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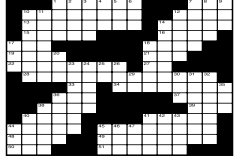
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OTTER MAGIC



Photo by Haley Harrison, Office of State Attorney R.J. Larizza

A young family member points to the portrait of former State Attorney Stephen Boyles during the dedication ceremony held at the S. James Foxman Justice Center.

State Attorney R.J. Larizza honors legacy of predecessors

NewsLine staff

State Attorney R.J. Larizza recently honored the legacy of the four former State Attorneys who served Florida's Seventh Judicial Circuit by hanging their portraits at the S. James Foxman Justice Center in Daytona Beach on Friday, March 27.

The office welcomed former State Attorneys John Tanner (1989 to 1992 and 1997 to 2008) and Steve Alexander (1993 to 1996), as well as the families of former State Attorneys Dan Warren (1962 to 1968) and Stephen Boyles (1969 to 1988), to the office to unveil the portraits. Also in attendance were several Seventh Judicial Circuit judges along with other local and state leaders.

R.J. Larizza cont. on pg. 2



Photo courtesy Ocean Palms Elementary PTO

Students work on a collaborative art piece during Ocean Palms Elementary's Family Night

Ocean Palms Elementary brings, art, STEM, fundraising and family together

By Lisa Farese,
Ocean Palms Elementary PTO

Ocean Palms Elementary hosted its annual Family Night this April in conjunction with an art showcase, STEM activities and the Otter Spirit Auction.



Photo courtesy Ocean Palms Elementary PTO

Face painting was among the many family-friendly activities featured during the event.

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Ocean Palms cont. on pg. 9

Landrum Middle School celebrates volunteers and staff

By Lisa Farese
Ocean Palms Elementary PTO



Photo courtesy Ocean Palms Elementary PTO

Volunteers Regan Cartwright, Lynne Jansen and Jasper Graham were recognized for their volunteer service to Landrum Middle School.

PONTE VEDRA BEACH — Regan Cartwright was named Landrum Middle School's Volunteer of the Year this year. As the current PTO president, a role she has served for the past year, and community partners chair, a position she has led for many years both at LMS and before at Ocean Palms Elementary School, bringing invaluable income to PTO projects and initiatives, her service is undeniable. School volunteers Lynne Jansen and Jasper Graham were also recognized for their service at LMS.

In addition to volunteer honors, the Landrum Middle School PTO recog-

nized teachers and staff this April with a "Landrum is Love" staff appreciation-themed week.

Monday, staff enjoyed coffee and donuts. Tuesday, staff munched on smoothies and fruit. A ramen luncheon accompanied Wednesday. And, finally, Thursday ended the week with pizza and salad. Additionally, students made notecards for all the staff, which were displayed at the school. Finally, the teachers and staff were all given a gift from the PTO. It was truly a heartfelt way to celebrate the LMS staff.



Photo courtesy Ocean Palms Elementary PTO

Regan Cartwright was named Landrum Middle School's Volunteer of the Year for her service as PTO president and community partners chair.



Photo courtesy Ocean Palms Elementary PTO

Staff members celebrate "Landrum is Love" week during the PTO-sponsored staff appreciation events.



Photo courtesy Ocean Palms Elementary PTO

Teachers and staff enjoy a pizza and salad luncheon, one of several themed meals provided during the week.



Photo courtesy Ocean Palms Elementary PTO

The Landrum Middle School media center served as a hub for staff appreciation activities throughout April.

R.J. Larizza cont. from pg. 1

At the ceremony, Larizza said that he spoke with the circuit court staff about this portrait initiative. Judges have their portraits in the courtrooms, he said, and questioned why past state attorneys should not be honored in the same way.

"I don't know of any job that is more demanding and more taxing on people, but you can't appreciate it unless and until you are in those shoes... Our job as state attorneys and as

prosecutors is to make justice happen, and that isn't always easy. Sometimes we try, and we fail. Sometimes we try, and we succeed... But we tried, and that is the important thing," Larizza said. "I'm real proud of the folks that I work with. I'm proud to be a part of this fraternity of state attorneys, and I'm proud today to be able to recognize the folks that have served in this capacity before I did."

Those honored represent decades of service to the citizens of Flagler, Putnam, St. Johns and Volusia counties.



Photo by Haley Harrison, Office of State Attorney R.J. Larizza

Portraits of four former State Attorneys who served Florida's Seventh Judicial Circuit now hang at the S. James Foxman Justice Center in Daytona Beach.

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Submissions

Community news and photos are due by the 10th of each month to ensure inclusion in the upcoming issue. Thank you for your support of trusted community journalism.

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BFF Best Furry Friend of the month



Meet Arthur!

- Breed:**
Chocolate Labrador
- Favorite activity:**
Digging in the sand at the beach,
playing fetch with any toys
- Favorite food:**
Treats
- Favorite friend:**
My human big brother, sister's
and everyone I meet
- How did your BFF get his name:**
My human brother

Do you have a cute pet? Send us your pet's picture and the answer to the five questions above before the 10th of the month. Also tell us you saw the BFF contest in First Coast NewsLine. Your pet could be our BFF of the month and appear in First Coast NewsLine! Email editor@floridanewslines.com to enter your pet.



Answers to our Puzzles PG 8

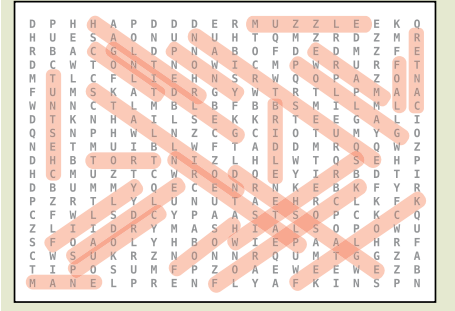
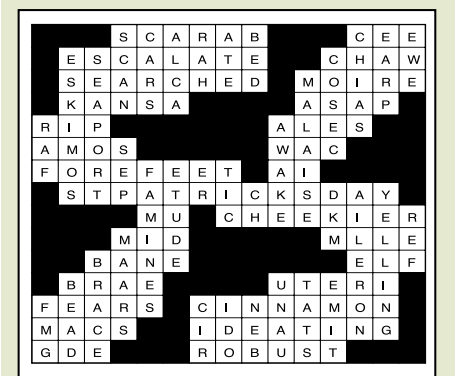


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Newcomers of North St. Johns to host May luncheon

By Michele Oliver

Newcomers of North Saint Johns (NNSJ) invites members and their guests to join the fun at our May luncheon on Tuesday, May 19, 2026, beginning at 11 a.m. at St. Johns Golf and Country Club, 205 St. Johns Club Drive, St. Augustine. Doors open at 10:30 a.m. Along with the installation of our NNSJ Board of Directors we will be celebrating Derby Days with a "Run for the Roses" theme.

Cost for the luncheon and program is \$35 for members and \$40 for guests. All reservations and payments must be received by May 11, 2026. For further information about the luncheon and membership, please go to the NNSJ

website at newcomersofnorthstjohns.org.

Luncheon includes entree choices of: Wood-Fired Roasted Chicken Galantine served with Parsley Potatoes and Roasted Red Pepper Sauce; Thyme-Crusted Pork Tenderloin served with Maple Glazed Sweet Potatoes or Vegetable Pasta Primavera topped with Sundried Tomato Sauce. Dessert is Chef's Choice. Beverages include iced tea, coffee and water. A cash bar is also available.

"Staying true to our theme of Derby Days, we ask that everyone wear their best Derby bonnet and be prepared to show off!" says Co-Vice President Dawn Coston. "We will be providing a photo

booth for all to have pictures taken and we'll be voting and awarding a prize for 'Best Hat'. Should be a fun day!"

The luncheon event also features the installation of our NNSJ Board of Directors for 2026-2028. "Our members who volunteer to serve on the Board and as Committee directors are really the engines that drive NNSJ to be one of the best social organizations in St. Johns County," says Co-President Michele Oliver, who is completing her last term as Co-President.

"We're looking forward to continuing to serve our members and bringing them fun and educational programs through our luncheon meetings and other activities," adds Charlene Lim

who will continue to serve on the Executive Board in her leadership role as Co-President.

As always, raffles for gift baskets and a fun 50-50 drawing spice up our NNSJ luncheons. And, perhaps you will win one of our beautiful centerpieces!

NNSJ offers a wide variety of activities for our members to stay connected and have fun including smaller lunch groups, Bunco, Canasta, wine socials, golf, Mah Jongg, a walking group, day trips and cultural events. Learn more about NNSJ by going to our website and meet your next new best friend!

Michele Oliver is Co-President, Newcomers of North St. Johns

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May

Community Calendar What's Happening in St. Johns

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

May 1

Savvy Job Hunters Virtual Workshop

The Savvy Job Hunters Ministry of Christ Episcopal Church will host a free virtual workshop, "Networking Strategies for Job Leads," Friday, May 1, from 10:30 a.m. to noon. Participants can learn how to optimize social media and other resources to expand their job leads network with the goal of transforming passive network connections into active promoters. The workshop will be presented by Chad Sorenson, SHRM-SCP, SPHR, president of Adaptive HR Solutions, LLC. Email Pam Ottesen at savvyjobs@ccpvb.org to receive the Zoom meeting link.

May 2

Cruisin' with Cops

The St. Augustine Beach Police Department will host a fun and safe community bike ride Saturday, May 2, at 4 p.m. for ages 14 and under. The event features a one-mile ride with safety stops throughout the way. RSVP is required by April 27 by emailing contact@sabpd.org.

May 3

Caribbean Night

The Ponte Vedra Woman's Club will host Caribbean Night Sunday, May 3, from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. at The Local Ponte Vedra Beach. The evening features a buffet, one signature drink, live music and a 50-50 raffle. All proceeds benefit local charities. The Betty Griffin Center will be onsite to collect clothing and home donations. Cost is \$45 per person.

May 4

Ponte Vedra Democratic Club Monthly Meeting

The Ponte Vedra Democratic Club will meet

Monday, May 4, at 6 p.m. at Christ Episcopal Church, 400 San Juan Road, Ponte Vedra Beach. The meeting features Rachel Grage and Alex Hazen, Democratic candidates for Florida's 5th District U.S. Congressional seat, in a "Meet the Press" format answering questions on topics such as health care, affordability, immigration and Middle East conflicts.

May 5

Juror Appreciation Month Designation

St. Johns County will formally designate May as Juror Appreciation Month during its meeting. The designation recognizes local residents empowered to uphold justice through fair and impartial trials.

May 5

Vicar's Landing Boutique and Cottage Sale

Vicar's Landing will host its monthly boutique and cottage sale Tuesday, May 5, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the main Vicar's Landing-Sawgrass Community Building. The boutique sale features jewelry, including 14- and 18-karat gold, sterling silver, costume and designer pieces; knick-knacks starting at \$1; and framed and unframed art in the hall. The Blue Heron will also have items available. The monthly cottage sale includes antiques, household items, home furnishings and decorative art. The public is welcome. Signs at the entrance will point the way to all shopping venues. Cash or checks only. All proceeds benefit the Vicar's Employee Scholarship Fund.

May 6

Coastal Friends Luncheon

Coastal Friends will host its monthly luncheon featuring guest speaker Quang Pham, author of "Underdog Nation," Wednesday, May 6, from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Marsh Landing Country Club, 25655 Marsh Landing Parkway, Ponte Vedra

Beach. Cost is \$25. Advance reservations must be made by April 29 by contacting bartshar@comcast.net.

May 12

Bartram Trail Newcomers Club Luncheon

The Bartram Trail Newcomers Club will host its May installation luncheon Tuesday, May 12, at 11 a.m. at St. Johns Golf and Country Club in St. Augustine. Attendees have a choice of fire-roasted chicken, thyme-crusted pork tenderloin or vegetable pasta. Cost is \$32 (cash or check). Visit facebook.com/BTNC.1 for details.

May 19

Newcomers of North St. Johns Luncheon

Newcomers of North St. Johns (NNSJ) will host its May luncheon Tuesday, May 19, beginning at 11 a.m. at St. Johns Golf and Country Club, 205 St. Johns Club Drive, St. Augustine. Doors open at 10:30 a.m. The event features the installation of the Board of Directors and a "Run for the Roses" Derby theme. Visit newcomersofnorthstjohns.org for more information.

May 20

Ponte Vedra Woman's Club Meeting

The Ponte Vedra Woman's Club will hold its Charity Check Presentations and Year End Activities Wednesday, May 20, at 6 p.m. at Marsh Landing Country Club.

May 21

Democratic Town Hall

U.S. House of Representatives candidates Mark Heggstad and Ronnie Murchinson-Rivera will host a town hall meeting Thursday, May 21, at 6:30 p.m. at The Center for Spiritual Living, 1795 Old Moultrie Road, St. Augustine. Registration is required at act.stjohnsdemocrats.org.

May 23

Ponte Vedra Writers Meeting

The Ponte Vedra Writers will meet Saturday, May 23, at 11 a.m. in the Media Room of the Ocean Grove Condominiums, 1 Arbor Club Drive. Retired psychotherapist turned mystery writer Cassandra Lamb will present "Writing Psychology Right," addressing common myths about psychological issues and emotional wounds as well as errors that writers commonly make. The meeting is free and open to the public.

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

Q: Florida's legislative session ended March 13. Has any legislation passed effecting elections?

A: Yes. Florida HB 991 (2026) was approved by the governor and signed into law on April 1, 2026. The law takes effect on Jan. 1, 2027.

Q: What is the main purpose of Florida HB 991 (2026)?

A: The bill aims to strengthen election integrity by tightening voter registration and identification requirements, including verifying U.S. citizenship and updating election procedures.

Q: What new ID requirement does HB 991 place on voters?

A: Beginning Jan. 1, 2027, individuals registering to vote must provide documentary proof of U.S. citizenship. Acceptable documents may include a REAL ID-compliant driver's license, birth certificate, U.S. passport, or naturalization or citizenship records.

Q: How does the bill change the voter registration process?

A: Applicants must affirm under oath that they are U.S. citizens, and their citizenship must be verified through state records, such as those maintained by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

Q: What happens if a voter's citizenship cannot be verified?

A: The voter will be designated as an "unverified voter" and must vote using a provisional ballot. The ballot will only be counted if citizenship is confirmed within the required timeframe.

Q: Were there any changes to ID rules at the polls?

A: Yes. The bill narrows the list of acceptable voter IDs at polling places by



Vicky Oakes

eliminating student IDs and retirement home or assisted living facility IDs. These changes take effect Jan. 1, 2027, after the 2026 elections.

For a current list of acceptable IDs for the 2026 elections, please visit votesjc.gov.

Q: Some readers have questions about Florida's permitless carry law. Does this allow voters to carry a firearm in the polling place?

A: No. The public carrying of firearms, whether concealed with a license or under permitless carry, remains prohibited in certain locations under Section 790.06(12)(a)(6), Florida Statutes. This includes early voting sites and Election Day polling places.

Q: Does this include law enforcement?

A: A sworn law enforcement officer who has been authorized by their agency to vote while on duty, and who is carrying a firearm in the course of their official duties, may carry a firearm into a polling place while voting or when present on official business at the request of the Elections Office.



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

Q: How will your Office recognize public service during the month of May?

A: On May 5, 2026, St. Johns County will formally designate May as Juror Appreciation Month, recognizing local residents who are empowered to uphold justice and protect citizens' rights through fair and impartial trials.

Q: How does jury duty reflect public service?

A: As a critical public service that often goes unnoticed, jurors play a direct role in protecting our rights and maintaining the integrity of our courts. A jury is the voice of justice, ensuring our legal system remains fair, impartial and grounded in the will of the people. I would encourage residents to view jury selection as an opportunity to serve your community as an effective part of the judicial process.

Q: What is the role of the clerk's office in jury management?

A: Our office manages the summoning and organizing of prospective jurors reporting for jury duty. More than 500 jury summonses are issued each month to residents using information provided by the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles.

Upon receiving the notice, those being summoned are welcome to check in online and may request excusals or deferrals based on their personal situation. The selection process begins with a large pool of names that are qualified and pared down to a panel of six to 12 selected jurors.

After a judge qualifies 50 to 100 prospective jurors, they are sent to the courtroom for a process known as voir dire, which involves questioning by the judge and lawyers. Throughout the process, our clerks work to ensure jury service is efficient, effective and not unduly burdensome.



Brandon Patty

Q: Why is the right to a jury trial important, and what responsibility do we have when called to serve as jurors?

A: The right to a jury trial is a fundamental cornerstone of America, enshrined in the U.S. Constitution to ensure that justice is not decided solely by government officials, but by a group of impartial peers. A jury of peers offers a fair and balanced verdict, safeguarding against potential bias or overreach by a single judge. When we're called to serve, we share the responsibility of upholding this right for others. We should approach the role with integrity and fairness, striving to be the kind of juror we'd want to decide our own case if we were involved in a civil or criminal trial.

Q: How can people get in touch with you?

A: For questions about jury duty, or the services we provide at the Clerk's Office, our Customer Care Call Center is available Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., at 904-819-3600, 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.



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A month of celebration and gratitude

By Kelly Barrera
St. Johns County School Board

May is such a fun and exciting time of year as we celebrate, appreciate and graduate!

Our students, teachers, staff and administrators have been working hard all year long learning, connecting and developing. May brings fun celebrations of all that has been accomplished and a bittersweet close to the school year. Our high school seniors are finishing their final exams and graduations are set to begin on May 18.

We are so incredibly grateful to all of our students, families, teachers and staff for their commitment and efforts that continue to make each of our schools successful.

I would like to highlight some special recognitions. In April, students were selected from each high school to represent the junior and senior classes for the American Youth Character Awards. From Allen D. Nease High School Pip-



Kelly Barrera

er Crecco, Lance DAmato, Audrey Jovel, and Luke Porter, Sydney Minx, Kayla Fitzgerald, William Gould, Kael Kincaid – Stewart, Sydney Lewis, Kevin Naranjo, Elizabeth Parker, Willie Thompson and Abigail Turner received awards. From Ponte Vedra High School Rachel Marino, Alexandria Mitisis, Asher Sutaria, Clare Wyant, Jack

Bergquist, Aurora Cook, Aiden Cristofono, Olivia Kaminsky, Austin Koziarski, Autumn Natal, Natalia Otero, Ivanka Rodriguez and Marge Scherz were awarded.

Our Valley Ridge Academy Team, coached by media specialist Lisa Barnette, won the Battle of the Books competition. The students competing included Valerie Jones, Keegan McCann, Liam McCallion, Mukil Kannan, Hannah Weirda, Madilyn Wert and Finn Wierda.

Our students and music directors were also recognized for their musical talents and progression during the Florida Allstate ensembles conference,

attended by over 10,000 people. In District 4, both Mark Stevens, music director of Landrum Middle School, and Stephen Panoff, music director from Pine Island Academy, were recognized for their hard work and dedication in developing enriching programs for students to thrive.

Congratulations to our St. Johns County Dr. Martin Luther King poster and essay contest winners which included Landrum Middle School students Gabriel Spohn, Noah Olomu and Paulina Tawk, who were awarded first, second and third place respectively in the middle school essay division for the school district. Ponte Vedra High School student Kate Mase was awarded first place in the high school poster contest.

Our teachers, staff and school administrators could not do what they do for students without the help of our many volunteers. And our school district has amazing volunteers that continue to connect with our students, assist our teachers, staff and administrators, supply additional equipment and support and provide real-world experience in our schools. Thank you so much to each

of you.

We recently were given the opportunity to share our appreciation to the volunteer of the year from each school. From District 4, these wonderful volunteers were recognized: Jasper Graham, Beatty Muserallo, Zoie Cuevas, Regan Cartwright, Christina Cummings, Jay Herigwl, Lindsay Carrao, Ashling Gilligan, Francis Houston and Marcy Jolles, Lynne Jansen, Steve Koran and Teresa Lyons.

The St. Johns County Youth Volunteer of the Year was Shreya Sharma who attends Nease High School and in second place Makenna Crim attending Ponte Vedra High School. Our Adult District Volunteer of the Year was Sierra Boyce from Ocean Palms.

Lastly, congratulations to our Nease NJROTC program for another outstanding achievement at the National Championships! Earning a spot among the top 23 teams and finishing third overall is an amazing accomplishment. Their hard work, dedication and teamwork really paid off. It's a proud moment for the school and the entire community.

First Coast Cultural Center to host 'Layers of Art' exhibition

NewsLine staff

"Layers of Art," a collection of thought-provoking, surrealistic oil and watercolor paintings by Susanne Schuenke, Ph.D., will be on display at First Coast Cultural Center beginning with an opening reception Thursday, April 23, from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. The reception is open to the public, with a suggested donation of \$5 per person, and no tickets are needed. "Layers of Art" will run through Thursday, June 18, at FCCC, 6000B Sawgrass Village Circle, Ponte Vedra.

"Schuenke's collection offers an exciting blend of engaging, scholarly and adventurous work," according to Silvia Romero, FCCC's executive director. Romero adds that in addition to this two-month exhibition, the artist will host an enlighten-

ing presentation discussing the deep layers of her creations on Friday, May 1, at 10 a.m. The cost for this presentation is \$15 for future members and \$10 for members.

"I put a lot of meaning into my art and consider it my task to nourish your eyes with beauty and stimulate your intellect with questions and answers," explains Schuenke, who is a native of Düsseldorf, Germany, earning her degrees at the University of Cologne. During her presentation on May 1, she plans to detail how each layer of a painting adds to the meaning of the piece, comparing it to a delicious food creation with ingredients coming together in a meaningful way.

"I want to share understanding and draw a person into a limitless world of imagina-



Photo courtesy First Coast Cultural Center

Artist Susanne Schuenke, Ph.D., stands with her work. Her collection, "Layers of Art," will be on display at the First Coast Cultural Center through June 18.

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St Johns County resident since 1993

tion," adds Schuenke. The Jacksonville resident is a seasoned artist and author with a long list of solo and group shows and paintings exhibited in public, corporate and private collections around the world.

Reach out to sromero@firstcoastculturalcenter.org with any questions

about the exhibition or upcoming programs, camps, classes and events. There are still some spots open for the "Up, Up, and Away!" Summer Art Camps for children ages six through 12, and these adventures will be held Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at FCCC.

St. Johns County School District releases latest facts and figures

NewsLine staff

The St. Johns County School District (SJCSD) has released its latest “Fast Facts” resource, providing a comprehensive look at the growth, performance and operations of the county’s largest employer and its 54 schools.

According to the district, total student enrollment reached 52,662 as of April 2026. The district currently operates 18 elementary schools, 12 academies, seven middle schools and nine high schools, along with technical, alternative, virtual and charter options. Growth remains a primary focus, with Magnolia Oaks Academy and Sabal Crest Academy scheduled to open in August 2026.

The district continues to be recognized as one of Florida’s highest-performing public school systems. Students rank first in the state for performance in reading, mathematics, science and End-of-Course (EOC) exams. Additionally, the district boasts a 97.1% graduation rate, significantly higher than the Florida state average of 92.2%.

Beyond academics, the district is the largest employer in St. Johns County, supporting 6,776 full- and part-time employees. This includes 3,625 instructional staff and 2,894 support staff members.

“We hope you’ll find this resource helpful in supporting your conversations and sharing accurate, up-to-date information with our community,” said Administrative Assistant Jill Sumner.

The district’s innovative programs include 29 Career and Technical Education (CTE) academies that offer hands-on learning aligned with high-demand careers. The district also maintains a strong partnership with the St. Johns County Sheriff’s Office to ensure a safe learning environment.

Residents can access the full district facts page and regular updates by visiting the school district website at stjohns.k12.fl.us/about.

Submitted by Jill Sumner, Administrative Assistant for St. Johns County School District

Photo courtesy St. Johns County School District

The St. Johns County School District’s latest “Fast Facts” provides a snapshot of enrollment, staffing and academic achievements across the county’s 54 schools.

Gardening

By Connie Doyle,
Master Gardener UF/IFAS

Right plant, right place: Smart substitutes for coastal Florida gardens

This is the month to enjoy the fruits of our labor and the beauty of our spring gardens; walking the pebbled paths in the early morning, sipping coffee and the cool breezy evenings, wine glass in hand. Take note of plants thriving... and those declining. One of the most common frustrations I hear from gardeners in Ponte Vedra and Palm Valley is this: “I planted it and then watched it decline.” More often than not, the issue isn’t how

the plant was cared for—it’s that the plant simply wasn’t suited for our coastal conditions.

Gardening along the northeast Florida coast comes with unique challenges. Sandy soil drains quickly, salt air can damage sensitive foliage and our heat and humidity can stress plants that thrive in cooler climates. The key to success is simple: Right Plant, Right Place — one of the key

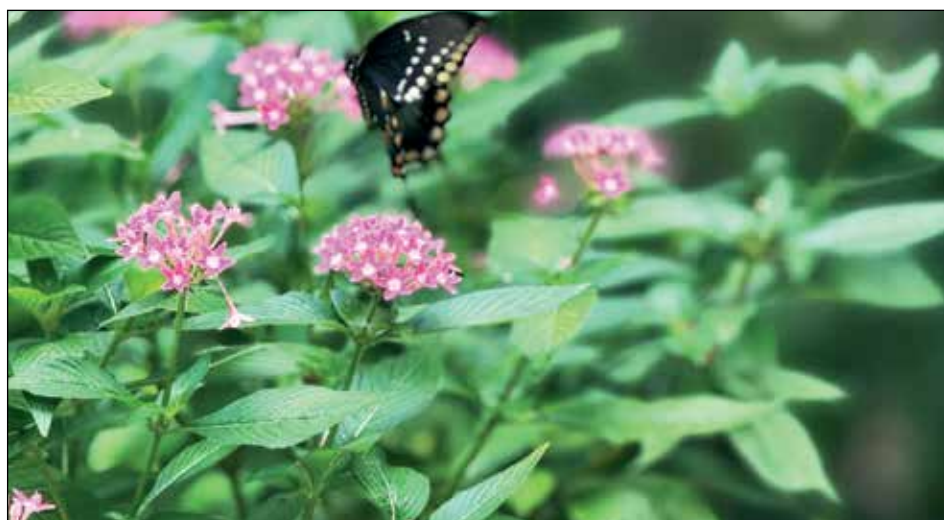


Photo courtesy Connie Doyle
Garden flower



Connie Doyle

principles of UF | IFAS’ nine principles of Florida-Friendly Gardening.

A good example is gardenia. While loved for its fragrant white blooms, gardenias often struggle in our sandy, alkaline soils and are sensitive to salt. A better choice is Simpson’s stopper, a Florida native shrub that produces delicate flowers, attracts birds and handles coastal conditions with ease.

Many gardeners also try to grow lavender, only to watch it decline in our humidity. Instead, consider gaillardia, more commonly known as blanket flower. It thrives in heat, tolerates poor soil and provides long-lasting color throughout the warmer months.

For those who love large showy blooms, peony and lilac are often disappointing choices due to their need for cold winters. A more reliable option is hibiscus or sweet almond bush, both of which flourish in Florida’s warmth and offer beautiful, often fragrant blooms.

If you are drawn to tall, colorful flower spikes like delphinium, try salvia, gaura

or society garlic. All not only handle our climate well but also attract bees, butterflies and hummingbirds — making them a great addition to any garden.

Shady flower beds can also be tricky. Traditional impatiens often struggle with disease and heat, while pentas provide reliable color and thrive in both sun and partial shade.

Even classic favorites like hydrangea macrophylla and Japanese maple can be difficult to grow successfully here. Instead, consider oakleaf hydrangea or dahoon holly, both of which are better adapted to Florida’s climate and soils.

And while tulip bulbs rarely perform well due to our mild winters, amaryllis offers a dependable and striking alternative with bold seasonal blooms.

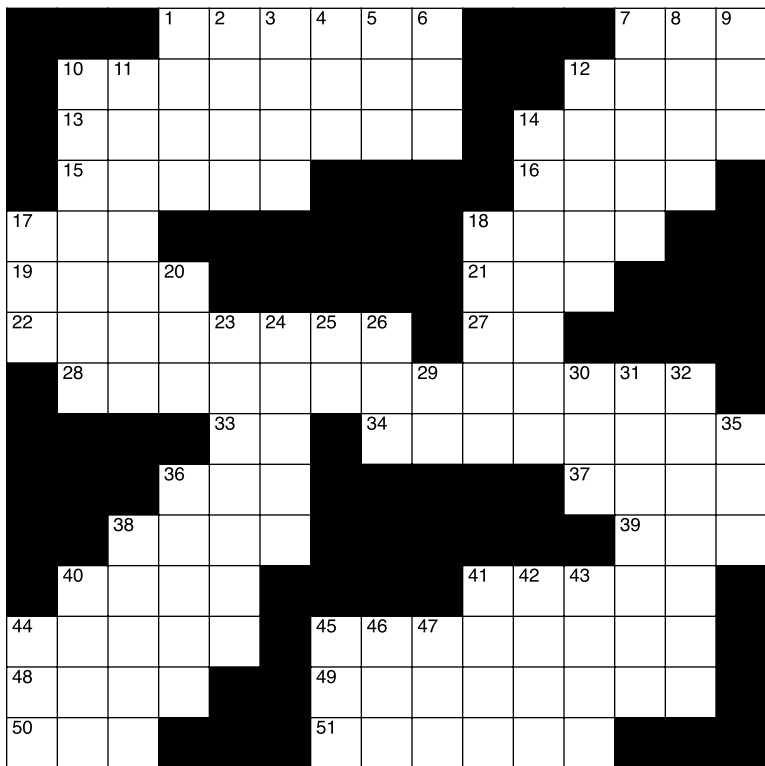
The takeaway is simple: gardening success in northeast Florida doesn’t come from working harder — it comes from choosing plants that naturally thrive here. By selecting the right substitutes, you can create a landscape that is not only beautiful but also resilient, low-maintenance and perfectly suited to life along the coast.

Meet you in the garden...

Connie Doyle writes The Good Earth, a gardening column inspired by a lifelong passion for plants, nature, and the peaceful rhythm of the garden. With more time in retirement, she has been inspired to take that passion to the next level — learning, growing, and sharing with others in our community by way of earning her Master Gardener Certification. Connie can be reached by email to mail@floridanewsline.com.

Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Large dung beetle | 28. Beloved March holiday |
| 7. Gambling game __-lo | 33. 12th letter of the Greek alphabet |
| 10. Further along | 34. More impudent |
| 12. Type of tobacco | 36. Indicates center |
| 13. Looked for | 37. Young woman (French) |
| 14. Silk fabric | 38. A cause of distress |
| 15. Computer method to solve equations | 39. Santa's helper |
| 16. As fast as can be done (abbr.) | 40. Hillside |
| 17. Tear | 41. Many wombs |
| 18. Brews | 44. Is afraid of |
| 19. "Famous" cookie baker | 45. Popular baked goods ingredient |
| 21. Women's Army Corps | 48. Popular computers |
| 22. Front parts of an animal | 49. Conceiving of |
| 27. It's causing quite a stir | 50. Google certification (abbr.) |
| | 51. Sturdy |

CLUES DOWN

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Peruse quickly | 25. Trauma center |
| 2. Automobiles | 26. Habitual twitching |
| 3. Razorbill genus | 29. A place where checks are exchanged (abbr.) |
| 4. Bravo! Bravo! Bravo! | 30. Decameter |
| 5. Consumed | 31. Hinged surface in a wing |
| 6. A place to sleep | 32. Shouting |
| 7. Small seeds | 35. Sports official |
| 8. Legendary law man Wyatt | 36. Volcanic craters |
| 9. Female sheep | 38. Supportive device |
| 10. Indigenous peoples of eastern Siberia | 40. It's part of a rosary |
| 11. A place ships dock | 41. Two-toed sloth |
| 12. Reciprocal of sine | 42. Body art |
| 14. Discomfort | 43. Let out |
| 17. British Air Aces | 44. Foreign medical graduate |
| 18. Exit sleep | 45. Nonprofit journalism organiz (abbr.) |
| 20. Solar energetic particle | 46. Couples say it |
| 23. Plagues characterized by starvation | 47. Bird's beak |
| 24. Short musical composition | |

LOVING HORSES WORD SEARCH

D P H H A P D D D E R M U Z Z L E E K Q
 H U E S A O N U N U H T Q M Z R D Z M R
 R B A C G L D P N A B O F D E D M Z F E
 D C W T O N T N O W I C M P W R U R F T
 M T L C F L I E H N S R W Q O P A Z O N
 F U M S K A T D R G Y W T R T L P M A A
 W N N C T L M B L B F B B S M I L M L C
 D T K N H A I L S E K K R T E E G A L I
 Q S N P U H W L N Z C G C I O T U M Y G O
 N E T M U I B L W F T A D D M R Q W Z
 D H B T O R T N I Z L H L W T Q S E H P
 H C M U Z T C W R O D Q E Y I R B D T I
 D B U M M Y Q E C E N R N K E B K F Y R
 P Z R T L Y L U N U T A E H R C L K F K
 C F W L S D C Y P A A S T S O P C K C Q
 Z L I I D R Y M A S H I A L S O P O W U
 S F O A O L Y H B O W I E P A A L H R F
 C W S U K R Z N O N N R Q U M T G G Z A
 T I P O S U M F P Z O A E W E E W E Z B
 M A N E L P R E N F L Y A F K I N S P N

WORDS

- BRIDLE
- CANTER
- CHESTNUT
- COLT
- CROUP
- DRESSAGE
- EQUESTRIAN
- FETLOCK
- FILLY
- FOAL
- FORELOCK
- GALLOP
- GELDING
- HALTER
- HOOF
- MANE
- MARE
- MUZZLE
- PASTERN
- PONY
- SADDLE
- STALLION
- TROT
- WITHERS

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



Solve the code to discover words related to horses.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 16 = D)

A. 12 23 18 17

Clue: Balances horse

B. 10 18 16 15 10

Clue: Passenger

C. 6 23 16 16 17 15

Clue: Riding accessory

D. 3 23 16 16 22 11 19

Clue: Small enclosure

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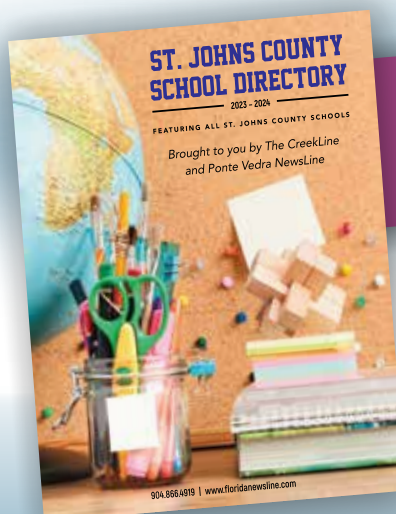
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St. Johns County women and children to benefit from record donation

By Jennifer Price

The Ponte Vedra Woman's Club (PVWC) has reached a record fundraising goal since being established in 1970, exceeding \$110,000 in total funds raised this year. The financial boost is intended to make a difference in the lives of local St. Johns County women and children.

The club presented scholarship checks to three winners on April 15 at Marsh Landing Country Club. Recipients Layla Harvey, Catherine Houston and Kalee Lechleidner each received \$5,000 toward their education.

The PVWC will continue its check presentations during year-end activities on Wednesday, May 20, at 6 p.m.



Photo courtesy Ponte Vedra Woman's Club

Scholarship recipients Layla Harvey and Catherine Houston were among the three winners awarded \$5,000 each by the Ponte Vedra Woman's Club.



Photo courtesy Ponte Vedra Woman's Club

Members of the Ponte Vedra Woman's Club celebrate reaching a record fundraising goal of \$110,000 for local charities.

at Marsh Landing Country Club. The funds support several local organizations, including:

- Betty Griffin Center: Provides shelter and services for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.
- BEAM: Helps low-income residents in Jacksonville's beach communities.
- Mission House: Operates as the only day facility to meet the needs of people who are homeless at the beaches through compassion, faith and programs designed to provide individual assistance.
- Port in the Storm: Serves as the only homeless youth shelter in St. Johns

County for individuals ages 18 to 24.

- Florida School for the Deaf and Blind: Provides tuition-free education for students from across Florida who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired or deaf-blind.

"I have served for the last two years as the Ponte Vedra Woman's Club President and am thrilled to have been elected for another two years," said President Anne Urban. "We have doubled our fundraising and our membership this past year. We are proud to share we now have 190 PV Woman's Club members!"

For more information, visit pontevedra-womansclub.com.



Photo courtesy Ocean Palms Elementary PTO

An interactive art display in the cafeteria allows students to step into famous works of art.



Photo courtesy Ocean Palms Elementary PTO

A student poses with artwork on display during the school-wide art adventure.

Ocean Palms cont. from pg. 1

OPE's Family Night featured inflatables, a game truck, a DJ, a candy walk, face painting, balloon art, the book fair and food provided by Jersey Mike's and Trasca. Otter families could relax, enjoy time with family and friends and come together as a community, thanks to this event, which was sponsored by Ponte Vedra Pediatric Dentistry and Orthodontics.



Photo courtesy Ocean Palms Elementary PTO

Families enjoyed a night of community and fun at Ocean Palms Elementary.

Additionally, families were taken on an art adventure as part of a collaborative effort between the PTO Children's Access to Art Program chairs and OPE's art teacher. With student work lining the hallways throughout the school and a special, interactive art display in the cafeteria, students showed their families their unique pieces of work, created some of their own and families could even bid on the collaborative art pieces created by all students in each grade. Finally, the media center was home to a choir performance and poetry readings.

STEM was also celebrated with hands-on activities throughout the night. These activities were led and sponsored by Code Ninjas.

Finally, families checked out the Otter Spirit Auction filled with live shows, tours, vacations, summer camps and more. The auction raised over \$30,000, which will go back to support OPE.



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Photo by Debi Lander

The Virgin River winds through the canyon floor, offering cool shade and beautiful reflections for hikers.



Photo by Debi Lander

A scenic hiking path leads through the towering sandstone cliffs and sculpted red rock formations of Zion.

Travel

Zion National Park: Big rock wonders and riverside trails

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewline.com

I recently flew to Las Vegas, then drove to two of America's standout national parks: Zion and Bryce Canyon. Both had been on my wish list for years. This month, I'll start with Zion, one of Utah's most dramatic landscapes.



Debi Lander

Zion's towering sandstone cliffs glow in layered shades of rust and cream, while the Virgin River winds through a deep canyon. Despite its popularity and crowds, Zion still offers moments of quiet beauty, especially in the early morning or late afternoon light.

Getting there is straightforward. Most visitors fly into Harry Reid International Airport in Las Vegas, Nevada, then drive nearly three hours northeast, briefly passing through Arizona before reaching the park's main entrance in Springdale, Utah. The scenic drive itself sets the tone, shifting from desert plains to sculpted red rock formations as you approach.

Once inside the park, private vehicles are restricted along the main canyon

road for most of the year. Instead, a free and efficient shuttle system transports visitors to trailheads and viewpoints. It is easy to use, but expect lines during peak times.

The shuttle delivers you to Zion Canyon Scenic Drive, where massive canyon walls rise thousands of feet overhead. If you are fortunate enough to stay at the Zion Lodge, the only in-park lodging, you can drive partway into this area. This saves time and makes it easier to access the other main road without re-entering through the busy entrance gate.

For an easy start, the Lower Emerald Pool Trail offers a gentle stroll to small waterfalls and shaded alcoves, although water flow can be limited depending on the season. Another favorite is the Riverside Walk at the end of the shuttle route. This paved path follows the Virgin River, offering cool shade and beautiful reflections. At the trail's end, more adventurous hikers can continue into The Narrows, where the river becomes the trail itself. Walking between

towering canyon walls with water swirling around your legs creates a uniquely immersive experience, but you'll need proper gear.

More ambitious visitors set their sights on Angels Landing, one of the park's most famous hikes. The final section climbs a narrow ridge with steep drop-offs on both sides, aided by chains bolted into the rock. Permits are required, and this hike is best suited for those who are very fit and comfortable with heights.

Photographers appreciate the Canyon Overlook Trail near the east entrance. I began this mile-long hike before sunrise and found it unnerving in the dark, but the return trip in daylight felt far easier. The view at sunrise, if you get one, is worth the effort, as the cliffs glow with warm color and dramatic contrast.

After dark, Zion's low light pollution makes it an excellent place for stargazing.

Beyond hiking, visitors enjoy e-bikes, horseback rides or simply slowing down. An open-air tram tour offers historical background. Whether you watch climbers scale sheer cliffs or sit and listen to the breeze move through cottonwood

trees, Zion encourages you to absorb the landscape.

In addition to lodging inside the park, Springdale offers numerous hotels and restaurants just outside the entrance. Be prepared for crowds, however. Even early in the morning, lines for the shuttle form quickly. And do not expect good cell service in the region.

Whether you visit for a day or stay longer, Zion's soaring cliffs, winding river and ever-changing light leave a lasting impression. Some come for the challenge of its most demanding hikes, others for the scenery. Either way, nature takes center stage, and visitors enjoy the ride.

Debi Lander is an award-winning travel writer and photographer who blends her passion for history, culture, food, and personal discovery into captivating stories. Through her website Bylandersea.com and her long-running travel column for Florida Newsline, she explores destinations from small U.S. towns to iconic global landmarks. She hopes her storytelling and practical insights inspire readers to experience the world with curiosity, appreciation, and a sense of adventure. Debi can be reached by email to mail@floridanewline.com.



Photo by Debi Lander

The stone entrance sign welcomes visitors to Zion National Park, one of Utah's most dramatic landscapes.

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