

Photo courtesy Viky Divertie
Eighth grader William Puzey.

DAR American History Essay Contest winners announced

By Viky Divertie
mail@floridanewslines.com

The Ponte Vedra Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) presented a bronze medal, certificate and \$50 to each winner of the American History Essay Contest for Landrum student winners at their chapter meeting on Feb. 4. The outstanding essay writers were Elle Pirris in sixth grade (history teacher Gregory Arcuri), Izzy Duran for seventh grade (history teacher Sean Soudrette), and William Puzey for eighth grade (history teacher Alexander Ford).

DAR American History cont. on pg. 7


PVHS wrestling returns to form

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.com

The boys' varsity wrestling team at Ponte Vedra High School is coming into prominence — this year they are the district runners up — and it's due in no small part to their head coach Josean Gonzalez and his team of assistant coaches, Jordan Matthews and Gary Define. When Gonzalez became the coach in 2018, he said the team contained a lot of good kids, but the team wasn't very big.

"We only had about 15 kids by the time the first season was over," he said, noting that there are 14 weight classes and not all of them were filled on his team. "Today we have 26 boys on the team and all the weight classes are filled."

Gonzalez said the team made strides for his first couple of years, only to be sidelined by COVID in 2020. It has taken four years to finally now have the team getting back to normal, which means performing well at districts and having multiple individual champions at various weight classes. Gonzalez, Matthews and Define also coach the



Photos courtesy Frank Milia

A: The PVHS wrestling team earned first place in January at a team dual called Destruction Duals in Baker County.



PVNS wrestler Poulo Milea vs Nease at Senior Night.

junior varsity team and a girls' team.

Like many middle schoolers, Gonzalez, who grew up in Orange Park, said he initially wanted to play football. When a friend introduced him to wrestling, he was hooked.

"It's the mental aspect of the sport," he said.

said. "When you're a kid, maybe not super athletic, and you go to practice and have to do 100 pushups, it was mind blowing. But then I became stronger and it became more normal."

Gonzalez stressed that being prepared mentally and physically, as well as remembering all the techniques, are critical to success in wrestling.

"Wrestling is a lot about the time you put in," Gonzalez said. "It's not a naturally intuitive sport such as there's not a hoop to throw a ball in. It's like you're in a controlled fight and you have to understand technique and positioning while you're out on the mat."

The Sharks wrestling team definitely puts in the time — Gonzalez said the wrestlers practice six days a week for up to three hours a day. He said wrestlers have to be prepared for matches which are basically six minute sprints. They practice for this when they are tired, hurt, and hungry.

"I'm really proud of the growth for this

PVHS wrestling cont. on pg. 8



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

Briefs

Beaches Celebration of the Arts Awards nominees sought

First Coast Cultural Center is seeking nominations for individuals, businesses, and organizations within the coastal counties of Nassau, Duval, and St. Johns, between Amelia Island and St. Augustine Beach, that go above and beyond to enhance the arts and culture in our community.

The nomination form with details for each of the six categories can be found online at <https://tinyurl.com/yc56mw-wc>. The deadline for nominations is March 15.

Winners will be chosen by a committee of carefully selected judges who are unaffiliated with First Coast Cultural Center. Those selected will be announced at the sixth annual gala, Beaches, A Celebration of the Arts, which is on Sunday, April 27, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., at the TPC Clubhouse in Ponte Vedra Beach. The Grecian-themed event will feature inspired chef specialties, live music, a silent auction, art, and an awards presentation. First Coast Cultural Center is also celebrating its “Year of the

Pearl,” marking 30 years of prosperity as a nonprofit organization. The gala has been a sell-out event in the past, and tickets can be purchased online at <https://firstcoastculturalcenter.org/beaches-a-celebration-of-the-arts-2025>.

How to create an authentic private investigator when you write

Most mystery writers never cracked a case in their real lives. It’s all fiction to them. But not to George Cramer. Before writing “New Liberty,” a police procedural novel about the life of a young Hispanic police officer and members of two vicious gangs, Cramer spent 40 years in law enforcement and as a private investigator. On Saturday, March 1,

beginning at 11:15 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library, Cramer will share insider tips on creating authentic private investigator characters and storylines with the Northeast Florida Sisters in Crime and their guests.

Cramer will address topics such as licensing, firearms, going undercover, domestic cases, locations (bar crimes), police connections, records and sex.

Cramer is of Karuk descent, and holds an MFA in creative writing from the Institute of American Indian Arts. His short stories and poems have been published in online and printed anthologies. He was the editor-in-chief of Impressions, the Las Positas College 2015 anthology. His current work in progress is a second police procedural novel.

All writers and readers interested in the topic are welcome to attend. Northeast Florida Sisters in Crime is a chapter of the national organization and serves mystery, crime, and thriller writers and readers. Programs feature speakers in forensic science, psychology, and law enforcement fields. Contact floridasistersincrime@gmail.com for more information.

Guzzo announces retirement

Donna Guzzo has retired as president and CEO of First Coast Cultural Center (FCCC) as of Feb. 28, 2025, and a replacement has yet to be named. Guzzo took the helm at FCCC, a nonprofit organization, in 2017. She has worked tirelessly on her mission to bring the arts into the life of the community through education, exhibitions, and outreach while honoring a donor-driven philosophy.

“In my eight years at the Center, it has been exciting to be part of its growth,” said Guzzo. “Today, the Center enjoys

more public prominence, community involvement, programming, and services to children with special needs — and as a result, more members and donors.”

A well-connected leader, Guzzo began the Kick StART Afterschool Arts Enrichment Program in St. Johns County and provided opportunities for students from low-income families to participate. Additionally, FCCC was able to expand services to the community as a Certified Autism Center. In one of her earlier roles, she founded the nonprofit Language Exploration Enrichment (LEE) Spanish program for St. Johns County students in 2003, and she was named Florida Foreign Language Most Valued Educator five times — being inducted into Florida’s Educator’s Hall of Fame in 2018.

Another highlight for Guzzo was moving FCCC into a 2-story “forever home” in Ponte Vedra Beach after weathering the 2020 Pandemic and relocating twice.

New cardiology center opens

Residents in the beaches area now have access to Baptist Beaches Cardiology Center, a newly renovated 28,000-square-foot facility conveniently located on the hospital’s campus. With the opening of the new center, patients have access to a full gamut of outpatient heart care. This includes appointments with cardiologists and advanced practice providers (APPs), outpatient cardiac testing, cardiac rehabilitation, and wound care treatments, all under one roof.

“Providing high-quality cardiovascular care is at the core of what we do at Baptist Health,” said Baptist Health president and CEO Michael A. Mayo, DHA, FACHE. “This new cardiology center strengthens our ability to serve

the Beaches community today while also preparing for future needs. With room to expand, it not only enhances local access to expert cardiac care but also connects seamlessly with our comprehensive network of Baptist Heart Specialists across the region, ensuring patients receive the right care in the right place.”

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S., and in the Beaches community, where a fifth of residents are over 65, the need for heart care services is growing rapidly.

The new center was possible thanks to the philanthropic support of Tom and Debbie Frankland. As heart patients themselves, the Franklands are passionate about expanding heart care services in the beaches area.

The renovated space increases the number and size of exam rooms from 18 to 24. The heart center has eight general cardiologists in addition to three electrophysiologists who treat patients with heart rhythm disorders.



Photo courtesy Baptist Beaches Cardiology Center and the Franklands.



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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Breed:
Australian Cattle Dog

Favorite Activity:
Herding the trash can to and from the street.

Favorite Treat:
We call them "street treats." She loves what she can't have.

Favorite Friend:
Her dog cousins Nala and Pixie.

How did your BFF get her name:
Bindi was named after Steve Irwin's daughter. The name is aboriginal and translates to "little girl."



Meet Bindi!

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 Ponte Vedra NewsLine. Your pet could be our BFF of the month and appear in Ponte Vedra NewsLine! Email editor@floridanewsline.com to enter your pet.



Happy St. Patrick's Day from your friends at Ponte Vedra NewsLine!

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Last month's Mystery Photo was the Flagler Community Garden.

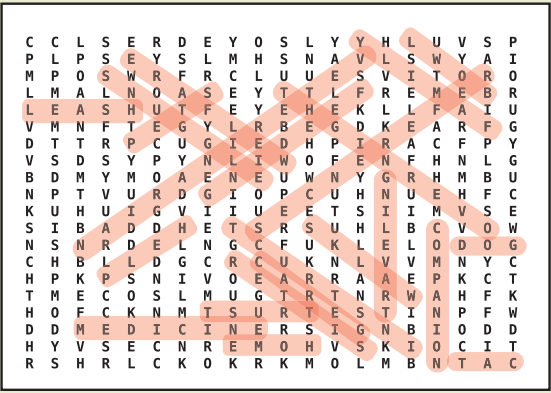
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PG 8



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March

Community Calendar

What's Happening in Ponte Vedra

Council on Aging offers interest groups at the COA Center at UF Health Nocatee. Meetings are free and self-guided. Advance registration for clubs and meetings is required; email pbrunell@Stjohnscoa.com or call (904) 814-9407. Tuesday clubs include: Open Card Play, every Tuesday 1 p.m. – 4 p.m. and Caregiver Support Group, every Tuesday 1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. Wednesday groups include: Mah Jongg Meet-up, 1 p.m. – 3 p.m.

Palm Valley Market is held inside and on the grounds of the Palm Valley Community Center at 148 Canal Road, every Tuesday from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. The market offers organically grown produce, microgreens, eggs, grass-finished beef, all natural chicken, Mayport shrimp, prepared meals, preservative-free bread, honey, tea, natural skincare, custom jewelry and soy candles. Visit the Palm Valley Market Facebook page for more information.

1st: Wellness events at Sawgrass Village will be held every Saturday in March from 10 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Hosted by Mind Body Social, all events are free and open to the community. Events include wellness classes such as yoga and barre, all held on the lawn in front of ABC Liquors. Visit <https://mbs.events/sv/> for more information and to register.

1st: NE Florida Sisters in Crime will host George Cramer, retired police officer turned author and private investigator, on March 1 at 11:15 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Bring your coffee and bring a friend; the group welcomes misters and sisters to learn about writing, promoting, and enjoying crime fiction. Visit nefloridasistersincrime.org for more information.

4th: Vicar's Landing monthly Boutique Sale will be held Tuesday, March from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. at 1000 Vicar's Landing Way. The sale includes household items and furnishings, knick-knacks, as well as framed art. The public is welcome. Checks or cash only please. The Vicar's Employee Scholarship Fund receives all the proceeds. Call

Beverly Webb at (904) 315-2610 for more information.

4th: Purely Social hosted by Ponte Vedra Woman's Club will be held on Tuesday, March 4, from 5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. at Lynch's Pub, 514 1st Street in Jacksonville Beach. Visit www.pontevedrawomansclub.com for more information and to register.

5th: Irish Cuisine with Chef Warren Caterson, a live cooking show, will be held at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library on March 5 from 5:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. Move beyond corned beef and cabbage and learn how this creative and healthy cuisine can be part of your diet beyond St. Patrick's Day. Best suited for teens and adults. RSVP required; register online at <https://sjcpls.org/> or contact the library at (904) 827-6950 for more information.

6th: Bingo will be held at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, on Thursdays from 1 p.m. – 2 p.m. for four weeks beginning Thursday, March 6. Contact Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for more information and to register.

6th – 8th: Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Cinderella" will be presented by The Creative Academy, in its 14th year of presenting musical performances, on March 6 and March 7 at 7 p.m. and March 8 at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. Tickets are available at <https://www.ticketleap.events/tickets/cec-som-5/cinderella>.

11th: Friends of the Ponte Vedra Beach Library will feature the Duque Collective at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library on March 11 from 6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. The concert will feature an evening of soulful rhythms and brilliance. Enjoy a mix of classic jazz standards as well as a few original compositions from the members of the band comprised of UNF students. Doors open at 6 p.m. The concert is free.

11th: PVB Adult Coloring Club at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library will be held on March 11 from 11 a.m.

– 1 p.m. This program is for adults older than 18; bring a snack or drink for yourself or to share with others. Call the library at (904) 827-6950 for more information.

18th: Friends of the Ponte Vedra Beach Library will host speaker John Delaney, president of Flagler College, in the FOL Room at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library on March 18 at 6:30 p.m. Doors open at 6 p.m. Delaney served as president of UNF for 15 years and was the second named President Emeritus of the university's 52 year history. His background also includes serving as chief assistant state attorney, general counsel of Jacksonville, and mayor.

19th: Ponte Vedra Woman's Club general meeting and luncheon will be held on Wednesday, March 19 at 5:30 p.m. at Marsh Landing Country Club. The program will be "Fashion Forward," featuring speaker Cindey Nordman. The cost of the dinner is \$35. Registration required; visit www.pontevedrawomansclub.com for more information.

20th: St. Johns County Republican Party District 4 monthly meeting will be held on the third Thursday of each month (this month, March 20) at 6:15 p.m. at Palm Valley Community Center, 148 Canal Blvd. Visit stjohns.gop for more information.

20th: Free Tech Help with David will be held on Thursday, March 20 from 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Drop in for tech assistance with your Android, Apple, and Reader devices; no RSVPs required. Visit sjcpls.org/branches/ponte-vedra-beach-branch/ for more information.

21st: The Savvy Job Hunters Ministry of Christ Episcopal Church will host a free virtual workshop, "Networking for Job Leads" on March 21 from 10:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. Learn how to optimize social media and other sources to expand your job leads network. The workshop will be presented by Chad

Sorenson, SHRM-SCP, SPHR, President of Adaptive HR Solutions, LLC. Email pot-tesen66@gmail.com to receive the Zoom link. All are welcome to attend.

22nd: GTM Research Reserve will host its monthly Beach Cleanup on Saturday, March 22 from 9 a.m. – 11 a.m. No registration is required; meet at the Visitor Center, 505 Guana River Road in Ponte Vedra Beach where gloves and trash bags will be provided. Visit gtmnerr.org for more information.

22nd: Ponte Vedra Writers will meet on Saturday, March 22 at 11 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Award-winning novelist and screenwriter Jamie Engle is the featured speaker. She will discuss marketing for authors in her workshop, "Rockstar Branding for Writers." The meetings are free and open to the public. Visit www.floridawriters.org for more information.

24th: Ponte Vedra Democratic Club will meet on Monday, March 24 at 5:30 p.m. for Chat & Chew before the 6 p.m. meeting at Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. The featured speaker will be Joy Andrews, county administrator for St. Johns County with her "State of the County" report, which will address infrastructure, road construction, housing development, and school building status. Email pvdemclub@gmail.com for more information.

27th: Crafters Corner will be held at Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library on March 27 from 3:30 p.m. – 5 p.m. This hands-on crafting session, where attendees will create painted rock garden art, offers a perfect opportunity to unwind and socialize. Supplies for this program are generously provided by the Friends of the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. RSVP required; contact Tessa Highstrom at thighstrom@sjcfl.us or call the library at (904) 827-6950.



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with St. Johns County School Board Member
Kelly Barrera, District 4

Q: What’s the latest on the search for
a new superintendent?

A: The online survey soliciting public opinion closed on Feb. 14, but there are still many other pieces to the process. The advertisement period for the position is scheduled to close on March 28 and the next major date will be April 10, when we will identify the semifinalists. All of the information and steps in the process are available to view on the school district website.

Q: Do you have any updates on the
new K – 8 school under construction
in Nocatee?

A: The tilt walls on this school went up in mid-February, so construction is coming along. This school is scheduled to open in Fall 2026 and we anticipate our new superintendent will name the principal by January 2026. We will address zoning this fall, after the start of next school year.

Q: Do you have any kudos to share?

A: I’d like to recognize the winners from the St. Johns County Secondary STEM Fair from District 4. The fair was held in early February and our district had a particularly strong showing at this event. Junior Categorical Award winners from Landrum Middle School were Sree Siliveri (who also recently won the St. Johns County Spelling Bee), Liam Khirsukhani, Shanmukha Patsamatla, Elizabeth Curran and Lorelei Cappock. Frederick Davis-Baer from Pine Island Academy also placed first in one of the Junior Categoricals. Senior Categorical Award winners from Ponte Vedra High School were Dhruva Gadiparthi, Arianna Rahmathulla, Nicholas Storm, Nicolette Finn, and Anya Dorairaj. Sophie Duan from Nease also placed first in one of the Senior Categoricals.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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

Guest Column

Advocating for update to senior
exemptions

By St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer

For many, our home is our primary means of security and of generating wealth. Homeownership is the bedrock of our economy and our families; however, homeownership is becoming more and more expensive, especially for our seniors. This group makes up a significant part of our population, as more than 20 percent of St. Johns County residents are older than 65 years old.

In the past eight years, taxes on homesteaded properties have increased by more than 20 percent and that is with the relief of homestead exemption and 3 percent cap for homesteaded property values. The cost for homeowners insurance has been increasing as well. In fact, property taxes and homeowners insurance in St. Johns County on a home at our median value can be as much as \$10,000 per year.

Many of our seniors are living on a fixed income and are unable to afford the increases in property taxes and homeowners insurance on their home. Currently, there are two additional exemptions for homesteaded properties that are available to seniors, but many seniors do not qualify for those exemptions because the

limits are set very low.

The senior exemptions for those older than age 65 are based on income and property value. The income limit is \$37,694 for 2025, and the property value limit is \$250,000. Both limits are unreasonably low in today’s Florida. With those limits, less than 3 percent of homesteaded properties in our county receive the exemptions.

I am advocating to improve the exemptions available for seniors by recommending an increase in the income and property value limits. In January, I spoke at the State Legislative Delegation Meeting attended by Senator Tom Leek, Representative Kim Kendall, Representative Sam Greco and Representative Judson Sapp, where I recommended amending these exemptions. Also, I will be working closely with the Veterans Council of St. Johns County and St. Johns County Council on Aging on this issue. I plan to visit Tallahassee to speak about the recommended changes with key decisionmakers as well. My ultimate goal is to ease the property tax burden for our seniors.

I am available to answer questions or provide additional information at Ed-die@sjcpa.gov or (904) 827-5500.

7 fun ways to celebrate
St. Patrick’s Day

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

St. Patrick’s Day is celebrated each year on March 17. The day honors St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, but it’s also a celebration of Irish culture. Although St. Patrick’s Day is celebrated around the world by people who can trace their lineage to the Emerald Isle, millions more with no such heritage join in the festivities each year. That means anyone who is Irish

or just Irish in spirit can take part in St. Patrick’s Day celebrations.

There are many entertaining ways to commemorate this special day. Here are a few to get the party started.

1 Eat green foods. Green is a prominent color for St. Patrick’s Day and Ireland in general. Many people eat foods and consume beverages dyed green on March 17.

St. Patrick’s Day cont. on pg. 11

“Before moving here, I had to weather several storms. I was alone and I was afraid. But here, I was not afraid. Feeling safe and secure made all the difference during the storm.”



Delores, Resident at
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ameripriseadvisors.com/chris.thompson
St. Johns County resident since 1993



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

Q. Will your office hold a driver license reinstatement event again this year?

A. Yes. Our office will participate in Operation Green Light, a statewide initiative sponsored by Florida’s clerks and comptrollers to help individuals with outstanding traffic tickets and court fines get back on the road.

Q. How many drivers can benefit from this initiative?

A. More than 8,000 residents in St. Johns County are restricted from driv-

ing because of unpaid fines and court fees. When left unpaid, these cases are sent to collections adding even more fees.

Q. How does Operation Green Light work?

A. During Operation Green Light, our clerks help these residents pay court fines and reinstate their driver license. The savings on collection agency surcharges can be as much as 40 percent. Leading up to the event, our office will promote Operation Green Light days on social media, and we’ll also send notices

through the mail to encourage people to take advantage of this opportunity. You can help us spread the word by letting people know about this chance to put the brakes on fees, clear up outstanding court costs, and get driving privileges back.

Q. When will Operation Green Light Take Place?

A: Operation Green light will take place between March 31 – April 11, from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m., at the Richard O. Watson Judicial Center (St. Johns County Courthouse), 4010 Lewis Speedway in St. Augustine. In addition to in-person payments at the courthouse, drivers can make payments online between March 29 – April 12 by visiting <https://stjohnsclerk.com/courts/ncourt-online-payment/>

Q. Can you help drivers with suspended licenses due to an expired payment plan?

A. Drivers who have a case that has not yet been sent to a collection agency may be eligible to update their payment plan and get their driver license reinstated if all requirements are met. Statutory fees and late charges will apply. Additional fees may be required for license reinstatement with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). You can check the status of your driver license at <https://services.flhsmv.gov/dlcheck/>.

Q. How can people get in touch with you with questions?

A. For questions about Operation Green Light, or any of 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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**with St. Johns County Sheriff
Rob Hardwick**

Q: What can you tell us about the podcast you’ve recently launched?

A: It’s called SJSO Unlocked, and it has been a goal of mine for years. Last year we hired Taylor Levesque, who is a former First Coast News journalist with the skillset to put this together for us. With this podcast, we want to highlight the agency and topics of interest.

Q: How often are new episodes released?

A: This is still a work in progress and right now, we are aiming for one per month. There’s a lot of work behind the scenes to get everything prepared for distribution. We may put episodes out more frequently as popularity grows.

Q: What are some of the topics that have already aired?

A: The current episode features members of our K9 Unit. The one before that, we had Madison Schemitz with us to discuss her recovery and work in the

community. We had a request from a citizen to highlight our Aviation Unit, so we’ll have our pilots on in the near future.

Q: How can people access the podcast?

A: SJSO Unlocked is available to listen on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, iHeartRadio, Amazon Music, and Pandora. If you want to watch, it is available on YouTube. Visit <https://rss.com/podcasts/sjsounlockedpodcast/> for easy access. We are always looking for topics that would interest the public; email unlockedpodcast@sjso.org with episode ideas or any questions.

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

A: They can email me at sheriff@sjso.org or call me at (904) 824-8304. Also, our website, www.sjso.org has a wealth of resources, from alarm registration to Crime Stoppers to our Neighbors app.

Landrum students spread love with teddy bear drive

By Jennifer Werba
mail@floridanewslsine.com

The students of Landrum Middle School made Valentine’s Day extra special for children at Wolfson Children’s



Photo courtesy Jennifer Werba

Dropping off the pajamas and teddy bears at Wolfson Children’s Hospital.

Landrum students cont. on pg. 7

Life

travel • pantry raiders • gardening
fishing • entertainment • puzzles

Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewsline.com

Janet Collins

Janet Collins said she was lucky to grow up in an active family — she spent her childhood in Omaha, Nebraska swimming and running and trying to keep up with her mother and siblings. She said she participated in pretty much everything but dance, which is ironic considering that ballroom dance has become a big part of her life, especially since her retirement about three years ago. She now dances competitively with her instructors from S Style Dance Team. She and her husband of 15 years, John Schwartz, live in Palencia.

Q: How did you come to live in NE Florida?

A: I moved here with my second husband. We were living in New York City at the time and I had a job with Hanes Hosiery servicing the Macy's account. He was downsized from his job, so we looked at trying something new and almost purchased a business in Florida, but that fell through. We moved down here anyway and I got a job as Director of Membership Services for Sawgrass Country Club.

Q: What did you like best about your job at Sawgrass?

A: I'll never forget it. I loved every minute and I especially loved the



Photo courtesy Janet Collins
Janet Collins

members. We had a great staff. I actually met my present husband, John, while working at Sawgrass Country Club. He was one of the members and we were friends. When my second husband passed away, John would check in on me. He was very nice. Then he broke up with his girlfriend and said he was interested in someone else ... and that someone was me! He was very patient with me though; we didn't get married for eight years.

Q: When did you retire?

A: I finally decided it was time to retire about three years ago. I thought it was time for the next generation to take over, and I feel like I left everything in great hands. They're all doing extremely well. I had friends who told me that they were bored once they retired, but I knew that wouldn't be me. I had been working since I was seven years old when I had a newspaper route with

my brother.

Q: How did you begin ballroom dancing?

A: I had been taking lessons from Dance Alday in Ponte Vedra Beach, but found a place closer to my home. One day I saw a sign for a new studio opening soon, so I went and knocked on the door. The owners were there putting in the dance floor and they invited me to the grand opening. I went and now am dancing and competing with the S Styles Dance Team.

Q: What styles of dance do you do and which is your favorite?

A: We do all genres. I have two instructors, one for Smooth dancing, which includes waltz, tango, foxtrot and Viennese waltz; and one for Latin dances. It's so hard to pick a favorite because all of the dances are wonderful — but I do really love to waltz.

Q: How do you prepare for competitions?

A: I train approximately eight hours per week. I have the time to do this now that I'm retired and I absolutely love it. My goal is to keep progressing to a higher level and to dance until I'm 100! We are getting ready for a competition March 5 – 8 in World Golf Village known as the First Coast Classic Dancesport Championships. It will be held at the Renaissance Hotel over three days and I would encourage anyone interested to come and check it out. Ballroom dancing is so wonderful because the dance community is very accepting and non-judgemental. Plus, this kind of dancing is something you can do for your entire life.

DAR American History cont. from pg. 1

The prompt this year was "Enjoying a New Kind of Tea Party." In each case, the writers wrote a first-person account of a tea party organized and executed by women patriots. The winning essays were forwarded to the Florida State Society DAR and will be entered into the state competition.

DAR is a non-political, genealogical women's service organization whose purpose is to promote historic preservation, education, and patriotism. The Ponte Vedra Chapter has been active in organizing a Valentine's Day celebration for military dependents, assisting with reading in area schools, cleaning the graves of veterans, participating in Wreaths across America, and purchasing benches for the Jacksonville National Cemetery. Visit DAR.com or contact regent. darpontevedra@gmail.com for more information.

Landrum students cont. from pg. 6

Hospital by collecting and donating more than 200 brand-new pajamas and more than 200 teddy bears. To help spread the word, Landrum's Engaged Citizenship students created eye-catching posters that promoted the initiative, encouraging their peers to participate and contribute to the cause. Their efforts played a key role in the overwhelming support received from the school community.

The donation was personally delivered to the hospital by Landrum Middle School Principal Troy Kasting, along with Judy Manley and eighth-grade students Payton Manley and Lilly Ritchie. The hospital staff was overjoyed by the incredible response and the outpouring of kindness from Landrum students and families.

"This initiative is a wonderful reflection of the compassion and generosity of our students and families," said Kasting. "Knowing that we were able to bring a little extra comfort to children in the hospital is truly rewarding."

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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative

1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8	9	10		11	12	13
14					15							16		
17				18								19		
20						21						22		
23					24			25			26			
				27			28	29	30					
31	32	33			34					35			36	37
38				39						40		41		
42			43			44					45			
		46			47					48				
49	50								51			52	53	54
55				56		57	58	59		60				
61				62					63					
64				65							66			
67				68							69			

CLUES ACROSS

1. Cut a little bit off
5. State with confidence
11. River in NE Scotland
14. Not narrow
15. Lacking social polish
16. Amount of time
17. Frame
19. Automobile
20. Toadstools
21. High school dances
22. Utilize
23. Challenged
25. One-sided
27. Showing extreme greed
31. Potted plants
34. Everyone has one
35. Lake in Botswana
38. E.T. rode in one
39. Juniors' parents
41. Small amount

42. Mother of Perseus
44. Ornamental box
45. Gov't investigators
46. Uncertain
49. A cotton fabric with a satiny finish
51. The vast grassy plains in S. America
55. Your consciousness of your own identity
56. Noted consumer advocate
60. Spanish sports club
61. Body part
62. Tractability
64. Woman (French)
65. Ready and willing to be taught
66. Muslim ruler title
67. Depressed
68. Gradually gave way
69. Clear-thinking

CLUES DOWN

1. Brushed aside
2. Water sprite
3. Ones to look up to
4. Monetary units
5. A number everyone has
6. Marine invertebrate
7. One who takes you to court
8. Indicates outer
9. Parallelograms
10. Strains
11. Cross
12. A way to remove
13. Some pages are dog-__
18. Ukraine city
24. A citizen of Denmark
26. Summer month (abbr.)
28. Hindu queens
29. Jewelry brand
30. Fictional rider of Rohan
31. Wet dirt
32. Russian city
33. Observed
36. Furious
37. Drivers' licenses
39. Musical composition
40. Auction
43. They __
45. Women
47. Inspire with love
48. Japanese ankle sock
49. Appears
50. Old World lizard
52. The leading performer
53. Type of protein
54. Pennsylvania town
57. Art __; around 1920
58. __ Blyton, children's author
59. Abnormal breathing
63. A place to sleep

PET SITTER WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

- BOWL
CARE
CAT
COMPANION
DOG
FAMILY
FEEDING
HELP
HOME
INSTRUCT
LEASH
MEDICINE
OVERNIGHT
PETS
REFERENCES
SITTER
SNUGGLE
TRAVELING
TRUST
VETERINARIAN
WALKS
WELFARE

CRYPTO FUN

Solve the code to discover words related to pet sitting.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 10 = R)

- A. 26 22 10 4 12 2 9 4 10
Clue: Babysitter
- B. 6 21 6 6 8
Clue: Young dog
- C. 16 14 22 10 13 2 7 12
Clue: Overnight animal care
- D. 1 10 22 9 4 24
Clue: Vacationing

PVHS wrestling cont. from pg. 1

post-COVID group,” he said. “The wrestlers who are seniors this year have battled adversity and have really stuck it out — and now they’re reaping the rewards of being a winning team.”

The wrestling season lasts from November through the first week of March. Next up for the athletes [as of interview date] is individual championships.

Gonzalez said many of the wrestlers train year round and are members of a wrestling club (that he coaches) that goes to competitions in the spring and summer.

Gonzalez credits his assistant coaches with sharing his vision for success. He said Matthews, who has been at PVHS for three years, has taken the program to the next level due to his knowledge and passion for the sport. Define has

been an assistant coach for two years and comes from a program with a winning tradition in Ohio, so he “knows what winning looks like,” according to Gonzalez.

For anyone interested in checking out wrestling, Gonzalez said, “Do it! Give wrestling a chance. Even if you don’t do it forever, it’s something to look back on that you can say challenged you and made you better able to handle life.”

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By Scott A. Grant
mail@floridanewsline.com

PopHistory

Hauntings at the St. Augustine Lighthouse

There are sources on the internet that proclaim the St. Augustine Lighthouse as one of the most haunted places, not only in Florida, not only in the United States, but in the world. This seems a little bit overstated to me. I wonder if the lighthouse is even the most haunted place in St. Augustine. The Castillo de San Marcos has been around a long time and many awful things happened there. One would think that the fort must have a plethora of ghosts.

On the other hand, you cannot fight the internet and if the internet says the lighthouse is the most haunted, it must be. A number of ghosts supposedly reside in and around the lighthouse. The most famous are the Pittee girls. This is their story.

In 1871, the old lighthouse was in such disrepair that a new one was needed. Congress allocated funds for the project. Hezekiah Pittee was hired to supervise the construction. He and his family travelled from their home in Cape Elizabeth, Maine. Hezekiah had been superintendent of lighthouse construction up and down the Atlantic coast. He was the perfect man for the job.

In order to unload supplies that came by sea, Hezekiah built a railway track and a cart that ran from the lighthouse to Salt Run several hundred yards away. The Pittee girls — Mary, 15, Eliza, 13, and Carrie, 4 — loved to play on this cart. They would ride it down to the harbor and then push it back up the hill and ride it down again. It was great fun! It was also what the law would call an “attractive nuisance.”

On July 10, 1873, the three Pittee daughters and an unknown African American friend, aged 10, got into the cart and took off for an exciting ride. The brakes failed. The cart flew off the end into the ocean and flipped over, trapping all four girls. A local worker, also an African American, named Dan Sessions rushed to the rescue. He jumped into the water and lifted the cart off of the four girls. His heroics were only enough to save one of the four children, four-year-old Carrie.

Dan Sessions was a former slave from Georgia. He emigrated to St. Augustine either during or after the Civil War. The first reference in our area shows him registering to vote here in 1867. The 1870 census shows Sessions working as a houseman at a local boarding house. Presumably, in 1873, he was working construction at the lighthouse.

Ever since that tragic day in 1873, visitors and employees at the lighthouse have reported strange happenings attributed to the three dead girls. The girls reportedly live in the basement of the keeper's house. They enjoy playing hide and seek with guests and playing pranks on members of the regular ghost tours, like tying people's shoes together. A number of visitors have reported watching the swings suddenly start to move when the girls' names are mentioned.

They say there are other ghosts living at the lighthouse, lots of them.

Scott A. Grant is a local historian and asset manager. He would love to hear your stories about encounters with the ghosts of the St. Augustine Lighthouse at scottg@standfastic.com.

Send us your community news!

editor@floridanewsline.com

Travel

Let's visit Rhode Island

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewslines.com

Although “island” is in its name, Rhode Island is a land-bound state with deep ties to the water. Every Rhode Islander lives within 30 minutes of the Atlantic Ocean or Narragansett Bay. And the Narragansett Bay stretches into the state’s eastern half, adding to the expansive 400-mile coastline.

No wonder the state is known for its beaches, sailing, seafood, and cute coastal towns. Rhode Island is one of the 13 original colonies with a deep colonial history. The city retains its historic colonial-era charm with steeply pitched gabled roofs on clapboard-sided homes.

If a trip to New England hovers in your future, consider visiting Providence. The capital city thrives with a population of just fewer than 200,000, and it is home to eight college/university campuses, including Ivy League Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), a famed art institute. Providence is just an hour from Boston, making it a more affordable alternative to Boston or NYC. The city’s compact size means you can walk to restaurants and other attractions.

WaterFire originated in 1994 and was such a hit that it remains Providence’s premier cultural and civic event. The evening experience is a must; I truly loved it. WaterFire features more than 80 floating braziers set along the Providence River, which are lit to create

a mesmerizing effect. The fires are accompanied by carefully curated music, street performances, art installations, and sometimes interactive exhibits. As the flames illuminate the downtown rivers, the event transforms the heart of Providence into a magical, ambient space that invites reflection. Reserve a gondola ride during WaterFire to create an even more marvelous memory.

The Capitol’s massive dome, visible throughout the city, spans approximately 50 feet across and rises to 278 feet. It is one of the largest self-supporting marble domes in the world and is topped by the Independent Man, a symbol of Rhode Islanders’ independent spirit. A tour of the State House includes historic murals, and flags, the original state seal, the state chambers, and an 1802 Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington. History buffs and art enthusiasts will enjoy a tour of the Stephen Hopkins House Museum and the RISD Museum.

New Englanders favor lobster, seafood, chowder, baked beans, wild-grown blueberries, and beer. Providence, nicknamed the Culinary Capital of New England, is home to the prestigious Johnson & Wales University. The school has produced top chefs nationwide, many of whom stay to work in the area.

No trip to Rhode Island is complete without a visit to the nearby



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
The Breakers in Newport.

opulent mansions of Newport, just a 45-minute drive from Providence. The Gilded Age mansions, built between the 1850s and 1900s, provide a glimpse into the extravagant lifestyles of wealthy industrialist families like the Vanderbilts and the Astors. These “summer cottages” are timeless architectural masterpieces, blending European-inspired design with luxurious interiors.

Among the highlights is The Breakers, the most famous mansion built by the Vanderbilt family, featuring a 70-room Italian Renaissance-style house with a 45-foot high central Great Hall. This mansion sits on a 13-acre estate overlooking a spectacular view of the Atlantic Ocean. The Elms is known for its French Château-style design and

impressive gardens. Marble House, another Vanderbilt estate, was completed in 1892 for \$11 million. It contains 500,000 cubic feet of American, Italian, and African marbles, gold-leafed rooms, and a Chinese Tea House on the grounds. (Make reservations to dine in the teahouse through their website.)

If time permits, stroll along the three-and-a-half-mile scenic Cliff Walk for dramatic panoramic ocean vistas with waves crashing against the rocks below, or explore the Museum of Yachting and the famous International Tennis Hall of Fame.

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



Marble House interior.



Rhode Island Capitol in Providence.

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The Pantry Raiders

Cuisine is a big part of Irish culture, even if it's not the first thing people think of when pondering the Emerald Isle. This St. Patrick's Day, celebrants can bring a touch of Irish cuisine to their celebrations by preparing the following recipe for "Irish Guinness Stew with Lamb" courtesy of Lines+Angles.

Irish Guinness Stew with Lamb

Makes 6 servings

- 8 cups lamb or beef stock; divided
- 1 cup pearl barley
- 3 lb. lamb shoulder, cubed
- Salt, to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 3 tbsp. oil
- ½ cup unbleached all-purpose flour
- 4 stalks of celery, washed, trimmed and chopped
- 2 large yellow onions, peeled and chopped
- 3 cloves of garlic, minced
- 3 large carrots, peeled and roughly chopped
- 12 fluid ounces Guinness stout
- 1 bunch fresh parsley
- 1 bunch fresh thyme
- 1 bunch fresh rosemary
- 3 large potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 2 tsp. cornstarch
- 4 tsp. water

Warm up with Irish stew this St. Patrick's Day

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1. In a medium saucepan set over medium heat, bring 3 cups of stock to a boil; add barley. Reduce heat to low and gently simmer for 20 minutes. Set aside.
2. Meanwhile, pat the meat dry with paper towels. Season the meat with salt and pepper. Heat the oil in a 6-quart Dutch oven. Brown the meat on all sides over medium-high heat. Using a slotted spoon, remove the meat from the pot. Sprinkle flour over the meat, shaking off any excess; set aside.
3. Add the celery, onions, garlic and carrots to the pot and saute until onions are soft and translucent. Add Guinness and deglaze the pot, scraping up all the caramelized bits on the bottom and sides of the pan.
4. Chop the leaves of the parsley, reserving the stems. Tie the parsley stems and several sprigs of thyme and rosemary into a bundle; drop the bundle into the pot. Chop the remaining thyme and rosemary; set chopped herbs aside.
5. Return the meat to the pot. Add the potatoes, barley and enough stock to cover the meat and vegetables. Bring to a boil over medium heat. Reduce heat to very low and simmer for 2 to 3



Photo courtesy MetroCreative
Irish Guinness Stew with Lamb

- hours, or until meat is fork tender. Stir occasionally, adding remaining stock as necessary.
6. Check seasoning; adjust to taste. Stir in chopped parsley, thyme and rosemary. Mix cornstarch in water and stir. Add to stew, stirring to incorporate. Cook over low heat for 5 to 10 minutes or until stew thickens. Ladle into bowls. Serve with crusty bread and of course more Guinness if desired.

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- 2 **Bake soda bread.** Everyone can take part in the kitchen whipping up a batch of delicious Irish Soda Bread. This is a great recipe for kids because there's no need to wait for dough to rise. Baking soda is the "soda" in the recipe and serves as the leavening agent.
- 3 **Take part in a parade.** St. Patrick's Day parades are held in major cities across the country, making it relatively easy for people to be there in person; however, many communities also host parades that are small in scale but still big on fun.
- 4 **Attend an Irish dancing demonstration.** Irish dance is a traditional dance that originated in Ireland. It is known for its intricate footwork and minimal upper-body movement.
- 5 **Dine the Irish way.** Although corned beef and cabbage is often served on St. Patrick's Day, it is not the most authentic Irish fare one can eat. Find a restaurant that serves Irish stew, Boxty, Colcannon, or Black and white pudding, or try making such dishes at home.
- 6 **Host a scavenger hunt.** See who can find the gold at the base of the rainbow. Pick a person to organize the scavenger hunt. This person can write the clues and hide the prize.
- 7 **Listen to Irish music.** Tune in to The Chieftains, The Dubliners, Planxty, The Gloaming, The Wolfe Tones, and others to get into a festive spirit.



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