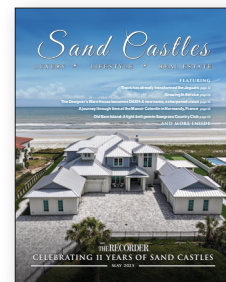


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Sand Castles
INSIDE

Thursday, May 22, 2025

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Guana land swap request withdrawn

By Anthony Richards

The request to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Acquisition and Restoration Council for a land swap of 600 acres in the Guana River Preserve for 3,066.23 acres in four locations across the state has been withdrawn.

The proposal drew strong opposition from residents, as well as Audubon Florida, which is a conservation society with the goal of protecting and advocating for birds, special places and water quality in the state.

State representative Kim Kendall scheduled a press conference to oppose the land swap and offer a plan to address the issue; however, Kendall opened the press conference by pumping her fists in the air and shouting "we did it," because Upland LLC, who owns 104.47 acres contiguous in the Guana River Wildlife Management Area, had withdrawn their request.

As soon as the word of the land swap request became known it began

GUANA continues on Page 8

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Centenarian lunch celebrates banner year

By Anthony Richards

Over the past couple of decades since the St. Johns County Council on Aging has been hosting its annual Centenarian Luncheon at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, they had never seen a crowd as big as the one at this year's event.

More than one hundred were in attendance, including six centenarians, who are older than 100 years old.

"This is a banner year, and we are delighted for what that means for all of us in this community," said Becky Yanni, COA executive director. "We are so honored to



Photo by Anthony Richards

Rita Bondanza tells Bruce Barber about her love of pasta.

CENTENARIAN continues on Page 9

**What to do with a
Bored Kid**
page 10

**Beautiful from
the Inside Out**
page 14

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INSIDE

One of Us
Page 6

Business Weekly
Pages 28-31

In the Arts
Pages 32-34

Sports
Pages 35-36

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BRIEFS

Local student earns degree at UF

Maclane Howell Fisher of Ponte Vedra Beach has graduated cum laude, receiving a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Florida with a major in aerospace engineering and a minor in computer science. Graduation was held Monday, May 5, 2025. Fisher attended Ocean Palms Elementary, Landrum Middle School and Ponte Vedra High School before enrolling at UF.

Mass arrest of rabbis to be commemorated

The 13th annual commemoration of the largest mass arrest of rabbis in U.S. history will take place at noon June 18 outdoors at the St. Johns County Jail Annex, 3955 Lewis Speedway, St. Augustine. This 30-minute event sponsored by the St. Augustine Jewish Historical Society is free and all are welcome. On June 18, 1964, 16 rabbis and a Reform Jewish administrator, in St. Augustine at the request of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., were arrested and held in the St. Johns County Jail. Overnight, they wrote a letter titled “Why We Went to St. Augustine,” which will be read as part of the commemoration. All are welcome, there is no charge. For further information, contact SAJHS at sajhs.com, sajhs1565@gmail.com or 804-914-4460.

Library book sale going on now

Seymour’s Bookstore in the Ponte Vedra Beach Library is having a May Days Lobby Book Sale now through Saturday, May 24. Open all library hours, but the book sale will close at 3 p.m. May 24. All books (fiction, non-fiction, children’s, cookbooks), CDs, DVDs and vinyls are \$1.

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.

Farmers market open every Friday

The Ponte Vedra Friday Farmers Market takes place from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. every Friday at The Peace of Heart Community Farm, offering fresh produce, local farm goods and a welcoming space to connect with neighbors and small businesses. This farmers market features fresh, organically grown produce; Florida grass-fed beef and pork; real local honey; pasture-raised chicken and eggs; wholegrain breads; gluten-free sourdough bread; natural botanical skincare; creations by local artisans and more in a family-friendly atmosphere. The Peace of Heart Community Farm is located at 14A S. Roscoe Blvd., Ponte Vedra Beach.

Ponte Vedra Woman’s Club plans happy hour

The Ponte Vedra Woman’s Club will hold its Purely Social Happy Hour from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. June 3 at Argyle Restaurant, 254 Alta Mar Drive, Ponte Vedra Beach. Free for members, \$10 for guests. Register at pontevedrawomansclub.com/eventregistrations.php.

Essential Tremor Support Group to meet

Do you suspect you have — or a loved one has — essential tremor, a condition often involving the shaking of head, hands and/or legs? “ET” is not Parkinson’s, similar

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Briefs

Continued from 2

but much more prevalent and not well known. You are invited at the Essential Tremor Support Group meeting, 11 a.m. Tuesday, June 3, at the Baptist HealthPlace in Nocatee (400 Colonnade Road, unit 130, Ponte Vedra) to hear from Stephen Morio, territory manager for Insightec Focused Ultrasound, about an incisionless surgical treatment now offered in Jacksonville. Questions and RSVP: Jan Kary, jkary@verizon.net.

— Compiled by Shaun Ryan

Flagler College students featured at symposium

Flagler College students recently had an opportunity to share their work at the Undergraduate Research & Creative Endeavors Symposium.

The symposium is an annual event that showcases the innovative research, creative projects and scholarly work of students. This symposium is a platform for students who have received the Undergraduate Research & Creative Endeavors grant, which supports their independent research and creative initiatives across various disciplines.

Through a poster session, these students have the opportunity to present their work to the campus community, fostering an environment of academic exchange and collaboration.

Caz Miner and Jackson Moser, both

of St. Augustine, presented work titled “Flagler Theatre at the Kennedy Center American Theatre Festival,” as cast and crew members of the “Streetlight Woodpecker” production.

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OBITUARIES



Rhoda Karol

Rhoda Karol, born on November 1st, 1930, passed away in Jacksonville, FL on Saturday, May 17th, 2025, at 94 years old after several health issues. She was born in Brooklyn, NY where she met her husband, Bill. They were married for 73 wonderful years and loved each other like never seen before. She worked in New York City as a bookkeeper, then again when they moved to Freehold, NJ. They

retired and moved to Wellington, FL and lived there for 25 years before moving to Ponte Vedra to be closer to family.

Rhoda was known to be vibrant, outgoing and made friends everywhere she went.

She is survived by her daughter, Marcia Karol and son-in-law, Michael O'Reilly; granddaughter, Brittany Karol with partner, Kyle Campbell; and granddaughter, Chelsea Widdows with grand son-in-law, Tanner Widdows. She is also survived by her sister and brother-in-law, Eleanor and Irving Stein, and her brother and sister-in-law, Barry and Shelly Fisher. She is pre-deceased by her husband, Bill Karol, and her son, Robert Karol.

Her funeral will be held on Friday, May 23rd at noon at Ponte Vedra Valley Funeral Home at 450 Palm Valley Road, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL. In lieu of flowers, please send donations to B'nai Brith.

For those that cannot attend, the service will be live-streamed and recorded, accessible on the Ponte Vedra Valley website.



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DEATH NOTICES

Patricia C. Boyd

Patricia C. Boyd, 90, of Ponte Vedra Beach, FL, passed away May 18, 2025. Arrangements by Quinn Shalz Funeral Home & Cremation Centre, Jacksonville Beach, FL 32250, 904-249-1100, www.quinn-shalz.com

Sharon Kay Cotterman

Sharon Kay Cotterman, 86, of Ponte Vedra Beach, FL, passed away May 13, 2025. Arrangements by Quinn Shalz Funeral Home & Cremation Centre, Jacksonville Beach, FL 32250, 904-249-1100, www.quinn-shalz.com

Esther Vivian Opfermann

Esther Vivian Opfermann, 94, of St. Augustine, FL, passed away May 16, 2025. Arrangements by Quinn Shalz Funeral Home & Cremation Centre, Jacksonville Beach, FL 32250, 904-249-1100, www.quinn-shalz.com



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St. Johns County completes four days of budget workshops

St. Johns County successfully hosted its budget workshop series for fiscal year of 2026 on May 8 to May 13.

The series brought together county leadership and community partners for what county administrator Joy Andrews called, "the most engaging and productive budget discussion I've ever experienced in my 19 years serving the county."

The presentations, video-on-demand of the discussions, and details on the proposed budget are available to the public at www.sjcfl.us/2026Budget. The public is encouraged to email questions to budget@sjcfl.us.

"We hosted the most engaging budget dialogue to date, fostering meaningful conversations and shared vision," Andrews said.

During the four days of budget workshops, 26 presentations were given by various county departments and community partners.

The sessions were designed to encourage open and collaborative conversations around the county's fiscal outlook, strategic priorities, and departmental goals.

Rather than traditional top-down presentations, the format encouraged cross-department dialogue, an open exchange of questions and answers, and joint exploration of both opportunities and challenges ahead.

In a follow-up message to participants, Andrews expressed heartfelt appreciation. "Your presence, insights, and willingness to lean into honest, thoughtful conversations made this more than just a budget meeting — it made it a moment of real collaboration," Andrews expressed. "It's clear how much time, heart, and expertise went into preparing such solid presentations and shaping a budget that reflects both responsibility and vision."

Department leaders gave presentations on key areas of service, including public safety, infrastructure, housing, economic development, and quality-of-life initiatives.

Special attention was given to county-wide issues such as workforce sustainability, growth management, and long-term capital investment strategies.

The atmosphere of the session underscored a growing culture of transparency and shared ownership in local governance.

"It felt less like a formality and more like a shared mission, one where every voice mattered and every contribution pushed us closer to the community we're all working to serve," Andrews said.

St. Johns County Parks and Recreation celebrates success of anti-vandalism campaign

The St. Johns County Parks and Recreation Department proudly celebrates the success of its Enjoy, Don't Destroy anti-vandalism campaign, which has saved the county tens of thousands of dollars in vandalism-related expenses.

From April 2024 to March 2025, following the launch of the Enjoy, Don't Destroy campaign in March 2024, the county spent \$18,093 on park vandalism repairs, an approximately 60% reduction in costs from the previous year.

"When the county doesn't have to spend time and resources cleaning up after vandals, that means more money for new park projects and amenities," Sheriff Robert Hardwick said. "Let's continue to watch out for and report vandals and any vandalism they do."

Parks and Recreation Director Ryan Kane cheered the department's outreach success and encouraged residents to continue combating vandalism wherever they encounter it.

"Let's continue to keep our parks and public spaces safe and clean for each other," Kane said.

Use the SJC Connect app to report vandalism and use the non-emergency number for the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office at 904-824-8304 to report people caught in the act of vandalism.

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Stéphane and Shalee Schafeitel are the husband-and-wife team, also known as “Stéph & Shay.” They have been named the “world’s No. 1 resilience coaches” by Apple News and the couple moved to Nocatee about two years ago.

Stéphane and Shalee Schafeitel

As told to Anthony Richards

Can you please briefly tell us about your background and what led you to being resilience coaches?

Stéphane: My parents came from the old country with my dad Swiss and my mom French, and they came over here to America, so I was the first to be born in America, which is very cool.

My mom being high-fashion Parisian French, she didn’t know how to exist in Greenville, South Carolina, and that was prior to the massive expansion that happened there, so she went from wearing Chanel head to toe to all of a sudden wearing blue jeans, a t-shirt and flip-flops.

It was a culture shock for her, and she wasn’t really happy, and my dad traveled a lot, which is why he was able to take a few thousand dollars to his name and create a multi-million-dollar enterprise in textiles in the 70s and 80s but he was always traveling.

So, there was a lot of strife in the household and my parents ended up getting divorced when I was three years old when my mom left and went back to Europe, and of course, as a three-year-old I took it personally because she was my mom and she left my brother and I.

After that, because my dad had a business, what did he do to raise us both? He put us in the business, so I was working for my dad at 11 years old and already learning about entrepreneurship, hard work, etc.

All that was the back story which helped setup what happened at 16 years old, which is when my dad got divorced again with my stepmom, and then he came to me and in a strong Swiss accent said he would have to go away for a while.

He was gone the next morning, so at 16 years old I was living by myself and had to do what I needed to do to fend for myself and figure it out.

I used that entrepreneurship I had learned and started to mow lawns, which was my first business.

In geometry class they’re sitting there doing geometry work and I’m sitting there balancing a real budget trying to figure out how I’m going to go to the store and how many Lean Cuisines I could buy for dinner.

It was at this time that I was asked by my high school principal to mentor and coach other kids who were struggling at the school.

We got called into the principal’s office and asked to be natural helpers, which was way advanced for its time, and something Shay and I want to maybe eventually establish something similar here.

There were students out there struggling with alcohol abuse, drug abuse, bullying, parental abuse, sexual abuse and all these other things and they weren’t talking to their parents or teachers, but they were talking to their fellow students, so they had us trained in how to handle it if someone came up to us to talk.

As I was leaving the office the principal put his hand on my shoulder and said that my name came up the most (as a reference) and that he was counting on me.

My life was falling apart at the time and now I was being asked to help put students back together while I’m doing the same with mine.

That was when I stepped into my purpose and found that I wanted to make a positive impact on the world.

I feel like I was here to help people, and I’ve always strived to do that in all aspects of my career since then and we eventually started our business in 2009.



Contributed photo

Stéphane and Shalee Schafeitel wrote an award-winning bestseller called Master Your Mindpower.

Shalee: It got to the point where I saw him enjoying his work to a certain point, but then all of a sudden he didn’t, so I asked him what he enjoyed about the work he had been doing?

He said, “I enjoyed taking raw talent and then helping to coach them up and guide them,” so I said, well go and do that.

Little did I know that I was going to go with him on this journey.

How did the journey in business together start?

Shalee: We had to figure out how do we help people and how we wanted to construct it into a business.

At that time, I had a marketing and graphic design branding business, and I had loved it previously but kind of fell out of love with it, so I was kind of at a crossroads as well, while also going through a health transformation losing about 30 pounds.

I was working out at an MMA gym and got healthy, and then all of a sudden people were coming up to me asking to help them with their health.

So, I went to Steph because I didn’t know how to help

them. I mean, I knew how I did it but that doesn’t mean it would work for them.

That’s when he asked me what I wanted to do? And I told him that I wanted to help them be the best person they can be, and not just as a fitness trainer but at life.

No matter what it is in life, it’s all about the mind first and then you just have to get down the consistency, whether it’s nutrition or whatever.

Stéphane: I told her that I thought she was ready to coach people, so we went back to do some more schooling to get an idea about elite level coaching.

Even today, we’re always still educating ourselves through research and we each have five mentors to just continue to help in that growth.

Everything has really just been a culmination of her backstory and my backstory. I had my defining moment at 16 and she had hers at 29.

It got to the point where it’s not just people we’re helping be the best they can be but also businesses, because after all a business is just a group of people that just need the right leadership.

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2.04ct	Radiant	GIA	–	E	VS ₂	\$ 30,000	\$ 19,000
3.52ct	Emerald Cut	GIA	–	G	VS ₁	\$ 70,000	\$ 58,000
3.61ct	Oval	GIA	–	I	SI ₁	\$ 55,000	\$ 43,000
3.64ct	Round	AGS	1-Excellent	D	SI ₁	\$ 110,000	\$ 64,000
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Photo by Anthony Richards

State Representative Kim Kendall was joined by several elected officials including St. Johns County Commissioners Clay Murphy, Ann Taylor, Sarah Arnold and Christian Whitehurst, as well as St. Augustine Mayor Nancy Sikes-Kline and St. Augustine Beach Mayor Dylan Rumrell during a press conference to discuss the recent proposed land swap.

Guana

Continued from 1

to spread less than a week ago, action quickly took place to make sure the community’s voice was heard regarding the issue including a protest effort where people came out with signs and posters and stood on the corner of State Road A1A and Mickler Road to help spread the word.

“By the grace of God and the heart of this community we were able to execute something very quickly,” Kendall said.

No proposed use for the swapped land was stated in the state documents, but private development is likely a motivation for the request. The properties that would

have been subject to the swap would have been located in St. Johns, Lafayette, Osceola and Volusia counties.

Kendall was joined by several elected officials including St. Johns County Commissioners Clay Murphy, Ann Taylor, Sarah Arnold and Christian Whitehurst, as well as St. Augustine Mayor Nancy Sikes-Kline and St. Augustine Beach Mayor Dylan Rumrell.

St. Johns County Commission chair Krista Keating-Joseph was also instrumental in helping the efforts against the proposed swap but was unable to attend the press conference due to a personal matter.

“We’re just a handful of people up here, and yes, we care about this community,



Photo courtesy of SaveGuanaNow.org

Members of the community came out with signs to protest the proposal at the corner of State Road A1A and Mickler Road on Saturday, May 17.

but we don’t have the impact if our community doesn’t kick in, and everybody kicked in,” Kendall said. “I have always said that St. Johns County is a big, small town. We have the benefits of a big city, but we have that small town feel of neighbor helping neighbor, and Guana is part of that family.”

According to the state Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the Guana River Wildlife Management Area contains mesic hammock, xenic hammock, scrub, mesic flatwoods, scrubby flatwoods, maritime hammock, depression marsh and basin swamp.

“As a native of Florida, this land means more to me than just what’s marked on a map,” Rumrell said. “I grew up fish-

ing the headwaters of the Guana River. I paddled those quiet waters and watched the sunsets over the marsh and felt the pull of a Redfish on my line. It’s part of who I am, and it’s part of who we are as a community.”

Kendall also wanted to make it clear that she believes the request did not fall under legislation that was passed in 2016 to address land swaps.

“It should have never been brought before the ARC (Acquisition and Restoration Council) and it is out of the spirit of the law for land swapping,” Kendall said. “In my opinion, this was a work around and I am committed toward legislation to figure out what we can button up to stop this from happening again.”

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This year's COA Centenarian Luncheon at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center was the most attended in the history of the event.

Centenarian

Continued from 1

have you here today, and to celebrate your longevity and your wisdom. Council on Aging is dedicated to helping our residents live their best possible life every day, and you honorees are a shining example of what it means to age well.”

According to Bruce Barber, master of ceremonies for the event, the combined age in the room was more than 6,000 years of life experience.

The centenarians included Josephine Trinca at 103, Shelia Winchester and

Josephine Steiner, both at 102, and Rita Bondanza, Robert Schuh and Luann Sterling who celebrated 101 years old.

Bingo continues to be one of Trinca’s favorite things to do and she makes sure to play it at least twice a week.

Food was a popular answer for what made life so special, as Bondanza said pasta and Steiner said her mother’s Hungarian goulash.

Sterling said that her family and friends are what has made her life so special, and the loudest laugh of the event came with Schuh’s answer of his birth as the most important event of his life.

Winchester recently turned 102 and she



Photos by Anthony Richards

The Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra Beach volunteered at the event.



St. Johns County Fire Rescue provided the honor guard at the event.

said that her happiest moment in her life was the end of World War II.

St. Johns County Fire Rescue provided the honor guard at the event, while The Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra Beach volunteered to serve food, and The Rev. Amy Slater of Christ Episcopal Church offered the invocation.

“We just need the basic things, and that’s to look around and see the beauty of this world and to be reminded that somebody is there to help you or that you can help somebody moving forward,” Slater said. “I encourage you to share your stories and remind us that what we do with our lives deeply matters no matter the life span.”



St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick and his wife Kendell attended the event.



Josephine Steiner shares a laugh as she’s honored as a centenarian.



The Pledge of Allegiance was said prior to the meal.

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What to do with
A BORED KID

THURSDAY, MAY 22, 2025 • PAGE 10

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Families enjoy Papa Johns pizza at OPE's Spring Family Night.

Ocean Palms springs into fun on Family Night

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Concerts in the Plaza is a free cultural event
presented by the City of St. Augustine

Students and families at Ocean Palms Elementary School had some spring in their step thanks to a recent Family Night, with inflatables, music, face paint, candy walking, art projects and more — not to mention the chance to dunk teachers and staff throughout the night, which is always a can't-miss experience.

Families enjoyed pizza from Papa Johns and meandered through the silent

Students and families at Ocean Palms Elementary School had some spring in their step thanks to a recent Family Night, with inflatables, music, face paint, candy walking, art projects and more — not to mention the chance to dunk teachers and staff throughout the night, which is always a can't-miss experience.

Families enjoyed pizza from Papa Johns and meandered through the silent

auction items on display. The book fair was open all night for those looking for a good book.

Family, friends and the otter community enjoyed this night of camaraderie, community and cheer.

Contributed photos



OPE students have their faces painted during this night of family fun.

Teachers and staff take the plunge as students attempt to dunk them!

Summer reading volunteers needed

If you are willing to spend a little time this summer helping others, there is an opportunity waiting for you. RSVP of St. Johns County is looking for community members to assist once a week in the summer reading program in the St. Johns County School District. Hours are flexible. If you are traveling this summer, you can help while you are in town.

“There are students who can greatly benefit from the help of those willing to give just a small amount of their time,” said Cheryl Freeman, RSVP director. “Assistance from community volunteers can make all the difference in helping these students succeed.”

Orientation will be provided, and background screening will be performed free of charge. For more information, contact RSVP at 904-547-3952 or Cheryl.Freeman@stjohns.k12.fl.us.

Jacksonville Dance Theatre plans summer dance intensive

Jacksonville Dance Theatre (JDT) has announced the return of its acclaimed summer intensive program, SHAPE/SHIFT 2025. Professional and pre-professional dancers ages 16 and up are invited to join JDT Artistic Director Rebecca R. Levy, resident choreographers, company dancers and special guest instructors for a transformative week of contemporary modern dance, July 28 to Aug. 1 at the Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ) South Campus.

Registration is now open, with limited spaces available; early registration is strongly encouraged.

This immersive five-day program offers dancers the opportunity to deepen their practice through contemporary and modern techniques while exploring composition, improvisation and choreography. The experience culminates in a professionally staged public performance on the evening of Aug. 1 at the Nathan H. Wilson Center for the Arts mainstage, showcasing work created during the week.

“SHAPE/SHIFT represents JDT’s commitment to nurturing the next generation of dance artists,” said Levy. “This intensive creates a space where dancers can challenge themselves technically while developing their unique artistic voices in a supportive and collaborative environment.”



Contributed photo

SHAPE/SHIFT 2025 Details

Times: 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. daily

Location: FSCJ South Campus, 11901

Beach Blvd., Jacksonville

Cost: \$550 per participant

Deadline to Register: June 15

Registration: jacksonvilledancetheatre.org/workshops-classes

Featured Faculty

The 2025 intensive features an exceptional faculty, including:

- Rebecca R. Levy — Choreographer, performer and educator whose work explores the intricacies of the mind, feminism and human dynamics through athleticism, humor and detailed movement. Levy co-founded Jacksonville Dance Theatre in 2012 and serves as artistic director, crafting dances, staging performances and fostering new talents. Her critically acclaimed choreographic works have

graced festivals, films, concerts and events worldwide.

- Eboné C. Amos — Assistant professor of African-American studies in the Theatre and Dance Department at Austin Peay State University, whose work interrogates the transformative power of the Black radical imagination through movement. Amos is a graduate from a highly competitive MFA dance program at Florida State University and has been staging works of dance in and around the Southern United States since 2010.

- Winter Bosanko — Educator, dance artist and somatic practitioner with more than a decade of dance education experience for students of all ages. Bosanko holds an MFA from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee where she was awarded the Advanced Opportunity Program Fellowship and was a JDT company dancer for seven seasons before becoming company manager in 2022.

- Susan Dodge — Former Paul Taylor Dance Company member, choreographer, educator and founder of the Amelia Island Dance Festival. She has choreographed musicals including “Fiddler on the Roof,” “Xanadu,” “The Drowsy Chaperone” and “Matilda” and made her directorial debut with “First Date” in June 2024.

- Jessica Plonka — Jacksonville native and company artist with JDT since 2021.

Plonka is a James Madison University graduate with dual degrees in dance and kinesiology. She serves on the dance faculty at LaVilla School of the Arts and Debbie’s Dance Company, specializing in modern, contemporary, jazz and competition dance.

- Emily Poli — Florida-born company artist and Jacksonville University graduate with a BFA and a minor in kinesiology. Poli’s professional experience includes contracts with Cleo Parker Robinson Dance Ensemble (Cleo II), Hannah Kahn Dance Company and Wonderbound in Denver, Colorado, before returning to Jacksonville where she performs with JDT while teaching at several local dance studios.

- Kristen Sholes Sullivan — JDT’s associate artistic director, choreographer and dance educator with more than 20 years of experience and an MFA from Florida State University. She danced professionally with Surfscapes Contemporary Dance Theatre from 2005 to 2014 and has performed internationally at theaters and festivals across Europe. Sullivan’s choreography has also been featured in festivals across the United States.

For more information or to register, go to jacksonvilledancetheatre.org/workshops-classes or contact Levy at rebecca@jacksonvilledancetheatre.org.



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Summer at the Cummer will begin May 30

The Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens has announced the return of its annual Summer at the Cummer event series, held on Friday evenings from May 30 through June 20.

Presented by Citi, Summer at the Cummer is a free series that activates the Cummer Museum's campus on Friday evenings from 4 to 9 p.m. Each week brings live music by some of the city's top musicians, dynamic art experiences by Northeast Florida creatives, hands-on art-making fun, playful lawn games and more.

Summer at the Cummer provides guests an opportunity to enjoy full access to the museum's historically significant

riverfront gardens and galleries featuring the permanent collection and special exhibitions, including "Knowing the West," organized by the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art.

"Citi Jacksonville is honored to be this year's presenting sponsor of Summer at the Cummer," said Citi Jacksonville Site Head Vickie Behan. "We're thrilled to continue supporting the Cummer Museum's commitment to providing accessible art, gardens and learning experiences for the entire community."

During each Summer at the Cummer event, attendees will be able to order food and beverages from the Cummer Café, including beer, wine and cocktails.



Guests will also have the opportunity to pre-order picnic baskets to enjoy the sunset on the river and dine picnic-style in the gardens.

"We are grateful to Citi for their long-standing partnership and for their support this year in providing this wonderful event series that honors our founder Ninah Cummer's vision to create a center of beauty for all," said Kimberly Noble, the interim George W. and Kathleen I. Gibbs Director and CEO. "Summer at the Cummer has something for everyone, and this year's lineup of musicians, artists and activities is going to be fantastic."

Live music is made possible by the Mildred Shafer Brown Memorial Fund.

The current schedule of artists and activities includes:

Friday, May 30

- 5:30 to 7 p.m. Visitors can participate in a weaving demonstration with looms and spinning wheels by the Jacksonville Weavers' Guild in Art Connections.
- 5 to 8 p.m. Garden activities and lawn games. Live music by musicians Chillakaya and Yale Dray.

Friday, June 6


- 5 to 8 p.m. Garden activities and lawn games. A special visit by Jax River City Pride in celebration of Pride Month. Live music by musicians Freddy for Peace and Scott Greenway.

Friday, June 13

- 5 to 6:30 p.m. Gullah Geechee storytelling and musical experience with Anastasia Ketchen.
- 5 to 8 p.m. Garden activities and lawn games. Live music by Akia Uwanda and Jesabel.

Friday, June 20

- 4 to 9 p.m. Garden activities, lawn games and live music by The Rip Currents and Arvid Smith.



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GUEST COLUMN

Helping Gen Z build smart money habits this summer

Submitted by First Florida Credit Union

Every summer the youth labor force grows by more than 2 million, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. With school out, students are looking to make some cash in their free time and graduates are entering the workforce, eager to launch their careers. Gen Z has one thing on their side, and that's time. Now is the perfect time to teach them smart money habits.

Studies show only 23% of Gen Z knows basic financial literacy. This includes budgeting, saving, credit and debit, banking basics and more. They'd prefer spending money on wants like travel and concerts than on essentials like rent and groceries. So, while they earn money this summer, it's the ideal moment to help them build a strong financial foundation that will serve them for years.

Finding a job is the first step. As Floridians, our beach towns are especially popular in the summer, drawing many to restaurants and golf courses. High school and college students can capitalize on roles like host, server, bartender assistant, cart attendant, pro shop staff or grounds crew. Beaches and pools are looking for lifeguards and swim coaches. Lawn care and landscaping jobs are also good choices. Lastly, teens can apply to work in retail where most stores are always in need of extra hands.

Once those paychecks start coming in, it's important for parents to step in and help teens manage their money. Without proper budgeting skills, those funds can disappear as quickly as they were earned. A good first step is



to open a student savings account specifically designated for summer income.

With a separate savings account comes lessons on budgeting. For teens earning their first paychecks, a simple approach could be saving 50%, spending 40% on things they enjoy now and setting aside 10% to give to charity — or start learning about investing.

Emphasize goal setting. Short-term goals look like a new phone or a concert. Long-term goals involve more complicated purchases like a car or college tuition. Simply having spending money once school is back in session can be a motivator for teens. The bottom line of every goal though is to save. Find what motivates your

child and build off of that.

Should you get your teen started with a credit card? If used responsibly, a credit card can help a teen build a credit history. However, set an initial low spending limit to prevent them from overextending themselves. If you're worried about accumulating debt, open a debit card for your teen instead. Debit cards give your teen, and you, immediate control over their spending.

As college graduates step into adulthood and begin their careers, it's important to understand the difference between seasonal work and long-term employment. Studies show only 20% of Gen Z is currently saving for retirement, despite this being the most crucial time to start because of the power of compound interest. Take time to explain to your teen how retirement plans work and encourage them to contribute, even if it's just 1% of their salary. Skipping retirement savings is one of the most common mistakes Gen Z workers make.

You can also help prep your college grad by ensuring they are contributing to an emergency fund, prioritizing student loan repayments (if applicable) and creating a post-college budget that accounts for rent, transportation and groceries.

Summer presents an ideal opportunity for both high school students and college graduates to not only earn money but also to learn valuable financial lessons. Parents and mentors have a critical role in guiding Gen Z to develop responsible money habits, making sure they balance immediate enjoyment with long-term financial security. By helping them navigate these issues, we can set them up for a lifetime of financial success.

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Diane's Natural Market sits on S Ponce De Leon Blvd.



The Diane's team cares about the community they serve.



The store supplies various natural grocery, supplement, and health & beauty options.

Diane's Natural Market brings holistic living to the community

By Holly Tishfield

Head south on Highway 1 in St. Augustine, not far from the hustle and bustle of the Historic District, and you'll spot a green logo with a cartoon carrot marking the location of Diane's Natural Market.

If you remember it as a small, natural grocery store with a similar name on the island side of St. Augustine from a few decades ago, you're thinking about the right place.

Over 30 years ago, Diane's was a tiny market selling local foods. Today, it's

changed ownership and location, though it's only continued to expand the unique offerings of organic grocery items and holistic health and beauty products.

"It's like walking into your family's house where you can get everything you need," said April Monaco, the wellness manager at Diane's Natural Market.

The market is unlike any of its kind, providing a natural-based approach to health and wellness centered around the spirit of healthy living in the Northeast Florida community.

Beyond an impressive selection of

organic grocery items such as Food For Life's Ezekiel 4:9 bread and California Farms' Organic Almond Milk, Diane's Natural Market stocks an impressive selection of vitamins and supplements from acclaimed brands.

The shelves are filled with bottles of Garden of Life and Nature's Way supplements/vitamins, but the market also carries its own line from a private label manufacturer.

If you are looking through those many vitamins and supplements but you are not quite sure what you need, there will be an

experienced employee in the department ready to offer assistance.

"If you go to a CVS or a Walmart or even a Publix to get over-the-counter vitamins and supplements, you don't always have somebody to talk to," said Monaco. "We always have somebody knowledgeable or with a degree on-staff so you can ask whatever questions you need."

Diane's Natural Market is unique in that each product that comes through the

DIANE'S continues on **Page 16**

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The whole body cryotherapy cabin, which changes theme depending on the season.



Local Wellness offers a variety of services and treatment options.

Contributed photos

Feel your best at Local Wellness



The owners of Local Wellness, Lauren and Casey Cowgill.

By Holly Tishfield

Step into Local Wellness and discover not just an artfully designed space complete with cabanas and cozy seating, but a team of educated professionals dedicated to helping customers look and feel their very best.

Lauren and Casey Cowgill opened Local Wellness at 2 Fairfield Blvd, Suite 9 in Ponte Vedra Beach just about three years ago. Despite neither of the two having much experience in the industry, the Cowgills were looking for something to invest in that would keep them connected to the community they love so much.

Lauren Cowgill, along with her partner in business and crime Stephanie Evans, researched the industry and ultimately

decided to go with the wellness route as opposed to the medspa route.

“I’m really proud of the grassroots effort we’ve created,” Cowgill said. “It’s been so amazing to see how this place has grown. It’s been an amazing journey.”

Local Wellness offers a wide variety of treatment options tailored to making self-care possible, personalized, and a priority.

The facility is home to two saunas,

LOCAL WELLNESS continues on Page 16

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Diane's

Continued from 14

door has been carefully vetted by experts to ensure that there are no harmful ingredients or additives, whether that product is for skincare or a new kind of frozen pizza.

“Sometimes there’s something we want to bring in, but we can’t because there’s something in there that we know isn’t healthy for the people in our community,” Monaco said.

The market works with local vendors to supply a holistic selection of body care products such as soaps, shampoos, and skincare. Jax Organix and Grass Fed Skin are just a few of their popular community-based products.

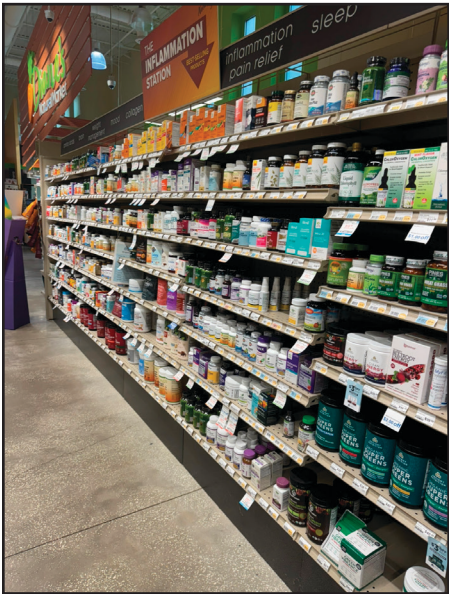
Makeup-wise, the store is proud to carry the Mineral Fusion brand and will soon be home to Gabriel Cosmetics. “Supplying good ingredients and feeding good people is our kind of thing,” Monaco said.

After Diane’s moved landside, it switched ownership a few times until it ended up in the hands of Andrew and Coleen Noel. In the past 3.5 years, the new owners have continued to grow the business and help it reach its full potential for providing care to the Northeast Florida community.

Diane’s Natural Market is more than just a community grocery store, it is a hub for health-conscious living, a place where personalized wellness meets trusted, natural products.



Organic, healthy foods at Diane's Natural Market



Contributed photos
The aisles of vitamins and supplement

Local Wellness

Continued from 15

a sauna pod and a sauna cabin, both geared towards detoxification, inflammation treatment, and muscle recovery. A Vodder Presotherapy machine is also an option, offering assistance with blood flow and lymphatic drainage, as well as a cryotherapy cabin, which happens to be one of the facility’s most popular services with student athletes in the area.

Local Wellness has a registered nurse on staff to administer IV therapy and other injectables, as well as microneedling and specialized facials. There is a trained acupuncturist, nurse practitioner, massage therapist(s), and mental health counselor who also provide services out of the Ponte Vedra Beach facility.

“It’s a whole combination of different people in this industry who have all



come together for a common cause,” said Cowgill. In the few years since opening its doors, Local Wellness has provided relief and specialized services for hundreds of community members. Cowgill and her staff listen to what the community needs and will add services/treatments suited to assist, such as the hyperbaric chamber that’s set to open soon.

“Our clientele has been nothing short of phenomenal. They’re 100% behind us,” said Cowgill. “We’ve built the most amazing relationships with these people, and we consider them our friends and family.” Local Wellness runs specials on treatments and services and encourages interested customers to follow them on social media for access to exclusive deals. Customers can also check out membership options on the business’s website.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Reminiscing about those good old days

To the editor:

Now in my 80s and having long since passed the crest of the hill, I find myself drifting back in thought to my days growing up in Jackson, New Jersey, in the late '40s and '50s. I still recall getting off the

school bus on a perfect June day. With books and school clothes quickly put away, it didn't take long putting my old Schwinn bicycle to good use. During the months of July and August if we were in for a really hot day, I remember those ubiquitous locusts (we always called the hot-birds) giving us advanced warning with their noisy unrelenting trill that we were in for a real scorcher. All of which would invariably

lead my mother to say, "It's going to be a barnburner today." I recollect my first job as a kid was picking strawberries at one of the local farms that didn't end well. Because of my propensity to eat more than I picked, I remember being informed the next day that my services were no longer required and my employment was unceremoniously terminated. I also remember back then, daisies and black-eyed Susans seemed to be everywhere, and many of our roads were lined with those magnificent tiger lilies dressed in their hue of orange and black. And was there anything more intoxicating on a June night than the scent of wild honey-suckle on the night air? At dusk, we would be entertained by nature's electric company-lightning bugs, which set both fields and woods aglow on those warm summer evenings. With mason jars in hand, it was "game on" to see who could catch the most, only to release them a short time later unharmed. During those days, it seemed there was always someone in their backyard cooking hot dogs and hamburgers. The fun really started, however, when the watermelon was brought out. Things quickly deteriorated into a watermelon seed-spitting contest — who could spit the seeds the farthest. It's hard to convey to the uninitiated, the pride and prestige

attached to being recognized by your peers as the best! When occasionally we overindulged with the tasty baked beans, it sometimes led to some unpleasant after-effects. We even managed to turn that into a contest, which usually resulted in inextinguishable laughter, at least among the participants. Let's just say we didn't make our mothers proud. Nightfall also awakened our neighborhood symphony — crickets! Competition for the night stage was intense. Of all the nocturnal performers, however, I think the katydids with their continuous unbroken night song on those long hot summer nights wins hands down. To me, a summer night wouldn't be the same without them. Unfortunately, my youthful exuberance and contest days have long since passed and now remain just a pleasant and delightful memory of a bygone time.

Borden Applegate (ret.)
Jacksonville Beach

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space that inspires

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

KATHY’S GARDENING GUIDE

Shade Landscaping

"Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago."
- Warren Buffett



By Kathy Esfahani

As Florida is the “Sunshine State,” we are always talking about plants that need full sun or love the heat! But, it is also important to choose the right plants for shady areas of your landscape.

When planning for the shady portion of your yard, start by watching how the sun moves across your landscape. Take notes! Depending on the path of the sun, your area could get 4 hours of direct sunlight per day combined with partial shade during other times. Also, notice how dense your shade is and, therefore, how light or dark it is at ground level.



Shade Landscape

Shade tolerant plants grow well if they receive fewer than 4 hours of sun, especially if these hours are during a cooler time of day. They grow in shade that moves - for example, shade caused

by tall trees - or partial shade throughout the day. These plants prosper in an environment where the soil drains rather than becoming too soggy.

These tips will help guide your shade landscaping:

- **Know your shade:** Understanding the amount of shade and indirect light your area receives is the biggest key to the success of a shady part of your landscape. All plants need sunlight to survive, so look for areas with indirect sunlight instead of dark areas with overly wet soil.
- **Light and Color:** Just because an area is shaded, don’t feel like you are limited to only green plants! There are quite a few plants, such as Caladium, with beautiful color to add to a shade landscape.
- **Mixture of Heights:** A mixture of ground cover with medium to tall plants will create depth for a lush shade garden.

Several plant varieties love the shade! When planning your shade landscape, be sure to consider Arboricola, Asiatic

Photos provided by Kathy’s Creative Gardens & Nursery



Begonia

Jasmine, Begonia, Bromeliads, Caladium, Canna Lilies, Cast Iron plants, Coleus, Farfugium, Foxtail Fern, Ginger (ornamental and variegated), Hawaiian Ti, Impatiens, Liriope, and Variegated Flax Lily.

Enjoy the shade!

Flower of the Week: Begonia

Please email Kathy at kathys.creativegardens@gmail.com for any questions or gardening tips you would like to see in the future.

For more information & ideas, visit our Nursery in Ponte Vedra Beach!
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Port in the Storm Homeless Youth Center to host Keys of Hope Gala in June

By Holly Tishfield

St. Francis House and Port in the Storm Homeless Youth Center are set to celebrate the youth center's sixth anniversary this summer with the first-ever Keys of Hope Gala.

The gala is presented by Bronx House Pizza and will take place on Saturday, June 28, at the picturesque Ancient City Farmstead in St. Augustine from 6 to 10 p.m.

Port in the Storm Homeless Youth Center is the only one of its kind in St. John's County, providing beds and resources to homeless young people throughout the county. It currently operates with 24 beds, but the shelter typically serves 30-35 young people per night.

"Our ultimate goal is to help homeless youth find permanent, stable housing," said Joy Casem, Director of Development at Port in the Storm Homeless Youth Center.

The Keys of Hope Gala later this summer will not only serve as a celebration, but a fundraiser to collect crucial funds necessary for the well-being of the facility



Contributed photo

and the youth that it supports.

The gala's tagline, "YOU are the KEY to unlocking HOPE for homeless youth in

St. John's County," rings true throughout the theme of the gala.

During the event, guests can enjoy beer,

KEYS OF HOPE GALA



wine, and signature cocktails along with delicious food from Bronx House Pizza. There will be music, dancing, and both silent and live auctions for bidding. Guests can also participate in a Key Raffle, where they will purchase a key in the hopes that it's the lucky match for a treasure chest of goodies.

Port in the Storm Homeless Youth Center's goal is to raise \$100,000 and see at least 250 guests attend the gala, though there is always room for a larger outcome.

The Keys for Hope Gala is still looking for sponsors and invites interested parties to look over sponsorship levels and opportunities.

Individual tickets for the gala are \$125 per person and can be purchased at www.stfrancisshelter.org/events/keyssofhope/.

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Dancin’ in the Streets tradition continues in Neptune Beach

The 38th Annual Dancin’ in the Street took place Saturday, May 17 at the Beaches Town Center in Neptune Beach. The event featured live music from several local bands, food trucks, a kids’ zone, arts and crafts vendors and beverage tents. There was something for the whole family to enjoy.

Photos by Susan Griffin





Author Quang X. Pham speaks on his journey "from Saigon to Sawgrass."



Quang X. Pham greets a guest at the party.



Amy Powell speaks at the gathering.

Book launch party launched for local author



A special cake was created to celebrate Quang X. Pham's new book, "Underdog Nation: Zero in on Effort and Results for Success."

On May 8, Sawgrass Country Club member Amy Powell hosted a book launch party for Quang X. Pham. A standing-room-only crowd enjoyed Pham's talk about his "From Saigon to Sawgrass" journey, which is covered in his second book, "Underdog Nation: Zero in on Effort and Results for Success," published last month to excellent reviews. Here are some pictures from the event.

"Underdog Nation" has already hit several Amazon bestselling categories.

Contributed photos



The audience gathers to hear Quang X. Pham's presentation.



Quang X. Pham speaks with attendees.



Amy Powell and Quang X. Pham at the podium.



Guests attending Quang X. Pham's book launch party and presentation about his journey "from Saigon to Sawgrass."

KEYS OF HOPE GALA

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St. Johns County Offers Free Memorial Day Weekend Beach Shuttles

Memorial Day weekend is one of the busiest holiday weekends on St. Johns County's beaches, and to reduce traffic congestion, St. Johns County Beach Services will offer two free shuttle services for beach goers.

The first shuttle location will run from St. Augustine Beach City Hall located at 2200 A1A S. to the fishing pier parking lot and the second will run from Cornerstone Park at 1046 A1A N. and go to Mickler's parking lot.

Both shuttle services will be available for free from May 24 to May 26 and operate from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. each of the days.

The St. Johns County Sheriff's Office, the St. Augustine Beach Police Department, and St. Johns County Marine Rescue personnel will patrol the beaches throughout the weekend, and St. Johns County Marine Rescue lifeguards will be stationed along the beaches from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Residents should be aware of beach flags displayed, which will indicate water and surf conditions.

However, the absence of a flag does not mean there is no danger present, and beachgoers are advised to see a go to a staffed lifeguard tower to find out local conditions.

On-beach driving hours are 8 a.m. and 7:30 p.m., and all vehicle traffic must remain in the designated driving lanes.

Beach driving conditions can change throughout the day at each access point, so beachgoers are encouraged to monitor daily updates on driving conditions by following @SJCBeaches on Facebook and X and by downloading the SJC Connect mobile app.

Residents and visitors can also monitor the St. Johns County Beach Services section of the County website for beach access updates.

Clerk's Office Welcomes Former State Senator Travis Hutson as Senior Advisor for Intergovernmental Affairs

The St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller's Office is thrilled to announce that former Florida State Senator Travis Hutson has joined the team as senior advisor for intergovernmental affairs, effective Monday, May 19.

"It's not often that someone with Travis' dedication to public service and legislative accomplishments steps into a role like this at the county level," Clerk Brandon J. Patty said. "We are honored to welcome him to the team, and I look forward to working alongside him as



we continue to strengthen our relationships with local and state partners."

Hutson brings over a decade of public service experience to the position, having served in the Florida Legislature

since 2012, first as a representative and later as a senator.

During his tenure, he played a key role in shaping economic, environmental, and infrastructure policy throughout the state. In 2023, he was named "Senate Legislator of the Year" by the Florida Clerks & Comptrollers Association after sponsoring Senate Bill 1130, which authorized clerks' offices to retain a larger portion of fees, enhancing their ability to serve residents more effectively.

As senior advisor for intergovern-

mental affairs, Hutson will help guide strategic initiatives and strengthen collaboration between the Clerk's Office and government entities at both the local and state levels.

"I'm honored to join Clerk Patty and the Office," Hutson said. "As a St. Johns County local, I'm excited to come back to my roots and serve the community that has always meant so much to me. I look forward to continuing my public service in this new capacity and supporting the Clerk's Office in its governmental needs."

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Photos by Jay Gardner

Putting it all on the line: Mickler's hosts triathlon

By Jay Gardner

The 2025 Game On! Ponte Vedra Beach Olympic and Sprint Triathlon was held at Mickler's Landing on Sunday, May 18.

More than 230 athletes competed in the event with another 39 participating in the Duathlon (run, bike, run).

The triathlon featured both sprint and Olympic distances, and the weather was perfect at the start of the race for the swim segment, but by the time the run began the heat wave the area has been experiencing started to make its presence felt on athletes and spectators alike.

The triathlon course for the race featured a swim at Mickler's Beach (.25 miles sprint, .93 miles Olympic), followed by a bike ride on A1A south (11 miles sprint, 24.8 Olympic), and lastly, a run up Ponte Vedra Boulevard (3.1 miles sprint, 6.2 miles Olympic).

In the women's sprint triathlon race, an exciting showdown emerged when Wendy Fejfar put in the sixth quickest bike split overall in the sprint distance with an average speed of 22.8 mph to lead out of

transition No. 2.

However, Ella Harmon would overcome the 37-second deficit to take the top step of the podium with a time of 1:08:58. In second place was Naomi Ventura with Wendy Fejfar rounding out the podium.

In the men's sprint race, a similar race took shape with the winner, Ryan Buzby, seeing his nearly two-minute advantage after transition No. 1 being evaporated by a blistering bike split by Alex Brown who set the quickest time with an average speed of 25.2 mph.

However, Buzby's scorching pace of 5:07 min/mile pace would overcome the nearly one-minute disadvantage at the end of the second transition to bring home the overall win with a time of 59:51.

Alex Brown came in second and Luke Klingenberg took the final step of the podium.

Staying with the men's Olympic distance, Luis Ortiz led from start to finish with a winning time of 1:58:56.

With his best overall bike speed of 26.1 mph over the 24.8 miles, Ortiz had built up nearly a seven-minute cushion to



second-place finisher John Richardson.

Richardson gave up a little bit of time compared to the third-place finisher Eric Lashway on the bike segment but left transition No. 2 with nearly a 40-second advantage.

Richardson would pull away on the run thanks to his second-best overall run pace of 6:15 min/mile.

Lashway was the only other athlete to break the 60-minute mark with the second overall quickest bike split at 24.8 mph.

However, it was the women's Olympic distance that took the honors for the best race with first and second place covered by just six seconds.

The racing was close right from the go. After exiting transition No. 1, the top three finishers were within about one minute of each other.

Jennifer Sylva launched herself into the lead by three and a half minutes after she put in the fourth quickest bike split of all athletes competing at the Olympic distance with an average speed of 24.3 mph over the 24.8 mile bike course.

However, Andrea Richardson needed every bit of the 6.2 mile run course and fourth overall quickest run pace at 6:32 min/mile pace to eat into the advantage and take the top step of the podium.

Catherine Rueppel, who led after the first transition would round out the podium.

Congratulations to all the athletes who participated and a big thank to all of the volunteers for making it a great day.

The complete results can be found by going to www.secondwindtiming.com/results.

The next Game On! event will be in St. Augustine for another triathlon on July 27.

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Mike Buresh to speak at Coastal Friends luncheon

Coastal Friends will host Mike Buresh, chief meteorologist on Action News Jax (WJAX) and WFOX, as its guest speaker at the June 4 luncheon. Buresh will speak about weather patterns and concerns here in Florida as we approach the summer and hurricane months. He also posts a blog titled “Talking the Tropics with Mike” during hurricane season June 1 to Nov. 30. Buresh was named 2024 National Weatherperson of the Year by the Federal Alliance of Safe Homes.

The luncheon runs from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and will be held at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Parkway, Ponte Vedra Beach. It is open to members and guests, as well as the community.

Lunch consists of caesar salad, chicken marsala, mashed potatoes and grilled jumbo asparagus, and chef’s choice for dessert. The cost to attend is \$25. Reservations must be made in advance by contacting the luncheon chairman at bartshar@comcast.net as soon as possible. The deadline for checks to be received is Friday morning, May 30.

Established in 1998, Coastal Friends is a social club comprised of women who live in Ponte Vedra Beach, Nocatee, Jacksonville Beach, Neptune Beach, Atlantic Beach, Jacksonville and the surrounding area, and St. Augustine. Some of the activities offered are: adventures and outings, book club, bunco, canasta, happy hour, lunch in, lunch out, mah jongg, samba and wine socials.

Luncheons are held on the first Wednesday of every month, except for July and August. New members are welcome throughout the year. Contact brookemeister@msn.com for more information on how to join.

Jacksonville woman named Military Spouse of the Year

Hire Heroes USA, a national nonprofit organization that empowers U.S. military members, veterans and spouses to succeed in the civilian workforce, hosted its third annual Empowerment Gala on May 8. The event celebrates individuals and partners who have made outstanding contributions to veterans and their spouses in the transition to civilian careers.

“We are proud to recognize this year’s honorees,” said Ross Dickman, CEO of Hire Heroes USA. “Their achievements reflect the resilience of the veteran community and inspire us all. Together, we celebrate our mission to empower veterans and their families for success in civilian life.”

The Empowerment Gala recognized outstanding partners and individuals including Verda Smith of Jacksonville, who was named Military Spouse of the Year.

Smith is a dedicated health care professional with more than a decade of experience as a physician assistant in family medicine, primary care and occupational medicine, embodying resilience and determination.

After the sudden loss of her veteran husband in 2023, Smith displayed extraordinary strength by navigating her grief while pursuing her career aspirations. Through unwavering commitment and a steadfast belief in her abilities, she secured her dream role, where she assesses service members in the medical board separation process.

Hire Heroes USA offers free, personalized one-on-one coaching, resume assistance, interview preparation and mentoring to military members, veterans and military spouses.

The organization maintains a job board, hosts virtual career fairs and works directly with employers to secure job placements for clients. Hire Heroes has facilitated more than 95,000 confirmed hires since the organization was founded in 2005, including nearly 14,000 job placements in 2024.

For more information, go to hireheroesusa.org.

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The Ponte Vedra Recorder, celebrating 55 years of community news excellence, has launched our seventh annual **BEST OF THE BEST of Ponte Vedra, 32081 & 32082.**

YOU, our valued readers, now have the chance to nominate your favorite businesses in various categories online. Online voting begins June 20th after nominations are complete.

HURRY, last day to nominate is June 19th!



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www.pontevedrarecorder.com/bestof2025

Nemours program addresses literacy challenge

Children who fall behind in reading don't just struggle in school — they are also at higher risk for chronic illness and mental health issues later in life. A new survey commissioned by Nemours Children's Health and conducted by The Harris Poll reveals that early-grade teachers recognize the crisis, but they don't feel they have the tools or training they need to address it.

"Investing in early childhood education, particularly in literacy, is one of the most effective strategies to improve long-term health outcomes," said Kara Odom Walker, MD, executive vice president and chief population health officer at Nemours Children's Health. "These survey results show just how urgently educators need effective tools so every child can build strong reading skills and a strong foundation for lifelong health."

Teachers sound the alarm

In the national survey of more than 300 U.S. teachers certified in grades K-3:

- 84% said they are concerned about the reading skills of students entering their classrooms.
- About half of students on average enter their classrooms reading at grade level.

The educators also highlighted the significant gaps in the types of tools available for early literacy instruction:

- Only 26% of teachers say they are highly satisfied with the literacy tools they have.
- More experienced teachers are the least satisfied — 19% of those with 10 or more years in the classroom expressed dissatisfaction, compared to 6% of newer teachers.
- More than 90% say they see value in multi-sensory learning and screen-free instruction options.
- 41% report that available literacy programs lack engaging content.

Small-group support lacking

One-on-one and small-group instruction is a proven method for helping struggling readers, yet:

- Only 55% of teachers surveyed said they can offer small-group instruction.
- The average amount of time spent on small-group and one-on-one support each day is 30 minutes or less.

These barriers further limit opportunities for personalized support in the classroom and underscore the urgent

need for more effective, research-based literacy support in early education.

Impact on health

Early literacy isn't just an academic concern, it's a public health issue. Roughly 90% of a child's brain development occurs before age 5. Children who are not reading at grade level by first grade have only a 10% chance of catching up by fourth grade.

Nationwide reading scores are at historic lows. According to the 2024 National Assessment of Educational Progress, only 60% of fourth graders and 67% of eighth graders are reading at basic or better levels — the lowest in more than 30 years.

Reading BrightStart!

Nemours Children's Health surveyed teachers to better understand their needs and how Nemours Children's Reading BrightStart! program could fill instructional gaps. The literacy program, tailored for infants through first grade, includes:

- Multi-sensory, screen-free curriculum.
- Educator training and professional development.
- A family-focused literacy website with a preschool reading screener.

Since its launch 20 years ago, the program's successes include:

- 295,000-plus children supported
- 5,260-plus early childhood educators trained
- 38 states reached
- In repeated studies of 3,300 children, two-thirds caught up to their peers after using the curriculum.

"At Nemours Children's, we're committed to whole-child health — our vision to go beyond offering the best in medical care to help every child reach their full potential," said Allison Gertel-Rosenberg, vice president and chief policy and prevention officer at Nemours Children's Health. "This survey shows that educators recognize the urgent need for stronger literacy support, but it will take commitment from school boards, policymakers and communities to get it right. Investing in early literacy isn't just about better education; it's about better health for generations to come."

Learn more about Reading BrightStart! at nemours.org/reading-brightstart.html.



Contributed photos

Staff members at Ocean Palms enjoyed a week filled with treats and celebration.

Ocean Palms brings sunshine to staff

Ocean Palms celebrated Staff Appreciation Week with nothing but sunshine for its sun-sational staff. The sun rose with a breakfast from Chick-fil-a and coffee from Starbucks

on Monday. The next ray of sunshine came with cookies, brownies and fruit from Trasca for a treat Tuesday. On Wednesday, families pooled their resources to provide the staff with \$100

Amazon gift cards. Thursday brought a catered lunch from Teriyaki Madness, and, finally, the sun set with ice cream from Millie’s ice cream truck on Friday.

It was a sun-filled week that brightened the days of OPE’s staff because they bring light to the students each and every day.



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THURSDAY, MAY 22, 2025 • PAGE 28

www.PonteVedraRecorder.com



Sylvan Learning opens St. Augustine location

Sylvan Learning held a ribbon-cutting ceremony with the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce as part of the grand opening of its St. Augustine location at 585 International Golf Parkway, Suite 7.

Photos courtesy of St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce



63 skilled-trades professionals graduate from program

The Northeast Florida Builders Association (NEFBA) celebrated the graduation of 63 apprentices from its nationally recognized apprenticeship program on Tuesday, May 6, at the University of North Florida. This milestone event marked another successful year of developing highly trained, workforce-ready

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professionals across the construction trades.

The program offers four-year training tracks in electrical, plumbing, HVAC and carpentry. Through a combination of classroom instruction and paid on-the-job training, participants graduate with the skills and certifications necessary to launch long-term careers in the construction industry.

Christina Thomas, NEFBA's director of workforce education, commended the graduates' journey and achievements.

"It's been inspiring to watch these individuals grow from trainees to skilled-trades professionals," she said. "Their

work ethic and commitment embody the values NEFBA is proud to foster and grow."

In support of its continued growth, NEFBA recently announced the acquisition of a 43,000-square-foot facility at 4932 Sunbeam Road, which will become the future home of the NEFBA Workforce Education Center. This state-of-the-art campus will feature classrooms, hands-on training labs and a 300-person auditorium, offering expanded opportunities for apprentices and elevating workforce development across Northeast Florida.

The building will play a pivotal role in

NEFBA's "Together We Build" campaign, a fundraising initiative to support renovations and help train the next generation of construction professionals.

For more information on how to participate and contribute, email build@nefba.com.

The program, which began in 1973, continues to grow in partnership with local employers, schools and community leaders, helping to fill the demand for a skilled workforce in Northeast Florida. NEFBA is committed to bridging the skilled-labor gap while empowering individuals with rewarding, high-demand career paths.

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April saw increased balance in housing market

Northeast Florida's housing market continued to stabilize in April, with growing inventory giving buyers more choices across the region. While home prices edged up slightly, the overall market showed healthier dynamics as we continue to see many new listings become available. These shifts suggest a move toward a more balanced market, offering opportunities for both buyers and sellers.

The median sales price for single-family homes in Northeast Florida's six-county region increased by 2.9% since March, rising to \$389,000. This caused the Home Affordability Index to fall to a score of 67, a 2.9% decrease from March.

"Buyers and sellers alike must remember that these shifts toward a balanced market are good overall and indicative of a healthy marketplace," said 2025 NEFAR President Mario Gonzalez.

In April, closed sales for single-family homes totaled 1,825 transactions, while pending sales were at 1,437. There were 3,106 new listings in the month of April.

Since March, the active inventory of single-family homes increased by 10.2% to 9,012 properties. This is a drastic increase from the previous year, as the number of properties has grown exponentially by 24.4% since April 2024. This rise in inventory from 2024 is a positive change for buyers, as they have many



options to choose from. The median number of days on the market increased to 44 days, a 29.4% increase from March, indicating homes selling slightly slower than they did last month.

"This increased inventory is a welcomed change for buyers who couldn't buy a home in the extraordinarily competitive market just a few years ago," said Gonzalez.

In St. Johns County, April's median price for single-family homes rose to \$557,990, a 1.8% increase from March.

Homes spent a median of 46 days on the market. Closed sales increased by 1.1% to 449, with pending sales now at 356.

There were 840 new listings, while active inventory increased by 14% to 2,528 homes, representing a 5.6-month supply. The Home Affordability Index fell slightly to 47, as St. Johns County remains the most expensive county in the region.

In Duval County, April showed a 5.9% increase since March in the median price of single-family homes, now at \$338,920.

Sales of homes decreased in speed in April, with the median days on the market rising 32.8% to 39 days. While closed sales fell 8.3% to 934, pending sales fell 30% to 726.

New listings were at 1,595, and there was a 9.9% climb in active inventory, now at 4,352 homes — a 4.7-month supply. The Home Affordability Index decreased since March by 6.1% to 77.

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 higher 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.

The source for all data in this article is NEFAR.



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GUEST COLUMN

Ask these four questions to help you prepare for retirement



Contributed photo

Written by/for Wells Fargo Advisors

To determine how much you will need to fund your retirement, it's helpful to estimate what your budget will look like. These four questions could help you identify your retirement lifestyle and plan for the related costs.

1. What will I be doing?

- Do I plan to continue working past age 65 or after I reach my full retirement age? Full time or part time?

- Are there hobbies I want to pursue that will either cost money or make money?
- Is there volunteer work that may also have costs associated?
- Do I plan to travel? Where?
- Are there things I enjoy that have related costs?

2. Where will I be living?

- Will I stay in my current home or downsize to something smaller or a rental property?
- Will I move to a retirement community or assisted living facility?
- Will I sell my home and replace it with an RV or other alternative living option?

3. What situations could impact my expenditures?

- What health care coverage do I need for my health conditions?
- Do I have an emergency fund for unexpected situations such as a health care crisis or property loss due to a natural disaster?
- What if I stop working sooner than

expected?

- What happens if I experience a significant income loss?

4. What barriers are keeping me from investing?

- I have nothing extra to invest.
- I have education loans or other debt.
- I don't know how to start an investment plan.
- I have time to start saving later.

Next steps

Prepare rather than panic. Create an outline from your answers to these questions. It should give you the framework to calculate the income you may need to support your retirement lifestyle.

Decide to adjust your spending patterns today. Choose something you really don't need and redirect that amount into your retirement savings. Take advantage of growth potential over time. Pay yourself first instead of spending money on something that won't support your future retirement needs. Creating that nest egg now

could reduce your stress about money.

Start or add to an emergency fund. Even if the amount seems very small, it's important to take the first step. As that amount grows and the behavior becomes a habit, you will likely gain confidence and momentum in your investment activities.

Meet with a financial advisor to review your answers and turn your outline into a plan to help you work toward your goals.

This article was written by/for Wells Fargo Advisors and provided courtesy of Ponte Vedra Wealth Management Group in Ponte Vedra Beach at 904-273-7918.

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Berkshire Hathaway celebrates Palm Coast offices

Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Network Realty recently celebrated the grand opening of its Palm Coast offices with ribbon-cutting ceremonies.

More than 100 clients, realtors, employees, Chamber members and community leaders were on hand to celebrate the firm's expansion and newest offices, the 10th and 11th locations of the business.

"Our growth into the Palm Coast community is an exciting new chapter for our company," said Ann King, Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices

Florida Network Realty president. "Our new Palm Coast offices demonstrate our continued commitment to elevate and enhance the services that we provide to our clients and communities throughout Northeast Florida."

The new offices in Palm Coast are located at 2 Florida Park Drive (the Palm Coast West Office) and east of the Intracoastal Waterway at 5048 Ocean Shore Boulevard N. (the Palm Coast Beach Office.)



Contributed photo

Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Network Realty recently celebrated the grand opening of its Palm Coast Beach office with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

BERKSHIRE continues on Page 31



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Baptist Beaches once again recognized for prioritizing patient safety

Baptist Medical Center Beaches has been recognized again for its steadfast commitment to safety, quality and transparency. The hospital has earned its 13th straight “A” safety ranking from The Leapfrog Group, an independent non-profit organization dedicated to helping consumers make informed choices in their health care.

The “A” rating places Baptist Beaches among the top 32% of hospitals nationwide. It is one of 113 hospitals in the country and only one of 15 in Florida to have received top marks consistently since spring 2019.

“Our patients’ safety and wellbeing are

our top priorities,” said Jarret Dreicer, hospital president of Baptist Beaches. “This recognition is a testament to the dedication of our team for consistently delivering the highest standard of care to those who entrust us with their health.”

The Hospital Safety Grade from The Leapfrog Group assigns letter grades based on hospitals’ performance measures and processes designed to protect patient safety and improve outcomes and experiences. The independent grading system helps patients make informed decisions to protect themselves and their families. This program is peer-reviewed, fully transparent and free to the public.

Letter grades of “A” through “F” are calculated using nearly 30 national performance measures from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, combined with additional information Baptist Health voluntarily submits for the overall score.

“Patient safety is a continuous journey, not a one-time goal, and it demands our collective commitment every day,” said Jeremy Goodman, MD, vice president and system quality officer at Baptist Health. “Earning top marks yet again is a moment of great pride for our team whose compassion and dedication, both behind the scenes and at the bedside, creates a safe environment for our patients.”

Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grades are released twice a year, in the spring and fall, with nearly 3,000 hospitals across the United States receiving a rating.

The score takes into consideration:

- Process measures (how a hospital gives patients a recommended treatment, including the responsiveness of hospital staff)
- Structural measures (the environment where patients receive care)
- Outcome measures (what happens to a patient while receiving care)

To learn more about Leapfrog Hospital Safety Grades, go to hospitalsafetygrade.org.

National accreditation piles up for 904 Home Watch

For the third year, 904 Home Watch has earned accreditation from the National Home Watch Association for its home watch services.

The NHWA was formed in 2009 in order to establish and maintain the highest industry standards for home watch and absentee homeowner services throughout the United States and Canada.

Home watch is a visual inspection of a home or property, looking for obvious issues, which means that it is a service that “keeps an eye on things” at your vacation or primary home while you are not in residence.

All principals of association accredited member companies are background-checked, insured, and bonded.

904 Home Watch started under the guidance of owner Bob Straub who earned a bachelor’s degree in economics from Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Following graduation, he entered a



career in the retail business. It was there that he built his foundation for understanding the value of customer service and delivering on a promise.

Over the last two decades, Straub has worked in the real estate industry in a variety of roles, primarily in the general brokerage and new home construction arenas.

As he transitioned into general brokerage in 2000, he took the significance of customer service and the power of promise with him.

He built his business in Baltimore, Maryland, using customer service and promise as cornerstones, and in 2002, familial changes had Straub and his family relocating to Charlotte, North Carolina.

He worked for a national builder, first in

sales, and then continued his evolution on the operations side by becoming a project manager, overseeing sales, marketing, construction, warranty, and accounting for a single community.

In 2012, Straub’s family moved to Northeast Florida, and he continued working with the Charlotte division of a large builder, as a consultant following the acquisition of another builder’s land position.

He continues to be excited to bring his experience and knowledge to the home watch industry.

904 Home Watch serves St. Johns County, Duval County, Nocatee, Sawgrass Country Club, Marsh Landing Country Club, Atlantic Beach, Neptune Beach, Jacksonville Beach, Ponte Vedra Beach, and Ponte Vedra.

You can reach Straub at 904-654-9951 or by emailing 904homewatch@gmail.com, and more info can be found about the business by going to www.904homewatchllc.com.

Berkshire

Continued from 30

The Palm Coast offices mark the latest move in a pattern of growth and expansion for Berkshire Hathaway and increase the company’s ability to provide real estate services to Flagler and Volusia counties.

The firm has nine additional offices located throughout Northeast Florida.

Berkshire Hathaway has a team of more than 500 real estate professionals and operates a corporate relocation division, a builder sales division, a commercial division, Florida Network Property Management, Gibraltar Title Services, LLC, Prosperity Home Mortgage, LLC, and HomeServices Insurance.

Go to FloridaNetworkRealty.com or FLNetworkRealty.com for more information.

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THURSDAY, MAY 22, 2025 • PAGE 32

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CONCERT REVIEW

The Jacksonville Symphony Takes on Mozart's Classics with Nartadjieva and Kuo

Review by Matt Bickett

“Classical music” has always held a handful of meanings. Your middle school chorus teacher was likely quick to remind you that it’s not just a genre on Spotify. “Classical refers to the period in music history after the Baroque and before the Romantic,” she might say, distinguishing the term from its reference to the classics of literature. But like the timeless writings of the ancient Greeks, or the Rolling Stones hits that never seem to be forgotten, the classics are revered as the music that shapes our culture. Classical music perennially reappears on the concert stage for good reason—this music reconnects us with our history, our culture, and ourselves.

The Jacksonville Symphony under the baton of Courtney Lewis dutifully continued this tradition last weekend, joining forces with impressive soloists and the Jacksonville Symphony Chorus in two concerts. The program, Classical composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s Sinfonia concertante in E-flat major and Requiem, inspired one of the 75th season’s most traditional yet well-executed concerts.

Concertmaster and soloist Adelya Nartadjieva with Principal Violist and soloist Yun-Ting Kuo joined the Symphony for a characterful rendition of Mozart’s Sinfonia concertante. The work’s playful dialogue highlighted the two soloists’ teamwork—the evenness and depth of Kuo’s tone provided an ideal complement to Nartadjieva’s extroverted, yet equally nuanced, flair.

Nartadjieva’s outspoken interpretation never overshadowed her duet partner, or the ensemble and the ensemble responded in kind with sensitivity and support throughout. Kuo’s mature and thoughtful approach revealed hidden layers to the score’s genius phrasing, even while some of the passages’ lower range notes receded from view.



Contributed photo

Despite your middle school music teacher’s concert-going instructions, applause after the first movement felt appropriate. The applause aided the transition from the excitement of the first movement’s duo cadenza and sunny phrases to the seriousness of the second. The two soloists’ dramatic intensity in tone and phrasing took a turn to the profound.

After such depth, Mozart’s almost perfunctory third movement felt out of place. The performers’ encore—Johan Halvorsen’s arrangement of the Passacaglia movement from one of Handel’s Harpsichord Suites—made up for the lost moment. After the encore’s dramatic journey, the audience left for intermission even more convinced of the magical results of the Nartadjieva-Kuo collaboration.

Following the delights and playful drama of the first half, the program’s second half turned to the bigger questions that often occupy authors of the classics. Mozart’s

final work, the Requiem—a nearly hour-long meditation on death and the afterlife through musical settings of the Church’s funeral texts—calls on the forces of four soloists, chorus, and orchestra to do so.

Joining the slightly smaller Classical-era orchestra, the Jacksonville Symphony invited soloists with voices specially trained for the light tone required by Mozart’s music. The Jacksonville Symphony Chorus, under the direction of Donald McCullough, appeared next to helpfully projected English translations of the sung texts.

The performance highlighted the grandeur possible in Mozart’s many intricacies. The ensemble’s winds provided a strong foundation in the work’s iconic opening bars. Particularly in the “Kyrie” and “Sanctus,” Lewis masterfully maintained attention to the performance’s overall affect while shaping the intricate interweaving of voice parts. Similarly, in the “Recordare,” soprano Nola Richardson and countertenor Reginald Mobley responded to each other’s sophisticated and well-informed phrasing in one of the highlights of the night.

Lewis’s balanced focus on fine details amidst larger forces at play lent this performance a particular freshness. As the classics continue to make their recurrence, last weekend’s performance confronted us with the question, what does it mean to perform Mozart’s Requiem now? For the Jacksonville Symphony, perhaps it’s that no detail is too small or insignificant to be cherished even among the larger-than-life feelings of the political moment—that we will perennially take effort to remember even the quiet voices among the outspoken crowd, and for good reason.

Matt Bickett is a musician and scholar based in Jacksonville, FL. Matt is Director of Music at St. Paul’s by the Sea Episcopal Church in Jacksonville Beach and is a Corps Member with Teach for America.



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Florida Chamber Music Project plans all-Beethoven concert

The Florida Chamber Music Project will end its season on Sunday, June 1, with an all-Beethoven program. The concert will take place at the Beaches Museum Chapel and is sponsored by an anonymous donor.

Beethoven's Quartet No.1 in F Major, Op. 18 was his first string quartet. It is said that his initial inspiration for the first movement was the crypt scene in Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet." The second Beethoven piece, String Quartet No. 16 in F Major, Op. 135 was his last string quartet. It was the last major piece he composed and was written in 1826. The influence of his one-time teacher, Haydn, can be heard.

"First, I'd like to thank all those who have joined us this season," said Artistic Director Susan Pardue. "It's been a joy to bring music to everyone and a special treat to end with Beethoven."

Tickets are \$30 at the door or through 904TIX. Student tickets are \$10 and available only at the door.

Beaches Museum Chapel is wheelchair-accessible and has free parking



Contributed photo

along Pablo Avenue near 4th Street North of Beach Boulevard. All concerts begin at 3 p.m. Attendees are invited to join the musicians after the concert for refreshments.

The Florida Chamber Music Project was founded 12 years ago by violist Pardue. Joining her are violinists Patrice Evans and Ann Hertler and cellist Laurie Casseday. All are members of the Jacksonville Symphony.

For advance tickets online: <http://fl-chambermusic.org>.

MOCA Jacksonville earns highest national recognition

The Museum of Contemporary Art Jacksonville, a cultural institute of the University of North Florida, is delighted to announce that it has achieved accreditation through the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), the highest national recognition afforded to American museums.

MOCA is among 35 museums to earn accreditation or reaccreditation during the AAM Accreditation Commission's most recent cycle and is one of three accredited museums in Jacksonville, alongside the Museum of Science & History and the Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens.

"After the huge success of MOCA's 100th anniversary last year, where we saw our highest ever visitation, community engagement, and growth it is particularly exciting to announce the successful completion of this important anniversary project," said Caitlin Doherty, executive director of MOCA Jacksonville. "As the first museum in Jacksonville to earn accreditation in



UNIVERSITY of NORTH FLORIDA

the early 1970s while housed on Art Museum Drive, it was of great significance to seek this prestigious national recognition during our milestone year to become accredited for the first time in our current location. I am thrilled to announce that MOCA Jacksonville is once again a fully accredited museum as we move into our next century of serving this community through art, artists, and ideas."

MOCA's strength and sustainability as it entered into the accreditation process is due, in part, to the support of

MOCA continues on Page 34

Don't miss the 75th Season finale!

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June 6 & 7 7:30 pm

George Gershwin *An American in Paris*

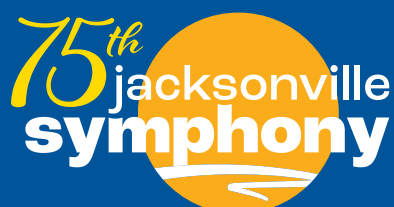
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Ponte Vedra Library to sponsor author's discussion on June 12

Local author, R.V. Little, Jr., will discuss his recent book, *Three Cold Wars: A Vermont Citizen-Soldier's Life In The Infantry*, that chronicles the military life of his father, a Vermonter and long-time Jacksonville resident.

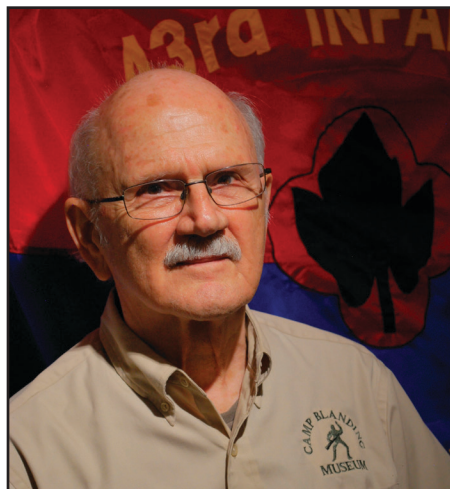
The book reveals a man who rose from the Great Depression and joined the Army National Guard as an Infantry private.

He then trained at Camp Blanding near Starke in 1941 to 1942, and later graduated from Officer Candidate School in Fort Benning, Georgia.

His following deployments in WWII and Korean War combat as an Infantry commander resulted in earning three awards for valor, two Combat Infantryman Badges and surviving three wounds.

Subsequent Cold War service in Troop Information and intelligence brought him to then West Germany, his third foreign Occupation Zone.

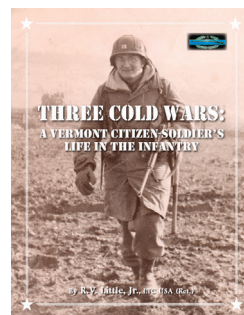
Ultimately, then Major Little retired to Jacksonville from 1963-2011 where he continued to work for the Army Reserve at the Naval Air Station.



R.V. Little, Jr.

Originally intended for family, the story follows the effects of a military life on a family and evolves into a military history of a valorous man and untold combat. Details are enhanced by the writer's background, as well as extensive use of archives and battlefield research assisted by four Italian museums.

Listeners will accompany Little through all aspects of service and be



introduced to how a military career unfolds – the training, personal life, separations, movement to combat, engagement, wounds, and even the

paperwork battle.

Special emphasis is made on the subject's three Purple Hearts to identify the exact enemy, define the wounds, and trace medical evacuations and recovery. The author also unravels examples of the difficulty in accurately discerning what occurs on a battlefield.

Accompanying the story are vignettes showing the bigger picture of history alongside the subject's service.

The author has significant Vietnam and Cold War service in Intelligence and Infantry, and his eye for detail equips him to interpret a service career and combat actions.

Most of his 300 publications were pub-

lished for the Defense Department, the President's Office of National Drug Control Policy, and as a Jacksonville community news columnist. Multiple national awards allude to significant contributions in analysis of military forces and counterdrugs, as well as to Arms Control and National Intelligence Estimates.

Articles in the Army Times and U.S. Coast Guard Navigator further attest to the breadth of his military orientation.

He was commissioned at the University of Florida, formerly serving as a Coast Guard Auxiliary officer in Mandarin and Cecil Field, and he is currently a docent for the Camp Blanding Military Museum, site of his subject's first year of federal service.

The book covers a number of aspects that affect military and Florida interests including history, the career path, and Army family life that are timeless. It is available on Amazon with 327 pages, color, 31 maps, over 100 photos, and indexed. Autographs are available at the presentation on June 12 at 3 pm, or by arrangement.

MOCA

Continued from 33

the University of North Florida.

In 2009, MOCA became a cultural institute of the University of North Florida, creating a turning point for the museum and bringing its ongoing themes of art and education full circle.

The support of UNF broadens the museum's reach and capabilities, while creating opportunities for meaningful work that impacts the community and supports student learning opportunities.

"UNF's museum, MOCA Jacksonville, is an important asset to the University

and our region," said Dr. Moez Limayem, president of the University of North Florida. "MOCA provides amazing cultural experiences for the community as well as unprecedented opportunities for our art faculty and students. From internships to research fellowships, our students gain valuable hands-on experience at MOCA."

MOCA is now counted among the 1,116 currently accredited museums of the estimated 33,000 museums across the United States.

Accreditation signifies excellence to the museum community, to governments, funders, outside agencies, and to the museum-going public. It indicates that a museum meets the National Standards

and Best Practices for U.S. Museums and joins a community of institutions that have chosen to hold themselves publicly accountable to a high standard of excellence.

Accreditation is determined through a process of self-assessment and peer-review and relies on the institution proving itself to be a good steward of its resources held in the public trust and a commitment to a philosophy of continual institutional growth.

"The museum is clearly a vibrant center of art, artists, ideas, and creative community engagement," said Marise McDermott, chair of the American Alliance of Museums Accreditation Commis-

sion and president emeritus of the Witte Museum. "The staff, board, University, and the community are to be congratulated for stewarding an exemplary, public-facing art museum for the benefit of students and the Jacksonville community. It is a model for how a town-gown museum can operate successfully in both worlds. Congratulations on this achievement. I know everyone at the museum has worked hard to earn this honor."

Developed and sustained by museum professionals for over 50 years, the AAM's museum accreditation program is the field's primary vehicle for quality assurance, self-regulation and public accountability.

"This important milestone is a testament to the hard work and dedication of the MOCA team," said Anne Joseph, chair of MOCA's Board of Trustees. "This was a more than year-long process, and a core initiative of our 100th year anniversary vision. I am so proud that the hard work our staff has been doing for years, and the museum's century of commitment to serving the Jacksonville community, have been recognized and validated by the American Alliance of Museums. This high profile, peer-based evaluation of the museum's operations and impact not only increases MOCA's credibility and value to stakeholders, it sets the museum apart in the field and is a powerful tool to help create and leverage relationships with peer institutions. This only means great things for the Jacksonville community, as it looks ahead to a future filled with exhibitions, installations, and loans of artwork of the highest caliber, and all in the heart of Downtown Jacksonville."

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Sports

THURSDAY, MAY 22, 2025 • PAGE 35

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New beach volleyball courts set to open in Nocatee

By Anthony Richards

When Andor Gyulai and Vanessa Summers-Gyulai first moved to the Ponte Vedra area about three years ago they felt like it was a great community to develop beach volleyball players and even Olympians.

So, they got right to work trying to make that happen and three years later, multiple beach volleyball courts are about to be opened on June 1 as part of the Nocatee community.

“When we arrived here, we knew there were some resources needed and one of them was beach volleyball, because it’s so far for the kids to go to Jax Beach from here,” Gyulai said. “So, I approached the county and made the proposition to them that there are some really great things with beach volleyball in the country, because it’s now in every single high school in the area and it’s the fastest growing sport in NCAA history.”

Gyulai’s expectations for the area are high and he has lofty goals that know with these designated beach volleyball courts located at 707 Little River Road in Ponte Vedra, all those goals are now within reach.



Photo by Anthony Richards

Vanessa Summers-Gyulai and Andor Gyulai stand in front of the new beach volleyball courts which are set to open in the Nocatee community on June 1.

“We came here to raise some beach volleyball Olympians and what’s so exciting is that know we have this avenue to do it,” Gyulai said. “We think this is an incredible location where we can tap into the Nocatee community and really build something special here.”

It will start with some camps this summer for high school and elite middle school players with parents able to learn more about the opportunities at www.stjohnsbeachvolleyball.com.

According to Summers-Gyulai, some of the best beach volleyball players in the world are shorter, which shows that you do not need to be extremely tall to be successful at the top level in beach volleyball as opposed to maybe the indoor side of

things.

“It’s been well established that you don’t have to have crazy height in order to really have a huge trajectory if you choose the sport, which is exciting,” Summers-Gyulai said. “I tell the moms we work with that what’s happening for volleyball for girls has never happened before and the level of popularity is so extreme, and it only continues to grow. Here at St. Johns Beach Volleyball, we’re super passionate about the sport but one of our trademarks is that it’s bigger than volleyball because we’re teaching them life skills to thrive no matter what they choose to do.”

Gyulai has more than 32 years and 50,000-plus hours developing elite volleyball players and has created more than 2,500 instructional videos with some of the sport’s greatest players and coaches, and he cannot wait to continue to pass that on to the local community more than he already does as the head coach of the Ponte Vedra High boys volleyball varsity team where his son Thor plays.

“Just think about how special it’s going to be come those Florida summer evenings with the lights on here (at the beach courts), there’s just something special about that,” Gyulai said.

Nominate a local field or park to receive possible revitalization

By Anthony Richards

TruGreen, the nation’s leading lawn care treatment provider, is proud to announce a groundbreaking partnership with Minor League Baseball that includes activations across all 120 clubs, a makeover of the home dugout in each

market, sponsorship of select MiLB team grounds crews, and a new initiative called “TruGreen Spaces” aimed at revitalizing community ballfields and public spaces across the country.

The multi-year partnership, which designates TruGreen as the “Official Lawn


Care Treatment Provider of MiLB,” unites two organizations deeply rooted in local communities.

Through the partnership, TruGreen and MiLB will celebrate the local pride associated with each club, work together to keep communities looking their best and

share in the one-a-kind game day experiences that make Minor League parks so special.

Locally, the Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp completed renovations to VyStar

TRUGREEN continues on Page 36



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TruGreen

Continued from 35

Ballpark prior to the start of its season and now a local field or park can possibly receive a much-needed update as well.

At the heart of the partnership is a new initiative called “TruGreen Spaces,” which will revitalize public ballfields and parks in MiLB markets across the country. Fans can nominate a local field or park at www.MiLB.com/TruGreenSpaces through June 30.

The winning entry will be selected from the 120 MiLB club markets.

“At TruGreen, we take great pride in understanding what’s happening in the hometown communities we serve and a big part of that is being the local experts who make keeping a great looking lawn look easy,” said Kurt Kane, president and CEO at TruGreen. “From the ball field to

the backyard, we’re the pros trusted by pros and our exciting partnership with Minor League Baseball is the perfect way to showcase that.”

“We couldn’t be more excited to welcome TruGreen as an Official Partner of Minor League Baseball,” said Uzma Rawn Dowler, Chief Marketing Officer and Senior Vice President of Global Corporate Partnerships at MLB. “Not only is the TruGreen home team dugout takeover a great way to express the connection between each hometown and the local TruGreen team, but the revitalization project is a powerful way for fans to be even more proud of the place they live.”

Minor League Baseball is the second-highest attended professional sports league in North America (behind only Major League Baseball) and the Minors’ footprint accesses over 70 percent of the U.S. population.



Contributed photo

TruGreen spaces initiative.jpg: A partnership between TruGreen and Minor League Baseball is looking to revitalize a local park or field in one of its 120 markets across the county.

Robinson, Lickliter awarded district honors

Ponte Vedra High baseball had a couple of district award winners with head coach Dennis Robinson being named coach of the year and junior pitcher Storm Lickliter as player of the year.

Photos by Lucy Miller



Dennis Robinson



Storm Lickliter



Heffernan finishes fifth at state meet

Colette Heffernan of Rawlings Elementary School raced her way to an impressive 5th place finish in the 1500-meter run at the Florida Track and Field State Meet. She finished with a time of 5:20.

She is excited to join the Landrum Middle School cross country and track teams next year.

Contributed photos



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Legals
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA PROBATE DIVISION
File No. CP25-0377
Division 59
IN RE: ESTATE OF JEROME TELFAIR, Deceased.
The administration of the estate of JEROME TELFAIR, deceased, whose date of death was October 27, 2024, is pending in the Circuit Court for St. Johns County, Florida, Probate Division, the address of which is 4010 Lewis Speedway, St. Augustine, FL 32084. The names and addresses of the personal representative and the personal representative's attorney are set forth below.
All creditors of the decedent and other persons having claims or demands against decedent's estate on whom a copy of this notice is required to be served must file their claims with this court ON OR BEFORE THE LATER OF 3 MONTHS AFTER THE TIME OF THE FIRST PUBLICATION OF THIS NOTICE OR 30 DAYS AFTER THE DATE OF SERVICE OF A COPY OF THIS NOTICE ON THEM.
The personal representative has no duty to discover whether any property held at the time of the decedent's death by the decedent or the decedent's surviving spouse is property to which the Florida Uniform Disposition of Community Property Rights at Death Act as described in ss. 732.216-732.228, Florida Statutes, applies, or may apply, unless a written demand is made by a creditor as specified under s. 732.2211, Florida Statutes. All other creditors of the decedent and other persons having claims or demands against decedent's estate must file their claims with this court WITHIN 3 MONTHS AFTER THE DATE OF THE FIRST PUBLICATION OF THIS NOTICE. ALL CLAIMS NOT FILED WITHIN THE TIME PERIODS SET FORTH IN FLORIDA STATUTES SECTION 733.702 WILL BE FOREVER BARRED.
NOTWITHSTANDING THE TIME PERIODS SET FORTH ABOVE, ANY CLAIM FILED TWO (2) YEARS OR MORE AFTER THE DECEDENT'S DATE OF DEATH IS BARRED.
The date of first publication of this notice is May 22, 2025.
Attorney for Personal Representative: /s/ James E. Bedsole
JAMES E. BEDSOLE, ESQ.
Attorney for Personal Representative
FL. Bar No.: 500194
2450 Old Moultrie Road, Ste. 104
St. Augustine, FL 32086
Tel: (904) 797-8701
service@bedsolelaw.com
Personal Representative: Judyth V. Pittman
JUDYTH V. PITTMAN
11694 Carson Lake Drive
Jacksonville, Florida 32221
Legal 127875 Published 5/22/2025 and 5/29/2025 in St. Johns County Ponte Vedra Recorder newspaper

Legals
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA PROBATE DIVISION
File No. CP25-0340
Division 59
IN RE: ESTATE OF RACHELLE ANN ALINE ROBSON, Deceased.
The administration of the estate of RACHELLE ANN ALINE ROBSON, deceased, whose date of death was March 4, 2025, is pending in the Circuit Court for St. Johns County, Florida, Probate Division, the address of which is 4010 Lewis Speedway, St. Augustine, FL 32084. The names and addresses of the personal representative and the personal representative's attorney are set forth below.
All creditors of the decedent and other persons having claims or demands against decedent's estate on whom a copy of this notice is required to be served must file their claims with this court ON OR BEFORE THE LATER OF 3 MONTHS AFTER THE TIME OF THE FIRST PUBLICATION OF THIS NOTICE OR 30 DAYS AFTER THE DATE OF SERVICE OF A COPY OF THIS NOTICE ON THEM.
The personal representative has no duty to discover whether any property held at the time of the decedent's death by the decedent or the decedent's surviving spouse is property to which the Florida Uniform Disposition of Community Property Rights at Death Act as described in ss. 732.216-732.228, Florida Statutes, applies, or may apply, unless a written demand is made by a creditor as specified under s. 732.2211, Florida Statutes. The written demand must be filed with the clerk.
All other creditors of the decedent and other persons having claims or demands against decedent's estate must file their claims with this court WITHIN 3 MONTHS AFTER THE DATE OF THE FIRST PUBLICATION OF THIS NOTICE. ALL CLAIMS NOT FILED WITHIN THE TIME PERIODS SET FORTH IN FLORIDA STATUTES SECTION 733.702 WILL BE FOREVER BARRED.
NOTWITHSTANDING THE TIME PERIODS SET FORTH ABOVE, ANY CLAIM FILED TWO (2) YEARS OR MORE AFTER THE DECEDENT'S DATE OF DEATH IS BARRED.
The date of first publication of this notice is May 15, 2025.
Attorney for Personal Representative: /s/ James E. Bedsole, Esq.
JAMES E. BEDSOLE, ESQ.
FL. Bar No.: 500194
2450 Old Moultrie Road, Ste. 104
St. Augustine, FL 32086
Telephone: (904) 797-8701
service@bedsolelaw.com
Personal Representative: /s/ Christopher M. Curran
CHRISTOPHER M. CURRAN
15033 Keyes Meadow Way
Huntersville, NC 28078
Legal 126260 Published 5/15/2025 and 5/22/2025 in St. Johns County Ponte Vedra Recorder newspaper

Legals
NOTICE TO CREDITORS
IN THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR ST. JOHNS COUNTY, FLORIDA PROBATE DIVISION
File No. CP25-0329
Division 59
IN RE: ESTATE OF SILVA JEAN NEILSON Deceased.
The administration of the estate of SILVA JEAN NEILSON, deceased, whose date of death was February 14, 2025, is pending in the Circuit Court for St. Johns County, Florida, Probate Division, the address of which is 4010 Lewis Speedway, St. Augustine, FL 32084. The names and addresses of the personal representative and the personal representative's attorney are set forth below.
All creditors of the decedent and other persons having claims or demands against decedent's estate on whom a copy of this notice is required to be served must file their claims with this court ON OR BEFORE THE LATER OF 3 MONTHS AFTER THE TIME OF THE FIRST PUBLICATION OF THIS NOTICE OR 30 DAYS AFTER THE DATE OF SERVICE OF A COPY OF THIS NOTICE ON THEM.
The personal representative has no duty to discover whether any property held at the time of the decedent's death by the decedent or the decedent's surviving spouse is property to which the Florida Uniform Disposition of Community Property Rights at Death Act as described in ss. 732.216-732.228, Florida Statutes, applies, or may apply, unless a written demand is made by a creditor as specified under s. 732.2211, Florida Statutes. The written demand must be filed with the clerk.
All other creditors of the decedent and other persons having claims or demands against decedent's estate must file their claims with this court WITHIN 3 MONTHS AFTER THE DATE OF THE FIRST PUBLICATION OF THIS NOTICE. ALL CLAIMS NOT FILED WITHIN THE TIME PERIODS SET FORTH IN FLORIDA STATUTES SECTION 733.702 WILL BE FOREVER BARRED.
NOTWITHSTANDING THE TIME PERIODS SET FORTH ABOVE, ANY CLAIM FILED TWO (2) YEARS OR MORE AFTER THE DECEDENT'S DATE OF DEATH IS BARRED.
The date of first publication of this notice is May 15, 2025.
Attorney for Personal Representative: /s/ James E. Bedsole, Esq.
JAMES E. BEDSOLE, ESQ.
FL. Bar No.: 500194
2450 Old Moultrie Road, Ste. 104
St. Augustine, FL 32086
Tel: (904) 797-8701
service@bedsolelaw.com
Personal Representative: /s/ Carlton Viar
CARLTON VIAR
15033 Keyes Meadow Way
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Legal 126391 Published 5/15/2025 and 5/22/2025 in St. Johns County Ponte Vedra Recorder newspaper

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Legals

NOTICE OF SALE OF PEDIATRIC MEDICINE PRACTICE

Notice is given that Dr. Anas Al Yazji has sold substantially all of the assets of Yazji Pediatric Care, LLC, d/b/a Tuka Pediatrics, located at 4125 Race Track Road, Unit 104, St. Johns, FL 32259, to Pediatrica Health of Florida, LLC. Pediatrica Health of Florida, LLC will maintain such patient records for the applicable statute of limitations. Pediatrica Health of Florida, LLC will provide a copy of or transfer any patient records upon request of the patient or his or her guardian.
Legal 124711 Published 5/1/2025, 5/8/2025, 5/15/2025 and 5/22/2025 in St. Johns County Ponte Vedra Recorder newspaper

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50							51							

ACROSS

- 1. Bring up
- 7. Child
- 10. Formal written defense
- 12. Bangladeshi currency
- 13. Burial site
- 14. In the lead
- 15. Large recesses in a church
- 16. Count on
- 17. Defunct phone company
- 18. Golf scores
- 19. Afflicts
- 21. Defensive nuclear weapon
- 22. Prominence
- 27. "The Great Lakes State"
- 28. SoCal ballplayer
- 33. Location of White House
- 34. Magnificence
- 36. Hip hop songstress
- 37. Capital of Yemen
- 38. ___ Blyton, children's author
- 39. Bomb
- 40. Pancake made of buckwheat flour
- 41. Pinkish-violet color
- 44. A way to make right
- 45. Monument to one buried elsewhere
- 48. Region south of Dead Sea
- 49. Acts out against
- 50. Harsh cry of a crow
- 51. Formal title for a woman

- 6. Bar bill
- 7. Weights
- 8. Satisfactorily
- 9. Small amount
- 10. Tree types
- 11. Small protuberances
- 12. Equivalent of 100K BTU
- 14. Type of horse
- 17. More (Spanish)
- 18. Argentinian province
- 20. A bad act
- 23. Moving in a circular way
- 24. Battery type
- 25. Atomic #58
- 26. Popular breakfast food

- 29. An alternative
- 30. Tooth caregiver
- 31. A way to conform
- 32. Disfigured men
- 35. Cool!
- 36. Genus of mosses
- 38. Body part
- 40. Kashmiri people
- 41. Round water pot
- 42. Something to purchase
- 43. Emit coherent radiation
- 44. Indicates 10
- 45. Advertising metric
- 46. Pitching stat
- 47. Head movement

SUDOKU

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

Level: Intermediate

DOWN

- 1. Kitchen devices
- 2. Wings
- 3. Mythological birds
- 4. Everyone has one
- 5. Matchstick game

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!



A silver Cadillac SUV, likely a Escalade, is shown from a front three-quarter view. The vehicle is parked on a grassy field with a line of trees in the background. The car features a large, dark grille with the Cadillac crest in the center, multi-spoke alloy wheels, and a sleek, modern design. The lighting suggests a bright, sunny day.

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