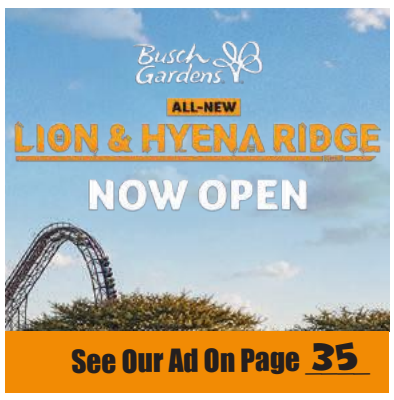


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BLOOMINGDALE DEDICATES 9/11 MEMORIAL ON 25TH ANNIVERSARY

By Marie Gilmore

Twenty-five years after the events of September 11, 2001, Bloomingdale will have a permanent place where residents can pause, remember and reflect.

The Bloomingdale Special District is preparing to dedicate a new 9/11 memorial at the corner of Culbreath Road and Nature's Way Boulevard, creating a lasting community landmark in honor of the 25th anniversary of the attacks.



The new Bloomingdale 9/11 memorial features replicas of the Twin Towers and a search-and-rescue dog, all crafted from black granite.

The memorial was inspired in part by ideas from Bloomingdale High School digital design students. Its centerpiece features the iconic twin towers and a search-and-rescue dog atop a pentagon-shaped base. The 72-inch towers, 30-inch canine and base are all crafted from black granite, creating a striking tribute to the courage and sacrifice displayed during one of the darkest days in American history.

A dedication ceremony is scheduled for 9 a.m. on Friday, September 11, bringing residents, families and community leaders together to officially unveil the memorial and remember those whose lives were changed forever.

"This memorial means a great deal to our community," said Tom Leech, president of the Bloomingdale Special District. "It's a place where neighbors can pause, reflect and remember — not just the tragedy of that day but the strength we found in one another."

Leech, a retired U.S. Navy captain, said the district first began discussing a memorial more than six years ago. Rather than simply installing a monument, however, district leaders wanted to create a beautiful gathering space that would become part of the community.

The completed project includes the granite monument, park benches, a flagpole, pavers and lighting, transforming the site into a peaceful area for reflection.

The custom memorial was created locally by P&G Memorials, a family-owned Tampa monument company. The design was completed about a year ago, with the granite delivered during the summer. The approximately $40,000 project was funded through the Bloomingdale Special District's budget over several years.

The memorial is the first of its kind in the Bloomingdale community and represents the district's broader mission of beautifying neighborhood spaces while strengthening community connections.

Serving nearly 22,000 residents, the Bloomingdale Special District works to enhance safety, appearance and quality of life through beautification projects, neighborhood improvements and community-focused initiatives.

On September 11, the new memorial will offer Bloomingdale a place to remember — and a reminder that even in the face of tragedy, communities can come together with courage, compassion and hope.

CHILL CAWFEE & QUIGS KAVA LOUNGE BRINGS COFFEE, FOOD AND CONNECTION TO FISHHAWK

By Libby Hopkins

Tom Quigley is the co-owner of FishHawk's newest addition, Chill Cawfee & Quigs Kava Lounge, along with his wife, Lisa, and their son, Hunter. The popular coffee — or 'cawfee,' as the family likes to say — shop first opened in 2020 with a simple goal: to create a warm, comfortable place where people could gather, relax and feel at home.



Chill Cawfee has a new home in FishHawk. Guests will still get the same great cup of 'cawfee' and so much more at the new location.

"We started Chill Cawfee to bring neighbors together," Quigley said. "Our original location was in Valrico, and then we opened a second location in Riverview. As time went on, we realized we needed to be closer to home, so we moved the two locations into one location in FishHawk. It's close to home for us and the community that makes up our neighbors."

The new location reflects that same mission, offering more than just coffee and pastries. For the Quigley family, Chill Cawfee is meant to feel like an extension of their living room — a welcoming space where longtime customers, new visitors, families, students and friends can sit down, connect and enjoy a slower moment in the middle of a busy day.

The new location gives the family a chance to bring together all the things customers enjoyed about the Valrico and Riverview shops while adding fresh menu items and more room for people to linger. Guests can choose from coffee drinks, espresso-based favorites, teas and light food options, making Chill Cawfee a place that works just as well for a morning pick-me-up as it does for an afternoon break. For those feeling a little more adventurous, the shop also offers kava drinks, which have become a popular nonalcoholic option for people looking for something different in a social setting. Kava is traditionally made from the root of a South Pacific plant and is often associated with relaxation and conversation.

"A lot of our clients are moving away from drinking alcohol but still want to have something that relaxes them, so we offer our kava and teas," Quigley said.

That mix of coffeehouse comfort and laid-back lounge atmosphere is exactly what the family hopes will make Chill Cawfee feel like a neighborhood gathering place.

Chill Cawfee also offers weekly events that offer a little something for everyone in the family. With networking events, game nights and open mic poetry nights, guests have a variety to choose from during the weekdays or weekend.

"We want there to be something for everyone, and that is why we offer so many different events," Quigley said. "We invite the community to come and have a seat in our living room."

Visit its website at www.chillcawfee.com. The 'cawfee' shop is located at 16741 FishHawk Blvd. in Lithia.

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ART MONKEY ADDS AQUATIC CLUB CAFE TO OFFERINGS IN FISHHAWK

By Srishti Tripathi



A long-standing staple in the local creative scene, Art Monkey is officially taking its signature flair poolside with its newest expansion: Art Monkey at The Aquatic Club Café.

At its main studio, located in Park Square at 16132 Churchview Dr. in Lithia, Art Monkey is best known as a walk-in pottery painting space where neighbors gather to paint ceramics, host events or enjoy coffee and sweet treats. For owner Jennifer Riggs, venturing into food service at the pool felt like a natural next step for the brand.

"For nearly two years, we had expressed interest in operating the cafe because we felt it was an opportunity to provide something the community had been missing," Riggs said. "While pottery is our creative outlet, cool treats have a way of bringing people together as well. We wanted to create a welcoming space where FishHawk families could grab a great meal, cool off with a treat, and enjoy their time at the pool without having to leave the community."

Located inside the FishHawk Ranch Aquatic Club at 15719 Fishhawk Ridge Dr. in Lithia, the newly refreshed cafe promises "good food, good vibes and cool drinks." The menu features casual dining staples like burgers, hot dogs, pizza and fresh chips and salsa from the locally owned Salsa Nation. For poolside refreshers, guests can pick up custom-made açaí bowls, Italian ice, novelties, flavored lemonades and iced lattes.

"Our goal was to offer something for everyone," Riggs explained. "Some early favorites have been our made-to-order açaí bowls, our grilled burgers and our refreshing, flavored lemonades — perfect for a hot Florida afternoon by the pool."

Access to the Aquatic Club Café is exclusive to FishHawk Ranch residents with valid community access cards and their invited guests. Operating hours run Monday through Thursday from 12 Noon-5 p.m. and Friday through Sunday from 11 a.m.-6 p.m., weather and season permitting.

For Riggs, the new venture is ultimately about fostering neighborhood connection.

"We want it to be another place where neighbors connect, families make memories and residents can enjoy quality food at reasonable prices while spending the day together," she shared.

To learn more about studio events or cafe updates, visit www.artmonkeyemporium.com or follow on Facebook at www.facebook.com/artmonkeyemporium.

ROBZFITNESS MARKS TWO DECADES OF BUILDING STRONG NEIGHBORS

By Zofia Osterman

For more than 20 years, Rob Zulkoski has been helping members of the FishHawk community become healthier, stronger and more confident through his personal training business, RobZFitness. While fitness has always been his passion, Zulkoski said his greatest motivation has never been building physiques it has been changing lives.



The Zulkoski family.

"What truly inspired me to become a personal trainer was seeing how exercise can completely change someone's life," Zulkoski said. "It's not just about losing weight or building muscle; it's about giving people confidence, improving their health and helping them enjoy life more."

Throughout his career, Zulkoski has worked with clients of all ages, but most are busy professionals, parents and adults over 40 looking to lose weight, gain strength and improve their overall health. He believes long-term success comes through accountability, consistency and creating personalized fitness plans that fit each client's lifestyle rather than relying on quick fixes.

After two decades of serving FishHawk, Zulkoski credits much of his success to the close-knit community he calls home. Built largely through referrals, his business has grown on trust and lasting relationships, allowing him to work with multiple generations of the same families.

"FishHawk has truly been home to our family," he said. "We've been blessed to build friendships here that have lasted for years, and so many of those relationships have grown into lifelong connections."

The Zulkoski family has become well known throughout the community. His wife, Amy, serves as assistant principal at FishHawk Creek Elementary, where she has dedicated her career to supporting students, teachers and families. One of their daughters, Paige, is entering her second season as an NFL cheerleader, while their daughter Kate is preparing to begin her sixth year as an educator. Despite their busy schedules, the family enjoys spending time together, especially on Disney trips and credits their shared faith, encouragement and support for each other's success.

"Without question, what I'm most proud of isn't a business milestone; it's the hundreds of lives I've had the privilege of helping change over the years," he said. "My goal has never been to create perfect bodies. My goal is to help people become the healthiest, strongest version of themselves so they can enjoy more of life's moments."

His advice for anyone beginning a fitness journey is simple: Start now.

"Small, consistent steps lead to big results over time," he said. "You don't have to be perfect; you just have to be willing to begin."

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FISHHAWK RESIDENT BRINGS NEW PLAYERS TO THE GAME OF MAHJONG

By Brooke Wilson



Alison Bernstein has been teaching American Mah Jongg for more than two years and has built a community of players through the FishHawk Mahjong Group on Facebook.

Whether it is spelled Mahjong, Mah Jongg or Mahjongg, one thing is certain: the centuries-old tile game is enjoying a surge in popularity, and FishHawk resident Alison Bernstein is helping introduce a new generation of players to the fun.

Bernstein has been teaching American Mahjong for more than two years and has developed a growing community of players throughout the greater Brandon area. For her, the appeal of the game extends far beyond the colorful tiles and the challenge of building a winning hand.

"It's the friendships, laughter and camaraderie that keep people coming back," Bernstein said.

Mahjong originated in China, where traditional versions of the game are played differently from the American version that has become increasingly popular across the United States. Chinese Mahjong is typically played with 136 to 144 tiles, while American Mah Jongg uses 152 tiles, including eight jokers.

The American version can seem intimidating to beginners, but Bernstein has developed a teaching approach designed to make learning the game enjoyable and accessible. Most of her students learn through a three-class series, allowing them to gradually become comfortable with the tiles, rules and strategies. For those with busier schedules, she also offers a single three-hour class.

In addition to teaching newcomers, Bernstein hosts a weekly game where friends and former students gather for an afternoon or evening of friendly competition, conversation and plenty of laughs.

Her FishHawk Mahjong Group on Facebook has grown to more than 200 members and continues to attract players from throughout the region. Although Bernstein often teaches from her home, she also travels to teach groups in the surrounding communities.

Despite the FishHawk name, her students have come from Riverview, Brandon, Apollo Beach, Hyde Park and beyond, reflecting the growing interest in the game across the Tampa Bay area.

Part of Mahjong's modern appeal may be its social atmosphere, Bernstein explained. Beautifully designed tiles, colorful playing mats and a variety of fun accessories can make each game feel like a special occasion.

For those who have been curious about Mahjong but don't know where to begin, Bernstein is inviting newcomers to pull up a chair and give it a try.

To learn more about lessons or upcoming games, contact Alison Goodman Bernstein on Facebook or join the FishHawk Mahjong Group on Facebook.

LOCAL MOM, MATH TEACHER AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER

By Libby Hopkins

Wearing many hats comes easily to Brandon resident Rebecca McDonagh. She is a mom with two teenagers and a rescue dog, Foxy. She has been teaching for 18 years with Hillsborough County Schools and loves to travel, but it's what she does in her off time that has made her a social media influencer. On Instagram, she is @mathwithmissmcd, and her reels are hysterical.



Rebecca McDonagh is a local mom, teacher and social media influencer. Her funny reels and videos she posts on her Instagram account, @mathwithmissmcd are inspired by her life.

"I actually started making content hoping to create a little side hustle; you may have heard teachers aren't exactly the highest-paid profession," McDonagh said. "It sort of slowly evolved into making silly videos instead of a serious business, which is great because this is way more fun."

The inspiration for her reels and videos comes from her real life.

"Luckily, real life gives me all the inspiration I need," she said. "My own interactions with my students, my kids and other people's stories give me plenty of material. My Teacher Hotline videos are what initially took off, and people still send me names to use all the time. I love how there's a part of so many people's experiences in my videos."

Making her videos and reel is cathartic to McDonagh.

"It's honestly just really fun and kind of takes the edge off what can sometimes be a stressful profession," she said. "I love hearing from my fellow teachers and moms about how something made them laugh or eased the chaos of the day,"

Being called a social media influencer is something that McDonagh takes in stride.

"I have a feeling that is a huge overstatement," McDonagh said with a laugh. "I'm not really an influencer (unless it's influencing people to drink Diet Coke, and then I absolutely am) or a celebrity, but it is the best when people come up and introduce themselves and say they like something on my channel. I've met people in different states and even different countries who've seen one of the videos, and it's a blast chatting and hearing about their own experiences."

McDonagh loves her followers and loves how the community supports her as both a teacher and a social media personality.

"I'm so proud of how our community rallies around teachers," she said. "I've always felt so supported here working in our local schools and I'm proud to call this home. I recently published two math workbooks for fourth and fifth graders called Math to the Music, and it's been amazing hearing such great feedback from everyone."

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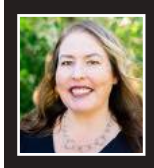
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Owned by India-based Tatas, the engine and the Range Rover itself are still assembled in England, though transmission is from Germany. Regardless, the full-size luxury SUV is equipped with a 3.0-liter V-6 supercharged/intercooled engine (48-volt mild hybrid system) doling out an impressive 395 horsepower at 6,500 rpm and 405 pounds-feet of torque at 5,000 rpm. Power is put to the road via a flawless and responsive eight-speed auto gearbox, which can be shifted via noble-plated steering wheel-mounted paddles. Suspension is handled via a double wishbone front and multilink rear suspension with Adaptive Dynamics to enhance balance, handling and grip by automatically adjusting firmness. All-wheel steering makes a U-turn or parking in a tight spot effortless. Bringing the massive 5,600-pound beast to a slowdown/halt are 14.9-inch front and 13.9-inch vented rear brakes. Terrain Response 2 offers one of the following, as per road/weather conditions: comfort (for daily driving), eco, dynamic and auto (grass/gravel/snow, mud/ruts, sand, rock crawl, wade).

The clamshell hood of the majestic SUV meets up with a colossal but attractive horizontal black grille that hosts the recognizable green oval emblem, surrounded by LED headlights with signature daytime running lamps. The wood trim is convincingly classy too. The fairly new Pivi Pro infotainment system is fundamentally a 13.1-inch floating curved glass touchscreen integrated into the center console for audio, navigation, climate, seat readings. Not to be forgotten is the 13.7-inch driver digital gauge with a rounded speedometer and tachometer. Lending lavishness to the pristine cabin is a short but evident shifter knob in the hub of it all. Rear passengers are treated to plentiful headroom and luxury-liner legroom space. Other standard goodies include the 12-way front heated/cooled seats, sliding panoramic moonroof, wireless phone charger/Android Auto/Apple CarPlay, four-zone auto AC, Meridian sound system, power second and third-row seats and tilt/telescopic steering column.

Standard safety features include the dual front and side airbags, side curtain airbags, four-wheel antilock brakes, dynamic/roll stability/electronic traction controls, forward-collision warning with auto emergency brakes, lane-keep/park-assist/blind-pot/hill-launch assists, rear traffic monitor, adaptive cruise control, front/rear parking aids, 3D surround camera, tire pressure monitoring system and daytime running lights.

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Yes, swagger's the word!







BLOOMINGDALE CHESS CLUB BRINGS PLAYERS OF ALL AGES TOGETHER

By Libby Hopkins



Dugg Smith of Dover is originally from Columbus, Ohio, and his lifelong love of chess began with a simple challenge from a friend. After losing a match, Smith was determined to learn more about the game and improve his skills. He checked out a book from the library and began studying the strategies, moves and patterns that make chess both challenging and rewarding.

"This was in the late 60s, and I was 10 years old," Smith said.

His interest grew even stronger in 1972 when American chess legend Bobby Fischer played Boris Spassky for the world title in Iceland. Smith and his buddy would get the newspaper each morning and review the results of the match together.

"Fischer lost the first game, forfeited the second game but completely outplayed Spassky the rest of the way to become the first American world champ," Smith said.

By then, Smith was playing on his junior high team.

"I continued playing through high school in league competitions," Smith said. "I was the chess club president as a senior. I played in rated tournaments all through junior and senior high school."

Smith started the Bloomingdale Chess Club in 2025, and it's registered with U.S Chess Association.

"We have been in existence for over a year now," Smith said. "We have a mix of older players and players as young as 5 years old that are just starting to learn the great game of chess. We don't charge to play or to participate in tournaments. We had our first tournament last month. We have players that are rated as high as 1,900 in the US Chess rating system, and many of our players participate in local US Chess-sanctioned tournaments."

Smith believes chess is a great tool for children to develop life skills, such as critical thinking, planning, strategy, time management, memory development and problem-solving skills.

"Chess helps children in reading and mathematics as well," Smith said. "The social aspect of chess is really great. When a child makes a great move, his face lights up. Chess is fantastic in building self-esteem in children. I'm a very competitive person, so chess allows me to compete and also has the added benefit of keeping my mind sharp as I age."

The Bloomingdale Chess Club meets at the Bloomingdale Regional Public Library, located at 1906 Bloomingdale Ave. in Valrico, on Wednesday night from 6-8:45 p.m. every week.

If you would like to learn more about the Bloomingdale Chess Club or join the club, you can visit the club's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/bloomingdale.chess.club.

100 WOMEN WHO CARE RIVERVIEW/ FISHHAWK SEEKS MEMBERS

By Marie Gilmore



Members of 100 Women Who Care Riverview/FishHawk gather to support local nonprofits. The group has donated more than $115,000 to charities since its founding and is seeking new members to help reach its goal of providing $10,000 to a deserving local organization each quarter.

A group of local women has already donated more than $115,000 to charities serving the community, and now 100 Women Who Care Riverview/FishHawk is inviting more women to join them and help make an even greater difference.

The organization will hold its third-quarter meeting on Monday, September 14, at 6 p.m. at Donovan's Meatery, located at 11206 Sullivan St. in Riverview.

100 Women Who Care is built around a simple but powerful idea. Members meet four times a year, with each woman committing to donate $100 per quarter. At each meeting, three local charities are nominated, and one is selected to receive the group's collective donation.

The chapter's goal is to reach and maintain 100 members, which would allow the group to donate $10,000 to a deserving local charity every quarter.

Since its founding, the Riverview/FishHawk chapter has demonstrated the impact that can be made when individuals pool their resources. In December 2024, the organization celebrated surpassing $100,000 in total donations to local charities. Since then, the group's giving has continued to grow, with more than $115,000 now contributed to organizations making a difference throughout the community.

"A Kid's Place was selected as our second-quarter charity," said chapter organizer Carole R. Gill. "We look forward to presenting the organization with its check at our September 14 meeting."

The group has currently collected $2,500 for A Kid's Place.

Members in good standing may also nominate a local charity to be considered for the September meeting. The deadline for charity nominations is Wednesday, September 2, at 5 p.m.

The quarterly gatherings offer women an opportunity not only to support worthwhile organizations but also to learn about the many nonprofits working to improve the lives of local residents.

The chapter is encouraging current members to invite friends, colleagues and other women who are interested in giving back to the community. Every new member brings the group closer to its goal of 100 women — and to the ability to provide a $10,000 donation to a local charity each quarter.

For more information about joining 100 Women Who Care Riverview/FishHawk, visit its Facebook page.



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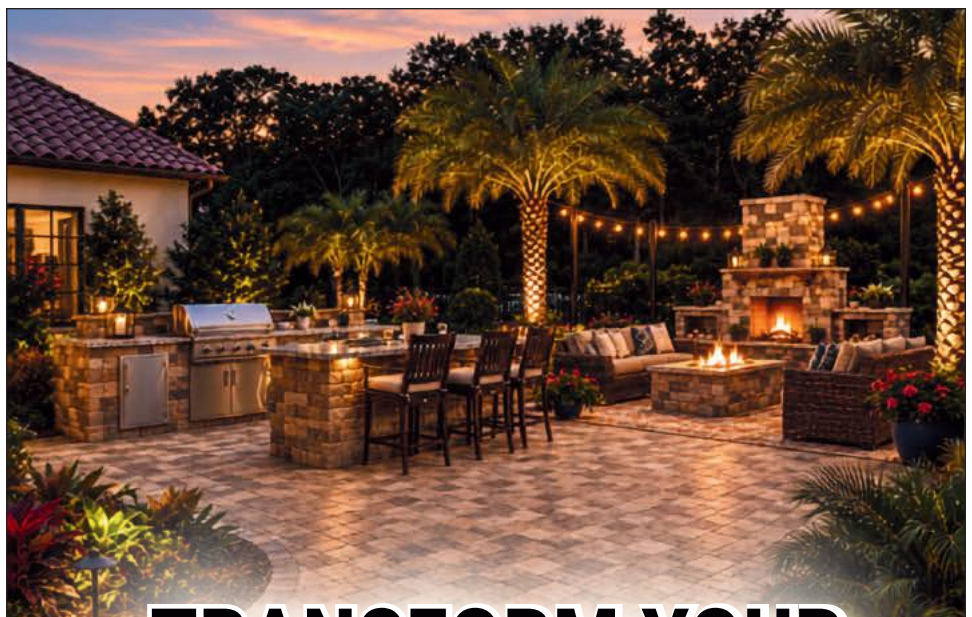
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OSPREY OBSERVER ENTERS 25TH YEAR WITH NEW HOME OFFICE LOCATION

Staff Report



The *Osprey Observer* is preparing to celebrate 25 years of publishing positive, hometown news while entering a new chapter with a move to a more flexible office.

The family-owned publication began printing in January 2002 as a single edition serving FishHawk. Today, the *Osprey Observer* publishes more than 70,000 direct-mailed newspapers each month across five editions: Bloomingdale/FishHawk, Riverview, Valrico, Brandon/Winthrop and its newest edition, SouthShore.

In September, the newspaper sold its longtime office on Lithia Pinecrest Road and opened a satellite office on Bloomingdale Avenue inside the EZ Choice Realty office located at 116 E Bloomingdale Ave, Brandon, FL 33511.

The move reflects how the newspaper's staff and operations have evolved, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic.

"After the pandemic, most of our team took their positions home," said Editor and Publisher Marie Gilmore. "So now, with Zoom staff meetings and staff working anywhere in the state and beyond, we are able to work remotely."

While much of the *Osprey Observer*'s staff now works remotely, the publication will maintain a physical office where readers, advertisers and community members can continue to connect with the newspaper.

The new office, located at 116 E. Bloomingdale Ave. in Brandon, will be open Monday through Friday from 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

"We still want to be a hub where members of the community can drop off press releases, pick up papers and prizes and still feel connected," Gilmore said.

The new location provides the newspaper with a central place to maintain that personal connection while allowing the company to continue embracing the flexibility of a remote workforce.

For Gilmore, who founded the *Osprey Observer* in January 2002 along with husband Doug and a small team of dedicated staff, the changes represent both growth and a return to the publication's roots.

Over the past 25 years, the newspaper has grown from one community edition into a five-edition publication reaching tens of thousands of local households. Throughout that growth, its mission has remained focused on telling the stories of the people, organizations, businesses and events that make the community special.

As the *Osprey Observer l*ooks toward its next 25 years, its new office will serve as a reminder that while the way newspapers work continues to change, the importance of staying connected to the communities it serves has not.

For more informatino, visit the website www.ospreyobserver.com, email editor@ospreyobserver.com or call 813-657-2418.



RESIDENTS WEIGH PROPOSAL FOR COUNTY-OWNED GREENSPACE PROPERTY

By Brian Bokor



An unsolicited offer to purchase 11.85 acres of Hillsborough County-owned property surrounded by portions of Bloomingdale and Tevalo Hills brought local residents to Cimino Elementary School at the end of August to learn more about the proposal and provide feedback.

The property has not been sold. The unsolicited offer presented at the meeting is currently the only proposal before Hillsborough County.

The meeting was organized through District 4 Commissioner Christine Miller's office to give residents an opportunity to learn about the proposal, ask questions and share their perspectives.

County staff attending the meeting included Facilities Management & Real Estate Services Director John Muller, Real Estate Division Director Anne-Marie Lenton and Eric Watkins, manager for surplus property, along with Miller's aide, Casaundra Marion.

Miller did not attend because a separate zoning request involving the future Hawk Springs development is quasi-judicial and could eventually come before her for a vote.

The property includes a 7.5-acre stormwater pond and approximately 4.35 acres designated for park and recreational use. Hillsborough County has owned the property since 2003, and residents currently use portions of it as a walking trail.

Muller said the largely unimproved property is overgrown and that its continued public use presents maintenance and management considerations for the county.

Under the proposal, the property would be transferred to the applicant, with a new homeowners association responsible for owning and maintaining it.

Plans include approximately 700 feet of recreational walking path, fencing, gated entrances, trash cans and pet-waste stations. Another 1,100-foot section would be 15 feet wide and capable of accommodating emergency vehicles. The connection could also serve as an evacuation route during emergencies.

Public access would be protected through an easement, while the county would retain access to the stormwater pond and drainage easements. Plans also show a 2- to 4-inch water line crossing the property and a $15,000 HOA maintenance reserve for the first five years.

The applicant is separately seeking to increase the future Hawk Springs development from 34 homes to 55 homes.

During the meeting, residents asked whether the proposed acquisition of the county property, including the emergency access and potential utility connection, was related to the request for additional homes.

The applicant disputed that characterization, maintaining that the emergency connection is something it would like to have rather than something required for Hawk Springs to proceed. It also said it has no desire to retain ownership of the property long-term.

Muller addressed questions about whether transferring the property could facilitate additional density.

"We have absolutely no problem putting restrictions on this sale," Muller said, explaining that restrictions could limit the property to park use and preserve public access. "We do not intend that the sale of this land be used to benefit for any increased density."

Oak Crest resident Richard Terry asked whether residents whose properties could be directly affected had received enough information.

"The stuff that's affecting their backyards — they had no idea this was even happening," Terry said.

Residents also asked questions about privacy, maintenance and public access.

"We don't want to be sitting here in two years and get a request to put 20 more homes there," Marion added.

Muller praised Miller's approach to gathering public feedback.

"The commissioner did an excellent job in saying, 'I want to hear from the community first, but we need to put a proposal on the table so you can comment on it.' And that's what we're here for," Muller said.

Attendees were asked to complete a county comment form about their proximity to the property, potential trail use and the proposed improvements. Responses will be reviewed by county staff and Miller's office.

Muller emphasized that the current offer is one possible option for the property. Oak Crest, multiple surrounding communities or another appropriate entity could present an alternative proposal.



RESOURCE FAIR CONNECTS DISTRICT 4 RESIDENTS WITH COUNTY SERVICES

By Brian Bokor

Residents attending Hillsborough County Commissioner Christine Miller's Community Resource Fair on August 5 found something different from a traditional town hall meeting.

Instead of sitting through speeches or waiting to ask the commissioner a question, residents could walk around the Hillsborough County Fairgrounds in Dover and speak directly with representatives from county departments and partner agencies.



Commissioner Christine Miller speaks with residents during hResource Fair in Dover.

The format allowed residents to ask questions and connect with people who work on roads, permitting, code enforcement and other issues every day.

Miller, who represents District 4 and currently serves as vice chair of the Hillsborough County Commission, said that was the idea.

"My goal with the resource fair was simple: Bring government directly to the people we serve," Miller said. "District 4 is vast, stretching across much of Eastern and Southern Hillsborough County, so I make an effort to bring events and resources to different parts of the district."

"Residents shouldn't have to figure out which department to call or spend weeks trying to find the right person," she said. "Putting everyone in one room gave people the opportunity to ask questions, get answers and make real connections."

Miller said the event also gave her and her staff an opportunity to hear directly from residents about their concerns and what could be improved.

"After seeing the turnout and watching residents move from table to table getting their questions answered, I think the format worked exactly as we hoped," Miller said. "It also gave me and my staff an opportunity to hear directly from residents about what is working and where we need to do better."

Miller pointed to several recent District 4 development decisions where resident concerns played a role.

Following controversy surrounding The Yard, a FishHawk-area property involved in code-enforcement and rezoning disputes, Miller worked to strengthen the county's evaluation process so an applicant's compliance history could be considered in future rezoning requests.

"The community worked hard to make sure their concerns about The Yard were heard, and I believed it was important to look at what we could do beyond a single vote," Miller said.

Miller also cited community concerns when explaining her vote on the recent YIGBY, or "Yes in God's Backyard," land-use discussion, saying she supports creative approaches to the county's housing shortage but believes development must be appropriate for surrounding communities.

"I support finding creative ways to address our housing needs, but I also believe we have to be thoughtful about where and how development occurs," Miller said.

Another example involved a development proposal near Dorman Road in rural Lithia. Residents questioned its intensity, compatibility and infrastructure, and Miller voted against moving the proposal forward.

MOONLIT PADDLE AND FRIGHT FEST OFFER ADVENTURE AT CAMP BAYOU

Staff Report

A special Observe the Moon Night Paddle will be offered on Saturday, September 19, starting at 7:30 p.m. To learn more about this international moon viewing event, visit https://science.nasa.gov/moon/observe-the-moon-night.



Camp Bayou Outdoor Learning Center invites the community to experience nature after dark with a special Observe the Moon Night Paddle on Saturday, September 19, followed by its annual Fall Fright Fest on Saturday, October 3.

The Camp Bayou paddle tour is $25 if you need to use one of its canoes or kayaks but $5 if you bring your own. Registration is required; email campbayou@gmail.com.

Save the date: Camp Bayou's Fall Fright Fest will be held on Saturday, October 3, from 5-9 p.m. First walks will be for the young ones, beginning at 6 p.m., learning about our native nocturnal wildlife. The 7 p.m. and later walks will have stories about past misadventures at Camp Bayou and the spirits who can't rest. Then, join in by the campfire for s'mores. A donation of $5 per person is requested to help cover the cost of supplies. Registration will be open in September.

For those who are interested in helping with registered groups, Camp Bayou is looking for enthusiastic volunteers who love the outdoors and want to pass along that passion to others through hands-on activities, walks and canoe tours, as well as help with maintenance and exhibits. Contact Becki at 813-641-8545 or fill out the form at www.campbayou.org. Camp Bayou is mainly looking for folks to help teach school groups K-6, but there are other opportunities as well. It is also looking to fill a director position on its board. If you'd like to help guide Camp Bayou's future, consider joining. Email Dolly for more information at campbayou@gmail.com.

Camp Bayou Outdoor Learning Center is neither a campground nor a summer camp. It was an RV park before the county's ELAP program purchased the land, but it is now open for day use only to the general public. Through volunteers, donations, supporters and grants, the managing nonprofit — Bayou Outdoor Learning and Discovery Inc. (B.O.L.D.) — offers preregistered programs to schools, youth groups, adult groups and families. The center is open from Thursday through Sunday, 9 a.m.-2 p.m., for passive recreational pursuits, such as wildlife watching, nature photography and trail walks. General admission is still free.

The Camp Bayou Outdoor Learning Center is a public-private partnership between B.O.L.D. and Hillsborough County Conservation & Environmental Lands Management. Camp Bayou is located 3 miles south of State Road 674 at the end of 24th St. SE in Ruskin. For more information, visit www.campbayou.org, call 813-641-8545, or check out the Camp Bayou Facebook page.



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ONE DAY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE: CEOS INVITED INTO CLASSROOMS

By Marie Gilmore



Tampa Bay business leaders will step into local classrooms on Nov. 6 as part of the 2026 CEOs in Schools.

Tampa Bay business leaders are being invited to trade their offices for classrooms and experience firsthand the impact they can make on the future workforce through the 2026 CEOs in Schools: 1 Day of Change program.

The countywide volunteer initiative, presented by Vistra Communications and the Hillsborough Education Foundation in partnership with Hillsborough County Public Schools, encourages CEOs and other business leaders to spend a day immersed in the daily life of a local elementary school. This year's official volunteer day is Friday, November 6, though participants and their assigned principals may coordinate another date if needed.

The program was inspired by Vistra Communications CEO Brian Butler's longtime relationship with Mort Elementary School. Butler once spent an entire day shadowing former Principal Woodland Johnson, taking on a variety of responsibilities that included teaching, planning, serving lunch and more.

That firsthand experience gave Butler a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing public schools and inspired him to challenge other business leaders to do the same.

Since then, Vistra's relationship with Mort Elementary has continued to grow through employee volunteerism, student visits to the company's headquarters, teacher appreciation events and other school initiatives. The idea expanded into CEOs in Schools in 2019, and Vistra partnered with the Hillsborough Education Foundation the following year to continue growing the initiative.

Today, nearly 150 Tampa Bay-area CEOs participate each year, gaining a unique perspective on the work of educators and the experiences of students while building relationships with the schools helping prepare tomorrow's workforce.

"Our schools are shaping tomorrow's community members, future workforce and leaders," said Hillsborough Education Foundation CEO Anna Corman. "We have a vested interest in their success."

Participants may greet students, read in classrooms, share their career experiences, attend leadership or planning meetings, tour school operations, have lunch with students or teachers and observe classrooms in action. Each visit is designed in collaboration with the school principal, giving participants an authentic 'day in the life' experience.

Superintendent Van Ayres praised the impact of the program, noting that even the smallest moments can make a meaningful difference in schools.

Business leaders interested in participating can reserve an available school online. Schools are matched with CEOs, who then work directly with the schools' principals to plan their visits.

For more information or to reserve a school, visit www.1dayofchange.com/ceos-inschools/.

EASTERN HILLS COMMUNITY BAND BRINGS SUPERHEROES TO THE STAGE

Staff Report



The Eastern Hillsborough Community Band, now with more than 100 members, will present its Superhero-Themed Fall Concert with performances in Brandon on October 8 and 9.

Heroes come in all shapes and sizes — and this fall, the heroes are musicians.

The Eastern Hillsborough Community Band will bring an evening of music, adventure and some of the world's most iconic heroes to Brandon with its Superhero-Themed Fall Concert, featuring two performances in October.

Audiences can expect an entertaining program filled with music inspired by legendary heroes, beloved films and epic adventures. Featured selections include Superman, Spider-Man, Captain America, The Incredibles, The Lord of the Rings and The Sorcerer's Apprentice.

For Kayla Vincent, an alto saxophone player in her second season with the Eastern Hillsborough Community Band, the concert is especially meaningful.

"This is my second season with the band, and it has been a dream to play music featured in two of Disney's most iconic films, Fantasia and The Incredibles," Vincent said.

The fall concert follows an extraordinary summer for the band. Members recently traveled to Normandy, France, after being selected to perform during D-Day commemorations, an opportunity that marked a significant milestone and tremendous honor for the ensemble.

Founded in the spring of 2009 by Plant City resident Kim McKamey, who still performs with the group as a trumpet player, the Eastern Hillsborough Community Band began rehearsing in a small church with approximately 10 members. Within a year, the growing ensemble moved to a larger facility in the Lithia area, with membership reaching nearly 50 musicians. The band also became a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation.

Today, the band rehearses weekly in Brandon and has 101 members, ranging from amateur musicians to seasoned professionals, all united by a shared love of music. It was also recently nominated for Creative Loafing's Best of the Bay 2026 for Best Jazz Band, recognizing its contribution to the Tampa Bay music community.

The Eastern Hillsborough Community Band is dedicated to fostering a love of music, improving musicianship and enlightening, entertaining and inspiring audiences throughout the region. It also gives musicians opportunities to build friendships and camaraderie through their shared passion for performing.

From comic-book legends and Disney classics to epic fantasy, the Superhero-Themed Fall Concert promises an evening of music and adventure for all ages.

The band will perform on Thursday, October 8, at 7 p.m. at Generations Church, located at 2602 S. Kings Ave. in Brandon, and Friday, October 9, at 7 p.m. at Bay Life Church, located at 1017 Kingsway Rd. in Brandon.

For more on upcoming concerts and membership, visit https://www.ehcb.org/.



SAXOPHONIST EIRINN ABU PERFORMS FOR IN SUN CITY CENTER

By Libby Hopkins

The GFWC Sun City Center Woman's Club will host an afternoon of fun, fellowship and live music by worldwide entertainer Eirinn Abu. The concert is on Friday, October 30, from 4-5:30 p.m. at the Sun City Center Community Hall, located at 1910 S. Pebble Blvd. in Sun City Center. Doors open at 3 p.m., so guests can arrive early to browse the silent auction, visit sponsor tables and enjoy dessert before the performance. Attendees are encouraged to bring their own beverages and snacks while they settle in for an uplifting musical program.



Eirinn Abu is a multiplatinum saxophone recording artist from Venice known for performances that blend soulful music with an uplifting message.

All net proceeds benefit numerous local charities, including Tunnel to Towers in Bradenton, food pantries, Meals on Wheels in Sun City Center and the Campaign Against Human Trafficking. The event offers residents a chance to enjoy an engaging community concert while supporting organizations that provide meaningful services throughout the area. Tickets for the performance are $25.

Abu is a multiplatinum saxophone recording artist from Venice known for performances that blend soulful music with an uplifting message. A 2025 World Entertainment Award winner for his ANTHEM album, Abu has collaborated with artists such as Dolly Parton and members of Miami Sound Machine. He is also recognized for using his music to support philanthropic efforts, including Tunnel to Towers in Bradenton.

"I saw him perform a few months ago," said GFWC Sun City Center Woman's Club Vice President Shawna Wainright. "I was impressed with his music and entertainment style. He performs songs from the 60s, 70s and 80s and created his award-winning album, ANTHEM. His life story, desire and mission are to help others overcome depression and suicide prevention. Even though Eirinn is from Venice, FL, he travels and performs nationally and internationally and has won numerous awards."

Through this entertaining fundraiser's ticket sales, sponsorships, raffle drawings and a silent auction, the club hopes to raise $3,500. Guests will have several ways to contribute throughout the afternoon, whether by purchasing tickets, bidding on auction items or supporting participating sponsors. The funds raised will help the GFWC Sun City Center Woman's Club continue its longtime commitment to local service projects and charitable organizations that assist residents in need. Club members hope the event will bring the community together for an enjoyable afternoon while making a meaningful impact beyond the concert hall.

If you would like to learn more about the GFWC Sun City Center Woman's Club or purchase a ticket for Abu's performance, you can visit the club's website at https://sccwomansclub.org/.

LOCAL SCHOOL NUTRITION LEADER HONORED AS S HUNGER HERO

Staff Report

Hillsborough County Public Schools Regional Supervisor James Lykins has been recognized as one of only five 2026 Summer Hunger Heroes selected statewide by No Kid Hungry Florida for his dedication to ensuring children have access to healthy meals during the summer.



\ James Lykins, regional supervisor for Student Nutrition Services at Hillsborough County Public Schools, has been named a 2026 Summer Hunger Hero by No Kid Hungry Florida.

Lykins, a regional supervisor for Student Nutrition Services with Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS), was honored alongside Bonnie Ross of the School District of Lee County, Constance Manning of Beth Page Missionary Baptist Church, Gary Rudd of Union County School Board and Victoria Pipitone of SKY Academy Englewood.

The recognition celebrates school nutrition professionals, community partners and volunteers who go above and beyond to help ensure children and families have access to nutritious meals when school is not in session.

"Summer meal programs are no easy lift, but they make a significant impact in the lives of so many children across our state," said Sky Beard, director of No Kid Hungry Florida. "We are entirely grateful for individuals like our Summer Hunger Heroes who are committed to ensuring no child goes to bed hungry."

Through HCPS' Summer Feeding Program, more than 650,000 free meals were distributed during the summer of 2026 at over 150 sites across Hillsborough County.

Lykins was specifically recognized for helping transform an ambitious idea into a resource for local families. He championed the creation of HCPS' first grab-and-go meal site and led its implementation, including site selection, operational planning, staffing coordination and collaboration across departments.

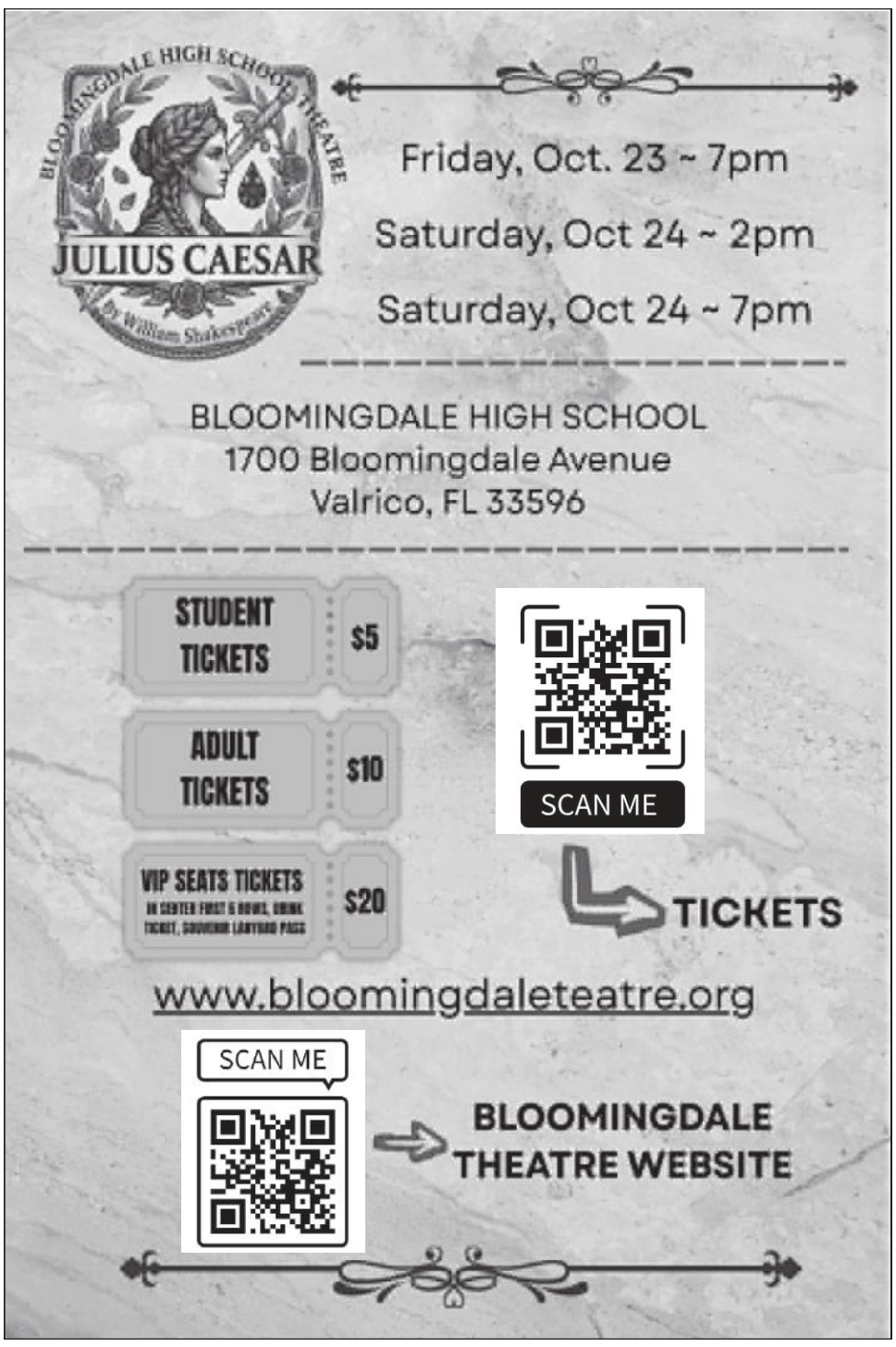
According to Shani Hall, general manager of Student Nutrition Services for HCPS, Lykins' leadership resulted in more than 14,000 meals being distributed each week from a single location.

"James consistently goes above and beyond to remove barriers for families and ensure children have access to nutritious meals when they need them most," Hall said. "This recognition is a well-deserved reflection of his extraordinary commitment to students and the community."

For many families who rely on school meals, summer can be one of the most challenging times of the year. Programs like HCPS' Summer Feeding Program help bridge the gap by continuing to provide healthy meals while school cafeterias are closed.

"Every day, James demonstrates what it means to put students first," said Superintendent Van Ayres. "Whether school is in session or students are enjoying summer break, he works to ensure children have access to the nutritious meals they need to learn, grow and succeed."

For more information about Student Nutrition Services, visit Hillsborough County Public Schools.





THE MORELAND WAY FAMILY HEALTH: HEALTH CARE WITH HEART

Staff Report



The Moreland Way Family Health team brings together expertise in advanced nursing practice, lactation counseling, pharmacy, social work and health care administration to provide compassionate, personalized care for the whole family.

The Moreland Way Family Health was built on a simple belief: Health care should be personal, compassionate and centered on the whole patient. Its practice is uniquely comprised of a family with backgrounds in advanced nursing practice (APRN), lactation counseling, registered nursing, pharmacy, case management through social work, and health care administration. Together, they bring a comprehensive perspective to patient care that has been shaped not only by their professional experience but also by their personal experiences as patients and caregivers.

The Moreland Way Family Health understands that health care is about more than treating symptoms. Every patient has a story, and every concern deserves to be heard. It takes the time to listen, understand everyone's needs and work alongside patients and families to address both physical and mental health concerns. Whether it's managing a chronic condition, navigating life's challenges or supporting preventive wellness, the Moreland Way's goal is to provide care that is thoughtful, respectful, and whole-hearted.

The practice believes strong relationships are the foundation of better health. By combining clinical expertise with compassion and personalized attention, it strives to create an environment where patients feel valued, supported and empowered in their health care journey.

Currently, it is welcoming new pediatric patients and looks forward to expanding services to include adult primary care this November and mental health therapy in January 2027. It invites you and your family to experience a different approach to health care, one where you're treated as more than a patient; you're treated like family.

To learn more or schedule an appointment, contact The Moreland Way Family Health today. Your family's health and well-being are its priority.

The Moreland Way Family Health is located at 10315 Black Mangrove Lane in Riverview. For more information, contact 813-320-6370 or visit www.tmwfamilyhealth.com.

PREPARING FOR MEDICARE OPEN ENROLLMENT WITH MB INSURANCE

By Makenzie Atkins Noel

Choosing the right insurance plan is about more than finding a familiar name. Doctors, prescriptions, costs and coverage can all change from year to year, making an annual review an important part of protecting both health and finances. With Medicare's annual enrollment period (AEP) approaching, MB Insurance Solutions is helping local clients prepare for the changes ahead.



Michele Bartock, owner of MB Insurance Solutions, helps clients navigate Medicare coverage and understand their options during Annual Enrollment Period.

Owned by Michele Bartock, MB Insurance Solutions is an independent health and life insurance agency serving Florida. Bartock, who has lived in the community for over 20 years, specializes in supplements, Medicare Advantage, prescription plans and life insurance. As an independent agent, she has access to 12 organizations and more than 80 Medicare plans, allowing her to compare options rather than limiting clients to one plan.

Bartock also helps clients with under-65 health insurance, off-market plans and group health insurance for small businesses. Additional coverage options include dental, vision, hearing, life, accident, indemnity, cancer and heart/stroke plans, as well as long-term care and annuities.

With Medicare's AEP approaching, now is the time for beneficiaries to start reviewing their coverage for 2027. AEP runs from October 15 through December 7, giving Medicare beneficiaries a limited window to make changes to their plans.

That review is especially important because Medicare plans can change from year to year. Prescription drug plans may change their formularies, deductibles and coinsurance, while out-of-pocket maximums can also increase. Bartock's goal is to compare the available options based on each client's doctors, medications and priorities so they can make an informed decision before the deadline.

"Every client has different needs, and I want them to understand their options rather than simply telling them what plan they should choose," said Bartock. "When clients know they can call with questions throughout the year and have someone who knows their situation, that is what makes the difference."

As the end of the year approaches, Bartock wants Medicare beneficiaries to keep a few important things in mind. Some Medicare Advantage plans offer a Part B premium 'Give Back,' while individuals may also qualify for Medicaid or the Low-Income Subsidy based on their income and assets. She also cautions beneficiaries about unsolicited calls promising gift cards or food cards, noting that these benefits are only available to those who meet certain qualifications. For those who miss the annual enrollment period or are unhappy with a new Medicare Advantage plan, there may be another opportunity to make a change between January and March.

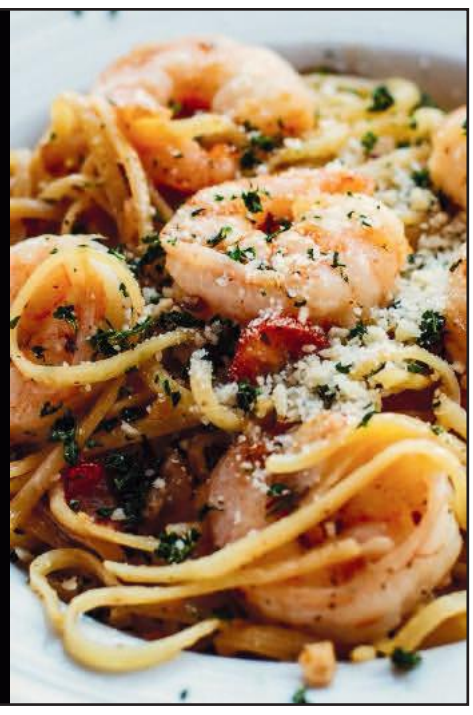
Outside of Medicare and Affordable Care Act plans, Bartok can also help clients with ancillary and small group plans. Visit online at www.medicareofflorida.com; call 813-553-3822, ext. 2; or mlbartock@gmail.com.

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T&J PAINTING GROWS WHILE KEEPING ITS FAMILY-OWNED TOUCH

By Libby Hopkins



T&J Painting started with a simple mission, to help people feel good in the spaces where they live and work.

T&J Painting, founded by Tony and Jen Friedrichsen, started with a simple mission: to help people feel good in the spaces where they live and work. As a family-owned painting company based in Brandon, it has been serving the community for more than a decade.

"Probably the biggest win at T&J Painting is that we have consistently seen growth our company by 60-70 percent year after year, with 2026 projecting to be the same, which is something Tony and I are incredibly proud of," said Jen, T&J's regional director of sales and marketing. "We have been able to bring in more leadership positions within the company, including an office manager, project coordinator and project manager. This allows us to provide the best customer service possible as we continue to navigate our tremendous growth."

Despite its growth, T&J Painting has kept its personal, family-owned approach.

"We never want to become so big that our customers feel like just another number," Jen said. "Tony and I are still involved every day, and maintaining those customer relationships will always be important to us. Growth is exciting, but growing the right way matters most."

Jen, Tony and their team at T&J understand how Florida's climate can affect paint quality and longevity, from the intense sun and humidity to the heavy rains that can wear down exterior surfaces over time. That local knowledge helps them recommend the right products, preparation methods and finishes for each home or business, so the final result looks great and lasts. T&J uses premium products and proven techniques to make sure their clients' finishes hold up season after season.

"Every job is planned with care and customized to meet your needs," Jen said. "Our goal is to deliver a clean, polished result that brings out the best in your property."

What sets T&J Painting apart is that it is not a franchise but rather a company built from the ground up by Tony and Jen.

"Tony is not someone who simply bought into a painting company and was handed a system and a name," Jen said. "My husband, business partner and best friend has been a painter for more than 30 years, and I have been around the painting industry for about 23 years. Our team is also incredibly important to us."

For the Friedrichsens, T&J Painting's success is closely tied to the community that has supported them along the way.

"Giving back to our community is something Tony and I are extremely passionate about," Jen said.

Visit www.tandjpaintingfl.com or call 813-723-9124. The company office is located at 330 Pauls Dr., Ste. 111, in Brandon.

ST. ANDREW'S QUILTERS SHARE BLESSINGS, ONE STITCH AT A TIME

By Dale Bliss



Blessings come in many forms, including the coziness and comfort of a handmade quilt created with prayers, love and generous hearts.

For 17 years, members of Quilters' Corner at St. Andrew's United Methodist Church in Brandon have used their talents to create handmade quilts for children and families in need. What began with just three or four women has grown into a mission group of approximately 25 members dedicated to sharing comfort, kindness and God's love, one stitch at a time.

Quilters' Corner was founded by Linda Cannan and meets on Tuesday mornings, with additional meetings held on the first and third Sunday afternoons of each month. Beginners are welcome, and donations are also appreciated to help support the group's mission.

A substantial number of the quilts are donated to children. One of the group's primary recipients is MountainHeart Community Services in West Virginia, where the quilts are distributed through its Head Start program.

The group's generosity has also helped support the organization in another meaningful way. Through an in-kind donation of quilts, MountainHeart Community Services received a matching grant of $15,130.

Last year alone, Quilters' Corner donated close to 250 quilts to MountainHeart and approximately 60 baby quilts to the NICU at HCA Florida Brandon Hospital. The group also supports Family Promise, helping provide comfort to families experiencing homelessness and other hardships.

"This is a mission group at St. Andrew's. We donate quilts to a children's nonprofit organization, MountainHeart charity, and I think it's Virginia. Last year, we donated close to 250 quilts. And we donate to Brandon NICU at Brandon Hospital. I think we did close to 60 for them last year," said group member Janice Lugo.

Each fall, the church holds a blessing ceremony for the quilts before they are sent to their destinations. The quilts are blessed during church services and then distributed with the goal of offering comfort and showing God's love to those who receive them.

The next quilt blessing ceremony will take place on Sunday, September 20, at St. Andrew's United Methodist Church, located at 3315 S. Bryan Rd. in Brandon.

"I think it's a beautiful mission group and a wonderful group of ladies and enjoy it immensely," said Lugo.

For more information about Quilters' Corner, call St. Andrew's United Methodist Church at 813-689-6849 or visit its website, www.saumc.net. Donations are appreciated, and new quilters, including beginners, are welcome.



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MASTER STYLIST WENDI ZEKE LAUNCHES CUSTOM HAIRCARE LINE

By Marie Gilmore



After years of working with clients as a master colorist and stylist, Wendi Zeke is taking her expertise beyond the salon chair with the launch of Wendi Zeke Signature Haircare, a new line of products designed with real women and their busy lifestyles in mind.



Zeke, an independent master colorist and hairstylist serving the Riverview and FishHawk/Lithia communities, has spent years listening to her clients and understanding what they need from their hair care routines. That experience inspired her to create a line that combines professional performance, affordability and convenience.

"I'm excited to announce the launch of my brand new brand," said Zeke, "I've worked closely with a chemist and a manufacturer to create a healthy affordable hair care line. I designed this product with my consumers in mind. These products perform are affordable and built to multitask making my clients lives easier."

The new collection reflects Zeke's philosophy that luxury hair care should be accessible and practical. Her goal is to provide products that perform without requiring a complicated routine or luxury price tag.

The launch of Wendi Zeke Signature Haircare will be celebrated with a launch party on Thursday, September 17, at The Boulevard Supper Club, located at 15260 FishHawk Blvd. in Lithia. The event will introduce the new brand and give guests an opportunity to learn more about the products and the inspiration behind the collection.

In addition to developing her own hair care line, Zeke continues to offer custom hairstyling, precision cutting and master hair coloring through Wendi Zeke Hair Designs.

With her new product line, Zeke hopes to bring the same personalized approach she has provided her salon clients for years to women's daily hair care routines.

"Luxury looks good on you" is the tagline behind the new collection.

For more information about Wendi Zeke Signature Haircare, visit https://wendizhaircare.com/ or call 813-944-8717.

CRAFTS TO WOODWORKING, OUTDOOR PROGRAMS INSPIRE CONFIDENCE

By Libby Hopkins

Nature crafts, woodworking, upcycling, outdoor engineering and games from around the world are among the activities offered by local creative instructor Christopher Boadu through his Outdoor Enrichment Program, which he hopes to bring to local schools, homeschool groups and community organizations.



Christopher Boadu.

Originally from West Africa, with roots in Nigeria and Ghana, Boadu now lives in Florida and is passionate about helping children learn through hands-on experiences.

"I am a creative instructor who enjoys nature, storytelling, crafts, gardening and working with people of all ages," Boadu said. "I am especially passionate about helping children learn through hands-on experiences that build confidence, curiosity and practical life skills."

Growing up in Nigeria and Ghana, much of Boadu's learning and recreation happened outdoors.

"We created games and toys from everyday materials, listened to stories, explored nature and learned useful skills by observing and working with others," he said. "Those experiences encouraged creativity, independence and a strong sense of community."

Boadu said those childhood experiences inspired him to create the Outdoor Enrichment Program and share a similar approach with children in the local community.

"I wanted to bring that same spirit to children here by giving them meaningful opportunities to step away from screens, use their imagination and learn through nature and hands-on activities," he said.

The program offers activities including nature exploration, gardening, storytelling, simple woodworking, crafts made from recycled materials, basic sewing, shelter-building concepts, teamwork challenges and creative problem-solving.

"These activities can strengthen communication, confidence, patience, coordination, leadership and teamwork," Boadu said. "They also teach children to be resourceful, respect the environment, appreciate different cultures and discover that learning can be enjoyable and practical."

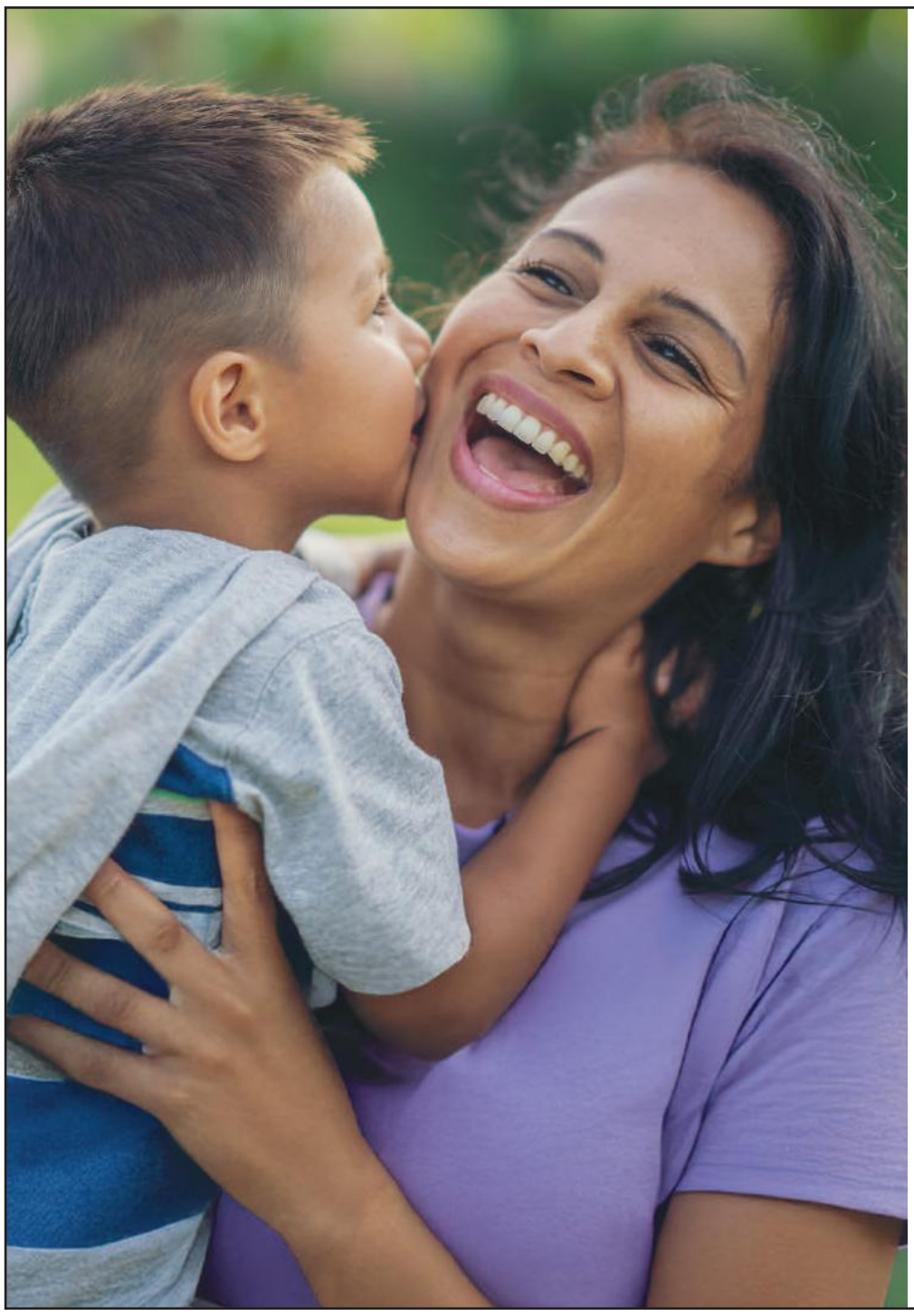
For Boadu, one of the most rewarding aspects is watching children gain confidence as they create something with their own hands or accomplish something they initially believed was too difficult.

"Every child has different strengths, and outdoor learning gives them the freedom to explore those strengths," he said. "Watching their confidence and curiosity grow is the most rewarding part for me."

Boadu hopes to develop a welcoming program where children can be active, creative and connected to nature while building practical skills. He is seeking partnerships with local schools, homeschool groups, youth programs and community organizations.

"In the future, I hope the program can offer regular workshops, seasonal activities and special events for children and families," Boadu said.

"The goal is not simply to keep children occupied," Boadu said. "It is to help them become more confident and connected to the world around them." Contact Boadu at christoveno@gmail.com or 813-906-6037.



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PARK SQUARE TO HOST 9/11 TRAVIS MANION HEROES RUN

Staff Report

The community is invited to gather at Park Square in Lithia on Saturday, September 12, for the 2026 Lithia 9/11 Heroes Run, hosted by the Travis Manion Foundation. Beginning with an opening ceremony at 8 a.m., the annual event will feature a 5K race and 1-mile memorial fun run/walk, welcoming runners, walkers and ruckers of all ages and fitness levels.

The race will begin at 8:46 a.m., marking the time when the first plane struck the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Participants will come together during the 25th anniversary of 9/11 to remember the civilians and first responders who lost their lives that day, as well as the veterans, military service members and first responders who have served in the years since.

The opening ceremony will include a color guard, the national anthem performed by military child Lily Zeedyk and remarks from the race director, the Travis Manion Foundation and the family of Driver/Engineer Jeannie Thomas. A brief warm-up will follow before the race begins.

The 5K course is an out-and-back route on the north side of the road, with Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office personnel posted at intersections. Medals will be presented to all participants, with additional awards for top overall finishers and age-group winners.

The 9/11 Heroes Run series was inspired by Marine 1st Lt. Travis Manion, who was killed by a sniper in Iraq in April 2007 while protecting his wounded teammates. Before his final deployment, Manion visited Rescue One in New York City, New York, a firehouse that lost nearly all its members on 9/11, strengthening his commitment to service.

Today, his legacy continues through the Travis Manion Foundation, which empowers veterans and families of fallen heroes to serve as role models and develop character in future generations.

"Each year, the anniversary of the September 11 attacks provides us an opportunity to gather, reflect and remember," said Ryan Manion, president of the Travis Manion Foundation. "We run to remember so future generations don't forget."

The national 9/11 Heroes Run series brings together approximately 60,000 participants and is held in communities across the United States and internationally. Proceeds support the Travis Manion Foundation and its mission to strengthen communities through character, leadership and service.

Park Square is located at 16132 Churchview Dr. in Lithia. Packet pickup will be available from Thursday through Saturday, September 10-12. For registration and additional information, visit the website online at www.travismanion.org.

SMOKIN' OAK OFFERS WOOD-FIRED PIZZA AND SELF-POUR TAPS

By Marie Gilmore



Smokin' Oak Wood-Fired Pizza & Taproom is now open in Lithia, bringing wood-fired pizza, a self-pour tap wall and a new gathering place for families and friends to the FishHawk area.

Located in the Alafia Commons Publix shopping center, the restaurant opened at the beginning of August and is owned and operated by Lauren and Korey Hoger, who have lived in the area for more than eight years.

The fast-casual restaurant features indoor seating and an outdoor patio, along with more than 11 TVs for guests to enjoy sporting events. Its interactive self-pour tap wall offers 20 taps, including two wines, six mixed alcoholic drinks and 12 beers, many from local Tampa Bay breweries.

The Hogers were drawn to the Smokin' Oak concept because of its simple, fresh approach to food.

"What drew us to Smokin' Oak Pizza was how clean and smooth the whole system is. There are no frozen ingredients, no oversized menu to manage; it's simple and done right. We also loved that like us, the founders are from the Midwest," said Korey.

Lauren added, "We are beyond excited to bring Smokin' Oak Wood-Fired Pizza & Taproom to the Lithia community. We've lived in the area for more than eight years, and we've found ourselves driving as far as 45 minutes just to get a great meal. We've spent the last year and a half waiting for the right space to become available, and we've also spent that time learning what the community loves to eat. We know Lithia is going to love our process, our people and our pizza."

Smokin' Oak is known for its commitment to fresh ingredients and authentic preparation. Dough and sauces are made in-house daily, and pizzas are cooked in a high-temperature oak wood-fired oven in less than two minutes. The open kitchen allows guests to watch their pizzas being prepared.

Guests can customize their pizzas with more than 35 toppings or choose from specialty pizzas, including the buffalo chicken pizza, Smokey Dokey and Porky Pine, made with smoky ham, crispy bacon, juicy pineapple and mozzarella.

The Lithia location also employs approximately 25 team members. Looking ahead, the Hogers hope to expand with additional Smokin' Oak locations in Wesley Chapel and the Bradenton and Sarasota areas.

Smokin' Oak Wood-Fired Pizza & Taproom is open Sunday through Thursday from 11 a.m.-9 p.m. and on Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m.-10 p.m.

Smokin' Oak Wood-Fired Pizza & Taproom is located at 5607 Circa Fishhawk Blvd. in Lithia. For more information, visit https://smokinoakpizza.com/lithia-fl.html or call 813-776-6546.





ALL ABOARD! INTERACTIVE TRAIN EXHIBIT OPENS AT GLAZER MUSEUM

Staff Report



Glazer Children's Museum and Suncoast Credit Union celebrated the grand opening of Suncoast Imagination Station, a new interactive train exhibit designed to inspire creativity, exploration and hands-on learning through the power of play.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony kicked off the new exhibit at Glazer Children's Museum, located at 110 W. Gasparilla Plaza in downtown Tampa.

The expansive train table features tracks winding through changeable landscapes filled with buildings, bridges and natural elements. Children can build, explore and create their own stories as the trains move through the exhibit. Recognizable Tampa landmarks add a local touch to the imaginative experience.

Designed with accessibility in mind, Suncoast Imagination Station wheelchair users, to participate in the experience. Crawl-through spaces and center cutouts encourage children to move through and interact with the exhibit in new ways, creating opportunities for discovery and shared play.

The exhibit is designed to offer more than entertainment. As children navigate train tracks, tackle design challenges and create imaginative stories, they can develop spatial reasoning, fine motor skills, collaboration and creativity. The open-ended nature of the experience encourages young visitors to experiment, problem-solve and make sense of the world around them.

Suncoast Credit Union, which traces its roots back to 1934, when it was founded as Hillsborough County Teachers Credit Union, has a long history of supporting children and families throughout Florida. Through its foundation, the credit union has contributed more than $63 million since 1990 to organizations and initiatives supporting children's health, education and emotional well-being.

The new exhibit also complements Glazer Children's Museum's mission of providing engaging, play-based learning experiences. With more than 35,000 square feet of interactive exhibits, the downtown Tampa museum encourages children and families to explore science, art, health and other subjects through purposeful play.

With Suncoast Imagination Station, families will soon have another opportunity to learn, imagine and create together — one train track at a time.

Glazer Children's Museum is located at 110 W. Gasparilla Plaza in Tampa.

For more information, visit the website at https://glazermuseum.org/.

WOMAN'S CLUB WELCOMES NEW PRESIDENT, PLANS YEAR OF FUN

Staff Report



The newly installed Riverview Woman's Club board, led by President Michelle Mosher, recently gathered for a leadership retreat to set goals, share ideas and plan for the club's 2026-27 year.

The Riverview Woman's Club (RWC) is beginning its 2026-27 year with new leadership, fresh ideas and a calendar filled with opportunities for members to connect, serve and have fun.

Michelle Mosher, owner of SouthShore Insurance, has been named the club's president for the third time. Mosher and the newly installed board recently gathered for a leadership retreat to share ideas, set goals and plan for an exciting year ahead "to empower the next leadership team and forge a path forward to continue this club's momentum."

"Our club is strongest when everyone gets involved," the organization shared.

Whether members attend a luncheon, participate in a social event, volunteer on a community project, serve on a committee or invite a friend to a meeting, each person plays an important role in the club's success.

Serving alongside Mosher are First Vice President Lisa Tackus, Second Vice President Kimberly Payne, secretary Mary Lee Walker, treasurer Jennifer King and parliamentarian Kitty Cunningham.

Board directors include Bill Andrew, Melissa Canfield, Aubrey Eikenberry, Ashley Falvey, Alison Farnan, Patti LeCompte, Heather Mershon and Faith Moeller. Kitty Cunningham, Jeanne Burkeson and Donna Fore will also serve in emeritus roles.

The club is already putting its commitment to community service into action. A group of RWC members recently volunteered at the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce Business and Education Event, representing the organization and lending their time to support an important community initiative.

Looking ahead, RWC members and prospective members have several upcoming opportunities to get involved. Coffee Chat will be held on Tuesday, September 1, with the location to be announced; the RWC Monthly Luncheon on Wednesday, September 9, from 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m.; the RWC After Hours event on Tuesday, September 22; and RWC Music Bingo on Tuesday, September 29, at Bullfrog Creek Brewing Co., located at 3632 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Valrico. Doors open at 6 p.m., with games beginning at 7 p.m.

Tickets for the September luncheon are $20 when reserved by Sunday, September 6, and $30 at the door. Reservations can be made through the club's event page.

For more information about the Riverview Woman's Club and upcoming events, visit https://riverviewwomansclub.org/.



LOCAL BUSINESSES INVITED TO JOIN HOLIDAY VENDOR FAIR

Staff Report



Local businesses have an opportunity to get their products, services and holiday offerings in front of area shoppers at the Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce's annual Shop Local Holiday Vendor Fair.

The event is scheduled for Saturday, November 7, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. at the Presbyterian Church of Bloomingdale, located at 710 E. Bloomingdale Ave. in Brandon. The festive event will bring together local businesses, families and holiday shoppers for an afternoon of shopping, entertainment and community connection.

This year's event chair, Mike Neill, is encouraging local businesses to take advantage of the opportunity to showcase what they offer during the busy holiday shopping season.

"The holidays are one of the best times to support local businesses," Neill said. "This event gives shoppers the chance to find one-of-a-kind gifts while meeting the people behind the businesses that help make our community thrive."

Vendor booths are available for $40, with space limited and the fee nonrefundable. Businesses interested in participating are encouraged to register early through the "Events" section of the Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce website at www.valricofishhawk.org.

The fair will feature a variety of vendors offering handcrafted items, holiday decor, boutique products, specialty foods, professional services and unique gift ideas. The goal is to create an interactive experience rather than simply a traditional vendor market.

Businesses, including service-based companies, are encouraged to make their booths engaging by offering games, demonstrations, crafts, contests or other activities that encourage visitors to stop and interact.

"We love seeing vendors get creative," Neill said. "Whether it's a game, a craft, a contest or another interactive idea, those experiences help create lasting memories and meaningful conversations."

The popular Flamingo Decorating Contest will also return. Each vendor receives a flamingo to decorate in a creative holiday theme, with awards presented in several categories.

For shoppers, the event will include food, music, raffles, giveaways and family-friendly activities, along with opportunities to discover local businesses and holiday gifts.

"The Shop Local Holiday Vendor Fair is all about bringing people together," Neill said. "It's an opportunity to support small businesses, strengthen community relationships and kick off the holiday season in a fun and meaningful way."

Businesses interested in becoming vendors can contact Mike Neill by email at shoplocal@valricofishhawk.org.

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ALL ABOARD: NORTH POLE EXPRESS BRINGS HOLIDAY MAGIC TO PARRISH

Staff Report



All aboard for a holiday journey filled with Christmas magic, festive activities and a visit with Santa Claus as the Florida Railroad Museum's North Pole Express returns for the 2026 holiday season.

The popular family tradition will operate on select evenings from Friday, November 27, through Tuesday, December 22. Departures are scheduled for 5:15 p.m. and 7:15 p.m. from the Florida Railroad Museum's Parrish station, with the complete experience lasting approximately three and three-quarter hours.

The adventure begins when families board a historic train for an approximately 45-minute journey through the Florida countryside to the North Pole. Once there, passengers will have about two and a half hours to explore a magical holiday destination filled with activities, entertainment and seasonal treats.

Every child will have an opportunity to visit Santa in his private office and receive a special gift to remember the journey. Tickets also include unlimited cookies and hot chocolate, storytelling, model train displays, campfires, reindeer-food making, access to the toy tent and other holiday activities. Bounce houses and additional festive entertainment add to the experience.

Additional food, beverages and s'mores kits will be available for purchase at the North Pole.

Families can choose from several classes of service. Coach Class offers an economical, open-air railroad experience, while Excursion Class provides assigned seating and additional comfort. First Class features fully enclosed, climate-controlled passenger cars and includes complimentary snacks and beverages during the ride to the North Pole.

Groups and extended families can also reserve a private historic caboose for up to 16 guests. Each caboose includes tables, flexible seating, a restroom and space for personal belongings, with a museum host accompanying the group.

Regardless of the class selected, every ticket includes the complete North Pole experience, including round-trip train transportation, a Santa visit, a child's gift, cookies, hot chocolate and holiday activities.

Guests are encouraged to arrive 45-60 minutes before departure to allow time for parking, ticket pickup and boarding. Boarding generally begins approximately 20-30 minutes before departure, and the train must leave on schedule.

Tickets are now on sale, and popular departures are expected to sell out quickly. Prices vary according to the event date, departure time and class of service selected.

The North Pole Express operates November 27-29 and December 2-6, 9-13 and 16-22.

The Florida Railroad Museum is located at 12210 83rd St. E. in Parrish. For tickets and additional information, visit its website at www.frrm.org.

ST. VINCENT DE PAUL CARES OPENS A NEW HOME FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

Staff Report



Community leaders and about 100 guests gathered today for the ribbon cutting of the Hillsborough CARE Center, a newly renovated campus serving veterans experiencing homelessness in Hillsborough County. Attendees included U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor and Hillsborough County Commissioners Gwen Myers, Harry Cohen and Chris Boles. St. Vincent de Paul (SVdP) CARES CEO Michael Raposa emceed the event.

"It's wonderful to see so many here today, but it really speaks to this community on everything that each and every one of you all do to make sure that veterans will see the care and dignity that they have earned," Castor said. "You have a remarkable team in St. Vincent de Paul CARES. You've come into our community and lifted up how we treat veterans, meeting the expectation that this community has for the men and women who have served us so well, to make sure that they receive the benefits they have earned, and that they live their lives in dignity."

The campus, operated by St. Vincent de Paul CARES, located at 384 15th St. N. in St. Petersburg, took more than a year to renovate, with crews rebuilding roofs, electrical, plumbing and water and sewer connections across all seven buildings. Hillsborough County invested approximately $4.4 million in the property, and St. Vincent de Paul CARES has committed to operating it for the next 30 years.

"It has really preserved the character of this neighborhood," Raposa said. "When you drive up to this place, you don't even know that this is what it is, and I think that's critical for the citizens of Tampa that live in this area."

The campus includes seven housing units for veterans, including one building for females, and a mess hall with a new kitchen, offering space for more than 60 veterans. The VA is providing funding tied to those beds. Residents receive three meals a day, computer lab access and laundry services and work with case managers and housing specialists toward permanent housing.

"The goal is in and out in 40 to 45 days," Raposa said. "We get them in, do an assessment, figure out their critical needs and address the housing concern right away. This is really meant to be a shelter — helping them get the services along the way to permanent housing."

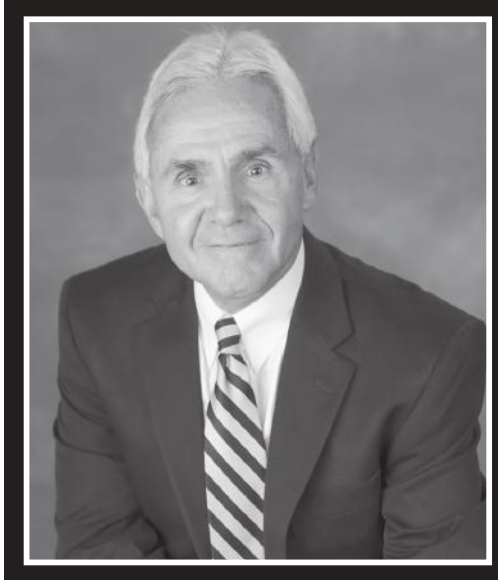
Shelter manager Nicole Maher and the SVdP team have worked to make the facility feel like home for its veteran residents.

"It's not an institution, it's not a shelter-like atmosphere," she said. "They're eating dinner in the living room, watching TV. They want to help, they want to give back and they're excited to look forward to getting their own place."

The number for veterans wishing to learn more about residency at the Hillsborough CARE Center is 813-395-4844.

Community members can support the CARE Center's residents by visiting www.svdp.care or calling 727-823-2516 and asking for the development department. Needed items include men's clothing, toiletries, towels, shoes, underwear and socks.

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LEGOLAND DEBUTS ALL-NEW & EXPANDED BRICK OR TREAT STREET

Staff Report



Families looking for a not-so-scary way to celebrate Halloween will find plenty of tricks, treats and LEGO fun at LEGOLAND Florida Resort this fall as the popular Brick or Treat event returns with a major new attraction.

Running on select dates from Saturday, September 5, through Saturday, October 31, Brick or Treat will once again transform the park into Mischief Town, where younger children and their families can enjoy a full day and evening of Halloween entertainment. This year, the event introduces Brick or Treat Street, an immersive, interactive trick-or-treat experience featuring six life-sized LEGO Monster homes.

"Brick or Treat has always been about creating a Halloween experience families can enjoy together, and this year we're taking it to a whole new level with the addition of Brick or Treat Street," said Brian Bacica, president of LEGOLAND Florida Resort.

Families can explore the homes of some of their favorite LEGO Monster characters, each offering its own surprises and interactive experiences. Visitors can search for runaway frogs at Wacky Witch's Cottage, witness Wolf Guy's full-moon transformation, encounter creepy-crawly surprises at Spider Lady's Castle and awaken an ancient curse in Mummy's Throne Room.

Other stops include Plant Monster's Greenhouse, where curious explorers can encounter giant vines and hungry plants, and Scarecrow's Barn, where guests can strike silly poses and collect a LEGO brick before continuing their adventure.

The Halloween fun continues throughout Mischief Town with monster meet-and-greets, live entertainment, interactive shows and seasonal LEGO building activities. Families can also experience The Great Monster Chase 4D Movie, featuring special effects and an action-packed LEGO Monster adventure.

After dark, guests can stroll through the new Potion Mischief Light Trail, featuring colorful projections, glowing effects and interactive experiences. On select Saturday evenings, the fan-favorite Monster Skytacular drone show will return, with hundreds of illuminated drones creating LEGO Monster-inspired scenes in the night sky.

All Brick or Treat activities are included with general admission and annual passes, making the event an accessible option for families seeking Halloween fun designed especially for younger children.

LEGOLAND Florida Resort is located in Winter Haven, approximately midway between Tampa and Orlando, and offers more than 50 rides, live shows and attractions across its 150-acre resort.

For event dates and additional information, visit LEGOLAND Florida Resort's website at www.legoland.com/florida/.

CONSERVATION PARTNERS & MOSAIC COMPANY DELIVER SCRUB-JAY WIN

Staff Report



A collaborative conservation effort is giving a small, isolated population of Florida scrub-jays a stronger chance at long-term survival. Conservation partners and The Mosaic Company have successfully relocated 48 federally threatened Florida scrub-jays to Wingate Creek State Park in Manatee County. The first-of-its-kind effort brings together young birds from three distinct Florida populations to increase genetic diversity and improve the species' long-term viability.

The project brought together The Mosaic Company, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Verdantas, the University of Central Florida and Archbold Biological Station. Manatee County, the Southwest Florida Water Management District, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and regional land managers also helped prepare and maintain suitable habitat.

Found nowhere else on Earth, Florida scrub-jays depend entirely on Florida's increasingly limited scrub habitat. Development and habitat fragmentation have reduced and isolated suitable areas, leaving smaller populations at greater risk of decline and local extinction.

The relocated birds came from Archbold Biological Station, Cape Canaveral Space Force Station and Duette Preserve. Researchers focused on young birds entering their first breeding season, giving them an opportunity to establish territories, select mates and integrate into the new population.

The effort builds on more than 25 years of habitat restoration and management in Manatee County, along with decades of research and monitoring across the scrub-jay's range.

Early results are encouraging. All 48 birds survived the initial translocation period, and monitoring shows they have established territories throughout Wingate Creek State Park and formed 11 family groups. Several pairs have already begun nesting. Several relocated birds have also dispersed into surrounding scrub habitats and interacted with nearby Florida scrub-jay populations, an early indication that the new genetics could become integrated throughout the broader regional population.

"At Mosaic, environmental stewardship means taking a long-term view of the landscapes we manage and the species that depend on them," said Dr. Raoul Boughton. "The early success of this translocation reflects more than 25 years of studying and monitoring efforts to grow the regional Florida scrub-jay population. Insights from translocations conducted between 2003 and 2010 helped us refine our approach, while genetic diversity studies showed there was even more we could do to support the species' recovery."

Before the translocation, the regional population that includes Wingate Creek State Park supported 56 breeding pairs. Researchers estimate the project could add up to 12 new breeding pairs over the next three years, with additional pairs potentially forming as birds disperse throughout the region.

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DANCING FOR JOY CELEBRATES FAITH, COMMUNITY AND THE ART OF DANCE

By Dale Bliss



A seasoned dancer with true joy for the art, April Joy McLane enjoys sharing her love for the art of dance. McLane has been dancing for the last four and one-half decades, and she never tires of sharing the enrichment that comes from dance.

McLane, with her daughter, Kate, opened Dancing for Joy in 2010.

"I opened a dance studio because I care tremendously about people and I want people to be part of the community as well as my love for dance," McLane explained.

The seasoned dance studio owner has been teaching for 28 years.

Dance, McLane explained, has helped her through many circumstances that she has met in her life.

"It built confidence, resilience, courage as well as teamwork," she continued.

McLane is a Christian and believes in prayer. She offers devotions and lessons in character to the students to build confidence, resilience, courage and teamwork. You can find this Scripture on her website: "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden," (Matthew 5:14).

Dancing for Joy is a studio where students can explore their wonderment and expand their knowledge for active art. Per its mission statement, Dancing for Joy's dance instructors "strive to ignite their light through dance."

McLane has approximately 20 teachers. They start and/or end classes with prayer. Following God's word is important to her.

She said, with emphasis, "God is the boss!" She gave a reminder that "God covers us and calls us to grow, to shine, to serve, to dance with purpose."

In addition to dancing classes, McLane offers help with homework, devotions, snacks games and more for students at the school. Recently offered is transportation through Not Your Mother's Taxi. Also, every month, a new challenge is offered.

Dancing for Joy is considered a counter-culture dance school. Forms of dance taught at the studio are praise, ballet, jazz, tap, acro, the Christian version of hip-hop and, yes, trapeze.

McLane offers classes at schools, day cares and churches.

Dancing for Joy is located at 11691 Boyette Rd. in Riverview in the Goolsby Pointe Shopping Center. Registration is now open for the 2026-27 season, which is starting soon. For more information or to register, visit www.dancingforjoy1.com.

THE TRAVEL INSURANCE CHICK™ GUIDES TRAVELERS WITH CONFIDENCE

By Kelly Wise Valdes



Michelle Mosher, founder of The Travel Insurance Chick™, offers clear, honest guidance to help travelers protect their journeys.

The Travel Insurance Chick™ was born from a gap Michelle Mosher saw repeatedly in the travel marketplace: travelers investing heavily in unforgettable experiences while treating protection as an afterthought.

"My husband and I are avid travelers, and I saw how often travel insurance was treated as an afterthought," said Mosher, president of The Travel Insurance Chick™. "People spend thousands of dollars and months planning a trip, then either skip the insurance or click a box without really knowing what they bought."

As a longtime insurance professional, Mosher recognized an opportunity to bridge the worlds of travel and insurance with clear, accessible guidance. "Travelers don't necessarily need more options," said Mosher. "They need someone who can explain the options and help them choose coverage that actually makes sense for their trip. That''s really how The Travel Insurance Chick™ came about."

Mosher's approach centers on education, beginning with the particulars of each trip rather than the fine print of a policy. Mosher asks her clients questions such as, "Where are you going and what have you invested? Are you cruising or traveling internationally? What would happen if you got sick or something disrupted the trip?" Only after understanding the traveler's needs does she walk clients through what coverage includes — and what it does not.

"I don't want someone to say, 'Michelle told me I'm covered.' I want them to understand their coverage and feel confident about what they're buying."

One of the most common misconceptions she encounters is the belief that all travel insurance products are the same. Many options may provide coverage, but the question is whether it's the right coverage for your trip. She also notes frequent confusion around credit card coverage and cruise line policies.

"I'd much rather explain those differences before someone travels than have them find out when something has already gone wrong."

Staying informed is essential in an evolving travel landscape.

"Travel changes constantly, so this isn't insurance you can learn once and put on a shelf," Mosher said.

She maintains close communication with carriers, monitors industry updates and draws on her own experiences.

"I'm also a traveler myself, so when there's a major storm, airline issue or something happening overseas, I'm looking at it from both sides."

A recent group trip to Ireland reinforced the importance of comprehensive protection. When two travelers arrived days late due to flight cancellations, multiple parts of their policy came into play.

"One canceled flight created a domino effect," Mosher said. "Having the right coverage helped keep a bad travel experience from becoming an even bigger financial loss. That's exactly why I believe understanding what you're buying matters."

The Travel Insurance Chick™'s office is located at 11216 Winthrop Main St. in Riverview. For more information, visit www.travelinsurancechick.com or call 813-448-7580.







BEYOND THE CHAIR: WATTS DENTAL TAKES ITS MISSION TO HONDURAS

Staff Report



At Watts Dental, dentistry has never been just about teeth.

"We're not in the dental business. We're in the people business."

That philosophy is at the heart of how Watts Dental serves its patients, supports its team, and gives back to communities—and this September, it will take the Watts Dental team all the way to Comayagua, Honduras.

From September 19–26, 2026, Watts Dental will partner with Solanus Medical Mission to provide dental treatment, education, compassion, and support to more than 300 people in underserved communities. The trip is especially significant because it will be the first time Solanus Medical Mission brings a dedicated dental team on one of its Honduras missions.

For Dr. Jason Watts, founder of Watts Dental, participating in a dental mission trip has been a longtime dream. But the team doesn't want to simply travel to Honduras, provide care for a week, and leave.

They want the impact to continue.

Watts Dental is raising funds to purchase dental instruments, equipment, materials, and supplies that can remain in Honduras after the mission. The goal is to equip local dental providers with additional resources they can continue using to care for their communities long after the Watts Dental team returns to Florida.

"We don't want this to be about what we can accomplish in one week. We want to leave something behind that allows care to continue after we're gone," said Maricarmen Saleta, Chief Heart Officer at Watts Dental.

That approach reflects a larger philosophy within the growing Tampa Bay dental group. Watts Dental believes a dental practice can be a force for good—not only through the care provided inside its offices, but through the way it treats people and invests in communities.

Through its partnership with B1G1, Watts Dental connects patient visits with charitable impact around the world, and the organization has also donated more than $1.7 million to local veterans.

The Honduras mission is the next chapter in that commitment.

To help make it possible, Watts Dental is inviting patients, local businesses, dental suppliers, and members of the Tampa Bay community to become part of the mission. Watts Dental will match every dollar raised, doubling the impact of community support. The organization is also seeking donations of dental equipment, instruments, materials, and supplies that can be used during the trip and, whenever possible, left behind for future care.

For Watts Dental, the mission represents what the organization wants dentistry to look like: people caring for people.

To support the Watts Dental Honduras Mission: www.gofundme.com/f/bring-smiles-to-honduras Watts Dental: www.wattsdentalfl.com Solanus Medical Mission: www.solanusmedicalmission.org.

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WRIGHT'S GOURMET PLANS FOR EXPANDED BAKERY IN BRANDON

By Brian Bokor

A South Tampa institution known for its signature sandwiches, cakes and pumpernickel bread is coming to Brandon.

Wright's Gourmet House plans to open an approximately 15,000-square-foot location at 328 Brandon Town Center Dr., near Brandon Exchange, in summer 2027. It will take over the building recently occupied by Abby Iron Doors and previously home to Peltz Shoes.

Plans call for a large, multipurpose location combining Wright's cafe with a bakery, espresso bar, gourmet market and expanded catering operation.

The menu is expected to include the breakfast selections, deli sandwiches, salads, cakes, pastries and cookies that have made Wright's a Tampa favorite for more than six decades. The new location will also offer grab-and-go meals, take-and-bake items, event desserts and Wright's-branded products.

Wright's opened in South Tampa in 1963 and built a devoted following for its oversized sandwiches, scratch-made cakes and longtime recipes. It remained in the Wright family until Caspers Co. purchased it from Jeff Mount, grandson of founders Marjorie and Pete Wright, in 2024.

Caspers Co. is owned by siblings Blake Casper and Allison Casper Adams, whose family was once Florida's largest McDonald's franchisee before selling its restaurants to McDonald's corporate in 2022. The siblings also own Oxford Commons, the hospitality company behind Oxford Exchange and other Tampa restaurants.

Brandon was a familiar market for Caspers Co., which previously operated nine McDonald's restaurants in the area. After acquiring Wright's, the company moved carefully to ensure the restaurant's longtime recipes and quality could be maintained as it expanded.

The Brandon location is expected to employ about 100 people. As Wright's prepares to expand, Yesy Cruz, director of operations, has focused on developing its workforce, which has more than doubled since Caspers Co. acquired the restaurant.

Wright's opened its first satellite cafe at Tampa General Hospital's Davis Islands campus in February.

A second location of approximately 15,000 square feet is planned between Culver's and Cooper's Hawk along State Road 56 at Wiregrass Ranch in Wesley Chapel, with an anticipated summer 2028 opening.

Wright's original location is at 1200 S. Dale Mabry Highway in Tampa. For more information, visit www.wrightsgourmet.com or call 813-253-3838.

For Brandon-area customers, summer 2027 means a trip to South Tampa will no longer be necessary for a Wright's Beef Martini sandwich or a slice of its famous layer cake.

LOCAL MILITARY COMMUNITY HAS NEW HEALTH COVERAGE OPTION

By Brad Stager

When it's PCS time for military personnel and their families, that means a permanent change of station is at hand and attention turns to the logistics of moving and the consuming ritual of packing and junking goods to arrive at a new duty assignment in good order.



TRICARE beneficiaries in the Tampa area have access to a new healthcare initiative from the Defense Health Agency. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Michelle Lessard-Terry.)

Beyond dealing with boxes, tape and debris, there are also administrative tasks to take care of, especially relating to the government health care program known as TRICARE, which provides insurance coverage to the military community.

TRICARE moves with enrollees, but action must be taken to ensure coverage continues. According to TRICARE's website, no changes are needed until boots hit the ground at a new assignment, but once there, it is necessary to update information in the military's DEERS personnel system and establish relationships with new medical providers.

A Defense Health Agency initiative provides another option in the Tampa area to access TRICARE coverage during a qualifying life event like a move.

The TRICARE Prime Demo is a pilot program started in January that gives eligible beneficiaries a new option to receive health care.

Besides active-duty family members, retirees and their family members (not eligible for Medicare/TRICARE For Life), survivors and families of mobilized Guard/Reserve members are also eligible to participate in the program. Active-duty members of the military are not eligible to participate.

The program is run by CareSource Military & Veterans (CSMV), a managed care organization active in government-sponsored health care programs. Beneficiaries use providers in CSMV's network instead of TRICARE's standard regional contractors like Humana.

According to TRICARE's website, the TRICARE Prime Demo has the same copayments, cost-shares and other out-of-pocket costs as TRICARE Prime.

Pamela Drake represents CSMV at community events and works with beneficiaries to adjust their coverage. According to her, maintaining the right coverage during a QLE can be a challenge, but it is important to take care of it before the first symptom appears.

"The biggest mistake is waiting until someone needs a doctor to start thinking about healthcare," she wrote in an email, adding, "Eligible beneficiaries generally have 90 days from the date of that change to review their coverage and make any plan changes available to them. If no one tells you that window exists, it can be easy to miss while you're getting settled."

Visit www.caresource.com and TRICARE's website at https://tricare.mil/.

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HOLIDAY FAVORITES TAKE CENTER STAGE IN ORCHESTRA'S SEASON

Staff Report



The holiday season will come to life through the sounds of The Florida Orchestra, which has announced a lineup of festive performances as part of its 2026-27 season.

Tickets for the new season went on sale August 11, including single tickets to the orchestra's holiday performances. Among the season's highlights are a live-to-film presentation of Disney's Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas and the traditional Classical Christmas concerts.

The Florida Orchestra will present The Nightmare Before Christmas in Concert Live to Film on Saturday, December 5, at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, December 6, at 2 p.m. at the Mahaffey Theater, located at 400 First St. S. St. Petersburg.

The 1993 holiday favorite will be shown on the big screen while The Florida Orchestra performs Grammy-winning composer Danny Elfman's musical score live. The film follows Pumpkin King Jack Skellington as he attempts to bring Christmas cheer to his spooky world, with unexpected consequences.

For those looking for a more traditional holiday experience, Classical Christmas will feature Music Director Michael Francis conducting The Florida Orchestra on Friday, December 18, at 7:30 p.m. at the Straz Center and Saturday, December 19, at 7:30 p.m. at the Mahaffey Theater.

The program will include music from Johann Sebastian Bach's Christmas Oratorio, George Frideric Handel's "Hallelujah" Chorus, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's The Nutcracker and traditional Christmas carols. The Master Chorale of Tampa Bay and Lumina Youth Choir will join the orchestra, and audiences will have opportunities to sing along.

The season also includes a family concert, A Star to Remember, on Sunday, October 25, at 2 p.m. at the Mahaffey Theater. The program follows Milo on an adventure to the mysterious Night Market and features music from E.T. and Coco, along with orchestral favorites. Families can arrive early for an Instrument Petting Zoo and other activities.

The Florida Orchestra will present nearly 100 concerts throughout Tampa Bay during the 2026-27 season, including classical, pops and family programming.

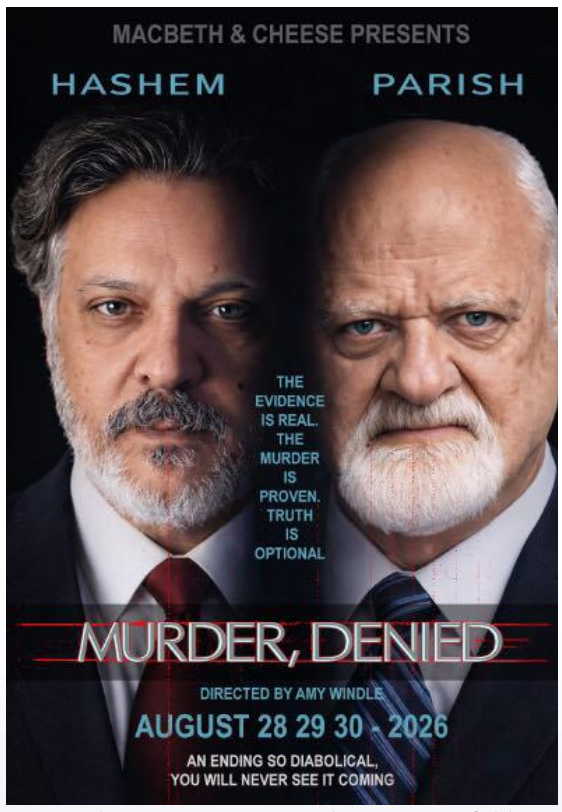
The season opens with Francis conducting Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture on Friday and Sunday, October 2 and 4, at the Mahaffey Theater. The Raymond James Pops series begins on Friday and Saturday, October 9-10, with Revolution: The Music of The Beatles.

Tickets are available at https://floridaorchestra.org/, by calling 727-892-3337 or at The Florida Orchestra Ticket Center, located at 244 Second Ave. N., 1st Floor, in St. Petersburg.

For the complete 2026-27 concert calendar and ticket information, visit https://floridaorchestra.org/.

MURDER, DENIED BRINGS PSYCHOLOGICAL SUSPENSE TO TWO LOCAL STAGES

Staff Report



Fans of suspense, psychological thrillers and unexpected twists will have two opportunities to experience Murder, Denied, an original Florida production that promises to keep audiences questioning what is real.

Presented by MacBeth & Cheese Productions, the psychological thriller will be performed at Brandon Performing Arts from Friday through Sunday, September 11-13. Directed by Amy Windle, Murder, Denied centers on Henry Whitaker, who has one night left to live and believes he has devised the perfect plan. When Michael Reyes arrives expecting a routine meeting, he instead finds a carefully prepared dinner table, precise timing and a locked room — all elements of a much darker scheme.

As the evening unfolds, long-buried secrets and past events come to light. Michael soon realizes that he was never simply invited to dinner. He was chosen.

Unlike a traditional murder mystery focused on identifying a killer, the production challenges audiences to decide what they believe. Each conversation, clue and revelation is designed to shift perceptions and encourage theatergoers to reconsider what they have just witnessed.

"The evidence is real. The murder is proven. Truth is optional," reads the production's tagline.

The intimate theater settings are expected to add to the tension, bringing audiences close to the action as the story unfolds. According to the production team, the twists continue until the final moments, with an ending intended to leave audiences debating what really happened long after the curtain falls.

Brandon Performing Arts is located at 225 E. Brandon Blvd. in Brandon. Tickets for the Murder, Denied performances are available through the MacBeth & Cheese Productions website, https://macbethandcheese.com/.

For audiences looking for an evening of mystery, revenge and psychological drama, Murder, Denied offers a story designed to keep the questions coming until — and perhaps long after — the final scene.



CHAMBER OF COMMERCE HOSTS CANDIDATE CONNECTION

Staff Report



The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) recently welcomed candidates, business leaders and community members to its 2026 Candidate Connection, an event designed to encourage civic engagement and give residents an opportunity to connect directly with candidates seeking public office.

Held at The Regent, the event brought together candidates from local, state and federal races. Attendees had an opportunity to meet candidates, ask questions, learn more about their platforms and become better informed ahead of the upcoming election.

The chamber thanked Curry Law Group, the event's presenting sponsor, as well as supporting sponsors Tampa Electric Company, RSA Consulting, Raulerson Castillo & Company CPAs, Charter Spectrum and State Rep. Danny Alvarez, Florida House District 69. Contributing sponsors included Adams & Reese; State Rep. Michael Owen, District 70; Stacy Hahn for Hillsborough County Commission District 5 Countywide; and The Regent.

The event also featured support from ABC Events, which provided decor; emcee Brian Porter of Florida Foam Factory; and Alex Li of Complete Weddings + Events, who provided music and audio services.

Food and refreshments were provided by chamber members Graze Craze Brandon, Texas Roadhouse, Dave's Hot Chicken and New York New York Pizza. PattiCakes Custom Cakes provided desserts.

Among the candidates participating were Sara Peacock, Louie Aguila and Nina McGucken Alvarez, candidates for circuit judge; Daniela Simic, Sally Harris Williamson, Brittany Lyssy, Kenneth Gay and Karen Perez, candidates for the Hillsborough County School Board; and Cindy Stuart, Stacy Hahn, Aileen Rodriguez, Neil Manimala, Joshua Wostal, Donna Cameron Cepeda and Gwen Myers, candidates for the Hillsborough Board of County Commissioners.

Candidates for Congress included Kimberly Overman, Brian Lambert, Kevin Steele, Bea Valenti, John Peters, Mike Beltran, Rocky Rochford and Gavriel Soriano.

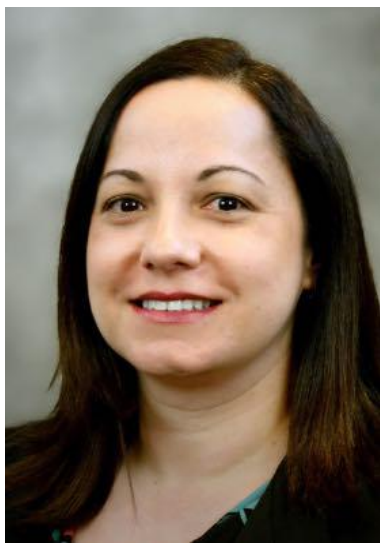
The event also included State Rep. Michael Owen, District 70, and Ryan Gill, a candidate for Florida House District 68.

The chamber expressed appreciation to all candidates who participated and engaged directly with residents by answering questions and sharing their perspectives.

According to BRCC, Candidate Connection reflects its ongoing commitment to creating opportunities for civic engagement throughout the Brandon and Riverview communities. Bringing candidates and community members together allows residents and business leaders to learn more about those seeking public office and participate in the civic process.

SOUTH HILLSBOROUGH PIPELINE MAKES SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS

By Maribel Medina



Tampa Bay Water's contractor is making significant progress on the construction of the new South Hillsborough Pipeline that will deliver high-quality drinking water to Hillsborough County. The county needs additional drinking water by the end of 2028 so that communities from Brandon to south of Balm can flourish.

You can see the progress we're making. Several major tunneling crossings are already complete, and additional work is underway at locations including State Road 60 and the Alafia River. Open-cut pipe installation — covering most of the route — has been completed along portions of South Kings Avenue and continues in other areas. Support for construction activities, such as traffic control, tree trimming and erosion prevention, is also taking place to prepare work zones and maintain safety.

We recognize that construction of 26-mile-long, 5-foot-diameter transmission main is disruptive, and we continue to work as a team to minimize the impact of this project on businesses, neighborhoods, homeowners and commuters. In fact, the pipeline design includes 17 tunnel locations to minimize impacts to roadways and waterways. Our team is working closely with Hillsborough County on all maintenance of traffic plans, and all detours and road closures are reported to navigation applications, like Waze and Google Maps, to help you plan your commute.

When the pipeline is in service in late 2028, it will supply drinking water that is vital to the public's health and Hillsborough County's economy. Hospitals, doctors' offices, schools, fire and rescue, recreation centers, businesses and homes all require clean drinking water, and we remain steadfast in our commitment to providing this essential service to the community.

Stay Informed; Support Local Businesses

Stay up to date on detours and road closures by signing up for email alerts at https://southhillsboroughpipeline.com/contact/.

Use your navigation app to help plan your commute.

Support local businesses — all businesses along the route are open and accessible. Please continue to support your favorite businesses along the route as they cope with different traffic patterns.

Maribel Medina is planning and projects director for Tampa Bay Water, which supplies wholesale drinking water to Hillsborough County, Pasco County, Pinellas County, New Port Richey, St. Petersburg and Tampa.

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WINTHROP SHOWCASES SEVEN RESTAURANTS DURING FIRST RESTAURANT WEEK SEPT 17-27

By Jane Owen



The owners of 7 Winthrop restaurants have teamed together to form the first restaurant week in September.

From upscale dining to a patio bar, Winthrop, a master-planned community located in Riverview, has over a dozen restaurants, bars, bakeries and cafes. Family-owned and operated by its founders, John and Kay Sullivan, who live in the town center, Winthrop has small-town charm and a focus on fostering community.

Winthrop is hosting Winthrop Restaurant Week to showcase its restaurants to the community. The restaurant week is from Thursday, September 17, through Sunday, September 27. Participating restaurants include Acropolis Greek Taverna, Cappy's Pizzeria, Cali Brandon, Donovan's Meatery, Himes Breakfast House, Tutto Tavola and Longshots Sports Bar.

Each restaurant will have a special restaurant week menu. Restaurant guests can order from a restaurant's regular menu, but they will have items to choose from that are unique for restaurant week. Some restaurants will have a prix fixe restaurant week menu, allowing guests to order an appetizer, a main entree and a dessert for a set price. Other restaurants will feature items on the menu that are only available during restaurant week.

Of the seven restaurants being showcased, the longest-opened restaurant is Acropolis, which has been in Winthrop for 17 years. The newest restaurant is Longshots Sports Bar, which just opened.

Restaurant week organizer Sarah Sullivan Xiong said it is the perfect time to try a restaurant for the first time or visit one that you know and love.

"Restaurant week is a special occasion to highlight the amazing restaurants at Winthrop. We're particularly proud that we have so many family-run and locally run businesses and restaurants," Xiong said.

"It's been done and been very successful in larger cities, but this is definitely a first in Riverview. We're really excited to see the ground swell and see how it works out this year. It can grow. But, unless you start, you don't know," Sullivan said.

The community growth from the event is already happening because of the connections being made between the restaurants.

"The restaurants are coming together in a collaborative way. It is already building a strong sense of community amongst the business owners," Xiong said.

Tutto Tavola owner Luigi Cavallaro said he is looking forward to the event. Tutto Tavola opened in Winthrop in January.

"It's a great way to showcase Winthrop restaurants. It's going to be a great event," Cavallaro said. "I love being in Winthrop because of the community. It's like a little village of its own," he added.

Sign up for the Winthrop newsletter at https://winthropfl.com/ and follow @WinthropFL to participate in the many giveaways happening. Visit WinthropFL.com/RestaurantWeek for more information.

TAMPA BAY RODEO & FAMILY FESTIVAL MAKES FIRST-EVER LABOR DAY APPEARANCE

Staff Report



The yearlong celebration of America's 250th anniversary continues Labor Day Weekend as the Tampa Bay Rodeo & Family Festival makes its first-ever Labor Day Weekend appearance on Friday and Saturday, September 4 and 5, at the Hillsborough County Fairgrounds, located at 215 Sydney Washer Rd. in Dover. After July's sold-out Tampa Bay Rodeo, fans asked for another opportunity to experience Florida's Hottest Show on Dirt — and organizers listened.

The Labor Day weekend event features two action-packed nights of full rodeo competition where the region's top cowboys and cowgirls will battle it out in bull riding, bronco busting, barrel racing, calf roping and more.

Continuing its yearlong celebration of America's 250th, the Tampa Bay Rodeo is proud to work with Wounded Warrior Project to create a memorable Labor Day weekend for wounded veterans and their families. The rodeo's stirring opening ceremony will pay tribute to the brave men and women of the U.S. military with mounted cowgirls carrying American flags, a moving musical salute and special recognition of veterans in attendance.

As part of its military appreciation initiative, the Tampa Bay Rodeo is providing complimentary tickets to personnel from MacDill Air Force Base, the Florida National Guard, the United States Air Force Recruiting Center and the Veterans Art Center Tampa Bay. Representatives from the Florida National Guard and the United States Air Force Recruiting Center will also be on-site throughout the weekend to connect with guests and share information about their organizations.

"We are always looking for ways to bring our veterans together in the community. This opportunity gives families a chance to enjoy the camaraderie of being out with fellow veterans and service members," said Kevin Sosa, Wounded Warrior Project Alumni Manager.

Guests can arrive early to enjoy the Family Festival featuring live music by Noah Hunton in the Busch Light Beer Barn, delicious food, mechanical bull rides, ax throwing, giant inflatable slides, military vehicle displays and a spectacular 110-foot patriotic American flag slide.

Fans looking for the best view can upgrade to the reserved seating area, featuring premium seating closest to the bucking chutes, access to a private bar, private restrooms, complimentary snacks, added security and a designated nonsmoking area.

Gates open at 4:30 p.m., live music begins at 5:45 p.m. and the rodeo starts at 7:30 p.m. The event will take place rain or shine. For more information and tickets, visit https://tamparodeo.com/.

EPIC SURF GRAND OPENING BRINGS LOCAL COUPLE'S VISION TO LIFE

By Brian Bokor



After years of planning, construction and anticipation, Epic Surf officially celebrated its grand opening at Heroes Paradise, welcoming guests to Florida's first Epic Surf deep-water standing wave. For owners Tim and Julie Pennenga, the ribbon cutting marked the realization of a vision to create more than just a surfing attraction, offering beginners and experienced surfers alike the opportunity to experience the thrill of riding a wave.

The grand opening gave guests a chance to experience that vision firsthand. Families gathered on the spacious deck overlooking the wave as music played, instructors worked with first-time surfers and applause regularly broke out when riders found their balance. Just as noticeable was the staff. From the moment guests arrived, employees were professional, respectful and welcoming, an atmosphere that continued throughout the facility.

Having followed the project since a hard-hat tour in January, when the attraction was still largely a concrete shell, I wanted to find out what many first-time visitors were probably wondering: Could someone who had never surfed really learn to do this?

Watching the instructors carve back and forth across the wave, I assumed they had years of experience. Instead, several had learned only months earlier. Julie said learning the attractions is part of the job for her team, helping employees understand what guests are experiencing rather than simply telling them what to do.

That approach became obvious once I stepped into the water.

My first two attempts ended face-first. Each time, however, an instructor explained what I had done wrong, offered another tip and encouraged me to get back on the board.

One instructor explained that beginners often hurt themselves by concentrating too hard on balancing. To get riders out of their own heads, instructors ask questions such as, "What's your favorite color?" or "What's your favorite sport?" In one case, they handed a struggling surfer toy lightsabers and had him pretend to duel while riding. Once he stopped thinking about balancing, he found it.

Julie said that learning curve is one reason Epic Surf's sessions last an hour.

"If you only give them 30 minutes, they're not going to get it. They're going to be discouraged," she said. Even experienced ocean surfers, she added, can spend much of their first session adjusting to the wave. "That last 10 or five minutes, that's when they get it."

By my fifth ride, I understood exactly what she meant. Something clicked. I found my balance, stayed on the wave and heard applause from the deck above.

My first thought was simple: "Wow ... I just did that!"

Julie sees that reaction regularly. Once riders begin figuring it out, she said, "They get addicted. They want to do it. They want to do it again."

Epic Surf is located at Heroes Paradise, 733 Knowles Road in Brandon. For information or reservations, visit www.heroesparadise.com/epicsurfusa or call 1-833-543-7637.

The finished attraction also represents the end of a difficult road for the Pennengas. When asked what proved most challenging in bringing Epic Surf to Heroes Paradise, Julie's answer wasn't construction or permitting.

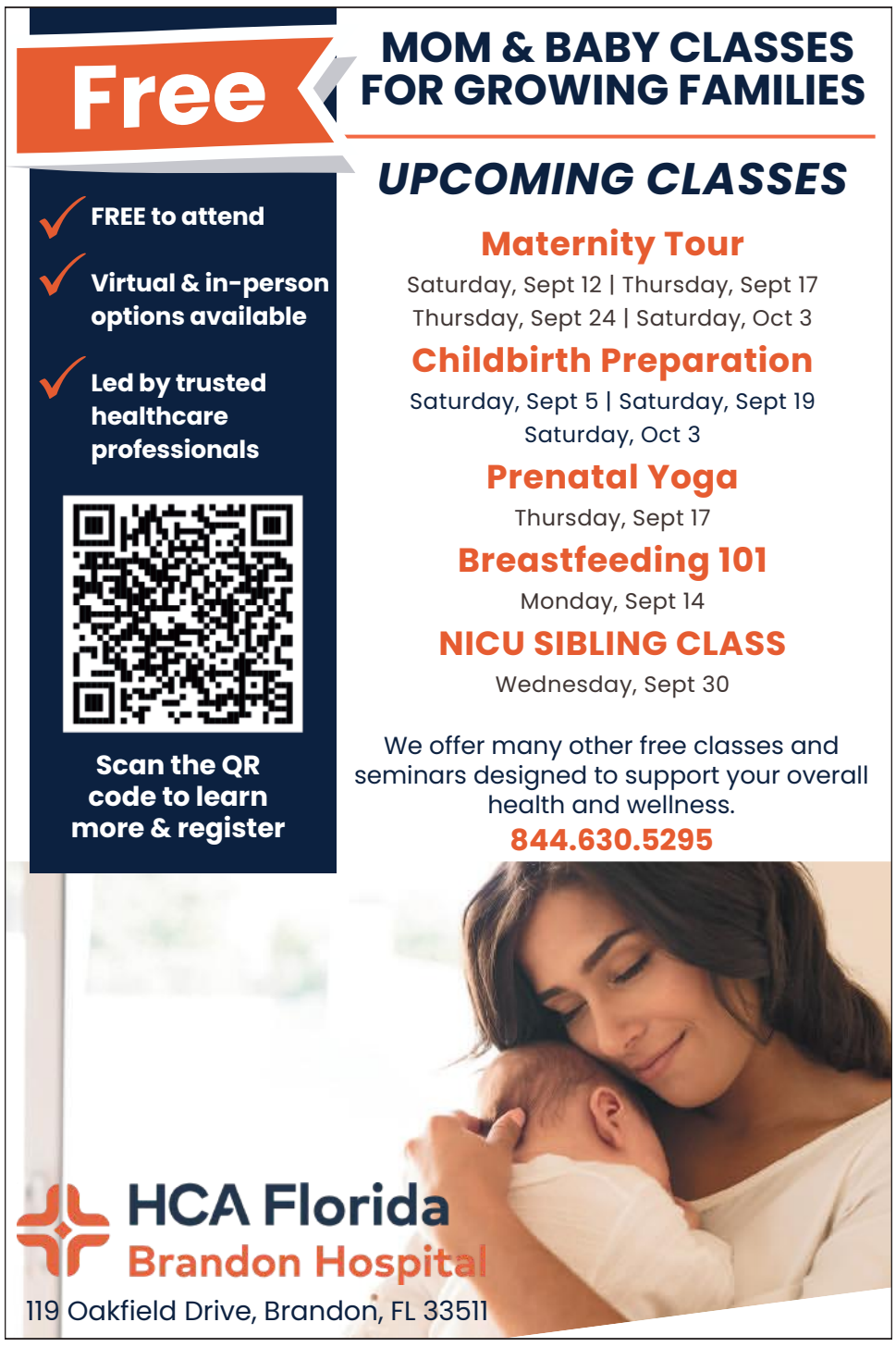
"Getting the business loan," she said.

With so few comparable attractions for lenders to evaluate, financing a concept this unusual required finding people willing to believe in what Tim and Julie were building.

By the time I headed toward the exit, however, what impressed me nearly as much as the wave was the culture they had created around it. The staff consistently addressed guests respectfully, offered encouragement after falls and celebrated successes. I felt welcomed when I arrived, welcomed while learning and welcomed again when I left.

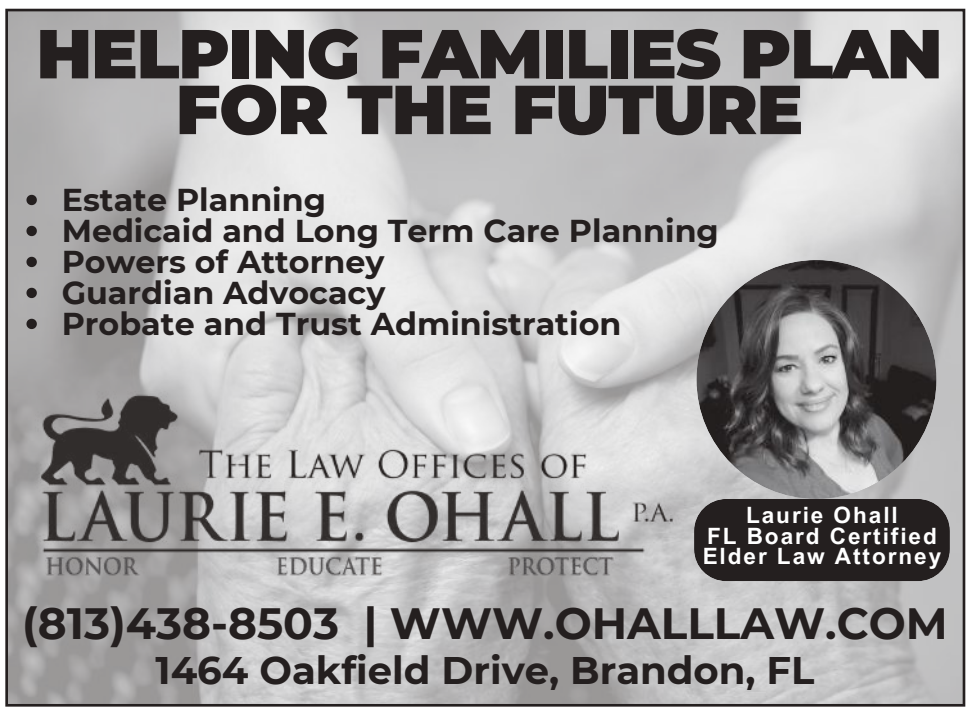
Tim shook my hand and offered one final invitation: "Don't make yourself a stranger." Julie and their son, Dylan, were nearby, also thanking guests and saying goodbye.

After the experience I had at Epic Surf, I don't plan to.









ECHO Wins, Black Cat 5K, Garage Sale, Gowns For Girls & More...

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

ECHO Named Gold Winner For Non-Profit Organization

ECHO (Emergency Care Help Organization) is proud to announce that it has been named a Gold Winner for Non-Profit Organization in the 2026 Tampa Bay Times Best of the Best awards.

This recognition celebrates organizations throughout the Tampa Bay area that stand out for their service, impact and commitment to the communities they serve. Being selected as a Gold Winner is a tremendous honor for ECHO and reflects the dedication of its staff, volunteers, donors and community partners.

"This recognition is a reflection of our entire ECHO family," said Iris S. Thurman, CEO of ECHO. "Our staff, volunteers, donors and community partners make it possible for us to continue showing up for our neighbors. We are incredibly grateful to everyone who supports our mission and helped make this recognition possible."

Annual Black Cat 5K Fun Run Benefitting A Kitten Place

Animal lovers are invited to lace up their sneakers and make a lifesaving difference at the sixth annual Black Cat 5K Fun Run, presented by The Fuddy Fund and benefiting A Kitten Place, a local nonprofit rescue dedicated to saving homeless cats and kittens throughout the Tampa Bay area.

The untimed 5K fun run and 1-mile walk will take place on Saturday, October 24, in the Twin Lakes neighborhood at 3002 Beaver Pond Trail in Valrico, bringing together runners, walkers, families and animal lovers for a morning of fun while raising funds for cats in need.

This year's event has an exciting new focus: fundraising through teams and individual participants. Organizers hope to expand the event's impact by encouraging supporters to create fundraising teams, invite friends and family to donate, and compete for fun prizes along the way. Registration is now open, and early-bird pricing is available through Sunday, August 23. For registration, fundraising information, sponsorship opportunities or more information about A Kitten Place, visit https://akittenplace.org/events/.

Gowns For Girls Pop-up

Gowns for Girls, a nonprofit which provides homecoming and prom dresses to high school girls for their high school dances, is hosting a homecoming pop-up boutique. The event will be held at King High School, located at 6815 N. 56th St. in Tampa, on Saturday, September 19 and 26, and Saturday, October 3 and 17, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. High school students from across Hillsborough County can shop for free with their ID to find that perfect dress. To find out more, visit its website at www.gownsforgirls.org.

Bloomingdale Garage Sales

All of Bloomingdale East and West neighborhoods are holding their annual garage sales on Saturday September 12, starting at 8 a.m. There will be road signs to specific individual homes posted throughout Bloomingdale. Many addresses for participating homes will be listed on the Bloomingdale Neighborhood Association Facebook page. If you would like your sale listed, email bl.neighbor1@gmail.com by Saturday, September 5.

Pioneers And Cowhunters Homeschool Day

Come to the Pioneers and Cowhunters Homeschool Day on Friday, September 18, at Cracker Country, located at the Florida State Fairgrounds at 4800 U.S. 301 N. in Tampa. Discover what life would have been like for a child growing up in a Florida farming and ranching community over 100 years ago. Educators in historic dress will welcome guests to authentic structures. Students will learn cowhunter skills, like how to read cattle brands and what to pack for a cattle drive. Visit https://floridastatefairgrounds.com/event/cracker-country-homeschool-day-pioneers-cowhunters/ for more information.

Impact Teen Huddles

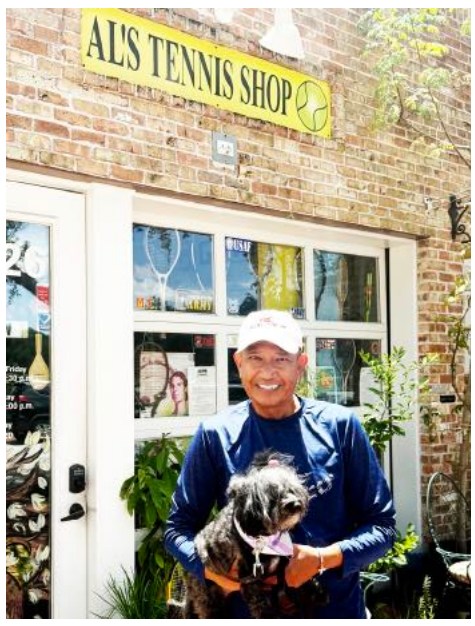
The Impact Program is now offering Teen Huddles, a faith-based small group 'huddle' intended to help students understand God's word, ask honest questions and learn how to apply biblical truths to real-life situations.

Students in sixth through 12th grade meet on the second and fourth Mondays of each month from 6:30-7:45 p.m. at 3115 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Valrico.

AL'S TENNIS SHOP CELEBRATES 14-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

By Jane Owen

Al's Tennis Shop in Winthrop celebrated 14 years in business on August 6. The shop is locally owned by Al Macasinag and has everything a Tennis player of any level could need to play.



Al Macasinag with his dog, Nola, in front of Al's Tennis shop in Winthrop.

Macasinag is a USRSA-certified stringer and master racquet technician. His shop carries Babolat, Wilson, Head, Solinco and Yonex brands and has a demo program where customers can try racquets free of charge. Macasinag's shop also has racquetball and pickleball equipment.

As a kid, Macasinag became an avid tennis player, loving the competition of tournaments. Nowadays, he enjoys playing for exercise and time with friends. He didn't set out to open a tennis shop when he got his business degree. He spent years in the corporate world, working as a flight attendant and then in human resources. He landed in the Brandon area with a human resources job. Then, the company was sold and his position was eliminated. That's when Macasinag started thinking about opening his own company.

"I didn't want to report to anyone anymore. I was tired of working for a corporation. I knew that if I started a business, whether it fails or succeeds, it's on me," Macasinag said.

Al's Tennis Shop has grown into a business that is deeply connected in the community, supporting local nonprofits and closely supporting tennis players of all levels.

"What I love about owning the shop is being independent and the people. My customers are my friends. You know, I have really been blessed. I thank God every day for the opportunities that have been given to me," Macasinag said.

From year one, Macasinag has been involved with Tennis For Fun, a volunteer-run organization that organizes free tennis clinics for athletes with special needs. Macasinag has volunteered at the Brandon clinics and accepts donations at his shop for the organization. Macasinag also volunteers with the June Rogers Foundation (June was one of Macasinag's customers) and the Trinity Cafe of Feeding Tampa Bay.

Al's Tennis Shop is open 9 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 9 a.m.-12 Noon on Saturdays. The shop is located at 6026 Winthrop Town Centre in Riverview. For more information, please visit https://alstennisshop.com/ or call 813-571-1010.

To know more about Tennis for Fun, visit https://alstennisshop.com/services#tennis-for-fun. Information about the June Rogers Foundation and Trinity Cafe can be found here: www.junerogersfoundation.org and https://ftb.org/groceries-meals/trinity-cafe, respectively.





STATE ATTORNEY BUILDS STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS TO PROTECT ANIMALS

By State Attorney Suzy Lopez



Last month, our office welcomed animal welfare organizations and rescues from across the region for our first Paws for Justice Advocacy Day. We wanted to open our doors to a community that plays an essential role in protecting some of our most vulnerable victims.

Animal cruelty cases present unique challenges. Our victims cannot tell us what happened to them, describe their injuries or explain what life was like before someone stepped in to help. Prosecutors must rely on the evidence others uncover to tell that story in a courtroom. That is where our animal welfare community can make an enormous difference.

Rescuers and advocates are on the front lines of this work. They encounter animals in distress and can see circumstances that may never be visible to a prosecutor. Helping them understand what becomes important in a criminal investigation can make us better partners and build stronger cases. That was the idea behind Paws for Justice.

We partnered with Hillsborough County Animal Control to take participants through an animal cruelty case from the first call for help to the final outcome in court. We talked about what prosecutors must prove, what can make these cases difficult and how information gathered early can take on greater significance later. Then we listened.

Our prosecutors sat down with advocates and heard directly about what they are seeing in our community. They asked questions of us, and we asked questions of them. Those conversations gave both sides a better understanding of the work happening beyond their own doors.

Fighting animal cruelty is a community effort. We were proud to also have Roxy's Coffee at the event, which donates proceeds to animal welfare organizations. The Hillsborough County Pet Resource Center also brought adoptable dogs, reminding us that behind every conversation about animal welfare is an animal depending on someone to advocate for them.

New connections are what made Paws for Justice so valuable. We did more than introduce ourselves and exchange business cards. We created relationships between people whose work may intersect the next time an animal needs help. Knowing who is on the other end of the phone, and understanding the role they play, can make it easier to work together when it matters most.

The next time an advocate encounters an animal they believe is being abused, I want them to understand how their actions can help protect that animal beyond the immediate rescue. I want them to know our office and know that we will fight tirelessly to advocate for the animals in our community.

Every animal cruelty case begins with someone willing to speak for a victim who cannot. Paws for Justice made sure more of those voices are connected.

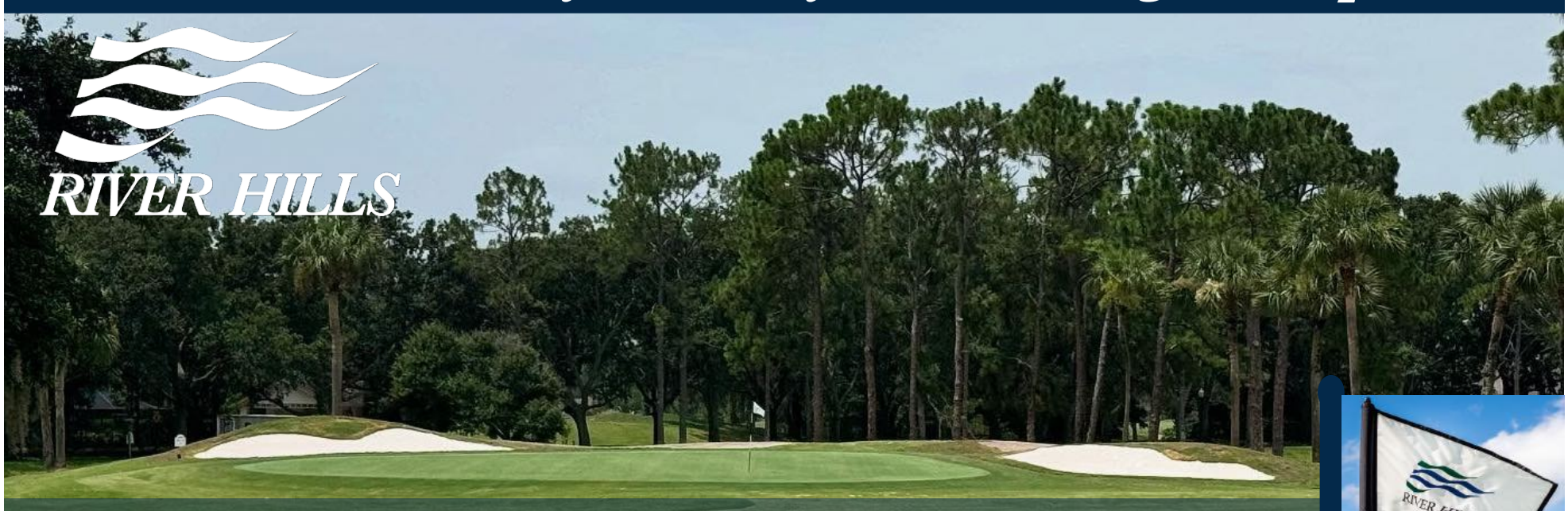
The State Attorney's Office of the 13th Judicial circuit encompasses all of Hillsborough County, including the cities of Tampa, Temple Terrace and Plant City. To learn more about the organization or apply to become part of the team, visit www.sao13th.com.

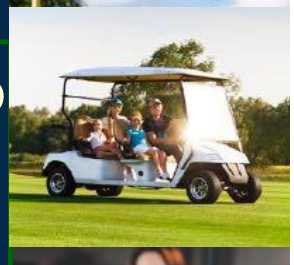
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CAMPBELL'S DAIRYLAND GETS NEW OWNERS, KEEPS ITS BRANDON ROOTS

By Marie Gilmore

For more than three decades, Campbell's Dairyland has been a gathering place for Brandon families looking for a good meal, a milkshake, an ice cream cone and a little taste of nostalgia.

Now, the restaurant at 200 S. Parsons Ave., has a new owner, but customers can expect much of what they love to remain exactly the same.



The Mueller family.

Dairy Joy, a family-owned Florida ice cream business with roots dating back to 1958, has acquired Campbell's Dairyland and is bringing the Brandon restaurant into its family of businesses. The new owners, Chris and Karrie Mueller, are not changing the Campbell's Dairyland name or the restaurant's identity.



Instead, the Muellers, who also own South Tampa's Xtreme Juice and Dairy Joy locations along with Rodeo Whip in Deland, plan to build on the legacy that has made Campbell's Dairyland a longtime community favorite.

"We're excited to bring Campbell's into the Dairy Joy and Rodeo Whip family," the Mueller's said. "Campbell's Dairyland is still Campbell's Dairyland — just with the Muellers helping carry its story into the future."

Campbell's Dairyland has a history nearly as rich as its menu. Founder Boyd Campbell began by selling chili dogs at local events, using a five-generation-old family chili recipe. In 1985, Boyd and his wife, Pam Campbell, purchased an ice cream business formerly known as Dairy Isle and began serving chili dogs alongside ice cream.

The business became Campbell's Dairyland in 1993. In 1998, the Campbells sold the restaurant to their daughters, Jill Paules and Leesa Lee, who continued the family business with their husbands, Jay Paules and James Lee. James passed away in 2025.

The restaurant faced one of its biggest challenges in November 2002, when a fire caused approximately $250,000 in damage. After eight months and eight days, Campbell's Dairyland reopened.

Campbell's Dairyland is known for sandwiches, burgers, hot dogs, salads, seafood, battered vegetables and more than 30 milkshake flavors, along with its extensive ice cream menu. The restaurant also features indoor and outdoor seating, a drive-thru and a small outdoor play area.

Dairy Joy has been serving generations of Florida families since 1958 and currently operates locations in South Tampa, Seminole and Jacksonville. The Muellers have three children and have made preserving the nostalgic character of Dairy Joy a priority.

For longtime customers, the message is simple: Campbell's Dairyland is still Campbell's Dairyland — just with Dairy Joy helping carry its story into the future.

ELIMINATING SCREEN TIME FOR OUR YOUNGEST STUDENTS

By Superintendent Van Ayres



A Letter From The **SUPERINTENDENT** of Hillsborough County Public Schools
Van Ayres

Something remarkable happens when a young child sounds out a word on a page for the very first time. In that moment, letters become language, and language becomes understanding. It's one of the most important milestones in a child's education, and it's why we're taking a different approach in our kindergarten through second grade classrooms.

This year, we're leading the way in reducing screen time in our kindergarten through second grade classrooms, and we're doing it for one clear reason: to help our youngest learners become stronger, faster, more confident readers.

We know that learning to read happens best through human connection. It happens when a teacher sits beside a student and helps them work through a challenging word. It happens during a read-aloud, a small-group lesson or a conversation about a story. Technology can be a useful tool, but it can't replace the value of a great teacher who recognizes exactly where a student needs support and provides it at that moment.

That's why our approach is so intentional. We're not eliminating technology. We're making sure it serves a purpose. We're creating more opportunities for students to learn with books in their hands, engage in face-to-face phonics instruction, participate in small-group instruction and build foundational literacy skills through meaningful practice. When technology adds value, we'll use it. When it doesn't, we'll prioritize what works best for children.

We're already seeing encouraging results. Teachers tell us students are more engaged, focused, and productive during reading instruction. Those early literacy skills matter because they build on one another year after year. When students become strong readers in the early grades, they're better prepared for success across every subject and throughout their educational journey.

As the nation's seventh-largest school district, we're proud to lead in a way that puts children's development first. Every decision we make begins with a simple question: What is best for students? In this case, the answer is clear.

And to our families, thank you for being our partners in this work. Tonight, take a few minutes to read with your child. Talk about the story. Ask questions. Celebrate each new word and every bit of progress. Those moments matter more than you may realize.

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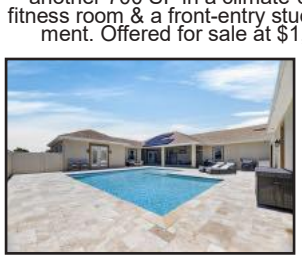
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WELCOME SPECTACULAR SUNSETS over the Diamond Hill Golf Club from your 500-SF backyard lanai & most of the other rooms in this 2,700-SF home updated from top to bottom during the last 2 years! Yes, after a new roof in 2024, these owners added 2025 LVP floors & carpet, upgraded ceiling fans, lighting, fresh paint & more. Now they're moving because of employment, so here is your chance to enhance this lovely location. It overlooks the 4th fairway at this gated community with its own clubhouse pool, fitness center, playground park & basketball court. You get 4 bedrooms & 3 full baths plus a 1,000-SF upstairs bonus as another bedroom, office, game room, etc. $500,000












IT'S A 3-CAR GARAGE despite a 2-car appearance! It's tandem style, & you'll find it on a long list of advantages at this 3-bed, 2-bath, 2,040-SF pool home in Riverglen: 3-year-new solar panels fully paid off, a 900-watt home generator, 50-amp EV charger, new water heater, new pool heater & pump, etc. $475,000



GET 2,700 SF on a gated & fenced 1/4 acre with no rear neighbor or HOA fees! In Boyette Springs, this original-owner home is available for the first time in a generation, still overlooking county conservation land from a big, pavered patio. An upstairs bonus room adds to 4 beds, 3 baths & lots more. $469,900



A BACKYARD BONUS you'll love: an extended, screened, roof-covered lanai & attached patio overlooking a tree-lined pond with lighted fountain! It's the all-day-or-night, all-weather highlight of this 2,200-SF gem in The Reserve at Pradera. Also, 2 suites among the 4 total beds & 3 full baths! $425,000

FOR RENT RIGHT NOW in Bloomingdale! With AC & luxury vinyl plank floors brand-new, this 4-bedroom / 3-bath home delivers a quality living experience. A screened lanai in a fenced back yard helps the home live larger than 1,665 SF, & the 2-car garage has built-in shelves for extra storage. $2,795/month



FOR RENT RIGHT NOW in Triple Creek! Another 4-bed/3-bath home, this at 1,900 SF with a pond view instead of a close back neighbor. Resort-style community amenities include pools, playground parks, clubhouse & fitness centers, tennis, basketball courts, & the Triple Creek Nature Preserve. $2,575/month



FOR RENT RIGHT NOW in Riverview's St. Charles Place! 3 beds/3 baths in 1,824 SF, a 1-car garage, & a screened lanai overlooking a pond instead of a back neighbor. Your water bills & yard care are covered, & you're near the pool in this town home enclave as well as so many other conveniences. $2,200/month



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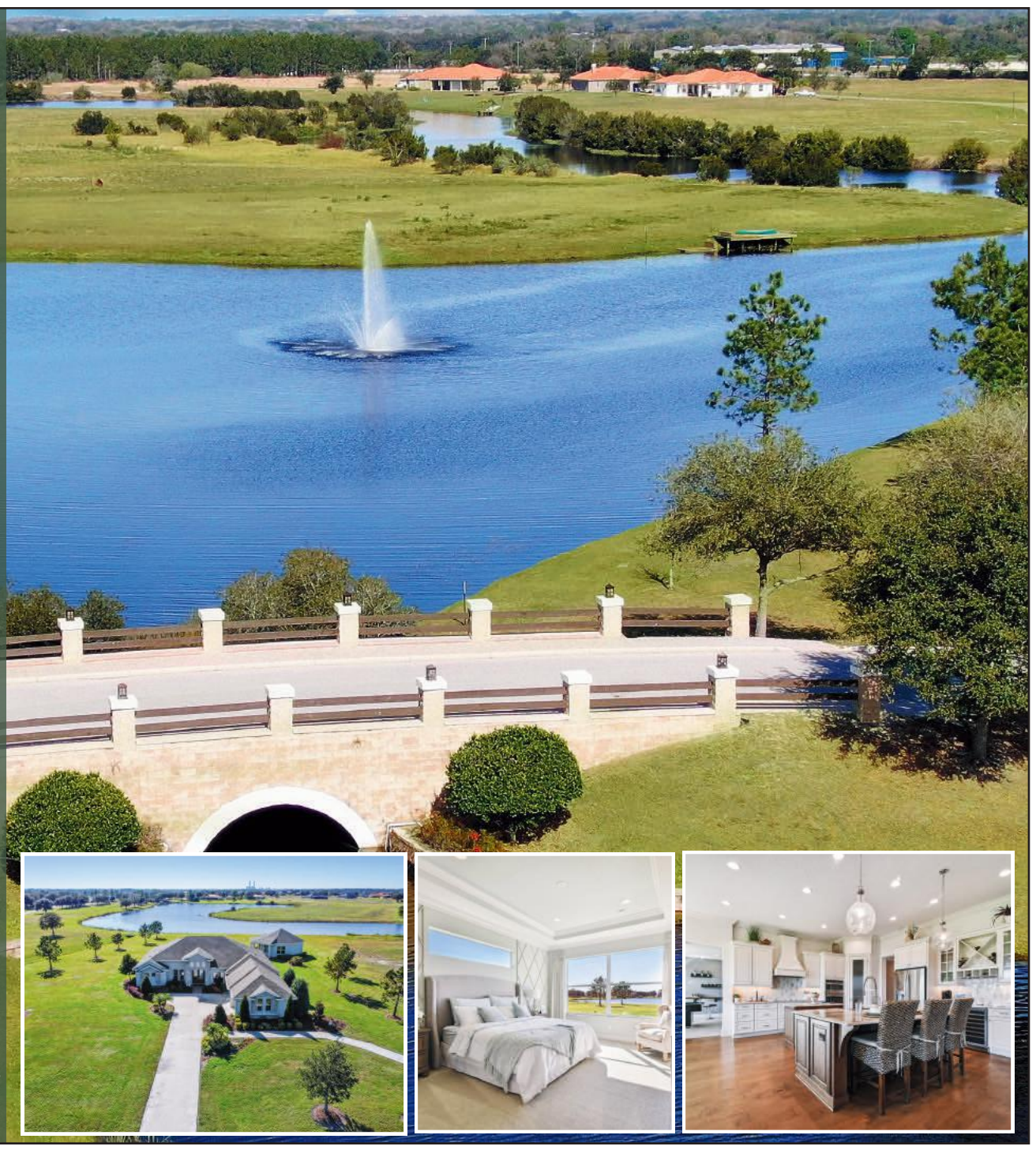
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Bloomingdale/FishHawk

September 2026 Vol. 25, Iss. 9

EYE ON BUSINESS



Edited by:
Jenny Bennett

To Submit Business News & Press Releases Mail Attn: Business Editor, 2109 Lithia Pinecrest Rd., Valrico, FL 33596
Fax 657-4469 | Email: jbennett@ospreyobserver.com
Deadline: 15th of each month.

Align Right Realty Rebrands To Elevated Realty – Raising The Standard



Effective immediately, Align Right Realty brokerage proudly announces its rebrand to Elevated Realty – Raising the Standard. While its name is changing, the foundation of the company remains the same. Elevated Realty continues under the ownership and leadership of broker/owner Lisa Tackus, with the same trusted leadership and committed agents, unwavering commitment to excellence and dedication to serving customers and the Tampa Bay community. The rebrand reflects the company's continued growth and long-term vision while honoring the relationships built over the past seven years as a brokerage and more than 21 years of real estate experience. For more information, visit www.elevatedrealtyfl.com or contact Elevated Realty at 813-563-5995.

JF Kicks Hosts Chamber Of Commerce Networking Group

Every Friday at noon, JF Kicks brings Brandon and Riverview Chamber of commerce members together for meaningful networking, lead-generating activities, engaging conversations, and plenty of opportunities to grow your business in a fun, supportive environment. Whether you're a brand-new member or you've been with the Chamber for years, there's always room for another connection—and that connection could be the one that opens your next door.

Bring your business cards, your smile, and a willingness to connect. We can't wait to meet you, learn about your business, and help you make valuable Chamber connections.

JF Kicks is located at 3345 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Valrico. Visit its website at https://jfkicksrestaurant.com/ for more information.

Retire With Confidence

Learn how to maximize your retirement with tax-efficient strategies at the Payant Wealth weekly seminar. The seminar is held every Tuesday at 10 a.m. and covers a variety of strategies, including how Roth conversions and tax-efficient investing may help reduce taxes over time, creating a sustainable retirement cash flow plan and what the number one threat to retirement security is and an approach to help address it. The seminar is held at the Payant Financial Center, located at 1653 Sun City Center Plaza in Sun City Center. Please call 813-633-7333 to reserve your spot, as seating is limited.



Fitness Forge Celebrates joining the Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce.

Fitness Forge Celebrates Ribbon-Cutting

Fitness Forge is a local gym which offers semiprivate personal training that conducts customized workouts for each individual's goals and expectations. Local owners Brett Daven and Taylor Green have created a fun yet productive community that strives for success both externally and internally. Fitness Forge celebrated joining the Valrico/FishHawk Chamber of Commerce with a ribbon cutting at the gym, which is located at 13456 Boyette Rd. in Riverview. Visit its website at www.fitnessforge2025.com or call 813-654-1313 for more information.



School of Rock Valrico, located at 3244 Lithia Pinecrest Rd., Ste. 104, celebrate its grand opening with a ribbon cutting.

School of Rock Valrico Now Open

Angela & Dave Ward are the owners of the new School of Rock Valrico. Offers music lessons and group rehearsals for all skill levels, with classes starting as early as age 4 up to adults.

For those interested in browsing classes or programs at the new location, check out www.schoolofrock.com for more information.



A hernia can make you miss all the good stuff.

Get back to big hugs.

Hernias can be annoying and painful. But worse, they can make you miss out on living your best life. Hernias are a common condition that can lead to serious complications. Fortunately, hernia repair surgery can help you feel better, fast. At AdventHealth Tampa's Advanced Hernia Center, our expert surgeons use minimally invasive and robotic techniques so you can bounce back quickly, and get back to what makes you feel whole.

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GET THE DIRT: WET FEET

BY LYNN BARBER, URBAN HORTICULTURE AGENT



Many of us are thrilled that the rainy season is here. We can capitalize on our upcoming moisture by planting perennials that like wet feet. A few of my favorites include swamp hibiscus, muhly grass, swamp sunflower, Fakahatchee grass and lemongrass. These plants thrive in low areas of your landscape that retain water.

Swamp hibiscus (scarlet rosemallow, Hibiscus coccineus), native to Florida and the Southeastern U.S., produces amazingly beautiful red flowers. We have this plant on the bank of our lower pond in the Bette S. Walker Discovery Garden, located at 5339 County Rd. 579 in

Seffner in the courtyard of the Extension office. This plant can reach a height of 15 feet.

Muhly grass (Muhlenbergia capillaris), a native plant, reaches a height of 3-5 feet and a spread of 2-3 feet. It prefers full sun and can tolerate extreme drought and flooding. Muhly grass has narrow foliage and produces pink fall flowers. This grass can be used as a border, accent, in mass plantings and as cut flowers.

Swamp sunflower (Helianthus debilis), another native, reaches a height and spread of 2-4 feet. It is fast-growing, prefers full sun and attracts butterflies and birds. It is a perennial that produces yellow/brown fall flowers. Plant it in mass for a large pop of color and interest.

Fakahatchee grass (Tripsacum dactyloides) forms large clumps and is almost maintenance-free. Its foliage is 4-6 feet tall and wide. The leaf edges are sharp. This grass is a larval plant food for the byssus skipper butterfly. It can be used to stabilize slopes and banks.

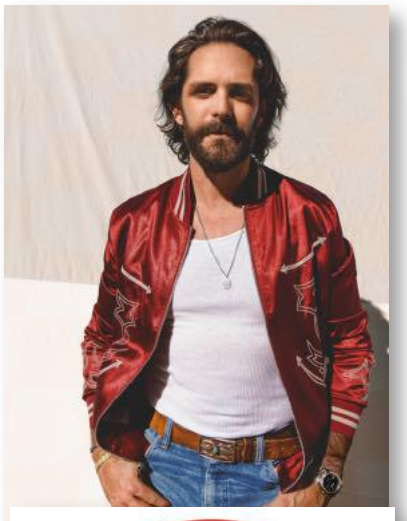
Lemongrass is an herbaceous perennial from India that is edible and adds an appealing lemony fragrance to your garden. Plant it in full or partial sun. It can grow to 6 feet tall and 4 feet wide. You can use lemongrass in Thai-style soups and curries.

Stop by our office during the week to get gardening ideas from the Bette S. Walker Discovery Garden and our perennial garden. Check our website, https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/hillsborough/, for scheduled events at Hillsborough County Extension. We hope to see you at a workshop soon.

Contact: labarber@ufl.edu.

THOMAS RHETT TO HEADLINE 15TH ANNUAL TAMPA PIG JIG

Staff Report



Country music superstar Thomas Rhett will headline the 15th annual Tampa Pig Jig on Saturday, October 17, at Julian B. Lane Riverfront Park, bringing one of Tampa Bay's largest philanthropic festivals back to the waterfront for a milestone celebration.

The 2026 lineup also includes Grammy-nominated trio Midland, country singer-songwriter Kameron Marlowe, Florida favorites Sister Hazel and rising country artist Cassidy Daniels. The event, presented by RIPA, Valley Bank and The Baldwin Group, will feature live music, food, games and family-friendly entertainment while raising money for families facing serious medical challenges.

What began 15 years ago as a backyard barbecue for a friend battling a rare kidney disease has grown into a major charitable event. The Tampa Pig Jig has raised more than $15 million as NephCure's largest annual fundraiser and has helped advance more than 60 clinical trials focused on rare, protein-spilling kidney diseases, including FSGS and nephrotic syndrome.

The event is hosted by the HopeWill Foundation, which has expanded the Pig Jig's reach to include local nonprofit organizations supporting individuals and families navigating life-changing medical diagnoses.

Rhett brings a decade-plus of country hits to the Pig Jig stage. The Diamond-certified artist has earned 25 No. 1 hits, more than 16 billion global streams, eight ACM Awards, two CMA Awards and five Grammy nominations. His latest album, ABOUT A WOMAN (Deluxe), features 25 tracks and collaborations with artists including Blake Shelton and Teddy Swims.

Midland will bring its signature throwback country sound, known through songs such as "Drinkin' Problem," while Marlowe will showcase music from his rapidly growing career and more than 1.2 billion global streams.

Sister Hazel, the Gainesville-based band behind "All for You," will add its high-energy performance to the lineup. Daniels, a finalist on the CBS/Paramount series The Road, rounds out the performers.

Tickets are on sale now through TIXR. New this year, GA+ tickets include expedited entry, a dedicated viewing area and three beverages. Limited Milestone Supply Lounge tickets include unlimited barbecue, complimentary drinks, private restrooms, shaded seating and front-stage views.

Children 10 and younger are admitted for free with an accompanying adult.

For tickets, sponsorships, volunteer opportunities and additional information, visit https://tampapigjig.com/.



CALL 811 BEFORE DIGGING: A SIMPLE STEP CAN PREVENT SERIOUS DAMAGE

Staff Report

Florida homeowners planning a landscaping project, installing a fence or cleaning up after a storm are being reminded to take one important step before breaking ground: Call 811.



Before you dig, make the call. Florida homeowners are reminded to contact 811 before landscaping, fence installation, tree removal or other excavation projects.

The reminder comes from Peoples Gas following National 811 Day on August 11, an annual observance designed to raise awareness about safe digging and the importance of knowing what is underground before starting an excavation project.

Florida ranks worst in the nation for damaged underground utility lines, according to Peoples Gas. Underground infrastructure can include natural gas pipelines, electric cables, telecommunications lines and other utilities. Accidentally striking a line can result in service interruptions, expensive repairs and potentially serious injuries.

Calling 811 is free, and homeowners can also submit a request through https://sunshine811.com/. The service notifies participating utility companies, which send professional locators to mark the approximate locations of underground facilities before work begins.

Peoples Gas reported that its locators responded to more than 570,000 locate requests throughout Florida last year. However, preventable damage continues to occur. Of approximately 1,700 incidents involving Peoples Gas facilities in 2025, 45 percent occurred when no call was made to 811.

The company recommends contacting 811 before any digging project, regardless of its size. Projects that require a call include planting trees or shrubs, installing landscaping or irrigation, replacing fences, building decks, removing fallen trees, grinding stumps and repairing storm-damaged property.

Homeowners should contact 811 at least two full business days before beginning excavation and provide the location and details of the project. After submitting a request, property owners should check its status and wait until all participating utilities have responded.

Once lines have been marked, excavators should respect the paint and flags identifying underground facilities. Extra care should be taken when digging within 24 inches of either side of a marked utility line, and markings should remain undisturbed until the project is finished.

Peoples Gas officials said one of the most common misconceptions is that shallow digging is safe. Even projects that appear minor can damage underground infrastructure.

For more information about safe digging, visit https://sunshine811.com/ or www.peoplesgas.com/safety.

Peoples Gas serves more than 520,000 homes and businesses throughout Florida.

BUSCH GARDENS BIER FEST RETURNS WITH NEW FLAVORS

Staff Report

Beer, barbecue and international flavors are taking over Busch Gardens Tampa Bay as Bier Fest Brews & BBQ returns for another season of Oktoberfest-inspired fun.



The annual festival runs on Saturdays and Sundays, along with Labor Day, through Monday, September 7. Bier Fest is included with regular park admission, giving visitors the opportunity to sample new foods and beverages while enjoying live entertainment, games, animal encounters and the park's rides and attractions.

This year's festival features an all-new global-inspired menu with dishes that put international twists on traditional barbecue.

At the Out of the Box Cabin, guests can try loaded brisket burnt-end stuffed potato balls, grilled sweet bourbon pineapple and pork skewers or gochujang and herb-grilled lamb chops. The Smokin' Samurai Cabin offers sticky pork pops with brown sugar sriracha barbecue sauce, brown sugar and miso pork bao buns and Thai chili peanut-butter-and-jelly-glazed pork wings.

Other options include beer-braised grilled cauliflower steak, Nashville hot street corn, stuffed jackfruit baby bell peppers and smoked duck sliders with raspberry bourbon barbecue.

More than 60 beverage choices will be available, including lagers, ales, hefeweizens, ciders, sours, moonshine and wines. New selections include Coconaut Porter from 3 Daughters Brewing, Sunshine Blonde Ale from South Beach Brewing Company, You're My Boy, Blue! from Florida Avenue Brewing and Voodoo Ranger Juicy Haze IPA from New Belgium Brewing.

For guests who want to sample multiple selections, Bier Fest Brews & BBQ Samplers start at $40 and are available with five or eight items. Pass members can get an exclusive 10-item sampler for the same price as an eight-item sampler.

In addition to food and drinks, visitors can listen to music at Helga's Bier Garten and participate in Oktoberfest-inspired games. The Wild Skies Drone Show has also been extended on select dates.

Guests can also explore the park's newest animal experience, Lion and Hyena Ridge, featuring what Busch Gardens describes as the largest coalition of lions in an Association of Zoos & Aquariums-accredited facility, along with two hyenas.

Annual passes offer another way to experience the festival, with passes starting at $13 per month. Benefits include 12 months of admission, free parking, guest tickets, special events and discounts.

Guests must be 21 or older to consume alcoholic beverages.



BIKES FOR CHRIST AWARDED $10,000 GRANT FROM THE MABEL & ELLSWORTH SIMMONS FOUNDATION

Staff Report



Bikes For Christ is proud to announce it has been awarded a $10,000 grant from The Mabel & Ellsworth Simmons Charitable Foundation Inc. The funding will help support the organization's ongoing program operations, allowing the nonprofit ministry to continue providing reliable transportation to individuals and families in need throughout the Tampa Bay region.

Founded in 2016, Bikes For Christ has become the premier provider of bicycle transportation to organizations serving those in need in parts of five counties. Working through a network of more than 200 partner organizations, schools, employers, social workers and community agencies, Bikes For Christ provides bicycles that help recipients travel to work, school, medical appointments and other essential destinations while sharing the love of Christ with every bicycle distributed.

The $10,000 grant will directly support the organization's transportation ministry by helping fund bicycle repairs and refurbishments, replacement parts, safety equipment, distribution costs, community outreach and other essential program expenses. These resources ensure that donated bicycles are safe, dependable and ready to make an immediate difference in someone's life.

"We are incredibly grateful to The Mabel & Ellsworth Simmons Charitable Foundation for believing in our mission," said Pat Simmons, founder and president of Bikes For Christ. "Reliable transportation is one of the greatest barriers many people face when trying to improve their lives. This generous investment allows us to continue removing that barrier while sharing hope, encouragement and the love of Christ throughout our community."

Since its founding, Bikes For Christ has distributed more than 3,000 bicycles to individuals in need and has partnered with over 200 organizations throughout the Tampa Bay area. The organization has earned recognition as Nonprofit of the Year from both the Plant City and Valrico FishHawk chambers of commerce, along with numerous community service awards recognizing its innovative approach to addressing transportation needs.

Every bicycle distributed represents more than transportation; it represents opportunity. Whether helping someone get to work, attend school, access health care or regain independence, each bicycle creates a pathway toward greater stability and self-sufficiency while opening the door to share the gospel message.

Bikes For Christ extends its sincere appreciation to The Mabel & Ellsworth Simmons Charitable Foundation for its generosity and commitment to strengthening communities through meaningful charitable investments. For more, visit www.bikes4christ.com.

TAMPA BAY SUN FC ANNOUNCES EXCITING 2026 FALL SCHEDULE

Staff Report

The defending champions are ready to return to the pitch as Tampa Bay Sun FC has announced its 2026 fall season schedule, giving local soccer fans seven opportunities to cheer on Tampa Bay's first professional women's sports team at Suncoast Credit Union Field.

The 2026 Fall Season marks a unique chapter for the Gainbridge Super League as the league transitions to a spring-to-fall calendar beginning in 2027. The condensed 'sprint' season will feature just 14 regular-season matches, making every game critical in the race for the Players' Shield. The top four teams in the standings will qualify for the playoffs, with semifinal matches scheduled for Saturday, December 5, and the league championship on Saturday, December 12.

The Sun will begin the season with three consecutive road matches, opening against Dallas Trinity FC on Saturday, August 15, before traveling to face Sporting JAX on Saturday, August 22, and Carolina Ascent FC on Saturday, August 29.

Tampa Bay returns home on Saturday, September 12, for its highly anticipated home opener against Fort Lauderdale FC. The match also marks the first Florida Derby of the season, renewing an in-state rivalry that is expected to draw plenty of excitement from fans.

October brings another challenging stretch for the Sun. The team welcomes reigning Gainbridge Super League champion Lexington SC to Tampa on Sunday, October 4, before hosting Carolina Ascent FC on Saturday, October 10. Tampa Bay then heads back on the road for matches against Lexington SC on Saturday, October 17, and Brooklyn FC on Saturday, October 24.

The final month of the regular season could determine playoff positioning. The Sun will host DC Power FC on Sunday, November 1, before welcoming Dallas Trinity FC on Saturday, November 14, and Brooklyn FC on Saturday, November 21. Tampa Bay closes out the regular season at home on Saturday, November 28, against Sporting Club Jacksonville in what could be a pivotal match with postseason implications.

Founded as one of the league's original eight clubs, Tampa Bay Sun FC made history as Tampa Bay's first professional women's sports franchise and captured the inaugural USL Super League championship in 2025. The league is now known as the Gainbridge Super League, with the Sun continuing to compete at the highest level of women's professional soccer in the United States.

Beyond winning championships, the club's mission is to build a locally rooted, nationally influential organization that empowers girls, elevates women and energizes the Tampa Bay community through the game of soccer.

Single-game tickets for the 2026 fall season, including the September 12 home opener, are now on sale.

For more, visit www.tampabaysunfc.com.





HISTORY AND SERVICE HONORED AT VIETNAM VETERANS ORGANIZATION

By Brad Stager

The call to service they once heard in the hot, muggy landscape of Southeast Asia now echoes through Hillsborough County's densely humid air and has been answered by members of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) Chapter 787 at its Veterans Memorial Park command and control center.



A Bell AH-1F Cobra helicopter on static display serves as gate guardian at the Veterans Memorial Park and Museum in Tampa, Florida.

In the more than half-century since the official end of the Vietnam War in 1975, many who served in that conflict have organized into a national organization that advocates for all of those who defend the nation and to serve the communities in which they live.

VVA Chapter 787 is one of 29 chapters in Florida and has been active in local community engagement since its founding in 1988. While 'Vietnam' in the group's name indicates an era of military service to distinguish it from other veteran organizations, VVA members actively support the general veteran community in Hillsborough County as well as aspiring warriors in local high schools by mentoring local JROTC cadets and relating firsthand their historical experiences to students.

Tom Leavitt, the chapter's president, wrote in an email, "Participation in the JROTC award programs in all 29 schools within the county is a special time each year of supporting our wonderful cadets."

Leavitt, who was an Army medic in Vietnam, expressed respect for the young people he and his comrades have encountered in their outreach efforts.

"We have found them to be what our young people are really all about and we see their leadership skills as our future," he said.

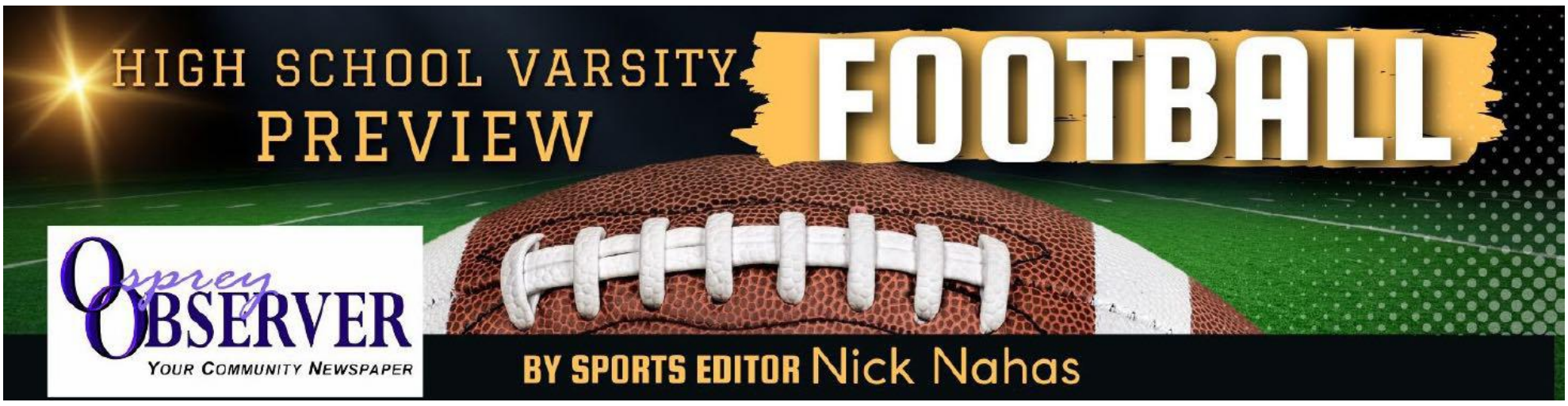
Business meetings are held every fourth Thursday of each month at Veterans Memorial Park and the organization's calendar is full of activities that support the local veteran community. Chapter 787 is a presence at many local patriotic events, such as Patriot's Day observances and Veterans Day parades at James A. Haley VA Hospital, where it also hosts a pizza dinner every other month for families staying at the adjacent Fisher House. Conducting an annual Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans event is a significant occasion for the chapter that corrects the abandonment Vietnam veterans once endured when they came home from the war decades ago. It is held on or around National Vietnam War Veterans Day which is observed each March 29.

One invaluable resource for veterans and their families is Chapter 787's website at https://vva787.org/, where extensive information about programs and services can be found as well as details about the VVA.









BULLS HOPE TO TURN PROGRAM AROUND UNDER NEW HEAD COACH



Michael Latimer took over as head of the football program in December after three-year former Head Coach Patrick Murphy resigned after the 2025 season. The program has been in flux, with five straight losing seasons after a record-setting 2020, in which they won 12 games and went to the state semifinal. They have won a total of eight games in the last three seasons combined.

"I care about these kids and I care about Bloomingdale High School, and I know where my heart is," said Latimer. "It felt like it was the right time for me to take over a job that, if I'm being honest, probably felt like the only job that I have ever been destined to do."

Latimer has been a teacher at Bloomingdale High School since 2012. He previously was an assistant coach for three years under Mike Gottman at Durant. Latimer joined the Bloomingdale coaching staff last season when his son entered high school.

The head coach said that the big emphasis for him and his coaching staff in his first offseason was establishing a new culture. The focus has been on getting the players to buy in, not necessarily X's and O's. He believes that an elite program has to be player-led. He wants to rely heavily on his senior leaders this season. "Brick-by-brick" has been the mantra of the team this season. He and his players believe that they are better than their recent record shows. The Bulls had a great showing in the spring game, leading Strawberry Crest 30-0 before the game got rained out halfway through the second quarter.

The Bulls return five starters on offense and five on defense. Senior dual-threat quarterback Sammy Zelaya will return as the starter. Senior quarterback and team captain Kingston Johnson is more of a traditional pocket passer and will take some starting reps with the first-team offense. Both are reliable leaders and will contribute offensively.

Latimer, a former offensive lineman for Columbia University and offensive line coach, wants his team's strength to be up front. Senior offensive lineman David Goderich and Matthew Peek have started on the varsity offensive line for three seasons. He really likes his front seven on defense and his two cornerbacks on the outside in juniors Euriah Benoit and Jackson Larry. Team captain Steven Flores Jr. was the team's most productive defensive lineman last year and will move to linebacker. Senior running back Caaden Coney is the third team captain and will be a key player running behind the offensive line. Latimer thinks kicker/punter Ben Beasley may be the best in the state of Florida. He currently has an offer from SMU and has a big leg that will help in the field position battle.

Latimer wants his team to have fun playing on Friday nights this season. He applauds his senior class that has been through a lot and has remained loyal and stayed at the school. He said that they have done everything that the coaching staff has asked of them and more in the offseason, leading up into the regular season.

"We try and do everything right, we try not to look too far ahead," said Latimer. "We understand if we take care of the little things, that we'll have the opportunity to do big things when the moment presents itself. But if we focus on those big things, we're never going to get the opportunity."

Bloomingdale is in the toughest district in Hillsborough County by far, with elite programs such as Plant, Tampa Bay Tech and Armwood. Improvement in the team won't necessarily reflect in the number of wins but in the process of competing every week against elite competition.

SCHEDULE

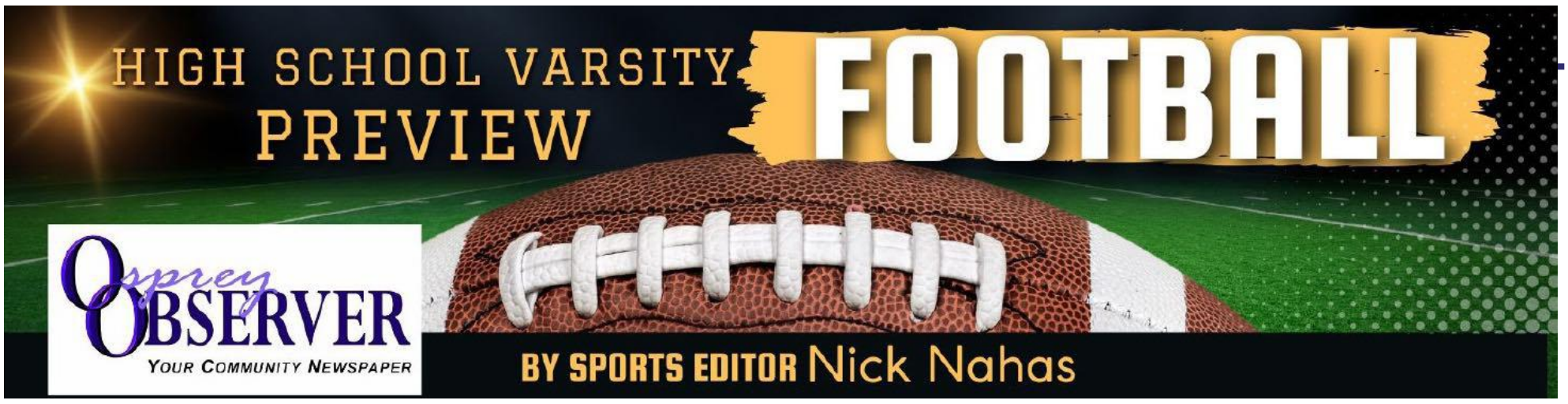
8/21 vs. Hillsborough	9/25 @ Tampa Bay Tech
8/28 @ Middleton	10/9 vs. Spoto
9/4 vs. Newsome	10/16 vs. Armwood
9/10 vs. Leto	10/23 @ Plant
9/18 @ Brandon	10/30 @ Freedom

ROSTER

#	NAME	POS	GR	#	NAME	POS	GR
0	Steven Flores Jr	LB, NG	Sr.	30	Jeriel Evans	DL, OLB	Jr.
1	Caaden Coney	RB, ATH	Sr.	32	Giovanni Staley	WR	So.
2	Rhyse Martinez	WR	Sr.	33	Angel Maldonado IV	WR, CB	So.
3	Jihan Ayala	RB, CB	So.	34	Eric Crum	WR	So.
4	Nykel Young	LB, RB	Sr.	39	Collin Bledsoe	DB, FS	So.
5	Zayvion Imani	DB, CB	Sr.	40	Aiden Hornyak	DL, FB	Jr.
6	James Stewart I	CB	Sr.	41	Jace Touchstone	LB, OLB	Jr.
7	Sammy Zelaya	QB	Sr.	44	Jaylin Ramos	LB, MLB	So.
8	Ayden Clark	LB, LS	Jr.	49	Trace Van Dorn	K, P	So.
9	Jeremiah Lowe	WR, RB	Sr.	50	Damian Riofriocedeno	DL, DT	So.
10	Andre Walker	LB,ATH,LS	Jr.	53	Jayden Besser	OL, C	Jr.
11	Eric Morman	WR, DB	Sr.	54	Matthew Peek	OL, G	Sr.
12	King Coney	DB, FS	Sr.	56	Jaylan Taylo	DL	Jr.
13	Solease Babb	DB, OLB	Jr.	58	Damani Gosa	OL, G	Sr.
14	Jackson Larry	DB, ATH	Jr.	60	Gabriel Camacho	OL, G	Sr.
15	Lennox Zelaya	DB, CB	Jr.	62	Colton Shrieves	OL	Jr.
16	Andrew Alvarez	LB, OLB	So.	63	Aiden Cates	OL, G	Sr.
17	Kingston Johnson	QB, LS	Sr.	66	Logan Brandenstein	OL, G	Jr.
18	Ryder Harlin	FB, ATH	Sr.	68	Brayden Moates	OL, DL	So.
19	Maddox Clark	DB, SS	Jr.	71	Cole Maloney	OL, T	So.
20	Ben Beasley	K, P	Jr.	75	David Goderich	OL, G	Sr.
21	Damaun Harvey	DB, FS	Sr.	80	Nyles Pinnock	WR	Sr.
22	Hunter Cable	RB, ATH	So.	84	Nate Spruill	WR	Jr.
23	Jordan Reese	DL, DT	Jr.	85	Alexandre Bzduch	WR	Sr.
25	Logan Murray	LB	So.	89	William Latimer	TE, DE	So.
27	Euriah Benoit	DB, ATH	Jr.	90	Elijah Eleazer	DT, DE	Jr.
28	Tytan Banner	LB, ATH	Jr.	99	Bradley Boerio	DL, OLB	So.
29	Mekhi Miller	DB	Jr.				

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WOLVES LOOK TO BOUNCE BACK WITH YOUNG AND TALENTED ROSTER



The Newsome Wolves are in a new district and have a young but talented roster that they hope to make noise within 2026.

Third-year Head Coach Jeff Turner is happy with his team's progress so far, with a productive off-season under their belt. The team went to the Webber International team camp, where they worked on fundamentals and gained some more team chemistry in the process. He said they just want to worry about the process and getting better every day, not necessarily who they are going to play. He wants his team to focus on fundamentals, such as tackling and blocking.

The team lost starters that transferred and didn't gain any transfers, so they will be a young roster again like last season. They will have to develop talent from within and learn through game experience throughout the season. They return two starters on offense and five on defense.

Sophomore quarterback Lukas Guenther will enter his second season as the head signal-caller and team leader. Turner said that Guenther, who got bigger and stronger in the off-season, is their best player and does everything well. They will lean on his leadership ability and athleticism all season long. Guenther threw for 1,200 yards as a freshman last year and is very capable of running as well.

Turner thinks that his offense will be a major strength of the team with Guenther and senior bruiser running back Gianni Flore leading the charge. Flore will work in tandem with his fellow running back, sophomore Ashton Ramos, as a one-two punch, splitting carries.

Ryan Moran, a 6'3" tight end/defensive end, will be a handful for opposing teams on both offense and defense. He currently has seven college offers and is considered one of Newsome's most talented players. Receiver and West Point commit, 6'5" senior Max Urbanec will be a big target for Guenther. Senior offensive/defensive lineman Jacob Rupe will also play both ways. Cornerback Tre Curatelli will be a key player on defense and has a couple Division II offers on the table. Turner wants his team to continue improving on defense and taking care of the ball on offense.

Turner and his team have goals of winning a district title and beating their rivals, Durant and Bloomingdale. Newsome is in a tough new district with Durant, Lennard, Plant City and Riverview and has a difficult overall schedule as well. They will likely get better each week and will be battle-tested by the end of the season, improving on their 3-7 2025 record.

"I'm looking forward to watching these guys grow," said Turner. "We've got the right guys. We are going to be great on leadership, and these guys are going to get a lot better quicker. They've helped build a culture around here. When you get the right kids on the bus and working and rowing in the same direction, good things tend to happen. You tend to enjoy it a lot more around kids that want to be here and want to be Newsome Wolves. That's what we want."

SCHEDULE

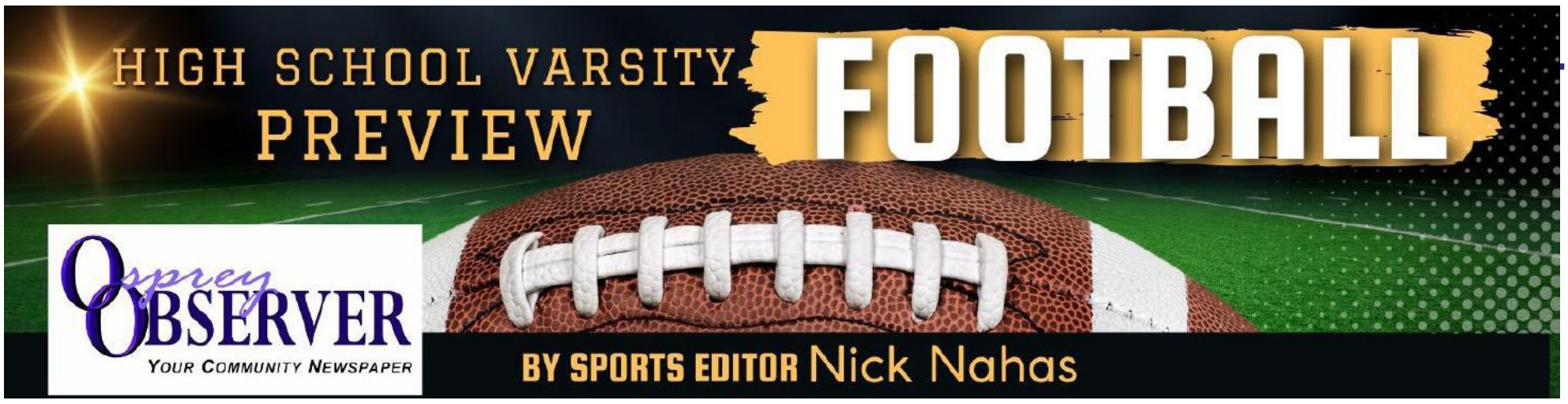
8/14 vs. Northeast
8/21 @ Land O' Lakes
8/28 vs. Freedom
9/4 @ Bloomingdale
9/10 @ Lennard
9/18 vs. Jefferson
10/2 @ Alonso
10/9 vs. Plant City
10/16 @ Durant
10/23 vs. Riverview
10/30 vs. Blake

ROSTER

#	NAME	POS	GR	#	NAME	POS	GR
0	Gianni Flore	RB, MLB	Sr.	40	Wyatt Simmons	OLB, TE	Jr.
1	Amir Keaton	CB, RB	Jr.	42	Barley Workman	MLB, TE	So.
1	Tre Curatelli	CB, WR	Sr.	44	Landen Suarez	DB, RB	Sr.
2	Bryson Rabon	CB, RB	Sr.	45	Bryce Brown	LB	Jr.
3	Lukas Guenther	QB	So.	50	Brady Shaffer	OL, DL	So.
4	Ray Ofiara	SS, RB	Sr.	51	Jacob Rupe	OL, DL	Sr.
5	Jaidan Taylor	CB, WR	Sr.	52	Bristol Rizzo		Sr.
6	Max Urbanek	WR, CB	Sr.	52	Carmelo Arias	OL, DL	Jr.
7	Isaac Saudi	MLB, TE	Sr.	53	Matthew Dickey	OL	So.
8	Colton Porter	SS, RB	Sr.	54	Jakye Hall	DL, OL	So.
9	Connor Eichler	OLB, RB	Sr.	55	Toby Stock	MLB, TE	Jr.
10	Carson Brockmeier	P, K	Sr.	56	Mathias Napuri	C, DT	Sr.
11	Ryan Moran	DE, TE	Sr.	56	Luke Simmons	OL, DL	Jr.
12	Lucas Dusnik	QB, SS	Jr.	57	Jermaine Anderson	DL, OL	Sr.
14	Matt Lambert	QB, SS	Sr.	58	Johnny Tesmer		Sr.
15	Michael Zitko	WR, CB	Sr.	58	Jaden Arzuaga	OL, DL	So.
16	Elbert Shumake III	FS	Sr.	60	Slade Forrester	OG, DL	So.
17	Will McFadden	OLB, RB	Jr.	61	Zach Quinn	DL, OL	Jr.
18	Ethan Lewis	DB, RB	Jr.	62	Nick Gonzalez	C	Sr.
20	Trey Gaffney	RB, DB	Jr.	63	Ben Salaguinto		Jr.
21	Robert Norton		Jr.	64	Dillon Schmitz	MLB, OL	Sr.
22	Ashton Ramos	SS, RB	Sr.	66	Rowan Hunter	OL, DL	Jr.
23	Chris Phillips	RB, DB	Jr.	68	Tayton Goff	OL, DL	Sr.
24	Demetrick Young	CB, WR	Jr.	72	Ben Sanchez		Sr.
25	Colton Galvan	OLB, TE	Sr.	72	Ethan Moran	OL, DL	Sr.
27	Camden Srodka		Jr.	74	Hudson Sanchez		Sr.
28	Sal Lotito	WR, DB	Sr.	75	Will Price	DE, T	Sr.
30	Dobbins Max		Jr.	75	Brady Keszler	OL, DL	Sr.
32	Ryder Moody	CB	Sr.	80	Patrick Jeans	SS, FS	Sr.
32	Carson Iannicelli		Sr.	81	Michael Fueger	P, K	Jr.
32	Zane Ciccarone	CB	Jr.	82	Preston Collins	K	Sr.
33	Adrian Fedoseenko	OLB, TE	Jr.	85	Christian Mounds		Jr.
34	Chase Thorstenson	WR, DB	Jr.				

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CRUSADERS LOOK TO BUILD OFF SUCCESSFUL SEASON WITH A YOUNG ROSTER



Seffner Christian Academy (SCA) Head Coach Travis Puelo has built a highly successful football program over his last 14 seasons at the helm. He, along with his coaching staff, have cultivated a family atmosphere built on team chemistry and leadership.

Puelo took 19 players and coaches on their yearly mission trip to Tennessee to help build team chemistry. A week later, they took the whole team to a three-day, two-night camp where they continued to practice and bond.

The Crusaders had another winning season in 2025, going 7-4 and making the playoffs for a second straight season. The team lost 15 seniors from last year and is going from a 53-man roster to around 30. Puelo has another young roster with talent, poised to make another playoff run. They will have to gain experience throughout the season with only seven seniors on the depth chart. Puelo also has a new defensive coordinator for the first time in 11 years. Stewart Weiss will take over those duties after joining the staff last year.

The head coach wants his team to play with relentless effort this year. The team slogan for 2026 is "relentless effort." The Crusader players and coaches don't want to leave anything on the table and want to give it their all on and off the field.

SCA returns five starters on offense and five on defense. They will have to replace two-year starting quarterback Gabe Hagan, who did a tremendous job leading the team. Senior transfer Marino Cozzens will take the reins at QB-1. Puelo said that he already commands leadership of the team and has the strongest arm of any quarterback he's worked with. Puelo said that Cozzens' dual-threat skill set will allow them to open up their spread offense and run it the way they envisioned.

Seffner Christian will rely on their skill position players to help out Cozzens. Senior wide receiver/cornerback Luke McLaughlin has sure hands and has played on the team for four seasons. Senior Plant High School transfer receiver Jasiah Bennett will pair nicely with McLaughlin and start at the other cornerback position. Sophomore running back Isaiah Balthazar could potentially rush for 1,000 yards. The Crusaders will run behind captain left tackle Dylan Edwards and left guard Ryan Rogers, who will both anchor the offensive line.

Puelo wants his team to cut down on penalties and take care of the ball better than they did the last two years. He wants his defense to tackle better and not give up as many big plays. Special teams will play a big role in the team's success. Junior kicker/punter Zack McKeehan has a big leg and will handle all kicking duties. He can hit field goals from 50 yards and beyond.

"I'm looking forward to seeing these guys grow together, being such a young and new team, watching these guys gel together excites me," said Puelo. "It's really a new team with the roster turnover. For me, in my 14 seasons at SCA, I haven't had this experience, and it's kind of reinvigorated me just watching it play out in front of my eyes. If this team can stay healthy and gel together quickly like I believe they can, like they're starting to do already, there's going to be some exciting days for this team for sure."

The expectations haven't changed at SCA. Puelo wants his team to play with relentless effort and discipline, taking it one game at a time. He said that his players are extremely coachable and soak up everything they learn like a sponge. The schedule is really tough, especially the last six games. Expect the Crusaders to go to the playoffs for a third straight season.

SCHEDULE

8/14 vs Avon Park
8/21 @ Legacy Charter
8/28 vs Indian Rocks Christian
9/4 @ CFCA
9/18 vs Northside Christian
9/25 vs Providence School
10/2 @ Cambridge Christian
10/8 vs Out-of-Door Academy
10/16 @ The Master's Academy
10/23 vs MDCA

ROSTER

#	NAME	POS	GR	#	NAME	POS	GR
2	Luke Mclaughlin	WR, CB	Sr.	23	Antonio Ercolano	RB, LB	Jr.
4	Marino Cozzens	QB	Sr.	40	Eli Hargus	LB, DE	So.
5	Jonathan Adams	RB, LB	Jr.	45	Dominic Clovis	RB, LB	Fr.
6	Jasiah Bennett	WR, CB	Sr.	50	Drew Frazier	G, DT	So.
7	Isaiah Balthazar	RB, S	So.	51	Luke Frazier	G, LB	So.
8	JC Weiss	DE	Sr.	52	Ryan Rogers	G, LB	Sr.
9	Graham Stewart	WR, FS	Sr.	54	Tyson Edwards	T, DT	8th
10	Judah Schmidt	TE, DT	So.	55	Dylan Edwards	T, DT	Sr.
11	Jose Alvarado	WR, CB	So.	56	Chase Miller	G, DT	Jr.
12	Mason Bowden	WR, CB	Fr.	57	Blake Herndon	C, DT	So.
14	Judah Triplett	WB, DE	Jr.	60	Elias Montes	G, DT	Fr.
15	Jamier Etheridge	WR, CB	8th	65	Lincoln Stewart	G, DT	Jr.
18	Jonathan Moss	WR, CB	So.	72	Nathan Hawsey	T, DE	Jr.
20	Drew Warrington	WR, S	Jr.	74	David Jupp	T, DT	Sr.
22	Gavin E Vital-Herne	WR, DE	Jr.	81	Zack McKeehan	K, P	Jr.

PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN

(never known to fail)

O Most beautiful flowers of Mount Carmel, fruitful vine, splendor of Heaven, Blessed Mother of the Son of God, Immaculate Virgin, assist me in my necessity. O Star of the Sea, help me and show me here you are my mother. O Holy Mary Mother of God, Queen of Heaven and Earth, I humbly beseech you from the bottom of my heart, to succeed me in my necessity (make request). There are none that can withstand your power. O Mary conceived without sin pray for us who have recourse to thee (three times). Holy Mary I place this cause in your hands (three times).

Say this prayer for three consecutive days and then you must publish and it will be granted to you.

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MEET THE 2026 TEAM OF *OSPREY OBSERVER* INTERNS

By Jamie Lu

Each summer, the Osprey Observer hosts an internship program for high school and college students interested in supporting the local community through journalism. Read on to learn more about this year's interns.

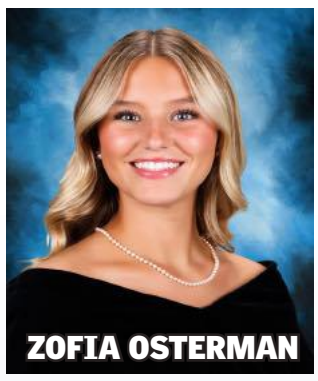














Ella Baroni

Ella Baroni is a high school senior planning to study communications and public relations. She applied to better understand reporting, journalism and what her future career may look like. Her goal was to write stories about people who do good and may go unnoticed.

"My favorite part has been learning about all these organizations through my assignments, taking initiative to better the community," Baroni said. "It's very empowering."

Baroni has played soccer her entire life and has traveled across the U.S. and to Barcelona, Spain, to compete.

Chloe Wagner

Chloe Wagner is a recent University of Central Florida graduate who majored in print and digital journalism with a minor in political science.

Wagner applied because she wanted to start her career with an outlet close to home. She grew up reading the Observer and was eager to join the team, build her portfolio and pursue jobs in the area.

"I've loved covering a variety of stories throughout the community," Wagner said. "I've always admired and championed the importance of community news. I think it's vital that community outlets such as the Observer exist because people often trust them more than larger, more commercialized outlets. It's always so heartwarming to see communities hold events and celebrate each other's successes!"

Wagner is a fourth-generation Tampeño and a huge fan of Tampa Bay sports, especially the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Abigail Dumas

Abigail Dumas is a junior at Newsome High School. She applied because she wants to pursue journalism and gain experience in the field. Her goal was to learn more about journalistic writing and the profession.

"My favorite part of the internship has been receiving the Osprey Observer newspapers and seeing my own articles in them," Dumas said.

She writes for both Newsome's yearbook and school paper.

Jamie Lu

Jamie Lu is a sophomore at the University of Missouri, double-majoring in journalism and constitutional democracy, with minors in creative writing, linguistics, history and political science.

Lu applied to support her hometown through reporting while studying abroad in the Philippines this summer. She is a proponent of local journalism and hopes to practice investigative journalism in the future.

Lu is also a competitive fencer for the University of Missouri.

Srishti Tripathi

Srishti Tripathi is a senior at Newsome High School who plans to major in business or finance on a prelaw track.

Her goals were to hone her feature writing and interviewing skills, learn how to capture local perspectives and gain a stronger understanding of community-driven publishing.

"My favorite part has been having the creative freedom to research and write local feature stories that highlight the people and events making a difference in our area. It's been incredible to take a story from an initial idea, interview community members and see the final piece come to life for readers," Tripathi said.

Tripathi performs color guard, manages social media for her school band and does sports and portrait photography.

Zofia Osterman

Zofia Osterman is a Newsome High School graduate and current sophomore at the University of Central Florida studying communications. She applied to experience working at a newspaper as a journalist.

"My favorite part of this internship has been meeting people from my community, interviewing them, and sharing their stories through my writing," Osterman said. "I have also enjoyed connecting with people from all different walks of life and learning about their unique experiences."

Osterman is a military child who has moved six times. She has also attended three elementary schools and two middle schools.

Brooke Wilson

A 2024 graduate of Durant High School, Brooke Wilson is spending the summer as an intern with Osprey Observer Communications. She is now a student in the Honors College at Florida Gulf Coast University, with an expected graduation date of May 2028.

Wilson is gaining hands-on experience in community journalism, marketing and communications while contributing to the newspaper's mission of highlighting positive local stories. At Durant, she was a member of the National Honor Society and earned several honors on the lacrosse field, including the Lacrosse Scholar-Athlete Award, Most Valuable Player Award and Cougar Award for Outstanding Spirit.

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Christian Voice



Grace Notes

Secret Things

By Debora Coty

What happens when God's answer to our prayer is "no"?

What if the solution we pray for seems sensible, biblically sound and custom-tailored to our needs but is bypassed for a different ending that isn't terribly happy?

In our world, sometimes people suffer ... physical pain, financial ruin, emotional turmoil. And we beg our heavenly Father for the bleeding to stop. We're disappointed that He didn't take care of us the way we think He should.

I've recently been there, pleading with Yahweh for peace about a years-long battle. When the dust finally settled, it didn't end at all the way I'd hoped. Yet my primary prayer during those trying years was, "Lord, redeem this ugly situation for your glory."

I truly believe He's doing that. The redeeming part just isn't obvious.

So, I turned to my Bible to see how early Christians remained faithful through disappointment: Daniel, Hannah, David, among others. Many suffered and lived — or died — with disappointment in the outcomes. Sometimes the problems were resolved with a happy ending (in their eyes) and sometimes not.

It's one of the mysteries of faith that we must accept. Not necessarily like but accept.

We have no guarantee of happy endings to the myriads of problems we encounter during our earth days. God's will may not include the outcome we hoped for, but if we turn the problem over to Him, we trust that the outcome is what He has chosen. Even if His reasons are ... secret.

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God," (Deuteronomy 29:29 NASB).

Yes, the secret, hidden things (in our perspective) belong to Him. He sees them. He controls them.

And there's solace in that. We rejoice in wonderful outcomes when they happen, but we don't exist just for happy endings. We exist to become more like our heavenly Father and to serve Him. Whatever the outcome.

Although His reasoning for "no" may be hidden, because He is large and in charge, the outcome that He orchestrates is indeed His will. And isn't that the place we most want to be — in the center of His will? Wherever He chooses for that to be.

Debora M. Coty is an inspirational speaker and award-winning author of over 40 books, including the bestselling Too Blessed to be Stressed series. Visit with Debora anytime at www.DeboraCoty.com.

STOP! IN THE NAME OF LOVE



"For the entire fullness of God's nature dwells bodily in Christ." — Colossians 2:9.

Saturday afternoon, I walked to the church to take a few photographs. I wanted to write a new "Reasons to go to Church" column, and God spoke to me directly from one of the images. I have taken better photographs of our church, but I don't think I have shared a better idea.

Right there, walking south on Saint Patrick Street, I noted how the corner stop sign visually covers the church entry. It begs the question, why stop? Why not walk on by?

I can imagine Jesus stepping out from behind something, holding his hand out palm forward like Diana Ross & the Supremes and saying, "Stop! In the name of love."

The implications give me chills. Just stop. Stop walking. Stop paying attention to those other things that have been on your mind. Stop being distracted. Stop focusing on everything else and not what's important.

Take pause to think about what Jesus means by "Stop in the name of love." Because for Jesus, love was — love is — the prime motivating force that led him to distill everything about God into the person and presence of a small, helpless baby.

Love is the lens, the filter through which Jesus pours every moment. Love defined his life and his love was so complete, so captivating, so full with goodness that when it bumped up against the powers of this world, they crucified him. When corruption is confronted by such goodness and purity, what happened to Jesus was inevitable.

This love, like the splitting of an atom, released such power — such a cosmic explosion of grace and goodness and light — that even death is extinguished in the wash, the torrent, the flood, the pure energy of Jesus.

That is what Jesus means by "Stop in the name of love."

Jesus means each one of us to stop, to look around and to take stock. Then he wants us to walk into church, take a seat, pray and open our heart to the forgiveness and the promise that belongs to each one of us.

Come to church. Come to Jesus. Come home.

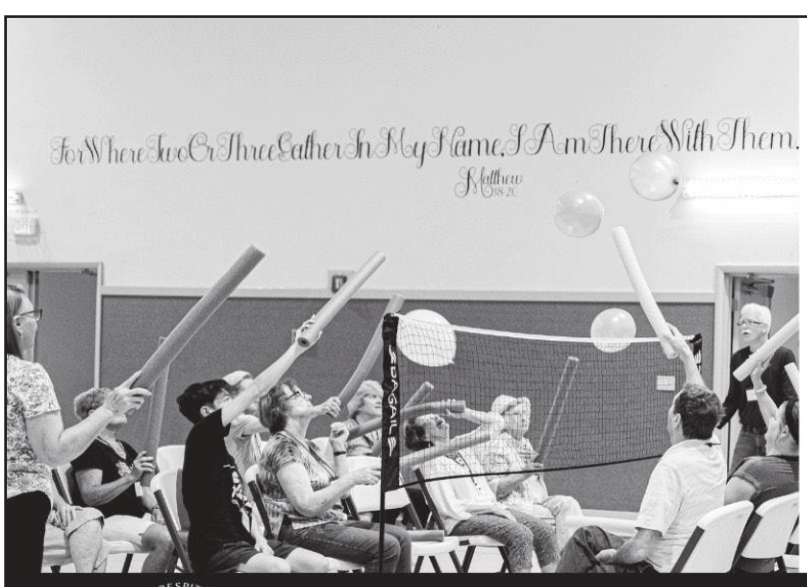
— Derek



Derek Maul has written for many news outlets, including the Tampa Tribune, The United Methodist News Service, All Pro Dad, FOCUS Magazine, Newsweek, USA Today, The Christian Science Monitor, Presbyterians Today, Guideposts, Chicken Soup for the Soul and many other publications. Read Derek Maul's daily blog posts at www.derekmaul.wordpress.com.







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KAREN BROOKS SHARES JOURNEY OF FAITH AND REDEMPTION

Staff Report



Karen Brooks recently celebrated the publication of her new eight-week spiritual and emotional growth workbook, Becoming a Display of HIS Splendor, with a book signing at Foxtail Coffee Riverview South.



Karen Brooks' dream to write and publish Becoming a Display of HIS Splendor was born out of much disappointment, defeat and discouragement. She discovered that delayed or denied dreams are not dead; they are sometimes redirected and rebirthed for God's greater victory and glory. She truly believes in her heart that God has a redeeming purpose for every disappointment and loss we face if we will surrender our pain to Him.

Brooks invites you to join her on this eight-week spiritual and emotional growth journey as she vulnerably shares parts of her painful past that led her to encounter God's perfect love, trust her Father's heart and stand firm with an unshakeable faith. Her hope and prayer are that her redemption story and the truths from God's word will inspire and ignite your faith to flourish and remain strong as "an oak of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor," (Isaiah 61:3).

As you experience this spiritual journey, you will:

• Be securely planted with your roots growing deeper in God's love and truth.

• Move from despair and doubt to healing and freedom as you persevere with an unwavering faith and trust in your heavenly Father.

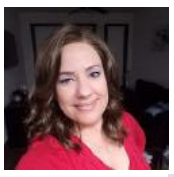
• Discover how abiding daily in His presence equips and empowers you to stand your ground in spiritual warfare against the attacks of the evil one.

• Display His splendor as you build and leave a legacy of faith, bearing eternal fruit to His glory.

Brooks recently hosted a book signing event at Foxtail Coffee Riverview South. She is truly grateful and feels blessed for all those who came to celebrate and rejoice with her. She especially wishes to thank Shanna Tvenstrup, franchisee, and her wonderful staff for hosting such a successful event.

Brooks looks forward to walking you through this spiritual workbook because you were created for the display of HIS splendor.

Her book can be purchased on Amazon at www.amazon.com/dp/1919386726.



CARING FOR BOTH GENERATIONS: FLORIDA HOMESTEAD AND YOUR ESTATE PLAN: WHAT HOMEOWNERS SHOULD KNOW

By Laurie E. Ohall, Florida Board-certified Elder Law Attorney



If you own a home in Florida, you have probably heard the term "homestead" in connection with your property taxes. What many homeowners do not realize is that Florida homestead affects much more than taxes. It also provides valuable creditor protection and determines how your home can pass to your loved ones after your death. Understanding these rules can help your family avoid unnecessary complications.

Florida homestead has three primary benefits. First, it provides a property tax exemption and the Save Our Homes assessment cap, which limits annual increases in your home's assessed value. Second, it offers strong protection from most creditors, making your primary residence one of your most protected assets. Third, it imposes special inheritance rules that can override what you have written in your will.

These inheritance restrictions often surprise homeowners. If you are survived by a spouse or a minor child, Florida law limits your ability to leave your homestead to whomever you choose. If the property is not properly planned for, the law generally gives the surviving spouse either a life estate in the home, with the remainder passing to the children, or the option to elect a one-half interest in the property. These default rules may not reflect your wishes and can create conflict between a surviving spouse and children.

Fortunately, careful estate planning provides greater flexibility. In some situations, a spouse may waive certain homestead rights through a valid prenuptial or postnuptial agreement. A properly drafted trust can also allow your home to pass outside of probate while preserving important homestead protections. However, these strategies must be implemented correctly to avoid unintended consequences.

Because Florida homestead affects taxes, creditor protection and inheritance, it should be a central part of every estate plan — not an afterthought. Reviewing how your home is titled and how it will pass at your death can help ensure your wishes are carried out while preserving the valuable protections Florida law provides.

A brief conversation with an experienced estate planning attorney can help determine whether your current plan fully protects your home and your family. Please call the Law Offices of Laurie E. Ohall at 813-438-8503 to talk through your estate planning.

Laurie Ohall is a Florida board-certified elder law attorney practicing in Brandon, Florida. She has been practicing law for 30 years and her practice is focused on estate planning, elder law planning and probate. Ohall is licensed to practice law in Florida and Ohio.

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$699,999



1224 RAINBROOK CIR
4BR/2.5BA/2CAR + POOL + POND VIEWS
$525,000



6209 GANNETDALE DR
4BR/2BA/2CAR + SCREENED PATIO + FENCED YARD
$450,000



5602 ROCKFIELD LOOP
3BR/2BA/2CAR + POOL + CORNER LOT
$439,900



4822 PORTOBELLO CIR
5BR/3BA/2CAR + POOL
$514,900



6073 SANDHILL RIDGE DR
2BR/2BA/2CAR + DEN + SCREENED LANAI
$345,000



2512 WRENCREST CIR
3BR/2BA/2CAR + FENCED YARD
$350,000



111 ALAFIA ESTATES LN
3BR/3BA/3CAR + OFFICE + 5.11 ACRES
$1,139,000



3530 FOX SQUIRREL LN
3BR/2BA/2CAR + POOL/SPA
$539,900



3512 CORDGRASS DR
4BR/3BA/2CAR + POOL
$549,000



6135 CHURCHSIDE DR
5BR/3.5BA/3CAR + OFFICE + PRIVATE APARTMENT
$650,000

DELIVERING RESULTS YEAR AFTER YEAR

BRENDA WADE
KELLER WILLIAMS SOUTH TAMPA
Top Producer
2002-2025

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