

A man and a woman in wedding attire are sitting on a wooden park bench. The man is wearing a black tuxedo with a white shirt and a black bow tie. The woman is wearing a white wedding dress with a high slit and pink high-heeled shoes. She is holding a large bouquet of flowers, including red, orange, and pink blooms. They are both looking at each other and smiling. The background is a park with many fallen yellow and orange leaves on the ground and trees with some autumn foliage.

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## about the cover



Maggie Beckett, Creative Director at The Social Society, with her new husband, Dave. Read more about Maggie and The Social Society on page 23.

COVER PHOTO BY RACHEL LEINER

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# ONE OF US

## Michael Bauer

as told to  
**HOLLY TISHFIELD**  
Contributed photo

**M**ichael Bauer, President and CEO of Michael's Formalwear, has been deeply involved in the family business since the late '90s, guiding its transition from a franchise to a local leader in tuxedo and suit rentals and sales.

### Tell me about your background.

I've been in Jacksonville pretty much my whole life. I did go to military school in the '90s, so I didn't go to high school here, but I've been here my whole life. I was born in Jacksonville and I still love it here. My dad started our family business, what's now Michael's Formalwear, in the 1970s. We've had this family business for over 50 years, this is our 51st year, so that's a very long time.

### How has Michael's Formalwear changed over the years?

I started working here around 1999-2000 more seriously, so it was a natural progression for me to take over. When my dad ran things, it was a franchise, but that changed and we closed a few stores so now we



have two locations, one in the Jacksonville Town Center and one in Orange Park. We used to be strictly tuxedos; nowadays we do tuxedos and suit rentals and we do sales. We have a state-of-the-art processing plant where we have all the different colors of apparel items. Everything's organized and we update it every year. It's a professional place where

we have the latest and greatest. We stay current with the trends.

### Are you pretty hands-on with both locations?

Yes, I'm hands-on with both locations I work. Mostly I'm at the Town Center, just because it's the busiest store, but I visit both stores almost every day. I go to both places and

our processing center to make sure everything's being pulled correctly, the correct inventory.

### Would you say that you enjoy what you do?

For sure I do. It's what I know how to do best. This is a business that is a little more complicated in the sense of there's a ton of moving parts. It's not like you're selling one thing that has one size or two sizes. Our shirts, our one style shirt, has 36 different sizes.

### Looking ahead to 2025, is there anything on the agenda for Michael's Formalwear?

We'd love to open a new store in St. Johns County; that's something that we're looking to do. We just haven't found the right spot yet. Also offering all the colors that people are looking for, which our competition doesn't always have. Like sage green, hunter green, that stone khaki color. Brown is a popular color that started in November, so we have a brown suit now. If our customers want a certain color, we can listen to our customers and supply what they want. We specialize in having all the colors of suits or tuxedos that people want, which is something that we can do by being a local place.



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# MASSIVE ATTENDANCE SEEN DURING MEMORABLE ARBOR DAY CELEBRATION

story and photos by  
**ANTHONY RICHARDS**

**G**reenscape of Jacksonville, a tree advocacy nonprofit, has teamed up with the city of Jacksonville since 1987 to hold its annual Great Tree Giveaway in downtown Jacksonville, which is recognized as the city's official Arbor Day celebration each year.

This year's event took place on Jan. 18, which was one day after the State of Florida's official Arbor Day in 2025.

Arbor Day is held earlier in Florida than other states across the nation due to January being a better time to plant a tree so that it has substantial time to get established prior to the summer heat.

A total of 1,600 trees featuring a variety of types were given away for free during the event. These types included Elderberry, Persimmon, Shumard Oak, Tonto Crape Myrtle, Eastern Red Cedar, Bald Cypress, Dahoon Holly, Sweet Bay Magnolia, Red Maple and Chastetree.

Each one of the trees is native and acceptive to the climate and friendly to the ecosystem in Northeast Florida.

This year's event was even more special because it helped mark the 50th anniversary since the creation of Greenscape of Jacksonville and is part of the yearlong festivities that the nonprofit has planned.

Once the giveaway got underway, it quickly became memorable for another reason as a mass of people took part in this year's event in one of the most attended giveaways ever.



Cars were lining up so much to get their trees that traffic was beginning to back up a lane on both the Hart and Matthews bridges heading to downtown.

As a result, certain types of trees began running out in the first hour of the planned four-hour event, which is something executive director Lisa Grubba had never experienced before.

The 1,600 trees given away during the event will just continue to add to the total of trees that the organization has helped plant in the Jacksonville area since it was founded by Ann Baker and Susan Fisher Davis in 1975.

Over the past 50 years, the organization is credited with adding more than



350,000 trees to the local community's canopy and continues to strive to approach neighborhoods, institutions and government agencies with exciting and innovative project ideas to ensure this growth continues.

Another big event scheduled is the 50th Anniversary Root Ball, which is the organization's major benefit gala, which will be held April 12 from 6 to 10 p.m. at the River Club in the Wells Fargo Center located at 1 Independent Drive in downtown Jacksonville.

This year's goal is to raise \$200,000 and this event will have a Masters Tournament theme with a dinner, live and silent auctions and a mini-golf tournament taking place.



# CONCOURS D'ELEGANCE, BOOK FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHT AMELIA ISLAND SPRING EVENTS

story by **ANTHONY RICHARDS**

photo courtesy of **THE AMELIA**

**T**here are several fun community events taking place at Amelia Island in the coming months, starting with the Amelia Island Book Festival, and the famed Concours d'Elegance.

The Amelia Island Book Festival started in 2001 and each year since has been hosting a festival with the purpose of literacy skills and the love of reading for children and adults across the Northeast Florida area.

The festival is a two-day showcase that will be held on Friday, Feb. 28, and Saturday, March 1, and it kicks off with the organization's award-winning Authors in Schools program, which strives to put a book in the hands of every student in Nassau County and bring authors to speak at the various schools.

Authors are selected by the schools and have included New York Times best-selling award winners in the past.

The festival's first day will conclude with the featured authors gala, which will feature an elegant evening of fine food and drink accompanied by discussion in a question-and-answer format as well as a live auction at the Ritz Carlton Amelia Island located at 4750 Amelia Island Parkway beginning at 6 p.m.

Authors then get to showcase their work and interact with the community even more in-depth during the official festival which will take place on March 1 at Fernandina Beach Middle School



The 30th Annual Amelia Island Concours week will be held March 6 to 9.

located at 315 Citrona Drive in Fernandina Beach. The festival will be from 8 a.m. to 3:40 p.m.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of The Amelia and Amelia Island Concours week.

The celebration of speed and style will feature hundreds of cars across eras of time and is a marquee event each year as the automobile industry and the car collector world turns its attention

to the First Coast.

The Amelia Cars & Community event is returning for another year and will be held on Saturday, March 8, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at The Golf Club of Amelia Island and will offer plenty of fun for the whole family, including RADwood, where vehicles from the 1980s and 1990s and their unique styles will be featured.

Attendees will also have the opportunity to ride and drive various vehicles as part of a free and interactive initiative.

The main showcase will take place on Sunday, March 9, with the official 30th Annual Amelia Concours d'Elegance where 275 historically significant vehicles across 35 different classes will be on display and judged for the ultimate prize of "best in class."



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THE PLAYERS is a marquee event for Northeast Florida each year.



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## FAMOUS TREE LIMBS, NEW FAN AREAS AMONG CHANGES AT THE PLAYERS

story and photos by  
**ANTHONY RICHARDS**

**T**he 51st edition of THE PLAYERS Championship is less than a month away and that also means that spring is right around the corner.

Not only is the weather cooler for both spectators and fans than the temperatures experienced during the tournament's stint in May, but Daylight Savings Time also begins the weekend before tournament week on Sunday, March 9, this year, which means longer days of golf action when THE PLAYERS takes place March 11-16.

There are always certain changes and updates that the event experiences each year, and this year that includes new food vendors, spectator viewing areas and an iconic tree limb that makes a return.

Twenty-three locally owned restaurants were a part of last year's event, and that list is growing even more with Bagels R Us and Carolina Jax set to come into the fold this year.

"We're always excited to have it where if folks eat the other 51 weeks of the year at Taco Lu, that they can come out to TPC the week of and still have those tacos," THE PLAYERS Executive Director Lee Smith said. "We're excited to continue and expand that tradition."

Course updates for this year include lengthening the distance on a handful of holes, but the most interesting update is the addition of a tree that had become famous for hanging over the tournament's sixth hole tee box before it died and had to be removed in 2014.



Rickie Fowler signs autographs at last year's event.

"It was left as a symbol by our architect, Pete Dye, that was really iconic and very polarizing," Smith said. "There were players that hated it and a lot who loved it, but they knew when playing that hole, they had to hit it under the tree limb."

However, a similar tree was found in the right rough on the No. 6 hole that was transplanted during the offseason and there will now once again be a tree and some classic Pete Dye flare that players will have to deal with when teeing off at the hole.

"When you come and walk the golf course, put the No. 6 tee box on your list to stop by and see," Smith said.

There will also be a new fan bleacher sitting near holes 10 and 11, which was something that used to be there and is being brought back and features a patio offering a 360-degree viewing area.

"We're always listening to the fans, and the feedback we got told us that we needed to bring an area like that back," Smith said.

One thing that does not change is the

massive economic impact the tournament continues to have on the community.

"It's a global awareness platform for Northeast Florida, the PGA Tour, Duval County, St. Johns County and the surrounding areas," Smith said.

According to Smith, an example of how that occurs is that 50 million hours of last year's television broadcast was consumed worldwide across 225 different countries and delivered in 28 different languages.

"You talk about the opportunity to put together a commercial for our Chambers and the area," Smith said. "Our global footprint is only going to continue to expand as we go forward."

Some of the ways in which THE PLAYERS and PGA Tour are looking to grow the footprint even more is with the recent creation of the PGA Studios and the world feed broadcast, which will designate cameras just for certain international players that media broadcasts from those countries can use.

"There's about 19,000 hotel rooms within about a 30-mile radius of TPC Sawgrass, and those hotel rooms are about 90% occupied during the week of THE PLAYERS and last year we had about 680,000 passengers come through Jacksonville International Airport, which were both the busiest weeks of the year," Smith said.

Over the years the event has also generated \$234 million in annual economic impact in Northeast Florida, which also includes helping support more than 300 local charities during that time.



# CULTURES, CAREERS REFLECT A NEW LEADERSHIP TEAM FOR WOMEN'S FOOD ALLIANCE

story by **LEIGH CORT**

**T**he Women's Food Alliance is maneuvering through the tides of change as they navigate the hospitality landscape of 2025 with the diversity of careers and cultures!

Celebrating its 12th anniversary, WFA nurtures and supports their members as they grow and work toward success yet to come. The future in hospitality reveals promising trends. The WFA is expanding its leadership team to stand together through enduring challenges as a "sorority" of business leaders.

The hospitality industry offers a vibrant and colorful career path today.

Guiding this path can also come with challenges. Led by founder Leigh Cort, the Women's Food Alliance is, and has been since 2013, dedicated to empowering their members and providing them with connections, opportunities and tools needed to advance.

Continuous learning and networking are essential. Through the members' eyes and experiences, building a strong caring network opens doors to new ideas, industry knowledge and gathering support from peers. Simply engaging with industry associates, attending meetings and events — plus participating (showing up) expands those connections. Sharing trends, technologies and customer feedback is crucial to staying

ahead with an open mind.

Through the years, Women's Food Alliance members have become trusted mentors, which plays a pivotal role in career growth. Mentors understand many obstacles; fostering a supportive organization is vital to thriving and achievement.

## Meet the Womens Food Alliance Leadership Team:



Sue Lomba

Sue Lomba is a true Jersey girl with her roots as a native New Yorker, too. Honing her expertise in corporate meeting and event management, she knows how to navigate the international corporate culture with a strong focus on collaboration and communication, which allows her to play a crucial role of vice president of the Women's Food Alliance. She's dedicated to supporting leadership teams in achieving their strategic objectives.

Sue is currently the executive assistance to the V.P. of research & development, contact lens platform at Johnson & Johnson, MedTech Vision, where she organizes team-building events, hosts town halls and facilitates activities for the executive leadership team.

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## LEADERSHIP

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Isela Gonzelez

Isela Gonzelez enjoys a rich heritage of family traditions from Cuba — the flavors and values that were brought to the U.S.A. and preserved across generations. Emigrating from Cuba meant leaving behind familiar settings but carrying forward cultural treasures, especially in food. Cuban cuisine is a blend of Spanish, African and Caribbean influences, which creates a vibrant culinary identity. Isela's restaurant in St. Augustine Beach, Paladar Cuban Eatery, shares the authentic flavors symbolizing cultural pride and resilience. Her abuela passed down culinary skills to Isela, ensuring that a piece of Cuba always lived with her family. Today, Isela connects with clients by offering them an authentic taste of Cuban hospitality.



Cindy Stavelly

Cindy Stavelly grew up in Springfield, Pennsylvania, recalling her large family and especially her grandmother (Mimi Mumper) who loved to cook. Pennsylvania Dutch dishes have lingered in Cindy's memory, notably launching her own coffee-and-donut business at 13! Her Pennsylvania heritage includes favorites like pot pie, shoo fly pie, chicken corn soup — while respecting "Less is more, enjoy the moments." Cindy's brilliant career

of 30-plus years in hospitality reflects management talents and genuine caring about her team; today, Cindy is executive director of St. Augustine's Pirate & Treasure Museum and the Colonial Quarter — and statewide hospitality organizations in leadership positions.



Marie Milton

Marie Milton is a second-generation woman whose parents emanated from South Korea and Guam. Born in Louisiana, brought up on a military base in central Texas, Marie lived everywhere from Alaska, Guam, Korea and across the U.S.A. Her hard-working parents raised her in the Korean culture, believing in the American dream for their children of college educations. Marie's children also enjoyed a close relationship with their Korean grandmother and her home still respects the same cultural practices integrated with her appreciation for American life, too. Marie's entrepreneurial spirit now finds her owning one of the most distinctive properties in St. Augustine — Three Stories Inn. It's a hallmark experience focusing on elegance and refinement, setting the stage for guests to create their own story.

Ellie Rose Schultze grew up in St. Augustine, where, at 14, she worked her way through nearly every position in restaurants from clearing tables to head chef. She's an avid traveler who has traveled to 50-plus countries, taking cook-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13 ■

## Coastal Pool Home in Ponte Vedra Beach



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## LEADERSHIP

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12



Ellie Rose  
Schultze

ing classes in Mexico, Thailand, Cambodia, China and more! Eventually landing in New York City, she attended culinary school, learning the ropes in fast-paced award-winning kitchens before returning to St. Augustine. Her goal? Opening her own restaurant. Jumping into the community as a private chef, caterer and now executive chef at Chez L'Amour (jazz bar, event space, eclectic dining destination), Ellie has won several awards, recognized for her outstanding culinary style. Her international love affair with food, each menu reflects world cuisines — always pushing boundaries and bringing something new to the Old City!



Monica  
Anderson

Monica Anderson brings her classic Southern background of legendary family recipes to the Women's Food Alliance from her large Jacksonville family, inspired by multiple generations of timeless cooking. Her mother grew up with encouragement from her mother; she started baking as the original oatmeal nut cookies because she wanted to replicate the cookies she had in grade school. Family flavors and techniques have been lovingly passed down, paired

with newer approaches to the classic beloved desserts that are created at her family's business, Arble Baking Company. Aunt Clara was a force of sass and humor who encouraged the famous sweet potato pie that always feels like family is in the house. Along with her hard-working parents and expanded family, Monica (now co-owner) is taking the family's business to the next level of contemporary Southern food. Surprises are coming in 2025.



Cindy Campbell-  
Taylor

Cindy Campbell-Taylor grew up in a bustling Midwest household with her mom as one of 13 children, and her parents raised seven children of their own. Meals were more than an opportunity to eat — they were events! Growing up in southern Illinois, with so many mouths to feed, Cindy and siblings took on the roles of sous chefs and cleanup crew, working side-by-side to pull off a "private catering" every night. Cindy's philosophy is "The land, the people and the culture" of America. Teamwork, creativity and joy that comes from sharing a well-prepared meal with those you love is her mantra. Merging love for food with a passion for storytelling during high impact years with the Walt Disney Company, branding and marketing is how Cindy creates extraordinary experiences for clients through Taylor-Made Solutions — helping clients find their unique voice through engagement.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14 ■

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## LEADERSHIP

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13



Erin Kelly

Erin Kelly was raised in Southern California with some of the best culinary ingredients at her fingertips; but as a child she was quite the picky eater. Her Czechoslovakian, Danish, German and Irish heritage combined for a rich legacy of marvelous cooks, many owning restaurants and a bakery. Erin had no idea how fortunate she was growing up in orange and avocado groves, learning how to appreciate the presentation and sharing beautiful food made with love.

With a successful and lengthy career in the airline industry, Erin is now the energy behind special events at Kelly Farm in St. Augustine. She's an A+ networker, keeping up with hospitality / event trends — especially in the wedding industry. Erin develops new business at Kelly Farm from iconic special



Nancy Slatsky

events like the St. Augustine Symphony to introducing new cuisines and event themes that inspire her creativity!

Nancy Slatsky is known far and wide for her outgoing, detail-driven personality in the food industry. A graduate of the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco, she became executive pastry chef at the Stanford Court Hotel. Nancy spent the following four years at The Grand

Hotel in Big Timber, Montana, as sous chef. Her heart was in pastry when her career blossomed at the Ponte Vedra Lodge & Club as pastry chef, followed by One Ocean Resort in Atlantic Beach. Knowledgeable about and influential in culinary sales, she serviced top hotels, restaurants and private club chefs when she became consultant and sales rep for Swiss Chalet Fine Foods. With her expansive ability of developing recipes and menus, Nancy's finely tuned sales abilities now find her as regional sales/consultant for Mr. Greens Produce, handling customer sales and satisfaction to a tee!



Chelsy Johnson

Chelsy Johnson grew up in Iowa, surrounded by lush agriculture and farm-to-table cuisine culture. In early years, she gained valuable experience working at iconic local restaurants such as B'Bops, Chuck E. Cheese, Maid-Rite, Godfather's Pizza and more. There, she learned the fundamentals of food service and high-volume sales. Moving to New York City, Chelsy dove into its vibrant food scene working in high-end Michelin-starred restaurants before exploring the diverse culinary cultures of Bermuda, Ireland, Belize, Mexico and onward. Chelsy's recent career includes managing operations as the G.M. for two renowned restaurants — River & Fort and Pesca Vilano. Always committed to an evolving culinary journey, Chelsy stays updated about the latest restaurant openings, food trends and industry news — especially as she opens the door to St. Augustine's new magazine, "Loving Our Town."



Kelly Mabry

Kelly Mabry, a Jacksonville girl, grew up with 10 siblings. Her childhood was filled with incredible grandmothers — Josephine from Arizona, a Mexican Pueblo Indian, and Isabel from Germany who owned a small café where she made country German dishes. Kelly was taught Spanish from Josephine and how to cook fusion dishes, making guava jelly, tortillas and sopapillas from scratch. Long summers were spent in Isabel's kitchen recalling stock pots of stew, corn chowder

and drop dumplings. The community of Fruit Cove was a favorite part of Kelly's life and the closeness she developed with her enormous family. The restaurant business lured Kelly, owning her own cafes and then three Tropical Smoothie Cafés with her husband Jim. Her passion has always been to hire and train hundreds of young adults over many years, while maintaining a healthy lifestyle and caring about the well-being of children and all of the people she loves!



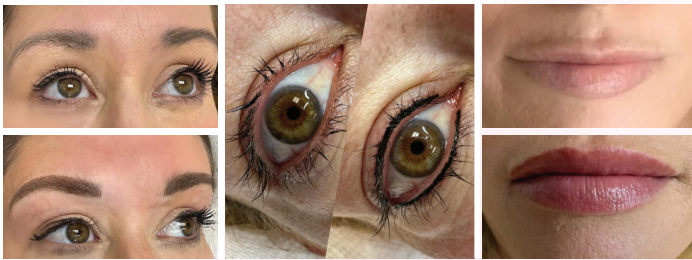
Leigh Cort

Leigh Cort, founder and president of the Women's Food Alliance, honors her 40-year career in the hospitality industry that began in New York as the party director at the Trump Tower. She views the journey that was punctuated with years at Sardi's in NYC's theater district and the Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, Florida, as her legacy to women in hospitality. Her members come together to advance their education, collaborate, mentor and enjoy the relationships that grow and flourish through the organization that is true to its mission of "Friendship First"!

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Lucky me! I have been a Realtor in my home, Northeast Florida, for nearly 40 years. I grew up in Jacksonville and moved to the beach in my 20s. I studied architecture and interior design in college, feeding my love of homes and style. After graduation, I worked in media, where I learned the art of listening and asking questions, marketing and advertising.

In 1985, I transitioned from media to real estate, joining Watson Realty's Ponte Vedra office. It was meant to be! Serving customers by customizing promotions for their homes and researching housing options for buyers is exciting. The reward of finding a seller or a buyer the perfect match is what keeps me charged up about real estate. In 1990, I moved to the original Marsh Landing Realty, where I learned about lots and builders and the development process.

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

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

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



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Ole Miss head coach Lane Kiffin celebrates with Princely Umanmielen after a defensive touchdown.



Rebels' fans cheering for their team.

## THE 80TH GATOR BOWL SHINES BRIGHT



Joshua Pickett of Duke says a prayer prior to the game.

photos by  
ANTHONY RICHARDS

**T**he Ole Miss Rebels routed the Duke Blue Devils 52-30 in the 80th TaxSlayer Gator Bowl contest on Jan. 2. Fans from both teams created a festive atmosphere as they welcomed in the New Year with some college football at EverBank Stadium in downtown Jacksonville.



The Rebels band performs during the pregame festivities.



The Blue Devils take the field.



The Rebels offense at work.



Ulysses Bentley IV breaks free on a run.



Duke's Ozzie Nicholas (No. 45) delivers a big hit.



Henry Belin IV hands off to Jaquez Moore (No. 9).



The Rebels' defensive front provides pressure.





Bright shades will also be in-demand this season



Flowing dresses in soft blues available at the boutique.



Some of the pastel-colored apparel popular this spring.

## LINDA CUNNINGHAM OFFERS EXPERT SPRING FASHION ADVICE

story by **HOLLY TISHFIELD**  
photos courtesy of  
**LINDA CUNNINGHAM**

If there's one thing designers always have on their minds, it's staying ahead of the latest trends and the brightest innovations in the fashion world. While you might be just now thinking about which pieces to add to your wardrobe for the spring season, boutiques and

fashion experts like Linda Cunningham are already looking ahead to the fall, their visions of color and texture taking them months down the road.

Cunningham has had her eye on design since the early '80s when she graduated from Florida State University with a degree in fashion design and won first place in the Mildred Pepper Design Awards. She began designing gowns for clients at a fashion boutique here in

Jacksonville until she eventually opened her own store and began brainstorming a signature line of her own.

For years now, Cunningham's design studio at her boutique in San Marco has served as an epicenter for couture collections and custom clothing for the greater Jacksonville area, with a range of brands and prices for any client in need of a new

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20 ■

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## FASHION

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

ensemble.

Looking at the spring 2025 season, Cunningham says that shoppers can expect a return of many beloved colors and patterns mixed with an introduction of new trends.

Colorwise, pastels remain a staple of the spring color palette. Powder blues, pistachio, baby pink, soft mocha and even Pantone's Color of the Year "Peach Fuzz" have been popular selections for the spring season. Brighter shades have also been popular, such as electric, azure blues and emerald-like greens. Dark browns remain a staple in both linens and base pieces.

"We saw it last fall, we're seeing it again for next fall and we're seeing it now for the spring, too," Cunningham said, referring to the revival of dark brown colors.

Emerging style trends are showcasing cropped jackets and cropped cardigan jackets making a triumphant stand as the must-have item of the season, according to Cunningham. The cardigans are primarily heavier materials with collars and buttons, but typically have a bit of



Linda Cunningham is an experienced designer based out of Jacksonville.

crop to the length.

"They're good because you can always have it with you to wear into a restaurant or somewhere if you're wearing a little sleeveless top and jeans," Cunningham said. "You're going casual but you still want to throw something on. That's why it's a staple piece."

Also popular this spring are blazers, the otherwise plain jacket becoming a statement piece with vibrant colors or

prints such as floral and abstract.

Sleeve details on shirts remain the talk of the season, coming across on items in the form of pleats, puffs, pintucks, or ruffles. Sheer sleeves have been hot on the market, lined with an inner fabric that provides both subtle coverage and a touch of elegance. Flowing fabrics and asymmetrical skirts are top spring picks, including stylish hi-lo designs and skirts with draped, fluid fabrics that offer both movement and flair. Strapless dresses that pair with wraps or cardigans are also predicted to fly off the rack.

When it comes to pants, cigarette-style are Cunningham's go-to with a pastel top and cropped jacket. Jeans, which have seen multiple style changes throughout the years, are predicted to take another turn. This time, towards the stovepipe fit.

"Not quite skinny jeans and not quite flared, they're stovepipes," Cunningham said. "I'd say it's definitely the trend of spring 2025."

As we step into spring, these trends offer fresh, bold ways to update your wardrobe while keeping comfort and style at the forefront. Whether you're experimenting with cropped cardigans or embracing sheer sleeves, this season's fashion is all about confidence and versatility.

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# DISCOVER HIDDEN GEMS AT THESE LOCAL BOUTIQUES

story by **HOLLY TISHFIELD**

## **Ellie Bing**

High-end fashion, vintage classic looks, edgy hipster apparel and hand-made artisan goods, Ellie Bing Boutique is a local destination for style, designer outfits and amazing gifts and accessories. Whether you're shopping for an upcoming event or looking for a meaningful gift, Ellie Bing showcases a unique blend of clothing, jewelry, accessories, gifts, home decor and local art. The boutique focuses its style on a lifestyle of easy glamor, and relaxed elegance. With two locations in Jacksonville Beach and Ponte Vedra Beach, Ellie Bing specializes in all things fashionable and eclectic.

## **A'propos Boutique**

This one-stop shop for everything from casual everyday wear to formal

event wear began in 2008 as a new business venture for owner Cathy Mad-dux Jenkins. The boutique specializes in personal attention, ensuring every shopper feels valued and empowered with the courage to be bold in their fashion choices. Located in beautiful Ponte Vedra Beach, A'propos offers unique apparel, a curation of designer brands and accessories for those who seek to express their style with sophistication and flair. The boutique is deeply integrated with the larger Jacksonville community, holding events in the store like trunk shows and themed shopping nights. A'propos is also proud to work with local country clubs and charity events to put on fashion shows with their beautiful selection of apparel. Looking for a unique shopping experience? A'propos offers private shopping parties where you

can get together with a minimum of 10 friends for a private in-store shopping experience.

## **Rochelle's Clothing**

Locally owned and operated, this St. Augustine-based boutique offers a bit of everything for women who want modern, stylish looks perfect for the Florida lifestyle. From shoes to jewelry to apparel, Rochelle's' owners have a hand in picking every piece that enters the boutique. The store is regularly updating its apparel choices with the hottest styles of the season, including designer brands like Hard Tail Forever, Rolla's Jeans, YFB Clothing and many more. A staple of the St. Augustine community for more than 40 years, this boutique invites its customers to shop for fashion and fabulousness with its curated collections.

## A'propos Boutique

A'propos Boutique is a women's designer clothing store in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida (greater Jacksonville area). We specialize in unique high end fashion and our specialty is helping you dress for any occasion — from denim to cocktail.



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# A BIG DECISION FOR THE BIG DAY

## True Me Boutique offers both gowns and alterations

story and photos by  
**SHAUN RYAN**

**A**s a bride-to-be approaches her big day, she's got a lot to think about. And her wedding dress is one of the most critical decisions she will have to make.

There may be a temptation to walk into a bridal shop and buy the first dress recommended to her.

But Carmela Johnson, owner of True Me Boutique

in St. Augustine, recommends a bride take her time, do some research and shop around. And if the recommended gown isn't quite right for her, it's OK to say no.

Of course, finding that right dress means more than seeking that long-idealized dream gown. It's important to find the dress that looks best on the bride. That's why it's a good idea to consult with a professional who has been in the business and has the bride's best interest in mind.

And to remember that tried-and-true advice: Try it on.

"It's always best to try it on and see what really looks



Carmela Johnson, owner of True Me Boutique in St. Augustine, shows off some of the many wedding gowns she has in stock.

good on you," said Johnson. "And be open minded. Sometimes, they're scared to try a gown because they think it's too sexy or it's 'not my body type,' but don't be afraid to put it on and give it a try. Because you never know. It might look really good on you."

Johnson also recommends

bringing a couple of close friends or family members along for support on these shopping excursions. But don't bring too many people. That only leads to confusion, as each may have a completely different idea on what looks good. Ultimately, it's

CONTINUED ON PAGE 27 ■

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# BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE SOCIAL SOCIETY WITH MAGGIE BECKETT

story by **HOLLY TISHFIELD**

Contributed photos

If you take a trip to The Social Society, located in Ponte Vedra Beach, and admire the colorful murals on the wall, you can thank Maggie Beckett. The playful photos on the store's website, the colorful collages on social media, the bubbly newsletters – Beckett has had a hand in it all.

Beckett met Seri Kertzner, founder of The Social Society, over a decade ago as she finished her degree at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, for graphic design and digital art. Kertzner invited Beckett to do some freelance work for her event planning business located in New York City, Little Miss Party Planner.

Beckett eventually moved to New York City to take on a permanent position with Kertzner's business. The two quickly established a dynamic work-



Maggie Beckett and her new husband, Dave Beckett

ing relationship, which is how Beckett became so heavily involved in Kertzner's next business venture in Northeast Florida: The Social Society.

From the moment Kertzner began con-

ceptualizing her dream store, through brainstorming business names and determining how the store would operate, Beckett was involved in every aspect of The Social Society's creation. Kertzner credits her as one of the store's founders.

"After so many years of knowing Seri, it was a huge goal of hers to open The Social Society. We were so excited and so proud that it finally happened," Beckett said.

Beckett acts as Kertzner's creative director, handling a large majority of the brand's digital content and digital design aspects. She manages the brand's social media accounts, designs and performs upkeep on the brand's website, and spends time in the Ponte Vedra Beach store for content photoshoots.

"I'm handling all of the things that I always did for the company, which is the creative, back-end, digital side of it

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 ■

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# REGARD LIBATIONS POURS PASSION INTO EVERY EVENT

story by **HOLLYTISHFIELD**  
photos courtesy of **REGARD LIBATIONS**

**F**or Audrey Ancelin, every event is an opportunity to hold each detail in the highest regard, ensuring an experience that's as memorable as it is seamless. Her mobile-bar business, Regard Libations, is a perfect example that even when life doesn't go as planned, it has a way of leading you exactly where you're meant to be.

Ancelin worked in the food and beverage industry for more than 15 years, using it as a way to make ends meet during her years as a professional ballet dancer and again during her time as an undergraduate student at the University of North Florida. During her college years, Ancelin anticipated a career in law, preparing for law school upon graduation, but when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it shifted her perspective.

After years of working as a bartender



Audrey Ancelin opened her mobile bar business, Regard Libations, in 2021.

in various spots around town, Ancelin developed a repertoire with many of the locals who grew to love her skills as a bartender and her friendly personality.

During the pandemic, some of those locals suggested she arrange pop-up backyard bars at small get-togethers, a way to reconnect in a socially-distanced manner. She agreed, ended up loving the experience, and decided to make the business an official LLC under the name Regard Libations.

"I'm very grateful for those bar regulars and existing clients that really brought my dreams to life," Ancelin said.

Regard Libations is a full-service mobile event bartending company that provides a luxury bartending experience. Clients provide the alcohol, and Ancelin and her highly-trained team take care of the rest. Everything from curating cocktail menus and setting up the bar space to hand-making fresh juices/garnishes and providing glassware. Once you've selected a service package through the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 ■

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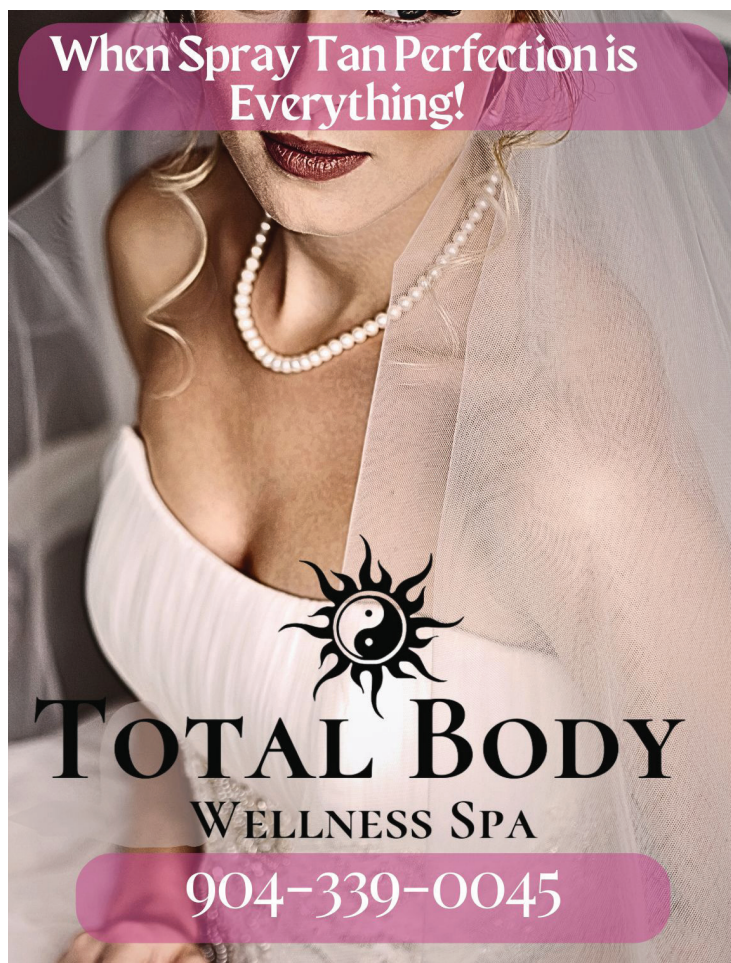
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## GUEST COLUMN

# ON YOUR WAY TO THE CHAPEL OF LOVE?

story by **AMBER BULLINGTON TIPTON,**  
**AMELIA ISLAND KAYAK EXCURSIONS**

Contributed photo

**S**pring is just around the corner, and many brides are dreaming about or planning for one the most special days of their lives. Are you anticipating a proposal, looking for “off-the-beaten-path” activities to do for your bachelorette party, or planning special outings for your honeymoon? Or maybe you just like reading about and looking at pictures of all things wedding.

But these dreams and plans aren’t just for the brides to be. Many guys are making serious plans on how to propose to their love. When? Where? How? What is special that will be memorable to us?

Today, I want to share my experience in helping a gentleman do some planning of his own! I am an agent with our family’s business, and it all began with this phone call:



“Amelia Island Kayak Excursions, this is Amber how may I help you?”

Caller: “Hi, I want to kayak.”

Amber: “I am happy to help, how many are in your party, and what dates are you available?”

Now Nervous Caller: “I want to kayak and propose to my girlfriend, can you help me?”

Amber: “Yes, absolutely!”

After hearing his story, offering options and ideas that would be special to them, such as a scavenger hunt leading

them to “buried treasure,” a message in the sand, etc., the plan was set!

The plan: Nearing sunset, our caller and his unsuspecting girlfriend embarked on a kayak tour skirting neighboring islands.

Our caller discretely asked, “Please will you keep the ring as I am too nervous to hold it?”

With a sleight of hand, the ring was passed off to our guide, who secured it until it was needed.

After touring the local waterways, we stopped off on a nearby uninhabited island. Once there, the “plan” was for them to stroll down the beach. Meanwhile, our guides hurriedly wrote “Will You Marry Me?” in the sand.

On their return, they stopped to read the message, and he got down on one knee. She said, “Yes!” They titled their

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 ■

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## CHAPEL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

complimentary photo album, “She Said Yes!”

Now, this was not the end of the story! As their wedding date neared, our caller booked a date for another kayaking tour for the wedding party and family to enjoy. But wait! There’s more!

One year later the phone rings. “Amelia Island Kayak Excursions, this is Amber how may I help you?”

Caller: “Hi, this is ‘She Said Yes!’ ‘Do you remember me?’”

For their anniversary, the couple booked a tour to kayak the route where it all began — “Will You Marry Me” written in the sand.

Now, you do not just have to read about someone else’s special moments because our area is rich in places to explore to make memories of your own.

Whether planning a proposal, a fun bachelor/bachelorette itinerary, a pre-wedding day activity or a relaxing honeymoon outing, we at Amelia Island Kayak Excursions can help you create your own outdoor story.

Imagine a day where laughter echoes across the water, as you and your closest friends embark on an unforgettable journey with us. Not only a kayaking adventure, but a celebration of love and friendship. Arrive on an uninhabited beach via kayak, paddle through naturally carved paths in the saltmarsh, or explore “Old Florida” wilderness waterways.

You get the idea! Let your imagination soar as you plan to make your dream come true with the people you hold dear. It’s just a phone call away!

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## REGARD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 24

business’s website, Regard Libations makes it their mission to provide everything that you need for an unforgettable event.

“My goal is to make my client’s life as easy as possible,” Ancelin said. “We’re selling our service, we’re selling hospitality. We want to make sure that the service is excellent and that the drinks are delicious and consistent.”

Regard Libations may be Ancelin’s first venture into owning a business, but she’s no stranger to the responsibilities that come with owning and running a successful brand. Coming from an entrepreneurial family, Ancelin always knew that she wanted to be the architect of her own success.

“I’ve always viewed bartending and serving as operating your own business because you’re solely responsible for how successful you are. The mindset is very similar,” she said. “My goal has always been to use a learned skill or trade as a vehicle to be an entrepreneur.”

In the four years since officially launching her business, Regard Libations has become a smash hit in the community, servicing more than 220 events in 2024 alone. Ancelin and her team are the preferred vendor for many event spaces here on the Northeast Florida coast and offer their mobile bar services throughout the state, provided they come to a travel agreement with clients.

Regard Libations services a wide variety of events, from gatherings as small as birthday celebrations or baby showers to gatherings as grand as corporate holiday parties or private weddings.

“Weddings are my first love,” Ancelin said. “It’s what got my business going after I started curating the brand during the pandemic.”

Despite her busy schedule owning, operating and acting as the face of Regard Libations,



A bartender at Regard Libations creates a fresh cocktail.



Regard Libations services a variety of events, such as weddings.

Ancelin still makes time to accompany the business as a bartender for certain events.

“I really love bartending, to this day. I just can’t let it go,” she said. “I’m fortunate enough to have an incredibly supportive partner and family and they give me the space to be 1,000% all-in on my dreams.”

When envisioning the name for her mobile bar business, Ancelin knew right from the start that she loved the word “libations,” given how it captures the essence of celebratory drinks and bright gatherings. She chose the word “regard” for the way it embodies how the business approaches every client and event — with outstanding service and unparalleled attention to detail.

To reach Regard Libations, you can visit [www.regardlibations.com](http://www.regardlibations.com).

## BECKETT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

all, which I’m so happy to do,” Beckett said. “It’s always been a joy to do content and website design with our event planning team in New York, but to be able to do it for The Social Society feels even more fun because it’s product-facing.”

The hands-on aspect of being at the Ponte Vedra Beach store is one of the qualities that Beckett enjoys the most, staging products and working directly with the employees who understand



The Becketts celebrated their marriage in style.

which of the most popular items should be photographed.

Beyond working closely with the products, Beckett has also enjoyed watching The Social Society take on a new direction with its thriving in-store events, such as mixology classes, bouquet making classes and other creative workshops.

“The community was really craving something to do and I think that’s why the events are so exciting,” Beckett said. “It’s so natural for us because we’re party planners, so to host events like this for the community, it just feels like a perfect fit.”



## GOWNS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

the bride's big day – she is the one wearing the dress – so it's her decision.

Because so many brides find themselves severely dieting so that they can squeeze into a tight dress, Johnson, an experienced seamstress, offers a solution in the alteration stage.

"I always tell the girls: Let me make it a little bit bigger," she said. "It's easier to take in than let out."

When speaking with her customers, Johnson always asks them about a few key considerations: How big the wedding will be, where it is to be held, and the month. The best dress for one answer may be different than the best dress for another.

For instance, a lot of local brides plan to get married at the beach.

"If you're getting married at the beach, you don't want to have a huge train, because it's just going to be in the sand," Johnson said.

And some months bring more rain – something to be considered if the ceremony is to be outdoors.

Another consideration is cost.

Not everyone can afford expensive designer gowns. Johnson sells gowns that look expensive, but are not.

And True Me Boutique offers another big money-saver: Because Johnson is a seamstress with years of experience doing alterations, she can offer that service in-house at a discount for women purchasing their dresses from her. True Me Boutique is a one-stop shop.

This is not a small matter. Pretty much every wedding dress requires alterations, which can seriously boost the price of the dress. A bride may purchase a \$1,000 dress, only to discover that it will cost her another \$1,000 to get altered.

"Alterations are expensive," said Johnson. "I'm not."

In fact, Johnson – who actually has a degree in restaurant management – started her career as a seamstress. Growing up in the Philippines, she always knew how to sew, but after moving here in 2004 she learned how to become a seamstress.

She began doing that professionally in 2007 and acquired an expertise in wedding dresses, gowns and suits. She bought her first alterations business –

the one she was working for – in 2014. She went on to open a dry-cleaning business. Both businesses are in St. Augustine Beach.

Then, in August 2023, she opened True Me Boutique at 2794 U.S. 1 South, St. Augustine. It's the business she calls her baby.

"I love it," she said with her characteristic enthusiasm.

In addition to wedding gowns, she sells dresses for the entire entourage: bridesmaids, mother of the bride, etc. She also sells dresses for prom, homecoming, galas – you name it.

And because some of her customers decide to get married while visiting St. Augustine for the weekend and therefore need a dress quickly, she has gowns in all sizes in her shop.

True Me Boutique is open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday.

While brides-to-be can stop by anytime to browse, Johnson encourages them to make an appointment to try dresses on. That way, she can be there to help them pick out the right dress.

Learn more at [www.shoptrueme.com](http://www.shoptrueme.com). Or call 904-460-4046.

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# CHOPHOUSE AT NOCATEE OFFERS THE FINE-DINING EXPERIENCE RESIDENTS ARE CRAVING

story by **HOLLYTISHFIELD**  
photos courtesy of  
**CHOPHOUSE AT NOCATEE**

**A**s Nocatee Town Center and the entire Nocatee area continue to expand, residents are craving versatile dining options. Beyond just quick-service chains and generic restaurants, Nocatee residents have been on the hunt for good, local dining.

Their pleas were answered when ChopHouse at Nocatee recently opened its long-awaited doors and welcomed guests into the massive two-story steakhouse.

“We felt that this would be a really neat thing for the folks who live out



ChopHouse at Nocatee is the community's newest fine-dining experience

here,” said Larry Press, a managing member for ChopHouse at Nocatee. “We know a lot of people

out here and we wanted to build them something really nice.”

ChopHouse at Nocatee

is one of the first high-end dining options available in the Nocatee Town Center, complete with two bars, a main dining room, an outdoor patio and a rooftop bar with beautiful views. According to the steakhouse's website, the multiple bars offer craft cocktails and premium liquor brands while the restaurant itself is proud to serve the highest quality ingredients from a scratch kitchen.

Owned and operated by the same team as ChopHouse Thirteen, Mandarin's premiere steakhouse for more than 50 years, ChopHouse at Nocatee promises

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32 ■



PHOTO BY SUSAN GRIFFIN

Andy Schweiger speaks about his family's wines.



CONTRIBUTED BY ANDY SCHWEIGER

Guests gather at the pop-up event for a Schweiger Vineyards sampling.



PHOTO BY SUSAN GRIFFIN

Schweiger Vineyards at Coastal Wine & Tapas.

## BRINGING NAPA TO NOCATEE WITH SCHWEIGER VINEYARDS AT COASTAL WINE & TAPAS

story by **HOLLYTISHFIELD**

**I**n mid-January, Coastal Wine & Tapas invited Schweiger Vineyards to sample wines and meet guests as part of the Meet Your Winemaker series.

After eight years, Coastal Wine Market & Tasting Room is rebranding to Coastal Wine & Tapas and relocating to a new expanded space in

Nocatee Town Center later this year. Local owners Steve and Shaun Lourie continue the cherished traditions that have built a loyal following for more than eight years, including the popular Meet Your Winemaker series.

Andrew “Andy” Schweiger of Schweiger Vineyards joined customers at Coastal Wine & Tapas to meet new, potential customers and explain the

family legacy behind the Schweiger brand.

Schweiger's appearance came at the request of loyal customers in the area, members of the Schweiger Wine Club, who requested a pop-up at Coastal Wine & Tapas location. When Schweiger reached out about hosting

CONTINUED ON PAGE 32 ■





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## ARGYLE INTRODUCES NEW CATERING SERVICE

story by **SHAUN RYAN**  
photos courtesy of **ARGYLE**

Always looking for new and better ways to serve its customers, Argyle restaurant has launched a high-end catering service for pickup or local delivery. The menu includes a host of options, including displayed platters, sandwich platters and boxed lunches, salads, hot and cold skewers, sides and entrees.

And it's an extension of the Argyle philosophy of giving the customers the best possible experience.

Co-owner and chef Jon Blackford called Argyle a "chef-driven restaurant" that makes just about ev-

everything in-house.

Blackford takes great care in his sourcing. He buys directly from purveyors that he trusts, like certain ingredients from Anson Mills in South Carolina, meats from Olympia Provisions in Oregon and Rancho Gordo Beans from California. Some breads come from New York, and a special ham called surryano comes from Edwards Smokehouse in Virginia.

"There's really nothing like it," Blackford said. "It just completely melts in your mouth."

In fact, the Argyle menu changes often as Blackford discovers new products or farms that he would like to feature.

"If you're looking for something a little creative and different, I feel like we kind of fill that void," he said.

In fact, he's always looking for ways to improve. Whenever he and his cooks try something new, even if it's really good, he always asks the same question: "How do we make it better?"

Argyle never uses processed foods or anything that's pre-made.

"When we make appetizers for big parties, we make every individual appetizer that we send out," Blackford said.

Because Argyle is using owner.com, which partners with DoorDash and Uber Eats, to make the deliveries, there are none of the usual fees, which means Blackford can avoid raising menu prices.

Deliveries can be made up to eight miles from Argyle, which helps the restaurant reach a broader range of customers. Located at 254 Alta Mar Drive, Ponte Vedra Beach, at The Yards, Argyle doesn't have the kind of drive-by or foot traffic that other restaurants enjoy. Some customers may even be

intimidated by the gate at the entrance to Sawgrass Players Club.

But the catering initiative takes Argyle to communities outside the gates, something that Blackford called a "game changer."

"This helps us expand our reach," he said.

Offices use the service, often to order a sandwich platter or charcuterie board for a meeting. But it also appeals to people having guests in their home or those who simply enjoy having the food come to them.

In fact, COVID may have introduced people to the satisfaction of staying home for meals rather than going out.

"I feel like some people enjoy being at home and throw more parties, now," Blackford said, "or maybe have people over a little more often."

Catered orders require a minimum of 48 hours' notice because the Argyle team needs time to prepare. For larger orders, a longer period of notice may be needed.

To learn more, see the menu or place an order, go to [argylepvb.com](http://argylepvb.com).

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# ST. AUGUSTINE FOOD + WINE FESTIVAL

## A BONANZA OF FOOD, DRINK AND CULTURE

story by **SHAUN RYAN**

**T**he fifth annual St. Augustine Food + Wine Festival will be held May 7-11, and tickets are on sale now.

The festival, which has been named “One of Florida’s Top 10 Food & Wine Festivals” by USA Today, is presented by Publix. Once again, it will showcase our area’s culinary, beverage and cultural offerings and highlight regional and local chefs, celebrity guest chefs and winemakers, beverage experts, live music and artisans, along with renowned wine, spirits and beer brands from around the world.

There will be a wide variety of events, from large-scale tasting events to intimate learning experiences.

The festival has announced that new VIP Private Tastings Lounge tickets and discount VIP package tickets are available. Go to [staugustinefoodandwinefestival.com/vip-packages](http://staugustinefoodandwinefestival.com/vip-packages) or [staugustinefoodandwinefestival.com/tickets](http://staugustinefoodandwinefestival.com/tickets).

The festival events take place throughout historic St. Augustine, World Golf Village and Vilano Beach.

**World Golf Village** is located 20 minutes north of downtown St. Augustine and is the host location site for Smoke on the Walk, the Grand Tasting and the new al fresco/covered tent, Mother’s Day Jazz Brunch on the Lawn.

**Smoke on the Walk** showcases great barbecue, as well as some of the Southeast’s most celebrated chefs. Enjoy beer, wine and spirit tastings on the World Golf Village Walk of Champions. The ticket includes unlimited beverage tastings with a souvenir glass and tasting bites. Parking is free. Must be at least 21 years old. No pets allowed.

The event will be held 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. May 9 at 1 World Golf Place, St. Augustine.

Tickets are \$99. (Some early bird pricing may be available.) Tickets available at [staugustinefoodandwinefestival.com/events/smoke-on-the-walk](http://staugustinefoodandwinefestival.com/events/smoke-on-the-walk).

VIP tickets are \$125 and include early 6 p.m. entry to the VIP Private Tastings Lounge, comfortable seating and shade with private restrooms, a special selection of signature cocktails, premium tastings

and culinary creations and a collection of Rosé wines from around the world.

**The Grand Tasting** will be held from 2 to 5 p.m. May 10, also at the Walk of Champions. This all-inclusive tasting event includes a souvenir glass with which to sample more than 300 varieties of wine, beer and spirits, as well as culinary samples from more than 20 of the region’s best, award-winning restaurants.

A variety of exhibitors will be on hand and live music by Laiken Love & The Fellowship of Love will be provided. The Publix Cooking Demonstration Stage will feature cooking and beverage demonstrations with limited tastings available for the first 100 people present for each session.

Parking is free. Must be at least 21 years old. No pets allowed.

Tickets are \$119 and can be purchased at [staugustinefoodandwinefestival.com/events/main-event](http://staugustinefoodandwinefestival.com/events/main-event). (Some early bird pricing may be available.)

CONTINUED ON PAGE 33 ■

## Coastal Casual AT ITS BEST

Specializing in coastal southern cuisine, *Barbara Jean’s On The Water* is a favorite among locals and visitors alike, conveniently located in Ponte Vedra Beach and offering picturesque views of the Intracoastal Waterway.



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Guests can enjoy the rooftop bar for a more casual menu.



ChopHouse at Nocatee offers fresh ingredients from its scratch kitchen.

## CHOPHOUSE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

the same unbelievable quality of service and dining in a refreshing, modern environment.

"It's not just a pretty place, which it is," said Press. "We also have the most sophisticated technology, as well."

The restaurant utilizes all the latest and greatest in kitchen technology in its two custom-built kitchens, one that services the main dining room and another that services the rooftop. In the

main dining hall, customers can expect a variety of high-quality culinary choices such as wagyu and prime beef steaks, house-smoked cheeses and meats, fresh fish and a plethora of appetizers. Up on the rooftop, guests can still order the famous steaks, but the mood shifts to a more casual menu.

"If you want to come in for an upscale dinner at our bar or main dining restaurant, you can," said Press. "Or, if you want to come right off the golf course or tennis court, you can go up the stairs to the rooftop, have a beer and watch the game."

There's a little bit of something for everyone at ChopHouse at Nocatee, according to Press.

Since opening, the community's reaction has been overwhelmingly positive, Nocatee residents happy to have a fine-dining location for special occasions and celebrations. The thrill of trying something new is what attracts recent Nocatee transplants to the steakhouse and the promise of exceptional cuisine and an inviting atmosphere are what keep them coming back.

## SCHWEIGER

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

pop-ups, he never expected such an overwhelming response. What started as a simple inquiry quickly turned into 16 consecutive days of events in Florida.

"We've only grown and succeeded because of the faithful following that we've developed across the country," Schweiger said.

Schweiger Vineyards began with Fred and Sally Schweiger, who purchased the 55-acre property in the mountains of St. Helena, California, in the early 1960s. After stumbling upon some old rows of grape plants, Fred Schweiger contemplated turning grape-growing into a hobby. By the 1980s, Schweiger Vineyards was planting, harvesting and selling wine grapes to wineries across Napa Valley. A short time after, the Schweigers decided to develop their own wines from the grapes they grew, releasing the first vintage of Schweiger Chardonnay, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon



PHOTO BY SUSAN GRIFFIN

Guests sampled multiple varieties of Schweiger Vineyards wines

in 1994.

Now approaching their 32nd vintage, Schweiger Vineyards distributes its wine at local stores in Florida, Georgia, Texas, Arizona and New York, though they're working on expanding availability.

"There aren't a lot of wineries that

have a 32-year track record of the same source every year, the same farming team and the same winemaker," Schweiger said, proud of his family's hard work and ingenuity throughout the years.

Schweiger Vineyards is a certified sustainable vineyard through the Napa Green Certified Vineyard program. They also have the distinction of being a certified Fish Friendly Farming vineyard, which goes beyond the scope of organic farming.

"I was a farmer before I was a winemaker," Schweiger said. "I farm with the principle that God has given my family the gift of this land and it's my responsibility as a steward to not only preserve it but to leave it in better condition than when I got here."

The Meet Your Winemaker series at Coastal Wine & Tapas allowed Schweiger to relay this message not only to the dedicated fans who requested a pop-up, but also to the new guests who were discovering his wines for the first time, creating a shared experience that blended storytelling, education and exceptional wine.



## FESTIVAL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 31

VIP tickets are \$149 and include early 1 p.m. entry, a private lounge, comfortable seating and shade with private restrooms, a limited edition souvenir wine glass, a custom souvenir tote bag, a special selection of signature cocktails, premium tastings and culinary creations and a collection of Rosé wines from around the world.

The al fresco **Mother's Day Jazz Brunch on the Lawn** will be held 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. May 11 on the Walk of Champions and will feature catered breakfast and lunch culinary stations. Some of the festival's most popular wines, beers, spirits and specialty cocktails will be available, along with souvenir glass. Moms receive a Mother's Day rose.

There will also be live jazz.

Tickets are \$99 per person, \$29 for students ages 7-12 and free admission for children younger than 6. Purchase tickets at [staugustinefoodandwinefestival.com/events/the-jazz-brunch](http://staugustinefoodandwinefestival.com/events/the-jazz-brunch).

### ST. AUGUSTINE

The **River Walk Tastings** event takes place at San Sebastian Winery, 157 King

St., St. Augustine. It will be held 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. May 7. Business and casual attire OK. Must be at least 21 years old.

The evening begins with a sparkling wine welcome and a guided tour of San Sebastian Winery. Guests will receive souvenir wine glasses for tastings.

Guests will then move to the new rooftop restaurant, La Cocina at the Cellar, where they will be treated to gourmet cuisine created by Executive Chef Norberto Jaramillo and Chef de Cuisine Sebastian Sikora.

Live music will be provided by Yael Zaza Flamenca.

Tickets are \$59 and can be purchased at [staugustinefoodandwinefestival.com/events/river-walk-tastings](http://staugustinefoodandwinefestival.com/events/river-walk-tastings). (Some early bird pricing may be available.)

### VILANO BEACH

Hyatt Place, 117 Vilano Road, St. Augustine, is the host location for the Harvest Awards & Tastings, which will be held 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. May 8. Business and casual attire OK. Must be at least 21 years old.

This event offers guests an opportunity to sample fare from some of Northeast Florida's best restaurants. Culinary professionals will judge the restaurants' offerings, the winner receiving the Harvest

Award.

Guests will receive a souvenir wine glass.

Tickets are \$79 and can be purchased at [staugustinefoodandwinefestival.com/events/harvest-awards](http://staugustinefoodandwinefestival.com/events/harvest-awards). (Some early bird pricing may be available.)

The St. Augustine Food + Wine Festival is made possible in part by support from St. Johns Cultural Council, Florida's Historic Coast: St. Augustine/Ponte Vedra and a 2025 St. Johns County Tourist Development Grant.

The festival's primary official charity partner is Vilano Beach Main Street, a local St. Augustine non-profit, 501(c)3 organization. The festival donates a portion of ticket sales and 100% of the Main Event's silent auction proceeds to Vilano Beach Main Street, with more than \$100,000 in donations made possible from the festival's foundation, The Adfish Group/Culinary Festivals Foundation, since 2022.

First Coast Technical College is also a festival charity partner.

The latest festival information is available at St. Augustine Food + Wine Festival and the festival's social media channels: [facebook.com/StAugustineFoodWine](https://facebook.com/StAugustineFoodWine) and [instagram.com/staugustinefoodwine](https://instagram.com/staugustinefoodwine).

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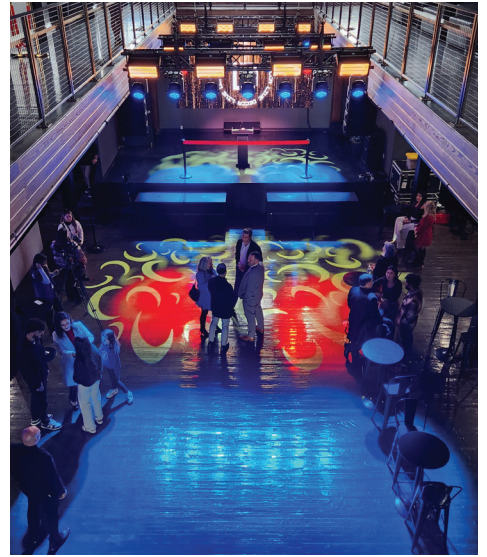
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Jacksonville Mayor Donna Deegan cuts the ribbon during Decca Live's opening ceremony while surrounded by venue owners and city representatives on stage.



A view looking down at the stage from the upper level of the venue.

## DECCA LIVE ADDS TO JACKSONVILLE'S GROWING NIGHTLIFE WITH UNIQUE VENUE

story and photos by  
**ANTHONY RICHARDS**

The social scene in downtown Jacksonville continues to grow with the recent opening of Decca Live, which is a multi-level music venue featuring a rooftop bar near the city's riverfront.

"We want this to really be just a hub for arts and creative for the greater community," said Eric Fuller, who is one of four owners of Decca Live. "Anything from country, rock to dance music and hip hop, we want this to be the live venue for all of Jacksonville to enjoy."

The venue kicked things off with a ribbon cutting on Jan. 23 at its location at 323 East Bay St. in Jacksonville, and it is the culmination of years of dreaming and planning, that even weathered the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Have you ever seen a space this amazing in downtown Jacksonville? I'm starting to feel like I'm in New York City, and congratulations to everyone who was involved in this project," City of Jacksonville Mayor Donna Deegan said. "This has been four years in the making with everything that you can possibly imagine getting thrown at them, but it could not look more beautiful than it does."

Fuller attended the University of



The bar on the floor level.

North Florida, and he is familiar with what Jacksonville has to offer, and he believes a venue like Decca Live is something that will only help it to reach its full potential in terms of the city's nightlife and a destination spot.

"There are some great facilities here already, like the Florida Theatre and Ponte Vedra Concert Hall, for example, but this marketing has been missing what we call 'a 1,000-cap club venue,' which is where a lot of artists get their start," he said. "If you think about your favorite artist, at some point Taylor Swift started in a venue like this, and we want to be that

breeding ground for artists as well as regional, national and international acts who are already making a career out of it."

The introduction of the venue will also create the potential for fans to follow certain artists throughout their career and see it come full circle from their grassroots beginnings at Decca Live's stage to years later seeing them performing in front of crowds down the road at Daily's Place or the VyStar Veterans Memorial Arena.

"My whole life has been dedicated to live music events and touring, and this state and city needs these types of facilities all over because it creates a network for everyone involved," Fuller said.

The name Decca Live has local historic significance as the new venue is in the building of the former Decca Records shop that occupied the space years ago.

"When they saw this historic space here in the heart of our city, they knew it would be the perfect spot to make their dream a reality," Deegan said. "The city and DIA (Downtown Investment Authority) were really proud to be a part of this, as we invested \$1.6 million towards the project."

That support from the local com-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 35 ■



# JACKSONVILLE SYMPHONY: 75TH SEASON FULL OF GREAT PERFORMANCES

FOR THE RECORDER  
photo provided by THE  
JACKSONVILLE SYMPHONY

The Jacksonville Symphony, led by the internationally acclaimed Music Director Courtney Lewis, is celebrating its 75th Anniversary Season with a diverse lineup of world-class guest artists, dazzling pops performances, world premieres, beloved masterworks, multi-media concerts and much more.

Beginning in September, the Symphony has seen many new faces in the hall, welcoming more than 11,000 newcomers during the first half of the season. The number will grow as the season continues with the music of John Williams, new works by world-renowned pianist Conrad Tao, the return of the ever-popular Cirque de la Symphonie and many more



Music Director Courtney Lewis conducts a performance of the Jacksonville Symphony.

major experiences.

With a new look and logo, the Jacksonville Symphony is focused on spreading awareness of its diverse offerings and appeal to people of all backgrounds.

This theme of variety continues on with the rest of the season, which includes

Take 6 on March 29, the Children's Music Festival on March 30, Antonín Dvořák's "New World" on April 25 and 26, "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2 in Concert" on May 2 and 3, Cirque of Ice and Fire on May 9 and 10, a unique collaboration with the Florida Ballet

and Jacksonville Dance Theatre for At the Ballet on May 22 and 23 and the season finale, Gershwin & Copland featuring the world premiere of a contemporary work "Zodiac" on June 6 and 7. And those are just a few highlights.

The symphony invites members of the public to hear the music they love come alive, performed by the highest caliber of musicians during this special anniversary season. For those who haven't attended a concert, there's truly no better time to discover the Jacksonville Symphony.

All tickets and event information are available at [JaxSymphony.org](http://JaxSymphony.org) or by calling the box office at 904-354-5547. Concerts take place in Jacoby Symphony Hall at the Jacksonville Center for the Performing Arts.

## DECCA

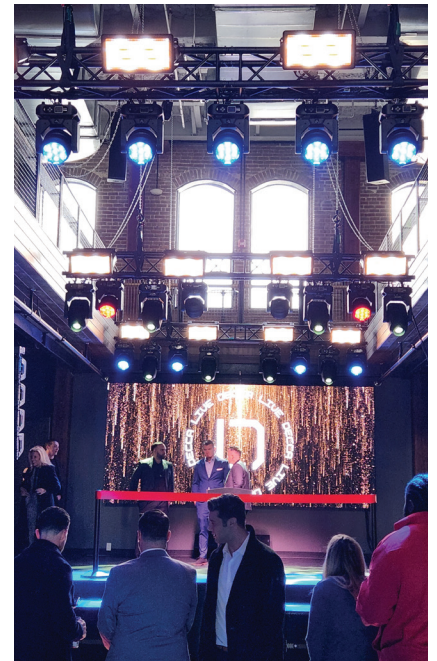
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munity is something that Fuller truly appreciates.

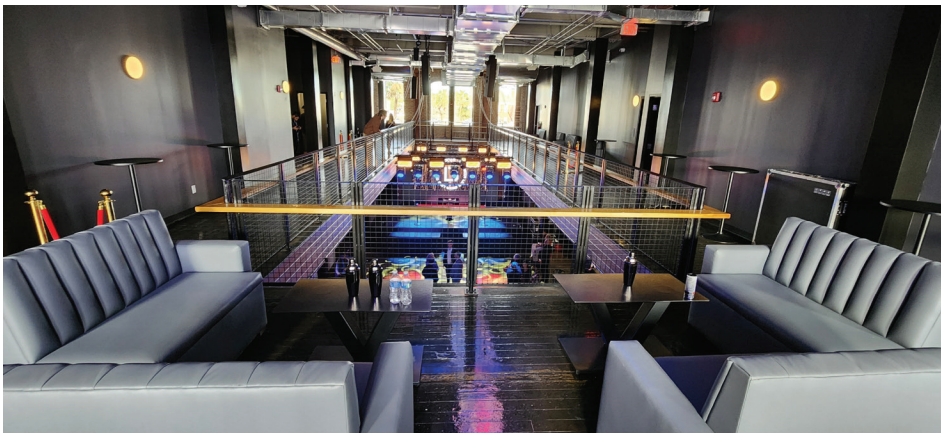
"First, when you walk into a building you have to be able to visualize it, and we sat with the architects and started working out all the intricacies that go into having a space like this, such as

having a shower down in our green room for the touring artists, because if you think about, you're on a bus all the time and where do you shower," Fuller said. "It's all the little things like that make all the difference."

A list of upcoming shows and events can be found at [www.deccalive.com](http://www.deccalive.com) or by Decca Live's social media pages on Instagram, X and Facebook.



A variety of musical acts have already been scheduled to perform at Decca Live from country and rock to dance music and hip hop.



The rooftop bar area offers a place to lounge and enjoy the music.





Jessica Racaniello and Kyle Geary in "Crimes of the Heart"



The magic of the theatre is alive at Limelight.

# LIVING IN THE LIMELIGHT

## Community theatre a pillar of St. Augustine's culture

story by **SHAUN RYAN**

photos courtesy of **LIMELIGHT THEATRE**

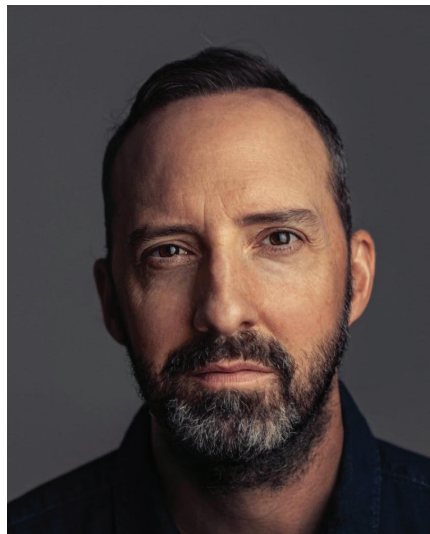
**O**n a bright February afternoon, a seemingly simple building bearing Spanish accents appears to sit quietly along a narrow street in the oldest town in America.

But the stillness is deceptive. This is a place of great drama, mysterious doings, soaring vocals and lots of laughter. And at any given time, it is abuzz with activity.

This is the Limelight Theatre, the only community theatre organization in St. Johns County that owns its own building. In its 33 seasons, it has weathered hurricanes, a pandemic and challenging budget cuts to enrich the culture, educate future thespians and offer the public high-quality live performances.

In a city that provides an astounding range of artistic and cultural opportunities, Limelight Theatre remains a pillar for the community, a place where the magic of the stage is alive and well. And it's a kind of home for those who live to create.

"I believe that Limelight is a very special little theatre," said Executive Director Sherrie Provence. "We want to create a haven for creative people, just a safe place where people can have a sense of belonging, a family type of atmosphere



Actor Tony Hale will present a program March 2 in Lewis Auditorium.

where the cast and crew are part of something bigger than just themselves."

And, quite literally, there is always something going on.

As one cast takes its final bow, another is already rehearsing the next show. Casting is underway for the show that follows that one, and preparations are being made for yet another show. Workshops and acting classes for all ages are being conducted, and young performers in the KidzFACTory program are preparing to present their own musical. Backstage, the remnants from a recently struck set rest side-by-side with new sets under construction.

All of this requires clockwork-precision scheduling.

"It's buzzing all the time here," said Provence, laughing.

### SETTING THE STAGE

Limelight Theatre was the brainchild of two friends, Anne Kraft and Jean Rahner, whose husband Tom had founded the theatre program at Flagler College. (Jean Rahner would go on to found a second theatre, A Classic Theatre, in 2005.)

Limelight's first production opened on Aug. 28, 1992, at the Monson Bayfront Inn in St. Augustine. It continued to operate there for almost two years. In 1994, the theatre was granted nonprofit status as a 501(c)3 organization. It went on to produce shows at a variety of locales, including a small building on U.S. 1.

Then, in 2001, a grant from the Joukowsky Family Foundation made it possible for the theatre to purchase the 10,000-square-foot building at 11 Old Mission Ave., formerly the home of the St. Johns County Council on Aging and, before that, the Ramada Inn cafeteria. Today's main stage was originally a dining hall and the workshop backstage had been the kitchen.

A \$398,000 state grant received in 2006 allowed the theatre to replace the roof, install new air conditioning and heating, and sound and light systems. The lobby and restrooms were renovated, and the Matusa Black Box theater was constructed, giving Limelight two stages.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 37 ■





Building the set for "Crimes of the Heart"



Limelight Theatre's education program gives young performers a chance to display their talents.



Kaleidoscope offers space for people to share their talents.

## LIMELIGHT

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For 18 years, the theatre was under the direction of Beth Lambert. When she retired in 2021, the board of directors conducted a nationwide search and ultimately hired Provence in 2022.

This year, the building is 50 years old, making it a historic site. This will allow Limelight Theatre to apply for grants that hadn't previously been available.

### SEASON 33

Today, big things are happening at Limelight.

The theatre is in the midst of its 33rd season. The most recent show, a dramedy titled "Crimes of the Heart," closed on Feb. 2. "The Drowsy Chaperone," a musical comedy, opens on Feb. 21 and runs through March 16. The show is a unique take on classic Broadway musicals of the 1920s and features a Jazz Age score by Tony Award-winning collaborators.

"Sense & Sensibility," based on the classic Jane Austin story, runs from April 4 through April 19.

Following that, "Fly By Night" takes the stage from May 9 through 25. Described as a "darkly comic rock-fable," the show is set in 1965 during the New York City blackout.

Next up will be Eugène Ionesco's "Rhinoceros." It's an absurdist show with a serious message and runs from May 30 through June 15.

The big summer musical, "Hairspray," runs from July 18 through Aug. 10. The show is set in the Baltimore of 1962 and follows a quirky teenager who finds a degree of fame dancing on a local TV show and uses that to speak out for racial integration.

"We tried to get the rights to that for

three years," said Provence.

### PROGRAMS, CLASSES AND MORE

Limelight Theatre generally stages eight or nine shows each season. Many are musicals, though there is an occasional drama, comedy or mystery.

But that isn't all.

The theatre has a thriving education program for ages 4 through 18, and an adult acting class that meets twice a week. The youth program will present Disney's "Alice in Wonderland Jr." on March 28-30.

That program has a rolling enrollment, so young theatre enthusiasts can join anytime. Then, as future shows come up, the theatre posts audition times on its website.

In the upcoming summer program, children and youths will present three age-appropriate shows.

Something new at Limelight is Kaleidoscope, a monthly gathering of artists who share their songs and poetry in a kind of nightclub atmosphere. It's free to join in, and the bar is open so that patrons can get snacks and drinks.

"It's been a big hit," said Provence.

While Kaleidoscope is meant to give a space to younger artists, all are welcome.

In another exciting development, the theatre has partnered with the Saint Augustine Film Festival and the St. Augustine Film Society to start screening films, especially older, regional or avant-garde films.

The plan is to hold Wednesday matinees and perhaps some Sunday showings when possible.

The projector purchased by the theatre to make that happen will also allow the stage shows to use projected backdrops, opening up new possibilities.

In addition, Limelight Theatre hosted

standup comedians as part of SJC Cultural Events' Sing Out Loud Festival in September.

Beyond performance art, Limelight regularly displays the work of local artists. One of these is Sue Schwartz, who paints some of the theatre's scenic backdrops but is also a notable fine artist.

### A CAREER IN COMEDY

On March 2, Limelight Theatre will present "A Conversation with Tony Hale: A Career in Comedy" at Lewis Auditorium in St. Augustine.

Audiences will have an opportunity to hear from the actor who played Buster Bluth in "Arrested Development" and Gary Walsh in "Veep," where he appeared alongside Julia Louis-Dreyfus.

The three-time Emmy winner has appeared in numerous films and has provided character voices in "The Tale of Despereaux," "The Angry Birds Movie" and more. He was the voice of Forky in "Toy Story 4" and Fear in "Inside Out 2."

He has played twin brothers on the Disney+ original "The Mysterious Benedict Society." His children's book, "Archibald's Next Big Thing," is now a popular Netflix series.

Provence wanted to hold this fundraiser at Flagler College to offer students an affordable price. The first 200 Flagler students can attend for free.

Tickets for this event are \$50 for adults, \$15 for students and admission for a family of four is \$100 (call the box office). Flagler students beyond the first 200 pay only \$15 with ID.

There is also a VIP after-party with drinks and dessert at the Casa Monica Resort & Spa, 95 Cordova St., St. Augustine. VIP tickets are \$300 apiece, or two

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## LIMELIGHT

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for \$500, and include VIP seating.

Tickets are available at [www.limelight.ludus.com](http://www.limelight.ludus.com) or by calling the box office at 904-825-1164. Use the promo code PVRECORDER to save \$5.

The program starts at 7 p.m. Lewis Auditorium is located at 14 Granada St., St. Augustine.

### SPOTLIGHT ON FUNDING

In June, Gov. Ron DeSantis cut about \$32 million in state grants that fund arts and culture organizations. That meant tens of thousands of dollars in lost revenue for the Limelight Theatre, a third of its budget.

The loss of funds came just when Limelight was preparing to pay licensing fees. When those aren't paid in full, the theatre cannot get the rights to its shows. As a result, Limelight had to cut one show from its season.

Unfortunately, losing a show also meant losing revenue that would have been generated by ticket sales for that show. And funding is needed not just to produce shows, but for important capi-



The makeup room

tal projects related to the building itself.

The theatre staff scrambled to find sponsors to help out.

Fortunately, generous donors stepped up. For instance, Ned and Paula Skinner sponsored "Crimes of the Heart."

Ray and Linda Matuza have donated more than \$50,000 over the years, and last year, philanthropist Inez McDonald donated \$100,000.

But sponsors are needed at all levels. It takes between \$2,500 and \$10,000 to sponsor a show. Donations can be made through the theatre's website or by calling Provenance.

Until the day when state grants are restored, the theatre continues to seek

ways to raise funds.

Beyond funding, the theatre needs volunteers and interns. There are multiple ways to help out: building sets, running lights, ushering shows and much, much more.

"There's always something to do," said Provenance.

### TICKETS AND MORE

Provenance said she always seeks out shows that include an element of hope.

"We want to create messages that leave people with something positive," she said. "We say on our website: 'Be the light. Share the light. Limelight.'"

Next season, she is trying for a theme of "faith."

"Faith in mankind, in love, in a higher power ... we need that in our lives," she said.

The theatre will announce the shows for its 34th season soon, and Provenance said it's going to be a big one.

To learn more about Limelight Theatre and what it offers, or to purchase tickets, go to [limelight-theatre.org](http://limelight-theatre.org). Also, the box office is open 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. The phone number is 904-825-1164.

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Adkison Towing partnered with Smith to help move the bus from its 25-year location on Thursday, Jan. 16.



The iconic double-decker bus located along U.S. 1 was recently bought by local business owner Craig Smith who plans to restore it for the community to enjoy for years to come.



It took some work and shoveling to complete the removal project.

## ICONIC LANDMARK SET TO BE PRESERVED

story by **ANTHONY RICHARDS**  
Contributed photos

**T**here are many iconic landmarks across Northeast Florida, but for those driving down U.S. 1 the London double-decker bus that stood in front of St. Augustine's Kings Head Pub for years was one that became a fixture.

However, since the Kings Head Pub closed its doors in September, the bus faced an uncertain future, that is until Craig Smith, owner of St. Johns Food Services and Alhambra Theatre & Dining, felt compelled to save it.

Upon hearing the news that the bus was set to be sent to a junkyard if no one put in a offer for it, Smith immediately reached out to the pub's owner with an proposal to preserve the cherished local landmark.

With his intent to restore the bus, Smith also enlisted the help of Marshall Adkison, owner of Adkison's Towing, who was then on his way with a team of employees ready to take on the challenge of moving the double-decker bus just 45 minutes after his conversation with Smith.

What made moving the bus a challenge was the fact that it had been in the same place for more than 25 years, which meant they had to dig tracks for



The bus was safely transported to St. Johns Food Service, where it will remain until restoration plans are finalized.

it to move along in the dirt just to get it up on the flat bed of a tow truck.

However, within hours, their shared vision of rescuing the bus became a reality and by 2 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 16, the bus was safely transported to St. Johns Food Service, where it will remain until restoration plans are finalized.

Smith has a history of revitalizing regional icons and giving them new life, as in 2009, he purchased Alhambra Theatre & Dining, which was then in disrepair, and transformed it from a \$2.5 million business into a thriving \$12 million enterprise.

Over 15 years, Smith has renovated the venue twice and welcomed more than 130,000 guests in 2023 alone.

Similarly, in 2023, Smith revitalized St. Johns Food Service, a 75-year-old St. Augustine institution, boosting its sales, growing its customer base and reshaping its culture.

"I have probably passed this bus 10,000 times in my travels down Phillips Highway, ever since I was a kid, and even more so since I bought St. Johns Food Service," Smith said. "When I saw the news about the bus being taken to the junkyard, I knew I had to save it. So, here we are."

As for the bus's future.

"We'll start by figuring out how to restore it and then work on finding a location where the public can enjoy it," Smith said. "Like the orange dinosaur on Beach Boulevard, we want to preserve these iconic pieces of Jacksonville's history, even as our city grows and changes."

Smith's dedication to preserving local heritage while fostering growth continues to leave a positive mark on the community.

The rescued double-decker bus is just the latest testament to his commitment to celebrating the past while embracing the future.

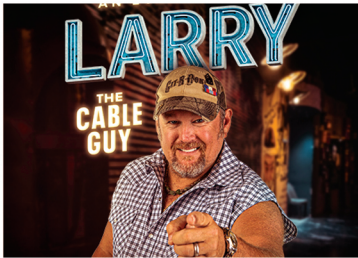




ONE NIGHT IN MEMPHIS  
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LARRY THE CABLE GUY  
MARCH 6 AT 7:30 PM



A YEAR WITH FROG  
AND TOAD  
APRIL 3 AT 10:30 AM



HOWIE MANDEL  
MARCH 13 AT 7:30 PM



PRETTY WOMAN:  
THE MUSICAL  
APRIL 14 AT 7:30 PM



THE MACHINE  
PERFORMS  
PINK FLOYD  
MARCH 14 AT 7:30 PM



1964 THE TRIBUTE  
OCTOBER 10 AT 7:30 PM



SPLISH SPLASH:  
THE MUSIC OF  
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