

Mandarin NewsLine

Celebrating 20 years!

July 2025 Volume 20 Issue 7

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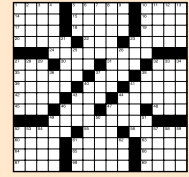
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Photos courtesy Brett Nolan
Brett Nolan and Emily Lisska receive the Neighborhood Champion Award on behalf of the Mandarin Community Club. P

Mandarin Community Club celebrates award and new fundraiser for 2025 Christmas Tree Lighting

By Brett Nolan
mail@floridanewline.com

The Mandarin Community Club was honored with a Neighborhood Champion Award by the City of Jacksonville Neighborhoods Department for its 2023 Mandarin Community Christmas Tree Lighting. The award, presented at the 50th Anniversary Neighborhoods USA Conference, recognizes the event's significance as a treasured tradition in Mandarin.

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Small church makes big impact

Tracy McCormick-Dishman
editor@floridanewline.com

What started as a simple call to action after Sunday service has blossomed into a lifeline for dozens of local families. Mandarin Lutheran Church's Baby Pantry, serving families with children ages newborn to 3, exemplifies how a small congregation can create meaningful change in their community.

"It started really small," said Jennifer McInnis, a church member and baby pantry volunteer. "We just kind of opened up, put the word out to the congregation and said, 'We have a family in need. Anybody who can stop and grab some diapers and wipes, bring them on over.'"

That humble beginning two years ago has grown into a twice-monthly operation serving approximately 40 registered families. Every other Sunday, for two hours after church service, volunteers transform the church into a distribution center, providing diapers, wipes, formula and clothing to an average of 15 families per session.

The operation runs on heart rather than high-tech systems. Paper binders serve as their database, and families provide birth certificates and proof of residency. When language becomes a



Volunteers Peggy Bergman, left, and Michelle Langston stand in front of donations for the Mandarin Lutheran Church Baby Pantry that serves children ages newborn to three years old.



Photos courtesy Mandarin Lutheran Church.
Carol Gomez, right, discusses the Mandarin Lutheran Baby Pantry with fellow volunteer, Harold Kendall.

barrier, volunteers use Spanish interpreters and find ways to communicate with families from Eastern European countries and those who are deaf.

"Everybody who's involved, from the volunteers to the families themselves, are just people," McInnis said. "It's really heartwarming to see the communication efforts between the volunteers and the families."

Despite having only 60 to 80 active members, the church meets substantial supply needs through congregational donations and a partnership with the Mandarin Food Bank. The relationship was cultivated by Sandy Mitten, known as "Grandma Gunner"—a spirited octogenarian, military veteran and Green Bay Packers fan who became the church's unofficial ambassador to the

food bank.

Mitten's advocacy created a mutually beneficial relationship where the church contributes food donations and fresh produce from gleaning activities, while the food bank reciprocates by sending baby supplies they can't use.

"She goes and takes it to the Mandarin food bank and has developed a really nice relationship with them over there," McInnis said. "When they can, if they have baby related items, they'll donate items to the baby pantry as well."

The church's commitment extends beyond weekly operations. Once annually, they organize a fundraising event for the baby pantry. This year's event is July 11, featuring trivia competition (\$10 per person) and a raffle with gift cards from nearly two dozen businesses.

Small church cont. on pg. 2



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From the publisher's desk:

It's with a bittersweet mix of gratitude and genuine sadness that I write today about the departure of a true cornerstone of Florida NewsLine: our esteemed editor, Martie Thompson. After more than 24 years of dedicated service, Martie is retiring, and while we wish her all the very best, her absence will be deeply felt by all of us who have had the

privilege of working alongside her.

For nearly a quarter-century, Martie has been far more than just an editor; she has been the vigilant guardian of our journalistic integrity, the meticulous architect of our pages, and the quiet force behind countless stories that have informed, engaged, and reflected the

vibrant communities we serve.

Her fingerprints are, quite literally, all over the publications we produce. From The CreekLine to Mandarin NewsLine, Ponte Vedra NewsLine to The Players Journal and The Ocean Breeze, among numerous others, Martie's keen eye, insightful judgment, and unwavering commitment to accuracy have shaped their very essence. She possesses a remarkable ability to understand the pulse of each community, ensuring that our content resonates deeply with our readers.

Beyond her formidable editorial skills, Martie was a true professional and a wonderful colleague. Her calm demeanor, even amid the chaos of deadlines, is legendary. She is a mentor to many young journalists who passed through our doors, patiently guiding them and instilling in them the values of responsible and impactful reporting. Her quiet strength and unwavering commitment to our mission set an example for us all.

It's hard to imagine Florida NewsLine without Martie Thompson. She has been an integral part of our growth and evolution, a constant presence through countless technological changes and shifts in the media landscape. She has seen it all and through every challenge, her dedication to delivering quality local news never wavered.

On behalf of the entire Florida NewsLine family and indeed, on behalf of the communities she so faithfully served, I extend our deepest gratitude to Martie Thompson. Thank you, Martie, for your tireless work, your unwavering dedication and your invaluable contributions. You leave behind a remarkable legacy of excellence, and we will miss you dearly.

We wish Martie a future filled with joy, relaxation, and all the new adventures she chooses to pursue. She has certainly earned it.

Mark Pettus, Publisher

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Small church cont. from pg. 1

For McInnis and her fellow volunteers—typically fewer than 10 people running the entire operation—the baby pantry represents their core mission in action.

"We really feel great about it and we hope that it helps them," she said. "That's a core piece of the mission here is to serve the community."

The church demonstrates that com-

munity impact isn't measured by congregation size but by commitment to neighbors, proving that even small groups can create substantial change.

Community members can donate diapers, baby wipes, bath needs, rash cream, ointments and gently used clothing at the church between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., Monday through Thursday. The church is located at 11900 San Jose Boulevard, Jacksonville. For more information, call 904-268-4591 or email office@mandarinlutheran.org.



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From top left, volunteers Beth Shuss, Pat Sartini and Carol Skiber, bottom right, stock the shelves with donations of the Mandarin Lutheran Church Baby Pantry.

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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

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MYSTERY PHOTO

Can you guess where this is?
Submit your answer to: mail@FloridaNewsLine.com.

Last month's Mystery Photo was Greenland Pines Elementary School.

Answers to our Puzzles
PG 8

CRYPTO FUN

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July

Community Calendar

What's Happening in Mandarin

Parkinson's Exercise Group meets every Thursday from 6 p.m. – 7 p.m. at 4911 Losco Road. People of all ages and stages of Parkinson's as well as spouses and caregivers are welcome to attend these free classes. Contact group leader Katheryn Donaldson at serving4_him@yahoo.com or (904) 710-1449 for more information.

Toast of Jax Toastmasters meets every Saturday, except on holiday weekends, at 8:30 a.m. at Baha'i Community Center, 5034 Greenland Road. Guests are welcome. The meetings can also be attended online at <https://toastofjax.toastmastersclubs.org/>.

MPC MomCo meets every other Tuesday from 9:45 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. on the Mandarin Presbyterian Church campus. MPC MomCo is a vibrant fellowship of moms who support each other in motherhood and grow together in faith. Register at mandarinpres.com/momco; space is limited. Email momco@mandarinpres.com for more information.

Acoustic Jam Session is held on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. in the Kids' Building of Trinity Mandarin, located at 2955 Orange Picker Road. This jam is open to everyone and all levels of ability are welcome. Come to play with the group or just sit back and enjoy the music. For more information, contact Burt Coulliette at (904) 302-0423.

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 playing-hookie2022@gmail.com for more information.

1st: **Honeybee** Quilters Guild will meet on Tuesday, July 1 at 6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church on the Loretto Road Campus in the Kids Space at 2501 Loretto Road. The program will be understanding the colors in your fabric stash. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

5th: **Walter Jones** Historical Park buildings, including the 1898 St. Joseph's Mission Schoolhouse for African American Children, the 1875 Webb Jones Farmhouse, the 1876 Barn, and the Losco Winery, are open the first Saturday of each month (this month, July 5 from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.). The Historic Mandarin Store & Post Office, located at 12471 Mandarin Road, will also be open. Museum volunteers will be inside each building for guided tours. Admission is free; Donations help support the museum's programming and operations. Visit www.mandarinmuseum.org or call (904) 268-0784 for more information.

5th: **Meet** the Maple Leaf Divers at the Mandarin Museum, 11964 Mandarin Road, from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. on the first Saturday of each month (this month, July 5). This is an informal, conversational-style event; drop in anytime within the two hours to chat with Dr. Keith Holland and his team and view the museum's expanded Maple Leaf exhibit. Admission to Meet the Maple Leaf Divers and Mandarin Museum is free. Donations help support the museum's programming and

operations. For more information, visit www.mandarinmuseum.org or call (904) 268-0784.

10th: **Mandarin** American Legion Post 372 general meeting will be held on July 10 at 7 p.m. at Williams Family YMCA 10415 San Jose Blvd., on the second floor. Visit <https://alpost372fl.org/> for more information.

10th: **Independent & Unstoppable:** Living a Healthy Life at Every Age, presented by River Garden, will be held at 11401 Old St. Augustine Road on July 10 from 11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m. Explore dietary practices for older adults that support heart health, energy and longevity, and learn how to start a simple walking program to boost mobility and mood. Pre-registration required for complimentary lunch at <https://shorturl.at/BPznB>.

11th: **Trivia Night** Fundraiser for the Mandarin Lutheran Church Baby Pantry, presented by Mandarin Lutheran Church, will be held at 11900 San Jose Blvd. on July 11 with doors opening at 6 p.m. and trivia starting at 7 p.m. \$10 per person to play with tons of prizes and raffle prizes valued at \$50 or more. Raffle tickets: 3/\$5, 8/\$10, 20/\$20. No need to be present to win most raffle prizes. Proceeds help local families with diapers, wipes and formula via the Baby Pantry. For more information and to buy raffle tickets call (904) 268-4591 or email Office@MandarinLutheran.org.

13th: **Mandarin** Parkinson's Support Group meets at Church of Eleven22, 4911 Losco Road, on the second Sunday of each month (this month, July 13 due to vacation) from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m.

Contact group leader Katheryn Donaldson at serving4_him@yahoo.com or (904) 710-1449 for more information.

21st: **The All Star** Quilters Guild will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on Monday, July 21 at First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. See the All Star Annual Challenge reveal and discover the stories behind each 36 inch square quilt. "Show and Tell" is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit www.allstarquilters.org for more information.

24th: **Advancing** the Science: The Latest in Alzheimer's and Dementia Research, presented by River Garden, will be held at 11401 Old St. Augustine Road on July 24 from 10:30 a.m. – 1 p.m. Join us for an informative lunch and learn session featuring the Alzheimer's Association and their innovative Brain Bus program. Pre-registration required for complimentary lunch at <https://shorturl.at/fSAdx>.

24th: **Mandarin** Republican Club will meet on Thursday, July 24 at St. Mary's Seafood, 11290 Old St. Augustine Road. Social time begins at 6 p.m. and the meeting starts at 6:30 p.m. First time visitors are welcome.

31st: **Strength & Balance:** The Otago Approach to Fall Prevention, presented by River Garden, will be held at 11401 Old St. Augustine Road on July 31 from 11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m. Pre-registration required for complimentary lunch at (904) 288-7855 or email kbell@rivergarden.org.

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Q&A with Jacksonville City Council Member Michael Boylan, District 6

Q: What's the latest on your idea for a Mandarin Beautification and Preservation project?

A: At the beginning of July, an RFP (Request for Proposals) is being put out to potentially secure a consultant to assist with this process. Basically, we will begin with investigating the viability of such a project and to see if there is interest among the residents and community and civic leaders in Mandarin to start such an organization in District 6. We plan to include all of the enlarged District 6, to include Old St. Augustine Road, Greenland Road and Losco as well as historic Mandarin. There are more than 40 distinct homeowner associations and neighborhood groups within Mandarin's boundaries. We now have a more diverse district than in the past and I believe we need the opportunity to speak as one voice and identify beneficial opportunities.

Q: What do you see as the main priorities for this project?

A: While other opportunities may manifest through the process, the initial priorities include preservation, beautification, visioning, and community engagement — all of which are necessary to not only honor the area, but also safeguard its character and charm.

Q: Do you have an update on the Mandarin Road sidewalk extension and the sidewalks along Loretto Road?

A: As we discussed last month, JTA is currently in the process of launching its new website and will have the dedicated page for the sidewalk project built soon after that. The expectation is that this will be completed by late June/early July. In the meantime, any inquiries regarding the project can be directed to MandarinRoad@jtafla.com.

As for the Loretto Road sidewalk, to be constructed from Flynn Road westward to Mandarin Road, the contractor is scheduled to start late July 2025 or early August. Note that this particular sidewalk project has been underway for a couple of years and we have just been waiting for utility pole relocation. This project should not be confused with the proposed Mandarin Road sidewalk extension project.

Q: Do you have anything else to share with District 6?

A: The Planning Department has approved the proposed redevelopment of Clark's Fish Camp's 250 seat restaurant. We won't have any other information with respect to the timeline for the civil

plan review, but I think it's just nice to see that it's coming back to life.

Also, we are beginning the new fiscal year for the City of Jacksonville and with that comes new council leadership and committee assignments. While I don't know which committees I will be assigned to yet, I want constituents to know that my plan going forward is to be focused on preserving the quality of life and character of Mandarin.

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

A: Community members can email me at MBoylan@coj.net or call (904) 255-5206.

Rotary honors Police Officer of the Year

By NewsLine staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

The Rotary Club of Mandarin presented Officer Christopher Bruns with the District 3 Jacksonville Sheriff's Office Police Officer of the Year 2024 Award on June 3.

Bruns' recognition stems from exceptional service throughout the past year, highlighted by a life-saving incident in April. When a frantic call came in about a missing 2-year-old girl, Bruns arrived to find the child had been located unresponsive in a pond by her mother and neighbors.

Without hesitation, Bruns took charge of the scene, continuing CPR that a neighbor had started until first responders could transport the girl to a respiratory unit. The combined efforts resulted in the child's full recovery.

"What happened next showcases the kind of training and character that separates good officers from great ones," said a Rotary Club spokesman.

The ceremony, attended by JSO District 3 leadership and Bruns' family, also

recognized Cmdr. Randi Glossman, who served as District 3 commander when Bruns was nominated. Glossman was honored for her distinguished career and community service.

The Police Officer of the Year Award is an annual tradition honoring Jacksonville Sheriff's Office members' commitment and courage in protecting the community. It serves as recognition for all JSO personnel.

"Stories like Officer Bruns' remind us that heroes don't always wear capes — sometimes they wear badges and show up when we need them most," organizers said.

The Rotary Club of Mandarin, known for its blend of local community involvement and global initiatives, meets for breakfast every Tuesday at 7:30 a.m. at the Ramada Inn on Hartley Road. Those interested in learning more can visit www.mandarinrotary.org or contact John Meux at membership@mandarinrotary.org for additional information about the organization's fellowship and leadership programs.



Photo courtesy Mandarin Rotary Club

Officer Christopher Bruns, second from right, receives the District 3 Jacksonville Sheriff's Office Police Officer of the Year 2024 Award from the Rotary Club of Mandarin on June 3. From left are Cmdr. Patena Tillman, Cmdr. Randi Glossman, Chief Jonathan Barrier, Bruns and Lt. Robert Lestrangle.



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Q&A with Duval County School Board Member Melody Bolduc, District 7

Q: What has been your focus as a school board member over the summer?

A: I've been meeting with all the principals in District 7 to find out how I can help them get what they need. The biggest issue is that most of the schools in District 7 have lost Title 1 funding. This is determined by a measurement of the percentage of students considered "high needs" such as being on free and reduced lunch. For high schools, 50 percent of students have to qualify in order to receive funding as a school, and for middle school 75 percent of students must qualify.

The impact in most cases is that schools lose positions. For example, Atlantic Coast High School lost 11 positions, such as reading and math interventionists who work with students who perform lowest. Mandarin Oaks Elementary lost funding last year and lost positions that support the school's English as a Second Language program. It's not just low income students who need support.

Q: Do you have any ideas to address this?

A: Our Mandarin schools are the most populated, but least likely to receive these types of funding due to the measurements involved. I have requested that the school district provide me with the number of students, by school, who qualify for funding in an effort to spread funds received by the district by students rather than by school. This way our students can get the funds they need as well.

Q: Have the Five Essentials surveys been received back by the district yet?

A: We had a huge campaign to encourage as many people — students, teachers and parents — to fill out this survey from the state as it gives us a lot of data. The Five Essentials addressed are effective leadership in the school, collaborative teachers, involved families, supportive environment (includes

school safety) and ambitious instruction.

We are still going through the data. That is the focal point of discussions right now at the school level and the district level. We are looking at areas for improvement and also celebrating some wins. These survey results will become publicly available at some point.

Q: Are you working on the district's strategic plan?

A: We are refreshing the document at a relatively fast pace. This is necessary because we are in year three of a five year plan, but we've changed tests and we've changed superintendents, so it's not fair to evaluate based on this older document.

Q: Do you have anything else to share with District 7?

A: Something unique to our district that we are hoping to serve as a pilot program is a partnership with military veterans to support military children. We are starting a service club at the high school level to support neighboring middle and elementary school students and we are starting with Atlantic Coast High School. The club will be known as the BRAT Pack (Brave, Resilient, Adaptable, Tough). The biggest hurdle that military kids have when they move to a new area is having to make new friends all over again. This club aims to pair high school students, who have already navigated this process, with younger students to share their experiences. As part of this process, we are aiming to get all District 7 schools classified as Purple Star schools, which means they are recognized as a school supporting military families.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

A: They can email me at BolducM@duvalschools.org or call me at (904) 390-2375.

Briefs

Southern charm and soulful sounds in "Bright Star: The Musical"

Presented by Act II Players, Mandarin's own community theater, and performed at Mandarin United Methodist Church, "Bright Star: The Musical," a heartwarming and toe-tapping musical — with music, book, and story by Steve Martin and Edie Brickel — promises an unforgettable journey through love, loss, and redemption. Set in the American South during the 1920s and 1940s, Bright Star weaves together two timelines to tell a deeply moving story inspired by a true event. With its bluegrass-infused score and rich storytelling, the show celebrates the enduring power of hope, the bonds of family, and the discovery of a long-buried secret that has the power to transform lives.

This production is directed by Jacksonville native Juliet Fixel (choreographer, director, and owner/artistic director of JFix Productions and Choreography), Ava Fixel (artistic director of Act II Players), and Ellen Milligan (musical director). Joining the local cast are three performers from the New York area on summer hiatus.

"Bright Star: The Musical" will be staged on July 17, 18 and 19 at 7:30 p.m.; July 19 at 2 p.m. and July 20 at 3 p.m. at Mandarin United Methodist Church Theatre, 11270 San Jose Blvd. Visit <https://actiplayers.org/> to buy tickets.

Seniors' thoughtful gift for young patients

Senior residents from River Garden Hebrew Home delivered 50 handmade ceramic money banks to junior patients at Wolfson Children's Hospital. Each bank was filled with \$5 in quarters for the children to spend on the "Wolfie Wagon," the Wolfson Children's Hospital Auxiliary's store on wheels.

The residents at River Garden enjoy opportunities to give back to their community and engage with the younger generations here in Jacksonville. When they learned about the Wolfie Wagon program at Wolfson Children's Hospital, they were eager to participate. The Wolfie Wagon is a program of the Wolfson Children's Hospital Auxiliary, with the goal of being a bright spot for kids undergoing care at the hospital. Patients are able to select a bank donated by the residents of River Garden, complete with \$5, so they can make snack, toy or gift purchases from the Wolfie Wagon.

With the creative support of the Life Enrichment team and volunteers, residents used their talents to create beautiful banks of various shapes and sizes. All pieces were handmade from start to finish in the River Garden ceramics studio to create long-lasting, brightly colored works of art that are sure to catch the eye of the children at Wolfson Children's Hospital.

"River Garden is delighted to be a long-standing supporter of Baptist Health and Wolfson Children's Hospital. This project is a wonderful way to support others in healthcare, but more importantly, we want this project to demonstrate how we



Photo courtesy River Garden

feel for these young patients," said Jenny Ross, Life Enrichment Director at River Garden.

Sunshine 811 offers tips to dig safe this summer

As summer kicks off, Floridians are diving into their home projects. Whether you are installing a new fence, building a deck, refreshing landscaping or putting in a new pool, Sunshine 811's got you covered with safe digging tips. Before you start digging to plant new trees or build a fence, the law requires you to contact 811. When you contact 811 (via phone or online at DigSafeFlorida.com — clicking on "Create a Ticket"), the organization sends your information to its member utilities who then mark or clear the lines so you can dig safely.

The organization offers the following tips and reminders to help homeowners dig safe for the summer:

Doing a DIY project? Contact 811 at least two business days before your project starts so underground lines can be marked.

Briefs cont. on pg. 9



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Mandarin students shine in first ever Minecraft build challenge

By Margaret Rogero-Hastings
mail@floridanewsline.com

On Tuesday, May 20, the City of Jacksonville hosted its first-ever Minecraft Education build challenge. The event featured four divisions — elementary, middle school, high school, and college. Leading up to the finals, 117 teams and more than 600 students submitted entries for the initial round of the competition. Each team was challenged to design a “Sustainable and Resilient Riverfront Development” using Minecraft Education. Students in third through fifth grade had two weeks to research, plan, and build their projects, followed by a two-minute video to explain their design.

With a short turnaround, both finalist teams — the Minecraft Nerds, made up of full-time Loretto students, and the other, the Cougar Conservationists from Greenland Pines, who attend Loretto once a week with gifted teacher and coach Kimberly Niebauer — rose to the challenge and showed their imagination, creativity, teamwork, and

ability to stay focused under pressure. Both teams, and their parents, were committed to meet, research and practice before and after school, as well as on Saturdays.

According to Matt Walker, principal of Loretto, “I was so proud of both teams, students, and coaches alike,” said Matt Walker, principal of Loretto. “As a technology magnet we have always prioritized learning opportunities like the Mayor’s Cup, but to have early success has been exciting for everyone. While we are thrilled to celebrate being the inaugural winner and our teams are already thinking about improvements for next year.”

During the 30-minute live final round, teams were tasked with coding and constructing a building, designing eco-friendly small businesses within it, and creating a functional library and event space. Each team included five main members and two alternates. Both teams began by using fill commands to design a building in less than a minute, a move which impressed judges and audience



Photos courtesy Margaret Rogero-Hastings
The Minecraft Nerds.

members alike. At the end of the 30 minutes, each team captain explained their build, the historical and community connection, and why they chose the sustainable materials. Once all team divisions had competed, the

winners were announced. There was a tense moment while the teams waited to hear who won, and then Mayor Donna Deegan announced that the “Minecraft Nerds” were taking home the trophy.

Native plant garden faces new challenges, seeks professional design

By Tracy McCormick-Dishman
editor@floridanewsline.com

What started as one neighbor’s simple idea has blossomed into a community project that’s weathered both storms and neighborhood debates.

In 2021, Anjie Palmer proposed adding native plants to her Lake Mandarin Garden HOA’s Ricky Road park. Then-President Don Lindstrom embraced the vision, and together they worked with landscape designer Lori Gilmore on a three-phase plan. The board approved the project with a \$1,000 budget and a protective fence.

On April 1, 2022, Phase 1 came to life. Clean Cuts Lawn Care, neighbors and Walter Bryant of the Florida Native Plant Society volunteered to install approximately 1,000 square feet of native plantings.

But the approved fence didn’t arrive for two years. The unprotected garden became a casualty of pedestrians,

bicycles and motorcycles, destroying native grasses, shrubs, blueberries and saw palmettos.

“We had to get creative,” Palmer said. Volunteers allowed Bidens alba — Spanish needles — to fill traffic areas, discouraging foot traffic while they added pollinator plants and flowers to protected sections.

When the fence finally arrived in 2024, it brought relief and controversy. Some neighbors wanted the project removed. Others pushed for Phase 2.

President Jim Jourdan asked Director Owen Derrick to form a committee. Despite “spirited discussions,” they’re moving forward. The group met with landscape designers and provided detailed information including plant locations, seasonal colors and pollinator benefits.

The HOA is also discussing replacing

Native plant cont. on pg. 10

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Get to Know ...

By Tracy McCormick-Dishman
editor@floridanewslines.com

Sandy Mitten

Sandy Mitten earned her nickname "Grandma Gunner" manning a .50-caliber machine gun on a 22-foot patrol boat in the Persian Gulf during the Gulf War. These days, the spirited octogenarian uses those same steady hands to tend orchids and coordinate food donations between Mandarin Lutheran Church and the local food bank.

The connection between her military past and community service might seem unlikely, but for Mitten, both represent a lifetime of breaking barriers and serving others.

The memorable nickname stuck because she was already a grandmother when she deployed.

"When I put my feet on the Saudi sand, I was known as Grandma Gunner," she said, recalling her six months stationed at the port of Khobar. She was part of the first Coast Guard Reserve unit ever activated for wartime duty — 97 members total, with only six women.

That deployment was the culmination of a 27-year Coast Guard Reserve career that began in 1974. But it wasn't her first time in uniform — she had briefly served in the Navy after high school, leaving when she became pregnant during an era when military women had to discharge if expecting.

Years later, working at Briggs & Stratton and raising three children, Mitten decided she needed additional



retirement security. When the Navy recruiter said she'd need too many waivers with three children under 18, he suggested the Coast Guard instead.

"Two weeks later, I joined the Coast Guard Reserve," said Mitten.

Her military service was groundbreaking in ways she didn't fully realize at the time. She later learned she was the first woman in Wisconsin Coast Guard Reserve history to be called to wartime duty and the first woman at Briggs & Stratton to work in a supervisory position.

Recognition followed her throughout the years. Her wartime letters to family are published in books about military correspondence. In 2021, she received the Woman of Valor honor at the Military Women's Memorial in Washington, D.C., along with a Living Legend recognition that came as a complete surprise.

"I don't want to sound like I'm bragging because I'm not," Mitten said.

"Fortunately, I have had so many blessings given to me by God over the last 25, 30 years."

After retiring from the Coast Guard in 2001, Mitten spent eight years as her aunt's caretaker before moving to Florida in 2010 to be closer to her children and grandchildren. She brought 165 plants with her — a testament to her other passion.

Armed with an associate degree in ornamental horticulture, she had run a landscape consulting business in Wisconsin. Though physical limitations have curtailed her gardening, she still maintains orchids and the spirit that drives her community connections.

At Mandarin Lutheran Church, where she's been a member since 2013, Mitten serves as fellowship lead while maintaining the vital link between the church and St. Joseph's Catholic Church food bank. What started as routine food donations evolved into something more when food bank volunteer Kenny began sending baby supplies back with her.

"One time he said to me, 'Sandy, wait a minute, I've got some stuff for you to take to church,'" Mitten recalled. "And he brings out all these baby wipes, and diapers, and food, and formula."

That simple exchange helps sustain the church's baby pantry, proving that sometimes the most meaningful connections happen through everyday acts of service — whether wielding a machine gun or carrying baby formula.

Mitten lives in Mandarin and continues her volunteer work at Mandarin Lutheran Church.

Mandarin Community Club cont. from pg. 2

Since its inception in 2020 to promote unity during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Christmas Tree Lighting has evolved into a beloved annual event held each December. The celebration has grown significantly, incorporating new features each year, such as a community food drive to aid local families, a children's movie night, performances by local musicians, and vendor booths highlighting small businesses. These additions have solidified the event as a cornerstone of Mandarin's holiday season, fostering community spirit and connection among residents of all ages.

Looking ahead to 2025, the Mandarin Community Club announced a new partnership with Florida Indian River Groves to host a citrus fundraiser leading up to the Christmas Tree Lighting, scheduled for Friday, Dec. 5. This initiative will support both the club's century-old organization and Florida's historic citrus industry, which has faced challenges from citrus greening, hurricanes, and urban development, contributing to a notable decline in orange production over the past 30 years.

This fall, families can pre-order boxes of grove-fresh citrus, including navel oranges, pink grapefruit, and mandarin oranges, all hand-picked in Florida. Orders will be available for pick-up at the Christmas Tree Lighting, blending holiday festivities with the chance to enjoy Florida's renowned citrus. The fundraiser aims to bolster community programs while supporting an industry vital to Florida's heritage.

The Mandarin Community Club is actively planning the 2025 Christmas Tree Lighting, promising another joyful celebration for the community. Residents are encouraged to stay updated by visiting www.mandarincommunityclub.org and club announcements via social media.

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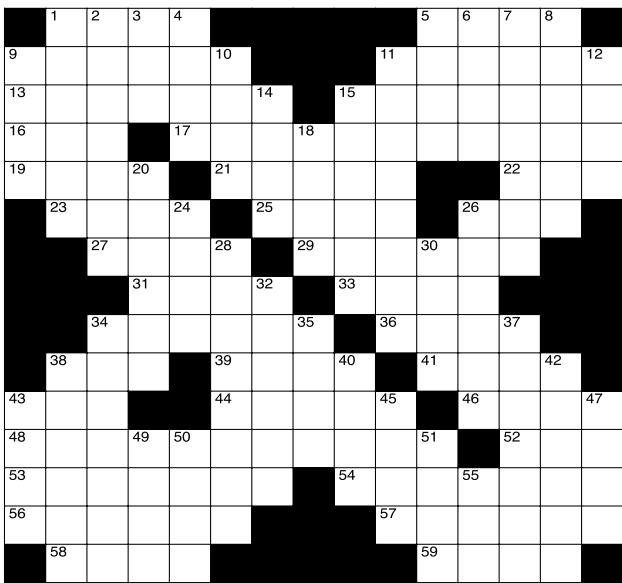
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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Resorts
- 5. One point south of southwest
- 9. Musical performances
- 11. Matched
- 13. Four-footed animal part
- 15. Express severe disapproval of
- 16. Type of leaf
- 17. Preparatory
- 19. Walk heavily
- 21. Succulent plants
- 22. Rectangle of grass
- 23. Lump in yarn
- 25. Too
- 26. Foot (Latin)
- 27. Afflicts
- 29. Smoothed
- 31. Mind (Greek)
- 33. Tampa ballclub
- 34. Semitic language
- 36. Sheltered sides
- 38. Ocean
- 39. Electronic point of sale
- 41. Thrust a knife into
- 43. 12th month (abbr.)
- 44. Ringworm
- 46. Father of Aoris (Greek myth.)
- 48. Fighting back
- 52. Cease to exist
- 53. Insects in adult stage
- 54. Freestanding sculpture
- 56. Caps
- 57. Repents
- 58. Brown and Wallace are two
- 59. Moved quickly

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Goes bad
- 2. Yard structure
- 3. They __
- 4. Marine invertebrate
- 5. European river
- 6. Office supplies firm
- 7. Physically abused
- 8. Service stations in Australia
- 9. Kills
- 10. Liquid body substances
- 11. Particular to a given individual
- 12. Brave or noble act
- 14. Sicilian city
- 15. Conqueror
- 18. Elected officials
- 20. Type of "pig"
- 24. Drop of viscous substance
- 26. Monetary unit of Spain
- 28. Guarantees
- 30. Coloring materials
- 32. Reddish browns
- 34. Square measure
- 35. Will not
- 37. Canned fish
- 38. Appeared
- 40. Six (Spanish)
- 42. Took off
- 43. Negligible amount
- 45. Posts in a Greek temple
- 47. Witnesses
- 49. Phil __, former CIA
- 50. Places to park
- 51. Guns
- 55. Dance to pop music

STAY COOL WORD SEARCH

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

WORDS

- AIRFLOW
- CAPACITY
- COIL
- CONDENSATE
- CONDENSER
- COOL
- DAMPER
- DIFFUSER
- DUCTWORK
- EFFICIENCY
- EVAPORATOR
- FAN
- FILTER
- HANDLER
- HEAT PUMP
- HUMIDITY
- HVAC
- REFRIGERANT
- SYSTEM
- TEMPERATURE
- THERMOSTAT
- VAPOR
- VENTS
- ZONES

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

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(Hint: 22 = O)

A. 9 22 22 24 18 25 17
Clue: Make less warm

B. 5 21 25
Clue: Circulates air

C. 18 25 1 22 22 13 4
Clue: Inside

D. 13 26 16 21 18 13 4
Clue: Fixes

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Briefs cont. from pg. 6

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Know the difference between public and private lines. Private lines on your property are not marked by utility companies and are your responsibility.

If you are removing bamboo and plan to dig up roots or use a stump grinder, make sure you contact 811 first. Those roots may have grown into the utility lines.

Use extra caution when installing a new fence or mailbox and landscaping, as they are the biggest contributors to underground utility damage. Roots can also be entangled with lines, and lines can also be very shallow.

Contact your utility immediately if you contact or damage a utility line.

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Fishing

Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis
mail@floridanewslines.com

Last month's report was all about shrimp and this one isn't going to be much different. We're having one of the best starts to shrimp season going on in the river so let's keep this momentum going.

I have covered how and where to catch them so let's focus on keeping them alive. Most of my life I've relied on a five gallon bucket with a battery powered aerator to keep bait alive on my boats. Shrimp aren't the most particular baits but keeping them cool and replacing the water often helps. It's also important not to overload your bait well since you can always catch more shrimp. It's better to have all live shrimp than half dead ones.

Rigging is simple. A 1/8-3/8oz chartreuse jig head is all you need. I like ones with longer shank hooks. Hooking the shrimp through the tail then twisting the hook and burying it back into the body of the shrimp keeps it very snag resistant. Floats work well in shallow water and free-lined is the most natural presentation but also the most difficult to do well.

Docks are one of best places to fish right now because they offer shade and a place to get out of the current. Just about any dock can hold fish right now but older docks along points and drop offs are always standouts. I also like docks over sand bottom as opposed to mud. Bridges in our area offer similar shade and current refuges so fish can be found there as well. Shell bars are another spot to consider even though they have no shade and limited current relief. They do congregate lots of shrimp, crabs, and small fish so bigger fish are not too far away. I think I've covered most of what you need to know about shrimp and fishing with shrimp in the river, but if you have any other questions feel free to send me an email.

Fishing has been hot which makes it almost too easy since catching shrimp is not a problem right now. It doesn't happen often so take advantage and go have some fun. Tight lines.

Native plant cont. from pg. 7

the playground and gazebo that fell into disrepair. One committee member, a children's recreational therapist, suggested adding inclusive equipment.

"Since the installation, we have weeded, planted and watered," Palmer said. "It's so rewarding when neighbors comment on the beautiful butterflies attracted to the native plants."

The garden operates without pesticides or fertilizers, requiring water only for new installations.

"It's fun to work on projects with neighbors improving the neighborhood," Palmer said.

The committee continues working toward Phase 2, balancing community input with the original vision of creating sustainable, native landscaping.



Photo courtesy Anjie Palmer.

Garden club honors members, announces summer sale

By NewsLine staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

The Mandarin Garden Club recently gathered to celebrate another year of growth and community service, honoring members whose dedication has helped the organization flourish.

At the club's annual meeting May 22, several Circle Life Awards were presented to individuals who provided outstanding service to their circles and the club. Cherokee Rose Circle honored Jan Duncan, while Elizabeth Devlin received the Magnolia Circle award. The Dogwood Circle recognized both Bonnie Myers and Suzanne Harper, and Susan Swiatosz earned the Live Oak Circle award.

Mark Klinepeter received an Honorary Membership Award for his extraordinary contributions to the club. Raven Philips was given a special Honorary Lifetime Membership for her generous help with club sales, and Juliet Johnson received a Presidential Award for her year-long contributions.

The meeting also featured the installation of new officers. Marvin Thompson will serve as president, with Sandra Varner as first vice president, Mary Johnstone as second vice president, Pam Morgan as treasurer and Joann Butler as recording secretary.

Looking ahead, the club will celebrate its 80th anniversary in November. More details will be announced as the date approaches.

The club will host its semi-annual clothing and jewelry sale Aug. 1-2 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. each day at 2892 Loretto Road. Gently used clothing, shoes and belts for men, women and children will sell for \$1, while boutique and jewelry items will be priced separately.

A pop-up plant sale will run concurrently in the gardens, featuring bargains on green plants. Master Gardeners will be available to answer gardening questions. Early shopping is recommended for the best selections.



Photo courtesy Mandarin Garden Club
Mandarin Garden Club members celebrate at their annual meeting May 22.

Gardening

It's Summer, It's Hot!

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale
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I know I'm probably not telling you anything you don't know, but it's so important that gardeners and other outdoor workers understand how important it is to keep safe in the heat. By following some simple practices, we can avoid the worst effects of the summer sun:

Wear a hat and light-weight, light-colored clothes. Long sleeves and long pants can prevent sunburn.

Use liberal amounts of sunscreen on exposed skin, minimum SPF 30. Protect your lips with a lip balm SPF 30. Reapply both frequently.

Take regular short breaks in the shade, or in air conditioning.

Drink water or a sports drink. It's best not to become thirsty so drink regularly before you do.

If possible, work early in the day.

For information on heat-related health problems, check out this article from the CDC, published last year: <https://tinyurl.com/3x285jb4>. It describes the problems clearly and what to do to help anyone who is affected. Heat stroke is very dangerous.

Back in the garden, there are weeds to conquer, insects to understand, and ever varying amounts of rain to contend with. As for me, I do spend time just wandering around, observing what insect life I can find on my plants. Yesterday I saw what appeared to be a tiny leaf-hopper, striped bright red and green. I haven't determined what it was, only that it was quite beautiful and potentially food for larger predatory insects or birds. A row of three tiny shiny brass-colored pyramid-shaped eggs spaced along a slender blade of muhly grass was similarly intriguing. And I

discovered that the jadeera bugs that feed on golden raintree seeds also feed on the developing fruits of Simpson's stoppers as well as the chrysalises of gulf fritillary butterflies! No wonder they are so numerous.

I planted an informal hedge of the beautiful native Darrow's blueberry (*Vaccinium darrowii*, <https://tinyurl.com/2w9vdsn8>) specifically for the birds, but to my disappointment they don't seem to want the fruit. Now the plants are well established, they are fruiting prolifically so I picked some to try. Straight off the bush they don't have the sweetness and juiciness of commercial varieties bred for the table but cooked down with some cinnamon and sugar they make a tasty topping for vanilla ice cream. Even so, I'm still hoping the birds will find them.

In many yards, there can be opportunities to incorporate attractive food plants into ornamental beds or containers. Being especially interested in native plants, I found 'Florida's Native Edible Plants' worth reading: <https://tinyurl.com/pyvxysu3>. For more conventional edible fruits, check out this article: <https://tinyurl.com/nn94a8ee>.

Many traditional summer crops don't hold up well here. We know that produce is often grown in more northerly states and shipped to our stores, but there are tropical varieties of greens, squashes, and beans that we can grow successfully in the home garden because it's so hot. These include southern peas, long beans, okra, tropical spinaches, and Seminole squash. For more information, check out <https://tinyurl.com/hmzrshc4>. There is even an Everglades tomato that will perform better in the heat than many more common varieties, but they still need us to take appropriate care of them.



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Travel

Timeless Venice: A city built on water and wonder

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewslines.com

Venice, Italy, is one of those places that doesn't quite feel real. Built on water, it stands as both a marvel of engineering and a tribute to human determination. A visit to Venice feels like stepping into a 500-year-old painting that has come to life.

The Venetian lagoon was settled in the 5th–6th centuries AD on wooden piles driven deep into the soft ground. It grew into a powerful maritime republic—a network of canals, bridges, and stone buildings still supported by this unique underwater foundation. The place made my mind drift between reality and dreams.

St. Mark's Basilica

I started where most visitors do—Piazza San Marco. The square is wide and open, bordered by elegant arcades, cafes and the towering St. Mark's Basilica. The site immediately grabs your attention with its immense mosaic-covered arches and domes, blending Byzantine, Romanesque and Gothic architecture. Venice was always influenced by both East and West.

Inside, it's dark and glowing. Mosaics cover practically every inch, illustrating stories from the Bible in gold tiles. The original church was built in the 9th century to house the relics of St. Mark the Evangelist. Legend claims Venetian merchants smuggled his remains out of

Alexandria, Egypt, in barrels of pork fat. While the story sounds unbelievable, the relics remain inside the basilica, and the city has claimed Mark as its patron saint ever since.

The Doge's Palace and Bridge of Sighs

Next door stands the Doge's Palace, once the seat of government and home to Venice's ruler. Its pink and white lacy stonework looks delicate from the outside, but inside I was overwhelmed by grand halls filled with enormous historic paintings. I walked through the Hall of the Great Council, where laws were debated beneath a gilded ceiling.

From there, a narrow corridor led to the Bridge of Sighs, connecting the palace to the old prison. Standing inside, I looked through the tiny window where prisoners supposedly took their last glimpse of Venice before sentencing—hence the name. It's a chilling contrast to the splendor of justice above.

The Grand Canal and gondolas

With no cars, the Grand Canal acts as Venice's main boulevard, curving like a lazy S through the heart of the city. Ride a vaporetto, the public water bus, to take it all in. See the old palaces, churches and hotels, all facing the water as they have for centuries.

Later, I splurged on a gondola ride—touristy, yes, but worth it. Gliding



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
A gondola on the Grand Canal

through the side canals, you pass under bridges, see laundry hanging, and finish beside mooring poles painted in bright blue and white. I loved the shimmering reflections of ancient facades, some crumbling and covered in moss, others restored. Venice is sadly decaying, yet the city continues to thrive.

Museums and local life

I visited many churches filled with art and Ca' Rezzonico, a museum set in an 18th-century palace. Rooms are filled with period furniture, Murano glass chandeliers, and paintings that give a glimpse into aristocratic life. It's easy to picture masked balls and the life of Casanova playing out in these rooms.

But the best moments happened away from the crowds—in the back canals and neighborhoods, where I stayed in a small apartment. Here, Venice feels more authentic. Locals shop at small markets, children play in alleyways, and I got lost more than once, wandering into quiet courtyards and crossing tiny bridges.

Venice may be aging, but it still moves with life. Wear comfortable shoes, allow time to wander, and let yourself get a little lost. Venice always leads you somewhere worth seeing.

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



High noon on the Grand Canal.



Interior of Ca'Rezzonica Museum

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