

# Mandarin NewsLine

March 2026 Volume 21 Issue 3

A Florida NewsLine Publication

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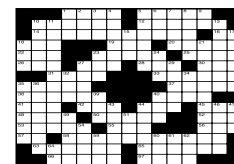
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## Heritage and Hues



Dick Kravitz

### Honoring a Mandarin champion

By Tracy McCormick-Dishman  
editor@floridanewsline.com

On Saturday morning, Feb. 21, District 6 Commissioner Michael Boylan and community members gathered to witness a significant change in the Mandarin landscape: the official renaming of Losco Regional Park to the Richard H. "Dick" Kravitz Regional Park.

While the sign at the entrance now bears a new name, the transition is rooted in a careful city process

**Park** cont. on pg. 2



Photo courtesy Mandarin Community Club  
Handcrafted ceramic works on display at a previous Mandarin Art Festival.

### Historic Mandarin Art Festival returns for annual celebration

Tracy McCormick-Dishman  
editor@floridanewsline.com

The Mandarin Community Club is preparing for a return to tradition this spring as it hosts the annual Mandarin Art Festival on Saturday, April 4, and Sunday, April 5.

Set beneath the moss-draped oaks of historic Mandarin Road, the juried fine art event is entering its 58th year.

"Since its founding in 1968, this juried fine art event has served as the longest-running festival of its kind in the region," said Susie Scott, a member of the Mandarin Community Club Board.

The 2026 festival will showcase the work of more than 100 local and nationally recognized artists across various media, including painting, sculpture, jewelry, photography and functional fine craft. As a juried show, artists will compete for awards and "Best in Show" honors.

Beyond the professional galleries, the



Photo by Mandarin NewsLine  
A local artist works on a vibrant landscape painting during a prior year's event.

event will feature the Children's Art Show, highlighting students from more than a dozen local elementary and middle schools.

The festival serves as the primary fundraiser for the Mandarin Community Club, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation, education and beautification of the historic Mandarin area.

"Proceeds go directly toward maintaining the club's three historic

properties and supporting local civic initiatives," Scott said.

The festival committee, which is meeting biweekly to coordinate logistics, recently announced the appointment of Noel Michael as the new show manager. Michael, a respected figure in the Northeast Florida arts scene, previously served as market manager for Coconut Barrel and was named the Riverside Arts



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**Heritage and Hues** cont. on pg. 2

**Park** cont. from pg. 1

designed to balance the honoring of local legends with the preservation of historical heritage.

**A legacy of parks**

The decision to rename the 210-acre park was not a sudden one. It followed the introduction of Ordinance 2025-16, a legislative move to recognize the decades of service provided by Dick Kravitz. A Philadelphia native who moved to Jacksonville in 1963, Kravitz served three terms on the Jacksonville City Council and later in the Florida House of Representatives.

During his tenure, Kravitz was known as a tireless advocate for green spaces. He was instrumental in the

acquisition or improvement of 17 different park sites, including Rogers Park, Palmetto Leaves Regional Park, and what is widely considered his "crowning jewel," the Walter Jones Historical and Nature Park.

"He was instrumental in the development of a lot of parks in the Mandarin area," Commissioner Boylan noted. "He's been a champion for parks since his time on the City Council."

**Balancing the past and present**

How does the city decide to rename a public facility? The process is governed by the Jacksonville Ordinance Code, which requires a formal report from the Historic Preservation Section. This review ensures that renam-

ing a park doesn't erase significant local history.

In the case of the park on Hood Road South, the historic review found that while the park land itself was purchased by the city in 1998, the "Losco" name carries its own weight. It honors Francis "Frank" Losco, an Italian immigrant who operated a successful vineyard and winery on the property in the 1880s.

To ensure the Losco family legacy remains intact, the city implemented a hybrid approach. While the regional park now carries Kravitz's name, the very popular central pavilion has been officially named the "Losco Pavilion." Additionally, a historic marker remains at the entrance of the trail, telling the story of the family's gate-

way to the local wine business.

**What's next**

With the renaming legislation now effective, residents can expect to see updated signage and markers throughout the spring. The move serves as a permanent memorial to a man who ensured that as Mandarin's population exploded, its access to nature and recreation kept pace.

As Boylan noted, the goal was to ensure the recognition was appropriate and respectful of all who shaped the land. For the Mandarin community, it means a park that now honors two different eras of local history — the pioneer families who worked the land and the public servants who fought to save it for future generations.

**Heritage and Hues** cont. from pg. 1

Market Maker of the Year in 2021.

"The committee is currently busy processing artist applications and orchestrating the behind-the-scenes logistics," Scott said. "We also have several volunteer opportunities available for those looking to get involved in this community tradition."

The event includes live musical entertainment, a food court and a Green Market featuring locally

produced consumables.

The festival will be open Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 12447 Mandarin Road. While admission is free, a \$2 donation per person is suggested to support the club's mission.

Free off-site parking and shuttle services will be available at nearby locations. For more information regarding artist lineups, volunteer opportunities or parking maps, visit [www.mandarinartfestival.org](http://www.mandarinartfestival.org).



Photo courtesy Mandarin Community Club  
Live art demonstrations captured during an earlier festival.



Photo courtesy Jax Parks  
Recently known as Losco Regional Park, Richard H. 'Dick' Kravitz Regional Park is located on Hood Road South, north of Losco Road near Julington Creek.

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# BFF

## Best Furry Friend of the month

### Meet Biscuit!

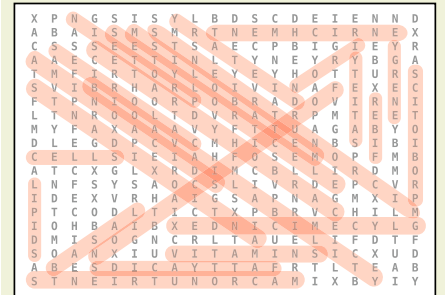
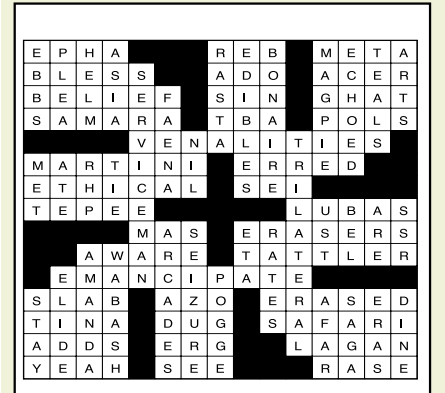


- Breed:*  
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- Favorite Activity:*  
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- Favorite Food:*  
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- Favorite Friends:*  
Grandpa W and Spike the ball.
- How did your BFF get their name:*  
He looks like a freshly baked biscuit.

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



## Answers to our Puzzles PG 9



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# March

## Community Calendar What's Happening in Mandarin

To submit items for the Community Calendar, email [editor@floridanewslines.com](mailto:editor@floridanewslines.com).

### March 2 History Chat: Memphis Wood

Local author and FSCJ professor Tim Gilmore presents a "History Chat" about celebrated local artist and long-time Mandarin resident Memphis Wood at 6:30 p.m. at South Mandarin Library. Register at [jaxlibrary.org/historychat](http://jaxlibrary.org/historychat).

### March 5 Hello Kitty Mini Games

Families are invited for an afternoon of themed mini games, Sanrio trivia and crafts at 3:30 p.m. at Mandarin Library. Kids can help Cinnamoroll with his café and create a Hello Kitty sticker to take home.

### March 6-7 Mandarin Garden Club Clothing and Jewelry \$1 Sale

Gently used clothing items and accessories for women, men and children are offered for \$1; boutique items and jewelry are priced slightly higher. Pop-up plants will be offered at bargain prices on the grounds of Mandarin Garden Club from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. both days.

### March 14 North Florida Genealogical Society meeting

The North Florida Genealogical Society will meet from 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. Saturday, March 14, at the society library, 6215 Sauterne Drive. World-renowned Irish genealogy expert John Grenham will discuss Ireland's records and his website, Irish Ancestors.

### March 14, 18 & 28 Read to a Therapy Dog

Children can practice reading one-on-one with trained therapy dogs at local libraries. Spots are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

• March 14: Read with Yona, a trained Newfoundland, from 2:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. at South Mandarin Library.

• March 18: Read with JC, a yellow Labrador retriever, from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. at South Mandarin Library.

• March 28: Yona returns for a reading session starting at 2:30 p.m. at Mandarin Library.

### March 16 All Star Quilters' Guild meeting

The All Star Quilters' Guild will meet Monday, March 16, at the First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. Socializing begins at 9:30 a.m. followed by the meeting at 10 a.m. The program will be a celebration of all things Irish and green, and "Sew and Tell" is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit [www.allstarquilters.org](http://www.allstarquilters.org) for more information.

### March 22 River Garden Anniversary Day

River Garden celebrates its 80th anniversary of serving older adults in Jacksonville from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. at the River Garden Campus, 11401 Old St. Augustine Road. The community is invited to enjoy complimentary barbecue and family activities.

### March 26 Mandarin Republican Club meeting

The Mandarin Republican Club will meet Thursday, March 26, at St. Mary's Seafood, 11290 Old St. Augustine Road. Social time begins at 6 p.m., and the meeting with a guest speaker starts at 6:30 p.m.

### March 27-28 African Violet Display and Sale

The Heart of Jacksonville African Violet Society presents its free annual display and sale, "Galaxy of Violets," at San Jose Church of Christ, 6233 San Jose Blvd. The event runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday, March 27, and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, March 28. The space-themed event features floral arrangements, expert growing advice and a wide variety of plants and supplies available for purchase. For more information, visit [jacksonvilleviolets.org](http://jacksonvilleviolets.org).

### April 4 Free Easter Egg Hunt

Mandarin Lutheran Church invites toddlers through third graders to its annual free Easter egg hunt from 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. on the church grounds, 11900 San Jose Blvd. The event includes the egg hunt and free photos with the Easter Bunny. Participants should

bring their own Easter baskets. For more information, call 904-268-4591.

### Ongoing Activities Mondays Youth Fandom Events

Mandarin Library hosts free events for youth ages 9 and older every Monday at 4 p.m. Activities include games and themes inspired by popular characters and books like Fortnite, Captain Underpants and Avatar the Last Airbender.

### Third Thursdays Friends of Mandarin South Library meeting and programs

The Friends Group meets at 1 p.m. the third Thursday of each month in the foyer meeting room. The group will continue to sponsor chair yoga through the end of the year, along with programs such as Young Artists, Critter Visits by the Zoo and board games for teens. These programs are funded by patron donations and sales of books, records, CDs and puzzles.

### Second Thursdays American Legion Post 372 Mandarin "Fallen Heroes"

The group meets the second Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. on the second floor of the Williams YMCA, 10415 San Jose Blvd. All veterans and spouses are welcome. For more information, visit [www.alpost372fl.org](http://www.alpost372fl.org).

### First and Third Thursdays Turn Up for Tech

Families can participate in STEM-based challenges involving robots, circuits, animation and coding from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. at South Mandarin Library. Suitable for all ages.

### Shuffleboard

Shuffleboard is played on Tuesdays at 1:30 p.m. at Tommy Hazouri Park. The courts are located at the park entrance next to the tennis courts. Beginners are welcome. Arrive a few minutes early for court assignments. Just show up, unless it rains.

### Sprout - Science through Gardening

Sprout program, Science through Gardening is offered for homeschoolers ages 9 to 12. They meet at the Mandarin Garden Club on second and fourth Mondays of the month from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. For more information or to register, contact [katprov5@gmail.com](mailto:katprov5@gmail.com) or visit [mandaringardenclub.org/sprouts](http://mandaringardenclub.org/sprouts).

**Mandarin Parkinson's Support Group**  
Men and women of all ages and stages of Parkinson's are welcome. Group and classes are free. Support group meets monthly on Sundays from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at Church of Eleven22, 4911 Losco Road. For more information, contact Katheryn Donaldson at [serving4\\_him@yahoo.com](mailto:serving4_him@yahoo.com) or 904-710-1449.

**Mandarin Parkinson's Exercise Classes**  
Exercise classes for those with Parkinson's meet Wednesdays from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. at Christ Church, 6045 Greenland Road, and Thursdays from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. at FBC Church, 210 N. Ridgecrest Lane. Classes are free. For more information, contact Katheryn Donaldson at [serving4\\_him@yahoo.com](mailto:serving4_him@yahoo.com) or 904-710-1449.

**Parkinson's Caregiver Group**  
Parkinson's Caregiver Group meets the fourth Saturday of the month from 10 a.m. to noon at 11480 Pine St. Group leader is MaryJane Fitzsimons. For more information, contact [fitzspjmj@comcast.net](mailto:fitzspjmj@comcast.net).

**Little Readers**  
Storytime for infants and toddlers (ages birth to five) with stories, music and movement. Storytimes run from 2 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. on Mondays and 10:15 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. on Thursdays at South Mandarin Library. Or join us from 10:15 a.m. or 11 a.m. on Fridays at Mandarin Library. Visit [jaxlibrary.org/events](http://jaxlibrary.org/events) for more information.

**Willows - A Local Social Group for Widows**  
A social group for widows of all ages to share conversation, fellowship and light refreshments. Meets on the second Tuesday of each month from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. Not a grief counseling group. RSVP to Ruth Saunders at 904-401-3291 or [FloridaSaunders974@gmail.com](mailto:FloridaSaunders974@gmail.com).

**Toast of Jax Toastmasters**  
Toast of Jax Toastmasters meets every Saturday, except on holiday weekends, at 8:30 a.m. at Baha'i Community Center, 5034 Greenland Road. Guests are welcome. The meetings can also be attended online at [toastofjax.toastmastersclubs.org](http://toastofjax.toastmastersclubs.org).

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## Q&A with District 6 Council Member Michael Boylan

Tracy McCormick-Dishman  
editor@floridanewsline.com

As District 6 moves into the spring season, several local initiatives and legislative changes are taking effect. Council Member Michael Boylan spoke with Mandarin NewsLine to explain recent council actions, the honoring of a local park champion and infrastructure projects affecting the Mandarin community.



Michael Boylan

### Connexion Plus fee increase?

A: Following significant feedback from residents who rely on this service daily, the JTA board has delayed the pilot program that included the proposed fee increase. We recognize that any meaningful hike would be a significant hardship for many in

our community. We will continue to advocate for a solution that maintains this vital service without placing an undue financial burden on its users.

### Q: What are the new animal welfare standards?

A: Ordinance 2025-0811 clarifies standards for animal cruelty, neglect and tethering. It gives Animal Care and Protective Services (ACPS) more latitude to determine if a dog housed outdoors is provided with sufficient shelter. The bill also classifies animal fighting as cruelty and reduces the "stray hold" period from six days to five to align with state statutes, helping shelters manage capacity more effectively.

### Q: Why is Losco Regional Park being renamed?

A: On Feb. 21, we officially introduced the renaming of the park as the Richard H. "Dick" Kravitz Regional Park. Dick was instrumental in developing many Mandarin-area parks and was a true champion for our green spaces during his time on the City Council. While we are honoring his legacy, the Losco family history remains a part of the park. The city originally purchased the land from the family, and we will continue to recognize them by naming the popular pavilion the Lasko Pavilion. There is also a historic marker at the trail entrance that tells the story of the family's history in the wine business and their ties to the land.

### Q: What is the status of the JTA

### Q: Which Mandarin-area road projects are currently underway?

A: There are two main JEA projects to note. A fire hydrant replacement on Mandarin Road, which required some overnight work, is nearing completion. Additionally, an emergency water main repair near Julington Creek is ongoing and will involve intermittent lane closures through April 2026. On the legislative side, we also approved \$9.4 million for traffic signal improvements at Braddock Road and Dunn Avenue, and for the widening of Pecan Park Road.

### Q: How should residents report neighborhood issues?

A: My office handles a massive volume of requests. To get your issue resolved quickly, please first report it through official channels: call 630-CITY, use the MYJAX app, or visit myjax.custhelp.com. Once you receive a reference or CARE number, email it to me at mboylan@coj.net. This allows my staff to track the issue at a high level and provides us with the tools necessary to step in if there is a delay in the resolution.

Contact Council Member Boylan at mboylan@coj.net or 904-255-5206.

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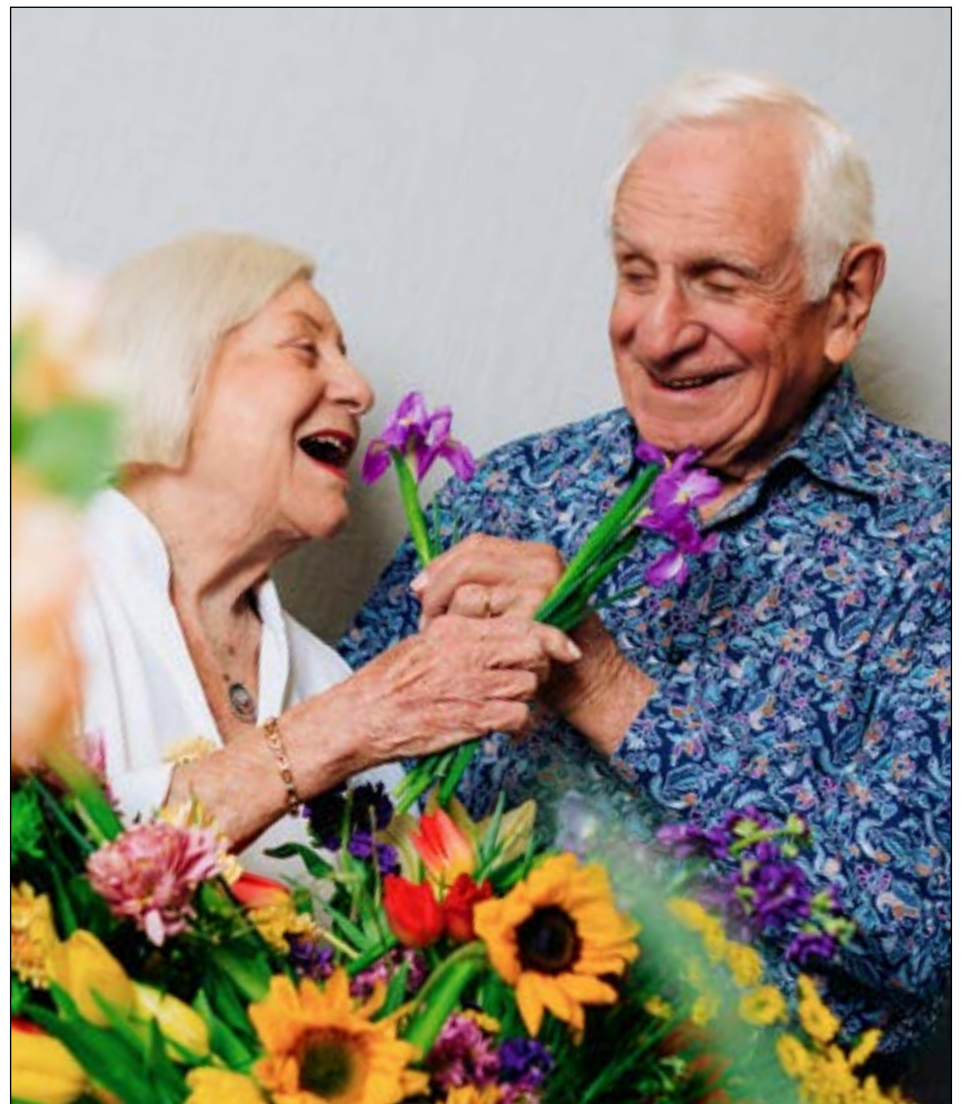


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# Loretto Elementary teacher joins global tech panel in London

By Margaret Rogero-Hastings

Loretto Elementary teacher Kimberly Niebauer recently shared the global spotlight in London as a panelist for the 2026 BETT Conference, one of the world's most influential educational technology events. Niebauer, a gifted education teacher and Microsoft Elevate Fellow, spoke at the Jan. 22 event alongside international leaders to discuss the future of classroom innovation.

BETT brings together educators, innovators and major technology companies from more than 130 countries to explore emerging tools and practices shaping the future of teaching and learning. Niebauer was selected to share her expertise alongside international education leaders, contributing to a global conversation on instructional innovation and technology integration.

Niebauer began her work with Microsoft in 2018 when she pursued her first educator credentials to strengthen her instructional practice. Since then, she



Kimberly Niebauer (center) collaborates with colleagues during a session at the international technology event.

has become a leader in integrating purposeful technology into the classroom to support student creativity, accessibility and engagement. Her contin-

ued professional growth has included participation in the Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert community since 2022 and ongoing training in artificial intelligence and digital learning tools.

During her panel presentation, Niebauer discussed what initially drew her to the Microsoft credentials and how she uses the tools daily to support student learning. She emphasized the importance of technology use and shared how professional learning communities have helped shape her instructional approach.



Kimberly Niebauer

“Things I do matter,” she said about classroom instruction, further emphasizing the impact that intentional technology integration can have on student learning.

Niebauer also highlighted Duval County Public Schools’ expanding use of Microsoft programs, including Minecraft Education. She noted that the district now features two Minecraft Education labs and a new mobile lab designed to provide students with hands-on opportunities for exploration, coding, collaboration and problem-solving. Teachers can also participate in professional development within the labs to learn how to effectively integrate Minecraft Education into instruction. Niebauer shared examples of how she uses the platform in her own classroom to increase engagement and support deeper learning across subject areas.

In addition to her work with students at Loretto Elementary, Niebauer provides professional learning for educa-

tors across the country, helping teachers at all grade levels understand how Microsoft tools can personalize learning and meet the diverse needs of students.

Niebauer attended the conference with Loretto Elementary Principal Matt Walker and colleague Margaret Rogero-Hastings, reflecting the school’s shared commitment to professional growth and instructional innovation. Throughout the multiday conference, the team attended face-to-face sessions and met with technology representatives, gathering a wide range of insights to bring back to their school community.

As a technology magnet school, Loretto Elementary values opportunities to learn from global education events and apply new strategies that enhance teaching and learning.

Margaret Rogero-Hastings is a third grade ELA instructor at Loretto Elementary School.



Kimberly Niebauer speaks during the Educator Panel at the 2026 BETT Conference in London.

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## Crown Point Elementary celebrates Literacy Week with patriotic theme

NewsLine staff  
mail@floridanewsline.com

During the week of Jan. 26, Crown Point Elementary students and staff marked Literacy Week with the patriotic theme, "Read White and Blue: Celebrating 250 Chapters of America."

The week featured several engaging activities designed to foster a love of reading. The celebration kicked off with the 100th day of school, where students dressed up as 100-year-olds to mark the milestone.

On Tuesday, students participated in "Reading Buddies Day," discovering that sharing stories with a friend makes reading more enjoyable. The spirit continued Wednesday with "Read White

and Blue Spirit Day," as students wore patriotic attire to show school pride.

The highlight of the week took place Thursday with the annual Storybook Character Parade. Students dressed as their favorite literary characters and paraded through the halls. That evening, the school hosted a family literacy night where parents joined their children for crafts and storytelling.

"Students created awesome crafts, read exciting stories and shared special moments of learning with their families," a school representative said.

The event served as a memorable experience for the entire Crown Point community, highlighting the importance of literacy in the classroom and at home.



Photo courtesy Crown Point Elementary  
Crown Point Elementary students and staff marked Literacy Week with the patriotic theme

## 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 limited. By



Photo courtesy Connie Doyle

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



Connie Doyle

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 coreopsis, 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 pollinators 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@floridanewsline.com.



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# Mandarin Women's Club to host annual lunch and bingo event

By Gail Packard

The Mandarin Women's Club is inviting the community to its highly anticipated annual bingo game and buffet lunch on Thursday, March 26.

The event will be held at the Ramada Inn, 3130 Hartley Road. Bingo cards will be available at 10 for \$5, with 10 games scheduled throughout the afternoon. Attendees are encouraged to bring their own daubers or pens for a chance to win various cash prizes.

"Bingo is a highly anticipated event every year," a recent club release noted. "Come join us for an opportunity to

spend time with old friends and make some new ones."

Doors open at 10:30 a.m. Reservations are required for the luncheon, which costs \$25 per person. Payments must be received by Monday, March 16.

For reservations and payment instructions, contact Barbara Metallo at 904-612-6494 or email [barbara.metallo@outlook.com](mailto:barbara.metallo@outlook.com). More information on upcoming events and membership forms can be found at [www.mandarinwomensclub.com](http://www.mandarinwomensclub.com).

*Gail Packard is the Mandarin Women's Club Publicity Chair*



Photo courtesy Mandarin Women's Club  
Members of the Mandarin Women's Club gather for a social outing.



## Q&A with Duval County School Board Member Melody Bolduc, District 7

By Tracy McCormick-Dishman  
editor@floridanewsline.com

As the second half of the school year progresses, Mandarin-area families and teachers are navigating significant changes to high school schedules and new student success initiatives. School Board Member Melody Bolduc spoke with Mandarin NewsLine to explain the impact of recent board decisions and celebrate the growing diversity and mentorship within Mandarin's classrooms.



Melody Bolduc

class spread over two days. While it solved a budget gap, it has placed a heavy burden on our teachers.

**Q: How is this new schedule affecting teachers and students?**

Bolduc: The biggest issue is the loss of daily planning time. Under the old block schedule, teachers had an hour and a half every day

to grade, plan and meet with parents. Now, they only have that planning block every other day. We are seeing real exhaustion. It's even impacting extra help for students; many of our best teachers, who used to stay after school for free to tutor, simply can't do it anymore because they are so drained. There is also a disparity issue: Stanton, Wolfson, Paxon and Douglas Anderson were permitted to keep the eight-period schedule, which gives their students an advantage that our students at Atlantic Coast and Mandarin High don't currently have.

**Q: How diverse are our local schools in Mandarin?**

Bolduc: Mandarin is incredibly vibrant. For example, at Mandarin Oaks Elementary, we have over 60 different

languages spoken. About 11% of that school's population are English Language Learners (ELL). We have a massive celebration coming up in May to honor these students, including the Seal of Biliteracy ceremony at UNF for students who are literate in two or more languages. It's a wonderful reminder of the global community we have right here in our neighborhood.

**Q: Can you explain the "Latinos in Action" program at Atlantic Coast?**

Bolduc: This is a fantastic program that we have at Atlantic Coast High and Twin Lakes Middle. It's a mentoring model where high school students act as reading coaches for middle schoolers. It was brought here from South Florida to help students who might be struggling with literacy. By pairing these older students with younger ones, it creates a peer-to-peer bond that improves reading scores and builds leadership skills. It's a great example of how our students are stepping up to support one another's academic growth.

**Q: What is the best way for parents to share their concerns with the board?**

Bolduc: We need to hear from you. The board and the superintendent listen when there is a steady stream of

feedback. If you are concerned about the scheduling disparities or the impact on your child's teachers, I encourage you to email the entire School Board and the Superintendent directly. Our next major workshop is March 17, and having those emails in our inbox before we meet is the most effective way to ensure your voice is part of the discussion.

For more information or to share feedback, contact Melody Bolduc at [bolducm@duvalschools.org](mailto:bolducm@duvalschools.org).

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# Travel

## Walking St. Augustine's Minorcan Past

By Debi Lander  
mail@floridanewline.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.



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.

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

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

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,



Photo by Debi Lander  
Minorcan Statue outside the Basilica.

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 Mediterranean 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](http://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@floridanewline.com](mailto:mail@floridanewline.com).*

# Record-breaking gift

NewsLine staff  
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The Bolles School has announced an unprecedented \$8 million planned gift from the realized estate of Kernan and George H. Hodges Jr. — the largest single contribution in the school's history since its founding in 1933.

The landmark gift provides enduring resources to care for the premier athletic venue on the Bolles Upper School San Jose Campus, according to a recent release. Bolles Chief Advancement Officer Carol Nimitz said the contribution affirms the essential role of the student-athlete experience and reflects extraordinary confidence in the school's mission.

The funds are designated for the long-term upkeep and maintenance of George H. Hodges Field and the facilities that support it in perpetuity. The field is named in honor of the donor's father, former Bolles Board of Trustees member George H. Hodges, whose leadership and generosity helped

shape the venue's legacy.

"Hodges Field is where so many Bolles stories begin — from Friday nights under the lights to championship moments and personal firsts," Nimitz said in the release. "George and Kernan's extraordinary estate gift safeguards this tradition and strengthens the future of every program and student-athlete who calls this field home. We are deeply grateful for their enduring commitment to Bolles."

The field's history reflects decades of community stewardship and family philanthropy. Originally named Dads' Field in 1942 to recognize the dedication of fathers of Bolles cadets, the venue underwent a major rejuvenation in 1951 led by George H. Hodges, a prominent contractor and engineer. At the time, the Dads' Club requested the field be renamed in his honor due to his financial assistance and interest in the project.

On Oct. 14, 1955, the field was



Photo courtesy The Bolles School  
An aerial view of George H. Hodges Field on the Bolles Upper School San Jose Campus.

officially dedicated to George H. Hodges during a game against Fletcher High School. It was later rededicated in 1976 by his widow, Nellie A. Hodges, and George H. Hodges Jr. as part of additional renovations. Subsequent gifts

from Kernan and George H. Hodges Jr., who were prominent real estate investors and philanthropists in Jacksonville, led to further rededications in 1984 and 2006.

# Mandarin wrestlers find success at Gateway Conference



Photo courtesy Emily Whitehead  
MHS Gateway Winners 2026

NewsLine staff  
mail@floridanewsline.com

The Mandarin High School boys wrestling team

brought home several medals from the 2026 Gateway Conference. Pictured from left are Jason Repper, third place, 165 pounds; Mark Eychner, third

place, 120 pounds; Coach AJ Stensrud; Brendon Warren, first place, 157 pounds; and Julius Canapa, third place, 190 pounds.



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