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on the cover



The cover of this Register features a photo by wedding photographer Jessica VanTassel of Stout Studios. Turn to page 9 for more about VanTassel and choosing the right wedding photographer.

REGISTER

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Karina Coryell
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Photo by MAGGIE FITZROY

One of Us!

SUSAN D.
As told to
MAGGIE FITZROY **BRANDENBURG**

Susan D. Brandenburg is an award-winning biographer of more than 40 books that chronicle the history of many prominent First Coast personalities. She lives in Jacksonville, in the Lakewood area, in a condominium overlooking the St. Johns River.

How and when did you begin writing biographies?

I was writing for the Florida Times-Union, the St. Augustine Record and Women's Digest as a freelancer, while I was a secretary at Blue Cross. I was writing at nights and on weekends. I was asked by the Reverend Doctors Don and Anne Bloch to help them write their book, "Sail the Seven C's of Matrimony," a Christian marriage guide. It was really their memoir while also a marriage guide. That was my first published book.

Did that quickly lead to the next?

Actually, it did. I have discovered that God grooms you for what you are going to do next. All of my freelance columns were based on human interest stories and were basically mini memoirs.

What was your next book?

Josephine Wall's "Palette of Dreams." She was in England, so I did it long distance over the phone. Andrea Jackson was my graphic designer for that book and many more.

What awards have you won?

In 2010, I won biography of the year from the Florida Writers Association for "Sharecropper's Son, The Story of Doc Garland Granger." In 2018, I won an award from the National League of American Pen Women for "Moonshine Days, The Century Old Story of Robert Lee Swindell." He was 100 when I wrote it.

What are the challenges of being a personal biographer?

God gives me the words. So, the main challenge I have is not to write negatively. People want to be remembered well and there is always a way to write something that doesn't hurt anyone involved. People hire me to write their biographies. And I want them to be proud of what I write.

Are your books family heirlooms?

Yes, they are definitely family heirlooms, and I often keep in touch with the people I write about. We become close friends. One of the hazards of writing someone's biography is that I know everything about them, all their secrets and some of those secrets do not make it to the pages. Some have become like family.

Do the books include pictures?

Yes. A picture is worth a thousand words, it's the truth. The more photographs, the better. There were so many pictures in Jimmy Stockton's biography, "Stockton Safaris," that my graphic designer had to divide them into family and friends, hunting, fishing, ancestors and world adventures. His book is 4 pounds and 402 pages. It's sold at the Ponte Vedra Inn & Club.



ABOVE: Susan D. Brandenburg in New York City with W. Scott McClucas, whose biography she wrote.

RIGHT: Brandenburg, with Craig Smith (left), owner of Alhambra Theatre & Dining and Harry Frisch. Brandenburg wrote Frisch's biography.



ABOVE: Some of Susan D. Brandenburg's more than 40 books. Photos provided by SUSAN D. BRANDENBURG



Tell us about yourself. Where did you grow up?

I was an Air Force brat. I grew up all over the world. When people ask me where I grew up, I say I'm an Earthling. We lived all over the United States and in Germany and Japan. We were once even marooned on Wake Island in the South Pacific by a typhoon.

How and when did you come to live in Jacksonville?

The first time, I came in the 1980s with my family. It has become home over the years. The last time I moved here was in 1998, to be near my son and his family.

Where do you live now?

Five years ago, I moved from Ponte Vedra Beach to a Lakewood condo. I'm on the eighth floor. Stetson Kennedy's grandson calls me "Susan in the Sky."

Did you write about Stetson Kennedy?

Many articles, but not his biography. I have become very close to his family. He died in 2011 at 94. I am the secretary on the board of the Stetson Kennedy Foundation. His legacy as a champion of human rights and the environment continues.

What other organizations are you involved with?

READ USA, which promotes the love of reading by giving free books to students in Title I elementary schools. I am on the board of the National League of American Pen Women and on the board of The Carpenter's Shop, a Christian afterschool and summer camp program. I also teach a class for the University of North Florida OLLI Program, called "Remember Who You Are."

What are you currently writing?

I'm writing the history of the Red Coats, the volunteer chairmen of The PLAYERS. I am also writing a 35-year history of The Pace Center for Girls with Vicki Burke, founder of Pace. I am also writing the 70th anniversary edition of Rodeheaver Boy's Ranch, the oldest Christian boys ranch in the state of Florida.

What do you enjoy about your life now?

I'm living my purpose. I'm using the words God gives me in his glory.

Where can people reach you?

My email is susanscribe@comcast.net and my website is susanthescribe.upweb.com.

SPRING

Bridal

The romance issue

Pages 8-21



photo by
JESSICA VANTASSEL

Jessica VanTassel of Stout Studios offers advice about capturing your ...

Perfect Wedding Day

As told to AMBER LAKE

How long have you been a wedding photographer? What got you started in the business?

I began photographing weddings in 2004. I had been studying photography at a community college and one of our assignments was to shadow a photographer. I contacted a local wedding photographer who agreed to allow me to come along. I assisted by loading his film (yes, film) and carrying his bags. After a few events he asked if I would like to be his apprentice and I agreed. I was thrilled at the opportunity.



What is some advice you'd give a bride/groom for the day of the photography?

In short, let it all go and enjoy the day! I've photographed over a thousand weddings and I often see couples get so invested in the inanimate objects, things like center pieces and name cards, and "perfection" of the day, they actually forget the most important part — they get to marry their favorite person. That's it. That is the entire point of the day. Not the flowers, not the bridesmaids, not the cake, or perfect weather. It's one day you get to spend with all your closest friends and relatives in one space celebrating together. If you're able to do this, it will actually improve your photographic results. Happy couples enjoying their day yield much better photos than a couple who is pouting over the wrong shade of peonies in the bouquet.

How have some of your most unique shots occurred? Are they planned?

Most often, they are not planned, but they are premeditated. There are three primary things I am looking for when putting together an image; light, a moment and composition. The absolute most important tool and skill a photographer can have is anticipation. Being aware of the surroundings and interactions. If you can anticipate a moment is going to happen, you're more likely to be prepared with the right lens, place yourself with (or artificially create) the best light, compose the frame and patiently wait for it to come together.

What are some common mistakes couples make during a photography session?

Underestimating the value of professional hair and makeup.

How has photographing weddings for a living affected your perception of weddings/marriage? Of love?

I love weddings and what they represent. My perception of them has changed a bit in the past few years, in large part due to Pinterest and social media putting a lot of pressure on couples to have the most elaborate wedding possible. While I can appreciate a beautifully designed wedding and love flowers and a cohesive design as much as the next artistic girl, I am saddened when that overshadows the celebration of love and family. That is one reason we do not show any decor photos of flowers, table settings, paper goods, etc. on our website or social media. Instead, we put an emphasis on impactful moments between the couple, family and friends.

How should a couple go about choosing the right photographer? Why is booking the right photographer important?

I think No. 1 would be connecting with the photographer's work. Within reason, a photographer wants their vision to be trusted. The biggest detriment to the outcome of your photography investment is to micromanage and give your photographer a shot list. All creativity ceases and we are instead focused on that list rather than creating and documenting your day. So, if you can find a photographer whose work you're excited about and that you trust, you're setting yourself up for success. I would say second to connecting with their work would be making sure the photographer is experienced. A new photographer may be able to beautifully photograph a perfect day with no timing issues, perfect weather and no lighting complications — but this kind of wedding photographer is a unicorn. ... In short, find a photographer whose experienced and one who's work you love!

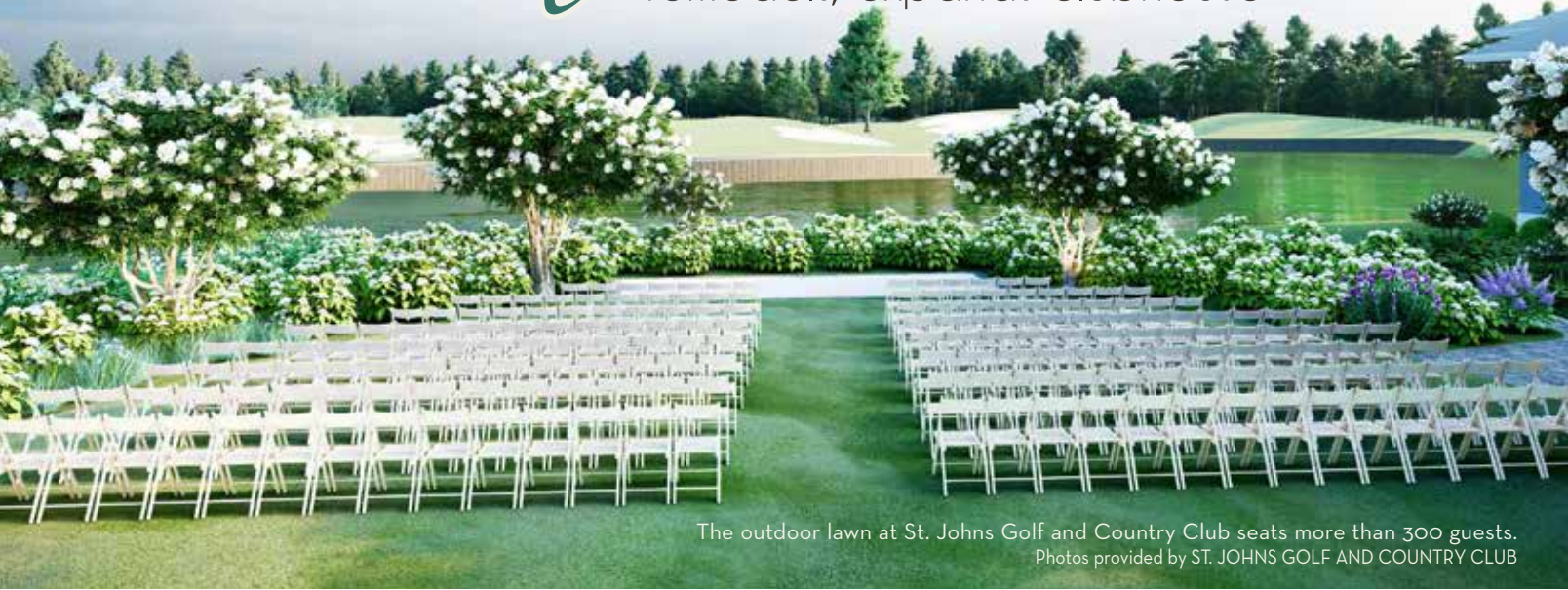
For more information about Stout Photography, visit stoutphoto.com.



Setting the Scene

by CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH

St. Johns Golf and Country Club
remodels, expands clubhouse



The outdoor lawn at St. Johns Golf and Country Club seats more than 300 guests.
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Executive Chef Eric Fritsche and his culinary team's fare is served in the refreshed dining space.



The outdoor covered patio overlooks the 9th and 18th greens.



The remodeled ballroom design is "farmhouse industrial."

According to TheKnot.com, country clubs rank among the most popular types of wedding venues with 70% of couples choosing to have the ceremony and reception in the same place. St. Johns Gold and Country Club is ahead of the trend's curve, and ups the ante with a recent clubhouse remodel and expansion.

Peter Hill, chairman and CEO of Billy Casper Golf, describes the project's design as "farmhouse industrial," intended to bring a fresh vibrancy to the club and tie nicely into the existing facilities. The expansion adds a 200-person banquet hall, which is connected to the current space. In total, overall event space for a seated function is 300-plus.

Couples and guests can enjoy an outdoor ceremony location overlooking a featured lake behind the clubhouse, a spacious natural banquet room and Florida's natural woodland backdrop. The event lawn will seat more than 300 for a wedding ceremony. There is also an outdoor bar on a covered patio overlooking the 9th and 18th greens. The final touch on the building is a large

fire pit area connecting the patio and banquet room.

"Besides the breathtaking views and state-of-the-art new space, we are experts in the wedding business," Amanda Dunn, director of sales, said. "We have been hosting weddings with stellar reviews for 19 years."

In addition to the newly updated space, Executive Chef Eric Fritsche and his culinary team is ready to prepare hors d'oeuvres, meals, cakes and desserts in elegant style. Chef Fritsche will fully orchestrate the day's cuisine or work with couples to create a customized menu.

"When a couple selects St. Johns Golf to host their wedding reception, we not only include all food, beverage, tables and chairs, we also include a complimentary wedding coordinator," Dunn said.

St. Johns Golf & Country Club is located at 205 St Johns Golf Drive, St. Augustine, FL 32092. For more information, call (904) 940-3206 or visit www.stjohnsgolf.com.

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For the mother of the bride, a 1960s vintage silk embroidered strapless gown, hand tailored in Japan. **\$275**



Mixing eras, this bride and groom select a vintage tuxedo from the 1920s and a wedding dress from the 1950s.



Breaking tradition, the bride wears a colorful 1960s floral silk chiffon gown with sheer sleeves and ruffle hemline.



This Edwardian lace embroidered wedding dress recalls turn-of-the-century fashion. **\$850**

Vintage fashion

Unique styles to walk down the aisle

by CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH
photos by KIM MYERS

Trends in bridal fashion shift from year to year, but quality garments never go out of style. To find the perfect attire, brides and grooms can turn to vintage stores to find unique, high-quality garments that express their personalities and interests.

Kim Myers opened The Way We Were vintage boutique on Charlotte Street about 7 years ago, and recently moved Uptown to a larger space at 74 San Marco Ave. in St. Augustine. The shop is curated and furnished for a full-emersion shopping experience where she greets guests warmly wearing vintage fashion.

“Anyone can have a shop and sell clothes,” she said. “I want to enjoy meeting you.”

Myers procures men’s and women’s fashion from the 1800s to

the 1990s including accessories — hats, gloves, shoes, jewelry, wigs, masks, belts, ties and more. She often has couples who come in to browse and end up making an appointment for a private shopping experience to find their style.

“The younger generation is becoming more conscious about fast fashion,” Myers said. “They’re looking for more sustainable options such as vintage instead of buying new.”

For the bridal party, matchy-matchy dresses are mostly “out,” with brides choosing a common color or style and allowing her attendants to choose something that reflects each personality. To find the perfect fit, the bride can schedule a fashion show with a photo shoot at the boutique with her friends.



This 1930s sheer lace wedding dress with sweetheart neckline is inspired by the period’s movie star glamour. **\$695**



The 1940s set the bridal standard with dresses like this ivory floral brocade with Peter Pan collar and scallop hemline. **\$750**



The 1950s bride felt like a princess in this gown with layers of lace and tulle, a fitted bodice, full skirt and court-length train. **\$850**

There is a fee for dress-up parties and photo sessions based on the number of guests and event requirements such as food, beverages or activities. Vintage movies and fashion shows are popular. The event could be as simple as a couples date night private photo session for two, a fun photo session with the bride and bridal party or a bachelorette party with a lingerie fashion show. Myers also rents attire for weddings, parties or themed events.

Couples looking for nontraditional weddings can coordinate a special ceremony in the shop for just the two of them or include a

few guests. The entire wedding party can participate, choosing an outfit from The Way We Were’s wardrobe and costume collection.

Choose a theme — 1920s, Beauty and the Beast, Titanic, Robin Hood and the list goes on. Myers even has a Knight in Shining Armor suit.

“If you can dream it, we can probably outfit it,” she said.

For more information, call (904) 825-0114, email hello@thewaywewerevintage.com or visit www.thewaywewerevintage.com

5

Eye-opening honeymoon destinations

by DANIELA TOPOREK

The Heart Reef located off the Australian coast is a stunning display of coral reef in the shape of a heart.

Photos provided by TRAVEL LEADERS



Beyond the blue waters of the Hawaiian Islands and the bright lights of the Eiffel Tower, there are many other awe inspiring places to visit around the world. And what better time to explore these destinations than on an extravagant, over-the-top honeymoon? Here are five top destinations to discover, according to Jessica Siregar (left), honeymoon specialist with Travel Leaders in Ponte Vedra Beach.

AUSTRALIA

Although the Australia brushfires have caused immense damage to the country, Siregar said that's even more incentive for visiting.

"When there's a natural disaster, I always advise people to go to that destination because those tourism dollars go towards their efforts in supporting anything that's been destroyed," she said. "Plus, the U.S. dollar is really strong."

Serigar recommends Australia for honeymooners who have some time to spend there.

"It's a big itinerary," she said. "I recommend at least two weeks so honeymooners can explore everywhere from the Great Barrier Reef, down the Gold Coast and the beaches."

She recommends Sydney for those who want to mix the city life with an adventurous vacation. Newlyweds can climb the bridge in the city and gaze at the city skyline. "You can see the water and Sydney Opera House, so it's both exciting and romantic."

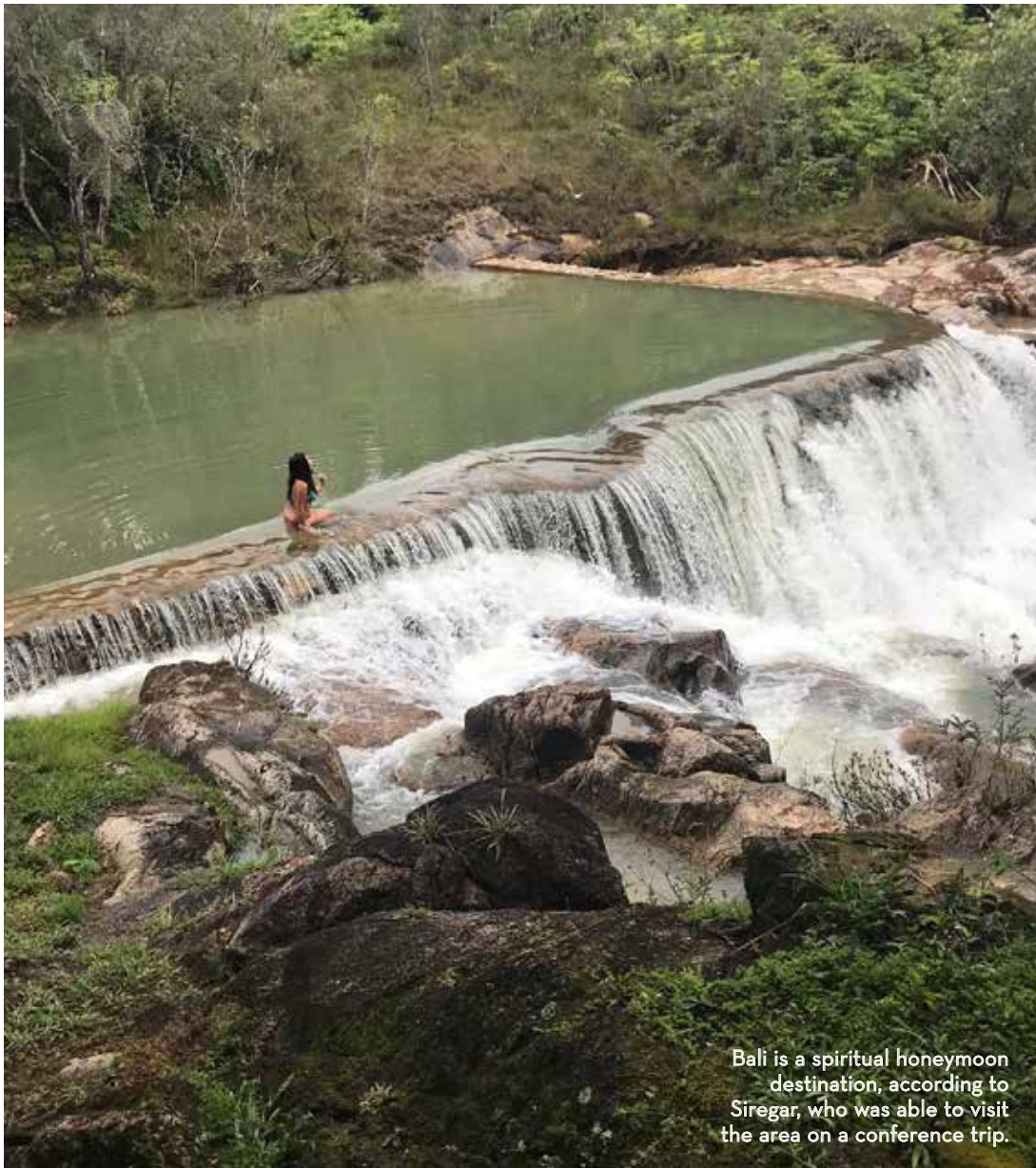
Or for a more relaxed stay, Melbourne is a hip, more eclectic city, she said. It's filled with small streets and street cafes, a similar vibe to European cities.



A woman poses during a bridge climb in Sydney, Australia.

Also, "Don't forget the wine region and getting some pinot noir in your life."

Australia is a country travelers like to return to because of the people, Siregar said. Which means honeymooners can look forward to a warm welcome and kindness throughout their stay.



Bali is a spiritual honeymoon destination, according to Siregar, who was able to visit the area on a conference trip.

BALI

Bali is a spiritual location, Siregar said. You can feel it as soon as the plane touches the ground.

"They have some of the most beautiful accommodations, like the Viceroy," Siregar said, mentioning that the small, family-run boutique hotel was also named the top honeymoon hotel by Conde Nast.

Or looking for something a little more, spacious? Try Capella Ubud. "It was so unique and had all these crazy antiques that were historical to Indonesia," said Siregar of a visit there. "One of the things they did offer was add transportation to the rice fields in Ubud. We got to hike the rice fields with a gentleman from the hotel, all included."

Wellness is a big trend in the market right now, she added. Not just going to a spa, but actually being kind to yourself and the environment that you are in, as well as the people. Sustainability in nature as well as sustainability within the culture, like giving back to the community, whatever country that may be.

"We got to go on the Bali swing," Siregar said. "They give you a push and it was really cool. I'm definitely an adventure honeymoon specialist."

Castello Banfi in Italy will have honeymooners feeling like kings and queens with its vast amenities and view.



ITALY

Who can forget one of the most romantic countries in the world?

“It’s so romantic,” Siregar said. And one of the top places right now is Castello Banfi.

“Banfi is a really famous wine that’s sold in the U.S.,” she said. “They have a castle you can stay at in the Tuscany region. It’s right in between Rome and Florence.”

The castle has a luxurious spa and restaurant to make honeymooners feel like royalty. Guests fall in love with the location.

For other activities in Italy, Siregar said, “You can even hike the Dolomites if you want some adventure and burn a little bit of that pasta, too.”

THE MALDIVES

The easy access through Dubai, the overwater bungalows and the views are some reasons to consider this awesome destination. It’s a place where you can combine nights of magical, Aladdin-esque romance with amazing underwater experiences.

Recoup and readjust to the time zone in Dubai and then take a short, four-hour flight to the Maldives to stay in an underwater bungalow.

“The Maldives are all about relaxing,” Siregar said. “So you can chill, snorkel, dive, eat, drink with your significant other and just be very romantic and happy.”

Siregar suggested staying at the Armani in Dubai before departure to the Maldives and remembered a couple she worked with who thought the trip was an unforgettable experience.

“They loved it,” she said. “The fireworks and light show they have

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every night is right over the balcony where the hotel restaurant is located. I killed that trip and they loved it.”

Siregar also mentioned that the trip was not just an unforgettable honeymoon experience, but a cultural one as well.

“The couple took a cultural tour and learned so much about Muslim culture. The woman said she was a little fearful when she got to Dubai because she’s blonde and blue-eyed, very “American” looking. After the tour, she said how kind the tour guide was, how much she learned and that the people there are amazing with such big hearts.”

Siregar added, “When people from different parts of the world realize that they are all the same, that’s celebrating life through travel. It’s making this whole world one world. I didn’t even set that up. That tour guide did it all himself.”

BELIZE

It’s only about a two-hour flight from Ft. Lauderdale to San Pedro, Belize, but don’t let the distance fool you.

Belize is the perfect spot for those with short honeymoon vacations, but who seek lots of adventure.

“You can have a jungle, Mayan experience on the mainland where you can explore Mayan ruins and go caving in tubes underneath the tunnels the Mayans would escape through,” said Siregar, adding it’s one of her personal top destinations.

“And you can have the island experience where you’re on the beach and can swim with sharks and stingrays. The Blue Hole is the second largest reef in the world, so there’s great diving.”

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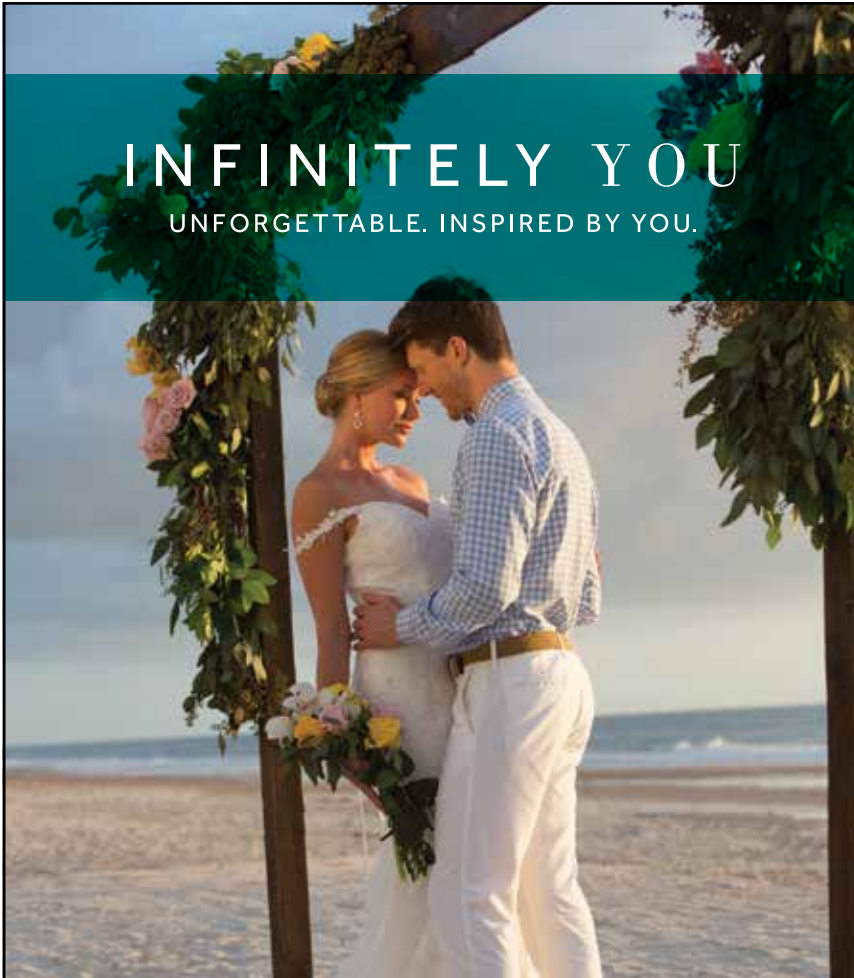
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The First Coast Register profiles three of those places in the following stories.

So, if one or more strikes your fancy, go.

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Romance close to Home

Photo by
CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH

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Love is in the air

AT WASHINGTON OAKS
GARDENS STATE PARK

by CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH



The formal gardens, fountains and storybook structures make Washington Oaks Gardens State Park the perfect place for lovers to walk hand-in-hand.
Photos by CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH

Walk hand-in-hand beneath a canopy of oaks along a path that meanders through a fragrant rose garden to the saltwater shore of the Matanzas River at Washington Oaks Gardens State Park. Located on Florida A1A, about a half-hour drive south of St. Augustine, the 425-acre park is the perfect destination for a romantic day trip.

Lovers can stand in the cool shade of centuries-old oaks, hold hands and connect in a meaningful way. For centuries, the enormous live oak has withstood wind, fire, drought and flood, much like long-term relationships stand fast through life's turbulent times.

Past the oak, the path leads to a raised octagon platform where couples can rest on a bench in quiet reflection beside the pond. The artesian spring keeps the water at 72 degrees and the tropical foliage warm during occasionally chilly winter days. A gazebo offers shade and overlooks the koi swimming below, while a fountain across the pond sounds like the pitter patter of a soft rain.

The scent of roses, considered the most romantic of all flowers, draws visitors to the formal rose garden. Fragrant blooms burst in hues of red, pink, yellow and white pleasing visitors and nourishing butterflies and bees.

The park's love story began in the late 1930s when Owen D. Young purchased the property as a wedding gift for fiancée Louise P. Clark. She designed the ornamental gardens and planned fruit orchards. The couple built a winter home along the Matanzas River, which now serves as a visitor center, where guests can learn more about the property's history and freshen up.

The seawall along the western border of the park is lined with benches, perfect for sharing a bite to eat or full lunch. But leave the wine at home, because alcohol is prohibited in the park. Visitors can plan to bring a picnic or opt for nearby take-out.

A day trip to Washington Oaks is a chance for couples to talk, laugh, hold hands and focus on what's really important — each other.



A Lover's Ride

A ROMANTIC HORSEBACK RIDE ALONG THE BEACH WITH KELLY SEAHORSE RANCH

by AMBER LAKE



Kelly Seahorse Ranch in Amelia Island is now accepting reservations. The ranch offers a special giveaway during the week of Valentine's Day. Photos provided by KELLY SEAHORSE RANCH



A backdrop of Mother Nature can make any romantic excursion a little more whimsical. Weave in some ocean air, the soft roar of waves and a rambling trek on horseback, well, you might have yourself a Harlequin romance novel.

You might also have yourself a reservation at Kelly Seahorse Ranch in Amelia Island.

The Kelly Seahorse Ranch is the only state-endorsed horse ranch located on the beach in the entire state of Florida. All year long they offer beach trail rides, although business really picks up in February. The romantic nature of the excursions is not lost on Jim Kelly and Kelly Robinson, owners of the family-owned business for the past 20 years.

"I think it's nostalgia," Robinson said. "When you set foot in that stirrup and get on a living, breathing, powerful animal like that — you kind of become one. They can feel your every move, even your heartbeat through the reins."

Treks through the Amelia Island State Park first take riders through salt-washed cedar skeletons and a moss-draped canopy of live oaks before heading over the dunes and onto the remote beach. For many, the ride is their first on a horse. Robinson is quick to point out her spotless safety record and individually trained guides. "This is not a hobby," she said. "We're horsemen first."

Robinson said she has been riding since she was a little girl and the effect of being on a horse has yet to wear off. Her secluded ranch houses over 20 horses, and she admits her attachment to them has prevented her from selling any. While for many guests of the ranch the ride is a dream-come-true, hers was the ranch itself.

Riding horses in nature is just a magical feeling, she said. "It's a one-with-the-universe kind of thing."

Visit www.kellyranchinc.net to make reservations or learn more about Kelly Seahorse Ranch.



The fishing pier at Alpine Groves leads out over the St. Johns River, making for a peaceful stroll
Photos by MAGGIE FITZROY



*Peaceful
& Pretty*



RELAX AT ALPINE GROVES PARK ON THE ST. JOHNS RIVER

by MAGGIE FITZROY

Alpine Groves is a jewel of a park, a romantic and peaceful place not far from anywhere one might live on the First Coast.

When you arrive, you'll find yourself descending into a world of quiet Northeast Florida woods, where walking down a winding path, you can almost hear the occasional leaf drifting off a tree amid the rustling of the breeze.

Alpine Groves is a St. Johns County park, located at 2060 State Road 13, Switzerland. Free and open daily from dawn to dusk, it spans 54.5 acres between the St. Johns River and William Bartram Scenic & Historic Highway.

It has a variety of features for visitors of all ages to explore, including a children's playground nestled in the woods near the entrance.

A long fishing pier leads out over the river, next to a kayak launch.

A 1-mile paved hiking trail, accessible to strollers and wheelchairs, winds through three distinct Florida habitats, and dogs are permitted on leashes.

The park also features two butterfly gardens and a variety of citrus trees throughout, connecting visitors to the park's historic roots. It was an orange grove in the 19th century, when the citrus industry boomed in the region. Three historic 1800s structures remain, including a house, citrus sorting shed that resembles an old barn and horse stables.

What could be more romantic than the sight of the wide, sun-sparkling St. Johns River as you take the path along it to the Alpine Groves Fishing Pier? And the sound of waves breaking gently on the shore lined with Spanish moss-draped oaks?

Whether you explore the park alone, or walking your dog, or pushing a baby stroller — or strolling hand-in-hand with a loved one, you'll find yourself in a world that feels far away from the hustle and bustle of real life.

It's nice to know there is a place to go not too far from home that's romantic and peaceful and free.

Wine & Dine

ON THE FIRST COAST

Pages 22-29



When planning a wedding, don't forget the wine



Ally Burkett

Regional director of sales for Southeast, Precept Wine

Congratulations! You're getting married ... Now what???

Planning a wedding can be stressful and with all the decisions that need to be made — cake, dress, seating chart, flowers — it's easy to get overwhelmed with it all.

Take a minute and think about your favorite wedding you were a guest at ... what made the night so enjoyable? The DJ playing YMCA? The best man's super-awkward speech?

For most guests at a wedding, it's not those details that are fondly remembered. It's the food (and most only remember if the food was bad) and the wine. But choosing the wines can be a daunting task especially if you aren't a wine drinker or don't know the difference between a Chardonnay and a Riesling.

To demystify the wine selection process for your upcoming nuptials, I thought I would head straight to an expert experienced in throwing some of the most lavish weddings in North Florida- Bo Cure, wine and spirits director at the Sawgrass Country Club and Beach Club in Ponte Vedra Beach.

"The first question I ask my bride and groom is, does your family like to drink!" Cure said as we sat outside of the Beach Club on a gorgeous day in January. "It's important to me to sit with the bride and groom and find out as much information about their family and guests as possible."

Cure often gets couples that aren't that well-versed in wine but want to ensure that their wine-savvy guests are happy with the selection offered. "It's all about making sure you know what your family and friends like to drink and coming to the table with a budget in mind," he said. That way, he said he can assess what and how much he will need for the event.

Most venues offer different packages to cater to different budgets, but according to Cure, tasting is key. "Sit down with your venue coordinator, and make sure you taste each wine as you go through keeping the food choices in mind," he said. And if you don't like a wine in your line-up, don't be shy to ask to substitute another in at the same price point if possible.

Some pro tips from Cure to keep in mind:

- Think about your friends and family and categorize them: Do they drink wine? Bourbon? Vodka?

- Are your guests super wine savvy or wouldn't notice if they had a glass of Two Buck Chuck in front of them? (If so, you

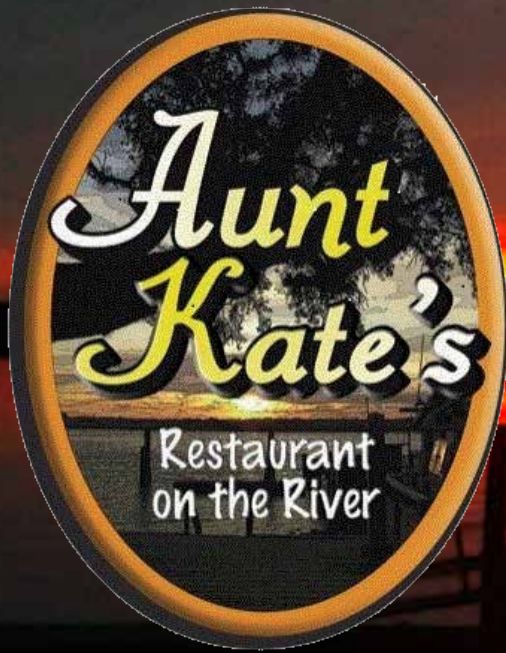


Bo Cure, wine and spirits director at Sawgrass Country Club

may be able to save on the level of package you choose).

- Your bar should have the basic spirits: vodka, bourbon, scotch, rum, tequila and a blended whiskey
- One bottle of wine = 4 standard 6 oz. pours
- One bottle of Champagne = 8 pours for the toast

Whether it's a lavish wedding for 500 or a small, intimate affair, a well thought out wine and spirits selection will make your wedding one to remember for a long time for you and your guests — so let's raise a glass to love in 2020!



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The colorful dessert was a brown chicken egg brûlée with guava, pâte à choux, caramelia and cocoa.

Photos provided by OMNI AMELIA ISLAND PLANTATION RESORT

Eggstravaganza

OMNI AMELIA ISLAND PLANTATION RESORT WOWS AT AMELIA ISLAND RESTAURANT WEEK WITH SPROUTING PROJECT DINNER, 'REBIRTH'

by DANIELA TOPOREK



Guava Pate de Fruit, an eggnog bon bon and a white chocolate egg were guests' take-home goodies, complimentary of the Omni and its Sprouting Project.



The emu eggs used for the main course were worth \$90 each, according to the Omni chefs.

Restaurant week in Amelia Island flourished with culinary flair, from restaurant previews to cheesemaking classes. And it all came down to the final evening on Jan. 25, at The Omni Amelia Island Plantation Resort, with its Sprouting Project Farm-to-Table dinner, "Rebirth," using eggs as the ingredient of inspiration.

"We always choose an ingredient from our Sprouting Projects, so today, we tried to incorporate egg into every single aspect, from the reception cocktail to the first course, to the salad, to the entree," said Omni Executive Sous Chef Jason Butcher. "It was a collaboration between Executive Chef Todd, myself and others and it was a good way for us to be culinary nerds, as I should say. We bounce ideas off of each other and put it all together."

Originally slated to be in the Omni greenhouse, the dinner was moved to the Sunrise Cafe due to the colder weather, but that didn't take anything away from the food.

Guests were welcomed with a signature cocktail, eggnog with cinnamon, a fitting beverage for the chilly night that took guests back to the holiday season.

A scotch egg with beet, walnut, smoke and cress was the first of five courses crafted by Executive Chef Todd Ruiz and the Omni culinary staff. The twist? It was quail egg, and according to a unanimous vote from the guests at Table 9, it was delicious.

Next up was the chicken egg, soft-boiled, with pork belly, soy, scallions, radish, nori, sesame and a kombu broth.

"The flavors are so nice," said dinner guest Stefanie Snabes, part of the Table 9 crew. "The pork belly is so crispy."

It was tough slicing the crispy pork within the broth, according to Snabes, but well worth it.

A duck egg croquette accompanied the Sprouting Project "Caesar" with tableside yolk dressing, anchovy croutons and black garlic.

"It's a sous-vide egg that we turned into a croquette, so when you cut into it, it just oozes out," Butcher said.

The anchovies were fried and crisp, complementing the silkiness of the greens and yolk dressing.

"I really liked them," said Table 9 guest Ashley Skurla, adding that it gave the salad more texture. "I think it made that dish."

The main and final course before dessert was an incredibly unique version of breakfast for dinner—a scrambled emu egg, served with bread and osso buco, with truffle, brioche and chives.

"I think that's a very nice dish," Butcher said. "It's a nice soft-scrambled egg with osso bucco chunks, crispy sweet breads. It's very creative."

Ashley Skurla's husband Mark, agreed and raved about the osso bucco. "It just falls off the bone," he said, taking another bite.

The fifth and final course came down to what seemed to be an elevated, deconstructed version of an egg creme brulee.

"So, the first thing I did was steal a bunch of eggs," Chef Ruiz joked while explaining the dessert, saying that the consistency of the duck eggs provided for the smoothness of the custard guests saw on their plates.

"This is really good," Mark Skurla said, again, scooping up another taste.

After dessert, guests stood up and gave a round of applause to Omni's culinary team, an array of professionals from all backgrounds and cultures with a common passion for food.



A chicken egg rests with pork belly, soy, scallion, radish, sesame and nori before kombu broth is poured over while served.



Executive Sous Chef Jason Butcher (left) and Executive Chef Todd Ruiz stop for a quick pose before dinner is served.



A scrambled emu egg was served with tender osso bucco, sweet brioche, truffle and chives.



Sous-vide duck croquettes delicately lay across the caesar plates before adding the finishing touches for the dinner.



Mini Japanese-style omelettes are served as an amuse bouche before the main entrees.



Dinner guests (clockwise, from top), Mark Skurla, Bill Edwards, Ashley Skurla and Laurie Edwards pose after an "eggstravagant" meal.

Wildcrafters

Love in a cup

by DANIELA TOPOREK

If there are three things Jacksonville locals love, it's a good drink, the Jacksonville Jaguars and a good meal, which is often an excuse for another good drink.

So, it was a refreshing surprise that when Yhang Quintero opened the first non-alcoholic bar in the city on Park Street, people welcomed it with open arms — and glasses.

Wildcrafters is a booze-free tea, Kava and cocktail bar that opened in the beginning of January, perfect timing for those washing off the boozy holidays.

Kava is a popular social and ceremonial drink in the South Pacific, according to Healthline.com and Quintero, who's lived in Jacksonville since 2012 and dreamed of opening his own kava bar.

"Kava is the root of a pepper plant (*Piper methysticum*)," he said. "It's found in Fiji or the South Pacific Islands. They dry, pound it and massage it with water and when you do that, you get what's called the kavalactone and that's what has a sedative effect."

The "sedative effect" is a subtle yet simple wave of relaxation, comparable to CBD oil.

"Some people have said kava feels stronger than CBD," Quintero said. "The difference is you're not supposed to feel CBD, but kava is not mind altering either. The most you get from kava is this super relaxed feeling."

Guests can order kava in 4 or 8 oz. "shots" or as a colorful, crafted cocktail.

"All the cocktails are botanical based," said Quintero, pointing at the cocktail names that are a playlist, from Interpool's "Stella Was A Diver" to rapper Kendrick Lamar's "Backseat Freestyle."

"Backseat Freestyle," a crowd favorite, according to Quintero, is made from butterfly pea flower. The vibrant blue color of the flower mixes with coconut cream and lemon to make a whimsical lavender tone. Add some mint, and voila!

"I got the Chocolate Raspberry and it's really good," said first-time kava drinker and guest, Rachel Tack. "It's different, but I'd have another one."

Or if you're not sure what to try, order the, "Talk To Me."

"For the 'Talk to Me'," Quintero said, "We'll ask you to tell us a little about yourself and we'll customize something for you."

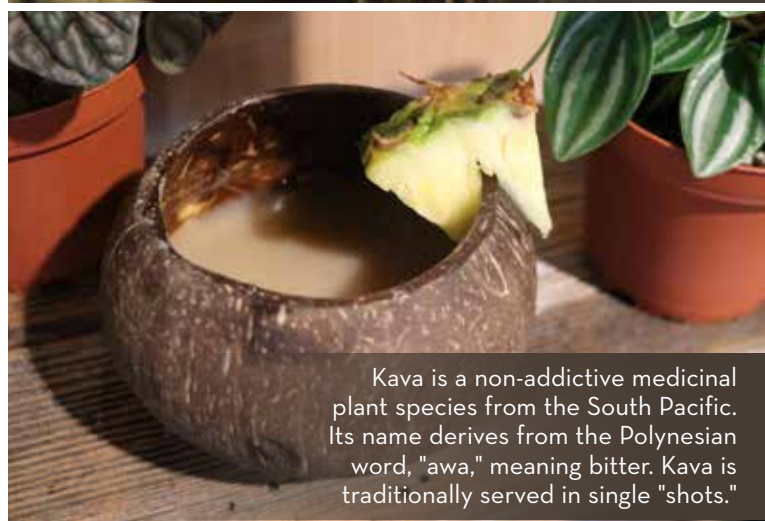
To enhance the experience, Quintero created a Zen-like environment, with plants dangling from the ceiling and cozy couches to study or socialize. Quintero designed and decorated the bar himself, from the natural wooden tabletops to the mosaic tiles behind the bar.



Wildcrafters is located at 2105 Park Street in Jacksonville. Photos by DANIELA TOPOREK



Founder and owner Yhang Quintero designed the Wildcrafters location himself, mentioning he envisioned a space where he would love to spend time in.



Kava is a non-addictive medicinal plant species from the South Pacific. Its name derives from the Polynesian word, "awa," meaning bitter. Kava is traditionally served in single "shots."



First-time visitors, Rachel Tack and Stacy Blount, try kava cocktails for the first time, ordering the Chocolate Raspberry and Kava Colada. They also said it wouldn't be their last.



Cinnamon Toast Crunch is a kava cocktail that includes cinnamon, vanilla syrup, oat milk and the Cinnamon Toast garnish.



The Backseat Freestyle (named after a Kendrick Lamar song) includes seedlip, coconut, lime, mint, butterfly pea flower and Topo Chico mineral water.

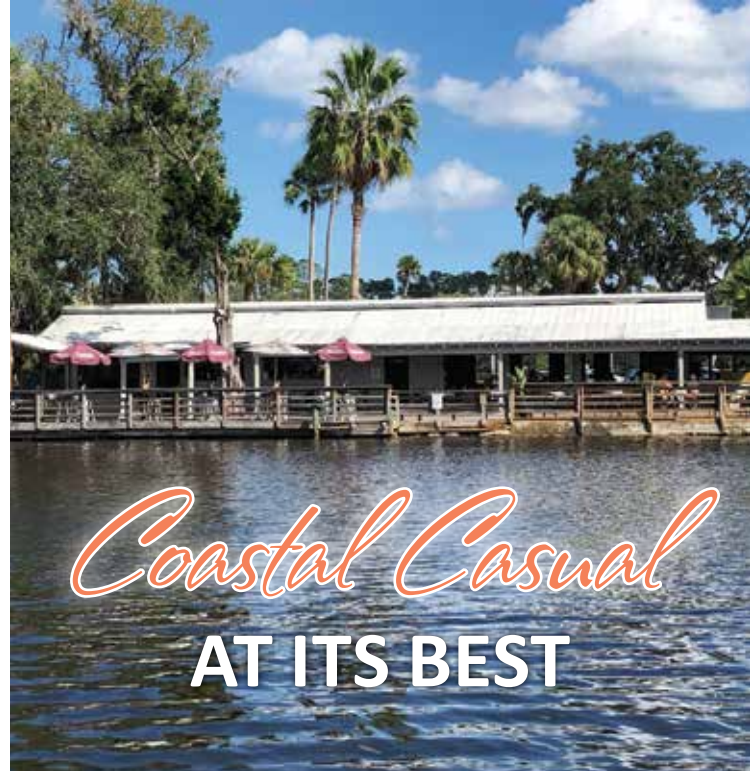
He was honest in saying Wildcrafters was created with his own likes in mind, but that doesn't mean others don't have similar taste. He wanted a place where friends can socialize and where strangers can become friends. It seems to be working.

"I've had people say, 'I've never felt so good making friends with strangers. This place has some sort of magic,'" he said, quoting guests. "It was great to hear because that was the idea. You're sober, so you can actually have an intellectual conversation and remember their names and faces."

Wildcrafters is not only helping create new (sober) connections, but also helping preserve old ones.

"To help friends who aren't drinkers or are in recovery, people will come here and take a break from the bar," he said. "I've been seeing that the last couple weeks and I think that's pretty awesome. It's the best part."

Quintero said he's heard kava referred as "love in a cup" because of its soothing effects and the positivity it spreads.



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LEFT: Prati Italia's pizza, because there's no such thing as too much pizza. **CENTER:** The 13-layer lasagna is a marbled work of art, with Bolognese, provolone, Parmigiano, marinara, garlic cream sauce and fresh herbs. **RIGHT:** The Tiramisu was a sweet and light finish to carb-filled evening.

BREAKS GROUND (AND BREAD)

Prati is an eclectic, food-centric shopping center and neighborhood in Rome, so when Jacksonville Chef Tom Gray transformed contemporary-American eatery Moxie Kitchen + Cocktails into a scratch-made Italian concept, the name came easy.

Prati Italia, located at the Markets at Town Center in Jacksonville, is the most recent creation by Chef Gray.

After Canadian chain Moxie's Grill & Bar was set to expand in Florida, according to Jacksonville.com, Gray took the risk of rebranding his location and turning it into something uniquely his.

"It's been an exciting adventure," said Gray. "It's a little unusual how we got here, but in the end, it

was a great transition."

The restaurant hosted a tasting on Jan. 29 in the renovated rooftop area, warmed with heaters, cocktails, conversation and carbs. Lots of carbs.

The cocktail hour was filled with signature cocktails like Aperol Spritz and Ciao Bella in a rose-gold martini glass. Next, the Prati staff brought appetizers. Crispy mushroom arancini, fontina meatballs and "fritto misto" with classic fried seafood, slowly but surely disappeared from the table.

But the garlic bread starter may have been the freshest yet. It might sound a little basic, but when served with in-house ricotta, black pepper and an olive tapenade, it's something everyone's taste buds will remember.

PRATI ITALIA

story and photos by
DANIELA TOPOREK



LEFT: The Aperol Spritz is a popular Italian cocktail made with Aperol, orange-culantro-vanilla shrub, bubbles and club soda.

RIGHT: Guests enjoy their meal at Prati Italia.



“We’re making every bit of ricotta here,” Gray said. “From what you had with your garlic toast to what goes into the ravioli. It’s all made in-house. It really speaks to the dishes, the textures — the silkiness you just don’t get with store-bought ricotta.”

The pasta is also made-from-scratch, in-house. As guests “snapped” and shot their social media stories of the first dish, the Sugo with pork, beef, casarecce and Parmesan, they were blindsided immediately with the second, ricotta ravioli.

An oxtail ragu, truffle butter and Parmesan gnocchi came next with its earthy colors and flavors, and a 13-layer lasagna, somehow both moist and crispy (in the best of ways), wowed with its vibrant and dessert-like presentation.

“It looks like a cake,” a guest said, marveling at all of its distinctive layers. The cheesy drizzle marbled in the tomato sauce like art.

And just when everyone thought the tasting was over, three different Roma-style pizzas came through the door, each baked in an authentic pizza oven imported from Italy.

“Our son Quinn hates tomatoes,” Gray explained. “So, he kept asking for a white pizza and for months, I kept telling him ‘people



Chef Tom Gray makes a toast to new beginnings with Prati Italia

won’t eat white pizza.’ I kept telling him that, but he didn’t know there was one going on the menu with his name on it. So, he learned the opening night when he got a menu and it’s his favorite ingredients. White pizza with mushrooms and cheese. It also happens to be one of the most popular pizzas so far.”

After that warm-hearted story and heavy eating, it was time for dessert, tiramisu. Each portion was large enough to share, but light enough to satisfy one’s sweet tooth without a guilty conscience. An applause at the end of the tasting verified Gray’s skill and love for what he does.

What was once a well-known and well-loved modern contemporary concept, has transitioned into a warm, welcoming classic dining location.

Like most Italian restaurants, the portions are heavy and the carbs come loaded. But at Prati, it’s not just about the dishes.

Chef Gray took a challenging situation and molded it into something new and entirely his own.

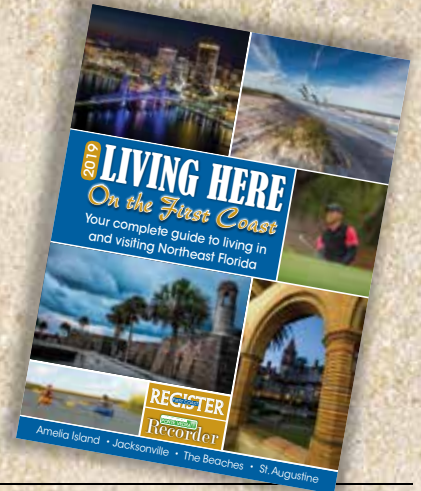
“It could have been bittersweet,” Gray said about the transition, “but it turned out to just be sweet.”

2020

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RESTORED ST. AUGUSTINE LANDMARK CELEBRATES

20 Years

by CHRISTINE
RODENBAUGH

Photos by
CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH

Richard Kessler, CEO of The Kessler Enterprise Inc., didn't listen to naysayers who contended a luxury hotel had no place in the Nation's Oldest City.

In the mid-1990s, Kessler visited St. Augustine on a trip with his college-age daughter, Laura. They stayed in a bed and breakfast inn and took in the sights. Kessler had just finished the Grand Bohemian Hotel in downtown Orlando, and realized St. Augustine visitors did not have a luxury hotel option.

He walked to the Lightner building and asked to see the city manager.

"I asked him if there was any property available for a hotel," Kessler said. "He walked to his window and pointed across the street to the courthouse. 'You can buy that,' he told me."

Arthur Andersen had done a feasibility study for a hotel in St. Augustine's downtown, advising it should have no more than 80 rooms, no more than three stars, and would take a long time to be successful.

"I didn't believe that," Kessler said. "I talked with Laura and we decided St. Augustine needed a luxury hotel."

The Casa Monica Hotel originally opened in 1888, but that same year Henry Flagler purchased the property for \$325,000. He renamed the hotel to Cordova and in 1903 rebranded the property as part of the Alcazar, which is now the Lightner Museum. It closed in 1932. The property served as the county courthouse from 1968 to the late 1970s.

Kessler recognized the value in restoration. He said it would cost \$600,000 "a key," meaning per room, to build it today. The restored Casa Monica Hotel opened its doors on Dec. 10, 1999.

"It was profitable in the first year," Kessler said.

To celebrate the property's 20th anniversary, Kessler and staff threw a party Dec. 11 for residents and visitors. Live music played while guests sipped champagne and sampled hors d'oeuvres. Kimberly Wilson, general manager, recognized 20-year employees Luis Estes and Gillen Durling.

Speakers included former St. Augustine Mayor Len Weeks, who was part of the ribbon-cutting ceremony in 1999, and Joe Joyner, president of Flagler College. The general sentiment was that the upscale property was an impetus to downtown revitalization.

"It's been a wonderful experience. The city is always supportive and that's important," Kessler said.



Richard Kessler, CEO of The Kessler Enterprise, (left) and General Manager Kimberly Wilson celebrate The Casa Monica Resort & Spa 20th anniversary.



Brenda Pausche (from left), Tammy Price Higginbotham and Carolyn Boyd are "local St. Augustine girls" who came out to celebrate the 20th anniversary.



ABOVE: Beth and Tom Dreisbach have visited the Casa Monica for 15 years.



LEFT: Jodi and Mark Ferris attend the 20th anniversary party at the Casa Monica in St. Augustine.



Guests were invited to have a piece of the five-tiered cake to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Casa Monica Resort & Spa.

Champagne Dress

sure to impress



Amanda wears a golden “strolling champagne dress” at the Casa Monica Resort & Spa 20th anniversary celebration Dec. 11. Guests could help themselves to a flute, or Amanda served the bubbly with a smile.

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SPRING FASHION

Fashion forward on the FIRST COAST



What's in
store for men
this spring?

by AMBER LAKE



1. Tie-dye short-sleeve, button-up shirt by Rhythm Livin at Inguz; 2. Bi-stretch wool five-pocket trousers by Meyer at Rosenblum's; 3. All Day Walkshort and Sultans cap by The Critical Slide Society at Inguz; 4. Bonzer boardshort by The Critical Slide Society at Inguz

Looking forward to a warm weather look to put a little spring in your step? This season, men's fashion is all about function without forgoing style, thanks to some innovative new fabrics and textiles hitting the market (also some old ones that are making a comeback).

It's time to toss your cargo shorts in the trash because slimmer and shorter is hitting the North Florida's fashion scene.

Tie dye is making its way back to men's wear but refrain from a full technicolor dream coat. Instead, opt for subtle, ombre patterns. Earthy tones and neutrals can add an interesting detail to an outfit without being overpowering or garish.

As formal and casual wear blend together, workwear is becoming more versatile. For a pant that transcends both the office and the weekend, opt for a five-pocket trouser. Made from a bi-stretch wool mixture, these ultra-comfortable pants keep stylish elements of jean while being suitable for a work environment. These days, just because you are a dad doesn't mean you have to look like someone's dad.

Just as women's fashion is seeing some comebacks from the 60s and 70s, men's fashion is welcoming back cords. While not

as clunky as they were in the past, corduroy is great for both preppy and casual attire. Pair with a jean jacket for a hip night out or with a blazer for a more formal take on the trending fabric. Avoid looking like a disheveled college professor by forgoing patterns and baggy outerwear when donning a cord. Like a black bear coming out of a long winter hibernation, corduroy doesn't work in packs and hates competition from other bulky fabrics.

If you live in Florida, you get a pass to wear baggies outside the beach. Perhaps some would argue against it, but it's not changing the fact that everyone does. Rather than fight it, be friends with the right pair of trending baggies that says, "I care — if not a lot."

Retro is all the rage for shorts, so make sure your baggies are not too, well...baggy. Color blocking and a seam that hits above the knee will channel an old school surf vibe perfect for North Florida. Oddly enough men have started saying OK to elastic waistbands again, however, that doesn't mean you should make a mad dash for a clearance rack at Walmart's swim section.

Make sure all the style boxes are checked before opting for the comfort of an elastic band.

SPRING FASHION

Fashion forward on the FIRST COAST



What's in
store for
women
this spring?

by AMBER LAKE



1. Cheetah shorts by Blank NYC at Rosie True; 2. Retro Resort Ella dress by Rhode at Penelope T; 3. Assorted gold necklaces by Serefina at Penelope T; 4. Assorted padded headbands by Saylor NYC at Penelope T

If North Florida is your catwalk, then be sure to style some of these trending prints, colors and fabrics with an all new spring wardrobe. From innovative textiles to maximalist statement pieces, this season is all about forgoing the floral for something a bit more ... extra.

If there were two lovers meant for each other, it's this season's hot pant trend coupled with animal prints. Florida and short shorts have long been acquainted, however, pairing a pair with layered prints and knee-high boots will take your shorties to the next level. Perhaps try them with a boyfriend blazer for a more refined look, or a patterned belt for an eye-catching way to elevate a lot with a little.

The 60s take the center stage this spring with wallpaper inspired patterns and big, colorful designs. Fluorescent colors are making a comeback for a dramatic way to take on the season. If big and bold doesn't suit your

sensibilities, however, opt for a simple neon accessory to add a pop of color to any look.

Padded headbands are the latest 80s trend to come full circle. To avoid channeling a cast member of "Saved by the Bell," pair them with a chic, modern outfit and don't get too matchy-matchy with it. Accessorize with a relaxed look like a French-tucked white tee and jeans, or a flowing skirt and chunky earrings for a great date night vibe that's feminine and fashionable.

All that glitters is gold this season, thanks to layering chains upon chains. Gold medallions are really making their presence known, giving the look more of a timeworn, archaic look rather than full Mr. T circa A-Team. Make it personalized by shopping for a coin reflective of your zodiac symbol or cultural heritage, (think ancient Grecian currency.)



Nancy and David Hutson literally break the record after it's announced the Givers Gala fundraising efforts broke the 2019 record.



Sen. Aaron Bean, Gala auctioneer, holds up a vinyl record during the auction announcing they will "break the record" if fundraising breaks last year's record.



Meredith Pearson (left) accepts The Jim and Nancy Burns Emerging Philanthropist Award from Nancy Burns and Suzanne Brown.



Viv Helwig (left) and Winsome Wint enjoy hot tea and dessert.



Julie Simmons, Bev Slough, Greg Simmons and Florida Rep. Cyndi Stevenson prepare for the live auction

UNITED WAY BREAKS RECORD AT *Giver's* Gala

by CHRISTINE
RODENBAUGH

photos by
CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH

Game changers, hand raisers and problem solvers arrived in style for the 2020 United Way of St. Johns County's Givers Gala on Jan. 24 at the Casa Monica Resort & Spa in St. Augustine. The formal affair celebrated the leadership, altruistic actions and transformational giving of local individuals and businesses.

Guests were greeted with a glass of Champagne and sipped on cocktails during the social hour. This was the best opportunity to review silent auction items and place bids for trips to Iceland or South Africa, a stay at the Casa Monica with spa treatments, theater events, yoga packages and more. Many donning black tie and formal gown posed as couples and small groups for a commemorative photo.

Melissa Nelson, United Way St. Johns County president and CEO, called guests to the dining room to begin dinner service and the awards program. Enthusiastic hosts presented awards from

three alternating podiums so none of the tables felt like they were at "the back of the room."

Promptly at 7:30 p.m., Florida Sen. Aaron Bean took the floor to begin the live auction. The first lot, titled "Get this party started," was three bottles of fine wine with service to the winning table by the United Way Campaign Cabinet. Table 12 won with a bid of \$850.

To everyone's surprise, a St. Johns County Sheriff's deputy roared through double doors, lights flashing and sirens blaring. It wasn't a raid; just a dramatic way to call attention to the second auction item — a day with a deputy including a ride in the new SJCSO new helicopter. Bean announced that if the bid reached \$5,000, the Sheriff would match



Drs. Gregory and Isabell Oxford, (from left) shared a table with Mayor Tracy Upchurch, Jane Boles and former Mayor Joe Boles

the donation. Bidders quickly matched the challenge.

The auction was off to a great start. Bean paused for a brief few seconds and said he was about to hold up an item anyone in the room under 40 may not recognize. He held a vinyl record album high and announced that if the night's fundraising broke the 2019 record, United Way would literally "break the record" at the end of the evening. The crowd cheered and Bean rolled out the next auction item.

The "Stoke the fire" lot featured a VIP version of the culinary trend known as "urban asado." The experience for 12 is a cookout that marries open flame and Argentine-style grill presented as the sun sets over the San Sebastian River. Bidding was heated. With such high interest, Bean announced sponsor Urban Asado & Chefs Collaborative would add two more VIP packages. Three lucky bidders won the culinary adventures to benefit the United Way raising \$3,300 per package.

Bean kept energy high through seven more auction lots including craft beer, jewelry, dancing in "The Nutcracker" ballet, a tour of the Brumos Collection, a trolley tour for 70, craft bourbon and a boatload of wine. Givers were generous with bids and the silent auction would remain open until just before final announcements at 9 p.m. The question remained — would the 1978 vinyl album by Junior Parker be broken at the end of the evening?

Jay Owen, United Way of St. Johns campaign chair, shared a video about the impact the nonprofit has on the local community, and how passionate the staff and board are about the mission and vision of the organization. He thanked everyone present for their ongoing support.

"I have chosen to invest my time, energy and money in United Way because ... I've seen the impact made in my life and the lives of others," Owen said. "Since 1957, money raised is used in or own community, our own backyards."

The party moved to the pool terrace upstairs under the stars for dessert and dancing. Some guests relaxed in cabanas while others hit the dance floor to familiar tunes played by live band, The Royals. Right on time, Melissa Nelson, Jay Owen and Sen. Bean took the stage. David and Nancy Hutson were on the dance floor holding Junior Parker's LP, waiting to find out if the 2019 Gala total of \$149,500 had been exceeded.

"Break the record!" Bean announced from the stage. The total raised at the 2020 Givers Gala was \$160,200. The Hutsons literally broke the record on the dance floor and The Royals broke into Kool and the Gang's "Celebration."

Confetti rained and the crowd celebrated.



Jay Owen, United Way St. Johns County campaign chair; Bev Slough, chairman of the board of directors; and Melissa Nelson, president and CEO, celebrate breaking the Gala fundraising record.



Erin and Noah Bailey



A St. Johns County Sheriff's deputy roars into the live auction to call attention to an opportunity to bid on a ride in the new helicopter and spend the day with a deputy.



Alondra Morales, (from left) Cody Hutson and Leysan and Oleksandr Vershynin

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ST. AUGUSTINE FILM FESTIVAL

features local, global motion pictures

The 10th annual St. Augustine Film Festival kicked off the four-day event with an opening party at the Lightner Museum on Jan. 17.



Pat Pope (left) and Bonnie Adams, senior program director



Sean Bloomfield (from left) Joe Pantoliano, Jessi Hannapel, Cimela Kidonakis and Daniella Pantoliano shared a table at the opening night dinner

by CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH

Celebrating its 10th year, the St. Augustine Film Festival kicked off the four-day event with an opening party at the Lightner Museum on Jan. 17. More than 40 films were screened at four venues in St. Augustine.

Organizers of the Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival, which debuted in 1986, brought a similar format to St. Augustine to celebrate the art form. Films include a broad range of topics and formats. Some are shorts, 5 minutes or less, and others are full-length feature films.

“The community is really supportive,” Bonnie Adams, senior program director, said. “Every year more and more people come. [Flagler] College has really gotten behind it.”

Flagler students volunteer and also submit films.

“America’s Untold Story,” shot in St. Augustine and narrated by Jimmy Smits, was shown in two, 2-hour parts at Flagler College’s Lewis Auditorium without charge.

The festival honored actor Joe Pantoliano with the Lifetime Achievement Award for his extensive body of work. Pantoliano has more than 100 credits in his name. Popular roles include Cypher in

“The Matrix,” Cosmo Renfroe in “The Fugitive” and Guido in “Risky Business” on the big screen and Ralph Cifaretto on the television series, “The Sopranos.”

After the opening party Jan. 17, guests strolled to Lewis Auditorium to see Pantoliano’s starring performance in “From the Vine.” He plays the role of a burned-out corporate executive who seeks his roots back in Italy in order to reset his moral compass. The journey transforms his life and his relationships and revives the small town in Italy his grandfather called home. The audience erupted in applause at the end of the film and Gregory von Hausch, president of the Ft. Lauderdale International Film Festival, called Pantoliano to the stage.

“It’s tough to see myself up there growing old,” he said.

Then he asked the audience for questions. Someone asked about his favorite role. “The next one,” he said.

After receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award, he said, “All I ever wanted to be was an actor.”



Ed Gomboz, Pam Gray, Sandy Bond and Craig Tomkin said it’s a great festival with wonderful parties.



Gregory von Hausch (left) president of the Ft. Lauderdale Film Festival, presents the Lifetime Achievement Award to actor Joe Pantoliano.



Irwin Levenstein, (from left) Janet Schwartz, Alec Silvester and Bianca Guilband travel from South Florida especially for the film festival.

photos by CHRISTINE RODENBAUGH



Dave Albaneze (from left), Robin Albaneze, Ken and Katherine Forrester and Robin and Jim Love

2019 ART & ANTIQUES SHOW

Paris in full bloom

by MARY MCALLISTER

A unique blend of the old, the new, and everything in between awaited visitors to the 43rd annual Arts and Antiques Show at the Prime Osborn Convention Center in Jacksonville the weekend of Dec. 6-8. The annual show benefits Wolfson Children's Hospital.

Antique furniture, jewelry and maps shared space with new artists and designers. A fashion show of current and former patients who have been treated at Wolfson was one of the highlights.

There were also book signings, talks by interior designers, Jim Howard, Ray Booth, and on Sunday, a talk by Adam Levine, the new director of the Cummer Museum. "I was delighted to be invited by the Women's Board to speak at this event to support these great initiatives to help people. Outside partnerships are so important to the museum, and we want to be a part of such a wonderful community cause," Levine said.

Vendors included Susan Spencer of New Hampshire, a first-time vendor who specializes in turning antique, mother-of-pearl Chinese gaming chips into jewelry; Foreign Affairs International, with antique prints; and Apropos Antiques, a fourth-time vendor who said this show was appealing because of the locale, the vendors and the activities.

The weekend began with a black-tie gala on Friday night, which was attended by 1,000 people, some of whom were corporate sponsors.

"There really is something for everyone," said Katherine Forrester, president of the Women's Board, which sponsors the event every year. Robin Albaneze and Robin Love were the Chairs for this year's event.



Karen and Don Wolfson



Ellen Gould (from left), Ray Martin, Annie Francis and Grace Nelson
Photos by LAURENCE GREENE PHOTOGRAPHY



Katherine Forrester, president of The Women's Board of Wolfson Children's Hospital



Voyne and Sue Stepp and Patty and Edward Nimnicht



A Wolfson Children's Hospital patient
Photo by MIMI SHERAN PEARCE

The Board is a 399-member, all-volunteer group that has raised \$32 million to date, and is the single largest volunteer donor to the hospital. "I have been a member for 24 years, and my father, Dr. George Armstrong, was the medical director of Wolfson for 25 years, and my mother, Kay Armstrong, is still an active member," she said. "Our funding target is to raise \$4 million in five years for a new Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, where each patient will have his/her own room and parents can spend the night with their children, pro-

moting faster healing," she explained. There are also plans for LED monitoring in the NICU so that patients will be free of wires. The new NICU will be a world-class facility.

All the food and drinks were donated by several sponsors and companies. The Tea Room was donated by The Brick, Black Sheep and Zoe's of Ponte Vedra, so all the money raised will go directly to Wolfson. Manning the Tea Room were Karen McCombs, Kristina Powell of Ponte Vedra Beach and Cristina Haddad.

"We met through our volunteer work with the board and we've been friends ever since. We love it, so we continue to do it every year," Powell said.

The other main focus of the Women's Board is the Florida Forum, which invites speakers from all over the world. The Chairs of the Forum are Heather Moseley, Anna Neal and Dearing Thouburn. The Forum has hosted such speakers as Nikki Haley, Tony Blair, George W. Bush and Laura Bush.

"The Florida Forum and the Art and Antiques Show are so important in the effort to reach our goals for Wolfson," Forrester said. "The Women's Board is a huge group of volunteers and members, and our volunteers are our engine."

Colleen Stevens, a 30-year member, said, "The energy here is exciting, and the cause is a good one. All kids, regardless of race, religion or ability to pay, are seen at Wolfson, and it is so heartwarming to give to such a great organization, and you can do as little or as much as you want."

For information about supporting the Women's Board or becoming a volunteer, call (904) 202-2886, or email womensboard@bmcjax.com.



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Mimi Sherman Pearce doesn't let vision impairment stop her from pursuing her ...

PASSION FOR PAINTING

by MAGGIE FITZROY

Mimi Sherman Pearce remembers well what her mother told her as a child, that “the only thing you can count on is change.”

So, she has never been afraid of change. In fact, “I want to embrace it in all aspects of my life,” she said. “Which keeps changing.”

Pearce's positive, sunny attitude has stood her well throughout her life. And it is especially valuable now, because the lifelong, awarding-winning artist loves to paint. And she doesn't let having macular degeneration stop her, or even slow her down.

“Everybody has something,” she said one recent day while taking a break from painting in her San Marco backyard.

“It's not necessarily good. It's not necessarily bad,” she said, quoting one of her University of North Florida art professors. “It just is.”

In her retirement years, Pearce not only embraces her passion, she embraces learning new techniques and growing her skills by attending classes at UNF through the Learning for a Lifetime Program, which allows people age “60 and better” to audit classes, where space is available, for free.

Pearce attends classes regularly with her husband, Jim, who is also an artist. Their home is filled with their paintings and their dining room serves as their studio. Their joint website is www.mimijimart.com.

“Follow your passion, follow your dream,” said Pearce, whose “wet and dry” macular degeneration was diagnosed when she was in her 50s. It came on gradually, and “I miss some parts of things,” she said. “But I never wanted to do detailed paintings, anyway. My mantra is: art is for everyone. Art should be everywhere—in the workspace as well as over the fireplace. It has the power to calm, to transport and to heal the spirit in times of turmoil and confusion. That's what I am hoping to do with my art.”

Pearce's free spirit attitude toward life is reflected in her work. Captivated by the process of painting, she favors using bold, juicy colors that she applies in layers with brush and palette knife. She uses a variety of materials, including paper, wood, canvas and aluminum to capture the horizons of nature.



Mimi Sherman Pearce takes a break from painting in her San Marco backyard.
Photos by MAGGIE FITZROY



Pearce's Cloudy Day, one, two, three triptych



Winter triptych by Mimi Pearce



“ My mantra is,
 art is for everyone.
 Art should be
 everywhere ... ”

Everyday objects and nature, including landscapes, are her favorite subjects. She often creates diptychs and triptychs, two and three paintings that work together but can also stand alone.

Her paintings “After the Rain I and II” recently won a prize at the Florida State Convention for the National League of American Pen Women. The landscape abstractions, with a definite sense of place, are currently on exhibit at the Haskell Gallery at Jacksonville International Airport through April 6.

Pearce grew up in San Marco, graduated from Bishop Kenny High School, then attended Springhill College in Mobile, Alabama. Going to college there in the 60s shaped her life, she said, in wonderful ways.

“I was an English major, but I was very excited about art,” she said. “I went to an art professor and said, ‘I want art to be my minor, but I don’t want to start with Drawing 101. I just want to paint.’ He let me do it.”

After college, Pearce pursued a career in public television at the local and national levels. She also pursued art at an intense level, participating in many exhibits over the past 30 years and winning numerous awards.

“I’ve never been a detail person,” she said. “I can’t be that way now, because I can’t see well enough. But I was never that way. I’m really more into color and emotion and motion. I paint not only what’s there, but what’s imagined.”

Pearce’s studio is located at 1225 Hendricks Ave., in Jacksonville.



Moving On diptych by Pearce



Pearce's Blue Sky with Navy and Orange diptych



Pearce’s kitchen is filled with many of the paintings she did early in life.

the Art of Pop

by MARY McALLISTER

Photos by MIMI SHERMAN PEARCE



Adam Levine, director of the Cummer Museum (left), with Barbara and William Harrell in front of the new Andy Warhol silkscreens.

Who knew that the Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, in addition to being a place to see beautiful art, would allow you to travel back in time to the 1970s?

That's just what the exhibit, "The Art of Pop," was designed to do Jan. 16, as guests at the first dinner party of 2020 learned while celebrating the museum's acquisition of works by pop-culture artist Andy Warhol.

Munching on gourmet grilled cheese sandwiches and tomato soup in the loggia of the museum, guests could be seen in sequins, wide pants and big hair, enjoying the atmosphere of the 70s and having their picture taken with "Andy," aka Barbara Colaciello, the artistic director of Bab's Lab.

In addition, the Terry Gallery was transformed into Studio 54, where disco lights and the Jacksonville Dance Theatre disco dancers grooved to the sounds spun by DJ NickFresh, who said, "Andy Warhol and that era has always fascinated me. There was an explosion of greatness, music and pop art, and it's great to revisit it."



DJ NickFresh, enjoying the food at the dinner party.

The Art of Pop was the "first of our dinner parties this year and it's the third year of our dinner parties," said Adam Levine, director of the museum. "Originally, the parties were launched to generate proceeds to help restore the gardens, but they were so successful that we instituted thrice yearly dinner parties themed in relation to temporary exhibitions or permanent collections." He added, "This party is an acknowledgment of a generous gift from a private collector, who wishes to remain anonymous, of Andy Warhol silkscreen prints of Chairman Mao. So, it's an entire suite of the Mao series, four of which are on view. And, we've had record attendance at this event."

Barbara Harrell, a trustee of the Cummer, attended with her husband William, and she commented on the growth of the Cummer and the event. "I think it's fun. It's a lot of fun. I went to school in the 60s, so Andy Warhol's like a friend."

The Vice Chair of the Board, Susan Towler, agreed, saying she loves "the new energy of the Cummer because it's stretching the boundaries of art and culture, while maintaining the legacy of the Cummer's rich history." Having served on the Board for 10 years, she said she has enjoyed the transformation.

All areas of Jacksonville were represented.

Martha Barrett, of Southside, remarked that "the Cummer is wonderful and I appreciate what it does for the community."



The two Andy Warhols of the evening. Andy Warhol (left) and Barbara Colaciello

The Jacksonville Dance Theater's Hilary Libman (from left), Rebecca R. Levy and Tiffany Santeiro



Cindy Anderson (from left), Patti Hendrix Joyce, Farley Kern, Susan Towler and Suzanne Perritt.



John Hurtubis, with friend Bill Struck, said they “love everything about the Cummer.”

And, Farley Kern, from Amelia Island Plantation, sharing a table with Cindy Anderson, Patti Hendrix Joyce, Farley Kern, Susan Towler and Suzanne Perritt, thought the event was a “great success and lots of fun.”

Much of the credit for the planning of the event goes to Cara Bowyer and Emily Moody-Rosete, who said that “we wanted a fun, festive environment for these dinner parties, centered on a theme such as this one, which was to celebrate the acquisition of the silkscreens.”

Upcoming dinner parties at the Cummer include “The Art of Power” in February, which is an Egyptian-themed dinner party, and “The Art of Nature: A Glamping Dinner Party,” in May.

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by AMBER LAKE

Janet E. Johnson, P.A.

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Janet Johnson is committed to aggressively defending people accused in all criminal matters in state and federal court. In practice since 1994, she is a member of the Florida Bar, The Federal Bar, Colorado Bar, as well as the Florida Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers. She has been on the faculty of FACDL "Blood, Breath & Tears" annual DUI seminar. Ms. Johnson has been awarded the AV preeminent rating™ from Martindale-Hubble® and was named a fellow to the prestigious Litigation Counsel of America™, as well as one of the ten best criminal defense attorneys nationally for client satisfaction by the American Institute of Criminal Law Attorneys. She also appears as a legal commentator on CNN and HLN.

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Automobile aficionados have long reveled at Amelia Island's annual Concours d'Elegance.

Now celebrating its 25th year, the Concours draws hundreds of rare vehicles from around the world to the delight of thousands of spectators.

One car that will make a splash this year has a special place in any collector's heart — the Chevrolet Corvette. These sleek, mid-engine cars are also lovingly known by enthusiasts as "America's sports car."

First introduced in 1953, the Corvette has long been known for its superior driving and distinctive bodywork. From March 5 through 8, attendees will have the opportunity to see some of the most coveted models in Chevy's history — the 1960 CERV I, the 1964 CERV II and the 1990 CERV III.

For this year's show, Bill Warner, founder and chairman of the event said organizers have been working with General Motor

Heritage Collection, the National Corvette Museum and the Rare Wheels Collection to help create the tribute to the mid-engine Corvette.

"The Mid-Engine Corvette Class is a dream class," Warner said. "We hope that everyone in attendance enjoys seeing these incredibly rare and historically significant vehicles together in person."

In addition to the CERV I, II and III, the Concours is especially excited to showcase the 1964 GS IIB, which will mark its first appearance outside of the Chaparral Gallery of the Petroleum Museum in Midland, Texas.

The experimental, aerodynamic design of the Corvette class showstoppers is certain to make this year's Concours d'Elegance an event not to be missed.

Amelia Island's Concours d'Elegance will take place March 5-8 at The Ritz-Carlton at 4750 Amelia Island Parkway, Amelia Island.



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An evening with *John Meacham*

by MAGGIE FITZROY

Presidential historian and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jon Meacham came to Jacksonville on Jan. 22 as part of the Florida Forum series presented by The Women's Board of Wolfson Children's Hospital.

After an entertaining and educational talk at the Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts, moderated by Jacksonville University President Tim Cost, Meacham attended a reception at the Ortega Boulevard home of Ann Hicks.

Guests at the reception, which included drinks and hors d'oeuvres, had the pleasure of personally meeting Meacham and having their picture taken with him.



ABOVE: Jon Meacham (left) on stage with moderator Tim Cost, president of Jacksonville University.



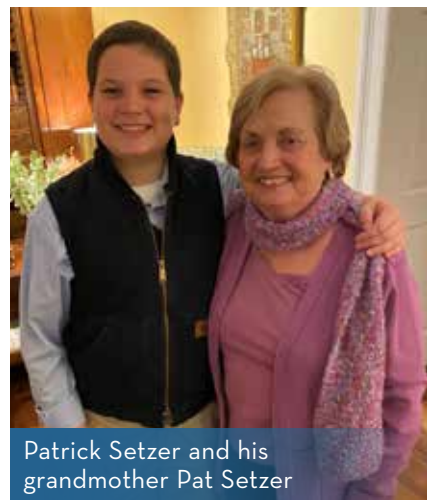
LEFT: Helen Lane (left) and Evelyn Howard attend the reception at the home of Ann Hicks
Photos by MAGGIE FITZROY



Kathy McIlvaine (left) and Robin Albanese



Sally Parsons, director of the Women's Board of Wolfson Children's Hospital (from left). Philip Green and Sheila Green



Patrick Setzer and his grandmother Pat Setzer



Gilchrist Berg (from left), Amy Berg, Tim Cost and Stephanie Cost



Charlie Ward (from left), Mike Cashner, Kathy Cashner, Sherry Cody and Rusty Cody

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