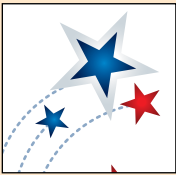
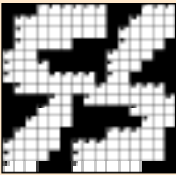


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MetroCreative

Affordable tips for a memorable Thanksgiving

By Brent Lister, President and CEO, First Florida Credit Union

The holiday season is right around the corner, and this year many households are wondering how to keep a Thanksgiving feast on the table without breaking their budget. Food prices are expected to rise another 3% in 2025, with groceries alone up 2.4%, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service. That means even the classics like turkey, stuffing and pie may come with a bigger price tag.

Still, there's no need to stretch yourself thin to create an extravagant spread. Small, intentional changes can make for a memorable yet affordable celebration.

As First Florida Credit Union suggests for everyday grocery

Thanksgiving cont. on pg. 5

Bridge, Battle, Baseball

At 101, veteran Bill Spates shares World War II lessons with a new generation

By Tracy McCormick-Dishman
editor@floridanewslines.com

At 101 years old, Bill Spates has vivid memories of his service in World War II—building pontoon bridges under enemy fire and learning leadership lessons from Gen. George Patton.

But these days, the Brooklyn native who now lives in St. Johns is better known by a different name: Uncle Bill.

Spates earned that nickname at Field of Dreams, where he's become a fixture at the youth baseball games, sharing his love of the sport and his remarkable history with a new generation. His daughter, Mary Anne Russell, helps translate his stories, acting as a clear voice for his incredible experiences.

"I could drive," Spates said, recalling how he joined the Army Corps of Engineers in 1943 at age 19. "All you guys drive a road grader? I could drive."

His skill led him on a path from basic training in Texas to England, then across France, Belgium, and finally Germany with the 291st Engineers, Company C. His unit's mission was critical: constructing and maintaining the bridges that would allow Allied forces to advance.

Building Bridges Under Fire

One of Spates's most significant assignments came at Remagen, where his unit was tasked with building a pontoon bridge across the Rhine River near a captured German bridge.

"We had to build a pontoon bridge right across," Spates recalled. "And when all the captured fell down, we had to run out and just hit at the pontoon bridge so they wouldn't drop."

Russell explained the harrowing scene: Patton's army needed to cross, and when the existing bridge collapsed, Spates's unit had to quickly dismantle their backup pontoon bridge to prevent it from being destroyed by the falling debris, then rapidly reassemble it for the troops to cross into Germany. The entire operation took less than a day.

"Bless the day," Spates said of the swift work. For this action, his unit received a citation for holding their position and completing the critical bridge construction.

Later, during the Battle of the Bulge, Spates was one of six soldiers assigned to guard and maintain a strategic bridge, with orders to mine it if necessary to prevent it from falling into German hands. The six were eventually



Photo courtesy Bill Spates
Bill Spates poses for a photo during his service with the Army Corps of Engineers in Europe during World War II. Spates joined the service in 1943 at age 19.

relieved by an entire battalion.

From Brooklyn to the Front Lines

He recalled a memorable leadership lesson from Gen. Patton that stuck with him. "He said you take a piece of spaghetti, okay, you can't push it, but you can take the pen and pull it,"

Bridge cont. on pg. 2

Mandarin chaplain's 30-year prayer answered through service to veterans

By Tracy McCormick-Dishman
editor@floridanewslines.com

When Larry Vollink prayed for God to place him in one church for 30 years, he never imagined his prayer would be answered in a way that would take him from Michigan to the halls of Congress and eventually to Mandarin, where he now calls home.

A graduate of South High School in Grand Rapids—the same school attended by President Gerald Ford and singer Al Green—Vollink has been a preacher for 50 years. As a young minister, he found himself moving between churches every few years, a pattern that troubled him deeply.



Larry Vollink

"I was a young preacher, and I had been at three different churches in 10 years," Vollink recalled. "I prayed, 'Lord, just please let me be in one church. I don't like going to all these churches every two or three years.'"

Veterans cont. on pg. 2



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Veterans cont. from pg. 1

Shortly after that prayer, Vollink joined the Army in 1980, beginning a journey that would span three decades of ministry to veterans.

During his 20 years of active duty service, Vollink served as an Army chaplain before retiring in 2001. But his calling to serve veterans was far from over. He became chaplain for the American Legion in Michigan, a role he held for another 20 years.

"While I was doing some of these things, I got asked to join the American Legion," Vollink said. "Being in Michigan, I got to be the chaplain there, and I stayed doing that for like 20 years."

His dedication didn't go unnoticed. During President Obama's administration, Vollink was appointed National Chaplain for the American Legion.

"Being a national chaplain, you get to do a lot of different things," he explained. "You get to say the prayer in the Congress and the Senate. You get to lay the wreath. You get to do a lot of different things with being a chaplain. So I had a lot of beautiful privileges."

In addition to his chaplain duties, Vollink worked for 10 years at the Veterans Administration in Michigan. He also served as Michigan Wing Chaplain for Civil Air Patrol, overseeing eight to ten chaplains across the state.

After giving 30 years to the American Legion, Vollink decided it was time to retire and move to Florida to be closer to his family. He now lives in Mandarin with his wife, Vicki, and attends Christ Church. He continues to wear his military hat proudly around the community.

It wasn't until years later that a pastor friend helped Vollink realize the significance of his long-ago prayer.

"I went back to that church and told them about my prayer I prayed about 30 years ago," Vollink said. "My friend, Pastor Fred, told me, 'Larry, let me tell you something. God really did answer your prayer because your ministry has always been to veterans.'"

That realization became the title of Vollink's chapter in a book about Michigan veterans: "And the Lord Answered His Prayer."

"My church was being a chaplain for 30 years with veterans," Vollink said. "God answered my prayer. He sure did."



Photo courtesy Larry Vollink
Larry Vollink in his Civil Air Patrol uniform. He served as Michigan Wing Chaplain overseeing eight to ten chaplains across the state.

Bridge cont. from pg. 1

Spates shared, referring to Patton's philosophy that you lead troops by pulling them forward, not pushing them.

A Life After War

Spates was on leave in Luxembourg when he heard that the war in Europe had ended. He was slated to ship out to the Pacific theater next, a deployment he was relieved to avoid when President Harry Truman ordered the dropping of the second atomic bomb on Japan. "If Harry had to order a second bomb, we would have been all the way over to Japan," Spates said, adding simply: "I hate bugs."

Discharged in December 1945, he was home for Christmas. Spates married his wife, Ann, in August 1948; they were married for 59 years before her passing in 2007.

After the war, he worked for a company that refurbished printing presses before joining the U.S. Postal Service in 1959. He worked there for 27 years, with his military service counting toward his retirement, giving him 30 years of credited service when he retired in 1986.

The couple raised three children in Poughkeepsie, including son Dick, who served with the Marines in Vietnam.

Uncle Bill and Field of Dreams

Spates and Mary Anne Russell moved to St. Johns last November. One of his longtime passions is youth baseball, which he prefers over the professional league.

When Russell's realtor suggested they check out Field of Dreams, they instantly loved watching the Little Leaguers.

George Vancore, the lead umpire, quickly struck up a friendship with the veteran and began calling him "Uncle Bill." Vancore often recognizes Spates over the microphone, thanking him for his service.

"Dad absolutely loves going to the games," Russell said. "He loves to tease them. He loves to have a hot dog."

Spates remains active, having played softball until he was 80, only stopping when he found the co-ed games too rough.

These days, Uncle Bill can be found at Field of Dreams, watching the next generation play the game he loves, sharing his remarkable history with anyone who asks, and, at 101, reminding everyone that there's always a reason to keep moving forward.



Photos courtesy Bill Spates
Bill Spates celebrates his 100th birthday. Spates, now 101, remains active and is known as "Uncle Bill" at the local Field of Dreams youth baseball park.



Allied soldiers rapidly construct a pontoon bridge across a European river. Spates's 291st Engineers, Company C, performed this critical, high-pressure work at locations like Remagen to keep troops moving forward.

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Mandarin NewsLine community newspaper is a free monthly publication delivered to all addresses in Zip Codes 32223, 32258, and selected neighborhoods in 32257. Submission of articles and photographs are received by mail or email, although email to editor@FloridaNewsLine.com is preferred. The writers' opinions do not necessarily reflect the opinion of Florida NewsLine. Advertising Rates are available by request. Florida NewsLine is not responsible for advertisement content or accuracy of information provided by its advertisers. Nor does Florida NewsLine endorse any of the products or services included in this publication. Florida NewsLine reserves the right to refuse advertisement or copy from any advertiser. All rights are reserved and no portion of this publication may be copied without the express written consent of the publisher. ©2025.



BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Wrangler!



Breed:
English bulldog/Boston terrier/lab mix

Favorite Activity:
swimming in her life jacket

Favorite Food:
eggs, sweet potatoes and blueberry pancakes

Favorite Friends:
Harper

How did your BFF get their name:
I am fun and sporty like a Jeep Wrangler

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.

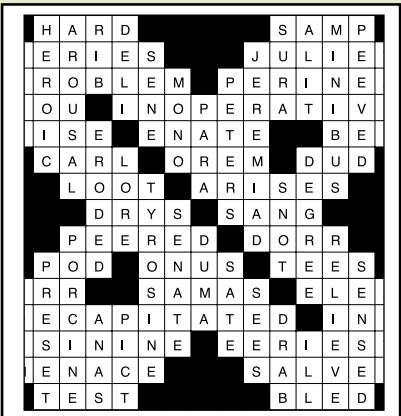
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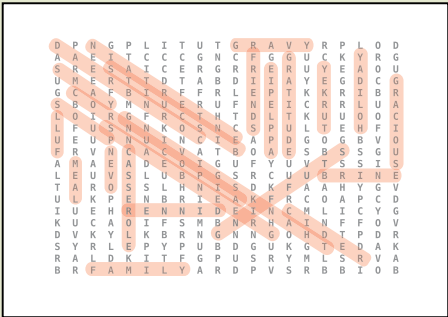
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Answers to our Puzzles PG 8



A message of gratitude from the editor

As we honor Veterans Day this November, I want to express my deepest appreciation to the veterans who answered our call to share their stories with our community.

Service takes many forms, and the response we received demonstrates the remarkable diversity of experiences within our veteran community. From those who served in peacetime to combat veterans, from enlisted sailors to commanding officers, each story reflects the dedication that defines military service.

The stories you'll read in these pages go beyond the uniform. They reveal what happens after the salute — the challenges of transition, the drive to continue serving in new ways, and the determination to tackle projects that others might deem impossible.

These narratives remind us that Veterans Day isn't just about thanking someone for their service — though that matters deeply. It's about recognizing that the values forged in military service continue to strengthen our community long after the uniform comes off.

To every veteran who shared their story: your willingness to open up about your experiences helps bridge the gap between military and civilian life. You've given our community something invaluable — a deeper understanding of service and sacrifice.

Thank you for your service, then and now.

With gratitude and respect,
Tracy Dishman, editor

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 - Dr. Amber Sun, Pediatric Dentist
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November

Community Calendar

What's Happening in Mandarin

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

Mandarin Library Fandom Fun for Youth

Youth ages 9 and older are invited to join us at 4 p.m. Mondays at Mandarin Library for fun with your favorite fandoms. This series is inspired by some of the most popular games, movies and books. Enjoy reading and hands-on activities inspired by Legend of Zelda (Nov. 3), Warriors (Nov. 10), The Oregon Trail (Nov. 17) and Kingdom Hearts (Nov. 24). Visit jaxlibrary.org/events for more information.

Nov. 4
Honeybee Quilters Guild meeting
Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet Tuesday, Nov. 4, at 6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church on the Loretto Road Campus in the Kids Space, 2501 Loretto Road. Program on How to Find and Value Quilts. New members always welcome; wearing masks optional. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

Nov. 4, 18
First Coast E-Sports Alliance Roblox Club
The First Coast E-Sports Alliance continues its Roblox Club for youth ages 8-17 at 6 p.m. Tuesdays, Nov. 4 and 18, at South Mandarin Library. Visit jaxlibrary.org/events for more information.

Nov. 8
Southern Genealogist's Exchange Society - Honoring Our Heroes
Join us as Valerie Bennett, a longtime NFGS volunteer, shares her inspiring work with the First Coast Honor Flight — a program that flies U.S. veterans from World War II through more recent eras to Washington, D.C., to visit the memorials built in their honor. Valerie will explain how the program works, who is eligible and how volunteers

can take part in saluting these men and women who have protected our freedoms. Saturday, Nov. 8, at 10 a.m. at Mandarin Branch Library, 3330 Kori Road. Free and open to the public. Call (904) 778-1000 or visit sgesjax.org for more information.

Nov. 9
Mandarin Garden Club 80th Anniversary
Mandarin Garden Club 80th anniversary celebration of existence and achievements. Sunday, Nov. 9, from 2-4 p.m. at 2892 Loretto Road. The public is invited to this free event. Visit mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

Nov. 13
Mandarin Garden Club Magnolia Circle - Learn about Daylily
Mandarin Garden Club Magnolia Circle meeting with an educational presentation on care of daylilies by Connie Gladding from Daylily Society. Wednesday, Nov. 13, at 10 a.m. at 2892 Loretto Road. The public is invited to this free event. Visit mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

Nov. 13
Turn Up for Tech
Explore the latest tech and complete fun challenges at Turn Up for Tech from 4-5 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 13, at South Mandarin Library. The whole family (ages 5 and older) can drop in and interact with everything from robots to circuits and from animation to coding. Visit jaxlibrary.org/events for more information.

Nov. 14
Teen Advisory Board: Criminal Minds
Teens ages 12-17: Step into the role of "criminal investigator" with Teen Advisory Board: Criminal Minds at 4:45 p.m. Friday, Nov. 14, at South Mandarin Library. Visit jaxlibrary.org/events for more information.

Nov. 15
Touch-A-Truck
Trinity Mandarin will again have its Touch-A-Truck community event where kids can climb into the driver's seat of some of our community's coolest vehicles where they can honk the horns, flip the switches and hear the sirens! Saturday, Nov. 15, from 10 a.m.-1 p.m. (Quiet hour from 10-11 a.m.) at Trinity Mandarin, 2955 Orange Picker Road.

Nov. 17
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. A "Chat with Sunnie about Other Techniques Quilts," with samples, will be the program. "Sew and Tell" is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit allstarquilters.org for more information.

Nov. 18
Mandarin Garden Club Dogwood Circle - Healing Power of Plants
Mandarin Garden Club Dogwood Circle meeting with an educational and inspiring presentation on the power of plants on the human body and mind by Mary Johnstone. Tuesday, Nov. 18, at 10 a.m. at 2892 Loretto Road. The public is invited to this free event. Visit mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

Nov. 20
Mandarin Garden Club Cherokee Rose - Herbal Flavored Vinegar
Mandarin Garden Club Cherokee Rose meeting. Come and learn about how to use herbs in making flavored vinegars. Educational presentation by Elizabeth Devlin. Wednesday, Nov. 20, at 2892 Loretto Road. The public is invited to this free event. Visit mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

Nov. 20
Mandarin Garden Club Live Oak Circle - Crafts Gifts for the Holidays
Mandarin Garden Club Live Oak Circle meeting. Joyce Datz will stimulate the imagination and craftsmanship on how to make your own holiday gifts. Wednesday, Nov. 20, at 7 p.m. at 2892 Loretto Road. The public is invited to this free event. Visit mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

Nov. 21
Italian American Club Friday Dinner
Stop by and pick up dinner for the family at the Italian American Club of Jacksonville, 2838 Westberry Road. Large portion of spaghetti, two huge meatballs and bread, only \$13; cannoli \$3. Friday, Nov. 21, at 5 p.m. Takeout only. Call (904) 586-2700 for more information.

Nov. 22
Mandarin Markets & Festivals
Trinity Mandarin will again host Mandarin Markets & Festivals! There will be a farmer's market, 170-plus vendors and some of Jax's best food trucks! Saturday, Nov. 22, from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. at Trinity Mandarin, 2955 Orange Picker Road.

Ongoing Activities
Widows Social Group
Social group for widows meets on the second Tuesday of each month from 11 a.m.-1 p.m. at First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. A social group to enjoy fellowship and light refreshments. All widows welcome.

Toast of Jax Toastmasters
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 toastofjax.toastmastersclubs.org.



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Q&A with Jacksonville City Council Member Michael Boylan, District 6

Q: Last Tuesday's council meeting ran longer than usual. What made it so contentious?

A: The meeting extended beyond our typical timeframe due to two J Bill resolutions and a highly contested rezoning for a parcel on Owen Avenue, part of an old landfill site. After an extended public hearing where all but one person spoke against the proposed 96-unit multifamily development, the Council voted 6-12 to deny the land use change. The rezoning application also was denied.

Q: Can you explain what a "J Bill" is and why the Council considered two?

A: A J Bill is a resolution the City Council submits to the Florida Legislature to amend the City Charter on matters that can't be addressed by local ordinance alone. If approved, it goes to the Duval County Legislative Delegation in Tallahassee, who can follow our recommendation or make their own decision. We considered two: one regarding the Jacksonville Aviation



Michael Boylan

Authority, and another about the School Board's General Counsel.

Q: What changes were made to the Jacksonville Aviation Authority proposal?

A: Vice President Howland worked closely with JAA's board and management to refine Resolution 2025-0693. The final version removed the proposed name change that would have added "Aerospace," struck proposed changes to board composition, revised language about the Cecil Airport economic development plan so it would be presented to Council rather than submitted, and updated procurement thresholds—raising the construction threshold from \$50,000 to \$325,000 and supplies from \$25,000 to \$65,000.

Q: The School Board General Counsel J Bill didn't receive Council support. Why was that?

A: Resolution 2025-0695 would have authorized the Duval County School Board to employ its own General Counsel, independent of the City's General Counsel. While not an

unreasonable request—especially given the challenge of replacing the recently retired city attorney who served the School Board—the majority of Council members opposed it as a precedent that could countermand a significant component of our consolidated government. I had suggested alternatives in committee that would give the school board a strong voice in the selection process and the ability to request replacement of an attorney who didn't meet their expectations. However, even without Council support, the Duval delegation can still move the J Bill forward if they choose.

Q: What infrastructure improvements are progressing in District 6?

A: Several projects are underway. The Loretto Road sidewalk from Mandarin Road to County Dock Road began construction in late September with substantial completion expected by April 2026. Sedgemore Drive drainage improvements received seven bids, with the low bid at \$613,948.42, awaiting contract execution. Design for the Palmetto Leaves Park soccer fields—including two rectangular fields, an Americans with Disabilities

Act restroom facility, sidewalks, and a concession stand—is 80% complete. The pedestrian crosswalk at Greenland Road and Lake Fern Drive leading to Palmetto Leaves Regional Park is substantially complete. The Burnett Park Road drainage project was cancelled due to needed revisions and will be re-advertised.

Q: What did residents learn at the recent District 6 town hall?

A: We had a great turnout of neighbors who heard updates about Hartley Road improvements, the Mandarin Road sidewalk project, and pending improvements to various parks in the district. I also discussed the status of the RFP for my proposed development of an organization focused on preservation, beautification, and restoration of the district—similar to what the Springfield Preservation and Restoration group, San Marco Preservation Society, and Riverside Avenue Preservation organization do for their communities.

Contact Council Member Boylan at MBoylan@coj.net or (904) 255-5206.

Sweet tradition: Citrus fundraiser honors local heritage

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. This year, the Club is partnering with Florida Indian River Groves for a fundraiser that supports both the Club's mission and Florida's citrus industry, which has deep roots right here in Mandarin. Launched on Sept. 1 and running through Nov. 14, the public can pre-order boxes of fresh, Florida-grown citrus, with pickup at the Club's Christmas Tree Lighting on Dec. 5.

Mandarin, Florida, named in 1830

for the variety of citrus commonly found in the area's thriving groves, has a rich heritage that reflects Florida's citrus story. Spanish explorers introduced citrus to Florida in the 1500s, and by the 19th century, the industry flourished along the St. Johns River. The river's banks were favorable to orange groves, with soil that gave noteworthy flavor to the fruit. Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wintered here in the late 1800s, noted properties with groves yielding tens of thousands of oranges. An 1879 Jacksonville newspaper reported that 25,000 orange trees were set out in groves between Beauclerc Bluff and the Mandarin Post Office. Today, Mandarin's commercial groves are largely gone, but backyard trees and small groves remain as testament to

our citrus legacy.

Florida's citrus industry has faced unprecedented challenges. Over the past two decades, production has plummeted by 90 percent, dropping from 300 million boxes annually in the early 2000s to a projected 12 million boxes for the 2024-25 season. Citrus greening disease and devastating hurricanes have weakened the industry, causing many growers to sell their land for development.

Yet there's hope on the horizon. Innovative solutions are helping growers fight citrus greening, and the Florida Legislature allocated nearly \$140 million to support research and recovery efforts in the 2025 Legislative Session. By purchasing

fresh, Florida-grown citrus during this fundraiser, residents help preserve a vibrant part of Florida's heritage while savoring the unmatched flavor of Sunshine State fruit.

"The Mandarin Community Club is proud to stand with Florida's citrus growers," said Brett Nolan, the 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 online at <https://iFundraise.com/1144774>, with pickup at the historic 1872 Mandarin Schoolhouse during the Christmas Tree Lighting on Dec. 5. Businesses looking to gift clients or employees can contact Julia Short, Fundraising Committee Chair, at (904) 318-1299. Shipping is available nationwide for an additional fee.

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Mandarin Garden Club celebrates 80 years of cultivating community

By Michele Alex

The Mandarin Garden Club is celebrating 80 years of beautifying the community with an anniversary event Nov. 9 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Formed in 1945 under the guidance of the Mandarin Community Club Beautification Committee, the garden club has grown into a well-known, historic nonprofit organization. Its mission focuses on educating Mandarin residents about caring for and beautifying the community while preserving and respecting the environment.

In 1988, at the suggestion of Mary Howe, one of the club's master gardeners and longtime members, the club invited the Duval County Extension Office to use the grounds as a demonstration garden. That joint venture continues today.

In 2022, the club's newsletters, scrapbooks and yearbooks were donated to the University of North Florida for preservation and can be viewed at <http://digitalcommons.unf.edu/mgc>.

The entire property is maintained by devoted members and volunteers, and the gardens are open to the public



Photo courtesy of Mandarin Garden Club
The Mandarin Garden Club marks its 80th anniversary with a celebration Nov. 9 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the club's demonstration gardens.

from dawn to dusk. Whether it's the demonstration gardens featuring perennials, vegetables, succulents, herbs, roses, camellias, bromeliads or ginger beds, or the native gardens, the Mandarin Garden Club offers a place of solitude where something is always in bloom.

The Nov. 9 celebration will feature garden tours, master gardeners, special speakers and refreshments. The public is invited to attend.

March sisters return all grown up in 'Good Wives'



Photo courtesy Theatre Troupe 1776
Cast members of Theatre Troupe 1776's production of "Good Wives" pose in period costume at the Mandarin Community Club. The show, based on Louisa May Alcott's "Little Women," runs Nov. 13-23.

By Patty Everett

Three years have passed, and the March sisters are all grown up. Jo, Meg, Beth and Amy are no longer girls. They are forging their paths while each pursuing their own dreams and ambitions in a rapidly changing world. Meg is married. Jo is pursuing her writing career. Beth finds solace in her music while Amy is polishing her artistic talents.

Watch as the March sisters navigate their lives as young adults. Based on the well-known novel by Louisa May Alcott, this show is perfect for the entire family. Come see this touching,

heartwarming classic featuring love, family and the heartfelt moments that we all remember from this beloved book.

Directed by Mandarin Community Club board member Patty Everett, "Good Wives" is being performed by Theatre Troupe 1776 Nov. 13-23 at the Mandarin Community Club. Tickets are available at showtixnow.com. Mandarin Community Club members get discounts on tickets. Additional discounts are available for seniors, students and military. You won't want to miss it.

Gardening

The Good Earth: For the love of pruning

By Connie Doyle, Master Gardener UF/IFAS

Welcome to November - and to our much-loved Thanksgiving season!

Last month we talked about cool-weather annuals to plant and some essential fall maintenance chores. This month, let's focus on one task that often mystifies even experienced gardeners: pruning.



Connie Doyle

pruning maintains a pleasing, balanced form. Growth control is another important benefit, as pruning keeps plants within size limits or encourages fuller, denser growth. When it comes to flowering and fruit production, strategic pruning improves bloom or fruit yield by directing the plant's energy where you want it. Finally,

safety considerations require clearing branches that block views, sidewalks, or other structures.

For more information, visit the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) website: edis.ifas.ufl.edu - a great resource for detailed pruning guides and seasonal advice. IFAS is a federal-state-county partnership dedicated to developing knowledge in agriculture, human and natural resources, and making that knowledge accessible to sustain and enhance the quality of human life. With Extension offices in all 67 Florida counties, IFAS provides research-based, science-backed information specifically tailored to Florida's unique climate and growing conditions. EDIS, the Electronic Data Information Source, offers thousands of peer-reviewed publications on topics ranging from landscape maintenance to pest management, all written by university researchers and Extension specialists.

For many of us, pruning remains a bit of a puzzle - when to do it, how much to remove, and what tools to use. And rightly so! Pruning can be tricky and requires both knowledge and experience. Still, it's an essential part of landscape and garden care that should be done regularly - not postponed until shrubs or trees are overgrown.

The good news? Much of the need for heavy pruning can be avoided by choosing and planting correctly from the start - that means knowing the mature height/width of your plant before it goes in the ground.

Pruning isn't just about making plants look tidy - it serves several key functions. For the health of your plants, removing dead, dying or diseased branches prevents decay from spreading to other parts of the plant and to other plants nearby.

From an aesthetic standpoint, proper



Photo courtesy Connie Doyle.

If you're not a do-it-yourselfer, consider hiring a qualified professional. A little expert help can go a long way toward keeping your landscape healthy and beautiful year-round.

Remember: God made rainy days so gardeners could get the housework done — Anonymous

Connie Doyle writes The Good Earth, a

gardening column inspired by a life-long passion for plants, nature, and the peaceful rhythm of the garden. With more time in retirement, she has been inspired to take that passion to the next level — learning, growing, and sharing with others in our community by way of earning her Master Gardener Certification. Connie can be reached by email to mail@floridanewslines.com.

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Ghost of first wife crashes the party in 'Blithe Spirit'

By Marilyn Painter

Act II Players, Mandarin's community theatre, brought a production of "Blithe Spirit" to life this past month in its new black box theater that helped the audience feel almost a part of the action.

In Noel Coward's hit play, skeptical novelist Charles Condomine (played by Derrek Koch in his stage debut) invites self-proclaimed medium Madame Arcati (played by Maureen Chadler Reid) to his home for a séance, hoping to gather material for a new book. When the hapless psychic accidentally summons the spirit of Condomine's late wife, Elvira (played by Marilyn Painter), his home and life are quickly turned

to farce as his wife's ghost torments both himself and his new bride, Ruth (played by Shannen Murray). Elvira's obsession with Charles and her strong desire to have him all to herself lead to the surfacing of secrets for all these characters with plenty of hijinks along the way.

Act II Players thanked everyone who made the production a success, with special recognition to Jamie Glavich, the producer who transformed her business, Almost Home Daybreak, into a black box theater.

For more information, visit actiplayers.org.



Photos courtesy Act II Players



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Bricks of remembrance, promise of presence

The following column is from "The Patriot Reader," the newsletter of the Veterans Council of St. Johns County.

Around our county, there have been several civic and veterans organizations that have honored and remembered our veterans in some special way. The most prominent way has been the laying of bricks in memorial gardens or Walls of Remembrance.

On Thursday, Sept. 18, Pedro Menendez High School performed such a dedication before their varsity football game that evening. The ceremony was conducted around the American flagpole at the entrance to the football field. This area contains many bricks honoring our local veterans from St. Johns County. The dedication service was attended by Joseph McDermott, director of the Veterans Service Office, and myself as guests of the school, and we participated in the dedication service. The Veterans Council purchased five bricks in honor of all former chairmen of the Veterans Council.

The Veterans Council of St. Johns County made a commitment years ago that no veteran from our county will ever be buried without a family member present. On numerous occasions, the Veterans Council has had to be that family member. This was the situation last Wednesday when Joseph McDermott, director of the Veterans Service Office, and I transported the cremains of an indigent veteran to Jacksonville National Cemetery for burial. Navy veteran Jacquis Hehelijah Rossiter had no known family that could



Bill Dudley

be located. Director McDermott and I, along with a member of the Jacksonville Ladies, a volunteer group that ensures no veteran is buried alone at Jacksonville National Cemetery, performed the services for veteran shipmate Rossiter.

Thank you for your service.

Bill Dudley is chairman of the Veterans Council of St. Johns County. He served 10 years of active duty in the U.S. Air Force, deploying during the Berlin Crisis and Cuban Missile Crisis, before transferring to the USAF Reserves and retiring at the rank of lieutenant colonel. Since 2005, he has served the veteran community as National Director of the U.S. Navy League and in leadership roles with the National Cemetery, Veterans Treatment Court Advisory Board and other local veterans organizations.

A military mom's story of pride and sacrifice

By Tracy McCormick-Dishman
editor@floridanewsline.com

Twelve years ago, my oldest son signed some documents and was whisked away into a life I knew nothing about, but one that he craved. His calling in life is to serve and protect our nation.

I knew how to build a career following a college pathway. I knew nothing about the military as a career. All I knew was this was important to him, and he had to go. He belonged to the United States Army now. I didn't have mom's authority to know what he was doing, where he was going, or who he was going with. I was a military mom.

There are two memories of my son's early military days that changed what it means to me to be an American.

The first memory is my son's graduation from boot camp. It was my first experience being on a military base and getting a peek into where he had been living for 10 weeks. The anticipation of waiting to see him was exhilarating and painful.

I remember hearing them march in as a newly formed team of soldiers. The cadence was one of the coolest songs I had ever heard. The pride of accomplishment showed in their form as they marched in unison. The stern looks of leadership on their faces were more than impressive.

In my opinion, the definition of a great leader is written in the eyes of an American soldier standing at attention; fully engaged in the mo-

ment, with every fiber of their being, and ready for whatever is next.

The feeling of pride in my son at that moment when I looked at his face for the first time in many weeks came bubbling out of me in sobs of joy. He was an American soldier. He was a man, standing at attention, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient. I could tell by the look on his face that he was exactly where he was meant to be.

The second memory was attending a welcome-home ceremony for his tour of duty overseas. My soldier had been active duty for several years at this point and had traveled to many places. We kept in touch over the phone, sometimes late in the evening for him after a grueling day, but an entire day in the future for me because of the time zone difference.

I moved mountains to make arrangements to get myself and my family to the base for his arrival. We gathered in a huge gymnasium and sat in the bleachers with other military families. The program started with a recap of what our soldiers had experienced and accomplished while away.

I knew my son was behind the big doors across the gym from me. We could see shadows under the doors of feet moving around. My heart was racing, and my eyes were starting to fill with happy tears.

Then, over the loudspeaker, "Proud to be an American," by Lee

Mom's story cont. on pg. 9

November 11: A nation says thank you

By NewsLine staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

On November 11, Americans observe Veterans Day, a federal holiday dedicated to honoring all military veterans for their service and patriotism. Unlike Memorial Day, which specifically honors those who died in military service, Veterans Day celebrates all who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces, living or dead.

The holiday has deep historical roots. Originally known as Armistice Day, it commemorated the end of World War I, which concluded at the 11th hour

of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918. Congress officially renamed it Veterans Day in 1954 to honor American veterans of all wars.

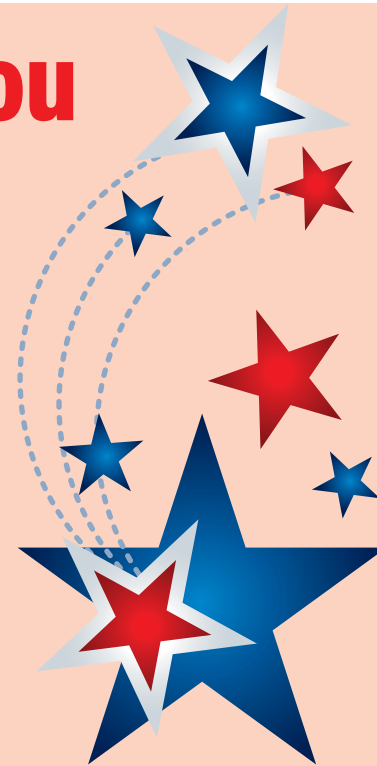
Veterans Day is always observed on November 11, regardless of what day of the week it falls on. This date was chosen to preserve the historical significance of the original armistice.

The purpose of Veterans Day is to show gratitude for the willingness of veterans to serve and sacrifice for our country. It's a time for communities to come together and thank those who have worn

the uniform in defense of our nation.

One interesting note: The official spelling is "Veterans Day" without an apostrophe. This is intentional, as the day honors all veterans collectively rather than being a day that "belongs" to veterans.

As November 11 approaches, take a moment to thank a veteran for their service. Their dedication and sacrifice have helped preserve the freedoms we enjoy today.





Local veteran brings navy boat back to life

By Lawrence P. Dukes

I am a retired U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. and former nuclear reactor operator. I'm also the owner of Dubuque, a 36-foot surplus U.S. Navy Landing Craft Personnel Light that once served aboard the Dubuque (LPD-8), which was decommissioned in 2006.



I found Dubuque on eBay in 2018 — high and dry, covered in red dust in a surplus yard in Del Rio, Texas along the Rio Grande. At first glance, I knew this was my boat. When it arrived at Green Cove Springs Marina, Fla., a crowd formed. Shouts of "it's a gunboat!" rang out. Dubuque was in bad shape — most of the engine missing, no windows, no cleats, no railing. It had been stripped, and I think they were making bets I would never get it in the water.

But the stainless-steel lettering on its stern gleaming in the sunlight stated defiantly "USS DUBUQUE" — identifying itself as one of the Dubuque's small boats. That was enough for me. I had been an engineer half of my Navy career. I was undaunted. I moved Dubuque to long-term storage and formulated a restoration plan.

After almost two years in storage, I moved Dubuque into the work area and began the restoration. COVID-19 hit, making parts difficult to find.



My biggest hurdle was the engine — too many parts missing. Then I miraculously found a fully functional 8V-71 Detroit Diesel on a GSA Government Auction website. I won the auction and drove to Yorktown, Va. to retrieve the 4,000-pound engine myself. The 26-hour trip back at 45 mph drew curious onlookers at every stop. It was slow going, but I made it back to Green Cove Springs.

After more work and a few hiccups, a year and a half after placing Dubuque on the hard stand, she was ready to be tested.

When I energized the batteries, Dubuque woke from a 20-year sleep — lights on, fan whirling. "It's alive!" I shouted. Next came the engine test. Two huge barrels of water on deck fed the raw water-cooling system. I pressed the start button. The engine tried to turn over: "wah," "wah," "wah." Charles, my boat neighbor, threw me a can of starting fluid. "Hit it with this! In the air intakes!" Two shots, and the engine rolled over with a roar, settling into the steady beat of a two-stroke Detroit Diesel. Beautiful.

The cooling water and exhaust flowed from the twin stern exhausts. I went down to view the propeller — the

shaft was spinning, the propeller turning smooth as butter. I sprayed silicon lubricant into the shaft strut bearing, and everything spun smoothly in silence. It was magical. I thought I heard Dubuque say, "Reporting for duty, ready to answer all bells, sir!"

Dubuque would be back in the water very soon now. I looked around and noticed that a few of the Marina Staff had been watching the activity, and they were now enthusiastically giving me and Dubuque a thumbs up. It was a great day. Mission accomplished.

I could not have accomplished this task without the support of the Green Cove Springs Marina Staff and my boat neighbors who are now my good friends.

Lawrence P. Dukes is a retired U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr., former reactor operator aboard the Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN-69), and U.S. Coast Guard licensed Master. He is a graduate of Terry Parker High School and the University of North Florida. He owns SEA STATE Realty Corp. and SEA STATE Maritime School in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.



Mom's story cont. from pg. 8

Greenwood, started playing. Special-effect smoke came from under and around the two sets of big doors I had been staring at. The doors swung open, and we all jumped to our feet as our soldiers marched in and filled the room.

The soldiers looked similar in their fa-

tigues. We were squinting and scanning each one to find our soldier as the group marched in and lined up in formation to face us. I recognized one of the forms that moved just a hair differently, one that I knew like the back of my hand. That's him! There he is!

The rush of emotions is something that is difficult to put into words. I soon got

my hug and looked into the eyes of my very exhausted son. My healthy, strong son.

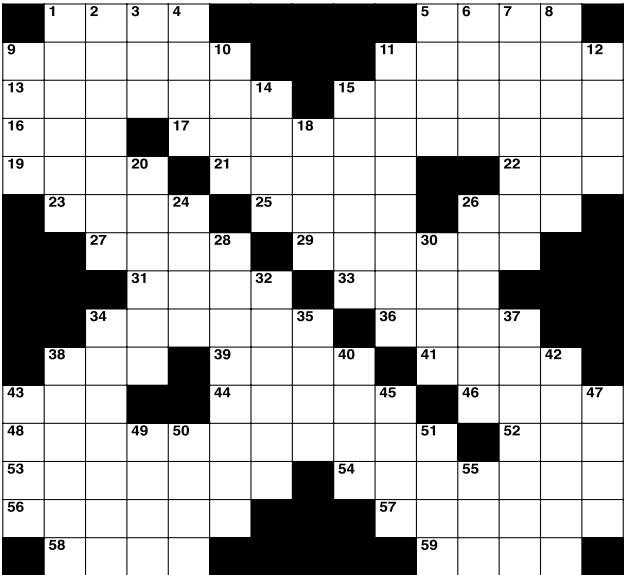
My son is a career military man in his 12th year of service. He now leads his own platoon and trains the next generation of soldiers. The pride he has in his country is evident on his face and in his voice whenever we talk about work.

I pray that pride in this beautiful nation is heard in your voice and shows on your face. I pray you take time to remember those who signed papers, were whisked away from their families to serve and protect, and gave the ultimate sacrifice.

God bless you and your family, and God bless America!

Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

1. Difficult
5. Coarsely ground corn
9. There's one for the "world"
11. Loved Romeo
13. Sticky situation
15. Pelvic areas
16. An informal debt instrument
17. Cannot be repaired surgically
19. A device attached to a workbench
21. Related on the mother's side
22. Sound unit
23. __ Sagan, astronomer
25. Utah city
26. A disappointing effort
27. Steal goods during a riot
29. Wakes up
31. Hair salon service
33. Serenaded
34. Looked intensely
36. U.S. Air Force expert Robert F.
38. A type of cast
39. One's duty
41. Where golfers begin
43. Make a mistake
44. Semitic sun god
46. Ancient Greek City
48. Having had the head cut off
52. A place to stay
53. Unwise
54. Most unnatural
56. Dennis is a notable one
57. Ointments
58. Students' exam
59. Leaked blood

CLUES DOWN

1. Brave
2. Act of awakening
3. Jest at
4. Sandwich store
5. Chapter of the Koran
6. Dismounted
7. Small vehicle
8. Irked
9. One who earns by disreputable dealings
10. Monetary unit of Samoa
11. Long, mournful lamentation
12. Weight unit
14. Alone, single
15. Decreases
18. Indicates beside
20. Worn by exposure to the weather
24. A body of traditions
26. College students' ultimate goal
28. Amino acid
30. Nasal mucus
32. US government entity
34. Swinish
35. Legislative body in Russia
37. Grant an exemption to
38. Put in advance
40. Satisfy
42. Felt
43. Mild yellow Dutch cheese made in balls
45. Witnesses
47. Picnic invaders
49. Gasteyer and de Armas are two
50. Ancient person of Scotland
51. Cheerless
55. Unwell

TURKEY DAY WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

- APPLE PIE
BISCUITS
BRINE
CASSEROLE
CIDER
CORNBREAD
CORNUCOPIA
DINNER
ENTERTAIN
FAMILY
FRIENDS
FULL
GRACIOUS
GRATITUDE
GRAVY
GREEN BEANS
HOLIDAY
MEAL
OVEN
SOUP
STUFFING
THANKSGIVING
TURKEY
YAMS



Solve the code to discover words related to senior safety.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 17 = E)

- A. 19 24 13 7 7 17 23 5
Clue: Slick
- B. 19 1 15 11 17 23
Clue: Place to wash
- C. 26 20 23 19
Clue: Handles
- D. 17 5 17 19 13 12 1 25
Clue: Ability to see



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November fishing shifts to bass, stripers

Jimmy Tomazinis
mail@floridanewslines.com

Hello again. I hope everyone is doing well as we begin our annual cool down and the start of the holidays. November brings a big shift for fishing in our area of the river. Saltwater species can still be around, but the balance will slowly shift to the freshwater species until they eventually make up most of our fishing opportunities through the winter, so I'll touch on a little of both this month.

What causes the shift? The water temperatures are dropping, which does make fish move, but the bigger influence on the fish, especially

the saltwater species, is the salinity. Shorter days, cooler temperatures, less evapotranspiration, etc., means more freshwater enters and stays in the river during the winter. This combination of lower temperatures and fresher water means it's not comfortable for many fish to hang around. They will head to our coastal marshes near the river's mouth if they can handle the cold. If they can't, they head out and south.

Shrimp will continue to exit. They're bigger but less numerous than previous months, but don't let that keep you

from looking. I've had some amazing days shrimping around Thanksgiving.

Flounder and redfish will be some of the last saltwater species to leave, and small numbers of them will even stay through the winter. A live shrimp or shiner is great for both. Try shallower water and use floats to cover more area.

Drum can still be found around bridge pilings and shell bars, but they will also be leaving throughout the month. Shrimp, clams and crab will work for them. If you fish with a Carolina or fish finder rig, try bouncing



Jimmy Tomazinis

the sinker off the bottom every now and then. The thud and puff of sediment can attract drum to your bait.

On the freshwater side of things, I'd say we have three main species to target now through the winter: Bass, specks and stripers. Catfish are an honorable mention since our channel and

white catfish are the most consistent bite throughout the winter, but for some reason they aren't targeted that much.

Bass and stripers would be my top picks this month. Try shallow structure and near creek mouths for bass and bridges for the stripers. Live shrimp have you covered for both. Next month we can talk all about freshwater, so keep an eye out for that. Tight lines.

Jimmy Tomazinis is a Jacksonville area native who has fished the St. Johns River his entire life. His passion for fish led him to study coastal biology at the University of North Florida. He has since participated in multiple fishery studies in Northeast Florida, continues to implement fish habitat and water quality improvement projects, fishes as much as he can, and has a monthly podcast called North Florida Fishing and Outdoors where the fishing conversation continues. Jimmy can be reached by email to mail@floridanewslines.com.



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Senior NewsLine

"Caregivers need care too:" How a local day program supports family caregivers

By River Garden Senior Services
mail@floridanewsline.com

More than 2 million Floridians currently provide caregiving for family members, a number that is expected to grow significantly during the next five years. Rich Demico and his wife under-

stand the related challenges all too well. Demico has been a caregiver for his 82-year-old mother Barbara for a year and a half. He moved Barbara into the couple's Bartram Park home when they realized her Alzheimer's had worsened.

"We immediately realized she was in worse shape than we thought," Demico said. "She was living alone, and a friend of hers was kind of hiding how badly she was doing, how much help she needed."

Those first few weeks were an adjustment for everyone. Demico, who is retired, and his wife who still works, spent four to six weeks helping Barbara acclimate to her new surroundings - cooking for her, cleaning for her, establishing a new sleeping pattern and getting caught up on all her medical needs.

"It's a constant thing where we have to be there at all times with her," he said. "My wife and I play tag team on the weekends and in the evenings just to make sure one of us is awake and available for her."

But when Barbara fell in the garage and broke her nose, they realized caregiving

was a greater responsibility than they expected. Rich's wife soon found River Garden Senior Services and discovered the Adult Day Program.

"She needs someone to be with her constantly, and we can't do that," Rich said. "River Garden was quite the life-saver for us."

The Adult Day Program is a safe and engaging space for seniors who live at home but need daytime support and social connection. Each senior receives a personalized, flexible schedule tailored to their needs. They may participate in a range of daily activities from chair exercises and ceramics to baking and bingo.

Caregivers typically begin by scheduling two days per week but often increase that as their loved one becomes more comfortable, said Melanie

Caregivers cont. on pg. 13



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From left, Rich Demico, Jackie Agnew, Barbara Demico, Rob Demico, Joyce Cox and Jenn Mulryan. Photo courtesy Rich Demico.

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Senior NewsLine

Caregivers cont. from pg. 12
Ruggiero, director of home and community based services at River Garden. The program operates Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"When we have caregivers come in and interview with us, they are exhausted," Ruggiero said. "Over time, we notice that they look rested."

Barbara now attends the program the full five days per week. For Rich, it's been life-changing. The time allows him to run errands, prepare meals and handle household responsibilities he can't manage when Barbara is home. But the biggest change, he says, has been in his mother.

"She's made a lot of friends; she's very sociable," Rich said. "I think it's a

distraction for her when she's engaged with her friends and staff, and that takes her mind off things."

Ruggiero says River Garden prides itself on being a safe place that caregivers trust. She says their goal is to make every person who walks through their doors feel understood and valued.

"No matter what their diagnosis is, we meet them where they are," Ruggiero said.

The Adult Day program is accepting new clients. Caregivers also now have access to a new drop-in program, where they can drop off their loved one for a four-hour window on short notice if something comes up.

Ruggiero says without respite, caregivers eventually burn out, which is why support systems like River Garden's are so critical.

"It's been a huge help because we have the peace of mind knowing she's being taken care of, and that it's something she enjoys," Rich said.

To learn more about River Garden's Adult Day Program, caregivers can visit RiverGarden.org.



Photo courtesy Rich Demico, Barbara Demico.



Photo courtesy River Garden.
Barbara Demico with a caregiver from the Adult Day Program at River Garden.



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Senior NewsLine

Thoughtful gifts offer comfort, fun for older adults

By NewsLine staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Gifts from friends and loved ones can make people feel cherished and valued. When these people are the older adults in one's life, such as parents or grandparents, gifts take on additional meaning because they can warm the hearts of very special people.

Finding unique gifts for seniors can be challenging because these individuals have been receiving gifts for many years, and many may already have everything they need. Inspiration is everything when shopping for the ideal gifts for the older adults in one's life, and the following are some categories that can serve as a springboard

for what to get seniors this holiday season.

Comfort and mobility

Although people like to say, 'age is just a number, getting older may come with a few aches and pains and even some limitations. Gifts like seat cushions that correct posture or easy on/off sock helpers can be helpful. Cloud foam slippers or even a grab bar that attaches into the hood of the car door can be great gifts.

Fitness and fun

Gifts that cater to interests, well-being and more can be ideal. Active seniors may appreciate a fitness tracker or exercise equipment (yoga mat, light dumbbells, resistance bands) to facilitate fitness goals.

Storage solutions for hobbies and craft items also can be fitting. See-through containers to store paints or beads or an organizer for fishing tackle can make seniors' hobbies even more enjoyable. A roll-up puzzle mat is great for puzzle enthusiasts to protect their work until completion.

Family gifts

Seniors also may appreciate gifts that touch the heart. A custom recipe cutting board that features a treasured family recipe may become a cherished item. A customized photo calendar that features family members' birthdays and other key events also is thoughtful. A photo jewelry locket makes a nice gift for a special senior woman.

Travel gifts

Seniors typically have more time to devote to travel than younger adults, and gifts that cater to their wanderlust are a perfect fit. Digital GPS-based devices that connect to keys or luggage can help prevent lost items while traveling. Bright luggage that won't get mixed up at the baggage carousel or ergonomic neck pillows that facilitate napping on a flight also can be appreciated. Those who know destinations the seniors in their lives may want to visit can purchase plane or cruise tickets as a generous gift for someone special.

Various categories can provide ample inspiration when shopping for gifts for seniors this holiday season.

Fredericksburg weaves American history into travel destination

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewsline.com

Few places in America weave so many layers of history into such a small area as Fredericksburg, Virginia. Nestled along the Rappahannock River between Washington, D.C., and Richmond, the town feels like a living timeline—one where the colonial era, Revolutionary War, Civil War and Civil Rights movement all left lasting marks. Walking its brick streets, visitors sense the weight of the nation's past amid a lively mix of shops, galleries and cafes.

The Washington Family Legacy

Fredericksburg proudly calls itself the boyhood home of George Washington. The story begins at Ferry Farm, where George lived from ages 6 to 16. After his father Augustine's death, his mother, Mary Ball Washington, guided the family through lean years, shaping her son's resilience and sense of duty. The reconstructed farmhouse and museum displays reveal what daily colonial life looked like for the future president.



Debi Lander

Downtown, the Mary Washington House preserves the home George bought for his mother in 1772. She lived there for the rest of her life, tending her gardens and welcoming visitors, including her famous son. Nearby stands the Rising Sun Tavern, built in 1760 by George's younger brother Charles. Costumed interpreters recreate the atmosphere of an 18th-century tavern, where politics and gossip mingled over tankards of ale.

The family story continues at Kenmore, the Georgian mansion of George's sister Betty Washington Lewis and her husband Fielding Lewis. Fielding sacrificed his fortune to fund supplies for the Revolutionary army, a powerful reminder of the personal cost of independence. The home dazzles with ornate plaster ceilings and exhibits honoring the enslaved community who maintained it.

Don't miss the Hugh Mercer Apothecary Shop, owned by Washington's friend and fellow patriot Dr. Mercer. The 18th-century pharmacy displays the remedies

of its day including herbs, tinctures and even leeches. The guides offer a fascinating glimpse into colonial medicine.

The Civil War Crossroads

If Washington's Fredericksburg represents America's beginning, its battlefields capture the nation's near collapse. the Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park encompasses four major battlefields—Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness and Spotsylvania Court House—forming one of the country's most extensive Civil War landscapes.

At Marye's Heights, visitors walk the ground where Union troops suffered staggering losses in December 1862. Chancellorsville, just west of town, saw Gen. Robert E. Lee's audacious victory but also the death of his trusted lieutenant, "Stonewall" Jackson. The 1864 battles of Wilderness and Spotsylvania marked the relentless Union drive toward Richmond under Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. Trails, exhibits and ranger programs bring these harrowing moments to life.

The Civil Rights Trail

Fredericksburg's story doesn't end with

muskets and monuments. the city also plays a key role on Virginia's U.S. Civil Rights Trail. the Shiloh Baptist Church (Old Site) served as a center of faith and activism for African Americans from the Civil War era through the modern Civil Rights movement.

Modern Fredericksburg

Though steeped in history, Fredericksburg thrives as a vibrant modern community. Its downtown brims with galleries, boutiques and eateries, while farmers' markets, carriage rides and festivals enliven the streets.

Debi Lander is an award-winning travel writer and photographer who blends her passion for history, culture, food, and personal discovery into captivating stories. Through her website Bylandersea.com and her long-running travel column for Florida Newsline, she explores destinations from small U.S. towns to iconic global landmarks. She hopes her storytelling and practical insights inspire readers to experience the world with curiosity, appreciation, and a sense of adventure. Debi can be reached by email to mail@floridanewsline.com.

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WELCOMING NEW PATIENTS

Help bring Mandarin's largest event to life in 2026

By Susie Scott

The 2026 Mandarin Art Festival is officially underway after an early Oct. 1 planning meeting. Volunteers are needed, as well as a show chair to coordinate and bring it all together by April 2026.

Many components of the festival are fully organized and staffed by volunteers, including the Children's Art Show, the Bake Sale, the Community Club table, advertising, sponsor and donor solicitation and many other activities critical to the festival's success.

The festival, which started in 1968 by the Mandarin Community Club, has grown into the largest event in Mandarin. Under the majestic oaks of Mandarin, more than 130 fine art and fine craft exhibitors and more than a dozen local artisans in the Green Market sell handmade, locally crafted consumable products.



Inside the 150-year-old historic building, the Children's Art Show has been an integral part of the festival for generations, making parents and family members proud while encouraging aspiring young artists. Also inside is a traditional bake sale fundraiser featuring homemade treats baked by Community Club members.

The food court features a variety of food trucks and vendors serving everything from empanadas to handcrafted specialty lemonades to tacos to pasta to Maine lobster rolls. Visitors can enjoy lunch in the shade of the Harriet Beecher Stowe pavilion while listening to local musicians.

The Easter weekend festival offers opportunities for community members to volunteer and be part of the event.

Email mandarinartfestival@gmail.com or visit mandarinartfestival.org for more information and to join the volunteer notification list.

The event is founded and hosted by the historic Mandarin Community Club, a local nonprofit 501(c)(3) whose mission is to promote and ensure the preservation, beautification and environmental well-being of Mandarin; to provide educational programs and meetings for the club's membership and the community; to enhance the cultural and recreational life of the citizens of Mandarin and to maintain the historic structures and properties owned by the club.



Photos courtesy Mandarin Art Festival



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* Comparison based on a study published by the Oxford Academic in June 2023 stating that the average primary care exam was approximately 21 minutes. Times vary based on services performed. Conviva does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, disability, age or religion in their programs and activities, including in admission or access to, or treatment or employment in, their programs and activities.