



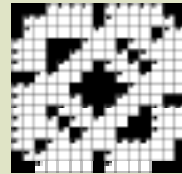
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Photos courtesy Dana Kelley

CAA Flag Football co-founders George and Mary Vancore and Debbie and Steve McCabe.

CAA Flag Football celebrates anniversary

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewline.com

On Jan. 11, on a regularly scheduled day of games, a ceremony was held at Plantation Park to recognize the 35th anniversary of CAA Flag Football. According to founding member George Vancore, back in 1988, the CAA league offered Pop Warner football in the fall and baseball in the spring — and in between there wasn't much for kids to do.

“So we started taking kids to Mills Field on Sunday afternoons to just throw the football around,” Vancore said.

CAA Flag Football cont. on pg. 2

St. Johns County Fight Night: First responders to box for charity

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewline.com

A new family-friendly event is coming to St. Johns County — Fight Night will test the boxing skills of employees of the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office against those of St. Johns County Fire and Rescue. Benefiting from the event will be the soon-to-be-built Diamond of Dreams, a ball field and playground for children with special needs, along with Historic St. Johns PAL (Police Athletic League), an organization that provides all youth an opportunity to play a variety of sports.

Fight Night will be held on Feb. 13 beginning at 6 p.m. at the St. Augustine Amphitheatre. The St. Johns County Sheriff's Office held its first boxing event last year on a smaller scale and as part of another event. It was a huge success. According to Fight Night coordinator SJSO Deputy Krissie Padgett, a stand alone event this year made sense for a few reasons.

“The logistics were difficult to piggy back off another event,” Padgett said.



Practice session with St. Johns County Fire and Rescue.



Photos courtesy Taylor Levesque

Fighters from last year's event with Sheriff Rob Hardwick and Kendell Hardwick.

“We also needed to be able to sell more tickets to meet the demand. We were turning people away at the smaller venue last year. Already [in early January] we have sold more tickets than last year.”

The event will consist of 15 bouts; the first three bouts will feature teenagers from the PAL boxing program. The main events will be the 12 bouts pitting first responders from SJSO against those from St. Johns Fire and Rescue.

Padgett said that the fighters have been training for about four months, three times per week, to get ready for the fight.

“It takes a big commitment to do this,” she said. “The fighters have to make sure their cardio and skill levels are up.”

The St. Augustine Amphitheatre will host the event and stadium seating will be available. The ring will be in the

pit on the floor, offering great viewing, especially for the seats that will be added to the pit. Padgett said the fighters will walk out on the stage before entering the pit to fight. Two SJSO deputies will act as DJ and The Amp will have food and beverage vendors to add to the festive atmosphere. Fight Night swag, including commemorative patches and shirts, will be available for purchase. The fight is sanctioned by the Combat Sports Athletic Commission, which will also provide some of the judges — in addition to a few current MMA fighters.

St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick is a big fan of not only the event, but also of the beneficiaries of the proceeds. Citing the success of the Field of Dreams in NW St. Johns County, he said that his wife Kendell Hardwick was inspired also by her work dealing with the special needs population in St. Johns County Schools to provide a similar project in the southern part of the county.

“The Diamond of Dreams will be located on PAL property leased from the Board of County Commissioners off

Fight Night cont. on pg.2



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Register to Attend: <http://learndbs.com/1599>

RSVP also available by phone: Alaine Keebaugh, PhD (c) 770-356-6410

Fight Night cont. from pg.1

Nease Road,” Sheriff Hardwick said. “It will include a carpeted playing field that is wheelchair accessible as well as a playground. The idea is for the PAL kids and the special needs kids to all be able to play together and learn from each other.”

Sheriff Hardwick said that fundraising for this project is ongoing, including the Fight Night event, but that Kendall Hardwick also successfully made a presentation to the Board of County Commissioners and was granted about \$2 million in ARPA funds that were set to expire if not utilized. Phase 1 of

site preparation should be underway shortly and the goal is to have children on the field this time next year.

Event promoter SJSO Deputy Padgett and SJCFR Public Information Officer Chris Naff are looking forward to a great event and seeing many community members there.

“It’s important to remember that these are not professional fighters,” Padgett said. “In real life, they fight fires and crimes. They are boxing on the side to represent their agency and raise money for a good cause.”

Naff agreed and said that each bout will be different and exciting, with an actual belt awarded to the winner.

“Plus, the winners will have bragging rights for the next year,” Naff said.



Practice session with St. Johns County Sheriff's Office.

CAA Flag Football cont. from pg. 1

By early 1989 the games between kids from Julington Creek versus kids from Mandarin had really taken off and it was decided to start a league. Four teams in 1989 grew to 12 teams in 1990.

Steve and Debbie McCabe were instrumental in forming and serving on the first board and were recognized at the Jan. 11 along with Vancore as founders and “steadfast advocates” for the league’s success.

Vancore remained active with the league until he stepped away in 2013, but others have stepped up and the league continues to succeed and grow. Today, there are more than 750 athletes between the ages of five and 16 who play flag football.

“If you can put something in place that’s sustainable, others will take over,” Vancore said. “It’s not an easy lift, but it’s very rewarding.”

Vancore noted that the league contin-



CAA Flag Football co-founder George Vancore.

ues to be run by volunteers who give of their hearts every day. High school age students, who have grown up playing flag football in the league, often return as coaches of younger teams and as referees.

CAA Flag Football offers both coed and girls only leagues, with practice beginning in November and games lasting through January each year. Games are played at Plantation Park. Signups start in July, online at www.caaflagfootball.org.



CAA Flag Football teams.

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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Punkin!



Breed:

Black Bombay.

Favorite Activity:

Playing in the woods and being outside.

Favorite Food:

Shredded chicken in gravy.

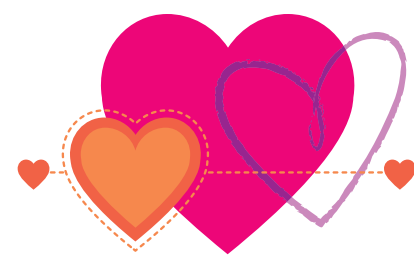
Favorite Friend:

Layla, his sister.

How did your BFF get their name?

Punkin got his name because his human dad had two Punkins before him. He is "Punkin The 3rd."

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



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

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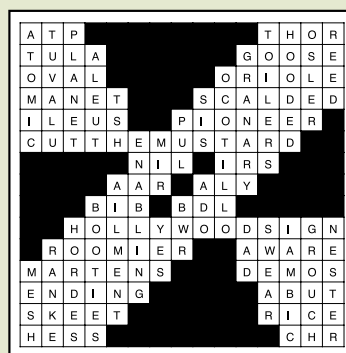
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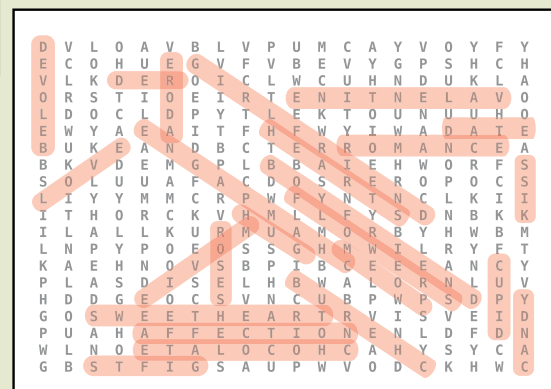


Answers to our Puzzles
PG 10

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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 11:30 a.m. each day. Contact Program Coordinator Gail Godzich at (904) 209-3658 or ggodzich@stjohnscoa.com 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 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.

2nd: A Course In Miracles Study Group will meet on Sundays from 9 a.m. - 10 a.m. at Unity Church for Creative Living, 2777 Race Track Road. This is a unique spiritual self-study program designed to awaken attendees to the truth of their oneness with God. Cost: donation. For more information, call (904) 287-1505 or email UCCLoffice2777@gmail.com.

4th: Happy Hookers crochet group will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on Feb. 4 and Feb. 18 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.

4th: Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet on Tuesday, Feb. 4 at 6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church on the Loretto Road Campus in the Kids Space at 2501 Loretto Road. New members/

guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

5th: 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 from 11:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m. Call (904) 209-3655 (Monday - Thursday) or email tharris@coasjc.org for more information.

6th: 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 on Thursdays from 12:15 p.m. - 3:15 p.m. Call (904) 209-3655 (Monday - Thursday) or email tharris@coasjc.org for more information.

8th: The Bartram Trail Genealogy Club meets the second Saturday of each month (this month, Feb. 8) from 2 p.m. - 4 p.m. at the Bartram Trail Branch Library. This month's topic is "Identifying Members' High School Photos." New and experienced genealogy members are welcomed. Email ginglish@comcast.net for more information. Visit www.facebook.com/groups/BTGenClubGroup to send a request to join the club.

8th: Friends of Alpine Park group will meet on Feb. 8 at 11 a.m. at the Harris-Bennett Farmhouse in Alpine Groves Park, 2060 State Road 13. Docents will conduct tours of the historic farmhouse from 12 p.m. until 2 p.m. The tours are free, and everyone is invited. Email friendsofalpinepark@gmail.com for more information.

10th: The Northwest St. Johns County United for Progress Club will elect its 2025 officers and welcome Rachel Grage who will outline legislative action for 2025 on Feb. 10. Social time begins

at 6:30 p.m. followed by the meeting at 7 p.m. Email nwsjcp@gmail.com for meeting details.

11th: Bartram Trail Women's Club will host its meeting and luncheon on Feb. 11 beginning at 11 a.m. at St. Johns Golf and Country Club. The luncheon theme is "Valentine's Day Trivia." 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 Feb. 4. Visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 for more information and a membership form.

12th: Metaphysics 1, a five-week class which will explore powerful Divine ideas, principles and laws that will improve lives and expand consciousness will begin on Feb. 12 from 7 p.m. - 9 p.m. The cost is \$120. The class will be held at Unity Church for Creative Living, 2777 Race Track Road. Register at unityinjax.com. Call (904) 287-1505 or email UCCLoffice2777@gmail.com for more information.

15th: Saturday Adult Book Club will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library at 10 a.m. on Feb. 15 to discuss "Book Lovers" by Emily Henry. Beverages and a light snack will be provided by the Friends of the Library. Call the library at (904) 827-6960 or email akuhn@sjcfl.us for more information.

17th: The All Star Quilters Guild will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on Monday, Feb. 17 at First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The program will feature a "Past and Present" trunk show. "Show and Tell" is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit www.allstarquilters.org for more information.

19th: Coin Collecting for Kids will be held at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on Feb. 19 from 4 p.m. - 5 p.m. Join Tony Bonaro from the Florida United

Numismatists to learn about history, geography, math, and science while studying coins. Call the library at (904) 827-6960 for more information.

19th: Free Tech Help with David will be held on Wednesday, Feb. 19 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/ for more information.

20th: William Bartram Scenic Highway Group will meet on Thursday, Feb. 20 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 alabatt@comcast.net or call (904) 699-8475.

20th: Newcomers of North Saint Johns will hold a luncheon on Thursday, Feb. 20 beginning at 11:15 a.m. at Alhambra Theatre and Dining, 12000 Beach Blvd. in Jacksonville. Attendees will enjoy lunch and a full presentation of "West Side Story." The cost for the luncheon and program is \$45 for members and \$55 for guests. Register by Feb. 4. Visit https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org for more information.

28th: "Exploitation of the Elderly and Disabled" 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, Feb. 28 from 10 a.m. - 11 a.m. Call (904) 209-3655 (Monday - Thursday) or email tharris@coasjc.org for more information.



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

Q: Do you have any update on the search for a new superintendent for St. Johns County schools?

A: We approved the timeline for the search at our school board meeting on Jan. 14. The first item will be a survey, to be widely distributed to all members of the community, to get input on what the public sees as important qualities of the new superintendent. The survey will have five categories of 10 questions each and we are asking respondents to select three questions from each category that they deem the most important. The five categories are performance accountability; board, staff and community relations; instructional leadership; business, financial and operational; and personal leadership qualities.

Q: When will the survey be available and how do people find it?

A: The survey will be online from Jan. 20 through Feb. 14. A link will be very visible on the front page of the St. Johns County School District website (stjohns.k12.fl.us). Information on how to obtain paper copies of the survey will also be available on the front page.

Q: Are there other opportunities for community input?

A: Between Feb. 3 and Feb. 21, we will host a series of forums and focus groups. General ones will be held in the north and south portions of the county and specialized ones will also be held for groups such as the teachers union and the business community. Again, this information will be available on the front page of our website. On Feb. 26, we will hold a school board workshop where we will discuss the results of the surveys to ascertain qualities suggested by the community to put together the advertisement for the superintendent position. We will also discuss the salary range and length of the contract at this workshop.

Q: What happens next?

A: The advertisement period will last from March 3 to March 28. At the April 10 board meeting we will identify the

semifinalists and work on interview questions. All applications received will be posted on our website. We will reach out to these semifinalists with questions to be answered in written and some in video form. On April 25, the board will meet to identify the finalists.

Q: Will there be onsite interviews? And when will the superintendent be selected?

A: Onsite interviews, including both public and private interviews with individual board members will be held the week of May 12. During this week, there will also be opportunities for the public to meet the candidates. On May 20, the board will meet at 9 a.m. to select the new superintendent. This school board meeting is being moved from the stated date of May 13 and also the time is earlier in the day due to there being two graduation ceremonies the evening of May 20. Contract negotiations will start and a start date will be determined. We anticipate this to be on or before July 1.

Q: This seems like a very busy and compact process. Do you have any idea how many applications you expect to receive?

A: Our consultant tells us that this is a very coveted position that doesn't come open often in our district. The consultant expects something in the neighborhood of 20 applications. We expect both internal and external candidates.

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

A: We are all heartbroken that two of our students have recently had accidents on the way to school. I urge parents to talk to their students about being diligent and careful on their way to school. And I also urge drivers to pay attention to the road and be extremely careful as well.

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.

JCE fifth graders take part in wax museum

On Jan. 10, the fifth graders in Gomati Sutaria and Kristi Wilson's gifted/blended classes culminated their study of the American Revolution by putting on a wax museum. Students posed in costume as a notable personality of the Revolution, came to life when a button was pressed, and gave a speech about their role and contribution. The museum visitors consisted of fifth grade classes, selected third and fourth grade classes, administration, and parents of the "wax statues." Students demonstrated their mastery of the standard: "SS.5.A.5.2- Identify significant individuals and groups who played a role in the American Revolution."



Photo courtesy Gomati Sutaria

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Guest Column

St. Johns County Property Appraiser's Office launches new online application for exemptions

By St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer

At the St. Johns County Property Appraiser's Office, we have launched a new and enhanced online application that provides St. Johns County homeowners with the opportunity to quickly and efficiently file for exemptions, including homestead, widow(er) and portability. The new application is submitted through a secure online portal and provides homeowners with step-by-step assistance and continual communication during the process. The new application also provides a quick approval turnaround for complete and valid applications, often within one business day. The application can be found on our website at www.sjcpa.gov/exemptions.

Here at the Property Appraiser's Office, we want to make filing for exemptions as convenient and easy as possible for our homeowners. This new application allows our homeowners to file for exemptions from the comfort of their own home and when their schedule allows while also providing a more secure, streamlined process with faster approvals.

The online portal and application are through Just Appraised, a business

partner of our office. By setting up an account with the online portal, homeowners can file for multiple exemptions and make changes as needed at any time. Currently, homeowners can apply for homestead, portability and widow(er) exemptions through the new application. By the end of the year, all other property-related exemptions can be applied for online. In the meantime, all other exemptions can be filed by visiting our office at 4030 Lewis Speedway in St. Augustine. Visit www.sjcpa.gov/otherexemptions for a complete list of available exemptions.

The deadline to apply for exemptions for the 2025 tax year is March 3, 2025. Exemptions reduce the property tax bill for eligible homeowners. For additional information, call our office at (904) 827-5500 or visit our website at www.sjcpa.gov.

Our mission at the St. Johns County Property Appraiser's Office is to prepare a tax roll that is fair, equitable and accurate and in a timely manner while complying with Florida Statutes and the requirements of the Florida Constitution. Our office has 46 employees and manages more than 185,000 parcels.



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

Q. With Valentine's Day around the corner, will your office host any special ceremonies this year?

A. We will be holding our annual Valentine's Day group wedding ceremony on Friday, Feb. 14, 2025, at 1 p.m. This year we're including vow renewals, and we are partnering with House of Assembly Events to host this momentous occasion at The Carriage House in downtown St. Augustine.

Q. Can you provide details for couples interested in registering?

A. To tie the knot or renew vows during the group ceremony on Valentine's Day, couples must register online by visiting stjohnsclerk.com/wedding. Registration closes on Friday, Feb. 7 at 5 p.m. The ceremony is limited to the first 50 couples. Participating couples must also purchase their marriage license from the clerk's office no later than Feb. 10. Photography services are available for an additional fee; if interested, choose this option when registering.

Q. For couples who can't attend the group ceremony, what services do you provide at your office?

A. Our clerks love helping couples navigate the process of starting a

new life together in marriage by assisting with marriage applications and issuing marriage licenses. In 2024, we issued 2,765 marriage licenses, and introduced a new wedding photo service to capture couples in their special moment. For couples who can't make it to our special Valentine's Day event, we also perform wedding ceremonies during regular business hours at the Richard O. Watson judicial center, located at 4010 Lewis Speedway in St. Augustine. While walk-ins are welcome, couples can also book an appointment online. Note that marriage licenses are not valid until three days after issuance (applies to Florida residents only).

Q. What is the best way for people to contact you with questions?

A. For questions about the services we provide at the Clerk's office, our Customer Care Call Center is available Monday – Friday from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. at (904) 819-3600, and by email at clerk@stjohnsclerk.com. I can also be reached directly on my cell at (904) 599-8688 or by email at BPatty@stjohnsclerk.com.



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ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Women-owned businesses are thriving

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Women entrepreneurs are not to be underestimated. Data affirms that women-owned businesses are growing and thriving. According to North One banking, women-owned firms account for more than 12 million businesses in the United States.



Photo courtesy MetroCreative

Women-owned businesses are driving economic growth, and a deeper look at some of the numbers supports that notion.

In addition, the 2024 Wells Fargo Impact of Women-Owned Business Report, in partnership with Ventureneer, Core Women and Women Impacting Public Policy, found the number of women-owned businesses increased at a rate of 4.5 times between 2019 to 2023. Women-owned businesses are driving economic growth, and a deeper look at some of the numbers supports that notion.

The Women's Business Enterprise Council says there are 12.3 million women-owned businesses in the U.S., which comprises about 40 percent of the total number of businesses.

Women-owned businesses bring in nearly \$2 trillion every year, says the National Women's Business Council.

During the pandemic, women-owned businesses added 1.4 million jobs and \$579.6 billion in revenue to the economy, says Wells Fargo.

The World Bank indicates that roughly one-third of principal owners of all businesses are female.

The Women's Business Enterprise Council advises that 64 percent of new women-owned businesses are started by women of color.

According to Forbes, women-led tech companies achieve a 35 percent higher ROI. A Forbes study with First Round Capital, a venture capital firm, found female-founded businesses in their portfolio outperformed male-founded companies by more than 60 percent.

SCORE Jacksonville to host workshops

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

SCORE is a national service organization that supports small businesses nationwide. SCORE has a network of more than 11,000 volunteers operating in more than 340 local chapters around the country. The organization is supported by the US Small Business Administration (SBA).

In February, the following workshops are scheduled:

Master 3 AI Tools to Streamline Your Sales Process, Feb. 4, 10 a.m. – 11 a.m. The presenter is Minesh Baxi, a 10X Certified coach, Grant Cardone licensee, and best-selling author of 12 books. Are you ready to revolutionize your sales process with AI? In this webinar, attendees will be guided through practical strategies to simplify workflow and achieve better results. This will include:

- Use AI-powered quizzes to qualify leads faster and focus on high-value opportunities.
- Automate follow-ups and routine client communication, freeing time for strategic tasks.

- Personalize outreach at scale to build stronger relationships and convert more leads into clients.

This workshop is free of charge.

Business Finance Basics, Feb. 7, 12 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. The presenter is Amanda Roberts, Financial Inclusion Leader with Truist. In this workshop, banking basics for business are discussed, including why it is important to have a separate business account from personal, and Roberts will introduce a basic cash flow worksheet. Discussion items include how to:

Grow your business through business credit and why it is important to create business credit

How can it help with the planning and expansion of a business?

The importance of insurance for the business, no matter the size, and why that is important.

This workshop is free of charge.

Visit SCORE's Workshop calendar at www.score.org/jacksonville/local-workshops for more information and to register.

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December trends reflect seasonal shifts

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

In December, the market saw growth in closed sales, which follows annual trends, since homeowners wanted to move into their new homes before the chaos of the holiday season. Meanwhile, pending sales took a dive in December suggesting that the usual slowdown in sales during the early part of 2025.

The median sales price for single-family homes in Northeast Florida's six-county

region increased by 2.3 percent compared to November, reaching \$400,000; however, this brought the Home Affordability Index (which measures whether a typical family earns enough to qualify for a mortgage on a typical home, based on current interest rates, median income, and median home prices) down to a score of 65, a 1.5 percent decrease from November.

“There is a rekindled excitement from many buyers and sellers as we head into 2025 as we are coming out of the uncer-

tainty of an election year. While we are in the ‘slow time’ that we see annually through the holidays, we are already seeing increased activity,” said 2025 NEFAR President, Mario Gonzalez.

In St. Johns County, the December 2024 median price for single-family homes decreased by 2 percent from the previous year to \$546,500. The market pace slowed, with median days on the market rising 33.9 percent from November to 79. Closed sales increased by 4.2 percent

to 473, and pending sales experienced a steep decline of 42.2 percent to 214. New listings dropped by 25.7 percent to 422, while active inventory decreased by 8.7 percent to 1,702 homes, representing a 3.6-month supply. The Home Affordability Index declined slightly by 2 percent to 48.0, as St. Johns County continues to be one of the most expensive areas in the region.

Visit <https://nefar.realtor/market-stats/> for more statistical information.

Briefs

Florida Supervisor of Elections Association announces scholarships

In a commitment to furthering education and civic engagement, the Florida Supervisors of Elections is offering three \$1,200 scholarships to college students across the state, according to St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes.

Applicants must be registered Florida voters and live in the state for at least the preceding two years. Applicants must be either a Political Science, Public Administration, Business Administration, or Journalism/Mass Communication major and be at least a junior in college. Students must be enrolled or accepted as a full-time student in a senior college or university in Florida and have maintained at least a “C” average or above for the previous year.

The deadline to apply for a scholarship is March 7, 2025. Applications are available online on the Scholarship page in the “About” section at www.votesjc.gov or may be picked up from the St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Office located at 4455 Avenue A, Suite 101, in St. Augustine.

Applications must be submitted to the Elections Office of the county in which the applicant is registered to vote. Each county will select one finalist to send to the FSE Scholarship Committee for consideration. Visit www.votesjc.gov or call (904) 823-2238 for more information.

Bartram Bash to benefit athletes at Bartram Trail High School

The Bartram Trail High School Athletic Booster Club has announced Friday, Feb. 28 as the date of the annual Bartram Bash. Featuring fun, food, and entertainment, the event will be held at La Venture Grove beginning at 6:30 p.m. Tickets are \$75 and include delicious appetizers. Don’t miss out on live music from Darrell Rae and the chance to win exciting prizes in the raffles.

Proceeds from this event will go toward supporting all sports at Bartram Trail High School. Contact the Bartram Trail Athletic Booster Club at bbabccommunications@gmail.com for more information. Tickets may be purchased at https://gofan.co/event/2340311?schoolId=FL68189_2

Or if you already have the GoFan app, search “2025 Bartram Bash” to purchase tickets.

Chocolate and Beyond to support volunteers and teachers

The 32nd annual Chocolate and Beyond event, a celebration of chocolate, desserts, and other delectable culinary treats, will be held on March 1 from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. at the Classic Car Museum of St. Augustine. Guests will sample tasty treats from some of the area’s finest restaurants and specialty shops, and tickets will include a tour of the museum. A silent auction and contests will also be part of this fun

and exciting afternoon.

This event is hosted by TASK — Teacher’s Aid for Student Knowledge. Proceeds from Chocolate and Beyond are utilized to support RSVP of St. Johns County as they recruit, train, and recognize senior volunteers, as well as local teachers as they receive special project grants. Tickets can be purchased at <https://tinyurl.com/bdh6back> and will also be available at the door.

Newcomers of North St. Johns goes to Alhambra Theatre and Dining

Newcomers of North Saint Johns will visit Alhambra Theatre and Dining, 12000 Beach Blvd., on Thursday Feb. 20 beginning at 11:15 a.m. for its February luncheon. The event features a delicious lunch and presentation of “West Side Story.”

“We will be seeing the entire play; this is their opening matinee,” said Priscilla Cobbs, co-president of Newcomers of North Saint Johns. “Alhambra shows generally run about two hours, so this is a special treat. We will be sitting in an area reserved for us and seats will be chosen upon entry to the dining area.”

Doors will open at 11:15 am with the presentation beginning at about 2 p.m. Cost for the luncheon and program is \$45 for members and \$55 for guests and non-members. A full Alhambra menu will be available for ordering the day at the venue. There will also be a cash bar. All reservations must be received by Feb. 4, 2025.

Newcomers of North Saint Johns offers a variety of activities including smaller lunch groups, wine socials, golf, Bunco, Mah Jongg, a book club and day trips planned throughout the year. Visit <https://newcomersof-northstjohns.org> for more information about the luncheon and membership.

Photography exhibit opens

“Where We Stand,” a powerful exhibition by St. Augustine fine art photographer Lenny Foster, will open with a reception at First Coast Cultural Center on Thursday, Feb. 6, from 5:30 p.m. – 7 p.m. In celebration of Black History Month, this exhibit will be featured at FCCC through March 27,

and it is free and open to the public.

Tickets are now on sale for First Coast Cultural Center’s 30th anniversary gala, “Beaches, A Celebration of the Arts.” This annual event will be held at TPC Sawgrass Clubhouse on April 27 from 6 p.m. – 8 p.m. Gala sponsorships and program advertisements are available.

Visit www.firstcoastculturalcenter.org or call (904) 280-0614 for more information on Foster’s exhibition and other events and programs. First Coast Cultural Center is located at 6000B Sawgrass Village Circle in Ponte Vedra Beach.

Bartram Trail Women’s Club to host Valentine’s Day trivia

The Bartram Trail Women’s Club will hold its meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, Feb. 11 at 11 a.m. at St. Johns Golf & Country Club, 205 St. Johns Golf Drive. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. John Harrell, co-owner of Fast Jax Trivia, will host a Valentine’s Day trivia contest. Attendees are encouraged to wear Valentine’s attire.

Checks for \$32 should be made payable to BTNC and mailed to Brenda Jenkins, 2204 Fort Mellon Court, St Augustine, FL 32092. Payment must be received no later than the first Tuesday of the month, Feb. 4, 2025. Be sure to indicate your entrée choice on the check memo. Our February luncheon theme is Valentine’s Day Trivia. You are encouraged to wear Valentine’s attire.

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 to First Vice President Adrienne Townsel-Wilson at bartramtnc@gmail.com for more information or visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 to see pictures of meetings and download a membership form.



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Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

Theresa DePonceau

Theresa DePonceau knew when she was a little girl that she wanted to be an interior designer. Growing up in Rochester, NY, the eldest of four sisters, she has artistic genes dating back to her grandparents. Her paternal grandfather started a metal shop to produce metal artwork known as repousse, which means the transfer of one metal to another. Her father took over the shop until his passing and now Theresa is finding her way as a third generation metal artisan. But it is residential and, initially, marine interior design that has provided Theresa her livelihood. Upon her graduation from Savannah College of Art and Design, she took a job with yacht manufacturer Sea Ray, moving on to other marine companies before moving over to residential interior design. Today, she works with custom builders and has an interior design studio in her home.

Q: How did you know that interior design would be your career?

A: It just kind of came to me. My maternal grandmother had a beautiful home and a great sense of style. If anyone was to get credit for what I think I'm capable of, it would be her. I used to practice in my own parents' home when I was a child; I'd move the furniture around all the time.

Q: What was your biggest career influence?

A: I worked for Sea Ray for seven



Photo courtesy Theresa DePonceau
Theresa DePonceau with some of her metal artworks.

years in marine residential design and only left because of the financial crisis that occurred after 9/11. I went on to other opportunities with Silverton Marine, which was part of LUHRS. This is what brought me to St. Augustine. Since the closing of this company, I've worked on a consultative basis for several manufacturers and private yacht owners. Ultimately I moved on to residential design.

Q: How does residential design differ from marine design?

A: The marine process was faster because of the production timeline. I worked on all the interior finishes, including upholstery, countertops, curtains and fixed furniture, which

was smaller in scale and size. For residential, there are more options in all these categories. I design for the way that people live in their homes. I always hope to create a living space with the same timeless sensibility that I use to build a wardrobe.

Q: What can you share about the metal artwork family business?

A: At the metal shop started by my grandfather in Rochester, we have a metal shop library of 176 steel dies that have been hand carved by my grandfather, my father, and other artisans over the years. One of

the dies commemorates the 150th anniversary of St. Augustine. Each weighs between 50 – 80 pounds. The finished pieces, primarily in aluminum, are all made by hand, hammered from the dies so that the metal actually becomes a relief of the die. We offer platters, bread trays and circular serving trays.

Q: Are these metal artworks available for sale?

A: Yes, I do the occasional art show and have some inventory locally. I'm working on an Etsy page.

Q: What do you like to do in your free time?

A: I enjoy yoga, walking on the beach and painting.

Earthy colors dominate 2025

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Change is in the air when a new year arrives. People often use the turn of the calendar as an opportunity to redecorate living spaces or revamp their wardrobes. As individuals narrow down their projects, they may want to incorporate a fresh and trendy palette of colors. For 2025, the options are decidedly warm, cozy and earthy.

Industry color experts routinely recommend hues that can elevate homes, offices and other spaces. The following is a selection of shades that insiders predict will color the world for the coming year.

Quietude: Sherwin-Williams has named Quietude its color of the year. This soft sage color exudes serenity and understated luxury. Grayish-green with a touch of blue, Quietude is a soothing color of tranquility. Sherwin-Williams also offers a Color Collection of the Year that includes Convivial Yellow, Spiced Cider, and Nomadic Desert, among others.

Mocha Mousse: The title of Pantone® Color of the Year 2025 belongs to Mocha Mousse. Just as the name implies, this rich, warm brown suggests the intoxicating qualities of coffee and chocolate. It can create a feeling of comfort in any space, or even serve as the basis of a chocolate wardrobe color palette. According to Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute, Mocha Mousse is "sophisticated and lush, yet at the same time an unpretentious classic."

Purple Basil: Glidden's 2025 color of the year title belongs to Purple Basil, a dusty, neutral violet purple hue with mauve undertones. It embraces rich, warm energy, and is equally at home in a bedroom as it is in a dining room.

Earthy cont. on pg.10

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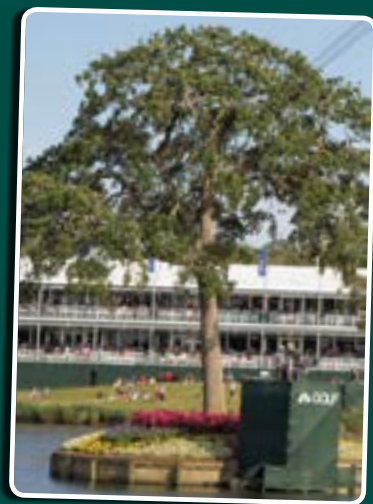


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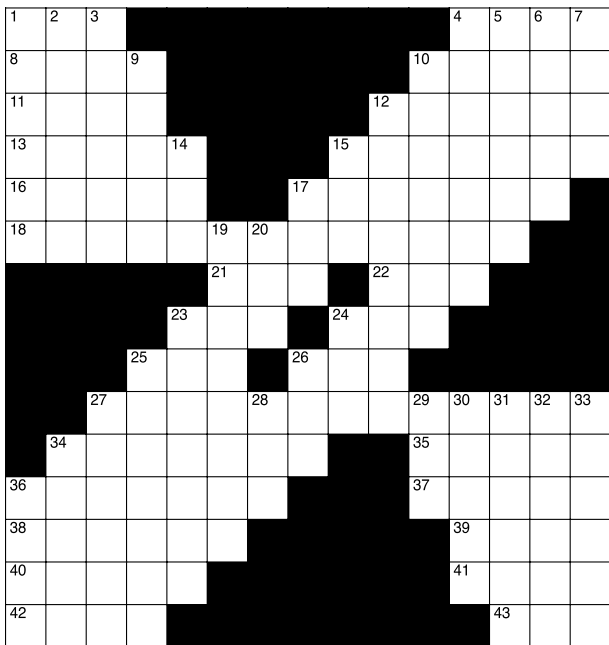
Spectators Guide



Championship

Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Racquet sport group (abbr.)
- 4. Norse god of thunder
- 8. Russian industrial city
- 10. What's good for the ___
- 11. Round-ish shape
- 12. Baltimore MLBer
- 13. French modernist painter
- 15. Burned with water
- 16. Intestinal issue
- 17. Take the lead
- 18. Prove oneself worthy
- 21. None
- 22. Tax collector
- 23. Swiss river
- 24. Gymnast Raisman
- 25. Baby's dining accessory
- 26. Canadian beer distributor
- 27. Iconic American tourist destination
- 34. More expansive
- 35. Alert
- 36. Popular boots Doc ___
- 37. Showings
- 38. Conclusion
- 39. Share a common boundary
- 40. Shooting sport
- 41. Popular side dish
- 42. Global energy firm
- 43. Chronicles (abbr.)

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Type of bomb
- 2. Polynesian island country
- 3. Heavenly body
- 4. Hard workers
- 5. Covered
- 6. Johns Hopkins Hospital founder
- 7. Plant of the grass family
- 9. Island person of the Bering Sea
- 10. Storehouse
- 12. Scarlet-flowered desert shrub
- 14. A pituitary hormone
- 15. Female sibling
- 17. Monetary unit of Afghanistan
- 19. Empowering
- 20. Space station
- 23. Disorder
- 24. State of fuss
- 25. Footwear for babies
- 26. Nuclear reactor (abbr.)
- 27. Doves
- 28. Affirmative
- 29. Male parent
- 30. Utter obscenities
- 31. Type of verse
- 32. Unpleasant person
- 33. One who settles down
- 34. Founder of source-based history
- 36. A way to snarl

VALENTINE'S DAY WORD SEARCH

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

WORDS

- ADORE
- AFFECTION
- BELOVED
- BOYFRIEND
- CANDY
- CHAMPAGNE
- CHERUB
- CHOCOLATE
- CUPID
- DATE
- FLOWERS
- GIFTS
- GIRLFRIEND
- HEARTS
- HUG
- KISS
- LOVE
- MOVIE
- POEM
- RED
- ROMANCE
- ROSES
- SWEETHEART
- VALENTINE

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



Solve the code to discover words related to Valentine's Day. Each number corresponds to a letter. (Hint: 3 = R)

- A. 23 14 3 18 16**
Clue: Greetings
- B. 3 9 16 20 16**
Clue: Popular flowers
- C. 3 9 19 14 24 23 20**
Clue: Strong feeling of attraction
- D. 17 20 10 3 4 14 3 5**
Clue: Second month

Earthy cont. from pg. 9

Cinnamon Slate: Cinnamon Slate is moody and introspective. This Benjamin Moore color blends rich plum and chocolate brown that the company calls "adaptable, yet distinct." In fact, it is quite similar to Glidden's color of the year, but a tad more brown in nature.

Caramelized: Homeowners may want to consider Caramelized, an earthy terracotta brown that is Dunn-Edwards'

2025 Color of the Year. Caramelized is versatile and elegant, and it complements both modern and vintage interiors.

Elderton: Paula Taylor, Graham & Brown's head stylist and trend specialist, calls Elderton "a chameleon color that can be sophisticated yet cozy." This medium brown is contemporary with a huge amount of depth. It may work in a rustic living room or a cozy library.

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Newcomers of North St. Johns donates to local food pantry

By Michele Oliver
mail@floridanewslines.com

Members of Newcomers of North St. Johns recently donated 283 pounds of food and collected \$140 to give to Our Lady of Good Council Food Pantry. The food items and money were collected at the group's December 2024 luncheon and is part of an annual outreach to the local food pantry.

"Our members continue to give so generously," said Newcomers of

North St. Johns Co-President Priscilla Cobbs. "This annual food drive has a tremendous impact for families in our area who are in need of food goods, especially at this time of year. The recipients are certainly appreciative and our members are happy to provide a little holiday cheer."

Visit <https://newcomersofnorthst-johns.org> or more information about Newcomers of North St. Johns and membership.



Photo courtesy Michele Oliver

Newcomers of North St. Johns member Mary Ellen Fleming delivers 283 pounds of assorted food items to Our Lady of Good Council Food Pantry.

Fishing

Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis
mail@floridanewslines.com

Brrrr, it's cold! But not for too much longer hopefully. February is traditionally the last of the stranglehold that winter puts upon us from year to year. Come March, the birds will be singing loud, welcoming new leaves and flowers to the world, but let's not wish away February just yet. There's more wintertime fishing fun to be had.

February is a month to pay close attention to water temperatures since bass and specks will be waiting for them to warm up enough for them to move up into cover to spawn. The closer the temperatures get to the numbers they want, the closer they will stage to those places.

Those "numbers" are always up for debate, and this is not an exact science, but 67 - 68 degrees would be a good bet. That's not to say that fish won't spawn in lower temperatures. After all, they will decide when the time is right. You just need to keep an eye out.

One of my favorite ways to fish for specks this time of year is to fish minnows on slip floats at varying depths in deeper water, while throwing a jig towards the bank and working it back

to the boat. The minnows will catch the fish still waiting to move into staging areas, but you can use the jig as a search bait looking for fish that have already moved up there. On many days, the jig has found me bigger fish between the boat and the bank. Once you find them you can move up with the minnows and thoroughly cover those areas.

Bass will also be staging near spawning locations this month. Points, inside bends, and creek mouths are all good areas to look. Slow trolling shiners along the vegetation in these places is a good way to locate the bass. If you find one, then there's likely others there for the same reason. It's a trophy hunt though, so don't expect big numbers.

I also want to put a little selfish conservation plug out there since we're talking about catching fish during spawning periods. This is the most crucial time for them to reproduce so that we might have lots of fish to catch next year and the year after that and so on. Only keep what you need and handle fish gently that you plan to release. Let's all do our part. Tight lines.

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Travel

Revisiting Istanbul

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewline.com

Whether traveling abroad or exploring my home state, I find something comforting about revisiting a place. Familiar landmarks, like Cinderella's Castle at Disney World bring back vivid memories of past visits. Of course, changes are inevitable — sometimes enhancing the experience, other times altering it in unexpected ways. Regardless, returning always offers the opportunity for new memories, especially when revisiting an international destination.

In 2016, I had my first encounter with Istanbul, a city rich in history and culture. Now officially spelled "Türkiye" instead of "Turkey," the country con-

tinues to evolve. Recently, I returned to Istanbul and revisited three historical monuments, each offering a fresh perspective.

Hagia Sophia is a masterpiece of Byzantine architecture, originally constructed as a cathedral in 537 AD under Emperor Justinian I. This UNESCO World Heritage Site features four minarets, a stunning dome and intricate mosaics. Over the centuries, it has served as a church, a mosque, and a museum.

In 2020, however, Türkiye's President Erdoğan decided to convert Hagia Sophia back into a mosque. This marked a significant shift in its identity. For nearly 900 years, it was a Christian cathedral until the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople in 1453, after which it became a mosque. In 1935, as part of Mustafa Atatürk's secularist reforms, it was turned into a museum.

Today, Hagia Sophia serves as an active place for Muslim worship while remaining accessible to visitors. Changes are immediately evident: the iconic Byzantine mosaics of Jesus and Mary are veiled during prayers, and soft green carpets now cover the marble floors. Unlike my previous visit, the ground level is no longer open to all visitors, a change I found disappointing. In 2016, I recall standing in awe beneath the immense dome, overwhelmed by its magnificence and history. During this trip, I was directed to the balcony level, where I looked down at the breathtak-



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Hagia Sophia.

ing interior. While the view from above was still mesmerizing, I missed the immersive experience of standing beneath the dome's grandeur.

One of my favorite attractions visited in 2016 was the Basilica Cistern, an illuminated underground wonder beneath Istanbul's streets. Upon my return, I discovered that the site had also undergone a transformation. A restoration project from 2017 to 2022 revitalized this subterranean marvel, making it safer and more accessible. New, sturdy walkways replaced the older paths, allowing visitors to explore the 336 ancient marble and granite columns with ease.

Modern LED lighting now enhances the cistern's ethereal quality, casting enchanting shadows and reflections. Contemporary art installations float in its shallow waters, blending modern creativity with the past. While these additions are lovely, I found myself nostalgic for the original, simpler design.

The iconic and unforgettable Medusa heads have been cleaned and preserved. They appeared green during my first visit, likely due to algae or mold, but now they glimmer in a cream-colored

hue. The addition of a metallic Medusa statue, with dramatic shadow play, offered a delightful surprise; however, I wish the lighting on the statue remained constant instead of cycling on and off.

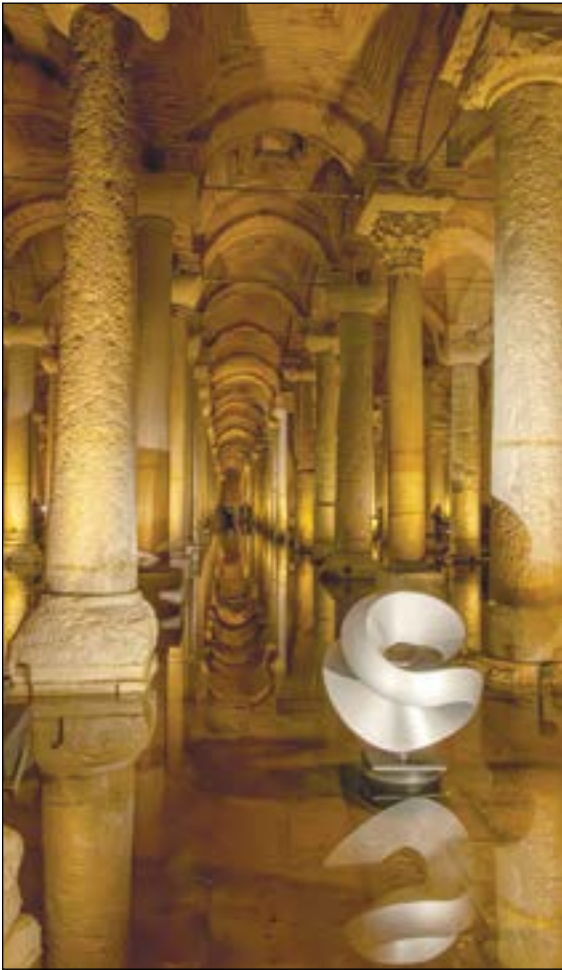
Topkapi Palace, once the heart of Ottoman power, continues to captivate visitors with its grandeur. Recent restorations have opened sections of the sprawling complex that were previously inaccessible. Visitors can now explore newly unveiled courtyards, though some areas that were once open now require separate tickets.

The highlight of my visit was the refurbished Imperial Treasury, where I finally saw the famed Topkapi Emerald dagger. Fans of the Peter Ustinov movie "Topkapi," which dramatizes a heist involving the dagger, will appreciate the cinematic connection.

Revisiting Istanbul was certainly worthwhile, yet reminded me that changes are an integral part of any journey.

For more: goturkiye.com

Visit www.bylandersea.com to read more of local travel writer Debi Lander's stories and travel tips.



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JCE's book vending machine fosters love of reading

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewline.com

In August, students at Julington Creek Elementary were welcomed back to school with an exciting new addition to the lobby. Over the summer, the school's Parent Teacher Organization purchased a book vending machine with the goal of promoting literacy by providing every student with a new book of their choosing each year. The machine is customized in the school's colors and a jaguar-print wrap (a tribute to the school's mascot) and is stocked with a wide range of titles, from picture books for the youngest readers to chapter books and graphic novels for older students.

Each week, students celebrating their birthday receive a token to select a new book to keep. Students with summer birthdays will make their selections in the spring. Thus far the program has been a hit with students and adults alike, with requests to add a machine for the grown-ups on campus. With its vibrant design and wonderful



Photos courtesy Heidi Karl

selection of books, Julington Creek Elementary's book vending machine not only enhances the school's commitment to literacy, but also fosters a love of reading that students will carry with them for years to come.



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The Pantry Raiders

Warm up with a good breakfast

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

People on the go may not have a lot of time to enjoy breakfast, which means they may grab something quick and not always so healthy. But a filling, hot breakfast provides enough sustenance and nutrients to last until lunch. Such is the case with “Green Chile Breakfast Burritos” from “Taste of Home Healthy Cooking Cookbook” (RDA Enthusiast Brands, LLC) by the Taste of Home Kitchens.

Green Chile Breakfast Burritos

Makes 6 servings

6 eggs

3 egg whites

1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced

Dash cayenne pepper

4 breakfast turkey sausage links, casings removed

¾ cup shredded reduced-fat Mexican cheese blend

1 can (4 oz) chopped green chiles, drained

6 whole wheat tortillas (8 inches), warmed

6 tbsp. salsa

1. In a small bowl, whisk the eggs, egg whites, jalapeño and cayenne; set aside.

2. Crumble sausage into a large skillet; cook over medium heat until no longer pink. Drain. Push sausage to the sides of pan. Pour egg mixture into center of pan. Cook and stir until set. Sprinkle with cheese and chiles. Remove from the heat, cover and let stand until cheese is melted.

3. Place ⅓ cup mixture off center on each tortilla. Fold sides and end over filling; roll up. Top with salsa.



Photo courtesy MetroCreative
Green Chile Breakfast Burritos

Rotary project helps STEM begin with stems

By Rotarian Al Kalter
mail@floridanewsline.com

With the help of the Rotary Club of Bartram Trail — Julington Creek, preschoolers at Fruit Cove Baptist Church are learning about agriculture and the joys of watching seeds develop into something they can eat.

Rotarian Jim Shine led the project, to which Rotary donated funds and effort to improve some raised beds at the church preschool. The club’s contributions included soil, seeds, and plants, and the result was appreciated by the students and staff at the school. With a focus on education, the project took on the name of “STEM begins with Stems.”



Preschoolers at Fruit Cove Baptist Church explore their garden beds, learning about the planting, care, and harvesting of produce.

“I have been a supporter of school and community garden projects throughout my career in agriculture,” Shine said. “I firmly believe that introducing children to the challenges of growing plants all the way through to production of an edible product teaches an important lesson toward understanding domestic food production. There are teaching opportunities in all core areas of basic education including mathematics, biology, language skills, history, environmental sciences and any other area a given instructor wants to use them for.”

The children at the school will watch the plants develop and grow, and perhaps harvest some produce that they can all enjoy. It’s a lesson that could well stay with them for a lifetime.

The Rotary Club of Bartram Trail — Julington Creek meets every Thursday morning, from 7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. at Westminster Woods on Julington Creek. Guests and prospective members are always welcome. Visit www.bartram-trailrotary.org for more information.



Rotarians Greg Manson, Molly Paxton, and Jim Shine worked to restore and improve raised garden beds at Fruit Cove Baptist Church Preschool.

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Gardening

Weather – Always our guide

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale
mail@floridanewsline.com

It's the second week of the New Year as I write, and we're in the throes of our first real freezing weather of the winter. This morning the water in our birdbaths froze for the third time, and the grass was touched with frost. I've tried to reduce the amount of work needed to protect my plants, mainly by growing fewer tropicals, but potted plants always need attention. Wrapping pots, protecting citrus grafts, taking more tender things into a shed or garage, but first ensuring they are well watered before the cold sets in, is all part of the gardening year.

Most of our seasonal vegetables will survive a short freeze, particularly brassicas like collards, broccoli, and kales, which taste all the sweeter after a frost. Lettuce can be damaged, so laying a frost cloth lightly over the plants will keep them safe. If you have casualties, begin growing more plants indoors and plant out when they are sufficiently well grown and hardened off. For vegetables to plant in February, check out this useful link: <https://floridafresh.ifas.ufl.edu/>. Just input your zip code to see what comes up and click on a vegetable for more information. For more detailed information, use the Florida Vegetable Gardening Guide (<https://tinyurl.com/59xyb9tt>). If you like to browse around the topic of vegetable gardening, see also <https://tinyurl.com/e96zzyk>, where you can find articles like "Veggies and Herbs made in the Shade" and "Growing Potatoes in the Florida Home Garden."

Tidying up after a freeze is not as simple as it may seem. For woody plants it may not be obvious which parts are dead. It's safest to wait to prune out dead material until you can see active growth; otherwise you risk cutting into live wood which makes the plant more vulnerable to the next cold snap. By leaving 12 – 14 inches of dead growth on perennials you can protect any insects that

are overwintering in the stems. If you feel you must cut them back farther, by gathering them up and placing them in an out-of-the-way place you can still protect any insects sheltering there.

If you're already thinking about your lawn and how to treat it coming out of the winter, hold off for a bit, as it won't yet be actively growing. Fertilize too early and the product will leach out of the soil before the grass is able to take it up. Similarly, trying to fertilize the grass and control weeds with a one-and-done application of a "weed and feed" product doesn't do either job well, as the timing of each function is necessarily different. Check out this link where you can find all the information you need to follow best management practices and keep your lawn in good condition, and if necessary rectify any problems: <https://tinyurl.com/2fpy55y5>.

I'm all for finding good articles to read on topics that I find most useful, and I particularly like the blogs written by Duval County Extension's Stephanie Means, our program assistant for the Florida-Friendly Program: <https://tinyurl.com/mspupxmy>.

And here I've found more information on wildlife-friendly gardening, which is really important to me: <https://tinyurl.com/2bkvat7n>. Designing an attractive yard which caters for both humans and wildlife can be achieved!

As always, the Duval County Extension newsletter is useful, offering timely tips, articles, and information on upcoming programs: <https://tinyurl.com/4fs4rvnd>. And finally, our statewide Master Gardener Volunteer newsletter, The Neighborhood Gardener, is always a good read: <https://tinyurl.com/38svv7fn>.

Now spring is almost on the doorstep and the year unfolds, I hope you enjoy your gardening projects, whatever they may be.



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