engineering a system to stabilize the bluff and restore the shoreline with native plants to preserve the wetlands ecosystem. The plantings will not only preserve the natural elements of Alpine Groves Park, but also protect its shoreline from future erosion events and the potential impacts of rising water levels.

S.E. Cline Construction, Inc., was the bidder chosen for the Alpine Groves Park improvement, for the price of \$659,149.81. Once the contractor is given notice to proceed, construction is expected to be finished in 170 days.

The project at Treaty Park (located at 1595 Wildwood Drive in St. Augustine) will add additional parking spaces, relocate the existing dog park and tennis courts, demolish the existing racquetball courts, and modify some of the existing tennis courts to become pickleball courts.

Black Water Construction Services, LLC, was the bidder chosen for the Treaty Park improvement, for the price of \$1,886,337. Once the contractor is given notice to proceed, construction is expected to be finished in 180 days.

"Treaty Park is one of the county's most active parks, and the coming changes will maximize the use of space," Parks and Recreation Director Ryan Kane said. "The Alpine Groves project will preserve the natural beauty of the park and reduce shoreline damage from extreme weather." "The approval of the construction contracts for Treaty Park and Alpine Groves Park shows a genuine commitment by the Board of County Commissioners to maintaining our public spaces," Parks and Recreation Assistant Director Jamie Baccari said. "The Alpine Groves project will go a long way toward preserving that park in the face of erosion. The Treaty Park project will provide additional pickleball courts, new tennis courts, and a new dog park, all amenities that our community has been asking for. Once it's complete, the project will bring a fresh look to one of the oldest and most popular parks in the county."

These moves to keep St. Johns County parks refreshed and in peak condition for the communities that treasure them are in keeping with the commitment to high-level park maintenance that saw the Parks and Recreation Department invest more than \$1.4 million in playground improvements throughout 2023.

St. Johns CARES has successful end of year donation drives

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

St. Johns CARES' annual Food Drive in October and November resulted in more than \$10,000 worth of nonperishable food distributed to seven food banks in the county. This was made possible due to 21 host donation sites, two neighborhood drives and the Florida Prime Sports and St. Johns Moms Group October Spooky Market Bash.

Donations at 45 Giving Tree host donation sites and by individual donors resulted in distribution of more than \$54,000 in needed items and gift cards to 40 nonprofit organizations serving the Elderly, Veterans, Abused, Homeless, Children and Animals in the county in

December. The donations received by the organizations helped meet client wishes and needs for the holidays and for several months in 2024.

"This success could not have been possible without the support of the community, host donation sites and our volunteers as efforts continue to meet our Mission of Uniting the Community Through Helping Others in Need," said Mary Ann Kriniske, president of St. Johns CARES. Visit www.stjohnscares.org or the Facebook page "St. Johns CARES Volunteer Organization" for more information about how to help others in need.

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Guest Column

Remembering Scampi

By Bucky Neustadt

Most everyone in the Julington Creek Plantation and surrounding area has seen this dog riding on top of a motorcycle. Her name is Scampi. For more than 14 years she has been riding and enjoying the wind in her face, going to amazing places with her human dad.

The adventures started back in 2009 when she was a puppy. She couldn't stand the fact that her dad would leave her when he got on that loud machine and rode away. So she



Photo courtesy Bucky Neustadt
Scampi on the motorcycle with Bucky Neustadt.

would escape and chase him down the roads looking for him. Eventually this became a serious problem due to the traffic in the area. Something had to give, and it wasn't going to be Scampi.

Things gradually began to evolve and her dad figured out a way to strap her in and found goggles for her to wear. Over the years she began to get really professional at riding. They would go up to the mountains and ride the banking curved roads. She would see a hard curve coming and throw her shoulder down into it just like she herself was driving the motorcycle. It was amazing to watch. She became the most popular rider in the biker community, and was featured many times on the covers of magazines.

Sadly Scampi got sick this past Christmas with a severe case of pancreatitis at the age of 15-1/2 and was not able to recover. A group of close friends came to see her off and many tears flowed. As popular as she was, she received about 1,400 condolences. Truly a one-of-a-kind dog.

If you have any pictures that you might want to share of this beautiful dog, please send them to: looplizard@newstat.com.

Fishing

Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis
mail@floridanewsline.com

While February can be one of the cold-est months we have, it can also hold a surprise warm up or two. It's on the cusp of spring and with the activities that accompany that season, it can be beneficial to look out for those warmer days. The activities I'm referring to are fish spawning and their preparations to do so. Many fish that spawn in the spring are triggered by thermal cues when the water warms to a certain point. Not that February is peak spawning for most, but I would say that the fish are at least changing their habits and becoming pre-spawn as we say. If we get multiple days in the 80s and the water goes from the high 50s to the mid to high 60s then I'd venture to say there's going to be some spawning going on. This is turning into a pretty good rant, but I apparently have a lot of thoughts on fish behavior. One last thing is that just because they start spawning doesn't mean they can't stop when the temperatures drop. They usually do.

Two species locally that I'll be looking for in this transitional month are specks and bass. Speck fishing has been up and down with fish being caught in the river and creeks, but up until this point most of the larger fish have been in the river or near the creek mouths. I'd expect more of those large fish to move into the creeks preparing to spawn. You'll also notice them being a lot plumper as the females become full of eggs. The fish will also start holding at more variable



Photo courtesy Jimmy Tomazinis
Look for specks moving into the creeks this month.

depths. This is when I like using jigs since you can cover the entire water column. When you find where most of the fish are staged you can stick with the jig or switch over to minnows.

Bass will be moving closer to the shoreline and you may even notice a few beds being prepared in places with decent water clarity. Females tend to be late to the party, but will hang in the vicinity of the beds until it's their time to shine. The best way to entice a big smart bass is a wild shiner. If you're inclined to throw artificials, then a swim bait or large rubber worm might be the ticket. Keep an eye out for warmer weather and tight lines.

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Travel

Berlin: The Wall and Beyond

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewslines.com

I'd visited Munich, the Black Forest, and Neuschwanstein Castle on previous European trips, but never Berlin, the capital of Germany. The city becomes especially attractive for Baby Boomers like myself, who recall the days when it was sadly divided. We want to journey through time, better understand the history, and see the city's remarkable transformation.

The story of the Berlin Wall remains confusing. Back in 1961, the East German authorities started building a barrier through Berlin. A 100-mile fortified concrete structure encircled and isolated West Berlin from East Germany, acting as the dividing line between capitalism and communism. The perimeter was

under the constant surveillance of armed East German border guards who were authorized to shoot anyone attempting to escape into the democratic West. Many died. Finally, the political climate warmed and the world witnessed the start of the Wall's demolition on Nov. 9, 1989. Eleven months later, East and West Germany were reunited.

The city keeps remnants of the barrier as vivid reminders of the divided past. I started my tour at Checkpoint Charlie, the tense border crossing during the Cold War. I stood at the epicenter, the same ground where East and West faced each other. I toured the Wall Museum, filled with memorabilia, newspaper articles, photos, and videos of both incredible escapes pulled off with heroic efforts and heartbreaking, tragic tales. I later walked through the Brandenburg Gate, the icon of the city that's seen many changes in government since construction in 1788.

Today, the energetic city of Berlin is alive and thriving with much more than Cold War history. Downtown's Museum Island, a UNESCO World Heritage site, offers visitors five world-famous museums. The impressive buildings house fantastic collections of ancient artifacts and modern art. (One could spend days here.) In the Neues Museum, I especially enjoyed viewing the beautiful bust of Nefertiti, which is more than 3,000 years old. FYI: the famous Pergamon



Standing by a section of the Berlin Wall.



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Palace Interior — Sanssouci.

Museum recently closed for major renovations.

I visited the ruins of the former King's Church, Kaiser-Wilhelm Kirche, whose damaged tower roof is one of the best-known symbols of Berlin. Attached is a new blue-glass octagonal church. Nearby rests the modern statue simply named Berlin, a "broken chain" meant to symbolize the severed connections between West and East Berlin, their closeness yet isolation on each side. (It also reminds me of German pretzels!)

Berlin's culinary scene bursts with a vast array of international flavors and traditional German cuisine. The luxury department store KaDeWe, similar to Harrods in London, showcased a gourmet food hall and restaurants covering more than 7,500 square feet on the top floor. My late fall visit did not include a local beer garden, but I enjoyed classic German dishes such as schnitzel, red cabbage, and strudel in a typical Gast

Haus or pub.

Public transportation by bus and train proved easy and affordable. I hopped on a train for a day trip to Sanssouci Palace in Potsdam, about half an hour away. Touring the complex is like visiting Versailles near Paris, so be prepared for lots of walking and gobsmacking gold. The grounds include multiple opulent royal palaces, meticulously landscaped gardens, and a fascinating glimpse into Prussian history.

Berlin is more than just a contemporary city for Boomers. It's full of younger people engaging in a vibrant workplace on lively streets filled with pop art, culture, and diverse activities. It's a blend of history and modernity that provides an unforgettable experience and leaves a lasting imprint on those who visit.

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

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