
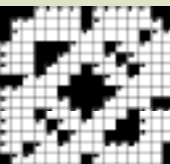
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# Rotary’s annual Pub Crawl fundraiser on tap for April 5

By Rotarian Al Kalter  
mail@floridanewslines.com

It’s fun, it’s for a good cause, and it’s been going on since 2009. On Saturday April 5, the annual Bartram Trail Rotary Pub Crawl will take place in the Shops of Bartram Walk, where Race Track Road meets State Road 13. Participants will crawl — that is, walk — around the shopping center, visiting five participating establishments and enjoying a cold beverage at each.

This event is the major annual fundraiser for the Rotary Club of Bartram Trail – Julington Creek, drawing a crowd of 150 fun-loving friends and neighbors. In sequence, the group will make the following stops: Moon Dog Pie House, 2nd Bay Brewing, Bono’s Bar-B-Q, La Nopalera, and Iggy’s Grill & Bar. The festivities get underway at 2:30 p.m., and should wrap up around 6:30 p.m.

Proceeds from the Pub Crawl help Rotary support area organizations such as the Betty Griffin Center, the Homeless Coalition of St. Johns, the local chapter of the National Federation of the Blind, Tom Coughlin’s Jay Fund, the Creekside High School Interact Club, and more.

Rotary Club Pub Crawl cont. on pg. 10

# Field of Dreams celebrates 15th opening day

By Martie Thompson  
editor@floridanewslines.com

Saturday, Jan. 18 was the 15th opening day for Field of Dreams, a league where children with special needs (intellectual or physical disabilities) have the opportunity to play baseball in an organized league.

“The weather that week was touch and go,” said George Vancore, co-founder and lead umpire. “But when we got to the field, we had sun and blue skies. We couldn’t have asked for anything better.”

Opening day is always a celebration. After the presentation of the colors by the Knights of Columbus and the playing of the National Anthem, all the teams show up and play one inning each. Vancore said that representatives from the St. Johns County Sheriff’s Office were in attendance, as well as elected officials like County Commissioner Christian Whitehurst and School Board Member Beverly Slough who, according to Vancore, has never missed an opening day.



Photo courtesy Jaclyn Conatser  
Field of Dreams player with buddies from Bartram Trail High School

At Field of Dreams, children with special needs of all ages have the opportunity to wear a uniform, have their names announced, and be a player on an athletic team. Everyone bats.

Volunteer buddies, at least one per special needs player, help with batting and rounding the bases. Some buddies are members of area youth or high school athletic teams who volunteer year after year. Opening day buddies, also marking their 15th year of participation, were students from the Bartram Trail High School softball and baseball teams.

Vancore stressed that the Field of Dreams exists due to the many unpaid volunteers who perform administrative duties, serve as umpires and buddies on game day, and work in the concession tent. Everything is free at Field of Dreams, including registration and hot dogs on game day, but donations are accepted.

“Nothing happens by magic; we don’t just show up,” Vancore said. “This league happens because of the dedicated and focused individuals who volunteer their time.”

This year, there are approximately 250



Photo courtesy Maryanne Kolisnyk  
Opening ceremony on Jan. 18, 2025.

Field of Dreams cont. on pg.2



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Photo courtesy Maryanne Kolisnyk  
The Field of Dreams.

**Field of Dreams** cont. from pg. 1

kids comprising 14 teams. Most of the volunteer coaches are ESE teachers and some are parents. The season lasts from mid-January until the first weekend of May and registration is ongoing (online at [www.fodbaseball.com](http://www.fodbaseball.com)).

Vancore said that on opening day, a special announcement was made by representatives from St. Johns County Parks and Recreation: county funding will be provided to build a full concession stand as well as four ADA-certified restrooms and additional parking at Field of Dreams. Ground is anticipated to be broken in mid-May with completion by the end of the year. The Field of Dreams league will outfit the concession stand, including a freezer, cooler, and icemaker, with donations from the community.

“I always say that ‘Special things happen between the white lines,’” Vancore said. “But look at what we’ve done over the past 15 years beyond those white lines — the Field of Dreams playground as well as the community spirit. We’re so proud of this.”

*Visit [www.fodbaseball.com](http://www.fodbaseball.com) for more information about Field of Dreams or to register your special needs child for baseball.*

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BFF

Best Furry Friend  
of the month

**Breed:**

Labrador Retriever mix

**Favorite Activity:**

Catching tennis balls in the backyard, playing  
hide and seek with his family and chasing  
bunnies and squirrels!

**Favorite Treat:**

Watermelon

**Favorite Friend:**

Gabe, human brother and Hayley, human  
sister.

**How did your BFF get his name?**

Jet flew to Florida on the owner of the rescue  
organization's private jet from Puerto Rico. He  
is also jet black and very fast. We thought his  
new name was perfect!



Meet Jet!

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



Happy St.  
Patrick's Day  
from your  
friends at  
The CreekLine!

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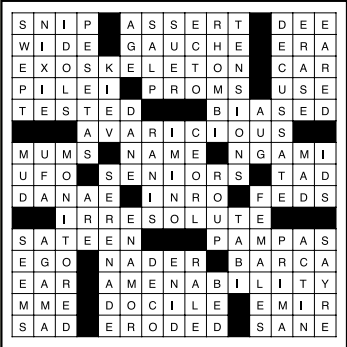
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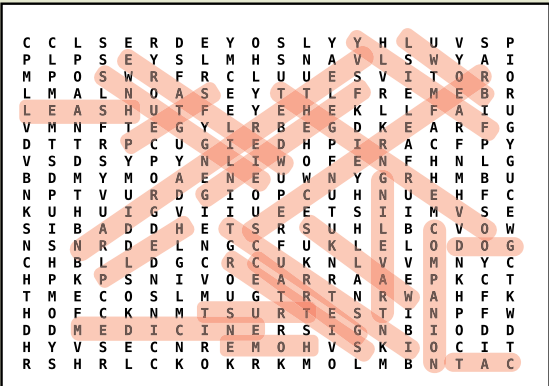
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Last month's Mystery Photo was Celebration Lutheran Church.



Answers  
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Puzzles  
PG 10



A. caregiver B. puppy C. boarding D. travel



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# March

## Community Calendar

### What's Happening in St. Johns

**Trout Creek Senior** Center offers activities for seniors on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings at 6795 Collier Road in Orangedale. Cards, crafts and games start each day at 9 a.m. with trivia, nutrition/exercise, Bunco and Bingo among the additional activities before lunch at 11:30 a.m. each day. Contact Program Coordinator Gail Godzich at (904) 209-3658 or ggodzich@stjohnscoa.com for more information.

**Playing HOOKie**, a group for those who enjoy knitting, crocheting and looming (with all items donated to charity) meets every Wednesday from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at Maple Street Biscuit Company, 1627 Race Track Road in St. Johns. Visit the group's Facebook page (Playing HOOKie) or email playinghookie2022@gmail.com for more information.

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

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

**4th: Happy Hookers** crochet group will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on March 4 and March 18 from 5:30 p.m. – 6:45 p.m. The group crochets or knits blankets for cancer patients at area hospitals. All skill levels are welcome. Visit [www.sjcpls.org](http://www.sjcpls.org) or call (904) 827-6960.

**4th: Honeybee Quilters** Guild will meet on Tuesday, March 4 at 6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church on the Loretto Road Campus in the Kids Space at 2501 Loretto Road. New members/guests welcome. Visit [honeybeequilters.org](http://honeybeequilters.org) for more information.

**8th: Women's Self-Defense** W.A.V.E. class will be held on March 8 from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. at Bartram Trail Branch Library. This class, for women and girls aged 13 and older, is focused on teaching participants basic self-defense techniques to respond to potential threats. Participants will receive one on one training and practice with an all-woman team composed of St. Johns County Sheriff's Office, St. Augustine Police Department, and St. Augustine Beach Police Department instructors. Registration is required and space is limited to the first 30 participants.

Contact Ashley at [akuhn@sjcfl.us](mailto:akuhn@sjcfl.us) or (904) 827-6960 to register or to be put on a waitlist.

**5th: Widow to Widow**, support group for widows by widows is held at Council on Aging (COA) River House, 179 Marine Street in St. Augustine on Wednesdays from 11:45 a.m. – 12:45 p.m. Call (904) 209-3655 (Monday – Thursday) or email [tharris@coasjc.org](mailto:tharris@coasjc.org) for more information.

**6th: Open Game** Play at Council on Aging (COA) River House, 179 Marine Street in St. Augustine. Bring your deck of cards or board game (there are also games available at River House) and socialize over a friendly game of your choosing on Thursdays from 12:15 p.m. – 3:15 p.m. Call (904) 209-3655 (Monday – Thursday) or email [tharris@coasjc.org](mailto:tharris@coasjc.org) for more information.

**8th: Business Forum:** Empowering Women in Business will be held on March 8 from 8:30 a.m. – 1 p.m. at the FSCJ Advanced Technology Center. Keynote speakers Zelda Greenberg, Teresa Applegate, Melody Petraglia, and Sharlyne Rogers, with Emcee Carolyn Daniels will explore Jacksonville trends, strategies to connect with your audience, business-impacting initiatives, childcare opportunities, and health and wellness tips. Breakfast and lunch included for only \$25 per person. Presented by SCORE Jacksonville and the Business Learning Institute (BLI). Visit <https://bit.ly/SCOREJAX> to register.

**8th: The Bartram** Trail Genealogy Club meets the second Saturday of each month (this month, March 8) from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. at the Bartram Trail Branch Library. This month's topic is "Storage of photos, letters, film negatives and other historic material in digital form," by Bill Sherman. New and experienced genealogy members are welcomed. Email [ginglish@comcast.net](mailto:ginglish@comcast.net) for more information. Visit [www.facebook.com/groups/BTGenClubGroup](http://www.facebook.com/groups/BTGenClubGroup) to send a request to join the club.

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

**10th: The Northwest** St. Johns County United for Progress Club will host speaker Mary Gatta who will speak on "The Economic Security of Women in Florida" on March 10. Social time begins at 6:30 p.m. followed by the meeting

at 7 p.m. Email [nwsjcp@gmail.com](mailto:nwsjcp@gmail.com) for meeting details.

**11th: Bartram Trail** Women's Club will host its meeting and luncheon on March 11 beginning at 11 a.m. at St. Johns Golf and Country Club. The luncheon theme is "Mardi Gras Masquerade Ball." Checks for \$32 should be made payable to BTNC and mailed to Brenda Jenkins, 2204 Fort Mellon Court, St. Augustine, FL 32092 no later than March 4. Visit [www.facebook.com/BTNC1](http://www.facebook.com/BTNC1) for more information and a membership form.

**14th: Check Meowt** cat adoption event will be held at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on March 14 from 12 p.m. – 3 p.m. All adoption fees will be waived. This event is presented in partnership with St. Johns County Animal Control.

**15th: Saturday Adult** Book Club will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library at 10 a.m. on March 15 to discuss "The Housemaid" by Freida McFadden. Beverages and a light snack will be provided by the Friends of the Library. Call the library at (904) 827-6960 or email [akuhn@sjcfl.us](mailto:akuhn@sjcfl.us) for more information.

**17th: The All Star** Quilters Guild will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on Monday, March 17 at First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The program will feature three quilters discussing "Modern Marvels." "Show and Tell" is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit [www.allstarquilters.org](http://www.allstarquilters.org) for more information.

**18th: Newcomers** of North Saint Johns will hold a luncheon on Tuesday, March 18 beginning at 10:30 a.m. at Blue Bamboo, 10110 San Jose Boulevard. Attendees will enjoy lunch and a special presentation by owner and Executive Chef Dennis Chan. The cost for the luncheon is \$35 for members and \$40 for guests. Register by March 10. Visit <https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org> for more information.

**19th: Coin Collecting** for Kids will be held at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on March 19 from 4 p.m. – 5 p.m. Join Tony Bonaro from the Florida United Numismatists to learn about history, geography, math, and science while studying coins. Call the library at (904) 827-6960 for more information.

**19th: Free Tech** Help with David will be held on Wednesday, March 19 from 10:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the Bartram Trail Branch Library. Drop in for tech assistance with Android, Apple, and reader devices; no RSVPs required. Bring your device fully charged and know your passwords.

Visit [sjcpls.org/branches/bartram-trail-branch/](http://sjcpls.org/branches/bartram-trail-branch/) for more information.

**19th: Garden Club** of Switzerland will host Amy S. Koch, president, St. Johns Regional Audubon, who will present "Our Birds Need Native Plants," on March 19 at the Bartram Trail Library, 60 Davis Pond Boulevard, from 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. Visit [www.switzerlandgc.org](http://www.switzerlandgc.org) or call (703) 635-4236 for more information.

**19th: Meditation** Moments will be held on March 19 at 7 p.m. at Unity Church for Creative Living, 2777 Race Track Road. Join Rev. Yvonne McAndrew for an hour of bliss-filled meditation. Cost: donation. For more information, call (904) 287-1505 or email [UCCLoffice2777@gmail.com](mailto:UCCLoffice2777@gmail.com).

**20th: William Bartram** Scenic Highway Group will meet on Thursday, March 20 beginning at 6:30 p.m. at Westminster Woods, Gathering Place Room. Join the discussion to keep NW St. Johns County Scenic and Historic and preserve the State Road 13 Scenic Highway. Virtual meeting access is available; contact [alabbat@comcast.net](mailto:alabbat@comcast.net) or call (904) 699-8475.

**23rd: Adopt-A-Road** Clean-Up, sponsored by Victory Lutheran Church, will be held in the Silverleaf neighborhood on Sunday, March 23 beginning at 3 p.m. Participants will meet at 70 Silver Forest Drive St. Augustine, FL 32092. All participants must be at least eight years old and are encouraged to wear a yellow or other brightly colored shirt. Community service verification letters are available. Call (904) 642-8900 for more information.

**26th: Rise Into** Your Power will be held on March 26 at 7 p.m. at Unity Church for Creative Living, 2777 Race Track Road. Join Rev. Yvonne McAndrew for discussion and insight on the 12 Powers of Man. Cost: donation. For more information, call (904) 287-1505 or email [UCCLoffice2777@gmail.com](mailto:UCCLoffice2777@gmail.com).

**28th: "Do You Need** a Living Will and How Can You Avoid the Need for a Guardianship," a free lecture by Megan Wall, St. Johns County Legal Aid, will be presented at Council on Aging (COA) River House, 179 Marine Street in St. Augustine, on Friday, March 28 from 10 a.m. – 11 a.m. Call (904) 209-3655 (Monday – Thursday) or email [tharris@coasjc.org](mailto:tharris@coasjc.org) for more information.



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with St. Johns County Commissioner  
Christian Whitehurst, District 1

**Q: Can you give an update on the status of the Bailey farm off of Bishop Estates Road?**

A: We were able to acquire two land parcels along the river through our LAMP (Land Acquisition Management Board) funds, but we don't have enough funding to purchase the large (67 acres) farm itself. We are seeking funding to purchase this larger property via a grant through the Rural and Family Lands Program and we think we have a good chance to get it. We should know something hopefully by summer as it will come out of the March legislative session.

**Q: What does the county plan to do with this land if acquired?**

A: Our plan is for it to stay the way it is; it houses a horse therapy program, which will receive state oversight going forward due to the grants (if we are awarded them). The Baileys are willing to take a discounted price over what a developer offered them because they want the property to stay in its current state and I commend them for this.

**Q: What's the latest on the World Golf Hall of Fame building and IMAX theater in World Golf Village?**

A: We still don't know anything definite regarding the World Golf Hall of Fame; we are considering lots of proposals for this property.

As for the IMAX, at our county commission meeting in January, we heard a proposal by St. Johns County Cultural Events. They propose to start running some unique programs out of the IMAX theater that will fit our community, such as lectures, short films, musical acts, and just generally a blend of entertainment for all ages. St. Johns County Cultural Events is the same outfit that currently runs The Amp and the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall, and their program proposal would be autonomous and self-sustaining. They need to come back to the commissioners with more details, likely sometime in March.

**Q: You mentioned the Board of County Commissioners meetings. How would you suggest that people stay up to date if they are not able to attend these meetings?**

A: Our meetings are held on the first and third Tuesday of each month beginning at 9 a.m. The meetings are livestreamed on GTV ([www.sjcfl.us/watch-govtv-live/](http://www.sjcfl.us/watch-govtv-live/)). Additionally, all of the agendas and minutes of past meetings are available on the Clerk of Courts website via a link from the county website ([www.sjcfl.us](http://www.sjcfl.us)).

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

A: Readers can email me at [bcc1cwhitehurst@sjcfl.us](mailto:bcc1cwhitehurst@sjcfl.us) or call me at (904) 584-5348.

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 [Eddie@sjcpa.gov](mailto:Eddie@sjcpa.gov) or (904) 827-5500.

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## Q & A

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

**Q: Do you have an update on the school district’s five year plan?**

A: At our meeting on Feb. 11, the school board approved a new five year plan. It’s important to note that we annually update this plan; it’s actually like an annual plan with a five year forecast. The new five year plan includes a high school, two elementary schools (one in RiverTown and one in the southern part of the county), four K-8 academies (including RiverTown, Nocatee, and Silverleaf already under construction) and one school expansion for South Woods Elementary that’s in progress. Interestingly, in our 20 year plan, we have projected 24 more schools in total. In 20 years, we anticipate a student population of 78,838 in 64 schools.

**Q: What is the latest on the search for a new superintendent?**

A: By the time you read this, we will have finished taking public input. We received more than 3,100 responses to our survey and there are still a few days left [as of interview date of Feb. 12.] Some of the responses we received from students taking the survey, in answer to the question about strengths the superintendent will need, included support of advanced academics and support for integrated student leadership positions. Students felt that teacher pay, quality and cost effective student lunches, and the dress code were critical needs to be addressed. Finally, students surveyed said personal qualities that the new superintendent should possess included an educational background, financial awareness, problem solving skills, and the ability to be a kind and gentle mentor.

Teachers who answered the survey were interested in support for free or paid certifications, consistent procedures,

expectations and discipline, and that the superintendent should be student-focused. Teachers felt that innovative programs and new ideas for professional learning were important and they felt that personal qualities that the new superintendent should possess included an educational background to include experience as a teacher and a principal, non-partisan, visible, and pro-teacher, as they felt that teacher retention is key in our county.

We expect to get a robust number of quality candidates for this position. We plan to name the new superintendent on May 20, but only if we have found the right person. All of the superintendent search information is available on our website.

**Q: When can parents start registering new students for next school year?**

A: March 1 is when registration for new kindergarteners or students new to our schools opens up. Parents should register online at their zoned school’s website.

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

A: I’m delighted that both the Teacher of the Year and Rookie Teacher of the Year, named at a wonderful event sponsored by INK! on Jan. 31, are from District 1. Congratulations to Jill Adams, instructional literary coach from Creekside High School, our new Teacher of the Year, and James Tansey, an educator in an ESE classroom at Fruit Cove Middle School, our new Rookie Teacher of the Year.

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

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

## Q & A

### 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](mailto: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](mailto:sheriff@sjso.org) or call me at (904) 824-8304. Also, our website, [www.sjso.org](http://www.sjso.org) has a wealth of resources, from alarm registration to Crime Stoppers to our Neighbors app.

# ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

## Managing aging parents' finances: What to know in 2025

By Chris Thompson, CFP®, CMFA®, CRPC®

Making financial decisions takes time, attention and energy at any age. In the case of elderly adults, it may become increasingly difficult to manage finances, particularly if their health is declining or they're experiencing a cognitive issue. If you're providing support to aging parents — or plan to in the future — here are some tips on how to handle the situation and prepare for what's to come.

Don't wait to start talking about money. While it may be uncomfortable to ask your parents to discuss their finances with you, it's essential that you are familiar with their intentions for future care and what plans they have in place. The first time you broach the

subject, emphasize that you are looking for only a high-level overview so that you can have more peace-of-mind that your parents will be well cared for. This initial conversation can help set the groundwork for future discussions.

Create a contact list. If your parents experience a sudden change in their health that affects their ability to manage their own affairs, it's important to have a game plan for what happens next. If you anticipate stepping in to pay bills, make insurance claims and handle other financial tasks, start by asking your parents for a list of contact information for the professionals they work with and where their accounts are held. Keep in mind that you may need to be an authorized user or power of attorney to be allowed access to

certain accounts. Consult a lawyer to talk through what permissions may be necessary for you to step in if the need arises.

Build a support network. Talk with siblings or other trusted family members about what a possible care plan could look like for your parents. While this conversation can be tough to initiate, know that it's often easier to bring everyone together while your parents are still healthy and in good mental capacity. Discuss who can realistically provide support — and in what way and at what cost.

Anticipate future lifestyle changes and challenges. Even if they aren't yet needed, explore the options and costs of various assisted living and memory care services. Check your parents' insurance policies to see if and how services might be covered. You may also want to explore whether their home or yours could be modified to provide additional space or comforts, such as wheelchair access.

Know your rights at work. The Federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) allows covered employees up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to provide care for a family member with a serious health condition (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/laws-and-regulations/laws/fmla>). Consult your Human Resources department to learn what your company's policies are for employees who are caring for a parent and how to initiate a claim if you need to. Many employers have access to resources and support groups to help you manage

your responsibilities at home and at work.

Maintain momentum on your own financial goals. It's understandable to want to provide your parents with as much support as you can. It's prudent to look at your finances to see how much support you could provide, if that is needed, without jeopardizing your own retirement and future health care needs.

It's hard to imagine — let alone talk about — what caring for an ill or aging parent may look like. For additional support in having family conversations, evaluating financial options and creating a plan for your parents, contact your financial advisor and lawyer. These experts work day-in and day-out with families in similar situations and can help you take the steps necessary to feel more confident about your own plan.

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

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## Q&A with St. Johns County 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 driving 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](mailto:clerk@stjohnsclerk.com). I can also be reached directly on my cell at (904) 599-8688 or by email at [BPatty@stjohnsclerk.com](mailto:BPatty@stjohnsclerk.com).

## Guest Column

### Population growth and district boundaries

By Al Abbatiello

Northwest St. Johns County, including the Fruit Cove and Switzerland areas of District 1, is the growth capital of St. Johns County. Why? Read on!

As a resident of St. Johns County for 27 years and chairman of the William Bartram Scenic Highway Group for 20 of those years, I've paid close attention to county politics, population growth, schools, traffic issues, and roadway congestion. Newcomers to the area and even longer-term residents have concerns about continued population growth and wonder why.

It's simple — District 1 is the growth capital of St. Johns County. It's a fact that a large proportion of residential growth has occurred in District 1 for the simple reason it's adjacent to Duval County. Jacksonville is the job center for Northeast Florida offering economic diversity with high paying jobs, public transportation, military bases, higher education institutions such as colleges and universities, and a business-friendly environment. These growth elements mean better jobs and higher pay for the Northeast Florida area, but because of the excellent reputation of the St. Johns County school system, residential growth has centered in NW St. Johns County, which has become a magnet for new families and home buyers.

District boundaries in St. Johns County are drawn based on population and attempt to represent equal numbers of residents. For example, the 2000 census shows our county population as 124,522 or 24,904 per district. The 2010 Census population was 191,268 or 38,253 per district; the 2020 Census shows population of 278,515 or 55,743 per district and the 2023 population of 320,110 or 64,022 per district. This is a growth rate of 256 percent per district.

District 1 is the only district significantly reduced in land area (necessary to keep district populations equal), but has grown in population and traffic congestion. Also, since Jacksonville is the major job center and the fact that State Road 13, US Highway 1, and Interstate 95/State Road 2209 are the only corridors in or out of our county, it's clear why traffic congestion continues to grow. The new First Coast Expressway beltway, when completed, will also increase traffic flow into and out of St. Johns County at whatever time it's completed.

Based on the above facts, it's up to local governments to find a way to slow the growth in NW St. Johns County and ease the traffic flow between St. Johns and Duval counties. Resident awareness and action at county government hearings is essential.



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## Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson  
editor@floridanewsline.com

### John and Renay Daigle

John and Renay Daigle have been mixing their business and personal lives for the past 20 years. As principals of Daigle Creative, the couple, married for 29 years, say it's important to respect each other's area of expertise when it comes to business — and to find other things to talk about at dinner than how their days went. John was raised in Green Cove Springs and had a career in journalism prior to joining Daigle Creative. Renay, originally from New Jersey, moved to Mandarin with her family as a teenager. Both graduated from the University of Florida before settling down in NW St. Johns County. They have two grown daughters.

#### Q: How did you choose your career paths?

John: My dad was in the military and I actually went to UF on a ROTC scholarship. My dad's plan was for me to join the Army, but that's not where my heart was. I decided to get my degree in journalism and I did one year of active duty before I joined the Florida National Guard and began my journalism career. I worked for Clay Today, the Daytona-Beach News Journal, and finally was able to get a job at the Florida Times Union. I eventually became the editor at the Jacksonville Business Journal.

Renay: I knew in high school that I wanted to be in advertising. I always loved the Super Bowl commercials. After I graduated from UF, I moved to Jacksonville to take a job with an agency where I had previously interned, only



Photo courtesy BEC Photography  
Johns and Renay Daigle

to have that job disappear in the midst of some big layoffs the company needed to do. I had to quickly find another job. I wanted to do the writing side of advertising, but all the jobs that were available were in sales, so I took one. I ended up being good at it.

#### Q: How did you meet?

Renay: I roomed with his sister at UF. He would come over to visit and she thought we would hit it off since we were both writers. He was four years older than me and had already graduated, but was still in Gainesville working.

#### Q: What inspired you to start your own business, Daigle Creative?

Renay: I was working at a mid-sized agency when I became pregnant with our first child. I wanted to work from home but that wasn't possible, so I started Daigle Creative as a consultancy in 2000. At first, I freelanced for other agencies, but then started getting my own clients. I wrote ad copy, newsletters, and annual reports. I mostly worked at night while my daughter slept and during nap time.

John: When Renay quit her advertising job to stay home and start Daigle Creative, I went to work for Jacksonville

University as the Marketing and Communications Director. I eventually joined Renay at Daigle Creative in 2005.

Renay: Our agency is 25 years old. We will celebrate our 29th wedding anniversary and our 20th anniversary of working together this year, so I joke that we should be able to add them together for almost 50 years

#### Q: What is the most challenging thing about owning the agency and working together?

John: One of the toughest things is certainly not the creative aspect, because we are both good at that. But the financial side ... we had to learn that side of the business. We have also learned to respect each other's lane, which provides a clear division in expertise and helps determine who gets the final say.

Renay: The first few years were the hardest, but we both think the other is very good at what they do and feel lucky to work together.

#### Q: What do you like to do in your spare time?

John: I enjoy tennis and pickleball and working out. I converted our garage to a gym. I also do a lot of gardening and home improvement projects now that we are empty nesters. Also, for the last few years, I've been an adjunct professor at UNE, teaching a class on political advertising.

Renay: I'm a beach person and go to the beach every chance I get. I'm an avid reader. As a self-actualization project, I've recently taken up public speaking. Also, as a breast cancer survivor, I consider myself an advocate and like talking to and encouraging other women.

## African violet sale announced

The Heart of Jacksonville African Violet Society will host its annual Display and Sale on March 28 and 29 at San Jose Church of Christ, 6233 San Jose Blvd. Event hours are 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. on Friday and 10 a.m. – 3 p.m. on Saturday.

This year's theme, "Timeless Elegance," celebrates the beauty and diversity of African violets and their many cousins. The event will feature displays, floral arrangements, and dish gardens of African violets and other gesneriads including streptocarpus, sinningia, primulina, and episcia — all dedicated to this elegant theme. All attendees will receive a free African violet leaf with instructions on how to propagate it.

A "Violets 101: Introduction to Violets" class will be held on Friday at 1 p.m. and Saturday at 12 p.m. Additionally, there will be an educational display and experienced club members on hand to answer any questions and give advice on keeping your plants beautiful. A variety of African violets and other gesneriads will be available for purchase, including mature, blooming plants, starter plantlets, and leaves. There will also be hard-to-find African violet supplies, including the club's special soilless potting mix formulated specifically for African violets. Admission and parking are free. Visit [jacksonvilleviolets.org](http://jacksonvilleviolets.org) for more information.

The Heart of Jacksonville African Violet Society is a non-profit organization founded in 1992 with the purpose of creating and stimulating interest in African violets. The club is committed to providing education on cultivation and propagation of African violets and meets on the third Sunday of each month at 2 p.m. at the Garden Club of Jacksonville, 1005 Riverside Ave., in Jacksonville.

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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

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

Rotary Club Pub Crawl cont. from pg.1

Tickets are \$50 each. Ticketholders will receive a commemorative Pub Crawl cup to use at each of the stops (one beer per stop is included), as well as raffle tickets for prizes from local businesses. Additional raffle tickets will be available for purchase. Sponsorships are also available.

This is an event that has sold out in recent years. Email [rotary.bartramtrail@](mailto:rotary.bartramtrail@)

gmail.com to obtain tickets or via Venmo (@RotaryClubofBartramTrail; be sure to include your name and “Pub Crawl 2025” in the memo line).

*The Rotary Club of Bartram Trail – Julington Creek meets every Thursday morning, from 7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. at Westminster Woods on Julington Creek. Guests and prospective members are always welcome. Visit [www.bartramtrailrotary.org](http://www.bartramtrailrotary.org) for more information.*

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# Troop 225 honors Eagle Scouts

By Paula Presley  
[mail@floridanewslines.com](mailto:mail@floridanewslines.com)

Since Boy Scouts of America's inception in 1911, fewer than 6 percent of Scouts earn the rank of Eagle, which is the highest achievement in the Scouts BSA program. BSA Troop 225 is one of the oldest troops in NW St. Johns County and has a long legacy of Eagle Scouts. During the past year, Troop 225 has added 10 new Eagle Scouts, making the troop's total number of Eagle Scouts 129 in its 35 years of existence, far outpacing the average.

Earning the Eagle rank is no small feat. The requirements include earning seven rank advancements and at least 21 merit badges, including 14 specific badges



Eric Jones and father Bruce Jones.

intended to create a well-rounded Scout who demonstrates an ideal attitude based on the Scout Oath and Law, service and leadership.  
Earning the rank of Eagle also includes the completion of an extensive service project that the scout plans, organizes, leads and manages. The service projects completed during the Scouts' attainment of their Eagle rank this past year were wide ranging and benefited many different organizations within our local community.  
Scouts recently earning this notable achievement and their Eagle project are:  
Matthew Presley, Jan. 31, 2024: Rebuilding an adaptive garden for Brooks Rehabilitation used by special needs youth.

Will McGonagle, March 14, 2024: Rebuilding and installing a new cross in the mediation garden for Geneva Presbyterian Church.  
Eric Jones, March 21, 2024: Planning and executing a food drive for Christ's Cupboard food pantry.  
Nolan Bailey, April 11, 2024: Planning and executing a donation drive for the Sulzbacher Center to support the needs of the homeless.  
Evan Ostrout, April 18, 2024: Construction of a gaga ball pit for the youth programs at Geneva Presbyterian Church.



Photos courtesy Paula Presley  
David Jeffers.



Evan Ostrout with leaders Phil Parker, Jon Berg, Tony Bonaro, and Mark Sletto.

**Briefs**

**OLLI comes to World Golf Village**

Starting on March 5, OLLI will conduct a program in the World Golf Village area. OLLI is the Osher Lifetime Learning Institute established by the Bernard Oshe Foundation along with 125 programs — all at colleges and universities — to promote and further the educational and cultural enrichment of those older than 50.

The program, conducted at Westminster St. Augustine, is titled “Voices Between the Wars: Stories That Grippped the Nation.” The program focuses on the period from the late 1920s to the end of the 1930, when the U.S. faced political upheavals abroad and significant societal changes at home. These changes,

ranging from extreme poverty to great wealth, were reflected in the works of artists, musicians, journalists and especially authors. John Steinbeck’s novels depicted the struggles of the poor, while F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote about the pleasures of the wealthy. Other authors captured the evolving American cultural landscape and its impact on people’s lives. The class will explore the works of authors like Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, Sinclair Lewis, Langton Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, John Dos Pasos and more. The class will discuss how these authors portray the changing social scene, the public’s reaction to their writings and their legacy. Interactive discussions will follow brief lectures that focus on this highly dynamic

period in American history.

The class will commence on March 5 and continue March 12, March 26, and April 2 at 1:30 p.m. It will be conducted in-person at Westminster St. Augustine, 235 Towerview Drive, and via Zoom after registering at Westminster St. Augustine or with OLLI. The registration fee for OLLI members is \$40. To register, contact OLLI at UNF or Westminster St. Augustine residents should contact the Lifestyle Office.

**Bartram Trail boosters offer scholarships**

The Bartram Bears Athletic Booster Club (BBABC) offers four scholarships for graduating seniors at Bartram Trail High School. The booster club will award scholarships to two male student-athletes and two female student-athletes. Applicants must be accepted to an accredited college or university, have earned a minimum of two varsity letters, adhered to the athlete code of conduct, and maintained academic eligibility to participate in athletics at Bartram Trail High School.

Applicants will: complete and submit the online application form; complete two short essays as part of the application form; and upload two letters of recommendation to submit with the application form. One must be from a Bartram Trail High School coach or faculty member and both must be ink or digitally signed and written specifically in support of the BBABC scholarship

The application period is now open through March 16, 2025. Applicants must use a Google account to upload Letters of Recommendation. Email BBABCScholarship00@gmail.com with any questions.

**Bartram Trail Women’s Club announces Mardi Gras luncheon**

The Bartram Trail Women’s Club (aka Bartram Trail Newcomers and Women’s Club) will hold its meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, March 11, at 11 a.m. at St. Johns Golf & Country Club, 205 St. Johns Golf Drive. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. The March luncheon theme is Mardi Gras Masquerade Ball and attendees are encouraged to wear Mardi Gras attire. Entertainment will be the Bold City Classic Jazz Band.

Checks for \$32 should be made payable to BTNC and mailed to Brenda Jenkins,

2204 Fort Mellon Court, St Augustine, FL 32092. Payment must be received no later than the first Tuesday of the month, March 4; indicate your entrée choice on the check memo.

The Bartram Trail Women’s Club meets the second Tuesday of every month from September to May for lunch. Email Adrienne Townsel-Wilson at bartramtnc@gmail.com for club information or visit [www.facebook.com/BTNC1](http://www.facebook.com/BTNC1) to see pictures of the meetings and download a membership form.

**Road cleanup volunteers needed**

St. Johns County’s Recycling will be holding its Adopt-A-Road Clean-Up in the Silverleaf neighborhood, sponsored by Victory Lutheran Church, on Sunday, March 23 beginning at 3 p.m. Participants will meet at 70 Silver Forest Drive St. Augustine, FL 32092. All participants must be at least eight years old and are encouraged to wear a yellow or other brightly colored shirt. Community service verification letters will be given to anyone requesting them.

The St. Johns County Adopt-a-Road Program owes its popularity and success to its many dedicated volunteers. For more information or to volunteer, contact the Victory Lutheran Church Office at (904) 642-8900.

**Newcomers of North St. Johns announces March luncheon**

Newcomers of North Saint Johns will host its March luncheon on Tuesday, March 18 at 11a.m. at Blue Bamboo, 10110 San Jose Boulevard. The event features a delicious lunch and special presentation by owner and Executive Chef Dennis Chan. Blue Bamboo is the latest chapter in a family saga that began many years ago on the Northside of Jacksonville. Today, Chef Dennis and his team serve Cantonese comfort food in a polished and welcoming atmosphere that brings together the best of old and new. Some recipes haven’t changed since their creation years ago, and others are modern interpretations of favorite foods.

Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. The cost for the luncheon is \$35 for members and \$40 for guests and non-members. All reservations must be received by March 10.

**Briefs** cont. on pg. 13

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LOCATION MAP

**Dates**  
Saturday, March 15<sup>th</sup>  
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Sunday, March 16<sup>th</sup>  
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Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis  
mail@floridanewsline.com

March is here. Our super hot February might have us a little ahead this year so far. I was seeing water temperatures around 70 degrees in certain places pretty early last month, so lots of spawning has already been occurring on the bass and speck side of things. They'll still be at it this month, but I suspect it will be tapering off by the end of it. Post-spawn fish will be hungry and looking to put some weight back on near the same areas they had been staging prior to moving into shallows. The same baits I mentioned last month will still be good bets: jigs, minnows, and shiners. Flipping soft plastics into heavy cover will also be good for bass or bowfin, which I think are tons of fun. Just watch out for those teeth.

The river will see more and more saltwater fish trickling in this month. Redfish usually show up first followed by sheepshead, trout, and flounder. The redfish will be on the smaller side, so try to use mini portions of their usual fare. If you still have any minnows left from speck fishing, those work pretty well. You can tip a jig with them or fish them under the same

floats you use for specks. I mainly focus on docks. Try to put the baits right behind the pilings in the eddies. A piece of crab might entice the bigger redfish as they show up.

Sheepshead will be moving up river after spawning at the inlet and offshore. Use fiddler crabs, clams, and shrimp around the most barnacle encrusted structure you can find. I don't say this enough, but if there's no current where you're fishing — go find some.

Speaking of shrimp, this is our last chance to throw a shrimp net as the season closes for April and May. I usually have pretty good luck catching enough for bait this month, sometimes more than I catch in June, surprisingly. These will be the best shrimp you can get for any of the saltwater species showing up.

If you're a trout snob it's going to be very dependent on how fast the salinity goes up. Last spring they really keyed in on smaller baits since there were so many anchovies around. Small jigs or twitch baits are good. Tight lines.

Briefs cont. from pg. 12

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

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>.

Festive community event held at historic Harris-Bennett Farmhouse

By Nick Andrews  
mail@floridanewsline.com

On Nov. 30, 2024, more than 900 people visited the historic Harris-Bennett Farmhouse at Alpine Groves Park in St. Johns County at a vibrant community event featuring more than 50 vendors and exhibitors. The day's festivities included engaging activities for children with seasonal activities, blacksmith demonstrations, and a variety of food trucks.

The Harris-Bennett Farmhouse, dating back to the 1880s, stands as a testament to the region's rich agricultural heritage. Originally part of a thriving orange grove, the farmhouse and its accompanying fruit packing shed were central to the area's citrus industry. In 1937, John Harris purchased the 55-acre property, naming it Alpine Groves in homage to its location in Switzerland, Florida. The

Harris family cherished the land, cultivating citrus trees, maintaining a vegetable garden, and raising various livestock. Notably, the Alpinia lilies planted by Harris continue to flourish between the farmhouse and the Ruth Harris Bennett Butterfly Garden, serving as a living link to the past. Alpine Groves Park has another butterfly garden, located near the entrance of the park, which contains all native Florida plants.

Today, the farmhouse serves as a vibrant hub for community events, providing an accessible and enriching link to the county's history. The recent gathering not only embraced the spirit of the season, but also showcased the lasting legacy of the Harris-Bennett Farmhouse. Visitors can explore this historic gem during guided tours held on the second Saturday of each month from 12 p.m. – 2 p.m.



Photo courtesy Friends of Alpine Groves Park



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## Let's visit Rhode Island

By Debi Lander  
[mail@floridanewsline.com](mailto:mail@floridanewsline.com)



Photos courtesy Debi Lander  
The Breakers in Newport.

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

# Gardening

## Spring is here

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale  
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Since the January freezes, the weather has warmed up and we have had periods of lovely sunny weather. We are now in our historically dry season and rainfall has been minimal, but despite that, many of our early spring plants have been showing signs of regrowth. This has highlighted plants that were either damaged or died back to the ground, but not necessarily killed outright.

As always, it pays to be careful about how much trimming and pruning we do until our last average frost date has passed, but with our change in heat zone to 9b, and generally higher temperatures year on year, it's harder to say when that is. Referring to NOAA's data (<https://tinyurl.com/y8vb9zc9>) the average last freeze date in Jacksonville, calculated from data till 2020, was Feb. 25. After more recent winters, we can assume that the average date is now earlier; however, the local day-to-day weather forecast is our best resource.

Lawns that might previously have come through the cold season without suffering from a freeze may be looking dead, but most turf in northeast Florida will simply be dormant. When a lawn begins to show signs of life we can think about the spring application of fertilizer, but not before. A broad set of lawn care guidelines can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/zj2rtjmr>.

If you need more information, check out the "Florida Lawn Handbook" at the link in the article. And remember that master gardener volunteers are available each weekday, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. and 12:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m., by calling (904) 255-7450 (or you can email them at [duval@ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:duval@ifas.ufl.edu)).

When growing summer annuals from seed, follow the advice on the seed packet. Right Plant Right Place applies to annuals too. Since they complete their life cycle in one short burst, the application of a slow-release fertilizer combined with a diluted liquid fertilizer as needed will supply the nutrients sometimes missing from our often-sandy soils. If you are creating a new bed, work a thin layer of organic matter such as home-made compost or a similar commercial product into the soil to help with moisture retention. Even drought-tolerant plants will benefit as long as the soil remains free draining. Remove spent flowers (dead head) to encourage more flowers. Replenish mulch as needed.

As spring temperatures rise, so will the number of insects, both good and bad. Aiming for a healthy ecosystem is the ideal way to balance the insects and bugs we find in our gardens. Some vegetables will attract aphids, but when the plants give off their chemical messages that they are in trouble — and they do! — beneficial insects like lady beetles and green lace wings will show up. Their larvae especially

are voracious eaters, and those aphids will be gone, or decimated, in no time. But for your vegetables' sake, don't wait: at the first sign of aphids, use a hard spray of water to dislodge them, or simply squish them, which will keep them in check. The predatory insects will then be safe when they arrive to feed on the inevitable survivors.

Recently there have been some lovely birds in our neighborhood, painted buntings among them. I use the Merlin app, which identifies birds from their song. It's been a real pleasure to discover more birds, and I'm beginning to recognize some of the less visible species from their songs. When birds are nesting and raising young, insect larvae are an important food source, so that's another reason to be prudent when balancing insect populations. There are many reasons why some bird numbers are plummeting; unthinkingly depriving them of their food needn't be one of them.

Check out "Landscaping Backyards for Wildlife: Top Ten Tips for Success" (<https://tinyurl.com/mr3wn5cd>). If you like a more relaxed approach to landscaping this may be for you. Native plants in the landscape also supply birds with food like berries, seeds, and the insects which are attracted to those plants. With insects as the foundation, the Xerces Society article found here: <https://tinyurl.com/4xser3pk>, coupled with your own research, perhaps, on the Florida Native Plant Society's website (<https://www.fnps.org/>) can help you develop your own wildlife-friendly haven. Enjoy!

Eagle Scout cont. from pg. 11

Jacob Hall, May 9, 2024: Construction of picnic tables for the football concessions area at Beachside High School.

David Jeffers, June 4, 2024: Installation of a basketball hoop for youth programs at Geneva Presbyterian Church.

Joe Lucier, Sept. 10, 2024: Planning and executing a community blood drive.

Charlie Berg, Oct. 17, 2024: Removing and reinstalling a fire pit used by programs at Geneva Presbyterian Church.

Luca Hall, Jan. 14, 2025: Building and installing a heritage garden at Alpine Groves Park

Troop 225 meets on Mondays at 7 p.m. at Geneva Presbyterian Church, which is the troop's charter organization. The youth leadership of the troop plan and execute meetings and monthly outdoor and camping activities. The troop recently camped at the Daytona Speedway and attended the ROAR. They are looking forward to camping at the Florida Caverns in March and a week-long camp this summer at Bert Adams Scout Camp in Georgia. Older scouts can participate in National Youth Leadership training and attend high adventure camps such as Sea Base located in the Florida Keys.

Contact Scoutmaster Matt Olsen at (407) 497-8252 or [nfctroop225@gmail.com](mailto:nfctroop225@gmail.com) if you are interested in learning more or visiting Troop 225.



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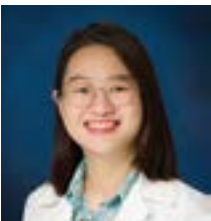


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