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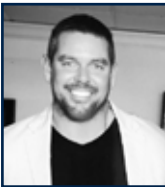
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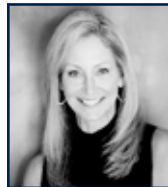
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About this magazine

The First Coast Register is a bimonthly general interest magazine published by The Ponte Vedra Recorder and OPC News, LLC. The magazine can be found throughout the upscale areas of greater Jacksonville. For advertising inquiries, call 904.285.8831.

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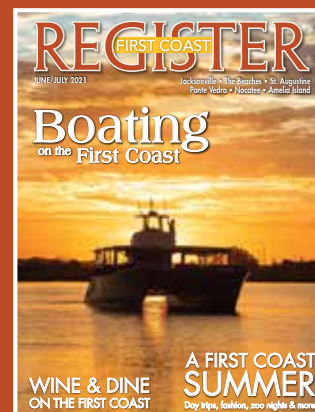
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on the cover



The cover photo is of the Sabrage Charters catamaran in St. Augustine. For more on Sabrage, go to pages 16-17.

Photo by ZACH THOMAS/
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One of Us!

as told to
SHAUN RYAN

PAMELA AYRES

Pamela Ayres is a photographer and owner of 2nd Story Gallery & Studios, which she opened at 5 S. 2nd St., Fernandina Beach, in November 2017. She is a key member of the Northeast Florida arts community.

Tell me a little bit about 2nd Story Gallery & Studios.

The gallery features photography on acrylic, canvas wraps, glass, birch block, bamboo, notecards and mini blocks by Pamela Ayres and 16 local artists and interns.

Ned Flemming has a studio at the gallery and displays his signature oils of dinghies, along with Dickie Anderson (acrylics), Ron Chabot (acrylic prints and notecards), Ana Companion (oils), Figment Jewelry, Lois Grunder (acrylics), Craig Impink (acrylics), Andrea Mateer (oils and acrylics), Jane Reese (acrylics), Alan Robertson (mixed media), Frances Rodgers (glass), Patti Saunderson (jewelry) and Beth Smith (decoupage shells).

Student interns Storm Rowland (acrylics), Mac Bloodworth (photography), Kara Montooth (photography) and Lane Press (photography) also have work on display at the gallery.



The gallery is open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. We participate in Fernandina Beach's monthly Second Saturday Arttrageous Art Walk.

Our customers are welcome to shop at the gallery, video shop, shop online at www.2ndstorygallerystudios.com, or shop by private appointment by calling (904)277-6676.

Tell me about your background and how you decided to open your business.

I moved to Amelia Island eight-and-a-half years ago to escape the rat race and cold of the Northeast and mid-Atlantic region.

A nature lover with a degree in environmental science and an M.B.A., my passion for photography and art came from my grandfather, who was an artist and avid photographer. I got a lot of my inspiration from him.

I always considered myself a hobby photographer until one day while working as a volunteer at the Plantation Artists' Guild and Gallery, I received some flattering comments about my photos and realized that I had an instinctive aptitude for photography.

In addition to wanting a downtown outlet to display my photography and my love of the natural beauty of the Northeast Florida area, I also wanted to highlight the many local artists and student artists. There is an awful lot of local talent here on Amelia Island and the myriad of genres of art that are represented is awesome. I wanted to showcase that at 2nd Story Gallery & Studios.



A collection of some of the art that can be found at 2nd Story Gallery & Studios in Fernandina Beach.

Photos provided by PAM AYRES

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8 ■



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Tell me about your photography.

I love Amelia Island and the beauty of its flora and fauna. I try to showcase that beauty through my photography. My favorite subjects are birds, the ocean, waves, sea turtles, beaches, marshes, sunrises, sunsets and the beach. I try to present my photography on a variety of mediums to enhance the subject of the photography.

You have a lot of enthusiasm for giving back to the community.

Amelia Island and Fernandina Beach are beautiful areas filled with wonderful people. I try to give back to the community by sharing local art and area subjects with residents and visitors, as well as introducing and fostering new local talent and area student interns.

What do you like best about living on the First Coast?

I love the beauty of the area, the community, the beach, the marsh and the sunny weather, warm temperatures and the island breeze.

How do you like to spend your free time?

I spend my free time traveling, golfing, kayaking, biking, swimming, walking the local beaches, participating in the Amelia Island Sea Turtle Watch, ushering at St. Michael Catholic Church, reading and spending time with my two daughters and my Maltese sidekick, Lucky, who accompanies me on my many photo walks!



2nd Story Gallery & Studios is located at 5 S. 2nd St. in Fernandina Beach

Photo provided by PAM AYRES



Pamela Ayres showcases the natural beauty of Northeast Florida in her photographs displayed at the gallery during a 2017 Artrageous Art Walk.

Photo by PARIS MOULDEN

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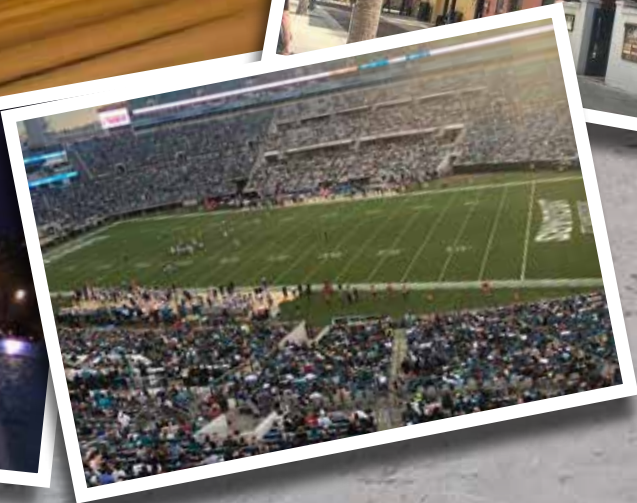
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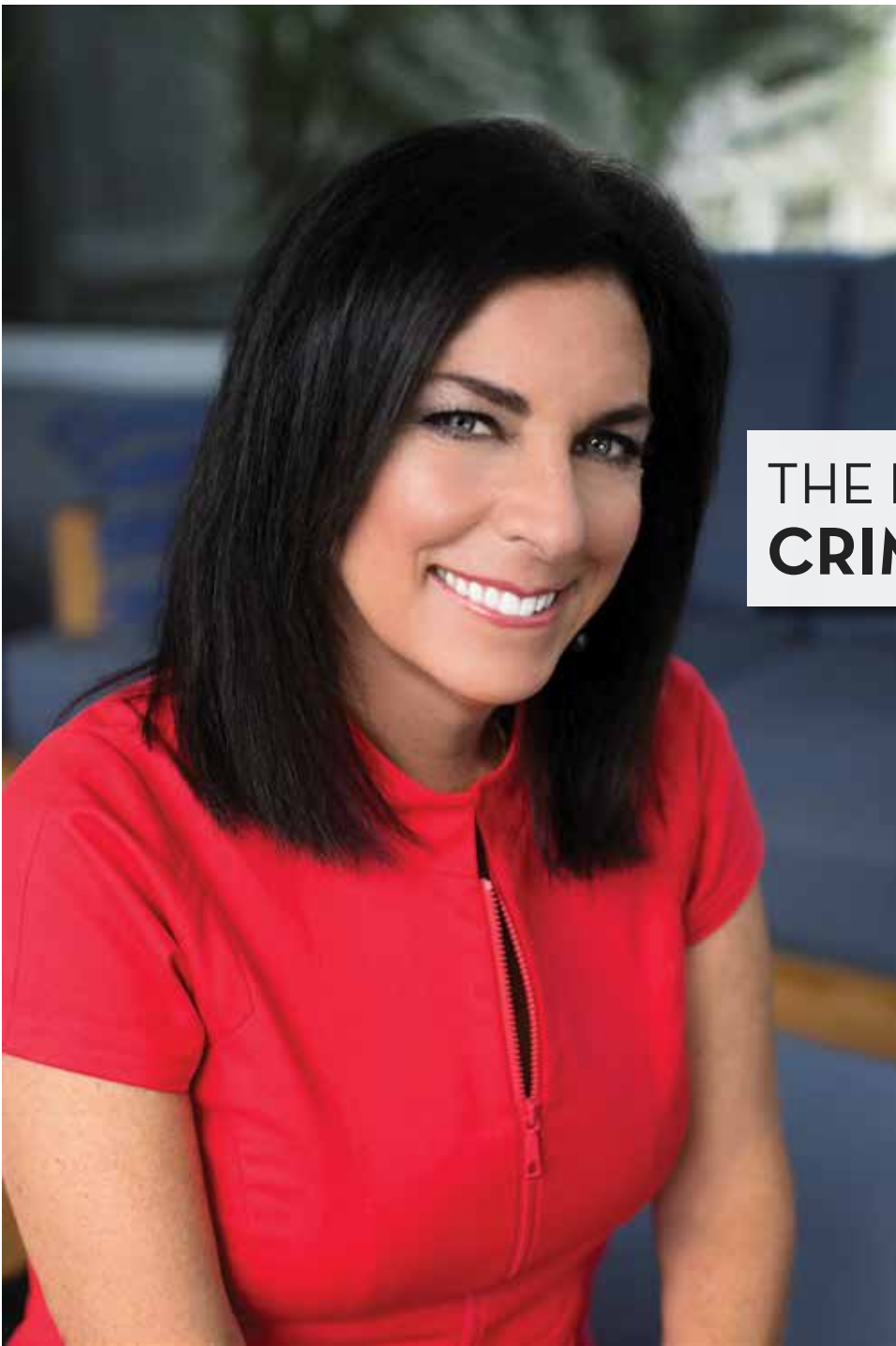
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FACES OF *The First Coast*



Faces Of The First Coast is an exclusive feature for First Coast Register readers to get to know prominent business leaders in Northeast Florida's coastal communities. *If you would like to be featured in Faces of the First Coast, please contact us at (904) 285-8831.*



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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.

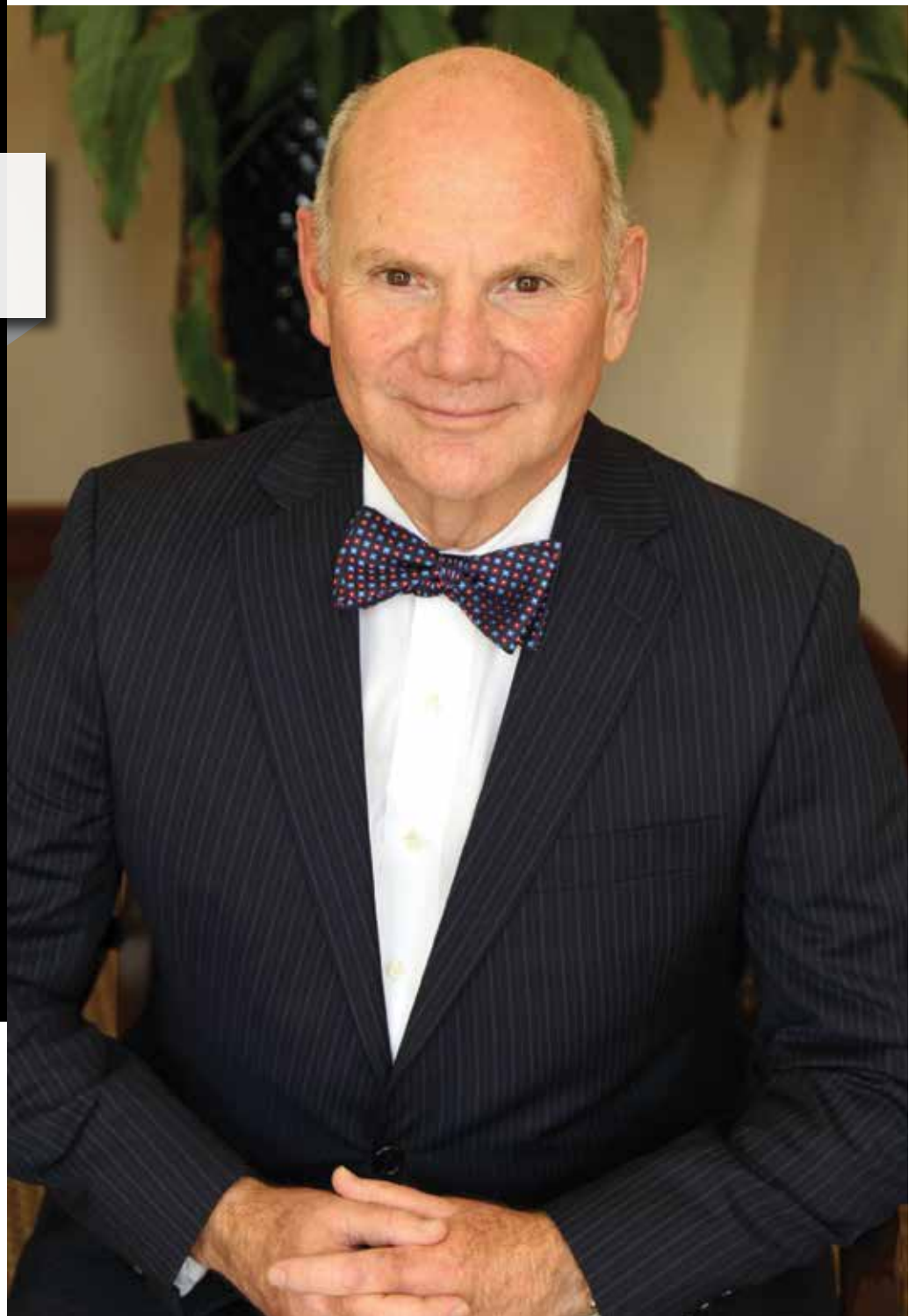
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Most people select a family law attorney based on recommendations from friends, cursory internet searches or a combination of the two. Florida Bar board certification – which recognizes attorneys’ special knowledge, skills, and proficiency – is seldom a leading factor. Yet, with only 7 percent of the state’s family law attorneys claiming the distinction, board certification should be a key issue in such important decisions.

Lawrence Datz is among the few board-certified marital and family law attorneys in Northeast Florida. He’s also one of just three locally who are Fellows of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers.

A former chair of the Florida Bar’s Marital and Family Law Board Certification Committee and past president of the Florida Association of Family and Conciliatory Courts, Datz is widely recognized as one of the state’s leaders in family law, high-asset divorces, high-conflict parenting disputes, division of business interests and other complex issues. The Florida Bar says board certification demonstrates a lawyer’s

significant commitment to and experience in a specialty field. To earn board certification, family law attorneys must practice for at least five years, have significant trial experience, withstand review by other attorneys and judges, and pass a difficult exam. Like no other measure, the distinction of board certification assures clients of a family law attorney’s capabilities like no other measure.

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Colleen Rodriguez is the executive director of Jewish Family & Community Services (JFCS), a role she has held for 10 years of the 24 she's been at the agency. The nonprofit is one of the oldest in the state and has been operating in Northeast Florida since 1917.

From adoption and foster care to mental health counseling and emergency financial assistance, JFCS's programs help individuals and families of all races, religions and backgrounds. The agency also provides hands-on support for seniors and Holocaust survivors in our area.

A fierce advocate for local families who are struggling, Rodriguez holds JFCS's mission of "helping people help themselves" close to her heart.

She says that by bridging the gap when people face temporary hardship, JFCS empowers thousands of people each year to make lasting positive changes. Rodriguez also works to ensure that her organization maximizes every dollar it receives. Less than 5 percent of funds donated to the nonprofit go towards administrative costs.

During her time at JFCS, Rodriguez has placed a continued focus on bolstering one of the nonprofit's major initiatives: the Max Block Food Pantry. The pantry provides nutritious groceries to hungry families on the

First Coast, with the agency recently adding two satellite locations – one of which is in George Washington Carver Elementary School where 99% of students face food insecurity.

As students head home for summer break and can no longer access school lunches, the need for food is expected to increase greatly at all pantry locations. Any donations to the Max Block Food Pantry will be matched 1:1 through July 31st – so please consider joining JFCS to fight hunger in our own backyard when gifts are automatically doubled.



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Rosanne Hearn has been the owner of our team for the past four years and has extensive knowledge of the real estate process when listing or buying a home. She has also lived in North East Florida for over twenty years with her family and loves sharing her love for there with her clients.

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Boating

ON THE FIRST COAST





Sabrage offers variety of summer experiences out on the water

by SHAUN RYAN

photos by
SUSAN GRIFFIN



SETTING THE SCENE



Sabrage has a bar and space for catering private charters.



Capt. Glen Davis stands aboard the Sabrage catamaran. Business partners Jonathan Cordero and Ian Bartlett are in the background.

Summer may be the best time to get out on the water, and Sabrage Charters is making the most of it.

Owned and operated by Capt. Glen Davis, Jonathan Cordero and Ian Bartlett, Sabrage is a 63-foot custom Cooper catamaran equipped with high-end finishes, spacious decks, two restrooms and comfortable seating for up to 110 guests.

The boat arrived in August and began renting in October.

“Sabrage is doing pretty well,” said Davis. “We’re growing slow but steady.”

The business specializes in daily excursions and group charter events, including sunset and eco cruises. It also offers a wine-tasting cruise and private charters for weddings, receptions and parties. In fact, its hosted about a dozen bachelorette parties to date.

Sabrage hosted its first wedding ceremony on June 25 and four more are planned for the fall.

Some local companies have also been chartering cruises for their employees, who are ready to get out and do something fun after more than a year of dealing with the pandemic.

One of the big announcements is the Sabrage Fourth of July cruise. The boat will go out at 7:15 p.m., anchor out in the bay so that passengers can get a front-row seat for the fireworks show, and then return at about 10:15 p.m.

The outing will feature a barbecue buffet and a full-service bar with drinks available for purchase.

Later in the summer, the Sabrage team is looking at a four-hour trip that will take passengers down to Bing’s Landing in Flagler County for a stop at Captain’s BBQ.

For more information, to charter a cruise or to sign up for one of the excursions, go to www.sabrageaugustine.com or call (904) 310-4999.

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PEDAL.

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Kraken CycleBoats provides a unique group experience

by HOLLY TISHFIELD

photos provided by ALYSSA RHOADES

After a trip to Nashville, Tennessee, longtime friends Tony Mendina and Jeff Rhoades had no idea that a spontaneous sightseeing tour would lead them to their next business venture.

The two traveled with their wives in the mid-2010s and booked a pedal pub tour through the streets of Nashville. Traditional pedal pubs are large, man-powered vehicles with pedals for pushing and a bar in the middle for drinking. These tours have become all the rage the last decade or so and have popped up in big cities such as Nashville and Miami.

Mendina and Rhoades loved the concept of a pedal pub so much that they wanted to create one of their own, but instead of pedaling through the streets these friends wanted to give this activity a Floridian spin, so they created their very own pedal pub boats.

The pedal boats, nicknamed the “Krakens,” began in Tampa roughly six years ago, and from there Kraken CycleBoats was born. These boats seat up to 16 passengers and have 10 stations for pedaling. An experienced captain welcomes crew members aboard and guides them on a beautiful tour of the waterways. Kraken CycleBoats became a huge success in the Tampa area, and in 2018 Mendina and Rhoades brought a “kraken” to the downtown Jacksonville area.

“Our intention was always to create a great, unique experience for everybody,” said Alyssa Rhoades, Jeff Rhoades’s wife and business partner. “I love to be a part of [that].”



The Kraken CycleBoat tours last two hours and are perfect for several outings. Rhoades said that guests book private tours to celebrate birthdays, graduations, engagements, bachelor/bachelorette parties and even family reunions. Jacksonville is particularly big with team building cruises from local businesses. Kraken also offers public tours for smaller groups but requires all passengers to be 21+ due to consumption of alcoholic beverages.



Cruises are always BYOB, but the Kraken CycleBoats are equipped with coolers and a speaker system for guest convenience. Halfway through the tour the boat makes a stop at River City Brewing, which Rhoades said has become a wonderful partner with Kraken CycleBoats, for restrooms and/or snacks. All Kraken guests receive a complimentary “Pedal, Pedal, Drink” souvenir cup after their tour.



Rhoades said that in the years since their creation, the Kraken CycleBoat tours have received loads of positive feedback from both the Tampa Bay and Jacksonville areas. Customers love the tours so much that they come back for more every few months. You can learn more about the Kraken CycleBoats on its website at krakencycleboats.com.

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Spring BOAT SHOW

*features a range
of watercraft*

story and photos by SHAUN RYAN

The Jacksonville Marine Association's Spring Boat Show, held April 16-18 at Metropolitan Park and Marina in Jacksonville, gave local boating enthusiasts a chance to browse and buy a variety of watercraft.

Twenty dealers showed off between 100 and 150 boats in all sizes and styles.

The demand for boats is on the rise and manufacturers have been challenged to meet it. In fact, it was a shortage of boats that prompted the association to hold its first-ever outdoor show at the marina.

Usually, the annual show is held in January at the Prime Osborn Convention Center. But concerns about the supply of boats prompted a cancellation of this year's show, and the spring show was held in its place.

If all goes well next year, the association may be able to host three shows: the annual January show, a repeat of the outdoor spring show and a third in St. Johns County.

The inaugural spring show was three days of water-related fun, family-friendly activities and educational seminars. Sixty-five vendors lined the walkways throughout the show offering a wide range of wares — some, though not all, nautical.

The stars of the show were the many fishing boats, cruisers, ski boats, pontoons, inflatables, personal watercraft and more.

Capt. Rick Murphy and Brie Gabrielle from Florida Insider Fishing Report gave presentations on throwing a cast net, fighting a fish and dissecting a water column. Kids' fishing clinics were held as well.

The event also featured live music and food trucks.



The Jacksonville Spring Boat Show featured between 100 and 150 boats in all sizes.



A boat show attendee examines a sign describing the attributes of one of the boats.



Show attendees take a few moments to look at surfboards being offered for sale.



This Honda BF50 was offered at a significant discount during the Spring Boat Show.



Boats are seen lined up in Metropolitan Park.



St. Augustine Race Week

brings excitement
to local waters

story and photos by SHAUN RYAN

The fifth annual St. Augustine Race Week, hosted by the St. Augustine Yacht Club, was held April 16-25. The eight-day celebration included parties, food, music and, of course, sailboat racing.

The event raised funds for the John Daniel Meehan Youth Sailing Scholarship Program, which sends kids ages 8 to 18 to summer sailing camps.

The week kicked off with the two-day Youth Sailing Regatta, in which junior sailors up to age 18 raced in Matanzas Bay between the Castillo de San Marcos and the Bridge of Lions. The race was sponsored by Yacht Sales by Rose Ann.

For more information about St. Augustine Sailing, which was a major sponsor of the event, and Yacht Sales by Rose Ann, go to sta-sail.com.

For more about Race Week, go to staugustineyachtclub.com.



by HOLLY TISHFIELD

photos provided by
NICO RECORE

GOOD & FOOD GORGEOUS VIEWS

St. Augustine's newest edition to the current food-truck craze is Marina Munch, a cozy food park settled on the banks of the San Sebastian River off Ponce De Leon Boulevard.

Marina Munch was created by CeCe Reigle and Commissioner John Valdes in early 2020. Commissioner Valdes asked Nico Recore, his social media manager of his 2018 campaign team, if she would manage this new food-truck park and she accepted without hesitation. Recore already had experience and connections with many local food trucks after running the Wednesday Pier Farmers Markets in St. Augustine. This gave her a great advantage when contacting trucks to be a part of the new Marina Munch.

Valdes is also a well-respected builder in the area, and Recore said he helped construct a beautiful food-truck park that is handicap-friendly, family friendly, pet friendly and even COVID-safety friendly. The tables of Marina Munch are all specifically positioned at least 10 feet apart from one another, making it a safe and comfortable place for guests throughout the duration of the pandemic.

Although Marina Munch opened just before the pandemic began last spring, Recore and both owners decided that closing the park was the safest thing to do.

"The city had mandated that businesses downtown close because of [the virus], so we knew it would be important for us to reflect what was being implemented," Recore said. "Our values first and foremost were to protect our citizens."

The food-truck park re-opened in May of 2020, and Marina Munch has been a smashing success ever since.

The park has over 20 revolving food-trucks that visit at various points throughout the month. There are always four trucks for guests to choose from, two of which are constant and two of which change weekly. Uptown Scratch Kitchen and Funkadelic are the anchors, while the other two spots are rotated between trucks like African Love Kitchen, German Street Food, The Saucy Pig and more.

"[We] keep the other two trucks revolving because it provides us with stability and variety," Recore said.

Marina Munch is in the process of obtaining their beer and wine license, but Recore said that they plan to keep the park family-friendly and not turn it into a "hang out" kind of spot.



“For us it is family first, and the beer and wine will merely accent the food,” she said.

Marina Munch and Recore herself are teaming up with their other river district neighbors such as Bluewater Adventure and Sabrage to host a San Sebastian River Cleanup on July 9 to give back to the environment and bring together the community of business owners.

“These businesses are not only there to profit from the river, but they are also contributing to the maintenance of it,” Recore said.

To keep up with Marina Munch’s revolving food trucks and see what other community events they are hosting, you can find them on Facebook at Marina Munch.



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Wen Raiti is the owner of House of Leaf & Bean located in Jacksonville

FROM CHINA TO AMERICA

Wen Raiti creates healthy meals one day at a time



TABLE TALK with LEIGH CORT

The House of Leaf & Bean, which opened in 2018 on Beach Boulevard in Jacksonville, is an organic restaurant committed to vegan, gluten-free, sustainable and simple, fresh organic meals that heal — while delicious and affordable. It was created by Chinese-American Wen Raiti, who grew up eating plant-based protein in China, especially tofu and soy milk, and home-made vegetarian foods made by her mother, a devout Buddhist. Her popular organic café where West meets East is dedicated to her family in China — and providing a fantastic dining experience for people who really love to eat, care about what they eat and want to improve their health and the health of the earth we share.

Whether dining in or driving through, the unique healthy menu is rooted in plant-based proteins, and the restaurant is committed to using fresh organic ingredients that cater to a wide range of palates and dietary needs.

At the House of Leaf & Bean, one of only a few tofu producers in the U.S. and the only commercial tofu producer in the South, Wen makes fresh premium tofu following traditional Chinese recipes. Simply, the process begins by grinding soybeans into pulp repeatedly, which is then cooked and pasteurized



ABOVE: Lettuce wraps filled with tempeh, hummus, julienne vegetables, house-grown beansprouts and brown rice

LEFT: Dumplings with tofu and mushrooms

Photos provided by LEIGH CORT



TOP LEFT: Organic crispy tofu bites

TOP RIGHT: Blocks of fresh organic tofu



RIGHT: Wen Raiti leads a traditional Tea Ceremony

into soy milk. Calcium and magnesium are mixed into the fresh soy milk, which creates soy curds that are then pressed to the desired firmness that comes out in blocks — or tofu cakes. Wen often does culinary presentations explaining the process of tofu making. In the future, she plans to have a production facility where she can offer tours of how her fresh tofu and her other vegan and vegetarian foods are made.

Why is this tofu at House of Leaf & Bean so unique? Aside from being the freshest tofu possible, her premium tofu is especially formulated to hold up to wok-frying or grilling, which gives it a much firmer texture than customers expect. It's denser than the extra firm tofu found in stores. And this means it can take a good bit of handling and still hold together like clean white meat or tuna or swordfish steaks. Imagine that it can easily soak up open flame flavors on the grill, or even deep-frying small slices into crispy chips with a crunch similar to bagel chips!

People throughout Asia have been eating all types of bean products for 3,000 years and enjoying long, active lives. Growing up in a small town in Xingning, Guangdong Province, she learned about the life and stories of her mother and grandmother having to be self-sufficient and grow everything on their land to support their daily needs. During and after World War II they had limited resources and access to the protein from animals to feed their large family of seven. Their diet consisted of a lot of fresh and organic vegetables, grains and beans that they grew on their land, which was naturally organic because no chemical fertilizers, pesticides or preservatives had been introduced or even available at that time. Soy beans were the most popular among all beans because they have rich protein and calcium.

Wen learned to make tofu by hand for special occasions like Chinese New Year, weddings, newborn baby celebrations and other important events. Wen recalls "They made the most delicious tofu dishes!" So, she started experimenting with making fresh soymilk and tofu from organic (non-GMO) soy beans a few years before opening her restaurant, realizing that her customers were hungry for authentic, raw, organic plant-based proteins and healthy foods!

Before opening House of Leaf & Bean, Wen found a warm welcome at the Beaches Green Market in Jarboe Park where she began selling her products, helping and encouraging more people to be able to have access to healthy food. She introduced her extensive line of organic freshly brewed tea (caffeinated and herbal) — a perfect combination that her clients enjoy. The most unique part of House of Leaf & Bean is also being able to de-stress and relax in a Zen-type of environment in her Meditation Room.

Wen, a CPA by trade, is passionate about Lifestyle Medicine due to her personal health journey. She is very knowledgeable about the incredible health benefits of drinking tea and sells more than 30 blends of organic loose-leaf teas in her café. As only one example, the Organic Matcha Mate Tea Blend is an East-meets-West fusion, a high-energy blend that results in a natural appetite suppressant and EGCG antioxidants — a powerful caffeine boost.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 ■



Coastal Casual AT ITS BEST



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Northeast Florida is so fortunate to have someone like Wen offering simple, fresh and organic meals that heal. She is currently working with Kailo Nutrition on the "Meals that Heal" program and the Synergy Lifestyle Center to make meals that help patients to reverse or improve their health conditions, such as heart problems, high cholesterols, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity and so on. Wen is proud of these healthful, healing dishes being affordable and delicious. She believes that what we eat and how we make our food should be simple, sustainable and beneficial not only for our health but also for our environment. That's why she created House of Leaf & Bean for her community that is beyond a restaurant. It is a community to educate and to offer a different way of making our food.



Wen Raiti's mother Xueqing Zhong (left) and grandmother Shuiyao Niao helped inspire Raiti's passion for "healing" meals.

As a community leader, Wen has taken many leadership roles in organizations like Jacksonville Sister City Association, National Asian American PAC FL, Jacksonville Chinese Association, Jacksonville Mayor's Asian American Advisory Board, Florida Restaurant and Lodging Association, Leadership Jacksonville and more.

For Wen, somehow Mother's Day lasts all year long, not just as a tribute to her mother and grandmother, but as a calling to care for Mother Earth — to give back — so that the Earth will be

healthy, green, lush and nurturing for our future generations. How does she do this? It's simple: first — eat more plant-based meals — an easy way to do your part! Second, she reminds us — don't waste! Be mindful of what you take and use. From the amount of food you buy to the packing and disposal utensils you use, Wen and her staff follow Reuse, Recycle, Reduce and Compost at work.

There are many exciting times ahead for Wen and House of Leaf & Bean. Watch for upcoming news about her new Tea Sippers Group: "Cha Dao." It will be the first in Northeast Florida and perhaps in America!

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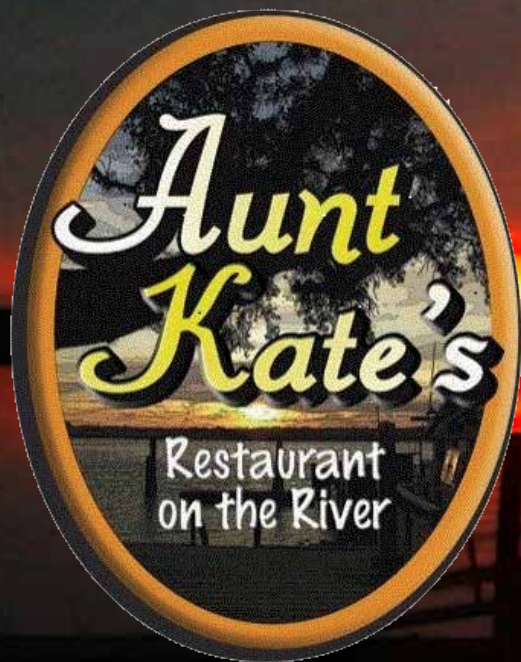
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THE FASHION CAMPER

brings summer collection to life

by HOLLY TISHFIELD

Residents of the First Coast have become acquainted with the bright pink, vintage camper that pops up at various arts markets around town. The Fashion Camper, owned and operated by Angie Pisacane, has especially become a favorite at the Nocatee Farmer's Market, where Pisacane said that people ask for her by name.

The Fashion Camper sells Pisacane's unique, handcrafted fashion and jewelry items in an adorable setup in and around her vintage camper. Pisacane's items are all one-of-a-kind, and they change with each collection.


Her newest collection, which debuted June 19 at the Nocatee Farmer's Market, is centered around a beachy/boho summer feel.



Photos provided by ANGIE PISACANE

It includes tons of sundresses, jewelry, handbags, beach bags and other clothing. Most of the jewelry comes from sharks' teeth that Pisacane collects herself from the beach and then fashions into stylish earrings, necklaces and bracelets. The sundresses, which happen to be some of Pisacane's favorites, can double as beach coverups and dresses suitable for a night out. Pisacane explained that each piece in her new collection can be combined to create a look that is either dressed up or dressed down.

"It is really hard to [pick a favorite] because I have really fallen in love with this collection," she said. "It is true to my style and my roots."








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cute cut-out back

The summer collection contains a focus on embellishments. Fun and funky embellishments, classy embellishments and overall unique trims and laces. Pisacane designed the newest clothing collection with the Floridian heat in mind and stuck with lightweight denim and textiles.

Her design brand, Gie Designs, has created high-fashion runway looks for the Jacksonville Magazine Fashion Project Runway Show and the Casa Marina Fashion Show fundraiser to benefit BEAM. Besides creating runway looks, Pisacane uses Gie Designs to create looks sold exclusively at The Fashion Camper and on her website.

“It is fun for me to fall in love with certain ideas and create a whole collection around them,” she said.

Although Pisacane has themed other seasons of collections before, she does not follow the stereotypical norm of “fashion trends.” Her collections change when she wants them to, no matter the season, and she feels that this makes her brand stand out.

“I am inspired all the time,” Pisacane said, “and I am just constantly sketching or jotting down ideas.”

You can catch The Fashion Camper and its new summer collection at pop-up markets around town all summer long, or follow along with their journey on Instagram at @thefashioncamper.

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Photos by DEREMER STUDIOS

A 1926 Hispano-Suiza H6B Cabriolet and 1974 Shadow DN4 were crowned this year's Best in Shows at the 26th annual Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance.

BEST IN SHOWS CROWNED, ST. JAMES HONORED AT 26TH ANNUAL AMELIA ISLAND

Concours d'Elegance

by MIKE BONTS

The 26th annual Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance took place this May 21-23 at Amelia Island in the shadow of the Ritz-Carlton to display some of the world's most coveted and exclusive automobiles.

A 1926 Hispano-Suiza H6B Cabriolet and 1974 Shadow DN4 were crowned this year's Best in Shows and Lyn St. James was the 2021 honoree.

"The 1926 Hispano-Suiza H6B Cabriolet and 1974 Shadow DN4 both represent the excellence we strive for at The Amelia," said Bill Warner, chairman and founder of the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance. "This year's show field might have been reduced to encourage social distancing, but the quality of the entries made selecting the winners as difficult as ever."

Moved from March to May this year, the show's foundation has donated over \$3.75 million to Community Hospice & Palliative Care, Spina Bifida of Jacksonville and other charities on Florida's First Coast since its inception in 1996.

The weekend began with cars, seminars and coffee events and auctions from RM Sotheby's and Bonhams. Together the two auction houses that sold during the annual car show amassed sales of \$61.3 million, up from \$57.2 million in March of 2020 according to Bloomberg News.

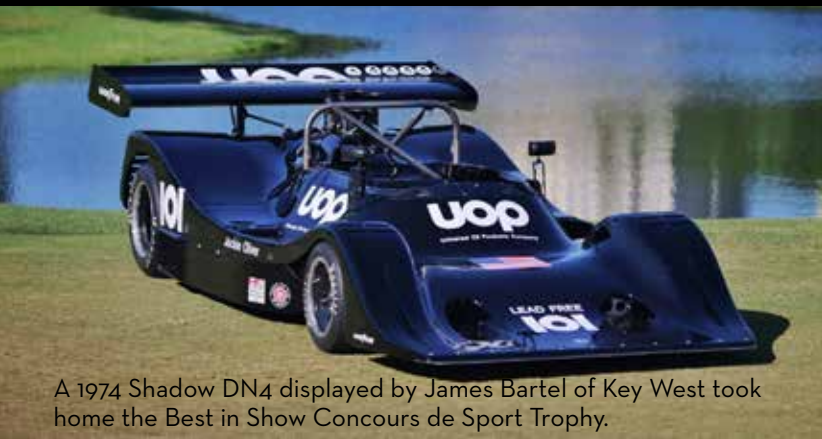
St. James was awarded the prestigious Spirit of Ford Award in a surprise ceremony on Saturday, May 22.

The Amelia gathered 11 of the cars that the racer, writer, broadcaster, entrepreneur and motivational speaker drove throughout her racing career, including the 1985 Ford Mustang displayed by 3 Dog Garage.

The Spirit of Ford was presented to St. James by Jim Farley, CEO of Ford Motor Company.



The Best in Show Concours d'Elegance Trophy was awarded to a 1926 Hispano-Suiza H6B Cabriolet displayed by Jill and Charles Mitchell of Stuart, Florida.



A 1974 Shadow DN4 displayed by James Bartel of Key West took home the Best in Show Concours de Sport Trophy.



The Spirit of Ford award was presented to 2021 Honoree Lyn St. James (above) by Jim Farley, CEO of Ford Motor Company.

“Lyn’s achievements on the track are special, but what she has done off the track is just as important to us in defining her legacy,” said Farley. “Lyn, while racing for us, was also a consumer adviser to Ford on women’s issues, including educating women on the car-buying process and how to maintain their vehicles during their ownership.

Her first Daytona 24-hour class victory would come behind the wheel of a historic pony car in 1987 when she shared driving duties with Daytona 500 winner Bill Elliott, Trans-Am Champ Tom Gloy and then-reigning IMSA GTO Champion, Scott Pruett.

The Best in Show Concours d'Elegance Trophy was awarded to a 1926 Hispano-Suiza H6B Cabriolet displayed by Jill and Charles Mitchell of Stuart.

A 1974 Shadow DN4 displayed by James Bartel of Key West took home the Best in Show Concours de Sport Trophy.

“Chevy Thunder” celebrated Chevy-powered cars that made history. Two classes of these V-8 powered cars were displayed at the show. A Friday seminar featured two-time Daytona 500 winner, Dale Earnhardt Jr.

The Amelia celebrated the “all-conquering Porsche 935” with a lively seminar and 13 examples of the iconic race car on the show field. Porsche’s 935 debuted 45 years ago in a world reeling from the oil embargo.

The 1895 Morris and Salom Electrobat IV from the America on Wheels Museum in Allentown, Pennsylvania, anchored The Amelia’s “It’s Electric” class.

The Amelia will be held March 3-6, 2022, at The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island and The Golf Club of Amelia Island.



ILLUMIZOO

JACKSONVILLE ZOO AND GARDENS LIGHTS UP THE NIGHT WITH DAZZLING DISPLAYS

story and photos by PARIS MOULDEN



Every Friday night through the end of August, Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens will present IllumiZoo, a magical display of lights and wonder to entertain all ages.

Aiming to give First Coast residents and visitors something to do outdoors this summer, the zoo created this event, which promises to “transcend from sleepy wildlife to a fantasy landscape of nature drenched in rich lighting.”

“We know that people want to get outside, and we wanted to find a way to bring people to an outdoor location where they can feel comfortable and with nature,” said Kelly Rouillard, director of marketing and sales for the zoo. “And we thought, you know, it’s always a great opportunity to partner that with illumination. How can we light up the zoo and have animated animal displays and moving light motifs and all kinds of interactive opportunities for all ages to enjoy? So that was kind of the creative concept behind it.”

Along with the magic of the lights, the zoo is also presenting themed food and drink specials, fire performers and live music.

Of course, the animals will be a key highlight as well, at least before dark.

“The first part of the experience is really being able to see and talk to and have a great time with our animals,” Rouillard said. “But once the sun goes down, that’s when we’re bringing this to life. You will see just a variety of landscapes illuminated with beautiful lighting and nature drenched in rich lighting and animation and project mapping. It will be a whole new experience and very different from the lighting that we have at our zoo light holiday events.”

Some of what guests can expect is a fire-and-ice-themed display, the “long-neck” area at the Savannah Gardens, which will feature beer specials and stilt walkers, and an enchanted fairy forest in the Riverview Garden.

“It’s really just kind of like a wonderland of mystical, interesting and just ‘wow’ things,” Rouillard said. “We’re really excited to share this with the community. And again, it’s just helping everyone to have fun and remember what it was like before COVID and know that things will be different, but we can still have fun and be safe doing so. But we want to make sure everyone gets back out with the family and they have a good time together.”

The event is open to the public and runs from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. every Friday until Aug. 27. A portion of all proceeds and memberships directly support the dietary habits and medical needs of the animals at the zoo. For more information on IllumiZoo and other zoo events, go to www.jacksonvillezoo.org.



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DAY TRIPPING

IT'S A SWAMP THING

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge offers more than wildlife



story by HOLLY TISHFIELD | photos by SUSAN GRIFFIN

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is one of more than 560 protected wildlife refuges throughout the United States. The very first National Wildlife Refuge system was established at Pelican Island, a small island on Florida's Atlantic coast, in the early 1900s by President Theodore Roosevelt in an attempt to protect native birds from market hunting. Today, the system spans across the country and protects nearly 95 million acres of land.

The Okefenokee Swamp, roughly translated to "Land of the Trembling Earth," was initiated into the National Wildlife Refuge system in 1937 and encompasses around 400,000 acres of bog and swamp land.

The area is rich with history, and has evidence of Native American residency as early as 1000 B.C. The name "Land of the Trembling Earth" can perhaps be linked to the unique ecosystem homed at the Okefenokee Swamp, which includes longleaf pines, hardwood hammocks, cypress swamps, wet prairies and thick peat-layers.

The peat layers, which float along the top of the swamp, are thick bands of organic material formed by the decomposition of plants in water. In the swamp, it takes about 50 years for one inch of peat to form. The peat ranges in depth from thin layers at the edges of the swamp and islands to more than 15 feet in places. The average depth of the peat is 5-10 feet. Unstable peat masses will tremble, hence the swamp's moniker.



The wildlife refuge and park are home to a vast number of aquatic and land animals, maintaining status as one of the most well-preserved and intact freshwater ecosystems in the world. While at the park, guests have the chance to see American alligators, red-cockaded woodpeckers, sandhill cranes, gopher tortoises and almost 400 other species.

This swamp has the distinction of birthing two notable river formations, the St. Mary's River and the Suwannee River. The St. Mary's River flows east to the Atlantic and forms the Georgia-Florida border, while the Suwannee River flows south through Florida to the Gulf of Mexico. In the late 1800s, the state of Georgia granted the Okefenokee land to the Suwannee Canal Company, who wanted to make a profit by draining the swamp and selling timber. Although a ditch was cut through the ridge, it was never cut down to the water level of the swamp. The diggings exposed many small springs which created a flow of water running back into the swamp instead of away from the swamp. This gave rise to stories that when the canal was finished, the water from the St. Mary's would flow back into the swamp.

The park offers many options for canoeing, hiking, biking, kayaking and camping. One of the most popular parts of the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge is the swamp park train known as "The Lady Suwannee" or the Okefenokee Railroad. This 1.5-mile track runs along the edge of a portion of swamp through multiple points of interest, including Pioneer Island, and circles through a large part of the Okefenokee Swamp.

To learn more about the options for exploration at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, go to fws.gov/refuge/okefenokee.





by LEIGH CORT

Once upon a time in Darien...

... There was a thriving riverfront town on the southern Georgia coast and the second oldest city in Georgia, founded by General James Oglethorpe. Defended by the powerful Scottish Highlanders, it's situated on the Altamaha and Darien Rivers near the Atlantic Ocean. Darien has historical, cultural and archaeological significance documented from the early 1700s, with much of it still discernable if you're a history buff! Imagine 1818 when the town was a prominent port for exporting Georgia-grown cotton and the rivers were the primary conveyor belt.

Half a century later, Darien was drawing large numbers of timber brokers to town — a destination for ships from Europe that would sail the oceans blue and come for the most exquisite woods to bring back to their homelands! During its heyday, Darien rivaled Savannah as a significant port city until the railroads bypassed Darien, chugging into and through Savannah while leaving Darien behind. This thriving little city plummeted into an economic low worsened by the Civil War — and by 1865 it ended up in ashes.

But courageous people rebuilt Darien brick by brick. Within a very short walk of three blocks to the waterfront, a wealthy timberman (Isaac Means Aiken) built his lavish Italianate style home in 1876 — that is now Open Gates Bed & Breakfast.

The house is a showpiece for this humble little hamlet — taking a prominent spot on Vernon Square (that's more of a rustic circle than a formal town square). But that is the key to journeying to Darien. You step into a time that almost could have been forgotten.

The beautiful home survived decades of Darien's changing generations; as the timber era declined, seafood became the area's main industry and the next prominent owners of the house were seafood merchants. This beloved home was remodeled in the 1930s by new owners — the Ploegers — with tiled bathrooms and indoor plumbing. Picture his poker room being added for gentlemen smoking cigars and playing cards; and her card room for ladies' bridge and library. It was during this era that the name "Open Gates" was created when Mrs. Ploeger painted a watercolor of the house depicting the fence with her gates standing open.

Another half century passed before Open Gates became a bed and breakfast — and another 20 years into 2016 when Zach and Carrie Rath discovered their dream.

"I always knew I was going to have a bed and breakfast," Zach said.

Zach's international chef career found him in New Zealand, catering to clients on private yachts from Newport to St. Maarten and traveling/cooking aboard Clipper Cruise Lines. "I've now created a home for us and a home away from home for our guests with five guest rooms in our quiet and quaint Open Gates Bed & Breakfast," he said.

Both he and Carrie May are charmingly adept at being innkeepers, especially balancing their talents with Carrie May's business acumen and chef's culinary hands-on inn details. "We do enjoy the morning breakfast chats with guests, meeting new people every day and truly living our dream in sweet Darien!" Carrie said.



Some history of Darien, Georgia.



Zach and Carrie May Rath bring today's passion for hospitality to Open Gates Bed & Breakfast!



Shrimp boats in Darien, Georgia.



Clay Hutchinson with Spartina Grill Treasures

Waking up to the smell of coffee emanating from the chef's stunning kitchen, I dreamed about his breakfast — especially since Zach won first prize in BedandBreakfast.com's recipe competition during their first year of ownership. This morning's Darien Shrimp Delight just wowed us. The dining room table was set for company — and we were all thrilled with Zach's award-winning flavors of yellow corn grits with andouille sausage, panko-crust-ed shrimp cake topped by a poached egg dressed in a dreamy lemon hollandaise! Table talk stopped as we all realized that we should consider staying overnight more often to enjoy other meals of blueberry moonshine flambe over johnny cakes and his truffled steak and eggs!

Don't let tiny vintage Darien fool you. This is a monumental year as the famed Fort King George celebrates its 300th TriCentennial Anniversary — one of the sleepest towns that boasts the first English fort on Georgia's coast! Wherever you wander in Darien, you feel the pulsing of a rich history — where Native American and European cultures met, where colonial empires collided, where soldiers toiled and perished ... and early American industry boomed on the shores of the Altamaha River.

In Darien, you can be as busy or as laid back as you choose. Taking a casual stroll to the waterfront to watch shrimping and small fishing boats might be a perfect morning. Or fish with an expert guide. Renting a kayak for a scenic tour through the tidal creeks and rivers is also at your fingertips. Your innkeepers can direct you to everything, including the Sapelo Island ferry that cruises visitors to one of the most picturesque islands on Georgia's coast; or pack a picnic to enjoy on one of the fort's sleepy picnic tables under the massive live oaks.

Photographers would cherish a visit to the Harris Neck Wildlife Refuge and the Butler Island Birding Station. It's oh-so-easy to do a spontaneous walking or driving tour around Darien where you can enjoy historic landmarks. Churches, cemeteries, old jail, monuments and homes are identified with historic markers and stories.

The seafood and dining "scene" in and around Darien isn't like most cities — it's extraordinarily casual! Local Georgia white shrimp, succulent blue crab and coastal fish take center stage. Even the names evoke an image like Skippers, Mudcat Charlies and Spartina Grill. All are on the river with local catch on every menu! Within a short drive, you can reach at least a dozen unpretentious restaurants in Townsend, Eulonia and Shellman's Bluff, too.

Within walking distance to Open Gates, two favorites are a must!

Skippers Fish Camp & Oyster Bar —

Reclaimed timbers make this popular restaurant one of the most appealing rustic and cool places on the Darien River — almost a midpoint of the 90-mile Georgia coast. It's actually two restaurants

in one, The Oyster Bar is fine for the bathing suit and whiskey-guzzling crowd. The Skippers' restaurant side requires at least your favorite flip-flops. Nearly 200 years ago on this site was an old saw mill during the lumber years — then it was transformed into a seafood processing plant. Check out the floor coverings that are made of hand-cut bricks recovered from a Georgia 1940s building; the bar and table tops are fashioned from milled timbers that had been floated down the Altamaha during Georgia's halcyon days and salvaged from Brunswick, Georgia's grand Oglethorpe Hotel. Select whether you're ready to dine in the open-air oyster bar or bustling indoors. peel-'n-eat shrimp, half-shell oysters, you-shuck-'em oysters, incredible local/fresh fish, Charlie's crab stew, smoked chicken and barbecue, whole crispy flounder, captain's platters and luscious crab cakes. Visit once and you'll be "hooked!"

Spartina Grill — The newest "kid on the bluff" just opened in fall 2020 for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Built on a famous spot that was originally the Magnolia House Hotel (circa 1885), this two-story restaurant and private party space is unique to historic Darien with its glistening contemporary vibe built on a legendary historic waterfront site. The River Deck is open for drinks and dining, live entertainment on weekends and has a screened-in porch and extensive wine list all compliment this fresh coastal dining experience. Owner Clay Hutchinson has a treasured collection of "pieces of collectibles" from centuries past that include old pottery, tomahawk heads, whiskey bottles and mementos from the timber merchants and old hotel. History isn't lost here; Hutchinson grew up on the Isle of Hope near Savannah and named his restaurant after the spartina grasses found in coastal salt marshes that are native to the Atlantic Ocean coastlines. Spartina's menus all boast coastal flavor from buttermilk biscuits and gravy to redfish tacos and Georgia shrimp po' boys, waffles and fried chicken and Thai shrimp bisque. Dinner includes some heavy hitters like bone-in pork chops and the Southern skillet that's actually served for two in a cast-iron skillet. The expansive waterfront and marsh views will make your visit truly worthwhile.

As our story comes to a close, it's only the preface to what you're going to discover when you check into Open Gates. Zach and Carrie May aren't really surprised that since they've been hosting guests through the years, at least 10 couples have followed their dreams and have moved to Darien. I gather they decided to linger in the low country, too — and see if they can spot "the guy on the bicycle with the Panama hat."

Any ideas?

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photo by CHARITY NAUD



Ken Block and Drew Copeland of Sister Hazel perform during a VIP booze cruise for the AS IF! The 90s Fest aboard Sabrage Charters on Sunday, May 16.

PARTY LIKE IT'S THE 90s

by HOLLY TISHFIELD and PARIS MOULDEN

After a full day of dancing, sipping on “adult” Capri-suns, and surfing down a 24-foot waterslide, guests from the AS IF! The 90s Fest had the chance to party with the event’s headlining performers.

On Saturday, May 15, VIP-ticketed attendees had the made the commute from Francis Field in downtown St. Augustine to Prohibition Kitchen for an exclusive after party with an extra performance from Coolio.

Coolio, who co-headlined the day’s festival at Francis Field, is a Grammy-award winning rapper from the 90s with infamous hits like “Gangsta’s Paradise,” “Fantastic Voyage,” and “C U When U Get There.”

The after party tickets were sold separately from daytime tickets and gave guests an opportunity to continue the party with more drinks and dancing to classic ’90s songs. Aerial stunt performers hung from the ceiling and dancers mingled with the crowd to keep everybody in high spirits.

Deejay Natural opened the party up by spinning tracks from other popular ’90s artists and Coolio entered the stage later in the night to close out with his own hits.

Besides the after party, guests could also purchase a meet-and-greet ticket to meet Coolio himself after the concert.

The following day, exclusive VIP guests got to board the Sabrage Charters catamaran for a special booze cruise with Ken Block and Drew Copeland of Sister Hazel, the other headliner at the festival.

The duo put on an intimate concert as the Sabrage coasted through the Matanzas Bay, and performed some of their hits, including “All For You” and “Change Your Mind.” They also shared funny stories about some of their touring experiences as guests were able to mingle, enjoy drinks and hors d’oeuvres and get a spectacular view of St. Augustine from the water.



Josh Cole and Steven Hancock on board for the Sister Hazel booze cruise.

photo by CHARITY NAUD



Alexandra and Patrick Gimmel attend the Sister Hazel booze cruise.

photo by PARIS MOULDEN



Angel and Carl Johnson enjoy the performance by Block and Copeland.

photo by PARIS MOULDEN



Coolio performs during an after party at the Prohibition Kitchen in St. Augustine.

photo by HOLLY TISHFIELD



ABOVE: Ken Block (left) and Drew Copeland of Sister Hazel pose with Monika Bernthal (second from left) and Jeanetta Salyer of the AS IF! The 90s Fest.
Photo by PARIS MOULDEN



Ian Bartlett and Jon Cordero of Sabrage Charters tended to guests on the Sister Hazel booze cruise.
Photo by CHARITY NAUD



RIGHT: Dancers perform during Coolio's after party celebration on Saturday, May 15.
Photo by HOLLY TISHFIELD



Kara and Ryan Mohre were among those on the limited guest list for the Sister Hazel booze cruise.
Photo by PARIS MOULDEN



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JAGUARS ANNOUNCE MAJOR PLANS FOR ...



DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

Photos provided by the JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS



The football performance center will be the first step in creating the "Stadium of the Future."



The Jacksonville Jaguars, together with their affiliated real estate development entity of Iguana Investments, announced Thursday, June 3, their development plans for downtown Jacksonville.

The plans include The Jacksonville Shipyards, a multi-faceted project that will feature a Four Seasons Hotel and Residences, a class A office building, an orthopedic sports medicine complex and improvements to the city-owned marina and public spaces.

The presentation included details about a football performance center, which would be the first step in creating the “Stadium of the Future” for Jaguars fans, and community investment plans to support downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods.

Among the projects’ goals are increasing the number of jobs in, and visitors to, downtown; community development; boosting the downtown residential population; activating the St. Johns River along the downtown riverfront; facilitating public engagement and helping solidify Jacksonville as the home of the Jaguars for generations to come.

To illustrate its plans and engage the community, the team has launched 1st DownTown Jacksonville – an all-encompassing initiative that captures the Jaguars’ commitment to downtown development, establishes a destination for up-to-date information about the Jaguars’ plans and offers everyone the opportunity to personally get involved in the effort.

More information can be found at www.1stdowntownjax.com.

“My goal is for downtown Jacksonville to be the envy of cities here in the U.S. and elsewhere, and I see no reason why we can’t achieve that goal.”

“My goal is for downtown Jacksonville to be the envy of cities here in the U.S. and elsewhere, and I see no reason why we can’t achieve that goal,” said Jaguars team owner Shad Khan. “I am confident we have the local leadership, spirit and commitment to revitalize downtown Jacksonville in a manner that will make the world take notice while also serving the needs of the community and the people who make Jacksonville their home.”

“Shad is making a big bet on our future,” said Jaguars team president Mark Lamping. “So, this is a big plan. Working together, we can make this happen.”

There are two planned phases for the development.

PHASE I

A Four Seasons Hotel and Residences, with 176 rooms and 25 residential units, is anticipated to open in early 2025.

It will cater to:

- Business travelers who prefer a luxury downtown location.
- Leisure travelers coming to Jacksonville for events, Jaguars games, concerts at Daily’s Place and the arena, baseball games and more.
- Jacksonville residents. The Four Seasons is expected to draw local residents and visitors alike who will enjoy the five-star spa, two restaurants, ballroom, meeting spaces and marina.

In addition, delivering the “Stadium of the Future” for Jaguars fans in the coming years begins with the construction of a football performance center, which will be a hybrid facility that blends football performance and public access.

The center will be built next to the stadium near Gate 2 and will include public art, public viewing stands, restrooms, concession areas, retail store and public meeting space.

The current space dedicated to football operations inside TIAA Bank Field does not meet NFL team requirements. Creating a football performance center will allow the Jaguars team and football operations to move out of the stadium permanently, permitting stadium renovations to commence.

This process will also allow for Jaguars home games to continue to be played at TIAA Bank Field during stadium renovations.

The team will sign a long-term lease of the practice facility, anticipated to open in summer 2023, in addition to contributing \$60 million — or 50% — of the cost. The Jaguars will bear full responsibility for ongoing capital, maintenance and operational costs of the football facilities, which in the past have been the responsibility of the City of Jacksonville.



The city-owned performance center will provide 125,000 square feet of space containing locker rooms, team and positional meeting rooms, training and recovery areas, medical support facilities, a state-of-the-art weight room, dining facilities, coaches and scouts’ offices, a draft room and public meeting space.

Additionally, there will be two full-size grass practice fields and a full-size indoor practice field, which will allow for the City of Jacksonville Parks and Recreation Department to program the existing Flex Field 300-plus days a year.

This facility will incorporate purposeful integration of green design and target LEED Platinum, with a solar roof featuring PV array.

Project plans do not include any development on the current site of Metropolitan Park, and the Jaguars are supportive of the Jessie Ball duPont Fund and the City of Jacksonville in efforts to activate the park and riverfront area. The Jaguars plan to adopt Met Park through the city’s Private Park Adoption Program, committing \$4 million over 20 years to help keep the park clean, safe and well-maintained.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44 ■

The Jaguars have always been strong supporters of the Northeast Florida community and have donated millions over the years through the Jaguars Foundation, with investment in downtown initiatives being a particular focus. The most recent Downtown community investment initiatives include Lift Jax, support of the Out East Neighborhood, MOSH, Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing Park and the adoption of Metropolitan Park.

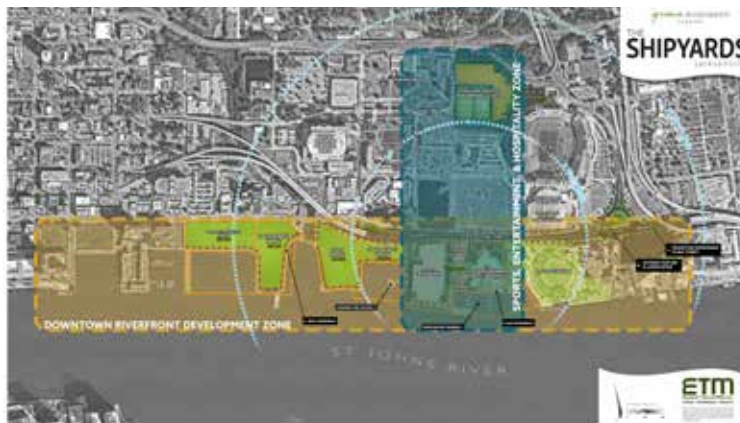
The city-owned marina will be renovated and modernized, including construction of a new 6,500-square foot marina support building to include a dockmaster's office, ship store, restrooms with showers, a food and beverage venue and a marina park and events lawn. The marina facilities will continue to be owned by the City of Jacksonville for the benefit of transient boaters.

Phase 1 will include the delivery of a six-floor office building, including 116,000 square feet of leasable space comprised of 100,000 square feet of class A office space and 16,000 square feet of retail, café and amenity space. This will become the future home of the Jaguars business operations, affiliated companies and third-party tenants.

The total estimated development cost for Phase 1 of the project is \$441 million.

PHASE II

Baptist Health/JOI is planning a 42,000-square-foot orthopedic sports medicine complex featuring advanced medical care for sports injury, recovery and prevention, as well as optimal performance training. The medical care, programs and services provided



The Jacksonville Shipyards will occupy an area along the St. Johns River adjacent to TIAA Bank Field.

here will meet the needs of athletes at all levels, in all sports —ranging from sports enthusiast and weekend warriors to competitive high school, collegiate and professional athletes.

Phase II will also include 15,000 square feet of street-level retail space, a parking structure with 200-plus spaces and possibly a residential component.

The Jaguars anticipate this two-phase project will be a catalyst for more development and growth in and around downtown, all of which will draw people to the Northbank for work, play, entertainment and more.

For more about the Jaguars' development plans, go to www.1stdowntownjax.com to sign up for email updates, connect on social media and register to show support for these projects. Updates and more details will be added as the development moves forward.

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In celebration of the NFL Draft and the Jaguars' historic selection of the first overall pick, the team joined the Cultural Council of Greater Jacksonville in May to commission one-of-a-kind painted and autographed footballs commemorating the occasion.

The partnership will appeal to anyone who collects memorabilia, is passionate about the Jaguars and enjoys art or simply wants to support innovation within the arts and cultural community of greater Jacksonville.

Twenty official NFL footballs were dipped in white paint to create blank "canvases" and then painted by five well-known Northeast Florida artists. Each was commissioned to paint four footballs. The artists were Heather Blanton, Tabitha Skye, Alma Ramirez, Ted Head and Dustin Harewood.

"As an artist, I've painted many of the zoo's animals, including the majestic jaguar sunning regally on a cliff," said Head. "To me nothing symbolizes our team more than these marvelous creatures painted in oils. As we move into a new and exciting phase, it's an honor to be part of the new season. After being constrained by the limits COVID placed on us, I, and the community, are ready to see the Jaguars regain their glory ... with strength, cunning and a fighting spirit!"

The footballs were also autographed by Jaguars players, among them Josh Lambo, D.J. Chark Jr., Logan Cooke, Andrew Norwell and Collin Johnson. The footballs were auctioned off by the Jaguar Foundation.

Cultural Council Board Director Adriel Rocha, who serves as director of the Jaguars Foundation & Community Impact at

“Ranging from abstract to realism, each work specifically or figuratively represents our Jaguars team and our city.”

The Jacksonville Jaguars Foundation, provided a unique fundraising opportunity leveraging the launching of the Cultural Council's new ARTS + campaign with the NFL Draft.

"Ranging from abstract to realism, each work specifically or figuratively represents our Jaguars team and our city," said Diana Donovan, executive director of the Cultural Council. "The ARTS + Sports collaborative partnership showcases Jacksonville's creative economy, igniting a merger of artists and athletes to bring a fresh perspective to a quality of life we all share, as well as a commitment to serving our city together as a team of equity-driven placemakers."

Funds remaining after a base stipend and percentage of the purchase price are paid to the artists will go to the Cultural Council to contribute to innovation-based grants, programming, events and additional areas of cultural collaboration.

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