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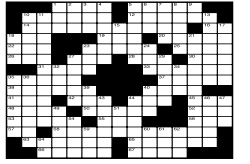


Photo courtesy Veterans Council of St. Johns County

WE CAN DO IT!: The Veterans Council is searching for local women who served in defense industries during WWII.

Local Search for 'Rosie the Riveters'

NewsLine staff

The Veterans Council of St. Johns County is joining a nationwide effort to locate and honor the women who served on the home front during World War II. Known collectively as "Rosie the Riveters," these women worked in defense industries, shipyards, and factories, filling critical roles while millions of men were serving overseas.

The Spirit of '45 organization is currently seeking to identify surviving "Rosies" in the Northeast Florida area to ensure their contributions to the war effort are formally recognized and recorded for historical preservation.

If you or someone you know served as a Rosie the Riveter during WWII, please contact the Veterans Council of St. Johns County or the Spirit of '45 organization. Local organizers hope to honor these trailblazing women at upcoming patriotic events throughout the spring.

Roar into Spring



Photos courtesy Landrum Middle School PTO

The Landrum Middle School mascot joins St. Johns County Sheriff Hardwick during the inaugural Lion Fest, which featured a safety talk and community pep rally.

Community partnerships, volunteer spirit drive local school success

By NewsLine staff
mail@floridanewsline.com

Local schools are roaring into spring with a wave of new student resources and community-wide celebrations, anchored by significant partnerships and the dedication of parent volunteers. From the unveiling of a specialized sensory room at Ocean Palms Elementary to the inaugural "Lion Fest" at Landrum Middle School, the First Coast education community is highlighting the impact of collaborative support, according to a recent release.

A major milestone was reached at Ocean Palms Elementary through a partnership with the JT Townsend



Former Ocean Palms Elementary principal Tiffany Cantwell, left, recognizes Sierra Boyce as the 2026 Volunteer of the Year for her dedicated service to the PTO.

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Photos courtesy Landrum Middle School

The new sensory room at Ocean Palms Elementary features specialized equipment designed to help students in the Varying Exceptionalities Program process sensory input and focus on learning.



Representatives from Ocean Palms Elementary and the JT Townsend Foundation gather to celebrate the opening of the new sensory room.

Roar into Spring cont. from pg. 1

Foundation to create a new sensory room. The space is specifically designed to serve the school's Varying Exceptionalities Program, providing a dedicated environment where students can safely explore and self-regulate, said the release.

The room features specialized equipment funded by the foundation, allowing students to engage in tailored learning activities. "The sensory room

is a wonderful gift for Ocean Palms," said Kim Bays, assistant principal. "It provides a calming space when needed and really allows them to express themselves," according to a recent release.

The JT Townsend Foundation has a long history with the school, having previously funded adaptive playground equipment in 2020 and classroom tools in 2024, said the release.

While institutional partnerships provide the hardware for student success, individual volunteers provide the heart. Ocean Palms recently recognized Sierra Boyce as the 2026 Volunteer of the Year. Boyce, who currently serves as PTO president, has spent four years managing the school's digital communications, including social media and the school website, according to a recent release.

Boyce's role in streamlining PTO newsletters and fliers has been credited with bringing the school community closer together. Beyond her communications work, she has served as vice president and a member of the school's SAC committee, said the release.

The spirit of community extended to Landrum Middle School this month as the PTO hosted its inaugural Lion Fest. The event brought together students, families, and local vendors for a night featuring a pep rally, a half-court basketball challenge, and the Scholastic Book Fair, according to a recent release.

The festival also emphasized student safety, featuring a talk hosted



A member of the Landrum Middle School administration prepares for a splash in the dunk tank during the spring festival.

by the school principal and the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office. Other highlights included food trucks and a dunk tank where students had the opportunity to "splash" members of the school administration, said the release.



Landrum cheerleaders perform during the pep rally, a highlight of the school's inaugural community event.

Landrum Roars into Spring with Inaugural Lion Fest

By NewsLine staff
mail@floridanewslines.com

The Landrum Middle School PTO hosted its inaugural Lion Fest event this spring with a turnout that had everyone roaring, according to a recent release.

Complete with a pep rally, a half-court basketball challenge, dunk tanks where students could splash administration, food trucks, the Scholastic Book Fair, and a safety talk hosted by the principal and sheriff's department, there was something for everyone. It was also a night to come together as a school community, said the release.

Students, families, local vendors and community members walked the halls, took part in the fun, and created a night to remember, according to a recent release.



Photo courtesy Landrum Middle School PTO

450 State Road 13 North
Suite 106 PMB 101
St. Johns, FL 32259
(904) 886-4919
www.FloridaNewsLine.com

Publisher

Mark Pettus

Publisher@FloridaNewsLine.com

Editor

Tracy Dishman

Editor@FloridaNewsLine.com

Bookkeeper

Emily Whitehead

Accounting@FloridaNewsLine.com

Social Media

SocialMedia@FloridaNewsLine.com

Advertising Sales

Haley Cook

haley.cook@newslinedigital.com

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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Noodle!



- Breed:**
Mixed breed rescue dog
- Favorite activity:**
Fishing with dad, splashing and walking on the beach
- Favorite food:**
From broccoli to steak
- Favorite friend:**
Five-month-old human sister
- How did your BFF get his name:**
Food of Southeast Asia

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 First Coast NewsLine. Your pet could be our BFF of the month and appear in First Coast NewsLine! Email editor@floridanewslines.com to enter your pet.



Answers to our Puzzles PG 8

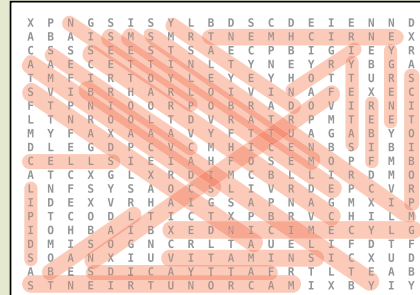
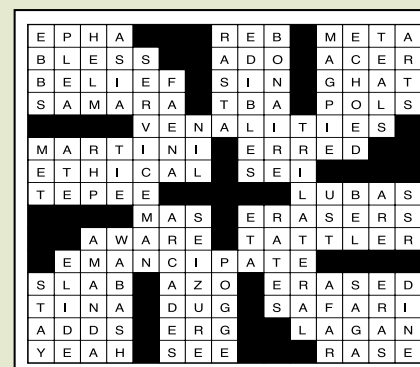


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March

Community Calendar What's Happening in St. Johns

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

March 3 Vicar's Landing Boutique and Cottage Sale

Vicar's Landing will host its monthly boutique and cottage sale Tuesday, March 3, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the main Vicar's Landing-Sawgrass Community Building. The sale features jewelry, knick-knacks, and framed and unframed art. The Art Gallery will also feature a show by Ellen Diamond and her students. The Cottage sale includes antiques and home furnishings. Proceeds benefit the Vicar's Employee scholarship fund. Cash or checks only. For more information, call Nancy Martin at 941-830-2141 or Diane Cannon at 904-392-6900.

March 3 Northwest St. Johns County United for Progress

The Northwest St. Johns County United for Progress will meet Tuesday, March 3, at 6:30 p.m. The program features guest speaker Joe McAnarney, who will discuss the Bartram Trail Scenic Highway. Additionally, members of the Creekside High School Young Democrats will be introduced, and Mark Heggestad, Democratic candidate for the 5th Congressional District, will attend. For more information, email nwsjcp@gmail.com.

March 10 Bartram Trail Newcomers Club Luncheon

The Bartram Trail Newcomers Club will host its March luncheon on Tuesday, March 10, at 11 a.m. at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club in St. Augustine. The event includes lunch and entertainment. Cost is \$32 (cash or check). The club is open to all women seeking community and fellowship. Visit

www.facebook.com/BTNC.1 for details.

March 12 Community Side-by-Side

The Jacksonville Symphony will host its annual "Community Side-by-Side" performance Thursday, March 12, at 7:30 p.m. at Jacoby Symphony Hall. This unique event allows musicians from across the community to perform onstage alongside professional Jacksonville Symphony musicians. For more information, visit jaxsymphony.org.

March 14 Bartram Trail Genealogy Club

The Bartram Trail Genealogy Club will meet Saturday, March 14, at 2 p.m. at Geneva Presbyterian Church in the Fellowship Hall, 1755 State Road 13, St. Johns. This temporary location is being used while the Bartram Trail Library is closed. The meeting will feature a group discussion reviewing members' experiences at the RootsTech 2026 virtual conference. For questions, contact Peggy Preusler at PJPgenealogy@gmail.com or 904-710-9149.

March 14-15 "Opulent Orchids" Show and Sale

The Jacksonville Orchid Society will present "Opulent Orchids" Saturday, March 14, and Sunday, March 15, at the Mandarin Garden Club, 2892 Loretto Road, Jacksonville. Doors open at 10 a.m. both days, closing at 6 p.m. Saturday and 4 p.m. Sunday. The free event features orchid displays, supplies for sale, and daily lectures on orchid culture. For more information, visit jaxorchidsociety.org.

March 19 William Bartram Scenic & Historic Highway Meeting

The William Bartram Scenic & Historic Highway will hold its

monthly meeting Thursday, March 19, at 6:30 p.m. The meeting will take place in Conference Room LB at Westminster Woods on Julington Creek, 25 State Road 13.

March 22 River Garden Anniversary Day

River Garden will celebrate its 80th anniversary of serving older adults Sunday, March 22, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. on the River Garden campus, 11401 Old St. Augustine Road, Jacksonville. The community is invited to enjoy complimentary barbecue and family-friendly activities.

March 26 ACT and SAT Prep Classes

The Friends of the Bartram Trail Public Library will offer ACT and SAT prep classes starting Thursday, March 26. Additional sessions follow on April 2, 9, 23, and 30. ACT classes run from 5 p.m. to 6:15 p.m., and SAT classes run from 6:30 p.m. to 7:45 p.m. The cost is \$50 per series; proceeds benefit library programming. Registration is required by March 23. Visit bartramtrailfol.org/satact-classes to register or email macyp17@yahoo.com.

March 28 Battle of Thomas Creek Recognition

The Jacksonville Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) will present its annual recognition of the Battle of Thomas Creek on Saturday, March 28, beginning at 10 a.m. The event, held at the Seaton Creek Historic Preserve in northeast Jacksonville, commemorates the 249th anniversary of the Revolutionary War battle.

Coming in April Lip Sync Battle: Totally '80s

Girls on the Run of Northeast Florida will host its first-ever

"Lip Sync Battle: Totally '80s" Thursday, April 9, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the WJCT Building. The adults-only (21+) event features performances emceed by Eden Kendall and Rance Adams of River City Live. Tickets include food, drinks, and parking. For tickets, visit gotrnefl.org/lip-sync-battle.

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 No-catee. Programs include lunch programs, duplicate bridge, tap dance, painting classes, chair exercise, tai chi, canasta, bingo and board games. Most activities are weekly. 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@Palm-ValleyMarket.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.



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

Q: We have heard a great deal about Florida's initiative petitions over the past year. Are there any updates?

A: Feb. 1 marked the submission deadline for proposed initiative petitions seeking placement on the 2026 general election ballot. To qualify for the ballot, each initiative petition was required to obtain at least 880,062 verified voter signatures, in addition to meeting other statutory requirements.

Between January 2025 and the submission deadline, front office staff at the St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Office processed more than 26,000 petition signatures. Following the deadline, the Florida Department of State announced that all 22 active proposed constitutional amendments submitted through the initiative petition process failed to meet the requirements of Florida law and, as a result, will not appear on the 2026 general election ballot.

Q: Aside from processing petitions, what other activities has the Elections Office been undertaking?

A: The Poll Worker Department, under the direction of Poll Worker Coordinator Amanda Sims, has been working diligently to update the Poll Worker Manual and develop a new, comprehensive training program in preparation for the 2026 elections. A recent poll worker newsletter was distributed to active poll workers and included an election availability survey to assist with recruitment, training and scheduling efforts.

This year, poll workers will be introduced to the office's new fleet of DS300 tabulator scanners. Technical departments have been engaged in onboarding, initial testing, system integration and staff training to ensure all personnel are well prepared to support poll workers, election technicians and voters throughout St. Johns County.

Q: Will the St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Office conduct voter outreach during the 2026 election cycle?



Vicky Oakes

A: Yes. The Voter Outreach Team is working alongside the Council on Aging to schedule visits to their community centers. We are also excited to participate in voter outreach on Saturday, April 25, at the Hastings Cabbage, Potato and Bacon Festival.

Voter education efforts are scheduled throughout the 2025-2026 school year. Outreach activities began in February with visits to St. Augustine High School, Pedro Menendez High School and Beachside High School. In March, the team will visit Creekside High School, Allen D. Nease High School, the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind and Toco Creek High School.

April outreach will include visits to St. Gerard House and Bartram Trail High School, as well as conducting the spring election at St. Augustine High School. In May, outreach will conclude with a visit to Ponte Vedra High School before the end of the school year and prior to the office's scheduled suspension of outreach and public events in preparation for the Aug. 18, 2026, primary election.

For additional information regarding voter outreach and education, please visit the "Voter Education" section of our website at www.votesjc.gov.



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

Q: What do you enjoy most about serving on the St. Johns County School Board?

A: One of my favorite things is to celebrate and honor the hard work of our students, teachers, families, volunteers, and business partners. It truly is pure joy. St. Johns County School District schools are brimming with energy and enthusiasm with our commitment that foster learning environments that prioritize both academic excellence and student well-being, as well as embracing innovation in education. This was fully displayed as we celebrated our students' achievements at the county Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) awards ceremony. STEM is interwoven throughout our educational system. The opportunities for students outshine what other institutions work to achieve. Our students dominate in their academic curiosity, ingenuity and determination. From middle school through their senior year of high school — our students were amazing!

Q: What stood out to you about the students recognized this year?

A: From middle school through their senior year of high school — our students were amazing! Some of the awards from District 4 were:

- The Lemelson Early Inventors Award: Nicholas Jimenez-Otalora
- Regeneron Biomedical Sciences Award: Nat Bagna
- Office of Naval Research: Wylan Osgood, Dhaani Ailawadhi
- St. Augustine Alligator Farm: John Chau, Minh Winn
- St. Johns Medical Alliance: Vi Miller



Kelly Barrera

- Stockholm Junior Water: Liana Yerkin
- United States Metric Association: Sahana Ganesh
- Yale Science and Engineering Association: Dhruv Battula
- Stage Zero Innovation and Persistence Award: Nicolas Jimenez-Otalora and Dhruva Gadiparthi

Junior Category Awards:

- Physics: 1st place, Piper Ross
- Earth/Plant/Animal: 3rd place, Juliet Tsai
- Chemistry/Biomedical/Microbiology: 1st place, Liam Heffernan
- Intelligent Machines, Math, Engineering: 1st place, Nicholas Jimenez-Otalora
- Behavioral: 1st place, Maahi Ailawadhi; 2nd place, Lucy Kate Bridges and Samantha Brant; 3rd place, Katherine Mai

Q&A Kelly Barrera cont. on pg. 7

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Q&A with St. Johns County Property Appraiser Eddie Creamer

Q: How are homestead exemption totals and assessment caps determined each year?

A: Every January, the Florida Department of Revenue notifies our office of the tax year's homestead exemption total, assessment limitation cap and income limitations for other personal exemptions. These totals are adjusted annually based on the change in the consumer price index (CPI) for homestead exemption or the cost-of-living index (COLI) for other personal exemptions.

Q: What are the current benefit totals for homesteaded properties in 2026?

A: Homestead exemption reduces the taxable value of a primary residence and limits the annual increase of a property's assessed value to no more than 3% or the change in the CPI, whichever is less. This year, the full homestead exemption total is \$51,411, and the assessment limitation cap is 2.7%. These updated figures are now reflected on property record cards at www.sjcpa.gov.

Q: What are the requirements for the senior and disability exemptions this year?

A: The senior exemption can reduce taxable value by up to an additional \$50,000 for homesteaded owners 65 or older with a total household adjusted income below \$38,686. Residents who have lived in their home for 25-plus years with a market value under \$250,000 may qualify for additional benefits. For the total and permanent civilian disability exemption, which totally exempts the owner from property taxes, the household income limit is \$37,712.



Eddie Creamer

Q: How and when should residents apply for these exemptions?

A: The deadline to apply for 2026 exemptions is March 2. Property owners can apply online at www.sjcpa.gov or visit our office at 4030 Lewis Speedway, Suite 203, in St. Augustine. We are open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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

A: Our office is located at 4030 Lewis Speedway, Suite 203, and the phone number is 904-827-5500. We are open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Readers can also email me directly at Eddie@sjcpa.us or call the office for assistance.



Q&A with St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller Brandon J. Patty

Q. Can you provide information about your special extended business hours in March?

A. Our main courthouse location in St. Augustine will be open for extended business hours until 6:30 p.m. every Friday during the month of March. These extended hours will allow residents and families greater access to essential services.

Q. What services are available during the extended hours?

A. To better serve residents, we will offer the following services during our extended hours:

- Customer Care: General information and payments on court cases and tickets.
- Document Recording Services: Submit deeds, mortgages and other important records.
- Passport Services: Apply for a new passport and have your passport photos taken on-site.
- Marriage Licenses and Ceremonies: One of our most joyful duties.
- Notary Services: Get official documents notarized with ease.

Q. Can I make an appointment?

A. Yes. Our office will accept appointments during extended hours at our main location at the Richard O. Watson Judicial Center, 4010 Lewis Speedway in St. Augustine.



Brandon Patty

Appointments can be scheduled online by visiting our website at <https://stjohnsclerk.com> or calling (904) 819-3600.

Q. How can people get in touch with you with questions?

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

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Local wealth advisor earns national recognition

NewsLine Staff

Christopher M. Thompson, a Private Wealth Advisor with Upper Deck Wealth Management at Ameriprise Financial, has achieved the company's Circle of Success recognition for 2026, according to a recent release. To earn this achievement, Thompson established himself as one of the company's top advisors, a distinction earned by only a select number of high-performing advisors, said the release.



Christopher Thompson

Thompson has 33 years of experience in the financial services industry, a career he began after being honorably discharged from the U.S. Navy. As a Private Wealth Advisor, he provides financial advice anchored in a solid understanding of client needs and expectations through one-on-one relationships, said a recent release.

Ameriprise Financial has been helping clients feel confident about their financial futures for more than 130 years. The company maintains a nationwide network of more than 10,000 financial advisors and pro-

vides extensive investment advice, global asset management capabilities, and insurance solutions, according to a recent release.

For more information, Thompson can be reached at 904-380-2290 or by visiting the Ameriprise office at 818 A1A North, Suite 301, in Ponte Vedra Beach. Information is also available at <https://www.ameripriseadvisors.com/team/upper-deck-management/>.

Q&A Kelly Barrera cont. from pg. 5

Senior Category Awards:

- Intelligent Machines, Physics, Engineering: 1st place, Sophie Duan; 2nd place, Dhaani Ailawadhi; 3rd place, Mohammed Rayan Sirajudeen
- Behavioral/Math: 1st place, Dhruva Gadiparthi; 2nd place, Matthew Jones; 3rd place, Aarit Moolchandani; Honorable Mention, Dhruv Battula
- Biomedical/Microbiology, Animal Sciences: 1st place, John Chau and Minh Winn; 2nd place, Preston Singh, Milicevic; 3rd place, Doga Tankut/Brett Delpuech
- Cellular Molecular Science: 1st place, Anya Dorairaj; 2nd place (tie), Nat Bagnall and Vailoces Miller; 3rd place, Daniel Byron

State Science and Engineering Fair Invitees: Nicholas Jiminez Otorala, Maahi Ailawadhi, Dhaani Ailawadhi, Nat Bagnall, Sophie Duan, Dhruva Gadiparthi, Vailoces Miller, Minh Winn, and John Chau.

International Science and Engineering Fair Invitees: Sophie Duan and Anya Dorairaj.

In addition, eight of our students placed in the top 10 finalists of the U.S. District Court Essay Contest and were recognized in a special ceremony at the Bryan Simpson United States Court House in Jacksonville. Rica Gavvala from Allen D. Nease High School and Lelia Dixon, Nancy James, Daniela Jimenez, Rachel Marino, Jonathon

Milicevic, Ashley Wright and Ananya Yegnamurthy from Ponte Vedra High School were honored for their exceptional submissions by the Honorable Marcia Morales Howard, Chief States District Judge for the Middle District of Florida, along with other Middle District of Florida judges.

Q: Are there any other updates that you would like the community to know?

A: Our St. Johns County School District graduated 97.1% of our students during the 2024-2025 school year, placing our school district third in the state! Our mission of fostering good character and a passion for lifelong learning in all students creates educated and caring contributors to the world. This strong graduation rate certainly demonstrates commitment and hard work toward our mission. We are proud of our students, teachers, parents, staff, and administrators for achieving this outstanding educational achievement.

This excitement continues, as we expand Pre-K and VPK offerings across our school district, open our two new schools in the Nocatee and Silverleaf communities and build on the amazing comprehensive opportunities for students that we offer. From STEM, Classical English Language Arts, to Career Academies — our schools are focused on every student, every day.

Q: How can our readers contact you?

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

DONNA Marathon Weekend celebrates 19th year, raises nearly \$250,000

NewsLine Staff

More than 9,700 runners took to the streets of the First Coast this past weekend for the 19th annual DONNA Marathon Weekend, raising nearly \$250,000 for breast cancer support and research.

The events, held Jan. 31 through Feb. 1, drew athletes from all 50 states and 11 countries. Proceeds from the weekend benefit The DONNA Foundation, which provides financial relief to those living with breast cancer.

“Marathon Sunday tested all of us. It was unusually cold, uncomfortable, and hard in ways Florida runners rarely experience,” said Amanda Napolitano, executive director of The DONNA Foundation. “Despite the extreme cold, the determination and heart shown across our race courses was extraordinary.”

The weekend saw several repeat champions and a new course record in the women's half marathon. Liina Winborn of Odessa, Florida, finished in 1:16:36, breaking a course record that had stood since 2011.

Heather Cohen of Saint Cloud, Florida, earned a triple victory in the Ultra 110 Marathon, winning the women's, adaptive, and marathon adaptive categories.

2026 RACE RESULTS

Ultra 110 Marathon

- **Men:** Marc Burget (Jacksonville), 16:23:27
- **Women's Adaptive:** Heather Cohen (Saint Cloud), 27:43:18

Marathon (26.2 miles)

- **Men:** Matthew Nelson (Ponte Vedra Beach), 2:41:31
- **Women:** Sarah Nelson (Chicago), 3:01:15
- **Survivor:** Gia Didonato Sroczenski (Webster, Mass.), 3:57:20
- **Masters Men:** Chris Wood (Lake Winnebago, Mo.), 2:58:24
- **Masters Women:** Jolene Young (Jacksonville Beach), 3:10:39

Half Marathon

- **Men:** Sem Sultanov (Jacksonville), 1:08:23
- **Women:** Liina Winborn (Odessa), 1:16:36
- **Survivor:** Dee Smith (Atlantic Beach), 1:52:12



Photo courtesy Donna Foundation

A runner crosses the finish line with a smile during the DONNA 5K, part of the 19th annual marathon weekend.

• **Masters Men:** Jeff Wight (Atlantic Beach), 1:23:31

• **Masters Women:** Meghann Featherstun (Kent, Ohio), 1:26:02

FIS DONNA 5K

- **Men:** Beau Beaudreau (Ponte Vedra Beach), 15:44
- **Women:** Adrianna Ducharme (Yulee), 18:00
- **Women's Survivor:** Andrea Sharp (Jacksonville Beach), 23:10

• **Men's Survivor:** Michael Singer (Cuddebackville, N.Y.), 1:06:16

GoRuck Divisions

• **Marathon Men:** Christopher Schneider (Ponte Vedra Beach), 4:33:16

• **Half Marathon Men:** Jim Carroll (Ponte Vedra), 2:05:44

• **Half Marathon Women:** Natalie LeClair (Ponte Vedra Beach), 1:43:06

Booby Trap Challenge

- **Marathon Men:** Corbin Scofield (Auburn, Ala.), 3:19:33
- **Marathon Women:** Kaseleigh McCarley (Frisco, Texas), 3:30:50
- **Half Marathon Men:** Jason Swan (Williamstown, N.J.), 1:53:18
- **Half Marathon Women:** Sienna King (Jacksonville), 1:55:22

“DONNA Marathon Weekend has always reflected the very best of Jacksonville,” said Mayor Donna Deegan, the foundation's founder. “This year, in particularly challenging weather, our community showed what it means to care for one another.”

Fundraising for the foundation will continue through Feb. 28. The 20th anniversary of the event is scheduled for Feb. 5-7, 2027.

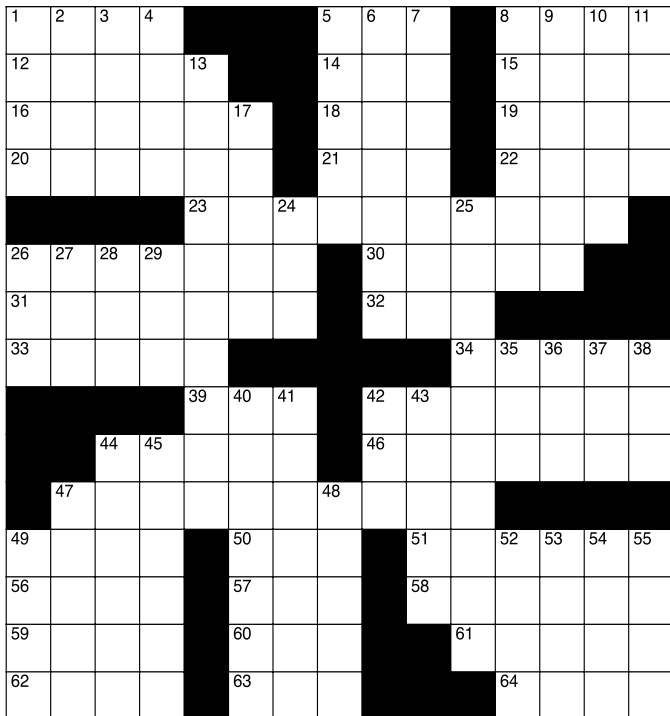


Photo courtesy Donna Foundation

Thousands of participants gathered in pink at the Seawalk Pavilion for the start of the DONNA 5K.

Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

1. Unit of dry measure
5. One who defies authority
8. Social media giant
12. Render holy
14. "Much __ about nothing"
15. Computer manufacturer
16. Creed
18. Immoral act
19. Mountain pass
20. Winged nut
21. Don't know when yet
22. Elected officials
23. Corrupt tendencies
26. Popular adult beverage
30. Made a mistake
31. Morally correct
32. Type of whale
33. Portable conical tent
34. Native people of the Congo

CLUES DOWN

39. More (Spanish)
 42. Classroom implements
 44. Cognizant of
 46. One who tells
 47. Free from bondage
 49. Thick piece of something
 50. Containing two adjacent nitrogen atoms
 51. Removed from the record
 56. Legendary singer Turner
 57. Broke up the earth
 58. Hunting expedition
 59. Contributes
 60. Unit of work or energy
 61. Wreckage on the sea bed
 62. Affirmative! (slang)
 63. Witness
 64. Scrape (Archaic)
1. " __ and flows"
 2. Humble request for help
 3. A position of leadership
 4. Continent
 5. Adherent of a particular religion
 6. Things that can be eaten
 7. Self-governing Netherlands territory
 8. Long-tailed crow
 9. Repeated
 10. Bluish greens
 11. Humanities
 13. Someone who serves in the armed forces
 17. Labor (Spanish)
 24. Zero
 25. Shared by involving three parties
 26. Queens ballplayer
 27. Consumed
 28. Rest here please
 29. Men's fashion accessory
 35. American time
 36. Sound unit
 37. They __
 38. Soviet Socialist Republic
 40. Places to play video games
 41. A sudden attack of illness
 42. When you hope to arrive
 43. Charges
 44. Actress Seyfried
 45. A tributary of the Ohio River
 47. Omit when speaking
 48. Armored fish
 49. Remain
 52. From a distance
 53. Adventure story
 54. Geological times
 55. Eat dinner

NUTRITION WORD SEARCH

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

WORDS

- AMINO ACIDS
- ANTIOXIDANTS
- BASAL
- BIOAVAILABILITY
- CALORIES
- CARBOHYDRATES
- CELLS
- DIETARY
- ELECTROLYTES
- ENERGY
- ENRICHMENT
- FATTY ACIDS
- FIBER
- FORTIFICATION
- GLYCEMIC INDEX
- IRON
- LIPIDS
- MACRONUTRIENTS
- METABOLISM
- MICRONUTRIENTS
- PROBIOTICS
- PROTEIN
- SATIETY
- VITAMINS

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



Solve the code to discover words related to nutrition.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 5 = E)

A. 14 5 11 5 7 3 8 5

Clue: Drink

B. 11 21 12 3 19 21 16

Clue: Organic molecule for health

C. 19 21 16 5 7 3 22

Clue: Solid inorganic substance

D. 24 17 17 20

Clue: Sustenance

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Coastal Friends to host garden party luncheon

NewsLine staff

Coastal Friends, a women's social club, will hold a garden party-themed luncheon on Wednesday, March 4, at Marsh Landing Country Club. The event will take place from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at 25655 Marsh Landing Parkway, according to a recent release.

"Following Punxsutawney Phil's prediction of six more weeks of winter on Feb. 2, Coastal Friends decided to combat the cold with a 'warm' theme in anticipation of spring," said Brooke Freeman, co-president of Coastal Friends. The luncheon will feature festive table decorations provided by The Social Society of Nocatee and theme-appropriate party favors at each place setting. Attendees can wear standard attire or opt for garden party outfits, with or without hats or fascinators. The attendee with the best garden party attire will win a \$50 Amazon gift card, said the release.

The club is pleased to welcome Elizabeth Filippelli as the guest speaker. Filippelli, the conservation director and a board member of the Duval Audubon Society, is a well-known figure in the region who recently addressed the Ribault Garden Club and the Beaches Museum. Her program will focus on bird conservation initiatives, protecting local and migrating

birds, and utilizing native plants to create backyard habitats, according to a recent release.

The luncheon menu features Caesar salad, short ribs with red wine demi-glaze, scalloped potatoes, a zucchini and squash medley, and apple cobbler. The cost to attend is \$25 and is open to members, guests, and the community. Reservations must be made in advance by contacting the luncheon chairman at bartshar@comcast.net. The deadline for checks is Friday, Feb. 27, at noon, said the release.

Established in 1998, Coastal Friends — formerly known as Newcomers Alumnae — is a social club for women living in Ponte Vedra Beach, Nocatee, the Beaches, St. Augustine, and Jacksonville. The club is designed for women who are new to the area, recently retired, or looking to meet new people. Activities include a book club, adventures and outings, bunco, mahjongg, and wine socials, according to a recent release.

Luncheons are held on the first Wednesday of every month at Marsh Landing Country Club, with the exception of July and August. New members are welcome throughout the year. For more information or to join, contact the membership chair at brookemeister@msn.com, said the release.



Photo courtesy Coastal Friends

A Coastal Friends member pauses for a photo during a nature outing. The club's March luncheon will feature a presentation on bird conservation and native habitats by Elizabeth Filippelli of the Duval Audubon Society.

Mandarin Art Festival returns April 4-5

NewsLine staff

The historic Mandarin Art Festival returns for its 58th year on Saturday, April 4, and Sunday, April 5, at the Mandarin Community Club, 12447 Mandarin Road. As the region's longest-running juried fine art event, the festival will feature more than 100 local and national artists, a Green Market, live music and a Children's Art Show featuring local students.

Newly appointed show manager Noel Michael will oversee the 2026 season. Proceeds from the event support the preservation and beautification efforts of the nonprofit Mandarin Community Club. Hours are 10 a.m. — 5 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. — 4 p.m. Sunday. Admission is free; a \$2 donation is suggested. Free off-site parking and shuttles will be provided. Visit www.mandarinartfestival.org for details.



Photo courtesy Mandarin Community Club



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Gardening

By Connie Doyle,
Master Gardener UF/IFAS

The Good Earth: Planting for Pollinators

March is a pivotal month in Northeast Florida gardens. The days are warming, plants are waking up and pollinators are emerging from winter in search of food. Bees, butterflies, moths and other beneficial insects depend on early-season blooms to regain strength, reproduce and continue the vital work of pollination

that supports both our landscapes and our food supply.

Many people think of pollinator gardening as a summer activity, but March is when the foundation is laid. Early blooms provide nectar and pollen at a time when natural food sources are still



Connie Doyle

limited. By choosing the right plants now, home gardeners can turn even small spaces into important refueling stations.

Native plants are especially valuable because they evolved alongside local pollinators. In our area, plants such as co-reopsis, blanket flower, native salvias and milkweed are excellent choices. Milkweed deserves special mention, as it is the only host plant for monarch butterfly caterpillars. Planting it early gives monarchs a place to lay eggs as they move through Florida during spring migration. Herbs like dill, fennel and parsley also play a dual role, feeding both people and swallowtail butterfly larvae.

Non-native plants can still be helpful when chosen carefully. Pentas, lantana and verbena are reliable nectar sources and perform well in our climate when planted in March. The key is diversity. A mix of flower shapes, colors and bloom times supports a wider range of pollina-

tors and keeps them visiting your garden throughout the season.

Equally important is how we garden, not just what we plant. Avoiding pesticides is critical, especially in spring when pollinators are most vulnerable. Many insect problems resolve themselves naturally once beneficial insects arrive.

Pollinator gardening does not require acres of land or perfectly designed beds. Containers on a patio, a corner of the yard or even a few flowering shrubs can provide real benefits. In Ponte Vedra's sandy soils, adding organic matter at planting time helps plants establish quickly and begin blooming sooner, which means pollinators benefit faster.

By planting with pollinators in mind this March, gardeners are doing more than creating beauty. They are participating in a larger ecosystem that supports birds, food crops and the health of our local environment. A garden that hums with life is not just enjoyable to watch—it is a sign that nature is working exactly as it should.

Plant it, and they will come!

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@floridanewline.com.



Photo courtesy Connie Doyle

A monarch butterfly feeds on nectar, highlighting the importance of providing early-season blooms for pollinators in the March garden.

Travel

Walking St. Augustine's Minorcan Past

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewsline.com

Long before Florida became American and waves of settlers arrived, a small Mediterranean community reshaped the cultural soul of St. Augustine. Their story is one of hardship, endurance and quiet influence. These were the Minorcans, along with Greeks and Italians, whose descendants still shape the city today.



Debi Lander

time, they became an essential part of the city's economic and cultural life.

When Florida returned to Spanish rule in 1783, many British residents left. The Minorcans stayed. Because they were Catholic and spoke a Mediterranean language, they bridged the gap between the departing British and

the returning Spanish, ensuring the city's survival through turbulent political shifts.

Traces of the Past

Today, the Minorcan legacy is everywhere. One of the most significant sites is the Father Pedro Camps statue in the west courtyard of the Cathedral Basilica.



Photo by Debi Lander
Ximenez-Fatio House.

Father Camps was the spiritual leader of the group and helped lead the survivors to St. Augustine. The statue symbolizes moral courage and faith.

A Failed Colony

In 1768, British physician Andrew Turnbull founded a plantation colony at New Smyrna, south of St. Augustine. To populate it, he recruited more than 1,400 laborers from the Mediterranean, primarily from the island of Minorca, along with settlers from Greece and Italy. Promised land and opportunity, they instead endured brutal conditions, disease, forced labor and harsh punishment.

After nine years of suffering, the surviving colonists—about 600 men, women and children—made a bold decision. In 1777, they abandoned New Smyrna and walked north to St. Augustine, then under British control. There, they sought protection from the governor, who granted them asylum and freedom.

That moment changed St. Augustine forever.

Building a New Life

The Minorcans settled primarily in the northern section of the walled city. They worked as fishermen, artisans, masons, carpenters and merchants, skills they brought from the Mediterranean. Over



Photo by Debi Lander
St. Photios Greek Orthodox National Shrine.

In a surprising discovery, that monument has a twin across the Atlantic. While visiting the island of Minorca, I found a replica of the Father Pedro Camps statue in the historic city of Ciutadella de Menorca. Cast in bronze on two continents, the statues link the Old World to the New and serve as bookends to the Minorcan journey.

Along St. George Street, the St. Photios Greek Orthodox National Shrine stands on the site where Greek members of the colony found refuge. Its Byzantine-style murals and icons mark one of the earliest expressions of Orthodox Christianity in what would become the United States.

Other Minorcan-related sites include the Llambias House, the Gonzalez-Alvarez House and the Ximenez-Fatio House. At Tolomato Cemetery, familiar Minorcan surnames are carved into coquina headstones.

Minorcan cuisine remains one of the most visible survivals of the community. Datil pepper dishes, especially Minorcan clam chowder, reflect a blend of Medi-

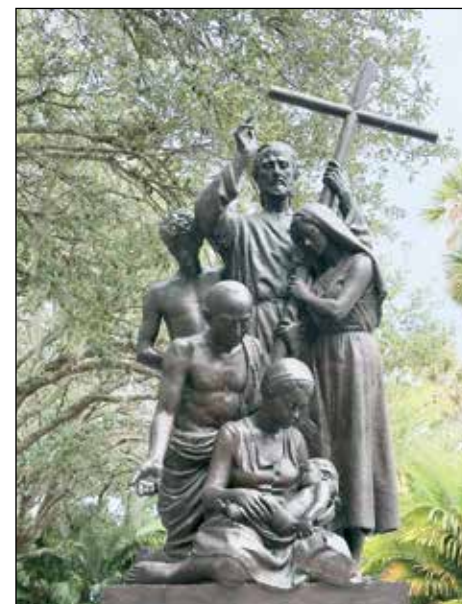


Photo by Debi Lander
Minorcan Statue outside the Basilica.

terranean tradition and local ingredients still honored today.

A Quiet Legacy

The Minorcans did not arrive as conquerors or colonists by choice. They came as laborers, suffered deeply and rebuilt their lives through resilience and faith. Their legacy is marked not by grand monuments, but by homes, churches, cemeteries and family names woven into the fabric of America's oldest city.

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 Bylandersea.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@floridanewsline.com.

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