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About this magazine

The First Coast Register is a bimonthly general interest magazine published by The Ponte Vedra Recorder and OPC News, LLC. The magazine can be found throughout the upscale areas of greater Jacksonville. For advertising inquiries call 904.285.8831.

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on the cover

The cover of this Register features the front of the St. Francis Inn in St. Augustine, decorated for the holidays.

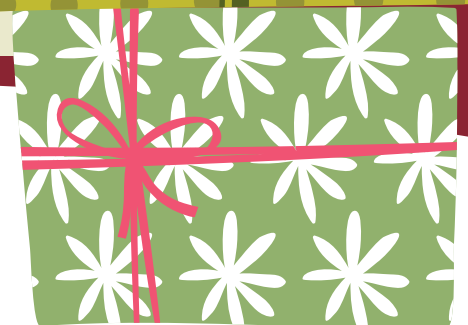
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Photo courtesy of St. Francis Inn



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One of Us!

JEFF DUNBAR

As told to
CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH

After living in several places throughout the country, Jeff Dunbar and his wife, Nancy, decided to call Fernandina Beach home. It's a coastal location with a small-town atmosphere that serves as a jumping off point for competition fishing or business trips to the Dominican Republic.

What can you share about your background?

I was born and raised in New Jersey and have had the good fortune to live in many diverse locales — Arizona, North Carolina and Georgia to name a few — in pursuit of my career goals.

How did you choose to call Fernandina Beach home?

My wife, Nancy, and I had been looking for a weekend beach getaway place when we lived in Atlanta. We had looked at almost every area from Little River, South Carolina, to the Louisiana bayous and always seemed to come back to Fernandina Beach.

Tell us about your role at Swisher International.

My team is responsible for managing and directing the Global Supply Chain. We move tobacco from all over the world, managing ocean freight, land freight, global purchasing and logistics.

What inspires you to “give back”?

There are so many tragedies in today's world it isn't hard to be inspired to help someone. Our hearts have been struck by the most recent devastation of the Abacos and Grand Bahama Island from Hurricane Dorian, especially having visited there often and fished with several friends in the islands. We have contributed to the relief fund and can only wish all Bahamians the best.

Does visiting the Dominican Republic change your world view?

In my view travel is the best educator — prodding the traveler, whether on business or for pleasure, to understand more of the outside world and therefore more of oneself. Mostly due to work, I have visited the Dominican Republic more than 150 times and have fallen in love with the country, people and culture. All of this contributes to my personal growth as well as the growth of those I come into contact with.



ABOVE: Jeff and Nancy Dunbar
Photo provided by JEFF DUNBAR

LEFT: Jeff Dunbar is an avid king mackerel tournament fisherman who competes on the Southern Kingfish Association Mercury Tournament Trail and the Pro Tour.

LOWER LEFT: Jeff and Nancy Dunbar fish together competitively for the toothy king mackerel.
Photos by TERRY LACOSS

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 ■

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Who is the Fish Dancer and how did you meet?

'THE' FishDancer is the alter-ego for my wife, Nancy. We have been married 33 years and together for 35. We met at Revlon where I was in management and Nan was the company nurse. I used to escort healthy employees to her for treatment just so I could speak to her – today this would probably create a scandal.

Why are you so passionate about king-fish tournaments?

Nan and I have been fishing king mackerel tournaments since 1996. For me, it is a process thing — preparing the equipment, fine tuning the boat and then trying to figure out the weather and fish. It's a constant challenge. Add the camaraderie and the competition and you have something of an addictive activity. I never calculate our performance against the size fish we have caught. I am always asking if we were properly prepared, were we in the right place and did we fish well. Otherwise, this sport could drive you crazy.

What is your most memorable catch?

Probably the most important fish we have scaled is nowhere near our biggest, nor did it win us a tournament. In 2002 we scaled



Winning tournaments can lead to sponsorships. That's why Jeff and Nancy Dunbar sport Mercury fishing attire for this photo during a tournament. Photo by TERRY LACOSS

a 25.16-pound king mackerel caught at the Nassau slough. That fish qualified us for the Southern Kingfish Association National Championship tournament for the first time and allowed us to begin competing along the SKA Pro Tour the next year. That qualifying fish has led directly to tournament wins, sponsorships, friends we have made and experiences we have had from Cape Hatteras, North Carolina to Port Fourchon, Louisiana, and almost everywhere in between.

What's the last thing you crossed off your bucket list?

Nan and I visited Paris for the first time and fell in love with the city. Le vin du moment along the Champs de Elysee was unforgettable.

What do you enjoy most about living in Fernandina Beach?

Fernandina Beach remains a small beach town, encompassing all that goes with it. After summer is over, you can walk the beach for several miles and perhaps run into one or two others – something that is difficult to do anywhere else these days. We have many good restaurants, but they are all local – no real chains on the island. And we have made many friends in Fernandina Beach. All of this adds up to a great little seaside town.

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Celebrating HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

.....

by DANIELA TOPOREK

The First Coast Hispanic Chamber of Commerce hosted its fourth annual Achieving the Dream Scholarship Awards and Hispanic Heritage Gala on Oct. 19 at TIAA Bank Field in Jacksonville. The event celebrated Hispanic Heritage month and the 25th anniversary of the Jacksonville Jaguars, making the night “A Black and Teal Affair.”

Hispanic Heritage month takes place every year from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15, said FCHCC President, Monica Hernandez. “It’s a time to recognize and celebrate the many contributions, diverse cultures and histories of the American-Latino community.”

The celebration included live entertainment from musical group Baba Caiman, dinner, a cash bar and fun photo opportunities with Chic Booth photo booth.

The emcee of the night was Action News Jax reporter Lorena Inclan. The featured speaker was Ramiro Cavazos, President and CEO of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. He spoke of what it means to be Hispanic and recognized the FCHCC as the number one Hispanic chamber of the year.

“Being Hispanic is a state of mind,” Cavazos said. “It’s a culture. We welcome everyone.” He congratulated the chamber for being number one out of 250 chambers around the country. “We’re very proud,” he said. “You all networked hard and put Jacksonville on the map and that’s going to pay off for many years to come.”

The event spotlighted 10 Hispanic students who “achieved the dream” and won “Achieve the Dream” scholarship awards that will provide them with financial assistance to further their education. The Jacksonville Jaguars franchise also surprised the award winners with custom Jaguars jerseys and sideline access to a home game.

“Being Latina, it wasn’t as easy getting into universities as it was for the majority of my friends coming from Nease High School,” said a scholarship winner, Katherine Rodriguez, a former student. Rodriguez’s scholarship will help fund her studies at the University of Rochester in New York, where she is majoring in biology with a minor in neuroscience, with her eye on attending medical school.

“Both of my parents are Cuban, but I lived in a single-parent, low-income household,” she said. “To be one of the few Latinas to graduate in the International Baccalaureate program, it was difficult, but I’m so thankful and grateful for this scholarship to pursue my academic goals.”

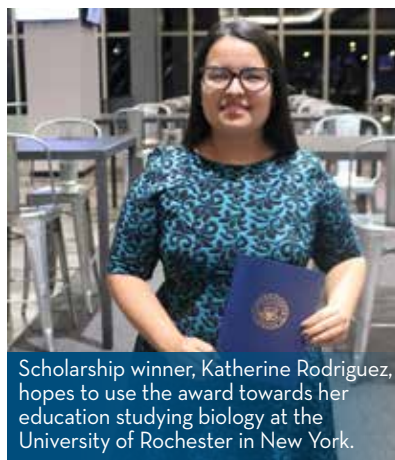
Hernandez said she could relate to the students. She moved to the United States about 20 years ago and said she remembers going through the same struggle of finding financial assistance for her education. Through the FCHCC, she hopes to continue helping students and opening new opportunities to the next generation of Hispanic-Americans. “I just want to be able to pay it for-



The First Coast Hispanic Chamber of Commerce celebrated its fourth annual Achieving the Dream Scholarship Awards and Hispanic Heritage Gala at TIAA Bank Field on Oct. 11.



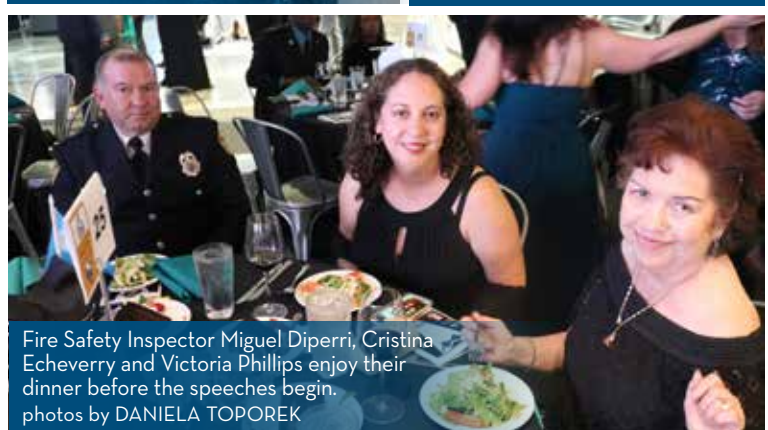
In addition to the Achieving the Dream scholarship, the 10 students also received a custom jersey from the Jacksonville Jaguars and sideline access at a home game.



Scholarship winner, Katherine Rodriguez, hopes to use the award towards her education studying biology at the University of Rochester in New York.



U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce president and CEO, Ramiro Cavazos, spoke at the gala and recognized the scholarship winners and the FCHCC for its success and being the best Hispanic chamber of the country in 2019.



Fire Safety Inspector Miguel Diperrri, Cristina Echeverry and Victoria Phillips enjoy their dinner before the speeches begin.
photos by DANIELA TOPOREK

ward,” she said, “and continue to encourage our students to remain focused on their aspirations regardless of what society and others tell them. Only they can set their own limits and their own goals.”



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Former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley recounts a life of 'pushing through the fear' at the

Florida Forum

by JENNIFER LOGUE



Former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley learned one of the most important lessons of her life as a 5-year-old on the playground.

Growing up in rural South Carolina, Haley – born Nimrata Randhawa – was the daughter of Indian immigrants. Her father wore a turban; her mother, a sari. To say the family stood out among the town's residents would be an understatement.

"They didn't know who we were or what we were about," Haley told attendees at the Oct. 28 Florida Forum lecture to benefit The Women's Board of Wolfson Children's Hospital. "But my mother told me, 'Your job is not to show them how we are different. Your job is to show them how we are similar.'"

The second great lesson she learned from her parents was to "push through the fear."

"If you push through the fear," she said, "you find you're so much stronger when you come out on the other side."

Those two lessons have stood Haley in good stead throughout her political career, from her early days as a South Carolina legislator to her tenure as the state's first female governor. In particular, Haley recalled pushing through the fear when a lingering debate over whether the Confederate flag should fly at South Carolina public buildings was reignited by a mass shooting at church Bible study session. Calling the incident one of the most painful moments in her public life, Haley said the turning point came when the families of the victims went to court just days after the shooting and publicly forgave the perpetrator.

"What we tried to do was focus on that forgiveness and that love and grace," Haley said. "We had no riots in South Carolina, we had vigils. And afterward, the flags came down and South

Carolina came out of it stronger."

Haley was called on to "push through the fear" again when President-elect Trump asked her to become America's ambassador to the United Nations. "I told my husband, 'I don't even know what the UN does – I just know everybody hates it.'"

Haley agreed to accept the position on the condition that it would be elevated to a cabinet-level position so she could report directly to the president and be made part of the National Security Council. She also warned the president-elect that she intended to speak her mind.

"That's exactly what I want you to do," Haley said the president told her.

"We were really focused on giving the U.S. a strong voice," she said. "We were not going to be pushed around. We were going to be respected."

In her Florida Forum presentation, Haley similarly pulled no punches in her assessment of her tenure as ambassador as well as the current geopolitical climate. Pointing to the Trump administration's efforts to curtail North Korea's nuclear ambitions and its successful exit from the Iran deal as major accomplishments achieved during her time as ambassador, Haley identified China as America's greatest long-term political threat.

"China has been investing in infrastructure all over the world," she said. "They get countries to run up debt. At the UN, we saw them bullying countries to vote (the way they wanted them to) or they would call in the debt. And when you see the places they're investing, it sends a chill up your spine."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ■



Ellen and Mark Gould with Heather and Hal Houston - Ellen is the granddaughter of Womens Board founder Ellen Cavert



Frank Denton and Elizabeth Colledge
photos by JENNIFER LOGUE



Makena and Joel Chamberlain with Henry and Jennifer Brown

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Nicki Whittum, Samantha Logue and Valerie Purcell

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12

Any company doing business in China, Haley noted, must cooperate with the Chinese military.

“Think of your tech companies, and all of the data and information they have on you,” she said. “We can’t be naïve anymore. We can’t trust China.”

And America “can never trust Russia,” Haley said.

“At the Security Council, there wasn’t one bad actor in the world where Russia wasn’t holding their hand,” she said. “They find their strength in causing chaos. Look how they meddled in our elections...all they were trying to do was cause a divide in our country. And they did a good job.”

Since leaving public office, Haley has written a new book –

“With All Due Respect: Defending America with Grace and Grit” – and started the nonprofit Stand for America (standforamericanow.com) to provide unbiased policy information. It’s her way, she said, of living out that early lesson from the playground: unite people through what they have in common instead of what divides them.

“The political climate is as toxic as I’ve ever seen it,” she said. “You have the parties calling one another evil. That hits a nerve with me, because I’ve seen evil – in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where rape is used as a weapon of war. In Sudan, where babies were thrown into fires and their mothers forced to eat the flesh. In Venezuela, where parents were holding their starving children.

“On our worst day,” Haley said, “we are blessed to be an American.”

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BEER, BRATWURST, BANDS HIGHLIGHT NOCtoberfest

by JENNIFER LOGUE



Sister Hazel performs at NOCtoberfest.

The spirit of Germany's Oktoberfest came to Nocatee Oct. 26-27, as the master-planned community hosted NOCtoberfest – an outdoor festival featuring beer, bratwursts and a two-day lineup featuring a dozen bands. The event attracted thousands of attendees, who had an opportunity to sip and savor dozens of domestic and international beers. Guests received a NOCtoberfest passport which they could get stamped at beer tents bearing the names of German cities such as Berlin, Munich, Frankfurt and Kiel. Attendees who got their passports stamped at all four tents received a T-shirt.

Complementing the various Bavarian beverages were numerous food trucks, a kids' activity zone, a Ferris wheel and a crafters' area.

Having a nationally known band perform was central to the event's design, Nocatee Community Manager David Ray acknowledged.

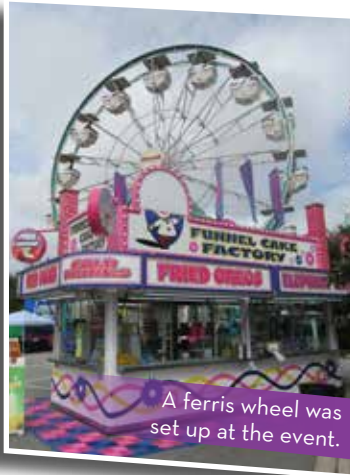
"That was an important element we wanted in planning the event," Ray said. "We wanted to reach beyond Nocatee to the wider community. The greater the ticket sales, the bigger of a headline act we could attract."



Delish Kebabs food truck

photos by JENNIFER LOGUE

Attendees in line at the Keil beer tent



A ferris wheel was set up at the event.

Ray noted that Nocatee presented NOCtoberfest in partnership with Woolsey Concert Group and credited Josh Woolsey with bringing the idea for the event to the community for consideration. Until recently, Woolsey – also a partner in the law firm of Woolsey/Morcom – was himself a resident of Nocatee, which is home to one of his law firm’s offices.

“The funny thing is, I still feel like I’m part of the community,” he said, noting that his law firm colleague Travis Klare helped organized NOCtoberfest. “I wanted to bring a national act here for my friends and neighbors to enjoy.”

In addition to Sister Hazel – whose Saturday night concert held attendees enthralled – the NOCtoberfest lineup included bands such as Barnes & The Heat, the Aaron Mansfield Band, The Band Be Easy and local band Austin Park. The modern country rock band named after one of Nocatee’s neighborhoods drew an enthusiastic crowd of local supporters, who cheered for songs such as “A Girl Walks In” and “Home Run,” which is now getting airplay on country stations across the nation.

Woolsey is already looking ahead to next year’s NOCtoberfest, expanding on the success of this year’s festival.

“It’s a great community event that’s helping local charities, too,” he said, noting that the beer tents were staffed by volunteers from local nonprofits. “We think that as it grows, we can add a second national act on Sunday, too.”

NOCtoberfest attendees applaud headliner Sister Hazel.



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HEROES GALA

supports work of Operation New Uniform

by JENNIFER LOGUE

It was an evening for heroes Nov. 8, when the Ponte Vedra Inn and Club hosted the 6th annual Heroes Gala to benefit the Jacksonville nonprofit Operation New Uniform (ONU).

Featuring a cocktail reception, dinner and both live and silent auctions, the gala attracted a large and enthusiastic audience committed to supporting ONU's mission of equipping veterans with the skills needed to make a successful transition to the civilian business world. And no one expressed that support more emphatically than the evening's guest speaker, retired Lt. Colonel Oliver North.

"The most important thing to veterans is to be productive – and they're willing to work hard to do just that," North told attendees. "They're not looking for a hand-out – but sometimes they need a hand up."

North said businesses should consider themselves fortunate to hire veterans, who bring a wealth of skills and experience to the business world. "These guys know more about responsibility and accountability than any CEO in America," he said, "because they're responsible for each other's lives."

A LIGHTBULB MOMENT

Yet despite the tremendous skillset veterans possess, it can be difficult for them to navigate the vastly different world of corporate America. ONU Founder and Executive Director Michele McManamon noted that those coming from a military background are used to having a very clear pathway for advancement as well as the camaraderie and support of a strong network of fellow soldiers.

"When they leave the service, that pathway, that camaraderie and that network goes away," McManamon said. "It's like being isolated and alone, without having the support you're used to."

McManamon told gala attendees how ONU grew out of her experience at Sandler Training and a desire to help one veteran with the skills needed to succeed in business.

"A veteran told me, 'Once we take off these uniforms people don't treat us the same way,'" she said. "A lightbulb went off. That's when I realized that we needed to help veterans take off their uniform and get into a new one – a business suit."

Since then, ONU has graduated 272 veterans from its training program – including U.S. Army veteran Eric Ford, who attended



Operation New Uniform Executive Director Michele McManamon and Lt. Colonel (ret.) Oliver North
photos by JENNIFER LOGUE

the gala with his wife, U.S. Army Sergeant Doreen Kay Ford. Ford credits the skills he learned at ONU with helping him secure a project management position.

"ONU made it easy," said Ford, who served 27 years in the Army. "In the military, you're used to having support; ONU fills that void. They connect those dots."

Retired Marine Capt. Alex Desjardins also benefited from ONU. While she did not participate in ONU's complete training program, Desjardins said she received assistance after finding it difficult to secure a new career after 21 years in the Marines.

"ONU helped me rewrite my resume," Desjardins said. "When I sent out my new resume to Lending Bear, within 30 seconds of applying (they) called me and offered me a job."

Navy veteran and recent ONU graduate Jeff Wallace said the program gave him the skills he needed to present himself well to prospective employers.

"There are so many skills that you don't acquire in the military – salary negotiation, interviewing, how to read other people and understand where they are coming from," Wallace said. "ONU gave me those skills and helped me recognize my skills and sharpen them."

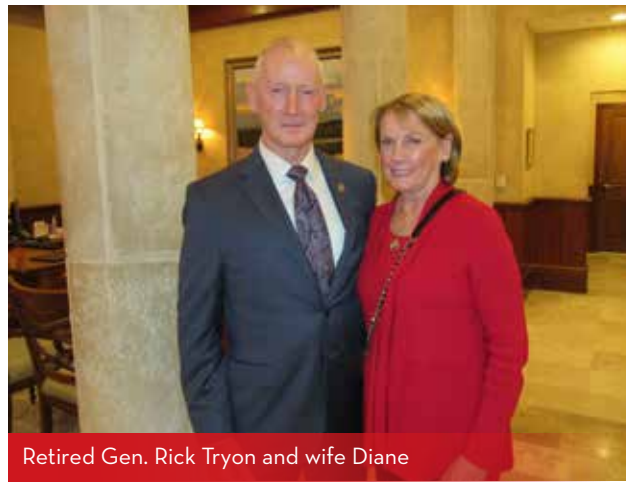
Since completing ONU's program, Wallace has gone on interviews and says they have felt much different than before. What's more, he noted, employers are now reaching out to him, and he is confident he will soon have a career in his desired field of education and training.

"I'm very blessed to have participated in this program," he said. "It gives me such confidence to have such a large network of people looking out for me."

For more information on Operation New Uniform, visit www.onuverts.org.



ONU graduate Jeff Wallace and wife Elissa



Retired Gen. Rick Tryon and wife Diane



Jackie Grzebin and sister, retired Marine Capt. Alex Desjardins



Jeri and Sid Johnson



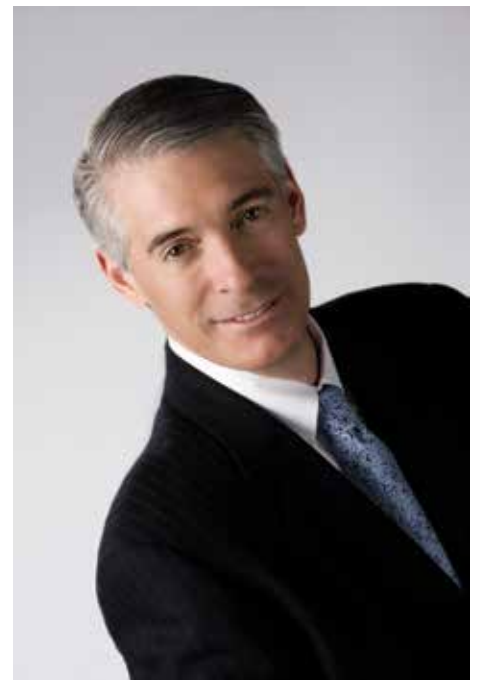
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Wine & Dine
on the First Coast

PAGES 20-27

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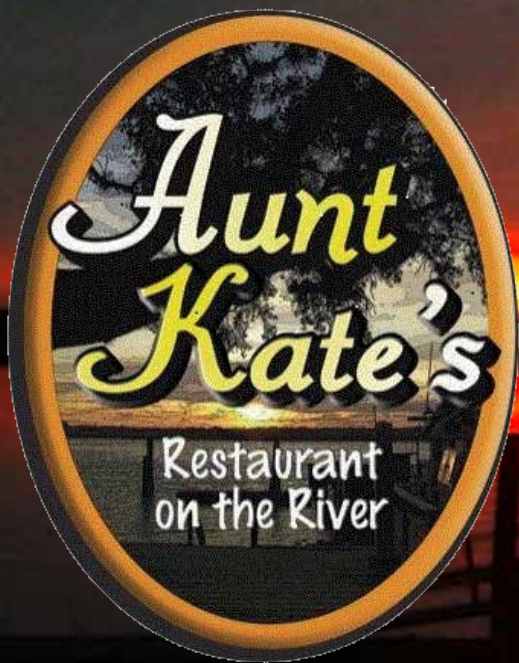
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WHY PAIR FOOD WITH WINE?

by STEVEN LOURIE
Sommelier and co-owner
of Coastal Wine Market



The upcoming holiday season brings yet another reason – as if we needed one – to enjoy food and wine with friends and family. This is something my wife, Shaun, and I certainly relish and enjoy as we are always eager to make any gathering as perfect as it can be.

We believe one of the biggest challenges some people face is the dreaded procurement of wines to please every member of their respective parties. “What does Grandma like? Is it Moscato?” “Will Uncle Gordon be drinking red or white? Or is it gin?”

Regardless, we believe there is something out there that everyone’s palate will agree with. So, here are some basic tips on food and wine pairing for a perfect culinary holiday. Keep in mind that collaboration is the ultimate objective—that the wine and food combine to create a totally new and superior tasting effect. And remember that wine should always complement the food and not dominate it.

How do we achieve that when selecting wines that enhance our menu? It really is a science of taste and aroma. There are five basic tastes that the tongue is sensitive to: salt, sweet, bitter, sour, and umami. If the last one sounds “fishy” you’re somewhat right. In Japanese, the term “umami” is used for a “meaty” sensation, whose characters literally mean “delicious flavor.” And through aromas we are able to actually taste the wine.

The most important elements to pay attention to in pairing wine and food are the acidity, tannin, alcohol and wood flavors, usually referred to as “oakiness.” Most important, remember to always know your guests’ personal taste. If your guests only drink red wine, consider matching red wine to your menu – even to fish.

SIMPLIFY THESE MAJOR PLAYERS IN WINE PAIRING

Tannins: The tannins give structure and backbone to the wine. When paired with dishes that are high in proteins and fats (such as red meat and hard cheeses), the tannins will bind to the proteins and come across as softer. **Suggestion:** Qupe Syrah, California, \$24. (All prices at Coastal Wine Market)

Oak: The chemical properties of oak itself can have a profound effect on the wine. Do complement oaky Chardonnay with foods that have toasty flavors, such as from toasted nuts, pastry crust, grilling or smoking. Pair crisp, delicate Chardonnay with simply flavored, simply prepared foods, such as baked fish or poultry with butter and herbs. **Suggestion:** Buena Vista Chardonnay, Napa Valley, \$28.



8 Years in the Desert Red Blend, Orin Swift Cellars is a real blockbuster powerhouse wine!



Willamette Valley Vineyards Pinot Noir Founder's Reserve exclusive to Coastal Wine Market & tasting room.



Pine Ridge Chenin-Blanc Viognier White Blend is a limited offering from Pine Ridge and a perfect balance of floral and fruit.



Veuve de Vernay Sparkling Brut Rose presents red and citrus fruits that bound out of the glass.

Sugar: The sugars in wine grapes are what make wine-making. Sweet wines will also pair well with rich foods like foie gras. Desserts that pair well with sweet wines come in all flavors and textures. **Suggestion:** Penfold’s Club Tawny Port, Australia, \$20.

Alcohol: Alcohol is the primary factor in dictating a wine’s weight and body. An increase in alcohol content will increase the perception of density and texture. In food and wine pairing, salt and spicy heat will accentuate the alcohol and the perception of “heat” or hotness in the mouth. **Suggestion:** Juan Gil Blue Label, Spain, \$36.

“After, “digesting” all this information, I’m adding a simple tutorial below that features four wines to have on hand over the holidays. While it’s nice to splurge sometimes, these wines are certain to please many palates and complement any conversation or menu without breaking the bank.

1. Veuve de Vernay Sparkling Brut Rose, \$12. This is hands-down the best bang for your buck. Red and citrus fruits that bound out of the glass and show a wonderfully balanced sweetness without even coming close to being cloying.

2. Pine Ridge Chenin-Blanc Viognier White Blend \$40. This limited offering from the Pine Ridge family of wines is one of our most unique and popular offerings at Coastal Wine Market. It’s a perfect balance of floral and fruit that make everyone’s eyes widen and becomes an instant favorite among friends and family.

3. Willamette Valley Vineyards Pinot Noir Founder’s Reserve \$36. This exclusive wine only found at Coastal Wine Market is the perfect accompaniment to any meal or gathering. Black and red cherry notes are backed with classic raspberry flavors that are framed with a cocoa and cola finish.

4. 8 Years in the Desert Red Blend, Orin Swift Cellars \$50. Many have heard of The Prisoner wine, and Dave Phinney (aka Orin Swift) is the mastermind. When The Prisoner was sold in 2010 for \$285 Million, Dave Phinney was not allowed to create a Prisoner-like Zinfandel-based blend for eight years. Then in 2018, he released 8 Years in the Desert. And it is a blockbuster powerhouse that will knock socks off around the dining table. So be prepared.

For a more customized approach, stop by Coastal Wine Market & tasting room for personal wine pairing suggestions. Address: 641 Crosswater Parkway, Suite B, Ponte Vedra, FL.



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10/SIX GRILLE

Wow the imagination

in Downtown Jacksonville

by DANIELA TOPOREK

From Winter Wonderland to Alice in Wonderland, Jacksonville keeps surprising us with new and creative events and locations to explore. The latest is Downtown Jacksonville's newest addition to the restaurant scene, the 10/Six Grille, inspired by the imaginative world of Lewis Carroll.

10/Six Grille is located off Hogan Street, within Sweet Pete's Candy. The restaurant and candy shop together offer an escape from the ordinary reality of office jobs and traffic downtown. 10/Six owner Russ Disparti said he chose to open his restaurant in the middle of the mundane for that very purpose.

"With all the stress, people need a place to escape," he said. "To let go and be weird and quirky."



ABOVE: 10/Six Grille offers a variety of menu options, with a focus on Southern cuisine. photos provided by 10/SIX GRILLE

BELOW: 10/Six offers all-day brunch Tuesday through Sunday and happy hour from 3 to 6 p.m., featuring signature candy cocktails.



BELOW: 10/Six Grille offers a whimsical theme in decor and menu choices. photo by DANIELA TOPOREK



ABOVE: 10/Six's shrimp po'boy comes with hand-breaded shrimp, lettuce, tomatoes, pickles and Cajun remoulade on a hoagie roll.



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Russ Disparri, owner of 10/Six Grille, hopes to offer an escape from the office to those working in downtown Jacksonville. photos by DANIELA TOPOREK

Disparri helps ease the stress with the 10/Six bar, with signature candy cocktails and with mocktails created in collaboration with Sweet Pete's. For those working downtown and looking for a new lunch spot, 10/Six's Cajun-inspired menu comes with a southern twist, with options like deviled eggs and fried green tomatoes for starters, to jambalaya, shrimp po'boys and stuffed dodo for the main dish.

Stuffed Dodo, whimsically named after the birds in "Alice in Wonderland," is grilled chicken breast, stuffed with goat cheese and topped with balsamic-glazed mushrooms, walnuts, served with collard greens.

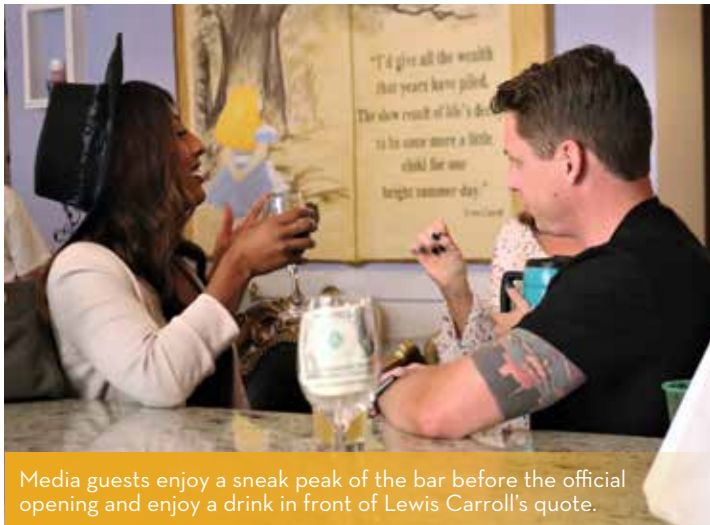
10/Six Grille is also open for brunch, with selections such as crepes, pancakes and beignets, as well as Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum, two eggs with ham, served over an English muffin and topped with Hollandaise sauce.

Disparri said he hopes people who work downtown and people who are just visiting will be open to taking a trip down the rabbit hole for a good meal.

"Escape a bit," he said. "Relax."

From Carroll's book, published in 1865, to the 1951 film and 2010 remake, Disparri believes "Alice in Wonderland" is a bridge to all generations. That it's a story all ages have experienced, relate to and can talk about together.

A quote by Carroll along one wall is one of Disparri's favorites and fits the theme of the place: "I'd give all the wealth that years have piled, the slow result of life's decay, To be once more a little child, for one bright summer day."



Media guests enjoy a sneak peak of the bar before the official opening and enjoy a drink in front of Lewis Carroll's quote.



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Chef Mimi Lan (far right) stands with Matthew's hard-working staff, posing for a photo after a long night of hosting.
photos by DANIELA TOPOREK

Chef Mimi Lan takes Vietnamese cuisine to

Luxury Levels

by DANIELA TOPOREK

Vietnamese food is growing in popularity throughout the First Coast, from ma-and-pop Pho restaurants to boba tea spots with bahn mi and other traditional foods. But Chef Mimi Lan took the cuisine to another level at her VIGLO pop-up dinner, Oct. 20, at Matthew's Restaurant, combining Vietnamese delicacies with a French twist and partnering with Matthew's two chefs, Alexander Yim and Antonella di Benedetto, to transform the dinner into a culinary experience.

VIGLO, or Vietnamese with Global Influences, is a pop-up dinner series Lan created after 16 years of running a marketing firm in Texas. She found inspiration through cooking and quit her job to become a chef and entrepreneur.

"We're meeting two friends from Ponte Vedra who invited us tonight," said dinner guest, Michelle Day, during the welcoming cocktail hour. "I'm looking forward to the Peking duck; it sounds so interesting, and this cocktail, as well. The dragon fruit is phenomenal."

Day was enjoying the Dragon Fruit French 75, a cocktail created by Matthew's mixologist and bar manager, Joshua Smith.

This was Smith's first time working with Lan, along with the collaborating chefs. Before, they knew Lan as a guest.

"She was just a sweet lady that came in and then a couple years ago, she started her VIGLO dinners, so this was a different experience," said Chef Alexander Yim, who helped create the second course, a foie gras congee with sides like century egg, salmon floss, and fermented green peppercorn.



Lance and Michelle Day pose after enjoying their welcoming cocktail and wait for dinner to be served.

"Congee is specific to China and Chef Alex is Chinese, so he was able to put some influence in that," said Chef Antonella di Benedetto, who was responsible for the dessert course. "Chef Alex and I know more international cuisines and Chef Mimi specifically does Vietnamese," he said, "so we were able to add our input to it. We let her take the lead and it's nice. For her to showcase her talent, her flavor, it's a good experience and we're happy for her."

"She has a lot of great ideas and wants to introduce people around the world to Vietnamese food in an elevated, more refined, dining level," Yim said.

Lan's signature dish is her truffle dumplings, stuffed with mushroom medley, vegetable coulis, roasted bone marrow and shaved black truffle. Served in Zhong truffle broth with a pink prawn rice cracker, it was an ode to her heritage with a French touch.



The Dragon Fruit French 75, created by Matthew's mixologist and bar manager Joshua Smith, was the featured cocktail for the welcome reception.



The dinner started with a goi ga chicken salad as the first course, with Napa, endive, Vietnamese herbs and veggies and shredded chicken, served with a green rice cracker and with a kumquat champagne nuoc cham vinaigrette.



The night came to an end with the final course, three flavorful macarons by Chef Antonella di Benedetto, served with tapioca pearls and pandan sauce.



VIGLO dinner guests smile at the table before digging into the first course.

“In Hoi An, the most famous dish is white rose dumplings,” she said. “These dishes are basic Vietnamese comfort foods that come in many variations and can be found anywhere in Vietnam. I elevated them using French ingredients to fit the theme.”

For the final course, Lan and di Benedetto served three pastel-colored macarons, each a different flavor, Vietnamese coffee, Thai tea and matcha green tea, elegantly plated, served with tapioca pearls with coconut and pandan sauce.

Dinner guests gave the chefs and Matthew’s staff a round of applause after the dinner.

“It’s not often that you have the opportunity to do this,” Lance Day, Michelle’s husband said.

“We’d totally do this again,” Michelle said. “Matthew’s always does an amazing job bringing culture, fun and new experiences.”

Email Mimi Lan at mimi@TasteCurator.com to learn about the next VIGLO pop-up dinner.

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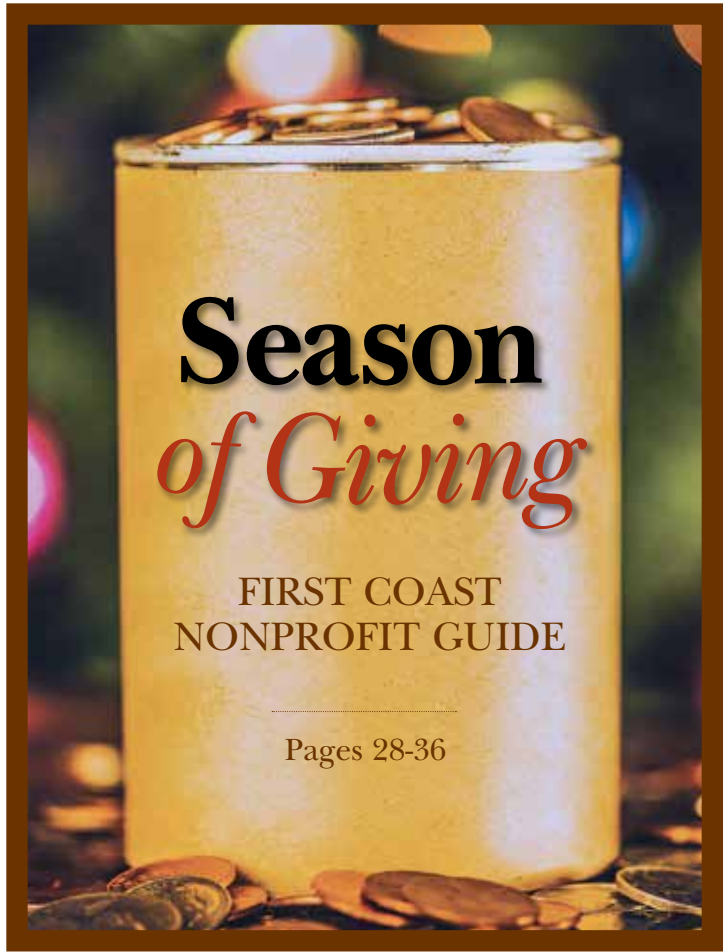
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FIRST COAST NONPROFIT GUIDE

Pages 28-36

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Caring Chefs raises over \$100,000 for Children's Home Society of Florida

by PARIS MOULDEN



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photos by SUSAN GRIFFIN

Children's Home Society of Florida hosted the 36th annual Caring Chefs in October, and attendees got to taste cuisine and drinks from some of the First Coast's finest restaurants and breweries, as well as contribute to a great cause.

"This year's event went really well," said Samantha D'Agostino, special events manager for the Children's Home Society of Florida. "It's always great to have the combination of volunteers and the community coming together to support our mission."

The event, held Oct. 20 at the Avenues Mall, raised more than \$105,000 for the Children's Home Society of Florida. More than 1,200 people attended the popular fundraiser, eager to try a variety of samples from the 48 area restaurants and breweries that set up stations at the event. Attendees were also treated to live music by the Bay Street Band and the Gary Starling Band.

And at the end of the day, the event was a success for both the nonprofit's mission of helping families and for attendees who got to try a vast variety of specialty cuisines and cocktails.

"People were able to leave with full hearts and full bellies, and that's really the goal," D'Agostino said.

The Children's Home Society of Florida is the oldest and largest statewide organization devoted to helping children and families. The nonprofit serves more than 60,000 children and family members throughout the state each year. For more information, visit www.chsfl.org.

The Ponte Vedra Recorder was proud to serve as a media partner of this event.

An evening for ROYALTY

“An Evening for Kings & Queens,” the 19th annual JDRF Miracles Gala, was held Oct. 19 at Sawgrass Marriott in Ponte Vedra Beach. The elegant event supported the Fund a Cure program, which provides the charity with the resources to fund innovative research and accelerate progress toward new treatments and eventually a cure for Type 1 Diabetes.

Founded in 1970, JDRF is the leading global organization focused on Type 1 Diabetes research. Driven by passionate grassroots volunteers connected to children, adolescents and adults with the disease, it has awarded more than \$2 billion to diabetes research to date.

The JDRF North Florida Chapter supports the JDRF mission through programs and donor relationships. The 2019 Gala Chair, Melody Van-Zant, announced at the gala that she was matching all donations. And Honoree Steve Halverson and his wife, Diane, gave \$25,000 to the cause.



David and Emily Rottmann,
Chris Thanner and Katie Kilbride
photos by KRISTIN FLANAGAN



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The Ultimate Chef's Challenge Beach Bash was held Oct. 28 in support of Habitat for Humanity. photos by AMBER LAKE

ULTIMATE CHEF'S CHALLENGE

Beach Bash

by AMBER LAKE

brings in record bucks for Beaches Habitat for Humanity

The Ultimate Chef's Challenge Beach Bash kicked off Oct. 28 in support of Habitat for Humanity at the Sawgrass Beach Club. The night was filled with music, a complimentary bar, an auction and, of course, some of the best restaurants and chefs in the area.

Guests sampled entrees from more than a dozen different restaurants and voted on their favorite. This year, Chef Taylor Pickett from Palm Valley Fish Camp won the Ultimate Chef's Challenge "Flavors of the World," representing Japan. His winning dish was Togarashi Seared Tuna with Ponzu Pickled Veggies on a bed of Sticky Rice and Ginger Soy Aioli topped off with Wasabi Caviar.

The real winners, however, are the area families that Habitat for Humanity builds affordable housing for. 2019's Ultimate Chef's Challenge Beach Bash raised a net profit of \$125,000, which was a record for the past 15 years the event has been hosted.

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HEAL Gala
Thursday, February 20, 2020
Ponte Vedra Inn & Club
6:30pm

Bobby Weed's Golf Gig
Friday, February 21, 2020
Ponte Vedra Inn & Club - Lagoon Course
8:00am - Bloody Marys & Morning Munchies
9:00am - Scramble

The HEAL Foundation provides grants to local organizations, programs, camps and schools serving those with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Northeast Florida.



Since 2007, HEAL is proud to have awarded over \$2 million dollars in grants, providing:

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- Educational seminars for parents, teachers and therapists
- Year-round fun recreational and social events for families
- Autism service dogs

HEAL delivers iPads to local ESE classrooms

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The HEAL Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Tax ID 20-1944817



“The Beach Bash has grown to become the major annual fundraiser for Beaches Habitat for Humanity,” said Amy Plowden McDaniel, Event Chairperson at Beaches Habitat for Humanity. “The chefs went above and beyond by serving the most incredible dishes in keeping with the international theme of ‘Flavors of the World.’”

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 BY 

VILANO RESIDENTS CELEBRATE AT Sea Turtle Soiree

by CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH



Bob Valentine (center) opens a bottle of champagne with Barbara Valentine (right) and Bill Long at the third annual Sea Turtle Soiree on Nov. 2 at the end of the Vilano Pier.



Andy and Elisa Hill look dapper at the Sea Turtle Soiree. Elisa is chair of the Vilano Beach Tour of Homes. photos by CHRISTIN RODENBAUGH



Diane Calhoun and Helene Alland attended the soiree for the first time and said they will be back every year.



Ramona the band provided entertainment.

Champagne flowed and music filled the air at the end of the Vilano Pier on Nov. 2 as friends and neighbors gathered inside a glowing tent for the third annual Sea Turtle Soiree.

The 1920s-themed party kicked off Vilano Fest, a charitable event in partnership with North Shores Improvement

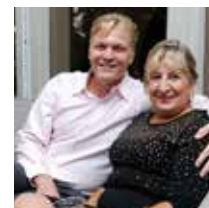
Association. Proceeds will help improve lighting and walkability throughout the Vilano Beach community.

Vilano Beach was platted in the 1920s Art Deco period and to celebrate the heritage, future and individuality of the beach community, most of the guests donned period clothing including flapper dresses and tuxedos. The Reef catered the event with a buffet that included shrimp and grits and jambalaya. Ramona's eight-piece band added ambience during dinner and dance music later in the evening.

Many of the soiree guests also had tickets for the Nov. 3 Vilano Beach Tour of Homes. Eight varied properties were chosen for the trolley tour and local artist, Barb Valentine, created a painting of each one.

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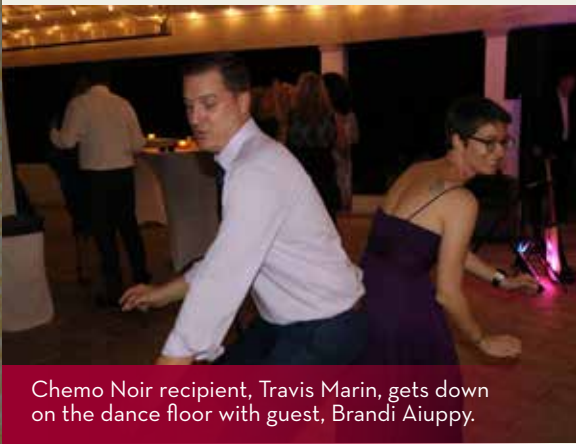
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Our mission is to host and inspire wine-centric events that raise money to provide financial support to the families, friends and fighters in their battle with Cancer.

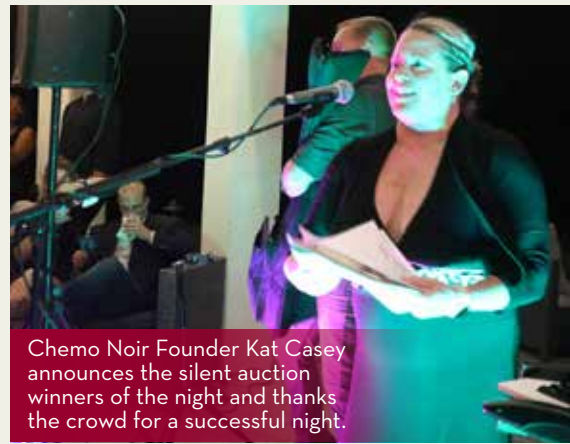
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Chemo Noir recipient, Travis Marin, gets down on the dance floor with guest, Brandi Aiuppy.



Courtney Fluegel (left) and Wendy Alexaitis volunteer for Chemo Noir and checked people in through the evening.



Chemo Noir Founder Kat Casey announces the silent auction winners of the night and thanks the crowd for a successful night.

Chemo Noir Gala

raises money for cancer patients by DANIELA TOPOREK

More than \$30,000 was recently raised at the third annual Chemo Noir Gala Oct. 19, where guests celebrated and danced at the nonprofit organization's signature fundraiser for cancer patients needing financial assistance.

The gala took place at 3 Palms Grille in Ponte Vedra Beach. Guests, dressed to impress in cocktail attire, socialized throughout the restaurant, surveying silent auction items and enjoying an elaborate buffet and open bar.

Barrett Thomas was the evening's musical guest, performing upbeat covers and enticing the crowd's liquid courage on the dance floor.

"I'm having a great time," said Travis Martin, gala guest and Chemo Noir financial recipient. "I had cancer for two years and I've seen this (event) grow tremendously, just in the amount of people here tonight."

Martin credited Kat Casey, founder of Chemo Noir, and her "genuine spirit" for both his physical and financial recovery and the

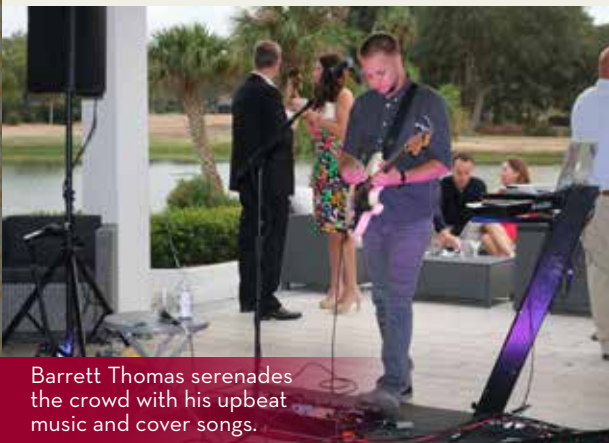
success of the foundation.

"It's the energy," he said, that keeps him coming back to Chemo Noir events. "Kat is beyond a beautiful person with an amazing soul. Some people in life were meant to do what they do, and Kat's right where she needs to be. I'm beyond grateful for that because she's been amazing in my life. I can't thank her enough."

Casey is also a cancer survivor. During her speech, which was met with applause, she said, "We're cancer-free, all around...this is what you guys are doing." Hoping she can make a difference for more struggling patients, she also said, "This journey is not easy. What you guys are doing here tonight is helping these people and I just can't thank you enough."

Raising her glass to everyone in the room she said, "Big cheers."

The Ponte Vedra Recorder was proud to serve as a media partner of this event.



Barrett Thomas serenades the crowd with his upbeat music and cover songs.



Travis Martin talks about how Chemo Noir helped him through his financial struggle after beating cancer.



Gala guests boogie down as the night comes to an end at 3 Palms Grille. photos by DANIELA TOPOREK

Chemo Noir hosts and inspires wine-centric events that raise money to provide financial support to the families, friends and fighters in their battle with cancer. For more information, visit www.chemonoir.com.



Mike Demi, Irene Wolfe, Jeff Reel, Lisa Reel, Erika Kegler and Hayden Reel



Tim Conner, Kim Conner and Charlie Joseph
photos by PARIS MOULDEN



Jeff Hazen, Cari McGowan, Lisa Bowden and Karie Hazen



Scott and Amikco Marolt



Rick Plotkin, Jen Plotkin,
Leslie Burnett and Jason Burnett

‘DARE TO DREAM’

MaliVai Washington Youth Foundation reaches \$5M goal at annual Champions for Children Gala

by PARIS MOULDEN

“Dare to Dream” was the slogan for the 23rd annual Champions for Children Gala and, through funds raised at the event, the MaliVai Washington Youth Foundation can help even more kids do just that.

The nonprofit reached its \$5 million Capital Campaign goal with help from contributions through the gala, which was held Oct. 17 at the Florida Blue Conference Center in Jacksonville. The Capital Campaign funds will go toward the foundation’s Teen Center, which is being built at Emmett Reed Park in Jacksonville. The new 13,000-plus-square-foot facility will be used to provide more assistance and support for area teens.

During the gala, attendees were able to meet teens who are having their dreams fulfilled through help from the MaliVai Washington Youth Foundation, including hearing a testimonial from the 2019 Student Athlete of the Year and recipient of a \$5,000 college scholarship Tyhlur Reynolds.

Former Jaguars player Donovan Darius served as the keynote speaker at the event.

“The work for me was not just on the field, it was using your image, your likeness, your ability, everything for a greater cause beyond yourself,” Darius said. “One of the things I admire most about Mal Washington is that he’s doing that.

Building a greater family, a greater community – he’s going to continue doing that for years to come.”

MaliVai Washington, who was a Wimbledon finalist in 1996, began the foundation 23 years, with the goal of introducing tennis to low-income children in the Jacksonville area. Since then, the foundation has assisted thousands of area children and grown to include school and summer youth development programs positively impacting hundreds of Jacksonville kids each year.

More than 450 business leaders and community members attended this year’s gala and raised more than \$250,000 at the event. Also, during the gala, the USTA Florida Section Foundation made the announcement it would be donating \$50,000 to the Capital Campaign.

“We are thrilled to have received such a generous gift,” Washington said in a press release. “The unwavering support from the USTA Florida Section Foundation and this evening’s generous \$50,000 gift not only helped us pass our \$5 million goal for our Club 904, but it will help us continue to serve hope and change the lives of thousands of youth for decades to come.”

For more information on the MaliVai Washington Youth Foundation, go to www.malwashington.com.



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Holiday **HAPPENINGS**

Celebrate the holiday season by checking out these festive events scheduled to take place in November and December in Northeast Florida.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS • PAGES 39-41

OLD-FASHIONED CHRISTMAS CAROLING • PAGES 42-43

HOLIDAYS AT ST. JOHNS TOWN CENTER • PAGES 44-45

"12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS" AT ST. AUGUSTINE INN • PAGES 46-47

GIVE THE GIFT OF AN EXPERIENCE • PAGES 48-56



There's just something in the air around this season that fills the First Coast with holiday spirit. No matter which holiday, this is the time of year to gather with loved ones and enjoy the magic of the gift-giving season. From tree lightings to arts and crafts to a "nerd market" filled with holiday cheer, there's always something for everyone around this time of year. | Compiled by DANIELA TOPOREK

GAAM HOLIDAY NERD MARKET

Dec. 1, Noon

Aloft Jacksonville Tapestry Park
(904) 998-4448
4812 Deer Lake Drive West
Jacksonville, Florida 32246

The second GAAM Holiday Nerd Market is put together by the GAAM team, with a focus on vendors and artists. Explore over 20 "nerdy" businesses with nerdy stuff to sell just in time for the gift-giving season. Gaming stations, a holiday social mixer, selfie spots, Christmas decorations, food trucks and more will be featured. GAAM will also be collecting toys for Toys for Tots. For each donated toy, attendees will receive one raffle ticket for a special GAAM giveaway contest (prize pack details to be announced). There will be a Silent Art Auction to benefit First Coast No More Homeless Pets.

HAPPIEST OF HOLIDAYS CONCERT

Dec. 5, 8 to 9:30 p.m.

The Lightner Museum
(904) 824-2874
75 King Street
St. Augustine, Florida 32284

The St. Augustine Orchestra will kick off the holidays with a festive concert at the Lightner Museum. Experience the magic of the holidays with red bows and candy canes as the Orchestra performs more than a dozen classics that bring holiday cheer to all.

A MAGICAL CIRQUE CHRISTMAS

Dec. 6, 8 p.m.

Times Union Center
(904) 632-5000
300 West Water Street
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

Experience holiday magic with dazzling performers and breathtaking cirque artists from around the world, accompanied by favorite holiday music that's performed live.

LUMINARY NIGHT AT ST. AUGUSTINE LIGHTHOUSE

Dec. 4, 6 to 9 p.m.

St. Augustine Lighthouse and Museum
(904) 829-0748
100 Red Cox Road
St. Augustine, Florida 32080

Luminary Night at the St. Augustine Lighthouse is a family-friendly tradition during St. Augustine's Nights of Lights where the Lighthouse grounds will open for an evening celebration that will delight both young and old. This popular event is a wonderful opportunity for visitors to get a taste of the holidays, St. Augustine-style.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Dec. 6 through 22

Players by the Sea
(904) 249-0289
106 Sixth Street North
Jacksonville Beach, Florida 32250

This adaptation of Charles Dickens's book brings the full spirit of Christmas, as well as Christmas Past, Present and Yet To Come, to life on stage.

DOWNTOWN JACKSONVILLE TREE-LIGHTING CEREMONY

Dec. 4, 6:25 p.m.

Hemming Park
(904) 515-5098
135 West Monroe Street
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

The traditional ceremony that was once celebrated at the Jacksonville Landing has found a new location, Hemming Park. Join as downtown Jacksonville opens a new chapter to the 33-year long tradition.

UGLY SWEATER 5K/OPEN HOUSE

Dec. 7, 8 a.m.

Winston Family YMCA
(904) 355-1436
221 Riverside Avenue
Jacksonville, Florida 32202

May all sweaters be ugly and bright. The 5K at the Winston Y begins at 8 a.m., but stay after for a family fun-filled Open House with hot cocoa, cookie decorating, arts and crafts, photos with Santa and the ugly sweater contest.



BREAKFAST WITH SANTA AT SHERATON JACKSONVILLE

Dec. 7, 8 a.m. to noon

Sheraton Jacksonville

(904) 380-4124

10605 Deerwood Park Boulevard
Jacksonville, Florida 32256

Santa is coming to town early! Visit St. Nick and enjoy holiday cheer at this year's Breakfast with Santa at the Sheraton Jacksonville Hotel. Bring family and friends for a hot breakfast buffet and a free photo with Santa.



HOPE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Dec. 11, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

TPC Sawgrass Clubhouse

(904) 735-0624

110 Championship Way
Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida 32082

Volunteer with the Jim & Tabitha Furyk Foundation as nearly 500 volunteers pack more than 4,000 holiday bags for kids in need for 24 Duval and St. Johns County schools and charities.



BEACHES TREE LIGHTING

Dec. 7, 3 to 8 p.m.

Beaches Town Center

(904) 247-5834

0 Atlantic Boulevard

Neptune Beach, Florida 32266

The Beaches Town Center, City of Atlantic Beach and City of Neptune Beach sponsor this free holiday event at Beaches Town Center. Join for a festive bike parade, live entertainment, face painting, crafts for all ages and hay rides. The mayors of both cities will light the community tree as Santa and Mrs. Claus arrive by sleigh at 6 p.m.



RUSTIC CHRISTMAS

Dec. 13, 7 to 9 p.m.

Painting with a Twist

(904) 687-4307

268 Solana Road

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida 32082

Paint on a canvas or a wooden board with this rustic Christmas set at Painting with a Twist. Cost is \$35 per person and is BYOB to enhance artistic abilities (or to just have a fun time painting a holiday theme).



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DEC. 6 - 22

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playersbythesea.org
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GINGERBREAD COOKIE DECORATING CLASS

Dec. 18, 4:30 p.m.

Sawgrass Marriott

(904) 285-7777

1000 PGA Tour Boulevard

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida 32082

Enjoy an evening of holiday-inspired fun while the Marriott pastry chefs host a kid-friendly gingerbread cookie decorating class. The class is complimentary to attend and adults who bring an unwrapped toy will receive a complimentary cocktail.



ROCKAPELLA: A ROCKAPELLA HOLIDAY

Dec. 19, 8 p.m.

Ponte Vedra Concert Hall

(904) 209-0399

1050 A1A North

Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida 32082

With catchy, original pop songs and complete, contemporary revisions of sparkling Motown, pop, and soul classics, this group has always been the one to watch. Now, for their new holiday show, Rockapella will present their original interpretation on the holidays, creating a light-hearted and unforgettable holiday experience filled with musical holiday cheer.



UGLY HOLIDAY SWEATER COCKTAIL TOUR

Dec. 20, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Historic Downtown Fernandina Beach

(904) 512-7472

4 North Second Street

Fernandina Beach, Florida 32034

Grab that ugly holiday sweater and join a mobile cocktail party in downtown Amelia Island. This 2-hour guided walking tour, will show the unique qualities of the island's local bars. Each tour has four stops, where guests will enjoy a tour cocktail and hear the history of each bar. The tour costs \$45 and includes guided tour, four tour cocktails and bartender gratuity.



MOSCOW BALLET'S GREAT RUSSIAN NUTCRACKER

Dec. 22, 1 p.m.

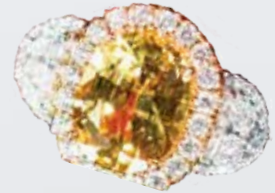
Florida Theatre

(904) 355-2787

128 East Forsyth Street

Jacksonville, Florida 32202

Step into a simpler time filled with sweet dreams and Christmas magic with the classic ballet that's been a First Coast tradition for years.



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The Christmas Carolers sing at a 2018 party at Sawgrass Beach Club in Ponte Vedra Beach. They entertain at events and parties from the day after Thanksgiving to Christmas Eve. photos by MAGGIE FITZROY

LOCAL CHRISTMAS CAROLERS BRING IT BACK

by AMBER LAKE

Old School



Also known as wassailing, an old Norse term, there are few things more iconic to Christmas than rosy-cheeked churchgoers going door to door singing holiday hymns.

Christmas carolers were the pre-Mariah Carey “Merry Christmas” album alternative to a holiday soundtrack, before going platinum was a thing. Back then, audiences ranged in household occupancy and singers were said to be paid in figgy pudding. A lot has changed.

Not so much for Rachel Root, however.

Root, Music Director at Christ Episcopal Church, is also the musical director of a very old-fashioned Christmas Caroling group in Ponte Vedra Beach — a

group that keeps Christmas as classic as the dusty and dog-eared pages of a Charles Dickens novel. Root started the group after seeing the impact the traditional songs had on her friends and family.

“I realized how strongly people build memories around the songs,” Root said. “It brings back a lot of wonderful memories for people. These are songs that have been passed down through the generations.”

While the group doesn’t pop up door-to-door to sing at surprised homeowners, they do, however, book luncheons, events and Christmas parties, with the money they raise going to fund music scholarships for young people.



They also are sure to dress from head to toe in traditional caroling garb. Bonnets, floor length skirts, Victorian blouses, top hats and white gloves give their audiences a complete throwback experience.

“The costumes are an investment,” Root said. “They have to pass muster. There are lots of different interpretations of what people think the costume needs to be.”



Although the costumes draw heavily on Victorian English winter fashion, there are days where Florida doesn't have the same designs. Humidity and rain, however, doesn't stop the group from recreating the standardized Christmas we all seem to hold in our heads.

Root says that the group's dedication to caroling stems from their love of music and Christmas songs. While some members are professional singers and some are students

majoring in vocal studies, others just love the music and want to put their heart and soul into the songs they grew up with.

“There is not very much in our human culture that is ‘soul-ish,’” Root said. “I think it touches deeply; it penetrates. It's emotional. For some people with dementia, these songs are some of the few things they remember. They'll start singing along.”

To book the Christmas Carolers, call Rachel Root at (253) 222-5542.

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Mrs. Claus makes an early visit to the Town Center and greets families before Santa's arrival. photos by DANIELA TOPOREK

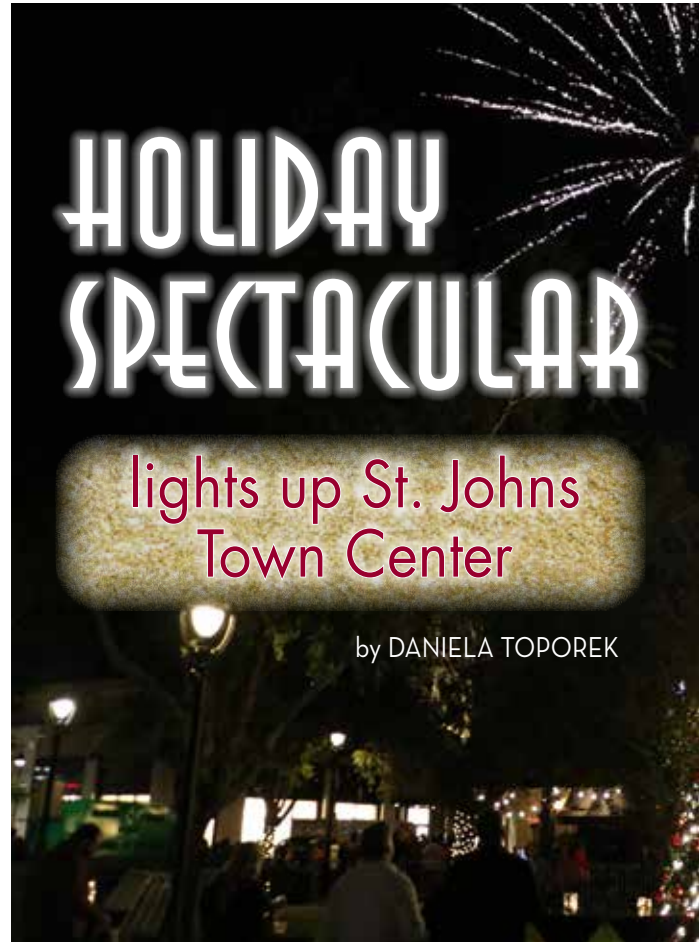
Holiday festivities started early at the St. Johns Town Center Holiday Spectacular, Nov. 9, where shoppers got in the Christmas spirit with family-friendly activities, live entertainment and the traditional hunt-down for a photo with Santa Claus.

Transformed into a winter wonderland, the Town Center's Holiday Spectacular featured festive kids' stations such as a Christmas card station, filled with eager children writing to Santa, sleigh-ride photos and familiar princesses interacting with families.

HOLIDAY SPECTACULAR

lights up St. Johns Town Center

by DANIELA TOPOREK



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32 YEARS

Holiday SALE

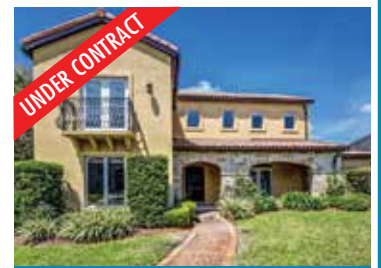
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A fireworks display illuminated the sky after the tree lights up at the St. Johns Town Center.



Elves on stilts entertain the crowd (and themselves) as they stroll along the festivities.



Jolly St. Nick smiles after counting down to the Christmas tree lighting and enjoying the fireworks grand finale.

“We’re super excited to welcome everyone to the St. Johns Town Center today,” said Director of Marketing at the Town Center, Ashlee Schneider. “We have lots of family-friendly activities, hot chocolate stations, face painting and caricature artists.”

Spotted on site was Mrs. Claus, who arrived a bit earlier than Santa to spread some cheer before the countdown to the tree lighting.

“She’s taking pictures with everyone,” Schneider said. “We have her and some princesses at the Santa house and a sleigh with reindeer, so it’s really cute.”

The all-day celebration came to a close with a live musical performance by former Nickelodeon star, MAX, where families gathered at the plaza in front of Maggiano’s to jam and help Santa Claus countdown to the grand finale.

When the tree finally illuminated, against the sky, it was a canvas for a bright fireworks display. The crowd stood in awe before they went home with new memories and holiday cheer.

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by LEIGH CORT

— ❄️ —

From the St. Francis Inn, with love for the holidays

— ❄️ —

I yearn to return to the St. Francis Inn, a graceful and stately home built in 1791, that continues to embrace the holiday season as the oldest bed and breakfast in St. Augustine..

For more than two centuries, the inn has been a vibrant, historic place filled with mystery.

When I visit it, and ‘Old City’ during Nights of Lights, my watch seems to be missing minute hands. It’s an enchanted time to reconnect and reflect.

Cherishing tradition is what the St. Francis Inn offers discerning guests who enjoy tranquility, privacy and exclusivity. For many years, owners Joe and Margaret Finnegan and their staff have enjoyed celebrating their own interpretation of the “12 Days of Christmas” with themed, contemporary culinary specialties.

The beloved song, first published in England in 1780, was first performed as a chant or rhyme. In keeping with that era, St. Francis Inn’s cook, Janice Leary, pays homage to the English Christmas carol with cleverly designed desserts that represent the ancient series of increasingly grand gifts presented on each of the 12 days of Christmas.

The Finnegans have become known for those celebratory, nightly chef-made desserts. Guests look forward to reconvening back at the inn each night to enjoy the surprising treats awaiting them after dinner.



photos by THE ST. FRANCIS INN

From Dec. 10 until Dec. 21, the evening festivities continue in the romantic illuminated courtyard, inside the inn's inviting dining room and throughout cozy corners that guests discover for themselves. Here you can disappear into a wondrous place in American history. Alluring firepits and s'mores are always popular, but this special holiday season is deliciously enticing with mulled cider, eggnog, gourmet coffees and locally sourced wine & spirits.

"I really enjoy the details that make a difference to our guests," Leary said. "We have a great time with each year's Christmas-themed nightly desserts."

One could easily get lost in St. Augustine throughout the intriguing maze of the historic downtown. Lost in hidden gardens. Lost in its colorful history, tempting art galleries and boutique shops tucked down narrow streets.

But as you follow old brick-paved St. George Street strolling back to the St. Francis Inn, you feel the blending of contemporary excitement with a place in history. A warm welcome awaits where you left off, and you are not lost at all.



ENGLISH CHRISTMAS CAROL

12. Drummers Drumming
11. Pipers Piping
10. Lords-a-Leaping
9. Ladies Dancing
8. Maids-a-Milking
7. Swans-a-Swimming
6. Geese-a-Laying
5. Gold Rings
4. Calling Birds
3. French Hens
2. Turtle Doves
1. Partridge in a Pear Tree

ST. FRANCIS INN DESSERT

- Red Velvet Drum Cake
- Pecan Pie
- Lord Baltimore Cake
- Strawberry Lady Finger Cake
- Tres Leche Cake
- Swan Cream Puffs
- Goose Nest Cupcakes
- Gold Rings Upside Down Cake
- Calling Birds Christmas Cake
- Raspberry Cream Milles Feuilles
- Turtle Dove Cheesecake
- Poached Pears

Holiday RECIPES

Guests like the 12 Days of Christmas desserts so much, they often request recipes. Here are two favorites from the St. Francis Inn:

LADY FINGER "CAKE"

- 4 packages lady fingers
- 2 8oz packages of cream cheese (softened)
- ¾ cup sugar
- 1 pkg white chocolate instant pudding (or vanilla)
- 1 tsp almond extract
- 16 oz whipping cream
- 1 8-inch round chocolate cake (split into 2 layers)
- Sliced Strawberries



DIRECTIONS:

1. Mix cream cheese and sugar until smooth and well blended.
 2. Whip the whipping cream, pudding mix and almond extract until stiff.
 3. Fold cream cheese and whipped cream together.
 4. Line the edges of a 9 inch spring form pan with lady fingers (stand the cookies upright around the edge of the pan)
 5. Start with a layer of chocolate cake, then a layer cream.
 6. Next a layer of lady fingers, then a layer of cream.
 7. Repeat cake, cream, lady fingers, cream
 8. Top with sliced strawberries
- Store the cake in the fridge until set, then remove the spring form ring, and serve.

TURTLE DOVE CHEESECAKE RECIPE

24 OREO Cookies, finely crushed (about 2 cups)

- 6 Tbsp. butter or margarine, melted
- 1 pkg. (14 oz.) Caramels
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1 cup chopped Pecans
- 3 pkg. (8 oz. each) Cream Cheese, softened
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1 Tbsp. vanilla
- 3 eggs
- 2 oz. Dove Chocolate



DIRECTIONS:

HEAT oven to 325°F.

MIX crumbs and butter; press onto bottom and 2 inches up side of 9-inch spring form pan.

MICROWAVE caramels and milk in small microwavable bowl on HIGH 3 min. or until caramels are completely melted, stirring after each minute. Stir in nuts; pour half into crust. Refrigerate 10 min. Refrigerate remaining caramel mixture for later use.

BEAT cream cheese, sugar and vanilla in large bowl with mixer until blended. Add eggs, 1 at a time, mixing on low speed after each just until blended. Pour over caramel layer in crust.

BAKE 1 hour 5 min. to 1 hour 10 min. or until center is almost set. Run knife around rim of pan to loosen cake; cool before removing rim. Refrigerate 4 hours.

MICROWAVE reserved caramel mixture 1 min.; stir. Pour over cheesecake. Melt chocolate as directed on package; drizzle over cheesecake.

CLEAN OCEAN SURFBOARDS



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This season, give the gift of a happy experience

They say it's better to give than to receive. And psychological studies have found that to be true. Spending money on someone else will definitely put a smile on your face more than buying something for yourself. But what if a loved one already has plenty of things? Then consider buying them an experience instead. Other studies point to the fact that gaining happiness from things, called materialism, affords us less pleasure than happy experiences. We adapt to material objects. Happy experiences, however, leave us with lasting, pleasant memories and often, over time, become part of our identities.

So...can't think of what to get that special person in your life who has everything?

The First Coast Register explored the region for ideas and came up with some interesting experiences for gifts. So, read the following stories for ideas. And happy gifting!

Pages 49-56



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Catty Claws Christmas will take place Wednesday, Friday and Saturday for Night Feedings and Thursday and Sunday for day tours on Dec. 4 through 29. Adults entry is \$15 and kids are \$10.



Lions, Tigers and Santa, oh my



photos provided by
CATTY SHACK RANCH

Give the gift of a big cat experience at the Catty Shack Ranch

by AMBER LAKE

There is no better combination of cuddly and killer than at the Catty Shack Ranch. The nonprofit serves as a rescue for various kinds of cats — from tigers, leopards and lions to native species like bobcats. The ranch provides a few different options for tours and events for guests wanting to check out these ferocious felines up close. It's the nighttime tour, however, when the real excitement starts.

Arriving at dusk at the Catty Shack Ranch, the facility strikes you as a true, low-key Florida gem. Treat yourself to some hot chocolate and sit down to view a 10-minute introduction video to the ranch's mission. Surrounded by donated leopard-print spandex, apparel and a few second-hand Jacksonville Jaguars memorabilia for sale, the introduction to Catty Shack Ranch won't knock you off your feet. It will, however, make you appreciative of the authenticity and charm of the nonprofit, which is largely embodied by its earnest staff of cat-loving volunteers.

Advice to newcomers; when the tour starts, stick close to your tour guide. Not only do they have the best cat facts, but they also get the most attention.

From the second guests cross the threshold of the ranch's inner sanctum, the big cats take notice, especially for their favorite volunteer guides (yes, they do have favorites). The proximity is no joke at the Catty Shack Ranch, making the experience something vastly different than a trip to the zoo and far, far, more intimidating. Seeing a wild cat up close and being

able to see it see you — is bound to make any veteran of nature in awe. These cats really are big.

Between visitors and the cats is a chain-link fence, which at moments can feel a little insubstantial. Fear not, however, the volunteers assure that there has never been more than a scratch on anyone working there — although whether that is reassuring is debatable.

After a short walkthrough with your guide, prepare for the madness — it's feeding time.

Once playful and charismatic, these cats turn into stone cold killers for raw chicken. Eyes turn into orbs of reflective light and sleek bodies turn into rippling muscles of pure death. That alone, however, won't cause an average guest to take a step back. It's the feral explosion of noise they make that will drive a stake of primordial fear into even the bravest of hearts. Feeding time roars cause the hair to stand up on your arms and make you feel like you're sitting in an armchair during an ad for a Japanese stereo system. They are by far the most memorable part of the experience.

The best part about a trip to the Catty Shack Ranch is that not only is it an incredibly impressive and original experience, every ticket sale goes to the feeding and care of these extraordinary animals, who would otherwise have nowhere else to turn. Additionally, for the first time ever, the sanctuary will be decorating for the Christmas season, hosting the first ever Catty Claws Christmas. Expect light displays, live music, occasional food truck nights, hot chocolate, s'mores pit, Mrs. Claws Night Before Christmas reading and a Santa Claus visit.

Go to cattyshack.org for more information.





A 'Chill
Massage' at
THE SPA
at Omni
Amelia Island
Plantation

by DANIELA TOPOREK

After the hustle of the holidays — from finding the perfect tree and gifts, to cleaning, decorating, cooking and hosting—there will come a time to FINALLY enjoy the holidays and relax. And I can't think of a better way to show appreciation to a holiday host than by booking them a much-needed spa appointment at The Spa at Omni Amelia Island Plantation.

“Even though the holidays are absolutely fabulous, and we all want this perfect, Norman Rockwell image, it rarely is,” Omni Spa Director Liz Hutto told me. “So, we think this is the greatest gift to give during this hectic time, or after you survived it,” she said with a laugh.

Hutto especially recommended The Spa's new “Chill Massage” that uses CBD oil produced by Naturapathica.

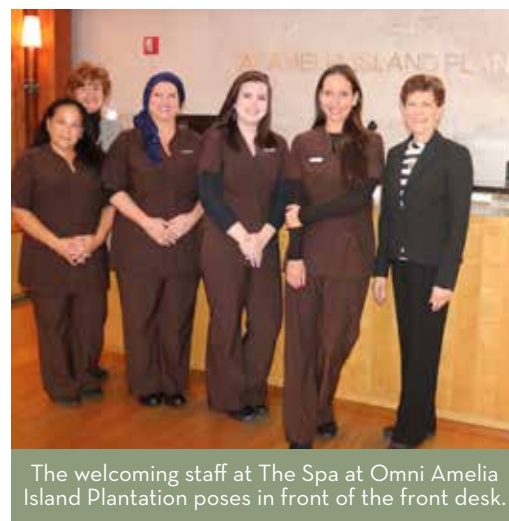
“The CBD used in it is of top-quality grade. It's organically grown and really is the cream of the crop as far as quality,” she said, adding that the oil



The Spa at Omni Amelia Island Plantation is located at 39 Amelia Village Cir., in Amelia Island. photos by DANIELA TOPOREK



The Spa offers a private locker for your belongings, a steam shower and custom toiletries.



The welcoming staff at The Spa at Omni Amelia Island Plantation poses in front of the front desk.

contains about .03% of THC, definitely not enough to feel any highs, but just enough to target relaxation receptors in the body.

The new chill massage uses two products, the CBD massage oil that can only be found through the Omni Spa property and is not retailed for home use, and the CBD balm that can be purchased and according to Hutto, is very effective.

“It can be massaged on the soles of the feet at night to help with sleep,” she said.

The massage itself is a mixture between a Swedish and deep-tissue massage, choreographed specifically for deep relaxation.

“We don't want to go too deep into deep-tissue because we want it to be a relaxing experience,” Hutto explained. “However, it is more intense than a Swedish massage and

with a lot of scalp work done because a lot of receptors are in the scalp.”

The lucky recipient of your gift can expect a foot rub during this session, too. According to Hutto, reflexology suggests that every organ in the body is reflected in the foot, so the therapist will focus on emphasizing this for significant relaxation.

After the service, they will be able to enjoy a cup of Stress Tea, an herbal tea also created by Natropathica, that's enriched with lavender, chamomile, basil, holy basil and more, combined to enhance the effects of the massage and combat stress.

This gift may not be tangible. It may not provide the perfect selfie or Kodak moment, but it will give a loved one something more important and priceless, a peace of mind.

For prices, spa packages and more information, call The Spa at (904) 432-2220 or visit www.omnihotels.com. The Spa at Omni Amelia Island Plantation is located at 39 Amelia Village Circle in Amelia Island.



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I recently took the free tour at St. Augustine Distillery, 112 Riberia St., on a Thursday morning with three other guests. We were led by Lisa, an energetic guide who told us the 1905 building housed Florida's first ice plant in 1917. When refrigerators replaced iceboxes in the 1950s, most ice plants closed. Local fishermen still needed ice, so the local plant was one of the last to close in 1959. For the next 40 years or so the building remained empty and was in a general state of disrepair. After extensive renovations, the Distillery opened in 2014.

We followed Lisa to a room with huge, copper stills, where she explained the distilling process. All of the ingredients used in production are from Northeast Florida except two — barley from Minnesota because it won't grow in Florida and juniper berries, for the gin, from Macedonia. Next, we passed the packaging room where employees label and pack as many as 1,200 bottles a day, without automated equipment.

The next stop featured a display of aging barrels. To be labeled "bourbon," the whiskey must be made in America, aged in a first-time-use barrel and at least 51% corn. What comes out of the copper pot stills is clear and only becomes bourbon after aging. The Distillery uses white oak, charred barrels from Kelvin Cooperage to age the spirits, which over the course of about three years results in

100% of the deep caramel color and about 60% of the taste. The vanilla, cocoa and nutty notes all come from the barrel.

Since the barrel can only be used once for bourbon, many are sent to neighboring San Sebastian Winery to age their port. After that, the barrels come back to the Distillery to be used for their Port Bourbon. Finally, the Distillery holds its signature Old Fashioned Mix in the barrel before using it to produce its premier, barrel-finished bourbon — The Saint.

It is said that "the proof in the pudding is in the tasting," so we did. Lisa moved behind a bar to serve three cocktails featuring vodka, rum and gin. She said even visitors who claim they don't like gin can appreciate the Distillery's product.

"The gin is our most-awarded spirit," she said. "We use fewer juniper berries and, instead of grinding them into a paste, we leave them whole to push the pine flavor to the back. This lets the citrus and spices come to the front."

Personally, I have never been a fan of gin, but I agreed with Lisa. I tasted lemon and tangerine before picking up on the juniper. When added to the Grapefruit Hibiscus Mixer and seltzer water, the gin didn't have the overpowering pine flavor of a popular national brand. I may revisit the julep on Derby Day.



ABOVE: The St. Augustine Distillery gift shop has attractive gift sets in a variety of price points, but the best option may be a gift certificate. Invite the lucky recipient to take the tour and choose a favorite.



RIGHT: The wood used to construct the barrels is aged for three years and influences the flavor of final product.



St. Augustine Distillery tour guide Lisa explains that the white oak, charred barrels used to age the spirits provide 100% of the deep caramel color and about 60% of the taste in the craft distillery's bourbon.



ABOVE: Nearly all of the ingredients used in the huge copper stills, Ella on the left and Bessie on the right, are sourced from Northeast Florida. "Yes, indeed, we name our stills," Lisa said.

RIGHT: Two employees hand label and package up to 1,200 bottles per day. photos by CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH



Fellow tasters and I agreed that the Florida Mule Mix and vodka was dangerous because it's so refreshing, and you can hardly taste the alcohol. There's no muddling required, but a sprig of fresh mint adds to the flavor and presentation.

When paired with rum, the Tropical Tiki Mix results in a tropical, beachy libation perfect for our coastal lifestyle. There's a hint of coconut, but it doesn't scream coconut like other mixes that use artificial flavors and colors. The Distillery's non-alcoholic mixers contain all-natural ingredients.

Upstairs in the gift shop, a mixologist added bourbon to the Old Fashioned Mixer, so we could taste a sample. Since I'm a fan of bourbon, the Old Fashioned was my favorite. We also tasted the barrel finished Port Bourbon, rum and The Saint bourbon.

Tours fill up later in the day and it's even busier on the weekends. General Manager Matt Stevens said Saturday is the busiest day. About 155,000 people tour the Distillery each year.

The Distillery offers gift certificates and you might recommend the lucky recipient take a tour to sample the spirits and choose a favorite. For information, visit staugustinedistillery.com or call (904) 825-4962.

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Like many kids growing up, I had fantasies of thwarting boobytraps while solving complex historical puzzles in forgotten, overgrown ruins. And, of course, making memorable friends along the way.

Blame “Indiana Jones,” “The Goonies,” “The DeVinci Code,” or “The Adventures of Tintin,” because these highly specific and totally counterfactual delusions of the actual activities of archeologists still reside in the heads of dreamers like me. Because for some people, Goonies never say die.

Perhaps it’s time to feed your inner Chunk and

take a well-deserved break from reality at the Escape Game in Jacksonville. It’s about as close as you can get to a real adventure while maintaining an adequate work/life balance — and you don’t have to sacrifice your 401K and health benefits to go slap Nazis with a whip.

Or, if your life is exciting enough, maybe the Escape Game would make a nice gift or a friend or family member who could use some adventure.

In any case, much like a “choose your own adventure” book, the Escape Game allows guests to pick an “immersive world” in which they’ll



Collaboration, intuition and creativity help solve puzzles at the Escape Game, located at the St. Johns Town Center.

photos by AMBER LAKE

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be asked to complete a task. For those with claustrophobia, don't worry. The game isn't so much about escaping the room as it is solving a story puzzle. This isn't a "Saw" movie, thank God.

I went with a group of friends, and we decided on the "The Heist," which involved uncovering a priceless Monet painting from a sinister and egotistical curator, who is believed to have hidden it. While the room is labeled as a difficulty level of 8/10, don't over analyze the intelligence criteria of your group. You don't need a master's in fine arts or a background in detective work. The game appoints you a guide that will a times help you through your mission.

As you progress through the game, with the clock counting down, you will be amazed at all the hidden and clever tricks the room offers. And the best part? You will feel exactly like Mr. Jones did when he found the Holy Grail. Each uncovered clue and solved mystery will take you further and further down the rabbit hole of total immersion in the game. By the end, as the last-minute strikes down on you and your group finally figures out the solution, you will celebrate with your teammates like it's the winning homerun of the World Series.

The Escape Game is located at 4720 Town Crossing Dr., Suite 107, Jacksonville. For more information, visit: theescapegame.com.



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Maggie FitzRoy on the beach in Ponte Vedra Beach with her electric bike.
photo by JOE KELLEHER

'Hello
Fun' is
Right!
by MAGGIE FITZROY

I felt like I was flying.
I was flying.

Zooming north along the beach on hard-packed sand, only feet from the ocean, riding an electric bike was way more fun than I'd expected. It was nothing like riding my regular bike, when pumping the pedals into the wind can feel more exasperating than exciting.

"You're going to have a hard time going in that direction today," a man called out to me and my guide, Joe Kelleher, after we'd ridden our bikes from Pedego Electric Bikes in Sawgrass Village in Ponte Vedra Beach to the public beach access point at Corona Road.

"No we won't," I said with a grin as the wind whipped my face. "These are electric."

I'd always wanted to try riding an electric bike, and Pedego makes it easy to see if it's for you. They not only sell them, they rent them too, by the hour or for the day.

Kelleher, store manager, offered to let me try one, and after a brief tutorial and quick spin around the parking lot, we set off on that windy, slightly drizzly day.

I was amazed how easy it was to learn how to work the controls – and how easy it

was to switch in and out of electric mode with the push of a button.

Joe and I rode on sidewalks all the way to the beach, and once we reached the sand, I increased my speed to an exhilarating 15 miles per hour. You can go faster than that if you want, but that was daring enough for me.

After zooming our way to the Ponte Vedra Inn & Club, we turned around and headed back.

I live in Ponte Vedra Beach, and often walk the beach from Corona to the Club, so that route is very familiar to me. My hour and a half e-bike ride, however, turned my back yard into an adventure. I'm glad to know I can go rent an e-bike from Pedego anytime I want to do it again. And who knows, if I get to like it enough, maybe even buy one.

Pedego has various models to choose from, either renting or buying. I rode an Interceptor, which has a throttle and pedal assist. They rent for \$25 an hour, or \$100 a day. Joe rode a Comfort Cruiser, which is throttle only, and rents for \$20 an hour, or \$80 a day. Pedego also has Tandem e-bikes with throttle only for \$25 an hour/\$100 a

day; and Stretch tandems, with throttle and pedal assist for \$35 an hour or \$125 per day.

The shop offers guided tours; one of the most popular is riding from Mickler's Landing Beach to the Jacksonville Beach fishing pier and back. Or, you can go out on your own.

At the speed I was going on the beach, a battery will last up to 50 miles. At the fastest speed, 21 miles an hour, the battery will last about 25 miles, Joe said.

Battery charges take several hours on regular household current.

Prices for buying e-bikes range from \$1,895 for a base model and up. Pedego also sells accessories, including super-strong foldable locks.

Would an e-bike rental make a good gift?

I think so. It made me see my hometown in a different light—like a tourist, which was fun.

Pedego's trademark mantra is: "Hello, fun." And fun is right!

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Democrats hold

ONE YEAR OUT

fundraiser at TPC Sawgrass Clubhouse

Jan Kary, Vice President of the Ponte Vedra Democratic Club and fundraising chair of the Blue Wave Coalition of St. Johns County, gives a speech during the One Year Out party.

photos by
MAGGIE FITZROY



by MAGGIE FITZROY

Ponte Vedra Beach area Democrats held a “One Year Out” fundraiser Nov. 3 at TPC Sawgrass Clubhouse. It was a joint event for the Ponte Vedra Democratic Club and the Blue Wave Coalition of St. Johns County.

The social featured appetizers, cocktails, speeches and a silent auction. And the mood was celebratory and upbeat.

“We are focusing on our campaign plan for 2020 in St. Johns County,” Erica Connor, President of the Ponte Vedra Democratic Club, said. “This is all about our local efforts.”

“This is our first fundraiser of the year,” said Marie Garnes, Campaign Director of the Blue Wave Coalition of St. Johns County. “We are doing incredibly well with our fundraising, and all of our money stays here in the county.”

The Ponte Vedra Democratic Club is one of six organizations in the county that makes up the Blue Wave Coalition of St. Johns County. Working together to elect leaders who reflect their values at the national, state and local levels, they are planning additional fundraisers to prepare for three election cycles next year: the March Presidential Preference Primary; the August Congressional/ Party Primary and the November General Election.



Susan Kary, left, and Vicki Pate



Ponte Vedra Beach area Democrats attend a One Year Out fundraiser at TPC Sawgrass Clubhouse Nov. 3.



Madeleine Tavares (left), Joe Tavares (center) and Vic DiGenti



Steve Terrell, Vivian Southwell, Erica Connor, Rhonda DiCamillo, Joseph DiCamillo



Robin Dion, Bernadette Miron, Charlene Gajewski, Gary Gajewski

First Coast BENGHAZI TRIBUTE honors fallen

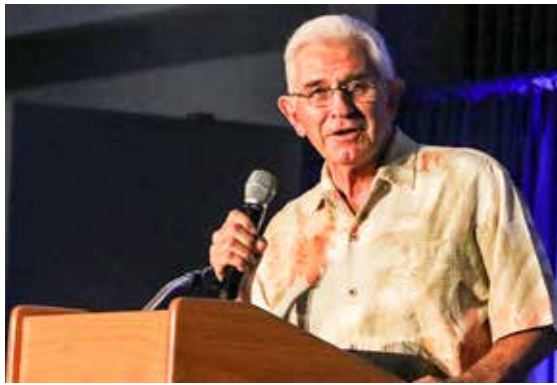
by CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH

To honor and remember U.S. Ambassador to Libya Chris Stevens, U.S. Navy Veteran SEAL Glen Doherty, U.S. Navy Veteran SEAL Tyrone Woods and U.S. Veteran Information Officer Sean Smith, the We Can Be Heroes Foundation hosted the seventh annual First Coast Benghazi Tribute on Saturday, Oct. 26. The four men gave their last, full measure during the Sept. 11, 2012, attacks on the U.S. diplomatic compound and CIA annex in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi.

Seven years later, interested Americans still seek the truth about how events unfolded. Charles Woods, father of Tyrone Woods who was killed in the attack on the CIA annex, flew from Hawaii to speak at the tribute.



ABOVE: Members of Sandalwood High JROTC present the Flag Folding Ceremony at the seventh annual First Coast Benghazi Tribute on Oct. 26 at the UNF campus in Jacksonville.



LEFT: Charles Woods, father of Tyrone Woods who was killed in the attack on the CIA annex in Benghazi in 2012, flew from Hawaii to speak at the tribute.

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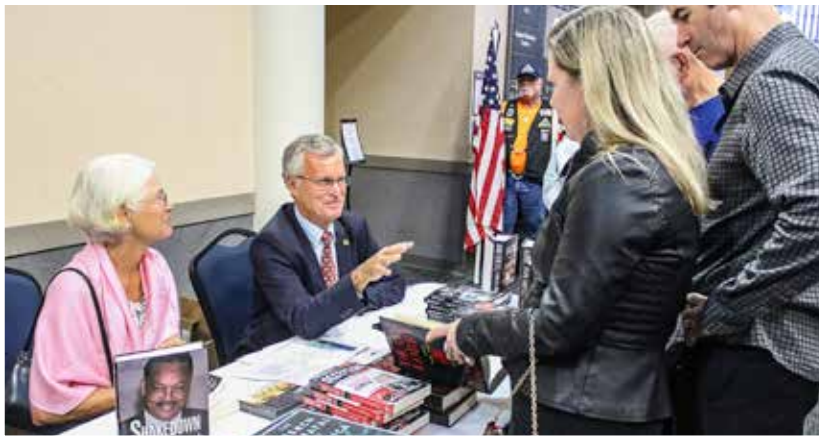
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ABOVE: Ken Timmerman (seated right) speaks to tribute attendees about several of his books. Timmerman signed books before and after the tribute. His wife Christina (seated left) was celebrating her birthday.



RIGHT: Featured speaker Clare Lopez is interviewed in the VIP room before the tribute. The video will be available pay-per-view online at the We Can Be Heroes website.

photos by
CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH

Woods choked back tears as he spoke about his son and asked, “Why was there no rescue at Benghazi?”

Ken Timmerman is an investigative reporter and author of several books including “Dark Forces: The Truth About What Happened in Benghazi.” Initially, it was reported that the attacks were the result of a spontaneous uprising caused by inflammatory material posted on the internet.

Timmerman disagrees.

“The Benghazi attacks were acts of state-sponsored terrorism,” he said. “It was the government of Iran that backed it.”

Clare Lopez, who served as operations officer with the Central Intelligence Agency, presented “New Administration – Same as Old Administration” at the tribute. She said a key to revealing the whole truth about how Benghazi happened is to declassify former President Obama’s Presidential Study Directive 11, also known as PSD-11.

PolitiChicks Morgan Brittany and Ann-Marie Burrell took questions and explained how “citizen journalists” have kept stories like Benghazi alive. They encourage everyone to be citizen journalists by using the internet and social media platforms to report the truth about events they are passionate about.

Several attendees said events like the annual First Coast Benghazi Tribute are important to remember the fallen and to continue to seek the truth.

“Heroes from the past cannot be forgotten,” Morgan Brittany said.

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LIGHTHOUSE CELEBRATES

145th Anniversary

by CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH

It's not visible from Ponte Vedra Beach, but the historic tower of the St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum celebrated its 145th anniversary Oct. 15. To commemorate the special occasion, St. Johns County residents were treated to free admission 145 years to the day after Keeper William Russell watched over the first lighting in 1874. Later in the evening, Executive Director and Junior Service League Active Sustainer Kathy Fleming, shared lighthouse history and interesting tales during a members-only event on the front lawn of the keeper's house.

Architect Ken Smith, who was tasked to oversee restoration of the tower in the 1980s, has continued to be involved with preservation efforts at the historic light tower. In recognition of his dedicated service, Fleming presented one of the bulbs that burned in the tower to Smith during the anniversary celebration.

"You received this major award, a burned-out lightbulb. We don't give these to just everybody," Fleming said.

As the sun set and the familiar beam of light shone bright through the first-order Fresnel lens overhead, volunteers served slices of cake to members and guests.



Architect Ken Smith, right, accepts a spent bulb used in the St. Augustine Lighthouse from Executive Director Kathy Fleming, Assistant Keeper Jason Smith and Head Keeper Rick Cain during the 145th anniversary celebration Oct. 15. photos by CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH



Executive Director, Kathy Fleming (far left) shares lighthouse history and interesting facts during a members-only event on the front lawn of the keeper's house Oct. 15.



Volunteers served cupcakes at the anniversary celebration



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