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Jimmy Orth



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Puzzles




Photo courtesy MetroCreative

## Watering restrictions: What you need to know

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

The St. Johns River Water Management District’s watering restrictions are designed to ensure the efficient use of water for landscape irrigation. The restrictions allow enough water to maintain healthy landscapes year-round. The mandatory restrictions specify the time when watering may occur, the amount of water that may be applied, and the days when watering may occur for residential and non-residential locations. These days depend on whether the address ends in an odd or even number, and on the time of year.

Watering restrictions cont. on pg. 9

## Teacher and Rookie Teacher of the Year are from NW St. Johns County

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

Creekside High School instructional literacy coach Jill Adams has been named the 2024 – 2025 St. Johns County District Teacher of the Year, while Fruit Cove Middle School ESE teacher James Tansey has been named St. Johns County Rookie Teacher of the Year. They were recognized at the St. Johns County Teacher of the Year Celebration, hosted by the St. Johns County Education Foundation, better known as Investing in Kids (INK!) on Friday, Jan. 31 at the World Golf Village Renaissance Resort.

“We are honored to acknowledge and recognize our dedicated and accomplished teachers for their professional achievements and unwavering commitment to our students,” said Cathy Newman, INK!’s executive director. “Our goal is to highlight the vital role teachers play in the lives of our students and the community.”

As an instructional literacy coach, Adams mentors and coaches teachers, providing professional learning to colleagues and supporting the success of



Jill Adams with former Teachers of the Year and Rookies of the Year and Superintendent Tim Forson.

students and teachers across campus. She is a highly accomplished educator with 26 years of experience. Before joining the St. Johns County School District, she was named the 2018 Seminole County Public Schools High School Teacher of the Year and recognized by the Florida Department of Education as a High Impact Teacher for three consecutive years. As Teacher of the Year, Adams will represent St. Johns County at the State of Florida Teacher of the Year program.

“I teach to ignite a curiosity and love for learning,” said Adams. “There is truly nothing I like better in all the world than students and teachers believing in themselves

and working hard to discover their greatness.”

Tansey is a first-year Exceptional Student Education (ESE) teacher. In addition to his daily teaching duties, Tansey mentors students and volunteers with multiple organizations on campus. He also coaches the Fruit Cove boys’ basketball team and the Toco Creek High School boys’ golf team. Tansey is a Bartram Trail High School graduate who found teaching after a tenure with the Professional Golfers’ Association (PGA) Tour.

“I’m a product of St. Johns County Schools, so I’m deeply honored and moved to receive this distinction,” said Tansey. “It is an honor to wake up every day and have the amazing opportunity to be a light in a young student’s life.”

Finalists for the 2024-2025 St. Johns County Teacher of the Year were Madison Gowin from Switzerland



James Tansey gives his Rookie of the Year acceptance speech.



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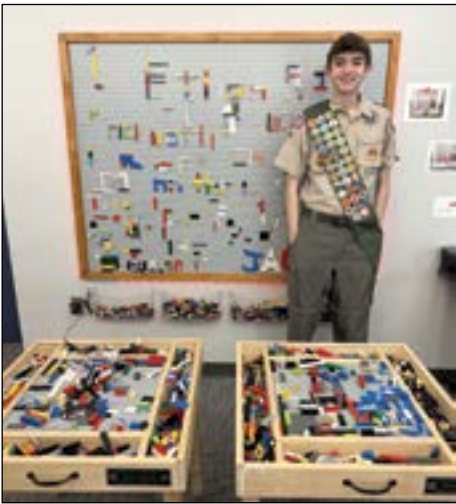
# Local teen builds LEGO wall for library as Eagle Scout project

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

The Bartram Trail Branch Library received a colorful new addition this past weekend thanks to the efforts of a local Scout. Ethan Miller, age 16, completed his Eagle Scout service project on Sunday, March 9, installing a custom-built four foot by five foot LEGO wall and two custom-built LEGO tables for young patrons to enjoy.

The project, which took three months to complete, provides an interactive play space for children visiting the library. Miller received support from Home Depot at Durbin Park, which donated materials for the construction.

“I wanted to create something that would spark creativity and bring joy to kids at the library,” said Miller. “As someone who grew up playing with LEGO, I know how they can inspire imagination and problem-



Ethan Miller and his Eagle Scout project at the Bartram Trail Branch Library.

solving skills. Seeing the excitement on the children’s faces when they first saw the wall made all the hard work worth it.”

“We’re thrilled with Ethan’s contribution to our children’s area,” said a library representative. “The LEGO wall and tables will provide count-

**Eagle Scout** cont. on pg. 10

## Guest Column

### Update on Switzerland Community Center

By Al Abbatiello

The Switzerland Community Center story is alive and well.

The restoration of the Switzerland Community Center, near Alpine Groves Park, has been an ongoing topic in earlier columns in The CreekLine — but we’re now more confident the Switzerland Community Center will finally become a huge asset for our community and St. Johns County.

You may recall the William Bartram Scenic and Historic Highway Management Group had an agreement with St. Johns County to restore the existing building; however, when our County Commissioners realized we might need their help with matching grant money to complete the restoration, they decided the county Parks and Recreation Department should assume control of the restoration.

After several months of architectural study, Parks and Recreation had decided the building could be restored or possibly build a brand-new building on the site; however, another non-profit organization called Operation Lifeline, Inc. stepped-up to offer a different option for the county to consider.

Operation Lifeline’s intent is to restore the concrete block structure (former volunteer fire station) to be used

as a Vocational Training Center for transitioning military service members to provide hands-on training in construction and general contracting as a pathway to civilian careers. The remainder of the structure will also be used as a community center.

Operation Lifeline, Inc., is a 501 C 3 nonprofit organization, led by executive director, Erick Saks — a retired United States Air Force officer, a Florida Certified General Contractor, and a Certified Aging-in-place Specialist.

Saks and his organizations are experienced in procuring federal and state funding for various similar projects and are very well qualified to make this site an asset for our area as a community center while also creating career pathways for others to learn a trade and a career.

St. Johns County and the Fruit Cove/ Switzerland community also benefit by gaining a community center for residents to gather for community events. St. Johns County will retain ownership of the property while leasing it to Operation Lifeline, Inc.

All things considered, this appears to be a big win for all parties — our community, career seekers, and St. Johns County.

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## Sunday Service 10:30 AM

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# April

## 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.

**1st –19th: Friends** of the Library Spring Book Sale will be held at the Bartram Trail Branch Library, 60 Davis Pond Blvd., April 1 – 19 during regular library hours. It will feature giftable quality books, games, puzzles and DVDs. All proceeds fund library programs and equipment.

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

**2nd: Widow to Widow**, support group for widows by widows is held at Council on Aging (COA) River House, 179 Marine Street in St. Augustine on Wednesdays from 11:45 a.m. – 12:45 p.m. Call (904) 209-3655 (Monday – Thursday) or email tharris@coasjc.org for more information.

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

**6th: 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.

**8th: Bartram Trail** Women's Club will host its meeting and luncheon on April 8 beginning at 11 a.m. at St. Johns Golf and Country Club. The luncheon theme is "Dressing for the Derby." 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 April 1. Visit [www.facebook.com/BTNC1](http://www.facebook.com/BTNC1) for more information and a membership form.

**9th: Metaphysics II** will be held on April 9 from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Unity Church for Creative Living, 2777 Race Track Road. Everyone who has taken Metaphysics I is encouraged to join. In this five-week class, attendees will explore powerful Divine ideas, principles and laws that will improve lives and expand consciousness. Cost: \$120. Register at [unityinjax.com](http://unityinjax.com) or call (904) 287-1505.

**12th: Second Saturday** Adult Book Club will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library at 10 a.m. on April 12 to discuss "Tom Lake" by Ann Patchett. Beverages and a light snack will be provided by the Friends of the Library. Call the library at (904) 827-6960 or email akuhn@sjcfl.us for more information.

**12th: The Bartram** Trail Genealogy Club meets the second Saturday of each month (this month, April 12) from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. at the Bartram Trail Branch Library. The topic is "Members presenting interesting sessions from Roots Tech." New and experienced genealogy members are welcomed. Email [ginglish@comcast.net](mailto:ginglish@comcast.net) for more information. Visit [www.facebook.com/groups/BTGenClub-Group](http://www.facebook.com/groups/BTGenClub-Group) to send a request to join the club.

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

**14th: The Northwest St. Johns** County United for Progress Club will celebrate Earth Day, Arbor Day and our environment on April 14. 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.

**15th: Happy Hookers** crochet group will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on April 15 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.

**15th: Newcomers** of North Saint Johns will hold a luncheon on Tuesday, April 15 beginning at 10:30 a.m. at Al Dente's Restaurant Italiano, 90 Shops Blvd., Unit 60. Attendees will enjoy lunch and a special presentation by St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick. The cost for the luncheon is \$35 for members and \$40 for guests. Register by April 7. Visit <https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org> for more information.

**16th: Coin Collecting** for Kids will be held at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on April 16 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.

**16th: Free Tech Help** with David will be held on Wednesday, April 16 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.

**17th: William** Bartram Scenic Highway Group will meet on Thursday, April 17 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.

**21st: The All Star Quilters** Guild will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on Monday, April 21 at First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The program is a trunk show by Mary-Jeanine Ibarguen, editor of the Florida Quilt Network newsletter. "Show and Tell" is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit [www.allstarquilters.org](http://www.allstarquilters.org) for more information.

**25th: "What Financial** Obligations Put You or Your Loved Ones' Nest Egg in Danger?" 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, April 25 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.

**26th: Paws and Pages**, an opportunity for young readers to read to friendly dog Dallas, will be held at the Bartram Trail Branch Library, 60 Davis Pond Blvd., on April 26 from 2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. Contact Paula at [ppradella@sjcfl.us](mailto:ppradella@sjcfl.us) for more information.

# GARAGE SALE

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### Saturday, April 12th

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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 new RiverTown school scheduled to open in the fall?**

A: The school has just been named by the school board: Hallowes Cove Academy, reflecting the very rich history of the area. It was named for a gentleman who lived in the area, Colonel John Hallowes, one of the earliest settlers in the region. I understand that the area was also inhabited at one time by indigenous people as well as emancipated slaves. Pristine Hallowes Cove is right across State Road 13 from the new school.

**Q: What are the next steps?**

A: Principal Jessley Hathaway is already having community meetings, where they will select the mascot and school colors. The school board picks the school's name, but the setting of the culture will be done by Principal Hathaway and his team and the community.

**Q: Can you tell us about the two prestigious awards recently earned by the school district?**

A: First, we received an award from the Florida School Boards Insurance Trust, which gives this award only if warranted, not necessarily annually. It is the "Excellence in Risk Management" and considers safety and the incidence of workman's compensation claims. It is such an honor to receive this award as it shows we worked hard to provide not only for the

safety of our children, but also the safety of our staff as well.

Secondly, we received, for the ninth year in a row, a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting by both the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and the Association of School Business Officials International recognizing our commitment to financial accountability and transparency. Compliments go out to our chief financial officer, Cathy Weber, and her staff.

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

A: Yes. Registration for new kindergarteners or students new to our schools opened up on March 1. Parents should register online at their zoned school's website. It's particularly essential to register early this year due to universal vouchers and a new charter school opening — we need to know how many children are coming to us so that we can plan for adequate staffing.

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

A: I hope everyone had a restful Spring Break and comes back ready for the fourth quarter of the school 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.

## Register your child now for school next year at JCE

By NewsLine Staff  
[mail@floridanewsline.com](mailto:mail@floridanewsline.com)

There are still several weeks left in the 2024 – 25 school year, but Julington Creek Elementary School faculty and staff are already looking forward to welcoming children in the fall.

Registration is now open for new kindergarten through fifth grade students joining us in August. Registration is a very simple process and can be accomplished by visiting the St Johns County School District website enrollment page at [www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/students/enrollment/](http://www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/students/enrollment/) Scroll all the way to the bottom to the red "2025-2026 Registration."

After you have enrolled, visit Julington Creek's website at [www.jce.stjohns.k12.fl.us/](http://www.jce.stjohns.k12.fl.us/) and take a peek at all the amazing activities and learning happening on the school's campus. So

much excitement, and many of your questions will be answered here.

Currently enrolled students will begin receiving Returning Student Verification emails mid-April. These emails will continue through May, and siblings may not receive their emails at the same time. This is also a simple process: just click a few buttons and your student will be enrolled for the new school year which will start on Aug. 11, 2025. Orientation days will be published over the summer.

Call or with any questions you may have: [JCES@stjohns.k12.fl.us](mailto:JCES@stjohns.k12.fl.us) or (904) 547-7982.

*[Editor's Note: All St. Johns County public schools are currently enrolling new students for the 2025 – 26 school year. Visit [www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/students/enrollment/](http://www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/students/enrollment/) for more information.]*

## Annual Plant Sale



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### EASTER SERVICE

Sunday, April 20th • 9:30 am



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Guest Column

Change in 2025 Homestead Exemption

By St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer

St. Johns County homeowners who receive homestead exemption will see a change on their 2025 property record card. In the past, homestead exemption has totaled \$50,000 for those entitled to the full homestead benefit. This year, the homestead exemption value is \$50,722 for those same homeowners. This increase is due to Constitutional Amendment 5, now Florida Statute 196.031(1)(b), that was approved by voters in November.

Homestead exemption reduces the amount of property taxes paid by a Florida homeowner on their primary residence. Homestead exemption has totaled \$50,000 for eligible homeowners with the first \$25,000 applied to all property taxes, including school taxes, and the second \$25,000 applied to the assessed value between \$50,000 and \$75,000, not including school taxes.

With Amendment 5, homestead exemption will still be applied in the same way, but the difference will be with the second \$25,000 amount. Now, \$25,000 will be the base with the total adjusted to account for annual inflation, which is determined by the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The CPI is reported by the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics and measures inflation on consumer goods and services. The CPI will be reviewed yearly, and if the inflation adjustment is positive, then an increase will be made to the second \$25,000. With this new calculation, this year’s homestead exemption increased by \$722 to account for

inflation.

Homeowners may be wondering if homestead exemption can decrease below \$50,000 due to this new legislation, and the answer is no. That is because the amount will only change when the inflation adjustment is positive. Therefore, the minimum total for homestead exemption is \$50,000 for homeowners entitled to the full homestead benefit.

Homestead exemption is important in reducing a homeowner’s property taxes. It not only reduces a property’s taxable value, but it also puts a 3 percent cap on the amount the home’s assessed value can increase annually. Also, homestead exemption is the gateway for other exemptions, meaning homeowners need to qualify for homestead exemption to be eligible for additional exemptions.

Contact St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer with any questions or to 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 Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller Brandon J. Patty

**Q: Your office is expanding services at the Julington Creek Annex location. What new services are available?**

A: We’re thrilled to offer expanded services closer to home for our residents in the northern end of the county. Our deputy clerks are available to assist the community with the following services:

Document Recording Services — Submit deeds, mortgages, and other important records.

Passport Services — Apply for a new passport and have your passport photos taken on-site.

Marriage Licenses — A certified copy of the marriage license will be returned to the couple once it is recorded.

Notary Services — Get official documents notarized with ease.

**Q: Where is the Julington Creek Annex located and what are the hours of operation?**

A: The Julington Creek Annex is located at 725 Flora Branch Blvd. in St. Johns. The office is open Mon-

day — Friday from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. Appointments are required and can be scheduled online by visiting our website at <https://stjohnsclerk.com> or calling (904) 819-3600.

**Q: What is a Clerk Ambassador and how do they assist your team?**

A: Clerk Ambassadors are volunteers who greet visitors at our office, help them find their way, and assist during jury selection. Ambassadors also support our team during special events. This role is a great way to give back to the community and connect with residents. If you have a positive attitude and enjoy helping people, consider applying. Visit <https://stjohnsclerk.com/ambassadors> for details.

**Q: How can people get in touch with you with questions?**

A: For questions about the services we provide at the Clerk’s office, or information about the Julington Creek Annex, 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).

Teacher of the Year cont. from pg. 1

Point Middle School, Jake Lankford from Toco Creek High School, Jessica MacMillan from First Coast Technical College, and Jordan Mattheus from Palm Valley Academy.

The St. Johns County Education Foundation, Inc., which operates

as Investing in Kids (INK!), promotes success for St. Johns County public school students and teachers by providing innovative programs, teacher support, classroom resources, and scholarships to benefit more than 52,000 students and approximately 3,200 teachers. Visit [ink-stjohns.org](http://ink-stjohns.org) for more information.



# ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

## Business Briefs

### Wealth advisory practice earns client excellence award

Upper Deck Wealth Management, LLC, a private wealth advisory practice of Ameriprise Financial, Inc. in Ponte Vedra Beach, has earned the Ameriprise Client Experience Award for 2024. This is the fourth year in a row for Chris Thompson, CFP®, CRPC®, CMFA® and second year for Todd Perkins.

Upper Deck Wealth Management, LLC was honored with this award because of the group's ability to consistently deliver personalized, goal-based advice and exceptional client service. Award recipients earned an overall client satisfaction rating equal to or greater than 4.9 out of 5.0 and maintained stellar business results. The award represents an elite group of Ameriprise advisors recognized as leaders for their commitment to making a difference in the lives of their clients.

As a private wealth advisory practice, Chris Thompson, Todd Perkins, and Sarah Blackley provide financial advice



Photo courtesy Chris Thompson  
Upper Deck Wealth Management, LLC, team.

that is anchored in a solid understanding of client needs and expectations and is delivered in one-on-one relationships with their clients. For more information contact Chris Thompson at (904) 380-2290.

### February showed quicker sales timelines for single family homes

The housing market in Northeast Florida sees a continuing rise in inventory, and homes selling a little bit

faster than last month. In February, the market experienced an upturn in closed sales for the first time this year, which was a welcome change from January. Additionally, the amount of time homes spent on the market fell notably, showing that homes are selling quicker.

The median sales price for single-family homes in Northeast Florida's six-county region increased by 4 percent since February, rising to \$389,989. This caused the Home Affordability Index to dip to a score of 66, a 2.9 percent decrease from January.

In February, closed sales for single-family homes rose by 8.7 percent month-over-month, totaling 1,271 transactions, while pending sales decreased by 16.4 percent, sitting at 1,231. New listings fell slightly by 1 percent from January to February, recording 3,304 homes.

Since January, the active inventory of single-family homes increased by 10.7 percent to 7,954 properties; however, this is a drastic increase from the previ-

ous year, as the number of properties has grown exponentially by 69.9 percent since February 2024. This rise in inventory from 2024 is a positive change for buyers, as they have many options to choose from. The median number of days on the market decreased to 41 days, a 19.6 percent decrease from January, indicating homes selling more quickly than they did last month.

In St. Johns County, the February 2025 median price for single-family homes increased by 4.6 percent from January to \$549,000. Median days on the market dropped 31.7 percent from January to 41. Closed sales increased by 7.8 percent to 303, with pending sales now at 301. New listings rose by 4.2 percent to 835, while active inventory increased by 15.4 percent to 2,081 homes, representing a 6.9-month supply. The Home Affordability Index fell slightly to 47, indicating that St. Johns County remains the most expensive county in the region.

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Certified Military Financial Advisor  
Chartered Retirement Planning Counselor  
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### Q&A with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

**Q: Illegal immigration is a hot topic; how does this affect SJSO?**

A: The St. Johns County Sheriff's Office has been enrolled in the federal 287(g) program for many years, which allows SJSO deputies to conduct immigration enforcement in partnership with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). We have a full-time task force

that has been working on Interstate 95 to combat narcotics and human trafficking; this group will also assist with immigration enforcement.

**Q: What can you tell us about your working relationship with the federal government?**

A: We have a duty to partner with

federal officials and the new administration has been crystal clear that illegal immigration is a priority. We have had a strong relationship with our federal partners for many years working not just immigration, but human trafficking, sex trafficking, narcotics, and other illegal activity.

**Q: How do you prioritize immigration enforcement?**

A: The priority is finding illegal aliens who are wanted for crimes. We meet frequently with federal, state, and local partners to discuss the worst of the

worst, criminal aliens wanted in Florida or in the immediate area. If you are wanted — whether you're an illegal alien or you're a citizen of the United States — we are going to find you and hold you accountable for your actions.

**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](https://www.sjso.org) has a wealth of resources, from alarm registration to Crime Stoppers to our Neighbors app.



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Briefs

St. Johns Riverkeeper has been defending Florida's longest river for 25 years

For 25 years, St. Johns Riverkeeper has served as a trusted voice and ardent advocate for the protection and restoration of the St. Johns River and its watershed.

“Our founders believed that we all have a right to clean water and a healthy river,” said Lisa Rinaman, the St. Johns Riverkeeper. “For the last 25 years, we have worked diligently each and every day to defend the river, hold polluters accountable, raise awareness, educate youth, and engage citizens to take a stand for the St. Johns.”

Throughout the 1990s, newspaper headlines like “Study shows river loaded with toxins,” “Report says quality of St. Johns worsening,” and “Effluent is pushing St. Johns into decline” were common. State agencies and environmental regulations were not keeping up with the pollution and impacts from the rapid growth and development occurring throughout our St. Johns River’s Watershed.

Frustrated by the declining health of the river, several concerned citizens recognized the need for an independent watchdog group to advocate for the St. Johns and hold regulatory agencies and polluters accountable. In October 1998, they organized a meeting of various citizen stakeholders to explore the possibility of starting a Riverkeeper program for the St. Johns. A steering committee was created, and the diverse group that ranged from environmentalists to anglers rallied around one common goal — protecting the St. Johns River. Due to their hard work and determination, St. Johns Riverkeeper received its license from the Waterkeeper Alliance, setting the stage for 25 years of advocacy for our St. Johns River.

St. Johns Riverkeeper is celebrating its 25th anniversary throughout 2025. The group is hosting a variety of events to

help the public explore the watershed and learn about the river — including a 25th Anniversary luncheon on the banks of the river in Jacksonville, the watershed-wide Great St. Johns River Cleanup, and 25 Taps for the St. Johns, a celebration of local breweries. Visit <https://stjohnsriverkeeper.org/25-years/> for more information.

Bartram Trail Women’s Club “Dresses for the Derby”

The Bartram Trail Women’s Club will hold its meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, April 8 at 11 a.m. at St. Johns Golf and Country Club, 205 St. Johns Golf Drive. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. The March luncheon theme is Dressing for the Derby and attendees are encouraged to wear Derby attire.

The luncheon will feature a version of a Kentucky Derby race, together with several Derby games. It will be an exciting celebration as attendees saddle up horses for a race that may come down to the wire, possibly winning by a nose. Contact Cindy at (904) 993-3133 if you want to be one of the six jockeys.

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 April 1; be sure to 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. In addition to the monthly meetings, the club has a wide variety of interest groups, including Bridge, Continental Rummy, Pennies Canasta, Mexican Chicken Train dominoes, Bunko, Mah Jong, golf, recipe exchange, monthly special events, book club, lunch and matinee, Lunch Divas, Ladies Night Out, a nature walk group and community projects. Email to Adrienne Townsel-Wilson at [bartramtnc@](mailto:bartramtnc@)

Briefs cont. on pg. 11



## SAVE THE DATE!

**Sunday, April 27<sup>th</sup> • 11a.m. - 4 p.m.**  
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# Life

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## Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson  
editor@floridanewsline.com

### Jimmy Orth

Jimmy Orth is the executive director of the St. Johns Riverkeeper; this year, the organization is celebrating its 25th anniversary as an advocate for and educator about the St. Johns River. Jimmy is a native of Jacksonville and grew up in the Mandarin area. He has a marketing degree from Florida State University and a master's degree in Public Administration from the University of North Florida. He started working with the Riverkeeper 21 years ago, right after he finished his master's degree at UNF. "The St. Johns Riverkeeper was looking to hire its first executive director at the time," he said. "I took a chance on them and they took a chance on me ... and 21 years later, here I am." Orth is married to Genora Crain-Orth and has a 17-year-old son. The family has two dogs and "an unknown number" of cats (including two inside cats and outside cats).

#### Q: Have you always been interested in the St. Johns River?

A: Growing up near the river, we were always exploring the area and riding our bikes. I had friends who lived on the river and we would jump off their docks into the river or fish along the shoreline. As I grew up, I had buddies who had boats, so we would go skiing. In my early years, the river was imprinted on me, but I didn't consider myself an environmentalist until I attended an Earth Day celebration in Tallahassee and eventually became involved in the Sierra Club. That's what led me to go back to school to get my

#### Get to Know ...

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



Photo courtesy Jimmy Orth  
Jimmy Orth

master's in Public Administration ... I hoped for a job with an environmental non-profit.

#### Q: What does the St. Johns Riverkeeper do?

A: Primarily, we advocate for the river and try to find policy solutions to protect the river. We educate adults and children about the river and plant seeds for the next generation of advocates. If we introduce people to the river, and they experience it, then they will care about it. We also investigate problems in the river, such as recently in areas south of Mandarin where we have seen a lot of grasses disappear after Hurricane Irma. Normally these grasses grow back after a time and we're trying to figure out why they haven't.

#### Q: What do you like the most about your job?

A: Probably the people I've met along the way. There are so many who care about and have a deep connection to the river, such as fishers and boaters. I like seeing people get involved as volunteers and donors and I like the education work we do with kids. I'm also proud of the fact that we're still here and moving forward. We haven't given up. This is a challenging job and there are many obstacles to protecting the river. We don't win all the battles, but we keep going.

We can all agree that we need to protect the river, regardless of political persuasion. We all want a clean and healthy river; how do we work together to get that? I think we've done a pretty good job on this over the years.

#### Q: What volunteer opportunities are available with the St. Johns Riverkeeper?

A: We have administrative opportunities as well as we always need people to man a Riverkeeper booth at various events, which gives the opportunity to educate people about the river. We need a strong constituency for the river, so one thing people can do is respond to our Calls to Action and write letters on various subjects to their elected officials. Also, river cleanups are always popular. They're a good way for groups to get together and see the tangible results of their efforts.

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

A: I like doing projects around the house and also paddling and hiking outdoors. I walk every day and listen to a lot of podcasts.

[Editor's Note: Visit <https://stjohnsriverkeeper.org/> for more information or follow them on Instagram or Facebook.]

#### Watering restrictions cont. from pg. 1

As of the start of Daylight Saving Time in March, homes with odd numbered addresses or no addresses may water on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Homes with even numbered addresses may water on Thursdays and Sundays. Nonresidential properties may water on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Water only when needed and not between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Watering in early morning and early evening hours, when temperature and wind speed are lowest, reduces losses from evaporation and wind that can occur during the middle of the day. This also allows the water to seep into the ground to the grass and plant roots, promoting healthier plants with deep root systems.

Water for no more than one hour per zone. Apply moderate amounts of water to create a healthy, drought- and stress-tolerant lawn. For most Florida soils, applying no more than three-quarters of an inch of water per application is enough to revitalize the grass. Saturate the root zone, then let soil dry to encourage healthy, deep root growth. Overwatering promotes weed growth, disease and fungus.

These restrictions apply to private wells and pumps, ground or surface water, and water from public and private utilities.

Visit [www.sjrwmd.com](http://www.sjrwmd.com) for more information.

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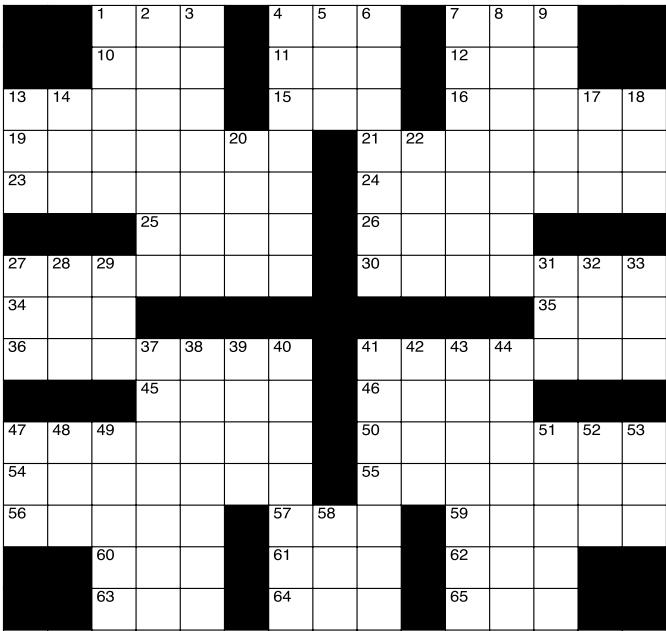


Puzzles

Answers on page 3  
Provided by MetroCreative



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CLUES ACROSS

1. English TV station  
4. It fuels cars  
7. Where ships dock (abbr.)  
10. Indigenous people of Thailand  
11. Midway between northeast and east  
12. Small Milky Way constellation  
13. Fritz \_\_, Austrian chemist  
15. A Brit’s grandmother  
16. Colombian city  
19. Visualize  
21. Charged  
23. People’s assets  
24. Informative books  
25. Jeer  
26. You can do it with your horn  
27. Agents of your downfall  
30. Central Uganda city  
34. Supervises flying
35. Type of tree  
36. Alfalfa  
41. Dishwasher soap brand  
45. Hall where military eats  
46. Ancient Greek City  
47. Speaks incessantly  
50. Discuss again  
54. Extreme greed  
55. Adopt or support  
56. Fantasy writer Russell  
57. Seize  
59. Early Mesoamerican civilizati  
60. Noted pet detective Ventura  
61. Automobile  
62. Georgia rockers  
63. Color opposite green  
64. Amount of time  
65. Attempt

CLUES DOWN

1. Sheep sound  
2. Some can be emotional  
3. Inflammation of colon lining  
4. Origins  
5. Comedienne Gasteyer  
6. Perceived by the senses  
7. A place to play ball  
8. Occur before  
9. Animal body parts  
13. Thanksgiving dessert  
14. Root mean square (abbr.)  
17. 1960s teen idol Bobby  
18. Promotional materials  
20. One point east of northeast  
22. Piers Anthony protagonist  
27. Popular sports league  
28. Cologne  
29. Partner to cheese
31. Constrictor snake  
32. Not good  
33. Supplement with difficulty  
37. Hug with fondness  
38. Enforced again  
39. Small amount of time (abbr.)  
40. Substance  
41. Anterior parts of the brain  
42. Brews  
43. Where ships load cargo  
44. Holiday season singer  
47. “\_\_ humbug!”  
48. Monetary unit of Macao  
49. Popular children's book elephant  
51. Glutinous  
52. Function  
53. Old world, new  
58. Swiss river

SPRING HAS SPRUNG WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

- APRIL  
AWAKENING  
BLOOMS  
BREEZE  
BUDDING  
BUNNY  
CHIRPING  
EGGS  
FLOWERS  
GARDEN  
GREEN  
GROWS  
INSECTS  
NEST  
POLLEN  
REBIRTH  
SAPLING  
SHOWERS  
SPRING  
SUNNY  
SUNSHINE  
TREES



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

- A. 2 7 22 19 21 10 4  
Clue: Blooms
- B. 6 15 11 4  
Clue: Beginnings of flowers
- C. 19 23 10 12 16 5  
Clue: Temperate climate
- D. 10 23 9 26 14  
Clue: Lots of wet precipitation

Eagle Scout cont. from pg. 2

less hours of imaginative play for our youngest patrons.”

The Eagle Scout rank is the highest achievement in the Scouting program, requiring candidates to plan and execute a service project that benefits the community. Miller’s project involved designing the structures, gathering materials, coordinating volunteers, and installing the

finished pieces.

Miller anticipates receiving his Eagle Scout award on May 10, marking the culmination of his Scouting journey and his commitment to community service.

The Bartram Trail Library invites community members to visit and enjoy the new LEGO wall and tables during regular library hours.

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Briefs cont. from pg. 8

gmail.com for club information. Visit [www.facebook.com/BTNC1](http://www.facebook.com/BTNC1) to see photos and download a membership form.

Showcase quilts needed

Quiltfest Inc. of Jacksonville has opened the submission window for quilts to be showcased at the Prime Osborn Center from Sept. 18 – 21, 2025.

This judged event is open to all quilters and will feature up to 450 quilts.

Visit <https://quiltfestjax.com/enter-your-quilt/> for a complete list of categories and rules.

Newcomers of North St. Johns to host Sheriff Rob Hardwick

Newcomers of North Saint Johns will hold its April luncheon on Tuesday, April 15 beginning at 11 a.m. at Al Dente's Restaurant Italiano, 90 Shops Blvd., Unit 60. The event features lunch and a presentation by St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick. As part of the luncheon meeting, the group is also collecting children's books to benefit the St. Johns County Public Library System.

"New and gently used children's books are welcomed for the donation," said Co-President Priscilla Cobbs. "We have been very successful with past book drives and are looking forward to making an impactful donation. We can also accept cash donations and checks made payable to the Friends of the St. Johns County Library."

Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. and the cost for the luncheon and program is \$35 for members and \$40 for guests

and non-members. All reservations must be received by April 7. Visit <https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org> for more information about the luncheon and membership.

Retired psychologist unlocks secrets of haunting characters

Psychologist turned bestselling mystery writer Jack Lawrence has a fresh perspective on creating compelling, psychologically rich characters that engage readers and keep them hooked. He's going to share that key with members and guests of Northeast Florida Sisters in Crime writers on Saturday, April 12 at 11:15 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library.

Lawrence will talk about creating core fears and desires of your characters — using real psychological principles — to elevate your story. Learn how to create unforgettable protagonists and villains whose motivations feel deeply human, making every twist and turn resonate with readers on a deep emotional level. From detectives to masterminds and their victims, discover how psychology can transform your character development process from flat to unforgettable.

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. Bring your coffee and bring a friend. The group welcomes men and women to learn more about writing, promoting, and enjoying crime fiction. Contact [floridasistersincrime@gmail.com](mailto:floridasistersincrime@gmail.com) for more information.

### Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis  
[mail@floridanewslines.com](mailto:mail@floridanewslines.com)

Happy April everybody! We've got a lot to look forward to this month as our seasonal saltwater species really start to pile into our area. If you're not done with your freshwater exploits this is probably the last month you want to brave confined areas like our local creeks especially on the weekends. Some specks might still be spawning, but most will be transitioning back out to the river or deep water havens in the creeks. Bass will mostly be done as well and making similar travel plans, except replace deep water with shallow heavy cover areas. They'll all be hungry though, so that's a plus. The creeks will still be absolutely gorgeous with a flush of green on all the trees so if we get a nice cool day, I'd take advantage of it.

I'm really excited to talk about saltwater fish this month. April is usually the height of the spring transition when waters warm to 70 degrees and it will likely be the last time we'll see that temperature until the fall. The surf will be teaming with pompano and whiting as they make their migrations north and the river will be filling up with everything from tarpon to croakers.

Some of the first signs of this will be the bait schools moving into the river. On calm days anchovies and small menhaden can be seen feeding at the surface. Both are filter feeders so they will skim algae and plankton. Underneath them will be the plethora of saltwater species we've been waiting for, such as redfish, trout, ladyfish, etc.

Shrimp will also be filling the river this month, but we'll have to wait until June 1 to throw a net for them. We can use store bought fresh dead or if you have any frozen from last year that will work too. Artificial shrimp like Gulp or DOA will also be productive. I mentioned this last month, but try to match the size of your lures to the size of the bait around. The shrimp, anchovies, and menhaden will be on the smaller side so try to match those. It really matters sometimes.

Sheepshead fishing should be great. I like to anchor up current from a structure, whether it's a bridge or dock, and put small pieces of shrimp or clams on the bottom very close to those structures. Minimize everything — hooks, weights, and leaders. Tight lines.

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# Summer Camp Activities Guide\*



## Summer camp options abound

By Newsline Staff  
mail@floridanewsline.com

Summer camp season will be here before parents know it. While children anxiously await the last day of school, adults know that it can be challenging to keep kids occupied and mentally stimulated when they aren't in the classroom. Although it may be alright to enjoy a few days lounging around and playing video games, too much sedentary behavior is not good for anyone, even children. Families turn to summer camp to provide children with activities to occupy their time when school is not in session.

Camps catering to a variety of interests are open to youngsters, so there's likely one out there to excite every child. Each year, more than 25 million children and adults take part in the camp experience, says the American Camp Association. Summer camp gives kids a chance to spread their wings and enjoy new adventures. When seeking camps, families can consider interests, proximity, cost, and other variables. Here are some of the different types of camps families can

consider.

**Day camp:** Day camps are a popular choice. Day camps tend to be general recreation camps that offer an array of activities. Campers are dropped off (or bussed) in the morning, and arrive home early evening. These camps are readily accessible and run by various organizations. Some camps enable you to pay by the week, rather than committing to an entire season.

**Sleep-away camp:** Like the name implies, sleep-away camp hosts campers overnight, typically for several weeks. This may be children's first extended time away from home, and there's bound to be a few nerves that spring up. Round-the-clock activities and chances to bond with their peers can help kids overcome fears of being away from home.

**Academic camp:** Academic camps focus their attention on various subjects, putting like-minded children together. Academic summer programs ensure children's brains stay active, helping students avoid that dreaded "summer



Photo courtesy MetroCreative

Summer camp options abound. It's only a matter of identifying a path for children and then seeking a camp that offers the desired program.

slide." Some of these camps mimic a school day so they are familiar to kids. Academic focus may vary from general

academia to specific subjects like STEM to astronomy to the arts.

**Scout camp:** Boys and girls participating in scouting programs often have the option to attend summer camp. During camp, kids will have an opportunity to earn badges and advance their rank. Many scout districts have relationships with a specific scout campsite where troops from all over live and advance together for a week or so during the summer.

**Fitness and sports camps:** Fitness-minded campers or those who play particular sports can investigate camps that focus on fitness and sports performance. These may be more rigorous than other types of camps since they involve lots of physical activity. Wilderness preparation camp is another type of camp that may fit into this category. It will highlight survival training and help mold active hikers and campers.




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# Summer Camp Activities Guide\*



## Benefits of attending summer camp



Photo courtesy MetroCreative

Summer camp benefits children in myriad ways

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

Summer camp is something akin to a rite of passage for millions of youngsters each year. Many adults look back fondly on their experiences at summer camp, often crediting such times as formative periods in their lives.

Summer camp benefits children in myriad ways. Recognition of the many advantages of attending summer camp can serve as a great reminder of just how fun it can be for children to spend their time away from school at a camp of their choosing.

Benefits cont. on pg. 14

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# Summer Camp Activities Guide\*



## Strategies to encourage kids to read more

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewsline.com

Many adults feel there’s no better way to relax than curling up with a good book. Though a relaxing afternoon of reading may appeal to adults, kids could prove a little more reluctant to crack a book.

Children have much to gain from reading and being read to. According to the Children’s Bureau of Southern California, a nonprofit organization devoted to strengthening vulnerable children, their families and the communities where they live, reading aloud to children supports their cognitive development; improves their language skills; prepares them for academic success; increases their discipline and ability to concentrate; and improves their imagination and creativity. Many of those same benefits apply to kids who read on their own, which may be more appealing as kids advance through elementary school

and aspire to become more independent.

Since children have so much to gain from cuddling up with a good book, parents can try these strategies to encourage kids to read more.

- Allow kids to read the same book. Parents of young readers or children learning to read undoubtedly know how much children like to read the same book over and over again. Though that might not engage moms and dads, experts note that allowing kids to read the same books again and again is an effective way to foster a love of reading in children. Researchers have linked reading the same books again and again to greater vocabulary acquisition and improved reading comprehension, among other benefits. Kids are more likely to enjoy reading if they recognize more words and can better understand the stories, so parents can encourage kids to read the

same books again and again.

- Take a book along when running errands or traveling. The Children’s Book Review notes that books can be just as handy in cars as tablets and other devices kids use to watch movies while on the go. Though some children may get car sick when reading while a car is in motion, those who don’t have plenty of time to read while in the backseat. On long road trips, promise a movie after kids have read for an hour. When running errands with the kids in tow, encourage them to read by keeping a couple of books or magazines in the backseat at all times.
- Practice positive reinforcement with emerging readers. Another way to encourage young readers to pick up a book more often is to praise their efforts even if they struggle with words. Patience can go a long way toward instilling a love of reading in children. If kids are struggling with a word or

words, read the sentence aloud with them. Reading also has a tendency to pique readers’ curiosity, so parents can encourage kids to ask questions about the books they read and help them find answers to those questions if necessary.

- Enroll kids in library reading programs. Summer reading programs sponsored by local libraries have been found to be conducive to promoting reading in young children. In its report titled “The Role of Public Libraries in Children’s Literacy Development,” the Pennsylvania Library Association indicated that preschool and summer reading programs encourage children to spend significant amounts of time with books and also encourage parents to play a greater role in their children’s literacy development. Participation in such programs is typically free of charge, so there’s no reason why families cannot take advantage of these highly effective programs.

**Benefits** cont. from pg. 13

- Campers continue to socialize throughout summer. Socializing isn’t just for the school year. While children in high school might be independent enough to come and go with their friends during summer break, kids who are still in elementary school or middle school might not be old enough to handle such freedom. That can make it hard to stay in touch with friends, which in turn can contribute to feelings of boredom and loneliness. Camp provides

ample opportunities for young children to socialize during a time of year when they might not see their school friends as often as they’re used to.

- Campers can expand their horizons. Though some summer camps are exclusive to residents of certain communities, many tend to feature children from numerous towns or municipalities. Such camps provide an opportunity for campers to expand their horizons by engaging with youngsters who come from different backgrounds. Indeed, the Graduate

School of Education at Harvard University notes that summer camp may be the first time children spend substantial amounts of time with people whose backgrounds differ from their own.

- Camp can get kids off their devices. Modern children are growing up in a digital world, and parents know how hard it can be to get kids to put down their devices and get outdoors. But the key to making that pivot could be access to outdoor play spaces. A 2025 study from researchers at the University of Michigan published in the journal “Health and Place” found that efforts to reduce kids’ screen time are more successful when children are given a chance to play outside. Many summer camps are structured around outdoor play, making them a potentially invaluable ally as parents seek to help children cut back on the time they spend using their

devices. Children who do not attend camp and live in households where both parents work or in single-parent households where Mom or Dad works may be forced to spend much of summer indoors, which could increase the frequency with which they turn to devices to occupy their time.

- Camp adds structure to summer days. Once a school year ends, the structure a school day provides vanishes into thin air. Couple that with extracurricular activities that go on hiatus during summer vacation, and kids accustomed to structure are left with little to do and no need to schedule their time. That can add an aimlessness to summer days. Camp can provide the structure kids are accustomed to but still offer a break from responsibilities like homework or the commitments required of extracurricular activities.

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# Gardening

## Assessing “Ecosystem Services”: A way of looking at our landscapes

By Master Gardener Volunteer Lesley Arrandale  
mail@floridanewslines.com

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

I came across the term “ecosystem services” in several training sessions last year, and it seemed a bit pretentious. The lectures were, after all, by leaders in their fields at The University of Florida so it’s not a term in everyday use. But it just prompts us to consider what we want from our yards and gardens, while considering the needs of the creatures that share our spaces.

When it comes to the pretty neighbors — the birds and butterflies — that many gardeners hope to attract, it seems easy enough. Give them food, water, and shelter, and they will come. But I’ve learned that it’s not that straightforward. For example, while birds are nesting and rearing their young, they need high protein insects to fatten their brood, so a feeder offering seed isn’t enough.

Now we might begin to consider the ecosystem services of our plants. Are they attractive to our local insects, buzzing with bees and other pollinators? Some flowering plants might not have the necessary characteristics to support our insect life. While I love the perfume of the tea olive near my drive, I haven’t seen insects homing in on its tiny flowers. Maybe they lack nectar and pollen that is easily accessible? Maybe the flowers simply don’t produce enough? Maybe there is something in its genes that makes it clear that it’s an exotic introduction, not a native plant? It certainly doesn’t attract any egg-laying insects; there are never any caterpillars browsing its leaves. No bird food here.

Modern cultivars of some of our classic flowers are hybridized and bred for characteristics like vigor, larger flowers, and a longer blooming season. But sometimes that’s at the expense of what a flower is supposed to do — and that’s produce seed after being fertilized by sometimes specialized insects. With those changes, insects may no longer be able to access the food, if it’s even still available.

And of course, we sometimes resort to dousing a plant in insecticides if it has a severe infestation of “pests,” which we could otherwise consider “bird food,” especially if those pests are caterpillars.



Photo courtesy Lesley Arrandale  
Crossvine (Bignonia capreolata)

Maybe that plant’s ecosystem service is simply to attract food for the birds?

So ecosystem services, while sounding like jargon, is a term that encourages us to evaluate what role our plants play in our environment. My old-timey tea olive (*Osmanthus fragrans*) isn’t very useful, except to give me pleasure with its sublime perfume. It isn’t even dense enough for nesting birds, although they use it to perch in their journeys around my yard. But the native crossvine (*Bignonia capreolata*) winding its way through a rangy old beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) provides food for bumblebees who happily nose their way into the trumpet-shaped flowers. And the tangled vines provide a perfect place for northern cardinals to nest.

We can also evaluate ecosystem services when it comes to our pleasure. Like my tea olive, maybe some of your choices will benefit only you. After all, a yard that doesn’t give you pleasure won’t be satisfying to live or work in. But a yard that is devoid of other creatures doesn’t work for me. Even if a yard is picture perfect, without the unexpected encounter — that black racer slipping out of sight under the shrimp plant, the now rare sight of lovebugs mating on our Simpson’s stopper (*Myrcianthes fragrans*) — where is the mystery? Where is the fun?

There will be attractive plants to tempt me, but if they hold no value for our wildlife I shall think twice before choosing them over native plants.

# Singing JCE students perform at hockey game



Photo courtesy Joy Reichenberg

The Julington Creek Elementary Music Club was recently given the opportunity to perform the National Anthem at a Jacksonville Icemen Hockey game.

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Travel

Iceland in Winter

By Debi Lander  
mail@floridanewslines.com

Floridians enjoy some of the mildest winters in the U.S., but I grew up in Virginia, recalling snow-filled childhood memories. Craving a winter wonderland, I set off for Iceland, hoping to see snowfall and the Northern Lights.

Surprisingly, flights from New York or Boston to Iceland take only five hours — closer than many imagine. Yet, everything in Iceland feels foreign — in the best way. The language is complex and nearly impossible to pronounce, the currency can be perplexing, but almost everyone speaks English. The highland is the dramatic range of landscapes — otherworldly in any season.

As my plane landed, I glimpsed a layer of white blanketing everything, a vision

of Game of Thrones’ icy Wall. Unable to check into my hotel so early, I headed straight to the Blue Lagoon.

Iceland’s most famous attraction was actually formed by accident. In 1976, wastewater from the Svartsengi geothermal power plant created a mineral-rich pool. Initially deemed unsafe for bathing, it soon became a local secret as workers discovered its soothing effects. By 1981, researchers confirmed the water’s healing properties, and in 1992, the Blue Lagoon officially opened as a spa retreat.

After showering, I descended steps into an indoor extension of the pool before slipping through a curtain into the open air. The cold morning wind jabbed me, but the water felt silky and warm. Steam rose against the black lava fields, creating an ethereal atmosphere. I smoothed the silica mud — provided on-site — over my face letting it dry as I meandered around. I explored a small cave, the steam room, and a sauna. Fully relaxed, I finally made my way to Reykjavik.

Reykjavik is a blend of

Nordic charm and modern energy best enjoyed on foot. I passed colorful buildings adorned with street art, visited Hallgrímskirkja, the striking church with panoramic city views, and admired Harpa Concert Hall’s shimmering glass facade. Along the waterfront, I paused at the Sun Voyager, a sleek steel rib-like sculpture reminiscent of a Viking ship.

The next morning, I set off on a small-group tour of the Golden Circle, arriving at Thingvellir National Park just as the sun crept over the horizon (winter daylight comes late). Fresh snowfall blanketed the landscape, turning it into a magical scene. A tiny church stood near the winding Öxará River, looking like something from a fairytale.

At Gullfoss, a thundering two-tiered waterfall, snowflakes swirled around me as mist rose from the canyon below. The Hvítá River plunges 105 feet into a rugged abyss. I took in the view from multiple vantage points — each more picturesque than the last, and wished I could have lingered longer.

Next was Haukadalur, a geothermal field alive with bubbling mud pots and steaming vents. I watched Strokkur Geyser erupt, a sudden burst of scalding water rocketing skyward before vanishing just as quickly. Unlike Yellowstone’s Old Faithful, Strokkur’s displays are brief but frequent.



Photos courtesy Debi Lander  
Blue Lagoon in the early morning.


Another long day took me along Iceland’s stunning south coast to Jökulsárlón Glacier Lagoon and nearby Diamond Beach. Icebergs, freshly calved from the glacier, floated across the lagoon before washing ashore, glistening like diamonds against the black sand. The surreal contrast of ice and volcanic shore is mesmerizing — I could hardly tear myself away.

No winter trip to Iceland would be complete without chasing the Northern Lights. Bundled up and full of anticipation, I ventured beyond Reykjavik to escape light pollution. But luck was not on my side; only the faintest shimmer of green and purple flickered across the cloudy sky. Still, the magic of Iceland in winter left me spellbound as I returned to sunny, warm Florida.

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