



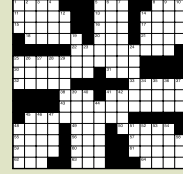
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Photo courtesy Deborah Bazzell

Sydney Watterson cheering on the Cincinnati Bengals.

Hometown cheerleader: From Bartram Bears to Cincinnati Bengals to Super Bowl

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

Like millions of children and young adults, it has been Sydney Watterson's lifelong dream to be an NFL cheerleader. With hard work and dedication, in 2021, she made the Bengals cheer team, never thinking she would have the opportunity to cheer at the Super Bowl her rookie year. In February, she traveled with her teammates to share the stage and cheer at the Superbowl LVI in Los Angeles, California.

Watterson attended San Juan Del Rio Catholic School and Bartram Trail High School, graduating in 2013. At Bartram Trail, she was a member

Hometown cheerleader cont. on pg. 7

St. Johns Riverkeeper wants you to "Get Your Feet Wet!"

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewline.com

The St. Johns River is a 310-mile national treasure that runs right through our area — and the St. Johns Riverkeeper is continuing their advocacy of it by implementing a new initiative this spring entitled "Get Your Feet Wet!"

"Our mission is to defend and restore the St. Johns River plus its tributaries and springs on behalf of all who enjoy it," said St. Johns Riverkeeper Lisa Rinaman. "We give the river a voice via advocacy, research and education."

Rinaman said she feels it's important to get everyone out on the river because people will want to protect what they love — which will in turn solidify the commitment to the river's health and inspire people to be more river-friendly in everyday life.

To that end, the "Get Your Feet Wet" initiative includes partnering with other nonprofits, agencies, and businesses to offer a variety of unique outdoor experiences and opportunities to experience and learn about the St. Johns River. Offerings include eco-tours, hikes, paddling trips, and expert speakers throughout the watershed, from the headwaters at Blue Cypress Lake in central/south Florida to the St. Johns River estuary in the Jacksonville area. Highlights include:

- Paddles: Explore the river and enjoy its beauty up close from a kayak on a guided tour. These trips will be offered as far south as the headwaters of Blue Cypress Lake up to the backwaters of the Timucuan Preserve near the river's mouth.
- Guided hikes: Stretch your legs, discover new flora and fauna, learn about the history of the watershed, and enjoy beautiful scenery on a guided hike.



Photos courtesy St. Johns Riverkeeper River Taxi Eco Tour.



Kayaking on Pottsborg Creek.

Rinaman as the guest speaker.

- Tiny Dock Concert Series: Enjoy outstanding music while on board your boat, kayak, or paddle board, or the St. Johns River Taxi. This year's concerts feature local renowned artists from a variety of genres, including Jacksonville resident and finalist from NBC's "The Voice,"

- Paris Winningham.
- Cleanups: Take in beautiful backdrops of the river's tributaries alongside like-minded neighbors while making the St. Johns River cleaner for all.

Events will be hosted throughout the watershed and are family friendly. The St. Johns Riverkeeper invites you to make a day trip to another part of the watershed or see something new in your own backyard. Attendees are encouraged to bring a friend — and make some new ones along the way.

"The goal of this initiative is to connect us," Rinaman said. "The river itself connects all of our counties and it's important for us to protect it for future generations."

Visit www.stjohnsriverkeeper.org/events for more information about Get Your Feet Wet 2022.

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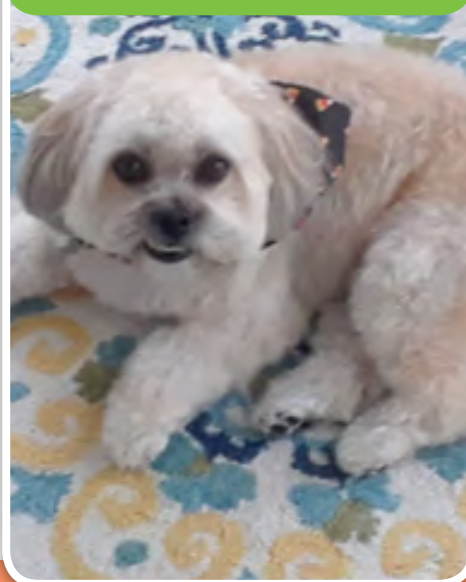
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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Teddi!



Breed:

Bichon and Shih Tzu mix.

Favorite Activity:

Rolling in the grass

Favorite treat:

Her Nylabone nutri dent greenie she gets first thing in the morning

Favorite friend(s):

Her new bff cousin, Honey, her bff Roxie and her bff Ruby-doobie

How our BFF got her name:

Her breed is a Teddy bear!

Do you have a cute pet? Send us your pet's picture and the answer to the five questions above before the 10th of the month. Also tell us you saw the BFF contest in The CreekLine! Your pet could be our BFF of the month and appear in The CreekLine! Email editor@floridanewsline.com to enter your pet.



Happy St. Patrick's Day!

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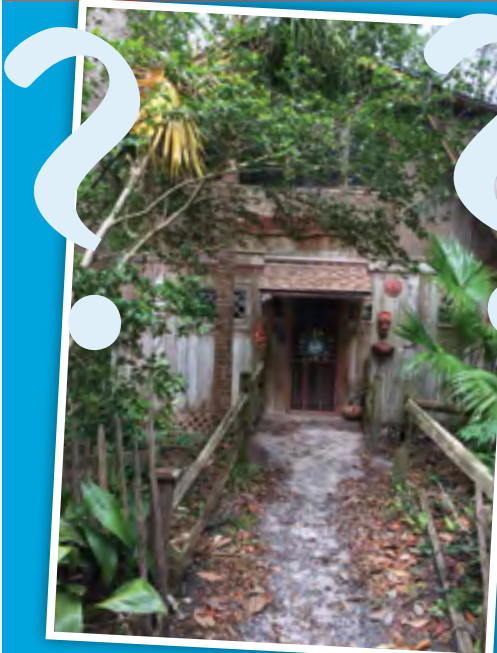
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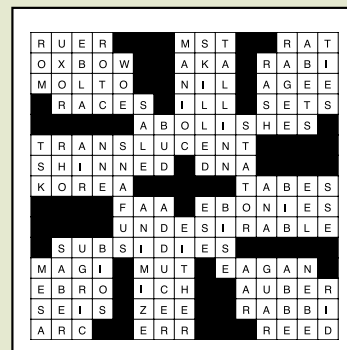


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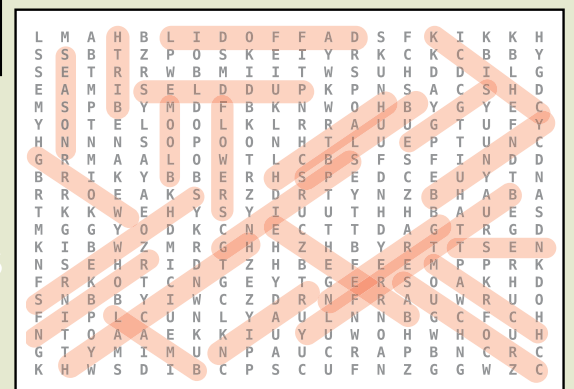
Last month's
Mystery Photo was
the Watson Realty
building on County
Road 210. Our
winner was Gale Joy.
Congratulations!



Answers
to our
Puzzles
PG 14



Answers: A. spring B. mild C. flower D. blooming



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March

What's Going On in St. Johns? A modified calendar of events

Community Calendar

Playing HOOKie, a group for those who enjoy knitting, crocheting and looming (with all items donated to charity) meets every Wednesday from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the outside eating area at Belgian Sweet House Bistro, 12276 San Jose Blvd. (next to Harbor Chase). Visit the group's Facebook page (Playing HOOKie) or email playinghookie31@gmail.com for more information.

Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet on Tuesday, March 1 at 6:30 p.m. in Mandarin Presbyterian Church's Fellowship Hall at 11844 Mandarin Road. Annette Paulson will be presenting EQ8, Electric Quilt's software for designing blocks and quilts. Mask-wearing requested. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

Bartram Trail High School Theatre Department will present "Chicago" (High School Edition), March 3, 4, and 5 at 7 p.m. each evening, along with a 2 p.m. matinee on Sunday, March 6 at the Bartram Trail High School Auditorium, 7399 Longleaf Pine Pkwy. Set in 1920s Chicago, this musical follows "Merry Murderesses" Roxie Hart and Velma Kelly as they vie for fame, fortune, and acquittal. Tickets are \$15. Visit <https://bit.ly/3zifTqK> for more information about showtimes

and tickets.

The Jacksonville Camera Club will meet on March 3 and March 17. On March 3, Alex Diaz, UNF professor of photography, will be the guest speaker. On Nov. 17, the results for images entered in the first print contest of 2022 will be presented. Visit jax.jaxcamera-club.com for more information and meeting location updates.

Mandarin Garden Club will hold its annual \$1 Clothing and Jewelry Sale on Friday, March 4 and Saturday, March 5 from 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. each day. Gently used clothes, shoes and accessories for the family will be sold for \$1 each. Some boutique and jewelry items will be priced slightly higher. Cash only is accepted and all CDC guidelines will be followed. The event features free parking and admission. The Masons' "Famous" Barbeque lunch will be for sale both days. The Mandarin Garden Club is located at 2892 Loretto Road. Visit mandaringardenclub.org for more information.

The Bartram Boogie, a fundraising event of Bartram Bears Athletic Booster Club, which supports athletes at Bartram Trail High School, will be held on March 5 from 6 p.m. – 10 p.m. at St. Johns Golf and Country Club. The event will include danc-

ing and a silent auction. Visit www.bartramathleticboosters.com/boogie for tickets and more information.

NW St. Johns County United for Progress is planning to meet in person on March 7 with special guests from the Rethreaded organization. Social begins at 6:30 p.m. and meeting starts at 7 p.m. Email nwsjcp@gmail.com for more information including meeting location. The group will host Cocktails and Conversation on March 15 at 5:30 p.m. at Moon Dog Pie House and Coffee and Conversation on March 28 at 10 a.m. at Maple Street Biscuit Company. Visit www.nwstjohnsup.com for more information.

The Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club will hold its meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, March 8 at 11 a.m. at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club, 205 St. Johns Golf Drive off County Road 210. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. In honor of St. Patrick's Day and the Kentucky Derby, the luncheon will feature the Irish Sweepstakes Race. The cost of the luncheon is \$23. Make checks payable to BTNC and mail to Deborah Russell, 12376 Fireberry Ct., Jacksonville, FL 32258. Payment must be received no later than March 3, 2022, no exceptions. Be sure to indicate entrée choice on the check memo line. Visit

www.facebook.com/BTNC1 for food choices and updated information.

The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable will meet on Monday, March 14 at 12 p.m. via Zoom. Vice Chair of the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners Christian Whitehurst will be the guest speaker. Email info@sjcroundtable.org to register for the meeting or visit www.sjcroundtable.org for more information about the St. Johns County Civic Roundtable.

Herbal Medicine from the Garden will be offered on March 19 at 10 a.m. Attendees will learn about traditionally used herbs to promote wellness and health as well as how to create their own tinctures, teas, and salves. Included are guides, plant identification, lecture and herbal snacks. Pre registration is required via phone or text: (386) 972-1891.

The All Star Quilters Guild will meet at 10 a.m. on Monday, March 21 at the First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The program is "Quilting with Wool" by Lynn Painter. Sew and Tell is always a feature. Guests are welcome but masks are required. Visit www.allstarquilters.org for more information.

What's Going on in St. Johns cont. on pg. 13

Easter at Fruit Cove Sunday, April 17

Worship at 8, 9:30 and 11am

Preschool 9:30 and 11am

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(1st-5th grades)

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with St. Johns County Commission Vice Chairman Christian Whitehurst, District 1

Q: Can you give some insight into your vote in mid-February to proceed with consideration of an infrastructure sales tax of one cent to be placed on the November 2022 ballot?

A: I ran for this position as someone who would work to solve problems in St. Johns County. Currently, we have infrastructure deficiencies and do not have money to address them. So, I and all the commissioners are looking for feedback from residents. I hear from some people that demand we address infrastructure issues. The question is are we willing to pay an extra penny on a dollar we spend to address these deficiencies immediately, or should we wait until the general budget allows money to be spent? Whatever decision is made by voters gives us direction as to how to address the deficiencies.

Q: What is the next step?

A: Per state statutes, the board does not have the authority to raise the sales tax. It has to be a community decision and go on the ballot. I trust the residents of St. Johns County to make this decision.

The Board of County Commissioners has directed our staff and legal team to come back to us with an ordinance as to where the money goes and when the surtax would sunset. Possibilities of where the money will be spent include roads and infrastructure; public safety; parks and recreation; and libraries. We will have two readings of the ordinance, the first on March 1 and the second and final reading on March 15, at which time the board will take action and vote. The good news about this timing is

that it gives the community plenty of time to educate themselves about these deficiencies and how they would like to address them and then to weigh in by letting us know their preference.

On the list of needs are public safety items; I would encourage readers to reach out to Sheriff Hardwick and Fire Chief Prevatt to find out why they are asking for money. Also, roads and parks will be addressed and both items are way behind in the Northwest, so there is potential for a lot of benefit to District 1.

Q: What is the latest on the Helow property?

A: At the same Board of County Commissioners meeting, Mr. Helow asked the board to continue his transportation mitigation agreement to a date uncertain. As background, when this project came to us for transmittal to the state, I voted to approve the transmittal, but pointed out that this was not an indication that I would approve the project. I planned to do my full due diligence during this transmittal period and I did. When we got closer to time for approval, I had my facts together and felt the needs of NW St. Johns County outweighed the project at this time. During the last couple of weeks, in conversations with staff and the Helow team, it became clear to them that I had too many concerns and so Mr. Helow decided to pull the project for now.

Q: What is the best way for our readers to contact you?

A: Readers can email me at bcc1cwhitehurst@sjcfl.us or call me at (904) 584-5348.



with St. Johns County School Board Member, Beverly Slough, District 1

Q: Can you address the issue of additional portables being added to schools to help alleviate overcrowding?

A: One of the things we discussed at the Town Hall meeting held recently at Freedom Crossing Academy was that the school district is bringing 120 additional portables to 16 different schools throughout the county. Most are in the northern part of the county, but not all. Growth is coming so fast and we cannot control how quickly the new houses come online.

It's important to note that we lease the portables; we do not purchase them. By leasing, the portables do not become part of the permanent capacity of the school. They are not included in the required percentages of seats available and therefore we can build additional schools more quickly.

Q: What kinds of solutions besides portables did you come up with at the Town Hall meeting?

A: We talked about near term and long term solutions. For the near term, we will do a rezoning in the fall to balance the schools in the NW sector. Many will still likely be overcrowded, but it will be more even. We don't have a plan yet, but when we do, we will bring just one plan for discussion at meetings with public input. We hope to have this settled in the early spring before school is out for the summer.

For a longer term solution, we are planning to build K-8 School NN in Shearwater. We have selected the architect and soon will put the contract out to bid. We want to get started as soon as possible so the school can accept students in August 2023.

The school district planning department asked us to include the zoning for the new K-8 School NN with the NW rezoning, so we will address both together.

Q: Why was the school site in Shearwater selected over the site in RiverTown?

A: First, Shearwater has been waiting longer and we have accumulated funds from their impact fees and property taxes so that we can pay for this school outright. We will not have to borrow any money to build this school. This gives us a year's breather on bonding capacity and then we can borrow more later to build the next school ... or two.

Additionally, RiverTown has promised us three parcels for schools: one middle school site and two elementary school sites. None of these sites are large enough for a K-8 school and only one has been deeded to us so far. The Shearwater site has been deeded to us and is ready to go.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

A: They can email me at beverly.slough@stjohns.k12.fl.us or call me at (904) 547-7510.



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with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

Q: What are your top priorities for the Sheriff's Office?

A: We just finished our strategic planning within our office, something we do annually to stay current, and we identified three priorities. The first one is to build and move into a facility for our Operations and General Services departments. We pride ourselves on delivering superior customer service to the citizens of St. Johns County, but we also want to have efficiency and be a nice place to work. The second is closely tied to the first, and that is to continue to prioritize compensation and benefits for all St. Johns County Sheriff's Office employees. We need to pay them adequately so they can afford to work, live and play in St. Johns County. Finally, refurbishing and expanding our jail — to prepare for the county's growth as well as provide the additional services required by our inmate population — will allow us to continue our mission to have people leave us in better shape than when they came.

Q: Can you give more details as to why a new sheriff's office is needed?

A: Currently, our departments that are housed outside of the new Training and Communications Center (off Interstate 95) are located in five buildings as well as assorted smaller buildings spread throughout the county — and, in addition to many of these buildings being older, none of them were designed to handle the work of the Sheriff's Office. For instance, our Youth Resources, Traffic, and Internet Crimes Against Children departments are housed in the old jail, built in 1953. The Office of the Sheriff and our Community Engagement Division are located in the old Wise potato chip building. Our Risk Management and Human Resources departments are housed in a building that originally was occupied by the county's medical examiner. Also, all these buildings had to be evacuated during recent hurricanes, which although we are grateful to our partner Ring Power, which allowed us to use its building, is not an ideal situation for the Sheriff's Office.

Q: What would the new office contain and where do you think it would be located?

A: The new building would contain the Operations Department (including Criminal Investigations) as well as General Services (including records, finance, risk division, IT, fleet, and the Office of the Sheriff). We would have office space for our command level team and the building would have space to allow us to hold meetings with the community. It would have to be a Category 5 building so that we don't have to evacuate in the event of a hurricane. We would possibly be able to locate this on the property where our new Training and Communications Center is located and we believe, based on current construction costs, that it would cost in the neighborhood of \$40 million – \$50 million.

Q: What would happen to the old buildings that you currently occupy?

A: If we can move the Sheriff's Offices out of the area, that would give us available real estate near the courthouse (which is mandatory) and the current jail to refurbish, expand, and connect to the current jail so it would all be one cohesive facility. Currently, we are occupying a jail built in 1986 (that replaced the 1953 jail) as well as four additional housing pods built in 1992, which bring our total beds in a piece-meal facility to 664. (Renovations were also done in 2010 and 2012 that added additional administrative space and the Community Work Release Center.) There are a lot of pieces to the puzzle as to how we must house inmates (gender/mental health/sentencing status etc.) and we really can't use even our 664 beds efficiently. On top of that, we need to prepare for the growth of the county and the inevitable growth we will experience in our prison population.

Q: What is the best way for our readers to contact you with any questions or suggestions about this article?

A: They can email me at sheriff@sjso.org or call me at (904) 824-8304.



with St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer

Q: What are you busy with at your office this month?

A: Right now, tangible personal property filings are in the forefront since the deadline for businesses to file is April 1.

If you own a business in St. Johns County, whether you own real estate or not, you are required to file a tangible personal property tax return.

This is an ad valorem tax and applied to the value of your business assets like equipment, furniture and computers. Also, if you rent residential property, the furniture, fixtures, and equipment are subject to tangible personal property tax.

Q: How much is the tax?

A: If the value of your business' assets

are \$25,000 or less, you are exempt from tangible personal property taxes, but you must still file one time. When you file the first time, you will be exempted and not have to file again, unless your business assets grow to more than \$25,000. It's very important to file because if you don't file, or file late, there are penalties.

If your business assets are valued at more than \$25,000, the tangible personal property tax is applied at the same millage as real property.

Q: What is the deadline to file the tangible personal property tax return?

A: The deadline is April 1. If you notify



with St. Johns County Clerk of Circuit Court and Comptroller Brandon Patty

Q. We've seen a lot of news coverage lately about scams involving governmental entities including the Clerk of Courts. What's going on?

A. There are at least two active scams in which the scammer claims to represent the St. Johns County Clerk of Courts office. The first is a jury duty scam, in which the swindler pretends to be law enforcement or a clerk and claims that you've missed jury duty and must make immediate payment to avoid penalties. In some cases, the scammer indicates a warrant has been issued for your arrest and requests personal information, such as Social Security number and date of birth, for verification. Some scammers seek payment for failure to appear for jury duty.

In another con, the scammer sends a text message suggesting that you failed to pay a fine or fee and your balance has gone to collections. The scammer wants you to click on a link to get your balance or to respond to the text.

Q. What do residents need to know to protect themselves?

A. First, the St. Johns County Clerk of Courts will never request personal information from you via email, telephone or text. We will not contact you by email, text or phone to elicit payment. Our clerks do not go door-to-door.

Regarding the jury duty scam, when residents don't respond to a summons for jury duty, they are contacted through an official letter from the St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller sent through the U.S. Postal Service. Failure to appear for jury duty requires attendance in court prior to any penalties being imposed, which would be ordered by a judge. I recommend just hanging up.

Be careful to not fall for the "Can you hear me?" scam, where the scammer

aims to get you to say "yes." Once they have a recording of your voice saying "yes," a scammer can use it to authorize charges on bills, credit cards and more.

In the debt collections scam, don't click on the link or respond to the text. If you have an unpaid fine or fee that has been forwarded to a collection agency, call the Clerk's Office at (904) 819-3600 to verify the agency that is handling your case. You may also visit our website at stjohnsclerk.com/courts/traffic-parking/collections/ for information and authentic telephone numbers for collection agencies with whom we do business.

You also can help others by reporting any incidents to the Florida Office of the Attorney General at 866-9NO-SCAM (866-966-7226) or file a complaint on their website.

Q. Is there anything we can do proactively to reduce our risks?

A. In addition to learning more tips to protect yourself against scams, you can protect your property from fraud with Recording Activity Notifications. According to the FBI, property and mortgage fraud is among the fastest growing white-collar crimes. Although the alert system does not prevent the actual fraudulent activity from occurring, it does provide an early warning system for subscribers to become aware of what may have otherwise gone undetected. Subscribers are able to take prompt, appropriate action if they determine the recording activity to be fraudulent. Visit <https://apps.stjohnsclerk.com/Landmark/FraudAlert> to sign up.

Q: What is the best way for our readers to contact you or your office?

A: A lot of questions can be answered by visiting our website, www.stjohnsclerk.com or you can call our main office at (904) 819-3600.

Q&A with Eddie Creamer cont. from pg. 6

our office in advance, we can give a 45-day extension. You can file your tangible personal property tax on paper or online on our website.

Q: What happens if a business doesn't file a tangible personal property tax return?

A: We are required by the state of Florida to estimate the value of your assets based on similar business filings and you will be taxed on that value with no

opportunity for appeal.

Q: What are the penalties for filing late?

A: There is a 5 percent penalty per month until you file, up to a total of 25 percent.

Q: What is the best way for our readers to contact you?

A: Our office is located at 4030 Lewis Speedway Ste. 203, (904) 827-5500. It is open Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. Also, readers can email me at Eddie@sjcpa.us or call me at (904) 827-5500.

Hometown cheerleader cont. from pg. 1

of the junior varsity cheer team and the varsity Bartram Trail Dance Team. At three years old, Watterson started dancing competitively from elementary school through college. In 2017, she graduated from Florida State University with a bachelor's degree in exercise science and from Xavier University in 2021 with an Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (ABSBN) degree.

Watterson's passion is equally shared in serving her community. She was deeply involved in volunteer and community

service activities throughout high school and college. In 2019, she danced for the Jacksonville Sharks Attack Dance Team. She currently works at Cincinnati Children's Hospital as a registered nurse and is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

"I'd like to dedicate this dream to the support and encouragement I received from family and friends and everyone that supported and coached me throughout my life," Watterson said. "From attending dance recitals to sitting on the sideline, they all have been there for me!"



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TAX TIP

Many of you have experienced significant delays in a tax refund for 2019 and 2020. Will that happen again this year? Hopefully, NO, but...The last I heard is that the IRS still has over 35 million pieces of unopened mail. What has caused this? It began with the pandemic in 2020 when the IRS closed in March and did not reopen until August! In addition, for both 2020 and 2021 (for 2019 and 2020 returns), there were more fraudulent returns filed on taxpayers than had been done in history. This "breach" and filing of fraudulent returns happened to MANY firms, both large and small—and sometimes, it just happened to the individual—not connected to ANY firm. When this happens, the individual that had a fraudulent return filed on them, MUST file a paper return. That alone takes much longer to process. PLUS, the IRS must determine, what the correct return is...Although contacting the IRS MAY speed up the process, it is still very slow! What can prevent this? **FILE EARLY!!!** Forms 1099s and W2s were required to be mailed to the recipient by January 31...Get them to your preparer ASAP!

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Guest Column

Securing Florida's elections

By St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes
mail@floridanewslines.com

The legislative session ends on March 11, but there's a lot in the news lately regarding the election law changes that are currently before our state legislature. Of great interest is Gov. Ron DeSantis' new Office of Election Crimes and Security that would be created within the Department of State as proposed in Senate Bill 524. The purpose of the office is to aid the Secretary of State in completing her duties under s. 97.012, FS. If approved, the office would be responsible for:

- Receiving and reviewing notices and reports generated by government officials or any other person regarding alleged occurrences of election law violations or election irregularities
- Initiating independent inquiries and conducting preliminary investigations into allegations of election law violations or election irregularities in the state
- Reviewing complaints and conducting preliminary investigations into alleged violations of the Florida Election Code or any rules pertaining to elections
- Overseeing the voter fraud hotline

Under our current law, when this office is made aware of voter fraud or voting irregularities, a complaint is filed with our local State Attorney's Office and the Division of Elections. Having one central agency to investigate election law violations and investigators who are specifically familiar with election laws and prosecutable violations would be a good thing. This would also allow our State Attorneys to focus on more serious crimes such as robbery, assault, and murder.

In addition to the proposed new office, Florida has existing laws in place that help secure our elections. First is photo and signature ID requirements for those voting in person. If you vote by mail,

your signature is required on the return envelope in order for your ballot to count. Think of it this way — when you vote by mail, your signature is your ID. Every signature is matched to the voter's record on each envelope to validate it. We use electronic poll books, which update your record as soon as you check in at any voting location and keep voters from voting twice. Electronic poll books also track vote by mail ballots, marking a voter's record when requested or a ballot returned as voted.

People are often very quick to make accusations of voter fraud, but when asked for specifics or documentation rarely are ever willing or able to provide any valid proof. During the last five years in St. Johns County, we have received and filed 11 complaints with the State Attorney's Office. These were documented cases of voters casting ballots in two states. Once we confirmed that a voter had voted in St. Johns County and in another state, each voter was turned over for prosecution of a third degree felony.

That five-year period encompasses five elections, including those in 2018 and 2020, with thousands of votes cast during each election. The reality is that we are just not seeing evidence of massive voter fraud locally. We will discuss more about election security in future columns, but if you know of any voter fraud, I encourage you to bring it directly to me. I stand ready to prosecute anyone who violates our voting laws.

Do you want to keep up with current elections news? Sign up for my monthly e-newsletter, which will be launched in March. Use the sign up link on the front page of the website votesjc.gov and submit your email address to subscribe. The best way to reach me is by email voakes@votesjc.gov or call the office (904) 823-2238. Don't forget, our website is also a great resource, so visit it often.

St. Johns County seeks community input for branding research process

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

St. Johns County has partnered with North Star Place Branding + Marketing to launch an exciting research process to develop a community "brand." This effort will ultimately define how the county communicates with its audiences in the future.

According to North Star CEO Will Ketchum, at the heart of St. Johns County's brand will be its competitive differentiator — in other words, what makes the community so unique. One of the best places to find that crucial information is in the hearts and minds of the people who call St. Johns County home.

Toward this end, North Star developed a customized community-wide online survey. The questionnaire has been carefully crafted to determine St. Johns County's strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and

opportunities. All who live or work in St. Johns County are invited and encouraged to participate in this important initiative. Surveys can be completed online and submitted electronically on www.BrandingSJC.com. Printed surveys will also be available at all St. Johns County Public Library branches and Council on Aging senior centers.

Surveys must be completed and submitted before March 6, 2022.

"We want to hear from everyone in St. Johns County about what makes our community special. It is important for us to celebrate what we love about our community and what makes us unique," said Hunter Conrad, St. Johns County Administrator.

Visit www.BrandingSJC.com to learn more about St. Johns County's branding initiative.

ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Hospital receives national 2021 Press Ganey Guardian of Excellence Award®

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

Baptist Medical Center South has been named a 2021 Guardian of Excellence Award® winner by Press Ganey, the national leader in healthcare consumer and workforce engagement.

Press Ganey recognizes top-performing healthcare organizations achieving the 95th percentile or above for performance in patient experience, which is measured by consumer ratings and how likely they are to recommend the medical center to others.

“Being named a national leader in patient experience is a great honor and something we strive to achieve every day,” said Kyle Dorsey, FACHE, hospital president of Baptist South. “The fact that this award is based on feedback from our patients makes it especially noteworthy.”

The Press Ganey Guardian of Excellence Award® is a preeminent, competitive achievement for leading healthcare organizations. Presented annually, the award applauds hospitals and health systems that consistently sustained performance in the

top 5 percent of all Press Ganey clients.

“Press Ganey is honored to recognize Baptist South as one of the nation’s leaders in patient experience,” said Patrick T. Ryan, chairman and chief executive officer, Press Ganey. “This award reflects an unwavering commitment to earning the trust and loyalty of patients throughout unimaginable challenges. We are humbled by Baptist Health’s incredible efforts, and their ability to adapt to imperatives of COVID-19 on top of the increasing demand for consumerism in healthcare.”



Photo courtesy Baptist Medical Center South
Kyle Dorsey, FACHE, hospital president of Baptist South.

Why mentoring is now a must-have: Nine benefits you can’t afford to ignore

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

As employers know all too well, it’s an employee’s market out there. Thanks to The Great Resignation, a shortage of skilled workers, and economic aftershocks from the pandemic, companies are struggling to hire (and hang on to) workers at a level we haven’t seen in 15 years. Bert Thornton and Dr. Sherry Hartnett say there’s a powerful recruitment and retention tool you may not have considered: mentoring.

“We tend to think of financial incentives first, but money is not always what motivates people,” reflects Thornton, coauthor along with Hartnett of the new book “High-Impact Mentoring: A Practical Guide to Creating Value in Other People’s Lives” (BookLogix, 2021, ISBN: 978-1-6653-0344-6, \$19.95, <https://highimpactmentoringbook.com/>). “We know young people really want to be developed. And we know that right now, people crave strong relationships and a sense of connection. Mentoring is the obvious answer.”

The authors wanted to meet the “huge and ironic need” for savvy leaders to share insights with the multitude of rising high achievers who crave that guidance. It makes sense for companies to bring the two groups together. But first they must know what good mentoring looks like, and they need a way to scale it in the organization. Their book helps on both fronts.

Part 1 is written by Thornton, the former president and COO of Waffle House, who offers “across the table” advice on one-on-one mentoring. Part 2 is written by Hartnett, founding director of the University of West Florida’s Executive Mentor Program, who lays out a framework to help companies put their own program in place.

“High-Impact Mentoring” serves as a blueprint for hardwiring the program into your culture so that every mentee gets a consistent experience every time. (This includes those who might be working remotely—there’s a whole chapter devoted to virtual mentoring.)

“Mentorship doesn’t happen on its own,” says Dr. Hartnett. “Individuals must make a conscious choice to become mentors and learn how to do it well. And companies need to plan and execute a mentorship program that delivers consistent, quality results to all new hires.”

Thornton and Hartnett say a good mentoring program can be the “silver bullet” that helps you thrive despite the current talent shortage. Consider these nine powerful benefits:

- Mentoring helps attract and retain talent. Especially in today’s environment of uncertainty and upheaval, companies need a strong team of employees. And it’s just as crucial that, once hired, good people stay on board. A mentoring program shows them there’s a path for advancement inside your company.
- “Millennials in particular deeply value training and development,” says Thornton. “By sharing their knowledge and experience with

younger employees, mentors help them grow and progress. At the same time, they teach younger people how to navigate challenges specific to their workplace so they are less likely to leave.”

- It helps new employees hit the ground running a lot faster. We no longer have the luxury of long onboarding periods for new hires. The pace of business requires everyone to become a contributing member of the team almost immediately. Assigning new employees a mentor early on can help expedite progress while helping them avoid pitfalls.
- A solid mentoring program can help cushion training budget shortfalls. Quite often in times of economic turmoil (like now), training budgets are on the chopping block. Mentors play a huge role in transferring knowledge and vital skills. They are a great source of on-the-job training that costs very little.
- It sets the stage for the ongoing

Mentoring cont. on pg. 15

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PopHistory

By Scott A. Grant

Moonshiners and Bootleggers at the Beach

People in Ponte Vedra like to drink. Life here can sometimes feel like an endless cocktail party. It has always been that way. Ponte Vedra and booze have a long and colorful history. This area was once known as Palm Valley on both sides of what is now the Intracoastal Waterway. In the old days, Palm Valley was a haven for moonshiners and bootleggers.

Palm Valley was known for producing some of the best moonshine in this part of the country. Moonshiners flavored Palm Valley Shine with charred peaches and palmetto berries. The palmetto berries gave the moonshine its distinctive darker color and added an extra kick.

During Prohibition, the demand for Palm Valley Shine skyrocketed. They say that before Fred's Tavern got one of the state's first liquor licenses, Fred sold moonshine from Palm Valley out of the now iconic storefront.

For many years, Roy Landrum was the local sheriff in Palm Valley. His wife, Alice, has a school named after her. The sheriff always made a big show of busting up stills around election time. But that did not quench the demand for good moonshine.

During prohibition, bootleggers operated off Ponte Vedra Beach. Large ships, laden with booze from the Bahamas, would anchor off the coast outside territorial waters like floating liquor stores. Small, fast boats would transport the illegal whiskey to shore.

A thirsty public flaunted Prohibition and the Feds struck back. Led by Mabel Walker Willebrandt, the first female US Assistant Attorney General, federal agents fought the unstoppable flow of illegal booze vigorously and aggressively. Some in Congress thought a little too vigorously.

One day in September 1928, John Hysler was picking up some illegal booze in Ponte Vedra. Hysler was known as the "Whiskey King" in Jacksonville. A customs officer spotted Hysler and an accomplice traveling towards Jacksonville in a Chrysler Roadster with stolen Alabama plates. The Chrysler was laden with 180 bottles of red whiskey.

A Prohibition agent named Hope King set a trap for Hysler. He waited for the "liquor car" at the tollbooth on the old Acosta Bridge. Hysler resisted and tried to flee. In the ensuing shootout, the popular Whiskey King was shot dead. Hope King was hospitalized.

The public was outraged. Some wanted to see the Prohibition agent charged with murder. They had to post a police guard outside Hope King's hospital room to keep him from being dragged outside and killed by angry citizens. Over 1,500 people came to John Hysler's funeral to mourn the passing of the Whiskey King.

Scott A. Grant is a local historian and author. By day, he is president of fiduciary asset manager, Standfast Asset Management.



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Nease NJROTC qualifies for Air Rifle national championships

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Nease's NJROTC program reached a new level in program history in February as its Air Rifle team placed second at the NJROTC Area-12 Air Rifle Championships in Anniston, Alabama. The top two schools move on to national championships.

This achievement marks the first time for the Air Rifle team to make it to the national championships. Nease's drill team (third at the 2021 national championships), brain brawl team (third at the 2021 national championships) and orienteering team (competing in March at the 2022 national championships), have all qualified multiple times for making it to nationals.

"I could not be more proud of the cadets," said Naval Science Instructor and Air Rifle Coach Gunnery Sergeant Duane Hanson. "This group put the time and effort in beginning in August and stayed the course for the past five months."

The four cadets making up the team are senior Nick Bohanon, sophomores Hailey Pitches (team captain), Gabriel



Photos courtesy Scott LaRoche
Area-12 Manager Johnathan Shaw, Chloe Westerlind, team captain Hailey Pitches, Gunnery Sergeant Duane Hanson, Gabriel Mitchell and Nicholas Bohanon with second place trophy at the Area-12 Championships.

Mitchell and Chloe Westerlind. Westerlind was the team high shooter and placed sixth overall in the championship Sporter Division.

Air Rifle is an authorized NJROTC activity that develops strong discipline, attention to detail and unwavering commitment in cadets. The Area-12 Air Rifle Championship brought together the best teams across the state of Georgia and northern Florida to the competition. During competition, cadets shoot from three positions – standing, kneeling and prone.



Nease cadets Nicholas Bohanon, Gabriel Mitchell, Chloe Westerlind and Hailey Pitches fire downrange from the kneeling position at the Area-12 Air Rifle Championships.

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Briefs

Chocolate and Beyond – A sweet way to support volunteers and teachers

Chocolate and Beyond, a celebration of chocolate, desserts, and other culinary sensations, will be held on Saturday March 5 from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. at The Classic Car Museum of St. Augustine. This year marks the 29th anniversary of the event.

Samples of chocolates, desserts, and savory fare will be available from some of the area's finest culinary artisans. Guests will cast their vote for the People's Choice Award winner and Guess the Chocolates. Great items will also be available for bid at the silent auction.

This event is hosted by TASK (Teacher's Aid for Student Knowledge), and

proceeds assist RSVP of St. Johns County in recruiting, placing, training, and recognizing volunteers 55 years and older that mentor and tutor students. Proceeds also assist teachers with classroom grants.

Tickets for Chocolate and Beyond are \$25 per person (\$15 for children younger than 12) and can be purchased online at <https://rb.gy/zbdbho>. Tickets will also be available at the door.

well-being and mental health of teens.

The Patrick Heinold Foundation's mission is to promote suicide prevention through programs dedicated to the well-being and mental health of the nation's teens. In Florida, suicide is the third leading cause of death for the 10 to 24 age group (AFSP Florida Fact Sheet, 2021). The best way to prevent suicide is through early detection, diagnosis, and treatment of mental health conditions.

Patrick Heinold, known to his teammates as "Pat," played on The Bolles School boys' varsity basketball team. Proceeds from this annual tournament and sponsorships from Fortegra, Jacksonville Orthopaedic Institute (JOI), Southern Association of Basketball Officials and Sports Edge Athletics home of JJVA, among others, have enabled the Patrick Heinold Foundation to present mental health speakers to Jacksonville-area teens, fund programs for educators to help identify teen mental health needs, and build partner programs with the North Florida chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), Here Tomorrow and Young Life.

The team entry fee is \$80; visit www.patrickheinoldfoundation.org to register.

Tale Tellers return storytelling to area

The Tale Tellers of St. Augustine have returned "Theater of the Mind: Storytelling" to Limelight Theatre with new offerings after a hiatus of almost two years. "Travel Tips," to be performed on March 8 at 7:30 p.m., will enlighten listeners about adventures in paradise, the details of the great international towel incident, and travel behind the speckled door. The program of music and stories features Chris Kastle, Margaret Kaler and Rose van der Berg. General admission is \$10 and group rates available. For reservations or information, call (904) 540-0402 or (386) 439-9413. Tickets may be purchased in advance online at www.taletellers.org.

The Tale Tellers of St. Augustine, a non-profit organization of cultural and educational orientation, was founded in 1993 to promote the art and perpetuate the tradition of storytelling. Dedicated to community enrichment, the guild promotes the art of storytelling by sponsoring its members in performance. Guests and new members are invited to meetings, which are held at 7 p.m. on the second Monday of each month except July.

Survey to identify needs of older adults and caregivers

ElderSource, the Area Agency on Aging and Aging and Disability Resource Center for Northeast Florida is seeking input from the community to better understand the needs of older adults, persons with disabilities and their caregivers. Working with the Health Planning Council of Northeast Florida, the data will be used to identify what is important to older adults living in Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, St.

Registration open for tournament supporting suicide prevention & Teen Mental Health

The Patrick Heinold Foundation will host its fifth annual 3v3 basketball tournament at the Sports Edge Athletics, home of JJVA Gym (8457 Western Way, Jacksonville) on March 27, 2022. Competitors, ranging from fifth grade to adults, will participate in a fundraiser to promote suicide prevention through programs dedicated to the

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Life

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Get to Know ...

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewsline.com

Andrew Burk

Andrew Burk's experience through Florida's public school system is one that he truly enjoyed, with teachers that he counted as some of the best. It is an experience that he wishes for every student, and he isn't certain that every child has this same experience. Burk is now a teacher who was recently named the St. Johns County Teacher of the Year, and he sees the award as the perfect platform to promote education equity statewide. "When you build a system of trust and you make the jobs attractive, what ultimately happens is the kids will be in good hands," said Burk, who has been Valley's Ridge's band director for the past three years. "Public school is awesome when we invest in it as a group and as a community. Everyone has to be all in." Burk, 28, grew up in Gainesville, attended Florida State University, and taught in South Florida for two years prior to teaching at Valley Ridge. He also has strong ties to Washington, D.C., both from having lived there briefly, but especially through his advocacy efforts that began while at FSU. He earned his degree in musical education but began with an interest in a social science degree — his political mind already in motion. "I am a very outspoken advocate for public education. I think that helped me stand out in the Teacher of the Year process," Burk said.



Photo courtesy Andrew Burk
Andrew Burk

Q: What is your teaching philosophy?

A: I like to concentrate on building a band family. It is important to build appropriate relationships with kids and to also help them build those relationships with each other. I like to break down barriers between social groups, and I set up an opportunity to rely on and trust each other. I use the words "family" and "team" a lot. I also make the students responsible for classroom tasks such as setting up the chairs in the room. I like to challenge my students, and I love to perform with them — a lot.

Q: How did you first get involved in band?

A: In the fifth grade, we had to choose an elective. My choices were PE, technology or band. I was too insecure to take PE and had no interest in technology. So, I chose band. I had no music background at that time. Everything I learned came from my school band experience. That is the best part of a beginning band class. It is designed knowing that you may have zero knowledge. You get to learn an instrument, learn to read music and try out different instruments. I made all my best friends through band. It was such a good group of people in a very

positive environment. I had great music and band teachers. I have not stopped playing since the sixth grade. My instrument is the trombone. From day one, I loved school and band was a big part of that experience. I was also part of the "Marching Chiefs" at FSU.

Q: What do you do in your free time?

A: I have a "Little Brother" with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northeast Florida. I volunteered in October 2020 because I wanted to feel like I belong in the community. We go canoeing a lot since I live on the St. Johns River and we cook often.

Q: You also work remotely for a law firm in Washington, D.C. Explain more about your passion for politics and education advocacy.

A: I have always been fascinated by policy and politics. I think it is important to address these education issues at the grassroots level. I was able to attend "Music Education Hill Day 2015" while at FSU through the National Association for Music Education and was given a chance to meet with and talk to senators. We wanted music to be listed as one of the core subjects in public school so that it would be eligible for federal dollars. I also interned at an education non-profit for literacy, 826DC, through The Washington Center. I partnered with the Florida Collegiate Music Education Association to create an Advocacy Day for Music Education in Tallahassee. I was so inspired by "Hill Day" that I wanted to help more teachers become engaged in the process. That is still my goal today.

Get to Know ...

Interested in being featured? Email Martie Thompson at editor@FloridaNewsLine.com

What's Going on in St. Johns cont. from pg. 4


Nease High School will participate in "Leadership Night" at the Jacksonville Icemen game on March 25 at 7 p.m. and 25 percent of ticket sales will support Nease High School. The event will include Zamboni rides for coaches and faculty and recognition of the Nease football team and head coach Collin Drafts. Nease Cheer and Band will welcome fans as they enter the arena. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/3p3am9u4> to purchase tickets through a special fundraising link.

The Jacksonville Gem and Mineral Society will host its 34th annual Gem and Mineral Show and Sale on March 25, 26, and 27 (10 a.m. – 5 p.m.) at the Jacksonville Fair Grounds. The cost is \$5 per day or \$8 for all three days. Visit www.facebook.com/JacksonvilleGemandMineral/ for more information.

The 39th annual St. Augustine Lions Spring Festival will be held at Francis Field, 25 W. Castillo Drive in St. Augustine, on March 26 and March 27. Hours are 10 a.m. – 10 p.m. on Saturday and 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. on Sunday. The festival features seafood, live music, kids' rides, and arts and crafts vendors. Free parking and shuttles will be available. Visit www.lionsfestival.com for more information.

The Newcomers of North St. Johns will host a meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, March 29 beginning at 11:15 a.m. at Alhambra Diner Theatre, 12000 Beach Blvd. in Jacksonville. The event features lunch and entertainment by the Alhambra Theatre Players. The cost for the luncheon and program is \$35 for members. All reservations must be received by March 18. Contact Sue Aird at sjaird@comcast.net to register. The Newcomers of North St. Johns offers a wide variety of activities, including smaller lunch groups, wine socials, golf, Mah Jongg, holiday parties, day trips and cultural events.

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Nutrition Check

Ch-ch-ch-chia. Have you tried chia seeds?

By Caroline Jury BS and Kristen Hicks-Roof PhD, RDN mail@floridanewslines.com

National Chia Day is March 23. Chia is more than a fun plant you put on pottery, watch it grow and sing a catchy jingle. Many ancient civilizations, such as the Mayans and Aztecs, have used chia as a staple as early as 3,500 B.C. Today, you can find chia seeds in various spots in the grocery store such as in the rice/quinoa aisle, health/vitamin aisle, or the baking aisle.

Chia seeds and nutritional value

Though tiny, chia seeds pack a punch, they have high nutritional value that may be beneficial and protective for hypertension, cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. Chia seeds are a good source of omega-3 fatty acids, which have cardioprotective benefits. In addition, in only two tablespoons, these seeds contain nearly 10 grams of dietary fiber. Lastly, chia seeds are

a good source of B vitamins and several minerals including calcium, iron, potassium, magnesium, and zinc.

How do I eat chia seeds?

Chia seeds have little distinctive flavor, so they are easy to add within or on top of various foods. They can be added to cereals, baked goods, yogurt, salads — or you can make your own chia seed pudding in minutes. First, start with two tablespoons of chia seed, add half a cup of milk (any kind), mix well to prevent any clumps, and wait for a few minutes to help it set. There are limitless opportunities for pudding toppings, such as fresh fruits, nuts, honey, agave and even chocolate chips. It can also be stored in the refrigerator for up to two weeks, so you can make your chia pudding ahead of time and have a delicious snack when you get hungry.

The Pantry Raiders

Add a healthy twist to classic Sloppy Joes

By NewsLine Staff mail@floridanewslines.com

Sweet yet savory ground meat served on a bun is a comfort food classic that has been a staple for restaurants and home cooks for decades.

Sloppy Joes are beloved sandwiches that feature meat paired with a lip-smacking, tomato-based sauce. Some attribute the original Sloppy Joe to a cafe in Sioux City, Iowa, where in 1930 a cook named Joe added tomato sauce to his “loose meat” sandwich. Others say the sandwich evolved from sandwiches that were introduced by Floyd Angell, the founder of the Maid Right Restaurants, in 1926. Others attribute the recipe to a bar and cafe in Havana, Cuba, called “Sloppy Joe’s.”

Though the origin story is debatable, most people agree that the sandwiches are delectable. Sloppy Joes are called by many different names in various parts of the country, including yum yums, steamers and slushburgers. While it's traditional to make them with ground beef, any other meat can be substituted, including ground turkey for a leaner take. Try this recipe for “Turkey Sloppy Joes for a Crowd” from “Taste of Home Healthy Cooking Cookbook” (RDA Enthusiast Brands, LLC) by the Taste of Home

Kitchen.

Turkey Sloppy Joes for a Crowd
16 servings

3 lb. lean ground turkey
3 medium green peppers, chopped
3 medium onions, finely chopped



Photo courtesy MetroCreative Turkey Sloppy Joes for a Crowd

2 ¼ cups ketchup
¾ cup water
3 tbsp. white vinegar
3 tbsp. spicy brown mustard
1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and chopped
½ teaspoon pepper
16 whole wheat hamburger buns, split

In a Dutch oven coated with cooking spray, cook the turkey, green peppers and onions over medium heat until the meat is no longer pink and the vegetables are tender; drain.

Stir in the ketchup, water, vinegar, mustard, jalapeño, and pepper. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer for 20 – 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Serve on buns.

Mentoring cont. from pg. 9

learning that will be needed in the future. Increasingly, we need our employees to have a “just-in-time” skill set. The education system can't keep up, and companies will need to ramp up their training to bridge the skills gap.

- Mentoring helps people weather tough storms. COVID-19 has put incredible stress on leaders and employees. In fact, many organizations have moved beyond stress and into the realm of trauma. By putting things in perspective (“We’ve lived through other hard times and survived”), providing a safe space for mentees to vent about their stresses and struggles, and sharing coping skills, mentors can go a long way toward helping employees build resilience while easing their loneliness and isolation.
- It engages employees. Mentoring makes it more likely that people will

“lean in” to their work. They’re being challenged to learn new things, so they don’t become complacent.

- Mentoring sharpens a company’s ability to execute. Companies must be agile, fast-thinking, and fast-acting if they’re to survive. By sharing their years of accumulated wisdom, mentors help people broaden their perspective, cut through the information overload, and get to the heart of what matters.
- It helps people build the relationship skills today’s companies need to survive. Strong relationships—based on honesty, trust, transparency, and empathy—matter more than ever now.
- Mentoring helps organizations become more diverse and inclusive. There is a huge focus right now on these issues. In many organizations, older employees may need to learn how best to work with those from different racial and cultural backgrounds, belief systems, and orientations.



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Gardening

The gardening calendar and some economical tips

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale
 mail@floridanewline.com

The gardening calendar (<https://tinyurl.com/muu6h6me>) is a good guide to what we can do in our yards, but the weather is often a better guide in determining what we need to do; however, it is useful to know our average last frost date. When I found this website, <https://tinyurl.com/2p8tv52h>, I was surprised to find that in my area, fairly close to the river, it falls between March 1 and March 10. In past years I've always believed it was around March 16 – 19, which is quite a change.

if you know what to look for. Last year I planted some wildflowers, so I'll pull weeds rather than hoe them down, and work around small seedlings until they are large enough to identify. (I think we're all probably familiar with the weeds lurking in our yards!) When I find wildflower seedlings I'll either leave them alone, if they're conveniently placed, or move them carefully into small pots. Once they're a good size they can go back into a new garden bed, which will mean free flowers for me and sustenance for pollinators.

Starting seeds indoors is a useful and economical way to get a head start on the spring vegetable garden and summer annuals. If the cost of grow lights is too high, perhaps this DIY set up constructed with PVC pipe might suit your budget: <https://tinyurl.com/mpkzmx6x>. I use a similar frame, slotting the pieces together without adhesive to make it easy to take down and store. Even a full spectrum led bulb in a simple directional desk lamp can give a houseplant or a few small seedlings a boost without the expense of a fancy system.

Some of my newer plants have been such a treat. I have some large-flowered rosemary, or scrub mint, *Conradina grandiflora*, a native which resembles a spreading, fine-leaved culinary rosemary. The plants were good specimens to begin with, and they haven't skipped a beat. One or two began flowering in early autumn and the others followed in profusion. The pale pink flowers are similar to rosemary, but larger. There are still a few flowers in early February. They don't need supplementary watering and flourish in sandy, well-drained sites. Pollinators love them. (*Conradina grandiflora* is endemic to Florida and endangered; it should only be purchased from a reputable nursery.)

If you have a compost heap that's been sitting for a while, now is a good time to check its progress. I generally throw on compostables and hope for the best, but I do aim for a mix of brown and green material and wet it down if dry. After a year or so, I use a large sieve to separate out the crumbly finished material. The sieve is a DIY item, fashioned from a square wooden frame to which is stapled with some wire mesh. It fits over my cart to catch the finished compost. The mesh is small enough to remove most material that hasn't fully decomposed, and this can either be added back to the heap or spread very lightly under mulch. For more efficient composting methods, check out <https://tinyurl.com/8d22d83k>. In Florida's heat, an efficiently managed heap can become finished compost in just a few months. Black gold!

Myrcianthes fragrans, Simpson's stopper, is a lovely evergreen shrub or small tree, graced with fragrant flowers and red fruits. Mine are supposed to be dwarf, but methods used in the horticultural trade to produce so-called dwarf plants aren't always permanent. Recently, with the unseasonably warm weather, they put on some beautiful red-tinged new growth. The last cold snap caused some minor damage, but I'll wait until after our last frost date before deciding if they need a little pruning: a useful guide.

Both saving seed and checking for plant volunteers save money. In spring it's easy to spot volunteer seedlings of perennials and annuals

A postscript: For information on the importance of helping our insects, see <https://tinyurl.com/262cws38>. While we may not be able individually to have much impact on global climate, we can try to protect the insects that pollinate our flowers and produce, starting in our own yards.

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Fishing

Capt. David's Fishing Report

By Capt. David Lifka
mail@floridanewline.com

We are finally reaching the time of year where our portion of the globe starts leaning closer to the sun again. With that comes spring and eventually summer. But first comes spring. With spring comes a rebirth of nature such as plants, trees, flowers, birds, and more importantly (in some people's minds) — fishing.

The month of March is the kickoff of a new fishing season. River, lakes, ponds, beach, jetties, inshore, and offshore will all have some kind of increased fishing activity. Certain species of fresh or saltwater fish will offer some of the best fishing of the year in the spring, while other species will begin to show and only get better as spring progresses to summer.

For folks that are new to fishing, spring is probably the best time of year to give it a try. Weather is usually mild and pleasant.

Catching certain species such as whiting in the surf, or bream or bass in a neighborhood pond or creek are at their easiest.

Because of the many benefits that spring-time fishing offers, it's the perfect time of year to introduce fishing to the family or to oneself. Fishing is more than being about catching fish. It's family time, outdoor time, recreation time, time to take notice of the splendors of nature and recognizing all that it has to offer.

There are lots of different ways to get started fishing. One of the easiest ways is to find a friend already with fishing knowledge. Hiring a guide to take you fishing is yet another. Watching people and asking questions (especially

if they are catching fish), or doing a little research online reading articles and watching YouTube videos.

Regardless of how you learn and what success you have, the fringe benefits and enjoyment that you may discover fishing will far outweigh never giving it a try. Springtime fishing is ready and waiting. Remember the old saying "A bad day fishing is better than a good day at work." For a lot of people, that saying holds true.



Photo courtesy Jimmy Tomazinis
Striper caught in December off of Mandarin Point.

Fishing Report: Great surf fishing for whiting everywhere. Pompano will be on the increase, especially St. Johns County and Flagler County beaches. Bass bite continues in all area freshwater.

Whether you catch one, some, or none, the family time spent fishing will last a lifetime.

Email your Catch of the Month photo to catchofthemonthpictures@gmail.com. Be sure to include the name of the person(s) in the photo, the name of the person who took the photo, the type of fish and date and location of the catch. We will select a photo each month for publication.

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— Resident Mary M. (with her dog, Jade)

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Travel

New attractions to see in New York City

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewsline.com

New construction, a seemingly never-ending process, occurs in all cities. On a recent trip to New York City, I saw work crews arrive before dawn to labor in unfinished skyscrapers and repair roads — but I also discovered a few newly-opened attractions I'd recommend seeing.

The Vessel, an unusual structure completed in 2019, soars 16 stories above Hudson Yards. From eye level, the building looks like the rear of a cruise ship, a series of horizontal platforms and inclined ramps. You'll find 154 intricately interconnecting flights of stairs — almost 2,500 individual steps and 80 landings. Make the effort and take the climb to earn remarkable views. Although that sounds like great exercise, my short trip didn't permit me time. I still found the structure fascinating and especially enjoyed its glittering glow from nighttime illumination.

The Shed stands next to the Vessel, a flexible, adaptable building resembling a mammoth soft-sided tent. It houses ever-changing works by emerging artists, musicians, theater productions, literature, sculpture, and dance.

The Vessel and Shed lead to the entrance of the High Line, a fantastic 1.5-mile pedestrian walkway over an old rail line. The elevated path stretches from Hudson Yards to the Meatpacking District. You stroll or jog along without the worry of crossing a street, encountering traffic jams, or stopping at red lights. Many new apartment buildings have arisen alongside the older



The Vessel illuminated at night.



The Shed.

ones lining the walkway. One particular condo or office center featured bowed-shaped windows reminding me of old root beer candies.

Near the end of the High Line, pedestrians come to the Chelsea Market, the former National Biscuit Company factory build-



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Little Island.

ing (where the Oreo cookie was created). The updated space serves as a food hall with gourmet shops, take-away or sit-down restaurants, gift shops, galleries, and more. Stop in for a cup of coffee, snack, or casual meal.

Continue down to the High Line's end, stop, then look right. You'll find an odd assemblage called Little Island. The new park was created utilizing pod-like containers, filled with soil, bushes, and trees, placed on stilts at the river's edge. The stilts resemble the backs of high-heeled shoes. The pods join together and create a unique green-like setting. People stroll around the grounds and, in the summer, sit at small tables or benches. They come to the amphitheater, with tiered seating and a stage facing the Hudson River, for performances.



The High Line.

Hike up to the highest point on Little Island, and you're blessed with a panoramic view of the Manhattan skyline. Gaze across the river to see Hoboken. Look carefully in the distance, and you might spy the Statue of Liberty.

The Whitney Museum, featuring American modern art collections, lies across the street from Little Island. Browse a large selection of Jasper Johns work, Alexander

Calder, and others.

While NYC can be tough on the wallet, the view of the Vessel, Shed, Little Island, and a stroll down the High Line are free — and most memorable. A quick getaway to the Big Apple always remains fun.

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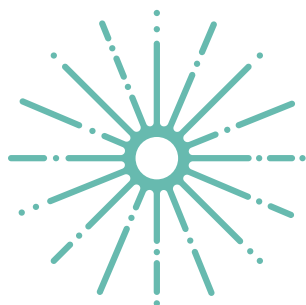
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