

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

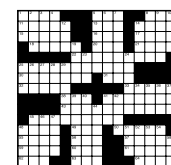
Meet Blue!
Best Furry Friend
of the Month
Page 3



Community
Calendar for
St. Johns County
Page 4



Puzzle Page:
Crossword
& More
Page 9



Power on the Path



Dr. Brennan W. Asplen III

St. Johns County schools celebrate outstanding achievements across all levels'

By Dr. Brennan W. Asplen

Schools across the St. Johns County School District are celebrating an extraordinary season of academic, artistic and athletic success, highlighted by record-breaking accomplishments, state recognitions and powerful community engagement initiatives.

St. Augustine High School: Rising achievement and state-level honors

St. Augustine High School continues to demonstrate excellence across academics, arts and athletics.

This year, the AICE program expanded from 1,600 to 2,000 exams administered, an impressive milestone following last year's 20% growth. Several Yellow Jackets earned national distinctions, including Gracie Flaherty (Class of 2025), who achieved the highest AICE Psychology score in the nation, and Anna Kerllenevich (Class of 2027), who earned Top in USA recognition for her combined AICE scores.

The SAHS JROTC unit was named an Honor Unit of Distinction and is advancing to state championships. On the athletic front, Avery Miller captured state weightlifting titles in both Olympic and Traditional events, while Taylor Pelchat earned

Schools cont. on pg. 3



Photo courtesy St. Johns County Sheriff's Office

Cpl. Michael Ettl displays the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office e-bike safety card, which outlines the differences between electric bicycle classes and illegal e-motos.

SJSO leads education-first initiative to bridge the gap between technology and traffic law

By Tracy McCormick-Dishman
editor@floridanewslines.com

Following a rapid increase in electric vehicle use across St. Johns County neighborhoods, the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office is shifting its focus

toward a comprehensive "education-first" model to address growing safety concerns. Director Russ Martin of the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office says the initiative is designed to clarify the legal boundaries between standard e-bikes and high-powered "e-motos," or electric motorcycles.

"We saw a rapid increase in the use of electric vehicles throughout the community," Martin said. "Unlike traditional pedal bikes and human-powered scooters everyone was accustomed to, these presented immediate safety concerns

Power on the Path cont. on pg. 2

Power on the Path cont. from pg. 1

on sidewalks and at intersections and crosswalks.”

Martin said the surge prompted the agency to take a hard look at the laws and create internal tools to track the problem. “We were playing catch-up,” he said.

Tracking the data

One of the first steps was creating a disposition code, an internal tracking category in the Sheriff’s Office computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system, specifically for e-bike violations and crashes.

“Prior to May, we didn’t have an e-bike specific or e-bike crash specific disposition code,” Martin said. “We had a bunch of crashes and it was going through a plethora of CAD notes... really trying to decipher, finding a needle



Photo courtesy St. Johns County Sheriff’s Office
Sheriff Robert Hardwick addresses community members during a presentation regarding the rise of electric vehicle use and safety regulations in St. Johns County.

in a haystack to see where do I hone in on the problem.”

With better data in hand, the agency launched a multi-pronged approach built around education, enforcement and community partnerships.

A partnership for safety

Central to that effort was a close working relationship with the St. Johns County School District and Superintendent Dr. Brennan Asplen.

“That partnership is super, super close,” Martin said. “We’re doing this thing together. And we’re trying to leverage each other for the benefit of our citizens that we serve.”

Youth resource deputies were trained on the new e-bike classifications and equipped with safety flyers featuring a QR code linking to educational materials. Before the 2025 Christmas break, deputies had completed safety presentations to sixth, seventh and eighth graders at every school in the district.

“The school district, they saw the importance of it, and they gave us a slot of time,” Martin said. “They really rolled the carpet out for us to not only give us a platform, but to be joined at the hip with us, side by side, preaching this message.”

Deputies also provided helmets to students who didn’t have them during daily encounters at the 44 schools in the district where the Sheriff’s Office provides youth resource deputies.

“Not only are we telling you about it, we’re trying to meet you a little farther than halfway in providing some of the equipment if necessary,” Martin said.



Photo courtesy St. Johns County Sheriff’s Office
St. Johns County Sheriff’s Office deputies inspect a high-powered electric vehicle. Officials warn that certain “e-motos” are not street legal and are classified as motorcycles.

Enforcement and the Task Force

The agency also established an e-bike task force, deploying bicycle and motor units into high-volume areas including Fruit Cove, Durbin Crossing, River-town, Aberdeen, Nocatee and World Golf Village. Martin said the approach put officers on the same devices as the riders, including e-bikes and, for more challenging situations, e-motos.

“We’ve matched them with the same devices,” he said, describing how deputies trained on e-motos to patrol areas where riders were evading traditional patrol vehicles. “Word spreads overnight. Hey, they’ve got the e-motos, too.”

Martin emphasized that the enforcement model leads with education.

“The enforcement effort is one piece of a massive piece to try to come up with a solution,” he said. “You can’t write so many tickets out of an issue that’s going on through the county.”

Knowing the law

A key part of the message has been directed at the hardware itself. Martin said devices classified as Class 3 e-bikes can travel up to 28 mph under state law, but some devices sold legally go even faster.

Under Florida law, e-bikes are classified into three categories. Classes 1 and 2 do not exceed 20 mph; Class 3 does not exceed 28 mph. E-motos, motorized devices without pedals that resemble

electric dirt bikes, are not street legal and cannot be ridden on roads, sidewalks or crosswalks unless properly licensed as a motorcycle.

“Just because it’s an electronic bike doesn’t mean it’s exempt from any of the rules of the road,” Martin said. “They all still apply.”

Call to action for parents

Martin’s call to parents is direct: get involved. He urges parents to consider their child’s behavior, knowledge and experience level when matching them with a device. He drew a parallel to the responsibility of a cell phone.

Martin drew a direct parallel to the responsibility of a cell phone. “It can bring great joy, but if you’re not actively involved in what your child is doing, it is not always age-appropriate,” he said. “They may not understand how finite some of those decisions can be.”

The effort has extended beyond the Sheriff’s Office. Martin said the St. Johns County Commission created a resolution to seek e-bike legislation at the state level, and the agency has been meeting with multiple counties to explore effective changes.

“We can’t legislate ourselves from a problem in our community,” Martin said. “All of us play a role, and if we play our role really well and stay in the role that we are called to, I know that we will continue to make positive strides.”

Image courtesy St. Johns County Sheriff’s Office
The St. Johns County Sheriff’s Office e-bike safety card provides a detailed breakdown of electric vehicle classifications, speed limits and safety regulations.

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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Blue!

Breed:
Vizsla

Favorite Activity:
Playing at the beach and chasing birds

Favorite Food:
Anything if we call it a «Scooby Snack»

Favorite Friends:
His people brothers

How did your BFF get their name:
Reminded us of the velociraptor named «Blue» in Jurassic Park

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.



Table of Contents

- 4 Community Calendar
- 7 Business Monthly
- 9 Crossword Puzzle
- 10 Classifieds
- 10 Community Marketplace

Answers to our Puzzles PG 9

B	A	T	A			L	E	U		E	L	F				
C	L	E	G	G		E	R	N		M	A	A	R			
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Schools cont. from pg. 1

acceptance to West Point and finished second in state girls wrestling.

The arts also shone, with the SJCCA Wind Ensemble earning a state berth for the fourth consecutive year, SJCCA Theatre's The Actor's Nightmare receiving Mainstage Designation, and Visual Arts students capturing top regional Scholastic Awards, scholarships and national adjudication honors.

SAHS students also excelled in the SJEA MLK Poster and Essay Competition, earning multiple first-, second- and third-place awards.

Ponte Vedra High School: Academic excellence and statewide recognition

Ponte Vedra High School celebrated exceptional achievements across academic programs, extracurricular activities and student leadership.

The National Honor Society led major service initiatives this year — including supporting HUGS, providing holiday assistance to local families and organizing a Veterans Honor Wall — while the Aspire Talks speaker series reached new heights.

In major academic news, Anya Dorairaj was selected as a prestigious Jefferson Scholar at the University of Virginia,

one of about 30 students nationwide to receive the full-ride award. PVHS students also dominated regional academic competitions, including the District Appellate Court Brief Writing and Moot Court Competition, the Middle District of Florida Essay Contest and the Environmental Science DUCKS certification exam with a 94% passing rate.

World language instruction saw innovation through "Spanish Mondays," a full-immersion learning initiative in Spanish 2 that resulted in students achieving 85% comprehension and increased interest in advanced coursework.

The theater, arts and music programs also thrived. Multiple students were selected for the Florida State Thespian Festival, with several accepted into top-tier college theater programs. The band program earned straight superiors across all MPAs for the first time in school history, and the marching band finished as state runner-up, winning top honors in music and visual performance.

Career and technical education programs expanded hands-on learning through DECA, marketing academy experiences and extensive field-based career exploration. DECA students again achieved Gold Certification for the Shark Shack, maintaining a perfect record since its founding.

The annual Mr. Fintastic philanthropy event raised more than \$10,000 for local charities.

Landrum Middle School: Celebrating student life and school improvements

Landrum Middle School is preparing for several major student events, including the return of the eighth grade dance and eighth grade graduation and awards ceremony — traditions being revived for the first time since 2014.

Athletically, Landrum celebrated district championships in both boys and girls basketball. The school is also slated for significant facility upgrades this summer, including new gym bleachers and a complete auditorium renovation featuring a new floor and seating.

PVPV/Rawlings Elementary: Academic leadership and a thriving school community

PVPV/Rawlings Elementary sustained its strong academic reputation — students in grades 3, 4 and 5 once again ranked at the top of the district in FAST Reading and Math proficiency.

The school's STEM Night was a major success, featuring student-designed engineering challenges, interactive STEM stations, community presenters and

contributions from Landrum Middle School and PVHS musicians.

The school will soon launch its annual Kindness Week, promoting empathy, inclusivity and character development through schoolwide activities. Families are also looking forward to the third annual Night of the Arts, showcasing student artwork, performances and interactive activities.

In collaboration with the Tristyn Bailey Foundation and the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office, PVPV/Rawlings, Ocean Palms Elementary, Landrum Middle and Ponte Vedra High will co-host "Empowering Families. Protecting Children," a community forum on internet safety to be held April 1 at Landrum Middle School.

A district united in excellence

From elementary enrichment nights to high school national award winners, St. Johns County schools continue to deliver exceptional experiences and opportunities for all students. This recent collection of accomplishments highlights not only academic achievement, but also character, creativity and community — cornerstones of education across the district.

Dr. Brennan W. Asplen III is the Superintendent of St. Johns County School District.

April

Community Calendar What's Happening in St. Johns

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

April 2

Maudy Thursday Service

St. Patrick's Episcopal Church, 1222 State Road 13, will hold a Maudy Thursday service including foot washing at 6 p.m.

April 2, 9, 23, 30

ACT and SAT Prep Classes

The Friends of the Bartram Trail Public Library will offer ACT and SAT prep classes. ACT classes run from 5 p.m. to 6:15 p.m., and SAT classes run from 6:30 p.m. to 7:45 p.m. The cost is \$50 per series; proceeds benefit library programming. Visit bartramtrailfol.org/satact-classes to register or email macy17@yahoo.com.

April 3

Good Friday Service

St. Patrick's Episcopal Church, 1222 State Road 13, will hold a Good Friday service at noon.

April 5

Easter Service

St. Patrick's Episcopal Church, 1222 State Road 13, will hold an Easter service at 10 a.m.

April 7

Honeybee Quilters Guild

The Honeybee Quilters Guild will meet Tuesday, April 7, at 6:30 p.m. at the Mandarin Church of Christ, 12791 Old St. Augustine Road. Doors open at 6 p.m. The program features "Quilt Finishes for Borders." New members and guests are welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

April 9

Whiskers and Wheels

The fourth annual Whiskers and Wheels event will be held Thursday, April 9, from 6:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Deerwood Castle, home of the Jacksonville Sports Car Museum. A

cocktail reception and car museum tour begins at 6 p.m. The evening supports local pets and features dinner, live music and auctions. Visit gotrnefl.org for details.

April 11

Second Saturday Arts & Farmers Market

The Second Saturday Arts & Farmers Market will take place Saturday, April 11, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. The market features more than 50 vendors and supports the church's outreach programs

April 11

Bartram Trail Genealogy Club

The Bartram Trail Genealogy Club will meet Saturday, April 11, from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. at the Bartram Trail Public Library. The meeting will feature an open genealogy discussion among club members. For questions, contact Peggy Preusler at 904-710-9149.

April 14

Bartram Trail Newcomers Club Luncheon

The Bartram Trail Newcomers Club will host its April luncheon Tuesday, April 14, at 11 a.m. at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club in St. Augustine. Attendees have a choice of fire-grilled flat iron steak, rosemary roasted chicken breast or grilled cauliflower steak. Cost is \$32 (cash or check). Visit facebook.com/BTNC.1 for details.

April 15

AARP Smart Driver Course

River Garden will host an AARP Smart Driver course Wednesday, April 15, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Cohen Auditorium, 11401 Old St. Augustine Road. The course covers defensive driving strategies. Cost is \$20 for AARP members and \$25 for non-members, including a complimentary lunch. Contact Kari Bell at 904-288-7855 to register.

April 16

William Bartram Scenic & Historic Highway Meeting

The William Bartram Scenic & Historic Highway will hold its monthly meeting Thursday, April 16, at 6:30 p.m. in Conference Room LB at Westminster Woods on Julington Creek, 25 State Road 13.

April 17

Aspire Women's Event

Creekside Christian Church, 92 Life Spring Way, will host the Aspire Women's Event Friday, April 17. Doors open at 6 p.m., followed by a pre-show panel at 6:30 p.m. and the main show at 7 p.m.

April 18

AIA Jacksonville Society Lecture

The Archaeological Institute of America—Jacksonville Society will meet Saturday, April 18, at noon in Building 51 at the University of North Florida. Dr. Zachery Dunseth will present "Dung and Copper: Environmental archaeology at the macro- and microscale." The lecture is free and open to the public. Contact Melva Price at 904-241-9411 for details.

April 18

Earth Day Community Cleanup

Beaches Go Green will host its annual Earth Day community cleanup Saturday, April 18, from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. at Jacksonville Beach and St. Augustine Beach. The event is open to the public and supplies are provided. Visit beachesgogreen.org for details.

April 20

Newcomers of North St. Johns Luncheon and Book Drive

Newcomers of North St. Johns (NNSJ) will host a trivia game luncheon and book drive Monday, April 20, beginning at 11 a.m. at Marsh Creek Country Club, 169 Marshside Drive, St. Augustine. Doors open at 10:30 a.m. Cost is \$38 for members and \$55 for guests. Reservations are due by April 10. Visit

newcomersofnorthstjohns.org for more information.

April 29

Encore Entrepreneurship Workshop

SCORE Jacksonville and Fifth Third Bank will host a workshop Wednesday, April 29, at 5:30 p.m. at the Etown branch, 11332 Apex Trail. The session, "Encore Entrepreneurship: Turning Life Experiences into a Business," is designed for those looking to start a business post-retirement. Contact Shelly Thompson at Shelly.Thompson@53.com to register.

Ongoing Activities

Open Game Play

Join the Council on Aging (COA) River House, 179 Marine St., St. Augustine, for open game play on Thursdays from 12:15 p.m. to 3:15 p.m. Bring your own cards or board games. Email tharris@coasjc.org for more information.

Trout Creek Senior Center Activities

The Trout Creek Senior Center, 6795 Collier Road, Orangedale, offers activities for seniors on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings. Cards, crafts and games begin at 9 a.m., followed by trivia, bunco or bingo before lunch at 11:30 a.m. Contact Jessica Curry at 904-209-3658 for details.

Playing HOOKie

This charity-focused knitting and crochet group meets every Wednesday from 10 a.m. to noon at Maple Street Biscuit Company, 1627 Race Track Road, St. Johns. For more information, email playinghookiecares@gmail.com.

Widow to Widow Support Group

A support group for widows is held at the COA River House, 179 Marine St., St. Augustine, on Wednesdays from 11:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. Call 904-209-3655 for more information.

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Property Appraiser's Office honored with 2026 Top Workplaces Awards

By Eddie Creamer St. Johns County Property Appraiser

I am pleased to announce that the St. Johns County Property Appraiser's Office has been honored with the 2026 Jacksonville Top Workplaces Award, presented by The Florida Times-Union in partnership with Energage, an employee engagement technology company. Our office also received two additional awards: one for ranking in the top three organizations in our category and a special award for the benefits provided to employees.



Eddie Creamer

At our office, we are a people-first organization. Our team makes all the difference in the important work we do to support the St. Johns County community, and I am thankful to each and every one of our employees for their tremendous work and dedication to our organization.

The Top Workplaces Award honors organizations in the Metro Jacksonville area that participated in the Top Workplaces survey. The confidential survey, administered by Energage, is emailed to all employees in each organization to receive feedback. The survey measures themes such as engagement, level of respect and support, growth opportunities and more.

Our office is one of 49 organizations in the region to receive the award. In the small organization category of fewer than 150 employees, we ranked third of the 16 organizations to receive the award. This was the first year our office applied for the award, and only 40 percent of companies that apply in their first year receive it. The special awards were presented based on specific topics, and our office was the only organization to receive the award for the benefits provided to employees.

Based on the survey results, the following key insights were identified about our office:

- The overall workplace experience score was 92 percent, seven points above the benchmark.
- 100 percent of employees believe their manager cares about their concerns.
- Our office is in the top 1 percent within the industry for communication and keeping employees informed.
- Our office is in the top 1 percent within the industry for prioritizing the well-being of employees.
- Our office is in the top 1 percent within the industry for offering fair compensation.

I am available to answer questions or provide information at Eddie@sjcpa.gov or 904-827-5500.

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

Q: What are the requirements to be a poll worker in St. Johns County?

A: To serve as a poll worker, you must be a U.S. citizen and a registered or pre-registered voter in St. Johns County. This includes 16- and 17-year-olds who are pre-registered to vote. Due to the responsibilities of the position, poll workers must be able to work up to a 14-hour day, which may include extended periods of standing or bending, and must be able to lift up to 30 pounds. Workers must be available to begin at 6 a.m., have reliable transportation, be able to read and write in English, and complete mandatory training prior to each election.

Q: What type of training do poll workers need?

A: Per Florida Statutes, poll workers must complete training prior to each election. In St. Johns County, this includes an initial orientation and online pre-training covering election law, voter eligibility, ballot handling

and security. Following the online portion, workers attend in-person, hands-on training that covers voting equipment, polling place procedures and accessibility.

Q: Where can registered voters apply to be a poll worker?

A: Interested voters can visit votesjc.gov to learn more and complete an application.

Q: Are you recruiting poll workers for the 2026 election cycle?

A: The Supervisor of Elections Office accepts applications on a rolling basis. While there is currently a strong roster of returning workers, Poll Worker Coordinator Amanda Sims recently completed five mandatory introductory orientations. For those interested in learning more about the process, the office is offering four public office tours throughout April and May. To register, visit votesjc.gov or call 904-823-2238.



Vicky Oakes

Gardening

The Good Earth: Small seeds, big rewards

By Connie Doyle, Master Gardener UF/IFAS

April is one of the most rewarding months to be a gardener in North-east Florida. The days are warming, the threat of frost has passed, and garden centers are bursting with colorful plants. But before filling a cart with plants, consider another option: starting plants from seed.



Connie Doyle, Master Gardener UF | IFAS

plants. Second, seeds offer a much wider variety than what is typically available as starter plants. Finally, there is a deep satisfaction in watching a plant grow from a tiny seed into a thriving part of the garden.

Many warm-season vegetables germinate quickly in spring soil. Gardeners can successfully plant

beans, cucumbers, squash, corn, melons and okra directly in the garden this month. Herbs such as basil also grow easily from seed once nighttime temperatures remain warm.

April is also an excellent time to sow seeds for summer flowers. Bright, heat-loving blooms such as zinnias, cosmos and sunflowers germinate quickly and will begin flowering in early summer.

There are a few simple tips to ensure success when growing from seed in this coastal environment. Because Ponte Vedra's soil can be sandy, seeds can dry

While gardeners in colder parts of the country must start seeds indoors months before spring arrives, those gardening in Zone 9B have the advantage of warm soil and a long growing season. According to planting guidance from the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences and UF/IFAS Extension, April is an excellent time to sow many seeds directly into the garden.

Starting from seed has several advantages. First, it is economical. A single packet of seeds often costs only a few dollars and can produce dozens of



out quickly. Keep the seedbed lightly moist until seedlings emerge, but avoid overwatering. Incorporating compost or other organic matter into the soil before planting can help improve moisture retention and provide nutrients for young plants. It is also helpful to follow the planting depth listed on the seed packet.

Once seedlings emerge, thinning them may be necessary so each plant has enough room to grow. While it can be difficult to remove healthy seedlings, proper spacing results in stronger plants and a better harvest.

Starting plants from seed requires a little patience, but the reward is well worth the effort. In just a few weeks,

these tiny seeds will transform into flourishing vegetables and colorful flowers, proving that one of the greatest joys of gardening is watching life grow from the very beginning.

Grow joy, one seed at a time.

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 at mail@floridanew-line.com.

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ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

Julington Creek resident Monica Zangerle joins Keller Williams St. Johns

NewsLine Staff

A Julington Creek Plantation resident who spent 15 years in banking has earned her Florida real estate license and joined the Keller Williams St. Johns team, said a recent release.

Monica Zangerle will work with buyers and sellers throughout Northeast Florida through the Keller Williams St. Johns brokerage, located at 45 Durbin Pavilion Drive, Suite 101, in St. Johns.

Zangerle's banking career focused on cash management sales for corporate and municipal clients, where she developed expertise in financial strategy, risk management and long-term

decision-making — skills she now brings to helping real estate clients, said the release.

"I believe buying or selling a home is one of the most important decisions people make," Zangerle said. "My goal is to advocate for my clients with honesty, compassion, empathy, and determination so they feel confident every step of the way."

Real estate is also a personal passion. Zangerle purchased her first home at age 22 and has since bought and sold nine properties with her husband, Craig, including two new construction homes, as the couple relocated from New York to New Jersey and Virginia before settling in Florida more than a

decade ago, said the release. The family has lived in Julington Creek Plantation for more than 11 years. Zangerle is a first-generation college graduate of Baruch College in New York City, where she earned a bachelor's degree in business, said the release.

"Keller Williams has built a reputation for providing some of the most comprehensive training and education programs in the real estate industry," Zangerle said. "I'm proud to be part of a team that emphasizes knowledge, mentorship, and putting clients first."

Zangerle can be reached at monica-zangerle@kw.com or (904) 988-1184.



Photo courtesy Monica Zangerle. Monica Zangerle has joined Keller Williams St. Johns as a licensed real estate agent.

Registration opens for new students at Julington Creek Elementary

NewsLine Staff

Julington Creek Elementary is preparing for the upcoming school year, with registration now open for new kindergarten through fifth-grade students set to join the campus in August.

Parents can complete the registration process online by visiting jce.stjohns.k12.fl.us and selecting the "26-27 Registration" button on the right side of the homepage. The school's website also offers a look at campus activities and answers frequently asked questions. Families can also access the enrollment portal by scanning the provided QR code.

For currently enrolled students, the school district will begin sending returning student verification emails in mid-April. These communications will continue through May. School officials noted that siblings may not receive their verification emails at the same time. Once received, parents can complete the enrollment for the new school year, which is scheduled to begin Aug. 10, 2026.

Orientation dates will be announced over the summer. For more information or assistance with the registration process, contact the school at 904-547-7982 or email JCES@stjohns.k12.fl.us.

Florida shifts to English-only driver exams

NewsLine Staff

Florida driver license exams transitioned to an English-only format as of February 2026, a move expected to affect thousands of residents preparing for permit and road tests.

A new report from Zutobi, an online driver education platform used by more than 10 million learners, highlighted the change as one of the most significant 2026 DMV updates in the country. According to the report, all driver license exams, including the written knowledge test and the behind-the-wheel exam, are now conducted solely in English. The use of translators or non-English printed tests is prohibited, following a brief transition period for previously scheduled Spanish-language appointments that concluded in March 2026.

While the language requirements have changed, the test structure itself remains consistent, requiring an 80 percent passing score on a 50-question exam. Additionally, the state continues to require teen drivers to complete 50 hours of supervised driving practice, including 10 hours of nighttime driving, before taking the road test.

"Changes like the English-only testing rule can have a big impact on new drivers, especially those who previously relied on translated exams," said Lucas Waldenback, co-founder of Zutobi. "It makes it even more important for learners to study with updated materials that reflect the current DMV rules."

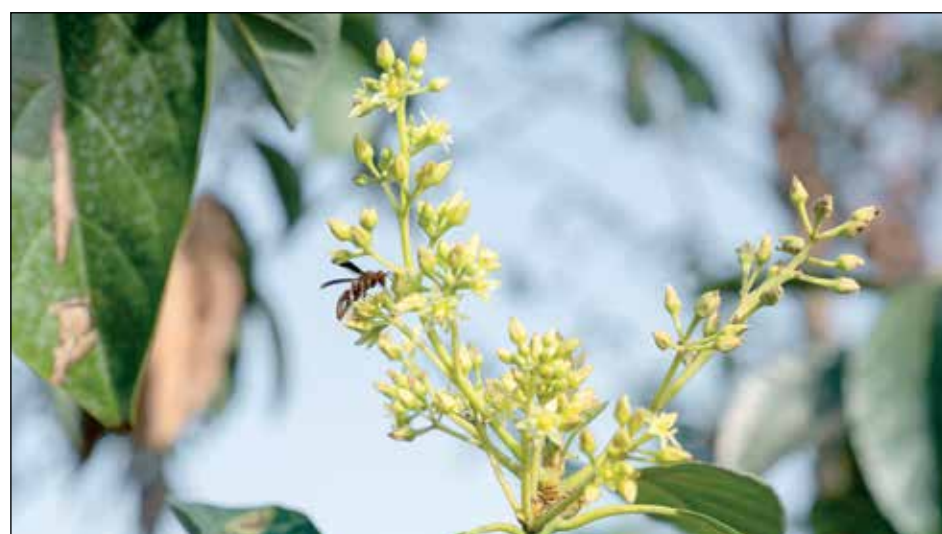
Zutobi has updated its Florida driver education courses and practice tests to reflect these 2026 requirements. The full report is available at zutobi.com.

UF/IFAS cold-hardy avocados poised to expand industry

NewsLine Staff

University of Florida scientists have confirmed that new cold-hardy avocado lines successfully survived the extreme freeze of January 2026, enduring temperatures as low as 17 degrees. This resilience marks a significant milestone, as commercial varieties like the Hass typically suffer damage below 26 degrees.

The success of these breeding lines could open avocado production to North Central Florida, offering local growers a new opportunity as western states face mounting water limitations



Avocado blossoms on one of the new cold-hardy varieties developed by UF/IFAS researchers. The flowers represent a potential shift in Florida's fruit industry following the January 2026 freeze.

and rising costs. José Chaparro, an associate professor of horticultural sciences at UF/IFAS, has led the 20-year effort to develop fruit that survives hard freezes while meeting commercial standards for size and oil content.

While researchers continue to refine peel durability and ripening characteristics to match consumer preferences, test plots are already in place with growers across the state. Officials believe providing cold resistance is the final piece of the puzzle to expanding Florida's role in the national avocado market by utilizing the state's available land and reliable water supply.



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

Q: Will your office hold a driver license reinstatement event again this year?

A: Yes. Between April 11 and April 25, our office will participate in Operation Green Light, a statewide initiative to help individuals with outstanding traffic tickets and court fines get back on the road. Drivers can make payments online at stjohnsclerk.com/OGL or by calling (904) 819-3600. To check the status of your driver license, visit services.flhsmv.gov/dlcheck.

Q: How does Operation Green Light help drivers?

A: More than 5,000 residents in St. Johns County currently have suspended licenses due to unpaid fines and court fees. During Operation Green Light, our Customer Care clerks

help participants save up to 40 percent on collection agency surcharges. Drivers with suspended licenses due to an expired payment plan may also be eligible to reinstate their license by updating their payment plan if all requirements are met. Statutory fees, late charges and DMV reinstatement fees may still apply.

Q: What other types of issues can the Customer Care team help residents with?

A: Our Customer Care clerks are highly skilled and cross-trained to provide both phone and in-person support across a wide range of services. They provide information related to court cases; assist with filings in civil and family cases; answer jury duty questions; provide details on marriage licenses and passport services; and

explain payment options for traffic tickets and fines.

Q: Why is customer service such a priority for your office?

A: Customer service remains a cornerstone of the Clerk's Office because it ensures residents and visitors receive timely, accurate and personal support — without the frustration of navigating automated phone systems. Our Customer Care clerks handle nearly 8,000 calls each month and are available during regular business hours to provide direct, personal assistance — whether you reach out by phone or visit our office in person.

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

A: For questions about Operation Green Light, or any of the services



Brandon Patty

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

Newcomers of North St. Johns announces April luncheon and book drive

By Michele Oliver

Newcomers of North St. Johns (NNSJ) invites members and guests to its upcoming luncheon on Monday, April 20, at 11 a.m. at Marsh Creek Country Club, 169 Marshside Drive, St. Augustine.

The event will feature a trivia game and the organization's annual book drive to benefit the St. Johns County Library System. Doors open at 10:30 a.m. The cost is \$38 for members and \$55 for guests. All reservations must be received by April 10.

Entertainment for the afternoon includes a special trivia game led by John Harrell of Fast Jax Trivia. Harrell, who

has hosted trivia for more than 11 years, will cover topics including music, movies, history, geography, sports, science, television and local trivia.

In addition to the program, NNSJ will hold its annual book drive.

"Our members continue to be generous in their support of community needs such as food banks and our local libraries," said Co-President Michele Oliver. "We look forward to making a sizable donation to the St. Johns County libraries so that our children and adults will benefit from reading throughout the summer and year."

The luncheon menu offers a choice of sliced beef tenderloin with demi-

glace, seasoned fingerling potatoes and asparagus; brown sugar glazed salmon with yellow rice and sautéed spinach; or linguine topped with a mushroom ragu. All entrées include warm rolls, citrus salad and cheesecake with berry topping. A cash bar will also be available, alongside traditional event raffles and a

50/50 drawing.

"In addition to fantastic luncheons, NNSJ offers a variety of activities for our members to connect and have fun including wine socials, golf, mah jongg, bingo, bunco, card games and special day trips," said Co-President Charlene Lim. "We continue to welcome new members from St. Johns, Duval and the surrounding areas."

For further information regarding the luncheon or membership, visit newcomersofnorthstjohns.org.



Pictured are Donna Fults, left, and Marta Mazo. Newcomers of North St. Johns members enjoyed a fun Mardi Gras themed luncheon in February.



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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative

1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	
11				12		13			14			
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59					60				61			
62					63					64		

CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Egyptian bull-god
- 5. Romanian monetary unit
- 8. Will Ferrell holiday film
- 11. "It Ain't Half Hot Mum" actor
- 13. Error-related negativity
- 14. Volcanic crater
- 15. Boston Herald columnist Margery
- 16. True market value
- 17. Italian term for exchange rate
- 18. Informal loan clubs
- 20. Men's fashion accessory
- 21. Children's craft supply
- 22. Extra benefits
- 25. In an early way
- 30. A judge has one
- 31. Soviet Socialist Republic
- 32. Tractor unit
- 33. Defunct supercomputer developer
- 38. Promotional materials
- 41. A forgetful state
- 43. One who beheads
- 45. Photographers
- 48. Small, rich sponge cake
- 49. Clergy's vestment
- 50. Expressed pleasure
- 55. Abba __, Israeli politician
- 56. Zero
- 57. Ancient Greek word for "earless"
- 59. Nigerian governmental area
- 60. Mild expression of surprise
- 61. Places to hang things
- 62. Keyboard key
- 63. Make a mistake
- 64. One-time president of Republic of Korea

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Bridge building degree
- 2. Expression of sorrow or pity
- 3. Large, stocky lizard
- 4. Romanian river
- 5. Communication
- 6. Stoats
- 7. Showcases
- 8. Bird of prey
- 9. King of Thebes
- 10. Cleaving tool
- 12. Large African antelope
- 14. Three are particularly notable
- 19. Meet one's needs
- 23. C. European river
- 24. Dictator
- 25. Indicates how much out of 100 (abbr.)
- 26. The 17th letter of the Greek alphabet
- 27. Consume food
- 28. Woman (French)
- 29. Scrape a surface
- 34. Green vegetable
- 35. Pacific Standard Time
- 36. Capital of Brazilian city
- 37. Paddle
- 39. Cause to become insane
- 40. Drier and flakier
- 41. Mimic
- 42. ESPN personality Kimes
- 44. One who moves slowly
- 45. Secret political clique
- 46. Behind the stern of a ship
- 47. Supernatural force
- 48. Sanctuary
- 51. Swiss river
- 52. Grayish white
- 53. Engrave by coating
- 54. North Carolina university
- 58. Midway between south and southeast

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Bartram Trail Newcomers Club to hold April luncheon

By Dawn Garrity

The Bartram Trail Newcomers Club will host its April luncheon on Tuesday, April 14, at the St. Johns Golf and Country Club in St. Augustine.

The event begins at 11 a.m. and will include both entertainment and a meal. The cost to attend is \$32 for those paying by cash or check. Attendees will

have a choice of three entrées: fire-grilled flat iron steak, rosemary roasted chicken breast or grilled cauliflower steak.

The upcoming gathering follows a successful March luncheon at the same location, which featured a St. Patrick's Day theme and a bagpipe performance by Pipin' Fla.

The Bartram Trail Newcomers Club is an organization dedicated to providing women with opportunities to learn about the community and foster fellowship through monthly meetings and social activities. Membership is open to all women in the area.

In addition to the monthly luncheons, the club hosts a variety of special interest groups. Members can participate

in activities such as bridge, continental rummy, pennies canasta, Mexican chicken train, bunco, mahjong and golf. Other offerings include a book club, nature walks, "Lunch Divas," "Girls Night Out" and various special events.

Those interested in joining or learning more about the club's activities are encouraged to visit the organization's Facebook page at facebook.com/BTNC.1.

How Rotary makes a difference in our local community

By Al Kalter

From packing meals for hungry children to helping build homes, members of the Rotary Club of Bartram Trail – Julington Creek are making a visible difference right here in St. Johns County. Rotary is the oldest and most international service organization in the world and has undertaken many projects around the globe to improve health, education and living conditions for countless people. But at its heart, Rotary is focused on its local communities, and the Rotary Club of Bartram Trail – Julington Creek does more than its share right here at home. Let's look at some of the ways that this local Rotary Club impacts our area.

Bartram Trail Rotarians have helped with the construction of a food pantry and provided other items for the Homeless Coalition of St. Johns County,



Photo courtesy Rotary Club of Bartram Trail – Julington Creek
The Homeless Coalition of St. Johns County benefits from its association with Bartram Trail Rotary, which provided a food pantry facility and other assistance.

which provides housing and services for more than 20 young families.

Club members recently spent a day packing meals for children at Feeding Northeast Florida, the largest, most efficient food bank serving a dozen local counties. Their food banks provide food for almost 100,000 neighbors in need every day.

Bartram Trail Rotary proudly works

with Habitat for Humanity in their ongoing home building efforts. Earlier this year, a team of Rotarians spent the day painting the exterior of a new home. Reportedly, they even got more paint on the house than on themselves!

Beyond food and housing, Rotary also supports organizations that restore dignity and hope. To assist the efforts of Rethreaded, a local charity serving survivors of human trafficking, our local Rotary Club provides warehouse volunteers to help sort and prepare merchandise for sale at their fundraising efforts.

Over the years, a favorite benefactor of Rotary volunteerism and donations has been the Betty Griffin Center, which provides services of hope and healing for victims of domestic and sexual assault in St. Johns County. Rotary participation has included funding for some much-needed renovations to their facilities and providing turkeys for their Thanksgiving dinners.

You may have driven by a group of Rotary volunteers picking up trash on Race Track Road, as part of the county's Adopt-a-Road program. Once each quarter, with reflective vests covering their red "Rotarian At Work" t-shirts, club members work with students from the Creekside High School Interact Club to keep the roadside looking good.

You'll also find Rotarians ringing the bell for the Salvation Army each December, assisting with parking and directions at the Alpine Groves Winter Festival, placing a ring of flags around the central courtyard at Westminster Woods for national holidays, and more. And, of course, Rotary makes financial contributions to many worthwhile organizations, both locally and globally, ensuring that our dollars do the most good for the most people.

Rotary invites everyone to assist in these efforts and more by participating in the club's largest fundraiser, its annual Pub Crawl, coming up on Saturday, April 18. Or, even better, by becoming a member and being part of all the good things that Rotary does. Either way, you'll be part of a group that believes service is both meaningful and enjoyable.

The Rotary Club of Bartram Trail – Julington Creek meets Thursday mornings, from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m., at Westminster Woods on Julington Creek. Guests and prospective members are always welcome. More information about our local club can be found at www.bartramtrailrotary.org.

Al Kalter is a member of the Rotary Club of Bartram Trail – Julington Creek.

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