

Photo courtesy St. Johns County Environmental Division

Protect hatchlings: Sea turtle nesting season begins May 1

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Sea turtle nesting season officially begins May 1, and the Ponte Vedra Sea Turtle Patrol is calling on all beachgoers to be good neighbors to these ancient marine reptiles by following a few simple, turtle-friendly tips.

“Florida’s Atlantic Coast is a vital nesting ground for over 75

Sea turtle season cont. on pg. 9

TPC Storytellers love showing off course and clubhouse

By Maggie FitzRoy
mail@floridanewsline.com

When visitors from Missouri and Massachusetts visited Ponte Vedra Beach one recent day, volunteer storyteller Tobey Jones gave them a free tour of the TPC Clubhouse, followed by a golf cart ride out to holes 16, 17, and 18 of the Stadium Course.

Excited to see iconic portions of a course they’d only seen on T.V. during coverage of THE PLAYERS Championship, they peppered Jones with questions, posed for pictures, and by the end of the hour-long tour had obtained a fun education about the history of the course, the clubhouse, and the championship.

“It’s a privilege for us to be able to show it all off,” says Jones. “Interesting people come here from all over the world, and they want to see holes 16, 17, and 18. I’ve been doing this for 12 years. I love it because of the people I meet.”

Storyteller Captain Fred DiBiase says there are currently 46 active Storytellers and on average each works three four-hour-long shifts a month. Tours are open to anyone, beginning at the top of every hour from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., seven days a week year-round.



Photos courtesy Maggie FitzRoy
TPC volunteer storyteller Tobey Jones gives recent visitors a tour of the clubhouse.

The Storytellers were created in 2007, after dedication of the 77,000-square-foot Mediterranean-style clubhouse that replaced the course’s original much smaller and modest one, DiBiase says. “Billy Dettlaff, with the PGA TOUR, came up with the idea. He wanted to add to the

magic of the Stadium Course by giving tours of the magnificent clubhouse.”

The history that the storytellers bring to life is displayed in photographs along the walls of the clubhouse’s first floor hallways.

Jones started his tour for Massachusetts visitors Michael and Carmen Zappala, and Missouri visitors Mary and Craig Sengel, in front of a 1980 photo of golf course architect Pete Dye and then-PGA TOUR Commissioner Deane Beman exploring the area where the Stadium Course was to be. Jones then pointed to photos depicting the 415 acres that the local Fletcher family sold to The TOUR in February 1979 for one dollar, with the understanding that The PGA TOUR would be headquartered in Ponte Vedra Beach.

“That one dollar check was never cashed because it’s hanging on the wall,” he said, pointing to the framed artifact.



TPC volunteer storyteller Tobey Jones gives recent visitors a golf cart tour of the Stadium Course.

TPC Storytellers cont. on pg. 2



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TPC Storytellers cont. from pg. 1

Other photos on the tour included pictures of the 17th hole under construction. Jones explained that Pete Dye’s wife, Alice — also a golf course architect — came up with the idea for the famed island hole, pointing out pictures of Alice, Pete, and their German Shepherd, Sixty.

Some photographs, and a large painting based on one of them, illustrate the excitement of the first Players Championship held on the Stadium Course in 1982. Jerry Pate won, and by prior arrangement with some of the other players, pushed Pete Dye and Deane Beman into the lake at the 18th hole during the award ceremony.

“The course was very challenging, and a lot of the big-name pros didn’t make the cut on Friday,” DiBiase says. “They complained and made a pact to make the architect pay for it.”

All in good fun, obviously, because a laughing Jerry Pate ended up in the water, too.

All the storytellers have different stories, DiBiase says, but all also follow the history laid out in a manual created by Dettlaff.

There is a waiting list for people interested in becoming storytellers. Volunteers are interviewed, go through training, then shadow experienced storytellers until they are ready to go out on their own. Storytellers often receive tips, which go to local charities.

“The Storyteller Annual Awards Committee selects four to five charities a year, which are presented annually in early December,” DiBiase says. “Last year we gave a record \$38,000.”

Risky human behavior, not aggressive gators, behind most alligator bites

By Lourdes Mederos, UF/IFAS
mail@floridanewslines.com

Risky human behavior, not aggression by alligators, is the leading cause of alligator bites, according to a groundbreaking study by scientists at the University of Florida and Centre College in Kentucky. Published in the journal “Human – Wildlife Interactions,” the research is the first to develop a ranking system that categorizes human actions immediately before an alligator encounter. Researchers found that in 96 percent of recorded incidents, some form of human inattention or risk-taking preceded the attack. The findings show how alligator bites are not random; they’re preventable.

The insights come at a time of year when alligator activity is ramping up. Mating season, which runs from April through June in Florida and the Southeast, brings more frequent movement and territorial behavior among alligators, making human awareness and safe practices even more essential.

“I wondered if crocodilians had an unwarranted reputation for attacks the same way snakes do,” said Mark Teshera, lead author of the study and a biology professor at Center College. “It was important to create a ranking system for risky human behaviors because it showed that the overwhelming majority of bites stemmed

from some level of humans engaging in risky behavior in places where alligators live. Therefore, we should not call these encounters ‘attacks.’”

To reach their conclusions, the team analyzed nearly three centuries of records from 1734 to 2021 on human-alligator interactions using the CrocBITE database, now called CrocAttack.org. The team then augmented that information with internet searches, literature review and communications with wildlife agencies. Each case was classified by the level of human behavior risk: no risk, low, moderate or high.

Most bites occurred following moderate-risk behaviors, such as swimming or wading in areas known to be inhabited by alligators. The highest proportion of fatal bites occurred after high-risk behaviors, such as deliberately entering alligator-inhabited waters. In contrast, low and no-risk behaviors, like walking near water or simply being present on land, rarely resulted in attacks.

“The takeaway lesson from this study is that many bites can be prevented if humans are aware of their surroundings and minimize risky behaviors such as walking small pets near bodies of water or swimming where alligators are known to be present,” said Frank Mazzotti, professor of wildlife ecology at UF/IFAS Fort Lauderdale

Research and Education Center (FL-REC) and an author on the study.

The most surprising finding was how high the percentage was for humans engaging in risky behavior. This indicates that humans, rather than alligators, are at fault in the vast majority of cases where bites occur, said Teshera.

The results emphasize that alligators aren’t seeking conflict, but they will respond when humans provide what scientists call an “attractive stimulus,” such as by splashing, swimming or entering alligator habitats. Although some bites happened without clear warning, in many cases, people unknowingly triggered the alligator’s natural response to defend itself or to hunt.

Researchers stress that humans are entering the environment of a large, wild predator much like hikers entering bear country or swimmers in shark-inhabited waters and should assume some level of responsibility and attentiveness.

“By examining these risk categories, and some of the activities people were involved in immediately preceding a bite, we are hoping that it reminds the public how crucial it is to maintain a situational awareness in alligator country, which will hopefully

Alligators cont. on pg. 8

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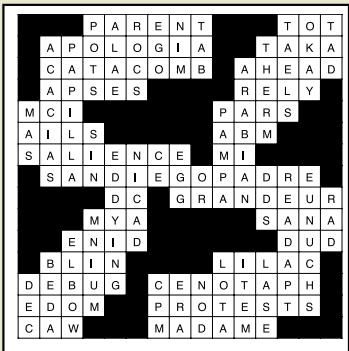
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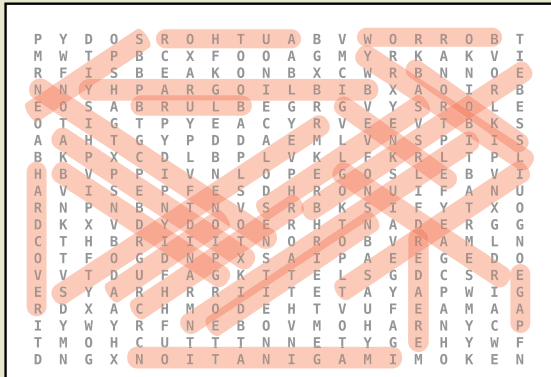
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May

Community Calendar

What's Happening in Ponte Vedra

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

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

2nd: The Savvy Job Hunters Ministry of Christ Episcopal Church will host a free virtual workshop, "Overriding Résumé Robots Applicants Tracking Software Systems" on May 2 from 10:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. Learn how to optimize your résumé for success in your job search and make it past the résumé robots. The workshop will be presented by Audra Larsen, University of North Florida Senior Career Counselor, Career Services. Email pottesen66@gmail.com to receive the Zoom link. All are welcome to attend.

3rd: Wellness events at Sawgrass Village will be held every Saturday in May from 10 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. Hosted by Mind Body Social, all events are free and open to the community. Events include wellness classes such as yoga and barre, all held on the lawn in front of ABC Liquors. Visit <https://mbs.events/sv/> for more information and to register.

6th: Vicar's Landing monthly Boutique Sale will be held Tuesday, May 6 from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. at 1000 Vicar's Landing Way. The sale includes framed art, antiques, household furnishings, and many \$1 knick-knacks. The public is welcome. Checks or cash only please. The Vicar's Employee Scholarship Fund receives all the proceeds. Call Beverly Webb at (904) 315-2610 for more information.

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

6th: Purely Social hosted by Ponte Vedra Woman's Club will be held on Tuesday, May 6 from 5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. at Palm Valley Outdoors, 377 S. Roscoe Blvd. The event is free for members and \$10 for guests. Visit www.pontevedrawomansclub.com for more information and to register.

7th: Coastal Friends will host archeologist Richard Eason at the monthly luncheon on May 7 from 11 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. at Marsh Landing Country Club. The luncheon is open to members, guests and the community. The cost to attend is \$25. Reservations must be made in advance by contacting bartshar@comcast.net as soon as possible.

10th: NE Florida Sisters in Crime will host Jason Futch, who will share his journey from student to cold-case authority, on May 10 at 10:15 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Bring your coffee and bring a friend; the group welcomes misters and sisters to learn about writing, promoting, and enjoying crime fiction. Visit nefloridasistersincrime.org for more information.

13th: Dr. Gerson Yessin Music Series Presents the Grass Menagerie at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library on May 13 from 6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. The concert's instrumentation lends itself to strict bluegrass rooted music, but the music selection takes it to another level by including jazz, pop, rock and country covers. Doors open at 6 p.m. The concert is free and is sponsored by the Friends of the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library.

15th: Free Tech Help with David will be held on Thursday, May 15 from 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Drop in for tech assistance with your Android, Apple, and Reader devices; no RSVPs required. Visit sjcpls.org/branches/ponte-vedra-beach-branch/ for more information.

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

20th: Friends of the Ponte Vedra Beach Library will host speaker Rona Brinlee, whose topic will be "What Should I Read Next," in the FOL Room at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library on May 20 at 6:30 p.m. Doors open at 6 p.m. Brinlee is the owner of the BookMark book store in Neptune Beach, which will celebrate its 35th birthday this year.

20th: "The Claire Project," practical ways to prevent falls, will be the topic at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, on Tuesday, May 20 from 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. Kris Wilson, occupational therapist and owner of Modified Independence, will present ways to modify a home for safer living. Contact Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for more information and to register.

21st: Ponte Vedra Woman's Club general meeting and dinner will be held on Wednesday, May 21 at 5:30 p.m. at Marsh Landing Country Club. The program will be the club's annual charity and check scholarship presentations. The cost of the dinner is \$35. Registration required; visit www.pontevedrawomansclub.com for more information.

21st: Hurricane Preparedness 101 will be held on May 21 from 4 p.m. – 5 p.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. This informative workshop will cover valuable insights and tips to safeguard a home and family during a hurricane. Presented by St. Johns County Emergency Management for attendees older than age 18. Call (904) 827-6950 or or visit sjcpls.org to register.

24th: GTM Research Reserve will host its monthly Beach Cleanup on Saturday, May 24 from 9 a.m. – 11 a.m. No registration is required; meet at the Visitor Center, 505 Guana River Road in Ponte Vedra Beach where gloves and trash bags will be provided. Visit gtmnerr.org for more information.

24th: Ponte Vedra Writers will meet on Saturday, May 24 at 11 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. Screenwriter Sharon Cobb will present a workshop on "How to Sell Books to Hollywood." The meetings are free and open to the public. Visit www.floridawriters.org for more information.

29th: "How to Avoid Becoming Victim to Predatory Lending," a free lecture by Megan Wall, St. Johns County Legal Aid, will be presented at THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, on Thursday, May 29 from 11 a.m. – 12 p.m. Contact Suzanne Duvall at (904) 209-3659 for more information and to register.



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

Q: What’s the latest on the new schools under construction?

A: On April 23, we will hold a Topping Off ceremony for the new K-8 school in Seabrook (school “RR”). We’re excited that construction is moving along nicely; this ceremony marks the midway point of the school’s completion.

Q: Can you comment on the board’s recent Call to Action?

A: We had our first Call to Action to proposed legislation in about 10 years when we recently sent information to parents regarding the proposed state budget, which would reduce the amount of funding by about \$7 million to advanced programs like IB, AP, ACE, Career and Technical Education and dual enrollment. We’re very concerned about this loss of funding that has been earmarked for these highly successful programs. Our hope is that these budget cuts will not go through and as our community knows, our school district has been very financially responsible with taxpayer dollars.

One other point: as our community knows, from time to time the state adjusts the school rating model and each time they do, our school district is first or second in the state. Basically, we have always risen to the occasion and we will continue to do so.

Q: Should parents be registering their kindergarten and new students for next year?

A: Yes. Registering early allows us to ensure adequate staffing for next year. Also, PVPV/Rawlings, Ocean Palms Elementary, and Landrum Middle School will all have availability under controlled open enrollment. If you

are interested in touring one of these schools, please reach out to the principal and they will be more than happy to arrange a meeting.

Q: Do you have any kudos to share?

A: District 4 has much to celebrate. The All-County Middle School Art Exhibit winners include: Honorable Mention for Brynlee McDonald, Palm Valley Academy, eighth grader, Drawing; Second Place for Emma Odavar, Valley Ridge Academy, eighth grader, Digital Art and Photography.

The 2025 Battle of the Books winner was Valley Ridge Academy, with students Hannah Wierda, Mukil Kannan (Timekeeper), Keegan McCann and Elysse Shrestha (Captain).

Congratulations to Shii McDuff, guidance clerk from Valley Ridge Academy who was selected by the Rotary Club of Ponte Vedra as the 2025 Rotary Heroes Education Hero.

Also, a big congratulations to Lisa Farese, Adult Volunteer of the Year from Ocean Palms Elementary who was also selected as the District Adult Volunteer of the Year.

We have so many local education heroes in our community and it’s fun to celebrate them. This is truly what makes our district great — a combined effort between the students, the teachers and the volunteers makes our schools unique and the core of our community.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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



with St. Johns County Commissioner
Krista Joseph District 4

Q: Can you give an update on the A1A medians in Ponte Vedra Beach?

A: Now that it’s spring, we are working on cleaning the medians and adding grass and flowers. We are trying to keep them looking neat and more manicured. We’d love to do more, but it’s important to point out that these medians have no irrigation and we are reliant on Mother Nature to water the plants.

Q: What is the latest with your proposed tree ordinance?

A: We were lucky to get the tree proposal pushed forward at our March Board of County Commissioners meeting. It proposes to create more buffers and preserve more of the bigger trees, as well as longleaf pines, with some of the same regulations already in place in the northwest part of the county. We are discussing the rights of private property owners and what is fair, but honestly I’m looking at large tracts of development — especially clearcutting — not someone’s one acre lot. Staff will be bringing this back with requested changes in a couple of months for the board to discuss.

Q: Where do we stand with the Comprehensive Plan?

A: This has moved forward and we will have a red line version available for our review in May. I’m excited to see where this is going, because I’m looking forward to protecting agricultural land

in the future and not developing as fast as we have been. We need to have the infrastructure — which includes not just roads, but also parks, utilities, fire stations and the like — caught up to where it should be before we continue developing our county. All five board members will discuss this at the May meeting.

Q: Can you describe your proposed new committees?

A: Another goal of mine is a quality of life advisory committee. It would be cool to have a panel look at proposed projects and identify where quality of life would make a difference to our county. The goal here is to give people the opportunity to express themselves on how the county is developed.

I’ve also proposed an agricultural advisory committee. We grow potatoes and other crops right here in St. Johns County and we don’t want to lose our food sources for the county, the state and the U.S. It’s sad to see our ag land becoming rooftops and solar panels, but I must acknowledge it’s private property. I just think it would be nice if we had some support and some incentives for farmers to keep contributing crops.

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

A: Readers can email me at bcc4k-joseph@sjcfl.us or call me at (904) 679-2620.

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

Q. With Public Service Recognition Week being held in May, what is an example of public service that often goes unnoticed?

A: One critical public service that often goes unnoticed is serving on a county, circuit, or federal jury. It is a vital civic duty that empowers local residents to uphold justice and protect citizens’ rights through fair and impartial trials.

Q. How does jury duty reflect public service?

A: Jurors play a direct role in protecting our rights and maintaining the integ-

riety of our courts. A jury is the voice of justice, ensuring our legal system remains fair, impartial and grounded in the will of the people. I would encourage residents to view jury selection as an opportunity to serve your community as an effective part of the judicial process.

Q: What is the role of the clerk’s office in jury management?

A: Our office manages the summoning and organizing of prospective jurors reporting for jury duty. More than 500 jury summonses are issued each month to residents using information provided

by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. Upon receiving the notice, those being summoned are welcome to check in online and may request excusals or deferrals based on their personal situation. The selection process begins with a large pool of names that are qualified and pared down to a panel of six to 12 selected jurors.

After a judge qualifies 50 – 100 prospective jurors, they are sent to the courtroom for a process known as voir dire, which involves questioning by the judge and lawyers. Throughout the process, our clerks work to ensure the process is efficient, effective, and not unduly burdensome.

Q. Why is the right to a jury trial important, and what responsibility do we have when called to serve as jurors?

A. The right to a jury trial is a fundamental cornerstone of America,

enshrined in the U.S. Constitution to ensure that justice is not decided solely by government officials, but by a group of impartial peers. A jury of peers offers a fair and balanced verdict, safeguarding against potential bias or overreach by a single judge. When we’re called to serve, we share the responsibility of upholding this right for others. We should approach the role with integrity and fairness, striving to be the kind of juror we’d want to decide our own case if we were involved in a civil or criminal trial.

Q. How can people get in touch with you?

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

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with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

Q: May marks the four-year anniversary of the murder of 13-year-old Tristyn Bailey in NW St. Johns County. How did this tragedy impact you personally?

A: I’ve been involved in numerous homicide investigations throughout my career. Tristyn’s murder was the first major case I was involved in as sheriff of St. Johns County and one of the most tragic I’ve seen.

Q: Do you have a relationship with the Bailey family?

A: They have become close personal friends to Kendell and me, and are part of our SJSO family. They are a phenomenal family and are so involved in helping others in our community.

Q: How does SJSO partner with the Bailey family in the community?

A: Our Women Against Violent Encounters (WAVE) team hosts self defense classes for women in collabora-

tion with the Tristyn Bailey Foundation. Additionally, we partner with the family to provide online safety presentations at locations throughout the county

Q: How do we find additional information?

A: There are a number of websites to visit, including the Tristyn Bailey Foundation (<https://tbstrong.org/>) as well as our website with information about WAVE (www.sjsso.org/public-affairs/wave). You can also follow SJSO on social media: @teamsjsso.

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@sjsso.org or call me at (904) 824-8304. Also, our website, www.sjsso.org has a wealth of resources, from alarm registration to Crime Stoppers to our Neighbors app.

County aims to educate residents with new video series

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

St. Johns County is launching a new video series, “Inside SJC,” aimed at educating, engaging, and empowering residents and business owners by showcasing the county’s departments, services, and key initiatives. The video series will roll out strategically, with each episode focusing on timely topics for the community.

“Inside SJC” will provide an in-depth look at how the county operates, the

resources available to residents, and the programs that contribute to making St. Johns County a vibrant and thriving community. From parks to libraries, the series will cover a wide array of subjects, offering viewers a comprehensive understanding of essential County services.

The first video, titled “Welcome to Inside SJC,” is now available on the St. Johns County YouTube channel. The series will be released monthly, with each video timed to coincide with relevant

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Briefs

Clerk's Office helps hundreds get back on the road during Operation Green Light

The St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller's Office has successfully concluded its participation in Operation Green Light, a statewide initiative aimed at helping residents reinstate suspended driver licenses and get back on the road.

Held from March 29 – April 12, 2025, this year's event, designed to reduce financial barriers and support residents in paying off court obligations, had a meaningful impact on the community:

189 cases were paid in full, giving many

individuals a fresh start.

16 drivers became eligible to have their licenses reinstated.

309 payment plans were set up to successfully transition cases out of collections.

More than \$84,000 was collected during the event, satisfying outstanding court fees.

Brandon J. Patty, Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller, praised the turnout and outcome of the event. During Operation Green Light, clerks' offices across Florida waive collection

surcharges on overdue court fines and traffic tickets under Florida Statutes 322.75.

For more information about Operation Green Light, or any of the other services available, the 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.



Go hot on the trail of cold case crime at local writers' meeting

On Saturday, May 10 at 10:15 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library, Jason Futch will share his journey from student to cold-case authority at the local monthly meeting of Sisters in Crime. All writers and readers interested in the topic are welcome to attend.

As a criminal justice student at Florida Gateway College in Live Oak, Futch learned about the cold case of an unidentified dismembered torso found at a local gas station in 1994. Intrigued, Futch followed the clues, interviewed people involved, and uncovered details never released to the public. He posted the information on Websleuths.com which, coupled with a poster from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, prompted the victim's relatives to come forward, leading to his identification as Fred Paul Laster and the arrest of his killer in 2017.

Futch has since helped police identify two previously unidentified cold case victims: a black teenager lynched in 1983, and a 36-year-old man found dead along Interstate 75 in 1990. He also founded Suwannee Valley Unsolved (SVU), a Facebook page and nonprofit that helps solve cold cases through an interactive map, road signs, and relationships with law enforcement and forensics personnel.

Contact floridasistersincrime@gmail.com for more information.

Newcomers group serves community

On March 20, nine members of Newcomers of the Beaches traveled to Lutheran Social Services in Jacksonville as part of the Volunteering /Community

Services Activity. The ladies packed bags of food items for families experiencing emergency financial need and assisted clients with help loading the groceries into their cars. Participants said they found the work rewarding and hoped to assist again.

On April 9, the group held its annual fashion show at the monthly luncheon. The venue was St. Johns Golf and Country Club and featured fashions from J McLaughlin Ponte Vedra Beach. The outfits and accessories were wonderful and lunch was delicious. A good time was had by all, especially the winners of the door prizes.

Visit <http://newcomersofthebeaches.com> for more information.

Archeologist to speak at Coastal Friends lunch

Coastal Friends will host Richard Eason, retired U.S. Foreign Service Officer and well-known lecturer at UNF's OLLI program on history and archeology, as their guest speaker at the May 7 luncheon. Eason's popular adult education courses cover ancient discoveries such as the Tomb of King Tut, Troy, Machu Picchu and others. He explains in understandable ways how the development of the use of science and technology can identify and date these treasures.

The luncheon runs from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and will be held at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Pkwy. It is open to members and guests, as well as the community. The menu will consist of Caesar salad, chicken with lemon beurre blanc, rice pilaf and mixed vegetables, and chef's choice for dessert.

The cost to attend is \$25. Reservations must be made in advance by contacting the luncheon chairman at bartshar@comcast.net as soon as possible.

Established in 1998, Coastal Friends is a social club comprised of women who live in Ponte Vedra Beach, Nocatee, Jacksonville Beach, Neptune Beach, Atlantic Beach, Jacksonville and the surrounding area, and St. Augustine. Some of the activities offered are adventures and outings, book club, bunco, canasta, happy hour, lunch in, lunch out, mah jongg, samba and wine socials. Luncheons are held on the first Wednesday of every month, except for July and August. New members are welcome throughout the year. Contact brookemeister@msn.com for more information on how to join.

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Alligators cont. from pg. 2

decrease future negative encounters," said Teshera.

A better educated public and more creative messaging about how to stay safe in gator territory could prevent injuries and save alligator lives, too.

"Frequently, when the alligator responsible for the bite is identified, it is removed by authorities and euthanized, losing its life because of risky human behavior," said Mazzotti.

The researchers recommend wildlife managers adopt diverse, targeted communication strategies to promote safe behavior around alligators. Increased awareness, they say, could dramatically reduce the number of bites and the need to euthanize alligators after attacks.

"Ultimately, the study underscores that situational awareness and informed choices, especially during recreational activities in alligator country, can help protect both people and wildlife," said Mazzotti.

Life

travel • pantry raiders • gardening
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Get to Know ...

By Maggie FitzRoy
mail@floridanewsline.com

Laura Burke

Since moving to Ponte Vedra Beach 20 years ago, Laura Burke says there are three ways people have come to know her.

“Everybody I know is by one or more of these three things,” she says. “I exercise with you, or I’ve helped you take care of your dog, or you’ve been on my faith journey.”

But you may have also spotted her at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library, where she volunteers in Seymour’s Book Store on Wednesdays and helps organize book sales throughout the year. “I’m a voracious reader. I believe in libraries. I want children to love books and want to read,” she says. “The best part of retirement is giving back and one of the best ways you can do that is to volunteer in the library.”

Q: Where did you live before moving to Ponte Vedra Beach?

A: I came from Gulf Breeze, Florida, near Pensacola. I grew up in Bay Head, New Jersey — a Jersey Shore town a mile long and a mile wide. My parents moved to Ft. Lauderdale when I was a teenager and that’s where I finished high school. Then I went to college, college, college, college.

Q: How many college degrees do you have?

A: I have two Bachelor of Science degrees, one Master of Science, one Ed.S. (educational specialist) and then I went



Photo courtesy Maggie FitzRoy
Laura Burke and her red tri Australian Shepherd, Joy.

back to school to become a registered nurse. I like school, I like learning.

Q: What can you tell us about your experience in the health care field?

A: My master’s in science is in exercise physiology and after that I worked as an R.N. in a hospital. My specialty was orthopedics and neurology, caring for people with bone, muscle, and head injuries.

Q: What kinds of exercise do you do?

A: I play pickleball. I go to the gym to work on core strength. I take two-hour hikes with my red tri Australian Shepherd, Joy, where we go to the beach, or we go to the golf course at the Ponte Vedra Inn & Club before the golfers arrive. I also work out at a beach boot camp, where there are stations where you work on different components of fitness, including flexibility, strength, balance, core, and cardio. I also go on bicycle trips with my husband, Mike. I do not think you grow old gracefully if you do not move. Motion is lotion; rest is rust.

Q: Do you have a hobby?

A: Dog grooming. It’s a passion, not a business. My absolute favorite thing in the world to do is to teach somebody how to take care of their dog — regular care, including bathing and nails. I help people get the equipment they need to groom their own dog if they want to learn. I help people who have dogs that are very old and have anxiety.

Q: How did your love for dogs begin?

A: When I was in elementary school, I told my dad he should be arrested for child abuse because I was growing up without a dog and that wasn’t right. A month or so later he took me to see a litter of miniature white poodle puppies and said, “Go get you one.” It was such a blessing because I learned how to groom. Nobody was going to take care of my dog but me.

Q: How did you learn how to groom dogs?

A: We found a groomer who would let me stay and watch. Then in high school, I found a grooming shop where I could be an apprentice. On summer vacations during my college years, I worked in grooming shops and for vets.

Q: What can you tell us about your faith journey?

A: My life was a train wreck until I was in my thirties. Horrible relationships, dangerous, reckless behavior. Then I ran into people who had so much joy and contentment and they had boundaries that brought them a more vibrant life. Those people brought me to Jesus, to faith, to a better life. I attend Beach Church, which is Christian, biblical, and community oriented. We are a service church to the community.

Sea turtle season cont. from pg. 1

percent of the world’s population of Loggerhead sea turtles,” said Sea Turtle Patrol Permit Holders Sandy Stam and Colette Crone. “We also welcome Green, Leatherback and Kemp’s Ridley marine turtles to our shores. It’s up to us to share the sand responsibly and make sure their nesting journey ends with a safe start for the next generation.”

Because most marine turtles lay their nests during the night hours, trained sea turtle patrol teams conduct daily morning surveys to monitor activity. When a patrol discovers a nest, it is triangulated by stakes and taped off to protect it.

Beachgoers can do their part by remembering “Clean, Dark, Flat”:

Clean: Leave only footprints. Sea turtles search for a quiet and obstacle-free space to make their nests. This means no plastic, toys or leftover chairs remaining on the beach after dusk. If it didn’t originate naturally from the ocean, it shouldn’t remain on the beach.

Dark: Lights out, turtles are out and about. Nesting females and hatchlings find the ocean by following the light of the moon — and flashlights, phones or bright building lights can lead them astray, often with fatal consequences. St. Johns County enforces strict lighting rules to help keep their path clear and natural.

Flat: Your personal sandcastle or mighty hole to China might be a trap for a turtle. Before you leave, flatten sand sculptures and fill in holes. What’s fun for humans can be hazardous for a nesting mama or tiny hatchling.

If a sea turtle is seen nesting or a hatchling is discovered along the beach, report it to the permit holder listed on the nest marker or contact the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

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By Scott A. Grant
mail@floridanewsline.com

PopHistory

The Gilded Age

Tariffs have been much in the news of late. You are either for them or against them, with a seeming majority of Americans coming out against.

The president has regularly lauded the McKinley Tariff, arguing that the years roughly encompassing the last decade of the 19th and first decade of the 20th centuries were a golden era for America and that the reason they were so great were the tariffs. The McKinley Tariffs were named for William McKinley, 25th president of the United States, but they were not implemented during his presidency; rather they were passed into law in 1890 when McKinley was in congress and Benjamin Harrison, the 23rd president was in the White House.

McKinley was the author and sponsor of the tariff act in the House of Representatives. Tariffs were a big political issue at that time. Democrat

Grover Cleveland, the 22nd and 24th president, opposed tariffs. In the election of 1888, Harrison, a Republican, attacked Cleveland's stance and the public agreed. McKinley, who was sometimes called the "Napoleon of Protectionism," introduced legislation enacting the new tariffs, arguing that the election had delivered a mandate in their favor.

The goal was to raise revenue and protect and develop native industry in goods such as tin plate. Tin plate was rolled steel coated in a thin layer of tin to keep it from rusting. Tin plate was a major import and McKinley and Harrison felt it was imperative for the long-term future of the country to develop domestic tin plate manufacturing. The act also radically increased the tariff on wool, another major import.

The tariffs were not well received either here or abroad. Prices rose for consum-

ers. England introduced retaliatory tariffs or their own. The voters were so incensed that they voted the Republicans out of office in the mid-term elections of 1890. In the 1892 presidential elections, Cleveland soundly defeated Benjamin Harrison to become the first, and for a long time only, president to serve nonconsecutive terms.

The tariffs would lead directly to the Panic of 1893, considered to be the worst recession our republic endured prior to the great depression that began with the stock market crash

of 1929. In the 19th century, recessions were generally called "panics" because they often featured panic runs on largely unregulated banks. Other factors that contributed to the 1893 depression were the collapse of wheat prices and the bankruptcy of a number of railroads including the Reading Line, made famous in the game of Monopoly.

Scott A. Grant is a local author and historian. He welcomes your comments at scottg@standfastic.com

Send us your community news!

editor@floridanewsline.com

Summer Camp Activities Guide*



Unique summer camps to be held at First Coast Cultural Center

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Registration is open for high-quality, arts education summer camps for children aged six through 17 at First Coast Cultural Center. Students will have opportunities to participate in theatre camp at Alhambra Theatre

and Dining and art, culinary, and drama camps in Sawgrass. In addition to these summer camps, a new Irish Dance class will be offered for students beginning in May.

According to Silvia Romero, First Coast Cultural Center’s senior opera-

tions director, theatre camp is part of First Coast Cultural Center’s ongoing collaboration with Alhambra, and it will be held at the theatre on Beach Boulevard in Jacksonville. There will be two different sessions, and each will run from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. and include two weeks of programming, a musical showcase, a meal, and a complimentary showcase ticket per registered child.

Additionally, First Coast Cultural Center will hold weekly art, culinary, and drama camps at its location in Sawgrass Village. Entitled Exploration Vacation: Florida Life, these camps run from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. each week. Led by professional art teachers in a peaceful, safe setting, students create two-dimensional and three-dimensional works of art using a variety of

tools and techniques. Students will also search through First Coast Cultural Center’s galleries, play outside, and observe the natural world like art detectives.

Meanwhile, culinary campers will explore age-appropriate cooking skills and kitchen safety, along with safe practices, introductory nutrition concepts, dining etiquette, and more. Finally, First Coast Cultural Center is excited to partner with Mumford Academy of Irish Dance to offer six weeks of beginning Irish dance lessons at the Cultural Center on Saturdays from May 10 to June 14. Visit first-coastculturalcenter.org/programs-events/youth-art-programs for more information and to register.



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Water recreation safety tips

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Fun in the sun often involves playing in the water. Whether you’re soaking up some rays in a backyard pool, catching some ocean waves on a surfboard or sliding your way across a Slip ‘N Slide, there’s no shortage of ways to incorporate water into warm weather recreation.

Water-based recreation makes especially warm days more comfortable, but caution must reign supreme when engaging in water play. The National Drowning Prevention Alliance offers the following safety tips to lower the risk of water recreation accidents.

- Brush up on your swimming skills. The NDPA reports that learning how to swim can reduce drowning risk by 88 percent. Adults and children alike are urged to go over the basics of swimming before getting in the water to ensure their skills are up to the task. If possible, practice the basics in the shallow end of a pool to reacclimate your body to

swimming. Parents can keep a watchful eye on their young swimmers to ensure they haven’t forgotten how to swim since last season.

- Never swim alone. Swimming with a partner is a fun way to stay safe. The buddy system ensures someone is there to look after swimmers and offer help if a swimmer is struggling. A buddy also can call for help by alerting a lifeguard when swimming in a public place such as a beach, lake or community swimming pool.
- Stick to designated swimming areas. The flag system is often employed at parks, beaches and lakes to indicate when and where it’s safe to swim. A red flag typically symbolizes swimming is unsafe, whereas a green flag means conditions are welcoming for swimmers. Stick to areas designated as safe. The NDPA notes it’s always preferable to swim under the supervision of a lifeguard.
- Err on the side of caution. The NDPA notes it’s best to get out when in doubt. If water conditions don’t feel right, exit the water. Falling rain, rough currents, muscle cramps, and/or physical fatigue can quickly transform a fun swimming session into a dangerous situation. Get out of the water at the first sign of doubt. You can always return later if your physical condition and/or the conditions in the water change.
- Be an educated swimmer. Savvy swimmers know to check the local forecast, including water conditions, before getting their toes wet. The NDPA notes it’s unsafe to swim in the rain, particularly if there is thunder and lightning. That’s true whether you’re swimming in an ocean, a lake or a backyard pool.

Additional water safety strategies can be found at ndpa.org.



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Summer Camp Activities Guide*



Tips to get kids to read more

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

From improving mental health to fostering stronger memory to teaching a person new things, reading offers many benefits. Reading also can boost creativity and help expand vocabulary. Despite these amazing perks, data indicates reading for fun has become less common among American children.

According to a survey conducted in late 2019 and early 2020 by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the percentage of nine to 13-year-olds who say they read for fun on an almost daily basis are at the lowest levels since the mid-1980s. In 2023, Scholastic released new data from its Kids & Family Reading Report®: 8th Edition that found only 32 percent of nine to 11-year-olds and 15 percent of 15- to 17-year-olds are frequent readers. Parents who want their children to read more can consider these strategies to foster a love of reading in youngsters.

Set limits on screen use: Scholastic’s report indicated children’s digital activities have risen since 2018 among all age groups studied. Children are increasingly participating in digital activities that include going online for fun and watching videos or utilizing apps. By setting limits on screen time for children, parents may increase the likelihood of diverting youngsters’ attention to other activities, such as reading.

Become a reading role model: One of the biggest predictors of reading frequency has to do with perceived importance of reading. If children see their parents frequently reading for pleasure and finding it important, and having access to a wide variety of books to read, then they may be encouraged to read for fun as well.

Make reading accessible: Parents can facilitate opportunities for kids to read by getting their children library cards, frequently taking them to bookstores, participating in school-run book fairs, and participating in other activities



Photo courtesy MetroCreative
Reading is beneficial for people of all ages.

that prioritize book access, such as sales at the local library. Furthermore, since children are so in tune with digital devices, offering access to an e-reader or digital reading app on a tablet will enable children to tap into the vast digital library of books.

Don’t stress about the content: Experts note that parents should not stress

about what kids are reading. Many times parents worry that their kids aren’t reading the classics or hard-hitting novels. As long as kids are reading age-appropriate material, the subject matter does not make a world of difference. From comic books to newspapers, kids can read anything so long as it’s appropriate for their age.

PVHS hosts girls’ summer basketball camp

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

The third annual Girls’ Basketball Summer Camp will be held at Ponte Vedra High School, June 9 – 12. Hosted by varsity and junior varsity coaches and players from PVHS, the camp serves as a fundraiser for the school’s girls’ basketball program.

“The camp has been well received since it is the the only girls-only basketball camp in Ponte Vedra,” said Coach Jess Spencer-Gardner,

varsity head coach, girls basketball. “Our camps are known for not just improving basketball skills, but each day we have a Motivational Minute

that focuses on character, confidence and being a great teammate and leader.”

This year’s cam will feature special guest coach Andrea Gorski, a former NCAA head coach.

The four-day Middle School Camp, for rising sixth through eighth graders, will be held June 9 – 12 from 1 p.m. – 4 p.m. each day. The three-day Little Shark Camp, for rising third through fifth graders, will be held June 9 – 11 from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. each day.

Visit www-pvhs.stjohns.k12.fl.us/basketball-girls/ for more information and to register.



Photo courtesy Jess Spencer-Gardner
The third annual Girls’ Basketball Summer Camp will be held at Ponte Vedra High School, June 9 – 12.

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Gardening

The Good Earth

By Connie Doyle, Florida Master Gardener UF| IFAS Extension

Spring is here and for all the gardeners out there I join in your feelings of excitement and anticipation of the rebirth of our gardens. Nothing quite matches the delight of bare branches leafing out in spring green extravaganza. Though gardening is the “zen” place for many, it is not without its challenges. And, of course, overcoming those challenges can reap great rewards.

For those of us who live in coastal areas and barrier islands in particular, the challenges can feel a bit overwhelming — unless you do your homework. The unique demands of coastal gardening are, to name a few, exposure to salty porous soil (sand) that does not retain nutrients well, sea spray, wind, and erosion. The University of Florida IFAS (Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences) program “Right Plant, Right Place” is a concept that applies everywhere and most certainly to the coastal regions. The premise is simple: Achieving a healthy, low-maintenance home landscape starts with putting the right plant in the right place. By selecting Florida Friendly plants and turf grass that match a site’s soil, light, water, and climate conditions (fl.ifas.ufl.edu) you increase your chances of success significantly while decreasing labor and cost. That’s a win-win! Here are a few tips to get you headed in the right direction:

Groundcovers and Flowers: On the coastline, flowering groundcovers are a good source of color. Beach sunflower, gaillardia, and seaside goldenrod are all wind and salt tolerant enough to brighten up an ocean view. Railroad vine and gopher apple spread quickly, too, and make excellent groundcovers and dune stabilizers. And if you’re looking for more flowers, try annuals like calendula, zinnia, and petunia.

Grasses: Ornamental grasses give coastal landscapes that classic wind-swept look. Saltmeadow cordgrass, muhly grass, Fakahatchee grass, and sea oats are all at least moderately salt tolerant. They’re Florida native species, too. For turf-grasses that can withstand the salt and wind, see the article on “Salt-Tolerant Lawngrasses.” I would also suggest contacting your county Extension office to ask which varieties perform best in your area.

Vines: There are a few vine options for coastal landscapes. Native railroad vine is a creeping type, with high tolerance for salty air and sandy soils. And, though only moderately salt tolerant, bougainvillea does well in landscapes a little further inland.

Trees and Shrubs: For trees that can handle the salt, live oak, southern red cedar, and mangrove are always safe choices. Southern magnolia is mod-

erately salt tolerant, but shouldn’t be planted on the coastline. Palms are all at least moderately salt tolerant. The highest tolerance is found in our native cabbage palms and saw palmettos. Washington palms are also very salt tolerant.

For flowering coastal shrubs, hibiscus, firebush, plumeria, and sterile lantana varieties are show stopping choices. For something truly unique, however, try our native wild coffee, necklace pod, or saltbush. Oleander is beautiful too, but highly toxic. Be cautious when adding this plant to your landscape.

Some coastal communities prefer more xeric landscape elements. Agaves, yucca (especially Spanish bayonet and Adam’s needle), prickly pear, and sea lavender all add to a desert-scape appearance. For more classic choices, try juniper, dwarf Indian hawthorn, waxmyrtle, or coontie.

Edible landscapes are popular and there are a number of salt-tolerant edibles that double as ornamental shrubs. Seagrape, cocoplum, and pineapple guava are favorites, certainly. Yaupon holly isn’t edible, but the leaves can be used to make caffeinated yaupon holly tea.

Happy Planting!

SJC new video series cont. from pg. 6

seasonal topics.

Episodes of “Inside SJC” will be available through multiple channels to ensure broad public access. The series can be found on the county’s website at www.sjcfl.us/inside-sjc, and videos will also be shared across the county’s social media platforms. Additionally, residents can watch the videos on the county’s GovTV channel.

St. Johns County residents and business owners are encouraged to watch, share, and interact with the Inside SJC video series. Engage with the content on social media using the hashtag #InsideSJC and share what you learn to inform others in the community.

**Thank you
for reading
Ponte Vedra
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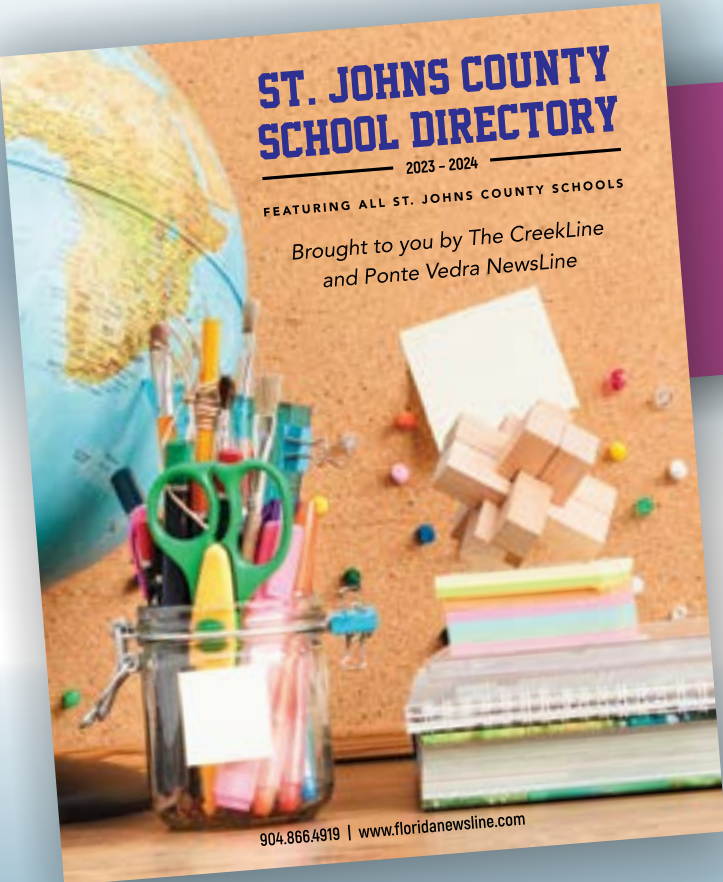


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Ocean Palms celebrates extraordinary volunteers

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

There was much to celebrate recently as Ocean Palms Elementary honored Lisa Farese as its Adult Volunteer of the Year, and Connor Dean as its Youth Volunteer of the Year.

Farese, the parent of three (current and former) Otters, has been an active member of the Ocean Palms school community for the past seven years, most recently serving two years as president of the school's PTO. In addition to the varied and numerous regular duties of PTO president, Farese helped to secure funding to sustain the school's STEM field study program; launched the Otter Raft program to welcome and orient new families; and spearheaded the realization of the Mike Parrish Storybook Path, a tribute to the school's first principal that inspires young readers and promotes a connection to the outdoors. She has also served as Ocean Palms' press parent and spent several years organizing the school's Scholastic Book Fairs.

On April 3, at a celebratory event at Nease High School, it was announced that Farese has also been chosen as the St. Johns County School District's Adult Volunteer of the Year. This honor puts her in the running to be recognized at the level of Florida's state school board.

Tiffany Cantwell, Ocean Palms principal, said, "Lisa's creativity, commitment and caring personality have fostered meaningful experiences for the students, families, and staff at Ocean Palms. We are so happy to recognize her contributions and celebrate the many wonderful things she has done for our school."



Photo courtesy Ocean Palms Elementary
Tiffany Cantwell, Ocean Palms Elementary School principal, with Lisa Farese and Connor Dean at the St. Johns County School District Volunteer Recognition Event on April 3.

Nease High School sophomore Connor Dean shares Farese's service mindset. For the past two summers, he has dedicated countless hours of his break to supporting Ocean Palms' campus readiness efforts. While many would consider summer a time to kick back and relax, Dean has painted, assembled furniture, and organized textbooks, among other tasks, to support the school in preparation to welcome students and teachers to a new academic year. He isn't afraid of some heavy lifting and takes on every task with a positive attitude and strong work ethic.

"Connor has become a reliable and trusted presence on our campus," said Cantwell. "In a time when many teens are focused solely on their own commitments, he chooses to serve his community. Connor's quiet leadership, initiative, and humility speak volumes about his character, and he reminds us of the difference one person can make."

In addition to his volunteer work, Dean balances a full academic schedule in Nease's Engineering Academy and plays pitcher and outfielder on the school's junior varsity baseball team.

Landrum Middle School honors February students of the month

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Landrum Middle School proudly continues its tradition of recognizing exceptional students through the "Students of the Month" program. This initiative celebrates students who demonstrate outstanding character, academic success, effort, and resilience.

For February, the honored students were sixth grader Elle Pirris (from January), sixth grader Stella Piper,

seventh grader Luke Tsao, and eighth grader Rafael DeCarvalho, recognized for their hard work, leadership, and dedication.

Each month, these remarkable students — selected by their teachers — enjoy a celebratory lunch with Principal Troy Kasting in his office. This special event sponsored by Chick-fil-A at Marsh Landing Parkway serves a meaningful way to recognize and reward their achievements.



Photo courtesy Landrum Middle School
Principal Troy Kasting shares a special lunch with February's "Students of the Month," honoring their hard work and dedication.

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