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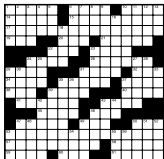
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The CreekLine seeks local stories in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Florida NewsLine Staff
editor@floridanewslines.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@floridanewslines.com by Monday, Sept. 14, for a chance to be featured.

The CreekLine seeks local stories to honor veterans

Florida NewsLine Staff
editor@floridanewslines.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@floridanewslines.com by Monday, Sept. 14 for a chance to be featured.

ADOPTING ADVENTURES



Photo courtesy of Chantelle Gauthier
Students visit an interactive exhibit at the Florida Aquarium.

Durbin Creek Elementary partners with Florida Aquarium 'Adopt an Animal' program

By Tracy McCormick-Dishman
editor@floridanewslines.com

Every classroom at Durbin Creek Elementary School adopted a marine animal this year as part of a new partnership between the school's Parent Teacher Organization and the Florida Aquarium, believed to be the first pro-

gram of its kind at a Florida school.

The "Adopt an Animal" program brings hands-on conservation education into every classroom at Durbin Creek Elementary, St. Johns County's largest VPK through fifth grade school. The program also serves as a fundraiser for the school amid public school budget

cuts. The partnership was organized by Chantelle Gauthier, the PTO's co-president and Partners in Learning coordinator, working with Jamie Whitehurst of the Florida Aquarium and Principal Ashley McCormick.

Aquarium cont. on pg. 6

Clerk's office opens new service center

By Tracy McCormick-Dishman
editor@floridanewslines.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



Photo courtesy of St. Johns County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller's Office
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.

Service center cont. on pg. 3



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Submissions

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

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BFF

Breed:
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Favorite Food:
Carrots

Favorite Friends:
Stan and Buehler (her Great Dane besties)

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

Best Furry Friend of the month

Meet Tater!

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



Answers to our Puzzles PG 7

A	B	A	C	A		A	R	A	S		B	O	O	K
B	E	G	A	N		S	E	V	E	R	A	N	C	E
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I	S	A	R	E	P	E	R	Y	M	F									
R	C	K	Z	M	I	Y	B												

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Service center cont. from pg. 1

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



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.

deeds, Notices of Commencement and plat and PUD maps; marriage licenses and wedding ceremonies; passport application acceptance; Value Adjustment 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.

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September

Community Calendar

What's Happening in St. Johns

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

September 1

Northwest SJC United for Progress meeting

The Northwest SJC United for Progress Club will host Eddie Creamer, St. Johns County property appraiser; Cathy Weber, St. Johns County School District chief financial officer; and Dr. Brennan Asplen, St. Johns County superintendent of schools, for a discussion on the ramifications of the Homestead Plan to eliminate real estate taxes for homestead properties in Florida, an amendment that will be on the Nov. 3 ballot. Social hour begins at 6:30 p.m., with the meeting starting at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 1. Email nwsjcp@gmail.com for more information.

September 1

Honeybee Quilters Guild meeting

The Honeybee Quilters Guild meets Tuesday, Sept. 1, at 6:30 p.m. at Mandarin Church of Christ, 12791 Old St. Augustine Road. Doors open at 6 p.m., to the right of the playground in the back. The program will introduce the 2027 Block Exchange. New members and guests are welcome. Visit honeybeequilters.org for more information.

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 12

Bartram Trail Genealogy Club

The Bartram Trail Genealogy Club meets Saturday, Sept. 12, from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Bartram Trail Public Library. Member Bill Sherman will explore the Genealogy Proof Standard (GPS) and how to use it.

September 17

William Bartram Scenic & Historic Highway monthly meeting

The William Bartram Scenic & Historic Highway monthly meeting is Wednesday, Sept. 17, at 6:30 p.m. at Westminster Woods on Julington Creek, 25 State Road 13, Conference Room LB.

September 19-20

St. Johns County Master Gardener Fall Plant Sale

The St. Johns County Master Gardener Fall Plant Sale is Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 19 and Sept. 20, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the St. Johns County Extension Office, 3125 Agricultural Center Dr., St. Augustine. The sale features landscape plants, houseplants and vegetable seedlings. Tours of the demonstration gardens are also offered. Visit sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/stjohns.

September 21

All Star Quilters' Guild meeting

The All Star Quilters' Guild meets Monday, Sept. 21, at The Springs Church, 900 Park Ave., Orange Park, with socializing at 9:30 a.m. ahead of the 10 a.m. meeting. The program will be a discussion about sewing rooms with photos, and Sew and Tell is always a feature. Guests are welcome. Visit allstarquilters.org for more information. *This location is temporary pending a more permanent location back in Mandarin.*

October Events

October 13

Bartram Trail Newcomers Club birthday luncheon

The Bartram Trail Newcomers Club will celebrate all members' birthdays at its monthly luncheon Tuesday, Oct. 13, at 11 a.m. at St. Johns Golf and Country Club. For more information, email BTNC@wildapricot.org.

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

Wednesdays

Playing HOOKie

This charity focused knitting and crochet group meets Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to noon at Maple Street Biscuit Company, 1627 Race Track Road, St. Johns. 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., St. Augustine. Call 904 209 3655.

Thursdays

Open Game Play

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

Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays

Trout Creek Senior Center Activities

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

Wednesdays

Al Anon and Alateen Meetings

Free confidential support groups for family and friends of those affected by someone else drinking meet Wednesdays from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at Swiss Cove Christian Church, 1965 State Road 13, St. Johns. Meetings are held on the second floor with an elevator available.



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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



Vicky Oakes

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,

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.

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



Eddie Creamer

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.

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.sjcpcpa.gov/amendment3. I'm available to answer questions or provide information at Eddie@sjcpcpa.gov or 904-827-5500.

Eddie Creamer is the St. Johns County property appraiser.



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FortifyFL tip leads to arrest of two St. Johns County teens; explosives, homemade guns seized

By NewsLine Staff

The St. Johns County Sheriff's Office arrested two teenagers on felony charges after a FortifyFL tip led to a joint investigation with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, recovering homemade firearms and explosive devices, according to a recent release.

On April 27, SJSO and the school district received a FortifyFL tip that two juveniles were using the Telegram app to discuss homemade weapons and conspire to commit an armed robbery, the release said. FortifyFL is a platform for reporting suspicious activity and potential threats involving juveniles, created and funded by the 2018 Florida Legislature as part of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Safety Act.

SJSO and the school district's safety team identified the suspects as Switzerland Point Middle School students Julian Davis, 14, and Charles Williams, 13, and searched both students' homes, according to the release.

Between April 27 and 30, SJSO's Major Crimes and Bomb Squad units, EOD

K9 units, and ATF agents searched Davis's residence on Tivoli Drive in St. Johns multiple times, recovering three homemade firearms, ammunition, suspected explosive components, makeshift handcuffs, handwritten notes on building firearms and chemical reactions, diagrams, manifesto-style books and a tactical vest bearing white supremacist drawings, the release said.

The ATF Forensic Science Laboratory tested the explosive components and found they contained homemade black powder, a mixture of erythritol tetranitrate, aluminum, sulfur and charcoal, and urea nitrate, produced using household products purchased online, according to the release.

Detectives also found an extensive search history on Davis's devices showing he had researched how to manufacture homemade firearms and explosives and had studied high-profile criminal incidents, the release said.

Detectives believe the two conspired to commit an armed robbery, based on the conversations between Davis and



Items recovered by the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office during the investigation, including a homemade firearm, ammunition and brass knuckles.

Williams and the evidence recovered, and that the investigation intercepted a larger violent incident in St. Johns County, according to the release.

Davis was charged with conspiracy to commit robbery with a firearm; two counts of making or possessing a destructive device firearm; three counts of making or possessing a destructive device explosive; discharging a destructive device; and furnishing a firearm to a minor. He remains in the St. Johns County Jail. Williams was charged with conspiracy to commit robbery with a firearm.

Although both students attended school in St. Johns County, officials said all actions occurred off campus and no threats were made toward local schools. Neither student may return to any school, according to the release.

"Collaboratively they each have played a

role in keeping our schools and communities safe," said St. Johns County School District Deputy Superintendent Paul Abatinozzi. "This situation highlights the value of the FortifyFL app as a tool for students, families and our community to report potential threats."

The investigation remains active, the release said.

"The magnitude of information at the fingertips of our youth is a concern," Sheriff Robert A. Hardwick said. "Knowing what your children are consuming online and the activities they engage in should be a priority for parents. This incident is a perfect example of: if you see something, say something. Through our in-depth investigation in partnership with ATF and the State Attorney's Office, we are thankful to have prevented a tragedy in St. Johns County."



A notebook containing handwritten diagrams was among the items recovered during the investigation.

Aquarium cont. from pg. 1

Gauthier said the idea grew out of a summer spent developing a new enrichment program for the school, beginning with outreach to Whitehurst and continuing through several video meetings. Just before the school year began, Gauthier and her two sons visited The Florida Aquarium in person to meet Whitehurst while returning from a family trip to South Florida.

Under the program, each classroom raised funds to adopt its own marine animal for a year-long enrichment program. The identity of each classroom's animal was kept secret from students until an official reveal on Adoption Day.

The program kicked off Monday, Aug. 24, with a special message from aquarium animal caretakers during the school's morning news broadcast.

Sponsorship opportunities for each classroom's animal went live that day through the Cheddar Up platform, with families given two weeks to sponsor their classroom's animal. Families also received exclusive animal videos through ParentSquare, while keeping their classroom's animal a secret from students.

Classrooms officially learned which animal they adopted on Adoption Day,

Tuesday, Sept. 8. Students viewed a video revealing their class's animal and received a plush "class stuffy" version of the animal, along with a fact sheet and an adoption certificate.

Throughout the school year, classrooms will receive quarterly video updates from Florida Aquarium caretakers, with content tailored to each grade level's curriculum.

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ST. JOHNS Business Monthly

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



Christopher Thompson

ing 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.

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 pri-

oritizing 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.

Larizza's office to launch new podcast

NewsLine staff

The Office of State Attorney R.J. Larizza, who leads Florida's 7th Judicial Circuit covering Volusia, Flagler, St. Johns and Putnam counties, is launching a new podcast, according to Haley Harrison, the office's public information officer and community engagement specialist.

Larizza said the whole office will take part in the podcast, along with guests brought in from partner organizations such as local school districts involved in the office's youth education initiatives.

"The whole office will be involved," Larizza told the Daytona Beach News-Journal. "We're going to bring folks in to chat from school districts, from the initiatives we're doing. We want to educate the public and help prevent some crimes, let folks know there are consequences for the things you do. And then get people in the community to tell us how they feel about how we're doing."

"I'm really excited," Larizza said. "I think it's going to be a great success, and we're about to kick it off."



State Attorney R.J. Larizza speaks near a podcast recording setup at his office. Submitted

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St. Johns County launches new stewardship video series

By NewsLine Staff

St. Johns County launched a new monthly video series exploring the history, culture and conservation efforts that have shaped the county, with its premiere episode focused on Fort Matanzas National Monument, according to the St. Johns County Parks and Recreation newsletter.

The SJC Stewardship Series comes from the St. Johns County Office of Public Affairs and features Megan Wright, the

county's environmental specialist, as host. The series supports two priorities in the St. Johns County Strategic Plan: Community Trust and Enhance Conservation, according to the newsletter.

In the first episode, Wright explores Fort Matanzas and its role in protecting St. Augustine, along with ongoing preservation efforts at the site. Built by the Spanish in 1742, the fort was positioned along the Matanzas River to guard the southern approach to the

city. It was constructed on a foundation of pine timbers and oyster shells, and includes an elevated gun deck, soldiers' quarters, a powder magazine and an observation deck overlooking the surrounding waterways.

Fort Matanzas is recognized as the oldest recorded structure in St. Johns County outside the city of St. Augustine and was designated a National Monument in 1924. Preservation work over the past century, including structural

stabilization and improved visitor access through ferry service and docking facilities, has helped protect the site while keeping it open to the public.

New episodes of the SJC Stewardship Series will be released monthly, each spotlighting a different historic or culturally significant location in St. Johns County. Episodes are available on the county's social media channels, its Gov-TV channel and the SJC Stewardship web page at sjcfl.us/sjc-stewardship.

Fall sports are kicking off at First Coast YMCA

By Phil Tensley

As the fall season of youth sports approaches, the Brown Family YMCA, YMCA at Flagler Health+ Village, St. Augustine YMCA and YMCA at Nocatee are gearing up for another busy stretch of practices, games and new faces on the roster. From returning athletes to first-timers, First Coast YMCA youth sports programs are a place for kids to develop their skills, learn teamwork and build confidence.

For many kids, the fall season becomes a period of real growth, one that shapes how they communicate, handle setbacks and build connections with their teammates. The First Coast YMCA prioritizes creating a space that is welcoming to all, so regardless of membership status, children from across the First Coast are welcome to join in on the fun.

Volleyball is taking the court

For kids craving to bump, set and spike, the First Coast YMCA offers an eight-week volleyball league. The session runs September to October for kids ages 7 to 17. Players have two practices a week and will play in friendly competition against teams from other First Coast YMCA branches. No tryouts are required, as kids of all skill levels are welcome to join a team, learn the basics of the game and improve their skills. Whether they're serving for the first time or coming back for another season, there's a spot on the roster for every kid.

Where basketball begins

For kids wanting to kickstart their basketball career, Skills and Drills is a fundamentals program that functions as a

starting point for kids new to the game. Hosted at the YMCA at Nocatee, players will join a four-week session, practicing twice a week for one hour. Children are separated by age group, creating a welcoming environment and allowing them to make friends in a no-pressure zone. The Skills and Drills program is a great way for kids to gain exposure to the sport and build a strong foundation before stepping into a league.

Basketball Academy's 10th anniversary

Basketball Academy is celebrating its 10th anniversary this month, marking a decade of giving young athletes the opportunity to compete at a higher level and grow through the game of basketball. Kids in this program play in a more competitive environment against other club teams in the region, and it is meant for those who want their skills challenged. The program has grown year after year, and it's not stopping any time soon.

This year marks the 18th birthday of players from the pilot year who have grown up in the program, and three have officially committed to playing in college: one each at Jacksonville University, Florida Atlantic University and



Photo courtesy of First Coast YMCA
Young athletes compete during a First Coast YMCA youth basketball game.

Florida Gulf Coast University. The First Coast YMCA is proud to have been part of these kids' journeys and looks forward to seeing the next generation of children continue to grow and thrive.

The game starts now

Whether children are interested in exploring different ways to stay healthy or have big goals for their athletic career, the First Coast YMCA will be there every step of the way. Parents can find member and non-member rates, registration information and financial assistance eligibility at fcymca.org. For questions about youth sports in St. Johns County, contact Phil Tensley, Associate Executive Director of Sports, at PTensley@fcymca.org.

Phil Tensley is the Associate Executive Director of Sports for First Coast YMCA.



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Puzzles

Answers on page 3
Provided by MetroCreative

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
14						15				16				
17						18								
19						20				21				
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			24	25					26				27	28
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					45				46					
		47	48					49					50	51
53							54				55	56		
57											58			
59						60					61			

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

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
SCARLET
SWEATER
TWILIGHT
VIBRANT

CRYPTO FUN



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

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.

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 critically at your perennial beds. Are plants becoming overcrowded? Has something outgrown its space? Is a perennial



Connie Doyle, Master Gardener UF | IFAS

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.



Photo courtesy Connie Doyle

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Denim and Diamonds Chamber Gala returns Sept. 10

By Tracy McCormick-Dishman
editor@floridanewslines.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, 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



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

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/.

Travel

Ocala gallops beyond expectations

By Debi Lander
mail@floridanewslines.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 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.



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."

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



Debi Lander

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 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 Newslines, 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@floridanewslines.com.



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No more pain, a lot more freedom.

Get relief from back or neck pain.

Don't let pain keep you from what matters. The trusted specialists at Baptist Health and Lyerly Neurosurgery have decades of experience and offer treatments that are innovative, personalized and minimally invasive – so you can live fully again.
Call the spine experts at 904.202.BACK or visit BaptistJax.com/Back



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