

THE RECORDER



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December 15, 2022

Volume 54, No. 7

75 cents

Serving Ponte Vedra, St. Augustine, The Beaches and Greater St. Johns County

PonteVedraRecorder.com



Season of Giving
See page 13



Nease vs. Ponte Vedra Soccer
Page 44



INSIDE: CHECK IT OUT!
The Recorder's Entertainment EXTRA featuring TV listings, streaming information, puzzles and more!



Photo by Anthony Richards

For the 27th consecutive year, Miss Felicia's dance ministry at Christ Episcopal Church of Ponte Vedra Beach performed its Nutcracker Ballet, which also serves as a major fundraiser for the church. See more photos from the Dec. 10 performance on page 41.

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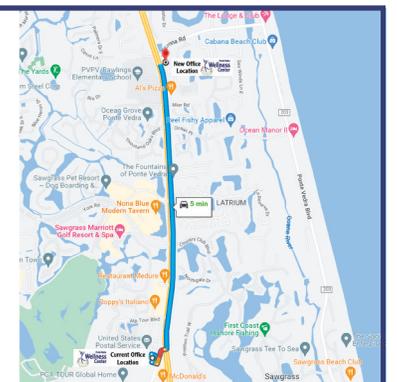
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INSIDE

One of Us

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Business Weekly

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In the Arts

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Sports

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Send us your news

We welcome submissions of photos, stories, columns and letters to the editor. Let us know what's happening. If you have hard copies of photos you want us to feature, feel free to bring them to our office — we'll scan them and hand them right back. E-mail submissions to news@pontevedrarecorder.com or bring them by our office at **1102 A1A N., Unit 108, Ponte Vedra Beach.**



Visit our new website at www.pontevedrarecorder.com

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PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

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THE RECORDER
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MSD meets for last time this year, first for new trustees

By Anthony Richards

The Ponte Vedra Municipal Service District met for the final time in 2022 when it held its Dec. 12 meeting, and it was also the first meeting for newest members, who were recently voted in.

Mickey White is one of the new trustees on the MSD board and he is very familiar with the area, having moved to Ponte Vedra here as a child in 1989 and his family lived on and off in the area ever since.

“Years ago, me and a group of neighbors put pavers on a beach walk together and worked with the MSD to get drainage fixed on my street,” White said. “I’ve been in contact with them over the years and decided I wanted to join and help that way.”

White believes he can bring a unique viewpoint to the board and be someone who can really help bring ideas to the table during the discussions that take place.

“My background is in construction, roadways and utilities, so I do this and the municipal side of it a lot,” White said. “It seemed like an easy way to volunteer.”

Rick Brown has lived within the MSD since 2005 and it was his neighbor and fellow trustee John Cellucci who got him interested in serving on the board after talking to him for years, and it just seemed like the right time to join.

In other news from the meeting, board chair-

man Al Hollon informed the trustees that the off-duty Sheriff’s officers reported 45 citations and 174 warnings given during the month of November.

The board approved to pay the MSD’s current web designer \$1,100 to continue on in that role for the next year.

Trustee Brad Wester informed the MSD that the FEMA beach sand project is complete with the exception for some plantings that they still have to take care of.

“As far as the contract is concerned, they are done with it,” Wester said.

He also stated that the process of gathering easements for homeowners along the beach has begun, in a proactive attempt against future beach projects needed due to storms.

“We’re entering another round of funding because of what just happened,” Wester said.

Trustee Kitty Switkes said it is important for the board to stay on top of the process moving forward, so that they can best inform the residents, because the easement situation can be a confusing thing.

Six walkovers within the MSD that were damaged during Tropical Storm Ian are on the list to be fixed but there is no timetable connected to it at this point.

According to Wester, each damaged walkover has a sign or tape over it to make sure pedestrians steer clear of using it.

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10th ANNUAL Nocatee Chanukah celebration, helicopter gelt to be held Dec. 20

On Tuesday, December 20, at 6:15 p.m. you will witness 10,000 chocolate coins rain down at the dramatic Helicopter Gelt Drop!

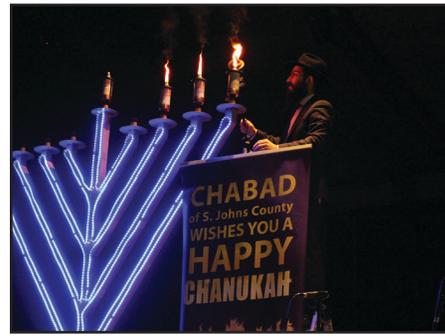
In honor of the 10th annual Chanukah celebration on Dec. 20, 10,000 chocolate coins will rain down from the sky in a dramatic helicopter gelt drop. It will be a spectacular shimmering shower; the children in attendance will rush in safely and collect their treasures.

The celebration will begin at 6:15 p.m. at the Nocatee Spray Park. Families are invited to a Chanukah light show following the kindling of a giant

glowing menorah. The special celebration is free and open to the public.

The show will be accompanied by lively music and delectable Chanukah treats for all. The lighting of a dazzling glow-in-the-dark menorah and the joyous, family atmosphere will be sure to keep children and children-at-heart engaged and entertained throughout the evening.

“The flames of the menorah shine out into the night, reminding us that even when confronted with much darkness, a tiny light can dispel it all,” said Rabbi Mendel Sharfstein, with Chabad of St.



Johns County. “Another act of goodness and kindness, another act of light, can make all the difference.”

As part of a global effort to bring

the message of light, love and warmth to the public, Chabad of St. Johns County (serving the Nocatee, St. Johns and World Golf Village areas) joins thousands of Chabad centers across the globe in staging public Chanukah celebrations.

For more information about all of the Chanukah events and public menorah lighting ceremonies, go to www.JewishStJohnsCounty.com, www.facebook.com/JewishStJohnsCounty, by phone at 904-701-4422 or by email at info@jewishStJohnsCounty.com.

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3 Bedrooms, 4 Bathrooms, 1 Half Bathroom \$1,969,000

Exception Views in Sawgrass Country Club

This beautifully updated in Sandpiper Cove in Sawgrass CC. Cul-de-sac lot, spectacular water to golf views. 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.

3 Bedrooms, 4 Bathrooms, 1 Half Bathroom \$1,969,000

SOLD

Oceanfront Home on Ponte Vedra Blvd.

This oceanfront home on Ponte Vedra Blvd. with 110 ft. of ocean frontage sold for lot value only at **\$10,500,000.**



SOLD

Amazing Vistas in Deercreek Country Club

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. Sellers have many updates including fully renovated kitchen and bathrooms. Don't miss this one!!

4 Bedrooms, 3 Bathrooms, 1 Half Bath \$930,000

Amazing Vistas in Deercreek Country Club

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. Sellers have many updates including fully renovated kitchen and bathrooms. Don't miss this one!!

4 Bedrooms, 3 Bathrooms, 1 Half Bath \$930,000

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5 Bedrooms, 5 Bathrooms, 4 Half Baths, \$7,995,000



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OBITUARIES

**Amy Duran**

Amy Duran, 97, passed away November 12, 2022, in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. She was born in Braddock, Pennsylvania on March 24, 1925, to the late Frank and Rose (Varuolo) Defino. Amy was the eldest of 5 children and, at the age of 18, played a vital role in raising her siblings along with her father when her mother passed away at age 41. During World War II, Amy worked in administrative roles for the Navy Department and Veterans Administration. After the war, she married Edward Matthew Duran, her loving spouse for 67 years, until his death in

2014. Amy was a devoted mother to her four children and after 20 years of child rearing, decided to rejoin the workforce. Amy was a valued, trusted employee everywhere she worked, including the University of Pittsburgh and Jacksonville University. She was smart, a go-getter and, along with Ed, instilled in her children a strong work ethic and dedication to strive for excellence. Amy had many, many friends who loved her for the genuine interest she had in everyone she met, her fun and easy nature, her generous and energetic spirit, and her quiet competitiveness ... especially at the bridge table. Amy enjoyed entertaining (she was a fabulous cook), bridge, playing the piano, watching the Pittsburgh Pirates and golf. Her greatest love, however, was her family. Nothing gave Amy more pleasure than being with her children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and numerous nieces and nephews. They each held a special place in her heart, and until the very end, her greatest joy was their visits or hearing about their latest adventures and accomplishments. Amy

is survived by sons John (Kathy) of Export, Pa., Paul (Debby) of Ponte Vedra, Fla., Ed (Laura) of Jacksonville, Fla. and daughter Roseann of Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla; grandchildren Gregory (Emily), Andy (Lisa), LeAna Kimball (Jake), Matthew (Melissa), Kimberly Lowman (Chad), Patrick (Erika), Joseph (Lani) and Elena; and great-grandchildren Canaan, Bella, Emma Grace, Kylee, Isabelle, Madelyn, Elsie, Berkeley, Anna and Josephine. A Mass of Christian Burial was held at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, December 1 at Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Church in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla., with Reverend John Tetlow as Celebrant. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Duran Genetics Center, Wolfson Children's Hospital, 800 Prudential Drive, Jacksonville, Florida 32207. Please visit the online Tribute at www.quinn-shalz.com.

Arrangements by



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Phone: 904.249.1100 Fax: 904.241.7554

DEATH NOTICES

Ylli Allamani

Ylli Allamani, 63, of Ponte Vedra, Florida, died Dec. 7, 2022. Ponte Vedra Valley Funeral Home, Cremation Center & Cemetery – 904-285-1130 – www.pontevedravally.com

Judy Ann Aldridge

Judy Ann Aldridge, 81, of Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, died Dec. 8, 2022. Ponte Vedra Valley Funeral Home, Cremation Center & Cemetery – 904-285-1130 – www.pontevedravally.com

Pal Cerri

Pal Cerri, 63, of Jacksonville, Florida, died Dec. 4, 2022. Arrangements by Quinn-Shalz Family Funeral Home & Cremation Centre. www.quinn-shalz.com. 904-249-1100

Michael Douglas Denzio

Michael Douglas Denzio, 29, of Jacksonville, Florida, died Nov. 28, 2022. Arrangements by Quinn-Shalz Family Funeral Home & Cremation Centre. www.quinn-shalz.com. 904-249-1100

Donna Lee Green

Donna Lee Green, 76, of Jacksonville, Florida, died Dec. 3, 2022. Ponte Vedra Valley Fu-

neral Home, Cremation Center & Cemetery – 904-285-1130 – www.pontevedravally.com

Barbara Inabinet

Barbara Inabinet, 84, of Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, died Dec. 4, 2022. Ponte Vedra Valley Funeral Home, Cremation Center & Cemetery – 904-285-1130 – www.pontevedravally.com

Richard Joseph Kostecki, MD

Richard Joseph Kostecki, MD, 86, of Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, died Nov. 27, 2022. Arrangements by Quinn-Shalz Family Funeral Home & Cremation Centre. www.quinn-shalz.com. 904-249-1100

Dorothy Ann Kuski

Dorothy Ann Kuski, 90, of Jacksonville, Florida, died Dec. 4, 2022. Arrangements by Quinn-Shalz Family Funeral Home & Cremation Centre. 904-249-1100 www.quinn-shalz.com

Vickie Lacy

Vickie Lacy, 71, of St. Augustine, Florida, died Nov. 30, 2022. Ponte Vedra Valley Funeral Home, Cremation Center & Cemetery – 904-285-1130 – www.pontevedravally.com

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\$2.3 million sidewalk project coming to Palm Valley

By Anthony Richards

County officials held an open house Dec. 8 for the public to see the proposed plans for the Palm Valley sidewalk project.

“It’s very simply about bringing out the community and letting them know that we’ve got a project going on that’s looking to build sidewalks on Palm Valley Road,” County Engineer Duane Kent said.

The open house was held at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center.

According to Kent, the project will consist of two phases down Palm Valley Road, with the first being from Landrum Lane to Canal Boulevard and the second phase would continue it up to TPC Sawgrass.

“The first phase is ready to go to bid, and we recently accepted \$800,000 from the State of Florida through the DOT as a grant fund to help us with the cost of the sidewalk,” Kent said. “With that \$800,000, we have a total project budget of \$2.3 million, which has been approved by the Board of County Commissioners.”

A lighter crowd was on hand for the open house compared to open houses for other projects in the past.

“Sidewalks generally are a pretty simple project, and there are not a lot of people that are directly impacted by the work itself,” Kent said. “There will be a lot of beneficiaries of the work as we move forward.”

Once phase one is through the bidding portion, the contractor has been allotted 180 days, which is about six months, to complete the phase.

At about that time, the phase two designs are expected to be finished and be ready to be bid out as well.

Sidewalks are widely regarded as an increased safety measure because it gets pedestrians away from walking on the roadway and gives them a much safer option.

“There’s been support for a sidewalk in this community for a long time,” Kent said. “Sidewalks are almost a no-brainer. Everyone wants one in their neighborhood, and as St. Johns County grows, we’re requiring developments to put in sidewalks.”

However, Kent stated that the major issue is that sidewalks will be disjointed with gaps between one sidewalk and the next.

“We’ve been really looking to target and fill those gaps in communities like Palm Valley, and really meet those needs as they arise,” Kent said.

Sidewalks can seem like a fairly easy venture, but according to Kent, there are a lot of factors that go into making it happen from an engineering standpoint.

“In a lot of cases sidewalks are very easy to put in, because the roadside is flat and the drainage works, but there are also a lot of cases, especially in one like this, where there are a lot of drainage issues and there are roadside ditches, which you have to go around or sometimes will have to pipe the ditches. Those ditches are also wetlands, so we have to go and get wetland permits from the state and water management district. You don’t just snap your fingers and put a sidewalk in.”

However, the challenges presented with this project have been figured out and Kent is confident in the plan that has been laid out.

After decades of hoping for a sidewalk, it looks like residents will finally see that come to fruition.



Photos by Anthony Richards

Jason Sparks with St. Johns County Public Works talks to residents during the Palm Valley sidewalk open house Dec. 8.



County engineer Duane Kent discusses the project with a resident.

DAVID YURMAN

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David Priest has had a passion for woodworking since he was a child growing up in Massachusetts. He moved to St. Augustine six years ago and owns Old Colony Woodworks, where his hobby has now become his full-time job and he never takes any day or project he works on for granted.

David Priest

As told to Anthony Richards

Tell us a little about yourself and your background.

I am originally from Maine, where I spent the first 25 years of my life and still have a couple of relatives up there.

I always had a passion for woodworking since I was a kid, and I think the creative side of me was inherited from my mother and her father "Gramp."

As the youngest of four boys, I was sort of in the background, and watched my brothers rebuild car engines, bake wedding cakes and write poetry while I chose to tinker with wood.

I eventually got into the world of entertainment, being a district manager for theaters across the Northeast, but all the while never gave up my passion for wood and would make things any chance I got, such as making furniture for the homes my wife and I lived in.

What led you to getting into woodworking full-time?

I kept it up as a hobby over the years, but then a friend of mine's wife passed away from cancer and asked if I could make her cremation box.

I made the box for him, and the funeral director came up to me afterwards and asked if I had made the box and that I should think about doing it for a living.

So, in 2009, I left my corporate job and followed his advice.

We had bought a house in the Old Colony part of Massachusetts, south of Boston, and that's where the name Old Colony Woodworks came from.

Six years ago, we made the move to Florida and St. Augustine, and with all it's history as the oldest city the name Old Colony seemed to still fit, so we kept it.

Is there something you specialize in making?

I started doing a lot more than just funeral boxes, and now I do everything from charcuterie boards and picture frames to furniture and other assorted items.

The customer and the wood pretty much lead where things go, and I try to make sure they are getting what they want and are in search of.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

It's a nice distraction, because when you're there with the wood, you have to give it your full attention, which allows you to kind of get lost in the work and forget about what else is going on in the world.

My brother was a full-time officer in the Air Force and loved woodworking as well, but he passed away from cancer and never got to experience his hobby full-time.

His words really hit me, and I never take any day of woodworking for granted.

I had a customer in Massachusetts that was emotionally upset to the point where he could barely speak over the phone because he had lost his fiancé and wanted me to create her cremation box. I remember, he wanted an owl engraved on it.

Three months later, he was able to talk, and he told me how much he appreciated the work I had done.

It's a tremendous satisfaction to know that I can make an impact on people's lives like that through my work.

I spent 30 years working in the corporate world and was very successful, but I never made a difference like I am now.



Photo by Anthony Richards

David Priest and his wife were recently a vendor at the First Coast Cultural Center's Holiday Shoppes at the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall.

What are some of the challenges you encounter?

You have to take what the wood gives you, and sometimes a person may want a certain wood that is just not available anymore, so you have to improvise.

One of the things I get most passionate about is a particular type of wood called "American Chestnut," which was the primary wood used in construction projects in America going back to the 1800s, but a virus killed all the American Chestnut trees, so that wood is not around anymore.

I have found some reclaimed wood, but that's the only way you can find it anymore. And if you're someone like me and grew up with things made from American Chestnut, you came to appreciate it and miss it.

What do you love most about living on the First Coast?

My wife is a conference planner, so we've been pretty much all over the country, and we eventually had the chance to check out St. Augustine, the fort and everything else it had to offer.

We loved it so much we came back that December to experience Nights of Lights and we knew it was where we wanted to make our home.

We play golf and do a lot of other outdoor activities, and not having to shovel snow during the winter is very nice as well.

One of our Christmas Day traditions is waking up that morning and taking a walk across the Bridge of Lions with friends.



NorthEastFloridaCoastHomes.com

Congratulations to our November Leaders!



Lara Hoffman
Ponte Vedra Beach



Will Landay & Rachael Ridaught
Ponte Vedra Beach



Kelly Whitaker, Wanda Petersen, Megan Hulling
Ponte Vedra Beach



Southern Latitude Group
Nocatee



Kathy Slusser & Jessica Slusser
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DEL WEBB PONTE VEDRA

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Judit Khor (904) 535-6593



TWENTY MILE

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Matt & Naomi (904) 234-5014



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BEACHWALK

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Atlantic Beach becomes LEED Gold certified

The City of Atlantic Beach has achieved LEED Gold certification and is the first city in the world to recertify under the LEED for Cities and Communities Rating System from the pilot version to v4.1 version.

The City of Atlantic Beach is part of a growing group of more than 300 local governments and communities worldwide to be certified using the LEED for Cities rating system.

There are now 20 LEED-certified local governments in Florida. A public celebration program will be held 6 to 7:30 p.m. Dec. 13 at the Adele Grage Cultural Center, 716 Ocean Blvd., in Atlantic Beach. Admission is free and registration is required. Register at: <http://tiny.cc/ABLEEDCelebration>.

The City of Atlantic Beach's efforts to recertify at the Gold level was spearheaded by its citizen-based Environmental Stewardship Committee, working in conjunction with City Planning and Community Development Director Amanda Askew.

The city's predominant work was performed by Principal Planner Brian Broedell. City Commission member Candace Kelly is credited with proposing LEED certification during the 2018 Atlantic Beach City Commission visioning process, and the City Commission continues to steadfast support this seminal environmental initiative.

Atlantic Beach mayor Ellen Glasser said it wasn't enough for the community "to passively appreciate its natural and community assets, and just rely on hope that the next generation would have them."

"This, along with our recently-adopted city vision and Community Action Plan, speak to our community's significant buy-in," Glasser said. "Thanks to our Environmental Stewardship Committee, our staff and other experts, and our local elected officials, but — mostly — I want to thank our citizens. Together, we did this."

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), was created by the

U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) and is the world's most widely used green-building rating program.

LEED is designed to help buildings, communities and cities achieve high performance in key areas of human and environmental health.

LEED for Cities enables cities to measure and track outcomes and be evaluated based on key metrics that include energy, water, waste, transportation, education, health, safety, prosperity and equitability. Performance is tracked through Arc, a digital platform that connects, manages, analyzes and scores sustainability progress using a performance score.

"We're beyond lucky to have such an amazing planning staff in Atlantic Beach that can take a bold Commission idea such as getting LEED for Cities-certified and turn it into a reality. They are truly a class act," said Atlantic Beach City Manager Shane Corbin. "I hope that LEED for Cities can be used as a tool to make this city a leader in environmental protection for years to come."

Atlantic Beach improved its 2019 LEED Silver score of 58 to a LEED Gold score of 67 under the much more robust and rigorous LEED for Cities v4.1 version.

In addition to implementing practical and measurable strategies and solutions aimed at improving sustainability, resiliency, and quality of life, the City of Atlantic Beach also created and passed a Sustainability & Resilience Community Action Plan, which includes aspirational 2050 goals.

"A sustainable Atlantic Beach strives to offer its residents a higher living standard. A LEED Atlantic Beach takes action and delivers measurable outcomes that improves overall quality of life for residents," said Peter Templeton, USGBC's president and CEO. "Given the extraordinary importance of climate protection, building more resilient cities is crucial and the City of Atlantic Beach's LEED Gold certification is a symbol of their leadership."

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Local team responds to shipwreck discovery near Daytona Beach

The Lighthouse Archaeological Maritime Program (LAMP) from the St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum is working with the Florida Department of State Bureau of Archaeological Research and FPAN (Florida Public Archaeology Network) to study a shipwreck that was discovered recently in Daytona Beach Shores. The wreckage began appearing after Hurricanes Ian and Nicole, but it has been partially buried on and off due to the tides.

St. Augustine Lighthouse Archaeologist Chuck Meide has confirmed that the object is, in fact, a shipwreck.

“The shipwreck is most likely a cargo-carrying sailing vessel from the 1800s,” he explained. “It would have likely sailed within sight of the coast and used lighthouses for navigation, though it was probably big enough to cross the Atlantic as well. It was re-buried by the time we got to it, so we didn’t see it at full exposure. We are not sure of its overall size but reports of witnesses said the wreckage was between 80 to 100 feet long.”

Meide and the LAMP team were on site in Daytona Beach Shores on Dec. 5-6, measuring and studying what parts of the ship were protruding above the sand. The wreck is near Frank Rendon Park, 2705 S. Atlantic Ave. in Daytona Beach.

“Here in Florida, we often have storms that reveal cultural material either offshore or right on the beach,” said Secretary of State Cord Byrd. “In these cases, our collective human story is brought to the forefront. The Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources is committed to protecting and promoting these significant submerged cultural resources. The Florida Department of State thanks Florida Public Archaeology Network and Lighthouse Archaeological Maritime Program for their rapid response to this recently exposed wreck on behalf of the state.”

He added that the public is encouraged to contact the Bureau of Archaeological Research when artifacts or sites are exposed on the beach.



Contributed photo

The Lighthouse Archaeological Maritime Program from the St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum works with the Florida Department of State Bureau of Archaeological Research to study a recently exposed shipwreck.

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Wildflower Healthcare continues to offer free dental and medical care to underserved

Wildflower Healthcare at 268 Herbert St. in West St. Augustine, provides free, high-quality dental and medical care to underserved, uninsured adult residents in St. Johns County and neighboring communities.

Since 1995, volunteer health professionals and paid staff have provided compassionate care and health education through clinics and community outreach programs.

The Wildflower Clinic serves uninsured adults 18 years old and older who have an annual income below 200% of the federal poverty level, which is \$55,500 in 2022 for a family of four.

The target patient population includes small business owners, restaurant workers, many new residents of St. Johns County and the homeless population, among others. Community partners, volunteers, individual donors and philanthropic foundations have generously supported the nonprofit with new and existing programs and services.

Recently, the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce welcomed Wildflower Healthcare as a new member and recognized the nonprofit's history with a ribbon cutting and open house. Event



Contributed photo

Wildflower Healthcare commemorates 27 years of service with a recent St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting.

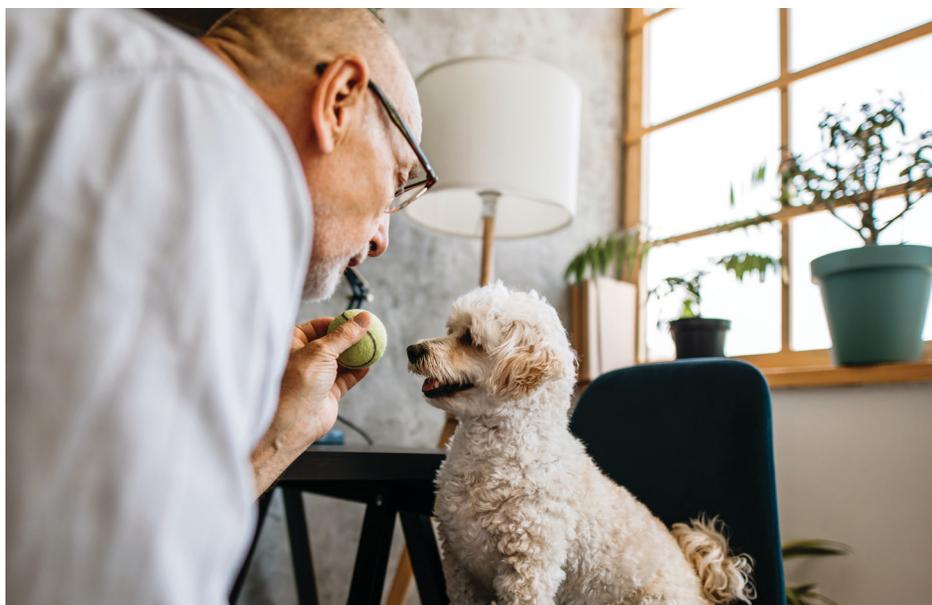
participants also celebrated a building upgrade and mural painting donated by a 10th grade student, Claire Walczak, from the Memorial Presbyterian Church youth group, along with new flooring made pos-

sible by Anastasia Baptist Church.

The event was attended by local businesses, nonprofit partners, volunteers, dignitaries, staff and community members.

Wildflower Healthcare provides much needed dental exams, x-rays, extractions, fillings, dentures, routine cleaning and

WILDFLOWER continues on **Page 37**



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The Recorder's garden columnist Kathy Esfahani of Kathy's Creative Gardens & Nursery shares her tips for growing gorgeous gardens in Northeast Florida.

KATHY'S GARDENING GUIDE

Winter Flowers

"Christmas is a season not only of rejoicing but of reflection." — Winston Churchill



By Kathy Esfahani

We are lucky that the Northeast Florida climate allows us to enjoy flowers blooming all year long! Many flowers are especially suited to the cooler months of winter in our area. Look for these flowers as you add color to your landscape beds and planters:

- Pansies are low-maintenance annuals that feature flowers in various combinations of blues, yellows and whites. Their large blooms are made of five heart-shaped petals, four facing upward and the fifth turned downward. Pansies are a type of viola, cultivated as hybrids. Make sure your pansies get at least six hours of sun per day, keep the soil moist and remove old blooms — these plants will reward you with beautiful color through the winter and

into the early spring.

- Violas are closely related to pansies and also feature blooms of five petals. However, Viola blooms are smaller than Pansy flowers and have two petals pointing up, three facing down. These annuals produce flowers in purples, blues, yellows and whites. Like pansies, violas prefer full to partial sun and moist, but well-drained soil.

- Dianthus flowers come in pinks, purples and whites and have delicate blooms with fringed edges. They grow well in areas of full sun but can tolerate partial shade. When grown organically, dianthus flowers are edible for humans and often used as culinary garnishes. These plants are deer-resistant but may be eaten by rabbits. Use dianthus as borders or splashes of color in garden beds or planters.

- Alyssum means "worth beyond beauty" or "sweetness of the soul." These annuals produce abundant small blooms known for their sweet honey scent. Alyssum flowers are available in white, yellow, pink and purple. Although they prefer full sun, alyssums can tolerate small amounts of shade.



Winter flowers

- Dusty Miller is a flowering shrub with soft, silvery leaves that stand out against darker foliage in a garden. They can sometimes last more than one season but may need cutting back between growth. These plants are also known as "silver ragwort" or "silver dust." The "fuzzy" texture of the leaves helps the plant retain moisture and, therefore, tolerate drier conditions. Although known for the silver leaves, Dusty Miller also produces clusters of small, yellow blooms. Add these plants to your garden as borders, dotted in rock gardens, or grouped together to contrast plants with brightly colored flowers.

- Petunias are easy to grow with lots of light and well-drained soil. Be sure to water regularly but avoid too much water as it can negatively affect the roots. Petunia plants produce large blooms in a variety of vibrant colors. These annuals are perfect for adding color to a garden bed or draping from planters or hanging baskets.

Photos provided by Kathy's Creative Gardens & Nursery

Flower of the Week



Pansies

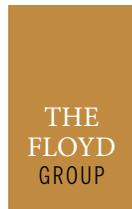
- Snapdragons prefer cooler temperatures and are, therefore, a wonderful winter annual. Named for the snout-like appearance of their blooms, snapdragons are available in white, yellow, orange, pink, red and purple. Children and adults alike cannot help but squeeze the sides of these blooms to see the "jaws" open and shut! Include snapdragons in gardens and planters for a variety of bright colors.

Visit us at the nursery to choose some of these vivid seasonal selections for your landscape. Happy planting!

Flower of the Week: Pansy

Please email Kathy at kcg.pvr@gmail.com for any questions or gardening tips you would like to see in the future. For more information & ideas, visit Kathy's Creative Gardens & Nursery, 196 N. Roscoe Blvd. The phone number is 904-655-7373.

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A golfer participates in the Cathedral Arts Project's sixth annual golf tournament.



Pictured from left are Charles Margiotta, Larry Feldman, Charlie Margiotta and Jerry Kelley.

Cathedral Arts Project Golf Tournament raises \$132,824

On Nov. 28, the Cathedral Arts Project hosted the sixth annual CAP Golf Tournament, presented by Fickling Construction, at Deerwood Country Club.

The event, chaired by CAP board member Alan Fickling, exceeded its goal and raised \$132,824 in support of arts education for children in Northeast Florida. Since its inception, the tournament has raised more than \$620,000. It is the only golf tournament to support arts education along the First Coast.

Despite a rescheduled date due to Hurricane Ian, 27 teams enjoyed a beautiful day on the course. The Cecil W. Powell Co. team took home the grand prize with the best net score of the day, followed by Cornelius, Schou & Leone LLC in second place and Weather Engineers in third.

Golfers, staff and volunteers attended an awards ceremony, with Fickling, CAP Vice President of Development Janette Allen and CAP Vice President of Programs Luisa Reis speaking about the importance of arts education for children in Northeast Florida.

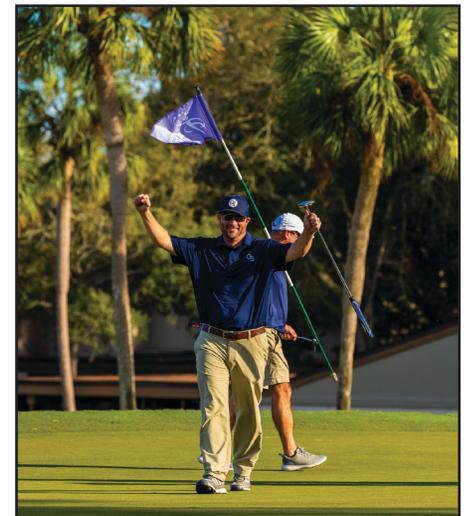
A video showcasing CAP's world drum class at Hyde Park Elementary School was also shown, giving attendees an inside look at a CAP classroom and providing a firsthand account of the impact CAP's programs have on the children who participate.

"It is such an honor to again host this tournament to raise funds that provide essential arts education for the children in our community," said Fickling. "The dedication and generosity of our spon-

sors, committee, volunteers and staff is unmatched as we continue to grow this event and empower every child's creative spirit through the arts."

"If your nonprofit is lucky enough to have a volunteer like Alan Fickling, cherish them," said CAP President and CEO Rev. Kimberly L. Hyatt. "Alan came to me a decade ago with an idea to hold a golf tournament. Not only did he wait a few years until we felt comfortable adding this to our mix, but he took responsibility for bringing his idea to fruition, including planning, fundraising and execution. And he continues to do so year after year."

CAP recognized those who made the tournament a success, including the golf tournament committee: Nader Farhat, PwC; Marty Kern, Constellation Brands; Robbie Manners, Bank of America Private Bank; Steve McCall, Florida Paint Company; Alan Pickert, Terrell Hogan; Larry Turknett, J. Williams Construction;



The Cathedral Arts Project's sixth annual golf tournament was a win for golfers and arts education.

and Bill Warden, Black Knight Financial Services.

The seventh annual CAP Golf Tournament will be held in fall 2023.



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HOLIDAY COCKTAILS WITH A KICK

Jacksonville-based Scoville Vodka releases new habanero flavor

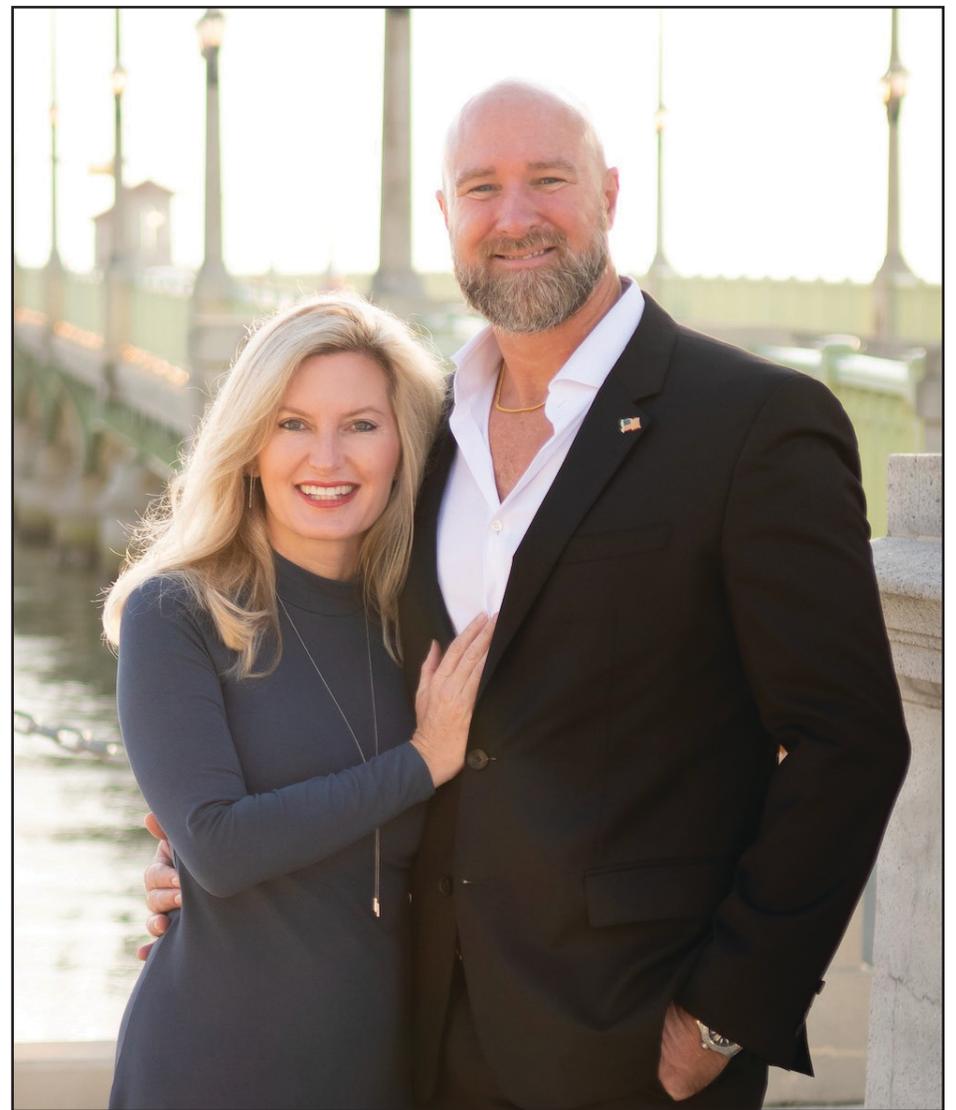
Set your tastebuds on fire. That's what you get when you taste Scoville Premium Vodka. Named after the Scoville Heat Unit (SHU), which measures the heat index of all peppers, Scoville Premium Vodka is a local veteran-owned company produced and bottled by Wholly Spirits LLC in Jacksonville.

The company's products exhibit bold flavors designed to savor, including Scoville Jalapeño Vodka, made with natural jalapeño extract, and new Scoville Habanero Vodka, made with real habanero infusion, for a one-of-a-kind experience.

"Scoville Premium Vodka was created with one goal in mind, to provide the highest quality spirit possible," explained Greg Anderson, who co-owns Scoville Premium Vodka along with his partner,

Dr. Deirdre Leake. "For us, that meant providing flavors that would leave a lasting impression, which is why our vodka is crafted with natural jalapeño extract and real habanero infusion. In addition, we check for standardization of our recipes, as well as clarity, aroma and flavor to ensure that our product is of the highest quality each and every time."

Scoville Premium Vodka is distilled seven times in small batches and crafted with the finest ingredients, including gluten-free, low-sugar corn mash. At 40% ABV / 80 Proof, this ultra-smooth spirit enhances every cocktail, from fruity, refreshing, cool or classic, while providing a unique flavor for those who prefer



Contributed photo

Dr. Deirdre Leake and Greg Anderson are the owners of Scoville Premium Vodka.

HABANERO continues on Page 16

Treasures Inspired by the Sea



Chris Kling, *Translucence*, Oil on canvas, 24" x 48"



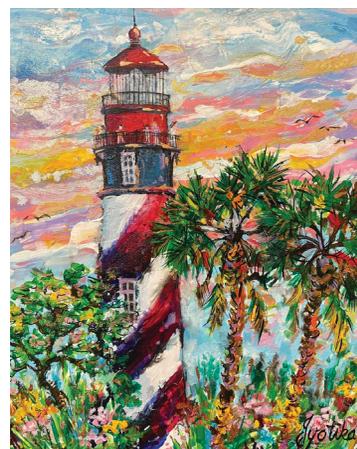
Lorraine Millspaugh, *Homeward*, Acrylic on Canvas, 11" x 14"



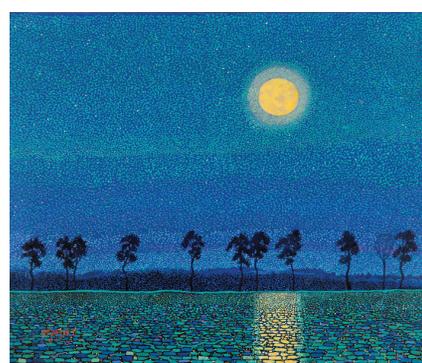
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Jyotika Shroff, *Sweet Glow at Sunset*, Acrylic on Canvas, 20" x 24"



H.M. Saffer II, *Moon Waters II*, Oil on Canvas, 24" x 20"



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United Way 211 a lifeline for many

Every day, United Way 211 in Northeast Florida receives hundreds of calls from people in need.

Mothers searching for diapers for their children. Veterans looking for a warm meal and bed. A grandmother struggling to put food on her family's table. A hard-working person trying to keep his lights on after a recent layoff.

Voices of all ages, races and incomes are found on the other end of the line. They call in hope of a helping hand to ease their burden, support through a particularly tough time and, sometimes, just someone to talk to.

But recently the team at United Way 211 received a different call — a call from a woman named Hazel (not her real name) who simply wanted to say two words: thank you.

"I am eternally grateful," Hazel said. "Thank you for your service. God bless you all. I just can't tell you how much I really appreciate this."

United Way 211 is a vital, life-saving helpline that connects anyone in need to available community resources. The 211

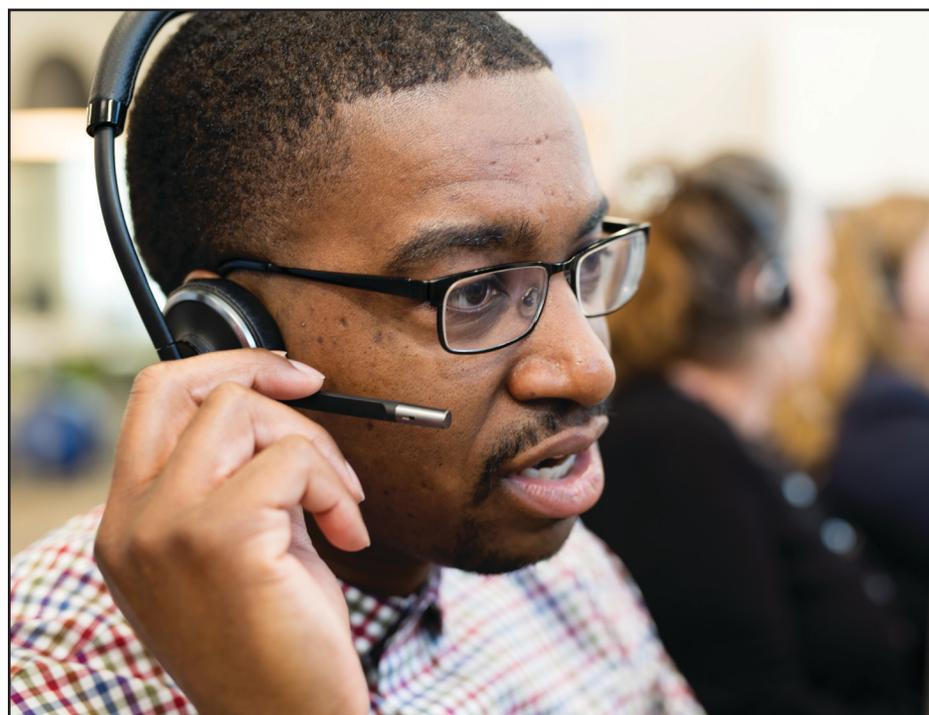
database includes a vast list of organizations and resources like food pantries, shelters, mental-health clinics, financial management services, child-care resources, crisis assistance, employment services and much more.

And it's all free and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The local 211 — part of a national network of 211s across the country — covers nine counties here in Northeast Florida: Baker, Clay, Columbia, Duval, Hamilton, Nassau, Putnam, St. Johns and Suwannee. During 2020, a record-breaking year due to COVID-19, the organization's community resource specialists answered 95,275 calls, connecting these callers to more than 92,800 community service referrals.

211 staff continue to serve on the frontlines of individuals in crisis and families in need in Northeast Florida. In 2021, the staff answered 111,615 calls and issued 96,406 referrals. The highest needs in the community continue to be rent and utility

UNITED WAY continues on **Page 21**



Contributed photo

United Way 211 has proven to be a critical resource for many people in the area.

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IPPOLITA



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Scoville Jalapeño Vodka and Scoville Habanero Vodka

Habanero

Continued from 14

to sip it neat.

“More than anything, this journey is all about trying something new,” said Anderson. “We wanted to create a product that would leave people asking, ‘What did I just experience, and how can I experience it again?’ So, we pushed the boundaries of traditional flavors and ended up with a product that is truly remarkable.

We’ve grown exponentially in just two short years, and I can’t wait to continue growing so that everyone can taste and experience the difference in our premium spirit.”

Founded in 2019 by Anderson and Leake of St. Augustine Beach, Scoville Premium Vodka is available in select markets throughout the state of Florida.

For recipes, and to learn more about the premium spirit, go to scovillevodka.com. Follow along on social media @ ScovilleVodka.



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SCOVILLE VODKA COCKTAILS

Chocolate Melt

3 oz. Scoville Habanero Vodka
1.5 oz. Crème de cacao

Pour ingredients into a shaker filled with ice, shake vigorously, strain into a martini glass and garnish with whipped cream, habanero slice and piece of chocolate.



Chocolate Melt



Air Cooled

Air Cooled

2 oz. Scoville Jalapeño Vodka
1 oz. lime juice
0.25 oz. simple syrup
8 fresh mint leaves

Muddle mint leaves in a pint glass and fill with ice. Combine vodka, lime juice, and simple syrup in a shaker filled with ice. Shake vigorously and strain into the pint glass. Top with soda water and garnish with sprig of mint and jalapeño slices.

Ignition

2 oz. Scoville Habanero Vodka
4 oz. tomato juice
0.25 oz. Worcestershire Sauce
0.25 oz. lemon juice
1 pinch black pepper
1 pinch sea salt

Pour ingredients into a shaker filled with ice, shake vigorously, strain into a Collins glass filled with fresh ice, and garnish with celery stick, habanero slices and a lemon wedge.



Ignition



Happy Jala-Days

Happy Jala-Days

2 oz. Scoville Jalapeño Vodka
1 oz. cranberry juice
1 oz. soda water
0.25 oz. simple syrup
0.25 oz. lime juice

Muddle mint leaves in a shaker. Combine cranberry juice, simple syrup and lime juice. Add ice. Shake vigorously, strain into a rocks glass filled with fresh ice, top with soda water, and garnish with a sprig of mint and a few fresh cranberries.

Holiday shopping last minute gift guide

By Benji Rust

Miriam's Jewelry

Last-minute shopping can feel frantic but worry not. We've got plenty of gift ideas to make holiday magic and wow your loved ones. The best part? They'll all arrive in time for the holidays. It's always the thought that counts, and your special someone will appreciate a gift that feels planned just for them. Read on for all your last-minute gift inspiration.

Shop Locally Owned Businesses

Many shipping deadlines have passed by now, so your best bet for an on-time gift is shopping in person. With so many fun and unique stores around the Jacksonville area, choosing a gift from a local business is a no-brainer.

Your loved one will appreciate a gift that is rare and one-of-a-kind, not something they could get from just any big-box store or online retailer. Plus, service from local businesses is often top-notch, because local owners care much more about their customers and reputation. This high level of service is especially important when purchasing big-ticket items like jewelry. You want to find a jeweler who can get to know you, provide you with personalized service

and help you pick out the perfect gifts for years to come.

Pass Down a Family Heirloom

What do you know? The perfect gift might just be hiding in your closet. Family heirlooms and keepsakes are some of the most treasured gifts. You can't give something more meaningful than a gift your loved one will always remember you by.

Think about any cherished watches, cufflinks, rings or necklaces that may have been gathering dust for years. Now is the time to clean them off and give them a new life. At Miriam's Jewelry, we can transform your heirloom pieces and redesign them with a more modern feel. We specialize in turning the old into new styles your loved ones can wear every day.

Pick the Perfect Gift Certificate

At first glance, gift cards may not seem like the most thoughtful option, but they can be the best gifts of all. The key is showing you chose the gift card specially for the recipient. For example, a gift card for a spa day could be just the luxurious treat your loved one has been craving. Or for your favorite foodie, choose a gift

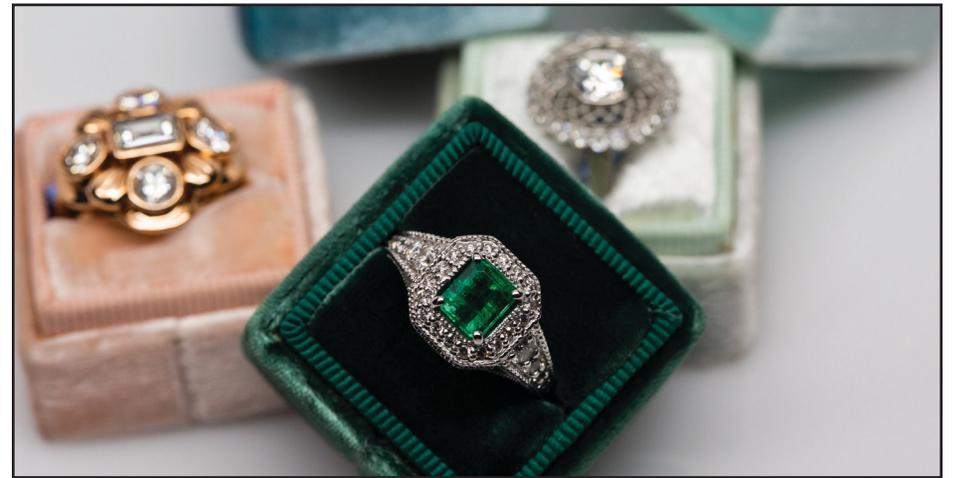


Photo courtesy of Miriam's Jewelry

card to a local restaurant they've been dying to try.

At Miriam's, gift certificates can be put toward custom jewelry pieces. This gives the option for you and your loved one to experience designing a piece of jewelry together after the holiday. Involving your loved one in the consultation process allows them to receive the perfect piece created just for them.

Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Help

As the holidays get closer, it can feel even harder to find the right thing. It's especially tricky when you're shopping for

someone who already has it all. The good news is that you don't have to do it alone. Try brainstorming with a mutual friend or loved one for a fresh perspective. Or ask our expert jewelry consultants at Miriam's. They have years of experience selecting just the right pieces to match your loved one's style and personality.

Benji Rust is a co-owner of Miriam's Jewelry, a family-owned jewelry store in the Sawgrass Village Shopping Center in Ponte Vedra Beach. To learn more about Miriam's and their specialty in custom, heirloom jewelry, go to MiriamsJewelry.com.

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Photo courtesy of Ripple Africa

The Goddard School of Ponte Vedra Beach partnered with Ripple Africa to raise more than \$9,200 to support a preschool in the country of Malawi.

The Goddard School raises more than \$9K to support preschool in Africa

By Anthony Richards

The Goddard School of Ponte Vedra Beach has developed a strong partnership with Ripple Africa in recent years, and this year raised more than \$9,200 through a variety of fundraising efforts during the month of November.

That total donation is more than the \$5,500 raised during the fundraising initiative's initial year in 2019, which would have likely been higher if not for being impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic regulations.

Ripple Africa helps support educational needs of children in Africa, and the money raised by The Goddard School will go towards helping support a preschool in Malawi, which according to Kay Yoder, director of U.S. operations with Ripple Africa, is one of the least developed countries in the world.

"This time of year is an opportunity to

make an impact and to count the blessings we have and discover where we can best give back," said Magan Lowery, director of education at The Goddard School of Ponte Vedra Beach.

According to Lowery, \$80 will support one child for an entire school year, so the funds raised by The Goddard School will support 115 students in Malawi.

The school's goal from the beginning has been to reach \$10,000 in donations. A goal that will remain heading into the campaign next year.

"Although COVID struck halfway into their efforts and sidelined all plans to reach their \$10,000 goal, the desire to continue the race never faded," Yoder said.

The Goddard School has eight classrooms, and each took part in the fundraising effort by coming up with ways to raise money.

"Those efforts were highlighted during the week of Nov. 14, in conjunction

GODDARD continues on Page 19



CAVIAR COLLECTIONS

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www.CityStAug.com
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The Nights of Lights and the park and ride shuttle are produced by the City of St. Augustine with funding assistance from the St. Johns County Tourist Development Council.

Goddard

Continued from 18

with World Kindness Day,” Lowery said. “It was definitely a lot of fun to see the students involved, and we look forward to continuing our partnership with Ripple Africa for years to come.”

Some of the creative fundraising ideas included a youth bake sale, virtual walk-athon, raffle baskets and an art gallery display.

“Classroom teachers came up with creative ideas for how the money could be raised throughout November,” Yoder said. “This has been an ‘all hands-on deck’ effort with students, teachers, administrators and parents involved in raising money to provide the gift of education to children living halfway around the world, who otherwise would not have this opportunity.”

The cause is one that is close to the heart of the entire staff at The Goddard School and was something that the students could relate to, because they were helping others of a similar age.

“We care deeply about childhood education no matter where in the world it is taking place,” Lowery said. “We’re striving to build the whole child, and that includes exposing them to diversity at a young age.”



The Goddard School of Ponte Vedra Beach partnered with Ripple Africa to raise more than \$9,200 to support a preschool in the country of Malawi.



The Goddard School had a goal of raising \$10,000, which will be goal again next year.



Photos courtesy of Ripple Africa

The money raised by The Goddard School will help support 115 African preschool students for an entire year.



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Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra Beach recognized for charitable giving



The Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra Beach was recently recognized for being among the top Rotary clubs in Northeast Florida in charitable giving. District Gov. Jeff Michelman visited the club Dec. 1 to present banners recognizing the achievement. Pictured from left are Ponte Vedra Beach Rotarians Rob Stursberg, Immediate Past President Lori Anderson, Michelman and current President Ronald “Doc” Renuart.

Year-end gifts to Daniel make a lasting difference

Year-end donations offered during this season of giving can make a crucial difference all year long for kids at Daniel, Florida’s oldest child-serving nonprofit.

For more than 138 years, the staff at Daniel has worked each day with thousands of local children struggling to overcome the emotional and physical damage caused by abuse, neglect and abandonment. The agency’s caring staff also works to help at-risk families to address problems that risk causing lasting damage to children.

Gifts that the Northeast Florida-based nonprofit receives each December make an enormous impact throughout the

year, helping Daniel continue providing counseling for abused children, connecting neglected or abandoned children with local foster families, providing homeless teens with shelter, and strengthening or reuniting at-risk families.

Daniel’s experienced team can provide the support and tools needed to restore the smiles of children who’ve suffered at no fault of their own, but they need the public’s help to do it.

Go to danielkids.org or call the agency at 904-296-1055 to learn how to help Daniel improve the odds for kids in the area.

10 gift ideas for the people who love cooking

Many people know someone who loves spending lots of time in the kitchen. Certain home cooks may enjoy whipping up favorite recipes, while others might get excited about experimenting with new flavors and ingredients.

A love of cooking paves the way for many different gifting opportunities. Food-related gifts also come in a wide variety of price points, making it easy for shoppers to spend as little or as

COOKING continues on **Page 21**



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Cooking

Continued from 20

much as they want. Check out these 10 gift ideas for the foodie on your holiday shopping list.

1. Sheet pans: They may not seem like the most high-tech tools of the kitchen, but sheet pans are among the most versatile. They can be used for cookies, sheet pan cakes, oven-frying cutlets or fries, or even serving as the perfect bases for candy brittles.

2. Air fryer tool set: By now many people have hopped on the air fryer bandwagon, but they may not have all of the accessories to take air frying to the next level. From spatulas to tongs to silicone brushes, an air fryer tool set can make meals even more delicious.

3. Dutch oven: You'd be hard-pressed to find a more hard-working tool in the kitchen than a Dutch oven. These heavy, often enameled cast iron vessels come in various quart sizes. They can be used to cook stews, breads, cakes, and much more.

4. Kitchen compost bin: Home cooks who want to cut down on waste will appreciate a countertop compost bin to gather food scraps.

5. Serving board: The rise in cheese and charcuterie boards means cooks will need something attractive to serve their spreads. Wooden and stone boards are attractive when serving sliced cheeses, crackers, chutneys, and other appetizer.

6. Electric wine opener: Wine is the perfect complement to many dishes, and what easier way to open bottles than with an electric wine opener? Many are

compatible with almost any bottleneck and can open several bottles on a single charge.

7. Spiralizer: The trend for pasta alternatives continues, and having a spiralizer that can turn vegetables like zucchini into spiraled "noodles" will be handy in most kitchens.

8. Apron and accessories: Home cooks need to protect their clothing in the kitchen. A fashionable apron and matching oven mitts can make a statement and keep clothes clean.

9. Meat delivery: The number of

direct-to-home meat shipping providers continues to grow. Have quality cuts of meat delivered right to a home cook's house so that he or she can cut back on trips to the store.

10. New blender: Today's blenders can crush ice, process foods, puree, and chop foods. These versatile appliances make a welcome addition to any kitchen.

Stock up on food-related gifts now for those people on your holiday shopping list who love to cook.

United Way

Continued from 15

assistance.

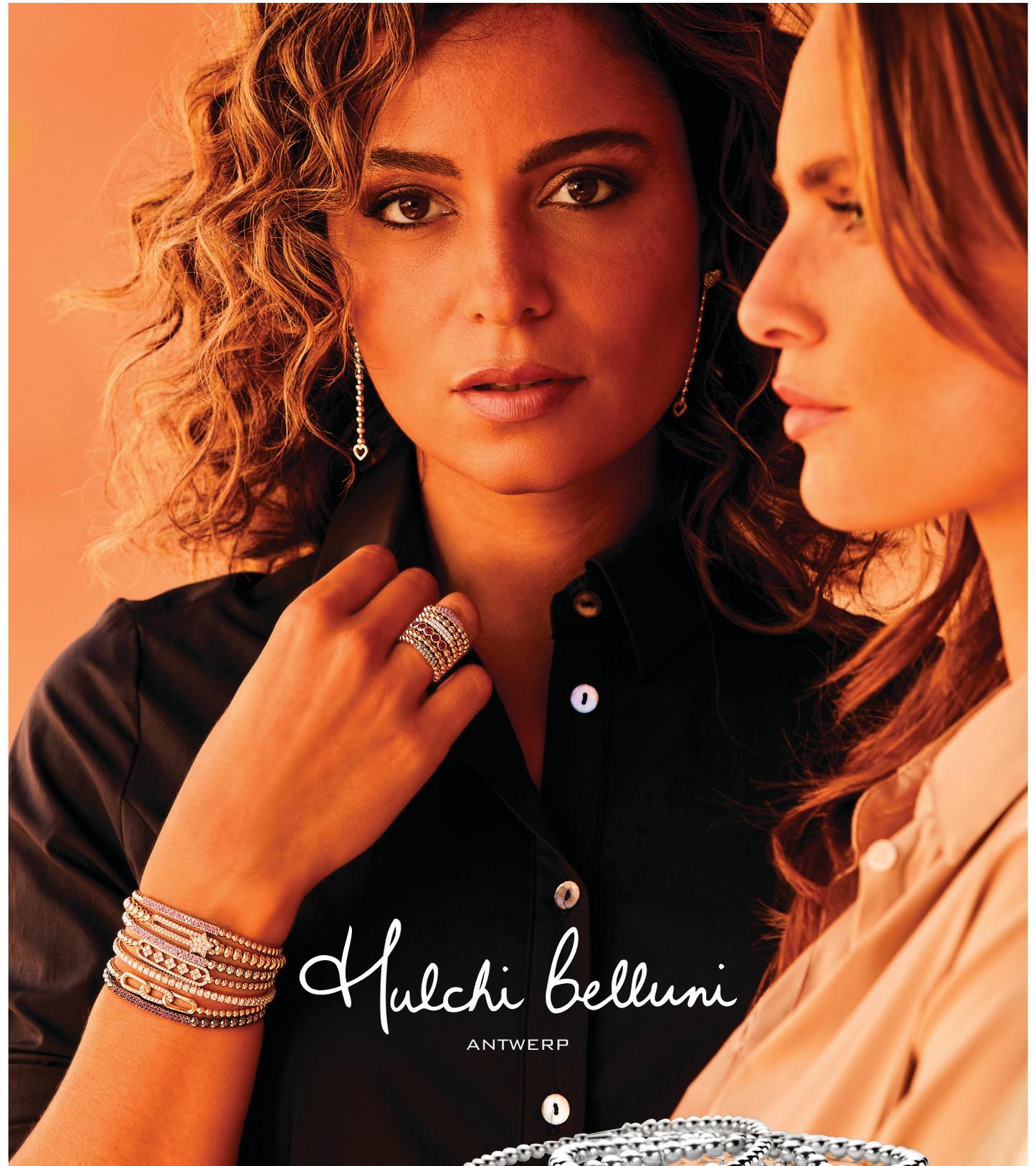
United Way 211 also provides the infrastructure for other critical support services, including new initiatives such as Mission United's dedicated care coordination for veterans and Ride United's transportation and meal-delivery programs.

This summer, United Way 211 soft-launched the 988 short dial for quicker access to mental health care in partnership with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. 988 officially launches nationwide in January. With this lifeline expansion comes the addition of a dedicated team of trained crisis specialists to the Northeast Florida 211 team and the opportunity to save more lives.

"We are thrilled to have the additional resources needed to save more lives," said Jeff Winkler, head of basic needs at United Way of Northeast Florida who oversees United Way 211. "This 988 expansion will allow us to hire highly trained specialists certified in crisis and suicide de-escalation while also freeing up our information and referral lines for additional call volume. We're grateful for this new opportunity and the lives we will change because of it."

In the midst of all of this growth, the United Way 211 team is also planning for the future: investing in new technology to reach more people, further increasing staff to answer more calls, and forging new partnerships to expand the current resource database.

To help contribute to this effort, go to unitedwaynefl.org/give.



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Council on Aging is there for local seniors and caregivers with your support

Council on Aging (COA) has been serving St. Johns County's older adults, their families and caregivers since 1973. COA is dedicated to being there for local seniors and caregivers and supporting them in living their best lives at every age. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, COA is able to accomplish this expansive mission through the generosity of donors and the caring commitment of local volunteers.

"At COA, we consider it a privilege and an honor to serve our community's elders," explained COA Executive Director Becky Yanni. "As a nonprofit organization, we cannot do it without the support of the entire community to accomplish this important mission."

COA serves as an advocate for quality of life and independence for those who need it, providing services that help older adults remain in their own homes where they are most comfortable for as long as possible. These support services include Meals on Wheels, prescription assistance,

minor home repairs, basic lawn care, adult daycare and transportation services. Services are available to anyone in St. Johns County, and may be paid for privately, or if you are over 60 and qualify, may be subsidized.

COA operates six lifelong learning and senior centers throughout St. Johns County where residents can continue to learn, grow and connect with the community. Among their offerings are classes, activities and clubs where residents may meet and pursue common interests, including the COA Travel Club. The centers also offer support groups, including caregiver support, grief support and Parkinson's support.

In the northeastern area of the county, there are two COA centers: THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center at 175 Landrum Lane in Ponte Vedra Beach, and the COA Center at Flagler Health+ Village at Nocatee at 351 Town Plaza Ave., Suite 205, in Ponte Vedra.

Local resident Kate Thomas is a par-

ticipant at THE PLAYERS Senior Center in Ponte Vedra Beach where she enjoys studying tap dancing and playing bridge. Kate had this to share about her experience at the center:

"It's the difference between being alive and not being alive," she said. "I like staying connected. It gives you life!"

COA also offers a ground-breaking program called IMEP, the Integrative Memory Enhancement Program. IMEP is an original, research-based program designed to maximize brain health and minimize the progression of memory loss and dementia. IMEP is offered in a relaxed, classroom setting at convenient locations throughout the county, including at COA's Ponte Vedra Memory Care Center at 1048 A1A N. in Ponte Vedra Beach. For more information about IMEP, go to coasjc.org/imepsjc. To sign up to try a free class, contact COA's Catherine Tupper at 904-729-9535 or ctupper@coasjc.org.

COA offers caregiver education programs, support groups and needs

assessments through their Community Care-Giving program. To schedule a free caregiver needs assessment, call 904-209-3674 or email caregiving@stjohnscoa.com. For more information, go to coasjc.org/caregiver-support.

In addition to these services, COA serves as a trusted, one-stop information resource for seniors and their adult children and caregivers who are seeking information, direction to resources, guidance and support.

Whether you are seeking adventure and personal growth, or in need of support services to maintain your independence at home, COA is there for you. For more information, go to coasjc.org or call 904-209-3700. To stay up to date on the latest news for seniors in St. Johns County, sign up to receive COA's e-newsletter at coasjc.org/sign-up.

To support COA's work in the community, go to coasjc.org/donate. Donations may also be mailed to COA at 180 Marine St., St. Augustine, FL 32084.

Gifts for people who love the great outdoors


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Certain people feel right at home in the great outdoors. With the sun on their faces and the wind in their hair, rock scramblers and kayaking buffs simply can't get enough of being outside in the elements.



Outdoor enthusiasts need reliable gear to make their experiences that much more enjoyable. Brandon Gaille Small Business & Marketing Advice reports that \$230.6 billion was spent worldwide on sportswear and outdoor apparel in 2021. However, there's always room to improve on adventures large and small, and holiday shoppers can keep these items in mind as they look for items for their favorite nature lover this season.

• **Plasma lighter:** A plasma lighter can start fires in conditions that aren't conducive to other fire-starting measures. Plasma lighters are water- and wind-resistant and work in nearly all weather conditions. Saberlight even makes a rechargeable option with USB charging cable.

• **Lantern:** Outside magazine recently named the BioLite AlpenGlow 250 as its new favorite road trip item. It can be used in a variety of settings, including inside a tent or at a hunting cabin, and produces customizable illumination.

• **Backpack cooler:** Yeti is known as a leader in coolers, and the Yeti Hopper Backflip Soft Cooler makes carrying food and beverages even more convenient. This product is a backpack and a cooler, so it's a hands-free and portable option

when out in nature.

• **Hiking socks:** Keeping feet cool and comfortable is essential on hiking trips. Injinji socks are made from CoolMax fibers that help provide a blister-free wilderness

experience designed to minimize friction.

• **Waterproof backpack:** Whether a loved one spends time in or near the water or just wants to safeguard his or her belongings in inclement weather, a waterproof backpack is the ideal outdoor gift. It's easy to clean and keeps items inside dry. IDRYBAG Waterproof Backpack is one to consider.

• **Lightweight sleeping bag:** Maybe someone's sleeping gear needs an overhaul? Enlightened Equipment offers an 850-fill, zero-degree sleeping bag that is warm, but only weighs 1.5 pounds. That helps free up space and lessens hikers' loads when carrying gear on the trail.

• **Power bank/solar charger:** Many people can't live without their devices, even when out in the great outdoors. Since you can't plug a phone into a tree, a portable solar charger and power bank is key. The BioLite SolarPanel 5+ comes with its own built-in battery, so a person can capture the sun's rays during the day and save some power reserves for charging after sunset.

These are just a few of the innovative items that can appeal to outdoor enthusiasts on your holiday shopping list.

St. Francis House gets holiday gift from THE PLAYERS



Contributed photo

THE PLAYERS Championship recently made a \$50,000 donation to The St. Francis Housing Crisis Center.

The St. Francis Housing Crisis Center recently received a surprise \$50,000 donation from THE PLAYERS Championship,

which will help the organization continue to provide shelter and services for homeless families in St. Johns County.

St. Francis House and Port in the Storm Homeless Youth Center assist those experiencing homelessness — men, women, families and youth — with shelter, comprehensive services and access to the resources and support they need to escape homelessness and maintain their housing.

“As more community members here in Northeast Florida find themselves in need of shelter, food and housing resources this holiday season, the team here at THE PLAYERS knew we had to help support this organization that does so much good for our local community,” said Emily Bellock, director, Community Outreach THE PLAYERS. “Our hope is that this gift will make the holiday season a little bit brighter here in Northeast Florida.”

St. Francis House is the only program of its kind in Northeast Florida, and it has been particularly impacted by the recent hurricanes in the region as many of the

people it serves have been displaced from their own homes and their own facility sustained substantial damage as a result of the storms.

“We are so appreciative,” said Judy Dembowski, executive director of St. Augustine Society. “These dollars will be going toward building onto our street outreach team. We want to add a person who will specifically be out there trying to engage our homeless youth and help them work towards a better future. This money will go to getting them the direct support that they need to help end their homelessness. Without organizations like THE PLAYERS, we would not be able to do all the fabulous work we do to get people off the streets and into their own homes again.”

To learn more about the charitable impact of THE PLAYERS Championship, go to THEPLAYERS.com/charity.

Experiential gifts for kids

Experiential gifts are often associated with adults and their bucket lists, but kids have much to gain from being gifted experiences as well. In addition to the lasting memories inspired by experiential gifts, such offerings also get kids up and out of the house. Parents recognize that’s not always so easy in the digital age. The following are a number of experiences that kids of all ages can enjoy.

- A day at the local zoo or museum
- A trip to a trampoline park
- Tickets to a sporting event, concert or live show
- Music, art or cooking lessons
- A paint and sip (juice) event with one or both parents
- A day at a nearby national park

- A camping trip
- Horseback riding lessons
- Tickets to an amusement park
- A day at a local arcade
- A helicopter ride
- A day on the beach
- Gymnastics lessons/classes
- A trip to the bowling alley with friends
- Ice skating lessons
- A round of mini golf
- Jewelry-making lessons/classes
- A fishing trip

There’s no shortage of experiences that can benefit children’s lives. That’s something holiday shoppers can keep in mind as they shop for the perfect gifts for youngsters on their shopping list this December.

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Heroes Gala celebrates success of Operation New Uniform

By Jennifer Logue

Honoring the service and sacrifices of U.S. military men and women was the theme of the ninth annual Heroes Gala to benefit Jacksonville-based Operation New Uniform.

Held Dec. 3 at the Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa, the gala attracted hundreds of supporters of the nonprofit that provides military veterans and spouses with free training programs that help them make the transition to the civilian workforce. In addition to cocktails and dinner, the evening featured both live and silent auctions to support veterans' training and networking programs.

"FOX & Friends" host Brian Kilmeade, who served as master of ceremonies, noted that Ponte Vedra was the perfect location for the charity benefit.

"People here care about this country," Kilmeade said. "They bleed red, white and blue — and when people want to be in the land of the free, they come to Ponte Vedra ..."

Kilmeade said strong support for the nation's military can be found among people on both sides of the political aisle.

"I think people have a sense of awe for people who serve," he said, adding that most Americans recognize that serving in the military requires men and women to put their lives on hold and make countless sacrifices.

The challenge comes, he said, when it comes

HEROES continues on **Page 25**



Photos by Jennifer Logue

Lt. Col. Allen West, Michele McManamon, Brian Kilmeade, Ingrid Piedrahita Morales of presenting sponsor Boeing and U.S. Representative-elect Aaron Bean.

EST. 2020 **THE YARDS**

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Allison and Adam Dillon



Ron Autrey



Lt. Col. Allen West and Cindy Cooper with Mary and Scott Brady.



Photos by Jennifer Logue

Wounded Warrior Project CEO Mike Linnington and wife Brenda Linnington.

Heroes

Continued from 24

time to leave the military.

“The military prepares you for everything, but it doesn’t prepare you to take off your uniform,” Kilmeade said.

That’s where organizations like Operation New Uniform come in. Since its inception, CEO Michele McManamon told attendees, ONU has provided training to 400 veterans and spouses, boasting a 97% success in helping them transition to well-paying positions in the civilian workforce.

“These are careers, not jobs,” she stressed.

‘Increased Devotion’

A special highlight of the evening was an address by former Congressman Lt. Col. Allen West, who drew inspiration from President Abraham Lincoln’s Get-

tysburg Address in calling for “increased devotion for those who are willing to give the last full measure of devotion.”

“My father served in World War II, and he told me, ‘Son, there is no greater honor than to wear the uniform of the United States of America,’” West said. “It irks me no end that we have to be here tonight. We have veterans we need to be here for tonight. We have to do better in showing increased devotion to them. When you take off that uniform, we need to have an organization like ONU.”

At a time when suicide among veterans has reached epidemic proportions, West called on attendees to continue to support America’s military men and women as they return to civilian life.

“Especially at the holiday season, there should not be a veteran who feels they are all alone, that this life is no longer worth living,” he said. “I challenge you every single day: We must give them that increased devotion.”



Leighton Tesche and Bob Buehn



Lance and Kristi Brown



Tamara and Doc Renuart



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Dec. 21-24-25

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Pace girls, team members and officers from the Jacksonville Sheriff's office hit the runway at the 5th Annual Fall into Fashion by the Sea Show at Casa Marina Hotel.



Pace Jacksonville's Board of Directors with Executive Director Chantell Miles.

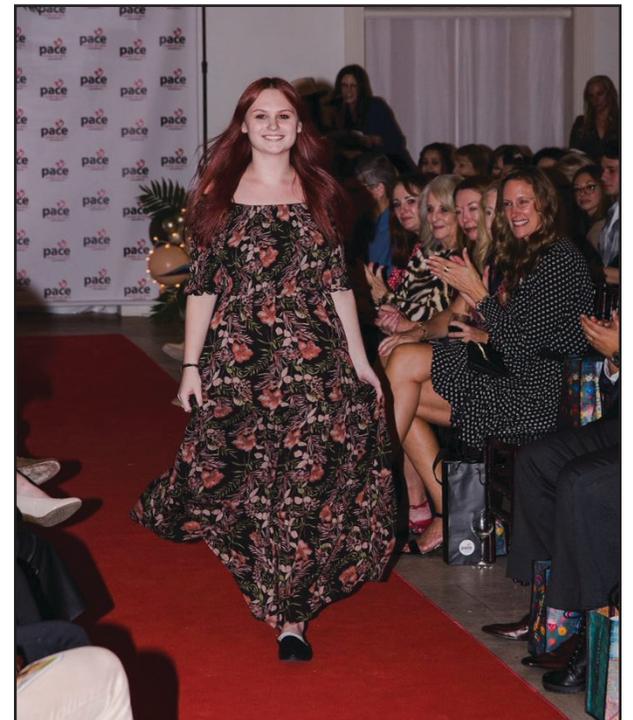
Contributed photos



Synayah, 17, walks along the runway.



Patti Hughes, left, founder and CEO of Natural Life, and Charlie Christenson, founder and CEO of Boob-eez.



Rheanna, 15, modeled styles from Jaffi's and Natural Life.

Pace Jacksonville girls hit the runway for fashion show

Recently, 13 Pace Jacksonville girls hit the runway for the 5th Annual Fall into Fashion by the Sea Show at Casa Marina Hotel. The fashion show is a community favorite and Pace Jacksonville's largest fundraiser of the year, raising nearly \$40,000 to support academic and social

services for at-promise girls.

More than 100 people attended the fashion show, cheering on Pace girls as they modeled attire from Jaffi's, Natural Life and T-Dubs. All clothes modeled by the girls were donated by the fashion sponsors.

"Our girls look forward to the fashion show all year," said Chantell Miles, executive director of Pace Jacksonville. "Being embraced by the community is an empowering moment in a girl's life and is an important part of the Pace journey for many girls. We are incredibly grateful for our community's generosity and shared vision in empowering our girls."

Each model had an opportunity to style their own look — validating their unique experiences and expressions.

"When you come to Pace, you have a whole community who is here to back you up," said Synayah, 17, Pace girl and model at the fashion show. "You have a whole bunch of people who support you, care about you and believe you will succeed in life."

Pace is a transformational program that not only empowers girls to reach their highest potential, but shows them that a life of love, success and happiness is possible for them.

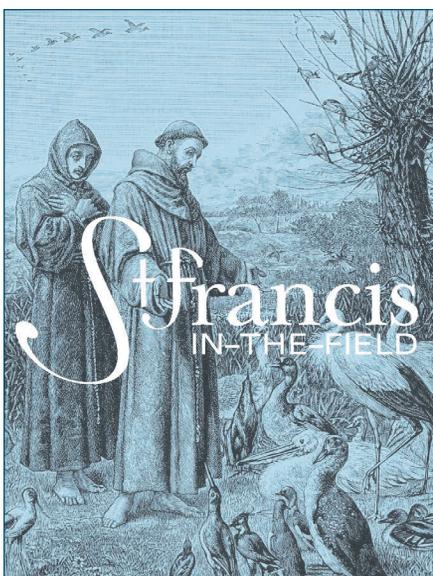
For many girls, Pace is a safe space where they know they will be cared for, and their needs will be met. Pace's model



Each model had an opportunity to style their own look, validating their unique experiences and expressions.

aims to ensure that things like technology, transportation and finances do not become a barrier to providing the holistic services that girls need.

Since its founding in 1985, Pace Jacksonville has served more than 3,000 girls throughout Duval County. To donate or enroll a girl, call 904-448-8002 or go to pacecenter.org/locations/jacksonville.



CHRISTMAS SERVICES

- Christmas Eve 12/24:
 - 2:00 p.m. Traditional Christmas Service
 - 4:00 p.m. Children's Christmas Pageant
 - 8:00 p.m. Traditional Christmas Service with Candle Lighting
- Christmas Day 12/25
 - 10:00 a.m. Christmas Service

St. Francis in-the-Field Episcopal Church
 895 Palm Valley Road, Ponte Vedra
stfrancisintheField.org
 904-615-2130

DONNA Foundation reports 24% increase in families served

The DONNA Foundation recently released its annual impact report, documenting the foundation’s work and contributions to the breast cancer community during the 2021-22 fiscal year (July 2021 through June 2022).

The report reflects a continued increase in requests for assistance received by the foundation. During the 2021-22 fiscal year, The DONNA CareLine served 1,891 patients and their families — a 24% increase over the prior year. More than 51% of the patients and families served by the CareLine reported an annual income of less than \$24,000 per year.

These metrics demonstrate the link between the continuing financial challenges of living with breast cancer and the current volatility of the economy, including rising interest rates, inflation and the increased cost of basic needs.

To address these challenges, The DONNA Foundation delivered \$662,165 in financial services including \$90,000 in direct financial aid to families in need. In-person programming resumed in 2021, celebrating survivorship, education and awareness, and bringing in much-needed funds to help meet the increased demand.

“Coming back together safely to celebrate survivorship in the 2021-2022 fiscal year was a true honor,” said Amanda

Napolitano, executive director of The DONNA Foundation. “Looking back at the impact report, we know that the need is higher than ever in our community and across the country. Thankfully, the increased need has been met with the fearless support of our community and corporate partners, runners, fundraisers, volunteers and donors. The organization is well positioned to continue our efforts as we celebrate our 20th anniversary year.”

Additional highlights from the Annual Impact Report include:

• **Top assistance provided:** Requests for assistance with housing were the most frequently resolved issues, with 611 cases; utility payment relief followed with 483 cases; transportation to treatment rounded out an additional 304 cases. Additional issues included co-pay assistance (225 cases), food financial assistance (119 cases) and deductible payment support (75 cases). In total, The DONNA Foundation resolved more than 2,644 issues.

• **Celebrating survivorship, together:** The DONNA Foundation’s signature race series and awareness events transitioned to a hybrid in-person and virtual approach as the COVID-19 pandemic continued, bringing together people worldwide across the organization’s three signature events, DONNA Marathon Weekend, THE

PLAYERS DONNA 5K presented by Nimnicht Family of Dealerships and the Black Knight DONNA Mother’s Day 5K. Together, these programs engaged people from 866 cities, all 50 states and eight countries.

• **Revenue impacts:** As The DONNA Foundation transitioned back to in-person events for the 2021-22 fiscal year, the organization balanced the increase in necessary funds and expenditures to operate both in-person and virtual events. The financial health of the organization is strong, raising \$1,630,940 in total support and revenue this year, an increase of 26% over last year.

• **Fundraising and services:** The foundation successfully provided more than \$662,165 in financial services to breast cancer patients and families, including \$90,000 in direct financial aid; designated \$25,000 to the DONNA Research Program, to launch the inaugural DONNA Breast Cancer Research Seed Grant Program; engaged more than 72 community and corporate partners and 125 fundraisers; and secured nearly \$400,000 through peer-to-peer fundraising.

The full report is available for review at thedonnafoundation.org/impact-financials. To support the foundation’s continued work, go to thedonnafoundation.org/support.

Last-minute holiday shopping tips

Some people wait until the last minute to do their holiday shopping. The following tips can help those who typically wait until the last minute to check names off their lists.

• **Utilize free shipping services or in-store pickup.** Many online retailers charge a premium for expedited shipping. Try to stick to shopping at online retailers that offer free shipping or in-store pickup, even in the eleventh hour.

• **Create a budget.** Make a list of how much you want to spend on each person, and stick to that limit for each person. Move on to the next store if you didn’t find what you need in your price range.

• **Establish a time limit.** Stores have strategies in place to keep shoppers in their establishments longer, hoping you’ll make impulse buys. Set an alarm on your watch or phone for each store so you get what you need and get out on time.

• **Choose one-size-fits-all gifts.** Think about a gift that can be purchased for multiple people so you can save time shopping for individualized gifts for everyone. For example, print a personalized photo calendar for several members of your family. You also can purchase multiple subscriptions or memberships to zoos or magazines for people on your list. Streamlining gifting in this way may save money as well as time.

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Contributed photos

The Pratt family poses in front of their house, decorated by FPL “elves” to brighten the winter season. On Dec. 5, FPL worked with Wounded Warriors to surprise local Army veteran Daryl Pratt at his St. Augustine home with some holiday cheer.

FPL decorates veteran’s home with energy-efficient display

On Monday, Dec. 5, Florida Power & Light Company “elves” decorated the St. Augustine home of a U.S. Army veteran, his wife and their three children for the holidays with thousands of LED lights, solar-powered decorations and other energy-efficient décor.

An annual tradition, this celebration

marks the 15th consecutive year of FPL’s holiday program, which gives back to local heroes for their commitment to the nation and the community.

Daryl Pratt served in the U.S. Army for nearly nine years as a staff sergeant. During his service, he advanced to platoon leader, overseeing 150 soldiers and was

deployed several times. Pratt medically retired due to injuries sustained on the job, although serving his country was what he wanted to do forever.

Pratt volunteers around his community to help his neighbors with home repairs, even mowing their lawns when needed, and is an advocate for the elderly. He is

passionate about wildlife conservation and last year raised more than \$100,000 for the local chapter of Ducks Unlimited, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of wetlands and associated upland habitats.

Pratt and his wife, Stacey, have three young children. Stacey Pratt and the Wounded Warrior Project partnered with FPL to surprise her husband this holiday season.

This Christmas Season give One day of shelter....

If you were homeless what would one day of shelter mean to you? It means a bed to sleep in, a safe place, enough food to be full, a shower, clean clothes and most of all, help from people who care.

What does one day of shelter cost? Just \$43
 Just \$43 to open the door to a new beginning.
 The journey out of homelessness begins with “one day of shelter”.
 You can help start that journey with your gift of \$43.

Without **YOU** the journey will not begin.

More than 2000 years ago an innkeeper gave shelter to a family and changed the course of history. YOU can change the course of history for someone experiencing homelessness with your gift.

Yes, I will give shelter and start the journey out of homelessness for a person in need.
 Please accept my Christmas gift of...

\$43 - one day of shelter \$129 - 3 days of shelter
 \$301 - one week of shelter Other

Visit stfrancisshelter.org and click on donate now to make your gift online.

St. Francis House & Port in the Storm are programs of St. Augustine Society, Inc. A nonprofit organization EIN 59-2475614. Gifts are tax deductible.

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- EMAIL YOUR HOLIDAY CARDS & PARTY INVITES!
- THINK REUSABLE OVER SINGLE-USE



Florida Power & Light Company “elves” decorated the home of a veteran and his family on Dec. 5 with thousands of LED lights, solar-powered decorations and other energy-efficient décor.

Volunteers build deck, wheelchair ramp for veteran

The St. Johns Housing Partnership, Bartram Trail Rotary, Creekside High Engineering Club and Builders Care came together Dec. 3 in Northwest St. Johns County to build a much-needed deck and wheelchair ramp for a disabled veteran.

“Everyone pulled together to make this happen,” said Bartram Trail Rotary Club President Jose Gavarrette. “Giving back to the community is a big part of what we do in Rotary. Thanks to Andy Chambers of MasterCraft Builder Group, the St. Johns Housing Partnership along with Builders Care and the Creekside High Engineering Club as well as all the many other dedicated volunteers.”

Creekside students under the guidance of teacher Kevin Davenport are regular volunteers for these kinds of projects.

“Working on St. Johns Housing Partnership volunteer projects is more than learning skills; they create an impactful, real-world experience for my students,” said Davenport.

Go to sjhp.org for more information or to donate to the St. Johns Housing Partnership.



Pictured from left are Parker Rowland, Builders Care; Jose Gavarrette, Bartram Trail Rotary Club; Cody Stanley, St. Johns Housing Partnership; Andy Chambers, MasterCraft Builder Group.



Contributed photos
Creekside High Engineering Club's Samba Tumbi, Kylen Elliott, Audrey O'Hara and teacher Kevin Davenport, pictured from left.



St. Johns Housing Partnerships Gene Knigge Jr., Jay Ferrell, Holly Stanley and Cody Stanley.



Volunteers build a deck and ramp for a local veteran.

CADDYSHACK COCKTAIL PARTY

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2023 FROM 5-9P

3 Palms Grille and The Yards will host our fundraising cocktail party (Chemo Noir Gala) with an elevated Caddyshack theme. There will be a closest to the pin golf opportunity, with a champagne wall, music, silent auction, our traditional cork pull, photo booth, beer, wine, full cash bar and a delicious spread of food throughout the evening. Cocktail or high-end golf attire.

GET TICKETS: chemonoirgala.com



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Boys & Girls Clubs' Youth of the Year receives car

Local Jacksonville teen and 2022 Youth of the Year for Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Florida Laniya Flowers recently received a surprise life-changing gift of a Nissan Altima for her 19th birthday.

On Dec. 1, an unsuspecting Flowers arrived at Greg's Auto Collision Center in St. Augustine with her mom, who had convinced her to stay home longer from her Thanksgiving college break. When her blindfold was removed to reveal a Nissan Altima, Flowers was completely shocked and overwhelmed with emotion.

"I was amazed to receive this generous gift," said Laniya Flowers. "My Boys & Girls Club experience has taught me that you're bigger than any obstacle. The mentors I found at the club taught me how to turn obstacles into benefits and use them to become a more wise, influential person."

In tears, she hugged her Boys & Girls Club family, mentors, parents, siblings and others who attended. Representatives from The Florida Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs, GEICO and the National Auto Body Council were onsite to congratulate Flowers on her new ride. She was also happy to receive a \$1,000 gift card and a complete car wash kit from Enterprise Rent-A-Car.

"The Florida Alliance is grateful for

the partnership with GEICO through the NABC's Recycled Rides program," said Joseph Davis, executive director, Florida Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs. "We are delighted that Boys & Girls Club youth and families have benefited from this charitable endeavor from GEICO, the National Auto Body Council and the collision centers that donate their time and effort. We look forward to the continued collaboration with GEICO."

This generous car donation was made possible by the National Auto Body Council's Recycled Rides Program, GEICO, The Florida Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs, Greg's Auto Collision Center and Enterprise Rent-A-Car.

"My office and I are extremely proud to be a part of a company that believes in giving back to the community," said Christopher Brown, principal owner, GEICO St. Augustine. "Being a business in a community isn't just about what the community does for you, but what you can do for the community to make it better."

Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Florida chose Flowers as the recipient of this surprise car giveaway because of her example of the organization's mission to enable all young people to reach their full potential.

"We are so proud of Laniya and how



Contributed photos

Laniya Flowers is surprised at being presented a Nissan Altima.

well she has represented Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Florida," said Paul Martinez, President & CEO, Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Florida. "We are excited to continue to play a role in her inspiring story."

Currently a freshman at Florida State University, Flowers was named the 2022 Youth of the Year for Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Florida in February following a rigorous selection process including public speaking, personal essays and panel interviews.

This annual Youth of the Year competi-



Laniya Flowers, center-left, surrounded by family, receives a Nissan Altima in recognition of her status as 2022 Youth of the Year for Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Florida.

tion recognizes outstanding young leaders among Boys & Girls Club members based on their academic achievements, leadership abilities and communication skills. Representing the Edward H. White Teen Center where she was a club member at the time, Flowers was selected as the most qualified finalist to serve as a role model, ambassador and spokesperson for Boys & Girls Clubs of Northeast Florida and its members.

Local Youth of the Year winners like Flowers represent the organization for that year in additional regional and national Youth of the Year competitions through Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

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Fostering Connections recently received a \$10,000 donation from the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority.

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority donates \$10,000 to Fostering Connections

Fostering Connections, a St. Johns County-based nonprofit organization, recently received a \$10,000 donation from the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. in honor of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority's recent Southeastern Regional Conference, held Nov. 11-13 at the Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa in Ponte Vedra Beach.

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, founded in 1920 on the campus of Howard University, is headquartered in Washington, D.C. It has initiated a diverse membership of more than 125,000 college-educated women with more than 900 chapters in North America, Europe, Asia, the Caribbean, Africa and the Middle East.

The Southeastern Region is the largest region of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority and is comprised of the states of Florida, Georgia and South Carolina, and the islands of the Bahamas, Virgin Islands and Trinidad and Tobago. The region hosts an annual leadership conference where its members come together to promote the business of the sorority and support the local community.

"It is our honor and pleasure to sow a financial seed into Fostering Connections," said Vicki L. Pearson, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. Southeastern Regional Director.

In May, Zeta Beta Sorority also donated \$3,500 to Fostering Connections

during their State of Florida Conference at the World Golf Village Renaissance Resort.

"It is an honor to be supported by this incredible organization of women that has donated over \$8 million and impacted more than 5 million people through their work in the community," said Aubrie Simpson-Gotham, founder and CEO at Fostering Connections. "The sisters of Zeta Phi Beta are all inspirational leaders working tirelessly to support their communities and make a difference throughout the world. I look forward to continuing to grow our partnership with Zeta Phi Beta."

The donation will support educational programs and enrichment scholarships for youth impacted by foster care or trauma in Northeast Florida.

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority is partnering with Fostering Connections in 2023 to support their Career Readiness Academy program and provide mentorship for students.

Fostering Connections is a nonprofit organization that supports children and families in the Northeast Florida region within foster care or impacted by trauma by providing tools and resources to aid in educational, career and life success. Established in 2019, Fostering Connections serves children impacted by foster care or trauma in pre-K through grade 12 in St. Johns, Duval, Putnam, Flagler and Volusia counties. In 2022, Fostering Connections served more than 300 youth across Northeast Florida.

For more information on Zeta Phi Beta Sorority and supporting Fostering Connections, go to zphib1920.org and fosteringconnectionsfl.org.

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Silent Auction open from 6:00pm – 9:00pm
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Festival of Trees benefits homeless outreach

By Shaun Ryan

The second annual Festival of Trees, held at the Lightner Museum in St. Augustine on Dec. 5-8, raised more than \$18,000 for two nonprofits that offer critical services to those facing homelessness.

In an online silent auction, people bid on a dozen decorated trees and 11 wreaths donated by local groups, organizations and churches. The proceeds generated by the event will benefit St. Francis House and Port in the Storm Homeless Youth Center.

The trees and wreaths set up in the entry area of the Lightner Museum were decorated in a variety of styles, some very traditional, others following specific themes and others simply lighthearted and fun. The winner of “favorite tree” was the Colonial Williamsburg tree donated by Construction Services and Innovations. The winning wreath was the coastal-themed wreath donated by Coastal Oaks Community Outreach Nocatee.

St. Francis House is a local shelter for



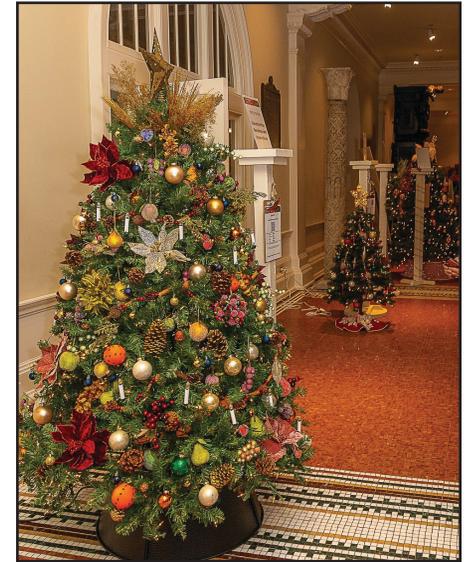
The Festival of Trees raised \$18,000 for the St. Francis House and Port in the Storm Homeless Youth Center in St. Augustine.

families and individuals, while Port in the Storm shelters youths between the ages of 18 and 24. Many of the youths have aged out of foster care, though some have been turned out by family or are fleeing an abusive situation.

The programs at Port in the Storm

teach these young people essential life skills and give them opportunities to take part in fun activities — all things they may have missed growing up.

The programs at St. Francis House are geared toward ending the cycle of homelessness. They help clients gain job



Contributed photos

The tree donated by Construction Services and Innovations was chosen as people's favorite.

interview skills and prepare to find housing. Many homeless people have simply fallen on hard times and need some help getting back on their feet.

The Festival of Trees is a fun holiday event with an important purpose.

Photos by Shaun Ryan



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HOLIDAY GATHERING

Dr. Dan Kuckel provided the music for a recent Wine Down Wednesday at the link in Nocatee. The event had a holiday theme and was attended by many members and guests. The link hosts multiple activities, events and conferences for families and businesses in addition to access-controlled co-working space. The facility is located at 425 Town Plaza Ave., Ponte Vedra. To learn more, go to thelink.zone.

Photos by Elaine Raby



The recent Wine Down Wednesday brought people out to the link.



Dr. Dan Kuckel provides the music at the recent Wine Down Wednesday at the link.



The recent Wine Down Wednesday event at the link brought out smiles all around.



Photo by Susan Griffin

A festive Christmas tree stands tall in the main gathering area at the link.

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Linda Johnson, Director of Community Outreach



Contributed photos

Catholic Charities Jacksonville's annual Black & White Soiree is a chance to enjoy a dazzling evening and raise critical funding to help the most vulnerable people in the community.

Catholic Charities plans Black & White Soiree

Catholic Charities Jacksonville will host the Black & White Soiree from 6 to 9 p.m. March 11 at TIAA Bank Field's Lower East Club.

The event will include a special cocktail reception with heavy hors d'oeuvres and an evening of dancing to live music from the Bay Kings Band. The evening's festivities will also include the kickoff of Catholic Charities' Feed A Family campaign, which helps fight local hunger by sustaining the organization's food pantry for thousands of food-insecure families throughout the year. Last year, the event raised more than \$100,000 for the initiative.

"The goal of the Black & White Soiree is not only to bring our community together for a dazzling evening, but also to raise crucial funds that help our organization continue to be a resource for the most vulnerable in our community," said Lori Weber, regional director of Catholic Charities Jacksonville. "We're grateful for the continued support of our incredible community as we look forward to another wonderful event."



Tickets are \$150 per person or \$300 per couple. Personal and corporate sponsorships are still available. Go to CCBJax.org/ballandgala for more details.

Founded in faith, but focused on all, the nonprofit serves those in need regardless of their background. Year-end gifts to the nonprofit also help support its myriad other support programs, which include emergency financial assistance, immigration legal services, refugee resettlement, and camps and activities for people with intellectual and developmental differences. With every donation, 92% of every dollar goes directly to clients. Learn more and donate at CCBJax.org.



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Wildflower

Continued from 10

dental health education.

Medical services include primary care with lab work and x-rays, urgent care, specialty clinics in cardio, endocrinology, orthopedics, hematology, gastroenterology, and vision screenings. Women’s wellness health and prescription assistance is also provided.

Outreach in the community is in conjunction with the Flagler Health+ Bus Mobile Clinic offering medical services at St. Francis House, Hastings Branch of the St. Johns County Public Library System, Family Worship Center and also Dining with Dignity with once a month visits.

Additionally, Ascension St. Johns partners with the nonprofit and its Dental Bus to offer services in the Hastings area once a month.

Wildflower offers outreach services to Home Again St. Johns, St. Francis House, Epic Cure, Council on Aging at Hastings Senior Center and other locations offering health care screenings and education, and pop-up flu vaccine clinics throughout St. Johns County.

According to Michelle P. Colee, Wildflower Healthcare’s executive director, patients can also receive newly expanded social services expertise at the facility with expansion of dental and medical care, plus in house diabetic education and additional staff professionals recently hired in outreach, dental and medical, and volunteer physicians in a myriad of specialties. The organization is continuing its ongoing services and programs six days a week from Monday through Saturday, and closed on Sunday.

“We are a small but mighty organization and extremely grateful for volunteers and donors who make our work possible,” said Colee. “New volunteers in all fields are always welcome, including



Wildflower Healthcare provides free, high-quality dental and medical care to underserved and uninsured residents.

dentists, physicians, physician assistants, advanced registered nurse practitioners and registered nurses, plus other professionals such as photographers, marketing and media specialists,” she said. “Donors are needed to help us with contributions along with those who are looking for a worthwhile cause. This is an excellent way to help the community by ensuring good health for all. In particular, we want to reach government officials to tell them our story and how Wildflower Healthcare is well integrated among the overall structure of St. Johns County services. This is important to our financial growth as a charitable organization.”

As the only free dental and medical clinic in St. Johns County, Wildflower Healthcare has seen a 30% increase in services provided this year with a mission to ensure access to high-quality, compassionate care for uninsured adult residents in St. Johns County. The nonprofit is recognized as a significant contributor to the health and wellbeing of people while building and sustaining full diversity and acceptance through the nonprofit’s culture, values, norms and behaviors.

In 1995, Good Samaritan Healthcare (GSHC) began providing free dental and medical services to underserved, uninsured residents through medical clinics held at St. Cyprian’s Episcopal Church and dental clinics held at St. Johns



Contributed photos

Wildflower Healthcare provides free, high-quality dental and medical care to underserved and uninsured residents.

County Health Department. In conjunction with New Mt. Moriah Christian Ministry in West Augustine and the St. Johns County Health Department, GSHC created the Wildflower Project in 2007.

In response to the community’s need for adult dental care, GSHC partnered with Anastasia Baptist Church and the Emergency Services Homeless Coalition to hold a five-day, mobile dental clinic for underserved, uninsured residents in 2007.

The GSHC Board of Directors initiated a capital campaign to raise funds to build a permanent facility for dental and medical services. New Mt. Moriah Christian Ministry donated land on Herbert Street for the Wildflower Clinic, which opened debt-free and began patient care in January 2010. The GSHC board rebranded the Wildflower Clinic as Wildflower Healthcare to reflect the scope of services

offered beyond a single clinic location and to highlight our greater community impact.

In 2021, patients served at Wildflower Healthcare and partner locations included 1,592 medical patients, 1,493 dental patients with 28 patients receiving full dentures, 77 specialty referrals, 155 flu shots, 799 Covid vaccines, and 2,693 households receiving health care information through food banks. Medications distributed were valued at close to \$766,000.

Dr. Shakira Husain, MD serves as the nonprofit’s president and medical director, and Dr. Stephanie Kinsey, DDS, serves as dental director.

For more information, call Michelle P. Colee at 904-829-1962, ext. 105, email director@wildflowerhealthcare.org. The website is wildflowerhealthcare.org.



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Real estate firm supports nonprofit's mission



Contributed photo

Pictured from left, Andrea Nichols, Donna Hodges, Veronica Davila, Claire Pitts, Rethreaded's Assistant Manager of Business Development Stephanie Patton, Kathy Stepulaitis, Margaret Ceaser and Kevin Waugaman.

Realtors and employees of Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Network Realty recently showed their support for Rethreaded, a Jacksonville-based nonprofit organization that renews hope, reignites dreams and provides career opportunities to survivors of human trafficking.

Two groups representing the company's DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) Council recently volunteered at Rethreaded. In addition to upcycling leather from

retired airline seat covers for use in new accessory products, the team toured the nonprofit's campus, talked directly with Rethreaded's team and shopped at their retail store.

"There's more to human trafficking than many are aware, and it's easy to misunderstand what it really looks like for the people affected by it," said Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Network Realty CEO Kevin Waugaman. "With job training,

employment and holistic services, Rethreaded is helping survivors of human trafficking heal and thrive in our community."

Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Network Realty's DEI Council is focused on increasing diversity education and awareness within the company and throughout the local community.

For more information about Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Network Realty, go to FloridaNetworkRealty.com.

New pacemaker studied

Baptist Health is the first health system in Northeast Florida to participate in the global Aveir DR i2i™ IDE Study, a clinical study designed to assess the safety and effectiveness of a new pacemaker system in patients with abnormal heart rhythms.

A normal heart beats regularly at a rate of 60 to 100 times per minute. People who experience a slower-than-normal or irregular heart rate may benefit from a pacemaker, which is a small battery-powered device implanted in the chest. In most pacemakers, electrical impulses are delivered via wires, called leads, which help the heart muscle restore a normal heart rhythm.

The pacemaker in this clinical study is unique because it is:

- **Leadless:** It delivers electrical impulses without the small wires, called "leads" used in traditional pacemakers.
- **Dual chamber:** The pacemaker is placed in the heart's right lower and upper chambers, whereas traditional pacemakers are only placed in one chamber.

An innovative algorithm allows the devices in the upper and lower chambers of the heart to communicate with each other to restore cardiac rhythm.

The new pacemaker is inserted into the heart via a minimally invasive procedure, making the hospital stay shorter and recovery time faster for patients.

Venkata Sagi MD, clinical cardiac electrophysiologist with Baptist Heart Specialists, is this study's principal investigator at Baptist Health and has implanted the first devices in four patients.

"Clinical trials allow us to bring the latest, innovative technology back to the people in our community," he said. "We were pleased to be the first in Northeast Florida to offer this option to patients through this study, and we look forward to seeing the results."

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JTA recognized by Natural Gas Vehicles for America

The Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA) was recently honored at the Natural Gas Vehicles for America's 2022 industry summit and annual meeting. JTA was a recipient of the 2022 NGV Achievement Award for their contributions to advancing natural gas in the public transportation industry.

"This award is a testament to the Jacksonville Transportation Authority's commitment to our long-term sustainability goals as outlined in our five-year strategic plan, MOVE2027," said JTA Chief Executive Officer Nathaniel P. Ford Sr. "With the recent additions of CNG-powered buses and electric charging stations, we look forward to

continuing to invest in a zero-emission and low-emission fleet."

The JTA began replacing diesel buses with CNG (compressed natural gas) with the launch of the First Coast Flyer Bus Rapid Transit Network in 2015, and built a CNG filling station on the Myrtle Avenue Operations Campus through a public-private partnership with Clean Energy. The JTA also added two battery electric buses and charging stations in 2020.

Additionally, the JTA was awarded \$15.4 million through the Low or No Emissions Buses & Bus Facilities Grant Program from the U.S. Department of Transporta-

tion in August 2022. This grant will replace 21 additional diesel buses with CNG by 2023.

The authority's current fleet features 127 CNG buses, 61 diesel buses, seven hybrid diesel buses and two battery electric buses.

Sustainability is a key theme of the JTA's five-year strategic plan, MOVE2027 — Mobility Optimization through Vision & Excellence. The plan is to keep the authority at the forefront of a changing region and mobility landscape.

To learn more about sustainability efforts and the future of mobility in Northeast Florida through MOVE2027, read the full plan at jtafla.com/projects/move2027.

Corner Lot named 2022 Developer of the Year

Honored for its innovation and creativity in positively impacting the affordable housing crisis in America, Corner Lot has been named 2022 Developer of the Year by the American Institute of Investment Housing.

"Being recognized for our efforts to ensure home ownership remains attainable in the communities where we build is truly an honor," said George Leone, Corner Lot COO. "Our teachers, first responders, and law enforcement personnel should be able to live and send their children to school in the same communities where they work and serve."

Active in the single-family, multifamily and urban housing markets, Corner Lot strives to incorporate attainable workforce housing elements within its developments where possible. The organization also works proactively with governmental agencies, including the City of Jacksonville, St. Johns County and the City of St. Augustine, to identify public/private partnership opportunities, improve legislation and identify grant opportunities that address the affordable housing deficit.

Notable Corner Lot projects that incorporate attainable housing elements include Johns Commons in downtown

Jacksonville, Flagler Crossing in St. Augustine and Kings Crossing in St. Johns County. In addition, Corner Lot's single-family home builder division, Breeze Homes, constructs entry-level houses with the intent of making home ownership attainable and the buying process simple for first-time homebuyers. Corner Lot also partnered with DLP Capital to invest in and develop several projects that will include entry-level home ownership opportunities.

"Corner Lot delivers a gold standard for best practices in development, creating quality housing that is in tune with the needs of the local workforce," said Don Wenner, president of American Institute of Investment Housing and CEO of DLP Capital. "When it comes to community and conscientious development, there are few finer examples than Corner Lot. The firm fully deserves recognition as the 2022 Developer of the Year."

Corner Lot also has business lines that include commercial development, hospitality development and historic preservation. Corner Lot was recognized as a Best Place to Work on the First Coast in August and Corner Lot CEO Andy Allen was named one of Jacksonville's Top Entrepreneurs in March.

Military lounge opened at JAX Airport



Contributed photo

The ribbon is cut for the opening of the military lounge at the Jacksonville International Airport.

The Jacksonville Aviation Authority (JAA) has officially opened a new military lounge for active-duty service men and women at Jacksonville International Airport (JAX) prior to the start of popular travel holidays such as Christmas and New Year's.

The Jacksonville International Airport Military Lounge is located on the baggage claim level in the site of the former USO. The authority refurbished and updated the space while North Jacksonville Rotary Club, United Way of Northeast Florida's Mission United and the Veterans Council of Duval County helped to coordinate volunteers to staff the lounge.

"With Northeast Florida's deep ties to the military community, having a designated lounge area for service men and women was incredibly important to us," JAA CEO Mark VanLoh said. "So many service members travel through our airport. We wanted them to have a space in our terminal where they could feel at home."

Anyone interested in volunteering at the JAX Airport Military lounge can apply at volgistics.com/ap-form/1353073576.

For more information about the Jacksonville Aviation Authority, go to flyjacksonville.com.




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Corner Lot sells O'Reilly building in Parkway Place Commercial Development

Four months after completing its first build-to-suit project for a national retailer, Corner Lot has sold the O'Reilly building located in Phase II of the organization's Parkway Place development.

Purchased for \$2.8 million on Nov. 30 by Park Plaza LLC, the building is located at 1335 St. Johns Parkway in St. Johns. The purchase price was a 5% cap rate. Construction began in October 2021 on the 7,225-square-foot project and was completed in July 2022.

O'Reilly currently holds a 15-year lease on the building.

"O'Reilly rocks, and we were excited to partner with them on this project," said Andy Allen, Corner Lot CEO. "With all of the growth occurring in St. Johns County, and the Durbin Park area in particular, it's the right store front, in the right location, at exactly the right time."

Will Wamble and Patrick Nutt with SRS Real Estate Partners served as brokers on the deal, and Corner Lot partner

Scherer Construction built the building.

Corner Lot sold Phase I of Parkway Place earlier this year and Phase III is scheduled to open in the first quarter of 2023. Future tenants include Tsaooca Tea, Kid Strong, and Oola Mala Noodles and Japanese Restaurant.

Corner Lot is an independent, privately-owned real estate development firm in North Florida with business lines that include residential, commercial, multi-family, urban and hospitality develop-

ment, as well as single family home construction. Corner Lot's mission is to foster quality, sustainable development for future businesses and residents, expand the markets of Central and North Florida with vision and leadership, and foster a foundation of long-term partnerships in investment, development, management and financing.

Corner Lot is located at 1819 Goodwin St., Jacksonville. The phone number is 904-551-2540.

Author focuses on professional and personal behaviors

Karen D. Nutter is a published author, professional coach and corporate trainer with two books and training methods through her business, CBK Advising. She is based in Atlantic Beach, and her publications focus on emotional intelligence (EI) and working and living in a tumultuous world to develop the ability to perceive, use, understand and manage emotions, and finding harmony during challenging times.

According to Nutter, she recommends starting the new year with getting the right people in the right roles and working with human resource professionals, career recruiters and business owners through training in the workplace. Activities include the potential for avoiding difficult encounters with assessment tools for specific issues with comprehensive, actionable and easy-to-understand steps.

"Get it right the first time with the right people in the right seats, helping them with communication struggles within company, and providing simple, daily tools can confirm decisions on new hires, succession planning and moving talent around," said Nutter. "There are innumerable behaviors, driving forces, competencies, soft skills and emotional intelligence tips that help with understanding oneself, and then others. And opportunities for improvement in black and white rather than speculation," she said. "Adaptation might be necessary for your role, but misunderstanding doesn't need to be. If you work hard to really understand your natural and

adaptive styles, you'll be able to explain exactly what you need from others while interacting in the workplace."

"Looking at a person's natural and adapted behavioral style can show how they prefer to do what they do, and how an individual adapts their behavior to fit the situation they are in," Nutter added. "For example, understanding these styles in hiring, the benchmarking process reveals whether someone lines up well with the job description and responsibilities. However, finding that fit isn't always a possibility. And, as an employee, if you currently find yourself in a role that requires a lot of adaptation, you may be an elevated risk for burning out."

Nutter's clients in Northeast Florida include companies, educational institutions, Mastermind groups, and more. She helps individuals and groups understand themselves as owners, employees and trainers to make the right selection with new hires, which can save them time, money and resources.

During the holidays and going into the new year, Nutter helps clients make stress relief a priority with tips including rest, communications, uninterrupted work time, unwind and decompress, among others.

"It doesn't depend upon your style; it is more important to notice the styles of others and use words and actions appropriate to them," she said. "Plus, you can try to meet in the middle along with paring and bonding behaviors among people and groups."

According to Mary Hayford, owner of Financial Freedom Journeys in Jacksonville, and one of Nutter's clients and an industry peer, being a part of the local Mastermind group has helped sharpen her communications skills.

"The involvement in Karen's group has benefited me in my business and personal life," said Hayford. "Karen excels in guiding, leading and teaching all at the same time. As a business owner, being a member of the group and collaborating



Contributed photo

Karen D. Nutter of Atlantic Beach offers assessments to determine professional and personal, natural and adapted behaviors.

alongside other motivated professionals from a variety of different industries has been highly beneficial."

Nutter focuses on brain and emotional health while developing steps and methods to assess how people can feel and operate more positively going into the holidays, the new year and beyond.

She offers tips to help with desires, priorities, time management, motivation, tasks, finding time for oneself, journaling, meditation, acts of kindness and more at cbkadvising.com/five-things-you-must-do-with-your-team-in-2022.

Karen Nutter is a Certified Emotional Intelligence Analyst and a Certified Master Coach, and an executive coach and founder of CBK Advising. She has assisted companies, leaders and sales professionals in the development of more

organized and effective business practices and communications.

Nutter focuses on helping people recognize their strengths and motivations to create a clear path and better streamlined structural practices along with cohesive communications.

She holds monthly Mastermind groups in Jacksonville for small business owners and train-the-trainer courses for human resources professionals. She is an expert in identifying dysfunction in the workplace and provides assessments tools and sales training methods through communications. She has implemented team building practices for white collar and blue-collar businesses and nonprofits.

For more information, call 904-323-2946 or email Karen@CBKAdvising.com.



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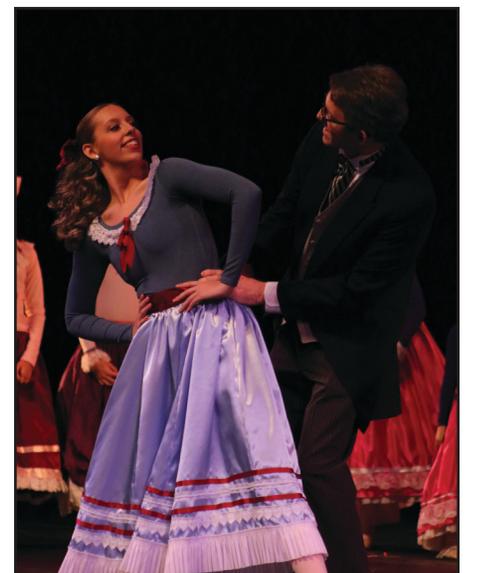
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A holiday tradition like no other

Christ Church in Ponte Vedra Beach held its 27th annual Nutcracker Ballet at the University of North Florida's Lazzara Performance Hall Dec. 10. The following are photos from the festive night.

Photos by Anthony Richards



Award-winning photographer's work featured at First Coast Cultural Center exhibit

By Anthony Richards

The work of photographer Paula Veloso is currently on display as part of "The Eyes are the Window to the Soul" exhibit by the First Coast Cultural Center.

The exhibit will continue to be displayed at the location at 3972 3rd St. S. in Jacksonville Beach each day from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. until Dec. 22.

Veloso's work has earned recognition and awards in recent years, since she held her first solo exhibition in 2018 in her hometown of Porto, Portugal.

According to Veloso, she has been fascinated with photography ever since she was a child and she enjoys capturing the world around her, which has become the primary focus of her artwork.

She found out about the First Coast Cultural Center through Instagram, and she developed a relationship with the center's executive director Donna Guzzo from that.

From there the relationship grew into a friendship and it all led to "The Eyes are the Windows to the Soul" exhibit making its world premiere at the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall during the Holiday Shoppes event Dec. 2 and 3.

"Donna came to Portugal, and it was a really pleasant meeting," Veloso said. "Everyone has been so friendly in this town, and it has been a great experience."

For Veloso, she does not come up with the ideas for the things for the subjects of her photographs, but instead she just tries to capture the world around her.

"I take photos of many different subjects, so there is much variety," Veloso said. "I photograph every day with my iPhone."

Over the years, she has found that it is the subtle moments and little things in life that are often overlooked that make for the best forms of artwork.

"When you stop and take the time to look, it's the little things that are much bigger than we think," Veloso said.



First Coast Cultural Center Executive Director Donna Guzzo with Paula Veloso during the world premiere of the "The Eyes are the Window to the Soul" exhibit.

According to Veloso, once she spots a moment to capture, it is the lighting and angles of the photo that truly brings that moment to life for the person viewing that photo.

"It's the lights and shadows that really allow for the feelings of a photo to come to life," Veloso said. "Those emotions are always so beautiful to me."

As with most people, Veloso got a lot of experience throughout the years taking photos of her two children as they grew up.

It was not until the past couple of years when she started putting her photos on display after she had been told by many that she needed to share her photos with the



Photos by Anthony Richards

One of Paula Veloso's award-winning photos titled "self-portrait," is on display.

rest of the world.

"I always liked to look back at my photos, but I never expected that they would be so good to win awards," Veloso said. "I've received so very many compliments of my photos, and I'm very happy with that."

The awards she has won were judged upon by those around the world, which has shown that her photos have an impact on the viewer no matter their culture or where they are from.

"It can be very difficult for me to choose my photos, because I have about 16,000 on my iPhone right now," Veloso said. "It's good to know that others like my photos as much as I do."

Soweto Gospel Choir to offer free concert

Hailing from Soweto, a township outside of Johannesburg and home of Nelson Mandela and South Africa's democratic movement, Soweto Gospel Choir continues to inspire audiences around the world with their powerful blend of African gospel, freedom songs and international classics. The choir first appeared in the Beaches Fine Arts Series in 2018 with a tribute to Mandela.

The singers will present a program at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 16, at St. Paul's

by-the-Sea Episcopal Church. Doors open at 6:45 p.m. Seating is first come, first served.

This new concert by the three-time Grammy-winning choir commemorates South Africa's freedom movement and the civil rights movement in the United States.

"Hope — It's Been a Long Time Coming" opens with a rousing program of South African freedom songs that inspired their Rainbow Nation. Then the choir's uplifting performance moves

to the United States with renditions of music from the civil rights movement, including works by legendary artists James Brown, Otis Redding, Curtis Mayfield and Aretha Franklin.

The choir will also perform some

special Christmas music selections. A reception follows with artwork by Chris Clark.

St. Paul's by-the-Sea Episcopal Church is located at 465 12th Ave. N., Jacksonville Beach.



Contributed photo

The Soweto Gospel Choir will perform a free concert Dec. 16 at St. Paul's by-the-Sea Episcopal Church.

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Contributed photo

Claudia Mueckay will once again dance the role of the Sugar Plum Fairy in this year's production of "Christmas Fantastique."

St. Augustine dancer returns in the role of a lifetime with 'Christmas Fantastique'

Countless young girls dream of one day dancing in pointe shoes on the tips of their toes like the Sugar Plum Fairy of the famed "Nutcracker" ballet. Some of them go on to study the demanding art form in earnest. And a very small fraction of these will one day get the chance to become this iconic figure on stage.

St. Augustine's Claudia Mueckay is one of the rare few. She will portray the Sugar Plum Fairy, the pinnacle of the ballet repertoire, on Dec. 22 in "Christmas Fantastique" at Lewis Auditorium in downtown St. Augustine.

The original production from Zoika's Dance reimagines the classic holiday story of "The Nutcracker," featuring classical ballet, as well as contemporary dance styles, including hip hop, tap, jazz, acro and modern dance.

Mueckay, a senior at Tocoi Creek High School, has been studying ballet since the age of 4. For the second year, she will dance the demanding Sugar Plum Fairy role alongside dance partner Jake Karger, also of St. Augustine. The two have been good friends and fellow dancers for most of their lives.

"I have always loved the Sugar Plum Fairy choreography," Mueckay said. "It is the role of a lifetime."

Director and choreographer Zoika Garcia is a former professional ballet dancer and owner of Zoika's Dance school in St. Augustine, where Mueckay trains in ballet.

"It is impossible to convey the amount of hard work and discipline necessary to dance at this level," Garcia explained. "Claudia has given her all to achieving it. She is so beautiful."

"Christmas Fantastique" takes the audience along young Clara's Christmas Eve dream as her toys come to life and she travels with a young prince to the Land of Sweets. There she meets the beautiful Sugar Plum Fairy and her Cavalier, and a host of scintillating dancers of different

genres from exotic lands. Throughout it all, the timeless music of Tchaikovsky's score evokes the holiday spirit.

The cast of 65 dancers includes both professional dancers as well as young, local dancers. Garcia has called upon the talents of professional dancers Enrique Sessa and Elisa Ruby of Mexico's Ballet Prover, Jenne Vermes (tap, contemporary), Sean Mansfield (tap, hip hop), Amaani Grant (hip hop, tap, contemporary) and Katie DeAcutis (hip hop, contemporary) to join the production. A choir of young vocalists will also perform before each show, with signing provided by deaf interpreter Amanda Villalobos.

Performances will be held at 2 and 7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 22, at Lewis Auditorium, Flagler College, 14 Granada St., St. Augustine. Tickets are \$20 and \$30 and may be purchased online at zoikadance.com.

ON STAGE

A roundup of musical acts appearing before Jan. 16 at local venues

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1050 A1A North, Ponte Vedra Beach

Purchase tickets at the St. Augustine Amphitheatre box office or ticketmaster.com.

For further information about each act, go to pvconcerthall.com/events.

• **Apex Theatre Studios Presents "Eb Scrooge: A Southern Fried Carol"** — Dec. 16-18

• **Donna The Buffalo** — Jan. 5, 8 p.m.

• **Marc Broussard** — Jan. 10, 8 p.m.

• **Geoff Tate's 2023 Big Rock Show** — With special guest Mark Daly. Jan. 11, 8 p.m.

• **Mason Jennings** — Jan. 13, 8 p.m.

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Box office hours are 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Saturdays.

Tickets sold at the box office are available via credit- and debit-card only. A valid ID is required for all box office transactions and ticket purchases must be made in person.

Tickets may also be purchased at ticketmaster.com.

For further information about each act, go to theamp.com/events.

• **Holiday Night Market** — Dec. 13, 5-9 p.m.

• **Venardos Circus** — Dec. 16-Jan. 1

— Compiled by Shaun Ryan



Image from The St. Augustine Amphitheatre

The Venardos Circus will present shows from Dec. 16 through New Year's Day at the St. Augustine Amphitheatre.

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Sports



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Nease's Tyler Ghazanfari (middle) is swarmed by teammates after scoring the game-tying goal in the 73rd minute against Ponte Vedra on Dec. 7.



Mark Romano of Ponte Vedra controls the ball along the sideline against Nease.

Photos by Anthony Richards

Panthers' late header earns draw with Sharks

By Anthony Richards

For the Nease Panthers' boys soccer squad, a 1-1 tie never tasted so sweet, especially with it coming on the road against the rival Ponte Vedra Sharks and keeping the Panthers' unbeaten mark intact through four games this season.

In the 73rd minute of the 80-minute contest, sophomore Tyler Ghazanfari buried a header into the back of the net, just off the fingertips and passed the outstretched arms of a leaping Will Sheehan in goal for the Sharks.

"I got nervous when I saw him get a hand on it, but then it went in," Ghazanfari chuckled.

It was the answer the Panthers had been looking for since going down a goal early in the contest.

"It's huge for us to be able to fight back, it really shows the character of this team," Nease goalie Evan Miriello said.

Ghazanfari made a nice run to the net and was on the receiving end of a beautifully placed free kick by senior Jacob True, which allowed for the golden opportunity.

"I knew they were aiming for me, so I just jumped, and it found the back of the net," Ghazanfari said.

The entire Nease bench emptied and ran down the sideline to celebrate the goal with Ghazanfari, while the Panther faithful that made the short trip over to Ponte Vedra High roared in applause.

The Sharks had a fury of chances following the goal during the final seven minutes, including free kicks, headers and corner kicks.

Perhaps the best of those chances was one by Joey Stephens, who had a shot right in front of the goal, but Miriello stood tall as he had all

night and stopped the shot for his ninth save of the night.

"My back line has been top notch this whole stretch so far," Miriello said. "They're not afraid to put their heart and their body on the line, and I know I couldn't do any of it without them."

Early on in the game, the Sharks did an excellent job of dictating the play and the result was some top-notch scoring chances, one of which, was finished off for a goal by Bobby Hitchcock in the fourth minute.

Miriello dove to his right to make the initial save on a hard shot by senior captain Mark Romano, but Hitchcock was in perfect position to knock home the rebound and put the Sharks up 1-0.

The goal was the first surrendered by the Panthers this season.

According to Romano, the mindset with the lead at halftime for the Sharks was to keep going forward, while making sure not to give up a goal.

"Sometimes, you can just try as hard as you can defensively, but there's only so much you can do at times at the end of the day," Romano said.

Although they were not able to get the win, Romano still likes the way things have been progressing for the team and he has high hopes for the group moving forward.

"We've had a good start to the season, and it's just something we'll have to bounce back from," Romano said. "It's definitely a learning experience, and something we can build from."

Sheehan stopped five of the six shots he faced during the game for the Sharks.



Nease goalie Evan Miriello comes out of his net to eliminate a scoring chance.



Ponte Vedra's Cooper Gottfried (No. 14) and Josh Sintich of Nease chase down a ball.

Ponte Vedra softball team finishes second at tournament

Ponte Vedra Girls Softball competed in the annual Queen of the Beach Softball Tournament on Dec. 3 and 4. The league entered three teams in the tournament: an 8U team, a 10U team and a 12U team.

The 8U team finished second out of eight teams in the tournament by reaching the championship game. The 8U team played three games on Saturday starting at 8 a.m. in pool play.

In the first game of the tournament on Saturday the team defeated the Creeks Crushers Select 5-3 at Palmetto Leaves Park. In the second game, the team had a come-from-behind win against the Fort Caroline Attitude 14-9 and then lost to the Middleburg Lady Broncos 5-3 in the third game of pool play.

On Dec. 4, as the three-seed in the tournament the team played the Middleburg Lady Broncos again and jumped out to an 11-2 lead. Middleburg scratched back and took the lead 14-11 before the Lightning came back to a 15-14 win.

“I am proud of this team and their determination,” said Coach Eugene Wilson. “We were down by three runs in the last inning and came back and scored four to take the lead and then got them out in the bottom of the inning. These girls worked hard all fall and the hard work paid off. It really is exciting to have three teams playing and competing in this tournament with some of the best teams in North Florida. I am proud of all three teams that we entered in the tournament.”

Wilson also serves as the league vice president. Spring signups are going to be out soon for all interested. Follow the league for more information on Facebook under Ponte Vedra Girls(PVGS).



Contributed photo

Pictured from left are, front row: Addie Beauregard, Ava Seden, Makenzie Larsen, Lily Graybeal and Helene Eichhmaer; back row: Margaret Worrell, Katelyn Hamlet, Annie Dreckman, Landry Wilson, Riley Stratton and Reese Agliata.

Second Annual Holiday Cup presents soccer for a good cause

By Anthony Richards

Four local high school boys soccer programs are joining forces to take part in the Second Annual Holiday Cup Dec. 20 at Creekside High School.

Nease head coach Fred Hallett and Creekside head coach Cameron Crandall teamed up last year for the inaugural event, which turned the matchup between the two teams into a fundraising effort.

The initiative has already shown growth in year two, as Bartram Trail and Mandarin will also play each other in the first game of the showcase at 5:30 p.m., while Nease and Creekside will take the field in game two starting at 7:20 p.m.

“The more people we can reach, the more help we can give to those in need,” Hallett said.

Not only is the Holiday Cup a unique fundraising effort, but there will also be some excellent soccer on display, as all four teams are ranked in the top 50 in the state regardless of class.

“It’s a great chance to see some really cool soccer and give back at the same time,” Hallett said.

According to Hallett, the gate for the game will be waived, but they are asking that people instead donate the

\$5 it would usually cost for a ticket to Soaring High or the Betty Griffin Center, which are the two nonprofit organizations the night will benefit this year.

On top of accepted donations at the game, attendees of the games are also asked to bring items to be donated, such as books for children, kids’ socks, twin-sized bedding that is light blue, light pink or grey, blankets.

Gift cards to either Publix, Winn-Dixie or Wal-Mart are also welcome.

The idea for holding such a fundraiser was something that Hallett had been thinking about for a couple of years now, and it all fell into place a year ago.

“I was talking and thinking about it out loud and Cameron was all on board to do what he could to help as well,” Hallett said. “We want to teach our players how to give and show them how they can really get involved and make an impact in the community around them. Sometimes you just have to start small, but it’s a start.”

First Coast Mortgage is the sponsor for the Holiday Cup, and Hallett welcomes any other businesses or residents in the communities that want to get involved to reach out by emailing him at fredhallett12@gmail.com.

Local basketball teams continue to trend upward through eight games

By Anthony Richards

For the second straight year the Nease Panthers boys basketball team reached the championship game of the Fortegra High School 9:12 Basketball Invitational.

The Panthers wound up losing their first contest of the season 59-40 to Providence in the tournament final Dec. 10, but continued their early season roll with another magical run

through the tournament.

Nease defeated Camden County, 46-34, who made the trip from Georgia to play in the competition held at Florida State College of Jacksonville’s south campus in the first round and then followed it up with a 42-23 victory over Sandalwood to reach the final.

BASKETBALL continues on Page 46



Photo courtesy of High School 9:12

The Nease boys basketball team reached the championship game of the Fortegra High School 9:12 Basketball Invitational for the second straight year.

CROSSWORD														
1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
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60					61				62		63			
64					65						66			
67					68						69			

ACROSS

- Chop up
- Ones who utilize
- Sings with closed lips
- South American hummingbird
- Serves as a coxswain
- Liquor distilled from coconut or rice
- Spur
- Senile
- Tanzanian people
- Cruel
- Boxing's "GOAT"
- Yokels
- London soccer team
- Chinese chess piece
- Supervises flying
- 007's creator
- Shaft horsepower (abbr.)
- A spider makes one
- Liquefied natural gas
- Opaque gem
- Brazilian palm
- Periodical (slang)
- You might step on one
- Marvin and Horsley are two
- Partner to cheese
- Unpleasant smell
- Field force unit (abbr.)
- Fashion accessory
- Cool!
- Time zone
- Songs to one's lover
- German river
- Go bad
- Sword
- Very eager
- Leaf bug
- Italian seaport
- Napoleon Dynamite's uncle
- Member of Jamaican religion
- Large wading bird
- Carries out
- Eternal rest
- It holds up your headwords

DOWN

- Not low
- Small water buffalo

- A mark left behind
- Archaic form of have
- Fiddler crabs
- Popular Hyundai sedan
- Deport
- Making over
- Midway between south and southeast
- Arabic masculine name
- Type of acid
- Popular 1980s Cher film
- Outdoor enthusiasts' tools
- Chinese city
- "Star Wars" character Solo
- The bill in a restaurant
- Old, ugly witch
- Burn with a hot liquid
- To claim or demand
- "A Doll's House" playwright
- Involuntary muscular contraction
- Pea stems (British)
- Double or multiple fold

- No longer is
- Lakers' crosstown rivals (abbr.)
- S. American plant cultivated in Peru
- Cloth or fabric
- Flanks
- Disfigure
- Angry
- Baltic coast peninsula
- Large, flightless birds
- Plants of the lily family
- Medieval Norwegian language
- Polio vaccine developer
- Not soft
- Exchange rate
- Voice (Italian)
- Baseball's Ruth
- Famed guitarist Clapton
- Take a chance
- Wife
- Elaborate handshake

SUDOKU								
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Level: Advanced

Here's How It Works:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!

Rutherford, Murphy introduce bipartisan Red Snapper Act

U.S. Reps. John Rutherford and Stephanie Murphy and 14 of their colleagues recently introduced H.R. 9373, the Red Snapper Act. This bipartisan legislation would prevent the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) from implementing area closures in the South Atlantic until the South Atlantic Great Red Snapper Count study is complete and the findings are integrated into the fishery's stock assessment.

Recreational fishing in Florida is a major economic driver that produced \$9.2 billion in economic output and supported 88,501 jobs in 2020. Over the past decade, the South Atlantic fishing community has worked hard to rebuild the red snapper stock. However, due to a lack of good data, seasons remain short and fail to reflect the real number of red snapper in the region. To fix this, Congress appropriated \$5.1 million over the last three years to fund the count, which will deliver reliable data on abundance, genomics and mortality and improve access to red snapper fishing for anglers.

Earlier this year, NOAA proposed

closures for all bottom fishing in the South Atlantic in an effort to decrease the red snapper caught outside of the two-day recreational season. While the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council ultimately rejected NOAA's proposal, the threat of future closures persists. The Red Snapper Act would prevent NOAA from making future sweeping management decisions until the count is complete.

"For too long, Florida's anglers have been forced to put up with bad science and short red snapper seasons," said Rutherford. "The sweeping closures proposed by NOAA would have devastated our economy right here in Northeast Florida. Our bipartisan Red Snapper Act will stop NOAA from closing fisheries and force them to use better data. Florida anglers deserve dependable access to red snapper fishing now and for years to come."

The Red Snapper Act has been endorsed by the Center for Sportfishing Policy, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, the Coastal Conservation Association and the American Sportfishing Association.

Basketball

Continued from 45

With the Panthers' latest run they improved to a record of 8-1 on the season, and Bryson Utter being named to the all-tournament team for his play during the three days.

Meanwhile, the Ponte Vedra Sharks boys basketball squad has been holding their own as well in the early going and are 6-1 following a 66-24 win over Kissimmee Poinciana and their first loss of the year in a close one, 75-69, against Tampa Catholic in a showcase hosted by Orlando Windemere Prep Dec. 9 and 10.

Sam and Ben Ritchie each scored 14 points apiece in the win of Kissimmee Poinciana, while Ben Ritchie followed that up with a 21-point outing against Tampa Catholic and Israel Nuhu joined him in double figures with 13 points.

The Nease girls basketball team (7-1) bounced back nicely after its first loss of the season against Ridgeview, 65-40 Dec. 8, with back-to-back victories, including defeating Menendez at home 48-36 the very next day on Dec. 9.

The Panthers then won a defensive slugfest against county-rival Creekside, 31-29, thanks to 17 valuable points

from Camryn Robinson to lead the way versus the Knights.

Things have been coming together for the Ponte Vedra girls, especially on the offensive end of late with 60-plus points in victories over Fleming Island (66-33) and St. Augustine (62-53).

Despite a narrow 36-35 loss on the road to Bartram Trail Dec. 13, the Sharks (5-3) are trending in the right direction through the first eight games of the season.

Morgan Gavazzi scored a team-high with points against Fleming Island and St. Augustine, with 21 and 23 points, respectively.

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