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The shark panel included, from left, Michael Brooks with First Port City Bank, Tara Beth Anderson, president of Baptist Health Nassau, Jenny Schaffer, owner of Summer House Realty and Cezar Gonzalez, former director of the local YMCA.

Shark Grant Night awards \$60K to teachers

Nassau County teachers stepped into the spotlight Dec. 4 at Shark Grant Night, a high-energy pitch competition inspired by a popular television investment show, where six innovative classroom ideas earned funding totaling \$60,000 from a panel of local business leaders.

The Nassau Education Foundation hosted the event at Mocama Beer Company, marking a significant milestone in the organization’s mission to support public school educators. The foundation reached \$1 million in total grant funding last year and created Shark Grant Night as part of its “Thanks a Million” celebration.

“We decided this year we would do something different and add a new opportunity,” said Susan DeVane, executive director of the Nassau Education Foundation. “We do believe our business leaders have a stake in our education system, have a passion for education, and they also have know-how to pick a good idea.”

The foundation typically awards classroom grants up to \$1,200 each through its annual program, with a budget between \$50,000 and \$70,000 per year. The shark grants offered significantly larger awards — up to \$10,000 each — for projects that would reach beyond a single classroom to involve multiple schools or disciplines.

Baptist Health Nassau contributed additional funding

Shark cont. on pg. 3

Framework First

Sarah Campbell marks one year as city manager

By Kate Kimmel
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Fernandina Beach City Manager Sarah Campbell recently marked her first anniversary working and living in the city, an occasion her staff celebrated with a poem, a homemade video and a commemorative plaque. The moment was public and lighthearted, but it reflected a role that is more often defined by what happens away from ceremony and microphones.

The city’s most visible moments unfold under bright lights and open comment periods, but the machinery that moves an agenda forward operates elsewhere. As city manager, Campbell occupies that quieter space, where policy is drafted, tested and revised before it ever reaches the dais. A self-described cautious leader, she approaches decision-making as a process of elimination and verification, insisting that every viable option be explored before the city commits to one.

At commission meetings, Campbell sits among elected officials, offering clarification or strategic context when needed. Long before those meetings, however, she is deeply involved in shaping how information is gathered, organized and presented, which is a process she takes particular pride in. For Campbell, preparation is not about controlling outcomes, but about ensuring



Photo courtesy City of Fernandina Beach
Fernandina Beach City Manager Sarah Campbell receives a commemorative plaque from Deputy City Manager Jeremiah Glisson celebrating her first anniversary with the city.

commissioners and the public alike are equipped with the same facts.

Campbell moved to Fernandina Beach last year from Clay County, where she had lived since 2002. She has said the transition brought noticeable changes, particularly the city’s larger scale and the very high level of engagement from community organizations. Residents

Sarah cont. on pg. 2

Downtown paid parking approved, trial period begins



Photo courtesy City of Fernandina Beach
Instead of traditional meters, downtown parking zones will feature signs with QR codes. Drivers can scan the code to reach a payment portal or text the number on the sign to pay for their session.

By Kate Kimmel
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Parking in downtown Fernandina Beach will look different this year following the City Commission’s vote to establish a paid parking program along Center Street and surrounding blocks.

The 4-1 vote, in which Vice Mayor Darron Ayscue cast the lone dissent, moves the city forward with a controversial program that has generated significant buzz within the community over the last few months.

The logistics

The paid parking zone will span two blocks wide and seven blocks long,

Parking cont. on pg. 2

Parking cont. from pg. 1

covering Alachua, Centre and Ash streets from Eighth Street west to the waterfront. All public parking north of Alachua Street, south of Ash Street and east of Eighth Street will remain free.

According to the ordinance, paid parking will be enforced seven days a week to 10 p.m. to 8 p.m., except on Sundays, when enforcement will run from 1 p.m. to 8 p.m. However, enforcement will not begin immediately; city officials have described the initial rollout as a “trial run” with a grace period to allow the public time to adjust.

Rates and methods

The city will not install parking meters or kiosks. Instead, paid parking areas will be marked by posted signs displaying a QR code that links to a payment portal where drivers enter their license plate number and payment information. For drivers without smartphones, each sign will also include a phone number that can be called or texted to submit payment.

Hourly parking rates will use flex pricing, ranging from \$2 to \$4 per hour, as determined by the city manager’s office. Visitors without county or city resident permits would pay between \$6 and \$12 for a three-hour night out, assuming they leave before 8 p.m.

Resident permits

Fernandina Beach residents will be able to park within the paid zone for up to four hours at no cost. Each household inside city limits may register two vehicles, with one parking permit per vehicle exempting it from payment during the free four-hour window. Once the four free hours expire, the card on

file will be automatically charged for each additional hour the vehicle remains parked.

Nassau County residents may also obtain the four-hour free parking benefit by purchasing an annual permit costing \$124 per vehicle. Like city residents, county permit holders who exceed the four-hour limit will be automatically charged rather than ticketed, provided payment information is linked to the vehicle.

Vehicles may be registered online, by phone or in person at One Parking’s downtown office.

Enforcement

Drivers of unregistered vehicles who fail to follow posted payment instructions will receive a municipal parking citation and a \$50 fine. Citations must be paid within 15 days. After that, a \$20 late fee will be added.

Drivers may request a fine waiver by submitting an affidavit of explanation to the city manager’s office, but waivers will only be granted under extreme circumstances such as verifiable emergencies.

The debate

The revenue generated from parking fees and citations will go towards what several commissioners have described as “long overdue” city infrastructure renourishment projects such as the sea wall replacement and the repaving of sidewalks.

“This is to generate revenue that’s not on the taxpayers’ back to start generating money to fix our town and our waterfront,” Commissioner Tim Poynter said. “Enough is enough we’re going to start getting this community fixed, not



Photo courtesy City of Fernandina Beach

The paid parking zone will span two blocks wide and seven blocks long, covering Alachua, Center and Ash streets from Eighth Street west to the waterfront.

on the backs of the 8,000 taxpayers, but we’re going to ask these other people to contribute a little to the town they say they love so much.”

Still, business owners have expressed concerns that paid parking will deter both residents and tourists from coming downtown. Neptune Beach recently lowered its paid parking fees at Beaches Town Center from \$5 to \$2.50 following what businesses reported as a 7% decrease in customers.

Nassau County resident Andrew Tonic has been frequenting downtown Fernandina for years, often parking on Centre Street and grabbing dinner and drinks with friends.

“Prices for everything nowadays are already out of control and I’d rather avoid downtown than pay a fee on top

of what I’m already spending,” he said.

Looking ahead

While the signs will go up soon, the issue is not entirely settled. A citizen-led referendum is expected to appear on the August ballot asking voters whether the paid parking ordinance should remain in effect. If voters reject the measure, the program would be repealed following the trial period.

Editor’s Note: This article was written immediately following the City Commission vote. At the time of publication, city staff were working to release official information to the public. As this is a developing program, further details may have emerged that were not available prior to our deadline.

Sarah cont. from pg. 1

here, she quickly learned, are deeply invested not only in outcomes, but in how decisions are made.

That sense of connection was not entirely new to her. Before relocating, Campbell and her husband frequently brought their two sons to Fernandina for events like Dickens on Centre, concerts downtown and camping trips to Fort Clinch and Little Talbot Island.

Professionally, Campbell arrived with deep municipal experience. She spent 16 years working for the Town of Orange Park, the last seven as city manager. While she had grown close to that community, she said she came to Fernandina Beach

seeking a broader scope of responsibility and a city facing more complex, transformative challenges.

Campbell has said she is not afraid of change — an important posture for a city navigating major infrastructure and development projects — but she pairs that openness with deliberation. She favors a balanced approach to growth, one that weighs economic opportunity alongside long-term impacts, and she is careful to present commissioners with multiple paths forward rather than a single recommendation.

That caution does not translate into hesitation. Colleagues describe her as organized and proactive, someone who

gathers extensive background on potential agenda items well before they formally appear before the commission. By the time an issue reaches public discussion, Campbell has often already examined its financial, logistical and legal dimensions.

It is this behind-the-scenes work that makes Campbell an often unseen but foundational presence in city governance. Commissioners debate and vote on policy, but the information guiding those decisions is curated through her office. That responsibility, she believes, carries an obligation to transparency.

Campbell has said she has no interest in shaping outcomes behind closed doors. Instead, she aims to make the public as informed as commissioners and staff, welcoming questions and encouraging dialogue, especially when misinformation circulates online. She values face-to-face conversations, where she can walk residents through policies and address concerns directly. At the same time, she does not dismiss the emotional weight those concerns can carry.

«The residents of Fernandina see it as a sacred place, and I understand that they have a vested interest in protecting it,»



Sarah Campbell

Campbell said.

Her engagement with the community extends beyond City Hall. Since moving to Fernandina, Campbell has joined the Rotary Club and occasionally runs with Amelia Island’s Sunday Funday group. She has completed half-marathons and hopes to continue participating in longer races as her schedule allows.

Professionally, Campbell points to several projects she

has found especially rewarding during her first year, including the waterfront park, the rebuild of the miniature golf facility and the reopening of North Second Street. She also highlighted quieter accomplishments, such as securing insurance savings that generated approximately \$5 million in new funds for the city.

She has overseen key hiring decisions as well, including the addition of a capital improvement projects manager and a new fire chief. Campbell has said she values working with what she considers a capable and collaborative staff — a team she credits with helping her navigate a demanding first year.

Having spent her first year building the framework, Campbell now looks ahead to navigating the projects she helped bring to life.

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Shark cont. from pg.1

to the initiative, including support for “calm/cool classroom” environments in elementary schools across the district.

Eighteen teachers applied for shark grants. A panel of four local business leaders — the “sharks” — joined board members and educators to evaluate applications using a scoring rubric. The six highest-scoring proposals advanced to the presentation round.

The shark panel included Michael Brooks with First Port City Bank, Jenny Schaffer, owner of Summer House Realty, Cezar Gonzalez, former director of the local YMCA, and Tara Beth Anderson, president of Baptist Health Nassau. Additional evaluators were Donna Martin and Tanya Williams, both board members and former teachers, along with DeVane.

At Shark Grant Night, teachers presented their ideas using videos, slides and team presentations while the sharks deliberated. All six finalists received funding.

Funded projects include Rhian Smith’s Reef Ball Grant at Yulee High School, where marine biology students will create an actual reef; Ashley Mitchell’s Virtual Algebra Grant at Yulee Middle School using VR headsets for real-life applications; Samantha Waite’s Southside



Photo courtesy Nassau Education Foundation

The shark panel included, from left, Michael Brooks with First Port City Bank, Tara Beth Anderson, president of Baptist Health Nassau, Jenny Schaffer, owner of Summer House Realty and Cezar Gonzalez, former director of the local YMCA.

Sensory Rooms Grant at Southside Elementary; Renee Thompson’s Outdoor Collaboration Lab Grant at Fernandina Beach Middle School; Erin Schreiber’s Celebrate America Grant at Hilliard Middle - Senior High School, featuring dramatic productions inspired by “Schoolhouse Rock” and “Hamilton” to mark the country’s 250th birthday; and Elizabeth Elder’s Resiliency Day Challenge Grant at Yulee High School.

“It was exactly what we envisioned in the middle of the night when we came up with the idea,” DeVane said. “The place

was packed and it was just a fun, exciting night.”

The foundation began fundraising at its Teacher of the Year Gala on Jan. 17, 2026, to make shark grants an annual program.

The Nassau Education Foundation awards grants exclusively to Nassau County public schools. For more information, contact Susan DeVane at the Nassau Education Foundation, sdevane@nassaueducationfoundation.org or (904) 753-0299.

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Follow the signs, dodge the alligators

In life, signs are everywhere. Some signs, like billboards, road markers and posted placards, are physical: “Stop,” “Caution,” “No shoes, no shirt, no service.” Conversely, some signs are metaphysical - whispers that nudge us from within until we comply, guiding us toward or away from someone or something. Be they a hunch, a coincidence or an aha moment, intuitive signs are the best kind of roadmaps - free of charge, always in stock and unique to each of us.

Ironically, the unwritten signs we encounter may eventually mimic the written ones. We might feel compelled to halt a la a stop sign, or re-evaluate as per a caution sign, or wear shoes ... you get the idea. After all, a caution sign demands that we change course - perhaps en route, perhaps in life.

My island neighborhood boasts two lovely lakes, both of which are flanked by posted signs reading, “No boating. No swimming. No fishing. Use caution when approaching. Alligators are present.” When I first caught a glimpse of these notices nearly seven years ago, I must admit I found them amusing.

Although the lakes are indeed charming, the water is characteristically opaque and not at all blue. A sort of bubbly, mossy mass drifts about. And the beautiful albeit inhospitable avian menagerie rules the roost. Any mere human attempting to wade those murky waters is likely asking for trouble.

Perhaps a feathered attacker could pounce. Or the water could generate a skin condition. Or an alligator could surface, strong-arming brave explorers to run for their life. Sure, nary a gator has been spotted in Amelia Park for decades.



Jennifer Silverman
The Curious Columnist

Nonetheless, between the umber water and the territorial fowl, our conveniently located ocean seems like a far better locale for water-based pursuits.

Recently, I noticed several boys with fishing poles at the lakes, actively pursuing creatures of the deep. I couldn’t help but chuckle. All were certainly old enough to read and comprehend the “no fishing” sign. One fishing fella was standing squarely next to the sign, ostensibly imagining it away.

What is it about signs that goad us to categorically ignore them? Do we object to rules in general and resent being told how to behave? Do we avoid the marked route because we distrust anything that comes easily? Do we simply feel in our bones that we know best? (To heck with people-eating alligators.)

I liken the phenomenon of ignoring inner and outward signs to the stereotypical dude who refuses to ask for directions. (Even in techie times, getting lost is still a thing - trust me.) As a result, the guy may wander the desert aimlessly for days. He may miss his family reunion. He may rack up thousands of miles on his rented car. Regardless, he is determined to find his own way, without heeding any guidance.

I’m reminded of an episode of “The Golden Girls,” in which the character of octogenarian Sophia Petrillo, played by Estelle Getty, volunteered an insightful tidbit: “Why do blessings always wear

disguises? If I were a blessing, I’d walk around naked.” It’s as though something within us believes wholeheartedly that we shouldn’t trust any sign, because surely, they are not what they seem.

Perhaps we’ve made an utterly simple concept, like signs, unnecessarily complicated. Why do we insist on dressing our blessings in disguises? How come we don’t consider definitive signs to be, well, definitive? (“Stop,” for instance, is seldom an ambiguous term.) Why do we question or downright ignore our internal guidance system?

Maybe the longer we hush those whispered directions, the longer we feel lost. We have all faced forks in the road, times of uncertainty and internal searches. So, why not donate all the disguises piling up in our mental attics, and reframe signs as blessings to be welcomed? Giving signs the benefit of the doubt just might steer us toward a detour in the right direction. And hey, if signs aim to protect us from both actual and metaphorical alligators, why not take the hint?

Jennifer Silverman has served as a celebrity wardrobe stylist for hundreds of TV personalities and professional athletes. A couple of her favorite projects include the Olympic Games and the Oscars. Silverman and her Westie, Petunia, relocated from Manhattan to Amelia Island in 2019. She launched her popular newspaper column, The Curious Columnist in 2022. Additional quirky commentary penned by Silverman is available by visiting www.CuriousColumnist.com. Email her at Jennifer@CuriousColumnist.com

Board OKs military regalia, honors top volunteers

Tracy McCormick-Dishman
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The Nassau County School Board unanimously approved a policy Jan. 8, allowing graduating seniors with verified military enlistments to wear authorized military stoles, cords and regalia during commencement ceremonies.

The policy, proposed by School Board Vice Chair Joe Zimmerman, formally recognizes students who commit to military service while preserving ceremonial standards of graduation exercises.

“This is about respect for service, respect for tradition, and for the significance of the commitment these young men and women are making,” Zimmerman said in a release regarding the vote. “When a student raises their right hand and volunteers to serve this country, that decision deserves to be acknowledged by the community they represent.”

Zimmerman noted the policy aligns with existing Florida law, including Senate Bill 292, which protects the right of students to wear their military dress uniforms at graduation. Similar policies have been adopted by other Florida school districts.

“This policy is about bringing clarity and consistency to an issue where Florida has already set a clear direction,” Zimmerman said.

The policy takes effect beginning

with the next graduating class.

Spotlights and Recognitions

Before tackling the business agenda, the board recognized several standout members of the school community during the Jan. 8 meeting.

The board honored three «Volunteers of the Year» for their service to district schools.

- Youth Volunteer of the Year: Sawyer Johnson of Callahan Elementary School, who tutors students and greets them at car drop-off in the mornings.
- Adult Volunteer of the Year: Liz Hinchliff of Yulee Middle School, recognized for her work with the drama program and Future Business Leaders of America.
- Senior Volunteer of the Year: Karen Seeley of Callahan Intermediate School, a retired educator who returns to support ESE students.

“We could not do any of the work that we do without the volunteers that cover up our schools on a regular basis,” Superintendent Kathy Burns said.

The board also recognized Fernandina Beach High School student Emily Mersrow as the district’s 2025-2026



Joe Zimmerman

Sunshine State Scholar. Mersrow, who holds a 4.67 weighted GPA, was selected for her excellence in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) and will represent the district in Orlando.

Additionally, school bookkeepers Susan Kegley and Gregory Slurf were honored for achieving perfect school audits.

Caitlin’s Ride for Autism

Mandy Connor, mother of Yulee High senior Kaitlyn Connor, appeared before the board to announce the 13th annual “Kaitlin’s Ride for Autism,” scheduled for April 18.

Connor announced that the event committee had selected Krista Hodges as the honorary grand marshal in memory of Scott Hodges, a former administrator and advocate for autism awareness who passed away.

Connor presented a check for \$1,500 to the district’s ESE department and an additional \$500 donation to Hilliard Elementary School for selling the most autism awareness shirts last year.

Other board business

The board voted unanimously to approve a school affiliation agreement with Baptist Health Systems. The agreement allows Nassau County students in the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program to return to Baptist facilities to complete their

required clinical hours.

Board members also approved the 2025-26 Instructional Materials Manual. During the board’s Jan. 5 workshop, staff noted that the manual was updated to reflect current administrative rules regarding book objections.

According to workshop discussions, the district currently has nearly 200 book challenges outstanding. A newly formed statutory compliance team has reviewed 60 books over the last three months, averaging about 20 reviews per month.

The board also voted to advertise revisions to Administrative Rule 5.12 regarding student out-of-zone transfers, setting the stage for a final vote at a future meeting.

Upcoming Meetings

The school board announced a series of upcoming joint meetings with local government bodies:

- Jan. 27: Joint meeting with the Board of County Commissioners at 6 p.m..
- Feb. 2: Joint meeting with the Town of Callahan at 6 p.m..
- Feb. 5: Joint meeting with the Town of Hilliard at 6 p.m..
- Feb. 10: Joint meeting with the Fernandina Beach City Commission at 6 p.m. at the district office.

The power of story

Over the holidays we had so many customers bring in their families to show off «their bookstore.» We love seeing them enjoy browsing, chatting with one another, staying for lunch and take a few books home. You can spoil a child with many things, but not books.

When we see grownups reading to children or children reading to one another, it fills us with hope that stories are still alive, connecting us with one another in meaningful ways.

Author Harold R. Johnson once wrote, «We are all story. We are the stories we are told and we are the stories we tell ourselves.» To understand a life, look at the stories and lessons learned as children. We can reflect on the stories our parents told us or the stories that were understood as we observed, listened to, and interacted with our families, our friends and teachers, our neighbors and colleagues. Each day stories surround us and shape us.

One of the surprising bestselling books of last year is Virginia Evans’s novel «The Correspondent,» a story of 73-year-old Sybil Van Antwerp. The media caught onto Evans’s touching story of almost giving up on having the



Donna Kaufman

novel published. Now, we can all be grateful that an acquisitions editor gave it the time of day and opened us up to how stories are part of our lives to the very end and even have repercussions after we’re gone.

«The Correspondent» is told in letters that span Sybil’s life. At the start of the novel, Sybil’s a pretty crusty old lady - judgmental, a bit harsh, and not very likable. As we flip the pages to read her correspondence throughout her lifetime, we learn about her childhood, marriage, divorce, her career, her relationships. We better understand the mistakes of her youth, the moral challenges she faced during her career as a lawyer, and all the mishaps and acts of kindness that occur during a lifetime. In the end, I better understood Sybil and felt compassion for her. All our lives can be this messy combination of experiences that shape who we become. The novel prompts personal reflection. Some customers have told me after reading the book they have gone back to writing cards and letters.

There is a corner of bookcases in Story & Song we call «Be Well» and you’ll find information and wisdom about personal growth, faith, grief and coping, relationships and health. There is a series of keepsake journals that invite us to share our stories. One book in the series is «Mom, I Want to Hear Your Story» and there are others for fathers, grandmothers and

grandfathers. Even though my mother and I were extremely close all of my life, it’s almost two decades since her death and I still think of things I wished I knew or better understood.


«Being well» is understanding our stories as well as growing through the authentic stories of others. The two are so closely intertwined. Relationship hardships would be softened if we opened up to our past and spent time understanding our stories and sharing more of them with others. There is

remarkable power in story to expand our understanding, compassion, and connection to live a full, engaging, and rewarding life.

Donna Paz Kaufman is the co-founder of Story & Song Center for Arts & Culture on Amelia Island. Since 1992, she and her husband Mark have helped train new owners of bookstore start-ups across the country. Donna has served as the national president of the other WNBA, the Women’s National Book Association.

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February

Community Calendar

What's Happening in Nassau County

What's Happening in Nassau County

Feb. 1
Amelia Island Festival of Stories & Songs
The celebration of storytelling concludes its final day. Visit storyandsongarts.org for the schedule of workshops and performances.

Feb. 3
AIGS Membership Morning
The Amelia Island Genealogical Society hosts a "Membership Morning" to share information about the society and answer questions. Tuesday, Feb. 3, from 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at Story & Song Bookstore.

Feb. 6 – 8
Wild Amelia Photography Festival
A three-day celebration showcasing nature photography and the beauty of the island's ecosystem. Friday, Feb. 6 through Sunday, Feb. 8. Visit wildamelia.org for details.

Feb. 7 – 8
First Weekend Federal Garrison Day
Travel back to 1864 at Fort Clinch State Park. Reenactors portray the Union Army's New York Engineers, bringing history to life with demonstrations and storytelling. Saturday, Feb. 7, and Sunday, Feb. 8, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Regular park admission fees apply plus a \$2.50 fort entry fee.

Feb. 7, 14
Beginning Genealogy Classes
The Amelia Island Genealogical Society continues its six-week course. Saturdays at 9:30 a.m. in the Community Room of the Fernandina Beach Public Library. Cost is \$50 per person. Contact Jean Mann at 904-261-0211 to register.

Feb. 7
Hunger Fight Packing Event
The community is invited to help pack meals for those in need. Saturday, Feb. 7, from 9:30 a.m. to noon at the Atlantic Recreation Center. To volunteer, contact local church offices (St. Peter's, First Presbyterian, Memorial United Methodist, or St. Michael).

Feb. 7
Zen on the Egans Creek Greenway
A mindfulness walking workshop led by Maria Murphy and Lurane Worth, featuring a gentle exploration of the trails focusing on

meditation and stress management skills. Saturday, Feb. 7, starting at 9 a.m. at the Pirate Playground parking lot (2490 Atlantic Ave). Registration is required online.

Feb. 8
Amelia Island Montessori Chili Cookoff
A popular downtown tradition featuring chili tasting, music, and family fun. Saturday, Feb. 8, from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. in Downtown Fernandina Beach. Visit <https://www.google.com/search?q=ameliachilicookoff.com> for details.

Feb. 9
NAMI Neighborhood Book Club
Meets on the second Monday of the month. Monday, Feb. 9, from 11 a.m. to noon at Story & Song Bookstore, 1430 Park Ave., Fernandina Beach.

Feb. 10
Wild Amelia Nature Presentation
Learn about local wildlife with a presentation titled "Save the Buzztails!" Tuesday, Feb. 10. Visit wildamelia.org for time and location.

Feb. 10
Callahan Lions Club
The club hosts its monthly social meeting. Tuesday, Feb. 10, at 7 p.m. at 543514 U.S. Highway 1 in Callahan.

Feb. 10
Marine Corps League
The Detachment 1017 Marine Corps League meets on the second Tuesday of the month. Tuesday, Feb. 10, at 7 p.m. at the American Legion Post 54 on Third Street in Fernandina Beach.

Feb. 12
Nassau County Democratic Party
Monthly meeting. Everyone is welcome; preregistration is required at nassaudems.org. Thursday, Feb. 12, at 7 p.m.

Feb. 15 – 17
Equipment Management Conference
An industry event bringing professionals together for networking and education. Sunday, Feb. 15 through Tuesday, Feb. 17.

Feb. 21
Free Food Distribution
The Good News Fellowship food distribution event takes place every third Saturday. Saturday, Feb. 21, from 10 a.m. to noon at New Life Baptist Church, 464069 State Road 200, Yulee.

Feb. 22
Karl Denson's Tiny Universe
A live musical performance scheduled for Sunday, Feb. 22. Check local venue listings for tickets and time.

Feb. 23
Hometown Heroes Fashion Show
Celebrate those who make Nassau County a better place at the Hometown Heroes Fashion Show. Monday, Feb. 23, at 5:30 p.m. at 629 S. 8th St., Fernandina Beach.

Feb. 28
Wildlight's Run Wild
Wildlight is gearing up for the fourth annual community race, Run Wild. It's always a high-energy event that brings together neighbors and fitness enthusiasts from across the county. Proceeds benefit the Wildlight YMCA's financial assistance program. Registration is now open at raceroster.com.

Feb. 28
Amelia Island Book Festival
Join the 25th Anniversary celebration with the "Hollywood Nights" theme. The Author Expo features celebrity authors like Claire Cook and Kate Quinn, plus over 100 exhibiting authors. The free event includes a Kids Zone and author signings. Saturday, Feb. 28, at Fernandina Beach Middle School, 315 Citrona Drive. Visit ameliaislandbookfestival.org for details.

Get Involved: Government & Civic Meetings
Feb. 2
Nassau County School Board Joint Meeting
The School Board will hold a Joint Meeting with the Callahan Town Council. Monday, Feb. 2, at 6 p.m.

Feb. 3, 17
Fernandina Beach City Commission
The Commission will hold a workshop

on Tuesday, Feb. 3, at 5 p.m., followed by the Regular Meeting at 6 p.m. The second Regular Meeting of the month is scheduled for Tuesday, Feb. 17, at 6 p.m. Meetings are held at City Hall, 204 Ash St.

Feb. 5
Nassau County School Board Joint Meeting
The School Board will hold a Joint Meeting with the Hilliard Town Council. Thursday, Feb. 5, at 6 p.m.

Feb. 9
Nassau County School Board Workshop
The Board will hold a workshop for agenda review. Monday, Feb. 9, at 5 p.m.

Feb. 9, 23
Nassau County Board of County Commissioners
The Board will hold regular meetings on Monday, Feb. 9 and Monday, Feb. 23 at 5 p.m. All meetings take place at the James S. Page Governmental Complex, 96135 Nassau Place, Yulee.

Feb. 10
Nassau County School Board Joint Meeting
The School Board will hold a Joint Meeting with the City of Fernandina Beach. Tuesday, Feb. 10, at 6 p.m.

Feb. 12
Nassau County School Board
Regular monthly meeting. Thursday, Feb. 12, at 6 p.m. at Callahan Middle School (Open Forum starts at 5:30 p.m.).

Ongoing Activities
Nassau County Council on Aging
Check out the monthly class schedule for seniors, featuring activities ranging from fitness and yoga to arts and technology workshops. Visit www.nassaucountycouncilonaging.org/event-calendar or call (904) 261-0701 for details.

A Fine Art Sale
Island Art Association with Luna Fine Art Gallery present A Fine Art Sale through the end of the year. It takes place in the Courtyard by Marriott at Amelia Island, 2700 Atlantic Ave. All proceeds fund IAA programs. Visit lunafineart.org.



with City of Fernandina Beach Commissioner Tim Poynter

Q: Why does Fernandina Beach need new revenue sources?

A: The city cannot raise sales tax - all we have is ad valorem tax. Sales tax goes to Tallahassee, gets divvied up by population. Last year the county received around \$20 million from sales tax. We got around \$2.3 million. As the county grows, the city will get less. Our operating budget is \$44 million - half is police and fire. We don't have \$30 million to fix the town in



Tim Poynter

one year. We need capital improvement plans spread over time, not just on the backs of 8,000 taxpayers.

Q: What needs to be fixed downtown?

A: Brett's (Brett's Waterway Cafe) has to come down, along with the seawall underneath it that's falling apart. The downtown is literally crumbling - the sidewalk is crumbling, the curbing is crumbling, the infrastructure is bad, the light posts are not working. We get sued three or four times a year from people tripping. We have no defense - we know there's trip hazards and we settle lawsuits. The state pledged \$6 million, but we have to spend \$6 million first and then apply for reimbursement. We need a revenue stream.

Q: Why do you keep running for commission despite past election losses?

A: I have never cared about getting reelected. When we did Forward Fernandina, we expanded the library and planned the waterfront park. We were vilified for spending \$600,000 on the library, but we have over 500,000 people a year that visit. We all got thrown out of office. Next time, I got funding to rebuild the airport FBO. Everyone said it was a waste. We got thrown out again. That building was picked the number one project in the state by the FAA. The previous commission promoted projects they didn't fund. Their answer was lower taxes. This commission is saying enough is enough.

Q: How can residents contact you?

A: My email and cell phone are posted. I hold monthly town halls at City Hall, 5:30-6:30 on the fourth Tuesday. You can ask me any questions. I'll get answers if I don't know them. About 12 citizens show up each time. I will not post on Facebook - if you want information, you have to reach out. All I see on Facebook is misinformation.

Tim Poynter is a City Commissioner for Fernandina Beach. Questions or comments can be directed to him at tpoynter@fbfl.city or 904-415-6533.



with City of Fernandina Beach Commissioner
Genece Minshew

Q: Why is it important for residents to experience paid parking before the referendum?

A: I particularly feel it is important because there has been so much misinformation about paid parking. In order for a citizen to make an informed decision in August or November, they need to see how it's going to work for a while. This is a great opportunity to let people touch it, feel it, experience it, and then make a decision at the ballot box based on facts and experience, not rumors and what-ifs.

Q: What are your legislative priorities for 2026?

A: The big challenge is ad valorem tax changes - we're talking about millions of dollars of lost revenue potentially. There continues to be pressure on home rule issues. The League of Cities is watching efforts to do away with community redevelopment agencies, issues on additional dwelling units and changes to SB 180, last year's hurricane recovery bill that took away local control.

Q: When will Waterfront Park be completed?

A: Once the pavilion gets finished, landscaping will move really quickly. We just ordered a half-million dollars worth of trees. The timeline is to get it done by the end of March, and the commitment is it'll be completely open and operational



Genece Minshew

before Shrimp Festival, which is the first weekend in May. We're also waiting on the final permit from the Army Corps of Engineers to get Atlantic Seafood demolished - that piece of the building sits out in the water just enough that we had to get Army Corps approval.

Q: What process improvements is the city making?

A: We made changes to the approval levels for the city manager, which will take weeks, if not months, out of project timelines. So many things had to come to us, and sometimes it takes a month to get on our calendar. We're also implementing contract management software - we don't have any today. We've been criticized about not managing contracts properly. Part of the way you fix that is putting tools in place that help you track dates and timelines.

Q: How is City Manager Sarah Campbell's leadership impacting the city?

A: The city is functioning at a higher level, and I give all the credit to Sarah Campbell. She has inspired the team with a new sense of purpose. Last year in Tallahassee, I cannot begin to tell you the number of people in the state legislature who would stop and say, «Oh my God, Sarah Campbell, it is so nice to see you» and «What do you need?» I said, «I did not know you were so politically connected,» and she said, «Well, nobody asked me that in the interview.» She has been a real breath of fresh air for the city.

Genece Minshew is a City Commissioner for Fernandina Beach. Questions or comments can be directed to her at gminshew@fbfl.city or 904-780-4188.



with City of Fernandina Beach Commissioner
Joyce Tuten

Q: What resiliency award did the city recently win?

A: At the annual Regional Awards for Excellence on Jan. 8, the Northeast Florida Regional Council awarded Fernandina Beach the 2025 Resiliency Award for our Flood Adaptation Plan.

Q: How was the plan funded and where can residents read it?

A: The Flood Adaptation Plan was funded by a Resilient Florida Program grant with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. It was prepared by Halff consultants working closely with city staff and community outreach. The plan aligns with state regulations to integrate resilience planning and goes one step further with development of actionable strategies. We are now positioned to apply for further funding with the Resilient Florida Program, which supports local projects aimed at mitigating flood risks, protecting critical infrastructure and enhancing natural resilience. Residents can read the plan at fbfl.us/975/resiliency. It contains 17 priorities with 76 actionable items that the city can implement to protect our assets.

Q: Why is the Flood Adaptation Plan necessary?

A: Since the Industrial Revolution, sea levels have risen nine inches in Fernandina. According to the 2022 NOAA Sea Level



Joyce Tuten

Rise Technical Report, the city will see another 10-12 inches of sea level rise by 2050 and then at least two more feet of sea level rise by 2100. Storm surge poses an additional threat. The city is a low-lying community on a barrier island, surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean, the Amelia River, the St. Marys River and Egans Creek. We have significant vulnerabilities.

Q: What is the focus of the Flood Adaptation Plan?

A: The plan identifies key vulnerabilities, assesses adaptation strategies and prioritizes actions. Our historic downtown is an especially high-risk area of critical importance to our historic, economic and cultural identity. Strategy 1 prioritizes completion of the seawall along Front Street.

Q: How will the city implement the Flood Adaptation Plan?

A: The plan identifies immediate, midterm and long-term needs. The plan identifies the city department to serve as implementation lead for each strategy, and each strategy is broken down into actionable steps. It is a practical, forward-looking framework for responding to increasing flood risks. It won't be easy and it will require years of sustained support and funding. But we must protect our assets now and for future generations. This proactive work is far more efficient than reacting to catastrophes as they come.

Joyce Tuten is a City Commissioner for Fernandina Beach. Questions or comments can be directed to her at jtuten@fbfl.city.



with City of Fernandina Beach Vice Mayor
Darron Ayscue

Q: Why did you vote against paid parking downtown?

A: Citizens brought many good ideas forward. The commission has yet to identify how paid parking revenue will generate the funds needed for the wanted capital projects nor if the citizens would even want to see those projects happen. A general obligation bond that is tied specifically to a project would give the commission the answer of whether or not the citizens believe debt is needed to fund certain projects. In short, the commission could simply let the people vote on any debt.

Q: What are your priorities for 2026?

A: The state law known as «Live Local» is here to stay. Fernandina Beach and Amelia Island cannot handle the amount of density «Live Local» brings. We, as a commission, are going to have to find creative ways to entice and incentivize property owners to build smart. Sticking our head in the sand on local development has the potential to have dire consequences. I do not believe our codes will protect us enough and we should be considering PUDs (Planned Unit Development) in certain areas so



Darron Ayscue

we can most effectively limit the effects of large residential projects.

Q: How do you engage with residents and incorporate their feedback?

A: I engage residents through a variety of forms. I'm responsive to emails, I will actively seek expert opinions on subjects and in general, I am out in the public. I ensure their feedback is reflected in the votes, simply by engaging with more than just a handful of people through a variety of mediums. As Coach Deion Sanders says, «I ain't hard to find.»

Q: What do you want residents to know about the commission's direction?

A: I have no idea what direction this commission is taking the city. This commission has spent a full year leaving the city paralyzed over paid parking. Other than the budgeted maintenance projects, I haven't seen any meaningful steps forward. I credit this commission with voting for a tax increase and dividing the city residents over paid parking as its most meaningful accomplishments, both of which I have voted against.

Darron Ayscue represents Seat 5 and serves as Vice Mayor of the Fernandina Beach City Commission. Questions or comments can be directed to him at dayscue@fbfl.org or (904) 780-4480.



with Nassau County Commissioner
Jeff Gray

Q: What recreation investments are Nassau County making?

A: When I speak with residents across Nassau County, one theme comes up again and again: the importance of places to gather, play and unwind. Our recreation projects are investments in our families, our health and our sense of community. Guided by community input and thoughtful planning, Nassau County continues to expand recreational opportunities while preserving what makes our community special.

Q: What's happening with Yulee Ballpark?

A: Yulee Ballpark has long been the heart of the Yulee community, a place where families gather, youth sports thrive and neighbors connect. As Yulee continues to grow, Nassau County has acquired 110 acres adjacent to the existing ballpark. We are now reviewing preliminary designs to expand recreational opportunities while preserving flexibility to serve the community for generations to come.

Q: How do public-private partnerships benefit Nassau County recreation?

A: Public-private partnerships help Nassau County deliver high-quality recreation projects efficiently and responsibly. By requiring developers to invest back into the community, growth pays for growth without adding burden on existing taxpayers.



Jeff Gray

These partnerships save time and taxpayer dollars, delivering new amenities alongside development. Two parks are currently under development through this approach: Liberty Cove Park, a 46.14-acre development by Matovina and Company along William Burgess Boulevard, will feature a 1.45-mile linear park and riverfront access to the Nassau River. Blackrock Cove Park, approximately 20 acres at Blackrock Road and Heron Isles Parkway, will include multi-use trails, exercise stations, a dog park, pickleball courts, a playground, a gymnasium and pavilions.

Q: What is Westside Regional Park?

Westside Regional Park will serve all of Nassau County, with an emphasis on residents in the western communities of Callahan, Bryceville and Hilliard. The park was designed using community feedback to ensure it meets local needs. Amenities will include an amphitheater for concerts and regional events, an airnasium (open air gymnasium), playground, three FIFA regulation-size multi-purpose fields, a dog park, nature trails and telescope facilities for star-gazers. These projects reflect Nassau County's commitment to creating spaces that bring people together, support healthy lifestyles and enhance quality of life for residents of all ages.

Jeff Gray represents District 3 on the Nassau County Board of County Commissioners. Questions or comments can be directed to him at jgray@nassaucountyfl.com or (904) 570-1946.

Former QB coach: ‘Sky’s the limit’ for Trevor Lawrence

By Beth Jones
bjones@nassaunewsline.net

Trevor Lawrence led the Jacksonville Jaguars to an AFC South division title and a playoff berth this season, and Fernandina Beach native Ronald Veal isn’t the least bit surprised.

Veal, who was Lawrence’s quarterback coach from middle school until he signed with the Jags in 2021, is pleased with his former student’s performance, especially his fifth season in Jacksonville.

“They played well,” Veal said of the 13-5 Jaguars, who lost to the Buffalo Bills 27-24 on Jan. 11 in the wild card round of the NFL playoffs. “That was a good game. They were just a couple of plays away from going to the next round.”

Veal was a three-sport standout at Fernandina Beach High School, where he also played basketball and was a pitcher and third baseman for the baseball team.

“We were 7-3 and ranked in the top 10 in the state of Florida,” said of the Pirate football team his senior season.

Veal said that success, “and going to camps,” helped him land a scholarship to play football at Arizona. After a stint in the Canadian Football League, he swapped his cleats for a whistle.

“I was coming home, and I saw this

kid throwing at the field by my house,” Veal said. “I told him, ‘I can help you be a better quarterback.’ And, that’s how it started.”

That was 2003, and Veal guesses he’s trained at least 100 quarterbacks. He’s still at it, when he’s not at the fire station.

“I’ve been a fireman for 20 some years,” he said. “I’m retiring in 2027, and I’ll just be coaching after that.”

Lawrence is one of two quarterbacks Veal coached currently playing in the NFL. He also coached Justin Fields, former Ohio State QB who now plays for the Jets.

Some of Veal’s other “kids” play in the Canadian Football League, the USFL and for colleges around the country.

“We’ve got some good ones,” Veal said.

And, they all hail from the Atlanta area, where Veal and his family now call home.

He still visits family often in Fernandina Beach, where he was “born and raised,” and credits the coaches from his hometown for his success as a player and coach.

“I had like a village,” Veal said. “Coach (Joel) Stockstill, Coach (Johnny T.) Smith, Coach Pete (Leonard Peterson). Just all those guys who helped me on the way, from the neighborhood at the Elm Street Rec.”

Veal is happy to pay it forward, and he can watch the fruits of his labor on Saturday and Sunday afternoons during the football season.

No, Veal isn’t surprised that “tall, lanky kid trying to find his body” back in seventh grade has turned into the phenomenal athlete Lawrence is today.

“He’s a level-headed person, and he’s always been that way,” Veal said. “He knows what he wants to do and how he wants to do it, and he goes from there.”

Respectful and humble are the words Veal chose to describe Lawrence, whom he still texts about “games and celebratory stuff.”

“Now, he’s a father, with a wife and a family. He’s just a solid individual,” Veal said, reflecting on the five years since relinquishing his coaching duties.

The season may be over for Lawrence and the Jaguars, but Veal sees a bright future for his star pupil and his



Photo courtesy Ronal Veal
Former Pirate quarterback Ronald Veal with Jaguar QB Trevor Lawrence in 2021, Lawrence's first season with Jacksonville.

teammates.

“I just think the sky’s the limit for him, if they keep doing what they’re doing and get some key pieces around him,” Veal said.

Art and Love: Exploring February’s most inspiring subject

Right from the earliest known cave drawings thousands of years ago, humans wanted to express to other humans what they saw, where they lived, who they were and always questioning where they came from. Art is communication. Watching your child draw you and the family. It has been the communication tool early on for humans to express their needs, desires, discoveries and questions to their fellow group and still works today so far - human to human, and hopefully remains that way (not looking for AI to human). What if the artists didn’t record their world centuries back, how would we know the past? It’s not just color and beauty, it’s history.

Well, here we are, February, the month of love and Valentine’s Day. What could possibly be more inspiring for artists than the subject of love. Love found, lost, denied, longed for, dreamed of, desired and sometimes avoided. Art communicates and love is surely the most universally expressed subject. Artists feel and convey the passion, emotions of love. They look to express it all - the pain, the joy, beauty, the fulfillment and also for some, the absence of this human phenomenon.

You can see love in so many ways - not just for human to human, but the love of nature, music, dance, cooking, writing ... the art of love drives our satisfaction of living. This February, look to see how love has influenced the arts you support and collect. It’s probably pretty deep.



Richard Restiano

Art’s definition generally falls into three categories: Art as Representational; Art as Expression of Emotional Content; Art as Form/Design.

Just think of your world without art, books, music, theatre, film, dance, sculpture. Art is personal to the viewer - and what the artist communicates makes you think and feel ... happy, serious, mad, confused, informational, memorial, joyful, optimistic. Experienced by the senses: visual, oral, touch. Take the time out of your crazy busy day to explore the oasis that the arts provide us humans. Shakespeare: «If music be the food of love, play on. Give me excess of it, surfeiting (feed to excess), the appetite may sicken and so die.»

The Art Leaders Forum: Story and Song, Feb. 23, 10 a.m. to noon. Nassau Arts leaders discuss next events, issues and concerns. City, County and Tourist Board present updates and planned

activities and events.

Richard A. Restiano, Sr. is the founder of Nassau Council of Arts and Culture, Inc., The West Nassau Arts Alliance and the Arts Leaders Forum- Arts and Culture

organizations that support the arts for Nassau County, FL. They create, promote and sustain positive art experiences and cultural opportunities while supporting cultural tourism to enhance the quality of life for all residents.



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America’s Youth Enterprises
907 S. 11th Street
Fernandina Beach, Florida 32034
Nassau County

February sports schedules



Photos by Penny Glackin

The Fernandina Beach High School grapplers hosted West Nassau on Dec. 16, 2025. Both teams head to Yulee Feb. 5 for the county championship.

**FERNANDINA BEACH HIGH SCHOOL
Boys Varsity Wrestling**

Feb. 4 home with Episcopal at 6 p.m.
Feb. 5 county championship at Yulee at 6 p.m.
Feb. 16 individual district tournament at Terry Parker at 10 a.m.
Feb. 27-28 region tournament at Bay High School
March 5-7 individual state championship at Silver Spurs Arena in Kissimmee, starting at noon

**FERNANDINA BEACH HIGH SCHOOL
Girls Wrestling**

Feb. 2 Monday Callout at Ridgeview at 4:30 p.m.
Feb. 4 home with Episcopal at 5 p.m.
Feb. 5 county championship at Yulee at 6 p.m.
Feb. 11 individual district tournament at Westside at 2:30 p.m.
Feb. 20-21 region at Mosley High School

March 5-7 individual state championship in Kissimmee at 12:30 p.m.

**FERNANDINA BEACH HIGH SCHOOL
Boys Junior Varsity Wrestling**

Feb. 2 Monday Callout at Ridgeview at 4:30 p.m.
Feb. 4 home with Episcopal at 5 p.m.
Feb. 5 county championship at Yulee High School at 6 p.m.
Feb. 6-7 JV state championship at Osceola High School

**YULEE HIGH SCHOOL
Wrestling**

Feb. 5 home for county championship and senior night
Feb. 7 home for JV region open
Feb. 16 district championship at Terry Parker
Feb. 27-28 region championship at Bay High School
March 5-7 state at Kissimmee

**FERNANDINA BEACH HIGH SCHOOL
Girls Weightlifting**

Feb. 11-13 state meet at Lakeland

**FERNANDINA BEACH HIGH SCHOOL
Varsity Baseball**

Feb. 10 at Atlantic Coast at 7 p.m.
Feb. 11 home with Bishop Kenny at 6:30 p.m.
Feb. 13 home with Baldwin at 6:30 p.m.
Feb. 17 home with Sandalwood at 6:30 p.m.
Feb. 19 at Hilliard at 7 p.m.
Feb. 20 home with Bishop Kenny at 6:30 p.m.
Feb. 24 at Wolfson at 7 p.m.
Feb. 26 at Keystone Heights at 6:30 p.m.

**FERNANDINA BEACH HIGH SCHOOL
Softball**

Feb. 17 home with Raines at 6 p.m.
Feb. 19 at Bishop Snyder at 6 p.m.
Feb. 23 at First Coast at 6 p.m.

Feb. 24 home with West Nassau at 6 p.m.
Feb. 26 home with Bishop Kenny at 5:30 p.m.

**YULEE HIGH SCHOOL
Varsity Baseball**

Feb. 9 at Old Plank Christian at 6 p.m.
Feb. 11 home with Duval Charter at 6:30 p.m.
Feb. 13 home with Covenant School at 6:30 p.m.
Feb. 17 at Wolfson at 6:30 p.m.
Feb. 19 home with Parsons Christian Academy at 6:30 p.m.
Feb. 20 at Fleming Island at 7 p.m.
Feb. 24 at Episcopal at 6 p.m.
Feb. 25 home with Sandalwood at 6:30 p.m.
Feb. 27 home with Paxon at 6:30 p.m.

**YULEE HIGH SCHOOL
Softball**

Feb. 17 at Baldwin at 7 p.m.
Feb. 19 home with West Nassau at 7 p.m.

