

The CreekLine

FEBRUARY 2023 Volume 23 Issue 2

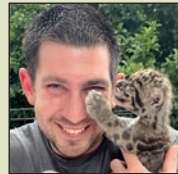
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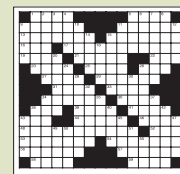
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Photo courtesy Henry Seiden

Sean Flynn, Jose Riera, and David Patrick, former DIV-14 Commander and member of Flotilla 14-7

Change of Watch for Flotilla 14 – 7

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

United States Coast Guard Flotilla 14 – 7 held its Change of Watch for members and guests, announcing a new slate of officers for 2023 on Jan. 5 at the St. Augustine Yacht Club.

After a potluck dinner, the program introduced the newly-elected Commander and Vice Commander and they announced new and returning staff officers. Sean Flynn, the Flotilla Commander, and Jose Riera, the Vice Flotilla Commander, discussed the flotilla's plans for the new year — one of recovery, a renewed commitment to community service and re-integration of programs in community support.

Present were approximately 20 members and invited guests of the flotilla, who also recognized awards and service of the past year's members and officers.

County developing master plan for multiple future parks

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

St. Johns County is getting closer to developing four regional parks in the northern part of the county. St. Johns County Parks and Recreation is collaborating with sports architecture and planning firm OSPOrts, along with its partners Catalyst Design Group, CHW Professional Consultants, and Perez Planning + Design, to develop a master plan for multiple future county parks as an operation of the "Parks and Recreation Master Plan," which evaluated the needs and priorities of the county and was last updated in 2019.

According to St. Johns County Parks and Recreation Director Ryan Kane, his department is in the process of gathering data from the community about wants and needs for the new parks. This is being accomplished by an online survey as well as a community meeting, which was held in Ponte Vedra Beach in early January. Next, the data will be evaluated and ultimately presented to the county's Recreation Advisory Board.

St. Johns County already owns the 163 acres of new parkland in consideration, spread across four sites: Northwest Park, off of Greenbriar Road (63 acres); Silverleaf Park (40 acres) and Shearwater Park (10 acres), which are near the communities with the same names; and Nocatee Park (50 acres) located north of Nocatee Parkway.

Kane said that approximately 50 – 60 people attended the community meeting in Ponte Vedra Beach and that they are hopeful to schedule a meeting in the Northwest as well.

"The online survey has been a major component of our data gathering," Kane said. "As of Jan. 10, we have already had 1,600 responses."

The survey (<https://ppd.mysocialpinpoint.com/st-johns-county-four-county-parks/st-johns-county-four-county-parks-page-1/>) asks respondents to prioritize, from a list, the amenities that they would prefer at each park location.

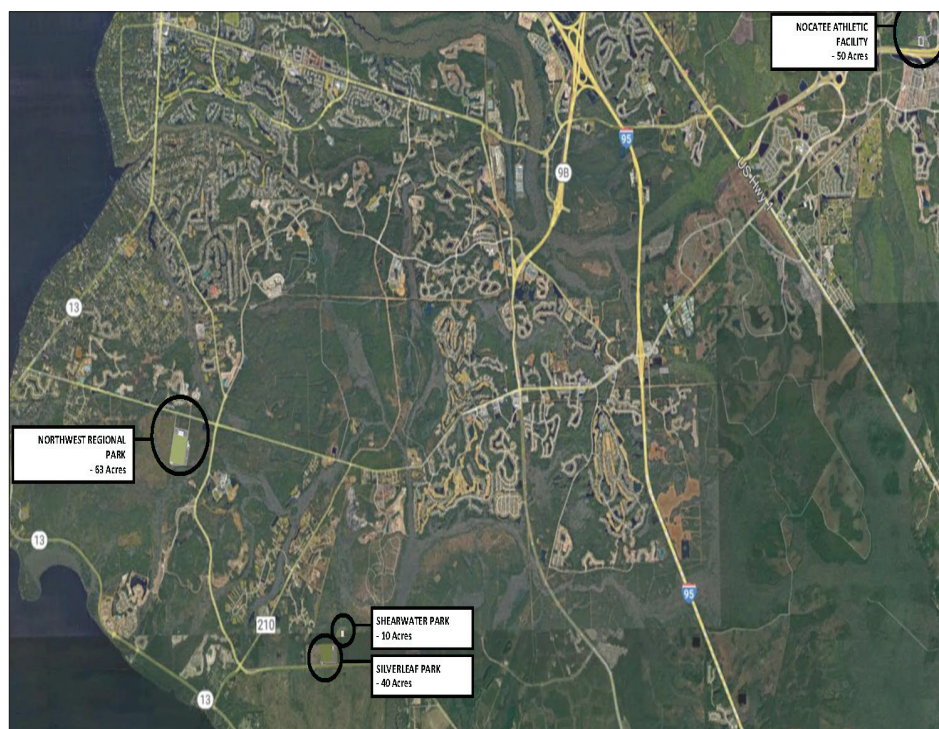


Photo courtesy St. Johns County Parks and Recreation

Aerial view of the location of four new parks in St. Johns County.

Options range from multipurpose fields and baseball/softball fields to playgrounds, off-road biking trails, disc golf, and a skate park, among others.

Kane said that the goal is to come up with a Master Plan to present to the Recreational Advisory Board, probably at a public meeting in March. Although construction will likely be phased due to financial constraints, at the end of the process the goal is to look at the four parks together so that hopefully all needs and wants are met. He pointed out that there will likely be some duplication of the most popular amenities.

In addition to the survey and community meeting, the Parks and Recreation Department has met with each county commissioner to learn what they had heard from their constituents. Kane said there had also been a stakeholders' meeting with the various youth sports organizations, including Creeks Athletic Association, Florida Elite, and Ponte Vedra Athletic Association, for their feedback.

"A lot of our parks are built just for youth sports," Kane said. "While that is important, we have a simultaneous great

need for a full component of assets in addition to meet the needs of the community. The youth sports organizations support us in this."

Kane said they'd like to model the four new regional parks after Treaty Park, located off State Road 207 in St. Augustine, which has a variety of assets and activities.

"Treaty Park is busy all day," he said. "For instance, during the day there could be people playing pickleball, utilizing the dog park, walking on the trails ... and then still have multipurpose fields for youth sports in the evenings."

Presently, there is \$14.5 million approved funding for all the parks, but Kane said that is just a beginning of the total amount that will be needed. Phased construction over the course of a number of years will be necessary due to funding needs. He said that prioritization decisions will be guided by finances and public opinion.

"Our goal is to make these parks community assets," Kane said. "We have a generational opportunity and we need to get these right and meet what the community wants."

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The CreekLine Community Newspaper is a free monthly publication distributed via mail to all addresses in Zip Codes 32259 and selected routes in 32092 and 32095. Submission of articles and photographs are received by mail or email, although email to editor@FloridaNewsLine.com is preferred. The writers' opinions do not necessarily reflect the opinion of Florida NewsLine. Advertising Rates are available by request. Florida NewsLine is not responsible for advertisement content or accuracy of information provided by its advertisers. Nor does Florida NewsLine endorse any of the products or services included in this publication. Florida NewsLine reserves the right to refuse advertisement or copy from any advertiser. All rights are reserved and no portion of this publication October be copied without the express written consent of the publisher. ©2023.



BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Dusty!



Breed:
Tabby

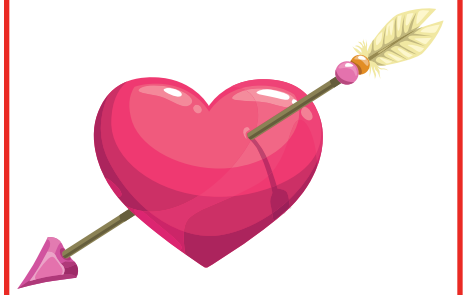
Favorite Activity:
Eating, playing and causing mischief

Favorite Treat:
Feline Greenies

Favorite Friend:
His brother Ace's tail and his humans, Dalton and Declan

How your BFF got their name:
My oldest son named him after his favorite "Stranger Things" character, Dustin!

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@floridanewslines.com to enter your pet.



Happy Valentine's Day!
From your friends at The CreekLine

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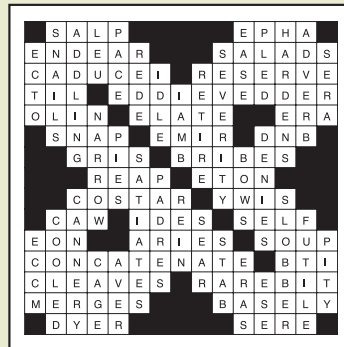
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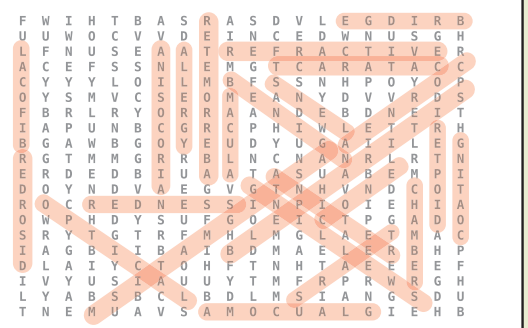
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Last month's Mystery Photo was the fence outside Julington Creek Elementary School.



Answers
Puzzles
PG 14

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February

Community Calendar What's Happening in St. Johns

Trout Creek Senior Center offers activities for seniors on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings at 6795 Collier Road in Orangedale. Cards, crafts and games start each day at 9 a.m. with trivia, nutrition/exercise, Bunco and Bingo among the additional activities before lunch at 11:45 a.m. each day. Contact Program Coordinator Anne Marie Forsythe at (904) 552-1611 for more information.

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 Table Cafe, 10391 Old St. Augustine Road. Visit the group's Facebook page (Playing HOOKie) or email playinghookie2022@gmail.com for more information.

Jokers Wild, a local card group, plays the game of "Hand, Knee, and Foot" on Wednesdays. If you are interested in joining, please call (904) 230-6962 and leave a message.

Men's afternoon group forming with plans to play public courses within 45 minutes of World Golf Village with tee times after 12 p.m. Golfers must be able to break 110. Email JaxGolfTour@gmail.com if you are interested in joining.

2nd: **Switzerland Garden Club** will host Kalia Baillene from the Garden Club of Palatka to talk about William Bartram's connections to Palatka and St. Johns at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on Thursday, Feb. 2 at 10 a.m. Visit www.switzerlandgc.org for more information.

4th: **CHARACTER COUNTS! 6K/3K Run/Walk** will be held on Saturday, February 4, 2023, at 9 a.m., beginning and ending at Palencia Elementary School, 355 Palencia Village Drive. Race proceeds support CHARACTER COUNTS! initiatives throughout the St. Johns County School District. Visit RunSignUp.com to learn more and register.

4th: **Field of Dreams Opening Day** will be held on Feb. 4 with games starting at 9 a.m. and the opening ceremony at 10:30 a.m. Visit www.fodbaseball.com for more information.

7th: **Happy Hookers crochet group** will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on Feb. 7 and Feb. 21 from 5:30 p.m. – 6:45 p.m. The group crochets or knits blankets for cancer patients at area hospitals. All skill levels are welcome. Visit www.sjcpls.org or call (904) 827-6960.

7th: **Honeybee Quilters Guild** will meet on Tuesday, Feb. 7 at 6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church in the Loft on the County Dock Road side of the church at 2501 Loretto Road. Annette Paulson will discuss creating Embroidery Cards. Wearing masks is optional. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

8th – 11th: **Bartram Trail Friends of the Library Book Sale** will be held at the Bartram Trail Branch Library, 60 Davis Pond Blvd., Feb. 8 – Feb. 11, during normal business hours of the library.

12th: **The Bartram Trail Genealogy Club** meets the second Saturday of each month (this month, Feb. 11) from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. in the Bartram Trail Library conference room, 60 Davis Pond Blvd. Every level, beginners to experts, are welcome. If interested, come to a meeting or send a request to join the club at www.facebook.com/groups/BTGenClubGroup.

13th: **The St. Johns County Civic Roundtable** will meet on Monday, Feb. 9 at 12 p.m. at St. Augustine Waterworks building, 184 San Marco Ave. in St. Augustine. Email info@sjcroundtable.org to register for the meeting or visit www.sjcroundtable.org for more information.

13th: **The Northwest St. Johns County United for Progress Club** will meet on Monday, Feb. 13. In celebration of Black History Month, noted author and St. Augustine historian David Nolan will speak about Black history. Board of director elections will also be held at this meeting. Contact nwsjcp@gmail.com for reservations if you'd like to attend.

15th: **Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club** will hold its meeting and luncheon on Wednesday, Feb. 15 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. The luncheon will include a "Cruising into Spring" fashion show featuring clothing from Petunia Patch Fashion Express owned by Peggy Johnson. The cost of the luncheon is \$32. Make checks payable to BTNC and mail to Donna Holland, 512 Candyroot Court, St. Johns, FL 32259. Payment must be received no later than Feb. 10, no exceptions. Be sure to indicate entrée choice on the check memo line. Visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 for food choices and updated information.

16th: **William Bartram Scenic Highway Group** will meet on Thursday, Feb. 16 beginning at 6:30 p.m. at the St. Johns County Annex, 725 Flora Branch Blvd. Join the discussion to keep NW St. Johns County Scenic and Historic and preserve the State Road 13 Scenic Highway. Virtual meeting access is available; contact alabbat@comcast.net or call (904) 699-8475.

18th: **Herbs and Foods for Wellness class** will be offered on Feb. 18 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 at (386) 972-1891.

19th: **Wellness Team of St. Patrick's Episcopal Church** will offer a special presentation on Sunday, Feb. 19 at 11 a.m. for Heart Month: guest speaker Lamar Kaleel will share his personal story, "Matters of the Heart: One Man's Story of Faith, Healing and Survival." This presentation is free and open to the public and will be held at St. Patrick's Episcopal Church (1221 State Road 13 in Fruit Cove). Call (904) 287-2807 for more information.

20th: **The All Star Quilters Guild** will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on Monday, Feb. 20 at the First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. Georgina Lewis will present a trunk show. Sew and Tell is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit www.allstarquilters.org for more information.

23rd: **The Newcomers of North St. Johns** will host a holiday luncheon on Thursday, Feb. 23 beginning at 11 a.m. at Jacksonville Golf & Country Club, 3985 Hunt Club Road. The event features a delicious lunch and a presentation about pearls by the Love the Pearls experts; all attending will receive a classic pair of pearl stud earrings. The cost for the luncheon and program is \$34 for members. All reservations must be received by Feb. 15. Visit <https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org> for more information.

23rd – 26th: **Bartram Trail High School Theatre Department** will stage "Matilda the Musical," inspired by Roald Dahl's book, at the Bartram Trail High School Auditorium, 7399 Longleaf Pine Pkwy. Performance times are 7 p.m. on Thursday through Saturday evening, with a matinee at 2 p.m. on Sunday. Tickets are \$15 or \$10 for students. Visit <https://bit.ly/3b9Vilf> for more information.

24th: **Gentle yoga** will be held at 10 a.m. on Feb. 24 at the Bartram Trail Branch Library, 60 Davis Pond Blvd. Register at www.sjcpls.org or call the library at (904) 824-6960. Space is limited to the first 24 patrons.

26th: **The Unity Church for Creative Living** will host a **Conscious Comedy Concert** — Vibrating at the Frequency of Fun with award-winning humorist Greg Tamblin on Sunday, Feb. 26 at 12:30 p.m. Tickets cost \$20 prior to Feb. 20 or \$30 afterwards. Unity Church for Creative Living is located at 2777 Race Track Road. Call (904) 287-1505 or visit UnityInJax.com for more information or to purchase a ticket.

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

Q: What's the latest update on the new schools under construction?

A: Things are moving along for all three schools and we still plan for all three to open in fall 2024. Work such as clearing and establishing the dirt pad are underway for the Shearwater school; land is being cleared for the Beacon Lakes school; and the bid for construction has been released for the RiverTown school. We anticipate awarding this bid in March and starting construction as soon as possible thereafter.

Q: What is the plan to staff these new schools?

A: We are already looking ahead to hire teachers for these new schools. We have a Job Fair scheduled on Feb. 25 from 8 a.m. until 12 p.m. at Nease High School and principals from all the schools will be onsite to conduct interviews on the spot. We are always looking for high quality teachers to join our district, to include new graduates, people returning to the workforce, or those with alternative certifications. We will have another Job Fair for teachers on March 25 and a similar job fair for other school employ-

ees at a date to be announced.

Q: When is this year's Teacher of the Year going to be announced?

A: On Feb. 2, we will honor our schools' Teachers of the Year and Rookie Teachers of the Year at a banquet at World Golf Village that will once again be hosted by INK!. I look forward to finding out which of our five finalists, which includes Gomati Sutaria of Liberty Pines Academy and Brianne Seplocha of Picolata Crossing Elementary in the Northwest, will be going to the state competition.

Q: Do you have anything else to share with NW St. Johns County?

A: The Field of Dreams will hold opening day on Feb. 4 with games starting at 9 a.m. and the opening ceremony at 10:30 a.m. I am delighted to be associated with the organization from the beginning because it gives all of our kids a chance to participate.

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.



**with St. Johns County Sheriff
Rob Hardwick**

Q: Can you share some information about your office's Real Time Intelligence Center?

A: The Real Time Intelligence Center is housed at our new facility, the Emergency Communications and Training Center. We have a supervisor assigned to this unit, along with six criminal analysts, two sworn detectives and a tech support specialist, and they physically solve crimes from behind their keyboards.

Q: What types of technology do you use?

A: We use Fusus, a software aggregator that brings all the technology under one platform — such as Computer Aided Dispatch calls (CAD calls), our patrol cars, the FDOT traffic cameras, Waze for traffic, and license plate readers (LPRs).

Q: What can you tell us about Connect St. Johns?

A: Connect St. Johns (www.connectstjohns.org) is a public safety program that enlists the help of residents and businesses to keep our communities safe. The website allows residents and businesses to register their home cameras so we know where they are located in the event of a crime. There is no direct access to privately owned cameras and we only use the registry to request footage if needed. Cameras may also be integrated using a special core device and written permission from the camera owner; in this way our authorized analysts would be able to tap into them real time to help solve a crime in progress. These programs are completely voluntary, but they provide another means of modern day electronic policing.

Q: How does your office use license plate readers (LPRs)?

A: This technology was actually developed in the 1970s in England and has

been used by other states for years. The Florida Department of Transportation uses LPRs to collect tolls. In St. Johns County we've only utilized it since 2018. I'd like to dispel some rumors about LPRs. The facts are that we only use LPR technology for public safety and criminal offenses. We do not issue any tickets or citations using LPRs. All data we receive from the LPRs, which we strategically place to protect the community such as around schools and near large events, is owned by SJSO and we do not sell it to anyone. The LPR only taps the rear of the vehicle, not the occupant inside or any personal information. Our office is audited quarterly to make sure that any data is only accessed by our Real Time Intelligence Center.

Q: Have the LPRs been successful in helping you solve crimes?

A: Yes. Since the inception of using LPRs here, we have recovered 398 stolen vehicles and 97 pieces of stolen property, arrested 170 individuals with active warrants for their arrest, and apprehended 478 individuals charged with a crime. We've also recovered 72 missing individuals. A double traffic homicide on Race Track Road in 2019 was solved when the driver who hit two bicyclists fled to his residence and hid the vehicle in the garage. Six hours later, we had a search warrant and were able to bring closure to the case.

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@sjsso.org or call me at (904) 824-8304. Also, our website, www.sjsso.org has a wealth of resources, from alarm registration to Crime Stoppers to our Neighbors app.

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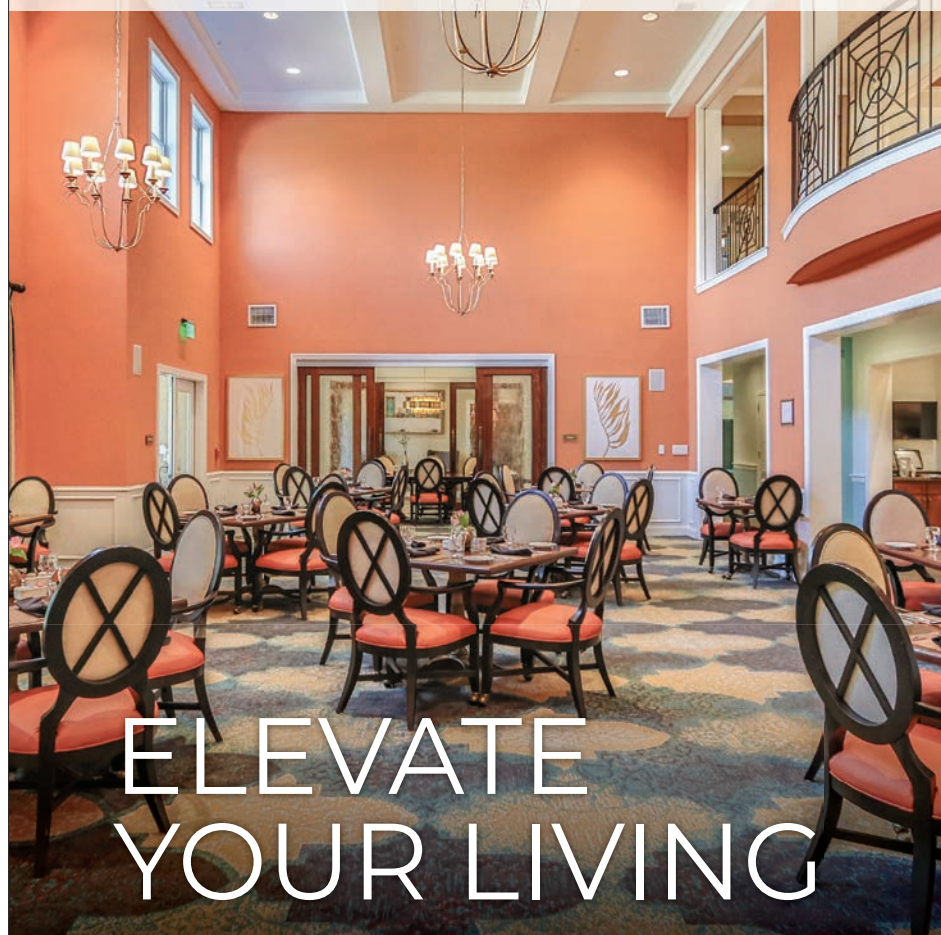
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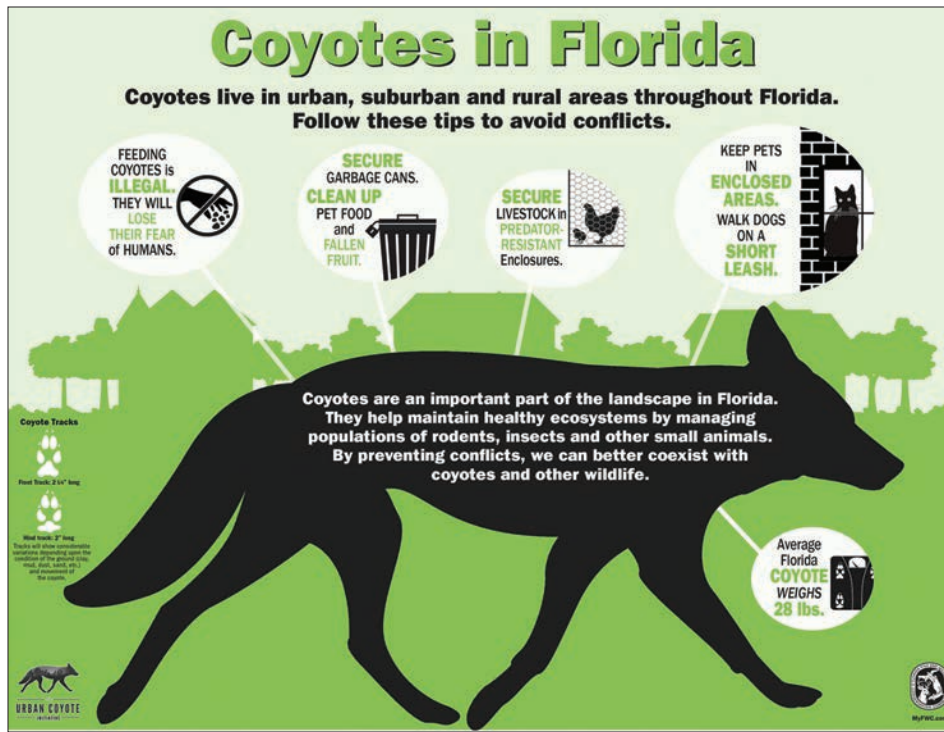
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Q&A with State Attorney, 7th Judicial Circuit, R.J. Larizza

Q: Can you describe your circuit's Operation Young Guns initiative?

A: We started this initiative in May of last year because we noticed that a lot of the violent gun crime, to include murder, attempted murder, armed robbery and drive-by shootings, was being done by young individuals between the ages of 12 and 25 years old. We decided to begin documenting these in our system so that we could appropriately and aggressively address and prosecute these cases, which have been dramatically increasing in number.

It's very disturbing because these kids are shooting and even killing each other over an issue as minimal as music preferences or "disrespect." So we said enough is enough and we began tracking these cases.

We suspected that some of these cases, including those where guns were fired but there was no victim, could be related. We started looking at social media and found that a lot of these individuals were glorifying gun violence with their posts. Via technology that compares shell casings, we have found that some guns reported as stolen were used in these crimes. As you know, we've had a rash of thefts from unlocked cars in the Northwest and Northeast areas of St. Johns County. Guns stolen in these areas have been used in crimes committed in other areas of the Seventh Circuit.

Q: Have you expanded the use of technology to identify firearms used in crimes?

A: A firearm will leave a "fingerprint" on the shell casing of a fired bullet. A semi-automatic firearm ejects shell casings and this process also leaves a unique mark. Previously, we have run these through a regional database, but have expanded to using a national database known as National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN). We've started using this technology even in non-murder cases where firearms have been used and are finding that casings at one crime site sometimes match another, so we can connect these crimes.

Q: Have you found success in prosecuting as a result of this initiative?

A: Yes. We have had three or four "Young Guns" trials in the past 60 days, all of which resulted in significant prison time. We are working closely with all the sheriffs in the circuit to ensure there is the most evidence available to prosecute.

Q: What would you say is the bottom line?

A: While crime is low in our circuit and we are fortunate to live in a low violence community, there are pockets of crime that we are focusing on because these can become a significant threat to all communities. We are making significant progress in cleaning up. Our duty is public safety and this is our number one priority.



Q&A with St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer

Q: Do you have an update on your December column, where you discussed the impact of storms Ian and Nicole on property owners' taxes?

A: Yes. When the State of Florida Legislature met for a special session in December, they approved a tax rebate for some property owners. If your home was damaged during Ian or Nicole and that damage prohibited the occupancy of the home for at least 30 days, you can apply for an abatement of your 2022 property taxes.

Q: How do affected homeowners go about getting this?

A: You have until April 3, 2023 to apply for the abatement. Your 2022 taxes must be paid current. To apply, you must fill out a form and provide evidence, such as an insurance claim or a contract and payments to contractors for repairs, that you were out of your home for at least 30 days. You should bring the form and your evidence to our office, or you could scan and email the documents to us, and we will review your claim. We have until June 1 to either approve or deny, but we will act on it very quickly once we receive it. If we approve, then we will forward the information to the St. Johns

County Tax Collector, who will rebate a pro rata share of the taxes paid while you were out of your home. If we deny your application, you can appeal to the Value Adjustment Board.

Q: Is there a maximum number of days that can be claimed?

A: If your home was damaged during Ian, you can apply for up to 95 days; if your home was damaged by Nicole, you can apply for up to 52 days.

Q: When can homeowners begin the application process?

A: Anytime between now and April 3. I'd recommend not waiting, because I have no authority to take an application after April 3. If there are any questions, homeowners can call our office and we will be happy to help.

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 Ed-die@sjcpa.us or call me at (904) 827-5500.

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Photo courtesy Friends of Alpine Groves Park
Alpine Groves Park's circa 1900s farmhouse.

Alpine Groves Park offers history and nature

By Nick Andrews
mail@floridanewsline.com

Alpine Groves Park, in Switzerland, is not only a great place to walk along the park's scenic trails, but it also offers a unique opportunity to step back in time and explore the history of Mandarin orange production in the area. The St. Johns River has provided a landscape that helped to create a rich cultural heritage in the area.

Alpine Groves Park is home to a circa 1900s farmhouse, which was built on a historic orange plantation. The Friends of Alpine Groves Park offer monthly tours and provide visitors with stories that give a glimpse into the lives of those who worked and lived on the plantation, and who helped to shape the present-day community. The tour guides will bring the history of the farm to life, making it a fun and educational experience for all.

The park has more to offer than historical tours — it's also a scenic place for families to take photographs, with natural scenery creating picturesque backgrounds for any family portrait. Alpine Groves Park is also an ideal place for nature enthusiasts and birdwatchers to glimpse a diverse range of birds, including the majestic bald eagle.

The park offers amenities such as playgrounds and picnic tables, as well as hiking trails and a fishing pier.

The next round of tours by the Friends of Alpine Groves Park will be held on Saturday, Feb. 4 from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. Check the group's Facebook page for more information or to inquire about any other scheduled events.

Nick Andrews is a member of the Friends of Alpine Groves Park.



Q&A with St. Johns County Tax Collector Dennis Hollingsworth

Q: How do I know if my driver license is REAL ID compliant?

A: The easiest way to check if your license is federally compliant is to see if your driver license has a star in the upper right hand corner.

Q: What do I do if my driver license is not REAL ID compliant?

A: You must visit a tax collector office to become REAL ID compliant for the first time. You will need to bring primary documents establishing your identity, proof of legal presence, and date of birth. You also will need to bring proof of your social security number and two documents that show your primary residence. For more information on the required documents, visit <https://www.flhsmv.gov/driver-licenses-id-cards/what-to-bring/>

Please note, there are specific proof of residency documents required for residents obtaining a commercial driver license or temporary permit.

Q: What does REAL ID compliant mean?

A: The federal REAL ID Act of 2005 set new standards for the issuance of driver licenses and ID cards. Florida began issuing REAL ID compliant credentials Jan. 1, 2010. REAL ID is a nationwide effort to improve the integrity and security of state issued driver licenses and ID cards, which helps fight terrorism and reduces identity fraud.

Q: Anything else?

A: Once a customer provides the required identification documents, they will only need to provide them again if their information changes, such as their name or residential address. After May 7, 2025, non-REAL ID compliant driver licenses or ID cards will not be accepted at airports. A United States passport may also be used in lieu of a REAL ID compliant credential.

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.sjctax.us. I may be reached by calling (904) 209-2250 or emailing taxcollector@sjctax.us.



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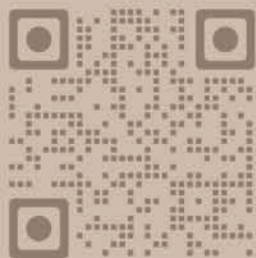
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St. Johns County announces new District 3 Commissioner and Interim Fire Chief

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Gov. Ron DeSantis has appointed Roy Alaimo to represent District 3 on the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners. Alaimo fills the seat left vacant by the untimely passing of Commissioner Paul Waldron, 53, in October 2022. District 3 covers the southeastern portion of the county. Alaimo is a former District Representative for the U.S. House of Representatives and previously served as the chair of the St. Johns County Planning and Zoning Agency. He is also the owner of Alaimo Strategies, a St. Augustine-based consulting firm.



Photos courtesy St. Johns County
County Commissioner Roy Alaimo.

has served the department in various operational ranks, including firefighter, engineer, lieutenant, captain, and battalion chief.

“I am honored and humbled to be appointed by Gov. DeSantis to serve on the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners,” said Alaimo. “I am excited for the opportunity, and I look forward to serving the community.”

Alaimo took the ceremonial oath of office during the Jan. 17, 2023, meeting. He will serve on the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners until the 2024 election.



Interim Fire Rescue Chief
Raymond Scott Bullard.

“Serving the people of St. Johns County has been one of the greatest honors of my life. I’m looking forward to continuing that service as the Interim Fire Rescue Chief and leading the best fire department in Florida and the nation,” he said.

The St. Johns County Fire Rescue Department has announced Raymond Scott Bullard as the new interim fire rescue chief. Interim Fire Rescue Chief Bullard’s appointment comes after the retirement of Chief Jeffrey Prevatt, who served St. Johns County for more than 40 years. Bullard is a 21-year St. Johns County Fire Rescue veteran who

Interim Fire Rescue Chief Bullard was selected as the 2013 Fire Rescue Paramedic of the Year and has been instrumental in developing several department initiatives, such as the Firefighter Development Program and the Live Fire Instructor Training Program.

St. Johns County Administration will continue the process of selecting a permanent fire rescue chief. Once a selection has been made, it will be announced to the public.

Grand opening held at credit union



Photo courtesy First Florida Credit Union

First Florida Credit Union recently celebrated the grand opening of its 19th location, the Durbin Creek Crossing Branch in St. Johns. The ribbon was cut by Jon Lyon, First Florida Credit Union board chairman. The event was attended by First Florida senior managers, board of directors members, St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ambassadors, and other local neighbors, partners, and members.



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ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Executive leadership promotions announced

Flagler Health+ has announced the promotions of Angie Metcalf, who has been named the organization's Chief Administrative Officer, and Donna Wagner as Chief Nursing Officer.

Metcalf, who had previously served as executive vice president, chief human resources officer, has been promoted to executive vice president, Chief Administrative Officer. She will retain her previous responsibilities over the human resources and marketing communications function, in addition to responsibilities for the partnership integration.

Donna Wagner, who recently celebrated 10 years with Flagler Health+, has been named Vice President, Chief Nursing Officer, a role she previously held on an interim basis. Wagner has an extensive nursing background including time spent as a nursing assistant, a bedside nurse in Med/Surg, ICCU, ICU, and open heart recovery, a nursing educator and adjunct professor, as well as experience in quality and patient experience.

Doctor joins family medicine practice

Dr. Elizabeth Di, a board-certified family medicine physician, has joined Flagler Health+'s network of Primary Care providers. Dr. Di is now scheduling appointments for new patients at the Flagler Health+ Primary Care office at Greenbriar, off of County Road 210 in northern St. Johns County. Dr. Di, who will see patients from newborn and up, joins Dr. Mark Michaels at the location.

Dr. Di joins the Flagler Health+ team after practicing family medicine at University Hospitals/Lake Health Mentor Family Practice in the greater Cleveland, OH area.

Dr. Di, who is fluent in Spanish, has

special interests in women's health, long-acting reversible contraception, and the care of underserved patients.

Dr. Di earned her bachelor's degrees in Psychology and Latin American Studies from the University of San Francisco and completed her master's in Community and Social Psychology from the University of Massachusetts-Lowell. After receiving her medical degree from the Northeast Ohio Medical University in Rootstown, Ohio, Dr. Di completed her residency in Family Medicine at Case Western MetroHealth Medical Center in Cleveland, Ohio, where she was education co-chief, centering pregnancy leader, and adjunct course instructor.

Hospital named as a 2023 Best Place to Work in Information Technology

Baptist Health in Northeast Florida was among only eight health systems in the nation, and the only health system based in Florida, to be ranked as a 2023 Best Employer in Information Technology.

Computerworld publisher Foundry surveyed large (more than 5,000 employees), midsize (1,001 to 4,999 employees), and small (1,000 or fewer employees) organizations to discover the top employers for its 29th annual "Best Places to Work in IT" report. While in past years the survey has been offered only to U.S.-based companies, this year, organizations across the globe participated. Public and private companies in all industries were welcome to participate.

Baptist Health was recognized on two levels, ranking 11th overall among all large companies, and also ranking among the following Computerworld Top 10 lists for 2023:

- #2 in IT growth: Demonstrating leadership in growing the IT ranks
- #3 in diversity: Demonstrating

excellence in advancing workforce DEI

- #4 in employee engagement: Fostering deeper connections and employee well-being
- #9 in career development: Investing in IT employees to help them grow their skills and careers

These annual lists were compiled based on a 52-question comprehensive survey about company offerings including:

diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practices; turnover, promotions and growth; retention and engagement programs; remote/hybrid working; benefits and perks; training and career development opportunities. The surveys were then scored and thoroughly vetted by a panel of industry experts. Responses to the company survey were collected and tabulated by a third-party research vendor and then vetted by a panel of industry experts.

New grocery store for St. Johns



Photo courtesy Southeastern Grocers

Southeastern Grocers, parent company of Winn-Dixie, officially revealed its newest Grand Cypress Winn-Dixie location on Wednesday, Dec. 14, with a ribbon cutting ceremony before the doors opened 8 a.m. to hundreds of waiting customers. The new store, located in the Grand Cypress Marketplace at 100 Little Cypress Drive (southwest corner of Race Track Road and Philips Highway), is the grocer's first store built from the ground-up in more than a decade. During the ceremony, the store also presented a \$1,000 donation to Bartram Springs Elementary School to aid the school's recycle programs and support Grand Cypress' future leaders.

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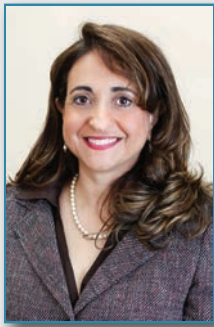
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A garden that speaks for itself

By Dianne Battle, Master Gardener,
Garden Club of Switzerland
mail@floridanewsline.com

This winter has been a hardship for our landscapes and gardens. Plants that stayed healthy last winter are now brown and dry, but that dead foliage is still useful providing protection for dormant plants and for birds and other wildlife. Alpine Groves Native Plant Butterfly Garden is in the same situation. Firebush, porter weed, and spiderwort that were vital and green last winter, have only dead leaves and branches. It's hard to imagine them vibrant and filled with birds, bees and butterflies, but native plants are resilient. They will leaf out, and the seeds of annuals will sprout, drawing the creatures that give us so much pleasure, dancing above the blossoms.



Photo courtesy John Battle

The Gold Lantana (*Lantana depressa*) is a nectar source for butterflies like the gulf fritillary.

In the meantime, the garden's "caretakers," St. Johns County Master Gardeners and the Garden Club of Switzerland, are starting a project that should make your experience in the garden more enjoyable and informative. All of the plants in this garden have value to pollinators, but few of them are identified with signage. Thanks to a grant from National Garden Clubs, Inc., we now have a system to label these plants, and to provide a scannable QR code to look them up at the University of Florida or the Florida Native Plant Society's website. All of the plants and seeds from our garden were obtained from native plant nurseries

nearby or less than two hours drive away. Once you find a plant you'd like for your own garden, we can help you locate a nursery that sells it.

In addition to signage for the plants, St. Johns County will be installing a kiosk with a poster showing Florida's Butterfly Caterpillars and their host plants

from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Once you've identified a plant from our signage, you can refer to the kiosk to find out what butterflies use it for nectar or to feed their caterpillars. The poster is no longer available, but the St. Johns County Library has the information in book form: "Florida Butterfly Caterpillars and Their Host Plants," by Marc C. Minno from the University of Florida Press.

Once the system is in place, we'd appreciate your feedback. If you take a picture of a butterfly or plant in our garden, we'd be happy to feature it on our garden club website, www.switzerlandgc.org.

ElderSource Looking for Caring Connections volunteers

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Duval County resident Carla Furr says she believes in the importance of giving back to her community. It's something that was instilled in her by her mother who believed in the power of good deeds and helping others. After retiring from the computer industry, Furr has spent her time volunteering in different organizations, but found something special with the ElderSource Caring Connections Telephone Reassurance program.



Photo courtesy ElderSource
Carla Furr

ElderSource's Caring Connections program is an initiative that provides a friendly phone call from a volunteer to an older adult who is living alone, homebound, or wants to receive a friendly call. The program helps to eliminate or reduce some of the concerns homebound older adults face such as isolation, loneliness, depression, and anxiety.

"The calls are not a permanent fix for their loneliness, but it puts that in the background for a while and brightens their day. I can tell for a little while they've been lifted out of their loneli-

ness," Furr said.

The cornerstone of volunteering with Caring Connections is being willing to establish a friendly, caring relationship with older adults over the phone. Volunteers must also have great listening skills, be willing to make a commitment to call a senior at least once a week for a minimum of six months and pass a background check. Orientation and free training sessions are provided.

Now going on her third year with Caring Connections, Furr calls on two different women once a week. The chats with the women vary, but for her it usually is about a two hour a week commitment.

The Caring Connections program is looking for more volunteers. There are currently more than two dozen older adults on the waiting list hoping to connect with a new friend.

An ElderSource staff member learns from each volunteer how many older adults they would like to be matched with and makes introductory calls. Seniors who receive the calls are 65 or older and reside in Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, St. Johns or Volusia County. People interested in becoming an ElderSource Caring Connections volunteer can call (904) 391-6631 or send an email to Volunteers@MyElderSource.org.

Finding a Port in the Storm: Homeless youth center provides safe haven for young people

By Tiffany Merlo Phelps
mail@floridanewline.com

There are more than 800 homeless students in the St. Johns County School District. Out of that number, 186 are unaccompanied youth — without a parent or guardian. The statistics tell the story of a homelessness trend that is currently reflected across the country.

In St. Johns County, Port in the Storm Homeless Youth Center is trying to change that story line and provide a place where youth can find shelter, food, clothing, and, most importantly, a plan to a better life.

“We serve ages 18 to 24. That age range is the fastest growing subset of the homeless nationwide,” said St. Augustine Society (St. Francis House/Port in the Storm) Executive Director Judy Dembowski. “We are a low barrier emergency shelter. We use as few reasons as possible to say no at the door. We really want them to come in and be safe.”

Dembowski said staff members engage with the youth to find out what they want to do, where they might find “natural support” in the family and then review education, mental health, and vocation goals.

“It is incumbent upon the staff to help these young people want more for themselves,” she said. “We are changing their trajectory.”

To that end, Port in the Storm offers case management, daytime drop-in programs and life-skills programs to provide the tools and support needed to move



Photo courtesy Karen Hensel
Team St. Johns County Sheriffs Office, grand champion winner for Port in the Storm fundraiser.

forward. In one case, a graduating high school student was accepted into a college, but just needed a place to stay until school began in the fall.

“They deserve the same shot at a productive healthy loving life as kids who come from other backgrounds. They deserve this opportunity, and we help show them that they do in fact deserve it,” said Dembowski.

Dembowski, who has worked with homeless youth since the mid-1990s, said that the job sometimes takes its toll on her and the staff, but it is also what keeps them motivated to do more.

“We are in this for a reason. We celebrate successes, and we cry about losses very privately,” she said. Dembowski said that there are a lot of misconceptions about the type of youth that run away.

“There is a false narrative about there being bad teen runaways who are out of control. Kids don’t run to the street. They run from something,” she said. “It is not fun and games. It takes a lot to leave your bed, your food, your shower.”

Another challenge then becomes to live life and blend in with your peers at school while being homeless.

“They are called the hidden homeless for a reason,” she said.

“They have been mistreated and ill-used by adults in their life and on the streets too. It takes a while to gain their trust.”

Michael Israel, St. Johns County School District Homeless Liaison, said his job is to identify students who are in transition, assess their needs, remove barriers, and assist in providing educational opportunities. This includes finding resources for housing, school supplies, transportation, free and reduced lunches and partnering with civic and faith-based organizations and the community to provide for needs that occur outside of school.

“We live in a very blessed county and people want to help. We have a great school district, superintendent, and community,” said Israel, who is also a pastor.

Dembowski said that she is grateful to the St. Johns County School District for its approach to helping homeless youth.

“We have a great relationship with the school district. I have never seen a school system like St. Johns County. They wrap around these kids. They are phenomenal. They invest in these homeless kids. They do not treat them as an issue,” she said.

Israel said that he sees his job as a ministry and has always had a strong desire to help children that could not help themselves. He also said that he is constantly impressed by the young people that he meets and the strength that they possess.

“They are very resilient, highly independent individuals. They want so much more for themselves. They are sometimes reluctant to accept help,” said Israel. “We do not impose on anyone. We find out their needs and meet them where they are at. We want them to know that we are here.”

[Author’s note: For more information about Port in the Storm, visit www.stfrancisshelter.org/port-in-the-storm. For those interested in donating, there is always a need for granola bars, snack size chips, pop top canned food and any non-perishable food. Gift cards (\$10) for Walmart, Target and grocery stores and \$5 gift cards to Dunkin Donuts, Chick-fil-A and McDonald’s are also appreciated.]

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Briefs

Scenic Highway group seeks members

The William Bartram Scenic and Historic Highway group recently sent invitations to residents living within 650 feet of the centerline of the William Bartram Scenic Highway, State Road 13, to join their organization to help protect and preserve the scenic corridor for present and future generations.

The group is a 501 C 3 non-profit charitable organization and has been in the forefront of the attempt to keep Northwest St. Johns County scenic and historic.

Readers are cordially invited to join the Scenic Highway Group by calling Al Abbatello at (904) 699-8475 or via email: alabbat@comcast.net.

St. Johns Riverkeeper launches new recreation website

St. Johns Riverkeeper has launched its new website, exploresthejohns.com. The website is for outdoor enthusiasts and novices alike. Visitors to the site can search various categories such as hiking, kayaking, marinas, dining, places to stay and more, to learn about and plan outings throughout the St. Johns River watershed.

"An important part of our work at St. Johns Riverkeeper is to educate people about the wonders of the St. Johns and introduce them to the many beautiful and special places throughout the river's watershed," explained Jimmy Orth, St. Johns Riverkeeper executive director. "The St. Johns is Florida's longest river and one of the most unique and important waterways in the United States. Our new website is intended to make it easier for the public to get out and explore this national treasure."

The website serves as a unique space for users to discover places to explore along the 310-mile St. Johns, including the lakes, creeks, tributaries and natural lands that comprise the river's nearly 9,000 square mile watershed. In addition to parks and outdoor recreation, the site highlights local businesses that are a part of the river community — including waterfront eateries, hotels and fish camps.

The St. Johns Riverkeeper team plans to continue to expand the website.

Visit exploresthejohns.com to find a new place to launch your kayak or boat, walk and enjoy Florida's winter weather, or join a guided nature tour along the water.

New schedule for Friends of Library book sales

The Friends of the Bartram Trail Library is trying something new this year. Instead of monthly book sales that are only open for three hours on a Saturday, the group will hold quarterly sales in the front meeting room of the Bartram Trail Branch Library with special early access for Friends members.

The first sale of 2023 will be Wednesday, Feb. 8 through Saturday, Feb. 11. Friends members will have early access from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. on Tuesday Feb. 7. Friends members can also fill a brown paper bag for \$5 on Saturday.

If you would like to become a member, pick up an application in the branch or download one from the St. Johns County Public Library website. Annual membership is \$20 per person or \$30 per family.

All memberships and donations provide programming, supplies, books and equipment to the library. Email info@bartram-trailfol.org with any questions.

Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club announce February Luncheon

The Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club will hold its February meeting and luncheon on Wednesday, Feb. 15 at 11 a.m. (note the change in day due to scheduling conflict) at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club, located at 205 St. Johns Golf Drive. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m.

The luncheon will include a "Cruising into Spring" fashion show featuring clothing from Petunia Patch Fashion Express owned by Peggy Johnson. Fashions including day wear, travel wear and evening wear. Models will be club members.

The cost of the luncheon will be \$32; make checks payable to BTNC and mail to Donna Holland, 512 Candyroot Ct., St. Johns, FL 32259. Payment must be received no later than Feb. 10, 2023, no exceptions. Be sure to indicate your entrée choice on the check memo line. Visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 for food choices and updated information.

The Bartram Trail Newcomers' and Women's Club meets the second Tuesday of every month from September to May for lunch. In addition to the monthly meetings, the club has a wide variety of interest groups, including Bridge, Continental Rummy, Pennies Canasta, Mexican Chicken Train dominoes, Bunko, Mah Jongg, golf, recipe exchange, monthly special events, book club, lunch and matinee, Lunch Divas, Ladies Night Out, a nature walk group and community projects.

Email Linda Beard at bartramtnc@gmail.com for club information. Visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 to see pictures of meetings and download a membership form.

Annual Giving Tree initiative benefitted many in need

In a year that had seen so many in need of assistance, the St. Johns County community's generosity and support of the 17th annual St. Johns CARES, Inc. Giving Tree initiative provided help to 40 non-profit organizations. These organizations serve the St. Johns CARES' target populations of the elderly, veterans, homeless, abused, children and pets in the county.

Donations at 52 host donation sites and by individuals resulted in distribution of \$62,843 in needed items and gift cards to help the non-profit organizations meet their client needs and wishes for the holidays and in the New Year.

Information on helping others in need can be found at www.stjohnscares.org and on the group's Facebook page, "St. Johns CARES Volunteer Organization." St. Johns CARES, Inc. is an all-volunteer nonprofit organization.

Newcomers of North St. Johns to learn about pearls at meeting

The Newcomers of North St. Johns February luncheon will be held on Thursday, Feb. 23 beginning at 11 a.m. at the Jacksonville Golf & Country Club, 3985 Hunt Club Road. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. The event will feature an entertaining

Life

travel • pantry raiders • gardening
fishing • entertainment • puzzles

Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

Stephen Brezil

Stephen Brezil said he has loved animals his whole life — somewhat surprising since his parents were not “animal people,” especially his father. Born in California and raised in the wilderness of Virginia, Brezil grew up exploring the woods and all the critters he could find. At one point, his mother limited the number of tanks he could have in his room containing animals, so he said he researched to learn which animals could live together in a tank so he could fit more in. Throughout his life, he has worked for a variety of pet stores, including his own: Blazin’ Reptiles, which he opened when he was still a teenager and eventually, Xtreme Exotics, now open on Philips Highway in Jacksonville. Almost five years ago, he started Xtreme Exotics Wildlife Foundation, a non-profit with the mission to take in rescue animals and endangered species. It is located on US Highway 1 just south of Palencia.



Photo courtesy Stephen Brezil
Stephen Brezil

just sell someone a pet, but I wanted to teach them how to keep the animal alive and healthy.

Q: Have you ever caught an alligator?

A: I have! On one of our family vacations to Florida, my goal was to catch an alligator. I did. I told my mom about it when we were in a restaurant and she screamed. I told her that [“Crocodile Hunter”] Steve Irwin had caught one when he was nine years old and I did it at 12, so I wasn’t that far behind. It was about three feet long and yes, the FWC did come and tell me I couldn’t keep the alligator, but I had already set it free. Of course you need a permit to catch an alligator ... as I now know.

Q: When did you open your pet store, Xtreme Exotics?

A: As a teenager, I worked at a number of pet stores. At one point, the owner

of one of the stores told me that I would never be successful in the business, so 30 days later I opened Blazin’ Reptiles, my first store, because I didn’t want to work for someone else again. I wanted to keep the animals safe and I even vetted potential owners. I owned Blazin’ Reptiles for about 12 years, and then decided to start over and change the name to keep things fresh and also to reflect that we sold more than just turtles and lizards. I opened Xtreme Exotics in 2016 with the support of many of my previous clients. We have everything from Bengal cats to bearded dragons, turtles, snakes, monitor lizards, and ferrets.

Q: What led you to start the Xtreme Exotics Wildlife Foundation?

A: At the pet store, we would take in between 100 – 150 rescue animals a

year ... sometimes the owners had lost their home or many times a military family had an abrupt transfer and they were unable to take their animal. About five years ago, I decided to buy some land after someone gave me a serval cat. The goal for our rescues is to get them healthy and then place them with a family if possible. We’ve grown to include endangered species with an eye towards conservation; we either release them to the wild or place them in zoos. We have monkeys, lemurs, kangaroos, owls, and a river otter from the Brevard Zoo, whose mom was killed in an accident that also left him permanently handicapped. He will live with us in one of our lagoons.

We live and work with these animals and we get the opportunity to show people what it takes to own them. The foundation is a non-profit and we offer private tours and accept donations of money and items to keep it going. For instance, two different Publix stores donate all their extra produce to us on a daily basis.

Q: What is the most interesting animal that you have at the Foundation?

A: Probably our clouded leopards, which are a threatened species. We have two girls that live at the Foundation and they became somewhat famous on TikTok last year.

Q: What do you do in your spare time?

A: I don’t really have much spare time between the store and the foundation. But I like to travel to other people’s zoos to learn what they do and offer to help with our knowledge if I can.

[Author’s Note: Tours are available at Xtreme Exotics Wildlife Foundation. Visit them on Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok to learn more.]

Q: What was your first job working with animals?

A: I started the selling of animals when I was a boy and we would travel from Virginia to Florida for family vacations. The pet stores in Virginia would buy invasive species such as iguanas that I would bring back from Florida. When I was 14, I got a worker’s permit to work underage for 20 hours per week at a pet store in Virginia. When we moved to Florida, I was 15 and I continued working in pet stores. My first job here was at AquaZoo. I always wanted to not

Get to Know ...

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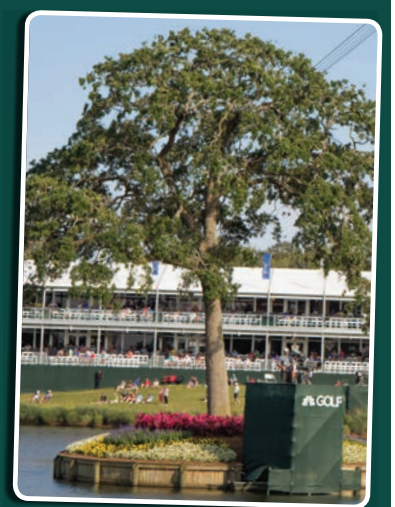
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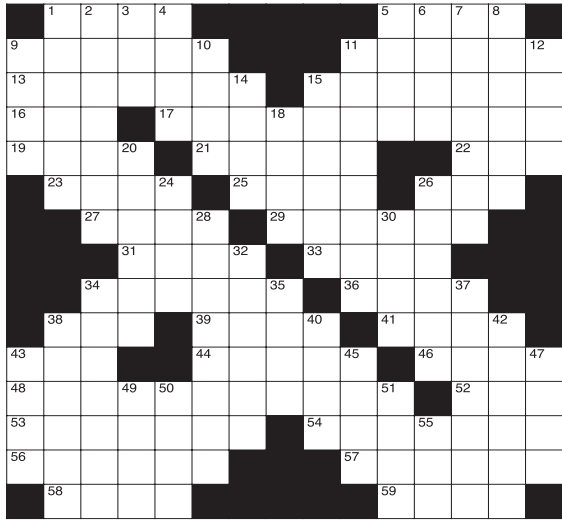
Spectators Guide

Championship



Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

1. Sea grape
5. European public health group (abbr.)
9. A way to delight
11. Appetizers
13. Ancient heralds' wands
15. Make a booking
16. '___ death do us part
17. Pearl Jam frontman
19. Spider genus
21. Fill with high spirits
22. A major division of geological time
23. Catch
25. An independent ruler or chieftain
26. Electronic music style (abbr.)
27. Influential Spanish cubist painter
29. Illegally persuades
31. A way to derive
33. British School
34. Appear alongside
36. Surely (archaic)
38. Harsh cry of a crow
39. A day in the middle
41. Kansas hoops coach Bill
43. The longest division of geological time
44. The first sign of the zodiac
46. Appetizer
48. Link together in a chain
52. A bacterium
53. In a way, forces apart
54. Cheese dish
56. Combines
57. In an inferior way
58. Colors clothes
59. Dried-up

CLUES DOWN

1. Gastropods
2. Confusing
3. Romanian monetary unit
4. The rate at which something proceeds
5. A prosperous state of well-being
6. Asked for forgiveness
7. Makes less soft
8. Part of speech
9. Outside
10. Advice or counsel
11. Badness
12. Protein-rich liquids
14. Not moving
15. Call it a career
18. Poetry term
20. Not wide
24. Pastries
26. Turns away
28. Satisfies
30. Gift adornments
32. San Diego ballplayers
34. Manufacturing plant
35. Check or guide
37. Dogs do it
38. Chilled
40. Scorch
42. Unproductive of success
43. Electronic counter-countermeasures
45. Attack with a knife
47. Feel bad for
49. Enclosure
50. Assert
51. Geological times
55. Midway between east and southeast

VISION CHECK WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

- ABERROMETER
- ALLERGY
- ANISOCORIA
- ASTIGMATISM
- BENIGN
- BIFOCAL
- BLEPHARITIS
- BRIDGE
- CATARACT
- CHAMBER
- COATING
- CONE
- CORNEA
- DIOPTER
- DISORDER
- GLAUCOMA
- LENS
- MACULA
- OPTICAL
- REDNESS
- REFRACTIVE
- RETINA
- SWELLING
- TEARS

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Solve the code to discover words related to breakfast time.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 17 = A)

- A. 10 17 18 2 17 16 23 22**
Clue: Flapjacks
- B. 23 19 19 22**
Clue: From chickens
- C. 22 17 20 22 17 19 23**
Clue: Pork product
- D. 7 14 17 22 7**
Clue: Heated bread

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Beta Club donates to St. Augustine Humane Society



Photo courtesy Kelli Gallant

The Timberlin Creek Elementary Beta Club welcomed guest speaker Lynn Washington from the St. Augustine Humane Society to its January meeting. The Beta Club presented Washington with a donation check for \$500, along with numerous items for cats. The students raised this money by earning donations for arts and crafts that they made. Washington also brought a special guest, Barry (the cat), who the students were fortunate enough to meet and learn about.

Timberlin Creek students support SAFE Pet Rescue



Photo courtesy Kelli Gallant

This year the first graders at Timberlin Creek Elementary decided to give back to the community during the holiday season, so they collected donations for S.A.F.E. Pet Rescue in St. Augustine. The students contributed more than 150 items, including collars, leashes, toys, and pet food.

Briefs cont. from pg. 12

presentation about pearls by the Love the Pearls experts and all attending will receive a classic pair of pearl stud earrings.

The cost for the luncheon and program is \$34 for members and \$39 for guests and all reservations must be received by Feb. 15, 2023. Visit <https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org> for more information about the luncheon, including entree choice, and membership.

Following lunch, guest speaker Mike Bren-

nan will deliver an informative and fun presentation about the wonderful world of pearls. There is also time to shop a huge selection of pearl jewelry, including new designs at incredible savings direct from the producer. Credit card or cash only.

The Newcomers of North St. Johns offers a variety of activities to get acquainted and have fun including smaller lunch groups, Bunco, Canasta, wine socials, golf, Mah Jongg, holiday parties, day trips and cultural events.

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The Pantry Raiders

This hearty meal chases away the chill

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

February may be known as the shortest month of the year, but it also can be among the coldest. When cooking during this time of year, whether it's a family meal or a romantic dinner for two on Valentine's Day, foods that take the cold weather into consideration are the best bets.

Cottage pie is a meal traditionally served in areas of Great Britain and Ireland. The name is sometimes used interchangeably with shepherd's pie, but that's a mistake. While shepherd's pie uses lamb in the recipe, cottage pie contains beef. Cottage pie features a layer of meat and vegetables topped with potatoes. Some people opt for a mashed potato topping, others arrange thin slices of potatoes to look like "shingles" on the cottage. This recipe for "Cottage Pies" from "Real Simple Dinner Tonight: Done" (Time Home Entertainment) from the editors of Real Simple prepares the pies into individual servings. They can be prepared up to two days in advance and then baked straight from the refrigerator as needed.

Cottage Pies

Serves 4

- 1 ½ pounds Yukon gold potatoes (about 3), peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces
- Kosher salt and black pepper
- ½ cup whole milk
- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1/3 cup ketchup

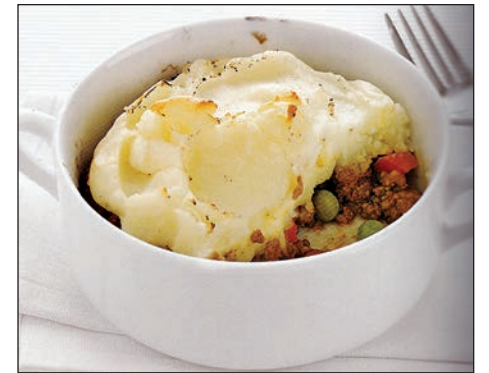


Photo courtesy MetroCreative
Cottage Pies

- 1 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 ½ cups frozen peas and carrots

Heat oven to 425 F. Place the potatoes in a large pot and add enough cold water to cover. Bring to a boil and add 2 teaspoons salt. Reduce heat and simmer until just tender, 15 to 18 minutes. Drain the potatoes and return them to the pot. Add the milk, butter, and 1/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper and mash to the desired consistency.

Meanwhile, heat the oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the beef and cook, breaking it up with a spoon, until no longer pink, 5 to 6 minutes. Stir in the ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Fold in the peas and carrots.

Transfer the beef mixture to 4 individual baking dishes and top with the mashed potatoes. Bake until golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes.

Nutrition Check

Foods that boost your mood

By Kristen Hicks-Roof PhD, RD and Rayonna Hills BS
mail@floridanewsline.com

The month of February is known as the month of love by many. For some, this means receiving and giving love to a spouse or friend, but this can also mean giving love to yourself. It may be hard to believe, but there has been scientific evidence that reveals eating specific foods can have a positive impact on your mood. This is possible due to food being able to promote dopamine and serotonin. (Cleveland Clinic)

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter in your brain that plays a role as a "reward center" in:

- motivation
- movement
- attention
- memory, and more.

Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that plays a key role in body functions such as:

- mood
- sleep
- happiness
- influencing learning

Foods that we consume daily can unlock your body's natural happiness. Some complex carbs that are important for stabilizing your mood include brown rice, beans, whole grain pasta, oats, and legumes. Another great

source of food that is packed with healthy fats and protein that contribute to healthy brain function and protect against depression are eggs. Other sources include whole grains, red meat, dairy, bananas, green vegetables, and beetroot.

Omega-3 fats are also important for brain function and the communication of dopamine and serotonin. These foods include oily fish such as sardines, salmon, trout, mackerel, and pilchards. Seafood like the fish mentioned above provides zinc to the body, which also is suggested to reduce anger and depression.

When dopamine and serotonin levels are low, you may experience a depressed mood, lack of motivation, fatigue, and difficulty concentrating. (Mayo Clinic) There are many food options that are shown to promote dopamine and serotonin and send positive vibes to the brain. Next time you're in the mood for a mood booster, give one of these foods a try.

Kristen Hicks-Roof PhD, RDN, LDN, CLC, FAND is an assistant professor in the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Brooks College of Health, University of North Florida.

Fishing

Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis
mail@floridanewline.com

I hope everyone is having a great winter season and staying warm throughout. Other than the three-day cold snap in December, we've continued to have some comfortable weather to fish in. Water temperatures have been trending from 55 to 62 degrees, though I'm sure they dipped lower than that in December. Unfortunately I wasn't able to fish those days.

I heard about and saw some fish that weren't able to make it through the cold water temperatures including a small tarpon in Doctors Lake. I've seen armored catfish and tilapia floating around Julington Creek. These two species are considered invasive and seasonal cold weather provides much needed relief to limit their encroachment on our native fishes.

Specks continue to be the best bite in the river and local creeks. Larger fish have still been in the main river but the increasing numbers of quality fish in the creeks seem to be indicating they're coming in preparing to spawn. Many of them already show signs of fattening up with roe. Jigs and minnows are still productive for them around structure and deeper holes.

While I understand that specks are considered excellent table fare and not necessarily a popular catch and release species, I would like to introduce a little selfish conservation plug. Specks and many other fish can easily be caught in high numbers when spawning or preparing to spawn since they congregate in relatively small areas. Females tend to be the larger fish caught and more often kept because of this. One egg-laden female can produce thousands upon thousands of eggs so the more females we can keep in the water to spawn, the more fish we'll have next year. Specks and all fish are resources we share as anglers. Our actions will affect the quantity and quality of those fisheries.

I haven't caught a shrimp since December and wouldn't expect to luck into any until next month — and with that probably a few more saltwater fish. Sheepshead, redfish, and flounder will start to fill in with them. We'll talk more about that next month. Surf fishing for whiting is still an option for you this month as well as fishing inshore waters like I mentioned in last month's report. Until then, we've almost made it through the cold, so stay warm, stay safe, and tight lines.



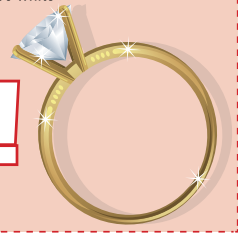
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Gardening

Early spring planning

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale
mail@floridanewsline.com

It’s just two weeks into the New Year as I write, and I’m already looking forward to spring. Not because I don’t enjoy this quieter time of the year in the garden, but because I am planning what I might plant and enjoy in the coming months.

Some small perennials need repotting and fertilizing if they are to make good sized garden plants this year. A dilute solution of liquid fertilizer every week or two should work. There are volunteers that I might venture to move. I’ve been slow to sow wildflower seeds, but though the seeds may not be as fertile as they were when fresh, I do expect some small successes. There are a few shrubs to go in before the warmer weather arrives. With the freezes knocking back some of my more tender plants, like Indian shot canna (*Canna indica*) and firespike (*Odon-tonema cuspidatum*), it’s clear I need to install evergreen shrubs or small trees to screen the neighbors’ yards. Possibilities include female yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*), rusty lyonia (*Lyonia ferruginea*), Simpson’s stopper (*Myrcianthes fragrans*), and maybe Walter’s viburnum (*Viburnum obovatum*). I have some sabal palms (*Sabal palmetto*) dotted around the yard and these plants could fit in well. I also have some wild coffee shrubs (*Psychotria nervosa*) to add into the mix, but after our recent hard freezes I may keep these in pots as they aren’t fully hardy in zone 9. These plants would all supply food and shelter for birds and insects, including butterflies, which is a big consideration, and are suited to our well-draining sandy soil, once established. It only remains to fill in lower layers of a design with plenty of flowers and subshrubs, either native or Florida-Friendly.

For information on these and other trees and shrubs, check out this comprehensive website: <https://tinyurl.com/k9vj9x->

fa. And this is another useful website, specifically for “bee-friendly” plants: <https://fl.ifas.ufl.edu/bees/>.

The Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide (<https://tinyurl.com/5pe3hx84>) will be useful in the coming weeks while planning the early spring and summer garden. Our winter garden includes mainly broccoli, collards, red and green heading cabbages, and a few rutabaga (or “swede” to those of us with British roots, no pun intended). It’s not too late to start beets, arugula, and lettuce, to name just a few, and not too early to start peas. Check the guide. Tomato growers need time sowing their seed indoors to about six weeks before the last average frost date, which makes that early February.

I was reminded of the importance of wildflowers, while watching two female painted buntings feeding on the seeds of a native red salvia, *Salvia coccinea*, just outside my front door. There are also males around, looking just like miniature parrots, they are so colorful (<https://tinyurl.com/bdzk63vp>). Some native broomsedge grasses (*Andropogon virginicus*) fed a small flock of chipping sparrows just before the freezes. And a dozen or so other species were flocking to my feeders as if they knew exactly what was coming. The robins, harbingers of spring, have returned, but it feels too early. I hope they find the food they need to sustain them before they continue northwards to breed.

As a reminder, the city of Jacksonville has a great tree planting program. If you are a homeowner with property next to a right of way, you can apply to have a tree planted there for free. For more information, visit <https://tinyurl.com/yckcby3u>, and click on 630 CITY Program Guide, where you can find out how the scheme could work for you.

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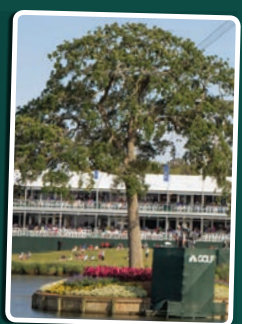
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Travel

Walk Van Gogh's final days in France

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewline.com



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Beautiful village of Auvers.

Unless you are a devoted fan of Vincent Van Gogh, you probably haven't heard of Auvers-Sur-Oise. The village, located in Normandy, France, near Vernon, rests about an hour's train ride from Paris. The picturesque spot inspired many Impressionist Masters: Van Gogh, Camille Pissarro, and Paul Cézanne. They all variously lived and worked in Auvers-Sur-Oise.

My Viking Seine River and Normandy Cruise included an excursion to the small town. Being curious, I signed on. Now, I am so thankful I took the opportunity to visit this town and learn about its history.

Auvers is where Vincent Van Gogh lived the last two months of his life in 1890. The area gave him such a source of creativity that he completed 80 paintings in 70 days.

When my group arrived, I spotted City Hall, called Hotel in Ville in France. The building looked like someone decorated it for Bastille Day with red, white, and blue French flags. As I gazed around,

the entire village seemed frozen in time, a 19th-century time capsule.

A guide met my group and began to lead us along. Before strolling down residential cobblestone streets, we passed a few cutsey shops and restaurants. Then, we came upon shuttered homes with lace curtains hanging in the windows and flower boxes in bloom outside.

We traveled along a discreetly marked Van Gogh Trail and stopped at the Eglise Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption, the church Van Gogh famously painted. The interior seemed somewhat drab, but it held a copy of the well-known painting. I loved comparing the Gothic, 13th-century building to the artwork. In a letter to his sister, Van Gogh described the church saying, "the building appears to be violet-hued against a sky of simple



Van Gogh's painting of the church.



Eglise Notre-Dame-de-l'Assomption.

deep blue color, pure cobalt; the stained-glass windows appear as ultramarine blotches, the roof is violet and partly orange. In the foreground, some green plants in bloom, and sand with the pink flow of sunshine in it."

The Viking tour group continued up a hill to the town cemetery, where we found the ivy-covered graves of Vincent and his brother Theo. Mystery surrounds Vincent's death, but the prevailing thought is suicide since he suffered from mental problems. He was supposed to be under a doctor's care. History says he shot himself in the fields and made it back to his room in the auberge (a French inn that provides meals). His brother was called and came from Paris. Vincent died soon afterward. Theo wanted to organize a funeral in the church at Auvers, but the priest refused as Vincent was protestant and committed suicide.

As the tour left the graveyard, we noted the fields that inspired another Van Gogh masterpiece: The Wheatfield and Crows.

We proceeded on to Auberge Ravoux, the artist's final home. Only two or three people at a time could enter his tiny, dingy, rented attic bedroom. It was barely large enough to fit a small cot and seemed filled with an aura of sadness. Hard to think of such a colorful artist living in cramped and drab quarters.

The tour at Auberge Ravoux also included an excellent video/slideshow of his art from the region. After seeing the area, I found it easy to imagine the scenes through the artist's eyes.

The way Vincent died doesn't truly matter; what matters is that the world lost the creative genius who gave us "Starry Night" and "Sunflowers." Vincent was only 37 years old. RIP.

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