

Mandarin NewsLine

September 2025 Volume 20 Issue 9

A Florida NewsLine Publication



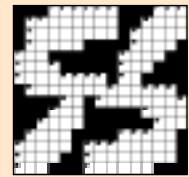
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Mandarin NewsLine seeks local stories in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Florida NewsLine Staff
editor@floridanewsline.com

This October, Mandarin NewsLine is proud to spotlight the strength and resilience of breast cancer warriors and survivors — and to honor the memory of those we've lost.

We invite you to share your story or the story of a loved one. Your journey can inspire, uplift and remind others that they are not alone.

Email us at editor@floridanewsline.com by Sunday, Sept. 22 for a chance to be featured.



Mandarin NewsLine seeks local stories to honor veterans

Florida NewsLine Staff
editor@floridanewsline.com

Mandarin NewsLine is honoring Veterans Day (Nov. 11), and we want to highlight the service, sacrifice and stories of our military veterans right here in our community.

We're looking for:

Local veteran trailblazers — business owners, community leaders, or anyone making a difference after their service.

Multigenerational military families keeping traditions of service alive.

Stories from veterans who made Duval County home after their service.

Veterans involved in local organizations, volunteer work, or mentoring.

Young veterans and their families sharing what service means to them.

Know a veteran we should spotlight? Want to share your own story?

Email us at editor@floridanewsline.com by Monday, Oct. 27 for a chance to be featured.

Zest for Success

Mandarin Community Club launches citrus fundraiser

By Brett Nolan
mail@floridanewsline.com

Since 1923, the Mandarin Community Club has served as a vital part of the Mandarin community, and with the public's help, the organization can sustain their mission for another century. Yet another industry integral to the Sunshine State needs help too — Florida Citrus. This year, the Mandarin Community Club is excited to partner with Florida Indian River Groves for a fundraiser that supports both the Mandarin Community Club's mission and Florida's storied citrus industry, with deep roots right here in Mandarin. From Sept. 1 to Nov. 14, the public can pre-order boxes of fresh, Florida-grown citrus, with pick-up at the Mandarin Community Club's Christmas Tree Lighting on Dec. 5.

25,000 orange trees reported in 19th-century Mandarin groves

Mandarin, Florida, named in 1830 for the variety of citrus commonly found in the area's thriving citrus groves, has a rich heritage that reflects the broader story of Florida's citrus industry. Spanish explorers, including Ponce de Leon,



Vintage postcard of Mandarin orange groves. Source: Mandarin Museum & Historical Society Archives

introduced citrus to Florida in the 1500s, and by the 1700s, Florida Indians were cultivating seeds from Spanish missionaries. In Mandarin, the industry took hold in the 19th century. The banks of the St. Johns River were known to be favorable to orange groves; the soil was believed to give noteworthy flavor to the fruit, and the river helped protect from the occasional freezing winds. Figures like Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wintered here in the late 1800s following the Civil War, noted properties boasting groves yielding tens of thousands of oranges. An article in a Jacksonville newspaper, the "Daily Florida Union," carried a story on March 30, 1879 stating: "Twenty-five thousand orange trees are set out in groves between Beauclerc Bluff and the Mandarin Post-Office, an area of some 4 miles —

3,500 of these trees are bearing fruit..." the reporter concluded that the citrus industry in Mandarin "has been cited to show the unbeliever that Mandarin can and does grow oranges successfully." Today, Mandarin's commercial groves are largely gone, but backyard trees and small groves, like the one next to the Club's Harriet Beecher Stowe Pavilion remain, a testament to our citrus legacy.

Florida's citrus production plummets by 90%

Florida's citrus industry, once the heartbeat of the state's economy and identity, has faced unprecedented challenges. Over the past two decades, production has plummeted by 90 percent, dropping from 300 million boxes annually in the

Greenland Pines cont. on pg. 2

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Greenland Pines cont. from pg. 1

early 2000s to a projected 12 million boxes of oranges for the 2024-25 season. Citrus greening disease, a bacterial infection spread by the Asian citrus psyllid, has infected nearly all of Florida's groves, reducing fruit production and yield. Devastating hurricanes, like Irma in 2017 and Ian in 2022, have caused hundreds of millions in damages, further weakening an already struggling industry. As a result, many growers have sold their land for development, and Florida, once the nation's top citrus producer, now trails behind California.

Brighter days ahead with your help

Yet, there's hope on the horizon. Innovative solutions are helping growers fight citrus greening, and the Florida Legislature has allocated nearly \$140 million to support research and recovery efforts, a record breaking investment set in the 2025 Legislative Session. By purchasing fresh, Florida-grown citrus during this fundraiser, residents are not just savoring the unmatched flavor of Sunshine State oranges, mandarins, and grapefruits—they're helping preserve a vibrant part of Florida's heritage. Nothing beats the taste of Florida citrus, picked at its peak and bursting with flavor, grown right here in the state's groves.

"The Mandarin Community Club is proud to stand with Florida's citrus growers," said Brett Nolan, the Mandarin Community Club's vice president. "Every purchase helps preserve our shared heritage and supports the recovery of an industry that defines the Sunshine State."

Residents can purchase fresh Florida-grown citrus, such as navel oranges, mandarins, and pink grapefruit, online at <https://iFundraise.com/1144774>, with pickup available at the historic 1872 Mandarin Schoolhouse, headquarters of the Mandarin Community Club, during the Christmas Tree Lighting on Dec. 5. A fundraiser table will be present at all Mandarin Community Club events during the pre-sale period, as well as out in the community to continue to raise awareness and support for both the Mandarin Community Club and



Painting of oranges in Mandarin by Harriet Beecher Stowe in the late 1800s.

the Florida Citrus Industry. Businesses looking to gift clients or employees with Florida's finest citrus are invited to contact Julia Short, Fundraising Committee Chair at the Mandarin Community Club, directly at (904) 318-1299. Individuals wishing to share the taste of Florida with family nationwide this holiday season can arrange shipping for an additional shipping and handling fee.

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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Milo!



Breed:

Pointer Mix

Favorite Activity:

I love walking outdoors and swimming in a lake.

Favorite Food:

Everything, including fruit.

Favorite Friends:

Gracie is a small dog and my best friend. I also love kids.

How did your BFF get their name:

In honor of my father's beloved dog, Mila. She was extremely loved and is missed.

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.

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Happy Hispanic Heritage Month from your friends at Mandarin!

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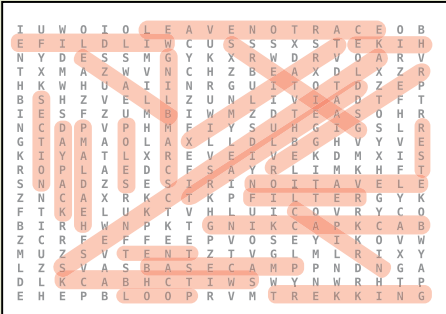


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Answers

to our
Puzzles
PG 8



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September

Community Calendar

What's Happening in Mandarin

To submit items for the Community Calendar, email editor@floridanewsline.com.

Sept. 11
American Legion Mandarin "Fallen Heroes" Post 372 meeting
American Legion Mandarin "Fallen Heroes" Post 372 meets on the second Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. at Williams Family YMCA upstairs on the second floor, 10415 San Jose Blvd., Jacksonville. Visit alpost372fl.org for more information.

Sept. 11
Mandarin Garden Club Walking Tour
Mandarin Garden Club Magnolia Circle will host a free walking tour at 10 a.m. Wednesday, Sept. 11. Master gardener Mary Foster will provide a narrative tour. The public is invited to this free event. Visit mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

Sept. 14
Mandarin Parkinson's Support Group meeting
Mandarin Parkinson's Support Group meets at Church of Eleven22, 4911 Losco Road, on the second Sunday of each month from 2-4 p.m. Contact group leader Katheryn Donaldson at serving4_him@yahoo.com or (904) 710-1449 for more information.

Sept. 15
All Star Quilters Guild meeting
The All Star Quilters Guild will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting at First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. "Show and Tell" is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit allstarquilters.org for more information.

Sept. 16
Learning about Fruit Trees
Mandarin Garden Club Dogwood Circle will welcome guest speaker Keel Cha-

chra Monday, Sept. 16, at 10 a.m. Keel and his father own Fruit Trees Only Nursery in St. Augustine and will present "Learning About Fruit Trees." The public is invited. Visit mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

Sept. 18
Growing with Purpose
Mandarin Garden Club Cherokee Rose Circle will host a presentation featuring Stephanie Means from UF/IFAS Extension Wednesday, Sept. 18, at 10 a.m. Her program is titled "Growing with Purpose." The public is invited to this free event. Visit mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

Sept. 18-21
Ladies International Poker Series Florida State Championship
The Ladies International Poker Series Florida State Championship will be held Thursday through Sunday, Sept. 18-21, at bestbet Jacksonville. The first, longest-running and most popular poker tour for women features ladies-only and co-ed play, plus a question-and-answer session with poker legends Linda Johnson and Jan Fisher.

Sept. 23
Acoustic Jam Session
Acoustic Jam Session is held at 7 p.m. in the Kids' Building of Trinity Mandarin, 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. Contact Burt Coulliette at (904) 302-0423.

Sept. 25
Planning and Planting for Fall Flowers and Foliage
Mandarin Garden Club Live Oak Circle will host a presentation by Jen Burnham, manager of Liberty Landscaping and Nursery, Wednesday, Sept. 25, at 7 p.m. The program

is titled "Planning and Planting for Fall Flowers and Foliage." The public is invited to this free event. Visit mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

Sept. 25
Mandarin Republican Club meeting
Mandarin Republican Club will meet Thursday, Sept. 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.

Sept. 25
Mandarin Women's Club luncheon
Mandarin Women's Club resumes luncheons Wednesday, Sept. 25, at Ramada Inn Mandarin, 3130 Hartley Road. Doors open at 10:30 a.m. Reservations required by Sept. 15. Contact Barbara Metallo at barbara.metallo@outlook.com or (904) 612-6494.

Sept. 26
Spaghetti to Go
Italian American Club of Jacksonville returns after summer break to host Spaghetti to Go Friday, Sept. 26, at 5 p.m. Dinners include two huge meatballs, a large portion of spaghetti and bread for \$13. Cannoli available for dessert for \$3 each. Take out orders only. Italian American Club is located at 2838 Westberry Road, Mandarin.

Oct. 3-4
Mandarin Garden Club Trash to Treasure Sale
Mandarin Garden Club will host its "Trash to Treasure Sale" Thursday and Friday, Oct. 3-4, from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. each day. The sale will feature items similar to garage, yard and estate sales. A pop-up plant sale and café will also be available during the same dates and times. Visit mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

Oct. 5
Walter Jones Historical Park buildings open
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, are open the first Saturday of each month 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. Visit mandarinmuseum.org or call (904) 268-0784.

Oct. 5
Meet the Maple Leaf Divers
Meet the Maple Leaf Divers at the Mandarin Museum, 11964 Mandarin Road, from 10 a.m.-noon on the first Saturday of each month. 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 is free. Visit mandarinmuseum.org or call (904) 268-0784.

Oct. 7
Honeybee Quilters Guild meeting
Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet Tuesday, Oct. 7, at 6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church on the Loretto Road Campus in the Kids Space at 2501 Loretto Road. New members and guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

Oct. 9
American Legion Mandarin "Fallen Heroes" Post 372 meeting
American Legion Mandarin "Fallen Heroes" Post 372 meets on the second Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. at Williams Family YMCA upstairs on the second floor, 10415 San Jose Blvd., Jacksonville. Visit alpost372fl.org for more information.

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Mandarin Women's Club resumes monthly luncheons

By Gail Packard
mail@floridanewsline.com

The Mandarin Women's Club resumes its monthly luncheons Thursday, Sept. 25, at the Ramada Inn in Mandarin (3130 Hartley Road) after a summer break. The club is excited to welcome the singing trio "Triple Sec" to entertain members as they return for another year of fun and fellowship.

Sherry Rosen, Lynette Haddock and Libby Montgomery have been singing harmonies of every genre of music since 2014 in musicals, Broadway shows, neighborhood parties and assisted living facilities.

Doors open at 10:30 a.m. and reservations are required. The luncheon costs \$25 and checks must be received by Thursday, Sept. 15. To make reservations and obtain payment instructions, call Barbara at (904) 612-6494 or email barbara.metallo@outlook.com.

The club encourages members to renew their membership or invites new members to join. For more information on events, photos and membership forms, visit mandarinwomen-sclub.com.



Photo courtesy Gail Packard
Mandarin Women's Club board members for 2025-26 are, from left, Judy Witte, Jo-Ellen Baxley, Patty Blalock, Barbara Metallo, Judy Baier, Andrea Braun and Sharon Rosenblum. Not pictured is Lisa Steely.

Mandarin Garden Club offers fall programs, events

By Michele Alex
mail@floridanewsline.com

The Mandarin Garden Club welcomes fall with an exciting lineup of educational programs and community events. Throughout September, the club is hosting free public programs featuring expert speakers on sustainable landscaping, gardening topics adapted to Florida's climate, and water conservation.

Circle meetings are scheduled on the second Tuesday at 10 a.m., the third Tuesday and Thursday at 10 a.m., and the fourth Thursday at 7 p.m. All September events are free and open to the public.

October brings special events including the "Trash to Treasure Sale" on Oct. 3-4 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. each day, featuring items similar to garage and estate sales, plus a pop-up plant sale and café. The annual Craft Fair has been moved to Oct. 25 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., featuring crafts by club members and local vendors.

The club is preparing for its 80th anniversary celebration in November. The Garden Club facility is available for rent for parties, weddings and special occasions. Visit mandaringardenclub.org or call the rental representative at (904) 910-3621.





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Scholar to explore inspiration behind 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'

By Brett Nolan
mail@floridanewsline.com

The Mandarin Community Club proudly presents a compelling presentation by Dr. Susanna Ashton, author of "A Plausible Man: The True Story of the Escaped Slave Who Inspired Uncle Tom's

Cabin." This event will illuminate the life of John Andrew Jackson, a fugitive slave whose brief stay in Harriet Beecher Stowe's home in 1850 likely inspired her iconic novel, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which galvanized the abolitionist movement and reshaped American history.

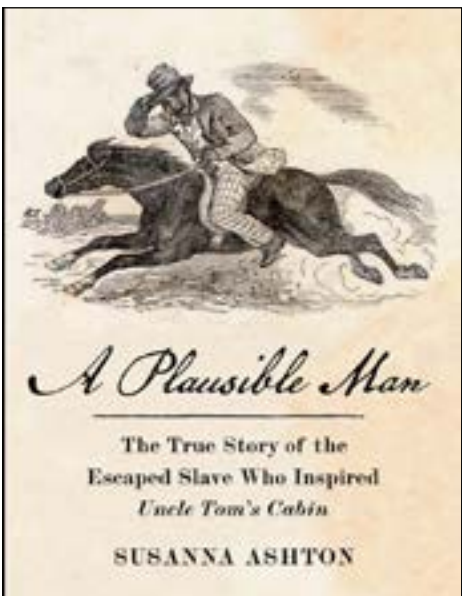
The event will take place on Friday, Sept. 19, at the historic Mandarin Community Club, 12447 Mandarin Road, with doors opening at 6 p.m. for a reception hosted by the Mandarin Museum & Historical Society, offering a beer and wine bar alongside a selection of savory and sweet hors d'oeuvres, followed by Dr. Ashton's presentation at 7 p.m.

Dr. Ashton, a professor of English at Clemson University, is a distinguished scholar of slavery and freedom narratives, with her work featured in The New York Times, CNN, The Wall Street Journal, The Smithsonian, and The New Republic. Renowned for her engaging and humorous presentations, she weaves insightful storytelling to captivate audiences. Her notable achievements include a W.E.B. DuBois Fellowship at Harvard, a Fulbright to Ireland, and a fellowship at Yale's Gilder Lehrman Center.

In "A Plausible Man" (The New Press, 2024), Ashton meticulously traces Jackson's journey from slavery to freedom, his fight to liberate his family, and his role as an international advocate for abolition, set against the backdrop of the Civil War and the country's Reconstruction era.

This event carries significance in Mandarin, where Harriet Beecher Stowe spent winters after the Civil War, penning essays and sketches about Florida life that reflected her connection to the South's complex post-war landscape.

Susie Scott, past president of the Mandarin Community Club and member



of the Club's events committee, who championed this event, shared her inspiration: "I was inspired to bring this literary exploration of Stowe's world-changing 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' to our community, where she lived for many years. After reading a book review, I became eager to share this story."

Scott added, "Stowe's work profoundly shaped her era and beyond, and this book offers a fascinating glimpse into how a single character may have sparked her transformative writing."

Join the Mandarin Community Club and the Mandarin Museum & Historical Society for an evening of history, storytelling, and community engagement. Copies of "A Plausible Man" are available for purchase at Amazon. Don't miss this chance to explore an interesting moment in American history, brought to life by a leading scholar and the vibrant Mandarin community.

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Duval superintendent visits elementary school on opening day



On the first day of the new school year, Duval County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Christopher Bernier brought excitement and encouragement to Crown Point Elementary (CPE) with a special campus visit. From left, Dr. Leah Murphy, Dr. Bernier and Brett Hartley give Superintendent Bernier a tour of Crown Point Elementary School.

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By Tracy McCormick-Dishman
editor@floridanewslines.com

Julia Short

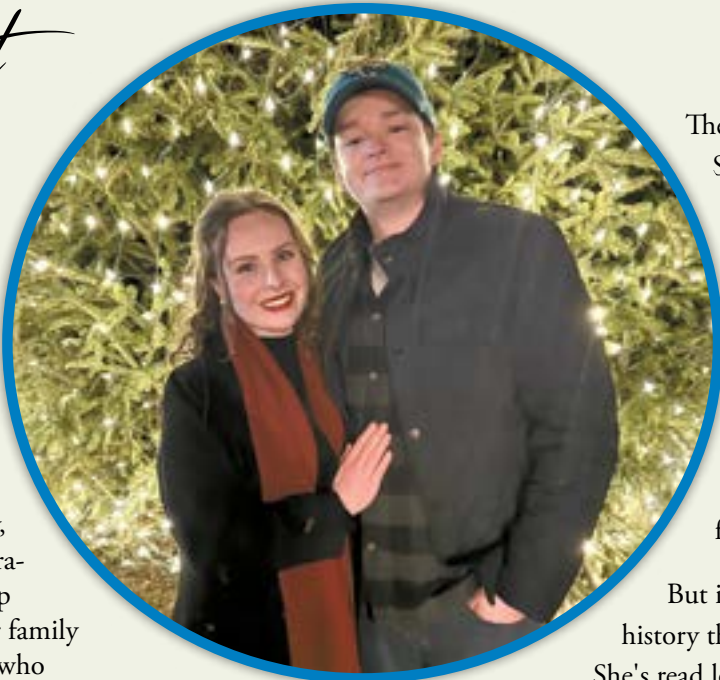
For Julia Short, Mandarin isn't just home – it's a legacy spanning seven generations of Florida history. As a lifelong resident, Short embodies the deep community roots that make Mandarin special.

"I'm a seventh generation Floridian, which blows people's minds because they say, 'well, what was here seven generations ago, other than like swamp and cows?'" Short explains. Her family descends from Florida crackers who built their homes with their own hands using surrounding trees. A proud graduate of Mandarin High School, Short continued her education at Florida State University.

Julia Cuthbertson Short's connection to her hometown runs so deep that when she met her husband during her freshman year at Florida State University, she made her intentions clear from the start.

"The moment my tassel turns, I'm going back to Mandarin," she told him. The couple eventually planned a small, intimate ceremony in her parents' living room, followed by dinner under string lights in the backyard. Fortunately, her Orlando-born husband fell in love with Mandarin's small-town feel, historic trees, and most importantly, its people.

Short's love for community and history naturally drew her to the Mandarin Community Club, where she now



The Community Club keeps Short busy year-round with events that bring neighbors together. Their largest fundraiser, an art festival running since the 1960s, takes place on Easter weekend. This fall, they're partnering with a Florida citrus grove for an online fundraiser.

But it's Short's passion for local history that truly sets her apart. She's read local architectural histories multiple times and serves as a graduate of the Leadership Jacksonville Next Generation program.

"We have a wonderful opportunity to embolden the stories of our historic neighborhoods and bring them with us to our next chapter of what our city can be," Short reflects. "I have a staunch belief that we each have a responsibility to give to our communities."

With Mandarin approaching its bicentennial in 2030, Short and the Community Club are already looking ahead to celebrate two centuries of history. As someone whose family helped write that history, she's perfectly positioned to help preserve it for future generations.

For Julia Short, preserving the past while building community for the future isn't just volunteer work – it's a calling rooted in seven generations of Florida soil.

serves as a volunteer board member on the fundraising team. Founded in 1923, the independent nonprofit organization is dedicated to preserving and beautifying Mandarin while maintaining three historic properties that tell the area's story.

The properties include the old schoolhouse, which has served as both church and school throughout its century-plus existence, and the original post office and general store along Mandarin Road.

"When I saw those buildings in middle school, I thought they're just gorgeous. They're in their original state – it's just incredible," Short recalls.

Short's professional background in fundraising serves her well in her volunteer role, where she naturally gravitated toward asking for support. "I was always the person on my sports teams or my school clubs that was kind of pushed to the front to do the asking when we would do our fundraisers," she recalls.

National Poison Control, FWEA video contest

By Abigail Addison

This year our CTE/Advanced TV production students participated in two different contests, one for the National Poison Control and the FWEA which stands for Florida Water Environmental Association. Why would they do this? Well, the National Poison Control contest is to help people with calling the poison control hotline and providing free medical assistance without having to go to the emergency room or going into the hospital. Students researched trending topics and information from the website. Our students entered a video no longer than 2 minutes and they won the People's Choice Award nationally, which had the most votes in the United States. Michael Brigman and Giovanni Pezzella won the \$100 prize. You may also be asking how they made these videos, well they worked as individual producers or in small groups to meet the video deadlines and parameters.



Abigail Addison

What about the FWEA contest? Our students created a video about what you should and shouldn't flush down your toilets. I know it sounds silly, but it's true we flush a lot of things down our toilets that we are not supposed to. Did you know that you're only supposed to flush down pee, poop, and paper? These videos were only 45 seconds or less. The winner for this contest was a student here at Mandarin Middle and her little brother; A seventh-grader named Alice Karakai and her little brother Alex Karaki won a \$300 prize and got

National Poison cont. on pg. 9

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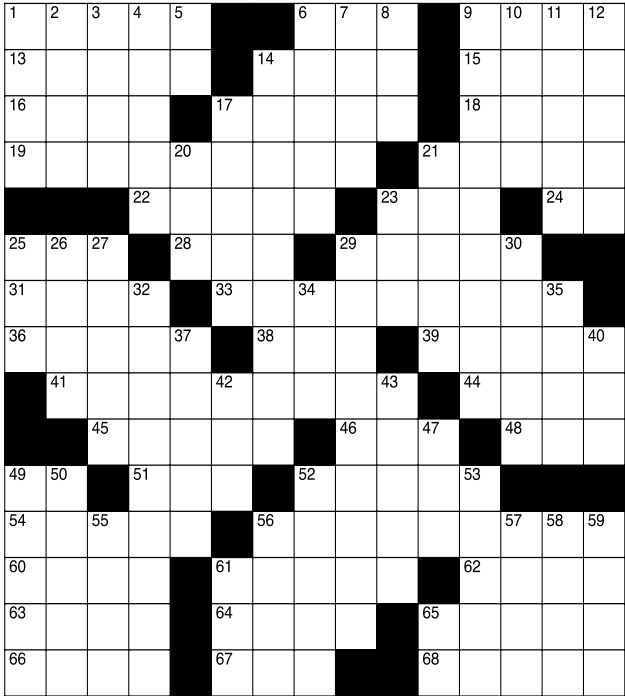
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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Fairly large
- 6. Barrels per day (abbr.)
- 9. Cover the entirety of
- 13. Leafy appetizer
- 14. Showy ornament
- 15. Norse personification of old age
- 16. Athletes
- 17. Closes tightly
- 18. Attack via hurling items
- 19. Where the reserves stand
- 21. Sword
- 22. Begat
- 23. Damage another's reputation
- 24. Northeast
- 25. Turf
- 28. For each
- 29. Hours (Spanish)
- 31. Western state
- 33. One who offers help
- 36. Flanks
- 38. A woolen cap of Scottish origin

- 39. Free from drink or drugs
- 41. Tunnels
- 44. Mature
- 45. More dried-up
- 46. News organization
- 48. Steal something
- 49. Forms one's public persona (abbr.)
- 51. Female fish eggs
- 52. Small petrel of southern seas
- 54. Edible starches
- 56. Historical
- 60. In a place to sleep
- 61. Horse grooms
- 62. Off-Broadway theater award
- 63. Chinese dynasty
- 64. Resembling a wing
- 65. Small projection on a bird's wing
- 66. Of the Isle of Man
- 67. Derived unit of force (abbr.)
- 68. Plate for Eucharist

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Vipers
- 2. Ancient city in Syria
- 3. Slog
- 4. Emits coherent radiation
- 5. "Pollock" actor Harris
- 6. Bleated
- 7. Monetary units of Afghanistan
- 8. Tooth doctor
- 9. One who takes apart
- 10. Commoner
- 11. Beat poet Ginsberg
- 12. Cave deposit material
- 14. Home energy backup
- 17. Begets
- 20. Face part
- 21. Frocks
- 23. Hill or rocky peak
- 25. Giving the impression of dishonesty
- 26. About ear

- 27. Male parents
- 29. Popular grilled food
- 30. Vaccine developer
- 32. Not conforming
- 34. Polite address for women
- 35. 1970 U.S. environmental law
- 37. Astronomical period of 18 years
- 40. One who fights the government
- 42. Center for Excellence in Education
- 43. Watches discreetly
- 47. An electrically charged atom
- 49. Hymn
- 50. Arabic given name
- 52. Popular pie nut
- 53. City in Zambia
- 55. Species of cherry
- 56. John __, British writer
- 57. Be next to
- 58. Make angry
- 59. Give birth to a lamb or kid

ON THE TRAIL WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

- ALTITUDE SICKNESS
- BACKPACKING
- BASE CAMP
- BLAZE
- CAIRN
- DAYPACK
- ELEVATION
- FILTER
- GAITERS
- HEADLAMP
- HIKE
- LEAVE NO TRACE
- LOOP
- POLES
- REGISTER
- REST
- SCRAMBLING
- SECTION
- SWITCHBACK
- TENT
- TRAILHEAD
- TRAIL MIX
- TREKKING
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Travel

Blue Ridge Bliss: A journey through Southwest Virginia

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewsline.com

The call of the Blue Ridge Parkway, often called “America’s Favorite Drive,” is hard to ignore. I recently followed that call into the heart of Southwest Virginia. The road is limited-access, billboard-free and designed for leisurely travel rather than high-speed driving.

I found scenic overlooks with layered ridgelines of misty blue and uncovered a string of small towns: Rocky Mount, Stuart and Floyd. Each one a gem in its own right, welcomed me with music, stories and now, memories that linger.

My trip began near Rocky Mount, a friendly spot with deep agricultural roots and the proud title of “Moonshine Capital of the World.” That evening, I sipped a moonshine cocktail and tapped my foot to the beat of old-time mountain music at Twin Creeks Distillery. Think banjo picking, fast fiddling, guitar and upright bass—the soundtrack of Appalachia.

Just outside town, I found the Blue Ridge Institute and Farm Museum in Ferrum. As Virginia’s official state center for folklore, it maintains a farmstead and exhibits on Appalachian traditions. I meandered through preserved 19th-century buildings, photographing rustic

barns, weathered tools and heritage breeds of livestock.

Farther south along the Parkway, I pulled over at the Rocky Knob Recreation Area, where I found opportunities for hiking, biking and camping. But I couldn’t resist stopping at the Saddle Overlook. It offered the opposite of Florida’s landscape—mighty mountain ridges rolling across the horizon. I loved it.

A bit farther on, I reached one of the Parkway’s most photographed landmarks: Mabry Mill. The weathered wooden gristmill, reflected in the still water, created a timeless scene. On weekends, local musicians gather there, adding an Appalachian soundtrack through the trees. Visitors can also watch demonstrations of traditional crafts like blacksmithing, sawmilling and sorghum-making.

I then made my way to Stuart for a stop at Fairy Stone State Park. Legend says the park’s cross-shaped stones were formed from the tears of mourning fairies. While I didn’t find any fairy stones, I discovered plenty of magic in the park’s peaceful woodland.



Photos courtesy Debi Lander

Visitors to Mabry Mill can watch demonstrations of traditional crafts like blacksmithing, sawmilling, and sorghum-making

But the real soul of this trip revealed itself in Floyd. Just a few miles off the Parkway, Floyd is a place where art, music and mountain spirit mingle on every corner. My visit coincided with the Thursday Night Jam, nearly as lively as the legendary Friday Night Jamboree at the Floyd Country Store. Locals and visitors pack the space, clapping and dancing. Joy abounds. I adored watching the fiddlers, twirling dancers and grinning elders tapping their toes.

By day, the Floyd Artisan Trail led me to tucked-away galleries and studios brimming with pottery, paintings and fine woodworking. The Hotel Floyd made an ideal overnight rest stop.

My final Parkway stop, near the North Carolina border, brought me to the Blue Ridge Music Center. Managed by the National Park Service, the museum

tells the story of mountain music’s deep roots. Out back, a shaded amphitheater hosts musicians who keep those tunes alive—melodies that rise from the hills.

October brings the most visitors to the Parkway, thanks to its explosion of fall color. Last year, I detoured there (while visiting Natural Bridge) just to catch the autumn display. All I can say is wow! Make your reservations soon.

My journey along the Blue Ridge Parkway reminded me that travel isn’t always about ticking off landmarks; it’s about pausing, observing and connecting. In Southwest Virginia, I found a place where the past is preserved with pride, the music never fades and the beauty begs to be relished. For anyone seeking an authentic slice of Appalachian culture, this route delivers.

Fishing

Cooler waters mean active fish

By Jimmy Tomazinis
mail@floridanewsline.com

We are on the downhill run now. Although it may be very hot out still, our Fall transition is in full swing. When water temperatures go from the low 90s to mid-80s with a Northeast wind here and there, the fish take notice. The main reason is because the food is leaving. Most of the shrimp, mullet, and various other bait fish that have grown up in the river throughout the year are starting to move out to begin the next stages of their lives. The predators take the hint, gorging as they follow them on their way out.

Hopefully the shrimp have returned. They disappeared last month after what was the best early run of shrimp I can remember. We went from catching 100 per cast to catching none two

weeks later. That’s weird. Especially when there’s no major storm event tied to it. If they stay scarce I’d still expect fishing to improve since when they were here in good numbers the fishing was a little slow.

The mullet run is also going on, so if you enjoy surf fishing it’s a good time to be on the sand. It’s a great show if nothing else. Just about every evening somewhere along the beach you will see lots of activity as the mullet travel south. Tarpon, sharks, jacks, etc, will be hot on their tails. We have mullet exiting the river too, but it’s hard to find them concentrated like they are in the surf. The run doesn’t last nearly as long either. Bridges, inlets, and jetties are all great places to look for them.

I would expect fishing for just about every fish species we have been chasing this summer to be improving. Redfish will be hunting the shallows early and late looking for mullet, shrimp, and whatever else they can find. Sheepshead would love some smaller shrimp around the dock and bridge pilings. Flounder are lurking on shell bars and drop offs waiting for bait to go by. Strippers should be going crazy now that the water temperatures are finally dropping and they can feel a little more comfortable chasing shrimp.

It is time to reenergize and break out of the summer doldrums. The fish are here but they won’t be for too much longer so go find them. Tight lines.

National Poison cont. from pg. 7

Honorable Mention on their State website. A few students of ours were awarded Honorable Mention on the FWEA State website for submitting a video that was sadly a few seconds more than the requirement. Those students were Emma Christopher, Chase Staggs, Owen Glenn, and Brayden Wiley. Congratulations to them. These sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders worked extremely hard to get these videos and our winners did absolutely amazing this year if you would like to see these videos you can go to the National Poison Control website at <https://poisoncenters.org/nppw-poster-and-video-contest> or the FWEA website at Video Contest - Florida Water Environment Association.

Thank you all for your support this school year. Go Hawks!



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Mandarin Middle School celebrated their "A" rating with a party and cake the first day of pre-planning. Congratulations to all the staff, students and families at Mandarin Middle School.

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Community theater sets October performances

By Marilyn Painter
mail@floridanewsline.com

Act II Players, Mandarin's Community Theatre, celebrated a successful July production of "Bright Star: The Musical" and announced its upcoming October performance of Noel Coward's "Blithe Spirit."

The Tony-nominated "Bright Star," featuring music, book and story by Steve Martin and Edie Brickell, took audiences on a journey of love, resilience and redemption set in the American South during the 1920s and 1940s. The heartwarming musical weaves together two timelines to tell a deeply moving story inspired by true events, featuring a soulful, bluegrass-inspired score.

The production was directed by Jacksonville native Juliet Fixel, a New York City choreographer and director who owns JFix Productions and Choreography, along with Ava Fixel, artistic director of Act II Players, and Ellen Milligan, musical director. Juliet Fixel also choreographed the show, and the local cast was joined by a performer from the New York area on summer hiatus.

"Act II Players is overflowing with gratitude for everyone who made our production of 'Bright Star' such a beautiful success," said the theater group. "Whether on stage or behind the scenes, your support brought this story to life in the most magical way."

The theater's next production will be "Blithe Spirit," Coward's 1940s hit comedic play about skeptical novelist Charles Condomine who invites self-



Photos courtesy Mandarin Community Theatre

proclaimed medium Madame Arcati to his home for a séance. When the psychic accidentally summons the spirit of Condomine's late wife, Elvira, his home and life quickly turn into chaos as the ghost torments both himself and his new bride, Ruth. The production will be directed by Ava Fixel.

"Blithe Spirit" will be performed the first weekend of October with four shows: Friday, Oct. 3, at 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, Oct. 4, at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.; and Sunday, Oct. 5, at 2 p.m.

All performances will be held in Act II Players' Black Box Theatre, located at 3604 Cardinal Point Drive, Jacksonville. Ticket prices are \$20 for general admission, \$15 for seniors 60 and older, and \$15 for students, plus sales tax and processing fees. For more information, visit actiplayers.org.



Gardening

In the heat, small steps make gardening rewarding

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale
mail@floridanewsline.com

While the August weather has been brutal, and it will probably continue into September, it's advisable to take it easy. But weeds and our favorite plants have all been growing apace since summer rains began. During heat advisories I find it's just bearable to be out early and my plants have benefited from some grooming here and there. That and a short weeding session, and it's satisfying to have done something useful despite the heat.

Major work needs to be delayed until autumn, so now is the ideal time to dream and plan. The resources we have available through the Uf/IFAS Florida Friendly landscaping program merit a look. The presenters are all experts in their fields and the information they share is rock solid. If you prefer to read to become informed, you can find design ideas, plant suggestions and articles on a host of other topics.

I've long been aware of color variations in flowers like blanket flower (*Gaillardia* sp.), and it's been brought into focus now that my delightful, dotted horsemint (*Monarda punctata*) plants are blooming.

My Shumard oak (*Quercus shumardii*) had some unusual twig dieback recently. Concerned that it could be serious, I contacted our Uf/IFAS Florida Extension specialist, Larry



Photos courtesy Lesley Arrandale

Dotted horsemint (*Monarda punctata*) in bloom shows off its distinctive color variations.

Figart, for advice. He immediately knew the likely cause, as this year the problem has been more prevalent than usual, and I was able to determine that the culprit is indeed a small black twig boring beetle. It lays its eggs inside small twigs and stems, boring a tiny hole on the underside of a twig, which is visible with a good hand lens. If you have any affected plants, prune back to healthy wood or stems and destroy the infected material.

I'm often made aware of my ignorance — discovering there are small beetles in my oak tree being one instance. It can be a challenge trying to understand the natural world, but finding something new is very rewarding.

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