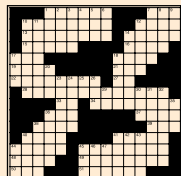




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Fernandina Beach Police Chief Jeffrey Tambasco

FBPD Chief Jeffrey Tambasco on training, outreach and goals

By Kate Kimmel

Fernandina Beach Police Chief Jeffrey Tambasco presented the department's 2025 annual report to the city commission last month, emphasizing the importance of training programs, community outreach efforts, and officer wellness for running a successful police force.

Tambasco announced that the department responded to 32,553 calls in 2025, an increase of more than 2,000 from the previous year. At the same time, Tambasco said overall crime has decreased, despite what may appear in the data at first glance.

Behind those numbers is a relatively small department handling a wide range of calls, from traffic stops to more serious incidents.

FBPD operates with 38 full-time sworn officers, along with part-time officers and civilian staff, and a \$7.05 million budget. Of that, 76.8% is allocated to salaries, 17.3% to operating costs and 5.8% to technology.

Most calls involve traffic-related offenses, including DUIs, as well as vehicle thefts.

Jeffrey Tambasco cont. on pg. 3

Million Dollar Moment

McArthur Family YMCA capital campaign hits \$1 million milestone

By Tracy McCormick-Dishman

The McArthur Family YMCA's capital campaign has officially reached \$1 million, and for the community that has rallied behind this effort, it is a milestone worth celebrating.

«Reaching that first million is a big step,» said Melissa Yuchasz, district executive director for the McArthur Family YMCA and YMCA at Wildlight. «We still have a ways to go, but this is absolutely something to celebrate.»

The campaign, which carries a \$3 million goal, will fund a significant expansion and renovation of the 29,000-square-foot facility at 1915 Citrona Drive in Fernandina Beach. Plans include a new state-of-the-art group exercise studio, a covered walkway connecting the main facility to the new studio, a new multi-generational space, a family locker room and an expansion of the existing parking lot.

Getting to this point has not been a straight road.

A Y born from vision, and a broom closet

The McArthur Family YMCA traces its roots to 1978, when banker Phil Floyd moved to Fernandina Beach from North Carolina and noticed the community had no YMCA. Through a partnership with First Coast YMCA in Jacksonville, the organization took shape. The inaugural executive director, Shelly Wilmes, began in March 1987 with an office that was, as board member Ray Cline recalls, essentially a supply closet next to the pool at the city's recreation center.

From those humble beginnings, the Y grew. A pivotal moment came when Jan Brogdon was named executive director and she and Floyd reached out to Maybelle McArthur, whose generous donation covered the cost of the land at Amelia Park. A capital campaign funded construction, and the facility was dedicated in 1998.

Today, the McArthur Family YMCA serves more than 5,900 members and 2,000 program participants annually across programs that include youth sports, swim lessons, afterschool care,



Photo courtesy McArthur Family YMCA

The McArthur Family YMCA in Fernandina Beach is the focus of a capital campaign to fund a significant expansion and renovation of the 29,000-square-foot facility.

summer day camp, the LIVESTRONG at the YMCA cancer survivorship program and Enhance Fitness for fall prevention. The Y has never turned away a family because of finances, with more than half of McArthur Y's members receiving financial assistance.

Then came Betty Berkman

For years, plans to expand the aging facility stalled, and COVID-19 dealt a further blow to momentum that was already stop-and-go.

The turnaround came from a deeply personal place. In August 2023, the Y accepted an extraordinary financial gift from Betty Berkman in honor of her late husband, David, who died Sept. 3, 2021, after a 10-year battle with lung cancer. For more than 60 years, David Berkman had built a successful real estate business in the Southeast and gave back generously to the communities he called home.

«Anything that had to do with kids and families, David was always right there,» Betty Berkman said.

Her gift reignited the capital campaign. In January 2024, the gymnasium was dedicated in David's name. The David Berkman Gymnasium now bears his legacy on its walls, a fitting tribute to a man who believed in the power of community.

A team effort crosses the million-dollar mark

Reaching \$1 million has been, as Yuchasz describes it, a genuine team effort. A dedicated steering committee of Kassy Sjuggerud, David Black, Barb GINGER, Bob and Kay Tetu, Ray Cline and Jen Schoening has kept the campaign alive and moving forward. Donors at every level

Million Dollar cont. on pg. 3

Shrimp Festival to debut kids stage at waterfront park

By Kate Kimmel

Local youth performers will have a major moment in the spotlight at this year's Isle of Eight Flags Shrimp Festival, as a new stage dedicated entirely to kid performers debuts in the festival's expanded children's area.

Set against the backdrop of the newly constructed waterfront park, the youth stage will be part of a «new and improved» kids fun zone, positioned at the northern edge of the park with food vendors, rides and festival activity stretching to the south. The three-day festival, which draws more than 150,000 visitors to Fernandina Beach each year, runs May 1-3, with youth performances scheduled throughout the weekend.

The stage will feature primarily open mic-style sets, giving young performers of all experience levels the chance to step up and share their talents, whether solo or as part of a group. Audiences can expect a wide range of acts, from first-time performers to more seasoned young musicians who have already begun writing and playing together.

Behind the effort is local musician Andria Shinn,



Salt Marsh Kids founder Andria Shinn plays guitar as a young performer takes the microphone at Shrimp Festival 2025.

Shrimp Festival cont. on pg. 5



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- **Summer Camp (Camp America)** — 10-week program covering academic learning, sports, life skills, computer training and recreational activities
- **Interfaith Dinner Network** — coalition of local churches and businesses serving meals four nights a week at the Salvation Army Hope House
- **Youth Leadership Program** — for ages 11-18, focused on community service, decision-making and project management



CONTACT INFORMATION

907 S. 11th St., Fernandina Beach, FL 32034
904-310-6377 | John@americayouth.org | AmericaYouth.org

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

Sports Editor

Beth Jones
bjones@nassaunewsline.net

Assistant Editor

Kate Kimmel
kkimmel@nassaunewsline.net

Bookkeeper

Emily Whitehead
accounting@floridanewsline.com

Haley Cook

Advertising Sales
haley.cook@newslinedigital.com

Community Calendar

editor@FloridaNewsLine.com

Call Our Office

(904) 886-4919

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Photo courtesy McArthur Family YMCA

The David Berkman Gymnasium was dedicated in January 2024 in honor of David Berkman, whose widow, Betty, made a major gift to reignite the capital campaign.

Million Dollar cont. from pg. 1

have played a role, and naming gifts have been received from Kassy and Steve Sjuggerud and Mary Jane Rafferty.

«This was a collaborative effort,» said Yuchasz. «Celebrating the volunteers is just as important as celebrating the milestone.»

“Olivia Smith, senior development director for First Coast YMCA, has been a key point of contact and support throughout the campaign,” continued Yuchasz.

The vision ahead and how you can help

Construction cannot begin until the campaign reaches \$2.4 million in pledges with \$1.5 million cash in hand. The Y has also launched the LegacyFive Society, inviting community members to give \$5,000 per year for five years for special recognition on the Capital Campaign Donor Recognition Wall.



Photo courtesy McArthur Family YMCA

A rendering depicts the planned multi-generational space to be added as part of the YMCA's expansion project.

Pioneer and legacy donors, those giving \$25,000 or more, are especially needed to push the effort to its next milestone.

To learn more or to contribute, contact Melissa Yuchasz, district executive director, at MYuchasz@fcmca.org or 904.261.1080.



Photo courtesy McArthur Family YMCA

A rendering shows the planned group exercise studio, one of several improvements included in the YMCA's expansion project.

Jeffrey Tambasco cont. from pg. 1

Violent crimes are less common and typically involve domestic violence or alcohol-related altercations, Tambasco said.

Tambasco, now in his 31st year in law enforcement, came to Fernandina Beach five years ago after working in the Orlando area. He was initially hired as deputy chief and later promoted following the retirement of former Chief James Hurley.

He said the apparent contradiction between rising calls and declining crime is largely due to changes in reporting. In 2025, the department fully transitioned to the National Incident-Based Reporting System, which records each offense within a single incident.

Under the previous system, only the most serious offense was counted, meaning incidents that once generated a single report may now be recorded as multiple crimes.

Much of Tambasco's focus as chief has centered on training, particularly de-escalation techniques. Of 346 arrests involving resistance last year, only two resulted in the use of force, which he attributed to that training.

The department has also incorporated new

technology into its approach. A recently acquired virtual reality system allows officers to train in simulated scenarios and review performance data that scores reflexes and decision-making.

“With the VR system, we have thousands of training simulations available, and we can pull data afterwards that shows us things like response times or how many times a trigger was pulled,” Tambasco said.

Officers completed 4,969 hours of training in 2025, and Tambasco said that he would like to increase that by 1,000 hours in the coming year. He said he would also like to see more leadership training to help prepare officers for supervisory roles.

“I want to keep promotions in-house, I hope to be the last person at this department who came into a leadership role from the outside,” Tambasco said.

This focus on training and leadership development is paired with efforts to better support officers.

The department's newly-formed Critical Incident Support Team brings together police officers and firefighters trained to help colleagues process traumatic calls. The program was shaped by employee input and allows first responders

to speak with peers outside their immediate workplace, Tambasco said.

In addition to officer and employee wellness, Tambasco spoke on the importance of maintaining a healthy relationship with the Fernandina community. FBPD officers engage with residents through programs like “Coffee with Cops” at Holy Grounds, reading to students at Southside Elementary, and mentorship initiatives with Fernandina Beach High School students.

Officer Tina Smith serves in a dedicated community engagement role with the help of Hanna the dog, and the department's “Shop with Cops” program provides holiday shopping opportunities for more than 150 local children each year.

“The better we know the community, the better we can serve them, and the easier our job is,” Tambasco said.

Looking ahead, Tambasco said the department's upcoming initiatives include the reduction of response times to about 2½ minutes by strategically positioning officers across the city. He also said traffic enforcement will increase in an attempt to address dangerous and impaired driving.

kkimmel@nassaunewsline.net

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April

Community Calendar What's Happening in Nassau County

To submit items for the Community Calendar, email tdishman@nassauonline.net

April 9 - 25 Bye Bye Birdie

Amelia Community Theatre presents the Tony Award-winning musical "Bye Bye Birdie" at 207 Cedar St. Evening performances at 7:30 p.m. on April 9-11, 16-18 and 23-25. Matinees at 2 p.m. on April 12 and 19. Tickets are \$30 for adults and \$15 for students. Available at AmeliaCommunityTheatre.org or 904-261-6749.

April 10 Federated Republican Women of Nassau County

The Federated Republican Women of Nassau County (FRWNC) holds its regular monthly meeting on the second Friday of the month. Friday, April 10, at 11:30 a.m. at the Fernandina Beach Golf Club. All interested community members are welcome.

April 10 - 11 Fernandina Beach Songwriters Festival

A weekend of live performances, artist meet and greets and a special boat cruise in Fernandina Beach. Visit fernandinaevents.com for details.

April 11 Household Hazardous Waste Collection

Keep Nassau Beautiful and Nassau County Solid Waste Management host a free household hazardous waste collection Saturday, April 11, from 8 a.m. to noon at the Nassau County Road Department in Yulee. The City of Fernandina Beach holds a separate free collection for city residents at the same time. Proof of residency required. Non-perishable food donations accepted for the Barnabas Food Pantry. For more information, visit keepnassaubeautiful.org/news-and-events or call 904-261-0165.

April 11 Wings & Wheels & WHY?

Friends of Fernandina Aviation (FoFA) hosts its third annual airplane and car show at the Fernandina Beach Municipal Airport. Saturday, April 11, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Free to the public.

April 11 Country Fried Steak Dinner

The American Legion Auxiliary hosts a country fried steak dinner. Saturday, April 11, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. at 626 S. 3rd St., Fernandina Beach. \$15 donation includes country fried steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans and lemon pound cake. Live music by After Hours Trio from 5-8 p.m. Open to the public; to-go meals available.

April 11 "Celebrating Sinatra, The Man and His Music"

The Dynamic Les DeMerle Band with Bonnie Eisele performs iconic Sinatra songs at Story & Song Center for Arts & Culture. Saturday, April 11, at 5 p.m. Tickets available in person, by calling 904-601-2118, or at storyandsongarts.org.

April 13 Federated Republican Women of Nassau County - West Nassau Meeting

A special evening meeting for west Nassau County members. Monday, April 13, at 6 p.m. at The Pig.

April 16 Nassau Community Band

The Nassau Community Band performs a free outdoor concert Thursday, April 16, at 6 p.m. at 123 Tinker St., Yulee. Bring a lawn chair. Selections include marches, classic rock and show tunes.

April 16 - 19 Fish to Fork

A premier dock-to-dish culinary event featuring local seafood and world-class

chefs at the Omni Amelia Island Resort. Wednesday, April 16 through Saturday, April 19. Visit fernandinaevents.com for details.

April 17 Nothing Bundt Cakes Ribbon Cutting

Official grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony for Nothing Bundt Cakes in Yulee. Friday, April 17. Visit fernandinaevents.com for time and location details.

April 18 YMCA Healthy Kids Day

The McArthur Family YMCA and YMCA at Wildlight celebrate Healthy Kids Day, a free public event. Saturday, April 18, from 10 a.m. to noon at participating YMCAs. For more information, visit FCYMCA.org.

April 18 Sea Turtle Festival

The third annual Sea Turtle Festival hosted by Beach Junkie takes place Saturday, April 18, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Main Beach Park in Fernandina Beach. Features live music, interactive exhibits, food trucks and educational activities including a scavenger hunt.

April 18 St. Marys River Cleanup

Annual volunteer event to clean the river and protect the local ecosystem. Saturday, April 18. Visit fernandinaevents.com for details.

April 21 Amelia Island Genealogical Society Monthly Meeting

The Amelia Island Genealogical Society hosts its monthly meeting Tuesday, April 21, at 7 p.m. at the Fernandina Beach Branch Library. Topic: "John Martin Waas: Early Immigration," with guest speaker Ernie Davis. Free and open to all.

April 25 And More Vendor Market

A local market featuring crafts, food and community vendors. Saturday, April 25, at the MLK Jr. Recreation Center.

April 30 - May 3 Isle of Eight Flags Shrimp Festival

One of Florida's most beloved coastal traditions returns for its 61st anniversary. The Shrimp Festival Parade kicks off the festivities Thursday, April 30, with full festival activities continuing through the weekend in Historic Downtown Fernandina Beach. For a full schedule, visit shrimpfestival.com.

May 16 Opening of the Beaches

Nassau County's annual Opening of the Beaches celebration takes place Saturday, May 16, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at Main Beach Park in Fernandina. The free, family-friendly event features live music, food and beverage vendors and the Wild Amelia Nature Festival. For more information, visit nassauffl.co/2026BeachesEvent.

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 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.

Find More: For additional events throughout the week, visit fernandinaevents.com.

News Briefs

City land purchase approved

City commissioners voted last month to purchase a \$2.1 million parcel across from City Hall as a potential site for a future municipal complex. Commissioner Tim Poynter said acquiring the property allows the city to maintain control over a key location. Most of the purchase was funded through impact fees. The vacant warehouse on the site is expected to be demolished, with the property to be used for parking until plans for a new City Hall are finalized.

County allows limited public alcohol sales

County commissioners have amended an ordinance prohibiting public alcohol consumption to allow sales at the Westside Regional Park amphitheater and other county-owned public spaces. Alcohol sales and consumption will be permitted only during county-approved events once the park opens.

City assumes marina operations

City commissioners brought marina operations in-house April 1 following the departure of contracted operator Alliance Marine. The transition comes as the marina prepares for a major redevelopment project later this spring, including demolition and redesign of Brett's Waterway Cafe and the marina operations building.

Waterfront park opening set

The city's long-awaited waterfront park is scheduled to open April 11 with a grand opening ceremony.

Detours shortened for CR 121 project

County commissioners approved a \$2.38 million change order last month to reduce detours associated with the County

Road 121 construction project from about 20 miles to less than 15 miles. Residents in the Bryceville area have raised concerns about emergency response times. Fire Chief Brady Rigdon said officials expect to be prepared when the road closure begins in May.

Opening of the Beaches set for May 16

Nassau County invites residents and visitors to the annual Opening of the Beaches on Saturday, May 16, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at Main Beach Park in Fernandina. The free, family-friendly event features live music, food and beverage vendors, and the Wild Amelia Nature Festival. The main stage lineup includes Brian Earnst; Laid Back; Andria Shinn and Loyal Souls; The Boogie Freaks; and headlining band The Honey Badgers. For more information, visit nassauffl.co/2026BeachesEvent.

Shrimp Festival cont. from pg. 1

founder of Salt Marsh Kids, an organization dedicated to creating performance opportunities for young artists.

A singer-songwriter with deep roots in the local music scene, Shinn has been performing for years, from open mic nights to fronting her band, The Loyal Souls, at venues across the island. Her music blends country influences with rock, soul, and blues, driven by storytelling and delivered through the twang in her voice. She released her debut solo album in 2019 and her latest album, "Stories," on March 28.

But it was not just her own music that brought her to this moment, it was what she noticed in the crowd.

After moving to Amelia Island, Shinn was struck by the area's vibrant live music scene. Just as noticeable, she said, was how many kids were eager to be part of it – and how few spaces existed for them to comfortably take the stage.

At adult-centered open mic nights, many young performers felt too intimidated to participate. That realization led Shinn to create Salt Marsh Kids, an organization built around a simple idea: there should always be room for one more.

In just a few years, the program has grown from its first small gatherings into a steady lineup of workshops, open mics, and youth showcases. Early events, including a kids open mic and music park held in 2024, drew strong support from local families and sponsors, with children picking up guitars, drums, and violins to perform in supportive, low-pressure settings.

Today, Salt Marsh Kids hosts songwriting and production workshops where participants

collaborate on lyrics, experiment with melodies and build confidence as performers. At a recent workshop led by Shinn and fellow musician Eric Erdman, kids developed original songs from scratch, starting with shared ideas and working together to shape them into full performances.

"At our events, you'll see everything from a kid playing on a toy guitar to our older kids who have formed bands together," Shinn said. "At our latest

Shinn Digg, kids who attended a songwriting workshop performed the song that they wrote."

That sense of growth, from tentative first notes to full performances, is exactly what Shinn hopes to bring to the Shrimp Festival stage.

Opening night will showcase that progression in full. Salt Marsh Kids participant Alexis Hall will sing the national anthem to kick off the festival before performing with her 3 fellow

bandmates and Salt Marsh Kids in their newly-formed band "Rip Current." Their performance will be followed by one of the most anticipated moments of the weekend, which will blend music with another corner of youth culture.

A locally produced skate video, created by Fernandina Beach photographer and videographer Brian Bowen in collaboration with his daughter, will premiere alongside a live musical score performed by young musicians. As tricks land on screen, the performers will respond in real time, adding guitar riffs, cymbal crashes and other sounds to match the action.

Shinn said the idea came from wanting to include skaters in the showcase, resulting in a collaboration that highlights both athletic and musical talent.

Throughout the rest of the weekend, the stage will remain open to young performers, offering a steady rotation of acts and a chance for kids to step into the spotlight. Salt Marsh Kids appeared briefly at last year's festival, but this year's dedicated stage marks a significant expansion and a milestone for the organization.

For Shinn, the goal is not perfection, but participation.

When she first began performing, she said, she was nervous enough that friends had to push her onto the stage. What kept her going was the feeling that she belonged there.

Now, she is working to create that same experience for the next generation.

At Shrimpfest, she hopes audiences won't just see young performers – but the beginning of something bigger. A first performance. A new band. A kid realizing, maybe for the first time, that there is room for them, too.



Photo by Mariah Lovin

Salt Marsh Kids perform as their newly formed band Rip Current at Tigre Island Room during a Shinn Digg event.



Photo courtesy Eight Flags Shrimp Festival Invasion of the Pirates at Shrimp Festival 2025.

2026 Isle of Eight Flags Shrimp Festival calendar of events

Thursday, April 30

The festival launches with a parade at 6p.m. The theme honors the semi quincentennial of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, celebrating patriotism, community pride and, of course, shrimp. The annual parade will feature bands, dancers and floats.

Friday, May 1

5:30 p.m. — Opening ceremonies
6:00 p.m. — Miss Shrimp Festival Pageant

6:30 p.m. — Skate Video Premiere / Salt Marsh Kids performance
7:15 p.m. — Parade awards ceremony
7:30 p.m. — Miss Shrimp Festival crowning
9:15 p.m. — Invasion of the Pirates
9:30 p.m. — Fireworks at the harbor

Saturday, May 2

8 a.m. — McArthur Family YMCA Shrimp Run
10 a.m. to noon — Pirate-in-training contests (Kids Stage)

Noon — Pirate invasion scholarship awards
12:30 p.m. — Beard contest
2:30 p.m. — Adult pirate contest
4:30 p.m. — Shrimp eating contest
5:30 p.m. — Honey Badgers

Sunday, May 3

12:15 p.m. — Bean School of Dance
1:15 p.m. — Decorated shrimp boat parade and contest
1:30 p.m. — Blessing of the Fleet

3 p.m. — Ice cream eating contest; boat awards
3:30 p.m. — Swingin' Medallions
5 p.m. — Closing ceremony

All Weekend

Arts and crafts booths line downtown streets. Nassau Place expands to two streets, featuring local small businesses and nonprofits. Antique and vintage vendors from across the Southeast will also span two streets this year.

Discovering your story: Finding your roots begins at home

One of my favorite programs is "Finding Your Roots" with Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. aired on PBS. During each episode, Gates presents two influential people, often celebrities, with an album of family history after using all of the resources and tools available to help connect them with their past. A renowned Harvard scholar, Gates always delivers fascinating facts, unanticipated connections, and often some surprising family secrets.

While some of us may be fortunate to have had close relationships with grandparents, most of us may only have family history that goes back that far. Yet our DNA goes back generations and generations. People have migrated for many reasons. Famine, war, education, work have been reasons that people have moved away from family and their homeland.

My niece just returned from a trip to her birthplace in Liberia. Adopted at the age of eight after both of her parents died and no living family member was able to care for her, she came to the U.S. and began a brand new chapter in her life. For decades she has thought about her village, wondered about the lives of any remaining family and ultimately, after becoming a mother herself, returned to find the missing stories of her early life.

When I was a little girl, I remember asking my mother to tell me stories about when she was growing up. Since her parents both died before my birth and we were estranged from my father's family, I never knew grandparents. Lost was the opportunity to hear their stories and be touched by their life experiences. Yet my mother told me stories — over and over again. She also left me just enough information about each of her parents



Donna Kaufman

that I could trace them back to the Polish village and farm of their births in the late 1800s. Walking that same land, learning the history of this region of the world, and seeing gravesites was a lesson on the continuation of life over many years and many generations.

Still, there are questions I wish I'd asked my mother before she died. That's why we carry so many books and journals in our bookstore like "Grandma, Tell Me Your Story." We can write our stories just for ourselves and we can write with the intent of sharing them with others. We'll never know who will need inspiration, connection and a sense of belonging. At the very

least, remembering and writing our life stories can be a tremendous exercise in self discovery. We are the collection of our stories.

Just as Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. opens up a national conversation about identity, we can explore the lives of the people and experiences that contribute to who and where we are. Through the many stories Dr. Gates has helped uncover, we expand the story of America itself. As we anticipate the country's 250th birthday, we honor the broad variety of customs, traditions, beliefs, and stories that our ancestors brought. We can celebrate the growing richness in our country that continues to define who we are.

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.

My dating app search for Cary Grant

After a long hiatus, I recently returned to dating apps. Not surprisingly, virtual romance roulette is still exasperating.

In digital dating, the focus is primarily on photos, encouraging users to prioritize covers over books. Thus, most opening lines contain demeaning commentary masquerading as flattery (or the cringy fire emoji which apparently conveys the same.)

The "About Me" portion of profiles is often ignored, so most prospective matches do not meet one another's criteria. Wallflowers may receive likes from party animals. Religious folk might try their luck with agnostics. Cat people often approach dog lovers. Sure, there is the whole "opposites attract" thing, but some common ground is essential, right?

And with every swipe, our expectations seem to become increasingly restrictive, whittling what we come to consider "our type" down to an all-or-nothing characterization. When profiles don't meet our every criterion, we brush them aside and keep combing.

Eventually, we become robots rejecting potential prospects in mere seconds. But what exactly are we rejecting? A person? A bad photo? A typo? Maybe all the above. Maybe none of the above.

My type is a debonair, witty, Cary Grant. His limbs are not adorned with tattoos (no judgement — they're just not my jam.) He doesn't stroll about with a python coiled around his neck. His commentary is courteous and captivating rather than crass.

To state the obvious, I didn't personally know the real Cary Grant. Who's to say he did not have a concealed tattoo or two, or an affinity for things that slither? Have I immediately rejected guys who don't fit into my imagined Cary Grant mold? Yes, I have.

And I didn't stop there. I've turned down gentlemen who want kids. I've passed on dudes who cite undying devotion to The Grateful Dead as a prerequisite to marriage. I've declined dates based on age. (Well, I stand by that one. I just turned 40, and somehow, I still get carded. Sorry, but I'd rather my date not be mistaken for my grandpa.)

A short time ago, I received a message from



Jennifer Silverman
The Curious Columnist

a fella who seemed authentic and kind. I reviewed his profile carefully. Impression one — tattoos. Impression two — hiking, kayaking, mountain-climbing. Impression three — mud... lots of mud. As I'm an unequivocal non-athletic, prissy neat-freak, I swiped left, vanishing the happy hiker into thin air.

Should I have given him a chance? Maybe. Are personality, integrity, and having a big heart far more important than a propensity for outdoorsy, mucky pastimes? Absolutely. However, I take these guys at their word. If they remark

how much they enjoy messy pursuits in nature, I assume I'm not their girl. (In fact, I'm the antithesis.)

Sure, we all have dealbreakers. But I wonder if perhaps I am hastily rejecting someone wonderful because he does not jive with the Old Hollywood image in my head. (Cary Grant was never muddy — even in the jungle.) When I arbitrarily split hairs, am I actually ignoring the bigger picture?

Maybe shared hobbies are not paramount. Maybe I shouldn't be searching for Cary Grant when most guys my age have never heard of him. Maybe I need to find the balance between adhering to my preferences, and reminding myself that they may not always serve me.

So, perhaps I'll say yes to the next charming hiker, and see what happens. After all, the man is more important than the mud. And who knows? He just might appreciate a prissy presence in his life.

Jennifer Silverman has served as a celebrity wardrobe stylist for hundreds of TV personalities and professional athletes. A few of her favorite projects include The Olympic Games, The World Cup 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, and recently authored a personal essay for Business Insider. Additional quirky commentary penned by Silverman is available by visiting www.CuriousColumnist.com. Email her at Jennifer@CuriousColumnist.com

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Spring awakening: Art, emotion and the new season

Spring has been a time cherished by humans for centuries; awaited with fervor and optimism. Life is art. Art is life.

Art is unquestionably one of the purest and highest elements in human happiness which is tied to our mood. Art trains the mind through the eye and the eye through the mind. 'As the sun colors flowers, so does art color life.' – (John Lubbock 1913).

Art enhances and relieves stress in our lives and adds to the quality of life. Art helps to communicate what artists feel, want you to see, or to believe. The seasonal changes and nature have always been a strong influence and significant factor on humans and artists, and art can express the experience of the spring season in many ways.

For artists, writers, and composers across cultures and centuries, they see spring as a symbol of renewal, beauty, and transformation. Their works span mythology, landscape, still life, and allegory, each capturing a different facet of the season's energy.

Some of these prominent artists are: Sandro Botticelli, 'Primavera,' 1480; Giuseppe Arcimboldo, 'Spring,' 1573; Katsushika Hokusai, 'Bullfinch and Weeping Cherry,' 1834; Claude Monet, 'In Springtime,' 1872; Camille Pissarro, 'Plum Trees in Blossom,' 1886; Van Gogh, 'Almond Blossom,' 1890. Their works were inspired by the sensual and emotional power of spring. Its colors, light, warmth and scent. Many painted still life pieces bursting with flowers, sometimes combining blooms from different seasons to heighten beauty.

Music and song also bring out certain emotions and feelings as well as providing inspiration or boosting people's morale. Composers who also celebrated spring include Antonio Vivaldi, 'Spring' from 'The Four Seasons'; Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony No. 6 'Pastoral'; Igor Stravinsky, 'The Rite of Spring'; Aaron Copland, 'Appalachian Spring.'

So, get out and enjoy the season. Support and celebrate our local arts organizations and artists. 'Arts bring us together and culture is what we share.'

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. Richard can be reached by email to richard@neflartleadersforum.com or by phone, 815-579-1677.



Richard Restiano



Photo by Kate Kimmel/Nassau NewsLine

Signage outside of Evans' provides history and acknowledges grant contributions.

County advances Evans' Rendezvous repairs after multiple deadline extensions

By Kate Kimmel

After years of delays and repeated deadline extensions, Nassau County commissioners in March approved a contract to begin long-awaited rehabilitation work on Evans' Rendezvous, a historic building in American Beach.

Commissioners voted to hire KBT Contracting Corp. for a \$383,300 project focused on stabilizing the structure, which has sat boarded up and fenced off as its condition deteriorated.

The work marks the first phase of a broader rehabilitation effort and will be funded through a \$500,000 African-American Historical and Cultural Grant the county accepted in May 2023 for infrastructure repairs.

Phase one will focus on securing the building against further damage, including foundation, wall and roof improvements. Plans outlined in the contract call for demolition and replacement of the interior slab, repairs to ceiling elements tied to the roof structure, strengthening of the building's wind resistance system and replacement of corroded hurricane ties.

The project represents a significant step forward for a site long viewed as a cultural landmark in American Beach, a historically Black community founded during segregation as a place where Black residents could gather and recreate.

The county's Monday agenda documents included an in-depth report

on the history of Evans' Rendezvous, which dates back to the mid-20th century when it operated as a bar, restaurant, and entertainment venue.

By 1960, the establishment could seat about 200 people and hosted live music and social events, becoming a centerpiece of community life. The building later became known as Ocean Rendezvous and continued operating into the late 1990s.

The property was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2002 as part of the American Beach Historic District, recognized for its significance in Black heritage and community development.

Despite its historic designation, progress on preserving the structure has been slow.

The state grant providing funds for the project was awarded in 2022 with an original completion deadline of June 30, 2023. However, county officials said the agreement terms were not received from the state until February 2023, prompting an initial extension request.

That same year, the county completed a historic structure report with support from the National Park Service and conducted community outreach to gather input on the site's future.

That process found general agreement among residents that stabilizing the building should be the top priority, followed by redevelopment for uses such as public interpretation, recreation and social events.

Since then, the county has extended the

deadline three times — first to Dec. 31, 2024, then to Dec. 31, 2025, and most recently to June 30, 2026.

The county's historic structure report outlines the complexity of rehabilitating a historic structure and the need to meet preservation standards required for such properties.

Those standards, set by the U.S. Department of the Interior, emphasize retaining historic character, repairing rather than replacing original features when possible, and ensuring any new work is compatible with the building's historic design.

Conceptual plans included in the report envision space for a museum and gallery, a gift shop, a bar, restaurant seating, and a stage, which reflect the building's historic role as a gathering place and music venue.

The county acquired the property in 2004 with assistance from the Trust for Public Land and Florida Communities Trust. Initial restoration efforts began in the mid-2000s, followed by additional repairs and hazardous material abatement in 2011 and 2012.

The newly approved contract is a critical first step toward preserving a landmark that has long held cultural and historical importance for American Beach.

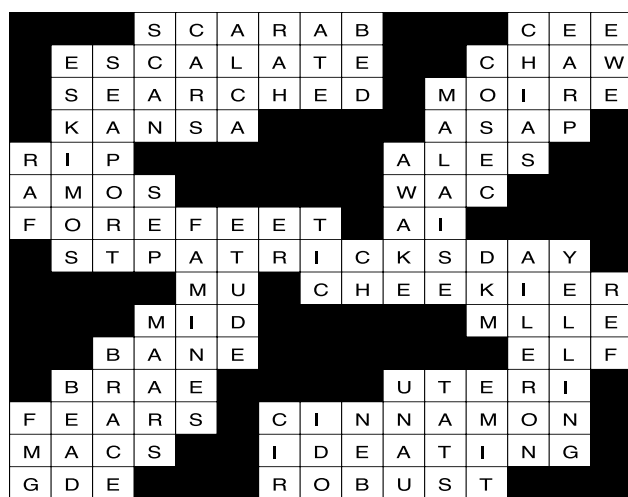
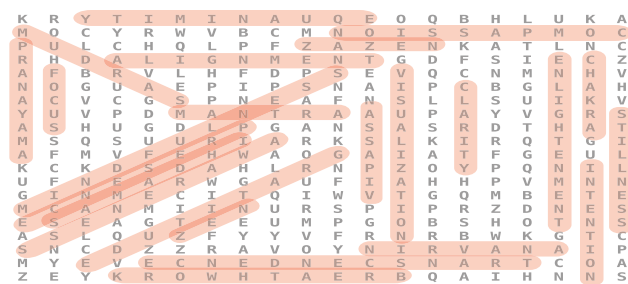
Further phases of rehabilitation and decisions about the building's long-term use are expected to follow.

kkimmel@nassaunewsline.net



Photo courtesy Historic Structure Report.

Photo taken in Nov. 2021 shows the interior deterioration of Evans' Rendezvous.





with Nassau County Commissioner
Jeff Gray

Q: What exciting things are happening in Parks & Recreation?

A: Through the «Nassau Package,» the BOCC has brought ballparks countywide up to a safe, modern standard with shade structures, bleachers, playgrounds, fitness equipment and landscaping upgrades. The Yulee Ballpark also received fresh paint, new gymnasium floors, fencing, basketball goals and covered batting cages, and the BOCC recently acquired 110 acres adjacent to it for future expansion.

Phase one of Westside Regional Park opens in late April or early May, featuring trails, multi-use fields, an airnasium, playground, dog park, stargazing court and the County's first amphitheater. The Nassau Crossing Splash Pad opened April 1, operating 9 a.m.-7 p.m. daily. The 3rd Annual Opening of the Beaches event is May 17 from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. at Main Beach Park.

Q: Why did the County decide to build a roundabout at Amelia Island Parkway & Buccaneer Trail and why didn't they wait to start after summer?

A: There is rarely a «perfect» time for roadway construction on a growing island. Delaying the project simply shifts inconvenience to another group and introduces broader risks — once a project is identified, procurement requirements under Florida Statutes mean it takes approximately five years before construction can begin, with each phase competitively bid separately.

Pausing now could require re-bidding completed phases and jeopardize funding or regulatory compliance. A traffic study identified safety concerns at this intersection and recommended a roundabout, which reduces vehicle speeds to 15-25 mph and can cut fatal and serious injury crashes by up to 82%, according to Federal Highway Administration data.

Q: What can you tell us about the rumored



Jeff Gray

data center for western Nassau County?

A: Unfortunately, we don't have any information to share. The Board of County Commissioners and their staff have no knowledge of this project beyond a press release issued by NextNRG in September 2025. County staff has contacted multiple economic development partners and none have knowledge of such a project. As of April 2, 2026, no applications have been filed with Nassau County related to this matter.

Q: What is being built with the \$6.25 million Florida Job Growth Grant recently awarded by Governor DeSantis and why is it important?

A: The grant funds engineering and construction of a four-lane roadway network and utility extensions to build the «backbone» of the new Nassau Southwest Industrial Park in Bryceville. The development is planned to include warehouse space, industrial flex-space, a 7.5-acre commercial hub and rail access — creating roughly 1,250 new jobs at the I-10 and U.S. 301 interchange and making the site «shovel-ready» for high-wage employers.

Q: What is sea turtle nesting season and why should we care?

A: Sea turtles help keep seagrass beds and coral reefs thriving, supporting marine life that humans depend on for food and coastal protection. Beginning May 1, sea turtle nesting season on Amelia Island is a critical time when these ancient creatures come ashore to lay their eggs. Residents can help by avoiding nighttime driving on the beach, removing chairs and trash that could block hatchlings and using sea turtle-safe lighting. For more information, visit nassaufl.co/SeaTurtleProtection.

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.



with Nassau County Commissioner
Alyson R. McCullough

Q: How does living in District 4 shape your approach to representing your constituents?

A: As someone who chooses to live «out there» in the rural area of the county, detours sometimes add 20 minutes to my trip, but I would never trade six months of inconvenience for getting to live out here. When we demand to have proper infrastructure, there will be short term sacrifices for long term gains.

Q: With phase one of the County Road 121 project underway, what concerns have you heard from constituents and how has the county responded?

A: The biggest concerns have been about the detours and emergency response times. We recently had a complaint about response time in an emergency situation, but the response time was under the state requirement. We did the \$3 million change order to the contract to lessen detours. Some people have suggested a plan that would require wetland mitigation, which would not only burden taxpayers across the county, but would add upwards of two years to what is already an 18-month project. That being said, we listened to constituents, we did the change order even though the project had already met state requirements.

Q: Nassau County was recently designated a 'rural area of opportunity' by the state. What does this mean for the county's workforce?

A: We don't control who buys and builds here, but we can try to attract certain industries. If it were up to me, we'd be bringing those high skill manufacturing, logistics, transportation jobs in, but I'm not the commercial and capital developer. This goes back to a fundamental issue which is the question of «do we have this skilled workforce in Nassau County.» The businesses can come, but it won't benefit residents if we don't have the employees or a trained, skilled workforce.



Alyson R. McCullough

Q: What would you say to a Nassau County resident looking to upgrade their skills or change careers?

A: We worked with Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ) to launch the Nassau Works program, where people can get skills training online or in person if they don't have internet access. We are trying to curate this hub in Nassau County where, when an industry comes in, we have that skilled workforce.

Q: What do you think causes disconnect between local governments and residents, and how would you solve it?

A: As an educator, I think it's a huge failing that our schools don't teach students about how local government works. My biggest message would be to read and to educate yourself about policy. It is not worth trading knowledge for complacency. The more you read, the more you know. I think there's a fundamental issue that we are facing right now in America where people just go to the polls and there's zero follow up and zero understanding.

I believe it's a truly, fundamentally broken part of our public school system that our children don't learn local government law. I think it would be a huge benefit if, say, in high school, students spent a few weeks understanding local comprehensive planning and zoning, commercial land usage, mortgages, trim notices, etc. I think 90% of problems could be solved if people educated themselves to have knowledge of policy, processes and procedures.

Alyson R. McCullough represents District 4 on the Nassau County Board of County Commissioners. Questions or comments can be directed to her at amccullough@nassaucountyfl.com or (904) 319-0689.



with City of Fernandina Beach
Commissioner Tim Poynter

Q: What do you want residents to understand about how paid parking revenues are being used?

A: The dollars that we are raising in the paid parking is not going into the general fund. It is going into a lock box that can only be spent in the downtown area and the waterfront to fix the downtown and the waterfront. It can't be used for street resurfacing at the beaches. It can't go for stormwater or someone else's street. It can only be used for the downtown infrastructure and the waterfront. We are saying that until we're blue in the face.

After two months of operation — the first of which was a grace period where no one was ticketed — the city has generated a gross of \$327,000, netting over \$200,000. Those are dollars that did not come out of our taxpayers' backs. And these are the dollars that we're going to start using to fix our downtown.

Q: When you say you want to 'fix downtown,' what does that actually mean?

A: That's literally fixing the electric that's buried in the ground. That is moving some transformers because they're inadequate. That's replacing the light posts. But you can't just fix the sidewalks. You don't fix the sidewalks and then have to fix the electric. All this stuff has to be done at the same time. So if you're digging up a sidewalk to repair all the underground electric conduits, you tear up the sidewalk, fix the conduits, put the conduits back in, and then you put the new sidewalk on. Which is why what we need to do, in order to do this without having a construction zone for the next 20 years, we have to be able to borrow the necessary dollars to complete the project in a year, year and a half.

Q: What is the long-term financial plan for paid parking revenues?

A: Our goal is to try to raise \$2 million with the paid parking. And that \$2 million would allow us to borrow \$30 million over the next 20 years, and that \$2 million a year would then pay back that loan to fix our downtown and the waterfront. We have not borrowed \$30 million. We have not borrowed any



Tim Poynter

money. What we have done is borrow a \$7 million line of credit to support taking down and fixing that section. It takes two years of demonstrating to a bank that this is a valid revenue stream before we can borrow against it. So this is what we call the start. It's not the finish.

Q: What would you say to residents who argue the city should wait on these improvements?

A: Nothing is getting cheaper. Concrete's more expensive, piping's more expensive. And if you think ignoring the sidewalks and those brick walls and the trees that are heaving all this — if you think waiting another five years is going to make it cheaper — you're just kidding yourself. Thirteen years ago it was going to cost \$165,000 to open up Alachua. We spent \$1.79 million this year to open up Alachua. All we're trying to do is fix the town that's been neglected for 50 years. And what won't kill your business is a cute, and beautiful, and vibrant, and well-decorated downtown. That, my friends, is what is going to save your businesses and enhance your businesses.

Q: How does your experience as a commissioner shape how you approach decisions that may not be popular?

A: I have never run and been an elected official that cared about getting reelected. I never have. Which is why I never got reelected. But we got things done. And when that library got done, we have something like 700 people on average a day come visit that library. When we fix the downtown, people will forget about all of this and they'll say, finally, the sidewalks look nice, the vegetation looks nice, the streetlights are working. This commission is looking not for the next election. We are looking for the next 20 and 30 years down the road and how we make our community better. I believe in what I do. I wouldn't change a thing. I love this community. I really do.

Tim Poynter serves as a City Commissioner for Fernandina Beach and holds monthly town halls at City Hall on the fourth Tuesday of each month from 5:30-6:30 p.m. 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: What are the infrastructure projects that paid parking revenues will fund, and why are they necessary?

A: Downtown has not been revitalized since the 1970s, and it needs it again. Street lights are mismatched, and some are irreparable. Sidewalks are made of different materials and are buckling due to tree roots, and much of the city's electrical infrastructure has not been updated in 50 years. About 25 to 30 years ago, a project began to put utilities underground, but it stopped at the side streets. The original plan was to extend undergrounding to Eighth Street; engineering plans have been completed, with an estimated cost of \$20 million to \$30 million.

Paid parking is a way of monetizing an asset in need of repair to help fund those improvements.

Q: Citizens opposed to paid parking have raised concerns that the city could overturn a citizen initiative. Is that possible?

A: The August vote sets requirements for citizen involvement, and the November vote would determine whether residents want paid parking. The city's charter was updated in 2020 based on models from other localities. A supermajority can override citizen petitions, as the commission is ultimately responsible for determining what is best for the city, even when citizen initiatives may not align with those interests.

Q: How does the city approach capital improvement projects, and what is the priority for stormwater infrastructure?

A: I refer to capital improvement projects as «community investment projects» because that is what they are. The city's stormwater master plan



Genece Minshew

is expected to be approved this month and addresses flooding, which is projected to become a significant issue within the next five years. The plan was developed through analysis of topography and water flow. A state law requires municipalities to stop discharging stormwater and wastewater into bodies of water and make systems fully reusable by 2032.

Q: What is the status of the Brett's demolition and the city's waterfront plans?

A: The Brett's demolition is also a major project. The city has received \$6 million in state appropriations for replacement of the seawall. A waterfront master plan is being developed, and the city is working with private property owners along the seawall from downtown to the port to coordinate rebuilding efforts.

Q: The city recently purchased the land across from city hall, with speculation that it could be the site of a new city hall. What does the future of city hall look like?

A: The current city hall is an older building that previously served as a fire station. City employees are spread across multiple locations, including the Peck Center and the city attorney's office, and consolidating services into one building would improve efficiency. Additionally, the city lacks adequate space for residents to meet with staff.

Our City Manager Sarah Campbell has done a great job of envisioning what the future of city hall could look like with streamlined operations.

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.

Bleachers demolished, but memories intact

By Beth Jones

The iconic concrete bleachers at Fernandina Beach High School, FBHS, have been demolished and will be replaced with metal grandstands and a press box in time for the home opener on Aug. 21.

The bleachers witnessed decades of athletic events and school functions, not just in the years they've stood at Pirate Stadium, but also through many seasons prior to 1987 at Buccaneer Field.

Ken Roland, former athletic director and longtime baseball coach at FBHS, remembers the move well. He was an assistant football coach at the time.

"The Quarterback Club, which was very active then, built the risers," he said.

The pre-stressed concrete double-Ts were placed on the risers, and the work was led by a parent.

"It went down Beech Street," he said. "They just tore it all up and loaded those up on a big trailer. We had a ready-made stadium in less than a year."

The bleachers were the home stands for football games, from Pop Warner to high school, and welcomed families for many graduations. They were the first-base stands for high school and senior league baseball games, too.

"I grew up here, and my father and mother played softball in that complex," Roland said. "I was here when the Minor League teams for the Orioles and the Twins trained here, so I have very fond memories of that whole complex down there."

He also remembers when high school football was played on two different nights.

"The Peck High Wolves would play on Thursday night, and we would play on Friday night," Roland said. "I remember as a little kid watching both."

Buccaneer Field was the heartbeat of the city.

"It was the center of everything," Roland said.

While Little League games were played at Joe Velardi Field behind the Atlantic Avenue Recreation Center and at Elm Street, almost every other outdoor sport was played at Buccaneer Field.

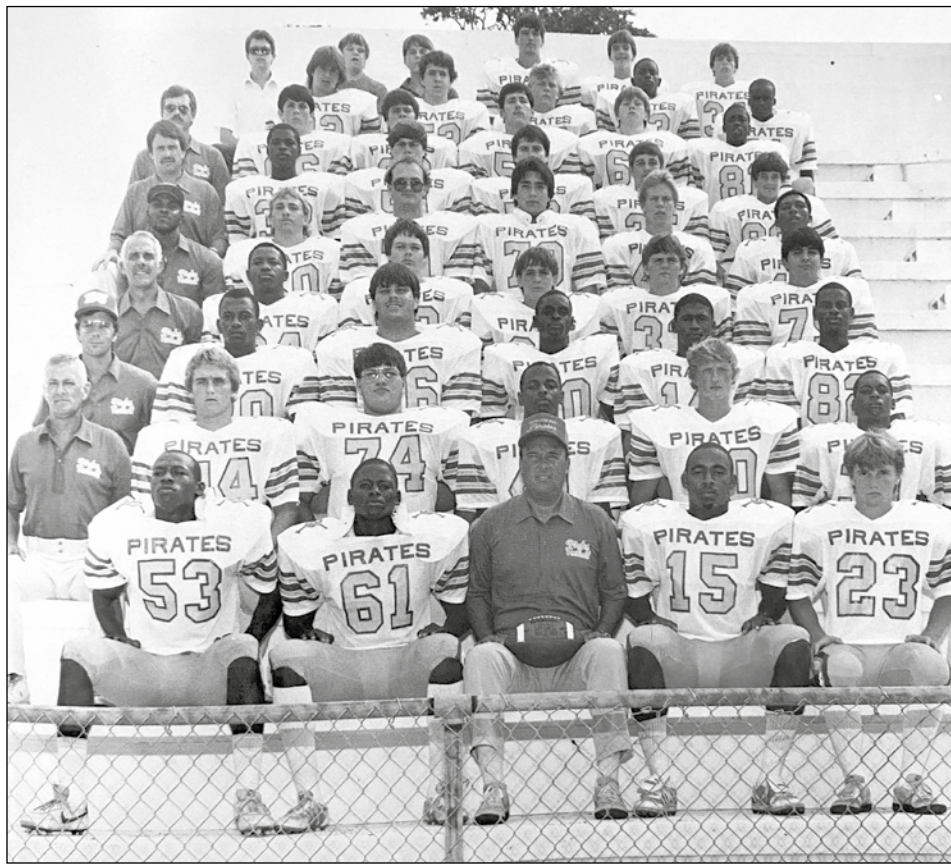
"They would put up a temporary fence for baseball and take it down for football," Roland said. "It was a multi-purpose field before multi-purpose became trendy."

While FBHS football practices were held on campus at the old high school, currently the middle school, teams had to load the bus every Friday night – even for home games.

"We rode the bus down Beech Street and into the field," said Roland, who also remembers missing that bus after a game.

"After we beat Alachua Santa Fe in 1985, (assistant coach) Larry Phillips and I got left behind," Roland said. "We had to walk down Beech Street back to the school. We missed the bus with the celebration. That's the way it was every Friday."

Roland said everyone wanted the field at the high school, "but it's hard to see that place go. We have such fond memories. It's where we all played growing up."



Submitted photo

Head Coach Joel Stockstill, front and center, with the 1985 Pirates at Buccaneer Field. Also pictured are assistant coaches Larry Phillips, Ken Roland, Jim Stearn, Leonard Peterson, Bob Howard and Larry Beggs, from bottom to top.

"I remember playing baseball in high school and looking up and seeing my mother sitting in those first-base stands. We always said there would be nothing like the Buc."

While the football team moved to the high school, Roland, head baseball coach at the time, and his team remained at Buccaneer Field until 1992.

"We practiced down there in those days, too," he said.

Buccaneer was and still is owned by the city.

"When the school board and the city worked together, it felt like a true community field," Roland said. "It certainly was a gathering place in the center of town. That part is always sad, but we like what we have here."

Joel Stockstill moved to Fernandina Beach from Georgetown, Ky., in 1975 to serve as head football coach and athletic director at FBHS.

"We really loved it here," he said. "I've been here ever since."

Stockstill's sons, Rick and Jeff, were quarterbacks, and his daughter Bonnie played tennis and was a cheerleader.

"She was the homecoming queen, too," Stockstill said.

The Stockstill's spent a lot of time at Buccaneer Field back then.

"Buccaneer Field was the first place we competed, and it has a lot of great memories," Stockstill said. "It was so nice for people in the community. They really came out and supported us."

"Everything seemed to go on around Buccaneer Field. It was the hub of everything that went on."

Stockstill pushed for the field to move to the high school.

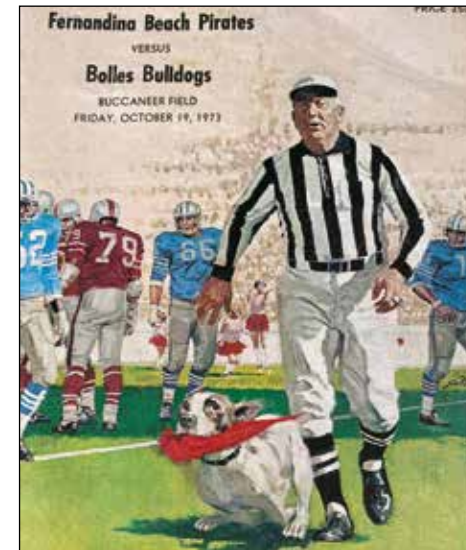
"It was kind of inconvenient," he said. "We had no locker room to go to at halftime. We basically did all our coaching at halftime in the end zone."

Stockstill started the Quarterback Club, and members quickly stepped up.

"I think it was Frank Hickman, Dave Caples, BJ Littlefield, some of those fellas, really got behind the idea of having the stadium built," Stockstill said. "We had tremendous support for moving it and playing on our fields. It turned out to be one of the best moves I think that's happened in this town."

The Pirates had a new field, but the field house was built later.

"You wasted a lot of time leaving the field and



Submitted photo

The 1973 football program for FBHS football, which played at Buccaneer Field then.



Photos by Beth Jones/Nassau NewsLine

Members of the Fernandina Beach High School class of 1986 during graduation practice at Buccaneer Field, with a shot of the concrete bleachers and the old concession stand.

coming back to the locker room at halftime, valuable time to talk to the kids," Stockstill said. "Other than that, it was nice."

Players took pride in their new field.

"After practices and on Saturdays after the field was graded, ready to sod, we would walk in lines picking up rocks off the field," Stockstill said. "We would pick up stones and wood to help clear it off; carry blocks to the workers who were putting the stadium together."

"The players carried the blocks up and helped out. It was pretty much a team effort."

Stockstill said the Pirates relished their first season in their new digs.

"Being able to protect our home field made a big difference to the kids," he said.

bjones@nassaunewsline.net



Submitted photo

An artist's rendering of the new Pirate Field.



Submitted photo

Pirate Field demolition.

WHAT'S GOING ON

By Beth Jones

Shrimp Fest 5K slated for May 2

The 29th annual Shrimp Festival 5K run and walk will be held May 2 at Main Beach. The 5K race and walk starts at 8 a.m., and the one-mile run for those 12 and under starts at 8:45 a.m. The McArthur Family YMCA is once again hosting the annual race, and Florida Public Utilities is the event's main sponsor. Proceeds benefit drowning prevention programs in Nassau County. Registration fee is \$30 through April 19, also the cutoff date to receive an event T-shirt. Late registration is April 20 through May 1. Race-day registration is \$40 with cash or a check. Fee is \$15 for

one-mile run. Go to <https://shrimpfestival5krunwalk.itsyourrace.com/register/> to sign up. Pick up race packets from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. May 1 at the Y, 1915 Citrona Drive in Fernandina Beach.

Reavis skates to first place

Fernandina Beach skateboarder Jude Reavis took first place in the 8-and-under division at The Boardr contest in Imo, S.C.

Nichols, Kovalcik dominate at meet

Fernandina Beach High School runners Mikaela Nichols, a senior, and Maya Kovalcik, a freshman, won their respective events at the

Toro Twilight on Saturday at Toco Creek High School. Nichols won the 800-meter run in 2:26, and Kovalcik won the 1,600-meter run in 5:28, with a margin of victory of 17 seconds.

Nichols, Kovalcik dominate at meet

Fernandina Beach High School runners Mikaela Nichols, a senior, and Maya Kovalcik, a freshman, won their respective events at the Toro Twilight on Saturday at Toco Creek High School. Nichols won the 800-meter run in 2:26, and Kovalcik won the 1,600-meter run in 5:28, with a margin of victory of 17 seconds.

WHAT'S GOING ON cont. on pg. 11



Jacob Kovalcik, Juliana Durr and Trey Bunn, from left, at a temple.

Pirates set sail to Japan

NewsLine staff

There is an old Shinto quote on travel: “A journey is best shared with others” (旅は道連れ、世は掛け — Tabi wa michizure, yo wa nasake).

Each spring, Fernandina Beach High School students travel beyond our country's borders and share their experiences with others.

Thirty-eight students from FBHS traveled to Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, Japan, for spring break 2026 and are now, as the quote implies, enriching their experiences by sharing them with others.

After a 13-hour flight, they began their incredible trip in Tokyo by visiting the serene Sensō-ji temple, the Meiji Shrine. A few even relished a quick run in the Yoyogi Park while others took advantage of fun shopping in the Harajuku District and the Akihabara Electric town.

While crossing the famous Shibuya crossing, some of the students made it to the famous Pokemon and Nintendo store.

The next day was full of a scenic day trip to the Hakone valley with a ropeway tour through the clouds. On top of Mt. Hakone they had a snack on the famous black eggs, then down the mountain to have lunch on the shores of Lake Ashi. The end of the trip was a lake cruise to the famous Hakone Shrine.

The day didn't end there, as they went off to an exciting night full of karaoke and more shopping. Two seniors, Jacob Kovalcik and Trey Bunn, who have traveled for the past three years with Mrs. Julianna Durr, along with Reid Webber, fulfilled a huge travel bucket list. They were able to dine at the infamous NOBU restaurant, where they met the founder and co-owner, Nobuyuki “Nobu” Matsuhisa.

Kyoto was the next stop via the Shinkansen bullet train. They fed the deer, which were eager to bow for treats at the Nara Deer Park. Visits to the Todai-ji temple and the UNESCO World Heritage site, Kasuga Grand Shrine, were the perfect way to learn the tenants of Buddhism and see in person the largest Buddha in the world.

They visited the Kinkaku-ji temple, another UNESCO world heritage site, to toss coins in a cup for good luck, drank hot green tea with gold specks and strolled around the golden temple's gardens.

The Arashiyama Bamboo Grove helped the students become one with nature and bamboo as they wandered through the bamboo grove and



FBHS teacher Steven Rathmann and son Dean walked through the 10K gates.

found their way to the top of the mountain. A few even ventured off the path to discover the monkeys on another hill.

A quick lunch by the river and they were off to observe the staggering 1,001 gold leaf soldiers at the Sanjūsangendō Temple.

In Osaka, they were able to climb the eight stories to the observatory deck and look out over the skyline of Osaka. However, the Umelda Sky Building offered a better view from the 40th floor observatory deck as the students braved the breeze and 360-degree breathtaking views of all of Osaka.

The final day ended in an adventurous day of fresh sushi lunch in Kuromon market and more shopping in the Dotonbori district.

This trip allowed the students to learn about the culture and traditions of Japan. They all fell in love with Japan and hope to return on their own.

A connection has been made between the Pirate travelers and the wonderful people and culture of Japan (#missionaccomplished).

For 2027, the Pirates will be off to Amsterdam, Brussels, London and Paris. This trip is officially sold out, with another 40 students coming along for a European adventure. The 2028 trip will be a trip to seven cities and three countries: Venice, Verona, Florence, Pisa, Monaco city, Nice and Paris.



Trey Bunn, Nobuyuki “Nobu” Matsuhisa, Jacob Kovalcik and Reid Webber, from left. Photos courtesy Fernandina Beach High School

Pinson's new board designed by childhood friend

By Beth Jones

Local pro skater Poe Pinson recently celebrated her 21st birthday, and she's also celebrating her new board, “Digital Bruise,” hitting stores this spring.

Pinson's latest deck was designed by her childhood friend, Jace Scott, also a skater.

“We even got a flashback to Poe's humble beginnings with two custom sticker inserts

showing a fully padded young Poe at her hometown skatepark, that is now named after her,” said a recent email from There Skateboards. “This one was as special for Jace as it was for Poe to see how far they've both come.”

Pinson turned pro last year, and in 2024, she competed in the Olympics in Paris, where she placed fifth in women's street skateboarding. The city named the skatepark at Main Beach in her honor.



Photo courtesy Poe Pinson
Local pro skater Poe Pinson.



Photo courtesy Poe Pinson
The ‘Digital Bruise’ board hitting stores this Spring.

WHAT'S GOING ON cont. from pg. 1

Sip and support YHS flag football

The Yulee High School flag football team will hold a fundraiser from 2-6 p.m. April 18 at Healthy Hub, 464008 SR 200 in Yulee. Purchase a \$10 ticket and get a 24-ounce energy tea and meal replacement shake, which will be made by the players.

All tips and 50% of all additional sales go to the team. Purchase tickets at www.healthyhub.club/yhsflag.

Pomp'n for Parkinson's

The Nassau Sport Fishing Association is hosting its Pomp'n for Parkinson's outing April 11 at Huguenot Park. The event kicks off at 7 a.m. and wraps up at 1 p.m. Members may enter the tournament or just show up and fish. Visit <https://nsfafish.net/April-Outing-1> for more details.

Summer soccer camp

Amelia Island Youth Soccer is hosting summer camps, and registration is open. Campers will hone their skills in ball mastery, passing, receiving, dribbling and finishing as well as defending and attacking.

Camp is open to ages 6-14, and participants are divided by age and skill level.

Camps are June 8-July 13 at Tributary Regional Park, 75433 Edward Road in Yulee; and June

15-July 20 at Ybor Alvarez, 3243 Bailey Road in Fernandina Beach. Camp runs from 9 a.m. to noon daily, and cost is \$150 per week with multi-player discounts.

Visit www.aiysoccer.com.

Spring Fling Wheeled Thng

Friends of Fernandina Skate Park is hosting the fourth annual Spring Fling Wheeled Thng from 4-8 p.m. May 9 at the Poe Pinson Skate Park at Main Beach. Skateboards, scooters, inline skates, ripsticks, adaptive and BMX are all welcome. There will be music, food trucks and vendors.

Register online. Visit <https://friendsofferandinaskatepark.com/>.

Skate & Surf Film Festival

The 2026 Amelia Island International Skate & Surf Film Festival will be held June 20 downtown Fernandina Beach, between Centre and Alachua streets. There will be food trucks and vendors from 1-9 p.m.

Skate and surf films will be playing throughout the day. Visit www.skatesurffilm.org.

Jags to play in Orlando in 2027

Orlando will be the Jacksonville Jaguars' home away from home during the 2027 season, while the stadium undergoes renovations. The team will temporarily host home games at Camping World Stadium. The Jaguars will return go the “Stadium of the Future” for the 2028 season.

PGlackin Photography, LLC.

SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY

WEBSITE:

pglackinphotography.smugmug.com



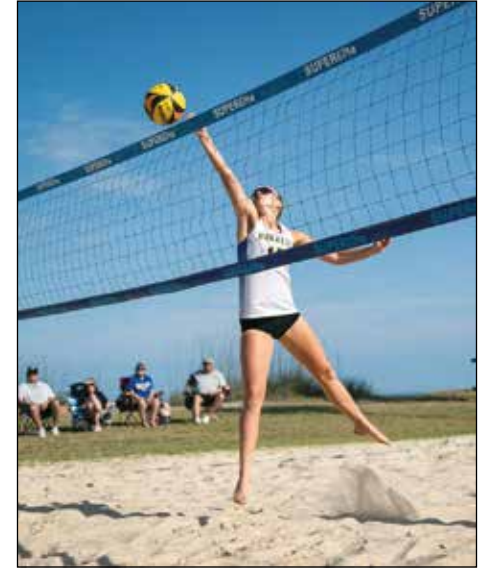
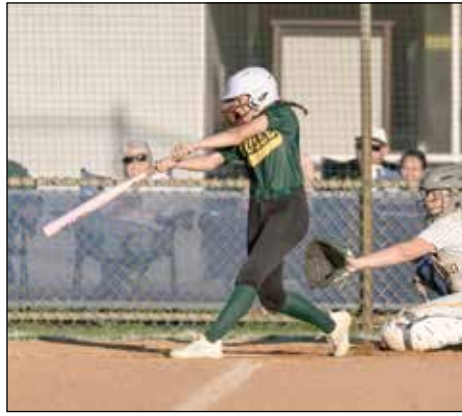
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penny.glackin@gmail.com



Athletes spring into action

Photos by Penny Glackin/Special to Nassau NewsLine

The Fernandina Beach and Yulee high school and middle school softball teams squared off in March, and the Fernandina Beach High School beach volleyball team hosted Sandalwood last month at Main Beach. Also pictured are high school lacrosse, tennis and weightlifting matches as well as the county track meet and FBHS baseball. Purchase tickets to all games at gofan.com, and for stats, scores and schedules, visit MaxPreps.com.

