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The Register  
INSIDE

Thursday, November 28, 2024

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## Hispanic Chamber is tops in U.S.

By Shaun Ryan

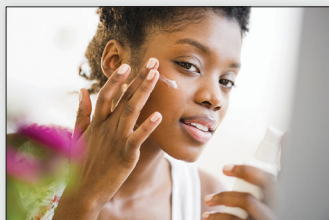
As the Hispanic population continues to grow in Northeast Florida, Hispanic-owned businesses are increasing in number, as well. Consequentially, the First Coast Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (FCHCC) is becoming an ever-more important resource throughout the five-county region it serves.

And recognition on the national level has validated its work to promote and facilitate the success of Hispanic-owned businesses here.

This year, for the second time — the first being in 2019 — the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce has named FCHCC its Chamber of the Year (Small Category). The award was presented Oct. 6 at the USHCC National Conference in Kansas City.

“It fills me with pride,” said FCHCC

CHAMBER continues on Page 4



**Holiday Health, Fitness & Beauty**  
page 16

**Business Weekly featuring Holiday Real Estate**  
page 20

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# Turkey donations give plenty to be thankful for

By Anthony Richards

One of the great aspects of the holiday season is not only is it a chance to be thankful for what and who one has in their life, but it also presents several opportunities to give back to the local community.

One of those ways was a turkey and Thanksgiving food item distribution on behalf of Winn-Dixie and a partnership between the Winn-Dixie Gives Foundation and First Coast YMCA.

Thanksgiving food items, which included a turkey, sack



Photo by Anthony Richards

The Winn-Dixie Gives Foundation and First Coast YMCA held a Thanksgiving food giveaway for 500 military families on Nov. 19.

DONATIONS continues on Page 8

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## INSIDE

One of Us

Page 6

Business Weekly

Pages 20-23

In the Arts

Pages 24-26

Sports

Pages 27-28

## THE RECORDER

SERVING PONTE VEDRA, ST. AUGUSTINE, THE BEACHES AND GREATER ST. JOHNS COUNTY

### Hugh Osteen

COO/VP  
hugh@osteenmediagroup.com  
(904) 285-8831

### Susan Griffin

Publisher  
susan@pontevedrarecorder.com  
(904) 686-3938

### Shaun Ryan

Editor  
shaun@pontevedrarecorder.com  
(904) 285-8831, ext. 1202

### Anthony Richards

Reporter  
anthony@pontevedrarecorder.com  
(904) 285-8831, ext. 1207

### Holly Tishfield

Reporter  
holly@pontevedrarecorder.com

### Don Coble

Contributor  
don@claytodayonline.com

### Amber Anderson

Page/Graphic Designer  
amber@pontevedrarecorder.com

### April Snyder

Sales Assistant  
april@pontevedrarecorder.com  
(904) 285-8831, ext. 1204

### Kristin Flanagan

Account Executive  
kristin@pontevedrarecorder.com  
(904) 285-8831, ext. 1206

### Melissa Domingues

Account Executive  
melissa@pontevedrarecorder.com  
(904) 933-0397

### Joe Wilhelm

Circulation Manager  
joe@osteenmediagroup.com  
(904) 300-5374

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## Let me introduce myself

### Clarice Touhey, NE Florida Regional Publisher for Osteen Media Group

Hello, fellow neighbors. I wanted to introduce myself. I'm Clarice Touhey, the new Florida Regional Publisher for Osteen Media Group, notably Clay Today and Ponte Vedra Recorder.

I just wanted to tell you a little about myself. I am a high-energy, passionate and dedicated media executive with a track record of building innovative strategies during my 40-year-plus career.

I recently was General Manager and Publisher at M. Roberts Media in Victoria, Texas, overseeing advertising, corporate events, editorial, operations and distribution. As we did in Texas, I plan to focus on digital advertising sales and fostering community partnerships.

I've also worked as the Publisher at Wick Communications in Williston, North Dakota, and Sidney, Montana; Group Publisher and President at Hearst Newspapers for the Community Newspapers group; oversaw advertising, editorial and operations for several newspapers in Louisiana and North Texas for Gatehouse Media and advertising manage-



*"A successful local media is creating a partnership with our community partners where ideas are shared."*

— NE Florida Regional Publisher  
**Clarice Touhey**

ment with the Sun Sentinel and Newsday.

I am deeply committed to community service. I actively participate in charitable events and have held various board positions in organizations such as the Lions Club, Elks Lodge and Boys and Girls Club and most recently the Salvation Army board in Victoria.

One of the things that impresses me about Clay Today and Ponte Vedra Recorder is their commitment to the community. They don't just report on the community; they are deeply involved in community projects. I will be

eager to be part of that, too.

I am eager to bring my expertise to a new and challenging role where I can contribute to driving growth and achieving excellence.

Of course, the community plays an equally important role in driving that growth and achieving excellence. A successful local media is a partnership where ideas are shared. We won't always agree on everything, but an honest and respectful exchange is essential.

That's why my door is always open. I'll be going out to meet as many of you as possible and hear what you think about our community.

forgood.com.

### Waterworks plans holiday open house

The St. Johns Cultural Council, the St. Johns County Main Public Library and A Classic Theatre invite the public to a holiday open house at The Waterworks, 184 San Marco Ave., St. Augustine.

Light refreshments and more are planned at this historic building from 5 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 10.

There will be a brief ceremony honoring

## BRIEFS

### Donation event helps fund home repairs and more

St. Johns Housing Partnership (SJHP) is hoping to raise \$10,000 during its annual Giving Tuesday event on Dec. 3.

The nonprofit promotes safe, decent and affordable housing for residents with low incomes, the elderly, disabled and others. It relies on generous funding from individuals, private foundations, corporate donors and the government to help homeowners in a variety of ways, such as with home repairs.

No donation is too small. Those who would like to contribute can go to <https://sjhp.network->

## PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

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# Briefs

Continued from 2

the recipients of the St. Johns Cultural Council's State of the Arts and Arts for All grants. Pianist Keith Teepen will play holiday tunes and more during the event.

To RSVP, go to <https://form.jotform.com/243245444976162>.

## St. Johns County announces holiday hours

All departments of the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners, administrative offices, libraries and bookmobile, the Supervisor of Elections Office, the Property Appraiser's Office, the Tax Collector's Office and the Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller's Office will be closed Thursday, Nov. 28, and Friday, Nov. 29, in observance of the Thanksgiving holiday.

St. Johns County libraries will resume regular business hours on Saturday, Nov. 30, and all other offices will resume regular business hours on Monday, Dec. 2.

Garbage, recycling, and yard waste will not be collected on Thursday, Nov. 28, and the Tillman Ridge and Stratton Road solid waste scale houses will be closed. Beginning Nov. 28, collections will be delayed one day with all routes being completed by Saturday, Nov. 30. Scale houses will resume standard operating hours on Friday, Nov. 29.

Additionally, residents can download the Recycle Coach app or go to [www.recyclestjohns.com](http://www.recyclestjohns.com) to obtain curbside collection schedules, sign up for alerts and quickly learn how to properly dispose of different household waste materials.

## Council on Aging joins Share the Love Event

St. Johns County Council on Aging

(COA) will participate in the 2024 Subaru Share the Love Event. As part of a national partnership with Meals on Wheels America, Subaru of America Inc. and its retailers will donate a minimum of \$300 to a charity of choice, such as Meals on Wheels, for every new vehicle leased or sold now to Jan. 2.

"This annual event allows us to help more homebound elders in our community receive the Meals on Wheels they need," said COA Executive Director Becky Yanni. "We are excited to get the word out to members of our community about this opportunity to help local seniors in a meaningful way."

Since the Subaru Share the Love Event

began in 2008, Subaru and its participating retailers have donated more than 4.6 million meals and helped provide friendly visits to seniors being served by local Meals on Wheels programs across the country.

For more information, go to [www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/sharethelove](http://www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/sharethelove).

## Palm Valley Market every Tuesday

The Palm Valley Market is held from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. every Tuesday inside the Palm Valley Community Center, 148 Canal Road. The market offers fresh produce, baked goods, local honey, tea, seasonal treats, soap, jewelry, plants and more.

— Compiled by Shaun Ryan

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# Chamber

Continued from 1

President and CEO Monica Hernandez. She credited her team for their work. “I always say my team and I, we leave our hearts on the table each and every single time — every event, every initiative.”

Hernandez was also president and CEO during the 2019 recognition.

“I want our members to equally feel as proud to know that the organization that is representing them works really hard to create partnerships with other organizations to benefit the entrepreneur,” she said.

One could argue that a spirit of entrepreneurship resides in the character of Hispanic people.

“It is in our blood,” Hernandez said. “It is how we were raised. To open a business, to work hard and provide for our families, to plant roots and be successful.”

The FCHCC was founded in 1992. It serves St. Johns, Duval, Clay, Nassau and Baker counties. It fulfills its mission through education, networking, connections and elevation of Hispanic businesses and culture. It currently has nearly 200 members.

Membership is open not only to businesses that are Hispanic-owned. A growing Hispanic population ben-

efits any business seeking a growing customer base.

“If you are a business owner looking to tap into the Hispanic community, we can help with that,” said Hernandez.

The FCHCC provides workshops, networking opportunities and all-day conferences that focus on its core mission.

Recently, it conducted a conference titled Hello, Entrepreneur — Hola, Emprende — that featured panel discussions, presentations and speakers. Among the latter were representatives of the Small Business Association, and Jessie Ball duPont Fund, Bank of America, Wells Fargo, the Community Foundation and more.

The financial component was critical as minority entrepreneurs often face obstacles when seeking capital.

“So, we [FCHCC] work furiously finding ways of creating that connection, of making sure that, as entrepreneurs, they understand the various options available for capital,” said Hernandez.

For instance, funding may be available through grants, alternative types of loans or Community Development Financial Institutions.

The FCHCC also conducts monthly networking events featuring a variety of speakers.

Next on the horizon, the FCHCC is planning its fifth annual Excellence in Business Awards — Talentos Hispanos. Six awards will be presented: Rising Star Award, Up & Coming Business Award, Business Leader of the Year, Small Business of the Year, Corporate Business of the Year and a Business of the Year Award for a woman-owned business.

The event will be held from 6 to 9 p.m. Dec. 13 at WJCT Studios, 100 Festival Park Ave., Jacksonville. Ticket prices are: \$125 each for FCHCC members, \$150 for non-members and guests. A special ticket sale is planned for Black Friday.

“If you are going to go, buy your tickets on Black Friday as they are going to be discounted,” Hernandez recommended.

Sponsorships are also available. For further information or to purchase tickets, go to [fchcc.com/2024-excellence-in-business-awards](http://fchcc.com/2024-excellence-in-business-awards).

In March, the FCHCC is planning Women del Mañana, a “women in business” event.

To learn more about the First Coast Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, go to [fchcc.com](http://fchcc.com). It can be found on LinkedIn, Facebook ([facebook.com/fchcc](https://facebook.com/fchcc)), X and Instagram ([@FCHCCflorida](https://@FCHCCflorida)).



Photo by Shaun Ryan

First Coast Hispanic Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Monica Hernandez holds the Chamber of the Year Award recently bestowed on the local organization.

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# New technology is changing the autism detection process

By Anthony Richards

Hope Haven, a leader in developmental and educational services for children, is now the only provider in Northeast Florida to offer groundbreaking Earli-Point Autism technology, which is a new diagnostic tool designed for early detection of autism in young children.

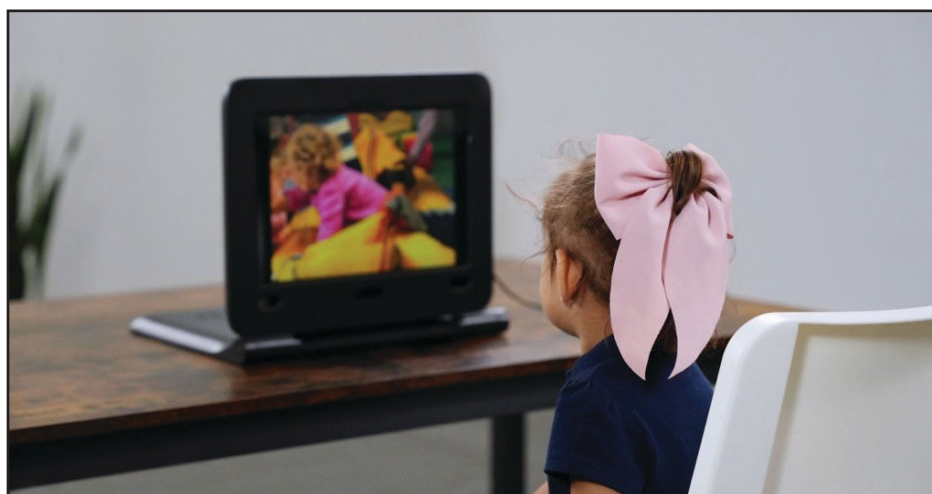
According to Dr. Alison Cato at Hope Haven, the staff was given training pertaining to the new technology in May and it is now an offered tool.

EarliPoint uses advanced eye-tracking technology and state-of-the-art algorithms to identify early social and communicative patterns associated with autism, enabling diagnoses as early as 16 months old.

By incorporating EarliPoint, Hope Haven is transforming early autism care in the region.

This technology allows clinicians to observe a child's visual tracking and responses to social cues, analyzing how the child engages with social stimuli.

The system generates insights about a child's social development that traditional



Contributed photo

**The EarliPoint technology allows clinicians to observe a child's visual tracking and responses to social cues, analyzing how the child engages with social stimuli.**

methods might miss.

“What captures their attention could be another child's face (in the video), but for a child with autism they may be more interested in objects or movement in the scene instead of the human interactions,” Cato said.

Another aspect that differs with the new technology is that the test only takes

12 minutes compared to the 45 minutes to an hour a typical evaluation takes, where a doctor evaluates how a child interacts with toys, looking for repetitive tendencies in their play and then using their clinical judgment.

For children with autism, this means access to earlier diagnoses, paving the way for timely interventions that can

significantly enhance social and cognitive development.

“Research consistently shows that early intervention can make a remarkable difference in the lives of children with autism,” said Stella Johnson, Hope Haven CEO. “With EarliPoint, we are able to provide earlier diagnoses and tailored support, which is critical during these formative years.”

For the families served by Hope Haven, the availability of EarliPoint brings new hope and confidence.

“Families are relieved to hear about the technology because before they may have been on a waiting list for longer,” Cato said. “To our knowledge, we're the first to adopt this technology in Florida, and we're excited to see how it can be even further used.”

According to Cato, the diagnosis of autism can also be important in leading to helping with the access to additional resources and the costs associated with it.

Hope Haven's commitment to delivering cutting-edge tools like EarliPoint reflects its broader mission to ensure that every child can reach their full potential.

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*Stella Johnson is the CEO of Hope Haven located at 4600 Beach Boulevard in Jacksonville. Having grown up in Jacksonville, she has brought years of experience in the youth and family services world since she joined the organization seven years ago. She is proud of the connections she has developed over the years and the continuous role it plays in helping the families and children of her hometown.*

## Stella Johnson

### As told to Anthony Richards

#### Tell us a little about yourself and your background.

I grew up in Jacksonville and then went away to Florida State for college before coming back and working in youth and family services for my entire career.

I've been at Hope Haven for seven years now.

#### How has your familiarity with the area helped in your role as CEO of Hope Haven?

I cannot emphasize how important the relationships I've had here have been.

Jacksonville is a really special place when it comes to youth and family services due to the collaboration we have with other organizations, and that is not the case throughout the state.

It's been very valuable for sure.

#### What have you seen that allows for such collaboration?

A colleague of mine shared with me years ago that our consolidated government with one mayor, one sheriff, and so on has a lot to do with it.

Instead of one, there could be 50 different municipalities you have to deal with in a certain region.

The logistical hurdles alone would be so much greater.

The consolidation of government allows for us to focus on our service and delivery methods and really makes it a more effective process.

#### When did you discover the path to a career in youth and family services?

I went to college on the law school path, as from the time I was five years old I thought I was going to be an attorney.

But then I took a psychology class and did some internships with juvenile justice and worked at a Boys and Girls Club in Jacksonville, and I never looked back from there.

I felt like it was a much better fit for me and my skill set.

I've learned about myself that I do my best work in an independent and autonomous organizational setting.

Our goal and purpose here at Hope Haven is to help children reach the clinical services, educational services and employment services that they need.

We start working with children as young as 16 months old and also help young adults get a job and anything else in between.



Contributed photo

Jacksonville native Stella Johnson is making a difference in her hometown as CEO of Hope Haven.

#### What do you enjoy most about your job and the field you are in?

The ones (clients) I remember the most are the ones that are working so hard themselves to get through whatever situation it is they are confronted with.

One of the things I love about Hope Haven is that people with resources have the ability to go anywhere for services, but when they choose Hope Haven, it means the quality is attached

to their decision.

But it also allows us to then make it obtainable to anyone out there that may be in need of our assistance.

I've just been so fortunate in my career to meet and work with some great people.

Hope Haven is going to be 100 years old in 2026, and I'm excited to help shepherd this organization into its next century. It's a privilege.

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

I've traveled all over the world, but I always come back and say that Jacksonville is the best and it has everything you're looking for.

You can't go down the river and see a Broadway show in New York City, but you can here in Jacksonville.



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The mobile food pantry event took place in the parking lot at the Winn-Dixie located in Neptune Beach on Nov. 19.



Photos by Anthony Richards

Volunteers helped load vehicles with turkey's and other food items for Thanksgiving meals.

## Donations

Continued from 1

of potatoes and a reusable bag full of other meal items were handed out to 500 military families that were already pre-registered for the event.

The mobile food pantry event took place in the parking lot at the Winn-Dixie located in Neptune Beach on Nov. 19 and was a major success as a mixture of holiday cheer and patriotism surrounded the event.

“Every year we do this, and its always cool because this is such a big military city and we’re all so interlinked with the military here,” said Shawn Sloan, regional vice president for North Florida Winn-Dixie and Harvey’s Supermarkets. “Coming out and just seeing the gratitude and being able to thank them for their service is something that we all just really enjoy doing.”

The location was the same as in recent years and is an ideal spot in many ways, especially with its proximity to Mayport Naval Station.

Seeing the cars lined up, even flowing on to Atlantic Boulevard waiting to go through the line was a sight to see and something that never gets old, according to Sloan.

And it caught the eyes of one man, who once he found out what was going on, walked up after shopping and asked how he could donate toward the cause.

There are many different causes Winn-Dixie is involved in through its foundation and to learn more people can

**DONATIONS** continues on **Page 9**

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Photo by Anthony Richards

There was a mixture of holiday cheer and patriotism that surrounded the event.

## Donations

Continued from 8

go to [www.winndixie.com/community](http://www.winndixie.com/community). Currently taking place through Dec. 17, Winn-Dixie stores around town are doing the Hunger Donation Program, where customers

can donate or round up their grocery bill at the registers, which will go toward helping fight hunger in the area through partnerships with Feeding America and other organizations.

“We try to make it simple for people to give back and all our cashiers frontend know how to help you if that’s something you’re interested in,” Sloan said.

## Vicious Biscuit thanks veterans, active military with free meals

In appreciation to all of the men and women who have served and protected the United States, Vicious Biscuit, the fast-casual breakfast concept and Southern-made originator of bold biscuit creations, announced it donated more than \$7,600 in free entrees to veterans and active-duty at its eight locations on Veterans Day. This equated to nearly 700 meals.

“This is the least we can do to celebrate and show our appreciation to those who’ve fought for our freedom and protected our beautiful country,” said Amanda Kahalehoe, COO for Vicious Biscuit. “We recognize the integrity, courage and sacrifice of our veterans and active military embody,



which are qualities we respect and deeply admire. They deserve more than this one day of recognition and celebration.”

For this very reason, Vicious Biscuit also offers a new 20% discount to both military and first responders every day, company-wide throughout the year. Recently, this discount has increased from 10% as the company’s additional way of saying thank you to those who have served and currently serve the United States of America.

Additionally, four of Vicious Biscuit’s nine restaurants are located near military bases, including the one at Neptune Beach.

Go to [viciousbiscuit.com](http://viciousbiscuit.com) for more information.

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Source: facebook.com/GivingMachineFlorida f



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PONTE VEDRA | FRI, DEC 6<sup>TH</sup>, 10:00AM-6:00PM & SAT DEC 7<sup>TH</sup>, 10:00AM-5:00PM

Have you ever bought a chicken from a vending machine? How about new bedding for a child, a haircut or a week of groceries for a family?

From Nov. 29 to Dec. 15, essential items like these can be purchased from a Light the World Giving Machine sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at the St. Augustine Visitors Center Plaza next to the parking garage. With prices starting at \$10, anyone can help those in need in St. Augustine, northern Florida and around the world.

The Giving Machine is a bright red vending machine with cards representing items needed by global and local non-profit organizations. Guests will be able to choose from a variety of options such as hygiene products, children's items, backpacks, bedding, hot meals, seeds and livestock (chickens). Prices range from \$10 to \$150 for donation items. After using a debit card (Apple Pay or cash not available), purchased item cards drop into an enclosed display bin. The donor then leaves with a digital receipt.

The Giving Machines will be available all hours. Volunteers will be available to assist from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily. Photos can be taken at the Light the World photo booth. A special ribbon-cutting event will take place on Dec. 3, "Giving Tuesday," at 6 p.m. A schedule of special invites will be posted on social media.

These popular red vending machines will appear in 106 cities in the U.S. and in nine countries worldwide, offering all who visit a fun, unique and memorable way to perform an instant act of kindness. Following their time in St. Augustine,

they will travel to the Altamonte Mall in Orlando to finish the Christmas season from Dec. 17 to Jan. 2.

"We are so excited to have the Giving Machine in our area again," said Michael S. Lavoie, leader of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in St. Augustine. "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints has a mission to relieve suffering and give hope to individuals who need it. The Giving Machine is a way for everyone to take part in that mission, especially during the holiday season."

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints covers all operational costs, so 100% of the money from the donors go to the charities to purchase and deliver selected items in the machines. Local and regional charities in St. Augustine's machines are Homeless Coalition of St. Johns County, Sharing Putnam's Bounty of Putnam County, Kim's Open Door of Duval County, BASCA of Clay County and Peaceful Paths of Alachua County. The two global charities in the machines are Catholic Relief Services and Lifting Hands International.

"The items we have in the machine will bless homeless families and unsheltered clients and give them joy," said Debi Redding, executive director of the Homeless Coalition of St. Johns County. "Thank you for allowing us to be a part of this amazing project."

Go to [instagram.com/givingmachine-florida](https://www.instagram.com/givingmachine-florida) and [facebook.com/GivingMachineFlorida](https://www.facebook.com/GivingMachineFlorida) for information about what is happening at the St. Augustine Giving Machine. To learn more about the global initiative, go to [GivingMachine.org](https://www.GivingMachine.org).

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# Nemours Children's Health to host run, walk

The Nemours Children's Health Run & Walk returns on Saturday, Dec. 7. The family-friendly event at EverBank Stadium includes a 10K, 5K and a free one-mile fun run. Proceeds from the event will benefit the health system's Compassionate Care Fund, which helps provide care for critically ill children and their families who may not otherwise be able to afford it.

The scenic 10K and 5K routes begin on the east side of the stadium and weave through downtown Jacksonville along the St. Johns River and over the iconic Hart Bridge. The free one-mile fun run is perfect for children and families who will not compete in a timed race.

Registration fees start at \$40 for the 10K and \$30 for the 5K with pre-registration available online at [secure.qgiv.com/event/2024kidshealthrunwalk](https://secure.qgiv.com/event/2024kidshealthrunwalk) until Friday, Dec. 6. On-site registration will be available on the day of the



event for an increased fee.

Participants of all ages can enjoy activities in the Runner's Village including the VIP KidZone presented by VyStar Credit Union with live music, games and inflatables, mascots, photo opportunities, food and refreshments.

The Nemours Children's Health Compassionate Care Fund plays a vital part in caring for children with chronic conditions such as eosinophilic esophagitis, sickle cell disease and cystic fibrosis. More than 40% of school-aged children and adolescents in the United States have at least one chronic health condition. These patients' health care needs can be complex and continuous, including daily management and addressing potential emergencies.

The 10K race begins at 8 a.m., the 5K race begins at 8:15 a.m. and the one-mile kids fun run begins at 9:45 a.m. at EverBank Stadium, 1 EverBank Stadium Drive, Jacksonville.

# December events offered at the link

Here's a look at the December events being planned at the link, 425 Town Plaza Ave., Ponte Vedra. Go to [app@thelink.zone](mailto:app@thelink.zone) for full details and registration.

## Kids Night Out — Tis the Season

Dec. 7  
Come one, come all: Kids' Night Out at the link includes a PJ pizza party, fun and games, movies, STEM projects, arts and crafts and Mr. Steven's Famous Dance Party!

## Festival of Trees

Dec. 13  
Enjoy a winter wonderland of Christmas trees at the link. Opening Night is on Dec. 13 from 4 to 9 p.m. Enjoy the trees, bid on your favorites for charity, shop in the Crafters Market, enjoy Christmas music and stop

in to see Santa! RSVP for this free event.

## College Talk 101

Dec. 14  
Enjoy this free event where a panel of college students will answer your questions. This is a great event for high school students and parents. Learn all about life on campus and how things work in college. RSVP for this free event.

## Kids Night Out — Winter Wonderland

Dec. 20  
The last Kids Night Out of the year!

## Winter Break Camps

Dec. 23-27  
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GUEST COLUMN

# American hero remembered at gathering



## Warrant Officer Michael Donato

Members of the Allen D. Nease NJROTC had the honor and privilege of presenting the family of John L. Patton with an American flag for his service to our country. Mr. Patton, a 101-year-old Navy veteran, passed away on Oct. 19, 2024. He left behind a shining legacy of service, surviving some of the most momentous battles in the Pacific Theater during WWII. These battles included the Battle of Midway, where he was stationed aboard the flight deck of the USS Enterprise while kamikaze pilots were coming so close that he could see their faces as they narrowly missed his ship. He also fought in the Battle of the Eastern Solomons and the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands. Mr. Patton earned six bronze stars for outstanding bravery by the time he reached 20 years of age.

Last year, Patton celebrated his 100th birthday on March 23, 2023. He was honored by the St. Johns County Commissioners, and during the celebration, Patton addressed several Nease NJROTC cadets. The interaction was impactful for the cadets as well as Patton. He said meeting the



HERO continues on Page 13

Contributed photos



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# Hero

Continued from 12

Nease cadets gave him hope our country was still turning out future leaders.

On Nov. 15, 2024, Patton's family and friends organized a celebration of his life. The gathering was held at Mission BBQ, an establishment known for generosity to our nation's military as well as first responders. Over 75 friends and family members honored Patton's life with a wonderful meal.

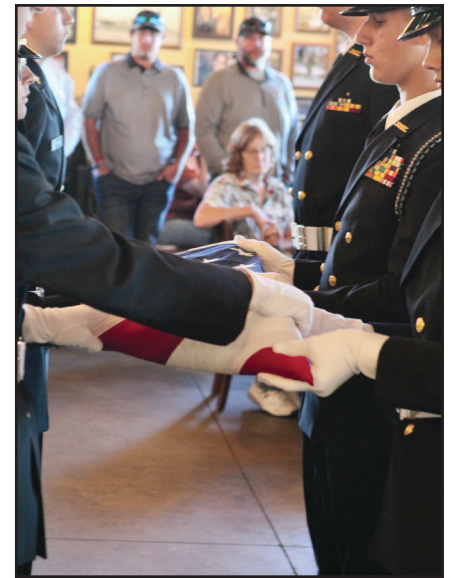
In a full circle moment, Nease NJROTC cadets performed a flag presentation ceremony. This is a ceremonial folding of the American flag and presenting it to the next of kin. Patton's eldest son, Rex Patton (whose daughter Lyndsi graduated from Nease in 1996), was moved to tears as he received the flag in his father's honor. Participating cadets also felt the magnitude of the moment and were honored to have been invited.

Thank you to Rex Patton, Ron Patton, their families, and Larry Ward for including the Nease NJROTC cadets in this extraordinary celebration. Thank you, Mr. Patton, for your extreme bravery and service to our country. It is an example to future generations.

The Patton family and friends have committed to a \$1,000 scholarship to be given to a deserving Nease cadet annually in honor of Mr. Patton.



Contributed photos



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## County Commission picks chair, vice chair

On Tuesday, Nov. 19, the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners elected Krista Joseph, District 4, to serve as chair and Clay Murphy, District 3, to serve as vice chair during a special reorganizational meeting of the board. Both will serve one-year terms in those roles.

“I’m excited to be representing the people of St. Johns County going forward,” said Joseph. “I’m going to be listening, and I would like to have a positive golden era of St. Johns County for this next year.”

During the meeting, a ceremonial oath of office for new commissioners was conducted. Judge Lauren Blocker administered the oath of office to Commissioner Christian Whitehurst, while Judge Charles Timlin administered the oath to Murphy and Commissioner Ann Taylor.

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# Olympic spirit marks Otter Run at Ocean Palms



True to its theme, this year’s Otter Run at Ocean Palms Elementary School, was marked by a series of events, just like the 16 days of the Olympics, that brought this team of teachers, staff, students and parents together to raise \$60,000 to enrich student, teacher and staff experi-

ences at the school.

Ollie, the otter, had an Olympic send off at the school’s open house, where families bore witness to class flags that adorned the hallways for the opening ceremonies. Then, as school-

**OTTER RUN** continues on Page 15



Contributed photos

Students at Ocean Palms hit the track for this year’s Olympic-themed Otter Run, which raised \$60,000.

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# Otter Run

Continued from 14

wide fundraising goals were met along the way, students enjoyed crazy hair day, a DJ at recess, dunking administration, teacher sumo wrestling and, finally, an inflatable at recess. Not to mention the pep rally, where teachers participated as teams in a series of games in a finale that was almost too close to call!

Finally, students took this Olympic adventure to the finish line at the Otter Run on Oct. 22. Dressed to impress with class-themed costumes ranging from the minions to goldfish, sharks and superheroes, it was a sight to behold, if only in a blur.

Sponsored by Fishman Pediatric Dentistry, this event brought Olympic spirit to life at Ocean Palms.

Contributed photos



Students at Ocean Palms hit the track for this year's Olympic-themed Otter Run, which raised \$60,000.



OPE students dunked administration on their way to reaching their fundraising goal!



Teachers led the school pep rally on the eve of the run by participating in a team-based series of games!



Students danced recess away to music with hula hoops, bubbles ... and a pink unicorn!

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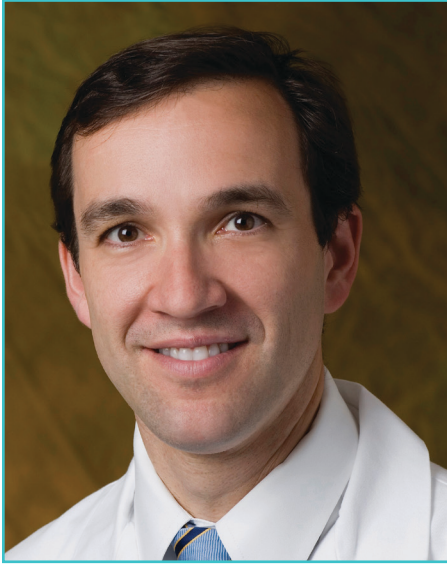
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## GUEST COLUMN

# Holiday heart syndrome: Protect your heart this season



By **Anthony Magnano, M.D.**

Ascension St. Vincent's Riverside

The holidays are a time to celebrate with family and friends, but all that cheer can sometimes be hard on your heart. Rich meals, busy schedules and alcohol consumption contribute to a spike in car-

diac emergencies during this time of year. A study in the British Medical Journal shows the weeks between Christmas and New Year's are especially high-risk, with heart attacks peaking on Christmas Eve.

One issue to watch out for is "holiday heart syndrome," which often shows up after moderate to heavy alcohol consumption and can lead to an abrupt onset of atrial fibrillation (AFib). It can cause symptoms like a racing heartbeat, shortness of breath and even fainting. While these episodes sometimes resolve on their own, they can still be frightening and dangerous. Knowing the risks and taking simple steps to protect your heart can help you fully enjoy the season — and many more to come.

## Listen to Your Body and Don't Delay Care

This season, it's more important than ever to pay attention to how you're feeling. Symptoms like chest pain, discomfort in your arms or jaw, nausea or lightheadedness can all signal a heart attack

or other emergency. The sooner you seek help, the better your outcome is likely to be. Remember: putting off care to avoid disrupting holiday plans isn't worth the risk. If you think you're having a heart attack, call 911 immediately.

## Keep Up with Your Medications

Between holiday travel, closures and the hectic nature of the season, it's easy to lose track of your medications. However, skipping doses or running out can be dangerous, especially if you have a heart condition. Make sure your prescriptions are refilled before pharmacies close and set a reminder to take them as prescribed. This small step can make a big difference in keeping your heart healthy.

## Skip the Extra Round of Drinks

Holiday parties and family gatherings often mean raising a glass, but too much alcohol can lead to a sudden episode of holiday heart syndrome or worse. Binge drinking, which is more than five drinks in two hours for men or four for women, raises your blood pressure and disrupts your heart rhythm.

Even moderate drinking can increase your risk of heart-related events for days afterward. For the best heart health, limit alcohol to no more than one drink per day. If you're thinking about skipping alcohol altogether, your heart will thank you. More and more studies suggest that minimizing alcohol is important for optimal sleep and cardiovascular health. Over the long term, habitual drinking of more than five alcoholic beverages per week

may have the potential for adverse health consequences.

## Take a Moment to Breathe

Let's face it: the holidays are stressful. From shopping to cooking to entertaining guests, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Unfortunately, all that stress can take a toll on your heart by raising your blood pressure and triggering your body's fight-or-flight response.

Make it a point to carve out time for yourself. A brisk walk, a quiet moment with a cup of tea, or even some deep breaths can go a long way in keeping your stress levels — and your heart — in check.

## Celebrate Smart and Stay Heart-Healthy

The holidays are about joy and connection, and keeping your heart healthy means you can savor every moment. By moderating alcohol, managing stress, and keeping up with your medications, you'll give yourself the best gift of all: good health.

Give yourself a gift this season by taking care of your heart. After all, a healthy heart will help you enjoy many more holidays to come.

**Dr. Anthony Magnano is a Ponte Vedra resident and chief of cardiology at Ascension St. Vincent's Riverside. For more information on Dr. Magnano and his specialty in treating Atrial fibrillation, go to [Healthcare.ascension.org](https://www.healthcare.ascension.org) or call 904-388-1820.**

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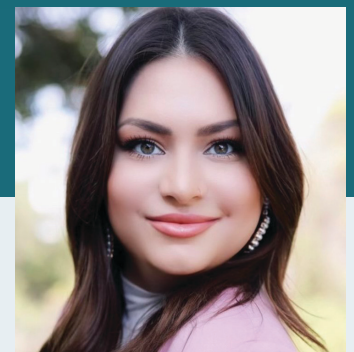
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# TIPS TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR SKIN

As the body's largest organ, skin is of the utmost importance to overall health. The skin protects against germs, regulates body temperature and enables tactile sensations, says the Cleveland Clinic. Despite those vital functions, skin is easily overlooked in health care regimens.

Even though the skin is susceptible to aging just like every other part of the body, there are steps everyone can take to maintain healthy skin throughout their lifetimes. Dermatologists, including those from the American Academy of Dermatology, share tips on how to care for and protect the skin so it looks beautiful and functions properly.

• **Use sun protection.** One of the key ways to care for the skin is to protect it from the sun. Over time, sun exposure can cause age spots, wrinkles and elevate the risk for skin cancer. Always use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher. Apply generously and be sure to reapply every two hours or more if you will be swimming or perspiring.

• **Stay away from tanning beds.** People mistakenly think that using tanning beds is safer than sitting out in the sun. However, tanning beds emit harmful UV radiation that



can cause skin cancer just like the sun. The AAD says one indoor tanning session can increase the risk of developing melanoma by 20 percent. Use self-tanning products instead for a golden glow.

• **Quit smoking or never begin.** Smoking makes the skin look older and contributes to wrinkles. Smoking narrows the tiny blood vessels in the outermost layers of the skin, decreasing blood flow to the skin and making the skin more pale, says the Mayo

Clinic. Smoking also depletes oxygen in the skin and can damage collagen and elastin, the fibers that give skin its elasticity and strength.

• **Avoid an overload of products.** Many dermatologists suggest their patients stick to the basics daily, which includes a mild cleanser, moisturizer and sunscreen. Drinking plenty of water also helps the skin. Exfoliating the skin once a week can help remove dead skin cells, but don't overdo it,

which can lead to excess oil production and breakouts.

• **Select the right products for your skin type.** Choose products that pertain to your skin type, which may be sensitive, normal, dry, oily, or a combination thereof.

• **Don't forget the lips.** Many people treat their entire faces but then do not address the skin on their lips. Skin cancer can form on the lips, so use a lip balm that has an SPF of 30 or higher. Petroleum jelly can add moisture to the lips if they feel dry.

• **Visit a dermatologist.** A dermatologist is an expert in many conditions of the skin, hair and nails. He or she can perform an annual examination to look at the entire body and determine the health of skin, and identify any moles or spots that may be of concern.

• **Check your own skin.** People are advised to pay attention to their skin and look regularly for new spots; spots that are different from other spots on the body; moles that itch, bleed or change color; and any other things that seem not quite right.

Taking care of the skin throughout the years can help a person look and feel his or her best.

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# 3 short-term fitness goals that can lead to long-term success

Fitness-based New Year's resolutions are popular every year, but people who aspire to make such changes recognize how difficult it can be to achieve them. In fact, the Forbes Health/One Poll survey found that roughly 44 percent of respondents indicated their resolutions flamed out at the two- or three-month marker.

Though there's no one-size-fits-all strategy for sticking with and ultimately achieving a resolution, identifying short-term goals that can help people stay motivated can lead to long-term progress. Individuals who want to improve their physical fitness can consider these three short-term goals and use them as measuring sticks as they

pursue more long-term objectives.

**1. Aspire for incremental weight loss.**

Individuals who aspire to lose 10 pounds undoubtedly recognize that such a goal cannot be achieved overnight, so why not aspire to lose small amounts of weight at predetermined intervals? For example, if the end goal is losing 10 lbs., aim to lose two pounds by the end of January. Incremental progress can motivate individuals to stay the course and ultimately propel them toward achieving a more substantial, long-term goal.

**2. Exercise for a predetermined number of days each week.** Another way to gradually build toward achieving long-

term fitness goals is to establish monthly minimum exercise sessions. Individuals accustomed to a sedentary lifestyle can resolve to exercise three days per week in the first month of their resolution, and then increase that by a day in the second month. A consistent schedule when designing this goal is imperative, which is why it can make more sense to plan for three days per week as opposed to 12 days per month.

**3. Resolve to walk a mile per day.**

Walking is an accessible cardiovascular activity that can have a profound effect on overall health. Walking also can help condition sedentary individuals' bodies for more strenuous activity, which is a transition

many people aspire to make when setting long-term fitness goals. A daily one-mile walk won't require a significant commitment of time, but it can help acclimate the body to routine exercise. As the effects of a daily walk begin to take hold, individuals may find it easier to engage in more strenuous physical activities, making this an ideal stepping stone on the way to achieving long-term fitness goals.

Short-term goals can help people remain motivated as they pursue more substantial goals that take longer to achieve. Such an approach can be especially useful for individuals resolving to improve their physical fitness at the start of a new year.

# DAILY DENTAL HYGIENE TIPS FOR OPTIMAL ORAL HEALTH

Dental health is an important component of daily life. Although clean teeth and gums make for a healthy mouth, oral health also is tied to general health throughout the body. Guardian Insurance indicates that, if left unaddressed, bacteria in the mouth can multiply and spread elsewhere through the bloodstream. Gum disease has been linked to diabetes, respiratory ailments, heart disease, and even Alzheimer's disease. As a result, it is essential to maintain proper dental hygiene. Best practices for maintaining healthy teeth and gums involve various

techniques. Here's how to brush up on maintaining a healthy mouth.

**• Brush at least twice per day.**

Utilizing toothpaste and a soft-bristled toothbrush, be sure to brush teeth each morning and night. Be sure to brush all tooth surfaces, including the backs and the sides. Brushing after every meal also can be done to keep teeth even cleaner.

**• Brush correctly.** Position the toothbrush at a 45-degree angle toward the gums. This will help sweep away plaque and bacteria



at the gum line, according to the Cleveland Clinic. Do not use a medium- or hard-bristled brush, which can damage the gums and tooth enamel. Move the toothbrush in gentle, circular motions to remove plaque.

**• Don't neglect your tongue.** Bacteria also can build up on the tongue, leading to bad mouth odor and additional oral health problems. Gently brush the tongue along with the teeth.

**• Use toothpaste with fluoride.** Fluoride has come under scrutiny due to its potential effects on overall

health. However, fluoride is a leading defender against tooth decay. It fights the germs that can lead to decay and provides a barrier for the teeth.

**• Use an antibacterial mouthwash.**

Use an antibacterial mouthwash each day to help reduce oral bacteria. This helps wash away food and debris, and also can help reduce the buildup of plaque.

**• Avoid smoking and tobacco.** Smoking is a leading cause of gum disease and oral cancer. Quit smoking and do not use other tobacco products to improve mouth health.



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FEATURING  
**Holiday Real Estate**

PAGE 20 THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2024

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## Underwood Jewelers supports Pink Ribbon Jax at annual designer trunk show

By Holly Tishfield

On Nov. 14, Underwood Jewelers hosted its highly anticipated designer trunk show and check presentation in support of Pink Ribbon Jax. The event brought together community members, supporters and advocates for an evening of celebration and giving.

Highlights of the evening included a lively cocktail party

and the much-awaited check presentation, where it was revealed that \$350,000 had been raised to support mammograms and imaging services for uninsured and underinsured individuals in Northeast Florida.

A cornerstone of this achievement was Underwood Jewelers' dedication to the cause, donating 10% of all trunk show sales to Pink Ribbon Jax. These funds will directly benefit the organi-

zation's mission of expanding access to essential breast health services in the community.

Pink Ribbon Jax is an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization created in 2006 that raises funds for free mammograms and imaging services for uninsured and underinsured women and men in Jacksonville. What began as one event, the Pink Ribbon Golf

**UNDERWOOD** continues on Page 21



Photo by Holly Tishfield

Shoppers enjoying the designer trunk show at Underwood Jewelers.



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# Underwood

Continued from 20

Classic, grew to multiple fundraising and educational events. To date, they have donated more than \$3.5 million in the fight against breast cancer, and it all stays in Jacksonville.

Underwood Jewelers has been a steadfast partner to Pink Ribbon Jax for nearly 20 years, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to supporting breast cancer awareness and care in the commu-

nity. This enduring partnership underscores the power of collaboration in making a lasting impact on the Northeast Florida community.

In 2024, Pink Ribbon Jax set an ambitious goal to raise \$500,000. With the support of dedicated local partners like Underwood Jewelers and the generosity of the Jacksonville community, they are well on their way to reaching this milestone. Each dollar raised brings them closer to their mission of providing lifesaving services and advancing the fight against breast cancer.



Julie Vermeulen and Patsy Powell



Photos by Holly Tishfield  
Guests browsing the designer trunk show at Underwood Jewelers.



Tina and Brian Zehren



Guests dress in pink to support Pink Ribbon Jax as they enjoy a cocktail party at Underwood Jewelers.



Michael Richards, Clayton and Christy Bromberg, Marcia Pendjer, and John Rutkowski present the check from Pink Ribbon Jax.



Frank and Elizabeth Ferris

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# Lisa Barton hosts customer appreciation party



The Lisa Barton Team Ponte Vedra with Keller Williams Realty Atlantic Partners hosted their annual customer appreciation party in October to celebrate their year. This event was hosted at Fantasy Farms, a fun, eclectic event space full of old Florida charm and a variety of animals such as lemurs, exotic birds, and a horse, plus a car museum.

Photos by Susan Griffin



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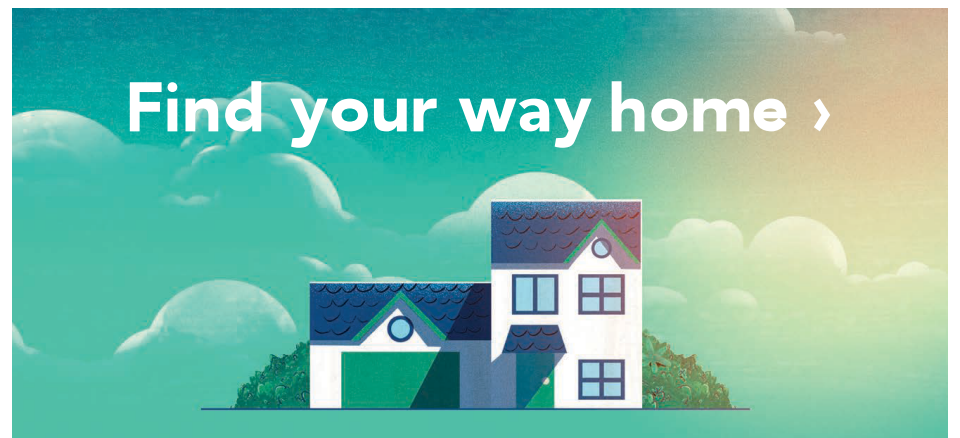




# Realtor & Builder's Trade Show features 80s vibe

The Realtor & Builder's Trade Show was held in Jacksonville on Oct. 18. This year's show had an 1980s theme that many of the vendors had fun and got creative with it.

Photos by Susan Griffin



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# In the Arts

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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2024 • PAGE 24

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Photos provided by the Jacksonville Symphony



The Jacksonville Symphony's "Holiday Pops" concert.



"The First Coast Nutcracker"

## Jacksonville Symphony announces holiday schedule

The Jacksonville Symphony will present five more holiday-themed programs during its 75th anniversary season, which started with "Big Band Holiday" on Nov. 24. The lineup includes annual favorites such as "Holiday Pops," "First Coast Nutcracker" and Handel's "Messiah" and concludes with a new program, "Holiday Brass, Organ and Percussion," on Dec. 19. The Jacksonville Youth Symphony Orchestras (JSYO) will perform their holiday concert, with tickets available to the public, on Dec. 9.

The symphony will also host a meet-and-greet with Santa before the Dec. 7 and 8 performances of "Holiday Pops."

The 2024-25 Holiday Season Schedule:

- "Holiday Pops": Dec. 5-8. Guest conductor Herb Smith leads this holiday staple with vocalists Carole J. Bufford and Campbell Walker Fields, the Jacksonville Symphony Chorus and dancers from Douglas Anderson School of the Arts. A one-hour concert on Dec. 6 at 11 a.m. will not include dancers or the chorus.
- JSYO Holiday Concert: Dec. 9. Students will perform festive classics the whole family will enjoy, led by Nathaniel Efthimiou.
- "The First Coast Nutcracker": Dec. 13-15. This local tradition features more

than 130 ballet dancers with music performed live by the symphony and conducted by Nathaniel Efthimiou.

- Handel's "Messiah": Dec. 14-15. This holiday classic led by Kevin Fitzgerald features the full power of the Jacksonville Symphony Chorus along with guest vocalists: Esteli Gomez, Jay Carter, Aaron Sheehan and Sidney Outlaw.
- "Holiday Brass, Organ and Percussion": Dec. 19. A new program conducted by guest conductor Matthew Wardell, featuring organist Greg Zelek.
- Tickets are available at [JaxSymphony.org](http://JaxSymphony.org) or by calling the box office at 904-354-5547.

## 'Christmas FANTASTIQUE' set for Dec. 7 and 8

"Christmas FANTASTIQUE" will be presented at 7 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 7, and 1 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 8, at Lewis Auditorium, 14 Granada St., St. Augustine. The original production by Zoika's Dance tells the classic holiday story of "The Nutcracker" through the language of dance, featuring classical ballet, as well as contemporary dance genres including tap, hip hop, jazz, contemporary and acro dance.

Professional dancers, actors, magicians and vocalists join young, local dancers on stage for the holiday extravaganza. Tickets range from \$23 to \$38 and may be purchased online at [www.zoikadance.com](http://www.zoikadance.com).

"Christmas FANTASTIQUE" invites audiences to share in young Clara's Christmas Eve dream, as her Christmas tree grows tall, her toys come to life and she travels with a young prince to the Land of Sweets.

To create this magic, director Zoika Garcia has assembled a cast of 90 performers, including professional dancers who will bring their mastery and fireworks to the stage.

Snow Queen and Snow King will be danced by Claudia Mueckay and Jake Karger of St. Augustine. Arabian will be performed by acro dance performers Julia Boyd and John Boyd, owners of AcroFit of Jacksonville. Jenne Vermes and Sean Mansfield of Noise Complaint Tap Dance Theatre will dance the roles of Russian lead and Rat King, respectively. Clara's grandmother and grandfather will be danced by Claudia Ruby of Ruby Dance Center of Tampa and Hector Figueroa, formerly of National Ballet of Cuba. Uncle Drosselmeyer will be performed by magician, Bret Blackshear. And young Clara, the story's protagonist, will be danced by 9-year-old dancer Zoey Halcrow.

Adding to the festive spirits, classical vocalist Raquel Rubi will perform carols, and harpist Kathleen Blackshear will entertain audiences before the show. Sign

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# Spanish Brass to perform free concert

The Beaches Fine Arts Series will present Spanish Brass in a holiday-themed program at 4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 8. Admission is free. Doors open at 3:15 and seating is first come-first served.

The concert will be held at St. Paul's by-the-Sea Episcopal Church, 465 12th Avenue North, Jacksonville Beach. A reception to meet the performers and view beautiful bespoke clothing by artist Michael Armano follows the concert.

This will be the third appearance of Spanish Brass at Beaches Fine Arts, but the first appearance at this venue. Other appearances included 2014 in St. Augustine and 2019 at St. John's Cathedral with organist Tim Tuller. The program will include Corelli's "Christmas Oratorio."

With a 35-year trajectory in the world of chamber music, Spanish Brass is one of the most dynamic and sought-after brass groups on the international musical stage.

Spanish Brass has been invited to be the keynote performers at the 2025 International Trumpet Guild conference, the most prestigious and high-profile event of its kind in the world.

Founded in 1989 by five Spanish musicians as an innovative project that quickly gained world renown for performances, educational activities and creative collaborations, Spanish Brass won the First Prize in the 1996 Narbonne (France) International Brass Quintet Competition, the most prestigious brass competition in the world.



Contributed photo

## Spanish Brass

Michael Armano, principal designer of Kalypso Couture and a founding member of Bespoke House Artisan Community, has carved a niche for himself as the "Drip Broker" in the vibrant landscape of bespoke fashion. With a flair for merging traditional craftsmanship with modern sensibilities, his journey in the fashion industry is a testament to his passion for creating garments that not only tell a story but also celebrate the individuality of his

clients.

Armano's designs are a homage to the timeless elegance of bespoke clothing, infused with a contemporary edge that speaks to today's fashion-forward audience. His dedication to quality and detail has earned him accolades and recognition, not just as a designer, but as an innovator who is constantly pushing the boundaries of custom fashion.

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- **First Coast Nutcracker**  
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Harry



Dave Tuttle in his studio.



Ted

# Mixed media 'robots' featured at gallery

Dave Tuttle is the December featured Artist at Butterfield Garage Gallery in St. Augustine. He is displaying a series of mixed media robots named "Metallic Whimsy."

Tuttle will be in the gallery during First Friday, Dec. 6, to discuss his process in building these delightful creatures.

Tuttle has been creating crazy, zany robots for months, in anticipation of his

December exhibit at Butterfield. Robots with wings, propellers and more. He draws on a supply of metal which he's collected over the years from machine shops, warehouses and individuals. His metal work is often infused with mixed media materials such as epoxy resin, polymer clay, alcohol ink, rivets and wire, to name just a few. The heart is a common motif. As a secular humanist, he

strives to convey compassion, tolerance and empathy through his work.

Tuttle migrated from Salt Lake City, Utah, in 2019 and works out of his metal shop and home studio where he uses a variety of tools to create works such as hearts, robots and industrial lamps. From small handheld magnets to five-foot sculptures, each one a delight to see, his pieces bring smiles to viewers for years to come.

Tuttle has a B.A. in history and anthropology and a master's in library and information science. After a career as a library technology consultant working with public and academic libraries throughout North America, and now devotes his time to creating art and educating himself on new techniques and mediums.



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Robohead

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## FANTASTIQUE

Continued from 24

language interpreter Amanda Villalobos will provide signing.

Garcia and the cast are also looking forward to sharing the magic of "Christmas FANTASTIQUE" with local children served by St. Johns County nonprofit organizations including St. Augustine Youth Services, the Betty Griffin House and Fostering Connections. Thanks to the support of community sponsors, Zoika's Dance will provide complimentary tickets for these children to experience the holiday magic.

"Sharing dance with the community gives us so much joy," Garcia explained. "And sharing this holiday experience with children who might not otherwise be able to attend makes it so much sweeter."

Sponsorship and marketing opportunities are available to support the production and its community outreach. For more information on becoming a sponsor,



Contributed photo

go to [www.zoikadance.com/sponsors](http://www.zoikadance.com/sponsors).

Zoika's Dance is a comprehensive dance school in St. Augustine that offers beginner to advanced classes in dance, as well as performance opportunities. To learn more, go to [www.zoikadance.com](http://www.zoikadance.com).



# Sports

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2024 · PAGE 27

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Nease takes the field prior to its second-round matchup against Oakleaf High.



Tyler Ghazanfari runs a route.

## Second round culminates in tough defeats

By Anthony Richards

It was a tough second round of postseason action for the Nease Panthers and Ponte Vedra Sharks, as both football teams suffered heartbreaking defeats.

The Panthers were seemingly searching for a rhythm from the opening kickoff in their 31-14 loss to the Oakleaf Knights, and although they appeared to find it at times with certain deep drives offensively or with crucial sacks on defense but were unable to fully establish it.

The best way to describe it is that it was just one of those nights where the ball did not bounce the Panthers' way and what worked for them throughout the season was not resulting in the usual success.

As a result, the Panthers were shutout in the first half and trailed 14-0 at the halftime break.

One of the factors that proved tough for the Panthers to come back from was that they lost the turnover battle with a fumbled punt return and two interceptions on the night while unable to force any of their own.

And when the Panthers did force a fumble early in the second half, the ball bounce around for a while on the field before an Oakleaf player came out of the bottom of the pile with it after it looked like the Panthers had possibly created an opportunity.

The Panthers got on the board with a K.J. Perry rushing



Photos by Anthony Richards

Noah Hodge chases down Oakleaf quarterback Jack McKissock.

touchdown from a couple of yards out but the Knights were quick to answer with a one-play drive as Fareed Coleman broke free for a 70-yard touchdown run and just like that the Knights were back up by three possessions, 28-7 early in the fourth quarter.

Following the loss, Nease head coach Collin Drafts made sure that his players knew that although the loss hurts in the moment it will not be what will define their careers or the season they had.

"At some point, and it may be a while, you're going to look back and smile at what you were able to accomplish

this year," Drafts said. "There will be a banner up soon in the weight room with this team's photo and it will say back-to-back district champs and the first undefeated regular season since 2006."

He asked all the underclassmen to thank the senior class for the legacy they will leave behind and challenged them to carry it on moving forward as they prepare to step into that role next year.

"They are handing over some monumental expectations to the next class," Drafts said. "It's a gift from the seniors."

For the Sharks, they experienced a heartbreaker of their own but in a different form, as they pushed the top-seeded Niceville Eagles to the brink as they jumped out to a lead following a 37-yard touchdown pass from Drew Price to Davitt Doherty and forced a pair of turnovers en route to grabbing a 14-7 halftime lead.

However, the Eagles scored a touchdown in the second half in what became a defensive battle between the two teams and tied the contest late in the third quarter and it eventually went to overtime.

In the overtime period, the Eagles scored a rushing touchdown and took a 21-14 lead, and the Sharks answered with a touchdown of their own but decided to go for a two-point conversion and the win, but a called quarterback run was stopped short and the game ended with the Sharks falling 21-20.

## Plenty of scoring, high-flying action to open basketball season

By Anthony Richards

As the holidays approach, that can only mean that the high school basketball season is now in full swing with many teams having played at least a couple of games.

The Ponte Vedra boys are off to a hot start once again to start a season with a record of 2-1 so far, with impressive wins over Matanzas, 77-59, and Riverside, 79-49, with both games at home.

Their lone loss came on the road against the Providence School, 56-47, but they have shown the ability to score on offense so far with junior Maddox Palmer leading all scorers with an average of 16.7 points per game, while senior

David Sanchez Barrera has been a facilitator of the offense with an average of five assists an outing.

The Nease boys have battled hard in their first two games but ended up on the losing end on both occasions against Bishop Snyder, 55-45, and Bartram Trail 39-37. The Panthers are in tough stretch where their first four games are all on the road.

Their home opener will be against Paxon on Dec. 3 at 7:30 p.m.

It has been furious starts for both the Nease and Ponte Vedra girls basketball squads as they have had some impressive showing in the first couple of weeks of the season.

The Panthers are 2-1 with a blowout win over Stanton

Prep and a hard-fought close 29-23 victory over Glynn Academy of Georgia in the Insider Exposure Thanksgiving Classic in Jacksonville.

Sophomore Sage Pytel and senior McKenna Owens are both averaging double digits scoring with 11 and 10.5 points per game, respectively.

The Sharks joined the Panthers as participants at the Thanksgiving Classic this year and just like the Panthers have a pair of wins to start the season over a pair of Clay County teams in Oakleaf and Fleming Island.

Junior Arden Doherty and freshman Jocelyn Hoffmann have been the leaders behind the Sharks offense so far as both are averaging 15 or more points.



Contributed photos



The Ponte Vedra girls cross-country team won the 2024 Class 3A cross-country state title.



The Ponte Vedra boys cross-country squad finished third in the state competition.

# Shark girls bring home second state title in four years, boys finish third

By Anthony Richards

The Ponte Vedra High cross-country program had high expectations heading into the postseason and it is safe to say that they lived up to the expectations in a big way, as the girls squad won the Class 3A state championship and the boys finished third overall, their highest ever finish at the state competition.

Both teams path to the state competition included capturing district titles.

The girls were led by senior Daisy Ross and won their fourth consecutive district title, while the boys were led by senior Tanner Andrade Brinsko.

The teams then faced an unusual scheduling this year, as they then traveled to Panama City for regionals just five days after districts.

However, it did not seem to bother the Sharks as the girls team handled business and brought home the regional champi-

onship as well, as senior Sofia Bushkell chose the perfect time to show her best and was the Sharks' No. 2 runner.

This was the girls' fourth straight regional championship, while the boys team finished third behind eventual state runner up Chiles High.

This was a proud third place finish after the Sharks' top runner, Andrade Brinsko, was injured after the first mile and was unable to finish the race.

The Sharks No. 2 runner junior Miles Wicks was also returning to form after a series of illnesses kept him sidelined for a month.

The success continued to mount and followed the Sharks as they went back out to the panhandle, this time to Tallahassee and Florida's cross-country capital for the FHSAA Class 3A State Championship.

The girls squad was slight favorites coming into the race against perennial rival Fort Lauderdale Dillard High who

were the defending champions.

As expected, Ross led the Sharks with another great performance, as she finished fourth overall with a time of 18:28.

This time junior Sam Gore stepped up for a career-best 18:56 and a spot on the medal stand with a 13th-place finish.

With another outstanding performance from Bushkell and fellow teammates Savannah Lavasser and Olivia Kaminsky, the Sharks were able to capture their second state title.

Ross and Bushkell have helped put the Sharks' girls program on the map during their high school careers and were able to win at states as both freshmen and seniors.

The boys battled hard to match their highest ever finish at states with the third-place finish.

They were once again led by Andrade Brinsko as well as Wicks, Sophomore Luke Ross, and juniors Walker White and Evan Wienroth.

As the Sharks look ahead to next season, the high expectations remain as a deep girls team returns three of their top five scorers.

They will also return Ella McGowan, Mia Wicks and Julia Preston who will be seniors along with a strong stable of juniors who are going to battle to be on the postseason squad.

The boys return four of their top scorers and have a rising crop of young runners who will look to contribute next year, including Cooper Hunt and Jasper Graham.

Under the guidance of former coach Rob Circelli and current coaches Jeff Cannada and Christian Skarat the Sharks have become one of the premier programs in Florida, and their championship resume continues to grow.

Thirty-two athletes from the track and cross-country programs have competed at the college level over the past seven years with more to come.

## Local lacrosse teams shine at Veteran's Day Invitational



The 10U Makos Jaws team won their championship.

The Ponte Vedra Lacrosse Jaws 10U Makos and 12U White Tips boys travel teams competed in the Veteran's Day Invitational in Palm Coast on November 9 and 10, showcasing skill and determination against top lacrosse talent from around the state. The 10U Makos won the championship, while the 12U White Tips finished third.

Contributed photos



The 12U White Tips Jaws team finished third.

## Nease football gives back to Blessings in a Backpack



Contributed photos

Nease High football seniors collected food through a food drive for Blessings in a Backpack. With the donations, they were able to collect and pack 101 backpacks as well as collect numerous additional items to go into future bags. After packing the bags, they wrote cards to put in each of the backpacks, which were delivered to five local schools.





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  - At a deliberate pace
  - Gurus
  - Of each
  - Angry
  - Popular beverage
  - Flower cluster
  - Blocks
  - Those who benefitted from efforts of relatives (slang)
  - Polio vaccine developer
  - A (usually) large and scholarly book
  - Popular soap ingredient
  - NBAer Bradley
  - Popular movie about a pig
  - Musician Clapton
  - Not a sure thing
  - Recipe measurement (abbr.)
  - Father
- DOWN**
- Piece of felted material
  - Ancient Greek City

SUDOKU								
	6	1		7	9		3	
		3	5	8	4			6
	5			6		7		
	9	8			2	1		7
			8				9	
	3			5		2		4
				9	8			5
	2			3				9

Level: Beginner

**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!





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4700 Southside Blvd, Jacksonville, FL 32216 | [www.randymarioncadillacofjacksonville.com](http://www.randymarioncadillacofjacksonville.com)