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Photo courtesy Donna Huntsman
Emma Huntsman with one of the GTM litter stations.

Creekside junior earns Girl Scout Gold Award for environmental advocacy

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Emma Huntsman, a junior at Creekside High School, was recently honored among the distinguished recipients of the Girl Scout Gold Award by Girl Scouts of Gateway Council at a special recognition event in Tallahassee on April 6. Huntsman partnered with Guana Tolomato Matanzas (GTM) Estuarine Research Reserve to contribute more than 300 volunteer hours toward her project, which aims to raise awareness about the critical role estuaries play in maintaining a healthy ecosystem.

Girl Scout cont. on pg. 7



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Field of Dreams groundbreaking celebrates upcoming expansion

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Field of Dreams Baseball, St. Johns County's disability-friendly baseball field located at Aberdeen Park, hosted a groundbreaking ceremony on May 3 to celebrate a major expansion. The project's \$1,513,800 construction contract was approved by the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners at its regular meeting on April 15.

The baseball field will have its existing parking lot expanded, and a new concession building with ADA-accessible restrooms will be added.

District 4 Commissioner and Board of County Commissioners Chair Krista Joseph, District 1 Commissioner Christian Whitehurst, District 2 Commissioner Sarah Arnold, and District 3 Commissioner Clay Murphy attended the ceremony, along with Sheriff Robert Hardwick and various St. Johns County administrators and staff. The ceremony was held on the field in between games, with players and their families present, ending in a series of first pitches between the commissioners and players.

"The new ADA amenities will really help enhance the Field of Dreams into a premier destination for families and players who already travel from throughout Northeast Florida to our community for this opportunity, to play on this kind of a field," Joseph said. "Beyond the bats and balls, the hits and the hugs, the field represents hope for the players."

The baseball field is home to the Field of Dreams (FOD) Baseball League, a sustainable voluntary organization that provides a safe, ADA-certified facility where children of all ages with mental or physical disabilities can play baseball for free and be an active part of a thriving athletic association. The FOD Baseball League gives disabled children the opportunity to play baseball in an organized league, wear a uniform, have their names announced, participate in the singing of the National Anthem before each game, and be a player on an athletic team. Aberdeen Park also offers an all-inclusive, ADA-accessible playground.

"When we started this league in 2011, I never envisioned what we would build here," Field of Dreams co-founder George Vancore said. "The commissioners have really stepped up and realized what we have built out here and what we're going to sustain over time."

Vancore attributed the success and popularity of Field of Dreams Baseball to a strong partnership with the county as well as the many Field of Dreams volunteers who work tirelessly performing administrative duties, serving as umpires and buddies on game day, and working in the concession stand.

"This is a very special place, but it doesn't happen by magic," Vancore said. "God bless these children — that's why we're here."



Photos courtesy St. Johns County
Dignitaries break ground on the new expansion of Field of Dreams on May 3.



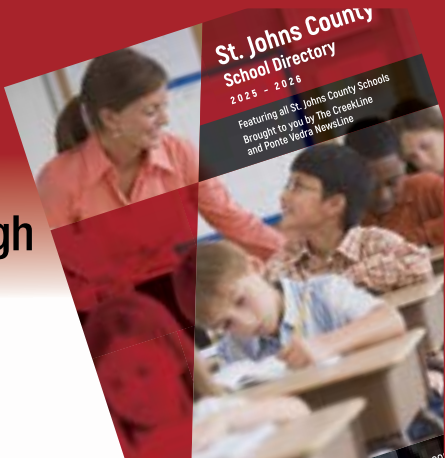
Field of Dreams co-founder and volunteer George Vancore with renderings of the proposed expansion.

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Briefs

School district launches “BusPlanner” for student bus information

St. Johns County School District has introduced BusPlanner, a new online transportation portal designed to give parents easy access to their students’ bus information. Beginning with the 2025 – 2026 school year, all student pick-up and drop-off times and locations will be provided exclusively through BusPlanner and will no longer be available on Home Access Center (HAC). Parents can access BusPlanner through its web portal at <https://sjcsd.mybusplanner.com> or by downloading the companion mobile app, Chipmunk, available for Android and Apple devices.

BusPlanner will also enhance communication by providing timely updates about bus delays and other important transportation-related notifications. In addition, parents can use the system to send messages directly to the St. Johns County School District Transportation Department.

To get started, families should create an account on the BusPlanner website (<https://sjcsd.mybusplanner.com/>) or on the Chipmunk app using the same email

address associated with their Home Access Center (HAC) account. The school district encourages all families with bus riders to register early and stay informed ahead of the upcoming school year.

Clerk’s Office launches “Salute to Service” program to honor local veterans

The St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller’s Office has launched a new initiative to recognize and honor the brave men and women who have served in the United States Armed Forces.

After recording their DD-214 discharge document into St. Johns County’s Official Records, veterans will be issued a free, official ID card that serves as verification. The Salute to Service program also connects veterans with discounts and special offers from participating restaurants, retail shops, service providers, and local attractions as a tangible “thank you” from the community.

To receive a Salute to Service ID card, veterans must record their DD-214 with the Clerk’s Office. The process is free and offered year-round. Once recorded,

veterans will have their photo taken and their personalized ID card will be issued within seven business days.

Veterans can visit the Richard O. Watson Judicial Center at 4010 Lewis Speedway in St. Augustine Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. with no appointment needed. The main office and two Annex locations accept appointments during regular business hours; the Julington Creek Annex is located at 725 Flora Branch Blvd and is open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. while the Ponte Vedra Beach Annex is located at 151 Sawgrass Corners Drive and is open Mondays and Wednesdays from 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. Visit stjohnsclerk.com to make an appointment online or for more information.

Elder abuse workshop scheduled

Older adults and caregivers are encouraged to register for an upcoming webinar hosted by ElderSource and focused on elder abuse and fraud prevention. “Empower and Protect: Elder Abuse and Fraud Prevention” will be held virtually on Zoom on Wednesday, June 11 from 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.

In observance of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, ElderSource is partnering with the 10 other Area Agencies on Aging from across the state of Florida to host this free webinar. The speakers will share their expertise on:

- The Florida Abuse Hotline
- What elder abuse is, and how to report it

- How to spot and prevent Medicare fraud
- How scammers try to steal Medicare numbers
- The top scams to look out for in 2025

Attendees must register for the event to join; visit bit.ly/FLWEAAD2025 to register.

Public awareness campaign reduces park vandalism repair costs

The St. Johns County Parks and Recreation Department recently celebrated the success of its “Enjoy, Don’t Destroy” anti-vandalism campaign, which has saved the county tens of thousands of dollars in vandalism-related expenses.

From April 2024 to March 2025, following the launch of the Enjoy, Don’t Destroy campaign in March 2024, St. Johns County spent \$18,093 on park vandalism repairs, an approximately 60 percent reduction in costs from the previous year.

Use the SJC Connect app to report vandalism and use the non-emergency number for the St. Johns County Sheriff’s Office — (904) 824-8304 — to report people caught in the act of vandalism.

“Oliver!” to be staged in July

River City Theatre will produce Lionel Bart’s “Oliver!” in July 2025. This beloved Tony and Olivier Award-winning musical is based on the Charles Dickens’ novel, “Oliver Twist.” The story follows a young orphan boy, Oliver, who escapes to London and finds acceptance amongst a group of petty thieves and pickpockets led by the elderly Fagin. When Oliver is captured for a theft that he did not commit, the benevolent victim, Mr. Brownlow, takes him in. Fearing the safety of his hideout, Fagin employs the sinister Bill Sikes and the sympathetic Nancy to kidnap him back, threatening Oliver’s chances of discovering the true love of a family.

Tickets are now on sale for performances July 17 – July 20 at 7 p.m. and July 24 – July 27 at 7 p.m. Performances will be held at The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd, Betsy Lovett Hall, in Riverside. Visit www.rivercitytheatre.com to purchase tickets or make a donation in support of River City Theatre.

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June

Community Calendar

What's Happening in St. Johns

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

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

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

3rd: Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet on Tuesday, June 3 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 understanding the colors in your fabric stash. New members/guests welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

8th: A Course in Miracles Study Group meets on Sundays from 9 a.m. – 10 a.m. at Unity Church for Creative Living, 2777 Race Track Road. This is a unique spiritual self-study program designed to awaken attendees to the truth of oneness with God. Cost: Donation. Call (904) 287-1505 or email UCCLoffice2777@gmail.com for more information.

9th: The Northwest St. Johns County United for Progress Club will meet at 6:30 p.m. on June 9. Kayla Hull, director of Children and Youth at River of Life Methodist Church will speak on "When Pride Is Polarizing." Email nwsjcp@gmail.com for more information.

11th: 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.

12th: 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.

14th: The Bartram Trail Genealogy Club meets the second Saturday of each month (this month, June 14) from 2 p.m. – 4 p.m. at the Bartram Trail Branch Library. The June topic is "Managing duplicate people and facts on Ancestry, in FTM and Roots Magic." New and experienced genealogy members are welcomed. Email ginglish@comcast.net for more information. Visit www.facebook.com/groups/BTGenClubGroup to send a request to join the club.

14th: Friends of Alpine Park group will meet on June 14 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.

16th: The All Star Quilters Guild will meet at 9:30 a.m. for socializing prior to the 10 a.m. meeting on Monday, June 16 at First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. Come help solve the "Mystery" as presented by Sharon Tomore, Linda McClelland, and a few extras. "Show and Tell" is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit www.allstarquilters.org for more information.

17th: Happy Hookers crochet group will meet at the Bartram Trail Branch Library on June 17 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.

18th: Free Tech Help with David will be held on Wednesday, June 18 from 10:30 a.m. – 12 p.m. at the Bartram Trail Branch Library. Drop in for tech assistance with Android, Apple, and reader devices; no RSVPs required. Bring your device fully charged and know your passwords. Visit sjcpls.org/branches/bartram-trail-branch/ for more information.

19th: William Bartram Scenic Highway Group will meet on Thursday, June 19 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.

23rd: Container Gardening and New Beginnings, presented by St. John County Master Gardener Karen Doyle, will be held at COA's River House, 179 Marine St., on June 23 from 9:15 a.m. – 11:15 a.m. Learn successful plant choices and design ideas for planting in pots. Attendees will have the opportunity to do their own hands-on container of cuttings to take home. If you want to make your own container garden, bring a small container, soil and plants. Pre-registration required at coasjc.coursestorm.com or call (904) 209-3655 (Monday to Thursday 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.)

28th: Dress a Girl Around the World at the Bartram Trail Branch Library will be held on Saturday, June 28 at 10 a.m. Learn to make dresses and shorts for girls around the world. You can pick up a kit to create at home, or turn in dresses you created to the Bartram Trail Branch. We also accept fabric and notion donations. Call the library at (904) 827-6960 for more information.

29th: The Heart of a Course in Miracles Workshop, will be held from 12:30 p.m. – 2 p.m. at Unity Church for Creative Living, 2777 Race Track Road. Cost: Early Bird, \$30; after June 22, \$40. Call (904) 287-1505 or email UCCLoffice2777@gmail.com for more information.



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

Q: What are your thoughts on the recently concluded search for a new superintendent?

A: I was very pleased with the process from start to finish. I was pleased with the number of applicants we received as well as the quality of the applicants. All four of our finalists were stellar and any one of them could have done the job. The conundrum and wisdom piece for us board members was finding the one person who could do the best job for St. Johns County.

Q: Can you take us through the process?

A: Tuesday, May 13 was a grueling day because it was the day of public interviews for the four finalists. Board members asked the same questions of each candidate to be fair. After this hours-long process wrapped up, we hosted an evening meet and greet for the finalists and any member of the public who wanted to attend. I'd say we had around 150 people in attendance, including school and district staff, teachers, principals and parents.

Q: What happened at the Meet and Greet?

A: Each finalist was allowed five minutes to introduce themselves without the other finalists in the room. Then, they each went to one of the four corners of the room to answer questions from attendees. They each drew a crowd. We board members watched the interactions and had the opportunity to see how comfortable each was when talking to the attendees. I was also able to chat with some people in the room and gleaned input. One fun thing was that Ketterlinus Elementary sent

their student news crew to interview the finalists. Also, a guitar trio from St. Augustine High School entertained us.

Q: What was the final part of the interview process?

A: On the next day, Wednesday, each board member interviewed each applicant individually for an hour. Board members were free to handle their interviews as they saw fit. I started each of mine asking for the finalist to tell me about themselves personally. I was trying for a more relaxed and conversational tone. Finally, we had one last opportunity to read the public comments from after the public interviews before the May 20 meeting where we selected the new superintendent.

Q: What was the procedure of the selection meeting on May 20?

A: We did have a specific process to follow. First, the entire selection process was reviewed. Then the board entered into rounds of discussion and voting. In the first round, each board member was given five minutes to give their thoughts on the candidates. Then, beginning with the second round, more discussion ensued before a motion was made to select Dr. Brennan Asplen as the new superintendent. I'm delighted to announce that he received the unanimous vote of the board.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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



with St. Johns County Commissioner
Christian Whitehurst, District 1

Q: We've seen an increase in the number of people asking for money at NW St. Johns County intersections. What can the Board of County Commissioners do about this?

A: We have already done something about it. In 2023, we passed an ordinance that would prohibit anyone from standing in the county right-of-way. The reason we drafted it as a pedestrian safety and right-of-way ordinance is we know that we can't infringe on anyone's First Amendment rights. Right now there is a court case against our county and multiple other counties in Florida, and SJSO cannot enforce our ordinance until we see the outcome of the case.

Q: What does the lawsuit allege and when is the case expected to be decided?

A: Their position is that our ordinance does infringe on First Amendment rights and I disagree. Our ordinance is a pedestrian safety ordinance. It's unknown at this point when the case will be decided, but for those interested in tracking its progress, here are the specifics: the lawsuit is Joseph LaValley et al vs. St. Johns County, case number 3:24-cv-01055 in the US Middle District of Florida Federal Court. I'm hoping that common sense prevails in the court's decision.

Q: Can you comment on the recent ebike accidents, including what the Board of County Commissioners can do to help prevent accidents?

A: First and foremost, it's very sad that two children in our community have been injured on ebikes in the last month. As a policy maker, I'm always looking for ways to improve safety, both on sidewalks and on streets.

This situation is a bit complex. We have existing helmet laws that require anyone under the age of 16 to wear a helmet when operating a bicycle or an ebike. That law is not always being followed or enforced by parents or SJSO. Another law already in place prohibits the ownership of an ebike capable of speeds higher than 28 mph. That law is not always being followed or enforced by parents or SJSO.

So, I ask myself, is it smart to make another law that is not followed or enforced? I want to be clear that as to enforcement, SJSO is spread very thin with limited manpower. They are busy enforcing traffic laws in our community. We as residents must ask ourselves if SJSO would even be capable of enforcing another new law passed by the Board of County Commissioners?

I would like people to reach out and email me with their thoughts on this topic.

Q: As a follow up to last month's column about the development of the land at the corner of State Road 13 and Otoes Place ... what is being built there?

A: Our Growth Management department has told me throughout this process that the developer is building a one-story office park, not a gas station or car wash (which the property would not be zoned for anyway.)

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.

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Guest Column

Busy real estate season is here

By St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer

The busy season for real estate has arrived. If you're looking to purchase a home, here are important items to keep in mind during the home-buying process.

First, be aware that the previous owner's property taxes will not be the same as your property taxes. Once ownership of a property changes, then all caps and exemptions are removed for the following tax year, and the property's assessed value is reset. To accurately determine what your property taxes will be on a

particular property, visit the tax estimator available on our website at www.sjcpa.gov. Once on the website, find the property on the map. Under the report of the property, click the tax estimator button. It will bring you to our tax estimator, and the tax district and millage rate will prepopulate for that property. When filling out the tax estimator fields, always use the property's sale price in the Just (Market) Value field for the most accurate calculation. Our online tax estimator also shows CDD fees, if applicable, and solid waste fees.

Next, if you're selling your home before

purchasing your new home, check your Portability/Save Our Homes total. If you feel this total should be different, contact us, and we will make every effort to work with you. It is important to contact us before your home is sold because we are unable to make updates to a previously owned property. You can find your Portability/Save Our Homes total by either looking at your TRIM notice found on your property record on our website or by contacting our office.

Finally, once you've purchased your home, don't forget to file for home-

stead exemption, Portability/Save Our Homes, and any other qualifying exemptions. The deadline to file for personal exemptions is March 1 of the tax year. Property owners can conveniently file for exemptions through our website or by visiting our office. Once you're approved for a homestead exemption, you do not need to reapply each year unless there has been a change in marital status.

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



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with St. Johns County Sheriff Rob Hardwick

Q: Can you comment on the recent ebike accidents?

A: Ebike rules and regulations as set forth in the Florida state statutes are not crystal clear, because they currently fall under the statutes that cover bicycles as to where one can ride and requirement for use of a helmet under the age of 16. These statutes predate ebikes and their popularity. If we create an ordinance here in St. Johns County and it's passed by the board of county commissioners, there still is the issue that not one size fits all. What's happening in the northwest part of the county is not the same as what we are seeing in the southern part of the county for instance.

Q: What is SJSO doing at this time to try to prevent ebike accidents?

A: First, we are in the midst of an educational campaign that we are sending out via the schools before summer break as a way to reach 52,000 students directly. Secondly, we are waiting to see if

a potential state ordinance receives Gov. DeSantis' signature as well as if our local board of county commissioners pass an ordinance for us to enforce.

Even with all of this, I believe some of the responsibility for safety of young ebike riders is up to the parents. Education should be done at home in addition to what we are doing. We want to have a partnership with parents and guardians so that they are holding their children accountable and they are the first enforcement rather than us.

We really don't want the first interaction of law enforcement with a child to be us giving them a ticket.

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

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

Girls on the Run celebrates successful season



Photo courtesy Anne Soracco

The Girls on the Run teams at Julington Creek Elementary School have just completed the spring season by participating in the Girls on the Run of Northeast Florida End of Season Celebration 5K on Sunday, April 27 at the University of North Florida. This event brings together families, friends, and community members in honoring the girls' growth and achievements. More than 75 teams from multiple surrounding counties participated in the 5K alongside the Julington Creek teams. Girls on the Run is designed to inspire girls of all abilities to recognize and embrace their inner strengths and make meaningful connections with others. The girls also developed and led a Community Impact Project, through which they were able to collect more than 300 boxes of cereal for local families in need. Along with collecting boxes from participating families at Julington Creek Elementary School, the Walmart Neighborhood Market in Fruit Cove donated \$250 worth of cereal.

ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

How to pass along a tradition of giving to your children

By Chris Thompson, CFP®, CRPC®, CMFA®

As an advisor, I often receive questions from my clients who want to help pass along a tradition of giving. If you're looking to impart financial values to your children, here are some ideas on how you can open their eyes to the gift of giving.

Talk about why you give. Help your child understand the importance of giving to others in need. Talk early and often about why sharing your knowledge, abilities, possessions or wealth matters to you. Instilling a culture of giving in your family is a process, not a one-time event. Remember to embrace the joy of giving, doing your best not to make giving back feel like a homework assignment or chore.

Find causes your child cares about. Your child is more likely to develop a

habit of giving back when he or she is passionate about the cause. Start by brainstorming the possibilities of who your child can help, such as their classmates, animals, the environment or individuals experiencing hunger — and encourage them to think about ways they can be of assistance. Do they love to bake or meet new people? Do they enjoy music or caring for animals? Next, help your child choose one or two charities whose missions reflect their interests. Involve older children in the search and vetting process, teaching them how to have confidence that a charity is doing its best to help the cause.

Give and volunteer together. When your children see you volunteering your time, talent and treasure, they see your values at work. Find ways to involve your children in your own giving. During the holiday season,

consider volunteering or purchasing gifts for another family together. Your children will learn first-hand how rewarding giving to others can feel, and you'll have the bonus of creating family memories to cherish, too.

Encourage disciplined saving. Kids need to learn how to manage their own money in order to become responsible givers as they grow older. When your children get an allowance, or otherwise receive money, they can practice making responsible choices. Introduce the idea of "save, share and spend" — setting aside a portion of their money for the future, a portion to help others and a portion for fun spending.

Create a family foundation. Consider establishing a foundation to fund causes you care about. Formalizing your giving in this way can create ongoing opportunities for you and your

children to make a lasting impact on the community. Talk to your financial advisor for advice regarding establishing a foundation and leaving a legacy of service to the next generation.

Chris Thompson, CFP®, CMFA®, CRPC® is a Private Wealth Advisor and Managing Director with Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC in Ponte Vedra Beach. He specializes in fee-based financial planning and asset management strategies and has been in practice for 31 years. To contact him, email chris.thompson@ampf.com; visit www.ameripriseadvisors.com/chris.thompson or call (904) 380-2290.

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PROPERTY APPRAISER**
Eddie Creamer, CFA



NOTICE OF CERTIFICATION OF TAX ROLL
Pursuant to Sections 193.122 and 197.323, Florida Statutes,
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Tax Collector on the 8th day of May, 2025, for the Collection of 2024 Taxes
to reflect all changes made by the Value Adjustment Board.

**EDDIE CREAMER
ST. JOHNS COUNTY PROPERTY APPRAISER**

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Girl Scout cont. from pg. 1

Estuaries — coastal areas where freshwater and saltwater meet — are the unsung heroes in the fight against climate change, according to Huntsman.

“Estuaries are capable of sequestering carbon at rates 10 times greater than a mature tropical rainforest. I was shocked when I first learned this in my environmental academy,” she said.

Understanding their ecological importance, Huntsman took a multifaceted

approach to conservation and education with her Gold Award project. As part of her project, Huntsman built three litter stations using Computer-Aided Design (CAD) and 3D printing. She installed each litter station at GTM's different beach access parking lots, making it easier for visitors to keep the environment clean while enjoying both the estuary and the beach. Each station features a 3D-printed QR code that links directly to the GTM's website, providing interactive educational resources about estuaries and GTM's invaluable work.

Huntsman also designed a Girl Scout patch program, ensuring that future scouts can learn about estuaries in an engaging, hands-on way. She collaborated to host educational opportunities like EstuaryFest, GTM's annual environmental event, hosting an informational booth to further educate the community on the importance of estuaries. Huntsman also hosted beach clean ups with classmates and younger Girl Scouts.

“Being a Girl Scout has taught me so much about leadership, about stand-

ing up and standing alone,” said Huntsman. “I really love what I'm doing and I'm so proud of what I've done and I'm happy to share it with the world.”

The Girl Scout Gold Award is the highest honor in Girl Scouting, recognizing young leaders who develop sustainable solutions to pressing community challenges. Visit <https://estuaryawareness.org/> for more information about Huntsman's project and how to support estuary conservation efforts.



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Get to Know ...

By Martie Thompson
editor@floridanewslines.com

Betty Bennett

Betty Bennett is a woman with many talents and a lot of life experience. A native Floridian born in Orlando, she has also lived in Tallahassee before moving to St. Johns. She is a graduate of the University of Central Florida (bachelor's and master's degrees) as well as Florida State University (doctorate degree in educational leadership). Retired from her first accomplished career in education, she is now onto her second career: canine massage via her business Ruff Rubs. She and her husband Gary have two grown sons, Daniel and Joseph, and one granddaughter. The Bennetts have three dogs: Chiweenies Millie and Abby and Teacup Chihuahua Lily.



Photo courtesy Betty Bennett
Betty Bennett

A: When I was a child, I wanted to be a veterinarian — until I sat in on a surgery and decided it wasn't for me. But I always loved animals and thought that for my second career I wanted to do something with animals. I did a Google search and considered making dog treats, but then I came across the certification for canine massage therapy. I commuted to Sarasota over seven weeks to become certified and I started my mobile business, Ruff Rubs, in 2017.

Q: What does canine massage therapy entail?

A: Dogs receive many of the same benefits from massage therapy that humans do: it enhances their quality of life as well as increases circulation and decreases joint pain. The majority of my clients are older dogs and many of their issues are arthritis-related. I go to their homes for treatment since the dogs are more comfortable there. Some dogs have anxiety issues and I am able to show owners the techniques to use to calm them during anxious times.

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

A: I like to swim and play with our dogs. I also like to read. I also still teach part time online for a university in Tennessee. I teach in the veterinary education program and my students are vets and vet techs who are going on to teach veterinary medicine at the college level. I have melded my two loves — teaching and animals — together.

[Editor's Note: Visit www.ruffrubs.com for more information about canine massage therapy.]

High School in Orange County, which was my alma mater.

Q: How did you meet your second husband, Gary?

A: I met him at my friend's bachelorette party at Rosie O'Grady's in downtown Orlando. My friend actually cut his hair for him and so she introduced us. We met in April, were engaged in July, and married in December. We've been married for 36 years.

Q: How did you end up living in St. Johns?

A: We had moved to Tallahassee for my husband's work. He is a sales rep for a building products wholesaler. In 1997, his work brought him to Jacksonville and we moved to St. Johns. I was hired at the University of North Florida, where I taught educational leadership classes and then became director of the school's alternative teacher certification program for the last 10 years before I retired in 2016.

Q: How did you become interested in canine massage therapy?

Q: What led to your decision to be a teacher?

A: I never thought about being a teacher and when I started college at UCF, I didn't know what I wanted to do. My first husband, who was a physical education teacher (and sadly passed away two years after we were married) encouraged me to take a teaching course as an elective just to try it out. I had a really good instructor and I liked the courses, so I stuck with it. I earned a bachelor's in elementary education and secondary math and then a master's in educational administration. I was a math and computers teacher at junior and senior high schools near Orlando and even served as a dean at Oakridge

Get to Know ...

Interested in being featured? Email Martie Thompson at editor@FloridaNewsLine.com

High school facilities open to public

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

In an effort to promote community health and well-being this summer, the St. Johns County School District will again open its high school facilities to the public on select Wednesday evenings throughout the summer. Outdoor facilities at Allen D. Nease, Bartram Trail, Beachside, Creekside, Pedro Menendez, St. Augustine and Toco Creek high schools will be open from 5 p.m. – 7 p.m. on the following Wednesdays: June 4, 11, 18, 25 and July 9, 16, 23.

Access to the tennis courts, track, and outdoor basketball courts will be allowed. Access will not be provided to the gymnasiums, stadium fields, batting cages, baseball fields, softball fields, or multi-purpose fields. The facilities will not be open to any organized practices, games or sport-sponsored, fee-based training and pets are not permitted. All campuses will be locked at 7 p.m. and all St. Johns County School Board Policies will apply.

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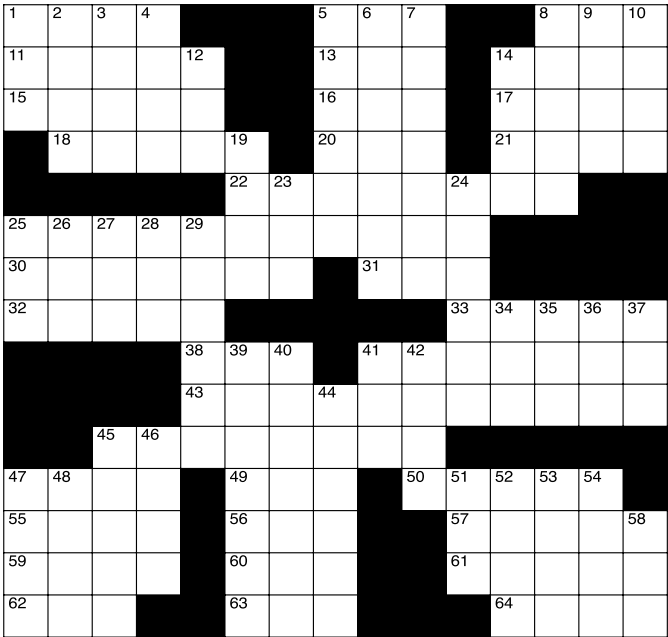
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CLUES ACROSS

1. Computer manufacturer
5. Noted space station
8. Kurt Russell film “Captain”
11. Automaton
13. Everyone has one
14. Incline from the vertical
15. Fights
16. Dunn & Bradstreet (abbr.)
17. Finishes off
18. Places to store things
20. Dutch painter Gerard ____
21. Smaller quantity
22. There’s a North, South and Central of these
25. In an early way
30. More spacious
31. Short-term memory
32. One who possesses
33. Sesame
38. Forbid
41. A way to explain
43. Not around
45. Evoke or suggest
47. Ancient kingdom near Dead S
49. Dekameter
50. Fencing sword
55. “Luther” actor Idris
56. Affirmative (slang)
57. Afflicted
59. One point north of northeast
60. Born of
61. Arabic name
62. Hong Kong food stall: ____
63. Not the start
64. Post

CLUES DOWN

1. Creative expression
2. Fiber from the outer husk of a coconut
3. City in ancient Syria
4. College army
5. More disturbed
6. Pays no attention to
7. Restored
8. Competitions
9. Lyric poems
10. Famed American lawman
12. Expression of disappointment
14. Scars
19. Satisfy
23. Central European river
24. Brass instrument
25. One who gets paid to perform
26. Propel with oars
27. Long period of time
28. Woman (French)
29. Type of plane
34. Pitching stat
35. Pointed end of a pen
36. Pro sports league
37. Body part
39. Inoffensive
40. Yellowish cotton cloth
41. Feline
42. Does not tell the truth
44. Set out to attract
45. Spiritual leader of a Jewish congregation
46. Abba __, Israeli politician
47. Repair
48. Genus of flowering plants
51. Tributary of the High Rhine
52. Prejudice
53. C. European river
54. Restrain
58. Father

DIPS AND FLIPS WORD SEARCH

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

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

WORDS

- AIRTIME
ANGLED
ASCEND
BANKING
BARREL ROLL
BOOMERANG
BRAKES
CAMELBACK
COASTER
COBRA ROLL
CORKSCREW
CURVES
DIVE
DROP
ELEVATED
FLOORLESS
GRAB BARS
INVERSION
LAUNCH
LOOPS
STANDUP
TURNAROUND
TWISTER
WOODEN



Solve the code to discover words related to roller coasters.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 1 = E)

- A. 18 24 1 1 22
Clue: Velocity
- B. 2 1 14 25 2 26
Clue: How tall
- C. 26 6 11 3 23 18
Clue: Rails
- D. 11 4 9 18 1 4 1 5 26
Clue: Diversion

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Jimmy's Fishing Report

By Jimmy Tomazinis
mail@floridanewsline.com

Happy shrimp season! I hope you got all your nets patched and other projects done, because our summer fishing is in full swing. From June through December, most years the river is blessed with an influx of marine shrimp from the ocean. The shrimp travel upriver past Palatka, eating and growing as they go. Later in the fall the shrimp begin to exit the river to go back out to the ocean to reproduce. There they are caught by local shrimp boats and marketed as our famous Mayport shrimp. Their upriver and down river journeys are shadowed by droves of fish taking advantage of the seasonal bounty. For that reason, our area fishing is closely tied to the shrimp.

As of right now our shrimp season runs June – March. At least that is when we can legally catch shrimp from the river for food or bait. How do you catch shrimp from the river? The most common method involves a cast net. If you're hesitant or not very experienced throwing a cast net, shrimp are one of the easiest things to catch with one. If you're wanting to catch shrimp during the daytime, I would highly recommend a taped net. The tape around the circumference of the net keeps the net open as it sinks in deeper water. This is important because during the day the shrimp can be at depths of 20 feet or more. An un-taped net would barely be open after it sinks in water that deep. At night shrimp move into shallow water and the tape is less important. You can buy an already taped net, or



Photo courtesy Jimmy Tomazinis

you can add it to one by putting duct tape around it or sewing chair webbing around it. The webbing lasts longer and is less messy but might take a little more time depending on your sewing skills.

Any prominent drop offs will hold shrimp during the day. The mouth of Doctors Lake and the marker in front of Club Continental are two well known spots that will have boats throwing nets around them most days. Shrimp will congregate on specific depth contours along the drop offs, so pay attention to the depth you are in when throwing for them and move deeper or shallower to find the highest numbers of them. I've run out of words for this month so more on shrimp next month. Tight lines.

Guest Column

Saluting US veterans with Honor Flight Network

By Valerie Bennett

Are you a veteran who served during the WWII, Korea or Vietnam conflict? Do you know a veteran from those eras? Then you need to check out the Honor Flight Network (honorflight.org), a nation-wide organization, based in Virginia. The group sponsors "A Trip of a Lifetime" to Washington, DC.

The Honor Flight events/schedule vary by hub, but in Jacksonville the First Coast Honor Flight (FCHF) starts with Orientation Day, about two weeks out. Prequalified veterans and their guardians learn what's ahead. Among activities: sign-off from the medical team, an interview with the hub's video photographer, and learning dos and don'ts for the flight day.

Start time for Flight Day will depend on the hub's individual needs. For the FCHF this usually means about 3 a.m. arrival time for the veterans, guardians and support staff. After greetings and last-minute instructions, participants board the bus for the motorcade led ride to the airport. As always, there's the TSA procedures, then wait at the gate for plane boarding and departure.

There is no cost to the veteran to be included. Guardians are needed for each traveling veteran. Guardians must make a (tax-free) contribution to the

organization to help with expenses. This amount varies by hub. Guardians can be a friend or family member (other than spouse). Married couples can fly together only if both are qualified veterans.

Arriving in Washington DC, the group is off to a grand day. Stops may include, if time warrants, National Mall (WWII, Korea, Vietnam Memorials), a front row seat for the Changing of the Guard at the Tomb of the Unknown and others. There are little opportunities for participants to go hungry during Honor Flight activities as all meals plus snacks and drinks are provided. Three weeks later, on Reunion Day, participants recall the fun and excitement and get a DVD video to remember the day.

With hundreds of "hubs" across the nation, there is most likely one near you. Each hub needs funding as well as hands-on-volunteers to be able to sponsor successful trips. The length of the trips depends on the hub's distance to Washington, DC. Costs include, but are not limited to airfare, ground transportation, hotels (if the trip is longer than one day), food, snacks, drinks, T-shirts, backpacks, name tags, and mementos. Applications for veterans, guardians and volunteers can be found at firstcoasthonorflight.org.

VPK students become published authors

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Eighteen Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) students at Deerwood Academy are published authors thanks to the efforts of their teacher, Jennifer Smith. These four- and five-year-olds contributed their own illustration page and writing to compile a book, “Beyond the Playground: Our Big Plans,” showcasing their dreams for adulthood. Their book was published through Studenttreasures Publishing using a free kit.

Two weeks before graduating VPK, students, parents and the preschool community celebrated this accomplishment at an Author’s Tea and book signing. Students read their pages to the crowd, received National Book Challenge certificates, and signed each other’s books.

“This is such a wonderful learning experience for the students that not only builds their confidence, and inspires them to dream big, but also gives them and their families a wonderful keepsake to remember their time in VPK,” said Karen Hamilton, Deerwood’s VPK director.

Smith came across the student publishing opportunity during a fall workshop at Duval’s Early Learning Coalition conference. She saw the project as a way



Photos courtesy Deerwood Academy St. Johns
Jennifer Smith helps Harlie Peralta share her story with event attendees.

to help encourage her students in their writing. The VPK class began working on the three-month project in January and submitted it in March.

When five-year-old Nara Harrison grows up she wants to be a scientist, and her favorite part about writing the book was “writing about making potions.” Her story tells how her “potions will heal scabs and make you feel like a unicorn. They will have glitter, and it will make you smell like a unicorn.”

“Beyond the Playground: Our Big Plans” is dedicated to the students’ families who could not be prouder of what they have accomplished.

Newcomers group donates children’s books to library

By NewsLine Staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

Members of the Newcomers of North St. Johns generously donated more than 114 children’s books to the St. Johns County Public Library System.



Photo courtesy Newcomers of North St. Johns
Accepting the books are Andrew J. Calvert, Youth Services Librarian, and Rachel Barman, Youth Services Librarian Intern, both with St. Johns County Public Library System.

Additionally, more than \$200 in cash donations were also collected for the library at the group’s April 2025 luncheon meeting.

“We were thrilled to be able to collect such a wonderful variety of children’s

books during our annual drive,” said co-president Priscilla Cobbs. “This is, by far, the most we’ve ever collected. Thanks to our members’ generosity, kids in our area will be able to keep up their reading skills during the summer and beyond.”

Co-president Michele Oliver delivered the books and in-kind donations to Andrew J. Calvert, Youth Services Librarian.

“Our members also brought food items to be donated to Our Lady of Good Counsel’s food pantry,” said Oliver.

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Travel

Barcelona Travel Tips: Gaudí, Gothic Charm, and Culinary Delights

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewslines.com

Barcelona ranks as one of Spain’s top tourist destinations — for good reasons. This dynamic Mediterranean city of more than 1.6 million residents offers a rich blend of architecture, culture, history, and food.

Gaudí’s Barcelona: The city’s most iconic landmarks are the creations of hometown superstar architect Antoni Gaudí. His whimsical, imaginative style defines much of Barcelona’s architecture.

The crown jewel is La Sagrada Família, the still-unfinished basilica that has become a symbol of the city. Construction



Park Güell with a gingerbread style house.

began in 1882 and continues to this day, with projected completion in the late 2020s. The Nativity façade resembles a drippy sandcastle, with intricate sculptures of people, animals, and biblical scenes. The Passion façade is stark, angular, and emotional — conveying the suffering of Christ. Be sure to book tickets well in advance; they sell out. Personally, I’d skip the tower tour — the views were mostly blocked by scaffolding.

Next is Park Güell, another Gaudí masterpiece, located on a hill above the city. While the park is stunning — with colorful mosaics, serpentine benches, and fairytale-like buildings — it can be hard to reach. Unless you enjoy long uphill climbs and staircases, take a taxi or public transport. You can tour a former Gaudí residence and others looking like Hansel and Gretel gingerbread cottages. My personal favorite Gaudí creation? Casa Vicens, the first house he designed in Barcelona. Originally a summer home, it’s a delightful mix of color, pattern, and Moorish-inspired fantasy. It’s less crowded than his more famous works, and the audio guide is excellent — just bring your own earbuds.

Music and Architecture: If you have time, attend a concert at the Palau de la Música. If not, take the guided tour. Built in 1908, this Art Nouveau concert hall feels like it was constructed

yesterday, thanks to its brilliant design and restoration. Expect stained glass, mosaic tiles, and ornate sculptural details — truly one of the most beautiful performance spaces I’ve ever seen.

Culinary Highlights: Foodies should consider a hands-on experience at the Barcelona Cooking School. My class included traditional dishes like tomato-rubbed bread, chicken paella, and a silky Spanish crema, similar to crème brûlée. Before class, we toured the fabulous Boqueria Market — a vibrant explosion of color, smells, and flavors. I only wish I’d discovered it earlier!

Neighborhood Strolls: Las Ramblas, the city’s famous pedestrian boulevard, is lined with shops, cafés, and street performers. Though it can be touristy, it’s a fun stroll. The Gothic Quarter is a maze of medieval lanes, tucked-away plazas, and Roman ruins. While I skipped the interior of the Barcelona Cathedral, the exterior is breathtaking, especially when lit up at night. Nearby, check out the Picasso Museum, home to hundreds of early works that show a different side of the famous artist. Also consider the Museum of the History of Barcelona where you can walk through underground Roman ruins.

Day Trip: Montserrat: One of my



Photos courtesy Debi Lander
Dramatic mountains of Montserrat.

favorite experiences was a day trip to Montserrat, a jagged mountain range about an hour outside Barcelona. A cogwheel train took us up to the monastery complex and the Basilica of Montserrat, home to the revered Black Madonna statue. Note: If you want to get up close to the Madonna, you’ll need a timed ticket — I didn’t have one, so I viewed her from below the altar. Afterward, my tour included lunch and a wine tasting at a centuries-old vineyard. The views of the Catalan countryside were the perfect contrast to the buzz of the city.

What I Missed: I didn’t have time to visit (and wish I had), Montjuïc, the hill above the city with its Magic Fountain show, Olympic venues, or Barcelona’s beaches.

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

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