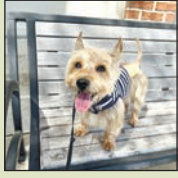


# The Creek Line

SEPTEMBER 2024 Volume 24 Issue 9

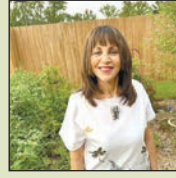
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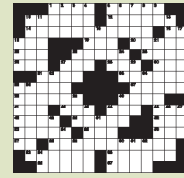
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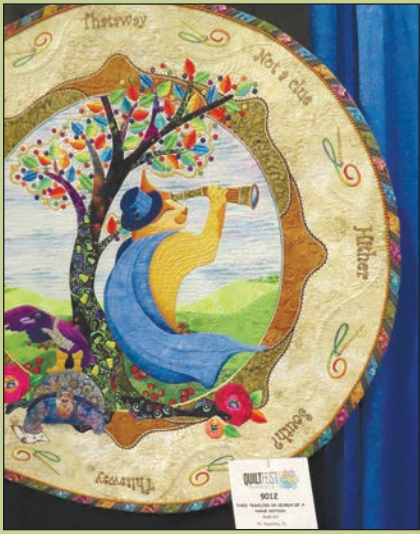
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Get to Know...  
Marilyn Feldstein



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Puzzles



Photos courtesy Sondie Frus

"Three Travelers in Search of a Vague Notion" by Nikki Hill (2023 Challenge Quilt First Place)

## Quiltfest: A celebration of unique and magical art

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

Do you believe in magic? Would you like to see some real life magic with your own eyes? Well, the fiber artists of Jacksonville have gathered 465 samples of magically sewn works of art in the form of quilts for a show at the Prime Osborn Center in Jacksonville. "Sew Your Heart Out," the 37th annual showcase of quilts by Quiltfest Inc. of Jacksonville will be at the Prime Osborn Convention Center, Sept. 19, 20, and 21, from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. daily.

Quiltfest cont. on pg. 2

## St. Johns County students return to school

By Martie Thompson  
editor@floridanewslines.com

Students across St. Johns County returned to school on a typically hot and humid Monday, Aug. 12. According to District 1 School Board Member Beverly Slough, the district welcomed back more than 52,000 students this year after the typical staggered start for kindergarten the first week.

This year, two new schools were opened in St. Johns County to relieve overcrowding, Lakeside Academy in the Beacon Lakes area off County Road 210 and Trout Creek Academy in the Shearwater neighborhood.

"The first day went very smoothly with very few glitches," Slough said. "Both new schools opened successfully as well. There was still some minor work being done such as landscaping that did not affect learning."

Slough said that also new this year is a change to all schools' safety procedures; all gates that surround school buildings are required to be locked during school



Photo courtesy Lauren O'Shell

Freedom Crossing Academy students are excited on the first day of school.

hours.

At Patriot Oaks Academy, second year principal Drew Chiodo likewise reported a successful start to the school year.

"We had a phenomenal day," he said, noting that this is the 10 year anniversary of Patriot Oaks Academy.

Chiodo said that they welcomed 1,356 students on the first day, but with the staggered start expect the school to have 1,450 students once all kindergarteners are in class.

As a Capturing Kids Hearts school,

First day of school cont. on pg. 10



Photo courtesy Kelli Gallant

Timberlin Creek had a photo op available for the first day of school.



Photo courtesy Crystal Kelley

This Mill Creek Academy student is excited for the first day of school!



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Alaine Keebaugh, PhD 770-356-6410

| Aloft Hotel: 4812 Deer Lake Drive West, Jacksonville, FL, 32246 |



Quiltfest cont. from pg. 1

What is so magical about quilts and why is it worth your time to come see this show? It must be magic for a sewing artist to be so passionate about creating works of love and beauty that one would work for hours to create each quilt. In fact, some quilters admit to taking as long as 20 years to finish their work. A quilt might yield a pleasing pattern from the play with color and shape; it might tell a story or make a statement about current events; or it might be an image suitable to hang on a wall. Whether it takes a few days, weeks, months, or years, the quilts are stunning. And to see them all together is magical.

So grab your friends and family for a unique outing. Maybe you will find something handmade to purchase at the boutique or the quilt sale room. There are also opportunities to buy small items to support Community Hospice PedsCare Bereavement, for you or your children to test out using a sewing machine or help make Me Dolls and Heart pillows for hospitalized patients, to win a quilt or basket of goodies, or to buy a gift for the quilter you know.

Tickets for the Quiltfest are available the days of the show or at numerous quilt stores in the region (until Sept. 7). Tickets are \$15 per day with children younger than 12 free and \$1 off for seniors and veterans. Parking in the Prime Osborn official lot is free. Visit [www.quiltfestjax.com](http://www.quiltfestjax.com) for a look at the 2023 winners, ticket information, and directions.

# America's Oldest City celebrates its 459th Birthday

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewline.com

The Diocese of St. Augustine and the City of St. Augustine are commemorating the 459th Founder's Day anniversary on Sept. 7. This event will be brimming with historical re-enactments and vibrant festivities that commemorate the 100th anniversary of the sister city relationship with Avilés, Spain.

Founder's Day commemorates Sept. 8, 1565, when a small band of Spaniards celebrated a Mass of Thanksgiving on the shores of Northeast Florida, marking the beginning of a new settlement. This event planted the seeds of Christianity in America north of Mexico and laid the foundation for a rich legacy of faith and social support in St. Augustine.

The Founder's Day celebration on Sept. 7 will begin at 10 a.m. at the National Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche, located within the grounds of Mission Nombre de Dios at 101 San Marco Ave. Visitors will have a chance to witness a historical re-enactment presented by the Historic Florida Militia: Men of Menéndez, bringing to life the 1565 historic landing of Don Pedro Menéndez de Avilés and the subsequent establishment of St. Augustine.

Following the re-enactment, Bishop Erik Pohlmeier will celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving at the Rustic Altar in its natural outdoor surroundings. The cel-



Photo courtesy Diocese of St. Augustine

bration is open to the public and free of charge. Attendees are encouraged to bring lawn chairs, sunscreen and water bottles.

The festivities will continue with afternoon events at the Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park, located next door to the mission at 11 Magnolia Ave. Pedro Menéndez and his entourage will march to the Fountain of Youth for

the ceremonial first Thanksgiving meal re-enactment at 1 p.m. Encampment and living history demonstrations at the Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park will be available until 5 p.m.; note that nominal admission fees may apply to enter this part of the celebration.

Visit: [www.citystaug.com/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=503](http://www.citystaug.com/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=503) for more information.



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## BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

**Breed:**  
*Schnorkie (half yorkie, half schnauzer)*

**Favorite Activity:**  
*Eating my mom's clothes and watching sports with Dad.*

**Fav Favorite Treat:**  
*Anything my parents drop from the table.*

**Favorite Friend:**  
*My hoomans.*

**How did your BFF get his name?**  
*He lives to the max!*



Meet Maximus!

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@floridanewline.com to enter your pet.



Back to School Guide in this issue! Pages 9 - 12

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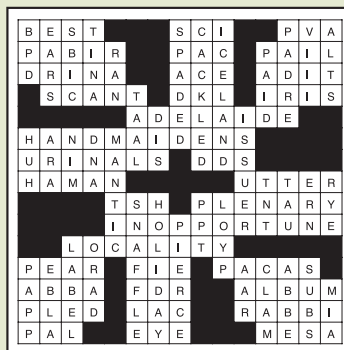
## MYSTERY PHOTO



Can you guess where this is?

Submit your answer to: mail@floridanewline.com

Last month's Mystery Photo was the Freedom Crossing Academy.

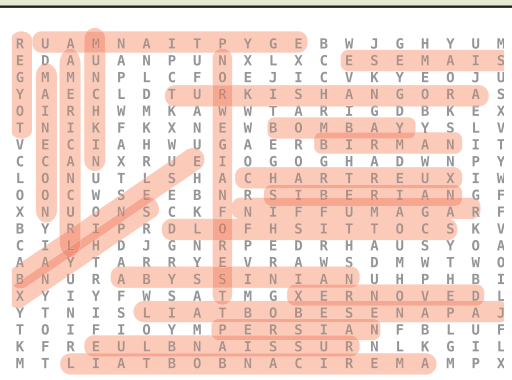


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A. meow B. purr C. whiskers D. pounce

Answers to our Puzzles  
PG 14



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904.209.5754  
wbu.com/staugustine

# September

## 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 11:30 a.m. each day. Contact Program Coordinator Myra Fisher at (904) 209-3658 or [mfisher@coasjc.org](mailto:mfisher@coasjc.org) 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 Maple Street Biscuit Company, 1627 Race Track Road in St. Johns. Visit the group's Facebook page (Playing HOOKie) or email [playinghookie2022@gmail.com](mailto: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.

**3rd: Happy Hookers** crochet group will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on Sept. 3 and Sept. 17 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](http://www.sjcpls.org) or call (904) 827-6960.

**3rd: Honeybee Quilters** Guild will meet on Tuesday, Sept. 3 at 6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church's Loretto Road Campus in the Kids Space at 2501 Loretto Road. New members/guests welcome. Visit [honeybeequilters.org](http://honeybeequilters.org) for more information.

**4th: Archery for veterans**, hosted by St. Johns County Parks and Rec, will be held on Sept. 4 from 7 p.m. – 8:30 p.m. at the St. Johns County Fairgrounds. Practice the finer points of bow and arrow in a program designed in partnership with Veterans Affairs. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/3ueb5kvw> for more information and to sign up for this free event.

**4th: Widow to Widow**, support group for widows by widows is held at Council on Aging (COA) River House, 179 Marine Street in St. Augustine on Wednesdays beginning Sept. 4 from 11:45 a.m. – 12:45 p.m. Call (904) 209-3655 (Monday – Thursday) or email [tharris@coasjc.org](mailto:tharris@coasjc.org) for more information.

**5th: Homeschool Geocaching**, hosted by St. Johns County Parks and Rec, will be held at Vaill Point Park, 630 Vaill Point Road in St. Augustine, on Sept. 5 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Kids can learn what geocaching is and how to get started on a modern-day treasure hunt. No experience required; download the geocaching app before arrival. Call (904) 209-0333 or visit <https://tinyurl.com/2x5k8x3f> for more information and to sign up for this free activity.

**5th: Open Game Play** at Council on Aging (COA) River House, 179 Marine Street in St. Augustine. Bring your deck of cards or board game (there are also games available at River House) and socialize over a friendly game of your choosing every Thursday beginning Sept. 5 from 12:15 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. Call (904) 209-3655 (Monday – Thursday) or email [tharris@coasjc.org](mailto:tharris@coasjc.org) for more information.

**6th: First Friday Adult Book Club** will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library at 10 a.m. on Sept. 6 to discuss "Tomorrow, Tomorrow and Tomorrow" by Gabrielle Zevin. Registration is required; email [draasch@sjcfl.us](mailto:draasch@sjcfl.us).

**9th: The Northwest St. Johns County United for Progress Club** will celebrate the Democratic National Convention delegates with a reception on Sept. 9 at 6:30 p.m. Special guest speaker Jay McGovern, candidate for US House District 5 will follow. Visit [www.nwstjohnsup.com](http://www.nwstjohnsup.com) or email [nwsjcp@gmail.com](mailto:nwsjcp@gmail.com) for more information.

**11th: Free Tech Help** with David will be held on Wednesday, Sept. 11 from 10:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the Bartram Trail Branch Library. Drop in for tech assistance with Android, Apple, and reader devices; no RSVPs required. Bring your

device fully charged and know your passwords. Visit [sjcpls.org/branches/bartram-trail-branch/](http://sjcpls.org/branches/bartram-trail-branch/) for more information.

**12th: Unity World Day of Prayer** Moving Mountains service will be held on Sept. 12 from 7 p.m. – 8 p.m. at Unity Church for Creative Living, 2777 Race Track Road. Join the Prayer Chaplain Team for an hour of prayer, music, and contemplation. Call (904) 287-1505 or email [UCCLOffice2777@gmail.com](mailto:UCCLOffice2777@gmail.com) for more information.

**14th: The Bartram Trail Genealogy Club** meets the second Saturday of each month (this month, Sept. 14) from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. at the Bartram Trail Branch Library. The topic for the meeting is "Show and Tell: Oldest documents and artifacts." Email [ginglish@comcast.net](mailto:ginglish@comcast.net) for more information. Visit [www.facebook.com/groups/BTGenClubGroup](http://www.facebook.com/groups/BTGenClubGroup) to send a request to join the club.

**16th: The All Star Quilters Guild** will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on Monday, Sept. 16 at First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The program will be a mini quilt show by the 12x12 group. Sew and Tell is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit [www.allstarquilters.org](http://www.allstarquilters.org) for more information.

**17th: Women of Unity** Gathering on Tuesday, Sept. 17 at 6:30 p.m. at Unity Church for Creative Living, 2777 Race Track Road. This is a safe place for women to gather, connect, support and explore spiritual principles. All women are welcome. Call (904) 287-1505 or email [UCCLOffice2777@gmail.com](mailto:UCCLOffice2777@gmail.com) for more information.

**18th: Garden Club of Switzerland** will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library, 60 Davis Pond Blvd., on Sept. 18 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. The presentation will be on the perils outdoor lighting presents for migrating songbirds and what we can do to ensure their safe passage. The event is open to the public. Use the contact information at [www.switzerlandgc.org](http://www.switzerlandgc.org) if you are interested in attending.

**19th: William Bartram Scenic Highway** Group will meet on Thursday, September 19 beginning at 6:30 p.m. at Westminster Woods, Gathering Place Room. 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 [alabba@comcast.net](mailto:alabba@comcast.net) or call (904) 699-8475.

**19th - 21st: 37th annual Quiltfest of Jacksonville, "Sew Your Heart Out"** will be held Sept. 19, 20, and 21 from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. daily at the Prime Osborn Convention Center. Tickets are available at local quilt stores, via Ticketmaster, or at the event. See [www.quiltfestjax.com](http://www.quiltfestjax.com) for more information.

**21st: First Coast Vendor Village** will be held on Sept. 21 from 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. at Celebration Lutheran Church, 810 Roberts Road. This fall community outreach event features small, local businesses selling products and offering services, as well as inflatables, food trucks, music, and a pet adoption. Call the church at (904) 230-2496 for more information.

**21st: Dress a Girl Around the World** at the Bartram Trail Branch Library will be held on Saturday, Sept. 21 at 10 a.m. Learn to make dresses and shorts for girls around the world. You can pick up a kit to create at home, or turn in dresses you created to the Bartram Trail Branch. We also accept fabric and notion donations. Call the library at (904) 827-6960 for more information.

**27th: "Spouse in a Nursing Home? Do You Have to Go Broke?"** a free lecture by Megan Wall, St. Johns County Legal Aid, will be presented at Council on Aging (COA) River House, 179 Marine Street in St. Augustine, on Friday, Sept. 27 from 10 a.m. – 11 a.m. Call (904) 209-3655 (Monday – Thursday) or email [tharris@coasjc.org](mailto:tharris@coasjc.org) for more information.



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**with St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes**

**Q: When is the next election?**

A: The 2024 General Election is Tuesday, Nov. 5, 2024.

**Q: Are there any registration deadlines ahead of the election?**

A: Yes, the deadline to register to vote for this election is Oct. 7, 2024. Voters can visit our website [www.votesjc.gov](http://www.votesjc.gov) to register online.

**Q: Is there anything voters should be doing to prepare now for the 2024 General Election?**

A: Yes! It's never too early to get election ready. I recommend visiting [www.votesjc.gov](http://www.votesjc.gov) and using the Check My Status tool to make sure that your information is up to date. It's also important to keep an updated signature on your voter record, especially for our voters that vote by mail. Voters needing to update their signature can download the Florida Voter Registration Application on our website, [www.votesjc.gov](http://www.votesjc.gov), and print, complete, and mail the form to the Elections Office. This service can also be done in person at the Elections Office, or at any St. Johns County Public Library or DMV office.

**Q: If I voted by mail in 2022, will I automatically get a vote-by-mail ballot this year?**

A: No. Due to law changes, vote-by-mail requests expire at the end of each

year. If you have not made a vote-by-mail request, you will not be mailed a ballot. To request a vote-by-mail ballot for the 2024 General Election, visit [www.votesjc.gov](http://www.votesjc.gov) or call the Elections Office at (904) 823-2238. The deadline to request a vote-by-mail ballot to be mailed for the 2024 General Election is Oct. 24, 2024, at 5 p.m.

**Q: When is early voting for the General Election?**

A: Early voting will begin Monday, Oct. 21, and continue through Saturday, Nov. 2, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. Locations will be announced closer to the election.

**Q: Do I have to be registered in a certain party to vote in the General Election?**

A: No, the General Election is an open election; party affiliation does not matter. All voters within a precinct will receive the same ballot with all candidates and parties on it.

**Q: What ways can voters contact the Elections Office?**

A: The St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Office is open Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. Residents can visit or call the office with any questions during business hours at (904) 823-2238. Our website, [www.votesjc.gov](http://www.votesjc.gov) also has a wealth of information.



**with St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller John Rundgren, Clerk Designee**

**Q. What is the significance of the Popular Annual Financial Report?**

A. The Popular Annual Financial Report (PAFR) is a simplified, easy-to-read version of the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR), which is a detailed financial statement that the St. Johns County Comptroller's Office is statutorily required to complete each year. Clerk Brandon Patty launched the PAFR in 2020 to ensure residents have an easy-to-read booklet on the

annual audit. The PAFR highlights key developments and major financial points, helping residents understand the financial situation of St. Johns County. Unlike the detailed ACFR, the PAFR focuses on selected financial data, providing a reader-friendly roadmap of the county's finances.

**Q. What are the largest expenditure categories for St. Johns County?**

Q&A with John Rundgren cont. on pg. 13

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**Vicky Oakes**  
St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections

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

**Q: Were you able to continue your tradition of visiting District 1 schools on the first day of school?**

A: Yes, I went to all 10 District 1 schools and found the students to be happy, well behaved and learning. The teachers were smiling and welcoming them back. We had a few glitches with transportation, as usual early in the school year. We ask for everyone's patience as we work out any unexpected surprises. Adjustments are ongoing and we expect to have everything on schedule very shortly.

**Q: What can you tell us about the new safety protocols?**

A: Some changes from the legislature to our safety procedures have been instituted. We are now required to lock all gates around the school buildings and of course visitors still have to ring a doorbell to be admitted to the school. The layers of security are deep. We've already had a visit from the Office of Safe Schools on the second day of school to make sure we were following the new procedures — which of course we are.

**Q: Have school grades been received yet from last school year?**

A: Yes and once again, our district did exceedingly well. All District 1 schools

remain an "A" and in fact the lowest graded school we have in the whole county is a "C." We actually had a couple of schools improve from either a "C" or a "B" to an "A" this year. Ever since grades have been given, our district has been an "A" district and we share that distinction with Sarasota County.

**Q: Are our schools sufficiently staffed [as of interview date of Aug. 15]?**

A: I'm very pleased that we have few staff vacancies; almost all of our schools are fully staffed. Also, at our upcoming Aug. 20 special school board meeting, we will ratify both of our union contracts. We are delighted to start the new school year with new contracts for our teachers and support staff.

**Q: Do you have anything else to share with District 1?**

A: Before the start of the school year, we had our traditional back to school prayer held at every school in the district. We've done this for more than 20 years.

**Q: How can our readers contact you?**

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

**Guest Column**

**Switzerland/Fruit Cove Community Center update**

By Al Abbatiello

The William Bartram Scenic Highway group of volunteers has been working to restore the Old Switzerland Community Center for the past several years. I'm now happy to say real progress has been made and it's now very likely we will eventually have a brand-new building to enjoy.

You may recall earlier columns describing the Bartram Scenic Highway Group efforts to restore the old, abandoned volunteer fire station based on a lease agreement negotiated with the county; however, the Board of County Commissioners eventually decided the St. Johns County Parks and Recreation Department would be better able to fund the restoration of a county owned facility.

The county eventually assigned a project manager to determine if the old building was, in fact, restorable and at what cost to the county. After several months of work by the project manager, an architectural firm contracted to survey the building/property, the county Tower Committee, and my continued follow-up of progress, a final report was prepared describing options for the old building. The Parks and Recreation

Department is now exploring funding options to likely pursue a phased approach inclusive of:

1. Demolish the building and secure the site. The intention is to salvage any reasonable pieces of the current structure to be able to highlight and preserve the history of the site.
2. On-board a firm to design, engineer and permit the project. In parallel during the design process, they will be engaging the community (us) to gain feedback on the development of conceptual site plans and programming options.
3. Construct the new building. Estimated cost approximately \$1.03 million.

In addition, the county project team is working with Growth Management to determine site compatibility for building a new structure on the site. This is based on earlier planning statements that there were only two options for the site — demolition or restoration of the old building. Your Bartram Scenic Highway team will continue following this project to hopefully, a new community treasure.

*Al Abbatiello is chairman of the William Bartram Scenic Highway group.*

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# ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

## This is back-to-school season; Talk to your student about money

By Chris Thompson, CFP®, CMFA®, CRPC®

The start of the school year is quickly approaching. If you have a child entering college or the workforce this fall, now is a great time to talk about money. Consider the tips below to guide the conversation:

Help your child establish a budget for the next phase of life. Begin by exploring the new costs your child may incur and offer to sit down and help them create a budget. For high school graduates, new expenses can include tuition for college, textbooks, housing, food and discretionary spending. Online estimators can be useful tools to discern how to allocate funds by category. If you typically covered your child's expenses throughout high school, educate them on what a typical grocery bill or trip to the movies can cost.

Set financial expectations. As your child grows toward financial independence, it is beneficial to have a conversation with them about what help they can expect from you, if any, and what costs they are responsible for.

- If your child is headed to college or trade school, discuss how tuition will be paid for and whether you'll cover any associated room and board expenses, technology fees, travel to return home, etc. Can your child rely on scholarships or help from a 529 plan? Will they need to pick up a job? To help answer these questions, encourage your child to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). All students can apply regardless of their family's financial status. If loans need to be taken out by you, your child or both for school, review the terms, including interest rates and payback schedule.

- If your child is headed directly into the workforce, discuss how to approach paying for rent, commuting to work, and other common expenses. Determine if your child can look to you for help in their first few months of expenses as they get on their feet. Discuss what bringing home a post-tax paycheck looks like and advise on saving and spending income. Also suggest starting a ROTH IRA and/or ROTH 401k early.

Consider alternate ways to help your

kids. While it's natural to want to support your child as much as you can, it's important to think about how to thoughtfully transition the financial responsibility to their shoulders over time. As a starting point, consider the difference between funding a key milestone — such as college tuition or a car that's necessary for their employment — and funding ongoing daily lifestyle expenses or wishes, like concert tickets or meals out. Some parents desire to cover all expenses while a child is in college so they can focus on their education. If you share this viewpoint, set any boundaries and decide an end date of when they will be fully responsible for their own expenses — perhaps at graduation or when they land a full-time job.

Set boundaries for future milestones. Once expectations are established for the financial responsibilities in your child's next phase of life, have a conversation with your spouse or partner about how you'll handle future milestones, such as a wedding or home purchase. Giving money to adult children can be

a sensitive subject, and it's an important one to be on the same page about. If you and your partner have work to do to align your viewpoints you're not alone: recent research from Ameriprise Financial found that 72 percent of couples support adult family members financially, yet 14 percent of couples disagree on how much financial support to give. Have open dialogue about how much monetary support is important to you to provide and consider putting a financial plan in place to guide future decisions.

*Chris Thompson, CFP®, CMFA®, CRPC® is a Private Wealth Advisor and Managing Director with Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC. in Ponte Vedra Beach. He specializes in fee-based financial planning and asset management strategies and has been in practice for 32 years. To contact him, email [chris.thompson@ampf.com](mailto:chris.thompson@ampf.com); visit [www.ameripriseadvisors.com/chris.thompson](http://www.ameripriseadvisors.com/chris.thompson) or call (904) 380-2290.*

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

**Q: Can you give some background information on Amendment 5?**

A: Amendment 5 will be on Florida voters' ballots in November. Since this pertains to homestead exemption, which is constitutional, it must be voted on by citizens and requires 66.66 percent approval to pass. This amendment proposes an annual inflation adjustment to the homestead exemption. As background, in the last eight years, our county has seen a 145 percent increase in property tax dollars collected, due to taxable value increases. This translates to higher property taxes for everyone. Amendment 5 could provide some relief if your property is homesteaded.

**Q: How does it work?**

A: Right now, the homestead exemption is \$25,000 applicable to all levies, and an additional \$25,000 applicable to all non-school levies. Most homesteads in St. Johns County receive the full \$50,000 exemption.

If Amendment 5 passes, homeowners will continue to have both of the above bands of exemption, but the second \$25,000 band would be increased each year based on changes in the CPI (Consumer Price Index). So, if the CPI went up 5 percent, so would the exemption increase 5 percent. It would compound each year and the exemption amount will only increase, not decrease.

**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](mailto:Eddie@sjcpa.us) or call me at (904) 827-5500.

# BACK TO SCHOOL GUIDE



## St. Johns County school district continues to grow

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

The student count for the St. Johns County School District the first day of school, Aug. 12, was 47,438, an increase of 1,943 students or 4.27 percent over last year's first day number of 45,495. St. Johns County continues to be one of the fastest growing school districts in the state.

The high school student count was 16,169 with 2,119 students at Bartram Trail High School, 2,076 at Beachside High School, 2,434 at Creekside High School, 1,362 at Pedro Menendez High School, 2,098 at Allen D. Nease High School, 1,842 at Ponte Vedra High School, 1,560 at St. Augustine High School and 2514 at Toco Creek High School. There were also 164 students in attendance at St. Johns Technical High School.

Middle school attendance totaled 6,843, with student headcounts ranging from 652 at Sebastian Middle School to 1,417 at Pacetti Bay Middle School. The other first day totals were Alice B. Landrum Middle School with 906,

Fruit Cove Middle School with 1,120, R. J. Murray Middle School with 678, Gamble Rogers Middle School with 819, and Switzerland Point Middle School with 1,251.

The district's K-8 schools totaled 13,017. Liberty Pines Academy had a first day headcount of 1,614, Patriot Oaks Academy with 1,356, Valley Ridge Academy with 1,095, Freedom Crossing Academy with 1,799, Palm Valley Academy with 1,324, Mill Creek Academy with 1,816, Pine Island Academy with 1,806, Trout Creek Academy with 1,049 and Lakeside Academy with 1,158.

The elementary school population totaled 11,081. This count only includes approximately 25 percent of all kindergarten students since schools stagger the kindergarten start date over a four-day period. Another 328 students attended the district's alternative and charter schools.

St. Johns County School District staff will continue to monitor attendance numbers, balance classrooms, and refine bus routes in the coming weeks.

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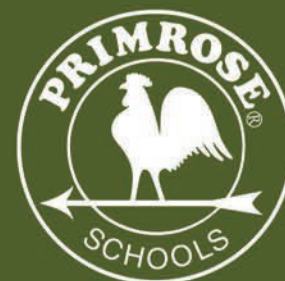
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# BACK TO SCHOOL GUIDE



## Add braces to back to school list

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewline.com

Back to school means cooler weather, school supplies, a new outfit — and braces. If you missed your window to have your child begin orthodontic treatment this summer, do not worry. At Smiles by Dr. Craig Hadgis Orthodontist, they work to make sure that braces are not just another bump in the adolescent road.

“We have invested in the latest technology to offer high quality options, a comfortable experience, and precise results for our patients,” said Dr. Hadgis. “We have several types of braces as well as Invisalign clear aligning trays that can be used for every age.”

Some of the back-to-school fun with the more traditional metal braces is choosing the colored ties that hold the wire on the brackets. Students like to use their school colors for the athletic games, black and orange are scary at Halloween, and red and green for the holidays.

Popular with the teens are Invisalign’s

clear aligning trays. The aligners can be removed to eat and brush so there are very few food restrictions, and they are nearly invisible, so Homecoming photos are not impacted. If braces are a better choice for your teen, the clear brackets are very small and discreet.

Dr. Hadgis said his office is frequently asked, “Can I still play sports with braces?” and the answer is yes.

“We have special mouthguards for sports that fit over the braces and allow the teeth to change position over the course of the season, so playing sports is not a problem and we just include those with treatment,” Dr. Hadgis said. “We also include a hygiene kit that fits into a backpack so it’s easy to keep the braces clean at school. Our Invisalign patients receive cases for their trays, so they stay safe during lunch and don’t get thrown out with the napkin or eaten by the dog.

Back to school while improving your child’s smile sounds like the perfect match. Visit [www.smilesbyghortho.com](http://www.smilesbyghortho.com) for more information.

First day of school cont. from pg. 1

Patriot Oaks Academy teachers and staff intentionally build relationships with each child. The first day, Chiodo said they greeted each student with a handshake.

“Also on the first day during lunch, we taught the entire elementary school some basic American Sign Language signs, such as ‘help,’ ‘fork,’ and ‘restroom’ so that all students can communicate with our Access Classroom students (children with intellectual disabilities who are often non-verbal) since everyone eats lunch together,” he said.

Freedom Crossing Academy has a new principal, Melissa Lime, and a current enrollment of 1,969 students. Lime helped to open Freedom Crossing in 2018 and has previously served as vice principal.

“The first day of school at Freedom Crossing Academy is always a celebration,” Lime said. “Students were greeted with music in the hallways and teachers standing at the doors ready to welcome new faces into the building.”

Lime said the staff spent the week prior to student arrival making collective commitments to each other and the students in order to model instructional practices based on the school’s population’s needs.

“Each classroom will continue to build a ‘Social Contract’ during the first two weeks of school, which is a collective commitment to each other about how



Photo courtesy Lauren O'Shell

More Freedom Crossing Academy students on the first day, we want to be treated and how others want to be treated by us,” Lime said.

Freedom Crossing continues to model excellence in the area of Positive Intervention and Behavioral Supports, as it earned Gold Status as a FLPBIS Model School. Additionally, the school is a Capturing Kids Hearts National Showcase School, one of only two schools in Florida with this highest designation.

Timberlin Creek Elementary, whose population was cut in half to about 635 students due to the opening of Trout Creek Academy, also reported a smooth opening day.

“Lots of smiling faces all over campus,” said Principal Linda Edel.

New this year at Timberlin Creek Elementary is the Drums Alive curriculum for students. According to music teacher Michelle Chapman, Drums Alive combines the benefits of a traditional physical fitness program with the brain-affected benefits of music and rhythm that fosters a healthy balance physically, mentally, emotionally and socially.

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## A refresher course in school bus safety

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

The dawn of a new school year is a time marked by change and fresh opportunities. For many children, school marks the first time they are away from their parents for an extended period of time. It also may be the first time they ride in a vehicle other than their parents' cars.

Each school day, 25 million children ride a bus to school in the United States. A school bus is among the safest modes of transport and one of the most regulated vehicles on the road, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Riding a school bus can be a novel experience no matter a student's age or grade. Kindergarteners may be introduced to the school bus on their first day of school, while older students are no doubt familiar with life inside a school bus. But all students and families can benefit from a refresher course on school bus procedures to ensure this school year begins on safe footing.

- Be a smart pedestrian. Riding the school bus is very safe, but injuries can occur walking to and from the bus stop. Watch for cars backing out of driveways and always look both ways

multiple times before crossing streets.

- Remember school bus laws. Most areas of the country have specific school bus laws that include stopping when red lights are flashing on the school bus. Cars must stop whether they're behind the school bus, next to it or on the opposite side of the street facing the bus. Stopping allows passengers to enter or exit the bus safely.

- Stand away from the curb. The National Safety Council advises keeping six feet, or three giant steps, away from the curb while waiting for the bus. Young children should be carefully supervised.

- Be visible. Always cross in front of the bus, making eye contact with the driver so that he or she knows your intentions before crossing. If you drop something, do not bend down to pick it up. Tell the driver instead.

- Remain seated. Find a seat promptly and remain seated for the duration of the ride. Do not stand up and proceed down the center aisle until the bus has stopped.

- Minimize distractions. Always speak softly and behave so that you do not distract the driver.

## Bolles Bulldogs return to school



Photos courtesy The Bolles School

Wednesday, Aug. 14 was the first day of school at The Bolles School and students came back to all four campuses ready to take on the 2024 – 25 school year.



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# Understanding the impact of social media on adolescent mental health

By Jamie Mericle, LMHC  
mail@floridanewsline.com

Our nation is grappling with a mental health crisis that has hit our youth es-

pecially hard, and social media is a major factor in this struggle. While these platforms connect young people, they also expose them to harmful content, cyberbullying and unrealistic standards,

increasing the risk of negative psychological effects and contributing to a troubling rise in youth suicide rates.

to guide children toward responsible online behavior.

Studies from the Journal of the American Medical Association and the National Institute of Health underscore the seriousness of this issue. And last year, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory highlighting the dangers of social media, particularly during adolescence, a critical period of brain development. That advisory revealed social media may contribute to body dissatisfaction, which can lead to disordered eating behaviors. When asked about the impact of social media on their body image, 46 percent of adolescents aged 13 – 17 said social media makes them feel worse, according to the Surgeon General.

This involves teaching kids about appropriate social media conversations and reinforcing the “stranger danger” rule. It’s also important to remind kids that not all harm comes from strangers; classmates and friends can be just as damaging through cyberbullying. Parents should also encourage open communication, so children feel safe coming to you if they’re being targeted.

Finally, establish tech-free zones at home to protect sleep and encourage in-person relationships. Limiting screen time, especially at night, can help prevent social media overuse.

Whether you fall on the pro or con side of social media platforms, they’re here to stay. The best way to balance their benefits and risks is by staying involved in our children’s online experiences, especially as the platforms continue to evolve.

Resources can be found online on various websites such as the Organization for Social Media Safety and National Cyber Security Alliance. If your child’s social media use leads to more serious mental health concerns, seek support from a mental health professional for help.

*Jaime Mericle is a licensed mental health counselor and the vice president of clinical services at Daniel, Florida’s oldest child-service agency. Daniel helps children with serious emotional/behavioral issues through its residential services program and offers a variety of other programs to kids and families in crisis. Visit [danielkids.org](http://danielkids.org) for more information.*

Moreover, researchers found that 64 percent of adolescents are often or sometimes exposed to hate-based content. When a child, who is still impressionable, repeatedly sees hateful behavior they get used to it. Over time, this can affect their ability to empathize with others.

These are just a few of the dangers. Cyberbullying can lead to severe emotional distress and depression, while predatory behavior from strangers poses safety risks and exploitation. Constant comparison with others online can also foster a sense of inadequacy.

Yet as technology use in our society continues to grow, we cannot simply ignore its presence or ban our children from using it. Social media also offers valuable opportunities for connection, self-expression and learning. It comes down to us, as parents and caregivers,

ST JOHNS COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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<p><b>LIVE.ME</b> IS A LIVE-STREAMING VIDEO APP THAT USES GEOLOCATION TO SHARE VIDEOS SO USERS CAN FIND OUT A BROADCASTER'S EXACT LOCATION. USERS CAN EARN "COINS" AS A WAY TO "PAY" MINORS FOR PHOTO.</p>	<p><b>BUMBLE</b> IS SIMILAR TO THE POPULAR DATING APP "TINDER" HOWEVER, IT REQUIRES WOMEN TO MAKE THE FIRST CONTACT. KIDS HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO USE BUMBLE TO CREATE FAKE ACCOUNTS AND FALSIFY THEIR AGE.</p>	<p><b>BADOO</b> IS A DATING AND SOCIAL NETWORKING APP WHERE USERS CAN CHAT, SHARE PHOTOS, AND VIDEOS AND CONNECT BASED ON LOCATION. WHILE THE APP IS INTENDED FOR ADULTS ONLY, TEENS ARE KNOWN TO CREATE PROFILES.</p>
<p><b>CALCULATOR%</b> IS ONLY ONE OF SEVERAL SECRET APPS USED TO HIDE PHOTOS, VIDEOS, FILES, AND BROWSER HISTORY.</p>	<p><b>GRINDR</b> IS A DATING APP GEARED TOWARDS LGBTQ+ PEOPLE. THE APP GIVES USERS OPTIONS TO CHAT, SHARE PHOTOS, AND MEET UP BASED ON A SMART PHONE'S GPS LOCATION.</p>	<p><b>SKOUT</b> IS A LOCATION-BASED DATING APP AND WEBSITE. WHILE USERS UNDER 17 YEARS OLD ARE UNABLE TO SHARE PRIVATE PHOTOS, KIDS CAN EASILY CREATE AN ACCOUNT USING A DIFFERENT AGE.</p>
<p><b>HOLLA</b> IS A SELF PROCLAIMED "ADDICTING" VIDEO CHAT APP THAT ALLOWS USERS TO MEET PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD IN JUST SECONDS. REVIEWERS SAY THEY HAVE BEEN CONFRONTED WITH RACIAL SLURS, EXPLICIT CONTENT, AND MORE.</p>	<p><b>SNAPCHAT</b> IS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR APPS IN RECENT YEARS. WHILE THE APP PROMISES USERS CAN TAKE A PHOTO/VIDEO AND IT WILL DISAPPEAR, NEW FEATURES INCLUDING "STORIES" ALLOWS USERS TO VIEW CONTENT FOR UP TO 24 HOURS. SNAPCHAT ALSO ALLOWS USERS TO SEE YOUR LOCATION.</p>	<p><b>HOT OR NOT</b> ENCOURAGES USERS TO RATE YOUR PROFILE, CHECK OUT PEOPLE IN THEIR AREA, AND CHAT WITH STRANGERS. THE GOAL OF THIS APP IS TO HOOK UP.</p>
<p><b>DISCORD</b> IS AN APP THAT ALLOWS USERS TO TALK TO FRIENDS AND STRANGERS IN REAL-TIME VIA VOICE, TEXT, OR VIDEO CHAT WHILE PLAYING VIDEO GAMES. REVIEWERS SAY THEY HAVE BEEN CONFRONTED WITH RACIAL SLURS, EXPLICIT CONTENT, AND MORE.</p>	<p><b>OMEGL</b> IS AN ONLINE CHAT SITE WHERE REGISTRATION IS NOT REQUIRED. USERS ARE ABLE TO CHAT ANONYMOUSLY VIA VIDEO, PRIVATE CHATS, OR GROUP CHATS. CHILD PORNOGRAPHY HAS BEEN AN ISSUE ON THIS SITE.</p>	<p><b>MEETME</b> IS A DATING SOCIAL MEDIA APP THAT ALLOWS USERS TO CONNECT WITH PEOPLE BASED ON GEOGRAPHIC PROXIMITY. AS THE APP'S NAME SUGGESTS, USERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO MEET EACH OTHER IN PERSON.</p>
<p><b>ASK.FM</b> IS KNOWN FOR CYBER BULLYING. THE APP ENCOURAGES USERS TO ALLOW ANONYMOUS PEOPLE TO ASK THEM QUESTIONS.</p>	<p><b>TIKTOK</b> IS A MOBILE DEVICE APP POPULAR WITH KIDS USED FOR CREATING AND SHARING SHORT VIDEOS. WITH VERY LIMITED PRIVACY CONTROLS, USERS ARE VERY VULNERABLE TO CYBER BULLYING AND EXPLICIT CONTENT.</p>	
<p><b>ROBLOX</b> IS AN ONLINE GAMING PLATFORM WITH A CHAT FUNCTION. UNDERAGE USERS HAVE HAD ISSUES WITH SOLICITATION FROM SEXUAL PREDATORS.</p>		
<p><b>WHATSAPP</b> IS A POPULAR MESSAGING APP THAT ALLOWS USERS TO SEND TEXTS, PHOTOS, VOICEMAIL, MAKE CALLS, AND VIDEO CHATS WORLDWIDE. WHATSAPP USES AN INTERNET CONNECTION ON SMARTPHONES AND COMPUTERS.</p>		
<p><b>KIK</b> ALLOWS ANYONE TO CONTACT AND DIRECT MESSAGE YOUR CHILD. KIDS CAN BYPASS TRADITIONAL TEXT MESSAGING FEATURES. KIK GIVES USERS UNLIMITED ACCESS TO ANYONE, ANYWHERE, ANYTIME.</p>		
<p><b>WHISPER</b> IS AN ANONYMOUS SOCIAL NETWORK THAT PROMOTES SHARING SECRETS WITH STRANGERS. IT ALSO REVEALS A USER'S LOCATION SO PEOPLE CAN MEET UP.</p>		

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# Life

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## Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson  
editor@floridanewline.com

### Marilyn Feldstein

Marilyn Feldstein has always wanted to help people. At first, after graduating from the University of South Florida with a degree in sociology and American studies, she became a social worker. Then, after moving to Pennsylvania so her husband could earn his PhD, she worked in banking to help pay the bills, but still she wanted a career that felt more meaningful to her. Realizing there was no future in this job, she decided to go back to school and earned her master's degree in public administration from Penn State. "I thought perhaps I'd go into human resources," she said. "I really needed a career coach, but there wasn't one." Ultimately, she landed a job back in Jacksonville (Marilyn was born and raised on Jacksonville's Westside) with AT&T American Transtech, which had just opened its headquarters in the city. Finally in 2000, she realized what she truly loved was helping people find their strengths and repackage them to find a career they loved. She became what she herself needed years previously: a career coach.

#### Q: How did you meet your husband?

A: I was living in Jacksonville and Charles was teaching at what was Florida Junior College at the time (now Florida State College at Jacksonville). We were basically set up on a blind date by a friend of his who recommended that his sister could date my brother and he could date me. So that's what happened. We went to a disco on a double date. Charles and I just hit it

#### Get to Know ...

Interested in being featured? Email Martie Thompson at [editor@FloridaNewsLine.com](mailto:editor@FloridaNewsLine.com)



Photo courtesy Marilyn Feldstein  
Marilyn Feldstein

off, but his sister and my brother did not. We dated for 13 months until he accepted a position in North Carolina and we were married before he left so I could accompany him.

#### Q: How did you end up "back" in Jacksonville?

A: After we lived in North Carolina for a couple years, we moved to Pennsylvania because Charles wanted to get his PhD at Penn State University. We were there for about six years and you know, it gets really cold in Central Pennsylvania — sometimes we had 25 feet of snow and wind chills below zero. I'm a Floridian! We decided to move south, but never in a million years thought we would move back to Jacksonville. While visiting my parents (who still lived here) I did something really smart that I didn't know was smart at the time. I had reached out to AT&T American Transtech about a job and never heard back from them. So while we were visiting my parents, I called them directly and ended up interviewing with them three of the five days of our visit. They called a few days later and offered me a job and then Charles had the major decision

of giving up his current job without another lined up.

#### Q: What did you learn working at AT&T American Transtech?

A: I worked there for 13 years and had lots of opportunities to learn new skills while I was there. I worked on many different teams and went through four downsizings. For each one, I tried to help my employees prepare for a new job, with my goal being for them to all find jobs before I left — which I did. It was a precursor to what I do today.

#### Q: What is your specialty?

A: I'm a certified Job and Career Transition Coach. I hear from people all the time, "I know what I don't like, but I don't know what I do like." So my job is to help them find what they really love. I start with career assessment tools and pull information from them about their passions. I help my clients write their resume to reflect this rather than just a historical representation of what they've done. I help them to highlight the accomplishments that support their skills and interest going forward and then I help them with networking and interviewing. My goal is for my clients to get the position if they interview — and then I help them negotiate the offer. My reward is when my client gets the job.

#### Q: What are your hobbies?

A: I love butterflies and hummingbirds and have a big garden for them in my yard. I exercise every day and read to keep my mind sharp. I also love to make up songs, including a fight song for the Jacksonville Jaguars that I made up in 1994!

#### Q&A with John Rundgren cont. from pg. 5

A. Public Safety was the largest expenditure in 2023, followed by Transportation, General Government, and Culture and Recreation.

#### Q. The section about Investments shows we are earning significant returns in the last fiscal year. What does this mean?

A. St. Johns County made more than \$30 million from investments in FY 2023. The county's top priority is investment safety, liquidity, and return on investment. By carefully managing daily cash and investing in options like Florida Prime SBA (State Board Administration), the county earned interest. This interest income supports various government and enterprise funds, and St. Johns County's strong financial health is reflected in its excellent bond rating.

#### Q. What is the Clerk and Comptroller's role in managing county government finances?

A. Our office functions as the county's accountant, internal auditor, and custodian of funds. We manage St. Johns County's investments, oversee payroll, handle bill payments, and prepare both the ACFR and PAFR.

#### Q. How can residents review the PAFR?

A. To review the PAFR, visit our website at [stjohnsclerk.com/PAFR](http://stjohnsclerk.com/PAFR). If you have any questions or would like to request a speaking engagement from the Clerk's Office leadership team, call (904) 819-3601 or email [clerk@stjohnsclerk.com](mailto:clerk@stjohnsclerk.com).

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**Jimmy's Fishing Report**

By Jimmy Tomazinis  
mail@floridanewslines.com

I just had to think pretty hard about whether I was writing this report for August or September. That's where this year and fishing has me right now. It seemed like everything was at least a month late this year and then somehow it all was a month early. At least some things were. For instance, the mullet run. September is usually the prime month for that, but when Hurricane Debby rolled through in August a deluge of mullet poured out of the inlets and for a few days it was amazing. The mullet were so small I think even they were surprised they didn't get an extra month to grow.

So, if you haven't gotten to the beach yet to enjoy the run, I'd get out there. I don't expect it to last an extra month just because it started so early. All you need is a bucket with a small cast net and one rod. It's not necessarily about catching a ton of fish, but being present for the spectacles that happen somewhere along the coast every day. We usually see a small mullet run in the river as well, but that's here one day and gone the next unfortunately.

Keep an eye out though.

The rain from Hurricane Debby didn't seem to do much to the shrimp, so they should be mostly bigger than bait size now if you're thinking of trying for some. The smaller ones are still great bait so you can trade them in for some nice fish still. Redfish, flounder, and a surprising number of drum have been under the docks lately. I'd expect even more could be around the bridges with the stripers. Jacks are schooling all over and ready to hit just about anything. It's still very hot out, so early and late can make it a little more comfortable for yourself.

I also want to mention bass fishing since they are probably my favorite fish to catch with live shrimp. Look for places with flowing freshwater like creek mouths and culverts. Water will be slightly cooler and possibly full of food, so bass tend to congregate there. If you can time it for after a large rain-storm when flows might be higher that can be ideal. It's worth poking around a bit. Believe me. Tight lines.

**Briefs**

**Suppers for Seniors to provide hunger relief among older adults**

Thousands of local older adults are currently on waiting lists to receive home-delivered meals. Each day they're forced to make tough decisions between buying medicine or groceries — and the problem is getting worse. Nonprofit ElderSource recently launched its Suppers for Seniors campaign, working to raise \$50,000 that will be matched by Delores Barr Weaver Legacy Funds to help move low-income people off the waitlist for desperately needed food assistance.

"More than 5,000 low-income older adults in our area need food assistance," said Linda Levin, CEO of ElderSource. "As the Area Agency on Aging for Northeast Florida, ElderSource has always focused on connections, linking older adults and caregivers with resources that enhance their lives. We have a rare opportunity to make a big impact with this campaign."

Funds raised through the campaign will help ElderSource provide home-delivered meals to local seniors in need through programs like Meals-on-Wheels. To meet the acute need — and in honor of ElderSource's 50th anniversary of service — Delores Barr Weaver Legacy Funds offered a one-time matching challenge grant of \$50,000. Because of this challenge grant, every donation made to Suppers for Seniors will be matched up to \$50,000. That means ElderSource has the opportunity to raise \$100,000 to-

ward feeding low-income older adults in its seven-county Northeast Florida service area.

Visit [MyElderSource.org/Suppers-ForSeniors](http://MyElderSource.org/Suppers-ForSeniors) for more information.

**Free needlepoint class and session offered**

Eight Flags Needlepoint Guild will hold an informational session about needlepoint at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on Sept. 21, from 10 a.m. until 12:45 p.m. On display will be finished projects from many of the guild's members. The session will also offer a free class for attendees to make their own bookmark.

Eight Flags Needlepoint Guild has many members encompassing St. Johns, Duval, Clay and Nassau counties. The guild has regular monthly meetings as well as monthly "stitch-ins" at various locations. This is a great way to meet new friends while developing a new hobby or expanding on an existing one.

Call (904) 824-9611 and leave a message with your name if you would like to make a bookmark at the informational session so the guild can provide enough supplies.

**Newcomers of North St. Johns announces September 2024 luncheon**

Newcomers of North Saint Johns will hold its September luncheon on Tuesday, Sept. 17 at the Cimarrone Golf Club, 2800 Cimarrone Blvd.

**Send us your community news!**  
[editor@floridanewslines.com](mailto:editor@floridanewslines.com)

**Briefs** cont. from pg. 15

Any resident who is interested in joining the group, is a member or a guest of a member is invited to attend. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. with the meeting beginning at 11 a.m. The cost for the luncheon and program is \$35 for members and \$40 for guests and all reservations must be received by Sept. 9.

“This is our first luncheon of the season and we’re thrilled to be back together and catch up on news and vacation adventures after this long hot summer,” said Co-President Priscilla Cobbs. “As part of the meeting, our members and guests will have the opportunity to learn more about all the wonderful special events and activities we offer throughout the year for our members. Everything from informative lunches to card games and Mahjong, Book Club and Golf outings, monthly Wine Socials and much more.”

Newcomers of North St. Johns County was established in 2004 to offer people an opportunity to make new friends while finding their place in our community. Visit <https://newcomersof-northstjohns.org> for more information about the luncheon and membership. (Annual membership is \$30.)

**New passport guide available from Clerk of Court**

The St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller has announced the release of a new Passport Guide designed to help residents navigate the passport application process. Applying for or renew-

ing a passport can be overwhelming and tedious, especially for first-time applicants. This guide aims to simplify the process by providing a clear, step-by-step outline on how to apply for or renew a passport.

The new Passport Guide not only makes the process easier, but also adds an element of fun. It’s packed with helpful tips and information to ensure residents have everything they need to successfully complete their applications. Whether you’re preparing for your first international trip or renewing your passport for future adventures, this guide is a valuable resource.

By using the Passport Guide, residents can confidently prepare for upcoming travels, knowing that they have all the information needed to secure their passport with ease.

Visit <https://stjohnsclerk.com/passports/> for more information or call (904) 819-3632 or email [passports@stjohnsclerk.com](mailto:passports@stjohnsclerk.com) with questions.

**River of Life UMC announces Pumpkin Patch opening**

This year, the River of Life UMC Pumpkin Patch celebrates its 21st year. Pumpkins will arrive Wednesday, Sept. 25 and the patch opens on Sept. 26. Patch hours are from 2 p.m. – 8 p.m., Monday through Friday, Saturday 10 a.m. – 8 p.m. and Sunday, 11 a.m. – 8 p.m. Morning field trips are permitted Monday through Friday for daycares, playgroups and schools at 9 a.m., 10 a.m. and 11 a.m. slots. (Schedule by calling Becky Kimball at (904) 254-7325.)

The church’s first Pumpkin Patch was back in 2002; it was a very small patch nestled in among the trees since the property had not yet been cleared.

“We would love for you to come out and enjoy the activities of games, books, activity sheets, decorate your pumpkin with stickers, take pictures at the several photo stations,” said Kimball. “We also have several picnic tables that you may use for a family, company, or group outing or party. Reserve in advance by giving me a call.”

The River of Life UMC Pumpkin Patch is a fundraiser for the church children’s ministries (Isaiah House, Hugs, Residing Hope formerly United Methodist Children Home). Volunteers at the patch will also collect non-perishable foods and household items (laundry soap, cleaning supplies, toiletries) to be given to local food banks and homeless shelters; visitors to the patch are encouraged to bring an item or two to donate.

“We will also have our annual free Family Fall Festival on Saturday, Oct. 26 from 12 a.m. – 4 p.m.,” said Kimball. “There will be hot dogs, chips, drinks, popcorn, snow cones, bouncies, facepainting and musical entertainment. Hope to see you at The Patch — Where We Carve Out Good Times!”

**Bartram Trail Women’s Club announces “Fall Kickoff” September meeting and luncheon**

The Bartram Trail Women’s Club (also known as the Bartram Trail Newcom-

ers and Women’s Club) will hold its meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, Sept. 10 at 11 a.m. at St Johns Golf and Country Club, 205 St. Johns Golf Drive. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. Checks for \$32 should be made payable to BTNC and mailed to Brenda Jenkins, 2204 Fort Mellon Court, St Augustine, FL 32092 no later than the first Tuesday of the month, Sept. 3. Be sure to indicate your entrée choice on the check memo (visit to [www.facebook.com/BTNC1](http://www.facebook.com/BTNC1) for choices).

The September luncheon theme is Fall Kickoff and attendees are encouraged to wear dress that reflects their favorite sports team. Entertainment will be Travel, Tours and More featuring Kelly Tours, which provides comprehensive group trip planning services, handling everything from hotel bookings to entertainment arrangements.

The Bartram Trail 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 Adrienne Townsel-Wilson at [bartramtnc@gmail.com](mailto:bartramtnc@gmail.com) for club information or visit [www.facebook.com/BTNC1](http://www.facebook.com/BTNC1) to see photos from meetings and download a membership form.



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## Bartram Bears booster club announces fundraiser

The Bartram Bears Athletic Booster Club will hold its inaugural fundraising event, The Bears Clay Classic, hosted by the Northeast Florida Builders Association Charitable Foundation (NEFBA), on Saturday, Sept. 7 at Jacksonville Clay Target Sports, 12125 New Berlin Road in Jacksonville. Participants are invited to join starting at 8 a.m. for registration and a light breakfast provided by Metro Diner. The event will feature various activities and opportunities for community involvement. The fundraiser aims to bolster the club's efforts in supporting a wide range of sports activities at Bartram Trail High School, from uniforms and equipment to facility upgrades and travel expenses.

"After months of planning, we are excited to launch The Bears Clay Classic in partnership with NEFBA," said Ian MacDonald, sponsorship co-chair of the Bartram Bears Athletic Booster Club. "Funds raised will directly benefit our student-athletes by providing essential resources for their athletic programs."

Contact Ian MacDonald by text at (904) 626-0353 or email at [ian.macdonald@regions.com](mailto:ian.macdonald@regions.com) for more information.

## Bartram Trail musicians are headed to Carnegie Hall

By Martie Thompson  
[editor@floridanewslines.com](mailto:editor@floridanewslines.com)

The wind ensemble from Bartram Trail High School, under the direction of band director Jason Duckett, has been invited to perform at Carnegie Hall in April 2025. The prestigious National Band and Orchestra Festival will host elite musicians from across the country who had to audition for their invitation. Bartram Trail's performance will not only highlight the band's achievements, but also highlight the school and community as a place of musical excellence.

"We are incredibly proud of our students and excited about the opportunity to perform at Carnegie Hall," said Duckett. "This experience will not only enhance their musical education, but



Photos courtesy Bartram Trail High School  
 The Bartram Trail High School Wind Ensemble with director Jason Duckett.

also provide memories that will last a lifetime. We are grateful for the support of our community in helping us make this dream a reality."

According to Kelly Kazmierski, Bartram Trail High School Band Boosters Association president, it is Duckett's intention that every musician in the 185 member band be able to experience the trip to Carnegie Hall, which will include arriving a few days before the performance for rehearsals as well as some New York City experiences.

"We expect the trip to be expensive," Kazmierski said. "For one thing, getting all of our concert instruments to New York will be no easy task."

In light of this, the band boosters have planned a massive fundraising effort, called "Start Spreading the News," to take place over the next several months.

"Every fundraiser you can think of, we will be doing in the next nine months," Kazmierski said.

Planned are events ranging from a gala at Flagler College in November to a golf tournament in January with car washes, a color run, gift wrap and candle sales in between. There will be something for every student to participate in — and participation from students will be required as buy-in for the undertaking. Kazmierski is also busy working on corporate sponsorships, and community and alumni donations are welcomed. So far around \$45,000 of the goal of \$250,000 has been raised.

For more information about the fundraising campaign and upcoming events, visit [www.spiritofbartram.com](http://www.spiritofbartram.com) or contact Kelly Kazmierski at [bthsbandboosters@gmail.com](mailto:bthsbandboosters@gmail.com).



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# Gardening

## Surviving the Florida summer and prepping for fall

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale  
 mail@floridanewslines.com

Writing in early August, it already feels like a very long hot summer. We've missed the worst of Hurricane Debby, so hopefully the heavy rains will not have had too bad an impact. Here the soil is prone to drying out quickly, so without regular rain I could soon be watering some plants, despite the more than five inches we had during the storm. And pots dry out rapidly too, now we're back in the 90 plus degree range.

Looking forward, it's not too soon to be planning the fall vegetable garden. As always, the Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide is the go-to for advice on what to plant when, and how: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/VH021>. I particularly like the section "No-pesticide Approaches," which describes cultural ways to avoid pests doing too much damage to your tender veggie plants. And this statement: "Do not panic and start spraying at the first sign of insect damage. Most plants that produce fruits, pods, or ears can stand a 10 percent to 20 percent loss of leaves without loss of potential yields" explains why.

A healthy ecosystem that supports a wide variety of insect species, more than 90 percent of which are beneficial, is what we ideally need to achieve. If you're growing in raised beds, grow some flowers nearby to attract useful insects. Alternatively, add some vegetable plants to your flower beds, if you can ensure they will get the nutrients and water they need for success. For myself, raised beds have worked best, as my yard is geared towards plants that don't need much input like fertilizers and water. Large pots nestled in the border can work well for adding color, and they could include attractive vegetables.

The Florida Master Gardener Volunteer newsletter is another useful resource. The August edition can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/2jx5nu57> and includes a piece about raised bed gardening. If you would like to receive the newsletter online every month you can sign up. Your email address won't be shared.

If you enjoy participating in group classes, over the next few months there are several to look forward to, hosted by the Extension service in Jacksonville. They are available for sign-up here:

<https://tinyurl.com/bdb4vdb>. Call the Extension office at (904) 255-7450 if you need further information.

Browsing the UF/IFAS website, I came across a fun and informative series of articles on "Garden Myths." This is a link to volume 1: <https://tinyurl.com/3x4y5zyp> and there are links to volumes 2 and 3. Ever wondered if Spanish moss is killing your tree? Wonder no more — it's not. How about those moles? Pests surely? But actually not, as they eat the sort of critters that feed on your plants' roots. And all the myth-busting information is 100 percent fact-based.

Looking around a local garden store, I hoped to find some salvias, which are good pollinator plants. There was only one that appealed, Mexican bush sage (*Salvia leucantha*). This is an attractive larger salvia that tends to flower later in the summer and fall. It usually has purple and white flowers, and its foliage is an attractive slightly fuzzy mid green. This year I have one in my garden for the first time and look forward to its blooms. A native salvia, admittedly more modest in appearance, tropical sage (*Salvia coccinea*) blooms non-stop and is only set back by extended dry periods. Texas sage (*Salvia greggii*) is a small, slightly woody subshrub. It is hardy in our area and can be evergreen. Like many salvias, it attracts hummingbirds to its small trumpet-shaped flowers. It blooms in summer through fall, often with cherry red flowers, although some varieties may have pink or other shades of red flowers.

Fall blooming flowers are important for both insects and birds, many of which rely on these food sources, which includes their seeds, to build themselves up to get through the winter. Migrant birds will be passing through, expecting to fatten themselves for their onward journeys so it's important to allow seeds to develop and remain on our plants. I am really looking forward to watching more than our regular backyard birds, delightful as they are!

*[Editor's Note: Our Gardening column is penned each month by Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale. Due to a layout error last month, she was not correctly credited with writing her article. We regret the error and apologize for any inconvenience.]*

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# Travel

## Explore New Discoveries at Historic Jamestown

By Debi Lander  
mail@floridanewslines.com



Photos courtesy Debi Lander  
Buffalo statue in Cody, Wyoming.

## Buffalo Bill, Western Art and Rodeos in Cody, Wyoming

By Debi Lander  
mail@floridanewslines.com

The allure of the West can be strong. I'd heard that Cody, Wyoming, founded by namesake Buffalo Bill Cody in 1896, exceeds expectations. The authentic downtown, surrounded by wide-open landscapes, soaring mountains, and many Western-style activities, sounded terrific. And it was.

Cody frequently appears in national media "best lists," with Travel & Leisure Magazine naming it "One of the Most Beautiful Towns in the U.S." and "A Top Art Town." The only negative I can think of is that Cody is somewhat difficult to get to for Easterners. I flew into Denver and took a bus. I could have flown to Billings or Cody, but the cost is higher. Once you arrive, you will want to stay.

I began with a Cody Trolley Tour to learn a little history and get a grasp of the town's layout. Much of downtown is walkable. I wanted to learn about the famous showman Buffalo Bill Cody, so I headed to his original hunting lodge, where a reenactor told his tales. The Pahaska Teepee Lodge rests near the Northeast Entrance to Yellowstone. When visitors traveled by horse and carriage, they'd spend the night at the lodge before going into the park. Cody wisely chose the location, as do many travelers today. The old lodge remains a tourist attraction, but you can stay on the property.

The town's spectacular attraction is the Buffalo Bill Center for the West. The complex includes five museums under one roof: Whitney Western Art Museum (a Smithsonian affiliate), Plains Indian Museum, Buffalo Bill Museum, Draper Natural History Museum, Cody Firearms Museum, and a research library. It's so large that the admission (just \$23) covers two days. You'll see just a fraction of the 100,000 Western American artifacts, including exceptional paintings and sculptures, taxidermy animal displays, Buffalo Bill memorabilia, interactive exhibits, and videos. For a truly enriching experience, sign up for

one of the museum's Exclusive Tours, led by an expert curator. The tours offer a behind-the-scenes look at the archives and allow you to tailor your visit to your specific interests.

Nearby, the Heart Mountain World War II Interpretive Center offers insight into a dark corner of U.S. history: the incarceration of 14,000 Japanese American citizens following the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Another day, I explored the Firearms Museum. While I'm not a gun enthusiast, I have to admit I found these guns and rifles fascinating. I followed a timeline of their development and enjoyed seeing famous people's firearms. The engraved details on some of the side plates look like works of art. Then, I went off to the Cody Firearms Experience, where I shot two guns at the indoor range. The facility maintains copies of many historic weapons, and I chose a 1795 Flintlock musket and a Gatling Gun. Firing the Gatling made me feel like a mobster; however, the musket was the most thrilling. My instructor loaded the gunpowder and the ball, and then I aimed and fired — with the gunpowder igniting close to my face.

I recommend dinner at the Cody Cattle Company while listening to live Western music. Then, walk over to the Cody Rodeo Fairgrounds. Rodeos run every night in the summer. First come the bucking bronco riders, then cattle roping, barrel racing, and lastly, the bull riders. What a fabulous show!

Lastly, I took a full-day bus trip to Yellowstone National Park. One day is not enough to see the geysers, bubbling mud pots, waterfalls, and abundant wildlife. The bison were plentiful and easy to spot. Bears were fewer, but I saw about eight to 10, just not up close!

If your inner cowboy is calling, head to Cody. (Information: <https://www.codywy.gov>)

Visit [www.bylandersea.com](http://www.bylandersea.com) to read more of local travel writer Debi Lander's stories and travel tips.



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**What is the current status of the negotiations between Baptist Health and Florida Blue?** After months of little progress, we recently had a flurry of negotiations activity with Florida Blue including a demand from them to approve a one-year increase. We believe a short-term solution is no solution at all. Baptist Health needs a long-term contract with Florida Blue which will enable us to plan and invest in crucial community health initiatives without the looming threat of annual disruption. A long-term contract provides us with certainty, Florida Blue with network stability and our patients with continued access to the quality care they rely on.

**Why do we need a long-term agreement?** We exist to care for the community, with a history of providing critically needed services in good times and bad. This requires long-term planning, predictable income, and stability so that we can sustain our mission. For some services, we are the only local place to get help. We will not

be able to serve our community in the same capacity as we do today unless there is a correction in our contract that accounts for years of being paid at below-market rates while costs of providing care increased dramatically due to external factors beyond our control. Florida Blue has falsely accused us of demanding excessive rates, when in fact we have only asked them to pay market rates, consistent with what they pay other similar health systems in the state.

**As part of our commitment to make health care more accessible and affordable,** we also have invested in convenient, extended-hours access to urgent care in 17 locations, the largest network of primary care physicians, on-demand doctor visits 24/7 with board-certified physicians and two new ambulatory surgery centers to provide services at significantly reduced prices. Our more than 200 outpatient locations are ready to serve the community in lower-cost settings.

**With several weeks still to go, we remain committed to negotiating in good faith.** The time for gamesmanship and short-term solutions is over. We value our relationship with Florida Blue and hope that they will share our vision and commitment to the health and well-being of our community. We devote our lives to serving this community, and

we would not be doing this if it weren't necessary to protect the long-term sustainability of our health system.

We appreciate the support and understanding of our patients, team members, physicians, and community partners during this negotiation process. It's very important that people know this is not how we wanted this to go, and we do not want anyone's health care to be disrupted.

- If you'd like to speak with a Baptist Health representative about our negotiation with Florida Blue, call us at **904.202.3247 (FAIR)**.
- For information about your benefits, call the number on the back of your insurance card. This negotiation potentially impacts patients with any Blue Cross and Blue Shield plan which is serviced by Florida Blue.
- To learn about all the insurance plans we accept, visit [baptistjax.com/florida-blue](http://baptistjax.com/florida-blue)

