

# Ponte Vedra NewsLine

FEBRUARY 2025 Volume 12 Issue 2

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

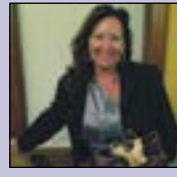
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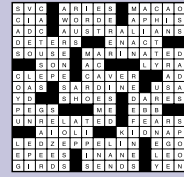
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Photos courtesy Jennifer Werba  
8U championship team.

## Jaws lacrosse teams dominate at Gold Coast Shootout

By Jennifer Werba  
mail@floridanewslines.com

The Jaws Lacrosse program celebrated an extraordinary weekend at the Gold Coast Shootout, showcasing the talent, teamwork, and determination of its players.

The competition was fierce, but the Jaws teams proved unstoppable, leaving it all on the field and earning championship titles in multiple divisions: 8U, 14U Jaws White 2030 and HS Silver. These outstanding performances are a testament to the players' hard work, resilience, and dedication, as well as the incredible support of their coaches and families.

Jaws lacrosse cont. on pg. 2

## St. Johns County Fight Night: First responders to box for charity

By Martie Thompson  
editor@floridanewslines.com

A new family-friendly event is coming to St. Johns County — Fight Night will test the boxing skills of employees of the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office against those of St. Johns County Fire and Rescue. Benefitting from the event will be the soon-to-be-built Diamond of Dreams, a ball field and playground for children with special needs, along with Historic St. Johns PAL (Police Athletic League), an organization that provides all youth an opportunity to play a variety of sports.

Fight Night will be held on Feb. 13 beginning at 6 p.m. at the St. Augustine Amphitheatre. The St. Johns County Sheriff's Office held its first boxing event last year on a smaller scale and as part of another event. It was a huge success. According to Fight Night coordinator SJSO Deputy Krisie Padgett, a stand alone event this year made sense for a few reasons.

"The logistics were difficult to piggy back off another event," Padgett said. "We also needed to be able to sell



Photos courtesy Taylor Levesque

Fighters from last year's event with Sheriff Rob Hardwick and Kendell Hardwick.

more tickets to meet the demand. We were turning people away at the smaller venue last year. Already [in early January] we have sold more tickets than last year."

The event will consist of 15 bouts; the first three bouts will feature teenag-

ers from the PAL boxing program. The main events will be the 12 bouts pitting first responders from SJSO against those from St. Johns Fire and Rescue.

Padgett said that the fighters have been training for about four months, three times per week, to get ready for the fight.

"It takes a big commitment to do this," she said. "The fighters have to make sure their cardio and skill levels are up."

The St. Augustine Amphitheatre will host the event and stadium seating will be available. The ring will be in the pit on the floor, offering great viewing, especially for the seats that will be added to the pit. Padgett said the fighters will walk out on the stage before entering the pit to fight. Two SJSO deputies will act as DJ and The Amp will have food and beverage vendors to add to the festive atmosphere. Fight Night swag, including com-



Practice session with St. Johns County Fire and Rescue.

Fight Night cont. on pg. 2



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**Option 2**

**Date: Tuesday February 25, 2025 • 11:00am**

Location: Sacred Heart Catholic, 7190 Hwy 17 S  
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Register to Attend: <http://learndbs.com/1599>

RSVP also available by phone: Alaine Keebaugh, PhD (c) 770-356-6410

**Fight Night** cont. from pg. 1

memorative patches and shirts, will be available for purchase. The fight is sanctioned by the Combat Sports Athletic Commission, which will also provide some of the judges — in addition to a few current MMA fighters.

St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick is a big fan of not only the event, but also of the beneficiaries of the proceeds. Citing the success of the Field of Dreams in NW St. Johns County, he said that his wife Kendell Hardwick was inspired also by her work dealing with the special needs population in St. Johns County Schools to provide a similar project in the southern part of the county.

“The Diamond of Dreams will be located on PAL property leased from the Board of County Commissioners off Nease Road,” Sheriff Hardwick said. “It will include a carpeted playing field that is wheelchair accessible as well as a playground. The idea is for the PAL kids and the special needs kids to all be able to play together and learn from each other.”

Sheriff Hardwick said that fundraising

for this project is ongoing, including the Fight Night event, but that Kendell Hardwick also successfully made a presentation to the Board of County Commissioners and was granted about \$2 million in ARPA funds that were set to expire if not utilized. Phase 1 of site preparation should be underway shortly and the goal is to have children on the field this time next year.

Event promoter SJSO Deputy Padgett and SJCFR Public Information Officer Chris Naff are looking forward to a great event and seeing many community members there.

“It’s important to remember that these are not professional fighters,” Padgett said. “In real life, they fight fires and crimes. They are boxing on the side to represent their agency and raise money for a good cause.”

Naff agreed and said that each bout will be different and exciting, with an actual belt awarded to the winner.

“Plus, the winners will have bragging rights for the next year,” Naff said.



Practice session with St. Johns County Sheriff’s Office.



Practice session with PAL fighters.

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**Jaws lacrosse** cont. from pg. 1

“We are so proud of every Jaws player who competed,” said the Jaws

coaching team. “Your effort and teamwork exemplify what it means to be part of the Jaws family.”



Photos courtesy Jennifer Werba

4U Jaws White 2030 championship team.



High school B championship team.

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# BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

**Breed:**

Definitely a mix. Bolt is a rescue dog from SAFE animal rescue in St. Augustine

**Favorite activities:**

Long walks with my mom.

**Favorite treat:**

Paul Newman treats; they support good causes and taste good.

**Favorite Friend:**

Gizmo and Sadie

**How did your BFF get his name?**

We had just gotten him and he was really scared. The door was left open and he "Bolted" out. Our wonderful neighbors spent four hours searching and we were able to get him back. The name just stuck.

## Meet Bolt!



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

Happy Valentine's Day!  
from your friends  
at Ponte Vedra NewsLine

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## MYSTERY PHOTO

Can you guess where this is?  
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Last month's Mystery Photo was the "Hello" sign at Nocatee.

### CRYPTO FUN

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A. cards B. roses C. romance D. February

**Answers  
Puzzles  
PG 8**

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# February

## Community Calendar

### What's Happening in Ponte Vedra

**Council on Aging** offers interest groups at the COA Center at UF Health Nocatee. Meetings are free and self-guided. Advance registration for clubs and meetings is required; email pbrunell@Stjohnscoa.com or call (904) 814-9407. Tuesday clubs include: Open Card Play, every Tuesday 1 p.m. - 4 p.m. and Caregiver Support Group, every Tuesday 1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. Wednesday groups include: Mah Jongg Meet-up, 1 p.m. - 3 p.m.

**Palm Valley Market** is held inside and on the grounds of the Palm Valley Community Center at 148 Canal Road, every Tuesday from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. The market offers organically grown produce, microgreens, eggs, grass-finished beef, all natural chicken, Mayport shrimp, prepared meals, preservative-free bread, honey, tea, natural skincare, custom jewelry and soy candles. Visit the Palm Valley Market Facebook page for more information.

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

**1st: NE Florida Sisters in Crime** will host Len Richelle, retired federal prison worker turned novelist, on Feb. 1 at 11:15 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. She will discuss a glimpse into the realities of working in federal prisons and provide inspiration for pursuing passion projects in retirement. Bring your coffee and bring a friend; the group welcomes misters and sisters to learn about writing, promoting, and enjoying crime fiction. Visit [nefloridasistersincrime.org](http://nefloridasistersincrime.org) for more information.

**4th: Vicar's** Landing monthly Boutique Sale will be held Tuesday, Feb. 4 from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. at

1000 Vicar's Landing Way. The sale includes household items and furnishings, knick-knacks, as well as framed art. The public is welcome. Checks or cash only please. The Vicar's Employee Scholarship Fund receives all the proceeds. Call Beverly Webb at (904) 315-2610 for more information.

**4th: Essential Tremor Support Group Meet, Greet and Educate** will be held on Tuesday, Feb. 4 at 11 a.m. at Baptist Health Place in Nocatee, 400 Colonnade Drive. Wellness and fitness specialist Pamela Ryczko, CES, will discuss "Essential Tremor and Balance ... Can It Be Improved?" All are welcome. RSVP to Jan Kary at [jkary@verizon.net](mailto:jkary@verizon.net) or (202) 438-6750.

**4th: Purely Social** hosted by Ponte Vedra Woman's Club will be held on Tuesday, Feb. 4, from 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. at V Pizza, 154 Canal Blvd. Visit [www.pontevedrawomansclub.com](http://www.pontevedrawomansclub.com) for more information and to register.

**5th: Coastal Friends** will host Chris Hoffman, executive director of the Beaches Museum, at the monthly luncheon on Feb. 5 from 11 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. at Marsh Landing Country Club. The luncheon is open to members, guests and the community. The cost to attend is \$25. Reservations must be made in advance by contacting [bartshar@comcast.net](mailto:bartshar@comcast.net) as soon as possible.

**5th: Ponte Vedra Democratic Club** will meet on Wednesday, Feb. 5 at 5:30 p.m. for Chat & Chew before the 6 p.m. meeting at Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. The featured speaker will be immigration attorney Andrea Reyes, who will speak about current US immigration policies and how they may be affected with the new administration. Email [pvdemclub@gmail.com](mailto:pvdemclub@gmail.com) for more information.

**6th: Bingo** will be held at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, on Thursdays from 1 p.m. - 2 p.m. for four weeks beginning Thursday, Feb. 6. Contact Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for

more information and to register.

**11th: Dr. Gerson Yessin Music Series** presents a classical trio performance at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library on Feb. 11 from 6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. The concert will feature chamber music from the classical and romantic eras including the Mendelssohn piano trio in D minor. Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra violinist Jonathan Kuo, principal cellist of the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra Alexei Romanenko, and collaborative artist Rose Shlyam Grace will perform on the piano.

**16th: St. Johns County Republican Party District 4** monthly meeting will be held on the third Thursday of each month (this month, Feb. 20) at 6:15 p.m. at Palm Valley Community Center, 148 Canal Blvd. Visit [stjohns.gov](http://stjohns.gov) for more information.

**19th: Ponte Vedra Woman's Club** general meeting and luncheon will be held on Wednesday, Feb. 19 at 12 p.m. at Marsh Landing Country Club. The program will feature fitness and nutrition guest speaker David Kampfe. The cost of the luncheon is \$30. Registration required; visit [www.pontevedrawomansclub.com](http://www.pontevedrawomansclub.com) for more information.

**20th: Free Tech Help** with David will be held on Thursday, Feb. 20 from 10:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Drop in for tech assistance with your Android, Apple, and Reader devices; no RSVPs required. Visit [sjcpls.org/branches/ponte-vedra-beach-branch/](http://sjcpls.org/branches/ponte-vedra-beach-branch/) for more information.

**21st: The Savvy Job Hunters** Ministry of Christ Episcopal Church will host a free virtual workshop, "Must-Have Interviewing Tips" on Feb. 21 from 10:30 a.m. - 12 p.m. The workshop will include interviewing pointers to get you started, preparing yourself for the interview, your quiver of arrows, and 20 interview questions, and more. The workshop will be presented by Buddy Webster, partner, LEADERS Professional

Recruiting, Inc. Email [pottesen66@gmail.com](mailto:pottesen66@gmail.com) to receive the Zoom link. All are welcome to attend.

**22nd: GTM Research Reserve** will host its monthly Beach Cleanup on Saturday, Feb. 22 from 9 a.m. - 11 a.m. No registration is required; meet at the Visitor Center, 505 Guana River Road in Ponte Vedra Beach where gloves and trash bags will be provided. Visit [gtmnerr.org](http://gtmnerr.org) for more information.

**22nd: Ponte Vedra Writers** will meet on Saturday, Feb. 22 at 11 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Author Kevin Pettway will speak on "Humor in Writing: How to Create Funny Murders, Monsters, and Romance, and Why You Should Try." The meetings are free and open to the public. Visit [www.floridawriters.org](http://www.floridawriters.org) for more information.

**22nd: Great Gatsby Gala**, hosted by the Ponte Vedra Woman's Club, will be held on Feb. 22 from 6 p.m. - 10 p.m. at The Yards. The event will be catered by The Local and music will be provided by the Chris Thomas Project. Registration required; visit [www.pontevedrawomansclub.com](http://www.pontevedrawomansclub.com) for more information.

**25th: PVB Adult Coloring Club** at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library will be held on Feb. 25 from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. This program is for adults older than 18; bring a snack or drink for yourself or to share with others. Call the library at (904) 827-6950 for more information.

**27th - March 8th: Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Cinderella"** will be presented by The Creative Academy, in its 14th year of presenting musical performances. Tickets are available at <https://www.ticketleap.events/tickets/cec-som-5/cinderella>.



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

**Q: Do you have an update on the selection process for a new superintendent?**

A: There will be an opportunity for community members to assist us in the search by providing feedback via an online survey. This will be available on the front page of the school district website from Jan. 20 through Feb. 14. Following that, there will be focus groups and community forums scheduled, where community members may share what characteristics they'd like to see in the next superintendent and provide this input to the school board. In May, we anticipate having face to face interviews (following video interviews and written responses). The resumes, video interviews, and written responses of all candidates will all be available on our website for people to view. We hope to select our new superintendent by the end of May with a start date of July 1.

**Q: What can you tell us about this year's upcoming legislative session?**

A: We have approved our legislative platform and it is on our website. Key items include making the certification and recertification process less onerous for teachers to allow us to be more competitive for talent. Also, this recertification process puts another layer of burden on teachers who are already in the field and doing excellent work. We will be requesting additional funding for our ESE students as we are seeing students with more complex needs. And we are always asking for transportation to be fully funded. The transportation categorical in St. Johns County is currently funded at 45 percent of our costs — and we have the most efficient of our state mandated requirements in the state. So the money must come from other areas in our budget to address the shortfall.

**Q: Is it time to start thinking about**

**schools for next year?**

A: We do encourage those families who are trying to make decisions for next school year to reach out to our schools for tours. This is a great way to get a feel for the school and meet the principal. There are especially lots of fun events for incoming kindergarteners. It's important to note that PVPV/Rawlings and Ocean Palms Elementary will both be accepting students from out of zone and out of county next year as part of controlled open enrollment. Limited seats will be available because both schools' anticipated enrollment will be less than 80 percent. This is a great opportunity for families who have wanted to attend one of these schools.

**Q: What is one of the things the district is emphasizing this semester?**

A: We have a big push to decrease absenteeism and increase attendance, especially as we go through the second semester. We want all of our students to finish strong.

**Q: Do you have any kudos to share?**

A: Congratulations to Sree Vidya Siliveri, an eighth-grader at Landrum Middle School, who won the annual St. Johns County School District Spelling Bee on Jan. 8. She won by spelling the word "diocese" correctly. This is her third consecutive win and last year she attended the National Spelling Bee in Washington DC.

Congratulations also to Rodrigo Deleon Ruiz of Nease High School, who placed first in the Incubate Debate competition with the guidance of coach, Mary Geiger.

**Q: How can our readers contact you?**

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



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

**Q. With Valentine's Day around the corner, will your office host any special ceremonies this year?**

A. We will be holding our annual Valentine's Day group wedding ceremony on Friday, Feb. 14, 2025, at 1 p.m. This year we're including vow renewals, and we are partnering with House of Assembly Events to host this momentous occasion at The Carriage House in downtown St. Augustine.

**Q. Can you provide details for couples interested in registering?**

A. To tie the knot or renew vows during the group ceremony on Valentine's Day, couples must register online by visiting [stjohnsclerk.com/wedding](http://stjohnsclerk.com/wedding). Registration closes on Friday, Feb. 7 at 5 p.m. The ceremony is limited to the first 50 couples. Participating couples

must also purchase their marriage license from the clerk's office no later than Feb. 10. Photography services are available for an additional fee; if interested, choose this option when registering.

**Q. For couples who can't attend the group ceremony, what services do you provide at your office?**

A. Our clerks love helping couples navigate the process of starting a new life together in marriage by assisting with marriage applications and issuing marriage licenses. In 2024, we issued 2,765 marriage licenses, and introduced a new wedding photo service to capture couples in their special moment. For couples who can't make it to our special Valentine's Day event,

Q&A with Brandon Patty cont. on pg. 8

## Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

It is with a heavy heart that I must let you know that our wonderful features writer, Tiffany Merlo Phelps, passed away on New Year's Day. She was a part of the Ponte Vedra NewsLine family for five years, contributing to every issue during that time.

Tiffany was a consummate professional and every article she wrote reflected her professionalism and big heart. She truly loved her community and was happy to spotlight the

good works that so many people and organizations were doing. I'm sure that many of you enjoyed and learned from her articles.

She will very much be missed. Please take a moment to read her obituary on page 10 to learn more about her life.

*Martie Thompson*

Editor

*"Before moving here, I had to weather several storms. I was alone and I was afraid. But here, I was not afraid. Feeling safe and secure made all the difference during the storm."*



**Delores**, Resident at Westminster St. Augustine

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**Guest Column**

# St. Johns County Property Appraiser's Office launches new online application for exemptions

By St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer

At the St. Johns County Property Appraiser's Office, we have launched a new and enhanced online application that provides St. Johns County homeowners with the opportunity to quickly and efficiently file for exemptions, including homestead, widow(er) and portability. The new application is submitted through a secure online portal and provides homeowners with step-by-step assistance and continual communication during the process. The new application also provides a quick approval turnaround for complete and valid applications, often within one business day. The application can be found on our website at [www.sjcpa.gov/exemptions](http://www.sjcpa.gov/exemptions).

Here at the Property Appraiser's Office, we want to make filing for exemptions as convenient and easy as possible for our homeowners. This new application allows our homeowners to file for exemptions from the comfort of their own home and when their schedule allows while also providing a more secure, streamlined process with faster approvals.

The online portal and application are through Just Appraised, a business

partner of our office. By setting up an account with the online portal, homeowners can file for multiple exemptions and make changes as needed at any time. Currently, homeowners can apply for homestead, portability and widow(er) exemptions through the new application. By the end of the year, all other property-related exemptions can be applied for online. In the meantime, all other exemptions can be filed by visiting our office at 4030 Lewis Speedway in St. Augustine. Visit [www.sjcpa.gov/otherexemptions](http://www.sjcpa.gov/otherexemptions) for a complete list of available exemptions.

The deadline to apply for exemptions for the 2025 tax year is March 3, 2025. Exemptions reduce the property tax bill for eligible homeowners. For additional information, call our office at (904) 827-5500 or visit our website at [www.sjcpa.gov](http://www.sjcpa.gov).

Our mission at the St. Johns County Property Appraiser's Office is to prepare a tax roll that is fair, equitable and accurate and in a timely manner while complying with Florida Statutes and the requirements of the Florida Constitution. Our office has 46 employees and manages more than 185,000 parcels.



with St. Johns County Commissioner  
Krista Joseph District 4

**Q: What is one of the items that is a priority for you on the Board of County Commissioners?**

A: I plan to bring back for discussion my 14-point Land Development Code change that addresses tree protection. The reason for this is that we now have two new commissioners on the board who, when running for office, seemed to support something like this.

**Q: What are some of the highlights?**

A: All 14 points are common sense, really. For instance, let's keep natural buffers so our community looks the same. If clear cutting can't be eliminated, why not just leave a natural buffer instead of clearcutting and then having to go to the trouble of replanting (but with immature trees)? A homebuilder once told me, "Trees sell houses," so this could be part of their marketing plan.

**Q: What are some other important elements?**

A: Currently, when a mature tree needs to be removed for development, the fines are very low. We need to raise the fines to the market value of replacing the tree. Also, right now developers can clear cut in advance of building, sometimes by four years. This causes the loss of wildlife habitat and ecosystem for years before building even takes place. Let's make the land clearing take place right before development to avoid this.

I'd say, in general, let's not lose what we have here in St. Johns County — quality of life. The City of St. Augustine and other surrounding cities and counties have tougher tree protections than the county does.

**Q: So what is the next step?**

A: A discussion of tree protections will be on the March meeting agenda. After that, we can forward to legal and growth management any proposed changes to the land development code for their input. Then, it will come back to the Board of County Commissioners for readings and a vote.

**Q: What are some of the items that will be on the agendas for February BCC meetings?**

A: For February, we will have the proposed comprehensive plan and a new concurrency ordinance for commercial development, among other items. Even if you can't attend our meetings, you can watch them live on GovTV, which can be accessed from the county website, [sjcfl.us](http://sjcfl.us). Meetings are the first and third Tuesdays of each month beginning at 9 a.m.

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

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

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**Wednesday, February 12**

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**Wednesday, February 19**

Murray Bros Caddyshack  
455 Legacy Trail, World Golf Village

**Friday, February 21**

Del Webb Nocatee Clubhouse  
451 Grand Wood Drive, Ponte Vedra, FL

**Wednesday, February 26**

Pusser's Bar & Grille  
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# Life

travel • pantry raiders • gardening  
fishing • entertainment • puzzles

## Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson  
editor@floridanewsline.com

## Briefs

### Florida Supervisor of Elections Association announces scholarships

In a commitment to furthering education and civic engagement, the Florida Supervisors of Elections is offering three \$1,200 scholarships to college students across the state, according to St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes.

Applicants must be registered Florida voters and live in the state for at least the preceding two years. Applicants must be either a Political Science, Public Administration, Business Administration, or Journalism/Mass Communication major and be at least a junior in college. Students must be enrolled or accepted as a full-time student in a senior college or university in Florida and have maintained at least a "C" average or above for the previous year.

The deadline to apply for a scholarship is March 7, 2025. Applications are available online on the Scholarship page in the "About" section at [www.votesjc.gov](http://www.votesjc.gov) or may be picked up from the St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Office located at 4455 Avenue A, Suite 101, in St. Augustine.

Applications must be submitted to the Elections Office of the county in which the applicant is registered to vote. Each county will select one finalist to send to the FSE Scholarship Committee for consideration. Visit [www.votesjc.gov](http://www.votesjc.gov) or call (904) 823-2238 for more information.

### Chocolate and Beyond to support volunteers and teachers

The 32nd annual Chocolate and Beyond event, a celebration of chocolate, desserts, and other delectable culinary treats, will be held on March 1 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,

Briefs cont. on pg. 9

## Theresa DePonceau

Theresa DePonceau knew when she was a little girl that she wanted to be an interior designer. Growing up in Rochester, NY, the eldest of four sisters, she has artistic genes dating back to her grandparents. Her paternal grandfather started a metal shop to produce metal artwork known as repousse, which means the transfer of one metal to another. Her father took over the shop until his passing and now Theresa is finding her way as a third generation metal artisan. But it is residential and, initially, marine interior design that has provided Theresa her livelihood. Upon her graduation from Savannah College of Art and Design, she took a job with yacht manufacturer Sea Ray, moving on to other marine companies before moving over to residential interior design. Today, she works with custom builders and has an interior design studio in her home.

### Q: How did you know that interior design would be your career?

A: It just kind of came to me. My maternal grandmother had a beautiful home and a great sense of style. If anyone was to get credit for what I think I'm capable of, it would be her. I used to practice in my own parents'

### Get to Know ...

Interested in being featured? Email Martie Thompson at [editor@FloridaNewsLine.com](mailto:editor@FloridaNewsLine.com)



Photo courtesy Theresa DePonceau  
Theresa DePonceau with some of her metal artworks.

home when I was a child; I'd move the furniture around all the time.

### Q: What was your biggest career influence?

A: I worked for Sea Ray for seven years in marine residential design and only left because of the financial crisis that occurred after 9/11. I went on to other opportunities with Silverton Marine, which was part of LUHRS. This is what brought me to St. Augustine. Since the closing of this company, I've worked on a consultative basis for several manufacturers and private yacht owners. Ultimately I moved on to residential design.

### Q: How does residential design differ from marine design?

A: The marine process was faster

because of the production timeline. I worked on all the interior finishes, including upholstery, countertops, curtains and fixed furniture, which was smaller in scale and size. For residential, there are more options in all these categories.

I design for the way that people live in their homes. I always hope to create a living space with the same timeless sensibility that I use to build a wardrobe.

### Q: What can you share about the metal artwork family business?

A: At the metal shop started by my grandfather in Rochester, we have a metal shop library of 176 steel dies that have been hand carved by my grandfather, my father, and other artisans over the years. One of the dies commemorates the 150th anniversary of St. Augustine. Each weighs between 50 – 80 pounds. The finished pieces, primarily in aluminum, are all made by hand, hammered from the dies so that the metal actually becomes a relief of the die. We offer platters, bread trays and circular serving trays.

### Q: Are these metal artworks available for sale?

A: Yes, I do the occasional art show and have some inventory locally. I'm working on an Etsy page.

### Q: What do you like to do in your free time?

A: I enjoy yoga, walking on the beach and painting.

## The PLAYERS Championship March 11 – 16, 2025

The "go to" fan guide for THE PLAYERS  
Official tournament information from the PGA TOUR

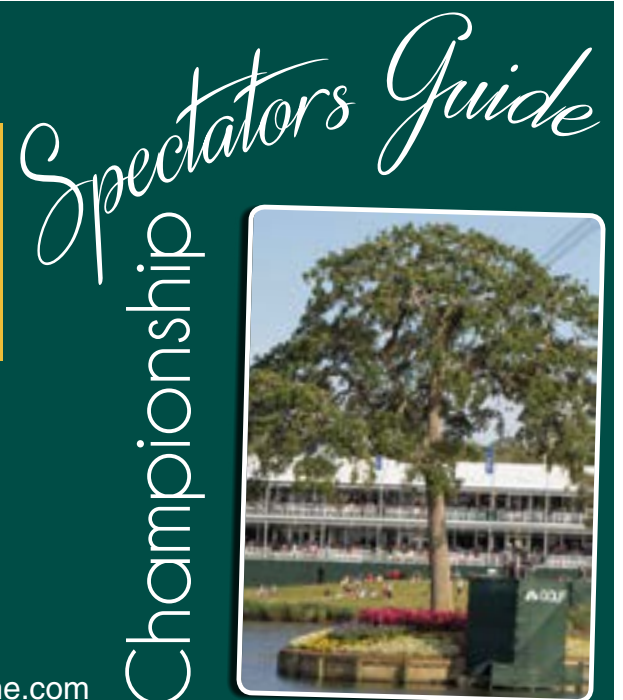
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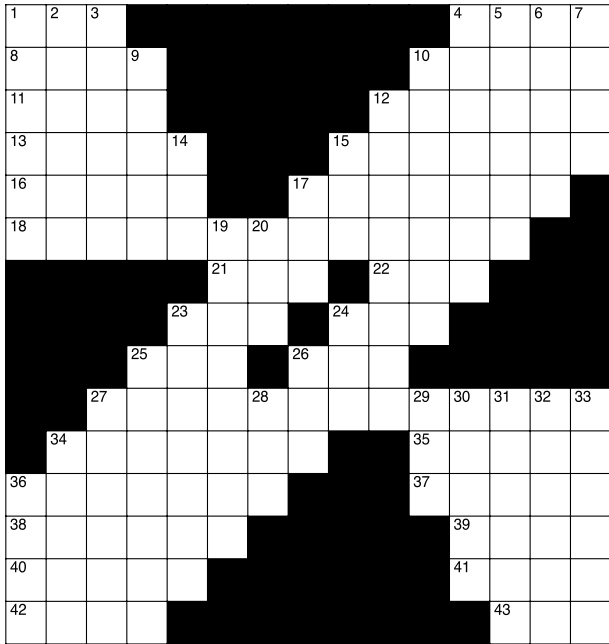
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# Puzzles

Answers on page 3  
Provided by MetroCreative



### CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Racquet sport group (abbr.)
- 4. Norse god of thunder
- 8. Russian industrial city
- 10. What's good for the \_\_\_
- 11. Round-ish shape
- 12. Baltimore MLBer
- 13. French modernist painter
- 15. Burned with water
- 16. Intestinal issue
- 17. Take the lead
- 18. Prove oneself worthy
- 21. None
- 22. Tax collector
- 23. Swiss river
- 24. Gymnast Raisman
- 25. Baby's dining accessory
- 26. Canadian beer distributor
- 27. Iconic American tourist destination
- 34. More expansive
- 35. Alert
- 36. Popular boots Doc \_\_\_
- 37. Showings
- 38. Conclusion
- 39. Share a common boundary
- 40. Shooting sport
- 41. Popular side dish
- 42. Global energy firm
- 43. Chronicles (abbr.)

### CLUES DOWN

- 1. Type of bomb
- 2. Polynesian island country
- 3. Heavenly body
- 4. Hard workers
- 5. Covered
- 6. Johns Hopkins Hospital founder
- 7. Plant of the grass family
- 9. Island person of the Bering Sea
- 10. Storehouse
- 12. Scarlet-flowered desert shrub
- 14. A pituitary hormone
- 15. Female sibling
- 17. Monetary unit of Afghanistan
- 19. Empowering
- 20. Space station
- 23. Disorder
- 24. State of fuss
- 25. Footwear for babies
- 26. Nuclear reactor (abbr.)
- 27. Drove
- 28. Affirmative
- 29. Male parent
- 30. Utter obscenities
- 31. Type of verse
- 32. Unpleasant person
- 33. One who settles down
- 34. Founder of source-based history
- 36. A way to snarl

## VALENTINE'S DAY WORD SEARCH

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

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

- ### WORDS
- ADORE
  - AFFECTION
  - BELOVED
  - BOYFRIEND
  - CANDY
  - CHAMPAGNE
  - CHERUB
  - CHOCOLATE
  - CUPID
  - DATE
  - FLOWERS
  - GIFTS
  - GIRLFRIEND
  - HEARTS
  - HUG
  - KISS
  - LOVE
  - MOVIE
  - POEM
  - RED
  - ROMANCE
  - ROSES
  - SWEETHEART
  - VALENTINE

## CRYPTO FUN

Solve the code to discover words related to Valentine's Day. Each number corresponds to a letter. (Hint: 3 = R)

**A. 23 14 3 18 16**  
Clue: Greetings

**B. 3 9 16 20 16**  
Clue: Popular flowers

**C. 3 9 19 14 24 23 20**  
Clue: Strong feeling of attraction

**D. 17 20 10 3 4 14 3 5**  
Clue: Second month

**Q&A with Brandon Patty** cont. from pg. 5

we also perform wedding ceremonies during regular business hours at the Richard O. Watson judicial center, located at 4010 Lewis Speedway in St. Augustine. While walk-ins are welcome, couples can also book an appointment online. Note that marriage licenses are not valid until three days after issuance (applies to Florida residents only).

**Q. What is the best way for people to contact you with questions?**

A. For questions about the services we provide at the Clerk's office, our Customer Care Call Center is available Monday – Friday from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. at (904) 819-3600, and by email at clerk@stjohnsclerk.com. I can also be reached directly on my cell at (904) 599-8688 or by email at BPatty@stjohnsclerk.com.

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**PopHistory**

By Scott A. Grant [mail@floridanewsline.com](mailto:mail@floridanewsline.com)

**A Coke and a smile**

At the height of the Great Depression, whole families were uprooted. Many wandered, seemingly aimlessly, about the country searching for work. They were indescribably poor. They were dirty and hungry and despondent. Some days, a 10-cent candy bar served as a meal for an entire family. A 5-cent bottle of Coca Cola was a luxury. Even so, people still spent that 5-cents and indulged themselves. Sometimes you just have to spoil yourself.

At least one man noticed this phenomenon. He was a banker in Quincy, Florida named Pat Munroe. He marveled at the fact that dirt poor farmers in his small hometown still seemed to have the money for the occasional Coke. He also marveled at the relatively cheap price of Coke stock. At the time, a single share went for \$19. The company had more money than that in the bank. He urged his customers to invest in the stock, even if it was just a single share.

“Mr. Pat” was a trusted member of the community. He was their banker. They relied on him for the loans that

allowed them to plant each spring. Quincy is a little town northwest of Tallahassee. The population was about 3,800 during the Great Depression and about 7,000 today. The principal crop back then was tobacco. Some of Munroe's customers took his advice and bought what stock they could. Never a lot. Who had the money back then?

The investment paid off, probably even far beyond the wildest dreams of the town's trusted banker and his following. Over the years, Coca Cola stock grew and grew and then grew some more. The price went up. The dividends went up. Eventually, Quincy, Florida — named after President John Quincy Adams — became the wealthiest city in America. At one time, the town boasted 67 “Coca-Cola Millionaires.”

A single share of Coke stock, purchased for \$19 in the 1930s would now be worth more than half a million dollars. More than \$10 million if you had reinvested the dividends. This year you would get more than \$15,000 a year in dividends alone. Even better, that dividend has gone

up every year for the past 57 years. Not bad for a \$19 investment.

The good citizens of Quincy were not the only ones to benefit. SunTrust Bank was the underwriter of the Initial Public Offering of Coca-Cola stock way back in 1919. The bank was paid \$100,000 of Coke stock for their troubles. A little over a decade later, the value of the stock had been cut in half. Many people might have panicked and sold. Cut their losses. SunTrust did not. They held the stock certificates in a vault for decades. Another vault at the bank held the secret formula for Coca-Cola.

In 2012, SunTrust finally sold those shares for nearly two billion dollars. The return on investment was nearly two million percent! Now, that may sound like a great deal. But the value of that stock has gone up another billion dollars since they sold.

*Scott A. Grant is a local historian and author. By day, he is a fiduciary asset manager at Standfast Asset Management. He welcomes your comments at [scottg@standfastic.com](mailto:scottg@standfastic.com)*

Briefs cont. from pg. 7

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://tinyurl.com/bdh6back> and will also be available at the door.

**Photography exhibit opens**

“Where We Stand,” a powerful exhibition by St. Augustine fine art photographer Lenny Foster, will open with a reception at First Coast Cultural Center on Thursday, Feb. 6, from 5:30 p.m. – 7 p.m. In celebration of Black History Month, this exhibit will be featured at FCCC through March 27, and it is free and open to the public.

Tickets are now on sale for First Coast Cultural Center's 30th anniversary gala, “Beaches, A Celebration of the Arts.” This annual event will be held at TPC Sawgrass Clubhouse on April 27 from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. Gala sponsorships and program advertisements are available.

Visit [www.firstcoastculturalcenter.org](http://www.firstcoastculturalcenter.org) or call (904) 280-0614 for more information on Foster's exhibition and other events and programs. First Coast Cultural Center is located at 6000B Sawgrass Village Circle in Ponte Vedra Beach.

# The Pantry Raiders

Warm up with a good  
breakfast

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

People on the go may not have a lot of time to enjoy breakfast, which means they may grab something quick and not always so healthy. But a filling, hot breakfast provides enough sustenance and nutrients to last until lunch. Such is the case with “Green Chile Breakfast Burritos” from “Taste of Home Healthy Cooking Cookbook” (RDA Enthusiast Brands, LLC) by the Taste of Home Kitchens.

## Green Chile Breakfast Burritos

Makes 6 servings

6 eggs

3 egg whites

1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced

Dash cayenne pepper

4 breakfast turkey sausage links, casings removed

¾ cup shredded reduced-fat Mexican cheese blend

1 can (4 oz) chopped green chiles, drained

6 whole wheat tortillas (8 inches), warmed

6 tbsp. salsa

1. In a small bowl, whisk the eggs, egg whites, jalapeño and cayenne; set aside.

2. Crumble sausage into a large skillet; cook over medium heat until no longer pink. Drain. Push sausage to the sides of pan. Pour egg mixture into center of pan. Cook and stir until set. Sprinkle with cheese and chiles. Remove from the heat, cover and let stand until cheese is melted.

3. Place ½ cup mixture off center on each tortilla. Fold sides and end over filling; roll up. Top with salsa.



Photo courtesy MetroCreative  
Green Chile Breakfast Burritos

## Tiffany Merlo Phelps

Tiffany Ann Merlo Phelps passed away on Jan. 1, 2025, in Palm Valley, FL, at the age of 51. Born in Jacksonville, FL on April 5, 1973, to Thomas and Korlis Merlo, Tiffany was a devoted mother, loving daughter and cherished member of the community.



Tiffany attended St. Paul's schools in Jacksonville Beach and graduated from Bishop Kenny High School in 1991. She studied English and Communications at Flagler College and received her Master of Arts from University of North Florida. Tiffany utilized her communication skills and love for community as a reporter for the Nassau County Record, and later for The St. Augustine Record. She then served as the Director of Public Relations at St. Johns River Community College from 2003 to 2007 where she was responsible for managing the college's public image and communication through media relations, internal communications, marketing and promotion and community engagement. There she met her future husband Jan-Hein Phelps. They married on Nov. 19, 2005. They began a beautiful life together and had two amazing children, Eva and Thomas Phelps. In 2014, they returned to the special property she had grown up on and built a home next to her parents.

In 2019, Tiffany channeled her gift for storytelling as a freelance writer at Ponte Vedra NewsLine, reaching 150,000 readers across Northeast Florida. Her regular monthly features kept her readers informed and engaged through in-depth insights into community events, programs and organizations, and her “Get To Know” series provided heartfelt profiles of various community members and fostered a sense of connection and unity.

In addition to her professional successes, Tiffany was a dedicated community advocate. As an Advisory Board Member at the Brown Family YMCA, she passionately supported the Y's mission and programs, actively promoted its initiatives within the

community, and played a key role in the annual campaign efforts. In 2023, she helped her son Thomas found the Palm Valley Trading Company, with the mission of representing the people of Palm Valley through signature clothing and collectibles to preserve the area's natural and historical elements for future generations to come.

More than anything else, Tiffany's greatest passion was her family. She loved above all things her children. She celebrated every milestone, and made sure they had everything they could need. She loved volunteering at Eva and Thomas' activities and championed their interests. She was also very devoted to her parents, always celebrating every moment and bringing amazing treats to make everyone feel important. She had a special way with people, made friends easily and always knew who to call no matter the subject. Of all her accomplishments, Tiffany was most proud of being a “Stay at home Mom.”

Tiffany will be remembered for her unbelievable kindness, her ability to make everyone around her feel special, her unwavering commitment to making a difference, and her love for celebrating holidays, especially birthdays.

Tiffany is survived by her husband, Jan-Hein; her children, Thomas and Eva; her parents, Thomas and Korlis, and her brother, Michael.

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# Travel

## Revisiting Istanbul

By Debi Lander  
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Whether traveling abroad or exploring my home state, I find something comforting about revisiting a place. Familiar landmarks, like Cinderella's Castle at Disney World bring back vivid memories of past visits. Of course, changes are inevitable — sometimes enhancing the experience, other times altering it in unexpected ways. Regardless, returning always offers the opportunity for new memories, especially when revisiting an international destination.

In 2016, I had my first encounter with Istanbul, a city rich in history and culture. Now officially spelled "Türkiye" instead of "Turkey," the country continues to evolve. Recently, I returned to Istanbul and revisited three historical monuments, each offering a fresh perspective.



Basilica Cistern with modern artwork.

Hagia Sophia is a masterpiece of Byzantine architecture, originally constructed as a cathedral in 537 AD under Emperor Justinian I. This UNESCO World Heritage Site features four minarets, a stunning dome and intricate mosaics. Over the centuries, it has served as a church, a mosque, and a museum.

In 2020, however, Türkiye's President Erdoğan decided to convert Hagia Sophia back into a mosque. This marked a significant shift in its identity. For nearly 900 years, it was a Christian cathedral until the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, after which it became a mosque. In 1935, as part of Mustafa Atatürk's secularist reforms, it was turned into a museum.

Today, Hagia Sophia serves as an active place for Muslim worship while remaining accessible to visitors. Changes are immediately evident: the iconic Byzantine mosaics of Jesus and Mary are veiled during prayers, and soft green carpets now cover the marble floors. Unlike my previous visit, the ground level is no longer open to all visitors, a change I found disappointing. In 2016, I recall standing in awe beneath the immense dome, overwhelmed by its magnificence and history. During this trip, I was directed to the balcony level, where I looked down at the breathtaking interior. While the view from above was still mesmerizing, I missed the immersive experience of standing beneath the dome's grandeur.

One of my favorite attractions visited in 2016 was the Basilica Cistern, an illuminated underground wonder beneath Istanbul's streets.



Photos courtesy Debi Lander  
Hagia Sophia.

Upon my return, I discovered that the site had also undergone a transformation. A restoration project from 2017 to 2022 revitalized this subterranean marvel, making it safer and more accessible. New, sturdy walkways replaced the older paths, allowing visitors to explore the 336 ancient marble and granite columns with ease.

Modern LED lighting now enhances the cistern's ethereal quality, casting enchanting shadows and reflections. Contemporary art installations float in its shallow waters, blending modern creativity with the past. While these additions are lovely, I found myself nostalgic for the original, simpler design.

The iconic and unforgettable Medusa heads have been cleaned and preserved. They appeared green during my first visit, likely due to algae or mold, but now they glimmer in a cream-colored hue. The addition of a metallic Medusa statue, with dramatic shadow play, offered a delightful surprise; however, I wish the lighting on the statue remained constant instead of cycling on

and off.

Topkapi Palace, once the heart of Ottoman power, continues to captivate visitors with its grandeur. Recent restorations have opened sections of the sprawling complex that were previously inaccessible. Visitors can now explore newly unveiled courtyards, though some areas that were once open now require separate tickets.

The highlight of my visit was the refurbished Imperial Treasury, where I finally saw the famed Topkapi Emerald dagger. Fans of the Peter Ustinov movie "Topkapi," which dramatizes a heist involving the dagger, will appreciate the cinematic connection.

Revisiting Istanbul was certainly worthwhile, yet reminded me that changes are an integral part of any journey.

For more information: [goturkiye.com](http://goturkiye.com)

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