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This beautifully updated home is located in Sandpiper Cove in Sawgrass CC. Located at the end of a cul-de-sac on an exceptional lot, the home features spectacular water to golf views with SE exposure. Built for year-round outdoor living with both a winter lanai with fireplace off the living room and a summer lanai off the family room with pool, spa and summer kitchen. Easy flow floorplan with large living room, spacious cook's kitchen, and den with built-in bookshelves and wet bar. Owner's suite and guest room on 1st floor and 3rd bedroom on 2nd floor with full bath.

3 Bedrooms, 4 Bathrooms, 1 Half Bath, \$2,150,000

Amazing Vistas in Deercreek Country Club



This beautifully updated and well-maintained home offers spacious living with pool/spa with serene lake-to-preserve views. Conveniently located in the front of the gated community of Deercreek CC, making it ideal for easy commutes. Once you are home you will feel like you are on vacation. Owner's suite is located on 1st floor along with living room, dining room, kitchen, butler's pantry, powder room, family room and office. Upstairs are 3 additional and spacious bedrooms, 2 full baths plus a flex space/theatre room.

4 Bedrooms, 3 Bathrooms, 1 Half Bath, \$999,500



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about the cover



The cover features a trio in costume from the Dickens on Centre holiday celebration.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AMELIA ISLAND CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

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ONE OF US

Sheila Harper

as told to **ANTHONY RICHARDS**
photo courtesy of **SHEILA HARPER**

Sheila Harper is president of Ellie Bing LLC, which she began in 2009 and describes as a “lifestyle boutique,” due to its variety of items sold such as clothing, jewelry, art and gifts. Much of which is designed or created by local artists, as she strives to maintain a community atmosphere and fun vibe within the shop.

Tell us a little about yourself and your background.

I have lived all over the place, and after graduating college I got on a boat and sailed to Grenadines and ended on the Virgin Islands where I met my husband. We now have three kids, including twins.

Some of the places I’ve lived include Connecticut, Philly and Atlanta. We moved to Jacksonville years ago and I’ve been here now longer than any place I’ve ever lived before.

What led you to get involved with Ellie Bing LLC?

It all started in 2009 when I decided to make the switch from just design to jewelry and custom jewelry at that time. We now sell jewelry, clothing art and gifts. Basically, any and everything someone would want.

We have two stores in both Ponte Vedra Beach and Jacksonville Beach, and it has really evolved into a lifestyle boutique.

Our Ponte Vedra Beach location is in Sawgrass Village, which is something that had been a long time coming, and we are happy to finally be there.

We opened at Sawgrass Village in October 2021, and it has been a great first year at that location.

However, our destination location continues to be Jax Beach, and it will always have a special place in my heart.

It also helps that my family’s support has been there every step of the way.



What is it that makes it a “lifestyle boutique,” and what goes into that?

Lifestyle boutique is a new term used that means we sell pretty much everything. It’s fun because I get to sell anything I want and everything I love. If I see something that I really like or I think people will be into, I can start selling it in the store.

What is the store’s primary mission?

I like to focus on local people that are starting out making a designing or making a certain product, and I love working with the local artists. To be a place where they can showcase their work is so special.

I’m picky, but it’s also nice to be able to focus on helping people out as they get their start. It’s kind of my way that I’m able to give back.

How have you seen Ellie Bing grow over the years?

I was completely naive when we opened back in 2009, because that was when the crash happened, and it was just a really bad economy to be opening up a business.

It was not an overnight success by any means, but we’ve stuck with it and the community has supported us over the years.

I remember my first sale that I made

was \$62 and I thought it was the biggest thing in the world because somebody bought something from me.

After three years in business, I started to look into more things with a beachy vibe and it has just evolved from there into far more.

I’m still learning everyday about ways to make the boutique even better, including strengthening our website. It’s one of those things we’ve slowly but surely continued to grow.

I would like to have a wholesale jewelry business down the road.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

I’m going to continue to do this until it is no longer fun anymore. I like interacting with the public and the people I work with make it very easy.

Our entire staff is just really friendly, which creates a certain vibe and environment enjoyable to both work and shop in.

A lot of my employees have been with me for a long time, and some since we started this thing. That goes a long way in creating such an environment.

I never say that they (employees) work for me, but instead they work with me. They all really care and are just as passionate about the business as I am.

Over time a relationship is built with your customers, and we’ll even help them out by calling them when something comes in that they’ve been looking for.

What do you enjoy most about living in the North Florida area?

I have moved around a lot, and the quality of life here is what it’s all about, and the people are just so friendly.

You have the beach and river on the other side, which makes it so unique and great for getting out and enjoying the nature.

There’s a reason why this is the place I’ve been the longest. Because there is no place like it.

The Plantation Showcase by Vicki Piatt

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holiday happenings

Here's a look at some of the events being held this holiday season. Many events are free to attend; for those that are not, fees for admission or registration are noted.

29TH ANNUAL NIGHTS OF LIGHTS

When: Nightly through Jan. 31
Where: Downtown St. Augustine

More than 3 million lights brighten the historic district in a display National Geographic magazine called one of the 10 best places in the world to see holiday lights.

RITZ-CARLTON CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING

When: 5:30 p.m. Nov. 23
Where: Ritz-Carlton Amelia

Island, 4750 Amelia Island Parkway, Fernandina Beach
Admission: \$15

This marquee tradition features the arrival of Santa Claus by Christmas train and the lighting of the 40-foot Christmas tree.

Go to ameliaisland.com/Calendar/The-Annual-Ritz-Carlton-Christmas-Tree-Lighting and follow the EventBrite link for tickets.

"WHITE CHRISTMAS"

When: Daily through Dec. 24 except for Mondays
Where: Alhambra Theatre & Dining, 12000 Beach Blvd., Jacksonville

Admission: Prices vary. See website.

The Christmas classic featur-

ing music by Irving Berlin. When two WWII GIs discover the secret their general has been keeping from his family, they use their musical talents to help him out.

Go to alhambrajax.com.

DECK THE CHAIRS

When: 5-11:30 p.m. daily through Dec. 31
Where: Seawalk Pavilion, 75 1st St. North, Jacksonville Beach.

More than 40 American Red Cross lifeguard chairs will be decorated in coastal-themed designs and lights. Kickoff is Wednesday, Nov. 23.

CHRISTMAS ON THE FARM

When: 6-10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, Nov. 25-Dec. 17
Where: Sykes Family Farms, 5995 Brough Road, Elkton
Admission: \$16 for ages 3 and older, \$15 military with ID and seniors (65 and older), free for ages 2 and younger.

Enjoy a hayride through this ¾-mile Christmas light show while sipping hot apple cider, hot chocolate or coffee. There will be bounce pads, swings, tube slides, barnyard ball zone and more. Mr. and Mrs. Claus will visit, so bring your camera. Gather round a campfire and watch Christmas movies on the big screen while roasting marshmallows or decorate your own ornament.

Go to sycofarms.com/christmas-on-the-farm.

MUSIC ON MAIN: TREE LIGHTING AND HOLIDAY MARKET

When: 5:30-8:30 p.m. Nov. 25
Where: Sesquicentennial Park, 1527 N. Main St., Jacksonville

Kick off the holiday season in Historic Springfield! This will be quite a festive night with the tree lighting ceremony and local holiday market. Bring a blanket or chair and enjoy music by Michael Mason and Heather Thoenke as well as a preview of Bethel Baptist Church's Christmas Cantata.

CHRISTMAS MADE IN THE SOUTH

When: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Nov. 25, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Nov. 26, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Nov. 27

Where: Prime Osborn Convention Center, 1000 Water St., Jacksonville

Admission: \$9 at the door, free to children age 12 and younger. One admission good for all three days.

Event is focused on keeping the world of fine arts and crafts vibrant. Exhibitors will demonstrate and sell their handcrafted works.

DAZZLING NIGHTS

When: 5:30 p.m. Nov. 25-Jan. 1. No admittance after 9:10 p.m.

Where: Jacksonville Arboretum & Botanical Gardens, 1445 Millcoia Road, Jacksonville

Admission: \$25 adult, \$22 child. Free to children age 2 and younger. Tickets must be purchased for a specific time and date and are not available at the door.

Parking: For on-site parking, arrive 20-30 minutes before scheduled entry time. For off-site parking shuttle, arrive 30 minutes before ticketed entry time.

Highlights include: 30-foot Christmas tree, canopy of flickering Moroccan lanterns, a live show featuring moving lights and live singers, inflatable Yeti play area, 8,000-square-foot lighted maze, hazy forest of lasers, "snow," holiday tunes and more. Light bites, hot chocolate, beer and wine are available for purchase.

Go to dazzlingjax.com.

FERNANDINA BEACH CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY

When: Noon to 6 p.m. Nov. 26
Where: Downtown Fernandina Beach

Kick off the holiday season with the annual Christmas Tree Lighting. There will be a day

Oceanfront Showcase by Vicki Piatt
Broker

Landmark Oceanfront Condo Jax Beach \$1,399,000

Windemere Oceanfront In Sawgrass Ponte Vedra \$2,495,000

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CONTINUED ON PAGE 11 ■

HOLIDAY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

of fun featuring food vendors, holiday merchandise for sale, performances by the Nassau Community Band and Royal Amelia Dance Academy, face painting, pictures with Santa and more.

Go to ameliaisland.com/Calendar/Annual-Christmas-Tree-Lighting-Ceremony.

JACKSONVILLE LIGHT BOAT PARADE

When: 6 p.m. Nov. 26

Where: Banks of St. Johns River in downtown Jacksonville

Vessels of all shapes and sizes will adorn their hulls with festive decorations as they float along the river. Boats will start at the Hyatt Regency Riverfront Hotel and follow along the Northbank Riverwalk to the Fuller Warren Bridge. The parade will then cross to the south bank and follow along the Riverwalk to the Duval

County School Board building. The parade will feature The 904 Pop Up Small Business Saturday event, 4-9 p.m. at Riverfront Plaza.

Go to JaxLightBoatParade.com.

CHRISTMAS IN THE CATHEDRAL DISTRICT

When: Nov. 27-Dec. 31

Where: The Jacksonville district bordered by Union Street on the north, Bay Street on the south, Main Street North on the west and North Liberty Street on the east.

A self-guided driving tour of the Cathedral District's historic churches and landmark buildings, illuminated with thousands of lights. Enjoy audio narration as well as music by the Jacksonville Symphony. Opening night: The five churches ring bells simultaneously at 6 p.m. Nov. 27. There will be live music and tours of the historic churches.

For three weekends

(Thursday-Sunday) between Dec. 10 and 26, there will be an incredible light art and sound installation at one of the churches, repeating every 15 minutes.

Go to cathedraldistrict-jax.org/christmas-2021.

CHRISTMAS TOURS AT THE VILLA ZORAYDA MUSEUM

When: 5:30 and 7:30 p.m.

Nov. 26 and Dec. 3, 9, 17, 21, 27; 5:30 p.m. Dec. 29, 30

Where: 83 King St., St. Augustine

Admission: \$22.99 adults, \$12.99 children ages 6-12. Not recommended for children age 5 and younger.

Decorated for the holidays, the museum features a spectacular Christmas tree, Victorian and traditional decorations, more than 100 candles and a state-of-the-art audio guided tour.

Tickets and information: villazorayda.com/candlelight-tours.

"SCROOGE THE MUSICAL"

When: 7:30 Dec. 1, 2, 3, 9, 10; 2:30 p.m. Dec. 4, 11

Where: Amelia Musical Playhouse, 1955 Island Walkway, Fernandina Beach

Admission: \$25 adults; \$15 students

Ebenezer Scrooge is mean and miserly, but this Christmas season, he will learn the spirit of Christmas!

Go to ameliamusicalplayhouse.com/performances/scrooge2022.

HOLIDAY SHOPPES

When: 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Dec. 2, 3

Where: Ponte Vedra Concert Hall, 1050 A1A N., Ponte Vedra Beach

Admission to Holiday Shoppes only: \$10.30.

Shop with one-of-a-kind vendors and experience Paula Veloso's "The Eyes are the Window to the Soul" interna-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 40 ■



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'ELF: THE MUSICAL' INSPIRES CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

story by **SHAUN RYAN**
Contributed photos

Broadway hit arrives in Jacksonville

Holidays got you down? Feeling a bit jaded this Christmas season? If so, you've got something in common with Jovie, a character played by Tieisha Thomas in the upcoming production of "Elf: The Musical."

Jovie is working as a store elf at Macy's in New York City and has become a bit cynical. But something is about to happen that will transform the way she sees her world. It's a journey she will share with audiences when the hit



Tieisha Thomas
plays "Jovie"

Broadway show comes to Jacksonville in December.

"If someone is maybe lacking a little Christmas spirit, I guarantee that once you come and see 'Elf,' you will leave feeling a lot better than when you first walked in," Thomas said.

The show is based on the 2003 New Line Cinema film "Elf." The Broadway version, however, is a musical featuring songs by Tony Award nominees Matthew Sklar and Chad Beguelin and book by Tony Award winners Thomas Meehan and Bob Martin.

It tells the story of Buddy, an orphan who mistakenly crawls into Santa's bag of gifts and is taken back to the North Pole. Unaware that he is not an elf, Buddy's enormous size and poor toy-making skills force him to face

the truth. He embarks on a journey to New York City to find his birth father, discover his true identity and help the Big Apple remember the true meaning of Christmas.

Though "Elf" may be mistaken for a kids-only show, Thomas said it's really a show for everyone.

Audiences, she said, "can expect a Christmas musical that will be big and flashy and colorful and lot of fun. We've got an amazing orchestra. We've got amazing costumes and scenic designs. Amazing dancers. You can literally see the love and care it took to really build this show."

Thomas said she finds Jovie an easy character to play, since they are both a lot alike. Originally, she had tried out for a different role but was asked to read for Jovie.

She calls "Never Fall In Love With An Elf" — which she sings — one of her favorite songs of the show. In fact, the relationship between Jovie and Buddy is one reason the show appeals to audiences of all ages.

Thomas grew up in New York and attended The High School of Performing Arts, the school featured in the movie "Fame." After graduation, however, she didn't believe in herself enough to pursue an acting career.

"If someone is maybe lacking a little Christmas spirit, I guarantee that once you come and see 'Elf,' you will leave feeling a lot better than when you first walked in."

- TIEISHA THOMAS



Santa (Mark Fishback) holds up a snow globe for Buddy (Cody Garcia) to see in a scene from "Elf: The Musical."

That changed five years ago when she stepped off a curb and severely injured herself. She spent the summer in physical therapy, relearning how to walk. During that time, she re-examined her professional choices. She credits God with giving her the strength to make a change.

She said she's also a big believer in vision boards, which help people clarify their goals.

"I love to write down the things that I want in my life," she said. "I wrote down: I want to book a national tour."

She learned about the auditions for "Elf" and did indeed get that national tour.

"Elf: The Musical" will be presented at 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays, 8 p.m. Fridays, 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Saturdays, and 1:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. Sundays from Dec. 6 through 11 at the Jacksonville Center for the Performing Arts, 300 Water St. It is part of the FSCJ Artist Series.

For tickets, go to fscjartistseries.org. Tickets can also be ordered by phone at 904-632-5000 weekdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Friday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

"I'm excited for the audience to travel with us on this journey," said Thomas. "It's going to be fun."

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Tree Lighting Ceremony

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2022
FROM 5:00PM - 7:00PM

Kick off the holiday season at our annual lobby tree lighting with refreshments and a visit from the big man, himself!

Christmas Eve Dinner

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2022
FROM 6:00PM - 9:00PM

Join us at Vernon's First Coast Kitchen & Bar for a prix-fixe dinner menu perfect for Christmas Eve. Reservations available on OpenTable.

Christmas Dinner

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2022
FROM 12:00PM - 5:00PM

Join us at Vernon's First Coast Kitchen & Bar for a bountiful holiday-inspired buffet. Reservations available on OpenTable.



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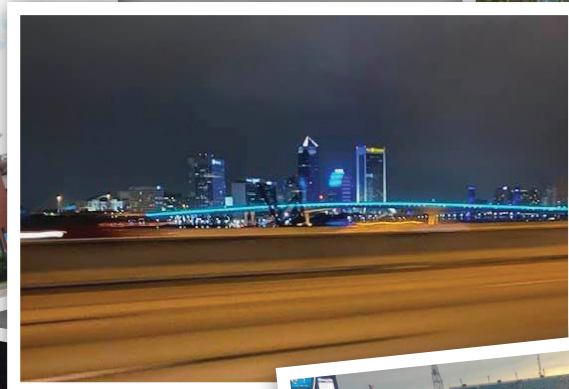


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Lucky me! I have been a Realtor in my home, Northeast Florida, for over 30 years. I grew up in Jacksonville and moved to the beach in my 20s. I studied architecture and interior design in college, feeding my love of homes and style. After I graduated, I started working in the media, where I learned the art of listening and of asking questions.

My real estate career began in 1985 with Watson Realty, where I learned the business of real estate consulting and advising. Then I moved to the original Marsh Landing Realty firm, which marketed the Marsh Landing development in stages, including the opening of unique Harbour Island, so I could understand real estate from the development perspective.

In 1993, I opened my own brokerage, Berry & Co. Real Estate. Our first listing was The Ponte Vedra Carlyle, 48 new condominiums on Ponte Vedra Boulevard. That was an exciting time – new residences in a premier location, with Lodge membership included for every purchaser! Berry & Co. Real Estate is a robust general brokerage business, having helped hundreds of buyers and sellers with their residential real estate needs. We take pride in our market knowledge - it is the foundation for the extra level of service we provide our customers.

My customers describe me as “one of our most trusted advisors”... “responsive, kind and honest”... “always felt we were in good hands” ... “stands out from the rest regarding professionalism, true customer satisfaction and a real passion to do things the right way.” I am proud to share my knowledge and insights to help make the real estate buying and selling process efficient, enjoyable and rewarding.

At our boutique brokerage, we are committed to identifying each customer’s needs, wants and desires. We match this customized perspective with our market knowledge and years of experience to help our customers make their best decisions. It is such a pleasure, as a native of this area, to show newcomers what makes Northeast Florida special, from the wildlife to the beaches to the residents and business owners who call the area home. Equally exciting to me is marketing homes and land, securing that best new owner through customized communications that tell the special story of each property.

While homebase for our office is Ponte Vedra Beach, we also are active in neighboring Jacksonville Beach, Neptune Beach, Atlantic Beach and Nocatee as well as greater Jacksonville. Our real estate market is ever-changing and always intriguing, keeping me excited about the challenges and opportunities each new day brings.



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Web: www.pennyweeks.com

Dr. Penney Weeks has been working in dentistry for 25 years, and she has seen a lot change over the years, both with the growth of her practice and with the advances in new technology and the future of dentistry.

Dr. Weeks said, “Emerging science confirms the future of medicine and the key to a healthier life starts in your mouth.” She is committed to complete health dentistry which focuses on the whole body, not just the teeth. Part of oral systemic healthcare, she said is nutritional counseling. Good nutrition supports healing and prevention of inflammation and disease.

She is a member of The American Academy of Oral Systemic Health- an organization of healthcare leaders and healthcare professionals committed to research and interdisciplinary treatment between dentists and physicians to care for patient’s total body health.

Growing up, Dr. Weeks always knew she wanted to go into some field of medicine and eventually found her perfect fit as a dentist. She is a native Floridian having been born and raised in Jacksonville and graduated from the University of Florida.

Dr. Weeks prides herself in the friendly and welcoming atmosphere her office presents to their patients. “Getting to know the patients and building those relationships is one of the most rewarding aspects of the job,” Dr. Weeks said.

She is joined in her practice by fellow dentist Carla Field as well as 12 very dedicated and exceptional support staff members. Much of her staff have been together for over 20 years, which creates a consistent experience for each patient. “That tells you a lot about how much we care for each other and our patients,” Dr. Weeks said.

New technology, like one visit crowns, laser treatments for snoring, and sleep apnea treatments, have been a welcomed advancement in dentistry. She looks forward to what comes next in the ever-emerging field of dentistry.

Her practice in Ponte Vedra Beach is located at 228 Ponte Vedra Park Drive, Suite 100 and the practice is open Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

For more information about Dr. Weeks’ practice, you can go to penneyweeks.com. To contact the office, call 904-285-1990 or email shelly@penneyweeks.com. They look forward to becoming a part of your wellness journey.



Since December of 2016, Jonathan Gibbs has been the State Farm Agent in the Nocatee community of Ponte Vedra, Florida. Being able to represent a company such as State Farm - which just celebrated its 100th year - is something he considers an extreme honor! Since the 2016 opening of Jonathan Gibbs State Farm, Jonathan has grown his staff to a team of five, full-time “Good Neighbor” team members, ready to assist all customers, with the risks of everyday life and to help them best prepare for their financial future.

With the volatility of the insurance market in Florida, particularly near the coast, being able to represent a company with the financial strength of State Farm has been a real advantage. State Farm has been the number one auto insurer since 1942 and the number one homeowner’s insurer since 1964. This is a leadership position that is almost unprecedented when it comes to a company of this magnitude.

Jonathan and his office have been able to qualify for some of the most prestigious awards in State Farm, including Chairmen’s Circle, Senior Vice President’s Club and Ambassador Travel Club – as a result of his team’s tireless commitment to putting customer needs first and recommending products that help customers face their financial future with confidence. Being a local to the area, having been born and raised in Ponte Vedra, Jonathan takes great pride in being able to give back to a community that he considers so special. It’s a common sight to see Jonathan and his team at the Nocatee Farmer’s Markets on Saturdays handing out State Farm swag, candy and joyously mixing with current clients and meeting others in the friendly community.

Jonathan’s office has also been the primary sponsor of Nocatee-A-Glow, for the last three years -an honor he hopes to continue for many years to come. It’s encouraging to know that State Farm is uniquely positioned to grow responsibly in Florida now and in the future. Jonathan Gibbs State Farm is honored to be able to lead that charge in Ponte Vedra and Nocatee.

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DICKENS ON CENTRE BRINGS VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS TO FERNANDINA BEACH

story by **ANTHONY RICHARDS**
photos courtesy of **AMELIA ISLAND CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU**

For the eighth year in a row, Fernandina Beach's historic downtown will go back in time and have the look and feel of Victorian London.

The transformation is all part of the 8th Annual Dickens on Centre holiday celebration which this year is scheduled for Dec. 8 to 11.

"Every year we make changes and look into how it can be improved upon even more," said Mariela Murphy, director of special events with the Amelia Island Convention & Visitors Bureau.

One of those changes is the expansion of the festival itself, which has spread its footprint in conjunction with its continued growth in popularity among those in the community and those visiting from surrounding areas.

According to Murphy, the celebration used to be primarily Centre Street and Second Street; however, it will now spread all the way up to Fourth Street.

One of the additions during the expansion that took place last year that will be back this year is the Enchanted Village, which will include eight "igloos" that are decorated to fit the Christmas theme that people can book for an hour at a time.

The igloos were such a hit that two more have been added to the six that



were available last year.

There will even be a snow machine that will be added to create the vibe of a true winter wonderland atmosphere, even in Florida.

Part of the growth also includes a noticeable increase in the number of people that are visiting from out of state to go to Dickens on Centre, especially from the Atlanta area.

"We want it to be a great festival that offers people the opportunity to have fun and be festive during the season," Murphy said.

There will also be a children's area where St. Nick will be present to interact with all the boys and girls.

The Lesesne House, one of the oldest houses in Fernandina Beach, will be part of the festivities this year, as the house, which was built in the 1800s will be used for "Dickens After Dark," a VIP party for attendees 21 and older

that will include food and drinks and a tour of the house.

Guests at the event are asked to "dress to impress" to fit the Victorian theme.

Last year was the first of the events held after the COVID-19 pandemic and the result was record numbers with roughly 18,000 people estimated to have attended the festival over the three-day span. Similar numbers are expected this year.

"A lot of growth has occurred with our vendor list as well, going from 60 to 65 to about 85 this year," Murphy said. "And we're stilling getting calls about it."

For the third year, an illuminated procession will kick off the festival at 7 p.m. Dec. 8.

People should gather near the welcome center in downtown Fernandina Beach. They can bring their own handmade lanterns or use the lanterns provided by the event.

"There's always a lot of caroling and kids at the procession," Murphy said. "It's a great way to get things started."

About 1,200 people took part in last year's illuminated procession.

Another fun tradition associated with the festival is the "Run Like the Dickens" 1-mile fun run along Amelia Island's main beach.



'tis the season of
GIVING

[season of giving]

A PURRFECT PLACE *to spend the night*

story by **SHAUN RYAN**
photos provided by **PURRAPY INC.**

Purrt City may be the most unusual place a traveler can spend the night.

Outwardly, it's a kind of campground with tents to rent. But what differentiates Purrt City — the lodging portion of the Purradise Springs property near Fort White in Columbia County — from other outdoor accommodations are the year-round residents and occasional “tentmates.”

In other words, cats.

Lots of them. Community cats, disabled cats, cats that are at-risk or simply have nowhere else to go. Because Purradise Springs is first and foremost a feline sanctuary, which rents out the tents to raise money for its related nonprofit, Purrapy Inc.



A woman cuddles one of the feline residents of Purradise Springs.

Purrt City's uniqueness is the main reason travelers stay there. True, about 10% of the guests have found it an affordable place to stay while visiting nearby Ichetucknee and Ginnie springs. But most are seeking a chance

to cuddle with the resident cats at the end of a long day. In fact, some guests grow so attached to their furry acquaintances, they adopt them.

Owners Denise and Thom Howard started down this path after losing a pair of cats they'd had for 11 years. To fill that empty spot in their lives, the Howards quickly adopted two kittens. At the same time they began to feed and care for a bunch of cats migrating from the house of a neighbor who had died.

Denise Howard discovered a passion for this type of work. She and her husband began to do trap-neuter-release to help control the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22 ■

[season of giving]

CARING CHEFS

RAISES MORE THAN \$75K FOR NORTHEAST FLORIDA CHILDREN

story by **ANTHONY RICHARDS** photos by **SUSAN GRIFFIN**

The Children’s Home Society of Florida held its 38th Annual Caring Chefs event Oct. 23 and raised more than \$75,000 to benefit projects going on within the organization’s Greater Northeast Florida First Coast region, that includes Duval, St. Johns, Clay, Baker and Nassau counties.

The proceeds from the event will help CHS provide the necessary resources it can for children and families in need of assistance in those counties.

This year’s event underwent a location change, as it was held at The



Charlene & Rich Savidge.

Glass Factory, and event venue in Jacksonville instead of the Avenues Mall where it had been in recent years.

“It was a bit smaller in the space

available, but everyone who attended was so excited to be there and take part in helping this great cause,” CHS development manager Kristina Curre said.

Some of the services CHS offers includes working partnerships with community schools, mental health counseling and child health services, such as childcare.

There were about 400 people that attended the event with 23 local

CONTINUED ON PAGE 21 ■

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CARING CHEFS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

restaurants highlighted and taking part as vendors that attendees could go around and sample the various cuisines they had to offer.

Although the number of vendors was less than in the past due to the smaller venue size, Curre believes that in turn had a positive affect on the night after receiving feedback from those that attended.

According to Curre, people found it easier to make sure they tried each of the food vendors and did not feel as rushed because they were more convenient and not as spread apart as in the past.

“Everyone was also excited because the smaller venue allowed for better opportunities to network,” Curre said.

“Caring Chefs was the first and biggest tasting event when they first rolled it out,” Curre said.

CHS never forgets that the goal of the



Leigh Cort & Jay Greene



Mel & Felicia Cox.

organization is to help those in need, and this is expressed by featuring blogs and stories of families helped throughout the year.

“If we can make a difference in at least one child’s life, we’ve reached our goal,” Curre said.

Children’s Home Society of Florida began in Jacksonville in 1902 and will be celebrating its 120th anniversary next year.

“It started off with just fostering and

“If we can make a difference in at least one child’s life, we’ve reached our goal.”

- KRISTINA CURRE

CONTINUED ON PAGE 39 ■



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[season of giving]

PURRADISE SPRINGS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

feral population in Jacksonville. But they wanted to do more. They wanted to create a sanctuary for the cats away from places where they may be poisoned or forced out due to construction.

They found a piece of property at 166 SW Lola Court, northwest of Fort White. A former mobile home park, it was



'Anyone home?' A Purradise Springs resident cat pays a visit to one of the guests.

large (nine acres) and secluded. It also had water, septic tanks and electricity, so the Howards considered having an RV camp on the site as a fundraiser.

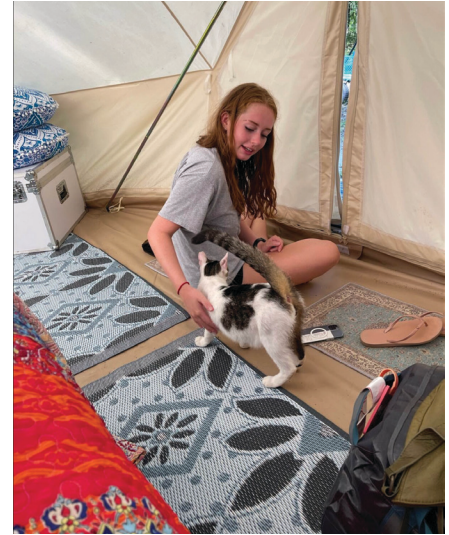
But the town passed an ordinance that made that impossible, and fans of the nonprofit said they didn't own any RVs. In addition, there was a danger that the cats would scratch up a \$150,000 vehicle.

At the suggestion of Denise Howard's sister, they elected to switch to tent camping: glamping. They have five tents, actually yurts — or in Purradise Springs lingo, "purrts." At least one is air-conditioned, the others cooled by fan. And a lodge building nearby offers guests a place to go to warm up, cool off or hang out with kittens.

The Howards moved in last January. They opened on the Fourth of July weekend and were fully booked.

"We've been booking pretty steady," said Denise Howard.

The Howards are planning to convert existing buildings on the property for



A cat pays a visit to one of Purradise Springs' guests.

use by the sanctuary. They are also working with other small rescues to form a cooperative and hope to enlist the help of area veterinarians.

Anyone looking to spend the night in one of the purrts and perhaps some quality time with the cats of Purradise Springs can learn more at purrapyinc.com.



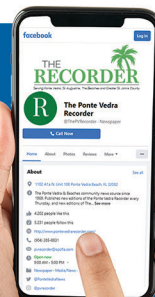
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TABLE TALK

SONAPA GRILLE: THE AMERICAN PALATE OF WINE-COUNTRY FLAVORS

story and photos by LEIGH CORT



The flourishing restaurant scene in Northeast Florida makes nightly choices of where to enjoy dinner, happy hour or in-between hours quite a dilemma.

Restaurants are places where you dream of having a fantastic meal with

friends, family or just on your own. They are also destinations where restaurant entrepreneurs can merge their talents and create something incredible.

Welcome to the new SoNapa Grille in Jacksonville Beach that now ranks as my favorite hometown drop-in – where you can either grab a seat at the bar or join friends at a comfy table anywhere in the restaurant.

The name was created by two of the world’s great wine regions – Sonoma Country and Napa Valley. Their wine selections are focused on great California wines that guests can afford – whether choosing an adventurous sampling of multiple wines or ordering a bottle that you drink to the last sip!

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24 ■

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SONAPA GRILLE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

Founder/creator of SoNapa Grille Adam Barringer draws inspiration from his own personal fondness for California, which is what inspired the first SoNapa Grille to open in New Smyrna Beach in 2006. By 2018, his second location joined the scene in Ormond Beach. Finally, he and partners Joe Bales and Chris Botting landed the third location in Jacksonville Beach. It's easy to find on 3rd Street and even easier to fall in love with the trio of everything they are doing well: contemporary and appealing ambiance, caring and knowledgeable service plus a fabulous menu of deliciousness!

SoNapa Grille touches the senses. It begins when you receive a friendly greeting from the hosts and then perhaps taking a seat at the bar, which is your portal to a relaxed and professional experience.



Savannah McLean

The restaurant gently flows from the popular bar to a comfortable dining room that segues into the open Barrel Room (obviously decorated with attractive California wine barrels). There is a private 14-seat, glassed-in party room (special reservation) especially with holiday entertaining! Earthen tones and classic woods infuse a sense of casual without the usual beachy theme that pervades many of



Adam Barringer and Joe Bales

the area's new eateries. For outdoor and pet-friendly dining, the 30-seat garden is rimmed with foliage, and nightly the white lights project a hint of romance.

The thoughtfully curated menu is committed to reflecting the diverse palates of California wine country

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 ■

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SONAPA GRILLE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

– flawlessly enhancing the easy-to-read wine list that begins with lighter vintages and ends with more full-bodied selections.

Popular winemakers like Chalk Hill, Rombauer, Caymus and Opus One dot the menu with many of Adam and Joe’s personal favorites. SoMade Cocktails embrace the California lifestyle, too. “When She’s in Napa” combines Tito’s vodka, Ferrari Carano Rose, lemon juice and a dash of blueberry. “The Tusk,” a California restaurant, inspired my favorite with Four Roses Bourbon, maple infused Vermouth, orange bitters and dried cherries!

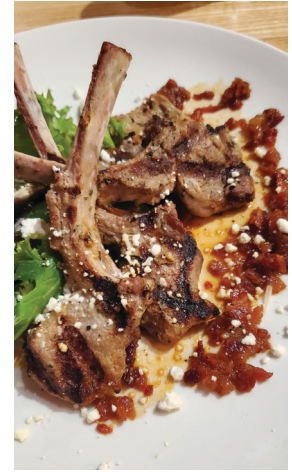
On one visit, I fell hard for the Edamame Potstickers (filled with edamame and cabbage, citrus ginger sauce and wasabi aioli) and Korean BBQ ribs (sesame seeds, green onions and Asian street fries). All of the appetizers are irresistible, but then I



Edamame Potstickers



Korean BBQ Ribs



Lollipop Lambchops

swooned for the Lollipop Lambchops (grilled Dijon-rubbed lamb chops with bacon jam, goat cheese and field greens).

Chef Patrick Brown explores and tries new and exciting combinations, yet there is still a feeling of authentic, conventional flavors.

The owners identify customer demand, a crucial first step in every restaurant’s success story. Look around; there’s a happy vibe at SoNapa Grille. It’s obvious that their customers are making wise decisions also based

CONTINUED ON PAGE 27 ■

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[wine & dine]

SONAPA GRILLE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

on their own ability to research food and wine before and during their visit.

It's been fun to arrive at 4 p.m. and linger at the bar until 6:30 – the span of 'Happy Hour'... The restaurant fills up quickly – especially when you can taste many specialty dishes, wines and cocktails at generous happy hour prices. The pet-friendly garden setting lures locals arriving in golf carts, on bicycles and simply with Fido on a leash!

What to order! For the seafood and pasta lover, Chef's Shrimp & Scallop Carbonara is a dreamy combination (fettuccine, parmesan cheese, prosciutto and peas). A lighter entrée is wildly popular fresh Sashimi Tuna

(yellowfin tuna, shichimi seasoned, seared rare with coconut sticky rice, Thai chili Brussels and traditional wasabi and pickled ginger).

With cooler weather appetites craving a more serious dinner, do not miss "Highway 29's" Famous Pork Chop (10 oz. center-cut bone-in chop with mustard sauce atop Yukon Gold mashed potatoes and pickled cabbage).

Menu surprises include craft cider and seltzers – a half dozen brick-oven flat breads

and luscious looking desserts. Don't resist the Howell Mountain (piping hot pineapple upside down cake served with vanilla ice cream) and the seasonal Fresh Baked Bread Pudding (sweet and salty bourbon sauce, candied pecans and creamy gelato). SoNapa Grille has bold personality with a revolving roster of highlights each night. It's fun to dine here and they're not shy or afraid to play around with flavors. Lucky for us that they're going to be around for a very long time! www.SoNapaGrille.com



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WHISKEY, WINE & WILDLIFE MAKES ST. JOHNS COUNTY DEBUT

photos by SUSAN GRIFFIN

The inaugural St. Johns County version of Whiskey, Wine & Wildlife was held Nov. 4-6, drawing large crowds for the festivities. Presented by Publix and GreenWise Market, the event included master classes, guided tours of the Guana Tolomato Matanzas Research Reserve, Whiskey Inspired “Pig Pickin’” on the Pier, a block party in Vilano Beach and a jazz brunch at Casa Monica Resort & Spa.

The following medals were awarded to winners in the restaurant competitions:

- **Best Overall:** Silkie’s Chicken & Champagne Bar, Jacksonville
- **Best Savory:** Gold – Amici’s Italian Restaurant, St. Augustine; Silver – Lotus Noodle Bar, St. Augustine; Bronze – Beaches at Vilano
- **Best Sweet:** Gold – Vilano Main Street Diner, St. Augustine; Silver – Blacksheep Restaurant Group
- **Best Seafood:** Gold, Tie – Catch 27 and Costa Brava, both of St. Augustine; Silver, Tie – Pesca by Michael’s and Cap’s on the Water, both of St. Augustine; Bronze – The Reef Restaurant, St. Augustine
- **Best Presentation:** Odd Birds Kitchen & Cocktail Lounge, St. Augustine



Whiskey Inspired “Pig Pickin’” at the Pier proved to be a very popular event.



People gather on the Vilano Beach Pier for good food and drink.



Chef Kenny Gilbert shared some delicious treats during the block party.



WhistlePig representative were on hand to tell visitors about their product.



Cabot Creamery handed out samples.



The Yael & Gabriel Duo performed on the pier.



Laiken Love & The Fellowship of Love provided music during the main event.

UNIQUE CONTEMPORARY HOME

an attention-getter

story by **LISA BARTON**
Contributed photos

On the west side of Ponte Vedra Boulevard, just south of the Sawgrass Country Club, sits an eye-catching contemporary-style home filled with light, art and personality. This house was designed by local architect Mark Macco for the owners, Denise and Jay Levitch.

The Levitches were involved in all the design aspects of the house, starting with the lot. The property is directly across

the street from the ocean and bordered on the west by the Guana Preserve.

Great care was taken to incorporate the natural areas into the home design, balancing conservation with construction. The result is a magnificent house with an incredible degree of privacy, ample outdoor living areas and views of nature from every room.

The Levitches were not novices to the home-building process when they started on this project. They designed and built a modern house in their hometown of St. Louis



The house at 930 Ponte Vedra Blvd. has a unique, eye-catching design.

before being transferred to the Jacksonville area.

Jay Levitch is an attorney for Fidelity National

Financial, and his position brought him to Jacksonville

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30 ■

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HOME

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

in 2013. Their first Florida home was the personal residence of architect Mark Macco. The Levitches enjoyed the homebuilding process the first time around, so when they decided to build something larger here in Jacksonville, they naturally reached out to Macco again.

The inspiration for this house was light — the more light the better. The design includes glass walls on the east and west sides, so the interior spaces are bathed in natural light throughout the day. The floor plan is open concept, which lends itself to flexibility in furniture placement. Most importantly, the design included gallery-style walls for the Levitches to display their art collection.

Denise Levitch sees the house as the background for the art pieces. Her taste in art is eclectic and she is drawn to colorful, quirky and unique designs. She has a wide variety of paintings, sculpture and wall hangings from



The house admits a lot of light to its interior.

all over the world. The collection is cheerful and many of the pieces prompt a smile. One of her favorite artists is George Rodrigue, a Louisiana painter who's known for his iconic "blue dog" paintings. These bright, happy paintings speak directly to Denise Levitch and her love of animals.

The home design is also very functional. The first floor is block construction, and the windows are high-end energy efficient, which keeps utility bills down. The polished cement floors give the house a contemporary feel without sacrificing its sense of

warmth. The downstairs is open, with the gourmet kitchen overlooking the dining and main living areas.

Jay Levitch loves to cook, and this floor plan allows him to be part of the conversation while creating culinary masterpieces. Walls of sliding doors open to the backyard pool area, allowing easy transition from indoor to outdoor areas.

Upstairs, four large bedrooms are easily accessed by an elevator. Each bedroom has its own unique bathroom and custom closet. The owners' suite includes a large balcony overlooking the pool and an elegant owners' bathroom with an enormous walk-in closet.

The outdoor spaces were planned as carefully as the indoor spaces, with large and colorful art on display. The Levitches have two Bernese Mountain dogs who need room to romp. The dogs love the big backyard and also enjoy frolicking at the beach.

The Levitches are ready for their next home building adventure. This home is now on the market for \$4,250,000.



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Decadent and mouth-watering, cheesecake is a dessert table staple. Everyone has a favorite cheesecake variety, and bakeries fill their display cases with plain or fruit-topped cheesecake offerings. Although making a cheesecake is a labor of love, the results often are well worth the effort.

This recipe for "Amaretti Cheesecake" from "Cooking Light: Dinner's Ready" (Oxmoor House) by The Cooking Light Editors utilizes a slow cooker to help make this cheesecake perfection.

Amaretti Cheesecake

Serves 10

Crust:

- 2/3 cup amaretti cookie crumbs (about 16 cookies)
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- Cooking spray

Filling:

- 2 (8-ounce) blocks fat-free cream cheese, softened and divided
- 1 (8-ounce) block 1/3-less-fat cream cheese, softened
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 2 large eggs
- 3/4 teaspoon almond extract
- Raspberries, optional



1. To prepare crust, combine the first three ingredients, tossing with a fork until moist and crumbly. Gently press mixture into the bottom of a 7-inch springform pan coating with cooking spray.

2. To prepare filling, beat 1 block fat-free cream cheese and 1/3-less-fat cream cheese with a mixer at medium speed until smooth. Add remaining 1 block fat-free cream cheese; beat until blended. Add 2/3 cup sugar and flour; beat well. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after

each addition. Stir in almond extract. Pour batter over crust in pan.

3. Pour 1 cup hot water into bottom of a 5-quart slow cooker. Place a rack in slow cooker (rack should be taller than water level). Place pan on rack. Place several layers of paper towels over slow cooker insert. Cover and cook on high for 2 hours, or until center of cheesecake barely moves when pan is touched. Remove lid from slow cooker; turn off heat, and run a knife around outside edge. Let cheesecake stand in slow cooker 1 hour. remove cheesecake from slow cooker. Cool to room temperature in pan on a wire rack. Cover and chill at least 6 hours. Cut into wedges. Garnish with raspberries, if desired.



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The Florida-Georgia Hall of Fame 2022 class inductees include Andre “Bubba” Caldwell and Trey Burton of Florida and Champ Bailey and John Little of Georgia.



Trey Burton poses with his daughter, while she holds his Hall of Fame bust.



Fans attended the ceremony to welcome this year’s Hall of Fame class.

MORE THAN A RIVALRY

story and photos by **ANTHONY RICHARDS**

Florida-Georgia Hall of Fame continues tradition

The 2022 class of the Florida-Georgia Hall of Fame was inducted during a ceremony Oct. 28 at the East Club inside TIAA Bank Field.

Each year two former players or coaches from both schools get inducted and recognized for their play during their football careers, and it has become a tradition and part of the festivities the day before the teams face off in their annual rivalry showdown in Jacksonville.

Fans from both teams were in

attendance to see Trey Burton and Andre “Bubba” Caldwell be inducted from Florida and John Little and Champ Bailey represent Georgia.

“You never expect this, and it isn’t why you play the game, but at the same time, it is such an honor, because there have been so many unbelievable players that have played in this game over the years,” Burton said.

For Burton, the journey has come full circle for, as he grew up a diehard Gators fan and now he has children of his own and he was able to take them to their first ever Gators game the day after he was inducted into the Florida-Georgia Hall of Fame.

“I grew up bleeding orange and blue,

and now I’m just happy that my kids are able to be here and be a part of this,” Burton said.

He also had a memorable career in the NFL and threw the touchdown pass as part of the now famous “Philly Special” play that helped the Philadelphia Eagles win Super Bowl 52 in 2018.

John Little also grew up in Florida but chose to attend Georgia, which gave him a unique perspective when it comes to the rivalry.

“I’ve always felt that the Georgia-Florida game just meant more,” Little said. “I remember just wanting to beat

CONTINUED ON PAGE 33 ■



Champ Bailey autographs a football for a Georgia fan.

RIVALRY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 26

them so bad. It was treated like a bowl game by both students and fans. It was ‘College Gameday’ (weekly kickoff show on ESPN) before ‘College Gameday.’”

Caldwell could not hold back his emotion during his acceptance speech and his vibes of pure excitement reverberated throughout the room.

“This is big, and I’m here,” Caldwell chuckled. “I made it baby. This is seriously the greatest rivalry in all of college football.”

He thanked his older brother Reche Caldwell, who also played wide receiver at the University of Florida prior to Andre stepping onto campus, for helping pave the path for him to follow.

“He’s the reason I’m a Gator,” Caldwell said. “I’m

so proud to have carried on that legacy.”

Champ Bailey has gotten used to being inducted into hall of fames in recent years, as he is also a member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame following more than a decade long career in the NFL.

He grew up in Folkston, Georgia, which it’s proximity to the Florida state line left the town split about 50/50 when it came to rooting for the Bulldogs or the Gators.

However, it was his mother’s passion for the Dawgs that fueled his love for them as well.

He reminisced about Steve Spurrier coming into his living room to recruit him and then later playing for Spurrier and having many Gator teammates over the years in the NFL.

“With all those connections to Florida, you can bet I’m a Gator hater,” Bailey chuckled, as his comment brought about several barks and chomps from Bulldogs and Gators fans attending the ceremony and signified the rivalry in a nutshell.



Andre “Bubba” Caldwell speaks to the crowd during his Hall of Fame speech.



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GATOR BOWL BUILDS FEMALE PRESENCE WITH NEW INITIATIVE

story and photos by **ANTHONY RICHARDS**

Gator Bowl Sports introduced a new and unique initiative this year that focuses on getting its female members more involved and connected.

The “Bowl’d Ladies” initiative included a pair of informational and networking events, the second of these was called College Football 102 and was held Nov. 4 at Embassy Suites on Baymeadows Road in Jacksonville.

The first meeting was held at the beginning of the season at Epping Forest in Jacksonville and was called College Football 101.

Susan Hamilton was the first female chair of the Gator Bowl, serving in 2002 in preparation for the matchup



It is the first year of the “Bowl'd Ladies” initiative by Gator Bowl Sports.

between Notre Dame and North Carolina State on New Year’s Day 2003, and she was on hand to take part in the event.

“I’m thrilled with this, because back then we would have about eight to 10

women at Gator Bowl events and there were no special events for women,” Hamilton said. “But now we’re doing a really good job of marketing to women and nowadays the women are so much more savvy when it comes to football. It is so wonderful to see how it has grown and developed.”

Gator Bowl President and CEO Greg McGarity spoke to those in attendance about the bowl’s selection process and took a deep dive into what goes into the final decision and what it considered before the bowl’s matchup is created.

“This is all part of a new initiative

CONTINUED ON PAGE 35 ■

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GATOR BOWL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

to get women engaged in the Gator Bowl,” McGarity said. “It’s an effort to educate while having fun and fellowship at the same time.”

According to McGarity, Gator Bowl sports has much more to offer throughout the year than just the game itself.

“I think a lot of people think it’s just a football game, but as they get more involved, they find out pretty quickly that it’s just one part of our organization,” McGarity said. “The charity side of things is what I think really attracts people.”

Gator Bowl Charities emphasizes supporting the development of youth on the First Coast through memorable sports experiences focusing on education, leadership and service.

Other Gator Bowl Sports programs also include awarding scholarships to local high school students and the “Little Gator Bowl,” which gives local Pop Warner teams the opportunity to



Gator Bowl President and CEO Greg McGarity talks about the bowl selection process.

play games on the big stage at TIAA Bank Field.

The idea behind the creation of Bowl’d Ladies was Sara Leutzinger Pomposo.

“We were at a green jacket (members) meeting last year and looking around the room, we noticed that there were a lot of women, and more than normal,” Leutzinger Pomposo said. “That sparked the idea



Peggy Tipping and Chrissy Graham

that we should try to get even more involved with the Gator Bowl and all that surrounds it.”

Bowl games and poll rankings are two things very unique to college football compared to the NFL, which is a common feedback Leutzinger Pomposo has received from women following the event.

“Just because you might know a lot about NFL football, does not mean that you may know everything about college football,” Leutzinger Pomposo said. “It’s really about bringing all that together, so that we can do some real good in the community.”

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JENNA BUSH HAGER

HIGHLIGHTS IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY AT FLORIDA FORUM TALK

story and photos by JENNIFER LOGUE

On Nov. 5, 1993, First Lady Barbara Bush attended the dedication of a new patient care tower at Wolfson Children's Hospital, reading "Goodnight Moon" to the children being treated there.

Nearly 29 years to the day of that visit, Bush's granddaughter, "Today" show co-host Jenna Bush Hager, visited the same hospital before sharing memories of her family at the Florida Forum speaker series – an initiative of The

Women's Board to benefit Wolfson Children's Hospital.

A mother of three young children, Hager said her visit to the hospital's neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) left a lasting impression.

"To see these tiny babies and their parents is something I'll never forget," she said, adding that during her visit, she met the family of an infant born prematurely who has been in the NICU for his entire first year of life.

"No mom wants to have to make use of these facilities," she said, "but to know that you have this type of health care right here in your own backyard is such a comfort."

A special bond

The Women's Board was founded 50 years ago after twin girls Annie and Abbie Martin were born prematurely, and the hospital lacked the equipment needed to care for both infants. As a result, Abbie lived just eight days. Since that time, The Women's Board has raised \$35 million to ensure that Wolfson Children's Hospital has the equipment, facilities and resources to provide first-class care to its young patients. Thanks in part to that support, Wolfson's was the facility at which conjoined twins Conner and Carter Mirabal were successfully separated in 2015.

During her Florida Forum talk, Hager spoke fondly of the special bond she enjoys with her own twin sister, Barbara.

"We have always been aware how lucky we are to have been born twins," she said. "We were 18 when our dad became president after a really long recount, and to have a sister to hold your hand on a day like that was such a blessing."

Hager noted that it's not uncommon for people to



Jenna Bush Hager

want to make comparisons between twins.

"People would say, 'Barbara's the quiet one and you're the loud one,'" she said. "Or 'She's the smart one and you're the funny one.' I'd want to say, 'Can't we be a little of both?'"

When their father left the White House in January 2009, the Bush sisters penned a letter to incoming Wolfson's was the facility at which conjoined twins Conner and Carter Mirabal were successfully separated in 2015. During her Florida Forum talk, Hager spoke fondly of the special bond she enjoys with her own twin sister, Barbara. "We have always been aware how lucky we are to have been born twins," she said. "We were 18 when our dad became president after a really long recount, and to have a sister to hold your hand on a day like that was such a blessing." Hager noted that it's not uncommon for people to

For Hager, her fondest memories of her years at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue revolve around family. In particular, she fondly recalls spending Christmas at the White House – a tradition started by her grandfather during his presidency and continued during her father's two

CONTINUED ON PAGE 37 ■

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FORUM

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 36

terms in office.

“We had 12 years where the entire extended family, with aunts and uncles and cousins, would gather for Christmas at the White House,” she said. “So, when I think of those years, it’s a lot about family.”

Hager noted that her parents tried as much as possible to allow their daughters to enjoy a normal college experience during his presidency. To that end, the girls’ Secret Service protection was instructed to be nearby but not to follow them into college classrooms or other buildings.

That all changed on 9/11.

“I woke up in my dorm that day, looked out the window and there were about 10 (Secret

Service agents) standing outside. I thought, ‘What’s happened?’”

A similar group of agents was waiting at Yale for Barbara. Both Bush daughters were escorted to safe locations as the world watched the tragedy unfold.

“The agents protecting Barbara were actually based out of the World Trade Center, so they were getting calls from family while trying to locate some of their colleagues,” Hager said. “Barbara recalled that one of the agents had his 5-year-old daughter with him and she was jumping up and down on the bed in this motel. She said it was a jarring juxtaposition – this little girl’s innocence with what was happening. And then everything changed.”

Asked if it has been difficult to make her own



Women’s Board President Robin Albaneze, George Armstrong and Katherine Forrester

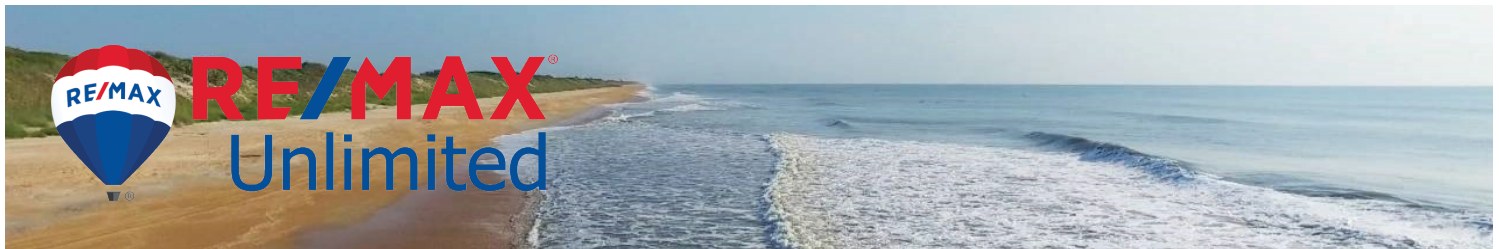
mark in the world coming from such an accomplished family, Hager said she has never resented being a Bush and that she was proud of what she had worked hard to accomplish as an author of several best-selling books and co-host of the “Today” show, where her contributions include launching “Read with Jenna,” a book club that spotlights debut and diverse voices. She also recently launched a production

company to bring some of the featured books to television.

So, what’s next for Jenna Bush Hager?

“Of all the jobs I’ve had, I take the job of mother most seriously,” she said. “We try really hard to have a house that is joyful, where our kids feel that they are enough.”

“So, what’s next are those three little people – and they will be for the rest of my life.”



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The caterer was The Chef's Garden and the event space was All About Events.



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The Women's Food Alliance hosted an evening with Jen Wolcott at All About Events to celebrate holiday entertaining at one of the premier party rental companies in Jacksonville.



Women's Food Alliance friendships

Colorful tablescapes featured: Country Rustic, Black & White, It's a White Floral Wonderland, Elegant Emerald! In their 4,000-square-foot showroom, they showcased exciting dinnerware, linens, unique matching tables and chairs, tents – especially new and trendy party décor that is often forgotten during the holidays.

Dinner was themed and deliciously presented by The Chef's Garden – a favorite Jacksonville caterer owned by Liz and Jen Earnest for nearly 25 years. Floral surprises wowed the guests and were created by a newcomer to the Women's Food Alliance by one week: Miki McGarry and her "Jars of Clay Designs."

The Women's Food Alliance cultivates and advances networking, education and collaboration for women in the culinary and hospitality industry.
www.WomensFoodAlliance.com

[season of giving]

CARING CHEFS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

adopting children, but it has really grown and expanded in its services over the years,” Curre said. “Now we’re involved and can offer help in so many aspects.”

Kendra Scott Jewelry had a booth setup and was selling jewelry during the event with 20% of the proceeds benefiting CHS and its initiatives.

Attendees were also able to text and donate to CHS during the event.

“We are thankful and blessed, because without all of the support from our sponsors and donors, we would not be able to do the things that we do to make a difference,” Curre said. “None of it would be possible.”

Putting on an event like Caring Chefs has a lot of moving pieces and work that must go on behind the scenes and as a result, they are already in the process of securing a venue and creating a planning committee for next year’s fundraiser.



Vance & Clare Berry.



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Live music was part of the entertainment at the 38th Annual Caring Chefs.

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HOLIDAY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

tional exhibit.

Also, there will be a Breakfast with Santa, 9-10 a.m. Dec. 3. Tickets for this event are \$25 for adults and children will be admitted free.

Go to firstcoastcultural-center.org/events/upcoming-events.

ST. AUGUSTINE CHRISTMAS PARADE

When: 9-11 a.m. Dec. 3

Where: The parade starts by the Mission Nombre de Dios off San Marco Avenue and continues through the downtown streets of historic St. Augustine.

16TH ANNUAL HOLIDAY HOME TOUR

When: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Dec. 3

Where: Amelia Island Museum of History, 233 S. Third St., Fernandina Beach

Admission: \$35 through 11/28; \$40 after 11/28

Carefully curated historic family homes, decorated by local florists and interior designers.

Go to ameliamuseum.org/holiday-home-tour.

HOLIDAY HALLELUJAH

When: 7:30 p.m. Dec. 3; 2 p.m. Dec. 4

Where: Flagler College's Lewis Auditorium, 14 Granada St., St. Augustine.

Admission: Ticket prices vary
Limelight Theatre partners with Jeff Dodd to present a holiday concert that is sure to get you in the Holiday spirit!

Go to limelight-theatre.org/season-31/holiday-hallelujah.

PALM VALLEY BOAT PARADE

When: 6-8 p.m. Dec. 3

Where: Palm Valley Bridge, South Roscoe Boulevard, Ponte Vedra

Enjoy this annual tradition of lighted boats to celebrate the holiday season in Ponte Vedra Bach. The parade route is seven miles of the Intra-coastal Waterway. It starts one mile south of the Palm Valley Bridge and travels north.

Go to palmvalleyboatparade.com.

GARDEN CLUB OF ST. AUGUSTINE HOLIDAY TOUR OF HOMES

When: Noon to 5 p.m. Dec. 4

Where: River House, 179 Marine St., St. Augustine

Admission: \$40

Enjoy this walking tour featuring 5-6 homes in the historic district decorated for the holidays. There will be a tea and holiday boutique at River House.

Go to gardenclubofstaugustine.org.

LUMINARY NIGHT

When: 6-9 p.m. Dec. 7

Where: St. Augustine Light-house & Maritime Museum, 100 Red Cox Road, St. Augustine

More than 2,000 luminaries are displayed throughout the grounds and on the streets surrounding this historic landmark. Guests can climb the tower for views of Nights of Lights.

"ELF THE MUSICAL"

When: 7:30 p.m. Dec. 6, 7, 8; 8 p.m. Dec. 9; 2 and 8 p.m. Dec. 10; 1:30 and 7 p.m. Dec. 11

Where: Moran Theater, Jacksonville Center for the Performing Arts, 300 Water St., Jacksonville.

Admission: Ticket prices vary.

The hilarious tale of Buddy, a young orphan child who mistakenly crawls into Santa's bag of gifts and is transported back to the North Pole. Unaware that he is actually human, Buddy's enormous size and poor toy-making abilities cause him to face the truth. With Santa's permission, Buddy embarks on a journey to New York City to discover his true identity.

Go to jacksonvillecenter-fortheperformingarts.com/events/2022/fscj-artist-series-elf-the-musical.

DICKENS ON CENTRE

When: 5-7:30 p.m. Dec. 8, 5-9 p.m. Dec. 9, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Dec. 10, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 11

Where: Downtown Fernandina Beach

A Victorian holiday festival offering fun for all. There will be Tiny Tim's Kids Zone, visits with St. Nick, holiday entertainment and shopping, festive

food and drink, costumed characters, holiday movies and plenty of Christmas inspiration. Jason Woods Productions will once again perform his one-man "A Christmas Carol" on the Main Stage, and there will be performances of "The Legend of St. Nick" and "Alice in a Christmas Wonderland." The festival will also feature Kristen Sparrow Circus' stilt walkers and jugglers performing throughout the festival, Victorian-era Carolers, dance ensembles, musicians, chalk artists, mural artists and so much more!

Go to ameliaisland.com/landing-pages/Dickens-on-Centre.

THE LIVING NATIVITY

When: 6:30-8:30 p.m. Dec. 8-11

Where: Westside Baptist Church, 7775 Herlong Road, Jacksonville.

Drive-through presentation of the first Christmas and the birth of Jesus.

HOLIDAY POPS

When: 7:30 p.m. Dec. 8-10

Where: Jacoby Symphony Hall, 300 Water St. Suite 200, Jacksonville.

Admission: Ticket prices vary
The Jacksonville Symphony, dancers from Douglas Anderson School for the Arts and other shining talent bring you the gift of the holiday season's most festive classics.

Go to jaxsymphony.org.

RIVERSIDE AVONDALE LUMINARIA

When: Dec. 11, begins at dusk

Where: Riverside Avondale neighborhood

Luminaria brings neighbors together as they walk along candle-lit sidewalks to socialize with friends.

Go to riversideavondale.org/events.

20TH ANNUAL GINGERBREAD EXTRAVAGANZA

When: Dec. 8-27, times vary. Closed Mondays and on Dec. 18, 24 and 25.

Where: Old St. Andrew's Church, 317 A. Philip Randolph Blvd., Jacksonville

Admission: \$11 adults, \$5 children (ages 4-11), free to

children age 4 and younger; \$7 for seniors (age 65 and older) and military.

The event includes the traditional gingerbread exhibit, as well as a holiday gift shop. New this year: Kids Day from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 11, where there will be a photo op with Santa Claus, balloon art, face painting artists and more.

Go to jaxhistory.org/20th-annual-gingerbread-extravaganza.

"NUTCRACKER IN A NUTSHELL"

When: 10:30-11:30 a.m. Dec. 9

Where: Thrasher-Horne Center, St. Johns River State College, 283 College Drive, Orange Park

Admission: \$19

Presented by The Florida Ballet, this is a family-friendly performance designed specifically with young children in mind.

Go to floridaballet.myboxoffice.us.

"THE NUTCRACKER"

When: 7:30 p.m. Dec. 9, 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Dec. 10, 2 p.m. Dec. 11

Where: Thrasher-Horne Center, St. Johns River State College, 283 College Drive, Orange Park

Admission: Ticket prices vary
This classic holiday tradition featuring The Florida Ballet's professional company and more than 100 local student dancers is sure to delight audience members of all ages.

Go to floridaballet.myboxoffice.us.

HOLIDAY REGATTA OF LIGHTS

When: 6-7:30 p.m. Dec. 10

Where: St. Augustine Bayfront, Avenida Menendez, St. Augustine

Gather on the Bayfront north of the Bridge of Lions for the annual boat parade. Watch the displays of brightly lit boats pass by decorated in everything from whimsical to patriotic themes.

—Compiled by Shaun Ryan



JOHN BEARD GALLERY SHOWCASES LOCAL ARTIST'S WORK

Many of artist John's Beard's works are very large and require a forklift to move.

story and photo by
SHAUN RYAN

As a boy, John Beard would sit in his mother's studio in the Keys and watch as she painted portraits and landscapes. Inspired, he painted his own pictures, which family friends placed in their Islamorada gift shop.

"They'd come to me and say, 'OK, here's \$25. Now we need another one,'" he recalled. "I don't know if they ever actually sold, but I was like, 'Wow! This is kind of cool; I can make money at this.'"

As he grew older, however, he elected to spend his time on baseball and football rather than art.

"I thought painting was, I don't know, not cool," he said.

After high school, he attended Bible college and then embarked on a life in the ministry. At first, he did work in the inner cities, eventually branching out to do relief work and help youth in India. After

that, he carried on his mission in Eastern Europe. In Romania, he helped to develop a medical clinic, a dental clinic and an orphanage.

He found those 18 years rewarding but ultimately decided to make a change.

At 36, he asked his mother for a canvas and said he was going to paint.

Not wanting to waste a canvas on him, she gave him a piece of paper, on which he painted a landscape. His mother was impressed with it. Today, that painting hangs on a wall in the production area of the John Beard Gallery, which opened three months ago just off County Road 210 east of I-95.

The painting marked a major shift in Beard's life.

"I never looked back," he said.

Where another budding artist might seek out classes, Beard found an advantage in having a close relative who understood art.

"I started as an Impressionistic painter," Beard said, "mentored by

my accomplished artist mother. She taught me color theory. She taught me composition. She taught me so many things. I was very fortunate to have her as a mentor."

Before he was out of his 30s, Beard underwent what he calls "an artistic awakening." He felt a strong need to move away from Impressionism and venture into something new.

Then, one day, he was in South Carolina when he made a firm decision.

"We were in Pawleys Island, painting plein air, and I said, 'This is it. This

is the day I'm going to start painting abstractly," he recalled.

Following this new direction, Beard didn't even limit himself to using traditional brushes or palette knives. He made custom brushes to get a specific effect, one about 16-to-18 inches wide.

"I use everything," he said. "I even grabbed by daughter's beach toy one day and started using it. And she's like, 'Dad! That's my toy!'"

For one painting, he

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43 ■

PAINT ALONG WITH ARTIST JOHN BEARD

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JEAN CLAUDE ROY EXHIBITS NEW WORKS *at Grand Bohemian*

story and photo by **SHAUN RYAN**

Because the style of his paintings dovetails with diverse art movements of the past, Jean Claude Roy describes himself as an “expressionist-colorist,” but in fact he is unique.

There’s a bit of Expressionism, a bit of the Abstract, bit of Realism, but, as Roy says, “I don’t follow rules.” He uses color to convey mood and doesn’t adhere to what his eyes tell him.

“You know, a tree; people would say when I was young the bark on the trunk is brown,” he said. “No! It could be red! You can see it as red. You can do what you want.”

He said he wants his work to generate emotion and finds it rewarding when viewers feel the same thing about a



Jean Claude Roy stands before several of his paintings at the Grand Bohemian Gallery in St. Augustine.

painting as he does when painting it.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of his landscapes is the ubiquitous sun. It is never round –

Roy says he “broke” it – and rarely yellow. With its unique appearance, this staple of Roy’s work acts almost like a signature; art aficionados immediately recognize the artist when they see it.

This often shapeless sun has been a part of Roy’s paintings since 1988.

“I was painting in France on a small canvas in a field,” he said. “It was hot. I was sitting down. And I looked at the sun too long; it blacked out. So I said, ‘I’m going to put a black sun in my painting.’”

And for three years, he did, later switching to other colors.

Roy laughs now when he remembers

CONTINUED ON PAGE 43 ■

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GALLERY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 41

suspended himself over a canvas from warehouse rafters, hoisted like a character in “Mission: Impossible” so that he could put down paint as he swung over the surface.

When creating a work of art, he is interested in how it impacts the viewer.

“Let’s face it,” he said. “Our daily lives are running around in traffic, and ‘Oh, we’re out of coffee; I’ve got to run to the store’; running kids to events ... you know, the everyday is always there to pull us into that grind. And when I paint, I go to a different place in my mind. It’s more of a spiritual place, a mystical place. As I’m painting, it’s like I get caught up in a cloud, and in that place time stands still. I might paint all night and finish a

painting, look at my watch, and it’s 8 a.m. — and I feel like I’ve only painted an hour.”

He said his goal is to pull the viewer into that place where he was when he was painting.

Today, Beard’s works are in high demand. And though he sells both original and giclee reproductions from his website, he now has a gallery at 110 Cumberland Park Drive, No. 105, west of Beachwalk.

It’s a studio, production facility, exhibit space and more.

“We make everything here in the gallery,” Beard said. “Everything from the stretcher bars to the actual canvas prints to framing. Everything is in-house.”

The gallery is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays, weekends by appointment. For more information, go to johnbeardcollection.com.

NEW WORKS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 42

thinking he was the first artist to depict a black sun. He eventually discovered that artist and writer Jean Cocteau had done it before him, and Gerard de Nerval wrote about a black sun in his 19th century poem “El Desdichado.”

Roy produces a painting every day. Last year, he actually did 385. He said he was not always so prolific. It is the result of much practice.

“In the beginning, a small painting used to take me a week,” he said, “but 40 years after, it takes me three hours.”

Each day, he goes out looking for the right thing to paint. Sometimes this search can last four hours, but he said, he must find the perfect spot.

“My eye will say what to

paint,” he said.

He spends six months per year each in France and Newfoundland, though the latter poses special challenges, such as painting in the snow or seeing his box easel blow over.

“They’ve never made an easel strong enough to withstand the Newfoundland weather,” he said.

It was in Newfoundland that Richard Kessler discovered Roy and offered to display his art at his galleries, which include the Grand Bohemian at 49 King St., St. Augustine. This marks the 20th year that Roy’s work has been exhibited there. The gallery is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Learn more at kesslercollection.com/casa-monica/experiences.

Learn more about Roy at jcroy.com.



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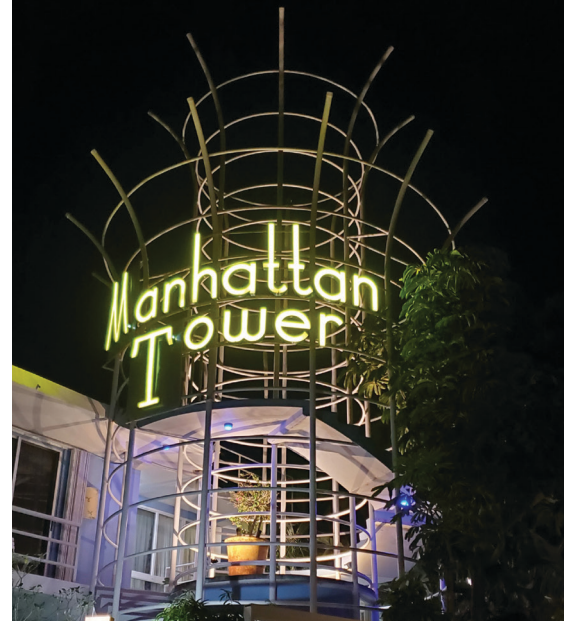
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Exterior photo from water taxi of the entire panorama of Manhattan Tower.



Manhattan Tower is a jeweled hideaway.



Intracoastal Gardens

DISCOVERING A HIDDEN FORT LAUDERDALE OASIS AND CLUB NIBBLES

story and photos by **LEIGH CORT**



It's so easy to fall in love with Manhattan Tower – a jeweled hideaway that's considered to be one of the best-kept secret vacation spots in bustling Fort Lauderdale.

Only two blocks from the world-famous 23-mile beach that is dotted with chic properties adorning the shore and skyline, Manhattan Tower transports you back to a timeless colorful past – a masterpiece of architecture for

General Motors executives in the early 1950s. Imagined by the innovative and famed mid-century architect Charles McKirahan, the hotel was conceived as a corporate retreat that began with its pedigree. He was known for designing many surviving grand properties in South Florida: yacht and country clubs, iconic hotels, resorts and luxurious mansions along major avenues and hidden driveways. Today, Manhattan Tower is an oasis of tranquility and imagination.

Owners Russel Dion and Joseph Caffey love their Manhattan Tower guests,

who practically become family. Tasteful furnishings (distinctly different in each of their 17 accommodations) have been curated over the years. And after careers in art and antiques with a gallery on Las Olas Boulevard, in 2000 they focused their attention on the restoration of Manhattan Tower.

The meticulous collection includes a wide variety of unusual art and treasures that now fill the hotel and gardens. Their studios, one- and two-bedroom apartments and garden

CONTINUED ON PAGE 45 ■



Suite with distinctive décor

OASIS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 44

villas are all comfy enclaves where they showcase the riches with anecdotes gathered from international travels mixed with newer acquisitions. Quiet, low-key and elegant, this is not a chain hotel experience. Russel and Joseph provide each guest with unequaled personal attention.

The three-story hideaway is reminiscent of images out of a Hollywood movie – although it’s a real home for Russel and Joseph who reside in the third-floor penthouse, while guests are excited to take up residence for a few days or weeks on the first and second floors. Enter into Manhattan Tower’s private tropical courtyard, manicured gardens and pristine pool. No bellman needed here. Even your elevator has charm – conveying a mid-century vibe that hints of romance and intrigue. If you’re a Hollywood film fanatic,

you might even think of the elevator scene in Hitchcock’s 1959 “North by Northwest.”

The true magic is the extensive Intracoastal waterfront patio that sweeps across the front of the hotel’s entire property. Guests are charmed with the privacy and grand comfort in the gardens where they can relax all day and night – an oasis dotted with chaise lounges, umbrella tables, pots of flora, sculptures and an open vista of flamboyant yachts cruising by.

Since each apartment has a full kitchen, it’s not surprising to enjoy an al fresco meal in this stylish setting that you prepare yourself – or bring in from a nearby gourmet market or restaurant. You can discover your own hush-hush spot to have a private champagne toast or bring out the charcuterie and share with other guests who might be doing exactly the same thing.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46 ■

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A place to relax by the pool.



Russel Dion and Joseph Caffey



Club Nibbles

OASIS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 45

Well-mannered dogs are invited to share your vacation and each year, Manhattan Tower is the quintessential location to watch the internationally acclaimed winter boat parade.

Fort Lauderdale, often tagged as the “Venice of Florida,” has a wealth of fine and fun dining, shopping, beaches, museums and sightseeing that is best seen and sampled by taking the water taxi that has a “stop” at Manhattan Tower. It’s exciting to know that for \$15-\$35 (children to adults) you can cruise the Intracoastal to shop, dine, stroll and explore the marvelous places that the crew advises for your pleasure. Each vacation is personalized as you discover the best way to see this beautiful city. You truly feel as if you have embarked on one of Florida’s sweet luxuries without hiring a private tour director or driving yourself. Within minutes from your call, a water taxi captain becomes your guide and historian. www.watertaxi.com

For years, Russel and Joseph have been dreaming about and planning Club Nibbles. They’ve created an inviting spot on the patio that’s chic and convenient for hotel guests to gather from 8 a.m. until 9 p.m. Start early with continental breakfast then throughout the day, Club

Nibbles’ menu features cappuccino and casual culinary delights, a wine bar, open-faced sandwiches and cocktail sweets and savories. This season is the debut of their long-awaited café. If you’re sunbathing poolside or relaxing on your private balcony, it’s only a few steps from your door. You can even invite friends to join you without leaving Manhattan Tower behind.

Where to dine? The greater Fort Lauderdale dining scene is staggering.

Now that you know where to find white sandy beaches (a gentle 10-minute stroll from Manhattan Tower) and shopping along famous avenues, South Florida’s all-year-round sunny weather, pristine water views and luxurious temperatures give you just enough inspiration to hit the town.

A bit of research will put you into bistros, pubs, rustic fish camps, celebrity chef dining rooms, alfresco rooftops and 5-star restaurants.

Food halls are the rage; Cuban food is a staple and Latin/Asian flavors could lure you out of bed for a late-night feast any night of the week. Fashion ranges from bathing attire to white dinner jacket and there are just too many choices to make this part of your vacation easy (but deliciously fun)!

A treasure not to overlook and only a short walk from Manhattan Tower is the historic Bonnet House Museum &

Gardens (circa late 1890s) – deeded to the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation as a “historic house museum.” Nearly a century later, the New York Times described it as “an unrivaled time capsule neatly preserved from an era when the wealthy elite could afford a cozy 35-acre winter hideaway in Florida.” www.bonnethouse.org

A mile from Manhattan Tower is Birch Park – the city’s own “Central Park” that has been preserved as a perfect refuge for exercise and relaxation. It’s a piece of the “Real Florida” and is a vibrant center for pleasures that range from inline skating to reading under the palms and oaks. You can rent canoes, kayak, walk dogs or just drive in, park and rent a beach chair and umbrella! www.floridastateparks.org

There is a bittersweet sadness about good times coming to an end. I adore Manhattan Tower and no matter the season, I’m smitten with its balance of history, today’s pulsating vibe of Fort Lauderdale and the comfort of being “Home.” Somehow, Apartment 108 will be my first indulgence when I return to fall in love all over again.

“Life is all memory except for the one present moment that goes by you so quickly you hardly catch it going.” – Tennessee Williams.

www.ManhattanTowerFL.com

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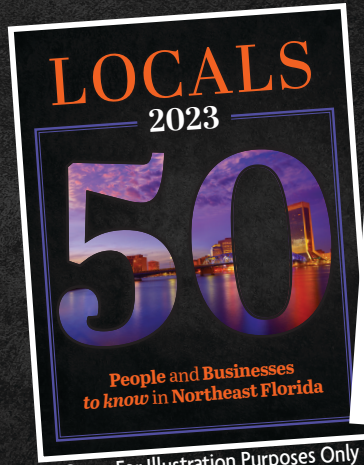
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