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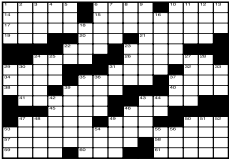
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First Coast NewsLine seeks local stories in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Florida NewsLine Staff
editor@floridanewsline.com

This October, First Coast NewsLine is proud to spotlight the strength and resilience of breast cancer warriors and survivors and to honor the memory of those we've lost.



We invite you to share your story or the story of a loved one. Your journey can inspire, uplift and remind others that they are not alone.

Email us at editor@floridanewsline.com by Monday, Sept. 14, for a chance to be featured.

First Coast NewsLine seeks local stories to honor veterans

Florida NewsLine Staff
editor@floridanewsline.com

First Coast NewsLine is honoring Veterans Day (Nov. 11), and we want to highlight the service, sacrifice and stories of our military veterans right here in our community.

We're looking for:

1. Local veteran trailblazers — business owners, community leaders, or anyone making a difference after their service.
2. Multigenerational military families keeping traditions of service alive.
3. Stories from veterans who made St. Johns County home after their service.
4. Veterans involved in local organizations, volunteer work or mentoring.
5. Young veterans and their families sharing what service means to them.

Know a veteran we should spotlight? Want to share your own story?

Email us at editor@floridanewsline.com by Monday, Sept. 14 for a chance to be featured.

SHORT AND SIMPLE



From left, Clerk Brandon Patty, Deputy Clerk Randy Beck, Recording Supervisor Kimberly Jarrell, Minutes & Records Director Matt Shuler, Deputy Clerk Adam Ehrenberg, Recording Director Kati Smith, Deputy Clerk Connie Logan, Deputy Clerk Zhane Brown and Master Clerk Rita Rios cut the ribbon on the new Public Service Center Monday, Aug. 3, 2026.

Clerk's office opens new service center

By Tracy McCormick-Dishman
editor@floridanewsline.com

Residents needing a marriage license, passport or copy of a recorded deed now have a dedicated stop at the St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller's Office, after the agency opened a new Public Service Center Monday, Aug. 3.

The center, at 4040 Lewis Speedway in St. Augustine, sits across the parking lot from the Richard O. Watson Judicial

Center and was built to shorten wait times and simplify access to the Clerk's most frequently requested services, according to the office.

"One of my guiding principles is making it easier for residents and our stakeholders to access our services, whether online or in person," said Brandon J. Patty, Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller. Patty said the new center adds customer service windows and closer parking, and is meant to

help residents complete business more quickly, whether they're applying for a passport, recording documents or obtaining a marriage license.

Several services have relocated to the new center, including recording of deeds, Notices of Commencement and plat and PUD maps; marriage licenses and wedding ceremonies; passport application acceptance; Value Adjust-

Service center cont. on pg. 4

Denim and Diamonds Chamber Gala returns Sept. 10

By Tracy McCormick-Dishman
editor@floridanewsline.com

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Foundation's annual fundraiser returns for another year, with organizers hoping this year's gala will grow scholarship opportunities for the county's next generation of business leaders.

The Denim and Diamonds Gala returns Thursday, Sept. 10, from 5:30 to 8 p.m. at Ancient City Farmstead in St. Augustine. The event, now a fixture on the Chamber's calendar, brings together members of the local business community to raise money for the Chamber Foundation, a 501(c)(3) that funds workforce and leadership programs across the county.

"The gala is one night, but its impact lasts all year," said Isabelle Renault,



St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce staff pose at the 2025 Denim and Diamonds Gala.

Denim cont. on pg. 4



Photo courtesy of First Coast YMCA
A coach huddles with young athletes during a First Coast YMCA youth sports practice.



Photo courtesy of First Coast YMCA
Young athletes compete during a First Coast YMCA youth soccer match.

Midseason momentum for fall youth sports at First Coast YMCA

By Devone Landers

Through youth sports, First Coast YMCA children build more than athletic skills; they develop teamwork, discipline and confidence they can carry with them beyond the field or court.

At the Brooks, Winston, Williams and Johnson family YMCAs, children can find opportunities to gain experience, build relationships and discover what they can achieve. Fall 1 runs Aug. 8 through Sept. 26, followed by Fall 2 from Oct. 14 through Dec. 14. Both seasons offer beginner and intermediate programming, and membership is not required to participate.

What’s offered this fall

Fall 1 features soccer leagues and basketball programming across Duval County branches. Skills & Drills introduces

basketball fundamentals to beginners in four-week sessions, meeting once a week for a two-hour practice.

Basketball Academy, offered at the Brooks, Williams and Winston branches, is designed for players ready to take their skills to the next level, with eight- to nine-week sessions of weekly practices and games.

Fall 2 brings volleyball and new opportunities

Beginning in October, Fall 2 continues Skills & Drills while kicking off the volleyball recreational season at the Winston and Williams branches, with weekly practices and games.

Winston YMCA will kick off its Club Volleyball season with tryouts and an expansion: In addition to a girls team, the YMCA will recruit a boys club volleyball

team for the first time. The season runs November through May.

Fall 2 registration opens Aug. 22 and closes Oct. 10, open to children ages 7 to 17. Club Volleyball tryout registration is open now for ages 11 to 16, with tryouts Oct. 24 for girls and Oct. 25 for boys.

Youth sports are available for every child

Not every child is ready to commit to a full season. At the Johnson Family YMCA, Sports Zone is a free Saturday morning program for children ages 3 to 12, running 9:30 to 10:30 a.m., with a different sport introduced each week — a chance to try before committing to a league.

The Brooks Family YMCA is also introducing basketball clinics designed spe-

cifically for children with special needs, providing an inclusive environment with additional support and accommodations.

Your game starts here

First Coast YMCA youth sports programs give every child a place to stay active, build confidence and discover a sport they can be enthusiastic about. Parents can find information about offerings, registration and financial assistance at fcymca.org.

For questions about youth sports in Duval County, contact Devone Landers, Associate Executive Director of Sports, at DLanders@fcymca.org.

Devone Landers is the Associate Executive Director of Sports, First Coast YMCA.



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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.

First Coast NewsLine community newspaper is a free monthly publication delivered to all addresses in Zip Codes 32081 and 32082. Submission of articles and photographs are received by mail or email, although email to editor@FloridaNewsLine.com is preferred. The writers' opinions do not necessarily reflect the opinion of Florida NewsLine. Advertising Rates are available by request. Florida NewsLine is not responsible for advertisement content or accuracy of information provided by its advertisers. Nor does Florida NewsLine endorse any of the products or services included in this publication. Florida NewsLine reserves the right to refuse advertisement or copy from any advertiser. All rights are reserved and no portion of this publication may be copied without the express written consent of the publisher. ©2025.



BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Tater!

Breed:
Labrador mix.

Favorite activity:
Water! Weather it be the Atlantic Beach water park, the ocean or a pool she's her happiest with a toy or anything to fetch.

Favorite food:
Carrots.

Favorite friend:
Stan and Buehler (her Great Dane besties).

How did your BFF get his name:
She is a Tater Tot, Tater Salad, Tater Bean.



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@floridanewsline.com to enter your pet.



Answers to our Puzzles PG 6

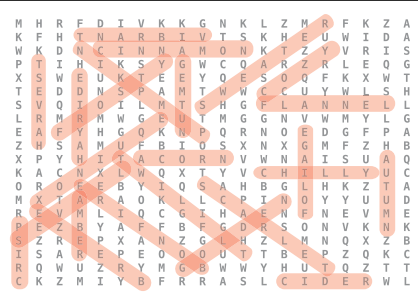
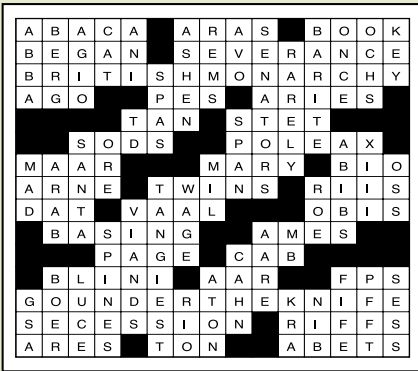


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Finance 101: The lessons every college-bound kid should learn now

By Chris Thompson

Sending a child to college marks an important milestone for families. It's often the first time students manage money independently while balancing classes, new responsibilities and newfound freedom. This transition creates a valuable opportunity for parents to teach their children how to build strong financial habits.

While it's easy to focus on major expenses like tuition and housing, the everyday financial behaviors students develop during this time can shape their future long after graduation. College presents an ideal environment to introduce foundational financial skills where the stakes are manageable, but the lessons are meaningful.

Understanding cash flow matters more than ever

For many students, college marks the first time money is not simply there when they need it. Whether funds come from a checking account, part-time work or family support, learning how to track income and expenses is essential. Teaching students the difference between fixed costs, like rent or meal plans, and flexible spending, like entertainment or dining out, can help



Christopher Thompson

them avoid running short before the semester ends.

Credit is powerful

Credit cards are often heavily marketed to young adults, but few understand how credit really works. College-bound students should recognize that credit is not additional income; interest can accumulate quickly, and payment history plays a critical role. Developing habits like paying balances on time and regularly reviewing statements can help build strong credit rather than costly missteps.

Saving is not just for later. It supports flexibility

Emergency expenses, unexpected travel home or gaps between part-time income can derail finances quickly without a cushion. Understanding the value of saving, even in small amounts, helps students experience firsthand how preparation creates options and reduces stress.

Financial decisions reflect values

College is often when young adults begin defining what matters most to them. Encouraging students to think about how they spend money, and why, can help align spending with personal priorities. Learning to make intentional choices, whether it means minimizing debt or prioritizing experiences, fosters independence and accountability.

The goal is not perfection, but to equip students with practical tools and a healthy relationship with money as they enter adulthood. For parents, this means maintaining open conversations and providing ongoing guidance. For families navigating this transition, a financial advisor can provide clarity and help balance education goals with future financial independence.

Chris Thompson, CFP®, CMFA®, CRPC® is a Private Wealth Advisor and managing director with Upper Deck Wealth Management a private wealth advisory practice of Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC in Ponte Vedra Beach, FL. He specializes in fee-based financial planning and asset management strategies and has been in practice for 33 years. To contact him, visit www.ameripriseadvisors.com/team/upper-deck-wealth-management, 818 A1A N, Suite 301 Ponte Vedra Beach FL, (904) 380-2322.

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St Johns County resident since 1993

September

Community Calendar

What's Happening in St. Johns

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

September 2, 27 and 30

St. Augustine Film Society season screenings

The St. Augustine Film Society launches its 15th season with three screenings. "Tais-toi!" (released internationally as "Shut Up!") shows Sunday, Sept. 2, at 4 p.m., with doors at 3:30 p.m., at Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. "The Handmaiden" shows Sunday, Sept. 27, at 4 p.m., with doors at 3:30 p.m., also at Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. "One to One: John and Yoko" shows Wednesday, Sept. 30, at 6 p.m., with doors at 5:30 p.m., at The Waterworks, and includes a talk from guest speaker Amy Kalafa. Admission is free for members and \$10 for guests at all three screenings.

September 8

Bartram Trail Newcomers Club luncheon

The Bartram Trail Newcomers Club kicks off its new year with a luncheon Tuesday,

Sept. 8, at 11 a.m. at St. Johns Golf and Country Club. Visit btnc.wildapricot.org for details.

September 15

Newcomers of North St. Johns luncheon

Newcomers of North St. Johns hosts its September luncheon Tuesday, Sept. 15, at 11 a.m. at St. Johns Golf & Country Club, 205 St. Johns Golf Drive, St. Augustine.

September 17

America 250 Constitution Celebration

The Beaches communities celebrate the U.S. Constitution Tuesday, Sept. 17, at 3 p.m. at the Seawalk Pavilion, 75 First St. N., Jacksonville Beach. The free, non-political event features patriotic music, a Colonial Color Guard presentation and family friendly giveaways. Guest speaker Cindy Addison will present followed by a community bell ringing at 4 p.m. Attendees should bring their own chairs.

September 26

Ponte Vedra Writers meeting

The Ponte Vedra Writers host award-winning author Lana McAra Saturday, Sept. 26, at 11 a.m. at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library. McAra will present "Why Good Books Don't Sell (And What Professional Authors Do Differently)." The meeting is free and open to the public.

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

Through Oct. 8

"A Brushstroke Journey" exhibition

First Coast Cultural Center presents "A Brushstroke Journey," a solo exhibition by artist Midge Scelzo, on view through Oct. 8 at FCCC, 6000B Sawgrass Village Circle, Ponte Vedra Beach.

Weekdays

COA THE PLAYERS Community Senior Center

The senior center at 175 Landrum Lane offers programs and activities. For details, call 904 209 3659 or visit coasjc.org.

Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays

Trout Creek Senior Center Activities

Trout Creek Senior Center, 6795 Collier Road, offers senior activities starting at 9 a.m. with cards and games, followed by trivia or bingo before lunch at 11:30 a.m. Call Jessica Curry at 904 209 3658.

Wednesdays

Playing HOOKie

This charity knitting and crochet group meets Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to noon at Maple Street Biscuit Company, 1627 Race Track Road. Email playinghookiecares@gmail.com.

Wednesdays

Widow to Widow Support Group

The support group meets Wednesdays from 11:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. at the COA River House, 179 Marine St. Call 904 209 3655.

Denim cont. from pg. 1

president and CEO of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. Renault said proceeds support the Foundation's work on attainable housing, workforce education and leadership development, and will help expand Leadership St. Johns, the Foundation's leadership development program, by adding scholarship funds for more participants.

The Foundation's mission also includes fostering a skilled local workforce and maintaining an emergency fund for businesses facing natural disasters or economic hardship.

Morrie Maple, chair of the Chamber Foundation's board of directors, said the gala remains the Foundation's largest annual fundraiser. "Every sponsorship, ticket, and auction item sold directly supports the Foundation's mission to

develop local leaders, strengthen our workforce, and stand by businesses in times of crisis," Maple said, adding that this year's proceeds will go toward growing the Leadership St. Johns scholarship specifically.

Tickets and sponsorship information are available at www.SJCCChamber.com/Foundation-Gala/.



Photo courtesy of St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce
Guests dressed to theme at last year's Denim and Diamonds Gala.

Service center cont. from pg. 1

ment Board applications; and public records searches.

Court operations remain at the Richard O. Watson Judicial Center, 4010 Lewis Speedway. That includes jury duty, child support payment assistance, restraining order petitions and traffic ticket payments.

The Public Service Center is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Residents can make an appointment or find more information at stjohnsclerk.com, or reach Customer Care Clerks at (904) 819-3600 or clerk@stjohnsclerk.com during the same hours.



Photo courtesy of St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller's Office
The first couple married at the new Public Service Center exchanged vows Monday, Aug. 3, 2026, the day the center opened.

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wbu.com/jacksonvillebeach

World Golf Village

180 Capulet Drive #5 (At Murabella)

904.209.5754

wbu.com/staugustine



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

Q: When is the next scheduled election?

A: The 2026 General Election is Tuesday, Nov. 3, 2026.

Q: Are there any registration deadlines ahead of the election?

A: Yes, the deadline to register to vote for the General Election is Oct. 5, 2026. Voters can visit www.votesjc.gov to register online.

Q: Is there anything voters should be doing to prepare now for the 2026 General Election?

A: It is never too early to get election ready. I recommend visiting www.votesjc.gov and using the Check My Status tool to make sure your information is up to date.

Q: If I voted by mail in 2024, will I automatically get a vote-by-mail ballot this year?

A: No. Vote-by-mail requests expire at the end of each year. If you have not made a vote-by-mail request, you will not be mailed a ballot.

To request a vote-by-mail ballot for the 2026 General Election, visit www.votesjc.gov or call the Elections Office at 904-823-2238. The deadline to request a vote-by-mail ballot to be mailed for the 2026 General Election is Oct. 22, 2026, at 5 p.m.

Q: When is early voting scheduled for the 2026 General Election?

A: Early voting will begin Monday, Oct. 21, and continue through Saturday,



Vicky Oakes

Oct. 31, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. Locations will be announced closer to the election.

Q: Do I have to be registered in a certain party to vote in the General Election?

A: No, your party affiliation does not affect your ability to vote in the General Election. All eligible voters in a precinct receive the same general election ballot, which includes candidates from all qualified parties.

Q: How can voters contact the Elections Office?

A: The St. Johns County Supervisor of Elections Office is open Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Residents can visit or call the office with any questions during business hours at 904-823-2238. Services are available around the clock on our website at www.votesjc.gov.

VISIT US ONLINE!
www.floridanewsline.com

Proposed 2026 Florida Property Tax Amendment 3

By Eddie Creamer

At this year's general election on Nov. 3, proposed 2026 Florida Property Tax Amendment 3 (CS/HRJ 1-F) will be on the ballot. If approved by voters, the constitutional amendment proposed by the Florida Legislature will make changes to Florida's property tax system.

Here's a factual overview of the proposed amendment for informational purposes only. My office and I do not support or oppose any constitutional amendment or ballot measures.

For homesteaded properties, which are primary residences of Florida homeowners, the below changes are proposed. Currently, this year's homestead exemption total is \$51,411, with \$25,000 exempt from all taxes and \$26,411 exempt from all taxes except school taxes.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2027, homestead exemption will increase to \$150,000, with \$25,000 exempt from all taxes and the remaining \$125,000 exempt from all taxes except school taxes.

Beginning the following year on Jan. 1, 2028, homestead exemption will increase to \$250,000, with \$25,000 exempt from all taxes and the remaining \$225,000 exempt from all taxes except school taxes.

The Florida Legislature will develop a schedule to address future increases after 2028.

For non-homesteaded properties, Amendment 3 will decrease the assessment limitation cap, the amount a property's assessed value can increase each year, from 10% to 5%. For homesteaded properties, the assessment limitation cap will remain unchanged at no more than 3% per year.



Eddie Creamer

Additionally, the proposed amendment includes a new Florida residency requirement. New residents after Jan. 1, 2027, will be eligible for the pre-existing homestead exemption of \$50,000, adjusted annually for inflation. New residents will then become eligible for the full homestead benefit beginning Jan. 1 after the fifth year of maintaining the exemption.

Existing tax-saving programs such as Save Our Homes/portability and other personal exemptions (veterans, seniors, first responders, widows/widowers, etc.) will remain unchanged.

The proposed amendment requires approval by at least 60% of Florida voters. If approved, the amendment will take effect on Jan. 1, 2027, and the changes will be reflected on the 2027 TRIM notices and tax bills.

For more information, visit www.sjcpa.gov/amendment3. I'm available to answer questions or provide information at Eddie@sjcpa.gov or 904-827-5500.

Eddie Creamer is the St. Johns County property appraiser.

Palencia Elementary welcomes a new first mate

By Tatyana Kovaleva

The new school year brings new people on board and Palencia Elementary School (PES) is excited to introduce our Assistant Principal, Carrie Mitten. She brings more than 30 years of experience and a tremendous love for working with kids. Even during the back-to-school rush, she answered our questions so the community could get to know her better.

Q: Could you tell us about your background?

A: After beginning my career teaching second and third grade, I became a reading specialist and teacher specialist before transitioning into school administration at middle and high school levels. I later served as the Program Director for an Alternative Education Program supporting middle and high school students before being promoted to Principal of an elementary school in Stevensville, Maryland. Those three years as an elementary principal were truly the best of my career. Following



Carrie Mitten

the passing of my husband in 2024, I retired after 32 years in Maryland and moved to St. Augustine to be closer to family. I am blessed to have a daughter, a stepdaughter and two wonderful granddaughters.

Q: What is the most Pirate-y thing you have done?

A: It may actually be coming back to my roots! My first administrative position was at a middle school whose mascot was the Pirates, so joining the Palencia Pirates truly feels like coming home.

Q: What was your first impression of PES?

A: My first impression of Palencia Elementary was simply, "Wow, what an amazing family!" I was fortunate to visit the school before summer break and immediately noticed the joy and enthusiasm shared by both the students and staff. Seeing such a positive school community warmed my heart and made me even more excited to become part of the team and help continue its growth and success.

Q: What kind of impact would you like to have on the school?

A: As Assistant Principal, I hope to support Captain Goodrich in keeping our ship sailing strong while ensuring every

student has the tools, encouragement and opportunities they need to become lifelong learners and make a positive impact on our community.

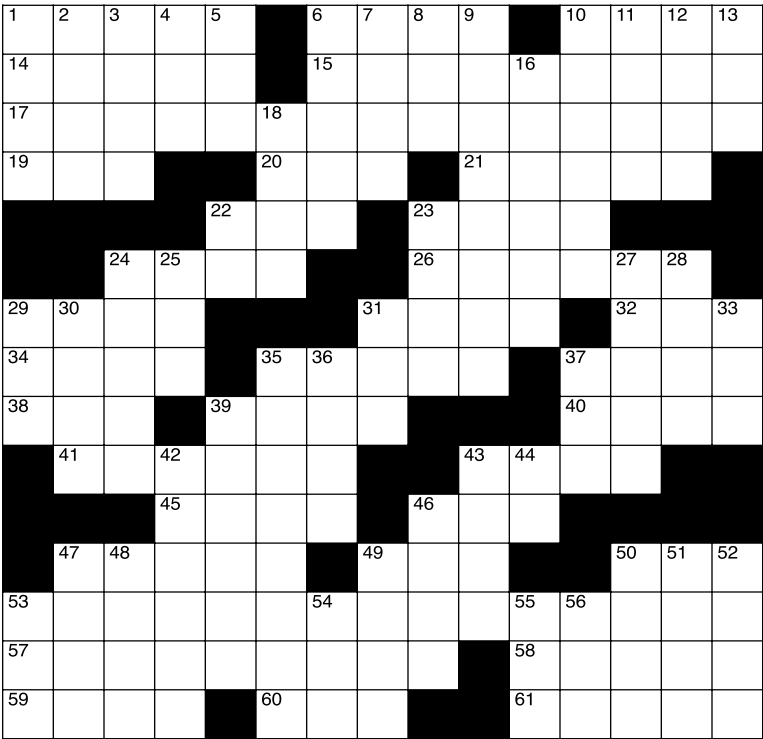
Q: What advice would you give to parents at the beginning of the school year?

A: We know that dropping kids off at school or a bus stop can be a vulnerable experience, and we appreciate you trusting your children into our hands. You can count on us to take care of them, keep them safe, educate them and support them - and you - along the way. Communicate with your teachers, be involved, and download ParentSquare if you haven't yet. It is the district's main communication tool, and it's like having your school's direct cell phone: all the messages go straight through.

We know Ms. Mitten will fit right in with the Crew, so if you see her on campus, give her a warm Pirate welcome!

Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative



CLUES ACROSS

1. Manila hemp plant

6. Turkish river

10. Something to read

14. In a way, initiated

15. Popular Apple TV series

17. King Charles is part of it

19. Earlier

20. Foot (Latin)

21. Zodiac sign

22. A browning of the skin

23. Remain as is

24. Turfs

26. It's used to slaughter animals

29. Volcanic crater

31. The mother of Jesus

32. One's life story

34. One-time Liverpool coach Slot

35. Counterparts
37. Jacob __, American journalist

38. Digital audiotape

39. River in South Africa

40. Kimono sashes

41. Rooting somewhere

43. American spy Aldrich

45. A way to call for

46. Taxi

47. Pancakes made of buckwheat flour

49. Swiss river

50. Popular type of video game (abbr.)

53. Have surgery

57. Formal withdrawal from a union

58. Performs spoken improv

59. Greek war god

60. 2,000 lbs.

61. Helps to evade capture

CLUES DOWN

1. Swedish rock group

2. "Friday Night Lights" director Peter

3. Currency exchange fee

4. Feline

5. Folk singer DiFranco

6. Ghastly pale from distress

7. Rapid eye movements

8. Monetary unit of Macao

9. Lawmakers

10. Colorless mineral

11. At some prior time

12. American protest singer

13. Opener

16. Seldom

18. Relaxing places

22. Touchdown

23. From end to end

24. Kids love him

25. Metal-bearing solid

27. Skin care product manufacturer

28. Thirteen

29. Angry

30. Member of a Semitic people
31. One-thousandth of an inch

33. Former CIA

35. Most lemony

36. Engage in

37. Mass of fish eggs

39. Food supplies

42. Backbones

43. American real estate investment firm

44. Megabyte

46. "Three Coins in the Fountain" songwriter

47. Dutch colonist

48. Full-grown pike fish

49. Emergency prep expert Edwards

50. Flute

51. Dismissive sound

52. Slang term for marijuana

53. Young women's association

54. Cosmopolitan city

55. Narrow isthmus in Thailand

56. Pointed end of a pen

FALL EVENINGS WORD SEARCH

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

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AUTUMN
BONFIRE
BREEZE
CHILLY
CIDER
CINNAMON
COZY
CRISP
EQUINOX
FLANNEL
FOLIAGE
FROSTY
GOLDEN
HARVEST
HAYRIDE
LEAVES
NUTMEG
PUMPKIN
SCARLET
SWEATER
TWILIGHT
VIBRANT

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



Solve the code to discover words related to fall.
Each number corresponds to a letter.
(Hint: 5 = E)

A. 18 5 6 15 5 7

Clue: Tree foliage

B. 13 6 17 5

Clue: Gathers leaves

C. 22 26 20 22 17 1 23

Clue: Orange gourd

D. 11 24 13 23

Clue: Starchy crop

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Golf cart update for Sabal Crest Academy

Sabal Crest Academy, a new K-8 school opening near Nocatee's Seabrook community, will include a dedicated golf cart staging area, community and school officials announced in a joint letter to Nocatee residents.

The plan replaces an earlier one that would have required golf cart drop-offs and pick-ups along Conservation Trail, the main roadway outside the school. Golf carts will instead queue with vehicle traffic, use the new staging area to drop off or pick up students, then exit along the internal roadway.

Permitting for the parking area is underway and may not be complete before the school year starts; the area will be accessible but unpaved until the permit is issued. The letter was signed by Brian Dean, community manager of Tolomato Community Development District; Richard T. Ray, chief executive officer of The PARC Group; Tiffany Cantwell, principal of Sabal Crest Academy; and Brennan Asplen, superintendent of the St. Johns County School District.

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Travel

Ocala gallops beyond expectations

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewsline.com

When most people think of Ocala, in Central Florida, horses naturally come to mind. Marion County proudly claims the title “Horse Capital of the World,” with more than 1,000 horse farms in the region. But after spending several days exploring the area, I discovered that today's Ocala offers far more than rolling pastures and championship thoroughbreds — glass-bottom boats, museums, outdoor adventure and a revitalized downtown all share the spotlight.

No visit is complete without experiencing the World Equestrian Center.



Debi Lander

Opened in 2021, WEC has quickly become a centerpiece of Ocala's horse culture, hosting competitions throughout the year on its manicured 2,000-acre campus, where Olympic-caliber horses soar effortlessly over towering jumps. WEC has evolved into a luxury resort featuring elegant hotels, restaurants, shopping, spas and premier competition facilities.

Three hotels anchor the property: the flagship Equestrian Hotel, overlooking the Grand Arena; the family-friendly Riding Academy Hotel; and the recently opened Equestrian Manor, which

adds rooftop dining, ballrooms and conference facilities.

Ocala's equestrian heritage extends beyond the jumping and dressage rings.

At GoldMark Farm, visitors gain a behind-the-scenes look at one of Florida's premier thoroughbred breeding opera-

Ocala cont. on pg. 8



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Photo courtesy of Debi Lander

The Equestrian Manor at World Equestrian Center offers rooftop dining, ballrooms and conference facilities.

Ocala cont. from pg. 7

tions, with insight into the care, training and business of horse breeding.

For a change of pace, head to nearby Silver Springs State Park, one of Florida’s oldest tourist attractions. Visitors marvel at the crystal-clear springs aboard the famous glass-bottom boats, gliding over water so transparent that



Photo courtesy of Debi Lander

Horses greet visitors along a pasture fence near Ocala, home to more than 1,000 horse farms and known as the “Horse Capital of the World.”

fish, turtles and underwater artifacts are visible below. Kayakers and hikers may even encounter rhesus macaques along the Silver River, descendants of monkeys introduced to the area in the 1930s.

Art lovers should not miss the Appleton Museum of Art, whose collection ranges from European and contemporary works to Asian art and African artifacts.

Adventure seekers can soar through the landscape at The Canyons Zip Line & Adventure Park, flying above dramatic limestone canyons, sparkling lakes and towering cliffs — terrain unlike anything visitors expect to find in Florida.

Downtown Ocala deserves time as well, with locally owned restaurants, wineries, boutiques, public art and inviting streets around its historic square — the perfect place to unwind after a day of sightseeing or horse shows.

What surprised me most about Ocala was how much there is to experience beyond its celebrated horse country. The horses may attract you, but the springs, art, outdoor adventures and lively downtown give you plenty of reasons to stay and explore. For more information: OcalaMarion.com.

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@floridanewsline.com.

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