



Numa Saisselin with Laura and Adam Edgecombe
The Florida Theatre Ball
MORE ON PAGE 25



Lauren Weedon Hopkins with Dr. Natalya Bannister Roby and Ed Jennings
4th Annual Wine Women & Shoes
MORE ON PAGE 29



Kathy Barbour with Jessica Cummings
The Soirée - A Tropical Paradise
MORE ON PAGE 27



Nick D'Angelo with Andres Santandreu
RAP Fourth Annual Yarden Tour
MORE ON PAGE 21



Anita and Steve Goyer with Colonial Dames
President La Grange Gippe
Belles, Beaux & BBQ
MORE ON PAGE 30

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Green Light for Emerald Trail's LaVilla Link

The Jacksonville community celebrated the grand opening of the Emerald Trail's 1.3-mile LaVilla Link, connecting Brooklyn to LaVilla and the existing S-line.

READ MORE ON PAGE 13

Community Shapes Resurfacing Project

The Riverside Avenue resurfacing project is slated to begin this summer, following last year's community feedback to add traffic-calming features in the Avondale shopping district.

READ MORE ON PAGE 4

Ramped-up Enforcement Underway for Derelict Vessels

New legislation proposing larger fines and shorter removal timelines for derelict or abandoned vessels could be in front of City Council as early as this summer.

READ MORE ON PAGE 2



Laura Street Trio (1927)

Legacy at Risk

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

The Jacksonville History Center presented its 2024 Endangered Historic Properties list at a brown bag lunch event on Wednesday, May 22 at Old St. Andrew's Church.

The annual list highlights the historic structures in Jacksonville that are at risk of being lost to the community. This year, the list consists of more than 25 structures. Jacksonville History Center CEO Alan Bliss said he was encouraged by the number of people who attended this year's lunch event, held every May in recognition of National Historic Preservation Month.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

“I don't see **HOW** they could even contemplate it.”

-Ruth Jackl

COMMUNITIES RALLY TO SAVE NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS. SEE PAGE 10



Gary Walsh with Richard Coquillon, Mark Anderson, Angela Washington, Robert Lee, Paul and Laurie Stasi

Honoring the Difference-Makers

The 9th Annual Difference Makers Gala, hosted by City Rescue Mission, shined a light on those who strive to make a difference in the Jacksonville community and celebrated the selfless contributions they've made to effect positive change in the lives of others. READ MORE ON PAGE 18

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IN HOMES BY JUNE 5, 2024

Tougher Enforcement Coming for Derelict Vessels

BY LAURA PHELPS

Efforts to strengthen the enforcement of ordinances that limit long-term anchoring and abandoned vessels in Jacksonville waterways are progressing with the help of the city's Office of General Counsel, according to Jacksonville Waterways Commission member Mike Barker.

The city's legal minds are currently working to combine two ordinances that govern these issues in order to provide law enforcement with a simple framework.

It's the latest chapter in a years-long battle to address derelict or abandoned vessels in the city's waterways, an issue that has garnered the support of local and state elected officials, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation (FWC), law enforcement and the boating community.

Abandoned vessels are more than eyesores. They can damage other boats and docks if they break loose during

storms or sink into the river. Barker estimates approximately three vessels sink in the river every year, and each can cost the city as much as \$30,000 to remove.

In 2021, Florida District 12 Rep. Wyman Duggan successfully passed a measure that granted counties the power to impose anchoring restrictions in urban areas with narrow waterways and significant boating traffic. In 2022, Jacksonville's City Council passed ordinances that separately address long-term anchoring and the removal of abandoned vessels.

"The problem was that it was confusing everybody, including law enforcement," Barker said. He reached out to Jacksonville's Office of General Counsel and invited them to a series of meetings with law enforcement agencies. Attorneys recommended combining and

simplifying the ordinances to create a clear enforcement framework.

"There's going to be one set of ordinances that will cover how long a vessel can sit there and what the penalties will be if you anchor and leave a boat there. And it's going to make it just a lot simpler for everybody to understand, a lot cleaner," Barker said.

Barker also said that under the current laws, the timeline for removal is too long and the fines are too small. After three rounds of citations and fines totaling less than \$500, it can take more than five months to remove an abandoned vessel, Barker said.

"What that means is for less than \$500 somebody could just drop their boat over the summer and let it sit here for three or four months. And that didn't make any sense. Clearly, they're just trying to avoid marina fees," Barker said.

Barker said the newly drafted ordinance will impose larger fines and reduce the timeline for removal down to two months.

"We welcome engaged boaters. If you're a legitimate mariner and you're cruising the eastern seaboard, and



An abandoned, derelict vessel sits partially sunk near the dock at Stinson Park.

you want to come and visit - great. We welcome that. But don't bring your junker here and dump it," Barker said.

On its website, FWC has a searchable map that shows the locations of derelict vessels in Florida. The map shows approximately 16 derelict vessels in Duval County, nine of which are pending removal, including one 30-foot vessel in the Cedar River that was initially reported in September 2023. The rest are under investigation.

Barker expects the Office of General Counsel to finish drafting the new, simplified ordinance in the next month or so, and it could go before the City Council for a vote this summer.

Downtown Investment Authority to Consider New Proposal for Laura Street Trio

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

There may soon be movement on a new redevelopment agreement for Jacksonville's Laura Street Trio as previously published reports indicate the development team has submitted a new proposal for review.

The Downtown Investment Authority (DIA) walked back the decision to end negotiations with SouthEast Development Group following a pair of board and committee meetings in April, instead amending its initial resolution to say it is still "willing and able" to negotiate

a redevelopment agreement, though it still firmly rejected the developer's "untenable" March 30 proposal.

According to published reports, the new proposal submitted by SouthEast Development Group includes \$22 million in loans from the Downtown Preservation and Revitalization Program, cash grants totaling \$49 million and a forgivable \$2 million city loan. It also drops the highly contested loan guarantee clause.

If approved, this proposal will not be the first redevelopment agreement

between the city and the development team for the historic trio. Following the April DIA committee meeting, DIA CEO Lori Boyer said there had been three redevelopment agreements previously signed with this developer that "were requested, were vetted, were approved" and went before City Council.

The most recent agreement was in 2021, though Boyer said that agreement was for a "hotel only" on Laura Street and had no multifamily component. Since then, the development has evolved.

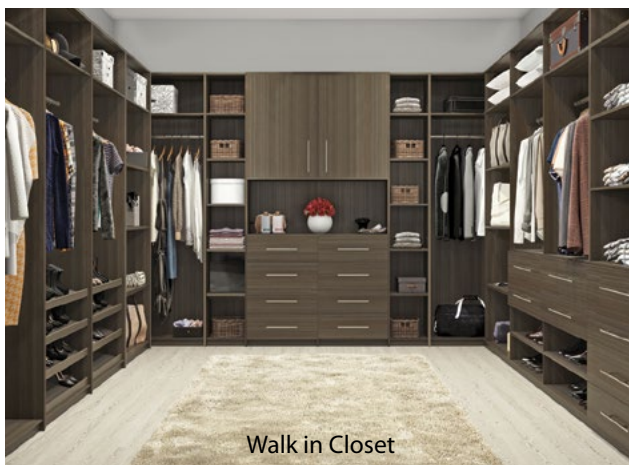
Current designs outline an Autograph Collection Hotel by Marriott offering 143 guest rooms, multiple restaurants and bars, ground-level retail space and 169 multifamily units, of which roughly 30% will be in the workforce category to these historic buildings.

SouthEast Development Group Principal and Managing Director Steve Atkins did not respond to multiple requests for comment on this latest proposal.

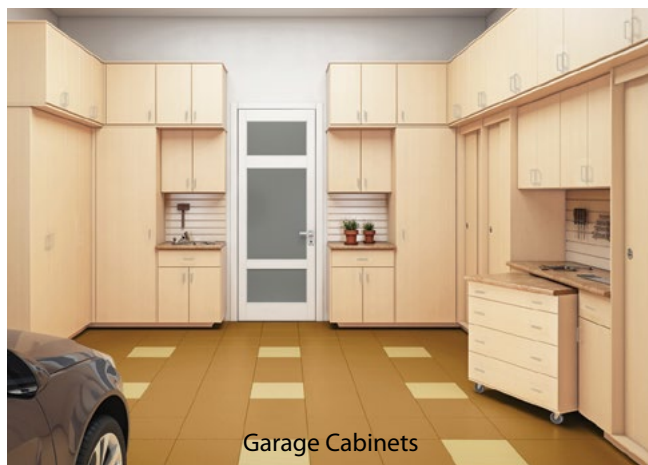
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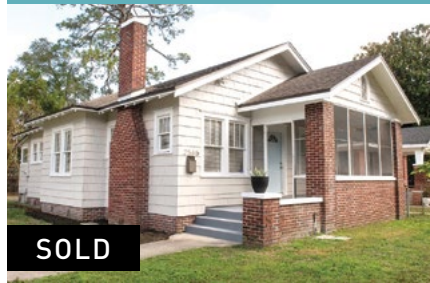
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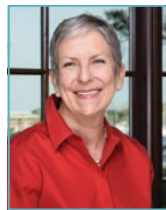
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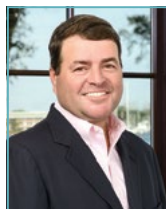
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Renderings of Related Group's 25-story, high-rise development.

City Council Considers Incentives for “More Ambitious” Development

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

A \$58.79 million incentives package is going before the Jacksonville City Council for Miami-based Related Group's proposed Southbank development.

The 3.02-acre parcel, located at 835 Museum Cir., was the site of former local landmark River City Brewing Company, which was demolished in July 2022 to clear the way for Related's intended development. Progress on the project was slow-going as the developer faced escalating post-pandemic construction and capital costs and supply chain issues, ultimately leading to the Downtown Investment Authority (DIA) terminating its redevelopment

agreement with Related because it failed to meet the agreement's deadlines, despite exhausting all available extensions.

Last year, however, Related returned with a revised proposal that gained the Downtown Development Review Board's (DDRB) conceptual and final approval at its April and October meetings, respectively.

At its May 15 meeting, the DIA Board unanimously backed a recommendation to approve the incentives package, setting it on track now to go before the city council.

“I know that this is a lot of money

that we're going to spend, but the return on the investment to the city is far above our one-to-one ratio that we seek, at 1.13,” said DIA Board Member Scott Wohlers. “The additional commitment from the Related Group to the parks is such a positive for our community on the Southbank that I'd be remiss if I didn't just mention that. So, thank you, guys, for all your hard work and dedication to bring a great deal to the Southbank in a premier location. And we look forward to seeing it come to fruition.”

A staff report called Related's development proposal “much more ambitious” and “more impactful on

Jacksonville's Southbank riverfront and skyline.”

The current project proposal includes a 25-story high-rise featuring eight stories of a minimum of 390 residential units ranging from studios to three bedrooms. Plans also incorporate a minimum 4,000-square-foot restaurant, 1,000-square-foot Ship's Store and a nine-story parking garage with 30 public parking spaces.

Upon the project's completion, Related will deed roughly 4,200 square feet back to the city for an expansion of St. Johns River Park and Friendship Fountain and provide a dedicated easement of approximately 400 square feet for a possible fuel tank location for public boaters.

DIA's proposed incentives package includes a \$19.8 million REV grant, a \$39 million completion grant and a parcel valued at \$5,000 for signage.

Discussions are still underway regarding potential agreements between the City and Related regarding the reconstruction of the marina that had been demolished. While bulkhead work is underway, the staff report said the City cannot enter into a new submerged land lease with the State of Florida until a new design is completed. Work on that design has not yet begun.

The new marina will feature a to-be-determined number of slips for public use to allow access to the restaurant, Riverwalk and St. John's Park, and fueling will be “brought back to the marina.”

“Related remains committed to working with the City on marina design, development, and operation,” the report stated.

In total, the development is estimated to cost more than \$202.5 million, a drastic increase from its initial \$99.2 million estimated cost.

Community Feedback Spurs Changes to Riverside Avenue Resurfacing

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

The Florida Department of Transportation's (FDOT) SR211 Resurfacing from San Juan Ave to I-95 project is on track to begin this summer.

According to FDOT Community Outreach Specialist Jacob Pickering, the contractor, Watson Civil Construction, Inc., “is actively engaged in mapping out their plan and schedule to ensure a seamless execution of the project.”

The FDOT hosted an open house about this project for the community on Thursday, May 23, to give them an opportunity to learn more about the project and ask any questions. Pickering explained that several changes have been made to the project based on community feedback from its previous open house last February.

In his e-mail, Pickering detailed the following changes:

- **“Addition and Subtraction of Sidewalk and Curb/Gutter Work:** The plans have been refined to include adjustments in sidewalk and curb/gutter work to better align with the needs of the roadway and ensure optimal pedestrian and vehicular flow.
- **Incidental Construction Plans:** Minor, meticulous considerations such as striping and pavement markings, ensuring that the final design promotes safety, efficiency, and ease of navigation for all road users.
- **Addition of Traffic-Calming Features in the Avondale Shopping District:** Notably, the inclusion of pedestrian ‘bulb-outs’ which seek to introduce

effective traffic calming measures, enhancing safety for pedestrians by allowing them to cross the roadway in a shorter amount of time.”

“Throughout this process, the Department has been actively engaging with local residents and businesses, striving to accommodate all while concurrently enhancing the roadway and addressing the necessary improvements,” Pickering added.

The Resident News previously reported on community concerns surrounding this project as it proposes removing several parking spots in an area where parking is at a premium. Rollplots of the project do detail parking spots that will remain on Riverside Avenue, spots to be removed and parking spaces to be added.

According to the graphics, a total of 20 new parking spots will be added, though more are slated for removal.

SR211 (Riverside Avenue) will gain 13 new spots between Beverly Avenue and St. Johns Avenue and seven between Lancaster Street and Bishop Gate Lane just beyond Memorial Park. To view these images, visit residentnews.net.

According to FDOT, along with milling and resurfacing, the project will include improvements such as “shoulder treatment, sidewalks and ADA curb upgrades, new bike lanes and shared-use lane markings, signals, highway signage, traffic calming features and pedestrian lighting upgrades.”

It is projected to be completed late 2025 and will cost an estimated \$11 million.



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An aerial photos of Corner Lot's Artea at Southbank residential development.



Renderings of Toll Brothers, Inc.'s townhomes at the RiversEdge: Life on the St. Johns, which are currently under construction.

Southbank Development Taking Shape

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

Development along Jacksonville's Southbank is progressing as two of its projects – RiversEdge: Life on the St. Johns and Artea at Southbank – continue to evolve.

The highly anticipated RiversEdge project by Dallas-based developer Preston Hollow Community Capital LLC (PHCC) will finally start to see vertical construction as Toll Brothers, Inc. begins construction on the 40 luxury townhomes within the development.

In a joint press release last month, PHCC and Toll Brothers announced Toll Brothers' purchase of 2.75 acres within the RiversEdge development for the two- to four-bedroom townhomes with three baths and two-car garages, ranging from 1,844 to 2,085-plus square feet. The townhomes will also include rooftop terraces with "an array of designer-appointed features."

Jacksonville Toll Brothers Group President Greg Netro said, "Toll Brothers at RiversEdge is an exciting townhome

community on the St. Johns River, coming soon to Jacksonville. The community is in a great location nearby the future Southbank Riverwalk extension."

Netro added that sales for the townhomes will begin later this fall.

The Resident News inquired about the next phases of construction on the RiversEdge development with PHCC, including details on any additional partners for further vertical construction. In an e-mail, PHCC Associate Director Madeleine Rehfeld said Preston Hollow is "not quite ready to share additional details regarding the development at this time."

When completed, RiversEdge will feature 1,130 high- and mid-rise residential units, 40 townhomes, a 125-slip marina, more than 100,000 square feet of restaurant, retail and entertainment space, and will be able to accommodate 200,000 square feet of office space. At PHCC's unveiling event last November, plans were also shared to include a 200-room boutique hotel at RiversEdge.

Toll Brothers, Inc. is the first vertical developer to join the development.

Adjacent to RiversEdge, Corner Lot Development Group's Artea at Southbank is expected to complete construction ahead of schedule.

While the initial overall completion date was initially anticipated for September 2025, Corner Lot Director of Construction Chris Anthony said it is "currently tracking for June 2025" with the first phase (consisting of the leasing office and 122 units) now anticipating an October 2024 completion date, up six months from its original April 2025 estimated date.

When completed, Artea at Southbank will feature 340 multi-family units ranging from studios to two-bedrooms across a four-story building. The development will also include a rooftop deck, pool, several amenity spaces and an "artistically screened-in" parking garage offering 425 spaces.

The Artea at Southbank development is facilitated through a partnership between Corner Lot Development Group and the Jacksonville Transportation Authority (JTA) as part of the JTA's Transit

Oriented Development Program. It will connect to the authority's San Marco Skyway rail station and new bike and pedestrian corridors.

Pre-leasing for Artea at Southbank is expected to begin in July.

District 5 City Councilmember Joe Carlucci said his office is working to add public spaces in the area following these projects to enhance residents' and guests' experience in the Southbank area. These spaces include playgrounds, splash pads, turf fields, pickleball and tennis courts and a dog park.

"RiversEdge and Artea are transforming our Southbank area," he said. "The development community is stepping up and it's time we do the same. I believe the go-outside-and-play type of experiences will only grow in the coming years and our city needs to provide that for those not living out in the suburbs."

While he said he is "eager" to share plans for these public spaces with the community, Carlucci added he "wants to make sure we have a thoughtful design in place beforehand."

LEGACY AT RISK, CONTINUED FROM COVER

"It's encouraging, too, that this audience and the larger community seems increasingly to understand that preserving old buildings and historic sites and structures is not just about nostalgia," he said.

There are two reasons, Bliss said, for advocating to preserve these historic structures for the Jacksonville community. One is for the tangible connection they provide, serving as the bridge between the residents of today and the events and stories of the past.

"The other reason is because historic structures lend authenticity to a place and authenticity adds value," he said. "And that strengthening of authentic identity in Jacksonville is important."

While the Laura Street Trio tops the list as its "most endangered," other notable structures include nine "endangered" schools, including Atlantic Beach, West Riverside, Fishweir and Ortega elementary schools.



Fishweir Elementary School

"Our public schools are the treasure in our community if you think about it," said Dr. Wayne Wood, who serves on the endangered sites committee responsible for creating the list. "They were built back in the teens and '20s when there were major building efforts and there was a large budget to build schools that weren't just buildings to house kids, but they were beautiful architecturally. The finest architects in our city designed them, and now they're on the verge of being thrown away."

A newcomer to the list this year is



Ortega Elementary School

the Scottish Rite Masonic Temple on Hubbard Street, which has remained under the same ownership since it was built in the 1920s. While the building is still in use by the Masons, the building itself needs extensive repairs.

"I can't give them money," Bliss said, "But I can give them attention."

The list also includes success stories of restored, renovated and adaptively reused buildings. Some of them are familiar transformations, including the Haydon Burns Library (now the Jessie Ball duPont Center), the First National



Scottish Rite Masonic Temple

Bank (now the Cowford Chophouse) and the Seminole Club (now home to Sweet Pete's candy company and a restaurant).

Bliss said he's grateful for the Jacksonville community's "increasing interest" in the stories, events and people of its past.

"It's encouraging that people take seriously the importance of the value of historic preservation," he said. "It's important to what we do and I'm grateful for all the public support for it."

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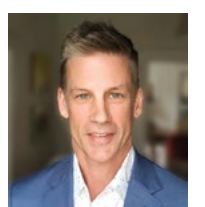


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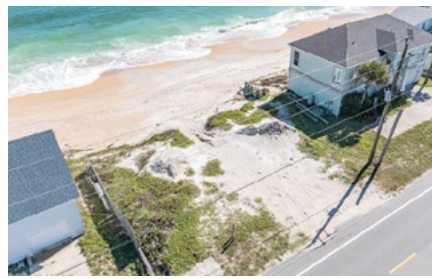




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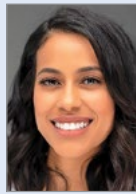
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Letters TO THE EDITOR

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Communiqué from our Local Council Representative

On April 23rd, the Jacksonville City Council decided to approve a rezoning that allowed storage units on the Southbank, thus breaking the Downtown overlay. Having been a part of the creation of the San Marco overlay and having contributed to the Downtown overlay as well as various overlays across the Great City of Jacksonville, I have seen first-hand just how hard our communities work to establish and protect these tools that we use to preserve our neighborhoods. The disappointment and frustration across the community has reached a breaking point and I believe it's crucial that we discuss why this recent decision not only "broke the overlay" but also threatens the tools we use to protect our vibrant communities across Jacksonville.

What is an overlay?

R. Brett James, the Director of Planning and Development for the City of Jacksonville, says regarding overlays "Jacksonville's overlay districts are a special type of zoning that allows protection of the unique character of selected districts. They are developed by stakeholders of the affected area, those that live or own property and businesses within the boundary of the proposed overlay district." Jacksonville boasts 11 such overlays, including Renew Arlington, Black Hammock, Mandarin, Mayport, and other overlays each designed to protect everything from environmental resources to historical integrity. These overlays start from the ground up, crafted by those who know their communities best, based off the tailored needs of each geographical area. Planning Director James continues, saying "Countless hours are invested by the public in creating the overlay district. Subsequent changes should be processed with similar rigor and public engagement. When this fails to happen, there is risk of not meeting the intent of those with much to lose from incompatible rezonings."

Imagine driving through the historic districts of San Marco, Riverside/Avondale, or Springfield. There's an unmistakable sense of place that makes each area distinct, its architecture, its streetscape, its culture. Overlays are the unsung heroes here, working behind the scenes to ensure that as our city grows, it retains these unique characteristics that make each of these eleven overlays feel distinct and appropriate. Jacksonville is one of the fastest growing cities in the nation and is projected to increase to 1.6 million in population in the next 50 years. Now is a critical time to ensure that city growth does not result in neighborhood deconstruction and identity crises.

Why the overlays exist

In drafting the editorial, I had a conversation with Lori Boyer, Downtown Investment Authority CEO, and former District 5 Council Member. She made a comment about overlays that rang true: "Code restrictions applicable to Jacksonville in general, do not necessarily work Downtown." The success of tailored zoning practices, like overlays, is evident in Downtown, where the overlay prioritizes mixed-use development, density, and walkability, for example. Typically, these priorities are not expressed

through our general zoning rules. The flexibility afforded by an overlay sparks economic development and reduces the need for cumbersome, parcel-by-parcel regulation. Rather, overlays allow an individual parcel to reach its best and higher use while maintaining continuity in a defined geographic area. This greatly influenced San Marco's past overlay efforts to address the inadequacies of a one-size-fits-all zoning approach which is especially detrimental in historic neighborhoods.

What I am proposing

The approval of a project that degrades the very essence of the Downtown Overlay is a stark reminder that our work is not done. Creating an overlay is a heavy lift for all involved and protecting it afterward is no easy task. This project, primarily intended to introduce self-storage, a use that is explicitly prohibited, flagrantly disregards the collective will of the community. To avoid future overreaches and to better protect the integrity of all our overlays, I am introducing legislation that would require a two-thirds vote from the City Council, rather than a simple majority, for any rezoning that contradicts an established overlay. This change will ensure that significant community support and council consensus are necessary before any modifications to our carefully constructed overlays are made and will also fulfill the Mayor's desire to protect the citizen inspired overlays.

These overlays are more than just effective zoning tools; they are manifestations of a community's commitment to preserving unique characteristics and solving its specific challenges.

If you support these efforts, please voice your opinion to your Council Members. Whether you live in one of our cherished historic neighborhoods, an area focused on environmental preservation, or any part of Jacksonville that values community input and integrity, this is about protecting what makes our city special.

- Matt Carlucci

Read the original bill [2024-373] and Bill Summary online at residentnews.net

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- Cynthia Lewis

Advocate for DCPS to Reevaluate their Approach

In light of the recent school closure proposal released by Duval County Public Schools (DCPS), the consultant's recommendations have pointed our eyes in a very specific direction. We have been forced to respond accordingly. However, as a small business owner and University of Florida business school graduate, I would like to redirect our attention to the best "products" in our school district.

iPhone is one of the most successful products for Apple. Apple revolutionized the world with their little device. Accounting for 58% of the company's revenue, Apple continues to pump money into its most successful device to drive more sales.

In our area, we see 3,623 elementary school students in the Riverside High School feeder pattern. Then in middle school, our area drops to an astounding 854 middle school students. The district gets a few more students back at 1,454 in high school. DCPS sees this pattern repeatedly in every school district across Duval County.

Elementary schools are DCPS's most successful product. The current DCPS proposal has selected many of our school district's "iPhones" and chosen to end production in the interest of saving money. That is the opposite of good business sense.

If Apple was having larger financial issues within its company, the company would look at their least profitable product lines and cut them. It would be odd if Apple decided to end the production of iPhones in the interest of larger budget issues. Apple knows its financial issues will get worse when cutting its main revenue stream.

As a DCPS parent, I am one of our district's "customers". I toured public, charter, and private school options for my child. I decided upon Stockton Elementary because of its consistent record for excellence for 50 years. Those results are hard to easily replicate overnight. The district will lose the money associated with my child and numerous other parents when schools like Stockton and Fishweir are cut.

DCPS needs to send this proposal back and ask for an option more in line with common business sense. DCPS can choose to navigate this financial shortfall in a way that can lead to more money coming into the district. We can focus on middle schools and bringing students back into the district instead of closing our popular elementary schools and pushing more families to charter and private options.

It is hard to imagine a world without iPhones. It is hard to imagine a world without Stockton, without Fishweir, without all these important neighborhood schools that have a tradition of excellence and are beloved neighborhood institutions. DCPS needs to find their "iPhone schools" and stick with them.

We do not need to believe the consultant's underlying assumption that 1,200 elementary student schools will solve our financial woes. Let's follow where the students (and money) are going in our district. Study where we already have success and listen to our customers (parents) on how we can replicate that in other areas. Then we will be able to build a district that can compete with the business of charter and private schools. Or dare I say, a district that brings back the families that the "top performing public schools" in St. Johns County have attracted.

- Laura Garcia

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Communities Rally to Save Neighborhood Schools

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

Inga Makarenko, Dominic T., Katie Williams, Lauren Agresti and Allison Cooke with signs supporting John N.C. Stockton Elementary School.

Ruth Jackl said the change she’s seen in her grandson in the weeks since he began attending John N.C. Stockton Elementary School has been “night and day.”

The family enrolled in the neighborhood elementary school in March of this year and Jackl said it would be a “tragedy” if the school should close.

“I don’t see how they could even contemplate it,” she said.

Jackl is just one of the many family and community members worried about the fate of the A-rated school after it was earmarked as one of the schools slated for potential closure in an updated Master Facility Plan (MFP) proposal presented to the Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) board earlier this year.

“Blueprints for Tomorrow: Strategic Adjustments for a Stronger Future” presented what DCPS Board

Chair Darryl Willie said was a “very aggressive view on how to right-size a district if you were using certain parameters.”

This included adjusting the boundaries of the existing feeder patterns and proposing the closures and consolidations of several schools throughout the district. In our Resident communities, the proposed high school feeder patterns are the Riverside High School and Englewood High School patterns and the proposed closures include Bayview, Fishweir, Hyde Grove, John N.C. Stockton, Ortega and West Riverside elementary schools.

Under this current proposal, students from Stockton and Ortega elementary schools would be consolidated into Venetia Elementary School while Fishweir students would consolidate into Ruth N. Upson Elementary School, and West Riverside into

Central Riverside.

“[Closing Stockton] would be a major detriment to our students and to our community,” said Stockton parent Lauren Agresti. “Eighty percent of this neighborhood attends Stockton and having to fold into Venetia, along with other schools...we will lose all of the things that make our school great.”

DCPS held its first public forum regarding the proposal at Fletcher High School on Tuesday, May 21, and was met with a full house and 138 public speaker cards. The formal meeting began at 6 p.m. and lasted more than three hours.

During the meeting, parents and community members asked questions and shared concerns regarding what they viewed as some of the primary issues leading to this proposal and the closures therein.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

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Forum Feedback

Board Member Cindy Pearson said the May public forum provided the school board with several topics of high concern for parents beyond wanting to save these neighborhood schools. It also, she said, solidified the fact that charters, private schools, virtual learning, home schooling or dedicated magnets are not the only options when it comes to school choice.

"I very much like now that parents are seeing their neighborhood schools as an intentional choice that they made, and I think that needs to get out more," she said.

“ The consultant answered a lot of questions that people had about the proposal, not in a way that I think parents would be happy about. There was a very visceral reaction to things that he was explaining because they don’t align with our community. ”

- Laura Garcia

Pearson said she believes there’s still “confusion” regarding why some schools were slated for closures and others were not, and there is a larger conversation that still needs to be had surrounding a proposed closures list. The conversation about right-sizing and adjusting boundaries and feeder patterns has occurred, but that’s just “a portion of the conversation.”

"To me, it seems like we’ve had about a third of the conversation that we need to have with the other two being more clarity on the financial side and the facilities’ condition side, and the impacts of transportation. And also, do we have the right programs in the right places?" she said.

"We have not had an in-depth conversation on those other topics yet, so it’s difficult to think about, to really get a whole picture, without having that comprehensive conversation," she added.

Transportation and the impact on traffic were hot topics at May’s event, as was bus transportation and other safe routes for students who are unable to take the bus. Parents voiced concerns regarding K-8 schools and the need to preserve special programs, should a consolidation take place.

Tracy Richter is the vice president of planning services for HPM and the consultant who put together the MFP proposal. During the public forum, he provided an overview of how the proposal was formulated and answered questions from the audience.

Parent Laura Garcia said she felt parents were less than impressed with some of his responses.

"The consultant answered a lot of questions that people had about the proposal, not in a way that I think parents would be happy about," she said. "There was a

very visceral reaction to things that he was explaining because they don’t align with our community."

In a May 17 interview, Willie had expressed a hope that attendance for these forums would see a “critical mass” in these early conversations surrounding the proposal.

In an interview following the forum, he said the board “appreciated” May’s attendance.

"We appreciate everyone who came out and shared their thoughts, opinions, and even strategies on how we can move forward with this process and in the plan," he said. "I think what it does is gives us an opportunity to attack the plan in different ways."

Willie said the DCPS board is in the process of finalizing the matrix it will ultimately use to “make the final decision.” That matrix, he said, should be formulated “in the next couple of weeks.”

The feedback from the forum, Willie said, allowed the board to hear from the parents on the parameters they’d like to see on that matrix and to see some potential candidates for the focus groups planned for further discussions following these public forums. These focus groups will be comprised of School Advisory Council representatives along with board-selected individuals.

"We got to hear some folks that may be really good members of that focus group," he said.

Charter Schools

The impact of charter schools on the DCPS landscape remains a top concern as they have had significant effects on both full-time enrollment (FTE) in, and funding allotted to, traditional neighborhood schools. According to DCPS, the number of charter schools in Duval County has increased nearly 35% over the last five years, from 32 in the 2019-20 school year to 43 in 2023-24.

DCPS Chief of Communications Tracy Pierce explained that school funding in the state of Florida “is directly tied to enrollment. The more students a district has, the more funding it receives.”

It is in the funding where charters have a primary impact on neighborhood schools.

Charter school enrollment has increased from fewer than 2,000 students in 2009 to more than 25,000 students today. The MFP breaks that enrollment down to 14,000 elementary-aged students; 7,300 middle school students and 4,400 high school students.

Pierce explained that both district and charter schools see capital funding (facility maintenance and improvement) from three sources: the half-penny sales tax, a local millage assessment and the Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) Trust Fund.

A law passed during the 2020 legislative session required that, moving forward, revenue from the half-penny sales tax be shared with charter schools based on FTE. Pierce said currently, charters’ portion of that revenue is approximately 20%.

Charter schools are the sole recipients of PECO dollars. Pierce said “it has been at least five and possibly six or more years since [DCPS] received PECO.”

With several schools in his district slated for possible closure, District 7 City Councilmember Jimmy Peluso attended the public forum. In an interview following it, he said withholding those PECO dollars from traditional schools “really puts us at a disadvantage.”

"Had we had those monies available to us like we did - up until Tallahassee took it away from us - had we had those dollars available to us over the last several years, we probably wouldn't be in the giant hole that we're in right now," he said.

There are currently no restrictions on where a charter school can be built in relation to a traditional

neighborhood school, nor are there limitations to how many charters can exist within the boundary of a particular school district. While DCPS does not have the authority to close or consolidate a charter school, it can opt to not renew a charter school’s contract if certain circumstances apply.

Those circumstances, according to DCPS, are:

- “Failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management due to deteriorating financial conditions or financial emergencies;
- “Failure to participate in the state’s school accountability system or meet the requirements for student performance (Charter schools that receive two consecutive school grades of ‘F’ are automatically closed per state law; Schools receiving three consecutive school grades below ‘C’ are required to choose from one of the turnaround options listed in state law. One of the options is voluntary closure);” and
- “Material violation of law.”

In the continued discussion surrounding school choice and charter schools, there are many who advocate in favor of choice and charter. Michael Hightower, who had been part of the committee advocating for the half-cent sales tax referendum, is a strong supporter of school choice for families.

“ Education is about providing the greatest opportunity and that comes through competition, and it comes through choice. ”

- Michael Hightower

"First and foremost, you know, education is about providing the greatest opportunity and that comes through competition, and it comes through choice," he said. "Charters give parents choice. It's not about whether one is right or wrong or anything like that. It's just, competition in the education system is good and it provides parents, guardians the opportunity to try and find the best option and opportunities for our children."

Patrick Tsakalakos, head of admissions and partnerships for Brilliant Microschools, said school choice affords parents the ability to find alternative education options for their children when other school structures aren't meeting the children's needs.

"Maybe a child who has lots of anxiety wouldn't be able to experience in-person setups in a traditional sense," he said. "So we try to build their confidence, potentially going through our school might mean them rejoining an in-person, public school, perhaps. So, we kind of act as a bridge."

"The ability for families to have a choice is kind of pivotal and paramount in eventually being able to join our online school," he added.

The next public forum will be at the DCPS administrative headquarters June 10 at 5:30 p.m. The Resident News will continue coverage of this issue as it develops. See additional forum times under DCPS Roundup, page 12.

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New Anti-Hate Bill Proposes Increased Penalties

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

A new anti-hate bill has been introduced to Jacksonville City Council proposing increased fines and penalties.

It was introduced at the end of April by City Councilmember Jimmy Peluso (District 7) and co-sponsored by Councilmembers Reggie Gaffney, Jr., Tyrona Clark-Murray, Ju'Coby Pittman, Rahman Johnson and Matt Carlucci (Districts 8, 9, 10, 14 and At-Large Group 4, respectively).

Bill 2024-0334 proposes strengthening punishments for violations of certain city ordinances if those violations are found to be "committed with the primary purpose of expressing, or attempting to promote, animosity, hostility or malice against a person or persons or against the property of a person or persons because of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, national origin, age or disability" and could triple the resulting fines and penalties.

The ordinances in question pertain to noise violations, unlawful signage (to include snipe signs and projections), littering or disruption of public order.

The bill has already met some pushback from other councilmembers who argue there's already legislation on the books regarding hate crimes and worry about "unintended consequences."

“As Council President, I led the charge on legislation that stopped bad actors from using private property to display hateful and antisemitic messages. Our work in Jacksonville resulted in the Florida Legislature passing a similar bill. However, this new legislation proposed by Councilman Peluso is government overreach that would create unintended consequences.”

- Councilman Terrance Freeman

Councilmember Terrence Freeman issued a release opposing the bill on May 20, stating, "As Council President, I led the charge on legislation that stopped bad actors from using private property to display hateful and antisemitic messages. Our work in Jacksonville resulted in the Florida Legislature passing a similar bill. However, this new legislation proposed by Councilman Peluso is government overreach that would create unintended consequences."

A public meeting was held on May 22, during which council members discussed and debated the bill's potential ramifications where enforcement is concerned and what could, or could not, be deemed enforceable according to the bill's language. Another public meeting, date pending, will be held this month for further discussion.

In a May 23 interview, Peluso said people could argue existing state statute "covers us" but state statute could change.

"We've seen state statutes change quite a bit, so what's protected today can easily be removed tomorrow," he said.

His bill, he said, provides "additional teeth" for local law enforcement and adds previously "neglected" protected classes.

Responding to concerns of treading into First Amendment waters, Peluso said he is "not super concerned" as it "very much mirrors state statute currently, which we know is constitutional."

"What this does is it makes sure that if people are passing out leaflets that say, 'Kill the Jews' or 'Kill Black people,' that that's immediately reported and those individuals are penalized not just for littering, but for littering with hate speech on it," he said.

The bill must first go before the Planning Commission - as the enforcement would now be the responsibility of officers within the Municipal Code Compliance Division - before advancing through the various committees and city council.

It is expected to go before the full city council for a final vote on June 25. The Resident News will continue coverage of the matter as deliberations on the proposed legislation unfold.

DCPS Roundup: Public Forums, Board Elections, New Superintendent

BY MICHELE LEIVAS



Christopher Bernier

Six public forums remain for families to learn more about the Duval County Public Schools (DCPS) Master Facility Plan (MFP) proposal, ask questions and share feedback.

In a May 17 interview, DCPS Board Chairman Darryl Willie said the board hopes these forums will see a "critical mass" of attendance.

"We hope that we'll get a critical mass of folks there [at the forums] to not only listen but help us to kind of get a sense of how we move forward in the process," he said. "This early on, as we've mentioned a number of times, this is the very beginning of the conversation to help iterate on the plan."

Willie stressed that, at this time, no decision has been made regarding the MFP. He said the board is in the process of establishing the "matrix, [or] a rubric, so to speak" through which it can "filter every decision."

The first public forum for the MFP proposal was held on Tuesday, May 21 at Fletcher High School. The remaining six forums are scheduled as follows:

- **June 10:** District Administration Building (1701 Prudential Dr.)
- **June 11:** Stanton College Preparatory School (1149 W. 13th St.)
- **June 13:** Edward H. White High School (1700 Old Middleburg Rd. N.)
- **June 17:** Atlantic Coast High School (9735 R.G. Skinner Pkwy.)
- **June 18:** Paxon School for Advanced Studies (3239 Norman E. Thagard Blvd.)
- **June 20:** Terry Parker High School (7301 Parker School Rd.)

Doors open for these forums at 5:30 p.m. with a 30-minute reception for guests to review the feeder patterns and ask questions. The formal meeting will begin at 6 p.m. Those wishing to speak during public comment should have their speaker cards submitted by 6 p.m.

Upcoming DCPS Board Election

The pre-qualifying period for this fall's election for four DCPS Board seats (districts 1, 3, 5 and 7) has begun. A current list of active candidates for these four seats can be found at <https://www.duval elections.com/Candidates-And-Committees/Candidate/Committee-Lists-Reports-Profiles>.

The primary election for these four seats is Aug. 20 and the general election is Nov. 5. The four-year terms will begin Nov. 19.

New Superintendent Selected

DCPS selected Christopher Bernier as its new superintendent May 23.

Bernier and Daniel Smith were announced as the two finalists from a pool of six semifinalists on May 7. Bernier's experience includes, most recently, Lee County School superintendent, chief of staff for Clark County Schools in Las Vegas, and Orange County Public Schools associate superintendent in Florida, among others.

Bernier will replace Dana Kriznar as superintendent beginning July 1.

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The May ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Emerald Trail's LaVilla Link saw a major turnout as city leaders, stakeholders and community members celebrated this milestone for Jacksonville.

A Step Toward Progress

First link of Emerald Trail now open in LaVilla

BY MICHELE LEIVAS

Jacksonville's dream of the Emerald Trail is one step closer to reality as the community celebrated the opening of its LaVilla Link at a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Monday, May 6.

City officials, community stakeholders and residents attended the ceremony, which included speakers Mayor Donna Deegan, City Council President Ron Salem, Groundwork Jacksonville CEO Kay Ehas, Baptist Health CEO and President Michael Mayo and Groundwork Jacksonville Board Chair Kerri Stewart.

This 1.3-mile link connects the Brooklyn neighborhood to LaVilla and the existing S-line via a vibrant, emerald-colored trail. Ehas explained that this particular link is a testament to how impactful community voices can be on projects such as this, since LaVilla was not included in the first draft for the Emerald Trail and now, she said during the ceremony, "We can't imagine the Emerald Trail without the LaVilla Link; that would have been a major, major miss."

Following the ceremony, she said the LaVilla link is "proof" that ensuring those community voices are involved and have a place at the decision-making table was the right decision.

"You're always going to have a better end product, the more people at the table, especially the people that live here," she said.

Residents will continue to see work done on this trail segment as enhancements are added, including public art, educational and directional signage, a shade structure on the Park Street overlook and the "hundreds of trees and native plants" Ehas said have been added along the trail.

The opening of this first link was a decade in the making, spanning three mayoral administrations: Alvin Brown, Lenny Curry and Donna Deegan.

In her address, Deegan called the Emerald Trail "a shining jewel" for Jacksonville.

The now-active LaVilla link, she added, will allow residents to visualize the 34-mile trail in its entirety.

"Picture a stunning greenbelt that features native plants, living shorelines and rain gardens, not to mention public art installations that celebrate each neighborhood's rich history and culture," she said. "With one fell swoop, the completed Emerald Trail will spur economic activity; it will beautify our city; it will give people an easy way to get outdoors and exercise, foster new connections and help to reduce carbon, stormwater runoff and heat island effects."

Following the press conference, guests enjoyed a trolley tour of the LaVilla link while other pedestrians and cyclists immediately headed down the trail. Members of the North Florida Bicycle Club (NFBC) came to watch the festivities and check out the new link.

Mary Glackin, a general director with NFBC, said this was "a huge step" for cyclist safety.

"[NFBC] is really dedicated to safety, biking safely. So this is a huge step in that, particularly for social riders," she said.

As more links are constructed and come online for the community to utilize, Glackin hopes this amenity will encourage more people to get out and be active while drawing more people to the city.

"I think that's exactly what we're looking for, and [it's] making Jacksonville more attractive overall for people to come into the city and participate in activities," she said.

Once completed, the Emerald Trail will connect 21 parks, 16 schools, 14 urban neighborhoods, three hospitals, two colleges and the JTA Regional Transportation Center.



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Nelson Honored for Decades of Service

“Amazing Grace” leaves legacy from D.C. to Jacksonville

The Jacksonville Chapter of The Florida House on Capitol Hill hosted a fundraiser and silent auction at Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center May 2 in honor of Grace Cavert Nelson, who was named its 2024 Florida House Vision Award winner. The evening celebrated Nelson’s decades of dedication to Florida House and her hometown of Jacksonville, for which she also received the key to the city from Mayor Donna Deegan.

In addition to her advocacy work alongside her husband, Senator Bill Nelson, Grace Nelson was a former officer in the Senate Spouses’ Club, met monthly with ambassadors’ wives and currently serves as board secretary for the National Prayer Breakfast Foundation. During her speech, she shared her gratitude for former Florida First Lady Rhea Chiles’ friendship and her work in creating our state embassy.

The Florida House on Capitol Hill is Florida’s state embassy in Washington, D.C.



Billy Nelson with Susan Smathers, Grace Nelson and Bruce Smathers



Rod and Deb Jones



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GIVING HOMEOWNERS THE TOOLS

Along with Springfield Preservation and Revitalization, RAP organized the “Restore Jacksonville” conference, which was held over three days in 2007. Some two-dozen speakers offered instruction on restoring historic homes.

“Learn more about the meaningful and lasting impact of Riverside Avondale Preservation over the last 50 years all year long..”



Make a contribution!

MOVERS & SHAKERS



Bee Home Realty co-owners Rachel Shepard, Lauren Rohman and Erin Armstrong

New Realty Company Offers Solution to Changing Industry

Bee Home Realty, located at 2720 Park St. in the historic Whiteway Corner building, freshly opened its doors on May 1 to a new way of operation within the real estate industry.

"The real estate industry is changing right now," said Lauren Rohman, co-owner of Bee Home Realty, regarding industry lawsuits that will reshape buying and selling agents' commission structures across the nation starting mid-July. "We saw a need for change. We wanted to be able to be flexible with that and adjust. Having our own company gives us the power to do that."

Traditionally, realtors used to guide buyers through the entire buying process at a cost typically absorbed by the seller. With the legal changes, that cost now falls to the buyer, and Bee Home Realty offers customizable solutions for buyers through its full-service and à la carte options. For buyers who have already found a house or agreed to terms, Bee Home's à la carte services can include things like assistance with writing an offer, or an inspection review to help ascertain which repairs need addressed.

"Now, since the buyer is responsible for paying that...if they can't afford it, don't want to pay it, don't need that extra help...we can do that," said Rohman.

Rohman, along with fellow co-owners Erin Armstrong and Rachel Shepard, bring a combined three decades of experience to their new venture. In addition to all being licensed realtors, Armstrong assists with the company accounting, Rohman serves as the managing broker, and Shepard heads up Bee Home's property management division.

Through its property management division, Bee Home offers tenant placement assistance – where the owner manages repairs and maintenance – as well as full-spectrum property management.

"We have a lot of owners choose that route, even some that are local, because property management is a full-time job," said Rohman.

In addition to housing their office in one of the area's historic landmarks, Rohman called their work in the historic districts their "bread and butter."

"We love those historical homes. I always say, 'If you can sell a historic home, you can sell anywhere.' There's just so much character and charm that those homes offer. It's a very eclectic neighborhood, which we love," she said.

After just a week and a half in operation, Bee Home Realty had already posted four active sales listings and 14 rental listings as of May 10.



Gayle Runion and Kelly Stone dressed in one of their famed, spirited costumes for Ortega Playschool graduation.

Runion Retires After 24 Years with Ortega Playschool

Gayle Runion, director of Ortega Playschool, retired from her position May 23, after 24 years with the organization.

The school, part of Ortega Methodist Church, celebrated her tenure with a retirement party and end-of-the-year teacher luncheon. Runion served as a board member, music teacher, classroom instructor and assistant director before spending the last 17 years as the school's director.

In her retirement, Runion said she's "making no plans" other than spending time with her family, though she'll likely remain a part of the school by volunteering and substitute teaching.

"The women working there are so dedicated and so loving and nurturing. It's just a special place," she said.

Runion has been with the program since its inception. She was a volunteer at the church's Mothers Morning Out program when it officially became a school in 1984. Since then, it has grown to over 100 students and 22 employees. Some of her favorite highlights were being able to have her children and grandchildren attend the school with her and to watch all the children's "little lightbulbs turn on to learning."

"The biggest blessing to me is that we're in a Christian environment and the children are learning their ABCs and 123s, but we have the opportunity to share the love of Christ with them," she said.

Runion's assistant director, Kelly Stone, will also be leaving the program at the end of this school year. The pair will be replaced effective July 1 by Casey Sharp, director of education, and Abbey Steedley, director of finance and communications.



One of LifeSouth's community blood donation buses

JFRD Wins Battle of the Badges

The Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department (JFRD) was announced as the winner of the LifeSouth Community Blood Centers' 2024 Battle of the Badges blood drive, a competition challenging first responders across Northeast Florida to donate. Community members also donated throughout April at LifeSouth blood donor centers on behalf of either the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office or JFRD.

Dick's Wings, United Veterans Brewery and Fishweir Brewery assisted by hosting themed drives for the general public during this life-saving initiative. According to America's Blood Centers, Florida maintains only a 1- to 2-day local blood supply.

JFRD received a congratulatory plaque and one year of bragging rights for the win.



Andrew Forrester

Forrester Joins Bolles Administration

Andrew Forrester has been named the new Associate Head of School at Bolles, a role he is slated to begin in July 2024. He will replace outgoing Bolles Associate Head Mike Drew, who served for the last seven years. Forrester has had more than 24 years of experience in education, working in various positions in France and England, and multiple locations in Florida.

Bolles President and Head of School Tyler Hodges said Forrester's expertise and sense of humor made him a stand-out candidate among the nationwide applicants. In addition to his educational leadership, Forrester has experience with boarding programs, fundraising and donor cultivation.

"I'm looking forward to working with the excellent leaders at The Bolles School to continue to provide innovative, educational experiences for the students across all four campuses," said Forrester.

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Women With Heart Honors Brandenburg

More than 60 attendees celebrated writer Susan D. Brandenburg at Women with Heart's "May in Margaritaville" event, held May 8 at the Alhambra Theatre. The event raised over \$6,000 for beneficiary Volunteers in Medicine to help provide free healthcare for the working uninsured. In addition to Brandenburg's honor, guests enjoyed tropical-inspired cuisine and a 15-minute excerpt from the theatre's then-running show, Jimmy Buffett's Escape to Margaritaville.

Brandenburg is an award-winning biographer with more than four decades of experience writing the biographies and historical memoirs of many local luminaries and organizations. She is a member of the Florida Writer's Association and on the board for the Stetson Kennedy Foundation, National League of American Pen Women, The Carpenter's Shop Center and READ USA. She is the president of Susan the Scribe, Inc. Publishing, through which she writes and publishes a monthly children's book for READ USA called Jeremy's Journey Through Jacksonville Looking for Leaders.



Amy Palmer

Palmer to Direct Arts Grantmaking

Amy Palmer has been named program director at The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida, where she will lead Foundation-directed grantmaking in the arts and offer support to the foundation's fields of interest and staff-assisted, donor-advised grantmaking.

Previously, Palmer served as the Director of Grants Administration for the Cultural Council of Greater Jacksonville for 22 years, where she was responsible for its grantmaking programs for nonprofit organizations and individual artists, including the \$7 million Cultural Service Grant Program. She also held development and communications positions at WJCT Public Media and the Museum of Science and History.

"Amy brings a wealth of expertise and experience to our team at The Community Foundation, where we greatly value thoughtful, fair grantmaking that follows the intent of donors," said Amy Crane, vice president of programs. "We couldn't be more pleased to welcome her."

Rogers Named Inaugural Development Director

Mateo Rogers joined Timucuan Parks Foundation (TPF) as the organization's first development director. With broad fundraising and donor engagement experience, he will work closely with the executive team and board of directors to continue the mission of supporting Jacksonville's expansive natural areas and landscapes.

"Mateo brings fundraising expertise to Timucuan Parks Foundation in areas where the organization needs it most," said Mayda Velez, TPF interim executive director. "His focus on enhancing accessibility, cultivating new audiences and fostering avenues for community support will not only champion the vitality and resilience of Jacksonville's wilderness parks but also enrich the lives of its residents."

A U.S. Navy veteran, Rogers has more than 10 years of experience in creating and driving strategies for operations, development, data management and community building. He studied international business at the University of North Florida, serves on the board for River City Pride and founded Stonewall Sports Jax.



Mateo Rogers

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Nemours Children's Health, Jacksonville

Medical Facilities Extend Research, Educational Partnership

Mayo Clinic in Florida and Nemours Children's Health, Jacksonville announced a 10-year extension of their three-decade collaboration to improve healthcare in the region and train future generations of medical professionals. It will continue to focus on medical training, research and clinical care, specifically in pediatrics, where there are significant shortages in Florida – just 83 pediatricians for every 100,000 children.

In addition to advancing scientific research, the collaboration will allow Mayo Clinic residents, fellows and staff to obtain much-needed specialty training at Nemours, including medical rotations in various pediatric subspecialties. Nemours clinical and research staff may also be considered for appointment to the faculty of Mayo Clinic College of Medicine and Science.

"This relationship has been critical for the development and expansion of the education programs at Mayo Clinic. Our medical school and many of our residency and fellowship programs would not have been possible without the training and mentorship efforts of our Nemours colleagues," said Dr. Gerardo Colon-Otero, vice dean, Mayo Clinic Alix School of Medicine. "In addition, the stem cell transplant and CAR-T cell therapy programs have been strengthened as a single Mayo Clinic-Nemours clinical and research program. We look forward to future collaborations for the benefit of the Jacksonville community."



Fresh Ministries CEO Rev. Dr. Robert V. Lee III provides a tour of the Weaver Street aquaponics farm in Jacksonville.



The Weaver Center aquaponics urban farm uses a sustainable farming method that combines aquaculture with hydroponics to create a symbiotic ecosystem where fish and plants thrive together. The combination produces a harvest of fresh, nutritious produce and fish.



Vertical plant beds brim with leafy vegetables and greens inside the newly opened Weaver Center aquaponics urban farm.

FreshMinistries Unveils Sustainable Hunger Solution

FreshMinistries opened the state-of-the-art Weaver Center aquaponics urban farm in Jacksonville on April 25, marking a significant milestone in the organization's commitment to fighting food insecurity through sustainable solutions.

The facility utilizes aquaponics, a sustainable farming method that combines the benefits of aquaculture (raising fish in tanks) with hydroponics (cultivating plants in water) to create a symbiotic ecosystem where fish and plants thrive together. The combination produces a harvest of fresh, nutritious produce and fish in a harmonious environment with a much lower carbon footprint than traditional farming.

"This facility is more than just a farm – it

is a beacon of hope and innovation in our ongoing efforts to combat food insecurity," said Rev. Dr. Robert V. Lee III, chairman and CEO of FreshMinistries.

"By leveraging sustainable farming practices, we are not only providing a key source of nourishment but also fostering resilience, environmental stewardship and empowerment within the communities we serve."

The farm will provide specialized training in aquaponics and business operations to individuals in low-income communities. It has partnered

with Chartwells K12, a dining service provider, and other organizations to ensure the center supplies fresh produce to the Duval County Public School system and other key beneficiaries.



Attendees to the Weaver Street aquaponics farm take a closer look at vertical plant beds where fresh vegetables are grown using the innovative farming technique.



Peter Vertacnik

Vertacnik Wins Poetry Prize

The Episcopal School of Jacksonville held a book signing and reading April 23 for English department faculty member Peter Vertacnik's "The Nature of Things Fragile." Vertacnik won the 23rd New Criterion Poetry Prize for this debut collection in 2023, of which the book's publishing was part of his prize award from Criterion Books.

Vertacnik's poetry, translations, and criticism have appeared in 32 Poems, Bad Lilies, The Cortland Review, Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review, The Hopkins Review, Literary Matters, The New Criterion, Phoebe, Plume, The Spectator (World), THINK, and Water-Stone Review. He holds degrees in creative writing and English from The University of Florida, Texas Tech University and Penn State University.



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Community Difference-Makers Honored

Laughter and support rang loudly at the City Rescue Mission's (CRM) 9th Annual Difference Makers Gala. Held Thursday, May 2 at the Southbank Hotel Jacksonville Riverwalk, the gala served as a celebration of CRM's achievements and milestones, and it recognized difference-makers who have positively impacted the community. The 2024 Difference Makers honorees were VyStar Credit Union, Briggs Equipment, Movement Mortgage and Callahan First Baptist Church. The night also featured the comedic musings of Robert G. Lee, a 30-year stand-up comedian famous for his ad-libbed, behind-the-scenes, sitcom crowd warm-ups.



Lisa Amato, left, and Jeff Amato, right, award the championship trophy to Jared Lissauer, Alexis Schuchart and Mike Marrou from team "Deez Balls."



The "Hakuna Ma-Tatas," Meredith Frish, Brooke Anderson and Shylo Kline, share a hug during a KATE KUP match.

\$100K Raised for Pediatric Cancer Research

The Kate Amato Foundation (KAF) raised more than \$100,000 at the 5th Annual KATE KUP Triples Tennis Tournament, held April 20 at The Yards Tennis Center. All proceeds from the event benefit KAF, whose mission is to fund pediatric cancer research. The foundation has funded \$575,000 in research grants toward the cause.

The family-friendly, three vs. three tournament was open to the public with over 300 participants and spectators – many in themed costumes. The 32 team slots sold out within a record-breaking 18 hours. Outside of the competition, activities included local food vendors, entertainment and a Kid Zone with face painting, balloon art, a photobooth, inflatables, crafts and games.

"We're overwhelmed by our community's continued commitment to honor Kate's life by helping other children," said Kate's parents, Jeff and Lisa Amato, in a statement. "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."



Leadership from Corner Lot Development Group and Kelco Management and Development, Inc. celebrated a May 8 ribbon-cutting ceremony alongside project and city stakeholders.

Home2 Suites Downtown Jacksonville Celebrates Grand Opening in Brooklyn

Home2 Suites by Hilton Jacksonville Downtown celebrated its grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony in Brooklyn May 7. The ceremony included speeches from Corner Lot Development Group, Kelco Management and Development, Inc. and District 7 City Councilmember Jimmy Peluso.

The new, six-story hotel hosts 100 guest rooms with fully equipped kitchens that include refrigerators, microwaves and dishwashers. The hotel's 24-hour fitness center has a Peloton cycle, hydro rowing machines, cardio and weight machines, free weights and other fitness equipment. An outdoor grill and fire pit area are also available to guests.

The hotel is owned by Kelco CL Park, LLC, which is a partnership between Corner Lot Development Group and Kelco Management & Development, Inc.

"This is our first hospitality project," said Corner Lot CEO Andy Allen during the ceremony. "It's our first hotel. We have a handful more in the pipeline thanks to a great partnership with Kelley [Slay] and his team at Kelco."

Construction on the hotel began in 2022. The development team included general contractor Pinkerton & Laws General Contractor and Kasper Architects + Associates. While the ribbon cutting ceremony was held last month, the hotel had already opened for business earlier in April.

Peluso said the addition of this new hotel is something that Jacksonville needs. "When we talk about the future of Jacksonville, we need more hotels," he said. "If we're really going to attract an NFL draft or, may I even say, another Super Bowl one day, we're going to need more hotels. We're going to need more amenities. We're going to need more stuff and the Brooklyn neighborhood is a great place to do it."

The building will also be home to the new Players Grille, a full-service restaurant

“ When we talk about the future of Jacksonville, we need more hotels. ”

– Jimmy Peluso
District 7 City Councilmember

and bar, which owner Phil Visali said is expected to be open in time for football season later this year. The 4,500-square-foot restaurant will feature 3,000 square feet of indoor and 1,500 square feet of outdoor seating with a permanently covered patio.

Last month, in a 7-to-0 vote with Downtown Investment Authority (DIA) Board Chair Jim Citrano abstaining, the DIA board approved a resolution for a Retail Enhancement Grant for the buildout of the Players Grille in an amount not to exceed \$72,430 through the Retail Enhancement Program (REP). DIA board members spoke favorably of the restaurant at the May 15 board meeting with Board Member Sondra Fetner calling the restaurant and the hotel "such a big win for the area."

In a text message, Visali said the coming month should see "a lot of progress." "[The DIA is] very supportive of our project and we are pumped to be 'all in' with Jacksonville," he said.

Home2 Suites by Hilton Jacksonville Downtown is located at 600 Park St.

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Emily Mason with her mother, Council Chair Janes Boles

Florida Forum Co-Chairs Announced



Randy DeFoor and Maxine McBride were announced as co-chairs of The Women's Board of Wolfson Children's Hospital's 2024-25 Florida Forum Speaker Series, which brings world-class speakers to the First Coast.

DeFoor is an attorney and businesswoman and served as a Jacksonville City Council member from 2019-23. A longtime member of The Women's Board, DeFoor is the daughter of founding member Marian Poitevent.

McBride is the president of Clockwork Marketing. She has been involved with The Women's Board, the Florida Forum and the First Coast Design Show for many years.

"We are proud that the Florida Forum raises awareness and funds for Wolfson Children's Hospital, supporting its mission to provide the highest quality of advanced pediatric healthcare and helping to make a positive impact in our community and beyond," said Kendra McCrary, president of The Women's Board.



Anna Izzi, Little Miss Mint Julep

Derby Day Supports Hospice Care

The Community Hospice & Palliative Care St. Augustine/St. Johns County Advisory Council hosted its 12th Annual Derby Run May 4 at The Tringali Barn in St. Augustine. Supporters celebrated in full fashion for the 150th running of the Kentucky Derby, and fundraising proceeds from the event benefited the organization's families in the St. Augustine and St. Johns County communities.

The 13th Annual Derby Run is slated for May 3, 2025.



Christine and Steve Chapman with Kendell and Sherriff Robert Hardwick



Laurie Gilmore with Daphne Cameron



Carter and Leigh Rosenbloom, Ryan and LeAnne Crabtree



Dan and April Dodd with Jim and Vaughn Lee Griffin

Rotary Holds Buffett-Themed Benefit

The Rotary Club of West Jacksonville held its 2023-24 Annual Fundraiser at Jimmy Buffett's show at the Alhambra Theatre April 24, 2024. Attended by 152 Rotarians, family and friends, the event raised more than \$10,000 to support its Rotary Youth Programs, which included honoring 12 high school students with a \$500 scholarship.

Winning scholars hailed from Bishop J. Snyder, Riverside, Paxon, Westside, Frank H. Peterson and Baldwin high schools.

The event also included Margaritaville-themed drawings. Rotary President-Elect Tim Johnson won the coveted 2-night stay at the Margaritaville Beach Hotel in Jacksonville Beach.



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NEW LISTING

NEPTUNE BEACH

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Listing Agent

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Participants of May's rose planting ceremony included Mary Svoboda, Ann Burt, Angela Demonbreun, Robert Burt, Hazel Clery, Ruth Thompson and Sharon Qualls.

Roses Return to Peace Memorial Rose Garden Park

There are roses once again at Riverside's Peace Memorial Rose Garden Park following a planting ceremony, held by the Friends of the Labyrinth at Peace Park on Tuesday, May 7.

Friends of the Labyrinth founding member Ruth Thompson explained that it had been roughly five decades since roses bloomed at the park. The Garden Club of Jacksonville first had the idea of planting peace roses in 1950 to symbolize world peace following the end of World War II, and Thompson said 200 rose bushes once filled the park that faces the Willowbranch Library.

The Friends of the Labyrinth may not have planted 200 bushes, but the four bushes of Louis Philippe Roses are a "symbolic gesture of bringing the roses back to the garden," said Thompson, who recalls how the park was filled with roses whenever she walked by as a child. These Florida-friendly roses are "hard to kill," Thompson said, and the bushes will grow to be five or six feet tall and roughly five feet wide.

The rose bushes were planted around the Peace Memorial Rose Garden Park sign ahead of Riverside Avondale Preservation's fourth annual Yarden Tour the following Saturday.

The planting party included members of the Friends of the Labyrinth, Friends of Boone Park South and Friends of Willowbranch Library.

"[The roses] are going to bring people back here, that's the thing," said Friends of the Labyrinth founding member Ann Burt. "And it's going to honor what it was meant to do."

The Friends of the Labyrinth's mission is to construct a 40-foot stone labyrinth in the grassy area that is Peace Memorial Rose Garden Park. It will be modeled after the iconic labyrinth in France's Chartres Cathedral and, the organization hopes, will "cultivate a meditative experience and engage the community."



Billy Dorsheimer, president, Men's Garden Club of Jacksonville

Men's Garden Club Installs New Officers

Men's Garden Clubs of America have been going strong since 1932, and the Jacksonville branch – for both men and women – has been dedicated to advancing the appreciation of horticulture within our community since 1945. The club recently held its annual barbecue and officer installation at the Garden Club of Jacksonville, which included a 50-50 drawing and plant raffle.

The new officers consist of: Billy Dorsheimer, president; Dave Savage, vice president; Jim Lewis, secretary; and Courland Hunter, treasurer. New directors include Sharon Basile, Beth Heyob, Bill Huebner, Lesley Strobe and Charles Willingham. Past President Walter Bryant presented a flower to each new officer in representation of the qualities of their new position.

The club established the Riverside Park Camellia Garden in 1967 and continues to care for the 78 camellia plants across 11 beds. Members also helped organize the 1st Annual Ortega Camellia Festival in 2024, which will be presented again January 2025.

The Men's Garden Club is active in Duval County 4-H programs and supports the Jim Watson Scholarship program, Boy Scouts of America Merit Badge projects, Junior Master Gardener programs and the aloe vera plant garden at the Jacksonville Zoo.

The group meets on the first Monday of each month at the Garden Club of Jacksonville from October through May. For more information, visit mgcjax.org.



New director Sharon Basile won the Men's Garden Club plant raffle but declined to allow another member to win.

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Brenda Anderson with Carla Toro



Phil Stantial in his backyard oasis

RAP Yarden Tour Returns for 4th Year of Blooming Beauty

On the heels of the 50th anniversary of its historic home tour, Riverside Avondale Preservation (RAP) hosted its fourth annual Yarden Tour, showcasing the gardens, yards and green spaces of its neighborhoods.

Participants enjoyed the self-guided stroll on Saturday, May 11 throughout the Riverside and Avondale areas, visiting 12 stops and six points of interest on this

year's tour. For some, it was their first time experiencing the Yarden Tour, but many others returned for the tour and its activities. Kiersten Flaws's grandmother, Linda Maslowski, timed her visit from South Carolina for this Riverside Avondale tradition, and the two cycled from stop to stop throughout the day.

The pair spent time at the RAP Community Garden for its scavenger hunt and Maslowski said she loved this annual event.

Phil Stantial had previously opened his home for the home tour in 2018, but this was the first time he'd opened his oasis-style backyard to Yarden Tour guests and enjoyed answering questions about his backyard green space.

"People seem to like it, and they've got lots of questions about different things," he said.

This outdoor event was born of the COVID pandemic, and its continued popularity has cemented its place in RAP's rotation of annual events. RAP Executive Director Shannon Blankinship said more than 600 guests attended this year's Yarden Tour.



Master Gardener Pam Eutsler stands between homeowners Everett Sullivan and Healey Dwyer.



David Barrish with Rosemond Barrish



Sabin Russell with Kay Senn, Steve Senn, Leslie Jamesson



Tony Tindol with Arnitha Harrell, Pam Williams, Kyle Williams and Charles Gardner

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Melinda Bergborn with Theo Prousis



Jackie Culver with Alicia Somers



Paul Sapia with Cindy Funkhouser



Abel Harding spoke at the event.



Penny Christian with Linda Lanier and Cindy Funkhouser



Linda Lanier with Jeff Winkler and Lauren Husband

Sulzbacher Fiestas for Good

Goodwill and philanthropy got lively during Sulzbacher's Fiesta at the Beach, May 7 at the Casa Marina Hotel in Jacksonville Beach. Celebrating 15 years at the organization's Beaches Health Center, the event's beneficiary, Fiesta at the Beach featured food, fun and live music from the Jeremiah 29 Band. Thanks to a \$15,000 matching gift challenge, donations and sponsorships were tripled.

First Christian Church of the Beaches received the 2024 Healthy Hero Award for its support of Beaches Health Center, having donated \$136,000 to date. Abel Harding from First Horizon Foundation also spoke about the importance of community support for providing access to healthcare for vulnerable populations.

Beaches Health Center helps homeless and disadvantaged people in the area receive the healthcare they need. Sulzbacher serves more than 7,000 people with healthcare needs annually.



Susan King with Jeff Winkler and Cindy Funkhouser



Nathan Loewen with Cindy Funkhouser



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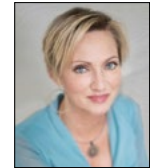
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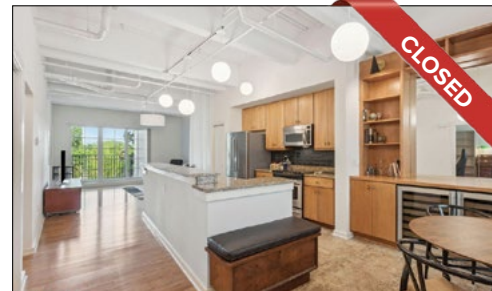
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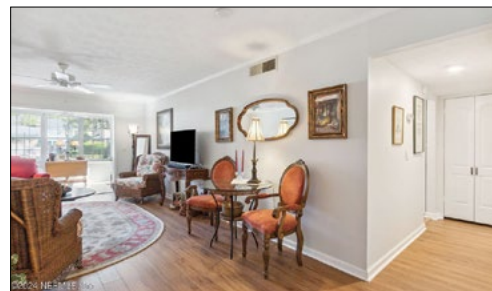
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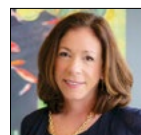
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Miko Burgstiner with Tricia Todd

Melissa Hunt with Tiffany Davis and Karen Schrader

Carey and Jim Whitsell



Tal Heppenstall with George Egan

James Richardson and Sandra Hull-Richardson

John Miller with Judy Hardwick and Zen Miller

Greenscape Hosts Sold-Out Root Ball



Kelly Harvey with Patrick MacRay

Greenscape of Jacksonville feted a sold-out crowd of supporters at its Root Ball 2024 gala. Held May 4 at The Garden Club of Jacksonville, against the backdrop of the St. Johns River, the event raised funds for the organization's programming and celebrated another successful planting season. Attendees sipped mint juleps beneath the live oaks before gathering inside to cheer for the 150th running of the Kentucky Derby.

The event, co-chaired by Sally Baker Lee and Erica Paul, also featured a Derby-inspired dinner, casino games, a silent auction and live tree decor from Liberty Landscape Supply. Root Ball is Greenscape's largest fundraiser and helps offset canopy loss.

Elevating Support



Karen Feagins with Holly Keris and Kim Kuta Dring

Numa Saisselin with Andrea Barnwell Brownlee

Support for the arts was in full bloom at Cathedral Arts Project's Spring for the Arts annual fundraiser, held April 26 at Epping Forest Yacht and Country Club. The evening raised a record-breaking \$820,579 in support of arts education and therapeutic programs for children and young adults. Since its inception, the event has generated nearly \$9 million for the cause.

In addition to gourmet cuisine, live music, dancing

and auctions, the event honored Montana as its Guardian of the First Coast for their work to safeguard the First Coast. Amy and Marisa were honorary chairs, and Marisa was the event.

"It is with immense gratitude to my family that I say 'thank you' to all who supported this event."



James and Meg Fowler

Jackie Kennedy and John Pomroy

Jennifer Glock and Michael Ward



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ort for the Arts



ee Anthony Austin with Rev. Kimberly Hyatt



Honorary Chairs Amy and Gary Norcross, CEO Kimberly Hyatt and Guardian of the Arts Award Recipients Karen and Greg Montana with the evening's student speaker, Evan.

hored Karen and Gregory of the Arts Award recipients and advance the arts along Gary Norcross served as a and Frank Martire chaired

and donor who made this year's Spring for the Arts our most successful fundraiser yet," said Rev. Kimberly L. Hyatt, CAP President and CEO. "It is a testimony not only to the generosity of our community but also their commitment to providing all children along the First Coast access to quality arts education."

The 20th Annual Spring for the Arts will be held April 4, 2025.



Linda and David Stein



Wendy Norfleet with Ronald Allen



Ryan and Amy Latham



Pamela Wardell with Kaci Barnes

Christi Zaffaroni with Rhonda Day

Dr. Lucy Chen with Brian Aitken

"All In" for Florida Theatre



Amy and Jason Rice with Ragu Murthy, Sonia Vohra and Bhavin Shah



Rob Marrione with Jordan Wilkerson, Elissa and Kevin Stone and Jason Roth

Jacksonville went from Bold City to Sin City for one night only, May 18, during the Florida Theatre's signature annual event, The Florida Theatre Ball - Vegas Style, presented by Dex Imaging. The night's starring lineup featured craft cocktails, Vegas-inspired cuisine from Well-Oiled Events, live music from The Chris Thomas Project and an auction that included a trip to the event's inspiration city, Las Vegas. Guests also experienced the thrill of a casino floor with fundraising games of craps, blackjack and roulette. The night's highlights included a proper Vegas-style wedding for Savio and Monica Valinho and nuptial renewal for Event Co-Chair Priyanka Murthy and her husband, Ragu. All proceeds from the event went to support the theatre's arts and entertainment experiences and the preservation of the historic landmark theatre.



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The Red Canoe (detail)
Sarah Crooks, Art Ventures Grantee
Collection of Rich McCann
Acrylic on Canvas



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Honorary Chairs Enola Gay Gilmore, Captain James Agee, Artis Gilmore (above), Renee Parenteau, JSHC CEO Michael Howland, Emcee Katie Jeffries, Chair John Paul Saenz, Honorary Chairs Grayson Eastman, Cason Schneider, Susan Tuohy, Captain Matthew Tuohy

Jacksonville Goes Two Fins Up for Speech, Hearing



Jackie Culver with Cathy Howland



Olivia Vo with Carol Campbell

Jacksonville Speech & Hearing Center's (JSHC) island-inspired fundraiser, FinFest, returned May 11 to Timuqana Country Club with emcee and board member Katie Jeffries. FinFest 2024 raised more than \$256,000 in support of JSHC's mission to provide care to those with speech, language or hearing disorders, regardless of their ability to pay.

The event featured a silent auction and music from Al Emerick and Top Secret Band. COO Chandra Manning, presented the first Talk of the Town Award to Ithan Hodge, recognizing his extraordinary growth as the result of speech-language therapy.

John-Paul and Jennifer Saenz served as this year's event chairs, and honorary chairs included Captain Matthew and Susan Tuohy, Ken and Liz Babby, Renee Parenteau and Captain James Agee, Cason Schneider and Grayson Eastman, and Artis and Enola Gay Gilmore.

FinFest 2024 was dedicated in memory of Sarah Rocco, JSHC board secretary and gala chair. It also honored Michael Howland's 11th and final FinFest as JSHC CEO.



Priscilla Stroud with Shirley Turner



Melissa Callender with Stephanie Carlos and Melanie Hooks



Debbie Martin Johnson with Ward Lariscy



Honorary Chairs Renee Parenteau and Captain James Agee



Lavinta Campbell with Victor Derienzo and Lisa Kempf



LeeAnn Mustello with Todd and Kathryn Everett



Kathy Barbour with Jessica Cummings

Brooks Soirées for Adaptive Sports

Brooks Rehabilitation presented its annual fundraiser, The Soirée – A Tropical Paradise on Saturday, April 27 at Deerwood Castle in Jacksonville. All proceeds went toward support of Brooks Rehabilitation's Adaptive Sports and Recreation Program, as well as its Pediatric Recreation Program, in order to offer these services to patients at little or no cost.

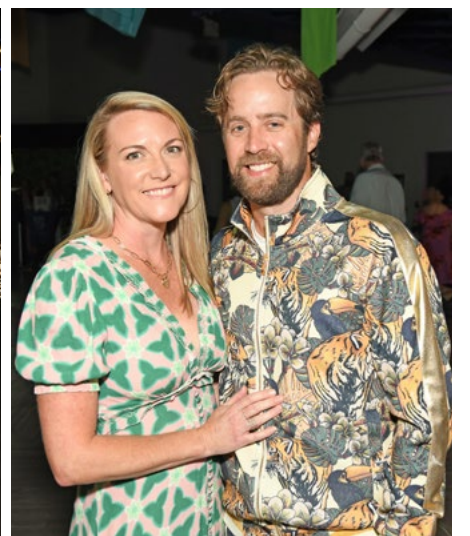
The event hosted supporters with offerings of delicious food, networking opportunities and entertainment. The night's program also featured a personal address from Don Bergman, founding member of Adaptive Sports and Recreation and member of the Brooks Bandits wheelchair rugby team.



Alessandro and Maryann Jimenez with Dave Gonzales and Cheryl Barber



Heather Brown, Dr. Kenneth Ngo and Katherine Gradus



Stephani and Christian Harden

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Niki Garvey with Jenell Flynn and Nathalia Dhaiti

Gala Honors Military Veterans

Five Star Veterans Center held its Armed Forces Military Gala Saturday, May 14 at the Southbank Marriott. The evening included dinner, a live auction and dancing as well as a testimonial from veteran Steve Staples. Former Lt. Governor and Navy Cmdr. Jennifer Carroll served as the guest speaker for the event, which was sponsored by First Citizens Bank and Jack Webb Law Group.

Five Star's mission is to provide displaced military veterans with safe housing and services, including mental health coping services like equine therapy, to help them transition to a life of independence.



Katie Warner of Fig and Willow with friends Christina Kelcourse, Rawan Kablawi, Amber Rumancik, Liz Derr and Manjari Cheria

Respite Care Support Takes to the Runway



Max and Ella Morel enjoying some father-daughter time at the fashion show

The Foundation of Community Hospice & Palliative Care celebrated the first annual Women's Leadership Council Fashion Show at The Glass Factory May 18. The event featured children from Community PēdsCare®, dressed by local fashion partners Fig & Willow, Heyday! and Willie's. More than 200 supporters attended the event, which benefited the Kelsi Leah Young Respite Care Fund, providing vital support to caregiving families needing respite care.

Barbi Young and Leslie Young served as the fashion show's honorary chairs. Beth Tonies spoke to the group about the impact the organization had on her family, and the entire event was emceed by Vic Micolucci.



Navy Cmdr. Adam and Edda Hernandez with Michael Atter and Robin Axtell



Jason Pratt with Andrew Lohman and Andrew Kisz



Suzie Loving with Gabriel Allen, Jill Floyd and Judge Moses Floyd, Jim Emright



Mike O'Brien with Col. Len Loving



Beth Lampp with Summer Taras



Kennedy Smith with Erin Strev



Beth Tonies with Nidhi Every



Photo/Amanda Rosenblatt

Cowford Ball committee members: Jim Webb, Anne Taylor, Allison Sample, Troy Winn, Beth Hill, Gigi Ackerman, Ashleigh Cheikelard, Lauren Hand, Addie Kasraean, Natalya Horne, Mathew Larson, Heather Rodeck, Nathan Adams, Laura Phillips Edgecombe, Sara Harris, Jill Bechtold, Sarah Allen Foster, Katherine Byra, Brittany Agee, Keely Kennedy, Ashley English, Shelby Tucker, Audry Terry, Stephanie Gamache, Linda Ehlen Dyal and Susan Shaw. Not pictured: Kristen Allen, Tiffany Goddard- Snyder, Amanda Rosenblatt, Alexa Wint, Emily Gonzales, Erika Windhaus, Jillian Green, Lori Gibbs, Natasha Preckajlo, Nina Cohen, Stephanie Gamache, Taryn Gerson, Hunter Sleiman, Paul Esdale, Nancy Moss, Jim Loos, Samantha Holtzman.

Cowford Prepares to Give Cancer the Boot

The committee for the 2024 Cowford Ball is in full swing preparing for the 29th annual Cowford Ball, presented by Morgan and Morgan. Tickets are on sale for this Gold Rush-themed annual event, held Sept. 21 at Deerwood Castle and benefiting the Jacksonville Hope Lodge. Planned highlights include an art project, mechanical bull, live music, photos, food and drink, a live and silent auction, and a Partner Reception at the Jax Sports Car Museum.

"Together, we can make a significant impact in the fight against cancer," said event chair Laura Phillips Edgecombe. "The American Cancer Society Cowford Ball raises the critical funds necessary to advance cancer research, support patient services and raise awareness in our community. Join me in this vital mission to create a world with more birthdays."

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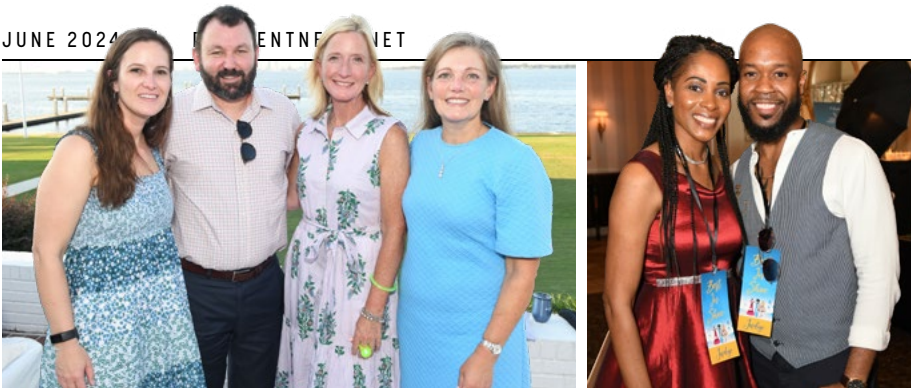
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Jennifer Streyle with Wendy Hughes and Eric Hendrickson



Radha Weeder with 2003 Gator Bowl Chairman Susan Hamilton, Dawn Wilson and Beth Ruzzo



Allison Boree and Heather Waisanen



Leighann Triplett with April Bliss and Whitney Loggins

Ladies Go Bowl'd for Jacksonville

Women across Jacksonville are getting bowl'd over for sports and networking in the Bold City.

Bowl'd Ladies is a women's networking group that serves as an extension of the Bowl'd Membership, a 250-member strong group of professionals who are passionate about sports and the community and known notably for overseeing Jacksonville's annual TaxSlayer Gator Bowl game.

The first Bowl'd Ladies event was hosted in April 2021, shortly after the primarily male-dominant, membership-based group noticed a large number of women in attendance at its first post-pandemic social event.

"From that moment, it has been a wildfire of excitement and meeting new people," said Katie Cox, vice president of marketing, membership and community relations for the Gator Bowl.

The Bowl'd Ladies has grown from 15 original members to more than 60 women who are passionate about college football and the community.

"Women have this perception that we are behind closed doors talking X's and O's of play. That is the furthest thing from the truth. We, at our core, are a community organization," said Cox.

She explained that the group is "all about networking and connectedness" and does not directly fundraise, though some women are looking to establish a fundraising arm in the future. The philanthropic giving comes from Gator Bowl Charities, which is supported by the membership fees.

"I hate networking, and we created a group that doesn't feel like you're networking, but that it is generating meaningful relationships with other business owners. It's not a business card shuffle. And it's fun. It's a thing you saw on your calendar and got excited about coming versus just another thing you have to do," she said.

In addition to socials, the Bowl'd Ladies host two luncheons each year - College Football 101 and College Football 102 - to educate members on the basics of college football and how teams get to bowl tournaments, specifically, the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl.

"Of course, we talk about football because we have this marquee event to celebrate the end of the calendar year, but in large part, we just come together and connect really cool people and give back to the community," she said.

This year, the Bowl'd Ladies partnered with Jacksonville University to establish and plan for a first-time celebration of girls and women in sports, slated for spring 2025.

Member Sara Pomposo is also showing the future of women in sports as she prepares to take the reins as chairman of the Gator Bowl Sports in 2025-26, following Andrew King's 2024-25 tenure. She will be only the fourth female chairman since 2003.

Fashion Show Supports Children's Potential



Lexie Kieweg with Hayley Wilder

The 4th Annual Wine, Women & Shoes put its best foot forward Thursday, May 16 at Timuquana Country Club. With highlights like a fashion show and Best in Shoe contest, the event strutted its stuff to raise funds for Episcopal Children's Services, in order to create opportunities for children to achieve their full potential. The night also included a wine tasting, designer marketplace, culinary treats, an auction and mission moments.



Jennifer Manso Farrell chuckles as Clarke Schools for Hearing and Speech student Whit Farrell hams it up for the audience.



River City Live's Jana Angel emcees as Emerson, Nina and Leighton McIntosh strut their stuff on the runway for the 2nd Annual Hear Me on the Runway fashion show.

Clarke Schools Raise \$10,000

Clarke Florida hosted the 2nd Annual Hear Me on the Runway fashion show benefiting Clarke Schools for Hearing and Speech, Florida on May 11. The event featured 16 current and alumni students strutting the runway alongside their families and siblings. Hear Me on the Runway partnered with Dillard's at the St. Johns Town Center and general manager Rodger Woika to raise \$10,000 for Clarke's listening and spoken language programs and services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. River City Live's Jana Angel emceed the event.



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Hanz Tanzler with Bob Gay



Event Co-Chair Allison Crisp with Anne and Larry Read



Sally Alice Smith with Peggy Johnson and Cheryl Hall



Frank Denton and Elizabeth College with Pat and Grif Helwig

Colonial Dames Take the Spotlight with Simultaneous Spectacles

The Florida chapter of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America marked its 2024 annual meeting with a two-part celebration at Timuquana Country Club. Belles, Beaux & BBQ kicked off May 1 with a bar-b-cue, silent auction, mystery wine game and dancing. The event raised funds for the organization's signature Ximenez-Fatio House in St. Augustine, Florida. Ellen Stark and Allison Crisp served as the event's co-chairs. The Colonial Dames returned the next morning to hear speaker Joseph Oppermann, a noted architect, historian and restorationist, followed by a group luncheon.



Joe and Langdon Opperman with Mary Love MacArthur, Winfield Duss and Elizabeth Howard



First place winners Syler Prince and Parker Stalvey



Second place winners Joe Cotromano and Joey Cotromano



Third place winners Terry Mullis and Miranda Crews

A Reel Win for Tiny Hearts

More than 1,000 anglers from across Florida and the Southeast took to the St. Johns River for the three-day 35th Annual Wolfson Children's Hospital Bass Tournament, which culminated May 18. Parker Stalvey and Syler Prince won first place overall with a five-fish aggregate weight of 27.79 pounds. Second place went to the father-son team of Joe and Joey Cotromano with a total weight of 23.61 pounds, and third place went to father-daughter team Terry Mullis and Miranda Crews with 23.52 pounds.

This year's tournament raised more than \$385,000 for heart surgery equipment for the C. Herman and Mary Virginia Terry Heart Institute at Wolfson Children's Hospital. More than \$7 million has been raised since its inception in 1989.

The tournament is one of the largest bass fishing tournaments in the state. This year's winners took home over \$48,000 in cash prizes. The 36th annual Wolfson Children's Hospital Bass Tournament is scheduled for May 15-17, 2025.



Community Nutcracker board members presented WeCareJax with a \$10,000 donation.







Community Nutcracker board members presented Dreams Come True with a \$40,000 donation.

Nutcracker Ballet Donates \$50K

Board members from the Community Nutcracker presented \$50,000 in donations to Dreams Come True of Jacksonville and WeCareJax at the historic Florida Theatre May 21. Proceeds were raised from the 32nd annual production of The Nutcracker Ballet, which was presented in December 2023 at the Florida Theatre. This year's contribution was in memory of the late Dr. George S. Trotter, one of the founders of the Community Nutcracker and WeCareJax.

Dreams Come True received \$40,000 and WeCareJax received \$10,000 from the organization. With these donations, Community Nutcracker has donated over \$850,000 to locally based nonprofit organizations since 1992.

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Unlocking the Power of 529 Plans and UTMA Accounts

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529 Plans: A Smart Choice for Education Funding

1. What are 529 Plans?

- 529 plans are tax-advantaged accounts designed specifically for education savings.
- Administered at the state level, these plans allow you to invest and grow your funds while enjoying tax benefits. The availability of such tax or other benefits may be conditioned on meeting certain requirements.

2. Recent Changes: K-12 Tuition Eligibility

- Thanks to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (effective January 1, 2018), 529 plans now cover K-12 tuition expenses.
- Families can withdraw up to \$10,000 per year per beneficiary to pay for private elementary and secondary school tuition.

3. Recent Changes: Roth IRA Conversion

- Starting in 2024, if there is any money leftover, 529 account holders can transfer up to a lifetime limit of \$35,000 from a 529 plan to a Roth IRA for a beneficiary. This rule helps 529 plan owners avoid taxes and penalties for nonqualified withdrawals. It's especially useful for funding a Roth in high-income years. The 529 account must have been open for more than 15 years, and the funds cannot be rolled into a Roth IRA until 5 years after the funds were contributed or earned. Participants are subject to

annual Roth IRA contribution limits and must have earned income at least equal to the amount of the rollover.

4. Maximizing 529 Plan Benefits

- We guide you in selecting the right 529 plan, considering state-specific advantages.
- Our experts help optimize contributions and withdrawals to minimize taxes.

UTMA (Uniform Transfers to Minors Act) Accounts: An Alternative Approach

1. What is an UTMA Account?

- UTMA accounts allow you to transfer assets to a minor (your child or grandchild) while maintaining control until they reach the age of majority (usually 18 or 21, depending on the state).
- Unlike 529 plans, UTMA accounts are not limited to education expenses. They can fund various needs, including private school tuition.

2. Tax Implications

- UTMA accounts offer tax advantages similar to 529 plans but not as powerful.
- However, withdrawals from UTMA accounts are not restricted to educational expenses, so more flexible.
- Be aware that once the minor reaches the age of majority, they gain full control over the account. Of course, the account will be long gone paying for education before that ever happens.

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- Walsh Investment Consulting Group assists in multigenerational planning.
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Conclusion: Investing in Education, Securing the Future

Education is an investment that pays dividends for generations. The Walsh Investment Consulting Group stands ready to guide your family toward smart choices, whether it's funding private, Catholic, or religious schooling. Let us help you build a brighter future for your loved ones.

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LOCAL FOLKS



WARREN COOKE

Yellowcard performed at a Jacksonville skate park in 2001 with Cooke (far left) playing bass.

Warren Cooke with his fiancé Amy Parks outside Jacksonville venue Jack Rabbits.

BY LAURA PHELPS

Warren Cooke had no idea that a playful comment he made to his dad in 1997 foreshadowed his future life as a rock star. But that's exactly what happened.

Cooke moved with his family from Tampa to Jacksonville that year to attend Douglas Anderson School of the Arts (DA).

"If I'm going to go to an art school, I'm going to put together a band," Cooke told his dad, partly joking. Though his father grew up in the Ortega area, Cooke was brand new in town and knew no one.

Whether it was fate or serendipity, Cooke met guitarist Ben Harper in the cafeteria on his second day at DA. That same day the two connected with drummer Longineu Parsons, a former DA student who had been touring internationally with his father – a world-famous jazz trumpet player.

"It started with Ben Harper, Longineu Parsons and I playing in Ben's bedroom in his mom's house," Cooke said.

They named the band Yellowcard – a soccer penalty and inside joke the teenage punk rockers used at parties.

Adding guitarist Todd Clary and lead singer Ben Dobson, the band adopted a hardcore punk style. They found their signature sound after adding fellow DA student Sean Mackin, a violinist.

But after two years of performing locally, the band struggled to break through in Jacksonville, and some band members left to pursue other projects. With a new lead singer (Ryan Key, also a DA grad), the

band members decided to move to Los Angeles.

"I think all of our parents were like, 'What the hell are you guys doing?' But we saw a vision. We saw other bands that were starting to break through, and we knew with our background and training, if we put the time into it, we had a shot," Cooke said. And he was right.

In California, Yellowcard signed with a small label, released their first full-length album, *One for the Kids*, and went on a national tour. Audiences grew at each show as the tour went on.

"We became known as the pop-punk band that had a violinist and also did backflips on stage, whatever we could do to get people to remember us," Cooke said.

When the band signed with Capitol Records, their ascent to fame accelerated. Cooke remembers performing at the Olympics Opening Ceremony in Salt Lake City, Utah, in front of thousands of people.

"That was the height of success for me," Cooke said, but it would be short-lived for him.

The band began working on its next album, *Ocean Avenue*, and Cooke disagreed with the stylistic changes record label executives wanted to make. He decided to leave the band in 2002, just before *Ocean Avenue* was released. The album reached number 23 on the US Billboard 200 and was certified platinum in the US.

"Some would say I did all the hard legwork and

then left right before the payoff," Cooke joked. "But for me, it was an amazing experience. I was in the band for five or six years, got to travel, got to play some amazing shows."

Cooke moved back to Jacksonville and became a fill-in bassist for nationally touring bands. He married, had kids and settled into steady work.

"Over the last 20 years, I've moved away from Jacksonville a couple times, and I've always come back here. I love Jacksonville; I think it's an amazing community. It's a great city with a lot of opportunity, and it's constantly expanding," he said.

Cooke also found a new passion: teaching.

"I started teaching piano, bass, guitar, even some ukulele," he said. "It's inspiring to watch somebody all of a sudden become passionate about an instrument when you just show them a couple little tricks of the trade. To me that's worth more than any amount of money because it's passing on knowledge."

While Cooke once taught private lessons full-time, today he focuses on just a handful of students and enjoys songwriting with some of them.

"I have two students right now that are really, really good at it. One of them is a bass player named Sophia. And she is really good at writing bass lines to chords. It's just a way to teach them how to be creative," Cooke said.

Cooke still performs (and probably always will). He plays in two cover bands and an original punk band called Flag On Fire. With a life that is filled with music, family and purpose, he has no regrets. And he hopes his story inspires and encourages young musicians who dream of making it big someday.

"It's just awesome to show them that it's possible. I remember when I was 13 or 14, and I first started taking guitar lessons, and people would say, 'Oh, you're never going to make it, you know, there's only one out of a million people that ever make it in the music business.' So, now I can say to kids, 'Hey, if I can do it, you can do it.'"

“ Over the last 20 years, I've moved away from Jacksonville a couple times, and I've always come back here. I love Jacksonville; I think it's an amazing community.

It's a great city with a lot of opportunity, and it's constantly expanding.”

– Warren Cooke

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If I couldn't see or smell, I would know I was home in our Resident Community because of the sounds we get to process around here daily. For better or worse (depending on the noisemaker), everyday auditory experiences really define our neighborhoods – they set us apart from other less hopping, more humdrum areas of town. Let's be grateful for these familiar echoes, even the grating ones! Hear me out on why it should all be music to our ears.

Each morning at 7 a.m., just before the roar of landscapers' blowers rouses all sleeping neighbors, most of us are privileged to hear the distant wail of Big Jim, the large copper steam whistle affixed to the roof of JEA's Main Street building in downtown Jacksonville. Like clockwork, Big Jim signals to the surrounding community that it is 7 a.m. (time to get your butt out of bed), noon (time to grab lunch), 1 p.m. (time to get back to the grindstone) and 5 p.m. (quittin' time). This is a sensible routine, one to which we are all so fortunate to align our lives. Big Jim makes sure we all just keep it simple and stick to the basics of the day. And I love how Big Jim has been a constant in our shared history. According to an old JEA release, the whistle has been keeping us on track since 1985, when the city opened the JEA plant near Springfield. "The 32-

inch copper steam whistle began marking the key times of the workday with few interruptions since. It also warned residents of the Great Fire of 1901 and signaled important historic events, such as the end of two world wars. It marked the arrival of electricity and each New Year's Day since 1896." What an honor to live in our neighborhoods and continue this tradition! Not everyone in Northeast Florida can do so.

I mentioned the blowers earlier. This is not one of my favorite neighborhood noises. And unlike the blow of Big Jim, landscape company blowers have no history, tradition or schedule, nor are they unique to our neighborhoods. But I cannot reflect on daily neighborhood sounds without wincing over and acknowledging their ear-bleeding existence. The only redeeming quality about this noise to me, personally, would be if it was OUR yard maintenance crew causing all the ruckus. But it NEVER IS. Our landscaper rarely shows up. Thus the rooty, dollar-weedy blanket of long, crunchy grass. SMH.

The other morning cacophony that gets the neighborhood going is the sound of waste management and recycling trucks. I don't mind these noises. To me, it is the sound of progress – that we are all working together to purge, lessen and banish the trash from our lives. That metal-grating discord also makes me feel extremely grateful for the men and women who work in waste removal. It's one of the most important and difficult jobs out there, in my opinion. These folks must wake up very early, get in big, smelly trucks and cart away all of the unwanted crap we discard. And to boot, they are really gracious people. The other day, the bestie and I were on a walk, and I guess looking exhausted or worried or just plain pitiful, and one of the garbage truck drivers waved and offered us two bottles of water. I mean, how generous and loving

– and embarrassing that I must look like death during my morning walks. I'll take it, though. This noise is fine by me.

Once I'm up and at 'em and doing my thing in the neighborhood, another familiar noise is the reverberating bellow of trains crossing many of our area streets and the St. Johns River bridge, of course. A more negative person – like the riled she-elf who informs many conversations in my head – would say these sounds really suck. Train whistles prophesy a painful car wait, usually when you're late for something important. Train whistles also can be scary when you're playing pickleball at the Southside Tennis Complex or elsewhere. Train whistles always come at the worst possible times and can be heard in the wee hours of the morning, long before Big Jim and the leaf blowers begin their daily howl. But here's the thing – the good thing – about trains' excruciating blasts. They indicate we live in a thriving community that is based on and has a future in logistics and transportation. Jacksonville is the Main and Main, coast-to-coast, north-to-south vortex of the commerce world. It all begins and ends in Jacksonville, Florida, and I don't think we want it any other way. Transportation is the foundation of our prosperity here. So, let's just do our best to accept that and use those long wait times at the railroad crossing to be productive and positive – redefine the wait as prayer time, or a 20-minute reflection, meditation or moment to call an old friend and reconnect. As god-awful as those blasts are, train noises are actually really good for us.

On the same note, so are the bells and ding-ding-dings we hear when one of our neighborhood draw bridges goes up so boats – and trains – can pass. A ding-ding-ding is, of course, much more tolerable than a whoooooo-whooooo(!!!) but it can cause the same grief – the kind that makes my inner-elf roll her eyes and slap the steering wheel. But again, we are privileged to witness healthy commerce and seafaring enjoyment from the front row. These sounds are ours to embrace. No other neighborhoods in Northeast Florida get to experience the city's strengths in this way.

Now that we're talking about planes, trains and automobiles, let's address the planes-and-helicopters part of the neighborhood sound equation. When

I worked at The Bolles School, NAS Jax planes – the big ones – were a common and most impressive commotion. They would fly low, directly over Bolles Hall and across the St. Johns River, multiple times throughout each day. It was the same – and even more fun – when the Blue Angels were practicing for an upcoming air show. And then there are the sounds of helicopters from Mayport Naval Air Station making their way downtown and following the bends of the St. Johns River. These are the sounds of freedom, y'all! I have never minded hearing these tones.

And let's talk about the sounds of impending imprisonment. Yes, Jacksonville Sheriff's Office helicopters often fly low and loud over our neighborhoods. They make me wonder if someone's hiding in my backyard or if I need to go lock a few extra doors and windows. Yes, these noises are disconcerting. But does Nocatee get this kind of crime-drama excitement? No, it does not. Boring as heck. We are fortunate to live in a neighborhood that has a flash of gritty flair from time to time.

It's a good thing that we have church bells to remind us of all the good in our midst, and that God is in charge. Aren't chimes so soothing? I love hearing them. A friend who lived very near a chiming church was not always happy to hear them, as bells can be loud and unnerving if you're trying to work or talk to someone. But let's be real; church bells remind us that we are a village, just like the old days when church bells signaled the time and called folks to worship.

As night comes, I know it's been a really great day in the neighborhood when I hear owls and foxes screeching at the moon and into the beautiful wild that surrounds us. I am grateful to be reminded of our place in a connected universe.

Susanna Barton sometimes enjoys the hushed sounds of late-night teenager mischief coming from the park because it's a reminder that some things in life never change. A Granada resident, Barton has written professionally for The Jacksonville Business Journal, The Resident News, Jacksonville University and The Bolles School. She currently manages an online community called Grand Plans, which encourages healthy conversations about aging and preparing for it on mygrandplans.com.

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ANIMAL HOUSE

Jacksonville Gallops into Action with American Wild Mustangs

BY JULIE KERNS GARMENDIA

Wild mustangs still freely roam on U.S. public rangelands. Yet, readers may be unaware that these living symbols of America's rich, Western pioneer and frontier history also live around Jacksonville. They were obtained through a U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) federal program that manages wild herds. Wild mustangs and burros (or donkeys) are defined by federal law as unbranded, unclaimed, free-roaming animals found on U.S. public lands. The BLM regularly rounds up these excess animals for immediate sale or adoption.

Wild mustangs and burros only survive today because Congress passed the 1959 Public Law 86-234, known as the Wild Horse Annie Act, and the 1971 Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act. Before those laws, they were routinely captured on public, state and private lands by ranchers or "mustangers" for sale or shipment to commercial slaughterhouses for pet food. They were also shot and poisoned by ranchers, hunters and landowners who considered them pests competing for water and vegetation.

In 1950, Velma Johnston was a Nevada secretary driving to work behind a truck overloaded with visibly wounded mustangs. Horrified, she documented that mustangs were commercially harvested, rounded up and sold to slaughterhouses for 6 1/2 cents per pound, regardless of injuries or suffering. Alive and mobile were the only requirements for sale.

"Wild Horse Annie," as Johnston became known, launched a national publicity campaign, successfully mobilizing students across America to flood Congressional members with

letters demanding federal protection for mustangs and laws banning inhumane treatment. The Wild Horse Annie Act was the first federal law to prohibit using aircraft or vehicles to capture or kill mustangs or poisoning water holes on federal land. Later, the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act prohibited the capture, injury or disturbance of free-roaming mustangs and burros on federal land.

Those familiar with mustangs say they differ from domestic horses. Mustangs are curious, sensitive and hyper-wary with a sixth sense for danger – necessary for



Amanda Flynn and Leo

survival in their open-range homelands.

The late Florida horsewoman/trainer Ashley Rose Stevenson, who founded Downtown Mustangs Florida Adoptions and saved thousands of mustangs, said, "Mustangs are like ninjas. They can see, hear and smell danger miles away and are the best trail horses, quiet as can be."

Mustangs are also highly prized for their unusually robust health and sound feet, strength, sure-footedness and adaptability. Their athleticism,



Amanda Flynn and her Bureau of Land Management mustang, Leo, with his U.S. Government freeze mark ID. Each unique freeze mark provides that animal's registration number, registering organization and birth year. The mark is made by a cold iron chilled in liquid nitrogen.

intelligence, trainability and quick learning distinguish them in pleasure riding or competition: barrels, dressage, reining, jumper, endurance, cross country, drill team, mounted shooting, Western or English riding and all-breed horse shows. They also successfully work in therapeutic equestrian programs.

Amanda Flynn and Leo

Jacksonville's Amanda Flynn and her Bay

in a new capacity, serving others at the Trinity Rescue Mission Farm as she coped with her loss.

"My friend, Barb, volunteered there, had horses and got me riding. It felt completely natural from the start," Flynn said. "I adopted an older, rescue quarter horse, Aspen, and then bought Serah, a Morgan, who helped me win my first barrel race. Barb and her husband had adopted a BLM mustang; that's how I first



Seth Samples with Peyton Norman, 13, atop Lincoln

Mustang Leo's story is unique compared to typical mustang owners. Flynn did not grow up in a saddle and boots but learned to ride as an adult. A corporate sales executive, she traveled between Miami and Atlanta, far from the equestrian life, until hers took a painful turn.

In 2018, Flynn's husband, Steve, 30, died, leaving her grief-stricken. A lifelong animal rescuer and shelter volunteer, she was a Friends of Jacksonville Animals board member. Flynn began volunteering

learned about mustangs."

In May 2022, Flynn heard that County Line Equine Rescue had adoptable BLM mustangs. There, she saw a Nevada mustang, Leo, 5. It was love at first sight.

"I knew as soon as I saw him; what a beauty!" Flynn said. "He's so smart, he unlatches doors and lets the other horses out. If anything is scary, Leo is the brave one who investigates," Flynn said.

Already boarding two horses, Flynn adopted Leo, sold her home, bought

CONTINUED ON PAGE 37

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Leo

property and grew her herd to six horses, five rescue dogs, emus, alpacas, goats and pigs. She is now happily engaged to Shane Tedder.

Seth Samples and Lincoln

Unlike Flynn, Seth Samples was born a cowboy, but horses, especially mustangs, changed his life, too. A former rodeo and competition-professional-turned-renowned-horse-whisperer, Samples says his greatest life lessons came from mustangs.

Samples can ride a wild mustang within a few hours, and he proved that by winning many rodeos, mustang-breaking and colt-starting competitions, despite the danger to himself and the horses. However, he no longer believes in timed competitions or the win-at-all-costs mentality for himself or his horses. His attitude toward training dramatically changed as he saw successful, more humane methods emerge and experienced his own personal trials.

In addition to training horses – without rigid deadlines or unrealistic goals – Samples helps manage 15,000 cattle within two hours of Jacksonville. He speaks reverently of famous horseman Dan “Buck” Brannaman, the trainer who inspired Nicholas Evans’ bestselling novel and 1998 hit movie, *The Horse Whisperer*. Brannaman still practices and teaches his gentle training methods, which are based on understanding how horses think and communicate and the critical difference that building a deep bond between horse and rider can make.

“While a horse is with me, no matter what situation it comes from, it is going to spend the best hours and days of its

life,” Samples said.

On a sunny morning at his ranch, Samples introduced Lincoln, a muscular, shining copper-colored Nebraska mustang, who stood perfectly still and relaxed, as indicated by his slightly lifted back hoof. Lincoln listened intently, ears pointed toward Samples. His weathered hands groomed Lincoln’s mane as he told the story of this special mustang.

“In 2023, my friend asked me to train his wife’s BLM wild mustang. Lincoln was a real looker...coat shines like a new, copper penny in the sun,” he said. “It took a few weeks until he came close, but I never touched him. I was waiting for him to tell me he was ready. My grandson touched him first when Lincoln was following him around. I told [my grandson] Bryar to just reach his hand back and let Lincoln nuzzle him. The horse did, and that was a moment.”

Samples said it’s a considerable responsibility to train a client’s horse, but a mustang even more so because they can be dangerous and unpredictable. Removing a mustang’s fear of anything touching or being on their back is “such a big deal.” After six months of patiently working with him, Samples thought Lincoln was ready for more contact. The day Samples raised his torso onto the horse’s back, his boot awkwardly caught Lincoln’s side, spooking him.

“He reacted just like a mountain lion was on him. He whipped around and bit my leg so hard. If not for my thick leather boots, he would have ripped out my entire calf,” Samples said.

The disappointing setback meant weeks of starting over from the beginning to regain Lincoln’s trust. One day, Samples looked over and saw owners’ daughter, Peyton Norman, 13, next to Lincoln’s flank, calmly scratching his belly.

“I about had a heart attack, but that little girl had no fear of him, and Lincoln knew it,” Samples said. “He was totally free and relaxed, enjoying her attention. I slowly walked over and put Peyton up on him, then my grandsons, Bryar and Aaron. He was fine with the kids, dragging his lead rope around. Then he accepted their smaller saddles; they all rode him. In six months, I rode him. Now, Peyton rides Lincoln bareback.”

For the full story on American mustangs, including their origins, visit residentnews.net.

Adopt Me!

Do you love black labs?

Meet Oliver. He cannot wait to meet his lab person! This ACPS superstar, mixed-breed lab is currently with a foster and looking for his forever home. Oliver, 6, weighs 85 pounds with a silky black coat and brown eyes. He is fully vetted, neutered, vaccinated, heartworm-negative, perfectly housebroken and high-energy, but does not bark, jump or act destructive. Oliver loves people, children and is dog-friendly. He lives to retrieve his Kong balls, is affectionate and bonds quickly. Oliver knows basic commands, is obedient and does not shed. Email Julie@residentnews.net for information or to arrange to meet this wonderful dog.

Looking for a different animal to call your own?

ACPS, along with 18 other shelter and adoption agencies, are participating in the Petco Love Statewide Mega Adoption Event, where hundreds of dogs and cats will be available for adoption. All pets are spayed/neutered, microchipped and vaccinated.



Oliver, 6, is available for adoption through ACPS.

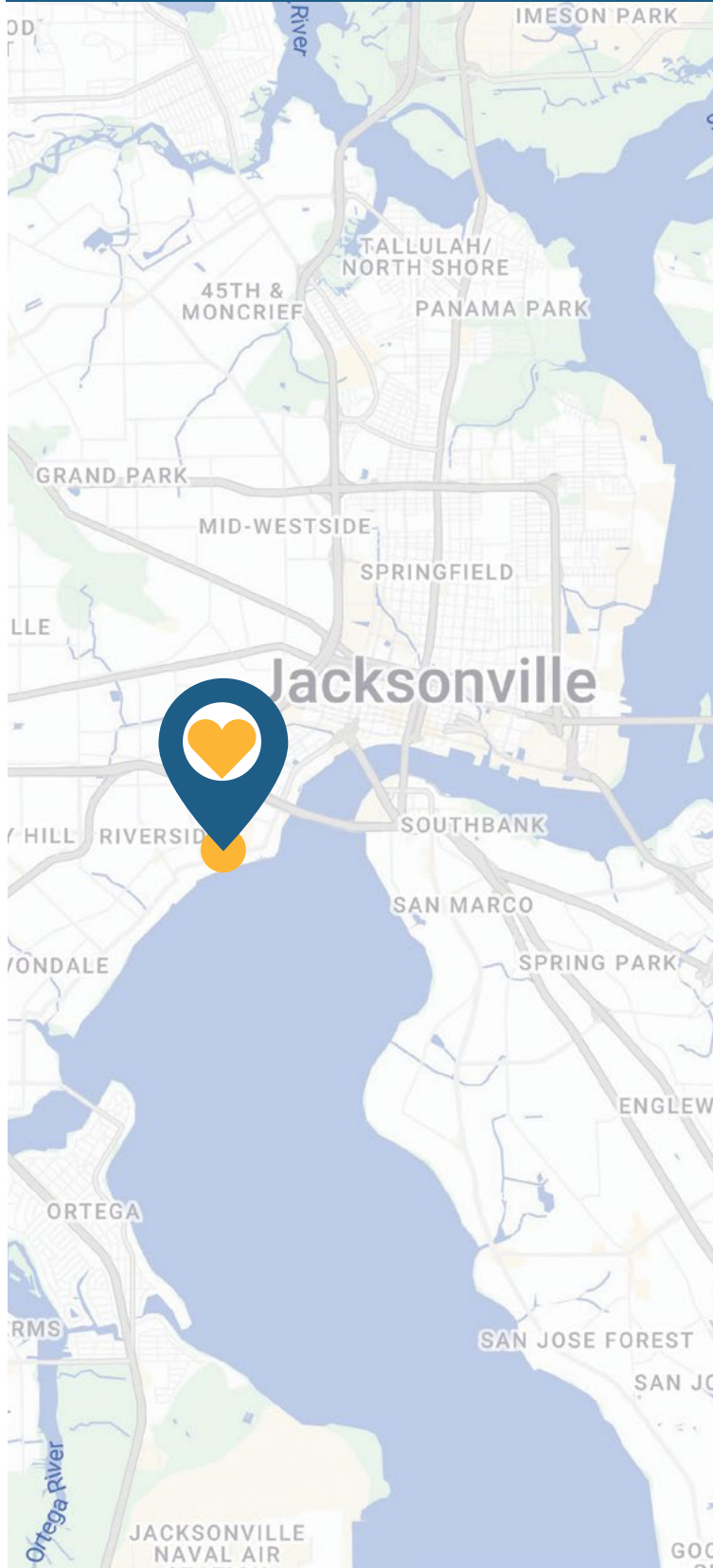


Thank you to everyone who joined us at our Armed Forces Military Gala. It was a fantastic event, drawing a distinguished crowd to celebrate it. The highlight of the evening was unveiling the newly named Five Star Veterans Center Col. and Suzie Loving Complex. This dedication honors the contributions of Col. Len Loving and his wife, Suzie, to the veteran community. In addition to the facility's naming, the Board of Directors, led by Mike Hightower, announced the creation of a new scholarship under Col. Len Loving's name. This scholarship will be awarded to individuals who journey from the battlefield to the classroom and beyond. It aims to recognize those who inspire others with their perseverance and passion. Five Star Veterans Center Col and Suzie Loving Complex's mission is to provide displaced military veterans the safe housing and the supportive services they need to successfully transition to living independently in a place they call home.

To donate, please go to our website 5starveteranscenter.org or tour the center, and call 904.723.5950 on how you can help us with this life-saving mission.



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BY PEGGY HARRELL JENNINGS



Paul Karabinis



Linda Chipperfield



Dustin Harewood with Joseph Provenza painting



Johnny Masiulewicz with Jim Draper



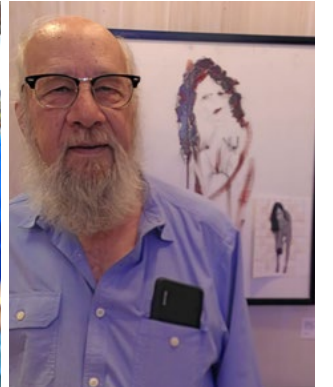
Barbara Colaciello with Dustin Harewood, Tif Manning and Johnny Masiulewicz



Larry Wilson with Tiffany Manning and Keith Dole



Annelies Dykgraaf with Ed and Sunny Malesky



Belton Wall



Kathy Stark

June reminds us that nature is the ultimate artist painting the world with vibrant colors and breathtaking landscapes. - Rebecca Serle

Nowhere was this more evident than the recent display at CoRK Arts District of 140 pieces of artwork by 63 contemporary artists in celebration of Florida's flora and wild places. "Floribunda," sponsored by the Ixia Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, drew a huge crowd of art enthusiasts and naturalists. Ixia Chapter Director Adam Arendell said the show was a tremendous success and offered thanks to CoRK and the "wonderful" artists who participated. A portion of the sales went to help the Florida Native Plant Society with the conservation of Florida ecosystems.

Chapter President Jody Willis said, "We were excited to work with all the artists to celebrate Florida's biodiversity through their art."

Betsy Harris, Ixia Chapter vice president, celebrated the opportunity to bring "artists, art enthusiasts, environmentalists and natural history lovers together" for the festive and educational event. The event was accompanied by energetic music from DJ and exhibiting artist John Drum.

In the back gallery, Joseph Provenza's vividly colored abstract paintings with representational cultural commentary were featured.



Tony Wood

April showers brought May flowers as Valentina Nedelcheva's "Kingdom of Flowers" exhibit adorned the second and third floors of Jacksonville's Main Library. Nedelcheva, an exhibiting artist at TAC - The Art Gallery, is known for her impasto style of painting which she creates with her fingers, palette knife and other utensils. The textural, vibrant paintings resemble thick icing.

Did you know the Main Library has docent-led tours of the current art exhibits twice a week and during Art Walk? Tours include the permanent collections of work by well-known artists Memphis Wood, Jerry Uelsmann, Augusta Savage, Lee Adams, and others. Go to jaxpubliclibrary.libret.info for tour times.

Southlight Gallery had a great representation during Art Walk. The gallery at 1 Independent Dr. has a lineup of award-winning artists and is open from 5-8 p.m. during Art Walk. Check out southlightgallery.com for hours and upcoming shows.

The Florida Mining Gallery at 2756 Park St. (formerly Pedestrian Gallery) now has its sign up, contemporary artwork displayed, and more to come. Receptions will begin in the fall. In the meantime, contact them for private showings at floridamininggallery.com.

The 22nd season of the Prelude Chamber Music Camp and Festival starts June 17 with daily concerts at noon at Riverside Park United Methodist Church. Their finale concert is June 22 at 11 am. Contact jjmajors12@gmail.com for more info.

June is busting out all over! Pick up the rhythm of life and chase' into summer with a poem, a song, a vision of beauty and joy inspired by the arts in your mind and in your heart.



This edition of the Artbeat column pays tribute to the talented local artist who shared his cartoons and artwork with *The Resident News* for the past 17 years. Ed, the artist who designed the column's logo, has sadly passed away, leaving a void in our Resident News family and the wider community. He will be deeply missed.



Valentina Nedelcheva



Lana Shuttleworth Wood and Wayne Wood in front of Jim Draper paintings from Southlight Gallery

THE BEAT GOES ON!

June 1

Authors' Showcase and Book Festival

11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at CoRK East with "Readers are Leaders" discussion panels, kid's activities and a bookmaking workshop

June 5

Reception at the Main Library during Art Walk

JAG members' juried art exhibit "Songs of Summer"

Beer and Ballet

7 p.m. at Jacksonville Dance. sprucejax.com

June 8

Hobby Horse Race and Art Exhibit

Ortega River Club, 5-10 p.m. with dinner, dancing and art exhibit. 4165 Lakeside Dr., ortegariverclub.net

June 9

Reception for Nifty-Sixty Art Exhibit

TAC Gallery, 320 E. Adams St., 2-4 p.m.

June 15

Duval Comic and Zine Fest

11a.m. to 5 p.m. at Jacksonville Main Public Library

June 23

Reception 2-4 p.m. at Happy Medium Books Café, 2756 Park St.

with art exhibit featuring Debbie Grisnik's "A Few of My Favorite Things" and LuAnn Dunkinson's "On the Road and Right at Home" and a book signing with Mary Atwood and Deborah Reid "Copyright Artfully Explained: The Illustrated Legal Reference for Visual Artists"

2nd and 4th Saturdays

2-4 p.m. at MOCA Jacksonville Ceramics Workshops, eventbrite.com for info and other educational events

2nd Sundays

2 p.m. at Happy Medium Books Café, 2756 Park St., hosted by Brooks Decker with local poets and writers

2nd and 4th Sundays

Ballroom dancing at Ortega River Club, 2-4 p.m., ortegariverclub.net

Do you know of an upcoming event or accolade that helps pump the rhythmic Artbeat of Jacksonville? Send the announcement to us at editor@residentnews.net for consideration in *The Beat Goes On*.



The library staff at Bill Brinton Murray Hill Library: Mandy Heaton, Sera-Ann Hargrove, Maeve Coen, Jimmy Morgan, Doug Fair and library supervisor Mia Clark (Not pictured: Kayleigh Schwend)

Murray Hill Library Celebrates National Library Week

The Bill Brinton Murray Hill Branch Library, 918 Edgewood Ave. S., participated in April's National Library Week, an annual celebration highlighting the role libraries, librarians and library workers play in transforming lives and strengthening communities. During the week, it hosted drop-in crafts and held an informal reception to view student artwork from neighborhood elementary schools on display at the branch. This year's National Library Week theme was "Ready, Set, Library!"

The Friends of the Bill Brinton Murray Hill Library recognized the contributions made by the library staff and workers with a token of their appreciation on National Library Workers Day, April 9.



Biltmore Elementary's Jaysean Parker exhibits his self-portrait to his grandmother Wanda Williams, sister Malaysia Parker and dad Major L. Parker.



Fishweir Elementary's Clementine Kelley points to her work on display at the library.



Frozen Proves Cool with Kids

The Jacksonville Center for the Performing Arts and the FSCJ Artist Series Broadway in Jacksonville presented Disney's "Frozen the Musical" April 27 through May 4 to the delight of showgoers young and old.

Haydon Williams, 4, Harper Hudson, 4, Melodie Hudson, 7, and Luke Garmendia, 8, "Let it Go" with Elsa, Anna, Olaf and friends for the April 30 show. Williams and Garmendia are the grandsons of Dr. José Garmendia and Julie Kerns Garmendia.

There are currently four productions of "Frozen the Musical" playing around the world - including Tokyo, London and Hamburg - that have welcomed more than two million guests.



Community Rolls Out for Bike Safety

John N.C. Stockton Elementary, along with 1,800 other schools across the nation, participated in the 13th Annual National Bike & Roll to School Day May 8. The event is designed to spotlight the joys and benefits of active travel to school while drawing attention to the need for safe, accessible school commutes.

More than 65 students, parents and community members met at the corner of Avon Lane and Carlisle Road to bike or walk the quarter mile to the school. Two Jacksonville Sheriff's Office officers lead the group, directing traffic and encouraging bike safety.

John N.C. Stockton Elementary has about 165 students who are within walking or biking distance of the school. "My wife and I walked because the neighborhood school is so important to us. Generations have attended the school, and it truly gives us a sense of community," said Barry Willis, Ortega Forest resident.

"National Bike & Roll to School Day provides a springboard for communities aiming to prioritize safe spaces for walking, biking and rolling," said Nancy Pullen-Seufert, director of the National Center for Safe Routes to School.



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| Appalachian State | Concordia University | Full Sail University | Maryland Institute College of Art | Peabody Conservatory | Suffolk University, MA | University of New Haven |
| Atlantic University | Cooper Union | Furman University | Marymount Manhattan College | Pennsylvania State University | Temple University | University of North Carolina |
| Ball State University | Converse College | Georgia Southern University | Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts | Portland State University | Tennessee State University | University of North Texas |
| Baldwin College | Daton State College | Georgia State University | Massachusetts Institute of Technology | Point Park University | Texas Tech University | University of North Florida |
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| Baylor University | Drexel University | Grambling State University, LA | Montclair State University | Ringling College of Art and Design | The University of the Arts | University of South Carolina |
| Belmont University | Duke University | Hamden Sydney College, Virginia | Moore College of Design | Roanoke College | University of Alabama | University of South Florida |
| Beloit College | Eckerd College | Hampton University | New England Conservatory of Music | Rollins College | University of California, Los Angeles | University of Southern California |
| Benedict College | Edward Waters College | Hollins University | New College of Florida | Rutgers University | University of Central Florida | University of Tampa |
| Bennington College | Embry Riddle Aeronautical University | Howard University | New Hampshire Institute of Art | Sam Houston State University | University of Connecticut | University of Texas |
| Bethune-Cookman University | Elon University | Illinois University | New World School of the Arts | Santa Fe College | University of Evansville | University of Vermont |
| Berklee College of Music | Emerson College | Indiana University | New York University | Sarah Lawrence College | University of Florida | University of Victoria, Canada |
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Tammy Yazgi, Dima Kroma and Nora Bouziane

Syrian-American Artist Mentors Students

Syrian-American artist Dima Kroma visited the Bolles Upper School San Jose Campus

April 22 to speak with art students from teacher Tiffany Gonzalez's classes.

Kroma discussed Islamic art and why she utilizes it in her works, noting her personal connection to the style. Afterward, she spent time mentoring two upper school students with whom she shares cultural connections. Senior Tammy Yazgi received feedback from Kroma on her pieces exploring the trauma of the Syrian War. Kroma also spent time with Nora Bouziane, who uses Arabic text with Islamic and Moroccan influences in her 3D art.

"Dima encouraged the students to continue leaning into heritage, research and personal meaning, remarking that it is exciting and encouraging to see relatable cultural expressions on display in Gooding Gallery," Gonzalez said.

Kroma recently completed her MFA at Jacksonville University, and her thesis show is on display in the Florida State College of Jacksonville Baymeadows Gallery. She is the youth and family programs manager at The Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens.



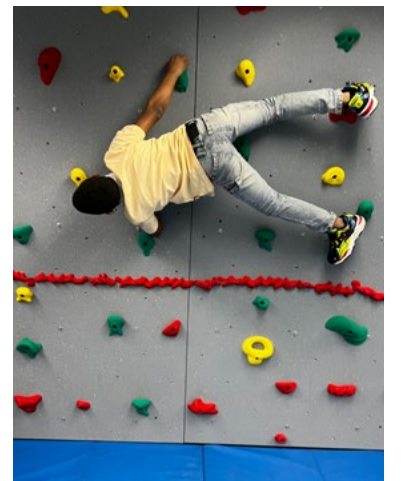
Vice Principal Michael Broach with Nick Martin, Keegan Gallup, Kolbe Sexton, Brody Cooper and Zach Crutchfield

Climbing Wall Helps Five Rise to Eagle Scout

Five Bishop Kenny High School students representing four Scout troops throughout Jacksonville achieved the rank of Eagle Scout, scouting's highest honor: Nick Martin, Keegan Gallup, Kolbe Sexton, Brody Cooper and Zach Crutchfield.

One of the main pillars of attaining the rank of Eagle Scout is the planning, development and completion of a significant service project. This year, the young men built projects ranging from butterfly and rock gardens to benches and picnic tables. The largest project involved installing a 20-by-8 adaptive climbing wall in a specially designed classroom that will be used by more than 75 elementary students.

The materials were funded through donations and the labor was provided by the young men as part of their service project. Additional support came from Assumption, Resurrection, and St. John the Baptist Catholic Churches, Neptune Beach Elementary School and the Italian American Society.



Alex Chindris and Anabella Platt at the Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair.

Platt Places Second at International Science Fair

Episcopal School of Jacksonville (ESJ) senior Anabella Platt won second place in the Earth and Environmental Science category at the Regeneron International Science and Engineering Fair in Los Angeles the week of May 13 for her investigation of hemp-based artificial coral reefs as a biodegradable solution to marine restoration. The award included a \$2,000 check. ESJ junior Alex Chindris was also a finalist at the competition, which included more than 1,600 students from 65 countries. The students presented their projects, attended panel discussions with Nobel Laureates and networked with the next generation of researchers and engineers.



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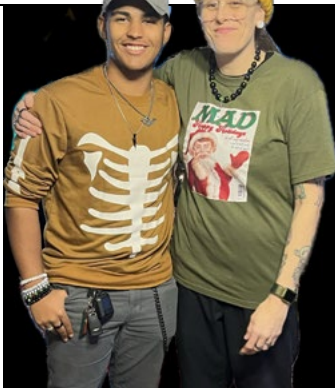
American University	Florida Gulf Coast University	Newberry College	The University of Texas at Austin	University of South Carolina
Anderson University	Florida Institute of Technology	North Carolina A & T State University	The University of West Florida	University of South Florida (Main Campus)
Appalachian State University	Florida International University	North Carolina State University	Thiel College	University of South Florida (St Petersburg)
Arizona State University (Tempe)	Florida International University	Northern Arizona University	Thomas Jefferson University	University of Southern Maine
Auburn University	Florida Polytechnic University	Nova Southeastern University	Trinity University	University of Utah
Babson College	Florida Southern College	Oklahoma State University (Main Campus)	Tulane University of Louisiana	University of Virginia (Main Campus)
Bard College	Florida State University	Palm Beach Atlantic University	United States Merchant Marine Academy	University of Washington (Seattle Campus)
Barry University	Fordham University	Penn State University (University Park)	United States Military Academy at West Point	University of West Georgia
Baylor University	Franklin & Marshall College	Purdue University (Main Campus)	University of Akron Main Campus	University of Wyoming
Belmont University	Furman University	Rhodes College	University of Alabama in Huntsville	Valdosta State University
Bethune-Cookman University	Gannon University	Rice University	University of Arizona	Villanova University
Bluffton University	George Washington University	Ripon College	University of Arkansas	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Boston College	Georgetown University	Rollins College	University of California (Riverside)	Voorhees University
Boston University	Georgia Institute of Technology	Samford University	University of Central Florida	Wake Forest University
Brenau University	Georgia Southern University	San Diego State University	University of Charleston	Washington and Lee University
Butler University	Gettysburg College	San Jose State University	University of Colorado Boulder	Washington State University
California Polytechnic State University (San Luis Obispo)	Hampden-Sydney College	Santa Fe College	University of Connecticut	Washington University in St. Louis
Carleton College	Hawai'i Pacific University	Sarah Lawrence College	University of Delaware	Wayne State University
Carlow University	High Point University	Seton Hall University	University of Denver	West Virginia University
Catholic University of America	Hillsborough Community College	Sewanee: The University of the South	University of Florida	Western Carolina University
Citadel Military College of South Carolina	Hillsdale College	Simmons University	University of Georgia	Wilkes University
Clemson University	Indiana University (Bloomington)	South Carolina State University	University of Hartford	William & Mary
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College of the Holy Cross	Jacksonville University	St. Andrews University	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Worcester State University
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Davidson College	Kansas State University	Stetson University	University of Kentucky	York College of Pennsylvania
Dickinson College	Kennesaw State University	Syracuse University	University of Maine	
Drexel University	Kenyon College	Tallahassee Community College	University of Memphis	
Duke Kunshan University	Louisiana State University	Temple University	University of Miami	
Duke University	Loyola Marymount University	Texas Christian University	University of Mississippi	
Eastern Nazarene College	Loyola University Chicago	The American University of Paris	University of Mount Union	
Eckerd College	Marymount University	The College of Wooster	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	
Elizabethtown College	Massachusetts Maritime Academy	The New School	University of North Carolina at Pembroke	
Elmhurst University	Mercer University	The Ohio State University	University of Oklahoma	
Elon University	Methodist University	The University of Alabama	University of Rhode Island	
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (Daytona Beach)	Michigan State University	The University of Tampa	University of Richmond	
Emory University	Middle Tennessee State University	The University of Tennessee (Knoxville)	University of San Diego	
Fairfield University	Montana State University			
Flagler College	Mount Holyoke College			
Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University	New York University			
Florida Atlantic University				



Age one to grade 12
www.esj.org



Dakota Linster and his award from National Sojourners, which he received earlier this year.



Dakota with his aunt, Nikki.



Dakota Linster

Hitting All the Right Notes

One teen's journey to find his voice and overcome adversity

Seventeen-year-old Dakota Linster has worked hard to find his voice – and not just as the frontman for his band, Eudaimonia.

The Riverside resident has a passion for music. He also plays the drums, plans to learn the keyboard and one day hopes to learn bass guitar and how to sing “properly.”

“Usually, I listen to music or watch TV or play video games, normal teen stuff but music is my pride and joy, you know, it’s what really makes me happy.”

A junior at Riverside High School, Linster is also turning an eye towards the future, which, for him, includes college and a degree in mechanical engineering, just in case music doesn’t work out as a successful career, he said. With that degree, he hopes to work in the motor vehicle industry, perhaps working on or designing cars.

Linster’s days are filled with typical teen activities: school, homework, band practice, working with his uncle on the weekends and hanging out with friends. As a sophomore, he joined the NJROTC and has since advanced to the rank of Lieutenant Commander. In April, he received the National Sojourners award “in recognition of the highest attributes of Americanism and support of the United States as a [Riverside High School Navy JROTC].”

“The award is pretty exciting because it’s the first medal I’ve gotten, and it’s the first award I’ve gotten,” Linster said. “I’m just proud. Proud of myself, really.”

Linster is excelling and excited to see what the future has in store for him beyond high school, but he’s had to overcome significant family upheaval to get to where he is today.

Four years ago, Linster’s aunt, Nikki Linster, took him in when her younger sister could no longer care for him. While she didn’t have children of her own, Nikki Linster referred to the learning curve of raising her teenage nephew as an experience she’s “enjoyed thoroughly” and said she is proud of everything they’ve both accomplished.

“I love the kid, like him being here, I like being a parent,” she said. “I didn’t know I would like that so much, but I do. I’m old, but it made me grow up a lot.”

Since coming to live with her, Dakota Linster said he’s proudest of how active and involved he’s become in his own life and said mealtimes are particularly special to him. At the dinner table with his aunt, he feels truly at home.

“I love that family experience, you know?” he said.

Other family members, too, have rallied around Linster, providing life lessons in everyday tasks. He earns spending money from his uncle by completing yard work or helping at the security firm his uncle runs, but for Linster, that work is “more than just a job.”

“He’s teaching me a lot of life skills that a father figure would teach their son,” he said.



Lee and Drew Haramis with Lee Haramis, Jr.



An Angel family decorating angels at the 2024 memorial event



Allison Brundick Haramis



Angel mom Heather Miller with friends and family.

Angels for Allison Shines in Dark Times

The Allison Brundick Haramis Foundation, also known as Angels for Allison, is marking its 15th anniversary in 2024. Since its inception, it has supported 1,000 families and given \$1 million toward funeral costs for families who have lost a child. The Foundation helped seven families in its first year, a number that has grown to 175 annually as of last year.

“Unfortunately, the need for our services will never go away, and this need continues to grow exponentially each year. If Angels for Allison did not exist, these families would not have another resource in their darkest time. We want to build awareness and broaden our community of supporters beyond our strong and dedicated roots in order to sustain and serve families in need in Northeast Florida,” said Executive Director Anne Marie Van Wie.

The organization was founded by Lee and Drew Haramis after the loss of their daughter, Allison. It raises funds for community funeral services through annual gala and luncheon events, as well as the sale of painted angels, which it also gives to families in honor of their lost child. It also recently established a new Angel Partner Program, where companies and individuals support the organization through an annual sponsorship. Constellation FURYK & FRIENDS presented by Circle K is the first organization to join the program.

Its annual gala, Flight of Fancy, will be held Nov. 8 at the Garden Club of Jacksonville.



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Songwriting student Eden Clayton records at Dolphinium Records. John Citrone looks on as Jason Perry works the soundboard.

Schools Collaborate for Student Songwriters, Musicians



Songwriting student Sam Rajashekar visits Dolphinium Records.

Douglas Anderson School of the Arts (DA) and Jacksonville University's (JU) recording label, Dolphinium Records, announced a partnership aimed at nurturing budding songwriters and enhancing music education. Under the guidance of DA teacher John Citrone, students can now gain hands-on experience in contemporary pop songwriting and professional recording at Dolphinium Records.

"This partnership with Dolphinium Records has allowed our students to immerse themselves in the music industry, learning from professionals and gaining practical experience in a professional recording studio," said Citrone.

Dolphinium Records is a student-run, campus-based record label for JU with a rich history dating back to at least 1968-69. It offers students at JU a range of opportunities to explore music production, sound design and live sound.

"Our collaboration with DA represents a shared commitment to nurturing the next generation of musical talent," said Jason Perry, JU songwriting professor and faculty advisor of Dolphinium Records. "This partnership aims to provide students with the resources and support they need to succeed in the music industry."

Looking ahead, Perry envisions expanded collaborations, including joint recording projects and live performances featuring students from both institutions.

"The best way to get an artist's music out there [is to] play it live," Perry said. "People still enjoy live music, and the talent coming out of DA is worth checking out!"



Students Opt for Immersive Summers

Ten Bolles students have opted to participate in immersive international summer programs through Children's International Summer Villages (CISV). The students, ranging from fifth to 11th grade, will travel to various destinations across the U.S., Europe and Asia for international leadership programs.

Alex Meyers, Laya Pakala and Karsyn Wilkins will attend international youth meetings held in Turkey, Pennsylvania and Norway with youth from eight countries. Kaia Roychowdhury will participate in an exchange program with another Italian student. Olivia Bassin will attend a three-week camp in Sweden, along with groups from 10 other countries. Sahana Gummadi will serve as a junior counselor at a month-long "Village" camp in South Korea, where she will help lead activities for 11-year-olds from 12 other countries.



Exchange Club Male Student of the Year Cody Chen with Exchange Club President Jennifer Johnson



Exchange Club Female Student of the Year Mary Clare Stinneford

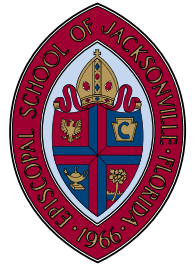
Exchange Club Awards Student Scholars

The Exchange Club of Jacksonville announced the recipients of its 2024 youth awards, selected from roughly 200 applicants throughout Duval County. University Christian School senior Cody Chen was awarded the club's Male Student of the Year award, and Mary Clare Stinneford, senior at Bishop Kenny High School (BK), was selected as the Female Student of the Year. Both received a scholarship check for \$2,000 and advanced to represent the club at the State District Convention May 18, where Stinneford won an additional \$2,500.

"It was such a touching moment to see the surprised look on their faces and the joy and pride in their parents' eyes. Moments like this that make me proud to be a part of the Exchange Club - our youth, community and a great country is what it is all about!" said Exchange Club 2023-24 President Jennifer Johnson.



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Addison Leigh Anderson
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Mark Williams Anderson
Addie is a student at the University of Florida

Jacksonville Debutante Coterie Announced

The Jacksonville Debutante Coterie has been announced for 2024. The debutantes will be presented June 7 during the Magnolia Ball at Timuquana Country Club. The coterie will make its final, formal bow at the Christmas Ball December 28, also at Timuquana Country Club.



Emma Katherine Beard
Daughter of Mrs. Caroline Long Sands and Mr. Charles Adams Beard
Emma Kate is a student at the College of Charleston



Francesca Caroline Borghese
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Scipione Antonio Borghese
Francesca is a student at Wofford College



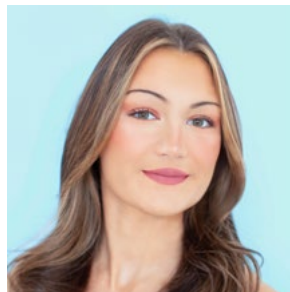
Virginia Grace Burhyte
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jason Peter Burhyte
Grace is a student at Southern Methodist University



Mary Emma Cook
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William Barham Cook
Mary Emma is a student at the University of Florida



Katharine Lovett Fant
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Julian Earle Fant III
Kakki is a student at Trinity College Dublin



Elizabeth Jane Gray Hager
Daughter of Mrs. Missy Hager Riley and Mr. Thomas Preston Hager
Jane Gray is a student at Florida State University



Caroline McComb Hobby
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Scott Lawson Hobby
Mackie is a student at the University of Mississippi



Bridget Elizabeth Monahan
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Vaughan Monahan
Bridget is a student at Auburn University



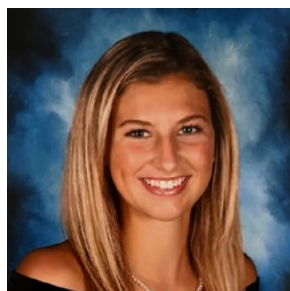
Lilly Anders Moore
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James William Moore, Jr.
Lilly is a student at Wake Forest University



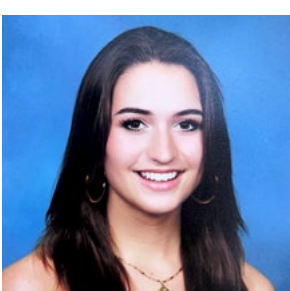
Elizabeth Bowles Ogletree
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Todd Ogletree
Ella is a student at the University of Mississippi



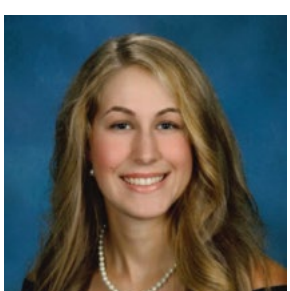
Lucy Walton Rachels
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Philip Sanford Rachels
Lucy is a student at Auburn University



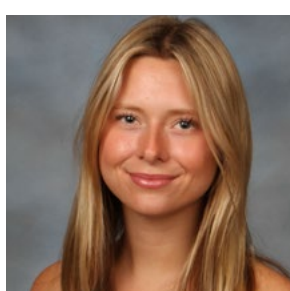
Hadley Sims Ropp
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George Elliott Adams Ropp
Hadley is a student at the University of South Carolina



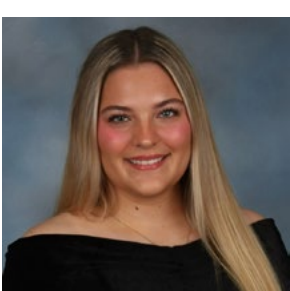
Madeleine Graham Runnels
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Barrett Runnels
Maddie is a student at the College of Charleston



Reilly Elisabeth Shapiro
Daughter of Dr. and Mrs. David Philip Shapiro
Reilly is a student at Bucknell University



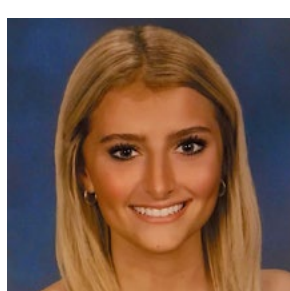
Courtney Elizabeth Thompson
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Willard Thompson
Courtney is a student at Florida State University



Mackenzie Anne Trobaugh
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Michael Joseph Trobaugh
Mackenzie is a student at the University of Alabama



Catherine Sims Wachholz
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Michael Scott Wachholz
Cate is a student at Washington and Lee University



Lucy Avery Williams
Daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Taylor Williams, Sr.
Lucy is a student at the University of South Carolina



The Wesconnett Wildcats participated in Walk Off Charities' Spring Baseball Celebration Weekend.



Coach Wesley and Walk Off Charities Executive Director Jarrod Simmons shared a laugh during the Walk Off Charities Spring Baseball Celebration Weekend introductions.

Charity, Pros Uplift Youth Baseball

In partnership with The Players Alliance and Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ), Walk Off Charities hosted a Spring Baseball Celebration Weekend April 27-28 on the FSCJ campus. The event supported its mission to provide underserved youth with opportunities, resources and access to the game of baseball. Its Spring League Opening Day Celebration, the largest program to date, featured more than 600 players across 63 teams.

"We are very excited about the growth of our programs throughout the year. Through partnerships with groups like The Players Alliance, we are able to impact our coaches and community that much more," said Jarrod Simmons, executive director at Walk Off Charities.

The weekend also included The Players Alliance Coaches Intensive, led by former Major League Baseball players Marquis Grissom, Lou Collier, Marvin Freeman and Lenny Webster. Following the Coaches Intensive was an open workout for the Walk Off Charities Scout Team, formed for minority high school level players to showcase their skills with the hopes of earning college scholarships or pro scouts' attention.

FSCJ baseball Head Coach Brad Frick said, "The kids in the spring leagues are future leaders, students and college baseball players. Supporting them now is setting them up for success in the future."



A baseball player from FSCJ provided hitting coaching to youth participants.

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WEEK 2: June 10th - 14th <i>Ninja Warrior Week</i>	WEEK 7: July 15th-19th <i>Jump Ropes and Hula Hoops</i>	6 HR CAMP 9pm-3pm \$50/day • \$200/week
WEEK 3: June 17th - June 21st <i>Nature Week</i>	WEEK 8: July 22nd - 26th <i>Super Mario Week</i>	9 HR CAMP 9am-6pm \$65/day • \$225/week
WEEK 4: June 24th - 28th <i>Mythical Creatures Week</i>	WEEK 9: July 29st - Aug 2nd <i>Crazy Sports Week</i>	9 HR CAMP with MORNING CARE 7am-6pm \$75/day • \$250/week
WEEK 5: July 1st - July 5th <i>Pirate, Prince and Princess</i>	WEEK 10: Aug 5th - 9th <i>Ooey Goey Science Week</i>	MORNING CARE 7am-9am \$10/day • \$30/week

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THE WAY WE WERE

A Tribute to Bill Carter

BY GEORGE N. MARTIN
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

Our house was within a block of what became known as Ortega Village – a small group of stores that included Banner Grocery, a barber shop, a small mercantile store owned by a neighbor, Mrs. Varnadoe, and the sundries store Doc Ingram's.

Many childhood memories come to mind about Doc's, including the annual promotion visits by the Filipino yo-yo salesmen. They'd spend a couple of days conducting demonstrations and contests in the dirt parking lot and selling a lot of yo-yos. And if you bought a new one, they would carve something on it. They'd use a pocketknife and deftly carve a sailfish or palm tree scene with your initials. I wish I'd kept one for posterity.

There was also the legendary pinball machine. With the flashing lights, bells and flippers – for a nickel a game – it was an exciting and great treat to play. I remember when a crowd of kids gathered, the protocol was to get your nickel in line on the glass top. When yours came to the bottom, your turn was next. Play also required the proper "body English", and nobody was better than my lifelong friend, Judi Wiggins Howell. I remember several boys would sometimes gently lift the machine so Judi could get the front legs on the toes of her PF Flyers...bringing the playing surface to near-level. With that advantage, Judi could win enough games for every kid in the neighborhood to play.

Doc Ingram retired sometime in the mid-'50s and sold the store to a couple of young pharmacists, and it remained the primary gathering place for kids in the neighborhood. As my group of friends grew into our early teens, it was also a period of spiritual awakening. For a time, there was an older, high school girl employed at the lunch counter in the afternoons and weekends. For a bunch of post-pubescent, 13-year-old boys, her feminine charms were spectacular. I remember thorough research being done to determine the flavor of ice cream that required her longest reach. And to this day, I still have a certain affinity for cherry-vanilla.

Doc's later became Carter's Ortega Pharmacy. The co-owner, Bill Carter, became a great friend and an important factor in my parents' later years. Perhaps my favorite story about him occurred on a gawd-awful summer day, long before the indoor world was air-



George Martin with Bill Carter at the counter of Carter's Ortega Pharmacy.

conditioned. Homes and places of business relied on open windows and powerful fans to make the humid Florida summer days bearable until evening brought a little relief.

On one such day, a friend foolishly stuck an ice cream sandwich in his short pants pocket and started for the door. Mr. Carter saw him do it and intercepted him before he could abscond. Rather than a confrontation, Mr. Carter engaged him in a lengthy discussion about family, plans for the next school year, the fortunes of the Jacksonville minor league baseball team, and on, and on. All the while, the ice cream sandwich sat in the unrelenting August heat, cruelly melting in his pocket. By the time Mr. Carter let him go, his pants were a sticky mess, ice cream was beginning to run down his leg and he was scared to death. Nothing was ever said to his parents, but he lost his taste for ice cream sandwiches that day and I don't know that he ever ate one again.

Bill Carter was the kind of guy who had some kind of foolishness for everyone and, for many of us neighborhood kids, a not-so-flattering nickname. Mine was "Norton", a co-star in Jackie Gleason's "Honeymooners" situation comedy skits. Ed Norton was a sewer worker, portrayed by Art Carney, a loosey-goosey character actor. Much of Norton's humor was associated with his work below ground. For several summers during high school, my dad arranged a job with the City of Jacksonville Sewer Department. I was paid \$1.00 an hour for some of the hardest work I've ever done, but for a 16-year-old in 1958, \$40 a week bought a lot of gasoline and tickets to the Normandy Drive-in Theater. When I took my paychecks to Carter's Pharmacy on Friday evenings, "City of Jacksonville Sewer Department" was printed across the top and I became "Norton".

Among my best Jax memories is the night before departing for college and the rest of my life. My high-school sweetie and I splurged at The Green Derby

Restaurant on Riverside Avenue for a farewell dinner. It was everything a special occasion should be: wonderful food, elegant atmosphere and a keen sense of the moment. From across the hazy dining room, I thought I recognized Bill Carter. I didn't give it much thought until being handed a note saying our tab had been taken care of by someone as they left. Of course, Bill had done it, but I left for my new life early the next morning and didn't think to thank him until many years later. He sheepishly admitted remembering the occasion and said it was not a big deal. It was, indeed, a big deal and he was an important factor in my life. That would've been in August 1960, and I still remember him with great fondness, especially for his kindness in later years to my aging parents and his ribald humor.

I was there during my Lee [High School] 50th class anniversary reunion in 2010. As I approached the pharmacy counter, Bill didn't even look up to greet me, once again with his acerbic, "Hey, Norton..."

Sometime after that, I was returning from a fishing trip in Palatka. I came back through Jacksonville early that morning for a ride through the old neighborhood and stopped in to see if Bill was in. He was, and what good fortune for me. We sat at the lunch counter and regaled each other with good stories. I had the opportunity to tell him how grateful I remain for all the years of his kindness and horse-crap foolishness. And yes, it was a long overdue chance to tell him that I genuinely loved him.

Several years later, Bill died. He was somewhere in his 90s and had continued his pharmacy practice until shortly before his death. I felt honor-bound to make the trip from South Carolina back to Jacksonville for his memorial service. As I sat there in the Ortega Methodist Church listening to the tearful tributes by grandchildren, I was overwhelmed with good memories...and wondered if my old friend ever tried another ice cream sandwich.

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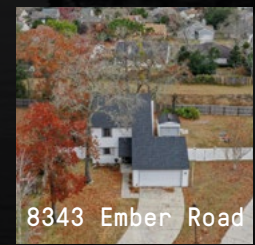
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