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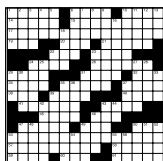
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## Mandarin NewsLine seeks local stories in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Florida NewsLine Staff  
editor@floridanewslines.com

This October, Mandarin 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@floridanewslines.com by Monday, Sept. 14, for a chance to be featured.



## Mandarin NewsLine seeks local stories to honor veterans

Florida NewsLine Staff  
editor@floridanewslines.com

Mandarin 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@floridanewslines.com by Friday, Oct. 9 for a chance to be featured.

# FALL INTO FUN



Photo courtesy of Mandarin Garden Club

Vendors display handmade quilted towels and linens at a past Mandarin Garden Club Craft Fair.

## Mandarin Garden Club welcomes fall with programs, sales and Craft Fair

By Michele Alex

The Mandarin Garden Club is welcoming fall with a lineup of free public programs and community events running through September and October.

Throughout September, the club is hosting free programs featuring expert speakers on sustainable landscaping, water conservation and gardening adapted to Florida's climate. Circle meetings are

scheduled for the second Tuesday, the third Tuesday and Thursday, all at 10 a.m., and the fourth Thursday at 7 p.m.

**Craft** cont. on pg. 11

## Citrus fundraiser returns to support club, growers

By Brett Nolan

The Mandarin Community Club is once again inviting the public to savor the taste of Florida while supporting two important causes. The club's Florida Citrus Fundraiser returns this fall, giving residents a chance to pre-order fresh, Florida-grown fruit and help both the historic club and the state's embattled citrus growers.

Last year's fundraiser moved more than 3,300 pounds of Florida citrus into homes and businesses.



Photo courtesy of Mandarin Community Club

The Mandarin Community Club's entrance sign welcomes visitors to the historic Mandarin site, home to this year's citrus fundraiser.

**Citrus** cont. on pg. 2

**Citrus** cont. from pg.1

Florida's citrus industry has taken a severe beating in recent decades as the state battles citrus greening, a devastating bacterial disease also known as Huanglongbing. Production that once reached 300 million boxes of citrus in the early 2000s has plummeted to roughly 14 million boxes in recent years.

**A stronger partnership for greater impact**

This year the Mandarin Community Club is partnering with the Florida Farm Bureau Federation, a nonprofit that works directly with the state's farming industry and serves as the largest voice for Florida agriculture. The collaboration brings additional citrus options, lower prices and a higher impact: a portion of the proceeds will go directly to support the state's remaining groves.

Every purchase also benefits the Mandarin Community Club itself. Founded in 1923, the historic nonprofit contin-

ues to serve the Mandarin community and acts as caregiver to one of North Florida's most historically significant buildings — the 1872 Mandarin Schoolhouse.

**Deep roots in Mandarin's citrus past**

The fundraiser also celebrates Mandarin's own citrus heritage. An 1879 Jacksonville newspaper article reported that 25,000 orange trees stood between Beauclerc Bluff and the Mandarin Post Office, an area of about four miles, with 3,500 of them already bearing fruit.

**New varieties and innovative growing methods**

Shoppers will find expanded choices this season. Options include classic Florida navel oranges, satsuma mandarins grown in North Florida groves, and red grapefruit produced under the Citrus Under Protective Screens (CUPS) program.

Trees are grown inside large, screened structures that keep out the Asian citrus

psyllid, the insect that spreads the disease. The red grapefruit offered this year ranks among the first large-scale CUPS harvests available to the public.

For those who prefer a smaller selection, a combo box containing all three varieties — navels, satsumas and red grapefruit — will be available.

**Convenient ordering, pickup and shipping**

Pre-orders run from September through November. Families are encouraged to take advantage of the lower prices on 10-pound bags of Florida navels, Florida red grapefruit or Florida satsuma mandarins this year by ordering online. Direct payment options will also be available at Mandarin Community Club events and at the Mandarin Markets on Sept. 26 and Oct. 24 at 2955 Orange Picker Road.

Those who prefer to pick up their orders can do so on the evening of Friday, Dec. 4, during the annual award-winning Mandarin Community Christmas Tree Lighting at the club. Families are

invited to kick off the holiday season at the historic site while collecting their citrus.

Businesses interested in bulk purchases can contact the club directly.

*Brett Nolan is the vice president of the Mandarin Community Club.*

**PRE ORDER FLORIDA CITRUS NOW!**  
**VISIT THE LINK BELOW**



A QR code links directly to the Mandarin Community Club's online pre-order page for this year's Florida Citrus Fundraiser.

# Williams Family YMCA rolls out fall programming

By Emily Delaney

As the temperature begins to cool, there's no better time to get moving, try something new and reconnect with your First Coast YMCA community. Whatever brings you back this fall — a new fitness routine, family time or new friendships — the Williams Family YMCA has something for you.

**Tennis for every age and ability:** The Williams Family YMCA is home to 13 clay tennis courts, with programs welcoming everyone from children as young as 4 years old to active adults in their 90s and beyond. Weekly youth tennis classes progress from fundamentals into advanced junior clinics and competitive play throughout the teen



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Photo courtesy of First Coast YMCA  
A women's USTA Florida Adult 40 & Over League 4.5 team celebrates winning the 2026 Sectional Championship.

years, while adults can choose from Tennis 101 for beginners, refresher clinics, USTA League teams, Working Women's teams, and private lessons. We're also introducing a new USTA Teen Tennis Program featuring Friday Night Match Play.

**Homeschool PE that builds healthy kids:** For more than two decades, the Williams Family YMCA has been a trusted partner for homeschool families. Our homeschool PE program is open to both YMCA members and non-members, helping children build physical literacy and confidence while learning teamwork and healthy habits. Instructors are nationally certified, with additional child-health curriculum certification. The YMCA is also an approved Florida PEP provider, available at all 16 First Coast locations.

**More than 70 group exercise classes every week:** No matter your fitness level, you'll find a class that keeps you motivated. Our weekly schedule features more than 70 group exercise

classes, including Les Mills® programs, strength training and cardio. Popular line dancing classes are offered three days a week.

**Pickleball every day:** One of America's fastest-growing sports continues to thrive at the First Coast YMCA, with daily pickleball bringing players of all skill levels together for friendly competition and fellowship.

**Keep summer going with aqua fitness:** There's still time to enjoy refreshing aqua fitness classes, offered Monday through Friday from 9 to 10 a.m. These low-impact, high-energy workouts improve strength and balance while boosting flexibility and heart health.

**Healthy living for every generation:** The First Coast YMCA's commitment to healthy living extends to every age. SilverSneakers® classes are offered Monday through Saturday, providing older adults opportunities to improve strength, balance, flexibility and overall wellness.

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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.

Mandarin NewsLine community newspaper is a free monthly publication delivered to all addresses in Zip Codes 32223, 32258, and selected neighborhoods in 32257. 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. ©2026.



BFF Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Luna!



**Breed:**  
Jack Russell Terrier  
**Favorite Activity:**  
Cuddling  
**Favorite Food:**  
Chicken  
**Favorite Friends:**  
Mom

**How did your BFF get their name:**  
Luna's parents are selenophiles — people who love the moon.

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.

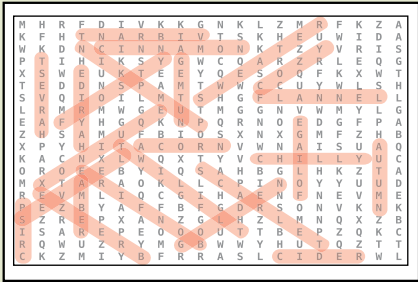
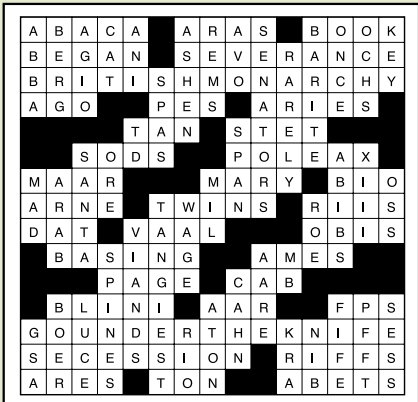
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Answers to our Puzzles PG 8



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# September

## Community Calendar

### What's Happening in Mandarin

To submit items for the Community Calendar, email [editor@floridanewsline.com](mailto:editor@floridanewsline.com).



### Now Hiring Licensed Dental Hygienist – River Garden Hebrew Home

River Garden Hebrew Home is seeking a compassionate and dependable licensed dental hygienist to join its team in a PRN capacity, up to 40 hours a month. Experience is required. The role suits a hygienist seeking flexible scheduling, supplemental income or a rewarding opportunity to serve residents in a long-term care setting. Contact human resources at **(904) 260-1818** for more information.

### September 8 GriefShare support group

A new 13-week GriefShare session begins Tuesday, Sept. 8, from 10 a.m. to noon at the Cody Enrichment Center, 4152 Loretto Rd. GriefShare offers understanding, guidance and a safe, supportive place to navigate the challenges of loss. To register, contact Gail Carpenter at 904-318-9308 or visit [griefshare.org](http://griefshare.org).

### September 10 Mandarin Garden Club Magnolia Circle: "Native Plants in Landscaping"

The Mandarin Garden Club Magnolia Circle hosts its monthly meeting Wednesday, Sept. 10, at 10 a.m. at 2892 Loretto Road, with an educational program on incorporating Florida native plants into home landscaping. The event is free and open to the public. Visit [mandaringardenclub.org](http://mandaringardenclub.org).

### September 15 Mandarin Garden Club Dogwood Circle: "Flowers and Plants for All"

The Mandarin Garden Club Dogwood Circle hosts its monthly meeting Monday, Sept. 15, at 10 a.m. at 2892 Loretto Road, featuring guest speaker and landscaper Jen Burnham on flowers and plants for Zone 9b. The event is free and open to the public. Visit [mandaringardenclub.org](http://mandaringardenclub.org).

### September 17 Mandarin Garden Club Cherokee Circle: "Eat Your Yard"

The Mandarin Garden Club Cherokee Circle hosts its monthly meeting Wednesday, Sept. 17, at 10 a.m. at 2892 Loretto Road, featuring Tim Armstrong on growing, nurturing and using plants for sustainable living and holistic well-being. The event is free and open to the public. Visit [mandaringardenclub.org](http://mandaringardenclub.org).

### September 24 Mandarin Garden Club Live Oak Circle meeting

The Mandarin Garden Club Live Oak

Circle hosts its monthly meeting Wednesday, Sept. 24, at 7 p.m. at 2892 Loretto Road, with guest speaker Stephanie Means, Florida Yards & Neighborhoods program assistant at UF/IFAS. The event is free and open to the public. Visit [mandaringardenclub.org](http://mandaringardenclub.org).

### September 24 Mandarin Republican Club meeting

The Mandarin Republican Club meets Thursday, Sept. 24, at St. Mary's Seafood, 11290 Old St. Augustine Road. Social time begins at 6 p.m., with the meeting starting at 6:30 p.m.

### September 24 Mandarin Women's Club luncheon

The Mandarin Women's Club resumes its monthly luncheons with a "Getting to Know You" event Thursday, Sept. 24, at the Ramada Inn in Mandarin, 3130 Hartley Road. Doors open at 10:30 a.m., and reservations are required. Cost is \$32, with payment due by Thursday, Sept. 14. To reserve a spot, contact Susie at 904-885-8952 or [spm104@aol.com](mailto:spm104@aol.com). Visit [mandarinwomensclub.com](http://mandarinwomensclub.com) for more information.

### October 2-3 Mandarin Garden Club "Trash to Treasure" sale

The Mandarin Garden Club hosts its "Trash to Treasure" garage and estate sale Thursday and Friday, Oct. 2 and Oct. 3, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at 2892 Loretto Road. A pop-up plant sale and garden cafe run the same dates and times. The event is free and open to the public. Visit [mandaringardenclub.org](http://mandaringardenclub.org).

### Ongoing Activities

#### Monthly Sundays Mandarin Parkinson's Support Group

The support group meets monthly on Sundays from 2 to 4 p.m. at Church of Eleven22, 4911 Losco Road. Contact Katheryn Donaldson at 904-710-1449.

#### Tuesdays Shuffleboard

Shuffleboard is played Tuesdays at 10 a.m. at Tommy Hazouri Park. Beginners are welcome. Meet at the park entrance next to the tennis courts.

#### Wednesdays North Florida Genealogical Society Library

The library at 6215 Sauterne Dr. is open every Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more information, call 904-778-1000 or visit [nfgen.org](http://nfgen.org).

#### Second Thursdays American Legion Post 372

The group meets the second Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. on the second floor of the Williams YMCA, 10415 San Jose Blvd. All veterans are welcome.

#### Third Thursdays Friends of Mandarin South Library

The group meets at 1 p.m. the third Thursday of each month in the foyer meeting room to sponsor library programs and activities.

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Photo courtesy of Mandarin Women's Club.  
Mandarin Women's Club members gather for a past social outing.

# Mandarin Women's Club resumes monthly luncheons

By Gail Packard

It's party time! The Mandarin Women's Club is excited to welcome everyone back for another year of fun. We will have a "Getting To Know You" luncheon on Thursday, Sept. 24, at the Ramada Inn in Mandarin (3130 Hartley Road). If you like to party, please join us as we will be playing our version of a \$cavenger Hunt to determine our most observant members. This will be a fun way to get to know each other better. We will also be sharing our plans for some great programs that are planned for the coming year. It's time to party and just have fun socializing

with old friends and new. Who knows, you might even win some ca\$h!

Doors open at 10:30 a.m. and reservations for the luncheon are required. The luncheon cost is \$32 and your check must be received by Thursday, Sept. 14. To make reservations and obtain payment instructions, call Susie at 904-885-8952 or email her at [spm104@aol.com](mailto:spm104@aol.com). For more information on events, photos and the membership form visit [www.mandarinwomensclub.com](http://www.mandarinwomensclub.com).

*Gail Packard manages publicity for the Mandarin Women's Club.*



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# Theatre Troupe 1776 Presents Broadway Cabaret Fundraiser at Historic Mandarin Community Club

By Brett Nolan

Theatre Troupe 1776, a local Jacksonville theatre group dedicated to family-friendly entertainment, will host its latest fundraiser, "Broadway Cabaret," on Friday, Sept. 18, at 7 p.m. (Doors open at 6:30 p.m.) at the Mandarin Community Club, 12447 Mandarin Road. All proceeds benefit the Mandarin Community Club.



Photo courtesy of Theatre Troupe 1776. Two young performers pose backstage in costume during a past Theatre Troupe 1776 production at the Mandarin Community Club.



Photo courtesy of Theatre Troupe 1776. Young cast members perform during Theatre Troupe 1776's "1950s Cabaret" in 2025 at the Mandarin Community Club.

The evening promises an unforgettable show filled with Broadway musical numbers, including selections from "Phantom of the Opera," "Les Misérables," "Singin' in the Rain" and more, performed by a cast of actors of all ages. Light food and beverages are included with every ticket purchase.

Adult tickets are \$20 and children's tickets are \$10. Guests can also stop by the Florida Citrus fundraising table on site to pre-order the finest Florida fruit the Sunshine State has to offer, with proceeds benefiting both the Mandarin Community Club and Florida's citrus growers.

This "Broadway Cabaret" continues the troupe's successful partnership with the club. It follows the popular "1945 Cabaret" held in 2024 and the "1950s Cabaret" presented in 2025, both of which raised funds to support the Mandarin Community Club.

Tickets are available in advance through the Mandarin Community Club website or Facebook, and guests are encouraged to reserve their spots ahead of time. Tickets will also be available for purchase at the door on the night of the show, subject to availability. Organizers encourage the community to attend and support this local arts and community collaboration.

Theatre Troupe 1776 specializes in both original works and classic productions. The group has staged numerous plays and performances on the historic stage of the Mandarin Community Club, a venue with deep theatrical roots dating back to the late 1800s and the era of Harriet Beecher Stowe, who once lived in the Mandarin community.



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Photo courtesy of Friends of the Mandarin Library.  
Friends of the Mandarin Library volunteers Ted and Louise sort donated books ahead of a past book sale.

# What's happening at your library this fall

By Jeremy Yates,  
Marketing Specialist, Jacksonville Public Library

### Jax Book Fest

Jax Book Fest returns from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 19, at the Main Library with more than 120 local authors and talks with New York Times bestselling authors John Patrick Green, Jennifer Lynn Barnes and Emma Straub. Find great books, enjoy book-themed crafts and much more. The event is free and open to the public. Visit [jaxlibrary.org/BookFest](http://jaxlibrary.org/BookFest) to learn more.

### Upgrade your library card

Unlock a world of possibilities with a free library card. Parents: Have a student in public school? Upgrade their free student card to a full-access public library card and unlock more checkouts and great digital content for kids on apps like Libby. Just bring your ID and one of these items for your child: report card, birth certificate, health insurance, student ID or Social Security card.

### Storytime

Hear great stories, mixed with music and movement, for a fun learning and bonding experience for parents and little ones. Storytimes run 2 to 2:30 p.m. on Tuesdays and 10:15 to 10:45 a.m. Thursdays at South Mandarin Library. Or join us at 10:15 or 11 a.m. on Thursdays at Mandarin Library.

### Sensory Friendly Storytime

A Sensory Friendly Storytime is offered at 10:15 a.m. and 11:15 a.m. on Wednesdays at Mandarin Library. Designed for children, ages 2-5 with sensory sensitivities, it combines traditional storytime components with supportive elements. Pre-registration online is recommended (attendance is limited to enhance the experience).

### Spanish storytime

New this month for children, ages 0-5, to learn, move and imagine with fun stories in Spanish! Led by dedicated

volunteers, these special programs run from 11 a.m. to noon on Fridays, starting Sept. 4 at South Mandarin Library. No registration is required but space is limited.

### Junior Artist and Junior Scientist

Do you have a Junior Artist or Junior Scientist? These art and STEM-based programs perfect for creative and curious 5-8-year-old kids. Programs alternate weekly (between art and science), with new themes and books each time. Stop by 3:30 – 4:30 p.m. on Wednesdays at Mandarin Library or 4 – 5 p.m. on Tuesdays at South Mandarin Library.

### Friends of the Mandarin Library Book Sale

Save the date for the Friends of the Mandarin Library's next Book Sale is happening 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, Oct. 2, and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 3 at 3330 Kori Rd. There will be a wide selection of books for every age, CDs, DVDs, puzzles and more. Spend just \$10 to fill up a paper bag. Individual items are priced \$5 and under. This sale is cash only.

*Jeremy Yates is a Marketing Specialist for the Jacksonville Public Library.*

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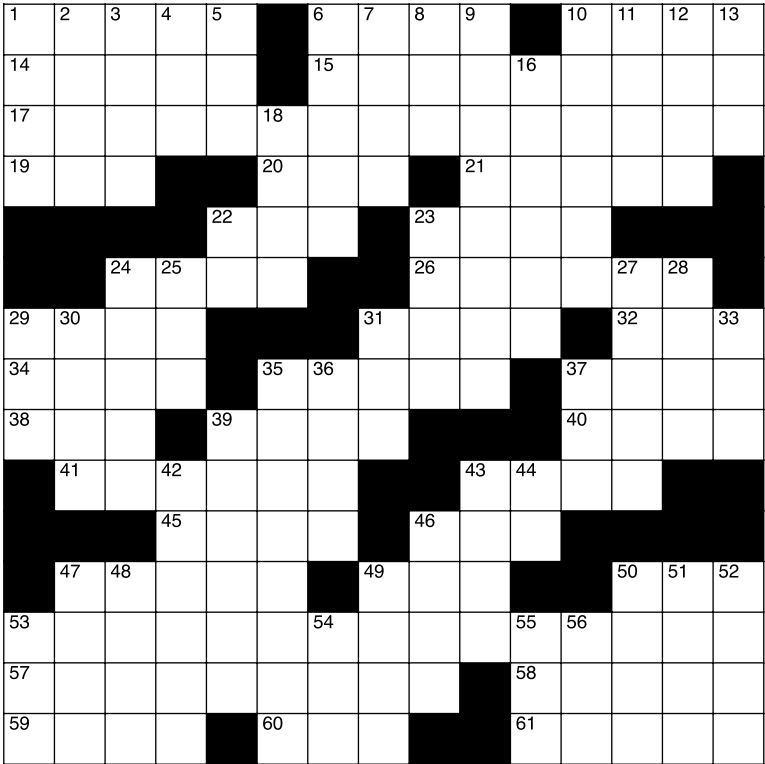


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CLUES ACROSS

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



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

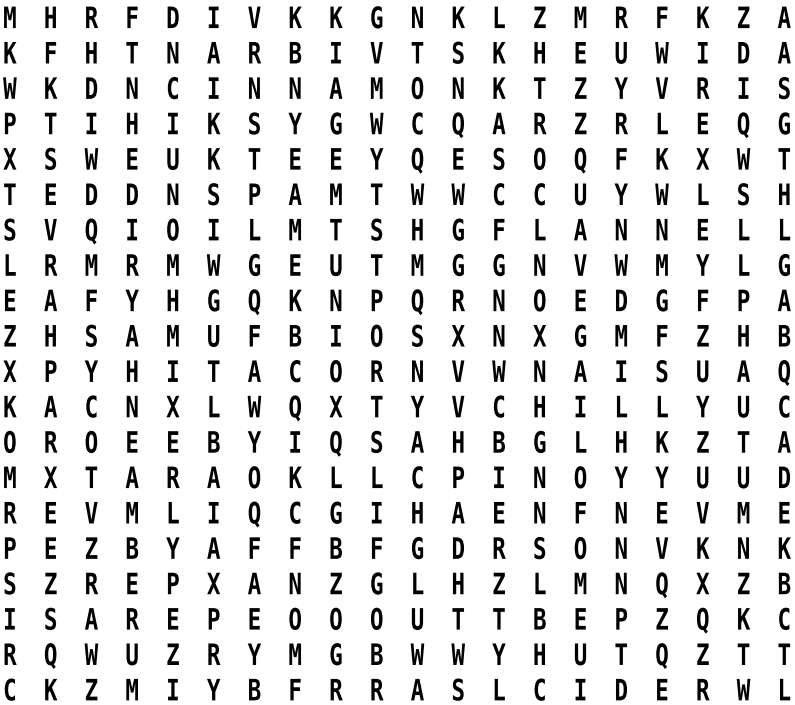
C. 22 26 20 22 17 1 23

Clue: Orange gourd

D. 11 24 13 23

Clue: Starchy crop

FALL EVENINGS WORD SEARCH



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

WORDS

- ACORN
- AMBER
- AUTUMN
- BONFIRE
- BREEZE
- CHILLY
- CIDER
- CINNAMON
- COZY
- CRISP
- EQUINOX
- FLANNEL
- FOLIAGE
- FROSTY
- GOLDEN
- HARVEST
- HAYRIDE
- LEAVES
- NUTMEG
- PUMPKIN
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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 new-found 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 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.



Christopher Thompson

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](http://www.ameripriseadvisors.com/team/upper-deck-wealth-management), 818 A1A N, Suite 301*

*Ponte Vedra Beach FL, (904) 380-2322.*

## Gardening

### The Good Earth: Fall has arrived, but don't tell your garden

By Connie Doyle, Master Gardener UF/IFAS

September has arrived, and according to the calendar, fall is here. Tell that to your garden.

Here in Northeast Florida, September is more of a transition than a true change of seasons. While gardeners farther north may be enjoying crisp mornings and the first hints of autumn color, our gardens are still dealing with heat, humidity and plenty of sunshine. But as the days slowly become a little shorter and nighttime temperatures begin to moderate, our plants know that something is changing.

September can actually be one of the most rewarding months to take a fresh look at your landscape.



Connie Doyle, Master Gardener UF | IFAS

cally at your perennial beds. Are plants becoming overcrowded? Has something outgrown its space? Is a perennial receiving too much — or too little — sun? September is a good month to begin planning where plants might be divided or relocated as temperatures become more comfortable. Sometimes the best thing we can do for a garden isn't to add

another plant, but to give the plants we already have a little more room to thrive.

And don't be too quick to remove plants simply because they look tired after summer. Some perennials need a little time to recover from our brutal July and August weather. A plant that looks less than impressive now may surprise you once the worst of the heat has passed.

September is also the beginning of our fall planting season. The warm soil gives newly planted trees, shrubs and perennials an opportunity to establish their roots before next summer's heat arrives. For Florida gardeners, this is one of the advantages of having a gardening calendar that doesn't quite follow the rest of the country.

So while September may announce the arrival of fall, don't be too quick to put away your gardening gloves. In Northeast Florida, fall doesn't mean the garden is going to sleep. It simply means the garden is changing gears — and there is still plenty to enjoy.

Out into the garden we go, to lose our minds and find our souls.

*Connie Doyle writes The Good Earth, a gardening column inspired by a life-long 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](mailto:mail@floridanewsline.com).*



Photo courtesy Connie Doyle

Many of our perennial plants that struggled through the hottest part of summer may begin to perk up as the extreme heat eases. Some will produce fresh growth, while others may reward us with another flush of flowers. Pentas, salvia, plumbago and firespike can continue providing color well into fall, while ornamental grasses such as muhly grass are preparing for their spectacular seasonal display.

This is also a good time to look criti-



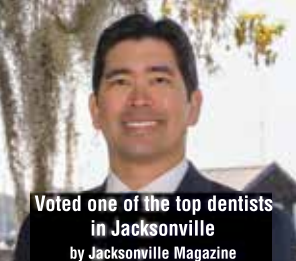
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# Act II Players wraps summer run, announces fall production of "Dracula"

Act II Players, Mandarin's local community theatre company, wrapped its July 16-19 run of "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying" and is now looking ahead to its Halloween-season show.

The all-volunteer organization relies on audience support to keep community theatre thriving in Jacksonville. Special recognition went to Caragh Zeigler, the production's assistant musical director and dance captain, who stepped in as an understudy to perform the role of J.B. Biggley.

The production was led by co-directors Ava and Juliet Fixel, with Juliet Fixel also serving as choreographer and musical director. They were joined by assistant choreographer Elliana Tessler, assistant musical director and dance captain Caragh Zeigler, stage manager Addison Farwell and producer Jamie Glavich.

The cast was led by Cameron Haddock as J. Pierrepont Finch, Avery Maxham as Rosemary Pilkington, Karl Rogers (understudied by Zeigler) as J.B. Biggley, Ethan Walls as Bud Frump, Katie O'Neill as Smitty and Julia Rigon as Hedy LaRue. The featured cast included Dennis Stouse, Chloe Dresback, Marilyn Painter, Bryan Morris, Skanda "AJ" Pratheek, Savannah Haddock, Joel Silverstein, Kai Thomas, Andrew Eger, Lisa Hunt, Shannen Murray and Tom Mackin. The ensemble featured Emmy Gilyana, Katelyn Maguire, Meg Mullaney, Juliana Williams and Camille Zeigler, with backstage support from crew members Jules Hartley, Carson Stover, Beckett Tweet and Lauren Wygonik.



Photo courtesy of Act II Players  
Cast members perform a musical number during Act II Players' summer production of "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying."

Looking ahead to Halloween, Act II Players will present John Mattera's comedic stage adaptation of Bram Stoker's "Dracula" Oct. 9-11 at the Black Box Theatre, 3604 Cardinal Point Drive, Jacksonville. The fast-paced show follows the famous vampire as he sets up shop next door to an insane asylum. Tickets are available now at [actiplayers.org](http://actiplayers.org).

For more information on upcoming performances, ticketing or volunteer opportunities, visit [actiplayers.org](http://actiplayers.org) or email [info@actiplayers.org](mailto:info@actiplayers.org).

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. Opened in 2021, WEC has quickly become a centerpiece of Ocala's horse culture, hosting competitions throughout



Debi Lander

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



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."



Photo courtesy of Debi Lander

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

premier thoroughbred breeding operations, 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 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.

Craft cont. from pg. 1

Topics and speakers for each meeting are posted on the club's Community Calendar page at mandaringardenclub.org.

The club's "Trash to Treasure Sale" is set for Thursday and Friday, Oct. 2 and 3, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. each day, featuring garage- and estate-sale-style items, a pop-up plant sale and a cafe.

The club's 17th annual Craft Fair follows Saturday, Oct. 24, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., featuring crafts from club members alongside numerous local vendors. A few outside 10-foot vendor spaces remain available for \$40. Vendors interested in participating can contact Joyce Datz at 904-287-3602 or jdatz@bellsouth.net.

The Mandarin Garden Club grounds are open to the public for walking and relaxing, and the club also books private events. More information is available at mandaringardenclub.org.



Photo courtesy of Mandarin Garden Club

Shoppers browse handmade wreaths and holiday decor at a past Mandarin Garden Club Craft Fair.

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