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HILLSBOROUGH CELEBRATES STANDOUT JROTC CADETS, NAMES CADET OF YEAR

Staff Report





C/CDR Andrew Papp from Riverview High School.



C/LTC Isabelle Rivera from Newsome High School.

Hillsborough County Public Schools (HCPS) announced its JROTC Cadet of the Year at a special event held at the University of South Florida. The district announced the top 10 cadets, along with the overall winner at the year-end awards program. C/Lt Col Vidyarth Sathya from Middleton High School took home the top honors for Cadet of the Year.

HCPS has 28 Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC) programs and over 5,000 cadets this school year. Currently, there are 11 Army JROTC programs, nine Navy programs, seven Air Force programs and one Marine Corps program. Each cadet that was nominated from the programs went through a rigorous board selection process to be considered for the top awards.

"The competition for Cadet of the Year is highly competitive, making this recognition a significant accomplishment," said Van Ayres, superintendent of schools. "Congratulations to each of these outstanding cadets on being named among the very best — your hard work and dedication truly set you apart."

This year's winners are:

Top winner: C/Lt Col Vidyarth Sathya from Middleton High
C/LTC Marielis Pena from Brandon High
C/Col Charlotte Belloso from Durant High
C/LTC Isabelle Rivera from Newsome High.
C/CDR Andrew Papp from Riverview High

For more information about the JROTC programs at HCPS, visit the district website at www.hillsboroughschools.org.

RIVERVIEW LIONS CLUB TAKES SHAPE, BRINGING CENTURY-LONG LEGACY OF SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

By Libby Hopkins



For more than 100 years, Lions Clubs have served with uncommon kindness, putting the needs of their neighbors, their communities and the world first. Through the incredible work of Lion and Leo members and the support of their association and their global foundation, they are serving a world in need.

'Driven by service, united by values, strengthened by diversity' are core beliefs of Lions Club members. Lions Bernadette and Bob Kalle have been charter members of the Fishhawk Lions Club for the past four years. They have been involved in projects like the collection of eyeglasses for reuse, early vision screening of children, volunteering at ECHO, the collection of food and clothing for foster children and playing Santa to raise money for charity, among other community events.

"As time passed, we saw a need to reach out to the greater Riverview community and provide service to our hometown," said Bob Kalle.

The couple decided to form a new Riverview Lions Club chapter.

"Since the club is still in formation, there is flexibility in the actions of the club," Bob Kalle said. "Currently, we are meeting the first and third Thursday of the month at the Riverview Public Library. However, as the club grows, the needs of the members of the club will determine any change in the schedule."

At the heart of everything Lions do are the values that inspire their service and the people they serve. Their core values consist of commitment to service, dedication to excellence, appreciation of diversity, dynamic collaboration, personal and professional integrity and spirit of innovation. "The goals of the club will be determined by the members," Bob Kalle said. "As a new club, there are many administrative actions that need to take place, and the club is focused on creating that foundation. Once the club is chartered by the Lions Club International, we will start to determine the actual goals of the club. We do know that we have an interest in continuing to screen the vision of children and want to be known for that action."

The couple hopes for the club are to be a major source of service to the Riverview community.

"We would like to have a community reputation and perception of our Lions motto, 'We Serve,'" Bob Kalle said. "As any service club, we are always looking for new members that would like to serve the community. There are no rules about participation since everyone is a volunteer. The door is open to any idea of any member about the direction of the club."

If you would like more information about the new club or are interested in joining, please feel free to contact Bob Kalle at 813-625-9985 or at bkalle813@gmail.com.

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BELL SHOALS ACADEMY INVESTS IN FUTURE WITH NEW HIGH SCHOOL

By Olivia Clark



Pastor Corey Abney and Bell Shoals Academy leaders participate in the ceremonial groundbreaking for the academy's future high school building.

Bell Shoals Academy marked a significant milestone on March 2 as school and church leaders, families and community members gathered to celebrate the groundbreaking of its future high school building. The ceremony represented not only the beginning of construction but also the continuation of a long-standing mission to provide Christ-centered education to students in the community.

Bell Shoals Academy, a ministry of Bell Shoals Church, has served families for more than 60 years. The new high school facility is part of a larger vision to expand the academy's ability to prepare students academically and spiritually for the future.

School leadership emphasized that the new building represents more than physical growth. It reflects a commitment to future generations of students who will walk through its doors.

"Today, we break ground on something more than just a building," said Pastor Corey Abney. "This new high school represents growth, opportunity and a bold commitment to preparing the next generation to live for Christ."

The project has been years in the making, supported by the dedication of church members, school leaders and families who have invested in the academy's mission over decades. Leaders noted that many individuals have prayed for and envisioned a high school campus for more than 40 years.

"This future extends far beyond the students we're serving today," said Pastor Abney. "It's about laying the foundation for generations we haven't even met yet."

The new high school is designed to support Bell Shoals Academy's continued growth while strengthening its mission of educating students academically and spiritually. Leaders shared that the goal of the school is not only to prepare students for future careers but also to encourage them to live lives of faith and purpose.

As construction begins, academy leaders remain focused on the long-term impact the new facility will have on students and families in the community.

The groundbreaking marks the first step in a project that leaders hope will serve generations of students while continuing Bell Shoals Academy's legacy of Christ-centered education through expanded opportunities, new classrooms and a dedicated learning environment for high school students.

The school is located at 2102 Bell Shoals Rd. in Brandon. For updates and more info, visit www.bellshoalsacademy.com.

16TH ANNUAL CRAWFISH FESTIVAL PROMISES FLAVORFUL FUN FOR A CAUSE

By Marie Gilmore





The 16th annual Crawfish Festival is set to bring a taste of Louisiana to Riverview in April, inviting the community to enjoy a lively day of food, music and family-friendly fun — all for a good cause.

Hosted by the FishHawk-Riverview Rotary Club, the popular event will take place on Saturday, April 25, from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. at Winthrop Town Centre in the Winthrop Commons field behind Donovan's. Admission and parking are free, making it an accessible outing for families, friends and even four-legged companions, as the festival is dog-friendly.

Festivalgoers can look forward to fresh crawfish delivered straight from Louisiana on the morning of the event, served Cajun-style with corn and potatoes. In addition to the signature dish, attendees will find a variety of Louisiana favorites, including gumbo, crawfish étouffée, red beans, rice and dirty rice. Other menu options, such as pulled pork sandwiches, hamburgers, hot dogs and smoked fish dip, ensure there is something for every palate, along with sweet treats offered by local vendors.

Live entertainment will be provided by Mike Imbasciani & His BluezRockerz, setting the tone for a festive atmosphere, while more than 30 vendors will offer local goods, crafts and festival merchandise. A dedicated children's area will provide activities for younger attendees, making the event a well-rounded experience for all ages.

Food and beverages at the festival are purchased using 'Crawfish Cash' or prepurchased meal tickets, available online and at the event. A standard crawfish dinner, featuring approximately 2 pounds of crawfish, is priced at $25, with additional food items ranging from $2-$8.

Beyond the food and entertainment, the Crawfish Festival serves a meaningful purpose. Proceeds benefit the FishHawk-Riverview Rotary Club Foundation, which supports initiatives aimed at alleviating hunger, poverty, illiteracy and disease both locally and internationally. Notably, 90 percent of proceeds remain in the local community, funding charitable organizations, youth scholarships and leadership development programs. With the support of attendees and volunteers, the foundation contributed $40,000 to community organizations in the past year alone.

To purchase tickets in advance, visit online at www.luvcrawfish.com.





FIT-HER AND 5TH GEAR FITNESS UNITE UNDER ONE WELLNESS ROOF

By Olivia Clark





FIT-HER Health & Fitness owner Ann Gilbert (center) welcomes the 5th Gear Fitness team.

A new chapter in local fitness is unfolding as FIT-HER Health & Fitness and 5th Gear Fitness come together in a strategic collaboration designed to elevate the member experience.

This is a strategic collaboration and shared-space partnership, not a merger," said Ann Gilbert, owner and operator of FIT-HER Health & Fitness. "We are bringing two respected brands under one roof to elevate the fitness experience while maintaining the integrity of each identity."

The partnership is rooted in a long-standing relationship between the two businesses, built through years of collaboration across the Brandon and Valrico communities.

"This was built on a long-standing relationship rooted in trust, shared education and community collaboration," said Gilbert. "We've worked side by side for years hosting charity events, supporting initiatives like the American Cancer Society and even creating the world's largest outdoor step event. This next step felt natural."

For current members, the transition brings expanded access without sacrificing the supportive environment FIT-HER is known for.

"It means more access, more expertise and more opportunity, all while maintaining the supportive, welcoming environment they love," said Gilbert.

The collaboration combines two distinct but complementary approaches to fitness. FIT-HER focuses on women's health and creating an empowering environment for all life stages, while 5th Gear emphasizes performance-driven training and structured coaching.

"Together, we create a full-spectrum fitness experience, from beginner to advanced," said Gilbert.

The result is what Gilbert describes as a "one-stop wellness hub," offering a wide range of services including personal training, small group coaching, cycle classes, strength training, Pilates reformer and aquatic fitness programming.

"This level of variety, expertise and community under one roof is unmatched in the area," said Gilbert.

New offerings are already on the horizon, including Pilates reformer classes launching on Sunday, June 1, expanded cycle and strength formats, summer aquatic fitness programs and small group training led by certified coaches.

FIT-HER Health & Fitness for Women is located at 731 W Lumsden Road. Visit www.FIT-HER.com.

FROM HOME SALES TO SCAVENGER HUNTS, CLARKIN CREATES FUN

By Makenzie Atkins Noel





In a community that continues to grow and evolve, Kerin Clarkin has made it his mission to ensure Riverview grows with heart, connection and a whole lot of fun.

Clarkin is a local realtor serving Riverview and surrounding areas including Tampa, Seminole Heights and St. Petersburg. Since entering the Tampa Bay real estate market in 2015, he has built his business on a simple philosophy: Put clients first and focus on relationships. His team does not charge cancellation fees or other hidden fees, keeping the process transparent for clients. This approach reflects his commitment to transparency and long-term trust.

Originally from Long Island, New York, Clarkin moved to the Tampa area in 2009 to work in apparel design and marketing. What began as a short-term move quickly turned into something permanent as he became immersed in the community and saw the area's growth and potential. When he stepped back into real estate, he did so with a desire to serve the place he now calls home.

Clarkin describes his style as hands-on and highly personal. He prides himself on being known for trust, respect, honesty and strong customer service.

"Our clients come first, always," Clarkin said. "By the end of the process, they're not just clients anymore. They're friends."

His involvement in the community naturally expanded beyond real estate. Through his Riverview Fun and Events Facebook group, Clarkin began organizing giveaways, scavenger hunts and free events designed to support local businesses and bring neighbors together. His Riverview-only scavenger hunts have become especially popular. In an effort to support small businesses in the community, he purchases gift cards from local businesses and hides them throughout Riverview, posting clues for residents to follow.

Over the years, he has given away more than $3,000 in gift cards and cash, hosted a 350-person bingo event with $1,000 in winnings and even gave away a car during a sports watch party. He regularly supports local schools and celebrations, helping make events more memorable and giving back to the students and families who call Riverview home.

Most recently, Clarkin expanded into the entertainment space with Cory Casino, a party casino business featuring professional dealers and travel-ready casino games. His goal is twofold. He wants to host free community events that bring people together in a new way, and he also offers the casino experience for businesses and organizations looking to elevate their own events.

Visit www.thekerin.com/ or find Clarkin on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/riverviewevents/.

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2026 Mitsubishi Outlander Is Attractive Choice

By Nitish Rele



The most underrated and neglected compact SUV on the road? Hands down the Mitsubishi Outlander! And sadly, it's been the case for several years now. That could very well change soon with the 2026 version, which gets a 1.5-liter four-cylinder turbocharged engine to replace the previous 2.5 liter. Basically, it is a mild hybrid with 48-volt starter-generator battery for substantial fuel savings and quick acceleration. The seven-seater puts out an adequate 174 horsepower at 5,000 rpm and 206 pounds-feet of torque at 3,000 rpm. A continuous variable transmission results in a drivetrain that is quiet and responsive.

OUTLANDER (SEL)
Tires: 255/45R20
Wheelbase: 106.5 inches
Length: 185.8 inches
Height: 68.8 inches
Width: 84.4 inches
Weight: 3,942 pounds
Fuel capacity: 14.5 gallons
City/hwy/comb: 26/30/27 mpg
Base price: $40,845
Price as tested: $47,235
Web site: www.mitsubishicars.com

A MacPherson strut front and a multilink rear suspension navigate sharp corners and turns with confidence and poise. The electric power rack-and-pinion steering calibration is spot-on, with superb on-center feel and excellent feedback. Lest we forget, Mitsubishi's all-wheel drive system (Super All-Wheel Control) puts the mind to rest in any untoward road/driving conditions. And if you venture off the beaten path, rest assured that ground clearance is high enough at 8.4 inches in the 2,000-pound-tow-capacity vehicle. A knob in the center console allows the driver to switch to eco, normal, tarmac, gravel, snow and mud modes.

The front fascia shows off a 'dynamic shield' black grille with the recognizable Mitsubishi insignia, surrounded by horizontal LED headlights and fog lamps. Step into the clean and simply designed cabin and find yourself staring at dual 12.3-inch screens: one for infotainment and the other the digital driver display. Eight-way front heated/cooled leather seats are sumptuous to touch. Its total passenger space of 120.8 cubic feet is plentiful, though occupants of the third-row 50/50 seat, which folds rearward into a deep well in the floor, may find the room tight. The tri-zone auto AC, thick-rimmed leather tilt/telescopic steering wheel, power liftgate/sunroof, heated second-row seat, rear-door manual sunshades and wireless phone charger/Android Auto/Apple CarPlay are a few numerous amenities. Fancy semi-aniline leather seats or a 12-speaker Yamaha audio system? Then opt for the $3,050 premium package, which also comes with a 10.8-inch head-up display, digital rearview mirror and black spoiler.

Dual front and knee airbags, side curtain airbags, a multiview camera, active stability and traction control, blind-spot and lane departure warnings, lane keep and hill start assists, rear cross-traffic alert, adaptive cruise control, automatic emergency/four-wheel antilock brakes, antitheft alarm, an electronic parking brake, daytime running lights and tire pressure monitoring system are standard.

Though slightly lacking in power, the 1.5-liter, four-cylinder turbo Outlander is a tempting proposition. After all, it makes up for the deficit with considerable cargo and passenger space, decent fuel mileage and a price that isn't astronomical, so to speak.

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-- Dr. Maya Angelou

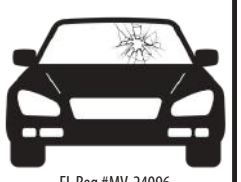




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WORKING TOGETHER TO PREVENT ANIMAL CRUELTY

By State Attorney Suzy Lopez



State Attorney Suzy Lopez.

Animals are more than just pets. They are our companions. They can serve as trusted law enforcement partners and even save lives. It is hard to imagine anyone intentionally harming one of our furry friends, but unfortunately it happens right here in our community.

That is why April, recognized as National Animal Cruelty Prevention Month, is an important time to raise awareness. When people know the signs of abuse and understand how to report it, they can help protect vulnerable creatures who cannot speak for themselves.

And when those cases are reported, our office can take action. Earlier this year, our office secured a conviction against Daniel Kujawa, a former Manatee County deputy, for felony aggravated animal cruelty against his dog, Rex. He was sentenced to 270 days in the Hillsborough County Jail, followed by 36 months of probation. He is also required to register in our county's Animal Abuser Database.

While Rex endured unimaginable cruelty, his story has a hopeful ending. He has since found a safe and loving home after a rescue in Apollo Beach helped him to get adopted.

Pursuing these cases does more than protect our pets. It helps keep our entire community safer. Studies show that people who commit violent crimes against animals are up to five times more likely to commit violent crimes against people. That's why these cases must be taken seriously and why collaboration with other agencies is so important.

I am proud that our office has joined the Central Florida Animal Cruelty Task Force, a partnership of prosecutors, law enforcement officers, veterinarians and animal welfare experts. We will aim to increase collaboration with other agencies and strengthen animal cruelty cases throughout our region. By working together, we can hold offenders accountable while educating the public about responsible pet ownership. But we cannot do that work alone.

Many animal cruelty cases start with a tip from someone in the community. If you see or suspect abuse, please report it to law enforcement immediately. Warning signs can include extreme thinness, untreated injuries, lack of shelter or no access to food and water.

When you speak up, you are helping us to hold these offenders accountable. My office remains committed to aggressively prosecuting these crimes and working with our partners to ensure they are treated with the seriousness they deserve. Together, we can make sure every pet in our community is treated with the care and dignity it deserves.

The State Attorney's Office of the 13th Judicial circuit encompasses all of Hillsborough County, including the cities of Tampa, Temple Terrace and Plant City. The office staff consists of approximately 320 dedicated public servants including 130 prosecutors, as well as investigators, victim advocates and support staff. The office handles approximately 50,000 cases every year. To learn more about the organization or apply to become part of the team, visit www.sao13th.com.

LEAGUE PROVIDES DISABLED ATHLETES A CHANCE TO COMPETE

By Nick Nahas



CEO and Commissioner of A League Of Their Own, David Ramos, has helped expand the Tampa organization to the Riverview area, providing a place where adults with unique abilities come together to enjoy the game of baseball. The inaugural season starts April 11.

ALOTO was founded by Stephenie Coonrod and Dennis Mueller, both of whom were inspired by their children with Down Syndrome.

A League Of Their Own provides athletes with mental and physical disabilities a chance to compete in sports that they normally wouldn't have the opportunity to partake in. Participants in the league are 18 years and older. According to Ramos, they have athletes in their 60s.

Ramos is also the Executive Director and Founder of First Steps Learning, which provides services to intellectually disabled adults. The agency has 12 employees that are rigorously screened and are compassionate towards others. The former assistant principal in Hillsborough County teamed up with A League Of Their Own to give disabled athletes a chance to show their individuality and give them a sense of community. In his time working with children with autism and Down Syndrome, he developed a love for that community and started his agency, First Steps Learning, and brought his clients to the league.

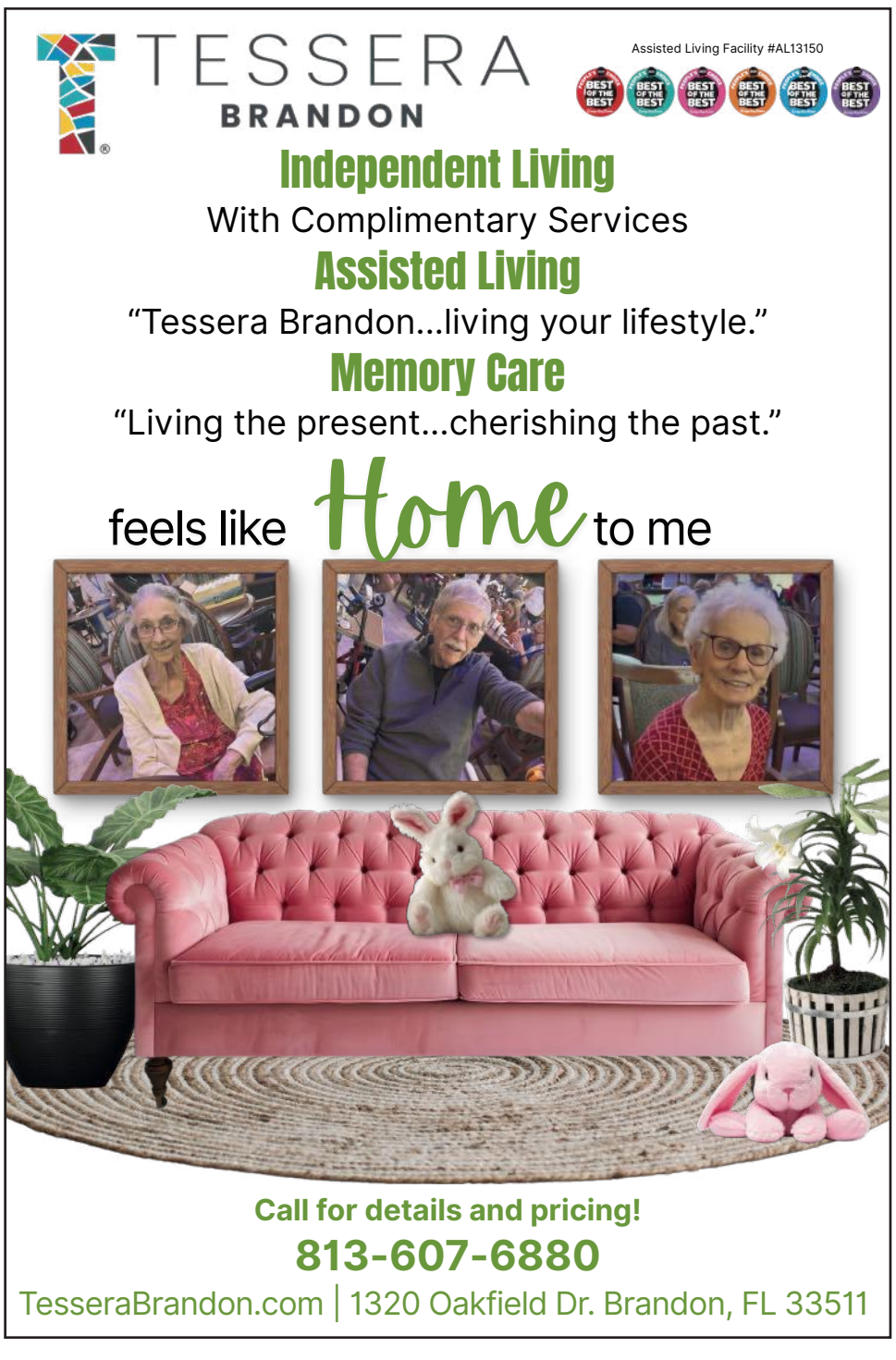
"The league is one of the happiest environments. These are folks that have often never been seen their entire lives because of their disability," said Ramos. "Often times they are marginalized and their needs are considered last and many of them have never played in a sports league. I wanted to give them an opportunity to shine."

Ramos's clients have aged out of school and don't have many social activities. As a part of his agency, his clients are given the opportunity to go out and have a fun time, and this also provides the parents some relief. He wants them to have an opportunity to compete in a league, have fans cheer for them, have the announcer say their name and have walkout music. They want to give the players that special feeling that major league players experience.

A League Of Their Own wants to expand to other areas besides Riverview and Tampa to help serve more people with disabilities. They have raised funds for the cause, but still need volunteers and donations to get things off the ground. The Tampa Bay Rays donated a field with artificial turf to the league. The astroturf is necessary for the players that are non-ambulatory and use wheelchairs to get around the bases safely.

"This community has so much love," said Ramos. "They just want to be seen, to be normal and to not be treated differently. Seeing their joy is my favorite part of the job."

For more information, or if you want to volunteer or donate to the league, visit AlotoRiverview.org.







VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR NATION'S LARGEST ONE-DAY FOOD DRIVE

Staff Report



Residents across the Brandon and South Shore communities are invited to make a meaningful difference on Saturday, May 9, as ECHO (Emergency Care Help Organization) hosts its largest food drive of the year in partnership with the United States Postal Service.

The annual "Stamp Out Hunger" food drive is part of a nationwide effort led by the National Association of Letter Carriers, which mobilizes thousands of cities to collect food for local families in need. Locally, donations gathered from neighborhoods will go directly to ECHO's Resource Centers, helping stock pantry shelves for months to come.

Last year, the community contributed more than 80,000 pounds of non-perishable food—an impressive show of generosity organizers hope to surpass in 2026.

"This is truly a community-wide effort," said event organizers. "From residents leaving food by their mailboxes to volunteers sorting donations, every role plays a part in feeding families right here at home."

Participation is simple. Residents can leave non-perishable food items by their mailbox on the morning of May 9, and letter carriers will collect and deliver them to local distribution sites. For those looking to get more involved, ECHO is actively recruiting volunteers to assist throughout the day.

Volunteer teams will be stationed at multiple post offices and ECHO Resource Centers in areas including Brandon, Riverview, Apollo Beach, Valrico, Seffner and Sun City Center. Tasks include transporting donations, unloading vehicles and sorting food for storage and distribution.

Organizers emphasize that volunteers are especially needed for "critical shifts" at ECHO's centers, where the bulk of donations are processed. Participants should be prepared to work outdoors, remain on their feet for extended periods and lift at least 25 pounds. Volunteers must be at least 15 years old, making this an excellent opportunity for high school students seeking Bright Futures service hours.

Those with pickup trucks or trailers are also encouraged to assist with transporting food from post offices to ECHO facilities.

The need remains significant. Nationwide, one in ten Americans faces food insecurity, and local organizations like ECHO rely heavily on events like Stamp Out Hunger to meet ongoing demand.

Community members are encouraged to sign up for volunteer shifts, invite friends and family, and take part in a day dedicated to giving back.

To learn more or register to volunteer, visit ECHO's website or contact event organizers directly.

As organizers put it, "Let's stamp out hunger—together."

Sign up to volunteer today: https://buff.ly/JhkoT61.

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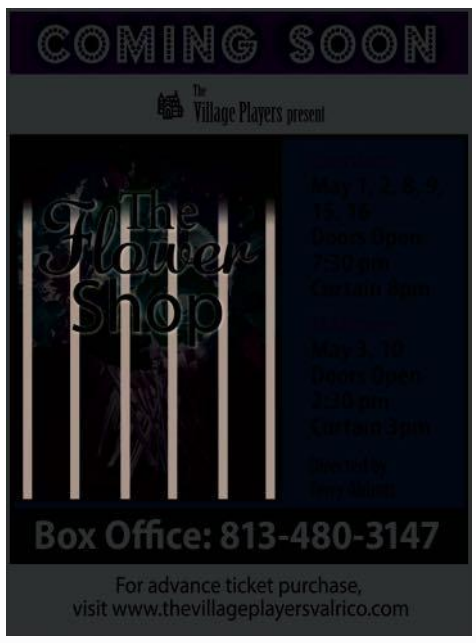
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THE FLOWER SHOP, DIRECTED BY VILLAGE PLAYERS' OWN T. ABBOTT

Staff Report



The Village Players invite audiences to experience The Flower Shop, a heartfelt drama about second chances, reconciliation, and the fragile work of rebuilding family. The production is directed by acclaimed local performer and storyteller Terry Abbott, a familiar and much-loved presence throughout the Tampa Bay arts community. Abbott is also known to many as "The Captain" with the Lorelei of Florida and as a featured entertainer at the Bay Area Renaissance Festival.

A Florida native, Abbott is widely recognized for his creativity and his ability to connect with audiences through music, performance, and story. His warmth and emotional authenticity bring a distinctive vision to this powerful production.

The Flower Shop follows a man newly released from prison as he steps into the life of the daughter who never knew he existed. As past mistakes collide with the hope for a new beginning, both must navigate the distance between them and decide whether forgiveness is possible. The play explores fractured families, long-buried truths, and the quiet courage it takes to start again, reminding us that even the most damaged roots can grow into something unexpectedly beautiful.

While the production stands on its own, it also continues the story first introduced in the 2010 original show The Prophet, offering longtime audiences a meaningful return while welcoming new viewers into a moving, self-contained theatrical experience.

Cast: John (Jim Sigal), Tiffany (Sara Horrocks), Joyce (Teagan McCarthy), Susette (Heather Horning), Mike (Steve Pruess), Sophia (Lucy Rogers) and Judge/ Bartender(Chris Duncan).

The performances will be held at James McCabe Theater, located at 506 N. 5th St. in Valrico and take place at 8 p.m. on Friday and Saturday, May 1-2, 8-9 and 15-16, with Sunday matinees at 3 p.m. on May 3 and 10. The doors open at least 30 minutes before curtain.

Tickets for senior, student and military are $20; general admission is $23.

This intimate drama continues The Village Players' tradition of bringing powerful, community-driven storytelling to the stage in Valrico. For tickets and additional information, visit thevillageplayersvalrico.com.

About The Village Players

The Village Players is a nonprofit, all-volunteer teaching theater performing in the charming James McCabe Theater in Valrico (506 N. 5th St., Valrico, FL 33594). The organization proudly spotlights local talent, teaches every aspect of stagecraft to performers of all ages, and works to make theater affordable and accessible for the entire community.

RIVERFEST RETURNS TO LIGHT UP TAMPA RIVERWALK FROM MAY 1-2

Staff Report



Residents and visitors alike are invited to experience one of the city's most anticipated annual traditions as Tampa Riverfest returns on Friday and Saturday, May 1-2, along the scenic Tampa Riverwalk. Presented by Publix Super Markets, the free, two-day festival will once again transform downtown into a vibrant hub of food, music and family-friendly entertainment.

Spanning the entire 2.6-mile riverwalk, the event will activate several waterfront parks, including Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park and Water Works Park, drawing an estimated 25,000 attendees and generating a significant economic impact for local businesses.

Festivities kick off on Friday evening with the popular Taste of Riverwalk, where attendees can sample offerings from a variety of local restaurants. The celebration continues on Saturday with Taco Fest, featuring a wide array of taco vendors serving up creative and traditional flavors.

Live entertainment will be a centerpiece throughout the weekend, with a full concert series showcasing regional and local bands performing on the main stage at Curtis Hixon Waterfront Park. As the sun sets each evening, the crowd will gather for the dazzling Balloon Glow, lighting up the downtown skyline.

Among the most anticipated events is the Lantern Parade on Saturday night, beginning at Water Works Park and winding its way along the Tampa Riverwalk to Curtis Hixon. Spectators can also enjoy a crowd-favorite Wiener Dog Derby, along with unique activities, such as a paddle invasion, a water ski show and community yoga sessions.

New this year is a dedicated kid zone at Water Works Park, which will offer expanded activities for families, ensuring younger attendees have plenty to enjoy throughout the weekend.

In addition to entertainment, the festival will feature a bustling vendor market and opportunities to explore Tampa's cultural institutions, all set against the backdrop of the city's growing and accessible waterfront.

While general admission is free, VIP tent experiences will be available for purchase for those seeking premium viewing and amenities. Organizers encourage early ticket purchases, as prices typically increase closer to the event.

With something for all ages, Tampa Riverfest continues to celebrate the spirit, culture and community that define the city — inviting everyone to come out and enjoy the waterfront at its liveliest.

For full schedule and details, visit https://thetampariverwalk.com/.

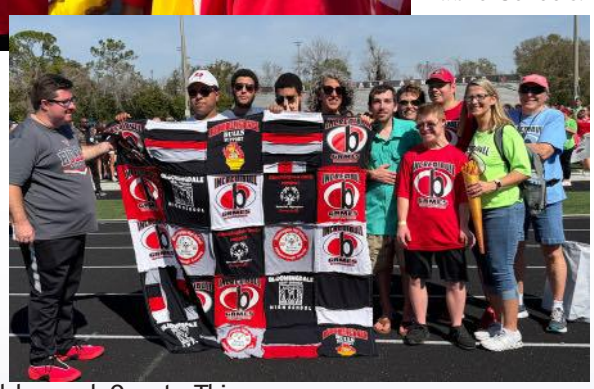
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INCREDIBULL GAMES CELEBRATE 10 YEARS OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS INCLUSION

By Olivia Clark





Bloomingdale Senior High School recently marked a major milestone as it hosted the 10th annual IncrediBULL Games, a Special Olympics-style event that continues to grow in both size and impact across Hillsborough County. This year, the event welcomed 595 student-athletes from 18 schools, supported by nearly 1,000 student volunteers.

"Bloomingdale High School and Newsome High School proudly celebrated the 10th annual IncrediBULL Games, a signature event dedicated to promoting inclusion, teamwork and the spirit of Special Olympics," said Marcos Rodriguez, principal of Bloomingdale High School. "As the IncrediBULL Games mark their 10th anniversary, Bloomingdale and Newsome high schools continue to honor the event's mission of inclusion while strengthening partnerships among schools, students and the broader community."

Athletes participated in a variety of activities, including soccer, track events and softball toss, while also enjoying the Olympic Village, a carnival-style space featuring interactive games and stations led by student clubs. The day emphasized not only competition but also connection.

"The event is the highlight of the year for our athletes, buddies and all of the student volunteers," said Debra Bellanti, director of media and public relations for Hillsborough County Public Schools. "It not only promotes inclusion but helps to build friendships that last over the years."

A defining element of the IncrediBULL Games is its buddy system, which pairs student volunteers one-on-one with athletes for the entire day. This ensures that every participant feels supported and celebrated throughout the experience.

"In addition to the competitive events, athletes spent time socializing and celebrating their special day, which is what makes this event so meaningful," Rodriguez said.

The event's origins date back a decade, when educators at Bloomingdale sought to bring a similar experience to the east side of the county after seeing the success of another local program. That vision has since evolved into one of the area's most anticipated annual events.

Community members interested in supporting future IncrediBULL Games can volunteer or contribute financially to help sustain and expand the event's reach.







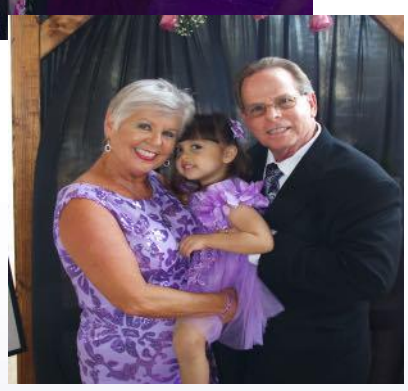




DONOVAN'S FUNDRAISER SUCCESS SUPPORTS CYSTIC FIBROSIS RESEARCH

Staff Report





The Wine and Roses for a Cure Gala, held on March 8, raised over $35,000 in support of finding a cure for cystic fibrosis.

Co-chairs Robin Hujar and Sharon Sefcik expressed their heartfelt gratitude for the incredible way the community came together, along with the generosity of many friends and donors, to make this annual event such a success. The gala sold out two months prior and was held at Donovan's Meatery in Riverview.

Robin Hujar and Sharon Sefcik shared that Donovan's Meatery could not have been more gracious in opening its doors to host the committee and guests. With spectacular service, exceptional food, live music and a wonderful selection of wines provided by Buckley Farm Winery Vineyards and Chateau Meichtry Family Vineyard and Winery — both located in Ellijay, Georgia — the evening was truly a triumph.

They would also like to extend a sincere thank you to the many generous sponsors, including Donovan's Meatery, Buckley Vineyards, Chateau Meichtry, FreshEdge, Brandon Elks Lodge #2383, Jerry and Roxanne Hujar, Robin and Dennis Hujar, Jeffrey Homes, Supreme Roofing Services, RE/MAX Experts Property Management, Outdoor Lighting Perspectives, Krewe of 65 Roses, Total Resource Financial, Plantation Realty, Beach Place One Real Estate Group, Gene and Lucy Watford and Tom and Debbie Wawrzyniakowski, as well as the dozens of individuals who contributed items to both the silent and live auctions.

In addition, this event would not have been possible without the dedicated team of volunteers, including Serena Cole, Lucy Watford, Jerry and Roxanne Hujar, Dennis and Roxanne Hujar, Mark and Debbie Perricone, Sharon and Brian Sefcik and Nathan Maloney and Ryan Reid from the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation.

Planning is already underway for next year's event. Please mark your calendars for 'The Gift of Breath Gala,' taking place on March 28, 2027, at The Regent in Riverview.

Robin Hujar, Sharon Sefcik and the entire committee look forward to welcoming you to what promises to be another highly anticipated and meaningful evening.

QUEST INC. OPENS THERAPY CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS WITH DISABILITIES

Staff Report

Quest Inc. recently held a grand opening celebration for its Quest Kids Therapy Center in Brandon, located at 1307 Providence Rd., as the nonprofit expands services for youth with developmental disabilities.



Leaders from Quest Inc. and the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce celebrate the grand opening and ribbon-cutting of the new Quest Kids Therapy Center on Providence Road in Brandon

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce joined Quest for the ribbon-cutting ceremony on March 18 to unveil a new facility where certified professionals help children and teenagers with autism and other developmental disabilities using applied behavior analysis (ABA) — one of the only clinically proven methods to change behavior. Families are offered expert guidance on:



- Early intervention services for autism spectrum disorder
- Toilet training and personal hygiene
- Motor skills development
- Life skills development
- Health and safety

"The need for ABA therapy services has never been greater, as doctors diagnose 1 in 31 children with autism," said John Gill, president and CEO of Quest. "Through this new center, we're meeting that demand by bringing positive change and hope to even more families in the Tampa Bay community."

Quest serves more than 800 individuals daily, providing education, employment, life-skills training and residential opportunities that empower individuals with developmental disabilities to achieve greater independence and quality of life.

For more information about Quest Inc. and its services, visit https://questinc.org.

About Quest Inc.

For over 60 years, Quest Inc. has transformed the lives of thousands of adults and children with developmental disabilities through a range of services proven to increase capabilities and quality of life. From the humble beginnings of a single location serving eight individuals to currently over 20 locations, serving over 800 individuals each day in Orlando and Tampa, Quest continues to help those with developmental disabilities experience a full life.




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MORE THAN A JOB FAIR: ECHO CONNECTS NEIGHBORS TO STABILITY

By Libby Hopkins



ECHO's mission is to assist residents of unincorporated Hillsborough County who are in crisis by providing emergency food and clothing, along with life-stabilizing programs and resources.

ECHO's Opportunity Center works with individuals every day who are ready to work but need support connecting to the right opportunities. The center hosted a job fair this past March at New Hope Church in Brandon. "This job fair was created to address a very real need in Southeast Hillsborough County, helping neighbors move from instability (unemployment or underemployment) into sustainable employment," said ECHO's Director of Opportunity, Dianne Horncastle. "ECHO is partnering with New Hope Church and Better Together Jobs, an organization that hosts highly effective job fairs across Florida and is known for creating an encouraging, supportive experience for job seekers.

Together, this collaboration allows us to create a job fair that is not just about hiring, but about restoring confidence, building connections, and opening doors."

At a previous ECHO hiring event, even with just one employer present, 55 neighbors attended, and more than 30 left with contingent job offers. "It's a powerful reminder of what's possible when opportunity and preparation come together," Horncastle said. "This upcoming job fair expands that impact significantly, bringing together dozens of employers and hundreds of job seekers in one place."

Attendees got more than a traditional job fair; it was designed to be a supportive and empowering experience from start to finish. "We had approximately 40 employers on-site who are actively hiring, along with 20 resource partners offering additional support services," Horncastle said. "Throughout the event, volunteers greeted attendees, walked alongside them, and helped make introductions to employers."

"While employer and resource partner spots for this event were full, there were still meaningful ways for the community to be involved," Horncastle said. "We had 75–80 volunteers who helped to create a welcoming and encouraging environment. Volunteers served as guides and cheerleaders, greeting attendees, walking alongside them, helping make introductions, and offering encouragement throughout the day."

Horncastle and the team at ECHO hoped that every person who attended would leave with more than they came with at the job fair. "That may be a job offer, a new connection, a stronger resume, or renewed confidence in their ability to move forward," Horncastle said. "We wanted neighbors to feel seen, supported, and capable, and for employers to connect with individuals who were ready and motivated to work."

If you would like to learn more about ECHO or their future job fairs, you can visit their website at https://echofl.org.

FREEZE HITS HARD, BUT BLUEBERRIES STILL HEADED TO MARKET

Staff Report



After a winter that hit harder than anyone expected, freezing blossoms and fruit and bruising hopes, Florida blueberry growers are working to recover from this chilly season.

They're coaxing every bit of sweetness they can from the surviving fruit, ready to deliver berries that are as vibrant and nutritious as ever, University of Florida (UF) experts said.

Farmers are always trying to produce the best berries for the market. Florida's harvesting season runs from March through May.

"Growers have already begun their recovery efforts, including debris cleanup from broken plants, resetting dislodged plants, spraying fungicides, repairing irrigation systems and more," said Doug Phillips, statewide blueberry Extension coordinator for the UF Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS). "These efforts are intended to promote plant health and recovery, with an eye toward having a full crop for the 2027 season."

"There will be Florida blueberries in the market this spring, although the volume will be less than in a typical season," Phillips said. "Harvest is starting in the south region, that was less damaged by the freeze, as well as in the north in protected tunnels."

For other growers, blueberry season will be in early to mid-April.

The extent of blueberry damage remains to be seen, as UF/IFAS economists put together an official assessment of statewide crop damage from the 2025-26 freezes statewide.

Over the 80-plus-year history of the UF/IFAS blueberry breeding program, researchers have developed about 70 varieties. The latest should please the palate. They include 'Sharper,' 'Falcon' and 'Sentinel.'

Growers are planting those berries throughout much of Florida, Phillips said.

"These varieties provide high yields and flavorful fruit. 'Sharper' and 'Falcon' in particular are large, very firm, tasty fruit, which should help growers be profitable and consumers to have a great eating experience and repeat as blueberry buyers during our market window," he said.

Josh Payne, a registered dietitian with UF/IFAS Extension Hillsborough County, categorizes blueberries as a 'superfruit,' so consumers eagerly await this fruit at the market.

"Blueberries are one of those foods that check every box," Payne said. "They're sweet, versatile and easy to add to yogurt, oatmeal or just grab by the handful. If you already love blueberries, it makes sense to ask for Fresh From Florida blueberries at the supermarket. You'll likely get better flavor and freshness, and you're supporting Florida farmers at the same time."

If you are a blueberry grower, UF/IFAS wants to hear from you about the extent of the damage you experienced from this winter's freezes. Visit https://ufl.qualtrics.com.



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KEEL FARMS BLUEBERRY FESTIVAL RETURNS EVERY WEEKEND IN APRIL

Staff Report



Keel Farms is excited to announce that the 18th annual Tampa Bay Blueberry Festival will kick off on Saturday, April 4. The Blueberry Festival will be open from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. every Saturday and Sunday in April (except for Easter Sunday, April 5). It has become one of the most attended festivals for both Tampa Bay area residents and tourists.



The Blueberry Festival spans the acreage of the Keel Farms property at 5202 W. Thonotosassa Rd. in Plant City, offering fun for the whole family amid the beautiful backdrop of the Keel + Curley Winery and Keel Farms Agrarian Ales and Ciders.

This family and pet friendly celebration of the blueberry harvest features local food trucks, craft vendors, a kids' zone, bounce houses, camel rides, a petting zoo, blueberry shortcake eating competitions, U-pick blueberries, games and special blueberry releases by Keel + Curley Winery and Keel Farms Agrarian Ciders.

"Our Blueberry Festival is our most popular event," said Clay Keel, president of Keel Farms. "Many families have made this a springtime tradition, and we love welcoming them back every year. For newcomers, get ready to be blown away. There's no other festival in Tampa Bay where you can take a camel ride, drink a blueberry cider, shop local vendors, have a great meal and leave with buckets of blueberries."

The blueberry U-pick will be offered on each day of the festival while supplies last and weather permits. Harvested prepackaged blueberries will also be available for purchase by the pound.

Admission is free and on-site parking is $10.

Water will be available along with food and drinks. No outside food or beverage is permitted. Buckets are provided for the U-pick, and no outside containers are permitted. For more information about everything Keel Farms has to offer, visit www.keelfarms.com. For more festival information, visit www.keelfarms.com/festivals.

About Keel Farms

Keel Farms is home to Keel + Curley Winery and Keel Farms Agrarian Ales and Cider. Its mission is to grow people, community and agriculture by always providing memorable experiences through quality farm products and sustainable practices.

ESPN2 TO AIR BIG BOY SOAP HOCKEY'S RIVERVIEW TOURNAMENT

By Nick Nahas



The Big Boy Soap Hockey League returns for its second tournament in two years in the Tampa area. The tournament takes place at the Showmen's Club, located at 6915 Riverview Dr. in Riverview, on Saturday, May 16, from 10:30 a.m.-1 p.m. and will air on ESPN2 in August.

The first tournament was held in Brandon last year at the J.C. Handly Sports Complex and made its TV debut on ESPN2 in August 2025. Reruns on ESPNews are shown frequently throughout the year.

Bloomingdale High School graduate Nick Pletcher, who runs production company Glass Eye Creative out of Atlanta, Georgia, wanted to bring soap hockey to his hometown because of the potential interest he thought the game would garner. Over 100 people attended the filming of the event last year. The popularity of the contest made ESPN want to air another tournament this summer. Spectators are encouraged to attend the free event, which will have food trucks, a drum line and a live DJ to accompany the festivities. A new mascot called Duck Duck Dude will attend. The giant rubber duck with a water gun will harass the players throughout the afternoon.

The Big Boy Soap Hockey League, which was created by Pletcher and his friends, is back with new players, new uniforms and brand-new logos, along with some new concepts. Soap hockey is played on a giant 30-foot-by-40-foot, soap-drenched tarp and is usually three versus three. Unlike regular hockey, soap hockey doesn't have very many rules but is also very rough and tumble. Players are allowed to grab other players sticks. The style and concept are in the same vein as the Savannah Bananas, with lax rules and a goofy, fun environment.

"I'm really looking forward to kind of trying to perfect this format and this tournament some more," said Pletcher. "Year one was really about just getting together and physically making it when kind of figuring it out as we're going. I think we really figured it out and I think that we are going to catch lightning in a bottle, and we have some really cool stuff in store."

The event will consist of eight teams in a single-elimination format with 10-minute games and live commentators. Popular Instagram hockey influencers from On The Bench will be the two power players that are allowed to sub in once a game for two minutes to help out a team. Power-ups are also a new addition this year, where for one minute a team can force the other players to either swap out their sticks for pool noodles or smaller sticks, or wear blindfolds or ankle weights.

"Last year, I think we had a lot of fun, it was a lot of high energy," said Pletcher. He wants the league to grow in popularity like the Savannah Bananas." For more, visit www.boysoaphockey.com.

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HCPS SECURITY CHIEF NAMED FL SAFETY SPECIALIST OF THE YEAR

Staff Report



Superintendent of Schools Van Ayres with John Newman, chief of school security and emergency management for Hillsborough County Public Schools.

John Newman, chief of school security and emergency management for Hillsborough County Public Schools, has been selected as Florida's School Safety Specialist of the Year, an honor recognizing exceptional leadership, professionalism and dedication to the safety and well-being of students and staff statewide.

The annual award is presented by the Florida Department of Education to recognize outstanding school safety specialists who exemplify the highest standards outlined in Florida law. The 2026 honoree was announced during Florida's National Summit on School Safety, held from March 29 through April 1 in Orlando.

Newman has served Hillsborough County Public Schools as chief of security and emergency management since 2014. Under his leadership, the district has strengthened a comprehensive, districtwide approach to school safety across more than 250 instructional and district sites, as well as 56 charter schools — supporting the daily well-being of more than 200,000 students and approximately 24,000 employees.

Among his many accomplishments, Newman led the implementation of innovative safety practices, including making Hillsborough County Public Schools one of the first districts in the nation to adopt CENTEGIX CrisisAlert countywide. He has also overseen continuous improvement of district safety policies and procedures to ensure alignment with evolving state laws and guidance.

Before joining the district, Newman retired from the Tampa Police Department after 29 years of distinguished service, including assignments in patrol, in the Criminal Intelligence Bureau, in legal and internal affairs and as an undercover narcotics detective. He coordinated security and public safety operations for major national events, such as the Gasparilla, three NFL Super Bowls, NCAA sporting events and the 2012 Republican National Convention, and he supported Florida communities during hurricane response efforts.

In addition to his district leadership, Newman was appointed in 2023 to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Public Safety Commission, reflecting his expertise and trusted leadership at the state level.

"Chief Newman's proactive, thorough and mission-driven approach has positioned Hillsborough County Public Schools as a model for school safety across Florida," said Superintendent of Schools Van Ayres. "His dedication and leadership continue to set a high standard for protecting students, staff and our community."

The School Safety Specialist of the Year award highlights the critical role school safety specialists play in maintaining secure learning environments and fostering strong partnerships with law enforcement, emergency management and community stakeholders across Florida.

LENNARD JROTC RECOGNIZES SENIOR ISABELA STITT AS CADET OF THE YEAR

By Madeline Gardner



Lennard High School Principal, Denise Savino, presents the Cadet of the Year award to senior Isabela Stitt.

On March 25, the Lennard High School JROTC recognized senior Isabela Stitt as Cadet of the Year during its annual end-of-the-year awards ceremony. Honored before the JROTC staff and her peers, Stitt described the moment as fulfilling.

"Being Cadet of the Year means a lot to me because ... I feel like I've put in a lot in four years and I've worked really hard to help this program and do a lot for myself while in this program," said Stitt. "And being able to do Cadet of the Year was like one of the big things that I worked ... [toward] since I was like a freshman, and just being able to do that is like [a] full-circle moment for me because now I've finally achieved everything I can get in JROTC."

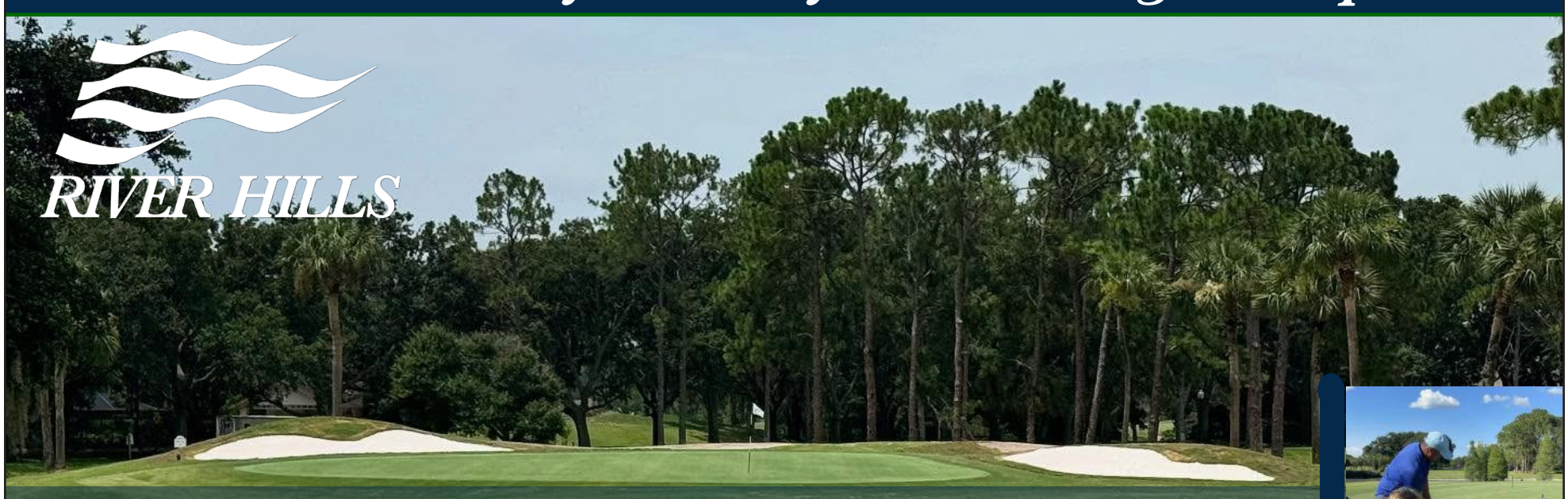
Having joined the Lennard JROTC program as a freshman, Stitt has since held several staff and leadership positions. During her sophomore year, Stitt served as a company commander, and later as a junior she managed the program's social media team as the head S-6 officer. Now in her final year, Stitt currently serves as the battalion commander.

Stitt has also received various awards throughout her career as a Lennard JROTC cadet. As a sophomore, she was awarded a medal from the local VFW post, and as a junior she earned the Superior Cadet Medal. Stitt was notified of her selection as the Cadet of the Year this past December.

After high school, Stitt plans to attend the University of South Florida and obtain a degree in criminology, with a major in cybercrime. She hopes to work for a government agency, like the CIA or FBI, after college. Excited for the opportunities ahead, Stitt remains grateful for her JROTC experience and the skills she learned through her participation in the program.

"Being in JROTC, ... I've gotten a lot of good leadership opportunities, which I think is probably one of the biggest things I'll take [away] from JROTC, because leadership — it's everywhere in life," said Stitt. "It can be with your friends, your family, your jobs ... I'm going to take what I learned here and use it in whatever job I have in the future and wherever my career takes me."

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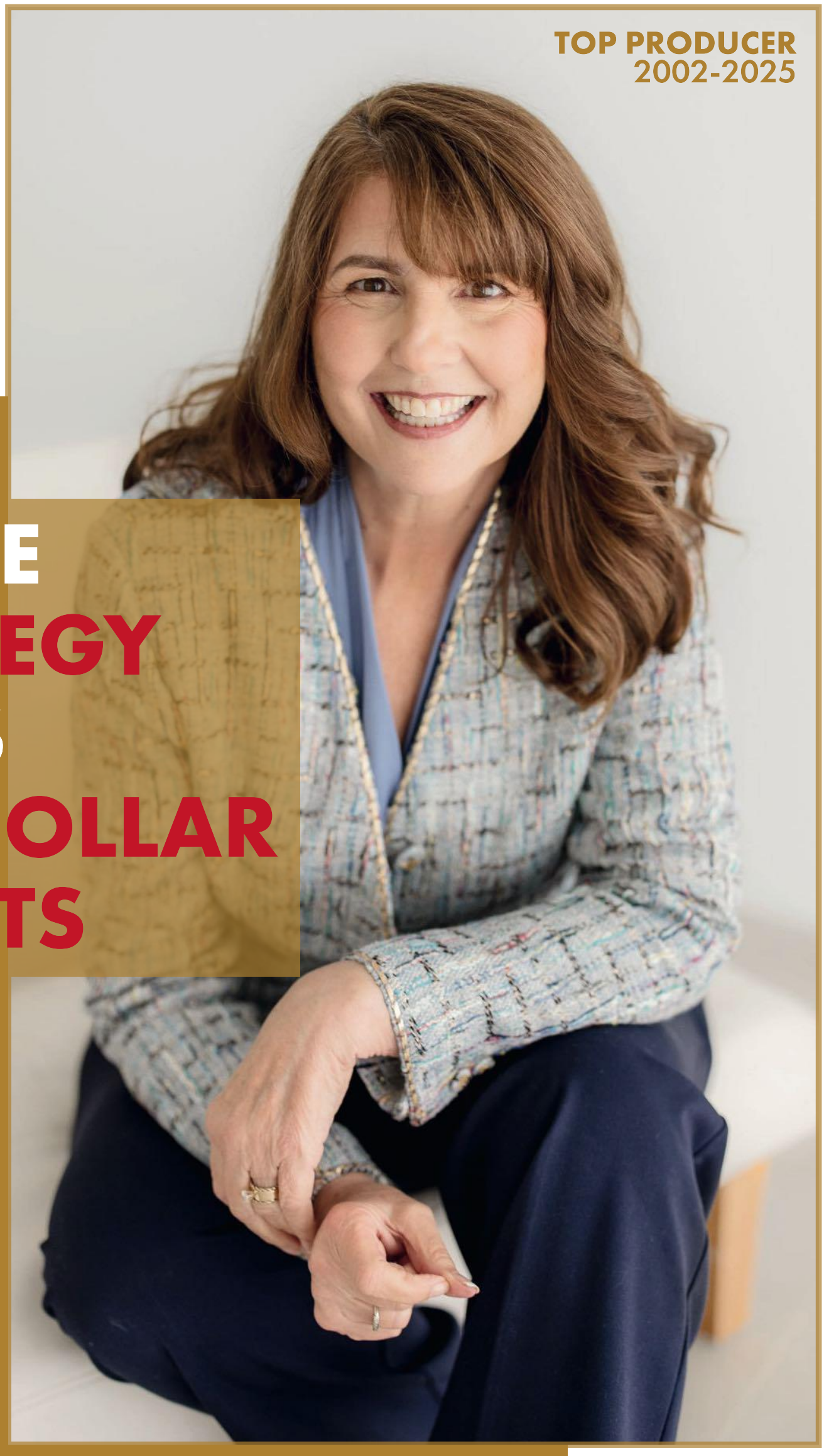


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MEALS ON WHEELS EXPANDS TO APOLLO BEACH, CALLS FOR COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Staff Report



Meals on Wheels of Tampa is expanding its reach into the Apollo Beach area, bringing critical meal delivery and companionship services to more homebound seniors and individuals in need. With the expansion comes an urgent call for additional volunteers, drivers, donors and recipients to help sustain and grow the program.

Each day, the organization prepares and delivers approximately 1,000 meals across Hillsborough County. For many recipients, the service provides far more than food.

"We nourish the body and our mission is delivered in the last mile by 1,400 volunteers," said CEO Mandy Cloninger. "The knock on the door is more than a meal; it's a daily check-in."

Its meals are designed to meet a variety of dietary needs, including heart-healthy, renal and diabetic options. Each recipient receives a daily hot meal along with a side dish, ensuring both nutrition and consistency. Currently, the organization operates 113 delivery routes and 18 distribution points throughout the county, including a pickup location at First Baptist Church of Riverview.

Despite the scale of the program, affordability remains a priority. Eighty percent of recipients pay less than $2.50 per meal, made possible through community donations and volunteer support. Meals on Wheels of Tampa is privately funded and does not accept direct government funding, relying instead on the generosity of local residents and organizations.

Beyond nourishment, the program addresses a deeper need — human connection. For many homebound individuals, a volunteer's visit may be the only interaction they have all day. These brief but meaningful encounters help reduce isolation, improve mental well-being and provide a vital safety check.

Founded in 1975 by Tampa resident Gloria Fuentes, the organization began by delivering just 14 meals. Today, it has grown into a cornerstone nonprofit, serving thousands while staying true to its mission of helping seniors maintain independence in their own homes.

As the Apollo Beach expansion begins, community involvement will be key to continuing that mission. Those interested in volunteering, donating or receiving services can learn more at the website at www.mowtampa.org.

HILLSBOROUGH SENIORS MEET EMPLOYERS AT FCA HIRING EVENTS

By Emily Harper



After a year spent exploring career pathways and preparing through professional development lessons, including elevator pitches, resume building, and mock interviews, thousands of Hillsborough County Public Schools seniors will take the final step in their Future Career Academy (FCA) journey this April, meeting face-to-face with employers ready to hire.

Six large-scale hiring events taking place April 2 - 23 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. across Hillsborough County will serve as the capstone experience for students enrolled in the Future Career Academy curriculum, a program designed by Florida-based nonprofit Workforce Development Partners (WDP) to help high school seniors transition directly from the classroom into the workforce, job training programs, and continued education.

Throughout the school year, FCA students complete career readiness lessons that include resume development, mock interviews, professional communication, and workplace expectations. The April hiring events are designed to put those skills into action with real employers.

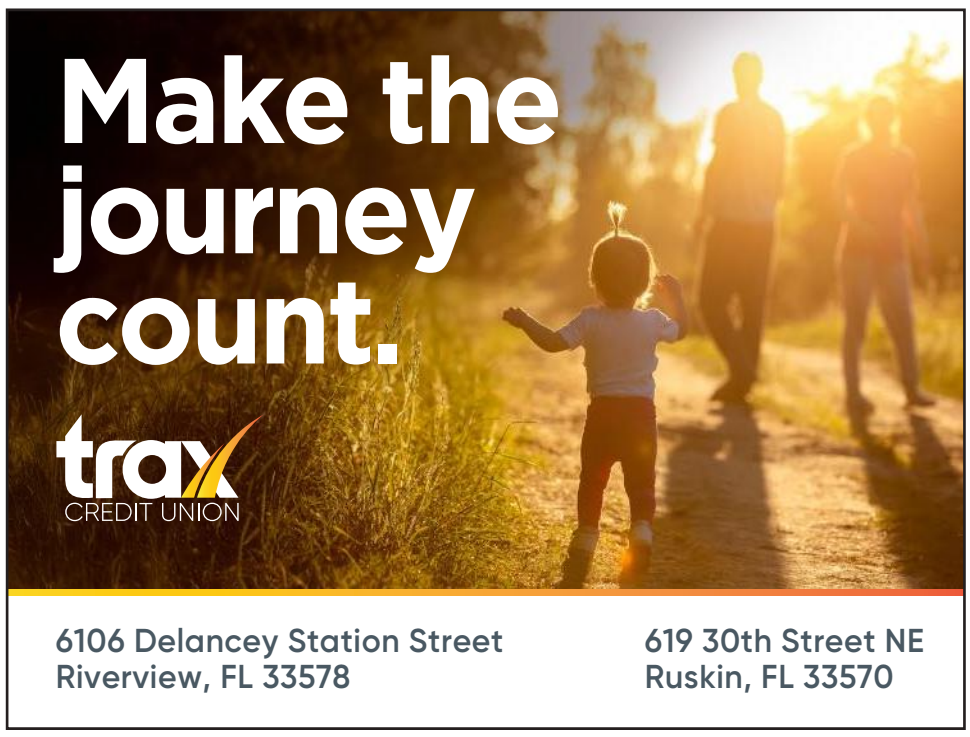
"These events represent the culmination of everything our students have worked toward this year," said Van Ayres, superintendent of Hillsborough County Public Schools. "Future Career Academy prepares students with real-world skills, and these hiring events give them the opportunity to apply those skills in front of employers who are looking for the next generation of talent. This is a recipe for post-graduation success."

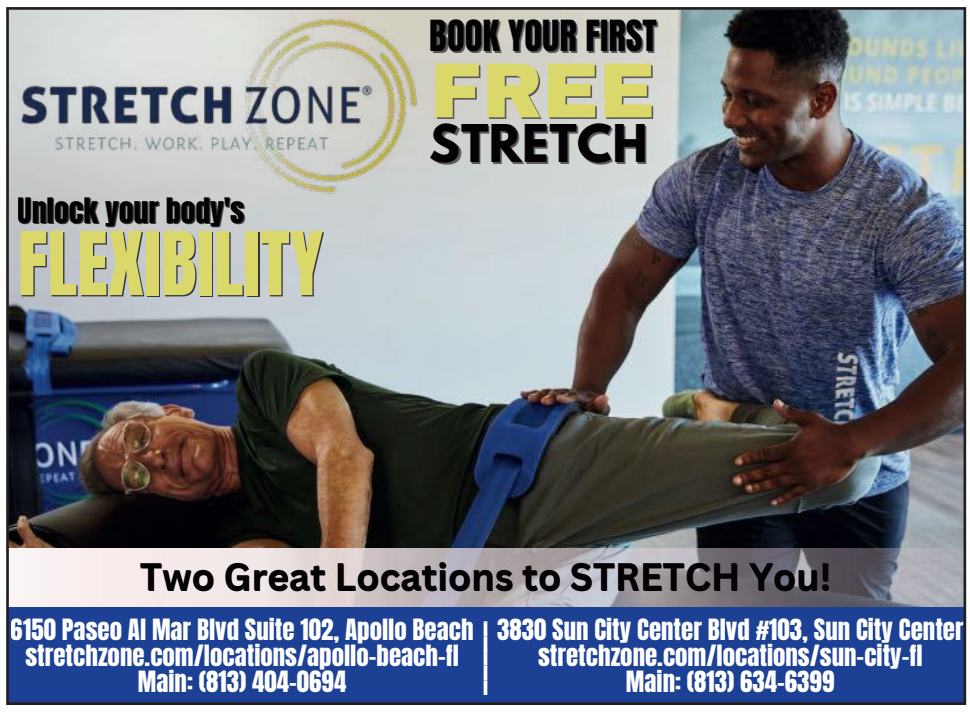
Each event will feature more than 50 local employers and training organizations from 16 industries, including healthcare, construction, retail, manufacturing, and technology, offering on-the-spot interviews, internships, and entry-level positions. Recruiters from the Armed Forces will also be on-site. Participating organizations include AdventHealth, BayCare Health System, Florida Army National Guard, HCA Florida Healthcare, Hillsborough College, Hillsborough County Public Schools, Hillsborough Technical Colleges, JPMorgan Chase, The Mosaic Company, Regions Bank, Tampa General Hospital, TECO, and The U.S. Army.

"College isn't the only option after graduating," said a Chamberlain High School alumnus. "There are entry-level positions and apprenticeships that not only prepare us for a desired career but also pay reasonably."

While the events serve as a final step in the Future Career Academy experience for seniors, organizers emphasize they are also designed to benefit the wider community.









HOW MCAULEY FINE JEWELRY TURNS MEMORIES INTO MASTERPIECES

By Kelly Wise Valdes

McAuley Fine Jewelry has become one of Brandon's most trusted names in fine jewelry, known for its blend of craftsmanship, customer care and multi-generational expertise. Whether you need jewelry repair, inspection, cleaning, ring sizing, watch battery replacement, appraisals or a custom-designed piece, McAuley is your one-stop shop for all your jewelry needs.



Ed McAuley and Joe Martin share a moment in the shop where their legacies meet — Martin's Jewelers became McAuley Fine Jewelry.

The store's reputation is reflected in the words of customer Terry Vassalotti, who shared, "I have to say it was a real pleasure working with McAuley Fine Jewelry. When my mom passed nearly nine years ago, I was left with her wedding ring. I didn't want to wear it as a ring but wanted to repurpose it into a pendant to honor her."

Vassalotti's experience highlights the personal attention McAuley Fine Jewelry is known for. McAuley's expert jewelers ultimately created a meaningful custom pendant using her mother's diamond and a sentimental stone of her own.

"I found out that I had enough credit with the gold I brought in to pay for the setting as well as the gold necklace that fits perfectly," said Vassalotti. "I met the owner, Ed, when I picked up the finished job, and he couldn't have been a nicer guy. I can't recommend them enough."

Since taking over the business in 2017, Ed and Jenn McAuley have guided the store through significant growth in staff, a new location, and new technology including laser welding, CAD and 3D printing.

"We purchased the old Carson Optical building and moved the jewelry store from 664 Oakfield to 201 S. Kings Avenue," said Jenn.

Even with these changes, one thing has remained constant: McAuley Fine Jewelry's commitment to exceptional service.

"Service and craftsmanship are where we excel," said Jenn. "Our jewelers have years upon years of experience."

Custom design continues to be a major part of their identity.

"We recommend an appointment [for custom designs]," said Jenn McAuley. "We typically will have two consults. If you don't know what you want, Ed listens for styling cues. Also, we'll talk about using any old scrap gold jewelry you may have."

"Our younger employees are learning from our jewelers with tons of experience," she added, "It's fun to have people come in and see how they can be creative. Due to our small business size, we still have the ability to operate with freedom."

McAuley Fine Jewelry is located at 201 S. Kings Ave. in Brandon. For more information, call 813-689-8124, visit https://mcauleyfinejewelry.com/ or follow the store on Facebook.





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STRAZ CENTER BROADWAY SEASON INCLUDES WICKED, HAMILTON & MORE

Staff Report



Photo by Joan Marcus
(L to R) Tyler Fauntleroy and Jimmie J.J. Jeter in Hamilton national tour.



K yra Belle Johnson and Fergie L. Philippe in Disney's Beauty and the Beast. Photo by Matthew Murphy Photo by Matthew Murphy



Photo by Joan Marcus
Jessie Davidson as Elphaba in the national tour of Wicked.

Straz Center for the Performing Arts is delighted to announce the 2026-2027 Bank of America Broadway at Straz Center season. The schedule includes Buena Vista Social Club™, 'Twas the Night Before ... by Cirque du Soleil, Death Becomes Her, The Great Gatsby, The Sound of Music, Boop!® The Musical, Disney's Beauty and the Beast, Operation Mincemeat: A New Musical and the return of Tampa's most "popular" musical Wicked. In addition to the nine-show package, the season features the Florida premiere engagement of Oh, Mary! and encores of Hamilton and Jersey Boys.

"We're excited to welcome another exceptional season of Broadway to Straz Center and to share these extraordinary productions with the Tampa Bay community," said Straz Center President and CEO Greg Holland. "From beloved audience favorites to award-winning new productions, this season reflects the creativity, energy and artistry that make Broadway so special. Whether returning to experience a longtime favorite or discovering something new, audiences will find performances that inspire, entertain and bring us together. We look forward to experiencing it with you."

Buena Vista Social Club™ runs Oct. 6-11. It's been years since legendary singer Omara Portuondo last entered a recording studio. Once known as the "Queen of Feeling," her voice was celebrated throughout Cuba — until she vanished from the spotlight. When an ambitious young record producer brings her a rare opportunity, the elusive diva must finally reckon with her past.

'Twas the Night Before ... by Cirque du Soleil runs Nov. 18-29. It's the holidays, and this year, things are different. For years, Isabella and her father have read "A Visit from Saint Nicholas" together, but now Isabella feels she has outgrown the tradition. When the magic of the poem comes to life, a snowstorm separates them and sends them on a fantastic journey.

Death Becomes Her runs Dec. 8-13. The Tony Award-winning musical comedy is based on the classic 1992 film, with direction and choreography by Tony winner Christopher Gattelli. It has been described as "a laugh-filled, tuneful musical to die for" (Variety) and "*a cheek-aching laughter roller coaster — the most fun night out!*" (The Daily Beast).

The Great Gatsby runs Jan. 19-24. Based on the novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald, the Tony Award-winning musical brings the Roaring Twenties to life in a story of love, wealth and tragedy. It has been called a "*Broadway extravaganza that explodes with life and energy*" (Entertainment Weekly).

Wicked returns Feb. 3-28, telling the story of two unlikely friends in the Land of Oz — one born with emerald-green skin and extraordinary talent, the other bubbly and popular. Featuring songs like "Defying Gravity," "Popular" and "For Good," Wicked has been called "*a magical Broadway musical with brains, heart and courage*" (Time Magazine).

The Sound of Music runs March 9-14. For 65 years, this Rodgers and Hammerstein classic has remained one of America's favorite musicals. Directed by three-time Tony Award winner Jack O'Brien, the story of Maria and the von Trapp family continues to captivate audiences with themes of love, resilience and the power of music.

Boop!® The Musical runs April 20-25. Inspired by the iconic Betty Boop character, the show follows Betty's adventure as she escapes her black-and-white world for a colorful journey in New York City. It has been described as a "*show-stopping rainbow of joy*" (The Daily Beast) filled with heart and humor.

Disney's Beauty and the Beast runs May 4-16. This marks Disney's first North American touring production of the beloved musical in more than 25 years. Featuring an Oscar-winning score by Alan Menken and Tim Rice, the production includes classic songs like "Be Our Guest" and "Beauty and the Beast," along with spectacular new sets and costumes.

Operation Mincemeat: A New Musical runs June 1-6, 2027. Set in 1943, the show tells the true story of a secret Allied mission that helped turn the tide of World War II. An Olivier Award winner for Best New Musical and a multiple 2025 Tony nominee, it has been called the "*No. 1 Broadway Show of 2025*" (Entertainment Weekly).

In addition to the season package, the Straz Center will present the Florida premiere of **Oh, Mary!** April 6-11, 2027. The dark comedy explores the life of Mary Todd Lincoln in the weeks leading up to Abraham Lincoln's assassination. Declared "*one of the best comedies in years*" by The New York Times, the production earned two Tony Awards, including Best Direction of a Play, along with multiple other honors and a Pulitzer Prize finalist designation.

For more, call the Straz Center Ticket Sales Office at 813-229-7827 or outside the Tampa Bay area at 800-955-1045 or visit www.strazcenter.org

Events, days, dates, times, performers and prices are subject to change without notice.





TOURS RETURN TO THE YUENGLING BREWERY AFTER 8-YEAR HIATUS

By Jane Owen



After an eight-year pause, brewery tours are officially returning to the Yuengling Tampa Brewery. Bookings went live on March 15 for visitors to begin making reservations, and tours began on March 20. The experience offers guests a behind-the-scenes look at America's oldest brewery brewing beer inside Florida's oldest operating brewery.

The relaunch of tours gives beer lovers and history enthusiasts alike the opportunity to learn about the craftsmanship and tradition that define the Yuengling name. Brewed locally in Tampa for more than 26 years, the brand is rooted in the company's nearly 200-year legacy as a sixth-generation, family-owned and operated American brewery.

Originally constructed in 1958 by the Schlitz Brewing Company, the Tampa facility was one of the most advanced breweries of its time. Ownership later transferred to Stroh's Brewery before being purchased by Yuengling in 1999, making Florida the company's second home behind the breweries in Pottsville, Pennsylvania — and the oldest brewery in America. Today, the Yuengling Tampa Brewery continues the family brewing legacy, blending tradition with modern brewing technology to produce its iconic beers for the Southeast region.

The Yuengling Draft Haus & Kitchen opened on-site in Tampa in June 2023. Since then, the only public access to brewery tours was through the restaurant's monthly Eagle Series Beer Dinner Experiences — chef-curated, multicourse beer pairing dinners featuring Yuengling favorites, like Traditional Lager, alongside small-batch, limited-release Eagle Series beers. The return of regularly scheduled tours now makes the brewery experience accessible to a broader audience of visitors to the Draft Haus & Kitchen beyond these exclusive, ticketed events.

Tour Experience Details

Yuengling Tampa Brewery Tour highlights include:

• An overview of Yuengling's almost 200-year heritage.

• Insight into Florida's oldest operating brewery.

• A guided behind-the-scenes look at the brewing process.

• Photo opportunities throughout the facility.

• Opportunity to taste the broader portfolio of Yuengling brands and special, limited-edition beers only available on-site.

Tours will be available on Fridays and Saturdays, with plans to expand availability in the future.

Tickets start at $10.95 per person, and tours are open to all ages. Guests ages 21 and up may upgrade their experience to include a guided beer flight tasting.

The Yuengling Tampa Brewery is located at 11109 N. 30th St. in Tampa. To book tickets, visit www.yuengling.com/tampa/. For more information, visit the website or call 813-488-6444.







CENTER HELPS RESIDENTS FIND THE HISTORY IN THEIR HOMES

By Libby Hopkins

Tampa Bay Community Design Center (TCDC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to celebrating the region's design and architectural heritage while encouraging preservation, sustainability and community engagement. Through events, tours and partnerships, TCDC helps connect people to the places, stories and ideas shaping Tampa Bay.



Tampa Bay Community Design Center (TCDC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to celebrating the region's design and architectural heritage

"Through our architectural tours, art events, gallery talks, walking tours and public installations, we inspire a deeper connection to our built environment and empower residents to actively participate in shaping the future of their communities," said TCDC board member Julia Gorzka Freeman.

This past March, TCDC partnered with the Hillsborough Library System to help local residents whose homes are 100 years old or older find the history of their homes.

"Curiosity, history and home converged at the John F. Germany Public Library as historic homeowners came together to uncover the mysteries of their properties," Freeman said.

Led by longtime librarian and fifth-generation Tampa Bay resident Pam Tucker, the free program taught local residents how to utilize the library's archives and historic documents, including plat maps, the Burgert Brothers Photographic Collection and historical newspapers, to research the past lives of their homes.

"Never underestimate the fun trivial facts you'll find," Tucker said. "ProQuest Historical Newspapers is a resource you can access online for free with your library card through the Hillsborough County library website. They have articles from the Tampa Tribune 1895-2015."

Freeman's home turned 100 years old this year and she is planning on throwing a party for it. Since her home is 100 years old, she is a member of The Century Club, which is another program offered by TCDC.

"The Century Club honors homes and buildings in the Tampa Bay region that have stood for 100 years or more," Freeman said.

On Tuesday, April 21, The Century Club will be hosting its first annual Century Club Birthday Party and Awards at J.C. Newman Cigar Company, located at 2701 N. 16th St. in Tampa, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Tickets are $25 for the party and awards ceremony.

"We're throwing a birthday party for Tampa Bay's oldest residents, the houses and buildings that were here before most of us and are still standing strong," Freeman said.

To attend the first annual Century Club Birthday Party and Awards, you can visit its website at www.tbcommunitydesign.org.

CHAMPIONSHIP BANNER RISES AS TAMPA BAY SUN FC CELEBRATES TITLE

By Olivia Clark

The Tampa Bay Sun FC marked a defining moment in franchise history on March 18 as the club raised its first national championship banner at Suncoast Credit Union Field in downtown Tampa. The pregame ceremony, held during Women's Empowerment Night, celebrated the team's groundbreaking inaugural title and solidified its place in the growing landscape of women's professional soccer.



The banner unveiling came at a pivotal time in the Sun's season. Just days earlier, the team battled through a physical contest against Carolina Ascent FC, ultimately falling 1-0 in Charlotte, North Carolina. Despite the loss, the performance underscored the resilience and competitive identity that fueled the championship run.

"The ladies played a really strong performance in a tough environment against a good team, and we created a lot of chances," said Denise Schilte-Brown, head coach of Tampa Bay Sun FC. "I think there's a lot to build on. We are never happy with not getting points, but the team performed well, and I am proud of them."

That same determination was front and center as the organization shifted its focus from a hard-fought loss to a celebratory milestone. The raising of the championship banner represented more than a past achievement; it signaled the standard the team now holds itself to in moving forward.

Players echoed that mindset following the Carolina match, emphasizing both accountability and optimism.

"I was honored to get the start," said forward Faith Webber, who made her first professional appearance. "I was hoping to help us earn three points, so I was disappointed about that."

Forward Madi Parsons highlighted the team's ability to stay composed under pressure, a trait that defined its title-winning campaign.

"We have a game plan, and one of my biggest strengths is holding up that ball and getting into tackles like that," said Parsons. "It's just buying into that game plan and continuing to stay locked in in games like this. We had so many chances tonight, so that gives us energy to keep going, no matter what the scoreline is."

As the banner rose, it served as both a celebration and a challenge, a visible reminder of what the Sun has accomplished and what it expects to achieve again. For fans, players and the Tampa Bay community, March 18 represented the continuation of something bigger than a single season: the establishment of a championship culture.

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COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING ENHANCED BY AI

Staff Report



By the time some patients report symptoms of colorectal cancer to a care provider, tumors have had a chance to grow or metastasize out of colon. At later stages, cancer is much more difficult to treat. Fortunately, more people are aware of the lifesaving value of routine colon cancer screenings, including colonoscopies. Now, when specialists enlist smart technologies like GI Genius, colon cancer screening can be more powerful and effective than ever. Used to assist in polyp detection through enhanced visualization during a colonoscopy, GI Genius was the first artificial intelligence system of its kind available in the U.S. It offers immediate analysis of video-imaging data, flagging potential problem areas so physicians can take a closer look to identify and remove precancerous polyps.

"It's an intelligent endoscopy module," says Adnan Muhammad, MD, FACG, a board-certified gastroenterologist and physician lead for AdventHealth West Florida Division Gastroenterology. "AI-assisted colorectal screenings using the GI Genius give us accurate, real-time analysis of lesions, including precancerous polyps and other abnormalities. It enhances our viewing and diagnostic capabilities."

Guided by the physician, the GI Genius module adds the power of AI to routine colonoscopy. By instantly flagging trouble spots for the gastroenterologist to assess, the GI Genius module offers an extra level of accuracy. The GI Genius module has been shown to increase adenoma (precancerous lesions) detection rate by up to 14.4%.

"The GI Genius works in concert with our routine screening equipment," says Dr. Muhammad. "It examines the video feed from the endoscope as we work, offering accurate identification of lesions. It is highly effective."

Recent research shows that the GI Genius positively identified 99.7% of lesions. It is a smart guide and a step forward in protecting patients' health and wellness with early, lifesaving colon cancer screening.

The GI Genius is now offered at AdventHealth Riverview. To learn more, visit online at www.YourColorectalExperts.com.

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BLOOMINGDALE/BRANDON: THE ONCE RURAL HOME TO THE BEGINNING FAMILIES

By Emily Harper



The Brandon High School Class of 1970 gathers in McLean Stadium for their graduation ceremony.



A McDonald's being built that still stands on U.S. Huwy. 60 today.



The house on the north side of Candi Cater Martin's family property. This photo was taken circa 1928.

Bloomingdale is now a booming area with restaurants, schools and shopping plazas on every corner. But for natives growing up in the 1950s-60s, this was not the case. The area that we now recognize with busy traffic and a lively atmosphere was a quiet home to these individuals.

Candi Carter Martin, Jim Quick, Gail Askew Sweeting and Donna Railey Hawkins Harper are all Brandon natives who share similarities in their childhood. For example, they all attended the same schools, Yates Elementary School and/or Brooker Elementary School, when it opened; Mann Middle School; and Brandon High School, as those were the only schools in the area. They also share similar memories of going to Lithia Springs and walking to catch the bus on U.S. Highway 60 from their homes.

"It was a great life. It was an absolutely great place to grow up. I have wonderful memories here," said Martin, reminiscing on her life growing up in what was called South Brandon.

Martin grew up on Bloomingdale Avenue, on the property where Walmart and Chick-fil-A are today. Her grandparents settled there, having property on both the north and south sides of the road.

Martin reminisced on a funny story, telling how rural the area once was: "My job as an elementary-age kid was to stand in the middle of Bloomingdale Avenue and hold my hands up, to stop any traffic that might come. Which I stood there, hoping that a car would come so I would get to stop them. But typically, there was none. It was nothing but a loose gravel road at that time."



The Quick family homestead around the year 1925.

In the late 1960s and early '70s, her family had an unoccupied barn on the property. This barn was then utilized and became the first station for the Bloomingdale Volunteer Fire Department.

Martin shared that four generations grew up on that property, with her children being the last, as they sold it to become the developed area we know today. However, Martin still lives in the area today and is still active in the community.

Quick was raised on the corner of Bloomingdale Avenue and Bell Shoals Road, which at that time was known as 'Quick Corner.' His great-grandparents established on that corner in the late 1920s. This property spanned from what is now known as CVS, north and east covering between 25-40 acres.

The land was then split up to the five children once they were grown, Quick's parents. Quick specifically lived on the lot where the strip mall is now, where shops like Green Boutique are.

During this time, Quick explained, Bloomingdale was a distant region. When he would mention that he lived in Bloomingdale, people would say, "Oh, you're from way out there?"

Today, none of the property is still in the family, as they slowly started selling the land in the mid '70s up until the past few years. After graduating from Brandon High School, he went on to serve in the Air Force for 20 years and then moved back to the area after his retirement.

Sweeting grew up on around 80 acres of land off Pauls Drive in Brandon. On this property, her family lived on one street, including her grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. She stated, "We could all say good night to each other or good morning to each other," which illustrates the proximity of the houses.

Her family worked together on the large property to manage a farm on their off days. There they grew vegetables and raised animals.

Sweeting cherishes her childhood in this area, as she met lifelong companions there. First, her husband and high school sweetheart Craig, and also one of her best friends, still to this day, Harper. The connections that she made through this community are ones that she still holds close to her heart. Sweeting now lives on a piece of land in Wimauma, where she continues to enjoy a serene life.

Harper spent her childhood on 40 acres off Bryan Road, cater-cornered to what is now Burns Middle School. There she has fond memories of "living out in the country," which is hard to fathom with the growth and development the town has experienced. Additionally, her mother was one of the first Girl Scout leaders in the area. Through her mom's leadership, young girls in the area learned important lessons about life, guiding them to success.

Harper eventually moved away when she got married and had children. However, she found her way back to Bloomingdale where she retired as a teacher with Hillsborough County Public Schools and spent lots of time as a neighbor to her grandchildren.



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ROCK STEADY BOXING HELPS PARKINSON'S PATIENTS FIGHT BACK

Staff Report



A specialized fitness program designed for people living with Parkinson's disease offers participants a chance to improve strength, balance and confidence through non-contact boxing exercises.

Rock Steady Boxing Fishhawk, has been serving the community for the past 9 ⅓ years, using training techniques inspired by professional boxers and adapted for individuals with Parkinson's. Classes include stretching, balance work, strength training, coordination, as well as guided boxing drills, all led by trained coaches. The program is open to men and women of all ages and stages of Parkinson's.

Health experts note that Parkinson's disease is being diagnosed more frequently, including among women and at younger ages than in the past, making programs like this increasingly important for early intervention and long-term quality of life.

"I am fortunate to be able to share this program in the community," said Kathy Glazewski, a NASM-certified Senior Fitness trainer as well as a Parkinson's Disease Fitness Specialist. "Teaching exercise to people living with Parkinson's is not just about movement-it's about restoring confidence, reclaiming strength, and reminding every person in the room that their body is still capable, resilient, and worth fighting for. Parkinson's may challenge them, but it does not define them."

Coach Glazewski completed Rock Steady Boxing's intensive training camp at their headquarters in Indianapolis and is certified to lead classes for individuals with Parkinson's disease. Rock Steady Boxing Fishhawk is one of the more than 800 affiliates worldwide.

Participants often report a wide range of benefits, including improved coordination, strength and overall fitness. Many also experience increased confidence, better posture, enhanced motor skills and a stronger sense of community through the supportive group environment.

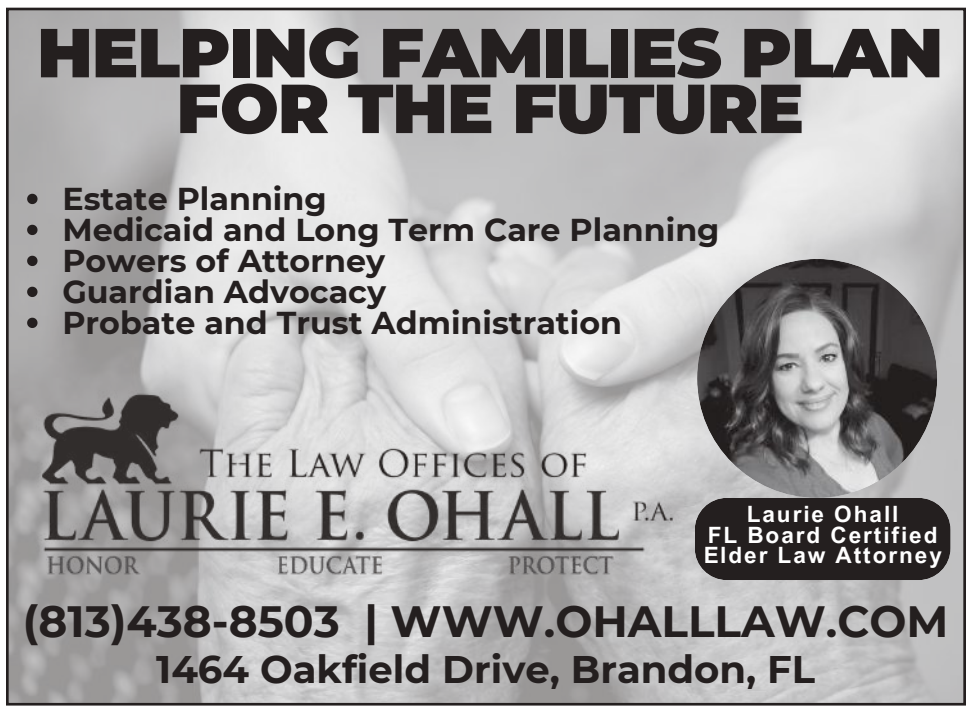
For Riverview resident Silvia Fabelo, the program has been life-changing. After noticing a tremor in her right foot, she sought medical advice and was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease at a relatively young age. Her neurologist recommended Rock Steady Boxing.

"I went straight from the doctor's office to the program," Fabelo said. "I found a group of people supporting me and a network of information. I want to make sure everyone knows about this program."

Parkinson's disease affects an estimated 1 to 1.5 million Americans, with approximately 60,000 new cases diagnosed each year. Advocates say growing awareness and earlier diagnosis are helping more people seek supportive therapies sooner.

Rock Steady Boxing classes are held at 3636 Erindale Drive, Unit 103, in Valrico. For more information, visit the website at www.rocksteadyboxing.org or email fishhawk@rsbaffiliae.com





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Missing the best days

Long-term investing is relatively simple, but it isn't always easy. Volatile markets tend to make investors nervous, particularly because when the stock market drops, it receives much more attention than when it rises.

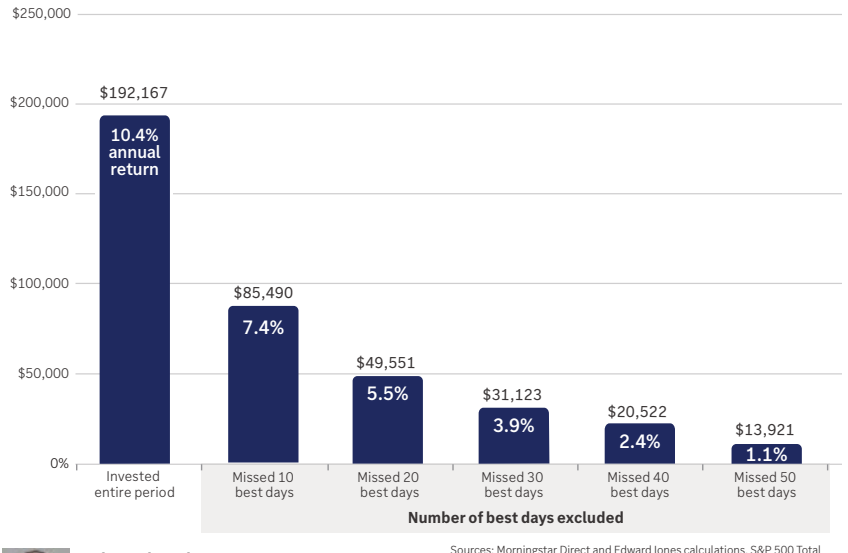
We believe the best asset allocation policy in the world won't matter much if you don't stick to your long-term investment strategy. We don't view stock market declines as a reason to sell quality investments. Rather, declines present an opportunity for investors with long-term goals to purchase additional investments at attractive prices.

You want to be invested on the "best" days. The problem is that no one knows when these days will occur. We believe buying investments when you have the money available and staying invested give you the best potential for success.

Below is an example of how returns can be impacted by missing some of the best days to be invested.

Market timing doesn't work

Value of a $10,000 investment in the S&P 500 beginning in 1996



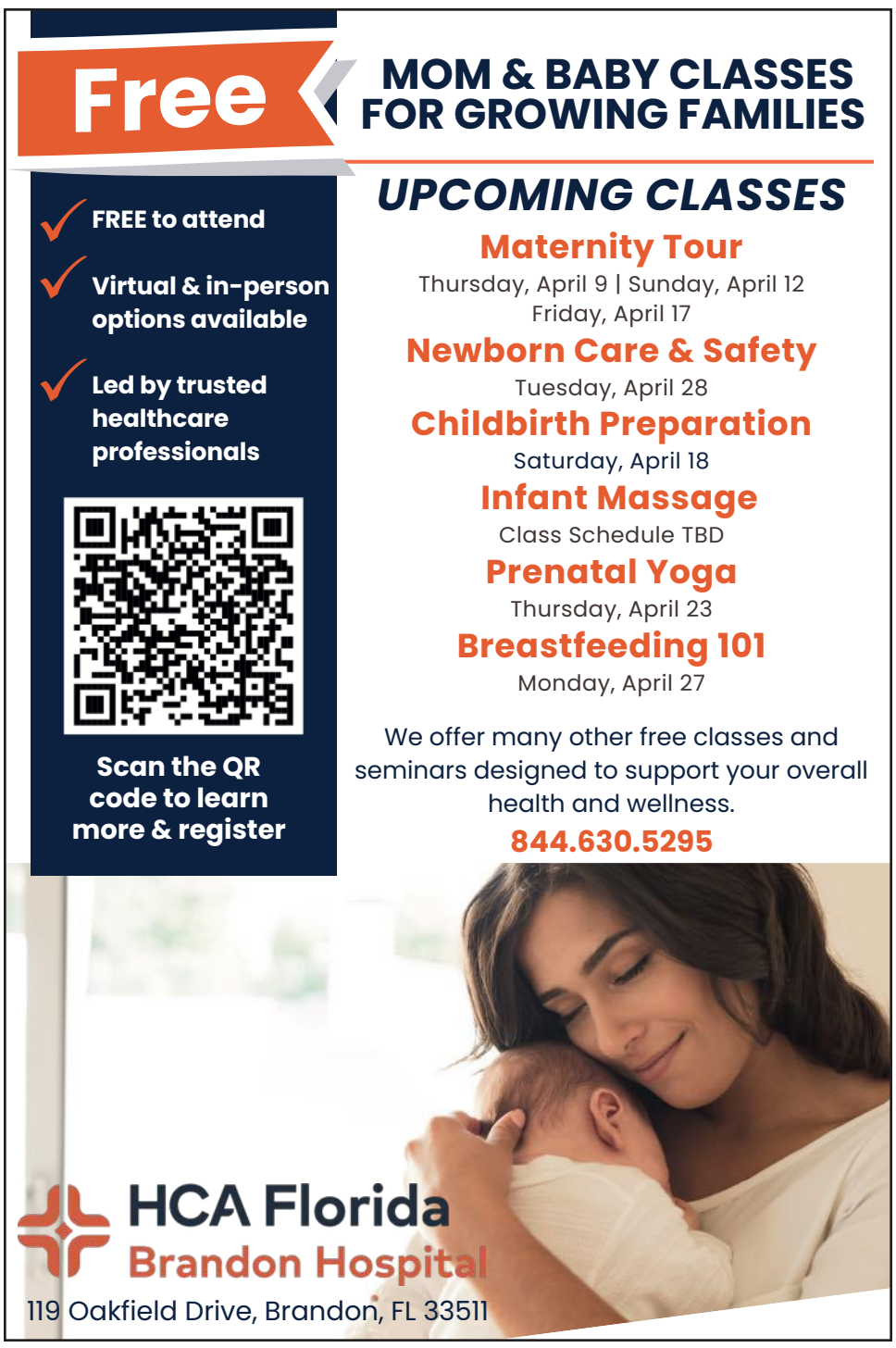


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Suite 105
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813-626-3052

Sources: Morningstar Direct and Edward Jones calculations. S&P 500 Total Return Index. 1/1/1996 – 12/31/2025. These calculations assume the best days, as defined as the top percentage gains for the S&P 500 for the time period designated, would not be included in the return. These calculations do not include any commissions or transaction fees that an investor may have incurred. If these fees were included, it would have a negative impact on the return. The S&P 500 is an unmanaged index and is not available for direct investment. Past performance does not guarantee future results. Dividends can be increased, decreased or eliminated at any point without notice. This is not meant to depict a real investment.

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www.edwardjones.com/adam-benabram



APRIL HONORARY MAYOR'S RACE BENEFITS LOCAL CHARITIES

Staff Report



Abe Agosto



Sunni Moreno

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is excited to announce the upcoming Honorary Mayor's Race, taking place throughout the month of April. This highly anticipated annual event brings together community leaders for a fun, high-energy fundraising campaign that celebrates local pride while making a meaningful impact.

Two outstanding candidates will step into the spotlight, each rallying support for charitable organizations close to their hearts:

- Abe Agosto, "Mortgage Coach Abe," of United Direct Lending, representing Impact Program and A League of Their Own Riverview
- Sunni Moreno of After Glow aesthetics & wellness, representing Angel Foundation Florida and Hope for Her

Throughout April, the candidates will engage the community through a series of exciting and creative fundraising events, all in the spirit of friendly competition. Every dollar raised counts as a "vote," with proceeds directly benefiting the candidates' selected charities.

"This event is a perfect example of how our business community comes together to create a positive impact," said Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce President, Amber Aaron. "The Honorary Mayor's Race is not only a fun and engaging competition, but also an opportunity to support incredible organizations that are doing meaningful work right here in our community."

The Honorary Mayor's Race highlights the Chamber's commitment to strengthening connections between businesses, nonprofits, and residents. By participating, attending events, or contributing to a candidate's campaign, community members play a direct role in supporting important local causes.

A full lineup of fundraising events will take place throughout April. Community members are encouraged to attend, participate, and show their support.

For event details and ways to get involved, please visit the Chamber's event calendar at www.centralhillsborough-chamber.com.

About the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce

The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to helping local businesses grow by fostering connections, promoting economic development, and supporting a thriving business community.

Through advocacy, networking, and community engagement, the Chamber serves as a catalyst for success in the Brandon and Riverview areas.

PROJECT HELPS SMALL BUSINESSES PREPARE FOR A WORST-CASE SCENARIO

Staff Report

PROJECT PHOENIX
TAMPA BAY REGIONAL PLANNING COUNCIL

As the 2026 hurricane season approaches, the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council (TBRPC) is urging small businesses to prepare now through Project Phoenix, an innovative training initiative that combines a realistic Category 5 hurricane video simulation with interactive tabletop training exercises. The TBRPC will be hosting six countywide training exercises across the Tampa Bay Region from Monday, April 20, through Friday, May 1.

The program immerses participants in a powerful, scenario-based experience that asks a critical question: What would happen if a catastrophic hurricane directly impacted the Tampa Bay region?

Project Phoenix features a video simulation of a Category 5 hurricane making landfall in Tampa Bay, illustrating the storm's formation, impact and devastating aftermath. The experience is paired with facilitated tabletop exercises that guide small business owners and emergency managers through real-world decision-making at every stage of disaster recovery, from immediate response to long-term rebuilding.

The training is structured around four key recovery phases:

- One Day Later: Immediate impacts and damage assessment.
- One Week Later: Short-term recovery operations.
- One to Six Months Later: Long-term recovery planning.
- One Year Later: Full recovery and resilience building.

Through guided discussions, participants evaluate business continuity plans, emergency communications, staffing challenges and financial recovery strategies. The program also integrates lessons learned from real business owners impacted by past hurricanes, including Helene and Milton, providing practical insights that can be applied before disaster strikes.

"Small businesses are the backbone of our regional economy, but many are not fully prepared for a catastrophic storm," said TBRPC Executive Director Wren Krahl. "Project Phoenix helps business owners visualize the risks and, more importantly, equips them with the tools to recover quickly and reopen."

The urgency is clear: Studies show that up to 40 percent of small businesses may never reopen after a major disaster without adequate preparation. Project Phoenix is designed to change that outcome by strengthening coordination between businesses and emergency management agencies and improving preparedness across the region.

The full-day tabletop training exercises will be held in each county for small businesses and local government staff, with the Hillsborough event being on April 20 at the Children's Board of Hillsborough County, located at 1002 E. Palm Ave. in Tampa, from 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.

To learn more about Project Phoenix or register for the event, visit https://phoenix.tbrpc.org/.

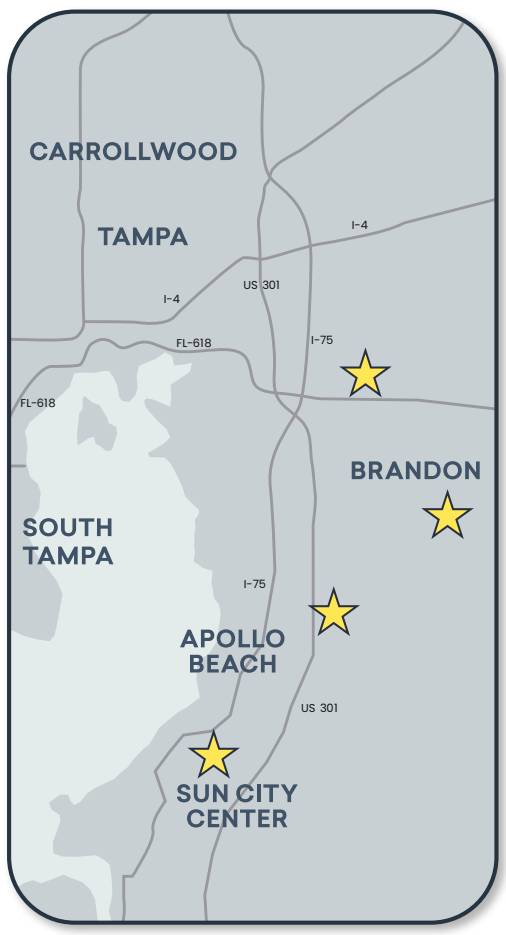
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SERENITY MEADOWS

HONEST FOOD GUY GIVES REVIEWS AT A LOCAL RESTAURANT NEAR YOU

By Libby Hopkins



Adam Turner aka The Honest Food Guy has a passion for food and sharing his reviews of local restaurants on his Facebook page.

Adam Turner has been a paranormal investigator, been on the T.V. show Pawn Stars and is know in the community as The Honest Food Guy. "I love food," Turner said. "Until high school, I really didn't get to experience different foods. My high school had a culinary class as an elective. That's when I started trying new things and that's where I feel in love with food."

His passion for food then turned into telling people about food. "I started writing on Trip Advisor and social media," Turner said. "I started a food page on Facebook when we moved to Florida, Honest Respectful Food Reviews of Hillsborough County and I would write my reviews there. Last year a restaurant owner asked me why I didn't make content as well. I told him I had no idea how and he convinced me to try. The rest is history." The Honest Food Guy was born!

Turner and his family visit local restaurants and give honest food review of what they eat. "Almost everything has been positive," Turner said. "Most restaurant owners have been extremely welcoming and love my vision. They are open to it."

Turner goes into the different restaurants as just a regular customer. "I don't do the normal influencer thing and have these places pay me to come in. I come in unannounced, buy my own food, and give a real and honest review," Turner said. "The only way to be real is to come in as a normal customer without anyone knowing I am there. I believe less than five restaurants have taken offense to this and even a few took to social media to try to discredit me. It's sad but beyond my control when this happens. Some people don't care for honesty, but most do. I have formed amazing relationships with some of these owners, and I am so grateful for that."

Every day is an adventure for Turner and his family. "I love the unknown. I get excited to try these places and whether the score is high or low, I love getting to tell people about these places," Turner said. "It is advertisement whether I enjoy it or now. The people who choose to hate me completely ignore the end where I invite everyone to come try it for themselves, regardless of what I think. I love involving my family on the journey. My kids think it's the greatest thing ever and I am leaving a legacy for them to continue."

If you would like to learn more about The Honest Food Guy, you can visit his Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61571945455265.

HILLSBOROUGH UNVEILS NEW ONLINE SYSTEM TO RESERVE CAMPING SPOTS

Staff Report





Want to get away somewhere close to nature, with plenty of room to relax and just feet away from a wide array of recreational opportunities? Booking a spot at one of Hillsborough County's almost 200 campsites in three of its most popular conservation parks just got a lot easier.

The county has unveiled a new online reservation system, which means that prospective campers no longer need to arrive early and in person to reserve a spot at Edward Medard, E.G. Simmons, or Lithia Springs Conservation Parks. The online system allows campers to see when and where vacant campsites are available and to reserve and pay for the specific site(s) up to six months in advance. Additionally, campers can search for sites with the amenities they desire, including electricity, water, picnic tables, grills and campfire rings.

Camping fees remain the same: $24 per site per night, $18 for those ages 55-64 and $12 for Hillsborough County residents ages 65 and older. All three conservation parks allow for both RV and tent camping.

In addition to camping, these conservation parks offer many other distinct amenities. Edward Medard Conservation Park, located at 6140 Turkey Creek Rd. in Plant City, is home to a 700-acre reservoir, observation tower, hiking trails, a disc golf course, picnic shelters and a large playground area. Lithia Springs Conservation Park, located at 3932 Lithia Springs Rd. in Lithia, includes picnic shelters, hiking trails, canoe rentals, an ADA-accessible playground and picturesque views of the Alafia River. The centerpiece of the park is a large freshwater spring that is popular with swimmers year-round. E.G. Simmons Conservation Park, located at 2401 19th Ave. NW in Ruskin, borders Tampa Bay and offers a large boat ramp facility, canoe/kayak rentals, a beach and swimming area, picnic shelters, fishing areas, two playgrounds and 200 acres of mangroves reserved for a bird and wildlife sanctuary.

The following number of campsites are available:

- E.G. Simmons Park, 103 sites.
- Lithia Springs Park, 45 sites.
- Edward Medard Park, 43 sites.

RV campers are limited to stays of 30 consecutive days per park; tent campers can stay up to 14 days within a 30-day period. A maximum of two dogs or cats is allowed. Also, the individual who reserved the campsite must be physically present at check-in.

For more information regarding camping options at Hillsborough County's conservation parks, please visit the website at www.hcfl.gov/camping.

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Spring Tea, ECHO Derby, Cracker Country Day & More...

Compiled by Jenny Bennett
jbennett@ospreyobserver.com

Angel Foundation FL Ladies Spring Tea

The Angel Foundation FL invites you to join them for its 2026 Ladies Spring Tea event on Thursday, April 23, at The Regent, located at 6437 Watson Rd. in Riverview. This fundraiser provides the Angel Foundation FL with gift cards to distribute to its Angel families facing a crisis, such as cancer or other catastrophic events, throughout the year.

You and your guests will enjoy a wonderful evening to celebrate with friends, including a fashion show, a silent auction and an inspiring message from an Angel family served by the Foundation Angel program.

Learn more and register at https://angelfoundationfl.com/spring-tea/.

The Derby: A Fundraising Event Benefiting ECHO

Join us on Saturday, May 2, at the Hillsborough County Fairgrounds for The Derby, an elegant and entertaining evening in support of ECHO and its mission to assist families in crisis.

Guests will enjoy classic mint juleps and a silent auction featuring a variety of exciting items. Attendees can also experience the refined atmosphere of Mi Casa Cigars and take part in a Best Hat Contest, with prizes awarded for standout derby styles.

All proceeds from the event will directly support ECHO's life-stabilizing programs, helping provide essential resources and hope to local families in need.

Dress in your finest derby attire and be part of an unforgettable night of community, generosity and celebration.

Pelican Players Community Theater Presents Farce Of Nature



The non-stop hilarity of Farce of Nature, penned by the noted playwriting team of Jessie Jones, Nicholas Hope and Jamie Wooten, focuses on one chaotic day in the life of the Wilburns, the owners of a struggling fishing lodge in the Ozarks. As in every farce, there are wild and unusual happenings, mistaken identity, frenzied confrontations, ridiculous disguises and secrets exposed as the family deals with a Witness Protection snitch, a cop dressed as a maid, a discontented wife and outrageous, unexpected guests.

All performances are at the Kings Point Veterans Theater in the North Clubhouse, located at 1900 Clubhouse Dr. in Sun City Center, and audiences will have four opportunities to see the play, starting on Thursday, May 14. Tickets are on sale now at the Kings Point Box Office from 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Music And Art Homeschool Day At Cracker Country

Discover some of Florida's rich music and art history at Cracker Country Music and Art Homeschool Day on Tuesday, May 12. While visiting the museum's historic buildings, homeschoolers can participate in activities designed to make late-19th-through-early-20th-century art and music come alive.

Enjoy live musical demonstrations on the dulcimer, mandolin and conga drum; make your own musical instrument; and do some 'everyday' chores, like churning butter and cleaning laundry on a washboard.

Advanced ticket purchase is required from its website at https://floridastatefair.com/event/homeschool-day-music-art/.

Impact Teen Huddles

The Impact Program is now offering Teen Huddles, a faith-based small group 'huddle' intended to help students understand God's word, ask honest questions and learn how to apply biblical truths to real-life situations. Students in sixth through 12th grade meet on the second and fourth Mondays of each month from 6:30-7:45 p.m. at 3115 Lithia Pinecrest Rd. in Valrico. For more information, contact Kayla Dorman, an Impact intern, at kdorman@whatisimpact.com or 863-220-3829.

Community Service Scholarship

Applications are now being accepted by the Democratic Women's Club of Southeast Hillsborough County for this year's Sandra Morehouse Community Service Scholarship. Visit the website at https://sehillsboroughdwc.org/ and scroll down to access the application. Applications must be received by Thursday, April 30, and can be emailed to smorehousescholarship@gmail.com.

Community Holocaust Memorial Service

On Monday, April 13, at 7 p.m., a communitywide interfaith Yom HaShoah service to remember the victims of the Holocaust will take place at the United Methodist Church of Sun City Center at 1971 Haverford Ave. in Sun City Center. The service will include prayers, memorial candle lighting and readings. Songs representing the faith at the time of the Holocaust will be sung by a community choir, led by Jeff Jordon, musical director at the church.

As a community, we will come together to remember what happened to the victims of Hitler, and to remember the heroes who did not live to tell their stories. The community is encouraged to attend.

Dominion Sanctuary

Dominion Sanctuary of Tampa Bay Inc., a beacon of light, is here to bring restoration of hope back into the lives of individuals. It is a family-oriented church focused on one-to-one interactions where you feel that you belong and are accepted. It builds family, it builds community and it restores hope. It is presently searching for a new place to worship, but for now it meets on Sundays at 9 a.m. in the meeting room of the Denny's at 3747 Sun City Blvd. in Ruskin. A monthly Healing and Deliverance program takes place on the last Saturday of every month (March 28 is the next one) at 2 p.m. in the meeting room for those who need God's powerful intervention. For more information, call 813-774-2773 or email dsanctuary222@gmail.com.

Dear friends, read this...

For the past few months, we've been having what some call "back of the envelope conversations" about Medicare and financial planning. But what does that really mean?

It means straightforward. No fluff. No jargon. No wandering through the acres of the financial buzz-o-sphere trying to figure out what matters. Instead, it's a focused conversation built around what actually moves the needle for you.

Because the truth is, most of the noise out there doesn't matter. Very little of it meaningfully improves your life. Our role is to filter it down to the few critical ideas and strategies that do.

That starts with helping you get great — not rationed — Medicare coverage. You've already paid for it. You deserve better. And yes, it's possible to access better care without spending more money.

It also means building retirement income that grows and is protected. Income you won't outlive. Income that inflation and taxes don't quietly erode over time. In many cases, it's possible to generate significantly more income from the same capital — without taking on greater risk.

And legacy planning? You don't need to be ultra-wealthy or write new checks to make a meaningful impact. A few thoughtful adjustments can create real, lasting results.

That's what a back of the envelope conversation is: clear, practical, and centered entirely on you.

No pressure. No nonsense. Just an honest discussion about what's possible.

You make the coffee or tea. We'll bring the envelope.

Let's talk.

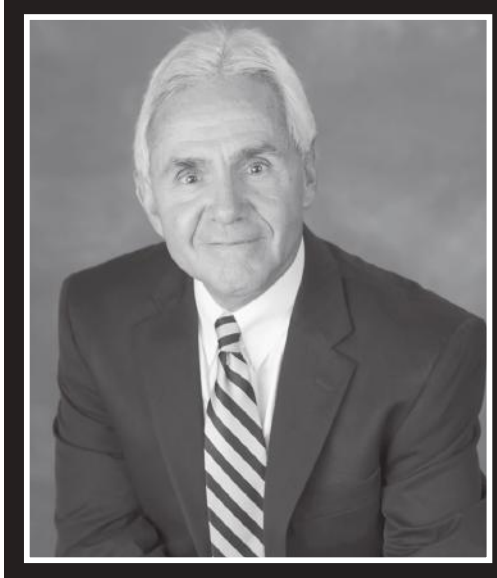
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(J is the founder of Johnson Brothers & Kurios, Inc, est 1995 and affiliated with Sequent Planning, LLC, a national RIA and Elaine is a partner of MedEdSeniorSolutions.com and connected to one of the nation's largest Medicare IMOs. They make their home in Brandon, Fl.)

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FRANKLIN STREET COMES ALIVE FOR BLOCK PARTY FOR TAMPA THEATRE

By Libby Hopkins



The historic auditorium may be closed for restoration, but there are still plenty of reasons to visit Tampa Theatre! On Wednesday, April 22, Tampa's majestic movie palace is hosting a Franklin Street Block party — presented by Urban E Recycling — in celebration of Earth Day.

The event is free and open to the public, and it will feature music, giveaways, family-friendly activities, community partners and vendors filling the 700 block of Franklin Street from 5-7 p.m., including:

- Urban E Recycling's hard drive shredder.
- Short films in the Taylor Screening Room.
- Animal interactions and costumed characters from The Florida Aquarium.
- Art inspired by the odd animal world by Megan Bites.
- Live music by Nick Ewing of ArtisTREE Gardens.
- An interactive drum circle from Giving Tree Music.
- Asian Fusion Street Food (with plenty of plant-based options) from the Miso Lucky food truck.
- Learn about bees with the Tampa Bay Beekeepers Association.
- Fun and games with Keel Farms.

More vendors are being added every day. Guests are also invited to bring books in good condition and rooted or potted plant cuttings for a Book and Plant Exchange near the theater's box office.

This block party kicks off a series of community events sponsored by Urban E Recycling, which is celebrating Tampa Theatre's 100th birthday with a gift of $100,000 intended to fund events to introduce people to Tampa Theatre.

"The Tampa Theatre has always held a special place in our hearts. From our very first dates to the many unforgettable events we've shared over the years, it has been part of our story," said Greg Rabinowitz, who co-founded Urban E Recycling with his wife, Dell. "We believe everyone should have the chance to experience this extraordinary place at least once. That's the spirit behind this gift — and our way of saying a heartfelt and resounding thank you to our community."

The Franklin Street Block Party is sponsored by Urban E Recycling. For a list of electronics that Urban E Recycling can take and to schedule your pickup, visit https://urbanerecycling.com/items/.

BLOOM IS BACK: SPRING INTO FLOWERS AT BONNET SPRINGS PARK

Staff Report



Bonnet Springs Park will welcome the community to Bloom, a vibrant two-day flower festival celebrating nature, creativity and horticulture, on Saturday and Sunday, April 11-12, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. The family-friendly event is free and open to all ages.

The park will transform into a lush wonderland filled with floral installations, botanical art displays, garden tours, a makers market, live entertainment and a variety of food and beverage vendors.

"We intentionally designed Bloom as an opportunity for families and visitors to experience the beauty of spring, discover local artists and vendors and celebrate the joy of flowers and plants," said Kirsten Hein, vice president of engagement at Bonnet Springs Park. "It's a chance for families from Tampa, Orlando and Lakeland to unplug, step outside and quite literally stop and smell the roses while connecting with nature and one another."

Throughout the weekend, guests can explore a sprawling outdoor market featuring local artists and makers, including Apothic Fox, Wild Within Flowers and Mamacita Lifestyle Co. The Bonnet Springs Park Plant Sale will also take place during the festival.

The market will be buzzing with energy all weekend long. Guests can catch live performances on the main stage while they explore, then wander over to the lounge, where a DJ will be spinning all day for both days, along with stunning aerialist performances soaring overhead. Local florists, including Montepuy, Taylormade Floral & Event Design, Blue House Florals, Lemon Drops Weddings & Events and In Bloom Florist, will create fresh and colorful installations across the festival grounds, forming a village of floral and botanical art for attendees to explore.

Free guided garden tours led by the park's horticulture staff and volunteers will be offered both days, along with pollinator and native plant education, horticulture demonstrations and interactive workshops. and food and beverage vendors.

April 11 Highlights

Bloom kicks off with a full day of live entertainment and immersive floral experiences. The main stage in the market area will feature performances by The Circus Arts Place aerialists, Sweet Harmony, a harpist, a Polk State College jazz quartet and a DJ set.

April 12 Highlights

The celebration continues on Sunday with additional performances and hands-on opportunities for guests of all ages. Entertainment on the main stage includes The Circus Arts Place aerialists, the Tom Sounds jazz trio, the Shay Butter Band, live music and a DJ set.

For a full schedule and additional details, visit www.bonnetspringspark.com/.





Riverview

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Edited by:
Jenny Bennett

EYE ON BUSINESS

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

Bridgewater Landing 55-Plus Apartments Ribbon Cutting





The Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce proudly hosted a ribbon-cutting ceremony on March 10 to celebrate the grand opening of Sunrise Homes – Bridgewater Landing Apartments, a new 55-plus active adult living community in Riverview. Leasing has officially opened for this community, which offers thoughtfully designed one and two-bedroom residences with modern finishes, in-unit laundry and private patios or balconies.

Residents also enjoy a variety of amenities, including access to the Sweet Water Club community clubhouse, walking trails, outdoor gathering spaces and convenient proximity to shopping and dining at Winthrop Town Centre.

The apartments are part of the larger Bridgewater Landing community, designed to support residents' ability to age in place. The campus includes villas and duplexes, independent living apartments and The Bridges Assisted Living Facility, creating a continuum of care and living options that allow residents to remain within the community as their needs evolve.

Visit its website at https://bridgewaterlandings.com/ for additional information and to schedule a tour.

NBS Esthetics Provides Treatments For Everyone

Whether you want to support your skin naturally or have had aggressive treatments, NBS Esthetics offers noninvasive facial treatments designed for men and women seeking healthy skin. Each facial begins with a thorough consultation and is customized to your skin's needs. NBS Esthetics offers face and body treatments for men and women to target fine lines, wrinkles, irritation, loss of elasticity and hyperpigmentation to help you achieve and maintain healthy, radiant skin naturally. NBS Esthetics is located at 223 Flamingo Dr. in Apollo Beach. For more information about the services provided, visit its website at https://nbsesthetics.com or call 813-922-9327.

Swim Life Celebrates Grand Re-Opening and New Pool Deck

Swim Life celebrated their grand re-opening and new pool deck with a ribbon cutting with the Valrico FishHawk Chamber of Commerce. Everyone at the event enjoyed cookies, coffee and, and swimming.

Swim Life offers individualized, survival-oriented, swimming lessons for children, along with skill-specific lesson options for all ages.

Coach Natalee believes that confidence in the water starts early. Early lessons help babies become comfortable in the water while building important survival skills. Swim Life offers infant survival swim lessons, survival swim lessons, stroke development, swim team preparation, and adult lessons all in a private heated salt-water pool in Lithia.

To learn more about Swim Life, visit https://www.myswimlife.com/ or email coachnatalee@myswimlife.com.

The Fancy Flea Vintage Home & Garden Market

The Fancy Flea Vintage Home & Garden Market, founded in 2009, is an upscale 'flea market' offering vintage goods, antiques, beautiful furniture, home decor, artisan soaps and body products, handmade and vintage jewelry, holiday items, baked goods, live music, food trucks and more. This year, the show will feature an old-fashioned pie bake-off, 'Bake a Pie, Save a Life,' benefiting Tampa Bay Strays, a 501(c)(3) small animal rescue based in Tampa. After the winner is announced, slices will be sold and money will be donated to the rescue. The spring market is being held at the Hillsborough County Fairgrounds, located at 215 Sydney Washer Rd. in Dover, on Friday and Saturday, April 24-25, from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Admission is $8. Children 12 and under enter for free. There is complimentary parking.

Southern Construction

Southern Construction, based in Valrico, is a full-service general contracting company dedicated to delivering quality craftsmanship and turnkey solutions across residential and commercial projects. With a team of licensed professionals and decades of combined experience, it specializes in custom home construction, road and infrastructure development, remodeling and restoration services.

Whether building your dream home, modernizing your space or responding to unexpected damage, it brings precision, efficiency and care to every project. Visit its website at www.southernconstruction.net for additional information.





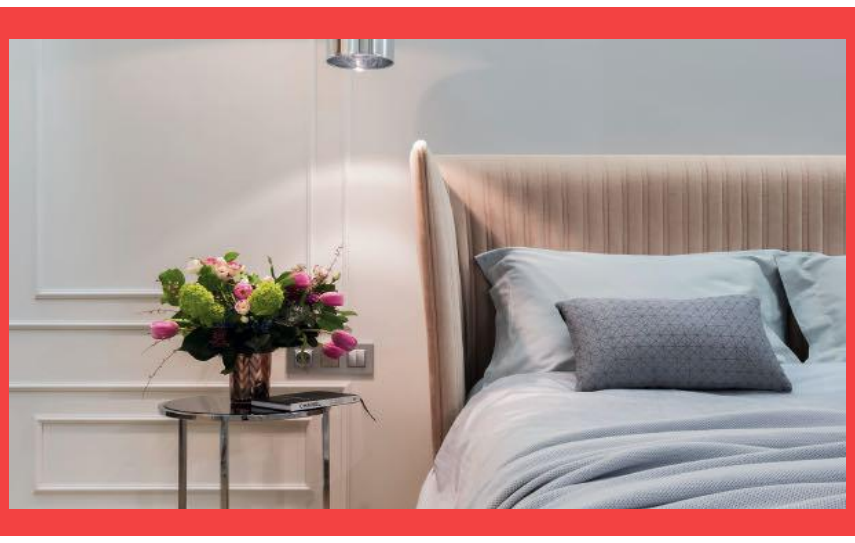
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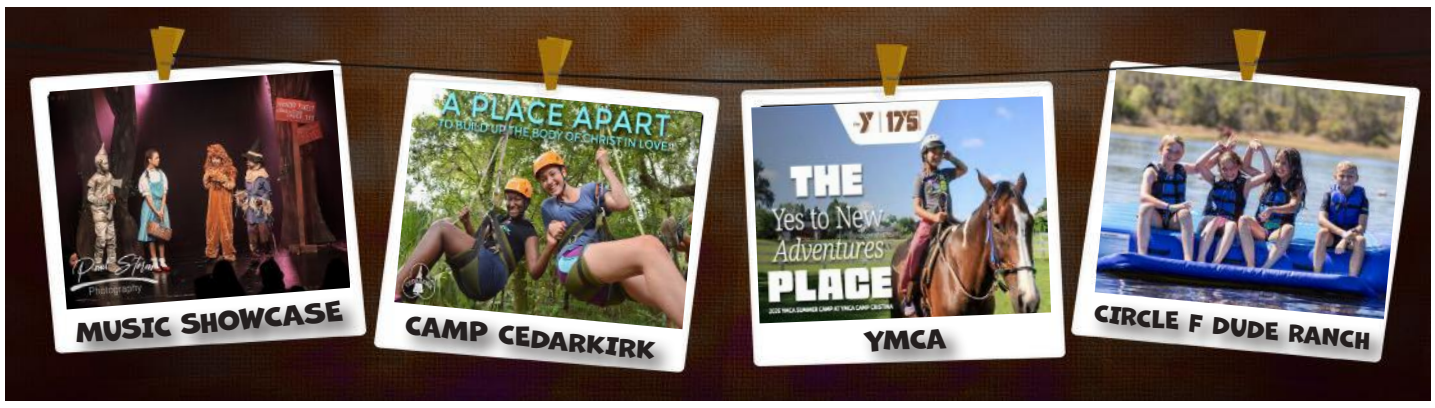


Special Section, More Inside!



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MAKE THIS SUMMER COUNT: LOCAL CAMPS BRING BIG FUN, CREATIVITY AND ADVENTURE



As the school year winds down and sunshine fills the days, families across the area are turning their attention to one thing: summer fun. From creative arts to outdoor adventure, this year's lineup of local camps promises a season packed with excitement, friendship and discovery for kids of all ages.

For young performers ready to shine, Music Showcase and the Florida Academy of Performing Arts offer lively musical theater experiences filled with acting, singing and dance. The Patel Conservatory expands those opportunities with a wide range of classes in music, theater and dance, while School of Rock Valrico brings energy to the stage with themed music camps. Center For Dance Arts and Overflow Fine Arts Camp also give budding artists the chance to explore movement, creativity and performance in welcoming environments.

Creative kids can dive into hands-on projects at AR Workshop, where imagination takes center stage through DIY crafts. Camp Mirage adds a mix of creativity and high-energy fun, ensuring campers head home happy, tired and ready for more.

For families craving outdoor adventure, options abound. Cedarkirk Camp & Conference Center offers a classic camp experience surrounded by nature along the Alafia River, with both day and overnight opportunities. Circle F Dude Ranch delivers a unique blend of traditional camp and Western-style excitement, while Busch Gardens Tampa Bay combines thrills, animal encounters and education into one unforgettable experience. Horse lovers can also spend their days riding and learning at TLC's Gypsy Haven Riding Camps.

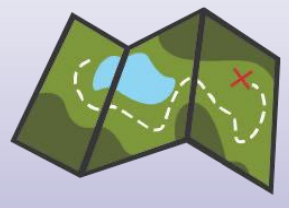
Sports and active play are front and center at Fellowship Church sports camps and High 5 Inc., where kids enjoy games, outdoor play, swimming and field trips throughout the summer. Meanwhile, YMCA Summer Camp locations across the region provide a little bit of everything — from zip-lining and gymnastics to arts and pool time.

Students looking to stay sharp academically while still having fun can explore programs at Mathnasium, Skill Samurai and Code Wiz, where STEM learning, coding and problem-solving are turned into engaging, hands-on experiences. Kids 'R' Kids Circa FishHawk rounds out the list with themed Camp VIBE sessions that mix education, field trips and summer fun in a safe and supportive setting.

With so many choices, Summer 2026 is shaping up to be full of memorable moments. Whether children are discovering a new passion, building skills or simply making new friends, these camps offer something for everyone. Families are encouraged to plan ahead and secure spots early as programs fill quickly, ensuring a summer filled with laughter, growth and endless adventure.

And, be sure to visit www.ospreyobserver.com and click on our Summer Camp Sweepstakes button for your chance to win a FREE week of Summer Camp!







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SUMMER CAMPS 2026





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DANCE, THEATER AND MUSIC PROGRAMS OFFERED AT STRAZ CENTER THIS SUMMER

By Olivia Clark



Registration for the 2026 Summer Camps and Classes is now open at the Patel Conservatory, the accredited performing arts school at the Straz Center for the Performing Arts in downtown Tampa. The Summer session runs Monday, June 1 through Friday, July 31, and the programs in dance, theater and music are carried out for students aged 3 through adult.

Each summer, the conservatory opens its doors to those who want a first experience in the arts and to those who desire more advanced, preprofessional training. Families from across the Tampa Bay area enroll in the programs, which offer both creative enrichment and more formalized skill development during the summer months. Classes are conducted by working artists and experienced instructors in a professional performing arts environment.

They can take dance courses in the Next Generation Ballet Summer Intensive, which has five, three-, and two-week sessions for ages 11 through college, and dorm housing is provided for older students. Younger dancers can join the Junior Intensive and other camps appropriate for their age, designed to enhance their technique, strength, and performance quality.

These students will get the chance to rehearse and perform in fully staged productions like Seussical, Jr. and Aladdin KIDS in which they will get acting, singing and stage movement experience. There are other specialty camps for fundamental acting skills and Shakespeare, and older students have the chance to audition for the Broadway Intensive production of Catch Me If You Can.

Music offerings include jazz, choral and chamber intensives, a singer-songwriter camp, and a number of workshops focusing on particular instruments. Younger students also learn about composition, rhythm and collaboration through weekly camps like The Science of Music and World Drumming and Storytelling.

Tuition rates differ for each program, with most week-long camps costing $475 and multiweek intensive programs charged at higher rates depending on the length of the program.

Auditions or placements are required for some programs before registration, and early enrollment is recommended since enrollment is limited.

To register, go to www.patelconservatory.asapconnected.com or www.patelconservatory.org. For more information, call 813-222-1040 or email admissions@strazcenter.org.

CEDARKIRK BLENDS FAITH, ADVENTURE AND LEADERSHIP FOR SUMMER 2026

By Olivia Clark



Tucked away on 170 wooded acres along the Alafia River, Cedarkirk Camp and Conference Center continues its longstanding tradition of offering a place apart for children and teens to grow in faith and community. Owned by the Presbyteries of Tampa Bay and Peace River, Cedarkirk has served the region since 1971 and welcomes more than 1,000 campers each summer.

While its residential camps remain a cornerstone of the ministry, Cedarkirk is placing added emphasis on its growing day camp program. Mandy Goff, Program Director, said the camp launched day camp two years ago and saw participation more than double in its second year. In response to family needs, Cedarkirk has added early drop-off from 8-8:30 a.m. and late pick-up from 5-5:30 p.m. for an additional fee.

"We are really trying to focus on our day camp program and make it affordable for families in this area," said Goff.

Day camp serves students who have completed kindergarten through fifth grade. Cedarkirk is also piloting a small middle school day camp during the final week of summer, Monday, July 27 to Friday, July 31, with limited space available. Residential camps continue to run Sunday to Friday for students who have completed third through 12th grade, while Explorer Camp provides a two-night introduction to overnight camp for children who have completed first through third grade.

Goff explained that a typical day camp day begins at 9 a.m., with drop-off beginning at 8:30 a.m. Campers join residential campers for morning songs before rotating through scheduled activity blocks that include zip lining, canoeing on the river, climbing the rock wall, arts and crafts and hiking. Campers swim daily, weather permitting, and share family-style lunches together. Each afternoon concludes with Bible study, worship and snack before pickup from 4:30-5 p.m.

Goff said creating community is central to the experience. Technology is not permitted, encouraging campers to build friendships, engage with nature and participate in shared traditions such as group songs and family-style meals. With approximately 30 summer staff members and small day camp groups of 12-14 campers per session, Cedarkirk continues to prioritize connection, outdoor adventure and spiritual growth.

Llearn more or register at www.cedarkirk.campbrainregistration.com.

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MATHNASIUM
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A LOOK INTO HIGH 5'S SUMMER CAMP PROGRAM FOR AGES 5-12

By Emily Harper



High 5 Inc. is a multipurpose facility committed to positively impacting the community. Located in Brandon, High 5's programs are divided into five pillars: learn to swim, special needs education, after-school care, sports and recreation and community partnerships.

From Monday, June 1, through Friday, August 7, High 5 offers summer camp for ages 5-12. This weekly program is Monday through Friday, 7 a.m.-6 p.m., for the main campus, and Monday through Thursday, 7 a.m.-6 p.m., for the off-site campus at Bevis Elementary School.



A typical day at the main summer camp consists of a wide variety of engaging activities. During the day, campers rotate through swimming, outdoor sports, gym games, playground time, arts and crafts, hands-on STEM experiences and Gamers Grotto (a supervised and age-appropriate video game room). The off-site location's camp is similar in structure, minus the pool. However, it does offer water activities on some days of the camp.

"What truly sets our camp apart is the experience we're able to provide on our beautiful, expansive campus and the wide range of activities we offer. Our programming is thoughtfully designed to balance fun with learning, physical activity with creativity and structure with exploration," said Jada Spano, vice president of operations.

Families can expect a safe and fun environment where children play and learn while making lifelong summer memories. High 5's experienced staff creates a welcoming atmosphere, keeping safety as their top priority.

"We focus on creating a safe, inclusive and supportive environment where every child feels valued and encouraged to grow," said Spano.

One of the most anticipated moments of camp is the 'World's Largest Swim Lesson'. Happening on Thursday, June 25, this global event promotes water safety and drowning prevention.

Spano stated, "Our campers love being part of something so meaningful and memorable, and families appreciate the important life-saving skills it reinforces."

Registration for the summer camp is now open on the website at www.high-5inc.org/camp. The main campus camp costs $175 per week, with a one-time $40 registration fee for the summer, while the off-site camp is $90 per week.

MATHNASIUM CAMPS KEEP MATH SKILLS SHARP DURING SUMMER BREAK

By Libby Hopkins



Summer is a season full of possibilities, longer days, new experiences and the perfect opportunity for kids to grow in confidence. It's also a powerful time to strengthen math skills in a way that feels positive, engaging and stress-free. At Mathnasium, summer learning doesn't pause; it accelerates, giving students the chance to build skills, explore new ideas and feel proud of their progress.

"Summer is one of the most powerful times for growth," said Mathnasium owner Becky McDaniels. "Without the pressure of school, kids have the space to truly understand math, and that's where Mathnasium shines. It's all about momentum and meeting students exactly where they are, strengthening skills and building confidence so they return to school prepared and proud of themselves. After 12-plus years with Mathnasium, it never gets old hearing students tell us after the first nine weeks how excited they are about their success and the confidence to raise their hand on day one."

While some students use summer to reinforce essential skills, others are ready to push ahead, and younger learners are just beginning to form the foundations that will support future success. Mathnasium supports students at every stage of learning, from building foundations to tackling advanced challenges.



At Mathnasium, summer learning is never one-size-fits-all. Every student begins with a personalized assessment that identifies strengths, gaps and learning styles. From there, McDaniels and her team create an individualized learning plan tailored specifically to each child. Students who need extra support receive targeted instruction to rebuild confidence and close learning gaps. Students who are on track keep their skills sharp and steady. Advanced learners are challenged with deeper concepts that keep them engaged and motivated. And its youngest 'Great Foundations' students develop number sense, problem-solving skills and a love of math that sets them up for long-term success.

Summer is also the ideal time to get ahead without pressure. Mathnasium sessions are engaging, encouraging and flexible, making it easy to balance learning with vacations, camps and family time.

"We're proud to be a Step Up for Students provider, making personalized math learning accessible for more families," added McDaniels. Learn more about Summer Camps at www.mathnasium.com. Mathnasium of Riverview, 13388 South US Highway 301 Riverview, Call 813-565-1102 or visit www.Mathnasium.com/riverview.

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FLORIDA ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS OFFERS FUN MUSICAL SUMMER CAMPS

By Libby Hopkins

The Florida Academy of Performing Arts (FAOPA) is a local nonprofit organization that was established to support the performing arts through programs at the academy and in the Brandon community.



FAOPA is committed to providing extraordinary theater experiences that educate, challenge and inspire students and their surrounding communities. FAOPA fosters self-discovery, creativity, confidence, group responsibility and pride in accomplishment.

"FAOPA celebrates the professional artistic disciplines of music, dance and the visual arts," said Danielle Sanchez, academy director of FAOPA. "We strive to be a model of excellence in theatre for all our audiences."

FAOPA and Music Showcase have offered summer camps, day camps and musical theater camps for many years.

"The day camps consist of singing, dancing, arts and crafts, intro into theater through improv," Sanchez said. "Our musical theater camps are for all ages and skill levels. We offer a variety of shows throughout the summer. Students work on choreography, blocking, stage direction and character development. Throughout the process, we watch students grow in confidence and self-esteem as they become blooming actors on the stage."

FAOPA is currently working on the camps they will be offering this summer to the community.

"We will offer musical theater camps and day camps," Sanchez said. "Our musical theater camps are two weeks long. Day camps are one week long. We have our middle school/high school groups that meet in the afternoon/evening."

The cost for musical theater camp is $295 plus a service fee. Day camps are from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. for half day and from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. for whole day. Day camp is for kindergartners through age 10, and the cost is $230 plus service fee.

"Parents love our musical theater camps," Sanchez said. "They love watching where their student starts and end up as well as seeing the difference. They love to watch their children grow in self-esteem and find the confidence to stand on the stage with their peers in the show. ."

If you would like to learn more about FAOPA and the camps it will be offering this summer, you can visit its website at www.faopa.org/ or call 813-490-ARTS (2787). FAOPA is located at 402 Oakfield Dr. in Brandon.

TEN WEEKS OF FUN AWAIT FAMILIES AT TAMPA YMCA SUMMER CAMPS

By Olivia Clark



Summer will arrive soon, and the Tampa Metropolitan Area YMCA is getting ready for another season of adventure, learning, and friendship. Registration is now open for Summer Camp at Campo Family YMCA, Spurlino Family YMCA, and North Brandon Family YMCA. Campers ages 6-15 can enjoy 10 weeks of fun activities in a safe and organized setting.

Each location offers a unique mix of Signature Camp and specialty options. Signature Camp allows kids to rotate through activities such as swimming, STEM projects, arts and crafts, outdoor education, and team-building games. Counselors support campers throughout daily activities designed to build confidence, promote friendships, and keep campers active during the summer.

Campo Family YMCA in Valrico features specialty camps that include sports, creative arts, and teen leadership programs. Spurlino Family YMCA in Riverview offers many athletic and enrichment camps, along with popular options for teens. North Brandon Family YMCA in Seffner provides sports, drama, gymnastics, and adaptive camps, ensuring families can find a program that fits their child's interests and abilities.

Teens have new opportunities this year, with three unique experiences tailored for ages 13-15. Programs focused on leadership, such as Junior Lifeguard Camp and Counselor in Training, help participants build responsibility, communication skills, and hands-on experience that lasts beyond summer. The Junior Teen Camp program introduces participants to outdoor exploration, basic archery, scenic trails, and lake adventures while fostering confidence and creativity.

Families can enhance the regular 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. camp day with optional add-ons, which vary by location. These may include swim lessons, open swim, sports, high ropes, horseback riding, and gymnastics. During registration, families can choose available add-ons specific to their YMCA. A nonrefundable deposit of $10 per week, per camper is due at registration, with separate deposits for specific teen leadership programs.

Tampa YMCA camps are ACA-accredited, which means they have gone through a thorough review by the American Camp Association focusing on health, safety, and program quality standards. This distinction places Tampa YMCA camps among a select group of accredited day camps in Florida.

Registration is available online at the website www.tampaymca.org, where families can view session weeks and age group details. Sessions fill up quickly.



At Circle F Dude Ranch Camp, we foster grit, growth, and a love for the outdoors. With the perfect blend of Western flair and classic camp fun, we give kids the kind of summer they'll never forget. Located in Lake Wales, campers 6 to 16 enjoy our overnight experiences for one, two and three-weeks sessions.

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CIRCLE F DUDE RANCH CELEBRATES 75 YEARS OF ADVENTURE AND TRADITION

By Kelly Wise Valdes



Circle F Dude Ranch Camp is excited to celebrate its 75th year, marking a milestone for the Lake Wales camp that has welcomed generations of young people. Camp Director Benjamin Moss said the camp's longevity comes from staying true to its mission while adapting to the needs of each new generation.

"Circle F has remained special because it has always stayed true to its purpose — helping young people grow in confidence, character, and independence — while thoughtfully evolving with each generation," Moss said. "Since 1952, families have trusted us to provide a place where kids can unplug, build real friendships and discover who they are beyond screens and schedules."

During the summer, Circle F welcomes about 200 campers per session, evenly split between boys and girls. Campers spend their days immersed in activities such as horseback riding, waterfront programs, arts, team and individual sports, ax throwing, paintball, boating and climbing towers.

The camp sits on 500 acres of southern live oak forest surrounding a spring-fed private lake, creating a scenic backdrop for exploration and adventure.

Many of Circle F's traditions have remained unchanged, Moss said, including opening and closing campfires, cabin living, horseback riding and more. "Those moments connect today's campers with generations who sat around the same fire before them," he said.

Moss said climbing, adventure sports, leadership pathways and more intentional skill development have helped shape the modern Circle F. "The balance between tradition and innovation is what defines modern Circle F, honoring our roots while preparing campers for the world ahead," he said.

Circle F will host an open house in May to give families a firsthand look at camp life. Moss said visitors can expect tours, staff introductions and opportunities to explore activity areas. "Visitors will tour cabins and activity areas, meet our leadership team and staff, see programs in action, and get a real sense of daily life at Circle F."

For more information, visit the website at www.CircleFDudeRanchCamp.com or call 863-676-4113.

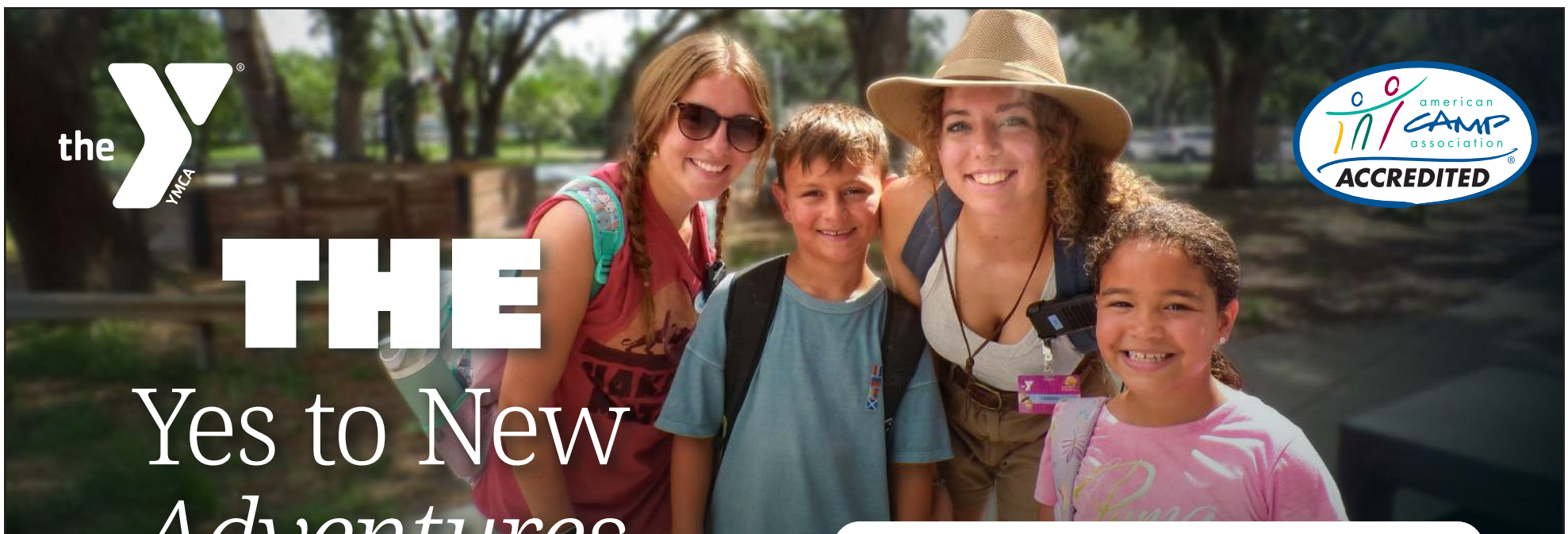
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tampaymca.org/LETSCAMP»



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CAMP CRISTINA OFFERS ADVENTURE & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ALL SUMMER

By Olivia Clark





At Camp Cristina in Riverview, the summer is set for exploration, skill enhancement and outdoor fun. Registrations are now open for the camp's 10-week summer program designed to offer hands-on and natural confidence-inspiring experience.

Signature Camp at Camp Cristina features a rotating line-up of activities for children that take place all day long and include swimming, STEM projects, arts and crafts, outdoor education and team-building games. Campers are closely monitored and grouped according to age, with counselors providing guidance in a structured environment where children can remain physically active and mentally stimulated.

Camp Cristina has a variety of specialty camps for older campers with particular interests. In Horse Camp, participants learn the basics of grooming, go on trail rides, and gain confidence working with horses. Swim Camp focuses on water safety and swim instruction with certified staff to help campers build skills in and around the water. Lifeguard Camp offers aquatics leadership skills, teamwork, and hands-on training that generates responsibility and prepares young adults for future certification opportunities.

Campers can also take part in Adventure Camp, which includes activities like archery, exploring the lake, and team challenges that promote cooperation and problem-solving. The Counselors in Training and Junior Lifeguards programs offer leadership skills, communication skills, and hands-on training in a nurturing environment focusing on growth and responsibility.

Thus, families can add on to the traditional camp day, which runs from Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., with weekly add-ons such as swim lessons, gymnastics and extended care. Add-ons vary according to the age group and availability and can be chosen during registration. There is a nonrefundable deposit at registration and a separate deposit for select teen leadership programs.

Camp Cristina is one of the Tampa YMCA's ACA-accredited camps, which is reflected in the national standards for safety, staff training, and program quality. This places the camp among the few day camps in Florida, meeting the standards set by the American Camp Association.

For further information or to register, go online to https://www.tampaymca.org/letscamp or the Tampa YMCA registration portal. Families are advised to register their children at the earliest opportunity to avoid missing out on available sessions.

ULTIMATE SUMMER WITH BUSCH GARDENS TAMPA BAY CAMPS

Staff Report

Busch Gardens camp
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Your search for summer plans is over. Families looking ahead to summer camp 2026 will find a wide range of engaging, educational and adventure-filled options at Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, where camps are designed for animal lovers, thrill seekers and curious minds of all ages.

Busch Gardens summer camps offer children and teens the chance to unplug and connect with animals, nature and one another in a dynamic, hands-on environment. Campers explore wildlife, learn about conservation and animal care, enjoy thrilling rides and shows, and build friendships that often last long after summer ends. These experiences are not only fun, but also meaningful, helping campers grow in confidence, curiosity and teamwork.

Busch Gardens' summer programs are led by carefully selected, highly trained professionals who know how to balance education with excitement. The park offers a variety of educational summer day camps for students from kindergarten through 12th grade, with sessions tailored to different age groups and interests. Campers enjoy close-up animal encounters, behind-the-scenes experiences, themed games and crafts, age-appropriate rides, live shows, and interactive learning activities. Each camper also receives souvenir keepsakes, including a camp T-shirt and water bottle, along with opportunities to return to the park after camp hours.

For older students seeking a deeper adventure, overnight resident camps provide a one-of-a-kind sleepaway experience. Based in a secure on-site lodge, these all-inclusive camps immerse rising seventh through 12th graders in a blend of wildlife education and adrenaline-pumping attractions. Campers gain exclusive access to animal care areas, interact with park professionals, and experience the park in ways not available to regular guests.

Busch Gardens camps are accredited by the American Camping Association, offering parents added confidence in program quality, safety and staff training. Priority access to attractions, enriching educational content and unforgettable behind-the-scenes moments consistently place these camps among the top summer programs in the region.

With options ranging from early elementary students to teens—and even specialized programs for those exploring future careers—Busch Gardens Tampa Bay continues to be a standout destination for summer camp 2026 registration opportunities. Register at www.buschgardens.com.

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DISCOVER CREATIVITY AT OVERFLOW FINE ARTS CAMPS

Staff Report

This summer, families in the Valrico area can explore a unique arts experience designed to inspire creativity and confidence in kids. Overflow Fine Arts offers engaging summer camps where students are encouraged to discover and develop their talents in a safe, welcoming environment. With a strong focus on belonging, every child is given the opportunity to grow artistically while building friendships and social skills.

Camps are offered in flexible sessions from 9am–1pm or 2pm–6pm, making it easy for families to find a schedule that works. With a low teacher-to-student ratio of 1:10, campers receive personalized attention and guidance throughout their experience. Pricing ranges from $225 to $275 depending on the camp selected, and families can take advantage of early bird discounts available through May 1st.

A Fun, Faith-Filled Approach to the Arts

Overflow Fine Arts blends creativity with purpose through its Fine Arts and Fun Arts programs. Campers will sing, act, dance, and create art while learning teamwork, focus, and confidence. Rooted in a mission to help students discover their God-given gifts, the program emphasizes growth through encouragement and hands-on learning.

Snacks are included daily, and campers are asked to bring their own lunch. Clothing recommendations will be shared with families ahead of time to ensure students are comfortable and prepared for all activities.

Building Confidence, Community, and Talent

More than just an arts camp, Overflow Fine Arts creates an environment where kids feel safe, valued, and inspired. Whether your child is experienced or just beginning to explore their creativity, this program offers a supportive space to try new things and build lasting skills.

For more information or to register, families can visit www.overflowfinearts.com or call 813-777-3808.

Stay connected on social media at @overflowfinearts for updates and highlights throughout the summer.







SUMMER CAMPS 2026









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CEDARKIRK, CIRCLE F DUDE, PATEL, MATHNASIUM AND MORE....

Compiled By Jenny Bennett

Cedarkirk Camp & Conference Center

Cedarkirk Camp & Conference Center, located on 170 acres of woodlands, wetlands and uplands near the Alafia River, will have summer overnight and day camps starting on Sunday, June 7, and finishing on Friday, July 31. Campers can sign up for a week or the whole summer. Day camp is available for campers who have completed kindergarten up to those who have completed fifth grade and is priced at $230 per week. Day campers must bring their own lunch. Overnight camp is available for campers who have completed first through 12th grade and starts at $555. Cedarkirk is located at 1920 Streetman Dr. in Lithia and can be reached at 813-685-4224. For more information and to register, visit www.cedarkirk.org.

Circle F Dude Ranch

Circle F Dude Ranch, located in Lake Wales, welcomes boys and girls from all over the United States and the world for one to three-week sleep-away camp sessions. Kids range in age from 6-16. Circle F fosters grit, growth and a love for the outdoors. With the perfect blend of Western flair and classic camp fun, it gives kids the kind of summer they'll never forget. Visit Circle F Dude Ranch for an open house on May 9, from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. meet the leadership team, try activities and learn about summers on the ranch, RSVP at admin.gazeboevents.com. For more and to sign up, visit www.circlefduderanchcamp.com.

Mathnasium

Summer is the perfect time for kids to grow in confidence and strengthen math skills without pressure. At Mathnasium, summer learning accelerates with personalized plans designed for every stage — from building foundations to tackling advanced challenges. Students receive targeted support, stay sharp or move ahead while enjoying engaging, flexible sessions that fit busy summer schedules. Parents often see gains not just in skills but also in confidence and attitude. This summer, help your child return to school prepared, motivated and excited about math. To find a location near you, please visit www.mathnasium.com.

The Patel Conservatory

The Straz Center's Patel Conservatory offers arts education courses and programs in dance, theater and music, with 100-plus camps and classes available. Students are instructed by passionate, working artists with a taste array of professional performance experience and exemplary curriculum vitae. Running from Monday, June 1, to Friday, July 31, full and half-day camps are available weekly for ages 4-18. The cost varies depending on the camp; financial aid and scholarships are available. Visit the website at www.patelconservatory.org or call 813-222-1040. Open House scheduled for Thurs,, May 14, from 5-6 p.m.

Busch Gardens

For more than 25 years, Busch Gardens Tampa Bay has provided children with inspiring, exciting and educational experiences through some of the best Tampa summer camp options. There are a wide variety of summer day camp options to fit your child's grade level and interests. One of the reasons to choose Busch Gardens as your summer camp include it being accredited by the American Camping Association, meaning parents can trust that the camp meets high standards for safety, staff training and program quality. Also, campers get to enjoy the adrenaline rush of rides as well as the unique opportunity to meet animals up close. Beyond the fun, campers experience activities that are both enriching and educational, providing a well-rounded experience.

For information, visit the park website at www.buschgardens.com.

Jam Room Music

Jam Room Music is a new concept in music stores, combining retail and lounge areas with space to jam. It knows the unique joy that occurs when musicians create music together and believes everyone should have that experience. Its goal is to build up the local music community by providing everything musicians of all skill levels need and creating a welcoming environment to spend time around music. Jam Room Music is offering half-day summer camps from Monday, June 8, through Friday, July 10, at its Valrico location at 1040 Bloomingdale Ave. Visit www.jamroommusic.com or call 813-709-7822 for information.

CAMP WEEKS:

YOUTH SPORTS $200 (6TH–12TH)	JUNE 1ST-5TH 9AM-1PM
FUN ARTS CAMP $275, (K–5TH)	JUNE 8TH - JUNE 12TH 9AM-3PM
SPORTS CAMP $200 (6TH–12TH)	JUNE 15TH-JUNE 19TH 9AM-1PM
OVERFLOW YOUTH THEATER $275, (6TH–12TH)	JUNE 22ND-JUNE 26TH 9AM-3PM
DANCE CAMP $200, K–5TH)	JUNE 22ND-JUNE 26TH 9AM-1PM
LEGO CAMP $2OO, (K–5TH)	JUNE 29TH- JULY 3RD 9AM-1PM
DANCE CAMP $200, (6TH–12TH)	JUNE 29TH - JULY 3RD 2PM-6PM
KID'S MUSICAL THEATER $200, (K–5TH)	JULY 6TH-JULY 10TH 9AM-3PM
ART CAMP $200, (K–5TH)	JULY 13TH– JULY 17TH 9AM-1PM

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ROCK SCHOOL, HORSE CAMP, BUSCH GARDENS, SKILLS & MORE...

Compiled By Jenny Bennett

Camp Mirage

Camp Mirage is an activity-based summer camp built around movement, creativity and hands-on fun. Its promise is simple — campers will go home tired, a little dirty, smiling and excited to come back the next day. It offers half-day camps for grades K and up, running from 9 a.m.-12 Noon, with before and after-care available from 7:30 a.m.- 5:30 p.m. Weekly tuition ranges from $125-$185 depending on age group, a membership discount program is available which provides 10 percent off tuition and a reduced rate for before and after care. Camp Mirage is located at 2913 John Moore Rd. in Brandon. Visit www.campmiragebrandon.com or call 813-825-2234.

Fellowship Church

Fellowship Church, located at 15326 FishHawk Blvd., in Lithia will be holding a weekly sports summer camp from Monday, June 1, through Thursday, July 23. Camp will be Mondays through Thursdays from 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m. and will cost $150, with a sibling discount available. Campers must bring drinks and a snack, as well as wear sports attire; a camp shirt will be provided. Visit its website at www.fellowship.church or call 813-655-7431.

Music Showcase And The Florida Academy Of Performing Arts

Music Showcase and the Florida Academy of Performing Arts (FAOPA) will host their annual summer camp this summer starting on Monday, June 1. Campers will be immersed in acting, singing, dancing and more throughout the summer. In Musical Theater Camp, campers will learn about working collaboratively, the art of stage character, voice projection, props and working with a set, with productions for all ages and skill levels. FAOPA's day camp will include activities to explore instruments, acting, singing and art, with themed weeks like Harry Potter, Wicked, superheroes and more. Free early drop-off, free late pickup, scholarships and sibling discounts. Music Showcase is located at 402 Oakfield Dr. in Brandon. Visit www.faopa.org.

Skill Samurai

Skill Samurai's STEM Camps give students hands-on experience with today's most exciting technologies. Campers explore Minecraft and Roblox through creative game design, learn responsible content creation in YouTube Studio and discover the fundamentals of artificial intelligence. Designed for curious minds, these camps build problem-solving, creativity and confidence in a fun, supportive environment. Perfect for beginners and experienced students alike, Skill Samurai helps children turn interest in technology into real-world skills that last a lifetime locally. Visit www.skillsamurai.com/fl-brandon/camps or call 813-761-2832

TLC's Gypsy Haven Riding Camps

Come and learn about horse riding and grooming at TLC's Gypsy Haven's summer camp, which offers hands-on experience and education. Camps run from Tuesday-Thursday from 9a.m. - 2p.m. from Tuesday, June 2, through Thursday, June 25, and Tuesday, July 7, through Thursday, July 30. Group lessons are also available on Fridays and Saturdays. Visit the website at www.tlcsfarms.com or call Tammi on 813-842-4236 for information. TLC's Gypsy Haven is located at 4325 Keysville Rd. in Lithia.

School of Rock Valrico

Let your budding musicians join School of Rock this summer for a variety of music-themed camps, including Taylor Swift and Classic Rock Rewind. There are different themes for different age groups, with camps suitable for ages 7-18. Camps are available for full or half days, with the earliest available drop-off being at 8:45 a.m.

School of Rock is located at 3244 Lithia Pinecrest Rd., #104, in Valrico. Visit www.schoolofrock.com/locations/valrico or call 813-397-8828.











SUMMER CAMPS 2026

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YMCA, CODE WIZ, AR WORKSHOP, VIBE CAMP, HIGH 5 INC. & MORE

Compiled By Jenny Bennett

High 5 Inc.

Brandon's High 5 Inc. is inviting students to embark on an exciting and adventurous journey where your child will experience the thrill of summer camp. Daily activities will include pool time, outdoor play, field games, arts and crafts and more, including field trips.

Camp is offered Monday through Friday from 7 a.m.-6 p.m. at High 5 Inc., located at 405 Beverly Blvd. in Brandon. Campers can sign up for individual weeks or throughout the entire summer. Visit www.high5inc.org or call 813-689-0908.



YMCA Summer Camp

With over 25 different summer camp options throughout the Tampa YMCA area, there's something for every camper to enjoy. From art and gymnastics to zip-lining and splashing in its pools, the Y is the ultimate summer destination with friends, fun and adventure. Summer camps start on Monday, June 2, and run all summer. Register at www.tampaymca.org/letscamp.

Code Wiz

Code Wiz, located at 16132 Churchview Dr., Ste. 105, in Lithia, teaches coding and robotics to children, its camps are hands-on, student-driven and designed to foster curiosity and independence. Campers are encouraged to explore, problem-solve and create at their own pace, with guidance from coaches to support their individual learning journeys. Camps will run throughout the summer and are available for mornings, afternoons or full days. Visit online at www. codewiz.com/fishhawk-fl.

Kids 'R' Kids

Looking for a summer camp that combines fun, education, and adventure? Look no further! Kids 'R' Kids Learning Academies has created the perfect summer escape for kids to learn, grow and explore in a safe and exciting environment. Camp VIBE involves a new theme designed to empower campers through amusing activities, fascinating field trips, timely lessons in teamwork and so much more. Campers will have their eyes opened to limitless possibilities and their minds focused to ignite their passions. Let them catch the VIBE of summer! Kids 'R' Kids is located at 5815 Kids Crossing Dr. in Lithia. For more information, visit its website at www.kidsrkids.com/circa-fishhawk/programs/summer-camp.

AR Workshop

AR Workshop is a craft studio offering hands-on classes for campers ages 5-17. The hands-on classes are designed to inspire creativity, confidence and fun in a supportive studio environment. Both full and half-day camps are available at its location in Valrico at 1046 Bloomingdale Ave. Visit its website at www.arworkshop.com/brandon for more information and to register.

Center For Dance Arts

The Center For Dance Arts offers dance instruction in various genres, from beginner to advanced levels, for students ages 2-18. It is also the home of an award-winning competition team. It will be offering summer camp; visit its website at www.mycfda.com or call 813-657-1500 for more information and to register. The Center For Dance Arts is located at 929 E. Brandon Blvd. in Brandon.

Overflow Fine Arts Camp

Overflow Fine Arts Camp is located at 4929 Bell Shoals Rd., in Valrico and will provide a wide variety of camps over the summer including a dance camp, kids musical theatre camp, art camp and lego camp. The emphasis at these camps will be on feeling safe and belonging, with a low ratio of teachers to campers. Camps will run from June 1 through July 17. Most camps will start at 9a.m. and will run through 3p.m. Visit its website at www.overflow-finearts.com or call 813 777 3808 for additional information.







& ACTIVITY GUIDE



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KIDS 'R' KIDS LAUNCHES CAMP VIBE, BLENDING EDUCATION AND FUN

Staff Report



Camp VIBE at Kids 'R' Kids Learning Academies is now enrolling, offering children a dynamic camp experience designed to inspire creativity, teamwork and personal growth.

Each week of Camp VIBE introduces a new theme, giving campers fresh opportunities to explore different interests through hands-on activities, interactive lessons and engaging field trips. From creative projects to team-building exercises, the program is structured to keep children excited while helping them discover new passions and build confidence.

Organizers say the goal is simple: create an environment where learning feels like an adventure. Campers are encouraged to think big, try new things and develop friendships along the way. With a balance of structured programming and playful exploration, the camp aims to deliver an experience that children will remember long after summer ends.

The program is part of Kids 'R' Kids Learning Academies, which serves families in Valrico, Brandon and the surrounding Tampa communities. The Circa Fishhawk location in Lithia offers a secure, technology-enhanced environment with trained educators, live-stream classroom access and controlled entry systems, providing peace of mind for parents. Beyond summer camp, Kids 'R' Kids offers accredited programs for children ranging from infants to age 12, including preschool and before- and after-school care. The school emphasizes a well-rounded approach to education, focusing on physical, emotional, social and intellectual development through play and structured learning.

Kids 'R' Kids Circa FishHawk is located at 5815 Kids Crossing Dr. Lithia. Call 813-654-7000. Visit the campus website at www.kidsrkids.com/circa-fishhawk.

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I'm honored to share that I am running for Honorary Mayor of Brandon for 2026 through the Brandon Riverview Chamber of Commerce. This a non-political fundraising effort and it's not about a title, it's about bringing the community together to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.



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Christian Voice



Grace Notes

Easter Blessings
By Debora Coty

My favorite Easter decoration is a wooden, one-eared bunny posted on my flowerbed. It's not new. It's not fancy. It's not terribly attractive.

But it's honest and blatant about the message it brings: You may be missing a vital part of yourself this year (notice the bunny's missing ear), but nevertheless you're blessed.

I suspect you feel diminished in your worth. You may know what caused it — perhaps the death of a loved one you've celebrated Easter with throughout most of your life. Maybe it's the absence of someone who brought you much joy and happiness at a different season of life. Could be the dissolving of a longtime dream. Or an unexpected change in your finances, job, health, church or circle of friends.

Something that has caused disillusionment with life as you thought you knew it.

Or maybe you don't know what has created this deep sense of loss within you. You find that you lean toward the melancholy rather than the joyous this Easter. Your spirit is dragging. You want to celebrate the miracle of Christ's death and resurrection, but there's some pervasive sorrow in your soul that defies identification.

You may not have a clue about why, where, when or how to process your unease (hence the bunny's baffled expression). You may only perceive that something vital is absent this year. Something is different. Something is off.

The message of this little broken Easter sign is that you're blessed. Regardless. It's okay to be broken. Unwhole. Disconnected. Bewildered over it all.

You're still blessed. Whether you feel it or not. Whether you think you deserve it or not. Two thousand years ago, Jesus willingly gave his life so that you could be blessed today. Eternal life is yours if you only choose to believe it. Papa God is pouring out His blessings on you like a gushing waterfall. You just have to recognize that you're all wet.

I pray that you'll acknowledge and embrace your Easter blessings — regardless of your circumstances — during this time of remembrance of the crucifixion and resurrection of your Savior.

Wow. What a blessing, my friend! Don't miss it.

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

A DEEPER LIFE OF FAITH IS OUR CIVIC DUTY



"But when the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth [full and complete truth]." — Jesus, John 16:13.

Quite often, preparing for Easter, I find myself turning to John's account of the Last Supper. The words seem to carry additional gravitas at this last meal together, as Jesus carefully goes over the highlights one more time.

His words resonate in the 21st century, where we take such sweeping liberties with truth. It makes good sense, then, to check in with the one who is truth personified. We dare not separate our pursuit of, our quest for and our understanding of truth from our pursuit of, our quest for and our understanding of God.

So, if we pray when we read the scriptures, why not pray before — and also as — we read the news, or research, or fact-check, or enter into conversation or debate? Is our relationship with God an integral part of our thinking, our emotions, our intellectual curiosity?

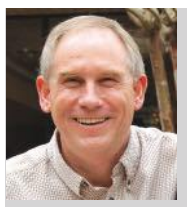
When I hear commentators referencing this time in history as 'the post-truth era,' I believe this means we live in a 'post-Jesus era' too. So, what exactly do we need if we say that "full and complete truth" is important? Well, we need Jesus. And we need to be, as Jesus puts it, "Guided by the Spirit of Truth."

We live in a time when the suppression of truth, the manipulation of truth and a wholesale disregard for truth are eating away at our freedom at an alarming rate. But thankfully, as Jesus pointed out, "The truth will set us free."

We cannot leave an active, purposeful relationship with God out of the equation. It is critically important that we love God, follow Jesus and are guided by the Spirit. Then, "when the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide us into all truth [full and complete truth]."

I guess, then, it would be fair to say that it is our civic duty to draw closer, and become more accountable, to God.

— DEREK



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

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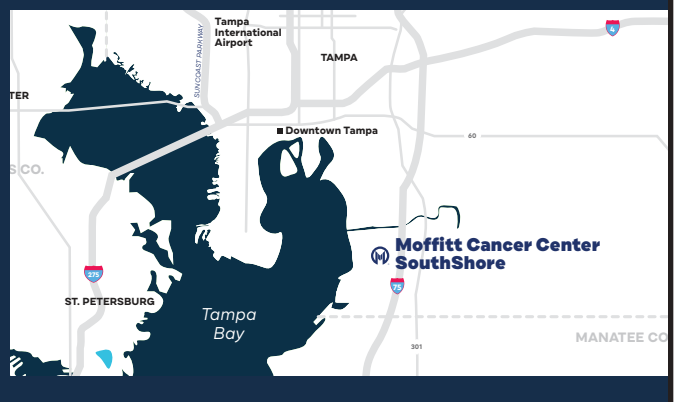
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ORCHESTRA ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT OF CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER SUSANA WEYMOUTH

Staff Report



The Florida Orchestra today announced that Chief Development Officer Susana Weymouth will retire this season, leaving a lasting legacy as a champion of the arts who has significantly impacted the organization and the Tampa Bay cultural landscape.

Since joining in December 2020, Weymouth helped drive major fundraising growth for the state's largest professional orchestra. Contributed revenue more than doubled during her tenure, bolstered by major gifts that strengthened the orchestra's endowment. Most notably, those efforts culminated in a historic $10 million donation—the largest single gift in the orchestra's 58-year history.

Weymouth also expanded partnerships with corporations and foundations, particularly through concert series sponsorships. She deepened engagement with donors through musician and concert sponsorships while broadening support for education and community programs that serve tens of thousands across Tampa Bay.

"Susana has been an incredibly dedicated colleague and partner," said President & CEO Ignacio Barrón Viela. "Her passion, care for our donors and belief in music have built momentum that will endure well into the future."

Music Director Michael Francis praised Weymouth's leadership, noting her ability to inspire "joyful giving" and strengthen connections between patrons and the orchestra's mission.

Weymouth will relocate to be closer to family in Savannah, Georgia, but will remain in an advisory role. The orchestra has engaged Aspen Leadership Group to conduct a national search for a Vice President of Development.

"For me, supporting the arts has always been a passion," Weymouth said, recalling a childhood in Washington, D.C., where early exposure to museums and symphonies shaped her lifelong commitment.

Over a career spanning more than four decades, Weymouth worked in major cultural centers including New York, Beijing, Paris, London and Miami. She moved to the Tampa Bay area in 2001 with her husband, Yann Weymouth, a renowned architect whose work includes projects at the National Gallery of Art and the Louvre.

Before joining the orchestra, Weymouth served as executive director of Tampa Bay Businesses for Culture and the Arts, where she helped strengthen connections between the arts and business communities.

Reflecting on her time with The Florida Orchestra, Weymouth expressed gratitude for colleagues, patrons and donors.

"Because of them, this orchestra continues to thrive," she said. "I'm confident the momentum we've built will inspire our community for generations to come."

TAMPA BAY RODEO & FAMILY FESTIVAL GALLOPS INTO HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS APRIL 10 & 11

Staff Report

Celebrate America's 250th birthday at the Tampa Bay Rodeo & Family Festival, presented by Bartow Ford, on Friday and Saturday, April 10-11, at the Hillsborough County Fairgrounds. Tampa's thrill-packed spring tradition delivers two action-packed nights of full rodeo competition, featuring bull riding, bronco busting, barrel racing, calf roping and more. The event also honors the brave men and women in law enforcement, fire and rescue who serve and safeguard our communities.

In honor of local police officers, firefighters and rescue personnel, a charitable donation will be made to Off-Road United, a nonprofit foundation dedicated to supporting the well-being of first responders in the Tampa Bay area. Complimentary tickets have also been distributed through local first responder organizations, which will also participate on-site with vendor booths. Blue-line and red-line flags will fly high above the entrance in tribute to those who serve this community.

This year's Family Festival expands its animal experience with more than 100 animals and an exciting new attraction. Camels, goats — including more than 20 babies — pigs, a monkey and an elephant join lions and tigers as part of the festival's growing animal lineup. New this year, the Tiger Encounter offers a live viewing and feeding experience where guests can learn about tiger behavior and conservation from trained handlers. Together, the animals create a lively attraction that gives families a chance to get up close to majestic creatures from around the world.

Guests can arrive early for the Family Festival to enjoy delicious food and interactive fun. Festival favorites include corn dogs, barbecue, tacos, funnel cake and hot-pressed Cuban sandwiches paired with refreshing beverages or ice-cold beer. Visitors can test their skills on the mechanical bull, try ax throwing, soar on the bungee trampoline, race down the giant slide and challenge friends to cornhole and giant Jenga. Guests can also climb aboard a monster truck or even take a ride on a camel.

When the sun goes down, the spotlight shifts to the rodeo arena, where superfans can upgrade their tickets to the new VIP Rodeo Section. VIP tickets include admission and premium reserved bleacher seating near the bucking chutes, along with exclusive access to a private bar, a Luxe restroom trailer, complimentary snacks and sponsor giveaways (while supplies last), additional security and a designated nonsmoking area. Gates open at 4:30 p.m., and the rodeo competition begins at 7 p.m.

The Tampa Bay Rodeo & Family Festival, presented by Bartow Ford, is a community event featuring local vendors and area sponsors.

For more information and tickets, please visit www.tamparodeo.com/.



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10434 SCENIC HOLLOW DR
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$390,000



16158 AMETHYST KEY DR
3BR/2BA/2CAR + CONSERVATION LOT
$325,000



7107 COLONIAL LAKE DR
3BR/3BA/2CAR + SCREENED PATIO
$439,000



6416 LAKE SUNRISE DR
3BR/2BA/2CAR + WATERFRONT + DOCK
$575,000



205 2ND AVE SE
3BR/1BA + BONUS + .28 ACRES
$275,000



4739 WHITE SANDERLING CT
2BR/2.5BA/1CAR + WATERVIEW
$239,000



4736 WOODS LANDING LN
4BR/2.5BA/2CAR + LOFT + FENCED YARD
$499,000



11724 WROUGHT PINE LOOP
4BR/2.5BA/3CAR + LOFT + OFFICE + POOL + OUTDOOR KITCHEN
$660,000



11474 CAPTIVA KAY DR
2BR/2BA/2CAR + POND VIEWS
$250,000



219 MANGROVE SHADE CIR
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Child Abuse Prevention calls to all of us for help. The Children's Board of Hillsborough County invites you to learn more at a free annual event Friday, April 3, from 9:30 to 11am at 1925 East 2nd Avenue in Tampa.

There are many ways we all might help to reduce the risks across our region, including involvement with the local Children's Board Family Resource Center. For more info, go online to childrensboard.org — & thanks!

I give free ad space to groups or events that improve our community. Call me with your ideas! — Ann Marie



Ann Marie Vaughan, Realtor

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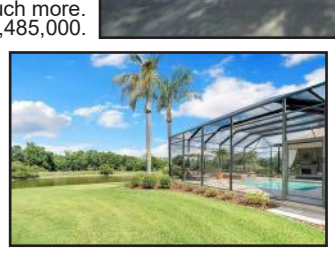
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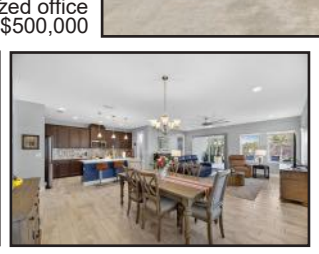
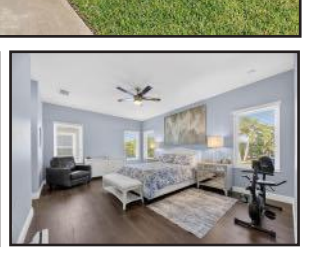
EXCELLENCE & ELEGANCE surround you at this magnificent, custom-built, 5,000-SF home in FishHawk's Kestrel Ridge! On a cul-de-sac half-acre in the security-gated enclave, the property features an impressive pool & spa lanai with a panoramic view of conservation woods & water. An outdoor kitchen & gas fireplace flank the heated pool on a travertine-tiled deck; triple pocket sliders open it all for great entertaining. Details are just as dazzling inside, of course: coffered ceilings, crown molding, columns & arches, gorgeous granite, diagonal-tile floors & backsplashes, decorative listello, raised-panel wood cabinets, walk-in wine closet & so much more. Offered for sale at $1,485,000.



WHEN YOU KNOW, YOU KNOW! If you want & recognize quality upgrades beyond most in an upscale neighborhood, here is the home for you within wonderful Waterset! Inside & outside this Sandpiper by West Bay, you'll find improvements from a 400-SF screened lanai to $65,000 in casement hurricane-impact windows. Tile & LVP floors, decorator fans & fixtures, seamless gutters, salt-free water softener, 8-foot doors including full-glass French doors to the office & a frosted-glass entry with sidelight, security system with cameras front & back, even an electric vehicle charger in the garage await you. It's a 2,100-SF 3/2/2 with a customized office that can be a 4th bedroom. $500,000



BETTER THAN WHEN IT WAS BUILT! From new tile, epoxy, & LVP floors to updated fans, fixtures, & other finishes, this thoroughly renovated townhome towers 4 stories above the Apollo Beach waterfront in the upscale boating colony of Sunset Bay.Your Florida lifestyle here can be truly low-maintenance -- not only because the 37-home association handles exterior work, water bills, pest control, flood insurance, & the exclusive residents pool beside the boat dock, but also because this unit has updated HVAC, LED lighting, quartz counters, stainless-steel appliances, fresh paint & more. Nearly 3,100 SF includes 3 beds, 3.5 baths, a 2-room top-floor bonus, & an elevator to make it easy! $499,900



FOR RENT NEAR FISHHAWK! Live just a mile east without deed restrictions on pets, boats, trailers, RVs, ATVs, etc! This 1,800-SF 3/2/2 on nearly 7 acres gives you privacy, flexibility, & security with a fenced yard of 1 acre, gated driveway, & even lockable holding pens on a concrete pad for animals or equipment. Inside you'll find terrazzo floors, not carpet, a kitchen with stainless-steel appliances & plenty of cabinets, plus formal living & dining rooms in addition to a family room with fireplace. A 200-SF Florida room & 600-SF garage complete the space. Well water & septic help you save on utility bills. All of this creates a value hard to find elsewhere! Offered for rent at $2,750 monthly.





