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COMMUNITY INVITED TO HELP NAME NEW WIMAUMA MIDDLE SCHOOL

Staff Report



Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) is seeking community input to help name the district's new middle school in the rapidly growing Wimauma community.

The approximately $72 million project will accommodate up to 1,600 students and is scheduled to open in August 2027. The school will offer dynamic academic and enrichment opportunities designed to complement the academic excellence at nearby Aquilla J. Morgan High School.

Programs will include rigorous and accelerated coursework, opportunities to earn high school credit, career and technical education, industry certifications and extracurricular activities such as clubs and sports based on student interest.

The project reflects the district's ongoing investment in modern, future-ready educational facilities to support Hillsborough County's continued population growth. Located on an 87-acre site at 1712 W. Lake Dr. in Wimauma, the new middle school will be situated near Aquilla J. Morgan High School, which opened in August 2025, as well as a future elementary school.

"Middle School VV represents our continued commitment to providing students with access to innovative learning environments in communities experiencing rapid growth," said Superintendent Van Ayres. "This new school will expand opportunities for students and support the educational needs of families in Wimauma and the surrounding area."

All proposed names must follow School Board Policy 7250. The naming and renaming of all school sites and facilities must respect all races, cultures and ethnic values. The school board also prohibits any name that violates School Board Policy 2260 – Nondiscrimination and Access to Equal Educational Opportunity.

School sites and facilities may be named for individuals who have rendered outstanding public service to public education, geographical locations or groups and clubs, as outlined in board policy. Elementary, middle and secondary schools may be named for U.S. presidents, school board members, educators, outstanding citizens or geographic locations. An elected official must have been out of public office for at least five years before being considered, and no current candidate for public office may be considered.

Name recommendations for the new middle school in the heart of the Wimauma community can be submitted at www.surveymonkey.com/r/8fpxcm7.

Submissions will be accepted from now through 5 p.m. on Friday, July 31. All names will be presented to the Hillsborough County School Board for consideration. The board is scheduled to vote on a name at its Tuesday, September 1, meeting.

To stay up to date on the school's progress, visit www.hillsboroughschools.org/page/middle-vv.

PROPOSED FORT HAMER RD INTERCHANGE ADDED TO COUNTY TRANSPORTATION PLAN

By Brian Bokor

A proposed new Interstate 75 interchange near the Hillsborough-Manatee county line took another step forward after the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners approved an amendment adding the project to the county's long-range transportation plans.



Commissioners approved Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA) 26-11 during a public hearing July 16. The amendment updates Hillsborough County's Corridor Preservation Plan Map to include a future Fort Hamer Road extension and a proposed interchange on I-75.

The proposed interchange would be located between State Road 674 and Moccasin Wallow Road in the southernmost portion of Hillsborough County.

The amendment does not authorize construction of either the roadway or the interchange. Instead, it preserves the corridor needed for future transportation improvements while additional planning, engineering and environmental studies continue.

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) began a feasibility study this spring to evaluate the proposed interchange on I-75 and the extension of Fort Hamer Road needed to reach it. The study area extends along I-75 from the Manatee County line north to the Valroy Road bridge and is expected to be completed in winter 2027.

Fort Hamer Road currently ends just south of the Hillsborough County line. Reaching the proposed interchange would require extending the roadway north through Manatee County into Hillsborough County. That extension is already included in Manatee County's long-range transportation plans, although funding for construction has not been identified.

The proposed interchange also fits into a broader long-range vision for improving east-west transportation across the region.

The Sarasota/Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization's current Long-Range Transportation Plan includes the proposed Commerce Connector, a future two-lane roadway intended to link U.S. 41 with Fort Hamer Road. The plan also identifies future extensions of Fort Hamer Road north toward Buckeye Road and County Line Road, creating a regional transportation network that could ultimately connect U.S. 41, I-75 and growing industrial and commercial areas in northern Manatee County.

Those additional roadway projects are separate from FDOT's current feasibility study and have not been approved for construction. Each would require its own planning, engineering, environmental review, public involvement, right-of-way acquisition, funding and additional state and local approvals before construction could begin.

Supporters of the proposed interchange say it could improve regional connectivity, provide additional access between Hillsborough and Manatee counties and help relieve traffic at the existing I-75 interchanges serving State Road 674 and Moccasin Wallow Road as development continues throughout South Shore and northern Manatee County.

Approval of CPA 26-11 adds the proposed transportation corridor to Hillsborough County's official planning maps, but it does not guarantee the interchange will be built.

The project is not currently funded for final design, right-of-way acquisition or construction.

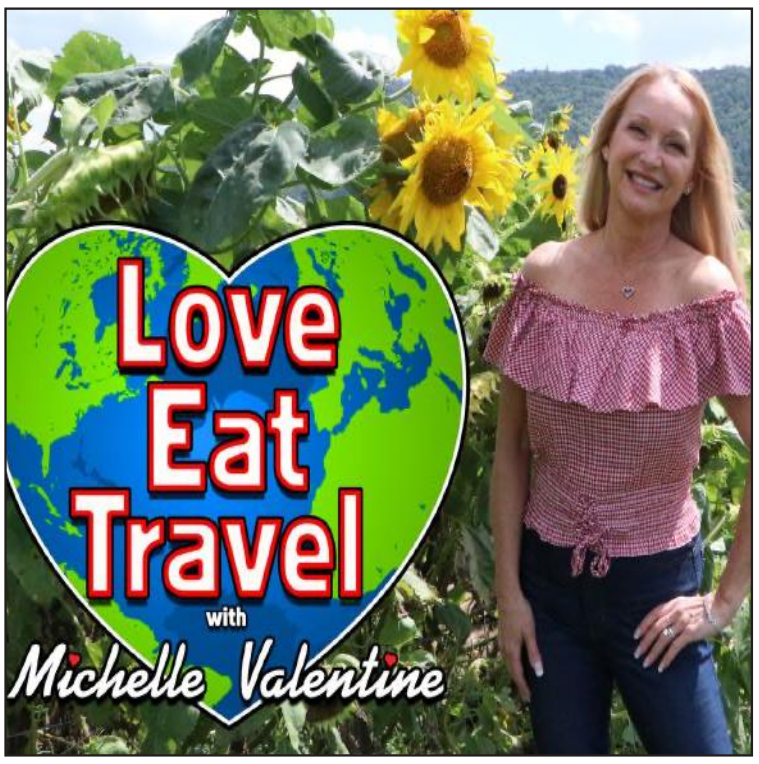
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Apollo Beach resident Michelle Valentine brings hidden American destinations to public television in her new series, LOVE EAT TRAVEL WITH MICHELLE VALENTINE, airing Saturdays and Sundays on WEDU and WEDQ throughout July. See full story on Page 22.



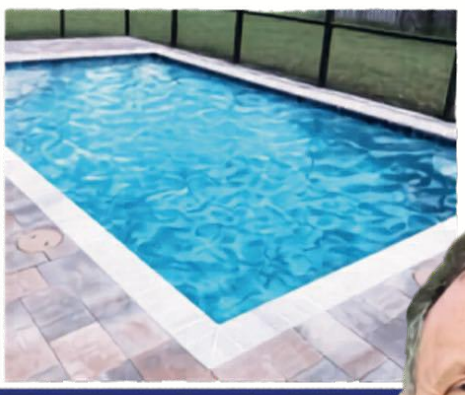
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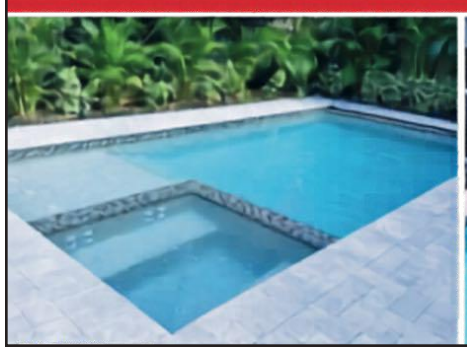
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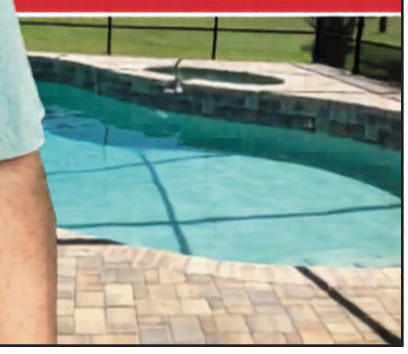
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CAMP BAYOU HOSTS ANNUAL BACK TO SCHOOL-BACK TO NATURE EVENT

By Dolly Cummings



The 18th annual Camp Bayou Back to School - Back to Nature event will be held this year on Saturday, August 1, from 9 a.m.-12 Noon. As always, the event is free. Stop by a table to learn something new about nature and receive a free school supply item, while supplies last. A free raffle for all children will offer larger prizes, such as backpacks, lunch packs and more.

Other organizations that are participating this year include the Paleo Preserve Fossil Museum, Hillsborough County Conservation & Environmental Lands Management, the SouthShore Regional Library, Little Manatee River State Park, the Environmental Protection Commission of Hillsborough County, the Manatee Viewing Center and The Florida Aquarium.

Camp Bayou continues to offer day paddle trips on the first and third Saturdays of each month at 9 a.m. The tour is $25 if you need to use one of its canoes or kayaks, or $5 if you bring your own. A special Observe the Moon Night Paddle will be offered on Saturday, September 19, starting 7:30 p.m. Registration required for all events; call 813-641-8545 or email campbayou@gmail.com.

Save the date: 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 it. Email Dolly for more info 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.

WHAT'S NEW SOUTHSHORE: SCHOOL, COSTCO, HOME DEPOT AND CHICK-FIL-A

By Brian Bokor

SouthShore continues to grow, with several significant projects moving forward across Wimauma, Riverview and Apollo Beach.



New Riverview Chick-fil-A owner-operator Lorena Kurtjian Hernandez.

New School Site Purchased in Wimauma

Hillsborough County Public Schools has purchased approximately 26 acres in Wimauma for a future school expected to serve the growing Berry Bay area. The property is separate from the district's existing 87-acre educational campus on West Lake Drive, where Aquilla J. Morgan High School opened in August 2025. Middle School VV is under construction and scheduled to open in August 2027, with a future elementary school also planned for the campus.

HCPS is inviting the community to help name Middle School VV through an online survey ahead of the school's opening.

Costco Planned on Big Bend Road

Plans are under review for a Costco warehouse and fuel station near the southwest corner of Big Bend Road and Interstate 75 in Apollo Beach. The warehouse would anchor a larger mixed-use development that could eventually include restaurants, additional retail, residential development and a hotel. The project remains in the county review process, and no construction timeline has been announced.

Home Depot Proposed Along U.S. 301

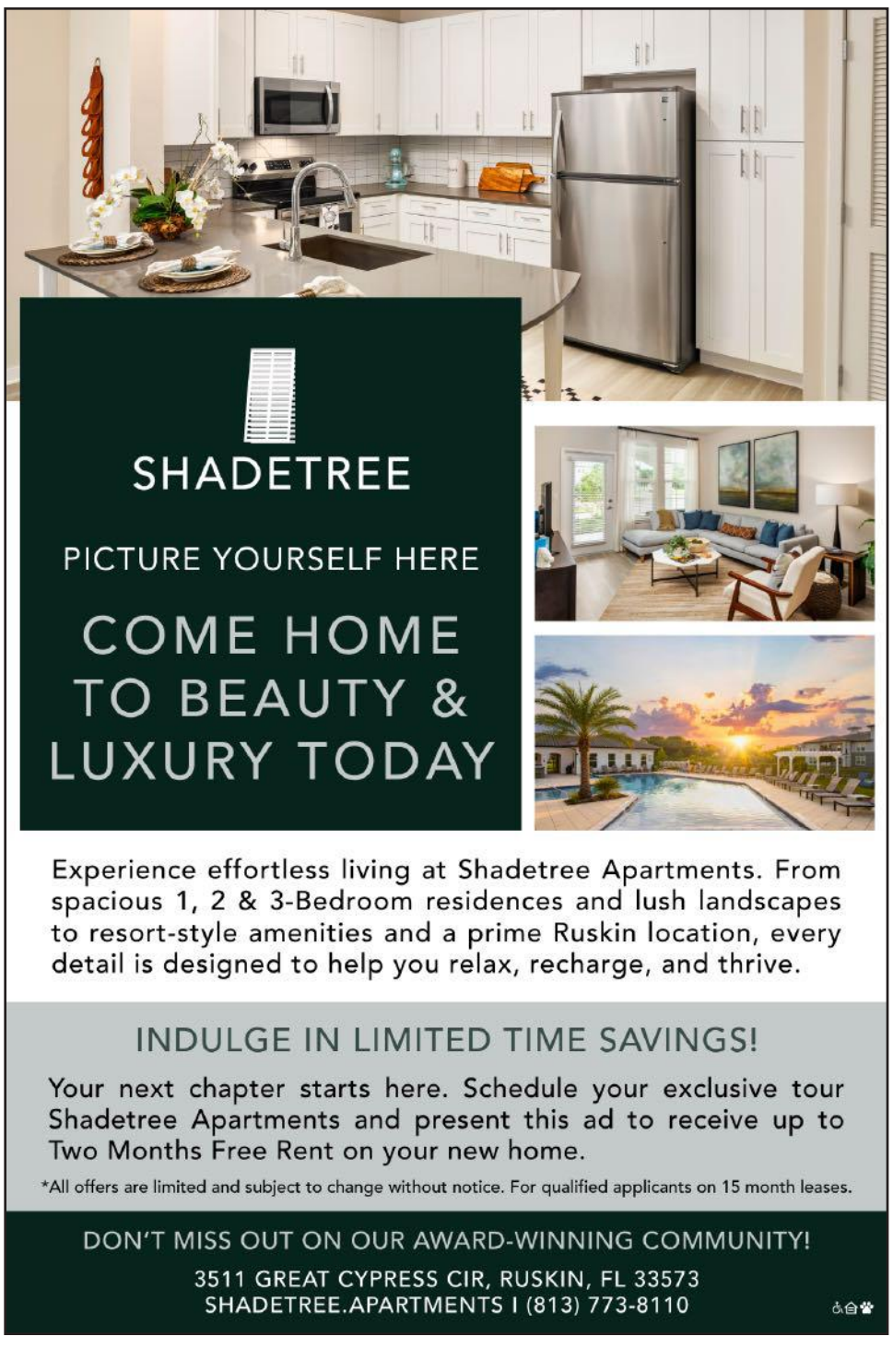
A 150,000-square-foot Home Depot has been proposed near U.S. 301 and Ambleside Boulevard in Riverview. The plans also include a 70,000-square-foot medical office building and roadway improvements, including a proposed traffic signal at U.S. 301 and Ambleside Boulevard. The proposal remains under county review.

Commercial Project Proposed in Wimauma

A mixed-use commercial development has been proposed at State Road 674 and Eleton Springs Drive in Wimauma. Plans call for approximately 31,000 square feet of commercial space in three buildings fronting State Road 674, with a climate-controlled self-storage facility behind them. The site plan also features future extensions of Lagoon Shore Boulevard and Center Street. The proposal remains under county review.

Chick-fil-A Nears Opening

Construction is wrapping up on the new Chick-fil-A at U.S. 301 and Balm Road in Riverview. The restaurant received 890 job applications during its first 10 days of hiring after recruitment began on July 6. Owner-operator Lorena Kurtjian Hernandez relocated to Florida with her husband, Felix, and daughter, Alessia, in 2022. After a four-year journey to become a Chick-fil-A owner-operator, Hernandez said she's excited to create a welcoming gathering place for SouthShore families while building partnerships throughout the community.





FREEDOM PLAZA WELCOMES BENJAMIN PATTON FOR LEGACY PRESENTATION

Staff Report



Benjamin Patton and his son at a memorial marker for Gen. George S. Patton Jr.

Freedom Plaza recently welcomed Benjamin Patton, entrepreneur, author and grandson of World War II Gen. George S. Patton Jr., for a presentation on military legacy, leadership, service and American history.

"Freedom Plaza has deep military roots, and many of our residents have dedicated their lives to service," said Angie Roher, executive director of Freedom Plaza. "Welcoming Benjamin Patton gave residents and guests a meaningful connection to American history and the leadership values that continue to inspire generations."

Benjamin shared personal family stories and lessons passed down through the Patton family, offering a perspective that goes beyond the history books. The presentation gave attendees a personal look at the family behind one of America's most influential military leaders while exploring resilience, service and character.

The visit was especially meaningful at Freedom Plaza, which was founded by retired military officers and remains home to many veterans and military families. The event reflected the community's commitment to honoring service and offering lifelong learning opportunities.

About Freedom Plaza

Freedom Plaza is a vibrant Life Care community in Sun City Center set on 140 acres of landscaped grounds. It features a private lake, walking trails and an 18-hole executive golf course and putting green. Just minutes from both Tampa and Sarasota, residents enjoy a maintenance-free retirement lifestyle with resort-inspired services and amenities. Freedom Plaza's pet-friendly community features over 400 independent living residences ranging from studio to one and two-bedroom apartment residences. It also offers assisted living residences; skilled nursing, including private rehabilitation suites; and memory care. For more, visit the website www.freedomplazafl.com.

FROM EAST BAY TO TEAM USA: JOHNSTON WINS WORLD CHEER TITLE

By Emily Harper



Gage Johnston graduated from East Bay High School after transferring during his senior year to be part of the area's only coed cheer team. After high school, Johnston continued his cheerleading career at the University of Kentucky. As a collegiate cheerleader, he has experienced unforgettable moments, including cheering courtside during March Madness.

Johnston has been cheering for six years, and he said, "Being able to go out on a stage while everyone is only watching you is one of the biggest adrenaline rushes you can get. There's no better feeling than hearing the crowd after smacking a routine."



Gage Johnston representing Team USA in Sweden.

From June 5-7, Johnston competed with Team USA in Gothenburg, Sweden, at the 2026 FISU World University Championship. Team USA selected 20 student athletes from all across the country to represent the United States in the championship. At the event, Team USA competed against other student athletes from across the globe, allowing athletes to showcase their talent while representing their countries.

For Johnston, this was his first time cheering with Team USA.

Reflecting on the tryout process, he said, "It was nerve-racking. When you do your tryout, the entire room stops to watch just you. When you try out, you're surrounded by some of the best athletes in the world. It makes you feel a crazy amount of pressure, but it's also super exciting."

In Sweden, he specifically competed in the Coed Premier division, which includes elite-level tumbling and partner stunts with a mix of male and female athletes. Their outstanding performance earned them the title of 2026 FISU World University Games champions.

While in Sweden, Johnston enjoyed experiencing Europe with the other teams.

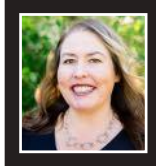
He said, "It was so fun to get to see all new places and meet people from all over the world."

Looking back on the experience, Johnstonn said, "I'm excited to see what the future holds."



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Marie Gilmore
813-657-2418
editor@ospreyobserver.com


DIRECTOR OF MEDIA OPERATIONS
Doug Gilmore
813-657-2418
doug@ospreyobserver.com


NEWS REPORTER
Taylor Wells
813-657-2418
twells@ospreyobserver.com


DELIVERY MANAGER
Bill Andrew
813-657-2418
bandrew@ospreyobserver.com


ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR
Libby Hopkins
813-657-2418
libby@ospreyobserver.com


CUSTOMER SERVICE
Jenny Bennett
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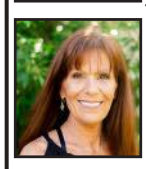
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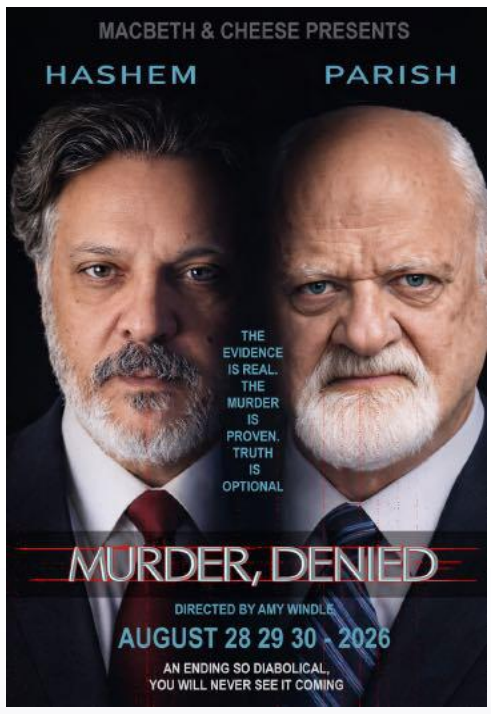

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FIREHOUSE INVITES AUDIENCES TO SOLVE THE MYSTERY IN MURDER, DENIED

Staff Report



Fans of suspense and psychological thrillers will have the chance to experience an evening of mystery, revenge and unexpected twists when Murder, Denied takes the stage at the Firehouse Cultural Center in Ruskin later this summer.

Presented by MacBeth & Cheese Productions as part of the Firehouse Center Stage series, the play opens on Friday, August 28, with an additional performances on Saturday, August 29, at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, August 30, at 3 p.m.

Directed by Amy Windle, Murder, Denied promises audiences a tense, edge-of-your-seat experience that explores justice, revenge and the fine line separating the two. The production stars Hashem and Parish in a story that begins with what appears to be an ordinary meeting but quickly transforms into a chilling psychological battle.

The plot centers on Henry Whitaker, who has one night left to live and believes he has devised the perfect plan. Michael Reyes arrives expecting nothing more than a routine meeting, only to discover that the carefully prepared dinner table, precise timing and locked room are all part of something far more sinister.

As long-buried secrets emerge and past events are revealed, Michael comes to a startling realization: he was never invited to dinner—he was chosen. The production challenges audiences to consider whether justice and revenge can ever truly be separated while delivering an ending designed to keep theatergoers guessing until the final moments.

Adding to the intrigue is the show's tagline: "The evidence is real. The murder is proven. Truth is optional."

The Firehouse Cultural Center describes Murder, Denied as a gripping psychological thriller with a conclusion audiences "will never see coming." The intimate setting of the center's theater is expected to heighten the suspense, placing viewers close to the action as the mystery unfolds.Tickets are $25 for Firehouse Cultural Center members and $30 for nonmembers. Seating is limited, so advance reservations are encouraged.

The Firehouse Cultural Center is located at 101 1st Ave. NE in Ruskin. Tickets may be purchased by calling 813-645-7651 or by visiting www.firehouseculturalcenter.org. Audiences looking for an evening of suspense, unexpected revelations and psychological drama won't want to miss this thrilling theatrical production.









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 that "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, expresses 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."

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 they also host 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 vva787.org where extensive information about programs and services can be found as well as details about the VVA.

SENIORS BRING SKILL & SPIRIT TO BRAIN & BODY CHALLENGE

Staff Report



Photo Courtesy of Hillsborough County

The Dance Challenge champions were the Ruskin Monsters of Mayhem.

More than 400 energetic seniors age 50+ came together for Hillsborough County Aging Services' annual Brain and Body Challenge, transforming the event into a playful showdown between superheroes and supervillains. The day was packed with high-energy activities, plenty of laughter, and a strong sense of community pride.

This year's Challenge highlighted how older adults across the county continue embracing active, connected lifestyles. Aging Services emphasized that pairing physical movement with mental engagement supports overall wellness, sharpens cognitive skills, and helps maintain daily vitality. The upbeat environment underscored how accessible, social activities can motivate seniors to stay active and involved.

"This was my first time attending, and I really enjoyed it. It was wonderful meeting new people and seeing the care and attention given to seniors," said Ruskin Senior Center resident Roman Delosseentos. "You can tell they truly look after their community. My favorite part of the day was playing basketball."

Participants arrived dressed as their favorite heroes and villains, setting the stage for friendly competition throughout the day.

Seniors took on a World Cup style penalty kick challenge and an NBA-inspired basketball free throw contest, showed off their best moves during a lively dance-off, and tackled quiz-style mental games designed to boost memory, focus, and problemsolving.

Top honors for team competitions went to:

- Champions: Progress Village Black Panthers
- 2nd Place: Town 'N Country Crimson Avengers
- 3rd Place: Plant City Spicy Strawberries

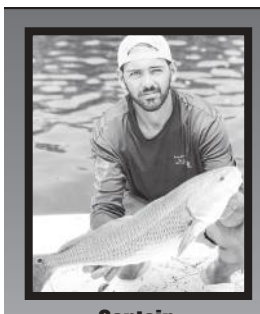
The Dance Challenge champions were the Ruskin Monsters of Mayhem.

Individual winners also shined in soccer and basketball challenges, as well as two timed brain competitions - color stacking and puzzle completion - with standout participants representing Progress Village, Oaks at Riverview, Ruskin, Brandon, Plant City, and JL Young.

The success of this year's event was made possible thanks to the support of 15 dedicated sponsors.

By bringing together participants from multiple senior centers, the Brain and Body Challenge strengthened friendships, encouraged new connections, and celebrated how communitydriven wellness continues to empower older adults throughout Hillsborough County.





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SUNRISE IRRIGATION CELEBRATES GROWTH TO SOUTH COUNTY

Staff Report



Sunrise Irrigation celebrates its expansion into serving South Hillsborough County.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) proudly joined Sunrise Irrigation in celebrating the grand opening of its new location with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on May 28, marking an exciting milestone for the family-owned business that has served the Brandon and Tampa Bay communities for more than three decades.

The event brought together chamber members, local business leaders, customers and community supporters for an afternoon of celebration, networking and recognition. Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce President Amber Aaron welcomed attendees and offered congratulatory remarks before the official ribbon-cutting ceremony. Following the ceremony, BRCC Ambassador Patty LeCompte presented a special proclamation declaring May 28 as Sunrise Irrigation Day in honor of the company's longstanding commitment to the community and dedication to excellence in service.

Guests enjoyed light refreshments while learning more about Sunrise Irrigation and the wide range of services the company provides to homeowners throughout Brandon and the surrounding Tampa Bay area.

Founded as a family-owned business, Sunrise Irrigation specializes in professional sprinkler repair, irrigation installation and maintenance services. With more than 30 years of industry experience, the company employs trained and certified technicians who diagnose and repair a variety of irrigation system issues, including clogged sprinkler heads, leaking pipes, broken valves and low water pressure. In addition to irrigation services, Sunrise Irrigation offers water drainage solutions, landscape lighting, mosquito control, well pump services and maintenance programs designed to extend system life and keep outdoor spaces healthy, efficient and attractive year-round.

"The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is proud to celebrate the continued growth and success of Sunrise Irrigation," said Aaron.

"Their commitment to quality service, customer satisfaction and community involvement has made them a trusted resource for homeowners throughout our region. We are excited to see their continued success in their new location."

The ribbon-cutting ceremony provided an opportunity for attendees to connect with fellow business professionals while recognizing the achievements of a local company that has built a reputation for reliability, expertise and exceptional customer care.

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce congratulates Sunrise Irrigation on this exciting new chapter and looks forward to supporting their continued growth and success for many years to come.

For more information or a quote, call 727-946-6603 or visit the company website at www. sunriseirrigation.com.

IN AN EMERGENCY, CLOSE CARE MATTERS

Staff Report



AdventHealth Riverview EMT Jared provides compassionate emergency care to patients when every second counts. His professionalism and reassuring presence reflect the hospital's commitment to delivering fast, high-quality care close to home for those facing urgent medical needs.

Emergency care and timely treatment matter when you have an illness or injury that needs immediate medical attention.

For three years, Kayla McDonald had episodes where her heart rate spiked to roughly 200 beats per minute. But every time she went to the emergency room, physicians said her heart wasn't the problem.

"The first time it happened in Panama City, they said I was too young for a heart condition. Without doing an EKG or anything, they just told me I was having a panic attack," said the 25-year-old. "The second time, they didn't take me seriously either. And after that, I felt bad even calling 911 or calling to ask for help."

That changed once McDonald moved to the Tampa Bay area. During another event in November 2025, emergency room physicians diagnosed her with supraventricular tachycardia (SVT), a common condition that causes fast, irregular heartbeats; chest pain; and lightheadedness.

The next time McDonald's SVT hit, she went to the emergency room at nearby AdventHealth Riverview and knew immediately that she'd found a health care home.

And that's where she went three times a week until she had a cardiac ablation to cure her SVT in May.

"They did everything they could for me very quickly and went the extra mile to fix my heart rhythm. They did their best to get me in and out immediately," she said. "It meant so much that they knew me. I got anxious with every episode, but they were very calming and caring. They never made me feel bad about coming in for help."

With AdventHealth, there are three ways to find complete care when you have a non-life-threatening illness or injury that still needs care fast. You can schedule a treatment time in the emergency room through InQuickER, request a virtual care visit with a physician or nurse practitioner or visit one of the AdventHealth Primary Care+ clinics located throughout the Tampa Bay area.

When you have an urgent illness or injury, AdventHealth Riverview, located at 9330 U.S. 301 in Riverview, is nearby with convenient emergency care. Find out more about its advanced emergency services at the website located at www.adventhealthriverview.com.

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PARKS & RECREATION FINALIST FOR BEST PARKS PROGRAM IN COUNTRY

Staff Report



For the fourth time in five years, Hillsborough County has been honored as having one of the top parks and recreation programs in the country.

Hillsborough County Parks & Recreation is one of four national finalists in the Class 1 category for the 2026 National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management, the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration announced. Class 1 includes the nation's largest parks and recreation departments, serving populations of more than 400,000.

Only one department will receive the highest award, the Grand Plaque, in October. Each finalist sends the judges a short video highlighting their department.

Achievements and highlights from Hillsborough County Parks & Recreation include:

• Effectively managing 180 parks, 223 sports fields, 118 playgrounds, 54 recreation centers, 47 athletic complexes, 11 dog parks, nine splash pads and four cultural/performing arts centers, spanning over 3,500 acres.

• Adding 40 new pickleball courts and six new splash pads and fitness zones in underserved communities.

• The Adaptive Sports program, which has grown by more than 200 percent since 2021, expanding from 26 programs serving 300 athletes to 68 programs reaching 955 athletes. The latest innovation is a dedicated Buddy Baseball field serving athletes ages 8-22.

• Collaborating with the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office to revitalize seven recreation centers through a $4.5 million investment.

• Launching the Swim Safe Initiative for children enrolled in Hillsborough County's Head Start program. In partnership with the City of Temple Terrace, the Tampa YMCA, the City of Tampa and High 5 Inc., children ages 3-5 are taken to nearby pools to receive free swim lessons.

• Hosting 336 performances last year at the New Tampa Performing Arts Center (NTPAC), ranging from The Florida Orchestra to fully staged musical theater, ballet, modern dance, stand-up comedy and jazz.

• Partnering with the American Heart Association to expand emergency preparedness across the park system, securing $125,000 to purchase nearly 100 automated external defibrillators (AEDs). These devices were strategically placed with youth sports partners, high-use parks and rural locations.

Founded in 1965, the Gold Medal Awards program honors park and recreation agencies in the United States and military installations worldwide that demonstrate excellence in parks and recreation through long-range planning, resource management, volunteerism, environmental stewardship, program development and more.

COLLEGE RECEIVES $120,000 STUDENT TRAINING GIFT FROM ADVANCE AUTO PARTS FOUNDATION

Staff Report



The Hillsborough College (HC) Foundation has received a $120,000 donation from the Advance Auto Parts Foundation to support students in the college's workforce programs, including the Automotive Service Technology and Diesel Systems Technician programs. The gift includes funding for industry-recognized certifications, specialty tools and instructional resources designed to help students build successful careers in the automotive repair and maintenance industry.

"We are proud to partner with and help support the automotive technology program at Hillsborough College and its students, as there's a growing demand for skilled automotive technicians," said Todd Davenport, president of the Advance Auto Parts Foundation and senior vice president, real estate and development at Advance Auto Parts. "Through this partnership, students will have expanded access to industry-recognized certifications, professional-grade tools and hands-on training that allows them to grow into skilled technicians dedicated to getting vehicles back on the road safely."

The gift includes $40,000 to help students earn additional Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certifications — a key credential for advancing toward master technician status. The Advance Auto Parts Foundation will also provide three top-performing students with professional-grade tool sets containing about 800 tools, valued at approximately $15,000.

In addition, a $60,000 specialty tool fund will provide approximately 80 students with advanced tools commonly used in today's automotive and diesel repair facilities, and $5,000 in Advance Auto Parts gift cards will support the purchase of training materials and equipment.

"This generous investment from the Advance Auto Parts Foundation will have a lasting impact on our students and the communities they will serve," said Garrett Weddle, executive director of the Hillsborough College Foundation. "By helping students earn industry certifications and access the tools they need to succeed, this partnership removes barriers to opportunity while strengthening the pipeline of skilled technicians for Tampa Bay's workforce."

Students, faculty and representatives from the Advance Auto Parts Foundation celebrated the partnership during a gift presentation event on June 25 at the HC Ybor City Campus Training Center, located at 5610 E. Columbus Dr. in Tampa.

About Hillsborough College

Hillsborough College is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) to award associate and baccalaureate degrees. Hillsborough College also may offer credentials such as certificates and diplomas at approved degree levels. Visit www.hcfl.edu/accreditation for more information.





MOM TURNS TRAGEDY INTO HOPE WITH NEW OVERDOSE SUPPORT GROUP

By Libby Hopkins



Showneen Hall of Riverview lost her son, Walter Shumaker, on October 22, 2023, at just 27 years old. He died from a fentanyl overdose.

Showneen Hall of Riverview got a call on October 22, 2023, that no parent ever wants to get. The call she got was to let her know that her son, Walter Shumaker, had died of an overdose. To make matters worse, because Walter had been incarcerated a few times in his life, she did not receive support from her community in her time of need.

"After losing my son to fentanyl addiction, my family and I were met with judgment and stigma by the very community that should have embraced us," Hall said. "The stress and harm caused by that treatment deeply affected my health and contributed to my suffering a heart attack."

Hall's son was just 27 years old at the time of his death.

Hall looked for support to help with her grief and found Tonya Aber of Ohio's Facebook post about an organization she started for families who were grieving the loss of loved ones who passed from drug overdoses.

"Tonya told me about her losing her daughter, Jessie, who also died from a fentanyl overdose," Hall said. "She also told me about the nonprofit she started to help families in the same situation as mine."

Aber's nonprofit is called 4 Them We Fight, and its mission is to love, support, advocate and educate veterans, addicts, those in recovery, those with mental illness and anybody else who may need a voice.

"We want to bring the veteran's story of their heroism to the public, show those lost in addiction through those in recovery that hope is possible and bring strength and love to those who just feel beaten down," Hall said. "This is why I started a Tampa chapter of 4 Them We Fight."

Hall started the Tampa chapter of 4 Then We Fight to offer support.

"We are here to remind parents, especially mothers of addicted angels, that it is OK to not be OK," Hall said. "There is no shame in loving a child who battled addiction, regardless of their past or their record."

Through 4 Them We Fight, Hall has become a certified NARCAN provider and is currently looking for local businesses that would allow her to put free NARCAN boxes at their locations to help raise awareness about fentanyl overdose.

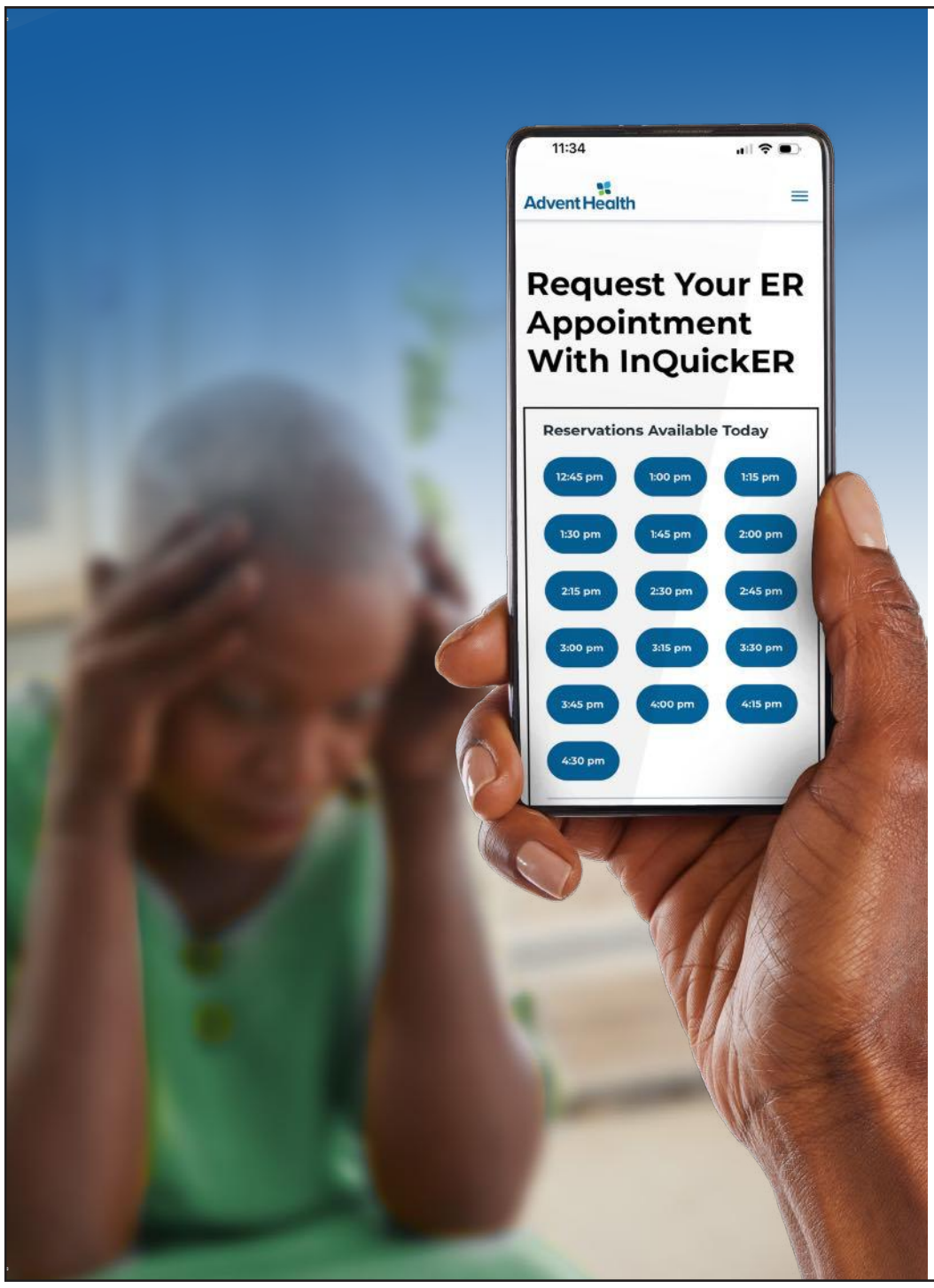
"NARCAN nasal spray competes with opioids to bind with the same receptors in the brain, reversing the effects of an opioid overdose in two to three minutes," Hall said. "This can save lives."

Hall is also hosting montly support group meetings at Concierge Healthcare Training Services & Consultants, located at 504 S. Kings Ave. in Brandon.

To learn more, visit its website at https://4themwefight.org/ or contact Hall at 813-270-6896.

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TWO TEACHERS NAMED FINALISTS FOR GRAMMY MUSIC EDUCATOR AWARD

Staff Report



Francisco Quixtan.

Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) is proud to announce that two of its educators have been named quarterfinalists for the 2027 Grammy Music Educator Award, presented by the Recording Academy and Grammy Museum. Ernesta Chicklowski of Roosevelt Elementary School in Tampa and Francisco Quixtan of Jule F. Sumner High School in Riverview are among just 202 educators selected nationwide from more than 2,100 nominations submitted across all 50 states.

The Grammy Music Educator Award recognizes current educators — kindergarten through college, in both public and private schools — who have made a significant and lasting contribution to the field of music education and demonstrate a commitment to the broader cause of maintaining music education in schools.

"Having two of our educators recognized at this level is a tremendous honor and a testament to the extraordinary talent and dedication within our district," said Superintendent Van Ayres. "Ernesta and Francisco exemplify what it means to inspire the next generation through music, and we are proud to have them representing Hillsborough County Public Schools on a national stage."

HCPS serves more than 218,000 students across more than 233 schools, making it one of the largest school districts in the nation. The district has long been committed to providing robust fine arts programming as part of a well-rounded education. Recently, the district was honored with the Best Communities for Music Education by the National Merchants (NAMM) Foundation.

Semifinalists for the 2027 Grammy Music Educator Award will be announced in September, with 10 finalists to be named later this fall. The ultimate recipient will be recognized during Grammy Week 2027 in Los Angeles, California, ahead of the 69th annual Grammy Awards on February 7, 2027. The winner receives a $10,000 honorarium and a matching grant for their school program.

About the Educators

Chicklowski — beloved by her students and known to them as 'Mrs. Chick' — has been Roosevelt Elementary School's music teacher for 23 years, building one of the most celebrated elementary music programs in Florida. In 2023-24, she was recognized as the Florida Elementary Music Educator of the Year. This marks her fifth Grammy Music Educator Award nomination .

Quixtan is a distinguished music educator and conductor at Sumner High School. A passionate musician and mentor, Quixtan has built Sumner High School's orchestra into a program that includes a beginning orchestra, a chamber ensemble and a full symphony orchestra. Quixtan's selection as a Grammy Music Educator Award quarterfinalist reflects his dedication to building a thriving music program at a school still in its early years — a remarkable achievement that speaks to his talent, commitment and the culture of excellence he has cultivated among Sumner's community.

To learn more about the music and fine arts programs at HCPS, visit www.hillsboroughschools.org/o/hcps/page/music.

LORENZO IS NEW ST. JOSEPH'S SOUTH PATIENT SERVICE DIRECTOR

Staff Report



Hector Lorenzo.

Riverview's Hector Lorenzo is the new St. Joseph's Hospital-South patient services director. As patient services director, Lorenzo is part of the Riverview hospital's leadership team involved with planning, organization, policy development and priority-setting. He'll oversee nursing personnel and lead and evaluate the nursing team and set objectives and long-term goals. He'll also work closely with clinical and medical teams in monitoring and evaluating patient care and services.

Lorenzo succeeds Rita Smith, newly appointed vice president and chief nursing officer at St. Joseph's Hospital-South, Plant City's South Florida Baptist Hospital and BayCare Hospital Manatee, scheduled to open in 2028 in Palmetto.

Lorenzo has been a registered nurse both in Puerto Rico and locally since 2007. He's been at St. Joseph's Hospital-South since 2014, where he's held supervisory and management positions since then, including charge nurse, administrator on duty and assistant nurse manager. Since 2020, Lorenzo has been nurse manager on St. Joseph's Hospital-South's cardiac medical unit. He was also project manager for the BayCare Virtual Hospital, housed at St. Joseph's Hospital-South.

In announcing Lorenzo's appointment, Smith noted Lorenzo's key strengths, which include patient experience, quality outcomes, operations, leadership development and hospital and system initiatives.

"Throughout his career at St. Joseph's Hospital-South, Hector has demonstrated a consistent commitment to high-quality, patient-centered care, staff engagement and operational excellence," Smith wrote in the announcement. "He is well respected by his peers, his team and leadership at St. Joseph's Hospital-South and BayCare. I am confident that his leadership will be a valuable addition to the St. Joseph's Hospital-South leadership team as we continue to advance nursing practice, deliver exceptional care to our patients and community and support our departments in achieving top-decile performance."

"As I step into this new role as director of patient services, I hope to foster a collaborative approach across all disciplines, recognizing that our success depends on working together and sharing a common vision and goals," Lorenzo said. "As a leader, I am committed to building on the strong culture we have developed over the years and continuing to support our team in delivering high-quality care in a safe environment. I also look forward to focusing on opportunities to enhance the overall patient experience and improve clinical outcomes."

Lorenzo holds a master's degree in health care administration and bachelor's in nursing.

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VETERANS GATHERED IN TAMPA FOR NATIONAL GOLDEN AGE GAMES

By Zofia Osterman



More than 1,300 veterans from across the country gathered in the Tampa Bay area as the National Veterans Golden Age Games made their Tampa debut, celebrating healthy aging through competition, camaraderie and rehabilitation.

Hosted by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the 41st annual National Veterans Golden Age Games took place from June 27 through July 2, welcoming veterans ages 55 and older to compete in adaptive sports while promoting lifelong health and wellness.

Among those competing was Connie White, a retired member of the Women's Army Corps who served from 1967-87. White participated in the ambulatory division and said the games represent far more than athletic competition.

"The Veteran Games are to encourage physical activity through competitive sports for positive outcomes and better health and wellness and an improved quality of life for our nation's older veterans," White said.

This year's games featured 21 sporting events divided into three competition categories: ambulatory, wheelchair and vision impaired. Veterans competed in events including archery, cornhole, air rifle, running, swimming, basketball, cycling, pickleball, powerlifting, golf, boccia and volleyball at venues throughout Hillsborough County, including the Tampa Convention Center, the University of South Florida and Bay Pines VA Medical Center.

White said approximately 1,300 veterans from across the nation participated in this year's Games, with 66 athletes representing the Tampa team. Competitors ranged in age from 55 and older, demonstrating that fitness and athletic achievement can continue well into later life.

According to White, one of the greatest benefits of the games is the impact they have beyond the competition itself.

"The National Veterans Golden Age Games have such an impact on veterans because they compete in sports for positive outcomes and better health and wellness and an improved quality of life," White said. "The VA puts veterans' health as a priority, and the Golden Age Games are a vital part of that mission. Not only are you participating, but you're meeting other veterans. There's camaraderie."

For White, this year's event was especially memorable because it was her first experience participating.

"This is such an amazing event, and I'm enjoying this being my first time," she said.

As Tampa hosted the National Veterans Golden Age Games for the first time, the event gave local residents an opportunity to witness inspiring displays of determination, resilience and sportsmanship while honoring those who served their country. Looking ahead, White said the 2027 National Veterans Golden Age Games are scheduled for June 23-30 in Cleveland, Ohio. For more information follow @Sports4Vets on Facebook, Instagram and X.

SHERIFF'S OFFICE ARRESTS SOUTH COUNTY MAN IN CREDIT CARD SCAM

Staff Report



The Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, in partnership with the Manatee County Sheriff's Office, has dismantled a sophisticated credit card fraud operation.

In June, detectives were notified that a counterfeit credit card had been used to purchase fuel at a Wawa on East Hillsborough Avenue. It was determined that the original card's information had been stolen using a credit card skimming device.

As part of the investigation, detectives served a search warrant on July 8 at a residence on Flamingo Avenue in Apollo Beach.

During the search, detectives discovered a counterfeit credit card manufacturing and fraud operation and seized 154 counterfeit credit cards, dozens of credit card skimming devices, multiple ledgers documenting the operation and numerous electronic devices used to facilitate the production and use of counterfeit credit cards.

Detectives also found that the suspect attempted to destroy evidence by flushing a stack of counterfeit credit cards down a toilet. Detectives were able to recover the flushed cards, along with additional skimming devices.

Detectives arrested Juan Miguel Acosta Ramos, 32, charging him with:

- Trafficking in 50 or More Counterfeit Credit Cards.
- Possession of Credit Card Making Equipment.
- Possession of a Skimming Device.
- Tampering with Physical Evidence.

"Detectives uncovered a sophisticated criminal operation designed to steal from hardworking people and businesses on a large scale," said Sheriff Chad Chronister. "If you choose to profit by victimizing our community, know this: We will find you, dismantle your operation and make sure you face the full consequences of your crimes."

Detectives also seized a Ford F-250 used to facilitate the criminal enterprise.

Detectives believe dismantling this operation prevented potentially millions of dollars in additional fraudulent transactions throughout the Tampa Bay area.

This is an ongoing investigation, and any updates will be provided by the public affairs office.



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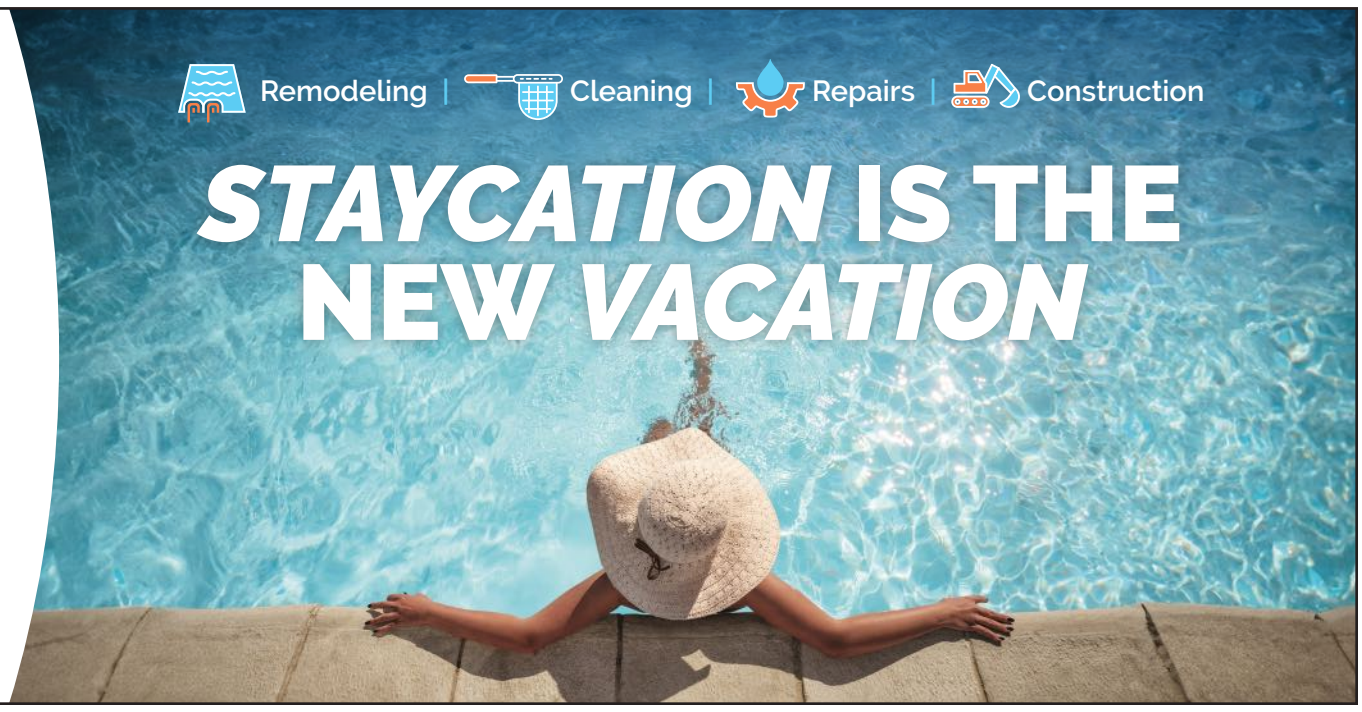
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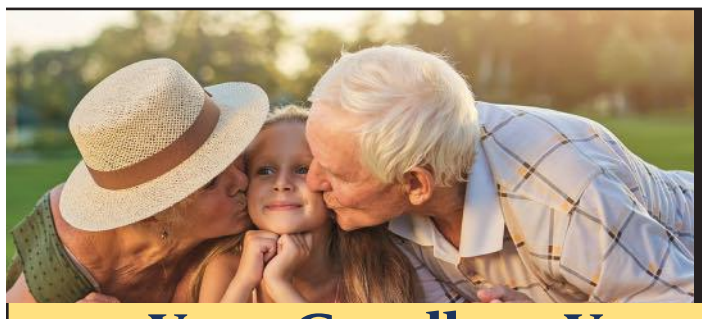
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EASTERSEALS HOSTS INCLUSIVE SUMMER CAMP FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

By Chloe Wagner



The Easterseals School for Limitless Learning is hosting its summer program designed for young neurodiverse learners and those with other disabilities in kindergarten through second grade.

The hands-on experience provides interactive STEAM-related (science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics) activities for children to learn and grow in an inclusive, supportive environment.

Easterseals Florida has served individuals from all walks of life with all kinds of disabilities across Florida since 1948. This includes services such as workforce development, early intervention, autism services, mental health services and recreation and camps. The school, located in the Bloomingdale area, was founded in 2024.

Easterseals School for Limitless Learning's school administrator, Dr. Janine Stewart, heads both the school and the summer camp programs.

"The summer program was created in response to the need for meaningful, structured activities during the summer for special needs children," Dr. Stewart said.

According to Dr. Stewart, Hillsborough county faces a growing need for specialized education services, with 35,000 students, or 15 percent of the county population, needing individualized education programs.

"We believe every child deserves meaningful access to STEAM experiences, and we provide the individualized supports to help each camper succeed," Dr. Stewart said.

The program currently has 22 campers, but Dr. Stewart and the school have plans to expand the summer program to hopefully accommodate more students in the future.

Activities for the camp are thought fully planned out with the support for each child's various needs. It is designed to foster an environment in which the children feel safe, understood and successful. Some activities at the camp include sensory activities, themed crafts, STEM exploration, music and movement, story time, outdoor play, gross motor activities and imaginative play.

The most beloved tradition at camp are the Friday Water Days, where campers end their week with water-related festivities such as sensory friendly water play, sprinklers, splash activities and outdoor fun.

"Because our campers are neurodiverse, every child has different interests and sensory preferences. Some love messy sensory play, while others enjoy movement activities, music, building, or hands-on exploration," Dr. Stewart said. "We intentionally offer a variety of sensory rich experiences, so every camper has opportunities to engage in activities they enjoy."

Easterseals School for Limitless Learning is currently enrolling for its Early Learning and Lower Elementary programs.

To learn more or to schedule a tour, visit https://florida.easterseals.com/ or contact Dr. Stewart at jstewart@esfl.org or 813-236-5589. Easterseals School for Limitless Learning is located in Valrico at 2460 Bloomingdale Ave., Ste. 170.

FIREHOUSE CULTURAL CENTER HOSTS COMEDY NIGHT WITH HEADLINER CHRIS GORGES

Staff Report



Chris Gorges is a high-energy comedian who has performed at the Firehouse Cultural Center (FCC) before, and he's returning for another performance on its center stage on Friday, August 7, from 7:30-9:30 p.m.

Gorges has been doing comedy for over 25 years in many forms. Through short films, improvisation and radio, he has proved his range. He is the host of the award-winning podcast The Double Special Show on iTunes. He's opened for the likes of Dave Chapelle, Pauly Shore and Bill Bellamy. High-energy, honest and edgy comedy set the tone for a show that is never the same twice. Lots of interaction and improvisation make for a great comedy experience.

Joining Gorges will be Bill 'Bull' Ohse, who is a national touring comedian with a unique brand of comedy that always leaves the audience wanting more. Ohse is an active member of H20 Comedy dedicated to reaching people in need and using comedy to share a positive message.

Tickets are $25 for members and $30 for future members. Book your tickets now, as seats are limited. Call in for tickets at 813-645-7651 or book online at https://firehouseculturalcenter.org/events/comedy-night-headliner-chris-gorges-feature-bull-ohse/.

The Firehouse Cultural Center is located at 101 First Ave. NE in Ruskin.

The Firehouse Cultural Center is a vibrant arts and education hub located in Ruskin, Florida, offering theater shows, educational classes, and community events.

The FCC features live performances, theater productions, comedy nights and musical concerts and offers art and music workshops for both children and adults. Historical roots: It is located on land originally donated by the Ruskin Commongood Society, reflecting the town's founding philosophy centered on art and community. The FCC includes a wheelchair-accessible entrance, a parking lot and restrooms.

Become a FCC member and save at https://firehouseculturalcenter.org/join/.



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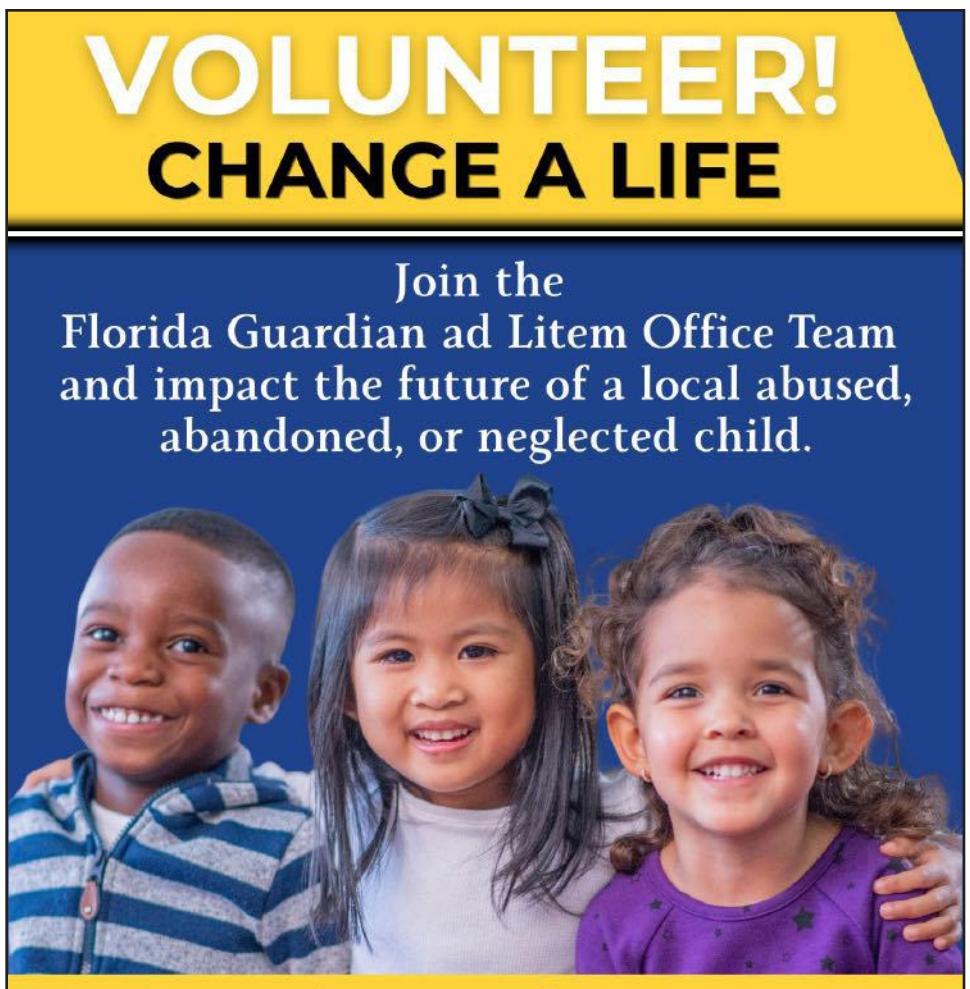
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INVESTING IN YOUNG MEN, STRENGTHENING OUR COMMUNITY

By State Attorney Suzy Lopez



One of the most important ways we can strengthen our community is by investing in our young people, especially young men who need positive role models and opportunities to succeed.

I was recently honored to speak at the Gentlemen's Quest Awards Gala. 'GQ' is a Hillsborough County mentoring organization that helps young men develop leadership skills, build confidence, and prepare for their future. During the event, I met an impressive young man named Don'Trevius Gadson.

At just 6 years old, Gadson watched his father being taken to jail. Experiences like that can leave lasting scars, but they do not have to define a child's future. Through the support of his mother, mentors and programs like Gentlemen's Quest, Gadson found direction and purpose. This spring, he graduated from Spoto High School. This fall, he will attend Florida A&M University with plans to become a criminal defense attorney.

His story is a powerful reminder of why mentorship matters.

The good news is there are many opportunities in Hillsborough County for young men to find that guidance. I was the keynote speaker at the Scouting America luncheon in Plant City last month, where we discussed the importance of positive adult influences in the lives of young people. The room was filled with leaders who understand that strengthening our community starts with investing in our next generation. Whether it is Scouting America, Gentlemen's Quest, youth sports or a program at church, mentorship comes in many forms. And we can all play our part.

As state attorney, I often see the consequences when young people make poor decisions. What the public doesn't always see are the success stories that happen because a coach, mentor or teacher took time to help a student realize his potential. Those stories may not make headlines, but they are helping build a safer and stronger community every day.

That is why I offered internships and job interviews to students at the Gentlemen's Quest Gala. We want these young men to see themselves in the courtroom one day as an attorney, a bailiff or a judge. Because sometimes the difference between success and failure is not talent or intelligence. It's whether someone is given a chance.

One day, I believe Gadson will walk into a courtroom as an attorney. Not only because he is smart and ambitious, but also because he has people in his corner who have helped him get there. That combination is powerful, and it is exactly why mentorship matters.

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. The office staff consists of approximately 320 dedicated public servants including 130 prosecutors, as well as investigators, victim advocates and support staff. The office handles approximately 50,000 cases every year. To learn more about the organization or apply to become part of the team, visit www.sao13th.com.

CHANGING NARRATIVE: INSIDE BRANDON'S YOUTH GRIEF SUPPORT PROGRAM

By Srishti Tripathi



When Keisha Wheeler's husband passed away, she was suddenly a widowed mother of seven navigating a world of profound loss. She quickly realized that grief ignores age, watching her 1 and 3-year-old children deeply feel their father's absence. When the local grief support group that helped her family heal ceased operations, Wheeler knew she had to act. Driven by faith, community and necessity, she founded Hand in Hand, a grassroots nonprofit dedicated to supporting grieving children and caregivers.

Every Tuesday evening, Hand in Hand transforms a local space into a comforting haven. The night begins with a shared light meal, followed by age-appropriate activities like art, storytelling and peer discussions. Simultaneously, a caregiver group provides adults with tools to support their children while navigating their own sorrow. Wheeler intentionally cultivates an environment where joy and grief coexist freely, ensuring no emotion is hidden.

"At Hand in Hand, there is no pressure to share before you're ready," Wheeler noted. "We simply offer a safe place to be with people who understand."

The organization's profound impact has expanded far beyond Florida. Thanks to University of South Florida (USF) interns, Hand in Hand now reaches families in states such as Texas, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Georgia through virtual support groups and personalized touches like handwritten cards. Wheeler views her own children as 'grief ambassadors' who help lead this mission, embodying the spirit of service they practiced alongside their late father.

"Serving others has become part of their healing," Wheeler shared. "It reminds them that even in the midst of loss, there is still purpose."

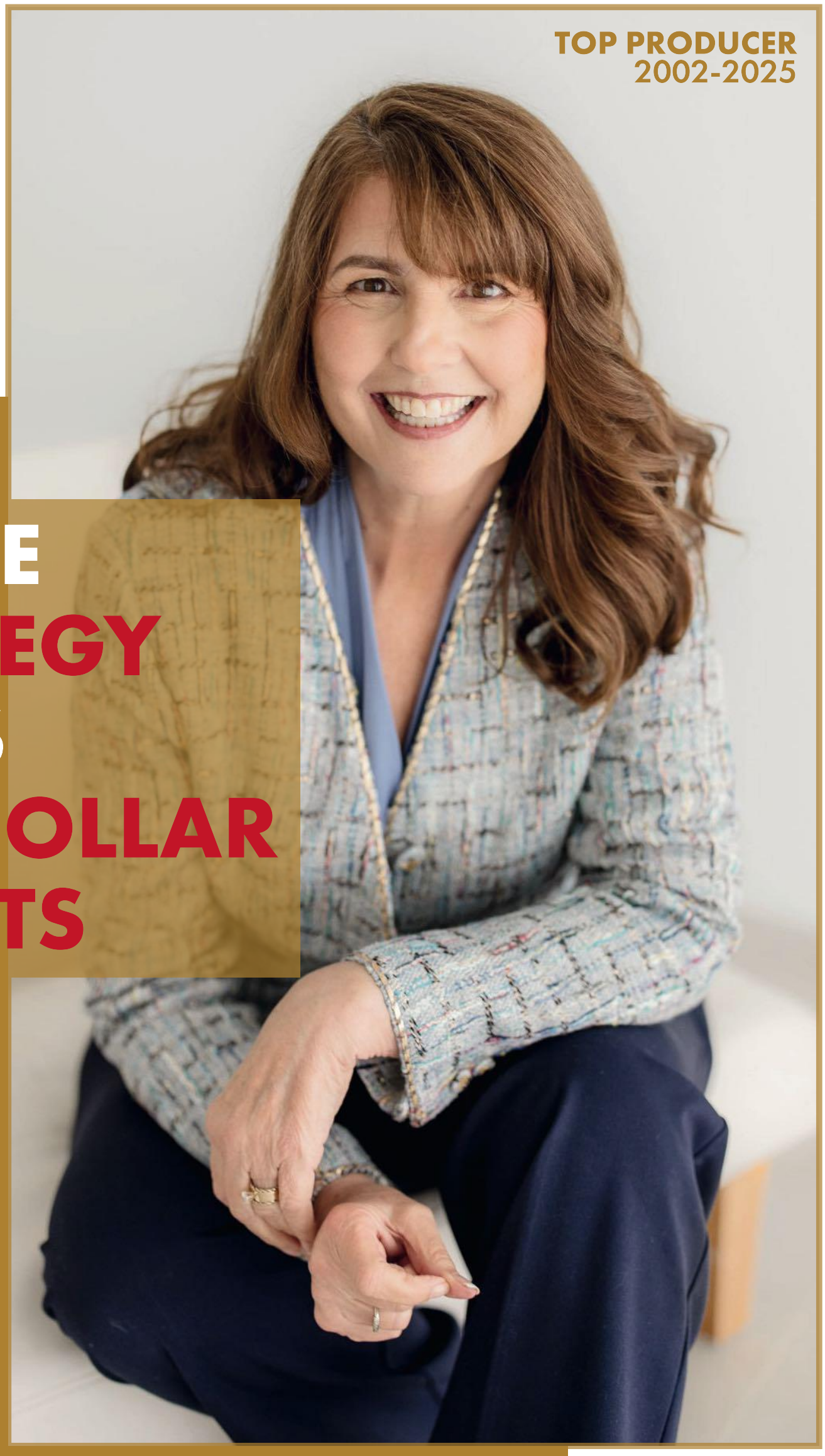
Operating entirely on donations and volunteers, Hand in Hand aims to welcome 25 additional families in Brandon through the generosity of St. Andrew's United Methodist Church. To secure sustainable funding, the organization is looking forward to its annual October fundraising gala, Art Heals the Heart, hosted by The Regent, which showcases artwork from local artists and participants.

Looking ahead, Wheeler envisions 'The Oasis of Hope,' a 3 to 5-acre healing farm in Hillsborough County where families can find quiet retreat. Ultimately, her mission is to completely reshape how society views loss.

"I always tell the children, 'Your grief is welcome here,'" Wheeler said. "My hope is that one day they won't need a special place to hear those word, that every grieving child will grow up in a community that understands grief."



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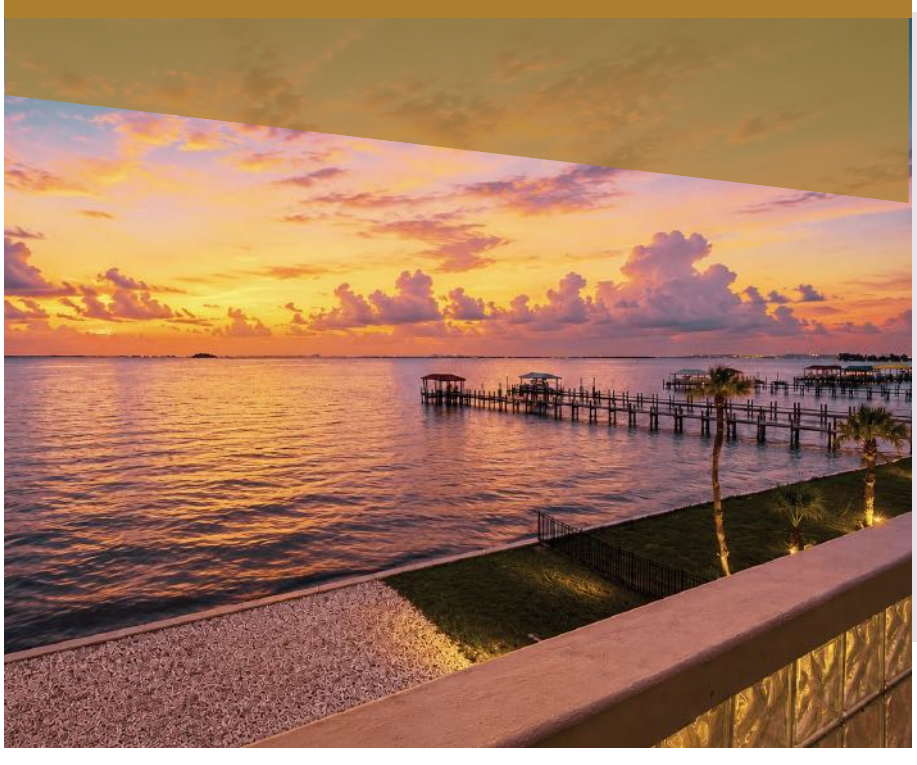
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Piano Concert, American Legion Meeting, Brunch & More....

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

Pianist Alan Curtis Tripp returns for a special appearance at the United Methodist Church of Sun City Center

Alan Tripp is an accomplished pianist, entertainer, composer, educator, and advocate whose diverse performance career spans two decades. Proficient in Classical, Jazz, Pop, and Sacred styles, he is equally at home in the concert hall, the church, the theater, and the jazz club.

Alan also serves extensively in charity and concert work through MissionGo, appearing as a musical missionary at a number of events for an organization that has ministered in more than 40 countries for over 80 years. He feels deeply called to use music to benefit audiences, bring healing, encouragement, and inspiration, and help address serious world issues.

Alan is honored to return for his July 24, 2026 concert at Sun City United Methodist Church, where he has performed many times over the years.

Tickets are $20 Advance $25 At the Door and are available at the Pages of Life Book Store Sun 9:30-12:30 and M-Th-10:00-2:00, Church Office M-Th 8:30-4:00 and online at lovethelight.org/events.

Adults Celebrate Their Bar And Bat Mitzvahs

On June 27 Beth Israel celebrated as five adult congregants became a bar or bat mitzvah, two of whom are recent converts to Judaism. After several months of study and preparation, they were called to the Torah, the sacred scroll containing the first five books of the scriptures. They each said and received special blessings and delivered a D'var Torah, a special commentary on the scriptures read, or on the occasion itself. Following the service, there was a special luncheon in their honor.

Beth Israel is located at 1115 E. Del Webb Blvd in Sun City Center.



Sun City Center American Legion Meeting

The next meeting of the Sun City Center American Legion Post 246 will be held on Friday, August 21, at 9:30 a.m. in Room 3, CA Community Hall,1910 South Pebble Beach Blvd., Sun City Center.

The guest speaker will be Bonina Garcia, Assistant Branch Manager of the South Shore Regional Library. She will share the many free services offered through the Hillsborough County Public Library System. In addition to the usual books and DVDs, patrons have access to online eBooks, magazines and audiobooks.

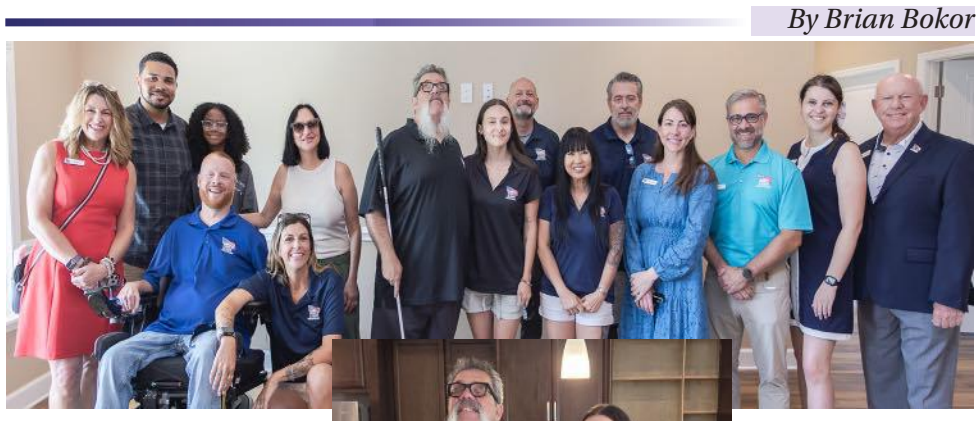
Coffee and donuts will be available at the 9:00 a.m. social time. All veterans, spouses and veteran's caregivers are welcome. For more information, call Paul Wheat at 813-391-7309 or e-mail at pawheatjr@aol.com.

Beth Israel to Host Sumptuous Brunch for Prospective Members

Beth Israel will have a sumptuous brunch for prospective members on Sunday, August 16th at 11 am in its social hall at 1115 E. Del Webb Blvd, Sun City Center. There is no charge for the brunch of coffee, bagels, lox, and whitefish salad with all the trimmings. This is an opportunity for prospective members to meet Beth Israel's new full-time rabbi, Adam Ruditsky, to make new friends, and learn about Beth Israel. To RSVP for the brunch contact Pam at membership@jcscc.org by August 13th.

HOMES FOR OUR TROOPS WELCOMES BLINDED ARMY VETERAN TO HIS NEW ADAPTED LITHIA HOME

By Brian Bokor





Reps from Homes For Our Troops and Lithia neighbors gathered to welcome Army Sgt. 1st Class Aaron Cornelius and daughter Gabby to their new home.

Army Sgt. 1st Class Aaron Cornelius received the keys to a mortgage-free, specially adapted custom home in Lithia on June 13, becoming the recipient of Homes For Our Troops' (HFOT) 50th home built and donated in Florida.

Cornelius was blinded in an IED blast during his third combat deployment in Iraq in 2008. The custom-built home is designed to provide the safety, accessibility and technology needed to help him navigate the next chapter of his life with greater independence.

The milestone home reflects the mission of Homes For Our Troops, a nonprofit organization that builds specially adapted homes for severely injured post-9/11 veterans.

Built by Elizabeth Evans Custom Homes, the residence was tailored specifically to Cornelius' needs and incorporates a variety of features that make everyday tasks safer and more accessible.

Features include a home automation package with voice-activated controls, smart locks, security cameras, smart blinds and voice communication systems.

For Cornelius, the day marked the culmination of nearly three years of planning and anticipation.

"I think this is just going to be a blessing moving forward," Cornelius added. "I can be at peace and help others in my life. I'm just so excited about this place. It's incredible."

One of the reasons Cornelius chose Florida was to be closer to his daughter, Gabby.

Gabby said watching her father receive the home after years of waiting was a special moment.

"I know he was a little nervous, but I think he's super excited," she said.

The ceremony also featured a special presentation of Ray-Ban Meta smart glasses, which are now being made available to eligible legally blind veterans through a newly announced partnership between Meta and the Blinded Veterans Association. The AI-powered glasses can assist users by reading text, identifying objects, recognizing colors and helping with everyday tasks through voice commands.

Founded in 2004, Homes For Our Troops builds specially adapted custom homes to help injured post-9/11 veterans rebuild their lives.

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FINDING WHAT WORKS FOR YOUR FAMILY



If there's one thing I've learned as an autism mom, it's this: We are always learning.

Just when we think we have something figured out, our loved ones grow, their needs change and sometimes we find ourselves looking for new answers. As parents and caregivers, we all want the same thing: to help our loved ones with autism live the healthiest, happiest and most fulfilling life possible.

But there is no one-size-fits-all approach to autism.

As a mom to a 21-year-old son with profound autism, I know this firsthand. Over the years, my husband and I have tried different therapies, medications and treatments. Some have helped, some haven't and some worked for a season. We have learned to adjust, ask questions and remain open to trying something new when needed.

Progress doesn't always come in huge, life-changing moments. Sometimes it's better sleep, fewer difficult days, trying a new food, communicating a need, tolerating a haircut or enjoying a family outing. Those small wins matter. Celebrate them!

My biggest advice? Pay attention and keep track.

Write down changes you notice in sleep, behavior, communication, eating and daily routines. Take notes before appointments. Keep a list of questions because, if you're like me, half of them will disappear from your mind the second the doctor walks into the room. Don't be afraid to ask questions, request more information or seek a second opinion.

Your family may choose behavioral therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, medication or other treatments and supports. Another family may make completely different choices. That's OK.

Connecting with other autism families, both in person and online, can also be helpful.

Another parent's experience may introduce you to something you didn't know existed or simply give you a better question to ask. Just remember: Someone else's experience is information, not a guarantee.

When it comes to medical decisions, work with health care professionals.

You don't have to have all the answers today. Keep learning, keep advocating and keep finding what works best for YOUR loved one and YOUR family. That's what matters most.



THE HIDDEN DANGERS OF CRYPTO SCAMS

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
CHAD CHRONISTER, SHERIFF

As more Americans explore digital currency, scammers are increasingly targeting seniors. While cryptocurrency has legitimate uses, it has also become a preferred tool for criminals. One of the greatest risks comes from crypto kiosks — machines similar to ATMs that allow users to buy cryptocurrency with cash.

Crypto kiosks offer convenience but carry significant risks. Unlike traditional bank or credit card transactions, cryptocurrency transfers are irreversible. Once funds are sent, they cannot be recovered, making these kiosks a favorite tool of scammers. Many kiosks also charge transaction fees of 10 percent to 30 percent or more and provide few consumer protections.

Scammers commonly convince victims to withdraw cash and deposit it into a crypto kiosk by claiming they must 'protect' their bank account, pay taxes or fees, verify an account or claim a prize. By the time victims realize they've been deceived, their money is gone.

Recognizing this growing threat, Florida enacted Florida Bill 505, which establishes new consumer protections for crypto kiosks. The law increases oversight, requires stronger consumer disclosures and provides additional tools for law enforcement to investigate kiosk-related fraud.

The legislation was developed and presented to Senator Darryl Rouson and Representative Mike Owen. Through testimony from law enforcement about real-world crypto scams, Rouson and Owen successfully guided the bill through the Florida Legislature. Their efforts transformed heartbreaking stories into meaningful protections for Florida residents, particularly older adults.

To protect yourself:

- Never use a crypto kiosk because someone contacts you by phone, email, text or social media and tells you to.
- Treat any request to convert cash into cryptocurrency as a major warning sign.
- Speak with a trusted family member or financial advisor before making large or unfamiliar financial transactions.
- Report suspected crypto scams immediately to your local law enforcement agency.

Cryptocurrency itself is not the problem — criminals exploit unfamiliar technology to steal from unsuspecting victims. By understanding how crypto kiosk scams work and taking advantage of the protections created through Florida Bill 505, seniors and their families can reduce their risk of becoming victims.

Stay informed, stay skeptical and never let anyone rush you into making financial decisions.



MAJOR SCHOOL SUMMER UPGRADES UNDERWAY ACROSS COUNTY

By Superintendent Van Ayres



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

While students and families enjoy a well-earned summer break, Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) is hard at work transforming campuses across the district. Funded through the voter-approved half-penny sales tax and state capital dollars, dozens of projects are underway to ensure students return to safe, modern and engaging learning environments this fall.

Summer improvements include air conditioning upgrades, drainage repairs and refreshed media centers. Below are some of the schools receiving air conditioning repairs or replacements:

- Alafia Elementary School – $7.1 million, air conditioning repair/replacement
- Apollo Beach K-8 School – $3.6 million, air conditioning repair/replacement
- Armwood High School – $11.5 million, air conditioning repair/replacement
- Stowers Elementary School – $4.3 million, air conditioning repair/replacement
- Turkey Creek Middle School – $8.9 million, air conditioning repair/replacement

Construction is also progressing on major long-term projects across the district. Most recently, HCPS celebrated a topping-off ceremony for the new middle school in the Wimauma area, marking a significant milestone. The school, scheduled to open in August 2027, will help accommodate continued growth in southern Hillsborough County and provide students with a state-of-the-art learning environment.

These improvements go beyond bricks and mortar. Updated, well-maintained schools foster student engagement, support academic success and build pride among students, staff and families. Creating safe, comfortable and inspiring spaces remains a top priority as the district prepares for the upcoming school year.

These investments are made possible through the continued support of Hillsborough County voters and taxpayers. As of May 31, 2026, the half-penny sales tax has generated more than $1.33 billion, with more than $1.29 billion already invested in school improvement projects. Notably, more than $704 million has been awarded to local businesses, ensuring these dollars also strengthen the local economy.

To learn more about current projects and how the half-penny sales tax continues to support school improvements, visit https://www.hillsboroughschools.org/page/half-penny-sales-tax-referendum.

NATIONAL PBS SERIES HOSTED BY MICHELLE VALENTINE FEATURES SOUTH COUNTY SITES

Staff Report



Love, Eat, Travel, hosted and produced by seasoned traveler and speaker Michelle Valentine, uncovers the heart and soul of hidden gem locations in Pennsylvania, Louisiana, and Florida. Valentine explores the history, culture, and food to be found in each location, while introducing viewers to the passionate locals who bring these destinations to life. The July episode airing in the Tampa Bay Market on PBS features:

Happy Valley, Pennsylvania - 101

Michelle visits a traditional Amish farm to learn the art of cheese making; enjoys farm-to-table dining; explores Penn's Cave and Wildlife Park where she takes a guided motorboat ride through the famous limestone cave and rides a safari bus through the wild animal encounter park; joins a local for a lesson in fly fishing; tours the historic Columbus Chapel and Boal Mansion museum; and joins in the dancing at the Grange country fair, celebrating its 149th year.

St. Landry Parish, Louisiana - 102

Michelle delves into the area's deep-rooted Creole and Cajun traditions and plays the rubboard in a jam session with a local Zydeco band, discovers the essential ingredients and techniques in a traditional gumbo, visits the Creole Heritage Folklife Center, learns how to create a traditional pecan praline gateau nana from a beloved French recipe, and tours the Shrine of St. John Berchmans.

SouthShore, Florida - 103

Michelle's journey begins at the TECO Manatee Viewing Center, a conservation facility protecting Florida's gentle giants; visits Elmira's Wildlife Sanctuary to meet Stanley, a rescued black bear who has captured the hearts of locals and visitors alike; tours the Paleo Preserve Fossil Museum to discover the history of Florida's ancient marine life; and enjoys a lively tour of the International Independent Showmen's Museum, which preserves the tradition of traveling carnivals and circus performers.

The series is presented nationally by WTTW Chicago and distributed to public television stations by NETA (National Educational Telecommunications Association). The series is produced by Michelle Valentine and directed by Lawrence Bakerman, Apollo Beach residents.

"I'm thrilled to bring Love Eat Travel to public television viewers nationwide. More than just a show, it's a heartfelt journey through America's hidden gems, rich cultures, and unforgettable people."

For more information, visit the website at www.MichelleValentine.tv.

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PANDA EXPRESS OPENS IN APOLLO BEACH WITH DONATION TO CHARITY

Staff Report





Local flavor just got a major upgrade. Panda Express, the nation's largest American Chinese dining concept, officially opened its highly anticipated, first-ever Apollo Beach location on Thursday, July 16, drawing crowds of excited residents eager for a taste of the brand's signature flavors.

The brand-new restaurant, located at 5577 N. US Highway 41, kicked off its grand opening with a lively community celebration and official ribbon-cutting ceremony at 9:30 a.m. The energy was high as the first 88 guests waiting in line were rewarded with exclusive, limited-edition "Hot Orange Chicken" t-shirts.

A key highlight of the opening festivities was Panda Express's immediate commitment to supporting the local community. During the opening ceremony, restaurant leadership presented a $1,000 donation check to the Wimauma Boys & Girls Club at Bethune Park. The funds will directly support the club's vital after-school programs and local youth outreach efforts.

In addition to bringing its world-famous wok-fired dishes to town, the new location provides a welcome boost to the local economy, employing nearly 40 community members.

The spacious restaurant seats up to 54 guests and showcases the company's modern "Panda Home" design, which beautifully blends Eastern and Western architectural aesthetics. Guests dining inside will experience a vibrant atmosphere featuring:

Traditional red lanterns

A stunning moon gate portal

Vibrant, eye-catching Chinatown-style signs

For busy families and commuters looking for a quick meal on the run, the location also features a convenient, state-of-the-art double drive-thru designed to keep service moving quickly.

With its doors now officially open, Apollo Beach's newest culinary landmark is ready to serve up fresh, delicious favorites to the neighborhood daily.







TWO WOUNDED ARMY VETERANS TO RECEIVE MORTGAGE-FREE HOMES IN RIVERVIEW

By Brian Bokor



Two wounded U.S. Army veterans are preparing to begin a new chapter after being selected to receive mortgage-free homes in Riverview through PulteGroup's Built to Honor program in partnership with Building Homes for Heroes.

Army Spc. Ryan Heard and Army Sgt. Carson Shaw were honored during a groundbreaking ceremony on June 24 for their future homes at Spencer Glen, where both houses are expected to be completed by November. The project marks the first time PulteGroup's West Florida Division has awarded two Built to Honor homes at the same time.

According to PulteGroup, company leaders chose to honor both veterans after hearing their stories of military service and sacrifice.

Heard enlisted in the Army in 2007 and served two tours in Iraq and one in Afghanistan. In 2013, he suffered a traumatic brain injury when an improvised explosive device detonated during a counter-IED mission in Afghanistan's Logar province. He was later awarded the Purple Heart.

Ryan and his partner, Danielle, are currently living with family as they search for a permanent home where they can raise their children.

"The fact that we're going to go from a single bedroom to our own home means so much to me," Heard told Spectrum News.

Shaw joined the Army in 2019 and achieved his longtime goal of becoming an Army ranger. During six years with the 1st Ranger Battalion, he deployed to Iraq, Syria and Africa before a line-of-duty vehicle accident in October 2024 left him paralyzed from the waist down.

His new home will be specially designed to meet his accessibility needs while allowing him and his partner, Annalisa, to begin the next chapter of their lives together. Shaw is also studying finance and economics and plans to establish a nonprofit organization that provides water-based recreational opportunities for people with disabilities.

When Shaw learned he had been selected, he expressed his gratitude, saying, "Thank you so much. 'Thank you' does not even begin to cover what this means to me and my family."

Built to Honor was launched in 2013 to provide mortgage-free homes to injured veterans and their families. PulteGroup has donated more than 100 homes nationwide, with the Riverview project representing the West Florida Division's seventh and eighth Built to Honor homes.

TAMPA BAY HOME SHOW RETURNS FOR WEEKEND EVENT AT THE FLORIDA STATE FAIRGROUNDS

Staff Report

The Tampa Bay Home Show is returning on Saturday and Sunday, August 1-2.

The largest quality consumer home show in Tampa Bay and on the West Coast is your opportunity to see, learn about and buy the latest home products and services under one roof. Discover the newest design ideas and hottest trends for your home, furniture, garden and more. The Tampa Bay Home Show is your source for everything you need for your home — inside and out.

Come on out and meet Tampa Bay Home Improvement Experts — windows, baths, kitchens, heating & cooling, energy efficiency, landscaping, pools, spas at so much more. See the latest in design trends and new products for your home.

Show up early for the event's daily giveaways and register to win a variety of promotions at individual booths as well as get advice and trade secrets that could be exactly what you need to know to move forward with your next home improvement project.

The first 300 guests each day will receive a free gift.

There is so much to see and do — don't miss the largest home show on Florida's West Coast.

The Tampa Bay Home Show will be held at the Florida State Fairgrounds' Main Expo Hall, located at 4800 U.S. 301 in Tampa. The hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. on Saturday and 10 a.m.-4 p.m. on Sunday.

Admission is free. Register for your free tickets today at www.tampabayhomeshows.com.

Tickets are FREE, Reserve Yours Today!

The first 300 people each day will receive a home show giveaway!

Explore the latest trends, meet industry experts, and discover everything you need to enhance your home and lifestyle.

Event Highlights:

Home Renovation & Design Inspiration: Meet top designers, contractors, and architects who can help turn your vision into reality. Get expert advice on remodeling, décor, and design trends that will elevate your space.

Innovative Home Products & Services: Browse the latest home improvement products, from cutting-edge appliances and smart-home technology to flooring, lighting, and energy-efficient solutions.

Outdoor Living Ideas: Discover products and services to help take your backyard to the next level, from patios and outdoor kitchens to landscaping, pools, and garden décor.

DIY Workshops & Demonstrations: Learn new skills with live workshops on everything from home repairs to creative crafts and décor projects.

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AFFORDABILITY TAKES CENTER STAGE AT LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP EVENT

By Brian Bokor

Long before congressional redistricting, county commission races or school superintendent elections entered the conversation, one word dominated the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce's Legislative Wrap-up breakfast: affordability.

It wasn't framed as politics. It was the reality facing Florida families dealing with rising insurance premiums, grocery bills, utility costs and property taxes.



State Representative Danny Alvarez (left), BRCC President Amber Aaron and Ron Pierce, president and CEO of RSA Consulting Group, pose following the chamber's Legislative Wrap-up breakfast.

State Representative Danny Alvarez (R-Riverview) didn't ease into the topic.

"Everywhere I go as a state representative, the number one thing someone asks me about is affordability. I'm tired of my power bill. I'm tired of my fuel bill. I'm tired of my insurance, my rent, my mortgage, my interest rate," Alvarez told the audience.

That message set the tone for a discussion led by Alvarez and Ron Pierce, president and CEO of RSA Consulting Group, reviewing the 2026 legislative session and issues expected on Hillsborough County's November ballot.

Pierce said the 2026 legislative session required three special sessions to complete the state budget, congressional redistricting and property tax reform.

Much of the discussion focused on a proposed constitutional amendment expanding Florida's homestead exemption while lowering the annual assessment cap on many nonhomestead properties. If approved by at least 60 percent of voters, the changes would take effect in 2027.

Pierce encouraged residents to understand the proposal's potential impact before voting. "Local governments just don't concede they lose that revenue," Pierce said. "They will try to come up with ways to increase revenue."

Alvarez agreed voters should make that decision. "There wasn't a chance that I was not going to give you the ability to say yes or no," he said.

"The citizens are tired. They're super exhausted from getting nickeled and dimed to death while they're trying to survive," he said.

According to Alvarez, affordability will dominate campaigns at every level of government. The speakers also discussed Hillsborough County ballot questions, including expanding the County Commission from seven to nine district-elected members.

Audience questions covered construction permitting, the widening of Lithia Pinecrest Road and the future of the Tampa Bay Rays.

Pierce said approximately $100 million has been committed to the Lithia Pinecrest Road expansion, with construction expected to begin within the next several years.

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NEW OWNERSHIP OF LITTLE GREEK FRESH GRILL RIVERVIEW

Staff Report



The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) recently hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the new ownership of Little Greek Fresh Grill Riverview and welcome owner Joseph Eden as he begins an exciting new chapter for the popular Mediterranean restaurant.

Guests gathered for an afternoon of networking, delicious food and community celebration. Attendees enjoyed sampler platters featuring Little Greek Fresh Grill's fresh Mediterranean favorites, along with opportunities to win exciting prizes, including free gyros and gift cards.

Chamber President Amber Aaron welcomed guests and thanked them for attending and supporting a fellow chamber member. She then introduced Eden, who shared his vision for the restaurant and his commitment to providing exceptional customer service while becoming an active partner in the Riverview community.

Little Greek Fresh Grill Riverview is a locally owned and operated restaurant focused on becoming the area's go-to destination for fresh Mediterranean cuisine, reliable catering services and a welcoming dining experience. Beyond serving quality food, the restaurant is committed to supporting local schools, businesses, hospitals and organizations while building lasting relationships throughout the community.

A special proclamation was presented by Honorary Mayor of Brandon Riverview and BRCC Ambassador Abe Agosto (Mortgage Coach Abe), officially proclaiming June 22 as Little Greek Fresh Grill Day in recognition of the occasion and the restaurant's dedication to serving the community.

"Ribbon cuttings are an opportunity to celebrate businesses that are investing in our community," said Aaron. "We are excited to welcome Joseph Eden as the new owner of Little Greek Fresh Grill Riverview and look forward to seeing the positive impact the restaurant will continue to have throughout the Riverview area."

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce congratulates Eden and the entire Little Greek Fresh Grill Riverview team and encourages the community to stop by, enjoy its favorite Mediterranean dishes and support this valued chamber member.

About Little Greek Fresh Grill Riverview

Little Greek Fresh Grill Riverview is a locally owned and operated restaurant offering fresh Mediterranean cuisine, catering services and exceptional customer service. Dedicated to building strong community relationships, the restaurant strives to provide a welcoming atmosphere while supporting local schools, businesses, hospitals and organizations throughout the Riverview area.

DONATE SCHOOL SUPPLIES AT ALL TAX COLLECTOR OFFICES

Staff Report



When students are prepared and equipped with everything they need for the school year without teachers needing to spend out of their own pocket for supplies, everyone wins. That's why the Hillsborough County Tax Collector's Office is once again supporting the Hillsborough Education Foundation by hosting a school supply drive throughout the month of July. This marks over 16 years of collaboration between the two organizations to ensure local students have the tools they need to succeed in the classroom.

All Hillsborough County Tax Collector's offices will serve as donation drop-off locations, collecting essential school supplies that will be distributed through the Hillsborough Education Foundation's Teaching Tools Store. The store provides free supplies to teachers across the county, with special emphasis on supporting educators from schools serving underprivileged communities.

"Every year, our team looks forward to this drive because we see firsthand what it means to our local teachers and students," said Nancy Millan, Hillsborough County tax collector. "A backpack full of supplies can be the difference between a student walking into class feeling ready and confident or feeling like they're already behind. This is our way of making sure every child starts the school year prepared to succeed."

Last year, the Hillsborough County tax collector team and generous community members donated over 34,000 items, and they are hoping to exceed that goal for this year. These supplies directly benefit teachers and students throughout Hillsborough County's public schools, particularly those in areas where families face financial challenges in preparing for the school year.

The Hillsborough Education Foundation has supported public education in the county through advocacy, resource investment, and innovative programs. Its Teaching Tools Store serves as a vital resource for educators who often spend their own money on classroom supplies.

The most-needed supply items include copy paper, pencils, pens, notebooks, composition books, crayons, markers, colored pencils, glue sticks, scissors, folders, binders, backpacks, hand sanitizer and tissues.

Community members are encouraged to drop off new school supplies at any Tax Collector's Office location during regular business hours throughout July. For a complete list of office locations and hours, visit www.hillstaxfl.gov/location/.

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Upcoming Sessions:	9:30am-11:00am
April 7 - May 14	Tuesdays
June 2 -June 30	OR
July 1- August 5	Thursdays
August 18 - September 24	(Bilingual/Spanish)

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MEET YOUR CANDIDATES

SPECIAL SECTION INSIDE

Know The Key Dates And The Three Ways To Vote Ahead Of Florida's Primary Election

Staff Report



In order to be an effective voter, you must be an informed voter. You need to know the key dates, know the three methods of voting available to every voter in Hillsborough County and wear your "I Voted Sticker" proudly.

Are You Ready To Vote?

The 2026 primary election is right around the corner, so I want to know — are you ready to vote? You still have time to register to vote, request a vote-by-mail ballot and make changes to your voter information.

Primary Election Dates & Deadlines

Deadline to register/change party: passed on Monday, July 20.

Deadline to request a vote-by-mail ballot: Thursday, August 6, 5 p.m.

Votes by mail: Due to our office no later than 7 p.m. on Tuesday, August 18.

Early voting: Monday, August 3, through Sunday, August 16, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.

Election day:

Tuesday, August 18, 7 a.m.-7 p.m.

Call our office at 813-744-5900 or visit our website and use the Voter Information Lookup tool at www.votehillsborough.gov to check your status and make any updates.

The deadline for candidates to qualify for the ballot was June 12. Visit the Local Candidates & Committees page of our website to see local candidates who qualified with our office, and the Candidates and Races database on the Division of Elections website at https://dos.elections.myflorida.com/candidates/ to see who qualified with them. Sample ballots showing the races that will be on your primary election ballot will be available on our website next month.



Understanding Primaries

During the primary, political parties nominate state and local candidates to move on to the general election. The races that appear on your ballot depend on where you live and what party you belong to.

Florida has closed primaries, which means that you must be registered with a political party to vote in that party's primary races. However, the primary election will also include nonpartisan contests that everybody votes on, whether affiliated with a party or not.

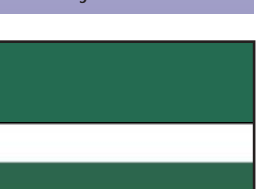
There will be three different ballots: a Republican ballot, a Democratic ballot and a nonpartisan ballot. Nonpartisan judicial and school board races will be on everyone's ballot, and voters in State Senate District 16, State House District 62 and State House District 63 will have a Universal Primary Contest on their ballot. Universal Primary Contests occur when all candidates for a seat have the same party affiliation and the winner would be unopposed in the general election.



Voters living in Temple Terrace and some special taxing districts will also have a referendum on the ballot.

Take a look at this quick video that explains Florida's closed primaries: https://vimeo.com/676448886.

Legislative Updates For 2026 — What's Changed?



You may live in a different congressional district because the legislature changed the district boundaries this year. Those changes affect which candidates will be on your ballot. We're sending new voter information cards to all voters so you can see all of your voting districts at a glance.

What Hasn't Changed?

Florida's voter registration and voting ID requirements haven't changed for the 2026 election. If you plan to vote in person, go to www.votehillsborough.gov and search "What to Bring" to find the list of acceptable ID.

The Last Word

Your signature can change over time — and the signature on file is used to verify your identity on vote-by-mail ballots, provisional ballots and petitions. Call us at 813-744-5900, go to www.votehillsborough.gov or visit any of our offices or public libraries to get a voter registration application (https://registertovoteflorida.gov/home) and update your signature so that you are #ElectionReady for 2026.



REQUESTING A VOTE BY MAIL BALLOT IS EASY:

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3. By Fax: (813) 744-5843
4. In Person: at any of our Supervisor of Elections

REQUESTING VOTE BY MAIL FOR YOURSELF, YOU MUST OFFICES

1. Your name and home address
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4. Your signature (for written requests)

POLITICALLY SPEAKING

YOUR VOTE COUNTS

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER DISTRICT 2



Brittany Lyssy
www.votebrittanylyssy.com

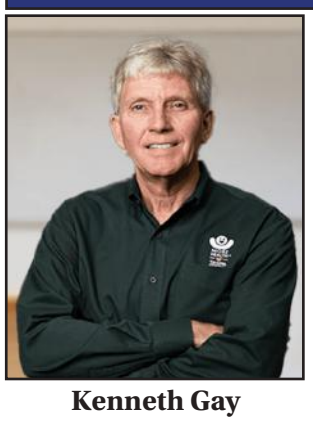


Daniela Simic
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Chris Taylor
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SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER DISTRICT 6



Kenneth Gay
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Sally Harris Williamson
www.sallyharris.org



Karen Perez
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Gwen Myers
www.votegwenmyers.com

COUNTY COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 5



Donna Cameron Cepeda
https://donnacameroncepeda.com



Stacy Hahn
www.votestacyhahn.com

COUNTY COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 7



Aileen Rodriguez
www.voteaileen2026.com



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www.facebook.com/VoteCindyStuart

13TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT GROUP 7



Luis Aguila
www.louieforjudge.com



Sara Peacock
www.sarapeacockforjudge.com

13TH JUDICIAL COURT GROUP 13



Nina McGucken Alvarez
www.electnina.com



Jim Wimsatt
www.jimforjudge.com





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.

T.O.C.M.B.

2 Chr 29:3
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WHO'S GOT YOUR VOTE?

SARA PEACOCK
13TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, GROUP 7

Staff Report



Few judicial candidates bring the combination of experience, community involvement and professional respect that Sara Peacock offers. A Tampa native, Peacock has spent her life in the community she now seeks to serve as a circuit judge.

Inspired by her parents, who are both attorneys, for the past 15 years Peacock has built a legal career that has prepared her for the responsibilities of the bench. Her experience includes family law, criminal defense and civil litigation, giving her a broad understanding of the issues that come before the circuit court. She has handled matters affecting individuals and families, earning a reputation for fairness, professionalism and sound judgment.

The respect Peacock has earned throughout her career is reflected in the broad support she has received from the legal community. Her endorsements include a retired chief justice of the Florida Supreme Court, numerous retired appellate and circuit court judges, the retired Hillsborough County public defender and more than 30 former presidents of local and statewide bar associations. Those who have worked with Peacock and observed her career firsthand recognize in her the qualities of an outstanding judge.

Away from the courtroom, Peacock is deeply involved in her community. She is married to Jason Bartos, and they have two children. She volunteers at her children's school, serves as 'Cookie Mom' for her daughter's Girl Scout troop, sings with the Tampa Oratorio Singers, volunteers with efforts to help children facing food insecurity and serves as an elder at Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church, where she has been a lifelong member. Her commitment to service reflects the same values of responsibility and leadership that have guided her legal career.

Peacock understands that judges make decisions that affect real people and real families. She believes every person deserves to be treated with fairness, dignity and respect, and that every case deserves careful preparation and thoughtful consideration.

Those qualities have defined Peacock's career and make her the right choice for circuit judge.

For more about Peacock, visit her website at www.sarapeacockforjudge.com.

MIKE BELTRAN
FLORIDA CONGRESS DISTRICT 14

Staff Report



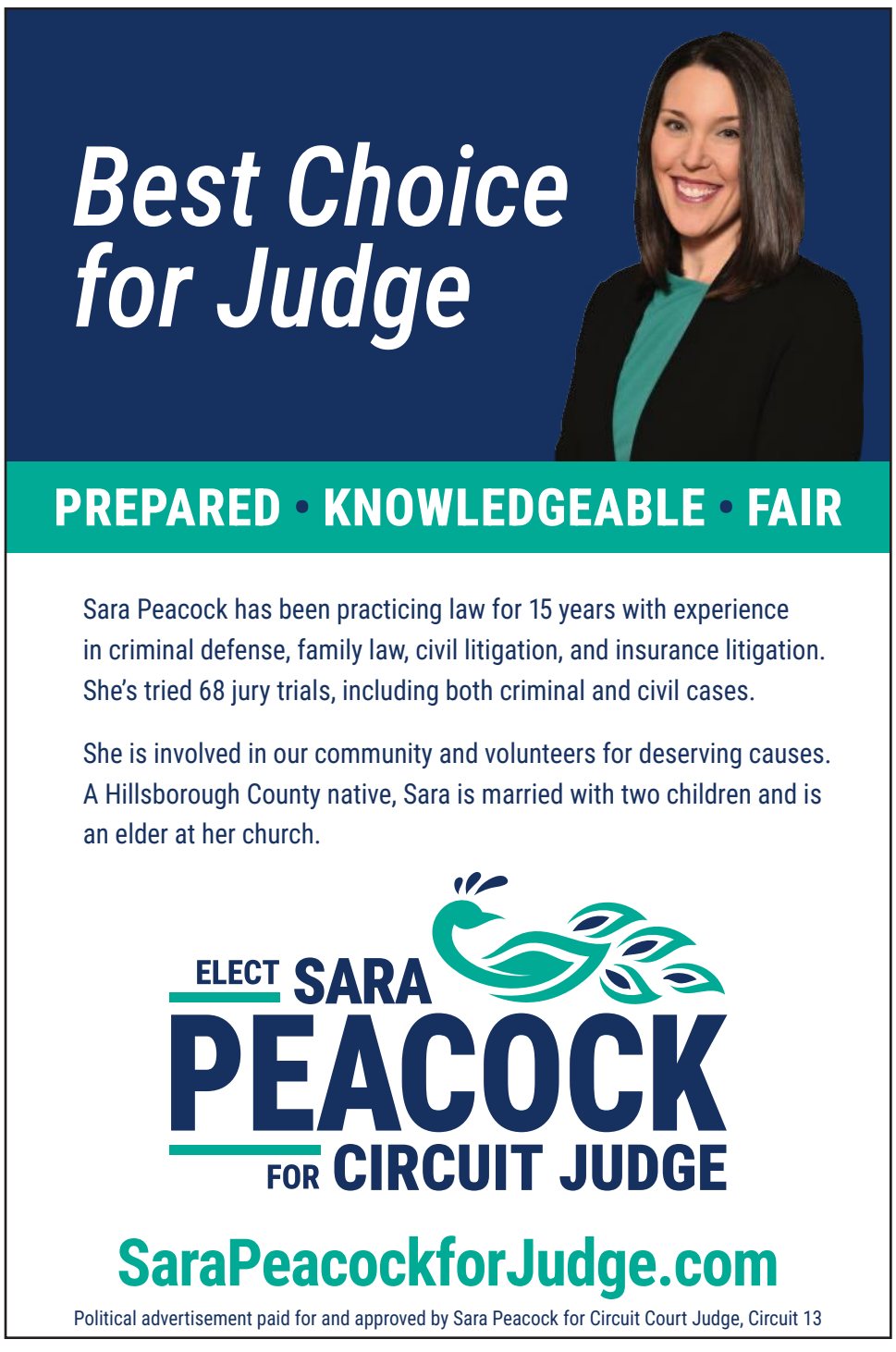
Former Conservative Republican State Representative Mike Beltran is running for Congress District 14 - a newly configured district that includes all of South and East Hillsborough, including Brandon, Riverview, Valrico, Lithia, Bloomingdale, Durant, Sun City Center, Apollo Beach, Ruskin, Wimauma, Balm, Gibsonton, Plant City, Dover, and Seffner as well as South and West Tampa.

For six years, Beltran served the people of Southern and Eastern Hillsborough County as their voice in Tallahassee. Beltran is a leader on issues related to the judiciary and constitution and is a fierce advocate for Hillsborough County. He was appointed by Governors Rick Scott and Ron DeSantis to the Judicial Nominating Commission for Florida's Thirteenth Circuit Court in Hillsborough County.

"I'm running for Congress to fight to defend the Constitution, preserve individual liberty, uphold the rule of law and preserve the American Dream for my sons' generation." Beltran is Pro-life, Pro-Trump, will be tough on violent crime and illegal immigration, and has promised to pursue a constitutional amendment to redress birth tourism and anchor babies. Beltran is endorsed by Gun Owners of America, over 20 current or former Florida State legislators, including Former Senate President Tom Lee, over a dozen local officials, including Commissioner Josh Wostal, over ten former judges or JNC members, over ten local Republican Club officials, four previous candidates for FL-14, four Trump lawyers, including a former Ambassador, and many veterans and high-ranking officers and law enforcement personnel, including two Generals and three Colonels.

Beltran is also an Eagle Scout and takes pride in this formative experience he had growing up. He attended the University of Pennsylvania and graduated in 2005 with a B.A. and honors in international relations, magna cum laude. He then went on to earn his law degree from Harvard Law School in 2008 before moving to Florida in 2010, where he served as a law clerk to a federal district judge. Beltran has been recognized as an Outstanding Young Florida Lawyer. He is still a practicing business attorney by trade, and he is happily married to his wife, Hope. The couple have two young sons, Michael and Ross.

For more, visit Beltran's campaign website at www.beltranforcongress.com.





POLITICALLY SPEAKING

NINA ALVAREZ
13TH JUDICIAL COURT, GROUP 13

Staff Report



For Nina McGucken Alvarez, serving the people of Hillsborough County is both a professional calling and a personal mission. As a third-generation Tampanian and lifelong resident of Hillsborough County, Alvarez has spent her life building strong connections within the community she proudly calls home. Her commitment to fairness, justice and public service has guided a legal career spanning more than 17 years and has earned her a reputation as a compassionate advocate and skilled attorney.

Alvarez brings a diverse range of legal experience to her work. For the past decade, she has been the owner of McGucken Alvarez, P.A., a law firm concentrating in family law, probate and guardianship matters. Through her private practice, she has helped families navigate some of life's most challenging circumstances with compassion, professionalism and a steadfast commitment to protecting their rights.

In addition to her private practice, Alvarez serves as assistant regional counsel with the Office of Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional Counsel in Tampa. She is privileged to serve as the only attorney in Hillsborough County appointed to represent indigent clients with developmental disabilities. This unique role reflects both her specialized legal knowledge and her passion for advocating for vulnerable members of the community. Her work in public service has provided her with extensive courtroom experience and reinforced her belief that every individual deserves equal access to justice, regardless of their circumstances.

She has also served for 15 years on the Hillsborough County court-appointed registry for incapacity, guardianship and guardian advocacy matters, gaining valuable insight into the legal and personal challenges faced by families and individuals requiring court protection.

Beyond her professional achievements, Alvarez is deeply rooted in family values. She has been married for 19 years and is the proud mother of two daughters. Her career and family have shaped her understanding of the issues that matter most to local families and strengthened her commitment to ensuring every person has a voice and a fair chance at justice.

With experience, integrity and a lifelong dedication to Hillsborough County, Nina McGucken Alvarez remains focused on our community with fairness, impartiality and respect for the rule of law.

SALLY HARRIS
SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER, DIST. 6

By McKenzie Brown



Longtime educator, business owner and community leader Sally Harris has dedicated her life to improving educational opportunities for children and families throughout Hillsborough County. Now, she hopes to continue that work by bringing her experience and ideas back to public service.

Harris founded Circle C Ranch Academy in Tampa in 1985, launching what would become one of the area's most respected early childhood education programs. For nearly four decades, the academy has earned local, regional and national recognition for excellence, receiving repeated national accreditations and maintaining the Florida Department of Children & Families Gold Seal of Excellence since 1999.

Beyond her work in education, Harris has been actively involved in the community. She has been a member of the South Tampa Chamber of Commerce since 1984 and served as its president from 1988-89. She has also held leadership positions with several professional and civic organizations, including the Florida Vocational Association, the Business and Professional Women's Association and the Hillsborough Association for Child Care Professionals.

Harris previously served on the Hillsborough County School Board from 2014-18 and later served as board chair. During her tenure, district graduation rates increased by 15 percent, reaching 83 percent in 2018. She also championed teacher pay raises, supported workforce development and apprenticeship programs.

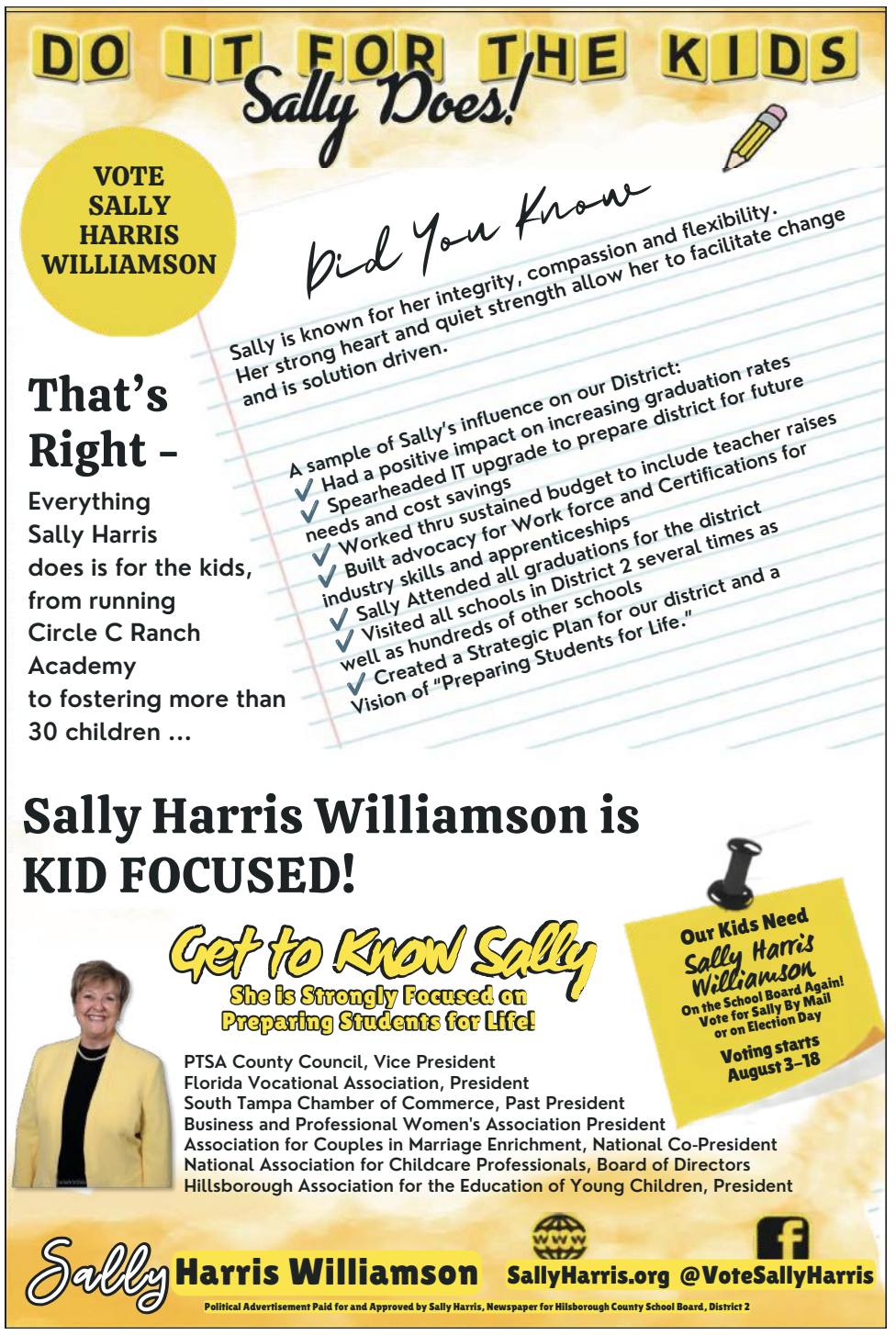
Harris said she decided to run because she believes she can still make a meaningful difference in the lives of students and educators. "I felt like I still had some great ideas and work that could make a difference."

Among her priorities is improving kindergarten readiness. Harris noted that only about 50 percent of children enter kindergarten fully prepared and believes expanding access to the county's free Voluntary Prekindergarten program could help address the issue.

A mother of five, foster parent to more than 30 children and grandmother of nine, Harris has built a career centered on service, leadership and a commitment to helping children succeed.

Contact Sally Harris at 813-766-8429 or visit her online at www.sallyharris.org.





WHO'S GOT YOUR VOTE?

JIM WIMSATT
13TH JUDICIAL COURT, GROUP 13

Staff Report



Jim Wimsatt understands that when people walk into a courtroom, they are often facing some of the most important moments of their lives. Decisions about children, families, homes, finances and futures can have lasting consequences. Those decisions deserve a circuit judge with experience, judgment, compassion and integrity.

Wimsatt has spent the last 22 years building a legal career that reflects those values. A graduate of Georgetown University Law Center, he has earned a reputation as a thoughtful attorney, a respected advocate and a dedicated member of the legal community.

For the past decade, Wimsatt has concentrated on family law, handling cases that affect the future of children, loved ones, homes, jobs and income. That experience is especially important because family law cases account for roughly 40 percent of all circuit court cases in Florida. He understands that behind every case file is a family seeking fairness, stability and justice.

His peers have recognized both his legal ability and his character. Wimsatt has been named to Best Lawyers in America for four consecutive years and Super Lawyers for two consecutive years. He also holds the prestigious AV Preeminent rating from Martindale-Hubbell, an honor awarded to less than 5 percent of attorneys who demonstrate the highest levels of professional excellence, ethics and legal skill.

Outside the courtroom, Wimsatt believes in serving the community he hopes to serve on the bench. He volunteers with organizations that help families in need, serves in community leadership roles and gives his time to mentoring young people through Scouting. He and his wife, Lauren, have been married for 15 years and are raising their two children, Lucy and Beck, in Hillsborough County.

Voters deserve judges who will approach every case with fairness, preparation and respect for the people whose lives are affected by their decisions. Wimsatt has spent his career earning that trust. He has the experience, temperament and integrity to serve the people of Hillsborough County with distinction.

Please vote Jim Wimsatt for circuit judge.

For more information about Wimsatt and his campaign for circuit judge, visit https://jimforjudge.com/.

LUIS 'LOUIE' AGUILA
13TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, GROUP 7

Staff Report



Luis 'Louie' Aguila is a lifelong Tampanian, dedicated public servant, and experienced prosecutor committed to protecting the community he proudly calls home.

Born and raised in Tampa, Aguila attended St. Lawrence Catholic School, graduated from Tampa Catholic High School and earned degrees from Florida College, the University of South Florida and Barry University School of Law.

Aguila's story reflects the American Dream. His father, grandparents and uncle immigrated from Cuba in the early 1960s seeking opportunity and a better future. Through hard work, sacrifice and determination, Aguila's grandfather built a successful family business that became a Tampa tradition. La Ideal and Aguila Sandwich Shop were more than local restaurants — they represented the values of faith, family, perseverance and service that continue to guide Aguila today.

From a young age, Aguila learned that success is earned through hard work and integrity. Those values inspired him to pursue a career in public service.

Since becoming an attorney in 2014, Aguila has devoted his career to seeking justice and protecting families. During eight years with the Hillsborough County State Attorney's Office, he prosecuted serious crimes, including homicide, domestic violence, child abuse, sexual assault and drug trafficking. Today, he serves in the Florida Attorney General's Office as a member of the Cold Case Unit, working to solve unsolved homicides and bringing answers to families who have waited years for justice.

Beyond the courtroom, Aguila is a devoted husband and proud father of two daughters. He is a parishioner of St. Timothy Catholic Church and remains deeply involved in his community. Aguila coaches his daughters' Little League softball team, helping teach the next generation the values of teamwork, discipline and respect.

Luis 'Louie' Aguila is a qualified attorney, proven leader, devoted family man and proud son and grandson of Cuban immigrants. He has spent his career serving the people of Hillsborough County with honor and integrity. Now, he is ready to continue that service as your next circuit court judge.



Families Matter to Jim Wimsatt

Jim Wimsatt is a highly skilled family law attorney. That's important when Family Law Cases make up roughly 40% of all circuit court cases in Florida. Citizens deserve a judge who is knowledgeable, prepared, compassionate and fair when they go to court and the future of the children, loved ones, house, job and income is on the line. ***Jim Wimsatt is the judge you want when you go to court.***

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- Proud husband, father and Little League softball coach



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POLITICALLY SPEAKING

STACY HAHN
COUNTY COMMISSIONER, DIST. 5

By Libby Hopkins



Stacy Hahn has called Hillsborough County home for 25 years.

"My husband, Jeff, and I raised our three sons here because we believe in this community and the opportunities it offers families," Hahn said. "For the past eight years, I've had the privilege of serving on the Hillsborough County School Board, overseeing one of the nation's largest school districts, managing a multibillion-dollar budget and working to protect taxpayer dollars while improving outcomes for students."

Throughout her service, she has listened, turned conversations into action and built partnerships that solve complex challenges. Before serving in elected office, she was professor at the University of South Florida.

"Public service has always been about giving back to the community that has given so much to my family, and I'm committed to continuing that service by helping Hillsborough County remain a place where families and businesses can thrive," Hahn said.

Hahn earned a reputation for fiscal responsibility, transparency and delivering high-quality outcomes for students. She is now running for County Commission, District 5, to bring the same disciplined, results-driven leadership to the community.

"I'm running for county commission to bring that same leadership, accountability and problem-solving approach to the decisions that will shape our community's future," Hahn said. "My priorities are straightforward: protect taxpayers, improve infrastructure, support law enforcement and first responders and ensure growth is planned responsibly so our quality of life is protected."

"Through initiatives like the Early Childhood Literacy Fair, Storytime Online, the Early Childhood Literacy Bus and community book distributions, we've helped thousands of children develop a love of reading before they enter the classroom," Hahn said.

"If elected, I want people to know they have a commissioner who is accessible, prepared, fiscally responsible and committed to making thoughtful decisions that strengthen our community for generations to come," she said. "When we work together, we create deeper, more lasting impacts."

To learn more about Hahn or become involved in her campaign, you can visit her website at www.votestacyhahn.com.

BRITTANY LYSSY
SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER, DIST. 2

Staff Report



Every parent wants to know their child is receiving the best education possible. For Brittany Lyssy, that belief is more than a campaign slogan—it's personal. As she and her husband raise their three young sons in Hillsborough County, Lyssy is committed to helping every student have the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed.

A lifelong Floridian, Lyssy believes the decisions made today will shape the classrooms, opportunities and future of our students. Her husband, a former firefighter who now serves as a physician, shares her lifelong commitment to serving others and strengthening our community.

Running for public office for the first time, Lyssy brings a fresh perspective shaped by her experiences as a mother, community volunteer and professional. She believes the best outcomes happen when families, teachers, principals and school staff work together as partners to help every child succeed. She supports high-quality educational options so parents can choose the learning environment that best meets their child's individual needs. Lyssy also believes schools should prepare students for success after graduation — whether that means college, skilled trades, military service or entering the workforce. Preparing students for success strengthens families and community.

Lyssy earned degrees from the University of Florida and Stetson University College of Law and is pursuing a Ph.D. in public policy at Liberty University. Her professional experience in law and public policy has provided her firsthand experience with analyzing complex issues, understanding budgets and governance and working with school board leaders on ethics, transparency and effective decision-making. She understands that every school board decision directly impacts students, teachers, families and taxpayers.

Her community involvement includes the Junior League of Tampa, the American Cancer Society and service on the City of Tampa Citizens Advisory Budget and Finance Committee.

Lyssy's priorities include strengthening literacy, providing responsible fiscal oversight, increasing transparency and encouraging meaningful parental involvement. She believes the school board should conduct its business with integrity, transparency and accountability because families, educators and taxpayers deserve leadership they can trust.

Vote Brittany Lyssy for Hillsborough County School Board on Tuesday, August 18.

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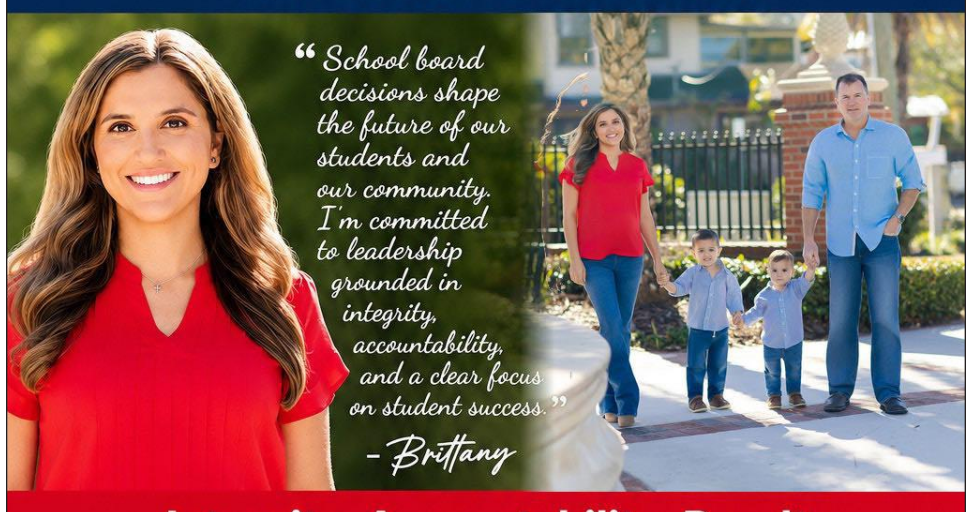


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COME MEET YOUR CANDIDATES AT THE 2026 CANDIDATE CONNECTION

Staff Report



The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is proud to present the 2026 Candidate Connection, formerly known as the Hob Nob, on Thursday, August 6, from 6-8 p.m. at The Regent, located at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview. This year's event, presented by Curry Law Group and powered by RSA Consulting Group, will also commemorate America's 250th birthday, providing a meaningful opportunity for civic engagement while celebrating our nation's history.

Candidate Connection is designed to connect voters with the individuals seeking to serve their communities. The event offers a welcoming, nonpartisan environment where attendees can meet candidates, visit sponsor and community organization booths, learn about local initiatives and public services and engage in meaningful conversations with neighbors and community leaders.

Guests will enjoy light refreshments while networking with local business professionals, elected officials and residents from across Hillsborough County. The event encourages informed civic participation by providing direct access to candidates representing a variety of local, county, state and federal offices.

For attendees seeking a more in-depth experience, VIP admission includes early entry from 5-6 p.m. and exclusive small-group conversations with participating candidates. These sessions provide an opportunity to hear directly from candidates about their visions, priorities and policy positions in a more personal setting.

Candidates currently scheduled to participate include Sara Peacock, judge candidate; Daniela Simic, Hillsborough County School Board; Sally Harris Williamson, Hillsborough County School Board, District 6; Nina McGucken Alvarez, circuit judge; Louie Aguila, judge candidate; Bob Henriquez, Hillsborough County property appraiser; Joshua Wostal, Hillsborough County Commission, District 7; Cindy Stuart, Hillsborough County Commission, District 7; Stacy Hahn, Hillsborough County Commission, District 5 (countywide); Brittany Lyssy, Hillsborough County School Board; Aileen Rodriguez, Hillsborough County Commission, District 7; Kevin Steele, U.S. Congress; and Bea Valenti, U.S. Congress.

Additional candidates may be announced prior to the event.

"Candidate Connection is one of our community's most important civic engagement events," said Amber Aaron, president and CEO of the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce. For ticket information and event details, visit www.centralhillsboroughchamber.com.





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EYE ON BUSINESS

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Deadline: 15th of each month.

Meetup Group Cruise

Whether you're single, traveling solo, a couple, or coming with friends, this is a fantastic opportunity to enjoy an incredible Caribbean vacation while meeting great people along the way. Travel advisor, Matthew Gordon with Cruise Planners – Venture Out Vacation, has secured special group pricing and blocked staterooms just for our Meetup members. This is a 7-Night Western Caribbean Cruise, October 17–24, 2026, roundtrip from Tampa, Florida. Ports of call include Key West, Florida; Roatán, Honduras; Belize City, Belize and Cozumel, Mexico. Plus two relaxing days at sea to enjoy everything the spectacular Margaritaville at Sea Islander has to offer!

For additional information or to book this cruise please visit ventureoutvacation.com or call 717 856 2646.

CARE Bingo Fundraiser

Join Critter Adoption And Rescue Effort (CARE) at Sunset Bar & Grill for a bingo fundraiser on Monday August 10 starting at 7p.m. Come early to get save your table, buy your cards and to order food and drink. Reservations are recommended for parties of six or more, contact Sunset Bar & Grill directly. As well as bingo there will be raffle prizes and a 50/50 drawing. Sunset Bar & Grill is located in Little Harbor at 602 Bahia Del Sol, in Ruskin.





Beth Israel Welcomes New Rabbi at Festive Cocktail Party

On Sunday, July 5th, close to 130 congregants and invited guests welcomed Beth Israel's new full-time rabbi, Adam Ruditsky, and his wife, Catharine, at a festive cocktail party in Beth Israel's social hall. Rabbi Ruditsky, or Rabbi Adam as he likes to be called, walked around the crowded room to personally greet all the attendees and answer their questions.

Beth Israel is located at 1115 E. Del Webb Blvd in Sun City Center. For information about joining Beth Israel contact Pam at membership@jsccc.org



From left, Jason Mirabella, co-owner of Executive Home Care of South East Tampa, caregiver Yudileris (Yudi) Alvarez, and Claudia Mirabella, co-owner of Executive Home Care of South East Tampa. Alvarez received the Loved01 Cares "Live Like a Legend" Caregiver Recognition Award.

AdventHealth Welcomes New Generation Of Physicians In White Coat Ceremony

AdventHealth's West Florida Division officially welcomed its newest class of resident physicians during its annual White Coat Ceremony The ceremony marked an important milestone as dozens of physicians-in-training from AdventHealth Tampa, AdventHealth Wesley Chapel and AdventHealth Sebring received their first white coats, symbolizing their transition into the next phase of medical training and their commitment to compassionate patient care.

A White Coat Ceremony is a long-standing tradition in medical education that celebrates the beginning of a physician's clinical journey. The white coat represents professionalism, responsibility and a commitment to serving patients with excellence and compassion.

These new resident physicians will live, learn and serve throughout communities across West Florida as they begin caring for patients under the guidance of experienced physician mentors. These residents represent the future of health care and will help address the growing need for physicians throughout the region.

Executive Home Care Honors Outstanding Dementia Caregiver

In recognition of Alzheimer's & Brain Awareness Month, Executive Home Care of South East Tampa has honored Hillsborough caregiver Yudileris (Yudi) Alvarez with the Loved01 Cares "Live Like a Legend" Caregiver Recognition Award for her exceptional compassion and dedication to individuals living with Alzheimer's disease and other special needs.

The recognition is part of a nationwide caregiver appreciation initiative through Loved01 Cares, celebrating caregivers who make a meaningful difference in the lives of individuals and families affected by Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

"Yudi has an incredible ability to connect with every client she serves," said Claudia Mirabella, co-owner of Executive Home Care of South East Tampa. "She always finds the best way to communicate with compassion, patience and kindness, while treating every individual with the dignity and respect they deserve."

For more about Executive Home Care, visit https://south-east-tampa.executivehomecare.com/ or call 813-772-4509.







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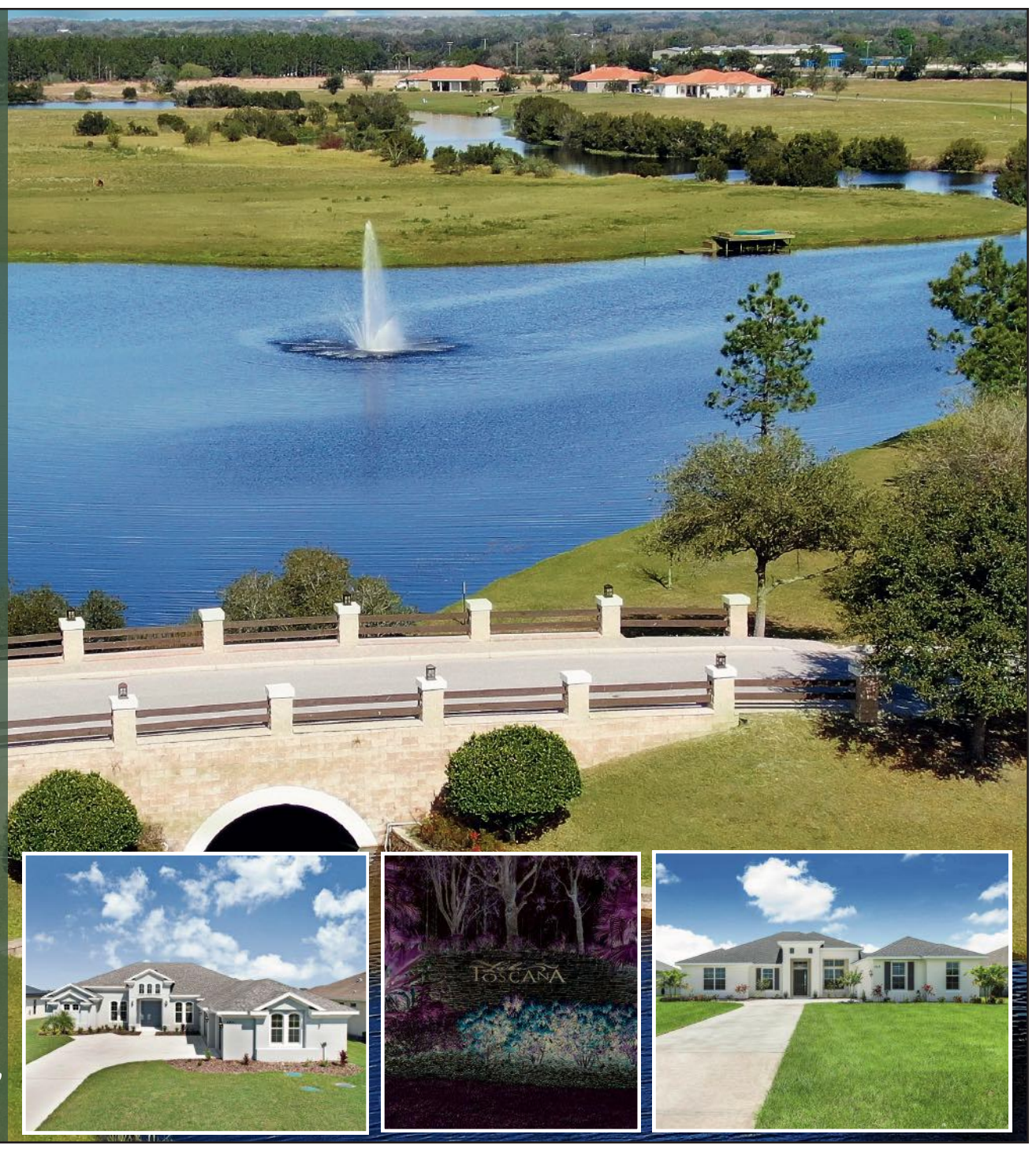
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