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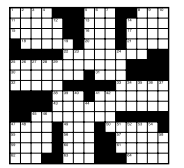
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Homegrown Highway



Residents and local master gardeners install the first native plant demonstration garden at Westminster Woods on Julington Creek.

William Bartram Scenic and Historic Highway Sparks Native Plant Initiative

NewsLine staff

The William Bartram Scenic and Historic Highway, our 17-mile-long State Road 13 along the St. Johns River from Julington Creek south to Wards Creek, has become the first scenic byway recognized by Homegrown National Park, according to a

recent release. The partnership encourages residents, businesses, schools and community groups to play a direct role by planting native species and reducing invasive plants across the broader byway corridor.

Named for 18th-century naturalist William Bartram, who documented

the region's rich plant and animal life, the byway provides a fitting setting for this work, a recent release stated. Organizers say the goal is not large-scale transformation overnight, but steady, achievable progress driven by local participation.

'Highway' cont. on pg. 2

Julington Creek Elementary 'Girls on the Run' completes spring season

By NewsLine staff

The Girls on the Run (GOTR) teams at Julington Creek Elementary School completed their 2026 spring season on April 11 when they participated in the GOTR Celebration 5K at the University of North Florida, according to a recent release. There were a lot of impressive times

and a ton of smiles at the finish line, a recent release stated.

During this season, the teams completed the new Hello, Bold Heart! curriculum where they learned valuable skills involving resilience, teamwork and goal setting, noted



A Girls on the Run participant from Julington Creek Elementary School celebrates with raised arms as she crosses the finish line at the Celebration 5K.

'Girls on the Run' cont. on pg. 2



Photo courtesy St. Johns County School District
An RSVP volunteer works one-on-one with a local student on a reading activity.

Summer reading volunteer opportunity

NewsLine staff

If you are willing to spend a little time this summer helping others, there is an opportunity waiting for you, according to a recent release.

Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of St. Johns County is looking for community members to assist once a week in the summer reading program in the St. Johns County School District, a recent release stated.

RSVP is a community-impact initiative that empowers adults aged 55 and older to volunteer as tutors, mentors and classroom assistants in local schools. Sponsored by the St. Johns County School District, the program gives seniors a meaningful way to stay active while directly supporting student achievement, a recent release explained.

"There are students who can greatly benefit from the help of those will-

'Volunteer' cont. on pg. 2

'Volunteer' cont. from pg.1

ing to give just a small amount of their time,” said Cheryl Freeman, RSVP director, in a recent release. “Assistance from community volunteers can make all the difference in helping these students succeed.”

Orientation will be provided, and background screening will be performed free of charge, noted a recent release.

For more information, contact RSVP at 904-547-3952 or cheryl.freeman@stjohns.k12.fl.us, per a recent release.

'Highway' cont. from pg.1

Rather than focusing solely on roadside improvements, the effort extends into neighborhoods and shared spaces, noted a recent release. Participants are invited to register their projects on Homegrown National Park's Biodiversity Map, contributing to a connected network of habitats that support birds, pollinators and other wildlife.

The initiative is already moving from concept to action, a recent release explained. On May 6, residents and local master gardeners installed the first native plant demonstration garden at Westminster Woods on Julington Creek, offering a visible example of how small-scale efforts can be replicated across the community.

“With a national organization called Homegrown National Park, Westminster and the Bartram Scenic and Historic Highway partnered to complete a native plant garden, thus qualifying Westminster as a 'national park' — a Homegrown National Park,” said Joe McAnarney, chair of the William Bartram Scenic and Historic Highway, in a recent release. “Over a period of time, the Scenic Highway has a goal of creating gardens all along its 17-mile length, such that this will also become the William Bartram Scenic and Historic Homegrown National Park.”

As interest in nature-based solutions continues to grow, the partnership offers a relatable story of how everyday landscapes, when connected, can support healthier ecosystems, per a recent release.

Learn more: <https://homegrownnationalpark.org> and <https://bartramscenichighway.com>



The Julington Creek Elementary School Girls on the Run program participants and coaches assemble for a group photo during the spring season. Photo courtesy Julington Creek Elementary School

'Girls on the Run' cont. from pg.1

a recent release. They also helped raise funds to cover the program fees for girls who need financial assistance through

the Confidence Cape Campaign, a recent release explained.

“GOTR inspires individuals of all abilities to discover, build and grow their

self-confidence,” said Anne Soracco, LEA Clerk from Julington Creek Elementary School in a recent release. “Together, they experience a sense of belonging and connection as a team.”



Members of the Julington Creek Elementary School Girls on the Run teams gather on the track at the University of North Florida during the spring 5K celebration. Photo courtesy Julington Creek Elementary School

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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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Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Oliver!



Breed: Mini poodle

Favorite Activity: Playing with Mom and Dad

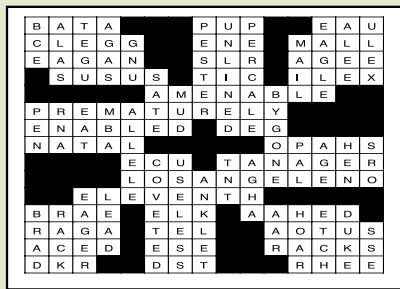
Favorite Food: Any meat he can steal

Favorite Friends: Rusty, a Golden doodle

How did your BFF get their name: My Mom named me

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@floridanewslines.com to enter your pet.

Answers to our Puzzles PG 7



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June

Community Calendar What's Happening in St. Johns

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

June 2

Northwest St Johns County United for Progress Club

Johns County United for Progress Club will welcome Jules Meyer, founder of NE Florida RESULTS, a bipartisan organization dedicated to ending poverty in the U.S. and globally. Social 6:30 p.m., meeting 7 p.m. For more information, email nwsjcp@gmail.com.

June 13

Bartram Trail Genealogy Club

The Bartram Trail Genealogy Club will meet Saturday, June 13, from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Bartram Trail Library, 60 Davis Pond Blvd., Fruit Cove. The topic is Father's Day theme and discussion. For more information, check the Bartram Trail Genealogy Club Facebook page.

June 15

All Star Quilters' Guild

The All Star Quilters' Guild will meet Monday, June 15, at the First Christian Church, 11924 San Jose Blvd. Socializing begins at 9:30 a.m. prior to the 10 a.m. meeting. The program will feature Kestrel's

Creations (a trunk show by award winning Kestrel Michaud). "Sew and Tell" is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit allstarquilters.org for more information.

June 16

Small Business Financing Workshop

SCORE Jacksonville, in collaboration with First Citizens Bank, will host a small business financing workshop, "Money Matters - Accessing Capital," Tuesday, June 16, from 3:30 to 5 p.m. at First Citizens Bank, 10201 Centurion Parkway North. The workshop, led by Derrick Smith of SCORE Jacksonville and Eric Garcia of First Citizens Bank, will cover establishing a business banking relationship, evaluating funding needs, determining capital needs and understanding financing options. Open to current and prospective small business owners. Space is limited. RSVP to eric.garcia@firstcitizens.com.

June 16

NW St. Johns County United for Progress Evening Social

NW St. Johns County United for Progress will host an evening social Tuesday, June 16, at 5:30 p.m. For location details, email nwsjcp@gmail.com.

June 22

Trout Creek Senior Center Father's Day Celebration

Trout Creek Senior Center will celebrate Father's Day Monday, June 22, at 6795 Collier Rd., Orangedale. Activities include "Wear your Best Tie," Dad joke competition and DJ Bill. Festivities begin at 9:30 a.m., with lunch at 11:30 a.m. Contact Jessica Curry at (904) 209-3658 or jcurry@stjohnscoa.com for more information.

June 22

NW St. Johns County United for Progress Coffee and Conversation

NW St. Johns County United for Progress will host Coffee and Conversation Monday, June 22, at 10 a.m. For location details, email nwsjcp@gmail.com.

Ongoing Activities

JCE Camp Sigma Registration

Registration is now open for JCE Camp Sigma 2026, "Mastering BOOMER SKILLS in a GEN ALPHA World!" For more information or to register, call 904-547-7983.

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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Cultivate your gardening journey at the extension center


By Norie Flowers

If you are unfamiliar with it, let me introduce you to the St. Johns County Extension Center, located on 52 acres at 3125 Agricultural Center Drive in St. Augustine. Administered jointly by the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) and the St. Johns County Commission, the center provides research-based support, education and programs to our community. Here is a look at some of the resources available.

The center provides best management practices to keep our local agricultural community sustainable, while also hosting 4-H Youth Development programs that teach leadership, citizenship and life skills to thousands of local children each year.

A major cornerstone of the center is the Master Gardener Volunteer Program. Certified master gardeners undergo rigorous UF/IFAS training and volunteer to provide research-based horticultural education to St. Johns County residents. These dedicated volunteers teach hands-on workshops at local schools and libraries, operate a diagnostic Help Desk, perform soil testing at no cost, host plant clinics and propagate species for community sales.

The extension center property features several specialty gardens maintained year-round by these volunteers. Free educational garden tours are held the



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first Tuesday of every month starting at 10 a.m., offering expert gardening advice and showcasing Florida's rich plant diversity. Special group and school tours can also be arranged by contacting the center directly.

Two major events not to be missed are the biannual plant sales held in April and September. Mark your calendars for the upcoming fall sale on Sept. 19 and 20! Plants are sold at low cost and include a rich variety of hard-to-find Florida native species.

Two popular gardening classes will also be held this June. To register, visit uffas-extension-st-johns-county.eventbrite.com or call the center directly at 904-209-0430:

- **June 1:** Summer Vegetable Gardening
- **June 22:** Turf 101

Take advantage of everything the St. Johns County Extension Center has to offer. Start by joining a Tuesday garden tour or planning your visit to the September plant sale to begin your own gardening journey!

Norie Flowers is a certified master gardener with the St. Johns County Extension Center.



Photo courtesy St. Johns County Extension Center

The St. Johns County Extension Center is located at 3125 Agricultural Center Drive in St. Augustine.

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

Q: The Aug. 18, 2026, primary election is only two months away. What is the Elections Office doing to prepare?

A: The Elections Office is entering a very busy period. Preparations this month include the start of poll worker training, the mailing of our publication, the Citizen's Guide to Registering and Voting, and the upcoming candidate qualifying period.



Vicky Oakes

Q: What offices qualify with the St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Office during the June qualifying period?

A: The Elections Office will qualify candidates for all county offices, special districts, municipalities and community development districts. The Florida Division of Elections in Tallahassee will qualify candidates for federal and state offices, including U.S. representative, governor, attorney general, commissioner of agriculture, chief financial officer, state representative and others.

Q: Can voters see which candidates are qualifying?

A: Yes. As local candidates file, their information is added into our system and posted on our website. Voters can visit votesjc.gov, select Candidate Information, then choose Candidate List and Reports to view the latest updates.

Q: Where can voters find more information about the 2026 elections?

A: In mid-June, the 2026 Citizen's Guide to the Primary and General Elections will be mailed to every residential address in St. Johns County. This publication provides all the information residents will need on how to register and participate in the 2026 elections.

Voters can also visit votesjc.gov any time for trusted election information. For additional assistance, please contact the Elections Office at 904-823-2238 during regular business hours, Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Vicky Oakes is the St. Johns County supervisor of elections.

Candidate qualifying will take place from noon on June 8 through noon on June 12. Pursuant to Section 99.061(8) of the Florida Statutes, qualifying papers have been accepted since May 26.

Q: Have any offices qualified already?

A: Yes. The first qualifying period of 2026 ran from April 20 through April 24. During this time, candidates for U.S. senator and judicial offices filed with the Florida Division of Elections.

The filing period for U.S. representative was moved to June when Gov. Ron DeSantis called a special session to convene the legislature to redraw the state's congressional districts. These candidates do not file with the supervisor of elections. More information is available on the Florida Division of Elections website.

Following the completion of the special session, there were no changes to the congressional boundaries in St. Johns County. Congressional Districts 5 and 6 remain unchanged.

Proactively assisting property owners

By Eddie Creamer

Here at our office, we take a proactive approach to helping property owners receive the property tax exemptions they qualify for and deserve. One of the primary duties of our office is to grant exemptions to eligible homeowners.



Eddie Creamer

This year, we looked at different ways to reach property owners who may be eligible for a homestead exemption, and a targeted mailing was determined to be the best way to directly reach the greatest number of people. A homestead exemption reduces the property tax burden for Florida homeowners by decreasing the taxable value of a homeowner's permanent residence by at least \$50,000. This total changes yearly because it is adjusted annually for inflation. This year's total is \$51,411. The annual deadline to apply for a homestead exemption is March 1.

To be eligible for a homestead exemption, the property must be the homeowner's primary residence and the homeowner may not receive a residency-based exemption in any other state.

In early February, a mailing was sent to property owners who met specific criteria: they purchased a home during the current portability-eligible years, their property address matched their

mailing address and they did not have a homestead exemption. Homeowners who purchased a home in 2025 did not receive the mailing because they are likely planning to file for a homestead exemption this year. If they do not file this year, they will receive the mailing next year.

The purpose of the mailing was to inform homeowners about the homestead exemption and how to apply if they qualify. The mailing was sent to 3,114 residences. As of April 30, 556 homestead exemption applications have been approved and an additional 187 applications are pending due to the mailing. Based on these numbers, we received a 24% response rate, which greatly exceeds the average direct-mail response rate. We plan to continue this mailing in future years as a reminder to apply.

Visit sjcpa.gov/homesteadportability for more information about the homestead exemption. I am available to answer questions or provide additional information at eddie@sjcpa.gov or 904-827-5500.

Eddie Creamer is the St. Johns County property appraiser.



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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative

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CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Egyptian bull-god
- 5. A young canine
- 8. Cologne
- 11. Fictional British P.I.
- 13. Midway between northeast and east
- 14. A place to shop
- 15. Minneapolis suburb
- 16. Single lens reflex
- 17. NY Mets great Tommie
- 18. Informal loan clubs
- 20. Habitual twitching
- 21. Holm oak
- 22. Willing to consent or submit
- 25. In an early way
- 30. Made possible
- 31. Language in Ghana
- 32. Relating to one's birth
- 33. Deep-bodied fishes
- 38. Defunct European currency
- 41. Small American songbird
- 43. One from L.A.
- 45. After tenth
- 47. Hillside
- 49. Red deer
- 50. Partner to "oohed"
- 55. Indian musical pattern
- 56. Israeli city ___ Aviv
- 57. Golden peas plant
- 59. Breezed through
- 60. Midway between east and southeast
- 61. Frameworks
- 62. Danish krone
- 63. Fall back
- 64. Influential Korean leader

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Bridge building degree
- 2. Expression of sorrow or pity
- 3. Large, stocky lizard
- 4. Turkish leader title
- 5. Nag
- 6. Blank
- 7. Closely woven cotton fabric
- 8. A nice shot in golf
- 9. Away from wind
- 10. Evergreen shrub genus
- 12. Large African antelope
- 14. Something you receive
- 19. Satisfy
- 23. Wet dirt
- 24. No longer here
- 25. Writing utensil
- 26. Ribonucleic acid
- 27. Consume food
- 28. Licensed for Wall Street
- 29. Alternative forms of a gene
- 34. Buddy
- 35. We all do it
- 36. Chicken
- 37. No seats available
- 39. Yearned to possess
- 40. Ineffectual
- 41. Explosive
- 42. Turkish title
- 44. Worn near the foot
- 45. Impatient
- 46. Set an example for others
- 47. Actor Pitt
- 48. Instrument of torture
- 51. Swiss river
- 52. Grayish white
- 53. A way to print
- 54. Storied college hoops program
- 58. Midway between south and southeast

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