



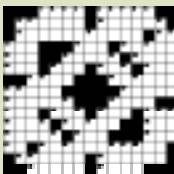
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## County aims to educate residents with new video series

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.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

**SJC new video** cont. on pg. 9

# Rotary Pub Crawl put the fun in fundraising

By Rotarian Al Kalter  
mail@floridanewslines.com

It was a beautifully sunny Saturday afternoon when 150 neighbors and friends enjoyed the annual Bartram Trail Rotary Pub Crawl in Bartram Walk. Participants took advantage of adult beverages at five establishments, hoped for a winning hand in the poker run, checked their raffle tickets to see what they may have won, and made new friends during the April 5 event.

“We’re incredibly grateful for the overwhelming support we received from the community for this year’s Pub Crawl fundraiser. Thanks to a fantastic turnout and the generosity of our attendees, we raised significant funds that will go directly to organizations making a real difference locally,” said Rotary Club President Molly Paxton. “We couldn’t have done it without the amazing local businesses who hosted us — Moon Dog Pie House, 2nd Bay Brewing, Bono’s Bar-B-Que, La Nopalera, and Iggy’s Grill & Bar — and everyone who



Photos courtesy Al Kalter

Pub Crawl guests are welcomed at the start, obtaining their wristbands and beer cups

bought tickets and joined the fun. Every year since the Crawl began in 2009, it’s just gotten better, and we thank everyone who helped make it such a success.”

The combination of ticket sales, sponsorships from area businesses, and contributions from the hosting bars and

**Rotary Pub** cont. on pg. 9

# Parks and Rec celebrates becoming a Certified Autism Center

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

On March 8, St. Johns County officials, staff, and community members gathered to celebrate the Parks and Recreation Department’s designation as a Certified Autism Center with a press conference and Kite Day at Treaty Park (1595 Wildwood Drive, St. Augustine).

“[The certification] means that our parks, our programs, and our staff are now better equipped to serve individuals with autism and sensory differences, ensuring that everyone can enjoy our beautiful parks, our programs, and our outdoor spaces,” Community Program Manager Tess Simpson said at the start



of the press conference.

In addition to staff training, the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards also conducted an on-site review of St.

Johns County parks and facilities in order to create sensory guides and additional recommendations to improve

**Parks** cont. on pg. 15



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# BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

**Breed:**

Domestic Short Hair/Tuxedo Tabby

**Favorite Activities:**

Playing outside chasing lizards.

**Favorite Treat:**

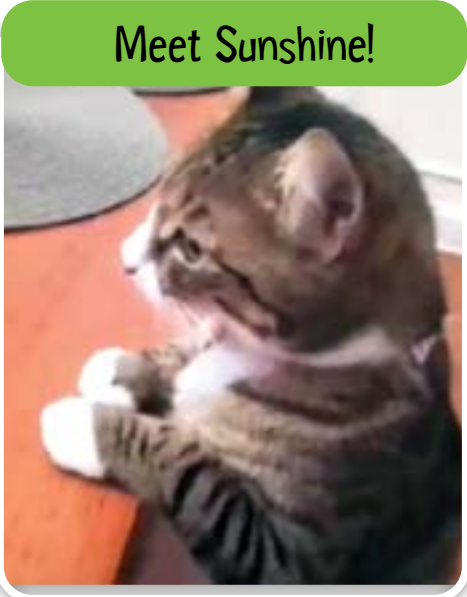
Turkey!

**Favorite Friend:**

Mila (human mom)

**How did your BFF get their name?:**

Brings sunshine to our lives.



Meet Sunshine!

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



Summer Camp Guide  
in this issue!  
Pages 12 - 14

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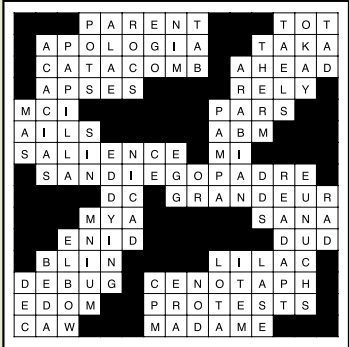
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Last month's Mystery Photo was the Bartram Trail Branch Library.

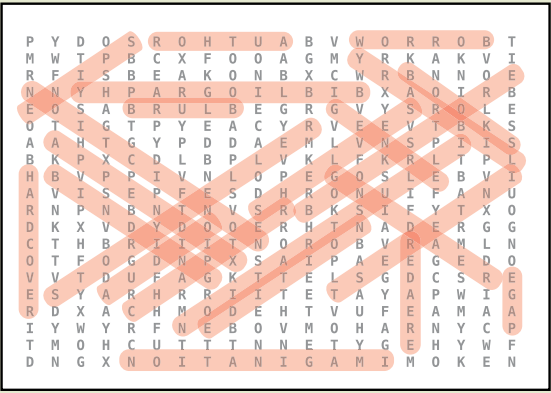


Answers  
to our  
Puzzles  
PG 10

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# May

## 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 H00Kie**, 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 H00Kie) or email playing-hookie2022@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, call (904) 230-6962 and leave a message.

**4th: Unity Basics**, a free, informative class on the foundations of Unity, will be held on May 4 from 12 p.m. – 2 p.m. at Unity Church for Creative Living, 2777 Race Track Road. Rev. Yvonne McAndrew will lead this fun, and interactive class. Call (904) 287-1505 or email UCCLOffice2777@gmail.com for more information.

**6th: Honeybee** Quilters Guild will meet on Tuesday, May 6 at 6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Presbyterian Church on the Loretto Road Campus in the Kids Space at 2501 Loretto Road. The program will be the annual auction of member-provided

sewing items; bring a checkbook for new-to-you treasures. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

**6th: Happy Hookers** crochet group will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on May 6 and May 20 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 or call (904) 827-6960.

**7th: 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.

**8th: 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.

**10th: The Bartram** Trail Genealogy Club meets the second Saturday of each month (this month, May 10) from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. at the Bartram Trail Branch Library. The group covers timely topics of general interest to Genealogists and Family Historians. New and experienced genealogy members are welcomed. Email gingham@comcast.net for more information. Visit www.facebook.com/

groups/BTGenClubGroup to send a request to join the club.

**10th: Friends of Alpine** Park group will meet on May 10 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 for more information.

**12th: The Northwest** St. Johns County United for Progress Club will celebrate its eighth birthday and honor the legacy of Stetson Kennedy at its annual picnic on May 12. Festivities begin at 6 p.m. Email nwsjcp@gmail.com for more information.

**13th: Bartram Trail** Women's Club will host its meeting and luncheon on May 13 beginning at 10:30 a.m. at Club Continental, 2143 Astor Street in Orange Park. The luncheon theme is "Island Paradise." 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 May 2. Visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 for more information and a membership form.

**15th: William Bartram** Scenic Highway Group will meet on Thursday, May 15 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 or call (904) 699-8475.

**19th: The All Star** Quilters Guild will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on Monday, May 19 at First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The program will feature quilter and fabric artist, Julie Mainor. "Show and Tell" is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit www.allstarquilters.org for more information.

**20th: Newcomers** of North Saint Johns will hold a luncheon on Tuesday, May 20 beginning at 11 a.m. at Club Continental, 2143 Astor Street in Orange Park. The luncheon will feature the installation of the Newcomers of North Saint Johns board of directors for 2025-2026. The cost for the luncheon is \$35 for members and \$40 for guests. Register by May 8. Visit https://newcomersofnorth-stjohns.org for more information.

**21st: Prosperity Plus** III-Living Full Spectrum Wealth, a 7-week experiment in living the life you love will be held Wednesdays, 7 p.m. – 8 p.m. at Unity Church for Creative Living, 2777 Race Track Road. Call (904) 287-1505 or email UCCLOffice2777@gmail.com for cost and to register.

**30th: "How to Avoid** Becoming Victim to Predatory Lending," 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, May 30 from 10 a.m. – 11 a.m. Call (904) 209-3655 (Monday – Thursday) or email tharris@coasjc.org for more information.

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Reverend Yvonne McAndrew

# Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

It's the end of an era for Florida News-Line, but the beginning of an exciting new chapter for our marketing representative, Linda Gay. She will begin enjoying a well-deserved retirement after this issue.

Linda has been with our community newspapers since the very beginning, back in 2000 when she and then-publisher Rebecca Taus began publishing a small newspaper in NW St. Johns County known as The CreekLine. At the time, the area was fledgling and as new businesses opened, there was no other media available to communicate with potential local customers. The CreekLine's first issue was mailed to just 3,500 addresses. Over the years, The CreekLine grew with the community and today is delivered to more than 27,000 addresses. In 2005, Mandarin NewsLine was added to the family, followed by Ponte Vedra NewsLine in 2014. In total, the three monthly publications now reach more than 78,000 addresses in the southern Duval/northern St. Johns County area, and Linda

has been a driving force in their success.

Over the years and various publishers, Linda has been a constant and has been directly responsible for the growth of the newspapers due to advertising revenues. With her finger on the pulse of our community, there are few businesses, small or large, who have not experienced Linda's friendly demeanor and professional, positive attitude as she sought to help them grow their business. Many times, she would be the first person to visit a new business and welcome them to our community.

Linda will certainly be missed, but we are happy to welcome Haley Cook and Garret True to our team. Linda feels that she can hand off the baton to these new marketing representatives and is confident that they will be able to continue to build on her success. She is looking forward to spending time with her family, traveling, and being completely unaware of the next issue's deadline.

Martie Thompson  
Editor

## Guest Column

### Early look at 2025 tax roll

By St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer

Our office is almost complete with the initial 2025 tax roll. While this year's tax roll won't be final until October, here's an early look at the 2025 numbers.

The total market value for all properties is nearly \$90 billion, which is a 5 percent increase from 2024. This total includes real properties (land and buildings) plus tangible personal properties (business equipment and assets). Of that, the total taxable value is almost \$59 billion, which is a 9 percent increase from 2024. The total taxable value is the market value minus caps (up to 3 percent cap for homesteaded properties and 10 percent cap for non-homesteaded properties) and exemptions.

In comparison, the total market value in 2016 was slightly more than \$31 billion, which is a 185 percent increase from then until now. In that same year, the total taxable value was slightly more than \$22 billion, which is a 167 percent increase from then until now.

For real property, the parcel count has increased from last year by 3 percent from 163,605 to 168,304. In comparison,

that number was 125,101 in 2016, a 35 percent increase from then until now. Throughout the past few years, our GIS Division has processed on average approximately 60 new subdivision plats each year, which has impacted the increase in parcel counts.

Our office approved 8,471 homestead exemption applications for the 2025 tax year so far. In comparison, 9,972 applications were approved last year, so this year has seen a 15 percent decrease. This year's number compares to the pre-COVID 2018 number, which was 8,418. The highest number of applications approved was in 2022 with more than 11,540.

The property information at [www.sjcpa.gov](http://www.sjcpa.gov) is published in real time, so all the most up-to-date information is found there. Be sure to review your property information online and also when you receive your TRIM notice in the mail this August, looking closely at the values and exemptions. If you haven't yet applied for homestead exemption for 2025, there's still time to apply until the end of the TRIM notice period.

I'm available to answer questions or provide additional information at [Eddie@sjcpa.gov](mailto:Eddie@sjcpa.gov) or (904) 827-5500.

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**Q&A with St. Johns County School Board Member, Beverly Slough, District 1**

**Q: Do you have an update on the search for a new superintendent [as of interview date of April 15]?**

A: At the school board’s meeting on April 10, we narrowed the 26 applicants for the position down to 10, four of whom are from St. Johns County. Those applicants will now have the opportunity to respond to us with responses to five questions, three via video and two written. On April 25, the school board will select the finalists for in-person interviews. During the week of May 12, the finalists will visit and each school

board member will interview each finalist in private. Additionally, there will be a public interview by the board members of all candidates. On May 14 at First Coast Technical College, there will be a reception for the public to attend to interact with the candidates. All along the way, there will be opportunities for the public to provide feedback.

Finally, on May 20, we moved our school board meeting to the morning (due to Toco Creek High School’s graduation ceremony that evening) and we will select the superintendent at that

meeting. If they accept, we will begin contract negotiations and get them employed by July 1. We feel like we have some very strong candidates in this pool and are pleased with the process. We wanted someone with day to day experience running a school (a former principal) as well as district experience. The Florida School Boards Association (FSBA) did a great job vetting the candidates.

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

A: First, Hallowes Cove Academy now has a mascot: they will be the Hurricanes. The principal and community members are still working on determining school colors as well as establishing traditions and forming the school’s PTO and SAC Committee. It won’t be long until administration can move into the building. We expect construction to be complete well before the start of next school year.

We will hold a Topping Out ceremony for the Nocatee K-8 school “RR” on May 23 and another Topping Out ceremony for the Silverleaf K-8 school “QQ” on May 30. All the schools are on schedule. On another note, we are really

pleased to have as our contractor a company that is locally owned by a graduate of our own school district.

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

A: We are approaching the end of the school year and with that comes a time of celebration and testing. We have already had the recognition of our Volunteer of the Year and our Teacher of the Year. Coming up soon will be a celebration of our highest achievers academically — the top 3 percent of each school’s graduating class — and our American Youth Character Awards next week. We are preparing for graduation ceremonies which will be here before we know it, beginning with Creekside High School on May 16 and continuing through the following week. Spring testing is upon us before that, including Progress Monitoring for kindergarten through 10th grade and End of Course exams as well as AP exams, which count for college credit.

**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.



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# ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

## Business Briefs

### Annual Small Business Week celebration announced

The 33rd annual Small Business Week Celebration will be held on Friday, May 9 at the University of North Florida. North Florida’s small business leaders, champions and top lenders will be honored at the event, which begins at 9:45 a.m. with a morning workshop and keynote speaker addressing “Your Story, Your Revenue: Turning Authenticity into Income.” The Small Business Week Awards luncheon will follow at 11:30 a.m.

In recognition of the small business community’s contribution to the economy and society, the president of the United States designates one week each year as National Small Business Week. The U.S. SBA, in conjunction with the FSBDC at UNF, will host this special event to honor and present awards to local entrepreneurs and those who support and advocate for small businesses. North Florida winners include 2025 North Florida District Small Businessperson of the Year Viv Helwig, owner of Vested Metals International; and 2025 North Florida, State of Florida and National 8a Graduate of the Year Gina Hill, G.M. Hill Engineering, Inc.

Visit <https://tinyurl.com/4x67tnmh> for more information and to register.

### No cost social media strategy webinar scheduled

The Florida SBDC at UNF will host a no cost webinar entitled, “Tailoring Your Social Media Strategy: Platform-Specific Success” on May 15 from 12 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. This hands-on webinar goes beyond general content tips to explore how to fine-tune posts for individual platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and more.

In this session, attendees will learn: key differences between platforms and how they shape content strategy; how to leverage each platform’s unique features (e.g., hashtags, stories, reels, carousels) for maximum impact; tips for adapting a message to align with different audience expectations and behaviors; and common pitfalls to avoid when repurposing content across multiple platforms.

Attendees will also gain the tools to craft tailored, impactful content that resonates with your audience and amplifies your brand. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/4ey95hjp> for more information and to register.

### March brings a rise in home sales, affordability, and inventory

As temperatures start to rise in Northeast Florida, so do closed sales and new listings. Following seasonal trends, the housing market sees an increase in inventory as well as sales, continuing the upturn that began last month after the winter months brought lower numbers. Additionally, home prices showed a rise in affordability, which is a welcome change for buyers.

The median sales price for single-family homes in Northeast Florida’s six-county region decreased by 1.8 percent since February, dropping to \$379,995. This caused the Home Affordability Index to rise to a score of 69, a 3 percent increase from February.

“While interest rates remain in line with pre-COVID levels, today’s higher home prices have become the new normal. Recent price dips have sparked renewed buyer interest, with a noticeable jump in showing requests and open house traffic,” said 2025 NEFAR President, Mario Gonzalez.

In March, closed sales for single-family homes rose by 35.7 percent month-over-month, totaling 1,784 transactions, while pending sales were at 1,514. New

listings rose noticeably by 10.6 percent from February to March, recording 3,656 homes.

Since February, the active inventory of single-family homes increased by 10.2 percent to 8,258 properties; however, this is a drastic increase from the previous year, as the number of properties has grown exponentially by 63.3 percent since March 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 increased to 43 days, a 19.4 percent increase from February, indicating homes selling slightly slower than they did last month.

In St. Johns County, the March 2025 median price for single-family homes did not change, sitting at \$549,000. Median days on the market rose 47.2 percent from February to 53. Closed sales increased by 34.3 to 415, with pending sales now at 339. New listings rose by 6.7 percent to 889, while active inventory increased by 14.2 percent to 2,258 homes, representing a 5.4 -month supply. The Home Affordability Index rose slightly to 48, though St. Johns County remains the most expensive county in the region.

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FAP-19420-A-AD



## with St. Johns County Commissioner Christian Whitehurst, District 1t 1

**Q: What can you tell us about the clearing taking place at the corner of State Road 13 and Otoes Place?**

A: This property was zoned decades ago and the owner has development rights for the use they are preparing for today. The Board of County Commissioners directed our staff to work with the neighborhood to try to get the developers to save as many trees as possible and to be a good neighbor. We really did everything we could, but unfortunately, the developers did cut down many trees.

**Q: Do you have any park updates?**

A: We had the ribbon cutting for Mill Creek Park in early March. This park has two new baseball fields, two new softball fields, and a new multipurpose field. It was packed with people and fully utilized the day we were there. The demand for more park space is clearly there.

There are also two new parks, the Central Community Park and the Central Sportsplex, that are getting underway.

We expect to cut the ribbon on these two parks, located on State Road 16A near the new K-8 school at the back entrance of Shearwater, by the end of 2026. That seems like a long time from now, but there is so much subterranean infrastructure that is needed for these parks. Finally, we had a community meeting recently to discuss the new neighborhood park off Pacetti Road. This will contain a pavilion, a dog park, and a basketball court, and is needed as it helps take some of the pressure off the other parks.

**Q: Can you shed any insight into the county’s new Strategic Plan?**

A: One of the legitimate criticisms of the county is that we’ve never had

formal plans for a path forward in St. Johns County. We’re excited that we just finalized the first Strategic Plan, which can be fine-tuned and adjusted if needed as the years go by. It addresses many things, like how we want to manage growth and recreation space, as well as aspirational vision statements that address lifestyle and quality of life. If a project comes before the board that doesn’t fit this Strategic Plan, we can now point to it and require the developer make revisions. It’s another tool in our tool kit to manage growth and it’s available to view on our website.

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

finances 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](mailto:clerk@stjohnsclerk.com).

Photo courtesy St. Johns County Clerk of Court St. Johns County Clerk Customer Care Division.

River City Theatre to stage first performance

River City Theatre is a new performing arts group led by executive artistic director, Stephen Billy, who previously served as the theatre instructor and program manager at Bartram Trail High School where he showcased his commitment to nurturing young talent and inspiring creativity in his students.

“At River City Theatre, we believe in the transformative power of the performing arts,” Billy said. “Through our innovative and high-quality theatrical productions and educational programs, we are dedicated to entertaining, engaging, and empowering the Jacksonville area. Whether you're a local actor sharing your talents on stage or a first-time audience member, we aim to create a welcoming ‘home away from home’ for everyone.”

River City Theatre is committed to

preserving theatre as an art form, which is matched only by its dedication to serving the community.

“Thanks to the generous support of individuals and organizations, we're able to craft theatre magic that changes lives,” Billy said.

In late July, River City Theatre will stage Lionel Bart's “Oliver!” Visit [rivercitytheatre.com](http://rivercitytheatre.com) for more information and to purchase tickets. For sponsorship opportunities, email Stephen Billy at [stephen.billy@rivercitytheatre.com](mailto:stephen.billy@rivercitytheatre.com).

Newcomers of North St. Johns announces May luncheon

Newcomers of North Saint Johns will host its May luncheon on Tuesday, May 20 beginning at 11 a.m. at Club Continental, 2143 Astor Street in Orange Park. Doors open at 10:30 a.m. The luncheon will feature the installation of the Newcomers of North Saint Johns board of directors for 2025-2026.

Luncheon includes entrée choices of: Tuscan chicken topped with mushrooms and spinach; citrus-glazed mahi mahi; or pasta primavera. All entrées are served with a house mixed salad and bread and butter. Dessert is the chef's choice. Beverages include iced tea, hot tea, coffee and water. A cash bar is also available.

The cost for the luncheon and program is \$35 for members and \$40 for guests. All reservations and payments must be received by May 8, 2025. Visit <https://newcomersofnorthstjohns.org> for more information about the luncheon and membership. Newcomers of North Saint Johns offers a wide variety of activities for its members to stay connected and have fun including smaller lunch groups, Bunco, Canasta, wine socials, golf, Mah Jongg, a walking group, day trips and cultural events.

Briefs cont. on pg.10



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

# Life

travel • pantry raiders • gardening  
fishing • entertainment • puzzles

## Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson  
editor@floridanewslines.com

### Karen Rippa

Karen Rippa, her husband James, and their four sons relocated to NW St. Johns County from western Massachusetts four years ago. “You could say we are a ‘post-COVID’ family,” she said. The Rippa family was very interested in living in a warmer climate near the ocean in a good school district, and also escaping the snow. Karen Rippa teaches fifth grade at Julington Creek Elementary School and James is a chiropractor who owns two practices in the area. Their sons, aged 11 through 17, span all three school levels and are very active in youth sports. They share their home with Goldendoodle Lola, whom they adopted in the middle of COVID lockdown “because we were tired of staring at each other,” according to Karen. The family has acclimated easily to the hometown feel of the area and is also very active in the Church of Eleven22.

#### Q: Did you always want to be a teacher?

A: I had always played school when I was little, but in first grade I had an amazing male teacher who was dynamic for the ‘80s. He would do cool things like print polaroids and hang them up in the classroom. We corresponded until I was through high school and he was proud that I was going to be a teacher. I know I was put on this planet to be a teacher and I always felt bad for those who struggled with



Photo courtesy Karen Rippa  
The Rippa Family.

what they wanted to do.

#### Q: How did you meet your husband, James?

A: We met through mutual friends and started dating our senior year of college at Elon University in North Carolina. He graduated with a degree in physiology and sports medicine and knew he wanted to do something in wellness. After I graduated with my teaching degree and moved back to Massachusetts to teach, he went to the University of Bridgeport (Connecticut) College of Chiropractic to begin a four-year program. He commuted to see me on the weekends and when he was able to relocate to Massachusetts to do his clinicals his fourth year, we were able to get married. I also earned a master’s degree at the University of Massachusetts during this time.

#### Q: What is your favorite part about being a teacher?

A: It’s always the kids ... their resili-

ence, and they are so excited to see you every day. They notice everything and know I work hard. They can tell if I’m having a bad day and they give me hugs. I love working at Julington Creek Elementary. It’s the quintessential neighborhood school. All the teachers are extremely dedicated and the PTO goes above and beyond.

#### Q: How did COVID and the lockdowns change you?

A: I remember complaining about my busy life and then COVID hit and we didn’t

have anything to do ... soon, all those things that felt like chores, I was grateful for. When everything halted, I had time to think and I realized I missed those things. It was an attitude adjustment; now I’m just grateful for all the opportunities we have.

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

A: We have four kids, so there is always something going on. Rocco is a senior at Creekside and plays football; Marco is a sophomore at Creekside and plays basketball; Nicolas is in eighth grade at Fruit Cove and plays football and basketball; and Matteo is in fifth grade at JCE and plays basketball for a club team.

I like to run, “Uber” the kids around and make dinner. We always have family dinner, even if it has to be late due to sports. James has always coached our kids and presently coaches Fruit Cove Middle School football and for the 904 Elite Basketball Club.

SJC new video cont. from pg. 1

released monthly, with each video timed to coincide with relevant 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](http://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.

Rotary Pub cont. from pg. 1

restaurants will translate into almost \$15,000 for Rotary’s charitable efforts locally and internationally.

The Rotary Club of Bartram Trail — Julington Creek meets every Thursday morning from 7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. at Westminster Woods on Julington Creek. Guests and prospective members are always welcome. There are more than 34,000 Rotary Clubs around the world, with over 1.4 million Rotarians, making Rotary the oldest and most international service club in the world. Visit [www.bartramtrailrotary.org](http://www.bartramtrailrotary.org) for more information.

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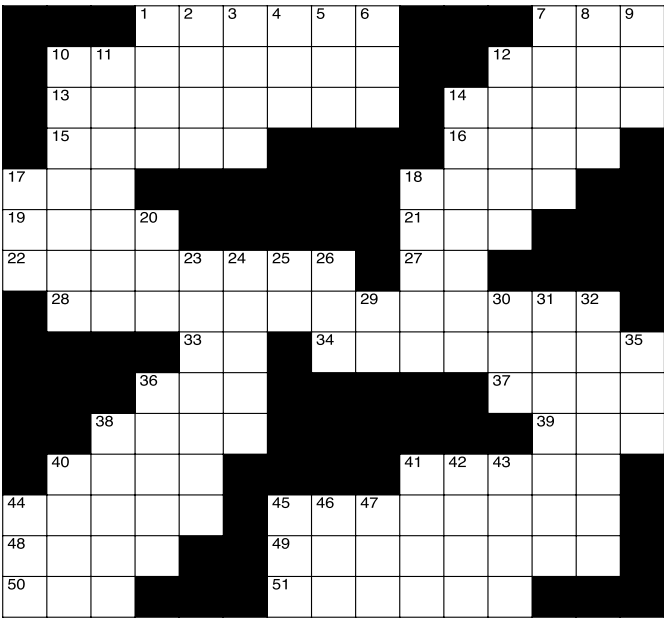
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CLUES ACROSS

1. Bring up  
7. Child  
10. Formal written defense  
12. Bangladeshi currency  
13. Burial site  
14. In the lead  
15. Large recesses in a church  
16. Count on  
17. Defunct phone company  
18. Golf scores  
19. Afflicts  
21. Defensive nuclear weapon  
22. Prominence  
27. “The Great Lakes State”  
28. SoCal ballplayer

33. Location of White House  
34. Magnificence  
36. Hip hop songstress  
37. Capital of Yemen  
38. \_\_ Blyton, children’s author  
39. Bomb  
40. Pancake made of buckwheat f  
41. Pinkish-violet color  
44. A way to make right  
45. Monument to one buried elsewhere  
48. Region south of Dead Sea  
49. Acts out against  
50. Harsh cry of a crow  
51. Formal title for a woman

CLUES DOWN

1. Kitchen devices  
2. Wings  
3. Mythological birds  
4. Everyone has one  
5. Matchstick game  
6. Bar bill  
7. Weights  
8. Satisfactorily  
9. Small amount  
10. Tree types  
11. Small protuberances  
12. Equivalent of 100K BTU  
14. Type of horse  
17. More (Spanish)  
18. Argentinian province  
20. A bad act  
23. Moving in a circular way  
24. Battery type
25. Atomic #58  
26. Popular breakfast food  
29. An alternative  
30. Tooth caregiver  
31. A way to conform  
32. Disfigured men  
35. Cool!  
36. Genus of mosses  
38. Body part  
40. Kashmiri people  
41. Round water pot  
42. Something to purchase  
43. Emit coherent radiation  
44. Indicates 10  
45. Advertising metric  
46. Pitching stat  
47. Head movement

CAUGHT READING WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

APPENDIX  
AUDIO  
AUTHOR  
BIBLIOGRAPHY  
BINDING  
BLURB  
BOOKS  
BOOKSTORE  
BORROW  
CHAPTER  
EDITION  
E-READER  
GENRE  
HARDCOVER  
ILLUSTRATION  
IMAGINATION  
INTEREST  
LIBRARY  
NONFICTION  
PAGE  
READING  
SHELVES  
SPINE  
STORYTELLER

CRYPTO FUN

Solve the code to discover words related to reading.  
Each number corresponds to a letter.  
(Hint: 20 = A)

A.

26 25 25 7 15 20 8 7

Clue: Holds place

B.

23 20 9 3 2

Clue: Sheets of paper

C.

10 21 20 8 20 10 13 3 8

Clue: Person in book

D.

11 17 10 13 17 25 6

Clue: Invented or untrue

Briefs cont. from pg. 8

Bartram Trail Women’s Club to host “Island Paradise”

The Bartram Trail Women’s Club (a/k/a Bartram Trail Newcomers and Women’s Club) will hold its meeting and luncheon on Tuesday, May 13, at 11 a.m. at Club Continental on the St. Johns River, 2143 Astor Street, in Orange Park. Doors will open at 10:30 a.m. The May luncheon theme is Island Paradise. Members may dress in island

theme or tourist attire if they desire. Island music from various islands and demonstrations of native dances in costume from those islands will be the entertainment.

The luncheon menu includes a house salad and Hawaiian bread with entree choices of Kahlua pork, citrus chicken or a vegetable spring roll, accompanied by pineapple rice, black beans. Dessert is a vanilla cake with pineapple frosting.

Checks for \$32 should be made payable to BTNC and mailed to Brenda Jenkins, 2204 Fort Mellon Court, St. Augustine, FL 32092. Payment must be received no later than the first Friday of the month, May 2, 2025. Be sure to indicate your entrée choice on the check memo.

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 bartramtnc@gmail.com for more information or visit www.facebook.com/BTNC1 to see pictures of the meetings and download a membership form.

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Free resources available to ease caregiver stress

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

Adult caregiving in the United States is a significant and growing responsibility. In Florida alone, AARP reports that 2.7 million adults serve as unpaid family caregivers on top of their existing responsibilities. The growing complexity of caregiving affects the caregivers' own finances, health and well-being. As the Area Agency on Aging and the Aging and Disability Resource Center for Northeast Florida, ElderSource offers a free program aimed at relieving the stresses on local caregivers.

ElderSource's Tailored Caregiver Assessment and Referral Program (TCARE) is designed to prevent caregiver burnout. Program participants are paired with trained specialists that provide them with strategies to reduce root causes of burnout and develop care plans customized for each caregiver's unique needs. It is completely free to participants, as the program is supported by a grant from the Humana Foundation.

TCARE has been a major lifeline for Northeast Florida families

since 2021, helping more than 220 caregivers to date. Aside from direct support provided by trained specialists, the program also connects caregivers with community resources that best meet their needs. It's a unique resource that enables caregivers to help loved ones age in place and delay nursing home placement, while also taking care of themselves.

The relief experienced by those who participated in TCARE is evident in the program's exit surveys.

"Working with you has changed my life, it's giving me a few hours off, which at 77 I desperately need. Dementia is a 24/7 job," one participant noted anonymously. "Your assistance is priceless, amazing!"

Access to the free TCARE program is available to caregivers who are supporting a loved one who is age 60 or older and resides in Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, St. Johns, Nassau or Volusia counties. ElderSource currently has 90 free spots available in the program. Visit MyElderSource.org or call (904) 391-6647 to learn more about TCARE and sign up.



Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis  
mail@floridanewslines.com

By now the heat is really starting to set in. For better or worse, 90 degree days are going to be more and more common for a while. Fishing should continue to improve this month. Just about everything I mentioned last month will still be applicable, but as a whole, the fishing will be more consistent.

The small redfish that seemed to be everywhere last month will still be ubiquitous, but larger slot reds will start to be more common. Docks and shell bars are good places to target, but they will also be up in the shallows cruising any grass beds we might be lucky enough to have. You can start to size up any artificials you've been throwing, since their natural forage is also growing. Mullet, crabs, and croakers to name a few.

Trout will be a better bet since salinity has increased with the water temperatures. Deeper docks and bridges are good areas to look. If you see any bait schools on the surface, try any structures in that vicinity. Trolling dock lines with soft plastics is a great way to find concentrations of trout. Don't go too fast; just fast enough to keep the

baits from dragging on the bottom is a good speed to start with. You can also experiment with colors and tail styles, but be sure it swims straight.

Chances are there might be a sheepshead on any dock in the river right now. If you're looking for simple, messy, and possibly aggravating fishing look no further than our convict fish. Aptly named for their striped outfits and knack for stealing baits, they are humbling fish. Clams are probably my favorite bait for them, followed by crab and fresh dead shrimp. If I could catch live shrimp in the river this month, I'd say that — but since the season is still closed, fresh dead is what I have. I fish them on a fish finder rig or knocker rig. Hook size will range from size 4 to 1/0. I size the hook to the size of the bait. Use just enough weight to keep the bait on the bottom. Fish up current from structure and drop baits back to it. Don't be afraid to move if nothing is happening. I usually give a spot 15 minutes before moving.

Lastly, there might be a few silver things showing up if you're interested. Tight lines.

# Summer Camp Activities Guide<sup>®</sup>



## 8 healthy snack ideas kids will love

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.com

Parents know that growing children need a lot of food. According to pediatric dietitian Hanna Leikin, MS, RD, CSP, LD, kids need a higher calorie demand per body weight compared to adults to support bone development, muscle growth and other bodily functions. Perhaps that’s why it seems like a stocked refrigerator or pantry can become barren in just a few days when kids are in the house.

Children are frequently looking for snacks between meals, which means that parents need to have a variety of snack foods at the ready for their youngsters. But it can be a struggle to find healthy snacks children will eat. With that in mind, parents can consider these eight healthy alternatives to less nutritional fare like chips or sugary treats.

1. Fruit on a stick: It seems any food enjoyed on a stick is fun to eat. This is certainly an item for older kids, as parents won’t want to worry about younger children getting injured with the pointy wooden skewers. Simply slide a variety of chopped or sliced fruit onto the skew-

ers and make a healthy, colorful snack. For an added bonus, include a small cup of low-fat vanilla yogurt for a fruit dip.

2. Baby carrots and hummus: Who can resist baby carrots? After all, they seem tailor-made for kids’ small fingers. Pair with a homemade or store-bought hummus, which is full of protein and fiber. You can even find dessert hummus, which may prove particularly appealing to children’s palates.

3. Crackers and cheese: Choose whole-grain crackers and a low-fat cheese. This provides the crunch of chips without the fat and calories. In addition, cheese adds protein and the benefits of calcium and other nutrients found in dairy.

4. Nut butters and pretzels: Kids need unsaturated fats to spur brain growth and overall development. Nuts and nut butters offer these good fats. The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases says peanut butter can be given to kids as young as four months old, and that early exposure may prevent peanut allergies. Additional nut butters include almond and cashew. Let kids dip pretzels into the nut butter for a



Photo courtesy MetroCreative  
Children are frequently looking for snacks between meals, which means that parents need to have a variety of snack foods at the ready for their youngsters.

filling snack.  
5. Overnight oats creations: Let kids take part in building jars or containers of overnight oats with their favorite ingredients. When old fashioned rolled

oats are mixed with low-fat milk (or dairy alternatives), raisins, granola, fresh fruit, chia seeds, and even low-fat yogurt and left to sit overnight, the result is a spoonable treat that’s ideal for meals and snacks. Plus the fiber in oatmeal will help keep children feeling fuller longer.

6. Frozen smoothie bowl: This is a great alternative to ice cream. Simply blend your child’s favorite frozen fruits (and toss in a few veggies) with low-fat Greek yogurt. Serve in a bowl with toppings like granola, finely chopped nuts or coconut flakes.

7. Energy balls or bars: Mix dates, nuts, seeds, and rolled oats and press into bar shapes or roll into bite-sized balls when kids need a sweet and energizing snack.

8. Turkey and cheese roll-ups: Ensure that kids are getting enough protein by offering a lean protein source like sliced turkey. Roll up a slice of turkey or sliced chicken breast around a cheese stick for a portable and fun snack.

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# 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 operations 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 [firstcoastculturalcenter.org/programs-events/youth-art-programs](http://firstcoastculturalcenter.org/programs-events/youth-art-programs) for more information and to register.

## Tips to get kids to read more

By NewsLine Staff  
mail@floridanewslines.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 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.



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## Water recreation safety tips

By NewsLine Staff  
[mail@floridanewslines.com](mailto: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](http://ndpa.org).



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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 integrity 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.

St. Johns cont. from pg. 7

**Q: What else do you have to share with District 1?**

A: I’m excited that the widening of Race Track Road from four lanes to six lanes, east- and west-bound around the intersection with W. Peyton Parkway, F has recently opened. This will go a long way towards relieving congestion at that intersection.

Also, I’d like everyone to know that I

am available to speak to homeowners associations, civic organizations and the like to discuss anything, including growth management. Just contact me via cell phone or email (below) and we will set something up.

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

A: Readers can email me at bcc1c-whitehurst@sjcfl.us or call me at (904) 584-5348.

Parks cont. from pg. 1

the visitor experience. Certification was received in April 2024. Parks and Recreation sites will be included on IBCCES’s app and on AutismTravel.com, a free online resource for parents that lists certified locations and professionals.


Clay Murphy, District 3 commissioner and vice-chair of the Board of County Commissioners, spoke in support of Parks and Recreation’s efforts, funded by the Tourist Development Council, to make the County’s public spaces more inclusive.

“This is such an exciting milestone for St. Johns County,” Commissioner Murphy said. “We want all families to feel welcome. This is just the beginning.”

St. Johns County Parks and Recreation joins a growing number of tourism

and recreation-related organizations in the area to complete certification as part of a larger initiative led by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce, aiming to achieve the Certified Autism Destination designation. This initiative will ensure that the area offers multiple certified options for entertainment, recreation, and lodging for autistic and sensory-sensitive individuals and their families.

“With one in 36 children in the U.S. diagnosed with autism, and nearly 20 percent of the population experiencing sensory processing sensitivity, it’s crucial that businesses and organizations have the tools to provide a supportive and engaging environment for all,” Chamber of Commerce president and CEO Isabelle Renault said. “We are now more than halfway to our goal of making St. Johns County the first certified autism tourist destination in Florida.”



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Travel

10 Famous Bridges in the USA

By Debi Lander  
mail@floridanewslines.com

The United States is home to some of the most remarkable bridges in the world, each with its own story and architectural significance. My travels captured memories from the following bridges. How many have you crossed?

1. Golden Gate Bridge (San Francisco, CA)

Arguably the most iconic bridge in the world, the Golden Gate Bridge spans a strait connecting San Francisco to Marin County. This suspension bridge, completed in 1937, stretches 1.7 miles and is instantly recognizable for its striking International Orange color and Art Deco design. Don't miss the pedestrian walkway.

2. Brooklyn Bridge (New York City)

Completed in 1883, the Brooklyn Bridge was the first steel-wire suspension bridge ever built. Connecting Manhattan and Brooklyn over the East River, it remains one of New York City's most celebrated landmarks, blending Gothic towers with steel cables.

3. George Washington Bridge (NYC-NJ)

The busiest bridge in the world, the George Washington Bridge spans the Hudson River, linking New York City and New Jersey. Opened in 1931, this double-decked suspension bridge carries millions of vehicles each year and offers stunning views of the Manhattan skyline.

4. Mackinac Bridge (Michigan)

Connecting Michigan's Upper and Lower Peninsulas, the Mackinac Bridge is one of the longest suspension bridges, spanning five miles across the Straits of Mackinac. This bridge, which opened in 1957, offers a vital transportation link.

5. Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel (Virginia)

A marvel of modern engineering, the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel stretches 17.6 miles, connecting Virginia's Eastern Shore with the mainland. Opened in 1964, it features a combination of bridges, tunnels, and artificial islands, making it one of the most unique bridge systems in the world. Be sure to stop in the Visitor Center to learn about its construction.

6. Lake Pontchartrain Causeway (Louisiana)

The Lake Pontchartrain Causeway stretches nearly 24 miles and holds the Guinness World Record as the longest continuous bridge over water. It offers drivers a journey across Louisiana's vast and foreboding lake near New Orleans.

7. Bixby Creek Bridge (Big Sur, CA)

A symbol of the rugged beauty of California's Pacific Coast Highway, the Bixby Creek Bridge is one of the most photographed bridges in the country. This concrete arch bridge, opened



Photo courtesy Bobbie Ray  
Sunshine Skyway Bridge.

in 1931, offers memorable cliffs and ocean views along Big Sur. I remember crossing Bixby Bridge during the Big Sur Marathon.

8. Seven Mile Bridge (Florida Keys)

If you've driven to Key West, you've traveled across the iconic Seven Mile Bridge, which connects Knight's Key to Little Duck Key. Initially completed in 1912 as part of the Florida East Coast Railway, a 1935 hurricane tore up the tracks. The current (1982) bridge runs parallel to the original and remains one of the longest bridges in the U.S. While stretching over turquoise waters, some sections hover just above the surface.

9. Sunshine Skyway Bridge (Tampa Bay)

One of the most visually striking bridges is Florida's Sunshine Skyway

Bridge, which spans Tampa Bay. Completed in 1987, this cable-stayed bridge becomes colorfully illuminated at night. You cannot walk across it — it's a 180-foot drop into the water.

10. Evergreen Point Floating Bridge (Seattle, WA)

The longest floating bridge in the world spans Lake Washington between Seattle and Medina. The current version, completed in 2016, features modern engineering improvements.

For me, bridges are more than just platforms that physically link two places, they evoke emotions that connect and unite me to the place.

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