

First Coast NewsLine

FEBRUARY 2026 Volume 14 Issue 2

Ponte Vedra and The Beaches

A Florida NewsLine Publication

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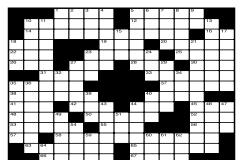
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Photos courtesy St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller
Couples exchange vows during the St. Johns County Clerk's Office annual Valentine's Day group wedding ceremony in 2025 at The Carriage House in St. Augustine.

Valentine Vows

NewsLine staff

The St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller's Office will host its annual Valentine's Day group wedding and vow renewal ceremony Feb. 13 at 1 p.m. at The Carriage House in St. Augustine.

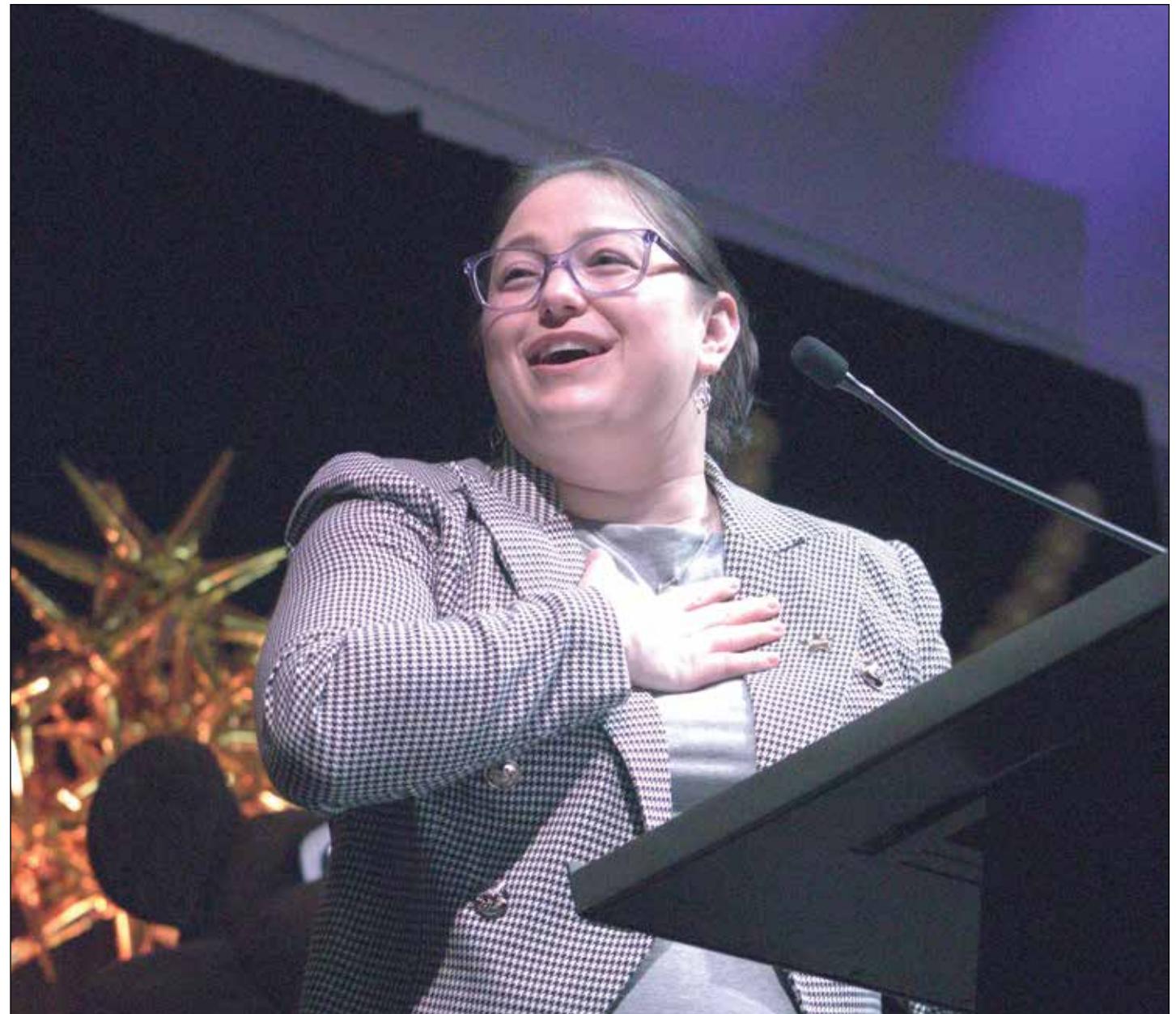
"Officiating marriages is one of our Office's most joyous duties," said Clerk Brandon J. Patty in a release. "We are excited to celebrate marriages and love with this year's Valentine's Day group wedding and vow renewal at The Carriage House."

The ceremony is limited to the first 50 couples who register online at <https://stjohnsclerk.com/wedding> by Monday, Feb. 9.

The ceremony costs \$30. Couples getting married are also required to purchase a marriage license and adhere to any waiting period. Florida residents who have not had coun-

Valentine Vows cont. on pg. 6

Class Acts



Photos courtesy St. Johns County Education Foundation

Atic, Vizcarra named St. Johns County Teachers of the Year

NewsLine Staff

Sabina Atic has been named the 2025-2026 St. Johns County District Teacher of the Year, and Ashley Vizcarra has been named Rookie Teacher of the Year.

The St. Johns County Education Foundation, also known as Investing in Kids (INK!), announced the awards following an extensive selection process. The educators were recognized at the St. Johns County Teacher of the Year Celebration on Jan. 15 at the World Golf Village Renaissance St. Augustine Resort.

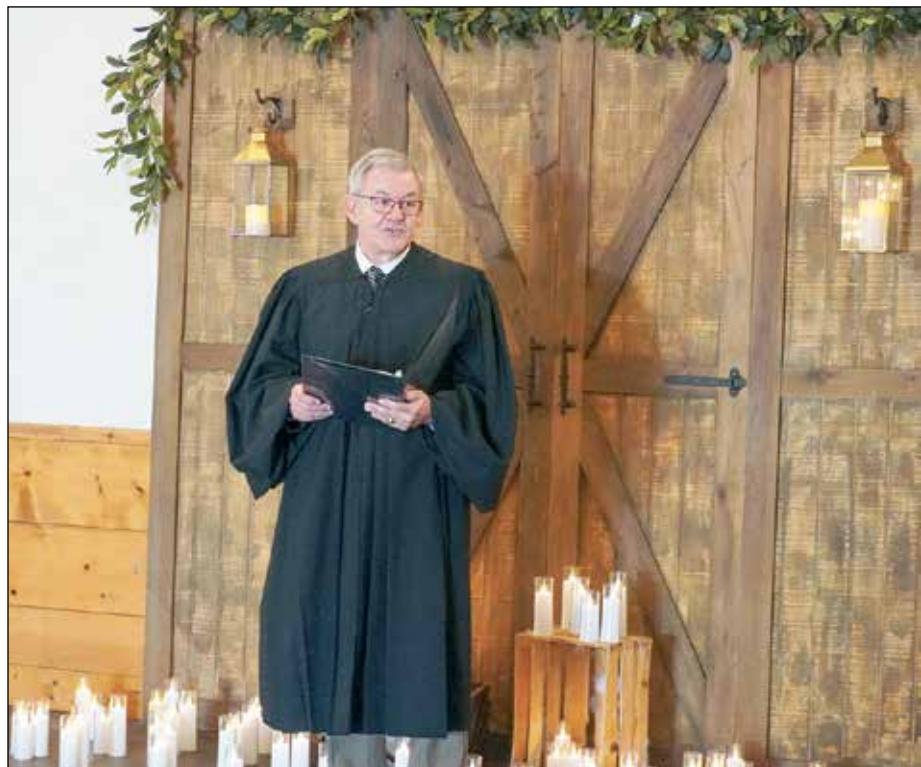


Photos courtesy St. Johns County Education Foundation
Local Equitable Advisors Team Members congratulate Rookie of the Year Ashley Vizcarra.

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Class Acts cont. on pg. 2



Photos courtesy St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller

Judge Howard O. McGillin Jr. will officiate the St. Johns County Clerk's Office annual Valentine's Day group wedding and vow renewal ceremony Feb. 13 at The Carriage House in St. Augustine.

Valentine Vows cont. from pg.1

seling must observe a waiting period. Information about license requirements and fees is available by calling 904-819-3600 or visiting <https://stjohnsclerk.com/marriage-licenses-ceremonies>.

According to the release, the group ceremony provides couples with an affordable way to be married in a beautiful, historic venue while saving

money for other priorities such as a family celebration, a future home or a honeymoon. Professional photography and bridal bouquets are also available at economical rates through third-party vendors.

The ceremony will be officiated by Judge Howard O. McGillin Jr.

The Carriage House is located at 259 San Marco Ave. in St. Augustine.



Photos courtesy St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller

Wedding cakes are displayed at the St. Johns County Clerk's Office annual Valentine's Day group wedding ceremony in 2025 at The Carriage House in St. Augustine.



Photos courtesy St. Johns County Education Foundation
Sabina Atic accepting the St. Johns County 2025-2026 Teacher of the Year award.



Photos courtesy St. Johns County Education Foundation
Rookie Teacher of the Year Ashley Vizcarra Valley
Ridge Academy.

Class Acts cont. from pg.1

"The level of professionalism and commitment from all of our nominees is extraordinary," INK! Executive Director Cathy Newman said in a news release. "Teachers play a huge role in the development of our children, supporting the growth of our next generation. It's our honor to recognize and continue the legacy of educators in St. Johns County."

Atic teaches biomedical sciences at Beachside High School, where she also sponsors HOSA-Future Health Professionals, a career and technical student organization. According to the release, she has taught in St. Johns County for seven years and was previously named the district's Rookie Teacher of the Year in 2018.

"Ms. Atic is more than just a teacher; she is a mentor and a role model," Pranavi Nagpal, a former student,

said in the release. "Her dedication, compassion, and patience have inspired countless students, myself included."

Vizcarra is a seventh and eighth grade teacher at Valley Ridge Academy, teaching advanced science, accelerated math and pre-algebra. She began teaching after serving in the U.S. Navy as a nuclear propulsion plant operator. Vizcarra also serves as the school's Soaring High program coordinator.

"Ms. Vizcarra possesses a rare gift for connecting with students, creating a supportive and engaging learning environment where they feel welcomed and supported," Valley Ridge Academy Principal Angie Fuller said in the release.

Finalists for the 2025-2026 Teacher of the Year included Kylie Benetsky of Switzerland Point Middle School, Katelin Bonner of Pedro Menendez High School, Pauline Harris of Valley Ridge Academy and Denise Shedlock of Creekside High School.



Photos courtesy St. Johns County Education Foundation
Teacher of the Year Sabina Atic surrounded by her Beachside High School students, Administration, School Board Member Dr.

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BFF

Breed:
Miniature Schnauzers
Favorite activity:
Charlotte loves solo walks. Bailey loves car rides to dance class.
Favorite food:
Chicken
Favorite friend:
Both Charlotte (husband Max) and Bailey (husband Tucker) are married after hosting two epic dog weddings.
How did your BFF get his name:
Charlotte is where her Mom and Dad met.
Bailey was given her name by her "dog mom" Clara.

Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Charlotte and Bailey!



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 Ponte Vedra NewsLine. Your pet could be our BFF of the month and appear in Ponte Vedra NewsLine!
Email editor@floridanewslne.com to enter your pet.



Answers
to our
Puzzles
PG 8

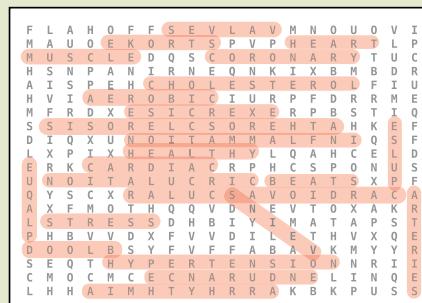
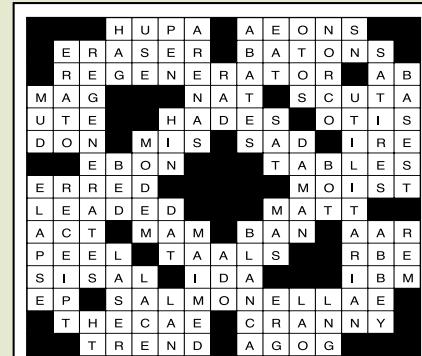


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February

Community Calendar

What's Happening in St. Johns

To submit items for the Community Calendar, email editor@floridanewsline.com.

Feb. 1

Job Fair at Nocatee

A job fair will be held Sunday, Feb. 1, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. in the Nocatee Room.

Feb. 3

Essential Tremor Support Group

The Essential Tremor Support Group will meet Tuesday, Feb. 3, at 11 a.m. at Baptist HealthPlace in Nocatee, 400 Colonnade Dr., Ponte Vedra. The session will feature a video presentation by Dr. Michael Johns, Director of USC's Voice Center, on "Tremors, Quakes & Shakes of the Voice." All are welcome. For information and RSVP, email Jan Kary at jkary@verizon.net.

Feb. 3

Vicar's Landing Boutique Sale

The February Vicar's Landing 2026 Boutique sale will be held Tuesday, Feb. 3, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. The sale includes 14K gold, sterling silver, costume and designer jewelry, knick-knacks with many \$1 items, and framed art in the hall. The monthly Vicar's Cottage sale will also feature antiques, household items, home furnishings and art. The public is welcome, with signs at the main entrance of the Vicar's Landing-Sawgrass Community Building pointing the way. Checks or cash only. Proceeds benefit the Vicar's Employee Scholarship Fund. For information, call Nancy Martin at 941-830-2141 or Diane Cannon at

904-392-6900.

Feb. 7

Who We Play For ECG Screenings

Who We Play For will provide ECG screenings for high school athletes ages 10-22 on Saturday, Feb. 7, from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. at Momentum Personal Training in Ponte Vedra Beach. ECG screening is mandatory for all high school student-athletes in Florida. The cost is free with a suggested donation. To sign up, visit <https://www.whoweplayfor.org/florida-st-johns>.

Feb. 9

Ponte Vedra Democratic Club Monthly Meeting

The Ponte Vedra Democratic Club will meet Monday, Feb. 9, at 6 p.m. at Christ Episcopal Church, 400 San Juan Road, Ponte Vedra Beach. Dr. Rudy Jamison, Executive Director of the Human Rights Commission for the City of Jacksonville, will be the featured speaker.

Feb. 11

Galentine's Sip and Shop

Enjoy a "Galentine's Sip and Shop" event on Wednesday, Feb. 11, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the Nocatee Room.

Feb. 13

Food Truck Friday

Food Truck Friday returns to Nocatee Station Field on Friday, Feb. 13, from 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Feb. 20

Résumé Workshop: Overriding Résumé Robots

The Savvy Job Hunters Ministry of

Christ Episcopal Church will host a free virtual workshop, "Overriding Résumé Robots Applicant Tracking Software Systems," on Friday, Feb. 20, from 10:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. Audra Larsen, Senior Career Counselor at UNF, will present on optimizing résumés for job search success. Email Pam Ottesen at savvyjobs@ccpvb.org to receive the Zoom link.

Feb. 21

Nocatee Farmers Market

The Nocatee Farmers Market will be held Saturday, Feb. 21, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Nocatee Station Field.

Feb. 25

Unwined Wednesday

Relax at Unwined Wednesday on Feb. 25 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Crosswater Hall.

Feb. 28

Ponte Vedra Writers Meeting

The Ponte Vedra Writers will meet Saturday, Feb. 28, at 11 a.m. at a temporary location: the Ocean Grove Condo Media Room, 1 Arbor Club Drive, while the Ponte Vedra Beach Library renovates its Children's Library section. Dan Sharp, a research scientist and martial artist, will present "How to Write Fight Scenes," providing insights into how fights develop and resources for describing them accurately.

Ongoing Activities

Council on Aging programs

Council on Aging offers interest groups at THE PLAYERS Community

Senior Center, 175 Landrum Lane, Ponte Vedra Beach, and the COA Center at UF Health Nocatee. Programs include lunch programs, duplicate bridge, tap dance, painting classes, chair exercise, tai chi, canasta, bingo and board games. Most activities are weekly beginning Dec. 2. THE PLAYERS Center is closed Dec. 24-26. Call (904) 209-3659 or visit www.coasjc.org/ponte-vedra-center. For Nocatee programs, email pbrunell@Stjohnscoa.com or call (904) 814-9407.

Palm Valley Market

Palm Valley Market will be held at Palm Valley Community Center, 148 Canal Blvd., every Tuesday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. The market offers organic produce, pasture-raised meats, local honey, baked goods and local crafts. Email info@PalmValleyMarket.com.

Ponte Vedra Friday Farmers Market

The market is held every Friday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at The Palm Valley Outdoors Bar & Grill, 377 S. Roscoe Blvd. Overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway, it features fresh organically grown produce, Florida grass-fed beef, pork, local honey, pasture-raised chicken and eggs, certified raw dairy, wholegrain breads, gluten-free baked goods, natural botanical skincare, local artisans and more in a family-friendly atmosphere.



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Local student selected for National Preservation Leadership Team

NewsLine Staff

Will Moffett, a Ponte Vedra resident and sophomore at the Episcopal School of Jacksonville, has been selected to join the American Battlefield Trust's 2025-2026 Youth Leadership Team.

Moffett is one of only 10 high school students selected from a competitive national pool of applicants to join the team during the nation's Semiquincentennial year. According to a news release, the group dedicates the academic year to advocating for historic preservation, education and increasing visitation to heritage sites.

Participants in the program undergo comprehensive training ranging from land preservation to media engagement and place-based education. As part of the curriculum, Trust staff mentor students as they develop an individualized capstone project.

According to the release, Moffett's capstone project will be the production of a documentary film regarding Fort Mose, the first free, legally sanctioned African American settlement in the United States. The film aims to highlight the stories of enslaved people who escaped to Spanish Florida, the British defeat at the Battle of Bloody Mose and upcoming archaeological digs at the site.

"I was drawn to working with the American Battlefield Trust because its mission aligns with my personal connection to American history and battlefield preservation. As a descendant of Revolutionary War veterans, I have always felt a strong sense of duty to honor those who fought for our country's freedoms," Moffett said in the release.

Moffett added that he views preservation as a way to maintain a connection to the past.



Photo courtesy American Battlefield Trust

Ponte Vedra student, Will Moffett, has been selected to join the American Battlefield Trust's 2025-2026 Youth Leadership Team.

"If we lose our battlefields, we lose our connection to our country's historical roots," he said.

Trust President David Duncan said the organization takes pride in supporting emerging leaders like Moffett.

"The Youth Leadership Team helps empower the next generation to actively participate [in] historic preservation efforts," Duncan said in the statement.

The American Battlefield Trust is a non-profit organization that has protected more than 60,000 acres of battlefields associated with the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the Civil War.

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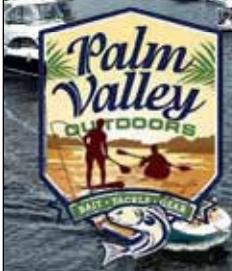
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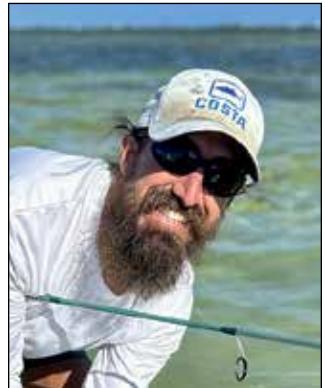


Jimmy's Fishing Report February 2026

Jimmy Tomazinis
mail@floridanewsline.com

Winter peak and spring spawning

Just like that, we are approaching the peak of our winter fishing season. February might still hold some cold days in store for us, but over the last couple of years we have seen enough warmer days to put the fish in their spring moods. For most freshwater fish that means spawning.



Jimmy Tomazinis

Fish spawning is tied to water temperatures. The magic numbers this time of year are 67-68 degrees. That triggers bass, specks and stripers to begin congregating. Bass will move up shallow and begin to fan beds around heavy cover. Specks will move into lily pads and laydowns. Stripers will gather on bridges before making treks up our area creeks to try to find flowing water.

The congregations, if you can find them, make the fish quite easy to catch.

For specks, I like to position the boat parallel to the shore and cast jigs towards the shoreline. This allows you to cover various depths as you slowly work the jig back to the boat. If you are consistently catching fish at a certain depth and distance

from the shoreline you can start to focus on just that depth or switch over to minnows on floats to cover that depth more thoroughly.

Bass don't congregate as tightly as the specks, but you can find multiple pairs of males and females in a short stretch of bank. I like

slow trolling shiners along the edges of the creeks to find these areas, making a couple of passes if I get any activity in a particular stretch. Flipping soft plastics up into the cover is another viable option. It can be a very time-consuming endeavor either way.

Stripers will require a trip out to the river to one of the bridges. The Shands, Doctors Lake, Buckman and even the ones downtown can hold large numbers of these river stripers. They are one of the largest fish we can target this time of year, and they love the cold. Some of the best times to look for them are after a cold front when water temperatures take a sudden drop. These temperature drops can make smaller baitfish lethargic and even die, becoming easy prey for the larger fish. I like throwing lipless

crankbaits or jigs that simulate a baitfish rising and falling in the water. Most hits come on the fall.

Till next time, tight lines.

Tight lines.

Jimmy Tomazinis is a Jacksonville area native who has fished the St. Johns River his entire life. His passion for fish led him to study coastal biology at the University of

North Florida. He has since participated in multiple fishery studies in Northeast Florida, continues to implement fish habitat and water quality improvement projects, fishes as much as he can, and has a monthly podcast called North Florida Fishing and Outdoors where the fishing conversation continues. Jimmy can be reached by email to mail@floridanewsline.com.

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- 2026 Annual Fixed Income Outlook

Space is limited! Please make a reservation by email to: [Sarah.Blackley@ampf.com](mailto:sarah.blackley@ampf.com)

Wednesday, January 28

Pusser's Bar & Grille
816 A1A N, Ponte Vedra Beach

Wednesday, February 4

Marsh Creek Country Club
169 Marshside Dr, St. Augustine

Wednesday, February 11

Murray Bros Caddyshack
455 Legacy Trail, World Golf Village

Wednesday, February 18

Julington Creek Fish House
112 Bartram Oaks Walk #102, St Johns

Wednesday, February 25

Pusser's Bar & Grille
816 Hwy A1A N, Ponte Vedra Beach

Wednesday, March 4

The Reef Restaurant
4100 Coastal Hwy, St. Augustine

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Q&A with St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Vicky Oakes

Q: When are the 2026 elections scheduled?

A: The 2026 Primary Election will be held on Aug. 18, 2026, and the 2026 General Election will take place on Nov. 3, 2026.

Q: Have there been any changes to polling places for the 2026 elections?

A: Yes. In 2025, Elections Office staff conducted a comprehensive review of polling places and the number of registered voters each location serves to ensure sites are not overwhelmed and voters experience minimal inconvenience. During this review, two areas of the county with significant population growth were identified where existing Election Day polling places had limited capacity. To better serve voters in these areas, precinct boundaries were adjusted and new polling locations were established.

Q: What precincts were affected?

A: Precinct 209, Village Church, was split in half at Pacetti Road, creating Precinct 214. Voters residing east of Pacetti Road will remain in Precinct 209, voting at Village Church. Voters residing west of Pacetti Road now fall into Precinct 214 and will vote at Trailmark Amenity Center.

Some voters were also removed from Precinct 501 (Creekside Christian Student Center) and Precinct 502 (The Clubhouse at Beacon Lake) to create Precinct 512. Voters residing in the newly created Precinct 512 will be voting at the Beachwalk Club.

As a result of these changes, St. Johns County will now have 55 precincts (an increase of two) and 45 Election Day polling places (an increase of two). These updates are intended to reduce wait times, improve efficiency, and better accommodate continued population growth. The proposed changes were presented to the Board of County Commissioners on Nov.



Vicky Oakes

18, 2025, and were adopted unanimously.

The polling place list and precinct maps on our website have been updated to reflect these changes, and affected voters will receive updated voter information cards by mail. For the most current polling place information, please visit www.votesjc.gov.

Q: What should voters be doing now to get ready for the 2026 elections?

A: Voters who are new to Florida or St. Johns County can register to vote online, in person at the Elections Office, or at any St. Johns County public library or DMV office.

All registered voters are strongly encouraged to visit www.votesjc.gov and use the "My Voter Status" tool to confirm their registration information is current.

Voters should also be aware that all vote-by-mail requests on file expired after the 2024 General Election. Anyone wishing to vote by mail in the 2026 elections must submit a new request. Requests can be made online at www.votesjc.gov or by calling the Elections Office at 904-823-2238, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.



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

Q: How did St. Johns County schools kick off the new year and the second semester?

A: The second semester of the 2025-2026 school year is off to a fantastic start. January marked the kickoff of Celebrate Literacy Week with the theme "Read, Write, and Blue." Our schools enthusiastically embraced the nation's Semiquincentennial by exploring 250 chapters of American history. Activities included guest readers, patriotic readings, and examining the Bill of Rights and the Constitution. Students also participated in rotating activities that explored pivotal moments in our nation's history.

Q: What recent efforts has the district made regarding financial transparency and community input?

A: Superintendent Tim Forson hosted two virtual town hall meetings focused on school budgets and financial transparency. These sessions provided valuable insights into the district's financial operations and allowed us to express gratitude for the recent passage of local referendums supporting our students and staff. Additionally, the district has organized numerous opportunities for parents and students to learn about resources, including sessions on autism education, ESE transition opportunities, mental health, and the Virtual AI Task Force.

Q: Are there any new leadership changes within the Ponte Vedra schools?

A: Yes, Ocean Palms Elementary is thrilled to welcome its new principal, Mollie Altick. She is no stranger to the community, having graduated from Nease High School and previously taught at Ocean Palms. With experience as a district-wide curriculum coordinator and assistant principal at Beachside and Creekside high schools, she brings a wealth of knowledge to the role. Meanwhile, our new school in Nocatee is taking shape under the leadership of Principal Tiffany Cantwell, who is working closely with Pine Island Academy Principal Riedl to ensure a smooth transition for families.



Kelly Barrera

Q: What recent academic or extra-curricular achievements have local students earned?

A: There have been several notable accomplishments. Landrum Middle School was recognized as a Purple Star School of Distinction for its support of military families. The Ponte Vedra High School Band won the 1A2A3A Division runner-up title at the Florida Federation Colorguard Circuit State Championship, placing first in both music and visuals. Additionally, the Allen D. Nease Navy JROTC earned outstanding marks in every area during a comprehensive inspection by Area 10 Manager Commander Shaw.

Q: Have any individual students been recognized for their skills in competitions?

A: Absolutely. At the St. Johns County District Spelling Bee on Jan. 7, Jahnavi Doneparthi of Liberty Pines Academy earned first place, with Betty Teplova of Pine Island Academy taking second. Furthermore, St. Johns County students captured eight of the top 10 awards in the U.S. District Court High School Essay Contest. Rachel Marino of Ponte Vedra High School won first place, followed by Jonathan Milicevic in second and Ananya Yegnamurthy in third.

Guest Column

Deadline to apply for Homestead Exemption Quickly approaching

By Eddie Creamer, St. Johns County Property Appraiser

An important deadline for property owners is quickly approaching, and that is the deadline to apply for homestead exemption and other personal exemptions, which is March 2, 2026, for the current tax year. This deadline is typically March 1 of every year, unless it falls on a weekend, which happens this year.

The purpose of homestead exemption is to reduce the property tax burden for Florida homeowners. Homestead exemption decreases the taxable value of a Florida homeowner's permanent residence by at least \$50,000 for those who are eligible for the full benefit. The homestead exemption total

changes from year to year since it is now adjusted annually for inflation, but it is always at least \$50,000.

Homesteaded properties are eligible for the Save Our Homes Limitation, which limits a home's assessed value from increasing no more than 3% per year. Another benefit of homestead exemption is the Save Our Homes Portability Transfer, which allows a property owner to transfer from one homesteaded property to another the accumulated difference between the just (market) value and assessed value, up to \$500,000. The portability transfer must occur within three tax years.

To be eligible for homestead exemption, the property must be the

homeowner's permanent residence, the homeowner must have owned the property as of Jan. 1 of the current year, and the homeowner must not be receiving any other residency-based property benefits in the United States. A property owner does not need to reapply every year for homestead exemption unless there has been a change in marital status, property ownership or title.

Besides homestead exemption, additional personal exemptions are available and include senior, widow/widower, military, first responder, veteran, disabled civilian, and more. For details about each exemption, visit www.sjcpa.gov/otherexemptions.

Homeowners can apply for homestead



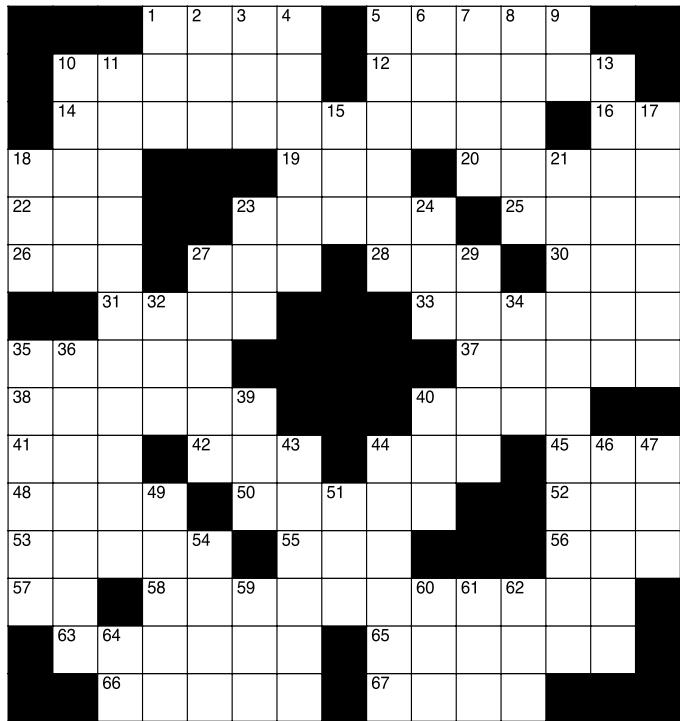
Eddie Creamer

exemption and other personal exemptions at their convenience through our secure, online application by visiting www.sjcpa.gov/exemptions. Also, applications can be submitted in person by visiting our office at 4030 Lewis Speedway, Suite 203, in St. Augustine on Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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

Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



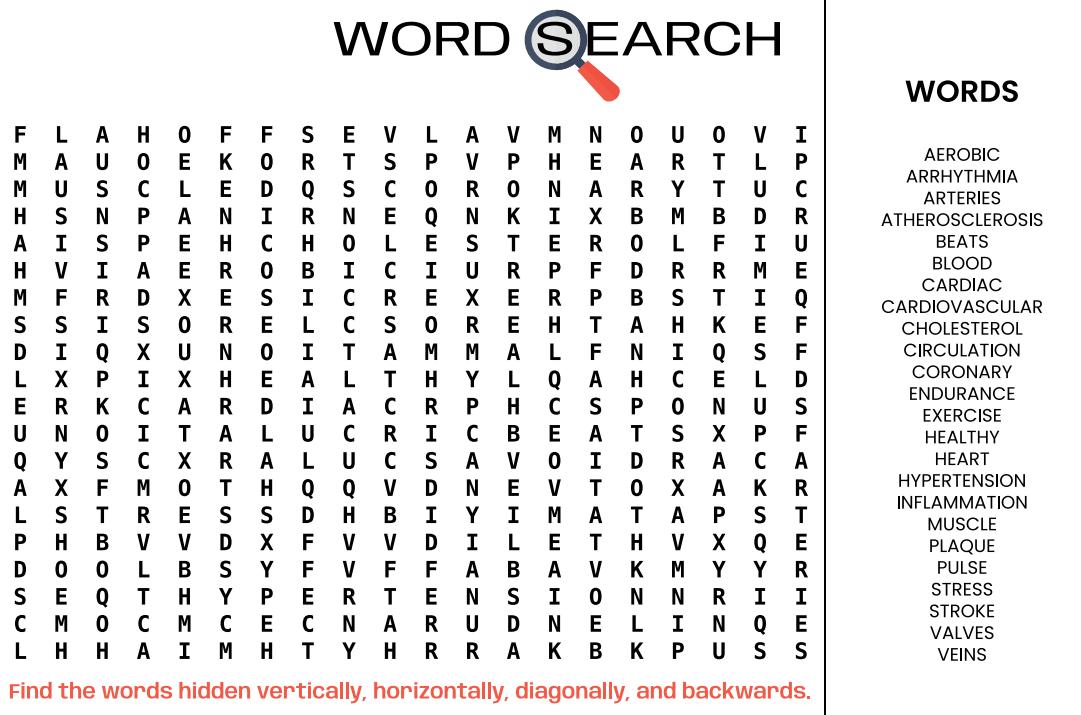
CLUES ACROSS

1. Native American group of	38. Type of fuel	32. A place to sleep
N. California	40. Actor Damon	34. AI tool
5. Geological times (Brit. sp.)	41. What thespians do	35. Pass or go by
10. Tool to remove	42. One's mother	36. Indicates a purchase
12. Rods	44. Disallow	39. A digital tape recording of sound
14. One who renews	45. Swiss river	40. More (Spanish)
16. They precede C	48. A banana has one	43. Disfigured
18. Chatter incessantly	50. Philippines lake and volcano are two	44. White (Spanish)
19. __ King Cole, musician	52. Relative biological effectiveness (abbr.)	46. Church building
20. Insect parts	53. Agave	47. Georgia rockers
22. One from Utah	55. Journalist Tarbell	49. Type of surgery
23. The world of the dead	56. One-time tech giant	51. Much __ about nothing
25. Singer Redding	57. Indicates upon	54. Make by braiding
26. NBA legend Nelson	58. Intestinal bacteria	59. Local area network
27. Indicates wrongly	63. Loose sheaths around the spinal cord	60. Unit of work or energy
28. Unhappy	65. It goes with nook	61. Member of indigenous people of Thailand
30. Anger	66. A fashion	62. Liquefied natural gas
31. Dark brown	67. Very eager to hear or see	64. Distance to top
33. Some are in kitchens		
35. Made a mistake		
37. Damp		

CLUES DOWN

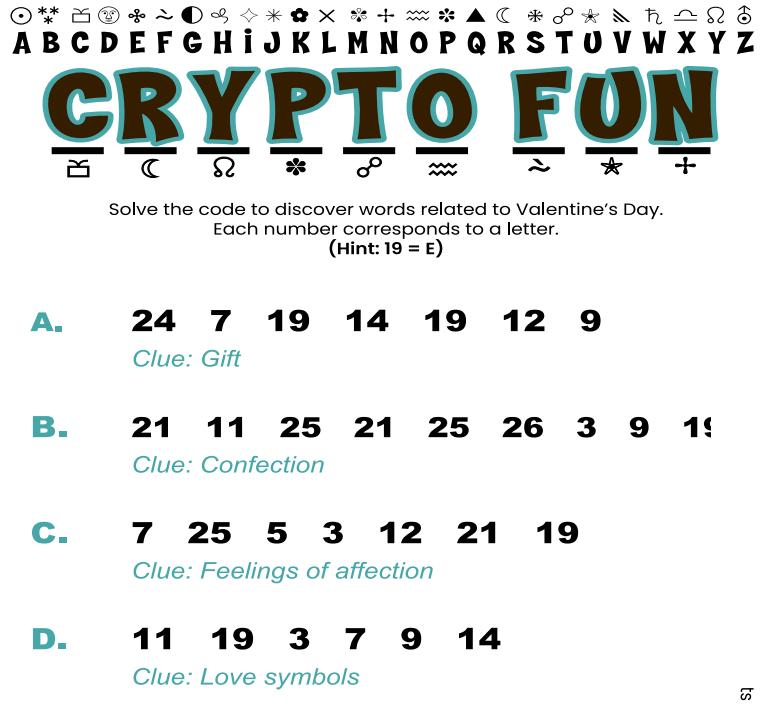
1. Witch	32. A place to sleep
2. Utilize	34. AI tool
3. Writing utensil	35. Pass or go by
4. Where rockers go to work	36. Indicates a purchase
5. Subsides	39. A digital tape recording of sound
6. Consume	40. More (Spanish)
7. Greek mythological figures	43. Disfigured
8. California mountain town	44. White (Spanish)
9. Tin	46. Church building
10. Muse of lyric and love poetry	47. Georgia rockers
11. Animates anew	49. Type of surgery
13. Humorous criticisms	51. Much _____ about nothing
15. Cool!	54. Make by braiding
17. Worst	59. Local area network
18. Wet dirt	60. Unit of work or energy
21. Designed to be useful	61. Member of indigenous people of Thailand
23. Hebrew unit of liquid capacity	62. Liquefied natural gas
24. High schoolers' test	64. Distance to top
27. Computer device	
29. Indian territory and Diu	

WORD SEARCH



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CARDIOVASCULAR
CHOLESTEROL
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SPCWA Women of Action connects members with volunteer opportunities

By Christina Loddo

As the new year begins, the Sawgrass Players Club Women's Association (SPCWA) shares an update on SPCWA Women of Action, a private, member-led group focused on learning about local volunteer opportunities in a relaxed and welcoming setting.

SPCWA Women of Action meets approximately quarterly on a weekday morning, typically hosted in a member's home. Gatherings are informal and social in nature, centered around coffee, light refreshments and conversation. Each meeting features a representative from a local organization who shares information about ways individuals may choose to volunteer their time and talents.

Past meetings have included presentations from a variety of organizations serving Northeast Florida, including JaxTHRIVE, Make-A-Wish Northeast Florida, the St. Johns County School District volunteer coordinator (highlighting tutoring and mentoring oppor-

tunities), Epic-Cure and Generation W.

The group's purpose is informational only. SPCWA Women of Action does not fundraise, organize volunteer teams or advocate for any particular organization. Instead, it provides a forum for members to learn about a range of opportunities and independently determine whether a cause aligns with their interests, availability and skills. Many members have discovered volunteer roles through these meetings and have gone on to serve on their own.

The next Women of Action gathering is scheduled for Feb. 4 at 10 a.m. and will feature Hearts for Educators, a non-profit dedicated to honoring and supporting teachers and staff at Title I and grant-funded county schools through appreciation initiatives and community-supported events.

Participation in SPCWA Women of Action is open exclusively to members of the Sawgrass Players Club Women's Association. Interested SPCWA members may request to be included on the



Photo courtesy SPCWA

SPCWA Women of Action visit Winter Park during an outing last spring.

Women of Action distribution list to receive occasional meeting invitations and updates. The group also welcomes nominations of nonprofit organizations in need of volunteers, as well as SPCWA members willing to host a gathering.

Women who reside within TPC Sawgrass Players Club and rent or own a home are eligible to join SPCWA.

The association brings women of TPC Sawgrass Players Club together for friendship, connection and shared interests, offering a variety of social, educational and community-focused activities throughout the year.

Additional information and membership forms are available at www.spcwa.org.

Former acting ambassador to speak at Coastal Friends luncheon

By Brooke Freeman

Coastal Friends will host Patrick Connell, a senior diplomatic fellow at the University of North Florida, as the guest speaker for its Feb. 4 luncheon at Marsh Landing Country Club.

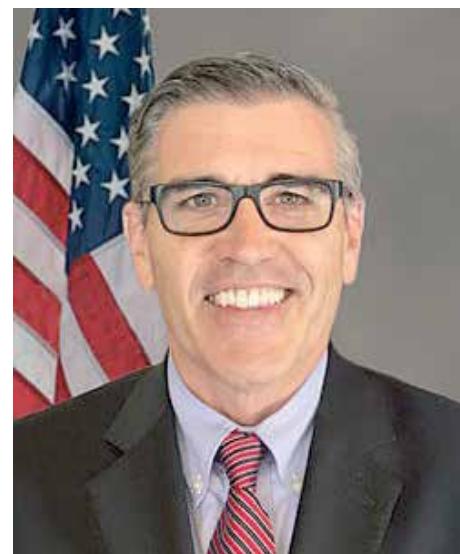
Connell is the former acting ambassador and deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy to the Holy See at the Vatican. Prior to his time at the Vatican, Connell led a team of diplomats, USAID officers and U.S. Army Special Operations Forces providing stabilization and humanitarian aid in Northeast Syria as the forward leader of the Syria Transition Assistance Response Team, aimed at securing the enduring defeat of ISIS. He is a career member of the U.S. Foreign Service and has spent 24 years with the U.S. Department of State.

The luncheon will be held Wednesday, Feb. 4, from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Parkway, Ponte Vedra Beach.

The menu will consist of a house salad with berry vinaigrette, chicken marsala, mashed potatoes, green beans and chocolate cake with strawberries. The cost to attend is \$25, and the lunch is open to Coastal Friends members, guests and the community.

Reservations must be made in advance by contacting the luncheon chairman at bartshar@comcast.net. Checks must be received by Friday, Jan. 30.

Coastal Friends is a women's social club established in 1998. It is comprised of



Patrick Connell, a senior diplomatic fellow at the University of North Florida and former acting ambassador to the Holy See, will speak at the Feb. 4 Coastal Friends luncheon.

women who live in Ponte Vedra Beach, Nocatee, Jacksonville Beach, Neptune Beach, Atlantic Beach, St. Augustine, Jacksonville and the surrounding area. Members include women who have had a change in circumstances, are new to the area, recently retired or just want to meet new people.

Activities include outings, book club, bunco, canasta, happy hour, mahjong, samba and wine socials. The club also highlights a specific charity each month.

Luncheons are held on the first Wednesday of every month at Marsh Landing Country Club, except for July and August. New members are welcome throughout the year. For more information, contact the membership chair at brookemeister@msn.com.

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rule: if it blooms in spring, wait until after it flowers to prune.

When pruning, it's important to make clean cuts using sharp, well-maintained tools. Cutting just above a leaf node or branch junction helps the plant heal more efficiently and reduces the risk of disease. Avoid excessive pruning, as removing too much at once can stress the plant. A good guideline is to remove no more than one-third of a plant's growth during a single pruning session.

Pruning is not about perfection; it's about improving plant health and encouraging natural growth. Even experienced gardeners make the occasional imperfect cut, and plants are remarkably forgiving. By taking advantage of February's mild temperatures and slower growth cycle, you're giving your landscape a strong start before the heat and humidity of spring and summer arrive.

With a little confidence and a pair of clean pruners, February pruning becomes less about fear and more about opportunity. The thoughtful cuts you make now will be rewarded with fuller plants, stronger growth and a more vibrant garden in the months ahead.

From my garden to yours, keep growing.

Connie Doyle writes The Good Earth, a gardening column inspired by a lifelong passion for plants, nature, and the peaceful rhythm of the garden. With more time in retirement, she has been inspired to take that passion to the next level — learning, growing, and sharing with others in our community by way of earning her Master Gardener Certification. Connie can be reached by email to mail@floridanewslines.com.

Gardening

The Good Earth: February's garden decisions

By Connie Doyle, Master Gardener UF/IFAS

For many homeowners, pruning can feel intimidating. The fear of cutting the wrong branch or damaging a beloved plant often leads to hesitation, but February is actually one of the best months to prune in Northeast Florida. With plants still in winter dormancy and spring growth just around the corner, thoughtful pruning now can lead to healthier plants and better blooms later in the season.



Connie Doyle, Master Gardener UF/IFAS

In our Ponte Vedra landscapes, many shrubs and perennials benefit from a February haircut. Roses, for example, respond beautifully to pruning this time of year. Removing old canes and opening up the center of the plant improves air circulation and encourages strong new growth. Other warm-season plants such as firebush, beautyberry, lantana and hibiscus can also be cut back now to remove cold damage and shape the plant before new growth begins. You may notice some branches that appear brown or brittle after winter cold snaps; these can be safely removed, as they will not recover.

That said, not everything in the garden should be pruned in February. Spring-flowering shrubs such as azaleas, camellias and gardenias have already set their buds, and pruning them now would mean cutting off this year's blooms. These plants are best pruned immediately after flowering, giving them time to set new buds for the next year. When in doubt, it's helpful to remember a simple

Travel

Viterbo: Where the Papal Conclave was born

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewslne.com

I recently took an hour-and-a-half train trip north from Rome to the medieval city of Viterbo. This predominantly stone-built region once stood at the very center of the Catholic world. Viterbo is not just another beautiful hill town. Known as The City of Popes, it is the place where the modern papal conclave was forged, born from frustration, faith, and a roof quite literally torn away.

Last year, when the world once again watched white smoke curl into the Roman sky with the election of Pope Leo, Viterbo's story felt newly alive. The ancient process that guided the Church through that transition began here more than seven centuries ago.

A city of popes and power

During the 13th century, Rome was often unstable, unhealthy, and racked by political conflict and violence. Viterbo, loyal to the papacy and protected by strong medieval walls, became a favored refuge for popes. Several lived and governed here, transforming the city into a temporary seat of Christendom.

The Palazzo dei Papi, with its commanding loggia and austere Gothic lines, still dominates Viterbo's skyline. Standing in its shadow, I could easily imagine the urgency and tension that once filled its chambers, for this is where one of the most significant events in Church history unfolded.

The election that changed everything

Viterbo's pivotal role began in 1261, when Pope Alexander IV died within the city walls. The cardinals gathered there to elect his successor, establishing Viterbo as a trusted stage for papal decision-making.

But it was after the death of Pope Clement IV in 1268 that Viterbo would truly change history.

The cardinals met again in the palace,



Debi Lander

but months turned into years. Yes, nearly three years passed, 1,003 days exactly, the longest papal election in history. The people of Viterbo, exhausted by the stalemate and fearing divine displeasure, finally took action. In those days it was customary for the city to host the cardinals, but after

such a long time, supplies were running low. The citizens locked the cardinals inside the palace, restricted their meals, and eventually removed the roof, exposing them to sun, rain, and winter winds. (They slept in tents and the room still bears the post holes.)

In 1271, the cardinals finally elected Teobaldo Visconti, who became Pope Gregory X. Deeply affected by the ordeal, Gregory later issued formal rules for future elections: the cardinals would henceforth meet cum clave, in strict seclusion until a pope was chosen.

The conclave was born.



Photo by Debi Lander
Medieval stone architecture fills the old quarter of Viterbo, where narrow lanes and arches remain largely unchanged since the Middle Ages.

From medieval crisis to modern ritual

When the cardinals assembled last year to elect Pope Leo, they followed procedures that trace directly back to Gregory X's decree, procedures shaped by that long winter in Viterbo.

The locked doors of the Sistine Chapel, the oath of secrecy, the daily ballots, the white smoke rising above St. Peter's, all of it carries the imprint of this small hill town.

Walking through living history

Today, visitors to Viterbo step into a remarkably preserved medieval world. The



Photo by Debi Lander
San Lorenzo Cathedral stands beside the Papal Palace in Viterbo's historic center.



Photo by Debi Lander
The medieval city of Viterbo, Italy, is known as The City of Popes and was the site where the modern papal conclave was born in the 13th century.



Photo by Debi Lander
The Papal Loggia at the Palazzo dei Papi in Viterbo, where cardinals were locked inside during the longest papal election in history, lasting 1,003 days from 1268 to 1271.

stark interior of San Lorenzo Cathedral stands beside the Papal Palace. The former conclave hall houses relics and a rare parchment bearing the original balloting tags of the cardinals. The old quarter unfolds in narrow stone lanes and arches that seem little changed since the Middle Ages.

Viterbo is not a museum city. It breathes. It lives. And its stones remember.

Viterbo taught the Church that even sacred decisions require structure and that faith sometimes needs the firm nudge. The rules born there continue to guide the world's largest Christian

institution, including the election of Pope Leo in our own time.

Debi Lander is an award-winning travel writer and photographer who blends her passion for history, culture, food, and personal discovery into captivating stories. Through her website Bylanderssea.com and her long-running travel column for Florida Newsline, she explores destinations from small U.S. towns to iconic global landmarks. She hopes her storytelling and practical insights inspire readers to experience the world with curiosity, appreciation, and a sense of adventure. Debi can be reached by email to mail@floridanewslne.com.

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