

Mandarin NewsLine

April 2024 Volume 19 Issue 4

A Florida NewsLine Publication



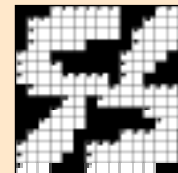
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Photos courtesy Jaclyn Rodriguez
The Survivors' lap at Relay for Life is very meaningful.

Relay For Life set for April 13 at Nease

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Nease High School will host the American Cancer Society Relay For Life of the First Coast six-hour event again this spring. Hundreds of area residents will join together to fight back against cancer on Saturday, April 13 from 4 p.m. – 10 p.m.

Relay For Life provides an opportunity for registered teams and participants to set up a tent-site on the track to fundraise for American Cancer Society life-saving programs, services, and research. Teams and participants take turns walking around the track for the duration of the event to show their support of those touched by cancer.

"In 2023, more than 1.9 million new cancer cases were expected to be

Relay For Life cont. on pg. 2

April 2024 marks the 160th anniversary of Maple Leaf's sinking

By Brittany Cohill
mail@floridanewsline.com

Before the sun rose on the morning of April 1, 1864, an explosion lit Mandarin's sky above the St. Johns River. Within minutes of the blast, the Union steamboat "Maple Leaf" sank more than 20 feet, coming to rest on the riverbed below. Unknown to the ship's captain and crew, Confederate soldiers attached to the 2nd Battalion, Florida Infantry had deployed a series of 12 mines floating just below the surface across the narrow channel at Mandarin Point.

The U.S. Civil War had raged for three years by this time, and Florida was essential to the Confederates' war effort as the supplier of beef, pork, salt, and cotton. Union incursions into Florida were aimed at cutting off these supply lines, and at various times since the war began, Union troops occupied Jacksonville. By February 1864, the Union permanently occupied the city and used it as a home base from which to control the St. Johns River, recruit



Photo courtesy Martie Thompson
The bow of the Maple Leaf is on exhibit.



Photo courtesy Mandarin Museum
A museum patron checks out the Maple Leaf exhibit.

Black men as soldiers, and launch westward advances into the interior.

Despite a Union defeat that same month at the Battle of Olustee in Baker

County, the United States remained committed to Florida, permanently occupying Palatka in addition to Jacksonville. On March 31, 1864, the "Maple Leaf" docked in Palatka to offload 87 cavalry men and their horses. Later that night, the steamer started its return to Jacksonville to deliver the contents of its cargo hold — the personal belongings and military-issued equipment of several Union regiments.

Romeo Murray, a formerly enslaved man on the Kingsley Plantation and the "Maple Leaf's" pilot, described the blast, "The

river was still and perfectly smooth and I could see the shore well and make the channel easy ... There was a loud noise right under the boat and the pilot house lifted right up. I was raised up and my head struck the top of the pilot house and I fell down and lost my cap. The floor sunk right down. When I got up, the wire had stretched and set the whistle blowing. I went out the starboard door and ran up the hog brace. I saw the second engineer forward and started for him supposing he went to let go the anchor. He said, 'get water. ... The whole deck, the main deck and the hurricane deck were settled right down and the pilot house fell forward ... The boat went right down head first.' The "Maple Leaf" was a total loss. Murray was one of 62 who survived the blast. Four other free-Black crewmen did not.

The ship's cargo rested forgotten, undisturbed, and preserved in the mud for well over a century. In the 1980s, Dr. Keith Holland, a Jacksonville den-

Maple Leaf cont. on pg. 9



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Relay For Life cont. from pg.1

diagnosed in the United States and more than 600,000 Americans were expected to die from cancer,” said Jaclyn Rodriguez, senior development manager at the American Cancer Society. “Educating, advocating and increasing equal access to care depends on what we do right now. Events like Relay For Life provide an opportunity for communities to raise awareness and funds for life-saving programs and services like Road to Recovery and Hope Lodge.”

The community is welcome to attend for food, games, and entertainment. The event kicks off at 4 p.m. with an Opening Ceremony that recognizes survivors and caregivers followed by a schedule of events and activities before our Luminaria Ceremony begins at 8:30 p.m.

Longtime participant Marion Linda said, “We enjoy the opening ceremony where they kick off the event with the survivor lap. There's a lot of festivities throughout the evening including a survivor and caregiver dinner reception. We support American Cancer Society local events because of all the work the society does to provide programs, services, research

and more to cancer patients and their families. We look forward to another successful event this year.”

The American Cancer Society's signature fundraising event, Relay For Life is more than a walk. It is a volunteer-led movement that unites communities to celebrate cancer survivors, remember loved ones lost to cancer, and raise funds to improve the lives of people with cancer and their families.

“Relay is an opportunity to connect survivors and caregivers to others who understand the cancer journey and the importance of having hope,” said Rodriguez. “Relay For Life provides this and more. It's a movement. It's something you don't fully understand until you experience it. I started Relaying in 2011 and it's been a part of my life ever since.”

In Florida, more than 162,000 new cancer cases are expected to be diagnosed. Cancer continues to be the second most common cause of death among Americans after heart disease. Visit RelayForLife.org/FirstCoastFL or call (800) 227-2345 to sign up or learn more about Relay For Life.



Libraries offer many youth activities — check it out!

By Jeremy Yates
mail@floridanewslines.com

Is your family participating in Mayor Donna Deegan's River City Readers Challenge? The city's top readers will win awesome prizes! Find more information and instructions for downloading the Beanstack app at rivercityreaders.com.

Storytime counts as minutes read! Join us for Little Readers (ages birth to five) Fridays at 10:15 a.m. or 11 a.m. at Mandarin Branch Library or Thursdays at 10:15 a.m. or 11 a.m. at South Mandarin Library. Note: Registration is not required for Little Readers, but space is limited. Please arrive early.

Drop in and read to a therapy dog! Sammy the Golden Retriever visits South Mandarin Library Wednesday, April 3 and April 17 at 2:30 p.m. Yona, the Newfoundland dog, visits the South Mandarin Branch on Wednesday, April 10 and April 24 at 2:30 p.m. and Saturday, April 13 at 2:30 p.m.

For reading paired with hands-on activities, check out STEAM & Stories (ages five through 12) Mondays at 3:30 p.m. at Mandarin Branch Library. For even more art and reading fun, join us at Junior Artists (ages five through eight) Tuesdays at 4 p.m. at South Mandarin Library. If your kids like exploring Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math concepts, they're going to love Junior Scientists (ages five through eight) Wednesdays at 3:30 p.m. at Mandarin Branch.

There are also fun Junior Labs for the older kids (ages nine to 12). Sculpture Lab runs Wednesdays at 4 p.m. at the South Mandarin Library and Thursdays at 3:30 p.m. at the Mandarin Library starting in April (through the end of May). The Dragon Tea Society needs

new tea dragon care supplies. They're looking for apprentice sculptors to learn the ins and outs of crafting with polymer clay.

Frosting Lab at South Mandarin Library starts April 5 and continues Fridays at 11 a.m. Homeschoolers (ages 10 through 14): Develop your dessert decorating skills and create edible art. By the end of the series, you'll have practiced with all the icing tools and techniques you need to create frosted masterpieces.

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

Need help preparing your taxes?

American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) TaxAide offers free tax counseling and preparation services at the Library during tax season!

Mandarin Library: Thursdays from 1 p.m. – 6 p.m.

- Call (904) 419-3402 or schedule online: tinyurl.com/TaxMandarinBranchLib

South Mandarin Library: Tuesdays from 1 p.m. – 5 p.m. or Saturdays from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

- Call (904) 257-6520 or schedule online: tinyurl.com/TaxSouthMandarinLib

Note: Taxes are prepared by appointment only. For other locations, call (904) 701-3462

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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Riley!

Breed:
"Shorkie" (Shih Tzu and Yorkshire terrier mix)

Favorite Activity:
Playing with his favorite toy puppy that is almost as big as he is!

Favorite Food:
Cheese of any variety.

Favorite Friend:
His human pack leader, mom Cindy.

How did your BFF get his name?
He looks like a Riley to us!

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

Summer Camp and Activities Guide in this issue! Pages 6 - 7

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Don't miss the May issue featuring our Summer Camp and Activities Guide! Deadline 4/18/24

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MYSTERY PHOTO

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

Last month's Mystery Photo was the Royalty Express gas station on Old St. Augustine Road.

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

CRYPTO FUN

Determine the code to reveal the answer!

A. flowers B. grass C. landscape D. mower

Answers to our Puzzles PG 10

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April

Community Calendar What's Happening in Mandarin

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

Toast of Jax Toastmasters meets every Saturday, except on holiday weekends, at 8:30 a.m. at Baha'i Community Center, 5034 Greenland Road. Guests are welcome. The meetings can also be attended online at <https://toastofjax.toastmastersclubs.org/>.

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

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

2nd: Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet on Tuesday, April 2 at 7 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church at the Loretto Road Campus in the Kids' Space at 2501 Loretto Road. Featured will be a presentation by JAX MQG on modern quilting. Wearing masks is optional. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

3rd: UF/IFAS Extension Duval County Spring Training will be held at the Mandarin Garden Club, 2892 Loretto Road, on April 3 from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. The program will include Edible Landscaping, Commonly Seen Native Plants in North Florida Landscapes, onsite propagation class and a garden tour. Bring your own lunch. Registration required; visit go.ufl.edu/duvalspring2024

4th - 7th: The Sound of Music will be performed April 4, 5, and 6 at 7 p.m. and April 7 at 4:30 p.m. at Mandarin United Methodist Church, 11270 San Jose Blvd. Tickets are \$15. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/2rhcpf5p> for tickets and more information.

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

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

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

6th: Mandarin Frog Paint Party at Mandarin Museum on Saturday, April 6 at 10 a.m. Purchase, paint, and take home your very own Mandarin Frog (or sea turtle or squirrel). The cost is \$22 per person and advanced registration is required. To register, email info@mandarinmuseum.org.

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

7th: "The Secrets We Keep," concert version, will take place on April 7 at 2 p.m. at River Garden, 11401 Old St. Augustine Road. Inspired by historical events and personal narratives, and written and directed by Danielle Wirsansky, "The Secrets We Keep" is a thought-provoking musical that delves into the untold stories of LGBTQ+ individuals during the Holocaust. Admission is free and open to the public, with donations accepted to support the ongoing work of White Mouse Productions.

9th: Jacksonville Chapter DAR will meet on Tuesday, April 9 at 11 a.m. at Blue Fish Restaurant. Visit jacksonvilleDAR.org for more information.

13th: The Southern Genealogist's Exchange Society will host speaker Mark Olsen, who will discuss the Family Tree Maker Program on Saturday, April 13 beginning at 10 a.m. at the Argyle Branch Library and via Zoom. Visit www.sgesjax.org to register for the meeting or call (904) 778-1000 for more information.

15th: The All Star Quilters Guild will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on Monday, April 15 at First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. Sharon Crumbliss of Crumbliss Art will talk and show some of her creations. Sew and Tell is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit www.allstarquilters.org for more information.

16th: Master Gardener Juliet Johnson will present "Sanctuary/Sacred Gardening" to the Dogwood Circle at Mandarin Garden Club, 2892 Loretto Road, at 10 a.m. on April 16. The public is invited to this free event. Visit www.mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

17th: Town Hall meeting with Council Member Michael Boylan about the proposed Hartley Road improvements will be held on April 17 at 6 p.m. at the Mandarin Senior Center, 3848 Hartley Road. Email MBoylan@coj.net or call (904) 255-5206 for more information.

18th: Third Thursday Lecture featuring "Our Mandarin Neighbors" will be held on April 18 from 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. at the Mandarin Community Club, 12447 Mandarin Road. The lecture will be hosted by Mandarin Museum in partnership with the Mandarin Community Club. Admission is free and the event is open to the community.

18th: "Lose the Lawn" will be presented by Master Gardener Juliet Johnson on April 18 at 10 a.m. at the Mandarin Garden Club, 2892 Loretto Road. The public is invited to this free event. Visit www.mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

23rd: GriefShare group will meet on Tuesdays beginning April 23 through July 23 from 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m. at the Cody Enrichment Center at St. Joseph's Catholic church, 4152 Loretto Road. Call (904) 318-9308 for more information and sign up.

25th: Mandarin Republican Club will meet on Thursday, April 25 at St. Mary's Seafood, 11290 Old St. Augustine Road. Social time begins at 6 p.m. and the meeting starts at 6:30 p.m. First time visitors are welcome.

25th: Mandarin Women's Club's monthly meeting and luncheon featuring the annual fashion show will be held on April 25 beginning at 10:30 a.m. at the Ramada Inn Mandarin. A representative from Chico's will be assisting the models in selecting the clothing that is just right for each of them. The cost of the lunch is \$25 and reservations and payment must be received by April 18 by calling Jo-Ellen at (904) 635-8722 or emailing her at joshifty@aol.com. Visit www.mandarinwomensclub.com for more information and membership forms.

25th: "Basic 104 - Invasives' Native Alternatives" will be presented by Marlys Goltz, Master Gardener, on April 25 at 7 p.m. at the Mandarin Garden Club, 2892 Loretto Road. The public is invited to this free event. Visit www.mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

26th: The Italian American Club of Jacksonville will hold its popular Spaghetti to Go on Friday, April 26 from 5 p.m. until the spaghetti is gone at the club building, 2838 Westberry Road. Take out only; cash, credit and debit cards are accepted. Dinners cost \$13 and there are small charges for extra meatballs, cannolis and pizza rolls. No phone orders. Visit www.iacofjacksonville.com or call (904) 586-2700 for more information.

27th: Archaeological Institute of America-Jacksonville Society will meet at 12 p.m. on April 27 in Building 51 at the University of North Florida to hear a lecture by Alex Diaz, Florida State University Master's student, who will discuss his research on bone tool technology used at the Mill Cove site in Jacksonville. The lecture is free and open to the public. On Saturday, parking is free, and the faculty/staff/vendor spaces are available to everyone. Contact Melva Price at (904) 241-9411 or go to the website aiajax.org for more information.

27th: Touch-A-Truck will be held from 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. at Trinity Mandarin, 2955 Orange Picker Road. This free family event will feature multiple trucks, vehicles and machinery for kids and families to see up close and explore, sit in the driver's seat, and honk the horn. Activities include face painting, balloon animals, and sidewalk chalk, with a quiet hour from 10 a.m. - 11 a.m. Food trucks with food for purchase will be on site. Call the church at (904) 262-6944 for more information.



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with Jacksonville City Council Member Michael Boylan, District 6

Q: What information do you have about the rezoning application of the old KMart property to become a Home Depot?

A: This is an 11.5 acre property that is requesting commercial rezoning to a commercial PUD. Although a bit more cumbersome, this allows us to codify any changes requested by the Planning Commission, the LUZ, or the City Council. The applicant is proposing to demolish the existing building and replace it with a 106,000 square foot building and a 25,000 square foot garden center. This application goes before the Planning Commission on April 4, the LUZ on April 16, and the City Council on April 23.

Q: Can you share information about the upcoming Hartley Road project Town Hall meeting?

A: We will hold a Town Hall on April 17 at 6 p.m. at the Mandarin Senior Center on Hartley Road to help share the plans for this project with those living in the area. The project proposes a full complement of improvements to Hartley Road, to include an additional lane between San Jose Boulevard and Old St. Augustine Road, as well as a bike lane and curbs and gutters. There is no approximate start date for this project yet. We will do our best to communicate the status via email and this column.

Q: When is the closing of Orange Picker Road scheduled for the

realignment construction?

A: Due to the Mandarin Art Festival at the end of March, the Public Works Department agreed to delay the closure of Orange Picker Road near the intersection with Brady Road until April 1. There are already some signs posted on Orange Picker and Flynn roads reminding motorists to expect delays. The scheduled length of the closure is approximately two months and we will keep everyone posted about any updates, as well as information regarding the parking improvements and dog park as it becomes available.

Q: Do you have anything else to share with District 6?

A: With respect to items like road

resurfacing, drainage and sidewalks, I'd like residents to know that those are all functions of the Mayor's office. All I can do is assist and advocate for improvements, which I am happy to do. I'd like residents to feel free to continue to email me (preferred method) their suggestions and I will pass them along. I will say that we are exploring with the administration an allocation of the (Capital Improvement Plan) CIP to individual districts where the council member would be able to prioritize projects that are perennial requests.

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

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



with Duval County School Board Member Lori Hershey, District 7

Q: Do you have an update on your motion to move the School Board offices?

A: On March 12, the School Board voted against moving out of our offices on the river by a 3 – 4 vote. I voted to move.

Q: What's the latest update on the search for a new superintendent?

A: The application window was from March 1 – March 31. In April we will begin reviewing these applications and on April 23 beginning at 9 a.m. in the Cline Auditorium, the board will hold a special meeting to select the semi-finalists. The goal is to make a decision by the end of May.

Q: Did you attend the groundbreaking for the new building at Mandarin High School on March 13?

A: I did and it was so exciting to have this project underway. The new building will contain additional classroom space, remove the school's portables and provide state of the art space for the medical art and culinary arts programs that are a part of the district's Career and Technical Education (CTE). The completion date is anticipated to be sometime in 2026.

Q: Are there any other items of note that the school board is considering?

A: On March 11, the school board began the conversation around further

school consolidations due to decreased enrollment. There will be no impacts for District 7, but we are looking at other parts of the district, especially where student enrollment in a school is fewer than 400. Community meetings will be held in those respective districts to get public feedback. I anticipate hosting a community meeting in District 7 to discuss potential boundary changes for upcoming school years. We won't be impacted in District 7 by school consolidations, but we likely will be impacted by boundary changes. The goal is to create more continuity of feeder patterns from elementary school through high school.

Q: Do you have any kudos to share?

A: Three Atlantic Coast High School students deserve congratulations. Georgia Wicker won first place in the pole vault and Ben Brown won first place in the Lewis James Invitations track and field meet at Raines High School. They competed against 16 girls' track teams and 17 boys' track teams.

Senior Rhett Printy, a member of the National Honor Society, became the all time leading goal scorer in lacrosse at Atlantic Coast. In March, he scored eight goals in one game to reach 100 goals.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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



The groundbreaking on the new building at Mandarin High School was held on March 13. Photo courtesy Duval County Public Schools

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Summer Camp Activities Guide[®]



Chicken fingers make summer picnics fun

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Fried chicken long has been a popular picnic menu item, but other chicken dishes can fill in for this staple quite easily. For example, this recipe for "Sesame Chicken Fingers with Honey Dip" can be enjoyed by kids and adults on a picnic or even at casual events at home. This recipe, from "125 Best Chicken Recipes" (Robert Rose) by Rose Murray, features a sweet honey dip, but other dips can complement the meal as well.

Sesame Chicken Fingers with Honey Dip

Serves 4

- 1/3 cup light mayonnaise
- 3 tbsp. liquid honey
- 1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1/4 cup light mayonnaise
- 2 tbsp. Dijon mustard
- 2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1/3 cup dry bread crumbs
- 3 tbsp. sesame seeds
- 1 tsp. dried Italian herb seasoning
- 1 lb. skinless boneless chicken breasts cut into fingers, 2 inches long by 1/2-inch wide

1. Honey Dip: In a small bowl, stir together the 1/3 cup mayonnaise, honey and 1 tablespoon lemon juice until well combined. Refrigerate if making ahead.

2. In a small bowl, combine the 1/4 cup mayonnaise, Dijon mustard and 2 tablespoons lemon juice.
3. On waxed paper or in a shallow bowl, combine the bread crumbs, sesame seeds and Italian seasoning.
4. Coat chicken with mayonnaise mixture, then with bread crumb mixture. Place on prepared cookie sheet. Bake in preheated oven for 15 to 20 minutes or until golden brown and the chicken is no longer pink inside, turning once. Serve hot with the honey dip and potato wedges, if desired.



Photo courtesy MetroCreative
Sesame Chicken Fingers with Honey Dip

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When is the right time to look into summer camp?

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Summer camp provides children weeks of entertainment, camaraderie and opportunities to learn and grow. It also offers a welcome respite for parents and other caregivers from having to provide recreation for kids during summer vacation, especially if those kids will be attending a sleepaway camp.

Many children are emotionally ready to attend camp between the ages of eight and 10. Some need a little more time to mature. Parents may think they have plenty of time to investigate camps. Chances are if the weather has already warmed and summer vacation is on the horizon, then it might already be too late to get kids into most summer camps.

According to HealthyChildren.org, a division of the American Academy of Pediatrics, it is important to start researching summer camps as soon as possible. Many start booking as early

as January of the current term year. Furthermore, popular programs fill up quite fast.

Start by asking for recommendations from others. The difficulty with this approach is that many people are very protective of their camp choices, especially if the programs are particularly popular. Parents also should conduct an internet search of camps in the area and look at online reviews and ratings.

Find out if the camp is accredited by the American Camp Association. This will not guarantee a risk-free environment, but ACA accreditation is a better bet for providing a camp that is safe and nurturing.

Price also may be a factor in the camp decision. Camps are not all priced the same, so it may require doing some math to figure out what is the best value. Location also can be a consideration. Having to drive a long distance away for camp can be a deterrent to some people.

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Summer Camp Activities Guide[®]



Greenland Pines' All Pro Dad chapter forges unbreakable bonds

By Leslie Echt
mail@floridanewline.com

Greenland Pines Elementary School isn't just a place of learning; it's a hub of family unity, thanks to its dynamic All Pro Dad Chapter. This innovative program offers fathers a chance to connect with their kids in a meaningful way, building strong relationships and unforgettable moments.



Photo courtesy Jessica Kayati
Greenland Pine Elementary's All Pro Dad Chapter fosters family unity.

Each month, dads and their little ones gather bright and early for a special session packed with fun activities and heart-to-heart chats. Led by passionate volunteers, these meetings delve into various topics, from the power of kindness to the importance of teamwork, sparking meaningful conversations that resonate with both dads and kids alike.

The highlight of the program? The much-anticipated "All Pro Dad's Day," where fathers and their children bond over breakfast and dive into engaging discussions led by guest speakers. It's a time for laughter, learning, and, most importantly, strengthening the ties that bind.

Adel Kayati, a dedicated member of the Greenland Pines Elementary community and the driving force behind the All Pro Dad Chapter, said, "Being part of the All Pro Dad Chapter has been an amazing journey for me and my daughter. It's more than just

spending time together; it's about growing and learning side by side. I eagerly anticipate our meetings every month."

The impact of the All Pro Dad Chapter goes beyond the school walls, as fathers and children carry the lessons learned and the memories made into their daily lives. Parents and educators alike applaud the program for its positive influence on family dynamics and its role in fostering a strong sense of community.

Principal Michelle Hinkley said, "The All Pro Dad Chapter is a cornerstone of our school's community. It provides fathers with a unique opportunity to actively engage in their children's lives, creating lasting bonds that transcend the classroom. We are proud to host such a meaningful program at Greenland Pines Elementary."

Leslie Echt is a SAC Member and parent at Greenland Pines Elementary.

Summer camp options abound

By Newsline Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

Summer camp season will be here before parents know it. While children anxiously await the last day of school, adults know that it can be challenging to keep kids occupied and mentally stimulated when they aren't in the classroom. Although it may be alright to enjoy a few days lounging around and playing video games, too much sedentary behavior is not good for anyone, even children. Families turn to summer camp to provide children with activities to occupy their time when school is not in session.

Camps catering to a variety of interests are open to youngsters, so there's likely one out there to excite every child. Each year, more than 25 million children and adults take part in the camp experience, says the American Camp Association. Summer camp gives kids a chance to spread their wings and enjoy new adventures. When seeking camps, families can consider interests, proximity, cost, and other variables. Here are some of the different types of camps families can consider.

Day camp: Day camps are a popular choice. Day camps tend to be general recreation camps that offer an array of activities. Campers are dropped off (or bussed) in the morning, and arrive home early evening. These camps are readily accessible and run by various organizations. Some camps enable you to pay by the week, rather than committing to an entire season.

Sleep-away camp: Like the name

implies, sleep-away camp hosts campers overnight, typically for several weeks. This may be children's first extended time away from home, and there's bound to be a few nerves that spring up. Round-the-clock activities and chances to bond with their peers can help kids overcome fears of being away from home.

Academic camp: Academic camps focus their attention on various subjects, putting like-minded children together. Academic summer programs ensure children's brains stay active, helping students avoid that dreaded "summer slide." Some of these camps mimic a school day so they are familiar to kids. Academic focus may vary from general academia to specific subjects like STEM to astronomy to the arts.

Scout camp: Boys and girls participating in scouting programs often have the option to attend summer camp. During camp, kids will have an opportunity to earn badges and advance their rank. Many scout districts have relationships with a specific scout campsite where troops from all over live and advance together for a week or so during the summer.

Fitness and sports camps: Fitness-minded campers or those who play particular sports can investigate camps that focus on fitness and sports performance. These may be more rigorous than other types of camps since they involve lots of physical activity. Wilderness preparation camp is another type of camp that may fit into this category. It will highlight survival training and help mold active hikers and campers.



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- Vacation Bible School 9:00 AM-12:00 PM \$50
 - For children 3 yrs (as of 9/1/23) to 6th grade*
- Afternoon Camp Options 12:30 PM - 5:00 PM | \$100
 - Basketball Camp 2nd-5th grade*
 - Arts, Crafts, and Fun Camp | 1st - 5th grade*
 - Mission: Delta 12 2 Preview age details below

Volunteers are 7th graders to adults

Camp Details for Weeks 2-7

- For Kindergarten to 6th grade*
- 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM \$210 per week
- Early drop off and extended day available for additional cost
- Weekly lunch package available for purchase
- Limited spots for 7th-9th graders* for SALT program (Students Acquiring Leadership Training), as supervised • helpers earning volunteer hours \$75 per week

*current grade for 23-24 school yr



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Briefs

Mandarin Women's Club hosts popular fashion show

On Thursday, April 25, the Mandarin Women's Club will hold its luncheon and annual Fashion Show at the Ramada Inn in Mandarin, 3130 Hartley Road. Club members will model casual and smart casual outfits provided by Chico's. A representative from Chico's will be assisting the models in selecting the clothing that is just right for each of them, then they will describe what each model is wearing as she strolls among the attendees. The Fashion Show will begin at 11 a.m., followed by lunch.

Doors open at 10:30 a.m. and reservations for the luncheon are required.

The luncheon cost is \$25 and must be received by Thursday, April 18. Call Jo-Ellen at (904) 635-8722 or email her at joshifty@aol.com to make reservations and obtain payment instructions. Visit www.mandarinwomensclub.com for more information on events, photos, and membership forms.

a special concert version of the new musical, "The Secrets We Keep," presented at River Garden Senior Services, 11401 Old St. Augustine Road, on April 7 at 2 p.m. This event is open to residents of River Garden as well as the public, offering a unique opportunity to experience the power of live theater in an intimate setting.

Written and directed by Danielle Wirsansky, "The Secrets We Keep" is a poignant and thought-provoking musical that delves into the untold stories of LGBTQ+ individuals during the Holocaust. The concert version of "The Secrets We Keep" will feature songs and scenes from the full production, performed by a talented cast of actors and musicians. Audiences can anticipate being moved by the stirring music, powerful performances, and compelling storytelling.

The show will open in Tallahassee April 25 – 27 and then "The Secrets We Keep" will make its Off-Broadway debut at American Theatre for Actors in May 2024, marking a significant milestone



Photo courtesy Gail Packard
28 members of the Mandarin Women's Club and five spouses went on a Caribbean cruise in February.

Mandarin Garden Club announces plant sale

The Mandarin Garden Club will host its annual Plant Sale on Friday, May

3 and Saturday, May 4 from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. each day at the club, located at 2892 Loretto Road.

A wide variety of low-cost, high-quality plants and hanging baskets will be for sale, plus various lawn ornaments, pots and garden related items. Master Gardeners will be available to answer gardening questions. The Jacksonville Herb Society, the Rose Society, the Orchid Society and the Bonsai Club will be also available for sales and public education.

The Garden Club's Crafty Ladies will have a booth with gift items available for purchase. They handcraft unique items that would make wonderful gifts for Mother's Day or any other special occasion. Club members will sell baked goodies and offer free coffee and water. The Masons will also be

providing food for sale. There will also be a kids' planting booth and every child will receive a free plant to take home.

Visit mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

Concert version of "The Secrets We Keep" to be staged at River Garden

White Mouse Productions announces

for the production. Audiences in Jacksonville will have the opportunity to experience this powerful and thought-provoking musical on April 7 before it heads to New York City.

New head of cancer medicine at Baptist MD Anderson

Tomislav "Tom" Dragovich, MD, PhD, joined Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center as head of the Division of Cancer Medicine and medical oncologist-in-chief, effective March 11. He will also serve as medical director of the center's clinical research programs. His appointment follows a national search and extensive review process.

Dr. Dragovich brings more than two decades of experience in medical oncology and clinical research to the region, with significant expertise in gastrointestinal cancer, innovative clinical trials and cancer drug development.

He will expand the cancer medicine programs at Baptist Medical Center South and Baptist Medical Center Clay with an eye toward increasing access to innovative cancer care throughout the region's ever-growing community. His leadership will strengthen Baptist MD Anderson's ability to meet the evolving needs of the community while maintaining its reputation for excellence.

Life

travel • pantry raiders • gardening
fishing • entertainment • puzzles

Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.com

Diana Openbrier

Diana Openbrier grew up in a farming community south of Pittsburgh. The family truly lived off the land, including eggs from chickens and a three-acre garden that provided vegetables as well as income from the sale of the crops. At age 11, Openbrier said this income provided for the purchase of the family's first television. "We never wanted for anything," Openbrier said. "I guess we were poor, but we had everything we needed."

Eventually, her parents divorced and she ultimately lived with her father off the farm. At age 15, she took a job at the Anchor Hocking glass factory and was able to save enough money to go to nursing school after she finished high school. She worked her way through nursing school by working at three jobs, but ended up being in the one-third of her class that graduated. Thus began a lengthy and distinguished career in nursing that included more education (bachelor's, master's, PhD and finally a certification as a Family Nurse Practitioner) and an eclectic assortment of jobs. Openbrier retired in January and still keeps busy with volunteer work, especially at the Mandarin Garden Club as well as with UNF Botanical Gardens. She was recently awarded certification as a Florida Master Naturalist. She and husband Gary Swanson recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary.

Q: What was a particular interest of yours during your nursing career?

Get to Know ...

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



Photo courtesy Diana Openbrier
Diana Openbrier

A: Nutrition became a big interest for me when I worked at the VA Hospital in Pittsburgh. I worked with COPD patients who were underweight. I worked with drug companies to develop a nutritional supplement for these patients, who had better outcomes once they gained some weight. I also developed the first home ventilator program and developed a home oxygen program with better equipment for these patients — and saved the VA money while doing so.

Q: How did you meet your husband?

A: He lived next door to me when I was in Pittsburgh. We were together for a number of years before we decided to get married before the end of a year for the tax deduction. It took us until New Year's Eve to do so. Gary is a mechanical engineer who worked at Westinghouse in Pittsburgh. The plan was for us to both work until 1990 and then take some time to go sailing, something we enjoyed together.

Q: Where did you sail?

A: We lived aboard our 30-foot sailboat "Lothlorien" for six and a half years and sailed around the Caribbean. We had lots of adventures, including the time I sewed a worker's finger back on in Trinidad and helped a bartender in Bequia with high blood pressure. But eventually, we came back to the States and sailed up the Intracoastal Waterway to Jacksonville. Gary decided he liked being on land, so we stayed here. I went back to work and earned my Family Nurse Practitioner certificate from the University of North Florida in 2003.

Q: How did you get involved with the Mandarin Garden Club?

A: Around 2012, a longtime member of the garden club was a patient of mine. She brought me a membership form and I joined the circle she belonged to. The circle needed help, so I offered — and then they made me the president. I've always enjoyed gardening, since I was a little girl on the farm. Even on the sailboat, I had a little tray of herb plants.

Q: What are some of the projects you're working on at the garden club?

A: The garden club has many gardens which require maintenance and we rely on our volunteers. We were having fewer and fewer people show up on work days, so I started offering lunch for those who came to volunteer. They would work in the garden in the morning every Wednesday and then have lunch together. We went from three people to 32 people.

Maple Leaf cont. from pg.1

tist and adventurer, assembled a team of amateur and professional marine archaeologists to dive the wreckage. They recovered nearly 3,000 objects, representing a small fraction of the still-submerged cargo.

The artifacts are now property of the State of Florida, with many on long-term loan to the Mandarin Museum for display in the newly expanded "Maple Leaf Shipwreck Gallery." During this 160th anniversary, the community is invited to learn more through a visit to the Mandarin Museum. The exhibit is open every Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. On April 6 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m., Dr. Keith Holland and his team of divers will be in the gallery for Meet the Divers. Admission to the museum and Meet the Divers is free. Visit mandarinmuseum.org for more information.

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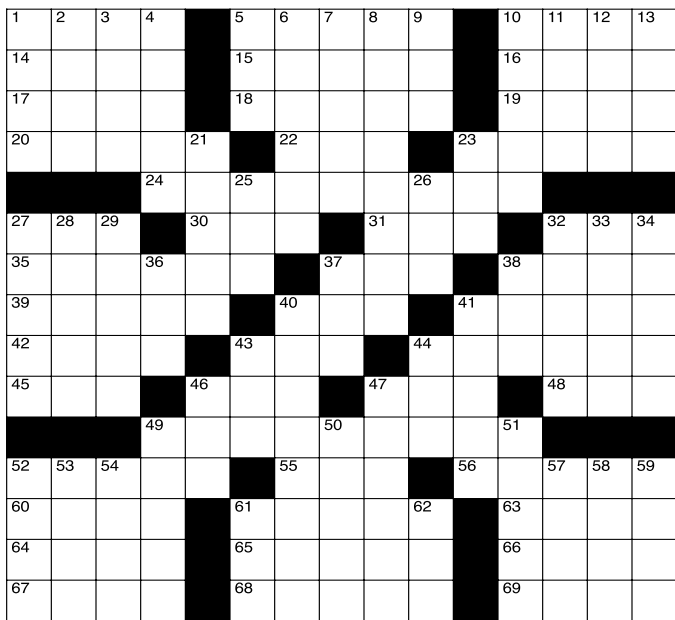
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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

1. Excessively theatrical actors
5. Footwear
10. A way to disfigure
14. Exchange rate
15. Hawaiian wreaths
16. North-central Indian city
17. Bungle
18. Extremely angry
19. A short note of what's owed
20. Criminal organization
22. Mimic
23. Try to grab
24. U.S.-born individuals
27. Some are covert
30. Order of the British Empire
31. Don't know when yet
32. Payment (abbr.)
35. Winged angelic being
37. Variety of Chinese
38. A way to be anxious
39. Famed wrestler Hulk
40. Partner to cheese

41. Slang for sergeant
42. Canadian flyers
43. Actress Ryan
44. Highly unpleasant vapor
45. Body part
46. Halfway
47. Cool!
48. Consume
49. Salts
52. Upper bract of a floret of grass
55. Housepet
56. Cavalry-sword
60. Symbol of a nation
61. Frocks
63. Used to carry food
64. Portuguese folk song
65. Sharp mountain ridge
66. Ireland
67. Where golfers begin
68. Greek mythological sorceress
69. Fluid suspensions

CLUES ACROSS

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66. Ireland
67. Where golfers begin
68. Greek mythological sorceress
69. Fluid suspensions

LAWN & GARDEN WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

- AMEND
- BLOOMING
- BORDER
- COMPOST
- CUT
- DRAINAGE
- DROUGHT
- EDGE
- FERTILIZE
- GARDEN
- GREEN
- HEALTHY
- INSECTS
- LANDSCAPING
- LAWN
- MOSSY
- MULCH
- POLLINATOR
- PRUNE
- SCENT
- SHRUBS
- SUNLIGHT
- TRIMMING
- WEEDS

⊙ * ☼ ☽ ☿ ♀ ♁ ♂ ♃ ♄ ♅ ♆ ♇ ♈ ♉ ♊ ♋ ♌ ♍ ♎ ♏ ♐ ♑ ♒ ♓ ♀ ♁ ♂ ♃ ♄ ♅ ♆ ♇ ♈ ♉ ♊ ♋ ♌ ♍ ♎ ♏ ♐ ♑ ♒ ♓

CRYPTO FUN

Determine the code to reveal the answer!

Solve the code to discover words related to lawn and garden.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 8 = S)

- A. 5 2 23 9 13 25 8**
Clue: Colorful plants
- B. 15 25 4 8 8**
Clue: Lawn plant
- C. 2 4 22 16 8 17 4 24 13**
Clue: Visual features on property
- D. 10 23 9 13 25**
Clue: Cuts grass

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Briefs cont. on pg. 11

“Dr. Dragovich has dedicated two decades of his career to advancing our understanding of cancer biology,” said Bill Putnam, MD, FACS, medical director of Baptist MD Anderson. “We are looking forward to sharing this expertise in clinical trials and cancer medicine with the Jacksonville community and beyond as part of our quest to offer tomorrow’s cancer treatments, today.”

Dr. Dragovich comes from Banner MD Anderson Cancer Center in Arizona, where he was one of the original founding oncologists and division chiefs of its cancer center. His most recent position was interim chief of cancer medicine and head of the clinical research division. He received his Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Belgrade College of Medicine and completed his clinical training at the University of Chicago Medical Center. He also holds a PhD in Molecular Pharmacology from the University of Illinois, Chicago.

Northeast Florida Sisters in Crime to meet April 20

“Living with Missingness: The Impact of Suffering with a Missing Person” is the theme of the Northeast Florida Sisters in Crime’s April meeting, to be held on April 20 beginning at 10:15 a.m. at the Ponte

Vedra Beach Branch Library.

When a loved one goes missing, the horror of not knowing what’s happened can be paralyzing. April speaker, Charlene “Charlie” Shunick played a pivotal role in the search for her sister, “Mickey” Shunick. In May 2012, Mickey vanished while cycling home. Charlie Shunick spearheaded search efforts using numerous forms of communication. Her family suffered for months while clinging to hope Mickey would be found alive. Tragically, this was not the case.

Charlie Shunick’s experience searching for her sister inspired her to establish the Resource Association for Missing People, a non-profit organization (ramissingpeople.org). Shunick, along with her board and team, have assisted hundreds of loved ones with their missing person cases. She also recently started an educational and consulting business for Criminal Justice Professionals called Shunick Missing Persons (shunickmp.com). Her long-term goal is to continue to advocate for the missing, while increasing awareness and information about missing persons in the United States.

Visit <https://nefloridasistersincrime.org> to register for the April meeting or email floridasistersincrime@gmail.com for more information.

Duval County School Board member Lori Hershey joins Daughters of the American Revolution

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Along with three other women, Duval County School Board member Lori Hershey was officially welcomed as a new member of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) at its monthly induction ceremony. The event, held in historic Avondale at the Blue Fish Restaurant and Oyster Bar, marked a significant milestone in Hershey’s journey to honor her patriotic lineage and contribute to the preservation of American history.

DAR is a lineage-based organization dedicated to promoting education, patriotism and historic preservation. Membership is open to all women, 18 years and older, who can trace their ancestry back to individuals who contributed to securing American independence during the Revolutionary War. Hershey’s induction into DAR is a testament to her commitment to honoring her family’s heritage and the sacrifices made by her ancestors for the cause of freedom.

During the ceremony, which included an oath of membership, Hershey was presented with her certificate, a rose, and a DAR pin symbolizing her membership in this prestigious organization. She was warmly welcomed by sister DAR

members, who celebrated her dedication to preserving our nation’s rich history and promoting the values of patriotism and civic duty.



Photo courtesy Michelle Rowe
Lori Hershey with Betty Reed, Honorary Regent of Jacksonville Chapter DAR.

Loretto receives Lithuanian book donation

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

Michael Breen, Lithuanian Honorary Consul, Jacksonville, Florida recently presented a book by famous Lithuanian children's author and poet Evelina Daciūta to Loretto Elementary School in celebration of the Day of Restoration of Independence of

Lithuania, Women in History Month, and National Children's Reading Week in the U.S.

"The Fox on the Swing" is a delightful story about a child learning to make friends and dealing with moving from a home they have known to a new location. It is especially relevant to students who are part of a military family.

Author Evelina Daciūte was born in 1975 in Vilnius. After studying at Vilnius University, she worked in the media as a journalist, communication specialist. As a writer, Daciūte made her debut in literature in 2014, when her first book for children "Meškių istorijos" was published. Since then, a dozen more books have appeared for children. Her first award-winning book is "Elephants Come to Visit." Together with illustrator Inga Dagile, she received the Best Book for Children award from the Lithuanian branch of IBBY in 2015.



Photo courtesy Michael Breen
Lithuanian Honorary Consul Michael Breen presents book by Evelina Daciūta to Loretto Elementary School Principal Tammy Boyd.

New state-of-the-art building addition coming to Mandarin High School

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

New culinary and medical labs are just a few of the new features coming to Mandarin High School with the construction of a building addition funded by the voter-approved, half-cent sales tax. Expected to be completed by the fall of 2025, this building addition will also result in the removal of 19 portables.

"This is a beacon of progress for Mandarin High School," said School Board member Dr. Lori Hershey at the groundbreaking on March 13. "It addresses critical needs for additional classroom space and state- of-the- arts facilities to advance culinary arts and the medical arts here at Mandarin High School. Investing in Mandarin today is clearly an investment that will benefit students and our community."

As a resident of Mandarin, superintendent Dr. Dana Kriznar shared how this was extra special for her. It goes beyond right-sizing the school and demolishing the portables (which are two fundamental goals of the district's Master Facility Plan).

"It's about making a strong investment in the quality of the student experience at this great school," said Dr. Kriznar. "It's about making a great school even better."

Noting that Mandarin High School has a College and Career Acceleration Rating of 85 percent — significantly higher than neighboring Creekside and Bartram Trail high schools — Dr. Kriznar said her goal is to provide students a learning experience to help

them build their resumes and stand out among their peers. This new building will help achieve that.

"I know I speak for many of us when I say how gratifying it is to see this level of investment in what we do for our students," said Dr. Kriznar in reference to the voter-approved, half-penny sales tax. "This is only possible because voters said yes."

Graduating senior Jasmine Sank won't be around when the new building addition is complete, but as a leader in the school and in the medical administrative assistant program, she said she is excited for her younger classmates.

"I think this is great for the medical academy," said Sank. "I'm really happy that they're going to be able to enjoy all the opportunities and resources that this will provide them. I think this will definitely help them in their career journey."

Budgeted at more than \$32 million, the project also includes an asphalt overlay and restriping of the school's driver's education course.

For Principal Sara Bravo, this investment in the school will unite the Mandarin community as they witness a promise being fulfilled.

"To be able to see all of those students, teachers, community members, and district leaders all come together for the school I have the privilege to lead is a little overwhelming," said Bravo. "I am going to think about this day for a long time, and I'm just excited to get started."



Photos courtesy Duval County Public Schools
Ceremonial groundbreaking at Mandarin High School.

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Crown Point holds Family-Fit-Equations Night

By Mary Eyer
mail@floridanewslines.com

Crown Point teachers and staff hosted a math Family-Fit-Equations Night on Thursday, Feb. 22. Students from Pre-K to fifth grade engaged in various activities, including the four major operations: adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing.

The activities included completing equations, measuring sharks of many sizes, and presenting different multi-digit numbers using place value charts. Math boot camp with drill sergeant Barbara Lakin, third grade math teacher, included jumping jacks, squats, push-ups, crunches, and more. Family night also included various fitness activities led by Crown Point's own self-care strategist, Deborah Bickle. Parents who attended the event enjoyed delicious snacks.



Photo courtesy Mary Eyer
Saara Abaza and her daughter, second grader Kiinda, measuring sharks.

Seniors celebrate St. Patrick's Day



Photo courtesy Mandarin Senior Center

The Mandarin Senior Center recently celebrated St. Patrick's Day with a corned beef and cabbage luncheon. Entertainment was provided by members of the Legacy Irish Dance Academy, the only Irish dance school in Jacksonville. Its members range in age from five to 21, and they frequently appear at venues around town and dance competitively both nationally and internationally. The Mandarin Senior Center is located at 3848 Hartley Road and is open weekdays from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Breakfast is provided daily at 9 a.m. and lunch at noon. Members enjoy a variety of activities to include chair volleyball, line dancing, bingo, mahjong, ceramics, woodworking, chair yoga, speakers, and field trips. For more information call (904) 255-6750 or stop by for a visit.

Quilts on display at JIA



Photo courtesy Sondie Frus

The QuiltfestJax seven guilds are hosting a special art exhibit at the Jacksonville International Airport. Four art cubes on the main level and four glass covered cases downstairs by baggage claim feature quilts from local quilters. The exhibits will be upstairs until April 1 and downstairs through May.

Mandarin Rotary builds 68th wheelchair ramp

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

On Feb. 24, eight members of the Mandarin Rotary Club built a wheelchair ramp at the home of Emma Moseley, who has impaired mobility. Club members provided all of the labor for the project, and Hart Felt Ministries provided all of the materials.

The ramps are built free of charge to mobility impaired homeowners in the local area and make it much easier for them to enter and leave their

homes when they otherwise would be homebound.

The Mandarin Rotary Club is dedicated to serving local citizens in need, with the motto, "Service Above Self." The club meets every Tuesday morning for breakfast at the Ramada Inn on Hartley Road in Mandarin. Contact Membership Chairman Michael Sullivan at michaels@coj.net for more information about the club and its opportunities for service and good fellowship.



Photo courtesy Steve Gallagher
Rotary members Jill Dunbar, Bill Gowen, Robert Meek, project supervisor Louis Dunbar, Leo Gurman, Jim Matthews, Jim Johns, and Paul Hardaker along with Emma Moseley's daughter Barbara.



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Gardening

How to be 'Florida-Friendly' in the garden

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale
mail@floridanewsline.com

I recently watched a webinar hosted by the Florida Wildflower Foundation discussing what it takes to define a plant as “native” and why it matters (<https://tinyurl.com/3zt7ah85>). It’s a complicated topic. I was surprised to learn that the lovely blanket flower (*Gaillardia pulchella*) isn’t native to Florida, but is a more western wildflower.

What is probably more relevant to a backyard gardener is the concept of ‘Florida-Friendly.’ There are nine ‘principles’ (see <https://tinyurl.com/46bvmtas>), but basically it is a way to treat the land we tend, however small, in ways to conserve and protect water sources and wildlife, like the bees and butterflies that grace our gardens. This University of Florida scheme (<https://ff.ifas.ufl.edu/>), can help us to choose and grow a wide variety of plants, design a landscape in which they can flourish, and enjoy the wildlife that will naturally be attracted to our yards. Luckily that blanket flower fits the bill. While much of the farming world still relies largely on potentially harmful pesticides and herbicides, individuals can go a long way in mitigating those harms by following Florida-Friendly principles in their own backyards.

If you use a landscaping company, the section of the Florida-Friendly website on hiring a Florida-Friendly professional (<https://ff.ifas.ufl.edu/resources/hire-florida-friendly/>), could help you assess whether a company or individual is sufficiently knowledgeable to take care of your landscape the Florida-Friendly way. If you want to tread lightly on

your land, it’s important that all the people who work on it agree about what that really means.

As the clocks go forward, there are unmistakable signs of spring. Spiderwort (*Tradescantia ohioensis*) is one native wildflower coming into its own. The subtle purple-blue three-petaled flowers have a fluffy center topped with yellow anthers and are irresistible to cruising honeybees. Native Darrow’s blueberries (*Vaccinium darrowii*) bloom early and attract a variety of small pollinators, while larger bumblebees enjoy the flower spikes of African Blue basil. This is a cultivated variety which, like many salvias, is very attractive to pollinators. My native cross vine (*Bignonia capreolata*) is festooned around a large beautyberry shrub — it looks glorious, and bees love it. In a few weeks’ time when the flowers fade, I’ll trim back the cross vine and the beautyberry will begin flowering. The two began growing together more than 20 years ago, and I’ve loved the combination ever since.

Check out the gardening calendar for North Florida (<https://tinyurl.com/4mzdkysv>) for a reminder of things to do and plants you can add to your garden. We all find gaps in our beds and wonder what new ideas we can try, and it’s helpful to find advice from the experts. As well as timely tips, there are links to topics such as bulbs for the Florida garden.

Enjoy our delightful spring weather while it lasts. The hot and humid days of summer are on the horizon!

April designated as Water Conservation Month

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Highlighting its commitment to the preservation and sustainable use of Florida’s water resources, the St. Johns River Water Management District’s governing board has officially proclaimed April 2024 as Water Conservation Month. This annual recognition, now in its 24th year, serves as a reminder of the critical role water conservation plays, particularly during the dry month of April when water demands escalate due to springtime planting.

“During Water Conservation Month, let’s focus on using water mindfully,” said St. Johns River Water Management District water conservation coordinator, Deirdre Irwin. “Over half of home water usage is for outdoor irrigation. With recent rains, the necessity to water decreases. We encourage residents not just to enhance irrigation methods but also to show restraint — remember to turn off the sprinklers when they aren’t necessary.”

While ensuring outdoor water use is limited, it is also important to not overlook indoor water consumption. Minor water leaks contribute to nearly 1 trillion gallons of water wasted annually in U.S. homes, as reported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In an average household, these leaks accumulate to around 10,000 gallons of water wasted each year — equivalent to the amount needed for 270 loads of laundry.

The district’s commitment to water conservation extends beyond Water Conservation Month. Daily efforts by district staff include promoting water conservation through comprehensive water supply planning, permitting processes, district cost-share programs, and effective communication and outreach initiatives.

Visit www.sjrwmd.com/waterconservation/savingwater or explore the Water Less campaign website at www.WaterLessFlorida.com for additional water-saving tips.

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The Pantry Raiders

Cheese and egg casserole a brunch staple

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

On lazy weekend mornings or when entertaining a crowd, it may be more fitting to serve brunch rather than breakfast or lunch. Brunch enables guests or family members to sleep in a little later. Plus the filling combination of menu items can keep people satisfied until dinner later on in the evening.

The recipe for "Farmhouse Skillet" from "Lord Honey Traditional Southern Recipes with a Country Bling Twist" (Pelican Publishing) by Chef Jason Smith, puts together a blend of savory ingredients into an egg casserole that can be a winner on any brunch table.

Farmhouse Skillet

Serves 8-10

- 1 lb. bacon, diced
- 2 cups cubed cooked ham
- ½ lb. breakfast sausage, cooked and crumbled
- 1 small purple onion, diced
- ½ red bell pepper, diced
- ½ yellow bell pepper diced
- 10 eggs, beaten
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 1 20-ounce package frozen shredded hash browns, or tater tots, thawed

Salt and ground black pepper to taste

1 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese
Preheat oven to 350 F.

In a very large cast-iron skillet (12-inch or larger), over medium heat, cook the bacon until crispy. Then add the ham and sausage and stir.

Add the onions and peppers, and sauté for 5 minutes, always stirring.

In a small bowl, whisk the eggs and heavy cream.

Stir the hash browns into the skillet, and add salt and pepper to taste. Cook for 5 to 8 minutes, until hash browns start to brown. Remove from heat. Add the egg mixture, top with cheese, and bake for 20 to 25 minutes or until bubbly and cheese is melted.



Photo courtesy MetroCreative
Farmhouse Skillet.

Fishing

Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis
mail@floridanewslines.com

As I sit here and write this under the warmth of a spring afternoon following a cool morning and a successful fishing trip, I have such great optimism for the coming weeks and months on the water. I hope all of you feel the same. Spring just has an energy to it, you know? Not that the winter was bad, but green is my favorite color so I do enjoy the new leaves.

Unfortunately, April is probably the last month you'll want to spend time in the creeks looking for specks and bass. Not because they're not there anymore, but because there will be a lot more people on the water enjoying the warmer weather — which makes a creek fishing trip a little more dangerous and a lot less enjoyable. Blind curves and lack of courtesy will encourage you to seek less congested areas. If you do plan to spend any time in the creeks this month look for the less comfortable days, if we have any, since they can fend off the fair weather crowd.

I know you're probably wondering where the optimism went so here it is. As soon as the creeks start to get packed

with boaters the river fishing really starts ramping up. At an average of two to three miles wide in our area, the river is a great place to spread out and get some space to yourself. Redfish, sheepshead, seatrout, and even tarpon will be around.

As I mentioned last month redfish will really stand out this month as long as you can get the bait that they want. Blue crab will be on the top of their list with fresh dead shrimp behind that. Remember April is closed to shrimping in the river, so leave that net at home. Pull some shrimp out of the freezer or buy some until June 1. Focus on points, dock lines, and shell beds for the reds.

Another favorite I like to target this month is sheepshead. They'll be moving in from their spawning run and hungry for a smaller piece of crab, clam, or shrimp. They're going to be tight to structure, so seek out pilings somewhere. Wherever you're fishing for them you may want to sacrifice some bait as chum to get them fired up. Get out there and enjoy the river. Tight lines.

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Travel

Extremadura, Spain: A soon to be heralded tourist destination

By Debi Lander
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Getting to the region of Extremadura in Spain takes a little extra effort — but travelers are rewarded with a wealth of Spanish history, cultural heritage, natural wonders (especially birds), exceptional cuisine, and the absence of crowds. A three-hour drive southwest of Madrid brought me to the medieval city of Cáceres. Passing through rolling countryside scattered with giant boulders and thousands of olive trees, I soon discovered a district primed for tourism and on the tip of being unveiled.

The Old Town of Cáceres (the "ce" is pronounced like "th" in "thin") is considered one of the best-preserved medieval cities in Europe, earning it UNESCO World Heritage site status. The sepia-toned walled historic center surrounds a stunning array of Roman, Islamic, Gothic, and Italian Renaissance architecture, and best of all, no modern embellishments.

I began by meandering along winding, narrow cobblestone paths, each turn bringing a picture-postcard view of a church, fortress, or civic building, most adorned with towers and steeples and many topped with stork nests or Spanish kestrels. Saintry statues filled wall niches and doorframes featured centuries-old family crests.

While strolling the 22 acres of the historic center hilltop, you'll pass the

statue of patron saint San Pedro de Alcantara in front of the Santa Maria Cathedral. The devoted stop to rub his bronze toes for blessings, while others do so for good luck. Then, take time to tour inside the cathedral to see the exquisitely carved wooden altar from the 15th century. Don't miss climbing the bell tower for one of the city's best panoramas or surmounting one of two towers on the popularly photographed Church of San Francisco Javier.

If Old Town looks like a scene from the hit drama "Game of Thrones," you are not imagining things. Filming sites included Arco de la Estrella, the arched main entrance to the historic center of Cáceres, as the fictional gate to King's Landing. When I went bird-watching at Los Barruecos Park, I saw the location used for the epic battleground where Daenerys Targaryen brought out her fire-breathing dragons. Extremadura is a bird lover's paradise with more than 360 species thriving in the area, but alas, no dragons.

One morning, I took a tour, gaining insider information from my guide, who stopped at the Convent of St. Paul (Poor Clare Nuns). He entered a side door, set coins on a secret turntable, and when the table spun back around, a box of cookies appeared. The cloistered nuns bake these, especially around Christmas and Easter. Holy Week brings a religious



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
View of Medieval Caceres.

festival to the city, which I learned about in the City Museum.

Cáceres became an ideal base for exploring the surrounding area, but touring outside the old town requires a car. I made exceptional trips to see ancient theater ruins in Merida and the golden splendor in Plasencia's New and Old Cathedral. I learned about Emperor Charles V's royal Monastery of San Jeronimo de Yuste.

One of the most surprising and well-hidden finds in Cáceres was Atrio, a three-Michelin-star restaurant, and its sister restaurant, Torre de Sande Eatery. Tapas (small plates) are famous in Spain, but dining happens very late by American standards. Extremadura's

highlights include Iberico ham from pigs that feast on sweet acorns and fabulous cheeses, especially Torta del Casar. I stayed at the lovely NH Collection Caceres Palacio de Oquendo, a converted 16th-century palace steps outside Cáceres' medieval walls. I also stayed in two paradors, historic buildings converted into hotels, in Spain.

Extremadura offers a wealth of tourism options that are beyond the norm and will soon be at the top of one of those must-see destination lists. Go soon before it gets crowded.

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

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