

Chamber Connections

October 2021



ST. JOHNS COUNTY
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
Ponte Vedra Beach Division



The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Beach Division Board of Directors 2021-2022

Front Row: Susan Griffin, Matt Price, Felica Cox, Lori Adams and Emily Tillo. Back Row: Kathleen Floryan, Pamela Bomba, Peter verDorn, Jennifer Servello, Mark Allen (Not pictured: Marla Buchanan)



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Isabelle Renault
President and CEO,
St. Johns County
Chamber of Commerce

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT/CEO

Chamber welcomes new members of leadership

Happy New Year! The Chamber's new fiscal year began Oct. 1 and I want to congratulate the Chamber's new volunteer leaders for the 2021-22 year. Their terms began Oct. 1, 2021.

The officers of the Chamber of Commerce board of directors were recently selected and are: Jim Bush, FP&L, chairman; Beth Sweeny, Flagler College, vice chair; Berta Odom, RE/MAX 100, treasurer; Orville Dothage, Northrop Grumman, secretary; Isabelle Renault, St. Johns County Chamber, chair of the chamber's economic development council executive committee; Mike Koppenhafer, Fisher Koppenhafer; and Dr. Erika Hamer, owner of Ponte Vedra Wellness Center, immediate past president.

The newly elected Chamber of Commerce board directors are: David Rice, Flagler Health+; James Machado, ACHE, Ascension St. Vincent's; Meg Zabijaka, Constangy Brooks,

Smith & Prophete LLP; and Chris Heibel, American Roll-on Roll-Off Carrier (ARCO).

They join those previously elected, including Carol Burns, Vista Hospitality; Michael Scine, Scine CPA Advisors; Melissa Morin, Wells Fargo; Melissa Rowe Benes, Puroclean Emergency Restoration Services; Stephen Hudson, Digital Mark Company LLC; and Chris Pokrivnak, VyStar Credit Union. The Chairs of the Ponte Vedra Beach Division and the Chamber Councils are: Matt Price, Regions Bank, Chair, Ponte Vedra Beach Division; Meghan Holder, Mudflower Media Creative, Chair, Agricultural and Environmental Council; Patti McRoberts, Sebastian Hotel, Chair, St. Augustine Historic Area Council; Donna Lueders, INKI, Chair, North Business Council; Trudy Padilla, Keller Williams, Chair, Small Business Council; William McBroom, St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra and The Beaches Visitors and Convention Bureau, Chair, Tourism & Hospital-

ity Council; and Julie Fuller, FastSigns, Chair, Women with Vision Council.

Leaving the board are: Kathy Fleming, St. Augustine Lighthouse and Maritime Museum; Darnell Smith, Florida Blue; and Gary Wheeler, Constangy, Brooks, Smith and Prophete, LLP, as they ended their three-year term Sept. 30, 2021.

Additional information and photos of the members of the 2021-2022 board of directors for the Ponte Vedra Beach Division are listed in this edition. Congratulations and thank you to all! Please join us for our thank you reception in November as we gather to thank our leaders and look ahead to our new year. Watch for details! Thanks for your continued support!

Regards,
Isabelle Renault
President and CEO, St. Johns County
Chamber of Commerce

Leadership St. Johns class holds project completion, ribbon cutting

The 23 members of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce's Leadership St. Johns Class of 2021 began its class year on April 9 and selected a nonprofit beneficiary as part of the program responsibilities. Class members are professionals from all sectors of industry, commerce and public service in St. Johns County.

This year, the group selected SEA Community Help Resource Center Inc., a 501(c)3 that was formally established in 2013 but began as an outreach ministry with the neighboring First Baptist Church of Armstrong in 2005. The charitable organization began meeting in a dirt parking lot to help those in need to enrich their lives from sub-standard housing, homelessness and hunger in the Spuds, Elkton and Armstrong communities.

SEA is located at 6408 Armstrong Road in Elkton, 13 miles southwest of St. Augustine.

Members of class, the Chamber, community leaders and local government officials celebrated the completion of the Leadership St. Johns project and donated property improvements at SEA with a formal ribbon cutting Oct. 13 at the Elkton property.

Classmates contacted local businesses to donate a new 30-by-30-foot concrete pad, picnic tables, signage, landscaping and yardwork, along with a screened area for food distribution to the community. Local donors include FASTSIGNS, Marker 38 Investments, Mudflower Creative Media and TBL Construction Inc.

As part of the Leadership St. Johns activities for this year's class, participants also conducted a back-to-school backpack and supplies giveaway at SEA for children



Photos provided by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

Leadership St. Johns 2021 Class members and SEA Community Help Resource Center staff.



Leadership St. Johns 2021 Class members help SEA Community Help Resource Center provide backpacks and school supplies.

and families in need of many required items to begin school.

In October 2017, SEA purchased a run-down cement block building at 6312 Armstrong Road to house a potential com-

munity center and public rest station along the Palatka-to-St. Augustine State Trail.

An improved structure and property alongside the bike and pedestrian paved pathway would help the underserved rural

community receive additional funds to better their quality of life while providing trail followers a place to rest and refresh.

The project is still in progress and needs volunteers and donors to complete the facility.

SEA has been operating in a single-wide trailer alongside the First Baptist Church of Armstrong and holds its food pantry — free to anyone — with daily bags of groceries and 150 to 800 hot meals each month.

The nonprofit also distributes 150 to 250 turkeys and hams each year during the holidays along with year-round field trips, clothes, shoes, books, toys, book bags, school supplies, computers and blankets.

A summer children's camp, lunch program and afterschool program are also offered. Services are also provided by North Florida Community Action Agency clients, FEMA, Toys for Tots and Empty Stocking.

Community activities and events hosted by SEA include a St. Vincent Mobile Outreach Unit, which provides medical services, and visits from the St. Johns County bookmobile; plus, biking events with the North Florida Bike Club and Bike Florida; the Annual Rails-to-Trail Festival, which includes a celebration of the area's Gullah Geechee ancestry; the MENDE Film Festival; Gullah Geechee Festival; and tables and chair rentals for third-party events.

A humanitarian outreach program to Haiti is also in place.

The class initially requested donations

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Fall is in the air along with new fiscal year



Karen B. Everett
Director Ponte Vedra Beach Division, St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

Isabelle Renault and I are both wishing everyone a Happy New Year! The Chamber's new fiscal year began Oct. 1.

And, it does feel like a change! Pumpkin has been added everywhere and I caught a whiff of fall air the other morning.

The members of the Ponte Vedra Beach Division board of directors held its annual strategy session the other week at the link in Nocatee and reflected on successes and challenges facing our business community.

Many intriguing new ideas—more to come. Their group photo is on the front and short bios and photos are contained in this issue. Thank them for their service when you see them out and about in our community.

We also have a full month of ribbon cuttings. Our Chamber Ambassadors and Board members faithfully attend these events and congratulate the new businesses.

We gratefully bid adieu to the Chairman of the

Board of Directors for the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce, Dr. Erika Hamer, owner of Ponte Vedra Wellness Center.

She began her Chamber career in the Ponte Vedra Beach area; she remains on the Chamber's executive committee as immediate past Chairman. Thank you for your service during an interesting year!

Please join us for our many events in the Ponte Vedra area and throughout the county in October, November and December and come visit the Chamber's Ponte Vedra Beach office at 200 Solana Road, Suite B. We are also a visitor information center and welcome your questions.

Thanks for your continued support!
Regards,

Karen Everett
Director, Ponte Vedra Beach Division
St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce



SEA Community Help Resource Center
Executive Director Malinda Peoples

Leadership

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from the community to help complete the nonprofit's improvement project with short- and long-term plans and worked to start renovations at the existing space for safety, comfort and security for recipients, residents, visitors and SEA staff.

The class envisions more work at the site including additional construction services, more concrete, patio and picnic tables, outdoor fans, lighting, gardening, landscaping, perishable and non-perishable items and in-kind services.

Leadership St. Johns Class of 2021 members are Trish Becker, Anastasia Mosquito Control Board; Randy Bradley, Northrop Grumman; Jason Caban, St. Johns County Sheriff's Office; Jennifer Michaux, St. Augustine Police Department; Diane Denholm, Supporting Strategies, Northeast Florida; Melissa Derrick, St. Augustine Youth Services; Tres Edenfield III, St. Johns County Sheriff's Office; Melissa Cecil, Flagler Health+; Whitney Kersey Graves, St. Johns County Tax Collector; Bonnie Hayflick, Bonnie Hayflick PR Counsel; Meghan Holder, Independent Agent, Primerica; Dawn Infanti, United Way; Lauren Howington, Herbie Wiles Insurance; Heidi Jameson, JAXUSA Partnership; Gurpreet Misra, self-employed entrepreneur; Vicky Ann Oliveri, St. Johns Title LLC; Dianne Pittman, Watson Realty; Jennifer Ravan, St. Johns County Tax Collector; Christina Parrish Stone, St. Johns County Cultural Council; Josh Underwood, St. Johns County Sheriff's Office; Greg Wells, K9s for Warriors; Meredith Breidenstein, City of St. Augustine; and Casey Woolsey, Woolsey/Morcom PLLC.

For additional information on Leadership St. Johns, go to sjcchamber.com/leadership-st.-johns.

ST. JOHNS COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PONTE VEDRA BEACH DIVISION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Matt Price Chairman

Matt Price was born and raised in Albany, Georgia, and graduated from Georgia Southern University in 2001. Currently, he is Vice President of Commercial Banking for Regions Bank. He was hired by Regions in 2006, and has built a successful career in banking for the past 20 years. Price has served as Chair for the Division's Ambassador program and was also recognized as Ambassador of the Year in 2017. He is married to his wife Paige, has a student at Ponte Vedra High School, and you can regularly find the entire family on a local tennis court.



and Georgia. She previously served on the board as a director and as Chairman. She has been actively involved with the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce since 1997. She also serves on the board of directors of the Overlook V Office Condominiums and is on the board of directors for the Florida Media Association.

Felicia Cox Secretary

Felicia has over 35 years of retail banking experience in North Florida. She started her career in banking with Barnett Bank, while attending high school in a school work program. She became part of the IBERIABANK team six years ago with the acquisition of Florida Bank. Currently, she is the Retail Banking Center Manager for the Ponte Vedra branch. She joined Florida Bank in 2007, 14 years ago and is a native of the North Florida market. She actively serves as a volunteer in the community where she grew up and is a past two-term Chairman of the St Johns Chamber of Commerce, Ponte Vedra Division. Felicia has a bachelor's degree in Business Management from Edward Waters College in Jacksonville.



Administration and Masters of Accountancy from the University of North Florida. She has always lived in Northeast Florida and now calls Palm Valley home. While she has a strong background in all areas of taxation, Pamela primarily specializes in consulting and compliance for large, multi-state corporations, partnerships and their owners. She has extensive experience with different tax sectors including local, state and federal taxation and financial accounting. Pamela is a member of the Florida Institute of Certified Public Accountants. In the community, she serves on the finance committee of The Cultural Center at Ponte Vedra Beach. Pamela is a mentor with the Jacksonville Women's Business Center and is a member of the Accounting and Financial Women's Alliance. She also actively volunteers with Junior Achievement.



Kathleen Floryan

Kathleen Floryan has been successfully selling properties and helping people buy homes as a consistent "Top Producer" year after year. She works full-time in real



Susan Griffin Vice Chair

Susan Griffin is publisher of the Ponte Vedra Recorder, the community paper of record serving Ponte Vedra and the Beaches since 1969 and now Nocatee. She also serves as publisher of the bimonthly First Coast Register magazine. She has been with the Recorder for 25 years, joining the paper as an advertising account executive and becoming sales manager before being named Publisher. Prior to joining the Recorder, Griffin owned travel agencies in Florida



Pamela Bomba, CPA

Pamela is a Tax Partner with Pivot CPAs, where she began her career in 2005 after receiving her B.A. in Business

Forson gives overview of St. Johns County Schools during Chamber event

Superintendent describes how district is meeting challenges

By Shaun Ryan

In many ways, it is a new era for Florida schools – and nowhere is it more apparent than in St. Johns County, where

district officials are working to address challenges in the aftermath of COVID-19, security following the tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and elimination of the Florida Standards Assessments (FSA).

Tim Forson, superintendent of St. Johns County Schools, addresses members of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Beach Division.

Forson continues on Page 13



Photos by Shaun Ryan

St. Johns County Schools Superintendent Tim Forson addresses members of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Beach Division.

Board

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estate and has through the toughest real estate markets since 2006. Kathleen lists and sells residential real estate within all of the communities and in all price ranges throughout the St Johns County and Beaches area. Her average day on market is less than 45 days. Kathleen's passion is specializing in luxury homes in Ponte Vedra Beach that includes oceanfront, golf courses homes and condos, gated and nongated neighborhoods to other waterfront such as marsh front, intra-coastal, or riverfront properties. She also sells in the newest community west of Ponte Vedra Beach called Nocatee. She is a certified Luxury Home Marketing Specialist, a certified short sale specialist, a certified residential resort and 2nd Home Specialist, certified Nocatee Realtor, certified Doctors Agent and Certified Express Offers Agent. Kathleen is proud to be a Broker Associate currently with eXp Realty.

Peter verDorn

Peter verDorn is the Director of Membership at TPC Sawgrass. Peter, his wife, Erin, and two-year-old daughter, Penny, moved to Ponte Vedra from New Jersey to be closer to family and enjoy a new lifestyle. He has an extensive background in golf and hospitality, with over 11 years of experience both in the public and private sector. He specializes in business development and believes that relationships are the key to success in any industry. Peter and his family are extremely happy to call Ponte Vedra home and he looks forward to continually helping people in the community.



Marla K. Buchanan, Esq.

Ms. Buchanan is the Chief Executive Officer and General Counsel for Blue Ocean Title, a full-service real estate law and title company with four office locations in Northeast and Central Florida. In addition, she also serves as Chief Operating Officer and General Counsel for GreenTechnologies, LLC, a product development and manufacturing company that focuses on the development and manufacturing of sustainable fertilizers derived from recycled nutrients from the water and wastewater treatment process. Ms. Buchanan earned her undergraduate degree and law degree from the University of Florida. She has been recognized with the Pro Bono Attorney of the Year and has served on the Board of BEAM and the Women's Board for Wolfson's children's hospital. In addition, Ms. Buchanan was a Founding Member and Board Member for the not for profit, The Missing Link, formed to assist victims of domestic violence.



Mark Allen

With decades of setting records as an innovator and leader in the automotive industry and at one point operating the largest dealership in the U.S., he also managed a successful auto racing and driver training career. Mark Allen founded All Florida Safety Institute in 2014 and now serves as the President and CEO of the largest driving school and third-party licensing agent in Florida covering over two-thirds of the State. A graduate of the Chamber's Leadership St. Johns Class of 2019, Mark, while keeping the headquarters in Ponte Vedra Beach is committed to their mission of saving lives and growing the organiza-



tion to expand their driver's education platform with over 30 school locations statewide and growing. A near native, Mark attended school in Northeast Florida from Kindergarten through 12th and attended the University of North Florida as a founding father of the current Sigma Chi Fraternity Chapter. Allen has served on the CEO Advisory Board for UF Health and Shands Hospitals and as a Prior Trustee for Daniel Kids and most recently was serving on one of the HOA Boards for Marsh Landing and a varsity soccer coach in Ponte Vedra. Drive Safe!

Jennifer Servello

Jennifer Servello is the Practice Manager of Flagler Health+ Village at Nocatee, an all-inclusive medical destination bringing comprehensive, multi-disciplinary care to where families live, work and play. A proud Navy wife, Jennifer has lived and worked all over the U.S., including Hawaii, Virginia, Tennessee, Maryland and Rhode Island, before settling in Nocatee in 2019. Her background in pediatric nursing led her to Flagler Health+ where she started as the Clinical Supervisor of Flagler Health+ Pediatrics while playing a lead role in the development and opening of the Health Village in 2020. Jennifer has a passion for helping patients access the care they need while helping her team members achieve their professional goals. Jennifer is active in the local military community.



Emily Tillo

Emily Tillo is the PR and Community Outreach Manager for THE PLAYERS Championship. She oversees the year-round public relations, messaging and community outreach plans for



the PGA TOUR's flagship event. Tillo joined the PGA TOUR in 2016 and graduated from Boston University, where she studied finance and journalism, competed on the school's Division 1 golf team and also became the first student-athlete in Boston University history to be named a Top-30 honoree for the NCAA's Woman of the Year Award. She continues to stay involved with her alma mater, currently serving as Chair of BU Athletics' Young Alumni Council. She lives in Ponte Vedra Beach and enjoys everything about the beach lifestyle. You have probably spotted her biking to the beach or walking to work at the PGA TOUR's new Global Home. Tillo is also active in the Northeast Florida community, serving as a board member of North Florida Junior Golf Foundation and committee member for the First Coast Women's Amateur Championship.

Lori Adams

Lori Adams is the Operations Manager for Harbor View Advisors, an investment banking firm located in Ponte Vedra Beach. She has 35 years of experience in the financial services industry with specialization in client service, operations and compliance. Her "can do" spirit creates positive energy among the team members. She has been employed at Harbor View Advisors since 2010. She also has been a cabi independent fashion stylist since 2010 and has been a part time employee of TPC Sawgrass since 2000, where she works as a Sales Associate in the golf shop. Lori has served as an Ambassador for the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce, Ponte Vedra Division and also served as Secretary on the Board. She received the Grace Hayes Ambassador of the Year Award for 2014-2015, as well as 2015-2016. She also is a member of the Ponte Vedra Women's Civic Alliance.



Forson

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County Schools, spoke about these and other issues Sept. 15 during the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Beach Division's Chamber at Noon event. The luncheon and presentation were held at the link, a new facility in Nocatee.

The coronavirus pandemic may have had more impact on the schools than any other issue in the last couple of years. It has affected the district's ability to find qualified applicants for jobs, acquisition of supplies needed to construct new schools and classroom attendance.

"Last year, we never had more than 200 students (test) positive at any given time," Forson said. But on a single day in the first week of this month, 846 students tested positive.

That resulted in a lot of absences – not only those who had contracted COVID, but also anyone who needed to be quarantined due to propinquity. However, the district has found that the need for such quarantining is reduced from 2020. In part this is due to older students receiving the vaccine, but also due to a shortening of the necessary quarantine period and a reduction of social distancing requirements.

Pine Island Academy, the new K-8 school in Nocatee, experienced a shortage



Pictured from left at a recent St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Beach Division event are Karen Everett, Tim Forson, Matt Price and Kari Zerrahn.

of flooring materials due to COVID-impacted supply-line disruptions. As a result, incoming students and staff found some floors to be exposed concrete.

It has also been difficult to fill many positions, as there are more jobs than available workers.

This has impacted the transportation and food services departments, as well as instruction.

At the same time, enrollment is up 8% over last year. Currently, it stands at 43,293. Forson said enrollment rose this

academic year equal to the student population of two entire schools.

Because the district has only one school planned to open next year, rising enrollment continues to be a concern.

Forson expressed optimism at the announcement on Sept. 14 by Gov. Ron DeSantis that Florida would be replacing the FSA with progress monitoring.

"We want the students to perform well," Forson said, "but I think we lost instructional time faced with the depth and the magnitude of some of the standardized



St. Johns County Schools Superintendent Tim Forson speaks about the school district at the link in Nocatee during a St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Beach Division event.

tests."

Still, he expressed some concern for accountability in education.

"When we lose something that everybody sees as a measuring tool, we just have to be prepared to replace it with something else that gives us confidence with what we're doing, that we're doing the right thing," he said.

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Painting with a Twist hosted 'After Hours' event

Painting with a Twist was an after hours event hosted Wednesday, Aug. 25 by the Ponte Vedra Beach Division of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. After hours events are held monthly.



Photos By Susan Griffin
Libbi Poole, Leonard Vitel, Lesley Vitel, and Karen Everett.



An array of edible arrangements was available at the Painting With a Twist event.



Karen Patino, Libbi Poole, Lesley Vitel, and Jade Smith.



Painting With a Twist had a variety of food samplings on display.



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Photo courtesy of The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

Economic Development Council Quarterly Breakfast

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce held its Economic Development Council Quarterly Breakfast on Aug. 13, and Mark Lamping, president, Jacksonville Jaguars, far right, was the keynote speaker. Joining him behind a life-sized foam jaguar on loan from Ocean Sole are, from left, Andy Jackson, Jacksonville Law Firm and Chamber Economic Development Council chair; Isabelle Renault, president and CEO, St. Johns County Chamber; and Dr. Erika Hamer, owner, Ponte Vedra Wellness Center and Chamber Board of Directors chair.

Ribbon cutting welcomes Hudson & Grace to Chamber



Photos by Susan Griffin

Kellyann Costanzo cuts the ribbon with her husband Tommy Costanzo during a ceremony on June 25 to welcome Hudson & Grace Consignment Boutique as a member the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce.

The Hudson & Grace Consignment Boutique is located at 10440 U.S. Highway 1 N. Suite 115 in St. Augustine and opened its doors with a ribbon cutting on June 25 to signify its membership with the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. It focuses on offering clothes,

shoes, toys and various other items for infants to children 14-year-olds. Owner Kellyann Costanzo has big plans for the shop in the future, including holding a prom dress drive in April 2022 for girls and families that are looking for a less expensive options.



Photo courtesy of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

Amason Aesthetics Med Spa holds Chamber ribbon cutting

St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce ambassadors join staff, family, friends and clients to mark the ribbon cutting for Amason Aesthetics Med Spa on Sept. 15. Amason is Located at 1515 County Road 210 West, Suite 104 near the County Road 210 and Interstate 95 interchange. An appointment with Amason can help you look your best.



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Photos courtesy of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce



Le Dental Spa in Nocatee hosts Chamber 'Before Hours'

Above: Le Dental Spa in Nocatee sponsored the Sept. 8 St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce "Before Hours" event. It allowed this group of Chamber members and Le Dental Spa staff to network and learn more about services provided by the chamber member. It was the perfect location for coffee and networking at a busy business.

Left: Dr. Pauline Le, center, gathers with two of her friendly staff at Le Dental Spa in Nocatee during a September Chamber "Before Hours" event.



Photos by Susan Griffin

Jackie Smith, Commissioner Jeremiah Blocker and Isabelle Renault.

Blocker speaks at Chamber at Noon event

County Commissioner Jeremiah Blocker was the guest speaker at the St. Johns County Chamber – Ponte Vedra Beach Division Chamber at Noon luncheon on Aug. 18 at Ruth's Chris Steak House. Members and guests enjoyed lunch and the opportunity to network at the event, which was sponsored by Fields Auto Group.



Judge Kenneth Janesk and St. Johns County Commissioner Jeremiah Blocker

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Photo courtesy of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

Monica Ketterman cuts the ribbon for Halo Spa in Nocatee on Oct. 1

Halo Spa holds grand opening, joins Chamber

Halo Spa in Ponte Vedra had its grand opening Oct. 1 and has also become a new member of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce. Halo Spa offers a full range of services and products, such as, a salt room, red light therapy, vitality booth, Glo Skin Beauty mineral makeup, facials, waxing and even more to come. Halo Spa is located at 320 Town Plaza Avenue, Suite 110. To book an appointment or schedule a private tour please call 904-789-HALO (4256).

Right: Halo Spa is owned by Monica and Ryan Ketterman.



Photo by Susan Griffin

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce welcomed Code Ninjas to Ponte Vedra Beach with a ribbon cutting ceremony Sept. 30.

Chamber welcomes Code Ninjas with ribbon cutting

Code Ninjas had a ribbon cutting celebrating its membership with the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Sept. 30. The business is located at 258 Solana Road in Ponte Vedra Beach. Code Ninjas is the nation's fastest growing kids coding franchise. The center will offer children ages 5 to 15 years old the opportunity to learn to code in a fun, non-intimidating way by playing and building video games they love.

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After Refacing

Before

FREE VIRTUAL CONSULTATIONS!

Chamber helps the link mark grand opening in Nocatee

By Shaun Ryan

Members of the public had a unique opportunity to see firsthand the next step in the evolution of working July 14-16 during the grand opening festivities at the link.

The celebration began with a pair of ribbon-cutting ceremonies, one for the link and another for the Flagler Health+ Immersive Studio located within the facility.

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Beach Division hosted the ceremony.

The link is a \$7 million, 22,500-square-foot co-working space, multi-use innovation incubator and membership-based venue in Nocatee Town Center that had been in the works since 2018. It is the creation of visionary entrepreneur Raghu Misra, founder of Wired2Perform, a talent-growth platform that's building workforce agility for the future, and the nonprofit Sapna Foundation, which helps displaced workers sync their talents with employment opportunities.

Ground was broken in June 2020 on a featureless plot of land at 425 Town Plaza Ave. Thirteen months later, Misra and his family cut the ribbon on a facility where people of all ages can go to "learn, play, think, do" under one roof.

"We want to be the link that makes things happen," said Misra during the ribbon cutting ceremony.

The link concept allows tech entrepreneurs to launch their businesses and

flourish while balancing career, family and recreation.

Though permanent offices were quickly snapped up, the link offers a variety of office-space solutions, including desks, meeting rooms, virtual office space and a mail service. There are audio and podcast recording studios, free highspeed WiFi and the Costa Coffee Smart Café, which can vend more than 200 flavors of coffee drinks.

But the link is more than a place to work.

For members, there is an emphasis on lifestyle, as well, with recreational and educational activities for children and families.

One of the most popular amenities for those attending the grand opening was the Flagler Health+ Immersive Stu-



Photos by Shaun Ryan

Raghu Misra, son Rohan Misra and wife Gurpreet Misra cut the ribbon on the link during grand opening festivities July 14.

dio. The meeting room's walls form a 360-degree environment that puts people inside videos from all around the world and images from webcams. The studio is useful for virtual travel, demonstrations, training, education, design visualization, team collaboration or simply relaxation.



St. Johns County Commissioner Christian Whitehurst, School Board member Beverly Slough and state Rep. Cyndi Stevenson at the grand opening festivities for the link on July 14.



Flagler Health+ President and CEO Jason Barrett cuts the ribbon on the Flagler Health+ Immersive Studio during grand opening festivities.

GRAND OPENING

Speakers at the grand opening celebration included PARC Group Director of Planning and Development Michael Osteen, Chamber CEO and President Isabelle Renault, state Rep. Cyndi Stevenson and Deputy County Administrator Joy Andrews. County Commissioners Jeb Smith, Paul Waldron and Christian Whitehurst, School Board members Beverly Slough and Anthony Coleman and Board Chair Dr. Erika Hamer were among the many who attended.



Flagler Health+ President and CEO Jason Barrett chats with entrepreneur Raghu Misra during grand opening festivities.

The ceremony also included a video showing how some of the sculptures featured at the link were created by Ocean Sole and a cake celebrating the 200th anniversary of St. Johns County.

On July 15, the First Coast Cultural Center (formerly the Cultural Center at Ponte Vedra Beach) held a full day of arts and performance, featuring a variety of musicians, poets, artists and more.

On July 16, the link held a series of presentations on entrepreneurship and innovation. Misra gave a "TED Talk"-style presentation, followed by entrepreneurial neuroscientist Maarten Rotman on innovation in health care, LASIK surgeon and inventor Dr. Arun Gulani, innovation and strategy executive Carlton Lamar Robinson, Marcia Corner on removing hurdles to achieve goals, 4FRONT Vice President of Innovation Brian Gainor on innovations in sports and more.

Chamber of Commerce hosts annual golf tournament

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce held its annual golf tournament at Slammer & Squire Golf Course in World Golf Village Monday, Sept. 27.

Golfers were treated to beautiful weather for playing golf and pristine course conditions.

The full field enjoyed competing, meeting members, interacting with sponsors and eating a barbecue lunch at the awards ceremony.

Although the 2021 tournament just ended, attention has already gravitated to the planning of next year's event.



Much appreciation goes out to the many sponsors that offered their support of the event, such as the team at Ponte Vedra Wellness Center, which includes owner and 2020-21 Chairman of the Chamber Board Dr. Erika Hamer, left, Janine Parker and Isabelle Renault, president and CEO, St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce.



Photos courtesy of St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce

Welcome to the 2021 St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Golf Tournament sponsored by SouthState Bank.



The putting green, sponsored by Blue Ocean Title, was enjoyed and began the golf tournament.



The golfers begin the day.



Mark Nighbor and Jim Bush competed with their team during the event.



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Guests mingle during the Before Hours showcase at Amara Med Spa.



Greg Wolff and Robin Handy at the Before Hours event.

Photos by Susan Griffin

Amara Med Spa joins Chamber during Before Hours event

Amara Med Spa was welcomed to Ponte Vedra Beach by the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce during a before hours social event held on July 21. The med spa is the result of a shared vision and partnership of founders Lindsay

Terranova and Greg Smith. It is the first of three locations that will be in the Northeast Florida area, with the other two currently being constructed in Jacksonville in the Avondale area and at the St. Johns Town Center.



Fred Seely and Lori Adams at the event.



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The Morris Center hosts Chamber After Hours

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Division hosted an After Hours event Sept. 22 at The Morris Center. The Morris Center is a trans-disciplinary learning center that works with children and adults with learning disabilities, such as Dyslexia, Dysgraphia,

Dyscalculia and other learning disabilities. They offer an intensive learning experience to include in our location, a speech pathologist, occupational therapist, psychologist and tutors that interact with the clients on an individual basis.



Photos by Susan Griffin

Dr. Tim Conway with The Morris Center's Chamber After Hours event Sept. 22.

Karina Coryell, Donna Guzzo and Lesley Vitel at the After Hours event.

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Entrepreneurs, start-ups invited to register for 'Pitch Factory'

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce has announced a partnership with the Jacksonville Women's Business Center and the link to bring the "Pitch Factory" entrepreneurial training program to the county.

Inspired by the JAX Bridges program, the Pitch Factory training course will help entrepreneurs and new start-ups elevate their businesses through an intensive training program designed to assist with developing and refining the entrepreneur's value proposition.

The free course will meet at the link, 425 Town Plaza Ave. in Nocatee Town Center, with the opportunity for individuals to join the sessions virtually as well. It kicks off Oct. 21 from 4 to 6 p.m. Classes will be held on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 4 to 6 p.m. on Oct. 26 and 28, and Nov. 2, 4 and 9.

Following the scheduled classes, aspiring entrepreneurs will connect with certified entrepreneur mentors through the "Network of Trust" virtual network to further refine their value proposition, develop their portfolio and hone their pitches.

At the conclusion of the program, rising entrepreneurs will share their value propositions with each other in a "Peer Pitch" platform to prepare for the live,

in-person pitch competition during the EnterCIRCLE 2021 entrepreneurial summit at the link on Nov. 18.

Each participant will be invited to present his or her entrepreneurial idea to key Northeast Florida investors and business leaders.

"The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce is excited to partner with the Jacksonville Women's Business Center and the link to bring local entrepreneurs together for this invaluable training and pitch opportunity," said Isabelle Renault, Chamber president/CEO. "The Pitch Factory is one more way St. Johns County is business ready."

Participants must complete each of the six live, interactive modules — in-person or virtually — in October and November to be eligible to participate in the live pitch event. The modules will not be recorded.

The Pitch Factory is available to residents of, and students studying in, St. Johns County as well as residents and students living in the neighboring counties within Northeast Florida. Space is limited and pre-registration is required. Registration closes at 5 pm. Oct. 14.

For further information, contact the Chamber at info@sjcchamber.com or by phone at 904-829-5681. Register online

at jaxcoc.centerdynamics.com/workshop.aspx?ekey=390410174.

The Commerce is the premier business and community organization in St. Johns County. It seeks to deliver continuous value-added service to members and the community, resulting in a business environment and quality of life where existing businesses have the opportunity to prosper and new businesses find it attractive to locate in the county. For more information, go to www.sjcchamber.com.

The Jacksonville Women's Business Center endeavors to create a new level

of innovation and ignite the enterprising spirit through advanced entrepreneurial development, education, extensive resources and dynamic networking.

Consisting of volunteer opportunities and a redeveloped suite of programs, the center provides an innovative and valuable educational experience that enables women in business to make sound decisions and develop the infrastructure to facilitate business growth and prosperity. For more information, call 904-366-6633 or go to jaxchamberfoundation.org/jacksonville-womens-business-center.



Photos courtesy of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Chamber board

Owner of the link, Raghu Misra, speaks briefly to the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Division during its board of directors meeting on Sept. 28.

The link hosts Chamber board of directors meeting

The St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce Ponte Vedra Division held a board of director's meeting at the link in Nocatee Sept. 28. Discussion included some of the organization's emerging goals, which included topics, such as, re-

aligning council/division and ambassadors to reflect market segments and county growth, as well as streamlining communication channels and expanding outreach to Jacksonville and young professionals.



The board of directors met and discussed strategy at the link.



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Photos by Anthony Richards

Christopher Brown (with scissors) was joined by his family and members of the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce during a ribbon cutting ceremony Friday, Sept. 17.



Brown and his family moved down from Georgia to open the new Geico location in St. Augustine.

New Geico in St. Augustine joins Chamber of Commerce

By Anthony Richards

For Christopher Brown opening a Geico location in St. Augustine was too much to pass up for the Georgia-native and his family. Brown's family was on hand when the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon cutting ceremony for the business on Friday, Sept. 17.

"Florida is where I want to be at, and I can see raising my family and living my life here," Brown said. "My family has been extremely supportive, from my par-

ents to my wife and my children Striker and Tatum. They are all really excited for a new adventure."

The business is located at 224 Florida 312, St. Augustine, 32086 and had not even been open for a week when the ribbon was cut.

The shopping center the business is in has several other stores, and Brown has already reached out in many cases to build the foundation for relationships with his neighboring business owners.

"The people in this shopping center are really friendly and accepting, which makes a big difference," Brown said.

Brown is very familiar with Geico, having worked at the corporate office for nine years prior to making the move.

"I got this amazing opportunity, and I couldn't think of a better place to be than in St. Augustine and St. Johns County," Brown said. "Geico saw the potential and I jumped on it. We don't just want to be a company, but we want to be a pillar in the

community."

According to Brown they are already partnering with Habitat for Humanity and other nonprofits in the area.

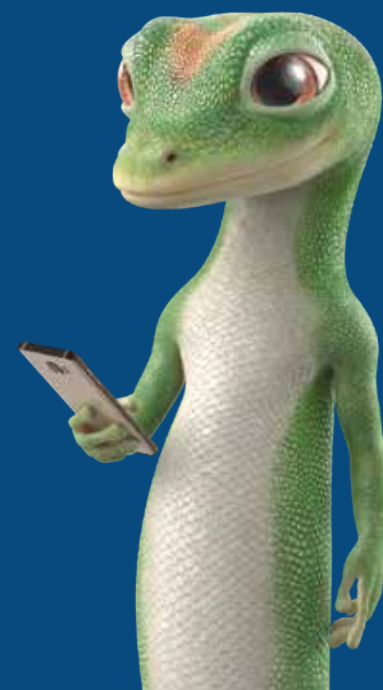
"Where Geico is a little different than other insurance companies is that we're open pretty much six to seven days a week," Geico said. "If something happens and you need insurance, your local agent may not be open, but Geico will be, and that's the one thing that we pride ourselves on."

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