

THE RECORDER

Celebrating 55 Years

INSIDE



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Thursday, May 2, 2024

PonteVedraRecorder.com

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PVHS speech, debate team wins pair of state titles in first year

By Anthony Richards

This is the first year that Ponte Vedra High School has had a speech and debate team in quite some time, and it has already left its mark in year one after winning a pair of state competitions.

According to PVHS teacher Holly Chaker, who serves as the team's sponsor, the idea behind the creation of the team started very grassroots, as she was approached a year ago by students Ella York and Cecilia Connor who were interested in getting it started.

One year later, York was one of the two Ponte Vedra students who earned first place in their respective categories.

DEBATE continues on Page 3

Hometown Conservative

Roy ALAIMO

FOR ST. JOHNS COUNTY COMMISSION

Paid for by Roy Alaimo, Republican, for St. Johns County Commission.

Change of Venue

Photo by Shaun Ryan

Ponte Vedra Concert Hall undergoing major transformation

By Shaun Ryan

Since the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall first tested its viability as a musical venue, something became immediately clear: This modest, out-of-the-way, former church had the potential to attract major stars to its small stage.

That first show, on March 20, 2009, featured The Artie Shaw Orchestra. It sold out. In fact, venue staff had to borrow



St. Johns County Commissioners and administration participate in the "load out."

chairs from the local senior center to make sure everyone had a place to sit.

Now, 484 unique acts and 1,081 shows later, the concert hall is about to undergo a 10-month, \$10.5 million transformation

expected to bring in multiple times the number of headline acts.

Friday, April 26, county officials,

VENUE continues on Page 4



INSIDE: CHECK IT OUT!
The Recorder's Entertainment EXTRA featuring TV listings, streaming information, puzzles and more!

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Plus, find the Recorder on Facebook at www.facebook.com/ThePVRecorder

BRIEFS

Ponte Vedra library to close temporarily

The Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library will be temporarily closed for roof replacement beginning Monday, May 6. This project is scheduled to be completed in about four weeks and the facility is anticipated to reopen to the public in early June. During this closure, no items will be due, all holds will be extended, and impacted patrons will not accrue late fees. In addition, the book drop will be inaccessible and donations will not be accepted at this location.

Patrons who would like to pick up holds are encouraged to utilize Bookmobile services. To view a schedule of stops, go to sjcpls.org/branches/bookmobile. For information on the Bookmobile, email libbe@sjcfl.us or call 904-827-6944. Patrons may also take advantage of various online resources, including e-books, databases and digital newspaper access, on the SJCPPLS website at sjcpls.org.

Learn about life as a police officer's wife

Wives of law enforcement officers and first responders live in continual stress. Just ask Vikki Downey, May speaker for the Northeast Florida Sisters in Crime, who for 25 years navigated the challenging role of being a police officer's wife.

Downey will share her insights during this hybrid meeting, which will be held at 10:15 a.m. Saturday, May 4 at the Ponte Vedra Beach Branch Library.

Register for the meeting at <https://nefloridasistersincrime.org>. For further information, contact floridasistersincrime@gmail.com.

The group welcomes misters and sisters to learn more about writing, promoting and enjoying crime fiction.

Republican committee to meet

The SJC Republican Executive Committee District 4 monthly meeting will be held at 6:15 p.m. Thursday May 16 at the Palm Valley Community Center, 148 Canal Blvd., Ponte Vedra Beach.

Guana exploration hike offered

A guided exploration hike will be offered from 9 to 11 a.m. Saturday, May 4, at Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve. Learn about the Guana peninsula's natural biodiversity, expansive cultural history, vital estuarine resources and current efforts to protect these resources. Meet at the GTM Research Reserve Trailhead Pavilion

(west of Guana Dam), 505 Guana River Road, Ponte Vedra Beach. To register, go to gtmnerr.org/visit/events.

The event is free but parking is \$3 per vehicle. Wear comfortable, closed-toe shoes. Hat, insect repellent, water and sunscreen are also recommended.

Palm Valley Market every Tuesday

The Palm Valley Market is held from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. every Tuesday inside the Palm Valley Community Center, 148 Canal Road. The market offers fresh produce, baked goods, local honey, tea, seasonal treats, soap, jewelry, plants and more.

— Compiled by Shaun Ryan

PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

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Debate

Continued from 1

“She is a very determined young lady, and she is really taking the world by storm,” Chaker said.

York won the novice extemporaneous speaking competition, while Garrett Smith took home the top honor in novice extemporaneous debate.

Eight students from PVHS competed in the competition in a wide variety of speech and debate categories in what turned out to be a long but successful day in Orlando.

There are about a dozen students that are on the team and have competed in some form of competition this year.

“We got in around 8 a.m. and did not wrap up until around 10 p.m.,” Chaker said. “There were more than 600 students taking part, which makes it all the more impressive what these kids were able to accomplish.”

The students found out their topic on the day of the competition and had 30 minutes to research and devise a speech or debate pertaining to it, which they would then present to judges to be graded on.

“It can be an intense atmosphere, but these kids handled it with such grace and eloquence,” Chaker said.

Not only did York win her category, but she took home a second trophy as her score earned her second overall for the competition.

Both Smith and York are juniors, which Chaker is excited about because of the experience they and the rest of the team gained this year, that they will be able to lean on next year.

Especially since they are expected to be moving up from the novice division for next year’s competition, which means even more challenging dynamics.

One of the neat aspects of the team is that there are varying degrees of speakers and personalities that make up the group. From York, who has spoken at the state capital and Washington, D.C., to others who do not feel as comfortable speaking in front of others.

According to Chaker, that has been one of the great things about the team, the way in which it can take people out of their comfort zone and help them grow as people.

“Ella and Garrett entered the competition with an air of confidence, so they just had to figure out the rules of the competition and how to go about it, while others are more shy and learned a little about themselves.”

Chaker is looking forward to the team’s future and believes that the success they had will only help grow the number of

students interested in joining the team moving forward.

One of the anticipated events next year will be the Great Debate, which is a national tournament held in Florida in November.

“We’re already planning for it, and we

would not be able to do any of this if it was not for the Florida Civics and Debate Initiative helping fund our way,” Chaker said. “It also helps to have such a great group of kids who are determined to put in the work and be successful in everything that they do.”



Contributed photo

Ponte Vedra High students Ella York and Garrett Smith each won first place awards at the 2024 state speech/debate competition.

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Venue

Continued from 1

members of the Friends of the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall, representatives of SJC Cultural Events — which operates and manages the venue — and others gathered for the official “load out.” This alternative to a normal groundbreaking ceremony mimicked the breakdown of equipment following a musical act’s performance.

SJC Cultural Events Board Chair Dylan Rumrell predicted that, when complete, the concert hall would be the “best indoor venue in North Florida.”

“The acts that will come here because of the renovation and enhancement that will take place will blow people away,” he said. “The best is yet to come.”

The venue has already established itself, hosting such performers as Art Garfunkel, David Crosby, the Indigo Girls, Wynonna Judd, Jose Feliciano, Don McLean and many, many more. Even a cursory glance at the list of past performers invokes surprise. How could such a small place, one that seats a mere 486 draw such talent?

Part of the answer lies with the late Tib Miller, music promoter and founder of Flying Saucer Presents. Miller, who died in November 2022, brought many of the big names to the venue.

At the ceremony Friday, the Friends group donated \$4,000 in Miller’s name to the North Florida School of Special Education for music lessons and classroom materials.

In addition to attracting major talent, the venue has also provided opportunities for area theatre and choral groups to present their shows.



Contributed photo

This rendering shows the design for the completed Ponte Vedra Concert Hall renovation.

A balcony and more

In 2006, St. Johns County purchased the former New Beginnings Baptist Church at 1050 A1A North and transformed it into the concert hall in 2009. Though the Artie Shaw show was held that same year, things did not truly get underway until 2011.

The Friends group supported several upgrades over the years, culminating in plans for a \$5.4 million “Balcony Project” announced in July 2022. Funding would come from federal, state and local sources, as well as a portion of \$8.9 million in grants from the Small Business Administration designed to help the live entertainment industry through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The public-private partnership between the county and SJC Cultural Events Inc. announced in September 2023 set the stage for this enhanced transformation.

When complete, the balcony is expected to increase seating capacity to about 600. Total audience capacity, when standing room is used, is expected to rise to about 1,000.

Because some artists prefer standing audiences to those in seats, maintaining that aspect should broaden the venue’s ability to attract top acts.

The concert hall will also add outdoor seating, as well as an area to sell merchandise and food. The box office will be brought back after its long hiatus.

The stage will be made deeper by the addition of four feet of floor. In addition, a greatly improved sound system will be installed.

According to Director of Production Carl Liberatore, the concert hall will be one of the first venues of its size to use the new technology.

“You should be able to close your eyes

and hear every instrument on stage, and you should hear every vocal,” said Gabe Pellicer, CEO and president of SJC Cultural Events.

Economic impact

Beyond its value as a source of quality entertainment, the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall has a significant, positive impact on the county’s economy.

“The St. Augustine Amphitheatre, the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall, Fort Mose Jazz and Blues Series and the Sing Out Loud Festival represent a cumulative impact of \$39 million per year to St. Johns County,” said County Commissioner Christian Whitehurst. All are operated and managed by SJC Cultural Events.

Whitehurst said the concert hall alone has contributed \$53 million to the county’s economy.

According to County Commissioner Sarah Arnold, 26% of visitors who attend shows in St. Johns County stay overnight, and 87% of those people stay more than one night. That means they also eat in local restaurants and shop in local stores.

To date, the concert hall has admitted 401,958 attendees.

“We are blessed with an ecosystem in St. Johns County that has allowed this 13-year dream to become a reality,” said Jerry Wilson, president of the Friends group.

Design of the renovated concert hall was performed by Jacksonville-based Fisher Koppenhafer Architecture and Interior Design. The contractor is DiMare Construction Co. of St. Augustine.

The concert hall is expected to reopen in March 2025.

Members of the public will be able to track the renovation’s progress at pvconcerthall.com/news.



Photo by Shaun Ryan

Gabe Pellicer, CEO and president of SJC Cultural Events, talks about the renovation during the recent “load out” ceremony.



Photo by Shaun Ryan

The Friends of the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall made a \$4,000 donation to the North Florida School of Special Education in Tib Miller’s name.



Photo by Susan Griffin



Photo by Shaun Ryan

These four singers from APEX Theatre Studio became the last performers to take the stage before the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall renovations began. They performed the classic hit “On Broadway.”



Photo by Susan Griffin

County Commissioner Roy Alaimo inspects a guitar in anticipation of the “load out.”



Photo by Susan Griffin



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Courtney Lewis has spent the past decade as music director of the Jacksonville Symphony, and he has seen it grow in both the talent on stage and its cultural place with the community. Growing up in Northern Ireland and working with symphonies around the world and the States, he believes the approach being taken is helping get the Jacksonville Symphony on the map among the best symphonies in the world.

Courtney Lewis

As told to Anthony Richards

Tell us a little about yourself and your background.

I grew up in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and went at 18 years old to study music at the University of Cambridge in England.

I was lucky that right out of college at 23 years old I got a job with the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, and my first substantial job was as assistant conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra.

Currently, I have served as the music director of the Jacksonville Symphony and April was 10 years in that role.

Has music always been a passion of yours and something you wanted to pursue?

Music has been my life for as long as I can remember.

I sang in the church choir as a young boy and then I had a wonderful high school music teacher who pushed me to pursue my love of music.

It has always been something that gives me great pleasure.

How have you seen the Jacksonville Symphony change in the decade you've been there?

There were 52 full-time musicians making up the orchestra when I was hired but not long after that we quickly increased to 60-plus.

Also, one of the things I am most proud of is that we worked on the contracts for our musicians and their pay increased by 30%.

That is huge because now we can go out and get the absolute best musicians that are out there.

I've approved about 40% of the orchestra members since I've been here and there is a lot that I look for during the audition process.

One of the important things I always consider is to make sure the symphony and our music is tailored to Jacksonville and that we are understanding of what the residents want.

We have gone about doing this by introducing more movies to music and incorporating a variety of both pop and classical musicians.

It took me a couple of years in my position to understand this, but now I believe we've really hit it on the head with the performances that we have.

What are your roles as music director?

As music director I'm in charge of fundraising and all of that as well as the music itself.

We come up with new music every week and I'm in charge of making sure everything flows.

I don't think people quite understand the range of music and the approach a symphony can go with. It's up to the director to decide how fast or slow the music will go at certain times throughout a performance.

I'm there to make sure everything goes as planned and that the musicians hit their spots. It can be quite the moving target.

What are your plans for the future of the Jacksonville Symphony?

Next year is our 75th anniversary and I'm really excited about what all we have planned.

We usually are looking two years down the road to plan, but classical music is a complex thing and its always evolving.

My biggest goal next is to tell the world just how good the Jacksonville Symphony is, because each performance is a way for us to be ambassadors for the city and all that it has to offer.

We also have the largest music education program in Northeast Florida from beginners to kids who go on to Juilliard (School).

I encourage readers to go to the orchestra and give it a try and I know you'll love what you hear.

I feel that often people think of the orchestra as something their parents or grandparents would go to or that its for rich people. But it's not that at all, because it's for everyone to experience and enjoy.

What does the remainder of the current season look like?

We've got two more classical concerts coming up.

On May 17 and 18, concertmaster Adelya Nartadjeva takes the stage for Vaughn Williams' "The Lark Ascending" and concludes with Walton's First Symphony.

It will be an all-English composer night, so it will a chance to bring some sounds of myself, because although I was born in Northern Ireland, I was musically trained in England.

Our season will come to an end on June 7 and 8 with Berlioz's "Symphonie Fantastique" which is a romantic love story.

What do you enjoy most about living in the North Florida area?

It has become my home as my fiancée and I live in Avondale and my fiancée even owns a small gym in the area.

















Courtesy of Jacksonville Symphony

Courtney Lewis has been music director at the Jacksonville Symphony for the past 10 years.

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The Recorder's garden columnist, Kathy Esfahani of Kathy's Creative Gardens & Nursery, shares her tips for growing gorgeous gardens in Northeast Florida.

Photos provided by Kathy's Creative Gardens & Nursery

KATHY'S GARDENING GUIDE

Citrus Trees

"He that plants trees loves others besides himself." — Thomas Fuller



By Kathy Esfahani

A wonderful perk to living in Northeast Florida is the ability to grow citrus trees in your own backyard! A citrus tree allows you the fun of harvesting fresh fruit and also

gives off a delightful, sweet scent. Although you will need to protect your citrus trees during freezing temperatures, Meyer lemon, Persian lime and various orange trees grow well in our area.

Citrus trees prefer areas of full sun with well-drained soil. Be sure the location you choose for your tree receives a minimum of six hours of sunlight. When planting, dig the hole a little larger than the size of your tree's container and add compost for nutrients.

Once the tree is in the ground, the top of the root ball should be even with or slightly above ground level. The new tree needs regular water, particularly as it becomes established, but be sure to allow the soil to dry out between watering. It is also not necessary to add mulch or topsoil around your tree as they can keep the soil too wet.

As your citrus tree grows, it is important to add fertilizer on a regular basis. Look for a fertilizer specifically made for citrus trees and follow the provided instructions. Apply fertilizer approximately a month after planting and then regularly throughout the growing season. Add the fertilizer evenly under the canopy of the tree and be careful that it does not pile up against the trunk.

When fruit is ready to harvest, twist and pull gently to remove it from the tree. Allow the fruit to fully ripen while still on the tree, as citrus does not continue to ripen once harvested. With this in mind, remove and taste a fruit to be sure it is ripe before harvesting the whole tree. You can also leave ripe citrus on the tree until you are ready to eat it — this fruit will continue to



Citrus trees with new fruit

get sweeter on the tree and extend the time you get to harvest and enjoy!

Citrus trees are available in full size and dwarf varieties. They grow well in a landscape, but you can also plant smaller trees in containers. If you have limited space but want more than one type of citrus, consider a cocktail citrus tree. These trees are grafted to produce three to five types of fruit on a single tree

Flower of the Week



Angelonia

and can include lemons, limes, oranges and grapefruits. Some cocktail trees can produce different types of fruit each year.

Now that warmer weather is here to stay, visit us at the nursery to select the perfect citrus tree to add to your landscape.

Flower of the Week: Angelonia

Please email Kathy at kcg.pvr@gmail.com for any questions or gardening tips you would like to see in the future. For more information and ideas, visit Kathy's Creative Gardens & Nursery, 196 N. Roscoe Blvd. The phone number is 904-655-7373.



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Sea turtle nesting season now under way

Sea turtle nesting season began Wednesday, May 1, and St. Johns County officials are asking residents, visitors and businesses to help protect the turtles' natural habitat by observing all nesting season laws and regulations. The beaches of St. Johns County are home to several species of endangered or threatened sea turtles.

Through Oct. 31, St. Johns County staff will close vehicular beach access gates at 7:30 p.m. and reopen them at 8 a.m. to allow nesting sea turtles to have a safe beach throughout the night.

Beach visitors can have a positive impact on nesting sea turtles by taking the following actions while enjoying the beach:

- Do not use fireworks and open fires; they are illegal.
- Remove ruts and sandcastles at the end of your beach day.
- Do not leave beach chairs or canopies on the beach overnight.
- Flashlights are strongly discouraged as they can harm sea turtles.
- Avoid entering dunes and conservation zones (15 feet seaward of the dune line).
- Do not release balloons, which can fall into the ocean and harm marine life; their release is also illegal.



Contributed photo

A leatherback turtle leaves Crescent Beach.

• Never approach sea turtles emerging from or returning to the sea. Nesting sea turtles are vulnerable, timid and can be easily frightened away.

Never push an injured animal back into the ocean. If you encounter an injured, sick or deceased sea turtle, call the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office nonemergency dispatch line at 904-824-8304.

The continued participation of residents and volunteers in protecting the turtles' nesting habitat has borne fruit: 2023 saw triple-digit green sea turtle nests along St. Johns County beaches for the first time since data has been collected.

For more information on the county's conservation efforts and how you can help, call St. Johns County Habitat Conservation and Beach Management at 904-209-3740, or go to sjcfl.us/departments/habitat-conservation or RecycleStJohns.com.

For more general information on St. Johns County Beach services, use the SJC Connect app (go to sjcfl.us/sjc-connect), which is replacing the older Reach the Beach app as the go-to source for beach updates. You can also sign up for the monthly Beach Brief newsletter (go to lp.constantcontactpages.com/su/N3tmmZN/The-BeachBrief) to have the latest beach news sent straight to your inbox.



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Making an impact one shoebox at a time

By Anthony Richards

So many times, volunteering or doing a good deed can be done without knowing who is directly being impacted, but it is the hope and belief that an impact is being made that drives the cause.

That is the case for those who volunteer their time to help pack shoeboxes as part of the Operation Christmas Child initiative begun three decades ago by Samaritan's Purse International Relief.

Local Operation Christmas Child volunteers were given the opportunity to meet Dioany Yosuno, who received a shoebox from the organization when she was 11 years old and living in the Venezuelan Amazon area, during a speaker event at Good News Church in St. Augustine on April 29.

"I grew up part of an indigenous group in the Amazon and I grew up in a Christian family with my mom, dad and my sister," Yosuno said.

She now lives in Texas after her family moved there when she was a junior in high school due to years of economic struggle in the country.

Although the family did not have much and times were hard, she still has fond memories of being a child and growing up near the Amazon.

"I love the mangos in the Amazon, because they were everywhere and we also had a tree in our backyard and it proved to be just the perfect snack," Yosuno said. "I also miss swimming in the river where we used to always go after church on Sundays."

The difference a shoebox from Operation Christmas Child can make in a child's life is everlasting, as Yosuno is an example of that as she still vividly remembers the moment when she received her box as if it was yesterday.

"Since a child I have always loved creativity, drawing and all of that, so I



Yosuno talked about her time growing up in Venezuela and how she was impacted after receiving her shoebox from Operation Christmas Child.

asked my mom for markers, but of course she said no because we could not afford it with everything else that was going on, but she gave me a Bible verse that said 'Take the light in the Lord and he will give you the desire of your heart,'" Yosuno said.

Although she did not get the verse fully at the time it would soon sink in through the craziest of circumstances.

"One day I remember there were so many kids excited about going to a soccer field and so we went and I remember getting there around five in the afternoon," Yosuno said. "The time came when I got my shoebox after waiting in line, and I remember just being happy to receive a box before I even looked in it."

The box included several items, such as a Slinky, which Yosuno admits she did not know how to play with so she used it as a bracelet, hair accessories and the markers she had been hoping and praying for in all sorts of colors imaginable.

"Right when I opened it, the Bible verse from my mom came back in my head and it was all I could think about," Yosuno said. "To me the shoebox was a gift from God and all of a sudden I under-



Photos by Anthony Richards

Dioany Yosuno, who received a shoebox from Operation Christmas Child when she was 11 years old and living in the Venezuelan Amazon area, spoke at an event at Good News Church in St. Augustine on April 29.

stood it."

This year, Operation Christmas Child is expected to pack and hand out 11.3 million shoeboxes for children across the world, and the goal for the current year is for 10,000 of those to come from St. Johns County.

Since moving to Texas, Yosuno has gotten involved with Operation Christmas Child not just as a spokesperson for the

organization, but she also takes part in packing her own shoeboxes as a way to continue to give back the kindness she received.

"It's a blessing to share the Gospel with children and it's important for us spread that word," Yosuno said. "You don't always know the person you're impacting but you know that every shoebox makes its own impact."

Flagler College sets records in Giving Challenge

Between April 3 and 4, 2,062 donors contributed to Flagler College's sixth annual Roar and Raise Giving Challenge, raising a record-breaking \$1,557,589 in support of the college's people, programs, and places.

"Year after year, our Saints community sets the bar higher for what we can accomplish through Roar and Raise," said Kristy Myers, vice president of institutional advancement. "Their devotion to the college's mission of academic excellence and personal enrichment is the backbone of Flagler's ability to deliver a truly transformative education."

Roar and Raise is Flagler College's biggest fundraising event of the year. First launched in 2019, the annual

48-hour giving challenge unites Saints worldwide behind advancing the college's student-centered educational mission.

Funds raised are invested into key areas of need under the Flagler Forward Campaign, the college's comprehensive plan to maintain the institution's prestige while elevating its student outreach, faculty support, programmatic offerings and facilities preservation and innovation.

"Behind every student engagement activity, academic program and funded scholarship, there is a loyal donor who has given their time and resources to bettering our campus community," Myers said. "That is what a Flagler education is all about."



Contributed photo

Flagler College students celebrate record-breaking donations during the Roar and Raise Giving Challenge.

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Bingo attendee Chris Bayer, who won the Culhane's gift basket in the raffle, stands next to Coldwell Banker Vanguard Realty Broker Manager Michele DeLiberto.



Bingo attendees from Triton Marine Construction and raffle basket lottery scratch off winner Patrick Shadduck displaying his winning basket.

The bingo fundraiser held at Culhane's Irish Pub and Restaurant in Atlantic Beach on Tuesday, April 23, raised more than \$2,000 for Mission House and BEAM (Beaches Emergency Assistance Ministry). More than 60 people attended the event, which was coordinated by the Coldwell Banker Vanguard Realtor's group, CBV Cares.

Prizes donated by area businesses including Culhane's and the Realtors were awarded to bingo game winners and those who purchased winning raffle tickets.

Mission House is a day shelter and provides a place for homeless in the area to shower, gain clothing, medical attention, meals and counseling to assist in their finding employment and a place to call home again. Mission House also has a medical clinic open two days a week to provide medical care with the help of area medical professional volunteers.

For more information on Mission House, go to missionhousejax.org.

BEAM is a Jacksonville Beach community-based organization serving lower income residents in the Beaches area. It relies heavily on community support to assist those in need.

For more information on BEAM, go to jaxbeam.org.

CBV Cares is a charitable fundraising organization created by Coldwell Banker Vanguard Realty real estate agents who support area charitable, nonprofit organization efforts. For more information, call Beaches CBV Cares Co-Chair Carole Bayer at 904-860-5000 or fellow Co-Chair Nancy Hammond at 816-820-6103 or go to facebook.com/CBVCares.



PGA pro golfer Len Mattiace, who won a Miriam's Jewelry ring in the raffle, stands next to Coldwell Banker Vanguard Realty Broker Manager Michele DeLiberto.



Bingo attendee Patrick Shadduck, who won a lottery scratch off and Visa gift card basket, is seen with Coldwell Banker Vanguard Realty Broker Manager Michele DeLiberto.



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Local Eagle Scout tackles Chinese Tallow trees

By Anthony Richards

The state of Florida calls the Chinese Tallow tree a “noxious weed” because of its rampant spreading and adaptability to any soil condition, and because of that it is forbidden to sell, plant or transfer this tree within the state.

Local Eagle Scout Nicholas Storm is looking to do something to help, as he has done other conservation work including building a native plants prayer garden at Lord of Life Lutheran Church on Roscoe Boulevard.

He recently identified Chinese Tallow trees on the church’s property with his conservation mentor Ginger Feagle, who is the north central regional coordinator for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

After researching, it turned out there were 203 Chinese Tallow trees and saplings on the property, Storm organized a weekend work event with his local Boy Scout Troop 277, which also fittingly fell around Earth Day.

The workday consisted of marking and cutting down trees or using an ax to put hatch marks into the trees, followed by applying a herbicide, using state guidelines, that will eventually kill them.

“I found out that it was Ben Franklin who brought this tree to the United



Local Eagle Scout Nicholas Storm uses an ax to mark Chinese Tallow trees, considered a “noxious weed,” on Lord of Life Lutheran Church property.

States, and while they look pretty, it’s now recognized that they spread really quickly and will overtake native Florida vegetation,” Storm said. “Its leaves, when they drop can even change the chemistry of the soil.”

Other states that have followed Florida’s lead by forbidding the trees include Texas, Mississippi and Louisiana.

According to Storm, it is a good time of year to identify the trees since new growth starts around February and Chinese Tallow trees will typically bloom until May.

The tree has a heart-shaped leaf that is rose colored when new, light grey rough bark, and will have a white flower with no petals, that resembles popcorn.

According to the Florida Natural Areas Inventory, Chinese Tallows originate from Southeast Asia and were first recorded to have been introduced to the United States in the early 1900s.

“We are grateful for Nicholas’s genuine interest in helping our church and being such a good steward of our local Ponte Vedra Beach environment,” said Sheila Kolesaire, council president of Lord of Life Lutheran Church. “We had no knowledge what these trees were on our property, but we will now be on the lookout for new seedlings.”

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Flagler College receives \$30K grant from Siemens to fund research

Contributed photo

Flagler College has received a significant grant from Siemens' Empower+.

The contribution, totaling \$30,000, will support two vital initiatives within the college community.

The grant includes \$25,000 for Flagler College Professor Matt Brown's San Sebastian River Water Quality Research Project. Additionally, \$5,000 has been allocated as the lead, title sponsor of Science Week in April underscoring Siemens' commitment to fostering scientific education and innovation.

Brown's research uses fecal bacteria such as enterococcus as indicators of untreated waste, with the goal of tracing sources of fecal input to local waterways. He also aims to study the response of enterococcus bacteria to saltwater exposure and its connections to the broader microbial community respiration. The results will help the City of St. Augustine target funding for sewer conversion to the areas that need it the most.

"The Empower+ grant will provide our students with the tools to explore topics such as biofuel optimization and partitioning of contaminant compounds," said Brown. "Allowing students to see the applications of their new skills right from the start is a powerful motivator for learning."

Specifically, the funds will allow the



college to purchase critical laboratory equipment, provide research stipends for undergraduate student researchers and cover travel and research dissemination expenses.

Steve Hoiberg, director of Siemens Empower+ Programs, emphasized the importance of such transformative research endeavors.

"Transformative research such as the study of the San Sebastian River and

related environmental issues is not only an important part of the college's core mission, but it's critical to the State of Florida's sustainable future," said Hoiberg. "This is the innovative, forward-thinking work that Siemens' Empower+ program is passionate about supporting."

Empower+ from Siemens expands partnerships and supports customized programming in various areas, including sustainability, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics), student success, workforce development, energy efficiency and community engagement. Through initiatives like Empower+, Siemens aims to collaborate with communities, schools, colleges and universities to inspire the next generation of leaders.

Siemens, a global technology company focusing on industry, infrastructure, transport and health care, believes that technology with purpose has the potential to address the greatest challenges of our time.

The partnership between Siemens and Flagler College has been ongoing since 2022, primarily focused on the renovation of Ponce Hall. Working together to enhance campus efficiency, Siemens and Flagler embarked on a project to construct a central chiller plant serving cooling needs across several campus buildings, including Ponce Hall, Kenan Hall, Molly Wiley Art Building, Ringhaver Student Center and Proctor Library. The project, scheduled for completion in 2025, will generate energy efficiency and cost savings for the college.

Marc Craddock, a Flagler alum, plays a pivotal role within the Siemens team as the higher education group lead in Florida.

Flagler College is grateful to Siemens for its continued partnership and generous support, which enables the institution to pursue innovative research and educational opportunities for its students and the wider community.

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St. Augustine Humane Society's annual Pin Up Paws Calendar returns

Fluff up your tail and find your fanciest collar. It's time for the St. Augustine Humane Society's annual Pin Up Paws Calendar!

The 15th iteration of the popular calendar will feature St. Augustine's winningest pets in a "Sweet Things" theme. The 13 pets that gather the most votes will be featured in the yearly calendar, with their adorableness captured in a professional photo shoot — 80 animals total will be included. Photo submissions began on Wednesday, May 1.

"When you enter your pet into the Pin Up Paws Contest, you're not just showing everyone how sweet they are," says Carolyn Sindad Smith, executive director of the St. Augustine Humane Society. "You're helping many pets who would otherwise not receive the lifesaving care they need to thrive and live happy, full lives. That's the wonderful part of this fundraiser. It's cute, it's fun and there are so many ways to support our critical work."

Owners can submit their pets' photos for a chance to win. Voting continues through Saturday, July 13, at 8 p.m. Each vote is a fundraiser: \$1 equals one vote. You can vote as many times and for as many pets as you wish. The top 13 animals will secure a spot in the 2025 "Sweet Things" Pin Up Paws Calendar.

The pet with the most votes will grace the cover, while the 12 second-place winners will represent the months; all pets will enjoy a professional photo shoot with award-winning photographer Addison Fitzgerald. Fine artist and graphic designer Maribel Angel will add her whimsical touch to the designs.

The calendar will be unveiled and available for purchase at the Pin Up Paws Party on Thursday, Oct. 24, at The White Room. The event promises a delightful evening with dinner, live music, a silent auction, a wine pull and more.

The first-place pet also receives a \$100 gift certificate to the Columbia Restaurant, two tickets to the Pin Up Paws Party and two copies of the calendar. The second-place winners receive a \$50 Columbia Restaurant gift certificate and two calendars.

Twelve runners-up will be featured

with their submission photos and a description. The top 80 pet fundraisers will have a small photo on a collage page.

All proceeds from submissions, vote donations and sales go toward supporting the lifesaving programs of the St. Augustine Humane Society.

To enter a pet, go to pinuppaws.com.

The St. Augustine Humane Society, located at 1665 Old Moultrie Road in St. Augustine, promotes healthy, responsible, lifelong pet ownership by serving the medical and rehabilitative needs of companion animals in the community.

They help prevent animals from entering shelters by providing low-cost services, training, food and support.

To make a donation or learn more, go to staughumane.org and follow along on Facebook @StAugustineHumaneSociety and Instagram @StAugHumane.

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KATE KUP Triples Tournament raises \$100K

The Kate Amato Foundation announced it has successfully raised more than \$100,000 at the Fifth Annual KATE KUP Triples Tennis Tournament last weekend. All proceeds from the event benefit Kate Amato Foundation (KAF), whose mission is funding innovative pediatric cancer research to develop safer, smarter and more effective treatments for childhood cancer.

The KATE KUP Triples Tennis Tournament, held April 20, is the only event of its kind in the Jacksonville area and is held annually at The Yards Tennis Center in Sawgrass. The format is a fun, three versus three, fast-paced tennis tournament in which players rotate counter-clockwise after every point, and the first

team to 21 (by 2 points) is the winner. To add energy to the event, teams dress up in themed costumes. The tournament has become so popular in the community that the 32 team slots sold out within a record breaking 18 hours.

The family-friendly tournament was open to the public with more than 300 participants and spectators in attendance to enjoy the day and support pediatric cancer research. Several local businesses rallied to support the event and provide refreshments and entertainment for the players and guests including TacoLu, Bearded Pig Barbecue, 1928 Cuban Bistro, Ancient City Brewing Company, Native Sun Natural Foods Market, Green Bean Productions, StretchLab, Happy Faces Ice Cream Truck and SpaceWalk Inflatables. There was also a Kid Zone, which offered face painting, balloon art, a photobooth, inflatables, arts and crafts activities, and games.

The Tournament Champion was awarded to the team “Deez Balls” (Alexis Schuchart, Mike Marrou, Jared Lisauer) and second place was awarded to the team “The Royal Tennisbaums” (Casey Cohen, Megan McGraw, Jude Kinaseswitz). The Best Team Costume was awarded to the team “Volley Parton” (Sarah-Lynn Le Roux, Franzi Herman, Joey Whelan). The Kate’s Kindness Award, given for good sportsmanship and kindness on the court, was awarded to the “Net Ninjas” (Meg Spears, Bre Young, Rebecca Parmelee). The Top Fundraising trophy went to the “The Royal Tennis-



baums” (Casey Cohen, Megan McGraw, Jude Kinaseswitz) for raising \$13,945 for the cause.

As part of their mission, KAF awards grant funding to cutting-edge pediatric cancer research projects at some of the leading immunotherapy and cancer

genomics research labs in the country, including Duke University, Texas Children’s Cancer Center/Baylor College of Medicine, Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), and Dana-Farber Cancer Institute/Harvard Medical School.

The foundation has funded \$575,000 in grants to support groundbreaking pediatric cancer research projects. These grants are predominantly funded by KATE Signature events: KATE KUP Triples Tennis Tournament, KATE KLASSIC Golf Tournament, and KATE KOMBO Golf and Pickleball Tournament. Additional foundation programs include KATE’S KINDNESS PROJECT, which provides immediate direct support to local children hospitalized with cancer, and KATE KLUB, a school-based program where children can get involved with fundraising events and activities.

The foundation would like to extend a special thanks to the KATE KUP Sponsors for being strong supporters of KAF and pediatric cancer research, including ARCO Design Build, Cosmetic Surgery Affiliates, Lockett Law, JET Home Loans, Hen House Marketing, Stellar Energy, Tina Webster Realty, DF Luxury Homes, Chic Booth, Golden Dog Title & Trust, Choose Your Way Therapy, Doro and KYDS Children’s Boutique.

Several families also rallied to support this year’s KATE KUP, including the Esposito family, the Wubker family, the Silverman family, the Burke family and the Devine family.

Kate’s parents, Jeff and Lisa Amato, were happy with the success of the event, sharing: “We’re overwhelmed by our community’s continued commitment to honor Kate’s life by helping other children. It’s a beautiful testament to the kindness and connection of our Beaches community. Our favorite part of this tournament is the outpouring of love in the participants’ bright smiles, warm hugs and infectious joy all day, because it shows us that Kate’s spirit is alive and well within all of us.”

The foundation is now actively preparing for the second annual KATE KOMBO, which will also be held at The Yards in Sawgrass on Oct. 11. The event is a simultaneous golf and pickleball tournament and is expected to sell out. Registration for the event opens in June.

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Brewers' Fest set for May 4

The fifth annual STA Brewers' Festival will be held from 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday, May 4, at the Fountain of Youth Archeological Park, 11 Magnolia Ave.

The festival will include free tastings from 25-plus regional breweries, local food trucks, face painting and live music — all while enjoying one of St. Augustine's most scenic and historical locations.

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Tickets are available at stabrewersfest.com.

"This is a great opportunity to try small batch beers right in your backyard," according to Doug and Courtney Murr, organizers and owners of Dog Rose Brewing Co. "Each attending brewery is encouraged to not only bring a unique offering but also a true brewery representative to share insights of their creations and answer all of your questions."

Festival organizers have donated more than \$50,000 to deserving nonprofits in the St. Augustine and St. Johns County community through Brewing A Community. This year's nonprofit beneficiaries include the St. Johns County Marine Science Program, EPIC Behavioral Healthcare, the St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum and Swamp Haven (pet adoption).

In addition to the regional brewers, five of St. Augustine's breweries will be part of the event — Bog Brewing Co., Dog Rose Brewing Co., Ancient City Brewing Co., Old Coast Ales and The Brewery at Jack's BBQ.

Unlimited beer tastings from the craft breweries will be the highlight of the annual St. Augustine Brewers' Fest. Each ticket holder will receive a commemorative 6-ounce tasting glass.

Food will be available from favorite lo-

cal food trucks and vendors. Live music by The Thick & Thin String Band will be on stage throughout the day.

Being true to a community event, family-friendly activities include face painting and plenty of space for kids to run around.

Merchandise for sale during the event will include T-shirts, koozies and hats, all created by Skinny Lizard T-shirt Printers.

Sponsors include Dog Rose Brewing Co., Skinny Lizard Screen Printers and Embroidery, The Eye Center of St. Augustine, Leonard's Photography, Meehan's, Kookaburra, Totally St. Augustine, Fishardy Charters, Stars Rehab, Ice Mule Coolers, Beaver Toyota, St. Augustine Experiences-Ale Trail, Quick Signs of St. Augustine and others.

General admission tickets are \$50 in advance (\$60 at the gate, if available) and a limited number of VIP tickets are \$120 (only 100 VIP available) VIP tickets include access to the climate-controlled pavilion, private beer station, private air-conditioned bathrooms, catered food by Meehan's Irish Pub, and a festival tasting glass.

Designated driver tickets also are available. If you are a designated driver with a VIP ticket-holder, you will also need to purchase a VIP ticket.

This event is expected to sell out.

More chairs to deck in 2024

Deck The Chairs (DTC) organizers have announced that the holiday event will have 10 more lifeguard chairs added to the popular exhibit space in Jax Beach.

The 2024 season will feature 52 decorated chairs. Organizers will also present the Third Annual Student Decorating Challenge with another 24 chairs in two Jacksonville park spaces. Both exhibits combine for the largest decorating partnerships in the organization's history.

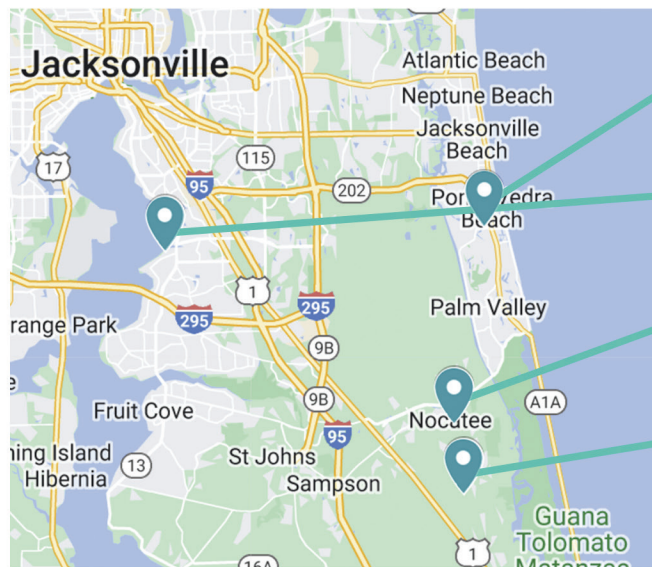
Interest in chair decorating has grown with more small business and nonprofit groups taking advantage of the unique opportunity for community outreach. DTC expects to have at least 50% of the decorated chair exhibit space represented through nonprofit partnerships.

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UNF, Mayo Clinic collaborate on 3D anatomy printing course

The University of North Florida has teamed up with the 3D Anatomic Modeling Laboratory at Mayo Clinic in Florida to create an innovative undergraduate course at UNF.

The course gives biology and engineering students hands-on experience in an emerging field that will help improve patient outcomes. It will also help build a pipeline of job applicants prepared to work in 3D medical printing labs.

A few years ago, Dr. Robert Pooley, medical physicist at the 3D Anatomic Modeling Laboratory, helped conduct Mayo Clinic's national job search for a software engineer in the lab and couldn't find anyone with the exact qualifications needed.

About the same time, Dr. Laura Habegger, UNF biology assistant professor, was looking for a way to teach her students advanced anatomic modeling.

The two scientists met during a UNF event and collaborated to create the framework for an innovative interdisciplinary course that launched with support from UNF MedNexus. This course will help fill a crucial gap in advanced medical printing skills and prepare students to enter careers with medical centers like Mayo Clinic and

private medical equipment suppliers.

"This educational collaboration with Mayo Clinic is a perfect example of UNF responding to evolving talent needs in our community," said UNF President Moez Limayem. "We are addressing a growing demand in medicine, while our students are gaining incredible experience in this cutting-edge field."

For the unique course that began this spring, Mayo Clinic selects tomographic imaging from unique medical cases and removes all patient identifiers to anonymize the scans. The data is then provided to students, who work together to interpret the CT and MRI data and convert the images into 3D models, such as a heart with a tumor or a brain with complex nerve damage. The students then fabricate the exact size and layers of the organs by 3D printing to include the specific medical issues for examination.

By combining Mayo Clinic's imaging with the UNF advanced manufacturing program's 3D printing resources, students taking the revolutionary UNF 3D Anatomy course are producing some of the most advanced, realistic and life-size models possible.

Using 3D printing for the creation of physical replicas of anatomical structures that are impacted by specific unique or complicated conditions is revolutionizing medical care and allowing doctors and researchers to improve surgical procedures, create better treatment plans and reduce costs. 3D models play a significant role in health care education and are used by practitioners around the world, including Mayo Clinic's medical students, residents, fellows and experienced surgeons.

Habegger is co-teaching the course with Dr. Grant Bevell, mechanical engineering associate professor, along with assistance from Dr. Pooley and Carleigh Eagle with Mayo Clinic and UNF graduate student Molly Dobrow.

Habegger and Pooley know of no other similar course offered by a university in the United States.

"We are the first known collegiate program that is introducing the field of anatomical 3D modeling and printing to undergraduate engineering and biology students," said Habegger. "Combined with the support of Mayo Clinic's top researchers, this course offers such a valuable, unique experience for our students."

How to determine if nursing is right for you

Nursing is a popular career choice. Individuals considering nursing need to determine if the field might be the right fit for them. It's not always glamorous being a nurse. In fact, it can be quite challenging and often stressful. However, the rewards tend to outshine the trials and tribulations. The following are some components of nursing that can help individuals determine if the field is right for them.

Training time constraints: There are different levels of nursing, each of which requires a different amount of training and certification, according to Nurse Money Talk. A certified nursing assistant must complete a program at a specific CNA vocational school, and such programs run between four and 10 months, on average. Licensed vocational nurses can expect to study for 12 to 18 months, and must pass

NURSING continues on Page 19

On this Nurse Week, we extend our heartfelt thanks to all the nurses who tirelessly provide care, compassion, and expertise to those in need. Your commitment to healing and comfort is truly inspiring. Thank you for your unwavering dedication and the difference you make every day. Happy Nurse Week!

Runelon Alcudia, DNP, APRN

Marcie Houser, MSN, APRN

Tricia Setnick, APRN

Rochelle Bardis, FNP-C

Smitha Unnikrishnan, APRN, ANCC

Saidy Harper, MSN, FNP-BEC

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Nurses serve in a variety of roles

Nurses are invaluable professionals within the medical community. Whether they work in hospital settings, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, doctor's offices, or elsewhere, nurses provide vital services to individuals in need every day.

Nurses wear many hats, and that's evidenced by the different types of nurses making a difference each day. Individuals considering a career in nursing should know that talented nurses are in high demand and career opportunities in the field are expected to grow in the years to come. For example, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that employment of registered nurses will grow by 6 percent between 2022 and 2032. That growth rate exceeds the average expected rate for all occupations. Whether individuals want to become a nurse or gain a greater understanding of the many ways nurses contribute each day, this rundown of the various types of nurses can shed light on these unsung heroes of the medical community.

- **Pediatric nurse:** Pediatric nurses make a strong impression because they are the first nursing professionals many people recall interacting with, and those interactions may last from early childhood through adolescence. Pediatric nurses perform a range of tasks, including the administration of medication; monitoring of vitals like temperature, pulse and blood pressure; health evaluations to identify symptoms; and even speak with parents to calm any nerves or anxieties they may have. Pediatric nurses typically work in doctor's offices or hospital settings.

- **Geriatric nurse:** Geriatric nurses

figure to be in especially high demand in the coming years, as an analysis from the Bipartisan Policy Center indicates more than four million individuals in the United States will turn 65 in 2024. AARP has characterized that surge in the over-65 population as a "silver tsunami," and geriatric nurses will play pivotal roles in ensuring the aging population gets the care it needs in the decades to come.

- **Family nurse practitioner:** The American Association of Nurse Practitioners notes family nurse practitioners (FNPs) provide a wide range of family-focused health care services to patients of all ages. FNPs perform physical exams; order or perform diagnostic tests; prescribe medications; develop treatment plans; and treat acute and chronic illnesses. If that sounds like a role played by physicians, it's not far off, making this among the most challenging jobs within the nursing profession.

- **Emergency room nurse:** Individuals who think a fast-paced work environment is for them may want to consider a career as an emergency room nurse. ER nurses treat patients of all ages from all walks of life. No two emergency room patients are the same, so ER nurses will rarely, if ever, have the same day on the job more than once. Accurate assessment skills are vital for ER nurses, who also must be skilled communicators, as emergency room patients are often in distress.

Nursing is an expansive profession with a host of opportunities for aspiring professionals who want to work in the medical community.

Nursing

Continued from 18

the NCLEX-PN licensing exam. Registered nurses will need two to four years of schooling and are expected to earn an associate's degree or bachelor's degree. Aspiring RNs also will need a passing grade on the NCLEX-RN licensing exam. Most nurses will have to complete clinicals to showcase skills in real life situations.

Flexibility: Nurses need to be adaptable and flexible. Shifts may not be consistent and the demands of the job may differ from day to day, even though there may be some overlap. If challenging new experiences come easy to you or if you have the flexibility to work different shifts rather than a set schedule, then nursing could be a good option.

Problem-solver and critical thinker: Although nurses are part of a larger health care team and may need to leave certain decisions to physicians, there are plenty of critical decisions and think-on-your-

feet actions that may need to be taken to ensure patient health. It is essential for nurses to keep their emotions in check so they can think clearly in stressful situations.

Good communicator: Nurses must be able to speak and interact with doctors and others in a clinical setting, but also communicate effectively with patients who may not fully understand all of the medical jargon nor what is happening to them. Nursing requires social skills and an ability to pivot between many different roles — all the while adjusting communication tactics depending on the audience.

Organized and diligent: There isn't too much room for mistakes in health care, which means nurses will need to maintain their attention to detail; otherwise, they could subject patients to injury or even death.

In addition to these traits, good nurses should have compassion for patients. A desire to help others during difficult times compels many people to become a nurse.

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Charcuterie workshop presents unique Mother's Day option

By Anthony Richards

There are several unique things to celebrate Mother's Day this year, as people are always looking for unique ideas to spend time with mom.

One of these unique ways will take place on May 9 as Char Above The Bar will host its second annual Mother's Day charcuterie workshop.

Char Above The Bar is located in Jacksonville Beach, but they are inviting anyone in the surrounding area to join the fun and are holding the event that will be held at the Palm Valley Barn located at 531 Wilderness Trail in Ponte Vedra.

The event will be held May 9 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. It is the second time for the event, which was held for the first time last year and was a success and is therefore back again this year.

It is perfect for large or small groups and is not only a way to display one's creative side, but it



Photo courtesy of Char Above The Bar

Char Above The Bar will host its second annual Mother's Day charcuterie workshop on May 9.

also introduces a delicious side of things that adds a tasteful twist that anyone can find something to enjoy about it.

Charcuterie boards are a popular way to add to parties and other events and the class will go over some of the various forms and techniques that can be used in the decorative process.

The class will not only include insight into the world of charcuterie but also light hors d'oeuvres, wine and champagne upon arrival for all those in attendance, and attendees will go home with a charcuterie tray to remember the night that was.

Tickets for the event are \$75 and can be purchased up to the event, although space is limited so reserving tickets early is recommended.

Char Above The Bar specializes not just in charcuterie boards but also grazing tables and boxes that can be customized for any occasion.

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Restaurants announce Mother's Day brunches

The Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort and Spa and 1912 Ocean Bar & Rooftop have announced their menus for Mother's Day brunch.

Vernon's First Coast Kitchen & Bar

Mother's Day brunch will be from 11:15 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. at Vernon's First Coast Kitchen at Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort and Spa. This farm-to-table restaurant offers scenic resort views and is the perfect setting to treat mom. Reservations

can be made at opentable.com/vernons-restaurant and are \$85 per adult and \$35 per child, with complimentary parking via validation. Note that the restaurant will be open for brunch service only this date.

Highlights include:

- Seafood Station including crab and jumbo shrimp; chilled mussels salpicon; oysters
- Spicy coconut seafood bisque with sherry cream, herbed pane carasau

- Olive oil poached halibut with von-gole sauce
- Monkey bread with vanilla and maple glaze, berries
- Omelette station with prime rib, mashed potatoes, gremolata; beef au jus
- Coffee torte with white chocolate, fresh raspberries
- Drunken peaches with oatmeal and pistachios cake

Sunday Brunch at 1912 Ocean Bar & Rooftop

On Mother's Day, 1912 Ocean Bar & Rooftop will offer its traditional Sunday brunch menu during its brunch hours, 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. 1912 offers upscale ambiance and sweeping views of the Atlantic Ocean making for an unforgettable Mother's Day setting. Reservations can be made at 1912OceanBarAndRooftop.com, with complimentary parking via validation.

Menu highlights include:

- 1912 Benedict – Citrus hollandaise, poached eggs, glass bread, rosemary jamon, artisan greens salad
- Mochi pancakes with chocolate hazelnut spread, brûléed bananas, crushed hazelnuts and chantilly
- Tortilla de Patatas – Spanish-style frittata with potatoes, manchego, artisan greens salad
- Citrus-poached peel-and-eat shrimp with cocktail sauce and datil aioli
- Adobo braised chicken with garlic oil toasted brioche, fried egg and fingerling potatoes
- Avocado Tartine – Artisan sourdough, sofrito avocado mash, poached eggs, compressed tomatoes, artisan greens salad
- Ricotta orange pound cake served with prosecco-macerated strawberries and whipped mascarpone



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Gifts of tea for Mother's Day come in many variations

For thousands of years, tea has been steeped in tradition and ritual. But it's no longer your grandma's high tea – one-note tea bags poured quietly in a dark drawing room. Tea is having its moment. Hot, sun-brewed, iced, sweet or enjoyed as is, this antioxidant powerhouse has evolved into an indulgent self-care moment designed to be savored.

This Mother's Day, The Spice and Tea Exchange is offering teas that energize, soothe and feel like a warm hug in a mug. The Spice & Tea Exchange is a purveyor of hand-blended artisanal teas, sustainably sourced from the world's finest growers, as well as infused sugars, honey, tea and gift sets, candles and more.

In addition to their core offerings, St. Augustine-based Spice and Tea Exchange features four new and one returning seasonal teas and sugars that are Not Your Grandma's High Tea, each thoughtfully designed to express the true flavor of the featured tea leaves and botanicals:

- **Dragon Fruit Fusion Herbal Tea:** This vibrant herbal blend combines the exotic flavors of pink dragon fruit, hibiscus and pineapple with accents of citrus, berry and apple. Refreshing and fruity.

- **Wild Berry Black-White Tea:** The robust and assertive qualities of black tea



Contributed photo

are calmed by the delicate, soft nuances of white tea leaves and married with deep cranberry, elderberry and blueberry. Accented by rosehip, hibiscus and amaranth. Rich and juicy.

- **ROYGBIV Green Tea:** A colorful blend featuring a base of jasmine green tea scattered with butterfly pea flowers, hibiscus, rose and chamomile blooms and scented with orange, lemongrass, apple and strawberry. A sweet and zesty tropical punch that brews anywhere from fuchsia to violet.

- **Dragon Fruit Sugar:** Fine sugar crystals are infused with exotic dragon fruit, producing a sweet and vibrant creation, perfect for pairing with fruit teas, rimming cocktail glasses and sprinkling on baked goods.

- **ROYGBIV Sugar:** Inspired by ROYGBIV Tea, pineapple, passion fruit, orange, apple and jasmine are blended with sugar and ube powder to create a stunning violet-hued sweetener. Use it to sweeten green teas, infuse liquors and cocktails and create a wow factor worthy of your IG feed.

Explore the full array of spices, blends, teas and sweeteners available through The Spice & Tea Exchange's online shop and almost 100 stores. Go to spiceandtea.com.

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St. Augustine Sailing offers high tea adventure

St. Augustine Sailing's newest offering is a true creation from the heart. Inspired by precious family heirlooms, High Tea Adventure – A Legacy of Love offers an enchanting mother-daughter experience like no other.

Elegance meets adventure on a truly unique sail, with departures available daily at 1 p.m. and again at 3:30 p.m. St. Augustine Sailing offers various luxury sailing experiences from their home port at the Camachee Cove Yacht Harbor Marina, 3076 Harbor Drive, St. Augustine.

"This sail holds a very special place in my heart," said Rose Ann Points, owner and captain at St. Augustine Sailing. "Both my grandmother and mother were drawn to the ritual of tea, collecting teapots, which I have now started to collect. I lost my mother, Doralee, five years ago, and I wanted to do something memorable as a tribute to her. We've combined my love of the sea with her love of high tea, and I think she would have adored it!"

The High Tea Adventure sets sail on St. Augustine Sailing's luxury Lagoon 40-foot catamaran, Wind Dancer. This multihull sailboat is ideal for a tea party – stable yet well-appointed. Guests are encouraged

to come dressed in their finest hats, gloves, costume jewelry and whimsical accessories. The crew will serve a traditional high tea: freshly baked scones, delicate finger sandwiches and decadent pastries paired with a selection of fine teas to sip and savor.

While guests enjoy the spread, the captain will guide the yacht toward St. Augustine's picturesque bayfront, pointing out historic landmarks and keeping an eye out for dolphins, turtles and other wildlife. Upon returning to the dock, each guest receives a special commemorative gift box containing a beautifully packaged teacup, saucer, stirring spoon and embroidered cloth napkin – a lasting memento of a high seas high tea adventure.

The two-hour excursion can accommodate up to 10 guests. To book the High Tea Adventure – A Legacy of Love cruise, go to sta-sail.com/high-tea-adventure.

"This sail offered me the chance to reflect on the laughter, love, and cherished memories I shared with my mother," said Points. "My hope is that generations can come together on our yachts and create their own memories that they can treasure for years to come."



Photo by Derk Burkin Photography







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DONNA Foundation celebrates moms with matching gift challenge, 5K

The DONNA Foundation has announced a matching gift challenge supporting fundraising efforts for its annual Celebrate Every Mom campaign.

Golf Fights Cancer, whose mission is to raise funds to make tangible improvements in the cancer-care experience for patients and their families, has pledged \$20,000 to match donations during the foundation's annual spring campaign. The pinnacle event, the ICE DONNA Mother's Day 5K, will be held on Saturday, May 11, in Jacksonville's Riverside neighborhood.

The event will start and finish at Friday Musicale, located at 645 Oak St.

Funds raised through the ICE DONNA Mother's Day 5K and the foundation's Celebrate Every Mom Fundraising Campaign will support The DONNA Foundation's mission to provide economic assistance and emotional support to individuals living with breast cancer and fund groundbreaking breast cancer research.

Approximately one in three patients served by The DONNA Foundation are mothers with children at home. By

hosting this event on the Saturday of Mother's Day weekend, foundation leaders hope to inspire moms everywhere to take steps toward understanding, improving and protecting their breast health — this and every year.

"Moms make the world go round, and we are so proud to honor moms everywhere through our annual DONNA Mother's Day race," said Amanda Napolitano, executive director of The DONNA Foundation. "Supporting moms, especially those undergoing breast cancer treatment, is a special honor and we look forward to welcoming every mom, their families, friends and supporters back to Riverside this Mother's Day weekend. The impact we can make, thanks to our partnership with Golf Fights Cancer, is truly humbling, and we are so grateful for their ongoing support. This generous fundraising match campaign will allow us to serve even more families living with breast cancer."

The Mother's Day race will begin and end at Friday Musicale, starting at 8 a.m. Along the way, participants will

experience the beauty of the Historic Riverside neighborhood, including the iconic architecture and gardens at the height of the spring blooming season. The DONNA Foundation also welcomes back ICE, formerly Black Knight, as the Title Sponsor of the 5K race.

"We are honored to once again sponsor the DONNA Mother's Day 5K," said Cheryl Kelly, DONNA Foundation board member and senior director of human resources at ICE. "Far too many of our ICE colleagues and extended family have had to face down breast cancer, and we know the toll it takes on everyone involved. Hundreds will gather to take part in the DONNA Mother's Day 5K, and every step taken will help fund the important work of serving patients and finding a cure for this terrible disease. We couldn't be more proud to support the DONNA Foundation in this goal."

During the days leading up to Mother's Day, The DONNA Foundation is celebrating moms locally and across the nation through its Celebrate Every Mom campaign. Supporters can join in this effort by:

- Registering to run or walk in the ICE DONNA Mother's Day 5K. Runners can choose to run in person or virtually their way, with time submissions open through Sunday, May 12, at 11:59 p.m. Register at runsignup.com/donnamd5k.

- Supporting the "Celebrate Every Mom" matching gift challenge by making a donation in support of the critical programs of The DONNA Foundation, starting a fundraiser or joining an existing fundraising team. Don't forget — you can double the impact of your gift

this month with the Golf Fights Cancer match. Give or raise funds at runsignup.com/donnamd5k/donate.

- Partnering with The DONNA Foundation to become a sponsor of the 2024 ICE DONNA Mother's Day 5K event. Sponsor and vendor opportunities designed to maximize brand exposure locally, regionally and nationwide to a unique, and desirable demographic are available. Companies can also sponsor race registrations for employees. Learn more at runsignup.com/Race/DONNAMD5K/Page/sponsor.

- Celebrating all month with your participation in various events and third-party fundraisers, all dedicated to supporting The DONNA Foundation's mission. Link to thedonnafoundation.org/events.

- Making an appointment for your mammogram on the Buddy Bus. Take advantage of the Baptist MD Anderson's Mobile mammography "Buddy Bus" — available for mammography appointments in Athlete's Village on race day. Learn more and book your appointment at app.smartsheet.com/b/form/12189030f2f345d38134b8ea1309dc72.

The ICE DONNA Mother's Day 5K is the second event of The DONNA Foundation's 2024 Fearless Series, with the final event of the year, the DONNA 5K at TPC Sawgrass, taking place in October. Registration will open later this spring.

Full details for The DONNA Foundation's 2025 Series, including the 18th Annual DONNA Marathon Weekend (Jan. 31-Feb. 2), will be announced later this year.



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A rendering of the fire station at Rivertown and Beachwalk.

St. Johns County announces five-year public safety plan

At the April 16 St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners meeting, a new five-year public safety plan was presented. It includes four new public safety stations, a new regional fire training center, a new medical examiner facility and a sheriff's headquarters expansion. Considering previous public safety capital projects since 2020, the county will have a 10-year infrastructure investment plan estimated to be more than \$100 million from 2020 to 2029.

Additionally, vital public safety initiatives including a Firefighter Safety & Wellness program will be expanded, providing firefighters additional bunker gear and new uniforms to meet NFPA safety standards. Additional funding will also be allocated to expand vital mental health and wellness programming for first responders recently launched by Fire Rescue and the Sheriff's Office.

The board authorized the county administrator to move forward with the public safety plan and assemble a county financing team to present a financing package to the commission under a subsequent agenda item as well as the use of up to \$800,000 from Fire/EMS Impact Fee Fund toward the design of the first two fire stations.

"It's crucial for our community to understand that not a single penny of property tax from our residents will be utilized to cover the construction costs of these new

public safety facilities," said County Administrator Joy Andrews. "To ensure fiscal responsibility, an estimated bond of \$44.1 million to \$49.1 million will be serviced solely using impact fees collected from developers and recurring state remitted revenue. Through proactive collaboration with our state legislative delegations and a successful strategy of leveraging state and federal funds, we've secured \$26.7 million in state appropriations to offset construction costs associated with this plan. Leveraging the county's impressive credit rating with Moody's Aaa and S&P AA+ further strengthens our ability to execute this essential public safety infrastructure plan."

Since 2020 the board's investment in Fire Rescue capital needs exceeds \$53 million. Beginning in 2025, Facilities Management will oversee a three-year, \$9 million program, to renovate and upgrade existing fire stations by the end of 2027.

Fire Stations approved as part of the public safety plan include:

- Fire Station 21 will be located in the Flagler Estates region and is estimated to be complete by the end of 2025.
- Fire Station 22 will be located in Silverleaf region and is estimated to be complete by the end of 2026 or early 2027.
- Fire Station 23 will be located in Beachwalk/Twin Creeks region and is estimated to be complete by the end of 2028.
- Fire Station 24 will be located in Long-Leaf Pine/Roberts Road and is esti-

ated to be complete by end of 2030.

Each new fire station will include a Sheriff's Office substation.

In addition to the expansion of fire stations, the county is also aggressively pursuing an improved countywide ISO rating through prioritized investments in public safety. This includes a water sourcing initiative, which will provide water supply to areas currently without fire hydrants by adding two additional staffed tanker apparatus at strategic locations in the county.

In response to Commissioner Christian Whitehurst's question regarding the impact of these stations on the residents, the St. Johns County Geographic Information System division has reported that the newly proposed four fire and sheriff stations, to be established within the next six years, will indeed have a significant impact on the residents. These stations are expected to provide enhanced public safety services to an estimated total of 46,738 homes. Moreover, a portion of these residents may see a potential savings on their property insurance premiums as a result of this strategic investment, with the goal of positively impacting the county's ISO rating.

Specifically, the breakdown of residential impact is as follows:

- The new Flagler Estates fire and sheriff station will directly serve 2,366 homes.
- The Central Regional Fire and Sheriff Station will improve services to 12,371

homes in the Silverleaf region.

- The newly proposed Beachwalk station will improve services to 15,435 homes.
- Lastly, the Rivertown station is projected to improve services for 16,565 homes.

"The goal is to provide opportunities for insurance cost savings for residential and commercial property owners based on their insurance carrier's use of ISO ratings to set coverage rates," said Andrews.

Other details of the five-year plan include:

- The Regional Training Facility. It will include a unified command center, classrooms, field training infrastructure and a bay for various public safety equipment and apparatus.
- The Tri-County Medical Examiner Facility. It will serve the communities of Flagler, Putnam and St. Johns, will help relocate the current facility out of a flood zone and the operating costs will be shared with Flagler and Putnam counties. It is estimated to be completed by the end of 2027.
- The expansion of the Sheriff's Headquarters. It will relocate the current headquarters from a flood zone and active railroad, as well as address current and future growth needs. The new location will be at State Road 16 and Interstate 95, and is estimated to be completed by the end of 2027.

Mausoleum honors unborn children, comforts families

By Jessica Larson

Amidst the gentle breeze of a cool April afternoon, Bishop Erik Pohlmeier stood alongside families and donors, their hearts united in purpose at San Lorenzo Catholic Cemetery in St. Augustine. Their mission held deep significance: to preside over a Mass and blessing for the newly erected Precious Ones Mausoleum. Beyond its marble walls lies more than just a monument; it stands as a sacred haven, a sanctuary where the memories of the unborn, the stillborn and infants, who departed this world way too early, are cherished and honored.

During the homily, Pohlmeier paid tribute to families and children who were lost in the womb, recognizing their grief as legitimate and in need of consolation. He spoke about the love of God and how it is embodied in the creation of a new life.

“When a child is conceived, an act of love has brought that child into existence,” he said. “Love of neighbor is a commitment, as a church, to witness to the reality of God as love.”

Thus, loving one’s neighbor means providing a place to console those who grieve.

“This place [mausoleum] stands as a reminder that a child in those earliest moments is worth this kind of tribute and worth this kind of dignity,” said Pohlmeier.

Lance and Juliana Vodicka and their four children, Elijah, Anna, Lily and Joseph, were among the families present at the ceremony. Last month, Julianna Vodicka delivered the couple’s miscarried daughter, Clara Faustina, who will be one of the first children laid to rest in the mausoleum.

Lance Vodicka recounted his experience of holding his daughter’s delicate remains.

“The nurses turned to us and placed in the palm of my hand our gestational 14-week-old daughter,” he said. “I was so grateful to see her beautiful face on this side of heaven, and to see where her soul resided until she went home to the Lord.”

He said the mausoleum would provide a dignified resting place for Clara Faustina and other children like her.

The mausoleum consists of 12 tombs, each marked with a saint’s name to include Augustine, Monica, Joseph, Anne, John Paul II, Teresa of Calcutta, Katharine Drexel, Gianna Molla, Padre Pio and Blesseds Carlos Acutis and Hermann who were identified for their affection for children.

The mausoleum was made possible by donors who contributed \$250,000 to its construction.



Contributed photos

Diocese of St. Augustine Bishop Erik Pohlmeier blesses Precious Ones Mausoleum.



The Precious Ones Mausoleum.

After the Mass, the bishop and the Vodicka family stood before the chamber named for St. Augustine to take a picture where their daughter, Clara Faustina, will be laid to rest. Interment will happen once the space can be filled. Until then, Clara Faustina will remain in the care of a local funeral home.

Maureen Shilkunas, director of the Human Life and Dignity office and coordinator of the event, expressed deep compassion for each family who has suffered the loss of a child. She explained that parents often do not know what to do after the loss of a child and that she is there to help them. She emphasized that every human

deserves a dignified resting place, and the Diocese of St. Augustine is committed to providing that for families who have lost a child.

Education is vital, explained Shilkunas. She said the state of Florida declared that children born aged 20 weeks of gestational growth and older are given a death certificate and taken to a funeral home. However, for younger babies, each hospital has different procedures.

Shilkunas said, “I am here to help you. You can take your child home from the hospital. We believe every human deserves a dignified resting place like the Precious Ones Mausoleum.”

The mausoleum stands as a testament to the Diocese of St. Augustine’s unwavering commitment to upholding the dignity of all human life. Participation is open to all families, regardless of their religious affiliation. Families entombing a child in the Precious Ones Mausoleum do not incur any costs. The child’s name will be preserved in the cemetery records, and families can purchase unique items such as pavers, benches and archways as meaningful memorials.

“Our prayer is that each person that comes here in the future will begin that journey of love of God and love of neighbor and will follow the Lord to a more profound understanding that helps shape our world according to the love of God,” said Pohlmeier.

The Precious Ones program is a comprehensive program with five pillars. It was initiated by May Oliver, the former director of the Human Life and Dignity office. The program began with the Mass of the Precious Ones, which is celebrated twice a year to honor the children who have passed away. This Mass allows the community, families and friends to remember them through prayer.

The second pillar is advocacy. Father Leonard Chuwa, a bioethicist, health care chaplain and pastor, played a significant role in advocating for the Catholic Church’s teachings on the proper care of the deceased.

The program’s third step launched a capital campaign to construct a mausoleum.

The next pillar, the Red Bird Ministries, is a grief support group established to assist people in transitioning from grief to healing.

Finally, the fifth pillar of the Precious Ones program is educating individuals about the importance of providing a proper burial for every human life. The church considers burial for the deceased a corporal work of mercy, reinforcing the belief that every human deserves a dignified resting place.

Churchmen Meet



Contributed photo

The Churchmen held their April luncheon at Marsh Landing. Pictured at the meeting, from left, are Chairman John Ekdahl; guest speaker Marty Evans, admiral USN retired; Vice Chair Rich Reilly; and Treasurer Peter Karpen.

Citizens Academy taking applications

St. Johns County will launch a new citizens academy called SJC 101. The program invites citizens to participate in activities and presentations to learn more about county government. Citizens can register at sjcfl.us/sjc101. The first 20 registrations will be invited to be a part of a four-class pilot program in 2024 that will begin May 23 and have the opportunity to be included in the inaugural academy in 2025. For more information, contact the St. Johns County Office of Public Affairs at sjcpublicaffairs@sjcfl.us or 904-209-0559.

SJC 101 is another supporting element of county administration's new Charting Performance: A Framework for Open Governance and Efficiency. The Office of Public Affairs is developing SJC 101. After the completion of the four-class pilot program, there are plans to expand SJC 101 to a larger academy in 2025.

An SJC 101 pilot program will consist of a series of four classes:

- May 23, 6 to 9 p.m., St. Johns County Public Works Department
- May 30, 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. or 2 to 3 p.m., St. Johns County Emergency Management Department
- June 6, 12 to 3 p.m., St. Johns County Fire Rescue Department
- June 20, 12 to 3 p.m., St. Johns County Utility Department

The goals of SJC 101 are to provide participants with a comprehensive understanding of county departments, get citizen feedback on county operations, build social engagement with participants and develop new leadership to serve on county advisory boards or other roles within the St. Johns County community.

The SJC 101 pilot program will be limited to the first 20 eligible applicants. Subsequent applicants will be placed on a waiting list for future SJC 101 academy dates. Following the pilot program, a comprehensive SJC 101 academy will be offered in 2025.

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Major sculpture created in Mandarin

Harriet Beecher Stowe subject of work

By Shaun Ryan A beautiful work of art is taking shape in Mandarin... and the public will have an opportunity to view and to witness the artist in action...

Post 129 sent pair to nationals as part of memorable year

By Anthony Richards Sending representatives both to Boys Nation and Girls Nation from the same area of a state is very unusual, but it is an honor to have them both come from the same American Legion post.

For both, the opportunity to take part in activities was an honor and something they will always cherish, and they shared their experiences and journeys to this point during Post 129's meeting on Feb. 1. For see the exciting story you getting to...

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www.PonteVedraRecorder.com

Extract Juicery opens in St. Johns

By Shaun Ryan

After Kevin Walker saw a television documentary on adopting a healthier lifestyle, he decided to try undergoing a cleanse, relying primarily on juices.

A year in, he was so impressed with the results that he bought a juicer. Before long, he realized there might be others who would want to do the same but who might not have time to do their own juicing.

That's how Extract Juicery was born. Walker, with wife Tammy, opened their first shop in Wheaton, Illinois, then a second in St.

Charles, Illinois. A third, in Edina, Minnesota, was soon added.

Now, Extract Juicery has opened its fourth location at 104 Ashourian Ave. Suite 103 in St. Johns.

"We're very excited to bring our products to this area," Walker said. "We do juices, smoothies, açai bowls, toasts, wraps, sandwiches, salads."

The products are 100% organic and made in-house. The juicing is performed daily, in-house, on cold-press machinery.

The shop is independently owned and operated — not a franchise.

"We've learned and continue to learn and continue to evolve and grow, so we can become the best we can to serve our customers the best way possible," Walker said.

The shop had a soft opening and then, on Friday, April 26, held its grand opening and a ribbon cutting ceremony with the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce.

"The St. Johns area is such a nice community," Walker said. "People were super-welcoming. People were super-friendly and very supportive for our business."

To learn more about Extract Juicery, go to extractjuicery.com.



Photo by Shaun Ryan

Extract Juicery owner Kevin Walker is seen inside his new shop.

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Tourism, hospitality employee awards announced

The St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches Visitors and Convention Bureau recently recognized the finalists in the 2023 St. Johns County's Tourism and Hospitality Employee of the Year awards. Each winner was recognized at his or her place of business in a celebration with their co-workers.

Susan Phillips, president and CEO of the St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches Visitors and Convention Bureau (VCB), and Jason Kerns, general manager, Embassy Suites Oceanfront Resort at St. Augustine Beach and chairman of the board of the VCB, presented the top awards in five categories: retail, attractions, government, accommodations and restaurants with individuals nominated for their service in St. Johns County largest industry: tourism and hospitality.

The winners for each category are:

- Lodging: Ashley Marshall, housekeeper, Courtyard by Marriott, I-95
- Attractions: Helen Loh, tour/retail associate, St Augustine Distillery
- Retail: Jessica Mootz, director of retail, Ponte Vedra Inn & Club
- Government: Joyce Kean, information host, City of St. Augustine

• Restaurant: Scott Dailey, general manager, Outer Banks Boil Company

"Each one of the nominees for the top recognition as Tourism Employee of the Year is very deserving," said Kerns. "All of the hospitality workers on Florida's Historic Coast are what makes this one of the best Florida destinations, and the VCB is pleased to honor and recognize these stand-out individuals for their hard work and dedication."

The additional hospitality workers nominated for the recognition are:

Ariel Brestin, tour guide/dummer camp coordinator, Colonial Quarter; Betsy Speer, retail assistant manager, St. Augustine Pirate & Treasure Museum; Charlyne Biggs, concierge, Casa Monica Resort & Spa; Corry Connors, retail manager, Whetstone Chocolates;

Darrell Bordley, restaurant supervisor, Embassy Suites St. Augustine Beach Oceanfront Resort; Diana Tucker, banquet supervisor; Renaissance St Augustine Historic Downtown Hotel; Elizabeth Dunn, sales associate, St. Augustine Pirate & Treasure Museum; Ellie Rose Schultze, executive chef, Chez L'Amour; Elvin Pearce Yarbrough, server, Columbia

Restaurant;

Emanuel Shockley, interpreter, Fountain of Youth Archeological Park; Grayson Stuber, tour guide, After Dark Investigations; Gretchen Willingham, manager/bartender, Raintree Restaurant; Heather Benzal, wedding sales manager, Embassy Suites St. Augustine Beach Oceanfront Resort; Joseph Higgins, head tour guide, Whetstone Chocolates;

Julian Payne, line cook, St. Augustine Seafood Company; Kory Crockett, front office manager, Holiday Inn Express St. Augustine Vilano Beach; Laura Morey, corporate tour manager, The Tasting Tours, LLC; Margaret Gomez, vice president, St. Augustine Wild Reserve;

Mel DeLoach, beverage manager/bartender, Bull & Crown Publick House; Miles Henley, visitor services associate, Lightner Museum; Shirley Mitri, front desk supervisor, Courtyard by Marriott St. Augustine; Sunny Stephens, banquet manager, Embassy Suites St. Augustine Beach Oceanfront Resort; Taneisha Johnson, supervisor in housekeeping, Embassy Suites St. Augustine Beach Oceanfront Resort;

Tara Galvin, sales & executive admin, Casa Monica Resort & Spa; Terran

McGinnis, facility historian/ manager of community development/social media coordinator, Marineland Dolphin Adventure; Terry Livingston, night auditor; Double-Tree St. Augustine;

Tory Byerly, food & beverage manager, Embassy Suites St. Augustine Beach Oceanfront Resort; Toste Muniz, office manager, St Augustine Sailing; Vera Brown, COO, City Gate Spirits; and Yisel Oliveira Mora, housekeeping supervisor, Hyatt Place St. Augustine/Vilano Beach.

Tourism is the largest industry in St. Johns County and supports more than 33,000 tourism-related jobs.

Florida's Historic Coast includes historic St. Augustine, the outstanding golf and seaside elegance of Ponte Vedra, the rural beauty of Hastings, Elkton, St. Johns, and 42 miles of pristine Atlantic beaches. Visitor Information Centers are located at 10 Castillo Drive, St. Augustine; 200 Solana Road Suite B, Ponte Vedra Beach; and at the St. Johns County Beach Pier Park, 350 A1A Beach Blvd., St. Augustine Beach.

For advance travel information, call 800-653-2489 or go to the Visitors and Convention Bureau website at FloridasHistoricCoast.com.

Benchmarks of Success

A look at major career developments in the area

Ascension St. Vincent's names hospital CEOs

Ascension St. Vincent's has named two new leaders for its hospitals in Northeast Florida. Kevin Rinks has been named president and CEO of St. Vincent's Southside, and Bryan Walrath has been



Kevin Rinks

named president and CEO of St. Vincent's Clay County.

Rinks and Walrath will oversee day-to-day operations at their hospitals, leading their teams in providing compassionate,

personalized patient care. Both will also focus on advancing patient access to



Bryan Walrath

specialty care in the region, bolstering the quality of the patient and associate experience at each hospital and strengthening ties with stakeholders in each community.

Rinks is a seasoned health care leader with more than two decades of leadership experience. He

previously served as president and CEO of St. Vincent's Clay County, a position he held since November 2020. He received a bachelor's degree in business administration, finance and economics from the University of Tennessee at Martin and a master's degree in health services administration from Strayer University.

Walrath is an experienced health care

BENCHMARKS continues on Page 31



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GUEST COLUMN

How to manage cash vs. borrowing when interest rates rise

Written by/for Wells Fargo Advisors

We all use credit in our daily lives, whether it's to help optimize cash flow, create tax efficiencies, or make purchases. A rising-interest-rate environment could be a good time to take a closer look at liquidity strategies and other forms of borrowing.

Using cash versus borrowing

It could make sense to pay cash instead of borrowing in some instances. Let's say you have a fair amount of cash and are not planning to invest it in the market. That could be a good solution for buying a car or a house, paying for a child's education, or expanding a business.

Amid higher interest rates, paying cash could be a better option than securing a long-term loan to buy a costly item.

"Increased rates may also impact purchasing power for bigger-ticket items (such as homes, boats and airplanes) traditionally financed over longer periods," says Brian Singsank, senior lead wealth custom lending specialist, Wells Fargo Wealth & Investment Management. "It's important to evaluate your balance sheet and wealth plan to make sure they are aligned to help meet upcoming liquidity needs."

Also, if you have an existing variable-



Jamie L. Seim, Matthew D. Guevara, Evonne T. Heykens and Stephen T. Foody

rate loan, such as an adjustable-rate mortgage or line of credit, that rate could go up, resulting in higher interest costs.

"If it's still a long-term funding need, when interest rates are rising could be the time to evaluate," Singsank says.

Whatever you decide, timing can be critical. Your investment planners can help you decide on what is best for your current situation.

Discuss credit and liquidity needs with your advisers

"Be proactive when interest rates

change," says Singsank. "Consider reviewing your wealth plan and related credit and liquidity needs with your banker, adviser, your CPA and even an estate-planning specialist."

Singsank recommends starting those conversations by sharing your answers to these basic questions:

1. How much in assets would you be willing to liquidate and why?
2. Are you debt-averse?
3. Would you consider alternatives to liquidating your current cash reserves in order to meet your financial needs?
4. Based on your balance-sheet lever-

age, what is your exposure to rising interest rates?

5. Are you comfortable with the amount you're paying or may have to pay to service your variable interest payments in a rising-rate environment?

6. As part of working toward your financial goals, do you anticipate upcoming borrowing or liquidity needs?

"Once you've answered these questions," says Singsank, "you should better understand whether you need to make changes to your wealth plan, including liquidity and other borrowing strategies, to help meet your financial goals."

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Gulani Vision Institute celebrates 20th anniversary

Gulani Vision Institute is marking its 20th anniversary, a significant milestone with a world record in medical tourism. Under the leadership of Dr. Arun Gu-

lani, the institute has become a global beacon for advanced eye surgery, having consulted patients from more than 100 countries.

More than 30 patients have traveled recently from around the world and across the country to participate in a group photograph to celebrate their successful treatments before travelling back home. Such everyday accomplishments and patient journeys not only highlights the institute's impact on their lives but also its pivotal role in placing Jacksonville on the map as a premier destination for eye surgery.

Gulani, the founding director, has spent more than 30 years at the forefront of ophthalmology, pioneering innovative surgical techniques, crafting award-winning inventions and authoring influential textbooks and articles. His efforts have drawn patients globally, contributing significantly to the field and to medical tourism on the First Coast.

Among the patients in this year's gathering are Joel, who traveled from Australia and regained his vision after 25



years thanks to Gulani's expertise. Joel also received treatment for a severely disfigured and red eye. Another patient, Robert from London, sought Gulani's help to correct complications from a previous Lasik surgery. Patients from across the United States have also sought out Gulani's patented surgical techniques, including LaZrPlastique for Lasik enhancement, LenzOplastique for advanced cataract surgery, and Corneoplastique for corneal repairs, all of which were developed at Gulani Vision Institute.

Gulani Vision Institute is located at 8075 Gate Parkway West, Suite 102, Jacksonville. For further information, go to gulanivision.com.

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Benchmarks

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leader with more than 25 years of leadership experience, including more than 20 years of military service, leading operations for multiple medical facilities of the U.S. Army. He previously served as president and CEO of Sacred Heart Emerald Coast, St. Vincent's sister health system, a position he held since July 2022. He received a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering from Georgia Institute of Technology and master's degrees in building construction and architectural engineering, also from Georgia Tech.



Cory Nye

Nye earns Certified Military Financial Advisor designation

Cory Nye, a financial advisor with Ameriprise Financial Services LLC in Ponte Vedra Beach, recently

obtained the Certified Military Financial Advisor (CMFA) designation. Ameriprise Financial partnered with Dalton Education to create the designation, which equips financial advisers with knowledge and expertise to help military members maximize resources and achieve their financial goals with confidence.

Nye successfully completed the CMFA requirements that include more than 40 hours of training and learning development modules, which provide advisers a deep understanding of the unique life circumstances and the benefits available to veterans, active duty, reserve, National Guard and their families.

Nye graduated from Wilmington University with a degree in business management. He has 12 years of experience in the financial services industry.

For more information, contact Nye at 904-830-5318 or go to ameripriseadvisors.com/cory.nye.

Johnson named director of workplace services at OE&S

Office Environments & Services



Melanie Johnson

(OE&S), a full-service workplace furniture and architectural products dealership, has announced the promotion of Melanie Johnson as director of workplace services. In her new

role, Johnson will provide leadership and oversight to the designers, project coordinators and account management teams that make up OE&S's Workplace Services Department.

Johnson has more than two decades of experience with OE&S, most recently serving as a designer and project manager. She has a strong understanding of office furniture, architectural products, space planning and interior design for corporate and commercial spaces.

Johnson enjoys working with clients and internal project teams to deliver a visually engaging and functional workspace that achieves the client's business goals.

She earned a bachelor's degree in Interior Design from Florida State University.

For more information about OE&S, go to Officeimagesinc.com/oes-jacksonville.



Chris Rusnak

Rusnak promoted at GreenPointe Holdings

GreenPointe Holdings, a diversified real estate company that specializes in creating high-value residential and mixed-use

communities throughout Florida, has announced the promotion of Chris Rusnak to chief accounting officer.

In his new expanded role, Rusnak will focus on the expansion and development of capital partner relations and overall corporate financial monitoring and analysis while continuing to direct all accounting and finance operations.

A licensed real estate professional and CPA, Rusnak has served as GreenPointe's vice president, accounting &

investor relations since 2020. He joined GreenPointe Holdings as controller in 2014.

Prior to joining GreenPointe, Rusnak held management roles at Regency Centers, the commercial real estate company, and the international accounting firm, KPMG.

An active member of Urban Land Institute North Florida, Rusnak graduated from ULI's Center for Leadership in 2019. He earned a bachelor's degree in accounting from Southeastern Louisiana University.

Stec appointed Nemours Children's, Jacksonville CMO

Nemours Children's Health, Jacksonville recently announced the appointment of Andrew Stec, MD, as vice president, chief medical officer (CMO), effective May 1.

As CMO, Stec will provide oversight of the medical operations and faculty at Nemours Children's Health, Jacksonville. He will also work with clinical and nonclinical leaders and team members across the organization to help maintain the highest levels of safe, quality care for Nemours patients and families.

Stec joined the urology team at Nemours Children's as division chief in September 2019. Previously, he served for five years as the director of pediatric urology at the Medical University of South Carolina. He earned his medical degree at Emory University School of Medicine and completed a residency in urology at Vanderbilt University. He specialized in pediatric urology with a two-year fellowship at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore.

Stec is currently an associate professor of urology at the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine and Science and is active in outcomes research, a branch of public health research that studies the end results of the structure and processes of the health care system on the health and well-being of patients.

Buckley joins NAI Hallmark

NAI Hallmark, the largest locally owned full-service commercial real estate brokerage and property man-



Patrick Buckley

agement firm in Jacksonville, has announced the appointment of Patrick Buckley as senior vice president of brokerage.

Buckley is a career sales professional with more than 18 years' experience as a commercial real estate adviser. In his new role, he will focus on tenant and landlord representation for industrial and office properties.

Buckley began his real estate career in 2003 at Colliers where he was a vice president for seven years. He then joined Richards Barry Joyce & Partners, which was later acquired by Transwestern where he was a senior vice president until the local office was acquired by CBRE in early 2018. In 2019, he joined Avison Young as a senior member, leader and major contributor to the urban leasing team which focused on landlord and tenant advisory work.



Shimi Meir

Meir joins real estate business

Berkshire Hathaway HomeServices Florida Network Realty has announced the addition of experienced real estate professional Shimi Meir

to its team. With more than a decade of experience in the industry, including 34 years of First Coast residency, Meir brings a wealth of expertise and a proven history of success to his new role.

Meir has earned a reputation as a top performer in the real estate market. His commitment to excellence and dedication to client satisfaction have consistently positioned him as a trusted adviser among his clientele.

Meir can be reached at 904-962-1004, Shimi@FloridaNetworkRealty.com and SMeir.FloridaNetworkRealty.com.

— Compiled by Shaun Ryan



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In the Arts

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www.PonteVedraRecorder.com



This year's event had a theme reminiscent of 'Breakfast at Tiffany's.'



The event featured a themed photo area where guests could have their pictures taken.

Photos by Shaun Ryan

Beaches gala an evening of elegance, arts

By Shaun Ryan

The First Coast Cultural Center's fifth annual Beaches, A Celebration of the Arts gala took on an enhanced level of elegance Sunday, April 28, with an Audrey Hepburn/"Breakfast at Tiffany's" theme. Sparkling with faux diamonds, pearls and crystal and featuring Sinatra-era music, the well-attended event took place at the TPC Sawgrass clubhouse.

Guests, dressed to the nines, mingled among the many silent auction items before retiring to the main dining area for dinner.

During the festivities, artists created live works onsite. This year, the event featured ceramic artist Catherine Lynn, painter and charcoal artist Claire Weaver and oil painter Katherine Weaver. Music

was provided in part by violinist Alyssa Albert and Candice Sirak, Sound Designs Music Therapy manager who invited guests to collaborate on short songs.

The keynote speaker was Aundra Wallace, president of JAXUSA Partnership, an economic development agency that oversees efforts in seven Northeast Florida counties. According to Wallace, the agency has helped create more than 133,000 jobs and attract \$12 billion in capital investment to the region.

To that end, according to Wallace, "the arts play a very pivotal role in fostering economic development."

Companies, he said, are drawn to areas where they can find the needed talent. And those individuals tend to gravitate toward places of pronounced culture.

"Regions that invest in arts gain a

competitive edge in attracting and retaining the skilled talent that these companies are looking for," said Wallace. "Creatives are drawn to communities with vibrant cultural scenes where they can find inspiration, collaboration and opportunities for personal and professional growth."

Cultural nonprofits generate \$166 billion annually in economic activity across the nation, supporting 4.6 million jobs and generating \$27.5 billion in government revenue, Wallace said.

"The arts also stimulate tourism," he said. "Cultural institutions, galleries, theaters and festivals draw tourists from near and far, injecting revenue into our local economies and supporting small



Zena Groover won The Art of Giving Award.

GALA continues on Page 33



JAXUSA Partnership President Aundra Wallace, center, shares some thoughts with others at his table.



Allison Reade won the #Gulanism Award.

Gala

Continued from 32

businesses.”

One of the highlights of the annual gala is the awards ceremony. Here’s a look at this year’s nominees and winners:

The Ron & Hilah Autrey Arts Education & Advocacy Award

Winner: Jim Draper, whose art can be seen in hundreds of collections and at the Jacksonville International Airport, Baptist Medical Center and Cowford Chophouse.

Other nominees: Joseph P. Bryant, Ellen Diamond, Allison Reade, Audrey and Jack Romberg, Monica Sevlever and Jessie Shipe

Emerging Artist Award

Winner: Cole Shapiro, whose art has been featured in several local exhibitions. Runner-up: Katherine Weaver

Other nominees: Ella Fullerton, Allison Reade, Milu Rodriguez

#Gulanism Award

This is a new award founded by Dr. Arun Gulani. It goes to a young person who exhibits positivity and is known for consistently sharing affirmations.

Winner: Allison Reade

Other nominees: Dawn Alexander, Brice Schaefer, Cole Shapiro, Katherine Weaver and Baylee Weidner.

The Art of Giving Award

Winner: Zena Groover, known for her community involvement. She was also recognized for making a major donation to the First Coast Cultural Center. Runner-up: Ellen Diamond

Other nominees: Joseph P. Bryant, Loretta Leto, Venezuela Marka Foundation, Audrey and Jack Romberg and In Memory of Cary Hart.



Guests enjoyed an evening at the TPC Sawgrass clubhouse, where the gala was held.



Cole Shapiro won the Emerging Artist Award.



Janet Wilson won the Irene Lazzara’s Beaches, A Celebration of the Arts Award.



Jim Draper won the Ron & Hilah Autrey Arts Education & Advocacy Award.

Community Impact Award (Members’ Choice)

Winner: Joseph P. Bryant. Runner-up: Venezuela Marka Foundation

Other nominees: Ellen Diamond, Chelsea Leonard, Milu Rodriguez and Diana Patterson

Irene Lazzara’s Beaches, A Celebration of the Arts Award

Winner: Janet Wilson

Other nominees: Joseph P. Bryant, Lourdes McGuire, Milu Rodriguez, Allison Reade, Marlene Scheer and Venezuela Marka Foundation

Volunteer of the Year:

Marlene Scheer

Employee of the Year:

Kimberly Sheridan



Photos by Shaun Ryan
Joseph P. Bryant won the Community Impact award.

Contributed photos



The artist is Sharon Luther.



The artist is Linda Kipp.



The artist is Keri Ippolito.

Community Art Project on display at Butterfield

Butterfield Garage Art Gallery recently invited the entire community to exercise their creative chops around the theme “Influences.” This eclectic show allowed anyone in the community to have the opportunity to explore personal interpretations of the theme. Butterfield’s mission is to encourage accessibility and dialogue between artists, patrons and the community within Northeast Florida. This exhibit is an example of that goal. It also kicks off a yearlong celebration of Butterfield Garage’s 25th anniversary.



From beginners to well-known local artists responded, and this upcoming exhibit displays the results from that open call.

All entries will be on display in the gallery during the month of May. The exhibit’s opening reception will take place on Friday, May 3. The King Street gallery is open daily from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., on First Friday until 9 p.m.

Butterfield Garage Art Gallery is located at 137 King St., St. Augustine. For more information, go to butterfieldgarage.com.

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Act II will include Broadway’s best duets and scenes of love and marriage to make for an enjoyable evening of laughter and song.

This production features ACT alums Jason Whitfield, Anna Vera, Dexter McDaniel, Jessica Racaniello, Joseph Stearman, Erika Weber, and David Abraham, as well as new faces Jeff Schaeffer and Jeanne Di Muzio Walti.

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Florida Chamber Music Project to perform at Romanza Festival

Florida Chamber Music Projects (FCMP) will perform quartets by Haydn and Schumann on May 6 as part of the St. Augustine Romanza Festival of Music and the Arts. The concert will be at Memorial Presbyterian Church at 32 Sevilla St. from noon to 1 p.m.

St. Augustine’s Romanza Festival of Music and the Arts features two weeks of daily events including dozens of concerts, shows, exhibits and much more at locations throughout the city.

“We are delighted to be part of this celebration of music and art,” said FCMP Artistic Director Susan Pardue. “Haydn’s String Quartet in G Major, Opus 77, No. 1 is an example of how he evolved as a

composer. Along with the other of his last quartets, it is described as Beethovenian. Robert Schumann’s String Quartet in F Major, Opus 41, No. 2 is among the first of his quartets and Haydn’s influence can be heard throughout.”

The Florida Chamber Music Project was founded 11 years ago by violist Susan Pardue. Members include violinists Patrice Evans, Igor Khukhua, and Ann Hertler and cellist Laurie Casseday. All are members of the Jacksonville Symphony.

For more information about FCMP, go to flchambermusic.org. For more information on the Romanza Festival, go to romanzafestival.com.

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Concertmaster Adelya Nartadjieva

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Sports



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Hannah Toole works to get around an Oak Hall defender during the regional semifinal on April 30.



Giada Antenucci of Ponte Vedra scoops up a ball in front of the opposing net.

Photos by Anthony Richards

Sharks one win from final four after convincing victory over Oak Hall

By Anthony Richards

The Ponte Vedra Sharks girls lacrosse team is just one win away from another trip to the final four following a convincing 20-10 victory over Gainesville Oak Hall in the regional semifinals on April 30.

The Sharks jumped out to an early 4-0 lead and got the home crowd and the momentum behind them from the opening faceoff, as they led 5-2 at the end of the first quarter.

The first quarter goal-scoring was highlighted by sophomore Giada Antenucci, who would not be denied as she recovered her own rebound in front of the net

and kept firing shots until her persistence paid off with a goal in the back of the net.

It was the Toole and Mosser show in the second quarter as the Sharks began to stretch their legs and open up the advantage.

Together, Hannah Toole, her sister Lily Toole and Lily Mosser combined to take over the game as they had a hand in nearly every goal in the quarter on offense.

The trio proved hard to stop not just with their shot-making ability but also with the way they were able to find each other on the field and assist on some well-designed scoring plays that used their chemistry on the field to perfection.

Hannah Toole finished with four goals and two assists in the second quarter alone, while Lily Toole accounted for a goal and two assists and Mosser scored a pair of goals herself.

At times during the night, it was their pure athleticism that created the opportunities, but the plays drawn up by the Sharks coaches were also spot on throughout the night, as they took advantage of the Eagles' aggressive defensive approach.

As the Eagles pressed the issue and played tight defense the Sharks were able to capitalize and turn it into good ball movement and scoring chances instead.

The Sharks grew the lead to 12-4 at halftime and never looked back as the Eagles were unable to keep pace with the high-powered Sharks.

With the win, the Sharks advance to a Class 1A regional final matchup against the Episcopal School of Jacksonville Eagles on May 3 beginning at 7 p.m.

As the top seed in region 1, the Sharks will host the contest, which is a highly anticipated matchup pitting the top two teams in the region against each other with a trip to the final four on the line.

The Eagles defeated Pensacola Catholic 20-8 in their regional semifinal matchup.



Ponte Vedra's Avery Hopf pushes the ball up field.



Tight defense is played by Ponte Vedra's Ashley Albert (No. 19) and Taylor Burke (No. 13).



Nease holds annual powderpuff showdown

Nease High held its annual powderpuff football game on April 29. In the contest, the junior class defeated the senior class 30-12.

Photos by Anthony Richards



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ACROSS

- Lions do it
- In favor of
- Rest here please (abbr.)
- Pulpits
- Leisure activity
- Fertility god
- Financial obligations
- When you anticipate getting somewhere
- Spanish river
- Sporting events
- Type of tree
- Ceased to be
- Persons
- Synthetic resin
- Relates to photochemical reactions
- Father
- Former Cowboys coach
- City in Finland
- Run batted in
- Got through
- They darken skin
- In a harmful way
- Form of weaving
- City of Angels hoopster
- Caucasian language
- Syngman ___, Korean president
- Sun up in New York
- Paddled
- Fishes
- Affirmative
- Nimble
- Doctor of Education
- Soviet Socialist Republic
- A small island

DOWN

- Cool!
- Hebrew unit of measure
- Swedish rock group
- College army
- Favor over another
- Called it a career

- Egg-shaped wind instrument
- Israeli statesman
- Hurries
- Slog
- Midway between south and southeast
- Benedictine monk
- Self-immolation by fire ritual
- Family of regulator genes
- Surrendering
- Political action committee
- S. American plant
- Long-term memory
- Bark
- Breathes in
- Take hold of
- Everyone has one
- Valentine's Day color

- Drivers' licenses and passports
- Outer walls of castles
- Enters with force
- One thousandth of an inch
- Deceased Chinese politician
- Sugary secretion of plants
- Expressed pleasure
- Shelter
- Utilizes
- Forest resident
- Fashion accessory
- A sharply directional antenna
- ___ Kristofferson, actor
- A bad place to end up
- MLBer Gordon


SUDOKU

			5	3		6	4	7
5	6			4	2	8	9	
			1	6			5	2
	4	9						
		7		5	1	4		
8			2	7		9		3
			6				2	8
9			8	1				
6	8	1				5	3	

Level: Beginner

Here's How It Works:

Sudoku puzzles are formatted as a 9x9 grid, broken down into nine 3x3 boxes. To solve a sudoku, the numbers 1 through 9 must fill each row, column and box. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and box. You can figure out the order in which the numbers will appear by using the numeric clues already provided in the boxes. The more numbers you name, the easier it gets to solve the puzzle!



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