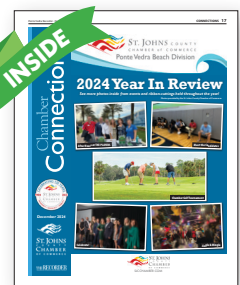


Celebrating 56 Years

Merry Christmas

# THE RECORDER

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**Connections**  
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Thursday, December 19, 2024

PonteVedraRecorder.com

VOLUME 56, NO. 7 \$1.00

## Bilotta Collection hosts fundraiser

*Benefits Homeless Coalition of St. Johns County*

By Holly Tishfield

The Bilotta Collection joined forces with the Homeless Coalition of St. Johns County (HCSJC) on Dec. 14 to host a fundraiser, bringing together the local community for an evening of connection. The event raised nearly \$10,000, with all proceeds directly benefiting the coalition and the families it serves.

The fundraiser took place at the Bilotta Collection's museum, located at 151 Sawgrass Corners Drive, where guests gathered to explore a one-of-a-kind assortment of rare and vintage memorabilia. The museum's eclectic display includes everything from tin robots and 1950s sci-fi rocket rides to full-sized robots, playable arcade machines and iconic movie posters.

The museum was founded by Kristine and Ozzie Bilotta, whose passion for collecting these treasures is matched by their dedication to giving back. Through events like this, the Bilottas are not just sharing their love of vintage memorabilia but also making a meaningful difference in the community.

"It's always a good time to donate, to help homeless families, but it's Christmas time, so this time of year is just

**BILOTTA** continues on Page 9

the link<sup>™</sup>  
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# DANCING INTO THE HOLIDAYS

By Anthony Richards

Christ Church in Ponte Vedra Beach and Miss Felicia's Dance ministry continued its Christmas tradition with its 29th Annual Nutcracker performance at the Lazzara Performance Hall at the University of North Florida on Dec. 14.

Since its inception nearly three decades ago, the showcase was produced and directed by Felicia Rhoden.

The production featured Bria Ragatz as Clara, while Rachel McManus, Olivia Baldwin and Kathryn Walls were the snow queens and Lauren Lineberger was the sugar plum fairy and Isabela Victoria starred as the lilac fairy.

Baldwin, Lineberger, McManus,



Photos by Anthony Richards and Allyson Wall

**HOLIDAYS** continues on Page 10

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## BRIEFS

### Applications accepted for beach toll attendants

St. Johns County Beach Services will begin accepting beach toll attendant applications from Jan. 8 to 10, between 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.

Pay for attendants starts at \$12.90 hourly but goes as high as \$15.05 based on experience and the level of responsibility an attendant is willing to take on. Shifts will be around five hours long, depending on the weather.

The season will begin mid-February and end the last weekend in September. Toll attendants will be responsible for selling vehicle beach access passes and providing customer service for St. Johns County beach visitors. In 2025, attendants will begin using handheld card readers and scanning vehicle barcodes.

In 2024, Beach Services' nine booths sold more than 78,000 daily and annual beach passes, with proceeds funding local law enforcement, marine rescue operations and maintenance of beach parks and beach access points. Some attendants will work from newly constructed booths during the 2025 beach season.

Those interested in this seasonal position are encouraged to visit the St. Johns County Beach Services Office at 901 Pope Road to obtain and complete an application on Jan. 8, 9 or 10. For more information, email [jwalker@sjcfl.us](mailto:jwalker@sjcfl.us) or call 904-209-0383.

### 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.

### Explore the beach at GTM Research Reserve

Join volunteers at the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve (GTM) for a beach exploration 9-11 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 21. Collect seashells, search for shark teeth and learn about coastal wildlife. Meet at GTM Research Reserve Visitor Center, 505 Guana River Road, Ponte Vedra Beach.

Wear comfortable closed-toe shoes. Hat, insect repellent, water and sunscreen are recommended. The event is free but online registration is required. To register, go to [gtmnerr.org/visit/events](http://gtmnerr.org/visit/events).

### Crowley honored for Environmental Achievement

The Chamber of Shipping of America (CSA) recently honored 101 Crowley-operated vessels and their crews with Environmental Achievement Awards, recognizing the company and its people for its safe environmental operations.

The CSA's award honors vessels that maintain an exemplary safety record, free from reportable spills, U.S. Coast Guard environmental citations or other pollution incidents. The recognition reinforces Crowley's dedication to environmental stewardship throughout its operations.

The 101 vessels, which include tugboats, containerships, tank vessels and managed ships for the government, combine to have 864 cumulative years of environmentally safe performance.

"Sustainability and safety are at the heart of everything we do at Crowley, and we're honored to be recognized yet again for our commitment," said Capt. Boren Chambers, director of fleet operations, Crowley Shipping. "These awards are a testament to the hard work that our team puts in to be industry-leaders in environmental stewardship."

— Compiled by Shaun Ryan

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# Supermarket evacuated after bomb threat

Publix in Sawgrass Village received a bomb threat on Monday, Dec. 16, according to the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office. Publix and surrounding businesses were evacuated as a precaution.

The St. Johns County Sheriff's Office Bomb Squad and Explosive Detection K9s conducted a search and nothing

concerning was discovered.

Authorities gave the all-clear at about 1:10 p.m. Police tape was removed five minutes later. Employees went in first and customers were allowed to re-enter the supermarket at about 1:45 p.m.

The businesses were reopened shortly thereafter.



Photos by Holly Tishfield

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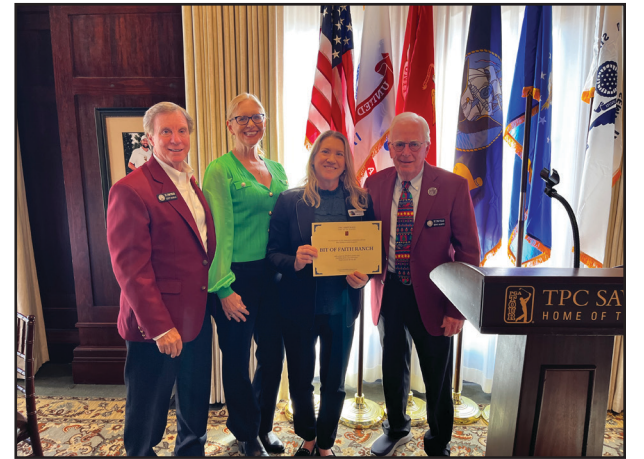
Contributed photos



Apryle Showers Representative Stephanie Rogers



BEAM Representative Jeff Winkler



Bit of Faith Ranch Representative Tammy Romanczuk

# Storyteller Luncheon celebrates community impact, philanthropy

On Dec. 3, the Storyteller Luncheon brought together guests, volunteers and charity representatives to celebrate a remarkable year of service and philanthropy through the Storyteller Program.

This volunteer-led initiative celebrates the rich history of The PLAYERS Championship and the iconic TPC Sawgrass. Through complimentary guided tours, Storytellers bring the legacy of THE PLAYERS and the game of golf to life, highlighting memorable moments and fostering connections among visitors, members and the local community.

With more than 5,800 guests welcomed this past year with an average of visi-

tors from 35 states and 10 countries per month, the program continues to connect people through its engaging tours and charitable initiatives.

This year's event celebrated the efforts of the Storyteller Advisory and Awards Committee (STAAC), led by Scott Reneau, alongside dedicated members like Denny Baldwin, Bill Briggs, Steve Byers, Linda Lago, John Walls, Janice Wood and Teri Mathes.

Together, they allocated and awarded \$38,000 in donations, distributed among five exceptional local charities. This was made possible entirely by the gratuities provided by visitors to Storytellers, who

collect and pool these contributions from their tours throughout the year to support these donations.

This year's honored charities were:

Apryle Showers: Provides respite weekends for families undergoing cancer treatment. Represented by Stephanie Rogers — [www.apryleshowers.org](http://www.apryleshowers.org)

Bit of Faith Ranch: Offers equine-assisted programs for children with autism. Represented by Tammy Romanczuk — [www.bitoffaithranch.org](http://www.bitoffaithranch.org)

Sisters in Arms: Mentors young women aging out of foster care. Represented by Mary Lourdes Saenz — [www.facebook.com/sistersinarmspontevedra](http://www.facebook.com/sistersinarmspontevedra)

BEAM Troop Tuesday Mayport: Supports junior enlisted families with food assistance. Represented by Jeff Winkler — [www.jaxbeam.org](http://www.jaxbeam.org)

Will of Iron Golf Foundation for Military Vets: Empowers veterans and their families through golf. Represented by Xiomara Spadafora — [www.willofironforvets.org](http://www.willofironforvets.org)

Since its inception, the Storyteller Program has awarded \$325,000 in donations. In 2024, the group hosted 23 special events and logged 5,277 service hours. November's tours alone welcomed

**STORYTELLER** continues on **Page 33**



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# State representatives tour District 23 Medical Examiner's office



**Dr. Wendolyn Sneed**

On Dec. 6, St. Johns County hosted a media tour featuring Florida House Reps. Sam Greco and Kim Kendall, along with Danielle Curbow, legislative aid for Florida Senator Tom Leek.

Representatives for the State Attorney's Office, St. Johns County Sheriff's Office, Flagler County Sheriff's Office and Putnam County Sheriff's Office were also in attendance.

The tour highlighted the vital work and pressing needs of the District 23 Medical Examiner's Office, which serves St. Johns, Putnam and Flagler counties. The District 23 Medical Examiner's Office is requesting state appropriations for the design and engineering of a new facility built to meet the needs of the region.

The event began with a presentation by Dr. Wendolyn Sneed, District 23 medical examiner, at the County Administration Building. Sneed provided a comprehensive overview of the office's role in serving a population of over half a million across three counties.

"We're like a well-kept secret," Sneed said, emphasizing the often-overlooked yet critical functions of her office.

Following the presentation, attendees visited the District 23 Medical Examiner's Office facility to gain a firsthand understanding of its operations and challenges. Sneed highlighted the increasing caseload and the limitations posed by the office's current 5,200-square-foot space.

"We are bursting at the seams," she said. "The county is growing, the cases are increasing and eventually, we will need to bring on more personnel. But we simply don't have the space to accommodate them."

One of the office's most pressing needs is a dedicated radiographic room.

"The amount of effort that goes into X-raying the cases we receive is incredible," Sneed said. "Having a dedicated space would enhance efficiency and allow us to fully X-ray every case, improving the quality of our work."

The facility is also in need of comprehensive technological upgrades as well as improved ventilation.

Despite the challenges, Sneed praised her team's dedication.

"My staff is committed to bringing the best to St. Johns, Putnam and Flagler counties," she said. However, she emphasized the need for a facility that can support the projected regional population growth to 700,000 by 2050 and beyond.

The tour underscored the importance



Contributed photos

## The District 23 Medical Examiner's Office

of state and local collaboration to address these challenges and ensure the Medical Examiner's Office is equipped to serve the growing community.

In addition to her work as District 23 medical examiner, Sneed is a member of the National Association of Medical

Examiners and the Florida Association of Medical Examiners and is a dedicated educator. She continues to provide educational seminars on the dangers of opiates and other drugs throughout the region and across the country, reinforcing her commitment to public health and safety.

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*A dedicated philanthropist with a passion for community, Parker Alter plays a vital role as a real estate agent helping families find their dream homes and an avid member of the Ponte Vedra Woman's Club.*

## Parker Alter

### As told to Holly Tishfield

#### Tell me about your background.

I moved to Jacksonville in 1998 and stayed here until about 2009, then I moved up to Virginia. I came back to Jacksonville in 2020 to be closer to my mom, who lives in Jacksonville Beach. I'm a real estate agent and a member of the Ponte Vedra Woman's Club. I'm a true believer in community. My tagline is "love where you live," and I think a part of that is being able to give back to the community in some way, small or large. I also have a background in cost marketing and sales, so that's how I got involved with the Ponte Vedra Woman's Club.

#### What's your role with the Ponte Vedra Woman's Club?

I started with the group a little over two years ago, but I took over as a vice president of ways and means a year and a half ago. I've got a great team on my committee and we handle all the fundraisers for the club so that we can donate to our charities. Our charities are amazing. We have some great events.

#### Why did you get involved with the club?

I got involved with the Ponte Vedra Woman's Club because of their philosophy. It's a social, educational and philanthropic club. When I moved back here in 2020, I had some friends that I knew previously but I really didn't have a community anymore, because I'd been gone long enough. My mom suggested that we join the Ponte Vedra Woman's Club because she had heard about them and how amazing they were. So we went together because we wanted something fun to do. We went to a social event and absolutely fell in love with every woman we met, every single one. From there, it kind of started snowballing.

#### What do you enjoy the most about the club?

I enjoy hearing what our speakers have to say; it's always great to learn new things. And I love the ability to make new friends that make you feel like a part of a community. As adults, it's really hard to move into an area and find a community, so the club gave me a great balance that I like in my life. It fulfilled that void I had of wanting to do something that felt greater than just myself. Our club is an amazing group of women from all walks

of life. We're a bunch of women who enjoy each other's company that want to give back to our community through volunteer efforts, fundraising and donations. I think that when you get a group of women together that are like-minded towards a similar goal, there's nothing you can't do.

#### Is the club only for Ponte Vedra residents?

No, you don't have to live in Ponte Vedra to be a member of our club. We have people who live out in St. Johns,

people that live across the river, people from St. Augustine, and even people from Southside. Our members have all different backgrounds. We have business women, we have stay-at-home moms, we have retirees. Our youngest member is 24 years old and our oldest member is 88 years old. The club has taken on a life of its own for women who come into town and want a place to feel like they're not only giving back to the community, but being social with each other. I invite anybody to join, or to come out to our gala in the new year.

#### What are you most looking forward to in the new year?

For the Ponte Vedra Woman's Club, our next big event is our Great Gatsby Gala on Feb. 22, so I'm really looking forward to that. Everyone's already bought our flapper gowns. We'll have music and both a silent and live auction. If people in the community would like to be a donor for those auctions, we're always grateful for that. It's going to be a great time. We love the fact that we can raise money and have so much fun doing it.



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## Happy Holidays

### Congratulations to our November Leaders!



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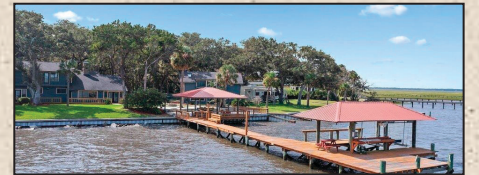
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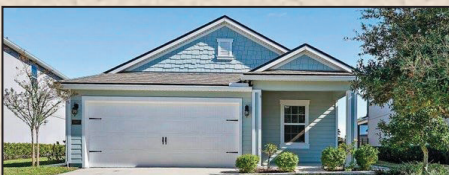
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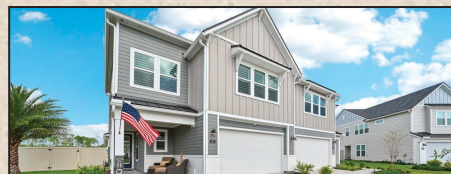
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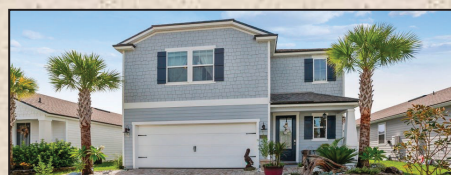
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# OBITUARIES

## Dwight "Butch" Bennett

Dwight "Butch" Bennett took his last trip around the bases on November 17, 2024, and is playing at the eternal ballpark in heaven. Butch passed away at his home in York, Maine at the age of 81 with his loving family by his side.

Butch was born in Spartanburg, South

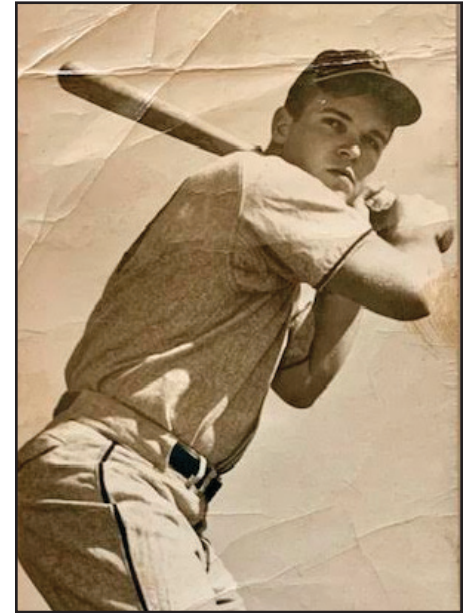
Carolina and soon found his way into a baseball dugout. He played baseball for Spartanburg, local Legion teams and Clemson University.

It all began when Butch invited Lynda on a Block S Club hayride to Rainbow Lake in South Carolina in 1960. He married his best friend and soulmate in 1963, and they were married for 60

wonderful years living in South Carolina, Virginia, North Carolina, Florida and finally in Maine. Butch and Lynda were blessed to have a daughter Leisa, who was the sparkle in her daddy's eye. Butch would intently follow her swimming, cheerleading, and softball years through school and was known to shower her with surprises from time to time. He loved his baby girl. In their retirement years Butch and Lynda traveled the east coast in their RV following the grandkid's baseball careers from Little League to College.

Butch was the co-owner of Bennett's Crystal Ice in Jacksonville, Florida before retiring to be with his family in Maine.

In addition to his wife Lynda, Butch is survived by his daughter Leisa D. McKenna, her husband Sean M. McKenna, grandsons Justin R. McKenna, Jordan M. McKenna, cherished little four-legged friend Emmie Sue, and several nieces and nephews. Butch is preceded in this life by his older baseball teammate and brother Gerald Bennett and his wife Betty.



If you wish to honor Butch, donations can be made to Beacon Hospice, 25 New Hampshire Avenue, Suite 272, Portsmouth, NH 03801

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A guest plays one of the vintage video games in the Bilotta Collection museum



Guests mingle as they browse the rare and vintage memorabilia.



Kim Martin and Jamie Mackey, board members for HCSJC, gave a speech.



Ozzie Bilotta welcomes guests to the event. Photos by Holly Tishfield

## Bilotta

Continued from 1

awesome,” said Ozzie Bilotta at the event. “We think this is a very worthy cause.”

Guests at the event enjoyed the opportunity to browse the museum’s collection while learning about the vital work of HCSJC. The organization provides a range of services to help stabilize families in need, including housing, meals and more. Currently, HCSJC operates a

campus with 23 homes and is working on an expansion that will add 16 new duplex units to provide more families with a safe place to live.

“We’re getting families out of their cars, giving them a safe place to live, and helping them build the skills to be self-sufficient when they leave,” said HCSJC Board Member Jamie Mackey.

The funds raised at the event will go directly toward these expansion efforts, enabling HCSJC to reach more families and provide the resources they need to

rebuild their lives.

In addition to raising funds, the event was an opportunity to celebrate the strength of community and the spirit of giving during the holiday season.

“We would also like to extend our deepest thanks to the attendees of the open house, whose generosity and support made this event such a success,” said HCSJC Board Member Martha G. Gleason in an email. “It is heartening to see members of the community come together to support a cause as important

as ending homelessness, and we are grateful for each and every donation that was made.”

The Bilotta Collection’s collaboration with the HCSJC for the fundraiser not only showcased the museum’s extensive collection, but also highlighted the Bilotta family’s dedication to supporting local causes. By offering a space for the community to come together, the Bilotta Collection made a significant impact on the HCSJC’s plans to continue serving in-need families in St. John’s County.

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Photos by Anthony Richards and Allyson Wall



# Holidays

Continued from 1

Victoria and Walls are all members of the graduating senior class within the dance ministry and have been part of the ministry for more than a decade.

They are joined by fellow seniors

Kyra Krieger, Eva Lantzy and Isabella Peet, who were all faced with the emotions of it being their final Nutcracker production with the ministry.

“My heart swells with pride as I think of the incredible young women you have become,” Rhoden said.

**HOLIDAYS** continues on **Page 11**



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# Holidays

Continued from 10

“Watching you grow from little ones in this dance ministry into graceful, confident, and compassionate individuals has been one of the greatest blessings in my life. I will forever cherish the memories we’ve created together through this beautiful journey of faith and dance.”

Photos by Anthony Richards and Allyson Wall



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The event was held at The Yards.



A large group of people came out to take part in the festive and sporty holiday event.



It was a fun and vibrant atmosphere.

# Holiday pickleball event supports Jay Fund

Pickleball in the Sun hosted its annual Serving Up Hope: Pickleball in the Sun Holiday Bash on Sunday, Dec. 8, at The Yards in Ponte Vedra Beach.

The event brought together more than 50 community members for a day of open play pickleball, holiday shopping and fundraising to support the Tom Coughlin Jay Fund Foundation.

Guests enjoyed browsing sponsor booths, participating in a gift card drive and trying their luck with raffle donations, all to benefit local families tackling childhood cancer.

The Jay Fund provides comprehensive financial, emotional and practical support to families with a loved one battling childhood cancer with the goal of allowing them to focus



Photo courtesy of Reza Raquib Photography

Garrett, Laura, Clara and Brian Gainor (left to right) hold the custom Jay Fund pickleball paddles designed by Liam, Finn and Nash.

on what matters most – their child’s well-being.

“As the founder of Pickleball in the Sun and a proud ambassador for the Tom Coughlin Jay Fund Foundation, I am honored to host this social event each year,” Laura Gainor said. “It’s truly heartwarming to see our community rally together for such an incredible cause, and I look forward to growing this event in the years to come.”

A highlight of the event was the unveiling of custom Jay Fund pickleball paddles featuring artwork by Liam, Finn and Nash, who are young friends of the organization.

Anyone wanting to learn more or support the Tom Coughlin Jay Fund Foundation during the holiday season can go to [tcjayfund.org](http://tcjayfund.org).

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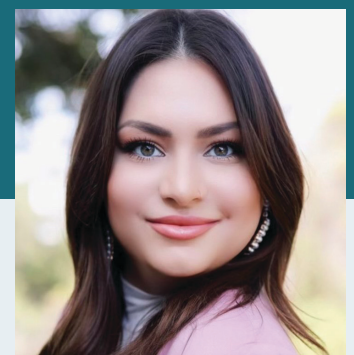
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**OBITUARIES**



**Jenny "Sassy" (Guidera) Wingate**

Jenny "Sassy" (Guidera) Wingate, 54, of Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, passed away unexpectedly on December 11, 2024. Jenny was born April 2, 1970 in Titusville, Florida, and moved to the Jacksonville area with her family in 1982. Jenny was a graduate of the University of North Florida, with a degree in Psychology, which ignited her life-long passion for caring for others. She met the love of her life, West Wingate, and they married

in December of 2000. Sassy and West had a life filled with laughter and a zest for traveling near and far to celebrate family and friendships. Always the life of the party, Sassy was the most gracious hostess, generous to her core, and never met a stranger. Sassy had a knack for bringing people together, with a glass of chardonnay (not the cheap stuff), and plenty of jokes. Her heart was her two boys, Wilson and Case. She loved them fiercely and was so proud of the young men they are growing up to be. She was grateful to see Wilson begin his college years at Western Colorado University, and flourish in his latest adventures high in the mountains of Gunnison, CO. She was excited about Case's decision to attend Georgia Southern in the Fall, where he will continue to hunt and fish, and hopefully study. Much of her free time was spent volunteering at the kids' schools, taking care of those in need, helping people organize their homes, and decorating their family farm in Hawkinsville, Georgia. Although her time with us was way too short, Sassy leaves behind a light that touched so many people, her smile that lit up the room, and her laughter that warmed all of our hearts.

Sassy is survived by her loving husband, West Wingate, her adored children Wilson and Case, and her sweet fur babies Max and Major. She is also survived by her mother Kathleen Guidera, brother-in-law Derrick Shea, and his children Anna Shea (Andrew) Albert and Emma Shea (Jason) Paruta; sister Carolyn Guidera Duenas, and her children Jonathon (Michelle) Duenas, Noah (Sydney) Duenas, and Ashley (Travis) Gailey; her brother John Guidera and his children, Skyler Guidera, Garrett Guidera and Will Guidera; her sister Laura Guidera (Scott) Woodward and their children Sarah Woodward and Jenna Woodward (Harrison); her father-in-law and

mother-in-law Big Ron and Diane Wingate; her sister-in-law Rhonda Wingate (Joe) Jumber, and their children Joseph Jumber, Matthew Jumber, Luke Jumber; her brother-in-law Owen (Johanna) Wingate, and their children Wyatt Wingate and Walker Wingate, and her many great-nieces and -nephews. She was preceded in death by her father William Guidera, and her sister Kathleen Guidera (Derrick) Shea.

A Celebration of Life was held at Crosswater Community Church, 211 Davis Park Road, Ponte Vedra, FL 32081, on Tuesday, December 17th at 11 a.m. Following the service, the celebration continued at Palm Valley Outdoors, 377 South Roscoe Blvd., Ponte Vedra 32082.

In lieu of sending flowers, the family requests that those who wish to honor Sassy's memory consider making a donation "In Honor of Jenny Wingate" to one of these charities that were special to her: Beam (Beaches Emergency Assistance Ministry — provide critical assistance to local families in need) <https://jaxbeam.org/donate> or call 904-241-2326, Dreams Come True (an organization to dedicating to granting dreams of children with life-threatening illness) [www.dreamscometrue.org](http://www.dreamscometrue.org) or call 904-296-3030.

Arrangements under the direction and care of Quinn Shalz Funeral Home, 3600 3rd St S, Jacksonville Beach, FL. Please visit our online tribute at [www.quinn-shalz.com](http://www.quinn-shalz.com).



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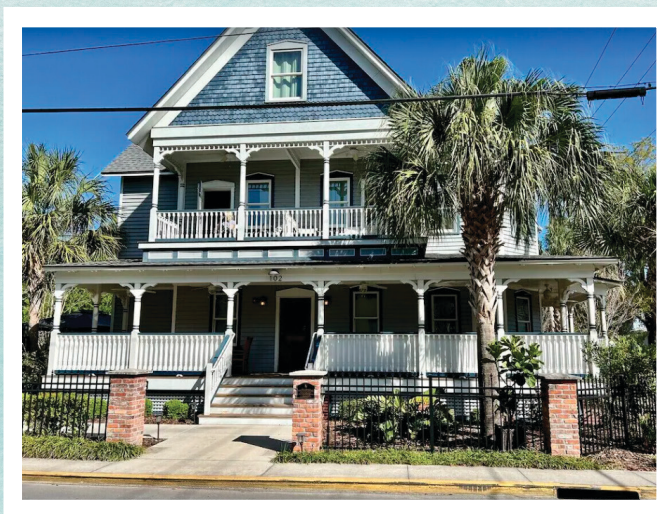
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## OBITUARIES



### Gypsy Lee Yount Alexander

Gypsy Lee Yount Alexander, 88, died Sunday, December 1, 2024 in Fernandina Beach following a long illness. Born in High Point, NC to Larry Yount and Mar-

garet Chandler, Gypsy was raised in Reidsville, NC and attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She later moved to Florida and settled at the Jacksonville Beaches in 1970. She was the wife of Thomas Hawe "Tommy" Hulihan, Jr., who predeceased her.

Gypsy was an avid tennis player at Selva Marina Country Club and had a lifelong love of fishing, a passion that she shared with her late husband. Although she wanted to be a journalist, she began selling real estate in the mid-1970s and discovered her true calling. Gypsy's long real estate career included stints at Stockton Land Company and Ponte Vedra Club Realty, but she also had brief detours selling real estate advertising for the Ponte Vedra Recorder and Jacksonville Today magazine. One of the highlights of her life and career was joining her boss and dear friend, Jimmy Stockton, and several colleagues on a trip to Africa in 1986. Gypsy was a member of Christ Church in Ponte Vedra Beach; a member of the Ponte Vedra Beach Chamber of Commerce, where she served as board president and vice president; and was a member of Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra Beach Sunset.

In addition to her husband, Gypsy was preceded in

death by two of her children, Chan Alexander (Dan Prieto) and Danny Alexander (Marissa Weightman); a half-sister, Linda Graham (U.J. Graham); and a half-brother, Ken Yount. She is survived by her three children, Tom Rankin of Ponte Vedra Beach, Jay Alexander (Mark Hampton) of New York City, and Ginny Alexander of Jacksonville; a sister, Sandra Barkley (Robert) of Youngstown, FL; three half-brothers, Larry "Coley" Yount, Jr., John Yount, and Danny Yount, all of Reidsville, NC; three stepsons, Tommy Hulihan (Kelly), Michael Hulihan (Tina), and Scott Hulihan (Tracy); 15 grandchildren, Luke Marsden (Connie); Colin Alexander (Rebekah Brewer); Bryce, Brittany, and London Alexander; Sierra Weightman; Thomas and Mack Hulihan; Michaela and Julianna Hulihan; Hayden, Cole, and Paige Hulihan and Sydney and Ryan Hofstetter; and a great-grandson, Avery Marsden.

A celebration of life will be planned for a future date. Gypsy was proud that all three of her children gave back through their work for various nonprofit organizations. In lieu of flowers, please consider a memorial gift to either K9s for Warriors or Starlings Volleyball, USA.



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## County seeks to keep IMAX open

According to the website for the IMAX Theater at World Golf Village: "The end

is here: the IMAX Theater is closed to the public." No shows are listed.

But St. Johns County issued a press release this week stating that it is soliciting operators to keep the IMAX Theater at World Golf Village open.

According to the county, this process was announced to refute what it calls "inaccurate information posted on the theater's social media about being closed to the public."

"We have always been and remain committed to keeping the IMAX theatre open for as long as we are able to," County Administrator Joy Andrews said.

Since the World Golf Foundation Inc. announced its relocation plans in 2023, the county has demonstrated a commitment to the IMAX Theatre and World Golf Village area.

On April 16, the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners approved the \$5.5 million purchase of all World Golf Foundation Inc. assets.

On May 21, the board approved World Golf Village's strategic recommendations and directed county staff to prepare for board approval a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to solicit proposals from developers to redevelop the assets based on community input.

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# Chamber Connections

## 2024 Year In Review

See more photos inside from events and ribbon-cuttings held throughout the year!

Photos provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce



After Hours at THE PLAYERS



Meet the Candidates



Chamber Golf Tournament



December 2024



Celebrate!



Jingle & Mingle



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO

## 2024 positioned the Chamber for greater future success



**Isabelle Renault**  
President/CEO, St. Johns  
County Chamber of Commerce

In 2024, the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce accomplished many things that have prepared us not only to continue our work as the premier advocate for business in the county but also to expand and enhance the ways we do that work.

This time of year is one of reflection, as we all look back on what we've achieved personally and professionally and look forward to what's ahead. Here are some highlights of the Chamber's accomplishments from 2024:

In the first quarter of the year, we closely followed the Legislative Session and kept Chamber members updated on developments from Tallahassee. These regular updates culminated in the annual Legislative Update Breakfast in May, where state and local officials and their representatives provided updates and analysis on legislation.

In April, we officially launched the St. Johns County Chamber Foundation, which extends the Chamber's commitment to strengthening the community through leadership, education and economic development, including Leadership St. Johns. The first LSJ class under the Foundation completed the program

in September.

In May, the Chamber debuted a redesigned website and new member software, making it easier for members to stay engaged and informed. The updated website also better showcases all the programs and initiatives the Chamber produces, such as Pitch Factory. The program, which kicks off every June, helps local entrepreneurs bring their businesses to the next level.

With this busy election year, the Chamber stayed focused on being a resource to the community and presented Meet the Candidates 2024 (formerly Politics in St. Johns) to provide the unique opportunity for hundreds of community members to have one-on-one conversations with candidates running for office to make the most informed choice in the voting booth.

As we moved toward fall, representatives from the Chamber were invited to join a delegation traveling to Aviles, Spain, in August to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the sister city relationship with St. Augustine. The trip allowed discussion with Aviles-based businesses and the Aviles Chamber of Commerce around commercial oppor-

tunities between Aviles and Northeast Florida.

As the General Election approached, the Chamber shared support for the St. Johns County School Board's tax proposals that extended the half-cent sales tax for another 10 years and added a 1-mill increase on property taxes to help fund the measures that make our local schools some of the very best in the state. Our schools are economic drivers for the county, attracting employers and employees alike, and these taxes are an investment in this important resource.

To close the success of 2024, the Chamber marked more than 120 years of success with our annual Celebrate! event in November, where we also recognized the best and brightest local business leaders.

As we look ahead to 2025, the Chamber is excited to build on our many successes and continue to support the success of the entire St. Johns County business community.

**Isabelle Renault,**

President and CEO, St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

## Chamber holds annual Veterans Day celebration

In November, the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce thanked military members for their service at the annual Veterans Day Celebration Luncheon.

A panel of veterans spoke about their military experiences and shared with attendees the challenges many veterans face today, as well as how businesses and communities can support veterans. Speakers included Master Chief Petty

Officer Christopher E. Smith, USN Command master chief, Patrol Squadron EIGHT (VP-8) "Fighting Tigers;" Dr. Stephanie Erwin, assistant professor and chief of institutional effectiveness, U.S. Air Force Air Command and Staff College; Ryan Clark, CEO of Code Coast Consulting; and Sean Rotolo, president and CEO of Rotolo Corp., owner of Oxi Fresh Carpet Cleaning of Northeast

Florida.

The panelists spoke on how their military experience has impacted their careers and professional lives, and they shared the community resources and veterans' services they found to be most helpful.

The event was hosted by the Chamber's Women with Vision Council and part of the Chamber at Noon program series. The Women with Vision Council

mentors, inspires and empowers professional women through education and collaboration to embrace their vision, purpose and value. Chamber at Noon programming keeps members on top of business trends in St. Johns County and Northeast Florida and offers valuable networking and educational opportunities through insightful topics and engaging speakers.



Veterans Day celebration panelists: Sean Rotolo, president and CEO of Rotolo Corp., owner of Oxi Fresh Carpet Cleaning of Northeast Florida; Master Chief Petty Officer Christopher E. Smith, USN Command master chief, Patrol Squadron EIGHT (VP-8) "Fighting Tigers;" Dr. Stephanie Erwin, assistant professor and chief of institutional effectiveness, U.S. Air Force Air Command and Staff College; and Ryan Clark, CEO of Code Coast Consulting.



Photos provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber's annual Veterans Day Celebration Luncheon featured a panel of military veterans who spoke about their experiences and how local businesses can support veterans.



# Business leaders Jingle & Mingle at holiday party

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce's annual Jingle & Mingle event in Ponte Vedra Beach was a huge hit this year.

Held on Dec. 12 at Fantasy Farms, the event drew more than 80 attendees who ate, drank, danced and networked at one of the area's most unusual venues. This year's event featured an ugly sweater contest, great door prizes, music by DJ Joe Allen and a photobooth by First Coast Headshots. Several attendees said it was the best Jingle & Mingle yet and that they're already looking forward to the 2025 event.

Balloon decorations were provided by The Social Society and To the Moon Party Designs, and food was provided by Pusser's, JaxSpice and Argyle. Trophies for the ugly sweater contest were provided by Ocean Sole. The Ponte Vedra Recorder provided wine for the event.

For more Chamber events and programs, go to [sjcchamber.com](http://sjcchamber.com).



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
**More than 80 Chamber members attended the annual Jingle & Mingle event, held this year at Fantasy Farms in Ponte Vedra Beach.**



Photos provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
**Ugly sweater contest winners received prizes from Ocean Sole, a company that creates sculptures from recycled flip-flops.**



Photo by Susan Griffin



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# Chamber marks 120th anniversary



Photos provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
**Chamber President and CEO Isabelle Renault (left); Heather Quinn, entertainment manager at Historic Tours of America, Chamber Member of the Year; Berta Odom, immediate past chair of Chamber Board of Directors**

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce held its annual signature event, Celebrate!, on Nov. 14 to mark its 120th anniversary while recognizing the area's top business leaders.

Additionally, Orv Dothage of Northrop Grumman was recognized as the new chair of the Chamber's Board of Directors, receiving the gavel from Immediate Past Chair Berta Odom of Team 100 Realty.

To celebrate 120 years of the Chamber, Rep. John Rutherford provided a proclamation on the Congressional Record, attendees viewed a timeline showcasing important events in the Chamber's history, and local actors provided a glimpse into the early 1900s when the Chamber got its start as the St. Augustine Board of Trade.

Chamber President and CEO Isabelle Renault and Berta Odom presented four awards to Chamber members:

- Marty Lewis Ambassador of the Year Award — Brian Walker, AIT Environmental Technology
- Small Business of the Year — Culver's St. Augustine
- Fred Schroeder Economic Development Council Member of the Year — Baptist Health
- Member of the Year — Historic Tours of America



**Chamber President and CEO Isabelle Renault (left); Sean Rotolo, Chamber Ambassadors past chair; Brian Walker, 2024 Ambassador of the Year; and Berta Odom, immediate past chair of Chamber Board of Directors**



**Jim Bush of Florida Power & Light, chair of the Economic Development Council; Dr. Brandon Chapman, vice president of medical affairs for Baptist South and Baptist Clay; Chamber President and CEO Isabelle Renault; Berta Odom, immediate past chair of Chamber Board of Directors**



**St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce staff. Berta Odom (board of directors), left, Scott Maynard, Elizabeth Middlebrooks, Daniel Lee, Elizabeth Bernardino, Bob Porter, Ericha Gore, Sophia Darabi, Aliyah Meyer and Isabelle Renault.**



**Chamber President and CEO Isabelle Renault (left); Lisa and Garth Darton of Culver's St. Augustine, Small Business of the Year; Berta Odom, immediate past chair of Chamber Board of Directors**



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# Chamber Ambassadors celebrate year of connecting

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ambassadors held their end-of-year celebration in December to mark another year of welcoming and connecting Chamber members in the St. Johns County business community.

At the event, the Chamber recognized Sean Rotolo, immediate past chair of the Ambassador board, and welcomed Lori Brandel, the Ambassador board's new chair.

Ambassadors are local business leaders who volunteer their time to welcome new Chamber members and build connections by engaging other local businesses and providing guidance about the chamber's programs and services.



Sean Rotolo, immediate past chair of Chamber Ambassadors, and Lori Brandel, new chair of Chamber Ambassadors.



Photos provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

Ambassadors collected donations of necessities for local nonprofit Alpha Omega Miracle Home, which provides shelter and support for women and children in need.

# Fed exec offers look ahead at EDC Breakfast

Looking ahead was the focus of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce's quarterly Economic Development Council Breakfast on Friday, Dec. 6, in St. Augustine.

The Chamber welcomed David Altig, executive vice president and chief economic adviser at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, as the program's featured speaker. He shared information about the latest economic policy from the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and how it affects business and industry in our region and discussed inflation and its local impact.

Altig also provided a national economic forecast and shared key performance indicators businesses should keep an eye on in the coming months.

In his predictions for the year, Altig pointed out that forecasting is a best guess, and this year was "rock solid" despite indications that the economy would not be as strong as it is.

"The economy is remarkably robust even in the face of historically rapidly tightening monetary policy," he told attendees, noting that election years are not always this friendly to economic activity.

The next Economic Development Council Breakfast is scheduled for Friday, Feb. 14, at Renaissance World Golf Village in St. Augustine. The speaker will be Mark Lamping, president of the Jacksonville Jaguars. Information and registration are available on the Chamber's website at sjcchamber.com.



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

Scott Maynard, senior vice president of economic development, St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce; David Altig, executive vice president and chief economic adviser at the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta; Isabelle Renault, president and CEO of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce



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## School superintendent explains tax referenda at EDC Breakfast



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce held its quarterly Economic Development Council breakfast on Friday, Sept. 20. Tim Forson, superintendent of St. Johns County School District, shared updates about the school system and what's needed to ensure St. Johns County retains its consistent "A" score and top statewide ranking.

**Tim Forson, superintendent of St. Johns County School District, speaks during the quarterly Economic Development Council breakfast.**

## County Update

St. Johns County Administrator Joy Andrews presented an update at the February 23 Economic Development Council breakfast highlighting the county's growth and how officials are managing and planning for development, infrastructure changes and maintaining the high quality of life for all St. Johns County residents. An update was also provided from Baptist Medical Center about their expansion into St. Johns County.



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

## Island Fin Poké Company ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

**Island Fin Poké Company, in the Beachwalk community of St. Johns County, held its ribbon cutting on Oct. 1. They serve Hawaiian-style poke, Dole soft serve and organic Tractor beverages.**

## Ability Tree First Coast ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

**Ability Tree First Coast opened its new space, known as the Treehouse, with an Oct. 17 ribbon cutting. This will allow for more socials, enrichment programs and activities to be offered to individuals with disabilities and their families.**

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### Art Collective St. Augustine ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
**Art Collective St. Augustine held its grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony on Nov. 1.** The celebration at the gallery in downtown St. Augustine was filled with music, food and fun. Art Collective hosts creative works from a diverse group of local artists, everything from traditional oil paintings to modern acrylics, pastels, mixed medium collage, paper quilling, pit fired pottery as well as exquisite jewelry makers.

### Fury Water Adventures ribbon cutting



Photo by Susan Griffin  
**Fury Water Adventures St. Augustine held a ribbon cutting on Oct. 30.** Their 65-foot catamaran sails through the serene waters of our historic city. Customers can book a Live Music Sunset Sail, a Dolphin Watch & Historic Harbor Sail or even a Fury Signature Private Charter.

### Legacy Roofing & Solar ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
**Legacy Roofing & Solar held a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Nov. 7.** Legacy Roofing & Solar is a woman-owned businesses that offers residential and commercial roofing services, ensuring their work protects homes and businesses from Florida sun and storms.

### Kilwins St. Johns — Beachwalk ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
**Kilwins St. Johns — Beachwalk held its grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony on Nov. 13.** This new location serves top-tier confections such as their large selections of chocolate, fudge, ice cream, caramel apples and more.

### Yoga Den St. Augustine ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
**Yoga Den St. Augustine held its ribbon cutting ceremony Nov. 20** to celebrate the newest location's opening in St. Augustine.

### Legacy Retirement Group ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
**The Legacy Retirement Group celebrated its official ribbon cutting and grand opening Nov. 15.** The Legacy Retirement Group provides financial and retirement planning services while being rooted in care, connection and community.

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### Ivybrook Academy — Valley Ridge ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ivybrook Academy — Valley Ridge held its official ribbon cutting Dec. 5. This location is open at a new commercial center near the U.S. 1 and C.R. 210 intersection. Ivybrook Academy has a team of dedicated educators who have been providing children with a strong foundation for a lifetime of learning by taking an innovative approach to early childhood education at a half-day preschool that encourages critical thinking, awards creativity and fosters a love for learning.

### A Classic Theatre ribbon cutting



Photo by Jackie Hird Photography A Classic Theatre held its ribbon cutting on Oct. 3.

### FastSigns Ribbon Cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce FastSigns held its ribbon cutting and reopening under new management on June 27.

### Golf Cart World ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Golf Cart World, located at 100 Sterling Plaza Drive in Ponte Vedra, held a ribbon cutting July 29 to celebrate their opening with members of the community.

### Hounds Town St. Augustine ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Hounds Town St. Augustine — Northeast held its official ribbon cutting Nov. 22. They offer a fully interactive doggie daycare, overnight dog boarding and pet spa services. This particular location also boasts a “Hounds Town Boulevard” complete with suites inspired by St. Augustine attractions and organizations.

### Conquer Health Chiropractic ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Conquer Health Chiropractic held its ribbon cutting ceremony June 28.

### Two businesses cut ribbons



Photos provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Deka Lash and YogaSix St. Johns held ribbon cuttings July 10. Both businesses are located in Northwest St. Johns County. Deka Lash provides customizable lash and brow services, and YogaSix offers a variety of yoga classes for everyone from beginners to experts.

### First Coast Headshots ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce First Coast Headshots held its ribbon cutting on Aug. 7. Owner Gabriel Giannelli opened the new studio in downtown St. Augustine at the historic Treasury Building at 24 Cathedral Place.

### GJ Gardner Homes ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce GJ Gardner Homes held its ribbon cutting and grand opening on July 26.

### Sawgrass Pet Resort celebrates expansion with dual ribbon cuttings



Photos provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Sawgrass Pet Resort in Ponte Vedra Beach held a ribbon cutting and open house on Aug. 18 to celebrate their opening after adding an additional 2,000 sq. ft. boarding area and walking trail. The grand opening of Sunrise Vet at Sawgrass was celebrated with a ribbon cutting the same day. Sawgrass Pet Resort offers many amenities for dog owners, including boarding, daycare, grooming and training.



### Rutherford addresses two Chambers



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce and JAX Chamber held a Joint Chamber at Noon on Oct. 31 at Casa Marina in Jacksonville Beach. U.S. Rep. John Rutherford provided a look ahead to the 2025 legislative session and a recap of the 2024 session. Rutherford represents Florida's 5th Congressional District, which includes parts of Duval, Nassau and St. Johns counties.

### Ponte Vedra Wellness Center marks 20 years



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. Ponte Vedra Wellness Center celebrated 20 years in business when Dr. Erika Hamer and her team hosted a Chamber After Hours on Oct. 2. Hamer has been a very active Chamber member over the last two decades and currently serves as the chair of the Chamber's Ponte Vedra Beach Division board. Ponte Vedra Wellness Center provides a variety of services, including chiropractic adjustments, physical therapy, red light and laser therapy and more. The office is located on State Road A1A at Corona Road in Ponte Vedra Beach.

### Chamber After Hours at DJ's Clam Shack



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. DJ's Clam Shack St. Augustine hosted a Chamber After Hours gathering on Nov. 6. It was a wonderful evening of networking, food and drinks.

### Recorder celebrates anniversary during Chamber After Hours



Staff photos. The Ponte Vedra Recorder celebrated its 55th anniversary during a Chamber After Hours event on Oct. 23.

### K9s For Warriors hosts Chamber Before Hours



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. K9s For Warriors hosted a Chamber Before Hours on Oct. 16 for members and friends. Kiersan Cue, development manager — corporate partners, gave an overview of the organization's mission. Attendees also heard from Steve Biggs and K9 Sunny, a recent graduate of the program.

### Chamber Before Hours at Southeast Branch Library



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. St. Johns County Public Library — Southeast Branch hosted a Chamber Before Hours gathering Oct. 17 for members and friends. Robby Camastro, assistant branch manager for the St. John's County Public Library, spoke about ways for small businesses to access resourceful information online with the St. Johns County Library card.

### Fountain of Youth hosts Chamber Before Hours



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. The Fountain of Youth in St. Augustine hosted Chamber Before Hours on Nov. 6. Alexandra Fraser and Chad Light shared a brief history of the property, and attendees had a great time networking in the Magnolia Room, the Fountain of Youth's event space, which is available for meetings, weddings and more.

### Chamber After Hours at Donna Mancini Interiors and Flooring



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. Donna Mancini Interiors and Flooring hosted the Aug. 21 Chamber After Hours event, providing a beautiful space for networking and fun. The business offers furniture, lighting, flooring and more, all under one roof.

### Chamber After Hours at Freedom Boat Club



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. Freedom Boat Club Jacksonville, Jacksonville Beach & St. Augustine hosted the June 27 Chamber After Hours event.

### Chamber After Hours at Old Coast Pickleball



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. On July 18, Old Coast Pickleball hosted a very fun Chamber After Hours, where members could network while playing pickleball at the indoor, air-conditioned facility during the evening thunderstorms. Owners Tim and Ashley Owens are also breaking ground on a new, 12-court facility in St. Augustine, near the intersection of Dobbs Road and Kings Estate Road.

### Chamber After Hours at Real Property Management Home Together



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. Real Property Management Home Together hosted a fun Chamber After Hours event Sept. 11 with great networking, food and drinks. The business offers an affordable solution to managing real estate in St. Johns County with a focus on quality residential property management.

### Chamber After Hours at Wells Fargo



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. Wells Fargo hosted the June 26 Chamber After Hours event.



# Lisa Barton Team hosts Chamber After Hours



Photo by Susan Griffin

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Beach Division held an After Hours event on April 17 that was hosted by the Lisa Barton Team with Keller Williams Realty Atlantic Partners at their Sawgrass Village location. Lori Adams, Cabi clothing representative, co-sponsored the event, and it was a great opportunity to meet and mingle with other local business representatives.

# Chamber After Hours at RISE



Photo by First Coast Headshots provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

The May 22 Chamber After Hours event was held at the RISE at Nocatee, celebrating the opening of the clubhouse for the 55+ active living community on Preservation Trail. Attendees enjoyed great food, drinks and networking. Jerry Shaffer and his team hosted the event.

# Chamber After Hours at Bestbet



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

Jamie Shelton and the team at Bestbet Poker Room/Jax, Orange Park and St. Augustine Players Group hosted the Feb. 22 Chamber After Hours Event. It was a wonderful evening of networking, food and drinks.

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### After Hours at THE PLAYERS



Photo by Susan Griffin

The photos above are from the joint After Hours at THE PLAYERS Championship event, co-hosted by the St. Johns County Chamber and the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce. The member event was held on THE PLAYERS grounds and took place March 7.

### After Hours at Brown Family YMCA



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Feb. 21 was a beautiful evening for a Chamber After Hours Event. Cara Roach and the team at Brown Family YMCA hosted the wonderful evening of networking, food and drinks.

### Chamber Before Hours at Code Ninjas



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Code Ninjas World Golf Village hosted Chamber Before Hours on Aug. 15 for fellow Chamber members. Owner Ryan Clark spoke about the importance of using technology to prepare children for the future. Clark, a member of the Chamber's Board of Directors, also owns Code Ninjas Ponte Vedra. At Code Ninjas, kids learn how to code in a fun, safe and social-learning environment where gaming is celebrated and STEM is cool.

### Chamber Before Hours



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ascension St. Vincent's Jacksonville hosted a great Chamber Before Hours on Aug. 7 for members and friends at their St. Johns County hospital. Guests heard from Mary Anne Thomas, director of foundation development, and Cory Darling, president of Ascension St. Vincent's St. Johns County. They shared information about the foundation and how it supports the hospital's community outreach ministries that provide care for impoverished and underinsured residents of Northeast Florida and Southeast Georgia.

### Chamber Before Hours at Hydro Med Spa



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Hydro Med Spa hosted the July 10 Chamber Before Hours event. Founder, CEO and Clinical Director Travis Jeffords spoke to the special approach Hydro Med Spa takes to help clients look and feel their best with custom IV infusions, hormone replacement, ozone therapy, aesthetics, body sculpting and more.

### Chamber Before Hours at Coastal Compass



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce The April 10 Chamber Before Hours was held at Coastal Compass. Cutter Arey and his team hosted the morning of networking, food and coffee.

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We hope you and your family enjoy a happy, healthy, and relaxing holiday.





### Chamber Before Hours at First Florida Credit Union



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
**First Florida Credit Union** hosted the June 7 Chamber Before Hours at the recently opened Durbin branch in the northwestern part of St. Johns County. In addition to the great networking and conversation, attendees heard from the credit union's Lena Hull, who shared more information about the credit union and a summer program designed to help teens learn important financial skills and the principles of building good credit. Learn more about FFCU at [firstflorida.org](http://firstflorida.org).

### Chamber Before Hours at TPC Sawgrass



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
 The June 12 Chamber Before Hours was held at TPC Sawgrass. Attending was a great group for networking and catching up with friends to kick off the workday. Find more Chamber Before Hours events on the calendar at [https://bit.ly/sjc\\_chamber\\_events](https://bit.ly/sjc_chamber_events).

### Chamber Before Hours at the Visitors & Convention Bureau in St. Augustine



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
 The Feb. 8 Chamber Before Hours was held at St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra and The Beaches Visitors & Convention Bureau in St. Augustine.

### Chamber at Noon focuses on planning for hurricane season



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
 Kelly Wilson (second from left), deputy director of St. Johns County Emergency Management, shared tips and resources for preparing for hurricane season at a recent Chamber at Noon in Ponte Vedra Beach. With Wilson are Elizabeth Bernardino, vice president of program development and marketing for the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce, and Harmony and Todd Marshall of All Dry Services of SE Jacksonville, who sponsored the event.

### Concert hall is Chamber at Noon subject



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
 The Ponte Vedra Concert Hall is changing — in a wonderful way! Diany Markovits of SJC Cultural Events and Jerry Wilson, president of Friends of the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall, were guests at the May 15 Chamber at Noon. They spoke about the major updates and renovations to this community landmark. Go to [pvconcerthall.com](http://pvconcerthall.com) to learn more about the venue and what's to come.

### Joint Chamber at Noon with JAX Chamber



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
 Marsh Landing Country Club was the setting for an informative joint Chamber at Noon with JAX Chamber. Experts from St. Johns County and the Florida Department of Transportation presented important information about our beaches and their impact on quality of life, businesses, tourism and more, with an ongoing focus on renourishment and resiliency planning.

### Smith talks THE PLAYERS economic impact, sightline changes



Photo by Anthony Richards  
 THE PLAYERS executive director Lee Smith speaks next to the tournament's 50th anniversary logo during the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Beach Division luncheon on Feb. 14.

### Social Society ribbon cutting



Photo by Anthony Richards  
 The Social Society held its ribbon cutting and grand opening on Sept. 16. The area's newest party supply store is now open in Nocatee, and owner Seri Kertzner has sourced everything you need to throw a fabulous party. In this fun and creative space, you'll find trendy gift ideas, pieces for everyday entertaining, a balloon bar with delivery options and more.

### Sugar Sugar Ribbon Cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
 Sugar Sugar — St. Johns held its ribbon cutting and grand opening on July 12. Sugar Sugar is located at 105 Nature Walk Parkway, Unit 107, off C.R. 210. It offers sugaring hair removal, spray tans, facials and brow services.

### 4Ever Young ribbon cutting

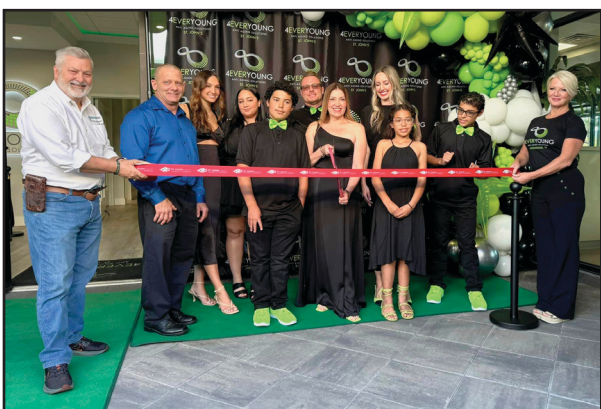


Photo courtesy of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
 4Ever Young Anti-Aging Solutions — St. Johns held its grand opening bash and ribbon cutting on April 12. It was an evening of networking and celebrating.

### Advanced Business Solutions ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
 Advanced Business Solutions, LLC held a ribbon cutting on May 22. Learn more about ABS at <https://www.goabsinc.com/>

### Ameriprise Financial ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
 Ameriprise Financial held its ribbon cutting on April 25. It was an afternoon of networking and celebrating.



# Ferreira Wealth Group ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

Ferreira Wealth Group held its ribbon cutting in January in Nocatee.

# Argyle Ribbon Cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

Argyle Ponte Vedra Beach held a ribbon cutting in February.

# Extract Juicery ribbon cutting



Photo by Shaun Ryan

Extract Juicery owner Kevin Walker cuts the ribbon April 26 for his new shop at 104 Ashourian Ave., Suite 103, in St. Johns. To learn more about Extract Juicery, go to [extractjuicery.com](http://extractjuicery.com).

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# IPPOLITA



### Culver's ribbon cutting



Photo by First Coast Headshots provided by The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

Culver's opened its newest location on Stratton Boulevard in St. Augustine, holding a ribbon cutting ceremony on May 20. The team is led by Garth and Lisa Darton. Of more than 1,000 Culver's locations, their restaurant on U.S. 1 is the fourth busiest in the entire United States.

### Myth & Legend holds ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
Myth & Legend held its grand opening and ribbon cutting on May 10. It was an afternoon of networking and celebrating.

### Land Title of America ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
A Chamber After Hours Event and ribbon cutting was held April 24 at Land Title of America Inc. Stephen Collins and his team hosted the evening of networking, food and drinks.

### Byron Chandler Interiors ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
Byron Chandler Interiors held its grand opening and ribbon cutting on Jan. 20. It was an afternoon of networking, food and celebrating.

### Old Coast Pickleball ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce  
Old Coast Pickleball held its ribbon cutting on April 26. It was an afternoon of networking and celebrating.

### CycleBar Ribbon Cutting



Photo by Anthony Richards  
CycleBar joined the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce with a ribbon cutting on Jan. 5.

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### Discover & Recovery ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Discover & Recovery St. Johns County held its ribbon cutting ceremony March 16. It was a wonderful afternoon of networking, food and celebrating.

### Fleur de Lis ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Fleur de Lis Ribbon Cutting

### St. Johns Premier Boat Rentals ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce St. Johns Premier Boat Rentals held its ribbon cutting ceremony on March 20. The event was a wonderful morning of networking and celebrating.

### Flagler Crossing ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce St. Johns County and the City of St. Augustine took another step forward in offering new options in attainable housing with the ribbon cutting April 28 at Flagler Crossing apartments. Congratulations to Corner Lot on the completion of phase one of this project. Plans for phase two are already in place.

### Effect Medspa grand opening



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce The Effect Lifestyle Practice held its grand opening and ribbon cutting Jan. 18.

### Fifth Third Bank ribbon cutting



Photo by First Coast Headshots Fifth Third Bank held a ribbon cutting at its new branch in Northwest St. Johns County in February.

### Third Space Improv holds ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Third Space Improv held its ribbon cutting ceremony in January.

### Flagler Family Medicine and Wellness ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Flagler Family Medicine and Wellness held a ribbon cutting at its new location in St. Augustine on June 7. In addition to family medicine, the practice offers a proactive wellness approach including full service well-woman exams, wellness coaches and medical physicians. Learn more at [flaglerfamilymedicine.com](http://flaglerfamilymedicine.com).

### FPL Investment



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Florida Power & Light has increased its investment in the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce to the Benefactor level. With this enhanced membership, FPL has a seat on the chamber's Board of Advisors.

### Miracle Leaf ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Miracle Leaf Saint Augustine franchise owners cut the ribbon on their new store Jan. 13.

### Tropical Smoothie Café ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Tropical Smoothie Café, 5821 Beach Blvd., held a ribbon cutting and grand opening on May 24. The staff and owners are friendly and helpful, and the menu and smoothies are delicious — just in time for summer fun.

### Texas Roadhouse holds ribbon cutting



Photo provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Texas Roadhouse celebrated joining the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce with a ribbon cutting on March 25.





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Contributed photos



Janice Wood and Lead Storyteller Fred DiBiase



Janice Wood, Fred DiBiase and Tobey Jones



Scott Reneau and Fred DiBiase

# Storyteller

Continued from 4

461 guests from 41 states and 10 foreign countries, showcasing the program's growing reach and impact.

Guests at the luncheon heard moving stories from the awardees themselves,

highlighting the importance of their missions. Storytellers Janice Wood and Tobey Jones were also recognized for 500 shifts in the Storyteller Program.

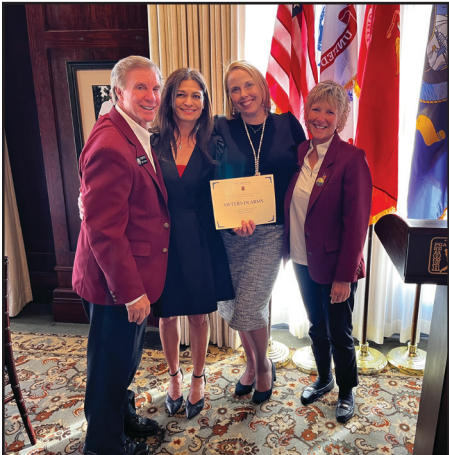
Storyteller tours are available seven days a week from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., starting at the top of every hour. Tours begin in the main lobby of the clubhouse and include visits to holes 16, 17 and 18 when

the Stadium Course is open.

"Seeing the direct impact of our efforts through these charities is truly inspiring," said Storyteller Fred DiBiase. "The luncheon is not only a celebration of the year's accomplishments but also a reminder of the power of storytelling to create a positive impact in our community."

Guests at the luncheon enjoyed heartfelt presentations by charity representatives and award recipients, highlighting the transformative power of these initiatives.

For more information on the Storyteller Program or to get involved, contact Peter verDorn at [peterverdorn@pgatourtpc.com](mailto:peterverdorn@pgatourtpc.com).



Sisters in Arms Representative Mary Lourdes



Will of Iron Golf Representative Xiomara Spadafora



The Storyteller group



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Photos by Shaun Ryan



The Festival of Trees featured an eclectic mix of decorated firs.



Santa and Mrs. Claus met with children during the event.

# Festival of Trees brings holiday spirit alive

By Shaun Ryan

The link in Nocatee was transformed Dec. 13 into a holiday wonderland during its inaugural Festival of Trees. And, though the focus of the event was a small forest of festively decorated Tannenbäume, visitors were treated to a multitude of sights and sounds celebrating the season.

About 700 people sent in RSVPs and, by the looks of things, nearly every one of those kids from 1 to 92 attended.

The trees — each decorated by a different group, business or organization — were displayed in the main lobby, with entertainers performing Christmas favorites on the stage and strolling around the grounds. Several families and friends gathered for a commemorative photo at the selfie station, and a variety of treats and baked goods were available for a donation. One whole room was devoted to kids' crafts and another was hopping with holiday shoppers seeking unique gifts.

Santa and Mrs. Claus met with children in a simulated snowscape inside the Flagler Health+ 360 Immersive Studio. Children were also excited to meet performers dressed as Elsa from "Frozen," Buddy the Elf and a toy ballerina.

The evening concluded with a "blizzard" of artificial snow and squeals of joy just outside the link.

The event was presented in partnership with Jessica Chard of To The Moon Party Designs.

Chard actually pitched the idea for the Festival of Trees. She met with Jeff Tawney, director of operations for the link, in October to work out the details.

The idea came from one of her favorite holiday memories growing up in Minnesota: Going to a festival of trees with her mother. So, she suggested they try the same thing here.

Chard enlisted the help of friend and

**FESTIVAL** continues on **Page 35**



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Photos by Shaun Ryan



The Sharkappellas entertained with a variety of Christmas favorites.



A huge window mural painted by Lauren Klose welcomed festivalgoers.

# Festival

Continued from 34

artist Lauren Klose as well as people she knew who would like to sponsor a tree.

“We’ve provided a magical Christmas space where people can come and have magical traditions,” Chard said. “I’m really proud of what we’ve been able to accomplish in the last month and a half.”

Each of the trees had a different theme, and their sale benefited charities of the creators’ choice.

Enormous window murals created by Artistic Aire artist Lauren Klose greeted revelers as they arrived at the link.

Klose is the same artist who did the “Nocatee” mural on the outside wall of the

Treylor Park restaurant.

It took about four days to complete the window murals.

“That was a really fun project,” she said. “It was the first time I’d ever painted on windows.”

Unlike her other work, where durability is essential, the window images will have to be removed after the holidays. Before painting, Klose researched the process and found that, using certain cleaning products, even the high-end paint can be removed.

Of course, any holiday event at this time of year would be incomplete without music.

Among the performers was Luann Dragone, who performed a variety of Christmas favorites on her piano. Dragone is a longtime music teacher for students of all

ages, though she especially enjoys teaching teens and adults.

Following Dragone was an a cappella group from Ponte Vedra High School, the Sharkappellas. Founded in 2010, the entirely student-run group has 18 members.

Member Bianca Connelly said one of the things she really enjoys about the group is its people.

“There are so many nice and good people, especially those who run it and make you feel so welcome,” she said.

Another member, Niran Ramesh, said she has enjoyed performing since she was in middle school but always found that it made her nervous. That changed when she

FESTIVAL continues on Page 36

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# Festival

Continued from 35

joined the Sharkappellas.

“I’ll never forget the rush that I felt the first time performing with everybody,” she said.

For the past five years, the Sharkappellas have competed in the International Competition of High School A cappella (ICHSA) and have received awards. The group hopes to compete at the next ICHSA, but they need money to travel to the competition. Toward that end, they held a bake sale at the Festival of Trees.

During their performance for the festival, the Sharkappellas sang as a group and then individual soloists took the spotlight for specific pieces.

One member of the group was Nicolas DeNora, who not only sings but plays and teaches piano.

Though he’d had a musical background, the world of a cappella singing really only revealed itself to him the first day he stepped into the PVHS drama room and everyone gathered around to sing.

“It was a great experience,” he said. “It was almost magical. I couldn’t get the smile off my face for about a week.”

Following the Sharkappellas performance at the Festival of Trees, DeNora set up his piano and played a variety of pieces.

Another group of performers, the Classic Charmed Quartet, did some good old-fashioned Christmas caroling throughout the festival.

By the time the evening drew to a close and the last snowflake fell, it was clear that the attendees had thoroughly enjoyed the event.

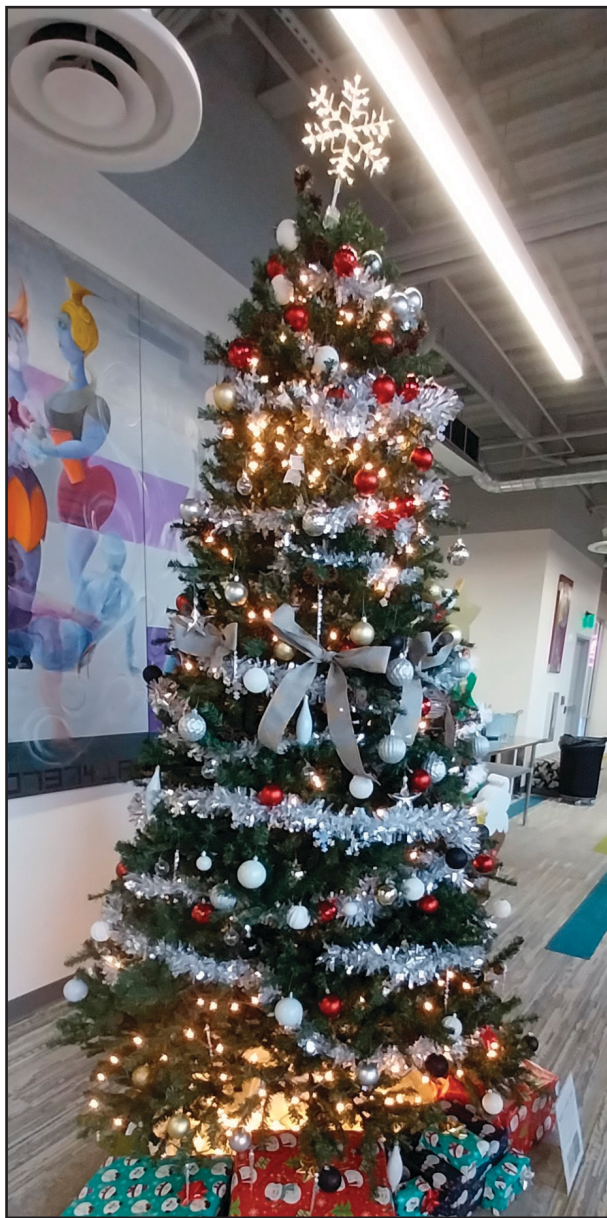
Matthew Garvey, who has an office at the link, said his kids loved it.

“They did an amazing job,” he said of the organizers.

**EDITOR’S NOTE: This is an abridged version of the article. To read the full piece and see more photos, go to [pontevedrerecorder.com](http://pontevedrerecorder.com).**



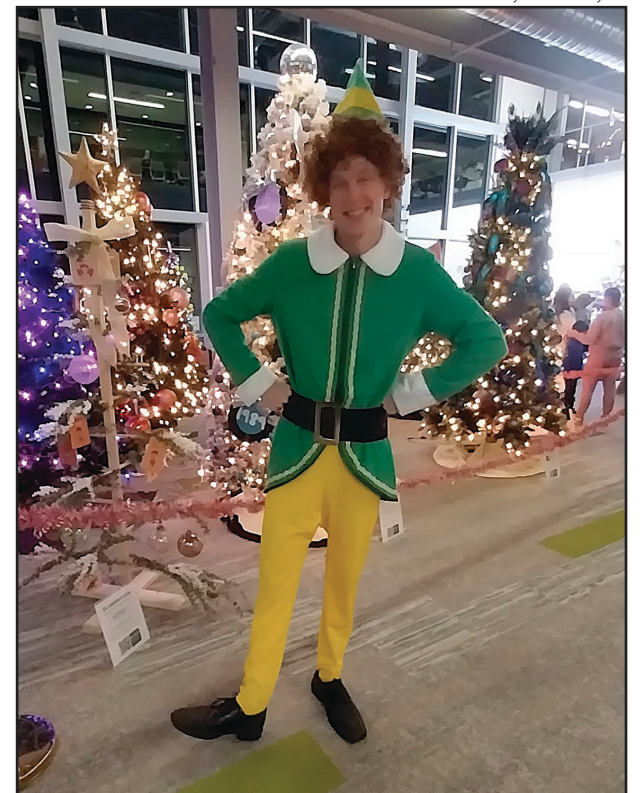
Each of the trees was different.



The Nikki Loves Tree was one of the tallest.



The Classic Charmed Quartet kept things humming with some great Christmas carols.



A visit by everyone’s favorite elf thrilled the youngest visitors.



A ballerina from Girly-Girl Partees visited to meet with the children.

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Photos by Shaun Ryan



# Business Weekly

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[www.PonteVedraRecorder.com](http://www.PonteVedraRecorder.com)

## Ground broken for Home2 Suites by Hilton at The Fountains at St. Johns

Cross Regions Group, a multifaceted company specializing in commercial real estate services, has announced the groundbreaking for the building that will become Home2 Suites by Hilton's newest location at The Fountains at St. Johns in St. Johns County.

The 137-room hotel will be the first hospitality development within The Fountains at St. Johns and the first Northeast Florida hotel to be located at the intersection of I-95 and C.R. 210.

"This is a milestone moment for Cross Regions Group and Aksoy Holdings as we break ground on a new Home2 Suites by Hilton at The Fountains at St. Johns," said Cross Regions Group President and CEO David Ergisi. "The Fountains at St. Johns offers one of the most convenient and sought-after locations in Northeast Florida. Our newest development at The Fountains represents our commitment to excellence while contributing to the local economy and the region's economic growth. We are honored to have Home2 Suites by Hilton coming soon to The Fountains at St. Johns."

Founded in 1978, Aksoy Holdings is a Turkey-based company operating a portfolio of high-class assets in retail, power, hospitality, real estate and trade industries.



Contributed photo

**Cross Regions Group commemorates the groundbreaking of its newest development, The Fountains at St. Johns East. Pictured from left: Sean Palmer, Davenport Consulting Group, vice president; Doug Smith, Cross Regions Group, COO; Mehul Patel, Ideal Hospitality Investments, president/CEO; David Ergisi, Cross Regions Group, president/CEO; Erdal Aksoy, Aksoy Holdings founder/chairperson; Batu Aksoy, Aksoy Holdings, CEO; Kerem Zeren, Aksoy Holdings, COO; and Al Cosar, Cross Regions Group, CFO.**

Home2 Suites by Hilton will be located in Fountains East, which will feature a town square with 35,000 square feet of retail and restaurants. Four buildings within Fountains East are already 80% committed. Fountains East will be the future home for Island Wings, Toasted Yolk, Wicked Cookies, Upgrade Labs, St. John Aesthetics and DaVinci's. Completion of the town square is anticipated in 14 months, and completion of the hotel is expected in 18 months.

The Fountains at St. Johns is Cross Regions Group's mixed-use medical and retail development located on nearly 100 acres at the northeastern intersection of County Road 210 West and Interstate 95 in St. Johns County. The Fountains at St. Johns offers approximately 200,000 square feet of retail, restaurant and medical/office space on 23 acres. The development includes Ascension St. Vincent's Health Center — St. Johns, an educational facility for Jacksonville University's health care sciences programs, 174 upscale apartments with 25,000 square feet of retail on first floor, 276 apartments from Madison Capital and a 13,000-square-foot facility for Chappell Schools. Future plans include an assisted living facility and wellness center.

For more information, go to [crossregions.com](http://crossregions.com).

*Happy Holidays*

*With the holidays approaching, our thoughts turn gratefully to those who have made our success possible.*

*Thank you for a great year!  
Wishing you the happiest of holidays!*

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# Supply of single-family inventory finds balance

As 2024 draws to a close, the Northeast Florida housing market follows seasonal trends. According to the Northeast Florida Association of Realtors (NEFAR) Market Statistics report for November, there was a decrease in affordability, but an increase in inventory, providing buyers with more options and allowing more people to find their homes.

The median sales price for single-family homes in Northeast Florida's six-county region rose by half a percentage point, reaching \$392,000. Because of this, the Home Affordability Index saw a 4.3% decline to a score of 66.

"The market nationally, as well as in Northeast Florida, typically slows in sales volume heading into the holiday cycle from Thanksgiving to year-end, which was shown in the changes for November," said 2024 NEFAR President Rory Dubin, referring to single-family homes in the five-county region. "Days on market are at the highest level in at least two years, moving to 52 days for the greater Northeast Florida area, an increase of almost 13% over October and over 20% since November 2023. Closed sales were down by almost 11% from last month's volume and pricing held steady at a nominal 0.6% increase. Active inventory is approaching 8,000 units, an increase of 6% from October with pending sales down over 16% from October. This resulted in an inventory supply of 5.4 months up over 18% from October."

Closed sales for single-family homes for the month showed a decrease of



12.7% from the previous month, totaling 1,385 transactions. Pending sales dropped more sharply by 22.2%, recording 1,081, and new listings fell by 6.3% to 2,569.

The active inventory of single-family homes rose by 7.8% to 7,676 properties, marking a substantial 67.7% increase compared to November 2023. This uptick is good news for buyers who are looking to keep their options open. Meanwhile, the median number of days on the market was raised to 53 days, showing a persistent balance in selling conditions.

"Interest rates remain volatile with unknown adjustments as we head into 2025," said Dubin. "Investors, a major factor in our market, are hopeful for economic policy and rates with a new administration taking office in January. It remains to be seen how the typically

stronger market in the first quarter will develop, meaning it is more important than ever to utilize a NEFAR Realtor for buyers, sellers and investors now and in the months ahead to navigate both the seasonal changes coupled with federal changes. Here's wishing for a strong year ahead for the robust Northeast Florida real estate market."

In St. Johns County, the November 2024 median price for single-family homes increased by 1.8% from the previous year to \$524,500. The market pace remained slow, with median days on the market rising 48.9% to 67. Closed sales decreased by 5.3% to 376, and pending sales experienced a steep decline of 20.6% to 274. New listings rose by 12.8% to 580, while active inventory increased by 2.6% to 1,961 homes, rep-

resenting a 5.2-month supply. The Home Affordability Index improved slightly by 4.3% to 49.0, though St. Johns County continues to be one of the most expensive areas in the region.

In Duval County, there was a slight 2.2% decrease in the median price of single-family homes, now at \$326,000. Sales of homes slowed down in November, with the median days on the market rising 11.9% to 47 days. While closed sales fell 17.7% to 675, pending sales took a sharper 22.4% drop to 559. Notably, new listings dropped 8.8% to 1,394, though there was still a 10.8% rise in active inventory, now at 3,744 homes — a 5.5-month supply. The Home Affordability Index decreased 1.3% to 79.

The Home Affordability Index measures housing affordability for the region. In other words, it measures whether a typical family earns enough to qualify for a mortgage on a typical home, based on current interest rates, median income and median home prices.

A higher number means greater affordability. This index measures affordability factors for all homebuyers making a 20% downpayment. An index of 100 is defined as the point where a median-income family has the exact amount of income needed to purchase a median-priced existing home. An index value greater than 100 means that the family has more than enough income, while a value lower than 100 means that a family doesn't have enough income to qualify for a mortgage loan.

## Area families offered free Pregnancy+ app

To help ensure more families have access to educational resources they need for healthy birth outcomes, the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition, Baptist Health and Philips Avent have partnered to offer a one-year, no-cost subscription to the premium version of Philips' Pregnancy+. Pregnancy+, the number one preg-

nancy app worldwide, will be available to women and their families in Baker, Clay and Duval counties.

"We want to do everything we can to improve the health and well-being of babies and their mothers," says Katie Ensign, VP community impact and investment with Baptist Health. "By

coming alongside moms and families with information in the palm of their hands on relevant topics such as safe sleep practices, breastfeeding and mental health tips, we intend to improve health outcomes and save lives."

Designed to supplement a woman's prenatal care, Pregnancy+ supports parents

from the moment they discover they are pregnant by offering personalized content, expert-written information and interactive 3D models to track a baby's development.

Users experience a curated daily feed of articles tailored to their pregnancy

APP continues on Page 40

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# Tickets available for 77th annual Jacksonville Boat Show

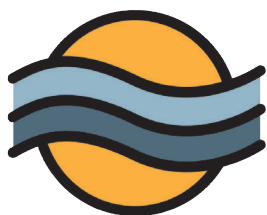
New year, new boat! The North Florida Marine Association has announced the 77th Jacksonville Boat Show, Jan. 24-26 at the Prime Osborn Convention Center in Jacksonville. This event has been bringing together the boating community since 1947.

This year's boat show, sponsored by VyStar Credit Union, will offer three days of water-related fun, family-friendly activities, and educational seminars — as well as deals on hundreds of boats and thousands of accessories. Boat show attendees will be among the first to see and board brand-new models of all types of watercraft, including fishing boats, cruisers, ski boats, pontoons, inflatables, personal watercraft and more.

Tickets are available now at [www.boatjax.com](http://www.boatjax.com). Hours and admission: Prime F. Osborn III Convention Center is located at 1000 Water St., Jacksonville. Boat show hours are 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday, Jan. 24; 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 25; and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 26. Admission is \$15 for adults; \$5 for children 12 and younger; and \$12 for seniors, military and first responders with ID. Food is purchased from the vendors and is not included with admission. For more information, go to [www.boatjax.com](http://www.boatjax.com)

Parking for the general public is \$10 per automobile per day.

Contributed photos



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# Ascension St. Vincent's now official health care partner of arena

St. Vincent's has entered a multiyear agreement with ASM Global to become the official, exclusive hospital and health care partner of Vystar Veterans Memorial Arena.

Under the agreement, the St. Vincent's brand will be prominently displayed at the arena in various locations, including the naming rights of the "Ascension St. Vincent's Arena Club" hospitality area and the arena box office, as well as multiple at-event activations.

"The Vystar Veterans Memorial Arena is a vital part of the fabric of downtown Jacksonville," said Michael Shaw, Ascension Florida Chief Strategy Officer. "We are excited to partner with ASM Global to enhance the experience for the audience of over 100 events each year. This investment underscores our commitment to growing the health and future of the vibrant downtown community and the entire Northeast Florida region."

VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena, nestled in the heart of Jacksonville stands as a dy-



Contributed photo

namic and versatile entertainment hub, weaving together the threads of music and sports to create a vibrant cultural tapestry. This multifaceted venue has earned its reputation not only as a top-tier concert destination but also as the proud home of esteemed sports teams, such as the Arena Bowl Champions, the Jacksonville Sharks and the Jacksonville Ice-men.

"We are proud to announce that Ascension St. Vincent's has become a corporate partner of ASM Global at the VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena," said Mike Kenny, ASM Global general manager. "This partnership marks a significant step in our shared commitment to promoting health and wellness within the community. Together, we look forward to creating new opportunities for engagement and improving access to health care services for all those who visit the arena."

This announcement comes as St. Vincent's is recognized as a top 15 health system in the country for 2024 by Fortune and PINC AI.

## App

Continued from 38

stage and can personalize pregnancy tracking, including allowing partners or other loved ones to follow their progress through the app. The premium version also features videos and audio courses with maternal health experts to further educate and support expectant moms on their pregnancy journey.

"Our community health workers, care coordinators and other staff members will work with families to onboard them

into the pilot and address any questions," said Faye Johnson, CEO of the Northeast Florida Healthy Start Coalition. "The ability to offer this informative tool to our moms-to-be is another way we can empower women with the knowledge necessary to make more informed decisions about their well-being and the health of their baby while also ensuring they're aware of the many community resources available."

In addition to important information about pregnancy and childbirth, the app also provides access to care by connecting women and their families to com-

munity resources such as home visiting programs.

Research shows families enrolled in programs such as Healthy Start, Nurse-Family Partnership and others have experienced reductions in preterm births and low birth weight, both factors in infant mortality. According to the American Journal of Public Health, home visiting programs reduce the risk of a child's death by approximately 25%.

The state of Michigan, which launched a customized version of the Pregnancy+ app last year, has reached 32,000 Michigan residents, including connecting

1,000 Medicaid-eligible individuals to the state's evidence-based home visiting programs.

"Every family deserves a strong start with the best care possible and the tools and resources they need for a healthy pregnancy and baby," said Jeff DiLullo, chief region leader for Philips North America. "It takes public-private partnerships with community organizations, health care and technology providers to ensure that we can make a meaningful impact in the U.S. maternal mortality crisis and help create a more equitable system."



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# In the Arts



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THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2024 · PAGE 41 [www.PonteVedraRecorder.com](http://www.PonteVedraRecorder.com)



Ron Autrey signs copies of his first book, "Ron's World: All the Times I Died."



Veteran Steven Biggs with Sunny, K9s for Warriors Chief Revenue Officer Lindsay Grayson, Ron Autrey and veteran Charlie Davis with Lady Cameo

Contributed photos

## Autrey book launch event raises \$50K for K9s for Warriors

Local business leader Ron Autrey kicked off his second career as an author recently with a book-signing event that raised \$50,000 for K9s for Warriors.

Held Nov. 13 at Marsh Landing Country Club, the cocktail reception featured "Voice of the Jaguars" Brian Sexton as emcee and enabled guests to have Autrey — the former CEO of Miller Electric — sign copies of his first book, "Ron's World: All the Times I Died." But the focus was squarely on the event's philanthropic component, as guests heard firsthand from K9s for Warriors staff and veterans aided by the Nocatee-based nonprofit.

"Your presence here helps improve — and in some cases saves — the lives of brave service members who've given so much in defense of this country," said

Autrey, a U.S. Army veteran. "It is truly an honor to have them here with us tonight."

Veteran Charlie Davis was in K9s for Warriors' first class of veterans to receive a service dog. At the time, he said, he had come close to dying by suicide.

"If it wasn't for K9s for Warriors, I wouldn't be standing here talking to you today," said Davis, with service dog Lady Cameo by his side. "I not only got my life back, I got my family back, I got my friends back."

K9s for Warriors Chief Revenue Officer Lindsay Grayson noted that K9s for Warriors operates the world's largest

shelter-to-service dog kennel in the world. In doing so, it aims to stop the veteran suicide epidemic; currently, approximately 20 veterans die by suicide each day.

"We want to put an end to veteran suicide," Grayson said. "And folks like Mr. Autrey are helping to make that possible."

### "Ron's World"

Autrey described "Ron's World" as a "historical memoir" that recounts key moments in his life within the context of the world events happening at the time.



Jacksonville Icemen defenseman Garrett Van Wyhe and wife Kate are K9s for Warriors "puppy raisers" for Labrador Mathis.

AUTREY continues on Page 42



Hilah and Ron Autrey

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# Juried Art Member exhibit entries sought

First Coast Cultural Center (FCCC) is accepting entries for its Juried Art Member (JAM) exhibition through Dec. 30. Participants will have an original art piece evaluated and then exhibited at JAM, which kicks off with an opening reception on Thursday, Jan. 16, from 5:30 to 7 p.m.

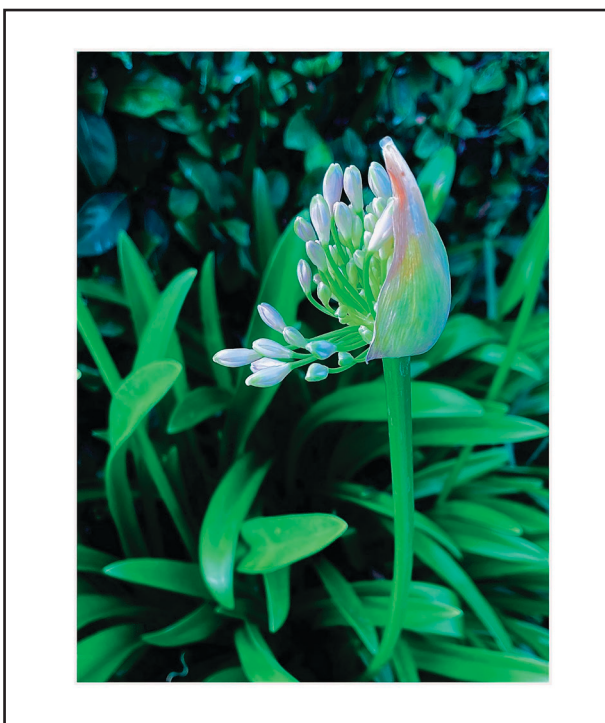
Works from dozens of artists will be featured at this annual event, showcasing photography and 2D and 3D work.

“It’s a great way to highlight the diversity of skill interest of our member artists,” according to Donna Guzzo, FCCC president and CEO.

JAM is free and open to the public, and the festive event will take place at FCCC, located at 6000B Sawgrass Village Circle, Ponte Vedra Beach.

“Winners will receive a monetary prize and will have the opportunity to display more pieces in a future exhibition called ‘Best of JAM,’” according to Silvia Romero, FCCC director of programs.

In regard to entering art for the JAM exhibition, FCCC will be accepting email entries from current members through Dec. 30. Interested nonmembers are welcome to purchase FCCC memberships at <https://firstcoastculturalcenter.org> on the membership page



**Cynthia Spitzer Photography won the Best of FCCC JAM 2024 in photography.**



Contributed photos

**Douglas Johnson won the Best of FCCC JAM 2024 for painting.**

and enter by the deadline. The first entry is free of charge, with the second entry being \$25 and the third \$35.

For information on becoming a member of FCCC or on the many programs and events offered, call 904-280-0614 or go to <https://firstcoastculturalcenter.org>.

## Undercover narc to speak at crime writers meeting

Drug trafficking is a dark and dangerous world and a mystery to the average person. And it’s a mystery that crime writers want to crack. Who better to help than a former undercover narc?

Brian Townsend, a retired special agent for the Drug Enforcement Agency, will share one of his most dangerous undercover executions at the Northeast Florida Sisters in Crime January meeting.

Townsend’s successful investigation of a cartel’s drug trafficking in a quiet Arkansas community was featured on A&E’s “Undercover: Caught on Tape” show. In addition, he will extract insights to help writers enrich their crime writing.

All writers and readers interested in the topic are welcome to attend. Here are the details for the meeting:

When: 11:15 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 4

Where: Ponte Vedra Beach Library, 101 Library Blvd., Ponte Vedra Beach, Friends of the Library (FOL) room

Northeast Florida Sisters in Crime is a chapter of the national organization and serves mystery, crime, and thriller writers and readers. Its programs feature speakers in forensic science, psychology and law enforcement fields.

Bring your coffee and bring a friend. The group welcomes men and women to learn more about writing, promoting and enjoying crime fiction.

For more information, contact [floridasistersincrime@gmail.com](mailto:floridasistersincrime@gmail.com).

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## Concert to help build bridges

The Jacksonville Symphony will present “Violins of Hope: Building Bridges Through the Power of Music” on Feb. 15 at Jacoby Symphony Hall. This special concert features instruments once owned by Holocaust victims, restored by Amnon and Avshalom Weinstein, and performed by Symphony musicians under the direction of Music Director Courtney Lewis.

The program includes solo performances by Concertmaster Adelya Nartadjieva and narration of selected readings chosen by the Symphony’s Violins of Hope Advisory Council, comprising local leaders, educators and second-generation Holocaust survivors.

Guests can also view more than 60 of the restored instruments in the lobby before the concert.

Leading up to the event, the Symphony will host educational and outreach

programs, including panel discussions and ensemble performances at the University of North Florida, the Jacksonville Public Library and Congregation Ahavath Chesed.

These events are free and open to the public, but tickets are required due to limited seating.

“Unfortunately, antisemitism is still prevalent today, and in some areas, even rising,” said Steven B. Libman, President and CEO of the Jacksonville Symphony. “Through ‘Violins of Hope,’ we aim to build bridges, fostering connection and empathy through music to stand against intolerance.”

Tickets for “Violins of Hope” are available at [JaxSymphony.org](http://JaxSymphony.org) or by calling the box office at 904-354-5547. The concert is part of the Greta Challen Berg Artist Series and is sponsored by Dr. Eugene and Brenda Wolchok.

## Autrey

Continued from 41

“In the book, I reflect on the juxtaposition between our advanced quality of life and our incredible propensity and capacity to destroy it,” Autrey said. “This perplexing reality of modern life serves as a backdrop for the book, and I break it up by sharing some of my own close brushes with death.”

Autrey also shared a preview of his next book, “Farn-

sworth’s Secret War” — a novel that follows 10 years in the life of a fictional West Point graduate and Army intelligence officer. Guests enjoyed a reading of excerpts from both books by former Northwest Airlines pilot and professional voiceover artist Pamela Almand before a signed copy of one of Autrey’s manuscripts was auctioned off to benefit K9s for Warriors.

“If Tom Clancy were alive,” Sexton said, “he’d be worried about Ron Autrey.”

“Ron’s World: All the Times I Died” is available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com) and Barnes & Noble.



Contributed photos

**K9s for Warriors’ Lindsay Grayson, Ron Autrey and Jacksonville Beach Mayor Christine Hoffman**



# Sports



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Chase Phifer shoots a jumper against Toco Creek High during the Fortegra Invitational on Dec. 12.



Langston Hackworth was a perfect three-for-three from beyond the arc against the Toros.

Photo by Anthony Richards

## Kuhl, Hackworth rack up points at invitational

By Anthony Richards

The Nease Panthers boys basketball team competed in the Fortegra Invitational for the third time in the last four years and went 1-2 during the three-day tournament at FSCJ South Campus in Jacksonville, including a 49-43 win over Bolles.

Senior Jack Kuhl led the way with 15 points in the victory over the Bulldogs as he shot 67% from the field, while Chase Phifer and Reid Foster joined him in double figures with 11 and 10 points, respectively.

Kuhl also had a team-high six rebounds and blocked two shots during the contest, as the Panthers ended a four-game losing

streak in a big way.

Prior to the win, the Panthers had been showing signs of improvement during the first couple of days of the tournament but were just unable to put an entire game together to come away with a victory.

They opened up with a 53-36 loss to University Christian, the eventual third-place team at the Fortegra Invitational, where one rough quarter proved to be the difference in the game.

The teams were one basket apart in the first, third and fourth quarters but the Panthers were outscored 15-3 in the second quarter, which proved too much to come back from.

Junior Langston Hackworth scored a



Photo by Anthony Richards

**The Panthers have played in the Fortegra Invitational three of the past four years.**

team-high 16 points against University Christian.

On the second day of the tournament, the Panthers faced fellow St. Johns County school Toco Creek High and

battled the Toros before falling 51-40.

Hackworth showcased his ability from long range against the Toros making all three of his three-point attempts en route to a team-leading 11 points.

Kuhl had a productive tournament all around and finished with another double figure scoring performance with 10 points against the Toros, while Luke Lindsay had three steals on defense.

With only three seniors on the squad the Panthers have relied a lot on young talent which continues to develop and stand out with each game, and the win over Bolles showed the team's potential when everything comes together for a complete game.



Senior point guard Landon Gebauer.



Reid Foster scores in the post.



Senior Jack Kuhl passes the ball out to a teammate.



# JAGA celebrates 2024 with annual awards

The Jacksonville Area Golf Association announced its 2024 JAGA Award winners at the organization's end-of-year annual meeting at Deerwood Country Club. The 2024 JAGA Awards nominating committee consisted of Cary Helton, Jeff Johnstone, Jim Loftin, John Milton, Fred Seely and Ryan Wharton.

## CLUB EXECUTIVE OF THE YEAR

### Tony Street

Jax Beach Golf Club, Head Golf Professional

From the first day of his arrival Tony Street embraced Jax Beach Golf Club's ethos of providing a fun, welcoming golf experience for all. First-time players and touring professionals alike have come to enjoy the Jax Beach vibe. When not overseeing a tee sheet which saw some 65,000 rounds in 2024, Tony has ensured players have great course conditions, a welcoming staff and a well-stocked pro shop reflecting the Jax Beach 'Muni' feel.

## COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

### Susie Fonde

Committee Member, First Coast Women's Amateur Championship and Member, Jacksonville Golf and Country Club

No stranger to the local Jacksonville golf community, Susie Fonde grew up in Jacksonville and is the daughter of the late lifetime PGA of America member Buster Reed. Her playing titles are numerous and include winning the inaugural First Coast Women's Amateur and two subsequent titles, in addition to five Jacksonville Women's Golf Championships over the span of four decades.

## DIRECTOR EMERITUS (Special Recognition Award)

### Fred Seely

JAGA Past President and JAGA Director, Timuquana Country Club

Fred Seely is JAGA's longest-serving member, having joined JAGA in 1979. He is a three-term president (1983, 2016 and 2017). His vast knowledge of and contacts within the Jacksonville-area community, its leaders and the golf scene have been instrumental in the growth JAGA has experienced during his 45-year tenure.



Photo courtesy of Jacksonville Amateur Golf Association

2024 JAGA award winners (left to right) Gregg Deiboldt, Duke Butler III, Susie Fonde, Dean Grunewald, Fred Seely, Alan Brown and Tony Street.

## EARL & ELEANOR KELLY LONG-TERM SERVICE AWARD

### Duke Butler III

JAGA Director, TPC Sawgrass and Life Member, PGA of America

Duke Butler III has dedicated his life to playing, promoting, teaching and officiating what he likes to refer to as "the greatest game" through his affiliations with the PGA TOUR, PGA of America, Houston Golf Association, JAGA, junior golf, Moore-Myers Children's Fund and numerous other charities and organizations.

## JAGA DIRECTOR OF THE YEAR

### Gregg Deiboldt

JAGA Director, Sawgrass Country Club

Gregg Deiboldt has been a JAGA member since 2014 and active in every aspect of the organization. He embodies the spirit of JAGA's mission and has been a key player in developing tournament schedules, recruiting and organizing clubs and volunteers, and directing all facets of its major championships as well as one-day tournaments.

## PROFESSIONAL OF THE YEAR

### Dean Grunewald

Director of Golf, The Plantation at Ponte Vedra Beach

Dean Grunewald joined The Plantation at Ponte Vedra Beach in February 2023 as Director of Golf, continuing a career of accomplishment and achievement in the Northeast Florida golf community, which has been marked by many personal relationships and fostering positive golf experiences for golfers of all ages and abilities.

## SUPERINTENDENT OF THE YEAR

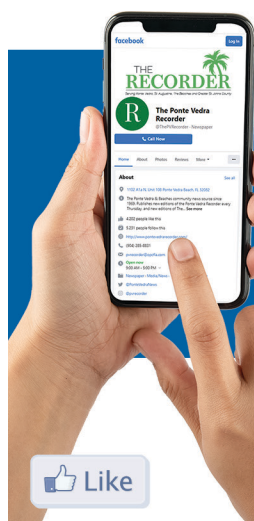
### Alan Brown

Director of Course and Grounds, Timuquana Country Club

Alan Brown graduated from the University of Tennessee with a B.S. in ornamental horticulture and landscape design, with a concentration in turfgrass management. He initiated his career in South Florida as an assistant superintendent, making stops at several prominent clubs – Pine Tree, Seminole, Old Marsh and Lost Tree Village. His first head superintendent role was at The Floridian.

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# Sharks' soccer teams looking special

By Anthony Richards

The soccer programs at Ponte Vedra High having been nearly unstoppable to this point in the soccer season with the boys and girls teams having combined for a record of 14-1-2.

Since a 4-0 loss to Creekside of Nov. 12, the second game of the season, the boys squad has been on fire with six straight victories.

The Sharks have looked the part especially against fellow St. Johns County opponents, including edging out the Bartram Trail High 3-2 to end the Bears' undefeated season on Dec. 9.

The offense has been something the Sharks have been able to rely on all season as they have scored at least three goals in all but two of their victories.

The attacking mindset that Thomas Arndt

and Nick Churchill have played with all season has paid dividends as they both lead the team with three goals apiece and are averaging three shots on goal a game as well.

Meanwhile, the girls team tied Bartram Trail 0-0 on Dec. 13, fueled by a stellar effort from Abby Kennedy in goal.

The sophomore goalkeeper faced eight shots on the night as the Bears outshot the Sharks 8-4, but she was up to the task and stopped all eight shots en route to the fourth game this season she has held the opponent scoreless.

The Sharks have had eight different players score a goal this season which shows the amount of depth they have on the offensive side of the ball, which is something to continue to watch as the season continues because it will only make them even more difficult to defend as the season progresses.



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### Miscellaneous

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M I K S Z L R G M L Z T O W E M E S V  
T V N T G V I T E B O A W U V C L A S N  
E G V R R N R C D Z D L P H F B L T B C  
E S X E P E R T U S S I S B T M B D P O  
D I U P C W S T G V C R A S O G H A T A  
I T M T A V R P R K X Z S N I O R H R T  
S I B H Z I C I R X I E N S A O T O L  
S E T Z R N G O H K W M L F S S O H X H G  
A A K O E I V O M S L E E I K R O S D U  
S P N A U M I O N A C N T W I P U N L B  
E E E T L M D A R T L E O T L R K W O C H  
A H X D F N R K I L S R I A H K W S C C  
G N C W N T F O I R M S S T P P F P N A  
E C O L I Z U I S S E M C H B T C L O M  
D N V H M S N G P W O T Z V I R U S M O  
F B N I X P G D S S A I C U H H X K M T  
K X E T H D A K I N T W U A E L B T O S  
T N N P X G L S K P A I N V B S O G C C  
M G F E T U B E R C U L O S I S U Z I O



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the same, subject to ALL prior liens, if any, to the highest and best bidder for CASH IN HAND, the proceeds to be applied as far as may be to the payment of said and satisfactory \_\_\_\_\_

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## UNDER THE WEATHER WORD SEARCH

G A X P A E N I A R G I M H C H P O S F  
M I K S X Z L R G M L Z T O W E M E S V  
T V N T G V I T E B O A W U V C L A S N  
E G V R R N R C D Z D L P H F B L T B C  
E S X E P E R T U S S I S B I M B D P O  
D I U P C W S T G V C R A S O G H A T A  
I T M T A V R P R K X Z S N I O R H R T  
S I B H Z T C I I R X I E N S A O T O L  
E T Z R N G O H K W M L F S S O H X H G  
A A K O E I V O M S L E E I K R O S D U  
S P N A U M I O N A C N T W I P U N L B  
E E E T L M D A R T L E O T L R K K O H  
A H X D F N R K I L S R I A H K W S C C  
G N C W N T F O I R M S S T P P F P N A  
E C O L I Z U I S S E M C H B I C L O M  
D N V H M S N G P W O T Z V I R U S M O  
F B N I X P G D S S A I C U H H X K M T  
K X E T H D A K I N T W U A E L B T O S  
T N N P X G L S K P A I N V B S O G C C  
M G F E T U B E R C U L O S I S U Z I O

Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

- |             |            |             |               |
|-------------|------------|-------------|---------------|
| ARTHRITIS   | FUNGAL     | MIGRAINE    | STREP THROAT  |
| BACTERIA    | HEPATITIS  | PAIN        | THRUSH        |
| COMMON COLD | HOOKWORMS  | PARASITE    | TOXOPLASMOSIS |
| COVID       | ILLNESS    | PERTUSSIS   | TRANSMISSIBLE |
| DISEASE     | INFECTIOUS | SALMONELLA  | TUBERCULOSIS  |
| E-COLI      | INFLUENZA  | STOMACH BUG | VIRUS         |

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- American Log Homes DEVELOPER LIQUIDATION SALE! Log Home kits selling for Balance Owed. Up to 50% off. Design plans can be modified! No time limit on delivery. Call 1-866-307-5491, MF 9am-5pm ET.

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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							69						70	

### ACROSS

- Miller beer variety
- Member of people inhabiting Bering Sea islands
- Stomach
- Investment vehicle
- Fictional soccer coach Ted
- Irregular in botanical parlance
- Cease standing
- "American Horror Story" actress
- Grow milk teeth
- Plant parts
- Snow house
- Most contemptuous
- Note to repay
- Old English
- Wings
- Financial institutions
- Parks and Lopez are two
- Mr. T's "The A-Team" character
- Relative biological effectiveness (abbr.)
- Give off
- Semitic alphabet letter
- Farm state
- Actress Sarandon
- Back parts
- Zoroastrian concept of holy fire
- Touchdown
- One point north of due east
- Refurbishes
- Silver and Dogg are two
- Former Tigers catcher Alex
- Type of envelope
- Seriously considered
- Unhappy
- Past (archaic)
- Asian wild dog
- Old English letter
- Young domestic sheep
- Football players need to gain them
- Witness

### DOWN

- Norwegian composer
- Indicates location
- Pubs
- Unable to walk easily
- Electronic warfare-support measures
- World leader
- Midsection
- Jewish calendar month
- Urological condition
- A small quantity of anything
- Mountain Time
- Affirmative
- Word element meaning ear
- Carried away
- Short-billed rails
- Newborn child
- Sword
- Groups of people
- Prickly, scrambling shrubs
- Become less intense
- Polishes
- Indicates position
- Songs sung to one's beloved
- The 12th letter of the Greek alphabet
- Insects
- Israeli politician
- Pre-digital
- Roaming
- Ambience
- Brew
- Late
- Make ecstatically happy
- Semitic alphabet letter
- Blend
- Dash
- Self
- Exclamation of satisfaction
- Hill or rocky peak

## SUDOKU

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

Level: Beginner

### Here's How It Works:

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

### DOWN

- Dormant Peruvian volcano





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