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Last Minute Gift Guide

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Thursday, December 12, 2024

PonteVedraRecorder.com

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Local eye surgeon a leader in First Coast medical tourism

By Shaun Ryan

It is no secret that tourism is the lifeblood of the Sunshine State's economy. According to Visit Florida, the state's official tourism marketing corporation, more than 140 million nonresidents visit each year.

The reasons are varied but unsurprising. The most popular attractions include beaches and waterfront activities, shopping, sightseeing and theme parks.

However, among a select population, there is a lesser-known — though notable — reason to travel to Florida: medical tourism.

Though this is often associated with the relative costs of medical care between countries, quality of care ranks high for those coming to the United States. The National Institutes of Health has found an increase in medical tourism in recent years, though actual statistics remain elusive.

Here in Northeast Florida, the rich abundance and reputation of hospitals and other medical facilities, cutting-edge innovation, physicians and specialties have made it a desirable place not only to visit, but in some cases to put down roots.

EYE SURGEON continues on Page 32

the link[™]
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Perfect for ages 7-12
Full-day camp



Register Today!



Recent offensive explosion helps Panthers find their groove

By Anthony Richards

The Nease High girls soccer team has successfully carried over the momentum they had at the end of last season following their regional final appearance.

The Panthers have started the season fast with a record of 6-2-1, and after a two-game stretch when they lost to both Toco Creek High and Staton Prep on the road 1-0, the Panthers have appeared to have righted the ship thanks to the offense coming alive of late.

They have scored 12 goals in the last three games, including 7-1 and 4-1 victories against Christ's Church Academy and West Nassau High, respectively, in back-to-back days on Dec. 9 and 10.



Photo by Anthony Richards

OFFENSIVE continues on Page 36

Senior Jess Morley is a major contributor to the Panthers' offensive success.

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THE RECORDER

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BRIEFS

Toys for Tots donations accepted

New and unwrapped toys are being accepted now through Sunday, Dec. 15, for the Toys for Tots toy drive at a local resort. Donation boxes are located in the main lobby of the Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa, 1000 Tournament Players Club Blvd., Ponte Vedra Beach, and the Cabana Beach Club, 619 Ponte Vedra Blvd., Ponte Vedra Beach.

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.

Family seining activity planned

Join a guided family seining activity from 9 to 11 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 14, at Guana Tolomato Matanzas (GTM) National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Learn about the animals and their roles in Guana Lake by pulling a seine net and collecting species of fish, crabs and other marine life.

Meet at GTM Research Reserve Guana Dam, 505 Guana River Road, Ponte Vedra Beach.

Register online at gtmnerr.org/visit/events.

The event is free, but parking is \$3 per vehicle. All necessary gear (waders and boots) will be provided. Hat, insect repellent, water and sunscreen are recommended.

St. Johns County Commission OKs \$2.18M for Diamond of Dreams

At their Dec. 3 regular meeting, the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners unanimously approved two motions that authorized the use of \$2,187,252 in American Rescue Plan Act funds and a funding assistance agreement for the St. Johns County Police Athletic League Diamond of Dreams project. It is an all-inclusive specially designed baseball/multipurpose field and playground for children of all abilities planned for southwestern St. Johns County.

The Diamond of Dreams project plans include a carpeted, wheelchair-accessible baseball field, dugouts, a press box, family seating, ADA-complaint asphalt parking spaces and restroom facilities and a wheelchair-accessible playground.

On May 10, 2021, the U.S. Department of the Treasury launched the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, established by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA). St. Johns County was allocated \$51,409,434. One part of the ARPA objective was to provide emergency funding for eligible local governments, to support the immediate pandemic response, bring back jobs and lay the groundwork for a strong and equitable recovery. Up to \$10 million of ARPA funding can be appropriated to capital projects under a "lost revenue" category. St. Johns County must commit/encumber ARPA funding by Dec. 31.

Previous ARPA-funded projects have included the Hastings Vocational School, water/sewer infrastructure and the West Augustine Medical Facility.

Rare turtle nests on St. Johns County beaches

St. Johns County's 2024 sea turtle nesting season included a milestone: the presence of four rare Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests on county beaches.

The Kemp's ridley sea turtle is the most endangered species of sea turtle in the world. It is also the smallest, reaching no more than 32 inches in length and 100 pounds in weight, and is the only sea turtle species that nests primarily during the day.

The first Kemp's ridley sea turtle nest recorded in St. Johns County was in 2015, and only a few more sporadic nestings have been recorded between then and 2024.

Ashley Raybould, environmental supervisor of St. Johns County Beach Services' Habitat Conservation Program, emphasized that the Kemp's rидleys' rarity and daytime nesting behavior makes it even more important to give them plenty of space and observe from a distance.

— Compiled by Shaun Ryan

PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

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SELECT NIGHTS
NOVEMBER — FEBRUARY

Open Mic to be held Saturday for area writers

Area writers can share their work at the annual Open Mic meeting of the Ponte Vedra Writers at 11 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 14, at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library.

Writing is a personal artform, and often done in seclusion, but the Open Mic forum allows writers to read excerpts of present or past work before a respectful audience of their peers. The meeting is open to writers of all genres, whether poetry, fiction or nonfiction. Depending on the number of participants, each person will have between eight and 12 minutes to read to the group.

Advance notice is required if you wish to participate to be sure there's time for everyone to read.



Email group leader Vic DiGenti at vicdig@mac.com if you wish to participate.

Refreshments will be served, and the meeting will include a book exchange. Those attending may bring one or two like-new books to share with others. Any books not taken will be donated to Seymour's, the library's bookstore.

The Ponte Vedra Writers group is affiliated with the Florida Writers Association, a statewide, non-profit organization dedicated to the support of both aspiring and published writers in any genre. The Dec. 14 meeting is free and open to members and nonmembers alike.

For information on FWA go to floridawriters.org

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Contributed photos



The LEGO Robotics, Drones and Carrera Slot Cars Camp is full of action-packed activities.



The Cooking and Art Camp is a fun mix of artistic exploration and culinary adventures.



The winter camps at the link offer a blend of creativity, hands-on activities and fun.

Camps to keep kids busy during winter break

Winter break is just around the corner, and parents looking to keep their children engaged and learning during the holiday season have two exciting options to consider. The winter camps at the link in Nocatee offer a blend of creativity, hands-on activities and fun designed for children of various ages, making this break both enjoyable and educational.

The Cooking and Art Camp runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Dec. 23, 26 and 27 with half-day options available. Geared for children ages 5 to 12, this camp blends artistic exploration with culinary adventures under the guidance of Miss Kara.

Children will dive into activities like

mastering the ancient art of marbling to create mesmerizing designs on leaves, rocks and scarves. They will explore food arts and science with projects such as making solar s'mores or creating magic with milk and dish soap.

Additionally, campers will design resin trays for serving or storage, craft vibrant home decor items, and prepare delicious recipes like Parmesan chicken, taco soup and edible cookie dough. Each day promises new projects, and children will bring home their creations daily.

For tech savvy kids ages 7 to 12, the LEGO Robotics, Drones and Carrera Slot Cars Camp also runs from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Dec. 23, 26 and 27. This camp

is designed to inspire young adventurers with action-packed activities that promote creativity and teamwork.

Campers will engage in LEGO robotics coding challenges, where they will build and program LEGO Spike Prime robots to tackle exciting tasks. They will navigate drones through obstacle courses and compete in high-speed slot car races. Campers will also engage in foam wars, where participants gear up with helmets and vests for friendly team battles, promoting collaboration and teamwork.

This immersive experience is a perfect opportunity for children to explore new interests and develop problem-solving

skills.

Both camps provide an enriching environment that helps children stay active and inspired during the winter break. The activities are thoughtfully designed to blend fun with learning, ensuring kids return to school energized and ready to embrace new challenges.

Parents are encouraged to sign up their children at app.thelink.zone to secure a spot. Scroll and click "Winter Break Camp" and select your camp from the list. These camps are nonrefundable and fill up quickly, so early registration is recommended.

Any questions can be addressed to the link team at info@thelink.zone.



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World War II veteran Joe Shomo



Veterans attending the Pearl Harbor Day event.



Retired Navy Capt. Ryman Shoaf was the keynote speaker.

WWII veteran guest of honor at Pearl Harbor Day event

Centenarian World War II veteran Joe Shomo was the guest of honor at the Dec. 7 Pearl Harbor Day Remembrance and Luncheon hosted by the We Can Be Heroes Foundation. Shomo graciously posed for photos with hundreds attending the event at the VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena.

Shomo rose from his wheelchair to stand and salute for the presentation of colors, the saying of Pledge of Allegiance and singing of the National Anthem. The event featured Shomo's prerecorded story of his service and explains why World War II veterans are referred to as the Greatest Generation.

Keynote speaker retired Navy Captain Ryman Shoaf presented the

unforgettable true story of the life of Japanese Imperial Navy Capt. Mitsuo Fuchida, who coordinated and commanded the air attack on Pearl Harbor. Fuchida's life had several surprising turns during the war. After the war and much personal suffering, Fuchida became a devout Christian, evangelist and friend of the Rev. Billy Graham.

Retired Command Master Chief Mack Ellis presented his renowned heartfelt "Old Glory" recital. Ellis and Shoaf served at home and abroad including the Naval Air Station Jacksonville, and the Naval Station Mayport.

The Black Creek Young Marines presented colors, assisted at the event and posed for pictures with Shomo and

guests.

The event concluded with group photos of veterans and first responders with Shomo.

A regular participant of Pearl Harbor Remembrances, World War II Prisoner of War John Connelly missed this year's event while recuperating from a

recent hospitalization.

The Remembrance was a benefit for the U. S. Warriors Pantry for troops serving at Camp Humphreys, South Korea. Thousands of dollars were raised at the event, and donors continue to respond to the need.

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Stefan Brunt, a North Florida native and University of Florida graduate, has dedicated his career to the golf industry, rising to general manager at Sawgrass Country Club. His passion for hospitality and community has made Ponte Vedra Beach both his home and the heart of his professional journey.

Stefan Brunt

As told to Holly Tishfield

Tell me about your background.

I'm native to North Florida. I grew up in Gainesville and graduated from the University of Florida. I'm happily married and have two kids, Avery and Evan. After college, I've spent the majority of my life and my career in the golf industry, primarily here at Sawgrass Country Club. When I was still in college, I did an internship in Amelia Island and that opened me up to Jacksonville. I had the opportunity to move here, to take my first job at Sawgrass, and that was my first real introduction to living here. I've been at Sawgrass since 2007. I left for three years but ended up coming back and I've been here ever since. I started as a cart attendant and worked my way up to where I am now as general manager.

What was appealing to you about the Jacksonville area?

I've always had an attraction to Jacksonville and Ponte Vedra Beach, but working at Sawgrass was an opportunity that came up through networking. I took the opportunity when it was available, and I really haven't turned back. Ponte Vedra has been a great place to live, a great place to raise my family. The schools are great, the people are nice, it was a hidden gem when we found it.

What has kept you at the Sawgrass Country Club throughout the years?

It's the people that I enjoy the most. Being able to provide that service and hospitality, it's a fantastic membership that we have here. It's really enjoyable to come to work and spend time there — whether I'm inside, outside, running tournaments or in my position now running the club, I get to work with so many great people. That's what's been the attraction for me to stay here as long as I have.

Would you say you've seen Ponte Vedra change over the years?

Absolutely. I think Ponte Vedra alone, along with Sawgrass, was a comfortable, easy-going environment. It had very little traffic that used to take me just minutes to get to work, now it takes me half an hour. We used



Contributed photo

Stefan Brunt, general manager at Sawgrass Country Club.

to call it our little slice of heaven, and now everybody has found out about it. With Nocatee growing and the attraction to the area, I think a lot of young families have moved here and, of course, a lot of retirees, as well. So, I think that the club and the area has grown in a healthy way. You're not seeing big buildings, you're not seeing the natural beach vibe get taken

away, but there are more people here enjoying it.

What do you enjoy the most about what you do?

I really enjoy the events that we're able to host. We're a very large club with almost 3,000 members. The events that we host, the ability to be a

part of The PLAYERS Championship, it's always an exciting time for us. It's fun to put on a show. The enjoyable part is the anticipation for big member tournaments that we host. Those are the good times. We're in the entertainment business as well as running an operation, so we get to entertain, and we get to put our best foot forward and put on a show.

Alligator Farm remembers adventurer who captured Gomek

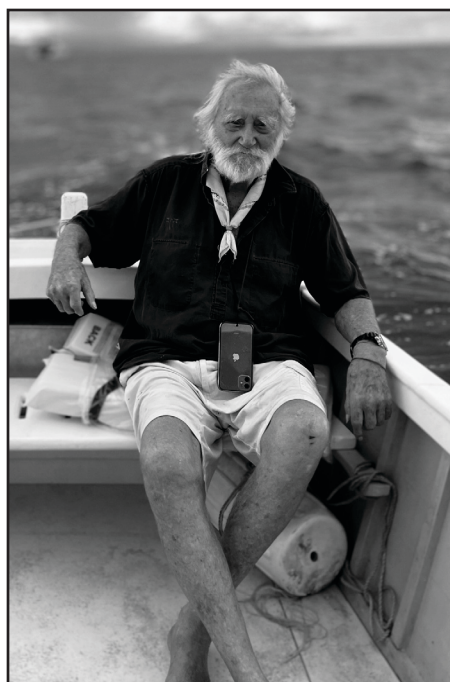
The St. Augustine Alligator Farm Zoological Park recently announced that one of the zoo's dearest friends, George J. Craig, died in November in Cairns, Australia, at the age of 94.

Craig, best known to St. Augustine residents as the captor of the legendary crocodile Gomek, played an instrumental role in the history of the Alligator Farm.

In 1968, Craig was called upon by residents of a remote region of Papua New Guinea to capture a large, dangerous crocodile terrorizing the Fly River. After successfully capturing the croc, Craig transported him 400 miles downriver, eventually bringing Gomek to his home on Daru Island.

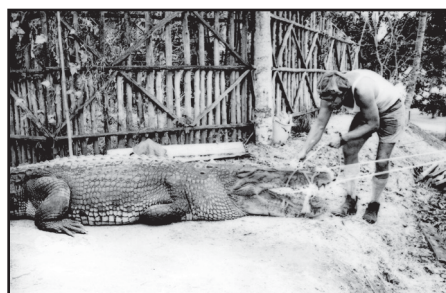
In 1972, Gomek was relocated to Marineland Melanesia on Green Island, where he was discovered by Arthur Jones, the founder of Nautilus Sports Medical Industries, who later arranged Gomek's transport to his wildlife sanctuary in Florida. In 1989, the St. Augustine Alligator Farm acquired Gomek, who lived the rest of his life in St. Augustine.

Craig was also instrumental in securing Maximo and Sydney, the Alligator Farm's



George James Craig

two remarkable saltwater crocodiles, and he played a key role in helping the zoo acquire a collection of New Guinea and Oceanic art pieces. His personal collection on Green Island has been called breathtak-



Photos provided by The St. Augustine Alligator Farm Zoological Park

George Craig gingerly approaches Gomek for the first time following the capture of the giant reptile.

ing, and several of his own artworks are proudly displayed in the Alligator Farm's Education Building.

"George was an exceptional man whose life was filled with adventure and achievement," said David C. Drysdale, owner of the St. Augustine Alligator Farm. "He was not only a pioneering wildlife conservationist, but also an artist and a storyteller who touched the lives of all who had the honor to know him. George's legacy is forever intertwined with the Alligator Farm, and we will always treasure his friendship, his contributions and the

incredible memories we shared."

Born in Peru in 1930, Craig's extraordinary life spanned continents and eras. From surviving the Battle of Britain as a young child to embarking on daring crocodile hunts in the wilds of Papua New Guinea, Craig's experiences were chronicled in the 1976 book "To Catch a Crocodile" by Australian author Peter Pinney. His adventurous spirit continued to inspire all who knew him, and he remained a passionate supporter of wildlife conservation throughout his life.

A model of Craig's collecting boat, the "Janis B" crafted by Tom Rahner, will be added to the Alligator Farm's Gomek display, along with photographs and memorabilia, ensuring Craig's legacy lives on in St. Augustine.

"We will continue to honor George's memory through our work and our dedication to the conservation of these magnificent creatures," added Drysdale. "We were fortunate to have known such a remarkable individual, and we are grateful for the indelible mark he has left on this place."

For more information, go to alligatorfarm.com.

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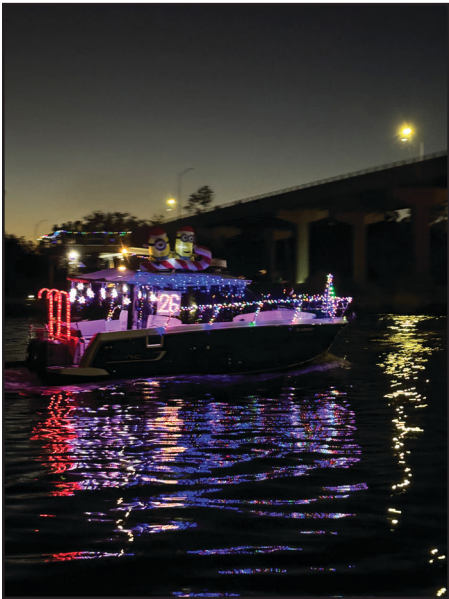
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Contributed photos

Partnership enhances annual Palm Valley Boat Parade

By Shaun Ryan

The annual Palm Valley Boat Parade was a big success this year.

“The Palm Valley and Ponte Vedra Beach communities were treated to one of the best-ever Holiday Boat Parades along the Intracoastal Waterway,” said Palm Valley Community Association President Greg Leonard. “This all-volunteer event, co-hosted by the Palm Valley Community Association (PVCA) and the St. Johns County Parks and

Recreation Department delighted viewers at special facilities set-up by Parks and Recreation under the Palm Valley Bridge.”

An estimated 300 spectators watched from under the bridge during the event, held from 6 to 8 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 7.

“This collaboration allowed us to engage a broader audience and provide a memorable experience to community members from across the region,” said Ryan Kane, director of the St. Johns County Parks and Recreation Depart-

ment. “We are thankful to all those involved in making this event a success and look forward to continuing such partnerships in the future.”

The holiday event, featuring brightly decorated boats traveling more than seven miles along the Intracoastal Waterway, has been held for about the past 40 years.

This year, the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners approved \$5,000 to cover the cost of a free shuttle service, safety lighting, additional porta-

ble restrooms, trash cans and more.

“Council on Aging buses transported hundreds of guests from Landrum Middle School parking to and from the bridge before, during and after the event,” said Leonard.

“The Parade Launch Party under the East Side of the Palm Valley Bridge was alive with holiday music, and kids were eager to accept glow sticks and bracelets to help light up the night,”

BOAT PARADE continues on **Page 8**

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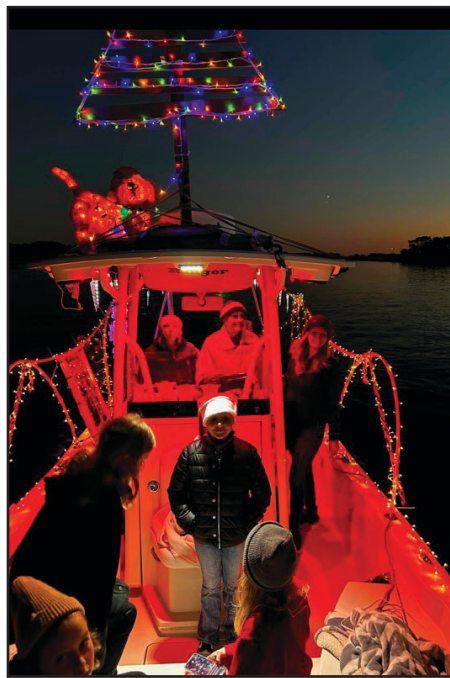
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Boat Parade

Continued from 8

said Jayne Evans, PVCA vice president. “Food trucks were busy selling refreshments and hot chocolate to viewers on a chilly evening, and 2024 Boat Parade T-shirts were in high demand.”

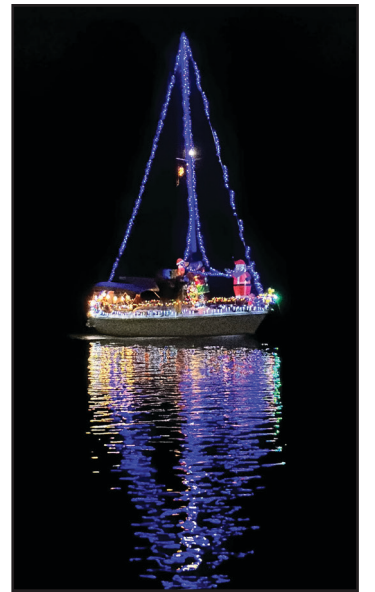
Evans credited County Commission Chair Krista Joseph for taking the lead in gaining the commission’s support. She noted that both Joseph and County Administrator Joy Andrews were in attendance.

“Our warmest thank you goes to Ryan

Kane, director of Parks and Recreation, for his enthusiasm and leadership,” Evans said.

“The Palm Valley Boat Parade was delighted to work with St. Johns County to significantly expand the public accessibility and overall spectator experience for this year’s Boat Parade,” said Beacham Still, parade coordinator. “The addition of remote parking, bleacher seating and on-site food trucks made for a great community celebration of the holiday season. We look forward to making additional improvements during the coming year and hope everyone will mark your calendars for Dec. 6, 2025!”

Contributed photos



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Sui outlasts Duff to capture St. Augustine Amateur

Justin Sui (Lake Orion, Michigan) shot a final-round 66 on Sunday, Dec. 8, to hold off local favorite Jason Duff (Elkton), a University of North Florida senior, by one stroke in the St. Augustine Amateur at the St. Johns Golf Club.

Sui finished at 10-under and Duff at 9-under after a closing 67.

Sui, 20, and Duff, 23, were tied at 5-under to begin the final round. Duff took a one-stroke lead at 7-under par with consecutive birdies on the third and fourth holes, but he gave those back with a double bogey on the drivable par-

4 sixth hole, hitting his tee shot in the water and another drive in a bunker to relinquish the lead after Sui got up and down for birdie on the hole.

Duff made a 40-foot birdie putt on the par-4 ninth to reach 7-under and was one shot behind entering the back nine.

Sui made eagle at the par-5 11th hole to increase his lead to two, which held for most of the back nine as Duff made bogeys on 14 and 15. But Duff made it interesting with birdies on the par-4 16th and par-3 17th. Sui was 10-under and Duff 9-under walking to the finish-

ing par 5.

Both players drove within 240 yards of the green and both missed the green just to the left, leaving a chipping match for the title. Duff chipped 10 feet long in trying to hole it, and Sui left his chip and run six feet short. Both missed putts for the final verdict.

“When we got to the back nine, we both realized it was going to one-on-one match play,” Sui said. “I knew I just needed to keep playing stable and match what (Duff) was doing. With the lack of wind today, you knew there were going to be some birdies.”

The victory was another highlight in Sui’s amateur career. His father, Shane, who also served as his caddie this week, came to the United States in 1995 from China as an automotive engineer and settled in Detroit.

Sui developed a love for golf as a youth, playing American Junior Golf Association events in Michigan and was a 2020 AJGA All-Star while graduating from high school at age 15. He aimed to attend Harvard, but COVID-19 kept him from that goal and any college golf scholarship opportunities that he wanted.

Now, the Suis spend the winter playing amateur events throughout Florida and Justin Sui could possibly turn pro-

St. Augustine Amateur Notes

Low rounds: Friday, Carson Johnson (66); Saturday, Justin Sui (67); Sunday, Ryan Nicholson (62)

Birdies, Field: Round 1, 175; Round 2, 183; Round 3, 201. In 2023: Round 1, 268; Round 2, 263; Round 3, 229.

Eagles, Field: Round 1, 3; Round 2, 11; Round 3, 10. In 2023: Round 1, 8; Round 2, 9; Round 3, 8

Field’s average score: Round 1, 77.12; Round 2, 76.36; Round 3, 74.48. Cumulative: 76.1. In 2023: Round 1, 73.65; Round 2, 73.75; Round 3, 73.33. Total: 73.61

Hardest Hole: Round 3, No. 7, 5.59 stroke average; Cumulative, No. 7, 5.62 stroke average. In 2023 (cumulative): No. 9, 4.44 stroke average

Easiest Hole: Round 3, No. 11, 4.54 stroke average; Cumulative, No. 11, 4.79 stroke average. In 2023 (cumulative): No. 11, 4.54 stroke average

To see the results, go to staugustineamateur.com and golfgenius.com/pages/10863149056654331005.

To read more about the individual players, go to staugustineamateur.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2024-StAug-Am-bios-final.pdf.

fessional next fall.

“My dad keeps me calm, tells me jokes,” Sui said. “When we get to the ball, we talk about situation. He keeps me company, keeps nerves down.”

Sui’s finish had to share the stage with Ryan Nicholson’s low round. The 2024 Nease High School graduate shot a 9-under-par 62 that included seven birdies and an eagle and established a new tournament and course 18-hole record. Nicholson, 18, is taking a gap year before moving on to play college golf at Kennesaw State next fall.

The tournament is scheduled again for Dec. 5-7, 2025.



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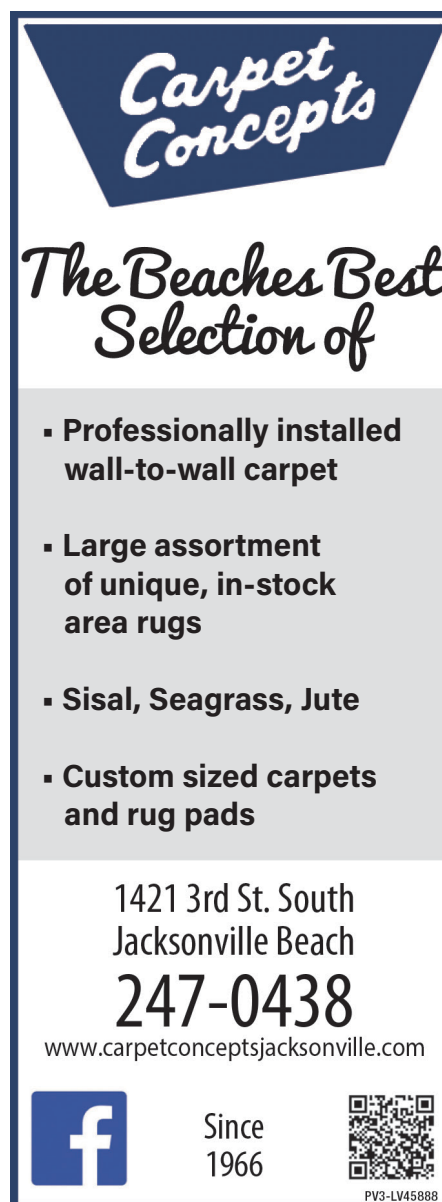
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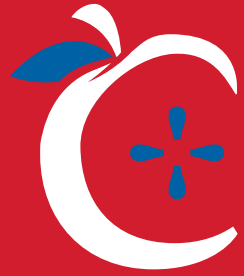
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GUEST COLUMN

Happy holidays, happy kids: Calming activities to prevent meltdowns

By **Jessica Wick**

Executive director of Brain Balance Center Jacksonville

The holiday season brings excitement and joy, but it can also be challenging, especially for kids who struggle with sensory processing or focus. By incorporating these simple tips and engaging activities, you can create a more peaceful holiday experience for every member of your family. Here's how to make this season less stressful and more enjoyable:

1. Set up a schedule for holiday events. Planning and sharing a schedule can help children who feel anxious about surprises or transitions. Talking to your children about what's ahead can give them a sense of security. Include details about each activity — such as whether it's outdoors, loud or crowded. Encourage them to ask questions. This helps kids feel more prepared and reduces their stress levels.

2. Establish a code word for breaks. Kids who feel overwhelmed might benefit from a code word that signals they

need a break. Knowing they can take a breather can be empowering and prevent meltdowns. Assure them that if they use the word, you'll respond immediately.

3. Have a quick family meeting before big events. Before heading to parties or parades, gather your family for a quick chat. Let everyone know how long you plan to stay and how you expect them to behave. This small step can help set expectations. Sleep schedules also play a critical role in maintaining calm, so prioritize rest for everyone.

4. Pack essentials for sensory comfort. For children with sensory sensitivities, holiday events may require extra preparation. Bring along earplugs for noisy environments, sensory fidgets or even a pair of soft clothes they can change into after wearing festive attire. Knowing your child's needs and being ready can make the difference between a fun day and a meltdown.

5. Plan for food sensitivities. Kids with food allergies or sensitivities may feel left out if they can't enjoy holiday treats. Plan ahead by bringing their favorite all-natural or allergy-friendly

snacks so they can fully enjoy the festivities. Making sure they feel included can go a long way in reducing frustration.

Sensory-based activities for holiday fun

To add even more joy to the holiday season, consider incorporating sensory-based activities to help all kids — especially those with sensory needs — engage in the holiday fun. Here are a few activities that offer the sensory experiences kids crave:

Baking Together

Holiday baking is a fantastic sensory activity. Let your kids knead dough, sift flour and pour ingredients to engage their senses. Kneading and stirring puts them in touch with their bodies, which can help organize their senses. Plus, they'll have a tasty treat to enjoy! Reduce distractions, turn on some soft holiday music and enjoy the process together.

Crafting Holiday Decorations

Crafting is not only fun but also great for developing fine motor skills.

Try stringing popcorn or beads or decorating homemade ornaments with glitter, pipe cleaners and pompoms. Younger kids can use safety scissors for practice, helping to strengthen their hands for future tasks like writing.

Making Music

Creating music is another excellent activity for kids. Gather household items like pots, spoons, jingle bells or homemade shakers for a festive jam session. For kids sensitive to loud noises, opt for quieter instruments or clap hands and stomp your feet to keep the beat.

With these tips and activities, you can make the holiday season more enjoyable and manageable for everyone in the family. Children with sensory sensitivities or ADHD may need a little extra support, but these preparations can create a calmer holiday environment. Remember: a bit of structure, sensitivity and hands-on fun go a long way toward making holiday memories that everyone can cherish.

ElderSource seeks advisory council members

ElderSource, a nonprofit organization that works to empower elders, adults with disabilities and their caregivers to promote aging with dignity and independence, is seeking volunteer

members to its advisory council, specifically seniors who reside in St. Johns County.

Duties for an advisory council member are to report on the needs of elderly and emerging issues in their respective counties; review and comment on the agency's area plan; study legislative issues and advocate on behalf of the elderly; assist in promoting the mission, programs and activities of the agency; and to educate the public about the needs and the contributions of

the elderly.

"Our advisory council members are an important asset to our organization," said Linda Levin, CEO of ElderSource. "They are an active voice we need to hear in order for us to stay in touch on senior issues affecting the communities in which they live."

Meetings are held the third Thursday of every other month from 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. and conducted virtually using the Zoom platform.

For more information about how

to become an ElderSource advisory council member, call 904-391-6690 or email Sherry.Holmes@MyElderSource.org.

ElderSource is a state designated Area Agency on Aging and Aging & Disability Resource Center funded in part by state and federal grants, foundation grants and private donations. It reaches out to more than 12,000 people each year throughout its seven-county service area in Northeast Florida.

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Landrum Lions win cheerleading competition

The Landrum Middle School Lions Varsity Competition Cheerleading Team roared into their competitive season with an impressive first place finish in the Gameday division at their first competition of the year. This victory sets the stage for an exciting season, which will run through February.

The Lions will participate in several local competitions across Northeast Florida as they prepare for the prestigious UCA Florida Regionals in Lakeland this month.

The 2024 Landrum Lions Competition Cheerleading Team includes: Haller Moseley, Eloise Davidson, Mary McHale, Vicky

Giusti, Paige Pilinko (Captain), Mina Bohsali (Captain), Madelyn Carrouth, Julia Jimenez, Kaye Cappock, Madelyn Schmidli, Cami McAllister, Sophie Vitale, Donna Wallace, Audrey Rich, Kinsley Barrett, Brooklyn Conolly, Hannah Crichton and Lillian Schrader.

The team is coached by Leslie Bohsali and Jillian Schmidli, who have dedicated their expertise to guiding the Lions to success this season.

For updates and to cheer on the Landrum Lions, follow @LandrumLionsCheer on Instagram.



Contributed photo

The 2024 Landrum Lions competition cheerleaders with their 1st Place banner.

Palm Valley Rotary marks 20 years

Palm Valley Rotarians recently celebrated the 20th anniversary of their club's charter. The happy group celebrated with dinner and champagne at the recently renovated The Plantation at Ponte Vedra Club. Rotary Club President Walther Vliegen (center) arranged the evening's festivities, which included cocktails on a private balcony overlooking the water, golf course and immaculate grounds, as well as dinner, a special dessert and a champagne toast.

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Betty Griffin Center's Adopt-A-Family and Food Drive under way

As the 2024 holiday season approaches, Betty Griffin Center's Adopt-A-Family Holiday Program is now under way to support those women, men and families who are staying at its domestic violence shelter.

Donors can adopt a family of any size, whether it is a single woman, a mom and child or multiple families.

Another giving option for companies and individuals is the Betty Griffin Center Holiday Food Drive. Donations of any nonperishable food items or grocery store gift cards will be accepted and can be dropped off or mailed to the Betty Griffin Outreach office, 2450 Old Moultrie Road, Suite 202, St. Augustine. Donations will be accepted through Dec. 23rd for holiday dinner.



Those interested in adopting a family for the holidays, or those who would like to hold a food drive and coordinate a photo, should contact event coordinator Carole Sullivan at caroles@bettygriffincenter.org or by phone at 904-808-8544 ext. 201 to find out more.

"Each year, the families in our shelter

fill out a 'wish list' for the holidays, which includes their ages, genders, clothing and shoe sizes, along with three gift requests and special interests and hobbies," said Betty Griffin Center CEO Kelly Franklin. "For those looking for a way to help others, we hope they will join us to make the holidays special for those staying in our shelter."

Franklin says a letter sent to Santa last year from a child in the shelter, sums up why the agency asks for donations each holiday season:

"Dear Santa, This year has been a tough year for my family, definitely my mom. She's been going through a lot, so they only thing I ask for this year is to make her happy. We lost our house. I have the

best mom in the world. She's doing her best, but is still crying at night. I hear her when she thinks we are sleeping. She is a good mom. Please help her find a home. She will be very happy with one like we had, so she knows that everything she is doing is not for nothing. But Santa, she will get mad if I don't ask for something for myself, but its okay if you don't bring it to me. Number 1 painting stuff, drawing stuff, books, tablet, bike and rollerblade shoes, size 5 or 8, but I know you already know that. Or just rollerblades, regular ones. I understand if I only get one thing. Love you Santa."

For more information about these and other holiday giving programs, go to bettygriffincenter.org/holiday-giving.

Holiday movie and food drive to benefit Feeding Northeast Florida

For the ninth year in a row, the Florida Theatre will host its annual holiday movie and food drive benefiting Feeding Northeast Florida and the Northeast Florida community. The movie this year will be "Home Alone" (1990) and will

start at 2 p.m. Monday, Dec. 23, inside the historic theater.

Admission is free for every adult and child with a gift of a canned or nonperishable food item. Please bring one item per adult and one item per child — but

more is welcome.

"We started this years ago (2015) as a way to give back to the community as a nonprofit ourselves," said Numa Saiselin, president of the Florida Theatre. "It is a great family event and an opportunity to teach kids about philanthropy. One year a lady pulled up in her car, opened her trunk, said she couldn't attend the movie but had been a recipient of the food bank in the past and wanted to donate to the cause. Her trunk was full of food."

Some suggestions for the food drive include canned vegetables like corn or green beans; canned fruit like peaches, pears or mixed fruit; peanut butter in plastic jars; canned meats like tuna or chicken; pop-top cans of ravioli and spa-

ghetti; canned soup; or boxed items like macaroni and cheese, pasta and instant potatoes.

All food donations will benefit Feeding Northeast Florida.

"Support from the community is critical to our ability to serve neighbors in need," said Susan King, president and CEO of Feeding Northeast Florida. "We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with the Florida Theatre again for this wonderful holiday tradition."

Doors open at 12:30 p.m. for arts and crafts and milk and cookies in the lobby. Attendees can also get their pictures taken with Santa. Showtime is 2 p.m. and the movie is one hour and 43 minutes long.

CSX is the presenting sponsor.



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Alhambra brings holiday season to life with latest feature

By Anthony Richards

An anticipated holiday event on the First Coast every year is the Christmas show at the Alhambra Theatre & Dining in Jacksonville.

And this year's feature, A Christmas Story The Musical, captures both the essence of being together with family during the Christmas season while also capturing funny times and memories that accompany it.

The popular story from the 1983 film which has so many fans was told in a creative way but while still holding true to the parts of the film that have become so beloved over the years.

It is a hilarious coming-of-age story of a young boy growing up in the Midwest in the 1940s and in search of the perfect Christmas gift.

Keegan Carroll was excellent in his role as Ralphie Parker, which he called his dream role in his fourth production at the Alhambra.

The search for the perfect Christmas gift is something that parents and children can relate with, which makes the show one that can be shared and enjoyed across generations and why it has not only stood the test of time but became a holiday classic in the process.

Craig Sherman of Los Angeles made his first appearance at the Alhambra playing Ralphie's dad, while Jennifer Medure played the role of Ralphie's mom.

Sherman and Medure embraced their roles on stage both with their acting skills and musical accompaniment.



One of the aspects that really brought the show to life was Jonathan Van Dyke who was a major part in the narration of the play and really helped lay the groundwork for the story line throughout.

The Christmas shows are always the most popular on the schedule each year and are known to sell out well in advance of the start date.

The Alhambra's 2025 schedule has been released and next year's Christmas feature is Elf The Musical and tickets for it go on sale to the public on Jan. 2.

Tickets to the Alhambra are always something that make a great idea for a Christmas gift either for the whole family to enjoy together or as a setting for a memorable date night.

Santa-themed Brunches planned

CuliVino Hospitality Management and Consulting has announced Santa-themed brunch events for the entire family to enjoy at Prati Italia, a popular restaurant located at the St. Johns Town Center and led by two-time James Beard nominee Chef Tom Gray.

The Santa Brunch event dates are Dec. 15 and 22.

The character-themed brunches are offered from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. They feature classic brunch dishes and seasonal treats served family-style and a Christmas photo station. The cost is \$48 for adults, \$24 for children ages 5 to 12, and free for kids age 4 and younger.

Go to pratiitalia.com or call 904-998-9744 for more information and reservations.

Prati Italia is located at the St. Johns Town Center, 4972 Big Island Drive, Jacksonville.

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Jackson Wagner talks to customers at Bricks & Minifigs.



Roddy Wagner and his son, Jackson Wagner, opened Bricks & Minifigs this fall.

Father-son duo open LEGO resale franchise in Jacksonville Beach

By Holly Tishfield

The LEGO community in Jacksonville received an upgrade earlier this fall when Bricks & Minifigs officially opened in Jacksonville Beach. The franchise, which is owned and operated by Roddy Wagner and his son Jackson, is the first of its kind in Northeast Florida offering new, used, vintage and retired LEGO pieces and sets.

Bricks & Minifigs specializes in all things LEGO. Customers can sell their new or gently used LEGO sets, minifigures and loose bricks with peace of mind and without the uncertainty that comes with reselling items on various online marketplaces.

There are also advantages of purchasing pieces directly from the Bricks & Minifigs storefront as opposed to online. Customers can physically inspect the LEGO sets and pieces, confident that they are dealing with a legitimate business, not a personal reseller.



Photos by Flashing Jax

Roddy Wagner holds a tray of LEGO minifigures in his Jax Beach store.

“It’s been awesome to meet our new regulars and see what it’s like being a part of the community from a small business perspective,” said Jackson Wagner, a first-time business owner working alongside his

father at the Jacksonville Beach storefront.

So far, Wagner says that running the business in Jacksonville Beach has been a welcoming experience, with customers both stumbling across the store in surprise and traveling from as far as Panama City to shop their collection of new and used LEGO items.

Although Bricks & Minifigs sells LEGO, it differs from a typical LEGO store because the larger LEGO stores only offer current items. The big stores discontinue sets more quickly, making it harder for enthusiasts to get their hands on high-demand sets. A customer can’t walk into an official LEGO store and purchase a late 1990s Star Wars set in mint condition, but they can at Bricks & Minifigs.

Once a set is retired from the LEGO store, it can be an expensive and time-consuming investment to find it for a reasonable price. Bricks & Minifigs prides itself on finding vintage and retired collec-

tions in decent condition to resell for a fair market price.

“It’s nice to know that our customers are happy with how we’ve been running our business,” Wagner said. “Everyone’s been great so far.”

Bricks & Minifigs offers more than just buying, selling and trading LEGO items; they also provide birthday party reservations, making it a perfect spot for celebrations. Their 1.5-hour party packages include time for children to get creative with loose LEGO pieces, race LEGO cars around a track and enjoy some birthday cake. At the end of the party, every child has the chance to create their own minifigure to take home.

In the future, the Wagners are looking forward to opening an online version of their storefront, possibly expanding to a second location, and becoming an integral part of the LEGO community in Jacksonville.

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Symphony presents the 'First Coast Nutcracker'

A beloved tradition for more than 50 years, the Jacksonville Symphony's "First Coast Nutcracker" returns at 8 p.m. Friday, Dec. 13; 2 and 8 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 14; and 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 15.



Enchantment and holiday magic take hold as Tchaikovsky's iconic melodies and arrangements evoke the spirit of

the holidays, alongside swirling snow, dazzling slippers and festive costumes.

The only local production featuring live music and more than 130 ballet dancers, this holiday fairy tale promises more cheer and unforgettable moments with your loved ones than ever before.

Don't miss out on this extraordinary 75th Anniversary holiday celebration!

The performance will be at Jacksonville Symphony, 300 Water St., Jacksonville — in the Moran Theater.

Nathaniel Efthimiou will conduct. Musicians of the Jacksonville Symphony will perform.

Presented by VyStar Credit Union. For tickets, go to jaxsymphony.org.

5 fun gift exchange ideas

Gift-giving is a significant component of the holiday season. Families can embrace traditional gift-giving, but those who want to add a touch of whimsy to gatherings with loved ones can consider these five creative and fun ways to exchange gifts.

1. Play the plastic wrap game. To exchange small stocking stuffer gifts, compile gift cards, cash, small toys, candy, and even some larger gifts (all participants can chip in and one person shops for the gifts). The designated person in charge begins rolling up the gifts in the plastic, adding one every few rolls. Turning the ball 90 degrees while wrapping helps make a more round, finished gift ball. To play, the person with the ball puts on oven mitts and tries to unwrap as much as they can to access the gifts, while the person to the left is attempting

to roll doubles on dice. When doubles are made, that person passes the dice to the left and starts his or her own attempts to get at the gifts in the plastic ball. The game ends when all the gifts are revealed, whether everyone has had a chance to unwrap or not.

2. Plan a white elephant gift exchange. A white elephant exchange is like a secret grab bag. Everyone brings a wrapped gift, and then takes turns choosing a gift based on the number they've been given. When the gift is chosen, the person opens it. The next player can select a fresh gift or steal one of the presents that's already been opened.

3. Host a make-and-take craft party. With this type of exchange, participants

GIFT continues on Page 22



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Contributed photos



Jax Spice Indian Restaurant & Bar offers holiday cocktails inspired by the season.



Jax Spice serves genuine Nepali and North Indian dishes.

Celebrating the season with family and flavor at Jax Spice

By Holly Tishfield

As the weather cools down, warm up with a visit to Jax Spice Indian Restaurant & Bar and enjoy genuine Nepali and North Indian dishes in a cozy, family-friendly atmosphere.

Puja Gautam runs Jax Spice with the help of her close-knit family, a dynamic that influences everything from the restaurant's diverse menu to its ability to comfortably host large groups. In the future, with plans for storefront expansion and dreams of selling prepackaged versions of their signature dishes in supermarkets,

Gautam says this family-oriented mindset will not change.

Gautam's father, an experienced businessman, and her mother, a passionate cook, inspired Gautam to bring Jax Spice to life. Her mother-in-law is also well-versed in Nepali and North Indian cuisine, offering her expertise to the restaurant's dishes.

"The menus and the different spices and flavors are always vetted by my mother-in-law, my mother, and my father because they know the right way that things should taste," Gautam said.

The menu at Jax Spice is full of fresh,

made-to-order Nepali and North Indian cuisine. The food combines time-honored recipes passed down through generations with an authentic glimpse of South Asia's culinary staples. Everything on the menu can be customized, from the level of spice to the combination or proteins, a unique quality that puts Jax Spice on the map.

Their two locations — one at Jacksonville Beach and the other on St. Johns County Road 210 — are open seven days per week, including holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas. The St. Johns location contains a large, private hall that can be reserved for wedding receptions,

showers, birthdays, graduations, holiday parties and more.

"If you want to enjoy a good drink and have Indian food that's tailored to your specific spice level, then you can find a perfect dinner at Jax Spice," Gautam said.

During the holiday season, Jax Spice crafts exquisite cocktails inspired by the festivities. For Christmas, enjoy drinks featuring maple and marshmallow flavors, bringing to life the wintry spirit of the season. Additionally, Jax Spice is offering limited-time holiday happy hours with discounts on appetizers, making it the perfect time to gather and celebrate.

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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

Poinsettia: The Christmas Star

"Blessed is the season which engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love." — Hamilton Wright Mabie



By Kathy Esfahani

The modern association of the poinsettia plant with Christmas evolved from a Mexican legend. The story describes a poor child on Christmas Eve gathering weeds along the road to decorate the church altar. When placed on the altar, the weeds turned into flowers of vibrant red and green colors!

Today, poinsettias are featured as a Christmas symbol, given as gifts and used as holiday decorations. Large plants can be arranged to frame a doorway or fireplace, while smaller poinsettias make beautiful centerpieces for tables and mantles.

Also known as the "Christmas Star,"

these plants symbolize hope, joy, love and purity. They are not necessarily flowers but instead red-topped shrubs. The star-shaped leaves make poinsettias a natural fit for the Christmas celebration.

Poinsettias are in bloom during the holiday season, showing off vivid red leaves called "bracts" with small round flowers in the center of the stalks. Place the plants in a sunny window and water when the top half inch to inch of soil is dry. Be careful not to let a poinsettia sit in water as these plants are susceptible to root rot.

Some people are hesitant to have poinsettias around animals or children — the sap in these plants can cause sickness if ingested and/or cause a mild rash on the skin. Be sure to wash any affected area with soap and water. Animals that eat the leaves may be less energetic due to mild discomfort or an upset stomach. Typically, these symptoms subside on their own, but owners may want to wait a couple hours before feeding to allow the stomach to settle. If sickness continues, it is always advisable to contact a veterinarian.

A poinsettia plant can live as long as one to two years or more if given the proper care! Although not always successful, it is possible to encourage regrowth during the next holiday season.

- For the first few months after the holidays (January through March), keep the poinsettia in a sunny location and water regularly. A houseplant fertilizer can be used during this time as new bracts appear.

- Spring months (April through May) are a resting period for poinsettias. After the leaves fade and drop, prune the stems back to no more than four inches and reduce the amount of watering.

- Begin increasing watering and fertilizing again during the warm summer months (June through September) to encourage growth. Replant the poinsettia in a larger pot with fresh soil. The plant can remain in a sunny area indoors or be moved to a partially shaded area outside.

- As cooler fall temperatures arrive, bring the plant indoors and reduce fertilizing.

- In early October, begin light treatment to encourage reblooming. Give the

Photo provided by Kathy's Creative Gardens & Nursery



Poinsettia

poinsettia at least six hours of sunlight combined with 12-15 hours of absolute darkness every day. Place the plant in a dark closet or cover with a cardboard box to achieve these dark hours. Water as needed during the hours of sunlight.

- Finally, as Thanksgiving nears, the poinsettia should begin to produce buds and new bracts. There is no longer a need for the hours of darkness; place the poinsettia in a sunny location and enjoy!

We hope you have a wonderful holiday season!

Flower of the Week: Poinsettia

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 and ideas, visit Kathy's Creative Gardens & Nursery, 196 N. Roscoe Blvd. The phone number is 904-655-7373.

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Gift

Continued from 19

will engage in some form of crafting for the duration of the event, whether it's pottery, painting, epoxy resin pouring, or even knit crafts. At the end of the night everyone can swap their creations with another or keep their own crafts as gifts.

4. Give the gift of a group outing. Instead of exchanging material gifts, focus on sharing experiences with friends and family. A trip to watch a sports game or a theater performance can be an excellent way to spend time together, and something a person may not be inclined to do on his or her own. Certain venues will offer discounts on group tickets, so everyone can pool their resources.

5. Host a DIY cookie and cocoa exchange. Cookies, cocoa and the holidays are a perfect combination. A gift exchange where participants supply ingredients for these sweet treats, share their favorite recipes and then put together the finished products can make for an entertaining and festive afternoon. Each person can fill a cookie tin with baked cookies to take home and mason jars filled with homemade hot cocoa mix and marshmallows can be an additional gift to enjoy later on a chilly evening.

Tickets for THE PLAYERS Championship 2025 on sale now

Tickets for THE PLAYERS Championship, The PGA Tour's flagship event, are now available for purchase. Tournament officials have announced that ticket prices will remain unchanged for the 2025 event.

A wide selection of ticket options allows both local fans and visitors to experience Northeast Florida's premier sporting event. With tickets dynamically priced based on demand, fans are encouraged to purchase early to secure the best rates and avoid missing out on the action, as last year's event saw a sellout on select days.

"We are committed to making this event accessible for all of Northeast Florida," said THE PLAYERS Executive Director Lee Smith. "By maintaining affordable pricing and offering flexible, demand-based options, we're ensuring that The PLAYERS Championship remains an event for everyone in the community."

Much like its commitment to accessibility and giving back to the region — having contributed more than \$110 million to local charities since 1974 — the tournament also serves as a celebration of the Northeast Florida community. The event will once again feature more than 20 local restaurants and food trucks, a fan shop showcasing local brands and designs, and a variety of other local influences throughout the fan experience.

In addition to its community focus, The PLAYERS Championship provides the opportunity to watch the world's best golfers

compete on the iconic PLAYERS Stadium Course at TPC Sawgrass, known for its challenging layout and dramatic finish.

THE PLAYERS is set for March 11-16, and fans are encouraged to secure their tickets early to lock in the best rates. Tickets are available now at THEPLAYERS.com/tickets, with prices starting as low as \$30 plus taxes and fees. Fans can purchase up to six tickets per day, per account.

Youth Ticket Policy

THE PLAYERS Championship continues to offer a family-friendly youth ticket policy: up to two children ages 15 and younger can attend for free with a ticketed adult all week long. This long-standing initiative makes it easy for families to enjoy the excitement of the tournament together, helping to introduce younger fans to the sport of golf. Note that children age 6 and older will need a ticket to access hospitality venues.

Mastercard Preferred Pricing

Mastercard cardholders can enjoy preferred pricing for The PLAYERS Championship by using their Mastercard to purchase up to four Stadium Passes per day, per account. This exclusive offer is available while supplies last. Terms and conditions apply.

Military and Veteran Ticket Packages

Military and veteran ticket packages will

return for The PLAYERS Championship 2025, offering complimentary and discounted admission for service members and veterans. The tournament will also continue its tradition of Military Appreciation Day and Ceremony to honor those who have served. Further details, including ticket information, will be released in the new year.

Intracoastal Club presented by Shark Coatings

The Intracoastal Club, located between the 12th and 13th holes, offers incredible views of two of the most exciting holes on the course. This open-air venue features bar-style seating, TVs and upscale food and beverage options, including beer, wine and signature cocktails. Access to the Intracoastal Club requires a separate ticket, available for purchase while supplies last.

Parking

Parking passes for The PLAYERS Championship 2025 must be purchased in advance online. A separate parking pass is required for each day of the tournament. Parking passes will be digital; no parking will be sold on-site. Rideshare services will be available, with drop-off and pick-up at the Couples entry off ATP Boulevard as well as complimentary bicycle and golf cart parking. For more details and to purchase parking passes, go to THEPLAYERS.com/parking.



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www.CityStAug.com

Visitor info @ www.NightsofLights.com

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.



THOUGHTFUL GIFTS FOR AGING PARENTS

When shopping for elderly parents, it may not be as simple as identifying interests, particularly if Mom and Dad are experiencing age-related health issues. Consider these gift ideas that may be ideal for the aging adults in your life.

• **Cozy blanket:** A new blanket or throw for a bed or to cuddle up with in a favorite recliner might be the perfect gift.

• **Family history book:** Budding writers can interview their aging parents and jot down family stories, compile them into a

book with photos to make a family history log.

• **Robotic vacuum:** Keeping up with the household chores is easier with a robotic

GIFTS continues on Page 24



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SEASON SCHEDULE

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<p><i>Southern Fried Funeral</i> JANUARY 9 - FEBRUARY 9</p> <p><i>West Side Story</i> FEB. 20 - MARCH 30</p> <p><i>Beautiful The Carole King Musical</i> APRIL 3 - MAY 11</p> <p><i>My Fair Lady</i> MAY 15 - JUNE 22</p>	<p><i>Roald Dahl's Charlie and the Chocolate Factory</i> JUNE 26 - AUGUST 17</p> <p><i>Fall Surprise</i> AUGUST 28 - OCT. 5</p> <p><i>The Mystery of Edwin Drood</i> OCT. 9 - NOV. 16</p> <p><i>Elf The Musical</i> NOV. 20 - DEC. 24</p>

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Jazz Christmas concert at St. Francis In-The-Field

The Kelly/Scott Jazz Quartet will perform “Jazz Stylings of Christmas Hymns & Songs” from 3 to 4:15 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 15, at St. Francis In-The-Field Church, 895 Palm Valley Road, Ponte Vedra. Doors open at 2:30 p.m.

The group consists of singer Lisa Kelly, JB Scott on trumpet, Jeff Phillips on piano/bass/guitar/strings and drummer Clyde Connor.

This uplifting afternoon of holiday music features the group’s original arrangements of classic Christmas hymns and songs in interpretive jazz styles of swing, Brazilian bossa nova, waltzes and sensitive ballads, as well as light grooves, gospel and the happy sounds of New Orleans.

Songs include “What Child is This,” “My Favorite Things,” “Winter Wonderland,” “We Three Kings,” “The Christmas Song,” “The First Noel,” “I Wonder As I Wander” and more. The program will also share a special selection by a St. Francis-In-The-Field musical group to preview the exciting Dec. 19 Music Department Charity Christmas Concert.

With notable career backgrounds that include the Larry Elgart Orchestra, the New York Pops, the St. Johns River City Band, Walt Disney World theme parks, leading the legendary Dukes of Dixieland, to drumming with the Navy Commodores in D.C., these popular artists are much followed for their exceptional, wonderfully entertaining

musicianship.

They have headlined jazz clubs and renowned concert halls, major corporate events and music festivals. Together, they have toured, recorded and delighted countless audiences regionally and abroad.

Donations for the quartet will be accepted at the door.

For further information, go to stfrancisvpb.org or phone 904-615-2130.

Lisa Kelly

Known for her smooth, intimate vocal tone, Lisa Kelly is a 2013 Jacksonville Jazz Festival “Hall of Fame” inductee. She was a featured vocalist with the legendary Larry Elgart Orchestra, the St. Johns River City Big Band and the UNF JE 1 big band.

Her worldwide performances have included the Vienna State Opera House, the Kennedy Center, Montreux Jazz Festival, the Pescara Jazz Festival, the Jazz Corner, the Van Wezel, the SS Norway Big Band Cruise and other major venues and jazz festivals.

She has sung with Ed Calle, Jane Monheit, Bransford Marsalis and other jazz notables. Earning her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in jazz studies, teaching music at various schools, Kelly originated the Jacksonville Jazz Festival jam session and ran it for 20 years. She now directs the multi-generational Swingin’ Summer Jazz Camp.

Kelly performs as a featured guest artist and presents jazz clinics and residencies.

JB Scott

The first graduate of the regarded UNF jazz program, JB Scott toured with the Jimmy Dorsey Orchestra and with the Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus (Japan) and led the famed “Dukes of Dixieland” in New Orleans’s Mahogany Hall. He performed on the PBS recorded special, “A

Salute to Jelly Roll Morton,” with Skitch Henderson and the New York Pops at Carnegie Hall, and with Al Jarreau and the Jacksonville Symphony.

Scott has performed with jazz notables Ed Calle, Jeff Hamilton, Lynn Seaton, Al Hirt and others. The 2017 Jacksonville Jazz Festival “Hall of Fame” inductee, in his 27th year as the UNF jazz trumpet

JAZZ continues on Page 24



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Jazz

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professor, directs the UNF JE 1 big band, the Great American Jazz Series and is the coordinator of jazz studies.

With a bachelor's degree from UNF and a master's in music education from FIU, Scott is a Warburton Signature Trumpet Artist, much in demand as a performer and clinician.

Jeff Phillips

Former staff pianist for years at Walt Disney World Parks with the Grand Floridian High Society Band and the Rhythm Rascals, Jeff Phillips has toured and recorded with Bill Allred Classic Jazz Band, the Midiri Brothers, Connie Haynes, Ken Peplowski, Louis Bellson, Warren Vache' Buddy DeFranco, Bob Draga and many other jazz luminaries.

He also plays organ and a unique keyboard-and-foot-pedal signature presentation.



Phillips has been featured on radio, TV and CD recordings and has more than 30 years of performances as a much in

demand accompanist and as a group leader. He serves as a guest artist/clinician with vocalist Lisa Kelly, and as an adjudicator.

Contributed photos

With a formal degree in tuba and music education, Phillips serves as an adjunct instructor at Harrison High SOTA in Lakeland.

Clyde Connor

A former drummer with the U.S. Navy Commodores Big Band in Washington, D.C., Clyde Connor has been featured on Bedwin, Connor, & Warner Brothers, and on other recordings of standing with Randy Brecker, Doc Severinsen, Dave Brubeck, Diane Schuur and countless others.

Connor continues to play big band, small group, symphony and "pops" concerts for jazz clubs, major venues and festivals. He was a main drummer for the St. Johns River City Big Band, the Baltimore Symphony and for the Jacksonville Jazz Festival's piano competition.

With bachelor's and master's degrees in jazz, attending the University of North Texas, with completion at the University of Florida, where he has been serving on faculty since 2016 as a drum professor, band director and instructor of arranging.

Gifts

Continued from 22

vacuum that automatically scours carpets and hard-surface floors.

• **Key finder:** A key finder can help adults find their keys if they are misplaced.

• **Magnifying light:** Older parents who like to do puzzles or close-up work like knitting or stitching can benefit from an LED lamp that also has a magnifying glass built right in.

• **E-reader:** E-readers can be customized so the print is the right size for the reader's needs. Also, the devices are lightweight and

easy to stow in a bag.

• **Resistance bands:** Resistance bands are like large rubber bands that exert force to strengthen muscles and improve flexibility. They can help aging adults stay in shape in a low-impact way.

• **Dining gift cards:** When parents do not want to spend additional time in the kitchen,

they may opt to visit a favorite restaurant. A combination of a gift card to a favorite establishment as well as pre-paid taxi or ride share service ensures a good meal and a safe ride home.

Although they seem to have everything, aging parents still can benefit from some thoughtful gifts.

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Poinsettia

50 Minutes

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SAWGRASS *Spa*



Link to present Festival of Trees on Dec. 13-17

The link in Nocatee, in partnership with To the Moon Party Designs, is set to enchant families with its Festival of Trees 2024.

This magical evening, filled with festivities, promises to captivate attendees of all ages. From Dec. 13 to 17, the venue transforms into a winter wonderland, showcasing beautifully decorated trees styled by local St. Johns County organizations. These trees, each one unique, are available for bidding, allowing participants to support meaningful community causes while bringing home a touch of holiday magic.

To the Moon Party Designs, a bespoke balloon company known for providing custom designs for events and special occasions, adds an extra layer of enchantment to the event.

"I was thrilled when the link approached me to partner with them on hosting events," said Jessica Chard, founder of To the Moon Party Designs. "For our first collaboration, I felt it was important to highlight the philanthropic nature of the link. They contribute so much to our community, and I'm not sure everyone realizes the extent of their impact. The Festival of Trees is the perfect way to showcase local businesses and organizations while simultaneously giving back to nonprofits. It also provides a special space for creating cherished holiday memories and traditions for the community as a whole ... I'm so excited to be a part of it."

The launch event for the trees will

take place 4-9 p.m. Friday, Dec. 13, and it is free for the community to attend. Visitors can look forward to photos with Santa from 5 to 8 p.m., family-friendly crafts, drinks and Christmas treats, making it a perfect holiday outing.

The event also features a Holiday Crafter Market, where local artisans and vendors present an array of unique, handmade treasures. This market is perfect for those seeking one-of-a-kind, last-minute gifts, whether for loved ones or as a personal holiday indulgence. Shoppers are sure to find something special among the handcrafted items and treats.

Enhancing the evening's charm, Ponte Vedra High School's a capella group, "The Sharkapellas," will perform holiday classics, 7-8 p.m. Their performances will create the perfect soundtrack for the holiday season.

Adding to the festive atmosphere, Lauren Klose, founder of Artistic Aire, has created stunning outdoor Holiday Murals on the windows of the link. These artistic displays are available for viewing until the end of the year, offering a visual treat that complements the holiday spirit.

All are invited to bring their holiday spirit, enjoy the artistry and soak up the music, making it a wonderful community celebration. This event is an ideal opportunity to come together, embrace the season of giving and create lasting memories with loved ones.

To attend, RSVP via Eventbrite at https://bit.ly/festivalof_trees.

Gifts for holiday hosts

Holiday hosts invest time and money into making their homes welcoming spaces to spend the holidays. Guests can treat these hosts with gifts to show how much their efforts and hospitality are appreciated.

• **Beverage of choice:** A bottle of wine or another spirit can be a great gift for holiday gatherings. Let hosts decide if they want to serve it with the meal or save it to enjoy at a later time.

• **Curated food basket:** A guest can put together a basket of different foods, including crackers, cheeses, jams, bread sticks, and other items that can be enjoyed as snacks or appetizers.

• **Holiday plant:** A poinsettia or Christmas cactus may be fitting this time of year, and a holiday host can enjoy seeing it grow during the season.

• **Kitchen tools or serving items:** A beautiful olive wood serving platter or cutting board might be appreciated, par-

ticularly if guests arrive with it covered in a charcuterie spread.

• **Scented candle:** Hosts can set the mood and add to the ambiance of an entertaining space with lit, scented candles, which make for a great gift. Guests can inquire as to the hosts' preferred aromas or stick with safe bets like vanilla or cinnamon.

• **Holiday ornament or decorative piece:** Guests can offer ornaments for the tree or another decorative item for hosts who are repeat entertainers. Dating the decoration or having it engraved can transform it into a memento hosts can relish through the years.

• **Comfort and care assortment:** Hosting takes effort, so a box of items to pamper holiday hosts can be a great gift. Fill the box with a loofah, bath bombs, shower gel, moisturizing cream, and massage oil.



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www.PonteVedraRecorder.com

Cummer presents work by Australian artist

The Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens presents “The Mysteries that Remain,” a survey of works by Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri, one of Australia’s most acclaimed Indigenous artists. This collection of paintings is an exploration of the ancestral narratives of his desert homeland executed in a modern, abstracted style. “The Mysteries that Remain” is on view until Jan. 12.

“This exhibition invites the viewer to reflect on Mick Namarari Tjapaltjarri’s journey of perseverance and innovation nourished by a deep connection to his heritage,” said Andrea Barnwell Brownlee, George W. and Kathleen I. Gibbs director and CEO of the Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens. “‘The Mysteries that Remain’ is a survey of masterful works that provide us all the opportunity to celebrate this important artist, whose works are featured in public and private collections throughout Australia, America and

Europe.”

Tjapaltjarri (c. 1923 – 1998) was a Pintupi man, born at Marnpi, a site about 330 miles west of Alice Springs. Raised with knowledge of desert survival skills and ancestral traditions, he worked in the cattle industry before starting to make paintings in the 1970s. As the Australian government transitioned its policies towards Aboriginal affairs from assimilation to self-determination, the Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd was formed to encourage the creation and marketing of art. Namarari was a founding shareholder of the longest-running Aboriginal-owned art business in Australia.

The collection of works tracks Tjapaltjarri’s progress from his iconographic and ritually explicit works of the 1970s to more abstracted landscapes of the 1990s. It shows Tjapaltjarri to be an artist who grasped the creative challenge of painting for the art market while never

losing sight of the ancestral underpinnings of his country.

Despite their alluring colors and designs, these paintings retain their mystery, hinting at the spiritual world beyond the painted image. This exhibition sheds new light on this enigmatic and important artist as he moved from detailed figurative works to grand abstractions. A quiet, reserved man, “The Mysteries that Remain” places Tjapaltjarri in his rightful place as contemporary master.

This exhibition is organized by the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection of the University of Virginia.

2024 Cummer Museum of Arts & Gardens Exhibition Presenters include: Season Presenters — City of Jacksonville, Cultural Council of Greater Jacksonville and Ronald and Karen Rettner; Presenting Sponsor — State of Florida; Lead Sponsors — The Robert D. Davis Family Endowment and The Schultz Family Endowment.



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Business Weekly

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PAGE 28 THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2024



— FEATURING —
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Señora Xerez, a boutique sherry and cocktail bar, opens

Sherry, Jerez, Xerez — it all means the same thing: a rich fortified wine hailing from the sun-kissed vineyards of the Jerez region of Andalusia, Spain. It is one of the oldest wines in the world, and it's now the centerpiece of a new bar and restaurant called Señora Xerez, 52 Charlotte St., St. Augustine, inside the Inn on Charlotte.

The Inn and bar are both founded by Ericka Patel, an entrepreneur and visionary who runs several historic inns in St. Augustine. Patel and her oldest son Ricky, both have a passion for wine, but it's their Hispanic heritage that inspired them to dream up Señora Xerez, which opened its doors this month.

"Señora Xerez is a living tribute to an era of resilience and progress in hospitality," Patel said. "Where women opened spaces for their community to gather, to share in the history, culture and identity of Spanish heritage."

Patel drew inspiration from Jerez de la Frontera, Spain, a city famous for producing sherry wine — or "Xerez." The bar focuses primarily on sherry wines and vermouths, serving specialty sangrias, sherry-based



Señora Xerez serves a variety of drinks, including sherry-based cocktails.

cocktails, sherry and vermouth flights and Spanish wines.

"Señora Xerez is a unique concept that is the first of its kind in St. Augustine," said Cesar Diaz, food and beverage consultant (and owner of Odd Birds and Charlotte



Photos by Cade Huffman

Señora Xerez has a character all its own.

33 Speakeasy). "And our cocktails are just as unique. Patrons have premier access to the finest selection of Spanish wines and sherry in the state of Florida."

BAR continues on Page 29



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Pastry tapas



Mussels

Bar

Continued from 28

Señora Xerez’s food menu is crafted by Miami-based Chef Manuel Garcia, who was born into one of the most renowned Spanish cuisine kitchens, La Paella Valenciana, owned by his father, Chef Pedro Garcia.

“We are proud to serve traditional Spanish tapas such as gambas al ajillo (Spanish garlic shrimp), pulpo a la gallega (octopus), pan con tomate (Spanish tomato bread), montaditos (tiny open-faced sandwiches), a curated selection of jamon iberico (curated meats), and a fine selection of Spanish cheeses,” said Garcia.

While Sherry is millenia old, many people might not know what varietal to order or how to pair it with food, and



Photos by Cade Huffman

Señora Xerez is located at 52 Charlotte St., St. Augustine, inside the Inn on Charlotte.

Señora Xerez wants to change that.

“Our staff is trained to give patrons an experience and an education, on both sherry and the gastronomy of Spain,” Patel said. “We’re bringing a piece of Xerez to America’s oldest city.”

Señora Xerez is open 4-9 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 4-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 4-9 p.m. Sunday.

New radio station broadcasts at The Light 101.3 FM

Flagler Broadcasting has launched its seventh local radio station, The Light 101.3 FM.

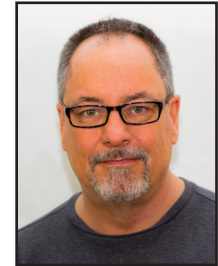
“We wanted to give St. Augustine a full-service contemporary Christian radio station with local DJs, news, weather, traffic and support for local churches and other nonprofits,” said David Ayres, Flagler Broadcasting’s president and CEO.

The Light’s on-air talent features DJs JT Thomas and Sandy.

Contemporary Christian music is one of the fastest-growing formats in the country, attracting listeners of all ages.

“You won’t hear us preaching or asking listeners for money,” said Thomas, program director and on-air talent for The Light 101.3 FM. “We just want to be a positive local radio station where our Christian messages are in our music.”

Featured artists will include: TobyMac, Phil Wickham, MercyMe, For King & Country, Tasha Layton, Casting Crowns, Megan Woods, Big



JT Thomas



Sandy

Daddy Weave, Consumed by Fire, Matt Maher, Anne Wilson, Chris Tomlin, Crowder and more.

Now, through Dec. 26, The Light 101.3 FM is playing Christmas music all day, every day. Listen locally on 101.3 FM or stream worldwide on the Flagler Radio App with Christmas music 24 hours a day. The regular format kicks in on Dec. 26 at midnight.

The Light 101.3 FM joins Beach 105.5 and St. Augustine Country 106.3 at the Flagler Broadcasting family. Kool Oldies 100.9, News Radio WNZF, Kix Country 98.7 and Beach 92.7FM are broadcast from Flagler County.



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GUEST COLUMN

Financial wellness check: Are you staying fiscally fit?

Contributed photo

Written by/for Wells Fargo Advisors

Understanding the current health of your finances starts with having a solid plan in place, but it depends on following the plan so you stay on track and continue working toward your financial goals. That's where a financial wellness check can be useful. It can help you make sure you're hitting the right milestones in your plan — and also help you check that your plan is working for you.

Where to start? Here, John Knowles, lead business growth strategy consultant at Wells Fargo Wealth & Investment Management, shares six questions that can set up your financial wellness check.

Are you adding to your investment accounts on a regular schedule?

Saving often and early is rule No. 1 because of the power of compounding. When you leave any investment gains in your account rather than taking them out, those gains have the opportunity to start earning returns as well.

Taking full advantage of your employer's retirement plan — typically a 401(k) — is a good place to start. That includes contributing enough to qualify for any potential company match, something Knowles stressed to his daughter when she entered the workforce. "If the company is going to match you up to 5%, put 5% in at least," he says.

Are you being smart about taxes?

With accounts such as 401(k)s and IRAs, the money has the potential to grow tax-deferred. That means you pay taxes on the funds only when you withdraw during retirement. But with choices such as Roth IRAs or Roth 401(k)s, you pay taxes on the money at the start, but then don't pay taxes when you take qualified withdrawals. (Other specialized accounts, such as health savings accounts and flexible spending accounts, may also provide



tax advantages.)

"It really boils down to not putting all your eggs in one tax basket," he says. "Putting most of your wealth in tax-deferred savings accounts means when you withdraw your money, you may potentially incur a large tax bill. Diversification with taxes in mind may help reduce it."

Are you getting advice from a professional adviser on a regular basis?

Having a financial wellness checkup with a financial adviser and other professionals on topics such as taxes, estate planning and insurance is like getting health input from a doctor, Knowles says.

A financial adviser can evaluate your situation by taking measurements on a regular basis or whenever a significant life event happens, such as a job change, marriage or divorce. This can help determine where you stand and what actions to consider. "Doctors don't ask you what your blood pressure is, they find out," he says. "Once they have all the data they need, they make a recommendation. In this case, it's your financial adviser

prescribing what can help improve your financial well-being after taking all the necessary measurements."

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Perry Homes acquires Mastercraft Builder Group

Perry Homes, one of the largest privately held homebuilders in the United States, announced on Dec. 3 the acquisition of MasterCraft Builder Group, a homebuilder in the Jacksonville.

Todd Chachere, chief executive officer of Perry Homes, expressed his enthusiasm about the acquisition.

"We are excited to welcome MasterCraft Builder Group to the Perry Homes family as both organization's values closely align," he said. "This partnership accelerates our growth in Florida while honoring MasterCraft Builder Group's reputation."

Chris Shee, owner and chief executive

officer of MasterCraft Builder Group, discussed the careful consideration behind the decision to partner with Perry Homes.

"Selling MasterCraft Builder Group was a deeply personal decision," he said. "My brother, Brad, and I have built this company alongside an incredible team, and finding a partner who shares our

values was essential. Perry Homes embodies the same commitment to quality, design and exceptional customer care that defines MasterCraft."

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Different types of insurance products

Financial security is vitally important for adults and their families. Recognition of that reality is evident in the efforts individuals make to secure their financial futures, which include investing in education, retirement planning and saving.

Insurance is another way individuals protect their financial security and the safety of their families. Insurance products run the gamut from auto insurance policies to annuities. It can benefit anyone to refresh their memories about the significance of various insurance products that can help them protect their financial freedom and manage unforeseen life events that much more easily.

Annuities — The Office of the Insurance Commissioner of Washington State notes that annuities are a type of contract between a consumer and an insurance company. When individuals purchase an annuity, they may pay a large, single premium or make a number of payments over a designated period of time. In exchange for those payments, annuity holders guarantee a future income. Money in an annuity grows on a tax-deferred basis. When an annuity

reaches maturity, money can be withdrawn in a lump sum or withdrawals can be arranged on a fixed payment system, which is why annuities are often characterized as means to ensuring income later in life. Insurance companies typically offer various types of annuities, so individuals can speak with an agent to determine which vehicle is best for them.

Life insurance — It's easy for young adults to overlook the importance of life insurance. After all, few individuals in their twenties or thirties think about providing for their families upon their passing. But life insurance is vital to securing the long-term financial security of your family, even for those individuals who have yet to start a family of their own. In addition, monthly premiums on life insurance policies tend to be lower the earlier a policy is opened, which provides another benefit to looking

into life insurance at a young age.

Travel insurance — The utility of travel insurance took center stage during the pandemic, when millions of individuals across the globe were forced to cancel or postpone travel plans due to travel restrictions at home and abroad. Before purchasing travel insurance, it's vital to read policies carefully, as individuals want to be sure the policy they're purchasing will protect them if they are forced to cancel a trip. Policies differ, so some might offer protection against variables like a pandemic, while others may not. The main reason to purchase travel insurance is to secure protection against financial loss if you're forced to cancel, delay or interrupt a trip. Confirm what a policy does and does not offer with an insurance agency representative. The knowledge that a travel investment is protected should plans change can make it all the more

enjoyable to plan vacations.

Natural disaster insurance — Homeowners and even renters are urged to carefully read their existing homeowners' or renters' insurance policies to confirm what level of coverage, if any, their policy provides against natural disasters. Some policies specifically note certain coverage is not provided. For example, residents in coastal areas may have policies indicating flood protection is not part of their coverage. However, many companies will offer separate coverage against natural disasters. Such supplemental coverage is worth investigating as the effects of climate change become more and more apparent in the coming years.

Insurance is a safety net no one should go without. Various insurance products are worth investigating for individuals who want to secure their financial futures.

Tips when shopping for insurance

The stakes are indeed high when shopping for insurance, as consumers want to be sure the policy they ultimately choose is going to safeguard them if or when they need it. With that in mind, individuals can consider these tips when shopping for insurance.

• **Resist any inclination to make price your top priority.** Though a low-cost policy might suit your immediate financial needs, such a policy may not offer a level of coverage necessary to prevent adverse financial outcomes should you experience accident or injury. It's best to prioritize getting the coverage you need over the lowest possible policy cost.

• **Comparison shop.** Once you have identified the level of coverage you need, you can then begin comparison shopping. Most insurance providers can issue quotes in a matter of minutes, and many offer similar levels of coverage.

• **Shop around for discounts, too.** Discounts can typically be found regardless of which type of policy you're looking for, so shop around or speak directly with customer service representatives to identify ways to lower the cost of coverage.

Insurance is necessary whether individuals are looking to protect their health, their homes, their cars, or their financial futures. A few simple strategies can ensure consumers have the coverage they need to avoid financial ruin should they experience an accident, injury or natural disaster.

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Eye surgeon

Continued from 1

One would be hard-pressed to find a better example of a key participant in this trend than the Gulani Vision Institute, the world's first eye surgery spa, located in Jacksonville.

A Matter of Focus

With more than three decades of experience, and having established himself early on as a leader in the field of ophthalmology, Dr. Arun C. Gulani is the founder of this practice, located at 8075 Gate Pkwy. West.

Gulani offers the full spectrum of services, but also proprietary techniques. Having become involved in LASIK (Laser Assisted In-Situ-Keratomileusis) years before it became available in the U.S., he literally wrote the book on several groundbreaking procedures. For instance, he trademarked LaZrPlastique, a form of LASIK that can be completed in minutes without cuts, blades or flaps, and LenzOplastique, a no-needle, stitch-free cataract surgery.

He has earned numerous accolades and endorsements for his work and might have chosen to locate his practice in New York or Beverly Hills, where the rewards would be considerable. However, his selection of Jacksonville has proven an asset for Northeast Florida, not only because of the propinquity of exceptional eye care, but also because of the financial impact of his ability to attract patients from around the United States and the world.

In fact, this aspect is central to Gulani's practice, with about 80% to 90% of his patients coming from outside the region. They come from as far away as the Orient, attracted by his reputation and success rate, but also by his personal approach.

He takes time to meet one-on-one



Photo provided by Gulani Vision Institute

Dr. Arun C. Gulani has contributed significantly to medical tourism along the First Coast. He founded his Gulani Vision Institute in Jacksonville and patients, familiar with his expertise and approach, come here from all over the world to seek treatment.

with his patients and doesn't maintain a traditional waiting room — when patients arrive for an appointment, they find the doctor completely focused on them.

It's a perspective he shares with physicians who have taken instruction from him.

"I teach other doctors all over the world: Just focus on the patient," Gulani said.

Accommodating the Patient

With an eye toward maximizing his clients' experience, Gulani has taken the extra step of enlisting the aid of a local hotel.

"A couple of years ago, the opportunity became available for us to partner with Dr. Gulani," said James Angel, director of sales for Aloft Jacksonville Tapestry Park. "He was looking exclusively for a hotel that his staff could recommend."

The hotel is only a mile and a half from Gulani's office, so it is convenient for

patients.

"They'll buy breakfast with us here, head over the Dr. Gulani's office, spend the afternoon there, come back here and they've got easy access for a late lunch or dinner without having to go very far," Angel said.

In addition, there are restaurants within walking distance — a desirable quality for someone undergoing eye surgery.

Because the hotel is smaller than some others, Angel sometimes has an opportunity to converse with the guests, and the subject of Dr. Gulani inevitably arises.

"They always tell me the same thing," Angel said. "Every time they're here, they're like, 'You know, he's incredible. He spends as much time as I need making me comfortable.'"

Angel himself has not needed to avail himself of Gulani's services, but he knows where he stands on the doctor's appeal.

"Based on the feedback from every

guest we've had, I'd recommend Dr. Gulani anytime without hesitation," he said.

Abundant Praise

Hotel stays and bed taxes are but one way the practice benefits the local economy. Patients eat in local restaurants, shop in local stores and seek out opportunities to explore Northeast Florida. One of Gulani's patients even hired a tennis pro for the five days he spent here.

Chris Maletis is among those who have traveled a considerable distance to acquire Gulani's services, and he holds nothing back in his praise for the man who rescued his eyesight.

"He's the GOAT, in my opinion, for what he does," said Maletis, using the acronym for "Greatest Of All Time."

Maletis, of Portland, Oregon, is an amateur golfer who has played all over the world, winning numerous tournaments, and even played in the U.S. Amateur at TPC Sawgrass.

However, a growing fluctuation in his vision began to interfere with his performance.

"You really do have to have excellent vision," he said.

He had some success with radial keratotomy. Later, he had a photorefractive keratectomy procedure done. But in the end, he simply had to accept that his vision would fluctuate throughout the day.

"I was wearing three sets of glasses during the day: a morning set of glasses, a noon set of glasses and then an afternoon set of glasses, each set a little weaker," he explained. "Basically, I just had to live with it."

Everything changed after he discovered Gulani online, though he was a bit skeptical at first, thinking that the endorsements he read there were simply too good to be true.

"What really got my attention was when eye doctors and other doctors who needed their eyes for their profession were going to him," Maletis said.



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Robert Morris stands next to Dr. Arun Gulani, post procedure. Morris and his wife were so impressed by the lifestyle they witnessed on the First Coast that they resolved to build a home here.



Chris Maletis, right, says he is very happy with how his eye surgery, performed by Dr. Arun Gulani (center) has restored his vision.

Photos provided by Gulani Vision Institute

Eye surgeon

Continued from 32

Ultimately, he flew to the First Coast and met with Gulani. The resulting procedures restored his eyesight.

These visits also allowed Maletis to enjoy the many attractions offered by Northeast Florida.

“Jacksonville’s just a great place to be,” he said. He spoke highly of the hotels where he stayed, the ease with which he got into and out of the airport and the access to the ocean.

One of the things Maletis learned was that he was not the only patient to travel a great distance to receive treatment. During a post-procedure gathering consisting of Gulani and a group of his patients, Maletis said he was “blown away” by all the people who could not receive the help they needed wherever they happened to live.

“I literally heard story after story after story of people that had nightmarish situations, with doctor after doctor saying, ‘There’s nothing we can do,’” Maletis said. “And they we’re practically in tears because Dr. Gulani gave them vision.”

He recalled meeting a patient from Kenya, named Eric, who was legally blind and needed a new lens that wasn’t even being made. In the end, one of the suppliers created a lens specifically for the man.

“Dr. Gulani basically made it his personal mission to do everything in his power to have Eric see again,” Maletis said.

New hope, new home

The history of Gulani Vision Institute is filled with such stories — patients who would fly in from all over the globe to avail themselves of these procedures. To date, Gulani said, he has treated people from more than 100 countries, which he believes to be a world record.

They will often bring family with



One of Dr. Arun Gulani’s patients brought his family with him from Africa. They soaked up the local scene and quickly became Jaguars fans.



A family from Egypt visits Gulani Vision Institute.

them, and while the patient is concerned with his or her treatment, the others in the entourage are sightseeing and spending money throughout the First Coast.

Some grow so enamored of this corner of the world, out of the way by New York or Los Angeles standards, that they relocate here permanently — even building homes here.

Robert Morris, a resident of Washington, D.C., for the past 31 years, is an example.

Like Maletis, he had radial keratotomy and also saw marked improvement after treatment. However, a decade and a half later, his focus was diminished and he followed up with photorefractive keratectomy. Again, the results were good, though temporary.

Discovering Gulani online, he did his due diligence. Reluctant to undergo yet a third set of surgeries, he continued to learn more about Gulani and, after about five years, opted to seek the doctor’s help.

Arriving in Jacksonville, Morris, who had retired from the U.S. Navy, was pleased with the familiar naval presence in the city. He was also impressed with his visit to Jacksonville Beach and the climate of Northeast Florida, which, compared with many other parts of the state, maintains a bit more seasonal fluctuation.

He found the transportation system to his liking, as well.

“It’s easy to get from one place to the other,” Morris said. “That was kind of a breath of fresh air.”

When he and wife Kelly discovered Del Webb Nocatee, they made a major life decision.

“We thought: This is the right spot for us; we’re going to build here in Ponte Vedra,” Morris explained.

A physician’s perspective

As Maletis pointed out, some of the most convincing patient testimonials come from physicians.

Dr. Emmanouil Nichlos, a plastic surgeon from Frankfort, Germany, flew to Jacksonville in 2021 for treatment.

“I had a special condition called pterygia in both eyes,” he said, referring to an abnormal growth of tissue on the clear membrane that covers the white of the eye. “Nobody in Germany was operating on this condition.”

Seeking a solution online, he found that Gulani was one of very few surgeons in the world who operated on this type of problem. As part of his research, he also read Gulani’s book, “The Art of Pterygium Surgery.”

Satisfied that Gulani lived up to his reputation, Nichlos flew to the First Coast.

“I am very pleased with the results,” Nichlos said. “I do not have any discomfort, and the red area from the irritation is now brilliant white!”

Though he stayed close to his hotel, he did have opportunity to visit downtown Jacksonville.

Now he is back home in Frankfort.

In a video testimony on YouTube, nationally renowned eye surgeon Dr. Ming Wang said, “I call (Gulani) the Mozart of eye surgery.”

As with any type of tourism, the object of the trip — particularly where it involves aligning multiple flights from distant locales and a considerable investment of time and resources — must be worthwhile. It must deliver as promised.

And Gulani’s many satisfied patients agree that his practice does just that.

Sports

Send your sports news to news@pontevedrarecorder.com

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www.PonteVedraRecorder.com

Local players make it official during football early signing day

Shemar McNair and Maddox Spencer of Nease High and Martin Geary of Ponte Vedra High all signed to play Division I football during National Signing Day on Wednesday, Dec. 4. McNair signed to play at the United States Military Academy in West Point, New York, while Spencer will be going to Charleston Southern University and Geary to Colgate University.

Contributed photos



Shemar McNair and Maddox Spencer pose with Nease head coach Collin Drafts after signing to play football at the next level.



Martin Geary celebrates with his coaches during his signing ceremony at Mr. Chubby's Wings in Ponte Vedra Beach.

Rebels, Blue Devils make up Gator Bowl's 80th edition

By Anthony Richards

The TaxSlayer Gator Bowl announced that its 80th matchup will pit the Duke Blue Devils against the No. 14 Ole Miss Rebels on Thursday, Jan. 2 at 7:30 p.m. at Bill Gay Grounds at EverBank Stadium.

Even after 79 years of playing the bowl game, there are still plenty of firsts taking place, as it will be the first ever meeting between the two teams and the first appearance in the bowl for the Blue Devils, who finished 9-3 in the first season under head coach Manny Diaz.

The Blue Devils have been on quite the run in recent years having won five consecutive bowls and a record of 26-12 over the last three years.

Diaz's defensive background has made a difference for the Blue Devils, as they finished the regular season as the

ACC's second-best defense allowing an average of 22.2 points per game.

The Gator Bowl has hosted the Rebels three times over the years, including one of the most iconic games in bowl

GATOR BOWL continues on **Page 35**



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Jace Murchison celebrating the victory.



Hudson Cleek pointing up and celebrating with Nate Bestic.

Landrum Lions celebrate championship season, team excellence

The Landrum Lions have capped off a sensational football season with a commanding 21-8 victory in the championship game, showcasing their dedication, teamwork and hard work.

Quarterback Hudson Cleek led the offense with a stellar 62% completion rate, more than 1,500 passing yards and 16 touchdowns. His connection with standout receiver Evan Sproull, who tallied 1,000 yards and 13

touchdowns on 39 receptions, was a driving force behind the team's success. Nate Bestic also shone, contributing 450 rushing yards, 300 receiving yards and 6 touchdowns, while Coleton Ritch and Eston Wardell delivered crucial catches throughout the season.

The Lions' defense, led by Jace Murchison with 75 tackles, three forced fumbles and two interceptions, was equally formidable. Key contributions came from Ben-

nett Zimmer, Brody Maddox and Andrew Delgado, with a combined 18 sacks. Sproull and Bestic added versatility on defense, with Bestic's championship-sealing pick-six capping an extraordinary effort.

This championship season was a testament to the Lions' unity, perseverance and spirit.

Contributed photos



Nate Bestic, Santiago Kern, Evan Sproull and Jace Murchison ready to stop Swiss Point.



Nate Bestic breaks away from Swiss defender.



Coleton Ritch and Evan Sproull combine to bring down Swiss receiver.

Gator Bowl

Continued from 34

history when Ole Miss met Auburn in January 1971 for the 26th Gator Bowl featuring Heisman Trophy runner up and legendary Ole Miss quarterback Archie Manning, who played in a full arm cast.

This year's Ole Miss squad also boasts a 9-3 record and were a contender for possibly making the College Football Playoff at points throughout the season.

"It's a tremendous honor to host the 80th annual TaxSlayer Gator Bowl," said Andy King, TaxSlayer Gator Bowl chairman. "As the sixth oldest bowl game in the nation, writing the 80th chapter of this iconic game carries a lot of pride for our membership and our community. The opportunity to host two top-tier teams in Duke vs Ole Miss as

well as their players, coaches and fans to our city for a great week of activities celebrating both programs' successful seasons."

The Rebels are led by Lane Kiffin in his fifth year as the team's head coach and have an explosive offensive attack with senior signal-caller Jaxson Dart having thrown for 3,614 yards and 24 touchdowns with just six interceptions on the season.

This year's game will once again be nationally televised on ESPN.

"Our company has proudly been the title sponsor of the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl for 14 years," said Jamie Saxe, CEO of TaxSlayer. "We're excited to be a part of this legacy that spans generations. Congratulations to the Duke Blue Devils and Ole Miss Rebels for making it this far."

Tickets and bowl information are available by going to www.taxslayergatorbowl.com.



Sharks make it seven in a row over Panthers

By Anthony Richards

Ponte Vedra High and Nease High met for the first time on the hardwood this season and it was the Sharks boys basketball squad that defeated the Panthers for the seventh consecutive time in the series, 46-35 on Friday, Dec. 6.

The Panthers came out of the gate playing their ferocious defense, which they have become known for over the years, as they were able to limit the Sharks' high-scoring attack early on with the teams tied at five-all following the first quarter.

However, the Sharks eventually found their groove, especially from long range with four three-pointers, and began pour-

ing on the points en route to outscoring the Panthers 16-6 in the second quarter and grabbing a 21-11 halftime lead.

Whenever these two teams meet it is always a back-and-forth battle, and the Panthers made adjustments and made a push in the third quarter behind their home crowd.

Jack Kuhl was the offensive catalyst for the Panthers as he scored eight of his game-high 10 points in the third quarter to help the Panthers cut the deficit to five points with one quarter to play.

The Sharks' lead was cut to three but that was the closest the Panthers came to completing the comeback as the Sharks tightened up their defense and stretched the advantage back to double digits by

the end to improve to 6-1 on the season.

Senior guard David Sanchez Barrera matched Kuhl with a game-high 10 points on the night, which was enough to make him the 14th player in Sharks' program history to reach the 500-point mark in a career.

Six different Sharks made three-pointers in the contest, including two from senior Alex Katsikas.

The Sharks spread the ball around and had five players finish with five or more points on the night, as Katsikas was joined by Trace Westercamp and Maddox Palmer with six points apiece, while Andrew Speace tallied five.

It capped what was a good week for the Sharks with a 54-53 road win over Uni-

versity Christian on Tuesday, Dec. 3 and a 65-50 victory at home against Wolfson High on Thursday, Dec. 5.

With the loss, the Panthers dropped to 2-4 on the season but they had been riding a two-game winning streak heading into the rivalry matchup, including a 40-24 win over Paxon on Tuesday, Dec. 3.

The Panthers will look to regain that momentum in the Annual Fortegra Invitational, which will take place in the gym at FSCJ South Campus in Jacksonville Dec. 12-14. Their opening game is scheduled against University Christian beginning at 4 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 12.

The next meeting between the Sharks and Panthers will be on Jan. 24 at 7:30 p.m. with Ponte Vedra High hosting.



Isabel Bostic is a senior leader for the Panthers.



Reese Heineman battles for a ball against West Nassau.

Offensive

Continued from 1

Seniors Jess Morley and Isabel Bostic are leading the way in the offense's recent surge of goals as they provide a veteran presence and an attacking mindset in the offensive zone.

Meanwhile, the defense has been strong as well having only allowed six

goals in the nine games played this season.

A major reason for the success has been a combination of senior goalkeeper Amber Jones being a force in the net with her continued development as a starter and the amount of support she has from her teammates in front of her.

Senior Taylor Larramore does an excellent job of both creating and maintaining possession in the midfield, while fellow senior Ava Thomas and junior Grace Chaves present a hard line of defense for opposing offenses to try and get past.

Freshman Landry Bower has also made an instant impact as a young player and has contributed to the defensive effort as well.

Just as the Panthers are starting to find their groove in the season, they are also preparing for a long home stand as their next four games will all be played in front of the home faithful after playing just three of their first nine games at the Panther's Den.

This home cooking will continue into the new year as their next road contest will not be until Jan. 13.



The Panthers have established momentum through the first nine games of the season. Photos by Anthony Richards

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NOTICE TO CREDITORS
IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA PROBATE DIVISION
File No. CP24-0831
Division 59
IN RE: ESTATE OF LOUISE K. DE BARYSHE, a/k/a Louise C. De Baryshe, Deceased.
 The administration of the estate of LOUISE K. DE BARYSHE, aka Louise C. De Baryshe, deceased, whose date of death was September 16, 2024, is pending in the Circuit Court for St. Johns County, Florida, Probate Division, the address of which is 4010 Lewis Speedway, St. Augustine, FL 32084. The names and addresses of the personal representative and the personal representative's attorney are set forth below.
 All creditors of the decedent and other persons having claims or demands against decedent's estate on whom a copy of this notice is required to be served must file their claims with this court ON OR BEFORE THE LATER OF 3 MONTHS AFTER THE TIME OF THE FIRST PUBLICATION OF THIS NOTICE OR 30 DAYS AFTER THE DATE OF SERVICE OF A COPY OF THIS NOTICE ON THEM.
 The personal representative has no duty to discover whether any property held at the time of the decedent's death by the decedent or the decedent's surviving spouse is property to which the Florida Uniform Disposition of Community Property Rights at Death Act as described in ss. 732.216-732.228, Florida Statutes, applies, or may apply, unless a written demand is made by a creditor as specified under s. 732.2211, Florida Statutes.
 All other creditors of the decedent and other persons having claims or demands against decedent's estate must file their claims with this court WITHIN 3 MONTHS AFTER THE DATE OF THE FIRST PUBLICATION OF THIS NOTICE.
 ALL CLAIMS NOT FILED WITHIN THE TIME PERIODS SET FORTH IN FLORIDA STATUTES SECTION 733.702 WILL BE FOREVER BARRED. NOTWITHSTANDING THE TIME PERIODS SET FORTH ABOVE, ANY CLAIM FILED TWO (2) YEARS OR MORE AFTER THE DECEDENT'S DATE OF DEATH IS BARRED.
 The date of first publication of this notice is December 5, 2024.
 Attorney for Personal Representative:
 /s/ James E. Bedsole
 JAMES E. BEDSOLE, ESQ.
 FL. Bar No.: 500194
 2450 Old Moultrie Road, Ste. 104
 St. Augustine, FL 32086
 Tel: (904) 797-8701
 service@bedsolelaw.com
 Personal Representative:
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 1093 Alcalá Drive
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CROSSWORD

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12
13						14				15			
16						17				18			
19				20						21			
			22					23				24	
25	26	27		28				29			30		
31			32		33		34					35	
36				37		38				39			40
	41				42				43		44		
		45					46		47		48		
49	50		51				52			53			
54		55				56					57	58	59
60					61					62			
63					64					65			
66					67					68			

ACROSS

- Thou ___ do it
- Sino-Soviet block (abbr.)
- Brainstem part
- Town in New York state
- Little (Spanish)
- Continent
- Retch
- Short-billed rails
- Small period of time (abbr.)
- Confused
- A team needs one
- Woman in ancient times
- Republican Party
- Spanish be
- "The Godfather" character Johnny
- Not around
- City in Zambia
- A type of beginning
- Numb
- Gurus
- Small, gray-headed crow
- Vehicle type
- Disorders
- One point east of southeast
- Indian soldier
- Tree type
- Midway between south and southeast
- It cools your home
- Corn comes on it
- Ship's deck
- A way to bake
- Improvised
- Butterfly genus
- Baseball fields have them
- Designated space
- Discharge
- Two of something
- Once more
- Part of your face
- Tax collector
- Cassia tree

- The Volunteer State
- Non-hydraulic cement
- Horse mackerel
- Jackson and Diddley are two
- Splendid displays
- Mountain in NE Greece
- A daughter or your brother or sister
- German surname
- Having more than one husband at a time
- Romanian city
- Makes less hot
- Gas diffusion electrode
- Former CIA
- Set an example for others
- Support of a particular person
- One from the Big Apple
- Mountain range

- Violate the sanctity of something
- Supervises flying
- Talks
- Persian male given name
- Born of
- Forcibly take one's possessions
- Discounts
- Knockouts
- Posh Colorado destination
- Form of therapy
- British rock band
- Type of virus (abbr.)
- The U. of Miami mascot is one
- Volcanic crater
- Middle Eastern nation
- Sinn __, Irish organization
- Ethiopian lake
- Bits per inch (abbr.)
- Equally

SUDOKU

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

Level: Beginner

DOWN

- One-time Aaron Rodgers target
- Wings
- Overly studious person
- They protect your valuables

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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<p>2005 MERCEDES-BENZ SL-CLASS</p> <p>SALE PRICE \$17,480 27,483 MILES STOCK# 5F094159</p>	<p>2023 CADILLAC CT5-V</p> <p>SALE PRICE \$91,980 3,840 MILES STOCK# P0810186</p>	<p>2024 GENESIS GV80</p> <p>SALE PRICE \$60,480 7,395 MILES STOCK# RU184776</p>	<p>2024 GMC SIERRA 1500</p> <p>SALE PRICE \$63,380 13,212 MILES STOCK# RZ179725</p>	<p>2020 CADILLAC CT4</p> <p>SALE PRICE \$26,980 57,009 MILES STOCK# L0155117</p>



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