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October 2026
Volume 1, Issue 10

24 YEARS Osprey Observer POSITIVE NEWS

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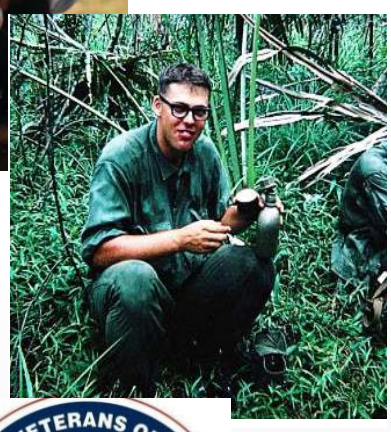
CELEBRATING 24 YEARS OF PUBLISHING POSITIVE COMMUNITY NEWS

HISTORY LIVES IN VIETNAM VETERANS EDUCATIONAL MISSION

By Brad Stager



Bill Dixon with his service dog Tank, who accompanies him to his classroom presentations about the Vietnam War.



War in the 21st century has become a pushbutton business of delivering remote-control death and destruction via missiles and drones, but not so long ago, real flesh-and-blood troops on the ground carried out the brutal dirty work of foreign policy, and among them are those who are dedicated to telling the stories of face-to-face combat.

The Vietnam Veterans of America are the graying vanguard of ensuring that one of America's most grueling and polarizing armed conflicts and those who sacrificed in the service of the nation are not forgotten.

Members of the organization venture into classrooms to relate their personal odysseys and reflections of the Vietnam War to a generation of students more than a half-century removed from their own school days.

Bill Dixon is the education chairman of VVA Chapter 787 in Riverview, and he said the lessons he presents to students balance the misinformation that has dominated the narrative about America's involvement in Southeast Asia.

"Most of the history the American people know about the Vietnam Conflict, and the men and women who were there is wrong," he wrote in an email.

Dixon, who served a yearlong tour of duty in Vietnam from June of 1967, cites media inaccuracies from the Gulf of Tonkin episode that greatly escalated America's involvement to the chopper-choked evacuation of Saigon that finally ended it. Dixon added that it is also an effort to acknowledge the sacrifices of the men and women behind the 58,281 names etched in the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall.

"Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 787, Tampa feels that we owe it to those whose names are on The Wall in D.C., to those who have died from their Vietnam service since they came home and to all surviving Veterans of the Vietnam Era as well as the American Citizens to tell the real, honest story of our conflict," Dixon said.

He has spoken to about 700 high school students in the past year and hopes the program will grow beyond classrooms.

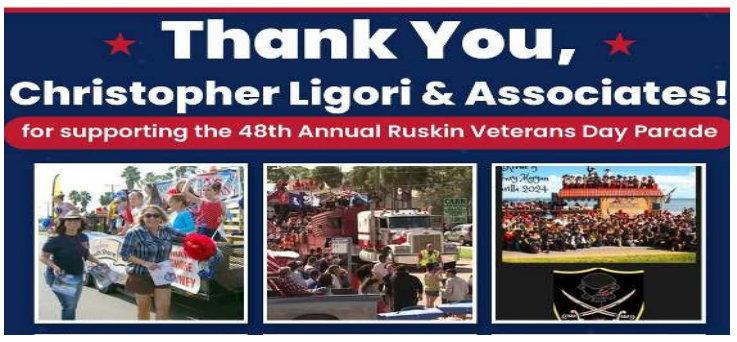
Speakers from VVA can help teachers meet Florida education benchmark requirements about the history and consequences of the Vietnam War and relate to the legislated mandates to teach about the grim perils of communism, which include required in-class observance of Victims of Communism Day each November 7.

To learn more about the local Vietnam Veterans of America activities, you can visit https://vva787.org/.

VETERANS DAY PARADE: COMMUNITY COMES TOGETHER TO HONOR THOSE WHO SERVED

By Dep. Jeff Merry





On Saturday, November 7, the streets of Ruskin will once again come alive with a proud American tradition — the Ruskin Veterans Day Parade. Beginning at 11 a.m., the parade will travel north along U.S. 41 from Fifth Avenue SE to 11th Avenue NE, bringing together veterans, families, civic organizations, businesses, schools and residents from throughout SouthShore.

At its heart, however, this parade is about one thing: saying thank you to the men and women who served our nation.

This year's parade carries an especially meaningful message as the community honors its surviving World War II veterans as grand marshals. These remarkable Americans belong to a generation that is disappearing before our eyes. They answered their nation's call decades ago, often at remarkably young ages, and helped preserve the freedoms that generations of Americans have enjoyed ever since.

Every year, there are fewer opportunities to personally thank a World War II veteran. That makes this year's parade more than a celebration — it is an opportunity to gather together while we still can, look these heroes in the eyes and simply say, "Thank you for your service."

The parade also represents something larger about the SouthShore community: the ability to come together for a purpose greater than us.

The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce recognized the importance of ensuring this beloved tradition continues. Rather than allowing a longstanding community celebration honoring veterans to disappear, the chamber felt compelled to help keep the parade moving forward. The chamber's involvement reflects an important principle: community traditions survive when people are willing to step forward, work together and take responsibility for preserving them.

And this will truly be a community parade.

Spectators will see colorful krewe floats, Jeep krewes, ROTC cadets, veterans organizations, civic groups, businesses and other community entries making their way down U.S. 41. Each participant brings something different, but they all share the same purpose — honoring America's veterans.

For the veterans watching from the sidelines, and especially those riding as grand marshals, the parade is a visible reminder that their sacrifices have not been forgotten.

For children, it is a living history lesson.

For families, it is an opportunity to teach the next generation about service and sacrifice.

And for the entire SouthShore community, it is a chance to stand together.

On November 7, Ruskin won't simply be hosting a parade. It will be making a statement: We remember. We appreciate. We honor.

Most importantly, we will say thank you to the veterans who gave so much so that all of us could enjoy the freedoms we sometimes take for granted.

For the Ruskin Veterans Day Parade, bring your family, bring your American flag, line U.S. 41 and join your neighbors in giving our veterans the welcome and gratitude they deserve.

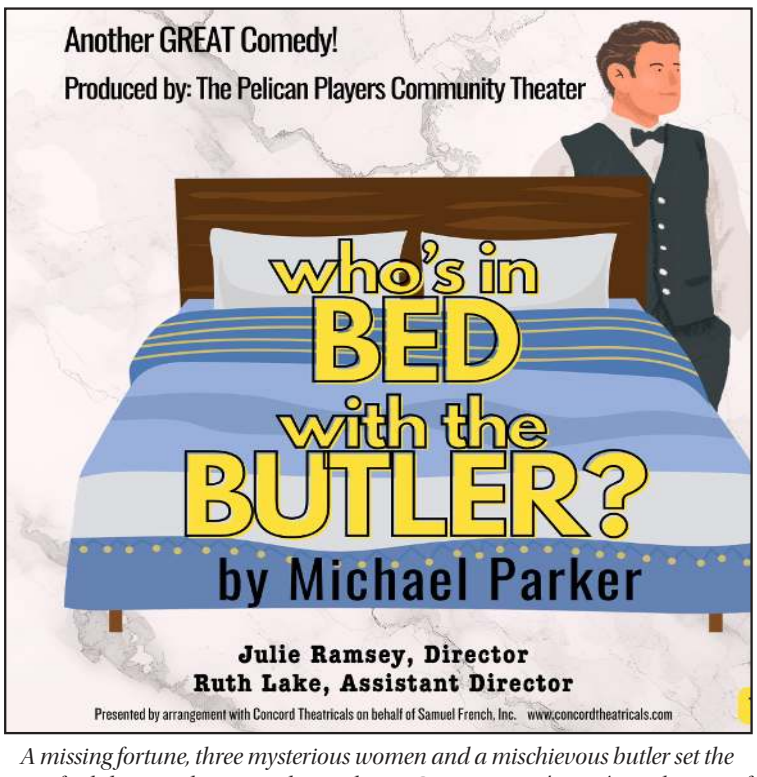
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A missing fortune, three mysterious women and a mischievous butler set the stage for hilarious chaos in Pelican Players Community Theater's production of Who's in Bed with the Butler? The madcap comedy features mistaken identities, secret romances and plenty of slapstick at the Kings Point Veterans Theater in Sun City Center, November 13-15. See Page 5 for full story.





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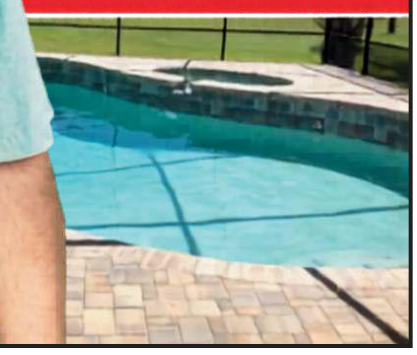
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MEN'S CHORUS HITS ALL THE RIGHT NOTES - AND WANTS YOU TO JOIN THE HARMONY

By Kelly Wise Valdes

The Sun City Center Men's Chorus is a nonprofit ensemble dedicated to educating, enriching and entertaining the community by providing vocal training and performance opportunities. The chorus is opening its doors to new members as it prepares for a busy performance season.



With holiday concerts approaching, the Sun City Center Men's Chorus is looking for new members ready to share in the music and the fun.

The group, which features 40 men singing four part accompanied harmony, welcomes anyone over age 18 who loves music and enjoys working as part of a team. Rehearsals are held on Thursdays from 3-5 p.m. at the Sun City Center United Methodist Church, located at 1971 Haverford Ave. in Sun City Center, from September through April.

The chorus is currently gearing up for its fall 2026 concerts, scheduled for Sunday, December 6, at 3 p.m. and Monday, December 7, at 7 p.m. Spring performances will follow in the beginning of April 2027. Spring rehearsals begin on January 7, 2027, but newcomers still have time to join this season, with eight rehearsals remaining before the winter concert.

New singers will find a supportive environment where they can explore their voices and build confidence. Jeff Jordon, artistic director, is known for his ability to bring out the best in each performer.

As accompanist Misti Kai explained, "From your first rehearsal, you will find that Jeff has a gift for recognizing each person's talents and interests and allowing them to grow in their own way."

The chorus emphasizes enthusiasm, teamwork and a willingness to learn.

"A guiding principle for our team is that every voice matters. Together, we accomplish what none of us could achieve alone," said David Gwynne, chorus president.

Joining midseason is possible, though readiness depends on each singer's comfort level. Experienced vocalists may learn the program quickly, while beginners often benefit from attending rehearsals now and performing in the spring.

Audiences can expect concerts that blend familiar favorites with new selections, all presented with humor and personality.

"One of the special things about our chorus is that the experience goes beyond singing notes on a page," said Paul Kraack, chorus secretary. "Our artistic director brings humor and personality to his introductions, helping audiences connect with the music and the stories behind it. We want people to leave entertained, uplifted and eager to come back."

To join, interested singers may contact Gwynne at 854-222-5462.

CHIPOTLE OPENS NEWEST RESTAURANT IN APOLLO BEACH

By Marie Gilmore



Burrito fans in Apollo Beach have a new option for quick, customizable meals with the opening of a new Chipotle Mexican Grill restaurant on U.S. Highway 41.

The restaurant, located at 5571 N. U.S. Highway 41 in Apollo Beach, is scheduled to open Tuesday, October 27, bringing Chipotle's signature menu and convenient digital pickup service to the growing SouthShore community.

The new location is among several Chipotle restaurants opening across the Tampa Bay area this year. A key feature is the brand's Chipotlane, a drive-thru pickup lane that allows customers to collect orders placed digitally without leaving their vehicles.

The restaurant is expected to operate daily from 10:45 a.m.-10 p.m., offering customers a range of customizable meals, including burritos, bowls, tacos and salads made with their choice of ingredients.

Guests can also try limited-time menu offerings, including Pollo Asado, featuring grilled chicken seasoned with garlic and Mexican spices, finished with citrus and fresh lime. Chili Lime Chips, made with fresh tortilla chips seasoned with lime and chili peppers, are another limited-time option.

For customers looking for protein-focused meals, Chipotle also offers a high-protein menu featuring selections with varying protein levels, including a Double High Protein Bowl and a High Protein-High Fiber Bowl. Family meal options provide another way to bring customizable meals home.

Customers can also join Chipotle Rewards, which offers members food rewards and other promotions. New members can sign up online and receive free chips and guacamole with a qualifying purchase, according to the company.

The Apollo Beach opening is part of Chipotle's broader expansion across the Tampa area. Other new locations have opened in Hudson, Clearwater and Spring Hill, with additional restaurants planned for Land O' Lakes and Wesley Chapel.

The company is also hiring crew members for its restaurants. According to Chipotle, positions offer competitive benefits that may include crew bonuses, debt-free college degree opportunities, English-as-a-second-language programs and access to mental health care for employees and their families.

Those interested in employment opportunities can visit chipotle.com/careers. For menu details, digital ordering and rewards information, visit chipotle.com.

The new restaurant adds another dining option along the U.S. 41 corridor for Apollo Beach residents seeking convenient meals for lunch, dinner or family takeout.

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THE GODDARD SCHOOL IS BRINGING A NEW LOCATION TO WIMAUMA

Staff Report



The Goddard School, a nationally acclaimed early childhood education franchise, is set to open its first location in Wimauma in late October, joining the more than 30 Goddard Schools in Florida offering an inquiry-based learning experience. The Goddard School of Wimauma is the third Florida school for owners Shekar Laveti and Soujanya Chalumuri, who opened The Goddard School of Lithia – FishHawk in 2017 and The Goddard School of Riverview in 2022.

Located at 10310 Paseo Al Mar Blvd. in Sun City Center, this 17,500-square-foot early childhood education center will have 15 classrooms to provide care for and educate approximately 250 students. Additionally, the school will add 40 teaching jobs to the community.

"As a father of two boys, I understand the importance of finding a high-quality early education program that meets a family's needs," said Laveti. "We are excited to provide families in Wimauma and the surrounding communities with an environment where children can build confidence, develop a lifelong love of learning and gain skills they need to thrive in kindergarten and beyond."

The new school will have an indoor gymnasium, a rock wall and a playground with artificial turf. Additionally, the school will be equipped with hospital-grade sanitization equipment to ensure a healthy environment.

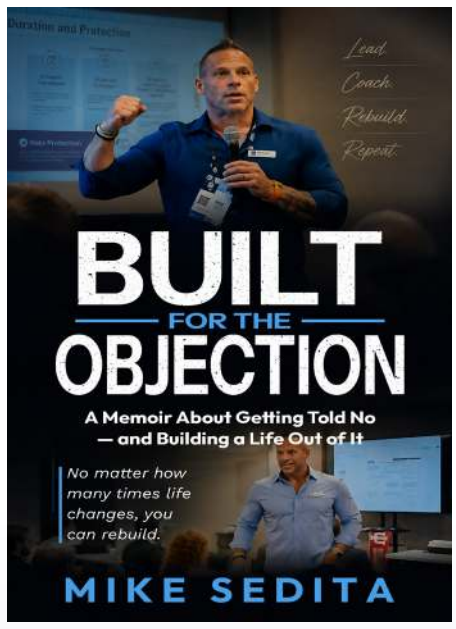
The Goddard School's exclusive inquiry-based education program, Wonder of Learning, embraces how children learn best — through their innate curiosity — because research confirms that when wonder leads, learning follows. Wonder of Learning features a cutting-edge curriculum developed by a diversely skilled group of educators, researchers, physicians and early childhood experts, as well as built-in assessment of academic and social-emotional progress and family communication via a proprietary app.

Inquiry-based learning, which guides the Wonder of Learning curriculum, is a teaching and learning approach that focuses on the natural curiosity and sense of wonder children bring into the classroom. With teacher-guided inquiry topics, children learn about themselves and the world around them by exploring their interests, investigating concepts and asking questions.

For families interested in learning more about The Goddard School and how to enroll in the new Wimauma location, visit www.goddardschool.com or call 813-535-5350.

SALES COACH TURNS A CAREER OF HEARING "NO" INTO NEW MEMOIR

Staff Report



Mike Sedita has heard "no" for a living for more than 20 years. He heard it from insurance customers, from advertisers and from life itself. His new memoir, *Built for the Objection*, tells how he learned to treat each one as a starting point instead of a dead end.

The book is now available on Amazon in Kindle, paperback and hardcover editions. Sedita is a region coach for Best Version Media and has sold more than $25 million in advertising since 2010. He grew up in Wood-Ridge, New Jersey, and has lived in the Tampa Bay area since 2019.

Built for the Objection follows Sedita from a North Jersey hometown to banking, car sales and two decades in financial services. In those years, he ran a 65-seat insurance call center that handled 3,500 calls a day. It then traces his years as a partner in an Atlanta, Georgia, media-buying agency and his move to Florida to rebuild.

At Best Version Media, Sedita launched three community magazines on his first day while carrying heavy personal obligations. He went on to set the company's single-month sales record of more than $558,000 in December 2023. He was named to the company's Inner Circle every year from 2022 through 2025.

"I didn't write this book because I always won," Sedita said. "I wrote it because I got knocked down more times than I can count, and I kept getting back up. If there's a will, there's a way."

The book has 34 short chapters in five parts. Each story carries a practical lesson for salespeople, business owners and anyone starting over. Sedita wrote it to sound the way he talks: direct, a little raw and built to move readers to action.

"Every objection is just a question nobody has answered yet," Sedita said. "That's true on a sales call, and it's true when life hands you a setback. I want people to close this book and go do something in their business the next morning."

An audiobook read by the author is in production. Sedita is available for interviews, podcasts and speaking engagements on sales, coaching, resilience and rebuilding after a setback.

Built for the Objection is available at www.amazon.com/dp/b0hl9hmxz2.

About The Author

Sedita is a sales performance coach for Best Version Media, where he helps new publishers launch community magazines across the country. He spent 20 years in financial services, including as director of international annuities. He has sold more than $25 million in media since 2010. Sedita is a strategic adviser to 16W Media Group, a Tampa Bay marketing agency. He lives in Apollo Beach with his wife, Kacey.

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PELICAN PLAYERS PRESENTS *WHO'S IN BED WITH THE BUTLER?* FROM NOV. 13-15

Staff Report



A madcap comedy filled with slapstick, double-entendres and witty situations, *Who's in Bed with the Butler?* has been delighting audiences around the world since its debut in 2023.

A wealthy California billionaire passes away, leaving his fortune to his daughter, Constance, while willing massive assets (a yacht, art collection and cars) to three mysterious women. When the daughter and her lawyer arrive at the mansion to contest the will or buy the women off, they find the valuables have vanished. Orchestrating the confusion is the butler, who deftly juggles a whirlwind of mistaken identities, secret past romances, an inept private investigator and a deaf housekeeper with a pet rat.

Who's in Bed with the Butler? was written by Michael Parker, award-winning author of Sex Please, We're Sixty!, Money Matters and Sin, Sex & the CIA.

"Directing this wonderfully seasoned cast has been a joy," said Director Julie Ramsey. "Their experience, talent and willingness to embrace the crazy physical comedy and lightning-fast pace of farce make this production truly special. They prove that there is no barrier to laughter, creativity, or having a great time on stage."

Ruth Lake is the assistant director, and Kevin Steinke is the stage manager.

Jack Parry plays the part of Clifton, the butler; Susie Potratz is Agnes; Diane Keyes is Susie Legere; Alesia Bischoff is Connie; Steve Preuss is Vance; Wayne Keyes is William Davis Jr.; Carol MacAlister is Renee LaFleur; Lucy Malacos is Josephine Sykes; and Michele Horvath is Marjorie Merivale.

Audiences from Sun City Center and all surrounding communities will have four opportunities to see the play: Friday, November 13, at 6:30 p.m.; Saturday, November 14, at 1:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.; and Sunday, November 15, at 1:30 p.m.

Doors open 30 minutes before curtain. Tickets are on sale now at the Kings Point Box Office from 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday through Friday. Evening performances are $18; matinee performances are $15. Tickets will also be sold at the door for each show; no credit cards will be accepted at the door, and correct change is appreciated.

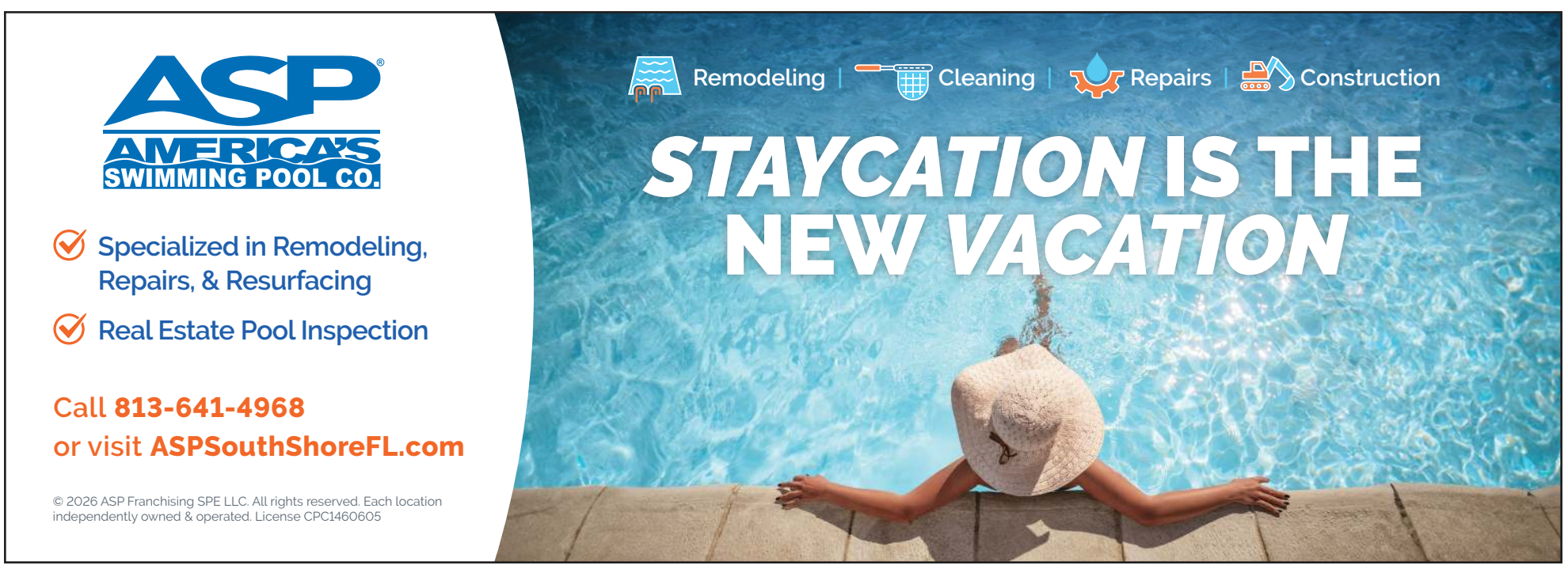
Reserved, cabaret-style seating plus open bleacher seating are available. BYO drinks and snacks.

All performances are at the Kings Point Veterans Theater in the North Clubhouse, located at 1900 Clubhouse Dr. in Sun City Center.

Founded in 1981, the Pelican Players Community Theater, a 501(c)(3) organization run by volunteers, aims to promote the dramatic arts through the staging of productions and educational activities. All profits go toward the Pelican Players Scholarship Fund, handled by Community Foundation Tampa Bay, benefiting local students pursuing the arts.







27NORTH REALTY MARKS FIRST YEAR WITH $110 MILLION IN PRODUCTION

By Shawna Calvert



One year ago, 27North Realty was an idea built around a simple question: What would a real estate brokerage look like if we created it around what agents and clients actually need?

Gregg and I have always tried to live by the Go-Giver philosophy of giving more in value than we expect to receive in return. It is how we approach our lives, our business and our relationships, and it became the foundation for 27North.

Our first year has been about turning that idea into something real. Before opening our Apollo Beach office, we remodeled the building and chose a location with highway frontage so 27North would be visible in the community we serve. We also launched an extensive marketing campaign to build brand awareness and make sure people understand who we are, what we stand for and how we are different.

That investment has produced results faster than we expected. As of October 7, 2026, 27North Realty ranks as the No. 1 brokerage in Apollo Beach by total volume, with more than $110 million in 2026 production (source: Stellar MLS, 1/1/2026 to 10/7/2026). We are proud of that accomplishment, but we are even more proud that it has come while building the kind of company we set out to create.

Sometimes, people assume success like that must come from shortcuts. It doesn't. It comes from hard work, from doing things the right way even when an easier way is available and from giving more than we receive.

We have focused heavily on helping agents grow through support, leads, education, mentorship and technology. Artificial intelligence has become a major part of that mission. We love finding the newest tools and teaching agents how to use them to better understand their businesses, market more creatively, communicate more effectively and connect at a deeper level with their clients. To us, technology should never replace relationships. It should help strengthen them.

One of the most rewarding parts of this year has been hearing from agents who have asked to join us. Like attracts like, and the people finding their way to 27North share the belief that how you do the work matters just as much as the results.

For year two, our goal is not simply to become bigger, it is to become better. Better education. Better technology. Better marketing. Better support. And, most importantly, stronger relationships with the agents, clients and community we are fortunate to serve.

We are proud of what we built in year one, but it still feels like we are just getting started. 27North is located at 6138 N U.S. Hwy 41, Apollo Beach, visit online at www.27northrealty.com or call (813) 645-4663.

WATERSET CONCERTS FOR A CAUSE — GOOD VIBES. GREAT CAUSE

Staff Report

Bring your friends and family to enjoy live music while supporting a great cause in the Waterset community. Admission to the concerts is free, and the event is open to the public — just bring a nonperishable food donation to support Feeding Tampa Bay. All donations go directly to a local food bank, The Community Cupboard, to help area families in need.

Concerts take place on select Saturdays in the fall from 6-9 p.m. at The Lakeside, located at 7250 Parkshore Dr. in Apollo Beach.*

Each concert will be accompanied by a tasty line-up of local food trucks sure to satisfy! Food trucks will be on-site at 5 p.m.

The Can't-miss Lineup

On Saturday, October 24, Stella Beat brings the vibrant energy of Latin music to the stage with infectious rhythms and lively performances. Whether you're dancing all night or simply soaking in the fun atmosphere, their high-energy show is a celebration of music, culture, and fun.

On Saturday, November 7, 501 Band brings the soulful sounds of blues, funk and jazz to the stage with a unique blend of groove-driven music rhythms and captivating musicianship. Based in Orlando, this talented group delivers dynamic live performances filled with energy and feel-good vibes.

On Saturday, November 14, Summer Breeze brings the smooth sounds of yacht rock and classic soft rock to the stage with timeless hits from the '70s and '80s. Their laid-back grooves and nostalgic melodies create the perfect soundtrack for an evening of great music and good vibes.

The Cause

Music feeds the soul and food feeds our potential. One hundred percent of every donation you bring goes directly to The Community Cupboard. This local initiative feeds over 500 families every week. Let's give back, together.

All donations are greatly appreciated! Enter your first name and last name both as Waterset when donating. Feeding Tampa Bay and the Community Cupboard need our help, especially with the holidays coming up soon. All donations will go to helping families in need within our community.

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BUDDY BREW COFFEE OPENS INSIDE RIVERVIEW SPROUTS

By Brian Bokor



Coffee lovers in Riverview have a new option for their morning caffeine fix with the opening of Buddy Brew Coffee inside Sprouts Farmers Market at 12960 S. U.S. 301 on September 23.

The new cafe is the sixth of 10 Buddy Brew locations planned inside Sprouts stores across the region. Buddy Brew President and co-founder Susan Ward said Sprouts approached the company to become its coffee partner in Florida.

"We love them, they are great," Ward said, citing the grocery chain's culture, commitment to quality and hospitality as a natural fit for Buddy Brew.

The partnership also gave Buddy Brew an opportunity to help design the cafe's appearance.

"We partnered with them on the build-out. They were wonderful in allowing us to really have a big say in design so that it looks like a Buddy Brew," Ward said.

The Riverview location offers a full cafe menu featuring espresso drinks, brewed coffee, cold brews, matcha, smoothies, breakfast and lunch items, pastries and seasonal specialty beverages.

Sprouts store manager Matt Rainey said shoppers had been asking for another coffee option, making the opening a welcome addition to the store.



Buddy Brew Coffee is owned by co-founders Dave and Susan Ward.

"I think it gives the people of Riverview a different option on local coffee, and it's going to bring more foot traffic to our location. Customers have been asking and asking, and they're super excited about it," Rainey said.

The cafe provides customers with an alternative to national coffee chains while introducing more shoppers to Buddy Brew's offerings.

Ward praised the Riverview team for creating a friendly atmosphere and emphasized the company's "Brew good. Do good." philosophy, which focuses on treating customers and team members with genuine care.

The Riverview opening is part of a larger expansion inside Sprouts stores. According to Ward, Carrollwood is next, followed by Palm Harbor, Trinity and Sarasota.

To celebrate the opening, Buddy Brew offered gift bags filled with merchandise, gift cards and other items to the first 25 guests in line. Attendees also had an opportunity to win free coffee for a year.

The Riverview cafe is open daily from 7 a.m.-5 p.m.

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WATER RATE INCREASE SUPPORTS $2.44 BILLION IN COUNTY PROJECTS

Staff Report



Hillsborough County recently embarked on one of the largest infrastructure projects in the county's history with the $1.2 billion One Water South Wastewater Conveyance and Treatment Project in Lithia.

Hillsborough County Water Resources customers are seeing new water and wastewater rates beginning October 1 following approval by the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners.

The updated rates are intended to help fund the ongoing operation, maintenance and improvement of the county's water and wastewater systems, which provide service to customers 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

For a residential customer using an average of 8,000 gallons of water per month, the estimated increase is approximately $9.31 per month. Actual bills will vary depending on factors including meter size, water consumption and wastewater service.

For fiscal year 2027, the Board approved a 5 percent rate increase, along with a 2.91 percent price index increase. The Tampa Bay Water passthrough charge also increased from $3.02 to $3.04 per 1,000 gallons.

According to Hillsborough County Water Resources, the rates help cover increasing operating costs, routine maintenance, system improvements, resiliency needs, regulatory requirements and investments in infrastructure needed to continue providing reliable service.

The additional revenue also supports a significant portfolio of capital improvement projects currently underway throughout the county.

The county's One Water Program includes 10 projects with a total investment of approximately $1.5 billion, making it the county's largest infrastructure project to date.

Other projects include 16 Master Program infrastructure projects totaling $573.09 million; nine Septic-to-Sewer projects totaling $157 million; and 13 Treatment Facility projects totaling $128 million.

The county is also investing $87 million in seven other projects and $47 million in three projects through the countywide Hillsborough Aquifer Recharge Program, known as CHARP.

Together, the Water Resources capital improvement program includes 58 projects representing approximately $2.44 billion in planned infrastructure investment.

The projects are designed to address both current and future needs as Hillsborough County continues to grow, while supporting the long-term reliability and resiliency of its water and wastewater systems.

Customers can view a detailed breakdown of current water and wastewater rates and fees online at hcfl.gov/water by selecting "Water Rates & Fees."

11TH ANNUAL WATERSET TURKEY TROT SUPPORTS FOUR LOCAL SCHOOLS

By Marie Gilmore



Join in for the 11th annual Turkey Trot at Waterset on Thanksgiving morning on Thursday, November 26, at 9 a.m. Proceeds of the Turkey Trot will benefit our local public schools: Doby Elementary, Eisenhower Middle School, East Bay High School and the Dorothy C. York Innovation Academy.



The race is chip-timed and a flat course. Want to participate virtually? No problem. Just sign up for the virtual 5K. However, virtual participant race packets are not guaranteed to arrive prior to Thanksgiving morning.

Registration is required. Register at https://runsignup.com/race/events/fl/apollobeach/turkeytrotatwaterset.

The 5K participants will each receive a race bib, race T-shirt and finisher's medal.

The Kids' Fun Run participants will each receive a race bib, race T-shirt and medal.

The 5K and Kids' Fun Run will start at approximately 8 a.m. and 9 a.m., respectively.

The 5K race route will be the same route as years past: north and south on Waterset Blvd. starting by The Lakeside, located at 7250 Parkshore Dr. in Apollo Beach.

The Kids' Fun Run routes will be the same as last year: 1-mile, half-mile and, for the little ones, a special mini route.

Strollers are welcome, but guests are asked to please go to the back of the starting line so the competitive participants can start first.

Pets are not allowed due to the growing size of the race. This new rule is simply to ensure the safety of all participants.

If you'd like to keep your distance when you walk/run, feel free to stay back and let participants start, and then you can start your race. Since it's chip-timed, your time won't start until you cross the starting line.

Online sign-up is available through November 26; however, shirts and specific sizes may not be available and are not guaranteed after Wednesday, November 4. The 5K Dri-FIT T-shirts are available in adult and youth sizes. The Kids' Fun Run T-shirts are also Dri-FIT this year, with youth sizes available.

For more information or to register for the event, visit https://runsignup.com/race/events/fl/apollobeach/turkeytrotatwaterset. The 5K registration prices will increase on Sunday, November 1, and then again on Monday, November 23. Kids' Fun Run registration will also increase on November 1.



RACE FOR EDUCATION MOVES TO USF FOR FIFTH ANNUAL RUN

By Jane Owen

The Race for Education benefiting Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) will take place on the campus of University of South Florida (USF) on Saturday, November 7.

The fifth annual event is a partnership between the Hillsborough Education Foundation (HEF), HCPS and USF and is being held at USF for the first time. The funds that are generated beyond the cost of the event will support HEF's school and classroom grants.

AnnMarie Courtney, the director of partnership engagement for HCPS, said the Race for Education provides a meaningful opportunity for students, families and staff to come together while promoting physical health, mental well-being and a strong sense of community.

"The Race for Education creates a culture of wellness by demonstrating that being active can be enjoyable and inclusive. Whether participants run, jog or walk, everyone can take part at their own pace. The shared experience promotes connection, school spirit and healthy choices that can extend well beyond race day," Courtney said.

HEF President and CEO Anna Corman said she is thankful for the way the race brings people together to celebrate public schools.

"Seeing so many people come out and participate is a powerful reminder of how much our community values its schools and the students and educators within them. We are very excited to bring this year's Race for Education to a new location at the University of South Florida, giving our community a new setting to come together and celebrate public education," Corman said.

In 2025, just over 1,200 community members participated in the event. Corman and Courtney are grateful for the participants, the business sponsors for the event and the new partnership with USF.

Genna Custard, a Florida Virtual School teacher and former HCPS educator, is a participant who runs the race every year.

"Year after year, I come back to the HEF run because I will use any opportunity to give back to teachers. I know teachers are the core and heart of our schools. They pour into our students every day. On a personal note, I enjoy seeing my fitness progress year after year. I do 99 percent of my runs solo and this is an opportunity to cheer on friends and colleagues and just have fun!" Custard said.

The Race for Education includes a 5K and 1-mile walk/run. There is on-course entertainment from HCPS student groups. The 5K is timed, and the top age-group 5K finishers will receive awards. Finishers of both the 5K and 1-mile walk/run will receive a race shirt and finisher's medal.

USF is located at 4202 E. Fowler Ave. in Tampa. To register for the race, visit https://runsignup.com/race/fl/tampa/hef5k.

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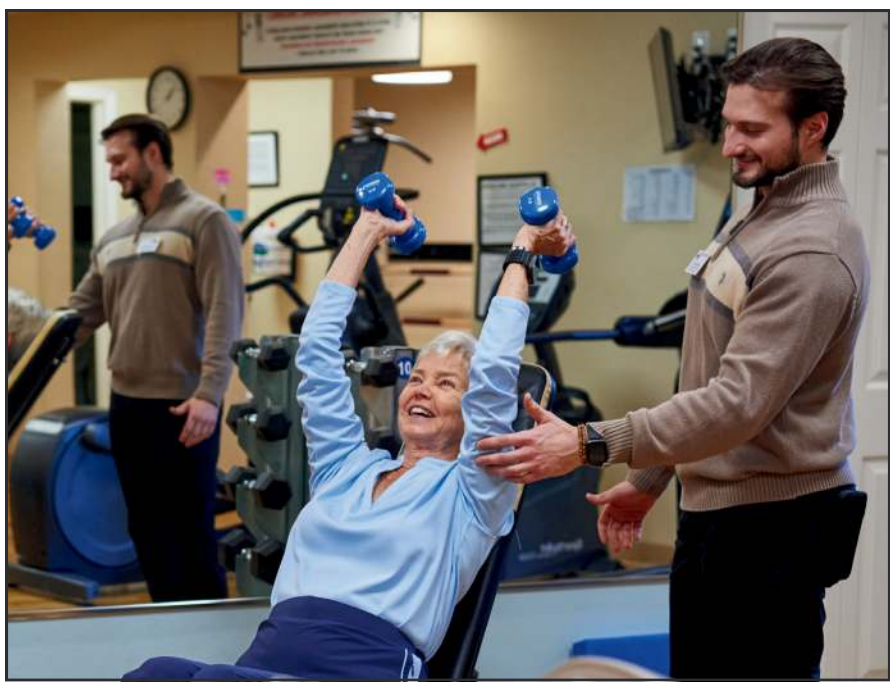
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DENNIS RIESE BUILDS ONE-OF-A-KIND, CUSTOM ARCADE MACHINES

By Libby Hopkins



Dennis Riese, a resident of Valrico and the founder of Phantom Arcades, builds premium, fully custom arcades for homes, businesses and events. Built with high-end components, stunning artwork and thousands of games, each machine delivers an unforgettable experience.

Since 2015, Riese has built 51 custom cabinets for celebrity owners, including The Undertaker and Michelle McCool, Rhea Ripley and Buddy Matthews, AJ Styles, Lil Yachty, Nick Carter, Joey Fatone and JWoww. Every machine is hand-built locally and designed around its owner, and his build videos have more than 10 million views online.

"Phantom Arcades really started by accident," Riese said. "I built my first arcade as a hobby for myself. One day, I had some friends over, and one of them liked it so much that he asked if he could buy it from me. I sold it to him and figured I'd just build myself another one. A few weeks later, another friend saw the new arcade and wanted to buy that one. So, I sold it to him too and built another. That was when I started thinking that maybe I had something here."

By 2022, Phantom Arcades had grown to the point where Riese had a decision to make.

"I decided to take a chance on the business, leave New York City Transit after 14 years, sell our home on Long Island, and move my family to Florida," he said. "That was when I committed to Phantom Arcades full time. Looking back, it's pretty incredible to think that the entire business started because a friend came over to my house and wanted to buy something I had built as a hobby."

What Riese enjoys most about building arcades is that no two projects are exactly the same.

"I get to take a customer's ideas, whether it's their favorite games, sports teams, movies, music or something personal to them, and turn those ideas into an arcade that is completely unique to them," he said. "I also love what happens after the arcade leaves my shop. These machines become something families and friends gather around. Knowing that something I built can become part of the memories a family makes together is probably the most rewarding part of what I do."

Riese's biggest goal for Phantom Arcades is to continue growing the business to the point where he can start hiring employees and building a team around it.

"Right now, Phantom Arcades is essentially a one-person operation," he said. "I'm very proud of that, but I also know that if I want the company to continue growing, eventually I can't do everything myself. I'd love to reach the point where I can hire people, teach them how I build these machines and create jobs here in our local community."

Recently, Phantom Arcades was featured on The Price Is Right, where one of Riese's custom arcades was a prize on the show.

If you'd like to learn more about Phantom Arcades or have a custom machine made, you can visit Riese's website at https://phantomarcades.com/ or call 813-419-7979.

HIGH 5 INC.'S ANNUAL CASINO NIGHT IS AROUND THE CORNER

By Emily Harper





High 5 Inc. is hosting its annual Ice the Dice Casino Night fundraiser on Friday, November 20. This event is the nonprofit's largest fundraiser of the year and serves as a way to positively impact the community.

"Don't miss one of the most exciting nights of the year — come roll the dice and change lives," High 5 Inc. posted on social media.

High 5 Inc. serves over 25,000 individuals in the Brandon area. The organization is dedicated to making a positive impact through its five pillars in progress: learn to swim, special needs education, after-school care, sports and recreation and community partnerships.

"Every dollar raised helps open doors to lifesaving swim lessons, adaptive programs that foster independence for adults with special needs, supportive places for children to learn and grow in a safe after-school space and recreational opportunities that build confidence, friendships and lifelong skills," according to High 5 Inc.'s website.

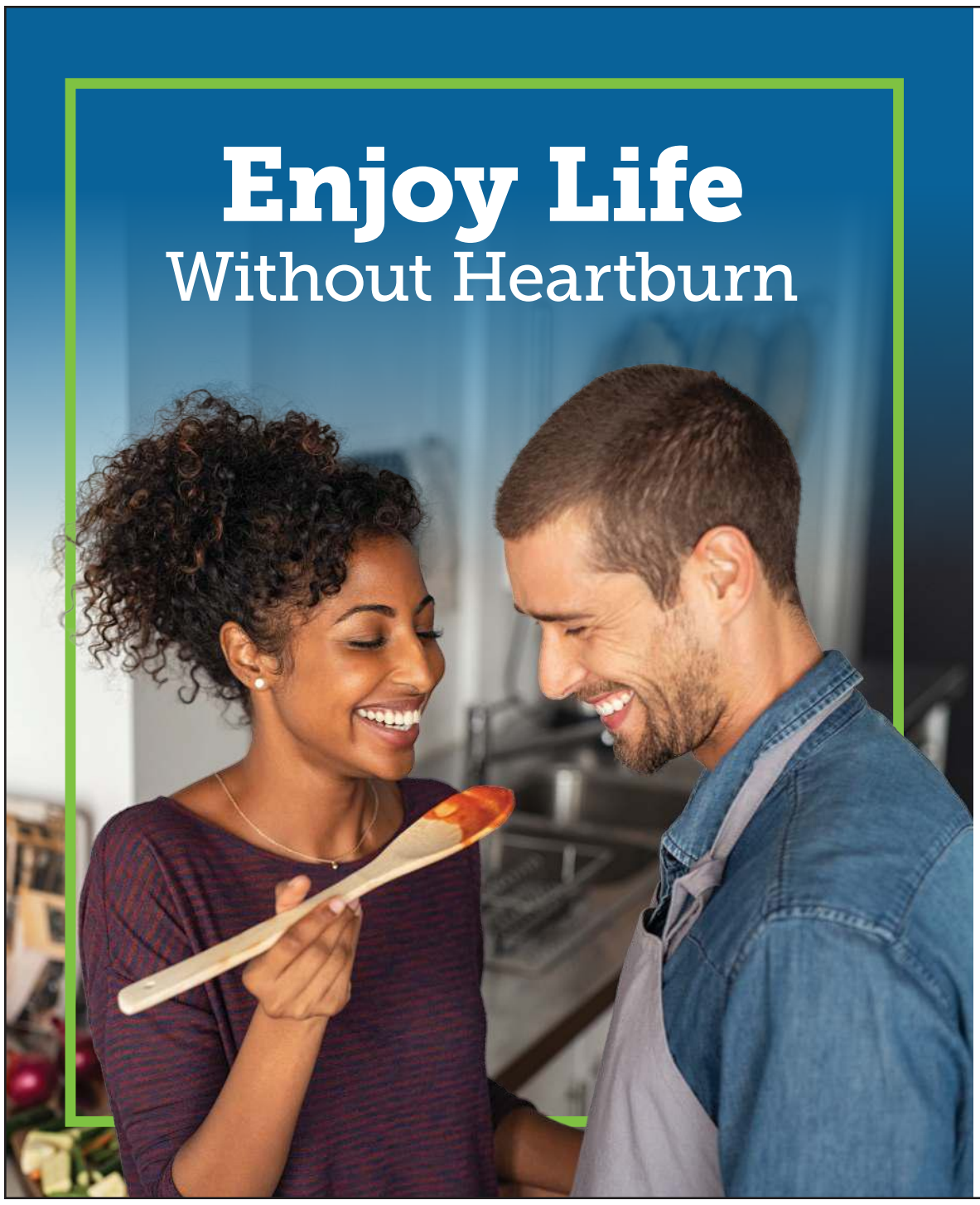
The fundraiser will be held at The Regent, located at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview, from 7-11 p.m. The attire is 'We're Bringing Back the '80s,' encouraging participants to dress in their favorite 80s-inspired fashion.

Throughout the night, there will be a variety of casino games, a dance floor, a silent auction, open bar, unlimited food and other entertainment.

Tickets can be purchased on High 5 Inc.'s website for $75 per person. You must be 21 or older to attend, and tickets include an open bar, unlimited food and play money.

High 5 is offering sponsorship opportunities at different tier levels, which include event tickets, open bar, unlimited food, play money and marketing specials.

For additional information about Ice the Dice Casino Night tickets or sponsorships, visit High 5 Inc.'s website at https://high5inc.org/casino-night/.



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TAMPA BAY WATER TO TEST EMERGENCY SIRENS AT RESERVOIR ON OCTOBER 7

Staff Report



Photo Courtesy of Tampa Bay Water

The 15.5-billion gallon C.W. Bill Young Regional Reservoir makes the region's water supply more drought resistant, reliable and flexible.

Tampa Bay Water is conducting a test of its emergency siren system at the C.W. Bill Young Regional Reservoir on Wednesday, October 7, at 9 a.m. To ensure the sirens are effective in the unlikely event of an emergency, the sirens will sound at 9 a.m. and will include three to five short blasts lasting 10-20 seconds each. This is only a test. Tampa Bay Water has notified Hillsborough County Emergency Management, the sheriff's office, fire rescue staff and residents surrounding the reservoir.

If residents have any questions or concerns about the sirens or the regularly scheduled testing, they may call our dedicated hotline at 1-866-INFO-H20 (1-866-463-6420) or email reservoir@tampabaywater.org. Residents may also sign up for email reminders of when the sirens will be tested at www.tampabaywater.org/sirentest.

Should the reservoir siren system sound for an actual emergency, the sirens will sound in a continuous blast. Hillsborough County Emergency Management will immediately contact residents using text messages, emails and telephone calls. Emergency responders will be dispatched to direct residents to safe evacuation routes.

To receive emergency notifications, residents should sign up and register their contact information by visiting https://hcfl.gov/hcflalert.

Following the October 7 reservoir siren test, there are two more tests scheduled for 2026:

- Wednesday, November 4, at 9 a.m.
- Wednesday, December 2, at 9 a.m.

The sirens were installed in 2004 during the construction of the C.W. Bill Young Regional Reservoir. The purpose of the sirens is to notify those closest to the facility of an emergency situation that requires immediate evacuation.

The reservoir is located in Southern Hillsborough County at 17611 Boyette Rd. in Lithia.

About Tampa Bay Water

Tampa Bay Water provides wholesale water to the public utility systems of Hillsborough, Pasco and Pinellas counties, as well as the cities of New Port Richey, St. Petersburg and Tampa. To learn more about Tampa Bay Water, please visit www.tampabaywater.org.

MOVE YOUR WAY, EARN A MEDAL: UF/IFAS VIRTUAL CHALLENGE

By Marie Gilmore



As the weather cools, it's the perfect time to join an easy, supportive way to become more active. Let's Walk Florida!, hosted by University of Florida (UF) Extension, is a statewide virtual educational program designed to help Floridians achieve and maintain health through physical activity. Let's Walk Florida! meets you where you are — both in terms of physical location and your current fitness level.

The statewide physical activity challenge runs from now through Monday, November 23.

This program is designed for all fitness levels, and despite the name, you do not have to walk to participate. Any intentional physical activity counts, including swimming, biking, dancing, walking. Participants will be counting minutes of intentional physical activity, not steps.

Participants receive:

- Weekly Health eGuides delivered to your phone or email.
- Weekly educational sessions with UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) health educators.
- A virtual community to track your progress for accountability and support.
- Weekly physical activity challenges.
- A statewide tracking dashboard where participants can see progress.
- An official finisher medal and certificate of completion.
- Opportunities to win prizes.

Register to participate via Eventbrite at www.eventbrite.com/e/1999046640314.

There is a nominal fee of $15 to participate, and scholarships are available if needed.

For questions about the program, please contact Andrea Nikolai, UF/IFAS Extension Polk County Family and Consumer Sciences agent, at andreanikolai@ufl.edu or 863-519-1072.

UF's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) is the home of UF/IFAS Extension Family and Consumer Sciences, providing research-based education in nutrition and wellness, food safety, personal finance and more to improve Floridians' quality of life. With Let's Walk Florida!, the goal is simple: move more, wherever you are, and be part of a community of Floridians working toward better health together.

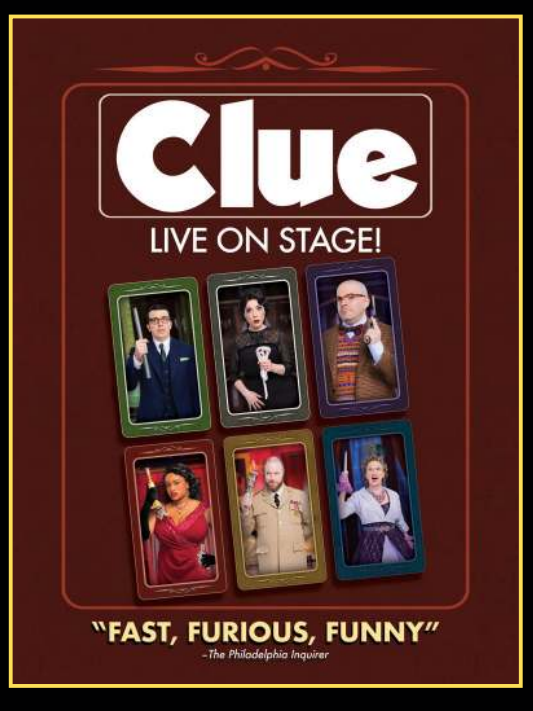
About UF/IFAS

The mission of the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) is to develop knowledge relevant to agricultural, human and natural resources and to make that knowledge available to sustain and enhance the quality of human life. With more than a dozen research facilities, 67 county Extension offices and award-winning students and faculty in the UF College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, UF/IFAS brings science-based solutions to the state's agricultural and natural resources industries, and all Florida residents.

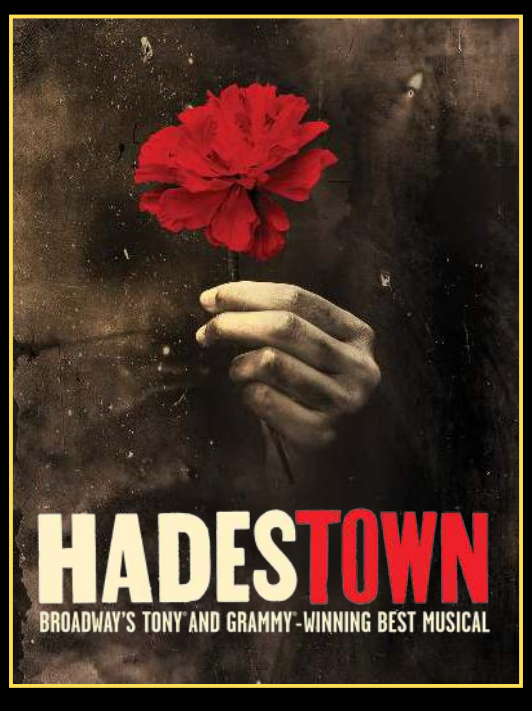
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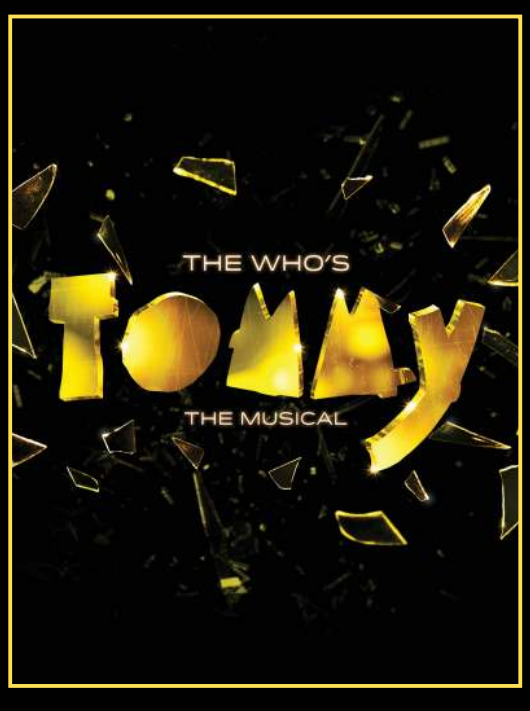
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TWO NIGHTS OF MAGIC AND MOTOWN COMING TO SUN CITY CENTER

Staff Report





Two evenings of entertainment are planned for November at the United Methodist Church of Sun City Center, featuring an award-winning comedy magician and a musical tribute to Motown and some of the greatest hits of all time.

Both performances will begin at 7 p.m. at the church, located at 1971 Haverford Ave. in Sun City Center.

The first show, on Friday, November 6, will feature Elliott Smith, a five-time award-winning comedy magician with more than 45 years of experience. Smith received the distinguished Order of Merlin Excalibur from the International Brotherhood of Magicians and has entertained audiences throughout the United States, Canada and Europe.

His performances combine magic, mentalism, illusions, comedy and audience participation. Over the years, Smith has entertained two former Canadian prime ministers, international ambassadors, legendary entertainer Liberace and comedian Jay Leno. He has also headlined at New York City's Friars Club and earned a place on the Wall of The Great Comedians at the National Comedy Hall of Fame Museum.

On Friday, November 20, The Sounds of Soul will take the stage for an energetic concert celebrating Motown and other popular music favorites.

The five-member group has performed nationwide since 1996, earning a reputation for powerful vocals, distinctive harmonies, lively choreography and polished performances. The show features songs made famous by artists including The Temptations, The Four Tops, Aretha Franklin, The Supremes, Whitney Houston, Lionel Richie, Tina Turner and Barry White.

The group has performed at venues from Los Angeles to New Orleans, aboard cruise ships and on the internationally syndicated television program Dance Connection.

Tickets for each performance are $15 in advance or $20 at the door. Advance tickets are available online at www.lovethelight.org/events, at the Pages of Life Book Store and at the church office. Bookstore hours are Sundays from 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. and Monday through Thursday from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. The church office is open Monday through Thursday from 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.

For more information about the performances, the upcoming Madrigal Dinner and other concerts and recitals, contact concert series coordinator Steve Krogh at 949-842-9616 or visit www.lovethelight.org.

VETERANS ART CENTER TO HOST 'RHYTHMS, RESILIENCE AND LAUGHTER' CONCERT

By Brian Bokor



Veterans Art Center Tampa Bay (VACTB) will celebrate its 13th anniversary with an afternoon of live music, comedy and art on Sunday, November 15, raising funds to expand mental health programs for military members, veterans, first responders and their families.

The event will take place from 1:30-5:15 p.m. at The Dallas Bull, located at 3322 U.S. 301 N. in Tampa.

The afternoon will feature Billboard-charting Southern rock performer Randy McNeeley and the Soul Circus Cowboys, along with comedian Ginger Kelly. Veteran radio personality and comedian Pat Largo will serve as emcee. Guests can also enjoy a veteran art showcase and silent auctions.

Founded to support mental wellness through creative expression, VACTB uses alternative art therapies to help participants process experiences, build resilience and connect with others. The nonprofit's mission includes suicide prevention and support for the families of those who serve.

According to the organization, its programs have provided art therapy to more than 3,025 individuals and support to more than 29,005 children. VACTB also reports helping prevent seven veteran suicides. More than 350 participant testimonials document the program's impact, with reported outcomes including a 90 percent reduction in suicidal ideation and a 75 percent increase in emotional well-being.

The organization has also completed six major contracted exhibits and established a "To Those Served" memorial dedication at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg campus.

"For our veterans, art isn't just a hobby; it's a lifeline," said Mack Macksam, VACTB founder and CEO. He said the partnership with the Soul Circus Cowboys offers an opportunity to celebrate veterans' resilience and bring the community together through music and art.

VACTB hopes to attract more than 300 attendees and raise $20,000 to support its 2027 programming. Tickets and sponsorship opportunities are available, with sponsorship levels ranging from silver to presenting.

"We are a community built on real stories," Macksam said, encouraging Tampa Bay residents to support programs that help service members, veterans and first responders find healing through creativity and connection.

For tickets, sponsorship details and additional information, visit https://vactb.org/events-for-veterans-and-supporters.





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SUNCOAST FOUNDATION INVESTS $327,000 IN HILLSBOROUGH EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Staff Report



Hillsborough Education Foundation (HEF) is proud to announce a charitable gift of $327,000 from the Suncoast Credit Union Foundation. The funds will support several of HEF's key programs, ensuring that students, teachers and schools throughout Hillsborough County receive the resources they need to thrive.

Through the Teaching Tools Resource Center, teachers can access essential classroom supplies at no cost, while the Transforming Early Literacy Initiative provides job-embedded coaching for early educators at 31 high-needs schools, helping young learners build strong foundations for future success. Suncoast Credit Union Foundation's support also helps fund School and Classroom Enrichment Grants that bring innovative learning opportunities to students, mentoring programs that provide students with guidance and encouragement and the CEOs in Schools initiative, which connects business leaders with public schools to deepen understanding and strengthen community partnerships.

"Suncoast Credit Union Foundation is a valued partner in expanding opportunities for students and educators across Hillsborough County," said Anna Corman, president and CEO of Hillsborough Education Foundation. "Their generous investment helps put essential resources in the hands of teachers, build strong foundations for our youngest learners and prepare students for success beyond high school. We are grateful for their continued commitment to public education and for investing alongside us in the success of our students, teachers and schools."

Suncoast Credit Union, Florida's largest credit union, founded the Suncoast Credit Union Foundation to promote the education, health and emotional well-being of children in the community. Each time a Suncoast member uses their debit or credit card, the credit union donates four cents to the foundation to fund local initiatives. Since its inception in 1990, the foundation has raised and donated more than $68 million.

"Founded by educators in 1934, Suncoast Credit Union has spent more than 90 years investing in teachers, students and schools," said Kevin Johnson, president and CEO of Suncoast Credit Union. "We're especially proud to help students across Hillsborough County thrive and reach their full potential."

COMMUNITY BRINGS 48TH ANNUAL RUSKIN VETERANS DAY PARADE BACK

By Marie Gilmore

After initially facing the possibility of cancellation, the Ruskin Veterans Day Parade will return to U.S. 41 this fall, thanks to generous community support.

The 48th annual Ruskin Veterans Day Parade is scheduled for Saturday, November 7, with the parade stepping off at 11 a.m. along the northbound lanes of U.S. 41 in Ruskin. The route will run from Fifth Avenue Southeast to 11th Avenue Northeast, the same route used last year.

The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce recently announced that the longtime community tradition would move forward following a generous donation made on behalf of local veterans.

The announcement came after the chamber shared concerns about the rising costs associated with safely and successfully hosting the parade. Community members responded with financial support and encouragement, ultimately providing the funding needed to move forward.

Christopher Ligori & Associates, Military Family Support and Ruskin Memorial VFW Post 6287 are among the main sponsors supporting the 2026 parade. Hillsborough County Representative Michael Owen also played an integral role in helping organizers secure the remaining funds needed to provide a safe and fun community celebration.

"We are incredibly grateful to everyone who stepped forward with financial support, encouragement and a willingness to help," the chamber said.

For 48 years, the parade has brought together veterans, military organizations, businesses, schools, civic groups, marching bands and families to honor those who have served the nation.

Organizers emphasized that the event is a community effort relying on volunteers, sponsors, businesses and organizations to keep the tradition going. The parade gives residents an opportunity to line U.S. 41, wave flags and show their appreciation for veterans from the SouthShore community and beyond.

Following the parade, an awards ceremony will be held at Ruskin Memorial VFW Post 6287, located at 5120 N. U.S. 41 in Apollo Beach.

Businesses, schools, civic groups, organizations and other community members interested in participating are encouraged to register with the chamber. Military and veteran organizations are not required to pay a participation fee.

The current registration deadline is Sunday, October 4, although organizers expect that deadline to be extended.

The parade committee is also continuing to accept donations to help cover remaining expenses.

"Together, we will give our veterans the celebration they so richly deserve," said Bonnie Peacock, executive director of the Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce.

For registration, donations or additional information, visit the chamber website at www.southshorechamberofcommerce.org or call the chamber at 813-645-1366.





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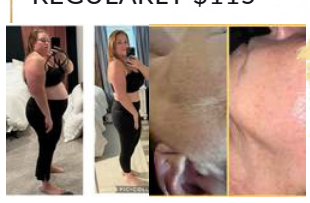
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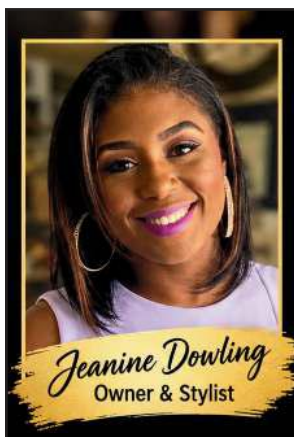
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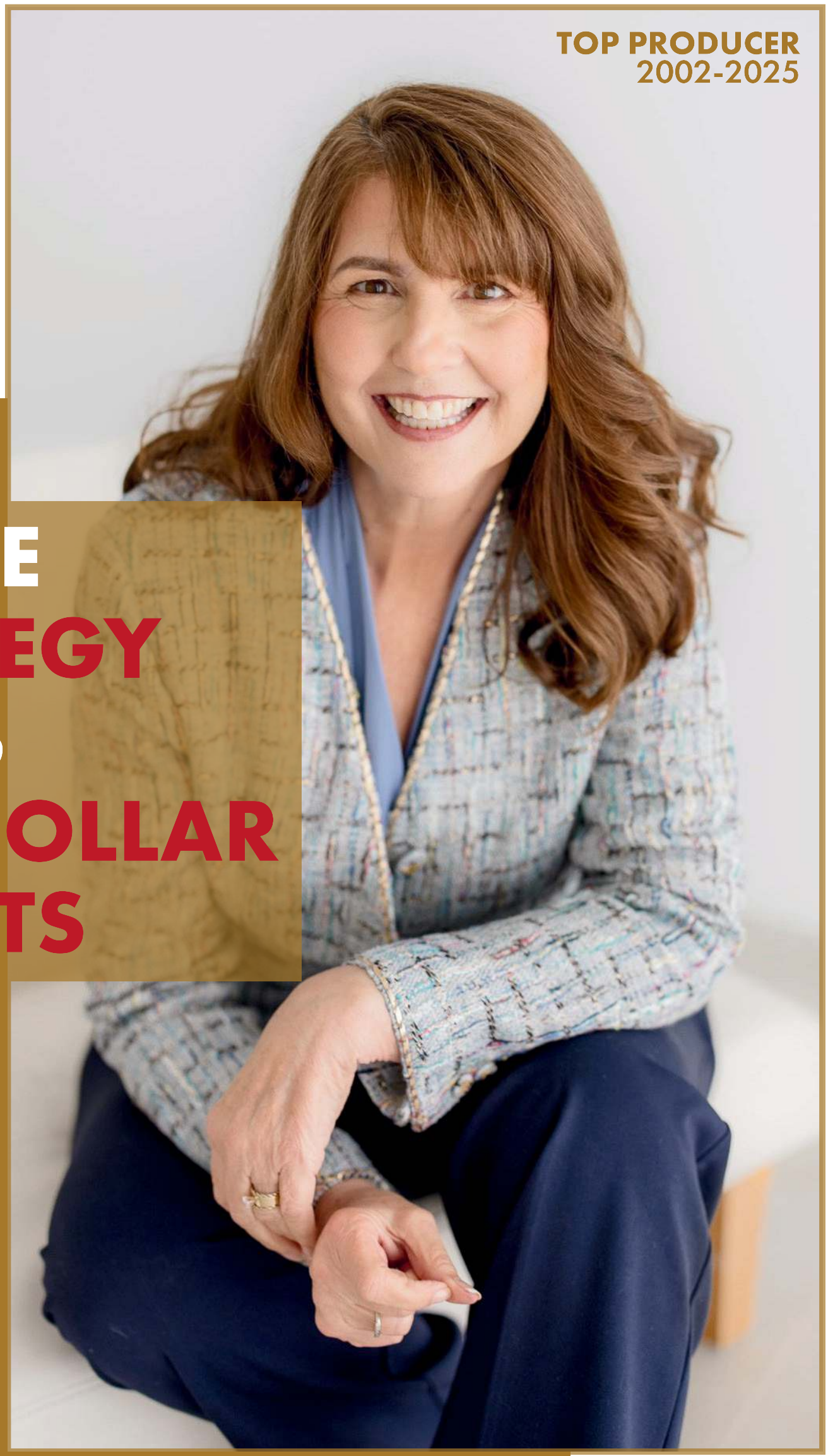
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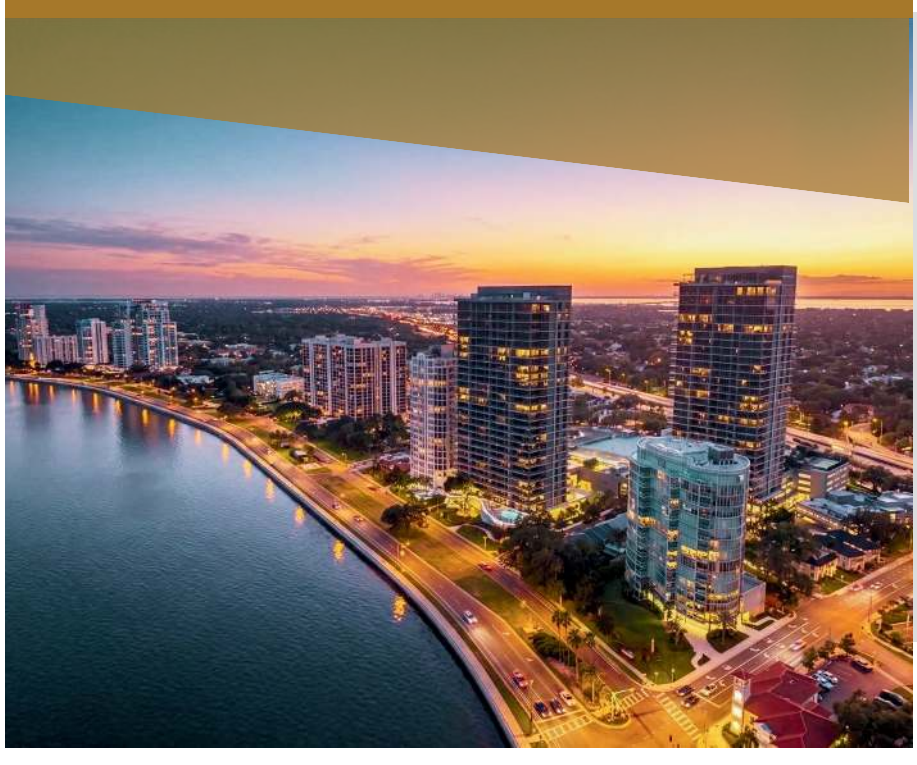
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WINN-DIXIE HELPS PROVIDE MORE THAN 1 MILLION MEALS

Staff Report



Winn-Dixie is helping put nutritious food on the tables of neighbors facing food insecurity through a Hunger Action Month initiative that will provide 1 million meals across Florida and southern Georgia.

The Winn-Dixie Company and its charitable arm, the Winn-Dixie Gives Foundation, donated $100,000 to Feeding America, with $10,000 designated for each of 10 partner food banks, including Feeding Tampa Bay.

In addition to the financial contribution, Winn-Dixie donated fresh produce and shelf-stable food through mobile food pantries operated in partnership with Feeding Tampa Bay and Feeding Northeast Florida. The mobile pantries bring food directly into local communities, helping provide immediate access to nutritious groceries for families and individuals in need.

"By providing nutritious food through mobile food pantries, Winn-Dixie is helping meet immediate needs and strengthen the communities we are proud to call home," said Raymond Rhee, president and CEO of The Winn-Dixie Company.

Feeding Tampa Bay is among the organizations benefiting from the $100,000 donation. Other recipients include All Faiths Food Bank, Feeding Northeast Florida, Feeding South Florida, Feeding the Gulf Coast, Harry Chapin Food Bank of Southwest Florida, Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida, Second Harvest of Coastal Georgia, Second Harvest of the Big Bend and Treasure Coast Food Bank.

Hunger Action Month, observed each September and led nationally by Feeding America, raises awareness about food insecurity and encourages communities to take action. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, nearly 48 million people in the United States experience hunger each year, including one in five children.

"Support from partners like The Winn-Dixie Company is critical in helping the Feeding America network deliver nutritious food to neighbors experiencing food insecurity," said Lisa Mann, chief development officer for Feeding America.

The Hunger Action Month effort builds on Winn-Dixie's year-round commitment to hunger relief. Earlier this year, the company donated $150,000 to the Florida State Alliance of YMCAs to help provide nutritious meals and snacks to children during the summer.

Customers can also support local hunger-relief organizations by purchasing $5, $10 or $15 prepackaged donation bags at participating Winn-Dixie stores. Since the program launched in November 2025, it has generated more than $900,000 in donated products for more than 100 organizations across Florida and southern Georgia.



SECOND CHANCE FOR THE GALVIN-CARL HOUSE



For more than a century, the Galvin-Carl House on Mulrennan Road in Valrico has quietly witnessed the transformation of Eastern Hillsborough County from a rural community into one of the region's fastest-growing areas.

Built in the late 19th century, with historical records generally dating the home to circa 1890, and some local documentation identifying 1893, the house was built for Daniel J. Galvin, an early Brandon businessman and civic leader. John McCormick was identified as the builder.

Galvin was a prominent figure during Brandon's early development. He operated a general store near the Brandon railroad depot on Moon Avenue and was involved in Hillsborough County government. His home stands as a tangible connection to the families and businesses that helped shape the community more than 130 years ago.

The property originally encompassed approximately 40 acres and included a citrus grove. Over the decades, the surrounding landscape changed, families came and went and the historic home eventually fell into significant disrepair.

With so few historic homes remaining in the Brandon and Valrico area, the future of the Galvin-Carl House became a matter of concern for local preservation advocates. At one point, demolition appeared to be its likely fate.

Then the story changed.

The current owner ultimately chose restoration over demolition, giving the historic property an opportunity to continue into another generation.

"Once completed, the Galvin-Carl House will pay homage to the original architecture, preserving the exterior details specific to the house when it was built in 1893," current owner said.

The plumbing, electrical and air-conditioning systems are being completely replaced, while much of the interior will be redesigned and key historic elements preserved.

"Every effort is being done to restore this historic resource while rebuilding it to last another 100 years," current owner said.

For a community rapidly losing many of its historic structures, the Galvin-Carl House represents more than an old building. It is a physical connection to the people, places and stories that came before us and a reminder that preservation sometimes begins with one important decision: to save it.

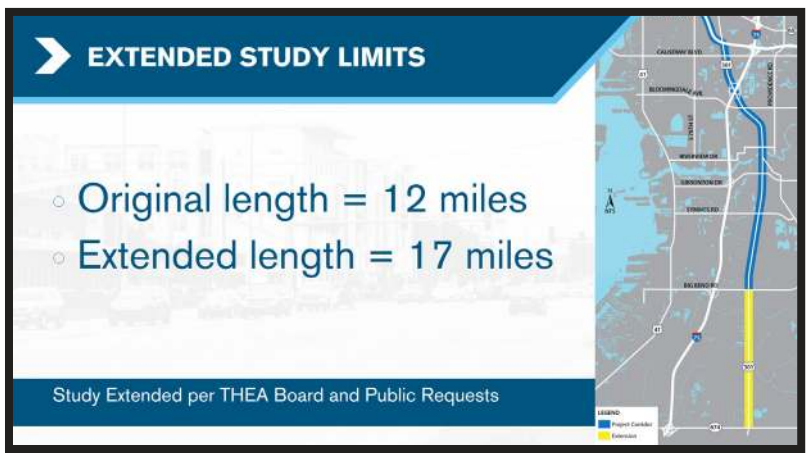
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PROPOSED U.S. 301 EXPRESS LANES COULD CUT COMMUTE TIMES FOR SOUTH COUNTY DRIVERS

By Brian Bokor



For South County drivers caught in morning and evening traffic, a proposed express route could offer another way toward Tampa and more time back in their day.

The Tampa Hillsborough Expressway Authority, known as THEA, is studying express lanes along 17 miles of U.S. 301 between the Selmon Expressway and north of State Road 674, or Sun City Center Boulevard.

The lanes could give U.S. 301 and Interstate 75 drivers another route, easing pressure on both roads while leaving more room on U.S. 301 for local trips.

Greg Slater, THEA's executive director and CEO, updated the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners during its September 16 regular meeting, covering traffic, access points, public outreach and financing.

The original 12-mile study ended at Big Bend Road. Requests from residents and THEA's board helped extend it five miles south.

"The important thing to note on that southern section, which is that Big Bend to Sun City, that's an area that has the least amount of volume of traffic today but it's also the area that we're seeing with the highest amount of growth between now and 2050," Slater said.

Early analysis estimated potential peak-period travel-time savings of up to 81 percent. Projected northbound morning savings included 62 minutes from Big Bend Road to the Selmon, 36 minutes from Gibsonton and 12 minutes from Bloomingdale.

Those projections are preliminary. THEA is working with the county and Florida Department of Transportation to update its traffic model with recent development and growth.

Slater said congestion can make rush hour last longer.

"One of the things that we find with congestion in particular is there's a point where it doesn't get worse, it just gets longer, so your peak hour becomes two hours and starts to kind of linger into the rest of it, and that's what we're seeing down there," he said.

The U.S. 301 study area corridor has 35 signalized intersections and 40 median openings. Express lanes would let longer-distance drivers bypass traffic lights.

Slater said choosing where drivers enter and exit will be "some of the most critical decisions that we make."

Potential access areas include between Sun City Center Boulevard and Big Bend Road, between Big Bend Road and Symmes Road, just south and north of Gibsonton Drive and just south of Bloomingdale Avenue. The presentation also shows a possible connection between Bloomingdale and Interstate 75, plus connections near the Selmon north of Causeway Boulevard. Exact ramp locations remain under study.



THEA is examining four sections and could address northern bottlenecks before moving south. Much of the corridor has about 200 feet of public right-of-way, or land set aside for transportation.

"There's a tremendous amount of room along that corridor to provide a solution," Slater said.

Engineers must work around structures near Interstate 75 and narrower right-of-way near the Alafia River. Near the Coca-Cola property between Causeway Boulevard and the Selmon, the team is exploring elevated lanes along the side of U.S. 301 because median space is limited.

Residents have provided feedback through workshops, community events and homeowners association meetings. Materials are available in English and Spanish, and the project website offers updates.

Local business input will also be welcome. THEA's past efforts include Shop Gandy, which supported Gandy corridor businesses during the Selmon Extension project.

A survey found that 92 percent of respondents experienced heavy or very heavy congestion on U.S. 301. More than nine in 10 supported exploring solutions. Concerns included noise, appearance and nearby roads.

"So, we want to make sure that we really work with the community to understand exactly what those concerns are so that we can provide some relief but also provide it in the context of that community that we're serving down there," Slater said.

Financing will shape the schedule. THEA is studying toll rates similar to the existing Selmon and following a federal process that could provide lower-cost loans. Grants or a state partnership could advance the project sooner.

The Project Development and Environment study contract has been awarded. A preview of alternatives is expected in summer 2027, with a public hearing anticipated in summer 2029. No construction or opening date was announced.

"And so, I argue a little bit on that timeline, where sometimes it's about going slow so you can go faster on the implementation front," Slater said.

Residents can learn more and sign up for updates at https://selmonstudies.com/us-301-study/.



Arts & Crafts Fair, Genealogical Society, Legion Meeting & More

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

South Bay Genealogical Society Meeting

The Tuesday, November 17, South Bay Genealogical Society Meeting will be held at the South Hillsborough Elks Lodge 2672, located at 1630 S. U.S. 41 in Ruskin. Beginning at 10:30 a.m., there will be an optional roundtable discussion, followed by a sit-down luncheon at 12 Noon. Following the luncheon, at 1 p.m., its guest speaker, Karen Fortin, will present 'Meet the Neighbors: Neighborhood Analysis Using Census Records.' The cost is $18 per person, which includes the meal and presentation. It now offer regular, vegetarian, and lactose free choice. For reservations and meal choice, please call Vicki at 360-608-1647.



Calvary Lutheran Church Arts & Crafts Fair

Calvary Lutheran Church will be hosting its first Arts & Crafts Fair on Saturday, November 28. Shop small this fall to find the most unique and high-quality treasures for everyone on your shopping list. Buy something for them and treat yourself to something special too. The Arts & Crafts Fair will be held inside Calvary Lutheran Church from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. It'll have over 40 incredible local artists and some tasty treats being served in its Calvary Café. Calvary wants to thank Redeemer Lutheran Church, which has hosted an impressive Arts & Crafts Fair for seven years now, for sharing its tips and tricks to ensure Calvary has the best possible event for its first time.

To learn more about Calvary's Arts & Crafts Fair, please call 813-645-1305, email info@calvaryalive.org or visit www.calvaryalive.org. Calvary Lutheran Church is located at 1250 E. College Ave. in Ruskin.

Beth Israel Sisterhood Luncheon

Beth Israel Sisterhood will have its annual paid-up membership luncheon on Tuesday, November 10, at 12 Noon in Beth Israel's social hall, located at 1115 E. Del Webb Blvd. in Sun City Center. The Kings Point Bella A Capella singers, under the direction of Faye Nepon, will serenade the attendees with their diverse mix of musical styles, including madrigals, spirituals, folk songs, pop music, Broadway show tunes and American standards. Come enjoy delicious food while being entertained by the dulcet voices of the chorus.

The luncheon is for Sisterhood members only, but you don't need to be a member of Beth Israel to join the Sisterhood. Sisterhood is a great way to meet other women and share fun times while watching, and participating in, interesting programs. For information about the meeting or to join Sisterhood, contact Donna at sisterhood@jcscc.org.

Redeemer Lutheran Church Fair

Redeemer Lutheran Church, located at 701 Valley Forge Blvd. in Sun City Center, will be holding its seventh annual Arts & Crafts Fair on Saturday, November 7, from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. With over 40 vendors, this event is an opportunity to find unique, handmade arts and crafts just in time for the holidays. There is something for everyone. There will also be some awesome raffle baskets, a 50/50 drawing and a delicious bake sale. This has been a highly attended event in the past, and it is an event that you won't want to miss. For more information, contact rlceventsscc@gmail.com.

Sun City Center American Legion Meeting

The next meeting of the Sun City Center American Legion Post 246 will be held on Friday, November 20, at 9:30 a.m. Room 3 of the Sun City Center Community Hall, located at 1910 S. Pebble Beach Blvd. in Sun City Center.

Tammy Arnold from Quilts of Valor will be in attendance to present specially made quilts to selected veterans. Deputy Sheriff Jeff Merry will also speak on issues relevant to seniors in our community.

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

Tampa Bay Mineral And Science Club Annual Fall Gem, Mineral And Jewelry Show

The Tampa Bay Mineral and Science Club presents its 67th annual Fall Gem, Mineral and Jewelry Show on Saturday and Sunday, November 7-8, at the Florida Fairgrounds Special Events Center, located at 4800 U.S. 301 N. in Tampa.

COMMUNITY RALLIES AROUND TAMPA FIRE CAPTAIN BENNY

By Brian Bokor



Tampa Fire Rescue Captain Benjamin 'Benny' Bengter has spent 15 years answering calls for people who needed help. Now, as Benny continues a difficult recovery from a life-threatening medical emergency, firefighters and community members throughout Tampa Bay are answering the call for him.

First responders, their families, friends and residents packed Voodoo Brewing Co. in Valrico on September 13 for 'Beers for Benny,' a fundraiser organized to support Benny, his fiancée and their young daughter.

Voodoo Brewing Co. Valrico owner Chris Ciulla said two firefighters who work at the brewery approached him after telling him what had happened to Benny.

"I have two firefighters who work for us, and they told me about Benny and what happened to him," Ciulla said. "They asked if they could hold a fundraiser, and I said, 'Hey, you can have use of my place any night you need. We're going to raise as much money for the family as we can.'"

Ciulla's connection to the fire service made the decision especially personal.

"My dad is a retired fire chief in New York City, so anytime we can help a firefighter, it hits home for me," Ciulla said.

The gathering brought together members of Tampa Fire Rescue and Hillsborough County Fire Rescue, including Hillsborough County Fire Rescue Chief Jason Dougherty. Some knew Benny personally, while others came because a firefighter and his family needed their support.

Benny became critically ill while vacationing with his family in Hawaii. His mother, Irina Bengter, said an attack of pancreatitis progressed to shock, organ failure, abdominal compartment syndrome and sepsis. Doctors performed emergency surgery and spent weeks stabilizing him before he returned to Tampa.

Although Benny could not attend the fundraiser, his daughter and a friend sent him photographs and videos throughout the evening. Irina said he was excited by what he saw and deeply appreciative.

"Ben asked me to share his heartfelt gratitude and say thank you to everyone who has lifted him up in prayer, supported him financially, sent messages, made phone calls and shown their love and support in so many other ways," Irina said. "He is forever grateful to each and every one of you."

The event featured "Benny Strong" T-shirts, vendors, food and drink specials, raffles, a silent auction and a DJ. More than $20,000 worth of prizes were donated.

Tampa Fire Rescue Driver Engineer Benjamin Carlson, a longtime friend of Benny, helped organize the fundraiser with assistance from the Firemen's Benevolent Association of the City of Tampa. The two have known each other since paramedic school in 2011.

"Last night truly filled my heart," Carlson wrote. "It means the world to me and my family."

Benny followed his father and uncles into the fire service and has risen from driver engineer to captain at Tampa Fire Rescue Station 16.

The Firemen's Benevolent Association has established an online fundraiser to help with medical and recovery expenses.

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SELF-CARE: PUT YOURSELF ON THE ROSTER!



Being a special needs parent or caregiver is a lot of work. It's a responsibility that many people may never fully understand. What others don't always see is the toll it can take on us mentally, emotionally and physically.

One of the biggest pieces of advice I give parents and caregivers is simple: Make time for yourself, and don't feel guilty about it!

As caregivers, we spend so much time making sure everyone else's needs are met that we often forget about our own. Between appointments, therapies, daily routines and life's unexpected challenges, it's easy to put ourselves at the bottom of the list.

I always say, "If I go down, this whole operation goes down!" And there's a lot of truth to that.

But let's look at self-care from a different perspective. It's not another task to add to your already busy schedule. It's an opportunity to do something that makes YOU happy!

Self-care doesn't have to be complicated, expensive or time-consuming. Sometimes, the simplest things make the biggest difference. Take a walk, try yoga or Pilates, go to the gym, read a book, get a pedicure, enjoy a date night, meet friends for lunch or take a peaceful drive alone. Even sitting outside with your morning coffee can be a little moment just for you.

The key is to start small and be intentional. Schedule some 'me time' on your calendar, just like any other appointment. Find activities that bring you joy, surround yourself with people who lift you up and don't be afraid to ask for help. Most importantly, let go of the guilt.

Remember, self-care isn't selfish. It's about creating balance, finding joy and giving yourself permission to enjoy life outside your caregiving responsibilities. Taking time for yourself can help you feel refreshed, more positive and better prepared for whatever life throws your way.

So, here's my challenge to every parent and caregiver: Learn to put yourself on the roster.

You matter too. You deserve happiness, rest and moments that are just for YOU!

HILLSBOROUGH MADE A PROMISE TO ITS SCHOOLS. NOW WE MUST KEEP IT

By Anna Corman, President and CEO, HEF



In 2018, too many Hillsborough County schools were struggling with failing air-conditioning systems, leaking roofs and years of deferred maintenance. The need was clear, but existing funding was insufficient to address the growing backlog.

Hillsborough County voters stepped forward and approved a half-penny sales tax dedicated to improving our public schools. It was a practical solution to a serious problem, and it has made a measurable difference.

Since 2019, more than $1.5 billion has been invested in schools throughout our district. More than 1,000 projects have been completed, with another 200 underway. Aging air-conditioning systems and roofs have been replaced. Schools have received improvements to safety and security, classroom technology, playgrounds, and athletic facilities.

These projects may not be what we picture first when we think about improving education. A new roof does not teach a child to read, and an air-conditioning system does not teach algebra. But students cannot do their best work in overheated classrooms, under leaking roofs or amid constant facility disruptions. Teachers should be able to focus on teaching, not whether their work environment will function as it should.

Safe, reliable, and well-maintained schools create the conditions students and educators need to succeed.

The half-penny has also allowed Hillsborough County Public Schools to address facility needs proactively and plan for long-term needs. With a dedicated funding source, the district can address problems before they become disruptive and more expensive.

That progress is now at risk.

The current half-penny expires at the end of 2028. Referendum 3 would renew it for another 10 years without increasing the tax rate. The renewal also maintains the accountability measures established in 2018, including independent audits, public reporting, and review by an independent citizen oversight committee.

The cost is shared broadly, while much of the economic benefit stays local. The average Hillsborough County household pays an estimated $86 per year, groceries and prescription drugs are exempt, and approximately 25% of the revenue is contributed by visitors to our region. At the same time, more than $800 million in work has been awarded to Tampa Bay businesses, supporting local jobs and keeping these dollars working in our community.

Without this dedicated funding, deferred maintenance will not simply pause. Roofs, air-conditioning systems, technology, and safety infrastructure will continue to age, and delaying those investments will only make them more expensive.

Hillsborough County voters made an important investment in our public schools in 2018, and we can see the results across the district. Renewing the half-penny will allow us to build on that progress and continue providing students and teachers with the safe, reliable schools they deserve.

Hillsborough Education Foundation encourages voters to vote yes on Referendum 3 and renew the Half-Penny Promise.



PUBLIX SERVES BRINGS 40 VOLUNTEERS AND A $60,000 GIFT TO LOCAL FOOD BANK

Staff Report



More than 40 Publix associates and store managers from 12 area stores spent Sept. 22 volunteering at United Food Bank and Services in Plant City as part of the company's Publix Serves initiative.

The visit also came with a major boost for the food bank. Publix Super Markets Charities presented the organization with a $60,000 contribution to strengthen hunger-relief efforts across eastern Hillsborough County.

John Doran, executive director of Publix Super Markets Charities, joined associates and local store leaders for the presentation. Publix Super Markets Charities, the grocery chain's charitable foundation, supports organizations focused on hunger relief, education and other community needs.

Throughout the day, volunteers worked on a range of projects that keep the food bank running. They assembled Kids Weekend Bags for students at 26 local schools, sorted fresh produce and shelf-stable food, prepared beverage bags and handed out meal boxes to families. Others pitched in on behind-the-scenes tasks that help the organization carry out its mission.

The work touched nearly every part of the food bank's operation, from the warehouse floor to the distribution line.

The Kids Weekend Bags are designed to help students who may not have enough to eat at home when school meals are not available, such as over the weekend.

The impact reaches well beyond a single day. United Food Bank and Services serves about 15,000 people each month, and the Publix donation will help provide food and other essential resources to local children, families, seniors and veterans.

Since 1991, the nonprofit has served as a lifeline for individuals and families facing hunger and hardship. Its mission is to help people move from "a state of hunger" to self-sufficiency, empowerment and self-reliance.

Through its Feeding Our Community program, the food bank offers daily on-site food distribution along with targeted outreach in underserved neighborhoods.

Publix Serves is the company's volunteer program, which encourages associates to give back in the communities where they live and work.

The food bank relies on donations and volunteers to keep up with demand. Contributions, according to the organization, help do more than fill empty plates; they help create lasting change.

For more information or to donate, visit ufbpc.org or follow @UnitedFoodBankAndServices on social media.

BROADWAY IN LAKELAND ANNOUNCES 2027 SEASON WITH THREE HIT SHOWS

Staff Report



Broadway fans can look forward to a new season of theater at the RP Funding Center in Lakeland, with three acclaimed productions scheduled for 2027.

The inaugural Broadway in Lakeland season will feature CLUE, HADESTOWN and The Who's TOMMY, offering audiences a mix of comedy, mythology and rock music.

Season subscriptions are now available, with packages starting at $145 for all three shows. Series price levels are $280 for Level One, $220 for Level Two and $145 for Level Three.

Subscribers receive guaranteed seats for each performance, access to the best available seats at subscription pricing, first options to upgrade seats and special ticket offers. Subscribers also have the opportunity to purchase tickets to select add-on performances before they go on sale to the general public.

The season opens with CLUE on January 31, 2027, at 7 p.m. Based on the popular 1985 movie and classic Hasbro board game, the production brings the familiar suspects and weapons to the stage for a comedic murder mystery. Six guests gather at Boddy Manor, where murder and blackmail lead to a night of twists, turns and unexpected revelations.

On March 2, 2027, at 7:30 p.m., HADESTOWN takes the stage. The Tony Award-winning musical, created by singer-songwriter Anaïs Mitchell and originally directed by Rachel Chavkin, weaves together the ancient stories of Orpheus and Eurydice and of Hades and Persephone. The production won eight Tony Awards in 2019, including Best Musical, as well as the 2020 Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album.

The season concludes on June 1, 2027, at 7 p.m. with The Who's TOMMY, a new production of the iconic rock opera created by The Who in 1969. Featuring songs including "Pinball Wizard," "I'm Free," "See Me, Feel Me" and "Sensation," the production follows Tommy Walker's extraordinary journey from troubled young man to pinball sensation.

Subscriptions can be purchased online at www.rpfundingcenter.com/broadway, by calling the RP Funding Center Box Office at 863-834-8111 or in person at 701 W. Lime St. The box office is open 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays.

For ticket and ADA seating information, call 863-834-8100. Service fees may apply.





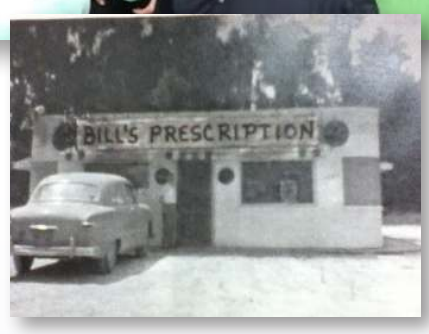




BILL'S PRESCRIPTION MARKS 70 YEARS WITH COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

By Marie Gilmore





When a local pharmacist Justo 'Bill' Noriega, opened a small drugstore on Brandon Boulevard in 1956, he could not have known it would one day care for four generations of the same families. Seventy years later, Bill's Prescription Center is still doing just that, and the family-owned pharmacy is inviting the community to celebrate.

The pharmacy will host a Community Wellness Celebration from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, November 7, at its location at 202 E. Brandon Blvd. in Brandon. The free event will bring together local health care providers, wellness businesses, longtime customers and neighbors for a day focused on health, education and connection.

Visitors can receive free health screenings, including blood pressure and glucose checks, as well as flu shots. Local health and wellness vendors will be on hand, along with giveaways, raffle prizes and family-friendly activities. The day will also include a special tribute to the pharmacy's founder and to the patients, employees, health care professionals and community members who have been part of its history.

Chelsea Noriega West, the founder's granddaughter and the daughter of the pharmacy's current owner, said her grandfather's philosophy of treating every patient like family remains at the heart of the business.

"My grandfather could never have imagined in 1956 that the small pharmacy he opened would become part of the lives of so many Brandon families," she said. "We have cared for grandparents, parents, children and now grandchildren of many of the same families who first walked through our doors decades ago."

Now a three-generation family business, Bill's Prescription Center has remained independent through seven decades of change in the health care industry. Noriega West said the anniversary is about more than the passage of time.

"It is a celebration of the people who have trusted us with their care, the dedicated staff members who have served generations of families and a community that has supported a local independent pharmacy," she said.

As health care continues to evolve, she added, the family hopes its story highlights the lasting value of accessible, personal, community-based care and the vital role local providers continue to play in the lives of Brandon residents.

For more information about the celebration, call Bill's Prescription Center at 813-277-8242.

ECHO THRIFT HELPS PRESERVE A PIECE OF BRANDON'S HISTORY

Staff Report

What began as an item donated to ECHO Thrift has turned into an opportunity to preserve a piece of Brandon's history for generations to come.

ECHO recently received an item at its thrift store that was handmade by Otis L. Brandon. Recognizing that the piece could have historical significance to the Brandon community, the ECHO team decided it deserved more than a place on a thrift store shelf.



ECHO Marketing Coordinator Kayla Vincent displays a handmade item created by Otis L. Brandon that was recently donated to ECHO Thrift and then donated to Preserving Brandon representative Karen Vaughn.



ECHO reached out to the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce, which connected the organization with Preserving Brandon, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving, protecting and sharing Brandon's history.

That connection confirmed that the item was indeed tied to the Brandon family legacy.

According to Preserving Brandon, Otis L. Brandon was born on April 1, 1929, and was a descendant of James Henry Brandon, the fourth child of John Brandon (1809) and Martha Brown Carson (1813). James built what is now known as the Brandon Homestead, also associated with Stowers Funeral Home, on State Road 60 in 1876.

Rather than reselling the item, ECHO worked with Preserving Brandon to ensure the piece could be preserved and have its history shared with the community.

"We are so grateful for the opportunity to be part of this incredible connection," said Kayla Vincent, ECHO's marketing coordinator. "What could have simply been another item moving through our thrift store instead became an opportunity to return a piece of Brandon's history to the community. It is a wonderful example of what can happen when local organizations recognize an opportunity and work together."

Preserving Brandon has also partnered with the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library. When the new Brandon Library opens, the organization plans to have a dedicated display shelf where historical items like this one can be featured for the public.

The journey of this item highlights the importance of community connections.

"As ECHO approaches 40 years of serving Brandon, we are reminded that we are not only part of Brandon's present — we are part of its story," the organization said.

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HALLOWEEN IS HIDING RIGHT IN PLANT CITY



DID YOU KNOW that one of the scariest Halloween experiences around is hiding right in Plant City?

Spooky season is officially here, and if you love Halloween, haunted houses, and that feeling of wondering whether you're brave enough to turn the next corner, there's a local attraction you need to know about.

Pemberton Haunted Acres
4802 W Knights Griffin Rd, Plant City, FL 33565

Pemberton Haunted Acres is a family-owned outdoor haunted attraction bringing a different kind of Halloween experience to the Plant City area.

At the center of the attraction is an approximately 5,000-square-foot haunted maze filled with handcrafted horror rooms, intense scare zones, immersive themed areas, and plenty of surprises waiting in the darkness.

And this isn't your typical walk-through Halloween display.

The experience is designed to put you right in the middle of the action. You'll make your way through dark passages, detailed horror scenes, themed rooms, and scare zones where you never quite know what—or who—is waiting around the next corner.

What makes Pemberton Haunted Acres even more interesting is that it's family-owned and locally created. A tremendous amount of work goes into building an attraction like this, from the sets and rooms to the characters, lighting, sound, and scares that bring everything to life.

So, if you're someone who counts down the days until October, watches scary movies all month, and believes Halloween should actually be SCARY, add this one to your spooky-season list.

You don't always have to drive hours away to find an incredible a experience.

Sometimes one of the best adventures is hiding right in your own backyard.

Now you know!

Have a local attraction, hidden gem, activity, restaurant, trail, park, or something else you think everyone should know about? Send it our way—it might just become the next edition of DID YOU KNOW?

THISTLESCOTCH BRINGS THOUGHTFUL BODY CARE TO LIFE

By Marie Gilmore



For Jennifer Blair, ThistleScotch is more than a body care brand. It is a reflection of resilience, healing and the women whose experiences have shaped her life.

Blair came to skin care through loss and witness. After losing her mother to breast cancer, watching her son serve as a donor for a young woman battling leukemia, celebrating that woman's recovery and experiencing the challenges of pregnancy, Blair began to see skin care differently.

Her own journey through menopause, along with watching her identical twin navigate the same transition while living with an autoimmune disease, deepened that perspective.

Blair said she began to recognize the physical and emotional weight women carry and wanted to create products she could not find herself — products designed to meet women where they are.

"What I mindfully crafted were products from the stories I heard, the stories I lived, from my voice," Blair said.

That philosophy became the foundation for ThistleScotch, a growing collection of body care products designed to be simple, thoughtful and supportive of real skin.

The collection includes Body Brine, Nourishing Dry Body Oil; Phase to Infuse, Body Serum; Element 18, Eau de Parfum; and Southern Bits, Personal Moisturizer.

Blair focuses on straightforward formulas and ingredients selected with purpose. She said each product is evaluated for how it feels when applied, how it settles on the skin and how the skin feels hours later.

"If something did not feel right, it did not move forward," she said.

The brand's name also carries a personal history. The thistle honors Blair's Scottish heritage and represents a hardy plant that can thrive in difficult conditions.

"Resilient is the Thistle!" Blair said.

'Scotch' comes from a family story. When Blair's mother discovered she was unexpectedly expecting twins, she joked that she would name them Scotch and Brandy. Blair, the firstborn, became 'Scotch,' a nickname that did not last but became a cherished family memory.

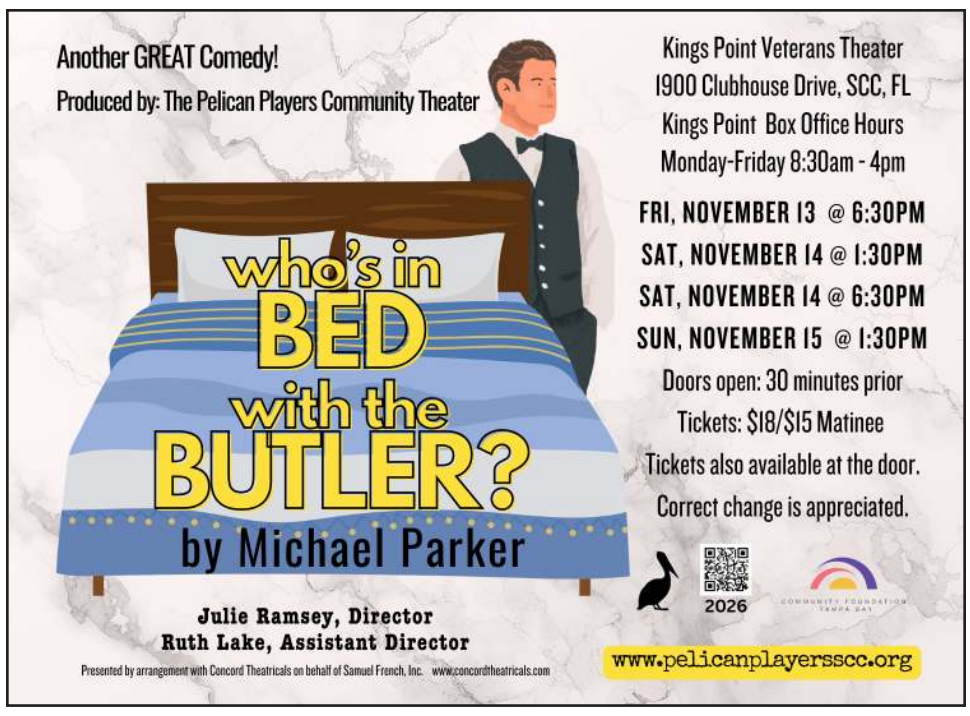
Today, that story lives on in ThistleScotch, connecting Blair's heritage, family and belief in women's resilience.

The brand's tagline, "A bit prickly. Thoughtfully created," reflects both the thistle and the honest spirit behind the products.

At its core, ThistleScotch encourages women to pause, reconnect with their bodies and remember that caring for themselves is not selfish — it is essential.

Learn more at thistlescotch.com.







YMCA CAMP CRISTINA UNVEILS NEW 30-FOOT CHALLENGE COURSE

By Marie Gilmore



Adventure is reaching new heights at YMCA Camp Cristina in Riverview with plans for a new 30-foot-high challenge course designed to bring climbing, teamwork, confidence-building and plenty of thrills to the community.

The new course will offer children, families, school groups, businesses and community organizations an opportunity to get outdoors, challenge themselves and experience YMCA Camp Cristina in a new way.

The centerpiece will be a 30-foot adventure tower featuring a climbing wall and elevated platform. From there, participants will navigate a series of high elements suspended above the ground, including platforms, cables, bridges and other obstacles designed to test balance, communication, problem-solving and courage.

The experience is intended to be about more than adrenaline.

Participants will have opportunities to work together, encourage one another and discover what they can accomplish outside their comfort zones.

"The goal isn't simply to see who can climb the highest or move through the course the fastest," according to the YMCA. "It's about creating experiences where people discover confidence in themselves and learn to trust the people around them."

The challenge course will add another attraction to the 65-acre YMCA Camp Cristina and create opportunities beyond traditional summer camp programming.

The YMCA envisions the course being used by families and YMCA members, school groups, teens, corporate teams, community organizations, birthday celebrations, retreats and leadership-development programs.

For businesses, the course could provide an opportunity for employees to participate in team-building activities while encouraging communication and collaboration. For families and young people, it can provide a supportive environment to face challenges, build confidence and celebrate accomplishments.

The project also reflects the YMCA's broader goal of making YMCA Camp Cristina a year-round destination.

Located in the heart of South Hillsborough, YMCA Camp Cristina has long provided opportunities for children and families to connect with nature, develop new skills and build relationships. The new challenge course will expand those opportunities with an elevated adventure experience.

YMCA Camp Cristina is located at 9840 Balm Riverview Rd. in Riverview.

For more information about YMCA Camp Cristina, its programs and upcoming opportunities, visit www.tampaymca.org/locations/ymca-camp-cristina or call 813-677-8400.

SCHOOL DISTRICT ASKS FOR SUPPORT AHEAD OF HALF-PENNY TAX VOTE

By Marie Gilmore



Chris Farkas, the district's Deputy Superintendent of Operations, School Board Member Patti Rendon and Citizen Oversight Committee member Ed Narain, MBA, JD.

Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) is hosting in person and virtual meetings about the Half-Penny Promise referendum that will appear on the November ballot.

The town halls are part of the district's commitment to providing voters with information about the Half-Penny Promise, including projects completed through the current program, ongoing investments in school facilities, and what reauthorization would mean for students and schools in the future.

"The Half-Penny Promise has supported major improvements in our schools, and these town halls will give residents a chance to learn more about the program, hear from district leaders, and understand how funds have been invested over time," said Superintendent Van Ayres.

Since its approval in 2018, more than $1.5 billion has been invested in schools, 1,000 projects have been completed and the average cost to Hillsborough County households is $8 per month. An additional 25 percent of the fund is paid by tourists. Groceries and prescriptions are exempt, as are anything above the first $5,000 of a purchase.

Several in-person meetings were held at schools across the district with one final virtual opportunity meeting remaining on Wednesday, October 14, from 6-7 p.m. on Microsoft Teams at https://rb.gy/0in6ib.

Members of the district's independent Citizen Oversight Committee will also participate in the meetings, sharing their perspective on accountability, transparency and how the Half-Penny Promise dollars have been monitored since the program began. The committee is made up of community leaders who review spending and ensure funds are spent as intended.

Since voters approved the Half-Penny Sales Tax in 2018, Hillsborough County Public Schools has invested more than $1.326 billion in school improvements, with more than $716 million awarded to local businesses. These investments have transformed learning environments across the district through critical upgrades such as air-conditioning replacements, roof renovations, enhanced safety and security measures and other essential infrastructure projects.

It appears on the ballot as Referendum 3: Continue the Half-Cent Sales Tax for Schools. This question asks whether to keep it for another 10 years, starting January 1, 2029. It is not a new tax. A YES vote continues the tax through 2038. A NO vote lets the tax end as scheduled.

To learn more about the Half Penny Promise, visit www.hillsboroughschools.org/half-penny-sales-tax-referendum.



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WHO'S GOT YOUR VOTE?

BALLOT EXPLAINED: THREE AMENDMENTS AND THREE REFERENDUMS

By Marie Gilmore

Voters will decide three statewide constitutional amendments and three Hillsborough County questions in the November 3 General Election. Statewide amendments require at least 60 percent approval. County referendums require a simple majority.

Statewide Amendments

Amendment 1: A Bigger "Rainy Day Fund" for the State

Florida maintains a Budget Stabilization Fund to cover emergencies and budget shortfalls. The amendment would increase the amount that can be retained from 10 percent to 25 percent of the state's general revenue collections.

It would also require the Legislature to transfer the lesser of $750 million or the amount needed to reach 25 percent each year, unless specified conditions allow the transfer to be suspended. Lawmakers could continue withdrawing money for critical state needs.

A YES vote supports increasing the fund's maximum balance and requiring annual transfers.

A NO vote opposes the proposed changes.

Amendment 2: Property Tax Exemption for Certain Agricultural Equipment

This amendment would exempt certain tangible personal property from property taxes when located on agricultural land and used to produce agricultural products or for agritourism activities.

The property must be owned by the landowner or leaseholder. Examples include qualifying farm equipment, tools and machinery.

If approved, the exemption would apply beginning January 1, 2027.

A YES vote supports exempting qualifying agricultural and agritourism-related property from taxes.

A NO vote opposes the proposed exemption.



Amendment 3: Larger Homestead Exemption and Changes to Property Assessments

This amendment would make several changes to Florida's property tax system.

Larger homestead exemption: The exemption for non-school taxes would increase to $150,000 in 2027 and $250,000 in 2028, with adjustments for inflation beginning in 2029. It would not apply to school district taxes.

Local option: Counties and municipalities could increase the homestead exemption for their respective taxes up to the property's full assessed value. Special districts could do the same with voter approval.

New Florida residents: People who are not Florida residents as of December 31, 2026, would initially receive the existing homestead exemption when they qualify.

Lower assessment cap: The annual cap on increases in assessed value for non-homestead property would decrease from 10 percent to 5 percent. This does not apply to school district taxes.

Property tax spending: Counties and municipalities would be required to use property tax revenues for public safety, education, infrastructure, natural resources, bond debt service, employee retirement benefits, and government operations.

The amendment would take effect January 1, 2027.

A YES vote supports the proposed changes.

A NO vote opposes those changes.



Hillsborough County Referendums

Referendum 1: Should Voters Elect the School Superintendent?

Currently, the Hillsborough County School Board appoints the superintendent of Hillsborough County Public Schools. This referendum asks whether the superintendent should instead be elected by voters in a partisan election.

If approved, the change would take effect with the 2028 general election, with the superintendent serving a four-year term.

A YES vote supports electing the superintendent.

A NO vote keeps the superintendent appointed by the School Board.

Referendum 2: More County Commissioners, All Elected by District

Hillsborough County currently has seven county commissioners. This referendum would increase the number to nine and eventually to 11 when the county reaches a population of 2.5 million.

It also would require every commissioner to be elected from a single-member district, meaning only district voters would elect that commissioner.

A YES vote supports expanding the commission and making all seats district-based.

A NO vote leaves the current seven-member structure in place.

Referendum 3: Continue the Half-Cent Sales Tax for Schools

Hillsborough County voters approved a half-cent school capital outlay sales surtax in 2018. The tax is scheduled to expire in 2028.

This referendum asks whether to continue the half-cent sales tax for another 10 years beginning January 1, 2029. Revenue would fund air conditioning replacement and repairs, school construction and improvements, security enhancements and other maintenance needs.

A YES vote supports continuing the tax through 2038.

A NO vote allows the tax to expire as scheduled.



A PLAN TO MEET TODAY'S CHALLENGES

KAREN PEREZ' PRIORITIES FOR OUR SCHOOLS

- BUILD ON OUR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GAINS
- CONTINUE TO FIGHT FOR HIGHER TEACHER PAY
- INVEST IN SCHOOL SAFETY
- RETAIN QUALITY TEACHERS
- FOCUS OUR LIMITED RESOURCES ON THE CLASSROOM

re-elect A+ Karen Perez for school board district 6

Karen's experience as Chair of the School Board, mother, business owner and mental health specialist, makes her uniquely prepared to face today's challenges.

- Elected to Hillsborough County School Board in 2018 and serves as Chair
- Owns a small business that works with children, families, and veterans on mental health issues
- Mother of three adult children, eight grandchildren and lives in New Tampa with Riley and Baxter, certified Therapy Dogs for comforting her clients
- Florida School Board Assoc. Member
- Serves on Value Adjustment Board
- Safe and Sound Leadership Council
- National Assoc. Social Workers Member
- Trilingual – English, Spanish and American Sign Language

/KarenPerezTampa | (813) 493-7705 | kperezhsb2004@aol.com

www.KeepKarenPerez.com

Political advertisement paid for and approved by Karen Perez, non-partisan, for Hillsborough County School Board District 6.

POLITICALLY SPEAKING

YOUR VOTE COUNTS

U.S. SENATOR



Ashley Moody
www.ashleymoody.com



Angie Nixon
www.angienixon.com



Neil J. Gillespie
www.neilgillespie4senate.blogspot.com

REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS DISTRICT 14



Mike Beltran
www.beltranforcongress.com



Kathy Castor
www.castorforcongress.com



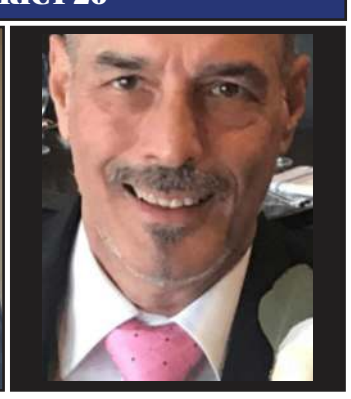
Brian Lambert
www.brianlambertforcongress.com

VOTE by MAIL

STATE SENATOR DISTRICT 20



Jim Boyd
www.boydforflorida.com



Gerald Baldi
www.baldiformanatee.com

STATE REPRESENTATIVE DISTRICT 69



Daniel Alvarez
www.electdannyalvarez.com



Ashley Elizabeth Hermann
www.ashleyforfloridahouse.com

STATE REPRESENTATIVE DISTRICT 70



Michael Owen
www.owenforflorida.com



Luther Keith Wilkins
www.lutherforfl.com

COUNTY COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 3



Gwen Myers
www.votegwenmyers.com



Luiz F. Garcia
www.electluizffgarcia.com

COUNTY COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 5



Stacy Hahn
www.votestacyhahn.com



Neil Manimala
www.neilmanimala.com

COUNTY COMMISSIONER DISTRICT 7



Joshua Wostal
www.joshuawostal.com



Aileen Rodriguez
www.voteaileen2026.com

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER DISTRICT 2



Brittany Lyssy
www.votebrittanylyssy.com



Daniela Simic
www.danielaforschools.com

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER DISTRICT 6



Kenneth Gay
www.votekennethgay.com



Karen Perez
www.keepkarenperez.com

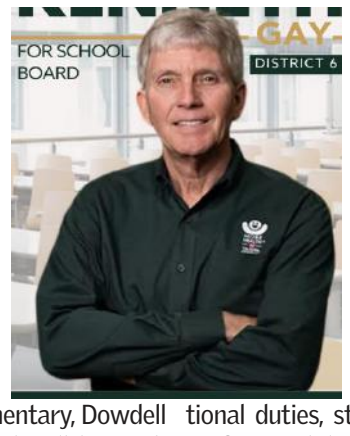
YOUR VOTE Is YOUR Voice

YOUR VOTE COUNTS

WHO'S GOT YOUR VOTE?

KENNETH GAY
SCHOOL BOARD, DISTRICT 6

Staff Report



Kenneth 'Ken' Gay is seeking a seat on the Hillsborough County School Board, District 6, drawing on nearly four decades of experience in public education and a lifelong connection to the community he hopes to serve.

A fifth-generation Floridian, Gay was born and raised in Tampa Bay and is a graduate of Palm River Elementary, Dowdell Middle Magnet School and Hillsborough High School. He continued his education at Hillsborough College, the University of South Florida and Nova Southeastern University, earning two master's degrees and a doctorate in child and youth studies.

Gay devoted 39 years to Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) as an educator and administrator before retiring in 2022. He continues working with students through MORE HEALTH and mentors teachers entering the profession through alternative certification.

His decision to run, he said, is rooted in a desire to keep students at the center of school district decisions while supporting educators, strengthening family partnerships and ensuring taxpayer resources are used effectively.

Gay identifies student achievement as a central priority, emphasizing the importance of identifying learning gaps early, strengthening instruction and expanding opportunities that prepare students for college, military service, careers and life.

He also points to teacher recruitment and retention as essential to student success. His priorities include competitive compensation, reducing unnecessary paperwork and noninstructional duties, strengthening mentoring and professional development and giving educators meaningful input before decisions affect classrooms.

School safety and discipline are another focus. Drawing on his experience as an assistant principal, Gay supports clear behavior expectations, consistent enforcement of discipline policies, family involvement and partnerships with school resource officers.

Beyond education, Gay serves as clerk of session at First Presbyterian Church of Brandon and has volunteered with Tampa Bay Watch, helping restore marine habitat.

After a lifetime in Hillsborough County, Gay said he is seeking the District 6 seat to continue serving students, educators and families through experienced leadership, fiscal responsibility and a focus on stronger student outcomes. District 6 is a countywide seat, meaning all Hillsborough County voters can participate in the election. For more information, visit www.votekennethgay.com.

NEIL MANIMALA
COUNTY COMMISSIONER, DIST. 5

By Amanda Castillo



For Neil Manimala, Hillsborough County has been the backdrop to nearly every chapter of his life, from growing up in Valrico as the son of two health care workers, to building a career as a physician serving the local medical community and now raising a family of his own.

Manimala's parents, both immigrants, worked in opposite hospitals while raising their family. His mother was a nurse and his father a respiratory therapist, an upbringing that cultivated his understanding of hard work, family, and service.

Looking back on their journey, he sees it as a reflection of what they were able to build.

"There is something to be said about the American dream," he said.

That example eventually led Manimala into health care. After graduating from Hillsborough County public schools, he earned his Medical degree from the University of South Florida. Today, he's a board-certified urologist caring for patients throughout Brandon, Riverview, Plant City and Sun City Center, and serves as the president of the Hillsborough County Medical Association.

His connection to the community extends beyond his medical practice. Manimala has served on the county's Health Care Advisory Board and the Health Council of West Central Florida, experiences that have kept him connected to issues affecting Hillsborough County.

His background in medicine and community shaped Manimala's decision to pursue public service as he campaigns for Hillsborough County Commission, District 5. His campaign has outlined priorities including health care access, public safety and economic opportunity.

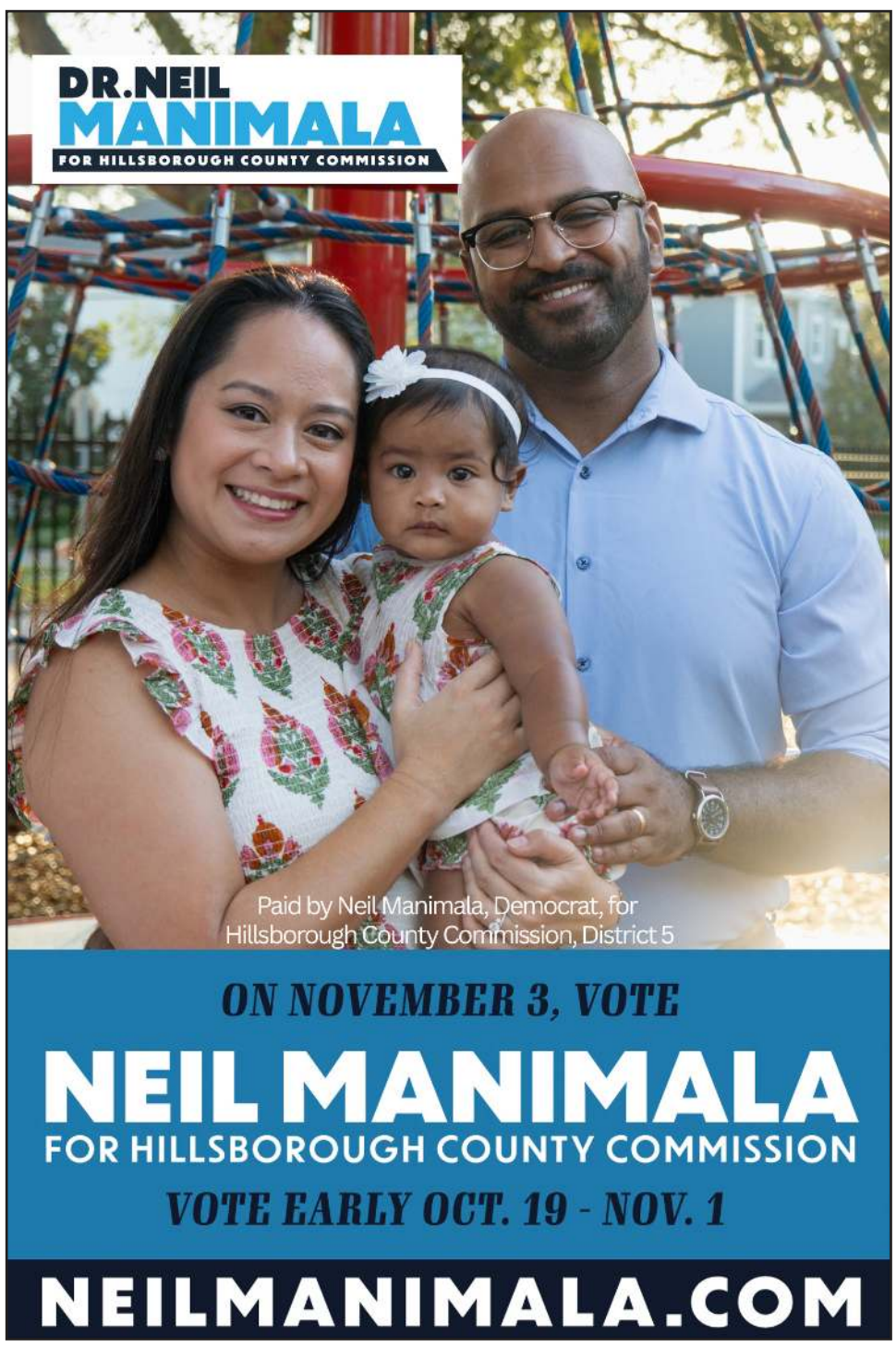
Since welcoming his daughter, Manimala's connection to Hillsborough County has taken on a new meaning. Becoming a father has sharpened his focus on the county's future and the community where his daughter will grow up.

"I couldn't sit on the sidelines," he said, "I couldn't let my daughter be my age 36 years from now looking back at this generation and saying we didn't do enough."

His campaign is rooted not only in the place he has called home for his whole life, but also in his determination to help build a healthier, more equitable Hillsborough County for the next generation.

For more information, visit his website at www.neilmanimala.com.





POLITICALLY SPEAKING

KAREN PEREZ
SCHOOL BOARD, DISTRICT 6

By Amanda Castillo



Karen Perez's connection to Tampa began when she was 15 years old. In 1979, her mother moved her to Tampa to continue her education. What began as a move would eventually become the foundation for a life spent helping others find their own opportunities.

For Perez, education has never been just about a diploma. It is something she carries with her and believes needs to be shared with others.

"Education does not make us superior to others but helps us level the playing field," she said.

Today, Perez serves as chair of the Hillsborough County School Board and is running for reelection to the District 6 at-large seat. She was first elected to the school board in 2018 and reelected in 2022.

Prior to entering public service, Perez spent years working in social work and mental health. She earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees in social work from the University of South Florida and became a licensed clinical social worker. Throughout her career, Perez has worked closely with children, families and veterans, focusing on mental health and the challenges that shape people's lives.

That experience continues to shape the way Perez approaches her work on the school board. Her years in social work taught her to look beyond what is visible and to understand that there is often more to a person's circumstances than what others see.

"Every person has a story," Perez said, a perspective she has carried into her work with students, families and the community.

As she addresses challenges facing Hillsborough County Public Schools, Perez emphasizes the importance of understanding the people behind the issues, not just the issues themselves.

Perez is running for another term because she believes "there is still work to be done." For her, that work begins with listening to the people behind the issues and making sure their experiences are heard.

Now, Perez hopes that the work she leaves behind will continue after her time in public service ends. She wants students and families to know that their stories matter, their voices deserve to be heard and someone will advocate for them. The opportunity her mother once fought to give her became a lifelong commitment to opening doors for others.

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.



WHO'S GOT YOUR VOTE?

BRITTANY LYSSY
SCHOOL BOARD, DISTRICT 2

Staff Report



Brittany Lyssy is a mom raising her children in Hillsborough County who said she often thinks about the questions facing local schools: Are children learning what they need to succeed? Are classrooms safe? Are teachers being supported? And are taxpayer dollars being used responsibly?

Those questions, she said, are why she is running for Hillsborough County School Board, District 2.

Lyssy has a background in education policy and law and has worked with school boards nationally on ethics, governance and policy. She also brings the perspective of a parent and said she understands what families expect when they send their children to school. In her view, strong schools begin with strong academics, supported teachers, safe classrooms and parent partnerships.

Lyssy said she respects educators and the work they do every day. She believes teachers should have the support and resources needed to help students learn, grow and succeed. She also believes School Board members have a responsibility to ask questions, examine how taxpayer dollars are spent, measure whether policies are producing results and make sure parents have a meaningful voice in decisions affecting their children.

Her priorities include strengthening core academics, particularly reading and math; identifying struggling students early; supporting and retaining great teachers; maintaining safe and orderly classrooms; and directing resources toward students and classrooms.

Lyssy supports school choice and said parents should have the freedom to choose the educational setting that best meets their child's needs. She believes strong public schools and educational choice can coexist and that families deserve options.

Fiscal responsibility is another priority. Lyssy supports transparency and accountability, including a line-by-line review of spending and a budget that keeps classrooms at the forefront.

She also believes schools should prepare students for a variety of paths after graduation, including college, career and technical education, apprenticeships, military service or the workforce.

Brittany Lyssy is running for Hillsborough County School Board, District 2. Learn more at www.votebrittanylyssy.com.

MICHAEL OWEN
FLORIDA HOUSE, DISTRICT 70

Staff Report



Serving House District 70 is personal for State Representative Michael Owen because this is home. The district includes portions of Hillsborough and Manatee counties, including Apollo Beach, Ruskin, Sun City Center, Riverview, Wimauma and Balm. These communities are home to families, businesses and residents who expect state government to stay focused on issues that affect everyday life.

Owen has called Hillsborough County home for almost all of his life. He was raised in Brandon, built his career here and has spent more than 20 years as a small business owner. Before being elected to the Florida House in 2024, he served on the Hillsborough County Commission. His experience in local government gave him perspective as state government tackles issues such as affordability, transportation and infrastructure, property insurance, public safety, protection of natural resources and the responsible use of taxpayer dollars.

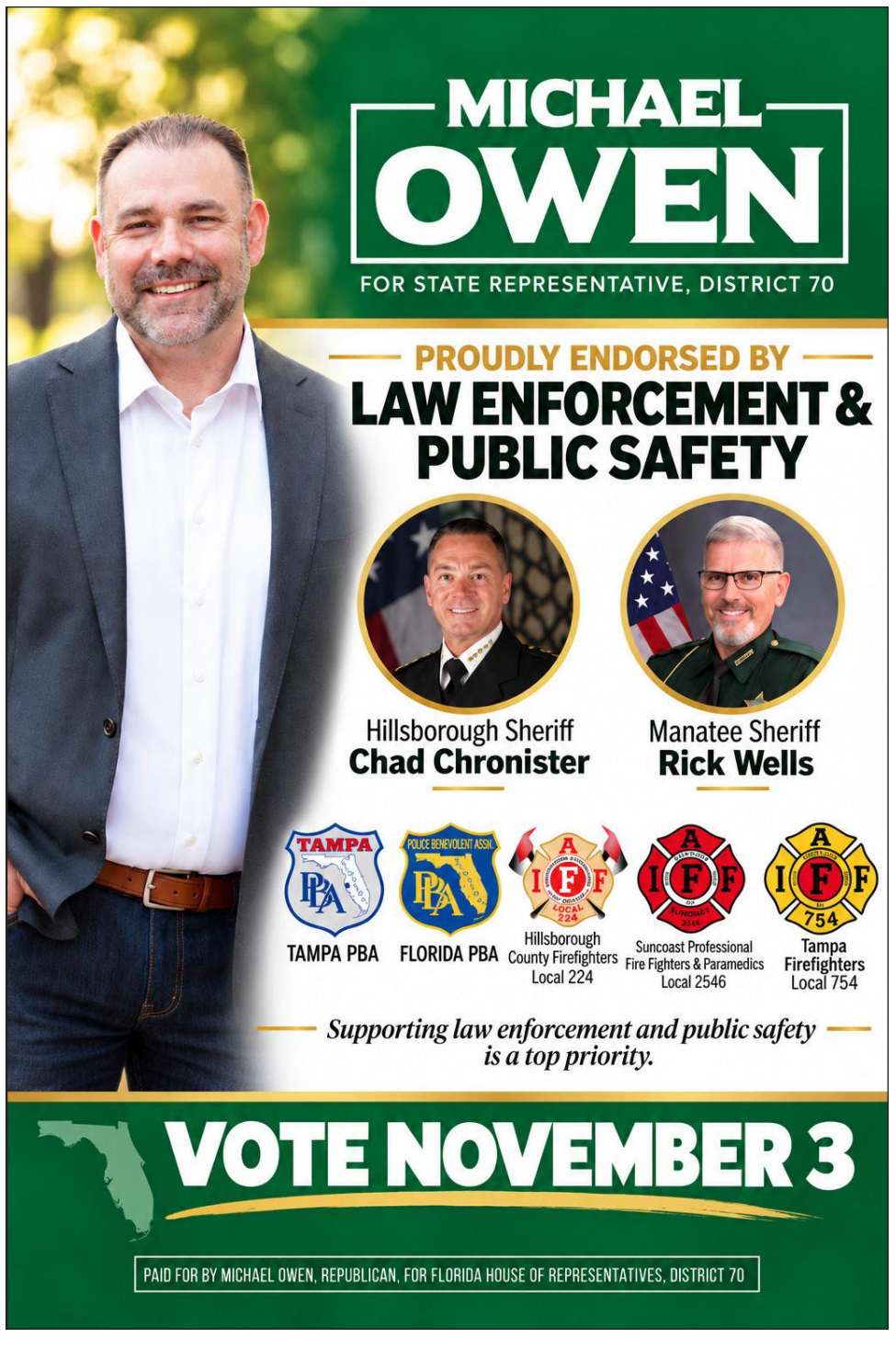
He has carried that local perspective with him to Tallahassee. His committee assignments have included State Affairs, Insurance and Banking, Natural Resources and Disasters, Student Academic Success, Transportation and Economic Development Budget, and the Select Committee on Property Taxes. Each of these areas touches issues that affect the people he represents.

During his time in the House, Owen has worked on legislation addressing consumer protections, regional planning and economic development, health care and local issues affecting Hillsborough County. He has also focused on transportation, property taxes, insurance, education, public safety and protecting Florida's natural resources.

Owen says his background in local government has reinforced the importance of making sure decisions in Tallahassee reflect how policies will affect communities at home. Whether the issue is roads and infrastructure, cost pressures facing families, support for law enforcement or responsible use of taxpayer dollars, he believes state leaders should understand the impact of the decisions they make.

For Owen, public service is about listening to the people he represents and carrying their concerns into the decisions made in Tallahassee. He is grateful for the opportunity to serve District 70 and, if elected, says he will continue working on the issues that matter to the families, businesses and communities that make the area home.





WHO'S GOT YOUR VOTE?

DANIELA SIMIC
SCHOOL BOARD, DISTRICT 2

By Libby Hopkins



When Daniela Simic moved to Tampa in 2003, she knew education would be her life's work.

With a master's degree in Educational Policy and Leadership from the University of

Pennsylvania, she began her Hillsborough County career in the classroom.

Over the next two decades, Simic worked at nearly every level of public education, from teaching and supporting struggling schools to serving at the Florida Department of Education and ultimately becoming Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction for Hillsborough County Public Schools.

"I've seen our schools from many different perspectives," Simic said. "But the question has always been the same. Are we giving every child the best possible chance to succeed?"

Today, Simic sees the school system as the parent of a fifth grader in Hillsborough County Public Schools. She has spent years involved in PTA, serving as president of her son's school PTA and now as Vice President of Advocacy for the Hillsborough County Council PTA.

Her path to motherhood also shaped her perspective. Simic lost her husband while pregnant

and has raised her son as a single mother, strengthening her belief in strong schools and

communities.

Simic believes the district must be accountable for student outcomes and taxpayer dollars, directing resources toward classrooms and programs that demonstrate results. She also wants to retain great teachers and staff, keep schools safe and expand career and technical opportunities.

"Not every child will take the same path after graduation," Simic said. "Our responsibility is to make sure every path can lead somewhere meaningful."

She believes parents deserve a meaningful voice and decisions affecting families should be communicated clearly and transparently.

"School Board is a nonpartisan job," Simic said. "We may not agree on everything, but we can agree that our children deserve safe schools, great teachers, strong academics and adults who will put them first."

For Simic, it comes back to the belief that has guided her career: Every child deserves every chance to succeed.

Daniela Simic will be on the November 3 ballot for Hillsborough County School Board, District 2.

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE OFFERS FOUR WEEKLY NETWORKING GROUPS

Staff Report



The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce (BRCC) offers four weekly networking opportunities designed to help local professionals build relationships, exchange ideas and become more connected to the business community.

The chamber encourages members to view networking as an ongoing investment rather than a one-time interaction. Regular participation helps members build familiarity and trust that can lead to referrals, collaborations and new business opportunities.

"Showing up consistently gives members the opportunity to move beyond simply knowing someone's name or business," said Amber Aaron, president of the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce. "Our networking groups create an environment where members can build relationships, learn how they can support one another and become a trusted resource within our business community."

INSPIRE Networking Group meets on Mondays at 3 p.m. at First Citizens Bank, located at 10670 Palm River Rd. in Tampa, next to Topgolf. The faith-based group is led by Dave Lechuga of Florida Executive Realty and Mikey Blewett of Generations Church and incorporates faith, encouragement and relationship building.

RISE Networking Group meets on Thursdays at 8 a.m. at the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce office, located at 6437 Watson Rd., Lower Level, in Riverview. Attendees should enter from the back of the building. The group is led by Me'Lanie' Munusami of G-FORCE Parking Lot Striping of Tampa and John Plumstead of East of Tampa.

Networking@Noon EAST meets on Fridays at 12 Noon at JF Kicks Restaurant and Patio Bar, located at 3345 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Valrico. It is led by Michael May of All American Title and Troops in Contact and Yolonda Young of WeWed.

Networking@Noon WEST meets on Fridays at 12 Noon at Brandon Crossroads Bowl, located at 609 Crater Lane in Tampa. The group is led by Barb Smith Gray of Flutterby Media and Joseph Brace of Primerica Financial Services.

All four groups are free and open to BRCC members. Visitors interested in experiencing the chamber's networking community may attend each group up to two times.

For more information, visit the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce or call 813-689-1221.

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ARE YOU READY TO VOTE?

2026 GENERAL ELECTION

Plan Your Vote

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Due by 7 PM on November 3

Deadline to Request a Mail Ballot: October 22

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Early Voting

October 19 – November 1
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November 3
7 AM - 7 PM

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On Election Day, you must vote in the polling place assigned to your precinct.



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Craig Latimer
Supervisor of Elections



THE OSPREY OBSERVER SouthShore Edition

Eye *on* Business

EDITED BY Jenny Bennett

October 2026, Vol. 1, Iss. 10

SUBMIT BUSINESS NEWS & PRESS RELEASES

Send to **Business Editor**
116 E. Bloomingdale Ave., Brandon, FL 33511
or email **jbennett@ospreyobserver.com**
DEADLINE: 15TH OF EACH MONTH

Apollo Pain Management Ribbon Cutting



The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce held a ribbon cutting for Apollo Pain Management on October 8 at its Sun City Center office, located at 720 Cortaro Dr.

Apollo Pain Management is a veteran-owned, physician-run practice founded by Dr. R. James Warren, a veteran, VA Choice doctor and University of South Florida (USF) assistant professor. The practice is also a rotation site for the USF Pain Fellowship.

Apollo Pain Management serves patients throughout the SouthShore and has a second office in Bradenton. For more information, call 833-320-7246.

Mathnasium Of Ruskin Ribbon Cutting

The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce celebrated a ribbon cutting at Mathnasium of Ruskin welcoming Center Director Nicole Pestano, M.Ed., and her team into the Chamber Family.

Mathnasium of Ruskin provides personalized math instruction for students in grades K–12 in a supportive learning environment. The Mathnasium Method helps students build understanding and confidence so they can catch up, keep up, and get ahead in math. Pestano brought Mathnasium of Ruskin to the community to advocate for local students and partner with SouthShore families and schools.

Mathnasium of Ruskin is located at 3062 19th Ave. NE in Ruskin. Families interested in learning more may contact Mathnasium of Ruskin at 813-819-6284 or ruskin@mathnasium.com, or visit www.mathnasium.com/ruskin.

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Blissologie Donates 3D Tattoos



In honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Blissologie Beauty, located at 101 Flamingo Dr. in Apollo Beach, is launching a special community initiative to provide two breast cancer survivors with complimentary 3D areola tattoo restoration services. 3D areola tattooing is a specialized paramedical tattoo technique that recreates the natural appearance of the areola and nipple following breast surgery and reconstruction. Throughout October, Blissologie will be accepting applications from local breast cancer survivors who have undergone breast reconstruction and are interested in receiving this service. Those interested in applying or learning more can contact it privately at blissologie.info@gmail.com.

Veterinary Urgent Care Opens In Gibsonton

The Greater SouthShore Chamber of Commerce celebrated a ribbon cutting for Bay Area Veterinary Care on September 25 at 7020 Big Bend Rd., Ste. 102, in Gibsonton.

Bay Area Veterinary Care is an urgent care clinic that welcomes walk-ins and also offers internal medicine and surgery, working alongside each pet's regular veterinarian. The clinic is open seven days a week from 12 Noon-10 p.m. It also offers free Happy Visits, which let pets stop in when they are not sick or hurt so they become comfortable with the clinic before they ever need care.

"Having evening and weekend care close to home is a real gift to SouthShore pet owners," said Bonnie Peacock, executive director of the SouthShore Chamber of Commerce.

For more information, call 813-402-2232 or visit www.bayareaveterinarycare.com.

Veterans Day Appreciation Event

RAZZLEDAZZLE Barbershop and Vet-Able Technologies are honoring veterans with free professional haircuts on Veterans Day, Wednesday, November 11. The complimentary men's haircut is a $35 value. If appointments fill, veterans who visit in person will receive a gift card for a free haircut at a later date. Food and refreshments will be sponsored by Gasparilla Pizzeria. Veterans can reserve an appointment by calling 813-820-3757. RAZZLEDAZZLE is at 11296 Sullivan St. in Riverview and is open 10 a.m.-7 p.m.



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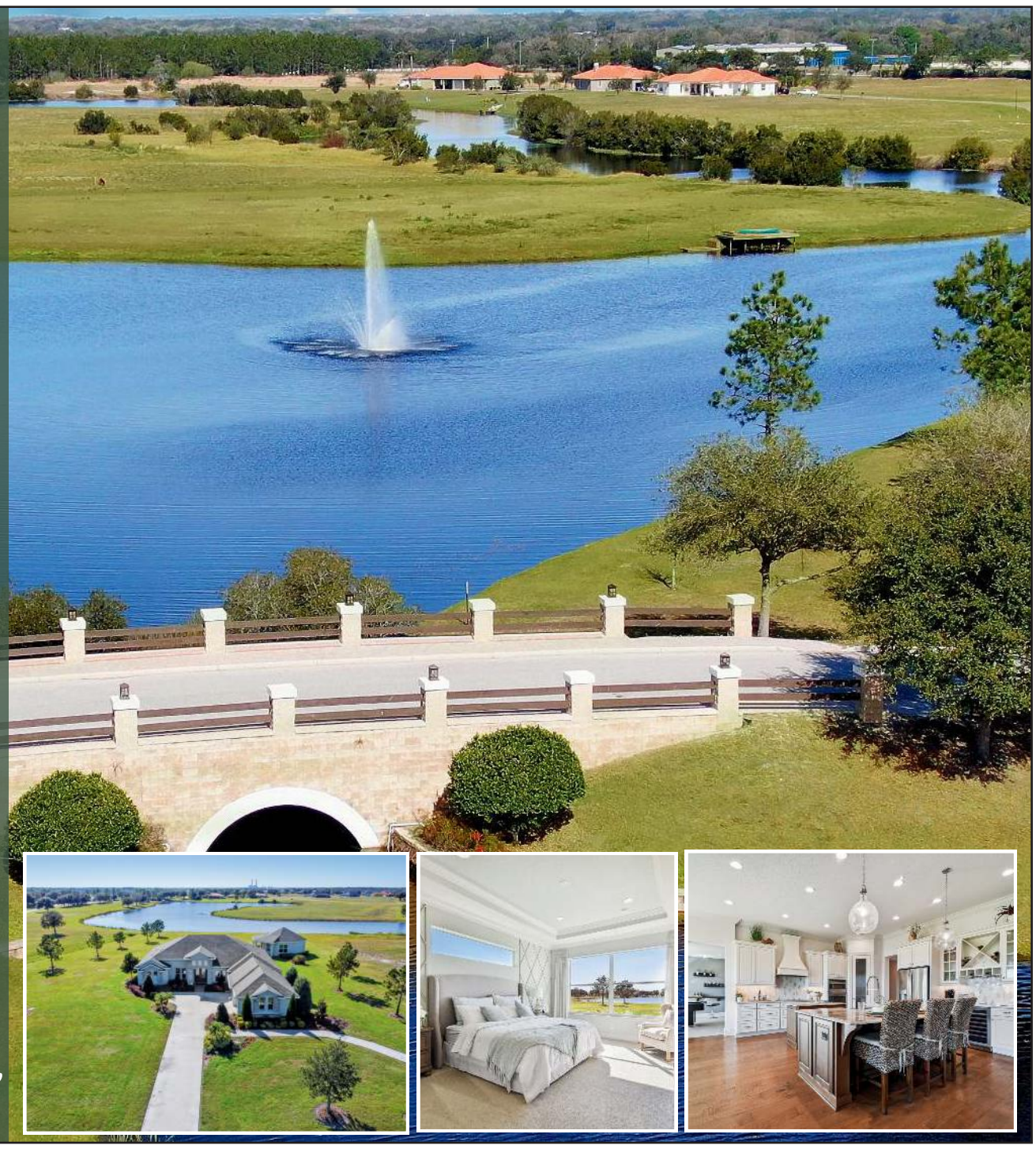
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STRAIGHT FROM THE SHORE

SHAWNA CALVERT | 27NORTH REALTY

SHAWNA'S MONTHLY MARKET UPDATE

Homeownership costs are worth watching this fall. On November 3, Florida voters will decide on Amendment 3, which would provide property tax relief for qualifying homeowners by expanding the homestead exemption for non-school property taxes. If approved, that exemption would increase to $150,000 in 2027 and $250,000 in 2028. Meanwhile, the federal MOVE Act, H.R. 10028, proposes a way to take your mortgage with you when you move. Imagine having a 3% mortgage and wanting to downsize or move closer to family. With a qualifying portable loan and lender approval, you can carry your existing interest rate, remaining balance and loan terms to your next home within 90 days of selling. That means keeping the low rate on the balance you still owe instead of replacing it with a new loan at a higher rate. The MOVE Act remains under proposed legislation and would not automatically make every existing mortgage portable. But the possibility of keeping a favorable rate could give homeowners more freedom to make their next move. It is a proposal worth following.

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VALRICO 33596
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4 Bed | 3 Bath



3766 LAUGHING DOVE AVE
SUN CITY CENTER 33573
List Price: $315,000 SOLD
3 Bed | 2 Bath



8623 DEEP MAPLE DR
RIVERVIEW 33578
List Price: $365,000 SOLD
3 Bed | 3 Bath



13311 GRAHAM YARDEN DR
RIVERVIEW 33579
List Price: $460,000 SOLD
4 Bed | 3 Bath



10922 PARK DR
RIVERVIEW 33569
List Price: $360,000 SOLD
3 Bed | 2 Bath



BROKER SPOTLIGHT

Gregg Calvert, owner and broker of 27North Realty in Apollo Beach, is passionate about teaching, giving back, and helping agents grow. He teaches several agent certification programs, with eight agents recently earning a commercial real estate certification. His philosophy of "turning profits into possibilities" means reinvesting company profits into resources that support his agents, including purchasing leads to help them build their businesses. Through education and continued investment in his team, Gregg creates opportunities for agents to succeed while serving the local community.

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